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Romain Tiquet, *Travail forcé et mobilisation de la main-d'œuvre au Sénégal: Années 1920-1960*, with a preface by Alexander Keese and an afterword by Andreas Eckert. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019. x + 282 pp. Bibliography, maps. €26.00 (pb). ISBN 978-2-7535-7610-0

Review by Dior Konaté, South Carolina State University.

More than two decades after the publication of Babacar Fall's pioneering work, *Le travail forcé en Afrique-Occidentale française: 1900-1946*,<sup>[1]</sup> Romain Tiquet offers us a new lens through which to view patterns of forced labor in French West Africa, raising important questions about connections between labor history and colonial history. In *Travail forcé et mobilisation de la main-d'œuvre au Sénégal*, Tiquet furthers our understanding of the mechanisms of the forced labor system by examining how it unfolded in Senegal. Its brutality was undeniable, and reactions to it raised serious doubts about its effectiveness and productivity, and served to mobilize further resistance. Indeed, Tiquet argues that in Senegal, compared to other colonies, the early development of a free labor market in urban areas, which limited the use of forced labor in the colony (p. 23), concealed brutal forms of forced labor that persisted after 1946, when forced labor was officially abolished in French West Africa. By investigating different forms of forced labor—*prestation*, penal labor, *deuxième portion du contingent*, and sisal plantations—as well as the methods and conditions of mobilization of workers, Tiquet highlights a much different pattern in forced labor practices in West Africa (p. 24), one that blurred the lines between *travail libre* (free labor) and *travail forcé* (unfree labor) (p. 24). Arguing that “ce qui est désigné officiellement comme travail libre par les autorités ne l'est pas souvent” (p. 25), Tiquet highlights the flexibility of the concept of labor. By providing a social history of forced labor in Senegal, *Travail forcé* is a welcome addition to a field that is significantly lagging.

*Travail forcé* is broad in its temporal scope. It begins in 1920 (when the Sarrault *plan de mise en valeur* of the colonies was implemented) and ends in 1960, when Senegal became independent, though the first of years of independence—which witnessed a new rhetoric of development or *construction nationale* (p. 211) anchored in the mobilization of a free and voluntary workforce—are also considered. The book's geographic scope is limited, however. This is a deliberate choice on the part of the author, who proposes “une réflexion renouvelée de la géographie du travail sur le territoire” (p. 241), one that focuses on Casamance and Sénégal Oriental, two regions generally overlooked by Senegalese historians. By arguing for a geography of forced labor, Tiquet is able to investigate the varied and brutal forms of recruitment and mobilization of workers, whether for public works sites (*prestation*, penal labor, and *deuxième portion du contingent*) or for private

enterprise (sisal plantations) in these regions, but also to reevaluate connections between space and coercion in the social control of populations.

Drawing on a considerable range of sources including archival material, press articles, and interviews, Tiquet offers a detailed account of the forced labor system and workforce mobilization in Senegal and situates them within a wider framework of French rule and colonial discourses such as *mise au travail* (p. 35), *civilisation par le travail* (p. 27), and authorities' rhetoric of forced labor as a *don de civilisation* (p. 22) offered to African populations to instill in them new working habits. Within this broader context of *mise en valeur* of the colonies (p. 21), the roles of multiple actors—metropolitan and colonial authorities, chiefs, *commandants de cercles*, owners of private enterprises, workers, and populations—are considered as Tiquet introduces different levels of agency. However, his reliance on colonial records demonstrates both the richness and limitations of such sources to illuminate the mechanisms and complexity of the forced labor system in Senegal and the involvement of these actors in its transformation, persistence, and abolition. For instance, Tiquet writes, “Dans le cadre du travail forcé, l'archive coloniale dresse une vision à sens unique, s'intéressant uniquement l'organisation du système du travail (organisation des chantiers, séquences de travail mais rarement aux conditions de travail et réactions des travailleurs)” (p. 38). Thus, the evolution of attitudes, behaviors, and reactions to forced labor, and the consequences of these for colonial labor requirements and policies, constitutes the core of the book (p. 35).

*Travail forcé* testifies to Tiquet's strong desire to expand the historiographical field: his methodology involves “renouveler l'histoire du travail contraint au Sénégal” (p. 33) “pour retenir la dimension politique du travail forcé en situation coloniale” (p.25). In his words, “le travail forcé constitue un ensemble de pratiques coercitives reflétant un type particulier de gouvernementalité, au sens foucauldien du terme” (p. 25). As he analyzes the brutal and coercive nature of the system, Tiquet views forced labor as “une technologie spécifique de pouvoir, reflétant l'obsession colonial de mise au travail et permettant le contrôle économique et l'encadrement sociopolitique de la main-d'œuvre” (p. 25). Armed with this methodology, he chooses to offer a microhistory of forced labor in Senegal (p. 35) that privileges the relationships between the multiple actors involved (metropolitan and colonial authorities, chiefs, *commandants de cercles*, private entrepreneurs, workers, and populations), instead of a history from the perspectives of authorities, or an approach centered on colonial bureaucratic routines, while proposing “une géographie du travail forcé multisituée et naviguant à plusieurs échelles” (p. 35). This methodology also allows Tiquet to challenge earlier Senegalese historiography of labor which he describes as *dakarocentrée* (p.35), which placed the history of labor in Senegal in the global context of workers' activism. Tiquet accomplishes this by suggesting new arguments concerning the nature of French rule in Senegal, colonial labor needs and policies, and the system of forced labor, claiming that “le travail forcé apparaît avant tout comme un système de contrôle répondant à l'obsession coloniale de mise au travail et d'ordre social” (p. 242). Yet he concludes that “la mise en place du travail forcé au Sénégal rencontre dans son organisation et application au quotidien un certain nombre d'adaptations, de tâtonnements, et parfois même d'échecs” (p. 242).

In *Travail forcé*, Tiquet's assertion that the forced labor system was a coercive and brutal institution employed by the colonial and postcolonial state testifies to his desire to understand and communicate the abuses of the forced labor system for those who experienced it or were subjected to. Furthermore, the role of populations, indigenous chiefs, *commandants de cercles*, and sisal planters in the evolution and transformation of the system over time, shows the limits and

difficulties faced by the colonial state in recruiting, mobilizing, and retaining forced laborers. The system of forced labor becomes, therefore, an avenue for rethinking the colonial state in Senegal.

Several themes arise in the book. For instance, the central and ambiguous role of chiefs—a role that Tiquet qualifies as a “véritable courroie de transmission de la politique coloniale sur le terrain” (p.119)—reappears throughout the book, particularly in chiefs’ contributions as “acteurs centraux du recrutement des travailleurs” (p. 109), and their “agissements et abus” (p. 110) committed in order to build “power, wealth, and prestige” (p. 141), which became the source of criticism from the local press, politicians, and populations. For instance, in chapter three, the author broadly discusses how the colonial authorities not only overlooked abuses on the part of chiefs out of fear of jeopardizing the *mise en valeur* of the colonies, but repeatedly supported abusive chiefs, often increasing their pay or giving them awards.

In detailing the multiplicity of human experience within the forced labor system (penal camps, sisal plantations, and road construction sites), Tiquet also vividly describes the treatment of workers. The violence inherent in the forced labor system, he argues, robbed workers of their lives, dignity, and humanity. He describes how hundreds of workers died or were injured, while many others spent days or months behind bars for refusing or avoiding work. The cultivation of sisal, a difficult and dangerous job, resulted in myriad deaths and elicited strong criticisms from the local press. Many local newspapers viewed sisal cultivation as a metaphor of colonial violence in Senegal. However, Tiquet convincingly shows that despite its brutality, the forced labor system did not rob workers of their consciousness, for they engaged in varied forms of resistance to the system by challenging working and living conditions characterized by relentless workload, abuses, poor diet, harsh punishments, and lack of health care and facilities. Migration, desertion, refusal to work, prison breaks and mutinies, sabotage, feigning illness, and self-mutilation (p. 144) became the norm in the forced labor work sites, thus offering a new window to reconsider the concept of resistance. The author convincingly argues that these “formes multiples de contestation constituent en effet bien plus que de simple réactions d’opposition” (p. 144). Throughout chapter four, he shows how they undermined the forced labor system: “elles sont autant de ruses, de bricolages, à la force créatrice et transformatrice, et qui à terme ont déstabilisé le pouvoir colonial, le forçant à réagir, à constamment s’adapter et se reformuler” (p. 144). This resistance, combined with the tense relations between colonial authorities, populations, chiefs, and private company owners, as well as the international scrutiny of forced labor as a whole, prompted a reconfiguration and reformulation of the practices and norms of the system (p. 243). There is no doubt that the harsh recruitment methods and horrible living and working conditions, whether on public or private work sites, compromised the availability and productivity of workers, thus frustrating efforts for the *mise en valeur* of the colonies. In Tiquet’s words, “la mobilisation forcée des populations pour la mise en valeur s’est avérée inefficace, voir contre-productive, dévoilant plus largement la fragilité de l’autorité politique coloniale” (p. 243).

A theme that permeates *Travail forcé* is the coercive nature of the recruitment and mobilization of forced labor workers in West Africa. The author does a wonderful job of showing how colonial authorities, *commandants de cercles*, and chiefs deployed the threat of prison and excessive taxes to “recruit” workers. While imprisonment and taxes became essential instruments in recruiting, mobilizing, retaining, and disciplining forced labor workers, what he calls *une justification par la différence* (p. 242) validated forced labor as a coercive institution. Tiquet defines the term as “une formulation de tout un ensemble d’arguments et de procédés discursifs utilisés par les autorités coloniales afin de justifier la conquête et l’usage de la contrainte: supériorité technologique,

politique et économique, ‘mission civilisatrice,’ prétendue paresse indigène, importance de la valeur du travail” (p. 242). The *mise en valeur* of the colonies, labor demands from private companies, strategies to escape the scrutiny of international labor organizations that deemed forced labor abusive, and efforts to support World War II, combined with an acute shortage of labor, also validated the recruitment of forced labor workers through *une justification par la différence*. Furthermore, Tiquet argues that in Senegal, forced labor also developed through *l’utilisation de la différence* (p. 242) that institutionalized the system. Between 1920 and 1946, multiple labor laws were passed aimed at strengthening the system while paradoxically trying to soften or hide its negative impact in the context of wide international scrutiny and criticism. This legislation produced in the colonies what the author calls *la loi du travail* (p. 27) that legitimized “dans les faits un système abusif” (p. 28). Furthermore, Tiquet shows that none escaped the cruelty of the forced labor system. Alongside able-bodied young men “recruited” in their villages against their will, women, children, and the elderly who were officially exempt from forced labor, nevertheless suffered the vast population movements and migrations of seasonal workers that emptied entire villages and shifted the population distribution in Senegal and the entire federation of French West Africa.

Finally, a strong element in Tiquet’s study is to establish the continuity between the colonial and postcolonial periods, since the legacies of colonial forced labor persisted in independent Senegal where leaders engaged in a “construction nationale” (p. 211) in the context of a free labor market. These legacies account for both ruptures and continuities after 1946. While, during the colonial period, French authorities rationalized and institutionalized forced labor through *une justification par la différence* and *l’utilisation de la différence*, in postcolonial Senegal, *animation rurale* (p. 214), *devoir de travail* (p. 215), the repression of vagrancy, vagabondage, homelessness, and joblessness—all reminiscent of colonial practices—provided the foundation for the mobilization of a free and voluntary workforce to support the politics of *investissement humain* (p. 220) and *service civique* (p. 231) in the context of a socialist economic program deemed necessary to build the new nation.

*Travail forcé* is a tour de force of social history that demonstrates the multiple ways forced labor and the mobilization of workers have shaped not only French economic and political policies in Senegal, but also the very terms with which we seek to understand the system and those who were subjected to it. For this reason, it makes an important contribution to the history of labor in Africa. By recovering the voices of workers through testimonies and popular reactions, it adds to the scholarship of African resistance to colonialism. As a historiographical milestone, the book represents the field’s limits as well as its strengths. Tiquet’s criticism of the *dakarocentrée* historiography is a bit disappointing because that historiography treats different time frames and contexts. In a book that covers so much so well, there is still room to flesh out the analysis of forced labor in regions other than Casamance and Sénégal Oriental.

## NOTES

[1] Babacar Fall, *Le travail forcé en Afrique-Occidentale française: 1900-1946* (Paris: Karthala, 1993). For a more recent study on Senegal specifically, see Ibra Sène, “Colonisation française et main-d’œuvre carcérale au Sénégal: De l’emploi des détenus des camps pénaux sur les chantiers des travaux routiers (1927-1940),” *French Colonial History* 5 (2004): 153-171.

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