

DÉBOUROU, DJIBRIL M. *La formation des cadres sous le régime colonial au Dahomey, 1932–1972*. L'Harmattan, 2018. ISBN 978-2-343-15603-3. Pp. 151.

Débourou's work provides a historical and chronological insight into the public and Catholic schools located in Bembéréké, a town and subdivision of Dahomey in present-day northern Bénin. The author focuses on the individuals who attended these schools and their subsequent trajectories in life, thereby placing this work between a collective biography and a prosaic and brief history of these students. Débourou, in his general introduction, highlights the reasoning behind this work by arguing that these simple individuals, intellectuals without a history, become part of history through their entrance into the colonial school in Bembéréké from 1932 to 1972. He later argues that these students are worthy of recognition even though many of them led unfortunate lives. To conduct the research for this work, Débourou uses documentary sources, oral interviews, official and unofficial school records, including written accounts and journalistic notebooks. Débourou interviewed the majority of the students who attended these schools during this period who were still alive, and, in his sources, he lists their names, ages, employment position, date of interview, and the nature of the information given. This work is divided into three distinct parts, divided chronologically based on the entrance years of the cohorts. The first part focuses on the development of the rural public school and its limitations (including the infrastructure and an insufficient number of teachers), its creation in 1913 and subsequent closings and reopenings during World War I, and the economic crises of the early 1930s. In this first part, the author takes a moment to praise the public primary school teachers, listing them by name and detailing their tenure in Bembéréké and their later pursuits. The second part of this work focuses on the successive generations of students at the rural public school from 1932 to 1955. After the closure of the public school and its subsequent reopening in 1932, the majority of the recruits from 1932 until 1948 became, after five to seven years of study, primarily farmers, the trade of their ancestors. Débourou highlights a handful of students who later became apprentices, colliers, soldiers, and even teachers. These initial students would, even after the successful completion of their studies, never receive their *certificat d'études primaires élémentaires*. However, in 1947, students who passed the *examen d'entrée en sixième*, which became very selective, would gain access to secondary education. The later years of this generation would see the opening of the Catholic school in Bembéréké, only a couple hundred meters away from the public school, at the beginning of the 1952–53 academic year, which created competition with the public school. The third part of this work focuses on the political and social activism by students of these schools from 1965 to 1972, with an emphasis on the *Front d'action commun des élèves et étudiants du nord* (FACÉÉN). Débourou's work provides an insightful look into the lives of those who passed through the educational system in rural Bembéréké.