The Journal of African History (2025), **66**, e9, 1–15
doi:10.1017/S0021853725100534

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Making Violators: Employers and African Workers in Colonial Dakar, 1918–43

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(Received 6 July 2023; revised 3 July 2025; accepted 24 July 2025)

Abstract

The domination and exploitation inherent to colonialism entailed casting Africans as violators of European standards, expectations, and even aspirations. This article identifies messaging which permeated the everyday experiences of African wage earners by locating the ways in which employers embedded their understanding of Africans as potential violators into the employment relationship. It examines the records of the Tribunal de Première Instance in Dakar, Senegal, during the decades of high colonialism to reveal the nature of that dynamic, exploring implicit expectations among employers regarding their employees, particularly related to allegations of theft or abandonment of work brought against workers. Analysis of such cases particularly highlights domestic workers, who were overwhelmingly male. The interactions and claims in the justice records reveal clear constructions of violation within the attitudes and actions of non-African employers in colonial Dakar and present the court as a venue for perpetuating that rhetoric.

Keywords: West Africa; Senegal; colonialism; courts; employment; racism; urban

The concept of violation was at the heart of colonialism's mechanisms of control. By framing Africans as violators, imperial powers could construe their own actions as constituting a needed corrective presence in Africa. Examined here, "violation" refers not only to infractions of codified laws but to the framing of Africans as inherently prone to transgressing European norms and expectations, justifying continuous colonial intervention in and control over African lives. This article examines the ways in which employers transformed personal expectations into quasi-legal rules they then accused Africans of violating, even when such expectations had no basis in actual law. This dynamic of violation revealed itself in workplace relations in Dakar from the late 1910s into the 1940s, the prime period for both labor and legal regimes in colonial Africa. Delving into evidence from the urban colonial civil court, this analysis considers the ways in which high-level colonial rhetoric about African violation filtered into employment practices and interactions. Employers used the Tribunal de Première Instance, Dakar's principal court, to assert their own preferences as formalized norms, reinforcing a culture in which African workers were positioned as perpetual violators. This study provides a new lens for understanding both labor and courts in French West Africa (FWA) by showing that non-African employers enacted a violation framework grounded not in legal codes but in performative assertions of entitlement in court when dealing in matters concerning African workers.

The construct of Africans as violators took clear shape as Europe ceased slave trading with Africa in the nineteenth century, giving rise to claims among European powers that their own direct

intervention in Africa was required to stamp out slavery on the continent.[1] Europeans presented themselves as liberators, dislodging powerful African states they asserted were oppressive or "alien" among "native" African populations.[2] In FWA, that rhetoric intensified following the 1903 decision by colonial authorities to outlaw unfree servitude in the colony. The proclamation ostensibly positioned France as a liberating force, but it also created new mechanisms for labor control and extraction.[3] Violation maintained a central place in the logic of colonial actions to that effect. As Florence Bernault has shown, colonial states "fabricated and disseminated" violence in their legal and carceral regimes as a means of self-justification; this formed systems where African transgressions were necessary to the functioning of colonial governance.[4] Criminalization of African movement became a means of domination and labor production, and vagrancy laws and native codes reinforced this.[5] The *indigénat* in FWA, for instance, empowered commandants to exercise arbitrary power over African subjects.[6]

The systems upholding these regimes were rooted in the premise that Africans violated Western norms and required interventionist devices of control. This embodies what Frantz Fanon theorized some years later as the Manichean world of colonialism: there existed a rigid binary system dividing the colonizer from the colonized in which the African population was cast as inherently deviant or criminal, while the colonizer's identity stood in direct opposition to that contrived moral deficiency.[7] Violation was inherent to this type of construct, and as it upheld all Europeans—not just the colonial state—in establishing what was acceptable, it made of them both the creators and judges of the code in force. The framing of violation explored here extends Fanon's Manichean binary and Partha Chatterjee's notion of the "truth of colonial difference"—a premise of inferiority that underpinned colonial dominance—into local workplace arrangements and dynamics between Europeans and Africans in colonial Dakar, capital of FWA.[8]

[1]For the depiction of Africans as violent in an analysis of French manipulations of images of African colonial soldiers, asserting that this stereotype emerged during the slave trade and served European interests, see Ruth Ginio, "French Officers, African Officers, and the Violent Image of African Colonial Soldiers," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 36, no. 2 (2010): 59–75.

[2]Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 4, 40, 255, 317; Anna Pondopoulo, "The Construction of Fulani Otherness in Faidherbe's Writings," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 36, no. 3 (1996): 421–41; Robin Law, "The 'Hamitic Hypothesis' in Indigenous West African Historical Thought," *History in Africa* 36 (2009): 293–314. For Islam's role in engendering colonial portrayals of alienness, see Christopher Harrison, *France and Islam in West Africa, 1860–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Benjamin F. Soares, *Islam and the Prayer Economy: History and Authority in a Malian Town* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 53–59. For a thorough framing of the shift in French policy to *Islam noir*, see David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880–1920* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000). Paul Lovejoy points out that Islamic states acted as a bulwark against European hegemony even well before colonial conquest in his "Islam, Slavery, and Political Transformation in West Africa: Constraints on the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade," *Outre-mers* 89, no. 336 (2002): 280.

[3]Richard Roberts, "Slavery, the End of Slavery, and the Intensification of Work in the French Soudan, 1883–1912," *African Economic History* 49, no. 1 (2021): 47–72.

[4]Florence Bernault, "The Shadow of Rule: Colonial Power and Modern Punishment in Africa," in *Cultures of Confinement: A History of the Prison in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, eds. Frank Dikkoter and Ian Brown (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 55–94.

[5]Babacar Fall, *Le travail forcé en Afrique occidentale française,1900–1945* (Paris: Karthala, 1993). See also: Benedetta Rossi, "From Unfree Work to Working for Free: Labor, Aid, and Gender in the Nigerien Sahel, 1930–2000," *International Labor and Working Class History* 92, (2017): 155–82.

[6]Gregory Mann, "What Was the Indigénat? The 'Empire of Law' In French West Africa," *The Journal of African History* 50, no. 3 (2009): 331–53. See also: Ousmane Gueye, *Le Code de l'indigénat: historique en Afrique francophone 1887–1946* (Dakar: Harmattan Sénégal, 2019); Gilbert Doho, *Le Code de l'indigénat: ou, Le fondement des États autocratiques en Afrique francophone* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2017); and Alexander Keese, "Slow Abolition within the Colonial Mind: British and French Debates about 'Vagrancy,' 'African Laziness,' and Forced Labour in West Central and South Central Africa, 1945–1965," *International Review of Social History* 59, no. 3 (2014): 377–407.

[7]Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 41–51.

[8]Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 20–22.

The manifestation of violation dynamics in the workplace emerged clearly in Dakar by the dawn of the 1920s, when urbanization intensified, and wage labor had become widespread across sectors. The interwar period generated anxiety among administrators about the access and power of city dwellers not only as workers but as local political power brokers and as state employees. As Harry Gamble has shown, such concerns prompted the administration of FWA to minimize urban dwellers and to resort, in the service of the maintenance of racialized hierarchies, to simple binaries that divided African and French students, urban and rural ones.[9] In their commitment to distancing Africans from Europeans prior to the Second World War, colonial officials also struggled to imagine Africans as normal urban wage-earners. Frederick Cooper's work on this has demonstrated that states held expedient rationales for the conditions they imposed on African laborers, asserting African incompatibility with modern economic systems.[10] The framing of Africans as fiscally irresponsible and thus deserving—even requiring—inadequate wages is something I have shown as central to the functioning of colonial Dakar in the interwar years.[11] Thus, a lens of deficiency and transgression was a constant, particularly in cities. Employers brought this to the fore in their own practice of wielding violation as a tool of control and power.

This article explores a culture of violation as manifested in the Tribunal de Première Instance, Dakar's main civil court, moving through three areas of exploration to reveal how deeply it permeated employer-employee relations. Only cases between non-African employers and African workers are examined, with either appearing as plaintiff. Such cases, which constitute just under 20 percent of the civil cases in the archives of the tribunal, reveal particular power dynamics and a clear violation framework, which this analysis approaches in three areas. First, this study considers pay and termination cases, revealing that unwritten, arbitrary expectations functioned as violable rules in the workplace. It then explores theft accusations concerning employees, demonstrating the ways in which employers mobilized the colonial court to reinforce racial hierarchies, even when evidence was nonexistent or when the employer was the defendant. Lastly, it considers the particular vulnerability of male workers, particularly those termed "boys," within the violation-invoking patterns of domestic workplaces. Such cases feature prominently in the archive and expose the ways in which non-African employers internalized the colonial understanding of Africans as violators into the employment relationship.

Among employment cases between non-African employers and African employees, domestic work was most prominent, accounting for roughly 40 percent of disputes, and cases across sectors also overwhelmingly involved men, with almost 90 percent of such cases involving male employees. Robyn Pariser's research on Dar es Salaam provides similar statistics to these, with 97 percent of domestic service roles occupied by males.[12] Work by Benita Sampedro Vizcaya and by Christine Deslaurier has been attentive to the male dimension of domestic service across colonial Africa, showing the "boy" to have been a central figure in that space, where power hierarchies and dependency reflected broader colonial relationships.[13] Tribunal evidence reveals that violation claims were intensively directed toward African men, who were cast by colonizers across Africa as dangerous, even as

[9]Harry Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa: Battles over Schools and the Colonial Order, 1900–1950* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 42–69.

[10]Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25–56.

[11]Rachel M. Petrocelli, *Transactional Culture in Colonial Dakar, 1902–44* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2024), 86–103.

[12]Robyn Pariser, "Masculinity and Organized Resistance in Domestic Service in Colonial Dar Es Salaam, 1919–1961," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 88 (2015): 109–29.

[13]Benita Sampedro Vizcaya, "Houseboys: Domestic Labour Practices in Spanish Settlers' Homes in Colonial West Africa," *Bulletin of Spanish Visual Studies* 6 (2022): 175–96; Christine Deslaurier, "Des 'boys' aux 'travailleurs de maison' au Burundi, ou le politique domestiqué," *Politique Africaine* 154, no. 2 (2019): 49–73.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534 Published online by Cambridge University Press

they were also painted as indolent or childlike.[14] Women were less present in the colonial wage labor market, as men were disproportionately targeted for participation in regimes of work. Yet, as judicial archives show, employers mobilized violation as a concept when confronted by challenges from female employees, even if such cases were less common or visible.

Dakar was a major employment hub in its region. Workers were employed in a number of industries, including dock work, construction, retail, urban services, and the domestic sector. The labor market was characterized by significant transience, with movement not only between jobs but also in and out of the capital based on economic and social requirements and on the conditions the colonial state created.[15] The ongoing movement of workers through Dakar's labor landscape created tensions in employment relationships, as employers came to view impermanence not as a normal feature of colonial economics but as a moral failing of African employees. That perspective influenced how they approached workplace disputes and conflicts.

The Tribunal de Première Instance offers a uniquely valuable lens through which to examine these dynamics.[16] Small workplaces that left minimal documentation elsewhere surface in records of the courts. Operating under French judicial code, the tribunal was open to those who possessed French status; in practice, however, a much broader range of litigants and witnesses appear in the records because of the nature of the initial court process and of the archives themselves. Cases began with complaints filed at police offices or through written grievances. An administrator then standardized these narratives into *procès-verbal* forms before determining next steps, which might involve calling witnesses, police investigation, and even surveilling the accused or urban spaces. Also influencing these documents were interpreters who translated claims lodged in person and testimony taken by the tribunal into French, as well as professional letter writers who crafted written grievances for many African plaintiffs. The shape of the archival documents reflects these procedural layers of production: the *procès-verbaux* records are primarily summaries rather than direct transcriptions of testimony.[17] My use of them acknowledges this, approaching quoting in a cautious manner.

A defining characteristic of the tribunal records is that they are *sans-suite* cases—matters which were initiated and recorded but in which no further action occurred. Thus, the records do not include verdicts, and no judges or attorneys became involved. Since the administrator receiving the case began the process, a legal encounter was recorded. Reasons for the absence of follow-up included disappearance of parties, resolution outside of court, or sending the matter to a different venue. Far from representing limitations, however, the *sans-suite* nature of records is compelling because it allows focus on the impetus to engage the court in the first place as well as on responses to claims. A textured representation of social and economic life emerges which, precisely because verdicts are not present, invites analysis of the actions, interactions, and power dynamics behind cases rather than outcomes.

My methodological approach to the tribunal records involves close analysis of the implications of these cases, treating them not merely as records of disputes but as windows into the dynamics embedded in daily life. I have selected cases from slightly over the two decades of high colonialism—1918 to

[14]On these attitudes, see, for example: Ginio, "French Officers, African Officers," 60–64; Caroline Séquin, *Desiring Whiteness: A Racial History of Prostitution in France and Colonial Senegal, 1848–1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2024), 54, 107, 121; Megan Vaughn, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 130. For Martin Chanock's arguments regarding criminal legal regimes in Africa as having been constructed during the era of white rule on the premise of the "dangerousness of Africans," see Martin Chanock, *The Making of South African Legal Culture, 1902–1936: Fear, Favour, and Prejudice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 115, 529.

[15]Petrocelli, *Transactional Culture*, 63–85.

[16]For a discussion of these archives and approaches to them, see Rachel Petrocelli, "Reputations at Stake: Positioning Self and Others in Dakar's Colonial Court, 1922–1942," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 53, no. 3 (2020): 315–33; and Petrocelli, *Transactional Culture*, 11–15.

[17]Richard Roberts, "Text and Testimony in the Tribunal de Première Instance, Dakar, During the Early Twentieth Century," *The Journal of African History* 31, no. 3 (1990): 447–63.

1943—during which the tribunal produced most records. Attention is paid to workplace allegations of theft, contract violations, pay disputes, and conflicts involving domestic workers for their prominence among cases as a whole between non-African employers and employees, regardless of who brought the claim. Cases involving both African plaintiffs and defendants were deliberately selected for this analysis to demonstrate how violation culture permeated the tribunal's record; even when Africans sought justice as plaintiffs, non-African employers reframed them as transgressors to delegitimize the claims and reinforce colonial hierarchy. My understanding of these records as windows onto historical reality does not imply that they are transparent; they are tinted windows where colonial power relations were on display and discernable but not always entirely clear. As such, I look deeply into the implications of their contents, paying attention to what they reveal about assumptions regarding African workers, the conditions of employment, and automatic expectations of validation among employers.

Threading throughout the records of employer-employee interaction is a violation logic. This framework closely aligns with what Kathleen Keller has identified as the "culture of suspicion" that emerged in the interwar period within colonial policies. Applied to Africans and foreigners alike, Keller explains that the state saw threats as a constant in the colony.[18] The FWA administration, she shows, surveilled the population in a way that revealed anxieties about potential internal and external dangers. Keller's examination of that regime of suspicion and surveillance asserts that actual infringement of law was not required for an individual to attract the eye of the state: in monitoring Africans who had traveled abroad, for instance, the state found those whom it considered "susceptible… to favorably accept revolutionary doctrines" to be suspicious.[19] Thus, the potential for violation underpinned the operations and developments she explores, such as the establishment of the Sûreté Générale in 1922—a year which saw the records kept by the tribunal expand and the assignment of investigations to that service grow.[20]

While Keller demonstrates how suspicion functioned at the state policy level, this study reveals that ordinary European employers in Dakar internalized and deployed that mindset in daily interactions, elevating subjective judgments about African workers' conduct to the status of enforceable standards. These uncodified "rules" were not law but personal inclination. At the tribunal, employers invoked colonial authority to police behaviors that violated not laws but simply their own expectations of what was allowable among employees. Though framed in quasi-legal terms, many employer grievances were in fact attempts to enforce personal standards rather than actual employment codes, demonstrating their use of the tribunal as a tool for racialized micro-policing of the colonial workplace. Thus, my analysis of Dakar extends and builds upon Keller's concept by revealing the ways in which suspicion of violation operated specifically in employment contexts and revealed itself to be present among the European population writ large.

Employer Expectations as Violable Rules in the Workplace

Employers interpreted their own expectations as possessing not only legitimacy but defensibility in court, informed by the overarching colonial framework in which Africans were depicted as violators. That further skewed existing power asymmetries in employment relationships, casting workers' independent choices—such as leaving a paid position—as invalid without permission. Employers who reported such alleged violations to the tribunal to seek punishment revealed this perspective. Even when employees appeared as plaintiffs, the defenses they mounted revealed those presumptions.

[18]Kathleen A. Keller, *Colonial Suspects: Suspicion, Imperial Rule, and Colonial Society in Interwar French West Africa* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 20–21.

[19]Ibid., 42.

[20]Ibid., 39.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534 Published online by Cambridge University Press

A brief case record from May 1922 offers entry into these dynamics.[21] Demba Sarr brought a complaint against his Lebanese employer, Mous Ba, to the tribunal for owed wages totaling forty francs.[22] He declared that he not only was owed pay but was also abruptly fired from his position as a driver with Ba. Rather than denying either of Sarr's claims, Ba asserted that Sarr was a "bad employee and did not do as he was told with the car."[23] His response suggests that employers in Dakar believed they could withhold earned wages as punishment for perceived poor performance, that payment was conditional on subjective assessment of work quality rather than completion of agreed-upon terms, that employers held unilateral authority to determine when payment was warranted, and that African workers needed to meet unstated standards. Sarr, however, clearly saw the sudden nature of his firing as problematic, especially coupled with owed wages, which were his principal concern. The case exemplifies the operation of a violation culture at an intimate level of employment relations: subjective employer expectations were transformed into rules that African workers could be accused of transgressing, even when those standards were never conveyed, and pay could be withheld as a result.

Another case displayed similar workings. In November 1922, Fatou Diallo lodged a grievance against Michel Ganamet for pay owed for laundry service.[24] Diallo alleged that Ganamet paid her only seventy francs instead of the hundred francs she was due. In his response, Ganamet asserted the laundry "was not clean."[25] His rebuttal rested on his own determination that Diallo's pay was dependent on his complete and subjective satisfaction with the product rather than with the fact of the completed service. For Diallo, who asserted to the court that she did her work "well," her completion of his laundry service constituted fulfillment and thus required pay; she stressed to the court that she was "owed" the money, redirecting the debate toward Ganamet's actual violation, rather than her own alleged one.[26] But for Ganamet, Diallo's pay was at his discretion, and by returning laundry he alone deemed still unclean but which she stated was in fact clean, she had violated the terms he implicitly held.

Both cases revealed employers positioning themselves as rule-setters who determined wages independent of work performed. While dismissal or discontinuation of service certainly could have been pursued, many cases show that these came with absence of owed wages: employees became violators who forfeited pay by allegedly performing unsatisfactory work. In 1922, Bara Diallo, a driver for Amaldo Bagnasco, the Italian consul, brought a case against his employer, claiming that Bagnasco withheld his wages after blaming him for breaking down a truck, which Diallo denied having done, adding he had "never touched" it.[27] Bagnasco confirmed having underpaid his driver, telling the tribunal that Diallo had been repeatedly warned about his driving, had caused damage to the vehicle, and thus saw a portion of his pay withheld to cover repair costs and serve as a warning to other drivers.[28] Here, the employer was aware of the power of his actions and claims, identifying them as extending beyond his individual relationship with one employee and into the broader field of workers at large. This dimension of entitlement and power within colonial society was inherent to the violation dynamic in workplaces.

This case also reveals another important aspect of the power dynamics at hand. Bagnasco sought to shift the focus the case from his own actions to those of Diallo. His accusation introduced as a form of defense regarding the vehicle's breakdown at Diallo's hands emerged only after Diallo approached the

[21] Note on orthography: I retain original name spellings as present in the archive. French administrators recorded grievances and typically had interpreters who, like letter writers, worked with a non-standardized system of transliterating Wolof and other African nuanced sounds which French spellings could not capture. French transliterations varied and changed over time. Used here are the spellings drawn directly from the archives. Such spellings may differ from those used today.

[22] Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS) 5M/206(184), Sarr v. Ba, 17 May 1922.

[23] ANS 5M/206(184), Sarr v. Ba, 17 May 1922.

[24] ANS 5M/208(184), Diallo v. Ganamet, 7 Nov. 1922.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] ANS 5M/206(184), Diallo v. Bagnasco, 29 May 1922.

[28] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tribunal for wages he alleged Bagnasco owed him. Bagnasco had not previously taken the initiative to sue his employee for the amount required to repair the car. Indeed, that Diallo refuted the claim regarding the vehicle's breakdown altogether called into question the veracity of the entire narrative Bagnasco entered into the record. *Diallo v. Bagnasco* thus reveals the relationship between perceptions of power and the strategies that employers understood themselves to be able to use in court when challenged or brought to account in a formal way by Africans who worked for them.

Employer Etienne Vidal took the same approach in his response to a July 1922 case brought by Maury Manga, who claimed his wages were too low.[29] Vidal disagreed, telling authorities that no raise was warranted. His narrative then moved to accusations laid upon the employee who had brought the claims: he added that Manga had broken a radiator and also had not worked during the month of June. The context for these claims remained unknown; the radiator might have broken accidentally, and Vidal had not lodged a claim about it previously, nor did the record state that he had deducted its cost from Manga's pay. It is unknown why Manga had not worked in June, if that had been the case, and the terms of his employment were not shared in court. But for Vidal, these two pieces of information were relevant and portrayed Manga as a sub-par employee. Equally important was the denial that a raise was warranted: the notion ingrained in colonial policy and worldviews that Africans could not be relied upon to continue in their jobs when paid sufficiently manifested here in Vidal's rationale.

Employer entitlement led to assumptions and accusations of wrongdoing on the part of employees beyond normal job duties. In April 1924, Ibrahima Ba was summoned by the tribunal to respond to a complaint brought by his boss, Jules Gandie.[30] Ba was a supervisor in Gandie's employ, earning 120 francs per month. He left his position when Gandie had failed to pay Ba and other workers after what Gandie said was a couple of days. After Ba quit, other workers followed suit, and Gandie claimed that Ba had urged them to do so. Ba denied this, explaining that he "did not invite the workers to leave" with him, adding, "those who wanted to stay could, but as for me, I was going to leave."[31] The court summoned another Gandie employee, who told authorities that while he was inspired to leave by Ba, his colleague had not asked him to quit. Here, the employer's grievance was that Ba encouraged other workers to leave their employment with him, suggesting that communication among coworkers was a violable offense worthy of a grievance in court. As Alice Conklin has noted, despite the promulgation of labor codes, the French colonial state did not recognize the choice not to work as an African right.[32] In the same way, Gandie treated worker departure as a court-worthy action.

Similar dynamics in which African actions were held to unwritten terms and codes emerge elsewhere. In June 1924, an employer named in the record as Mr. Schmitt alleged that employee Lamou Sene had convinced thirty recently hired workers to demand fifteen francs per hour instead of the twelve francs that were offered at recruitment.[33] When Schmitt refused to pay fifteen, the workers quit. He argued to the court that Sene was responsible for the voluntary actions of the other employees. The employer viewed employing workers on his terms as a right, one which Sene violated by demanding higher pay, an act which was then linked to the actions of others. Indeed, Schmitt appeared surprised at the communication and coordination among his employees in their request for higher pay, especially given his use of an African crew chief, Aly M'Baye, in recruitment. As it was M'Baye's role to seek out the employees, communication among them was unavoidable and necessary—aside from being natural in any working environment. For Schmitt, though, African workers were to communicate in a prescribed fashion and act in predictable ways. Sene had violated unspoken, personal rules, which the employer, as in other cases examined here, believed the tribunal should uphold.

[29] ANS 5M/207(184), Manga v. Vidal, 3 July 1922.
[30] ANS 5M/211(184), Gandie v. Ba, 23 Apr. 1924.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 238.
[33] ANS 5M/211(184), Schmitt v. Sene, 18 Jun. 1924.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Employer privilege to make rules as they saw fit was a presence in both workplace dynamics and the court proceedings themselves, as Amadou Faye witnessed after lodging a complaint against his employer in March 1924.[34] He had worked for Mrs. Mayras as a truck driver for ten francs per day but was then fired, he said, after a misunderstanding. He added that Mayras also threatened to "put [him] in prison."[35] At the time he was fired, he had worked seventeen days and was owed those wages, which Mayras refused to pay. The records note that when summoned to provide her testimony, she "refused to respond" to the tribunal.[36] *Faye vs. Mayras* brings out the same dynamics present in the other cases but illustrates an additional layer of employer self-perceived rights insofar as Mayras refused to adhere to court summons, all while allegedly having threatened Faye with that very justice system. For her, the worker's claim and use of the court was illegitimate; only her own decisions and actions held any weight, and her grievances in court alone could produce consequences. When engaged by Faye for his own purposes, however, Mayras treated the court and its authority with little concern.

Terminations appear throughout the record in the 1920s, suggesting employers denied or contrived explanations for the dismissal of African workers as the labor environment became more robust. There was the premise that rules or expectations had been violated, but employees often received no details as to what those were. This applied not only to employment with individuals but also with larger enterprises in which one might have expected more codified policies to have been communicated. Tribunal records contain numerous examples: Moussa Sissoko (February 1922) claimed wages after unexpected termination despite twenty years of service; Fary Sissoko (September 1923) brought a claim against the Dakar-Saint-Louis Railway for his unexplained termination after four years as an iron laborer; and several others filed similar complaints throughout the 1922–24 timespan.[37]

As the 1930s set in, these trends continued, with employers holding full control over the terms and the sets of unwritten rules which surrounded them. A case entry which includes a rare written assertion by an employee that the employer had established an arbitrary system of violation appears in 1930. In his letter, Samba Faye explained what has transpired with his employer, Mr. Lorgeros, for whom he worked as a driver. "Mr. Lorgeros forced me to leave my position with Mademoiselle Lidy to buy his car on credit with easy payment terms," he explained, continuing, "I therefore took his car for the price of 8,000 francs…"[38] However, at the last payment of 200 francs, Lorgeros imposed new terms. Faye stated, "he informed me that he would take back his car on the grounds that he had seen it being driven by another driver, which, in my opinion, is none of his business."[39] Faye identified the issue directly: what he did with a vehicle he had purchased was irrelevant to his ownership of it and to his paid position as a driver. And yet, Lorgeros sought to assume complete control over Faye not only within the workplace but in his ownership of the car based on notions only he possessed.

Potential violation of unwritten or unclear rules and expectations infused all manner of interactions with employers, as this ensemble of cases has revealed. They also show the French court to have been a paradox. It at once represented an opportunity to right wrongs and seek to come to resolutions, and this was a function African employees expected it to fill, as evidenced by their presence as plaintiffs against employers in the records. At the same time, it operated as a venue for the practice of colonial dominance which took as its premise deficiency among Africans—an argument presented regularly by employers regardless of their status as plaintiff or defendant. The othering of African workers in the tribunal was built into its status as a colonial institution. Indeed, as Bonny

[34] ANS 5M/211(184), Faye v. Mayras, 6 Mar. 1924.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] ANS 5M/206(184), Sissoko v. Cie. Charbonnages, 17 Feb. 1922; ANS 5M/206(184), Sy v. Perrysea, 3 Mar. 1922; ANS 5M/206(184), Cisse v. unnamed tailor, 27 Mar. 1922; ANS 5M/206(184), Ngom v. Philippe Delmas, 19 Apr. 1922; ANS 5M/210(184), Sissoko v. Dakar-Saint-Louis Railway, 25 Sept. 1923; ANS 5M/211(184), Fall v. Liguiere, 2 Apr. 1924.

[38] ANS 5M219(184), Faye v. Lorgeros, 2 June 1930.

[39] Ibid.

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Ibhawoh has examined, colonial judicial systems played roles in both constructing and maintaining "native difference," which was delineated in "racial, ethnic, and cultural" terms.[40] That the violation culture of Dakar emerges so clearly within such cases, then, is revelatory of the court's own role in its perpetuation.

Theft Accusations and Presumption of Violation in the Workplace

Dakar's tribunal received many claims regarding theft across all segments of urban society. Theft reports typically reported a missing item assumed to be stolen, or named a suspect accused of having committed theft. While the latter occurred among individuals sharing residences or communal spaces, such claims also appeared frequently within workplaces. Employers approached authorities to accuse workers of stealing, and at times theft allegations arose amid other claims regarding the employment relationship. Dakar was a colonial city openly built on domination and exploitation, injecting clear economic, political, and racialized dimensions into the dynamics between Dakar's workers and employers. Workers operated in an environment designed to benefit employers in every aspect of the employment relationship, and this rendered theft allegations lodged by employers particularly susceptible to presumptions of employee guilt. Such claims were laid between people in power asymmetries undergirded by racism and anchored in the colonial condition, which conceived of Africans as violators. Workplace theft in colonial Dakar also occurred within the exploitative and uneven wage system that comprised the capital's labor market. David Anderson has shown similar dynamics around pay to have functioned in Kenya, and as Frederick Cooper has examined, even as African workers mobilized in their own interests as earners through labor strikes, colonial states in the interwar period sought means to exploit and control them.[41] As I have presented elsewhere, officials in Dakar justified low pay by depicting Africans as irrational financial actors who would violate the capitalist norms that drove most workers in the West.[42]

That context both primed employers to presume their employees would steal and risked creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of violation through theft. The reality of exploitation might have encouraged theft as an act of resistance and survival in a context which Africans understood oppressed them, and the ability to exit the capital easily facilitated that. Because of the transience that was central to Dakar, theft cases in which the plaintiff named an employee as the suspect often also entailed the employee's disappearance.[43] Such records were never entered as missing persons cases. Rather, employers criminalized disappearance of individuals, tying it to theft by lodging complaints regarding the disappearance of money or possessions.

Cases brought by employers reveal the dynamics around theft in the workplace plainly. In April 1918, for example, Marguerite Bouquereau brought a complaint against Bouna Fall, a domestic worker.[44] Her allegation was that Fall had stolen a blanket that had only been lent to him temporarily. Fall, who was fifteen years old, told authorities he had taken nothing and was "shocked" at the accusation.[45] He added that the conditions in the Bouquereau house were terrible and that he had left her employ. In another case in July 1923, Joseph Guingnand accused his household worker, Ousseyman N'diaye, of theft. Police sought N'diaye for questioning but could not find him, so the record was closed.[46] In both cases, the employees had left their positions. While the tribunal located Fall but could not find N'diaye, the cases had in common both the disappearance of money or objects

[40] Bonny Ibhawoh, *Imperial Justice: Africans in Empire's Court* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4–7.

[41] David Anderson, "Master and Servant in Colonial Kenya, 1895–1939," *The Journal of African History* 41, no. 3 (2000): 459–85; Cooper, *Decolonization*, 94–96, 226–27.

[42] Rachel Petrocelli, "Transactions and Informality: Financial Needs and Relationships in Colonial Dakar, 1914–1944," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 55, no. 218 (2015): 255–77.

[43] Petrocelli, *Transactional Culture*, 40–85.

[44] ANS 5M/203(184), Bouquereau v. Fall, 11 Apr. 1918.

[45] Ibid.

[46] ANS 5M/209(184), Guingnand v. N'diaye, 12 July 1923.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and the departure of an employee. Given the transience of those who sought work and other pursuits in Dakar, employee departure should have been unsurprising. Employers certainly understood that alleging theft against an employee who was either no longer employed there, or had simply disappeared, was unlikely to produce results. Some employers indeed revealed the weak connections between themselves and their employees insofar as they did not know their employees' names.

Engagement with the court was an exercise in perpetuating the use of violation as a tool. Fruitless claims contributed to an expanding record of Africans as violators in colonial spaces of judgment. This allowed for the preservation of devices of control. By naming a missing employee as a theft suspect, an employer compelled the state to attempt to locate that individual merely on the premise of a statement in which no evidence was brought to bear. This also conveyed that the colonial state implicitly supported the belief among employers that employees did not necessarily have the right to simply leave a position, or were naturally suspect when they did. Given FWA's forced labor regimes, employers unsurprisingly approached worker relationships through lenses of obligation and discipline. Indeed, employers actively sought and expected the colonial administration to support their control over African workers, and official communications showed state alignment with this attitude at times.[47]

As a tool used by employers to that effect, theft was invoked even when the plaintiff was the employee. In November 1922, Ely Saloum approached the tribunal with a case against his employer, Mr. Harquin.[48] As in most cases, Saloum's grievance regarded owed wages. Harquin countered the claim, stating not only that he owed Saloum nothing, but that Saloum had previously been detained for theft of 400 francs. The record does not indicate that Saloum had been tried for such a crime or that authorities cross-checked the claim. Harquin entered the statement regarding a potentially significant theft in the hopes that it would discredit Saloum's claims regarding nonpayment of wages. Few details regarding that allegation were furnished. Even if a prior arrest had occurred, it was unrelated; any detention, common under colonial rule given the range of infractions the state created, did not change the fact that Saloum worked for Harquin for pay. The employer, rather, offered his statement within the framework of constructed violation in which he operated, suggesting that the court could have been receptive to factoring in potentially irrelevant information if it implied a history of theft on Saloum's part. In this way, his wage reclamation claims could be discredited.

Theft cases reaching the tribunal also bore evidence of the relationships of dependency that operated within the enormously asymmetric power relationships at hand. This was a clear element in 1918's *Bouquereau v. Fall*, for instance: not only was the employee a minor, but the allegedly stolen item was a blanket intended for Fall's use—very likely a basic need. A 1928 case brought by Lebanese merchant Antoine Kredi against his Guinean employee Alkaly Souma revealed such dependency within the violation culture with particular texture. Kredi accused Souma of stealing parts from his truck, telling authorities that Souma was the only person with access to it. He listed the salary as 150 francs monthly, adding that he "gave him five francs each day and [had] bought him four suits as gifts."[49] Souma denied the claim and said he did not know why it was being brought. In his explanation that followed, Souma revealed concerns about his employment with Kredi, telling the court, "I have worked for Kredi Antoine for four months, earning 150 francs a month, and I have never received a cent. Every morning, I ask him for money, but he never gives me any."[50] He then added, "two months ago, my boss took me to Bamako but left me stranded in Kayes, where I stayed for forty days without Kredi taking care of me. I had to file a complaint against him before he helped me."[51] Souma noted that sold his belongings to survive.

[47] Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, 237–38.
[48] ANS 5M/208(184), Saloum v. Harquin, 9 Nov. 1922.
[49] ANS 5M/221(184), Kredi v. Souma, 16 Aug. 1930.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Rather than considering these the important contents of Souma's statement, authorities pursued Kredi's accusations, conducting an investigation that resulted in no evidence of theft. The court did not close the case even then, leaving it unresolved, as if the possibility that evidence might surface remained. Seemingly indifferent to Souma's testimony, the tribunal acted in the way Kredi likely intended. It served as part of the machinery that reinforced the dynamics of violation culture in profound ways, such that even asserting one's own rights within a clearly unequal relationship which exhibited signs of infringement of basic worker rights led to accusations and investigations of the employee by the court and police.

So pervasive were attitudes about theft within Dakar's workplace violation dynamics that colonial bureaucrats at times readily validated the claims. In August 1930, François Barthes alleged theft had been committed by his former "boy," Momo Kamara. Barthes was prompted to lodge his grievance when he spotted what he said was a missing overcoat being worn by a different man, Morlaye Kamara (no relation), who said he had purchased it at Sandaga market. The case record includes a Service de Sûreté report of its questioning of the Morlaye Kamara which found that the "declarations of…Kamara seem to be in good faith and suggest that the stolen overcoat would have been sold to him by Mr. Barthes' boy himself."[52] Here, an unsubstantiated accusation was easily transformed into a credible claim without any direct evidence. In pursuing an investigation and drawing such conclusions, the state reinforced both the possibility of violation and the understanding among employers that the tribunal existed to uphold assertions based on that premise.

"Boys" and Violation Claims in Dakar

Dakar's labor market from the 1910s to the 1940s was predominantly male across both manual and educated positions. With a consistent French population and growing Lebanese population, Dakar also had a robust domestic service sector, one which was fraught with dependency, as this analysis has revealed. France's own labor regime had moved through transformations that saw labor contracts reframed away from the ancien régime's systems of bondage, which supported employers through criminal punishments for laborers or servants, and toward a legal landscape that conceived of work as governed by civil codes.[53] As Alessandro Stanziani has shown, the evolution of workers' rights was a slow one in the metropole.[54] In FWA, this context was compounded by the declaration in 1903 that unfree servitude of any kind was no longer a legal category, ushering in a transitional period for labor relationships in which wages were increasingly common but dependency and power asymmetries remained.[55] In Senegal, where domestic slavery had been more common than trade slavery, enslaved people, who were often juveniles, entered systems of pawnship. As Marie Rodet has explained, creditors sent pawned children into wage labor, creating doubly layered dependency.[56] At the same time, as Babacar Fall, Alexander Keese, and Catherin Bogosian Ash have each shown, the state codified forms of unfree labor that it did not label slavery, using that construct to support its own colonial apparatus and economy.[57] This context shaped labor agreements, especially in domestic settings where living

[52] ANS 5M/220(184), Barthes v. Kamara, 1 Aug. 1930.

[53] Alessandro Stanziani, "Beyond Colonialism: Servants, Wage Earners and Indentured Migrants in Rural France and on Reunion Island (c. 1750–1900)," *Labor History* 54, no. 1 (2013): 69–70.

[54] Stanziani, "Beyond Colonialism," 79–80.

[55] Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); Benjamin Lawrance and Richard Roberts, eds., *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experiences of Women and Children in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012); Kelly M. Duke Bryant, "Changing Childhood: 'Liberated Minors,' Guardianship, and the Colonial State in Senegal, 1895–1911," *The Journal of African History* 60, no. 2 (2019): 209–28.

[56] Marie Rodet, "Under the Guise of Guardianship and Marriage: Mobilizing Juvenile and Female Labor in the Aftermath of Slavery in Kaye, French Soudan, 1900–39," in Lawrance and Roberts, *Trafficking*, 108–24.

[57] Babacar Fall, *Le travail forcé*; Keese, "Slow Abolition within the Colonial Mind"; Catherine Bogosian Ash, "Free to Coerce: Forced Labor During and after the Vichy Years in French West Africa," in *Africa and World War II*, eds. Judith A. Byfield, Carolyn A. Brown, Timothy Parsons, and Ahmad Alawad Sikainga (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 109–26.

conditions were bound to work obligations. Perceptions about what work was and what constituted a violation existed in this complex landscape until the close of the Second World War.

While women and girls were at times hired as housekeepers, laundresses, or nannies in colonial Dakar, men and boys worked as drivers, cooks, guards, and "boys." In her study of Tanzania, Janet Bujra has argued that households preferred hiring men over women, and tribunal records show this to have been the case in Dakar as well.[58] "Boys" were hired in households as well as businesses: males worked as all-around employees, handling any number of tasks. Tribunal documentation show those to have included running errands, odd jobs, cleaning, watching the house, and performing work normally done by other domestic workers if a household did not employ those others. Although many different types of employees surfaced in the cases brought to the court, the position of "boy" appeared with regularity and with greater frequency as Dakar's population expanded significantly in the 1930s and 1940s.

By hiring African men as servants in these settings, colonizers exercised their paternalistic attitude toward African males, whom Europeans sought to maintain in subservience and submission. The term was purposeful, casting grown men as children. Employing adult and adolescent males as "boys" allowed Europeans to perform domination and paternalism within the most localized, intimate employment spaces. In Dakar, households and small businesses were where Africans and French interacted in close quarters, and employers were aware of the vulnerabilities inherent in bringing their workers into contact with the most personal aspects of their lives. Tribunal records show that males employed as "boys" interacted with their employers' money, possessions, private spaces, and other affairs. Court accusations about minor issues reinforced control mechanisms, focusing on male employees as potential violators. Employers used Dakar's tribunal to extend their hierarchical status in personal and arbitrary ways, forcing African men to face colonial authorities and potential legal consequences. Tribunal records show "boys" were readily made into suspects at work.

An April 1932 case illustrates this dynamic. Pierre Martinaux approached the court with a claim against Mamadou Sadia, his "boy," for allegedly stealing a gold ring.[59] He told authorities that the previous day, he had taken off the ring, put it on the dining table, and gone out. Upon his return, Martinaux noticed that the ring had disappeared. He questioned Sadia, who said he had cleaned the table and never saw the ring. Martinaux reported that the following day, Sadia came to work with new clothes. Asked about the clothes, Sadia told his boss that a former employer had given them to him. It was at that point, Martinaux testified, that he had decided that this "boy" had stolen the ring, sold it, and bought the new clothes. Sadia told the court that he neither saw nor took the ring. Regarding the clothing, he told officials that had owned them for a month. Sadia added that the allegation concerning the ring actually stemmed from a plate he had broken. Martinaux had become so angry about the plate, Sadia asserted, that "he began yelling at [Sadia] that he would put [him] in prison."[60]

The tribunal's role in the employer's performance of authority and engagement with the wielding of violation were obvious in several elements of this case. First was Martinaux's decision to bring the matter to the court. He had no evidence that the ring was stolen; a small object such as a ring was easily misplaced or lost. Since he provided a timeline, it is clear he did not commit a great deal of time to attempting to locate the ring but rather pursued immediate action against Sadia in court. It was the appearance of what Martinaux believed was brand new clothing on Sadia's body that gave him what he saw as his confirmation of suspicion and justification for legal action. The employer displayed assumptions that permitted Sadia to be cast as a violator; this included his perception of Sadia's display of new possessions. Martinaux's claims revealed that African workers could be made

[58]Janet Bujra, *Serving Class: Masculinity and the Feminisation of Domestic Service in Tanzania* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000); see also, as cited above, Sampedro Vizcaya, "Houseboys"; Deslaurier, "Des 'boys' aux 'travailleurs de maison' au Burundi"; Pariser, "Masculinity and Organized Resistance."

[59]ANS 5M/225(184), Martinaux v. Sadia, 23 Apr. 1932.

[60]Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534 Published online by Cambridge University Press

suspect by any new personal acquisition since employers believed that, given the low wages paid, Africans could not afford this.

Martinaux's allegations also showed the ease with which he could accuse Sadia of violation both in private and in public, as well as his understanding of the court as a tool for his own use in doing so. Sadia's testimony that his employer threatened to put him in prison is revelatory in this regard. Breaking a plate was clearly not a criminal offense, as Martinaux knew. Only the state had authority to imprison someone, yet Martinaux confidently threatened this punishment. He clearly perceived the distance between him and the state as not only small but also supportive. Frustrated with minor events occurring in his household, Martinaux thus turned to rhetoric he believed resonated with the state and served to intimidate his employee, whom he depicted within the framework of violation requiring consequences.

The third element of this case was the value of the object in question, demonstrating the low bar employers set for antagonizing their employees. Martinaux said the ring was of "local gold"—typically an alloy or gold plate—and had a value of no more than forty francs.[61] Jewelry cases came before the tribunal with great frequency, and the relative values of jewelry over four decades can be roughly traced through such claims. Cases from the early 1930s indicate that a value of thirty to forty francs was not significant relative to other cases from those years, which cited values much greater than this. In one case from April 1932, for instance, a claim concerning a watch and chain in gold plate was for 480 francs,[62] and a June 1933 theft claim placed the value of two items made of local gold at 500 francs.[63] Neither the ring nor the plate in Martinaux's claim was of great value; the items themselves were secondary to the central objective of positioning himself over Sadia, whom he sought to cast as a violator in order to maintain his dominance.

Item value had little bearing on employers' willingness to engage the court, particularly regarding domestic "boys." In June 1934, Marie Thérèse Jupin alleged theft against domestic worker Abdoulaye Sy, telling the court she fired Sy after the disappearance of various possessions, including a silver-plated fork, another few pieces of flatware, and two pet birds.[64] After she let him go, she then saw she was missing five towels. Sy easily could have stolen them and then sold them, she asserted. Jupin's assumption was theft, despite the fact that pet birds could have escaped, towels might have been lost when at laundry service, and forks and spoons sometimes ended up with discarded food. Sy had been the "only native in her employ," she explained, a statement suggesting she did not consider non-Africans in her search for suspects.[65]

Sy painted a very different picture of his experience with Jupin. He revealed that he only worked for her for two weeks and stated he had never stolen anything. Rather, he said, she threw him out because of a disagreement regarding room and board. It had been his understanding, he reported, that his seventy-five francs per month salary came with room and board, but when he asked for meals, she fired him. Meanwhile, he had been returning to her home to claim seventeen days' worth in wages but failed to find her there. Sy added that he had never sold anything in Dakar's Sandaga market, a known site for trade in stolen goods. Nonetheless, police searched Sy's lodging at his uncle's residence in Dakar's Medina, fulfilling Jupin's expectations of the colonial authorities in backing her. None of the missing items Jupin had listed was found.

As has been noted in other cases examined here, it is possible that Jupin brought theft charges in this case against Sy to intimidate him and impede his efforts to retrieve the wages owed. By shifting the narrative to African violation, employers sought to skirt allegations against themselves. The missing items showed no pattern nor significance of value. Because Sy also lived at Jupin's home during his employment, he likely had less opportunity to hide objects he might have stolen before selling them,

[61] Ibid.
[62] ANS 5M/224 (184), Comptoir Reamur v. Diop, 10 Feb. 1932.
[63] ANS 5M/229(184), Mbeye v. Unknown, 11 Jun. 1933.
[64] ANS 5M/233(184), Jupin v. Sy, 28 Jun. 1934.
[65] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534 Published online by Cambridge University Press

particularly birds and bathroom linens. These factors, combined with the dispute over room and board, brought into question the basis for theft claims, particularly in conjunction with indignation on the part of the employer at the request her "boy" made for employer-provided meals.

Tribunal records show that "boy" cases increased in frequency in the early 1940s, when a tendency toward surveillance had reached a peak in Dakar as the capital operated amid wartime measures.[66] Suspicion, and the willingness to report it, among employers increased. The summer of 1940 saw a number of cases against "boys" lodged with the tribunal, and summer of 1943 saw a larger number of the same.[67] Most of the cases alleged theft. Summer was the hottest time of year in Dakar. Typically, Europeans fled the humid season, but war made that less feasible.[68] Thus, wartime summers saw larger French populations than was typical for Dakar, and domestic staffing followed suit. Summertime also demanded adaptations to make the climate bearable, with open doors and windows, even at night. With private spaces exposed to the public, personal possessions disappeared, and "boys" found themselves targeted by their own employers and even other Europeans in the neighborhood. The confluence of summer, proximity, and wartime suspicion heightened such risks for employees.

A September 1940 case was illustrative. Youssef Bistoni approached the tribunal with a complaint against an African man whom he called simply a "native," admitting that he did not know his name but had hired him to do some work during the preceding months.[69] He said that the man, whom the court identified as Diame Sarr, had asked if Bistoni had any work available; Bistoni told him to return the next day. Sarr did, and Bistoni sent him on some errands, after which he paid him. Bistoni said Sarr then sat in the courtyard for a while. Toward evening, Bistoni placed 1,800 francs under his pillow. As it was hot, he left the door to his room open and then went outside for a couple of hours. During that time, Bistoni told the court, Sarr left the courtyard and went away, but Bistoni added that he had not really noticed Sarr's departure. The next morning, Bistoni found the money mostly gone. The theft could only have happened, he claimed, when Sarr was in the courtyard and Bistoni was on his walk. He added that he believed Sarr was responsible for the disappearance of other small things in the previous three months. Explaining why he had not brought charges at that time, Bistoni said such thefts went initially unnoticed and that he had not known Sarr's name.

Sarr denied stealing anything, claiming he had not been in Bistoni's courtyard that afternoon but was selling kolas at Sandaga with a friend. He added that he did not hesitate to come when summoned by Bistoni's employee, going "immediately" when asked to do so.[70] In this, Sarr emphasized his innocence. The court pursued other witnesses and ultimately, as with the other cases in this collection of tribunal records, the case was inconclusive. But Bistoni's narrative revealed his willingness to overlook a host of possibilities as to the missing money, minimize his own responsibility, craft a narrative that placed Sarr in a criminal light as he pursued work. That narrative reworked past events and disregarded the implications of bringing an individual into his household for work without even learning the person's name. In such a context, violation became inevitable, and this was, as the analysis of these cases has proposed, in many ways the point.

Conclusion

Across its pursuits and objectives, colonialism retained the premise of its self-ascribed value, which was framed as a needed controlling and guiding presence in Africa. Iterations of this shifted over time, but the role of a framework of violation that positioned Africans—particularly males—as transgressors remained constant. By the second decade of the twentieth century, as colonialism began to reach

[66] Petrocelli, *Transactional Culture*, 148–71.

[67] ANS 5M/254(184); ANS 5M/265(184).

[68] ANS 2G17/26, Senegal, Territoires d'administration directe, Rapport général, 3eme Trimestre, for Dakar, Gorée, Rufisque, et banlieue de Dakar, 1917; ANS 17G/410, Renseignements politiques, Service de Sûreté, Sep.–Dec. 1943.

[69] ANS 5M/254(184), Bistoni v. Sarr, 19 Sep. 1940.

[70] Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534 Published online by Cambridge University Press

its zenith, that culture was just as apparent in quotidian urban employment situations as it was in the overarching policies of the state.

Examination of Dakar's Tribunal de Première Instance records reveals the centrality of violation as an idea and a tool in employers' approaches to their workers, particularly male employees. Mirroring aspects of the colonial state, employers premised relationships on implicit, violable expectations, treating them as law and using courts to that effect. African workers navigated a terrain defined by employers' shifting terms that were not always communicated, subject to change, and devised to be violated by African employees, especially if such workers brought claims for wages or better working conditions. The context of low pay and exploitation allowed African workers to be accused of theft in various settings with relative ease.

As a site for the types of employer-employee interactions and claims examined here, the tribunal acted as a venue in which employers revealed their sense of privilege and closeness to the state, perceiving the court as a sympathetic, collaborative body. Employers reinforced a rhetoric of subservience, power, and violation in their interactions with the judicial system they at times approached of their own volition and at others engaged as defendants in claims brought by Africans who vested faith in the court as a legitimate outlet for grievances. As the tribunal records reveal, employment cases more often served to reinforce colonial dynamics and their inherent violation culture than they acted as a means to entrench actual labor codes or earnestly resolve disputes. Africans working in Dakar prior to the close of the Second World War operated within a world where the boundaries between law and prerogative were blurred by concepts of race and power.

Cite this article: Rachel M. Petrocelli, "Making Violators: Employers and African Workers in Colonial Dakar, 1918–43," *The Journal of African History* 66, e9 (2025): 1–15, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853725100534.