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Dim Delobsom

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unknown both in the United States and the broader African diaspora. He did, however, emerge as a symbol of black separatism and African consciousness during the Black Power and Black Arts movements of the 1960s and 1970s. He was also included in the historian Molefi K. Asante's *100 Greatest African Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (2002).

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THE EDITORS

Delobsom, Dim (1897–1940), Burkinan author, canton chief, and civil servant, was born in Sao village, about 60 kilometers northwest of Ouagadougou, in the Mossi region of the present-day country of Burkina Faso. His mother was Datoumi Yaaré, from the village of Kaonghin; and his father, Gueta Wagdogo, was the son of Yiougo, the *naba* (Mossi chief) of Sao. Naba Yiougo supported Mogho Naba Wobgo (Boukary Koutu), the principal king of the four Mossi kingdoms, against a rebelling vassal, the *naba* of Lallé. In 1896, Mogho Naba Wobgo supported Gueta Wagdogo to attain the chieftaincy (whereupon he assumed the name “Naba Piiga”) after the death of Naba Yiougo. The meaning of Dim Delobsom’s name, “The king has returned the favor,” acknowledged the relationship between the two rulers.

Naba Piiga was unable to help his suzerain when the French column led by Captain Paul Voulet seized Ouagadougou on 1 September 1896. Mogho Naba Wobgo eventually fled to the Gold Coast, and the remaining Mossi kingdoms submitted to the French. In Sao, Naba Piiga likewise acquiesced to French colonial rule, and Delobsom was sent in 1905 to the newly established École de Fils de Chefs, in Kayes, Mali, and then to the Lycée Faidherbe in Saint Louis, Senegal. He returned to Ouagadougou in 1913 and began a career in the French colonial administration. During the 1920s he was principal clerk to Louis Fousset, secretary-general of the

colonial administration. Delobsom was close to Fousset and other leading French colonial authorities.

Delobsom began authoring ethnographic studies of the Mossi, using his Christian name, Antoine Augustin Dim Delobsom. In 1932, he published in France the first ethnography from French West Africa authored by a native, *L'empire du mogho naba* (*The empire of the Mogho Naba*). The book controversially suggested that the Mossi had offered little resistance to the French conquest. Delobsom also argued that the chief ministers of the Mogho Naba (e.g., the Larlé *naba*, Baloum *naba*, and Ouidi *naba*) were not traditionally superior to the canton or district chiefs but, rather, had been given that authority by the French. Finally, Delobsom appeared to argue that the Mogho Naba in Ouagadougou had suzerainty over the other Mossi kings. Many prominent historians of the Mossi kingdoms dispute this assertion.

The argument that the chief ministers did not have authority over canton chiefs had a personal subtext: the Baloum *naba* had converted to Christianity and was widely viewed as being very close to the missionary order of the White Fathers, especially to Joanny Thévenoud, the bishop of Ouagadougou. The Baloum *naba* also had authority over the chieftaincy of Sao under colonial rule. Delobsom’s father was, apparently, not friendly to the White Fathers. Delobsom’s position had the effect of undermining the power of the Baloum *naba* and increasing the power of the Mogho Naba, an ally of Delobsom.

In 1934 he published *Les secrets des sorciers noirs* (*The Secrets of the Black Sorcerers*). The book remains a masterful description of traditional magical practices. Delobsom adopts an agnostic tone, occasionally gently chiding his fellow Mossi for the banality of their transactions with ritual specialists but also expressing wonder at their insights.

After the passing of Delobsom’s father in 1934, local colonial administrators opposed Delobsom’s accession to the chieftaincy. His prominence and capabilities were seen as a potential threat. Some felt that there was a fundamental incompatibility for an *évolué* French citizen to serve as both colonial administrator and indigenous chief. Later that year, some French administrators and Bishop Thévenoud implicated Delobsom as the instigator of a plot against them. Henri Carbou, an experienced administrator serving in an interim capacity in Ouagadougou, launched serious charges against the White Fathers and pro-Catholic administrators. Carbou warned that traditional chiefs were likely to

revolt because of abuses of authority. The colonial government eventually sanctioned both sides. The White Fathers were closely monitored, and their expansion was stalled. In 1936, Delobsom was transferred from Ouagadougou to Ferkessedougou, to become chief clerk at the post. His brother Zang-nê was named interim chief of Sao.

In time, Delobsom launched a campaign to return to Ouagadougou and take up the Sao chieftaincy. An extensive file developed concerning the case. With help from the Mogho Naba and Edmond Louveau, the new resident superior of the region (the colony of Upper Volta having been suppressed in 1933), Delobsom finally ousted Zang-nê in April 1940 and was enthroned as *naba* of Sao.

After the German invasion of France, Louveau sided with the Resistance movement on 22 June 1940. Other governors of French West African colonies, including the governor-general in Dakar, sided with the Vichy regime. Around 8 July, Louveau organized a secret evacuation of troops and munitions to the Gold Coast. On 11 July, the pro-Vichy faction in Dakar took effective control of Ouagadougou and declared martial law. Delobsom died three days later in Sao. Around 22 July, Louveau was taken to Dakar, arrested, and sent to prison in Vichy France.

It is not known what role Delobsom may have played, as the highest-ranking indigenous civil servant in the colony, in the dramatic events of July. Delobsom's descendants have asserted that he was poisoned when he drank a bottle of wine to celebrate Bastille Day. An autopsy report ordered by the colonial administration was inconclusive.

Delobsom's life exemplified the contingency of French colonial occupation: he and other members of African elites embedded chieftaincy in the bureaucratic state imposed by the French, refashioning tradition along the way. It is likely that Delobsom would have become the leading agitator for autonomy and independence in the postwar period. His suspicious death had the effect of sending a strong signal to those who would challenge the colonial order. His life and death, then, offer an important window into the rapidly changing social structure of Sahelian West Africa under French rule.

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MICHAEL KEVANE

Demoz, Abraham (1925-1994), Eritrean-born Ethiopian linguist, Africanist scholar, and political activist, was born in Asmara, Eritrea. He was fluent in several European and African languages including Italian, French, Latin, Hebrew, Arabic, Amharic, and Tigrinya, his mother tongue. His main area of expertise was linguistics, with particular focus on the Semitic languages of Eritrea and Ethiopia, but his intellectual interest covered a broad spectrum, including history, policy studies, and culture.

Demoz graduated from Haile Selassie University, Addis Ababa, with a bachelor's degree in 1956. He received a master's degree in education from Harvard University in 1957 and later studied linguistics at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he received master's and PhD degrees in Semitic languages in 1959 and 1964, respectively. Demoz started his professional career at Haile Selassie University, where he taught and served as dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1964 to 1967. He was also a visiting professor at the University of London, and copublished a scholarly article on the correspondence of Emperor Yohannes of Ethiopia with Queen Victoria and Lord Granville with the distinguished linguist Professor Edward Ullendorff, one of the founding editors of the Tigrinya newspaper, the *Eritrean Weekly News* (1942-1952).

Demoz was a visiting professor at Northwestern University in 1968-1969. He joined the faculty in 1974, serving as director of the Program of African Studies from 1974 to 1980 and as professor from 1981 to his death in 1994. His work as a teacher and researcher at Northwestern was held in such high esteem that, after his death, the university founded the Abraham Demoz Prize, which, as the university Web site states, "the Linguistics Department awards [to] the best undergraduate work in linguistics in memory of Professor Abraham Demoz, one of the founding members of the department."

As it appears from a number of citations in the literature of his field, Demoz is among the earliest