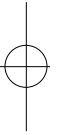
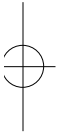
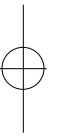


WEST AFRICA





WEST AFRICA

An Introduction to its History,
Civilization and Contemporary Situation

Eugene L. Mendonsa
University of Colorado

CAROLINA ACADEMIC PRESS

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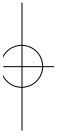
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This book is dedicated to two of my sons,
one of my loins, both of my heart—

Matthew Eugene Mendonsa
and
Nenkentie Badzongoly





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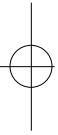
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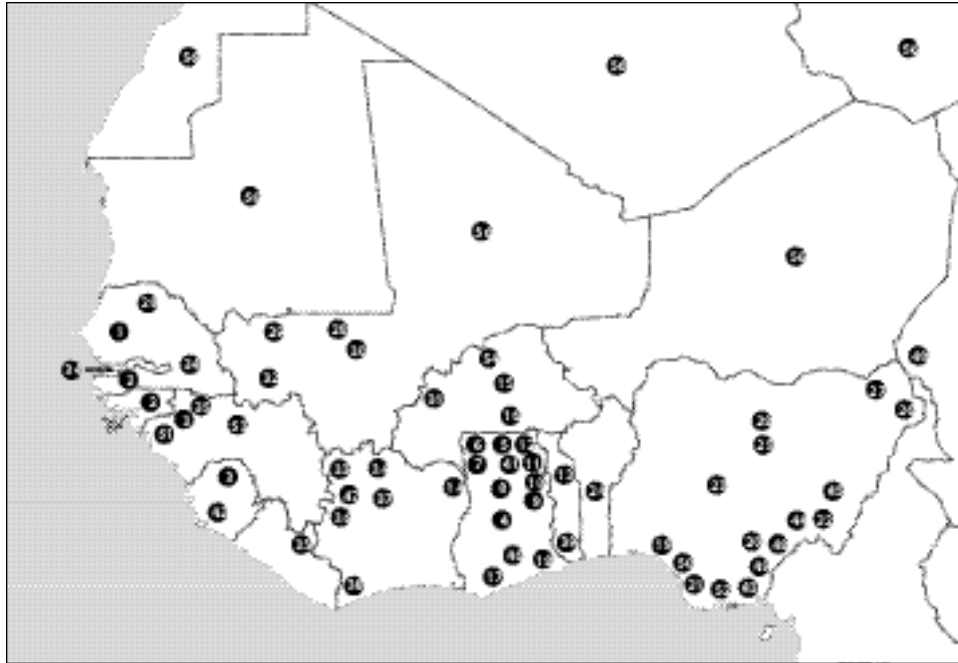
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Location of Selected Ethnic Groups in West Africa.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Wolof | 20. Igbo (Ibo) | 39. Ewe |
| 2. Mende | 21. Kalabari | 40. Sao |
| 3. Temme | 22. Tiv | 41. Buisla |
| 4. Asante | 23. Nupe | 42. Krios (Creoles) |
| 5. Sisala (Grunshi*) | 24. Fon (Dahomey) | 43. Ogoni |
| 6. Dagara | 25. Hausa | 44. Idoma |
| 7. Wala | 26. Kanuri | 45. Jukun |
| 8. Gonja | 27. Caliphate of Sokoto | 46. Akwapims (Akyem) |
| 9. Dagomba | 28. Fulani | 47. Guro |
| 10. Mamprusi | 29. Soninke | 48. Yakö |
| 11. Tallensi | 30. Dogon | 49. Ekoï |
| 12. Fra Fra (Grusi**) | 31. Bobo | 50. Efik |
| 13. Kabre | 32. Bambara (Djula) | 51. Sherbro |
| 14. Lobi | 33. Senfo | 52. Aja (Ijaw) |
| 15. Mossi | 34. Mandingo (Mandinka) | 53. Koranko |
| 16. Kasena (Grunshi) | 35. Kpelle | 54. Bwa |
| 17. Fante | 36. Dan | 55. Susu |
| 18. Gã | 37. Baule | 56. Tuaregs & Berbers |
| 19. Yoruba | 38. Kru | |

* A pejorative term meaning “bush” or “hick.”

** Similar to Grunshi. Most of the acephalous Voltaic peoples were called by a similar derogatory term.



ECOWAS Countries with Their Dates of Independence.



Preface

In this textbook, I am going to tell a story. It is the story of the clash of two civilizations, one African, the other European. The first civilization has been compromised by contact with Europe, but it still survives through the customs and values of the people of West Africa. The second civilization is a global giant. It is overwhelming the world at present. It is the materially-based civilization of the Core (Western Civilization or the North), characterized by an economy based on capitalism, also referred to as the global economy.

This is a sad story, full of racism, conflict, slavery, exploitation and domination by members of European culture—the traders, sailors, missionaries, administrators, soldiers and adventurers who came to the shores of “Guinea.” I write it in hopes that in some small way, when the student comes to understand the impact of history on the present, s/he will begin to understand what needs to be done now and in the future to begin to let the light of West Africa’s indigenous civilization shine through the dankness of foreign oppression.

In a way, the saga of West Africa is a sad story. It is one of exploitation and domination; but it is also a story about a region filled with wonderful people. In my life I have had the opportunity to live in nearly twenty different countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. In all my travels I have not found any people or region with more gracious people, with a culture I would rather be around. West Africa greatly impacted my consciousness when I first went there in 1970 as a young and naïve graduate student pursuing my first ethnographic field site, which became Sisalaland in Northern Ghana. Through the years I have been drawn back, again and again, not only by the opportunity to learn more about this fascinating region of the world, but also by the civility of its people, a warmth of friendship and relationship I have come to value of one of my most prized experiences as an anthropologist and human being.

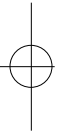
The ending of this story I cannot write because it is being written by history, but what I want to do here is give the student an idea of how West African civilization developed and what its nature was and is. Secondly, I want to show the nature of European civilization, explain why Europeans came to West Africa and describe the immediate impact of that arrival. Then I want the student to understand that the historical clash between these two cultures has affected the nature of West Africa today, that the processes set in motion long ago resonate today in words like neocolonialism, underdevelopment, imperialism and dependency. West Africa’s past is closely tied to the spread and power of European civilization beginning in the Age of Discovery and continued through centuries of contact and trade in the region. Similarly, West Africa’s future is integrally connected to the spread and power of international capitalism. In other words, the dependency established at contact remains today.

Throughout the book, I will indicate how such intertwining began and how it has evolved. I begin with the setting, the geography, environment and languages of West Africa. I continue by showing how a civic way of life developed in West Africa, based on a fearful respect for nature and the spirits of the occult realm that were thought to be instrumental in the lives of the people. I will explicate the communalistic nature of

this agricultural civilization that developed complex and humanitarian institutions to cope with nature, to make a living and provide a sense of community pride and warm security within their extended families and villages.

The advance of European civilization into West Africa encroached on the security of collectivist way of life. Little by little, Europeans moved down the Guinea coast from Portugal looking for riches. Their rapacious and materialistic appetites were to come face to face with the community-centered civilization of West Africa. Since West Africa already had an advanced regional trading system, what the French have called *economie de traite*, trade with the Europeans was a natural outgrowth. Ultimately, however, it had devastating consequences for West African communities. West African life was based on collectives designed to care for the weak and aged, and extended families focused on maintaining a mystic balance with nature and the ancestors. The acquisitive culture of the Northerners was to eventually dominate and transform the civilization of West Africa.

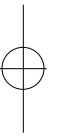
This book is about that transformative process.



Political Economy

I need to say a word here about the important concept of political economy that will figure so prominently in this work. The political economy is a tangle of institutions and relations involving political powers and related economic endeavors in a country or region. In most behavioral arenas, politics and economics go hand in glove. Politicians work with wealthy patrons and influential barons of trade or industry, each influencing the other. More and more social scientists are realizing the fundamental importance of this complex as driving force behind behaviors that heretofore were spoken of as separately political or economic, not both in combination.

In pre-contact times in West Africa, the kings and chiefs often controlled the political economy of states. With the coming of the Europeans a new political economy emerged, that of increasing European domination of trade. Control by these outsiders was gradually formalized over time, till the era of colonialism. When political independence was granted to the people of the region and Europeans ceremoniously withdrew, the economy remained in European hands. Europeans were able to manipulate the new holders of political office by persuasion, power plays and outright corruption. That political economy remains in place as of this writing.



How this Book is Organized

In chapter one, I will look at the geography, environment and language zones of West Africa to give the reader a perspective on what the region is like in terms of climate, vegetation, soils and language. I will also provide maps to acquaint the student with demographic divisions in the region.

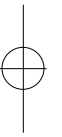
Chapters two through seven present a detailed analysis of West African social organization. This section introduces kinship institutions and civic life that, together, form the foundation of West African culture. I go on to explain ritual institutions which are critical to any understanding of West African civic life. I also look at the traditional economic factors and political institutions that have shaped West African civilization and how these have changed over time in the region. The student is presented with a perspective called political economy that reflects the inter-relatedness of these two sets of institutions. This section ends with an excursion into the world of West African art and music and their place in ritual, social and political aspects of life.

In chapter eight, I present a short survey of the prehistory of West Africa as found in its meager archaeological record. I then turn to the pre-contact history of the region in chapter nine, focusing on the Great Sudanic kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhai and the coming of Islam¹ to West Africa. At this juncture, I turn to the period of contact with the Portuguese and the effects of that collision on West Africans. In chapter eleven, we look at the all-important period of slave raiding and its consequences, especially those devolving from the discovery of the New World and the advent of the Atlantic Slave Trade. I move to a discussion in chapter twelve of how West Africans began to resist imperialism and the increasing shift toward hegemony by the Portuguese, British, French and Germans. In chapter 13, I chronicle the establishment of formal colonial status in the region. Chapter 14 is a discussion of the freedom movements and struggles for independence by West African intellectuals and their eventual attainment of political, if not economic, independence.

Chapter 15 covers the Postcolonial Period, its high expectations and the subsequent fall into underdevelopment. In chapter 16, I explain why West Africa can be considered a singular region and what the ECOWAS community is. I also provide a time line in this section with important events and other demographic information for each of the 16 West African countries. These final chapters cover the nature of dependent governance and lack of development today, urbanization, responses to modernity, the increasing integration of peasants and the economy into global capitalism, the nature of dept dependence, SAP's, NGOization, neocolonialism, underdevelopment and the spread of AIDS into the region.

Given this bleak picture, I end the book with a question: "Whither West African Civilization?" In this last chapter I will try to give the reader a sense of where West Africa is today, where it might be going, and my thoughts about how it might get there.

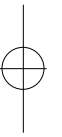
1. The dominant form of Islam practiced in West Africa is *Shi'ite*. Adherents believe that the law of Allah is superior to the law of the land. Fundamentalists who believe in *Shari'a* Law as supreme law.



Special Features in the Text

In this book, the important terms a student reader should know are in **boldface** in the text, and are repeated at the end of each chapter. I have bolded a few terms in this preface to give the reader an example, though these terms will appear many times throughout the textbook. Definitions can be found in the back of the book in the Glossary. There is a special glossary for West African People Cities, States & Empires. Since there are many acronyms in the text, I have included them in a special glossary.

At the end of each chapter, the reader will find *Critical Thinking Questions*, which can be used by the professor as essay questions or for purposes of class discussion. A section called *Key Concepts* includes all the bolded terms of that chapter. *Sources and Suggested Reading* contains the references used in creating the chapter and sources for further investigation.



Special Thanks

This book is a much better text because of the tireless and extremely efficient editing of Gretchen Jordan. Not only is she a great copy editor, but she is an anthropologist who helped me think through some of the main issues in this textbook.

