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# Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris

Jennifer Anne Boittin

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COLONIAL  
METR°POLIS

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France Overseas:  
*Studies in Empire  
and Decolonization*

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# COLONIAL METR°POLIS

*The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism  
and Feminism in Interwar Paris*

JENNIFER ANNE BOITTIN

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS | LINCOLN & LONDON

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Set in Fournier MT by Kim Essman.

Designed by A. Shahan.

*A ma famille,  
to my family,  
On several continents  
but always near  
And to Jens*



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# INTRODUCTION

On May 6, 1931, a black man walked up the steps of a brand new metro station in Paris.<sup>1</sup> The Métro Dorée station was built as part of the French government's bid to lure what would eventually be 8 million visitors to the event known as the Colonial Exposition. Analogous to a world's fair, the Colonial Exposition was a project to showcase France's colonial empire both to its own citizens and to other nations. The policemen who were staking out the métro exit immediately noticed the man as he emerged from underground. After all, very few people of African descent were attempting to enter the exposition. Most Africans and Antilleans (people from the French West Indies, or Caribbean) were already inside its gates, in attendance not to visit but to perform aspects of colonial life for visiting dignitaries and other spectators.

Agent Joé, as he was known, was at the Colonial Exposition on its opening day not only to take in the sights. He was also an informer, there to report on what he heard and saw in the African, Caribbean, and other colonial milieus of Paris to the French authorities. If he had made it through the exposition's gates, his task would have been to locate other politically militant black men present at the event and take note of what they said and to whom they said it. Were they speaking to the performers, who had been sailed in for the exposition and were to be sent back overseas once it was over, hopefully without the baggage of Parisian anticolonial politics? Were they approaching white French men and women? However, with only a few hundred meters to go Joé was waylaid himself and arrested by the police inspectors, who discreetly took him to a police station nearby. Convinced that

he was militantly opposed to France's presence in the colonies, they detained him until 6:00 p.m., perhaps in the hope that he would not cross paths with the visiting notables arriving that afternoon. None of the superiors to whom he usually reported came to his rescue, perhaps because they were at the Colonial Exposition.

A mere three weeks later, on May 28, Joé was once again confronted by the police. He was on his way to a meeting organized by the Federal Union of Students and the League Against Imperialism (LAI). A few meters from the door of the auditorium to which he was headed, he recognized one of the inspectors who had detained him on the day of the exposition's inauguration. The man eyed him suspiciously. Joé's words best describe what happened next:

Seeing, once again, that stupid and idiotic gesture of policemen who seek only to aggravate everyone, and after my wife had told me that there was no one at the auditorium of the Sociétés Savantes . . . I made the decision to leave—and departed by the Rue des Grands-Augustins where we sat down at the terrace of a small café near the Seine. Still, during more than an hour that we stayed there, we were watched and hounded all the time by two men who seemed to us to be two policemen.<sup>2</sup>

This outburst has been preserved at the Overseas Archives in Aix-en-Provence, a hand-written document amidst the many typed sheets that make up the Service de Liaison avec les Originaires des Territoires Français d'Outre-Mer archival series (Service for Liaising with People Originating in the French Overseas Territories, SLOTFOM).<sup>3</sup> Even the thick, dark pencil marks that were intended to censor his irritation before it was typed into a report remain. Among the censored items was his criticism of the police as incapable of acting with dignity or intelligence.

This book argues that interwar Paris was a colonial space, meaning a space in which the specter of "empire" guided the self-identification of its residents as well as their social and political interactions. Joé's experiences illustrate the complexity of living in such an environ-

ment. He and his wife were two of the many black and white men and women who expressed their politics and culture through the prisms of race and gender. In the process they shaped Paris into a colonial metropolis.<sup>4</sup> Within this city, men and women learned to rearticulate their desires and dissents after deliberately or inadvertently introducing one another to their particular manipulations of identity politics. Thus here the term colonial, as opposed to imperial, reveals the agency, or autonomy, embedded in the act of occupying and utilizing city spaces—white women and colonial migrants all found their own ways to “colonize” Paris.

As these men and women exchanged culture and politics, they transformed this cosmopolitan setting into their locus of power. The possibilities for these men and women to challenge the political and cultural status quo were multiplied in Paris by their proximity to core administrative and political institutions and by constant encounters with empire. Like the port cities of Marseille, Toulon, Le Havre, and Bordeaux, Paris was a point of transit for colonial populations. Paris was also the hub of imperial government and a base for many artists and intellectuals. Black anti-imperial organizations—with their litany of exigencies ranging from equal civil liberties in the colonies to nationhood and independence from France—had their headquarters in the city. So did feminists, in a reflection of the centralization that has often characterized France. In Paris, empire took shape in the colonial migrants present on its streets, in the white men and women who had traveled to the colonies but were based in the city, and in the many images and representations of empire. Those without the vote and other civil rights discovered that the grounds for their struggles, and justifications they advanced in demanding their rights, were limited neither to the colonies nor to the metropole. Indeed, the two spaces were inherently connected and thus colonial and metropolitan men and women could play urban and overseas connections off of one another as they searched for effective arguments and unified fronts.

This book started with a two-part question: Were there any links between the French fascination with jazz and other forms of black culture during the 1920s and 1930s and the men and women of African descent who lived in France during that time? Was the cultural



phenomenon known as, among other things, the *tumulte noir* (black tumult) in any way tied to the politics (including anti-imperialism) and social lives of those it supposedly represented? Answering this question called for learning about the African, African American, and Antillean men and women in France. Two ways of tracing the existences of black men and women soon presented themselves: through their artistic and literary productions and through their daily lives as recorded by the French state, notably in police records.<sup>5</sup> Combined, these approaches were not only fascinating but in turn structured the book's main premise: that Paris during the 1920s and 1930s can be considered a colonial metropolis. Why? In part because of what these sources do not explain. For example, what did it mean that African American actress, dancer, and singer Josephine Baker was mentioned in a report about the anti-imperialist from the French Sudan (today Mali) Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté? Why were most African and Caribbean intellectuals of the 1930s, such as the future Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor, largely absent from police records? Why were their (until recently) less well-known female counterparts, the Martinican Nardal sisters, referenced comparatively often? Clearly certain organizations and names constituted focal points of black communities, but others only touched upon in the reports were also palpable parts of these networks. Moreover, not all those cryptically alluded to were black. Some were white women whose elusive lives, activities, and literary productions were relegated to references even more fleeting than those accorded black colonial men.

So how and why were white women, including a number of feminists, in contact with politically active, working-class black men? And who else was a part of these networks? My initial question had evolved so that I could no longer study only colonial migrants. With so many other people a part of the migrants' communities and horizons, this book explores what their interactions teach us about interwar Paris, the relationship between colonies and their metropole, and the manner in which class, gender, and race intersected among groups legally consigned to the outskirts of citizenship between the wars. The four overarching groups most often mentioned both in the texts written by black colonial migrants and feminists and in the po-

lice reports about them—black men, black women, white men, and white women—were not just talking about race, or class, or gender. Rather, through such categories they were also dissecting and coming to terms with France’s relationship to its colonies, the colonies’ relationship to France, and their place within that association.

### *Colonial Migrants and Feminists*

Africans and Antilleans were intriguing members of France’s pre–World War I past, interwar present, and for that matter twentieth- and twenty-first-century future. They had been integrated into the empire in two waves. During the early colonialism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, France acquired parts of present-day Senegal in West Africa, as well as overseas territories in or near the West Indies including Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana in South America, and, most famously, St. Domingue (today Haiti), which gained independence in 1804. Still France amassed most of its overseas territory throughout the nineteenth century during what is sometimes termed a period of new imperialism. North Africa (including Algeria), West and Equatorial (or central) Africa, the island of Madagascar (off the East coast of Africa), and Indochina (Vietnam and surrounding territories) all became colonies during this century.

Until World War I colonized citizens and subjects remained largely out of sight, far from metropolitan France, and thus were more representation than person to most French people. However during the war approximately 134,000 West African and Malagasy soldiers and several thousand workers, as well as numerous North African, Chinese, and Indochinese soldiers and workers, fought or labored in France.<sup>6</sup> In all, some half million colonial soldiers were deployed in Europe and in addition, 20,000 made their way to Europe from the older colonies such as Guadeloupe and Martinique.<sup>7</sup> Some found ways to stay on in France after the war and were joined by more colonial migrants. A definitive count of black colonial migrants during the interwar years is difficult to establish, in part because the numbers the police provided at the time often did not take into account Antilleans (who were French citizens); these figures conflicted with the police’s own estimates that several hundred black men regularly at-

tended political rallies in Paris alone; and records probably took into account only those Africans whose immigration status was regularized. Authorities calculated the presence in France of 379 French West and Equatorial Africans along with 462 Malagasies in September 1924 (out of 9,496 colonial migrants of every origin); of 2,015 Africans and 665 Malagasies in November 1926; and of 894 Africans and 559 Malagasies in June 1932 (out of 3,745 colonial migrants of every origin).<sup>8</sup> Approximately a third of what has been conservatively estimated as 3,000 to 5,000 African men in the country were believed to be in the Paris region (in all likelihood only 2 percent of the total African population, including North Africans, was female).<sup>9</sup> However, still according to the police, in 1926 there were as many as 10,000 to 15,000 black men in Paris alone.<sup>10</sup> The latter numbers probably include those from the French West Indies, although they still seem high and may very well take into account North Africans who were often simply termed African. Whatever the exact numbers, although some black colonies had been a part of France for far longer than areas such as Algeria or French Indochina, the latter populations were a more formidable presence in France by the 1920s and 1930s.

Why, then, focus upon black colonial migrants? They had enduring ties to France and to each other—in particular with respect to parts of Senegal and the West Indies. In order to capitalize upon the goods provided by the West Indies, France not only had to establish trading posts and ports, but (more problematically) to find manpower—slavepower—to produce these goods. Starting with France's first colonial empire, then, Senegal was linked to the Caribbean because France's ports in Africa functioned as the points of exit for slaves crossing the Atlantic. The history of slavery in both regions shaped how these men and women thought about colonialism and race in the twentieth century. Moreover, some colonized people in these territories were French citizens, but others were not. This contrast in civil and suffrage rights, often perceived as arbitrarily imposed by the French authorities, influenced considerations of what it meant to belong to a French republic legitimized in part by its claim to be founded on universal rights. The very fact that there were fewer black than other colonial migrants means that their strategies for coping with metropolitan life and building communities in the metropole are both

less well understood and well worth exploring. For example, black colonial migrants in Paris were not only defined by authorities, but also defined themselves, through a manipulation of the language of race, thereby claiming transatlantic ties to Africa, North America, and South America. Finally, the *tumulte noir* as a phenomenon was distinctive. There were, of course, cultural manifestations of exoticism showcasing other colonial groups. However they did not contribute to the production of a superstar quite as ubiquitous as Josephine Baker, or a phenomenon such as jazz, both of which remain important parts of France's culture to this day. Nor did they rely upon a blending of cultures that stemmed from three continents and their islands.

Paris was transformed by the arrival of black colonial migrants after World War I, but it was also marked by a second major development: the growing presence of women, including outspoken feminists, in the public sphere.<sup>11</sup> Like colonial migrants, these women saw representations of themselves abound in popular culture. Following the war, women and black men renewed similar demands. Both groups wished to become full-fledged citizens with access to civil rights and perhaps even suffrage, either of France or of lands they hoped would soon be decolonized and transformed into independent nations. Several governments of France's Third Republic (1870–1940) found various excuses for evading these requests. Indeed women did not obtain the vote, and colonized men and women did not win independence or negotiate assimilation, until after the next world war. In the meantime colonized men and feminist women were in a strategic location for making themselves heard by both fellow migrants and other disabused metropolitans, since they had converged in Paris and other urban centers for their wartime jobs and often stayed there following World War I. The migration intended to fulfill the nation's need for a wartime workforce soon gave rise to an intellectual and political evolution that called into question a number of the tenets of Third Republic France, including the place of empire and of women in modern life.

What do the stories of black colonial migrants and feminists help us to understand? As a colonial space Paris was significant both to the colonized and to the colonizers. The city fostered and was nurtured by incredibly vibrant communities intent upon confronting var-

ious aspects of France's empire. Their stories reveal the many ways in which colonialism became a part of daily lives. This is not to say that empire was a system taken for granted. Instead, people seeking to assert themselves, or resist what they interpreted as the inflexible components of the imperial nation-state to which they all belonged, recognized the presence of colonialism. They tweaked their readings of it and found ways to integrate it into their struggles. The groups explored in this book demonstrate some of the ways in which a transnational system and local struggles for identity collided. Feminism, nationalism, and other forms of political militancy are sometimes assumed to be about difference, the construction of one identity in opposition to another. The story told here suggests that dialogue, open-mindedness, and the construction of networks across disparate groups were also an important part of these identity politics.

Colonialism mattered, to put it bluntly, to a lot of people in a lot of different ways. This book focuses upon voices that murmured in response, those that spun intricate webs of political and social commentary, and those that roared. Some words have since been garbled or misplaced and others have simply not been considered, or not been contemplated in this particular manner. The focus upon black colonial migrants is not intended to exclude other colonial migrants or anyone else from the colonial metropolis. To the contrary, this book is also about North African and Indochinese migrants: not with respect to the vast majority of its examples, footnotes, or stories, but with respect to its understanding that multiple singular, local experiences—whether those of groups or of individuals—when contrasted to one another reveal connections, interactions, and patterns that taken together can help us to better comprehend the many facets of what made France an imperial nation-state.

*Frameworks: Empire, Immigration,  
Diaspora, Race, Gender, and Locality*

This book explores empire as it coincides with metropole, immigration as it overlaps with black and African diaspora, race as it intersects with gender and class, and the effects of specific locations upon all these frameworks. Let us then consider these contexts for a moment.

Ever since the French Revolution of 1789 first pronounced France to be a republic and a democracy based both on universal and on national rights, one question has lingered: how can an individual's rights be guaranteed by his or her humanity while being restricted by legal definitions of French citizenship and civil rights as put forth by the nation? Humanity should trump citizenship, and yet has not consistently done so within France's history. Otherwise, suffrage and civil rights would have been ubiquitous in every one of its republics, rather than being limited by gender, income, or geography.

Noting the ongoing tension between universal rights and how particular groups or individuals have been treated throughout modern French history, historian Gary Wilder proposes that we read France between the wars as an imperial nation-state. Understanding colonialism as merely some kind of blight on France, in need of condemnation or arduous justification, threatens to limit our reading of its history. As an intricate, albeit muddled part of France from the moment the country first became a republic, colonialism needs to be understood as part of what defines the nation, not something accidental, exceptional, or external to it. Once the nation-state is understood to be imperial, then our focus can turn to the many ways in which its people dealt with the paradoxes they daily experienced or witnessed. Or as historian Frederick Cooper suggests, we can consider how both the leaders of empire-states and those involved in political insubordination from within those systems were "thinking like an empire."<sup>12</sup>

Although France's imperial nature had more distant roots, it was after World War I that the French truly shifted from considering only "individual autonomy or national identity" to considering race and empire, a fact that helps to explain why the daily struggles of city dwellers in Paris commingled with empire during the interwar years.<sup>13</sup> The idea of a colonial metropolis based in mainland France makes sense from this perspective.<sup>14</sup> But how does recognizing Paris as a colonial metropolis help us to understand France as an imperial nation-state? Ever since scholars first started putting more emphasis on the central role of immigration in France, many studies have focused on migrants' relationships to the state and French perceptions of migrants (including xenophobia and racism).<sup>15</sup> These immigration

studies intersect in intriguing ways with the rich and growing body of literature on how Africans, Antilleans, and African Americans in France were part of a diaspora with roots in Africa and slavery.<sup>16</sup> In approaching these fields I focus on migrants' agency, meaning how they functioned as a community that also defined itself internally, rather than solely in relationship to the republic. Moreover, I do not consider primarily the relationships that migrants entered into with colonial administrators and settlers. Instead, I delve into exchanges between men and women who although not its official representatives, were also not unconscious inhabitants of an empire.<sup>17</sup> There is still much to be learned about such personal, cultural, and social interactions in France by careful readings of sources such as the *SLOTFOM* series. They invite us to explore not just how black workers and intellectuals differed amongst themselves in their Parisian politics and lives, but also and just as intriguingly how black and white men and women interacted within the capital of an imperial nation-state.<sup>18</sup> Studying the interplay among empire-minded Parisians contributes to our awareness of how anti-imperialists and feminists were affected by one another, police informants, and the city itself.

Thus, this book further adds to existing literature with a systematic gendered analysis of intellectual, political, and social relations among the colonizers and colonized evolving in an urban setting. The importance of gender as a category of analysis for probing metropolitan-colonial dynamics has been well established, as has the importance of evaluating gender with race.<sup>19</sup> That being said, masculinity in particular remains underexplored within the francophone context, even though it was a crucial component of how early black, anti-imperial, working-class circles, as well as intellectual ones, functioned.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, the links among feminism, colonialism, race, and anti-imperialism are still far less well understood in the francophone setting than they are in the anglophone one.<sup>21</sup> Albeit not always in agreement with respect to what constituted feminism or its goals, many women in interwar France were conscious that both Paris and the imperial context could help them to elaborate their politics.

The last major theme upon which this book focuses is the importance of locality in our understanding of transnational imperial his-

tory. This study of the intricate links between metropole and colony substantiates the claim that social changes are reflections of both worldwide patterns and local contestations and therefore that scholars should consider “metropole and colony in a single analytic field.”<sup>22</sup> Within this premise, I also consider the places in which struggles developed. Colonial histories warrant local analysis because this approach sheds light on the particularities of specific social and political systems.<sup>23</sup> Paris lends itself well to such local analysis because in this city the center and peripheries of empire coincided.<sup>24</sup>

*The Jazz Age, Colonial Politics, and Parisian Spaces*

The cultural phenomenon known variously as the jazz age, negro-philosophy, the *tumulte noir*, and the *vogue nègre* affected those considering colonialism.<sup>25</sup> Such people included African and Antillean students, workers, and intellectuals who created black nationalistic movements that permanently transformed the relationship between French colonies and the metropole. They not only generated the *vogue nègre*, in the case of performers, but also had their perspectives fundamentally altered through negro-philosophy’s often explicit focus on exoticism and sexuality, an intersection that brought gender to the fore of race relations. In “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” the German philosopher, essayist, and critic Walter Benjamin argues that during world exhibitions the entertainment industry elevated “people to the level of commodities.”<sup>26</sup> His analysis relates to the interwar years. In the twentieth century, Parisians flocked to the Colonial Exposition because they felt as though the world was coming to them, and black performers became a commodity, partially enthroned as “merchandise.”<sup>27</sup>

Yet not only black migrants who rejoiced in the limelight but also those who were just walking down the street to buy their groceries risked being viewed as specimens in a Paris that sought out the museums, ethnography, and collections to which exotic memorabilia were imported.<sup>28</sup> The tension between everyday life, politics, and the cultural production of blackness is explored from several angles in this book. Josephine Baker, for example, chose the role of performer; the black, Martinican Nardal sisters had it forced upon them; African



and Antillean anti-imperialists used their status as permanent spectacle to gain a foothold in the political and social circles of Paris, effectively reversing the exoticism imposed upon them; white men and women, in reaction to the *vogue nègre*, felt challenged to expand their circle of consciousness to include the outer reaches of the empire. Some white women formulated astute readings of the links between their own representations within popular culture and those of colonial individuals.

While the dissection of representations of blackness has previously led to some fascinating studies, this book steps away from the realm of the French social imaginary (“the cultural elements from which we construct our understanding of the social world”) and into an analysis of how representations overlapped with, and influenced, interactions.<sup>29</sup> Superficial contacts, whether physical or intellectual, were often initiated in settings such as the Colonial Exposition or nightclubs. These were rather obvious places for Parisian constructions of colonial otherness. At times, exchanges were subsequently pursued into more complex and enduring relationships that were political, emotional, intellectual, physical, or social and moved through other Parisian spaces.<sup>30</sup> The mediums in which these interactions emerged comprised novels, newspapers, streets, political organizations, police reports, spies’ minutes, films, graphic art, and more. Some spaces were tangible urban constructions such as streets or rooms sheltering political meetings. Others, such as newspapers, novels, and films, were elusive forums of a creative or intellectual type. Each chapter of this work is structured around such modes of expression, or sources, available to and favored by its urban characters. The chapters thus approach the same events, time period, and themes from different perspectives, thereby creating a series of snapshots of the many ways in which men and women fashioned Paris into a colonial metropolis.

#### *Agent Joé in the Colonial Metropolis*

Agent Joé was one such person. We met him at the beginning of this chapter, complaining to his superiors about being trailed and arrested. Joé’s case illustrates how informants can be considered “participant observers.”<sup>31</sup> They were heavily implicated in the revolution-

ary milieus upon which they spied. Reports such as those Joé wrote are repositories of details that illuminate otherwise obscure exchanges among Parisians. Their authors' identities were veiled by pseudonyms and their real names reserved for oral communication.<sup>32</sup> Yet much, including many Indochinese informants' identities, has been uncovered about their choices and lives that illuminates the significance of this source group as a whole.<sup>33</sup> Joé and other agents bring to light how unambiguous distinctions rapidly dissolved within the colonial metropolis.

In 1923 the Ministry of Colonies centralized surveillance of colonial migrants within the Centre des Affaires Indigènes (Center for Native Affairs, CAI). It later became the SLOTFOM, which is why the archival series has this acronym. Helping colonial migrants in the metropole was part of the justification for its existence, but the CAI's focus was spying upon and regulating urban associations.<sup>34</sup> The CAI worked closely with the Ministry of the Interior, and in particular with the French Sûreté Générale, or secret police, to recruit spies, translators, and so forth. The CAI also coordinated locally with the Prefecture of Police, another division of the Ministry of the Interior, and in particular with the prefecture's political branch (Renseignements Généraux), which had a section devoted to watching over migrants and detecting revolutionary colonial propaganda. In addition, the CAI exchanged information with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, overseas, with the Governors General of various French colonies and their local sûretés.<sup>35</sup>

Distinctions such as skin color and language made African, Caribbean, and Malagasy men stand out on the streets of Paris, but behind closed doors these attributes instilled a protective barrier. Informants could only be easily integrated when they originated from within the ranks of those upon whom they reported. Once recruited, their existence was normalized; for example they held routine jobs as cover for their role as informant. But why did they become agents? Pro-French sentiment may have persuaded some. Money was certainly a motivation, and so was coercion—perhaps release from prison in exchange for cooperation.<sup>36</sup> Neither of the latter factors was reliably effectual; in July 1927 Marseille-based agents, incensed by their near

poverty, slurred the CAI and threatened to reserve bullets for each of their bosses.<sup>37</sup> However, authorities held two motivational trumps in hand: at any moment, they could force spies to return to the empire's periphery or they could blow their cover.<sup>38</sup> In November 1937 Agent Coco, knowing that he had been privy to details to which very few people had access, begged readers, "Please keep secret, for now, this information."<sup>39</sup>

Angry as it made him, being arrested and later shadowed in May 1931 protected Agent Joé. On that same day other members of the anti-imperialist organization known as the Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre (League for the Defense of the *Nègre* Race, LDRN) were followed by policemen. One, the anti-imperialist leader Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté, confronted his tail only to hear "we have orders to follow you, don't complain or we'll arrest you pronto—plus when we leave around 6 p.m., two others will relieve us."<sup>40</sup> Later that day another black member of the LDRN slipped into the exposition. Rather than viewing his freedom of movement as a success, members of the LDRN became wary. If this man had not been detained, did that mean he was an informant?

At the next LDRN meeting, all those who had been trailed recounted their frustration. Agent Joé was present—he wrote one of the reports about the meeting—and he grumbled about his arrest to fellow members.<sup>41</sup> He was, in fact, the only person detained on the opening day of the exposition. The others were merely warned away. The details Agent Joé consigned in his note to superiors explaining why he never made it into the Colonial Exposition were exactly the same as those given in three other reports—but in the latter three documents his true name was used.<sup>42</sup> Overlap, in particular with respect to elements such as the police station to which he was taken, makes it reasonable to conclude that Agent Joé was Edmond Thomas Ramananjato.

Ramananjato was an extremely outspoken, intelligent and incisive member of the black community. He came to France from Madagascar in order to fight in World War I and then worked under exploitative conditions for a horticulturalist named Carriat. He was naturalized French in 1924. After arriving in Paris, Ramananjato became an accountant and lived in an apartment near the Moulin Rouge, which

was at the heart of the heated Montmartre nightlife in which blacks were so exoticized. He was first noticed as being connected with the anti-imperial community in 1929, just as Agent Jo   started signing his notes on the black community.<sup>43</sup> His central role in militant organizations was reflected in his multiple elections as treasurer and secretary of the LDRN and other anti-imperial organizations. He was also politically engaged in the Malagasy community. And as an informant with the proper linguistic skills, he wrote prolifically about Malagasy performers at the Colonial Exposition.

Jo   certainly had a stake in the CAI’s game of cat and mouse. Even his arrest may not have been straightforward. Occasionally arrests were planned by the CAI to bolster the credibility of its informants, and his May 6, 1931, arrest may have been one such set-up.<sup>44</sup> Yet this possibility is hard to determine in Jo  ’s case because while he explained in a quick postscript to superiors that the two policemen “m’ont fait passer” for a known militant, the phrase has two contradictory meanings: they “passed me off as” a political militant or they “made me out to be” a political militant.<sup>45</sup> On one hand, soon thereafter Ramananjato was listed as one of only two people whom the leading anti-imperialist of the moment, Kouyat  , trusted.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, so much of the CAI’s system depended upon no one knowing who the informants actually were, that if this was a set-up it seems most likely the policemen were tipped off to the presence of an anti-imperialist by Jo  ’s handler. In other words, the policemen never learned that he was an informant.

While the arrest may have been routine, there was nothing feigned about Jo  ’s privately expressed outrage when he was tailed just a few weeks later. Agents’ handlers were often highly suspicious of productive informants like Jo  , prolific ones who were at the center of revolutionary milieus.<sup>47</sup> His spying did not preclude genuine anti-imperialist sentiment or that he would invest in maintaining a black colony in interwar Paris. After all, Ramananjato was convincing enough in his politics for several other informants to write reports about him. And he certainly openly rejected limits being placed on his freedom. When Agent Jo   seethed, “*I made the decision to leave,*” (emphasis mine) after noticing his tails, he attempted to regain control over the

situation by asserting his authority. This language gains added meaning when one considers that his wife had just witnessed the humiliation of his second encounter with the police. Although political activists knew that they were being watched, they rarely meekly accepted this challenge from the authorities.

This book explores many examples similar to Joé's of how black men colonized and moved through Parisian spaces, at times aggressively. They, and others, constructed their identity in part through the conception of autonomous spaces. The multiplication of such spaces and manipulation of their environment, then, allowed black and white, men and women, to figure out how to define themselves, their politics, their communities, and their identities. While investing themselves in the shaping of traditional as well as nontraditional urban localities, black and white Parisians used their relationship to colonialism as both a way of coming to terms with their own identity, and an active process by which to ground themselves in, or even to "colonize," Paris.

#### *A Brief Note on Terminology*

Racial terms such as *noir* (black), *nègre* (loosely Negro), *métis* (mixed race), and *mulâtre* (mulatto), as well as their feminine equivalents *négresse*, *mulâtresse*, and *métisse*, cannot be translated precisely into English, and indeed in the French language have a very rich linguistic and historical background that will be explored throughout this work. Malagasies, West Africans, Antilleans, and the French constructed communities for themselves or were perceived in Paris in part through such language, but the categories of race, gender, and class are neither binary nor immutable. (For more on the problem of translating these terms see Brent Hayes Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*.) Hence they will be left in French throughout, as well as the terms *indigène*, which here refers to a native of the French colonies, and *tirailleurs* (infantry troops made up of *indigènes*). "Colonial migrants" refers to colonized men and women living either permanently or temporarily in France (see MacMaster, *Colonial Migrants and Racism*). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.