Dividing Guinea into Four Parts: How Colonization Imagined Africa
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At the time of French colonization, the division of Guinea into four regions solidified, especially from the 1920s onward. However, this administrative and ethnic partitioning was a process of simplification, which continued even after independence in 1958, and its symbolism continues to influence a whole array of everyday processes. Based on the Guinean example, this paper argues for a history of colonial heritages.

“The exclusion of any Guinean is not a sign of stability. Guinea is like a car with four wheels,” proclaimed one of the candidates in the 2010 presidential election.¹

Some months earlier, a billboard featuring the faces of four women appeared in the streets of Conakry, an image that attracted attention and caused puzzlement (see Document 1).²

There is nothing unique about using women for their metonymic value. History has made us familiar with symbolic depictions of a value (such as justice or charity), a nation (Marianne, Germania), and many other things. For anyone familiar with Guinea, deciphering this message is easy: the four women, recognizable by their attire, refer to the four regions that have made up the conventional depiction of the country

¹ El hadj Bah Ousmane, candidate of the Union for Progress and Renewal (UPR), May 20, 2010 (http://guineenouvelle.info)
² Seen in 2008 in the streets of Conakry, this ad for Sotelgui also appeared in the press.

for decades. The implicit messages are the nation’s diversity in unity and population stereotypes, hence a simplification of demographic and cultural data.

Before advertising and political rhetoric appropriated this way of depicting the country, it was conveyed by other media (such as official speeches, miscellaneous written documents, and reports) as a symbol of a widespread view of Guinea (see Document 2). The intention of this paper is not to analyze the nation-building process after independence, gained through a break with France in 1958, or the specific relationship between knowledge and power under colonization,³ but rather to explore the colonial origins of this categorization and to follow its manifestations to the present day. This involves examining how Guinea’s division came out of the overseas transposition of the process of inventing “countries”, a blend of socio-ethnographic-geographic description in the tradition of Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1918) and

Frédéric Le Play (1806–1882) and of administrative reasoning. Being contemporary with colonial claims, the late nineteenth century coincides with the promotion of a new way of dividing up the globe into regions on naturalistic bases that were both geographic and social rather than on historical-political foundations or centering on river basins.\footnote{Marie-Vic Ozouf-Mariginier et Marie-Claire Robic (eds.) \textit{Régions naturelles et noms de pays: Étude sur la région parisienne} (Paris: CTHS, 2008), xxii.} Influenced by theories prevailing in France at the turn of the twentieth century, travelers, promoters
discovering Guinea, and administrators strove to present a vision of the colony that matched the French model, a means of depiction that continued after independence.

The division of Guinea into four “natural”
regions (Maritime Guinea, Middle Guinea, Upper Guinea, and Forest Guinea) has been apparent since the 1920s and can be found in works introducing the country, designed in Guinea and abroad, as well as in current discourse. This division, the result of an intellectual construction with pre-colonial roots and drawing on various historical memories, has an impact on the perception of the country and its
peoples, on regional and local identities, even on political options. Without giving too much credit to colonial actors in this process of naming and organizing spaces and populations, it is important to take a fresh look at the genesis of this heritage and to explore its future. This archeological approach to knowledge—to borrow Michel Foucault’s concept—by which it is possible to identify not just sources but also the intellectual underpinnings helps us understand the phenomena of perpetuation, modification, and re-appropriation of categories.

Measuring the impact of this division into regions and its effects at various levels is complex as this categorical factor functions as part of a set of possible referents, and its performative power may vary. Individuals in their villages or neighborhoods or administrators in their offices or in the field do not necessarily—even rarely—situate themselves in relation to a division that has more to do with the convenience of external customs than with a directly administrative or political approach. However, this categorization imprints itself on minds and
plays a role in the birth and reinforcement of regional identities, whose outlines fluctuate.

**Constructing the Colonial Division into Four Parts**

The merchants, travelers, military men, and missionaries who regularly visited West Africa left detailed accounts of the regions they passed through. In the nineteenth century, their narratives were rich in meticulous descriptions of the vegetation, topography, environments, and people they encountered, which could then be drawn upon to construct a specific body of scientific knowledge and take control.\(^1\) Nature offers multiple facets, from the estuaries and mangrove swamps along the coast to the foothills of the inland mountain range, the valleys crisscrossed by the Niger and the Tinkisso rivers, the hinterland plateau, and finally, over 800 kilometers from the coast, expanses of forest.

Guinea is striking in the diversity of its landscapes, cultures, and history. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the two monumental works by André Arcin, a former administrator, bear witness to the impossibility of capturing Guinea’s physical and human environment in a few oversimplified sentences.\(^2\) Yet in less than half a century, this meticulous approach gave way to an organization born of the taxonomic logic bequeathed by the Enlightenment. Naming and categorizing operate as tools of power.\(^3\) In the hands of those who rule, they can be used to establish their presence and set its forms or contours through their performative power. Envisaging Guinea as a space that can be easily imagined led to conquest and control of the land and its people. Spreading a simplified perception also reinforced this notion among the population of the European territories of France and envelopes the colonized peoples in a coarse mesh.\(^4\)

Although going from precise descriptions to simplistic and consensual depiction was a laborious process, it came out of the geographicization of the social sciences, with the participation of geographers and sociologists, who, while in disciplinary competition with one another, opted for the same method (the monograph) and the same subject matter (the country). Dividing Guinea into four parts thus took some decades before becoming established as an obvious discourse at the end of the 1920s. As with the invention of “Black Africa,” the criteria fluctuated until geographic concepts won the day, making it possible to adopt the terminology of borders and regions, which were based on the political-administrative partitioning of the colony.\(^5,6\)

An analysis of numerous documents by travelers and administrators as well as official publications allows us to follow the stages of this construction. Without being exhaustive, the corpus used is as large as possible and includes:

\(^{4}\) Valentin Mudimbe stresses the binary, simplifying structure of the paradigms applied to Africa in: *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 4.


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First it is clear that the division of Guinea could not take place until after the colonial borders had been definitively set, i.e., at the very end of the nineteenth century after the annexation of the Faranah district in 1895, the military defeat of the Fouta-Djalon State in 1896, and the integration of the entire southern region of Sudan in 1899 (see Document 3). This process was internal to the French Empire as part of negotiations between the military and civilians. Second, it is equally clear that once the borders were fixed, categorization was subjected to the political imperatives of the moment; hence Fouta-Djalon could not be considered a unique region as long as Alpha Yaya Diallo, France’s ally, dominated the eastern province of Labé.

works dealing with the entire territory. Because their status differs, not all the administrative narratives can be placed on the same footing. While some result from personal knowledge of Guinea, others are summaries, and some are based on in-depth examinations, while others consist of colonial propaganda or are tourism brochures. Taken together, they make it possible to follow the stages in the process and to analyze the classification criteria without denying reversals or hesitations. Ultimately, the documents present the end result of a process whose intellectual path, implicit reasoning, and subsequent debates are often masked. While the theory of countries is never explicitly cited, it underlies the entire process.

Likewise, the far southeast retained a separate status as a military region until 1911–1912.

The invention of this division into four parts was first and foremost practical as the aim was to organize the colony into regional units that were larger than the “districts,”¹ the basic administrative districts. When Guinea was just seven years old² and the conquest not yet complete, a reorganization was outlined, anticipating the later arrangements, with some regions being split off. These included the maritime region (with four districts: Rio Nunez, Rio Pongo, Dubréka, Mellacorée), Fouta Djalon (Timbo, Labé, and Kadé districts), and the Niger Basin (Faranah districts). The rest was blurred and chopped up, with two districts in the mountainous region between the coast the Fouta Djalon (Friguiagbé, Ouassou) in addition to the Dinguiraye, Kouroussa, Kankan, Kissidougou, and Beyla districts, which consisted of newly annexed regions.³

The decree of May 18, 1905, which fixed the administrative division of Guinea, presented the first official version, grouping the districts into six categories: Lower Guinea (Mellacorée, Dubréka, Rio Pongo, Rio Nunez), Labé (Labé, Toub, Yambéring), Fouta-Djalon (Timbo, Ditinn, Dinguiraye), Haute-Guinée (Kouroussa, Kankan, Signir), Upper Niger (Beyla, Kissidougou), and the catch-all category of “independent” noncontiguous districts (Kindia, Coniaguis, Timbis, Faranah) (Journal Officiel de la Guinée, 1905). Arcin (1907) argues along similar lines, following the cited order. At that point, classification factors were based on geography (elevation or river: Lower Guinea, Upper Niger) or on political (Fouta-Djalon, Labé) or cultural (Coniaguis)⁴ entities. Little by little, the classification system became more sophisticated and complete. Although the most frequent criterion refers to ecosystems, the authors hesitated between division into two, three, and finally, four parts.

The political and administrative implications of this division initially outweighed the natural criteria as these were not the sole or dominant criteria, as shown by the terminology. Here again, we recognize the Vidal de La Blache approach, whereby “the characteristic of a land is also a complex thing, resulting from all of a large number of features and the way they combine with and modify one another.”⁵

The words used to designate the regions blend elements associated with elevation and geography (Lower, Upper, and later, Middle), location (maritime), vegetation (forest), or a political reference (Fouta-Djalon). This parallels the system followed for naming the French départements. In describing the “great natural regions” of Guinea, Fernand Rouget, an archivist in the Ministry of Colonies, noted in 1906 that:

French Guinea is split into two very distinct zones:

I. The Soussou land,⁶ i.e., the basins of the coastal rivers, from the Rio Nunez to the Kolenté or Great Scarcie;

II. Fouta-Djallon, mountain and plateau regions.⁷

Rouget assigns all the rest of Guinea to Zone II. The contrast between the coast and the interior is an approach to categorization

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¹ This term refers to the equivalent of départements in French West Africa, which were headed by district commandants, showing the perpetuation of military terminology.
² French Guinea was established as a colony in 1893.
³ Lucien Marie François Famechon, Notice sur la Guinée française (Paris: Alcan-Lévy, 1900), 120.
⁴ This ethnic group stood apart through their prolonged resistance to domination. The border between Senegal and Guinea split the group in two.
⁶ This is a coastal area, named here for its dominant population, the Susu/Soussous.
DIVIDING GUINEA INTO FOUR PARTS

frequently used by Europeans. However, the crescent-shaped configuration of the Guinean territory lent itself poorly to this crude dichotomy.

In 1922, an official note described Guinea as follows:

It is formed by three large natural regions: the coastal region, or Lower Guinea, the central region, or Middle Guinea, and the Niger River region, or Upper Guinea.¹

This third region seems rather vague, as the southeastern part of the colony is assigned to it despite its unique geographic and climatic features. The military conquest of the high eastern plateaus by troops from French Sudan rather than from the coast, the late and difficult subjugation of the far southeast, and the lesser familiarity with an area so far from Conakry explain the late differentiation of these two regions and, hence, the hesitation between naming three or four regions. This is clearly stated in a document from 1924, which states that “Upper Guinea comprises two very distinct regions: the French Sudan area, and the forest area.”² It is the separate recognition of these two inland sub regions, a product of nature as much as of distant and recent history,³ that led to setting the number at four.

The division into four parts was firmly established during the 1920s and became the stereotypical view of Guinea, as developed by the meticulous description adopted for the 1929 Exhibition, which concluded that:

Finally, following the colony’s winding borders, the part of Guinea that touches Liberia and constitutes a distinct region is very mountainous. On its southern slopes, it is covered in forests that only vaguely resemble the great forest of Côte d’Ivoire; nonetheless, it is called a forest region.⁴

The document always associates a region with a topography while underscoring the internal diversity. It is instructive to make comparisons between Guinean regions or between Guinea and other colonies, in this case the sylvan Côte d’Ivoire. Finally, the mention of the winding borders underscores the complexity of the apportionment. In fact, we often find the expression “forest region.”

At the Paris Colonial Exhibition of 1931, Guinea’s division into four regions was presented as self-evident,⁵ and this apportionment then became the norm. This categorization is necessarily rough-hewn, and it would be reckless to challenge the natural evidence of the boundaries between regions on the ground. Furthermore, to complete the picture, other categorization factors were patched on to the criteria of physical geography and climatology in an equally simplistic way. This reinforced the feature in question in an attempt to make the regional apportionment coincide with a nation, even if this proved more difficult.

From Nature to Ethnicity

The dominant ecological characteristics are not enough to establish a vision of Guinea as each region is presented as a coherent, human whole, a “social unit,” in the words of Paul Vidal de La Blache, which, in a colonial situation,

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¹ La Guinée, note published for the Marseille Colonial Exhibition of 1922, Montauban, (Commissariat de l’AOF/Imprimerie Coopérative Barrière, 1922), 5.
³ We may point to the Samori Touré Empire (1860–1890) or to resistance to the constructed political entities in the forest region.
If we consider only the predominant races, Guinea can be divided into four large regions: the coastal region, Fouta-Djallon, the Niger River region, and the forest region. However, this division is oversimplified as in each of the regions listed above, there are no absolutely pure races.3

The second chapter of the 1931 work replicates this document almost word for word, which shows not only borrowings but also the impossibility of arguing in linear steps.

The classification of a region with a people was not self-evident as it contradicted available information on cultural diversity and, quite often, colonial policy itself, which at various levels strove to divide in order to rule. Hence in 1929, the inhabitants of the coast were enumerated (“the Soussous or Diallonkés, the Bagas, Timénés, Mandés, and Nalous”), as were those of the forest (“the Kissiens, Tomás, and Guerzés”), whereas Fouta-Djalon relates only to “the Peulhs or Foulahs” and Upper Guinea to the “Malinkés.”

Equating a region with a people involves not only twisting human reality but also inventing ethnic groups,4 as in the case of the Forestiers, the customary name for the peoples of the forest region. As seen from Conakry, over 800 kilometers away, the original peoples of this region seemed sufficiently different from other Guineans and sufficiently similar to one another to be categorized together. Furthermore, the administrative authorities in general, and the colonizers in particular, did not

In Guinea, we find a considerable number of races speaking distinct dialects, it would be tedious to list them all, especially as none of these races is pure and each one has been largely hybridized through mixing with neighboring races. However, it is possible to group them into three broad categories corresponding to the country’s three large natural regions: the Soussous in Lower Guinea, the Peulhs in Middle Guinea, and the Malinkes in Upper Guinea.2

As part of the tripartite approach shown above, the Malinkes are associated with “the Coniaguis near Kade” and “the Kissiens, Tomás, Guerzès and Manons, peoples living in the forest along the Liberian border.”

This document continues to express ambivalence between an awareness of multiplicity and the tendency to simplify, showing no linguistic or cultural awareness of the peoples of far-southeastern Guinea. The switch to a four-part division was thus a natural progression, and was applied beginning in the following year:

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(3) “La Guinée française,” La vie technique, industrielle, agricole, et coloniale, (1923), 5. The document also cites invasions and clashes between populations.
like to bother themselves with small numbers. The inhabitants of the most remote regions, including the forested Southeast, migrated in limited groups toward the coast. For their part, the forest populations benefited from this supra-regional association, which gave them weight on the local or national political scene and in some circumstances enabled them to speak with one voice. It was therefore possible to call oneself a Forestier outside of the region but a Loma or Kpelle\(^\text{1}\) at home, all of which was a matter of perspective and circumstance.

Categorizing involves oversimplifying realities and minimizing differences. It is therefore not surprising that along with this simplistic division into four parts, we also find hesitations and nuances being expressed. In effect, the two discourses did not have the same purposes, nor did they circulate in the same spheres. Thus one of the earliest tourist brochures introduces the four regions as a self-evident fact: “French Guinea, a land of infinite variety, offers the traveler four main regions: the Coast, the Mountains, the Savanah, and the Forest.”\(^\text{2}\) Conversely, in the same period, the director of the Institut Français d’Afrique Noire (IFAN) in Conakry attests to a more complex reality, even after citing the “four natural regions.”\(^\text{3}\) In the same way, the 1954 census speaks of “four clearly differentiated regions.” However, a few pages further on, the classification qualifies this statement by introducing the concept of “transition district” between two regions.\(^\text{4}\) While one document is a simplified brochure and the other a detailed, scientific source, both make the division into four parts the frame of reference.

One final evolution marks the process, namely the slide of descriptive categories toward the political sphere. Associative or party-based organization along ethnic or regional lines was in fact one of the components, partially or sporadically, of politics. This was true of associations of migrants joining together in solidarity, young people’s associations,\(^\text{5}\) and political movements expressing a regional identity. One of the first associations was the Amicale Gilbert-Vieillard, established in 1944 in Fouta-Djalon. Taking the name of an administrator who died in 1940 and who had taken a keen interest in Peulh culture, this association defended local interests. When political parties were legalized in 1946, a manipulative ethnicization of politics followed. Before blocking the rise of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), which was founded in Bamako in October 1946, as well as its variant, the Democratic Party of Guinea (PDG),\(^\text{6}\) the colonial administration gave rise to regionalist movements.\(^\text{7}\) In 1946, the Forest Union, the Lower Guinea Union (or Committee), and the Mandingo Union (or Union du Mandé) were officially established. In the phase leading up to the election, this identification may have tempted citizens, who were often guided by chiefs siding with the administration. Although

\(^{\text{(1)}}\) Toma and Guerzé, respectively, from the era of colonization.  
\(^{\text{(2)}}\) Tourist Office of French Guinea, early 1950s.  
\(^{\text{(5)}}\) Foyer des jeunes de la Basse-Guinée, Jeunesse du Fouta, etc. These Conakry-based associations coexisted with sports or cultural groups with no regional reference.  
\(^{\text{(6)}}\) Sékou Touré, Guinea’s future president and dictator, participated in its creation in 1947 and was its general secretary from 1952 to 1984.  
this process helped consolidate certain antagonisms, it did not become the rule.¹

The four-part division provided a simple view of a country created through colonial intervention for purposes of administrative, promotional, or touristic presentation, clearly a classic phenomenon. Moreover, this partitioning did not come out of nothing. Rather, it is clearly informed by local memories or the strategies of certain groups or individuals and backed by indications given by the colonized peoples themselves. Thus we can detect continuities or similarities between the supposedly colonial categorization and prior divisions, opposition between old neighboring political entities (theocratic state of Fouta-Djalon/Empire of Samory Touré; initial domain of Samory Touré/political organizations of the forest), contrast between ancient Muslim areas (Center and East, mainly) and recently converted areas located outside the Muslim sphere, confrontation between slave-predatory and slave-provider regions, or juxtaposition of ecosystems (forest kola, coastal salt, central cattle, etc.). From this standpoint, the colonial categorization, long ignored by the colonized masses though rooted in previously held perceptions, revived locally rooted feelings of belonging and can therefore be seen as a step toward national consciousness and identity, one of the formative stages in the nation’s image. In fact, the end of colonization did not mark the disappearance of the four-way division, which went through various incarnations in contemporary discourse and practice.

Perpetuating the Colonial “Invention”

The website of Guinea’s embassy in France states that: “[Guinea] comprises four natural regions: Lower Guinea or Maritime Guinea, Middle Guinea, Upper Guinea, and Forest Guinea.” This depiction of Guinea is not limited to administrative documents or descriptions for outside use but also permeates popular discourse. However, maintenance of the four-part division does not imply continuity since independence.

Greater methodological caution is required because of the expansion of the potential corpus. Under colonization, categorization resulted from the efforts of the colonial administration, whose ideas were nourished by the descriptive flourishes of writers, scholars, and advertisers. For independent Guinea, the role of outside influences in the choice of categories cannot be ignored. However, even if it is essential to differentiate these documents according to their origin, author, and status, it is difficult to understand their prehistory. This analysis, which cannot be exhaustive, seeks to follow the rise of this four-part division. It is based on textual or visual, institutional or symbolic sources, overlapping between the era of Sékou Touré (1958–1984), who wanted to break with France, Guinea needed international recognition. From this standpoint, various documents intended for foreign consumption were written, mainly in English, German, and French. These richly illustrated documents presented an image of Guinea that matched the earlier categorization. Moreover, the division was also perpetuated in the discourse of the PDG as

¹ We will not deal here with the ethnicization of politics following independence.

² http://www.ambaguinee-paris.org (Fall 2009).
well as institutionally as background for development plans in 1960 or for ministerial delegations from 1964 to 1975.

At the same time, in order to build the nation, Sékou Touré focused on what united Guineans (anti-imperialism, socialism) and not on divisions, at least rhetorically. Influenced by Pan-Africanism, the PDG transcended regional differences in a dialectic relationship between ethnicity and nation: “No ethnic group could survive if the nation perished under the solvent effects of ethnic particularities.” The Guinean national anthem, which combines a tune composed as a song of praise to the Peulh leader, Alpha Yaya, and the virtuosity of Malinké lyric writers is symptomatic of the desire to move beyond ethnicity. This tension between national unity and regional specificities is also illustrated by the artistic competitions aimed at promoting traditional cultures and contemporary creativity as regionally selected bands went on to participate in a national festival in Conakry. This was an attempt at creating the nation through unifying hybridization. The instrumental ensemble played tunes from all over Guinea: Mandingo epics, songs from Lower Guinea, melodies of the Mande kora, notes on the Peulh pastoral flute, etc. The national orchestras (Kélétigué and his Tambourinis, Balla and his Baladins, Bembeya Jazz) contributed toward founding modern Guinean music as a symbol of the Revolution.

In short, the four-part division was carried on for both internal and external purposes and combined with elements calling for national unity. Demographers presented the 1983 census according to the four natural regions on the grounds that these ecological and sociological entities were more homogeneous than the Revolution’s seven general commissariats or the provinces resulting from the current administrative partitioning. This adoption of the customary divisions shows both the persistence of this categorization and the impact of the international institutions that financed the operation. That same year, an official document went further and stated that “Guinea, which has a wide variety of climates, can be divided into four main regions.”

The paradigm of the four regions therefore persisted during the First Republic and continued under Lansana Conté, both inside and outside of the country, through specialists and popularizers equally. From Bernard Charles in 1963 (“Traveling around the country, one can easily distinguish four main natural regions”) or Jean Suret-Canale in 1970 to the historical dictionary by Thomas O'Toole (1978–2005), from André Lewin (1984) to

(1) It is not possible here to closely analyze a regime that, given its obsession with plots, heightened antagonisms. This culminated in the suppression of the Portuguese aggression in 1970 and the “Peuh plot” of 1976, followed by the death at Camp Boiro of Diallo Télli, Guinea’s first representative to the United Nations.


(4) General Census of Population and Living Conditions (RGPH), February 1983. Analysis of the final results, Conakry, December 1989 (Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation). No official census had been undertaken since the 1950s.

(5) Guinée-Festival (Conakry, Cultural Commission of the Central Committee, 1983), 12.


(7) From the first edition in 1978 to the fourth edition in 2005, O’Toole presents the four regions (Upper Guinea, Lower Guinea, Middle Guinea, Forest Region).

(8) André Lewin, La Guinée (Paris: PUF, 1984), 11 (for physical geography). However, the section on human geography shows greater complexity (18).
while maintaining his national and even Pan-African stature, Samori was associated with Upper Guinea, the center of his State. This meant hushing up the abuses for which he was responsible in the neighboring regions and the failures he suffered in his southward expansionism. Efforts were also made to find a dominant hero elsewhere. As in any approach of this type, the invention of a central figure and the transfer to a single hero of the benefits of the resistance implies rewriting history and denying internal conflicts. For example, Alpha Yaya Diallo, chief of the Diwal of Labé and a complex historical figure, came to symbolize all of Fouta-Djalon as an archetype of the resistance, whereas he long collaborated with the French in order to establish his own personal power.\(^6\)

Likewise, Dinah Salifou, ruler of Rio Nunez, wavered between alliance to the French and resistance, thus embodying resistance along the coast, whereas his power was in fact localized. The cultural and political partitioning of the Southern Rivers area, the theoretical suzerainty of the State of Fouta-Djalon over certain areas, and the chronological primacy of French claims to the coast clearly made the choice of a single figure a kind of historical sleight-of-hand. However, it also ensured equality among the regions, all of which resisted in various ways but with a single voice.

The case of the forest region is also complex because, as elsewhere, no single people can claim to embody the entire region and its history. Yet the PDG regime put forth a single leader, Nzebela Tokpa Pivi,\(^7\) who came from...

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(4) The data are organized according to the four regions. See http://www.stat-guinee.org (accessed in 2008 and 2010).

(5) Tradition has it that Sékou Touré was a descendant of Baghè Ramata Touré, one of Samori Touré’s daughters.

(6) His desire for real independence led to his definitive political elimination by the French in 1911. He was the subject of many theatrical plays and appears on bank bills issued in 1971 and 1980.

(7) Various spellings co-exist: N’Zegbela Togba Pivi, Zèbèla Tokpa Pivhi, etc. The Loma were then called Toma. Of the region’s many war chiefs and leaders, it was his rise that coincided with the French advance, which explains his choice.
the Loma area, a version challenged by various historians.¹

Hence whatever the region, assigning a single resistance leader to it is the result of an ideological invention. However, it does put the four regions on an equal footing.²

This symbolic form of one-upmanship also made use of visuals in order to reinforce the


(2) Meanwhile, Pan-African and anti-imperialist heroes were magnified, from Souniata Keita (15th century) to Kwame N’Krumah and from Ho Chi Minh to Tito.

association between a region and a people and, in this case, a woman. As part of the people and places of colonial imagery, women (and more specifically, stereotypes of the woman) symbolized populations. Guinea was a breeding ground for images produced through the decades and conveying the hierarchy of colonial ethnology. In this context, one stereotype that came out of Fouta-Djalon was especially appreciated, that of the Peulh aristocrats sporting the crested hairstyle. This icon appeared on bank bills issued in 1958 and 1960 but disappeared with the reform that replaced the Guinean franc with a new currency, the syli, in 1971. Starting in 1985, however, the bills issued by the Second Republic adopted the

Document 4: A popular illustration: The “made-up woman” on a bank bill
four-part division, with four women’s faces appearing on the six bills. Each female stereotype is associated with an object from another region, a way of opening up to the Guinean nation and of becoming part of local cultures, especially by drawing from Baga culture. The bank bills appear in decreasing values (should we see some meaning in this?): the Peulh aristocrat on the 5,000 new Guinea franc bill, next to a nimba, the famous Baga statue (see Document 4), a Susu woman on the 1,000 new Guinea franc bill, with a Susu drum, a Malinke woman on the 500 new Guinea franc bill, with a Baga drum carried by a horse, and a woman from the Forest Region on the 100 new Guinea franc bill, associated with another Baga statue. Although the bills were modified in 1998, the same women’s faces appear on them. The bills also serve to make the four-part division familiar because they are used every day and circulate from hand to hand throughout the country.

Do the women depicting the four peoples promote the idea of a nation united in diversity, or do they reinforce the perception of internal oppositions manipulated by political stakeholders? Although this depiction of Guinea, an extrapolation of the initial concept of “country,” still enjoys consensus, it is only one modality among others. Begun under colonization, it endured after independence, reinforced by a symbolic system: to each region its stereotypes. Obviously, the partitioning of a country on a socio-geographic basis is not exclusive to Guinea. In some cases, the binary opposition between the coast and the interior was essential and, based on historical and cultural criteria, led to forms of mental partitioning with political implications. It is important therefore to explain manifestations of colonial heritages, especially in a context in which, under the influence of international concepts (including governance, participatory citizenship, agency, and empowerment), these concepts tend to disappear at the explicit level without observers having been able to judge their prior mental absorption. The historian thus updates the constructed, performative side of the categories while denouncing essentialist temptations that mask the intentions of those who conceived them. This makes it possible to dismantle the implications of a historically dated categorization, its rootedness in contemporary perceptions, and its political uses. By advertising the stereotypes, the appropriation of these categories trivializes them, conveys implicit messages for all Guineans, and may contaminate politics. After the Malinke Sékou Touré and the Susu Lansana Conté, when the “Forestier” Moussa Dadis Camara took power in late 2008, it was perceived as a logical succession, with the expectation that the fourth group will come to power next.

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(1) Frederick Lamp, *Art of the Baga: A Drama of Cultural Reinvention* (New York, Museum for African Art, 1996). The Baga are one of the peoples on Guinea’s coast, known especially for growing rice and for their sculptures. The “nimba” (or D’amba), a female mask, became one of the symbols of Guinea.

(2) In another form, the 1970 attempt in Dahomey (which became Benin in 1975) at a three-headed government representing the north, center, and south, illustrates this process.

(3) This theme was at the heart of the 2010 electoral campaign, which saw two candidates face off in the second round who were perceived as being Malinke and Peulh, respectively. We wish to thank Bernard Charles, Mike McGovern, and Jean-Louis Triaud for their invaluable information and constructive criticism of this paper.
DIVIDING GUINEA INTO FOUR PARTS

explores economic and social history in urban contexts from a gender perspective and examines categorizations and perceptions. Her current work examines the cinema as a social and cultural practice in West Africa. She has published several books, including *Pouvoir colonial, municipalités, et espaces urbains: Conakry et Freetown des années 1880 à 1914* (L’Harmattan, 1997) as well as many scholarly papers. (odile.goerg@univ-paris-diderot.fr)

**Abstract**

— Influenced by theories prevailing in France at the turn of the twentieth century, travelers, politicians, and administrators discovering Guinea invented a way of depicting this colony that matched the French model, that is, that of the region. This paper explores the colonial origins of the division of Guinea into four so-called natural regions and how this invention has been exploited in political terms from colonial times to the present. The resulting geographic and administrative divisions that drew upon a historical and cultural heritage had an impact on the way in which the country and its people were depicted, on regional identities and, later, on various political choices. The example of Guinea may be used as a model for studying similar ideological constructions elsewhere and addressing the issue of the ethnicization of politics.

**Keywords:** Guinea, categorization, ethnicity, identity

**Annex. Main Sources Consulted**

The publications listed below do not simply highlight the genesis of a line of thought, in this case categorization but also help understand the interrelatedness of the citations. Note that some of the documents are duplicated, especially in the case of official colonial or contemporary brochures.

Publications from the Sékou Touré period, especially the writings of the President himself, official speeches, and proceedings of various congresses of the Guinean Democratic Party (PDG—thirty volumes in all), are too numerous to be cited exhaustively. However, their duplication minimizes this gap. Likewise, it is not possible to cite all recent works.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title and Author(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1905</td>
<td>Official Journal of Guinea, decree of June 1, 1905.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>La Guinée, note published for the 1922 Marseille Colonial Exhibition, Montauban, Commissariat de l’AOF/Imprimerie Coopérative Barrier et Cie.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>La Guinée française en 1924, Supplément illustré du Courrier colonial: Organe de Madagascar et des colonies de l’Océan Indien, March 25, 1924.</td>
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c. 1950 Brochure of the Tourist Office of French Guinea, Conakry.


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