

Véronique Dimier, ECPR, Copenhagen, 2000.

"From local to international citizenship" : The French Union (1946-1958)".

"Au lieu des conceptions vagues et mal adaptées de ceux qui paraissent associer certains indigènes au gouvernement de toute la France et de tout l'Empire, nous nous attacherons sans démagogie et avec certitude de bien faire à les transformer d'abord en citoyens de leurs propres pays", Félix Eboué¹ (governor general of French Equatorial Africa, 1941-1944).

The French 1946 constitution invented a new territorial entity, the Union Française, and a new concept, the "citizen of the Union". This Union included the French Republic and its colonies, called after the Second World War "overseas territories"² and was based on the principles of a strict equality between the peoples who shared the privilege of being in the Union³. The inhabitants of those overseas territories, once called "subjects of Empire", became citizens of the Union and were supposed to share with French nationals the same rights and duties⁴...or almost the same rights and duties. Indeed, beyond the contradictions and imprecision of the Constitution on that issue, it appears that being a citizen of the Union was not exactly the same as being a French citizen. French citizens had to abide by the same civil law (the code civil). Citizens of the Union could keep their personal status, that is their common law, customs and religions. Both citizens could send representatives to the French Assemblée Nationale in Paris. But concerning the citizens of the Union, these political rights were to be precised by a "specific law". According to this law, French citizens and citizens of the Union were not part of the same "electoral college", and compared to the overall population of the colonial territories, the latter sent relatively

¹ Eboué, F., *La nouvelle politique indigène pour l'Afrique Equatoriale Française*, Paris, Office Français d'Edition, 1945, p. 45. Former colonial administrator in Oubangui-Chari, F. Eboué (1884-1944) became governor of the Tchad in 1939. During the Second World War he was the first one in the colonial Empire to answer De Gaulle's call (26th August 1940) and to join the Liberation movement. From London De Gaulle nominated him governor general of French Equatorial Africa in 1941. His famous circulars on native policies (which were published in the above book) served as the main basis for discussion during the Brazzaville Conference (28th January-8 February 1944), which was supposed to prepare the future of the French Empire and whose conclusions were used by the constitutional assemblies to set up the Union Française in 1946. He died in 1944 of exhaustion. His body rests in the French Panthéon.

² It included associated territories like Indochina and Territoires d'Outre-Mer (Tropical Africa mainly). Algeria was part of France.

³ Constitution 27th Octobre 1946, Preamble : "La France forme avec les peuples d'outre-mer une Union fondée sur l'égalité des droits et des devoirs, sans distinction de race ni de religion. L'Union Française est composée de nations et de peuples qui mettent en commun ou coordonnent leurs ressources et leurs efforts pour développer leurs civilisations respectives, accroître leur bien-être et assurer leur sécurité".

⁴ Ibidem, Titre VIII, article 80 : "Tous les ressortissants des territoires d'outre-mer ont la qualité de citoyen, au même titre que les nationaux français de la métropole ou des territoires d'outre-mer. Des lois particulières établiront les conditions dans lesquelles ils exercent leurs droits de citoyens". Article 81 : "Tous les nationaux français et les ressortissants de l'Union française ont la qualité de citoyen de l'Union française qui leur assure la jouissance des droits et libertés garantis par le préambule de la présente constitution". Article 82 : "Les citoyens qui n'ont pas le statut civil français conservent leur statut personnel tant qu'ils n'y ont pas renoncé. Ce statut ne peut en aucun cas constituer un motif pour refuser ou limiter les droits et libertés attachés à la qualité de citoyen français".

few deputies to the metropolitan assembly⁵. A law dating from the 5th October 1946⁶ also reserved the right to vote to certain categories of people (among the citizens of the Union), those who could meet specific conditions. Universal suffrage was still the privilege of the French citizens. In sum, the citizenship of the Union Française was of an hybrid kind...much like the Union Française itself.

To say that this Union was based on a strict equality between the French Republic and its overseas territories was a mere illusion. First, the constitution was adopted by a French assembly. If some African representatives did take part in the discussion, the clauses concerning the Union Française were not submitted to the approval of the populations concerned. In sum, former colonies were not asked whether they wanted to remain in or to leave what was formerly called the French Empire. Secondly, the institutional structure of the Union could hardly hide the dominant position of the French Republic and the subordinate places of its overseas territories. The Union had its own assembly (different from the Assemblée Nationale) which included for one half representatives of France (sent by the two French assemblies, the Assemblée Nationale and the Conseil de la République (sénat)), for the other half representatives of the overseas territories (sent by their local assemblies). However the Assembly of the Union, unlike federal assemblies, had mere consultative powers : it was supposed to give advice to the Assemblée Nationale which included some (actually few) representatives of the overseas territory and which did vote the law to be applied in those territories as well as the law to be applied in France. The Union also had a specific Council (Haut Conseil), which included representatives of the French government and representatives of each overseas territory, and which was presided over by the French Président de la République, who was also the Président of the Union. However the main function of this council was to "assist" the French government in ruling the Union. Last but not least, the Constitution envisaged for each territory an assembly (Assemblée Territoriale), elected according to "specific laws" by the citizens of the Union, and whose powers were left to subsequent discussions.

These institutions were supposed to fulfil one of the aims of the Constitution : "lead overseas peoples to rule themselves in a democratic way"⁷. But apparently there were two ways in interpreting that sentence, as there were two ways in considering the Union Française, or at least its evolution : following a unitarian model, it could lead to the total integration of overseas territories in one great "One and Indivisible French Republic", which meant one parliament, one government, one kind of citizen ; following a federal or even a confederal model, it could lead overseas territories to have a larger and larger autonomy within a kind of Commonwealth of peoples. The hybrid nature of the Union Française and its institutions may reflect the impossibility of the men who voted the constitution to chose between these two models. It also reflects the presence of conflicting views as to the way people of different cultures may be integrated in a same political entity, that is conflicting views

⁵ Lois du 5 octobre 1946, J. O. *Lois et Décrets*, 8 octobre 1946, p. 8494-8498. Overseas territories had 34 representatives into the Assemblée Nationale. Metropolitan France had 553 representatives.

⁶Ibidem.

⁷ Constitution 27th Octobre 1946, Preamble : "Fidèle à sa mission traditionnelle, la France entend conduire les peuples dont elle a pris la charge à la liberté de s'administrer eux-mêmes et de gérer démocratiquement leurs propres affaires, écartant tout système de colonisation fondé sur l'arbitraire, elle garantit à tous l'égal accès aux fonctions publiques et l'exercice individuelle ou collectif des droits et libertés proclamés ou confirmés ci-dessus".

of citizenship : one based on political and social assimilation within a centralised state ; one based on the respect of local customs and local autonomy.

France is usually remembered for the first one. As shown by historians like Pierre Rosanvallon⁸, citizens envisaged during the French Revolution (1789) and latter by the Republican were supposed to be rational individuals "all equal in their rights and duties" who were linked by a same social contract, and who were part of the same French nation, that is the same society, the same cultural whole. In so far as they were supposed to take part in the vote of the law, they all had to abide by that law, which meant that particular privileges but also local laws and customs had to disappear. To follow Eugène Weber's demonstration⁹ this ideal could only be reached (and was reached) through education and violent assimilation, by destroying local cultures and transforming progressively peasants of the French provinces into Frenchmen. As we shall see here, there was an other way, even amongst Republican, to consider the integration of French nationals into the Republic, there was an other possible conception of citizenship.

According to that conception, citizens were not those abstract rational men linked by a social contract as envisaged by the French revolutionaries. They had a social existence and identity only if they were "rooted" in a particular cultural and territorial community ("terroirs"). To destroy those terroirs and their cultures, to cut the "sacred link" between men and their territorial communities meant that individuals would lose their identity, which may lead to social disintegration. Thus, the integration of citizens into a larger political entity like the French Republic would be successful only if the specificity of the territorial communities were recognised and preserved through a decentralised political system. And the same was considered to be true for the Union Française. This Union would be possible only if the different cultures of overseas peoples were preserved and some kind of local political and democratic system set up. As J. Brévié, one of the most influential colonial theoreticians of 1940s period, put it : before being citizens of the French Union, African peoples had to be citizens of their own local communities. As we shall, see this opinion was held by a number of other influential Republicans and colonial theoretician, like Robert Delavignette (1896-1976), a former colonial administrator in West Africa, Director of the Colonial School (1937-1946) and later (1947-1951) directeur des Affaires Politiques in the Ministère des Colonies (one of the highest post). We will focus here on his works and novels¹⁰, as they are particularly representative of those "territorial" conceptions of society and citizenship.

Assimilation or association ?

⁸ Rosanvallon, P., *Le sacre du citoyen. Histoire du suffrage universel en France*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992.

⁹ Weber, E., *La fin des terroirs, la modernisation de la France rurale, 1870-1914*, Paris, Fayard, 1983.

¹⁰ Delavignette, R., under the pseudonyme L. Faivre , *Toum*, Paris, Grasset, 1926 ; Delavignette, R., *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, Paris, Grasset, 1935 ; Delavignette, R., *Petites histoire des colonies françaises*, Paris, PUF, 1942 ; Delavignette, R., *Les Paysans Noirs*, Paris, Stock, 1946 (1st edition 1931) ; Delavignette, R., *Service Africain*, Paris, Gallimard, 1946 (1st edition 1939, under the title : *Les vrais chefs de l'Empire*).

In one of his articles, Hubert Deschamps¹¹, a French historian and himself a former colonial administrator stressed that assimilation had scarcely been the colonial policy of the French Republic, an assertion which runs against the usual image which is given of the French Empire and Republic, especially by British academics¹². Officially assimilation ceased to be the policy of France as soon as 1905¹³. From then on, the concept itself disappeared almost completely from the discourse of the colonial ministry. It is worth noticing that assimilation, as a word, was hardly pronounced during the long discussion of the two constitutional assemblies in 1946¹⁴. Neither was it referred to by the 1946 Constitution and by the Brazzaville Conference (January-February 1944)¹⁵ which was supposed to devise the organisation of the future French Empire. In the official discourse it was replaced by the more ambiguous concept of "association". If assimilation meant imposing French culture and French laws to the natives, association meant that native peoples would be allowed to evolve within their tradition, ("l'évolution dans la tradition"), which was a very ambiguous aim in itself. Indeed it left particularly imprecise the ultimate outcome of such process. As a result it could be, and was, interpreted differently by different people, not so much according to their attachment to the Republican ideal but according to the way they considered French "Civilisation" in its relationship with African "cultures". Two interpretations at least were to clash in the inter-war period as well as in the 1946 constitutional assemblies.

For those like Albert Sarraut¹⁶ (Ministre des Colonies from 1920 to 1924, 1932 to 1933), who were still influenced by the evolutionist and ethnocentrist theories of the 19th Century, natives were still perceived as the "child races of the world", as inferior species placed at the bottom on the evolution scale. By contrast, French Civilisation was supposed to represent the ultimate result of the technical and moral progress of humanity, the very end of that evolution process that all the peoples in the world will inevitably follow. French mission was then to help African peoples to climb the evolution scale more quickly, to "civilise" them. The respect of what was called native customs was necessary at once (as you could not get rid of them in one day, as they were a necessary step in the evolution) but was also purely temporary. As to the ultimate result of the civilising mission, it was not clearly specified.

¹¹ Deschamps, H., "Et maintenant Lord Lugard ?", *Africa*, octobre 1963, V 33, n°4, p. 294-305.

¹² For a typical example, see : Crowder, M., "Indirect Rule : French and British style", *Africa*, juillet 1964, V 34, n°3, p. 197-204.

¹³ Betts, R. F., *La doctrine coloniale française entre 1890 et 1910 : de l'Assimilation à l'Association*, Thèse pour le Doctorat, Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Grenoble, 1955.

¹⁴ A first constitutional assembly was elected on the 21st October 1945. It voted a first constitutional project (19th April 1946), which was submitted to referendum and refused (5th May 1946). A second assembly was elected on the 2nd June 1946 whose project was adopted through referendum (13rd October 1946) and promulgated on the 27th October 1946. Several overseas (mainly African) representatives were associated to the discussion of those assemblies (among them L. Senghor, representative of the Senegal). Senghor was one of the few to use the word "assimilation". But he precised that for him it meant to respect African civilisations while allowing African peoples to take what they wanted in French one and conversely, what he called "une assimilation active de part et d'autre". See : J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, séance du 11 avril 1946, p. 1713 (first constitutional assembly) ; séance du 19 septembre 1946, p. 3791 (second constitutional assembly).

¹⁵ *La Conférence Africaine Française, Brazzaville, 30 janvier-8 février 1944*, Brazzaville, Edition du Boab, sans date.

¹⁶ Sarraut, A., *La mise en valeur des colonies française*, Paris, Payot, 1923.

But one may guess, from Sarraut's writings, that a full political and cultural integration into the French Republic would follow. In any case, such integration was not envisaged before long...

It became closer in 1946 for the members of the constitutional assemblies who still adhered to Sarraut's conceptions. Talking of inferior races became impossible after the Second World War and words used to describe the natives were chosen with much caution. The very word "native" itself was replaced by a term more politically correct : "African people". Still, some went on talking of the French Civilisation as more "advanced", which gave France the right to continue its guiding, not so say, its civilising mission¹⁷. For those people, as for Albert Sarraut, the ultimate aim of the French Republic and of the French Union, through the Association policy, was not so different from what had been once called assimilation. The methods only were opposed. Assimilation meant for them a policy based on force and coercion (it meant "imposing" a foreign culture), which explained why it was avoided as a concept. Association supposed more educational means as it aimed at "convincing" African peoples that their evolution towards French Civilisation was good for them.

By contrast, for people like Robert Delavignette or his friends in the constitutional assemblies, Léopold Senghor (the representative of Senegal) and Marius Moutet (the Ministre des Colonies in 1946)¹⁸, the aim of Association and Assimilation were radically different. Influenced by the social anthropological theories developed in the inter-war period (Malinowski), they came to question the superiority of French Civilisation and to recognise the value of African ones. In the thirties, Robert Delavignette was much critical towards assimilation and what was supposed to constitute the superiority of French Civilisation according to the Positivists and Republicans of the 19th Century : technical and moral progress¹⁹. Having himself experimented that progress during the First World War on the battlefield, he was quite sceptical about its benefits. At the same time, he refused to consider African peoples as "the child races of the world". Those had their own cultures or rather "civilisations" (a word also used by Senghor)²⁰, their own social and political organisations, which were worth considering. Colonisation as a cultural

¹⁷ Teitgen for example referred to "ces nations que nous avons infantées à la civilisation", J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 22 août 1946, p. 3238 (2nd Ass. Const). Baumel talked of "l'oeuvre civilisatrice de la France, ce magnifique travail", 23 août 1946, p. 3293 (2nd Ass. Const).

¹⁸ Senghor reported for the Union Française in the first constitutional assembly. See : J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 11 avril 1946, p. 1713. R. Delavignette reserved some pages in his book, *Service African*, to a man (Senghor) he considered as the best representative of his own ideas. M. Moutet was much influenced by R. Delavignette who had been once his chef de Cabinet (1936) when he was Ministre des Colonies under the Popular Front. He appointed him as director of the colonial school. They remained close friends. The three of them were socialists.

¹⁹ "Mais quel est donc le caractère principal de cette civilisation qui est servie en Afrique par des nations européennes si diverses et dans chaque nation par des hommes aussi opposés qu'un gentilhomme d'ancien régime et un tribun révolutionnaire ? C'est une civilisation qui croit au Progrès, et au Progrès par les Sciences. C'est une civilisation qui tient pour assurée la primauté de l'Homme sur la Nature, de l'énergie et du savoir humain sur les forces naturelles. Il faut bien voir qu'une telle Civilisation - du fait même qu'elle possède une machinerie formidable et sans cesse perfectionnée et qu'elle prétend de très bonne foi s'en servir pour des fins morales - fait assez bon marché des civilisations indigènes de l'Afrique où elle ne découvre d'abord que des superstitions et des faiblesses. Il n'y a qu'une civilisation et l'Européen est son prophète. Voilà le dogme colonial en Afrique et surtout en Afrique Noire", Delavignette, R., "Deux Europes pour une Afrique", *Afrique Française*, février 1936, p. 87.

²⁰ Senghor : "il n'existe pas une civilisation mais des civilisations", J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 11 avril 1946, p. 1714 ; 18 septembre 1946, p. 3791. Moutet agreed (*Ibidem*, p. 3791).

contact had been more or less destructive for those civilisations. Thus, the aim of Association was to protect them or rather to find a new "adjustment" between what was best in French civilisation and what was best in native civilisations. The outcome of that adjustment was unclear and could vary from one society or one government to another. But for sure, it could not be the same as the outcome of assimilation. According to Robert Delavignette, Occidental nations still held the keys of social and economic development and were still the guardians of what he considered to be universal values, human rights. In that sense, its cultural relativism had its own limits. However, if France could bring those beneficial elements to Africa, Africa could bring to Europe its own values : the values of rural communities that Robert Delavignette came to idealise.

A territorial vision of society.

Robert Delavignette's vision of African societies was not especially original in the thirties, reflecting conceptions which were very popular in France or in other European countries (Britain especially). In his books, the real Africa could only be the rural Africa of the bush inhabited by small peasants "rooted" in their land. African societies were seen as small territorial entities, "villages", cut from the outside world. They were autonomous communities, particularly egalitarian or even democratic where social conflicts did not exist, where human beings lived in harmony with one another and with nature, were linked by a religious solidarity and by a same "*communion with the land*"²¹. The community life of the village was organised around their land and religion ("les sorciers faiseurs de pluie"). Properties belonged to families, working was on a collective basis and despite his poor techniques, the Black Peasant knew how to take advantage of his environment, because he knew the most important thing : "*to love his land*"²². According to Robert Delavignette, his spirit, his soul, his customs came from this land. In his books he devoted many pages to the description of these customs, of the black peasants' agrarian "mentalité", criticising at the same time those European who used to consider them as idle, lacking any methods of production, any organisation²³. Of course his vision of African societies was largely idealised and influenced by his own idealised view of the French rural past. As a novelist, Robert Delavignette belonged to that regionalist literature analysed by Anne Marie Thiesse²⁴, to those people, like Gaston Roupnel, who praised the old agrarian French civilisation²⁵. As the later had been the schoolmaster of Robert Delavignette, lots of similarities can be drawn between the African village described by Robert Delavignette and the "Manse" (rural community) of the Middle Age described by Gaston Roupnel²⁶. They both spoke of this "*the sacred bond with the land*"²⁷ which

²¹ Delavignette, R., *Service Africain*, op. cit., p. 127.

²² Delavignette, R., *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, op. cit., p. 133.

²³ Delavignette, R., *Service Africain*, op. cit., p. 179 ; 181-182.

²⁴ Thiesse, A. M., *Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Epoque et la Libération*, Thèse pour le doctorat d'Etat, Université Lyon II, 1989.

²⁵ Roupnel, G., *Histoire de la campagne française*, Paris, Grasset, 1932.

²⁶ See : Delavignette, R., *Service Africain*, op. cit., p. 173-182 ; Delavignette, R., *Les Paysans Noirs*, op. cit., p. 31 et suivantes ; Delavignette, R., *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, op. cit., p. 135-136. In some articles, R. Delavignette referred directly to G. Roupnel : Delavignette, R., "La campagne française et la colonie africaine", *Dépêche Coloniale*, 24-25 juillet 1933.

²⁷ Roupnel, G., *Histoire de la campagne française*, op. cit., p. 382.

guaranteed the essential values of justice, human dignity, liberty, which guaranteed the rights and duties of each man within the Community.

This conception of an organic and mystical link between men and land is quite significant of a specific definition of society, of the individual and collective identities based on the idea of "taking root" in a territory ("enracinement"). As shown by Philippe Veitl²⁸, we find this idea in the works of French anthropologists like Marcel Mauss and Lucien Levy-Bruhl. But more generally it was part of a wider belief which had been very popular amongst French urban elite (whatever its political preferences) from the end of the nineteenth century²⁹. Paradoxically, at a time when man left more and more his native land to be integrated in professional groups, territorial solidarity went on to be considered as the most important one. "*Man and land were seen as amalgamated, merged, as part of the same organism which was the elementary cell of social life*"³⁰. Robert Delavignette for example used to present himself as the "*son of this land*"³¹ of Bourgogne, his "terroir" or "pays"³². As a consequence of this fusion, man had a social existence only if he remained "rooted" in his native land. This land gave him his real personality, his soul, his "vital energy". Born in a specific land, he belonged to a specific community of people sharing the same culture and living in harmony with one another.

Like Gaston Roupnel and many other people at that time, Robert Delavignette considered that the true French civilisation "*civilisation de jardiniers*"³³, was not to be found in the uniform technical and moral progress praised by the Positivists of the 19th century but in the values and diverse cultures of the countryside -as the real Africa was to be found in the rural and traditional Africa. Of course, through this idealisation of rural France, French political elite could praise different values³⁴. For the catholic and monarchic right, it meant to go back to a pre-industrial, pre-democratic, pre-Republican society, to the essential values of family, hierarchy and religion, as this was considered to be the only way to solve social conflict. It was part of a discourse which was consecrated by the Vichy Regime in 1940. For the Republican left, whom Robert Delavignette belonged to, it meant to go back to the pre-feudal, pre-capitalist society, that is according to him, a more egalitarian society based on solidarity...For all, however, the end of rural France also meant the end of French civilisation and of social disintegration. Indeed, detached from his native land, his "terroir", man was nothing socially speaking. He would soon lose his moral, his energy...Corruption, misery and social conflict would follow. In sum, he would be like an "uprooted" tree, which was doomed to perish. This scenario explained, according to Philippe Veitl, that land desertion was much feared during the inter-war period³⁵

²⁸ Veitl, P., *Les régions économiques Clémentel et l'invention de la région des Alpes Françaises*, Thèse de Doctorat en Sciences Politiques, IEP Grenoble, UPMF, Grenoble II, 1992, p. 18.

²⁹ See also : Thiesse, A. M., *Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Epoque et la Libération*, op. cit., p. 108-124 ; Veitl, P., *Les régions économiques Clémentel et l'invention de la région des Alpes Françaises*, op. cit., notamment p. 19-23.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 22.

³¹ Delavignette, R., *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, op. cit., p. 236.

³² The word pays or terroir is used in France to describe your native land.

³³ Delavignette, R., *Service Africain*, op. cit., p. 220.

³⁴ See : Lebovics, H., *La vraie France. les enjeux de l'identité culturelle, 1900-1945*, Paris, Belin, 1995 ; Thiesse, A. M., *Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Epoque et la Libération*, op. cit.

³⁵ R. Delavignette shared this fear : Delavignette, R., *Toum*, op. cit., p. 210 ; Delavignette, R., "Action colonisatrice et paysannat indigène", *Afrique Française*, septembre 1935, p. 529.

and that many amongst the French political elite were incapable of considering urban life and industrial growth in a positive way. Towns were not seen as having their own social organisations, but as the loss for each individual they attracted of his identity and former territorial belonging, and then as threatening the social and national cohesion. Robert Delavignette's description³⁶ of Paris and its urban proletariat, the very result of what he called "mass uprooting"³⁷, is quite significant. As a socialist, he condemned capitalism in the colonies as well as in France because it took away people from their land and led them to join this "disturbing French urban youth"³⁸, ready for riots and political upheaval. As Félix Eboué, the famous French governor put it, land desertion meant that uprooted natives "would disappear for ever in this floating urban population without discipline and without support"³⁹.

Thus the question for France as well as for the colonies was : how to integrate people in a larger political, economic and cultural whole (the Republic in France) without destroying their "sacred bond with the land", their local culture. Concerning France itself, different solutions were found or at least experimented : for example, C. Clémentel, the Trade Minister between 1914 and 1919, tried to create new territorial and administrative entities, the regions⁴⁰. Through some kind of decentralisation, these were supposed to facilitate the social and economic modernisation of the whole country while maintaining people on their terroir and allowing them to take an active part into the changes envisaged by the Republic. Similar preoccupations can be found in the education policy of the Republic, especially in the 1920s-1930s. It has often been said that French school masters (the "Hussards noirs de la République") "imposed" to French children the French language, national identity and culture⁴¹. In fact as shown by Jean François Chanet and Anne Marie Thiesse⁴², reality was much more complicated and probably less coercive than it appeared. Many regulations in the thirties invited the schoolmasters to respect the local cultures, history, geography and even languages and to use them. Schoolbooks were made which celebrated the French provinces and their customs⁴³. Many schoolmasters became the ethnologists of Provincial France...etc.

Of course French and the values of the Republic had also to be taught, as the aim of the education policy was to make citizens and Frenchmen. But to be able to explain what was France and the Republic you had first to make these concepts understandable, that is, you had to integrate them in the day to day experience of the children. In sum, before teaching them how to love France and the Republic you had

³⁶ "Au Soudan je sais qui je suis (...). Mais à Paris, voici que j'ai un frisson d'inquiétude devant les troupes de ma propre couleur. Dans la perpétuelle déglutition des rues, je redoute d'être dilué. Où donc rencontrer, reconnaître, éprouver et suivre les hommes de la cité dans cette termitière d'esclaves minutés en semaine et lâchés le dimanche ", Delavignette, R., *Soudan Paris Bourgogne*, op. cit., p. 172-173.

³⁷ Delavignette, R., *Service Africain*, op. cit., p. 147.

³⁸ Delavignette, R., *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, op. cit., p. 102-3.

³⁹ Eboué, F., circulaire du 8 novembre 1941, in : *La nouvelle politique indigène pour l'A. E. F.*, op. cit., p. 52.

⁴⁰ Veitl, P., *Les régions économiques Clémentel et l'invention de la région des Alpes Françaises*, op. cit.

⁴¹ Weber, E., *La fin des terroirs, la modernisation de la France rurale, 1870-1914*, op. cit.

⁴² Chanet, J. F., *L'école républicaine et les petites patries. Enseignement primaire et sentiment d'appartenance en France sous la Troisième République (1879-1940)*, Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris I, Panthéon Sorbonne, 1994 ; Thiesse, A. M., *Le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Epoque et la Libération*, op. cit.

⁴³ See also : Lebovics, H., *La vraie France, les enjeux de l'identité culturelle, 1900-1945*, op. cit.

to teach them how to love their own "little patries". This was also considered to be the only way to develop among them a new identity without uprooting them

Thus, as shown also by Hubert Pérez⁴⁴, the French nation and the Republic were not built through the assimilation process described by Eugène Weber⁴⁵, that is through the destruction of local customs. To allow a new collective identity to develop, the Republic had to use the territorial entities where socialisation had always been taking place : the village, the terroirs and their customs. Local politics (through local elections...) became necessary as a way of mediation between the "little patries" and the great French nation, as a way for the new citizens to be educated, to experiment concretely democracy and the Republic. National identity and local identities were not seen as opposed but as complementary, and for that reason both had to be kept. If the second came to disappear, the reason is to be found in the social and economic evolution of the Occidental world and not, as the regionalist movements often said, in the Republican policy. Being a regionalist and a Republican, Robert Delavignette was the typical example of the contradictions noticed by Hubert Pérez in these regionalist movements : he spent a whole book⁴⁶ criticising the assimilation policy of the French Republic and celebrating the culture of Bourgogne, which was in itself the proof that not all Republican were born assimilators and that local customs were still alive after fifty years of Republicanism !

Whatever these contradiction, it is worth noticing that the ideal French Republic envisaged by Robert Delavignette was not a cultural whole but a mixture of peoples still attached to their local cultures and "terroirs" but also linked by a same project : democracy, social and economic development. The only way to reach both aims was first to develop a kind of "rooted modernism", that is to improve the economic capacity of French peasants and create small industries in the countryside. Secondly, a more decentralised political system had to be set up, based on a greater political autonomy for the villages. The same recipes were envisaged for the Union Française. As we said, to Robert Delavignette, the Association policy had to allow a kind of adjustment between French and African civilisations. Whatever the outcome of that adjustment for each native society, it had to lead to a great community of "associated" peoples sharing the same ideals and interests, the same political and economic project while having their own interests and civilisations preserved⁴⁷ (a kind of community also envisaged by Leopold Senghor⁴⁸). This community had to be built

⁴⁴ Pérès, H., "Le village dans la nation française sous la Troisième République. Une configuration cumulative de l'identité", in Martin, D. C. (dir.), *Carte d'identité. Comment dit on nous en politique ?*, Paris, Presse FNSP, 1994, p. 211.

⁴⁵ Weber, E., *La fin des terroirs, la modernisation de la France rurale, 1870-1914*, op. cit

⁴⁶ Delavignette, R., *Soudan, Paris, Bourgogne*, op. cit.

⁴⁷ La communauté sera une communauté de "nations associées" basée sur "l'autonomie culturelle et locale", et "dont chaque partie gardera son originalité propre, ses traditions, ses lois spéciales, dont toutes les parties seront liées par un même idéal et par des intérêts communs", Archives Privées de Robert Delavignette, (A. P. R. D.), Carton 16, Dossier 208, Delavignette, R., "Note au sujet du document de presse "self-government pour les colonies"", 22 novembre 1944.

⁴⁸ "L'union Française doit être une conjonction de civilisations, un creuset de cultures. (...) Il ne s'agit pas pour nous de détruire la civilisation française pas plus qu'il ne s'agit pour vous de détruire nos civilisations originales en nous colonisant. Pour qu'il y est une réelle fédération, il faut une assimilation active de part et d'autres. C'est ainsi qu'ensemble nous créerons un humanisme nouveau, une civilisation nouvelle", J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 18 septembre 1946, p. 3791. M. Moutet, Ministre des Colonies agreed.

from bottom to top, by consent and on the basis of the African "pays"⁴⁹. In order to take into account those pays, the wishes, interests and civilisations of each people, priority had to be given to that level of government where they could be expressed directly : the local level, that is for Robert Delavignette, the village. The political organisation of the village could vary from one place to another as it had to take into account the native customs and traditional authorities (chiefs, councils...) which, in some places, were already of democratic kind (through a consensual democracy). It could evolve towards more occidental forms of local democracy (through electoral process). In any case it had to allow people to rule themselves, to allow the true representation of their wishes. From that local level larger entities could be built through mutual consent and would lead to a kind of federation. Federation or confederation ? The answer was unclear especially as Robert Delavignette often took the British Commonwealth as an example of the ideal Union Française, a tendency which was common amongst the federalists⁵⁰.

"Construire le toit avant les fondations".

Was the Union Française the opportunity to build such community ? In 1946 Robert Delavignette was quite optimistic about it⁵¹. The preamble of the 1946 Constitution stressed clearly that the aim of the Union Française was to develop the civilisation of each people, care for their welfare and lead them to rule themselves. These principles were all the more to be respected that they were also part of the ONU Charter that France had signed, a point which was raised several times during the discussions of the constitutional assemblies⁵². The Constitution envisaged the creation of local assemblies at the head of each colony, called "assemblées territoriales"⁵³. The powers and organisation of such assemblies were supposed to be specified by a subsequent law⁵⁴. No specific political organisation was envisaged for the other levels of local government (especially the villages and districts), the internal organisation of

⁴⁹ The word "pays" was used by Robert Delavignette to describe its native land, la Bourgogne, but also the different regions of Africa. See : Delavignette, R., "Pour le paysannat noir, pour l'Esprit Africain", *Esprit*, 1er décembre 1935, n° 39, p. 371.

⁵⁰ For example : Moreux, R. "La révision constitutionnelle ne doit pas se borner à envisager les problèmes métropolitains mais d'urgence ceux de l'Union Française tout entière", *Marchés coloniaux et Tropicaux*, 20 juin 1953, p. 1825.

⁵¹ See the last chapter of his book, *Service Africain (1946)*, which is devoted to the Union Française.

⁵² " Nous avons le devoir de respecter scrupuleusement les particularismes et originalités de certains éléments de l'Union Française. Nous avons d'autant plus le devoir de les respecter qu'ils ont été consacrés par des traités de valeur internationale où la France a engagé sa parole", Colonna (representative of Tunisia), J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 18 septembre 1946, p. 3822. Concerning the former mandate territories and the colonies, the ONU charter said that the aim of the colonial powers would be : "*d'assurer, en respectant la culture des populations en question, leur progrès politique, économique et social ainsi que le développement de leur instruction, de les traiter avec équité et de les protéger contre les abus*" et "*de développer leurs capacités de s'administrer elles-mêmes, de tenir compte des aspirations politiques des populations, et de les aider dans le développement progressif de leurs libres institutions politiques, dans la mesure appropriée aux conditions particulières de chaque territoire et de ses habitants et à leurs degrés variables de développement*". Chapitre XI, Article 73, Charte des Nations Unies, 26 juin 1945.

⁵³ Article 77 : "dans chaque territoire est instituée une assemblée élue. Le régime électoral, la composition et la compétence de cette assemblée sont déterminés par la loi".

⁵⁴ In fact a decree and not a law came to precise the powers and organisation of the Assemblées Territoriales : Décret, 25 octobre 1946, portant institution d'assemblées représentatives dans les Territoires d'Outre Mer, J. O. *Lois et Décrets*, 27 octobre 1946, p. 9109-9123

each colony being left open to discussion⁵⁵. However, as the Constitution also recognised the existence of local territorial entities in France itself (a novelty in French institutional laws)⁵⁶, it was hoped that such recognition would be extended and would become a reality in the overseas territories as well. Unfortunately these hopes were soon to be deceived. The Assemblées territoriales elected by the citizens of the Union were given few powers and remained under the strict control of the French governors. Besides, after some years of expectation, during which no laws were adopted to precise the organisation of other local assemblies (at the village or district levels) in the overseas territories, it became clear to Robert Delavignette that those levels would not be given the priority it deserved.

As a consequence he became quite critical of an institutional framework which gave African peoples the right to send some few representatives to the French assembly whose preoccupation for the overseas territories has never been very strong, but which refused to give them the right to rule themselves locally⁵⁷. Such situation resulted in giving the real powers to the colonial governors and its administration, like in the Empire of the 1930s⁵⁸. It did not prepare African peoples to rule themselves democratically as the Constitution envisaged it. In sum, did the Union Française not give very theoretical and superficial rights to theoretical and superficial citizens ? "Was it not a big mistake to build the roof of the house before its foundations"⁵⁹? This was one of the questions that Robert Delavignette gave to his students at the colonial schools in the 1950s⁶⁰. And the answer of one of them (who was given an excellent mark, 18/20) left no doubt as to the answer he expected : *"before giving colonial peoples a right to intervene at the general level, right which has been very ill conceived, it would have been better to build a juridical framework from a solid basis : their participation to the municipal, then regional, then territorial authorities. This would have allowed a political evolution, which would have penetrated the African masses in depth (...). France was not able to choose between assimilation and federalism, which led to the compromise of the 1946 Constitution.*

⁵⁵ Article 74 : "Les territoires d'outre-mer sont dotés d'un statut particulier tenant compte de leurs intérêts propres dans l'ensemble des intérêts de la République. Ce statut et l'organisation intérieure de chaque territoire d'outre-mer ou de chaque groupe de territoires sont fixés par la loi, après avis de l'Assemblée de l'Union Française et consultation des assemblées territoriales".

⁵⁶ Titre X (Des collectivités territoriales), article 85 : "La République Française, une et indivisible, reconnaît l'existence de collectivités territoriales. Ces collectivités sont les communes et départements, les territoires d'outre-mer". Article 86 : "le cadre, l'étendue, le regroupement éventuel et l'organisation des communes et départements, territoires d'outre-mer, sont fixés par la loi". Article 87 : "les collectivités territoriales s'administrent librement par des conseils élus au suffrage universel...".

⁵⁷ See the courses he gave at the colonial school in the 1950s : A. P. R. D., Carton 16, Dossier 209, Notes pour le cours donné à l'E. N. F. O. M. sur l'évolution politique des Territoires d'Outre-Mer, "les colonies et l'Union Française", juillet 1952.

⁵⁸ The constitution envisaged that in the overseas territories, the legislative powers belonged to the Assemblée Nationale (for all matters concerning criminal laws, public liberties, political and administrative organisations). For all other matters the French law was extended to the colonies only if it was clearly specified by the Assemblée Nationale or if it was decided by a decree. This also meant that in case the Assemblée Nationale was not very active in voting specific laws for the overseas territories, decisions would be taken by decree, that is by the French Ministre des Colonies or his local delegates (the governor). See : Rolland, L., Lampué, P., *Précis de Droit des Pays d'Outre Mer*, 2ème édition, 1952, op. cit., p. 178 et suivantes ; 189 et suivantes.

⁵⁹ A. P. R. D., Carton 13, Dossier 180, Conférence d'introduction au cours d'organisation administrative des Territoires d'Outre-Mer, donnée à l'E. N. F. O. M., le 25 mars 1953.

⁶⁰ In 1951 Robert Delavignette was given the Chair de Droits et Coutumes d'Outre Mer at the colonial school. He gave several courses on African sociology and politics.

*This compromise goes too far or not far enough : too far on the way towards assimilation, as it allowed overseas peoples to take part in the government of Metropolitan France ; not far enough on the ways towards federalism, as it did not give them the opportunity to have political rights in the framework of a large economic and financial local autonomy"*⁶¹.

How far was this position quite common in the 1950s ? As we said, the 1946 constitution was the result of two opposite tendencies among the French political elite : a unitarian model and a federal one. Both these models already clashed during the Brazzaville Conference in January-February 1944⁶². As a consequence, its conclusions on the future Union Française which served as a basis for the two projects proposed to the constitutional assemblies, were of an hybrid kind. In his report to the first constitutional assembly⁶³, Leopold Senghor recognised that very fact, insisting at the same time on the transitory nature of the Union Française : eventually it would be to the African peoples themselves to choose between more assimilation or more federation. Later discussion⁶⁴ in the second constitutional assembly showed that he was himself largely in favour of the second solution. If the Union Française wanted to be a "co-operation between civilisations" respectful of the culture of each people, a kind of federation based on local political life had to be devised.

Looking at the discussions of the first constitutional assembly it seemed that the federal opinion prevailed. People of different political opinions like René Pleven⁶⁵ and Jacques Soustelle⁶⁶ kept asking that the Assembly of the Union Français and the territorial assemblies should be given legislative powers, as in any federation. Soustelle even talked of the Union Française as a possible "multinational state" whose future could only be federal. Their proposals were rejected with a small majority⁶⁷. This may explain why the report of Coste Floret⁶⁸ to the second constitutional assembly presented the Union Française as a true federation (while the project itself was almost the same). Of course nobody was convinced by the argument⁶⁹, except those "Unitarists" and assimilationists who considered it as too much federal, as a first step towards secession, that is independence.

⁶¹ A. P. R. D., Carton 11, Dossier 150, Correction des copies sur le sujet : "on a dit que la constitution de 1946 bâtitait outre-mer la maison par le toit", Examen sur le cours de politique indigène, mai 1952, copie de Mr A Merlet.

⁶² See : Isoart, P., "Les aspects politiques, constitutionnels et administratifs des recommandations", in : Institut Charles De Gaulle (dir.), "*Brazzaville, janvier-février 1944. Aux sources de la décolonisation. Colloque organisé par l'Institut Charle De Gaulle et l'Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent, 22-23 mai 1987*", Paris, Plon, 1988, p. 79-96. The federal idea was defended by H. Laurentie, a former collaborator of J. Brévié and one of the most influential men during the conference.

⁶³ J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 11 avril 1946, p. 1613.

⁶⁴ J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 18 septembre 1946, p. 3792.

⁶⁵ J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 11 avril 1946, p. 1720. R. Pleven (left, Union Démocratique et socialiste de la Résistance) had been President of the Brazzaville Conference in 1944, Ministre de la France d'Outre Mer in 1944.

⁶⁶ J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 12 avril 1946, p. 1773. J. Soustelle (right, Gaullist), ethnologist, Ministre de la France d'Outre Mer in 1945.

⁶⁷ J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 15 avril 1946, p. 1865 : 288 voted against ; 266 voted for.

⁶⁸ J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 20 août 1946, p. 3189-3190.

⁶⁹ P. Cot : "vous dites, nous faisons une fédération. Et bien non, nous ne faisons pas une fédération. Une fédération suppose des Etats égaux. Dans une fédération tous les hommes ont les mêmes droits et les mêmes devoirs", J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 18 septembre 1946, p. 3816.

To Baumel⁷⁰, the project was an "open door to a new French girondism"⁷¹. It ran against the true French Republican tradition (jacobin) and civilising mission which allowed to build French national unity. The federal elements of the Union Française, like, by the way, the recognition by the same constitutional project of the local territorial entities in France itself, were a danger for that unity. The only alternative solution was the integration of overseas territories in the same national and political whole, the Republic and the French nation, that is, even if the word was not pronounced, their cultural and political assimilation. The very problem that a true political assimilation could entail was not referred to, even if it was a real problem. As Herriot put it⁷², it meant millions of electors who would outnumber French electors and who would vote the French law. Would it not lead to "France being colonised by its own colonies" ? This fear was strong enough to calm down the claims of the unitarists. Still the debate went on and on, focusing on the contradictions of the citizenship of the Union ; on the problem raised by electoral colleges, which meant different rights for different categories of citizens, a point which was not acceptable for the African representatives⁷³ ; on the powers and organisation of territorial and local assemblies, which were, for the federalists, "the keystone of the whole system"⁷⁴, "the best school for democracy"⁷⁵. In the end, the project was accepted with few modifications. Marius Moutet, the Ministre de la France d'Outre-Mer, concluded in a reassuring way : "*local assemblies will be created, which will respect the local customs while guiding the native peoples to more modern forms of democracy*"⁷⁶. Subsequent laws will decide of that creation and precise their competence as the competence of the territorial assemblies.

The only problem was that subsequent laws came very slowly. So slowly that "*this immobilism came to disconcert the African populations*"⁷⁷. A temporary decree was adopted in 1946⁷⁸ to precise some of the few competence of the Assemblées Territoriales, but the expected law concerning their full powers remained a matter for discussion⁷⁹. Concerning the creation of other local assemblies (at the village or district level), several proposals were made by African representatives as soon as 1947⁸⁰. A project was devised by the government in 1951, which envisaged

⁷⁰ J. O., *Débats Assemblée Constituante*, 23 août 1946, p. 3293. Baumel was from the left (Union Démocratique et socialiste de la résistance).

⁷¹ During the French Revolution (1789) Girondin were those who wanted a decentralized state respectful of the provincial identities and who opposed the jacobinist model (centralised state).

⁷² J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 27 août 1946, p. 3333.

⁷³ Were against two separate colleges : Lamine Gueye (Senegal), J. O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 18 septembre 1946, p. 3798 ; Sissoko (Soudan), *Ibidem*, p. 3820, Houphouët (Côte d'Ivoire, *Ibidem*).

⁷⁴ Sissoko, *Ibidem*, p. 3820.

⁷⁵ P. Cot (Parti Radical, left), J.O., *Débats, Assemblée Constituante*, 20 septembre 1946, p. 3901.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 3904.

⁷⁷ Djim Momar Guèye, *J.O., Union Française, Débats*, p. 824, 23 juillet 1953, p. 824.

⁷⁸ Décret, 25 octobre 1946, portant institution d'assemblées représentatives dans les Territoires d'Outre Mer, J. O., *Lois et Décrets*, 27 octobre 1946, p. 9109-9123.

⁷⁹ Rapport fait au nom de la commission de politique générale sur la demande d'avis transmise par le Président de l'Assemblée Nationale sur la proposition de loi de Senghor et plusieurs de ses collègues députés, tendant à fixer les attributions des Assemblées Territoriales et Provinciales des Territoires de l'AOF, AEF, Madagascar, Côte Française des Somalis, par Ya Doumbia, J. O., *Union Française, Documents*, annexe 270, séance du 16 juillet 53, p. 265-278.

⁸⁰ The list of those proposals is to be found in : Proposition de résolution tendant à la création de conseils locaux et valablement représentatifs des collectivités indigènes dans les circonscriptions administratives de l'AEF, AOF, Madagascar, par L. Jousset, et autres membres du Mouvement

the creation of some kind of municipal assemblies⁸¹. This project, like former and later proposals, were transmitted for advise to the members of the Assemblée de l'Union Française whose impatience grew considerably, as most of the texts examined were similar and never led to the law expected⁸². The arguments of those who supported that kind of proposals were much the same as Robert Delavignette's. First, the existing system of local administration and government was seen as obsolete considering the evolution of African societies. It was still based on French colonial administrators having much power and helped by village's heads, district chiefs (who could be the traditional chiefs) and at the regional level by a Conseil de Notables made up of the district chiefs and whose powers were purely consultative⁸³. For historical reason, the four Communes of Senegal were the only places where local assemblies democratically elected on the French model (with an elected mayor) were set up as soon as the end of the 19th century (they were called communes de plein exercice)⁸⁴. Several decrees adopted from the 1920s also allowed the creation of "communes mixtes" in large cities⁸⁵. Many in the Assemblée de l'Union Française considered that such assemblies (whose composition and organisation could be adapted to local customs) should be extended elsewhere. After all, did not the 1946 Constitution recognised the existence of those assemblies for the metropole ? Why should it be different for the colonies ? Were they not part of the same political whole as France ?⁸⁶,

The second repeated argument was that the Union Française, as a democratic pyramid, was doomed to collapse if its peak was built before the rest⁸⁷, if *"the roof of the house was built without preoccupation for the foundation (...). It is precisely what was done when we gave those populations rights that a majority of them could not actually used while not setting up basic institutions, which at the local level, could have allowed them to be conscious of their responsibilities, to have some political apprenticeship and to rule themselves. In any country in the world the evolution towards democracy began through those liberties which allowed local*

Républicain Populaire, J. O., *Union Française, Documents*, annexe n°106, séance du 6 février 1952, p. 127-128.

⁸¹ Projet de loi relatif relatif à l'organisation municipale en Afrique Occidentale Française, en Afrique Equatoriale Française, au Togo, au Cameroun, présenté par R. Pleven, Président du Conseil des Ministres et L. Jaquinot, Ministre de la France d'outre-Mer, J. O., *Assemblée Nationale, Documents*, annexe 1353, séance du 6 novembre 1951, p. 2691-2.

⁸² J. O., *Union Française, Débats*, 30 Octobre 1952, p. 1027.

⁸³ J. O. *Union Française*, annexe 106, op. cit., p. 127.

⁸⁴ These communes were part of the colonial territories conquered before the great expansion of the end of the 19th century. Their inhabitants were considered as French citizens and had the same rights (they could keep their personal status). These communes were organised on the same pattern as French ones (Law of 5th April 1884). The same was applied for the French comptoirs in India. See : Rolland, L., Lampué, P., *Droit d'Outre-Mer*, Paris, Dalloz, 1959, p. 369.

⁸⁵ ex: décret 17 avril 1920 for French West Africa. These communes could be set up by the governor. They had their own budget. They were administrated by a administrateur-maire (French colonial administrators or governors) assisted by an assembly whose membres were chosen by the later or elected for some of them.

⁸⁶ J. O., *Union Française, Débats*, 30 octobre 1952, p. 1027 et suivantes.

⁸⁷ **Leo Hamond**, "Il faut donner à la pyramide démocratique ces assises inférieures sans lesquelles la pointe de la pyramide, sa cime serait nécessairement aventurée. (...) Il ne suffit pas de proclamer la possibilité d'un accès des élus d'Outre-Mer dans des assemblées parlementaires, il faut encore veiller à ce que la vie locale offre des possibilités de démocratie et garanties d'éducation par la démocratie sans lesquels l'édifice serait précaire", quoted in annexe 270, J. O. *Union Française*, op. cit, p. 265.

entities to defend efficiently their rights ”⁸⁸. The Minister de la France d'Outre Mer, Pfmilin, agreed : "we need to set up local elected institutions where democracy would be experimented : these institutions could be regional or municipal assemblies, whose members, as representatives of the population, could deliberate on what they knew the best, their quotidian life while being still inspired by their ancestral wisdom"⁸⁹. The proposals generally envisaged that these councils would “ dealt at the local levels with local problems, as far as they could be dealt with at this level and would give the Assemblées Territoriales local information to help them in their deliberations. Among their competence they would discuss the local budget and could have some consultative powers in such matters as economics and social development (...). Uniform rules concerning their organisation and designation had to be avoided as different religions, customs, evolution called for different solutions ” ⁹⁰. As a consequence it was to the governors (with the advice of the Assemblées Territoriales) to decide on those matters. Concerning their designation, universal suffrage may not be adapted in some circumstances. In each case, the different parts of the population should be represented, but “ we need to reconcile our concern to see democratic institutions penetrate the masses with the institutions already existing ”⁹¹. Those institutions may be of a democratic or aristocratic kind (chiefs...). But as long as the native people were attached to them, they had to be integrated in one way or another into the new councils. Otherwise these councils may just be rejected by the people and their traditional authority. Besides they "should allow the population to take initiatives on any subject of local interest and especially on the possible consequences of general and uniform measures when those measures may neglect the rights and customs of the local population"⁹². Last but not least, it was thought that these councils would "attach the rural population more closely to their villages, thus avoiding land desertion. Considering those detribalised masses, desoriented, packed in African towns in awful housing conditions, one may see that argument as extremely important"⁹³. The village as a traditional community was seen as the "future of Africa"⁹⁴. Rural municipalities would allow the "consecration of the African reality"⁹⁵. Behind that argument was also the fear that "uprooted" rural masses may follow the ideas and claims for independence of some of the African political parties led by those

⁸⁸ Proposition tendant à inviter le gouvernement à instituer des conseils régionaux dans les territoires d'outre-mer présentée par H. Laurier et autres membres du groupe du Rassemblement du Peuple Français, *J. O. Union Française, Documents*, annexe 352, séance du 23 octobre 1952, p. 284.

⁸⁹ J. O. *Union Française*, annexe 270 op. cit., p. 265. These arguments were also largely used in the debate of the Assemblée de l'Union Française, J. O., *Union Française*, 30 octobre 52, op. cit.

⁹⁰ J. O., *Union Française*, annexe 352, op. cit., p. 284.

⁹¹ Ibidem, J. Brevié was here quoted.

⁹² J. O. *Union Française*, annexe n°106, op. cit., p. 127.

⁹³ Laurin, J. O. *Union Française, Débats*, 5 mai 1955, p. 448. This discussion was on a report : Rapport fait au nom de la commission de politique générale sur demande d'avis du Président de l'Assemblée Nationale sur un projet de loi visant la création de conseils de subdivision et l'institution d'un budget de cercle, par Laurin., J. O., *Union Française, Documents*, annexe 374, séance 25 novembre 1954, p. 458. See : Projet de loi autorisant la création en Afrique Occidentale française de conseils de subdivision et de cercle, en Afrique Equatoriale française de conseils de district et de région, présenté au nom de J. Laniel, président du conseil des ministres, et par L. Jaquinot, Ministre de la France d'Outre Mer, J. O., *Union Française, Documents*, annexe 8258, séance du 1er avril 1954, p. 697-8.

⁹⁴ Charle Gros, J. O., *Union Française, Débats*, 5 mai 1955, p. 450.

⁹⁵ Ibidem.

educated African of the cities⁹⁶. Keeping them on their land under the traditional authority of their chiefs while giving them new possibilities of ruling themselves locally was a way of keeping a strict control on them and of avoiding that danger.

Those arguments also tend to prove that Robert Delavignette's territorial vision of Africa society was still quite popular in the 1950s. Considering the debates held in the Assemblée of the Union Française, it seems that his federal position in favour of more decentralisation was dominant in that assembly⁹⁷, which tends to confirm a survey made amongst its members in 1956 by *Marchés coloniaux du Monde* (one of the most influential colonial journal at that time) on the question of the reforms to implement within the Union Française⁹⁸. The results have to be taken with much caution as the questions themselves were largely oriented towards federalism and decentralisation as the director of the journal was a great advocate of that position⁹⁹. Not surprisingly, most of the answers were conformed to those expected : federalism was inevitable and the local assemblies of the villages had to be the "cellule civique de base"¹⁰⁰, the basis for "educating citizens"¹⁰¹. These answers were also probably prompted by the fact that a law on local (municipal) assembly in the overseas territories had just been voted by the Assemblée Nationale in 1955¹⁰² after almost ten years expectation, after many reports and proposals¹⁰³. The law itself was

⁹⁶ "Les masses sont prêtes à accueillir les assurances les plus folles, les annonces les plus messianiques, comme toutes les masses analphabètes et mystiques. C'est dire le danger que peut présenter, si on ne met pas en place un système politique valable, la propagande d'agitateurs qui réclament l'indépendance immédiate et promettent comme corollaires la richesse et la puissance. Du jour au lendemain, séduite par les promesses faciles, les foules déracinées ou non enracinées risqueraient de se précipiter dans l'anarchie", (sans auteur) "Nécessité de structures politiques de base", *Marchés coloniaux du Monde*, 6 mars 1954, p. 637.

⁹⁷ The general tendency of the debates we referred to were in favour of that position.

⁹⁸ 55 men took part in that survey (amongst whom were also deputies to the Assemblée Nationale or Sénateur). See *Marchés coloniaux du Monde*, 31 mars 1956. 1st Question : La marche vers le FEDERALISME a été d'abord celle de la décentralisation, au profit des Territoires d'Outre-Mer. Quelles mesures nouvelles préconisez vous aujourd'hui dans cette voie ? (par exemple : création d'un conseil de gouvernement près du chef du territoire, ce conseil de 5 ou 4 membres étant élu parmi les membres de l'Assemblée Territoriale et par elle). 2nd question : Etes vous partisans des REFORMES de base mises en place actuellement : communes rurales élues près des chefs traditionnels dans les subdivisions ; dans le cercle, conseils élus avec certains pouvoirs de décision et un budget suffisant pour l'exécution de certains travaux locaux ?

⁹⁹ R. Moreux (director of the journal) : "L'Union Française sera fédérale ou ne sera pas", *Marchés coloniaux du Monde*, 12 janvier 1952, p. 58-59 ; "La décomposition de l'Union Française ne peut être évitée que par le fédéralisme", *Ibidem*, 18 juillet 1953, p. 2065-66. See also for example : R. Malbrant, "il faut créer, à tous les échelons administratifs des conseils régionaux dans les TOM", *Ibidem*, 6 décembre 1952, p. 3081-82 ; L. Sengor, "Le fédéralisme est la vérité du vingtième siècle et l'avenir de l'Union Française", *Ibidem*, 17 septembre 1955, p. 2513-14 ; L. Senghor, "Contre le courant centrifuge de l'Etat associé, une seule solution : la République Fédérale Française", *Ibidem*, 4 avril 1953, p. 1005-6 ;

¹⁰⁰ A. Sarraut, Président of the Assemblée de l'union Française, answering the survey, *Marchés coloniaux du Monde*, 31 mars 1956, p. 887.

¹⁰¹ J. Lecanuet (ancien député, ancien ministre), *Ibidem*, p. 889 ;

¹⁰² Loi 18 novembre 1955 relative à la réorganisation municipale en AOF, AEF, Togo, Cameroun et Madagascar, JO Lois et Décrets, 19 novembre 1955, p. 11274-77.

¹⁰³ On those late proposals and project see : Rapport fait au nom de la commission des territoires d'outre-mer sur : 1) le projet de loi (n°1353, 1951) relatif à l'organisation municipale en AOF, en AEF, au Togo et au Cameroun. 2) Les propositions de loi de Mitterrand et plusieurs de ses collègues tendant à l'extension du régime des municipalités de plein exercice à certaines localités de l'AOF, de l'AEF, du Togo et du Cameroun ; de Senghor et plusieurs de ses collègues relative à l'organisation municipale en

very supple and left room for adaptation but also bias : new communes (on the French model, called communes de plein exercice) could be created by decree after the advise of the Assemblées Territoriales ; other kinds of communes much like the older communes mixtes (with a mayor nominated by the French administration but an elected assembly) could also be set up by the governor, but only if the community concerned was "developed enough" to have money for its budget. This law was the first step towards an important reform (called Loi cadre Defferre)¹⁰⁴. It gave the Assemblée Territoriale real legislative powers in some matters (budget included), envisaged a real universal suffrage and the creation of a Conseil de Gouvernement for each territory, a kind of Conseil des Ministres chosen by the Assemblée Territoriale, presided over by the governor and in charge of the executive power. In places where no communes existed, it also set up Communes rurales, which would be ruled by traditional chiefs or "notables" assisted by an elected council.

This reform was supposed to lead to that great community envisaged by Robert Delavignette, where a large autonomy would be progressively given to each territory. In fact this autonomy (almost the equivalent to the Dominion Status in the British Commonwealth) was given faster than expected through the Communauté Française that De Gaulle proposed to the overseas territory in the new constitution of 1958. One may conclude that in the end the federal or even the confederal idea won. Unfortunately, it was already too late, as De Gaulle's proposals, submitted to referendum in each colonial territory, was refused by Sekou Touré (Guinée). Other territories followed, independence came and that great "République diverse et indivisible"¹⁰⁵ which some French Republican were dreaming of aborted. On the other hand France was already taking part in the building of a new multicultural community, centred on Europe.

AOF, AEF, au Togo et au Cameroun, par Y. Diallo, J. O., *Assemblée Nationale, Débats*, annexe 6686, séance du 24 juillet 1953, p. 1332.

¹⁰⁴ Loi du 23 juin 1956 modified by an other law, 19 juin 1957. See : Rolland, L., Lampué, P., *Droit d'Outre-Mer*, Paris, Dalloz, 1959, p. 149.

¹⁰⁵ Boisdon, D., "Playdoyer pour une véritable révision constitutionnelle", *Marchés coloniaux du monde*, 1er Août 1953, p. 2186.