
by

ABOU BAMBA

Under the Direction of Ian C. Fletcher

ABSTRACT

I argue that competing visions of development guided the interventions of the United States and France in the West African country of Ivory Coast during the late colonial and early independence periods from 1946 through the 1960s. Indeed, the postwar arrival of American modernity provided an opportunity for nationalist leaders to triangulate the relationship between metropolitan France and colonial Ivory Coast. The ensuing politics of triangulation forced French colonial officials, diplomats, and development experts to “dub” modernization in order to bolster (neo)colonial ties between France and the Ivory Coast. By dubbing I mean the effort to translate and adapt for French purposes development concepts and techniques first elaborated in the United States. I explore these issues in case histories of the port of Abidjan, Kossou dam, and San Pedro development projects.
I highlight the discursive as well as institutional frameworks that shaped the development of Ivory Coast. In the early twentieth century, French colonialism’s *mission civilisatrice* and *mise en valeur* posited that the colonizers were rational and productive, while the colonized were backward and incompetent to exploit their natural resources. After the Second World War, the ascendant American modernization paradigm added a new level of valuation to colonialism’s moral economy. It proposed a dynamic and progressive teleology in which the colonized could become modernized and actually “work by themselves” to reproduce hegemonic U.S. technological, economic, and political norms. Modernization was a civilizing project as well, but in contrast French (neo)colonialism now appeared static and paternalistic. French attempts to recuperate their position in the Ivory Coast deployed the epistemic memories of decades of work in the colony but ironically involved promoting forms of regional planning pioneered by the Tennessee Valley Authority.

To reach these insights, I have used an interdisciplinary historical methodology that is multiarchival and multisited. My dissertation is based on research in numerous French and American archives as well as oral histories with French and American actors who participated in the (post)colonial development drive in the Ivory Coast.

**KEY WORDS:** Development, *Mise en valeur*, Modernization, (Neo)colonialism, Ivory Coast, France, United States, Foreign relations

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For Isa and Coco ...  
And all those children  
Who remind us daily ...  
That another world is possible.
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*A beau mentir qui vient de loin.* Rather than ponder on the meaning of this common sense wisdom, I want to lay out some of the major moments that led to the writing of this dissertation, which weirdly recall the peregrinations of Bertin—the narrator of Bernard B. Dadié’s *Un nègre à Paris.* Unlike Bertin’s story, mine started on one hot day in April 2000 when I received a phone call from the American Cultural Center in Abidjan. The news would enchant my heart for the many months to come. For the government of the United States, on behalf of its generous people, had just awarded me a grant to go to America and learn of the progressive culture of this nation; to study the history of this modern nation in the historicist hope that I would apply the lessons of its experience to the future of my beloved Ivory Coast. After all, the past of the universal has always been the future of the local.

A month or so later I was at the Aeroport International Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Port-Bouët, Abidjan. Even though Port-Bouët was busy remodeling its facilities and “things [were] fall[ing] apart” as Yeats would have had it, I immediately came under the charm of its “creative destruction.” At the ticketing desk I was told that more was awaiting me…*there … in America!*

It was past 9 PM: under the cover of the night the plane took off. Direction…? East … Charles de Gaulle, Paris! Even with my then shaky geographic literacy I had always believed the U.S. was to the west of the Atlantic. Then … why Paris? Why the Hexagon? I soon learned that there is no direct flight between Abidjan and any of the U.S. international airports. The reason…? The Ivorian prime international airport did not
live up to Uncle Sam’s security standards. And yet air traffic from other “developed” nations supplied it everyday. This was before September 11. This was before Homeland Security. This was before shirtless airport traveling: Uncle Sam, Uncle Sam… quand tu nous tiens!

But beyond the whims of an uncle that many a young Ivorian admires by now, my query remained still—stubborn as a thirsty donkey: Why Charles de Gaulle? Why Europe? Why not Accra which offered flights to New York? Was there a protocol that my budding diplomatic interest could not grasp? Had the pilot lost his way? As I pondered these questions I soon began to muse that maybe the colonial past of my country made it virtually impossible to establish a direct bilateral relationship with the United States. Indeed, in a post-colonial era that many still see as neocolonial, it suddenly appeared to me that Ivorians had to go through the mediation of France (the former imperial metropole from 1893 to 1960) to access the new powerhouse of what they call the endpoint of modernity.

**ANECDOTE AS MICROCOSM**

*A beau mentir qui vient de loin!* Obviously this story is another of those anecdotes that strangers can easily make up, invent, fabricate … and adorn at will. How could it be otherwise? Aren’t strangers the masters of fiction?! As we shall see, however, this rather personal and maybe adorned narrative highlights some of the major themes that have crisscrossed the relationship among the United States, France, and the Ivory Coast, if not up to now, at least through the 1970s. In many ways, the anecdote about my peregrination speaks to issues related to modernization, nation-building, triangulation, dubbing, transnationalism, … and many more. With hindsight, these issues might have become
clearer. But as the actions themselves unfolded, I could not notice any logics: they just hit my eyes, imposing themselves on the big eyes of the stranger that I was (and probably still remain). Like Bertin in *Un nègre à Paris*, I was naively amused … to be empowered to gaze at America, this America of my intellectual dreams, the America of my childhood Western movies, of my disco and later funky years, the America of Michael Jackson, and of the NBA …

The primary goal of this project was initially to provide a theoretically-informed historical critique of U.S.-led development efforts in postcolonial Ivory Coast. But as the introductory anecdote hints at, a creative look at the legacy of Ivory Coast’s colonial past, the U.S. Cold War crusades, and France’s neocolonial projects in Francophone Africa soon turned the notion of a bilateral relationship between Abidjan and Washington into a dynamic triad. This triad was something akin to what Jacques Lacan, in a different context, has termed Oedipal triangulation. Or could it be pointing to the classic case of a romantic triangle?

Thus one of the issues that this project relates to the triangulated conceptualizations of development in Ivory Coast, the United States, and France. While the U.S. perspective on these conceptualizations will be of prime concern, a look at the way Ivorian elite and French colonial bureaucrats and later coopérants conceived of the modernization of the Ivory Coast will also be explored. Given the historical French (neo)colonial presence in the Ivory Coast, it was important to inquire into how France perceived U.S. involvement in Ivorian development. Were there attempts on the part of the French to collaborate with the Americans, or were they out to sabotage, as some U.S. sources suggest, American efforts in Ivory Coast development projects? Moreover, how
did the Ivorian elite react to both the French and the U.S. as providers of developmental assistance and the ultimate example of modernity at work? Did they have their own alternative ways of undertaking development? What inputs (if any) did the people involved in the implementation of modernization projects bring to development as experienced in the Ivory Coast? How did the Ivorian people who were supposed to receive the benefits of development negotiate its inherent regime of discipline? These are some of the issues that the current dissertation has set itself to address. To do so, I adopted an approach that was not only informed by diplomatic and transnational history, geography, and the anthropology of knowledge production and its interaction with society and social change, but also by social studies on the moral economy of development.

*OF PROMETHEUS AND MORE*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARSO: Autorite pour l’Amenagement de la Region du Sud-Ouest
AVB: Autorite pour l’Amenagement de la Vallee du Bandama
BCEOM: Bureau Central d’Etudes pour les Equipements d’Outre-Mer
CCFOM: Caisse Centrale de la France d’Outre Mer
CENIS: Center for International Studies
CNBRL: Compagnie Nationale du Bas-Rhone Languedoc
CNRS: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique
D&R: Development and Resources Corporation
DATAR: Délégation pour l’Aménagement du Territoire et de l’Action Régionale
ECA: Economic Cooperation Administration
EDF: Electricité de France
FEANF: Fédération des Etudiants d’Afrique Noire en France
FIDES: Fonds d’Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social
ICA: International Cooperation Agency
IFAN: Institut Français d’Afrique Noire
ORS(T)OM: Office de la Recherche Scientifique (Technique) Outre-Mer
PDCI: Parti Démocratique de Côte d’Ivoire
RDA: Rassemblement Démocratique Africain
TVA: Tennessee Valley Authority
UNDP: United Nations Development Program
USAID: United States Agency for International Development
In the main, plans for economic development show too little regard for the multiple, particularly the cultural, factors involved. If they are drawn by those on the ground, they tend to emanate from government bureaus, where the inertia of past methods prevails, even when the good will toward the indigenous peoples is unquestioned. If international organizations or metropolitan governments are concerned, the techniques of the visiting mission of experts is [sic] employed. In either case, an assumption that the people of the territory to be developed can be manipulated, that they are passive elements in the situation, is implicit in the thinking of the planners.

Melville J. Herskovits (1956)
**INTRODUCTION**

*Ah, Dunya lo tigue* (What a spectacle, this life!)

Mande exclamation

America is the original version of modernity. We are the dubbed or subtitled versions. America ducks the question of origins; it cultivates no origin or mythical authenticity; it has no past and no founding truth.


The availability of French-dubbed U.S. products is determined by their marketability first in France. If an American program has not been dubbed for use in France, it is not available to French-speaking Africa.

Floyd M. Land, “Television, Culture, and the State” (1990)

In March 1961 David Lilienthal paid a visit to Abidjan, capital of the newly independent state of Ivory Coast. Unlike most Americans who had ventured to Africa before decolonization, Lilienthal was not on a Safari. Rather the man, now past his 60s, had come to the West African country to put the finishing touches to a contract that the Ivorian government was negotiating with Development & Resources Corporation, the transnational firm that Lilienthal had set up when he retired from the Civil Service. Although consulting for the mineral development of the country, Lilienthal—a former director of the world-acclaimed Tennessee Valley Authority—could not help but visit Ivory Coast’s first hydroelectric dam. And in the March 18 entry of his journal, the assiduous diary keeper noted:
Visited the [Ayamé I] dam about noon—a medium-sized concrete gravity and earth fill, total capacity about 30,000 kw; only one of the two generators now being required. When we arrived the only person on duty was an intelligent young African, at the power-control board. The French technicians, quite a group, some of them students, were at the canteen having an apéritif. After lunch, with the engineer in charge, a Frenchman, we returned to the power station; again the only man around the place was a tall, friendly, handsome Ivorian.

Said the homesick French engineer: ‘We can’t trust the Africans with so complicated a thing as a dam and powerhouse; they must always have someone watching over them.’

While he was saying this he and his quite beautiful bride of three months (from Nancy in Lorraine) were giving us an elaborate and delicious luncheon, served with elegance in the heart of the forest. Down in the powerhouse the men ‘who couldn’t be trusted’ and had to be ‘watched every minute’ were tending to the production of electricity. A sense of indispensability and superiority is an essential of being a good colonialist.¹

Despite its hyperbolic tone, Lilienthal’s critical observation was not misguided since French-style decolonization was like a drama without an epilogue. In effect, while the collapse of the empire had forced the French authorities to redirect their disciplinary gaze toward the “colonization of everyday life” in the metropole, France designed its departure from many of its overseas possessions so as to perpetuate the dependency of the latter.² In the case of Africa, this was all the more possible since historically and epistemologically the French foreign policymakers remained convinced that Africans were “inherently inferior.” More specifically, they considered that their former colonial subjects characteristically and permanently needed to be “dependent on France for their survival.”³ It was in this context that various bilateral defense agreements (accords de défense) were signed with such countries as Senegal, Mauritania, Madagascar, Togo, Central African Republic, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Congo, Chad and Dahomey.⁴ The French neocolonial presence in Africa was furthered by the establishment of cooperation—the
Gallic channel of assistance—all of which were perfected geopolitically in the institutionalization of *La Francophonie* movement.⁵

Given this context of Franco-African intimacy that smacked of paternalism, Lilienthal’s critique hit right on target—especially with reference to the Ivory Coast and President Felix Houphouët-Boigny, whom the Martinique-born scholar and activist Frantz Fanon had dismissed in 1958 as the “traveling salesman of French colonialism.”⁶ In fact, the former TVA chairman was not the only American to be appalled by the lingering French hegemony in postcolonial Ivory Coast. From U.S. career diplomats to American investors and journalists posted in Abidjan, all agreed that Houphouët-Boigny’s country was indeed in French hands.⁷ While there was much truth in these perceptions, French control in postcolonial Ivory Coast was not all-encompassing. In unoccupied interstices, the U.S. and other global forces were now appearing and transforming what had been a largely bilateral Ivoiro-French relationship into something akin to a multilateral encounter.

This general introductory chapter elaborates on this and other related issues. It is divided into five sections: I begin with a discussion of the triangulated nature of the politics of development in postcolonial Ivory Coast as I review and problematize the rise and eventual fall of the Ivorian economic miracle. Then I clarify the notion of French dubbing as I trace the origin of this socio-cultural practice to the rise of the American Century, which can be defined as U.S. informal empire of the twentieth century. I also provide a discussion of the method and sources that I have used to write a transnational history of the Ivorian modernization drive from the end of the Second World War until the late 1960s. In the last section, I outline the main articulations of the dissertation as a whole.
Even though foreign experts criticized French hegemonic control of Ivory Coast’s economy, almost all those who assessed the postwar evolution of the West African country concluded that its socioeconomic achievements were indeed impressive. In fact, beginning in 1946, new housing complexes, new roads, and new schools increasingly dotted the Ivorian landscape. By 1975, however, the Ivorian Miracle—as the Ivorian postwar economic boom came to be known—had turned into a mirage. How can one make sense of this dramatic shift? What role can an historical analysis play in such a quest for meaning? What was the role(s) of local Ivorians and transnational forces in shaping the so-called Ivorian miracle?

It is true that with the completion of a deep sea harbor in Abidjan in 1951, the Ivory Coast witnessed the beginning of an economic boom which soon helped the country displace Senegal as the most successful of France’s colonial possessions in West Africa. At independence, the country would continue its capitalist-induced growth. With the availability of “free” land in the western part of the country, coupled with an “open door” policy to attract cheap labor from such neighboring countries as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea, the Ivory Coast indulged in an extensive cash crop cultivation which soon turned the country into the world’s largest producer of cocoa and third biggest producer of coffee. By the late 1960s, these two primary products, together with timber, provided 70 per cent of the country’s earnings and 40 per cent of its national budget.8

Scholars have long underscored the role of France in the making of the Ivorian so-called economic miracle. If anything, the presence of an exceptionally high number of French expatriates/immigrants in the Ivory Coast provided undeniable evidence of the
“privileged” relations between the Ivory Coast and France with regard to the politics of Ivorian development. William Zartman and Christopher Delgado have furthered this point as they show that post-colonial Ivory Coast had the “highest number of French technical assistants in Africa, the highest number of students in French universities, and the highest number of large French firms in any African country.”

Despite the insights of the scholarship on Ivoirio-French relations and in contradistinction to the view that peremptorily casts France as the unchallenged foreign power in (post)colonial Ivory Coast, this dissertation argues that the United States was a major player in targeted areas of the Ivorian politics of development. While the West African country never pushed for a dramatic break from the former colonial power, it also actively wooed Washington to provide development assistance. And this created a triangulated relationship whose frictions, together with the structure of the world-system, shut off many possibilities for the Ivorian post-colony. Furthermore, my examination of the heterogeneity of what Ivorians perceived as development, the normative nature of the transnational diffusion of U.S. modernization theory, and the pervasiveness of France’s aura in Francophone Africa complicates the notion of bilateral relations between Abidjan and Washington. What we find instead is something akin to a multilateral encounter over development which many experts at the time had come to posit as a “secular telos of material redemption.”

To couch the issue of development in the language of redemption reminds us of the now familiar solipsistic teleology that underlay the civilizing mission of the new imperialisms from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, a mission meant to “uplift” the natives from both ignorance and poverty. Implicit in such language is the
moral judgment that portrayed the colonized as lazy, or at best, as incapable bodies that could not tap into and valorize the natural resources surrounding them. Many other scholars have unearthed a similar logic in the modernization drives of the post-World War II era. What most of these social scientists do not address, however, is the novel moral valuation that postwar developmentalism orchestrated as it privileged a U.S.-centric understanding of human progress over alternative ways of embracing modernity, including the paternalistic French mission civilisatrice and its doctrine of mise en valeur. Thus while the emergence of modernization theory signaled a global diffusion of U.S. capitalist visions of development, it also opened a space for triangulated relations among the United States, the European colonial powers, and most of the world still under colonial rule. Such conjuncture, as I explain below, provided the basis for what I call “dubbing.”

Many historical and social scientists who have mined the recent past of such countries as Vietnam, Senegal, and Algeria are contributing to this scholarship of triangulation. Using a similar approach I have revisited the trajectory of Ivory Coast’s modernization and have attempted to explain historically why the Ivorian “economic miracle” of the 1950s and 1960s turned into a mirage by the middle of the 1970s. Was the Ivorian failure to modernize due the inherent fragility of the national economic system? Should part of the blame be put on the short-sightedness of the local comprador bourgeoisie as suggested by dependency theorists? If this was the case, what role did U.S. support of the autocratic Houphouët-Boigny regime play in bringing about the deferral of the dream of a decent life for ordinary Ivorians? How can one analyze such support as an endorsement of the Rostovian notion that in the transition period from a traditional to a
developed/industrial society certain countries might need to be managed by dictatorship? What does the endorsement tell us about the moral underpinnings of U.S.-led development efforts in the Third World during the Cold War? At the level of micropolitics, what did the construction of the Kossou Dam or even the anticipated development of the Southeast region mean for the ordinary Ivorian? American political scientist David L. Cingranelli has emphasized the significance of the notion of responsibility in assessing the ethical stance of a foreign policy. In this view, one can imagine that the U.S. Embassy’s insistence on providing a “non-colonial” form of assistance to the Ivory Coast’s development was meant to chart a new course in U.S. relations with a Third World country. Then, how can we account for the fact that more than 70 per cent of U.S. assistance to the Ivory Coast was channeled through hard loans? Given its privileged relations with the Ivory Coast, how did France perceive U.S. involvement in Ivorian development? How did the French coopérants and other development experts perceive the ethical judgment that undergirded American modernization schemes? Were there attempts on the part of the French to collaborate with or to sabotage, as some U.S. sources suggest, American efforts in Ivory Coast development projects? In this regard, should we really describe Franco-American relationship in terms of “cold alliance” or is there room to see it as “hot peace”?

**DUBBING AMERICAN MODERNITY:**
*A Discussion of Historical Texts, Cotexts, and Contexts*

To answer these sets of questions, the appropriation of the concept of “dubbing” has proven very valuable. A socio-cultural process whereby American visions about how to achieve the good life were translated into French-mediated ideas and policy actions, dubbing insured the continuity of French hegemony in the Ivory Coast. I argue
that faced with the imperial crisis of the postwar years, stemming partly from the rise of
the American Century, the French colonial state resorted to dubbing in an attempt to
maintain control over its ever more restive colonies. This was all the more necessary
since many nationalists were beginning to embrace the promises of an American version
of modernity.

In their quest to understand the global rise of an American-dominated twentieth
century, historians have largely focused on Latin America, Europe, and Asia.\textsuperscript{19} This
dissertation suggests that the spatial scope of the American Century reached into Africa,
especially during the Cold War years when Americans and Russians were competing to
win the hearts and minds of people worldwide. Led by the assumption that people are
likely to embrace communism if they are poor, American policy-makers not only
extended their assistance to Western Europe but also set up aid programs intended for the
“dependent territories” of the European colonial powers.\textsuperscript{20} Such a conjuncture provided
an initial opportunity for the emerging nationalist leaders in the Ivory Coast to triangulate
the relationship of their societies with metropolitan France. Throughout the dissertation, I
track the unfolding of the ensuing politics of triangulation as I critically assess and
engage various historical texts, cotexts, and contexts of the Ivorian modernization drive.

With the present trend to internationalize the historical study of the Cold War, a
resort to multiarchival research should not come as a surprise. The interactive global
context of \textit{Cold War} development projects analyzed in this dissertation also makes my
study a multisited endeavor. This should be obvious, especially if one remembers that
U.S. relations with the Ivory Coast had ramifications for U.S. relations with France, and
vice versa. This multilateral character of U.S. relations with former French colonies in a
Cold War context has been aptly demonstrated by such scholars as Matthew Connelly and Mark Philip Bradley.\textsuperscript{21}

Yet my resort to a multisited approach is motivated less by the dynamics of the international situation (or even the triangular nature of my project) as it is by the way I conceive of development—the phenomenological object/space of my inquiry. In effect, I regard development as a nexus of moral discourses and social practices traversed by multiple temporalities. The perceptive observer can see the influence of the so-called European Enlightenment and its “secular telos of material redemption,” to which development is discursively linked through colonialism. One can also see the temporality of American developmentalist discourse as it was institutionalized in the World Bank and other agencies of the post-1945 new world order. In the specific case of the two U.S.-sponsored development initiatives toward the Ivory Coast, the space that such initiatives opened in the early 1960s was crisscrossed by the temporalities of U.S. international anti-communist crusades, the Ivory Coast’s postcolonial modernization/nation-building performances, and France’s (neo)colonial paternalism and reordered culture.

Thus, building on the pioneering works of such scholars as Arjun Appadurai, Emily Martin, and George Marcus, I posit development as a commodity-like object whose social/cultural life will be explored at the various sites of its production, mediation, and consumption.\textsuperscript{22} In other words, I have deliberately crossed “back and forth across the borders between the institutions in which scientists produce knowledge […] and the wider [Ivorian] society” which was supposed to receive its benefits in the form of modernization.\textsuperscript{23} This dialogic approach complicates our understanding of the U.S. Cold War development initiatives toward the Ivory Coast, for it demonstrates that
development was much more than the material and supposedly moral transformation of a society, according to a hegemonic French or American model.

My privileging of a dialogic approach led me to interview people who witnessed and/or underwent the discipline inherent in the implementation of development projects. These oral histories enabled me to “read” written sources, both archival and published, in new ways. In fact, I used a mass of diplomatic records and official policy papers for an appreciation of the moral/ethical foundation of policy-making, and the press and academic literature for the formulation of opinions, then and now. Opting to use news stories and scholarly articles as contexts along with official records finds its justification in the ubiquitous presence of these journalistic, scholarly, and even popular sources in the archives and personal papers of many policymakers.²⁴

**MAIN ARTICULATIONS OF THE DISSERTATION**

In Chapter 1, I look at the historical context that illuminates the interest of the United States in socio-economic processes in the Ivory Coast. Stepping back in time, I highlight the centrality of the Second World War, U.S. projections of power, the anti-communist crusade, and the incipient nationalist tilt in the colonial world of the European powers. All these factors, I argue, conspired to shift the practice of development from regional development schemes to a more sector-oriented productivism. While American modernization theory rose to preeminence in a Cold War context in which American leaders were searching for the best means to short-cut the appeal of Soviet-style development, modernization theory also revealed the limits of French civilizing-mission project and its doctrine of *mise en valeur*. 
In Chapter 2, I examine the ways in which French colonial administrators responded to the implicit critique that modernization theory raised against their rule in French Africa. In particular, I highlight the logics that informed the French policy of dubbing modernization discourse. Increasingly aware of the threat that the coming of the American Century posed to the maintenance of French rule in the Ivory Coast as well as other part of the outre mer, French colonial authorities opted to translate American-inflected modernity into the language of a rejuvenated mise en valeur of the overseas territories. Such a move was all the more so clever since it secured the steady flow of American Marshall funds into the French empire while providing a timely answer to the politics of triangulation that some nationalist leaders had just begun to articulate.

In Chapter 3, I focus in on one significant instance of France’s postwar anxiety in the outre mer (overseas territories): the completion of the century-old project of building a deep-sea harbor in Abidjan. Analyzing the history of the port scheme along with the capitalization of the city, I show the moral economy that informed the production of Abidjan as a bridgehead. If the postwar infrastructural projects in the Ivory Coast were meant to suspend the march of time toward decolonization, they ultimately failed. Most of France’s overseas territories gained independence as the 1950s came to a close. Did decolonization, however, bring any substantial change in the discourse and practice of modernization? How did the United States insert itself in the postcolonial nation-building of the Ivory Coast? Was the end of the formal empire synonymous with the end of French hegemony in France’s sphere of influence or pré carré?

I address these questions in Chapter 4 as I investigate how the coming of independence provided a time to reframe development planning in the Ivory Coast. I
begin this chapter by looking at the dilemma faced by the Ivorian leadership in the field of human resources. Decolonization had meant for many nationalists just an Africanization of the staff that managed a largely Euro-American bureaucratic type in an African setting, but meeting the demand of filling vacancies led the Ivorian leaders to resort to international cooperation as a viable alternative to what some of them called “cut-rate” Africanization. Having proven themselves as a reliable source of expertise, French researchers from the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer (ORSTOM) would not only come to dominate the design of Ivorian postcolonial modernization but attempt to bring back regional concerns in Ivorian development planning. Rejecting a sectoral understanding of development, the Orstomians would reintroduce spatial analysis as a central parameter in any postcolonial nation-building effort undertaken by the Ivorian authorities.

In Chapter 5, I examine the first large-scale postcolonial development project in which the United States was involved: namely the construction of the Kossou Dam in Central Ivory Coast and the expansion of the Ivorian electricity grid. Looking at both the inflow of U.S. financial capital through the Export-Import Bank and American expertise through Kaiser Engineers I demonstrate that the making of Kossou was a truly transatlantic process. This was all the more so since the ideology of integrated regional development that informed the Kossou operation had transited through the region of Languedoc-Roussillon in southwestern France.

In the last chapter, I tackle the other major postcolonial project directly affected by the United States: the dual incorporation of the Ivorian southwest into the fold of modernity and the Ivorian nation. By examining the Ivorian activities of one of
America’s most revered, if unofficial, ambassador, David E. Lilienthal, I underline the significance of the United States in the Ivorian leadership’s dreams of modernity. For when he retired from the civil service, the former chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority set up a consulting firm, Development & Resources Corporation, which would become one key player in the scheme to develop the southwestern part of the Ivory Coast. This was all the more possible since the Ivorian authorities had initiated in the mid-1960s a policy of diversification. But the cost of an American-style modernization of the southwest was not easy to shoulder, which forced the Ivorians to fall back on French mediation. Ultimately, in the vicissitudes of Ivorian development in a world system in transition between French (and European) colonialism and U.S. neocolonialism, we may find the answer to the riddle, how a miracle becomes a mirage.
CHAPTER ONE

“MIGHTIER THAN MARX”: TECHNOfirstname, DEVELOPMENTALISM, AND THE INCORPORATION OF THE IVORY COAST INTO THE AMERICAN CENTURY

What, then, of our adaptation to Africa? We shall need to unlearn some of our old geography and learn some new geography relating to Africa.

Samuel W. Boggs, “Africa: Maps and Man” (1943)

A country is explored before it is administered or settled. … Exploration is a continuing process, and for years after a country is first penetrated, administrators, missionaries, and the like, who form another great class of amateurs continue to push into localities hitherto untouched.

J. P. Mills, “Anthropology as a Hobby” (1952)

I thought of Tarzan of the apes dropping coconuts on the enemy, and knew instantly what I must do. I must go to Africa. Now.

So I set about it methodically, boning up on the Tarzan books and an atlas, planning my itinerary and equipment. Into a small felt bag I packed, if I recall rightly, a large carving knife, a compass, a slingshot with marbles for ammunition, a map of the Congo copied from the atlas, a packet of bouillon cubes to eke out a Tarzan-berry soup, and a mighty document written by me in longhand.

Hassoldt Davis, World without a Roof (1957)

Historians have long argued that both the production of new economic spaces and the containment policies of the United States in the postwar years eventually forced American diplomats to take critical steps toward the establishment of an ungrounded empire. Less discussed in the recent histories of modernization theory is how the globalization of the American developmentalist paradigm operated as a subtle critique of the civilizing mission of the European colonial powers. The American demand for a say
in the management of the United Nations trustee territories or, even more to the point, the U.S. request to open a consulate in Abidjan in the early 1950s may be taken as indications that American diplomats, besides their customary concern for geopolitics, had come to doubt the capacity of the French, British, Belgians, and Portuguese to bring the Africans into legitimate (meaning American-style) modernity. To be sure, this was the case of U.S. intervention in Vietnam, where the Americans eventually initiated spectacular modernization programs informed by a U.S.-style technopolitics.¹

I argue in this chapter that a similar technopolitics was at work in the postwar modernization of the Ivory Coast. As shall become clear, the moral framework which structured postwar developmentalism was multistranded and layered: multistranded, because the moral framework of the modernization drive in the later years of French colonial rule brought together the mores of various groups whose ideals did not necessarily coincide; and layered because the developmentalist framework was the stage from which French experts passed judgment on the “backward” Ivorians, and American modernization theorists dismissed both the Ivorians and the French whose (neo)colonialism they inscribed as passé. Perhaps no other instance better captures the nuances of the interlocking technopolitical valuations than the activities of American adventurer Hassoldt Davis, who together with his wife toured the Ivory Coast in the mid-1950s.² His rather fanciful account of the trip reveals nonetheless that American liberals had come to doubt the emancipatory power of the French mission civilisatrice. Even more, Davis’s travelogue shows that Americans operated diligently to displace French colonial rule with U.S.-style modernity, using an infatuation with technoscience as antidote to the appeal of communism among the indigenous peoples of the French
empire. A self-appointed cold warrior, Hassoldt Davis was also a critic of French colonialism and a zealous apostle of American-style modernity. A roving U.S. ambassador, he had come to believe, like some of his Ivorian informants, that “Magic […] was mightier than Marx.” Ultimately, American modernity and its artifacts proved to be a powerful way to exhibit and project American power in the flagging French empire.

I begin this chapter by looking at how the American paranoia over the perceived expansion of communism in Africa led U.S. policymakers and liberals to extend the spatial scope of the American Century. Starting with an almost unknown incident involving the efforts of high-level American diplomats and lawmakers to open a consular post in Abidjan, the next section of the chapter follows the transatlantic voyage of the idea of development in French West Africa. I focus on postwar Ivory Coast, discussing how the history of the late colonial modernization drive in the territory can be read as a moral tale in which American modernization theorists and liberal intellectuals dismissed the French *mission civilisatrice* as retrograde. Such an American evaluation might explain, at least partially, why Burton Berry—Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs—requested the opening of a U.S. Consulate in Abidjan. This was all the more important to the Americans since many American liberals linked the rise of radical nationalism and communism to unsuccessful or inappropriate development efforts in the colonial and semi-colonial worlds. The third section of the chapter takes up this idea of communism in postwar Ivory Coast and the short-lived sway it had on key members of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA)—the main nationalist movement in French West Africa. Following the findings of earlier historians,
I suggest that the paranoia over a communist takeover in the region was misguided. In actuality, by the time the Americans made their request for a consular office, the main Ivorian nationalist movement had become timorous to the point of being seen as collaborationist. If such was the case then, as I document in the last section, the American proposal for opening a consulate in the Ivory Coast certainly betrayed a project of incorporating the territory into the fold of the hegemonic American Century.

**COMPLICATING THE STORY OF THE “WHITE MAN”’S MAGIC:**
*Cold War Politics, Modernization Theory, and the Extensification of the American Century*

The Ivory Coast was a blind spot for most Americans until the 1950s, when suddenly the territory under French imperial control gained some degree of visibility among Washington’s career diplomats, journalists, travel writers, and political pundits. This should not come as a surprise since the United States had up to the Second World War maintained a rather relatively low profile in the African continent as a whole. During the war and its immediate aftermath, the official stance of the United States slightly shifted as Washington began to grant aid to Africa and fund research on its peoples. This shift notwithstanding, American assistance to Africa still represented but a fraction of the total U.S. foreign aid package.

Limited as it may have been, American interest in Africa and African affairs was not non-existent. Within the context of incipient nationalist demands and the fear of communist internationalism, the American foreign policy elite could not ignore a continent whose strategic importance had been positively tested during the war years. While American diplomats reassuringly claimed that they were “not in position to exercise direct responsibility with respect to Africa,” they maintained in the words of the
Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs that Washington should “continue to have access to Africa’s vital reservoir of minerals which are critical stockpile items in the United States.” Moreover, given the postwar American boom, George McGhee reiterated the idea that Washington should “preserve [American] rights of equal economic treatment in the territories of Africa.”

The emerging Cold War and the Machiavellian moral economy that fed the ideological competition between the United States and the Soviet Union to win over the hearts and minds of the “wretched of the earth” confirmed these geo-strategic appraisals. While most American diplomats concurred that the communists had made “no substantial progress” in Africa, they repeatedly cautioned Americans against resting on their laurels; all the more so since conditions such as poverty, white supremacy, and detribalization existed on the continent, and this “could well play into the hands of Communist agitators.”

Under these circumstances, U.S. foreign policymakers opted to extend their assistance, which was aimed at insuring that “Africa’s emerging peoples will choose of their own free will to remain associated with the democratic nations of the free world.” While relatively small, American aid to the various African territories grew over the years. From a modest indirect overall contribution of 28.6 million dollars in 1953, for instance, U.S. assistance to the continent (excluding Egypt and South Africa) reached 50.5 million dollars in 1956 and almost 200 million by the end of the decade. Technical assistance under the aegis of the Point Four Program witnessed a similarly steady increase.
A quasi-religious belief in the modernizing powers of technology and applied science played a crucial role in the mission of supplementing and even improving the civilizing mission of the European colonial powers in Africa. If sometimes couched in the language of American generosity and humanitarianism, what the foreign policy elite of the United States persistently pointed to was their “faith in the application of technology as a means” to promoting and achieving progress in Africa.\(^{11}\) While such faith in the power of technology had deep roots in American history, its mobilization in the context of late colonial Africa tended to complicate the story of the technology-savvy “White man” that had partly justified the European colonization of Africa.\(^{12}\)

Indeed, having realized that the “disintegration of the old colonialism is inevitable,” American policymakers in the 1950s came to the conclusion that the “old concept of the ‘white man’s burden’ is obsolete and provides no valid justification for
colonialism.”

Informed by their own idyll with technology and science, the Americans proposed instead a new teleology of progress for the colonized peoples. Even more, they took their own colonial experiment in the Philippines and its reliance on the expertise of the engineers as a template that the Europeans should emulate. Not only did the Americans equate mechanization with modernity but in sharp contradistinction to European colonialism they also saw their civilizing mission as “one of tutelage rather than paternalistic domination.” Of course such perception was replete with an exceptionalist sense of superiority that associated European colonialism with backwardness even as it built on the ideology of Europe’s long history of expansionism.

The architects of U.S. postwar policy toward Africa inherited the logics of these associations and their implicit moral valuations. One indication of this is provided by the pronouncement of a diplomat who could still claim as late as 1953 that “conditions of life in a large part of [Africa] are still primitive,” subtly implying the ineptitude of European colonization and its civilizing mission in uplifting the indigenous Africans. Another American official, John Orchard, acting as a consultant on overseas territories with the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) and chairman of the ECA Advisory Committee on Underdeveloped Areas, faulted the ineffectiveness of the Europeans in the “bureaucratic conservatism” of their colonial administrations. While the economist maintained that there was a “somewhat naïve view that American technical know-how in itself can bring about great changes in production and living standards,” Orchard never doubted the emancipatory power of science and technology.

Despite this pragmatic postwar confidence in America’s applied science as the ultimate path to modernity, anxiety emerged in the early 1950s as the Soviet Union
demonstrated a “scientific and technological prowess to match or surpass a steady American arms buildup.” The immediate response of the American decision-makers was to extend the imperial realm of the American Century. Global in scope, the growth of the postwar American Century was achieved through the imposition of new epistemologies regarding modernity, tradition, and ultimately the meaning of the “good” life. In Europe and at home this agenda was carried out through the institutionalization of American Studies, the funding of cultural events and prizes, and the granting of scholarships to talented foreign students. The rise of an empire of knowledge was also graphed on the development of International and Area Studies as well as modernization theory, which aimed at producing usable knowledge on the emerging countries of the Third World. To this end, the federal government, private foundations, and major American universities established research programs targeting African, Asian, and Latin American countries.

Arguably, the program of the Center for International Studies (CENIS) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) was one of the most influential of these academic schemes. An outgrowth of the Cold War-funded Project Troy, CENIS was established in the early 1950s. Despite its modest beginnings, the center had become a major think tank by the time John F. Kennedy arrived in the White House. Unlike other Area Studies programs in U.S. universities, CENIS’s research agenda was meant to be a “Problem Program” that sought to produce a body of knowledge for government use rather than for its own sake. Research plans launched by CENIS strived to “reach conclusions that have some general application and relevance to the national needs of our own country and of others.” More insightfully, CENIS’s programs aimed at studying
“the political, cultural, institutional, psychological, and sociological factors that affect the rate and character of economic growth.”

Of course, like Area Studies as a whole, CENIS was informed by Cold War concerns:

> It is manifestly in the interest of the United States that the non-communist nations of the world maintain reasonable political stability, avoid a trend towards communism, and move gradually toward an increasing degree of democracy. The trend of events outside the Iron Curtain countries is likely to have a major effect on the nature of Soviet-American relations and on the likelihood of open war. Policy, or the lack of it, relative to those parts of the world over which the United States still exercises considerable influence may, therefore, be crucial to our national survival.

National security concerns did not only lead CENIS to dismiss Area Studies as backward-looking in favor of a course of research which was “primarily concerned with implications for the future.” The emergence of the modernization paradigm that informed CENIS’s research agenda also insured that it would eventually overshadow regional planning and development in American economic thinking.

While hardly at the forefront of studies carried out by modernization theorists, Africa was never missing from their scholarship. Already in early 1950, Africanist researcher and diplomat Vernon McKay had urged academics to include Africa in their area studies research, claiming that the “time has arrived for a full-fledged program of African studies at a major university, preferably in the area around Washington or New York.” Echoing this exhortation, George McGhee announced a couple of months later during an address at Northwestern University that the State Department was pleased to cooperate with Melville Herskovits’s institution in promoting African Studies. With the passing of time, academic programs to study Africa mushroomed in the United States, culminating in the establishment of the African Studies Association (ASA) in 1957 and the creation of a number of specialized journals to disseminate knowledge about Africa.
Even before the findings of American modernization theorists were translated into French policy idioms, an American-type development had emerged as a priority on the agenda of the French colonial bureaucrats. Yet its implementation never favored the relatively reformist and decentralized road to modernity that regional planning seemed to promote in metropolitan France. In fact, more often than not, French colonial modernizers relied on what Nils Gilman has termed “revolutionary and authoritarian visions” of American-style modernization, that is, an anti-populist, state-centered, and universalist approach to development.\(^{29}\) In the context of the Marshall Plan and increasing American pressure on France to show more muscle in the fight against communism, French colonial authorities may have been acting from an American script. In fact, as early as 1950, Marshall planners had ruled that the United States must promote a “streamlined approach” to the postwar development issues of the colonial territories. Privileging a state-centered approach, the Economic Cooperation Administration was urged to devote “technical assistance funds only to non-controversial type projects.”\(^{30}\) This meant that ECA would highlight a-spatial and non-place-specific modernization endeavors such as the establishment of research facilities, market studies, labor training, and the conduct of basic surveys regarding health, communication, and transportation.\(^{31}\)

Whether in the form of regional planning or a-spatial developmentalism, the ideology that informed American foreign assistance and modernization programs always betrayed the belief that “communism could triumph only in a country in which economic conditions were so intolerable for the masses that they would choose communism as an alternative to their misery.”\(^{32}\) For this reasons, most U.S. diplomats reveled in the knowledge that France was the European colonial power that took the most advantage of
American assistance offers. This French loyalty notwithstanding, the foreign policy elite in Washington never fully trusted their Parisian colleagues. As we shall see, when nationalists in French West Africa became ever more insistent in their demands, they even toyed with the idea of taking matters into their own hands. If anything, this showed that American liberals discriminated not only between Soviet-style progress and American modernity but also between good development and bad development within the U.S.’s own sphere of influence.

**GOOD DEVELOPMENT/BAD DEVELOPMENT:**

*American Liberals, French Bureaucrats, and the Technopolitics of Anti-communism*

On the last day of February 1951, Burton Y. Berry appeared before the U.S. Congress to defend an appropriation requested by the Office of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs. In the absence of Assistant Secretary George C. McGhee who was on mission, Deputy Assistant Secretary Berry was called upon to justify the increase of eight positions anticipated by his department. With an easiness that only the most seasoned expert could muster, Berry first described the geographic area under his jurisdiction. With the help of maps and other visuals, he pointed to the strategic importance of Africa and Asia in view of the escalating Cold War. Then in an attempt to explain the projected increase in personnel the State Department official proffered: “The principal reason for the new employees is to open two new posts: we propose to open posts at Brazzaville and at Abidjan.”

The discussion that immediately ensued between the Deputy Assistant Secretary and the lawmakers was not kept on Congressional records. Still, when later called upon to comment on rumors that there was a “considerable infiltration of communism among the
African tribes,” Berry provided a revealing insight into the official mindset of the State Department in the 1950s: “Yes,” the diplomat responded, “That is one of the reasons that we propose to open [a] post at Abidjan.” Expanding on his answer, the Deputy Assistant Secretary added: “Our information is that a Communist-front party has its stronghold in Abidjan. From there it infiltrates members through Black Africa, going even to Leopoldville.” Elaborating on this last point, Berry further explained: “On the belief that infiltration does exist and is a potential danger, we would like to know a great deal more about it than we do, and a great deal more than we can know from our present listening posts.”

The interchange between Deputy Assistant Secretary Berry and the restive American lawmakers is instructive in many ways: first because it shows that French Africa was not below the radar of American strategic thinking in the postwar years. And further, the explicit reference to “listening posts” confirms the importance of information gathering and spatial concerns in the waging of the Cold War and the making of the American Century. Yet the discussions between Berry and the appropriations committee might have remained buried in the minutes of the Congress had it not been for a front page news item in Le Monde, which, acting as cotext, reported that the United States was considering opening a Consulate General in Abidjan so as to “monitor” the subversive activities of communists. Allegedly, the newspaper continued, the latter were using the Ivory Coast as a base to destabilize the entire West African region. More discomfited than alarmed by the journalistic leak, French colonial authorities in West Africa undertook their own investigation and concluded that the United States ultimately had
“commercial motives,” leading them to deny Washington’s request to open a consular office in Abidjan.³⁸

In light of both the political difficulties that the French communists faced in metropolitan France and Governor Laurent Péchoux’s merciless crackdown on the vocal nationalist movement of the Ivory Coast in the late 1940s, together with the ensuing disaffiliation of the Ivorian anti-colonial leaders from the French Communist Party (PCF), the conclusion that French colonial authorities reached was not misguided. With the passing of time, of course, an American consulate was eventually allowed to open in Abidjan in the mid-1950s. If anything, though, the episode of the refusal of the first request already highlighted the major elements that would come to structure American involvement in the moral economy of Ivory Coast’s development: Washington’s use of anti-communist or other idealistic rhetoric to camouflage a U.S. desire to displace France in its colonial empire, the implicit American critique of French (post)imperial rule as outmoded, and France’s constant vigilance to safeguard its pré carré against American encroachment.

Although the French officials rejected the American request, the on-going projection of American power into colonial Ivory Coast never stopped. In fact, the 1950s witnessed a stream of American observers visiting the West African country. While the mere presence of many American liberals who ventured into postwar Ivory Coast betrayed the idea of an American interest in the fledging bridgehead of France’s colonial domain in West Africa, none of them embodied the calling of the American Century as potently as Hassoldt Davis.
Born in 1907 into a wealthy Boston family, Hassoldt Davis was perhaps the last incarnation of those rich young men who endlessly suffer from pathological boredom for lack of genuine and primeval outlets for masculine adventure. In such a condition only rhyming and the reading of Tarzan books provided him with an escape into an imaginary world of romance and manhood.\textsuperscript{39} The exotic adventures of Tarzan were to have a lasting influence on the young Davis. At 32, the Bostonian curtailed his education by leaving Harvard College and joining the Denis-Roosevelt expedition to Asia as both writer and photographer. This experience inspired him to write \textit{Land of the Eye} and \textit{Nepal, Land of Mystery}, both of which would be well received.\textsuperscript{40} At outbreak of the Second World War, the action-driven Davis volunteered to help General de Gaulle’s Free France. In order to achieve this goal, the Bostonian now turned New Yorker boarded a steamer \textit{en route} for the French Congo whence he joined General Jacques-Philippe Leclerc and his troops in Chad as the Free French forces readied themselves to fight the Italians in North Africa.\textsuperscript{41} His participation in the war won Davis both the French \textit{Croix de Guerre} and the prestigious \textit{Légion d’Honneur}.\textsuperscript{42}

Even more rewarding than these honorific titles was the writer-explorer’s encounter with Brong Prince Kouamé Adingra who, after fleeing the Vichy-controlled Ivory Coast, had joined General Leclerc’s forces in Chad. This fortuitous encounter was to facilitate Davis’s second major expedition after the war.\textsuperscript{43} An inveterate traveler, Davis was also a prolific writer. His stories, if sometimes contrived and voyeuristic, always had the touch of both the amateur ethnographer and the \textit{poète raté}. Already in 1952 he had published the favorably received \textit{The Jungle and the Damned}, an account of his
expedition to French Guiana. Acting sometimes as a literary critic himself, Davis also regularly contributed to the *New York Times*.44

This experienced explorer and writer arrived in the Ivory Coast in late 1949. Accompanied by his wife Ruth—a former photographer for the French Information Service in New York—the Francophile couple planned not only to find a village where sorcerers and witches were supposedly trained but also to unveil the mystery surrounding the custom among the Yakuba people of western Ivory Coast in which a “king of the Dance is elected annually and killed at the end of his term with a golden arrow.”45 The peregrinations of the Davises resulted in the publication of *Sorcerers’ Village* in 1955, a cinematic version of which was jointly sponsored in the late 1950s by the American Museum of Natural History and the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS).46

Figure 1.2: Roaming the Ivory Coast
While *Sorcerers' Village* opens with a generous preface in which Hassoldt Davis extends his gratitude to Governor Laurent Péchoux, the Chargeurs Reunis, the Compagnie de Transports Océaniques, and Ambassador Henri Bonnet, many instances in the actual travelogue reveal the French colonists to be weak, if not effeminate cold warriors, who must be replaced by stronger and more efficient Americans. Not only was the French *mission civilisatrice* incapable of uprooting cannibalism among the so-called backward indigenous people, but more troubling in Davis’s account, the French colonial authorities proved themselves unable to contain the spread of communism in the territory. Davis echoed the script of Burton Berry’s congressional appearance, faulting the French for turning the communists into an omnipresent threat with their mythical leadership going “everywhere, but everywhere […] to make more trouble.”

One such episode occurred in the district of Tiébissou in the center of the territory where the communists had reportedly rebelled against the authorities and assaulted a number of district guards. While the local district officer (*commandant de cercle*) eventually rounded up the rebellious communists and forced them to apologize and renounce their subversive faith, agitation did not end. In fact, the communists organized a rally in the nearby district of Toumodi soon after. With the French displaying yet more signs of weakness, it was only the assistance of Davis and his scooter (symbol of American modernity) that allowed the authorities to monitor the recalcitrant communists. As an American cold warrior, Hassoldt Davis never doubted the power of machines as a more powerful tool to contain the perceived expansion of the communists. This confidence, he proved with his use of American technoscience such as canned foods, radio, and voice recorder to lure the seemingly credulous natives away from the
To paraphrase Nils Gilman, where the French had failed to uplift the Ivorians from both material “backwardness” and dearth, Davis promised to “exorcise the secular demons of the postwar world—poverty, Communism, and colonialism.” Like the officially anointed American modernizers, he had armed himself with “sacramental science and technology” to meet the challenge of the restive French colonial subjects of the Ivory Coast.54

In truth, Sorcerers’ Village reads like a surreal story, especially for anyone familiar with the protracted nationalist politics of postwar French West Africa. How, for instance, could one person (be they American or otherwise) defeat such a mighty and well organized group as the communist militants and their sympathizers in French-ruled Ivory Coast? How did the so-called agitators react to the presence of the Davises in the territory? Why didn’t they attack them, especially if, as Governor Péchoux claimed, they were “solely anti-whiteman”?55 It is hard to answer these questions. One can legitimately cast doubt on the Davisian account, all the more so since the New York Times, in one of its reports on the peregrinations of the Davises, suggested rather economic motivations in explaining the end of the romance between the communists and the natives in the interior of the Ivory Coast.56

These limitations notwithstanding, Hassoldt Davis’s travelogue is a window that allows us to see how the American struggle to win the loyalty of the “wretched of the earth” was also a struggle to replace the civilizing mission of the European power. Indeed, it was a dual effort not only to limit the appeal of communism, but also to update and even substitute European colonialism with a technopolitical regime that promised material redemption for the colonial subjects. But as we shall see, the story of native
mobilization against French colonialism in the Ivory Coast was much more complex. The Ivorians never were the passive victims of communism and colonialism that the Davises and other American outsiders assumed they could liberate.

Colonial subjects had long revered American social theory and technological prowess. For example, an earlier indication of this reverence for all things American came from Filipino editor Gregorio Nieva, who congratulated U.S. colonial administrators on their better civilizing efforts in the Philippines while calling upon the European powers to emulate them. The trans-hemispheric spread of the Wilsonian notion of self-determination and the diffusion of the larger American economic and cultural models after the First World War amplified the hold of this admiration. In French-ruled Indochina, the reform-minded Vietnamese elite mobilized major American political tropes to articulate their own vision of the rebirth of an independent Vietnam.

The nascent Soviet internationalism of the interwar years, however, checked what seems to have been the first impulse of U.S. cultural imperialism on a global scale. After the Second World War, as local nationalist leaders increasingly adopted Marxist-Leninist rhetoric to denounce European colonial rule in Asia and Africa, the United States government, unlike Hassoldt Davis and his wife, found itself faced with an almost paralyzing dilemma. This was all the more so since the colonial powers in both Asia and Africa were none other than the Cold War allies and protégés of Washington. Arguably the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) was one of the first movements to adopt Marxist-Leninist anti-colonial tactics in French West Africa. From its inception, RDA established itself as an interterritorial political movement whose aim was to unite all the democratic forces in sub-Saharan Africa in a common fight against the
conservative backlash following the abolition of the key colonial laws abridging the rights of colonial subjects. These included, among others, the suppression of both the *indigénat* (February 1946) and the *travail forcé* (April 1946) as well as the extension of citizenship rights (May 1946) to all the colonial subjects living in France’s overseas territories.60

Alarmed by these seeming liberal developments, the French colonial lobby and their metropolitan backers met during the summer in Douala (Cameroon) and later in Paris to come up with plans to regain control of colonial affairs. Their rear-guard resistance partly paid off. The colonists first succeeded in having the proposed constitution of April 1946 rejected. Even more significant, they effectively replaced it with a schizophrenic constitutional arrangement that, skillfully clad in the nebulous legalism of the *Union Française* (French Union), nonetheless restricted the self-governing status that the native elites were seeking for their respective territories. It was in this context that the newly elected député Félix Houphouët-Boigny convened a meeting in Bamako (Mali) in October 1946. With delegates from most of the territories of French-rulled sub-Saharan Africa, the Bamako convention eventually agreed on the creation of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain.61

The active support of the French Communist Party (PCF) was crucial in these formative years. French communists not only provided logistical assistance in the organization of the Bamako meeting but also gave the delegates protection against the reactionary retaliation that most of them faced at the hands of zealous local colonial administrators. Even more instrumental for the ultimate survival of the budding nationalist movement was the ideological and political training that the PCF’s affiliated
Groupes d’Etudes Communistes (GEC) offered to RDA members in the various territories. In Paris, the communists further consolidated their support by allowing RDA députés to form a parliamentary bloc with the communist representatives.

RDA’s affiliation with the French communists was like a double-edged sword though. In the context of the PCF’s participation in the first postwar French government, the African nationalists enjoyed the protection of an influential metropolitan political movement which still enjoyed the favor of the French people, thanks to its role in the resistance against Nazi occupation. Such protection helped Houphouët-Boigny and his activists to build and maintain their organization with relative ease. However, when the communists were forced to leave the government in 1947 because of their opposition to the Marshall Plan, the RDA—whose nationalism hardly went beyond reformism—suddenly found itself a most vulnerable target of the colonial lobby and its metropolitan associates.

The best structured and probably most active of all RDA’s territorial sections, the Parti Démocratique de Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI), was the first organization to experience the painful truth of this new situation. The most conservative elements of the French colonists in the Ivory Coast, including white planters and the Catholic clergy, had long despised the local leadership of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain whom they rightly identified as the staunchest opponents to the colonial status quo. Having secured the recall of the rather liberal Governor André Latrille, they moved against the unprotected RDA. The colonists’ first strike occurred in February 1949, when the newly appointed governor Laurent Péchoux arrested most of the PDCI’s leaders and charged them with instigating the partisan violence surrounding a political dispute in
Treichville—the native quarter of colonial Abidjan. The following year, the brutal repression of anti-colonial protests in various cities, including Bouaflé, Dimbokro, Agboville, and Séguela, resulted in the killing of at least sixteen people and the wounding of hundreds more. As if these casualties were not sufficient, the police arrested thousands of RDA sympathizers as well as numerous PDCI field secretaries. The colonial authorities even contemplated the arrest of Houphouët-Boigny himself. However, the mobilization of the “natives” dissuaded them from carrying out this anti-constitutional plan.\textsuperscript{66} With unrest and rebellion in Indochina, Algeria, and Madagascar on the mind of many, the aim of the repression in the Ivory Coast in the late 1940s was to nip in the bud the nascent anti-colonial movement in French West Africa. Consequently, the first people to be hit by the \textit{péchoutage} (as Governor Pêchoux’s repressive methods came to be known by contemporaries) were local RDA intellectuals, including the writer Bernard B. Dadié who spent three years in the colonial prison of Grand Bassam.\textsuperscript{67}

The native population never remained passive in the face of colonial repression. From their mobilization to prevent the arrest of Houphouët-Boigny to the march of the Ivorian women on the Grand Bassam prison, via the active boycott of European consumer goods, the African population was always alert and ready to fight back. Yet \textit{péchoutage} proved victorious, at least in co-opting many RDA leaders. Indeed, while his colleagues were still in jail, Félix Houphouët-Boigny was approached by various metropolitan officials in charge of French colonial affairs. The ensuing series of secretive discussions eventually resulted in the RDA’s disavowal of communist rhetoric and disaffiliation (\textit{désapparentement}) from the French Communist Party in 1950.\textsuperscript{68}
Nationalism in French-rulled sub-Saharan Africa did not die though. In fact, the désapparentement prompted an open crisis among RDA leadership as key voices rose to denounce what they saw as a betrayal on the part of their député. Moreover, at a time when revolution was in the air and news of nationalist victories in India and Indonesia was filtering in, African students in metropolitan France joined in the denunciation of the demise of RDA leadership. Fusing Marxist theory with the philosophies of Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwame Nkrumah, and other African nationalists, they organized in the vocal Fédération des Étudiants d’Afrique Noire en France (FEANF) and kept aloft the torch of national liberation and self-determination. Braving the threat of cancellation of their fellowships and risking even deportation back to Africa, FEANF activists urged their Western-educated African elders to emulate the nationalist movements in the disintegrating British empire and pressed the colonial authorities in France to grant independence to the African territories.

It is not clear whether American diplomats were aware of these specific developments. Still the paranoia of U.S. officials over a supposed communist takeover of the world in the late 1940s and 1950s led them to take unconventional measures in terms of international relations. Within the context of Washington’s crusade against communism, the capabilities of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were expanded and improved. In metropolitan France as well as in the overseas French dependencies, American agents and diplomats were put to work—breaking even the most elementary rules of diplomacy. Thus while Deputy Assistant Secretary Burton Berry’s claim that Abidjan was the headquarters of a communist front which aimed at destabilizing West Africa was a strategy to win congressional funds, according to French diplomats, the very
use of communist subversion as a bogeyman to force Congress into action translated a real concern among American political elite. Domestically, the concern soon grew into a pathological anxiety that the leadership of both the Democratic and Republican parties shared. Consequently civil liberties were curtailed while McCarthyism ruled supreme.\textsuperscript{73}

Internationally, Washington’s paranoia led the United States to reinforce its military alliance with the Western European countries while its financial planners embarked on a vast program of economic assistance to a devastated Europe. As they implemented both the Marshall Plan and President Truman’s Point Four projects, U.S. economic policymakers not only “fixed” American capital by creating novel frontiers of economic activity, they also proved themselves to be faithful disciples of George Kennan’s doctrine of containment.\textsuperscript{74} Concomitant with a materialistic approach, American modernization theorists developed a whole new discourse about developmentalism, which eclipsed regional planning as envisioned in the TVA experiment. Instead modernization theory as a liberal ideology pitted American “good” development against the “bad” development promoted and practiced not only by the Soviets but also the older French colonial modernizers.

There was more though. In fact, the globalization of American-style modernization acted as a technopolitical regime that aimed to disrupt the territorial empires of Europe while it promoted an informal American empire of free trade and consumerism. Another look at the activities of Hassoldt Davis will bring to light how this other construction of modernization was played out in the Ivory Coast. By the same token, revisiting the peregrinations of the Davises in Ivorian territory will prove how
crucial was the expansion of capitalism and its consumerist ethics in the globalization of the American Century.

_A PAX AMERICANA IN POSTWAR IVORY COAST?: Machines, Travel Writing, and the Geo/ethnography of Imperial Expansion_

While the ethnography in _Sorcerers’ Village_ was “more diverting than memorable,” the meaning of the epistemic endeavor went beyond the rather modest artistic qualities of Davis’s opus. According to Mary Louise Pratt this was so because travel writing, taken as a literary genre, is as much about accumulating knowledge as it is about extending the disciplinary gaze of the Empire. In this light, Hassoldt Davis may be held as the agent _par excellence_ of the U.S. imperial drive in postwar Ivory Coast. This may have not always been clear to the explorer himself. Yet a careful reading of the narrative of Davis’s travel throughout the West African country reveals him to be in the vanguard of America’s capitalist modernity in French West Africa.

An impatient reader of _Sorcerers’ Village_ might conclude that Davis was yet another American subscriber to French colonialism and its epistemology; especially so since his first informant is none other than the local representative of the Institut Français d’Afrique Noire (IFAN) which was one of the key organizations in the construction, circulation, and institutionalization of French Africanist discourse. However, as the expedition party set off for the interior of the Ivory Coast and gradually moved away from the French-style city of Abidjan, it soon appeared that besides the logistical aid of the French colonial authorities, the major forces that would decisively help Davis in completing his exploration were American consumer products such as flashlights, Coleman lanterns, radio sets, canned foods, and the like. For instance, he reportedly used his “electric bull-prod” to subdue unruly native peoples whenever he felt threatened by their presence. Again and again, Davis would mobilize American technoculture and its
artifacts to lure the native populations who had reportedly remained impervious to the French *mission civilisatrice.*

Anticipating the marketing possibilities that an African expedition might offer for their global expansion, American firms had contributed to the funding of Davis’s voyage to French West Africa. A self-appointed explorer, Davis was nonetheless the representative of a culture that created in him only a Baudelairean *spleen.* In this role, he served the interests of corporate America which was always in search of new lands to bring into the fold of the American Century.

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Figure 1. 3: Selling American Modernity

The blurb accompanying the picture reads: “Hassoldt Davis and Emie the Chimp in multiple publicity scene: Lambretta Scooter, Borden’s Klim, Eastman’s Medallist camera, Tupperware.”

We do not know how many American products the Davis Expedition brought to the Ivory Coast, but as the exploration party crisscrossed the territory from South to North and East to West, the Davises always left behind a “heap of grateful presents” for the native peoples. Given the complexity of the “social life” that consumer products may assume in a society, it is hard to gauge the reception of the “grateful presents” among the local people. Yet if one should rely on Davis’s own account, the native populations not only liked them but also actively sought them. Thus as he opened the Ivorian territory to the “imperial eyes” of the United States, Hassoldt Davis also subtly paved the way for the projection of the American Dream and the market-driven consumer culture that it diligently conveyed.

Even before Davis’s expedition to the Ivory Coast, American firms had been trying to tap the various markets of France’s African colonies. In a report written toward the end of the Second World War, for instance, French colonial authorities observed that American businesses were “considering the exploitation of the commercial markets located in our possessions of West and Equatorial Africa.” Indeed, Ivorian cocoa beans had found their way to Great Britain and the United States throughout the war years. As the conflict came to a close, tropical wood from France’s African colonies came to supplement the now diverse agricultural products that supplied the American market. While contemporary accounts specifically emphasized American interest in the exploitation of rubber, peanuts, and other agricultural raw materials, it was also the case that many American businesses were developing an interest in the booming infrastructural markets that French West Africa offered. Thus already in 1941, RCA Communications had opened a radiotelegraph circuit that was to link the United States to
various cities in French Africa. Illustrating a similar U.S. interest, if obliquely, was an unsuccessful bid on behalf of the American constructor Raymond Concrete Pile in 1946 to finish the construction of the Abidjan port facilities. However, given French fears of American encroachment, the offer did not go through. Yet it revealed an early American interest in the political economy of social and cultural change in the Ivory Coast.

By and large, the war years and the eventual defeat of the Axis Powers witnessed the rise of the United States as a global hegemon. Even though Americans had roamed the French empire as early as the late nineteenth century, it was the logistics of military deployment during the Second World War that forced American strategists and diplomats to envisage a U.S. presence in Africa on a permanent basis. As the wartime alliance of the United States and the Soviet Union broke down and the emerging Cold War and anti-colonial agitations appeared to converge in the postwar period, the American presence in French Africa became consolidated through a network of diplomatic and economic outposts on the continent. Such consolidation made the American Century a synchronic reality, at least for elite nationalists who were now embracing modernization discourse in their fight against European imperialism.

While both ethnographic and geographic discourses played an important role in the coming of the Pax Americana, the displacement of European power that U.S. hegemony orchestrated in the postwar period was “simultaneously a victory over geography.” Perhaps no other instance better epitomizes the pertinence of this insight than the mobilization of Area Studies and modernization theory by American cold
warriors in their worldwide crusade against communism. As they did so, American strategists not only attempted to roll back the perceived advance of Soviet ideological influence in Europe’s colonial possessions but also managed to lay the foundations of their own informal empire in Western European nations and their dependencies. Indeed, swayed by a more dynamic appreciation of the global context of the American Century, U.S. foreign policy decision-makers cast doubt on the future of European imperialism, which they, along with modernization theorists, increasingly viewed as outmoded and ineffective in uplifting the indigenous people. How did the European modernizers respond to such unfriendly critique? What was the impact of the critique of late colonial governmentality on the ever more restive colonial subjects in France’s dependencies? The next chapter addresses these issues as I focus attention on the micropolitics of translating American-style modernization for a West African audience.
CHAPTER TWO

TOWARD DUBBING MODERNITY: FRENCH COLONIAL AUTHORITIES, RESTIVE IVORIANS, AND THE CRUCIBLE OF POSTWAR DEVELOPMENT

Spread everywhere with infinite variations, the American system now has the whole world for its field. It seems—but it is no more than a seeming—compatible with every political system. It adapts itself to anything, takes charge of everything, and succeeds in everything. It is turning Soviet Russia itself into a colony, purely in virtue, if I dare to say so, of its so clearly pointing the way.

Georges Duhamel, Scènes de la vie future (1930)

Subtitling and dubbing represent two extremes on the translation spectrum because they originate from two opposite types of cultural systems. Subtitling corresponds to a weaker system open to foreign influences. Dubbing results from a dominant nationalistic system in which a nationalistic film rhetoric and language policy are promoted equally. Suppressing or accepting the foreign nature of imported films is a key to understanding how a country perceives itself in relation to others, and how it views the importance of its own culture and language.

Martine Danan, “Dubbing” (1991)

“Will France become an American colony?” Such was the provocative question that French writer Georges Soria decided to raise as he articulated the anxiety which many of his compatriots felt about their country’s postwar relationship with the United States. His book, which appeared at a time when French communists were denouncing the “Marshallization” of their patrie, echoed the already widespread resentment of the French elite over asymmetrical Franco-American cooperation.¹ In a context marked by an unprecedented affirmation of American hegemony on a global scale, the concerns of the French were actually shared by a substantial number of Europeans who invariably saw
American-led reconstruction of war-torn Europe as a clever means set up by the Americans to erode their lifestyles and worldviews. Consequently they decided to act, if not popularly, at least with a populist rhetoric. To provide resistance against what Georges Duhamel had prophesized during the interwar years as the slow diffusion of the American way of life onto the world was therefore the aim of the anti-U.S. mobilization that spanned across political affiliation.²

While the mobilizations against the United States were performatively successful, not all of the postwar French leadership subscribed to the rhetoric of anti-Americanism. In fact, quite a few prominent French luminaries, including Jean Monnet, Philippe Lamour, Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, and Pierre Mendès-France sought to import American modernity to the Hexagon. But given the history of the love-hate relationship between France and the United States, the very process of transplanting an American model in France forced even the most zealous advocate of Americanization to opt for modulation rather than modelization. Such pro-active stance made the adaptation of American modernization discourse and practices a necessity.³

I argue in this chapter that French colonial administrators and experts—a substantial number of whom went to the United States as productivity missionaries—had a much more difficult task. In the face of mounting anti-colonial nationalism, they not only had to find ways to uphold the myth of a modern and civilized France before their colonial subjects but also had to acknowledge the hollowness of their mission civilisatrice compared to the American modernization paradigm: hence the politics of dubbing, that is, the project and process aimed at translating and adapting for their colonial subjects development concepts and techniques that largely emanated from the United States. A
subtle yet still paternalistic trick, the politics of dubbing ensured that French colonial administrators and experts would remain the hegemonic mediators between American modernity and the indigenous people of the newly created *Union Française*. In other words, by suppressing the historically-constituted “American-ness” of postwar developmentalism, the French colonial state and its managers aimed to brand themselves as the sole providers of progress and the “good” life to their colonial subjects. What were the outcomes of such political acts of seduction? How was the effort at translation actually achieved? What were its conditions of possibility? Where there any constraints that limited the effectiveness of the translational performance deployed by the French colonial authorities?

In answering these questions, the chapter begins with a look at the spectral presence of the United States in colonial Ivory Coast. Departing from the literature on the postwar Americanization of the world that largely focuses on Europe, Latin America, and Asia, I argue that the spatial extent of the process of exporting American values and ways of being was not restricted to the European, Latin American, and Asian landscapes. Even more interesting, the coming of American modernity in colonial Ivory Coast, I show, provided an opportunity for the emerging nationalist leaders to triangulate the relationship of their society with metropolitan France. The ensuing politics of triangulation, I further suggest, created or deepened extant chaos within the French empire, which ultimately forced colonial authorities to resort to dubbing modernization in a last effort to bolster the weakening imperial ties. In a third moment, I track some of the conservative results of the politics of dubbing as I look at a number of postwar modernization projects in the Ivory Coast. Focusing on the infrastructural development
efforts supported by the Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social (FIDES), the Caisse Centrale de la France d’Outre Mer (CCFOM), and, indirectly, the Marshall Plan’s fund for the modernization of Europe’s dependent territories, I reveal the continuity between the policy of *mise en valeur* and postwar modernization ideology.\(^4\)

If the politics of dubbing and the efforts at infrastructural development were meant to help roll back the nationalist tide in the French empire, they failed. By the mid-1950s, the signs pointed to the fact that decolonization had become irreversible. I close the chapter by sketching the public relations campaign that accompanied France’s policy of modernizing its *outre mer*, a campaign that was directed toward securing the cooperation of the United States. This was the case, as we shall see, because the French colonial state had rightly identified the United States as a powerful, if sometimes reluctant, model that informed people’s expectations of modernity in colonial Ivory Coast.

*THE SPECTER OF AMERICANIZATION IN THE IVORY COAST:*
*Consumerism, Colonial Frustrations, and the Politics of Triangulating Modernity*

With very few exceptions, historians of American expansionism in the twentieth century have rarely anchored their investigations in Africa’s past, let alone enquire into the African ramifications of the rise of the American Century. Instead, Latin America, Canada, Western Europe, and Asia have customarily been the focus of much scholarship on the extension and ultimate globalization of U.S. soft power.\(^5\) To a certain degree, this scholarly fixation has meant that the spread of the American dream and faith in consumer capitalism on a global scale have operated within certain geography of market attractiveness, consumer behavior, and knowledge that American firms and marketers had mustered about the rest of the world.\(^6\)
As the story of Hassoldt and Ruth Davis revealed, however, such marginal territory as the Ivory Coast was not outside the purview and circulatory reach of American products after the Second World War. While the previous chapter showed where colonial Ivory Coast stood in the geopolitics of American projections of power, I want to tackle here both Ivorian and French responses to the spread of the American dream into the French-ruled territory. In doing so, my aim is not only to track how the coming of American modernity was perceived by both colonial subjects and colonial rulers but also to pay close attention to the particular logics of subaltern engagements with Americanization in a colonial Francophone context. As will become apparent later, only then will we be able to ascertain whether the socio-political actions of the French administrators and their colonial subjects in the Ivorian territory merely replicated the populist politics that targeted the so-called “Marshallization” of postwar society in metropolitan France.

By dislodging Europe’s “old regime of consumption” and replacing its “ethics of distinction” with an ethics geared toward service, America’s market empire proved itself to be, according to Victoria de Grazia, an “irresistible” force. Following the work of Kristin Ross, we have a better understanding of how Americanization and decolonization re-ordered metropolitan culture in postwar France. France’s dependencies and overseas territories were not spared the social and cultural re-structuring that the rise of a hegemonic U.S. emporium/imperium orchestrated throughout the world. From the postwar architectural ventures in Morocco’s premier international city of Casablanca to U.S. cultural diplomacy in Southeast Asia, American informal imperialism, indeed, shied away from no barrier, except perhaps the various “curtains” of the Cold War. Even then,
American policymakers and Cold War strategists sought to expand the reach of a U.S.-dominated “Free World” and its irresistible consumerist ethics everywhere, even kitchens in the Soviet Union.¹⁰

There is evidence that the coming of American consumer durables into colonial Ivory Coast predated the postwar rise of the United States as an international leader in the provision of cheap industrial products to the world.¹¹ Still, the adoption or at least admiration of American consumption pattern by the Ivorian évolutés occurred only after the Second World War, when rapid urbanization, consumer euphoria, and over-equipment made the Ivory Coast a prime site for the expansion of America’s market empire in French West Africa. Such was the case because French residents in the territory had begun, despite lagging behind their peers in metropolitan France, to conspicuously display their new found modernity in the form of imported refrigerators, cars, scooters, air-conditioners, and other consumer durables.¹²

It is very difficult to quantify how many of these products were American-made. But given the Hexagon’s own reliance on U.S. consumer goods in the immediate postwar period, it is quite plausible that some of these goods found their way into the dependencies. In their efforts to mimic the new French middle class, French residents in the Ivory Coast used their access to the consumer products that the Marshall Plan had rendered available to distance themselves further from the colonial subjects.¹³ As it turned out, this imperial differentiation deepened the frustration of the Ivorian elite and ultimately prompted some of them to deploy a politics of triangulation by calling upon the United States to advance their own budding nationalist agenda. This development was made possible by the flow of foreign media images into the colony, exposing both
metropolitan residents and colonial subjects to the marvels of postwar American modernity. Compounding this situation was the growing number of students who not only were ever more restive in the nationalist cause but also were drawn to the American cornucopia. The resulting conjuncture, in many ways, explained why the colonial authorities were so much afraid of what Benedict Anderson, in his history of the origin of Southeast Asian nationalism, has referred to as the “spectre of comparisons,” that is, colonial subjects’ comparison of the actions of their immediate overlords with those of other imperial powers.

French fear that they might lose control over their colonial “wards” if the latter were exposed to Americanization was not misguided, at least if assessed against the backdrop of the decolonization saga in the larger French empire. In Indochina, for instance, Vietnamese nationalists had strategically used a number of tropes drawn from the annals of American history, such as the Declaration of Independence, to articulate their own aspiration for independence. The resulting war of Vietnam certainly succeeded in convincing many French colonial authorities that America, whether “real” or “imagined,” posed a serious threat to French rule in the *outre mer*. This was so because the mere presence of the United States even as transatlantic ally invariably acted as a force which threatened to dislodge French rule and its *mission civilisatrice*. At the same time, the very specter of the United States provided the colonial subjects with an alternative to French colonial modernity.

Contemporary developments in the Ivory Coast proved such assessment to be on target. For example, the lawyer Kouamé Binzême, acting as the mouthpiece of a group of disgruntled Ivorian planters, decided in the fall of 1948 to write directly to American
Marshall planners to enlist their active support for what he anticipated would be the effective modernization of his country. Historiographically, such action does not seem to conform to the conventional depiction of the Ivorian postwar elite who have usually been posited as right-hand-men of French colonialism and its exclusivist civilizing mission. In fact, even though Binzème was educated in the French system and was completing his law degree in a metropolitan French institution, he had come to see the United States as a modernizing force to be reckoned with. Who was Maître Binzème? What was his message to the American authorities? How did the Marshall planners respond to his appeal? How did the French react to his implicit critique of colonial governmentality?

Born to parents from the wealthier Ivorian southeast, Kouamé Binzème completed elementary school in the Ivory Coast. He first worked as a clerk for a local merchant, then went to France for secondary schooling. After securing a scholarship, he started his university training in legal studies in the 1930s. In 1935, Binzème returned to the Ivory Coast to set up a newspaper, which did not run for more than a year. After this short-lived experiment, Binzème made his way back to France. He completed his law degree and soon came back home to become enmeshed in the postwar political and nationalist battles, which led to a confrontation with Félix Houphouët-Boigny and his political machine. It was in this context of political and nationalist upheavals that Binzème wrote to the managers of the Marshall Plan. While his aim was clearly to recruit the Americans for the socio-economic development of the Ivory Coast, Binzème’s attitude also confirmed the fear of the French colonial authorities regarding the
subversive potential inherent in the rise of a comparative consciousness among France’s colonial subjects.19

Figure 2. 1: Kouamé Binzème, circa 1951.

Source: Amon d’Aby, Côte d’Ivoire, p. 120, Planche 3.

Binzème’s plan for the modernization of the Ivory Coast was striking in more than one regard. From the outset, it boldly argued for an active participation of the United States in Ivorian postwar development drive, almost to the exclusion of the French
colonial state. As the lawyer put it himself, his program was informed by the “principle of partnership (association) between American capital and African labor.” Implicitly critiquing the French doctrine of colonial mise en valeur, which was more exploitative than beneficial to the colonial subjects, Binzème added that the Ivoiro-American partnership in the domain of development should above all, “protect the integrity of indigenous natural resources” while it promoted, at the same time, “freedom, economic progress, and social betterment for the Africans.”

In practical terms, however, the Binzème Plan was a reappropriation of some of the programs that the Fonds d’Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social (FIDES) had initiated in the Ivory Coast. These included the industrial exploitation of strategic minerals such as manganese, iron, silver, gold, and oil. Still in line with FIDES program, Binzème hoped to mechanize Ivorian agriculture and forestry for a better exploitation of their resources. Against France’s protectionist policy limiting the importation of consumer goods into the outre mer, Binzème solicited the “active collaboration” of American industries to meet the “unsatisfied needs” of the indigenous peoples. Finally, the Ivorian lawyer requested that American financial groups participate in the creation of a venture firm whose aim would be the exploitation of Ivorian natural resources.

It is not clear how American Marshall Planners responded to Maître Binzème’s proposals. Nor can we ascertain whether the French colonial authorities took notice of his correspondence with the Americans. Still, the attitude of the Ivorian lawyer crystallized a tendency visible throughout the larger French empire in the postwar period: the
nationalist politics of triangulating development and a rather voluntarist call for more Americanization. If modernization had, indeed, emerged as a transnational ideology that most people espoused, French colonial subjects increasing came to doubt the modernizing capability of Paris and its imperial extension. In contrast to France’s *mission civilisatrice*, people like Kouamé Binzème were counterposing the potential benefits of the American way of life and the modernization theory that informed its expansion. The dangers inherent in the politics of triangulating modernization were not lost on the French colonial administrators. Their reaction, which came in the form of dubbing American modernization, if desperate, at least suggested that knowledge, translation, and comparativism had become transnational discursive forces in the postwar world of French imperialism, not unlike the doctrine of *mise en valeur* that informed the early French civilizing mission.

*ENACTING THE POLITICS OF DUBBING: Knowledge, Translation, and the Rehabilitation of *Mise en Valeur*

French concerns for the development of the natural resources of their colonies were coeval with the very project of imperial expansion. Still, their articulation as a legitimate governmental policy was only achieved during the interwar period when the Minister for the Colonies, Albert Sarraut, conceived his doctrine of *mise en valeur*. In a bid to curb perceived communist-led agitation in France’s colonial possessions, as one historian has shown, Sarraut argued that “economic development was essential to limit the popular appeal of leftist ideas to colonized peoples.” More critically, *mise en valeur* was designed to help France revive its economy after the First World War. This was all
the more necessary since the war had left metropolitan France crippled and its citizens demoralized.27

To carry out the twofold objective of *mise en valeur*, the task of accumulating knowledge about the colonial subjects and their lands was to emerge as a crucial undertaking. In the Ivory Coast as well as much of French-ruled Africa, the endeavor was to fall on explorers, geographers, tropical biologists and doctors, anthropologists, colonial administrators, and religious missionaries who soon appeared as the first experts on Africa.28 By setting Africa as the “absolute other” of Europe, the discourses (travel writing, fiction, cartography, medical and survival manuals, etc.) of these first amateur Africanists proved to be enduring resources that enabled the later institutionalization of French and other Africanisms.29 Right from its foundational moment, the order of this emerging Africanist epistemological field set itself as a dual-use place of memory: firstly, it was used to erect an ethnocentric construct of France by exhibiting what it was supposed not to be. Secondly, it was incrementally used to feed the epistemic memories of the French Africanists, thus increasing their capacity to act on this hyperreal object called “Africa.”30

Unlike American-led development sciences after the Second World War, the epistemology that informed the early version of *mise en valeur* was graphed on a biological understanding of races. It posed the native as an irrational flesh no better than a “corpus rarum” (*corps d’exception*) who could not tap the abundant natural resources surrounding him.31 But the rise of modernization theory after the Second World War rendered *mise en valeur* problematic, if not obsolete. In an American Century bent on shifting imperial dominance from the control of territories and bodies to the education of
people’s desires and imaginaries, biological racism was replaced by cultural racism. In this process the *mission civilisatrice* was supposedly improved, at least in the minds of American modernization theorists. French authorities did not remain indifferent in face of this implicit critique of their colonial governmentality and the epistemologies that informed its implementation. Ever more dependent on American assistance for postwar reconstruction, French political and cultural elites could not but engage American leadership. Yet the everyday management of this engagement in their colonies forced them to dub American-inflected modernization theory in an attempt to preserve French *grandeur*—or rather its myth.

The architects of this ingenious effort at dubbing were the colonial administrators and their retinue of specialists, technicians, and experts. Given the decentralized nature of French colonial rule, the local administrators may have been the actual makers of much of French imperialism in Africa. But their *commandement* would have amounted to nothing had the colonial administrators not been able to rely on the counsels and even guidance of the colonial experts. During the early moments of the drive toward *mise en valeur*, for instance, geographers and engineers had to survey the newly acquired territories to make them legible for colonial rule. In a similar vein, military engineers had to build roads, railways, bridges, and canals while doctors and medical biologists were making sure the *outre mer* was free from debilitating germs and diseases. Without these efforts, the realization of the project of *mise en valeur* would have proved elusive. After the Second World War, this pattern of collaboration between science, technology, and colonial rule was maintained and extended with the addition of the dubbing of American modernization theory by colonial experts. How was the politics of dubbing orchestrated?
What were its modes of operation? Any answer to these questions requires an understanding of U.S. postwar economic strategy to maintain, if not, expand its emporium over a disillusioned world in search of a new compass to guide itself.

Even while the war was still raging, American diplomats had anticipated that a U.S.-led global market economy would be the basis for any reconstruction efforts. In this regard, Washington economic planners designed programs to boost productivity around the world in an attempt to bridge the postwar “dollar gap” and the wider trade imbalance between the United States and its European partners. Typically, the planners believed that the reconstruction of Europe and the stability of the wider world were untenable unless foreign governments managed their economies according to the dictates of consumer capitalism. To this end, the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) brought thousands of visitors to the United States to expose them to American modernity in the hope that they would replicate an American model of development once they returned to their home countries. Among these visitors, French officials and executives numbered in the thousands. Between 1949 and 1956, some 335 French missions went to the United States, totaling around 3700 people. As a rule, the French missionaries wanted to learn about the “causes and methods of American high productivity.” The more enthusiast members of French delegations used the opportunity of the transatlantic voyage to initiate critical self-examinations of their own society. At the same time, many productivity missionaries struggled to adapt the American gospel to the realities of metropolitan France.

The job of the French colonial administrators and experts who visited the United States was even more complicated. With anti-colonial nationalism on the rise, one
mission proposal suggested, the colonial administrators had to minimize the time-consuming process of trial and error inherent to development practice. It went on to argue that the focus should be on speeding up colonial productivity by the introduction of American machinery. This proposal was confirmed in subsequent reports. For instance, after his second month touring the United States, P. Labrousse concluded that while a “tremendous work of verification” would be needed, it was “more likely that we would end up trying some of the machines in our pilot regions.” Saint Hippolite adopted the same position when he argued that France had no other option but “bring some [American machines] to our possessions.” A few colonial scientists joined the missionary wave. Such was the case of Hubert Moulinier who spent four months in the United States studying agronomic issues. At the end of his visit, the chef de travaux de laboratoires returned to West Africa convinced that many American methods, if adapted judiciously, could improve the productivity of such tropical cash crops as coffee and cocoa.

The United States did not provide leadership to the French only in the field of agronomy. The French missionaries also looked up to such American social experiment as race relations from which they surprisingly hoped to draw lessons for the outre mer. In fact, even though French scholars were among the inventors of “race” as an anthropological category in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, French political and cultural elites came to shun discussion of race in twentieth century France. Rather they claimed race was an American problem. This myth of a color-blind France attracted many African Americans to the Hexagon. Yet a racialist unconscious haunted French society as a whole, which was revealed at the time of France’s embrace of U.S.
technoculture. If anything, the claim that social conditions in the overseas territories were closer to the U.S. (because of the presence of blacks) than metropolitan France betrayed the belief that race indeed mattered to the French decision-makers. Already in their discussion of what telecommunication equipment to procure in the U.S., colonial authorities in France observed what they believed was a similarity in land-use patterns between certain American southern regions and Africa.45

Yet it was in their observations on housing and hygiene that the racialist unconscious became glaring. Revealingly, one administrator claimed that the existence of blacks in the American South made it imperative for the missionaries to visit this part of the United States. Another administrator suggested that the mission on overseas equipment would have to study both the “adaptation of whites to special living conditions (in terms of housing, climate, and interactions with backward [peu évolué] natives) and training as well as adaptation of a backward labor force to mechanized work.”46 Implicit in these recommendations was the belief that African Americans shared the status of corps d’exception with France’s colonial subjects in Africa. Furthermore, by insisting on a study of interactions between blacks and whites in the United States, the French colonial administrators suggested that a successful race relations was part and parcel of the modernization package.

Not all colonial authorities had to make the transatlantic voyage in order to be exposed to American developmental know-how. Sometimes they could have their share of American modernity mediated through Paris. For instance, at the end of the mission on gold mining, M. Philippe asked various French overseas institutions to let him know the number of copies of the final report they would need. Many of the institutions in charge
of the *outr
t mer*, including the Haut Commisariat d’AOF and the Office de la Recherche Scientifique Outre-Mer (ORSOM), responded promptly. In other instances, American development missionaries effected the reverse voyage overseas to train French colonial managers. For example, ECA/MSA sent a U.S. cotton geneticist to French Africa while another American expert was lent to French colonial authorities to train them in American techniques of mechanical rice harvesting.

Despite the suspicion of some colonial administrators, a number of French institutions in charge of overseas affairs actively sought this type of cooperation. Such was the case of ORSOM, which not only asked for the delivery of American scientific equipment and documentation to its various laboratories but also proposed to send its own technicians to the U.S. while it anticipated hosting American experts at its overseas facilities in Africa.

At the level of implementation, French colonial administrators translated American modernity into the terms of a rejuvenated *pacte colonial*. Burying the industrialization projects that Vichy had intended for the *outr
t mer*, postwar leaders and planners soon resuscitated the stale notion of economic complementarity between the metropole and the colonies. In the mind of most postwar modernizers what mattered, after all, was increased sectoral productivity within the framework of the imperial (and international) division of labor. As he gave his blessings for the sending of French productivity missionaries to the United States, Jean Monnet emphasized the extractive activities of the overseas territories, including the colonial dependencies in French West Africa. With Marshall Plan money channeled through the FIDES, French authorities rehabilitated, for instance, the irrigation project of the Office du Niger as it was
envisioned in the 1920s. Even though they were heirs to the emerging American modernization paradigm, and perhaps because of these very filiations, many FIDES projects entrenched the status quo. The story of postwar development endeavors in the Ivory Coast exemplified this situation.

**PERFORMING POSTWAR MISE EN VALEUR: Research, Applied Science and the Making of FIDES Projects**

While they also encouraged the expansion of cash crop agriculture, FIDES planners specifically focused on the *grands travaux* (public works), best epitomized by the speeding up and eventual completion of the quarter-century old projected harbor of Abidjan. The next chapter will expand on this theme in the specific context of the constitution of Abidjan as a colonial bridgehead. It will suffice here to trace the outlines of other late colonial modernization projects. In so doing, we must remember that the purpose of *grands travaux*, just like the other FIDES infrastructural projects, was to create a network of communication and transportation facilities that would expedite the delivery of colonial raw materials and foodstuffs to the metropole.

Technology and civil/social engineering played a critical role in this postwar drive toward modernization. In view of the reconstruction of metropolitan France, the rise of applied science at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) proved to be a most opportune conjuncture. Colonial authorities in Africa, including those posted to the Ivory Coast, managed to recreate a similar condition as they set up the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer (ORSTOM) whose mission, as a public agency, was to orient, coordinate, and control scientific research in France’s overseas territories. Given the postwar enthusiasm for commissioning the production of useful
knowledge, it came with no surprise that a share of FIDES funds for the modernization of the colonies was devoted to applied research. In postwar Ivory Coast, for instance, FIDES spent about $240 (or 400 000 CFA francs) on research, including socio-economic studies related to the rehabilitation and effective operation of a palm oil factory at Dabou.\textsuperscript{55}

If the late interwar \textit{mise en valeur} projects partly relied on the research expertise of the Institut Français d’Afrique Noire (IFAN), the modernizers of the 1940s and 1950s mobilized the epistemic power of ORSTOM. In a context dominated by a search for better means to exploit the resources of the \textit{outre mer}, ORSTOM’s agenda was pragmatically updated to include applied ecological and social research. Thus, echoing a practice already in place among their fellow sociologists in metropolitan France, the expertise of the colonial social scientists was called upon to guide postwar development policies.\textsuperscript{56} Survey teams were immediately sent to various parts of the \textit{outre mer}, including French Equatorial and West Africa, Madagascar, and New Caledonia. To the satisfaction of the local authorities, the colonial social scientists highlighted the \textit{mentalités} of the “Natives” with regard to their economic, social, and agronomical practices.\textsuperscript{57}

Already during the negotiations for the establishment of the Ivorian branch of ORSTOM, Professor Raoul Combes— the chairman of the research agency—had told the Governor General of French West Africa that his institution would not fail to serve the interest of any territory willing to host ORSTOM’s facilities and research centers.\textsuperscript{58} Turning this promise into a reality, Orstomians carried out soil research in various regions of the French-ruled territories in West Africa in the late 1940s in order to determine soil types and suggest the corresponding best agricultural uses for them.\textsuperscript{59} In the wake of the FIDES modernization drive, ORSTOM was also contracted to train
agricultural extension agents for the overseas territories. On the assumption that the colonial farmers would produce better only if they were guided appropriately, the FIDES managing directorate [comité directeur] granted substantial funds to ORSTOM to establish a training program for the extension agents. The creation of the Conseil supérieur des recherches sociologiques d’outre-mer in 1951 helped ORSTOM further extend this drive toward applied research for the benefit of the metropolitan interests.

While part of FIDES money went into the making of applied research, the bulk of French postwar development fund was devoted to infrastructural expansion. As one French official report put it at the end of the colonial period, the aim of the investment was to not only “cause the transformation of the territories into modern countries,” but also “meet their need for social progress.” Thus infrastructural development represented more than 75 per cent of all FIDES expenditure in colonial Ivory Coast.

This infrastructural development effort was immediately visible on the Ivorian landscape. By 1948, the territory boasted some 1400 meters of bridges and 10 850 kilometers of roads, including 50 kilometers of tarred expressways which allowed the country to increase its importation of automobiles. Besides expanding the network of roads, FIDES also attempted to create a lagoon transportation system along the coast by building canals and waterways to link the Ebrié Lagoon to adjacent ones, including the Aby Lagoon of the Aboisso region. Furthermore, the airport of Abidjan at Port-Bouët was updated to accommodate modern standards while smaller airfields were erected in such regional hubs as Bouaké, Korhogo, Man, Divo, Sassandra, Tabou, Abengourou, Agnibilékrou, and Bondoukou. Finally, given the increase in energy consumption after the war, the first hydroelectric dam of the territory was built on the Bia River. To the satisfaction of the colonial authorities, the Ayamé Dam was soon producing more than 85 per cent of the Ivory Coast’s electricity.
Contrary to the unsubstantiated claim that FIDES devoted much of its attention to the “social” sector, it appears that infrastructural development—at least in the Ivory Coast—was the main focus of France’s postwar modernization drive. With demographic and urban explosions on the rise in most African territories during the
postwar years, FIDES planners found themselves assisting the Ivorian colonial authorities as much as other rulers in the larger French West Africa in designing the new urbanism of the territory.\textsuperscript{69} Thus the planners endorsed the increase of the FIDES share devoted to social infrastructural development which reached more than 30 per cent of the overall FIDES expenditure in the Ivory Coast by the time of the Third Plan.\textsuperscript{70} Concretely, this allowed the construction of hospitals, clinics, and schools in various cities of the territory.\textsuperscript{71}

If dubbing modernization and accelerating infrastructural development were meant to appease and moderate the nationalist demands of the colonial subjects, they met with poor results. For the coming of American modernity in the dependencies, even mediated through the paternalism of the colonial administrators and experts, was like the opening of Pandora’s box, with the nationalist leaders mobilizing the late colonial development policies to request more concessions from Paris. As Frederick Cooper has persuasively demonstrated, the nationalists effectively argued—not without subaltern wit—that what the French authorities portrayed as the benefits of France’s benevolent development effort were, in fact, long-overdue entitlements.\textsuperscript{72} Moreover, with Marshall Plan administrators’ dissatisfaction with French management of American credits, French authorities were forced to mount a public relations campaign to brand their amended version of mise en valeur as something novel and daring.
Officially-sponsored propaganda as a particular form of state branding was not new to French and other imperial ventures of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While these earlier state branding performances were directed toward tightening the imperial ties between metropoles and colonies, the French postwar efforts at imperial propaganda as public relations ploy aimed to enlist American support. In fact, in a context marked by the calculation that the United States not only distrusted the maintenance of European colonialism but was seeking to dismantle it, the French found themselves banding with the British to protect their respective empires. Even more significant, French colonial authorities launched a public relations campaign whose ultimate aim was to reassure the Americans over the legitimacy of France’s prolonged presence in West Africa.\(^73\)

The trigger of the postwar French campaign to win over perceived restive American policymakers was a diplomatic crisis that began in late 1949. In the fall of that year, Perry N. Jester, the American Consul General at Dakar, wrote a letter to ECA chief of Overseas Territories Division in Paris in which he lashed out at the program: “Every American who makes contact with ECA operations in French West Africa is disturbed and appalled at the waste of good dollars and good equipment.”\(^74\) Already in September, the diplomat had expressed concerns about the difficulties encountered by the Consulate in obtaining information on the Marshall Plan aid in French West Africa.\(^75\) Within a month of the disclosure of French mismanagement of ECA funds, American Marshall Planners announced that they were ceasing the allowance of credit for French West Africa, which instantly created a wave of feverish panic among French authorities.\(^76\) Fearing that the American decision might be used by anti-colonial activists as yet another sign of French “administrative negligence and immaturity” (incurie administrative), the
metropolitan authorities urged the French embassy in Washington to ensure that the Americans did not air the issue in public. The American authorities agreed but on condition that they be allowed to conduct an investigation of French modernization projects in West Africa. In spite of their customary suspicion, the French bowed to the request, thus allowing their Atlantic partner to gather crucial information on some of their most important overseas territories, including the Ivory Coast.\textsuperscript{77}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Monitoring the Use of Marshall Plan Funds}
\end{figure}

French acceptance of American oversight was a precursor to a larger strategy to win, if not the hearts, at least the minds of American decision-makers. In Asia, the war against the Vietnamese was on its way to becoming an international embarrassment. With
news of events in Indochina, the people of Madagascar launched an assault on the symbols of French rule on their island in 1947. In Algeria, nationalists started their own war of liberation as the French Army conceded defeat in Vietnam in 1954. Despite the collaborationist volte-face of the main nationalist movement in French West Africa, the situation was no better there for French colonial administrators by the mid-1950s. In the United States itself, African Americans and liberal internationalists were pressing for the dismantling of Europe’s empire. To the chagrin of French diplomats, the American press was even more critical of French colonial rule.78

Under these circumstances, French Ambassador Henri Bonnet, after recognizing that France could no longer deal with its overseas territories in the “traditional bilateral framework,” suggested that France “provoke in the world a climate of opinion sympathetic to our program of reform.” More concretely, he recommended that a worldwide propaganda campaign be launched, including exhibits in the United States to showcase “Franco-American cooperation in the modernization of Africa.”79 Realizing a year later that the task would not be easy since Americans allegedly learned from an early age about the drawbacks of colonialism, Bonnet pressed the French Minister for Foreign Affairs not to abandon the “program of information on Africa,” which should include not only printed but also visual materials.80

Perhaps the first indication that French metropolitan authorities agreed with the diplomat’s line of reasoning was the publication of France actuelle, a periodical appropriately subtitled A Weekly Report for Americans on Modern France and Union Française, which gave broad coverage of French modernization efforts in the overseas territories.81 In a similar register, the Press Service of the French Embassy published in
the late 1950s a pamphlet, *French Africa: A Decade of Progress, 1948-1958*, which showcased the achievements of French development projects.\textsuperscript{82}

![Figure 2.4: Branding the French Colonial State](source: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (Boston, Mass.), Pre-Presidential Papers, Box 570.)

This publicity campaign on French Africa continued well into the late years of France’s rule in Africa. Nevertheless, anti-colonial sentiments kept expanding both among the colonial subjects in Africa and the general public in the United States. For example, the Guinean “No” vote in the referendum of September 1958 was hailed in the American press as a token of political “awakening” in French-ruled Africa.\textsuperscript{83} In what appears as a last desperate attempt to hold the tide back, the French embassy even began to sponsor lecture tours featuring French Africanists and colonial experts in the hope that
they would better articulate French modernization to critical American audiences. Such
tours brought to the United States, for instance, Africanist Paul Mercier in 1953, Paul-
Marc Henry in April 1958, and economist Pierre Moussa in November 1958.84 Finally,
Félix Houphouët-Boigny was sent to Washington and New York to counter Guinean
President Sékou Touré’s visit to the United Nations.85 To further bolster their public
relations campaign, the colonial authorities accepted a second U.S. request to open an
American consulate at Abidjan in 1956 because such a decision, as the Minister in charge
of the overseas territories argued, would “help French propaganda and thus counter, to a
certain extent, the anti-colonial tendency of the American public opinion.”86 Ultimately,
however, the American foreign policy elite used the establishment of the consulate in the
Ivory Coast to further expand the reach of Washington’s informal empire.

* * *

Whether the United States was really dedicated to the decolonization of the
French colonies remains an open question. Still Washington’s foreign policy elite and
decision-makers seized upon the prime opportunity that the Second World War provided
to project American power into the world, including the French empire. The modality of
this projection was multifarious. Geo-strategic during the war, American power became
more hegemonic (in the Gramscian sense) with the beginning of the Cold War as
American amateur anthropologists, economic planners, and diplomats crisscrossed
France’s overseas territories. Thus, through the export of consumer capitalism, Marshall
Plan funds, American business and management cultures, or modernization theory, the
United States inserted its vision of modernity into a world in search of meaning. By this
token, the emergence of the United States as a global power threatened the survival of the European empires.

Self-conscious of the decline of their own power, French colonial authorities attempted to control events in the territories under their rule as they sped up colonial development projects or reappropriated the U.S.-inflected modernization drive. These efforts notwithstanding, the coming of the *Pax Americana* opened new spaces that helped the French colonial subjects triangulate their dreams and expectations of modernity. This was all the more so because the brave new world of the American Century subtly displaced the older *mission civilisatrice* that had so long justified the French presence in West Africa and other parts of Greater France. Perhaps no instance better typified this imperceptible displacement of French hegemony than the slow decline of Paris in the management of local affairs in the *outre mer*. Still, the charm of the politics of dubbing that the French colonial authorities enacted should not be lost on us. While the outcome of the translational ploy was illusory, the effort at cultural translation itself suggested that development, whether informed by *mise en valeur* or modernization theory, was never a ready-made recipe. Posited rather as a process as much as an end, it appeared that the effort at dubbing modernization was the terrain where competing social actors engaged with one another so as to establish a certain understanding of “modernity.” As we shall see in the next chapter on the completion of the port of Abidjan in colonial Ivory Coast, the politics of dubbing also proved French colonialism to be a most flexible adventure.
CHAPTER THREE
PRODUCING A BRIDGEHEAD IN COLONIAL IVORY COAST:
MISE EN VALEUR, SPATIAL RE-STRUCTURING, AND THE MAKING OF ABIDJAN

After a few miles drifting on the lagoon, the boats arrive at the Banco Bay and the upper peninsula of Abidjan—a modern city with villas scattered among the trees. Such a scene will not fail to charm the visitor. In fact, Abidjan will be one of the most beautiful stopovers on the Western coast of Africa which, in this regard, is not particularly endowed.

Gabriel Rougerie, *Le Port d’Abidjan* (1951)

The peoples of the Guinea coast, twisted then by long decades of responding to the European demand for slaves, appeared all too easily as peoples without a history, without the means of progress, without the hope of salvation. Nothing with them, as many Europeans thought, could have changed since the age of apes and stone.

Basil Davidson, *Lost Cities of Africa* (1959)

Thus, the expansion of Abidjan is quite recent and fast growing. In fact, it accelerated swiftly after the opening of the canal and the construction of the port facilities. It was the completion of this rather old project which ultimately gave Abidjan its final boost.

Edmond Bernus, “Abidjan” (1962)

August 1958 was a particularly busy month in French-ruled Africa. Just a couple of weeks away from the empire-wide constitutional referendum on the future of Franco-African relations, mass mobilizations were under way in all parts of France’s African territories. Correspondents from major wire services as well as journalists from international news groups had flocked to the region, eager to relay the historic event to their readers. Their coverage soon formed a steady stream of reports which, if read carefully, revealed the essentially hopeless dream of maintaining a French imperial republic.1

Unlike most foreign journalists posted in West Africa, the *New York Times* correspondent in Abidjan—capital of the economically-attractive Ivory Coast—opted to
provide her readers a typical “human interest” story. Indeed, rather than add another piece to the already large coverage of General Charles de Gaulle’s African tour to rally support for his proposed Communauté Franco-Africaine, Mildred R. Marcus drags her readers into the human geography and the highly conspicuous life of the French colons in the metropolis. The opening paragraphs of her news story are remarkable: “Although there are but 8,000 Europeans—most of them French—among this equatorial city’s 125,000 population, they have imparted to the place an atmosphere that is peculiarly their own.” Then the journalist elaborates: “Café-sitting is one of the most popular diversions and from late afternoon until well after midnight, the outdoor café of the Hotel du Parc is filled with a cosmopolitan crowd sipping coffee, beer, wine, and soft drinks.” Bringing nuance to her coverage, which otherwise might have led readers to think of Abidjan as the helpless French enclave in tropical Africa, the American journalist notes: “The number of strollers, taxis, and automobiles that pass makes a comparison with the Champs-Elysées in Paris quite plausible, but the modern, gleaming white and cream-colored cement buildings are more reminiscent of Miami Beach than of Paris.” The reference to Florida’s tourist resort was not fortuitous—at least in the eyes of the reporter who soon clarifies her comparison: “A mere twenty or so Americans live in Abidjan and yet the city’s similarity to the United States can be extended in many ways, not the least of which is the four-lane, fluorescent-lit highway, intersected with clover-leafs that leads to the airport.”

The American journalist does not elaborate further than this picture in broad brushstrokes. The rest of her report rather highlights the prices of consumer goods and services in the Ivorian capital which, she complains, were most exorbitant.
Notwithstanding her criticism of the cost of living, Marcus closes her coverage with the claim that Abidjan was “probably one of the most amazing cities in Africa.” Then she concludes: “Its progress and prosperity will change nearly every visitor’s impression of West Africa. The airport, the roads, the tall, new, well-designed homes and office buildings, the shops and the industrial sector can compare favorable with any modern city anywhere in the world.”

When one remembers that Abidjan would not have figured in the itinerary of foreign visitors and travel writers earlier in the century, the enthusiastic portrayal of the port-city that the American journalist offers to her readers becomes even more intriguing. If anything, the story of the rise of Abidjan confirms the insight that spatial forms are rarely gifts of nature. Rather, urban configurations emerge as both the product and the reproduction of particular social relations. As environments formed through anthropogenesis, such diverse cities as Dakar, Cotonou, Conakry, or Abidjan, appeared in the recent past of West Africa as the fruits of histories of struggle and negotiation between various groups of people who came to share a common space.

While the mediating forces that helped give birth to colonial urbanism were innumerable, none of them matched the power of capitalism. The interactive but still asymmetrical engagements between metropolitan colonists and colonial subjects resulted in the production of spatial configurations that favored a certain expectation of capitalist modernity. In the particular case of French imperialism, the doctrine of the pacte colonial that sustained French colonial development (mise en valeur) played a decisive role in the production of the historical urban configurations in the overseas territories. As the ideology and praxis that fed French imperialism, the pacte required in each of the
overseas possessions the building of at least one peripheral metropolis, that is, a city fed by the “selective acceleration of the informal and tertiary sectors” of the urban economy. Acting as systemic nodes of French capitalism, these colonial urban formations were meant to connect the areas that produced raw materials in the hinterland of the colony to the industrial centers of metropolitan France. Thus, like the tales of so many other cities in the outre mer, the early history of the foundation of Abidjan is the story of the desperate search for the ideal tropical beach head that would link the Ivorian periphery to the larger capitalist world-system via France. With a view toward implementing this imperial scheme, the French colonial rulers deemed it necessary to restructure the pre-colonial urban networks of the Ivorian territory. How did this restructuring take place? What modernist ideology sustained it? Did the United States play any role in this historical process? If so, what were the modalities of American involvement in the production of an urban Ivory Coast?

While the previous chapter somewhat looked broadly at the politics of dubbing modernization and the efforts at late colonial development projects, the current chapter, with its focus on the completion of the port of Abidjan, provides a narrower window to appreciate the process of urbanization posited as a logical corollary to the making of the “Ivorian miracle.” Besides the customary history of the built environment (urbs), the chapter highlights the socio-economic impacts of the infrastructural modernization on the larger society. While the construction of the deep-sea harbor at Abidjan started some time in the early 1900s, its realization came only in mid-century when the Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social (FIDES), the Caisse Centrale de la France d’Outre Mer (CCFOM), and the Marshall Plan’s fund for the modernization of Europe’s dependent territories were all mobilized to boost colonial development throughout the French Empire. Technologically, the creation of the port
was made possible through the cutting of a canal at Vridi—a technical prowess that eventually linked the Ebrié Lagoon around Abidjan to the sea and the larger Atlantic-centered world economy. Besides emphasizing the importance of both FIDES and the Marshall Plan, this chapter also traces the history of the larger infrastructural development of Abidjan, including the building of the Abidjan-Niger railroad, the construction of the international airport at Port-Bouët, and the successive attempts at digging the Vridi Canal. A major key to the dramatic transformation of Abidjan was the transfer of American urbanization model to the Ivorian capital. Under the aegis of Le Corbusier’s international style, indeed, functionalism entered the world of many postwar French colonial urban planners who deployed it in their numerous designs for the modernization of urban centers in French Africa. Understandably, therefore, besides its financial contribution to the urban growth of Abidjan, the United States maintained a commanding, if diffuse, presence in the very ideology that sustained the postwar development of the Ivorian metropolis.

Moving beyond this history of modernization as technological/ideological process, the chapter finally looks at the experience of cosmopolitanism, community building (civitas), and everyday spatial practices in the port-city during the late colonial period. As Edmond Bernus’s research in the early 1960s suggested, the Abidjan of the late 1950s had emerged as a most modern city in French Africa. Although a fledging urban center, it was already on its way to displacing the primacy of Dakar in Senegal. This new deal in the urban hierarchy of the cities of French West Africa led many Americans hoping to tap in the economic boom to bet on Abidjan. Their choice was not misguided. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the area that came to be called Abidjan was a non-place in terms of international economics. By mid-century, however, it concentrated much of the Ivory Coast’s urban population while the city’s newly opened port attracted more and more investors.
To understand the rise of the Ebrié locality, one is first forced to disentangle the spatial politics that shaped French imperialism in the Ivorian colony. Only then, will we be in a position to see that the Abidjan of the postwar years, which was now marketed as the “Pearl of the Lagoons,” was the last born in a long line of projected ideal peripheral cities that the French imperial state tried to set up as it took control over large tracks of land in West Africa.

**IN SEARCH OF THE IDEAL PERIPHERAL METROPOLIS:**
*Colonization, Capitalization, and the Restructuring of the Ivorian Urban Grid*

While the coastal areas of what would become the colony of Ivory Coast witnessed the emergence of port cities before and during the era of the Atlantic slave trade, these urban formations were largely clustered along the strip of land between the far eastern seacoast of the territory and the mouth of the Volta River on the Slave Coast. The incorporation of the Ivory Coast into the expanding French empire did not immediately alter this overall urban pattern. In fact, from the establishment of the colony in 1893, French missionaries, military, and merchants came to use the forts and warehouses along the far eastern coast as stepping stones for their colonial expansions into the interior. Consequently, only Grand Bassam, Assinie, Aboisso, and Dabou could be said to have been coastal cities at the beginning of Governor Angoulvant’s pacification policy during the second decade of the twentieth century. Yet concerns for the health of the colonists and the capitalist bias inherent in the extractive economy (*économie de traite*) of colonialism ultimately helped Abidjan become the leading city of the territory.
Right from the inception of French colonization, Grand Bassam had served as both political and economic capital of the Ivorian territory. The *Gouvernorat* and other administrative offices were built there in the early 1890s. Seeking to entrench French presence even further, Governor Louis-Gustave Binger issued in September 1893 an edict that outlined the conditions under which French citizens and other foreigners could be freely granted lands.\textsuperscript{12} As anticipated, the administrative incentive attracted many French merchants and would-be colonists. But the arrival of these European settlers also meant an inflow of Africans who were to serve as cooks, servants, errand boys, and handymen.

Ecologically, the presence of both Europeans and Africans in Grand Bassam resulted in the adoption of the schizophrenic urban design so typical of French colonialism and its fantastic demand for hygiene.\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, echoing a segregationist land-use practice in French urbanism in North Africa and other regions of the *outre mer*, the colonial authorities set the “European town” (*ville européenne*) apart from the “Native quarter” (*village indigène*) in an elusive attempt to keep the Africans and their perceived “dirty” ways at bay. Despite these urbanistic measures that smacked of racial segregation, an epidemic of yellow fever broke out in 1899-1903 and forced the colonial administrators to relocate the capital of colonial Ivory Coast to Bingerville.\textsuperscript{14}

Compared to Grand Bassam, the location of the new capital seemed more salubrious, at least in the eyes of the colonial authorities.\textsuperscript{15} Perched on a coastal plateau with an altitude reaching some 80 to 100 meters above the lagoon, Bingerville’s attraction was reinforced by the site’s friendlier land coverage, which included not only forest zones but also savannah pockets that, at times, ended with mangroves. Furthermore, refreshing night time breezes contributed to the area’s reputation as a
relative spa-like resort for the Europeans.\textsuperscript{16} After securing the construction of government offices and services, Bingerville was selected the administrative capital of the colony in 1909. The Governor and his staff relocated in 1910, much to the chagrin of Grand Bassam’s leading commercial interests.\textsuperscript{17}

Yet the capitalization of Bingerville was to be short-lived. In fact, even as officials and merchants discussed the suitability of the transfer of the capital to the west of Grand Bassam, many had bet on the Ebrié village only as a provisional solution. Rather, their eyes had been on Abidjan—the projected site of the colony’s deep-water port and future bridgehead of the railroad that was to link the Atlantic to the hinterland of France’s West African possessions. Its altitude might have been lower relative to Bingerville, yet, with confidence, Abidjan towered above the lagoon. Consequently its climate appeared even healthier and therefore more attractive to many of the French colons.\textsuperscript{18}

The single most important asset that gave Abidjan a distinctive edge over both Bingerville and Grand Bassam, was the railroad and its terminus at the junction of projected Vridi Canal. If anything, the prospect of joining the northern part of the colony to the south made the Ebrié peninsula the ideal site for the construction of the Ivorian main city. Thus Abidjan was raised to the status of capital in 1920 and its first urban plan was adopted less than a decade later.\textsuperscript{19} As transshipment activities expanded in the 1930s, it became an economic as well as political capital city.
Between the incorporation of the colony into the French empire and the beginning of the Great Depression, the Ivory Coast witnessed the capitalization of three cities. Such rapid succession of leading cities led many contemporaries to accuse French administrators of indecision. Yet the phenomenon of wandering capitals was not specific to the Ivory Coast. In fact, most of the African territories under varying colonial rulers witnessed similar turnover among their capital cities.\textsuperscript{20} Whatever the conditions under which they were chosen as principal cities, these capitals invariably served as the major nodes of an urban network that only confirmed the peripherality of urbanization in the colonies. Linked to the capitalist world-system by the \textit{pacte colonial}, the capitals
functioned as points of collection of the tropical raw materials to be sent to the industries of the metropole. Thus, while the first colonial cities in the Ivory Coast started as military garrisons, such origins should not be overemphasized. The search for ports and rail stations either initiated or reinforced the expansion of the major urban formations. This was all the more so since the architects of French colonial expansion viewed infrastructural development as a significant ally in the everyday operation of the *pacte colonial*.  

The French investment in infrastructural development produced a peripheral form of urbanization that mirrored the spatial logics of colonialism and reordered the overall urban landscape of the territory. Perhaps no other instance crystallized this process in Ivory Coast better than the simultaneous production of colonial Abidjan and the withering of the pre-colonial cities of northern Ivory Coast. Abidjan’s economy relied almost exclusively on the service sector since few industries established themselves on banks of the Ebrié Lagoon during the interwar period. Still, the capitalization of Abidjan meant an increase of investment for the city. And this made a difference. In fact, even in the context of a world depression, more than 25 percent of the overall public expenditure of the colony in 1931 was devoted to the *grands travaux* (public works) of Abidjan. The following year, these financial efforts rose to 64 percent—an all-time record for the Ivory Coast. Understandably, the construction of the administrative offices as well as housing to accommodate the metropolitan civil servants absorbed the bulk of the interwar public expenditure. With such sustained effort to turn Abidjan into an operational capital city, the hierarchy of urban formations of the territory was dramatically altered.
Long before the French conquest, Kong, Bouna, and Bondoukou—all located in the North—had been thriving urban centers that mediated commercial and cross-cultural interactions between the societies of the Niger valley and the numerous polities of the forest regions of the south. The activities of trading families and their networks helped market localities at the edge of the forest and in the savanna to prosper and become bustling cities. The coming of Islam in the tenth century further consolidated this already elaborate pattern of pre-colonial urbanization. But the linkage of these societies to colonial capitalism signaled a precipitous process of decline for many of the pre-colonial cities. So much so that, on eve of the Second World War and soon thereafter, the southeastern regions and the zones along the railway had become the most urbanized areas of the Ivory Coast, with Abidjan already showing inauspicious signs of distorted and excessive urban development relative to the rest of the colony.

Figure 3.2: Evolution of Urban Network.
A. Distribution of pre-colonial cities
B. Distribution of cities, circa 1955
The reason for this maldevelopment concerned the growth of trade without industry. The economic logic of the *pacte colonial* and its attendant peripheral urbanization in the French overseas territories had made it virtually impossible to endow the Ivory Coast with industries. The few industrial ventures that were allowed to operate in the colony before the Second World War generally opted to establish themselves on the banks of the Ebrié Lagoon. While this conjunction changed in the wake of the postwar period with the colonial authorities more and more encouraging industrial investment in the city, much of the drive was geared toward the creation of light industries. Thus, on the eve of independence, commercial activities and the service sector still dominated the urban economy of Abidjan. A logical question that comes to mind then is how the preeminence of trade and services in this metropolitan economy impacted the layout of the port-city. What urbanist theories fed its design? Who were its planners?

**THE POLITICS OF FUNCTIONAL URBAN DESIGN:**
**Abidjan-Niger, Vridi, and the Building of the Ivorian Bridgehead**

As Edmond Bernus long ago suggested, the impressive growth of Abidjan can hardly be dissociated with the opening of the seaway at Vridi and the construction of the port in the Ebrié Lagoon. Digging Vridi was an old project whose origin was closely connected to the ambient functionalism of French colonial urbanism. By mid-century, however, American pragmatism in city planning had come to infuse French and other European architectural development and urban planning. Consequently, many of the urban experts and planners who were to perform in French Africa had already been influenced by American ideals regarding urban development. Given this Americanization of the cultures and techniques of French urbanism, the late colonial history of the
expansion of Abidjan resembled more the urban histories of American cities than such an older European metropolis as Paris. A detour through the impact of Le Corbusier’s urban theories on colonial urban planners in the postwar years will clarify this claim. Before such detour though, a look at the genealogy of infrastructural development (ports, railroad stations, and airport) in Abidjan will shed light on the intimate link between the politics of *mise en valeur* and the transformation of the city into a coveted regional urban pearl that would come to attract many potential cosmopolites.

Most analysts of the rapid growth of Abidjan attributed its expansion to the opening of the port at Vridi. They have failed to take into account that such growth cannot be dissociated from the Abidjan-Niger railroad. Historically, the decision to build a railroad line to link the Ivorian coast to the hinterland emerged during the last years of the conquest—a time of general railroad frenzy among European imperialists striving to “open up” the entire African continent for their commercial interest. In the fledging colony of the Ivory Coast, two main plans circulated as far as the route of the projected railroad line was concerned. On the one hand, commercial interests based in Grand Bassam wanted the rail connection up to the Niger Valley to be placed along the Comoé River, which obviously would give a central position to their chosen city in the colonial economy. On the other hand, partisans of the transfer of the capital to Abidjan were promoting the valley of the Bandama River as the ideal route since it would link up the railroad to Port-Bouët at Vridi, which was being considered for the construction of the colony’s deep-sea harbor. At the conclusion of various feasibility studies, the Bandama Valley plan prevailed and construction works started in 1904 at Abidjan.
Despite the hostility of many native ethnic groups, the laying of the rail tracks progressed steadily. In 1906, it reached Agboville. Four years later, Dimbokro had its station soon to be followed by Bouaké in 1912, only to slow down at the beginning of the First World War. In the interwar period, the railroad reached the frontier town of Ferkéssé Dougou in the North of the colony. And by 1955, Ouagadougou (Upper Volta) was linked to Abidjan.32
With raw materials such as coffee, cocoa beans, palm nuts, and peanuts coming down from all the regions of the hinterland, life on the docks of Abidjan soon turned rhythmic as trains and trucks discharged their loads on the banks of the Ebrié Lagoon. However, the port city of Abidjan assumed more than the exclusive role of colonial warehouse that peripheral cities so slavishly performed within the framework of the capitalist world-system. If, as Michael Adas has shown, the railway played an important role in the self-perception of the colonists as a superior race while at the same time consolidating their civilizing mission, then Abidjan—as the starting point of the *transnigerien* rail line—served as the crucible of France’s *mission civilisatrice* in the Ivory Coast. The rail system not only showed the mastery of the French over time but it also exhibited the colonists’ dominion over space through the spectacular alteration of the African landscape. Indeed, the massive production, circulation, and consumption of postcards displaying railway imagery revealed such a subtle superiority complex during the first decades of the twentieth century. Yet it was the cutting of the seaway at Vridi, and by extension the dramatic transformation of the port city of Abidjan itself, which provided a powerful showcase for the abilities of the *colons* and the possibilities they held in store for the entire colony.

Ideas regarding the construction of a port in Abidjan went back to the early days of the French takeover of the Ivorian territory. In their desire to tap the natural resources, the authorities had deemed it necessary to build a maritime bridgehead. To this effect, a rather picturesque wharf was erected in Grand Bassam as early as 1893. The efficiency of this makeshift facility left much to be desired. Given this situation, a team of metropolitan French engineers headed by Commandant Houdaille was commissioned to
study the feasibility of a deep-sea harbor in connection with the drawing of the rail line. In the midst of debates fueled by the public disclosure of proposals and counterproposals, Houdaille chose the bay of Abidjan as the site of the future port, arguing that the “construction of the port of Abidjan, [if] conducted with prudence, shall be a fruitful operation—not only for trade but also for the finances of the Colony.” Complementing the development of the railroad, the construction of the port began in 1903. These *grands travaux* included not only the building of new docks and the dredging of the lagoon, but also the digging of a canal at Vridi, for which hundreds of local Africans were drafted into labor gangs. By early 1906, a first waterway was connecting the Ebrié Lagoon to the Atlantic Ocean.

![Figure 3.4: Digging Vridi Canal](image)

Despite the success of the initial digging, the channel soon filled up with sandy sediments from the sea. Deploying this first failure as alibi, proponents of alternative plans pressed for the abandonment of Port-Bouët as the site for the harbor. Many colonial interests recommended the mouth of the Comoé River as a much more suitable site. In order to test this recommendation, metropolitan authorities sent two missions to the Ivory Coast in 1912 to evaluate the possibilities offered by the Comoé. While the ensuing report recommended the new site, the beginning of the First World War brought a halt to the project. The Comoé alternative was briefly resuscitated in the 1920s. But a new outbreak of yellow fever in 1922 dashed any hope that Grand Bassam would regain its older status as capital of the colony. Furthermore, with the export-led commercial boom of the postwar period, the partisans of Abidjan succeeded in repositioning Port-Bouët as the only solution to the problem of creating a bridgehead between the Ivory Coast and the world beyond the seas. All the more so since the location of Abidjan as the rail terminus gave Port Bouët a relative edge over any other alternative. By 1930, Port Bouët had re-emerged as the favorite site for the construction of the much-anticipated harbor. In this élan, the construction company Schneider & Daydé was entrusted with the task of carrying out the revived project, while other development projects were undertaken to provide Abidjan with running water and thoroughfares lit by electric lamps.

Few Americans—diplomats or otherwise—were aware of these developments in the interwar period. Even the Seabrooks who roamed the Ivory Coast during the early Depression years did not deem it important to make a stopover on the shores of the Ebrié Lagoon, which otherwise were offering enough comfort for its French metropolitan residents. As the world went to war in the late 1930s, however, Abidjan became one of
the focal points of U.S. transnational media coverage. All the more so since Washington, in its effort to curb the appeal of Vichy France and later communism, contributed in various capacities to the cutting of the seaway that made the port of Abidjan accessible to ocean-going vessels.

Already in September 1941, as the Second World War raged, various American newspapers alerted their readers to the fact that the Vichy government in French West Africa was speeding up the completion of the port with the obvious aim of neutralizing the British (and eventually the Allied Forces) at Freetown in Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{39} Free France eventually took over Abidjan in late 1942. At the end of the war, American interest in the Ivorian harbor project became even more explicit despite the fact that the French diplomats increased their protectionism over building contracts. The first indication of the resumption of French protectionism appeared in the summer that followed the end of the war. In July 1946, André Schock—one of the députés representing the Ivory Coast—requested that the American construction firm, Raymond Concrete Pile, be approached about taking over the completion of the Abidjan harbor.\textsuperscript{40} Having built the port of Monrovia during the war, Raymond Concrete Pile presented the best credentials to bring to conclusion the half-century long project of Port-Bouët. Arguing that a public expenditure contract to a foreign firm raised “delicate political questions,” the colonial authorities never acted on Schock’s request.\textsuperscript{41} Rather, they contracted with three French construction firms to put the finishing touches to the port, which was finally opened to international transshipment in 1951.\textsuperscript{42}
While the completion of the Vridi Canal as well as the improvement of the port facilities proceeded without direct American involvement, there was U.S. participation in the infrastructural development of the Ivorian capital, especially in the years immediately following the war. In fact, as part of American assistance for the reconstruction of France and its empire, U.S. aid found its way to the making of many FIDES-funded projects, including the Abidjan-Niger railroad and Vridi in the Ivory Coast. While it is not possible to break down and disentangle the American contribution from purely local and French financial efforts in the postwar urban boom of Abidjan, it is evident that American assistance was not negligible. Perhaps the American supervisory role in the management of France’s overseas development fund provides a circumstantial indication

Figure 3.4: Harbor of Abidjan at Port-Bouet

Source: Adapted from Thomas, “Railways and Ports,” 11.
that Washington indeed contributed to the making of the Ivorian capital.\textsuperscript{44} But American influence was even more diffuse in the postwar technopolitics of urban design and planning of Abidjan.

The First World War had opened many windows for the transfer of American urban modernity to Western Europe, a trend that was further amplified with the onset of the Marshall Plan program and its effort to reconstruct Europe after the Second World. The colonial ramifications of this Americanization have not always been adequately appreciated. Yet as American modernity began its transatlantic voyage, it invariably dropped anchor on the shores of many colonial metropolises. In the context of the flagging French empire of the 1940s, such anchorages came through the mediation of the young French architects and urban designers who were increasingly imbued with Taylorist dreams and Corbusian ideas regarding the advantage of mass produced housing, mechanization, and ultimately the modern functional city.\textsuperscript{45}

The man who introduced Le Corbusier’s American-dubbed urbanistic idiom in the Ivory Coast was Daniel Badani. Born in 1914, Badani completed his training in design and architecture at the time when Le Corbusier’s ideas were in vogue in France. He became one of the numerous disciples of the Swiss-born French theoretician of modern urbanism.\textsuperscript{46} In the postwar context of the modernization of the \textit{outre mer}, he was commissioned to build in Dakar the precincts of the \textit{Grand Conseil} of French West Africa, which eventually came to house the National Assembly of Senegal. As resident-architect with the colonial government of the Ivory Coast in the late 1940s and much of the 1950s, Badani drew up the first postwar urban plan of Abidjan, which subsequently bore his name.\textsuperscript{47}
Badani’s plan for Abidjan centered on what has been appropriately dubbed the “port-industrial complex” (*complexe industrielo-portuaire*). Dividing the city along the major functions laid out in Le Corbusier’s Athens Charter, it reserved the banks of the lagoon to the construction of import-substitution and other “light” industries which at times necessitated the forcible removal of indigenous villages. The central part of city would house the businesses and apartments of the metropolitan residents. Still in line with French colonial urbanism, appropriate quarters were to be created in the north and on the peninsula of Petit Bassam (south) to keep the Africans at bay. Finally, a new highway was projected to connect the city center to the airport located in the south.

Figure 3.5: Plan Badani, 1949-1952

To a lesser degree, architect Henri Chomette also helped in the diffusion of American urban modernity in the Ivory Coast. A former student of the renowned Tony Garnier, Chomette was equally an admirer of Le Corbusier. If less present in the urban design of colonial Abidjan, he nonetheless left his distinctive mark on the architectural landscape of the Ivorian capital. In 1952, his firm was contracted to build the Immeuble Clozel, which experimented with high-rise housing in the port city. Incorporating both African motifs and indigenous construction materials in his work in order to minimize cost, Chomette and his associates utilized, like many of their contemporaries, concrete and steel, making sure their projects were forward-looking and functional. Such rejection of the backward-looking style of the beaux-arts and adoption of concrete monumental structures were best epitomized in the construction of the Hotel de Ville, completed in 1956 to the general acclaim of reviewers.

The prime aim of the colonial authorities with regard to the spatial production of Abidjan was just another machine-like structure that would function as a peripheral node in French colonial capitalism. As it turned out, the urban machine escaped the control of its designers. The unpredictable results were not immediately legible, at least by the authorities and their commissioned social scientists who, after the Second World War, swarmed into the Ivorian capital in search of material to prove their preconceived theories about the workings of African societies. If anything, the reappropriation of the urban space by the indigenous Africans unearthed a singular truth about the soul of Abidjan—and for the matter, any other peripheral city born out of the fitful negotiations of the colonial situation.
Since its inception as capital of the colony, Abidjan was meant to be a sort of urban warehouse, a spatial apparatus set up to be managed by the minority of French colonos who lived in the city and oversaw the tropical machinery of French capitalism. Headquarters of the extractive colonial “milking” economy, Abidjan was also the locus from which radiated French imperial culture in direction of the interior of the Ivory Coast. The modalities of the diffusion of this imperial culture were as numerous as they were complex; the identities of the transterritorial agents who carried it to the larger Ivorian population were multifaceted; and its reception was unpredictable. Consequently, the interaction of the French modernizers with the colonial subjects in Abidjan produced a form of urbanity that was both universal and contingent.

Because of the particular historical context that gave birth to the city, Abidjan was a racially-segregated locality dominated by its few metropolitan French residents who represented but a fraction of the overall Abidjanese population. In 1915, there were 107 French living in the port-city. Understandably, this number increased as the economic infrastructures and outlets of Abidjan were expanded. Thus, in 1929, some 1,010 French now resided in the leading Ivorian city. In relative terms, this represented about 11 percent of the entire city population. While the Great Depression brought the percentage down to 7 in the years that followed the Wall Street crash, the absolute number of French in Abidjan kept rising until it reached some 1,900 on the eve of the Second World War.51

Despite their minority status, the French dominated Abidjan, at least up to 1945. Given that the city was created to serve as a subregional bridgehead for French colonial
capitalism, such domination was logical in that the control of resources was premised on an exclusive metropolitan control of the reins of power. Yet the domination of the French residents of Abidjan was neither unprecedented nor unusual. Except for the Four Communes in Senegal, whose substantial number of rights-bearing African *originaires* from Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque and Dakar dominated urban governance in their localities, much of the urban formations in the rest of French West Africa had remained under the socio-political rule of the metropolitan French residents who rationalized their hegemony in both ideological and sociological terms.\(^{52}\) Posited as *corps d’exception*, the indigenous people were thought to be incapable of managing civic affairs, lest the city fall back into an imagined pre-colonial chaos and barbarism. Sociologically, the French authorities kept the African residents of Abidjan away from official electoral and civic politics for fear they would be outmaneuvered by the black majority.

Whether in Dakar, Conakry, or Cotonou, the exercise of French domination in the city was paralleled by spatial differentiation.\(^{53}\) In this regard, while French and Africans had lived side by side in the city from the beginning of the century, segregation of the communities had become the norm by the time of the capitalization of Abidjan. The spatial translation of this *de facto* apartheid reserved the heights of the Plateau central district to the French and their businesses. To protect the metropolitan residents against the Africans, their “odors” and “germs,” two indigenous quarters were erected: Adjamé in the North, which was separated from the European town by the barracks of the Camp Galliéni, and Treichville, located in the South on the other side of the lagoon.\(^{54}\)
The earlier French residents of Abidjan were a medley of administrators, civil servants, military officers, missionaries, and young adventurers many of whom had found employment in such trading companies as the Compagnie française de l’Afrique de l’Ouest (CFAO), the Société commerciale de l’ouest africain (SCOA), and the Compagnie française de Côte d’Ivoire (CFCI). Since trade was the “prime site of accumulation” in the peripheral urban economy of the city, the representatives of these trading firms were among the most influential members of the metropolitan urban community.\textsuperscript{55} Joining other professionals and a majority of civil servants, they soon
formed voluntary associations and sporting clubs that became the center-stages of colonial sociability among the European expatriates. Between 1904 and 1934, about 143 of such social groupings were created in the Ivory Coast, including 59 in the city of Abidjan alone.56

As they escaped their provinces in metropolitan France, the candidates for expatriation had hoped to leave behind both their proverbial boredom and the memory of poverty. What they found in Grand Bassam, Bingerville, and even Abidjan, was not only isolation and anxiety but also another form of *vie de cafard*, which even tropicalized, was no less depressing.57 Under these circumstances, the voluntary associations and clubs emerged as the ideal refuge against their colonial malaise. In these spaces of sociability, the *colons* not only came out of their anonymity but they also recreated a miniature France while taking a belated revenge upon the lifestyles they could not afford in the Hexagon.58

The situation did not change dramatically after 1945, except for the coming of American-style consumerism, which in the wake of the implementation of the Marshall Plan became the norm for many to enact their modernity. Trying to emulate their compatriots in Paris, Lyon, Marseille, and other cities in France, the French residents in Abidjan began to import cars, fridges, and other consumer durables that were becoming available during the *trentes glorieuses* (Thirty Glorious Years).59 As markers of their newly achieved postwar modernity, possession of these goods not only suggested their willingness to participate whole-heartedly in the larger trans-Atlantic modernist world dominated by the United States but also drew the line of demarcation around the enclave
of capitalist modernity in which they lived and the rest of the peripheral urban landscape of Abidjan.

Not all the French who resided in Abidjan benefited evenly from the racialized economic boom of the postwar years. In fact, beneath the glamorized life of the white colonat and their spaces of sociability, there existed a substantial number of petits blancs whose conditions and lives suggested to perceptive observers that the segregation in colonial Abidjan was the result of a historical process which, even though it strategically fed on colonial racism, was ontologically larger than racial politics. Arriving in Abidjan at a time when the export economy of the Ivory Coast was taking off, these white settlers of modest means had served as sales agents for the numerous European trading firms. However, the end of the exclusive political privilege of the metropolitans after the Second World War signaled the beginning of a downward socio-economic change for most of the metropolitan residents, especially the petits blancs who were most vulnerable to competition from an increasing number of Levantine immigrants. In effect, taking advantage of the new opportunities that the postwar economy offered to all, the now conspicuously large Lebanese community extended its share of the urban economy of Abidjan. As a result, its members climbed higher on the city’s social ladder.

The majority of both the petits blancs and the Levantines lived in the wealthier districts or in apartments along the commercial streets of Treichville. But, by far, Treichville was the African mecca of colonial Abidjan. Located on an island opposite the Plateau, the settlement started as a cité dortoir designed for the African employees who worked in the commercial district. While affordable public housing projects were realized in the postwar period, Treichville remained the domain of self-built housing and
communal compounds. With a mosaic of ethnicity from all over West Africa, its expansion paralleled the growth of the city as a leading metropolis in French West Africa. More significantly, the exuberant associational life of its residents curved out a novel civic space that threatened to subvert the very foundation of French colonial imperialism even as it seemed to support colonial capitalism.

Admittedly, the efforts of the various colonial states in the field of housing were focused on “constructing housing estates and subsidizing and regularizing housing for the more stable and compact working class [whom] officials hoped to shape.” In Abidjan, however, such efforts were not sufficient, especially since migration to the port-city was reaching unmanageable proportions. Pushed to the margins of the colonial urban world, the African residents of Treichville and other “native” quarters took matters into their own hands by establishing voluntary associations with the ultimate aim of improving their daily lives. As early embodiments of civil society, these civic associations emerged as “countervailing powers” that disputed the hegemony of the colonial state and its minimalist take on social reproduction in the city. The proliferation of slums in and around Abidjan’s legal districts provided an early hint that the African residents of the city were determined to be full agents in the production of Abidjan. A further indication of this attitude was revealed in 1949 when, under the leadership of Ivorian lawyer Kouamé Binzème, some members of the French-educated elite created the *Habitat Africain*—a credit union established to help the Africans acquire cheap and decent housing. If anything, then, the creation of voluntary associations showed the limits of a top-down approach to urban governance.
The opening of the Vridi Canal in 1951 had ushered in an unprecedented economic boom. By the late 1950s, however, the capitalist growth began to taper off, prompting bitterness not only among the city’s most vulnerable residents but also those who occupied precarious positions in the urban economy. During the last week of October 1958, the resentment turned violent when the Ivorian population of Abidjan began to attack Dahomeyans, Togolese, and other foreign Africans whom they accused of monopolizing the market of white-collar jobs. By the end of the month, an estimated 500 and more houses had been damaged or destroyed. Concomitantly about 25,000 African foreigners were coerced into leaving the country. While law and order were restored in the subsequent weeks, this first wave of xenophobic riots in Abidjan revealed that the urban development of the Ivorian capital was fraught with problems that could erupt anytime into violent collective action.69

Maybe the colonial authorities had early on figured out this explosive character of the urbanization of Abidjan. In 1939, they raised the port-city to the status of commune-mixte de deuxième degré, which meant that the municipal council of the Ivorian capital would be elected by popular, if restricted, suffrage.70 When elections were eventually held in 1945, Félix Houphouët succeeded not only in outmaneuvering the local colonial establishment through the adroit exclusion of all the European residents from the African-dominated slates but also by securing his own election as the first African mayor of the city.71

Félix Houphouët’s term of office as the first elected African administrator of Abidjan coincided with the heyday of the promotion of the city as both a tourist resort and a strategic hub for West African business. Following the opening of the Vridi Canal,
the provincial governor of the Ivory Coast had used an opportunity offered by the passage of an American newspaper crew to sell the possibilities of the city: “The influx of capital, and the numerous demands for installations now being made along the Ivory Coast following the cutting of the canal […] already show particularly stimulating promise for the future.”

In the same vein, locally-based businesses had placed ads in the *New York Herald Tribune* with the obvious hope that they would attract American investors or partners. Taking this promotional endeavor even further, the government of the colony produced tourist brochures that hailed Abidjan as the “Pearl of the Lagoons,” an urban formation that skillfully synthesized the culture of “traditional” Africa and the supposed modern lifestyles of Europe and North America. Such efforts would further wet the appetite of the international business community, including the Americans who were eager to gain a foothold in West Africa.

The French had hoped that, by dubbing American modernity in their colonies, they would be in a position to hold back the tide of Americanization and thus maintain French influence in Abidjan. Implicit in such strategy was the misguided belief that Americanization was a largely agent-less process in an agent-less colonial space. They were proved wrong, and the ruse of dubbing did not work out as initially planned. In an international arena where Soviet-style development and American modernization competed to win over the hearts and minds of the “wretched of the earth,” U.S. policymakers adopted a pro-active, if subtle, stance vis-à-vis the colonial subjects of Europe’s imperial world, including those of France’s *outré mer* who were increasingly incorporated into the purview of the expanding American empire of knowledge. If
anything, the postwar politics of the production of Abidjan made this extension of American hegemonic élan to French West Africa particularly exciting.

**EYEING AN ALLY’S BRIDGEHEAD:**
*Washington and Its Search for a Strategic Base in French West Africa*

In 1951, the American authorities requested that they be allowed to open a second consulate in French West Africa. Officially, the new consular office in Abidjan was to be used as a post to “keep tab on Communist front activities” in the region. While the French denied the request, the United States never gave up on Abidjan. Rather, the ensuing years witnessed an increase in fact-finding mission activities undertaken by American nationals in the Ivorian metropolis. Their reports, if sketchy and scattered, soon formed the beginning of an American archive at large on Abidjan, a body of bits of information that would later allow Americans to construct the Ivorian port-city as a provincial yet very attractive tropical bridgehead that should be, by necessity, open to all.

The first Americans to visit Abidjan after the war were perhaps Hassoldt and Ruth Davis. While these amateur ethnographers spent most of their time in the interior of the territory, they visited Abidjan for a few days. Davis’s brief description of social life in the Ivorian capital betrayed no hegemonic design as such. Yet it revealed how the French colons were perceived by a rising number of Americans flocking into one of the showcases of France’s postwar modernization drive in West Africa:

Ruth and I went somewhat divergent ways, with malice toward none. Hers led to the Club Sportif, where the great wood merchants, the harbor masters, and the two female dentists assembled; where you had too many drinks for lunch and danced the torrid time away in the evening when you could tear your mate, or someone else’s, from the stifling gossip circles.

There, at noon, you were shuttered against the possible ingress of the wicked sun, and mothers would call from the bar stools to their children, “Chérie, ton casque!” (Darling, your helmet!) The severer matrons would even make their husbands wear their
earlier, hunters’ helmets at the bar for fear of the *reverberations*, which was what the burglar sunlight might strike you dead with if a door were opened.

The colonial Frenchwoman lives in deadly terror of two things: the *reverberation* and the *courant d’air*, the draft. She must maintain that she is a delicate bloom, as the long petals of her nonworking fingernails attest. To further this illusion she usually is attended by a wooly mongrel dog, coiffured and tufted to resemble a poodle, and nearly too lazy to nip at you. Nearly.76

Earlier on Davis had noted, not without a grain of cynicism, that Abidjan was typical of the simplicity of “Civilization” in a colonial city. The caste, he had explained, were five, namely the “political folk, the military, the wealthy industrialists, the sweating merchants, and the natives.” More disturbing for him was that “Social as well as racial miscegenation was practically unknown.” As a result the “social half-caste suffered as did his racial prototype.” This was so because “he was despised by both his affiliates.”77

Almost a decade later, a similar description of Abidjan as a segregated city would be taken up by another American visitor who, after a few days in the city, lashed out: “Abidjan is very European and very French but is also almost entirely an African city insofar as population is concerned. Yet there is a complete *de facto* segregation which everyone seems to take for granted. In the evenings the Europeans sit on the terrace of the hotel having their drinks while the Africans shuffle by along the sidewalk.”78 Thus contrary to the diplomatic stance of the U.S. government, which praised France’s presence in the Ivory Coast, a number of American visitors who came to observe the social life of Abidjan became disgusted with the social face of colonialism and the racial politics that sustained its management. In this regard, Abidjan offered an interesting venue to test the reality of the French civilizing mission.

Besides the trailblazing activities of individual Americans, a few U.S. institutions began sponsoring research trips to Abidjan and other cities in French West Africa.
Among these was the Ford Foundation, which launched a program of fellowships for the study of emerging countries in 1952. While the Ford area study program for the African continent largely focused on British Africa, a few of the institution’s funded researchers opted to work on French Africa, including the Ivory Coast. Logically, many of these junior American social scientists, including Elliott J. Berg (1957), Immanuel Wallerstein (1957), and Aristide Zolberg (1958) found their way to Abidjan—the new spotlight of French colonial urbanism in West Africa. The knowledge produced by these scholars became the resource for an informal American empire in Ivorian territory because their research extended the ethnographic gaze of the United States into colonial Abidjan.

Crowning this mounting American fascination for the Ivorian leading metropolis was the publication and circulation of a number of articles in scholarly and popular circles, all of which suggested the significance of Abidjan. While some American observers marveled at the cosmopolitan character of the city, others revealed the business opportunities and the quality of the infrastructural network that the locality offered to potential investors. A few went even as far as to dub Abidjan as a tropical version of the American Wild West. In the context of this construction of Abidjan as a cosmopolitan tropical frontier to be tapped, the Department of State was forced to renew its effort to have an American consulate in Abidjan. Already in 1955, Washington had resuscitated its request for a consular post in the Ivorian capital. But lack of adequate funding prevented the Department of State from following up on the issue. With Dakar ever more burdened with diplomatic, economic as well as administrative red tape, the need to have a second American consulate in French West Africa became pressing. As a result, an
American consulate finally opened in Abidjan in 1956, and Parke Duncan Massey, the first consular officer arrived in mid-1957. Even as they accepted the presence of a U.S. consulate in the Ivory Coast, the French authorities never dropped their suspicion of the Americans. Betraying this mistrust of their Atlantic partner was the French refusal to allow a U.S. Information Service (USIS) to be adjoined to the consular offices in Abidjan. Furthermore, the colonial officials in Abidjan kept a watch on the activities of the American researchers, including both Immanuel Wallerstein and Aristide Zolberg. It was in this climate of suspicion that the first American consul was recalled, allegedly for making public statements during the 1958 referendum that a French diplomat found “unpleasant and preposterous.”

The suspicion of the French colonial authorities was not without foundation. The memory of Vietnam was still fresh on the mind of many French diplomats, who now saw the reincarnation of the “quiet American” in every American diplomat posted in a French colony. Compounding this situation, American businesses were increasingly showing interest in the Ivory Coast, whose leading city they wanted to use as a regional gateway to the other territories of French West Africa. Their interest was all the more well targeted since the dissemination of the first results of the Ford-funded research confirmed the relative edge of the Ivory Coast over the other French-speaking countries in West Africa. In this context, the Plymouth Oil Company expressed an interest in deep drilling near the coast of Abidjan. Similarly, David E. Lilienthal’s Development and Resources Corporation (D&R) established contacts with the Ivorian government in Abidjan in anticipation of a contract that would eventually allow the American consulting firm to undertake development planning work for the Ivory Coast. Thus when independence
came in August 1960, Americans had been eyeing Abidjan, which many of them regarded as a positive move in their strategy to have access to the new gateway to France’s *outre mer* in West Africa.

* * *

The history of the foundation and phenomenal growth of Abidjan is suggestive of the fluid nature and unpredictable character of colonial urbanism and development. Both the perfection of these colonial urban formations and a refraction of the globalization of colonial capitalism, Abidjan participated in the reproduction of colonial domination as its design prioritized conceived space of the French imperialists over both the perceived and lived spaces of the indigenous people of the colony.

While it fed a certain vision of modernity, the cosmopolitan dynamism of Abidjan actually betrayed the conservative nature of both French colonial urbanism and the political economy that sustained it. This was so because the reinvention of urbanism in Abidjan was graphed on a stale imperial ideology of producing both de-totalized spaces and a network of beach-heads and inland capitalist nodes that ultimately were meant to serve no other functions than those performed by systemic peripheral metropolises.

Yet these functions were constantly under assault, for they did not always correspond to the needs of the colonial subjects. The imperial crisis opened up by the Second World War created spaces that helped these dissatisfied urban residents to re-appropriate Abidjan and its civic politics. In the process, imperialism was partially outmaneuvered leading to the independence of the Ivory Coast. If sometimes ambiguous, American participation in these historical developments was no less constant.
CHAPTER FOUR
WEIGHTS OF THE PAST, MEASURES OF THE FUTURE: DECOLONIZATION, NATION-BUILDING, AND THE FRAMING OF IVORIAN POST-COLONIAL DEVELOPMENT

What the “insufficiently developed” countries reproached the others with is not so much that they have been Westernized, but that they were not quickly given the means to Westernize.


In a world turned upside-down, Fama had inherited an honor without the means to uphold it, like a headless snake.


On 19 August 1960, only twelve days after proclaiming the formal independence of his country from France, Félix Houphouët-Boigny wrote a letter to the U.S. ambassador in Abidjan. A translation of the correspondence was telegraphed to the Department of State the following day:

Desirous of devoting its efforts to building with greatest speed economic power of state and thereby to reinforce its political independence, Government of Ivory Coast has honor to solicit aid from US able to contribute to development. […] Amount and means this aid could be determined by common agreement after study that would be made in Ivory Coast by mission of your government’s experts that I would be happy to welcome at Abidjan as soon as possible.¹

Despite their rather laconic and approximate rendition of Houphouët-Boigny’s letter, American diplomats posted in Abidjan did acknowledge and actually gave importance to the principal request of the Ivorian leader: aid for development. Two days later, on 22 August 1960, the U.S. Embassy in Abidjan cabled yet another message to Washington; this time to appeal to the State Department for an International Cooperation Agency (ICA) survey team to be sent to Ivory Coast by 15 September 1960.² During the second
week of September 1960 an American survey team of the ICA did arrive in Abidjan. Responding to the Ivorian request, the Americans assessed the development needs of the newly sovereign republic of Ivory Coast and offered plans for its modernization.³

French diplomats, always alert and on guard in the pré carré, did not fail to see this as a new opportunity that Washington was likely to exploit. They construed the swiftness of U.S. response as a form of propaganda, showcasing America’s “will to provide the Ivory Coast with an assistance which allegedly portrays itself as disinterested.”⁴ Subsequent developments would prove them right. Basing its judgment on the ICA report, the U.S. Embassy observed in a 1961 telegram that the Ivory Coast was a “relatively well-endowed” country in West Africa whose “economic development [was] within reach of the stage of self-sustaining growth.” The telegram deplored the fact that this remarkable progress in the Ivory Coast was “the result almost exclusively of French planning, financing, and execution.” This omnipresence of France, the Embassy ruled, was the “basic weakness” of developmental endeavors in the Ivory Coast.⁵ Thus, even though the American diplomats in Abidjan recognized that France had the “main burden and responsibility for Ivory Coast development,” they nonetheless recommended that Washington show the “non-colonial U.S. interest in Ivory Coast development in a concrete way.”⁶

The Embassy’s insistence on demonstrating the “non-colonial U.S. interest” in Ivory Coast exudes a certain benevolence in Washington’s self-representation of U.S. relations with the Third World. Obviously, such a construction glosses over the rather long imperial history of the United States. There is more than a narcissistic self-image to this construction though. For by foregrounding its own selfless effort in Ivory Coast, the U.S. Embassy’s message strategically inscribed France as a neo-colonial, if no longer
explicitly colonialist power in West Africa. This, to be sure, had a lasting impact on U.S. policy-making. Indeed, convinced of the assessment, Ambassador Bolden Reams suggested that the American diplomatic effort emphasize, among others, the “Africanization of key [Ivorian] personnel” as a legitimate objective of the U.S. aid program in the newly independent country. How did the Department of State respond to Reams’s request? How did the eventual response affect Ivorian development planning? Further, in an African context dominated by an ever pervasive rhetoric of Africanization and an international environment enthused by a so-called Decade of Development sponsored by the United Nations, how did the Ivorian authorities articulate their vision(s) of modernization?

As this chapter will show, both the geopolitics of expertise and the eventual French dubbing of modernization theory in the form of regional planning played a crucial role in the elaboration of Ivorian projections of development. Equally important in shaping the design of post-independent development in the Ivory Coast were the tensions arising from the demands of an increasingly vocal Ivorian youth calling for indigenization, the growing French expatriate presence in the Ivory Coast, and the amplification of Félix Houphouët-Boigny’s ambivalence regarding French neocolonial designs for his country. All of this conspired to not only frame the temporality of high politics in 1960s Ivory Coast but to also turn development planning itself into a political imbroglio that reinforced the predicament of modernization in the Ivorian postcolony.

**THE PREDICAMENT OF POSTCOLONIAL MODERNIZATION:**

Africanization, Human Resources, and the Staffing of the Developmental State

At the time of the arrival of the American survey team in the Ivory Coast, Ivorian cadres in the Ministry of Civil Service (Fonction Publique) were putting the finishing
touches on a policy document that eventually circulated among the leadership of the newly independent country. It is not clear whether American survey team was aware of the document entitled “Rapport sur l’africanisation des cadres,” although a copy of the report did find its way into the files of the French diplomatic intelligence.\(^8\) Still the transnational debate over the desirability of Africanization, with reference to a certain idea of development, may have acted as a co-text whose rhetoric could not be lost on the Americans.

In the aftermath of independence, there emerged a polemic around the legacy of colonial bureaucracies and administrative structures that soon crystallized in a debate over Africanization. The dispute pitted two major groups against each other. The first, whose position was perhaps best articulated by A. M. Kamark, argued that, since Africans were not well versed in the management of the civil service, any process of Africanization would “result in a decline in bureaucratic efficiency.”\(^9\) In contrast to this stance, others claimed that since post-colonial polities in Africa would be facing novel problems, there was no need to have been trained in the colonial school. Rather, coming from an African background, the argument went, Africans were “more in tune to the hopes and aspirations of the African people, and more committed to working to assist in the development of their nations.”\(^10\)

While debates about the desirability of Africanization came to the fore in the years following the independence movement, talks about the process had started as early as the interwar period. At that time, what would become known as the Guggisberg Plan had called for the employment of Western-educated Africans in the British colony of Gold Coast. But largely due to “politics and prejudice,” the plan failed,\(^11\) so much so that
on the eve of decolonization in British Africa, J. G. Amamoo could still claim that Africanization was one of the three major problems awaiting the prospective new nation-states of Africa. Admittedly, Amamoo saw the substitution of Africans for Europeans as a normal course of action in the context of Third World nationalisms. Yet he cautioned against overnight Africanization, which he and many African leaders posited would be bound to be harmful. Instead, Amamoo suggested a policy of gradual replacement of Europeans “coupled with an increase in the tempo of training the local people.”

In French Africa, Africanization as an ideology hardly found its way into public debates before the years of political decolonization. Of course, Africans had been serving in the colonial primary school system since the last years of the interwar period. More generally, African politicians had gained a measure of power after the Second World War, while educational opportunities had expanded in the meantime for many in the colonies. Yet, as Brian Weinstein argues, because France never seriously “recognize[d] complete independence as a legitimate goal” for its African colonies until 1960, “few plans were, therefore, made or believed necessary for a complete and rapid transformation of the public services.” For this reason, many former French colonies in Africa were wont to call upon French personnel to help run the bureaucracies of their countries after the proclamation of independence. Such a move was officialized through the signing of numerous cooperation agreements between France and its former colonial possessions. The ensuing situation exemplified what Albert Bourgi has described as a Gallic “colonial type of domination under a rejuvenated legal cover.” Mokubung Nkomo’s comparative analysis of Africanization in Zambia and (Portuguese) Mozambique reminds us, however, that “constitutional arrangements” that maintained
British power and influence were also the “hallmark of decolonization in former British territories.”

From the standpoint of postcolonial critique, there was an implicit definitional assumption that posited Africanization merely as the process of replacing European civil servants and professionals serving in Africa with comparably skilled and qualified Africans. In this sense, as a strategy of decolonization, Africanization was lauded by most Pan-Africanists. Yet, from its inception, Africanization was doomed, at least in some nationalist circles. For the very language it used was one provided largely by nineteenth-century, post-Enlightenment European philosophy, with its emphasis, among others, on reason, race, and nationalism. Kwame Anthony Appiah and other philosophically-minded scholars have aptly criticized this as a predicament that obstructed a genuinely African emancipation.18

The practical limits of Africanization as a nationalist ideology in French-speaking West Africa was revealed in 1958 when anti-Dahomeyan riots broke out in the streets of Abidjan and other commercial cities in the Ivory Coast. On the pretext that the subaltern clerical workforce of the Ivorian civil service and commercial sector were overstaffed with foreigners (from Togo, Dahomey, Senegal), young unemployed Ivorians had taken to the streets chasing after West Africans. Even though order was soon restored, the crisis led to the forced repatriation of thousands of Dahomeyans.19 A similar experience in Nigeria has led Nicholas Balabkins to suggest that a term such as “Africanization” is a misnomer. In its stead, he proposes the concept of “indigenization” to describe the process of replacing foreigners with (Nigerian) nationals.20 The ultimate predicament of Africanization, though, was the rather dominant belief that Euro-American bureaucratic
rationality was the way to organize the various polities in post-colonial Africa, especially if progress was to be achieved. In this light, Levi-Strauss’s provocative statement (used as an epigraph for this chapter) makes better sense. What was at stake in the Africanization drive in the wake of decolonization was less the deep structure of Euro-American governmentality than the spectacularity of its performance. It was less the moral economy of governance that mattered than who was holding the reins of political power. The treatment reserved to the technical assistants who swarmed into the Ivory Coast after independence amply proves this point.

In August 1960, the very week Ambassador Reams transmitted Houphouët-Boigny’s aid request to the Department of State, the French Embassy in Abidjan made an evaluation of the Africanization process that the Ivory Coast government had just initiated. After acquiescing to the fact that Ivorians were under-represented in top management positions in the administration, the evaluator hinted at a generational conflict unfolding in the Ivory Coast between the young “évolués” and their elders. The evaluation concluded: “despite the wishes of the young Ivorian functionaries, the Africanization of the top positions does not seem to have been sped up.” In fact, President Houphouët-Boigny had “refrained from making any decision regarding the recent request formulated by the representatives of the various trade unions of the civil service sector.”21 It may have been the case that the Ivorian leader was waiting for the findings of a study by a special commission he had charged with “drawing a precise inventory of all the young Ivorians of value and comparing their skills with the needs of the country.”22 Such justification, however, soon falls apart when one remembers Le Vieux rejecting reportedly, as early as May 1960, the hiring of young Ivorians because
such a course of action would be “cut-rate Africanization” (*africanisation au rabais*).\(^{23}\) To the dismay of job-hungry Ivorian graduates, Ivorian decision-makers defended their go-slow policy before their peers of the Council of the Entente Inter-state Commission on Africanization. This stance led a French diplomat to observe that the Entente delegates reiterated, if not emphasized the will of the Entente to go ahead with Africanization without compromising the efficiency of the civil services.\(^{24}\) Bringing nuance to his assessment, Manent added:

One must note however that the Ivory Coast seems to show less haste in this domain than its partners. Ivorians are particularly eager to reconcile the demand of acting quickly—because of the political imperative which comes along with effective independence—and the necessity to act wisely so as to avoid the dangers of “cut-rate” Africanization … \(^{25}\)

While fear of an *africanisation au rabais* believed to be detrimental to the effective modernization of the Ivory Coast may have been a factor in the exponential increase in the number of French technical assistants, it was, according to the analysis of the Ministry of Civil Service, the sending of middle-level Ivorian functionaries to France for training after the adoption of the *Loi-Cadre* that caused the “paradoxical situation of swelling in the number of French cadres in management positions.”\(^{26}\) Further discussing this state of affairs, the Ministry’s report declared that the growing presence of French expatriates was largely negative. First, it lowered output because the *coopérants* did not want to antagonize Ivorians and thus tended to be lenient. Second, it created an unhealthy environment by provoking nationalist resentment and tension in the workplace. Lastly, the staffing of the *coopérants* in top management alienated them from their Africans colleagues and therefore prevented any real pedagogical input on the part of the technical assistants. For all these reasons, the report concluded that the “key point” to be retained
from the study was that French technical assistants must “be removed from any top administrative position.”

The recommendation was not implemented. In fact, the number of French coopérants (and the larger Colonie française) in post-colonial Ivory Coast dramatically surged between independence and the mid-1970s [see Table], passing from about 1200 technical assistants in 1962 to more than 3300 in 1974.

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<tr>
<td>Number of coopérants</td>
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<td>1535</td>
<td>2258</td>
<td>2961</td>
<td>3318</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7000</td>
<td>20000</td>
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Sources: La Coopération entre la France et les États francophone d’Afrique noire et de l’Océan Indien (Paris: Ministère de la Coopération, 1974).


In contrast to Madagascar or Senegal, which witnessed an actual decrease in the number of French coopérants, the Ivory Coast almost doubled its contingent of French technical assistants. Even in the absence of any other evidence, this confirmed to many critics that Le Vieux’s country was the epitome of French neocolonialism in Africa.

The political longevity of Raphaël Saller, the French-born Ivorian minister of finances and planning, offers some support for the critics’ claim. Born in 1899 at Le Marin, Martinique, Raphaël Michel Saller was a bank clerk before he joined, like many other Antillais (French West Indians), the colonial administration in 1920. Thanks to his wit and dedication, he was soon promoted to commandant de cercle in Koudougou (Upper Volta colony). At the outbreak of the Second World War, he sided with General
de Gaulle’s Free France, which earned him an appointment as interim Governor in French Somalia. Soon after the war, Saller was promoted Director of Planning at the French Ministry of Colonies. Elected Senator for the Colony of Guinea in 1948, he joined the PDCI and in 1957 was appointed Minister of Finances and Planning of the Ivory Coast.\(^{30}\)

Despite the fact that Félix Houphouët-Boigny held him in high esteem, Raphaël Saller was a source of constant discomfort and even tension in the post-independence cabinet of the Ivory Coast. The sole remaining white person in the Ivorian government after the January 1961 reshuffle, he was an “anomaly,” even among the largely moderate leadership of the Ivory Coast.\(^{31}\) And this put him under permanent siege. For instance, in 1962, during the preliminary planning for Houphouët-Boigny’s first state visit to the U.S., the Ivorian leadership had wanted to substitute Ernest Boka, the Minister of Justice, for Saller, reportedly in an “effort to keep [presidential visiting] party all Ivoirien.”\(^{32}\) Saller’s particularly difficult character may have made the situation even more untenable. Admittedly, the “erstwhile non-cooperator,” as American diplomats dubbed him, had somehow turned “remarkably genial and pleasant.” But such a transformation may have been a response to the hurried departure of the Finance Minister’s close advisor who had just “blown up and returned home.” Seeing this, “Perhaps Saller, known to the Africans as ‘the Frenchman,’ has begun to make comparisons in which Paris does not necessarily come off too well.”\(^{33}\) Yet, two years later, Saller would oppose the proposed Africanization of Ivory Coast custom services.\(^{34}\) In fact, in October 1964, Saller had a “violent dispute” (altercation assez violente) over public expenditures with some fellow cabinet members whom French diplomatic intelligence described condescendingly as
“spendthrift bureaucrats” (*ministres depensiers*). Although Houphouët-Boigny had backed the Frenchman when he threatened to resign, the incident forced the Ivorian president to become more open to the idea of a lasting, if not “rapid Africanization of ministerial positions.”

Factional conflicts within the government may have added a nationalist flavor to Saller’s ordeal. Thus, even though he had appeared to have “jumped over the [reverse] color bar” in the various cabinet reshuffles after independence, Saller was finally removed in 1966. Two younger Ivorians were appointed to replace him: Henri Konan Bédié, the former Ivorian ambassador to the U.S., and Mohamed T. Diawara, an erstwhile activist of the vocal Fédération des Etudiants d’Afrique Noire en France (FEANF). Still, if 1966 marked the end of Raphaël Saller as one of the key players in the political economy of development in postcolonial Ivory Coast, the same year witnessed the emergence of the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer (ORSTOM) as the new powerhouse in the politics of engineering the modernization of *Le Vieux*’s country.

Created in 1943 under Vichy, and confirmed by General de Gaulle’s government thereafter, ORSTOM was established to implement and coordinate French scientific research in the colonies. To carry out such a task, apart from a parent research center at Bondy, on the outskirts of Paris, various local branches were established throughout the overseas territories, among which the Adiopodoumé center in the Ivory Coast was perhaps the most strategic. From its inception in 1946, ORSTOM-Côte d’Ivoire (also known as Institut d’Enseignement et de Recherche Tropicale or IDERT) set itself up as an institute that would couple its theoretical research (*recherches fondamentales*) with an
applied component that, in the words of one of the architects of the project, would “render innumerable services to the Ivory Coast.” For example, applied research was done on various soils to determine their potential for agriculture, which pleased the colonial authorities. During the heyday of the drive for decolonization some Ivorians, including Houphouët-Boigny himself, called for a nationalization of the institute, but their request was never granted. Thus, ORSTOM-Côte d’Ivoire was still in French hands at independence. With its involvement in various projects in post-colonial Ivory Coast, ORSTOM eventually became, in the words of its Director General, one of the “cornerstones of the durability of the French presence” in Houphouët-Boigny’s country. The director’s claim was confirmed by the outcome of the geopolitics of expertise in its connection with development planning in postcolonial Ivory Coast.

THE GEOPOLITICS OF POST-COLONIAL EXPERTISE: Knowledge, Memory, and the Travails of Planning Development

In November 1966, Mohamed T. Diawara, the newly appointed Ivorian Minister in charge of Planning, called upon the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer. Anticipating an agreement between his Department and the Section “Economie et Démographie” of the French research institute, the Ivorian minister underlined the need for a “close collaboration” between the two parties. He envisioned this cooperation in the framework of on-going development planning, which was set to “achieve a region-centered decentralization of the 1970-1975 Plan.” Having proven itself an effective source of expertise during the preliminary surveys known as Etudes Régionales, which were undertaken between 1962 and 1964 so as to make an inventory of the resources and the possibilities of development of all the regions of the Ivory Coast, the Section des Sciences Humaines of ORSTOM emerged, in the mid-sixties, as the
social sciences laboratory *par excellence* for post-colonial modernization of the Ivory Coast. It became the only entity capable of carrying out the theoretical, methodological, and technical aspects of the development of the country.

To understand the rise of this French research institution to prominence on the stage of development expertise in the Ivory Coast, one must revisit the very nature of the politics of knowledge that ORSTOM orchestrated so as to increase its influence among key members of the Ivorian Ministry of Planning. Here the transformation of the “colonial library” into a nexus of *epistemic memories* proved decisive. Thus the privileged access of the Orstromians to the archives in which knowledges of the Ivory Coast were deposited made them prime candidates to win the respect of Ivorian policymakers. This means that besides the neo-colonial paternalism of the Quai d’Orsay, which gave a partial boost to French researchers in the Ivory Coast, the success of ORSTOM must be understood in terms of the power of its “patriarchic” presence in the landscape of expertise in the Ivorian postcolony. Thus, Ambassador Reams’s assessment that the Ivorian “economic miracle” relied too heavily on the French was on target. However, like most economists and social scientists who would subsequently discuss the political economy of the Ivory Coast, he failed to recognize the role of the geopolitics of knowledge in the establishment of French post-colonial hegemony in Le Vieux’s country.

If anything, American scientific interests in the country had been growing ever since the opening of the U.S. consulate in Abidjan in 1957. As we have seen, toward the end of the colonial era, a few American scholars, including Immanuel Wallerstein and Aristide Zolberg, were already roaming the West African territory as they conducted doctoral dissertation research. After independence, an even greater number of U.S.
researchers opted to study the Ivory Coast, a most discussed country whose “economic miracle” intrigued many an observer. Indeed, a steady stream of American survey teams visited Abidjan and other significant showcases of France’s neo-colonial sphere of influence. Such was the case of Richard J. Peterec, who surveyed the role of the port of Abidjan in the Ivorian economy, or the Ralph M. Parsons Company, which undertook a hydrogeological reconnaissance of the country in 1964 on behalf of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).\textsuperscript{43} Moreover, both the Ford and Rockefeller foundations were stepping up their assistance to the Ivory Coast in a bid to help the country sustain its formal independence.\textsuperscript{44} Finally, the results of the first Ford-funded area studies regarding Francophone Africa were coming out, raising the visibility of the Ivory Coast in the academic landscape of the United States.\textsuperscript{45}

Already in the late 1950s, the American economic and epistemological offensives in Africa had provoked concern in certain French circles. In 1958, for instance, \textit{Le Monde diplomatique} had found that French leaders were becoming fixated on the supposed loss of their country’s influence in its African territories due to the growing American and Soviet presence in the region.\textsuperscript{46} Although one of the chroniclers of the magazine concluded that French fear was unfounded, the editors nonetheless advised the French not to dismiss as insignificant the encroachment of the United States.\textsuperscript{47} The (post)imperial concern grew into paranoia as Guinea, Mali, Senegal, the Ivory Coast and other former French colonies consolidated their political independence, leading some French diplomats to liken their American colleagues to protagonists drawn from Graham Greene’s \textit{The Quiet American}.\textsuperscript{48}
Admittedly, the U.S. had replaced France as the hegemonic Western power in Indochina after the French debacle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, but to think that such a scenario was transposable in Black Africa was to over-estimate the competences and institutional performances of the United States, especially when one understands that “day to day” operations (as opposed to long term planning) were the “rule rather than the exception” in the conduct of U.S. diplomacy in Africa. Such an easy transposition ignored the lack of substantial epistemic memories in American expertise as far as Francophone Africa was concerned.

The French diplomats in Washington were aware of this handicap, at least as far as the Ivory Coast was concerned. Thus, in January 1961, in a long correspondence with his minister, the French Ambassador to the United States, Hervé Alphand, observed:

On January 16, one of my collaborators had a long discussion with the Head of ICA West Africa Service, Mr. Behoteguy and Mr. Mazzoco who has just been appointed as representative of this administration in Abidjan with jurisdiction over the four countries of the Council of the Entente.

The remarks made by these civil servants show that a new spirit exists in the ICA with regard to Black Africa, compared to that which we had often denounced in, for example, the Far East and North Africa. As I understand it, this evolution comes from various factors: realization by the American services of the failure of the actions in various areas of the world in spite of the enormous sums of money spent, and the desire to use the resources available in the best interest of the recipients, according to their real needs and not for prefabricated opinions, awareness also of the quasi-total ignorance which reigns in the United States as far as the problems of Black Africa are concerned; finally, “last but not least,” great consideration for the efforts supported by France in its former territories, efforts which one knows perfectly well are carried out here via specialists who know their subject in depth and whom Americans may find it greatly beneficial to listen to.

The ICA civil servants declared that they were very satisfied with this discussion and stressed that they counted on such organizations as the Central Office of Studies for the Equipment of overseas to direct their action and to facilitate the choice of the points of application of U.S. assistance.

Despite his self-satisfaction, the French ambassador was on target when he underlined the ignorance of the American experts and their dependence on French
mediation to understand African problems. For if Africa was not completely missing in the geopolitics of area-studies knowledge production in U.S. universities and research centers, the black continent played only a marginal role. This is certainly the impression created by a working paper from the very influential Center for International Studies (CENIS) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which since 1953 had chosen India, Indonesia, and to a lesser extent Italy as case studies whose findings were to enlighten American experts about their duties in the Third World.51 But Alphand’s letter translated more than geopolitical and epistemological concern. In fact, by contrasting the weak repercussions of the “enormous sums spent” by the American government in its attempt to gain a foothold in Africa against the success of the French due to their “deep” knowledge of African issues, the ambassador alluded to a different understanding of capital than purely economic or financial.52

French anthropological investments (sociological missions, archaeological excavations, ethnocultural expeditions, etc.) during the colonial period, and especially the scientific capital that resulted from it in the form of epistemic memories, enabled French experts to triumph over the Americans in their fight to control the politics of development in the Ivory Coast. The proof of this victory was the signing, in April 1962, of a Convention Générale de Coopération Scientifique between the French and Ivorian governments, covering such hexagonal research organizations as the Institut de Recherches en Agronomie Tropicale (IRAT), the Institut des Fruits et Agrumes Coloniaux (IFAC), and of course, ORSTOM.53 Thus, if there is a conclusion to be drawn from Franco-American antagonism regarding the development of the Ivorian post-colony, it is that the problems of epistemic memories and the problematics of power are closely related. This is why the archives, as places of memory, were potential weapons at the
disposal of those who could construct and use them, as we shall see in the case of ORSTOM and its ascent to the top of Ivorian developmentalist apparatus.

In November 1961, L. Ziegle, the deputy general manager of ORSTOM, sent a memorandum to several cadres of the research organization inviting them to meet in order to “exchange views on a possible policy” that the Office could deploy regarding the projected regional studies and investigations in Madagascar and the Ivory Coast. He showed himself more a politician than a scientist:

Initiators of many research projects, we are likely to find ourselves reduced to the status of subcontractors vis-à-vis the private consulting organizations which are being better positioned than we are, because their business-like PR techniques and their manpower (even if their researchers are acquired through hasty recruitments) to treat with the local authorities.

These companies tend to portray our competence as nil. Thus our task is to imagine a policy for ORSTOM, a policy which will perhaps consist in intervening differently than the private consulting firms.54

In the aftermath of independence, the booming Ivorian economy had attracted a substantial number of “bureaux d’étude” (consulting firms), leading to what many contemporary observers saw as a mushrooming of private consulting firms and the unnecessary development of “parallel technical assistance” (assistance technique parallèle).55 While such a situation forced ORSTOM to compete with private firms and other French para-statal agencies, the judicious use of the epistemic memory by ORSTOM’s researchers during the Etudes Régionales succeeded in turning the Section des Sciences Humaines into a veritable think tank.

A vast program of demographic and socio-economic investigations, the Etudes Régionales began as an idea in the late 1950s throughout the French empire in Africa.56 After independence, most countries maintained the practice, with the Ivory Coast initiating its own survey campaign in 1962. Since the program was co-financed by the
government of the Ivory Coast and the French Fonds d'Aide à la Coopération (FAC), the scientific competence of both Ivorian and French experts was mobilized to implement the campaign. Apart from ORSTOM, other French private research corporations or parastatal organizations were actively involved in the making of the *Etudes Régionales*, including the Société d’Etudes Mathématiques Appliquées (SEMA), the Société d’Etudes pour le Développement Economique et Social (SEDES), and the Bureau pour le Développement de la Production Agricole (BDPA), UNINTER, and IDET-CEGOS.⁵⁷

![Figure 4.1: Zones Covered by the *Etudes Régionales*](image)


While ORSTOM eventually became part of this program along with the other French research firms, it is less well-known that it had not initially been summoned
during the first preparatory meetings of the *Etudes Régionales*, despite its “knowledge” of the socio-anthropological milieu of the Ivory Coast. Indeed, ORSTOM was initially kept away by the Ivorian authorities on the grounds that the Office had “never done a coordinated regional survey.”\(^5\) This stance was to change, however, during a meeting in October 1961 to which certain cadres of ORSTOM had been invited, including veteran Africanist geographer Gilles Sautter. His thorough knowledge of fieldwork methodology reportedly enabled him to overshadow the other participants. As the records reveal it, Sautter criticized “very harshly, but with much precision the method proposed by the private research organizations.” The encounter became something of a landmark, embedding ORSTOM in the landscape of postcolonial social-scientific expertise in the Ivory Coast.\(^5\)

Sautter’s performance resulted in the adoption of the plan that ORSTOM would be in charge of one of the studies. Two months later, the Director of the ORSTOM center in Adiopodoumé (near Abidjan, Ivory Coast) announced to his superior in Paris that the Ivorian Ministry of Planning had finally decided to integrate the Orstomians into its own research team. Commenting on the decision, he added: “This formula is far from your first suggestions which required an exclusive ORSTOM scientific management.” But for the director of the ORSTOM center in the Ivory Coast, the time for work under the exclusive control of his social sciences researchers had not yet arrived: “I do not think that it is convenient to insist on putting [ORSTOM’s] own stamp (*obtenir son individualité propre*) on the studies. Rather the ORSTOM team will have to prove itself in the field before being entrusted with other regional studies.” To prepare for this moment, he recommended that a “very dynamic and valuable collaboration” be
established between ORSTOM and the government of the Ivory Coast. In the search for an “ORTSTOM policy” to overcome the competition from private research firms, the Head Office in Paris adopted the recommendation of Adiopodoumé. And so an accord was signed in June 1962 authorizing ORSTOM to lead the investigation of the Bouaké area in collaboration with the technicians of the Ivory Coast’s Service de Statistique du Plan. Thus from its marginal position in the preparatory meetings of the *Etudes Régionales*, ORSTOM became a major actor in the socio-economic surveys. Such an overture helped the French research institution later take the lead in the study of the Baoulé region of Central Ivory Coast.

To understand this victory, the place of the archive of knowledge in the geopolitics of postcolonial expertise must be reconsidered. For the explanation of the success of the Office in its campaign of seduction vis-à-vis the Ivorian authorities lies less in ORSTOM’s status as a French institute than in the institution’s strategic position in the (re)production and circulation of knowledge regarding soil sciences, demography, ethnology, and the larger interdisciplinary ruralist studies collectively known as *études de terroir*. The mobilization of epistemic memories proved highly crucial in this instance.

Bouaké had long been a zone of investigation for ORSTOM social science researchers. In 1954, for instance, Jean-Louis Boutillier had been part of a five-man mission given the task of studying the agrarian practices and dietary habits of the population of the Bouaké district (*Cercle de Bouaké*). While the mission was jointly funded by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the French colonial government in the Ivory Coast, copies of the methods of the investigations as well as the preliminary results found their way into the reference library of ORSTOM.
Furthermore, by the time the *Etudes Régionales* were worked out in post-independence Ivory Coast, Boutillier had become a senior researcher in Adiopodoumé. He was a resource person whose professional advice was always welcomed by the junior researchers. The close friendship and *esprit de corps* that existed among the expatriate Orstomians facilitated a transfer of knowledge from the older to the younger generation.

Beyond the value of these epistemic memories as “gestures and habits, unspoken craft traditions, intimate physical knowledge, ingrained reminiscences, and spontaneous reflexes,” however, one must revisit the whole research methodology which the Section des Sciences Humaines deployed to distinguish itself from the private consulting firms. Here again, the remobilization of past epistemic practices helped the French research organization to leave its mark.

In fact, once the principle of the participation of ORSTOM in the *Etudes Régionales* was established, Gilles Sautter wrote a methodological note intended for the researchers. An applied version of a paper that the geographer had given not long before, “Structure d’une enquête régionale à entreprendre en Côte d’Ivoire” exposed a whole practice of expertise in an African postcolony. On the diagnostic basis that there existed in Africa neither reliable statistics nor a “tight administrative network” to produce them, Sautter came to the idea that the “investigation must thus create its own frameworks.” Furthermore, contrary to the method of armchair investigation used by private consulting companies, the Africanist declared that an “investigation in Africa is not carried out from afar.” More concretely for the Bouaké *Etudes Régionales*, he recommended as preparatory phase to the investigation, an inventory of knowledge already produced on the Ivory Coast, and even Ghana, because the “20 or 30 years’ lead that Ghana has in the
field of the economic development make it believable to a certain point that the Ivory Coast is moving towards where Ghana has been, and consequently, enables us to better distinguish, for the future of this country, which issues are significant and which ones are not.\textsuperscript{69} The geographer also suggested the necessity of interviewing the local elite of the area under study. This phase would be followed by “an in-depth study” that Sautter named the “case studies,” which consisted of making “grounded investigations, carried out interdisciplinarily by the various specialists interested in each case.”\textsuperscript{70} From this, it would be necessary to produce generalizations. In the conclusion of the methodological memorandum, ORSTOM’s expert-counselor recommended a stress on sociological analyses because the experiment of research on post-war Africa had shown that the “principal errors made in development planning are due to insufficient knowledge of the particular conditions in the human realm.”\textsuperscript{71}

Sautter’s rather linear vision of development is definitely problematic, especially in light of the recent critical histories of modernization theory. In the same way, quite a few observers might have remained skeptical had they been exposed to the geographer’s idea that Ghana had “20 or 30 years’ lead” over the Ivory Coast. However, few scholars can raise doubts about the pragmatic value of the ideas the geographer defended in his methodological note. To be sure, the thoughts appeared very useful to the Orstomians since the ORSTOM researchers finished their study of Bouaké within the prescribed time, crowning it with a documentation of at least nine monographic or synthetic studies.\textsuperscript{72}

While there are limited materials to gauge the effectiveness of the Orstomians, the fact that they were later mobilized to bring their expertise to help other teams can be construed as evidence that they indeed were appreciated.\textsuperscript{73} Georges Balandier confirmed
such an evaluation in a report prepared towards the end of the *Etudes Régionales*, when he wrote that the Orstomians produced most of the monographs and that their contributions were outstanding as well. Then he added: “I double checked their work and concluded it was of an exceptional quality.”74 The Ivorian leaders implicitly shared the satisfaction. This was obliquely revealed by the General Director of ORSTOM who, in his response to an offer by the Ivory Coast of an exclusive agreement between ORSTOM and the Ministry of Planning, noted: “I thank you for [this] proposal which testifies to the interest that you attached to the excellent qualities that ORSTOM brought to some of your projects and in particular the socio-economic surveys of Bouaké.”75

It can thus be argued that L. Ziegle’s proposed strategy was shrewd because thanks to ORSTOM’s “very dynamic and valuable” participation in the *Etudes Régionales*, the Office eventually gained recognition of its unique character as the Direction Générale had originally wished. In fact, a convention signed in 1966 made ORSTOM the essential element in the scientific device for future development planning endeavors in the Ivory Coast. Still, with a victory over the private consulting companies, the *Etudes Régionales* collaterally created the conditions for the institutionalization of social sciences within the ORSTOM Center in Adiopodoumé.76

In fact, the rivalries between Institut Français d’Afrique Noire (IFAN) and ORSTOM during the colonial era had left a legacy that prevented the organization of the social sciences on an institutional basis. Rather, the Orstomians in the field of social sciences had carried out specific missions. But the subsequent involvement of the Office in the *Etudes Régionales* had required the mobilization of a greater number of researchers, which, at the end of the surveys, posed the “problem of the future use [of our] researchers,” as Georges Balandier put it. For him as well as for the researchers
themselves, the establishment of the social sciences “on a permanent basis” in the Ivory Coast was both “needed and urgent.” It was especially so since authorities in the Ivory Coast were organizing and even structuring the natural academic landscape with a view toward stimulating the whole scientific field, and more particularly ethnology, which was believed to “secure the fundamental knowledge of the country.” More imperatively, Georges Balandier recommended that the ORSTOM Center for Social Sciences be located in Abidjan for researchers “have to be in contact with the University and its research institutes, the state agencies with interests in their investigations, and the information centers.” Even though the Orstomians had to wait until 1969 to see the relocation of the Section des Sciences Humaines to Petit Bassam, a neighborhood of Abidjan, the first directives offered by Balandier were applied immediately as Paris decided on the creation of a Service des Sciences Humaines within the ORSTOM Center at Adiopodoumé.

Ultimately, the politics of knowledge and the campaigns of seduction carried out by the cadres of the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre-Mer helped increase the influence of the French organization among the Ivorian authorities. Moreover, the involvement of the researchers of the Office in the socio-economic surveys resulted in the incorporation of the social sciences in the scientific universe of the Ivory Coast. The role of epistemic memories in this double process should be obvious now. Benefiting from the victory of the Quai d’Orsay over the Americans, but especially using its “patriarchic” capability enabled by a privileged access to the anthropological capital left by its predecessors, ORSTOM thus renegotiated its place on the market of expertise in the Ivory Coast. This place was consolidated in due course, with the Section des
Sciences Humaines evolving from a simple auxiliary of research in 1962 to leading actor in the regional development experiment of the Ivory Coast four years later. Ironically, as the Orstomians performed their new roles as experts on regional planning, they extended the transnational reach of American modernization theory, even if this was to be mediated through another trick of French dubbing.

**DUBBING MODERNIZATION ... ANEW!:**
*Ironies of French Postcolonial Expertise in the Pré Carré*

In 1967 the Ivory Coast government published *Perspectives décennales de développement économique, social et culturel, 1960-1970*, a text which had initially been sketched in 1962 when French-born Saller and Vinay were still in charge of the planning of the Ivorian economy. The policy document was meant to provide Ivorian planners with broad guidelines for the modernization of the country during the first decade after independence. A product of its time, *Perspectives décennales* exuded the developmentalist *cum* productivist *élan* of the post-1945 era, an *élan* that was clearly informed by American modernization discourse as evidenced by the direct reference to Walt W. Rostow and his “stage theory” of economic growth. Such an embrace of Rostovian rhetoric is logical in light of the disaffiliation (*désapparentement*) episode of the 1950s and the subsequent pro-Western politics of *Le Vieux* and his loyal or co-opted disciples of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain. A closer look at the mobilization of American modernization discourse by the Ivorian policy planners further reveals that the development world of postcolonial Ivory Coast was an arena where sectarian visions of modernity among the members of the French expatriate community come into relief.

In metropolitan France, the reception of Rostovian ideas was most problematic. For even though *Les Cahiers de la République* and *Le Contrat social* had published a
translation of Rostow’s famous essay in *The Economist*, very few French academics chose to engage the American. Further, while *The Stages of Economic Growth* was reviewed in the *Rêvue de l’action populaire* and its French translation discussed by a reviewer in *Population*, few university professors, if any, deemed it interesting to include Rostow in their lectures. In fact, the academic reception of Rostovian ideas in France largely vacillated between condescending indifference as in the case of Emile James, who never discussed Rostow in his review columns of the *Annales*, and outright rejection as in the case of Raymond Aron, who dismissed *The Stages of Economic Growth* as an exercise in mythmaking. The Franco-American rivalry of the Kennedy era may partly explain this rather cold reception of Rostow’s ideas by the French intellectual elite. It may have also been the case that the aura of Marxism was still strong in French academic circles, including development scholars. In this light, the decision of the French translator/publisher to drop the subtitle (*A Non-Communist Manifesto*) may have been a wise yet ultimately ineffective move.

The reception of Rostow’s ideas among Third World leaders and international development practitioners was radically different. Heirs to both late colonial developmentalism and the Marshall Plan recovery programs, they believed they had an experiential knowledge of the power of modernization theory. In this respect, Maurice Trémolières, a French engineer and *coopérant* in Rabat, Morocco, may have been speaking the minds of many laypersons when he wrote to Rostow:

> I think that, there, you have touched the most important problem of our time, that is: the possibilities given to the entrepreneurship by the social system (and therefore the institutional regime) of underdeveloped countries.

> For 20 years in France and 7 years in Morocco, my job has been a combination of bureau of reclamation and soil conservation service work. […] Today I am convinced that a free enterprise is indispensable for development, and that the reason why underdeveloped countries remain underdeveloped, is that they are not able to modify their institutions in such a way that enough opportunities are left to free enterprise.
The introduction of techniques and economy into underdeveloped countries is a lost struggle if, at the same time, institutions are not modified so that the country can benefit of the means brought in. […] Of course no change of the institutional system of a country is possible if the government of that country is not willing or does not know how to proceed.\(^8\)

The details of Rostow’s reply to Trémolières are unknown. Still it is clear that issues regarding institutional change in the non-industrial, “developing” world were one of the key research interests for most postwar modernizers, including American modernization theorists who articulated the issue in the language of the passage from traditional, hence backward, polity to a society and economy where mass consumerism ruled.

It is striking that Trémolières’s enthusiasm for Rostow’s ideas and the larger modernization paradigm was shared by many leaders in the hectic (post)colonial decades of the 1950s and 1960s. In the Ivory Coast, *Le Vieux* displayed a variant of this enthusiasm in his Preface to the *Perspectives décennales*, arguing that Ivorian national growth required the establishment of an “important apparatus of production” to be coupled with the “training of men willing to take up the challenge of development.”\(^8\)

Echoing his president, Mohamed T. Diawara defended the development options laid out by his predecessors. An economist by training, the Minister in charge of Planning was even more in tune with Rostovian discourse, which he mobilized to explain Ivory Coast’s phenomenal growth. Thanks to the cumulative effect of a policy of free enterprise, the priority given to the establishment of a production apparatus, and an emphasis on training, Diawara argued, the Ivory Coast had reaped very exceptional dividends. Such a favorable outcome led the minister to predict that by 1970 the Ivorian economy would “enter the stage of take-off, allowing thus the country to embark on a course of self-sustaining growth.”\(^9\)
Policy-wise, the appropriation of modernization theory was enacted by focusing on how to increase the productivity of the various sectors of the economy. However, little care was given to where these sectors were geographically located. Thus while post-independence Ivory Coast maintained the phenomenal economic growth that started soon after the opening of the Vridi Canal in 1951, such a macroeconomic exploit was not evenly distributed nationwide. As the unevenness became increasingly conspicuous by the mid-1960s, the Ivorian planners attempted to shift development planning from sector-oriented programming to regional planning. The role of ORSTOM social scientists in this attempt at re-orienting the political economy of the Ivory Coast was significant.

In fact, as the Ivory Coast Ministry of Planning made available its Perspectives décennales, ORSTOM published a special issue of its Cahiers ORSTOM, série Sciences Humaines, whose dual aim was to lay out the theoretical bases of regional development planning and showcase a model for action as manifested in the Ivorian experiment. The two contributors were J. C. Perrin, professor at the Faculté de Droit et des Sciences Economiques at the University of Aix-en-Provence and head of the Technical Committee of ORSTOM’s Economy and Demography department, and Hugues Lhuillier, a junior research at ORSTOM who has just been posted in Abidjan.

In his contribution, J. C. Perrin reiterated an idea that he had developed earlier in 1962 for Madagascar, namely, that development be understood as “essentially a problem of changing the economic base” of a country. Expanding upon a notion dear to most modernization theorists, the social scientist explained that development could be reached only through restructuring the economy with a view to “revitalizing both consumption and the larger consumer culture.” Critiquing the conventional wisdom which prioritized
capital investment as the key measure to fight underdevelopment, Perrin maintained that the major problem confronting the emerging countries was how to spread the effects of such investment across the various “economic regions.” In a diagnostic mode, the researcher also claimed that Third World countries lacked both the capacity to amplify the dynamics of productive investment and the monetary resources for such investment. Yet, Perrin suggested, there was room for hope since deep changes were underway thanks largely to the “effects of imitation” (of the West) which were altering entrenched socio-economic mores that had long inhibited change in the “new” countries. According to the ORSTOM senior social scientist, the amplification of this mimetic process could be achieved if regional cities were empowered because dynamic urban networks, posited as poles of development, were likely to “ground the very process of economic growth within the framework of the region.” On the whole, Perrin concluded, urban-induced transformations could open a window of opportunity for the newly independent countries.

A convenient argument, yet Perrin’s contribution remained rather general with regard to the specifics of Ivorian development. But this was done on purpose since Lhuillier’s input to the special issue of the Cahiers was precisely meant to tackle the regional planning initiative that the Ivorian leadership was contemplating. To begin with, the junior Orstomian underlined that his text is not a theoretical treatise but a policy-oriented paper written to serve as a critical guide for development planning in the Ivory Coast. The paper was based on various Etudes Régionales seminars in which other experts participated, and Lhuillier believed that its ideas could be presented as a “collective effort” even though he took sole responsibility for their articulation. After these cautionary notes, Lhuillier focused on the Ivorian experience in planning. He criticized both the Perspectives décennales and the Etudes Régionales, which failed
because they lacked not only clear definitions of strategies for regional development and a conceptual frame for organizing ideas related to such planning, but most important of all methods for viable projections for regional development. In order to get around these limitations, he proposed a number of measures. First, regional growth poles for industrial decentralization must become part of national planning so as to distribute growth evenly in the national space. Next, since national planners had to work with preliminary sketches produced by regional planners, there should be collaboration between the two for a better coherence in development programming. Finally, the establishment of a permanent apparatus for gathering socio-economic information at the regional level was necessary because planning could be effective only if there existed a “permanent monitoring mechanism” (dispositif permanent d’observation).

Admittedly the set of measures the Orstomians envisioned in their role as postcolonial coopérants was meant to fit the specifics of Ivorian development. With their so-called “intimate” approach to knowledge production, ORSTOM researchers seemed indeed innovative, especially when compared to the guidelines of Perspectives décennales. Yet, the logics that underlay growth pole regionalization as a policy package geared toward the development of the Ivory Coast was conceived according to a “fairly rigid and conservative theoretical framework,” a development strategy that industrialized countries had been implementing for decades.

Recourse to regional planning as an administrative practice was used as early as the 1930s in the United States. Yet the global ascent of regional planning “as a policy concern” occurred with the “rise of the post-war welfare state with its emphasis on social equity and redistribution of wealth.” With the worldwide adoption of the paradigm, special agencies were set up in Canada (Department of Regional Economic Expansion),
Italy (Casa di Mezzogiorno), France (Délégation à l’Aménagement du Territoire et à l’Action Régionale), and many other countries as a means to overcome regional disparities within the context of national recovery programs. In the process, new concepts were coined to dub and thus translate the largely U.S.-informed administrative practice.

Arguably, François Perroux’s notion of growth pole was the most famous of these new concepts. First drafted in the wake of the publication of Jean-François Gravier’s critical yet influential Paris et le desert français, the idea of growth pole as a regional development strategy was later fine tuned and subsequently published in an issue of Economie appliquée as “Notes sur la notion de pôle de croissance.” And the ideas of the French economist were received with general acclaim. Building on the Perrousian concept, French geographers, economists, and planners came up with the policy of aménagement du territoire (regional planning) as they emphasized the need to create a set of métropoles d’équilibre (regional hubs) to counter the macrocephalistic pull of Paris. Consequently the Délégation pour l’Aménagement du Territoire et de l’Action Régionale (DATAR) was created in the early 1960s. Further, in the international context of decolonization, the ideas of regional planning were sold to the prospective leaders of the Third World as evidenced by the public performance of the conferees and French experts involved in the Stage sur les questions de planification organized by the French government in mid-1960 for the newly independent African countries. As if to make sure France would maintain a subtle control over the minds of the future development planners of its African post-colonies, the organizers of the internship laid out and explained the key strategies in planning, making sure the presenters (all of whom were French) gave a particularly metropolitan flavor to their ideas. In this regard, as he
historicized the vogue in regional planning, Philippe Bernard, a Chargé de Mission at the French Commissariat Général du Plan, explained to his African audience that the trend was a move away from bureaucratic centralization. Then he added:

If social concerns appeared to be the primary objective of regional policy, economic concerns gradually came to the fore; meaning that extreme depopulation of certain regions untouched by economic development projects, as opposed to the high population in urban zones, made them less attractive from a social policy perspective, and equally costly [in economic terms].

Thus heirs to both Jean-François Gravier’s critical scholarship against centralized development in France and the Délégation pour l’Aménagement du Territoire et de l’Action Régionale’s experiment in the aménagement du territoire on the one hand, and a particularly clever politics of dubbing on the other, development professionals, including those who would become the coopérants in the African post-colonies, had by the late 1950s embraced the notion that modernization could be successful only if growth were evenly distributed throughout the national space. Therefore, Orstomians’ claim that the French think tank pioneered the techniques of regional development planning in the Ivory Coast must be nuanced. For it appears that Orstomians, just like the Ivorian planning elite, were influenced by the prevailing discourse on regional development and growth pole economics. No other evidence better typifies this than the very language of the 1966 request letter that Mohamed T. Diawara sent to the ORSTOM director asking for the “close collaboration” of the French institution in his attempt at restructuring Ivorian development planning while steering it toward regional planning.

Still, the impact of the ORSTOM experts on the formulation of the 1967-1970 Loi-Programme was most noticeable. With two Orstomians on the board of the Bureau de Conception, de Coordination et d’Exploitation des Etudes Regionales (BCCE), ORSTOM helped create the Regional Commission for Development (CRD) and secure
the appointment of a Regional Planning Delegate (DRP) for each of the Ivorian provinces.\textsuperscript{110} Moreover, the expertise of the Orstomians helped establish Kossou and San Pedro as the major projects in the years to come. In this process, the very idea of “reducing regional disparities” found its way into the discourse of Ivorian planning, even though there was no efficient policy to bring it into practice.\textsuperscript{111} Observers such as Anceny, Pescay, and even Dubresson have claimed that the legacy of political centralization in the Ivory Coast can largely account for the failure of this attempted regional decentralization.\textsuperscript{112} However, Ivorian planners might have been on target when they later criticized urban-induced modernization and regional decentralization and dismissed both procedures as “abstract and scanty rationalism.”\textsuperscript{113} For by over-insisting on the notion of lack in their assessment of the development needs of the Ivory Coast, the Orstomians presented development not simply as a paternalistic project in the way colonial bureaucrats did a decade before in Africa, but more significantly, they failed to root out the Eurocentric bias of their modernist concepts.\textsuperscript{114}

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The first decade following the independence of the Ivory Coast was a decisive moment in the framing of postcolonial modernization in the West African country. Hypnotized by the ideology of developmentalism and lacking in human resources to operationalize their project of nation-building, Ivorian authorities called upon both French and American expertise that came in the form of assistance and international cooperation. While this bid toward diversification showed their willingness to expand their circle of partners enlisted in the task of national development, \textit{Le Vieux} and his
lieutenants were nonetheless forced to acknowledge the solidity of French assistance which was itself informed by the legacy of the “colonial library.” Because it had both institutional and epistemic memories of applied research in the Ivory Coast, ORSTOM came to be the major player in the geopolitics of international assistance and development expertise. In effect, from its marginal position in the apparatus set up to conduct Ivorian postcolonial modernization in the early 1960s, the Orstomians became the conceptual designers of Ivory Coast’s turn to growth pole development in the late 1960s. While their expertise seemed innovative on the surface, it actually turned out to be a dubbing of an earlier American experiment with regional planning. If anything, this meant that the specter of America haunting so many French diplomats never went away even as France secured its influence in the Ivorian postcolony. The next two chapters will take up this point as I analyze U.S. involvement in two postcolonial modernization experiments: the expansion of the electricity grid in the Ivory Coast and the effort to bring the Ivorian southwest into the fold of capitalist modernity.
CHAPTER FIVE
ENERGIZING THE “ECONOMIC MIRACLE”: IVORIAN ELECTRIFICATION, AMERICAN FOREIGN AID, AND THE LOGIC OF INFORMAL IMPERIALISM

Even the European powers, when confronted with North American diplomacy, are like a rapier pitted against a revolver. In the order of ideas with which we are dealing, Washington has modified the whole perspective. The first conquerors, with their elementary type of mind, annexed the inhabitants in the guise of slaves. Those who came afterwards annexed territories without inhabitants. The United States [...] inaugurated the system of annexing wealth, apart from inhabitants or territories, disdaining outward shows in order to arrive at the essentials of domination without a dead-weight of areas to administer and multitudes to govern.

Manuel Ugarte, Destiny of a Continent (1925)

Is the Ivory Coast—the quintessential French province in Africa—on its way to becoming an American neo-colony?

L’Echo des comptoirs (December 1973)

In December 1965 Africa Report voted Ivory Coast’s Félix Houphouët-Boigny as the man of the year in Francophone Africa. With the picture of an all-smiling Le Vieux to anchor his story, the columnist of the Washington-based periodical explained this choice by offering a few salient examples of Houphouët-Boigny’s achievements. His leadership reportedly included not only the efficient political management of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), but also new economic initiatives at home and abroad. As a result, “The Ivory Coast is one of the few African countries today that has become steadily prosperous since independence. Economic growth, while less spectacular than in the banner year 1963-1964, when it reached 15 percent, is nevertheless at the respectable figure of five percent and steady.” The journalist further reported that while the
“continued economic growth” in the former French colony was particularly manifest in the capital city of Abidjan, the signs of the new prosperity could also be felt in the interior of the country where “Mud huts are giving way to cement houses with tin roofs. Quaints old building relics of the colonial era –are being replaced by modern structures.”¹ Glowing as it may appear, the portrait offered by Africa Report was a familiar one in the years following the independence of the Ivory Coast. In fact, both critics and apologists of what became known by contemporaries as an “economic miracle” viewed the achievements of Le Vieux’s country as indeed impressive.²

At independence, the Ivorian government had opted to focus economic development on the export of three main products: coffee, cocoa, and timber. With the earnings gained from these raw materials, it hoped to import manufactured goods and other services from the industrialized countries. This comparative advantage option paid off in macroeconomic terms. For Ivorian development planners, moreover, it was only one component of their modernization strategy. The other schemes and policies included an ultra-liberal investment code and infrastructural development that was projected to pave the way for the gradual industrialization of the country.³

With large construction projects underway in almost all parts of the Ivory Coast, the search for more energy became a pressing matter. Besides thermal energy, Ivorian authorities elected to build a hydroelectric dam on the Bandama River in the late 1960s. Such a choice was not surprising. In fact, the Ivorian leadership had predicted as early as 1959 that hydroelectric power would help secure the welfare of the Ivorian people while providing at the same time the basis for national industrialization, which they envisioned was the “pre-condition for the creation of the modern state.”⁴ The nationalist enthusiasm
that followed independence all the way through the first decade of postcolonial nation-building provided an opportunity to actualize this electrified vision of President Houphouët-Boigny and his lieutenants. In a context where they were looking, albeit timidly, for more international partners to enlist in their country’s modernization, the Ivorian authorities called upon the World Bank and later U.S. expertise and capital. Assistance and investment, as we shall see later, soon came in the form of loans administrated by the Export-Import Bank of the United States.  

This chapter explores American involvement in an ambitious electrification effort launched by the Ivorian postcolonial state. Begun in 1963, the inflow of American grants and loans to finance the construction of utilities, roadways, and other infrastructural networks in the Ivory Coast cumulatively reached more than $40 million. Consequently, at the end of the 1960s, Le Vieux’s country was the only Francophone West African state to receive more American loans at market rate (i.e., hard loans) than grants. Representing more than 80 per cent of all U.S. public credit lending to the country, American bilateral aid was geared mainly toward energizing the Ivorian “economic miracle,” or to borrow from the New York Times, U.S. financial assistance was meant to “brighten [the] economic picture” of the Ivory Coast. Such involvement did not go unopposed by France, the former colonial power and aspirant for the maintenance of an unabashed neocolonial presence in the country. French efforts to preserve their influence in the windowcase of their pré carré created transatlantic tensions akin to a hot peace within the larger context of the Cold War. Admittedly the provision of American aid through hard loans, as unearthed by some French observers, demonstrated the cynicism of the moral economy of American foreign aid. Yet beyond the Franco-American tensions over the
Ivorian postcolony, the American presence in the electrification program of postcolonial Ivory Coast confirmed the pervasiveness of U.S. know-how in the practice of comprehensive regional development both in France and the Ivory Coast. Such was the case because, besides the shared perception of electricity as both a tool of modernization and the quintessential symbol of modernity, regional development of the type promoted by the Tennessee Valley Authority had regained favor as macroeconomic strategy.

I begin this chapter by looking at the expansion of the Ivorian energy grid in the 1960s. As I track the history of this expansion, I show that the U.S. had long been interested in this striving sector of the Ivorian economy, which came to be firmly established with the construction of the Kossou Dam. Putting the Kossou experiment into relief, I show in the ensuing section the centrality of the TVA model in the making of Ivorian, and ironically enough, French regionalist modernization programs. The damming of the Bandama opens a window on the moral economy of American aid in the postcolonial modernization of the Ivory Coast. I reveal that Washington’s eager lending to the Ivory Coast was tied to buying American goods and services. It appears that the United States aimed to use the showcase of France’s pré carré as its own bridgehead for penetration into Francophone Africa as a whole. I conclude the chapter by unraveling the major ideological threads of American informal empire in the former French West Africa.

EXPANDING THE IVORIAN ENERGY GRID:
An Electrification Between History, Politics, and Business

Electricity in the Ivory Coast, much like in the other Francophone African countries, was a relative latecomer on the economic and technological scene. The pervasive regime of the pacte colonial, along with concerns for cost efficiency, largely
explain this technocratic lag. While countries in Western Europe and North America started using electricity as early as the 1880s, Dakar, for instance, the most “modernized” city in all of French West Africa through the mid-1950s, acquired its first thermal plant only in 1910. Not until the implementation of the Fonds d’Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social (FIDES) in the late 1940s, would other cities, including Bamako (Mali) and Abidjan-Bingerville (Ivory Coast), come to boast of their own rudimentary power plants. Despite the fact that French industrialists of the electricity sector had advocated the electrification of the outre mer as early as 1931, it was only with the prospect of independence for the colonial societies and the political consequences of the import-substitution industrialization movement in the Third World in the 1950s that planners and development consultants found themselves forced to focus on electrical energy production on a larger scale.

In the Ivory Coast, the electricity grid had run on steam and thermal energy until 1952 when it became clear to the French colonial authorities that the country could use its rivers to generate electric power. Following up on this realization, surveying for the first hydroelectric dam began on the Bia River which led to the construction of the Ayamé I power plant. With venture capital from metropolitan French financiers, the dam was completed in late 1959 and generated approximately 80 million kilowatts per hour. When the Ivory Coast gained its independence in 1960, the nationalist leaders, pushed by the dream of building a “modern and model” postcolonial nation-state, came to rely on electrification as the “most essential task for the social and economic progress” of their country. Under these circumstances, the consumption of energy, which was posited as much a sign of modernity as a tool of modernization, soared exponentially [Fig 1],
passing effectively from an annual use of less than 20 GWh in 1956, for instance, to reach almost 200 GWh ten years later.\textsuperscript{14}

![Figure 5.1: Ivorian Energy Consumption, 1952-1965](image)


Faced with a growing demand for energy both for industrial and domestic consumption, the post-colonial state completed a second hydroelectric dam on the Bia in 1964. The behind-the-scenes politics leading to the construction of Ayamé II revealed both an earlier U.S. interest in the electrification of the Ivory Coast and France’s determination to protect its historic sphere of influence. Thus when Westinghouse claimed in 1962 that it had worked out a cheaper plan for the projected Ayamé II, Electricité de France (EDF)’s expatriates resentfully accused the American electrical firm of “looting their earlier works” in order to write its own report for the construction of the Ayamé II Dam.\textsuperscript{15} To settle matters, Ivory Coast’s French-born Minister of Finance and Planning, Raphaël Saller, convened a confrontation between experts from both Westinghouse and the French power company, which ended with the victory of the French. In light of the pervasive Africanist epistemic memory shared by many French
experts, this victory does not appear surprising. Yet, as the French ambassador acknowledged, the strategy of the Ivorian minister demonstrated his “concern for the general good.”

Similarly, Saller’s very resort confrontation showed his willingness to exert some degree of sovereign control over the Ivorian economy. Perhaps no instance better exemplified this “nationalist” will than the 1962 breach of the tacit trade agreement requiring that the Ivory Coast “consult either the French Commercial attaché [in Abidjan] or French equipment firms” before importing electrical, civil engineering or construction equipment from another country. As early as 1961, American diplomats had denounced this type of arrangement which they aptly described in the case of France’s military relations with some of its former colonies in West Africa as a French attempt to “cleverly tie [the] hands [of the Africans] while at the same time leaving [the] impression of flexibility [in] this regard.”

Despite numerous setbacks, American interest in the Ivorian energy sector was confirmed in February 1963 when the U.S. Export-Import Bank granted the Ivory Coast a $1.9 million loan at market rate to be used for the expansion of the Abidjan thermal plant. A year later, the Ivorian government initiated another round of negotiations with the Americans for a further expansion of the thermal power plant. French diplomats ensured that this second American contract did not go through. In effect, alarmed by U.S. encroachments, the French Minister of Cooperation wrote to his Foreign Affairs colleague, who in turn requested French legations in Washington and Abidjan to enquire into the Westinghouse deal. Invoking an earlier agreement between the Ivory Coast and France, the ministerial request went further to claim that France “is in its rights to expect
that the Ivory Coast favors the marketing of French products in its territory since France privileges the selling of Ivorian products on its soil.”

Using a combination of pressure and neocolonial seduction, the French diplomats eventually succeeded not only in canceling the impending Westinghouse contract but they also made sure a contract between the Ivory Coast government and the French company Alsthom was signed. Knowledge of the Hexagon’s neocolonial rights in the Ivorian postcolony must have been shared by most French residents in the Ivory Coast. Indeed, in the midst of the Westinghouse episode, some French business leaders accused Houphouët-Boigny of moving away from France to become “l’homme des Américains,” or the “right-hand man of the Americans.”

If already visible in the expansion of Ivory Coast’s thermal energy sector, it was in the damming of the Bandama at Kossou from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s that clearly established the American presence in the Ivorian electrification program. The most extravagant modernization scheme undertaken during the first decade following Ivorian independence, Kossou was the second large-scale hydroelectric constructed by the postcolonial state (and the third in the history of the country since the end of the Second World War). Built on the Bandama, the largest river of the country, the dam was projected to produce more than 500 million kilowatts per hour each year. Although not suffering from budgetary constraints, the Ivorian authorities opted to finance the damming project with international aid from Canada, Italy, and the United States, whose Kaiser Engineers was entrusted to build the dam.
Kossou did not start with U.S. endorsement though. In fact, plans for its construction were revealed as early as 1960 when the newly independent Ivory Coast asked EDF along with American Kaiser Engineers and Constructors to carry out hydrological surveys in order to spot the ideal location for the country’s third
hydroelectric complex. Ivorian planners used the findings in a plan submitted hurriedly to the World Bank in 1965, but the proposal was rejected because of its high cost and low profitability.25 Reacting to this rejection, the Ivorian ambassador to Washington, Henri Konan Bedié, accused the bank of being biased against Francophone Africa and implicitly criticized Paris for tolerating this state of affairs. Anticipating an appeal, the ambassador, reportedly acting “on instruction” from Le Vieux, requested that French diplomats intervene “in favor of the Bandama.”26 He met with disappointment, all the more so since rumors suggested that the World Bank rejection had been encouraged by the French members of the international financial institution.27

The ensuing bitterness of the West Africans must have momentarily cooled Franco-Ivorian relations. As a result, EDF was outbid by Kaiser Engineers, which not only developed a more thorough feasibility study in 1966 but also encouraged the Ivorian government to submit its damming project to the Exim Bank.28 Alarmed by yet another American encroachment, the French Commercial Attaché in Abidjan concluded that the “total exclusion of any French participation (through EDF) in this new study” as well as Kaiser’s pretense to control works sub-contracted to French laboratories, could “give a certain weight to the rumors that the new Ivorian economic policy favors the United States.”29

The French diplomat may have been right. An indication of this was provided by Henri K. Bedié, newly promoted Minister of Economy and Finance, who, as a further reprisal for French opposition/inaction, requested that France not be directly involved in the new Bandama venture.30 President Houphouët-Boigny apparently shared this position. This is why he wrote to U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson soon after the World
Bank rejection and asked for American participation in the Kossou Project. In his response to the Ivorian request, suggestive of Johnson’s effort to supersede the Kennedy mystique and win the hearts and minds of Third World leaders by his own charm, the American President assured his Ivorian counterpart that the U.S. government had “given this matter [Kossou Project] our thorough attention and shall continue our efforts to be of help.”\(^\text{31}\) In this light, he instructed the Exim Bank to study the Bandama project and recommend appropriate forms of American backing, which the bank effected in 1968.

If anything, the involvement of the United States in Ivorian modernization projects turned the cold alliance between the United States and France into something akin to a hot peace. The provision of a U.S. loan to the Ivory Coast created tensions between the U.S. and France, confirmed by the fixation of French diplomats on the U.S. to the exclusion of Italy and later Canada, both of which were equally involved in the Kossou Project. The Ivorian electrification program, however, shed light on more than just the politics of international finance and development. For a closer look at the powering of the “Ivorian miracle” through the multi-purpose damming scheme on the Bandama River reveals the transatlantic presence of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) as the model for the integrated regional development of a river valley.

\textit{A TRANSATLANTIC CIRCULATION OF AMERICAN KNOW-HOW: The TVA Model and the Making of the Kossou Project}

While the emerging Cold War of the late 1940s had conspired to displace the experiment undertaken by the Tennessee Valley Authority in the southern United States, the TVA remained a model to be emulated. This was especially true for the Third World countries engaged in an illusory all-out race to catch up with the industrialized nations. In
this regard, Knoxville—headquarters for the Tennessee Valley Authority—remained the favorite destination for numerous development experts and Third World luminaries. Indeed, in the context of ever difficult race relations in the U.S. South, this inflow of largely non-white visitors had unanticipated consequences as white supremacists were forced to accommodate dignitaries from the Third World. At the same time, the TVA confirmed its standing as a “major source of international technical assistance” whose influence was felt worldwide.

In the Ivory Coast, the mobilization of the TVA model in the making of Kossou, as we shall see, was ironically wrought through French mediation in the person of Philippe Lamour. A Chairman of the French National Commission on Regional Planning (Commission Nationale pour l’Aménagement du Territoire) and one time Chief Executive Officer of the agency for the rehabilitation of the Lower-Rhône region (Compagnie du Bas-Rhône Languedoc), he was invited to study the social issues surrounding the relocation of the people to be displaced by the construction of the Kossou Dam and to give expert advice on the ways to remedy the problems.

Monsieur Lamour did arrive in the Ivory Coast in late February 1969, carried out his task to the satisfaction of the Ivorian authorities, and returned to France. In many respects, the Lamour visit also brought some degree of contentment to the French diplomats posted in Abidjan. For, in a context marked by what contemporary observers saw as a mushrooming of competing private consulting firms to tap a booming Ivorian economy and the development of what the Chief of French Aid Mission in the Ivory Coast denounced as “unofficial technical assistance” (assistance technique parallèle), the Lamour mission provided an opportunity for the French ambassador to reassess his policy.
options and possibly chart a new course of diplomatic action.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, only a couple of months after Lamour’s departure, he wrote:

Following the mission of M. Philippe Lamour and maybe because the Department is seemingly hesitant to provide technical assistance personnel to the company in charge of the development of the Bandama valley, SCET-Coopération and other French firms have or are planning to provide high-level experts to this new and very important Ivorian agency. Such a course has the advantage of helping prevent foreign experts from exercising a monopoly in the making of the Kossou Project.\textsuperscript{36}

While Ambassador Jacques Raphaël-Leygues did not explicitly name the national origins of the foreign experts he feared were gradually controlling the Kossou project to the exclusion of the French, it is obvious that he had an eye on the United States. For years, French diplomats and political pundits had been warning that the U.S. was increasing its interest in Francophone Africa. In this context, Raphaël-Leygues’s recommendation that SCET-Coopération and other French firms be encouraged in the Kossou venture was meant to check the expansion of America’s informal empire in the most economically-attractive of France’s former colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa. While such a move was understandable given French hysteria over losing influence in the pré carré, it is the case that many French decision-makers and commentators overlooked the fact that the culture of U.S. regional development expertise was already shared by quite a few French planners, including key experts and consultants at SCET-Coopération. Perhaps no other instance better epitomizes the pervasiveness of this technocratic culture than the enthusiastic appropriation of the development experiment launched by the New Deal in the southern states of the United States. Over the years, an ever increasing number of French nationals and later Ivorian politicians came to admire and hold the
TVA as a model to emulate as they attempted to effect multi-purpose damming schemes of their own.

The Rhône in southwestern France was the middle point of the transatlantic and triangular circulation of American know-how regarding integrated regional development. In the late nineteenth century, the Languedoc-Roussillon had emerged as one of the major problem regions of France. Outraged by the fraudulent practices of industrial wine makers and their Northern allies, the people of the region staged a rebellion in 1907 whose reverberations were felt throughout the country. Although it lasted only a couple of months, the Revolte du Midi was to become known as the most serious uprising since the French Revolution. A combination of ecological and human factors explained the difficult situation of southwestern France. Even though the Rhône River traversed the eastern frontier of the region, its calcareous soil had turned the Languedoc into a semi-arid zone. The introduction of agriculture and animal husbandry further degraded this fragile ecology.

Yet southwestern France had not always been a desolate land. In fact, the region was the site of numerous successful textile plants in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, the decline of the woolens industry in the late nineteenth century left much of the region poor and forced its inhabitants to either emigrate or adopt the monoculture of the vine. While such a course was a boon for the region as a whole, its rehabilitating effects did not last. Rather viticulture and acute depopulation turned the Languedoc-Roussillon into a chronically unstable region as it became structurally dependent on both the labor of immigrants and the cycle of boom and bust of the empire-wide French wine market. It was in this anemic region that Philippe Lamour—the man
who would for a long time embody French regional planning—settled at the outbreak of the Second World War. While he was born in Landrecies in the North of France, Lamour moved to the Southwest in 1940 with his family as they fled the German occupation of the northern half of France. Enamored of the region and enthused by the possibilities it offered, the former journalist and trained lawyer opted to replace his jurist gown with the boots of a peasant. But he was a peasant with radical and high-modernist ideals. As early as 1926 Lamour had argued that the future of France lay in a rational regionalist planning which would remove administrative management from corrupt politicians in Paris and give it to corporate managers at the local level. In the wake of the postwar reconstruction efforts and Marshall Plan enthusiasm, he attempted to apply this principle to the Languedoc-Roussillon.

The first step in achieving this goal was to set up the Compagnie du Bas-Rhône Languedoc (CBRL), which the government of Pierre Mendès France approved in 1955. To tackle the region’s ecological anemia, the newly created agency decided to realize the century-old dream of irrigating the Languedoc with the waters of the Rhône. Such a policy was graphed on the belief that a “Mediterranean region with no source of water was helplessly doomed.” Thus the CBRL initiated a vast program of canal construction meant to divert part of the Rhône waters to the dry areas of the Languedoc [see Map] and make its desolate lands more hospitable. Despite the mixed results of the land management operation, the Languedoc experiment was to serve as example for other regions of France.
Admittedly CBRL and its leadership operated neither within an administrative nor an ideological void. Beginning first with the Vichy government and later the Charles de Gaulle-led Free France, state-directed economic planning had emerged as the sole viable option for the speedy reconstruction of postwar France. In 1946, the General Planning Office (Commissariat Général du Plan) was set up and entrusted with the task of preparing and supervising the reconstruction of the French national and imperial economy. Headed by the pro-American Jean Monnet, the new agency entrenched the
notion of state-controlled planning as it successfully executed its mission. Ideologically, the resurgence of planning as a legitimate administrative practice in France can also be traced to the interwar period when a substantial number of modernist intellectuals, including Le Corbusier and Philippe Lamour, came to espouse the idea of social engineering.

These socio-historical contexts notwithstanding, it is evident that the TVA experiment and its chief publicist David E. Lilienthal exerted a most lasting fascination on Lamour. If anything, Lamour’s trip in June 1946 to study the TVA provides strong support for such a claim. After touring the Authority’s installations in the Tennessee area, an elated Lamour wrote to David Lilienthal that his visit to Knoxville was a “complete success.” Then the Frenchman exulted: “One sees in [TVA’s] principles and in its methods the possibility of realizing democratically the great constructive projects which France needs as America does.”

Perhaps even more influential on the action-minded Lamour than his visit was Lilienthal’s *TVA: Democracy on the March*, a French translation of which was published in 1945. Lamour himself acknowledged the influence of Lilienthal’s work on him by revealing that “since the liberation of France I have read your book [and] I have understood that it was possible to realize what appeared could only be a dream […] that it was important to find means of emerging from the realm of words to enter that of action.” Interestingly, Lamour continued, the *Compagnie du Bas-Rhône Languedoc* was “trying to realize in th[e] French region [of Languedoc-Roussillon] a work comparable, all allowance being made, to that which you have accomplished.” With such generous yet sincere words which apparently humbled Lilienthal, it is not surprising that Lamour
concluded his correspondence by inviting the American to visit France and “bring us the support of your experience and to help us along the road that you have so magnificently traced in your book.” Philippe Lamour wrote to other TVA officials, including Gordon Clapp and Harcourt A. Morgan. In all of his correspondence with the Americans, the Frenchman displayed the same enthusiasm for the Tennessee Valley Authority whose philosophy he would later describe as a “doctrine of comprehensive land-use management (aménagement global) which I was swayed to apply as I adapted its principles to the particulars of the various regions of France.”

Those who underwent the developmentalist regime of the TVA knew the experiment was far from rosy. In fact, the federally-orchestrated modernization scheme of the Tennessee valley left many inhabitants confused, if not disoriented. Compounding this situation, African Americans—the “most marginal people” in the region—bore the brunt of readjustment because the TVA failed to uphold its promise of fair treatment for all. Mesmerized by TVA public relations ploys, Lamour, and for that matter most of the international visitors to the Tennessee valley, may have overlooked the social issues surrounding the regional development in the watershed area of the Tennessee River. After he returned to the Hexagon and secured the backing of Jean Monnet, Philippe Lamour set up the région-pilotes which would provide him with the space and administrative environments to implement the TVA lessons. Thus, through Philippe Lamour, American know-how on land-use management and the larger regional planning ideology that fed it filtered into the scene of French aménagement du territoire. The role of the TVA model in the circulation of this technocratic culture was crucial. Imbued with the spirit of high-modernism as he was, it came as no surprise that Lamour,
when called upon by the Ivorian government, tried to apply a similar policy of “comprehensive land-use management” to the Kossou Project.

To begin with, the chairman of the CBRL lectured against viewing the production of electricity as an end in itself in the Kossou experiment. The Ivory Coast “could well build thermal plants which would be both more powerful and cost-effective.” What should retain the attention of each and everyone, Lamour explained, was the economic transformations that the damming scheme would work out in the Bandama valley: “Agriculture, fishing, and animal husbandry—these are what will be the major activities.” The region of central Ivory Coast, he prophesied, will effectively “witness rapid [economic] expansion.” As he left the country, Lamour “promised he will submit a brief memorandum to the Ivorian government within three weeks in which he would lay out the objectives to be pursued so that Kossou become a success story in the larger frame of the aménagement du territoire in the Ivory Coast.” Before the submission of his memorandum, the Frenchman recommended as interim action that a census of the people to be displaced by the construction of the dam be made. Lamour also encouraged the Ivorian authorities to survey the valley in search of land to be irrigated for agriculture. Most importantly, the chairman of CBRL requested that comprehensive development roadmaps (schéma directeurs d’aménagement) be drawn for both the Bandama valley and southwestern Ivory Coast. Thus, even though U.S. money and technological expertise underpinned the Kossou Dam, it was the intervention of a French Americanophile that provided the visionary framework for the project.

The French mediation in the making of Kossou was not restricted to the missionary activity of Philippe Lamour. In fact, with the implementation of the relocation
of the victims/wretched (les sinistrés) of the damming scheme within the context of an increasing internationalization of the Kossou Project, other French actors rose to prominence, including ORSTOM researchers whose epistemic memories would prove once again crucial in securing a place of honor for the French research institution on the market of postcolonial expertise in the Ivory Coast. As early as June 1969, the Ivorian Minister for Development Planning had asked Pierre Etienne, one of the Orstomians who had carried out the *Etudes Régionales* in the Bouaké area, to take charge of the sociological survey regarding the villages to be displaced by the construction of the Kossou Dam. A month later, anticipating the acceptance of its bid for a research contract for the Kossou Project, the Swiss consulting firm Bonnard & Gardel wrote to ORSTOM Director General Guy Camus proposing a partnership: “We consider the work being carried out by your agency, and specifically by Messieurs Etienne, Chevassu and Michotte, to be excellent.” Such excellent work led the Swiss to ask for collaboration with the French public agency, which they envisioned would be “most rewarding” for both Bonnard & Gardel and ORSTOM.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) further confirmed the centrality of ORSTOM as an intellectual resource in the implementation of the Kossou scheme. After visiting the Ivory Coast in mid-1969, UNDP experts concluded that the country lacked not only sufficient knowledge to develop the resources of the Bandama valley but also skilled personnel and trained social scientists to “carry out successfully (*mener à bien par eux-mêmes*) a project as huge and complex” as Kossou. In light of this weakness, the international agency requested to the Ivorian authorities that the expertise of ORSTOM be mobilized. Given the dominance of the Orstomians over the Ivorian
epistemological landscape, the request was granted. And Pierre Etienne was appointed as part-time consultant with the Autorité pour l’Aménagement de la Vallée du Bandama (AVB)—the agency set up in 1969 to carry out the Kossou Project.64

It would to be a mistake, of course, to conclude that all the American technocratic knowledge that found its way into the making of Kossou transited through France and its expatriate extension in the Ivory Coast. This was far from being the case, especially in a post-independence context in Africa marked by what a contemporary called a relative “trend toward the loosening of old imperial ties.”65 In fact, as early as 1963, a group of Ivorian parliamentarians and lawmakers had visited the TVA installations in the Knoxville area.66 Although no evidence at present allows us to gauge the direct impact of the Tennessee valley tour on the Ivorians, it is clear, as in the case of Philippe Lamour, that both David Lilienthal and the TVA model exerted a lasting if indirect influence of the Ivorian policymakers. As if to exhibit the effects of this spell, Raphaël Saller—the cabinet minister who ran Ivory Coast’s development planning—flatteringly proffered in 1962 when he first met with Lilienthal: “I know about you and about TVA, so I know TVA isn’t just dams.”67 The minister, who reportedly had longed for “fifteen years” to meet Lilienthal, even reminisced having sent “two of his men to TVA in 1946 because ‘There was the center, the mecca for planned development the world over.’”68 Beyond the flatteries of an eccentric Martinique-born Saller whom Lilienthal described as “not really an Ivorian,” the radiance of the TVA model reached deep into the elite imaginary of the regional planning world of the Ivory Coast.69 President Houphouët-Boigny himself had reportedly expressed interest in the TVA as a model as early as his first meeting with David Lilienthal in the late 1950s.70
The Autorité pour l’Aménagement de la Vallée du Bandama (AVB), whose very name recalled the Tennessee Valley Authority, was juridically patterned on the TVA.\textsuperscript{71} As maître d’œuvre of the Kossou operation, AVB was the first non-sectoral modernization agency in the postcolonial history of the Ivory Coast whose goal was to achieve a comprehensive and integrated regional development of the Bandama valley.\textsuperscript{72} Perhaps it was in its statutory positioning in the Ivorian administrative landscape that AVB came closest to the TVA model. In a country that had largely inherited the French Jacobin tradition of centralized government, the Autorité was given a semi-autonomous status which effectively removed the agency’s actions from ministerial jurisdiction and placed it under direct presidential supervision.\textsuperscript{73} Opting for such an administrative arrangement, the Ivorian government hoped to bestow the new agency with a flexibility that a number of Kaiser top managers in Abidjan thought would enhance its efficiency.\textsuperscript{74} However, bureaucratic centralization within AVB itself, the jealousy of numerous civil servants in the various technical ministries as well as the competition of other sectoral development agencies that felt their spheres of actions were being encroached by AVB, all converged to turn Kossou into another short-lived modernization experiment.\textsuperscript{75}

If anything, the making of Kossou showed that the French, whether or not they had initiated a project, were to be reckoned with in the politics of Ivorian development. David Lilienthal had recognized this in the course of his numerous trips to the Ivory Coast as chairman of Development & Resources Corporation, a consulting firm he established when he became a supporter of big business.\textsuperscript{76} Thus in an attempt to tap in the Kossou Project, he allied his company with French OTAM in order to bid for the research and management aspects of the program for the relocation of the sinistrés. Such an
alliance, while pragmatic, did not imply an acceptance of France’s paternalistic presence in postcolonial Ivory Coast. In fact, Lilienthal had long criticized French technical assistance policy toward Le Vieux’s country as a neocolonialist scheme meant to maintain France’s hegemony in its former colonies, and the Ivory Coast in particular. Does this mean that he supported Washington’s designs for the African country? What was this design? In particular, what was the logic of American assistance to plans for Ivorian electrification?

**THE MORAL ECONOMY OF AID:**
*Exim Bank and American Assistance to the Electrification of the Ivory Coast*

Lilienthal said very little about the U.S. government in the Ivory Coast deal besides his tirade that, historically, “U.S. Government foreign aid agencies” rarely identified themselves “fully with the recipient countries.” But even the most casual observer of American involvement in the Kossou endeavor would have noticed that cynicism lubricated the machinery of U.S. financial relations with the Ivory Coast. This becomes particularly evident if we pay close attention to both the logics that undergirded American participation in the Ivorian electrification program and the subsequent Washington’s loan giving spree to the West African country.

Beginning modestly in 1960, U.S. non-concessionary loans to the Ivory Coast had reached a total of $41.5 million by the time the first postcolonial decade came to a close in 1969-70. This represented almost 74 per cent of U.S. government-backed capital infusion into Ivorian development schemes as compared to American aid channeled through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—the designated agency for managing U.S. assistance to the Third World.
Thus, contrary to the largely self-congratulatory claim that the Exim Bank only played a “complementary role in U.S. aid to Africa,” hard loans predominated in Washington’s assistance to the Ivory Coast. To understand U.S. involvement in the Ivorian electrification scheme, and particularly the type of assistance the American decision-makers chose to give, perhaps one has to place the U.S. endorsement against the acceptance among Washington foreign aid elite of Walt W. Rostow’s theory on how best to expedite the development of the “less advanced countries.” This is especially crucial since few analysts of U.S. foreign aid underline the correlation between the modal terms of American aid and the supposed “stage of development” of the recipient country.

Arguably no other group in the U.S. embraced Rostow’s ideas as whole-heartedly as American foreign policy decision-makers who, in their fight against communist threats worldwide, used the Rostovian paradigm to convince Congress of the necessity of aid to the Third World. As articulated in *A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy*—the foreign policy pamphlet co-authored by Rostow, Max Millikan, and other social scientists
at MIT’s Center for International Studies (CENIS)—the stage theory promised Congress and the larger American public that “an upper limit” of developmental aid could be established. Indeed, reviewing the current progress “free world” countries had made along the path of self-sustaining growth, the CENIS think-tank “projected how much foreign aid these nations could productively absorb. By definition, developing nations would no longer need economic aid once they had achieved the self-sustaining growth stage.”

Ivorian planners shared such beliefs. Revealingly they predicted in *Perspectives décennales*—the first postcolonial planning roadmap document—that the Ivory Coast would “no longer resort to foreign aid by 1975” because the country would have reached a “complete financial autonomy.”

Besides its obvious anti-communist appeal, the stage theory also provided the Washington foreign policy elite with a practical tool for allocating foreign aid to countries in the developing world. The theory effectively implied that during the precondition stage, countries would be given technical assistance and some grants; at take-off, they would be provided with “as much capital as they could absorb on favorable loan terms”; and eventually, during the stage of self-sustaining growth, the recipient country’s access to capital “would be on the open market.” By choosing to channel their aid to the Ivorian energy sector through the Exim Bank, that is, by privileging loan terms over grant provisions, the U.S. foreign policy elite revealed the enduring influence of the Rostovian paradigm. By the same token, the endorsement of the Kossou Project confirmed an earlier assessment by U.S. experts and diplomats alike that the Ivory Coast was a “relatively well-endowed” country whose “economic development [was] within reach of the stage of self-sustaining growth” and which had “sufficient potential to repay
development loans” once the lags in transportation and telecommunications were corrected.\textsuperscript{83} Such confidence in the Ivorian economy was reiterated repeatedly by key members of the Johnson administration, including the President himself.\textsuperscript{84}

When examined in relation to the French refusal to lobby the World Bank to accept the first Kossou plan, American involvement in the Bandama venture pointed to a new policy direction in Washington. Vice President Hubert Humphrey outlined this course at the end of his 1967-68 African trip when he reported that “some 320 million African people in 39 nations cannot be left solely to the care of the former colonial powers, who often lack the necessary understanding and financial resources to help them.”\textsuperscript{85} As a result, Humphrey “delivered [to the Ivorian authorities] the offer of the Export-Import Bank to finance 40 per cent of [the] hydro-electrical and irrigation project,” and recommended to Johnson that “we move ahead in our support of the Bandama Dam.”\textsuperscript{86} Thus while American assistance programs toward the newly independent states worldwide were primarily meant to contain the spread of communism and negate the appeal of Soviet-style development model, they were also used to frustrate the (neo)colonial presence/designs of such countries as Britain, France, and Belgium. Such soft imperial practice has long and rich antecedents in U.S. international sorties, including aid to Latin America after the collapse of the Iberian empires and Washington’s assistance to South Vietnam in the wake of France’s debacle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.\textsuperscript{87} Yet the motivations for U.S. involvement in the ambitious Ivorian electrification program, especially the American government’s lukewarm endorsement of the Bandama project appeared more complex, if not cynical in its pecuniary orchestration.
In the spring of 1967, American experts had concluded that there were foreseeable “economic disadvantages connected with the [Kossou] project as presented by the Government of Ivory Coast.” For this reason the administrators of the Exim Bank were undecided until early May 1967. Given the risk inherent in such a costly endeavor, they recommended that the USAID share in the burden of financing the problematic damming scheme. Despite this negative appraisal, a memorandum intended for President Johnson encouraged him to support the Ivorian project even if he should tell his Ivorian counterpart that the U.S. government was “not overwhelmed by the economic merits of the [Bandama] proposal.” Understandably, the American authorities used the Exim Bank rather than the USAID to channel their financial assistance, which meant that the loan’s interest would be set at the prevailing commercial rate.

A number of factors help make sense of this largely Machiavellian posture of the U.S. government. First, the new ruling elite of the Ivory Coast was opening up membership of ministerial positions to younger technocrats, including the Ivorian Ambassador to Washington, Henri K. Bedié, and the economist Mohamed T. Diawara, both of whom were not only sympathetic to the United States but were prodding their American contacts to lobby on behalf of the Ivory Coast. Moreover, in an international context dominated by the worsening U.S. war in Vietnam, it was unsurprising that Johnson should reward the leadership of the Ivory Coast whom American diplomats believed to be the “strongest [U.S.] supporter in French-speaking tropical Africa and an effective proponent of our Vietnam policy.” This reward was all the more predictable because, as some confidential American intelligence reports revealed, the Bandama project had become the “apple of Houphouët’s eye.”
Ultimately, it was the imagined creditworthiness of the Ivory Coast and the unacknowledged scheme of making the Ivorian economy dependent on American international finance that prompted the U.S. government to request that the Exim Bank endorse Kossou. This cynical vision was revealed in an internal memorandum of the White House in early May 1967, which concluded: “In weighing these arguments the dilemma comes to mind of the banker whose client seeks a loan for a Cadillac but whose needs are really for a Volkswagen.” Elaborating even further on the vehicular metaphor, the memorandum noted: “The banker feels that the Volkswagen will be better for the client because it will permit him to use the cost difference for many essential expenditures. Nevertheless the banker knows that the client has the resources to finance the Cadillac, if he has sufficient determination, and will resent having his loan turned down.”

The larger history of the Exim Bank demonstrates that American assistance was rarely supportive of the national interests of foreign countries over those of the United States. In fact, although the Exim Bank was initially meant to help finance trade with the Soviet Union, it soon became one of the key instruments of U.S. dollar diplomacy and economic imperialism in Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, and other Latin American countries. In line with this institutional memory and in contradistinction to the rhetoric of development aid, the involvement of the Exim Bank in the Ivorian energy sector was driven by imperial motives. Even though France remained the major provider of bilateral loans to the Ivory Coast after the collapse of its empire, the public lending scheme of the U.S. was far from insignificant. By the 1970s, compared to other donor countries, Washington was a reliable source of credit inflow to the Ivorian economy. It provided roughly 22 per cent
of all bilateral loans, making the U.S. the second largest creditor country of the Ivory
Coast after France (whose total loan inflow amounted to almost 55 per cent of all foreign-
government lending). These lending efforts in the Ivorian electrification program
reflected, moreover, the decades-long objective of the U.S. government of gaining a
foothold in the Ivory Coast so as to reach out to the larger West African region. This
strategy had first emerged when the United States sought to open a consulate in colonial
Abidjan. The U.S. Ambassador George Morgan and his assistants, in the context of the
late 1960s balance-of-payment crisis of the American economy, summed it up in a few
words: “Think big, think Francophone.”

ENVISIONING AN INFORMAL EMPIRE IN WEST AFRICA:
Balance-of-Payment Deficit, Tied Loan, and the Spatial Logic of Foreign Aid

Ever since his appointment as the new American ambassador to the Ivory Coast in
August 1965, George Morgan had hoped to bring the Ivory Coast and the larger
Francophone Africa into the fold of the ever expanding informal American empire.
Following the adoption of the Korry Report to restructure the administration of U.S. aid
to Africa in 1966, Morgan had sent a message requesting the State Department to
reconsider the marginalized place that the French-speaking countries held in the new
policy. Active in his defense of the cause of the Francophone nations of Africa,
Ambassador Morgan was far from being a Francophile. In fact, while he specifically
urged against antagonizing the French for fear that the resulting reaction might “seriously
handicap our work,” the diplomat never hesitated to encourage the State Department to
collaborate with the Ivorians in a view toward helping them “grow beyond the confines
of their French heritage.”
To achieve this goal, the American diplomat called for the infusion of “those American ingredients that are most needed in Ivorian development.” He enumerated these ingredients: “attitudes, know-how, institutions, and products that express American practicality, dynamism, informality, democratic social attitudes, reliance on individual and small group initiative.”101 Contrary to French neo-colonial practices that the diplomat implicitly dismissed as constraining and outmoded, the American cooperation was portrayed as liberating for the West Africans since it is aimed to “support Ivorian efforts toward qualitative manpower development (e.g., practical education, health, Africanization).”102 Despite the appearance of disinterestedness, the American ambassador hoped to increase U.S. influence in the Ivory Coast and the larger Francophone world in West Africa, especially in the field of trade and business culture.

Up to the mid-1960s, most American efforts to tap the Ivorian market had been frustrated by the neo-colonial privileges that French firms enjoyed in the Ivory Coast. Morgan’s message to Washington suggested that the U.S. was no longer willing to accept this situation.103 The “expansion of U.S. exports” now emerged as a “top priority” for American diplomats in the West African country.104 The trade missions and exhibits organized on a rather erratic basis had failed to increase the American share of the Ivorian market.105 The signing of the Kossou contract offered an opportunity to transform the situation, which Ambassador Morgan and his assistants outlined in a 48-page document enclosed in the diplomat’s mid-October 1968 correspondence to the policymakers of the State Department.106

Reviewing the obstacles that had hindered U.S. participation in the Ivorian market, Morgan singled out the persistence of the protectionist maneuvers of the
European industrial powers, especially France, whose political leaders have ensured that French technical assistance personnel be “layered throughout most [Ivorian] government ministries.” In addition, consumers in the Ivory Coast appeared to be “inured through the colonial period and thereafter to familiarity with French product lines.” Despite the relative smallness of the Ivorian market and the unfair commercial practices of European competitors, Morgan believed that U.S. firms had a chance in the Ivory Coast, if they could learn “how to break into the market for the first time.”

Morgan recommended various policy actions. First, the Commerce Department should be urged to publish promotional notes in relevant commercial magazines, including *International Commerce*, to acquaint Americans with the West African region. The promotional effort should include regularly-organized seminars and lectures for businesspeople in the United States. Given the balance-of-payment crisis of the U.S. economy in the late 1960s, Morgan highlighted the “Buy American” provision of the Kossou deal. Finally, he encouraged business executives to view the Ivory Coast as part of a large Francophone West African market, which meant that “an export foothold in the Ivory Coast thus gives an American firm good experience and the opportunity to move into other territories.”

It is not clear how the American business community responded to the recommendations. To the alarm of the French residents in the Ivory Coast, there was an increase in the number of U.S. commercial emissaries to Abidjan, showcase of the French *pré carré* in Africa. Furthermore, a couple of American financial missionaries visited the Ivory Coast in the spring of 1970. But they were more interested in talking with the officials of the African Development Bank, an Africa-wide institution headquartered in
Abidjan. Although U.S. exports to the Ivory Coast witnessed an improvement during the post-Kossou deal period compared to the previous half decade, they never picked up in any dramatic way. On the contrary, the American trade deficit with the Ivory Coast worsened as the U.S. economy groped its way into the 1970s.

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On the surface, the strategy of tying the Kossou loan to Ivorian purchase of American goods and services then did little to alter the overall make-up of U.S.-Ivory Coast commercial relations. But foreign aid sometimes displays a spatial logic which does not always conform to the logic of profit-making theorized in classical macroeconomics. Indeed, because their effects are felt only in the longue durée, foreign assistance and economic cooperation tend to orchestrate silent revolutions in that they not only “reach deep” (agir en profondeur) but, in the long run, they also “modify the socio-economic structures” of developing countries. Specifically, by tying its Kossou project loan, the United States created the condition for further linking the strongest economy of Francophone West Africa to the global capitalist economy. Translated into spatial terms,
this meant that the integrated economies of French-speaking West Africa would become another new frontier for American informal imperialism.

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On the whole, the story of the electrification of postcolonial Ivory Coast reveals a transnational history fraught with ironies. Beginning with an incremental expansion of the capacities of Ivorian thermal plants, the electrification program culminated in the late 1960s with the construction of the U.S.-funded Kossou Dam. In a bid to exclude American participation in the making of the postcolonial modernization project, French diplomats had ruled that giving a prod to missionary activities of Philippe Lamour would help mitigate American influence in the showcase of the pré carré. Unaware of their compatriot’s own reliance on U.S. know-how in his modernization of southwestern France, the diplomats inadvertently reinforced the transnational presence of the United States in the Kossou Project. This was all the more so since Philippe Lamour’s American-mediated expertise added to Washington’s financial assistance a more diffuse hegemonic U.S. presence in such a crucial postcolonial modernization experiment as the damming of the Bandama. Furthermore, by opting to channel their financial assistance in the Kossou scheme through the Exim Bank in the form of hard loans doubled with a “Buy American” provision, the United States gave additional ammunition to those critics who have argued that American foreign aid-giving was never an act of philanthropy. Very much the opposite!115

Although Kossou was informed by the ideology of regional development, its actualization was ironically never grounded in the constitution of a regional growth pole.
Even Bouaké, the historical hub of central Ivory Coast, never benefited structurally from the damming scheme on the Bandama. The other regional development endeavor that the Ivorian authorities initiated in the late 1960s did not experience a similar fate. Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, the San Pedro Program—a development scheme engineered by Development & Resources Corporation and meant to bring the southwest into the fold of both the Ivorian nation and modernity—relied on the establishment of the port-city of San Pedro as métropole d’équilibre to alleviate (at least theoretically) the dominance and attraction of Abidjan.
CHAPTER SIX


Ivory Coast is an outstanding example of the benefits of private enterprise in the development process.


San Pedro for us means hope. For by giving life to a region, it will provide new jobs and considerable tracts of land to those who are willing to develop them and thus create a growth pole that is likely to bring balance to our economy.

It is also the rational bet in enthusiasm and faith in the will to equip our country with an infrastructure that befits its needs.

Félix Houphouët-Boigny (1972)

In mid-August 1967, the Ivorian president paid a visit to Washington, D.C. This was the second such visit since his country obtained its independence from France in 1960. Félix Houphouët-Boigny’s discussions with U.S. officials emphasized the familiar theme of aid, peace, and progress, but in an international environment in which the prospects of capitalist development in the Third World were increasingly doubtful. Reacting to unnamed skeptics as he welcomed his African guest, President Lyndon B. Johnson reminded his White House audience that progress was “not a straight line,” for it contained ups and downs. Then the American leader added defiantly: “To those that tell us that developing countries are really doomed, to those Cassandras, […] we have a very simple answer. We say to them: Look at the Ivory Coast.”
Johnson had every reason to showcase Le Vieux’s country as both a success story and a model of Western-style “development.” In fact, beginning with the digging of the Vrider Canal in 1951, Ivory Coast had witnessed a phenomenal increase in its annual growth rate, which reached an average of 7 per cent by the late 1960s. The record growth of the former French colony was so phenomenal that it prompted many observers to dub Ivory Coast’s experience as the “Ivorian economic miracle.” While the Ivorian authorities shared in the enthusiasm regarding the relative health of their country’s economic progress, they were among the first to recognize that the “Ivorian economic miracle” was not evenly shared among the various regions of the nation. In governmental publications such as Le Sud-ouest ivoirien or Perspectives décennales, for instance, they emphasized how the Ivorian Southwest had been bypassed by the country’s sustained drive toward capitalist modernity. To remedy this situation, which was perceived as detrimental to the government’s overall nation-building efforts, the Ivorian leadership indulged in arguably the most spectacular development endeavor ever undertaken in the country: the integrated regional development plan of the Ivorian Southwest, commonly known as the San Pedro Project.

This chapter analyzes the discourses and policies that various actors mobilized in order to make the San Pedro bet a reality. Adopting a social constructionist approach, I begin the chapter by looking at the ways in which the Ivorian Southwest was constituted as a “backward” region in both the colonial and post-independence periods. I argue that this construction of the Southwest was a sine qua non that ultimately justified the interventionism of the Ivorian state in the late 1960s. While this activist role of the state made sense in the context of postcolonial nation-building, it was also the case that San
Pedro crystallized the post-independence nationalist policy of diversification. The second section of the chapter takes up this point as I analyze how the Southwest became the site where an American-style regional development was operationalized. The third section furthers this argument as I focus on U.S. involvement in the modernization of the Southwest through the loan program of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the consulting activities of David E. Lilienthal’s Development and Resources Corporation (D&R). In the final section, I pay closer attention to the translational endeavors to turn the San Pedro plan into a policy action aimed at incorporating the Southwest into the postcolonial Ivorian nation. In line with the previous chapters of the dissertation, where I demonstrated that French mediation was always a pervasive factor in the operation of U.S.-Ivory Coast relations, I track the actions of the French expatriates and social scientists. They served as brokers of modernity, indeed, as secular missionaries ready to exploit and negotiate the social change deemed necessary to uplift “backward” local people and impoverished immigrants who flocked into San Pedro and its hinterland in the late 1960s and subsequent decades.

**CONSTITUTING A “BACKWARD” REGION: Geography, History, and the Discursive Power of Development**

While they basked in the reflected glory of the Ivorian economic miracle, Houphouët-Boigny and his aides were among the first to acknowledge that not all the regions of their country had reaped the benefits of the unprecedented economic growth. This was particularly true for the ordinary Ivorians who lived in the remotest rural areas of the nation. In many government circles the Southwest and the Northeast were readily
seen as the two regions that tarnished the reputation of the Ivory Coast as a success story of postcolonial development. In the case of the former, various discursive strategies were mobilized to account for this state of affairs. If outwardly different from colonialist discourses on the so-called primitive Ivorian Southwest, the government-produced postcolonial documents perpetuated the image of a region in need of authoritarian intervention to turn its natural resources into wealth that would benefit the nation as a whole.

In almost all the government documents issued in connection with San Pedro and the development of the Southwest, the discursive convention was to treat the region as an area which had been bypassed by the Ivorian miracle. For instance, a policy paper in late 1969 argued that San Pedro and its hinterland have been marginalized in past development efforts despite the region’s agricultural potential. In a similar vein, another document characterized the land cover of the Southwest as a natural resource “almost exclusively made up of tall forests that [were] nearly untouched,” that is, raw and still available for developmentalist intervention. To follow through this idea, an aerial image of the region is provided, which confirms visually that the Southwest was indeed all covered with an unending and ever green rainforest with no sign of “modern” civilization.

In the eyes of the Ivorian authorities, the single phenomenon that best revealed the backwardness of the Southwest was the persistence of its subsistence agriculture. In this regard, they deplored in the words of yet another document that the main activity of the inhabitants of the region was “the production of food that they consume themselves.” The consequence of this reliance on subsistence economy was that it left “no food surplus”
that could be sold to outsiders. While they hardly acknowledged it, one key implication of such assessments was that San Pedro and its hinterland did not participate, at least fully, in the national effort to build a modern and prosperous Ivory Coast.

The people of the region were not to be blamed exclusively. In fact, a closer look at governmental documents and public speeches reveals that many decision-makers actually located the causes of the perceived backwardness of the region in the past. In an implicit critique of French colonial state and its colonial governmentality, some officials argued that the San Pedro region did not benefit from the infrastructural development that the Ivory Coast witnessed in much of the late 1940s and 1950s. Such neglect, the argument went, left the region isolated and cut off from the rest of the budding nation. Charles Donwahi, a native of the region and one of its most prominent sons on the national scene, articulated this line of argument more clearly in his inaugural speech at the opening ceremony of the San Pedro port. While agreeing with most observers that the Southwest had been left out from the Ivorian miracle, Donwahi pointed out that the region had not always been a “no man’s land.” In fact, very much the opposite, early in its history San Pedro and the other coastal towns of the Southwest had served as beacons radiating economic progress and European culture into the interior. Unfortunately, Donwahi continued, when the flow and circulation of people and commodities shifted from the West to the eastern seacoast, the region fell into an era of lethargy. Now stripped of any sense of bearing and largely disarticulated, the politician suggested, it was only logical that the Southwest had become an “economic desert,” a region at the periphery of Ivorian postcolonial modernity.
The past and its articulation as history were mobilized in other ways to account for the marginalization of the Southwest in the making of the Ivorian miracle. In *Le Sud ouest ivoirien*, for instance, the concessionary regime of the early colonial state is critically revisited in an effort to explain the origin of the region’s underdevelopment. In a rather subtle rebuttal of past French rule, the anonymous authors of the document argued that the Southwest had been neglected until the late 1950s due to the inconsistent existence of the San Pedro territory (*Domaine de San Pedro*) over which the colonial state had relinquished any jurisdiction. In fact, as early as August 1900, an area of roughly 270,000 hectares on either side of the San Pedro River had been conceded to Arthur Verdier, a French colonial entrepreneur very active in West Africa. This transaction served as both a reward to the French merchant for helping France maintain its presence in the Ivory Coast (against British competition) and a trade-off for an earlier tract of land that the government had confiscated from Verdier.

What *Le Sud ouest ivoirien* deplored was not so much the concession itself as the legal regime that framed its implementation. Indeed, as the document put it, the colonial state “gave to the owner of San Pedro exceptional rights, including immediate full possession of the soil and subsoil, without any plan (*cahier des charges*) nor exploitation requirement (*ni obligation de mise en valeur)*.” A decade later, the unpredictable Verdier ironically sold off the San Pedro territory to the Ivory Coast Corporation, Ltd., an English firm which undertook an inventory of the land’s resources [Map 6-1], including the cartographic identification of the various commercial wood species, wild rubber plantation, lands suitable for farming, as well as foot-roads to reach them.
Subsequently, the San Pedro domain changed hands several times. In 1917, it was sold to the New Ivory Coast Company, Ltd. when the first Ivory Coast Company went bankrupt. Three years later, some private groups allied themselves with a Franco-Dutch
consortium to acquire the land. During these recurrent changes in ownership in the first half of the twentieth century, the colonial state avoided any direct involvement. It was not until December 1959 that the Ivorian government succeeded in buying the territory from these private hands. According to the authors of *Le Sud ouest ivoirien*, it was only then that the *mise en valeur* of the Southwest really started.\(^{13}\)

Academic historians might cast doubts on the Hegelian feel of such monological history that constructs the state or central power as the prime midwife of modernity. Socioeconomic development in this historical account is perceived as a positive change that only a government can orchestrate. There is undoubtedly an element of self-aggrandizement in the official narrative on the “underdevelopment” of the Southwest and the need to valorize its natural resources. Yet one can apply James Ferguson’s perceptive analysis of the “development industry” in Lesotho to the Ivorian historical discourse on the Southwest. In this regard, the discursive articulations of the Ivorian leaders should not be seen as bad history. Rather their mobilization of the past must be regarded as a response to a different set of rules of formation and management of development discourse.\(^{14}\)

There is more to this historical construction. While conspicuously attempting to depart from a colonialist understanding of *mise en valeur*, the discursive strategy of the Ivorian officials does not entirely cast off the modernist legacy of developmentalism. In fact, both the colonial state and the post-independence authorities perceived the transformation of the Southwest as a one-way and top-down intervention. As we shall see, they shared an uncritical acceptance of *mise en valeur* and its Eurocentric understanding of capitalist exploitation. Similarly, they ruthlessly discarded the moral
economy that informed the indigenous people’s interaction with the land, ecosystem, and resources of the Southwest.

While their deployment of the concept of *mise en valeur* presupposes that there was a singular definition of what value meant, it is also the case that the developmentalist discourse of both colonial and postcolonial authorities was informed by a paternalist view of the Ivorian Southwest. Already at the beginning of French rule, colonial administrators exulted at the sight of what they saw as the region’s “untapped” natural wealth. In 1901, Georges Thomann, who was to become one of the first administrators, gave his assessment: everywhere there existed an abundant supply/reserve of tree and lianas that produced “rubber of the utmost quality.” There were kola trees aplenty and palm trees revealed themselves to be “inexhaustible.” Despite this largesse of nature, Thomann noticed, half of the riches lay unexploited because the indigenous Neyo people did not know the value of the “limitless variety of precious wood” or were simply too lazy to develop (*mettre en valeur*) them. Moreover, while there had been an initial attempt to exploit the Southwest during the governorship of Gustave Binger (1893-1896), the region fell in general neglect after his departure and consequently “its economic development stopped.”

The paternalist discourse of Georges Thomann grew even clearer when he mobilized then popular Eurocentric ethnological categories to account for the region’s economic backwardness. The French administrator-ethnologist singled out the male members of the Neyo as the laziest of all since it was their women who, along with their slaves, toiled the land. A logical result of this state of affairs was that there was not enough food for the people. Thus largely due to the Neyo’s own fault, the Frenchman
concluded, “starvation has come to rule over the land.” While Thomann acknowledged the existence of the Krumen institution of seafaring, a tradition long established among the male members of the Neyo and other indigenous groups of the Southwest, he dismissed it as a phenomenon that “highly hinders [economic] development” in the region.

This vision of the Ivorian Southwest as an “undeveloped” and “isolated” region continued well into the twentieth century. In 1942, an American observer could still claim that the region looked ‘primitive’ while its inhabitants (still) believed in witchcraft, ghosts, and devils. Keeping up with a discursive tradition that has been appropriately called “environmental Orientalism,” George H. Tate argued that the Southwest harbored a “relatively undiminished” rain forest with an “almost endless miscellany of trees, shrubs, vines, epiphytes, bryophytes, lichens, among which may be mentioned coca trees [...] African mahogany, orchids, lilies, wild figs, and giant climbing aroids. And through it roams, crawls, flies a correspondingly rich fauna.” Such extant “ecological exuberance” of the Southwest, as yet another French observer called it in the late 1950s, made the region a landscape difficult to penetrate.

In many ways, the constitution of the Southwest as an underdeveloped area, indeed as a region in need of authoritarian intervention, should not come as a surprise. As Jonathan Crush has pointed out, development discourse customarily “construct[s] the world as an unruly terrain requiring management and intervention.” By exhibiting the Ivorian Southwest as the land of the primitive and the epitome of a region that had been bypassed by modernity, the luminaries of the modernization of the San Pedro region only proved themselves to be true heirs of a rather long discursive tradition. Michael Adas has
convincingly traced the origin of the tradition to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when European and North American thinkers established a “correspondence between the mastery of nature and the overall social development in the non-Western world.” Using their own historicity as universal norm, these social scientists then came to view Africans and Asians as lesser beings, if at all human.²⁴ As this discussion of the official discourse on the Ivorian Southwest shows, such an assumption continued to frame the nationalists’ assessment of the remotest regions of postcolonial nations. To a certain degree, this discursive continuity partly gives credence to the claim of many postcolonial critics that the achievement of political independence in the 1950s and 1960s was almost meaningless. But while paternalism informed both the colonial and post-independence discourse on the need to develop the region, differences soon emerge when we look at what the postcolonial state proposed to bring the Southwest into the fold of the Ivorian nation. This was so because the plan to develop San Pedro and its hinterland was graphed on a desire shared by many Ivorians to add more “American ingredients” to their modernization recipes while renegotiating their country’s relationship with France and the legacy of its mission civilisatrice.

**CONSOLIDATING AN AMERICAN-STYLE DEVELOPMENT?:**
*Regional Disparity, Diversification, and the Geopolitics of Nation-Building*

Many of the social scientists, including Véronique Lassailly-Jacob, Gérard Ancy, and Michel Pescay, who have analyzed the regional planning experiments in both central and southwest Ivory Coast, have noticed the influence of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) model in shaping the organizational makeup of the two main agencies charged with the implementation of the Ivorian regional development endeavor.²⁵ Few analysts,
however, have fully explored the magnitude as well as ramifications of such American influence. As we saw in the case of the Kossou Project, the idea of *aménagement du territoire* migrated from the U.S. South to central Ivory Coast via the Languedoc region of southern France. Although it was the only major regional project that involved the integrated transformation of a river valley, the damming of the Bandama was not the sole regionalist effort in the Ivory Coast to be impacted by the TVA model. An examination of the San Pedro Project will make my claim clearer. At the same time, it will demonstrate that beyond economics, both San Pedro and the TVA experiments were more about perfecting the political project of nation-building than anything else.

There is little doubt that the regional development of the Tennessee valley as envisioned in the TVA experiment was also an attempt to overcome the distinctive characters of the various regions traversed by the Tennessee River. Following the American Civil War, there had been repeated efforts to reshape the American South along northern industrial models. Such endeavors, while regularly frustrated, culminated in the 1930s when, due to the Depression, the forces of change (New South ideologues and New Deal interventionists) succeeded in defeating the last resistances of states’ rights politicians in the South. It was under these circumstances that the Tennessee Valley Authority was established so as to coordinate the rehabilitation of the American South.26 Local contemporary observers readily credited TVA’s efforts as largely positive. Indeed, in less than five years, some claimed, a new life had been instilled into the valley. Such rapid transformation led the *New York Times* to hail TVA as a most revolutionary experiment in the annals of American history.27
Recent historical research has cast doubt on these evaluations. But if these conclusions are to be believed, as many contemporary observers saw it, then the coming of the TVA in the U.S. South might have signaled the incorporation of the agricultural economy of the region into a nation that strove to present itself as the center of twentieth-century modernization. In consolidating the national project of the United States as an “imagined community,” the federal government deemed it necessary to raise the living standards of the peoples of the Tennessee valley. Such incorporation was all the more necessary, since regional disparity was seen as a threat to the welfare of the nation, indeed as a situation likely to imperil the construction of an American community of citizens that shared in a similar industrial destiny. In other words, the implementation of the TVA as a nation-building strategy purported to substitute a willed and planned regionalist geo-economy for natural geography.

A similar geopolitics of nation-building was at work in the regional development efforts in Southwest Ivory Coast, even though it was never explicitly articulated. In arguing this point, I want to underline that, among all the deficiencies the Ivorian authorities found most limiting for the future of the Southwest, the region’s relative isolation was first and foremost. Compared to the rest of the country, as the discourse on the underdevelopment of the Southwest put it, San Pedro and its hinterland boasted almost no major transportation network [Map 6-2] connecting it to the other regions of the nation. Implicit in the discursive construction of the Ivorian nation-builders was the notion that geographic distance translated into social distance, which appeared as a threat to the coming of a genuine community of destiny. Not only were the natural resources of the San Pedro region locked up (*enclavées*) in the formidable rain forest of the Southwest
but its inhabitants were equally shut off from any meaningful participation in the making of the nation. For the Ivorian officials, the remoteness of the Southwest not merely betrayed the backwardness of the Southwest, it actually compounded it.

Under these circumstances, the opening up of the region (*désenclavement*) emerged as a priority in the official effort to develop the Southwest. To overcome the
marginalization of the San Pedro region, for instance, it was decided to populate its sparsely inhabited landscape with people from the more densely settled central and eastern Ivory Coast, including the population of the Kossou area to be displaced because of the damming of the Bandama. At a moment when the first Ivorian Cocoa Belt in the southeast was showing signs of weariness, the shift of agricultural expansion toward the southwest appeared as a judicious choice that purported to maintain the land-hungry Ivorian miracle on its two-decade long course of success while fighting against regional disparity.

Agro-economic diversification was a natural corollary of such geopolitics of nation-building in postcolonial Ivory Coast. While the north of the country received some attention in the diversification élan of the late 1960s, the bulk of the focus of the Ivorian planners was on the Southwest, which soon became the last frontier of both the Ivorian extensive agriculture and the so-called economic miracle.\(^{28}\) Besides cocoa and coffee plantations, the cultivation of rubber and palm oil trees was encouraged. To feed an ever growing urban population, whose increase went on par with the economic boom, the officials also promoted the development of food crops such as yam, cassava, plantain, and rice. Finally, the commercial wood species of the forest reserve were subjected to heavy exploitation.\(^ {29}\) Taken together with the migration of get-rich agricultural adventurers, these policy actions eventually led to the degradation of the human and environmental ecologies of the region, including ethnic conflicts, forest fragmentation, and the extinction of many floral and faunal species.\(^ {30}\)

Diversification was not limited to agriculture. In fact, paralleling the national strategy to promote the development of other regions of the country and the exploitation
of their geographically diverse natural resources, the planners of the Ivorian economy launched an international campaign to attract new business partners and investors and thus displace the French, who had come to see the Ivory Coast as a game preserve (chasse gardée) of sorts. This supplemental diversification policy culminated in an ad campaign that largely targeted the U.S. business community.

In May 1962, various foreign countries, including such African states as Liberia, Nigeria, and the Ivory Coast, were reported to have “signed contracts with American public relations firms” as a first step in a campaign to “cultivate the goodwill of Americans.” In what turned out to be a campaign to “sway Uncle Sam,” as a perceptive columnist of the Wall Street Journal put it, Ivorian Ambassador Henri K. Bedié had indeed hired the Hamilton Wright group of New York to lobby for them in the rather complex maze of American politico-business world. With its substantial fee, Hamilton Wright promised to place ad displays of “120,000 lines monthly in American and European newspapers.” In addition, the American publicist “guaranteed that a 13-minute documentary film about the Ivory Coast would be shown on at least 60 television stations.”

It is not clear whether such promises were actually met. But in early 1964, an advertisement about the Ivory Coast appeared in the New York Times. With texts, basic statistics as well as images, the ad showcased Ivorian policy choices as a “Plan for Economic Growth … that Works.” The following year, another display was placed in the newspaper. Titled “Business Opportunities in the Ivory Coast Republic,” this new public relations piece characterized Houphouët-Boigny’s country as “One of Africa’s Soundest Economies.” Even more interesting, this 1965 ad opened with an appealing
presentation of the Southwest and its “wide varieties of wood: mahogany, iroko, makore, sapelli, etc.,” which, the reader is made to believe, are still awaiting exploitation by anyone willing to invest in resource development in the Ivory Coast.\textsuperscript{34} In subsequent years, many more such ads would appear in leading American newspapers, including an installment in 1968 that specifically claimed that “as economic progress continues in the Ivory Coast, the government welcomes American private investments.”\textsuperscript{35} A series of several displays appeared in 1971, including one that purported to exhibit San Pedro as a promising Atlantic port.\textsuperscript{36}

![Figure 6.3: Seducing the Americans](image)

**Source:** *New York Times*
If the columns of leading American print media can be taken as a reliable mirror of the views of their audiences, then it appears that the geopolitics of nation-building that informed the Ivorian diversification program had many supporters in the United States. For instance, the New York Times reassuringly reported in 1964 that while Ivory Coast’s economy was “still strongly linked” to that of France, it was the case that the African country had “made further steps in 1963 in its plans for diversification of exports and elimination of preferential tariffs which, it is hoped, will eventually enable her to trade freely on the world market.”\(^{37}\) Four months later, a columnist of the Wall Street Journal approvingly disclosed that Intercontinental Hotel Inc., a subsidiary of Pan American Airways, had broken into the expanding tourist industry of the Ivory Coast.\(^{38}\) Mesmerized by these shifts and transformations as well as the booming Ivorian economy itself, another writer for the New York Times encouraged American investors to venture into the West African country because diversification would potentially offer a market for U.S. firms, especially in the field of industrial equipment.\(^{39}\)

These recommendations were heeded, even if many American investors continued to denounce the neocolonial French presence in the Ivory Coast as a serious impediment to their business. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many U.S. firms succeeded in securing business contracts, including Pickands Mather & Co. and International Systems & Controls Inc.\(^{40}\) Perhaps the most dramatic of these breakthroughs, if initiated a little earlier, was the consulting deal of David Lilienthal’s Development and Resources Corporation (D&R) to engineer the mise en valeur of the Ivorian Southwest. This contract, as we shall see, helped the TVA-style regional planning philosophy make further inroads into the San Pedro project.
AN AMERICAN PLAN FOR THE SOUTHWEST:
Regionalization, Exploitation, and the Politics of State-led Development

I recall that long ago, in my first audience with the President of the Republic of the Ivory Coast, he spoke of TVA, and of his interest in some development of a comparable character in your own country.

The basic approach of the TVA has been adopted, as you know, in other countries and under other conditions than those in my own country. I have been fortunate enough, through Development and Resources Corporation, to have had a hand in those “other TVA’s.” One of these was in the Cauca Valley of Colombia, South America; an even closer parallel is D&R’s fourteen years of work in the Khuzestan region of Southwest Persia.41

These were the opening lines of a correspondence that David E. Lilienthal sent to the Ivorian minister of Planning in early July 1969. Accompanying an autographed copy of The Road to Change—the fourth volume of Lilienthal’s journals—the letter concluded with the following words: “I am taking the liberty of sending you an inscribed copy of this volume with my best wishes. How that project began and the story of its early years, years not without problems but also of achievement, may be interesting to you as you consider a comparable development in your own native land.”42 It is easy to dismiss this correspondence as yet another routine ploy mobilized by a business partner to maintain good relations with the other party. There is certainly something of a self-serving quality to Lilienthal’s gift giving. Sending his book on the eve of the implementation of both the San Pedro and Kossou projects, however, it is clear that the American liberal also hoped to influence the making of Ivorian regional development policy, especially since his own consulting firm had produced the master plan for the mise en valeur of the Southwest. In this regard, Lilienthal proactively sought to encourage a key Ivorian decision-maker charged with development planning to adopt the “basic approach of the TVA” in the state-led modernization of a marginal region.
While Lilienthal’s missive can be read as the culmination of a long-held interest in the development and exploitation of Ivory Coast’s resources, the conjuncture that made such interest possible concerned both transnational business networking and Ivorians’ desire to diversify their international economic partners. For one thing, the initial encounter between the Ivorians and Lilienthal’s D&R was arranged by the financier André Meyer. Following this encounter, it was decided that D&R would conduct a survey to identify the mineral resources of the Ivory Coast and propose a program for their efficient exploitation. By early 1962, however, the “scope of [this] responsibility” had been expanded to include the “development of the southwest region.” With a missionary’s self-confidence in the American way as the ultimate road to twentieth-century modernity—a confidence so characteristic to American liberalism—Lilienthal could not hide his excitement in November 1964: “A large gathering in my office this afternoon promises to be the beginning of something useful at last.” Then the former chairman of the TVA continued, “We should hear from Washington by Friday, Minister Saller told us, whether AID is in agreement. And then to go to work on what could be an exceptionally interesting and rewarding task, ‘planning’ and developing a completely unsettled region of Africa, starting with the slate clean.”

Thus even though the first years of D&R consulting work with the Ivorian government had rather been frustrating, Lilienthal agreed to take up the challenge. In May 1963, his firm had sent a preliminary report to the Ivorian government. In the presentation letter that introduced the document, the American consultant outlined the main findings and conclusions of D&R’s research. First, the correspondence emphasized the nature of the survey, whose scope was not “confined to studies and investigations, but
include[d] specific activities to be initiated during the two year period and continued thereafter." In addition, the American researchers focused not only on the development of the physical resources but also on human resources because the two “cannot be dissociated.” After identifying the potentialities of the Southwest, D&R recommended, along the lines of the TVA model, that an integrated program of development be launched under the supervision of an autonomous agency: “Existing Government services should be associated as far as possible, and to the full extent of their capacities, with the execution of the program,” Lilienthal started. However, “because the area is more remote from the capital than its distance implies, and because of the proposed program’s integrated character, direction of the program should be vested in an organization especially created or engaged for this purpose.”

Policy-wise, D&R experts also put forward the rational exploitation of the region’s forest products, mines, and agricultural potentials as well as the development of its human resources.

Ivorian officials followed many of these recommendations. For instance, they set up the Autorité pour l’Aménagement de la Région du Sud-Ouest (ARSO) in late 1969 with the intention that this new TVA-like agency should oversee the execution of the mise en valeur of the Southwest, including its opening up to the outside world and the constitution of the port-city of San Pedro as regional growth pole. Taking the lead in what it envisioned as the modernist socio-economic transformation of the region, the postcolonial state also agreed on the creation of rural modernization centers and state-controlled industrial plantations of rubber, oil palm, and coconut. To turn San Pedro into a regional growth pole, the authorities eventually decided on revamping the port and other transportation facilities in the city, which culminated in a new urban master plan for
the emerging capital city of the Southwest\textsuperscript{54} Still in line with the recommendations, the Ivorian government even considered establishing a paper mill. However, this industrial project for San Pedro never materialized as initially envisioned by D&R experts\textsuperscript{55}

Figure 6.4: D&R Plan for the Southwest
Embracing an American-style regional development planning in the modernization of the Southwest came with a high price, the dollar costs of which were financed by the United States Agency for International Development. In 1963, USAID contributed $85,000 to pay for D&R’s reconnaissance of the Ivorian Southwest. By the end of 1964, the American contribution to the Southwest project had reached some $785,000. By the conclusion of USAID’s commitment in the project in 1968/69, the United States had spent more than one million dollars on the mise en valeur of San Pedro and its hinterland. Despite this financial assistance, the Ivorian government could not shoulder the cost of the integrated development of the Southwest. Aware of this situation, it sought the backing of other foreign governments, including Italy and West Germany.\textsuperscript{56} Even with these additional funding sources, the Ivorian authorities could not avoid turning to the French, who then emerged in the late 1960s as the ultimate brokers of the modernization of the Southwest.

\textit{SHOULDERING THE COST OF MODERNIZATION:
French Postcolonial Diplomacy and the Labor of Brokering Development}

As early as 1960, French diplomats had kept a close tab on American involvement in the program to open up the Ivorian Southwest. In October 1960, for instance, the special representative of France to the Ivory Coast reported on the deal between D&R and the West African country. He was emphatic that the agreement lacked any notion of assistance.\textsuperscript{57} In the wake of Houphouet-Boigny’s May 1962 visit to the United States, the French Embassy in Washington revealed that a major outcome of the Ivorian leader’s voyage was American decision to finance various Ivorian development projects, including the reconnaissance survey of the Southwest.\textsuperscript{58} The French intelligence
gathering continued through the late 1960s. This became apparent in September 1969 when the French chargé d’affaires in Abidjan lashed out at the American diplomats posted there, accusing them of pressuring the Ivorian government into granting the initial research on the Southwest to Development and Resources Corporation.\textsuperscript{59}

Ironically, the policies of the American diplomats and foreign economic planners were received with suspicion by key members of D&R, including David Lilienthal himself. During the preliminary talks between USAID and the Ivorian authorities regarding the D&R contract, Lilienthal accused the American government of never “identify[ing] itself more fully with the recipient countries” of U.S. assistance. For this reason, he did not want his firm to work under the direct aegis of the U.S. economic planners.\textsuperscript{60} Later, Lilienthal would dismiss the efficiency of USAID bureaucrats, calling them talkers rather than doers.\textsuperscript{61}

Lilienthal’s exasperation with and critique of U.S. foreign assistance bureaucrats did not mean that he endorsed the intrigues of French diplomacy in postcolonial Ivory Coast. Matching his suspicion of the Americans, his revulsion over France’s economic maneuverings was equally high. In early 1961, for instance, he expressed his “righteous indignation” at the French domination of the Ivory Coast, especially the hegemonic presence of the French middle class: “The beautiful food in the wonderful restaurants […] The big apartments. The banks, the high government posts, the cars, the art books in the beautiful bookstores—you name it, the French have it here.”\textsuperscript{62} Like other Americans who had raised concern over this situation, Lilienthal could only see but an “acute case of indignation.”\textsuperscript{63}
It is tempting to follow the logics of Lilienthal’s tirade and conclude that postcolonial Ivory Coast was the epitome of France’s neo-colonialism in Africa. In fact, much of the literature on Franco-Ivorian relations has subscribed to this conclusion. While such a characterization may be insightful in many regards, it should not mask the active role of the Ivorian leadership in courting French involvement. Indeed, it must not overlook that fact that in many instances the Ivorian officials may have been the junior partners who actually dragged the French into shouldering part of the cost of Ivory Coast’s post-independence economic miracle. In this regard, it is worth remembering that during the vogue of Africanization in the early 1960s, Houphouet-Boigny had resisted the call for the replacement of the numerous French expatriates staffing the Ivorian civil service. Although the incessant pressure coming from young Ivorians, especially recent graduates in the late 1960s, forced the president to reconsider his opposition to what he saw as “Africanization on the cheap” (africanisation au rabais), Houphouet-Boigny never renounced his reliance on the French. This was particularly true in the implementation of the San Pedro project. An indication of the continued nature of Ivorian reliance on France came in September 1973 when the French aid mission received a request from the Ivorian government asking Paris to finance the expansion of metropolitan San Pedro, including its port facilities. Transmitting the request to his superiors, the French diplomat concurred with the Ivorian assessment that if no action was taken, the cost of the subsequent urban sprawl would be impossible to control.

If sometimes motivated by self-interest and neo-colonial paternalism, French willingness to shoulder at least part of the cost of the Southwest project was not new. In the early 1960s, for instance, the Bureau Central d’Etudes pour les Equipements d’Outre-
Mer (BCEOM) had conducted the feasibility studies for the proposed port of San Pedro.\textsuperscript{67} Along similar lines, the French authorities agreed on staffing the executive board of the port with expatriates.\textsuperscript{68} Monitoring the financial burden and subsequent debt build-up caused by the Southwest (and the damming of the Bandama River) was another feature of French diplomatic efforts to assist the Ivorian authorities. In their reports, they not only tabulated foreign loans and the costs of the projects but also repeatedly warned the Ivorians against exhausting their country’s ability to borrow lest the Ivory Coast be forced to accept harsh conditionalities for future financial assistance from international donors.\textsuperscript{69} It was perhaps through the activities of French social scientists that France’s labor of brokering the modernization of the Ivorian Southwest came close to something exclusive. Here, as in other instances where applied anthropological knowledge was crucial for maintaining the radiance of France in postcolonial Ivory Coast, the expertise of the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Techniques Outre-Mer (ORSTOM) proved indispensable.

Ever since the \textit{Etudes Regionales} of the mid-1960s, the researchers of ORSTOM had emerged as the key players in the Ivory Coast’s bid for regional planning. By the late 1960s, ORSTOM began a number of applied research programs, which taken together, helped the French parastatal organization to consolidate its hegemony over the epistemopolitical world of development planning in the Ivory Coast. Carried out by both veteran and younger researchers such as Philippe Haeringer, Pierre Etienne, Anne-Marie Cotten, and Alfred Schwartz, these programs allowed ORSTOM to become the main “provider of basic [development] data” to the Ivorian authorities.\textsuperscript{70} Moreover, ORSTOM initiated in 1969 an interdisciplinary program focused on the Southwest. As an astute observational
apparatus, this new program aimed at understanding how the development efforts in the “virgin” region of San Pedro would restructure the regional population dynamics as well as the larger economy of the area. It is hard to overestimate the impact of ORSTOM’s applied social science endeavor on the transformation of the Southwest. A critical review of the working papers that the Orstomians left behind could, however, be a particularly insightful step forward to gauge the epistemological dimension of the French effort to shoulder and therefore influence the implementation of the plans to open up a region perceived to have been bypassed by the Ivorian miracle.

The first ORSTOM researcher to work on San Pedro and the transformations that gave birth to it was Philippe Haeringer. A veteran urban geographer who made his name as an expert on Abidjan, Haeringer wrote an article in 1969 in which he analyzed immigration to San Pedro. While his focus was on both the spatial and labor dimensions of the phenomenal growth of the city, Haeringer also proved himself to be an activist who wanted to influence the implementation of the Southwest Project. This was clearly demonstrated by his critique of the housing policies that the Ivorian authorities were trying to implement in the port-city. Readily identifying San Pedro as a boomtown, much as Abidjan once was, he warned against stiff construction laws which, he claimed, were likely to turn San Pedro into another sprawling urban settlement. Capitalizing on his technocratic knowledge, Haeringer hoped to use the San Pedro experiment not only as a laboratory of applied social science research but also as a conjuncture to push forward his views about the appropriate measures that the Ivorians should take for an effective urban planning. In so doing, he extended the hegemonic presence of France in the efforts to transform what many saw as the last frontier of “backwardness” in the Ivory Coast.
The urban geographer was not the only Orstomian to work on San Pedro and its hinterland. In early 1970, a group of ORSTOM’s medical entomologists visited the southwest in order to identify the pathogens of various tropical diseases. Keeping up with this public health concern, another group explored the port-city of San Pedro from mid to late October 1972 to assess the risk of yellow fever in the emerging capital of the Southwest. Perhaps it was the work of Alfred Schwartz which best succeeds in showing the epistemological foundation of France’s eventual domination in the implementation phase of the Southwest Project. A former student of Georges Balandier, Schwartz had conducted sociological and ethnographic studies of Western Ivory Coast during his graduate years. When the San Pedro operations started in the late 1960s, he was subsequently loaned to ARSO. Not only did such experience allow Schwartz to write his monumental doctorat d'état on the Southwest Project but also provided him with a space to attempt to influence decision-making regarding many policy choices in implementing the D&R plan for the Ivorian Southwest. Thus with people like Schwartz, Haeringer, and other researchers, France, which felt it had been left out in the initial stages of the development of the Southwest, emerged in the 1970s as the major shaper of the San Pedro operation. This, to be sure, confirmed the all-important legacy of the past in mediating and modifying the numerous American-led modernization efforts in postcolonial Ivory Coast.

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On the whole, the making of the Ivorian Southwest came to rely on the mediation of the French. Both the financial difficulties inherent in the “big” modernization project and the epistemological hegemony of France’s research institutions made such a brokerage an eventuality hard to avoid. Conversely, it was predictable that D&R would not be able to outdo the French in the Ivory Coast. Indeed, despite the fact that the TVA model had come to permeate the landscape of Ivorian regional development planning, the Americans lacked the necessary epistemic memory to exercise a lasting influence in the West Africa country, especially since few of them could communicate with the Ivorians. Thus by the mid-1970s, D&R was forced to close its Abidjan office. The Americans and the French may have been in competition to influence the transformation of Ivory Coast’s last frontier, but in the end, both groups proposed a rather conservative program for the Ivorian South: an export-led modernization plan. Thus, it made sense that the growth of San Pedro would follow the path of peripheral urbanization that had already characterized the development of Abidjan. That the postcolonial Ivorian authorities accepted the plan at all confirmed that the “decolonization of the minds” called for by a younger generation of radicals would be deferred for many years to come.
CONCLUSION

For many, terms like Development and Modernization have lost their meaning. They have become code words. They refer to policies pursued by governments and international agencies that enrich ruling elites and technocrats, while the masses are told to await the benefits of the “trickle down” effect. For many, Development and Modernization are terms that refer to a politics of reform designed to preserve the status quo while promising to alter it.


It will be through the historical studies of everyday life that we may be able to find diverse definitions for the concept of modernity.

Fakhri Haggani (2003)

This project has explored the relatively unfamiliar terrain of the U.S. presence in the colonial and postcolonial Francophone worlds of sub-Saharan Africa. The historian of American foreign relations rarely stops at Francophone West Africa. Accustomed to devouring “hot” geopolitical performances, the diplomatic historian is usually quick to dismiss a country such as the Ivory Coast as a backwater of Washington’s hegemonic élans. Contrary to this, my dissertation has argued that the United States has been a recurrent model in the visions of many Ivorians as far as the modernization of their country was concerned. Even more, I have suggested that the U.S. actively participated at various levels in the politics of development that the French colonial state and later the Ivorian government initiated. In many ways such American involvement in the socio-cultural transformations of the West African country irritated France, America’s NATO ally and declining imperial power in West Africa. Throughout the dissertation, I have
hinted that the ensuing Franco-American tension be posited as a “hot peace” within the larger Cold War between “the West” and “the East”.¹

But the key research findings of this dissertation research concern themselves more readily with the historical sociology of modernization and the numerous theories that informed its implementation in the situated geo-temporal context of the more than three decades long period of the Ivorian economic miracle. These findings are intended for both academics and professionals interested in issues of development and state-led social change in what is now called the Global South. This is all the more so since right from the beginning the scope of my doctoral project was meant to extend far beyond the “bounded” framework of diplomatic history and reach out to the world of interdisciplinary social science research. Of course, given the poverty of the literature on Washington’s ventures in French-speaking Africa, an historical analysis of American assistance programs toward Ivory Coast enriches our knowledge of U.S. foreign policy in a relatively non-strategic area. Similarly, by triangulating the analysis of post-1945 development and emphasizing the instances of “hot peace” between the United States and France during the Cold War, my study helps place the Franco-American tensions of the 1960s in a historical logic, which, I claim, is more complex than the “Americanization of Europe” paradigm. Beyond these contributions to diplomatic history, however, I have tried to engage a broader scholarship from such diverse fields as development studies, (historical) geography, and the various strands of postcolonial studies.

Mustering the strength of interdisciplinary research, the dissertation has shown that development—firstly seen as a socially consequential discourse—was a hybridized phenomenon whose loci of production cannot be limited to the elitist institutions of
development. In fact, the research confirmed the insight of many scholars that
development, posited as a modernist social praxis, is best understood in terms of
translation and hybridization. But my project differs with the works of many of these
scholars in terms of its epistemic and historical assumptions. Because of their focus on
the ethnographic present, most studies on alternative/vernacular/local modernities
ironically construct the supposed subjects of development as “people without history.”

In the specific case of American-influenced modernization instances in Francophone
Africa, much of the scholarship also fails to acknowledge the mediating role of France
and its postcolonial extension in various parts of Africa. Using the skills of historical
inquiry and the concept of dubbing borrowed from the field of cinema studies, I have
demonstrated that the translation works involved in the implementation of American-
style modernization in the Ivory Coast were carried out by French diplomats and social
scientists, including the researchers of the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et
Technique Outre-Mer. Here, as other scholars have shown, the constitution and legacy of
the “colonial library” and other “knowledge-power regimes” proved to be very
instrumental in securing the permanence of French control over the state-led
transformations of the Ivory Coast during the years of the Ivorian economic miracle.

Indeed, from the spatial production of Abidjan as a strategic economic bridgehead to the
integrated regional planning of the San Pedro Project and passing through the
construction of the Kossou Dam as a launching pad for an energized postcolonial
modernity, French expatriates proved themselves to be formidable masters in brokering
the U.S. model of development.
Recalling the insights from the scholarship of transnational history, one should bear in mind that the vernacularization of Western modernities—in the local Ivorian context at least—is not a novel phenomenon. More generally, as the dissertation has suggested, the post-1945 development discourse is persuasively mapped out only when one sees it as a site where multiple modernities become imbricated due to the emergence of a new world order. Such an approach not only emphasized the multilateral nature of most development endeavors in the Global South but also the moral saga orchestrated by the emergence of the American Century, for the global ascendancy of an American-sanctioned modernization paradigm necessarily involved passing judgment on colonial developmentalism and the civilizing mission that sustained its deployment. Furthermore, posing development as a hybrid phenomenon and a negotiated experience of everyday life has the advantage of extending not only historical agency to “local” peoples but more subversively it assumes the existence of “indigenous” modernities before the various post-1945 developmental encounters.

In this regard, then, far from a straightforward bureaucratic exercise, state-initiated development in the Ivory Coast was an open-ended process the meaning of which was constantly framed and reinvented in the day-to-day encounters among (American and French) expatriate development planners, Ivorian bureaucrats, and local Ivorians. While it was not always possible to bring in the voices the local Ivorians into this dissertation, recent historical and social scientific work on modernization suggest that recovering the voices of everyday people can add another layer of complexity to the study of the politics of development in the Ivory Coast. By challenging scholars and policymakers to view Ivorians as more than just the passive objects of a hegemonic
French or American model of modernization, such a study is likely to further illuminate the contested nature of the ethics of development by revealing that Third World peoples took an active role in the transformation of their societies. By so doing, as one of my epigraphs suggests, both development and its endpoint (i.e. modernity) will emerge as a complex political, cultural and ethical endeavor, and not simply a matter of economic growth rates.

One can even muse about the findings of additional research into the Ivory Coast’s modernization élan. Building on the dissertation project, one can envision an historical research that deals with the environmental dimensions and consequences of the development drive in the Ivory Coast. Engaging critically with the blame-the-victim unconscious that informs so much of the current neoliberal literature on the crisis of developmentalism, such a research can deploy the techniques of historical Geographic Information Science (GIS) to map the spatial transformations and ecological changes wrought by Ivorian development projects. Supplementing the quantitative approach of GIS with oral histories and more archival research in the Ivory Coast, it will be possible to use critical social theory to investigate how local Ivorians interacted with their changing environment. What strategies did they deploy to maintain a sense of self and community in the face of a disintegrating ecosystem? How did indigenous knowledge systems fit into those existential strategies? Why did the (post)colonial modernizers dismiss these local epistemologies?

With hindsight, we now have a better understanding of the disastrous environmental consequences of the various state-led development projects in West African countries. By focusing on the paradigmatic yet understudied case of Ivory
Coast’s failed modernization, it will be possible to document historically that “maldevelopment” has far less to do with the supposedly inherent incapabilities of the “wretched of the earth” than it has to do with the socially as well as ecologically consequential moral economy of the modern world system.
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NOTES TO INTRODUCTION


14 *Mise en valeur* can mean “development,” “exploitation” or even a little of both. Because the meaning will depend on the context in which the term is used, I have decided not to translate it.


18 Dubbing is a concept that I have borrowed from translation/cinema studies. I use it to capture the process by which foreign products are brought in a country while making sure the “foreign-ness” is of the product is masked.


25 Originally, Office de la Recherche Scientifique Coloniale (ORSC), it was created in 1943 and meant to be the colonial counterpart of the all prestigious Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). Between 1949 and 1953, the Office twice changed its name: first, ORSC became ORSOM (Office de la Recherche Scientifique Outre-Mer) which was soon turned into ORSTOM. Since 1999, the Office, which had been renamed in the meantime as Institut Français de Recherche Scientifique pour le Développement en Coopération, became simply Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD). Furthermore, apart from its Head Office in Paris, ORSTOM administratively had two main training/research centers: Bondy (near Paris) which received students in their first year of training; and Adiopodoumé (near Abidjan, Ivory Coast) wherein the students—especially those in the biological sciences, had to stay as interns during their second year of training. For details, see Michel Gleizes, *Un Regard sur l’ORSTOM*, 1943-1983 (Paris: Editions de l’ORSTOM, 1985). See also Christophe Bonneuil, *Des Savants pour l’empire: La Structuration des recherches scientifiques coloniales au temps de la “mise en valeur des colonies françaises, ” 1917-1945* (Paris: ORSTOM Editions, 1991).

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1


3 In fact, Davis’s informant used the phrase in reference of indigenous magic. But later, Davis appropriated the idea as he schemed to demonstrate the superiority of American technosience. For details, see Davis, *Sorcerers’ Village*, 31, 271-274, 325.


7 Ibid., 1002.


18 Adas, *Dominance by Design*, 237.


24 Ibid., p. 1.

26 McKay, “Needs and Opportunities,” 84.


30 National Archive and Records Administration (College Park, Maryland, hereafter USNA), RG 469, Box 5, Productivity and Technical Assistance Division, Office of the Director, Subject File 1950-51, OP. Survey of Technical Assistance Program, (n.d.), p. 33.


33 Cowan, “American Foreign Aid,” 2; McGhee, “Africa’s Role,” 100; Orchard, “ECA and the Dependent Territories,” 75.

34 *Department of State Appropriation for 1952* (Congressional Information Service, 1952), 188-91.

35 Ibid., 192.

36 Ibid., 201-02.


41 For a full account of Davis’s experience in the war, see his *Half Past When: An American with the Fighting French* (Philadelphia & New York: J. B. Lippincott Co, 1944).


47 Davis, *Sorcerers’ Village*, ix-x.

48 Ibid., 4-6.

49 Ibid., 62-63.


51 Ibid., 34-35.

52 Ibid., 35.

53 Ibid., 273-274, 319-325.


57 Adas, “Improving on the Civilizing Mission?,” 48-49.


64 On the admiration of PCF by the French in the immediate postwar period, see Jacques Chapsal, La Vie politique en France de 1940 à 1958 (Paris: PUF, 1984).


68 On the rationale for this disaffiliation, see Houphouët-Boigny, Chronique, 15-18; idem, Anthologie des Discours, t. 1, 1946-1978 (Abidjan: CEDA, 1978), 83-89.


78 Davis, Sorcerers’ Village, 23.

79 Ibid., 35, 121, 221, 273-74.

80 Ibid., 327.


82 Davis, Sorcerers’ Village, 333.


84 Davis, Sorcerers’ Village, 165, 273, 325.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 2


2 Georges Duhamel, Scènes de la vie future (Paris: Mercure de France, 1930).


13 Ross, Fast Cars, Clean Bodies, 123-156; Tirefort, “‘Manières de Blans,’” 165-178.

14 Seya, “Transnational Capitalist Ideology,” 154-156; Tirefort, “‘Manières de Blans,’” 176.


20 USNA, RG 469, Box 7. Maître Kouamé Binzème to ECA/Paris, 2 September 1948. (Emphasis in the original).

21 Ibid.


23 Ibid., pp. 2-5.
24 Ibid., pp. 6-7.

25 Ibid., p. 8.


38 Kuisel, Seducing the French, 70-102.
39 In this regard, Pierre Pfimlin, the French Minister of Agriculture, noted: “The aim [of these missions] was not just documentary. What we needed was to interpret the observations and figure out how the methods used in the United States could be adapted to France.” For details, see P. Pfimlin, “Avant-propos,” Rapport de la mission pilote agricole sur son voyage aux Etats-Unis, February 1950.
40 CAOM, 2 FIDES 913. Projet de mission (Machinisme agricole), 27 November 1950.
41 CAOM, 2 FIDES 913. P. Labrousse, Rapport № 2, 22 September 1951.
42 CAOM, 2 FIDES 913. Saint Hippolite, Rapport № 4, 5 October 1951.
45 CAOM, 2 FIDES 912. Note sur les matériels de télécommunication à examiner aux USA, 5 March 1955.
47 CAOM, 2 FIDES 911. Philippe, Rapport préliminaire, 8 February 1951. For the responses, see CAOM, 2 FIDES 911. Directeur de l’ORSOM to Ministre de la France d’Outre-Mer, 18 February 1951; ibid., Haut Commissaire AOF to Ministre de la France d’Outre-Mer, 21 March 1951.
48 USNA, RG 469, Box 4. Summary of Technical Assistance Projects in Dependent Areas of ERP Countries Approved for ECA/MSA Financing, 7 January 1953.
49 USNA, RG 469, Box 4. Propositions pour l’Office de la Recherche Scientifique Outre-Mer (ORSOM), n.d. For the suspicion of French colonial authorities, see USNA, RG 469, Box 7. American Consulate General (Dakar) to Secretary of State, 25 April 1949. See also, CAOM, 2 FIDES 911. Sagot to Directeur des Affaires Economique et du Plan, 1 December 1954.
50 Marseille, Empire colonial, 269-275.


58 Archives Nationales de France (Paris, hereafter ANF), Fonds ORSTOM, F 17 Bis 90.17, Article 52. Combes to Governor General AOF, 30 April 1947.


63 Ibid., p. 3.


75 USNA, RG 469, Box 7. Jester to Secretary of State, 8 September 1949.

76 At least, three telegrams were sent in two days regarding this issue. Furthermore, the first telegram is classified, “Priorité absolue” (Absolute priority). For details, see AMAE, série: Afrique-Levant (1944-1952)/sous-série: Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF), Carton 6. Paris [first telegram] to Washington, 13 November 1949; ibid., Washington to Paris, 14 November 1949.


81 A sample of the first issues of France actuelle can be found in AMAE, série: Amérique/sous-série: Etats-Unis, Carton 359.
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3 Ibid.

4 For two examples of travel accounts regarding the Ivory Coast in which Abidjan is conspicuously missing, see William B. Seabrook, *Jungle Ways* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1931); Katherine Edmondson Seabrook, *Gao of the Ivory Coast* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1931).


The pacte colonial was the tacit arrangement whereby the colonial territories were to produce only raw materials while the metropole would specialize in their transformation into finished products. As such, the pacte forbade the industrialization of the colonies.


As one historian puts it, such move was aimed at encouraging the expatriate French/Europeans to build shops, hotels, and housing estates likely to promote the French presence and its permanence in the colony. For details, see Pierre Kipré, Villes de Côte d’Ivoire, 1893-1940, vol. 1, Fondation des villes coloniales en Côte d’Ivoire (Abidjan: Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1985), 94-95.


Ibid., 86-87.

Ibid., 88-94.


For the discussion of the military origins of colonial cities in the Ivory Coast, see Kipré, Villes de Côte d’Ivoire, vol. 1, Fondation, 83-101. For the crucial role of infrastructural development in urbanization of the Ivory Coast, see Semi-Bi Zan, “La Politique coloniale des travaux publique en Côte d’Ivoire (1900-


24 As Jimenez explains, the transfer of the Ivoirian capital accounted for the preponderance of investments in Abidjan during the interwar period. In fact, the capitalization of the Ebrié village necessitated the construction of 13 new buildings for functionaries. Half a dozen of villas/pavilions were also built. In the same vein, about 10 housing projects intended for the *évolués* were initiated. For details, see Jimenez, “Investissements urbains,” 92.


35 Commandant Houdaille as cited in Zan, “Politique coloniale,” 45.

36 For this new outbreak of yellow fever in Grand Bassam and an early Franco-American cooperation to stamp out the disease, see Rockefeller Archive Center (Tarrytown, New York), Record Group (RG) 5, Series 1.2, Box 145, Folder 1918. F. F. Russell to Chef de Santé/Grand Bassam, 31 August 1922; ibid., Box 123, Folder 1652. H. C. Bauvallet to Rockefeller Foundation, 6 July 1921.


42 “Man-made Port at Ivory Coast,” Christian Science Monitor, 14 February 1952, 5; Gbagbo, Côte d’Ivoire, 111.


47 Dubresson, Villes et industries, 197-203.

49 Ibid., 69.

50 Ibid., 163.


57 Ibid., 112-114.

58 Ibid., 114-115.


60 Aristide Zolberg (interview), 26 June 2007.


68 Amon d’Aby, *Côte d’Ivoire*, 118-120.

69 For a first-hand account of these civic unrests, see “150 Are Arrested in Ivory Coast Riots,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 28 October 1958, A5. See also Zolberg, *One-Party Government*, 245-247.

70 Amon d’Aby, *Côte d’Ivoire*, 47.

71 Ibid., 48-50.


73 For a visual evidence of these ads, see *New York Herald Tribune*, 29 March 1951, 6-7.


77 Ibid., 12.


81 Of course, I am not dealing with the intentions or motives of the scholars whose work was used by the U.S. policy-makers. My point is that once the findings of a scholarly work become publicly available, the scholars who produced them no longer have exclusive control over their use.


87 AMAE, Série Amérique, sous/série Etats-Unis, Carton 340. Ministre FOM to MAE, 20 October 1957.
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5 USNA, 770M.5-MSP/8-1161. Abidjan to Secretary of State, 11 August 1961, pp. 2; 5.

6 Ibid., pp. 8-9.

7 Ibid., p. 8.


10 Ibid., p. 3.


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25 Ibid.


27 Ibid., p. 2.


30 Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer (Aix-en-Provence, hereafter CAOM), Fonds Ministeriels (FM), EE/II/5503/Saller.


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34 AMAE, DAM/CI, Carton 1885. Raguenet to MAE, 6 November 1964.


36 CAD, Abidjan, Carton 7. Note de renseignements, 28 October 1964.


38 Archives Nationales de France (Paris, hereafter ANF), Fonds ORSTOM, F 17 Bis 90.17, Article 52, Combes (Directeur de l’ORSTOM) to Gouverneur de Côte d’Ivoire, 8 Mars 1947.


40 ANF, Fonds ORSTOM, F 17 Bis 90.17, Article 55. Ministre Délégué au Plan (de la Côte d’Ivoire) to Directeur de l’ORSTOM, 18 November 1966.

41 I define *epistemic memories* as the memories that come through remembrance of past scientific practices and their findings. While the concept builds on Mudimbé’s notion of “colonial library” as the body of knowledges on Africa that were put together by European colonial administrators, missionaries, anthropologists and other social scientists, it adopts a more dynamic approach to the production of knowledge by highlighting the agency of the producers of knowledge. For details, see Valentin Y. Mudimbé, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); idem, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

42 Immanuel Wallerstein (interview), 27 June 2007; Aristide Zolberg (interview), 26 June 2007.


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64 Emmanuel Terray (interview), 4 April 2005; Marc Augé (interview), 23 February 2005.

65 See Jean-Louis Boutillier (interview), 1 March 2005.


69 Ibid., p. 2.

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71 Ibid., p. 6.


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81 Ibid., 25.
82. *Les Cahiers de la République* 21 (September-October 1959); *Le Contrat social: Revue historique et critique des faits et des idées* IV, 5 (September 1960).


89. Félix Houphouët-Boigny, “Préface” in *Perspectives décennales*, vol. 1, 4.


92. Ibid., 11.

93. Ibid., 15-19.


96. Ibid., 61.

97. Ibid., 62-63.

98. Ibid., 104-05.

99. Ibid., 109.

100. Ibid., 111.


104 Ibid.


109 ANF, Fonds ORSTOM, F 17 Bis 90.17, Article 55, Ministre Délégué au Plan (Ivory Coast) to Directeur de l’ORSTOM, 18 November 1966.

110 The two researchers were Lhuillier and Lê Châu. For details on their participation and the names of other Orstomians in future planning projects, cf. ANF, Fonds ORSTOM, F 17 Bis 90.17, Article 55, “Les Recherches en Sciences Humaines de l’ORSTOM en Côte d’Ivoire,” April 1972, pp. 4-16.


NOTES TO CHAPTER 5


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12 “Barrage de la Bia,” 4-5.


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66 These visitors included Raymond Kouassi Goffri (Vice President of the National Assembly), Aimé Barou (Secretary of the National Assembly), Alphonse Boni (Chief Justice), Dr. Apagny Tanoe, Mrs. Jeanne Gervais, and a certain Mr. Assamoua. For details, see USNA-SE, RG 142, Records of TVA International Visitors Center (IVC), Box 1. Report on operations for the period of six months ended in 11 December 1963. See also ibid, Box 2. Log book 0-1963, 4 August 1963.

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NOTES TO CONCLUSION

1 This suggestion of a “hot peace” is meant to revise the notion of “cold alliance” that Frank Costigliola sees in Franco-American relations, especially during the De Gaulle years. For details, see his France and the United States: The Cold Alliance Since World War II (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992).


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