

**A Colored Contrast:
The Commercialization of Africa
in the Search for French National Identity**

Regan Bardeen

By examining the images of Africa in two collecting-card albums from 1930s France, this paper looks to understand the connections between colony and métropole in the formation of French national identity. The card illustrations follow a prescribed colonial text, extolling the economic benefits of the African colonies while emphasizing their culture distance. Nevertheless, the popularity of these illustrations in the public imagination suggests the transformative role that Africa played in shaping France as an imperial nation-state.

*"Le continent africain, qui comprend la plus grande partie de la FRANCE D'OUTRE-MER, va defler sous vos yeux ravis, grace aux belles images..."*¹

French imperialism reached its apotheosis during the interwar period, when nearly five million square miles of the world's landmass were under French control. During the recently-concluded Great War, colonial subjects in Africa and Asia had given their lives and resources for the support of the métropole, and they were becoming an increasingly important market and raw goods supplier for the French economy. In the following decades, until World War II, the French government believed that these colonies would be a permanent fixture of *la grande France*, an empire that would extend French culture across the oceans. At the same time, movements against imperial rule were beginning to coalesce in the colonies themselves. Therefore, the French metropolitan and colonial administrations desired to publicize the colonies as possessions of the French nation-state. The increasingly visible promotion of the colonial empire in France may be viewed as a direct response to the rising protests against French rule in the colonies and skepticism among the French public. As a result, the interwar period was the era in which this new, modern France developed an imperialist and racialized national identity. From an historical perspective, discourse on French national identity cannot be disengaged from the physical presence of colonial subjects and their place in the imagination of the French populace. This paper will approach the topic of imperialism and racial/national identity by examining two commercially-produced albums of French chocolate company trading cards, held in the *Association Connaissance*

de l'histoire de l'Afrique contemporaine collection at the Getty Research Institute. Each album contains a series of trading cards that illustrate aspects of history, industry and daily living in the African colonies. Trading card albums such as these were common to large advertising campaigns in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, and they allow us to explore the commercial arena as a space of discourse about colonial assimilation and difference.

Commercial material culture is a rich source of study because it reflects the interactions between a consuming public and the economic sector that contributes to the production of identity. The trading card albums, (**Figure 1** and **Figure 2**) under consideration here were published by *Chocolat Cémoi* and *Chocolat Pupier* during the early 1930s.² They depict two images of Africa, dueling representations of what the colonies could and should be.³ **Figure 1** is of the eternal, 'primitive' Africa, a romanticized notion of the colonies as less-complicated places that would be grateful for the refinement of France. **Figure 2** is of the industrious, developing Africa, willing to offer the riches of its land in exchange for the civilization of France. This dual colonial African image, as consumed by the French public in the trading card albums, contributed to the shaping of French national identity between the two World Wars by creating a contrast between 'dark' colonial Africa and the newly-identified 'white' French nation.

A French consumer buying a candy bar from *Chocolat Pupier* or *Chocolat Cémoi* would find one of the trading cards inside the wrapper.⁴ These cards were published in a series, allowing customers to collect all of them and place them in the separately purchased albums. The *Chocolat Pupier* album is organized geographically, dedicating one or two pages to the African colonies of

each European power. In the *Chocolat Cémoi* album, each series of cards illustrates a feature of life in Afrique Équatoriale Française (AEF), including military leaders, architecture, agriculture and technology.⁵



Figure 1: *Chocolat Pupier*, 7, features scenes from French West Africa



Figure 2: Chocolat Cémoi, ed., *Historique des Colonies Françaises l'Afrique Équatoriale* (Grenoble: 193[?]), Série C, illustres various examples of colonial architecture.

The albums themselves are colorfully illustrated. The *Chocolat Pupier* album provides a descriptive caption for each card, while the *Chocolat Cémoi* album serves as a narrative of the colonial conquest. The publicity campaigns spearheaded through these albums were carefully targeted. Chocolate manufacturers sometimes focused separately on boys and girls, the primary consumers of these products, by publishing albums that appealed to the mission work of the colonies for girls and the adventure of colonial travel for boys.⁶ Using these techniques, chocolate producers advertised their goods while supporting the official rhetoric of the French colonial mission in Africa.

Images of Africa were pervasive in France. While scholars are still uncertain about the numbers of Africans in France, it is clear that they became more visible from the 1890s onward, coinciding with the beginning of the colonial era. This conspicuousness is not only apparent in print; many other displays of Africa existed. National and regional expositions and even village fairs exhibited live African panoramas. In 1936, *'le train-expo de la France d'outre-mer'* made its way through France.⁷ The popularity of the colonial and international expositions taking place in France from the *fin-de-siècle* through the interwar period indicates, to some extent, the desire of the métropole population to experience the 'exotic' at home. Of the subjects of 'Greater France,' the African colonies were considered the most foreign. Odile Goerg describes Africa as "the most disorienting and, consequently, the most attractive continent" to French consumers.⁸ Unlike these forms of propaganda, advertisements were not meant to educate the public, but to promote a certain image. The albums discussed in this paper fall between

these two purposes: they educated their young consumers to promote a connection between the noble and imperial French identity and their own products. Images of Africa and Africans on advertisements, product labels, games, postcards and other ephemera allowed viewers to take a "simulated journey" to the 'other' France of the *outré-mer* at a time of limited international travel.⁹ Buyers of colonial images were purchasing a product that, although part of the commercial sector, was often influenced by official government policy.

These visual spaces were controlled and manipulated in order to be portrayed as appropriate for French consumption, and yet different enough to not be fully French. They created a representation of an Africa that was purporting to be 'authentic.'¹⁰ Advertising images of Africa and Africans take their place alongside official government exhibitions and lectures as a form of colonial propaganda. Promoters of the empire included many unofficial participants, such as writers and filmmakers.¹¹ However, the purpose of the album cards extended beyond promoting imperial ideals; they advocated a specifically colonial project by illustrating the economic ties between France and the *outré-mer*, as well as endorsing the idea of spreading French civilization beyond the borders of the metropole, often called the *mission civilisatrice*. This commercial representation of colonialism reinforced the dominant French position vis-à-vis Africa and so encouraged a distinction between the white French *citizen* and the black African *subject*, whether in political or commercial visual consumption.

French colonial rule during the inter-war period was based on the precept that French and African societies were verifiably different. The colonialist dichotomy of citizen and subject helped to define France as a nation of

citizens, in opposition to its colonial subjects. However, this balance was disrupted by the existence of Africans who did not fit the mold of authenticity, who could not be identified as distinctly 'African.'¹² Therefore, representations of Africans, such as those described in the card albums, emphasized the authentic difference of their cultures so as to deny the possibility of assimilation. The policy concept of association is useful for thinking about representations of Africa in France because it illustrates why collecting card images were not simply commercial propaganda; the images of 'authentically' African societies were the only way to represent Africa so that it fit into the world system of modernization. In both albums, Africans are shown living and working only in rural areas, in contrast to the urbanization of modern France. The colonial preservation of 'authentic' African cultures is illustrated in Série B of the *Chocolat Cémoi* album, which records a variety of indigenous architectural styles.¹³ **Figure 4** depicts an image of French colonial architecture, the AEF pavilion at the colonial exposition.¹⁴



Figure 3: Ibid., 7
(Detail of Figure 2, pg. 70)



Figure 4: Ibid., 7
(Detail of Figure 5, pg. 75)

Directly opposite this card in **Figure 3** is the Af-

rican counterpart, from the village du Hogone. Here, the French reproduce and claim as their own the 'African' architecture. This set of trading cards from the *Chocolat Cémoi* album illustrates a central colonial policy of the inter-war period; African cultures, it was insisted, could not be made fully French, but the French nation could incorporate and control pieces of Africa.¹⁹ Older images of Africans as 'savages' were largely discarded in this era, in favor of a view of the 'authenticity' of African practices. Nevertheless, the concept of an undeveloped Africa is still present in the collecting card albums, but this view is couched in more acceptable terms of productivity and contentment. For example, the caption accompanying a picture of palm oil processing explains that "la culture du palmier à huile, qui vit dans le pays à l'état sauvage, est plus facile que celle du bananier, du caféier ou du cacaoyer, et les indigènes s'y livrent pour leur propre compte."¹⁵ According to this description, the African women depicted performing this labor-intensive task are lucky to take part in an activity that is so 'suitable' for them. For the historian, these images show that the French administration in Africa was not in search of cultural authenticity, but a particularly economically beneficial version of it.

Of the many categories of colonial images, including ethnographic photographs, postcards and travelers' descriptions, trading cards are the most recent to gain widespread use. They are part of an older advertising tradition that began with the *cartes publicitaires* of the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁶ These small advertising cards are also called *chromolithographie*, or *chromos* for short. It was only in the early years of the twentieth century that they became ubiquitous on the streets of Paris and other metropolitan centers in France. According to advertis-

ers, a colorful illustration would pique the interest of a potential customer and then provide the essential product information.¹⁷ However, printed advertisements were at first viewed with suspicion in France, having been labeled as ill-mannered and lower class. To create a nation-wide market while modernizing the production, distribution and commercial practices for new industries, French businesses wanted to avoid what they considered the “American” advertising approach of direct appeals to consumer desire. Instead, they advertised their products as “part of an effort to preserve what they nostalgically identified as tradition while bringing it up to date.”¹⁸ The chocolate card albums achieve this dual message by showing French development efforts as contributing to the larger goal of making Africa more, but not too, French.



Figure 5: Chocolat Cémoi, Cérie C.

In **Figure 5**, the trading cards form an illustration of French development projects in the African colonies. French consumers collected cards depicting 'Western' education and marriage, as well as various examples of colonial architecture.¹⁹ Nevertheless, these 'improvements' are clearly set in a tropical African location, far from the civilization of France.

Over the course of the first decades of the twentieth century, technological innovations in printing increased quality and reduced price, pushing print advertisements to the forefront of information sharing. As they blanketed the country, the images in these advertisements became common in the daily lives of French consumers. Among the images advertising a wide variety of products and services were many of African and Asian colonial subjects, suggesting the effectiveness of these images in attracting attention.²⁰ Advertising techniques that relied on recognizable images grew more popular and persuasive as French culture became more visually oriented. In turn, the African-themed trading card albums appealed to this visual, participatory French public.

While chocolate advertisements became ubiquitous in the early twentieth century, as a product of consumption, chocolate is relatively recent to the markets of Europe, first being made on a large scale in the 1820s. In 1867, only three percent of the French population regularly ate chocolate. Furthermore, French producers were not in the vanguard of chocolate production.²¹ But by the turn of the century, the market for chocolate in Europe was booming. With the democratization of chocolate, chocolatiers became some of the earliest exploiters of mass advertising. Unlike some older industries, the marketing of chocolate may have played a significant role in the economic fortunes of its producers. To create a market,

chocolate producers depicted their product as having a place in everyday life. Two contrasting campaigns seem to have been used in early chocolate advertising. One appealed to a rooted French identity, as exemplified by the most well-known chocolate advertising image of the early twentieth century, the Menier girl.

The little white Menier girl, always depicted in a country setting with her braids and picnic basket, was a symbol of nostalgia for rural France. She represented consumers of chocolate as white, part of a French citizenry that had well-established rural roots.²² The use of African images, on the other hand, was meant to evoke the exoticism of the colonies and associate the product with the success and permanence of the colonial mission at the height of twentieth century imperialism. The text of the *Chocolat Cémoi* album points out that cacao beans imported from Afrique Équatoriale Française were “necessary to the creation of the chocolates that you know well.”²³ Furthermore, images of Africa made use of the colonial racial paradigm in which white French citizens benefited from the labor of black African subjects.

Dana Hale’s study of French product trademarks establishes this relationship between commodities and race. She argues that these images had the capacity, through their daily presence in people’s lives, to shape ideas about race.²⁴ On the trademarks registered in Paris and Marseilles between 1886 and 1940, Black Africans were usually portrayed as children, soldiers, entertainers or servants. ‘Blackness’ was marketed as a positive quality in food products such as coffee and chocolate. For cleaning products, like soap and bleach, the trademarks presented blackness as a negative quality that could be eliminated.²⁵ Trading card albums differ from trademarks in that they are not intended as symbols of a single consumer prod-

uct. However, the "limited repertoire of visual symbols" utilized by the trade-marking companies is reflected in the narrow representations of African in the albums.²⁶ They portray Africans as both inferior to and beneficiaries of the French and their 'civilizing mission.' Chocolate advertisers, as demonstrated within the *Chocolat Cémoi* and *Chocolat Pupier* albums, also attempted to utilize this racial paradigm.

As the commercial market for chocolate grew in importance, the advertising promotions of the chocolate manufacturers created a narrative that promoted particular ideals. The central colonial narrative described a relationship in which the French government and industry and colonies mutually benefited one another. The question is why the commercial sector supported the standard colonial narrative. The mythology surrounding the chocolate industry can be considered a collection of "commemorative texts and discursive narratives."²⁷ These texts, as exemplified by the collecting card albums, encouraged French consumers to identify with the colonies as both a source of their national identity and the source of the chocolate product. Even though the French presence in Africa extended back to the seventeenth century, the citizens of France were not necessarily invested in the idea of the colonial mission. They had to be wooed with visions of *la plus grande France*. Herman Lebovics discusses the concept of greater France, with national borders extending far beyond the hexagon, which gained currency after the First World War. This "True France" is described by the dual-development of national and imperial identity.²⁸ During the inter-war period, a growing class of citizens classified the colonial empire as part of the inheritance of their French social-political identity. Across the sea, the subjects of France were incorporated into this new national

identity, albeit as a preferably invisible presence.

During this period, the government began to view its imperial power as an important component of French identity in the international community. Although the Third Republic was established in 1870, a republican ideology that validated the colonial venture was solidified through the national discourse surrounding the Dreyfus Affair and the entrance into the First World War. At the same time, France was taking a more active approach to claiming and controlling African colonies. While the initial colonial incursion into Africa took place in Algeria in 1830, the government truly began to build an African empire around the time of the Dreyfus Affair, forming *Afrique Occidentale Française* in 1904 and *Afrique Équatoriale Française* in 1910. Assimilation was the guiding theory of colonial policy during the first stage of military incursion. Colonial leaders believed strongly in the *mission civilisatrice*, that the rationality and morality of French civilization would have a profound, Frenchifying affect on African cultures. This theory eventually gave way to one of association, which proposed that France could not assimilate Africans, but only engage them in a mutually beneficial relationship. In the generally accepted chronology, association followed assimilation as the theoretical basis for colonial policy after World War I. However, the contrary goals of assimilation and association seem to have continued to stimulate policies up to the time of decolonization.

The phrase "colonial modernity" describes imperialist interactions with African societies that resulted in new kinds of organization that were different and yet inextricable from European sociopolitical modes.²⁹ The First World War accelerated the drive towards colonial modernity because it forced legislators in France and admin-

istrators in the colonies into a close working relationship based on their mutual need for assistance in the increasingly-welfarist French state.³⁰ They were supported in this endeavor by French industrialists who conducted a high volume of trade with the African colonies. Furthermore, many businesses, including large chocolate manufacturers like *Pupier* and *Cémoi*, relied on raw goods from the colonies. Colonial modernity also came to be associated with the change in policy that generally occurred after the war. The French administration of the AEF provides an instructive example here. Until 1914, AOF colonial administrators in Africa pursued a policy of dismantling chieftaincies, to be replaced by a system of rule more easily controlled by the French. Assimilationist policymakers hoped that a French-ruled Africa would soon become a replication of France *in* Africa. The instability created by this system, coupled with a series of revolts after the war, caused French administrators to retreat on the policy of assimilation. Instead, the colonial administration fostered a network of 'traditional leaders' who were put in place to offset the authority of the French-educated, and increasingly nationalist, African elite.³¹ Colonial administrators were also motivated by the growing desire to preserve 'authentic culture' in their African possessions, so as to create a relationship of what they called 'association' with the colonies.³² Association policies were perhaps thought to forestall African protest to colonial rule. In the midst of these fluctuations, the French nation, or at least those who believed they belonged to it, was in search of an identity, a moral consensus on the meaning of belonging.³³ The result was an intensification of nationalism, which increasingly relied on a subjected 'other' to define a 'self.' The new imperialists, including product manufacturers, supported this search because it could potentially

be profitable to them.

The publishers of the chocolate trading card albums drew on the concept of French identity to create a product that was tied to a larger thematic campaign. For the Africa-based albums, this theme was *empire*; as an important part of the French cultural fabric, representations of empire made an attractive package for buyers. The cover illustration of *Historique des Colonies Françaises l'Afrique Équatoriale* exemplifies this commercial desire to champion the *mission civilisatrice* in Africa to the consuming public.



Figure 6: Chocolat Cémoi, cover

On it, as seen in **Figure 6** a white girl holds a tin of 'Matina,' the *Chocolat Cémoi* nutritional drink product. The boy, dressed in the garb of a colonial officer, waves bars of chocolate at the appreciative African family. The European children are returning to Africa with the resources that had been extracted from the continent, now processed and commodified. There are two buildings in the background; one appears to be the home of the African family, the other has a sign reading 'DÉPÔT DO-FI-NEY.' The inside cover is a map of the AEF territory (**Figure 7**), including the present-day countries of Chad, Central African Republic, Republic of the Congo and Gabon.



Figure 7: Chocolat Cémoy, inside cover

The map is illustrated with small symbols of the most important resources in each territory – camels, cattle, timber, tobacco and what appears to be cotton and charcoal. These elements are indicative of the dual mandate of the colonial project: to bring civilization to Africa and to strengthen the imperial French nation, through trade and commerce.³⁴

The phrase '*la plus grande France*' was introduced into popular usage by Léon Archimbaud in his book by the same name. Published in 1928, the book described France as an empire of many *pays*. Because of their high level of cultural/social/economic development, the French had an imperial calling to take their civilization to these far-flung places. This duty was known as the *mission civilisatrice*, and it remained the rationale for empire through periods of assimilationist and associationist colonial policies. During the Third Republic, a state apparatus was put in place to carry out the republican mission in France and overseas. This apparatus functioned by creating social identities, rooted in a racial paradigm, that supported the hierarchy of power. Interactions between French and African people in the colonies were structured so as to physically and psychologically define the ruler and subject.

Social identity is formulated by defining not only who one is, but also who one is not.³⁵ The inhabitants of metropolitan France encountered colonial subjects, the people who they were not, both physically and through visual sources. The physical presence of colonial subject increased significantly during and after World War I, when hundreds of thousands of Africans came to France to serve as soldiers and laborers. Their physical presence disrupted the official colonial narrative, which had sidestepped the inherent contradictions in republican-colonial rule by preaching republicanism at home and authoritarianism overseas. In order to return to a *mission civilisatrice*, the government desired to lessen the impact of the physical presence of these non-white immigrants. Although 300,000 workers entered France from North Africa, Indochina and China, and the government acknowledged the tremendous need for additional labor, it was anxious to ensure that French citizens did not feel they were being replaced by 'inferior' peoples. When the war ended, therefore, the government recruited additional white European laborers and expelled the nonwhite workers. Of a total population of 132,000 North African workers, for example, only 7,000 remained in the country by the end of 1919. Stovall argues that the crystallization of Republicanism and the growth of a nonwhite population in France were necessary for the racialization of French identity that occurred in the interwar period.³⁶

Colonial-based interwar product advertisements were an element of this racialization of French identity. Many colonial products, including soaps, coffee and chocolate, "marketed whiteness as the ultimate desire and achievement of the enlightened French consumer."³⁷ Interestingly, these products were exported from the colonies as raw goods and then manufactured by and sold to a

largely white market. Africa-based advertising campaigns assumed whiteness as an indicator of the French identity and marked the chocolate products as reserved for a white consumer. Chocolate was made *by* black subjects of the colonies *for* white citizens of the metropole.³⁸ Advertising departments, through their representation of the chocolate industry, promoted the colonial narrative of order, obedience and superiority of the white French civilization.

The ideals of republicanism and universalism, celebrated during this era, are not synonymous. Promoting and performing republican policies, so central to French national identity in this time period, hardly lived up to the national fantasy in the real world. Instead, theories and policies labeled as 'republican' dealt with the complexities of the *mise en valeur* in Africa. Gary Wilder argues that the post-World War I French metropolitan government became increasingly center-oriented while aspiring to republicanism, like its colonial counterpart. As a result, "the imperial nation-state was at once republican and illiberal."³⁹ In order to reconcile the hard-won hexagonal 'French' identity with the newly important 'imperial' identity, it was necessary to focus on the separateness of France and the colonies, even as they became more economically entwined. By 1928, France's highest volume of trade occurred with its colonies.⁴⁰

Octave Homberg, author of a widely-read 1927 book about the colonies, called for a "France of all the continents," disparate regions united, just as the regions of metropolitan France were united under the Third Republic.⁴¹ Advocates of the French empire in Africa, in order to support their case, had to demonstrate the benefits of investing in such a vast and distant place. World War I, followed by the Bolshevik Revolution and growing unrest in the colonies, left French society in a state of upheaval

and led to an "intensifying racism" within the French public.⁴² Citizens of France were unsure that they wanted black subjects to be included in *la grande France*.

Colonialism was defined by a hierarchical connection between France and its colonies that came to be predicated on racial difference. It was necessary to establish this difference, with an emphasis on the superiority of white civilization, and not just of French civilization. Even before the growth of imperialism under the Third Republic, there was a historical precedent for using whiteness as a requisite of citizenship, or belonging, by describing the 'other,' non-citizens as dark. Visual sources, like the trading card albums, excluded anyone not white enough from national membership by defining black and white, master and subject. It must be noted that the presence of North and West Africans in France during the interwar period is a point of contention among scholars. Garson, for example, refers to a large African population in interwar France, citing a critical need for laborers and a low birth rate as reasons for the recruitment of African workers to the metropole.⁴³ Tyler Stovall, however, links the fad for exoticism and primitivism to the physical distance of the subject populations, made possible by the expulsion of African laborers. He argues that the romanticization of African cultures was possible only because they were remote from the everyday lives of the French. Nevertheless, the visibility of Africans, whether in the metropole or in visual sources like the albums, piqued French ethnographic interest.⁴⁴ This physical and cultural distance between Africa and France is highlighted in the albums. On the cover of the *Chocolat Cémoi* album, the two white children sit astride an ostrich as they wave their chocolate bars in greeting to the African family.⁴⁵ The excited family stands in front of their 'traditional' mud-walled

house wearing African cloth, in contrast to the safari-attired children. This illustration emphasizes the cultural distance between white French and black African and the physical distance the children traveled in order to reach such an 'exotic' locale.

Despite the need for colonial propaganda, the interwar French government had no intention of dismantling its empire. *La plus grande France* was to be a permanent expansion of French culture and identity. To create a cogent policy that would contribute to the discourse on identity, French colonialists attempted to know and understand their African possessions. Museums, artwork, expositions and colonial tourism dedicated to Africa indicate a widespread public ethnographic interest in the continent new to the inter-war period.⁴⁶ The collecting cards can be placed squarely within this tradition of colonial ethnography, which had been developing since the late-nineteenth century. Official channels of ethnographic production, such as the *École Coloniale*, which was opened in 1925, produced studies of colonial cultures. However, alternative means of ethnographic exploration also existed.⁴⁷ Interwar tourism was one arena of formation of the national imperial identity. In this case, tourism extends beyond physical travel to include the viewing of printed materials and metropolitan exhibits. Ethnography was not purely an academic pursuit, but also a commercial enterprise that sold images of the exotic to consumers, while avoiding the harsher realities of colonialism in Africa.

This is a useful way of thinking about the card albums; they are forms of visual tourism. The *Chocolat Cémoi* album includes two sets of cards dedicated to ethnographic representations of African subjects.



Figure 8: Chocolat Cémoi, 18, 19.

As seen in **Figure 8**, each card is a portrait of an African man, woman or child. The women's pictures feature hairstyles and facial/body scarring. The center card shows a woman with lip plate, turned in profile so as to emphasize this 'exotic' characteristic. Each woman is presented in an isolated rural setting, so as to confirm the 'authenticity' of these trading card illustrations.⁴⁸ A card labeled "Préparation de l'Huile de Palme" demonstrates another aspect of this ethnographic quality in the albums. As seen in **Figure 9** it shows fourteen women holding pestles and gathered around a basin constructed of hardened earth. They are

placed in the context of a village, with two



Figure 9: Chocolat Pupier, 7.
(Detail of Figure 1, pg. 69)

thatch-roofed buildings visible behind them. “La préparation de l’huile de palme exige . . . une abondante main-d’oeuvre féminine armée de longues perches,” proclaims the caption.⁴⁹ By reproducing a scene of community work in a rural village, the card contributes to an ethnography that labels African workers too unequal to be a part of urban, industrial France.

Visual depictions of the French colonies, meant for entertainment as much as education and propaganda, took other forms besides trading cards. One of the most wide-reaching of these spectacles was the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris. In his discussion of this event, Lebovics applies Fredric Jameson’s concept of “wrapping.”⁵⁰ ‘Wrapping’ refers to the process of incorporation and re-definition whereby a place or object is given a new identity. For the exposition, each pavilion was built both to represent a geographical place, with a unique culture, and to redefine it as a French place. By visually ‘wrapping’ the colonies in the accoutrements of French civilization, the exposition-planners succeeded in giving visitors the tools to locate these ‘exotic’ places within *la Grande France*. The exposition served not only as a visual display of the French empire and its imperial achievements; the pavilions became places to begin what Lebovics calls

“a kind of mutual apprenticeship in citizenship.”⁵¹ This observation points to the fact that the colonial process forced French citizens and colonial subjects alike to re-imagine their identities.

Like the temporary exhibits of the colonial exposition, the albums are ephemeral objects that wrapped the colonies in a French identity, and in the process contributed to its formation. They illustrate the desire to identify the colonies as part of France, while giving this colonial project a purpose by carrying out the *mission civilisatrice*. The albums’ depictions of the colonies were legitimate in the eyes of consumers because the colonies were shown as components of a stable and well-functioning France.

Promotional campaigns, such as the exposition, the albums, games and news coverage, were needed to instruct members of the metropolitan French public about their political and economic connections to the colonies. In his opening remarks to the 1931 colonial exposition, Minister of Colonies Paul Reynaud promoted the event as an opportunity “to make the empire a part of French consciousness.”⁵² The albums are evidence of this complex relationship between the French government, public and their African colonies. The growth of a French empire during the nineteenth century did not begin as a national project; the government and colonial supporters had to create and promote the concept of an “imperial culture” to gain support for their empire.⁵³ This culture can be described as “the domestication of the exotic, and the defamiliarization of the familiar.”⁵⁴ The imperial culture was defined by and located within metropolitan France, but included the colonies as part of its cultural identity.

The chocolate trading card albums are valuable records of imperial France because they present a comprehensive narrative of colonial involvement in Africa. While

each card is descriptive as an individual illustration of the French colonial conscious, as a collection they provide a clearer picture of the visual history of popular French colonialism.⁵⁵ Although this paper focuses on primary sources that were mass-produced and widely-distributed to French consumers, the elite social class that produced these advertising materials should also be subject to historical scrutiny. Were they really “reluctant modernizers who clung to the high cultural traditions of their past”?⁵⁶ Imperialism, nationalism and class struggle were movements that were closely related throughout the Third Republic, suggesting that a study of class, as well as race, would positively complicate an historical understanding of the formation of French national identity.

During the interwar period, the effort to create and sustain an imperial national identity involved “a people whose genius lay in assimilating peoples so that they both kept their *petit pays* and yet partook of the universal identity of a French-defined and French-administered humanity.”⁵⁷ The French government worked to promote a colonial consciousness through propaganda and economic regulations. The official narrative stated that colonies were beneficial to France, but did not play a role in the formation of a French national identity; the “transformative influence” only moved in one direction. Moreover, interwar colonial policies had to fulfill “a dual imperative,” that mandated ‘improving’ the colonies while keeping their ‘indigenous’ cultures the same.⁵⁸ The collecting card album illustrations follow these prescribed texts, but their existence and seeming popularity suggests that Africa did have a transformative influence on French identity. Images of Africa and Africans in these albums support the notion that France was France because it was imperial.

Endnotes

¹ Chocolat Pupier, ed., *L'Afrique* (France?: 193[?]), 1. "The African continent, which includes the largest part of non-metropolitan France, will entrance you with these beautiful images as they unfurl before your eyes . . ."

² The albums do not record publishing dates, but the content indicates that they were issued after Togoland and Cameroon became French mandates and before the beginning of European hostilities in the late 1930s.

³ Although one of the albums contains images of North Africa, I will focus on representations of Sub-Saharan Africa. See David Prochaska, "L'Algérie imaginaire: Jalons pour une histoire de l'iconographie coloniale," *Gradhiva* 7 (1989): 29-38, for an introduction to the French visual relationship with colonial North Africa.

⁴ Chocolat Pupier, 1.

⁵ Chocolat Pupier, 7, features scenes from French West Africa. Chocolat Cémoi, ed., *Historique des Colonies Françaises l'Afrique Équatoriale* (Grenoble: 193[?]), Série C, illustrates various examples of colonial architecture.

⁶ Deroo, 74. Deroo fails to ask why advertisers would adopt the official rhetoric to promote their goods.

⁷ Odile Goerg, "The French Provinces and 'Greater France,'" in *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France*, eds. Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 90.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹ Ellen Furlough, "Une leçon des choses: Tourism, Empire, and the Nation in Interwar France," *French Historical Studies* 25, 3 (2002): 447.

¹⁰ James Genoa, *Colonial Ambivalence, Cultural Authenticity, and the Limitations of Mimicry in French-Ruled West Africa*,

1914-1956 (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 105-106.

¹¹ See Elizabeth Ezra, *The Colonial Unconscious: Race and Culture in Interwar France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

¹² Genoa, 180-181.

¹³ Chocolat Cémoi, 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵ Chocolat Pupier, 7.

¹⁶ *Negripub*, 110-111.

¹⁷ Aaron Segal, "The Republic of Goods: Advertising and National Identity in France, 1875-1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1995), 84.

¹⁸ Marjorie Beale, *The Modernist Enterprise: French Elites and the Threat of Modernity, 1900-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 103.

¹⁹ Chocolat Cémoi, Cérie C.

²⁰ Dana Hale, "French Images of Race on Product Trademarks during the Third Republic," in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, eds. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 131-132.

²¹ William Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and Chocolate, 1765-1914* (London: Routledge, 2000), 11, 24.

²² Marketworks, available from <http://images.marketworks.com>; Internet; accessed 27 March 2007. The Menier girl, reproduced in mass-market posters, remains recognizable among consumers.

²³ Chocolat Cémoi, page opposite of 'U.'

²⁴ Hale, 131.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁷ Susan Terrio, *Crafting the Culture and History of French Chocolate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 7.

²⁸ Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chi-

cago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 33. Herman Lebovics, *True France: The Wars Over Cultural Identity, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 9.

²⁹ Wilder, 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

³¹ Genova, 94.

³² Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 305. Conklin points out that the question should not be whether colonial policy was assimilationist or associationist, but in what contexts each of these occurred.

³³ Lebovics, 8.

³⁴ *Chocolat Cémoi*, cover and inside cover.

³⁵ Tyler Stovall, "National Identity and Shifting Imperial Frontiers: Whiteness and the Exclusion of Colonial Labor After World War I," *Representations* 84 (2003): 52.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 53, 58.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁸ Terrio, 255.

³⁹ Wilder, 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴² Conklin, 142, 168.

⁴³ Jean-Pierre Garson, "Migration and Interdependence: The Migration System between France and Africa," in *International Migration Systems: A Global Approach*, eds., Mary Kritz, Lin Lean Lim and Hania Zlotnik (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 82.

⁴⁴ See Wilder and Ezra for discussions on the popular French Africanism of the era.

⁴⁵ See Figure 7.

⁴⁶ See Chris Godsen and Chantal Knowles, *Collecting Colonialism: Material Culture and Colonial Change* (Oxford:

Berg, 2001).

⁴⁷ Furlough, 447.

⁴⁸ Chocolat Cémoi, 18, 19.

⁴⁹ Chocolat Pupier, 7.

⁵⁰ Lebovics, 57.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵⁴ Ezra, 9.

⁵⁵ However, without data on the publication and circulation numbers of the albums, it remains unclear how effective they were in promoting a colonial message.

⁵⁶ Beale, 172.

⁵⁷ Lebovics, 93.

⁵⁸ Wilder, 5, 7.

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