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Oppression and Dispossession out of Fields of Plenty: Colonialism and Indigenous Agricultural Transformation

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Abstract

Colonial encounters generate incredible degrees of societal transformation. Such transformations most often occur at the expense of the colonized majority and ultimately serve as means to benefit the colonizer minority. A specific case where this kind of unbalanced societal change can be observed is colonialism-induced transformations to indigenous agriculture. In this paper I use both ancient and modern examples of colonial encounters —Roman Gaul and French West Africa—to show that a number of conclusions can be drawn on how colonialism impacts indigenous agriculture. I argue that in both Roman Gaul and French West Africa, colonial-induced changes to agriculture brought forth negative consequences for the indigenous populations because they lost their sovereign control over the means of agricultural production and crop production was altered in such a manner that rarely benefited rural farming populations.

Keywords

Agriculture, Colonialism, West Africa, Gaul, Transformation

Disciplines

Anthropology | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | Social and Cultural Anthropology

Comments

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*Oppression and Dispossession out of Fields of Plenty: Colonialism
and Indigenous Agricultural Transformation*

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Anthropology 400

Professor Evrard

“If the discipline [anthropology] can unmask anything unique about the nature of the human condition—of colonialism and consciousness, of domination and resistance, of oppression and liberation—it is both possible and worthwhile” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, xvi).

“Farmers are dependent on the natural environment, the changing circumstances of water, soil, and weather, and the actions of animals, plants, and other life forms that can threaten farm production . . . On the other hand, farmers through most of history have been subject to the rule of agencies outside their villages, usually urban authorities such as kings, armies, tax collectors, banks, and markets. In some cases farmers under extreme duress have risen up against towns and overthrown empires, or at least played an important role in a complex circumstance of regime change” (Tauger 2011, 12).

Post-colonial scholar Aimé Césaire wrote in 1955, “Between the colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, [and] degraded masses” (Césaire 2000, 42). A number of these points—particularly taxation, compulsory cropping, the division between elites and a degraded indigenous majority—are especially relevant to colonialism’s impact upon indigenous agriculture. In this paper, I analyze two case studies of indigenous agricultural transformation during periods of colonial occupation. I use both ancient and modern examples of colonial encounters —Roman Gaul and French West Africa—to show that a number of conclusions can be drawn on how colonialism impacts indigenous agriculture. Through studying colonialism’s impact on agriculture, we are able to see how colonial encounters generate changes to elements of culture like resource production and ownership in rural landscapes. I argue that in both Roman Gaul and French West Africa, colonial-induced changes to agriculture brought forth negative consequences for the indigenous populations because they lost their sovereign control over the means of agricultural production and crop production was altered in such a manner that rarely benefited rural farming populations. In particular we see that indigenous farmers, who prior to colonization practiced

kinship-based agricultural production that supported their families, in most cases were reduced to tenant farmers or even enslaved laborers who toiled away on farms owned by wealthy elites. We also see that indigenous agriculture shifted away from producing food crops to instead commercialized agriculture focusing on the production of cash crops that were exported onto wider markets, which had devastating consequences for indigenous farming communities who were now forced to cope with periods of famine.

By studying the disastrous impact that colonial agricultural change can inflict on people's lives and livelihoods, this paper challenges arguments that emphasize the benefits of colonialism to local populations. A number of scholars adamantly argue that colonialism can have beneficial qualities.¹ For example, historians L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, in their infamous text *Burden of Empire*, wrote that "men all through the ages have gloried in the splendor of empire," and conclude that Western colonialism was beneficial to indigenous peoples across Africa, Asia, and South America (Gann and Duignan 1967, 360). Contemporary political scientist Bruce Gilley makes a similar argument in a highly controversial journal article, that "Western colonialism was, as a general rule, both objectively beneficial and subjectively legitimate" (Gilley 2017, 1). However, by studying colonialism's impact upon indigenous agriculture and drawing from archaeological, historical, and ethnographic evidence that focus on the control over agricultural production and the actual goods produced, I aim to show that pre-colonial agricultures schemes were far more beneficial to the rural majority than their colonial and post-colonial counterparts.

¹ This implicit thinking, however, is not restricted just to a fringe group of several scholars. A great deal of the way the West conceptualizes the formerly colonized world is still rooted in colonial perceptions and colonial-era dialogue. For example, a BBC article titled "How Africa Hopes to Gain from the 'New Scramble,'" published on February 24, 2020, suggests that a "renewed scramble for Africa" could alleviate poverty in the continent (BBC 2020). What the article fails to recognize is that it was the "original scramble" for Africa of the 1880s that helped create conditions that causing the present issue of poverty in the first place.

Besides opposing arguments that make light of colonial encounters, my research also contributes to the growing scholarship within the anthropology of colonialism due to the lack of studies analyzing agriculture situated within colonial contexts. There are a considerable number of material and non-verbal elements associated with both agriculture and colonialism, including agricultural labor, population migration, agricultural production, and violence, all of which can provide valuable insight on human social life and inter-societal interaction. The paper will begin first with a literature review that provides a summary of pre-existing anthropological scholarship focused on colonialism. This is followed by a brief methods section where I explain my source material and my reasoning for conducting a comparative study. Next, I will describe the case study of Roman Gaul—which existed from the 1st century BCE to the 5th century CE—beginning first by outlining what rural life was like prior to colonization which will be followed by a description of transformations that occurred in the colonial era. Next, I will present the case of French West Africa—which endured colonial occupation from the 1800s till 1960—also beginning with a description of pre-colonial rural life that will be followed by an outline of the transformations that occurred during French occupation.

Literature Review

Up to the 1960s, American anthropology generally avoided confronting its colonial past. However, during the second half of that decade, a new trend in anthropological scholarship emerged, one which not only grappled with the discipline's dark origins but also posited that anthropology had something to contribute to colonial studies. It was in that period in which the anthropology of colonialism was born, and it is arguably one of the most reflexive and most interdisciplinary subfields within the discipline. In particular, it is a subfield that anthropologist

Peter Pels (1997, 163) believes “erases the boundaries between anthropology and history or literary studies, and between the postcolonial present and the colonial past.”

Since its emergence as a subfield in the late-1960s, anthropologies of colonialism have expanded significantly and now cover a wide range of topics. The existing literature of the anthropology of colonialism can be deconstructed into two major bodies: reflexive anthropologies that study anthropology’s role in modern colonialism and anthropologies that study colonial encounters. Ultimately, I envision that the research presented in this paper contributes to the anthropology of colonialism on a broad level, and more specifically, it contributes to the existing literature of anthropologies that study colonial encounters.

The anthropology of colonialism was born from the reflexive movement within anthropology that started in the 1960s, a period where according to anthropologist Diane Lewis, the discipline “focused on the failure of anthropologists to come to terms with and accept responsibility for the political implications of their work” (1973, 581). Attempts to understand anthropology’s colonial heritage and how to move past it are some of the most essential issues that reflexive anthropologies of colonialism tackle. Since these issues require such strict degrees of reflexivity on the part of the anthropologist, Pels argues that reflexive anthropologies of colonialism are effectively “anthropologies of anthropology.” He believes that these reflexive anthropologies of colonialism—or anthropologies of anthropology—are essential because particular aspects of the discipline retain colonial elements (Pels 1999, 165). It is precisely these topics that Pels outlines which are the central focuses of most of the existing reflexive anthropologies of colonialism scholarship.

Anthropological methodology is one of the most analyzed aspects of the discipline within these reflexive anthropologies. In particular, anthropologists address the relationship between the

researcher and their research subjects. There seems to be a consensus that this relationship in some ways continues to resemble the colonial dichotomy of the foreign outsider using and exploiting the services of indigenous people. What remains especially colonial about this relationship is that too often the work of indigenous research subject goes unappreciated and that indigenous research communities receive few, if any, benefits from published ethnographies. Ironically, if anthropologists of the colonial era gave back anything, it was knowledge to the colonial state, which could be used by the colonial state *against* the indigenous communities who had given so much to anthropologists (Lewis 1973, 582). Roger Sanjek articulates this scenario best, writing that these communities “have been major providers of information, translation, fieldnotes, and fieldwork,” and yet the “remarkable contribution of these assistants—mainly persons of color—is not widely appreciated or understood” (Sanjek 2014, 72). It is recognized that the problematic relationship between anthropologist and research subject is one where the anthropologist still is the one who often bears a position of power and Western privilege, and that the relationship can be attributed to the colonial era. Talal Asad identifies that the “colonial power structure made the objective of anthropological study accessible and safe” (Asad 1973, 17). Through the colonial state, early anthropologists entered and lived among indigenous communities and then left without providing anything in return to these communities.

In addition to identifying problematic links of anthropology to its colonial heritage, such as the researcher-research subject relationship, another common theme found within reflexive anthropologies is one where anthropologists seek the means whereby the discipline can decolonize itself. Sanjek writes that “if the discipline is to move into a phase of political maturity and responsibility in a color-full world, we need to face up to our historical antecedents” (Sanjek 2014, 81). One of the best ways go about this according to Sanjek and other anthropologists is

for the discipline to begin giving credence to non-Western epistemologies and to stop seeing itself as a purely objective social science. There are also calls for the increased incorporation of non-Western anthropologists into the discipline, particularly inside the realm of “insider” anthropology, where non-Western anthropologists can bring new perspectives on their own cultures (Sanjek 2014, 81; Lewis 1973, 589-90). For example, archaeologist Alejandro F. Haber argues that current means of discourse within anthropology to study inequality within Andean societies in pre-colonial and colonial contexts is limiting, and itself rooted in colonialist worldview. He introduces an indigenous concept of relatedness in his discussion about inequality to show that “past societies can be understood without assuming to have been launched on a career leading towards complexity or inequality and ending in colonial domination” (Haber 2007, 282).

Besides bettering itself through the reflexive approach, it is also clear that anthropological methodology and scholarship can contribute to colonial studies. It is the study of colonial encounters that makes up the second half of the anthropology of colonialism’s existing literature (Pels 1999, 169). Pels argues that to better understand colonialism, it is essential to study its nonverbal elements, including “the exchange of objects, the arrangement and disposition of bodies, clothes, buildings, and tools in agricultural practices, medical and religious performances, regimes of domesticity and kinship, physical discipline, and the construction of landscape” (Pels 1999, 169). Both archaeology and ethnohistory are well suited to analyzing these elements, which are traditionally left out of the archival record. Archaeology is particularly valuable to the anthropology of colonialism since the archaeological record is a temporal space in which every colonial encounter from history sits, contains elements of material history, and

can fill in gaps that the written record leaves out (Dietler 2010, 20; Godsen 2004, 6; Campana 2010, 129-30).

Currently, within anthropologies of colonial encounters, there are currently two trending approaches of analysis: comparative studies that cross-analyze two or more case studies of colonial encounters, and studies of a single colonial encounter. In both approaches, it is common to pay homage to reflexive anthropologies of colonialism, where these scholars acknowledge anthropology's colonial past in their introductions before moving forward with their analyses.

There is a consensus that broad comparative studies within the anthropology of colonialism have significant benefits to the overall understanding of colonialism. Most importantly, these broader comparative studies shed light on commonalities of colonialism that transcend temporal space while also highlighting differences between colonialism due to their unique historical contexts (Godsen 2004, 6; Hayes and Cipolla 2015, 3). Furthermore, according to archaeologist Michael Dietler, comparative anthropologies of colonial encounters “pay serious attention to culture as both a historical product and agent” (Dietler 2010, 50). They show that culture is directly shaped by unique historical contexts and that culture itself can impact historical development.

Comparative studies that cross-analyze Classical and modern colonial encounters are especially beneficial in that they can show the true breadth of colonialism-related consequences and how ideas prevalent in ancient colonialisms have transcended into modern colonialisms (Hayes and Cipolla 2015, 10; Mattingly 2011, 6).

To be sure, the comparative approach to studying colonialism, regardless if it is done through the ethnohistorical or archaeological perspective, risks making overgeneralizations in which the complexities of colonial encounters can be lost. And there is truth that valuable perspectives can come from anthropologies of colonial encounters following the localized

approaches that focus on single colonial encounters. They often reveal that colonial encounters are far more complex than just systems that include a strict dichotomy of the colonizer versus the colonized and one-way cognitive and material cultural exchanges (Comaroff and Comaroff 1990, 9-10). Instead, localized case studies, when taken into account together, reflect what archaeologist David Mattingly calls “discrepant experiences” (Mattingly 2011, 28-29).

Depending on the context, we see that indigenous communities responded differently to colonial occupation, that material and ideological exchange were extremely complicated, and that the split between the colonizer and the colonized is too simplistic (Robert 1995; Reid et al 1997). At the same time, however, these studies following the localized approach run the risk of failing to connect their data and conclusions into the larger framework of colonial processes, consequently ignoring the colonial commonalities that do exist.

A middle ground between the comparative and localized approaches does in fact exist, where these are comparative analyses of different colonial encounters which incorporate rich individual case studies as evidence. Dietler argues that a comparative approach is capable of doing both by improving upon “previous work by countering the mechanistic, reductionist tendencies” of older comparative works and “finding more flexible and sensitive ways of situating local histories within global processes” (Dietler 2010, 50). Comparative studies that use detailed case studies take into account the particularities and aspects of a given colonial period attributed to historical context, while still managing to identify and highlight commonalities across all colonial encounters (Cipolla and Hayes 2015, 2-3). Often the format that is taken are books where individual chapters cover specific case studies which in turn are used to highlight broad similarities and trends across different colonial encounters (e.g. Etienne and Leacock 1980; Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002; Mattingly 2011). Another format includes journal articles

that compile localized case studies into a comparative focus from which colonial similarities and commonalities can be identified (e.g. Smith 1994). The particular benefit that comes with comparative studies in all the above formats that draw upon specific case studies is that they contribute to anthropology's larger goal of drawing conclusions about human societies that transcend time and geography through the utilization of concrete, varied evidence.

Methods

There are enough similarities across colonial encounters where they can, and should, be compared and contrasted. Therefore, I have chosen to follow the comparative approach common amongst a number of anthropologies of colonial encounters. What is perhaps most valuable about the comparative approach common in anthropologies of colonial encounters is that they provide a diachronic perspective of cultural change over time, up to a thousand years of change in fact, which is the case with my own case studies. Either one of the case studies, Roman Gaul or French West Africa, could in their own right receive in-depth analyses. However, in doing so, so much of the larger conclusions that can be made about colonial change would be lost. In following comparative analysis, I show that similarities and commonalities do indeed exist within colonialism-induced transformations of indigenous agriculture.

Since I am using Classical-era Roman Gaul and nineteenth-century French West Africa as my two case studies, the source material used in this paper is considerably varied. One of the consequences of such a project is that I have to rely on the data of others. However, the secondary source data I have collected comes from several disciplines, including classical studies, archaeology, socio-cultural anthropology, and history, and there are still moments where I incorporate primary sources when discussing agricultural transformation in Roman Gaul and

French West Africa. The combination of sources used in this paper, one that is not uncommon in anthropologies of colonialism, does much of what Pels suggests: it erases the academic borders between anthropology, history, and other disciplines (Pels 1997, 167).

Most of the source material I use for analyzing agricultural change to Roman Gaul includes interpretations of archaeological data by classicists and archaeologists who specialize in the archaeology of the classics. On occasion, I also draw upon the texts of classical writers like Strabo and Julius Caesar, who while far from adopting the perspective of an anthropologists, did write extensively about their encounters with the Celtic peoples of Gaul. By taking their voices into account with skepticism and in consideration of what contemporary archaeologists and classical historians have said, their perspectives are useful; at the very least one can see how the Romans, the colonizer, perceived the Celts, the colonized. In the case of my sources for my French West Africa case study, I draw heavily upon data and arguments made by historians specializing in the region. Many of these secondary historical sources are large sweeping histories of the region, while some texts go into great detail about the colonial period, while others focus on French activity in the regions. Like my case study of Roman Gaul, I also use several primary sources in my analysis of Gaul—some of which come from voices of West Africans, others from the French.

Pre-Colonial Rural Life in Gaul

It is important to briefly describe the history of the Gauls and how their precolonial society was organized and functioned. The period of Celtic history, more broadly, and Gallic history, more specifically, of concern for this paper was the Iron Age, which began approximately around 900 BCE, and for Gaul, lasted till the Roman invasion which began in the

first century BCE. The Iron Age has been broken down by archaeologists into two distinct phases: the Late Hallstatt phase (750BCE-500BCE) and the La Tène phase (450 BCE-Roman Conquest). The La Tène phase is most relevant to this paper because it was during this phase that archaeologists have noted significant changes to Celtic culture and lifestyle. These changes included the development of a distinct Celtic material culture, migrations of Celtic peoples across central Europe, and by the second century BCE, the establishment of important urban centers called *oppida* in many parts of Gaul (Price 2013, 289-290; Wells 1999, 48-49). The development of the oppida in Gaul and elsewhere reflected the development of an increasingly complex Celtic economy. Oppida were centers for currency production through the minting of coins, and centers for the production of iron tools, personal jewelry, and pottery. While the oppida were significant elements to Gallic society prior to Roman colonization, they were not present everywhere in Gaul, and most Gauls actually lived in small villages or rural settlements (Wells 1999, 53-54, 57).

Regarding the Gallic social structure, archaeologist Peter Wells (Wells 1997, 57) explains that the archaeological record “does not suggest such a straightforward division, but instead a wide range of variation without any distinct breaks in wealth or status” among Gallic social classes. Furthermore, he proposes Gaul was not one unified region with a chieftain in charge of every Gallic tribe. Instead, the stratified hierarchy outlined above existed only at the local level in “small-scale, family-based territorial units,” where “each territorial unit had elite and non-elite individuals” (Wells 1999, 57). Therefore, for much of Gallic society, hierarchy existed, but only at the local level, and even there, it was very loosely practiced.

The vast majority of the Gallic population were rural farming families. Gallic farmers lived on small homesteads that dotted the countryside that housed individual family units. These

family units were often in association with oppida or large villages connected through extended familial relations (Alcock 2009, 79; James 1993, 54; Roymans 1996, 44). From its Mediterranean coast to the British Channel, Gallic farmers made extensive use of the region's rich and cultivatable soils. Roman historian Strabo took notice of the degree to which Gallic farmers applied themselves to the land, writing that "the country produces grain in large quantities, and millet, and nuts, and all kinds of livestock." According to Strabo's observations, "none of the country is untilled except parts where tilling is precluded by swamps and woods" (Strabo, *Geography* 4. 1. 2). Strabo rightly observed that Gallic agricultural produce was extremely varied. Cereal grains were the predominant crop of choice, including wheat, barley, and millet, all of which Gallic farmers had selectively raised due to these crops' ability to withstand drought. The wheat, rye, and barley that the Gallic farmers grew also had a high protein value, and were easy to transform into a number of nutritional breads and pottages (Alcock 2009, 82; James 1993, 55; Roymans 1996, 49). Cereal grains in general, including wheat, had beverage purposes as well; Gallic farmers often fermented the barley into a distinct alcoholic brew (Alcock 2009, 82). Gallic farmers also grew several varieties of legumes, including a bean appropriately now known as the "Celtic bean." The bean itself is rich in protein and rich dietary fiber. Gallic farmers also found that the shells of Celtic beans served well as livestock feed (Alcock 2009, 87).

Arguably the most significant element of Gallic farming was that control over the means of production was organized around kinship. The kinship-based agricultural production practiced by the Gauls is part of a larger level of production that anthropologist Eric Wolf called the kin-ordered mode of production. In a kin-ordered mode production, a nucleus of individuals belonging to the same family group manages the production of material goods. Additionally,

labor is organized strictly around members who identify as to belonging to the same kinship group (Wolf 1982, 99). In the context of pre-colonial Gaul, farms belonged to individual family units, and almost exclusively, Gallic farm labor was organized around members of immediate and distant family units.

Archaeological evidence suggests that pre-colonial Gallic kinship-based agriculture was capable of providing a sizable surplus. Evidence for means to store large quantities of food have been uncovered by archaeologists on numerous archaeological sites excavated in contemporary France. In particular a number of excavations of Gallic farms have uncovered pits dug beneath the earth that acted as grain silos. Archaeologists have also found examples of raised granaries on pre-Roman Gallic farms. They conclude that surplus crop yields collected on good years of harvest would be transferred to these subterranean silos and raised granaries for the winter and for years when harvests went bad (Wells 1999, 58; James 1993, 56-57). Often, elements from surplus crop yields would be brought to and sold in villages which were dependent on the farms that surrounded them for food. By the end of the late Iron Age, the situation was somewhat different in Mediterranean Gaul. By the second century BCE, when the population of Gaul became more urbanized with the development of oppida, farming withdrew from the distant countryside in Southern Gaul and was relocated just outside of these urban centers. The farmers who managed these fields actually often resided inside the oppida instead of on distant farmsteads. However, while farmers in the south actually resided inside of the oppida, this did not mean they lost control over their agricultural surpluses. Instead, the surpluses of grain remained in the hands of individual farming-family units (Luley 2016, 40).

Right up until the end of the Iron Age, the means of agricultural production was almost entirely under the control of Gallic kinship-based farming units, regardless if they lived in rural

farmsteads in western, central, or northern Gaul, or were “urban farmers” of Mediterranean Gaul living in oppida and tending fields just outside of the walls of these urban centers. Gallic farmers commanded a wide variety of subsistence crops, and while they were extremely self-sufficient, they were also innovative agriculturalists capable of not just providing for themselves, but also for villages and growing urban areas. It was, however, at the end of the Iron Age that Gaul would witness the erosion of its regionally varied and independent lifestyle. The war machine of the Roman Republic would crash into the region, forever changing the lives of all Gauls, and drastically transforming the Gallic countryside and the people who lived there.

The Roman Wars of Conquest

Rome’s colonization of Gaul was by no means a straightforward matter; it happened in two waves of colonial wars, with the first beginning in the second century BCE and the second beginning in 58 BCE. In both waves, direct, organized violence—a common element “fundamental to the process of colonization and the attempt to establish sovereignty” on the behalf of the colonizing power (Dietler 2010, 157)—dominated the scene. A significant driver behind the violence that the Roman Republic inflicted upon the Gauls during its two wars of colonial occupation was pervasive Roman ethnocentrism. Greek geographer Strabo, in his work *Geography*, captured the sentiment adopted by the Romans: “The whole race which is now called both ‘Gallic’ and ‘Galactic’ is war mad, and both high-spirited and quick for battle” (Strabo, *Geography* 4. 2). He added, “there is also that custom, barbarous and exotic,” where Gallic warriors “depart from battle they hang the heads of their enemies from the neck of their horses, and when they have brought them home, nail the spectacle to the entrances of their homes” (Strabo, *Geography* 4. 5). Reasons for such an ignorant assessment of the Gauls

originated centuries prior to the first colonizing phase of the second century BCE. Rome fought a number of brutal border wars with the Gauls in the northern end of the Italian peninsula, and in either 387 or 386 BCE, Gallic warriors even managed to sweep down into Italy and sack the city of Rome. The border conflicts and the sacking of the city of Rome left a lasting negative impression upon the Romans, for whom the Gauls came to symbolize a “barbaric” and dangerous adversary (Boatwright 2012, 34).

The first war that led to Gaul’s downfall that lasted between 125-121 BCE, when Rome sent an army to subdue several Gallic tribes that had been antagonizing the city of Massalia (present-day Marseille, France), a Greek colony and Roman ally. In 120 BCE, after several years of brutal warfare, Rome defeated the Gallic tribes of the south and consolidated the entire southern coast of Gaul, including Massalia, into the new Roman colony/province of Gallia Transalpina (Cunliffe 2003, 75-76; Wells 1999, 70). Strabo would write of the affair in his *Geography* that “at the present time, they [the Gallic tribes of the south] are all at peace, since they have been enslaved and are living in accordance with the commands of the Romans who captured them” (Strabo, *Geography* 4. 2). He added, to his relief, that after the war, the Romans put an end to what he considered barbaric practices, “as well as to all those connected with the sacrifices and divinations that are opposed to our usages” (Strabo, *Geography* 4. 2).

Rome’s second war against Gaul began in 58 BCE, when the armies of Roman general Julius Caesar, marched into to the Gallic interior to assist the Aedui, a Gallic tribe considered to be a close ally of Rome, in a war against another Gallic tribe, the Helvetii. The conflict only escalated further when other Gallic tribes began opposing Caesar’s intrusion, while others found it more beneficial to side with the invading army. Soon, the entire region of Gaul was swept up into brutal warfare (Wells 1999, 72). The ethnocentric mindset of the Romans that existed in the

previous century had not changed. Caesar express little sympathy for the Gauls he encountered and ultimately subjugated. In his account of his campaigns in the region, Caesar inaccurately believed that the Gallic masses “are treated almost as slaves, venturing naught of themselves, never taken into council” (Caesar, *The Gallic War* 6. 13). He even claimed that in Gallic ritual sacrifices to their gods, when a prisoner or other wrongdoer could not be obtained, “they resort to the execution even of the innocent” (Caesar, *The Gallic War* 6. 16).

In 52 BCE, in the midst of all of this chaos, a number of Gallic tribes united under the leadership of the chieftain, Vercingetorix, rose up against Caesar’s invading armies, only to be defeated in the hellish siege of Alesia soon thereafter. By 51 BCE, the Gauls could no longer hold out against Caesar’s advances, and Gaul was brought under Roman control—all at an incredible cost to human life (Wells 1999, 72-73). In twisted irony, Caesar, who inaccurately criticized the Gauls for keeping their masses in a state of perpetual slavery, himself enslaved over a million Gauls. His armies are believed to have outright killed an additional million more. On Caesar’s devastating war, archaeologist Barry Cunliffe writes that “the whole of Celtic Gaul had been caught up in the trauma” (Cunliffe 2003, 83). Meanwhile, the classicist Martin Goodman elaborated upon the devastation, claiming that “the impact of Roman Rule on Celtic society was dramatic, sudden and drastic. The whole social order was effectively changed (Goodman 1997, 208). This disorder would eventually lead to drastic transformations to the countryside.

Agricultural Transformations in Roman Gaul

In the aftermath of the Roman conquest, archaeologist Greg Woolf argues that “every aspect of Gallic life was to some extent transformed by integration into the empire, including

most spheres of rural life” (Woolf 1998, 142).² Specifically, Gallic agriculture after Roman colonization differed from its pre-colonial counterpart in two distinct ways: the types of crops of crops being produced and more significantly the degree in which they were produced, as well as changes to the organization of agricultural labor. In both cases, the average Gallic farmer, who in the pre-colonial era was the master of his own farm and prioritized his agricultural produce for his family unit, was robbed of agency by processes of colonialism. Free farming that had been so common prior to the Roman conquest gave way to intensive specialized farming no longer managed by the free farmer himself, but instead a landowner who utilized the labor of poor tenants and enslaved people.

After the Romans conquered Gaul and the indigenous Gallic population was significantly disrupted, with millions having been killed or enslaved, the typical farm environment changed. Following massive land redistribution, small farms of the pre-colonial days were for the most part replaced by estate farms called villae. Woolf defines the Roman villa as “a settlement site, with construction and design of broadly Roman style, located in the countryside,” and “usually the centre of a working farm, often providing a degree of comfort for the occupants” (Woolf 1998, 148). The various components that made up each villa and the large number of workers who lived on its premises is why, according to archaeologist Steven K. Drummond and historian Lynn H. Nelson, “a typical villa was more like a village than a farm” (Drummond and Nelson 1994, 45). In general, a villa included a main house, housing for laborers, outbuildings for craftsmen, and storage buildings for grain, all of which would sometimes be enclosed within a wall. While this was the typical organization of a villa, archaeological excavations of Gallo-

² However, Peter Wells disputes the degree to which how much of all of Gaul transformed under Roman rule. In particular, he suggests that certain aspects of Gallic culture and tradition long endured, especially on the distant Gallic frontier. For more information, see Wells (1999, 148-170).

Roman villae show that the reality was much more complicated than this. Archaeologists have recognized that their establishment in Gaul was not immediate, but rather gradually emerged beginning in the south on the outset of Roman colonization, and expanding in number significantly by the end the first century CE (Woolf 1998, 152). Through such a gradual and often irregular development, the style and construction of villae in Gaul was likewise varied (Percival 1976, 67-82). The types of materials used in construction and the types of building constructed differed by greatly by region, with villae in the south sometimes bearing closer semblance to typical italic villae while those to the north bearing little architectural semblance to their Latin counterparts and instead “represent a local use of Gallo-Roman technology in ways that were determined by local tastes” (Woolf 1998, 155).

This brings us to the point of addressing the issue of just who were in charge of these new agricultural centers. Following Roman colonization, we see that there was an establishment of a segment of Gallic-Roman aristocracy—indigenous Gauls who established close ties to the Roman state and carried considerable social and political influence across Gaul, in both the newly established urban centers and the countryside. Archaeologists have concluded it was they, not wealthy colonialists from the Italian peninsula, who most frequently were the owners and managers of villae (Woolf 1998, 163; Wells 1999, 176; Drinkwater 1983, 178).³ It is believed that the Gallo-Roman aristocracy were descendants of Gallic social elites who found favor with the Roman state, exchanging their loyalty for wealth and status. However, it is important to note that the wealth between the Gallo-Roman aristocracy varied considerably. Archaeological evidence suggests that some members of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy owned and managed

³ Mediterranean Roman Gaul was to a certain extent an exception to this point however. There was a larger influx Roman settlers, and thus, landowners there than in other regions of Roman Gaul (Woolf 1998, 162-63).

villae that were extremely large and contained buildings that were well furnished, while others were of more modest means, and their villae reflected that modesty (Woolf 1998, 163, 164).

In the meantime, however, agricultural laborers who toiled on Gallo-Roman villae were a considerably unfortunate collective, and their situation differed immensely from that of the pre-colonial free farmers. Roman colonization had effectively created a distinct class of laborers consisting of free Gallic tenant farmers who sold their labor to villae owners as well as enslaved indigenous people (Drummond and Nelson 1994, 45). In both cases, compared to the previous condition where Gallic farmers were for the most part, free, and able to labor strictly for their family's behalf, the agricultural labor required of villae laborers was certainly a downgraded standard of living. For the enslaved workers who had no choice, this should be obvious. They had to perform the difficult labor of tending fields and livestock, all without the benefit of receiving any pay for their labor nor benefiting from the crops which they produced. The labor conditions for enslaved people working the fields were so brutal that archaeologist Ross Samson has suggested that they "were the most wretched and impoverished creatures of the Roman empire" (Samson 1989, 100). Additionally, they were left to the mercy of their master and could face punishment that included being chained together with other slaves all the while being forced to carry on their usual labor.

The conditions of tenant farmers who were employed by the villa master were little better. They were effectively a dispossessed collective bound to serve villae owners and, really, the only difference between themselves and their enslaved counterparts was that the tenant laborers received a wage (Drinkwater 1983, 171). The land which they worked, the buildings in which they slept, and the crops that they produced were not theirs. In effect, the tenants who worked on villae were no longer responsible for producing their own food and were dependent

on the Gallo-Roman aristocracy for employment with which they could earn wages used to now purchase food (Roymans 1996, 65). The lack of ownership over the production of agricultural goods, coupled with the fact that Roman agricultural laborers were not paid that well, in reality made their condition little better than that of the enslaved indigenous laborers. Samson argues along this line of logic, that “the field hand residents on a villa, living in the villa owner's buildings, working his fields, raising his livestock and producing in his workshops were more like slaves than tenants” (Samson 1989, 110). The anthropologist David Graeber also questions the difference between wage labor and slavery. He argues that wage labor “involves a degree of subordination: a laborer has to be to some degree at the command of his or her employer. This is exactly why, through most of history, free men and women tended to avoid it” (Graeber 2006, 67). Taking Graeber’s argument into account with the fact that wage laborers on villae lacked any ownership over what they produced, we see that the standard of living for them and their enslaved colleagues was significantly worse than their pre-colonial predecessors.

Besides the transformation of labor relations on the Gallic farmstead, the transformation in crop production is also revealing of the detrimental impact that colonialism can have upon agricultural communities. The typical pre-colonial Gallic farmer spent his days tending to a wide variety of crops that served a multitude of needs on the farmstead, including grains such as barley, which could feed both the farmer’s family and his livestock. We see an incredible shift away from this sort of farming to intensified farming focusing on a number of specialized crops which were distributed to new Gallo-Roman urban centers, Roman legionary garrisons, and across the wider Roman economy, rather than benefiting the laborers who produced these goods. Most of Gaul’s agricultural output came from the intensified production of cereal crops like wheat and of wine via viticulture.

Current archaeological evidence shows that wine was an agricultural good that already had been produced in Gaul by its indigenous population centuries before the Roman occupation, albeit in smaller quantities (Brun 2001; Boissinot 2001; McGovern et al. 2013). However, in the aftermath of the Roman wars of occupation and the development of villae across the Gallic countryside, it did not take long for wine to become a dominant and essential product in the Gallo-Roman economy. Its importance is well-reflected within the archaeological record, as there are numerous examples of villae across Gaul that specialized in viniculture. Evidence for intensified viniculture is also seen in the mass production of amphorae—ceramic vessels designed exclusively for the transportation of wine (and sometimes olive oil). The domestic production of amphorae increased dramatically after Roman colonization, and these locally produced amphorae were utilized to transport domestically produced wine across Gaul itself and the rest of the Roman Empire. (Dietler 2010, 223; Buffat et al. 2001, 91). While wine was produced in villae across most of Gaul, it was in the south, such as in regions like Narbonensis which had an ideal dry climate, that viniculture production had most significantly expanded by the first century CE. According to Dietler, most of the wine that was produced in Roman Gaul's villae was sold to one of two sources. For the most part, wine produced on Gallo-Roman villae actually remained in Gaul where it was sold in the markets of major urban centers or to Roman forts situated along Gaul's border with Germania. It was also frequently exported out of Gaul through coastal ports along the Mediterranean to other locations within the Roman Empire, and even to the Roman metropole (Dietler 2010, 224).

Besides wine, wheat was another crop that was intensively produced on villae in Rome. Although, like wine, cereal grains were already commonly grown by Gallic free farmers prior to Roman colonization, it was during the colonial period where these grains were grown *en masse*

more for commercial purposes rather than for local consumption (Roymans 1996, 64). Most predominantly, wheat came to be the dominant cereal crop produced on Gallic villae, and also like wine, the commercialization of wheat meant that instead of going directly back into the rural community in which it was produced, the wheat was instead distributed across Gallo-Roman urban centers and, more often, Roman legionary forts which demanded large quantities of resources to sustain themselves. A number of these legionary forts were established along Gaul's eastern border with Germania, and they were dependent on villae for a steady supply of each. On average, a single Roman legion required at least two thousand tons of wheat in a single year to sustain itself. Taking this into account with the fact that archaeologists have excavated a number of Roman forts located on Gaul's frontier, all of which housed several legions, the demand the Roman military placed upon Gallo-Roman agricultural production was especially taxing (Wells 1997, 142; Drummond and Lynn 1994, 42).

What is particularly crucial to recognize about the intensive production of specialized crops when coupled with the fact that these goods were not necessarily redistributed among the Gallic rural communities was that these communities were placed at great risk of famine. Especially when it came to Gallo-Roman wheat production, the Roman military took priority as the consumer, not the typical Gaul who worked as a tenant farmer on a villa nor his family. There is at least one example of famine occurring in Roman-Gaul, in between the two phases of Roman colonization of the region. The Roman historian Sallust noted that during a war ca 74 BCE in Mediterranean Gaul, the Roman general Pompey and his army requisitioned so much grain that the local Gallo-Roman rural population "which was also suffering from a crop failure at the time, could hardly feed itself" (Sallust, *Letters of Gnaeus Pompeius* 5). So long as the Roman military remained primary consumer of wheat in the region, the inhabitants of rural Gaul

were regularly threatened with the prospect of food insecurity. In the case of French-occupied West Africa, West African rural communities would unfortunately have face similar transformations that resulted from colonial occupation.

Rural Life in Pre-Colonial West Africa

In the case of pre-colonial West Africa, there are some a number of social commonalities that transcended state and kingdom borders. For example, many West African societies that would end up under French control were organized as stratified hierarchies, where royalty were positioned on top, free farmers and artisans made up the middle of society, and at the bottom sat enslaved people (Davidson 1998, 160-161). While most West African social organization was generally stratified into these three groups, just like Gaul this hierarchy was considerably loose; the notion of class division did not yet exist in exist in West Africa (Davidson 1998, 161). In general, the massive free rural population, especially those who lived deep in the interior of the region, engaged in farming, and the means of agricultural production was most often organized around kinship, similarly to what existed in pre-Roman Gaul. The kinds of crops that these farmers grew varied significantly, and was only further expanded when frequent contact was established with Europeans around 1500. “New World” crops like maize (corn) and various types of tropical produce became increasingly popular with farmers, in addition to the regular crops, like millet, which they had traditionally grown. Surpluses of crops were certainly accumulated, and were sometimes directly used to exchange for items such as iron agricultural implements (Davidson 1998, 134).

To get a better picture of rural life in West Africa before it was colonized by Europeans, we can look at the agriculture practiced in three examples: The Kingdom of Dahomey (part of

present-day Benin), the Kingdom of Waalo (part of present-day Senegal), and the Baule people who live in present-day Ivory Coast. Dahomey was a highly centralized kingdom throughout most of its existence. Dahomey also had a complex interregional and transcontinental economy, in which agriculture made up an important source of revenue for the kingdom. Once the international slave trade was abolished for the most part in the beginning of the nineteenth century, Dahomey's main source of revenue came from the sale of palm oil (Obichere, 1971, 15). However, while the production of palm oil was an essential component of the Dahomean state, most farming was dedicated to food production on farms organized around kinship where farmers labored collectively together.

Across the kingdom, farmers in different regions were encouraged to produce specific food crops so that an ample food supply existed for all people. For example, farmers in the region of Abomey were specialists who mostly grew various legumes and maize at the state's direction, while in the region of Zagnanado, farmers specialized in the production of millet. Farmers across Dahomey were nevertheless capable of growing most crops available, regardless of their home region. When specialized crops in one region failed, the system was set up in such a way where farmers from other regions could muster their forces together to prevent a potentially devastating shortage of one specific crop (Webster et al. 1967, 83). Within these regions, free farmers owned their own fields but also organized themselves in communal collectives, where they "joined together to build houses, cultivate the farms, construct and repair roads, and erect ramparts and walls" effectively so that each farming community was self-sustaining (Obichere 1971, 15). By specifically working together for crop production on fields they themselves owned, Dahomean kinship-based farming ensured satisfactory food production for their own community and other regions.

Like the Kingdom of Dahomey, the vast majority of the agriculture of Kingdom of Waalo located in present-day Senegal was organized as kinship-based farming. Waalo was mostly inhabited by people of the Wolof ethnic group, and prior to the colonial period, Waalo society, especially its rural component, was anti-materialistic. A French traveler from the seventeenth century noted how Waalo farmers “did not thirst after riches” and that land ownership was expanded within an extended family group. Furthermore, although its social organization was hierarchical, the same French traveler to the region observed that all members of society were engaged in agricultural work, even the nobility (Barry 2012, 25). Millet was one of the most prominent crops grown in the Kingdom of Waalo, which could be grown and harvested twice a year. On the side, Waalo’s free farmers also grew legumes, various types of gourds, and cotton. Waalo farmers were left to their own to grow and harvest as much crops as their family unit needed in a given year. This particular practice of agriculture was most ideal for fending off misfortunes associated with agriculture, particularly environmental hazards including flooding, drought, and locust attacks (Barry 2012, 25-26). Just as the collective free farmer population in Dahomey was organized to provide for itself, the individual kinship-based farming collectives in Waalo were likewise self-sufficient and capable of keeping people fed, even in times of hardship.

The situation was the same for the Baule people whose pre-colonial ancestors lived in what is today the Ivory Coast. According to cultural anthropologist Mona Etienne who studied the Baule, farming was an important component of Baule culture. Like the previous two examples, pre-colonial Baule society engaged in kinship-based agriculture (Etienne 1980, 218-29, 222). Both Baule men and women were equally engaged in crop production, and in the early stages of preparing land for cultivation, Etienne explains that men typically broke the ground for all the crops while women helped them burn and clear away the brush (Etienne 1980, 220).

Once crops were officially planted, however, gender division between crop management occurred. The men took responsibility of caring for the yam crop as it grew, and once it was harvested, they were also responsible for its redistribution into the community. Meanwhile, Etienne notes that because women were responsible for watching over and caring for all other crops, they “had ownership of the end-product and could dispose of it unreservedly, once family subsistence needs were taken care of” (Etienne 1980, 222). Just like in the cases of Dahomey and Waalo, it can be seen here that the primary concern of Baule farmers was first and foremost to ensure enough food could be grown for the immediate family unit, and that only once that was met, produce surpluses could be used for other purposes. Once French colonial forces arrived *en masse* in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the kinship agriculture practiced by the Dahomey, Waalo, Baule, and other West African polities would drastically change.

France’s Savage Wars of “Peace”

While Rome’s colonial conquest of Gaul was by no means a straightforward matter, the situation was even more complicated in West Africa. The region was in frequent contact with Europeans beginning in the sixteenth century, with a number of European states establishing trade posts and forts along part of West Africa’s coast. It was through these trading centers that the trans-Atlantic slave trade, a tragedy that removed millions of Africans from their homeland, operated out of. This was largely the status quo until the nineteenth century when the French and other European powers aggressively began to colonize the entire continent. Although the French had already begun the colonizing process in the beginning of the nineteenth century, the process exacerbated during the later quarter of that century. The global economy was in a slump, and Africa not only seemed to be region of wealth that could be exploited by Europeans; it was also

seen as a place to establish brand new markets for goods created from the very raw materials that Europeans would extract from the continent (Boahen 1987, 31).

Like other European powers interested in colonizing Africa, the French masked their more sinister intentions of exploitation with imperialist propaganda that suggested that it was France's duty to bring the light of civilization to the supposedly "dark" continent. In fact, European powers often cited their supposed Roman and Greek "heritage" as a justification to finish the so-called civilizing mission that Rome had started over a thousand years previously (Dietler 2010, 33). Closely associated with claims of a Roman legacy, Europeans also used paternalistic racism to justify their colonial conquest of Africa. European scientific-racism generally presented Africans as biologically inferior beings incapable of leading themselves into modernity. European imperialists propagated the idea that only Europeans, believing that they were racially and culturally superior, could both develop Africa and modernize Africans. Historian Alice Conklin writes that specifically in the case of France, "the ruling elite of the Third Republic soon made every effort to disseminate the idea as widely as possible" through education and media outlets (Conklin 1997, 13). Tragically, a direct consequence of this so-called civilizing mission of the Europeans was violence and destruction (Reid 2012, 146).

In West Africa, the French fought a number of wars against preexisting African states who resisted occupation in a period lasting from the 1870s till the early 1900s. Like Caesar and his legions in Gaul, the French often pitted different African states against one another to divide and conquer the region. The urban centers of well-established states like the Kingdom of Dahomey, which fiercely resisted French colonization until it was destroyed in 1893, fell rather quickly to colonizing forces, while in the deep interior, rural communities were far more

challenging to subjugate (Reid 2012, 156). And It was within these rural communities that the French perpetrated some of the worst examples colonial violence.

A specific instance of this violence was the subjugation of the Sanan people in the 1880s in what is today Burkina Faso. According to Alfred Simon Diban Ki-Zerbo, a Sanan man who witnessed the French colonization of his people, explained that prior to the colonization, the Sanan “were peasants who were very attached to the land and their millet. They built barns that were more important than their own houses” (Ki-Zerbo in Jacobs 2014, 75). When the French arrived in the Sanan homeland, they aggressively resisted French forces, but struggled to gain advantage of superior French military technology. Eventually, after countless lives were lost, the Sanan were forced to surrender to the French colonizers in, of all places, a millet field. However, the violence did not immediately end there. In order to ensure the Sanan would be prevented from rising up, the French crippled Sanan resources. Ki-Zerbo explained that “the repression came down, un pitying and savage,” and that the French “burned all the harvest, put fire to the barns. Not a single one remained intact” (Ki-Zerbo in Jacobs 2014, 76). This destruction was soon followed by a terrible famine that left most of the Sanan either starving or dead. This particular example is eerily similar to the famines emerged in southern Gaul soon after it was conquered by Rome as a result Pompey’s requisition of grain to feed his troops. In the aftermath of the death and destruction wrought by France’s colonial wars in West Africa, conditions for rural people would only continue to drastically change, and for the vast majority of African free farmers in the region, this change was overwhelmingly.

Agricultural Transformations in French West Africa

There is substantial documentary evidence to show that the French colonial state sought to exploit West Africa for its natural resources and use the region to create new markets for the fledgling global economy. For example, a passage from a French concessionary company—which were organizations that managed the extraction of natural resources out of France’s African colonies—provides a snapshot of the intentions of the French colonial state. Investors of the concessionary company, *Le société d’études pour le commerce d’exportation, d’importation et de transports dans le Haut-Dahomey et en Afrique centrale*, sought to extract and export “skins, ivory, rubber, cotton, wax, gum, palm kernels, leather, shea tree, egret feathers, ostrich feathers, etc.” out of West and Central Africa (“Notice,” in Jacobs 2014, 113). The company also intended to import European manufactured goods into the region, including clothing items, tools, and processed food items like sugar. The ultimate goal of the company’s extraction and importation process in West Africa was to generate “the rapid increase of the needs of the native in regions that are not already open to European commerce” (“Notice,” in Jacobs 2014, 113). The burden of extraction of natural resources, of which many were agricultural products, fell onto the shoulders of West Africa’s colonized farmer populations. After French rule established itself in West Africa, the rural communities that were previously self-sufficient cooperative institutions were gravely impacted by negative consequences of colonialism.

By analyzing the agricultural transformations that took place in French West Africa, we see that they largely mimicked what transpired in Roman Gaul. Farmers who were previously free in the pre-colonial era were often forced to migrate and sell their labor to a newly established class of wealthier farmers who found favor with the French state. Meanwhile, slavery persisted in the region, which the French state took advantage of, coercing many enslaved people to work on massive farms owned by the wealthy elite. In the colonial era, there was also the

intensification of specific crops, especially cash crops that held more commercial than subsistence value to the rural population that produced them. Like the case of the tenant farmers and enslaved agricultural workers of Roman-Gaul, we see that the above transformations that occurred in French-occupied West Africa had an overall negative impact upon the rural masses. And also like Roman-Gaul, the only groups that benefited from these transformation was a minority of indigenous elites and the colonial state.

It was the general farmer population that was expected to produce the desired agricultural goods the French colonial state desired. Like what happened in Gaul, an indigenous wealthy elite class emerged in the wake of colonization, and it was this group that came to dominate the West African agricultural domain. French actually played a direct role in creating this new class of rural social elites when they completely deconstructed pre-colonial social hierarchies, replacing them with a new hierarchy where educated West Africans, particularly Muslim scholars called *marabouts*, were given positions of power and wealth (Boahen 1987, 59; O'Brien 1971, 33). The French specifically did so with the hopes that the handful of indigenous people they empowered through money and social status would make controlling the region and extracting its resources a simpler process. The *marabouts* were more than happy to oblige the French colonial state, which granted them the opportunity to consolidate power and wealth (O'Brien 1971, 34).

Despite France's attempt to justify its colonization of West Africa by dismantling the practice of slavery in the region, in reality, the French were hesitant to immediately abolish slave labor. In fact, the French allowed wealthy indigenous farmers to use enslaved people for labor on their large farms precisely due to the fact the French saw slave labor as facilitating the economic exploitation of the region. Historian Richard Reid draws attention to the fact that "slaves constituted an essential part of the economic systems upon which colonial states depended in

their early years” (Reid 2012 195). Even in regions where slavery was technically deemed illegal “slaves were discouraged from actually leaving their masters—for example by preventing them from owing land and not assisting them to resettle” (Reid 2012, 195). France ultimately would encourage indigenous elites to utilize the labor of enslaved people in agriculture as well as other sectors of the economy for nearly three decades, only finally outlawing it—and enforcing the law—in most of West Africa by 1910 (Klein 1998, 100).

Enslaved people were not the only source of labor in West Africa that produced cash crops. Most of the labor was in fact technically “free”; however, Reid makes an important point that the newly-created “ruling elites often treated formally ‘free’ labor as mere slaves; in their minds the legal distinction was irrelevant” (Reid 2012, 193). Just like the tenant farmers who toiled away working the soils of Gallic fields, free agricultural laborers in West Africa received a wage—a wage they greatly depended upon for survival. It was with the money they made working the fields that grew crops that directly had no benefit to them that these free agricultural laborers were expected to pay off exhaustive French taxes (Reid 2012, 196; Jacobs 2014, 112).⁴ Any remaining money would be used to buy manufactured good and vital food items sold by concessionary companies. To further bring freedom of choice that “free” West African agricultural laborers actually had into question, there was the fact that the French often directly forced hundreds of thousands of these workers into fields of the elites as well as into other occupations like development projects—all of which was meant to benefit the colonial economy (Reid 2012, 194). In her own research on the Baule people, who fell under French rule in 1908,

⁴ Madagascar, while not part of West Africa, was a part of the continent also colonized by the French. As a part of conducting ethnographic fieldwork there, the anthropologist Graeber shows that the indigenous Malagasy farmers, like other African indigenous peoples colonized by the French, were victims of harsh levels of taxation. In order to pay taxes, Malagasy farmers often had to sell the majority of their rice crops, which in turn, left them with little food to feed their families. (Graeber 2011, 51).

the anthropologist Etienne notes that “quotas were established and physical violence was used to oblige villagers to cultivate ‘collective fields’ of cotton” (Etienne 1980, 227).

Besides cases where the French colonial state forced free laborers into agricultural work, many free West African farmers simply had no choice but to migrate to large farms to seek employment because they had experienced a bad harvest, needed money to pay French taxes, or their farms could no longer compete with their larger, wealthier contemporaries. Galadio Traore of Senegal was one such farmer who had to migrate and seek work on large farms multiple times in his life during the 1930s in order to survive. His first experience occurred when he was only twelve years old, and it was particularly bad because the landowner “starved us almost to death. His family was wasting food while we were struggling to survive eating wild fruits” (Traore in Jacobs 2014, 275). During one of his times on the road, in the process of migration, he noted how many people struggled to endure the difficult travel. He pointed out “some of them [other migrants] were fainting on the road” and that “we collected a group of migrants lying along the roadside almost dying and we helped them pursue their trip” (Traore in Jacobs 2014, 276).

It is important to address the fact that the free labor used in French West Africa for intensive agricultural production was almost exclusively done by male workers. In her research on the Baule people, Etienne points out that “cash-crop cotton,” which in pre-colonial days was managed by women, “like other cash crops became the man’s domain” (Etienne 1980, 227). Most females remained home, and it was their responsibility to grow the crops that could provide a safety net of food throughout the year (Reid 2012, 194). The intensified agricultural production that took place on the large farms of the wealthy West Africans were almost exclusively on a limited number of cash crops, most of which had no nutritional value to begin with, and even for the ones that did, they were most often exported abroad (Boahen 1987, 60). In French West

Africa, the main cash crops that were produced on larger farms by the mixture of slave and free labor included ground nuts, specifically peanuts, palm oil, and cotton. Natural oils like palm oil had particularly high commercial value on the international market because it was an important ingredient for soaps and mechanical lubricants (Jacobs 2014, 109). The intensification process was extraordinary in terms of the figures it produced. At the turn of the century in 1897, in Senegal, over 50,000 tons of ground nuts were exported, which expanded to 240,000 tons in 1913 (Reid 2012, 196).

There was a significant problem with the intensive focus on cash crops. So much time and energy were dedicated to them over crops typically reserved for consumption that much of French West Africa risked food insecurity, despite the effort of female farmers who worked hard to grow enough food-related crops to keep their families fed.⁵ The disparity between local cash crop and subsistence crop production was so severe that food often had to be imported from abroad (Boahen 1987, 60). This point about food simply added to the ways in which the French colonial state indirectly forced the indigenous West Africans to become dependent on the concessionary companies for vital resources. The combination of heavy taxation, obsession with cash cropping, and labor migration proved to be extremely deadly. Famine was often the consequence, and there are numerous cases where famine broke out in the region where thousands of West African faced starvation, resulting in countless deaths (Reid 2012, 213; Klein 1998, 174-175, 210-211).

⁵ Etienne points out that since money was associated with male-dominated cash-cropping, the importance of women's work producing crops for food actually became less valued among the Baule. Through fieldwork, she noticed that even in the post-colonial era, "these productive activities, quantitatively, financially, and by their economic function, have become far less important than those controlled by men" (Etienne 1980, 228).

Conclusion

From this study, like other anthropologies of colonial encounters that compare case studies, we are able to make some general conclusions about how colonialism impacts indigenous agriculture. Through the use of a combination of archaeological, classical, historical, and ethnographic evidence drawn from two specific case studies separated from one another by a span of over 1,500 years, it can be seen that colonial encounters typically impact indigenous agriculture by transforming labor relations in the countryside. In both classical Roman Gaul and French West Africa, this paper has shown that the Celtic and West African farmers lost their sovereign control over the means of production after becoming subservient to elites, who through their close connections to the colonial state, were allowed to dominate the agricultural scene. In both case studies, kinship-based modes of production transitioned into a mode of production Eric Wolf described best as where the population was divided “into a class of surplus producers and a class of surplus takers” (Wolf 1982, 99). Whether farmers worked as an enslaved laborers or received wages mattered little because in both situations the individual was now at the mercy of the colonial state and left with far less agency than they had prior to colonial contact. Furthermore, the colonial state’s push for cash crop production in both Roman Gaul and French West Africa left rural populations to face food insecurity. One therefore cannot dispute that changes to farming through colonialism was largely a negative phenomenon.

It is important to recognize that the legacy of these negative colonialism-induced transformations in rural landscapes have long lasting consequences. The West African case study used in this paper is a good representative of this fact. Contemporary anthropologists and African historians both recognize that the relationship that the African continent shares with the West has in many ways changed little from the way it was during the colonial period. Even after the

decolonization of the region, the practice of monocropping which originated in the colonial era is still pervasive among the economies of Francophone West African nations today. Corporations, most of which are based in Western countries including France, continue to profit from the monocropping in a manner much like the concessionary companies of the colonial era did.

In her research on the cocoa production of the Ivory Coast, cultural anthropologist Bama Athreya (Athreya 2011, 51-3) shows that giant chocolate companies including Nestle and Hershey rely on underpaid and abused labor utilized by contemporary massive cocoa farms located in the country. Athreya concludes that in the fight against these practices that mimic those of the colonial era, “indigenous voices that could speak for farmers and their families in labor negotiations are systematically ignored or silenced” by corporate officials and the wider Western world (Athreya 2011, 51). Another consequence of contemporary monocropping in Africa that mimics the colonial past is that many independent African nations are now reliant on the former metropole for essential resources like food. Farmers of West Africa furthermore continue to remain at the mercy of the ever-changing international market.

Besides showing that we can draw basic conclusions about colonialism’s impact of cultural elements, such as agricultural production, comparative anthropologies of colonial encounters serve as a reminder to contemporary anthropologists that many elements of indigenous culture seen today are products of past colonial encounters. In particular, through taking history into account, they remind us that culture is not static, but rather it is subject to change over the course of time. Additionally, as pointed out in the case of the West’s current relationship with Africa, it is clear we are still living in a world where elements of colonialism are still accepted or ignored by much of the Western world. Anthropologists can take an active role in this situation through continuing to uncover how colonialism shapes culture throughout

history. In doing so, anthropology as a discipline can therefore help people see that many of the social issues that plague our world today, which are perceived as having always existed, are in fact direct consequences of colonial encounters.

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