

The Original Exception: The *Originaires* in Senegal, 1848–1960

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Abstract

When French colonialists governed parts of Africa, they partitioned Africans into groups of unique, individual statuses: *sujets*, *métis*, *originaires*, *tirailleurs*, and *assimilés*. These statuses contributed to uneven access to French goods and services within the French Empire, and the effects of such privilege help to explain the variation in success in Francophone West Africa. Senegal, specifically, included four privileged cities known as the Four Communes. Daily life in these four cities—Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque, and Dakar—resembled Parisian life, in terms of both architecture and economic structure. The number of French settlers in the Communes increased access to education and administrative positions for Africans, primarily those belonging to the *métis* or *originaires* categories. This paper focuses on the lives of *originaires*, who were granted citizenship rights in the early twentieth century, attended French schools, and often worked for the French empire or as wealthy businessmen. *Originaires* gained the right to vote in 1833, although most other African groups did not gain this political right until 1946. This earlier access to political rights helped to establish the place of *originaires* and the Four Communes in the greater French Empire, which in turn led to a more active role in the French Union and better post-independence relationships. Furthermore, the success of these individuals contributed to Senegal's economic success in a post-colonial world.

Introduction

Originaires in colonial French West Africa were an exceptional group within the hierarchical structure of Senegal, as they represented a “crossroad between European, African and Muslim institutions and values.”¹ This hierarchal structure was based on both citizenship and race, and *originaires* were distinct within this categorization. The French began their exploitation of the Senegalese peoples in 1659 with the establishment of a trade port in Saint-Louis, though they were not the first to be attracted by the natural resources of the Senegal River. France was the third largest exploiter in the transatlantic slave trade, removed Africans from the continent, sent them to the Americas, and shipped sugarcane and coffee and other plantation crops to wealthy Europeans. Although later viewed as more civilized than interior Senegal, Saint-Louis and Gorée were the first port

¹ Francesca Bruschi, “Military Collaboration, Conscription and Citizenship Rights in the Four Communes of Senegal and in French West Africa (1912-1946),” in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau et al. (Leiden, NL: Brill Publishing, 2010): 429.

of contact with Europeans and consequently lost nearly 300,000 Africans to the transatlantic slave trade.²

Nearly two centuries after such harsh interactions with Africans, France prohibited the slave trade and freed all former slaves living in French colonies following the February Revolution in France (1848) and the increased emphasis on the Rights of Man. In addition to freeing Africans from bondage, France also granted Senegal a seat as a representative in the French National Assembly and subsequently extended voting rights to anyone living in the two cities of Saint-Louis and Gorée. As the coastal cities of Dakar and Rufisque gained both economic and political importance, they too were granted the unique status as French voters, regardless of their personal status, or *statut personnel*. The status of French citizen was fully extended to *originaires* in 1916, nearly thirty years before the rest of the French Empire. Together, Saint-Louis, Gorée, Rufisque, and Dakar constituted the *Quatre Communes* (Four Communes).³ Because of their exceptional positions, both the unique geographic location and citizenship within the broader French Empire, the Four Communes have had greater economic success and more political clout than the former Protectorate in the interior regions of Senegal.

Based on existing economic literature investigating the long-term impacts of historical institutions, both colonial history and colonial rulers—Belgium, France, Great Britain, or Portugal—have significant consequences for economic growth in the present.⁴ Furthermore, these institutions and histories are “persistent,” meaning that they have long-term ramifications.⁵ Particularly, this persistence of history can be easily observed in considering how education has a lasting effect on development and institutions. Because education provides individuals with agency and opportunity for a more prosperous future, it continues to impact generations long after the initial school is built.⁶ Relative to French colonial history in Senegal and French West Africa, the Four Communes have had a significant impact the current economic and political state of Dakar in particular, as well as the country as a whole. This paper argues that the unique status of *originaires* in the Four Communes created during French colonization has resulted in greater economic success in these cities, Saint-Louis, Rufisque, Gorée, and Dakar. The *originaires* were considered as exceptional among Africans and special privileges among this unique group have continued despite the end of colonialism in Senegal.

² Nathan Nunn, “The Long-Term Effects of Africa’s Slave Trades,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123, no. 1 (2008): 139–176.

³ *Quatre Communes* will be referred to as both the Four Communes and Communes throughout this essay to be consistent with the literature.

⁴ Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson, “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation,” *American Economic Review* 91 (2001): 1369–1401; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, “The Reversal of Fortune: Geography and Institutions in the Making of Modern World Income Distribution,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117 (2002): 1231–1294; Graziella Bertocchi and Fabio Canova, “Did Colonization Matter for Growth? An Empirical Exploration into the Historical Causes of Africa’s Underdevelopment,” *European Economic Review* 46 (2002): 1851–1871; Robert E. Hall and Charles I. Jones, “Why do Some Countries Produce So Much More Output Per Worker than Others?” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 114, no. 1 (1999): 83–116; Nunn, “Historical Legacies: A Model Linking Africa’s Past to its Current Underdevelopment,” *Journal of Development Economics* 83, no. 1 (2007): 157–175; Nunn, “The Long Term Effects of Africa’s Slave Trades.”

⁵ Melissa Dell, “The Persistent Effects of Peru’s Mining *Mita*,” *Econometrica* 78, no. 6 (2010): 1863–1903.

⁶ Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson, and Pierre Yared, “From Education to Democracy?” *National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 11204* (2005): 1–11.

Colonial Senegal

The Four Communes were the first places in Senegal to be colonized by the French, and this history has set these areas apart from the interior. After the partial colonization along the coastal area by France in the mid-seventeenth century, Senegal was fully colonized in the late nineteenth century after the Berlin Conference in 1884. This conference outlined the agreed-upon rules among Europeans for dividing up the vast continent in what is known as the “Scramble for Africa.” Due to both a delay in interaction between the French and the African “savages” as well as the difference in statuses, the Four Communes have a distinct history compared to the interior or protectorate of Senegal. Much of this distinction is rooted in the varying terms of economic production that each region held. Senegal was a consistent economic powerhouse for France due to a constant supply of slaves until the mid-nineteenth century, a mass export of peanuts and groundnuts, and a coastal location providing quick access to France and to interior Africa as necessary.

Granted status several years apart—Saint-Louis and Gorée in 1872, followed by Rufisque and Gorée in 1880 and 1887, respectively—the Communes allowed Africans living in each city for at least five years to obtain rights as voters in French elections as a “blood tax”⁷ for their defense of the French Empire. Additionally, “black and *métis* residents of Senegal’s towns claimed citizenship rights because of their long history of loyalty to France and their engagement with republican political institutions.”⁸ These rights were granted regardless of personal status, meaning that a person could still be Muslim and practice polygamy while possessing a French political and economic identity.⁹ The decree that granted voting rights to Africans in Saint-Louis in 1872 also “created municipal councils responsible for deciding the local tax rate, collecting commune revenues, and reviewing the annual commune budget and presenting it to the governor for approval,” further distinguishing the specific role of *originaires* within French Senegal.¹⁰

Citizenship to freed slaves in the old colonies was granted in 1794 under the decree of *16 Pluviose Year II*, which proclaimed “Any person born free or having legally acquired his liberty enjoys in the French colonies: (1) civil rights [and] (2) political rights under conditions prescribed by law.”¹¹ This right and abolishment of slavery was extended to Saint-Louis in 1797 and Gorée in 1848. Because this legal action freed African slaves, nearly 12,000 mostly illiterate Africans obtained political rights equal to those of a French citizen.¹² This is exceptional because a later policy of *assimilation* required that Africans be well-educated and fluent in the French language; however, the

⁷ Mamadou Diouf, “The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation and the Civility of the Originaires of the Four Communes (Senegal): A Nineteenth Century Globalization Project,” *Development and Change* 29 (1998): 672; Bruschi, “Military Collaboration, Conscription and Citizenship Rights,” 429.

⁸ *Métis* are of mixed blood, meaning one French and one African parent, as will be discussed in subsequent sections. Hillary Jones, “Rethinking Politics in the Colony: The *Métis* of Senegal and Urban Politics in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,” *Journal of African History* 53 (2012): 344.

⁹ This issue of personal status would prove to be an issue in upcoming battles with *assimilés*, Algerian Muslims, and eventually for Africans gaining citizenship under the umbrella of the French Union. Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 16–17.

¹⁰ Jones, “Rethinking Politics in the Colony,” 334.

¹¹ Michael Crowder, *Senegal: A Study in French Assimilation Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 10.

¹² *Ibid.*

originaires gained French citizenship simply due to their geographic location and despite their complete unfamiliarity with the French language. Additionally, this origin of political rights was not distinguished based on socioeconomic class, except for owning land, but rather by proximity to and interaction with the French.

The Four Communes not only possessed unique citizenship rights compared to that of interior Senegal, but each city also had a distinct responsibility in the quotidian and long-term operations of the colony and frequently greater French West Africa. For example, Saint-Louis was the colonial capital city until 1902 and contained the largest population of *métis*; Gorée served as the headquarters for colonial naval operations; Rufisque was the commercial center for the southern markets, especially for peanuts due to its proximity to the inland areas growing crops; and Dakar was the administrative powerhouse, containing the Governor General's palace and administration for all of French West Africa.¹³ Furthermore, in terms of geographic location, Saint-Louis was unique as it was a combination of both Islamic culture, influenced primarily by the nearby city of Médine, and the presence of French colonial administrators as well as *métis* traders.¹⁴

The Communes maintained an advantage over other African cities and were better adjusted to living communities composed of diverse peoples and backgrounds because they underwent urbanization in the nineteenth century, nearly a century earlier than interior Senegal.¹⁵ Much of the urbanization efforts in the Four Communes included a telecommunications network and an efficient transportation for goods and peoples in the construction of railroads, as is evident Figure 1. Although often economically beneficial to the colonies and France, the railroads were not without their problems, and African workers frequently protested railroad labor through strikes, as is phenomenally depicted in the African literature, *God's Bits of Wood*.¹⁶

¹³ Diouf, "The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation," 674; G. Wesley Johnson, Jr., *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal: The Struggle for Power in the Four Communes, 1900-1920* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971), 34.

¹⁴ Diouf, "Islam, the 'Originaires,' and the Making of Public Space in a Colonial City: Saint-Louis of Senegal," in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, ed. Mamadou Diouf (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 183.

¹⁵ Crowder, *Senegal*, 83.

¹⁶ Ousmane Sèmbène, *God's Bits of Wood* (Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers, 1960).

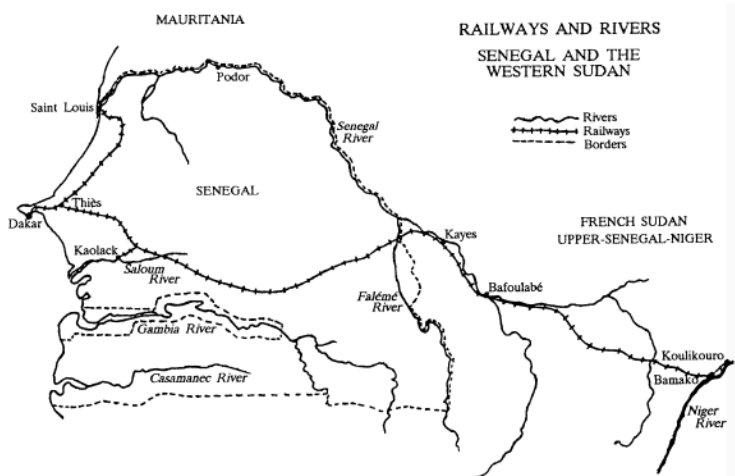


Figure 1. Railways and Waterways in French Senegal¹⁷

Because of the economic opportunities the Four Communes provided, as well as their status as French citizens, these cities underwent remarkable population growth during the mass expansion of French colonies, as illustrated in Table 1. Not all of the Africans residing in the Four Communes possessed *originaires* status. Specifically, “in 1878-79, there were 5,000 originaires qualified to vote out of 30,000 Africans living in the Four Communes; there were 7,000 out of 65,000 in 1910, and 18,000 out of 66,000 in 1922.”¹⁸ The rapid change in the population of *originaires* during the early twentieth century is attributed to three things: (1) “rural African women who were expecting children now made a practice of moving to a Commune temporarily so that their children would be born as *originaires*,” (2) the extension of *originaires* status based on *judgment suppletif* (judicial ruling), and (3) high population growth among *originaire* families.¹⁹ Non-citizens residing in the Communes had better access to state services but were still at a disadvantage when compared to the *originaires*, particularly in terms of education and political activism.

Table 1. Growth of the Four Communes 1865-1921²⁰

^a Estimated figures.

Commune	1865 ^a	1878	1910	1921
Saint-Louis	15,000	15,980	22,093	17,493
Gorée	3,000	3,243	1,306	917
Rufisque	300	1,173	12,457	11,106
Dakar	300	1,566	24,914	30,037

¹⁷ Margaret O. McLane, “Railroads and Waterways: The Dakar Railway Network and the Senegal River in the ‘mise en valeur’ of French West Africa,” *Proceedings of the Meeting of the Colonial Historical Society* 16 (1992): 98.

¹⁸ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal*, 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁰ Reprinted from Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal*, 35.

The Four Communes resembled metropolitan French in terms of architecture and paved roads, with Dakar being referred to as the “little Paris” in Africa, mostly due to the presence of French settlers and bolstering trade in the urban areas.²¹ They were ruled under direct administration—perhaps even an overseas department—as opposed to a protectorate, and in 1946,²² they were “given full municipal status as equivalent to French towns.”²³ Although the Four Communes were strong urban centers, they were not the only urban areas in Senegal as places, like Thiès, were economically urban but lacked the distinct political status of both *originaires* and Communes. This further solidified their place in the Empire as different from interior Senegal. However, the French Communes were not intended to be distinct but were the first places to be under French control. By the time the rest of Senegal was under French rule, the local administration refused to extend citizenship rights despite the imposition of the French government in the early 1880s advocating for continuous inclusion of Africans within the French Empire.²⁴

Statutes in French Senegal

Although the *originaires* occupied a unique space with the colonial empire, these individuals were not the only exceptional group among Africans living in French Senegal or even the first to gain a distinct status. This section will briefly describe the various identities of French West Africa and how the *originaires* continued to represent a unique category. It is important to understand the special status of *originaires* in the Four Communes in order to analyze how this status has contributed to the region’s overall success. The most basic sorting of the colonized only distinguishes between citizenships and subjects, or *sujets*. However, this would combine *originaires*, *métis*, and Frenchmen into one classification, which obscures the diversity and privilege within each group and also disregards the special place of African soldiers, or *tirailleurs*, within the French Empire. Because Frenchmen, who were simply citizens from France living in Senegal, were most likely businessmen or working for the colonial administration, it is not necessary to analyze their place of privilege or their access to education and welfare programs considering they represented the highest status by directly belonging to the French race.

Métis

French colonial administrators were required to live in Senegal for several yearlong periods because of their need to be close to the African *sujets* in order to provide stability and enforce labor. Oftentimes, these men would marry *signares*, or the elite African women. Because Frenchwomen were lacking in the colonies, France originally encouraged interracial marriages “to produce a more stable community.”²⁵ However, these marriages were often not official in terms of Catholic rites and frequently dissolved when men returned back to France. The women, as well as their children, possessed certain privileges in colonial Senegal including inheritance of property and trade, which provided them with greater economic security and capacity.²⁶ Offspring of a Frenchman and a native woman resulted in children of mixed parentage, referred to as *métis* in

²¹ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal*, 34.

²² Oludare H. Idowu, “The Establishment of Protectorate Administration in Senegal, 1890-1904,” *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 2 (1968): 248

²³ Crowder, *Senegal*, 34.

²⁴ Idowu, “Assimilation in 19th Century Senegal,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 9, no. 34 (1969): 216.

²⁵ John D. Hargreaves, “Assimilation in Eighteenth-Century Senegal,” *The Journal of African History* 6, no. 2 (1965): 178.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

French.²⁷ The status of *métis* was unique because they were considered to be French—unlike the principle of hypodescent of mulattos in the Americas—and were granted French political rights and social benefits at birth.

Métis were often educated in French schools, either in the colonies or mainland France. Because they “blurred the dividing line between colonizers and colonies,” *métis* existed as go-betweens among the French and the *sujets*.²⁸ They were educated in French institutions but were acclimated to the somewhat hostile African environment and resistant to many African diseases.²⁹ This intermediary position and dual identity resulted in an elite status that allowed and encouraged *métis* to serve in positions of power, such as lower administrative positions and eventually mayors of the Communes and deputies representing Senegal to the French National Assembly.³⁰ Although the classification of *métis* would later present a challenge to the authority of both *originaires* and *sujets*, their position in the French colonial society may have helped to pave the way for other Africans to become administrators and government officials.

Métis were a representation of the potential success that the policy of assimilation could have in Africa. *Assimilation* was based on the philosophy of the French Revolution and Declaration of the Rights of Man, which were considered as “applicable everywhere, since it was thought that if men were given the opportunity they would become civilized, rational, and free.”³¹ This ideology also “assumed that what was good for themselves [the French] as rational beings would also be good for other people of whatever colour, race or cultural heritage,” which motivated the French to pursue the “civilization” of natives, especially through the spread of the French language and education.³² Nearly the entire *métis* population had converted to Catholicism, which eliminated the issues of *statut personnel* that plagued other groups within French Senegal.³³ Although *métis* had French blood, they were also African and when granted citizenship status they were a symbol of success that men could become civilized with education. Because of their achievements and unique place in society, *métis* viewed themselves as distinct and often superior to Africans because of their French association and successful *assimilation*.³⁴ Further accentuating their unique status in the French Empire, two important and powerful *métis* families, the Devès and Carpots, held several prestigious administrative positions and influenced much of the colonial policy in Senegal. Despite their prestige in the early years of French colonization, the *métis* power began to dissolve as Frenchmen began to bring their wives to the colony beginning in 1914, and their numbers were slowly reduced.³⁵

Sujets

Unlike the *originaires* and the *métis*, this group of native Africans lacked any conceivable form of citizenship or political representation. Their place in the French Empire was constructed through *mise en valeur* (development or improvement), and they

²⁷ *Métis* are also referred to as mulattos or Creoles with respect to the literature on French West Africa, depending on the author and the time period in which it was written.

²⁸ Emmanuelle Saada, *Empire's Children: Race, Filiation, and Citizenship in the French Colonies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 81; Jones, “Rethinking Politics in the Colony,” 328.

²⁹ Saada, *Empire's Children*, 212.

³⁰ Jones, “Rethinking Politics in the Colony,” 330; Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 107.

³¹ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 75.

³² Idowu, “Assimilation in 19th Century Senegal,” 210.

³³ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 23.

³⁴ Jones, “Rethinking Politics in the Colony,” 343.

³⁵ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 106.

possessed “duties” to the French Republic rather than rights within it.³⁶ *Mise en valeur* was the rational development of both natural and human resources, which shifted from construction of railroads and telecommunications to education, agricultural, health, and trade throughout the French colonial period.³⁷ The purpose of *mise en valeur* was threefold: (1) to increase France’s population in terms of manpower against Germany; (2) to raise Africa’s “financial contribution to France”; (3) to supply greater France with additional raw materials.³⁸ *Sujets* were compelled by both *mise en valeur* and the policy of *assimilation* as their primary place within the rest of the colony. They lacked access to higher levels of education and were also more likely to be educated by African teachers in an indigenous or Arabic language. Education, which will later be discussed in terms of modern-day Senegal, was used as a tool for upward mobility, increases in political rights, and representation within the French Empire as well as further justification for the success of assimilation.

In addition to this discrimination, *sujets* were under the authority of the native courts, *indigénat*, instead of the French or Muslim courts. The *indigénat*

consisted of regulations that allowed colonial administrators to inflict punishment on African subjects without obtaining a court judgment or approval from the metropolis. It allowed the colonial officers to jail any Africans for up to two years without trial, to impose heavy taxes and punitive fines, or to burn villages of those who refused to pay.³⁹

This court was also responsible for the “administrative sanctions applied colonial subjects,” which greatly contributed to the psychological colonization of the “native.”⁴⁰ Despite the severity and discrimination of the native courts on colonial subjects, France continued to justify the use of the *indigénat* as “a function of the lack of advancement of the populations that they sought to govern,” arguing that natives were still lesser members of the rational societal structure and could only be brought to civilization through harsh punishments rather than education.⁴¹ Although the *indigénat* technically applied to non-citizens living in Dakar—some 40,000 in 1922—the native courts were never implemented in practice, and those living in the Communes, regardless of their specific status, were under the jurisdiction of French or Muslims courts of law.⁴²

Sujets were not given citizenship rights within the French Empire, later referred to as the French Union post–World War II, until the Lamine Guèye law of 1946. Lamine Guèye served as an African representative on the French Assembly and was the primary advocate of extended citizenship status to all French status. However, this law was poorly implemented as French representatives of the National Assembly continued their attempts to deny citizenship based on the *statut personnel*. Because of these disagreements at the legislative level, *sujets* were given citizenship of the French Union but not necessarily of France itself. Specifically, Africans were given passports distinguishing their belonging to the greater French Community in efforts to accommodate the issue of *statut personnel*.⁴³ Subsequently, this citizenship did not necessarily imply voting rights for all *sujets*; only 1.5 million out of the entire overseas

³⁶ Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 166.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸ Crowder, *Senegal*, 27.

³⁹ George B. N. Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 83.

⁴⁰ Gregory Mann, “What was the *Indigénat*? The ‘Empire of Law’ in French West Africa,” *Journal of African History* 50 (2009): 331.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 346.

⁴³ Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*, 113; Crowder, *Senegal*, 31.

population were granted voting rights and the remaining constituents were represented indirectly.⁴⁴

Tirailleurs

Tirailleurs Sénégalaise were originally men recruited from the Four Communes who were responsible for pacification in French colonies, including Algeria, French Indochina, and interior Senegal. As the need for African troops intensified throughout the World Wars of the early twentieth century, men were recruited from outside the Communes with the help of *chefs de canton*—African chiefs in charge of villages under the jurisdiction of a French administrator. These chiefs provided troops in exchange for lower taxes and slightly more power in their respective villages.⁴⁵ Additionally, thanks to the legislative work of Senegalese deputy Blaise Diagne in August 1915, *tirailleurs* specifically from the Communes were prevented from joining the African troops and allowed to fight in the French regiments due to their distinct status as French citizens and protest of the military’s previous intolerance.⁴⁶ *Originaires* belonging to the regular French army had access to goods and services equal to that of the French military, as Table 2 clearly reveals.

Table 2. Comparative service conditions for *originaires* and protectorate Africans, ca. 1915⁴⁷

Condition	Originaires in regular army	Colonial troops
Service liability	Initial three-year enlistment	Same
Pay	Same as French soldiers	One-half <i>originaires</i> ’ pay
Quarters	Barracks, with bed	No provision for beds; sleep on ground or floor; blankets issued
Food	European food; food allowance 3.76 francs per ration	Traditional African food prepared by Senegalese women accompanying the troops; allowance 1.68 francs per ration
Promotion	Same as Frenchmen; can become officers in regular army	No promotion beyond noncommissioned rank; authority over African troops only
Pension (25 years service)	1,500 to 1,800 francs	437 to 572 francs

Despite the discrimination between regiments, African soldiers with *sujet* status were awarded with specific rights after their service. In exchange for defending greater France, all *tirailleurs* claimed a “blood debt” which included a social pension for

⁴⁴ Crowder, *Senegal*, 32–33.

⁴⁵ Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 15; Bruschi, “Military Collaboration, Conscription and Citizenship Rights,” 441.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 183, 187.

⁴⁷ Reprinted from Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 190.

the soldier and his family, and exclusion from the harsh *indigénat*. Furthermore several former soldiers successfully petitioned for French citizenship.⁴⁸ Upon returning from the wars, *tirailleurs* cited that “the war experience had changed their perception of themselves and of their role in society,” which resulted in their demand for more political representation and greater social benefits.⁴⁹ This increase in privilege within the French community may have motivated soldiers to become politically active in advocating for rights as citizens under colonialism and pushing for independence during the formation of the French Union. However, Gregory Mann, a historian at Columbia University, claims that the evidence for soldiers fighting for independence is “rarely substantiated,” rather “political independence arose from the intersection of variety of factors most of which were beyond veteran’s control...veterans in Soudan Français were engaged in a complex struggle to secure and maintain the privileges and material perks of their relationship with France.”⁵⁰ Regardless of their role in the independence movements, *tirailleurs* represented a unique part of French-African society that allotted certain privileges and prestige because of their service to maintaining greater France.

Originaires

With an improved understanding of the alternative categories within French West Africa, it is easier to observe the extraordinary status of the *originaires*. The Four Communes—Dakar, Gorée, Rufisque, and Saint-Louis—were the first cities colonized in France and therefore had the longest standing relationship with French citizens and institutions, aside from brief periods under the British during the Seven Years War and the Napoleonic Wars or under Vichy France during World War II.⁵¹ Consequently, in spite of or perhaps due to these brief interruptions in French rule, the *originaires* continued to possess their unique status as Africans with French citizenship. *Originaires* formed both hybridization and acculturation of French society as they possessed “a free and subversive relationship with the French language; a strong claim and a supreme affirmation of equality with the metropolitans; rights to defend and promote; political rights that express identity connected with a special status that safeguards a unique civility,” as well as their intersecting identities as Muslims.⁵²

The most exceptional status is in regards to the *statut personnel*, which meant that *originaires* were allowed to continue practicing Islam and in some instances polygamy. However, this resulted in further complications concerning the status of children from second and third wives, since these marriages were permitted but not viewed as legitimate under French civil law.⁵³ Apart from the obstacle of polygamy, *originaires* were the only group of Africans who were allowed to retain their full Muslim identity, including the right to trial under Muslim courts. *Originaires* were politically and economically assimilated with the French, but they lacked the absolute cultural assimilation by preserving their Muslim identity.⁵⁴ Because of their unique status, they possessed the agency to refuse French cultural assimilation, as well as the refusal of the French civil code and the ability to argue for a legitimate Muslim court.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Mann, *Native Sons*, 6; Mann, “What was the *Indigénat*?” 344.

⁴⁹ Bruschi, “Military Collaboration, Conscription and Citizenship Rights,” 446.

⁵⁰ Mann, *Native Sons*, 22–23.

⁵¹ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 22, 25; Diouf, “The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation,” 672.

⁵² Diouf, “The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation,” 685; Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 42.

⁵³ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 200.

⁵⁴ Diouf, “The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation,” 675; Idowu, “Assimilation in 19th Century Senegal,” 212.

⁵⁵ Diouf, “The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation,” 671.

Assimilés, a group of Africans who were assimilated to French culture, were forced to abandon polygamy and prove their identity as French with regard to the registration of life events, such as marriages, births, and deaths of all family members, as well as confirmation of French education and fluency in the French language.⁵⁶ The *statut personnel* was the central problem in extending citizenship to Algerian Muslims. When France finally extended citizenship to all Africans under the Lamine Guèye law in 1946, the debate of *statut personnel* emerged once again, with the resulting compromise being citizenship of the French Union.

Political Rights

Although *originaires* were never officially excluded from citizenship based on their Muslim identity, several governor-generals attempted to lessen their claims to French citizenship, which was primarily granted as a result of the legislative work of Blaise Diagne. Diagne belonged to the educated class (*évolué*) and was instrumental in gaining political rights for Senegalese and other West Africans. In 1910, only *originaires* physically located in the communes could participate in voting, since “the French government did not consider the *originaires* as true citizens.”⁵⁷ This was a deliberative reaction to *originaires* outnumbering Frenchmen living in Senegal, in an attempt to restrict their ability to further influence legislation and French politics. Additional benefits of *originaires*’ status included exemption from the *indigénat* and the ability to choose trials under either French or Muslim courts in agreement with the teachings of the Qur’an. Under Governor General William Ponty, who passed a reform in 1912, *originaires* living outside the communes were placed under the responsibility of the *indigénat*.⁵⁸ However, Diagne was successful in repealing this law and reinforcing the special privileges of the *originaires* both within and outside the Communes.

Originaires gained further influence in the colonies with the deputy election of Blaise Diagne to the French National Assembly in 1914. He was the first black African to serve at the legislative level of government. In 1916, based off of his campaign platform for deputy, Diagne pushed the Assembly to confirm that the *originaires* “did not simply have certain rights of a citizen but *were* French citizens” and further restated that they could keep their *statut personnel* (personal status, i.e. Muslim).⁵⁹ Furthermore, it extended *originaires* status to those born in the Four Communes but residing outside the four cities, as well as to their offspring. This was confirmed through *judgment suppletif*, in which “the petitioner brought two friends to court to swear that he had been either born in the Communes or born of *originaires* parents.”⁶⁰ Alongside *métis* and Frenchmen, who felt empowered after the successful election of Blaise Diagne, *originaires* were allowed to and frequently elected to local government positions. As further proof of their political influence, the elections in 1919 led to “all Africans in charge of the local governments of the Four Communes,” as many Frenchmen were occupied with fighting in the First World War.⁶¹

Other exceptions that accompanied the *originaires*’ identity were the effectiveness of their political objections, both inside and outside the Communes. Historian Rebecca Shereikis examines *originaires* who left the Four Communes for the nearby cities of Kayes or Medine and how their identity as Muslims and voters influenced their political protestation of rights to trial under Muslim Courts outside the

⁵⁶ Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*, 168.

⁵⁷ Crowder, *Senegal*, 19.

⁵⁸ Rebecca Shereikis, “From Law to Custom: The Shifting Legal Status of Muslim *Originaires* in Kayes and Medina, 1903-1913,” *The Journal of African History* 42 (2001): 275.

⁵⁹ Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*, 16.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics*, 196.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 202.

Communes. They petitioned the French administration to obtain such rights to a Muslim court, but it was subsequently prohibited in 1913 and *originaires* living in these two cities suddenly found themselves under the jurisdiction of the hostile *indigénat*.⁶² However, this did not discourage *originaires* from demanding their political rights. They continued to be politically active in their communities and continuously protest legislation that they deemed to be unfair or contradictory to their Islamic culture. Furthermore, some *originaires* refused to pay capitation taxes in the interior and other colonies because of the special privileges they previously held in the Communes.⁶³

When the General Council was dissolved in 1920 to create the Colonial Council, the *originaires* were once again favored compared to autochthonous Africans, as the newly formed council “consisted of forty members; half were elected by citizens of the communes and half, nominated by French-appointed canton chiefs of the protectorate,” meaning that natives only possessed indirect representation.⁶⁴ *Originaires* were permitted to both directly elect their representative and run for political office. They were able to influence the shape of colonial France and eventually the French Union with the help of Leopold Senghor—a deputy from the interior elected in 1946—and Lamine Guèye. African historian Mamadou Diouf best explains the unique status of the *originaires*:

By constantly making claims based on their citizenship rights, they [the *originaires*] initiated a twofold process, inserting themselves in the colonial narrative and fabricating a world of their own through a daily engagement with colonial policy and knowledge as well as with traditional moral and social prescriptions.⁶⁵

The *originaires*’ ability to insert themselves as somewhat powerful individuals and achieve many of their political goals can be attributed to their substantial access to education.

Education

Specifically in terms of education, “Senegal was the only territory with an educational system in any way compatible with the policy of assimilation,” particularly due to the major education efforts and reforms supported by France throughout colonization, which resulted in a substantial African elite compared to the rest of French West Africa.⁶⁶ Beginning with Louis Faidherbe as Governor of Senegal in 1854—who has been compared to the British Lord Lugard due to Faidherbe’s success in his conquest of Senegal and economic consolidation of the colony—primary education was granted for citizens in Saint-Louis with the opportunity for scholarships for secondary education in France.⁶⁷ Additionally during this period, there were small technical schools established in Dakar, which eventually became the central driver of education policy throughout colonization.⁶⁸ The exception once again occurred in the Four Communes, as formal education was not extended into the interior of Senegal until 1905. Furthermore, education in the protectorate was in few ways similar to that of the communes.

Throughout French Senegal, there were three levels of schools that possessed separate curricula with a specific purpose.⁶⁹ The most basic level of education was for

⁶² Shereikis, “From Law to Custom,” 262.

⁶³ Idowu, “Assimilation in 19th Century Senegal,” 217.

⁶⁴ Jones, “Rethinking Politics in the Colony,” 342.

⁶⁵ Diouf, “Islam, the ‘*Originaires*,’” 180.

⁶⁶ Crowder, *Senegal*, 4–5, 27.

⁶⁷ Diouf, “The French Colonial Policy of Assimilation,” 673.

⁶⁸ Crowder, *Senegal*, 13.

⁶⁹ Kelly Duke Bryant, “‘The Color of the Pupils’: Schooling and Race in Senegal’s Cities, 1900–10,” *Journal of African History* 52 (2011): 299.

autochthonous Africans, who were able to attend village schools for two to three years of rudimentary instruction from African teachers. The purpose of village schools was to create loyal subjects or civilized peoples rather than patriotic citizens, which was the motivation behind education in the metropole.⁷⁰ A slightly improved version of the village school was the regional school. Students were selected to attend such schools in order to further *mise en valeur*, as these institutions trained Africans in practical skills, like agriculture and trade. Upon completion of the curricula and proof of some French fluency, students received certificates of their professional studies instead of degrees. In addition to supporting the constant need for African workers in the colonies, France believed that education could also “engender support for French rule” and prevent rebellions.⁷¹

The most prestigious school in colonial Senegal was the urban school, which closely resembled schooling in mainland France. Urban schools were primarily available to children of French administrators, *métis*, and *originaires*. The curricula followed that of France, and students were taught primarily by Europeans in only the French language.⁷² Despite such privilege, many black students were still excluded from urban schooling on the basis of their race. However, when a student was not permitted to attend an urban school because he was “native,” his father exercised his political rights by protesting such discrimination and won his claim with the lieutenant governor.⁷³ Some Africans argued that urban schools should discriminate based on individual status, like *métis* or *originaires*, and one’s ability to speak the French language in an attempt to further exclude native Africans living in the Four Communes.

French education was especially important for *originaires* because “French-style schooling prepared Africans for political participation and citizenship, especially when, in urban schools, they received the same civic education as their French peers...[which] blur[red] the lines between themselves and their rulers.”⁷⁴ Continued access to superior education, as well as interaction with French elites, further distinguished the *originaires* as belonging to a specific space within the colonial period. Because of this space, “*originaires*, proud of their citizenship, their education, and their urban culture, saw themselves as different from and better than colonial subjects.”⁷⁵

Post-Independence Senegal

After the collapse of the Vichy regime towards the end of World War II, Free France regained power over metropolitan France and all of its colonial possessions. Due to the global motifs of institutionalism, combined with the foundation of both the United Nations and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), France was pressured by the international community to abide by the declarations from the Atlantic Charter, which advocated for self-determination of all peoples. However, self-determination for Africans would not be fully realized until the “year of independence” in 1960, after several years of reform attempting to appease both African and French demands for equality. Under pressure from Lamine Guèye, Léopold Senghor, and other prominent Africans, the Fourth Republic granted a limited form of citizenship to all of its colonies and attempted to restructure the French Empire into the French Union. As aforementioned, this form of citizenship clarified that the colonized belonged to the French Union rather than the French Republic, and remained as a form of

⁷⁰ Bryant, *Education as Politics: Colonial Schooling and Political Debate in Senegal, 1850s-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 9.

⁷¹ Bryant, *Education as Politics*, 15.

⁷² Bryant, “The Color of the Pupils,” 304.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁷⁵ Bryant, *Education as Politics*, 157–158.

discrimination. Under the rationalist umbrella of the French Union, many Africans, especially Senghor, used this ideology to their advantage in efforts to gain more autonomy for African territories. Because of its special relationship with France, Senegal retained the single college electorate under the Fourth Republic, whereas all other territories had to operate under a dual college system.⁷⁶

Despite the dominant theme that all Africans wanted independence, Senghor advocated for a federation of African nations and France in an attempt to bind its relations and gain more equality for Africans. Representatives' successes in advocating for more evenly applied citizenship "is one of the main reasons why the activities of French Africans, particularly in Senegal, were channelled [sic] not towards the attainment of independence but the assertion of their fundamental equality with the French."⁷⁷ However, such equality proved unattainable when France failed to fully grant Senegal and its other African colonies the autonomous rule within the French Union that they demanded. Citing these injustices, as well as the internal protests from its citizens, Senegal gained its independence in 1960 and elected Senghor as president—who ruled until 1980. Yet independence would not hold the end of the Franco-Senegal network nor bring about a less exceptional Senegal.

Senegal is the Exception

Although surrounded by failed states and military regimes, Senegal has constantly risen above the negative trends frequently associated with Africa.⁷⁸ As has been argued throughout this paper, one possible explanation for Senegal's political success is the status of the *originaires*. However, there are additional explanations based on various historical analyses of French colonization. Political scientist Alfred Stepan argues that mutual respect between religions and cultures, rooted in the colonial history, has been a key driver of Senegal's success in modern times. In addition to the mutual respect between various Senegalese backgrounds, Senegal lacks the harsh ethnic divides because the French did not put chiefs in power based on their ethnicity (like the divide and rule style of the British), and the French limited the traditional authority of chiefs with direct rule.⁷⁹ Furthermore, inter-marriages between tribes and ethnic groups helped to create a Senegalese identity rather than Wolof or Mandinka or Lebou identities.⁸⁰ The cooperation between the citizens of Senegal, combined with their exceptional engagement in French politics, may provide an explanation for their success today.

For better or worse, France continues to engage with Senegalese politicians, especially through *Françafrique*, which is the interconnectedness of foreign aid (Official Development Assistance) and French corporations, combined with several military operations in West Africa, including a permanent base in Senegal. Perceptions of *Françafrique* are further intensified by the number of French citizens living in Senegal. Immediately following independence, it was estimated that nearly 40,000 Frenchmen were living and working in Senegal with nearly three-quarters of this population residing in Dakar.⁸¹ Today, the number of French resettling in Dakar, for various economic and personal reasons, is around 56,000. Although a minority of the population, the French residing in Senegal create awareness around certain issues and further France's soft diplomacy.

⁷⁶ Crowder, *Senegal*, 34.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁸ Alfred Stepan, "Stateness, Democracy, and Respect: Senegal in a Comparative Perspective," in *Tolerance, Democracy, and Sufis in Senegal*, ed. Mamadou Diouf (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013): 209.

⁷⁹ Crowder, *Senegal*, 78.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

Development Indicators

Due to the lasting economic effects of colonial institutions as well as the early urbanization of the Four Communes, Dakar, Saint-Louis, and Rufisque have remained economically vital to Senegal and can be distinguished by their success in measures of overall well-being, including high completion rates of primary education, lower infant mortality rates, and more consistent access to electricity than other urban areas and rural Senegal (Figures 2 and 3). Although we cannot distinguish between correlation and causation without sufficient data from the archives in Dakar, it is possible to draw limited conclusions that the uniqueness of the *originaires*' status and the urbanization of the Four Communes have contributed to the broader economic and political success of Senegal.

The Four Communes are located on the western coast, with Dakar in the Dakar Department.⁸² From the figures below, we can see that these coastal regions are the most successful in lower infant mortality rates and more consistent access to electricity, including the coastal regions in Casamance, which also had early interaction with the French colonizers, yet a completely different experience compared to the *originaires* and *métis* in the Four Communes.

⁸² Departments are regions or provinces in Senegal.

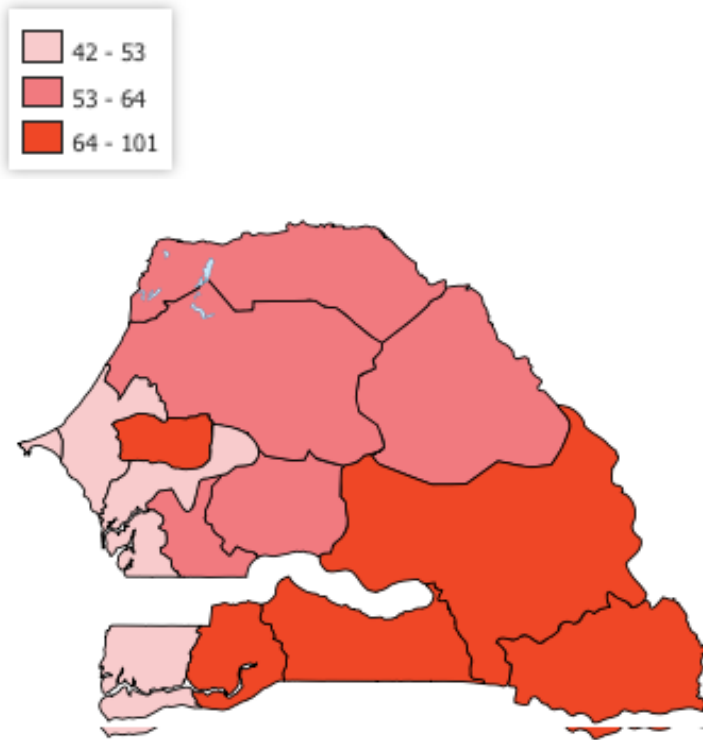


Figure 2. Infant mortality, per 1000 (2013)⁸³

⁸³ "Infant Mortality," Sénégal: Le Portail de Données, 2013, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://senegal.opendataforafrica.org/tamoiee/infant-mortality>.

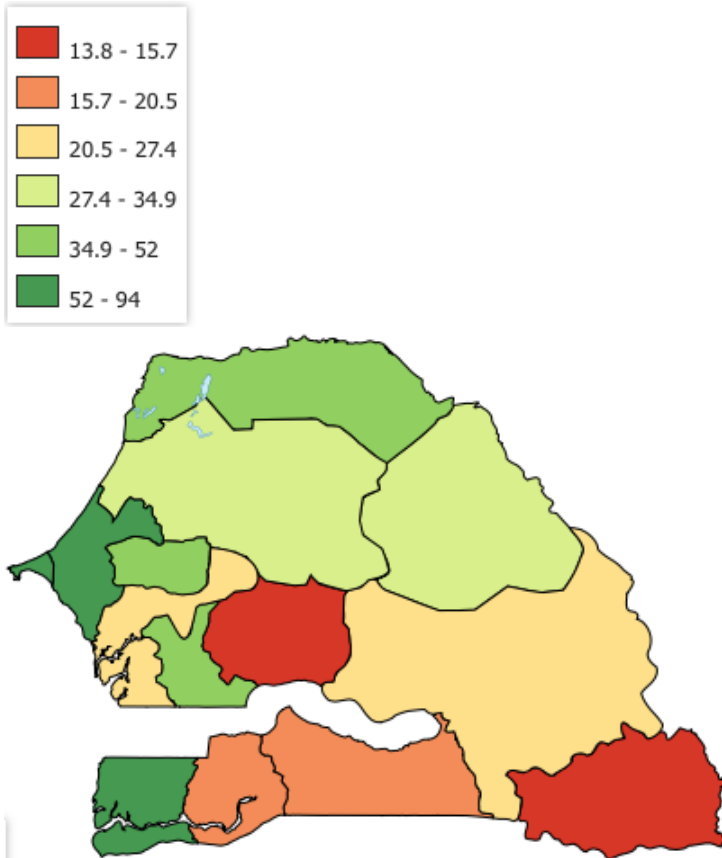


Figure 3. Consistent access to electricity (2013)⁸⁴

Education

Because of its historic involvement with education under the French Empire, Senegal has continued to focus on primary education for all, in accordance with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals proposed in 2015. Although far from full attendance, Senegal has been successful in educating most of the schoolchildren living in urban areas and is shifting focus to urban regions. According to the World Bank, Senegal has consistently spent more expenditure on education as a percentage of total government fees, which helps to explain the constant rise in primary school enrollment, as illustrated in Figure 4. However, Senegal still falls behind in primary school completion compared to the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa and has much room for improvement in the coming decades in order to achieve the objectives outlined by the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

⁸⁴ “Senegal Census Data, 2013,” Sénégal: Le Portail de Données, 2013, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://senegal.opendataforafrica.org/SNCD2015/senegal-census-data-2013?location=1000010-dakar>.

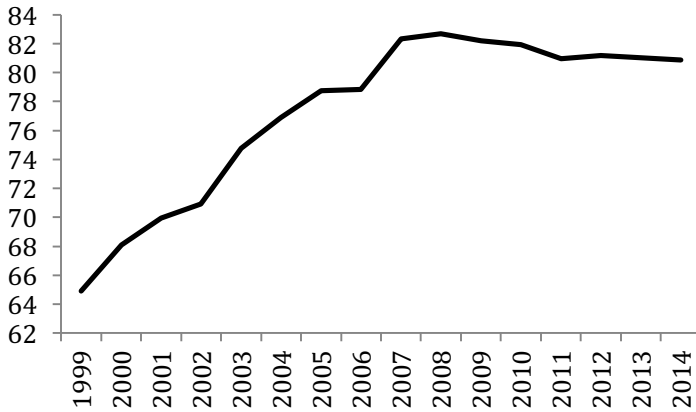


Figure 4. Gross enrollment in primary school (1999–2014)⁸⁵

Conclusion

Originaires' prominence challenges the discriminatory French *assimilation* policies as they constantly battled the status quo for political rights and representation. Even more remarkable was their overall success in their primary endeavors, such as full citizenship rights and access to French education despite the color of their skin. Furthermore, they were successful despite their identities as Muslim. Historian Mamadou Diouf best illustrates the uniqueness of *originaires*:

By collaborating with the colonial administration, and adeptly using French legislation and their civil rights, they managed to create an autonomous civic space for themselves. Educated in the arts and sciences as well as the Islamic court system, they also had a perfect knowledge of the arcane colonial administrative system and a mastery of the professional rules that governed commercial activities. Their very respectable level of education predisposed them to an active participation in the moral, theological, and political debates that outlined the civil and political culture of both the Senegalese colony and Saint-Louis civil society.⁸⁶

The prestige of the *originaires* during the colonial period resulted in preferential treatment, as they existed in a space that was not fully African or fully French, but a mix of assimilationist ideals. These advantages persisted in Senegal both immediately after independence and in modern times, notably in the number of presidents and prime ministers who have origins in the Four Communes or ancestors of *originaires* status. It is critical to further understand and continue to evaluate how the discrepancies in colonial policies have affected politics, economics, and society in modern-day Senegal. Likewise, this history is vital for understanding Franco-Senegal relations in the present, especially with respect to the policy of *Françafrique* and cooperation in international institutions like the United Nations and World Bank.

⁸⁵ "Education: Gross Enrolment Ratio, Primary, Both Sexes (%)," UNESCO, 1999–2014, accessed November 30, 2016, http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=EDULIT_DS#.

⁸⁶ Diouf, "Islam, the 'Originaires,'" 181.

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