

REPORT No. 7

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O U A H I G O U Y A

Submitted to the Governor General

of French West Africa

by

Madame SAVINEAU, Technical

Adviser on Education

3 April 1938

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Having left Dori in the Niger colony on the 29th January, I stopped during that day in the village of Aribinda in the French Sudan. I then spent 30th and 31st January in Ouahigouya.

In Aribinda¹ it was just a question of getting some details on the tribal customs of the people who have lived in this area for a very long time and are perhaps indigenous. I noted one interesting peculiarity. In common with many African villages, the boys and the girls form separate groups, each with their own leader. Here, even in the case of the girls, the leader is chosen on the basis of physical strength. They fight in pairs to determine which boy and girl cannot be beaten by the others. I asked to be shown the leader of the girls and, amidst more robust companions, I was presented with a child of 15 with weak-looking shoulders.

The girl who had been chosen was the daughter of the local canton chief². Here customs are

¹ Madame Savineau has already reported her brief stop in Aribinda in Report 5 pages 30-31. She noted at the end of Report 5 that she would write a special report on Ouahigouya. It is this account that follows in Report 7.

² The canton was the smallest administrative district in the French colonial system, and was led by a local chief nominated by the French in French West Africa.

changing: prestige, which was once a question of personal qualities, is now becoming hereditary. .../...

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- 2-

Ouahigouya

Schooling

The head of the schools sector, Mr BRICHETEAU, is not satisfied with his African staff, who rely too much on rote learning and are not interested enough in whether the pupils have understood.

The school remains very much the preserve of the sons of the local chiefs, who look upon the school as their own and are not bothering to register the children living in their cantons. Some of the children are still running away. However, according to Mr BRICHETEAU, "One feels the time is coming when young Mossi children will be begging to be allowed to go to school, and will cry if they are not allowed to."

All the girls in the school are daughters of chiefs or civil servants. They have had their own class for 4 months, run by Madame BRICHETEAU. There is an obvious difference between the girls, who are being taught by an experienced European teacher, and the boys who are being exposed to the old methods. The boys are glum while the girls are so bright and attentive. Bright eyed, they all listened to the questions that I put to one of them, and up shot their hands, they were keen and ready to answer my questions. When girls are said to be unintelligent, clearly it is often the fault of the teacher.

Ouahigouya does not yet have a school for domestic science.

The health service

The clinic and permanent medical centres are well used. Some Peuls travel 125 kilometres to visit the doctor. Unfortunately, the doctor has only been able to reach one tenth of the population so far. His car is in such bad condition that he is unable to complete his visits. .../...

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-3-

The local people are asking for a doctor in Djibo, where they do not even have a nurse yet.

A very good midwife manages to get access to all the pregnant women in Ouahigouya, as verified by the register of births. They number about thirty in the maternity unit and two or three in town. A second midwife will be taking on the other areas.

The district nurse is a very pleasant and intelligent woman, but she has a limp and cannot ride a bicycle. All she can do is assist the midwife.

Traditional birthing attendants do three-month placements in the maternity unit and are achieving good results. But what can they do with this learning out in the villages, given that they haven't got any equipment? It would cost barely 100 francs to supply them with two pairs of tongs, one pair of scissors, and a bit of nitrate. If they had these a lot of umbilical hernias could be avoided. It is because of these hernias that many would-be riflemen are deemed unfit for service.

Families of Settlers in the Niger Office

In Ouahigouya I was hoping to find the families of Mossi settlers who had been moved to the Niger Office. It was easy enough to find them because here a man is the subject of his chief rather than the son of his father. I was told that the settlers belonged to three chiefs: the Baloum Naba, the Rassam Naba, and the Togho Naba.

It was therefore necessary to speak to these three men and quite pointless to imagine that any of their men might express an opinion that would differ from theirs.

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-4-

The Rassam said that he has never received any news directly, he gets his information from the Baloum. The Togho gets his information from the Commandant. “The Commandant had said ‘It’s good’, so, ‘it’s good’ ”.

The Baloum was aware that they worked very hard over there and he was satisfied with this.

- The men are fine.

- And the women?

- If the men are satisfied, the women are satisfied too.

The Baloum’s own son left for the Niger, because the Commandant had said ‘It’s good’, and that was good enough for him. He showed me a letter from his son, who writes in French. It was a tremendously respectful letter. In essence, it said “You put us here and we do not question your orders. Everything is fine”, to which he added some details: “ The Whites do what I ask of them in your name, they have given us eight oxen and four ploughs.” but finally, and tellingly he wrote: “Send us some clothes; we are almost naked”. This shows how obedient the Mossis are.

A Departure for the Niger Office

During my visit Ouahigouya was full of people waiting in front of offices for various reasons, including the recruitment of riflemen, the arrival of a convoy from the 2nd Section

of the contingent³ returning from the Niger Office, and the departure of a convoy of families for the Niger Office.

I observed this departure. .../...

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-5-

Seven lorries had been sent by the Niger Office for 198 people. The lorries had been fitted out with empty petrol containers to be used as seating for the passengers, but these took up too much space and had to be taken off.

There were no escorts. Mr DONGIER, the Administrator, had to call for a European sergeant, who had come with the 2nd section of the contingent, to accompany the lorries.

The Niger Office had sent blankets, but only fifty. So the rest had to be ordered.

The families were called up. Each was taking with it as much luggage as possible: not just calabashes and bowls, but also cages of chickens, weaving looms, rolls of cotton tape, dogs, recliners, fetishes, millet and maize, all extremely valuable and worth keeping, but also very cumbersome. At least half of the surface area was taken up with all this. The number of passengers had not been calculated to take account of their possessions. They piled in as best they could, and a few were deferred, perhaps because I was present. The sergeant grumbled that this was making a fuss about people who deserved no favours.

The journey was supposed to last two days. Mr. DONGIER insisted on three and had to send a telegram himself to arrange for food and lodging to be prepared for the stopovers: the Niger Office had not made any arrangements. Previous convoys had been even more

³ The second section, or *deuxième portion* in French, were military reservists recruited by the French in West Africa. In 1926, under the Governor-General Jules Carde (1923-1930), authorisation was granted by the colonial government to use military reservists for development projects in the colonies. Again, as with the case with the *prestation* system, this responded to what was perceived by the occupying power as a chronic shortage of labour.

badly organized with no canvas covers on the lorries and no petrol supplies. They had had to borrow from the Yatanga Naba who still has not received payment for it though this was several months ago. .../...

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-6-

A great many people came to witness the departure, which took place calmly and almost mechanically.

A few women were missing when their names were called out.

I questioned a few of people about to leave. The men seemed genuinely happy: they would be fine; the Yatanga had brought back the most encouraging news. They knew nothing whatever of the conditions of work awaiting them. The women were simply following without presuming to hold an opinion of their own. The children were delighted to be travelling in a lorry.

Mr DONGIER made quite a few suggestions regarding the journey, and asked the settlers to write to him with news about themselves. Everybody left full of confidence at his promise of a better life. Dongier himself, having administered Mopti, did not believe it and tried to find excuses: they will eat better than they do here; it's better they go to the Niger Office than to the Gold Coast.

The truth is that at that very moment entire families were making their way down to the Gold Coast to avoid this recruitment to the Niger Office. The Administrator, Mr LOUVEAU, had been travelling along this road by car. He had counted 100 people in 10 minutes, and kept coming across these groups from morning till night, for several days.

