

Introduction

Between the summers of 1932 and 1934, two residents in St. Louis (the capital city of the colony of Senegal in French West Africa during the period of French colonial rule) wrote letters to the colony's governor imploring the colonial state to assume the care and education of a child named Charles Jondot because he was "*métis*" – that is, multiracial. Their letters elaborated that Jondot was the child of an African woman from the region and a deceased European man who had worked in the town as a teacher. According to French law, the relationship was not legally a marriage and therefore Jondot was a natural or illegitimate child; his presumed father had not publicly acknowledged filiation, which rendered Jondot's paternity as "legally unknown." French colonial law demarcated people residing in French Africa into two racialized legal categories, *indigène* (native) and *citoyen* (citizen). In French West and Equatorial Africa, which are the focus of this book, the colonial subject or native – the *indigène* – was racialized as black and African; by contrast, the *citoyen* was racialized as white and European. Jondot was *indigène*, since his mother was *indigène* and his father "unknown." Given that he was *indigène*, the French colonial state bore no obligation to intervene or pay for his education or care, although it may have taken on the responsibility for a child who was a *citoyen*. However, both letter-writers claimed there was a third category – *métis* or multiracial – that tied children born of interracial unions to French society and made them rights-bearing individuals vis-à-vis French colonial society and the state.

The first suppliant was a Mrs. de la Torre, a French colonial settler and the president of the Charity for Abandoned *Métis* Children.¹ For de la Torre, multiracial children such as Jondot held a liminal status due to their European filiation, even though their fathers played no roles in their lives. Further, they had been "morally abandoned" by French society and the state because they were being raised in their African maternal milieus. However,

¹ Archive Nationales du Senegal (hereafter ANS), 10 D 1 (24): Letter from the president of the Executive Board of the Charity for Abandoned *Métis* Children to the governor-general of Senegal, July 20, 1932, letter 14009.

they were entitled to a French lifestyle and educational environments. The charity sought to remove these children from their maternal milieus and raise them in Catholic mission stations in the colony.

The second supplicant, Dugay Clédor, was a black African who was an *originaire* – a person who resided in the towns of St. Louis, Rufisque, Gorée, or Dakar in Senegal (known as the Four Communes). *Originaires* held rights of French citizenship rather than the colonial legal status of indigène.² Clédor argued that the Senegalese colonial state should open, fund, and manage residential schools for métis children such as Jondot who were “visible in the streets of St. Louis.”³ Unlike de la Torre, who viewed multiracial children as special compared to other children born in Africa, Clédor was in favor of state welfare for Jondot as but one part of an educational ecosystem that the colonial state should provide for all indigènes children. If the French colonial state did not even provide for children with French blood in their veins, he argued, he saw little hope that the French could fulfill the colonial promise of bettering the standards of living in Africa or upholding republican principles of liberty, equality, and brotherhood in Africa.

In 1934, in the town of Libreville (the capital city of the colony of Gabon in French Equatorial Africa during the period of French colonial rule), a self-identified métis man named Joseph-Gaston Walker-Deemin, who was born from a métis woman and a European man, also wrote a letter to colonial officials. Deemin had founded and was the president of an association called the Amicale of Métis.⁴ The Amicale decried that the vast majority of the European fathers did not provide for their children, with most having repatriated to Europe after short stays in the colony. Deemin demanded the recognition of and certain rights for people born of interracial relationships between African women and European men. Yet he articulated a broader definition of rights-bearing métis for whom he was advocating than did Clédor or de la Torre in Senegal. The Amicale defined métis who were rights-bearers vis-à-vis the colonial state and society based on their multiraciality as those who were

² This status came about through the efforts of Blaise Diagne, a black Senegalese man born in 1872 who studied in France and was elected as the representative of the Four Communes in the Chamber of Deputies in France. Diagne’s advocacy led to the French parliament’s passage of a 1916 law named after him, which conferred the legal status of French citizen to these cities’ African residents, regardless of race or religion. The French perpetually sought to limit the numbers of people who could claim *originaires* status and limit the exercise of full citizenship rights, limitations against which *originaires* consistently protested and mobilized. G. Wesley Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal: The Struggle for Power in the Four Communes, 1900–1920* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971).

³ ANS, 13 G 93 (280): Letter from the president of the Colonial Council, Dugay-Clédor, to Lieutenant Governor Beurnier, June 23, 1934, letter 444.

⁴ Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer (ANOM), FEA/GGFEA/5D44: Letter from the president of the Amicale des Métis to the mayor of Libreville, June 11, 1936, document 4.

generationally métis – that is, those who were the children of métis parents, in addition to those who were the children of a European and an African. In Gabon, métis tended to intermarry and viewed themselves as distinct from and superior to other Africans, even though they too held the legal status of indigène. The Amicale demanded that the colonial state provide métis children with free education in state-run residential institutions, segregated from black indigènes children. Their justification was that these children's European lineage rendered them vulnerable to diseases in African milieus. Additionally, the Amicale argued that métis were French and should be granted legal status as “citoyen” and “European” and be privy to all associated rights and resources.

In 1954 in Dakar, Senegal, Nicolas Rigonaux – who referred to himself as “Eurafrican” (*Eurafricain*) – founded the Union of Eurafricans of French West Africa.⁵ His mother was from Dahomey and his father was from France; Rigonaux's father had repatriated there after his birth without recognizing him. Rigonaux accused the French colonial government and black Senegalese alike of racism for not recognizing “Eurafrican” as a distinct identity for people such as he, who were born of a European and an African parent. He demanded that the colonial state pay stipends to mothers so that women like his mother – who were left bereft in raising their children – could afford to send their children to school and provide adequate living conditions. Additionally, he argued that Eurafricans should be granted French legal status. Rigonaux aimed for the organization to bring together Eurafricans (a term he used interchangeably with métis) from both French West Africa and Equatorial Africa. He argued that Eurafricans simultaneously maintained multiple identities – métis, black, African, white, and French, and European – and would contribute to the betterment of all of these societies at local and international levels.

From their different locations and positionality in French Africa, Rigonaux, Deemin, Clédor, and de la Torre launched different articulations of multiracial identity and assertions that these identities generated rights related to children and childhood as well as citizens and citizenship in twentieth-century colonial French West Africa and Equatorial Africa. They accused African and French societies of inequities against multiracial peoples, and they envisioned individual and collective actions by and on behalf of multiracial people as the means and ends to create just presents. These claims, which I refer to as multiracial projects, mattered. First, they belied the French assertion that colonial rule was “colorblind”: they challenged the asymmetrical racialized hierarchies of indigène and citoyen that were proxies for race and the

⁵ ANOM, FM 1 AFF-POL 3406: Letter from President Rigonaux of the Union of Eurafricans of French West Africa to the minister of Overseas France, February 9, 1949, letter 31/U.E.

foundations of French colonial rule.⁶ Second, these claims complicated the meanings of emerging but seemingly fixed identities – such as “indigène,” “citoyen,” “African,” “French,” and “European.” They demonstrated the capaciousness of how processes of identity formation in Africa called into question the geographically, culturally, and racially bound concepts of identity.

Third, these articulations of multiracial identities demonstrated the complexities of racial identity, thought, and practice in African history. Each used the French terms “métis” or “Eurafricain” to convey varied conceptions of what it meant to be multiracial, with shifting factors related to descent, biology, and culture. On the surface, they agreed on who constituted this population, namely, children fathered by European men and born to African women. Yet Deemin, in Gabon, defined métis who could claim rights from the French state based on their multiraciality not only as children fathered by European men and born to African women but also those who were multi-generational métis. I too use this term to delineate people born of two métis parents and their descendants. This distinction is critical, as historical actors throughout the twentieth century argued over what degree of closeness to, or distance from, European parentage would delineate a multiracial identity and the rights that such identities engendered. These four individuals will reappear throughout this book with fuller portraits of their historical trajectories.

Multiracial Identities narrates the history of métis or multiracial people of African and European parentage and descent in French Africa – specifically in French Equatorial Africa (FEA) where they numbered about 3,000 people and French West Africa (FWA) that included between 3,500 and 4,000 people – in the period of the expansion, consolidation, and decline of colonial rule. The years covered are from ca. 1895 to 1960.⁷ This book surveys all of FEA and FWA but focuses on four towns that became consistent centers of métis activism and debate about *métis*. In FWA, these towns were St. Louis and

⁶ I refer to these varied claims as multiracial projects through borrowing from Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s analysis of race in the United States as a “socially constructed and historically fluid” category of “inequality, of difference/identity and of agency, both individual and collective” manifested in changing “racial projects.” Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2015), x and 3.

⁷ Variations exist in enumerating the number of métis in FWA, not only because there were contestations in how people articulated and claimed these identities but also because French colonial census taking, record-keeping, and categorizations were disorganized and inconsistent. I obtained the number of 3,500 from Owen White, who cites a 1938 French colonial census – but estimates the number was closer to 4,000. Later chapters of this book return to the question of statistics regarding the number of métis. Owen White, *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1985–1960* (Oxford: Clarendon University Press), 2–3.

Dakar in the colony of Senegal; in FEA, the respective towns and colonies were in Libreville, Gabon and Brazzaville, French Congo. *Multiracial Identities* traces the roots and routes of multiple articulations of multiracial identities and the contestations that resulted over how such identities made people rights-bearing subjects as children and as citizens, based on the changing dynamics of parentage, life stage, culture, biology, and the law. In analyzing the expressions of multiracial thought and multiracial praxis in French Africa, this book deepens our understanding of how historical actors deployed changing ideas about race to shape the conceptions about and lived experiences of personhood (the demarcation of individual selfhood, rights, and obligations) and peoplehood (the cohering of particular individuals to a shared sense of belonging, rights, and obligations). Analyzing the processes by which historical actors articulated, contested, denied, or invested in the articulation and acknowledgment of multiracial identities also offers a window into conceptions of legitimacy, illegitimacy, inclusion, and exclusion.

Emphasizing the language and meaning of how multiracial men and women talked about themselves, this book uses the terms “métis,” “Eurafrican,” and “multiracial” interchangeably. In the communities in which multiracial peoples examined in this book lived, people who identified as métis and locals in these communities generally used the French word “métis” to refer to multiracial people, rather than terms in African languages. As discussed in later chapters, some métis communities in the 1950s began to use the term “Eurafrican.” I use the term “multiracial” rather than “mixed race” or “biracial” – also used by other scholars – because it more aptly captures the multivalent ways in which individuals and collectives chronicled in this book crafted and contested individual and collective identities. Following recent scholarship on multiraciality and the field of global mixed-race studies, I do not use the term “mulato” (*mulâtre*), which was sometimes used by the French and other Europeans in twentieth- and nineteenth-century archival documents. The reason is the derivation of the term in scientific racism that compared interracial sex to the breeding of animals.⁸ This book traces the changes over time in terminology and meaning, and the contestations over terms and meanings, in how various constituencies referred to multiracial people.

Along the Atlantic coast of West and West-Central Africa, sexual unions between African women and European men had been occurring as early as the

⁸ A small sampling of studies in mixed-race scholarship includes Alyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Sarah Iverson, Ann Morning, Aliya Saperstein, and Janet Xu, “Regimes beyond the One-Drop Rule: New Models of Multiracial Identity,” *Genealogy* 6, 2 (June 2020), 57–80; Erica Chito Childs, *The Boundaries of Mixedness: A Global Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Jasmine Mitchel, “Back to Race, Not beyond Race: Multiraciality and Racial Identity in the United States and Brazil,” *Comparative Migration Studies* Volume 10, Article 22 (2022).

late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Those unions ranged from sexual violence inflicted upon enslaved women to long-term cohabitation arrangements that lasted for months or years and were legalized as marriage according to local customs (*marriage à la mode du pays*). They had birthed Eurafrikan communities in coastal trade towns.⁹ As cultural and trade brokers between Africans and Europeans, some black and multiracial women in marriage à la mode du pays in trans-Atlantic trading hubs, such as St. Louis and Gorée in Senegal, referred to as *signares*, and Libreville in Gabon, amassed influence or wealth.¹⁰

Multiracial communities that formed in the precolonial sixteenth through nineteenth centuries along Africa's coast of the Atlantic Ocean constituted socioeconomic elites.¹¹ Multiracial women and men acted as cultural brokers, spoke European and African languages, and adopted European clothing and material culture. Multiracial people acted as middlemen in the trans-Atlantic and trans-continental exchanges of people and goods, as well as employees and interpreters for European firms. The most well researched of these precolonial multiracial communities has been the métis in Senegal, most of whom resided in the town of St. Louis. There, in the mid-nineteenth century, "métis of the first generation," in the words of historian Hilary Jones, went on to form "a distinct group identity based on their ability to trace their descent to a signare and a European merchant who lived in the coastal towns of St. Louis or

⁹ Karl Davis Patterson, *The Northern Coast of Gabon to 1975* (Cambridge: Clarendon Press, 1975); George Brooks, *Eurafrikans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003); David Northrup, "Commerce and Culture" in *Africa's Discovery of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 54–75; Mariana Candido, "Strategies for Social Mobility: Liaisons between Foreign Men and Slave Women in Benguela, c. 1770–1850" in Gwyn Campbell and Elizabeth Elbourne, eds, *Sex, Power and Slavery: The Dynamics of Carnal Relations under Enslavement* (Athens: Ohio University, 2014), 272–88.

¹⁰ For information on increased wealth and status for women in interracial relationships in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in French Africa, see: Brooks, *Eurafrikans in Western Africa*, xvii; Rachel Jean-Baptiste, "A Black Girl Should Not Be with a White Man: Sex, Race, and African Women's Social and Legal Status in Colonial Gabon, c. 1900–1946," *Journal of Women's History* 22, 2 (2010), 56–82; Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); Mariana Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 93–4 and 128–9.

¹¹ Patterson, *The Northern Coast of Gabon to 1975*; Jones, *The Métis of Senegal*; Henry Hale Bucher, *The Mpongwe of the Gabon Estuary: A History to 1860*, PhD Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1977. George Brooks comments that in Senegambia, Eurafrikans in stratified and patrilineal societies were marginalized and excluded from rights held by others in their age sets, whereas Eurafrikans in acephalous and matrilineal societies could reside in and own land and marry without constraints. Brooks, *Eurafrikans in Western Africa*, xxi–xxii. See also Chapter 2: "The Rise of an Atlantic Port, 1710–1850" in Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World*, 89–143.

Gorée in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century.”¹² They maintained this distinction through endogamy, holding the surname of European ascendants, adhering to the Catholic faith, speaking French, and residing in French bourgeois living conditions. However, they also spoke African languages and maintained ties with African societies in the interior.

Beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, when France, Britain, and Portugal consolidated colonial rule in West and Central Africa based on racialized hierarchies of black and white and segregated built environments, colonial discourses came to represent interracial sexuality as illicit.¹³ Nevertheless, interracial sexual unions between European men and black and multiracial African women continued. Relationships between European women and African men in colonial-era Africa remained rare. Heterosexual interracial relationships resulted in the births of thousands of children; however, most fathers did not acknowledge paternity, provide financial resources, or maintain contact. In what became French West and Equatorial Africa, the children born of these interracial unions differed from earlier generations of multiracial peoples as they struggled to assert their social and legal status in the rigidifying colonial racial boundaries.¹⁴ Excluded from legal, cultural, educational, and affective connections to French and European societies, métis born after the consolidation of colonial rule claimed distinct identities based on their multiracial parentage and marginalization and struggled to legitimize their group identities and status as rights holders.

¹² Jones, *The Métis of Senegal*, 9–11 and 82–3. These métis communities numbered about 1,200 people in 1830; 1,600 in 1860; and 1,620 in 1920. H. O. Idowu, “Café au Lait: Senegal’s Mulatto Community in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6 (December 1972), 274.

¹³ For more on late nineteenth and twentieth century European discourses about interracial sexuality, in Africa and other colonial settings, see Ronal Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991); Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social Worlds of Batavia: A History of Dutch Asia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Ann Laura Stoler, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, with a new preface (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Carina Ray, “Interracial Sex and the Making of Empire” in Ato Quayson and Girish Daswani, eds., *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2013). For German and British attitudes towards interracial marriages in Namibia, see Ulrike Lindner, “Contested Concepts of ‘White’/‘Native’ and Mixed Marriages in German South-West Africa and the Cape Colony 1900–1914: A Histoire Croisée,” *Journal of Namibian Studies* 6 (2009), 57–79.

¹⁴ Métis descended from precolonial interracial relationships concentrated their residence within the Four Communes of Senegal, in St. Louis in particular. They saw themselves as a distinct group and were a “self-conscious” and “inward-looking” group. In theory holding French legal status, they intermarried and sometimes were in alignment with *originaires* of varied racial and ethnic identities in their struggles to exercise full French citizenship rights. Jones, *The Métis of Senegal*.

Not all people of multiracial descent in FWA and FEA claimed a multiracial identity, nor was there a singular articulation of what multiracial identity meant; rather, there were numerous articulations of multiracial identities. This book does not encompass the self-identified métis descended from pre-colonial interracial relationships in Senegal, who continued to be concentrated in towns that became the Four Communes, especially St. Louis, after the consolidation of French colonial rule – which accelerated in the late nineteenth century. Métis descended from signares continued to maintain a distinct group identity and did not identify with or join in the struggles of métis born of European fathers and black or multiracial African mothers not descended from a signare.¹⁵ Métis in St. Louis descended from precolonial interracial relationships held French colonial legal status as *originaires*, holding the rights of French citizenship by virtue of being born in these towns. As the French attempted to exert more centralized political control after 1919, métis originaires often expressly aligned with and protested with other originaires – the vast majority of whom were black and Muslim – against French colonial attempts to deny originaires full expression of French citizenship rights.¹⁶ However, the multiracial people in Libreville and Brazzaville who articulated multiracial identities, and who are the focus of this book, include those who were fathered by a European man and born to African women (black and métis) as well as multigenerational métis, people descended from métis parents. In FEA, multigenerational métis and children born of interracial relationships alike held the legal status of indigène and joined together to assert collective identities and struggles for rights.

The French created the administrative units of FWA and FEA in 1895 and 1910, respectively, to consolidate and streamline colonial rule. These geographic units differentiated African societies across a vast space according to French ideations of ethnolinguistic, cultural, and religious categories. Such mapping tactics were intended to facilitate governance. However, individuals

¹⁵ Senegalese historian Ousseydou Faye refers to métis descended from *signares* as “métis of the first generation” and those descended from colonial-era interracial relationships as “métis of the second generation.” In *The Métis of Senegal*, Hilary Jones argues:

The ability to trace one’s ancestry to a *signare* and a European merchant or soldier who arrived in the colony in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century distinguishes the métis of Saint Louis and Gorée from people of mixed race who were the products of twentieth-century French West Africa. (182)

See also Ousseydou Faye, “Les métis de la seconde génération, les enfants mal-aimés de la colonisation française en Afrique occidentale, 1895–1960,” in Charles Becker, Saliou Mbaye and Ibrahima Thioub (eds.), *AOF Réalités et héritages: Sociétés ouest-africaines et ordre colonial, 1895–1960, tome II* (Dakar: Direction des Archives Nationales, 1997), 773–94.

¹⁶ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal*, 196–215; Idowu, “Café au lait,” 284–9; Jones, *The Métis of Senegal*, 139–55.

and collectives in FEA and FWA perpetually confounded these colonial concepts through practices and thought, redrawing identities in their local communities and across the colonial geographies.

The numbers of multiracial African Europeans in twentieth-century colonial sub-Saharan French Africa – which included FWA, FEA, and Madagascar – were relatively small. Nonetheless, French colonial officials, settlers, missionaries, and jurists in metropolitan France expressed heightened anxiety about their status.¹⁷ Elsewhere in the French Empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in Indochina, colonial officials and settlers also worried about the existence and status of racially ambiguous peoples. Scholars of French colonial history and Indochina such as Emmanuelle Saada and Ann Stoler have characterized representations of the racial categorization and legal, cultural, and social status of people of mixed European and indigenous parentage as “the métis question” or “the métis problem.” These scholars have published important works that showcase the racialized, sexualized, and gendered asymmetries of colonial rule.¹⁸ French anxieties about métis, this body of scholarship argues, reveal the tenuous nature of conceptions of whiteness and the interior frontiers of European identity. However, scholars of European colonial studies have rarely considered the dialectic implications of how the actions and thoughts of multiracial people shaped European thought, practice, and law. Scholars who have focused on the life experiences of métis children and their mothers in Indochina, such as Christina Firpo in her study of French colonial child removal schemes, have shown how these individuals sought to create belonging and family even in the glare of colonial power.¹⁹

However, there has been little scholarly investigation regarding twentieth-century colonial FWA and FEA of how multiracial Africans conceived of their own identities and how the African societies in which they lived considered the question of multiraciality.²⁰ Multiracial Africans and African societies themselves debated the meanings and implications of multiracial identities. In addressing these silences in African history, this book shows that such

¹⁷ White, *Children of The French Empire*; Violaine Tisseau, *Être métis en Imerina (Madagascar) aux XIXe-XXe siècles* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 2017).

¹⁸ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* Emmanuelle Saada, *Les enfants de la colonie: Les métis de l'Empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007). See also Yves Denéchère, ed. *Enjeux postcoloniaux de l'enfance et de la jeunesse: Espace francophone (1945–1980)* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2019).

¹⁹ Christina Elizabeth Firpo, *The Uprooted: Race, Children, and Imperialism in French Indochina* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016); Denéchère, Yves, ed. *Enjeux postcoloniaux de l'enfance et de la jeunesse*.

²⁰ An exception is the important book by Jones, *The Métis of Senegal*. Although more focused on French colonial thought, *Children of the French Empire* by White briefly touches on how multiracial people saw their own identities.

articulations shaped the formation not only of African identities and concepts of blackness but also the meanings of whiteness and of French and European identities, as well as the very concepts of belonging and citizenship in Europe and Africa.

This book argues that multiraciality was a critical conduit for demarcating and reordering social relations, economic resources, political power, and laws regulating nationality, family, and marriage. It also influenced practices of parenting, fostering, and education in French Africa, both within African communities and in relation to the French colonial state. Lived experiences of and ideas regarding multiraciality in French Africa shaped two important interrelated and constitutive processes of personhood in African, French, and European history, namely childhood and citizenship. Claims to and contestations about multiraciality were also proxies for defining futures, anchoring the past, and demarcating parameters of gender, sexuality, and respectability. Moreover, in analyzing how the French in Africa and metropolitan France sought to define and regulate the articulation of multiracial identities and the rights that such identities may have entailed, this book blurs the boundaries between African and European studies as analytically distinct areas.

At first glance, the commonality of the four towns that are the focus of this book – St. Louis and Dakar in Senegal, Libreville in Gabon, and Brazzaville in the French Congo – seems to stem from their status as French colonial capital cities. St. Louis was the capital city of the colony of Senegal from 1872 to 1959 and the capital of FWA from 1895 to 1902. Dakar became the capital city of FWA in 1902 and was the capital of the independent Mali Federation from 1959 to 1960 and of the Republic of Senegal in 1960. Libreville was the capital of the colony of Gabon from 1842 to 1960. Brazzaville became the capital of the colony of French Congo in 1904, of FEA in 1910, and of Free France during the World War II years of Vichy occupation (see map in Figure 1).

In the French mind, FWA and FEA were distinct units politically, socially, and culturally in the “mission to civilize” Africa and Africans (see Figure 2). They believed FWA was populated by relatively “advanced” peoples because some precolonial West African societies had centralized states and empires, whereas FEA was inhabited by “backwards” acephalous peoples.²¹

In Paris, the Ministry of Colonies aimed to oversee the management of the French Empire, with the governors-general of FWA and FEA responsible for

²¹ For more on French colonial thinking and the division between FEA and FWA, see Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Christopher Gray, *Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa: Southern Gabon, ca. 1850–1940* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2002).

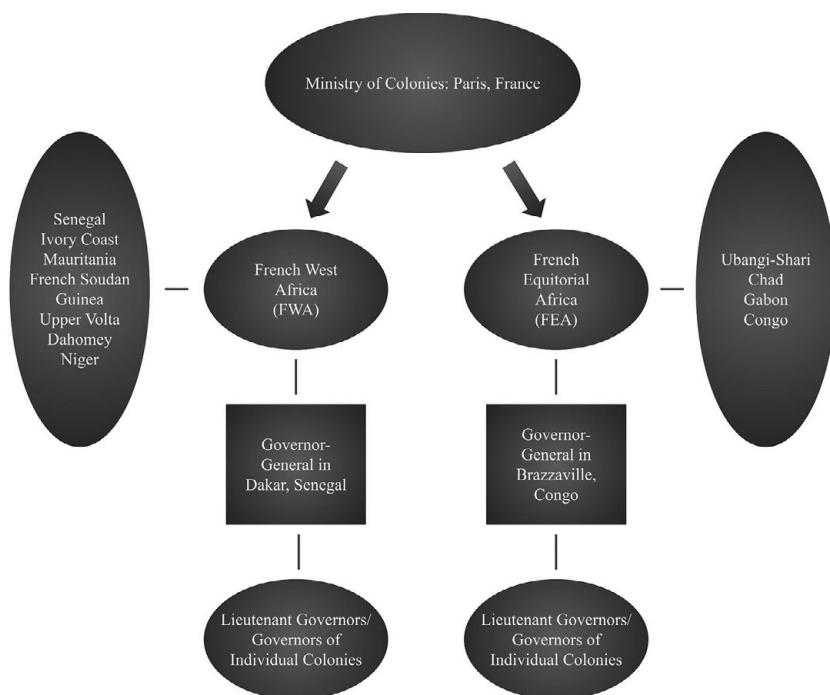


Figure 1 Map of colonial French West and Equatorial Africa.

Source: Drawn by Cassandra Jean-Baptiste.

the centralized management of consolidated geographic units, which were to generate their own revenues. The governor-general of each region was to be assisted by lieutenant governors, that is, governors of individual colonies, who would oversee a host of French civil servants and military personnel to administer the economic, political, and social affairs at local levels. But the articulation of multiracial identities in these locations where the French colonial state sought to broadcast its power demonstrates the tenuousness of colonial hierarchies and power. Ultimately, the assertions of multiracial identities by various individuals and collectives in French Africa defied the racialized colonial logic of distinction between indigène/African/black and citoyen/European/white that undergirded colonial rule.

Within these “French colonial capitals,” and despite the plans for consolidation, it was African peoples who animated meanings and practices of urban life, built environments, and governance. Inhabitants of these “trans-African cities,” to use Lorelle Semley’s phrase, hailed from various shores of the

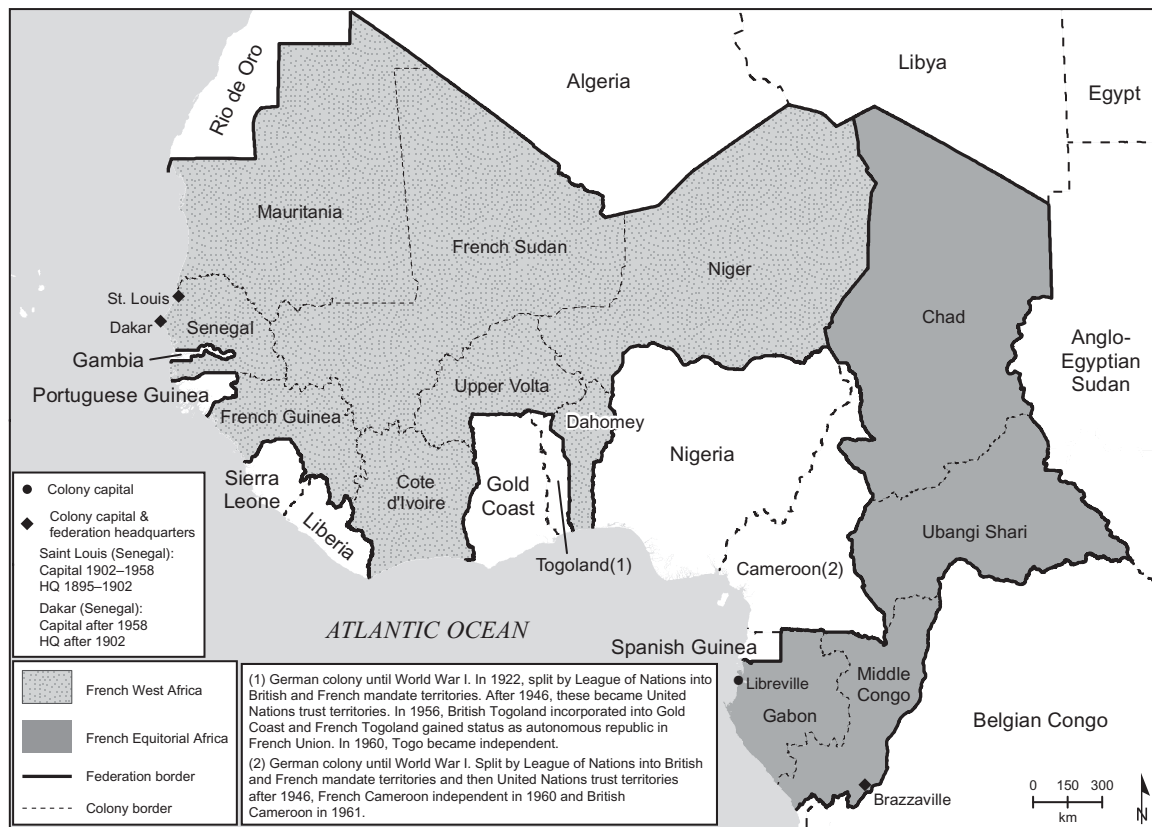


Figure 2 Organizational chart of French colonial governance in French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa.

Source: Brian Edward Balsley, GISP.

French Caribbean and Atlantic Ocean Africa, and some had also spent time in Europe.²² Merging local cultural forms and their diverse life experiences, they articulated a dual identity as black *and* French and claimed the political, social, and economic rights denied to them by the French colonial state. However, this book shows that some inhabitants in these towns also articulated an identity as multiracial; they saw themselves as having a triple identity as black *and* white *and* French and therefore distinct from others in their local communities.

Multiracial people who lived alongside Africans of various identities had been born in or migrated to the four towns in search of opportunities, to attend French schools, to obtain wage labor from the colonial state or European businesses, and to better their present and future. In these four urban spaces, multiracial people articulated changing conceptions of multiracial identities, referring to themselves by shifting terms – “métis” or “Eurafricain” – that served to legitimize their assertions of group identities and as rights holders vis-à-vis French and African societies. By the 1930s, métis associations had sprung up across FWA and FEA. In individual colonies, organizations made persistent claims for the French to provide monetary resources and schools and other institutions for the care and education of métis children. They also demanded that métis adults should hold French legal status, together with the bundle of economic and social rights that such status entailed. Some of these associations buttressed their claims for special recognition and entitlements with the racist sentiment that their lighter skin color made them superior to black Africans. When French missionaries and the colonial state opened “orphanages” at the turn of the twentieth century to educate métis children according to their own interests, métis associations – led by male leaders – claimed to be mediators for black mothers and on behalf of métis children to negotiate their standards of living and education.

By 1930 in FWA and by 1936 in FEA, French nationality laws had shifted to allow métis to claim French legal status and shed the status of indigène. By the 1950s, hundreds of métis adults in FEA and FWA had been recognized as possessing the “quality of French citizen” (*qualité de citoyen français*) under special nationality laws promulgated for métis. In the process, they had transformed the very articulation of French citizenship and what it meant to be Eurafrican at midcentury and throughout the decades to come.

After World War II, métis of black and white parentage and descent in French Africa defied the colonial boundaries that distinguished FWA from FEA. They communicated and organized with multiracial people across French Africa. Additionally, some métis in French Africa organized with multiracial people elsewhere in the global French Empire and in Germany.

²² Lorelle Semley, *To Be Free and French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 162–3.

Some expressed a sense of commonness with Afro-Germans, who shared the experience of being marginalized. This new manifestation of multiracial identity expressed the possibility of transnational fictive kinship around people's common derivation from black and white parentage. By the 1950s, some métis also articulated what I refer to as métis or multiracial internationalism; the term refers to the assertion of multiracial identities as a framework to unite people across the world born of a white and non-white parent in a collective identity and shared struggle. Claims of multiracial peoplehood made by métis offered counter-discourses of belonging to the efforts of emerging African political leaders to delineate an essentialized black identity in multilingual, multiethnic, and multireligious African societies, amid increased demands for autonomy or independence in the context of French colonial rule.

Multiracial Identities explores one of the most enduring questions of historical inquiry: How do societies calibrate difference, belonging, and power based on changing constructions of race? Claims by métis or on their behalf – some made by individuals and others by collectives such as métis self-help associations – shaped public debates, policies, and practices of legal, cultural, and familial belonging, particularly regarding child welfare and nationality law. Analyzing the comparative history of multiracial identities in French Africa demonstrates that a more global history of the processes of racial identity formation and belonging must consider how these concepts were conceptualized, contested, and lived in Africa. One must understand how ideas about – and lived experiences of – multiracial Africans were in conversation with and shaped identity formation in the global French Empire, in Europe, and elsewhere. In doing so, this book expands our knowledge of race *and* Africa and race *in* Africa. It explores the history of the “intimate,” childhood and children, motherhood and fatherhood, parenting, fostering, and family, and citizenship and nationality law.

Race *and* Africa, Race *in* Africa

An important body of scholarship is one that I call race *and* Africa, in that it collectively explores how Africa has been a touchstone for processes of racialization in global history. One such strand of scholarship traces the origination of race as a category – the source of antiblack racism – in the Western world based on the othering of Africa and Africans. V. Y. Mudimbe's analysis of how European societies have racialized Africa and Africans since antiquity is key here.²³ Scholars of the Americas have explored how antiblack

²³ V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

racism and racial capitalism fed the enslavement of Africans in the fifteenth-through nineteenth-century trans-Atlantic slave trade as well as in slavery-based societies and post-emancipation societies.²⁴ Indeed, racism was at the core of European colonialism across the African continent, as has been argued by a number of thinkers and scholars.²⁵

Additionally, scholars of African diaspora literary and historical studies have interpreted the African continent as a critical source of essentialized racial identity formation for people of African descent who were enslaved in the Americas and their descendants. As these scholars have shown, enslaved people and their descendants have articulated conceptions of black identity as rooted partly in shared experiences of slavery and activism against slavery and white supremacy.²⁶ Yet conceptualizations such as the Black Atlantic, black internationalism, and Pan-Africanism have posited Africa as the source of essentialized blackness and tend to obfuscate the history of fluid and contested racial identities in Africa.²⁷

Until the past decade, historical scholarship on race in Africa has been relatively sparse. Such studies examine how Africans have conceptualized, deployed, and contested notions of race and how these notions have changed over time. Several themes have categorized this research. Scholars of South African history have analyzed how European settler colonies institutionalized seemingly naturalized racial and ethnic categories of Africans as “natives,” divided into “tribes,” to demarcate virulent color bars that shored up white minority rule.²⁸ A particular focus of scholarship on race in southern Africa is

²⁴ Some of this research to date includes Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992); Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Destin Jenkins and Justin Leroy (eds.), *Histories of Racial Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

²⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 2008); F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 2021); William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530–1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); George M. Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

²⁶ A small sampling of this literature includes Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Jennifer Wilks, *Race, Gender, and Comparative Black Modernism: Suzanne Lacascade, Marita Bonner, Suzanne Césaire* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Cheryl Higashida, *Black Internationalist Feminism: Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945–1995* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Tiffany Gill and Keisha Blaine (eds.), *To Turn the Whole World Over: Black Women and Internationalism* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019).

²⁷ Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

²⁸ Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); *Citizen and Subject:*

the analysis of white settlers' ideology of "Black Peril" – representations of African men inflicting sexual violence on white women – and the nature of settler colonialism and the history of whiteness.²⁹

Beyond the context of settler colonialisms, a second important intervention in the study of race in Africa has been made by scholars such as Jonathan Glassman, Bruce Hall, and Chouki El Hamel, who have disavowed that racialization in Africa – particularly the differentiation of people as either "black" or "Arab" and the existence of anti-Arab or antiblack sentiment in Muslim East and West Africa – was invented solely by Europeans who indoctrinated Arabs and blacks to buy into these articulations.³⁰ Instead, these scholars emphasize intra-African racial dynamics. Glassman demonstrates how "indigenous intellectuals" and African thinkers constructed and contested changing meanings of racial thought in a short-lived outburst of ethnonationalist and racial violence that broke out in 1960s postcolonial Zanzibar, Tanzania.³¹ Hall's research on the Sahel region of northern Mali and Niger explores how Africans used "idioms of race to describe intra-African differences" before the arrival of Europeans, dating as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and suggests that the French layered their own notions of race upon these existing political idioms for colonial rule.³² For Hall, concepts like "Arabs and Tuaregs" and "blacks" in the Sahel did not constitute racial identities but rather "racial arguments," which he defines as "the emergence and changing structures of ideas about racial difference, as well as the ways these ideas were deployed in a variety of contexts over time in the Niger bend to make arguments about particular social and political matters."³³

Another strand of scholarship has examined racial thought and racial identities through colonial and postcolonial African and Indian interactions in the Indian Ocean world, the African continent, and India. In exploring the creation of urban life in colonial Dar Es Salaam as articulated, lived, and contested by Indians and Africans, James Brenan demonstrates the historically fluid meanings of "Swahili" and "African" identities.³⁴ Shobana Shankar's research on

Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

²⁹ Jock McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902–1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Brett Shadle, *The Souls of White Folk: White Settlers in Kenya* (London: Manchester University Press, 2015).

³⁰ Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

³¹ Jonathon Glassman, *War of Words, War of Stones* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 8 and 17.

³² Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16–17.

³³ Hall, *A History of Race*, 22.

³⁴ James Brenan, *Taifa: Making Nation and Race in Urban Tanzania* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012).

the creation of racial knowledge in postcolonial West Africa and India provides an understanding of how non-Western societies defined race and racialization in what she calls the context of a “cultural economy” of goods, music, films, and the creation of academic disciplines, departments, and publications.³⁵

Collectively, this wealth of scholarship has demonstrated the historically contingent and fluid nature of racial thought and racial identity formation in Africa and about Africa. This book builds on such scholarship, which urges attention to how African societies conceived of and enacted racialization and how these processes have shaped intra-African dynamics. *Multiracial Identities* narrates how the maternal communities in which métis lived engaged the claim to multiracial identities and how these claims launched intra-African contestations regarding how to define people’s belonging and social and legal status. Further building on this body of research, I show how articulations of multiracial identities also fundamentally challenged and reordered the racialized ideas that the French held about African cultures and societies. Beyond discourse or intellectual thought about race, this book also pays attention to racial practice, or race-as-lived, and how quotidian manifestations of race have constituted an important, yet less well studied, dynamic in African history.

Another strand of scholars of race in Africa has sought to maintain conversations with global African diaspora studies, but with Africa and Africans centered as active participants in creating varied black identities.³⁶ *Multiracial Identities* draws from a rich historiography that places Africa as an active participant in the making and remaking of the Black Atlantic as a concept and geographic space. Jemima Pierre’s ethnography on racialization in postcolonial Ghana shows how constructions of “blackness” in racially homogenous twentieth-century postcolonial Ghana underwrote the creation of global black identities, modern globalized racial processes, and “transnational blackness.”³⁷ Pierre’s research reconfigures African diaspora studies, placing people of African descent outside of Africa and people who live in the African continent within “mutually constitutive” processes of the global production of black identities.³⁸ In tracing how Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and other Antillean and African thinkers and political figures physically and

³⁵ Shobana Shankar, *An Uneasy Embrace: African, India, and Spectre of Race* (London: Hurst, 2020).

³⁶ Lynn Thomas, *Beneath the Surface: A Transnational History of Skin Lighteners* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020); Lisa A. Lindsay, *Atlantic Bonds: A Nineteenth Century Odyssey from America to Africa* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Michael Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

³⁷ Jemima Pierre, *Predicaments of Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), xii.

³⁸ Pierre, *Predicaments of Blackness*, 206.

ideologically traversed Martinique, Senegal, and France between 1945 to 1960 to create *négritude* thought, Gary Wilder further outlines the multivalent constructions of blackness.³⁹ Yet, ultimately, the very term “Black Atlantic” reifies the concept of blackness as the primordial foil through which people in Atlantic Ocean Africa created a sense of shared racial identity and belonging.

A commonality between both strands of scholarship of race *in* Africa has been the idea that Africans have articulated a uniracial expression of racial identity. As much as scholars may argue that individuals and collectives over time and space in African history have articulated changing meanings of terms such as “Swahili,” “Arab,” “Tuareg,” “black,” or “Indian,” scholars have nonetheless reinforced the concept of Africans as claiming a singular racial identity. *Multiracial Identities* connects these two strands of research on race in Africa, analyzing intra-African debates about the meanings of multiraciality within local and transcontinental contexts as well as how such contestations interacted with and shaped French thought and policies in FEA, FWA, and the metropole. Further, this book traces the ideation of a multiracial Atlantic world that encompasses Africa, the Antilles and elsewhere in the Americas, and Europe.

The book also expands the analytic, conceptual, and geographic scale of a small but impactful literature: a third strand about race *in* Africa, which addresses the history of interracial sexuality (*métissage*) and multiracial Africans as articulated, debated, and lived by Africans. This strand reveals a fuller history of the complex processes and fluid manifestations of identity formation in African societies. The identities and legal statuses of multiracial people across colonial-era Africa depended on intertwined factors of local conditions and European legal regimes.

Violaine Tisseau has expanded the research on multiracial identities and societies in colonial-era French Africa, with a focus on the Imerina ethno-language group clustered in towns in the interior highlands of Madagascar, including the colonial capital city Antananarivo. Tisseau has argued that the “métis question” arose for the French and Malagasy of varied identities alike, between the late nineteenth century and 1960.⁴⁰ In the mid-nineteenth century, as the European presence expanded, interracial sexual relations between French men and women from the Imerina Kingdom – a society that was highly stratified according to people’s status as slave or free, their occupation, whether or not their kin had a tomb, and their origins as Austronesian, Bantu, or Arab – facilitated trade and commerce. After Madagascar became a French colony in 1896, the French constructed difference and legal

³⁹ Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

⁴⁰ Tisseau, *Être métis en Imerina*.

categories in Madagascar according to the racialized binaries of indigènes and citoyen and viewed interracial sexuality and multiracial people as dangers to French prestige.⁴¹ Though few interracial unions were marriages according to French civil law in the region, a majority of French fathers recognized their children who went on to hold citoyen or European legal status, with fifty percent of multiracial children remaining unrecognized and therefore categorized as indigènes.⁴² In towns in the Antananarivo region, Tisseau chronicles how mothers of unrecognized children sought out European schooling in spite of limited offerings by the French colonial state; individual unrecognized métis sought to be acknowledged as French citizens; métis indicated their belonging to French society through wearing European clothing; and métis cast themselves as distinct, claiming membership in Malagasy and French societies. As locations in which many métis were grouped and educated as children, the city – Tisseau argues – facilitated “sociability between métis” and “constituted the privileged site of a sociability between métis, which tended to transform them from a category to a group.”⁴³

Even within the rigid legal racial classifications of native, white, or colored in settler colonial states in southern Africa, scholars have shown that Euraficans nevertheless crafted a sense of cohesion around varied multiracial identities. Christopher Lee examines the “alter-native subjectivities” of some 10,000 people born between 1911 and 1956 in British Central Africa – Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Zambia – of a “native” mother and a father who was not native. Colonial censuses and missionaries often categorized them as natives and sometimes as “colored,” but multiracial people referred to themselves variously as Anglo-African, Indo-African, Eurafican, Euro-African, and Cape Afrikaner. The question of why and how the small numbers of multiracial Euraficans in this region are a critical topic of inquiry in African history is an issue that Lee tackles in his study. Postcolonial scholars of Africa, Lee argues, have identified “the black African subject” as the universal African, an articulation of nativism that comes from colonial binary categories of native and nonnative but also served African nationalist agendas and attempts to unify heterogeneous African societies into nation-states. Lee contends:

Though small population figures offer a reason for minimizing these communities, scholarship should not be governed by demographic data alone. Their experiences underscore the significance of social margins and border histories, which offer

⁴¹ A 1938 census recorded 5,558 métis, of whom 1,330 were located in the central region of Antananarivo. Tisseau, *Être métis en Imerina*, 22–44.

⁴² Fifty percent of 1,330 métis in the central region of Madagascar were not recognized as such. Tisseau, *Être métis en Imerina*, 181.

⁴³ Tisseau, *Être métis en Imerina*, 267.

perspectives that disrupt our current narratives of the past and the frames of analysis we simply employ to understand that past.⁴⁴

Juliette Milner-Thornton's "autoethnographic historical account" of her family's complex articulation of their identity as the descendants of a colonial-era relationship between an African woman and a European man demonstrates how imperial experiences of race and culture continue to impact personhood and peoplehood in contemporary Zambia.⁴⁵

In Ghana, in contrast, as argued by Carina Ray in her analysis of interracial sexuality in twentieth-century colonial Gold Coast – which briefly touches on the identity and legal status of multiracial Gold Coasters – neither Gold Coasters nor the British had articulated "a métis problem." Ray argues that "multiracial" as a "category of being had little salience in colonial Ghana for Africans and Europeans alike," who were focused on interracial relationships and not their progeny.⁴⁶ Gold Coasters did not call on the British colonial state to provide for the care of multiracial children; neither did the British intervene. African families absorbed multiracial children. Further, British law conferred a common nationality on all people in the Commonwealth, whether in colonies or in Britain: all were British subjects after 1904 and citizens after 1948. That Africans and Europeans in the British Commonwealth held, in theory, the same legal status may be why claims of distinction and organizing by multiracial people did not result in similar fashion to métis in French Africa. Yet, despite the letter of the law, British colonialism still differentiated access to political rights and hierarchies of belonging based on "the color line." When multiracial Gold Coasters protested against aspects of colonial rule, they did so together with black Gold Coasters to decry their shared experiences of inequity.⁴⁷

Multiracial people in FWA and FEA chronicled in this book enacted self-naming practices and, at times, racist views against blacks, as did multiracial people in British Central Africa. They held similarly ambiguous positions in relation to French colonial rule as did the métis in Senegal, at times facilitating colonial governance and at others tying their claims to those of Africans of varied identities who also claimed to be rights-bearers. And they maintained affective ties and a feeling of connectedness to maternal communities, as did multiracial people in Madagascar and the Gold Coast. As in Madagascar, métis

⁴⁴ Christopher J. Lee, *Unreasonable Histories: Nativism, Multiracial Lives, and the Genealogical Imagination in British Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 239.

⁴⁵ Juliette Millner-Thornton, *The Long Shadow of the British Empire: The Ongoing Legacies of Race and Class in Zambia* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012).

⁴⁶ Carina Ray, *Crossing the Color Line: Race, Sex, and the Contested Politics of Colonialism in Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015), 16.

⁴⁷ Carina Ray, "Decrying White Peril: Interracial Sex and the Rise of Anticolonial Nationalism in the Gold Coast," *The American Historical Review* 119, 1 (2014), 78–110.

who congregated in towns and colonial capitals of FEA and FWA to attend French schools or seek wage labor opportunities coalesced with each other in social circles. But in FWA and FEA they also formed associations and launched collective actions to assert their group identities and the rights that such identities entailed. *Multiracial Identities* is distinct from previously published works on the history of multiraciality in Africa in that it demonstrates the international dimensions of how métis reached out to each other and envisioned a shared sense of identity with multiracial people elsewhere in the French Empire, Europe, and Africa.

Sources, Methods, and Organization of the Book

Multiracial Identities draws on various and diverse source materials, methodologies, and transnational research. Following the paths of historical actors entailed conducting archival and field research in Africa – in Senegal, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo; and in Europe – France, Italy, and Germany. Archival research yielded thousands of documents, such as citizenship case files, administrative and financial records of schools and orphanages, police records, publications of métis self-help organizations and their correspondence with colonial administrators, documents by missionaries, and the files of private charities. Archival research has also unearthed the correspondence that men and women in FWA and FEA sent to people in positions of power in the colonial state and Christian churches. These precious documents reveal narratives of love, pain, separation, and attachment, providing insights into the emotional history so often missing from research in African studies. In analyzing texts produced by African historical actors, I have heeded Derek Peterson's and Stephanie Newell's highlighting of writing and print cultures of African societies as underutilized yet rich sources of African history.⁴⁸

Archival research alone was not sufficient. *Multiracial Identities* poses questions about intimacies, family history, and trauma, questions that historical actors and states often sought to erase or hide from the public record. I pursued fieldwork alongside archival research, gathering private family papers and photographs from the descendants of my historical actors and the few who

⁴⁸ Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004); Stephanie Newell, *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading*, Oxford Postcolonial Studies Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Newell, *Ghanaian Popular Fiction: "Thrilling Discoveries in Conjugal Life"* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Newell, "Newsprint Worlds and Reading Publics in Colonial Contexts" in "Colonial Public Spheres and the Worlds of Print," special issue, *Itinerario: Journal of Imperial and Global Interactions* 44, 2 (2020), 435–45.

were still alive and had lived in the period of French colonial rule. I traveled to wherever I was able to track down these descendants and I recorded thirty oral histories in Gabon, Senegal, the United States, France, and Italy. I have analyzed both the oral and the text sources with a critical eye for the biases, viewpoints, and limitations of all source materials.

The arc of this book traces the geographic and ideological circuits of métis in the African continent, elsewhere in the French Empire, and in Europe, between the 1930s and 1960, as they formulated changing ideas about racial identity tied to claims to and opportunities for child welfare resources and French citizenship. Chapter 1 chronicles métissage from the turn of the nineteenth century to the 1930s and outlines the varied circumstances in which women gave birth to multiracial children in the early decades of the twentieth century, as well as the possibilities and constraints these circumstances played in childrearing, naming practices, and educational strategies. I establish the foundational significance with which women and children and ideas about motherhood and family intersected with ideas about race and legal status, themes which would intersect and be contested for decades to come.

Chapter 2 traces the experiences of children who passed through the doors of state, private, and missionary institutions and into the households of maternal kin in Libreville, St. Louis, and elsewhere in FEA and FWA, starting in the 1930s. The chapter examines the intersectionality of racial thought and concepts about children, childhood, and welfare. In the 1930s, a minimalist colonial welfare state emerged both FWA and FEA. Colonial administrators pooled limited amounts of money and people into state-run and missionary-run schools, residences, and social and health services exclusively for métis children – who in policies were called “wards of the state.” It was not just the actions and thoughts of colonizers that led to this welfare state. It was also through the insistence of African mothers, kin, and other African individuals who were not métis, as well as métis self-help societies, that these children became entitled to certain rights and resources.⁴⁹ Here, I apply Abosede George’s argument, as seen in her study of children and childhood in colonial-era Lagos, for scholars to “historicize changes in the ideology of childhood over time” in African history and pay more attention to ideas about “childhood itself as a historical or theoretical question” and “social category and a life stage.” By doing so, she argues,

⁴⁹ In French Africa, it was often African caretakers – and not the French or Belgians, as occurred in child removal schemes in Indochina, Belgian Congo, and Rwanda – who enrolled multiracial children in special French state or mission schools for métis as an investment in children’s futures and capacity for social mobility. Firpo, *The Uprooted*; Assumani Budagwa, *Noirs, blancs, métis: La Belgique et la ségrégation des métis du Congo belge et du Ruanda-Urundi (1908–1960)* (self-pub., 2014).

we can more fully analyze how “societies view notions of progress, development, modernity, and futurity.”⁵⁰

Chapter 3 also focuses on FWA and FEA in the 1930s. It centers the question of citizenship, specifically examining how métis sought out, obtained, or were denied French legal status in response to decrees promulgated by the French specifically for métis. The chapter analyzes how the hundreds of men, women, and children who petitioned for citizenship invested in the colonial courts and colonial law to acknowledge their feelings of selfhood and belonging to French society. Implementing this change in French nationality law resulted in further contestations between petitioners, witnesses in their local communities who were to corroborate their claims, and colonial officials regarding the slipperiness of how biology, culture, language, and descent shaped racial identity and citizenship.

Chapter 4 spotlights Brazzaville, the capital of Free France for much of World War II, from 1939 to 1950. This town was a site of entrenched debates around the recalibration of race and multiraciality, power, and the rights of French citizenship – which would impact all of French Africa after the end of the war. In Brazzaville, the black governor-general of FEA, Félix Eboué (who was a French citizen from Guyana) sought to end what he saw as colorist entitlements for métis and to enact child welfare and the conferral of citizenship in ways that would more universally assure the development of African societies and buttress French colonial rule. His visions collided with those of activist métis associations, which forwarded varied visions of their relationships to black Africans and white supremacy and the particular legal status and social entitlements the associations sought. The chapter traces how these contestations in Brazzaville reverberated across FEA, FWA, elsewhere in the French empire, and in Europe where varied military and civilian factions claimed to be the legitimate government of the fractured French nation. Post–World War II was a watershed period in which the French were forced to respond to expanded claims, differentiated by race, across French Africa for equality and autonomy. A new French constitution of 1946, drafted with African participation, declared all who were indigènes in French Africa to now be citoyens. Black political thinkers and delegates elected to newly formed legislative assemblies questioned the conferral of entitlements specifically for métis. The chapter traces how various race-based discourses shaped rights-based discourses in how historical actors sought to define the meaning of citizenship, colonial reform, and autonomy during these years of increased anticolonial agitation.

Chapters 5 and 6 are a dyad. Chapter 5 focuses on Dakar in the early 1950s and analyzes how Nicolas Rigonaux and the Union of Euraficans of French

⁵⁰ Abosede George, *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor and Social Development in Colonial Lagos* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), 13–15.

West Africa shifted the policies of the colonial welfare state, diverting colonial state expenditures on behalf of multiracial children from European state and missionary institutions to direct payments made to mothers and the Union itself. The chapter narrates Rigonaux's founding of a charity and foyer that housed métis boys. Additionally, it discusses how métis across the colonial units of FEA and FWA began to claim a collective identity and mobilize together, and Rigonaux corresponded with the leaders of métis associations in individual colonies to form the Union of Euraficans of Black Africa. The Union also began to publish a French-language newsletter, seeking to create pathways for métis in French Africa to directly control money, services, and communications with each other and multiracial people elsewhere in the world.

Chapter 6 crisscrosses between Dakar, Brazzaville, Paris, and Neu-Asel in Germany, from 1959 to 1963. The chapter explores the emergence of a concept I call "multiracial internationalism" in the twilight years of colonial rule and at the dawn of independent Africa. In these years, the name of the Union of Euraficans of Black Africa changed to the International Union of Métis. The name change is illustrative of the organization's efforts to cultivate a shared identity as "multiracial" not only across colonial boundaries in French Africa but also reaching beyond Africa and the French-speaking world. The organization held two congresses, one in Brazzaville and the other in Neu-Asel, in which attendees forwarded the concept of multiracial people as a global family and the rights of multiracial people as universal human rights that transcended rapidly changing ideas of colony, nation, and citizenship. Contributing to recent scholarship that seeks to complexitize the meaning and processes of decolonization, this chapter explores alternative African futures, crafted in multiracial thought and praxes in ways that both contested and reified the racialized logics and binaries that had characterized the colonial period.⁵¹

⁵¹ For analyses that disrupt interpretations of decolonization in Africa as inevitably leading to nation-states see Jean Marie Allman, *The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1993); Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Lee, *Unreasonable Histories*; Wilder, *Freedom Time*.