

Chapter 9

“In [Them] We Will Find Very Desirable Tributaries for Our Commerce”: Cash Crops, Commodities, and Subjectivities in Siin (Senegal) During the Colonial Era

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Formations of Colonial Capitalism: From Totalities to Assemblages

Why should historical archaeologists “at large” be interested in the material past of colonial French West Africa? One answer might invoke the fact that, over the past decade, the discipline has become increasingly concerned with the study of colonial modernity worldwide. This pursuit has primarily focused on recovering the faded existence of colonized peoples confined to the margins of recorded history, in an effort to complicate narratives of the past painted in broad regional or global strokes. By this account, the shifting patterns of action, acquiescence, and resistance crafted by the subject populations of French West Africa contribute valuable empirical materials to the wide tapestry of indigenous experiences that archaeology has so effectively documented and which illustrate the dynamic nature, implicit tensions, and intrinsic variability of colonial life-worlds over time and space (e.g., Hall 2000; Dawdy 2008; Silliman 2005; Voss 2008).

The fact that this essay – the substantive portions of which examine the rationalities and uncertainties of colonial economy and governance in the Siin province (Senegal) – is the only chapter in this volume dealing with French imperialism and one of the three contributions on continental Africa may outline other elements of answer. First, despite a growing number of archaeological studies on African colonial worlds and despite the relative lateness of formal colonization on the continent (one of whose manifestations is a wealth of ethnographic and oral archives directly germane to the study of colonialism), Africa has not centrally featured in disciplinary conversations about colonial histories, processes, and materialities. Second, while archaeological research is shedding widening light on French imperial ventures in the Americas (Dawdy 2008; Kelly 2009), the archaeological history of French colonialism and capitalism in Africa has only begun to be written.

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If the relative invisibility of French colonial Africa in historical archaeology is surely a matter of empirical poverty, it also indexes a certain structural unevenness in the geography of discourse and scholarship on colonialism and capitalism. As collective contributions to this volume testify, the archaeological study of colonial encounters *has* dramatically expanded its spatial compass over the past few years, and case studies now stretch around the globe from Alaska (Crowell, Chap. 4) to Australia (Paterson, Chap. 11), spanning a variety of national, imperial, territorial, and cultural configurations. Having recognized this, Kelly's (2009) recent observations about the Caribbean – that the material history of the region has often been written in relation to the *English* colonial world at the expense of a more complex mosaic of local colonial cultures, some quite singular in their expressions – nevertheless seem broadly applicable to the historical archaeology of colonialism. Because a disproportionate amount of research has taken place in settings occupied by people of British extraction and because of epochal developments in British manufacturing, production, and distribution that resulted in the global diffusion of mass-produced material culture in the second half of the eighteenth century, archaeology's colonial geographies often implicitly evoke the British imperial world as their primary context of reference (though the very robust body of work that is developing on the California mission system is rapidly promoting the Spanish empire as a complementary theater of analysis). In related fashion, archaeologies of capitalism have more often than not examined its Anglo-American variety, which is sometimes seen as a metonymic expression of capital as a historical and social formation (Delle et al. 2000; Johnson 1996; Leone and Potter 1999; McGuire and Paynter 1991; but see papers in Hamilakis and Duke 2007). A turn to French colonial Africa (and, by extension, other understudied imperial geographies), then, offers the proverbial decentering gesture, which can help to unsettle certain archaeological assumptions or expectations about the nature of colonial relations and power geometries; by pointing to commonalities and dissonances in the orchestration of colonial life over time across imperial dominions, such gestures have the potential to “make strange” and thus illuminate all the power fields under consideration.¹ To use an African example, for instance, British and French colonial Africa are often contrasted on the basis of different styles and regimes of governance, the former being associated with the so-called indirect rule and the latter with direct rule. As the case study presented in this essay reveals, however, this distinction is largely specious in that although the French administration gradually shifted over time from a posture of “governing at a distance” to a more capillary, makeshift form of governmentality (Conklin 1997: 6–7; also Cooper 1996), the colonial state was at all times beholden to local indigenous institutions, authorities, intermediaries, and elites for the exercise and enforcement of rule (Lawrance et al. 2006). Likewise,

¹As examined elsewhere (Richard n.d.), this decentering move can be applied within imperial formations as well. For instance, the presence of different artifactual assemblages and archaeological patterns in eighteenth- to nineteenth-century French occupations in Louisiana, Guadeloupe, and Gorée speak to the possibility that different configurations of subjectivity, sociality, and placemaking were in existence in various parts of the French imperial world.

as I hope to argue below, capitalism as a historical mode of political economy is always mediated through local circumstances, institutions, and ideas, and French conceptions of “markets” and commerce, profitability, civility, and morality, and their relationship to political control did not always mirror the economic positions and practices espoused in various parts of the British empire. In other words, despite convergences and “family resemblances” speaking to shared concerns, realities, and philosophies of colonial imposition,² modern imperial formations – whether rooted in Britain, Spain, France, Portugal, Germany, Russia, or Japan – ultimately coagulated around different doctrines and ideologies of rule, different economic policies, as well as vastly variable cultural and political terrains *within* their territories (e.g., Pagden 1995). Capturing “coloniality” as a historical object, thus, demands an attentive eye to departures, permutations, and fluctuations across imperial lines, if only to reveal that variability and unpredictability are two of the most enduring attributes of “the colonial moment” and forms which it has historically adopted.

Recent efforts of archaeology to study global encounters at the nexus of (material) culture, capitalism, and colonialism follow in the well-trodden tracks of a set of perspectives pioneered in the fields of historical anthropology and postcolonial thinking. Starting in the 1980s and coming to full maturity the following decade, infused with the writings of Michel Foucault, cultural Marxism, and post-structuralism, this scholarship has worked to expand and rethink narratives of the left and the right regarding the incorporation of world populations into a common, if highly uneven, history of global exchange (Cohn 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Cooper and Stoler 1997; Dirks 1992; Stoler 1995a, b; Taussig 1987; Thomas 1994). Part of this corrective work has endeavored to nuance a certain Marxist canon that has accorded preeminence to the implacable unfolding of capital’s laws of development and its transformative hold on people caught in the eddies of the world economy. In the process of conversing with these strands of thought, postcolonial literature has also engaged a number of Marxist theses about the history of capital and colony in an effort to complicate classic scenarios merging the motions/motivations of capitalism to the class interests of the Bourgeois state, as well as analyses of imperialism and capitalist growth of Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. On the other side of the political spectrum, anthropological histories have also challenged liberal and modernist orthodoxies chronicling the forward march, progressive agencies, and promises of free market exchange (Cooper 1993).

Collectively, these studies have forged a structure of feeling and conceptual foundation for historical analyses of the intersections among colonial sovereignty, imperial economies, and global markets. Anthropologies of colonialism have succeeded in tempering the certainties of earlier intellectual annals and substituting in their stead a more sobering commitment to the contingency and historicity of culture, power, and political economy. In lieu of previous tendencies to portray colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism as total systems organized by recurring sets of principles,

²Some of these family resemblances can be traced to very concrete historical processes of knowledge diffusion and construction. In effect, as shown in Stoler et al. (2007), social planners often looked “beyond the nation” to other colonial empires for inspiration regarding effective technologies of rule, development programs, and blueprints of population management (also Morgan 2009).

dynamics, and directions, the outcome has been a fragmentation of these totalities, which have been unhooked from a common trajectory of causation and determination and replaced by careful examinations of the discrepant contexts, agents, and structures framing the exercise of governance, passage of capital, and construction of colonial worlds and identities.

To take some of the relevant operative terms, for instance, the use of “the colony” (or “coloniality”), “empire,” or “the postcolony” in the paradigmatic singular – as if describing an epochal “condition” or discursive formation, a Platonic idea or neo-Kantian form – has come under increasing scholarly criticism (Cooper 2004, 2005; Weate 2003). While recognizing the convenience of these terms as shorthands, pointing to broad commonalities in structures of power and lived existence, critics have noted the historical and sociological underspecification they convey, as well as a certain flattening of experience which ironically runs the risk of airbrushing the cluster of agencies, strategies, and histories that exceed their narrative frame.³ Instead, recent scholarship has encouraged the need to examine colonies and empires as “sociohistorical formations,” that are contingent configurations of political, economic, and cultural practices whose expressions must be thoroughly situated in time and space. As such, colonies and empires are not “things,” but “polities of dislocation, processes of dispersion, appropriation, and displacement” working through people, milieux, and categories; they are not “steady states, but states of becoming, (polities) in states of solution and constant formation” (Stoler et al. 2007: 8–9; cf. Calhoun et al. 2006). Such critical analytic, in turn, is tailored to the recuperation of the plurality of forms, stakes, agendas, and experiences that constituted colonial worlds and which shaped the process of their making and unmaking. Of course, a similar critique can be leveled at the idea of “the colonial state,” which is a subspecies of the state abstraction and creates a singular political object masking the empty foundations of sovereignty (Bartelson 2001), where there was in actuality an assemblage of practices, interests, rationalities, and institutions (Barry et al. 1996; Comaroff 1998; Moore 2005).⁴

A final critical category, both in the context of this volume and studies of colonial experience, is that of “capitalism.” As is now well-recognized (e.g., Blim 2000; Sahlins 1994), there are, of course, different “moments” and configurations of capitalism – mercantile, industrial, corporate, (neo)liberal, financial, etc. ... – though different epochal structures and logics of capitalism interweave with local economic institutions, political regimes, and cultural imaginations to achieve particular forms on the ground. As astutely remarked by Chakrabarty (2008: Chap. 2) in his close rereading of Marx’s (1973) *Grundrisse*, while the historical move-

³Similar arguments have been extended to the use of “colonial governmentality” or “colonial modernity” declined in the singular, which both paper over the precise operations and mechanism involved in the construction of different ways of being and feeling in colonial settings (Cooper 2005).

⁴In this optic, I should indicate that when, in the course of the case study, I occasionally reference “colony” or “colonial state” in the singular, those abbreviations refer to the specific context of French Senegal – which does not mean that they cannot speak to a broader set of colonial dynamics.

ment of capital is propelled by its own structural logics (its inner *being*), capitalism always encounters antecedent histories that are rarely subsumed in full, as its agents, forces, and appendages work to create the conditions of its social reproduction. Its omnivorous and universalizing obsessions notwithstanding, capital does not simply exhaust difference and otherness. It can tolerate or even encourage their presence, leaving the possibility for the makers of these other histories to resist, ignore, or accommodate the logic of capital’s workings. These other histories, in other words, whose traces anthropologists and archaeologists hope to retrieve, are both constitutive of capitalism and constantly interrupt its totalizing drives. Taking the emancipatory possibilities watermarking Marx’s analyses to greater deconstructive lengths Gidwani (2008) has proposed to open the category of capitalism to question. He argues that the ceaseless interruption, alteration, and reinforcement of capitalism’s motives – a compulsive pursuit of profit, accumulation for its own sake, and the exponential genesis of surplus value – by a variety of other logics challenge the ontology of capital as a (shape-shifting) totality animated by a series of unifying logics or laws. Instead, he proposes that

Even though capitalist production dominates the universe of human (and nonhuman) activities, these activities are not reducible to – *not mere expressions of* – capital. Instead, we are forced to confront a “complex whole” *where production activity oriented to profit-making for accumulation interdigitates with other value-creating or normative practices*. Moreover, we encounter a dense circuitry of humans and nonhumans that capitalist value must traverse in the garb of product, commodity, and money in order to be affirmed. (Gidwani 2008: xxiv, original emphasis)

I find Gidwani’s reformulation particularly compelling for two reasons: first, because it aims to explicitly address the convolutions of capitalism in agrarian societies (in Gujarat) in ways that are particularly germane for the rural communities that made up the vast majority of France’s imperial subjects in Africa and second, because it converges with previously discussed efforts to rethink the critical categories of global history along an analytic of assemblages: to view them no longer as totalities, but as contingent formations of elements sutured together into the appearance of *dei ex machina*: “the colony,” “the colonial state,” and “capitalism” (see also Callon 1992, and Çaliskan and Callon 2009, for different but similarly minded analyses of “markets” and “economy”).

Combining these different inspirations, I approach the question of colonial capitalism in Senegal by heeding Gidwani’s search for intersecting regimes of value and the “dense circuitry” of people, spaces, and things channeling the various incarnations which capital can take. At the same time, my analysis *also* seeks to examine how processes of value creation and circulation articulated with, and were given shape by, other colonial assemblages involving different arrangements of political rule, social practices, and ideologies of development (Coronil 2001). One salient element of this relationship is that, instead of portraying French colonial capitalism as a smoothly functioning whole, the analysis points to disjunctures (both latent and realized) between the interests of merchant capital and those of colonial governance (Marseille 1984; also Boone 1992). Additionally, it highlights the role of political

institutions and legal conventions in delimiting and constraining the freedom of markets and operations of capital (also Chakrabarty 2008: 51–52, 56–57). Interestingly, it is at the seams between politics and commerce that new forms of economic life emerge in starkest light and where the strategies of different colonial actors can be most clearly observed. It is also in the interplay of these articulations suturing different repertoires of practices and relations that colonial capitalism acquired shape, enduring but unstable, combining and recombining into new precipitates as its constitutive elements shifted over time.

Before these general remarks and turning to colonial past of Senegal, I should perhaps confess that my evocation of historical anthropology earlier in this introduction was not entirely innocent. As it stands, much of the analysis presented in this chapter is stitched together from ethnographic and documentary accounts, with archaeological sources featuring more marginally in the picture. As already alluded above, this analytical strategy is in part dictated by the rudimentary nature of the archaeological record in Siin, where rich material assemblages recovered from definable contexts are largely absent. With the exceptions of two sites (Joral and Pecc Waagaan), where small-scale excavations and limited testing were conducted, the bulk of the archaeological evidence for the colonial period comes in the form of surface assemblages collected at over 90 residential sites featuring late nineteenth–twentieth-century components. This empirical evidence limits archaeological observations to a very general level of argument and description. Having said this, the methodological choice underpinning this chapter is not solely a product of necessity, but also hails from conviction: a sentiment that historical archaeology is never so effective as when it is conceived as a form of historical anthropology, one where the contexts for the investigation of past materialities and cultural experiences are defined in the systematic triangulation between/within *different* evidential archives, regardless of their medium (Stahl 2001).⁵ Surely, archaeological narratives can provide compelling alternatives to accounts crafted from nonmaterial sources, but in the absence of such self-standing narratives, archaeological sensibilities and attention to the minutiae of object worlds can still provoke new ways of engaging historical and ethnographic documents (e.g., Dawdy 2008; Hall 2000; Voss 2008). This means that texts can be read “archaeologically” with an eye for objects and material mediations that might have escaped the purview of earlier readers mining them for other information. This also suggests that archaeological patterns, even if they are not richly informative, can nevertheless productively mesh with more evocative textual evidence, with the twinned aims of pushing historical sources in new empirical directions while bringing archaeological ones into thicker registers of interpretation.

This somewhat long parenthesis into theory and methodology, thus, returns us to the question with which we opened this chapter, with further possibility for widening

⁵Certainly, the recent and sophisticated forays spearheaded by literary studies scholars associated with the journal *Critical Inquiry* into the analysis of materiality underscore the capacity of textual interpretation to enhance our understanding of the relationships binding people and things (e.g., Brown 2004a, b).

its readership. Beyond the substantive analysis of Siin’s grapplings with France’s ideology of empire and the deepening penetration of market forces, historical archaeologists may find interest in (1) the proposal for a dissolution of the various totalities that have dominated the study of the modern world system, (2) the suggestion that “colony,” “capital,” and “empire” be examined as contingent and intersecting formations made up of shifting assemblages of agents, relations, and representations, and (3) the proposed alloying of historical anthropology and archaeology. Having closed this prefatory circle, at least momentarily, it is now time to open the floor to Senegal.

Mise-en-Valeur: Logics and Aesthetics of Colonial Capitalism in French West Africa

In the late 1850s, on the eve of formal colonization, French officials were gazing upon the land of Senegal, their eyes filled with promise. Some 40 years prior, from its coastal enclaves, the nascent French colony had embarked on a project of *mise-en-valeur* (“putting to use”): a program of agricultural colonization focused on ameliorating cultivable land and exploiting available resources animated by the pursuit of realization of African soils’ agricultural value through development (Hardy 1921; Monteilhet 1916). The escalation of political hostility generated by these measures led to the prompt abortion of the agricultural project, but the idea of *mise-en-valeur* never really expired and continued to stimulate France’s imperial ambitions (Aldrich 2002). In effect, the decades leading up to colonial conquest saw the emergence of peanut cash cropping, and by the time of the first military expeditions, the lowly peanut had begun to bind African communities to French commercial interests while offering a foundation for the affirmation of French interventions in regional politics (Klein 1968; Mbodj and Becker 1999).

By the end of the 1880s, military “pacification” and muscular diplomacy had demarcated a nominally secure and stable territory, opening a new economic frontier, where French commercial energies would expand and thrive. The military and political costs of the colony would be validated and recouped through the economic returns obtained on the access to raw materials. As the official rhetoric went, natural and agricultural resources would be obtained in exchange for metropolitan goods and shipped to France, where they would be transformed into commodities and then circulated back to colonial consumer markets. The economic value accrued at each step in the process of transformation would not only help colonial government to pay for itself, but would also bring revenues into metropolitan coffers (Faidherbe 1889).⁶ Seeking to limit capital investment and maximize revenues, colonial

⁶See Marseille (1984) for a trenchant discussion of the flaws in French colonial ideology, and incompatibilities between tricolor colonialism and capitalism (also Cooper 1993).

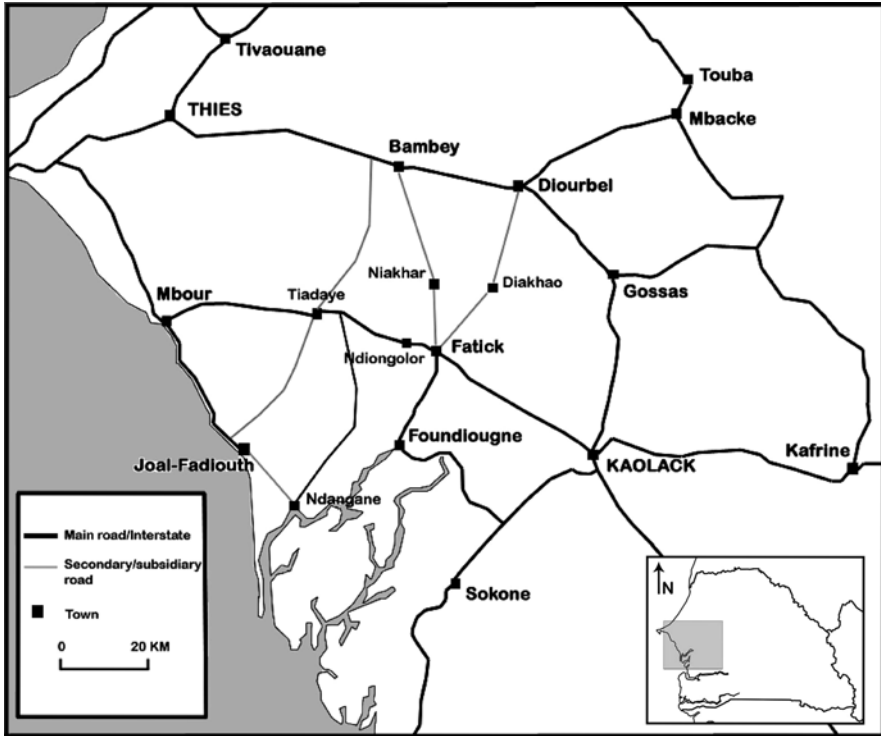


Fig. 9.1 The Siin region of Senegal

economists and officials planned to build colonial *mise-en-valeur* not on infrastructural development, “modernizing,” or reorganizing local economies, but to pursue economic extraction on the cheap by using existing structures of production and local agricultural *savoir-faire*.

The small province of Siin in west-central Senegal was to play a prominent role in this economic scheme (Fig. 9.1). A modest political actor, the Siin was home to one of the most sophisticated agricultural ecologies in French West Africa. Siin’s agrarian world formed a complex edifice of land rights, labor sharing, and field rotation combining multicrop cultivation, animal husbandry, and regenerative fallows integrated into a broader cosmology and symbolic economy. This agro-pastoral system permitted the achievement of comparatively high population densities and abundant crop production, a fact that did not escape colonial officials. Not surprisingly, the process of French economic expansion coincided with the birth of colonial ethnography, which, in time, paved the way for the deployment of new technologies of the state, practices of enumeration and codification, as well as modes of regulation designed to assist the proper conduct of colonial governance (Robinson 2000; cf. Cohn 1996). In this other kind of “putting to use,” new forms of biopolitical knowledge and classificatory grids were overlaid onto colonized

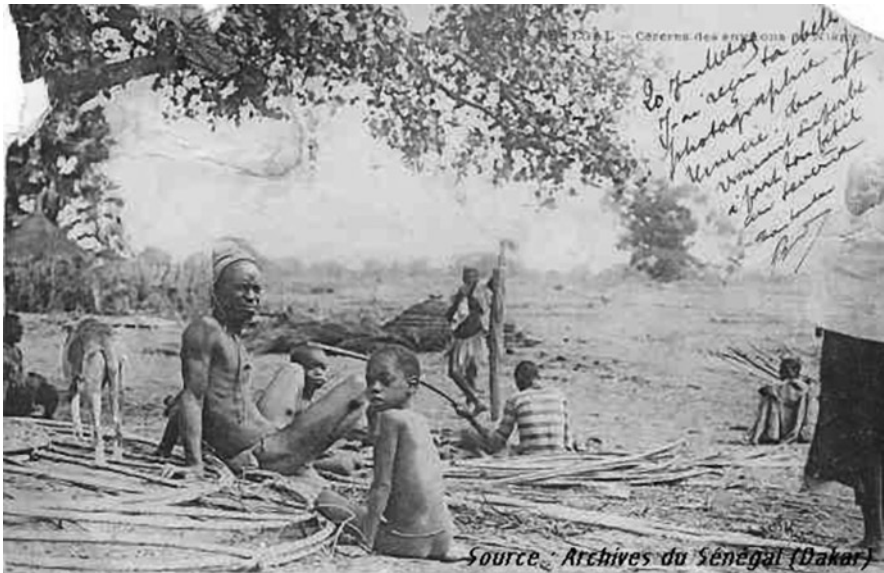


Fig. 9.2 Postcard, “Serer from the vicinity of Nianing” (early 1900s) (Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Iconographie, #0615) <http://www.archivesdusenegal.gouv.sn/cartes/0615.JPG>

populations so as to identify existing “racial” assets and weave them into programs of economic development. In this context, the Serer, Siin’s majority ethnic group, soon came to be perceived as one of the most successful peasantries of Senegal, a population of hardworking, conservative, and isolationist rural folk, wedded to their land, suspicious of change, and outside influences (Fig. 9.2).

The figure of the “typical peasant” probably emerged at the nexus of the colonial gaze and a more deeply rooted domain of socioeconomic practices among Serer populations, making difficult to say which of history or imagination holds primary authorship (Galvan 2004: Chap. 2; Richard 2007: 155–174). More significant, however, is the “truth effect” of this representational economy, which conveniently welded culture and race and recontextualized them into a landscape of bounded ethnic units – a *montage* that reveals more about French interests and anxieties than African identities. Juxtaposed against neighboring ethnic groups, the Serer peasant became a significant counterpart to French ideas of progress, modernization, and “civilization” (Conklin 1997). In this light, the Serer provided a compelling, multi-purpose “other,” whose traditional lifeways appeared at once compatible with and antithetic to colonial economic policies. This ambivalence is denoted in two contrasting colonial perspectives on the Serer, with some observers decriing their hostility to change as an obstacle to progress opposing it to the faculty of economic adaptation and cultural “assimilation” of Wolof populations (Geismar 1933; Reynier 1933; Rousseau 1928), and others also appealed to the romance of a pristine rural civilization, celebrated for its longevity, ingenuity, and symbiotic ties to the landscape (Galvan 2004: 49–50). This image also had pragmatic resonance for

French officials. Many indeed underscored that the Serer provided exactly the kind of small-scale production and agricultural diligence required by the project of *mise-en-valeur*. Thus, Béranger-Féraud (1879: 279, 284) saw early on the promise of the Serer as both valuable producers and consumers for the colonial economy, who would supply “our commerce with products of serious value in very satisfying quantities,” while becoming “very desirable tributaries for our commerce if we manage, through a series of long-term measures, to diminish their inclination for drunkenness and protect them against incursions from their neighbors, who under the pretext of converting them to Islam, devastate their country from time to time.”

Economic development, in other words, also entailed cultivating the “native peasant within,” even as imperial moral education demanded a radical transformation of colonized subjectivities and being-in-the-world (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997) – an impossible project demanding at once change and its opposite, a rural play on the not white/not quite contradiction (Bhabha 1994). These contradictions, in turn, are apparent in colonial reports that largely lamented the Serer’s inability to fully convert to commodity farming, individual entrepreneurship, and modernity, even as the Siin dominated cash crop production in French West Africa at the height of the colonial period. And thus, as colonial officials and later scholars continued to portray the Siin as a bastion of cultural conservatism, a complex story of cultural transformations, compromises, and negotiations has gone largely undocumented (but see Galvan 2004; Guigou 1992; Reinwald 1997a, b for important exceptions).

The rest of this chapter essays a few reflections on these contradictions, particularly as generated by the colonial reconfiguration of Senegal’s rural economy and integration of the region into a broader sphere of capitalist relations. Economic exploitation in Senegal was accompanied by the attempt to inculcate new affects of place and politics, new ideas of property and civility, new tastes and desires, as well as modes of sociality into African communities. The advent of peanut agriculture became enmeshed with and reliant on a broader sphere of colonial strategies, involving taxation, commoditization, monetization, legal codification, and labor movements.⁷ While these technologies of government and the movements of capital they sanctioned entailed significant agricultural and social transformations, they were also mediated and modified by local social forms and perceptions.

Drawing on historical ethnography and archaeology, I explore the particular shapes that these entanglements acquired in the Siin province between the 1860s and 1930s. I pursue the trail of encounters between colonial state and subjects across a messy world of “multiple, indeterminate configurations of power and authority” (Hansen and Stepputat 2006: 302), bridged by tensions and compromises, where the rule of law had to be reestablished constantly in its engagement with local populations (Comaroff 1998; Cooper and Stoler 1997; Hansen and Stepputat 2005). The slippage between colonial policy and local realities, in turn, opened a space of action, where the conditions of colonial existence could be subverted and negotiated away from

⁷For important historical works on these questions in Francophone Africa, see Cooper (1996), Roberts (2005), and Roitman (2005).

official influence, where hegemony and orthodoxy dissolved into hybridity and heterodoxy (Bhabha 1994; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Hall 2000; Mbembe 2001; Schrire 1996).

My concern is with the material terrains on which colonial power plays were waged, the assemblages of authority and agency involved, and the traces of African cultural voices lingering in materiality yet lost to history and modern understandings (Smith 2004). Documenting these expressions requires attention to the Janus face of subjectivity: the condition of being subjected to a particular regime of rule *and* that of coming to occupy a particular understanding of oneself and mode of consciousness (Foucault 1994: 331). It also calls for careful analysis of the fashioning of subjective experiences in particular fields of culture, history, and material relations. Finally, it demands sensitivity to both the repressive and productive sides of power: the world of rules, discipline, and authority that constrains the will and deeds of historical agents, but which, in doing so, also creates conditions that enable new courses of action and imaginations.

In an effort to accommodate constraints of time and space, I take up one facet of the colonial narrative of labor, law, and commerce – namely, regimes of value and their material repertoires. Cultural economy is particularly germane to the study of Serer communities’ engagement with the projects of colonial governance in that it represents one of the “contact zones” (Linke 2006), “targets,” and “points of application” (Scott 1999: 25), where the technologies and forms of authority of the colonial state met previously existing structures of power as well as the cultural senses and sensibilities of African populations, where different domains of materiality clashed or interlocked (also Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Foucault 2007; Trouillot 2003). It is in this mosaic of familiar places and strange spaces – agricultural fields, stretches of landscapes, villages, market centers, administrative posts – that colonial capital flows converged on local worlds of cultural intimacy, where rural Africans reasoned with, contested, and compromised the reason of state (*raison d’état*) and logic of the market. But before getting to this story of culture and commodities, a bit of historical background is in order.

Peanuts, “The Market,” and the Making of Colonial Sovereignty

The roots of colonial economy were planted in the course of the nineteenth century, building on the commercial networks and commodity circuits that had supplied the Atlantic era (Curtin 1975). After a brief boom in the first half of the nineteenth century (Curtin 1981), the gum commerce began to wane during the 1840s, thus opening an outlet for the peanut trade (Brooks 1975). With the developing soap industry and need for lubricant for industrial machinery in the metropole, peanut production soon escalated from a measly 1 metric ton in 1840 to 5,000 tons in 1850; in 1898, export reached 95,000 metric tons (Klein 1968: 36–38; Moitt 1989: 27) (Fig. 9.3). The growing weight of peanut cash cropping in the balance of trade occasioned a recentering of the Atlantic economy after 1850s from the Senegal River toward the



Fig. 9.3 Postcard, “Senegal, the peanut trade” (early 1900s) (Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Iconographie, #0424) <http://www.archivesdusenegal.gouv.sn/cartes/0424.JPG>

provinces of the “peanut basin,” and the Siin-Saalum emerged as the primary producing region at the *fin-de-siècle*.

The introduction of peanuts dramatically altered the contours of economic and power relations in Siin. Cash cropping was a veritable instrument of social promotion for African peasantries (Mbodj 1978: 102–104), which freed trade and production from the moorings of customary privileges and eroded the economic order of the precolonial state (Klein 1979). Peasants were allowed to confront the market more directly as producers rather than through the intermediary of the *buur* (king), nobility, and other traditional authorities. Once beholden to aristocratic lords, peasants reclaimed the fruits of their labor, channeling the proceeds of foodstuff and peanut sales toward the acquisition of goods that were once restricted to social elites or limited in circulation because of their connection to Atlantic exchanges (imported cloth, beads and trinkets, manufactures) (but see Richard 2010; Searing 1993). Weapons became particularly prized as a protective measure against pillages, which further loosened peasants from the predatory grasp of kings and their enslaved armies (Klein 1968: 67; Mbodj 1978: 81).

In effect, with peanut cultivation came linkages to a broader sphere of goods and exchanges which enabled peasants to gradually replace *buurs* and *ceddos* (slave warriors) as beneficiaries of the external commerce by becoming instrumental, if unequal, agents of that economy. The threat of growing peasant economic independence triggered a period of unbridled reprisals, as local aristocracies sought to combat declining incomes and tap the newfound peanut wealth of the peasant world through pillaging and ransacking villages and imposing tribute and customs on the trade

(Curtin 1981: 86). On this background of social tensions, famines, and conflict, French military interventions and pacification between the 1850s and 1870s introduced further instability by destroying fields and torching down villages, policing trade, etc.

The era of the protectorate (1887–1924) ushered further major transitions in political power, bringing about transformations in chiefly authority, as well as a gradual decrease of the *ceddo* entourage and its eventual dilution into the growing mass of the peasantry toward the end of the 1890s (Noirot 1896; also Klein 1968: Chap. 8; Mbodj 1980). Crippled by anemic budgets and metropolitan penny-pinching, French administrators chose to exploit Serer sociopolitical structures and collaborate with local chiefs and monarchs to graft the armature of the colonial system onto local rural settings (Pélissier 1966: 202). French colonial rule, thus, created two effective spheres of administration: a level of former kings and chiefs doing the grunt work on the ground, overseen at a distance by a broader bureaucratic system made up of French administrators and governors. The aristocracy was left in place and operated until World War II under this régime of indirect administration. They were delegated institutional functions (levying fines, recruiting for *corvée* labor, administering simply judicial matters), tax collection duties, and monitored peanut cash cropping (Aujas 1929; Guy 1908: 308). By the late nineteenth century, considerable changes in the forms and distribution of power had been underway at the expense of “traditional” grassroot institutions, mostly land custodians/lineage heads (*lamaans*) and village authorities.

Colonialism also reframed local economies, social structures, and relations of production, introducing new administrative divisions, modes of taxation, and forced labor (often inducing migrations when colonial demands were too heavy); new systems of social and residential organization; an overall economic dependence on prices established in distant countries, on French commercial houses for loans, cash, and goods, as well as on migrant workers; and the growing influences of Islam and Catholicism (Galvan 2004; Klein 1968, 1979; Mbodj and Becker 1999). Although Senegal’s dependence on the world market remained low until the late nineteenth century, colonial agriculture, need for cash to pay the head tax, and growing reliance on French products effectively tethered local lives to the fate of peanuts, generally at the expense of local modes of subsistence and industries (Noirot (1896), in Klein 1968: 174–175). Further, the penetration of *navétanes* (seasonal laborers) and growing agricultural presence of other ethnic groups followed the expansion of peanut agriculture (David 1980; Pélissier 1966: 204–205) and resulted in important changes on the social geography and occupation of space.

The lack of colonial personnel, budgetary shortages, and a need for bureaucratic frugality forced the colonial administration to craft a “hegemonic” political sphere by interpolating new institutions and forms of governance into a precolonial sphere of sovereignty and authority – and not an uncontested one at that. The result was a tense and complex social space, traversed by different planes of political action representing different political projects with different lines of force and extensions, whose contradictions provided fertile ground for the rise of divergent political effects and affinities. This very landscape provided the coded and charged social

terrain across which colonial capital, commerce, and commodities moved, and the sites of their entanglement with Serer's social practices, forms of signification, and cultural economy – to wit, the sites whereon particular colonial subjects arose from the deployment of stately political rationalities and their entwinement with Serer's world-making practices.

Cash Crops, Commodities, and Regimes of Value

Like many rural societies in Africa (Klein 1980), the Siin economy in recent history has been predicated on what peasant scholars call a “subsistence ethic” and “safety-first” principle. Faced with a precarious environment and capricious seasonal rainfalls, Serer peasants have labored to ensure adequate and dependable grain yields, instead of maximizing agricultural production (see Bourgeau 1933: 36; Martin et al. 1980: 53; Reynier 1933: 5–6). During most of the colonial period, Siin farmers managed a continued focus on subsistence cereal and rarely allowed cash crop acreage to exceed that of surfaces planted in millet (Pélissier 1966).

As they toiled to meet subsistence needs, Siin peasants also worked toward accumulating a portfolio of maternal wealth. This “community of goods” was a form of family group insurance, which operated as a “safety net” against the uncertainties of weather and subsistence, a ceremonial fund applied toward the maintenance and reproduction of social networks, and capital that could be invested in production (Aujas 1931: 307–308; Gastellu 1981: 130). Though nominally a bilineal society, the Serer of Siin placed greater social emphasis on matrilineal descent and inheritance, and so building the “wealth of the maternal hut” (*halal a ndok yaay*) was the “finality of economic activity in the Serer milieu” (Gastellu 1974: 39; also Richard 2007: 174–187, 206–211).

These parallel economic logics found concrete expression in the agrarian landscape, where the harvests of selected fields went into feeding the members of “kitchens” (*ngak*, the basic locus of consumption/production) while another set of fields was cultivated to augment lineage wealth (Gastellu 1981; Guigou 1992; Reinwald 1997a, b). Historically, millet and rice fields were devoted to self-subsistence, with cereal surpluses channeled toward amassing maternal wealth (Bourgeau 1933: 36). The expansion of cash crops offered new opportunities for collective accumulation without compromising the existing subsistence economy (Gastellu 1974: 89). Agricultural production became increasingly compartmentalized. While millet farming continued to be directed toward food consumption, the cash proceeds of peanut sales went to satisfy the immediate needs in the *ngak* in the form of head tax, cloth purchases, and reimbursement of credit, before being routed toward matrilineal funds (ibid.: 49). Traditionally, collective accumulation was generally not invested in production; instead, millet surpluses were exchanged for cattle, the most highly regarded expression of wealth, generally in combination with jewelry and cloth (ibid.: 29). Cattle have historically been employed as a communal form of economic and symbolic capital, embodying the lineage's prestige and material

wealth (Gastellu 1985; Richard 2007: 209). As a particularly liquid form of capital, convertible into social relations and spouses, cattle also played a pivotal role in local ceremonial exchanges and the building of alliances and obligations (Dupire et al. 1974; Guigou 1992: 189, 419).

Serer economic sensibilities, based on dual spheres of relations and circulation, were looked on with great suspicion by the French administration and merchant community (Galvan 2004): first, because they were seen as a primitive throwback barring the implementation of free market exchange and normalization of ownership arrangements along a European template of individualism, contract relations, divisible property, patrimonialism, and primogeniture; second, because the absence of a singular system of land title and holding weakened social control; and third, because the Serer would prove to be particularly adept at navigating the Byzantine networks of bilineal inheritance to evade debt/loan repayment and taxation (Dulphy 1939; Galvan 1997: 19–20). The standardization “effect” expected of the introduction of new idioms of property, commodification, and monetization also aimed to foster new dispositions (industriousness) and a taste for commerce and French goods. These measures were put in place to encourage redoubled devotion to peanut production and intensification, and the use of agricultural proceeds to acquire everything else. Key, then, was to create a *need* for cash so as to increase peasant dependence on money and markets for social reproduction. The results turned out to be more mitigated in practice (also Roitman 2005).

At first sight, it is undeniable that Serer’s commodity consumption increased dramatically after the 1860s. This period saw a dramatic increase and diversification in imported goods on archaeological sites. Alcohol consumption appears to have been significant, as suggested by the dominance of gin and wine bottle in material assemblages (Fig. 9.4).⁸ At the same time, the acquisition of alcohol and other imported goods was not exactly a novel phenomenon in Siin, but one drawing on long-existing economic circuits. Not only had Serer’s consumption practices been shaped by centuries of interaction with European commerce, but local communities had displayed a considerable amount of agency in commercial relations, as local régimes of value influenced the reception and incorporation of trade items and new forms of social distinction emerged in the process (Richard 2010). Wine, for instance, acquired a central role in the domain of elite ritual practice (feasting and ceremonies of investiture, in particular) while trade liquor was relegated to the more mundane theater of daily consumption, social prestations, labor parties, and ancestor worship.

⁸This lends some support to contemporary writings that lamented the prodigious consumption of alcohol in the region and debilitating effects of chronic drunkenness on Serer populations (Bérenger-Féraud 1879: 18–20, 279; Corre 1876–77: 598–599; Guy 1908: 305; Pinet-Laprade 1865: 154), as well as the darker repercussions of “civilization” (Carlus 1880: 105, 411). While these testimonies contain a probable amount of strategic distortion and ethnic defamation on the part of European observers, their consistency across colonial correspondence suggests a measure of historical truth, underwriting the central role of alcohol in processes of colonization (see Richard 2007: 166, 212–213, 215; also Dietler 2006). Archaeological and documentary evidence, however, also indicates some differences in alcohol and glass use/consumption across the Siin during the colonial period (Debien 1964: 549; Richard 2010).



Fig. 9.4 Imported liquor bottles, Diakhao region, mid-nineteenth century contexts and later

Alcohol became an intrinsic feature of rural sociality. In turn, local capacity for decision making and consumption choices stretched into the colonial era. Witness, for instance, in the 1890s, Ernest Noirot's (1896: 54–55) complaint that colonial authorities' attempt to replace alcohol with imported cloth and make the latter the chief means of barter was largely unsuccessful, since the Serer were unwilling to let go of liquor and preferred African cloth.

What then of common charges, such as those leveled by Reynier (1933: 1) who condemned the Serer for their “little inclination for commerce,” lack of “adventurous mind,” and “imperfectible” nature? At issue here is not so much that the Serer did not engage in commerce, but that they did so selectively without being drawn into the web of colonial dependence.

The Serer's relative success in preserving economic self-sufficiency was in part derived from their well-integrated agro-pastoral economy, which had sufficient flexibility to accommodate French imperial demands while retaining traditional forms of production (Pélissier 1953: 113). Although a marginal woman's crop at first (Gastellu 1974: 56), peanut was progressively worked in the agricultural cycle and found its place in the alternating millet–fallow rotations (Mbodj 1978: 303–308; Pélissier 1966: 246–250).⁹ Mbodj (1980: 145) estimates that until the first decade of

⁹Expansion in the volume of cash crop exports offers telling evidence of peanuts' increasing role in Siin's economy. The amount of peanuts exported from the region rose from 8,000 tons in 1884 to 40,000 tons in 1909, and then more than doubled by 1914 to reach 100,000 tons. Cash crop exports reached a high plateau in the 1930s at an average of 250,000 tons a year, thereby making Siin-Saalum the premiere economic region in French West Africa (Klein 1979: 77–79; Mbodj 1978: 542–543).

1900s, Serer peasants produced enough to meet their subsistence needs and began to enter the cycle of food dependence only after that period. In fact, until the 1930s, millet continued to be grown for subsistence while peanuts were mainly cultivated for sale (Bourgeau 1933: 36; Gastellu 1974: 56–60): when prices to the producer slumped too low and the terms of trade proved too unfavorable, Serer peasants could respond to economic crises by reducing cash crop production, growing millet instead, and reinforcing their nutrient base with rice (Reinwald 1997b: 159).

Another factor, mentioned in practically every colonial report until the 1930s, was the aversion of Serer peasants for loans and credit purchases and their remarkably low levels of indebtedness compared to other ethnic groups (Reinwald 1997b: 157). These forms of refusal were assisted by the development of composite practices of property and conversion. The institution of land pawnship (*taille*), for instance, entailed the temporary transfer of land use rights for cash, providing one instance of renegotiation of colonial idioms of land management below the façade of the “law.” Serer notions of inalienable matrilineal land were stretched to allow its cash convertibility and virtual commodification (Galvan 2004). This enabled Serer peasants to generate cash so as to meet the imperatives of taxation and social reproduction without compromising local management rights, forms of property, and commitment to the matrilineage. In turn, the reluctance to borrow both buttressed Serer resistance to full-scale peanut agriculture and slowed down the progress of commodification in the first third of the 20th century (Galvan 2004: 112–113). In this light, the effects of market forces and colonial economic policies proved much less disruptive on Serer’s traditional agricultural economy than for their Wolof neighbors who embraced cash crop at the expense of cereal farming (Guigou 1992: 58; Péliissier 1966: 237).

At the same time, after the 1890s, trade in Siin *was* increasingly regulated by peanut production (Mbodj 1978: 548–552). Pressed by the exigencies of taxation, the need to purchase the basic commodities they no longer produced and the threat of *corvée* labor, peasants were left with little choice but to gradually enter the sphere of cash-mediated exchanges (Galvan 1997; Klein 1968: 186; Mbodj 1980; also Guyer 1995). Farmers reluctantly acquiesced, by increasing surfaces cultivable in peanuts, which tethered local subsistence to the fates of world market prices and climatic vagaries (Lericollais 1972; Mbodj 1978: 321–427). Growing reliance on monetized exchanges also had a profound impact on local consumption practices and moral economy (Bourgeau 1933: 55–56; Mbodj 1978: 102–104, 530; Reinwald 1997a). Trading points (*escales*) played a central role in making available manufactured goods that became integral part of the peasants’ quotidian (Fig. 9.5), as more and more of the cash proceeds derived from peanut sales were used to purchase imported items and things, such as medicine, travel, or education (Galvan 1997: 22; also Bourgeau 1933: 55; Guy 1908: 313–314; Martin et al. 1980: 70).

These various transformations have left concrete echoes and signatures in the archaeological landscapes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While sparse in regional material inventories prior to the 1850s, imported objects become a ubiquitous fixture of village remains of the colonial period. Along with trade alcohol, the rising presence of pharmaceutical containers, perfume bottles, molded beads, buttons, and metal hardware and cookware on regional sites (Richard 2007:

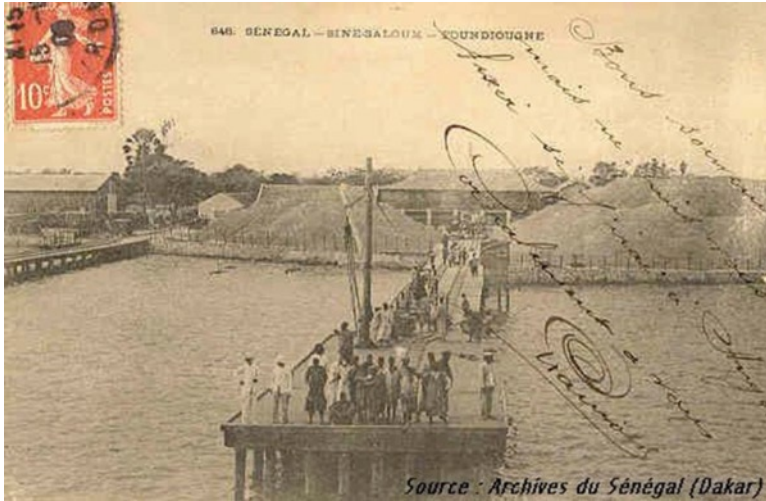


Fig. 9.5 Postcard, “Sine-Saloum, the Foundiougne escale” (early 1900s) (Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Iconographie, #0696) <http://www.archivesdusenegal.gouv.sn/cartes/0696.JPG>

Chap. 9) offers a material testimony of how Serer’s understanding of the world and themselves in it was gradually recalibrated around commodity acquisition and changing forms of consumption.

The material underside of Serer’s colonial subjectivities can also be felt in the restructuration of social space toward French trading and administrative centers, such as Fatick, Foundiougne, or Kaolack, where crops could be sold and converted into cash, food, or other purchasable goods (Aujas 1929; Klein 1968: 114–116, 150–152). We, thus, note a palpable increase of post-1870s settlements in the Fatick area, which seems to support archival evidence of a landscape in flux (Guigou 1992: 77–78), as the town began to pull local farmers and seasonal migrant labor in its commercial orbit. Other colonial investments, such as the development of transportation infrastructure, also influenced the Serer’s residential landscape, their legacy still visible in many contemporary villages of the Siin hinterland that agglutinate in ribbons along primary and secondary roads.

From the economic realm, framed by new necessities of consumption and market exchange, commodities and money began to trickle into the sphere of socially significant transactions, causing a diversification of social payments at baptisms, weddings, or funerals and a related decrease in the symbolic prestige of cattle. After the 1930s, the terms of social and ritual reproduction in Siin were increasingly dictated by cash exchanges. More dramatically perhaps, the realm of imported manufactures became a terrain of struggle for the redefinition of ownership and inheritance, where social ontologies were tested, or in the case of matrilineal allegiances gradually unmade (Gravrand 1966).

Between Past and Postcolony: Siin and the Politics of Representation

To the architects of imperialism, Siin’s built world was iconic of the cultural inferiority and lack of civility of African populations – a profoundly premodern, savage mode of existence out of which they should be lifted. The limited political, financial, and physical presence of France in Siin represented so many stumbling blocks to the disciplining and “advancement” of colonized populations. Instead, “commerce” – that most implacable force of social development – would provide the gospel and main vector of France’s *mission civilisatrice*. In colonial rhetoric, conversion to the market and commodity farming (imposed through the artifices of commoditization, new legal proscriptions [*Code de l’Indigénat*], new notions of work, exchange, and property) would naturally reform the hearts and minds, cultures, and comportments of African subjects. When translated into the messier realm of practice, however, these injunctions often failed to deliver the promises of modernist “purification,” begetting instead a proliferation of hybrid constructs and assemblages (Latour 1993).

Curiously, colonial authors have often failed to appreciate the profound transformations wrought by colonial capitalism in Siin, a “silence” (Trouillot 1995) perpetuated in today’s ethnic imagination in Senegal, where the discourse of Serer-cum-backward peasant is well and alive. Even as sensitive a cultural analyst as Lericollais (1972: 117), writing on the Siin heartland of the 1960s, found it “striking to find only few traces of ... 50 years of trading economy, when one draws up an inventory of the goods in a sérèr house, aside from a few tubs and cooking pots, a few dresses in chests, sometimes a few corrugated iron sheets on the roof.” And yet, almost 100 years earlier, in a series of descriptions of coastal houses, Corre (1883; also Debien 1964) hinted that imported rifles, knifelets, hoes, and small trunks could be found alongside locally obtained calabashes, mortars and pestles, wooden and ceramic containers, mats, baskets, etc... (Fig. 9.6). In other words, trade imports not only seamlessly coexisted with local crafts, but were also probably quite central to daily activities, such as hunting, protection, and agriculture. Indeed, the mere ubiquity of mass-produced artifacts on the surface of villages dating to the colonial period provides quiet, but potent, reminders of peasants’ binding attachments to a world beyond. Much like the liberal economists criticized by Marx (1973), most observers of Siin have tethered their gazes to objects and surface appearances – a sense of failed or unachieved commodification – and missed the complex array of historical relations and experiences underwriting the phenomenal world of the Serer. The rhetoric of conservatism, then, is less about resistance to change and innovation than it is a moral commentary on the (perceived) Serer’s distance from modernity, colonial or otherwise.

But colonial modernity (of whatever national flavor), as this essay suggests, was never determinate or sedimented; it was an incomplete suite of experimental projects and ideological justifications for the expansion of imperial capitalisms and sovereignties. Always in the making, at once symbolic and sensible, yet no less violent



Fig. 9.6 Postcard, “Serer, preparation of a fermented millet beverage” (early 1900s) (Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Iconographie, #0348) <http://www.archivesdusenegal.gouv.sn/cartes/0348>. *JPG* Note the imported cast iron cauldrons in the foreground

and repressive, these projects and the architecture of order they supported collided with a mosaic of cultural topographies and practical terrains (Watts 1992). Much as in the Siin, these encounters produced fractured spaces of sovereignty and subjectivity that rewrote the experiences of all involved parties. Far from passive witnesses of history, African farmers emerged as particular subjects who navigated within the impositions of colonial law and commerce and the possibilities of culture and customary arrangements (cf. Watts 1993). Faced with changing social coordinates and calculi, Siin peasants worked to maintain a delicate balance between growing food and peanuts, acquiring objects while honoring matrilineal obligations, paying taxes and the costs of social reproduction while avoiding debt or famine, working within the terms of freehold property without giving up their notions of inalienable land, etc. In doing so, they retained a degree of social autonomy in the face of colonial encroachments, even as they were becoming more deeply enmeshed with the fate of global markets.

These mitigated experiences did not stop at the gates of postindependence Senegal. In fact, on some level, Serer peasants have had to contend with a no less formidable opponent in the form of the Senegalese state (Galvan 2004), which in the 1960s imposed rather drastic institutional land reforms that fully did away with precolonial tenure systems, regimes of management, and modes of conflict arbitration (Abelin 1979). Subsequent declines in world prices, ecological crises, rising cost of fertilizers and basic necessities, and growing urban recentering of Senegal (Lericollais 1999; Mbodj 1992) have pushed the Siin to an even more marginal position in the national imaginary, as the obverse face of Senegal’s modernity.

Beyond acts of vain resistance and an increasing estrangement between the realm of official administration and local informal management, Serer villagers have responded to their worsening conditions by mobilizing cultural memory and reworking collective imaginations of the precolonial and postcolonial pasts to articulate a critical commentary on state legitimacy, citizens’ rights, social justice, and state–subject relations (Galvan 2004). These projects, however, have often rested on a romanticization and glorification of different political institutions: customary authorities, the precolonial kingdom, the colonial state, or Islamic clerics. The present study might provide an alternative, perhaps complementary, stance of critique. Taking a deeper view of history may help us to illuminate the current postcolonial predicaments without invoking essentializations of culture or history inherited from earlier periods. Placed in a long trajectory of power, the historical fate of rural villagers in Siin can be understood as the product of a complex engagement with multiple configurations of authority and sovereignty, which have sought to control and constrain their freedom of choice while opening unsuspected horizons of cultural action. Understanding the dynamic modes of practice and forms of existence that arose from these historical junctures can help us to dispel contemporary stereotypes in Senegal and the politics of difference they authorize. More importantly, documenting how the terrain of cultural and political choices in Siin has been reconfigured in the *longue durée* of colonial/postcolonial history can offer some glimpses of the kinds of subjectivities and futures that these encounters with modern power have made possible (Mbembe 2001; Scott 1999; Weiss 2004).

Looking beyond West Africa to other geographic and archaeological contexts, the example of the Siin offers a reminder that history is always and perhaps inevitably an “argument about the present” (Holston 2008: 33–35). The material and discursive pasts we encounter in various archives leak into contemporary realities, and, through the recomposition and rearrangement of their elements over time, continue to structure possibilities of today and tomorrow. Placing colonial experiences in conversation with postcolonial conditions may help us survey the problem space of colonial history with fresh eyes and instruments in ways that locate salient historical questions *because of their enduring resonance in the present*. The project of colonial capitalism and how it has been historically formulated – in terms of totalities and determination, tradition and modernity, subsumption or autonomy, progress or tragedy – has indelibly stamped the shaping of political identities in the public sphere of colonized nations with lingering effects on the global present. Concurrently, charting the circuitry of material relations and articulations across the historical geography of colonialism can reveal how various framings of rule, economy, and identity crystallized at various conjectures. This mode of analysis can also expose how the fluency of social life often interrupted, contested, and contaminated the categories, technologies, and legacies of colonialism, and thus break the spell of colonialism and capitalism’s coherence by attending to the vulnerabilities and instabilities on which these projects were built. As they push against the frame of habitual chronologies, historical determinations, and geographic delimitations, colonial assemblages of practices can help to write histories of colonial capitalism that respect the global gravity of capital and colony without making fetishes of them, that acknowledge the ubiquity of entanglement without reifying the local into the

locus primus of history, that accept the power of categories without falling prey to their beguiling aura ... These histories, above all, refuse the triviality of being simply about the long ago. As they rummage through the debris of colonialism, as they jostle and reorder its fragments, loosen them from the matrix of time, and smuggle them into the here and now, archaeology's histories have no choice but to accept their capacity to comment about the present and inspire new ways of imagining and transforming the worlds of tomorrow (e.g., Silliman 2009).

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