SOURCES AND METHODS FOR AFRICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF ADAM JONES

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FINALE

Rethinking Colonial Intermediaries: On the Use of Career Records as a Source for African History – a Sample from Togo

Joël Glasman

African employees of the colonial state are the subject of an important historiographical renewal.[1] Recent studies on teachers, midwives, soldiers, and interpreters have considerably revitalised African history.[2] At the same time, there has been a proliferation of terms used to refer to social groups situated in the 'in-between' space of colonial society: cultural intermediaries, colonial intermediaries, imperial intermediaries, middle figures, middle men, mediators, courtiers/brokers, etc.[3] This raises the question of which sources and methods are relevant for the study of these social categories. This article proposes to examine a type of source that remains underutilised by historians of Africa: career records. It argues that these sources can contribute considerably to enriching our understanding of African careers in the colonial state and, consequently, of the history of relations between states and societies in Africa.

This case study focuses on the civilian police in Togo.[4] The inquiry involves a collection of 114 individual records (currently held in the archives of the Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reform in Lomé) of policemen who served between the

1 This article is a slightly modified version of a text originally published in French (Joël Glasman, Penser les intermédiaires coloniaux. Note sur les dossiers de carrière de la police du Togo, *History in Africa*, 37 [2010], 51–81). I thank Sophie Schlondorff for the translation, as well as Tanita Jill Pöggel and the editors of this volume for their comments.

2 See: Jezequel, *Mangeurs de craies;* Barthélemy, *Femmes, africaines et diplômées*; Mann, *Native Sons;* Moyd, *Violent intermediaries*.

3 Lawrance/Osborn/Roberts, *Intermediaries.* See also: Raison/Salvaing/Goerg, *Intermédiaires culturels* (on 'cultural intermediaries'), Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon* (on 'middle figures'), Eckert, *Grundbesitz*, 190–203 (on 'middle men' and 'intercessors' ('Mittler')), Reinwald, *Reisen durch den Krieg*, 19–27 (on 'cultural brokers') and Burbank/Cooper, *Empires in World History* (on 'imperial intermediaries' and 'local intermediaries'). These approaches echo the notions of 'ambivalence' and 'mimicry' crafted by postcolonial studies (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*).

4 Until 1956, Togo was a trust territory under French administration. In 1956, it was an autonomous Republic led by the pro-French party PTP. In 1958, the CUT led by Sylvanus Olympio wins elections and prepared for Independence, eventually achieved in 1960. In 1963, the military coup against Olympio changed the political setting once again. See: Glasman, *Les Corps habillés*.

1940s and early 1960s.[5] While today's Europeanist historians and anthropologists are already very familiar with career records – and with personal records more generally – historians of Africa still do not use them very much.

There are several explanations for the reluctance of specialists in African history to use these sources. First, an epistemological reason: fear of getting trapped in colonial categories. While postcolonial criticism usefully warned historians against the bias of colonial coding, it has led to the baby being thrown out with the bathwater, with not just colonial categories being rejected, but the use of classic tools of social science as well.[6] Next, a practical reason: the difficulty of accessing career records in archival holdings in Africa. As the archivist and historian Saliou Mbaya has pointed out, personnel files are, in principle, legally off limits for a century after the birth of the person concerned, and exemptions are granted only very rarely.[7]

However, in practice, access to these records depends more often on the goodwill of local 'gate keepers' than on administrative and legal rules – which means that, with a bit of patience, it may possible to gain access to sources that, in principle, are off limits.[8] Researchers who have worked with sources of this kind have revealed the wealth of information they can contain for African history and, in particular, for colonial history.[9]

During the past ten years, there has been a rapid growth in researchers' interest in categories of African employees in the service of the colonial state. Yet, while teachers and soldiers, for example, have been studied extensively, the social history of the colonial police has not been the subject of any major renewal.[10] The available studies are essentially macro-historical, whether written from a Marxist perspective or couched in theories of modernization or dependence.[11] Lacking in subtlety as compared to analyses of other professional bodies, studies of the police often serve as a vehicle for holistic and teleological interpretations of the history of law enforcement agents and rely heavily on colonial dichotomies (collaborators/resisters, mercenaries/victims, etc.).

This article supports the view that the tools currently being forged by Europeanist historians can significantly enrich the social history of Africa. The statistical and micro-historical study of career records can help us to rethink the history of colonial intermediaries, provided we carry out (I) an external evaluation that pays close atten-

5 The 1940s–1960s were decades of deep institutional reforms in police forces. The *corps* of civil police entails two sets of ranks: the senior ranks (local police assistant, auxiliary inspector, inspector and commissioner), and the subaltern ranks (police agent, brigadiers, chef brigadiers).

6 Amselle, *L'Occident décroché*.

7 Mbaye, Personnel Files, 289–95.

8 Béliard/Biland, Enquêter dossiers personnels, 108.

9 Mbaye, Personnel Files; Jezequel, *Mangeurs de craies*; Vivier, groupe socio-professionnel, 295–325.

10 For a historiographical overview: Blanchard/Glasman, Le maintien de l'ordre, 11–41 ; Killingray/Omissi, *Guardians of Empire*.

11 Tamuno, *The Police in Modern Nigeria*; Ahire, *Imperial Policing*.

tion to the conditions of how these sources came into being and are stored, and (II) an internal evaluation mindful of the shift from colonial categories to statistical categories. This type of source contributes to (III) questioning the concept of 'colonial intermediaries' by (IV) bringing to light the diversity of career paths and tensions at work within the group under examination.

I

How career records are produced and stored by the colonial and post-colonial administration determines of what interest these sources are to historical research. In principle, a career file (also referred to as a 'personnel file' or 'individual file' in the sources) is opened for each agent and civil servant of the colonial administration and subsequently, of independent Togo, when he joins the administration, and is closed when he leaves (retirement, resignation, death, termination, etc.). For Togo, these records are not held, as one might expect, in the National Archives, but at the Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reform in Lomé. The records are stored in four adjacent rooms, two of which are dedicated to 'open' records (that is, ones concerning still-active agents), while the other two – jokingly referred to as 'the morgue' by the ministry staff – hold files that have been 'closed' following an agent's departure.[12]

While the open records are rigorously organised and managed, the 'morgue' contains files arranged on shelves or stacked on the floor, neither in alphabetic order nor systematically categorised.[13] The ministry staff, though active and competent, has virtually no means or time to organise dusty files subject to humidity and termites.[14] Since these archives are not intended for access by historians, written authorization from the ministry must be obtained in order to enter, and historians must make do without a comprehensive catalog or list of files. Therefore, in order to find any particular records, it is necessary to comprehensively screen all existing files to select those that are of interest to the subject of one's research.[15] Even those files that are organised alphabetically cannot be searched by the first letter of a surname since variations of names were very common during the colonial period. For example, Commissioner Deckon, one of the first African police commissioners of Togo- French West Africa, who lent his name to one of Lomé's main commercial hubs, began his career under the name Acapossa Félix before becoming Acapossa Cosme, Cosme Félix, and finally Cosme Deckon. Because

12 A civil servant may have two different files (if his career had been interrupted).

13 For an expose of classification problems in Archives, see: Jones, Ghana National Archives, 385–88.

14 Some of the files are organised according to the initials of the name, others according to the year of departures, others are stapled without particular order.

15 Béliard/Biland, Enquêtes dossiers personnels.

of this it is impossible to know a priori which shelf to look on – A, C, F or D – and one must resign oneself to reviewing all records present.

Finally, numerous files – the vast majority – are missing. Only 114 files have been found for a total population of between 400 and 500 policemen. This raises the question of how representative counts based on these sources are. Contrary to standard procedure, according to which a sample is chosen at random, here the sample is determined by circumstance. There are several explanations for the missing files. Some may have been lost while being transported or stored. Others have been removed by a ministry for a specific purpose and not returned – this is very frequently the case. Those most dramatically affected by these missing files are not, of course, historians, who are used to working on incomplete corpuses; rather, it is the users of the Togolese administration, in this case former civil servants who need some part of their records to claim their rights (most often the right to retirement) and who are obliged to travel to Lomé and to wait there for several weeks as an agent of the ministry looks for their file, after which, as is frequently the case, they return home again empty handed. Yet chance isn't the only reason why files have disappeared. During the authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes of Etienne (Gnassingbé) Eyadéma (1967–2005) and his son Faure Gnassingbé (since 2005), files may have been removed by the authorities, either to put pressure on an agent, or, conversely, to destroy the documents in order to protect the civil servant concerned.

The individual files of the Togolese public administration generally contain between five and six sub-folders. Individual reports of biannual grades are assembled under the heading '*Notes*' ('Grades'). The '*Promotions*' ('Promotions'), '*Congés*' ('Time Off'), and '*Mutations*' ('Transfers') files contain certified copies of the corresponding orders concerning the movements of the civil servant. The sub-folder '*Sanctions*' ('Sanctions') includes all documents regarding disciplinary decisions (in particular documentation by the disciplinary committee), while the sub-folder '*Divers*' ('Miscellaneous') may contain a wide range of documents (birth certificates, extracts of criminal records, certificates of good conduct, service records for members of the military, identity cards). Finally, the last folder also includes correspondence between the agent and administration (application letters, requests for time off, letters protesting a disciplinary measure deemed unjustified, letters of resignation, etc.). Taken as a whole, these documents provide a significant amount of information about the agent viewed through the prism of his relationship with the administration.

Unfortunately, it is rare for a file to contain all of these documents. This is because agents have the right to recover some of them when they retire (in particular their identity cards and military service records). Some of these documents may also have been lost. As a result, based on the preservation of the records and the duration of each career (some agents stay in the force for 20 years, others for less than a year), the files vary widely in thickness, with some offering veritable short professional biographies while others provide barely a handful of data. The individual grade reports – the minimum

amount of information contained in the files, in some respects, since it is the one document that is most widely included (an agent only has to have served for one semester for it to have been issued) – indicates how an agent is graded by his superiors, and gives information regarding his civil status, date and place of birth, marital status and children's names, occupations practiced prior to joining the corps, 'race,' 'religion,' etc.

For some agents with thick files, it is possible to get a general sense of their background, a relatively clear idea of their education, and quite an accurate picture of the stages of their career up through retirement, as well as some information about their family lives. This information that can serve as a starting point for more extensive biographical studies. Disciplinary actions and above all the protocols of the disciplinary committees make it possible to tackle topics not easily accessible to historians, in particular corruption cases. The documents make certain aspects of the day-to-day history of the state ('state at work'), of the interface between institution and individuals, available for analysis. The value of case studies aside, these career records prove to be richest from a prosopographic point of view. However, shifting from colonial to statistical coding requires particular vigilance when it comes to how African agents are classified by the bureaucratic apparatus.

II

In the coding of personnel files, the shift from colonial to statistical categories deserves particular attention, for at least two reasons. The first is rooted in the fact that the effect of the institution – as sociology and anthropology of the state teaches us – resides precisely in its coding operations (classification, selection, categorisation), which comprise the state's 'biographical knowledge,' which it uses to control its agents.[16] The second – a lesson from postcolonial criticism this time – is that colonial discourse, emerging from power relationships characterised by the lack of legitimacy of the colonial state and from a 'practical misunderstanding' at the local level, contributed especially to forging African realities.[17] As a result, colonial archives are both composed of *state knowledge* – that is, are prone to reproducing the state's modes of thinking and dichotomies useful to its methods of domination – and of *European knowledge*, knowledge composed of concepts (institution, individual, family, etc.) that are equally 'indispensable as inadequate' for thinking about non-European societies.[18]

16 Béliard/Biland, Enquêtes dossiers personnels, 107. On colonial statistics, see: Raymond/Mandé, Comment compter.

17 Cooper/Stoler, Metropole and Colony, 1–58, 34.

18 On 'state knowledge' see: Bourdieu, Esprits d'Etat, 49–62, 49. On the use of European categories to think non-European societies, see: Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe,* 6.

The colonial bias is revealed the moment one examines the bureaucratic categories of personnel management, including those that claim to be objective and that one would least suspect of carrying cultural value judgments, such as a civil servant's date or place of birth. In some cases, an archive may admit to its limitations, indicating 'born around 1915' for an agent. Most of the time, however, the fragility of colonial knowledge is revealed by the contradictory information contained in documents issued by different departments. There may thus be an entry in a police agent's civil status registry established in 1947 by the first-degree court of law of Grand-Popo that declares he was born in 1908, and military papers that state he was born in 1910. [19] For another officer, there may be information saying he was born in Lomé in 1931 or in Aného in 1928.[20]

Yet it is when an archive claims to know an individual's precise date of birth that it may actually prove to be most misleading. It is easy to forget that, in a colonial setting, date of birth is just as often a product of misunderstanding as the object of negotiations between the state and its citizens. A former police commissioner recalls that he was away in Aneho, when the administration established his civil status in Sokodé in the late 1940s. The administrator in charge and the family member who had gone to collect the certificate of civil status estimated the absent child's age using the usual criteria: his size, degree of hairiness, and any political or natural events that would allow them to agree on a date.[21] However, because of the age limit for school admission, it was usually in a family's best interests to lower the child's age. Indicated as having been born in 1938, the former commissioner was more likely born in 1934 or 1935.[22]

The colonial bias becomes even more apparent when it comes to categories intended to classify realities perceived as culturally and socially significant by the administration, such as 'ethnicity' or 'race.' During the colonial period, several types of personnel administrative documents in French West Africa, including the individual grade reports and registration cards, indicated an agent's 'race.' In Togo, this category disappeared from the grade reports after 1963, while 'religion' was eliminated in the course of the 1950s. In this case, the administrators' doubts are even more obvious than those concerning the 'date of birth'. Far from being anecdotal, the trial-and-error spelling attempts (Bassarien/Bassari/Bassar, Ahoulan/Aoulan/Anlo, Cabrais/Kabyè, Ahoussa/Aoussah/Haussa, Kotokoli/Cotokoli/Tem, Peulh/Peul/Fulani; Ouatchi/Wouatchi/Woatchi, Mina/Minat/Ewe, etc.) are at the very heart of colonial efforts to categorize and classify.

For one and the same individual, documents issued on different dates or by different administrative departments indicate different 'races': Pédomé D. was successively

19 Archives du Ministère de la Fonction Publique et de la Réforme Administrative (AMFP)/Dossier G. Michel.

20 AMFP/Dossier personnel K. Comlan.

21 Among important markers: the Lome riots (1933), the earthquake (1939), the solar eclipse (1947).

22 Interview with a former police commissionner, Lomé-Doumassessé, 11 November 2008.

classified as 'Anlo' (1949), 'Awlan' (1953), 'Mina' (1959), 'Anloan' (1961), and then 'Ewe' (1966). These flawed practices reflect both the colonial administration's omnipresent attempt to impose rigid bureaucratic categories, as well as administrators' pragmatism when faced with shifting 'ethnic' labels and multiple identities. For the 'race' field, with very few exceptions, only one response was possible. Yet, as numerous studies have shown, the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity' were used during the colonial period to identify social groups exhibiting a wide range of connections – sometimes designating a linguistic group, sometimes one united by a shared history or stemming from the same political entity, at times a group sharing religious practices ('Muslim') or a way of life, and occasionally even a professional group. Most frequently, however, this category synthesises by reifying various criteria, thereby inventing the very social entities it claims to denote.[23]

In this way, during negotiations that start over again each time papers are renewed, administrative documents oblige first the user, then the administrator, to choose which among various assignments of identity should qualify as the 'ethnic' identity. Civil status documents, which are very often ambivalent, are only of scant use to administrators. Since Ahmada M.'s birth certificate indicates that he is 'Nagot' (or Yoruba) on his father's side and 'Adja' on his mother's side, he will be referred to as 'of Fon race' yet 'of Nagot tradition' (that is, in his relationship to colonial justice), which will then justify the choice of one or the other ethnicity for subsequent documents.[24] Constructed though they may be, colonial categories affected the individuals they targeted no less lastingly, masking the major identity transformations at work during this period.[25]

Colonial archives' obsession with classifying agents by 'race' went hand in hand with their lack of interest in understanding the agents' religious and family connections. Like the 'race' category, the 'religion' field only allows for a single response and almost exclusively mentions the religions of the book, only in very rare cases indicating a local religion, generally using the terms 'fetishist' or 'pagan.' [26] In the same way, the 'marital status' field only accepts one marriage, and the 'wife' status only mentions one wife – which, according to interviews conducted as part of this study, has given rise to a recurring conflict between wives for the status of the official wife, whose name is entered in the archive.[27] Likewise, the field 'child' only indicates dependent children,

23 Amselle/M'Bokolo, *Au cœur de l'ethnie*; Lentz, 'Tribalism' and Ethnicity, 303–28; Ranger, Invention of Tradition, 211–62.

24 AMFP/Ahmada M.: Acte de naissance, audience publique du tribunal du 1er degré de Athiémé, 23 novembre 1942.

25 Ethnic categorizations sometimes become family names: T. Sossou is 'Sossou,' Z. Mossi is 'Mossi,' K. Konkomba is 'Konkomba'. cf. AMFP/Dossiers T. Sossou, Z. Mossi., K. Konkomba.

26 In the file AMFP/Dossier personnel T. Savi., a document mentions 'Pagan' ('païen') another says 'Muslim' ('musulman').

27 In the career records, the name of the wife on the successive grading sheets can change depending on the year (for instance because of a death, or because a new power relation between different spouses).

that is, those who are minors and still alive. On the biannual grade reports, this field is located at the bottom of the page and only provides room for a handful of first names (and dates of birth, which must as a rule be indicated). Some practical administrators glued an additional piece of paper to the bottom of the page in order to accommodate large families. Others, less conscientious, abbreviated: '16 children, ages 26 to 1 year: Jeannette, Gabriel, Prosper, Nestor, Didier, Lydia, Grâce, Aristide, Brigitte, Angéla, Prisca, Virginie, *etc* (sic).' [28]

Yet the colonial categories are problematic even beyond private social connections. The field for 'occupations performed prior to joining the corps' uses identical terms to refer to professional occupations that are in reality very different. Unlike the 'race' field, 'occupation' frequently allows for several responses: Prior to joining the police, an individual may have been a 'farmer, serviceman, driver,' while another was a 'builder, farmer, unemployed.' Yet, here, too, the problem is knowing what these terms mean in a colonial context. In many cases, the terms for jobs change from one year to the next: The field 'occupations performed prior to joining the corps' for Gnabodé A. successively lists 'none,' 'driver,' 'mechanic,' 'serviceman,' etc.,[29] without there being any way of knowing whether these indications correspond to various jobs performed successively or are simply re-characterizations of one and the same job. A driver may have been a driver-mechanic, or a driver first and then a mechanic.

The matter is further complicated by questions of the meaning of socio-professional categories in social history: What did it mean to be a 'farmer' in Togo in the middle of the twentieth century? Did the word refer to the wealthy owner of a coconut grove, an export-oriented African 'capitalist,' or to a small farmer involved in local economic circuits? The term covered very different realities, masking not just an individual's socio-economic class, but also the degree to which he is integrated into colonial economic networks.[30]

In addition, the intersection of European techniques of domination and African strategies of emancipation produced misunderstandings that are even more difficult to discern in the sources. As Bourdieu and Sayad have shown, the categories 'farmer' and 'unemployed' are more ambiguous than they may seem at first glance. If the Kabyles, when asked about their occupation, more often declared themselves 'unemployed' than 'farmers,' while the farmers of southern Algeria tended to do the opposite, it is in fact, these sociologists tell us, because the Kabyles have interiorised the colonial discourse,

(This is different from the colonial personnel files of customary chiefs, in which several spouses can be mentioned: Goerg, Chefs de quartier, 25–45).

28 AMFP/Dossier personnel A. Hubert.

29 AMFP/Dossier personnel Gnabodé A.

30 This is similar to the notion of 'owner' in 19th Century France (Christophe Charle, 'Micro-histoire sociale et macro-histoire sociale,' in: Charle, *Histoire sociale, histoire globale?*, 45–57, 54).

interpreting their regular work as underemployment as a result. In this way, 'unemployed Kabyles were, in reality, farmers who considered themselves insufficiently occupied, and the farmers of the South were unemployed without being aware of it.' At the heart of the colonial misunderstanding is the possibility of isolating a quantifiable amount of time spent working, namely paid work.[31]

Finally, it is important to consider the local meanings of terms routinely used to identify an individual's social position.[32] For example, it is doubtful whether the concept of 'father's occupation' is best suited for identifying the 'social origins' of an individual from a polygamous family.[33] In many cases, the mother's occupation seems to be more decisive than the father's, because it was often the mother who determined whether or not to invest in a child's education. However, the mother's occupation is rarely indicated. Moreover, since the occupations most frequently indicated for mothers in the documents are 'housewife,' 'farmer,' and 'merchant', it is difficult to extrapolate usable information from these indications; after all, in practice, these activities could overlap significantly, with the wife of a farmer from northern Togo being perhaps both a farmer and a housewife, while also working as a merchant once a week to sell a portion of her output.[34] Here again we see how colonial categories crush the diversity of African activities – the bureaucratic prism coupling with a cultural one.

While career records substantiate the information set out so far, they are, in contrast, almost completely silent about other important aspects of the agents' social and professional lives. Thus, while the civil servants' place in the *hierarchy* is well documented – including through the justifications for promotions mentioned in the grade reports – the *functions* they served, in contrast, are almost always omitted from the records. Often, it is only due to coincidental similarities that one discovers very different functions among police agents of the same grade, from typists to law enforcement officers, including driver, orderly, etc.

The sources in question being professional documents, they are also almost completely silent on many aspects of the agents' private lives. Their 'wealth' status is almost never indicated. 'Families,' above all, appear only very rarely occasions (such as in applications for leave due to a close relative's illness or family ceremony such as a wedding or funeral). As a result, the family appears only in pared-down form; the 'extended family' is omitted in favor of larger social units ('ethnicity' and 'race'), and the 'immediate fam-

31 Bourdieu/Sayad, *Le Déracinement*, 64.

32 On the genesis of socio-professional categories, see: Desrosières/Thévenot, *Catégories socio-professionnelles*.

33 In career records, the profession of the parents is mentioned on the military documents. Therefore, we know more often the parent's profession of former soldiers than of other policemen.

34 On the ambiguity of the word 'ménagère' in colonial sources (here probably used for 'housewife', see: Lauro, *Coloniaux, ménagères et prostituées*.).

ily' or household is cut. While the personnel files may offer basic information about the relationships between individuals and the administration, they do so only at the price of a reification – that of overvaluing the importance of the institution and individual at the expense of the multiple entities at work within this very connection: families and 'kinship fronts,' friendship networks, and public servant networks.[35] Due to the shifting nature of proper names, it is almost impossible to know whether a brother, cousin, or parent played a role in the hiring, promotion, etc. of an agent and, *a fortiori*, of a friend. Since, in an area like that of careers, personal connections (especially clientelism) often played an important role, it is essential to cross-reference these sources with other documents – in particular with life stories.[36]

III

The aim of this chapter is to show that, once the necessary methodological precautions have been taken to liberate social history from colonial categories, the study of career records can contribute significantly to a better understanding of the groups of colonial civil servants. A corpus of this kind may be read in two successive – and complementary – ways. First, the statistical study of all or part of the target population makes it possible to describe the group as a whole. Second, the reconstruction of individual paths and professional biographies helps to situate specific agents within the group. Like all micro-historical analyses, the primary contribution of such an approach is to reveal the group's diversity, thereby correcting overgeneralizations regarding a social category.[37]

Before the rise of the interest in colonial intermediaries, African employees were studied from a class perspective. In the 1960s and 1970s, the colonial period was studied as the basis for awareness of modern class, against the background of the grand narrative of the emergence of the African working class.[38] Yet the term 'class' raises two major issues: one is that it is too rigid, and teleological; and the other that it is poorly suited to the study of African employees, an atypical social ensemble that is difficult to situate between a changeable elite and a working class in the making.[39] In the early 1980s, the work of Henri Brunschwig contributed to taking class teleology out of the study of African auxiliaries and enriching it with a study of power instead by introduc-

35 For the analysis of 'fronts de parenté,' see: Levi, *Pouvoir au village*, 53–96. On the notion of individuals, see: Piot, *Isolément global*, 33–35.

36 Mann, *Native Sons*, 13–15.

37 Levi, *Pouvoir au village;* Revel, Micro-analyse, 15–36.

38 Diop, *Histoire des classes sociales*; Sandbrook/Cohen, *African Working Class*.

39 Jezequel, *Mangeurs de craies*, 7–17.

ing the idea of 'collaborators,' which he used to refer to traditional leaders, post office and telegraph managers, printers, local health executives, and policemen – in short, 'the extensive rank and file of the voluntary collaborators' of colonization.[40] Brunschwig's analysis had the merit of insisting on the role these agents could play as intercessors in the eyes of villagers, but it did not open up a new field of research, which would instead continue to lie fallow for another ten to fifteen years.[41]

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a new approach took hold that no longer examined colonial employees in terms of social class, but according to their position in the colonial context, within the framework of the concept of intermediaries of colonization. In a recent work on this subject, Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Osborn, and Richard Roberts use this term to designate individuals who held a subaltern position in the colonial administration and whose job it was to act as a link between the colonisers and colonised.[42] This work, which is renewing the historiography of this subject, is helping to give new momentum to research on the intercessors of colonization: After the people 'from below' (peasantry and proletariat) and from 'above' (elites) have had their turn, those from the middle now have the place of honor.

This invitation from historians to rethink the colonial state starting from the question of intermediaries is linked to two considerations. First, there is the empirical observation of 'the generality of the role of intermediation granted to indigenous actors' in the colonial state;[43] the colonial states were characterised by the significant number of these agents and their particularly important role in transactions between the European administrators and local populations.[44] Second, there is a theoretical consideration: Colonial intermediaries offer an analytical means to rethink certain colonial dichotomies, in particular colonisers versus colonised, dominant versus dominated, Whites versus Blacks, collaborators versus resisters.[45] Colonial intermediaries participated in these categories, which 'caused problems' for the imperial powers because – just like other social categories ('évolués'; 'the converted'; Métis, etc.) – they forced them to constantly reconsider the 'great dividing' line between 'Europeans' and the 'Indigenous.'[46]

The issue of the intermediaries of colonization has thus considerably enriched the study of professional groups in the service of the colonial state, the main heuristic contribution of the term arising from its relational character, since the category of 'intermediary' is to 'middle class' what the category of 'subaltern' is to 'proletariat': a way

40 Brunschwig, *Noirs et Blancs*, 135.
41 Brunschwig, *Noirs et Blancs*, 155.
42 Lawrance/Osborn/Roberts, *Intermediaries*.
43 Bayart et al., Legs colonial, 1–22, 9.
44 Trutz von Trotha defines colonial statehood as a form of power based on 'intermediarity' (Trotha, Utopie staatlicher Herrschaft, 23–251).
45 Cooper/Stoler, Metropole and Colony.
46 Saada, *Les enfants de la colonie*, 20.

of replacing the essence with a relationship and the relationship of production with a power relationship.[47]

Yet the concept of 'intermediary' is more problematic than it seems. Indeed, this concept conveys the implicit idea that the position an individual occupies on the social scale corresponds to that which he holds in the administrative apparatus. We should be wary of the impulse that inclines us to assume that, because they are at the centre of the relationships between the state's bureaucracy and users, the employees of the colonial state necessarily find themselves at the centre of society and – even more questionable – that they necessarily find themselves *between* two cultural worlds. While administrative hierarchies, socioeconomic disparities, and cultural differences may corroborate one another, they do not necessarily overlap.

IV

The career records add complexity to the concept of colonial intermediaries in two ways. First, they demonstrate both the diversity and insecurity of the policing profession. The policemen came from very different social and cultural backgrounds; moreover, they often only stayed in the force for a very short time. Second, they show the unequal distribution of resources within the policing sector – in particular that of the most strategic resources: Educational capital and military experience. As a result, they show that the agents, far from merely being part of a vertical scale with elites at the top and subalterns at the bottom, were actually also part of a horizontal space organised around the possession of various types of capital – educational and martial capital in particular – which put them in a situation of having to compete for positions.

The career records reveal, first and foremost, the diversity of the police group and insecurity of its members' careers. Despite its small size, the group was remarkably heterogeneous. It includes members of all of Togo's societies (Kabye, Ewe, Gen, Bassar, Moba, Lama, Losso, Konkomba, Fon, Kposo, etc.), with none of the eighteen groups represented being obviously overrepresented; the diversity of languages spoken (twenty languages for 114 men) confirms the notion that no particular 'intermediary' ethnicity was more likely to specialise in police work than any other.[48] The jobs carried out by agents before joining the force also disprove the tendency to believe that colonial agents specialised in intermediary functions early on. The police corps included former farmers, fishers, workers, dockworkers, soldiers, drivers, teachers, clerks, hairdressers, and

47 Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak?, 271–313.

48 The reading of career records leads to modify slightly the weight of the ideology of 'martial races', which are crucial in colonial discourses, but not always followed by concrete effects (see: Glasman, *Corps habillés,* chapter 4).

unemployed individuals, and though urban jobs were undeniably overrepresented, no particular attraction between these jobs and certain intermediary functions becomes clearly apparent. Finally, the range of the policemen's educational levels reinforces the idea of diversity: one-quarter of the policemen held degrees; one-quarter were described as 'well-read' without, however, holding degrees; and one-third were 'illiterate.'[49] In other words, holding a position as an African agent of the colonial state did not necessarily mean having an intermediate level of education.

In addition to the group's diversity, what is also striking is its extreme fragility. Far from being stable and robust, it was a shifting and relatively fragile entity, and subject to tremendous job insecurity. Only one-third of police officers remained in the force until retirement. One-fifth of the group died before reaching retirement age, while another significant share resigned. Even more importantly, between one-fourth and one-third of policemen were dismissed, for political, administrative, medical, or legal reasons. Of the dismissals for medical or legal reasons, it is not always clear whether they were in fact politically motivated.[50] As a result, the average duration of careers was relatively short. Only one-third of policemen worked in the force for more than fifteen years, while another third stayed for less than five years. Strikingly, in 15 % of cases, the policemen resigned or were dismissed less than a year after being hired. As the records show, getting a job in the security forces did not mean having job security.

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49 Level of formal (colonial or missionary) education (N=114) (CEPE= Certificat d'Ecole Primaire Elémentaire/primary school degree)

Degree higher than CEPE	8 %
CEPE	18 %
'well read' ('lettré')	25 %
'Illiterate' ('illettré')	31 %
Unknown	18 %
Total	100 %

(source: Data base on career records)

50 Causes for leaving the police (N=114):

Dismissed	28 %
Retired	36 %
Resignation (for another position)	9 %
Death	18 %
Resignation (for unknown reason)	5 %
Unknown	4 %
Total	100 %

(source: Data base on career records)

Second, the investigation shows that the status of policemen cannot be summed up as a position between the top and bottom of society, or as a mid-level administrative rank on a vertical scale. The police group was a vertical hierarchy, of course, one that is both objective (managers and rank-and-file, salary and bonus, job stability, leadership) and subjective (mode of conduct, way of wearing the uniform, monopolization of certain knowledge, closeness to the European leadership). Yet it was also characterised by horizontal competition between agents who held different forms of colonial capital.

In the 1940s and 1950s, positions for police officers (commissioners, inspectors, assistant inspectors, police assistants) were reserved for graduates, but posts for policemen (policemen, brigadiers, chief brigadiers) were open to non-graduates. In particular, the colonial administration relied heavily on former native guards and servicemen to fill the ranks of the police. During the last twenty years of the colonial period in Togo, the position of police agents in the hierarchy depended on various factors (seniority in the force, services rendered, seniority in other law enforcement bodies, duties) that went beyond the simple question of what educational degree they held. As a result, the competition for positions, reinforced by the instability of the job market and brutal socio-political changes of the 1950s, led to competition between the holders of distinct, legitimate expertise: On one side were the holders of cultural capital, based on quantifiable resources (degrees and educational qualifications) and non-quantifiable ones (command of the French language, eloquence, command of European cultural codes) acquired primarily in colonial or missionary schools, and on the other were the holders of martial capital, defined by physical attributes (muscular strength, size, health) and specific skills (ability to be physically imposing, discipline, shooting skill) acquired predominantly in the army.[51]

Agents possessing various types of resources could remain calm in the face of the problem of competition between policemen. For the rest of the group, it helped to set oneself apart, with some agents denouncing 'intellectuals' (a pejorative expression for self-aggrandizing graduates), while others made fun of the '*coulibaly*' (an equally pejorative term for former servicemen considered uncultured and brutish).[52] For both groups, the evolution of law enforcement agencies – bureaucratization and increasing administrative tasks, or, conversely, emphasis on law-enforcement functions – had an

51 On the notion of capital, see: Bourdieu, *La distinction*. Laurence Proteau and Geneviève Pruvost use the term 'warrior capital' ('capital guerrier') to sketch the social space of French police and military forces (Proteau/Pruvost, Se distinguer, 7–13, 13). Rémy Bazenguissa coins the term 'military capital' ('capital militaire'), very similar to what we mean here with martial capital (cf. Bazenguissa, *Voies du politique au Congo*, 126–32).

52 Expressions collected in interviews with former policemen and officiers in Lomé between October 2008 and January 2009. 'Coulibaly' is a Bambara name which relates to the fact that many Tirailleurs were recruited among Bambara-speaking populations.

immediate impact on their opportunities for employment and for hierarchical and social advancement.

Conclusion

The career records of African civil servants present a privileged source for rethinking the history of the groups that served the colonial state. Still largely underutilised, these dense and nominative documents – like other corpuses recently discovered and used by historians (legal sources, investigation files, land registers, registration books, surveys, records of community leaders) – can help us to write a new social history of Africa using a micro-historical approach.[53] Historians of Europe are increasingly drawing on personnel files, and the methodological debates around the use of this type of source should encourage historians of Africa to turn to them as well.

That said, African archival collections assume a different form from European collections: Less dense, and patchy, they also remain confined by the colonial categories historians are trying to cast off. Using these career records thus means having to adapt methods developed by Europeanists to African archival realities. Historians of Africa shall neither reject the colonial archives, nor imitate conventional techniques of Europeanist history, but rather adapt these methods for a different terrain. The history of Africa requires conceptual and methodological 'bricolage' to adapt known historical techniques to sources that remain under-recognised.[54]

The analysis of career records must encourage considerations regarding emerging categories in social history. The concept of 'intermediary' can thus be enriched through a microscopic analysis of the careers and conflicts within the groups of African auxiliaries. Colonial policemen were not situated in a one-dimensional space – that is, the vertical scale of colonial society abstractly perceived in terms of 'top' and 'bottom' – but in a two-dimensional social space that was first and foremost that of their professional setting: That is, the small group of policemen, soldiers, gendarmes and guards who represented the socio-professional field in which the careers are made and unmade. 'Colonial intermediaries' – yes; however, they must be understood less as being *between* – Blacks and Whites, high and low, state and society – as *at the centre* of the tensions that run through colonial society.

53 On juridical sources, see: Roberts, *Litigants and Households*; Rodet, *Migrantes ignorées*; Goerg, Femmes adultères*icaines*, 495–522. On inquiry files: McCaskie, *Asante Identities*; on land property registers: Eckert, *Grundbesitz*; on school registers: Jezequel, *Mangeurs de craies*; on personnel files of customary chiefs: Goerg, Chefs de quartier.

54 Jezequel, Ecrire l'histoire.

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