

Please send your suggestions for additions in French, English or West African languages on the form available on the CONTACT tab of the website

## Savineau Glossary<sup>1</sup>

**Note.** This glossary lists words of African, French, or other non-English origins that appear in the English translation of the Savineau Report. Words of English and African origins are presented in bold and normal font, French words are presented in bold italics, Latin terms in non-bold italics.

\* \* \*

**African (*indigène*).** Madame Savineau's attitude towards the African population is not communicated accurately by the English term "native", the more translation of the French *indigène*; consequently, the term "African" is preferred. However, the adjectives "native" and "local" are sometimes used to translate *indigène*, according to context.

**Argamasse** is a mixture of sand, water, and sometimes lime, used as a roofing material in West Africa. Its origins are believed to lie in India from where it was imported via the Indian Ocean islands to Africa in the 17th century. It became a popular African building material as it can withstand the sudden and heavy rainfall of tropical regions.

**Auxiliary doctor** (French: **médecin auxiliaire**) was a member of a medical corps founded by Governor-General Roume in 1906 (the original training was as medical assistants or **aides-médecins indigènes**). The auxiliary doctors underwent 30 months of training at the French West Africa medical school in Dakar. When Savineau was completing her tour of inspection in 1938, 185 auxiliary doctors were employed by the French administration in French West Africa. From 1945 the term "auxiliary doctor" was changed to "African doctor" (**médecin africain**)[151].

**Banco** is a West African building material, similar to adobe, made from a mixture of earth, water, and sand, and sometimes other local materials such as straw. This mixture is formed into earthenware bricks which are then baked hard in the sun. Banco is most often used for building walls in West African homes.

**Bans** is the bambara word for the bamboo palm (*Raphia vinifera*). It is referred to several times as a widely-used building material in Savineau's Report 6 from Dahomey.

**Berceau africain** was one of the oldest French charitable organisations operating in French Africa. It was founded in 1926 in Dakar under the auspices of the Minister of the Colonies. It focused particularly on providing care for babies and young children. (see Vincent Bonnacase.(2011).*La pauvreté au Sahel. Du savoir colonial à la mesure internationale*. Paris : Karthala. p.47)

**Bélimé, Emile** (see **Office du Niger**).

**Boubou** is a long voluminous robe resembling a kaftan.

**Calabash** is the fruit of the calabash tree. The hard shell of the fruit is hollowed out, cleaned

---

<sup>1</sup> This is an updated version of the "Appendix" (Glossary) published in Claire H. Griffiths, "Colonial subjects: race and gender in French West Africa", special issue of *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 26, 11/12 (2006), pp.591-594.

and dried, sometimes sculpted and decorated, and used for storing food or as a bowl.

**Canton** was the smallest administrative district in colonial French West Africa. It generally comprised a small group of neighbouring villages. Each canton had a chief and its own local court.

**Canton Chief** (French: **chef de canton**), the chief of the canton was selected by the French from among the local male notables to serve as the representative and leader of the canton. In general, the European colonisers would not recognise women as potential leaders or even as heads of households, regardless of whether women traditionally held positions of power in local communities.

**Circle** (French: **Cercle**): elsewhere often translated as “District”, it denotes the principal administrative unit in a French West African colony. It was headed by a European administrator called the

**Circle Commandant** (French: **Commandant de cercle**). A Circle consisted of several cantons and a main district town where the district court was held and presided over by the **Circle Commandant**.

**CFAO** (**Compagnie française de l’Afrique Occidentale**) was a French trading company that established trading posts throughout French West Africa.

**CICONIC** (**Compagnie agricole et industrielle du Soudan français**), the agricultural and industrial company of the French Sudan was responsible for commercial development in the French Sudan (Mali) under French colonial rule.

**CIRCONNIC** (**Compagnie de culture cotonnière du Niger**): the Niger Cotton Company was a private firm that operated in the interwar period growing irrigated cotton in the Niger River Valley near Segou (Mali).

**De Coppet, Marcel**: b.1881 d.1968. Jules Marcel de Coppet had a long career in the African colonial service rising through the ranks of the administration to reach the post of Lieutenant-Governor of Chad in 1926. He is mentioned in Andre Gide’s *Voyage au Congo* in the entry for 31 December 1926. Gide noted with approval that de Coppet allowed a contingent of 1,500 forced labourers to take the day off to participate in the New Year celebrations (Gide, 1927). De Coppet left Chad in 1938, but resumed the governorship from 1929 to 1932 before being posted to French West Africa, first as Governor of Benin, then as Governor of Mauritania. He was in post in Mauritania in August 1936 when Marius Moutet, the new Minister of the Colonies, offered him the top post in French West Africa. De Coppet officially took up office as Governor-General of French West Africa on 27 September 1936 and served through to the autumn of 1938. In June 1939, he was appointed Governor-General of France’s largest Indian Ocean colony, Madagascar. Following France’s defeat by Germany in May 1940 and the establishment of the collaborationist Vichy government, de Coppet resigned from office in July 1940. On 19 May 1946, de Coppet returned to Government House (**la Résidence**) in Tananarive to be met by opposition from the Malagasy independence activists. The movement grew and resulted in violent demonstrations in 1947 which were met by brutal repression on the part of the French forces. De Coppet retired from the office of Governor-General of Madagascar in 1947.

**Cowrie/cowry shells**: before the arrival of Europeans cowries constituted the traditional currency of exchange for settling family and commercial business in West Africa. They continued to be used by Africans during French and British colonial rule in the region.

**DN** is an abbreviation of “Dakar–Niger”. It refers to the railway line which connected Dakar, the headquarters of the French West African administration, with the Niger River at Koulikoro, some 40 miles north east of Bamako (Mali). Its line reached the Niger River in 1923.

**Daba** is the term used by Bambara and Joola people to describe a traditional agricultural implement similar to the European hoe. The term then came to be used figuratively, and in colonial discourse to denote an African male agricultural worker.

**Dolo** is an alcoholic drink made from millet, sorghum, or maize.

**Fonio** is one of the oldest indigenous grain crops grown in West Africa.

**Forced labour** (French: **prestation**): forced labour was introduced in French West Africa in 1912 as a response to the labour shortage. It was provided by African men in the form of a number of forced labour days, typically between eight and 12 depending on the colony. It was distinguished from slave labour in that the men were paid a small sum of money for each day worked, but it was widely abused.

**Foutah-Djallon** (or **Fouta-Djalou**) is a large mountainous region in central Guinea with a dense river system providing much of the fresh water in the West Africa region.

**Hivernage** is the name used in francophone West Africa for the **rainy season** which generally starts in July in the Western part of francophone West Africa and lasts through to late September.

The **indigénat**, usually translated as the “**native justice system**”, was the colonial legal system used to impose discipline and punishment on Africans (as opposed to Europeans who were subject to the French legal system). It was in operation in French West Africa up to the end of World War II. By decree of 3 December 1931, the French colonial authorities set up the structures by which native justice could be implemented through a local court (**le tribunal du 1er degré**) or a district court (**le tribunal du 2ème degré**) under the authority of the Circle Commandant (Houis, 1953).

**Instructor** (French: **instructeur**) was the term used in the Niger Office for Europeans with some agricultural training employed by the Office to oversee the work of “monitors” (see below). They were responsible for the management of farming in three to eight villages

**Liberty villages**: the French started setting up liberty villages in French West Africa in the latter part of the 19th century as sanctuaries for freed slaves.

**Moutet, Marius**: appointed Minister of the Colonies on 4 June 1936. Moutet was a member of the SFIO (Socialist Party) in the Popular Front government, and lost no time in appointing friend and fellow socialist, Jules Marcel de Coppet, to the Governorship of French West Africa. Moutet served as Minister until 18 January 1938 when he was replaced by Théodore Steeg. He was reappointed on 13 March 1938. When France fell to the German invasion in May 1940, Moutet withdrew from the government and joined the “group of 80” French deputies who refused to accept the leadership of Marshall Philippe Pétain. Moutet had to spend the rest of the war in hiding and returned to national politics after the fall of Vichy in the summer of 1944. In late January 1946, shortly after Charles de Gaulle resigned his premiership, Moutet was appointed once again Minister of the Colonies and headed the ill-fated negotiations with Ho Chi Minh over the future of Indochina. He left office on 23 October 1947.

**Messageries Africaines**, referred to locally as **Messafric**: this company ran steamships along the Niger River in the 1930s. Savineau boarded one of their steamships, the “Van Vollenhoven”, at Niamey when she left the Niger colony on 2 January 1938.

**Monitor** (French: *moniteur*) was the term used in the Niger Office for an agricultural extension agent who was usually an African employed by the Niger Office to oversee farming in a village. To qualify as a “monitor” the applicant had to pass an exam in French and maths. No agricultural training was required (Van Beusekom, 2002, p. 101).

**Navetane** is a French corruption of the Wolof word for a seasonal worker. It was used in French West Africa to denote a seasonal agricultural worker employed by the French administration.

The **Office du Niger (Niger Office)** was founded in 1932 as a development project designed to irrigate the Niger River Valley in the French Sudan. Initial planning had begun back in 1910 when Emile Bélime, a French hydraulics engineer, put forward his plan for irrigating the Niger River valley based on the Gezira Scheme operated by the British in the Sudan. In 1925, a pilot project was undertaken in the region around Bamako, the capital of the French Sudan, where 7,500 acres were irrigated to produce rice for consumption and cotton for export. The **Office du Niger** transplanted families from elsewhere in the French Sudan and Upper Volta to work as settler farmers in the river valley region. It also used forced labour to develop its projects including the Markala Dam, which was built by forced labourers between 1935 and 1947. It has been described by generations of observers and historians as a disastrous undertaking (Couture et al., 2002).

**Pagne** is the term used in francophone West Africa for the long piece of cloth (generally three yards or more in length) worn around the body as a wrap-around garment. It is called a wrapper in other parts of Anglophone West Africa.

**Patente du Dioula**: a permit to engage in long-distance commerce; obtained by Africans in order to move from one *cercle* to another.

**SIP (*Société indigène de prévoyance*)** the “Native Provident Societies” provided extension services and credit to farmers. The first SIP was set up in Senegal in 1910. The provident movement was clearly flourishing in French West Africa in the 1930s, and Denise Savineau makes favourable mention of several examples in her fieldwork reports and devotes an 7-page chapter to them in the report published here.

The **STIN (*Service Temporaire d'Irrigation du Niger*)** the Niger irrigation service, was set up in 1925 by the colonial administration in Dakar under the auspices of the chief engineer of the Niger irrigation project, Emile Bélime. It was run as the government department responsible for building canals, dams, and other projects connected to irrigation operations in the Niger Office.

**Shea butter** is an oil extracted from the nuts produced by shea trees in West Africa. The oil from the nuts has many uses, such as the principal moisturising ingredient in body lotion and face cream.

**SPROA (*Société des plantations réunies de l'Ouest africain*)**, the joint West African plantation company was run by the directors of the largest European-run plantations in French West Africa.

**Tara** is a West African term for a type of low-lying bed.

**Terrasson de Fougères, Jean** was the Governor of the French Sudan at various times during the 1920s. The technical upper primary school in Bamako (Mali) was named after him. The school is referred to by Savineau as “Terrasson de Fougères”. The school became the “Lycée Terrasson de Fougères” in the 1940s and is now the “Lycée Askia Mohamed”.

The *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were African riflemen serving in the French army. The first corps of riflemen was founded Louis Faidherbe, Governor-General of Senegal, in 1857 and the first regiment was formed in Saint-Louis in Senegal.

**Traditional Birth Attendant:** these women would be called upon to attend and sometimes aid in childbirth in West African societies. They are most frequently referred to in the most negative terms in this report, only occasionally being described as a source of support when working under the influence of the French-trained midwifery service in French West Africa.

**Upper Primary School (*Ecole Primaire Supérieure* or *EPS* in French),** Upper Primary Schools were established in the capitals of the colonial territories to train African men for employment in the lower echelons of the colonial service. Access to the *EPS* was by competition. Candidates sat an entrance exam based around the typical French academic exercises of French dictation and composition.

“*William Ponty*” was the name commonly used to refer to the prestigious teacher training college opened in Saint Louis, Senegal in 1903. In 1915, it transferred to Gorée Island near Dakar. It was then referred to both by its location, *Gorée* and by its name, *William Ponty*, in colonial correspondence of the 1930s, prior to its move to Sebokitane towards the end of the decade. The term *Pontins* was used to refer to the graduates of this top school.

**Wrapper** is the term used in Anglophone West Africa for the long piece of cloth (generally three yards or more in length) worn around the body as a wrap-around garment. It is called a *pagne* in francophone West Africa.

**Yaws** is a common chronic infectious disease that occurs mainly in the warm humid regions of the tropics. It is characterised by red blotches and bumps on the skin of the face, hands, feet, and genital area. Most cases of yaws are in children under 15 years of age. It is caused by a spiral-shaped bacterium (spirochete) called *Treponema pertenue*. A different type of spirochete, *Treponema pallidum*, is the organism responsible for the venereal disease syphilis.