

REPORT No. 1

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**THE WOMAN AND THE FAMILY IN BAMAKO**

Submitted to  
the Governor General of French  
West Africa  
by Madame Savineau, Technical  
Adviser on Education

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REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE GOVERNOR GENERAL  
OF FRENCH WEST AFRICA

by

Madame SAVINEAU, TECHNICAL ADVISER ON EDUCATION

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**No.1: THE WOMAN AND THE FAMILY IN BAMAKO**

Following the decision taken on October 7th 1937 (E) my mission was to undertake a survey of the situation of African<sup>1</sup> women and women of mixed race in French West Africa.

Having left Dakar on October 19th, I arrived in Bamako on the 21st. I remained there until October 29th. The local authorities were kind enough to enable me to circulate freely and gather the information I required. I will present my findings under the following headings:

- The population of Bamako
- The different types of native households
- The cost of living
- Marriage and divorce
- Prostitution
- Female prisoners

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<sup>1</sup> The more direct translation of the French term is 'native'. However, Madame Savineau's attitude towards the African population is not communicated accurately by the use of this term in modern English, consequently the term 'African' is preferred here. The adjectives 'native' and 'local' are used in other parts of the text to translate *indigène*. Ed.

- People of mixed race
- Education -
- The Health Service -
- African personnel and personnel of mixed race -
- African opinion and female development -

During the course of my stay in Bamako, I visited the Niger Office's settlement centres in Baguineda. These will be discussed in a separate report on the Niger Office.

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## 1. THE POPULATION OF BAMAKO -

Bamako is an administrative and commercial centre with a population of some 25,000 inhabitants. They are mostly civil servants, shopkeepers, craftsmen, African workers and workers of mixed race.

The locals come from a wide diversity of races, some Islamic, others fetishist. They are generally Westernised people of mixed origins. This is not the place to study all of the various ways of life to be found in Bamako, what we are focusing on here is the life of the typical inhabitant.

The women, almost all of whom are still uneducated, tend to dress in the so-called 'native' style. However, it is not possible to distinguish a Bambara from a Peul, either from their hairstyles or their clothing. They all wear the same camisole, the same wide, long

boubou<sup>2</sup> made from an imported material that costs between 8 to 20 francs a metre, the same rubber slippers, and as much gold jewellery as they can carry.

A schoolteacher, Bouillagin Fadiga, commented that, “Sudanese women are adapting faster than their menfolk. Within two months of arriving even those who have come from the bush are just like all the other women in Bamako.”

### DIFFERENT TYPES OF NATIVE HOUSEHOLDS -

So, what we have here are men and women who have developed very differently. The former have been to school and taken examinations; their way of thinking, their way of life, no longer resembles the life their parents lived. The women, apart from a few exceptions who have studied and have administrative jobs, speak little or no French, and have scant knowledge or no knowledge at all of French customs. The biggest influence over them has been trade, which has excited their interest in tempting jewellery.

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Polygamy<sup>3</sup> has not only remained in practice among these men and women, it has become more widespread. A civil servant displays his status by the number of wives he has.

### Different types of household:

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<sup>2</sup> A long robe resembling a kaftan.

<sup>3</sup> The more accurate term for the practice referred to here is ‘polygyny’, as this form of polygamy involves the marriage of one man to several wives. However, as ‘polygamy’ is the common term used in this context, so we have adopted it here. Ed.

A) Minamba Coulibaly, a clerk in the Finance Branch, and the son of an African rifleman<sup>4</sup> who had played a part in the taking of Sikasso, was sent to school at an early age and completed his studies at the teacher training college on Gorée Island<sup>5</sup>. He is 35 years old and earns 1,700 francs a month including the allowances he receives for his six children. If Minamba had no children, he would earn 900 francs. The bigger the family, the wealthier he becomes, so he continues to enlarge his family.

The Administration<sup>6</sup> has given Minamba a plot of land. He has used it to have three living quarters for himself and his two wives. They are built in banco<sup>7</sup> around a central courtyard.

Each room has an iron bed and a mosquito net. In the husband's, there are armchairs, a desk and some books. In the room of the younger wife, a fat, cheerful Bambara, we find a *broderie anglaise* bedspread, and fans, Japanese wall-hangings, poker-work spoons, and Islamic-style tinted lithographs on the walls. It is all very clean.

The second wife, a Sarakolle woman, seemed downcast. She said that her living quarters were the same as those of her co-wife. She did not invite me in to see them.

Minamba has a house boy who does the ironing and the cooking of European-style food. His wives eat local African food together, which is prepared by a female servant. Each wife receives 100 francs pocket money a month and her board. Minamba is economizing.

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<sup>4</sup> Known in French as the *tirailleurs*, or *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, a regiment of African rifles first formed in Saint-Louis, Senegal in the 1850s.

<sup>5</sup> An island situated a few miles off the Atlantic coastline of Dakar, Senegal.

<sup>6</sup> 'The Administration' is a particularly French notion which includes not only the colonial civil service but all its dependent services and structures, including the formal education system.

<sup>7</sup> A building material, similar to adobe, made from compacting earth, straw, water and other local materials. It is dried in bricks in the sun.

I ask him if he is satisfied with his household arrangements. He thinks it is necessary to have two wives, because when one wife is pregnant or breast-feeding she refuses to have conjugal relations with him. When he is travelling, he takes the cheerful Bambara wife along. She eats at the table with him. At home equality rules. The Bambara would prefer to have her husband to herself; the Sarakolle prefers to have a co-wife, because she would get bored on her own.

b) Amadou Ba, a despatch clerk, is Peul and the son of a local notable from Bandiagara. He obtained the school-leaving certificate from the Bamako primary school. He is now following a correspondence course in France.

Amadou Ba speaks very well in excellent French. He has remained a devout Muslim with an enlightened, westernized perspective on his religion. He is more erudite than any of Bamako's marabouts<sup>8</sup>, and he has considerable influence over the Peul population.

Amadou Ba has two wives and 7 children. They live in living quarters similar to those we visited earlier, but they sleep on local-style beds called 'taras'. The husband, out of contrition, occupies just one room, but has a European-style bed.

He reads Pascal, Dumas, Hugo, 'A Thousand and One Nights', and numerous works on the religions.

Amadou Ba earns 1,200 francs. He is the head of a large family that includes his mother, a young brother, two women servants, two builders and a weaver. Although he receives an income from Bandiagara, he still has to live extremely prudently.

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<sup>8</sup> A Muslim teacher and leader.

He has responsibility for distributing the millet between his wives. Each is given 150 francs per month for condiments (meat or fish, vegetables, pepper etc.) and 50 francs as a gift.

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All the vegetables from Europe are included in the preparation of African-style meals, of which Amadou Ba receives his share.

c) Altogether more modest is the household of X (I forgot to note down his name), a 25 year-old schoolteacher and former pupil of the Gorée Island school, who earns 750 francs per month.

He lives with his brother and his cousin; the women do the cooking for all of them. The men eat their food from plates with a metal spoon.

X and his wife each have their own room. He sleeps on a bed, while she sleeps on a tara<sup>9</sup>. They each, including the child, have a mosquito net.

The floor is made of concrete and the ceiling of corrugated iron. They have electricity, a fan, and a bookcase. The child was wearing *grigris*<sup>10</sup> but was also being treated at the clinic. In 2 years, X has paid off his wife's dowry of 1,200 francs.

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<sup>9</sup> A bed.

<sup>10</sup> 'Grigris' are local charms used to ward off evil spirits or conjure benevolent ones.

d) Birama Coumari is a 23-year-old Bozo. He was the top of his class at the high school and was thinking of going to William Ponty<sup>11</sup> but he failed the medical examination. As an assistant interpreter at Bamako's town hall, he earns 250 francs a month.

He has just got married. The young couple occupy two rooms built of banco. The larger of the two is furnished with a cheap table, a chaise-longue and two iron chairs. In the other, there is a mat underneath the mosquito net, between a tin trunk and a pile of rags. Birama, accustomed at high school to sleeping in a bed and using cutlery, has found it difficult to return to local customs. During the week he dons a tatty boubou, and only puts on trousers and a shirt on Sundays. He lives a communal life there with a friend. The two of them look after five people. They each .../...

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contribute 175 francs a month for food, and pay 15 francs for the rent and 25 francs for ironing the clothes washed by the women.

e) Marigué Maré, a wealthy canton<sup>12</sup> chief, has six wives and 13 children. By passing through several small courtyards and halls, one gains access to the shady enclosure around which his wives' living quarters are located. Each wife's apartment comprises two rooms, the smaller of which has a tiny skylight that provides very little daylight. A divan base ensconced in a

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<sup>11</sup> 'William Ponty' school was founded in 1903 as the *Ecole Normale de Saint Louis* becoming the *Ecole Normale William Ponty* in 1915. It transferred to Gorée Island, then to Sebikotane, then to Thiès and is now located in Kolda where it is known as the *EFI William Ponty*.

<sup>12</sup> The canton was the smallest administrative unit in a *Cercle* (circle), the French term for a colonial district. Each canton was led by a canton chief.



mosquito net, and a pile of strong-smelling vegetables fill the room. It is unhealthy and depressing. Marigué's wives are opulently dressed.

He lives "elsewhere". He declined to show me his dwelling.

The above were chosen as typical examples.

None of the women had been to school. The only progressive couples I saw were people of mixed-race. They live European-style, in fairly rough and ready properties. Being Catholics they are all monogamous.

There are women who have attended school who have co-wives. I saw one of them but I was not able to get any personal details from her. I was told that she is the second of three wives. But she is the one who runs the household and she is not unhappy about having the others around to use almost like servants.

Where a progressive woman is earning her own living, she keeps her salary and pays a servant to replace her for the domestic duties. Very often she gives the rest of her earnings to her father.

It should be noted that fathers do not buy a wife for sons who are employees. On the contrary, they see to it .../...

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that they receive a share of the earnings.

Here are some examples of non-progressive households encountered at random in the street:

a) A farmer and his one wife. They have no children. They live in a hut made of banco with two rooms opening onto a yard shared by several households. In the first room there was a heap of rice. The second contained a tara covered with a cotton mosquito net.

The woman points out that all this work is making her lose weight. Their harvest is not sufficient to provide for these two old people, who have to pay tax, have their cabin repaired, and buy clothes that cost more in town than in the village. They have had to cut back on food.

The woman makes groundnut paste, which she takes to market. She brings back small quantities of foodstuffs to sell on her doorstep. She wishes that her husband were wealthy enough to marry a young woman who would be her servant.

b) Next we met two carpenter couples living their separate lives in a large courtyard. The husbands have made the furniture out of boxes. There was a bed in the middle, a mattress covered in packing canvas, a table, and a coat stand. The floor is paved with broken tiles. Each couple lives in a single room, with the young children. Financially they seem to be quite comfortable. This was the most striking and encouraging example I have come across of a healthy, well-organized, materially improved life bringing a couple closer together. We can see how progress in manual<sup>13</sup> activities can be worth even more than purely intellectual progress.

c) We then met an old Peul woman, covered in jewellery. Her large bed was weighed down with bedcovers and pieces of embroidery, the walls were decorated with Arabic prints. This woman oversees the work of a sizeable staff .../...

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<sup>13</sup> We have included most of the original punctuation (such as this underlining) to give a flavour of the emphasis Madame Savineau communicated in her text.

of craftsmen, farmers, and vendors.

d) Here we have an old railway employee with 28 years' service. He has two wives and four young children and earns a salary of 200 francs a month. His old wife sells peanuts on her doorstep and cotton that she cards by rolling a metal stem over a stone.

They were clothed in rags, and told us that they are not getting enough to eat. Their dwelling consists of several tiny rooms completely devoid of any natural light, adorned only by a mat. In one of them there is a hammock for the children. One of the rooms had just been swept and was filled with a choking dust that just settled again in the same place.

#### THE COST OF LIVING - FOOD

An insight into the cost of living (transcribed below) has been provided by Me<sup>14</sup> Saintard who is the director of the experimental farm in Sotuba.

##### Fresh meat:

|                  |                                                      |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 January 1936 : | 0. 90 francs per kilo (including bones and entrails) |
| 1 October 1937:  | 2.80 francs per kilo ( ditto )                       |

##### Dried fish:

|                 |                      |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| 1 January 1926: | 1.42 francs per kilo |
| 1 October 1937: | 5.00 francs per kilo |

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<sup>14</sup> *Me* denotes 'Maître', the title given to a qualified lawyer.

These are the wholesale prices that the farm staff pays. Market prices are higher. The Africans can no longer afford to buy by weight. They are given a tiny amount for one franc.

The Maison Teissère company buys live pork at 2 francs a kilo and sells it on for 14 to 20 francs a kilo. The mark-up on beef is less, as live beef costs twice as much. Nevertheless the price of meat has tripled.

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The price of millet and rice has hardly changed. As for vegetables,

Mr. Desgranges, the chief administrator on board the Gallieni (one of the *Messageries Africaines* shipping company vessels), accounts for their scarcity and high cost with the following explanation.

They were planted in great quantities around Bamako. But gardeners, in order to pay their taxes, took leaks and carrots out of the ground while they were still tiny, thus greatly reducing their profitability. Furthermore, European women, who will pay 12 francs for a cabbage from France, will only pay a few centimes for a local cabbage.

Thus vegetable gardening is not profitable, and the locals are abandoning the practice.

#### MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE -

The following information emerged from discussions with European and African civil servants, as well as local notables:

Formerly, Bambara fathers married off their sons without consulting them. This practice is rare nowadays, although a young civil servant in Bamako is said to have had a wife imposed upon him in this way recently.

Daughters are still frequently married off, but this is also becoming rarer, as the woman often leaves, and when the divorce is not finalized in her favour, she forfeits the dowry.

Insofar as they are able, fathers speculate on the likelihood of young employed men taking several wives. The dowry price has increased considerably. Formerly, it was 200 francs, nowadays it can be anything up to 1,500 francs. The value of presents has increased even more, since where a divorce takes place the presents are not reimbursed.

As for the husband, he has great difficulty in pleasing his wife, who constantly threatens to file a complaint with the Commandant. It is not easy to replace a wife once she has left. A lot of searching is required to find a new spouse, and a lot of work is needed to pay for her.

Wives are beaten far less often than in the past.

That said, marital disputes occupy the bulk of the proceedings at the cantonal court<sup>15</sup>.

In 1936, 267 cases of this type were admitted. Wives who had been, or who claimed to have been beaten, abandoned wives, and unfaithful wives. Of these 227 ended in reconciliation. The judges, by their own admission, try to ensure the wife returns to the husband. This runs counter the increasing trend in family breakdown.

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<sup>15</sup> Literally 'a first degree court', each canton had its own local court. The second, higher level court, was located in the main county town (*chef-lieu*) of the *Cercle*/District.

PROSTITUTION -

The lure of jewellery now available commercially has significantly contributed to the loose behaviour of women. Fathers and sons are not in agreement over the seriousness of such misbehaviour. The former, while he never seeks to benefit from his daughter's prostitution, does not blame her either.

The Chief of Police drew our attention to some more serious cases, including one where the husband went off to work in some distant place and left behind his wife and children without any resources. Hunger can drive a woman to prostitution.

There are approximately 200 prostitutes in Bamako. The number of women who might be .../...

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spreading venereal diseases is significantly higher. One attempt at regulation has come to nothing. According to the Chief of Police, all the women of Bamako would have had to be registered.

PRISON -

The prison population, on October 25th 1937, stood at 191 inmates, of whom six were women. They are kept in a big, fenced-in yard that gives onto the men's yard and housed in a vast building during the night.

They are used to crush some of the grain that constitutes the prisoners' food - some 60 kilos of rice or 80 kilos of millet every day. The women's ration is the same as the men's, they get millet with sauce four times a week and rice with 100 grams of meat three times a week.

So who are these women and why are they in prison?

a) Yaya Diafara, a hairdresser of approximately 35 years of age, earned enough to keep herself clothed. Then her husband started drinking and stopped giving her food. They came to blows.

b) Tenemba Diara, 30, is under detention, and has not yet been convicted. Her husband sells *grigris*. They have been married for eight years. For the last seven of them he has not provided for her. She grinds millet in other women's homes. She left her husband and wants a divorce. She will 'do what she can' to get the dowry reimbursed.

c) Mouloubali Traoré, 25, a prostitute, who stole 1,000 francs (she is a repeat offender). This is an exceptional case. In Bamako prison there are many men who have stolen for women, but very few thieves as such.

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Mouloubali relates how, when she was still almost a child, she was raped by a man who then forced her to marry him. He never produced the presents, nor did he ever provide her with food. She would like another husband and a quiet life.

d) A case of adultery, the woman having been married against her will.

e) The sister of the aforementioned woman convicted of complicity in the corruption of a married woman, and in marital fraud.

f) Haoua Ai Dara, 31, a pretty Sarakolle woman who looks sad yet dignified. She was convicted of receiving stolen goods. Her husband had carried out the theft and the stolen goods were found at her house. She did not know where they had come from. Her husband died in prison. She has three children in the care of her mother-in-law.

This particular case is disconcerting in itself given that a woman is required to obey the husband without question, a practice which sits uneasily with a woman's responsibilities. It is all the more disconcerting when one considers Haoua Aïdara<sup>16</sup> herself, and the degeneration that she alone of the inmates seems to be experiencing. The director of the prison feels, like me, that a miscarriage of justice has taken place here, and has promised to put forward a plea for clemency.

Generally speaking, in this group of prisoners, there are more victims of circumstance than genuine criminals. It should be added that the female criminal is more or less unknown in Bamako. There are no infanticides (apart from one case in 1937, but the mother was pronounced insane). A natural child is warmly received by its maternal grand-parents.

#### PEOPLE OF MIXED RACE -

We have already referred to people of mixed race, who constitute a distinct group in local society. The mixed race population of the French Sudan, which numbers between 120 and 125, has set up the Mixed-Race Mutual Society of the Sudan. When I arrived, they immediately expressed the desire to .../...

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<sup>16</sup> Madame Savineau is often inconsistent in her spelling of the names of individuals cited in the Reports. As we are generally not in a position to judge which is accurate, we have tended to reproduce all her versions, as given in the original French text.



receive me. I accepted their invitation and met about ten couples; the husbands were either civil servants or employees in commerce, and the women were midwives or teaching assistants.

They expressed their gratitude at the Governor General's desire to gather information on the state of people's lives. Their life, they explained, is fairly precarious because they live European-style - an "effort" which deserves our sympathy. They earn the same as Africans and have the same financial responsibilities.

Here is a typical budget: the husband, a schoolteacher, earns 800 francs, and his wife, a midwife, 650. That makes 1,450 francs to cover the rent and food and in addition to the couple there are four children, two mothers and an uncle in the household.

Such poverty is all the more striking when a person of mixed race performs duties normally reserved for a European, such as in the case of the locally-engaged administrative agent, for example. People of mixed race would like to be eligible for entry into the higher common ranks of the civil service.

Also, they often feel themselves to be under the dual burden of being neither white nor black. It is because of this situation that Mr Moncourt, a commercial employee who owns fourteen hectares of land that he farms on Sundays with labourers, was not allowed to join the Welfare Society because he is not deemed an African. He also could not get a farm loan, with neither family nor fixed employment he did not have the necessary security. Mr. Moncourt would like to farm his land with a plough, but he has to make do with a hoe.

My hosts pointed out also that because of procedural delays, once they have finished their studies they do not always succeed in obtaining French citizenship before their military

service. They are enlisted as African Riflemen. Several schoolteachers are said to have died from the rigours .../...

of camp life.

In hospital, mixed race daughters are admitted as Europeans, while the boys are admitted as Africans. Their friends provide them with European food, at the doctor's request.

Finally, couples who are civil servants complain about being too easily separated. Three times a veterinary surgeon, absent on a tour of duty for several months returned to find that his wife had been relocated.<sup>17</sup> Commercial employees based in town likewise complain that their wives are often sent into the bush. They expressed the wish that young mixed race women be prepared for careers that they could pursue in town, as typists or dressmakers. The profession of dressmaker is thought to be very lucrative.

There is also the question of education for mixed race children. If they are sent to the lycée<sup>18</sup> in Dakar, it is not possible to find a family there to take them in. A boarding school, even partially fee-paying, would solve the problem. I announced that a Mixed-Race Boarding House was going to be built, and the prospect was greeted with considerable joy.

#### EDUCATION -

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<sup>17</sup> The Governor-General has left his mark on this report. Here he underlined the text and wrote a comment in blue pen in the left margin, of which only 'Sudan' and his initials are now legible.

<sup>18</sup> The 'lycée' is the highest and most academic institution in the French secondary school system.

After the above observations, it remains for us to examine the educational influence that we are exerting over society in the French Sudan. Since my brief was to concentrate on the female condition, I made enquiries into female establishments in particular.

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Primary School for Girls. Madame Pelé<sup>19</sup>, the headmistress, received me with the bitter observation: “Finally, somebody is showing an interest in us!”

She revealed to me why she was so distressed. There are 40 pupils in the class for the older pupils, for which she is responsible, and 140 in the junior class. On top of this, they do not have enough equipment. There is no possibility of using the new teaching methods based on observation, though the need for them is even greater here than in France.

In the class for the little ones, this problem is particularly acute. I found a host of bright-eyed little girls, some seated on tables, others lined up on additional bench-space, others on the platform where there was already a row of kneeling girls being punished. Although their boubous were reasonably clean and the windows were open, there was an unpleasant smell in the air.

Madame Moncourt, the young mixed race teacher in charge of the class, restricts herself to making her pupils shout in unison, to banging on the desk with her stick and to yelling when the occasion demands. Madame Pelée<sup>20</sup> admits to being unable to get her to apply more satisfactory methods in such deplorable conditions.

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<sup>19</sup> This surname is written PELE and PELEE, in capitals in the original, conforming with the bureaucratic tradition. We have had to guess at how this name is accented in its lowercase form.

<sup>20</sup> See note 19

Of the younger ones, only twenty or so pupils proceed each year to the senior class, where the teaching and learning are scarcely any better. Domestic science, according to Madame Pelé, cannot amount to much more than a session of chatting and shouting. The pupils are set tasks of washing, ironing and darning, but are spread all about the place and the teacher cannot possibly keep an eye on them all at once. On top of all this, Madame Pelé is aggrieved about having to spend, on stationery, considerably more than the meagre 120 francs she is allocated for this.<sup>21</sup>

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The young girls in Bamako spend quite a few years at primary school learning very little. Then they think of marriage and lose interest in this unattractive education. One or two become day pupils at the Mixed-Race Orphanage, where they prepare their entrance exams for the schools in Dakar. Under better guidance, several of them, according to their headmistress, would make competent midwives and teaching assistants.

Mixed-Race Orphanage. Mixed-race pupils start at the Orphanage at about 6 or 8 years of age. They prepare to sit for the primary school leaving certificate, the entrance examination for the School of Midwifery in Dakar, and the teaching assistants' examination. Those who fail are automatically taken on as visiting nurses.

When not in lessons, they spend their hours at the Orphanage doing housework.

The older pupils look after the younger ones. In addition, they learn to cook, sew, wash clothes, do the ironing, and are given instruction in the theory of childcare.

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<sup>21</sup> The whole of this section on girls schooling was highlighted in the margin by the Governor General.

Madame Assomption, the director of the Orphanage, was absent on leave. Madame Demurat, who was standing in for her, accompanied me on an inspection of two smoothly run classes. The young girls were wearing nice dresses that apparently they had made themselves. So are these competent dressmakers? If so, why do mixed-race husbands bemoan the fact that their wives are not dressmakers? I was told in town that the dresses I had seen were stitched but neither cut nor made up by the girls wearing them.

There was black woman squatting .../...

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in the corner of the room, she was the classroom assistant. I saw her again later in town, cudgel in hand, accompanying a group of orphans. With only one exception, the assistants do not speak French.

The exercise books are neat and the homework is well presented. The overall impression is one of order. “Results” are all important here. But what discipline! Madame Demurat stops in her tracks when she comes across the tiniest bit of paper that is not where it should be. Her reprimands are authoritarian rather than kindly.

Outside lesson time there are no recreational activities whatever; the pupils do not even sing. Once a month they are allowed to go to the village, to visit their mother or a “guardian”. The classroom assistant, guardians and mothers all encourage would-be suitors.

The moral education of the young mixed-race girls is left to nuns. Some of the boys are freethinkers, and all of the girls are Catholics. They can be heard at night reciting their litanies together, and as schoolteachers in the vicinity will attest, without any surveillance.

During my stay in Bamako, I saw the outcome of such an education. We discovered that that two orphans, namely Mari Coulibaly, 18, and Julienne Koné, 15 or 16, were pregnant. The former refused to name the father; local opinion pointed the finger at a married man of mixed race. The latter showed some letters from a local schoolteacher, touching in a childishly lyrical way, and full of quotations from Musset and other “classical” authors.

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Marie Coulibaly’s mother, who is married to a policeman of good reputation, has run off with another man. Julienne Koné is the daughter of a tradesman who was on the point of acknowledging her and her brother as his own when he died suddenly. Her only family is an aunt. The father of her lover, a local Muslim tradesman, is opposed to his son marrying a Christian girl.

These two girls are in a particularly bad predicament and the staff of the Orphanage is quite clearly responsible, in part, for their misfortune. From what Madame Demurat had to say about it, however, there can be little doubt that she has treated the two girls like a pair of criminals. Mr. Assomption, the Schools Inspector, was resolved to expel them without further ado.

The prospect of this caused a stir amongst several members of the teaching staff. They recalled that in 1931, another young border at the Orphanage, Marie Camara, had been expelled on the same grounds. She took refuge in the village, at her mother’s home, who encouraged her to take up prostitution. Marie died in early 1933, stricken with both tuberculosis and syphilis. The child died also.

Mr. Assomption went on leave without taking a decision with regard to Marie Coulibaly and Julienne Koné. His replacement, Mr. Cros, takes the view that the Administration of the Colony, as legal guardian of minors of mixed race, has the right and the duty to continue to monitor their situation. He has referred the case to the Governor of the French Sudan, who has pledged his support.

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The Mixed-Race Mutual Society has also promised to help, whilst insisting that the two young girls be taken away from Bamako so that the help given them should remain a secret and not encourage inappropriate behaviour in others. Mr. Cros has replied that sending the girls to Dakar would be a much greater incentive. There was never any question of enabling two orphan girls in the family way to complete their studies. It seemed that Marie Coulibaly was going to go on to the School of Midwifery. At the end of November, the two girls were still in Bamako. One was being supported by her father-in-law, the policeman, but not housed by him, and the other was being put up by a mixed-race couple.

These events focused attention on Madame Assomption, the director of the Orphanage. Nobody in Bamako blames her. She benefits from the admiration that people have for her husband. She is held to be punctual, an orderly and authoritative woman. On the other hand, people admit that she does not put her heart into her duties. She does her lessons wearing rollers in her hair, and as soon as the bell goes off she dashes to do her hair ready for her social life. Surely it is not too much to expect that the director of an establishment as difficult to manage as an orphanage for young girls of mixed race would be more devoted to

her duties? In the French Sudan, there is no shortage of female, and even male schoolteachers who are utterly dedicated to their profession.

The young girls at the orphanage are in need, above all, of affection and happiness. They need to be able to take a sustained interest in lively activities. They should be allowed to sing and act. It has been suggested, also, that a crèche be added to the Orphanage and entrusted to the pupils in the middle and higher classes.

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All young African girls adore babies. It would make them very happy if they were allowed to look after a few of the babies, and it would be excellent experience for them too. The crèche could also be used for the young mixed-race children who are waiting around in the village until they are old enough to go to the Orphanage.

Other educational establishments. I was not required to visit boys' schools, but as I was offered a quick tour, I took the opportunity to do so. After all, one can only make a sound judgement on the state of a whole body if one is familiar with all of its parts.

The headmasters and the teachers aired their grievances to me which I pass on here:  
Primary School for Boys – It is even more overcrowded than the girls' school. There are 200 pupils in the junior class, and the total number enrolled has topped 300. The boys' school is turning away many pupils.

Upper Primary School - The mixed-race boys are complaining that they do not have an orphanage. Everyone is concerned about the sad situation of the younger pupils, who are



subject to the same regime as the older ones. Mr. le Gall tried to set up a troop of scouts. The Catholics immediately tried to take over this project.

The rural teacher training school of Katibougou - Here we find the youngsters who have not made it to the Gorée Island School, so the selection to this school is done in reverse. This explains why the level of education is low here. Also the boys are disappointed, they had thought they were going to become “intellectuals”, but now feel they are destined for manual work. The teachers need to use all their tact and powers of persuasion to lift the boys’ morale. Mr. Enard in particular is entirely devoted to this cause and seems to be succeeding. One particular material shortcoming upsets these future village teachers, namely that their uniform is a short, grey boubou and short grey trousers. Some .../...

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of them wear a full-length boubou at home; indeed some of them even wear a European suit, in the Dahomeyan style. It is true that they look like houseboys or tidy prisoners, rather than a select group of pupils. They hanker after the uniform the Gorée pupils wear. They send a unanimous plea to the Governor General to change their uniform<sup>22</sup>. The teachers at Katibougou ask why they are not granted the privileges teachers in the bush get, given that they are too living in the bush.

The Staff - The teachers in Bamako are not sufficiently aware of the resources that Dakar can make available to them. For instance the director of the Upper Primary School was delighted

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<sup>22</sup> This sentence is underlined by hand in the original report with a note in the left margin, part of which has disintegrated. The remaining words say ‘donnez ...tisfaction’ presumably meaning ‘do as they wish’. The note is signed M.C. indicating the hand of Marcel de Coppet, the Governor General.

to learn that our archivist would be happy to advise them on the purchase of new books for their mobile library. The Katibougou establishments complained about their inability to identify bush plants, and they did not know that they could send their plants to the botanical garden at Hann. They are greatly looking forward to collaborating in the creation of the two herbariums being developed at Hann.

Schooling and the local population. The local population is totally won over to the idea of schooling, according to Mr. Assomption. New classes for girls are filling up immediately, albeit only with the children of African civil servants. Girls who have attended school are much sought after and are attracting a big dowry because they know how to sew, mend, and iron clothes. Only a handful of Moslems remain hostile to the idea of educating girls.

However, schooling in Bamako will not expand unless we provide new buildings and, above all, qualified staff.

I have listed below a break-down of the school population of Bamako (20,000 inhabitants):

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|                                                   |      |
|---------------------------------------------------|------|
| Upper Primary School .....                        | 348  |
| Mixed-Race Orphanage (including day pupils) ..... | 83   |
| Regional school .....                             | 1009 |
| Elementary school .....                           | 250  |
| Rural school .....                                | 80   |
| School for young African girls .....              | 229  |

Urban school ..... 44

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A high proportion of these children come from all parts of the Sudan<sup>23</sup>, and even from other colonies.

Convent school – There are around 100 pupils of both sexes divided into two classes. They recite prayers and do memory exercises. After several years’ of schooling, the children only just understand a few words of French. The nuns, who are very uninformed about the results achieved in State schools in French West Africa, consider blacks<sup>24</sup> more or less incapable of learning.

### HEALTH SERVICE

The wives of civil servants, employees and farmers that we visited all stated that they go to the clinic every time that they or their children need medical care. So the question is how many people in Bamako put themselves in the hands of the doctor?

The clinic - The clinic is run by Dr Martin. Two students from the School of Medicine in Dakar, which is still on vacation, were assisting him and benefitting from his advice. Several nurses carry out the prescriptions and hand out medication.

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<sup>23</sup> the French Sudan

<sup>24</sup> The original text uses ‘noirs’ in lower case to designate Africans here. The change in designation from the usual ‘indigènes’ hints at Madame Savineau’s disgust at the attitude of these nuns towards African people.

The clinic can hospitalize 16 men and 4 women.

The doctor informed that it is difficult to hospitalize women. Their husbands and children depend on them, and often the whole family assembles to take them home.

According to the register, there are on average 130 consultations a day, rising to 250-300 in the dry season. Some people come here from far away places. In 1936, there were 22,435 patients in all, which involved 48,545 consultations.

Of these patients, 8,806 were men, 3,559 were women and 10,070 were children. From these figures we can conclude that women come far more often on their children's behalf than for themselves.

Dr Martin is of the opinion that he sees barely half the population of Bamako. Even the progressive ones leave it very late before coming forward, having tried the *gris-gris* first. Furthermore, there is only one clinic and it is too far away, being up to four kilometres, from some districts. A new clinic is being built.

I witnessed a striking case where a thin man, with breathing problems presented. He is an accountant. The doctor diagnosed pneumonia, which had already been developing for several days. No bed was available, so the patient was sent home.

Consultations with pregnant women and infants -

Pregnant women: 351 consultations in 1936

Infants between 0 and 2 years old: 2,679 cases involving 16,400 consultations, to which we should add the monitoring .../...

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of infants carried out by the charity known as Berceau Africain<sup>25</sup>.

The maternity ward This comprises 16 beds, which were all occupied. An additional seven women were lying down on mats. According to the midwife, some women in labour take to the yard and refuse to leave. She has delivered as many as seven babies in a night in these conditions.

The number of deliveries in the ward is rising year on year.

In 1936 there were 207. In the first three quarters of 1937 there had been 296.

The number of births in town attended by a midwife is dropping. There were 125 in 1936, and 88 in the first three quarters of 1937.

A new maternity ward is being built.

The mixed-race midwife, Madame Leroux, does very satisfactory work, according to the doctor. She told me that a great deal of work had gone into pacifying women who had not wanted to be examined. Their resistance had since been overcome. Madame Leroux showed me a beneficiary of her competent work - a European baby born prematurely whose mother had died. Madame Leroux has taken it upon herself to look after this child. It had been a struggle to save him. He is a remarkably beautiful baby.

There are no specialized native-style deliveries in Bamako. It is the grandmothers who serve as midwives. They are less stubborn than would be the case with professionals, and they do not discourage the women from going to the maternity ward. Two old women of 60 are doing a training course with the midwife. They were told to go to her, and will receive 120 francs before they leave. The outcome, .../...

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<sup>25</sup> Literally 'African Cradle', a local charity established in Bamako by European women in 1936.

quite obviously, will be negligible.

One of the negative effects resulting from the use of traditional midwives is vesico-vaginal fistula. Due to a muscular atony that is common among women of the region, protracted labours and often irreparable lacerations can occur. I saw several young women with this problem who survived thanks to use of forceps in Bamako Hospital at Point G.

There are also many cases of metritis.

Among the newborn there is a high rate of mortality due to bronchial pneumonia and diarrhoea. There are difficulties with feeding babies where the mother has no milk as the other mothers do not wish to give any of their own milk, and the use of cow's milk involves precautions which are beyond the grasp of a village woman.

At the maternity ward, they have managed to ensure that the newborn babies do not ingest shea butter, but it has not yet proved possible to set up regular feeding sessions.

Both at the clinic and in the maternity ward there is a tremendous shortage of medication<sup>26</sup>.

Leprosy Institute – This is a fine establishment. One is pleasantly surprised to find so few mutilated people here. Dr Tixeuil claimed that his effective treatment made his patients look good. A little later, at San, I saw some lepers, who were just as quiet but with far more serious mutilations, their hands, feet and faces all severely ravaged by the disease. Why are these lepers not receiving hospital treatment in Bamako? Is it that the hospital prefers to take patients who can work?

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<sup>26</sup> There is a note here in the margin of the original, signalling interest in this section, signed M de Coppet and dated December 1937.

Bamako's lepers act up a little too, dressing up in tissue paper and begging for assistance from the "good white folk" of the town. Madame Tixeuil, the chief medical officer's wife, has been stepping up her efforts to collect and distribute clothes. The nurse pointedly remarked that patients suffering from all manner of complaints wanted to be cared for at the Leprosy Institute rather than at the clinic. The whole establishment struck me as having a strong interest in conversions.

The growing influence of doctors in the Sudan:

The chief medical officer, Colonel Sice showed me his statistics, from which I extracted the following figures:

1927 - 80,000 consultations

1936 - 365,000 -d°-

Hospitalizations:

1927 - 2,500

1936 - 9,500

There is a problem with feeding patients. Families are having to make provision for this. Patients who have come from far away are given the basic prisoner ration by the Administration.

Deliveries: 1927 - 500

1936 - 6,100

Progress between 1936 and 1937:

Consultations:

|                             | <u>August 1936</u> | <u>August 1937</u> |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Men .....                   | 6,913              | 7,432              |
| Women .....                 | 4,364              | 5,101              |
| Children aged 0 to 2 .....  | 3,452              | 2,648              |
| Children over 2 years ..... | 5,134              | 7,612              |

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Child welfare:

|                            | <u>August 1936</u> | <u>August 1937</u> |
|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Women .....                | 627                | 691                |
| Children aged 0 to 1 ..... | 2,276              | 2,232              |
| Children aged 2 to 5 ..... | 595                | 652                |

These last two tables show that the health of infants aged 0 to 1-2 is improving.

AFRICAN AND MIXED-RACE PERSONNEL -

Colonel Sice, the chief medical officer, and the doctors at the hospital and the clinic, were all agreed that the female African staff and the mixed-race staff were entirely satisfactory when supervised.

The doctor at the clinic complained about the visiting nurses. As we saw for ourselves, mixed-race girls from the Orphanage who did not get into the School of Midwifery automatically become visiting nurses. This is an unsatisfactory means of selection. Dr Martin believes that visiting nurses, like the midwives, should be trained in Dakar.



Dr Sice prefers Bambara women to women of mixed-race as visiting nurses. The former are stronger and therefore more dedicated. Some of them do their rounds on a bicycle. In Sikasso, the niece of the canton chief exercises a remarkable degree of influence by doing this. As soon as women of mixed-race have several children they neglect their professional duties. Moreover, the local population often considers them to be foreigners.

In Dr Sice's opinion, we need more maternity wards in town, alongside schools.

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As regards the women on the teaching staff, it is not possible to give an overall opinion, as there are some very good teaching assistants and some poor ones.

#### NATIVE OPINION ON THE PROGRESS OF WOMEN

Modi Dramé, an old Muslim assessor at the District Court<sup>27</sup>, compares past and present in the following terms:

“In days gone by a woman respected her father and mother, and was afraid of her husband. Both the father and the mother would beat their daughter to put her on the right track. Her husband did not beat her, but would give her advice. The girls were reserved and knew how to stay at home and not wander about.

“Nowadays they do what they like, things that their father, mother and God would not allow. They go out when their husbands are not there, and go off and have a good time, even when they have been told not to.

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<sup>27</sup> This is the higher level court attended by the district administrative officer, known locally as the *Commandant du Cercle* (commandant of the Circle).

“In the past, they were happy with modest clothes and simple food. Nowadays they want new outfits every three months; they want good things to eat and still expect to be given some money, otherwise they go off and get it in bad ways.

“Parents have also been greedy. They have insisted on big dowries. The father promises his daughter, receives presents, and then reneges on his word if someone makes him a more generous offer. The mothers in particular make a business out of their daughters and encourage divorce, despite the father’s objections.”

I ask Modi Dramé if he thinks that the situation would be better if the girls were educated.

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“To become midwives – yes - that would be fine”, he said. “The old women don’t know what they are doing. And the women need female doctors”.

He accepts that women with progressive views should be allowed to choose their own husbands.

The male teachers and civil servants give no more thought to women than Modi Dramé does. What they want is a way of life that suits them, rather than suiting the women. Of course it is highly desirable that women be taught how to do housework and cooking, and, above all, to do the ironing and darn European-style clothes for their westernized husbands. What they find regrettable is that such women do not care for polygamy. If one attempts to focus their attention on women’s feelings, they are taken aback initially: they have never thought about that. And since I am a woman, they admit that they have to make some concessions.

Bouillague Fadiga, a teacher of great common sense who knows how to make a balanced judgement, had this to say:

“The modern woman is becoming increasingly independent from her husband’s authority. She is spending more and more money. But at the same time she is cleaner, more elegant; she looks after the home and makes it more pleasant. Above all she ensures that her children are clean.”

This is the information that I have been able to gather in Bamako. To this should be added the information (sometimes of a quite different nature) provided by civil servants and populations in other towns and villages of the French Sudan.

Signed: M. SAVINEAU<sup>28</sup>

Dire, French Sudan, 25th November 1937

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<sup>28</sup> The usual abbreviation for Madame is ‘Mme.’ and the usual abbreviation for ‘Monsieur’ is M. so by signing herself M.Savineau, Madame Savineau is using an unusual form.