

**REPORT No. 2**



**SETTLEMENT VILLAGES  
IN THE NIGER OFFICE**

Submitted to the Governor General  
of French West Africa

by

Madame Savineau, Technical Adviser  
on Education

*Gao, 15 December 1937*

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Following the instructions I was given, I focused particularly on families that have been moved to settlement villages in the Niger Office<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Office du Niger (Niger Office)* proposal to irrigate the Niger River delta in the French Sudan for cotton and rice production was officially sanctioned by the French government in 1931 and implemented in French West Africa in 1932. Initial planning had begun back in 1910 when Emile Bélime, a French hydraulics engineer, put forward his plan for irrigating the Niger river valley based on the Gezira Scheme operated by the British in the Sudan. In the 1920s a pilot project was undertaken in the region around Bamako, the capital of the French Sudan, where 7500 acres were irrigated to produce rice for consumption and cotton for export. The *Office du Niger* transplanted families from elsewhere in the French Sudan and Upper Volta to work as settler farmers in the river valley region. It also used forced labour to develop its projects including the Markala Dam, which was built by forced labourers between 1935 and 1947. It has been described by generations of observers and historians as a disastrous undertaking. (See: J.-L.Couture *Institutional Innovations and Water management in the Office du Niger 1910-1999*, Scientific Directorate Working Paper No 29; and Van Beusekom, M.M. *Negotiating Development . African farmers and colonial experts at the Office du Niger 1920-1960* [Oxford: James Currey, 2002] for a more detailed account of the travails of the settlers in the Niger Office.)

I visited the villages in the following order:

- BAGUINEDA CENTRE (Sotuba) 28<sup>th</sup> October,
- NIENEBALE and BAROUELI ..... 29<sup>th</sup> October
- KOKRY CENTRE (Macina)..... 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> November
- SIGUENE CENTRE ..... 7<sup>th</sup> November
- NIONO CENTRE (Sahel)..... 8<sup>th</sup> November

I will start this report by recounting what I saw and heard. I will then attempt to evaluate this information and offer some conclusions. I have found it essential here to use a narrative style and at times to include dialogue in order to give full weight to what was said as it is this that forms the basis of my evaluation.



## 1. – THE BAGUINEDA GROUP

The origins of this settlement date back to 1930. It is now considered to be in its definitive form as far as crops are concerned. I was met by a controller<sup>2</sup> of the settlement ../..

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<sup>2</sup> There are no directly equivalent terms in English for all the several supervisory categories referred to in this Report, as the English colonial administration was not identical to that of the French. For this reason and for purposes of clarity we have maintained the French nomenclature as far as possible.

who provided me with the only car and chauffeur capable of travelling along the roads that had recently been flooded because of a breach in the canal. A pupil from the Bamako Upper Primary School accompanied me and served as our interpreter. Mr. Boige pointed out to me with pride, that Baguineda is rich, as evidenced by the number of bicycles there are here.

Kogni village (established in 1934).

The inhabitants are Bambaras, who were ordered to resettle here from twenty miles away. Each concession consists of a vast square plot of land, flanked by small square huts. Some light rain, the last of the season, had fallen the night before. The yards were muddy. It appears they do not dry out quickly. In each of them there were two or three ploughs and harrows. There was no sign of any women busy with their housework, and no calabashes on display.

Inside the huts are bare. An old man and a few young children, all dressed in rags, were huddled together in one of them, it is little more than a makeshift shelter. They seemed to be waiting for life to return.

The old man yearns for his village. Another man came over, also dressed in rags. He said he was happy enough. He farms the land with his wife and two children aged 10 and 12. He did not know how much he harvested last year, nor how much the Office took from him and how much that left him with. They lived on rice, they paid their tax, and now they have 150 francs left over. In the past, they did not have enough to eat and there was always the problem of locusts. Now they have all gone (doubtless this good man will have changed his mind since we spoke). All this he owes to the white man. The man smiled broadly and his happiness seemed genuine. He looked exceptionally strong and must get through a great deal of work. "You do

what you can”, he said. A group of old men had gathered around him, glumly shaking their heads. I ask them if the fetishes are satisfied. They have not brought them here: there is no point. .../...

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A blind man would use the same tone of voice to say that he had no need of spectacles.

The auxiliary doctor<sup>3</sup>, Antoine, whom I met a few moments later, explained to me that in the early days, these villages were decimated by dysentery. There were a great many deaths, especially among the women and children. At present, falling leaves constitute an insoluble problem as the water is very close to ground level and the wells get contaminated. They are considering filtering the water.

It is also very difficult to control malaria, since there are mosquitoes everywhere. Some heads of the families have bought mosquito nets for themselves, but they refuse to give them to their wives and children, and when our agents have reproached them for this they are told, in so many words, to mind their own business.

#### Soundougouba village

The settlement here started in 1930, but part of this village seems to be much older, and the trees are well established. It has splendid avenues of mangoes. It was market day. There are foodstuffs, fabrics and glassware on sale. There were finely-

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<sup>3</sup> Up to 1946 these were African doctors trained in French West Africa (usually at the medical school in Dakar where they undertook a 30 month course) to ‘assist’ French doctors from the military medical corps stationed in French West Africa. At this time the *Assistance médicale indigène (AMI)*, as the health service was called, numbered around 190 European doctors and 180 African, or ‘auxiliary’, doctors. (Source: [www.asnom.org](http://www.asnom.org))

dressed women walking around. The driver told me that these were not the settlers' wives, they were the wives of the labourers and guards, or strangers who have come in from villages outside the Niger Office. One of them told me that her husband is a builder, and another was the wife of a tradesman. The tradeswomen are also not from around here. The settlers' wives were out working in the fields.

In a corner, the butcher was piling up meat on his scales. It was for the camp. In fact there were no clients at all at this shop. The settlers do not eat meat.

- And fish?

- If they go fishing.

This answer provoked some laughter.

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The concessions here look just as empty and muddy as the ones we saw in the previous village. The chief of the village was sitting alone under a tree. He too could not say how much he had harvested or how much he had sold.

“We work for the Administration. Sometimes there is not enough left for us. Some people have eaten all their harvest and only have manioc left. We used to grow beans but we can't here.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, he is not asking to go back where he came from.

“Here or back there, what's the difference.”

Gnognan village (established in 1932)

We passed in front of small gardens overtaken by weeds. These are the women's gardens. It is quite obvious that they do not have the time to tend to them.

The people of this village were busy blocking up an enormous hole in the side of the canal where water was gushing out. (A monitor<sup>5</sup> told me that this is the fourth time this year that the canal had burst.)

The people of Gnognan live on rice.

“But sometimes we don't have any.”

The chief explains the work schedule to me: At six o'clock, the instructor calls them. They go to the fields and work till midday, and then again from two o'clock until sunset.

Their harvest is much bigger than the one they used to get in their old village and they are less tired. The mortality rate among the children has dropped. Nobody could say how much money he has received.

In this village, there are some huts being built out of bricks. I installed myself in one of them for lunch. At about two, a voice rang out.

“Bunch of pigs! Where are they?”

I went outside and found myself in the presence of two Europeans.

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The one who has just made himself heard is the instructor; the other is an Italian master builder, who greeted me in an exaggerated Roman style.

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<sup>4</sup> The Niger Office managers insisted the settlers focussed all their energies on growing rice and cotton. In fact the settlers started to use land outside the Niger Office to grow their own varieties of food crops and supplement their otherwise inadequate diets. (See: Van Beusekom, M.M. (2002) *op cit.* )

<sup>5</sup> Monitors were local African employees engaged to help supervise the settlers. As the monitors themselves generally had no agricultural training they had to learn 'on the job'.

And we proceeded to discuss “the pigs” in question, who earn up to 30,000 francs per family.

“How many people in a family?”

“65.”

“They buy wine, women, and bicycles. These houses are theirs - and they are far too good for them.”

“We have to build a few, so that they all will want one”, the instructor observed.

“Are they given these houses?”

“No, no! They have to pay for them!”

In *Remarks on the Settlement Methods of the Niger Office*, it is stated on page 48 that 55 settlers had asked for brick-built huts. I doubt whether these tiny, sun-baked structures that look like mausoleums will appeal to many of them.

### Massakoni village

We visited one of the two villages which, according to Mr. Bélime<sup>6</sup> (*1935 Report*, page 35), were founded by nomads, some of whom then decided to move on. “Of the 724 brought into the area in 1924”, he states, “there remain today, in the two areas, 517 people who seem to have taken up permanent residence.”

They describe themselves as Peuls, but these people are black, and were probably former subjects of the Peuls, and they do not seem to have been real nomads. They say that they used to live five days’ walk away. They had lots of herds which were wiped out by an epidemic, this is why they agreed to move. They are not

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<sup>6</sup> Emile Bélime became Director General of the Niger Office.

thrilled with their present life: they own cattle but no cows, and sometimes they wish they could drink .../...

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milk, but they manage. They used to eat plenty of meat too, and now they have very little. But they do have money to buy clothes. They say they are happy but the look on their faces suggests that really they just accept their lot.

It is the wives who are not happy. In the past they did not work in the fields, and things were better that way. Now, *they have to, it is obligatory* (some barely concealed sniggering could be heard when this was announced).

A considerable number of those who had taken up residence in this village have since left.

#### Farakan village

This village was also established in 1934. Only the old people were there. In the absence of their chief, they were initially reluctant to talk. In the end they did say that it involves a lot of work, but the food is plentiful and they have money. An individual can earn up to 1,200 or 1,400 francs, that would be for a family of twenty people. With the money the head of the family buys clothes or he marries more wives.

The young people are not happy. Many have gone away. Last year, the chief himself left.

They did not know whether others are intending to leave this year.

These old people answered grudgingly, with an air of hostility and were certainly not telling the whole truth.

Mofa village (established in 1934)

On the road to Mofa, I encountered three young men in a groundnut field.

- Good harvest?
- Okay, but it's a lot of work.
- Do you have enough to eat?
- A little.

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- Do you have bicycles?
- Food before pleasure. You need lots of women before you can earn a bicycle.<sup>7</sup>

The young men do not have wives. It is the old men who have them. Only the eldest of these three strapping young men, aged about 23, 26 and 30, is married.

Timéné village

Timéné is one of the villages which, according to Mr. Béline (*1935 Report*), has some originality thanks to the construction of a number of “bolo”<sup>8</sup>. Timéné, like all the other villages in the Baguineda Centre, is built around a big circular area bisected by two perpendicular avenues. In the centre of each of the segments of the

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<sup>7</sup> Underlining for emphasis in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Clearly Madame Savineau is not familiar with the term being used in this way. In Bambara, *bolo* means ‘hand’ which does not clarify its use here either.

circle they have built a portico. They accentuate the harsh, not to say 'authoritarian', impression created by this layout. All of these central areas are, incidentally, empty and the settlers certainly do not feel at home in them. It should be pointed out that a concerted attempt has been made to provide some shade in the avenues, but the shade plants have either not taken very well, or are still too young.

In the hut of the chief of Timéné, I found his 18 year-old younger brother, who was busy preparing millet stalks for making a mat. He works for his older brother. Old village, new village, it is all the same to him. They have harvested plenty. They harvested plenty before too.

Thus ended my visit to the Baguineda centre.

There is not a single school in this group of villages. The infirmaries are housed in rectangular-shaped huts made of banco<sup>9</sup>. A few phials were lined up on a table. The chief medical officer of the Niger Office, Dr Maury, whom I met at the centre, seemed to me very keen to avoid all serious discussion about the state of health of the settlers.

### **3. – THE KOKRY GROUP**

This is a recently built centre with villages dating back three years at most. During the first year, and at times during the second year, the settlers received provisions in advance. During this third year they are exempt from paying any dues.

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<sup>9</sup> Banco is a local building material similar to adobe. A mixture of compacted earth and straw is formed into bricks and baked in the sun.

Consequently they do not really have a clear idea regarding the new life that awaits them.

Furthermore, I doubt that their comments were sincere: everywhere they had to speak to me in the presence of Office staff. We can compare their comments here with those passed on to me later in confidence. But the “official” tour of the villages was not without interest, if only for its having shed some light on the attitude of the “colonisers” towards the settlers.

Mr. Grellat<sup>10</sup>, the Controller of the Centre, took me by car and on foot across flooded roads and mounds of cracked earth. In numerous places, the small dikes in the canal have given way. He says it is the children’s fault, they come at night and release the floodgates so they can do some fishing.

Mr. Reynaud, the assistant director of the Niger Office, gave me a different explanation (every deficiency is explained twice rather than once at the Niger Office): it is the settlers’ fault, they are interfering with the gates to collect water. Whatever, it would seem that the work has not been carried out as carefully as it should have been (we have already seen one example of this and others will follow).

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The interpreter Mr. Grellat brought with him was a pupil from the school at Katibougou, who has been sent by the school to train as an instructor. This young man, who speaks excellent French, is not therefore his employee. Nevertheless, he uses the familiar ‘tu’ form of address with him, showers him with commands, and treats him like his houseboy.

“Put some water in the radiator!” he says, using the same tone a master uses to address a slave. I came across it everywhere Europeans were speaking to settlers.

On the whole, the villages in Kokry are happier places than those in Baguineda. In Baguineda, it took a lot of dissatisfied people to make the Administration realise that it was necessary to try a different approach. But unfortunately while some Bambaras prefer to live under thatch, others prefer an argamasse<sup>11</sup> roof. The Bambaras around here are not happy with the thatch that the Baguineda Bambaras were hankering after.

What is more, you cannot make decent banco<sup>12</sup> out of the soil in Kokry. The walls have all crumbled. The settlers have had to rebuild them, and luckily their buildings are a lot more solid than those built by the Office.

#### Sangaréougou village

This village is composed of retired people who brought their herds here three years ago. These men and women are not too keen on farming the land. They live in relatively small groups. There are 500 people in 74 families. They have taken on labourers and are doing so well that the village has its own baker, butcher, and tailor. Everybody can afford to buy meat and chicken,

The chief of Sangaréougou speaks French; he is a boastful type who is knows how to talk up the virtues of colonisation. No doubt, his zeal works very much to his advantage.

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<sup>10</sup> Later referred to as Mr Grelat. We are not in a position to know which spelling is correct so have followed the original. Ed.

<sup>11</sup> Argamasse is a mixture of sand, water and sometimes lime, used as a roofing material. Its origins are believed to lie in India from where it was imported to Africa via the Indian Ocean islands.

<sup>12</sup> See note 9

Seeing some men repairing his hut, I asked him who they were. "Relatives" he hurriedly explained. This .../...

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was manifestly not the case, as was soon confirmed. These men were either construction labourers or forced labourers taken on in some private enterprise.

I was introduced to several heads of families:

1) Firstly we met a former cook, injured in Togo and now almost blind. He has two wives and a young child, and farms nine hectares of land. He himself 'does not often work'. He employs labourers, whom he pays 500 francs for ten months including food, or 45 francs a month including food. The first year he arrived in June and could not sow any seed. The second year, the Office paid half his supplies. The third year is still ongoing.

2) Next we met a retired district guard<sup>13</sup>, who lives with four sons, two wives, and two daughters-in-law. Both the men and the women work in the fields. The women weed, hoe, harvest, and maintain gardens for growing vegetables which they sell, and they also grow cotton, which they spin. Both they and the sons are fed and clothed in exchange for their labour. There has been no profit as yet.

3) Then we met two brothers, working as partners, who brought money with them. They sometimes employ workers. Last year, they paid them 45 francs, this year, as much as 75 francs.

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<sup>13</sup> Literally a 'circle' guard, a 'circle' being the French colonial administrative district.

They sold their last harvest for 5,500 francs and could not repay their loans. Mr. Bélime wrote about the settlers in Sangarébourg in the following terms (*1935 Report*, page 112): “Although very inexperienced, these farmers (*sic*) have managed to produce satisfactory harvests”. On page 16, he speaks of the “craze” that Sangarébourg’s success has sparked off. He neglects to point out that this village is an exception.

Dambougou village

Composed of Peuls, Bambaras and Markas, there are 475 inhabitants here living in 95 families. These are “bits of families” who have come here without any possessions:

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1. The chief of this village, who comes from Macina, has a family of 20 people, four of whom are adult men. He employs labourers whom he pays 50 francs. The women do not work in the fields. At ten years of age, the children drive the oxen on the plough.

They arrived last year, at the beginning of March. First they had to clear the scrub, the soil was very wet and sticky, then they had to train the cattle. The Controller took pity on them and gave them some seed. At first, they were not at all happy; they did not take the ploughing seriously. From December onwards, they realized that it was a serious business. Now, they are very happy, although there are too many locusts. Despite everything, they think that they will have had a better harvest than they had in their old village. They also recognize the benefits of

irrigation. Didn't they realise that the groundnuts would need irrigating because of the drought?

When they have accumulated some money, they will buy cattle and women, then some goats and sheep, followed by gold, clothes, and finally horses, but not bicycles.

2) In the neighbouring enclosure, a woman was busy spinning.

“When we have millet, we eat well. When we don't, we rest”, she said philosophically

“Does your husband give you any boubous<sup>14</sup>?”

“He doesn't have anything”.

However precarious her situation may be, this woman will just accept it.

3) A Peul family of four men, five women, and three children came here voluntarily in 1936, with ten cattle, eight of which have died. The two children born last year also died, and one woman died in labour.

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They brought in a small harvest in 1936 and hope to bring in a good one in 1937.

4) A Marka family of two men, one woman and a nine-year old boy who forcibly resettled here in 1935.

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<sup>14</sup> A long robe resembling a kaftan.

Back in the village they worked hard and ate well. All the women did was spin cotton. Now they work really hard! They are not hungry but they do not eat their fill. Mr Grelat explained that rice is not as ‘filling’ as millet. It seemed that satisfying the stomach is not, in his eyes, a necessity.

These Markas like the plough. You can do ten days work in one day, and without getting tired.

A brother was there visiting. I asked him whether he would like to be a settler. He replied with an emphatic ‘no!’, and when pressed to explain he said:

“My mother’s back there, and we don’t know yet whether it’s better here.”

#### Bediandougou village

Up till now the people we encountered have come from the local area. Here we find people who have really come from a long way away, they are 140 Miniankas from the village of Novagosso in the San District. They came voluntarily in March 1937 in order to get away from a canton chief whose authority they did not accept.

Back home the harvests were good but they did not eat well because of this canton chief. When they arrived they cut down the trees. In principle the land is cleared before it is allocated but, as we saw later, the felling machine just cuts through the trunks.

They then cleared the plot of undergrowth, and were given ploughs and cattle, which they trained. But the training was insufficient and, as a result, the ploughing did not go well.

The women labour a lot in the fields, and children from the age of ten work with the plough. Everybody has enough to eat in the period before the harvest.

What they do not like is their huts. I better understood this dislike when I saw for myself what Minianka villages were like in Koutiala and San. Each family has its own 'soukala', with its covered hall positioned with its back to the wind, and a yard sheltered by very high walls, lofts, henhouses, and numerous dwellings. A Minianka soukala seems much more comfortable, wealthier and even more "civilised" than one of the Niger Office's concessions, with its empty yards and low walls. It is worth adding that the Miniankas like square huts covered with argamasse and they have been allocated round huts covered in thatch which the termites have already started to devour.

They were given permission to go and visit their families and invite them to move. They also went to fetch an old fetish. According to Mr. DESPRES, an instructor, this is because we encourage them to preserve their customs; this helps keep the family together.

#### Bamakakoura village

This village has a dilapidated appearance. It houses 160 very primitive Bambaras who came in March 1937. The chief tried to count the number of children he has but finally gave up:

- It's on the white man's paper.

They were happy in their village. They were forced to come here, but no regrets yet (this was accompanied by doubtful smiles).

#### Nara village

This is inhabited by 13 Bambara families - 250 people in all - from Segu.  
They arrived in February 1937. The old people seem dejected and cough quietly.../...

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by way of reply. The youngsters look sideways, they are not convinced.

It was not possible to train the oxen as they were ill. Of 150 oxen, three died in four months; the Office replaced them. One man insisted that all the oxen were ill, otherwise they would be working well. He said this with such energy that it appeared he was fighting off accusations of laziness.

#### Medina village

There are 428 Bambaras here in 25 families who were forcibly resettled in 1936. They are satisfied now, according to the old people.

“Is the plough popular?”

“It’s the young people who do the ploughing”.

The chief wants to stay here. He does not know what the others think.

#### Dar Salam village

There are Bambaras, Markas, and Somonos here, 325 people in 25 families who came in 1936. The women have pretty boubous which their husbands bought for them before they moved here. Mr. Grelat tries in vain to make them say “after”.

I met a Bambara family who came as volunteers from Sansanding, they were forced to come by the older brother. Before, they worked a lot and had plenty of millet; now

they work and they eat. Those who did not bring in enough harvest have received help.

Ouahigouya village

This village houses 128 Mossis who came from Ouahigouya, hence its name. Here, no effort has been made to make the settlers feel at home. The round huts were built for a labourers' camp, all in a dead straight line, with no walls, not even half-walls. The overall impression is one of strong discipline and absolute cleanliness.

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Mr. ROBERT, the instructor, used to plant cotton in Mexico, so he was also chosen to plant rice in the Niger. It seems the Niger Office thinks that managing labourers is the same business wherever you are in the world.

Mr. ROBERT, who received major injuries in the Great War, haughtily barks out his orders. A Mossi interpreter relays his commands. This interpreter is the archetypal cheeky ex-African Rifleman, quick to answer back.

Having got together a few old men, who are manifestly unfamiliar with the work in question and indifferent to everything, he refused to put my questions to them and replied himself: they came willingly because they were short of land and were hungry. They came last March; they are happy and well. Another assistant the Office must be rewarding.

Yet in his zeal this optimist provided one or two interesting details:

- Yeah, men, women and children, they all work. They're ready for work at the first bell and never get into trouble.

Mr. ROBERT praises his settlers for being “very hard-working and very docile”.

Nemabougou village

Here we have Markas and Bambaras, who arrived last March. They like the plough and the oxen and you get a sense that they are really proud to own them. They do not know yet what yield they are getting for their work: they are not accustomed to growing rice. Some of them have good land and others have poor land, as God sees fit.

The chief of the village brought six men with him. One left, and a second went to look for him .../...

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and did not return. The same happened with a third.

Culling of locusts and birds.

It is a known fact that Africans get very concerned about this problem, and those living in Kokry’s villages seemed to me to be overwhelmed by the difficulty of protecting the crops. The crops here are more spread out than the crops back in the village.

Confidential information obtained in the Kokry centre

Here is some information that I was told confidentially on the lives of settlers in the Kokry centre.

Three unofficial informants came to see me at night and began by telling me that, even in the absence of Office agents, the settlers would not have told me the truth “because they are afraid.”

According to these informants, the work regime in the typical village of the Niger Office is as follows:

The settlers are not forced to leave together for the fields, but they must not be found in the village between sunrise and sunset (the women take food with them to the fields and remain there).

Nobody is allowed to move around without authorisation or, *a fortiori*, leave the Office’s territory.

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It is forbidden to strike a settler. But punishments are inflicted upon those whose work is judged to be below standard.

For new settlers, who receive a repayable ration is distributed, these punishments take the form of:

- 1 - withdrawal of salt ration
- 2 - withdrawal of butter ration
- 3 - withdrawal of dried fish (the ration never includes meat)
- 4 - reduction or forfeiture of millet and rice

Women are not punished, but the husband receives a warning. The first two or three times he gets bawled out, after that his ration is docked.

The husband is also punished if his wife refuses to go to the quinine distribution.

The children are punished by their parents, but only rarely because they are very indulgent, but they wish that they too would be left in peace.

The nature of the 'bawling out' they alluded to is a premeditated affair, it does not vary depending upon who is administering it. There is the instructor's bawling out and the controller's bawling out. If liable for the latter, the individual concerned presents himself at the office, bearing the relevant document. He is slapped once or twice, threatened with the wrath of the head of Macina's Subdivision, and, if considered necessary, he is given a day's hard labour.

In the first two years the work is very demanding and the settlers have bitter memories of it. Not only do they have to prepare the soil, train the oxen, and farm vast stretches using methods they are not used to, .../...

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but they also have to reinforce the canals (which is hard work), and repair huts and fences. In the third year, there is visible progress and the settlers begin to understand the system and gain confidence. Some of them no longer need monitors, who here are mainly retired people from Sangarébourgou.

Some women work as much as the men and the children pull the oxen in the fields. When there are no older boys to work with the *daba*<sup>15</sup>, they take the younger ones and the women.

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<sup>15</sup> *Daba* is the term used by Bambara and Dioula people for a traditional agricultural implement similar to the European hoe. The term came to be used figuratively in colonial discourse to denote an African male agricultural worker but here is being used in its original sense.

Since circumcision and the wearing of trousers indicate that young boys are of working age, they are carrying out circumcision earlier everywhere. Every family head, who feels powerful enough, is abusing his paternal authority.

Instructions arrive. Orders are communicated to the settlers and they have to carry them out. No explanation of any educational value is given to them.

The Minianka and the Mossi are particularly disinclined to accept this system (Mr Robert calls them docile). This is due to their independence rather than laziness. The Mossi are “bad animals” that have been got rid of.

Another difficulty is the poor land. Some have been given land where the weeds grow back as soon as they have been removed, and whatever they plant is strangled. They cannot manage to produce even 20 kilogrammes<sup>16</sup> from any of their crops. As a result, there have been angry outbursts, the instructor has been insulted, and the monitor hit on occasion. When there is talk of leaving, the management gives them other plots of land, just as it replaces dead oxen, because they must ensure at all costs that they do not leave.

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Another complication is the need to move the oxen to new grazing lands. Where the land is irrigated there are automatically mosquitoes and ticks. They are swarming around the Kokry centre. During the dry season the oxen have to go through an anti-tick dip once a week and this goes up to twice a week in the rainy season.

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<sup>16</sup> Approximately 45 lbs.

Well before the rice and potato fields are ready the oxen are driven away, so they have to prepare the land using the daba. The settlers who have been there the longest complain about this, because they have lost some of their skill in using this implement.

The mosquitoes are a nuisance for the animals, but also for the people who cannot get away from them by moving to new pastures. They complain that the villages have been sited in the muddiest and worst locations where fever is rife.

The ration which is provided in advance during the first two years is not considered adequate, to which the managers, as we have seen, reply that rice is just as nutritious as millet but 'fills them up less'.

Overall the only ones who are satisfied are the very large families, the ones I was introduced to. Small families have a lot of trouble making a go of it. In both small and large families women and children are working often beyond their physical capacities.

This is what the auxiliary doctor had to say:

"There is a lot of dysentery among the Mossi and Minianka, particularly among the children, because of the change in diet. We have registered several deaths". .../...

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According to the register of visits there are many cases of digestive disorders:

45 cases in May 1937 including 2 deaths;

40 cases in June 1937.

Respiratory problems are even more numerous:

83 cases in May 1937 including 2 deaths;

76 cases in June 1937.

As their huts are infested with mosquitoes, the settlers prefer to sleep outdoors, hence the number of serious chills, which will become more numerous in the cold season.

Finally malaria:

13 bouts in May 1937

24 bouts in June 1937 (of which 13 involved children under 2 years of age).

Malaria was initially very common in young children, and led to several deaths. Since the introduction of quinine, they have been less badly affected.

Some Mossis have been diagnosed with tracoma.

Finally, some people come to see the doctor simply because they are exhausted. The doctor declares them ill so that the instructor will let them get some rest.

The instructor is not happy when he sees his settlers heading towards the clinic. He sometimes comes looking for the women who are waiting for their quinine.

#### The Office and the surrounding villages

Mr BIANCHI, a special; agent who was carrying out the duties of the head of the Subdivision of .../...

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Macina, received me at this post.

He pointed out that the Office has drained the water from several outlying villages including N'golo-Manzana and Mazamana, and that a large area to the right of the road which leads to Niono, was once rich and is now ruined. The herds that used to graze there are now starting to head south.

Furthermore, the maintenance of the road running from Markala to Macina – which is hardly ever used by the Office staff - represents a very considerable burden for the Macina subdivision. Since the Bozos who live along the road do not know how to use a pickaxe, it is necessary to call upon more distant villages. This year, four tonnes of rice have been distributed to forced labourers<sup>17</sup>, which amounts to some five thousand days' service.

#### **4. NIONO**

##### **THE ONLY VILLAGE IRRIGATED BY THE SAHEL CANAL**

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When the settlers from Niono (who are Bambaras) arrived in April 1937, their village still did not have drinking water. It proved necessary to dig to a depth of 49 meters to find it. In the meantime, they had to go long distances to get their water supplies.

When they first saw their fields they were not pleased, there were too many of them. But as soon as the plough and the oxen appeared they were happy enough,

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<sup>17</sup> Forced labourers, or *prestataires* in French, were serving out their labour tax, a system introduced in French West Africa in 1912 to respond to the labour shortage in the African colonies and as a way of regulating the use of slave labour in the African Empire. The *prestation* was supposed to last around 9 days but in fact the system was widely abused and inadequately monitored. Savineau notes elsewhere that a forced labourer was earning 4.50 francs a day in 1938.

which has remained the case ever since. Things are not too difficult here and they do not have .../...

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backache the way they used to. Their ration is sufficient and they have received mosquito nets. A few women have them too, but not the children.

As soon as they have some money, they will marry off the boys.

This strangely orthodox profession of faith was followed immediately by a spontaneous burst of praise for the Controller, Mr BLANC.

He is a very young, extremely nervous man who expresses himself in the imperative style so dear to Kokry's managers. I began to suspect that the people were afraid of him. That very evening, having had my bed set up outside, I heard Mr BLANC fly into a rage at a chauffeur who had gone to sleep twenty paces from his car whilst Mr BLANC was enjoying the evening. I was told, also, that Mr BLANC's African wife is apt to go to the workers' camp to pick an argument with some woman or other whose husband soon finds himself out of a job. A labourer's wife is said to have been injured recently when hit with a bracelet.

Mr REYNAUD has since told me that this is a purely female affair for which a European man could not be held responsible.

When the injured party and her husband filed a complaint with the administrative service at the post, their case thrown out.

Those Africans I questioned added that all the whites here (engineers and crop managers) are "bad, very bad", with the exception of Captain SCHOELCHER, from Martinique, who makes no distinction between blacks and whites.

## 5. 'VULGARISATION' CENTRES

Managed crop farming which is not based on irrigation is called 'vulgarisation' in the Niger Office. Sometimes this has involved moving villages, sometimes they have been taken over on their existing site, and sometimes supervision is exercised only over those families who have asked for it. Farming involves the use of the plough, their crop farming is usually dry, but is sometimes irrigated.

### Niénébalé centre

I arrived in Niénébalé in the afternoon. The workers were in the fields. Mr BOUVIER, the manager of the settlement, described their work to me. 31 families, who have come from 40 kilometres away at most, are grouped together in three villages. They are a very hard-working group of people, the men are farming from break of day to nightfall. At ploughing time, they work at night too, from 9 pm to sunrise sometimes. It is forbidden to plough after 8.30 in the morning because the oxen would perish if they did.

The women are in the fields from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon. They sow, hoe and peel the groundnuts and they also grow onions which they sell to the head of the family. One of the settlers married a girl from Koulikoro who refused to work in the fields. After three days she was set upon by all of the women and had to flee.

Another girl, by contrast, refused to marry a settler and Mr BOUVIER suggested that she should be brought here for three days to see for herself. She was so delighted with what she saw that she accepted the marriage.

Niénébalé's three villages harvest groundnuts, millet, fonio<sup>18</sup>, tobacco, potatoes, and rice. Unfortunately, the rice is irrigated only when it rains .../...

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a lot, and so it has not succeeded this year. The settlers live well, nevertheless.

The average profit is 2,000 francs per worker (the Niger Office does not take into account the work done by women and children). Their wealth is indicated by the fact that among 31 families there are 28 bicycles.

I asked whether the heads of families abuse their authority. Mr BOUVIER replied that he has had no trouble putting a brake on the old men's habits as regards marriage.

"If you do not marry off your sons," he has told them, "you will not be paid."

As for the women, if they did not receive their boubous<sup>19</sup> they would leave.

The children tend to want total independence. The heads are having to fight to keep their paternal authority.

The school is attended by 72 boys aged six to twelve. There are no girls. The local African teacher seems to be getting good results. Almost of the children understood the questions I put to them, and replied without difficulty.

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<sup>18</sup> The original reads 'fonion', clearly a typing error. Fonio is one of the earliest cereal crops known to have been grown in the sub-Saharan West Africa region.

<sup>19</sup> See note 14.

Mr BOUVIER pointed out that their merit extends further than just this, they also know how to drive the plough.

Not that they walk in front of the oxen to guide them, but rather they hold on to the plough handles.

- But doesn't ploughing take place at night?

- Yes, and the school is closed during the ploughing session, from 15<sup>th</sup> of June to 15<sup>th</sup> of August.

I asked which pupils do the ploughing.

Twenty three of them put up their hands, some were little eight year-olds. I suggest that they might be boasting. But Mr BOUVIER, very proudly said,

- No, no, it's all of them, over the age of eight.

They grow tobacco too, on an individual basis. Those who join the Youth Association, after circumcision, .../...

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hire themselves out to heads of family who are short of labourers. There are 80 members in the Youth Association. It offers a day's labour for 100 francs plus food, which works out at 1.25 franc for each worker.

“Without this youth association, the settlement could not function”, Mr BOUVIER remarked.

In other words, a cut-price labour force is essential. He added that young people no longer leave the area to look for work in the dry season.

Finally, I asked Mr BOUVIER whether the settlers have preserved their religious rites. He told me that they are put under no pressure, but hardly anyone is

exploiting their credulity anymore, and so the old traditions have been abandoned, particularly among the younger people.

Nevertheless, Mr BOUVIER complained about one custom they have kept, where all the men in the village file in front of each new-born baby and spit into its navel.

### Barouéli

Between Niénébalé and Barouéli, I met some well-dressed women with their hair nicely done, carrying freshly washed laundry in calabashes. They were Marka women from Nénékou, a village that has not been involved in the colonisation. Once night fell, the procession of settlers began, the men in their short attire, carrying a *daba* on their shoulders, the women and children weighed down under enormous loads of groundnuts or wood. A good many of the women were carrying a child on their backs and some were even pregnant.

Mr PICHON, the settlement controller in Baroueli, seemed a little more concerned than most of his colleagues about the tendency of the wealthier settlers to employ workers at a low price.

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Baroueli is populated in part by Markas who arrived with their livestock. They took over around 100 hectares of land and employed Bambaras to work at a rate of 20 to 30 francs plus food for a whole season.

That was during the crisis when the groundnuts in Senegal had failed. Now a Baroueli worker earns 4 francs plus food. The Youth Association demands 3 francs

and a very big meal (Friday is their day). The settlers readily abandon tracts of land, they have to be pushed to work because they are lazy.

Once out of Baroueli I stopped at the village of Nango, within the district of Baroueli. It is a Bambara village and the old people wearing their long boubous said how content they were. Last year's profit had been 1,500 francs per family (each family having five *dabas*<sup>20</sup>). That amounted to 300 francs per household.

### Siguine Centre

After seven years not everyone has no ploughs. What we have here is a very slow development that has involved no moving of people nor any major settlement costs.

Mr DELEGER, the instructor, supervises families living in 50 villages. He seems to know how to shout a lot and demand a lot of hard work, but his loudness is less inhuman than the cold discipline of the Kokry regime.

Furthermore he is dealing with people who are at home here and who need to be pleased. That alone makes him more circumspect.

I saw three of the Siguine villages, one accompanied by Mr DELEGER and two on my own. The driver, who had been driving me since Bamako, served as the interpreter.

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<sup>20</sup> Here a *daba* is being used in its figurative sense, see note 15.

These three visits all left me with the same impression. The people are clearly more satisfied here than in the settlement villages, but everywhere one sees this tendency for some to live off the work of others.

In Siguine, just as in Baguinéda, nobody knew how much they earned last year.

“But it’s a lot”.

And from past years of work they still have goats, horses, and gold. Those who have ploughs lend them to those still using the daba, against a security of gold jewellery.

Although those working under the managed system in Siguine harvest less than the settlement villages, they have fewer expenses. This year, their cotton is not doing well, whereas that the settlers’ is thriving. But like the settlers, and despite the locusts, which everyone is suffering from, “They hope to make ends meet”.

As for profits, these tend to go to the father, rather than to the women and children, and to the chief more than to the individual. One is providing a dowry for his brother but has not given wrappers<sup>21</sup> to his wives because

‘he did he would then have to give wrappers to his brother’s wives too, and that would be a right pain in the ar--.’<sup>22</sup>

Another got himself embroiled in some business over tax receipts that have not been returned to the interested party, to which however, the entire group smiled in silence.

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<sup>21</sup> Wrapper is an English term used in West Africa for the long piece of cloth (generally 3 yards or more in length) worn around the body as a wrap-around garment. It is called a *pagne* in francophone West Africa.

<sup>22</sup> Madame Savineau never spelled out in full in her reports those terms she considered to be too vulgar for an official written report.

From irrigation to inundation

As I was visiting Siguiné, a monitor came to inform Mr DELEGER about some water-related damage. I asked for an explanation and got the following response:

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The canal which supplies Niono burst at the 14 kilometre point, which caused flooding in Kolodougou, to 12 hectares of cotton, 12 hectares of groundnuts, and 4 or 5 hectares of millet.

In order to clear the water, the canal was breached in two places and five villages were flooded, namely:

Bao - 6 hectares flooded and 2 huts destroyed;

Toumakoro - 3 fields flooded;

M'Pébala - all the crops;

Nadani - 20 hectares;

Bagala - 6 hectares.

The water reached a sixth village, apparently they had to swim out to inspect the extent of the damage.

The administration of the Office is responsible for this disaster. Some of the dimensions were wrong and some were just not noted down. The director of planning and works gave the order to open the canal thinking that the water would flow along the Diakar stretch, which it did not.

When the breach at the 14-km point reopened, it was an enormous hole that I saw for myself the following day. Kolodougou's crops were flooded again.

The damages are going to be covered by an indemnity, but quite obviously they are trying to cover up this affair.

## 6. ACTIVITIES AROUND THE SETTLEMENTS

Here it is a question of the paid employees working on construction or planning projects rather than settlers.

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### Banankoro farm

It is managed by a very young man who has just recently arrived. The workers he employs said they are being paid the normal rate. But he has his fields guarded by boys aged eight to twelve whom he calls, strangely enough, "bird fenders", as they scare off birds. These little boys are paid 15 francs a month, which they give to their fathers, along and receive a ration of millet without any meat or fish.

"The practice was in place when I arrived, I kept it going", a European told me. He is not even aware that child labour is regulated.

### Kayo farm

The manager, Mr VINCENT, complained about not being able to hire workers who offer their services at a reduced price. He says he cannot pay them the proper rate and so all is lost. That does not prevent the Office's agents and some settlers from

claiming that labourers are few and far between, and that they demand high rates of pay. It seems rather to be the case that labourers do not want to work in the plantations.

### Markala

The turners employed by the Consortium (the company responsible for construction) went on strike a week before my arrival. One of them explained his and his co-workers' grievances in the following terms:

“We are made to do eleven and a half hours' work: from 7 in the morning until 12 noon and then from 12.30 pm until 7 in the evening.

If we are late by 10 or 15 minutes, the penalty is two to three hours'

labour. We went on strike, all 32 turners, for 5 days. The administrator

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from Segu came. He told us to go back to work, saying that he would resolve the matter with management. We went back to work eight days ago and in that time there has been no more talk of mediation”.

Markala's police superintendent, Mr DEBOUTEILLER, evaded my questions on the matter, but said it was: ‘A stupid strike about the deductions for lateness. The natives can't do their accounts, you see. But the Commandant<sup>23</sup> came and sorted things out.’

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<sup>23</sup> The Circle Commandant, the French equivalent of the British District Officer.

Mr REYNAUD, the deputy director of the Office, whom I also questioned, showed me the work contracts, where it is stated the employer has the right to lay off employees. According to him, it is this right that has been exercised.

I was unable to speak to the Commandant of the district when I got back as he was away in Segou.

Other evidence gathered in Markala would seem to confirm that employees, labourers and conscripts from the 'second section'<sup>24</sup> of the contingent are being exploited. A driver who took me to Kokry and Niono told me that:

“We are not given a rest day. We are paid for six days a week and work seven. We work day and night but we're not paid overtime. We're not allowed to leave the vehicle. We buy a piece of bread and have to eat it in our seats. There's no insurance when we're travelling around on the road and no advances, either in money or provisions.”

If I compare these statements with Mr BLANC's fury at discovering a chauffeur who had fallen asleep whilst waiting for him, it seems to me that the drivers employed by the Niger Office have grounds for complaint.

According to junior European employees, some haulage work is carried out by two teams of Africans each working a 12-hour shift one after the other. They are never paid .../...

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<sup>24</sup> The second section, or *deuxième portion* in French, were military reservists recruited by the French in West Africa. In 1926, under the Governor-General Jules Carde (1923-1930), authorisation was granted by the colonial government to use military reservists for development projects in the colonies. Again, as with the case with the *prestation* system, this responded to what was perceived by the occupying power as a chronic shortage of labour.

the overtime rate. Work lasts for three months, at the end of which they get a fortnight's paid rest. In other words, for 234 hours' overtime, each the equivalent of  $1/5^{\text{th}}$  of a day or  $9/5^{\text{ths}}$  of an hour (on a work contract) and for the 144 hours worked in place of the weekly period of rest, each the equivalent of  $18/5^{\text{ths}}$  of an hour, this makes a total of  $421 + 518 = 939$  hours. In other words, this is the equivalent of 12 days' work, or 98 hours.

But, in the words of the junior employees, the rest of the year they are just "doing odd jobs".

It is the same with labourers. The non-commissioned officer who was given the task of introducing them to me said that they do overtime, but they are given time in lieu.

I will now provide some information on work-related accidents taken from the registers at the clinic. These registers were shown to me by the medical officer, Lieutenant FOSTER<sup>25</sup>.

For 1936:

Labourers - 82 non-fatal accidents,

Labourers - 19 fatal accidents

2<sup>nd</sup> Section (approximately 1000 reservists in total) - 27 non-fatal accidents, + 1 declared unfit for service.

The most common accidents are drowning and asphyxiation as a result of landslides. They occur, according to Cl. Fevez, the director of the workforce, because the daily work allocation is done without any thought for the worker's experience or aptitude. The worker is often not competent for the job. Also, there is no training

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<sup>25</sup> The medical service was largely staffed by serving officers of the French armed forces, notably the Navy.

programme. Dr Foster adds that the men's feet are often injured because they work so closely together that they injure each other.

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I also saw a pitiful group in the infirmary. They were from a contingent of workers recently arrived from Ouahigouya, transported care of the Niger Office. 116 of them had arrived seriously ill with flu, fever, dysentery, tuberculosis, and one man was dead. There were eight patients left who did not seem likely to recover.

The indemnities paid to families (I could not find a complete list) are almost invariably 300 francs, in other words, the indemnity paid for death by natural causes, which means no responsibility on the part of the employer.

The work is very hard, according to the doctor. Conscripts prefer to do seven years' military service to two years' manual labour. Labourers have to be drawn by lot. They are unhappy from the start, hence the friction between them and their team leaders.

At the camp, I overheard a conversation between a chief mechanic and an accountant who is sent to keep an eye on work when things get busy. They were complaining that the blacks were no longer the 'animals' that they used to be, easy to handle. To make sure you are obeyed you have to be 'hard', but you have to be careful too, only hit them behind closed doors.

They were deploring the fact that the creation of a Workforce Service had emboldened 'moaners'. Mass demonstrations had taken place outside the police station. There were fights between reservists of the contingent and 'volunteers'. Until now these had been quickly put down, but a strong hand was needed. One day, if

things go on the way they have been, these two prattlers concluded, the situation will get nasty.

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Moving on to criticise the management, the accountant, who ‘sees it all close up, since he is responsible for auditing’, spoke of an agreement between those representing the companies and those in charge of inspections. “If you could call them ‘inspections’. For instance, there were 1,000 tons of cement, no longer fit for purpose, delivered by the *Messageries Africaines* shipping company<sup>26</sup>, and the Consortium accepted the consignment under the obliging eye of the Inspection Service.” said our accountant. The dubious role played by the head of the Inspection Service, Mr. LEGORGEUX, had also been pointed out to me by CI FEVEZ. 150,000 francs had been allocated for repairs on a machine which had become unusable because it had been abandoned with no maintenance for a whole year. There’s no attempt at covering up this protection of the companies’ interests. After the Governor of the Sudan had asked that work carried out between midnight and four in the morning receive a bonus, Mr. LEGORGEUX proposed 40 centimes an hour for volunteers, and 10 centimes an hour for the contingent reservists, as a proportion of the loan taken as salary.

CI FEVEZ adds that he finds himself confronted with systematic ill will: when clothing is distributed, provisions are missing. When they do arrive eventually, they are put in reserve, and so one distribution is saved and the supplies mount up.

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<sup>26</sup> The *Messageries Africaines* company ran steamships along the Niger River in the 1930s. Savineau took such a steamship, the ‘Van Vollenhoven’, when she left the Niger colony from Niamey on 2 January 1938.

Last April, there was a shortage of meat. A cry of *force majeure* went up, without anything being done to remedy the situation. Every observation receives a tardy or evasive reply. Mr LEGORGEUX himself smiles a lot and looks at the ground to the left or the right when he talks to you.

CI FEVEZ, being an honest man, is indignant. Unfortunately, he is also having problems maintaining good relations with .../...

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all the heads of the various services in Markala. He describes himself as powerless to exercise any effective protection, due to a lack of personnel. Of the 13 non-commissioned officers expected (two for the three camps), he has been given only eight.

## **7 - CONCLUSIONS ARISING FROM THIS ENQUIRY**

The preceding observations were gathered in the space of twelve days. Though the work has been both attentive and intensive, the result can be no more than a partial study. It highlights more problems than it resolves. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw a certain number of conclusions.

### The African response to European Crop Farming Methods

Firstly, it seems to be the case - and the heads of rural schools, and the directors of some provident societies are of the same view – that the Africans succeed

more quickly than had been hoped in understanding, appreciating and applying our methods of farming, almost without resistance.

It should be pointed out that they were not as unfamiliar with these methods as is commonly supposed. Some of them were familiar with crop rotation, using manure, even irrigation, as a forthcoming report on the development of Diré will show.

The African response to the Methods of the Niger Office

The question here is whether the methods practised in the Niger Office are the most appropriate and profitable for the Black African?

Before deciding one way or the other, the Niger Office has to be considered in two ways, firstly, from a wide social, economic and financial point of view; and secondly, from the individual point of view.

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It was not for me to concern myself with the former. I will simply show that the work carried out by the Niger Office in this respect needs to be reviewed. I have applied myself to the latter, an approach which the Niger Office stubbornly refuses to confront head on, other than to disguise or hide the reality of what is going on here.

Comparison between settlement and vulgarisation methods

It should be said at the outset that there are two basic methods in operation: settlement, or the foundation of villages on irrigated land; the second is what they call here 'vulgarisation', or crop-farming on non- or partially-irrigated land, with the aid of a plough and involving no population movement.

The first of these two methods has been used in Baguinéda since 1930. This centre is considered to have reached its definitive state. Productivity varies from 3,000 francs for a family of 10 (we will discuss later the number of workers involved) down to 600 or 700 francs, or even 150 francs, for a family of four people.

In Niénébalé (under semi-irrigation), the official figure is 2,000 francs per worker, on the basis of two workers per family of 10 people. For a family of this size then, productivity is estimated at 4,000 francs, which is more than the maximum in Baguinéda.

In Barouéli, working a non-irrigated method, 1,500 francs for 5 workers makes 600 francs for 10 people<sup>27</sup>. That is clearly the average figure for Baguinéda. It seems that settlement does not leave the farmer with much more than the vulgarisation method.

However, the irrigated farming methods incur huge expenses for the colony, such as the heavy costs of maintaining the canal for the settlers. There are serious political problems with the relocation of villages, and there is a serious economic problem with the selling on of .../...

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products.

The official method and the real method

I have shown elsewhere that the methods employed in the Niger Office are neither as educative nor as liberal as they ought to be and are claimed to be.

### Labour costs - Family work

A great deal is made of family work by the Niger Office, along with home-based work, and in contrast to salaried employment. The International Labour Office has been looking into this for some considerable time now.

The system consists of having the head of the family exploit women and children who are put to work without benefiting from any of the protective laws governing salaried work. In *Remarks on the Settlement Methods of the Niger Office*, there is indeed a reference on page 3 to the ‘small rural property’ and to the ‘prolific workforce’ which alone leads to ‘high productivity’. The reader is supposed to believe that the sheer joy of being a landowner brings about the miracle of stimulating the worker. The work of women and children is described as ‘minor’, only the men are seen as doing the ‘farming’, in other words using a hoe or a plough (which, incidentally, is often not the case).

In reality, hours of work are put in by men, women and children. It may well be true that not all of the hours worked are worth the same, but in calculating profits, everything has to be taken into account, which is what the Niger Office does not do.

In the Niger Office, the understanding is that a family of 10 people includes 2 workers. In fact, they are referred to as ‘dabas’ (the term for the native hoe). On page 35 of his 1935 Report, Mr BELIME<sup>28</sup> wrote: ‘a family of 12 people, of whom 3 are workers.’ .../...

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<sup>27</sup> The calculations vary. Later in the report she states that the earnings of workers in Baroueli amount to 150 francs. We have transcribed her figures *verbatim* here. Ed.

<sup>28</sup> See note 1. Emile Bélime subsequently became director of the Niger Office.

Let us now consider how, on page 81, Mr. BELIME breaks down the family in Baguinéda:

Able-bodied men aged 15 to 65:	1,146
Able-bodied women aged 15 to 65:	1,412
Children aged 8 to 15:	926

Information gathered on the spot allows us to confirm that these three categories of people all work and that once over the age of 15, if not 13 or 14, a boy is considered a 'daba'.

Supposing that women and children under the age of 15 are the equivalent of 1/2 a daba, and this would be a conservative estimate, that makes 2,338 people amounting to 1,169 dabas. This does not make two dabas per family, it makes more than four per family.

Let us return to the profits that have been announced. In the course of the year, each worker has earned:

750 francs (maximum) .....	in Baguinéda.
1,000 francs .....	in Niénébalé -
150 francs .....	in Barouéli -

This is for somewhere in the region of 3,000 hours. This makes 0.33 francs an hour, or 2.97 francs for a 9-hour day in Niénébalé. In Baguinéda it comes to 0.25 francs an hour, or 2 francs a day, and in Barouéli, 0.05 francs an hour or 0.45 francs a day. These are the official figures, whereas the earnings of the settlers are often less.

The Niger Office is at pains to point out that the farmers are fed. Labourers who are paid at 2 francs or 2.20 francs, are also fed. It is emphasised that in the Niger

Office those who do not work are still fed. But the labourer's ration includes meat or fish, and oil-based condiments. The farmer only keeps back grain, worth about 40 or 50 centimes a day, to which he adds meat and condiments, to the value of at least 1 franc, which does not amount to much as meat alone costs 4 francs a kilo. In other words, the settler is worse .../...

.....

off than a labourer, because even with his 'profit', he cannot always cover the costs of his food. The objection is made that at home, the settlers did not eat meat. But the work they carried out there was less demanding and what is the point of relocating them if their diet is not going to improve?

In any case, all this is pure theory, since the worker does not receive individually the fruits of his labour.

On page 43 of *Remarks on Settlement*, it states that 'There can be no question of dividing up the profits among the workers in the same family, which, at present, go directly to the head of the family. To do so would be to go against native customs and destroy the authority of the head of the family, which we have an interest in maintaining or even reinforcing.'

If the individual were given directly the derisory sum that he has earned, I have no doubt he would not stay on. Giving the earnings to the family head pleases him, and his wife and son too. They will receive a present and maybe they will be satisfied with that. Blessed be the custom!

## Customs

Let us not be deceived by this word: it is one thing to respect the customs in a village and another in an economic system run by Europeans and from which they benefit. It is scandalous that a European company should profit at the expense of the weak in a community, even if local custom subscribes to it. It is a form of indirect slavery.

There is also a difference between the manner in which this particular custom is applied in the village, and the way it is exploited in the Office. Certainly, in the village, the head of the family receives the product of everyone's labour, at least amongst the Bambaras and the Miniankas. Amongst the Mossis, the family is .../...

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generally much smaller, not the kind of extended family unit. But the head of the family is responsible for ensuring that everyone is well-fed, and clothed, and for building up reserves, and marrying the young. He does not shy away from any of his duties and he does not misappropriate the goods of the Community, which he knows are not his. Were he to forget this, his brothers, nephews, cousins, brought together in a village council, would remind him, supported by other family heads and, if necessary, by a senior chief in charge of several villages.

The Youth Association would protest on behalf of its members, as would the parents-in-law in the case of a woman, since, in the village, though the woman often works very hard, she has her own personal dwelling, which is as comfortable as her husband's. If the mosquito net were a native piece of furniture, the women would have their own.

The family head recognised by the Niger Office was probably not destined to exercise this power. Intoxicated by the lure of gain, he is a *parvenu* operating outside the family structure that would have kept him in check, this cunning old man plays the custom for his own profit, with the support of the Office, and will turn against the Office itself when the need arises. It can then be said in the Niger Office that ‘custom is to blame’, and that no European is familiar enough with it to invoke it wisely, even if he wished to.

It is true that some thought is being given to the issue of reversing this ‘reinforced’ paternal authority. It is discussed in *Remarks on Settlement* (page 43), in the form of offering young people land and shared materials, so that they can earn the dowry themselves. I was told in Barouéli that custom allows them to work for themselves one day a week when they earn 3 francs. By the end of the year they will all have saved 156 francs. In order to amass a dowry and the necessary sum for presents and wedding expenses, it would take some ten years.

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### Working conditions

If we turn our attention now to working conditions, we see that they are not as the Niger Office would have us believe.

The settlers, we are told, have come of their own volition and have placed themselves under the supervision of the Office’s agents, who let them work freely, limiting themselves to giving advice and managing them. They are at home here and work for themselves. They are free to leave.

In reality, almost all of them have been brought by force. They have to be at work at a given time and provide a given quantity of produce, or suffer brutal sanctions. They do not have freedom of movement or the right to be absent.

They can leave, but this means leaving behind, without any indemnity, the plot of land that they have cleared, worked and improved. It is only after 10 years that they have the right to receive the title of property.

Here is a case that was related to me in Bamako. It shows, incidentally, that the Niger Office has not hesitated to grant huge concessions to people who were not going to cultivate the land themselves but have it cultivated. I have this information from Mr LEROUX, a schoolteacher of mixed race, and secretary to the Schools Inspector of the Sudan.

The Niger Office granted to Mr LEROUX and 12 other civil servants between eighteen to twenty hectares of land in Baguinéda, to be signed for in Bamako. Mr LEROUX bought, in addition, 75 fruit trees at 15 francs a piece. He transported the whole lot 30 kilometres. His mule died from over-exertion. He then had a small building built which the Office rents from him from time to time for 75 francs a month. He also had the necessary irrigation work done for his plantation. Next, he bought two ploughs at 800 francs each, .../...

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two bulls at 475 and 450 francs, some sheep and poultry. In all, he spent 86,000 francs. Mr LEROUX employs workers to do the farming, whom he pays 37.50 to 55 francs a month, including food and lodging. This workforce costs him 5,400 francs a

year. Now the irrigation is not adequate; this year they have all had to take out the rice because there was no water, the Niger Office having neglected to drain the canal to clean it.

Mr LEROUX's takings are never more than 6,000 francs a year.

Furthermore, though he has developed his plot, Mr LEROUX is not the owner of this land, just like his twelve colleagues. Recently, one of them, Mamadou COULIBALY, a postman with the DN<sup>29</sup> and Bamako's sub-stationmaster, died. The Niger Office offered his father the opportunity to continue farming in his place. Unable to do so, the father asked to relinquish his rights to the land. His request was turned down and so he was sent a letter of withdrawal. The land was passed on in this condition to another occupant. The family protested and the occupant was removed. Now the land is being invaded by undergrowth, and the neighbours have divided up the trees amongst themselves. Mamadou COULIBALY was the father of four children.

#### Building and canal works

We have seen that irrigated villages are insalubrious, that huts provided by the Office are collapsing, that walls are not the height that they are supposed to be. The clearing of land is also more of a question of theory than practice. The machine that I saw in operation was breaking the trees rather than uprooting them. According to Mr PECAS, who is an engineer, this makes clearing the land more difficult.

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<sup>29</sup> The DN (an abbreviation of 'Dakar-Niger') was the term used for the railway which connected Dakar, the headquarters of the French West African administration, and Koulikoro on the Niger River, some 40 miles north east of Bamako in the French Sudan (Mali).

We have seen that canal works and dikes are falling apart everywhere. Mr REYNAUD claims that it is always like this at the beginning. It is the same with the roads, he says, big holes appear until the earth has settled. This is a technical problem that I am not competent to judge. But I have seen the road running from Markala to Macina. It is being repaired in the middle. The forced labourers<sup>30</sup> have plenty of work on their hands with that, and they are not repairing the sides, which would be clearly well beyond what one can expect of them. So the road remains deeply furrowed on both sides and is quite obviously becoming narrower every year, in places it appears to be down to half its original width. The time is coming when machines will have to be brought in to repair it.

The settlers are responsible for maintaining minor roads and these are in an even worse state. At the moment labourers are made available for repair work. But what will happen when the labourers have moved on from the older sectors? Furthermore there is a plan to open up roads for the movement of cattle, these are currently off-limits to Moors as their herds are often contaminated. All this is just another complication caused by the relocation of population groups. Wells and resting-places will be constructed on these routes. Who will be responsible for maintaining these?

### Personnel

Inspectors and instructors, as we have seen, speak to settlers in an authoritarian tone of voice and with such sharpness that would be shocking if they

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<sup>30</sup> See note 17

were addressing employees. It is all the more shocking as these people are not employees, as everyone is so prone to point out in the Niger Office.

I expressed my indignation at all this to Mr REYNAUD. He agreed that such conduct was unacceptable. But how is it that he has never noticed it before? He .../...

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asked me for names. I mentioned Mr BLANC and Mr ROBERT. He urged me not to name them in my report, since they are two of his better agents, the most productive probably, and I was going to cost them their jobs. He promised to give them ‘a thorough dressing down’.

I promised, not to say nothing, but to take Mr REYNAUD’s request into account in my report, which I have done. I wanted to give myself time to think about the matter and I have thought about it at length. I believe that it matters not that two nasty individuals lose their jobs, if two less nasty individuals replace them.

It would, however, be unfair if Mr ROBERT and Mr BLANC were to be singled out for punishment. Because the instructor in Baguinéda, whose name escapes me, a man who regaled those around him with cries of ‘Bunch of pigs!’, also deserves to be mentioned. As I saw him less recently I cannot now remember it. Also I might well have witnessed other scenes with other agents acting in a similar way. Almost all of them seemed to me to be capable of such behaviour. Mr VINCENT, who boasts about his nickname, ‘the Tornado’, may well say he is now ‘a changed man’.

Everybody, or almost everybody at the Niger Office, treats the African badly.

This is the style of the whole enterprise and it is easy to see why. A very demanding, delicate, perhaps superhuman task is given to people who have no experience and

sometimes no education. What is required of them is, above all, a return; this is what they are valued for, and if they fail to provide it, they will lose their jobs.

Almost all of them are also too young. But no doubt they cost less. In Niono, in particular, there are two Europeans, Mr BLANC, the inspector, and Mr PAGAUD, the engineer, who both look like children. They have neither physical strength nor experience. They are nervous and they even .../...

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stammer while trying to get the words out quickly enough.

It is understood that this personnel has an exclusively agricultural role. In reality this role should be educational, but it fails completely in this regard. By contrast, and in spite of all the protests to the contrary, their role *is* an administrative one. Mr PICHON, we have seen, has admitted to having cowry shells crushed to bits at the market, with the praiseworthy aim of preventing speculation. He is not even aware that such an act is illegal. He also admitted that people came to him with disputes to resolve, and no doubt he deals with these with the same degree of inventiveness, and his colleagues will be just the same.

It is also clear that the Niger Office undermines the course of justice. In the village of Medina, in Kokry centre, I witnessed a man who came along with a complaint that his brother had been seriously injured by a neighbour. He was told that his brother had got what he deserved, having been caught with another woman by her husband. As he was not sent in the direction of the administrative authorities, he perhaps thought his complaint had been rejected. It is possible also that he was

prevented from going to Macina. Mr BIANCHI, whom I saw at this post, told me that this happens frequently: a man who goes to make a complaint has to abandon his work, then witnesses are called and they too have to leave the fields. This annoys the same agents who are sending the women waiting for their quinine at the clinic on their way. And Mr REYNAUD hopes to obtain rural police powers for his staff! He does not respect the concept of justice enough to deserve this.

### Management

I have tried in vain to find out how the management of the Niger Office is overseen. The settlers do not know what they have harvested and they do not know what they are owed. I was told that far from being a problem this is positive situation for them, because they have to be satisfied and so the statistics .../...

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have to reflect favourably upon the Office. But if it is true, as I was told, that several senior members of the management team are paid out of the proceeds of false accounting on the centres' budgets, who suffers from the swindle - the settlers or the general budget? What is clear is that the Office is doing exactly as it pleases. On page 45 of *Remarks*, quoted above, it mentions two systems for the distribution of produce from harvests, the first of which is fairer than the second, but more onerous for the Office. It is the second method that is used, not without it being stressed that it enables the settlers to 'keep their wealth a secret'. Let it be added that it also enables the Office to ignore their poverty.

In keeping with the above, the Office also monitors sanitary and veterinary matters (cf. p. 35).

### The Spirit of Colonisation

The Niger Office is being run by recent graduates from one of our top management schools who have only recently arrived in Africa, but have some surprising insights to offer us regarding its population. For instance, one reads in *Remarks* (p. 4) that the native's love of the land 'is not, as in France, an attachment to a particular plot of land'. The conclusion is that 'we can avoid disorientating the immigrants by allocating entire cantons to them by race' (page 105). Now even if the native is not attached to his particular plot of land, he is attached to the site on which this particular plot is located. But the truth is readily manipulated in the Niger Office in the interests of 'settlement'.

If we attempt now to identify the ethos governing the development of the Niger Office, we will see that there is something to suit all tastes: 'The black is "incapable" of imagining that solidarity can extend beyond familiar horizons (?)' (page 49); and we wish 'to save what remains of the old and admirable Sudanese community spirit' (page 50); .../...

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and when creating new villages, we want 'to force new movements to form by themselves' (page 106).

Clearer still is the following:

On page 23, we read of ‘forging a native peasantry that has the same flaws but also the same incomparable virtues of the French peasantry’.

On page 27, there is an aversion to joint ownership of carts, and a preference either for the single owner, who can rent out to others, or for everyone having his own cart, ‘even if the potential this offers far exceeds the owner’s needs’.

In short, the Office’s aims work against individualism and against co-operation simultaneously. There is a tendency at the Niger Office, and we will not shrink from repeating it, to institute slavery with the vast majority toiling for the benefit of the few. The word ‘communism’, whatever one’s views on that system may be, would be totally out of place here. When I was in Soviet central Asia I visited some settlements they call ‘*kolkhoses*’ in what used to be the Turkistan of the tsars. The *kolkhoses* were farmed by subject populations who resemble the Sudanese in terms of customs, religion and the type of work they do. The means of production had been transferred to common ownership, and the farming organised using teams. Membership was on an individual basis, however, and the individual man or woman being free to withdraw at will with his or her land. The member had to be at least seventeen years of age. Below this age, all children attended school. I would add that this system is perfectly viable while being more liberal than the one operating in the Niger Office, and based on equally extensive irrigation works. The farms are equipped with sophisticated equipment, the worker is well fed (each has a garden and abundant food supplies) and able to decorate his home with valuable carpets and wear silk embroidered clothes on rest days. They have generous amounts of instruction, distractions and health care at their disposal.

I have given this example because it seems important to me to compare it with the Niger Office. Such large-scale ventures .../...

benefit from knowing about each other and getting a bit of inspiration from each other, for by knowing the other one can automatically see the weaknesses in one's own system.

### The Niger Office and the Law

Even when the Niger Office settlers consider themselves satisfied, it behoves us to be less easily satisfied and consider the legality of the system we have subjected them to.

There is no question, as we have already pointed out, of our invoking for them either legislation protecting the salaried employee or women and children. But a law will soon come into effect of which the Niger Office will be in flagrant contravention, namely the law prohibiting forced labour.

According to the terms of the Convention adopted by the International Labour Congress on June 10<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> 1930, and applied to French West Africa by the decree of August 12<sup>th</sup> 1937, forced labour is defined as:

Any form of work required of an individual under the threat of punishment or for which the individual has not offered his services willingly.

Not only does the work carried out initially in the Niger Office correspond to this definition, but it continues to correspond to this definition. Though Article 9 allows for forced labour when it is in the direct interests of the community as a whole, it cannot be invoked here. In addition to the obvious European interests at stake, the

putative interests of the settlers in this case are pursued where necessary at the expense of their neighbours.

Besides, even if the principle of collective interest were admissible, the following articles would condemn the Niger Office. I will summarise them briefly:

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Art. 10 - Forced labour must not take the worker away from his place of residence.

Art. 11 - It can be applied only to able-bodied male adults, aged 18 to 45.

Art. 12 - It must not exceed 60 days in any twelve-month period.

Art. 16 - It must not involve a move that results in a change of diet in a climate damaging to the individual's health.

The Niger Office is clearly guilty on these counts.

## CONCLUSION

The Niger Office likes to present itself as a social welfare initiative but in reality it is an exploitative regime. Huge interests, next to which the settlers' seem very insignificant, are at stake.

The managers, far from denying it, state that this provides a guarantee: have they not been bound, for example, to increase the population? Hence all the care and attention and the medical inspections, and so on... But this care and attention does not

extend beyond what a breeder shows to his livestock, he invests care where it is going to give him a return. People are forced to live on waterlogged land and so they are given quinine. There is no indication that the Niger Office is concerned with its subjects' genuine well-being, or with providing more comfortable living conditions and the possibilities of intellectual progress. After 10 years, Baguinéda has no school. One cannot .../...

point to a few bicycles and call it 'civilization'.

However, the Niger Office will reply that the settlers are the envy of the surrounding populations, that requests for concessions abound. All the neighbouring people I came across were concerned to remain free. Mr SAINTARD, the director of the Sotuba Experimental Farm, said that the Bambaras around him are disaffected. There was talk in my presence of the incurable 'lack of enthusiasm' among the settlers, who had not been properly prepared, and of the deleterious effect of this on recruitment.

If the haste to join up were real rather than imagined, would the Niger Office really need to organise a publicity programme of visits by the Commandants?

It should be added that while the managers of the Niger Office cover up their activities and everything that might point to their failure, they are perhaps convinced that the Africans deserve what they get. At any rate, they know how to impress this view upon a number of their agents. In Segou, a lot of Europeans who are supporters of

freedom when it comes to themselves, are full of admiration for these colonisers who treat the natives badly ‘for their own good’, and they envy of these ‘civilisers’ who have the right to conduct themselves any way they like with those they ‘civilise’.

The true spirit of brotherly tutelage between the Europeans and the Africans in the Niger Office has a long way to go. For this reason it is regrettable that, faced with such an important and delicate task as managing the farming along the banks of the Niger, the Administration has practically abdicated all responsibility. It has a duty to reconsider this problem, to review the applications and .../...

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calculations it receives from the Niger Office and to place the Office in more expert, well-intentioned and disinterested hands.

signed: M. SAVINEAU.<sup>31</sup>

GAO, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1937

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<sup>31</sup> M. usually signifies ‘Monsieur’. Reports 1,2,3,et 13 are signed M. Savineau. Report 4 is signed **Mme.** Savineau, while the other reports, typed up by a secretary at HQ in Dakar, have no name at the end.