

France and Britain in tropical Africa The intellectual consequences of a contrasted decolonisation

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With the economic crisis of the 1930s, the failure of the previous colonial mode of exploitation became obvious. Political and social reforms began, in French-speaking as well as in English-speaking Africa. Elections began to appear, trade-unions and political parties began to emerge. The Atlantic chart (1941) and the United nations chart (1945) popularized the right of people for self government. A still small but active African middle class began to oppose colonial oppression. The British understood it and put an end to their tropical jewel, India (1947). They had experienced decolonisation for long, the first one being the American Independence War (1776). « White colonies » became independent one after the other all over the 19th century, the last one, if one may say so, being the South African Union (1910). Therefore Britain was not taken by surprise. On the contrary, imperial ideology was exacerbated by France till the end, in spite of a declining empire : international colonial exhibition (1931), glorification of the Empire as well by the Vichy regime as by De Gaulle. Ironically, colonised politicians also were for a moment seduced by French citizenship as announced by the Union française (1946). Decolonisation was more abrupt, for colonised people as well as for colonisers. Three Wars of Liberation were necessary (Indochina 1946-1954, Algeria 1954-1962, Cameroon 1955-1961).

The result was a differentiated African intellectuals' training by the British and by the French. Specialised French supervisors appeared only one generation later than their British counterparts. As early as 1947, English-speaking universities had developed in Africa (Legon, Ibadan, Ife, Dar es Salam...) as well as in London (*SOAS School of Oriental and African Studies*), while only one French college shyly began to appear in Dakar in the early 1950s. It became independent only in 1958, while President Senghor himself wanted Dakar university to remain a French university. Therefore an anglophone historical team was early trained, rather influenced by the so-called Oxbridge mind, while the Francophone historical school of Dakar took form only later on. The ambition of this paper is to analyse the results of this contrasted heritage in writing African history, as well by African as by European scholars.