

Living Beyond Boundaries: West African Servicemen in French Colonial Conflicts, 1908-1962

By

Sarah Jean Zimmerman

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Committee in charge:

Professor Tabitha Kanogo, Chair

Professor Richard Roberts

Professor Tyler Stovall

Professor Mariane Ferme

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## Abstract

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*Living Beyond Boundaries: West African Servicemen in French Colonial Conflicts, 1908-1962*, is a history of French West African colonial soldiers who served in French Empire. Known by the misnomer *tirailleurs sénégalais*, these servicemen contributed to the expansion, maintenance, and defense of France's presence on several continents. The complex identity and shifting purpose of this institution were directly linked to French colonialism, but determined by numerous actors and settings. The men in the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* came from France's colonial federations in sub-Saharan Africa—French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. During the twentieth century, *tirailleurs sénégalais*' deployed to North Africa, the Levant, Indochina, and Madagascar, where their exploits brought them into contact with other imperial populations. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* played crucial roles in assembling and disassembling French empire. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* provide a unique West African perspective of France's colonial empire that challenges national and French colonial readings of this colonial military institution.

*Tirailleurs sénégalais* were colonial soldiers and intermediaries who experienced French colonialism unlike other colonized peoples. As employees of the colonial state, West African soldiers were often among the first populations to experience novel colonial policy. As soldiers, they implemented those policies in foreign colonial populations. However, these men were not simply the conveyors of colonialism. Their imperial assignments in colonial wars evidenced the importance of lateral exchanges of knowledge and experience between colonial populations linked together by France's presence. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* demonstrate that the core-periphery model of historicizing colonialism, where information and historical causality flow unidirectionally from the French metropole into its colonies, is limited in portraying how people experienced colonialism.

The roles of women and wives in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' history attest to the significance of cross-colonial exchange in the French colonial world. West African women followed their soldier/husbands to North Africa and Madagascar. Repatriating soldiers brought foreign wives home to French West Africa from Syria, Lebanon, and Indochina. Regardless of their origin or the setting of their interactions with soldiers, women affected the decisions that West African men made regarding their military service. By accounting for the importance of

wives and marriage, this project also illustrates how women and soldiers challenged a secular colonial state to redefine marriage. Soldiers and wives convinced the colonial state to allot family allowances to polygynous Muslim West African soldiers.

By emphasizing the importance of foreign women and cross-colonial exchange in the history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, this project problematizes histories of federal colonial institutions that are circumscribed by the boundaries of modern nation-states. Due to its composition and the range of its deployments, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* was an international enterprise. When shoehorned into the national history of a contemporary West African country, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* become a tool for interrogating French colonialism in that West African. These histories overemphasize the hand of France in the histories of West Africans and neglect the global influences on men who made French empire. When viewed through the lens of empire, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* also challenge the periodization of the colonial period. West Africans fought in the French-Algerian conflict after their home colonies were sovereign nations. The veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* continue to rely on this historical relationship through the collection of their pensions.

This project is informed by archival, published, and oral sources. They sources provide a nuanced understanding of the various worlds that *tirailleurs sénégalais* traipsed through in the twentieth century. The first half of this dissertation relies on French archival materials and published memoirs. These written sources were penned predominantly by French men, but the voices and agency of West African troops emerge in critical moments. These sources also portray French biases towards the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, as well as the ways in West African intermediaries contributed to French knowledge regarding their recruits. Roughly one hundred interviews conducted with veterans and their families inform the second half of this dissertation. Memory and oral history added complexity to the history presented by archival military documents. A source fraught with its own biases and omissions, veterans' memory of the past enriched this dissertation with anecdotal evidence. Their memories also illustrated how the fifty years since independence have influenced how they give importance particular events in their personal histories as soldiers and veterans.

*Living Beyond Boundaries* chronologically, and geographically follows *tirailleurs sénégalais*' imperial engagements in Morocco, Syria-Lebanon, Indochina, Madagascar, and Algeria. The West Africans in this dissertation were soldiers in the employment of France and large-scale conflicts act as the chronological framing device of this dissertation. Each chapter takes place in different imperial locations, but each analyzes recurring themes that illustrate how West Africans experienced the French colonial military and how they maintained empire.

Chapter One introduces *tirailleurs sénégalais* and situates them within several genres of historical literature and accounts for the institution's nineteenth-century history. Chapter Two analyzes their deployment in the Moroccan "pacification" campaign, between 1908 and 1914. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*' deployment in North Africa was an experiment that served as the springboard for subsequent deployments in French empire. The Moroccan campaign tested the adaptability of West African servicemen to military life in temperate climates, as well as challenged the French assumptions about their sub-Saharan African troops. The outbreak of the Great War brought the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to France.

Chapter Three deals with pivotal legislation that reshaped the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The Blaise Diagne Laws of 1915 and 1916 passed as result of the crises of the Great War. These laws secured citizenship for a minority of West Africans, who became obligated to service in the

French military. The renegotiation of citizenship for military service led to the bifurcation of West African soldiers in the French Armed Forces—West African citizens served in the French metropolitan army and West African subjects in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Their experiences as soldiers diverged after the ratification of this legislation.

After the armistice in 1918, *tirailleurs sénégalais* were diverted from France to serve in recently acquired French mandate territories—Syria and Lebanon. Chapter Four takes place in the interwar period, when the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' role in empire was redefined as they fought in small-scale conflicts in the Levant and Morocco. The financial crisis of the 1920s and 1930s negatively impacted the colonial military's effort to improve and professionalize the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The “hollow years” witnessed important processes in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The French military's attempt to professionalize the *tirailleurs sénégalais* was also thwarted by their paradoxical move to reestablish racial hierarchy in empire.

The outbreak of World War II brought schizophrenia, paranoia and fratricide to the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Chapter Five studies the division of empire into factions aligned with Free France and Vichy France. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* existed on both sides of this divide and found themselves facing one another on the battlefields of Syria when Allied forces attacked Vichy forces there. French Indochina fell under the authority of neighboring Japan and West African soldiers relied on romantic relationships with Indochinese women to survive the war. The reversals of World War II encouraged postwar challenges to France's authority in several of its colonies. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*' participated in these events as colonizers and colonized peoples.

The conclusion of hostilities in France were eclipsed by the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence. Chapter Six addresses the nine-year guerilla war in Indochina, where *tirailleurs sénégalais* found themselves overwhelmed by the intimacy and violence of close fighting quarters. This chapter is informed by veterans and their widows' memories, which illuminated the personal and psychological characteristics of this conflict. This was the first large-scale anti-colonial war where evidence suggests that *tirailleurs sénégalais* questioned their role in French colonialism. Deserters abandoned the French army for political reasons and for love. The romantic relationships between soldiers and Indochinese women led to the international migrations of inter-racial families to West Africa. West African communities dealt with the aftermath of the French-Indochinese War as their sons' families integrated into their households.

After the conclusion of the Indochinese conflict in 1954, some *tirailleurs sénégalais* were redeployed immediately to the battlefields of Algeria. Chapter Seven uses the French-Algerian war as a backdrop for troops' demobilization and West Africa's decolonization. The French Constitutional Referendum in 1958 launched West African independence. West African soldiers became caught up in the extrication of France from West Africa, since both entities desired trained troops. As a result, *tirailleurs sénégalais* remained in France's employment after their natal countries were sovereign nations. West African soldiers' dual allegiance to France and their country of origin challenged the meaning and finality of political independence. The Conclusion takes this argument further by analyzing the contemporary relationships between *tirailleurs sénégalais* veterans, West African states and France.

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## Nomenclature and Orthography

Locating an accurate name for West African colonial servicemen is as complex as defining the forces shaping the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The ethno-linguistic composition of the sub-Saharan Africans employed in the French armed forces radically evolved throughout the twentieth century. At its inception in 1857, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* was made up of men recruited from Saint-Louis and the banks of the Senegal River, hence the “senegal” in *sénégalais*. However, the moniker of *tirailleurs sénégalais* became quickly a misnomer once the borders of colonial Senegal were established and more soldiers were recruited from what became French Soudan (contemporary Mali). By the 1930s, soldiers from Senegal to Chad to Gabon were *tirailleurs sénégalais*. This problematizes the use of this moniker, as well as any assumptions that these soldiers had homogenous socio-cultural backgrounds or uniformly interpreted their military experiences. The French military reductively referred to these troops as *tirailleurs sénégalais* and *troupes noires* (black troops) until 1958. This terminology has echoed into historical and popular literature, which imprudently misconstrues the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as a homogenous body.

This dissertation flags major shifts in *tirailleurs sénégalais*' demographics; however, my terminology is reductive in order to facilitate accessibility and comprehension. I use *tirailleurs sénégalais* throughout the to refer to the colonial military institution and the men who served in its ranks. After 1915, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were clearly designated as colonial subject soldiers. Thus, from 1915 forward, I use *originaires* soldiers to describe those recruits coming from the Four Communes, who were French citizens and served in the French metropolitan army. When broadly referring to both *originaires* soldiers and *tirailleurs sénégalais*, I employ West African servicemen or soldiers. The distinctions between *originaires* and *tirailleurs sénégalais* hardened over time, but *tirailleurs sénégalais* was a flexible corporate identity. During the interwar period, 1918-1939, soldiers from French Equatorial Africa (AEF) were incorporated into the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. After which point, I employ sub-Saharan African servicemen or soldiers to generalize about these troops' experiences, although it borders on cumbersome.

As with any project that deals in foreign languages, choices had to be made regarding how to transcribe, transliterate, and translate place names and proper nouns from other languages. I leave certain proper nouns, like *tirailleurs sénégalais* and *originaires*, in French and italics throughout. This has led me to pool English and French grammatical rules regarding the translation of French grammatical rules regarding matching plurality in adjectives with the nouns they describe. When referring to one *tirailleur sénégalais* or *originnaire*, I drop the “s” to denote singularity. I also modify the French italicized adjective for variations in singular and plural forms; for example *Mesdames tirailleurs* and *Madame tirailleur*.

During the colonial period, Mali was the French Soudan. I retain the French spelling of “Soudan”, as opposed to the anglicized Sudan, in order to avoid confusion with the contemporary nation-state. I retain the French spelling of Haute-Volta in place of the anglicized Upper-Volta. I employ the acronyms AOF and AEF to refer to French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.



## Abbreviations

AEF	Afrique Équatoriale Française
AFN	Afrique Française du Nord
ADN	Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes, France
ANS	Archives Nationales du Senegal, Dakar
ANG	Archives Nationales de la Guinée, Conakry
AOF	Afrique Occidentale Française
APD	Archives de Prefét de Dakar
AWOL	Away Without Leave
BAA	Bureau des Affaires Africains
BCSC	Bataillon Colonial de Saigon-Cholon
BMC	Bordelles Militaires de Campagne
BMTS	Bataillon de Marche de Tirailleurs Sénégalais
BTS	Bataillon de Tirailleurs Sénégalais
BM AOF	Bataillon de Marche d'Afrique Occidentale Française
BNRM	Bibliothèque Nationle du Royaume du Maroc, Rabat
CAOM	Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mers, France
CFA	Commaunité Franc Africain
CHETOM	Centre des Hautes Études des Troupes d'Outre-Mers, Fréjus.
CNRS	Centre National des Recherches et Sciences, Saint-Louis, Senegal
ECPA-D	Établissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense
EET	École des Enfants de Troupe
EFORTOM	École de Formation des Officiers du Ressortissants des Territoires d'Outre-Mer
EMPA	École Militaire de Préparation de l'Afrique, after independence these become École Militaire de Préparation de l'Armée
ENS	École Normale Supérieure of Dakar
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
IFAN	Institut Fondamental de l'Afrique Noire, Dakar
JAH	Journal of African History
JMO	Journal de Marche et Opérations
JORF	Journal Officiel de la République de France
JOS	Journal Officiel du Sénégal
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
POW	Prisoner of War
RDA	Rassemblement Démocratique Africain
RIC	Régiment d'Infanterie Coloniale
RIMa	Régiment d'Infanterie de Marine
RTS	Régiment de Tirailleur Sénégalais
SHDT	Service Historique de la Défense, Terre, Vincennes
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection

UNAC  
V

Union National des Anciens Combattants  
Versement—in citations—refers to archival organization at ANS.

## Chapter One: French West African Servicemen: Introduction, History and Ideas

*Living Beyond Boundaries: West African Servicemen in French Colonial Conflicts, 1908-1962*, is a history of French West African colonial soldiers who served in French Empire. Known by the misnomer *tirailleurs sénégalais*, these servicemen contributed to the expansion, maintenance, and defense of France's presence on several continents. The complex identity and shifting purpose of this institution were directly linked to French colonialism, but determined by numerous actors and settings. The men in the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* came from France's colonial federations in sub-Saharan Africa—French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. During the twentieth century, *tirailleurs sénégalais*' deployed to North Africa, the Levant, Indochina, and Madagascar, where they came into contact with other imperial populations. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* played crucial roles in assembling and disassembling French empire. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* provide a unique West African perspective of France's colonial empire that challenges national and French colonial readings of this colonial military institution.

The *tirailleurs sénégalais* challenge West African histories that project modern political boundaries and identities into colonial and pre-colonial African past. The existence of “Senegalese” or “Ivoirian” histories of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* shoehorn this dynamic colonial institution into a national historical narratives. When the study of African history was in its infancy in the 1960s and 1970s, writing national African histories was part of a project to provide newly independent African countries with histories that legitimized their new political boundaries. Historical literature has pointed out the conceptual errors of teleologically reorganizing the past for the validation of modern nation-states. This project engages with those debates by portraying the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as a international colonial institution. By paying attention to the trans-national and international components of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, this dissertation calls into question West African national histories that take place in the colonial period.

The men who enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* came from communities located in present-day Mauretania, Senegal, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Togo, Benin, and several countries in former French Equatorial Africa. This heterogeneous bunch became colonial soldiers and intermediaries who experienced French colonialism unlike other colonized peoples. As employees of the colonial state, West African soldiers were often among the first populations to experience colonial policy. As soldiers, they implemented those policies in foreign colonial populations. However, these men were not simply the receivers and conveyors of colonialism. Their imperial assignments in colonial wars evidenced the importance of lateral exchanges of knowledge and experience between colonial populations linked together by France's presence. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* demonstrate that the core-periphery model of historicizing colonialism, where information and historical causality flow unidirectionally from the French metropole into its colonies, is limited in portraying how people experienced colonialism.

The *tirailleurs sénégalais*' imperial history complicates the ways in which colonial histories traditionally periodize French colonialism in West Africa. The military institution predated the formal colonization of the majority of West Africa by thirty to forty years. At the

other end of the colonial period, West Africans' colonies of origin became politically independent while they continued to serve in the French military. Some West African soldiers existed in a liminal space for several years where they served the interests of a state entity, lacked civic membership in that state. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* organically defy interpretations of West African independence as the end of French colonialism for West Africans. Veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, unlike most West Africans, continue to maintain ties with their formal colonial power. Veterans' pensions have come to symbolize France's contemporary and historical relationship with West Africa.

The essentialization of the colonial relationship between France and AOF blinds us to the lateral movements that colonial peoples made within the calculus of French colonialism. In directing our attention to empire, *tirailleurs sénégalais* illustrate that France provided the pathways and channels through which members of empire interacted, but by no means controlled the flow of information between its colonial populations. The deployment of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in other colonial spaces enabled a cross-colonial exchange that challenged the logic of French colonialism, military obedience, and West Africans' observance of the social rules of their own societies. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* were introduced to anti-colonial discourses in Indochina and Algeria, which led some to question their role in the French military. *Tirailleurs sénégalais'* cross-colonial romantic relationships were an unexpected result of their imperial deployments.

The roles of women and wives in the *tirailleurs sénégalais'* history attest to the significance of cross-colonial exchange in the French colonial world. West African women followed their soldier/husbands to North Africa and Madagascar. Repatriating soldiers brought foreign wives home to French West Africa from Syria, Lebanon, Indochina, and Madagascar. Regardless of their origin or the setting of their interactions with soldiers, women affected the decisions that West African men made regarding their military service. By accounting for the importance of wives and marriage, this project also illustrates how women and soldiers challenged a secular colonial state to redefine marriage. Soldiers and wives convinced the colonial state to allot family allowances to polygynous Muslim West African soldiers.

Through marriage, the wives of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* became indirect clients of the French colonial state. As clients, these women could make demands on the colonial state, which became involved in claims of marital legitimacy. When dealing with West African marriages, the French colonial state accommodated coexisting legal systems—French civil code, *sharia*, and the *indigénat*—to adjudicate West African soldiers' marital issues.<sup>1</sup> The civic status of soldiers affected the outcomes of marriages and divorces. West African citizens and subjects served in the French armed forces. Their separate sets of responsibilities to the colonial state and their bifurcation into separate divisions of the military questions assumptions that colonial citizens were treated more favorably than colonial subjects.

By envisioning the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as dynamic institution shaped by a variety of international events, actors, and ideas, this project offers a new model for analyzing the themes colonialism and war in twentieth century through the eyes of West Africans. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were the protagonists of an international colonial enterprise stretching from West Africa to Southeast Asia. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* participated in France's conquest of the frontiers of empire and they were infantrymen in the protracted wars that ended France's colonial

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<sup>1</sup> Sharia is Muslim canonical law based on the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. *Indigénat* was the French legal system for its colonial subjects characterized by local decrees.

rule in Indochina and Algeria. West African servicemen's presence in French empire challenges the ways in which we understand sub-Saharan Africans' contribution to the modern world. Their critical role in colonial conflicts and the World Wars complicate the legacy of French colonialism in West Africa and in France's former empire.

## History and Historiography

This dissertation begins with the deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco, in 1908, but the historical roots of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* are in the nineteenth century. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were the result of several converging nineteenth-century processes—growth in international oceanic trade along the West African coast, French colonization, and the formal abolition of slavery. The growing presence of an international merchant community on banks of the Senegal River occasioned a need for locally procured security and merchant middlemen. The metropolitan French soldiers sent to West Africa in the mid-nineteenth century were predominantly made up of penal brigades, which were unruly and prone to overindulgence. In the 1830s and 1840s, the French military replaced some of their security forces with *laptots*.

Recruited from Saint-Louis and Gorée's increasingly cosmopolitan populations, *laptots* acted as armed security for merchants' cargo and ships. *Laptot*, in Wolof, means translator, but due to their employment in security forces, *laptots* evolved to signify West African male intermediaries working for the French marines. The *laptots*, according to most historical accounts, were voluntary employees of the French Marines. Until French West Africa transitioned to civilian rule in the twentieth century, the French Marines administered and protected France's imperial claims in West African.

In addition to *laptots*, there were other West African men integrated into local French security forces, whose labor had been purchased from their owner. Through the *rachat*, or “repurchasing,” system French administrative powers purchased the freedom, or merely the labor, of West African slaves from their West African owners. Those “emancipated” through the *rachat* system were often required to serve ten- to fourteen-year contracts in the French military as indentured laborers.<sup>2</sup> This system became an embarrassment to France after 1848 because it contradicted the new Second French Republic's investment in universal human rights and the eradication of slavery.

The 1848 universal declaration of abolition primarily targeted France's territories in the Caribbean, but did cause some concern for the French military's condonation of domestic slavery in West Africa. The *rachat* system continued to supply military labor to the French until the 1880s. The French also procured military employees from Liberty Villages, which had been set up by the French to protect emancipated and runaway slaves from re-enslavement by West Africans. By 1891, fugitive slaves residing in Liberty Villages could receive official emancipation papers if they enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>3</sup>

During his tenure as governor of Senegal, General Louis Faidherbe created the first battalion of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in 1857. This act established a separate, standing military unit made up entirely of West African recruits. Although wary of employing slave labor in an

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<sup>2</sup> The *rachat* process is described at length in Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 8-11.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 85.

official military unit, Faidherbe employed slaves in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. These men participated in his ambitious project to emancipate and pacify the regions that would become the colonies of Senegal and French Soudan.<sup>4</sup> Judging from Faidherbe's monograph, the goal of pacification was of greater import than the humanistic goal of slave emancipation.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the French competed with other European powers to establish claims over great swaths of the African interior. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* were in the military units used to pacify indigenous West African leaders, like Samori Touré and Lat Dior, who challenged France's growing presence. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were an integral component of France's military strength and ability to establish their political supremacy in West Africa, Equatorial Africa, and Madagascar in the nineteenth century. These campaigns established the foundation for *tirailleurs sénégalais'* international deployments in the twentieth century.

Then men enlisting in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* during the nineteenth century were most often former slaves and men of low social standing. They volunteered for the French colonial military because of the unspoken promise of fringe benefits. Membership in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* offered recruits opportunities to accumulate power and wealth through a means that skirted traditional paths to authority. Instead of amassing social and financial capital through lineage or personal accomplishment within West African communities, West African soldiers could acquire the accoutrements of status and affluence through French conquest. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* acquired booty in the form of material possessions, as well as claims to land and livestock. Soldiers also assisted in the liberation of slaves, who were incorporated into the ranks of military units or found work as auxiliaries. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* also integrated former slave women into their households. By marrying emancipated slave women, these soldiers circumvented traditional marital practices of familial negotiation and the exchange of bridewealth.

Women played a crucial role in the early reproduction of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the nineteenth-century conquest of the sub-Saharan African interior and continued to do so in the twentieth century. Wives of *tirailleurs sénégalais* provided domestic services, as well as auxiliary services for the military—acting comparably to other nineteenth century sutlers and camp followers found in American and European armies. West African women's integral presence in camp life compelled the French colonial military/administration to formulate inexact policies and opinions regarding *tirailleurs sénégalais'* wives and families.

According to J. Malcolm Thompson, the French military came to view the establishment of *tirailleurs sénégalais'* households as beneficial, even though they were suspicious of soldiers' liaisons with women from the communities surrounding military posts. Soldiers with households became dependent on the French military for economic security, but their established relationships with women and local communities provided them with social connections that were autonomous to military life.<sup>5</sup> Marie Rodet's work on migrant women at the turn of the twentieth century raised important points regarding the motivations of *tirailleurs sénégalais'* wives in seeking out marital relationships with soldiers in the employment of the colonial state.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> General Faidherbe, *Le Senegal: La France dans L'Afrique Occidentale* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1889), 377-380.

<sup>5</sup> J. Malcolm Thompson, "Colonial Policy and the Family Life of Black Troops in French West Africa, 1817-1904," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23 (1990): 423-453.

<sup>6</sup> See Marie Rodet, *Les Migrantes ignorées du Haut-Sénégal (1900-1946)* (Paris: Karthala, 2009).

*Tirailleurs sénégalais*' relationships with civilian women resurface in each chapter of this dissertation.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the French military sent *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their female dependents to Madagascar. Amadou Ba's doctoral thesis chronicled the presence of West African colonial laborers and military men in Madagascar, where the French military continued to view the wives of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as essential auxiliaries.<sup>7</sup> The French colonial state sanctioned and funded the oceanic travel of West African wives to Madagascar, which necessitated the "legitimatization" of their marital status from the standpoint of the colonial state. The regulation of *tirailleurs sénégalais* marriages intensified throughout the twentieth century due to the expense of transporting wives around French empire. The majority of the secondary literature on the *tirailleurs sénégalais* disregards, and in one case sensationalizes, women in *tirailleurs sénégalais*' history.<sup>8</sup> The following dissertation remedies these omissions with qualitative analysis of women's role the reproduction of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

The work of conquest in West Africa, Equatorial Africa, and Madagascar was largely complete by the beginning of the twentieth century. France's transition from conquest to the maintenance of territories in West Africa led to a reconfiguration and redefinition of the relationship between France and its West African colonial soldiers. Charles Balesi went so far as to argue that transformations in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries signaled an inversion of the animosities between the West African indigenous groups and the French military during the years of conquest.<sup>9</sup> Balesi overstated the absoluteness of West Africans' transition from adversaries to comrades-in-arms, but he was astute to recognize a major shift in the employment and exploitation of West African soldiers by the French military.

Balesi, like many historians of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, overlooked a major step in the evolution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*—the pacification of Morocco. Stretching from 1908 to 1914, the French campaigns in Morocco served as the environment for vetting the *tirailleurs sénégalais* for empire. Their performance in the mountainous, temperate regions of Morocco convinced the French of West African soldiers' utility outside of conquest in tropical and Sahelian Africa. Throughout the twentieth century, Morocco was a training ground for *tirailleurs sénégalais* destined for French or imperial battlefields. The military bases around Casablanca also served as a rest stop during troops' demobilization and repatriation back to French West Africa.

Morocco also served as the last space in empire where *tirailleurs sénégalais* infantrymen were permitted to travel with their West African wives. The erasure of this privilege was indicative of a broader turn towards the professionalization of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. By the mid-nineteenth century, most state-sponsored national armies in North America and Europe had

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<sup>7</sup>Amadou Ba, "Les 'Sénégalais' à Madagascar: Militaires ouest-africains dans la conquête et la colonization de la Grande Île (1895-1960)" (Doctoral thesis, Université Paris-VII, 2010), 269-275.

<sup>8</sup> One exceptions is new work coming from Camille Duparc, and sensationalization comes from Éric Deroo, and Antoine Champeaux, *La Force noire: Gloire et infortunes d'une légende coloniale* (Paris: Talliendier, 2006), 34-41,

<sup>9</sup> Charles Balesi, *From Adversaries to Comrades-in-Arms: West Africans in the French Military, 1885-1918* (Waltham, MA: Crossroads Press, 1979).

eliminated their dependence on auxiliary services and provisions supplied by civilians.<sup>10</sup> Pointedly, camp followers and unmarried women were eliminated from military environments. The *tirailleurs sénégalais*' wives, who followed them to Madagascar and Morocco, illustrate how colonial armies in empire retained the services of civilians through the Great War.

The Great War built upon and intensified recruitment processes put into place during the French campaign in Morocco. In the historiography of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, the Great War has been portrayed as a moment of import and crisis for the West African soldiers. The sheer numbers of West Africans mobilized for the war effort—nearly 200,000 West Africans—depict the importance of this war in the history of the West Africa and the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Marc Michel appraises West Africa's contribution to the Great War in terms of manpower, as well as provides an analysis of the legislative changes engendered by the large participation of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in this conflict.<sup>11</sup>

Joe Lunn's monograph, *Memoirs of the Maëlstrom*, filled the gaps in Michel's research by exploiting rich, oral accounts of soldiers' experiences in the Great War. Inspired by veterans' memories, Lunn unambiguously criticized the French colonial military for its exploitation and under-preparation of West African troops who deployed in France.<sup>12</sup> The most recent publication on the colonial soldiers in World War I, Rick Fogarty's *Race and War in France*, studies how the deployment of 500,000 colonial troops in the defense of France affected the cultural ideology and racialized hierarchies of French colonialism.<sup>13</sup> In Fogarty's portrayal, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were critical to a process of unmaking and remaking imperial racial and social categories in France.

The role of West African servicemen in World War II has also received a large degree of historical attention, particularly because of the contemporary politics surrounding veterans' pensions and France's indebtedness to their war contributions. Nancy Lawler's monograph, *Soldiers of Misfortune*, is similar to Joe Lunn's work in the ways in which Lawler privileged the voices of veterans to chronicle their experiences in war.<sup>14</sup> Lawler's work reflected the opinions of Ivoirian veterans and carried the same tone of victimization, sacrifice, and exploitation that reverberates in recent publications focusing on the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as POWs in World War II. Raphael Scheck's *Hitler's African Victims*, and Armelle Mabons' *Prisonniers de guerre indigènes* historicize African prisoners-of-war and engage in the politics of colonial neglect, abuse and amnesia.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to publications concerning West African colonial soldiers' participation in the World Wars, there have been several publications that have taken a longer chronological view of

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<sup>10</sup> Barton C. Hacker, "Women and Military Institutions in Early Modern Europe: A Reconnaissance," *Signs* 6 (Summer 1981), 645.

<sup>11</sup> Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en AOF (1914-1919)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maëlstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of WWII* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Armelle Mabon, *Prisonniers de Guerre "Indigènes": Visages oubliés de la France occupée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).



the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' military and social history. Published in 1934, Shelby Cullom Davis' thesis on the *tirailleurs sénégalais* initiated the historical debates on West African servicemen.<sup>16</sup> Anthony Clayton's monograph, *France, Soldiers, and Africa*, portrayed the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as minor actors in a French imperial project of conquest and defense.<sup>17</sup> Myron Echenberg's *Colonial Conscripts* remains the most exhaustive and comprehensive monograph on the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>18</sup> Echenberg casts the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as salient agents in the social and labor history of French colonial West Africa. In *Native Sons*, Gregory Mann shifted our attention from active soldiering to the plight of West African veterans in order to examine the relationship of reciprocity and mutual obligation between the French state and its former West African colonial soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

There are a growing number of scholars who work on colonial soldiers from African, Asian, and Caribbean empires.<sup>20</sup> They are adding to a historiography concerned with the social and cultural history of colonial soldiers, as well as their multifaceted roles within colonialism. When compared to historical publications on British colonial African troops and British military cultures in Africa, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* evidence France's more liberal use of sub-Saharan African troops in empire.<sup>21</sup> French West African troops were funded by the French treasury, whereas British African troops were maintained by their colonies' budgets. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* made their careers in empire, whereas the Askari, the King's African Rifles, and the West African Fighting Forces were predominantly stayed in sub-Saharan Africa. Colonial policies of assimilation and the aspirations of French Republicanism allude to why the French relied more heavily on their sub-Saharan African soldiers than their European counterparts.

Too numerous to list here, historical work concerning colonial and imperial studies inform this dissertation throughout. The debates concerned with intermediaries, agency, assimilation, civic belonging, citizenship, colonial tensions, gender, and decolonization are particularly significant in the imperial history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. For this project, the limitations of the work on colonialism has been its emphasis on the narrow circulation of information between metropole and periphery.

## Methods and Sources

This project is informed by archival, published, and oral sources. These sources provide a nuanced understanding of the various worlds that *tirailleurs sénégalais* traipsed through in the twentieth century. The written sources for this project come from archives and libraries located in Senegal, Guinea, Morocco, Algeria and France. The first half of this dissertation relies

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<sup>16</sup> Shelby Cullom Davis, *Reservoirs of Men: A History of the Black Troops of French West Africa* (Chambéry: Imprimeries Réunies, 1934), 12.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Clayton, *France, Soldiers, and Africa* (London: Brassey's Defense Publishers, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991) and please see bibliography for his other publications.

<sup>19</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> I have had the pleasure of presenting at conferences with Michelle Moyd, Ron Lamothe, Julian Saltman, Ruth Ginio, Driss Maghraoui, Joe Lunn, and Dick van Galen on colonial soldiering.

<sup>21</sup> Please see publications by Peter Clarke, David Killingray, David Omissi, Tim Parsons, Richard Rathbone, and Nancy Lawler's *Soldiers, Airmen, Spies, and Whisperers*.

principally on French archival materials and published memoirs because of the lack of living veterans who deployed in conflicts prior to World War II. Roughly one hundred interviews with veterans and their families inform the second half of this dissertation. Veterans' memory and oral history added complex layers to the historical information presented by archival military documents.

The majority of written sources used in this dissertation were authored by French men employed by the colonial military or state. As a result, archival information pertaining to West Africans and other people under colonial domination were inherently biased in their portrayal of West Africans. French authors categorized and ranked information about West African soldiers in particular ways, which gives us perspective on how the French colonial state envisioned soldiers' position the colonial army and in the empire. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* challenged that vision. Descriptions of West Africans soldiers as recalcitrant or subversive soldiers were moments where *tirailleurs sénégalais* made demands upon the French colonial army for better treatment and increased provisions.

The memoirs of French officers and French troops who made observations on *tirailleurs sénégalais* in French empire were undergirded by paternalism. These written accounts often infantilized adult West African soldiers who were neophytes in French military culture. Military memoirs also reproduced and embellished the biases of French colonialism. Memoirs take greater liberty in elaborating the past because the authors' recollections indulge the clichés of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Given their problems as sources, memoirs also provide valuable "unofficial" information about the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Memoirs contain anecdotal field notes, which describe social aspects of *tirailleurs sénégalais* off the battlefield. Memoirs portray how West Africans adjusted to life on campaign and how they adapted their cultural practices to war. Memoirs individualized and humanized *tirailleurs sénégalais*, whereas archives tended to see the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as a homogenous group of soldiers who fit under an umbrella identity.

With all written sources that describe the "other" in histories of colonialism in Africa, one must take into account how the voices of Africans entered the archival record. Colonial agents were informed by their own observations, but relied on the cultural translations made by their African intermediaries. Thus, Africans participated in, contributed to, and manipulated colonial systems of knowledge that informed the colonial archive. The colonial production of knowledge regarding the *tirailleurs sénégalais* is bound up in colonial powers' reinforcement and invention African traditions.<sup>22</sup> West Africans' contributions to the colonial archive relates to an argument made by Gene Irschick about the dialogic nature of the production knowledge regarding colonial societies. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* had a hand in the ways the French understood its West African colonial subjects.<sup>23</sup>

The second half of the dissertation, spanning World War II, the Indochinese, and Algerian conflicts, is informed by oral and written sources. I conducted over sixty interviews with West African veterans, their wives, and retired French officers. These interviews occurred in regional cities in Senegal, Conakry in Guinea, as well as in Paris. Conducted in French and Wolof in hallways, homes, restaurants, cars, and veterans' bureaus, these interviews were rarely

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<sup>22</sup> This debate was launched with Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). This ensuing debates continue to influence the ways in which Africanist scholars think about custom, tradition, and law.

<sup>23</sup> Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 8.

completed without interruption or audiences. I did not use questionnaires, preferring to allow informants to follow their own spontaneous interests regarding their personal memories of soldiering in empire.

At no point in the interviewing process, did I believe that I would capture an essentialized “*tirailleurs sénégalais* perspective” of their tours-of-duty in Indochina, Algeria or decolonization processes. However, I hoped to gain personal histories and anecdotes that would inform me of how veterans’ memories organized and hierarchized information differently than colonial and military archives. From their memories, I learned how important women, wives, and children were to their military service, which led me to interview Indochinese women who had migrated to West Africa after the Fall of Dien Bien Phu with their West African soldier/husbands. In some cases, I also interviewed their inter-racial children, who were middle-aged in 2008. These voices added complex layers to understanding how *tirailleurs sénégalais* were perceived by other colonial populations and how West African soldiers positioned themselves within imperial history.

Oral history and oral tradition are the hallowed tools of Africanist historians. The use of these sources have spread beyond the field of Africa history, since the publication of Jan Vansina’s seminal work in the 1960s.<sup>24</sup> The debates regarding the utility of oral tradition in pre-colonial history have shifted to debates regarding the use of oral sources and memory in historicizing the colonial period in Africa.<sup>25</sup> In terms of this project, oral history and memory have enriched the *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ history. Veterans’ memory provided rich anecdotal evidence from the past, as well as illustrated how the fifty years since independence have influenced how veterans understand their role in French colonial empire.

During the interview process, I learned how veterans constructed collective memories of war among their smaller social circles. The years since decolonization have greatly shaped veterans’ opinions and memories regarding their service, which became obvious after I conducted interviews with Guinean veterans residing in Dakar and Conakry. Guinean veterans were traumatized by Sekou Touré’s twenty-four year presidency and those Guinean veterans who had relocated to Senegal gave different meanings to their military service than those Guinean veterans who had remained in independent Guinea. Within Senegal, I found that Senegalese veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* had constructed separate narratives within their social groups. Veterans in Ziguinchor were not as politicized as those in Dakar or Saint-Louis. I located most informants through veterans bureaus, which meant that my informants self-identified as veterans. The few veterans I located through family and friend connections placed far less importance on their military experiences as formative in their adult lives and deemphasized the importance of soldiering in their young lives.

I also accessed to roughly thirty Master’s theses from the École Normale Supérieure in Dakar, which were part of a state-funded oral history project to commemorate Senegalese

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<sup>24</sup> Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, trans. H.M. Wright (London: Routledge, 1965).

<sup>25</sup> Isabel Hofmeyr, “*We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told*”: *Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994), Chapter One and Louise White, Stephan F. Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), Introduction.

veterans' experiences in the French Armed Forces. These Master's theses were predominantly informed by students' interviews with veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The biases in the Masters' theses came from the political motivations of the project to commemorate Senegalese veterans. Many of the students followed a standard questionnaire in their interviews with veterans and neglected to contextualize their responses in colonial, cultural, or social history. However, these theses are valuable because of the seemingly comprehensive reproduction of the interviews conducted, as well as how the veterans provided different types of coded cultural information to Senegalese Master's students.

The *tirailleurs sénégalais*' history was informed and documented by, a multitude of voices, policies and experiences. Archival sources and oral sources reveal how competing logics shaped the *tirailleurs sénégalais* over the course of fifty-four years. The written and archival sources provided the chronological scope of the dissertation and a new understanding of the complexity of West Africans' role in France's colonial enterprise. Without oral sources we could not properly grasp the personal and social meaning of the imperial soldering to West African soldiers and their dependents. Women's voices, as informants and reproduced in the archives, opened up a new window in the relevance of family life to the reproduction of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in empire. When juxtaposed, oral sources and written sources contest and confirm the meaning soldiering within the framework of French colonialism.

## **Chronology and Cartography**

The following chapters span 1908 to 1962 because these dates bookend the major imperial French conflicts where West African colonial soldiers were deployed in the twentieth century. The pacification of Morocco, the World Wars, the interwar period, as well as the Indochinese and Algerian conflicts chronologically and geographically circumscribe the following chapters. Between 1908 and 1962, West African servicemen were exposed to warcraft. They learned about the project of French colonialism on the battlefields and in the brothels, mess halls, training camps, and cafés of empire. While stationed in landscapes of war, young West African men redefined their values and expectations regarding their personal ambitions within the ranks of the colonial military, as well as in civilian life. For many West African colonial soldiers, their military service provided a license for experimentation with authority roles, social habits, new customs and foreign languages. Within the literature on the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, the World Wars are the most prominent conflicts, but not the most paramount, in the history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were actively deployed on French soil for five years, whereas they served in sub-Saharan African and other parts of French empire between 1857 and 1963.

Chapter Two analyzes the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' experiences in Morocco between 1908 and 1914. This chapter portrays the deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in France's "pacification" of Morocco as a militarized social experiment. French officers and the West African soldiers learned a great deal about one another on this campaign, which served as a foundation for the continued use of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in empire until the 1960s. There was a great deal of anxiety surrounding the use of sub-Saharan African soldiers in Morocco because this was the first time the French had deployed *tirailleurs sénégalais* in North Africa. The legacy of the trans-Saharan slave trade and the cultural stigma that Arabo-Berbers held toward dark-skinned peoples was a cause for French anxiety. The French military used medical and

morale reports to monitor how *tirailleurs sénégalais* responded to fighting in an epidemiological and environmental region distinct from West Africa. In order to salve emerging problems, the French imported West African wives to the Moroccan campaign in order to (re)create “negro villages.” These villages were constructed to limit vitriolic exchanges between Moroccans West Africans off of the battlefield. This experiment in Morocco convinced the French of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ utility in empire and colder climes.

The French declaration of war, in 1914, engendered the transfer of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* from Morocco to the trenches of France. There have been a growing number of publications that use the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as a unit of analysis for addressing themes linked to the Great War—masculinity, race, contribution, representation, reciprocity, memory, and the inversion of colonial hierarchy. Chapter Three bypasses an examination of sub-Saharan Africans’ war experiences in order to analyze a fundamental change within the history West African soldiers. The Great War provided the shifting climate for a small percentage of West Africans to secure French citizenship through a renegotiation of military obligations and rights. The Blaise Diagne legislation of 1915 and 1916 bifurcated West African servicemen according to their civic designation as French citizen or subject. Citizens (*originaires*) would serve in the regular French military, and subjects (*indigènes*) would continue to serve in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. This division between *originaires* soldiers and *indigènes* soldiers physically separated them in the ranks and hierarchized the social status of West African soldiers according to civic category. The bifurcation also profoundly affected the ways in which military family pay was allocated to polygynous households and redefined the ways in which the French colonial state understood soldiers’ marriages and romantic relationships.

The interwar period is often viewed as a barren period sandwiched by the World Wars. However, it was a era where the relationship between the French colonial state and the *tirailleurs sénégalais* greatly evolved in response to the fiscal constraints of the era. Chapter Four analyzes the paradoxes of the interwar period. The French colonial military attempted to raise the skill levels of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, while the French colonial state countered to re-entrench colonial hierarchies placing the French at the top of a cultural ladder with Africans on its lowest rung. In re-establishing their authority in empire, the French permanently quartered West Africans in other parts of empire as representatives of French colonialism. Due to their presence in empire, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* participated in the violent repression of minor colonial conflicts in Syria and Morocco in the 1920s. These conflicts brought the *tirailleurs sénégalais* into intimate contact with other colonial populations. The movement of soldiers, wives, and children between Syria, Morocco, Madagascar, and AOF demonstrated how cross-colonial nature of romance was affected by budgetary restraints in the interwar period

The outbreak of the World War II brought schizophrenia and paranoia to the *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in empire. Chapter Five argues that the most critical changes to the *tirailleurs sénégalais* during the war happened in empire. Due to the co-existence of Vichy France and Free France, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* served Axis and Allied Powers in empire. As a result sub-Saharan African soldiers faced each other under separate banners on the battlefields of Syria during Allied Powers’ move to capture colonies from Axis powers. West African *originaires* soldiers stationed in Indochina found themselves in another sticky situation—under the threat of Japanese occupation in Vietnam. The reversals of World War II led colonial populations to question the authority of French colonialism. As a result, *tirailleurs sénégalais* were involved in uprisings in Senegal, Algeria, Madagascar, and Morocco in the aftermath of the war.

Due to the Japanese occupation of Indochina during World War II and Ho Chi Minh's declaration of Vietnamese independence in 1945, the French had to reestablish their colonial authority in Indochina through a violent war of reoccupation. Chapter Six examines the West African soldiers' experiences in the first concerted anti-colonial war against France. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* deployed in this war found themselves involved in a conflict characterized by violence and intimacy. During the Indochinese conflict, the French colonial military began scrutinizing *tirailleurs sénégalais*' psychological health and monitoring their contact with indigenous people. West African soldiers contracted romantic relationships with Indochinese women. Romantic affairs with civilian women were threatening and dangerous to the French military of these women's questionable loyalties. However, after the fall of Dien Bien Phu, many of these women, and their inter-racial offspring, were assisted by French colonial state to relocate to West Africa with their husbands. The introduction of Indochinese women, and interracial children into West African communities revealed the degree to which *tirailleurs sénégalais*' choices in empire conflicted with the customs of their natal communities.

The fall of Dien Bien Phu in May of 1954 preceded the violent outset of the French-Algerian war by roughly six months. Some *tirailleurs sénégalais* demobilized from Indochina and redeployed directly to Algeria without taking leave in West Africa. Chapter Seven addresses how the French-Algerian war became the backdrop for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' final demobilizations during decolonization. The crisis of the Algerian war compelled France to redesign its empire, and in the midst of an empire-wide referendum, Guinea voted for independence. After September 1958, the vituperative particularities of decolonization, demobilization, and repatriation of Guinean soldiers opened a precarious future for Guinean veterans. As the rest of West African soldiers demobilized between 1960 and 1964, it became clear that *tirailleurs sénégalais* were unique in their transgression of the neat boundaries of colonialism and enduring fiscal relationship with France. The dissertation concludes with a brief comment on how the legacy of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and French colonialism has been harnessed in paradoxical ways in contemporary West African politics.

## Chapter Two: *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*' in the Pacification of Morocco, 1908-1914

In 1911, a Senegalese woman, made impatient by the queue at a Moroccan well, cut the line. This act elicited the derisive criticism of a Moroccan woman waiting her turn. The ensuing verbal exchange traded insults that linked cleanliness with purity and skin color, and then further devolved into physical abuse and obscenities linked to civility—"Moroccans are savages!! Moroccans have dirty faces, dirty clothes, and are all dirty."<sup>1</sup> This exchange was recorded by French military officials, who were intent to portray primordial animosities between women from opposing sides of the Sahara. These women were brought together in the domestic chore of water collecting because they were wives of North and West Africa colonial soldiers fighting in the French campaign of to "pacify" Morocco.<sup>2</sup> West African colonial infantrymen, known by the misnomer *tirailleurs sénégalais*, were first deployed in Morocco in 1908. These soldiers were accompanied by a small contingent of West African wives, who provided domestic services to the West African soldiers and military labor to the French colonial military. The deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco built upon and inverted precedents in trans-Saharan history and in their role as historical agents of French conquest. West African soldiers' participation in the pacification of Morocco also turned a new page in the history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

The French military's use of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the Moroccan campaign was remarkable because for the first time sub-Saharan Africans troops were deployed outside of tropical and Sahelian Africa. French military strategists envisioned the Moroccan campaigns as a laboratory for experimentation. By monitoring troop losses and overall morale, the French military could make informed conclusions regarding *tirailleurs sénégalais* physical adaptability to the high elevations of the Atlas Mountains and along the temperate Atlantic coastline. This would in turn inform the French military regarding the possibility of deploying *tirailleurs sénégalais* on French metropolitan soil and other parts of French empire. Much of the pejorative language and stereotypical images of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, which became common in twentieth-century military documents and French popular culture, were generated by the Moroccan campaign. Tactics like *hivernage*, or weathering sub-Saharan African troops in warmer climates during the winter, became common practice after many West Africans suffered in early autumn mountain storms in the Atlas Mountains. The Moroccan campaign served as a site of trial and error in terms of testing the physical limits of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, but the West African men and women serving there were not simply the lab rats in this experiment.

This chapter focuses on how and why West Africans participated in the processes that brought them to Morocco between 1908 and 1914. This brief campaign established Morocco as a strategic layover and training ground for sub-Saharan African troops throughout the twentieth century. The first half of the chapter considers the factors that contributed to, and pushed back against, the growing presence of *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their wives in Morocco. These factors included France's increasing colonial interests in Morocco, the weakness of the Sultan,

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Khorat, *Scènes de la Pacification Marocaine* (Perrin et Cie: Paris, 1914), 179-180.

<sup>2</sup> The French military used "pacification" to describe their campaign in Morocco. I do not retain the quotation marks throughout the chapter. However, with each use, I nod towards the irony of labeling a violent campaign of conquest with the word "pacification."

the Mangin debates, and West Africans' enthusiasm for military service. The second half of this chapter illustrates the experiences of *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their wives on campaign in Morocco. The French colonial military's measures to isolate and study West Africans' performance in North Africa were particularly fascinating due to the accommodations made for them.

In 1908, two battalions of West African troops, or roughly 1,600 men, disembarked in Casablanca, Morocco.<sup>3</sup> Morocco was not a formal French possession and it was the first time *tirailleurs sénégalais* were deployed in North Africa. France's unconventional use of West African troops to protect Casablanca's port from neighboring Moroccan communities did not go unnoticed. Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Mangin, an industrious and persuasive French military official, interpreted the event as the dawn of a new era in colonial military strategy. Although this deployment had the official support of the Moroccan Sultan, Moroccan civilians interpreted France's military presence in Morocco as a sign of the Sultan's illegitimacy and weakness. France's increasing interest in Morocco, and the Moroccan Sultan's increasing financial and political indebtedness to the French military in protecting his legitimacy, contributed to France and Spain's formal partition of Morocco in 1912. This act, in combination with military legislation and recruitment in West Africa, increased the presence of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco. These political and administrative processes on both sides of the Sahara affected the nature and tenure of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' military service in Morocco.

### **Locating the Lab: Morocco's Integration into France's Sphere of Influence**

During the late nineteenth century, European powers formally partitioned the majority of the African continent. Morocco was a rare exception until its domestic and international political legitimacy were threatened at the turn of the twentieth century. After the Treaty of Algeciras, in 1906, France and Spain controlled Morocco's foreign trade. The following year, a French doctor named Mauchamp was assassinated in Marrakech and there were armed uprisings aimed at foreigners in Casablanca. The French military used the events of 1907 as justification to deploy troops in Morocco in 1908.<sup>4</sup> Over the course of the next couple of years, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* participated in campaigns to secure the port towns of Casablanca and Kenitra, as well as the interior imperial cities of Meknes, Fez, and Marrakech. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* also faced rural Moroccan semi-nomadic clans, who federated to oppose French incursions into their traditional homelands.

By 1912, the Sultan of Morocco had bankrupted his treasury and was reliant upon French occupying forces to protect his dynastic title from fraternal competition. With the Treaty of Fez on March 12, 1912, France and Spain formally partitioned Morocco into two protectorate zones. France retained the lion's share of Morocco and Spain had jurisdiction over the northern Mediterranean littoral and the southern arid regions. As a protectorate, France and Spain regulated Morocco's international affairs and, theoretically, the Moroccan Sultan retained political authority over Moroccan civilians. The Sultan held no political, judicial, or punitive power over military or civilian French people present in Morocco. In a move that demonstrated

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Fremaux, *L'Afrique à l'ombre des épées* (Paris: Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1993), 114.

<sup>4</sup> Moshe Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco: Colonialism and its Consequences* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 50.



the impotence of the Moroccan Sultan, French Resident-General Marshal Hubert Lyautey successfully pressured Moroccan Sultan to abdicate his throne. Among the possible heirs to the throne, Lyautey lobbied for the abdicating Sultan's brother, Moulay al-Youssouf, to occupy the throne. El-Youssouf became Sultan and Lyautey's political ally on August 13, 1912. Once these political arrangements had concluded and a cordial relationship formed, Lyautey increased the presence of French troops in the Morocco in order to quell acts of rebellion against vestiges of the Sultanic government and French Protectorate.<sup>5</sup>

### **Making an Argument for Budgetary Approval**

As mentioned in the Chapter One, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* was a French colonial military institution conceived for the explicit purpose of expediting French conquest of sub-Saharan Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century, West African men enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* because they could supplement their military pay with wives and booty acquired during the tumultuous acquisition of the West African hinterland. Acquiring wives without paying bridewealth bolstered soldiers' economic and social status, particularly for soldiers who had slave ancestry, or were slaves in their own lifetime.<sup>6</sup> Myron Echenberg and Martin Klein have written about the connections between West African slavery, emancipation, and military service in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Echenberg observed that the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* depended on the incorporation of recently freed slaves during the nineteenth century. The *rachat*, or repurchasing, system yielded a steady source of able-bodied men for military service. In this process, the French compensated local notables for liberating their slaves, which also obliged the emancipated slaves to repay—the French—their purchase price through a maximum of fourteen years of military service.<sup>7</sup>

As French conquest dwindled in the twentieth century, West African men's motivations for enlisting in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* also diminished. By 1905, the populations once interested in serving the French colonial army no longer needed the French colonial regime's assistance in the process of emancipation. William Ponty, Governor-General of French West Africa from 1908 to 1915, linked West African men's decreasing enlistment in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* with the abolition of slavery. He observed that with the disappearance of slavery, a new type of stability ruled in West Africa and the "*indigènes* were less likely to leave their villages<sup>8</sup>...and one must recognize that the garrison life only moderately pleases the Senegalese."<sup>9</sup> A few years earlier, in 1907, the Governor of French Guinea commented that Guineans were wary of distant voyages associated with military service, and would rather find

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from William Ponty to Cabinet of the Minister, Director of Military Services, 23 September 1909, 5D37V89, ANS.

<sup>7</sup> Myron Echenberg, "Slaves into Soldiers: Social Origins of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais," In *Africans in Bondage: Studies in Slavery and the Slave Trade*, ed. Paul Lovejoy. (African Studies Program: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1986), 312.

<sup>8</sup> *Indigène* translates to "native" in English, but for the French in West Africa it served as a category to distinguish French citizens from subjects. *Indigène* acquired derisive connotations.

<sup>9</sup> "Note sur le recrutement des Troupes Noires en Afrique Occidentale Française," signed by William Ponty, 1910, 10N104, ANS.

employment in the growing service and industrial sectors in Guinea.<sup>10</sup> If true, this meant that the French colonial military was in competition for labor with the private sector and the labor pool for colonial state projects.

The French military responded to the insufficient number of new voluntary recruits for the *tirailleurs sénégalais* by adding standardized bonuses and payments. As early as 1904, the French colonial army introduced a signing bonus to encourage new and re-enlisting recruits in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the signing bonus, the military would provide an indemnity, worth twice a month's salary, to soldiers designated to serve outside of French West Africa (AOF), which at the time meant deploying to French Equatorial Africa (AEF) and Madagascar. In effort to encourage West African men to enlist in the army, the French military replaced the unspoken promise of booty with monetary compensation. However, signing bonuses and indemnities were a flash in the pan in terms of maintaining a steady stream of fresh recruits over the long term. The colonial army was unable to reduce *tirailleurs sénégalais*' four-year tours of duty to the metropolitan army's standard two years because colonial troops were regulated by local decree.<sup>12</sup>

In 1908, the French colonial military extended the use of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to Morocco. This was a surprising move on the part of the French, considering West Africans' low levels of enthusiasm for military service. The deployment caught the attention of a military strategist by the name of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Mangin. Mangin had commanded *tirailleurs sénégalais* under Colonel Marchand in the conquest of the Sahel north of the Niger River bend. In 1909, Mangin launched a campaign to rapidly increase the size of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* permanently quartered in AOF. In coordination with Governor-General Ponty, he proposed basic strategies to encourage enlistment by altering the image of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The first strategy was spun as a means to create stronger bonds between the French colonial administration and traditional West African leaders. Colonial agents coerced local notables to push their elite sons into the military with the hope that their presence would raise the status of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>13</sup> The French colonial administration depended on local leaders and to help them in their colonial projects, and by gaining control over the heirs of indigenous titles, the French could wield a higher degree of power over traditional rulers. The second tactic to improve the image of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* was to alter recruitment legislation.

Mangin promoted the increased deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* outside of AOF, particularly in North Africa, which would make them conveniently accessible in case of an aggressive German threat to metropolitan France.<sup>14</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais* could fulfill this task because of Mangin's own pseudo-scientific reasoning. The African diaspora, ranging from Mameluke soldiers in Egypt to Africans-Americans serving in the American Civil War were, for Mangin, incontrovertible evidence of the innate martial quality of black peoples, as well as their

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<sup>10</sup> Correspondence from the Lieutenant-Governor of French Guinea to the Governor-General of AOF, William Ponty, 19 October 1907, 4D30, ANS.

<sup>11</sup> Decree of 14 November 1904: *Journal Officiel de la République de France (JORF)*, 23 November 1904, 6934.

<sup>12</sup> Law of 21 March 1905: *JORF*, 23 March 1905, 1881.

<sup>13</sup> Summary written by Charles Mangin destined for William Ponty, in a file dated 1909-1910, 4D31, ANS.

<sup>14</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Mangin, *La Force Noire* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1910), 101.

adaptability to a wide range of climates and geographies.<sup>15</sup> Particularly pertinent to the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' recent deployment in Morocco, Mangin connected them with a Moroccan military institution, the *Abid al-Bukhari*, which was an elite Guard created by Moroccan Sultan Moulay Ismail during his reign from 1671 to 1727.<sup>16</sup> In making these references to military institutions made up of diasporic sub-Saharan Africans, Mangin glossed over the historical meanings of the trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan slavery, as well as the socio-economic stereotypes attached to dark-skinned peoples in North Africa and North America.

In 1909, Mangin embarked on a tour across AOF in order to conduct a census of West Africa. The results allowed France to better understand the demographic statistics of the enormous space it had just colonized. Mangin published the results of what became known as the Mangin Mission, in his *pièce de résistance*, *La Force Noire*, in 1910.<sup>17</sup> He estimated that there were 10,650,000 inhabitants (without making age and gender distinctions) in West Africa, then argued that French military could recruit up to 40,000 troops over the next four years (1910-1913), which would engage less than four percent of the total population.<sup>18</sup>

*La Force Noire* launched numerous debates regarding the use of sub-Saharan African colonial troops in North Africa. The competing voices and concerns in these debates exposed the paucity of France's knowledge of West and North African peoples. These debates were informed by a superficial understanding of the profound trans-Saharan relations between North and West Africa that extended nearly a millennium into the past. The French reached misinformed conclusions regarding the confluence of slave ancestry and sub-Saharan African phenotypical characteristics in Morocco, as well as and their relevance to socio-economic status in early twentieth-century Morocco.<sup>19</sup> On one hand, the French believed that the deployment of sub-Saharan African soldiers in Morocco would offend Moroccans' sensibilities regarding racial hierarchy. Conversely, it was argued that Moroccans would not oppose the use of French colonial sub-Saharan troops in Morocco, because of the historical legacies of slavery attached to institutions like the *Abid al-Bukhari*.

*Tirailleurs sénégalais* were marketed as ideal intermediaries in North Africa because West African soldiers would be more politically neutral than soldiers recruited from populations indigenous to Morocco. However, cultural similarities, like Islam, could undermine French control over their sub-Saharan African troops. The French aired concerns regarding shared religious practices among Moroccans and *tirailleurs sénégalais* that could encourage subversive exchange between those in the employment of the French military, and those being pacified. The number of practicing Muslims among West African troops in the pre-WWI period is

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<sup>15</sup> Mangin, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles, "La Force Noire dans L'Histoire," *La Force Noire* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1910), 103-175.

<sup>16</sup> The *Abid al-Bukhari* was compiled of dark-skinned Moroccan peoples, who assumed slaves, or former slaves, because of their sub-Saharan African phenotypical characteristics.

<sup>17</sup> *Noire* means black in English, and *force* translates to strength, force, power, or manpower.

<sup>18</sup> Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'Effort de Guerre en AOF (1914-1919)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982), 24.

<sup>19</sup> For further literature on similar questions, please see Chouki El Hamel. "Blacks and Slavery in Morocco: The Question of the *Haratin* at the End of the Seventeenth Century," in *Diasporic Africa: A Reader* (New York: New York University, 2006), 177-199, or Mohammed Ennaji, *Serving the Master: Slavery and Society in Nineteenth-Century Morocco*. Trans. by Seth Graebner. (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1999), Chapter Nine, or William Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880*. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000), Introduction.

difficult to ascertain, though they were a drastic minority in the ranks. Nevertheless, some Frenchmen felt extremist Islam could permeate the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and inspire acts of indiscipline and recalcitrance. Mangin assuaged these fears by emphasizing that West African Islam was distinct from North African or Arabian Islam due to the degree of mysticism and pagan beliefs that were incorporated into its adherents' daily practices.<sup>20</sup>

Members of the French military argued that racial and linguistic barriers would maintain social segregation between colonial troops and Moroccans. This would serve the French military because it would be exceedingly difficult for *tirailleurs sénégalais* to defect and seek refuge within Moroccan communities. Members of local populations would also be unable to infiltrate and influence the allegiances of sub-Saharan African soldiers due to linguistic differences. Mangin also made ludicrous claims that the *tirailleurs sénégalais* only subscribed to the cult of the military and extremist Moroccan religious leaders could not distract them from their military obligations.<sup>21</sup> In blanket statements meant to stifle further, Mangin predicted *tirailleurs sénégalais* would not interact with Moroccans, and vice versa. Race-based mutual hatred,<sup>22</sup> language barriers,<sup>23</sup> and black soldiers' isolation in "negro villages" would segregate them.<sup>24</sup>

Medical issues were also present in the debates regarding *tirailleurs sénégalais*' deployment in Morocco. It was feared that West African men accustomed to Sahelian and tropical climates would not perform satisfactory military labor in temperate and wintry environments. There were also questions raised about *tirailleurs sénégalais*' immunity to social and physical diseases in Morocco. Mangin placated the concerns of epidemiology and health conditions specific to West Africans serving in Morocco. French commanding officers in North Africa, who supported Mangin's mission, used their medical and morale reports to heap accolades on the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' performance and capabilities in Morocco. These reports were laced with the same jargon and ideas coined by Mangin in *La Force Noire*. Mangin and his co-conspirators exploited every bit of advantageous information regarding the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' performance in North Africa and discounted all negative reports as exceptional and conditional to specific and abnormal circumstances.

The debates following the publication of *La Force Noire* also grappled with the financial aspects of recruiting, training, and maintaining the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The French military contended that West Africans' needs were fewer than those of North African troops due to the austere, harsh West African conditions that they grew up in. Consequently, West African troops could be paid much less than metropolitan or North African soldiers. They would also require fewer supplies in terms of food, bedding, housing, and clothes. This was a winning point for those in support of building a reservoir of soldiers in AOF. In 1911, the central French government approved increases in the recruitment and maintenance for such a permanent presence in AOF. The Ministry of War would contribute 1,800,000 francs, and the Ministry of the Colonies would contribute 2,870,000 to this military maneuver.<sup>25</sup> With financial support

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<sup>20</sup> "Les Troupes Noires," *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française*, 4 (April 1912).

<sup>21</sup> Mangin, *La Force Noire*, 331-2.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from General Moinier to the Minister of War, 12 November 1909, 7N81, SHDT.

<sup>23</sup> Report by General Bailloud on the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, 9 July 1911, 7N81, SHDT.

<sup>24</sup> I address these "negro villages" at length later in this chapter.

<sup>25</sup> "Histoire de la question des Troupes Noires," undated and anonymous; in a folder dated 1908-11, 7N81, SHDT.

pledged from each of these governmental ministries, the next step was to legislate the rapid recruitment of men living in French West Africa.

This came in a special decree on February 7, 1912 that substantially altered methods of recruitment in West Africa. After the abolition of the *rachat* system, most *tirailleurs sénégalais* were voluntary enlistees, although coercion and social pressure influenced recruits' decisions to sign up for the French colonial military. After 1912, the French military could conscript West African men between the ages of twenty and forty, through a quota-based system.<sup>26</sup> Conscripted soldiers were obligated to serve four-year engagements and were awarded 160 francs as a signing bonus. Voluntary soldiers signed up for five- to six-year engagements and their signing bonus ranged from 200 to 240 francs respectively. Clearly there were financial advantages to being voluntary soldiers, and conscripted soldiers were allowed to change their status to voluntary and were supposed to be compensated for the difference between the two signing bonuses. There was also a new stipulation in this legislation that standardized *tirailleurs sénégalais*' military service outside of AOF. They were required to complete at least a one-year tour of duty outside their home colony. The French military hoped that the 1912 decree would permit them to raise the standing number of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* from 24,000 to 30,000 men, as well as drastically increase their presence and utility in other regions of French empire.<sup>27</sup>

The number of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco increased dramatically between 1908 and 1913. The composition of the French Army deployed in Morocco prior to the World War I was distributed as follows:<sup>28</sup>

Year	Total Forces	Europeans	Algerians and Tunisians	<i>Tirailleurs Sénégalais</i>	Percentage <i>Tirailleurs Sénégalais</i>
1908	10,476	4,260	4,872	1,344	13
1909	7,325	3,681	2,532	1,112	15
1910	6,228	3,314	2,166	748	12
1911	17,819	10,094	5,945	1,780	10
1912	41,065	23,882	13,314	3,870	9
1913	61,692	35,867	17,573	8,252	13

The largest increase in recruitment of West African troops coincided with conscription legislation ratified in 1912, as well as the formal integration of Morocco into France's political sphere. With the 1912 recruitment decree, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were well on their way to fulfilling former Governor-General Léon Faidherbe's prediction regarding Senegal's role in French empire: "other colonies give us products, this one will give us men."<sup>29</sup> With the pacification of Morocco, the new French Protectorate was poised to become the experimental site for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' debut outside of sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>26</sup> Decree of 7 February 1912: *JORF*, 10 February 1912, 1347-1348.

<sup>27</sup> "Nos Troupes Indigènes," *Bulletin du Comité de l'Afrique Française*, 2 (February 1912): 67-8.

<sup>28</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), 28.

<sup>29</sup> Mangin, *La Force Noire*, 259.

## Locating Lab Specimens: Recruiting West Africans

After 1912, the recruitment and mobilization processes brought French colonialism into the lives of a great swath of the population of AOF. West Africans participated in recruitment drives through a range of roles that included medical inspectors, agents of recruitment and coercion, and most often as prospective recruits. West Africans' reactions to mobile recruitment boards and invasive medical exams are fascinating because of strategies employed by West Africans to improve their standing with the army, or avoid military service altogether. Article Six of the 1912 recruitment legislation awarded the French military a degree of latitude in recruitment practices because it stated, "recruitment through conscription would be made following local customs."<sup>30</sup> Within the broader imperial system of French military recruitment, this legislation made West Africa an exceptional space where recruitment practices occurred differently than on metropolitan soil or in other colonies. The authors of this legislation made erroneous assumptions regarding local customs and whether each West African society had historical traditions of conscripting soldiers and maintaining standing armies.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the majority of West Africa had only recently been integrated into French empire. Non-littoral communities had had little contact with French people, or the French language, prior to the appearance of military recruiting agents. Mobile recruitment boards often consisted of metropolitan and West African soldiers and officers, locally born interlocutors, medical practitioners, and translators. The French military used West African doctors to save expenses by exploiting their medical expertise and knowledge of local languages and customs. Two West African doctors, from Ouagadougou and Mopti, protested their assignment to military recruitment boards because they felt it wasted their education and violated their contracts with the French colonial administration.<sup>31</sup>

In the recruitment process, there were also conflicting interests in the French colonial army, the soldiers being recruited, and the political leadership of the communities from which they came. Mandatory service was to be adapted to the idioms of indigenous traditions, which would lead indigenous populations to more easily accept conscription.<sup>32</sup> Archival reports do not suggest that the French adapted their recruitment practices to each locality. Instead, the French entered "numerous, incessant discussions" with local chiefs in order to convince them to endorse recruitment and cooperate in forwarding able men to the recruitment board.<sup>33</sup> The French colonial administration had to invest power in local chiefs in order to achieve authority over a broader swath of the population. This hierarchy of trust was ironic considering that the French did not have confidence in local leaders to be even-handed in furnishing local, able-bodied, men to the French military. In 1912, William Ponty cautioned French military agents must "exercise a great surveillance and vigilant control on the operations of recruitment: they must see to it that the chiefs do not abuse their authority in order to satiate personal or familial rancor and hatred." He also advised military recruiters to prevent chiefs from profiting from the authority conferred on them by the French colonial administration.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Decree of 7 February 1912: *JORF*, 10 February 1912, 1347-1348.

<sup>31</sup> Report on recruitment addressed to the Governor-General of the AOF, 1<sup>st</sup> semester 1913, 4D34, ANS.

<sup>32</sup> Document about reorganizing indigenous troops signed by Clozel, 1 March 1912, 4D35, ANS.

<sup>33</sup> Report signed by William Ponty, 22 August 1912, 4D33, ANS.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

In reality, the French could not control all of the details of recruitment in West Africa. They were reliant on West African intermediaries to perform the bulk of recruitment, which meant they had to overlook inappropriate recruitment procedures manifest in rural areas. One example was the confirmation of a recruit's age. In principal, the French colonial military recruited West African men between the ages of twenty and forty. At the turn of the twentieth-century, the French administration lacked a cohesive civil service that recorded most West African peoples' demographic and civil data. Birth certificates were largely non-existent, thus soldiers, medical professionals, and local headmen estimated enlistee's ages. In addition to approximating age, many potential recruits were required to choose the names to be entered into the recruitment register. This act legally bound them to the names registered with the French army, which would have consequences for their re-enlistment and access to military pensions in the future. The concept of possessing a single, official name was uncommon in much of West Africa because nicknames were prolific. Gregory Mann claimed that some recruits used enlistment as an opportunity to effectively erase an undesirable past, but in most cases, name changes were managed by French military recruitment agents and local leaders in order to benefit themselves, as opposed to the recruit.<sup>35</sup>

Many individuals in West Africa were reported to have employed a variety of tactics to foil the 1912 recruitment campaign. Rural populations in the Saloum River watershed hastily relocated to the Gambia, a neighboring British colony, in order to avoid conscription. Entire villages, like Dacamaliek and Messirah, were completely abandoned by populations fleeing the conscription of their young males.<sup>36</sup> Recruitment drives also affected commerce in the Saloum region. Merchants living in the Gambia refrained from traveling into French territories because they feared conscription. Military obligations also provoked nomadic and migratory populations of the West African Savannah and Sahel to relocate to remote regions far from the reach of French colonialism.<sup>37</sup> In addition to migration, villages hid their able-bodied men from recruitment officers and substituted community members who were physically inapt for military service.<sup>38</sup> Muslim communities around Saint-Louis in Senegal used religious seclusion to undermine the conscription of their young males. A significant number of these men were placed under the protection of marabouts.<sup>39</sup> A military administrator commented that these evasive tactics negatively affected local populations because their able-bodied men could not participate in agricultural work.<sup>40</sup> He failed to acknowledge that military service would also detrimentally affect local populations ability to farm. Aside from agricultural labor, French business owners in French Guinea alerted the French military that their contracted manual

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<sup>35</sup> Gregory Mann, "What's in an Alias? Family Names, Individual Histories, and Historical Method in the Western Sudan," *History in Africa*, 29 (2002): 312.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from Challey to Ponty, 23 May 1913, 4D33, ANS.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from the Administer of Louga to the Governor of Senegal, 7 April 1912, 4D35, ANS.

<sup>38</sup> Report on indigenous recruitment addressed to the Governor-General of the AOF, 1<sup>st</sup> semester 1913, 4D34, ANS.

<sup>39</sup> Marabout has taken on many meanings in terms of political, social, and cultural authority. For the purposes of the point above, we shall restrict the meaning to a Sufi religious leader entrusted with pupils to teach them the Koran.

<sup>40</sup> Letter to the heads of regional Senegalese administrative units, 28 May 1912, 4D35, ANS.

laborers were abandoning their jobs to sign up with the *tirailleurs sénégalais* units destined for North Africa as early as 1910.<sup>41</sup>

In some cases, West African men eagerly petitioned the French military in order to enter its ranks. Several hand-written letters from Senegalese men, which may have been penned by intermediaries or fabricated by the French military, arrived on the desks of high-ranking colonial administrators. François Yousouf Gaye, from Thiès, claimed that he had been interested in a military career since the age of ten. His request was accepted and he was integrated into the *tirailleurs sénégalais* units destined for Africa in 1910.<sup>42</sup> Another man, Nicola Huchard, wrote to the French military in the hopes of enlisting in the French metropolitan units, as opposed to the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Huchard was considered a French citizen because he had been born in Rufisque, one of the Four Communes.<sup>43</sup> Huchard's appeal was rejected because of his birth in Senegal, which outweighed his citizenship and made him eligible for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>44</sup> Huchard had shrewdly attempted to serve the reduced two years required of French citizens, as opposed to the four- to six-year terms required of West African *indigènes* serving in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

For other enlistees, the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* provided an opportunity to escape oppressive, patriarchal, and gerontocratic hierarchies of socio-political authority. Bakary Diallo, a Senegalese soldier who served in Morocco, joined the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to flee poor familial relations and life employment as a shepherd. Diallo claimed other recruits also viewed military service as an economic opportunity for themselves and their families.<sup>45</sup> Veterans, and active *tirailleurs sénégalais*, served to positively influence West Africans to enlist in the colonial military institutions. These men sported uniforms, exhibited wealth, and carried the authority of the French military.<sup>46</sup> A French general observed that men living near French posts, who had more contact with the French and their African intermediaries, were more likely to see France's cause as their own.<sup>47</sup> At the turn of the century, many veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* went on to locate posts in the civil service, and some were able to exploit their new positions of power—like the fictional Wangrin.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Tirailleurs Sénégalais'* Experiential Education in Morocco**

The level of disorganization and inconsistency in the recruitment process paralleled novel recruits' training and education. There were many complaints from French officers in Morocco regarding the poor quality of West African troops arriving in Casablanca between 1910 and

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<sup>41</sup> Letter from the Lieutenant-Governor of Guinea to the Administrator of La Camayenne, 13 February 1911, 4D31, ANS.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to the Lieutenant-Governor of Senegal, 30 March 1910, 4D30, ANS.

<sup>43</sup> I address the differences between *originaires* and *indigènes*, and their military commitments, in Chapter Three.

<sup>44</sup> Letter signed by Bouvet, 24 May 1910, 4D30, ANS. The outcome would have been the opposite after 1915.

<sup>45</sup> Bakary Diallo, *Force Bonté* (Paris: F. Reider et Cie, 1926), 26.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>47</sup> "Sur l'utilisation des troupes noires en 1910-1911," 22 September 1911, 3H152, SHDT.

<sup>48</sup> Amadou Hampaté Bâ, *The Fortunes of Wangrin*, trans. Aina Pavolini Taylor, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).



1914. Some French officers surmised that this was a result of West Africans' civilizational underdevelopment, but most blamed recruiters and drill sergeants in West Africa. The French military was inconsistent in training *tirailleurs sénégalais* in AOF, but were consistent in poorly preparing troops for North Africa. Berdoulat, a French military agent in Morocco in 1913, found many *tirailleurs sénégalais* had received abbreviated training, which in no way prepared them for the prolonged, arduous battles in Morocco.<sup>49</sup> Another military representative claimed that there were only ninety-eight of 600 soldiers in the 11<sup>th</sup> *tirailleurs sénégalais* battalion (BTS) who had served in the army more than six months before the battalion was deployed in Morocco.<sup>50</sup> Reports of disobedience indicated how poorly *tirailleurs sénégalais* adjusted to military order and neglectful abuse. Many of the new *tirailleurs sénégalais* were unaccustomed to military rigor, weapons, and the French language—even after six months of training.

During the recruitment process, the French military constructed and reinforced stereotypes regarding the martial quality of particular ethno-linguistic groups in West Africa. The French military claimed that West Africans had innate warrior qualities, but the majority of their recruits were agriculturalists prior to their enlistment.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, based on assumptions of fixed West African ethno-linguistic groups, French colonial military agents attempted to ethnically balance *tirailleurs sénégalais* units so that no ethnic group dominated a particular regiment or company. The French assumed that this would facilitate obedience. Contrarily, this tactic created linguistic confusion and conflicted with French efforts to create a degree of uniformity among the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. French West Africa was a vast territory inhabited by numerous ethno-linguistic groups who had distinct social and cultural practices. By amalgamating them intentionally, the French did themselves a disservice regarding the fluid and complete transmission of information in one military unit. Instead, important information required several translators, translations, and valuable minutes.

In socially engineering their *tirailleurs sénégalais* units, the French also respected what they perceived as indigenous socio-cultural hierarchies. French administrators' and military officials' based the racial hierarchy on assumptions correlating with historical relations between nomadic Saharan peoples, herding populations of the Savannah regions, and sedentary populations of the forest belt.<sup>52</sup> Once again the history of trans-Saharan slavery and the movement of slaves from West Africa to Saharan oases and North Africa also influenced how French military agents imagined French West African racial hierarchies. As a result, the French separated West African races into "white" and "black" peoples. Whites were those peoples assumed to have some Arab or Berber ancestry and lived in, or on the fringes, of the Sahara. Blacks were those sedentary societies living closer to the forest belts.<sup>53</sup> French military officials generally believed that they should respect this racial hierarchy by disallowing members of "black" races to command "white" races.<sup>54</sup> The French also considered nomadic peoples largely

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<sup>49</sup> Letter from Berdoulat to the Minister of the Colonies, 25 June 1913, 4D102, ANS.

<sup>50</sup> Report on the 11<sup>th</sup> BTS, 20 August 1913, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>51</sup> Report on indigenous recruitment addressed to the Governor-General of the AOF, 1<sup>st</sup> semester 1913, 4D34, ANS.

<sup>52</sup> James Webb, *Desert Frontier: Ecological and Economic Change Along the Western Sahel, 1600-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 22-26.

<sup>53</sup> "Les Peuples de l'Afrique Occidentale" which is an extract from the "Mission des Troupes Noires," signed by Charles Mangin, 2 June 1912, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>54</sup> Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, Introduction.

unsuitable for infantry purposes because of their unruly nature and their inability to assimilate to the French army's hierarchical order.<sup>55</sup>

Given France's acknowledgement of distinct ethnicities and purposeful balancing act regarding ethnicities and races, they often failed to achieve uniform discipline or an umbrella identity that superseded these racial and ethnic divisions. The French military also believed they could achieve troop consistency by combining new West African recruits with re-enlisting soldiers. New recruits, mostly untrained in French, learned the principles and values of the French military more often from experienced soldiers, who spoke indigenous West African languages, than from French officers. The intermixing of seasoned and novice soldiers purportedly allowed for the latter to organically experience socialization and conformity through observations and proximity to the former. Additionally, the ideal composition of large military units in Morocco was a third North African troops, a third metropolitan troops, and a third of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*; however, this was rarely achieved.<sup>56</sup>

Once West Africans were officially recruits of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, the military transported them to regional training centers, where they underwent physical strengthening, learned military maneuvers, rhythms, and chain-of-command. West African soldiers learned how obedience, or lack thereof, elicited rewards and punishments. The training period also allowed West African soldiers to adjust to novel aspects of soldiering, like wearing closed-toe rigid boots and new styles of pre-fabricated clothing. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the French military made little effort to teach French to *tirailleurs sénégalais* recruits beyond basic military commands and rudimentary comprehension skills. The Resident-General of Morocco, Lyautey, made several complaints to the Minister of War and the Governor-General of the AOF regarding the slip shod assemblage, incomplete training, and reckless deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco. Lyautey specifically requested that the French military only send West Africans to Morocco who already read and speak French.<sup>57</sup>

There were serious repercussions for *tirailleurs sénégalais* if they were not properly trained in military maneuvers and in basic French. In some cases, where there was heavy fire, West African troops crouched together in "fatalistic groups."<sup>58</sup> These soldiers were untrained in methods of taking cover, exit strategies, and riposting. Marksmanship should have been a critical skill in *tirailleurs sénégalais*' training prior to their deployment from Dakar. However, Commander Mordelle, in 1912, divulged that West African soldiers were not supplied with rifles prior to leaving Dakar, and there were insufficient arms for them in Casablanca.<sup>59</sup> This indicated *tirailleurs sénégalais* probably had limited contact with firearms in West Africa that they were under-equipped for battle in Morocco. Commander Mordelle also illuminated the fact that French military operatives in West Africa and North Africa often neglected *tirailleurs sénégalais*' instruction by squandering soldiers' energy with manual labor. This was a common complaint, which evidenced the fact that the French colonial military, in collaboration with the

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<sup>55</sup> Letter from General Perreaux to the Governor-General of the AOF, 9 July 1906, 4D30, ANS.

<sup>56</sup> "Sur les troupes sénégalaises du Maroc Occidental," signed by Franchet d'Esperey, September 1913, 4D31, ANS.

<sup>57</sup> Letter from Berdoulat to the Minister of the Colonies, 17 April 1913, 4D102, ANS.

<sup>58</sup> "Sur le troupes Sénégalaises du Maroc Occidental," signed by Franchet d'Esperey, September 1913, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Mordelle to the Governor-General of the AOF, 14 May 1912, 4D101, ANS.

colonial state, sent fresh recruits to toil on public works projects as opposed to properly training them in military arts.

Pierre Khorat, a French officer, argued that the majority of Frenchmen commanding West African troops were not sufficiently concerned with the special needs of black troops.<sup>60</sup> In fact, there were examples of overt abuse directed at *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in Morocco. In one example of mistreatment, a member of the French Foreign Legion told the *tirailleurs sénégalais* that their dinner comprised of the horses that were killed during the previous day's fighting. French officers tried to debunk this falsehood, but nonetheless, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* refused to eat that evening.<sup>61</sup> These types of incidents alluded to the ubiquitous insults and agitations that West African troops lived with both on and off the battlefield. Some *tirailleurs sénégalais* sought ways to avoid them by truncating their military career. West Africans intentionally made themselves ill, committed self-mutilation, and attempted suicide or flight. A general report on the performance of *tirailleurs sénégalais* detailed that of nine *tirailleurs sénégalais* sent to special section, four were being punished for voluntary mutilation. In 1913, seven out of fifteen West African troops who went before the Military Council were punished for attempted defection or acting as accessories to AWOL soldiers.<sup>62</sup> Small-scale recalcitrance and individual disciplinary infractions made clear West Africans' irritations with their treatment, Morocco's climate and terrain, as well as their dissatisfaction with military life.

After one exceptional display of disobedience, in April of 1913, several West African troops were given five-year sentences in military prison in Morocco. The events began with a single *tirailleurs sénégalais*, Moussa Sambaké, of the 1<sup>st</sup> Company of the 15<sup>th</sup> BTS refused to pick up his *barda*, or military kit, during training exercises on the Merzaga Plateau. Sambaké was removed from the ranks and isolated for his act of indiscipline. The following day, two other soldiers, Mambé Keita and Digbo Missaté, refused to march at a rapid pace. They were removed from training maneuvers and sent to the nearby military police headquarters. In order to resume drilling exercises, the present commanding officer ordered troops to don their *bardas*, which led more *tirailleurs sénégalais* to break rank. First-class soldier, Karifa Missaré, said in Bambara, "Anyone who picks up their *barda*, will be known as an incestuous cur," which gave rise to general disorder. On his way to the police station, Missaré placed his hand on his machete and said, "I will go to prison, but I will not carry my *barda*."<sup>63</sup>

At first blush, this event demonstrated that *tirailleurs sénégalais* lacked respect for their commanding officers and had not been properly sensitized to military discipline prior to deployment in Morocco. At the end of this lengthy report on *tirailleurs sénégalais* punitively condemned to military prison, there was a brief mention that recent decreases in sugar, coffee, and cooking oil rations may have influenced the West African troops' collective disobedience. Suddenly, the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' recalcitrance looks like collective protest against austerity measures and general negligence on the part of the French colonial military. The events unfolding on the Merzaga Plateau also alluded to how the French military experimented with troops' performance level and their daily rations. Commanding officers were lenient and

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<sup>60</sup> Pierre Khorat, *Scènes de la Pacification Marocaine*, 262-3.

<sup>61</sup> Diallo, *Force Bonté*, 76.

<sup>62</sup> "Sur les troupes sénégalaises du Maroc Occidental," signed by Franchet d'Esperey, September 1913, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>63</sup> "État des militaires des unités sénégalaises condamnées par le 1<sup>ère</sup> Conseil de Guerre des T2H0 du 1<sup>er</sup> janvier au 30 juin 1913," from Casablanca 1913, 3H692, SHDT.

Missaré, Keita, and Missaté were eventually released from detention. Missaré, in particular, was given special treatment because the French recognized that Missaré was Malinké, and all the men of his ethno-linguistic group in the company looked up to him.

### **Results of Experimentation: Hypotheses versus *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*' Realities**

While serving in Morocco, the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' daily experiences were significantly affected by how much time, energy, and money the French colonial military invested in them. For the French colonial military, one of the attractions in increasing the usage of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in empire was their low cost of maintenance in comparison with North African and metropolitan troops. In order to maintain their affordability, the French colonial military tinkered with troops' baseline health by undersupplying basic provisions. Instead of properly training *tirailleurs sénégalais*, their French commanders relied heavily upon their innate "martial" qualities. Throughout the archival record, French military agents portrayed their prejudices towards sub-Saharan Africans' rugged tenacity that came as a result of growing up in harsh physical environments and primitive upbringings. Ostensibly, *tirailleurs sénégalais*' indigenous living conditions predisposed them to perform superhuman tasks with inadequate nourishment and insufficient protection from the elements. Combined with this erroneous belief was a conviction that West Africans were less civilized and required fewer basic necessities than other troops serving in the French army. Thus, pre-WWI Morocco became the French colonial military's Petri dish, in which to probe the limits of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' physical health through dietary and social engineering. This period in *tirailleurs sénégalais*' history represents a moment where the French military penetrated West African troops' intimate physiological functions in order to grasp their basic carnal and corporeal requirements. As a result, there were several health emergencies among *tirailleurs sénégalais* because the French colonial military made a science out of balancing negligence with subsistence.

Predominantly, the central carbohydrate in many West Africans' diets was rice or millet. In Morocco, the most prevalent carbohydrate was couscous made from wheat semolina. The military imported rice or distributed local, lower quality, rice to the *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in Morocco—and sometimes little else. In 1908 there was a beriberi outbreak among the *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in Chaouia, which was the large, unsettled region surrounding Casablanca.<sup>64</sup> Beriberi is a disease caused by deficiencies in thiamine, or vitamin B1, and is characterized by degenerative changes in the immune, digestive, and cardiovascular systems. Thiamine is essential for the body's metabolic processes and is amply found in plants and animals, whereas many grains, like rice, are deficient in B-complex vitamins. Beriberi is associated with famines in rice-dependent Asian countries because the populations' caloric intake principally consisted of rice. In Morocco, West Africans were the only soldiers among the ranks of the colonial army affected by the outbreak of beriberi. The French military deliberately accommodated the *tirailleurs sénégalais* with rice, but inevitably failed in nourishing these troops because of their misconceptions of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' metabolic hardiness. After the beriberi outbreak in 1908, there were efforts made to diversify West African soldiers' dietary regimens. Despite measures implemented, individual *tirailleurs sénégalais*

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<sup>64</sup> "Note pour l'État-Majeur de l'Armée," 5 November 1909, 7N80, SHDT.

were hospitalized for beriberi throughout Morocco's pacification and there was another small outbreak of beriberi in 1913.<sup>65</sup>

*Tirailleurs sénégalais* also lacked sufficient potable water. Dysentery, giardia, and diarrhea were prolific in medical reports from the pacification campaign in Morocco. Beriberi discriminately affected West African troops, however waterborne illnesses impacted all troops deployed by France in Morocco. Troops were often stationed in sparsely populated regions of Morocco, where the terrain ranged from rocky, mountainous vertical landscapes to featureless arid plateaus with few water sources. The principal means of water purification was a Lapeyriere filtration system, which was cumbersome and required several components imported from France. Consequently, fully functioning water treatment apparatuses were in short supply and reserved for metropolitan troops stationed in Morocco.<sup>66</sup> Ironically, the highest French official in Morocco had acknowledged that *tirailleurs sénégalais* consumed more water than their North African and European counterparts.<sup>67</sup> These factors combined, led to an abundance of low-level intestinal and digestive ailments in West African soldiers.

In addition to illnesses caused by poor diet and unsanitary water, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* frequently contracted respiratory ailments, pulmonary infections, fevers, worms, and common colds. West Africa and North Africa, separated by the Sahara, were distinct epidemiologic and environmental zones. Sub-Saharan Africans' exposure to a new set of communicable diseases and the French army's slow recognition of their degrading affect on *tirailleurs sénégalais'* health increased black troops susceptibility to viruses and bacteria prevalent in Morocco. In 1909, *tirailleurs sénégalais* were hospitalized for respiratory infections twice as frequently as European soldiers, and three times as often during 1910.<sup>68</sup> In both of those years, there were three times as many European soldiers stationed in Morocco than *tirailleurs sénégalais* so these hospitalizations were extremely disproportionate. In 1913, a report disclosed that 910 out of 5,962 West African servicemen, or roughly fifteen percent, were hospitalized for pneumonia, dysentery, severe fevers, tuberculosis, and typhoid. Nearly three hundred West African troops stationed in Fez during the winter of 1913 were plagued with respiratory infections; forty were admitted to the hospital, and six died.<sup>69</sup> Finally in 1914, there was recognition at high administrative levels that West African soldiers were useful in Morocco, however they needed at least one to two years to acclimatize and should not be posted to the mountainous zones during the winter.<sup>70</sup>

Most West African troops had not previously experienced the temperate climates of the Moroccan coast, needless to say the bulk of them were strangers to the frigid temperatures, freezing rain, and snow of the Atlas Mountains. Most were also unfamiliar with the rugged terrain and higher elevations of the Moroccan hinterland. The French army, as late as 1913, did not acknowledge that *tirailleurs sénégalais* required extra blankets, additional warm clothing, and high quality footwear to insulate them from the climate and decrease their susceptibility to

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<sup>65</sup> Report from Lieutenant Dardignac of Casbah Tadla to General-Commandant in Casablanca, 18 November 1913, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>66</sup> Report from Health Services signed by Doctor Débrin, 12 September 1911, 3H153, SHDT.

<sup>67</sup> "Troupes débarquées au Maroc," for the Minister of War, 22 September 1911, 3H152, SHDT.

<sup>68</sup> Report from Health Services signed by Doctor Debrin, 15 August 1911, 3H153, SHDT.

<sup>69</sup> Report from Colonel Bulleux, commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Mixed Colonial Regiment of Morocco in Fez, 25 October 1913, 3H92, SHDT.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from General Lyautey to the Minister of War, 14 November 1914, 3H92, SHDT.

viral infection. West Africans were assigned lace-up half boots, known as *brodequins*, which crippled them with podiatric ailments. A study, conducted in June of 1911, reported an astonishing number of foot injuries among the troops of the 4<sup>th</sup> BTS. The root cause of the injuries was defective shoes assigned to West African troops.<sup>71</sup> A laymen's suggested absurd remedy was that the *tirailleurs sénégalais* should march barefoot or in sandals, like they did in West Africa.<sup>72</sup> Basic uniforms were also insufficient, in their material, quality, and abundance, for the rigors of the Moroccan climate and topography.<sup>73</sup> While the French seemed slow on the uptake regarding the basic needs of their West African troops stationed in Morocco, they were overly cautious regarding social exchange and social diseases that the military had less direct control over.

The social diseases that the French found most threatening to their West African troops included Islamic propaganda, alcoholism, and sexually transmitted infections. During the Mangin debates, Islamic fundamentalism was raised as a potentially subversive ideology that could spread from Moroccan civilians to *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Based on archival sources, these fears never became a reality. The French estimated that less than twenty percent of their West African troops were Muslim.<sup>74</sup> Recruits were often identified as fetishists and animists. More often than not, the space in their military passbooks for religious belief remained blank. Regardless of their religious persuasion, there were many archival references to *gris-gris*, or talisman, which *tirailleurs sénégalais* wore as spiritual protection. In one descriptive desert battle scene, West African troops “participating in the battle, caressed their *gris-gris*.”<sup>75</sup> In another example, where French troops were in a skirmish with Moroccan insurgents, the French and North African troops were “stumbling and crawling towards the precarious shelter of the trenches, whereas the West African troops, confident in their *gris-gris*, took impassive attitudes to gunfire.”<sup>76</sup> The description of these soldiers' unflappable reactions to deadly fire conforms to the fatalism that the French colonial military affiliated with Muslim *tirailleurs sénégalais* throughout the archival record.

The French military conceptualized alcoholism in much the same way as fundamental Islam in terms of its undetectable spread, how susceptible West African troops were to it, and how it could potentially undermine military order. The military feared that drunkenness would not only lead *tirailleurs sénégalais* to acts of misconduct, but would also physically impair them in performing physical labor. The French colonial military assumed that *tirailleurs sénégalais* could not moderate their alcohol consumption, so West African troops were not allocated daily wine rations—like other troops serving in the French army. Palm wine was consumed regularly in much of tropical Africa, which meant that many *tirailleurs sénégalais* had had some experience with fermented beverages. The French military probably prevented West African troops from imbibing alcoholic beverages because they wanted to scrimp on wine rations and feared how inebriation would affect their undernourished and undersupplied troops. In fact, alcoholism was never a widespread disease among *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco. The

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<sup>71</sup> Report from the Health Services, signed by Doctor Debrin, 15 August 1911, 3H153, SHDT.

<sup>72</sup> “Troupes débarquées au Maroc,” for the Minister of War, 22 September 1911, 3H152, SHDT.

<sup>73</sup> Note for the Etat-Majeur of the Army, signed by Capitaine J. Dufieux, 5 November 1909, 7N80, SHDT.

<sup>74</sup> Letter detailing “La Force Noire,” 16 August 1913, 4D102, ANS.

<sup>75</sup> Khorat, *Scènes de la pacification marocaine*, 59.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

French claimed that those black troops—on average three to four per unit—who became drunk did so because of low tolerance, not extraordinary consumption.<sup>77</sup>

The spread of sexually transmitted infections among troops stationed in Morocco was pinned on unsavory social interactions between Moroccan women and troops employed by the French. According to one report, Morocco was considered a theater of promiscuity that yielded a double threat to the sexual health of *tirailleurs sénégalais*—venereal disease and homosexuality.<sup>78</sup> Homesickness was suspected as the major catalyst motivating troops to seek sexual liaisons with the local population. In order to counter homesickness, the French military took measures to isolate and insulate West African troops when they were not on campaign. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were housed separately from North African and metropolitan troops in Moroccan military camps. The French placed a positive spin on this racial segregation of their troops by touting the notion of recreating “negro villages” in which *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ quarters were literally part bivouac, part camp and part village.<sup>79</sup> The French military conjectured that in these separate spaces, West African troops could socialize among themselves and rekindle something of their non-military, African lives. In order to complete these segregated black villages, the French military funded the transportation of *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ wives and children to Morocco.

### **(Re)Creating an African Village**

West African soldiers and their families lived in constructed spaces that were distinct and removed from other colonial and French soldiers participating in the pacification of Morocco. This situation was advantageous to *tirailleurs sénégalais* in terms of providing stability through domesticity, however it was detrimental to the incorporation and homogenization of West African troops with the rest of the French army. Ultimately, the French military’s stylized (re)creation of a pejorative West African village life, independent of other colonial troops’ standard barracks, encouraged the ostracization of West African troops and their typecasting as the dregs of the colonial troops. The presence of West African women in these villages also engendered rumors regarding these women’s loose sexual mores, as opposed to their wifely fidelity. The following section takes a closer look at the political economy of the African villages of the Moroccan campaign, as well as the role of West African women within them.

French officers described the *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ African villages as “a sort of smala,<sup>80</sup> where they are able to install themselves in something similar to their natal villages; proper

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<sup>77</sup> Report from Marrakech regarding the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 6<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Colonial Infantry in Morocco, 25 August 1913, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>78</sup> “Utilisation des troupes noires en 1910-1911,” for the Minister of War, 22 September 1911, 3H153, SHDT.

<sup>79</sup> “Sur les troupes sénégalaises du Maroc Occidental,” signed by Franchet d’Esperey, September 1913, 3H692, SHDT. In the archives, the *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ encampments were labeled “villages nègres” or “villages africains.” I use the English translations, negro or African village, interchangeably throughout this dissertation, but please note that even without quotation marks, I question the racial and civilizational prejudices embedded in these terms.

<sup>80</sup> From Arabic describing an arrangement of tents, which serve as a camp sheltering families and their belongings from the elements.

enough to support their morale and to facilitate their existence.”<sup>81</sup> Most likely, this French officer came to these conclusions without consulting the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, who lived in white, double-sided, conical tents that were grouped together along latitudinal and longitudinal corridors. The tents were impermanent structures and modeled after the semi-permanent structures of Touaregs and other Saharan nomadic people, who were largely excluded from recruitment into the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The tents served as sleeping quarters and all other activities, like dining, cleaning, and socializing, occurred outside the entryways. Natural sources of water were located nearby or the French installed pipe systems in order to provide water for cooking and washing. These special military camps were by no means comparable to *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ home communities, yet they served stereotypical French misconceptions of rustic village living in Africa.

West African villages were complex, functioning social units made up of people of all ranges of age, mutually beneficial social networks, agriculture and trade. West African villages were often positioned in a physical space that was conducive to supporting a large number of semi-sedentary people. West African troops hailed largely from small communities where there was much more ethno-linguistically homogenous than what they found in their special camps in Morocco. In fact, one French observer noted that the *tirailleurs sénégalais* existed in small groups, “generally formed by soldiers originating from the same region of the AOF, and a woman from the same region makes food for the group.”<sup>82</sup> Thus, when given the option, inactive soldiers fraternized with other men and women hailing from similar linguistic and geographical origins. Obviously, the special camps for the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were created for the benefit of the military, not West African soldiers nor their wives.

The “negro villages” were described as rudimentary installations in newly occupied regions of Morocco. The French colonial military installed *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ wives and children in these hazardous spaces.<sup>83</sup> The wives’ envisioned roles encompassed those of laborers, warriors, domestics servants, and finally as sexualized agents who reduced the occurrence of venereal disease amongst black soldiers. The French military also contended that West African soldiers’ families would protect *tirailleurs sénégalais* from the “triple threat of the country—homesickness, venereal disease, and homosexuality.”<sup>84</sup> Medical reports from Boucheron, Morocco, boasted low rates of venereal disease among *tirailleurs sénégalais*, which were directly credited to the presence of *mesdames tirailleurs*.<sup>85</sup> For example, fifty percent of the colonial troops in Boucheron were hospitalized for venereal diseases; of that population only eighteen percent were from sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> “Extraits et Commentaires de la ‘Force Noire’ fu Colonel Mangin,” by Capitaine Voluand, undated, 4D31, ANS.

<sup>82</sup> Quoting Commandant Mouveaux of an Algerian BTS in *Bulletin du Comité de l’Afrique Française*, 4 (April 1912): 124-130.

<sup>83</sup> “Sur les troupes sénégalais du Maroc Occidental,” signed by Franchet d’Esperey in September 1913, 3H152, SHDT.

<sup>84</sup> “Sur l’utilisation des troupes noires en 1910-1911,” for the Minister of War, 22 September 1911, 3H152, SHDT

<sup>85</sup> *Mesdames tirailleurs* was a pejorative and admirable label deployed by the French military for these women. I use it because it alludes to these women’s affiliation with *tirailleurs sénégalais*, yet obscures their roles as wives in favor of emphasizing their supportive duties to maintaining troops on campaign.

<sup>86</sup> Report from the Health Services, signed by Doctor Debrin, 15 August 1911, 3H153, SHDT.



Historically, the French military provided for the their soldiers' sexual needs with military brothels, or BMC, thus if the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were isolated, they French colonial military felt obligated to provide access to women.<sup>87</sup> The French military also hoped that the opportunity to bring a wife to Morocco would encourage soldiers to re-enlist in the military after their initial tour of duty.<sup>88</sup> In 1910, recruitment agents in French Guinea promoted wifely accompaniment in Morocco as if it were a signing bonus.<sup>89</sup> Although advertisements seemed to promote universal opportunities for wives to accompany *tirailleurs sénégalais* to North Africa, the French engineered gender imbalances in the “negro villages” of the Moroccan campaign. This was largely due to the cost of their transportation and nourishment. In 1910, it was proposed that the number of wives traveling to North Africa should not exceed twenty-five percent of the West African effective. This remained a standard percentage throughout the Moroccan campaign, and it was also suggested that the number of West African children in Morocco should not exceed one child for every four women.<sup>90</sup> If the French were attempting to imitate West African society in the Moroccan campaign “negro villages,” these orchestrated gender and age imbalances belied their efforts.

The cost of transportation from West Africa to North Africa and the logistics of supporting women and children on campaign were factors influencing the French colonial military's decision to limit the number of *mesdames tirailleurs* in Morocco. Their baggage, offspring, and additional supplies for housing, cooking, and raising children were funded by the military each time they relocated. The French military calculated this financial burden in terms of weight and freight. Each woman was allowed approximately fifty-five pounds of baggage, and for each accompanying infant, they were permitted an additional eleven pounds of baggage.<sup>91</sup> The military estimated that they would need at least one train car per twelve wives, in order to transport *mesdames tirailleurs* from Casablanca to anywhere else in Morocco. In 1911, the 2<sup>nd</sup> BTS was accompanied by 113 wives, the 3<sup>rd</sup> BTS had 199, and the 4<sup>th</sup> BTS had 214; thus, for their baggage, infants, and housing the military would have needed an estimated sixty-five train cars.<sup>92</sup> The expense of moving the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' families was prohibitive and there were some reported cases where West African soldiers were medically evacuated or repatriated and their wives and children remained stranded in camp without passage.<sup>93</sup> The French colonial military's effort to reduce their budgetary expenditure on transporting *mesdames tirailleurs* resulted in the abandonment of wives, who would have surpassed the twenty-five percent quota, in major West African ports and military encampments.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Michel Serge Hardy, *De la morale au moral des troupes ou l'histoire des B.M.C 1918-2004* (Panazol: Lavauzelle, 2004), 7-11. The acronym BMC in French is *bordel militaire de campagne*.

<sup>88</sup> Report from Lieutenant-Colonel Mazillier, who commanded a West African Regiment in Ciflez, Morocco, 5 August 1911, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>89</sup> Letter from the Head of the Military Office in Bofosso, Guinea, 3 February 1910, 3N44, ANG.

<sup>90</sup> “Sur les Troupes Sénégalais du Maroc Occidental,” signed by Franchet d’Esperey, September 1913, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>91</sup> “Projet d’instruction relative à l’envoi des femmes sénégalais à Rabat et à Meknes,” undated, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from Capitaine Caurette to the commander of troops disembarking in Morocco, 19 September 1911, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from the Minister of War to the Minister of the Colonies, 22 January 1913, 4D102, ANS.

<sup>94</sup> I will elaborate on this point in Chapter Three.

## Legitimate “Marriage” and Narrowing Definitions of “Wife”

The French army pared down the number of women eligible to accompany soldiers to North Africa by establishing criterion, albeit flexible and inconsistently enforced, for marital legitimacy. This was crucial in defining the colonial army’s economic obligations to *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their dependants. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* were conduits through which women could petition the French state to regulate grievances against their soldier/husbands and collect family allowances from the French army.<sup>95</sup> In order to recognize whether the relationship between a *tirailleurs sénégalais* and a West African woman was indeed a “marriage,” the French military relied on Islamic and Christian matrimonial traditions as guidelines. The French readily sanctioned Christian *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ marriages because of familiar religious practices and the use of civil courts. However, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the majority of *tirailleurs sénégalais* were nominally Muslim or followed pagan practices. Polygyny drew fire with the French because it contradicted French Family Code, which stipulated that Frenchmen could have only one wife. Muslim men, according to the tenets of Islam, were allowed up to four wives, and the French military was inconsistent throughout this period in sanctioning *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ multi-wife households. Muslim marriages were also difficult for the colonial state to legitimate due to where marriage ceremonies took place, the language of the ceremony, as well as their use of Muslim tribunals (as opposed to French civil servants) for official recognition of the unions. The French army endeavored to establish a more-or-less fixed definition of marriage for their *tirailleurs sénégalais*, but they remained flexible in recognizing marital unions, particularly those deemed traditional or pagan.

French military officials attempted to decipher, culturally translate, and use local customs to legitimize pagan marriages. This was a feat unto itself, considering that the French had only recently penetrated the interior of West Africa and were unversed in the range of marital traditions practiced by the heterogeneous and disparate communities inhabiting AOF. One determinant used to establish marital legitimacy was the exchange of bridewealth.<sup>96</sup> The essentialization of financial exchange between marrying parties reduced the complex negotiations preceding a marriage, as well as the importance of expanding kinship networks. Another attribute of legitimate marriage was “durable cohabitation,” which lacked definition regarding the standard historical longevity needed to deem a relationship durable.<sup>97</sup> How to determine if relationships were romantic versus platonic was also not evident in archival documents. These reductive and vague definitions of bridewealth and/or cohabitation permitted *mesdames tirailleurs* and *tirailleurs sénégalais* to claim they were married in order to continue their romantic relationships under the observation of the French colonial army. French military observers misrepresented the relationships between *tirailleurs sénégalais* and *mesdames*

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<sup>95</sup> Here I refer to *tirailleurs sénégalais* as the soldier/husbands in order to portray their intermediary position between the French colonial military and wives.

<sup>96</sup> Letter addressed to the Governor-General’s military cabinet, 2 May 1911, 4D32, ANS.

<sup>97</sup> For more information on French colonial observations of bridewealth in West Africa, Richard Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895-1912* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005), Chapter Six.

*tirailleurs*, and too often contrasted them to idealized versions of French marriages.<sup>98</sup> Owen White has argued, that the French believed West African's marriages were temporary,<sup>99</sup> which was substantiated by one French officers' observation in Morocco that it was "difficult to distinguish the difference between married and single *tirailleurs sénégalais* because their type of marriage is informal and divorce is frequent."<sup>100</sup> This signified that military officers were sometimes ambivalent in enforcing monogamy, but, more importantly that they were aware of, yet disregarded, *tirailleurs sénégalais*' and *mesdames tirailleurs*' ignorance of French definitions of marriage.

## A Village Economy

The French military passed the financial burden of nourishing and nurturing *mesdames tirailleurs* onto *tirailleurs sénégalais*. In 1911, a French doctor in North Africa claimed that the *tirailleurs sénégalais* could not feed themselves, or their dependents, with their pitiful wages and insufficient rations.<sup>101</sup> The monthly premium allotted to married soldiers was merely ten francs. *Mesdames tirailleurs* received a food ration that was half an active soldiers' ration, which was outrageous considering the productive and reproductive energy these women spent in maintaining the "negro villages," their children, and troops.<sup>102</sup> The French military conceptualized the "negro village" economy in Morocco as that of the male breadwinner model, which meant that the husband earned wages and then distributed his earnings to his family. The French military only created a direct channel of economic distribution between *mesdames tirailleurs* and the French treasury if their husbands died while serving France. Widows were awarded a single, one-installment payment of the equivalent of 160 dollars, with an additional forty dollars for each of their children less than twelve years old.<sup>103</sup>

One of the marketing strategies for using *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco was that they could be paid less than metropolitan and or Algerian troops. French officers in Morocco were permitted family travel and maintenance allowances, but their dependents remained at port military bases, like Casablanca, and did not follow troops on campaign. French infantrymen's wives could not accompany them to Morocco, and they were paid roughly three times the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' income. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*' paltry pay fueled the bounded economies of "negro villages." In 1909, an article estimated that a West African soldier cost the French army 550 francs per year, while Algerian soldiers cost 810 francs annually.<sup>104</sup> Two years later, the French military paid *tirailleurs sénégalais* 676 francs annually, while Algerian soldiers took

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<sup>98</sup> For a similar example of colonial misinterpretations of African marriages see Jean Allman and Victoria B. Tatiana, "*I Will Not Eat Stone:*" *A Women's History of Colonial Asante* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000), Chapter Three.

<sup>99</sup> Owen White, *Children of French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1895-1960* (Clarendon: Oxford, 2000), 9.

<sup>100</sup> Letter by France d'Esperey, 30 April 1913, 3H152, SHDT.

<sup>101</sup> Health report from Doctor Casanove at Colomb-Béchar, 8 January 1911, 7N80, SHDT.

<sup>102</sup> Report from Lieutenant-Colonel Reuf, 24 November 1912, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>103</sup> Currency exchange calculated through x-rates.com (May 12, 2009) and from Wikipedia entry "File:FrancEuro1907-1959.png," (May 12, 2009.)

<sup>104</sup> "Troupes Noires," *L'Afrique Française: Bulletin Mensuel du Comité de l'Afrique Française et du Comité du Maroc*, 8 (August 1909), 274-278.

home 872 francs.<sup>105</sup> The purchasing power of Algerian and West African troops' monthly allowances was greater than gap between the actual wages garnered. Unlike West African troops, Algerian *tirailleurs*' dependents did not accompany them to Morocco and they did not support their families on campaign. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* who brought *mesdames tirailleurs* to Morocco experienced double economic hardship.

*Mesdames tirailleurs* took on extra-military duties in order to supplement their family's incomes. Many took on the laundering and cooking duties for single soldiers, who compensated them for their work. Like the female camp followers in the American Revolutionary and Frontier Wars, *mesdames tirailleurs* ran enterprises like bootlegging and trafficking luxury goods. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were often restricted to camp, however the French provided *mesdames tirailleurs* with store credit in local Moroccan markets in order to accommodate domestic work.<sup>106</sup> The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were prohibited from consuming alcoholic beverages while on campaign in Morocco. Contrary to this prohibition, *mesdames tirailleurs* purchased locally fermented beverages and resold them to *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>107</sup> The French considered *mesdames tirailleurs*' business endeavors subversive to military obedience because intoxicated soldiers were often insubordinate. Moreover, local alcoholic beverages were often blended with turned wine, or adulterated liquor, which increased medical problems for infantrymen. Military officials refrained from seeking out *mesdames tirailleurs* for punishment because they were intimidated by *mesdames tirailleurs* and many were hesitant to enter the "negro villages."

### **Bearing Children while Pacifying Morocco**

*Mesdames tirailleurs* had difficulty accessing medical treatment for their children's health problems, as well as their own ailments and pre-natal needs. Pediatric, obstetric, or gynecological specialists were not standard staff in the French colonial military's medical services. One medical report commented that it was "difficult, especially in the absence of their husbands, to appraise the health and hygiene of the negro villages. The women do not make timely requests for medical care." The report went on to blame *mesdames tirailleurs* for increased infant mortality rates.<sup>108</sup> Generally speaking, French officials preferred to approach *mesdames tirailleurs* through their soldier/husbands, who acted as cultural intermediaries. French health professionals' lack of fluency in West African languages and healing practices created an exasperating gap between *mesdames tirailleurs* and army medical officers. There was cognitive dissonance between them concerning pregnancy, childbirth, and raising infants, which both groups may have preferred to leave in the hands of *mesdames tirailleurs* in order to avoid unpleasantness. Convincing *mesdames tirailleurs*, who were largely unfamiliar with French medical practices, to take prophylactics and administer medical treatments to their children would have been discussions replete with miscommunication, miscomprehension, and mistranslation. In the majority of AOF, obstetrics and midwifery were integral components of a

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<sup>105</sup> "Sur l'utilisation des troupes noires en 1910-1911," 22 September 1911, 3H152, SHDT.

<sup>106</sup> Letter from Mouveaux to the Governor-General of the AOF, 1 December 1910, 4D32, ANS.

<sup>107</sup> Franchet d'Esperey "Sur les troupes sénégalaises du Maroc Occidental," September 1913, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>108</sup> "Avantages et Inconvénients que comporte la présence des familles noires auprès des unités détachées au Maroc," 22 September 1911, 3H152, SHDT.

constellation of esoteric knowledge largely entrusted to post-menopausal women, who often gained their skills through an apprenticeship with older female relatives.<sup>109</sup> Elderly West African women were not transported to Morocco to assist *mesdames tirailleurs* in delivering children. Medical reports also neglected to acknowledge that *mesdames tirailleurs* were allotted half-rations and labored for their husbands, as well as the French army. The combination of undernourishment and strenuous labor may have reduced their fecundity or their ability to carry pregnancies to term.

Given these conditions, it's odd that the French military envisioned the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' wives as the font of a new generation of colonial soldiers. Raising children in a politically hostile foreign environment was no insignificant task for *mesdames tirailleurs* in North Africa, especially since their children were predominantly under the age of five.<sup>110</sup> In their communities of origin, West African mothers relied on mutually dependent relationships with extended family and neighbors to aid them in raising their children. Childrearing included initiating children in the community through cultural rites and social education. This social instruction was absent, or drastically reduced, in North Africa. The French colonial military did not take an active interest in *mesdames tirailleurs* unless they caused the military problems. However, the military erratically provided limited education to *mesdames tirailleurs*' male children. In several of the military camps, the French set up schools for male children, which were run by Europeans and seconded by West African officers.<sup>111</sup> The curriculum in these schools was similar to the education provided to new recruits in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Their education consisted of rudimentary French for the purpose of following military commands, as well as physical training and military drilling. Postcards from the Moroccan campaign bearing captions like "The Future Black Army" or "The Future Tirailleurs" portrayed groups of young children flanked by French soldiers with the conical tents of the "negro villages" in the background.<sup>112</sup>

### **Inter-reactions and Uncivil Disputes: West African Women and Moroccans**

The French military exponentially, and immeasurably, profited from the participation of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' wives in the pacification of Morocco. Pointedly, *tirailleurs sénégalais* signed contracts with the French military and *mesdames tirailleurs* did not. These women were in a unique position where military expectations of obedience were not explained or enforced through formal contract. However, *mesdames tirailleurs*' transportation, sustenance, and living quarters were provided by the French military and the French army assumed that they would act in accordance with military order. *Mesdames tirailleurs* were left with little alternative other

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<sup>109</sup> Jane Turriffin, "Colonial Midwives and Modernizing Childbirth in French West Africa," in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, eds. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nkanyike Musisi. (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 71-94.

<sup>110</sup> Author's observations of postcards from the Moroccan campaign available in the 2K series at Service Iconographique within SHDT and the IA series at Établissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense (ECPA-D).

<sup>111</sup> Report from Capitaine Caussette, commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, 1 September 1911, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>112</sup> Postcard entitled, "Casablanca. –Au Camp Sénégalais: Les Futurs Tirailleurs," 2K 148 Michat Album Maroc/Algésiras/Chaouia/ Casablanca 32, Service Iconographique, SHDT.

than complying with the French military in Morocco because their homes were a long walk south across open desert. If inclined to desertion, their physical and linguistic differences from the bulk of Moroccan populations would have hampered integration, and may have led to their enslavement by trans-Saharan traders.<sup>113</sup> Given their restricted mobility and limited language comprehension in a war zone, these women may have suffered from mental and emotional stress, as well as other psychological illnesses that affect combatants in war zones.

The French often portrayed *mesdames tirailleurs* as recalcitrant, especially when recounting interactions between them and local populations. A French captain surmised that *mesdames tirailleurs* considered Moroccans, particularly women, their inferiors.<sup>114</sup> Ironically, the French indulged the inverse—Moroccans as superior to West Africans. A French observer in Morocco claimed that when *tirailleurs sénégalais* and Moroccan servicemen were stationed in the same military posts, they feigned to ignore one another because military order prevented them from insulting one another based on racial differences. However, if *mesdames tirailleurs* encountered Moroccan women, the smallest pretext could facilitate an explosion, which required the intervention of their husbands.<sup>115</sup> Initially, the French military was at a loss for how to discipline *mesdames tirailleurs*, who belonged to the regiments of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, but were not legally bound to its discipline. Wives' relationship to the French colonial army was ill-defined, and contingent upon imprecise definitions of marital unions with their enlisted soldier/husbands. The military did not subject *mesdames tirailleurs* to the same punishments as insubordinate *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Since the union between these women and their soldier/husbands was the contract that connected them to the army, the French army depended on *tirailleurs sénégalais* to regulate their wives' behavior, as well as discipline them when appropriate. Symbolically, this system of punishment mirrored that of male breadwinner economic distribution model. This method of meting out punishments forced *tirailleurs sénégalais* to reprimand *mesdames tirailleurs* for offenses judged egregious by the French military, but not necessarily by *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

For an example of the French military's inadequacies in controlling *mesdames tirailleurs'* behavior, we turn back to the dispute mentioned at the beginning of the chapter between a *madame tirailleur* and a Moroccan cavalier's wife. Pierre Khorat, a French officer commanding a battalion of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco, detailed the event. Khorat seemed sympathetic to West Africans' plight in Morocco and he was prone to embellishment and pseudo-anthropological observations that emphasized differences and curiosities in West Africans' behaviors. He described one *madame tirailleur* in line at a well:

Justly made impatient by the amount people in the queue, a Senegalese woman attempted to fill her container before her turn. A Moroccan cavalier's wife vehemently protested. With calm insolence, the first wedged an enormous bowl under the water stream. 'It's truly spiteful to monopolize the fountain,' sniggered the Moroccan woman, 'All that water won't make your skin white!' 'What did you say?' gulped *madame sénégalais*. 'It's true, I'm black, but my body and my

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<sup>113</sup> As late as 1944, this was a reported fear of sub-Saharan Africans in the Sahara. F.J.G. Mercardier, *L'Esclave de Timimoun* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1971), 175.

<sup>114</sup> Report from Captain Causette in Casablanca, 1 September 1911, 3H692, SHDT.

<sup>115</sup> Letter from General Moinier to the Minister of War, 12 November 1909, 3H152, SHDT.

clothes are clean. You can rub them and they won't change color. One couldn't say the same for you.' The women chortled at one another.

The Moroccan ostentatiously displayed the relative paleness of her face and her arms. Rendered furious by the mockery, the Senegalese woman dampened her scarf and with a firm hand rubbed her face and chest, and proudly displayed that the fabric had not altered in color. Then, leaping upon the Moroccan woman, she gripped her vigorously and roughly rubbed her down with the moist scarf. The face of her victim lightened under the rubbings, and suddenly the scarf's fabric appeared grayish from the dirt that came off the Moroccan's face. Triumph on her side, the Senegalese woman had achieved her victory by routing her adversary, and with clenched fists and her neck swollen by the effort, she yelled: 'Moroccans are savages!! Moroccans have dirty faces, dirty clothes, and are all dirty.'<sup>116</sup>

This is a staggering account regarding relations between *mesdames tirailleurs* and Moroccan women. Yet, it is doubtful that this altercation took place in a language which was comprehensible to French military agents, *mesdames tirailleurs*, and Moroccan women. Thus, Khorat probably added exaggerations and additions that adhered to French notions of racial prejudice in Morocco to enhance the account.

Whether or not this heated argument occurred in some form similar to the one presented in Khorat's memoirs, it demonstrated how the French sought to substantiate their stereotypes of animosity between North and sub-Saharan Africans. Importantly, this exchange demonstrated how each woman attempted to gain authority and superior social footing in a setting of political conquest, military hierarchy, and male dominance. Their tools for gaining advantage were articulated through intersecting discourses of race and cleanliness. The Moroccan woman wielded racial superiority by insinuating the West African woman would like to lighten her skin in order to improve her social position. The *madame tirailleur's* response shifted the argument to cleanliness, which was a more universal value among women regarding their appearance, as well as their homes. The *madame tirailleur* successfully shamed the Moroccan by publically exposing her unwashed face, which had implications for the degree to which Moroccans generally valued cleanliness. This had further implications for virtuousness, respectability, and morality. This altercation occurred in the presence of French officers, and was eventually broken up by a representative of the French colonial army. If military officers witnessed this exchange between the *madame tirailleur* and the Moroccan woman, one can only wonder what occurred off the military's radar.

The French military ascribed these incidents to historical race relations between North and West Africans. The volatile nature of West African women was also faulted for any problems arising between them and civilian Moroccans. By passing the blame onto history or the character of women, the French military conveniently absolved itself from causing these adversarial conflicts. In order to reduce contact between West Africans and Moroccan civilians, French commanding officers prohibited certain *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their wives from leaving the military garrison. "Negro villages" facilitated the military's control and monitoring of West Africans' movements. The (re)creation of "negro villages" was the French colonial army's attempt to quell or avoid instances where West Africans, other troops, and local peoples

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<sup>116</sup> Khorat, *Scènes de la Pacification Marocaine*, 179-180.

openly maligned one another off the battlefield. Their formal segregation from other troops aided the French army in impeding racial mixing between *tirailleurs sénégalais* and Moroccan women. By creating a controlled environment, the French colonial military could better record West Africans' movements, behavior, and health in *tirailleurs sénégalais'* foray into North African.

## Conclusion

The experimental deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco had inconclusive results. Some of the French military's fears regarding the cross-pollination of religious fundamentalism, between Moroccan civilian populations and *tirailleurs sénégalais*, had been assuaged. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* had been gravely affected by Morocco's different epidemiological zone, climate, rugged terrain, and the French colonial military's intentional negligence. By the onset of WWI, military officers had surmounted some of the problems of under-equipment and undernourishment. Another concern, regarding the difficulties arising from Moroccan racism and the history of the trans-Saharan slave trade, were either proven, or avoided. In constructing African villages on the Moroccan campaign of pacification, the French circumvented any problems that would have occurred if West Africans, French troops, and civilian Moroccans could have intermixed freely. The most pronounced example of racialized tensions and derision came from two wives queuing at a well. *Mesdames tirailleurs* greatly contributed to the Moroccan campaign of pacification, as emotional support, mothers, sutlers, and auxiliary soldiers. Even though *mesdames tirailleurs'* labor was inestimably important to the functioning of "negro villages" they would not see the battlefields of France.

West African colonial soldiers' deployment in the pacification of Morocco, from 1908-1914, marked a turning point in the narrative of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in empire. Prior to 1908, the French military had deployed West African colonial troops in wars of conquest limited to sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar. Once they cut their teeth in temperate climates, against better-armed adversaries, the French military did not hesitate to send *tirailleurs sénégalais* directly from Morocco to France in 1914—even through the work of pacifying Morocco was incomplete. By 1914, the French colonial military had moved forward in professionalizing the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, and women were not allowed to follow their soldier/husbands to France. The campaign in Morocco had proven that *tirailleurs sénégalais* were physically and psychologically able to campaign outside of sub-Saharan Africa, and their performance had convinced the French colonial military of their versatility. After this experiment, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* would be deployed to all corners of empire until the end of French colonialism. Morocco provided a foundation and a springboard for *tirailleurs sénégalais* participation in empire, as well as served as a training ground for the trenches of World War I.



## Chapter Three: Institutional Changes to the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* during World War I

“The Sergeant-Major read a report. It was a bit long and we only understood two things: ‘Germany had declared war on France...and France has made a call to all of its children.’”<sup>1</sup>

France’s declaration of war against Germany found Bakary Diallo in Casablanca, on leave, and preparing to return to AOF after completing his tour of duty. Diallo was from Senegal and serving in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the French campaign to “pacify” Morocco. Within weeks of France’s declaration of war, Diallo found himself on mainland France contributing to the war effort. Little did Diallo know that his deployment to France had been anticipated as early as 1909 and that he had been part of a colonial military experiment to test the versatility and endurance of West African soldiers in temperate environments. At the onset of the Great War in 1914, Diallo could not have predicted how France’s needs for “all its children” would trigger a massive levying of soldiers from West Africa, the bifurcation of West African troops according to civil categories, as well as the intensification of interactions between agents of French colonialism and West African soldiers and their families. In the language Diallo used to describe his war experiences, there was a reproduction and faith in the French military’s paternalism—particularly in the ways in which they imagined colonial soldiers as children. But inexperienced minors, they were not.

The shifting political landscape of World War I enabled assertive political maneuvers on the part of a minority of West Africans, who sought incontrovertible membership in the French imperial state.<sup>2</sup> This minority consisted of people from the Four Communes of Senegal—Saint-Louis, Gorée, Dakar, and Rufisque—known as the *originaires*. In order to secure citizenship, *originaires* became obligated to military service in the French army. The renegotiation of citizenship through contributions to the war effort was not unique to West Africa.<sup>3</sup> The Blaise Diagne Laws of 1915 and 1916 assured French citizenship for *originaires* and were significant in shaping the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. This legislation channeled West African *originaires* and *indigènes* into separate spheres of the military and deepened the entrenchment of legal and social

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<sup>1</sup> Bakary Diallo, *Force-Bonté* (Paris: F. Reider et Cie, 1926), 109.

<sup>2</sup> I use French imperial state to refer to the governing powers that affected all people living in France and French empire. The French colonial state refers to the legal and political frameworks affecting colonial subjects, which was the *Indigénat* in French. The French state governed metropolitan French people and French citizens living in empire.

<sup>3</sup> World War I was pivotal to suffragette movements in the United States and Britain. Citizenship and patriotism were reframed by contributions to the war effort. See Nicoletta Gullace, *“The Blood of Our Sons”*: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 101-106.

differences between French West African citizens and subjects.<sup>4</sup> This bifurcation also shaped the ways in which the French colonial state and military engaged with its recruits and their families. This categorical division of West African soldiers bore upon the relationship between the French state and soldiers' wives. By extending civic rights to *originaires*, the French state opened itself up to new claims and demands on the part of its West African citizens, particularly *originaires* prerogative to practice polygyny.

World War I has played a major role in historiography of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and the contemporary politics surrounding veterans' pensions. This chapter de-emphasizes the battle experiences of West African soldiers in the Great War in order to profoundly engage with institutional changes to the *tirailleurs sénégalais* particular to that period. The Blaise Diagne legislation was pivotal to the history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* because the laws occasioned parallel sets of experiential possibilities for *originaires* and *indigènes* soldiers. The Blaise Diagne legislation and its repercussions for military service reconfigured the modes of reciprocity, mutual obligations, and the guidelines shaping engagements between the French imperial state and two categories of West African civil society—citizens and subjects. This institutional segregation would affect West Africans serving in sub-Saharan Africa, France, and other parts of empire, as well as have lasting effects on the relationships between France, West Africa, colonial military institutions, and soldiers throughout the twentieth century.

The presence of West Africans in the trenches of World War I made imperial people visible to metropolitan France, particularly since an estimated one point three percent of West Africa's population mobilized for the war effort.<sup>5</sup> The importation of half a million colonial troops had consequences for national ideas regarding race and empire, which resulted in a reevaluation of the limits of French Republican ideals—liberty, equality, and fraternity.<sup>6</sup> The growing numbers of West African soldiers in the service of France also called for an evolution of how the French colonial state recompensed West African soldiers who had defended them from Germany. While the Great War may have provided a space through which to negotiate reciprocity, the French colonial state was exploitative in their recruitment, training, and employment of West African soldiers.<sup>7</sup> The harshest critics of the arbitrary and violent power of the colonial state have been framed through the soldiers' payment of the *impôt de sang*, or blood tax.<sup>8</sup> But, West Africans' participation in World War I was not a simple case of France's exploitation of its colonial subjects. Intermediaries' mediation in legislating and recruiting AOF's contributions to the French war effort indicated the multitude of voices involved in these

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<sup>4</sup> The co-existence of two hierarchized categories of civil society in colonial south Africa was studied at length in Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en AOF (1914-1919)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982) 404.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 270-274, and Michael Adas, "Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology," *Journal of World History* 15 (March 2004): pp 31-63.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Chapter Two.

<sup>8</sup> Myron Echenberg, "Paying the Blood Tax: Military Conscription in French West Africa, 1914-1929." *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 9 (1975): 171-192, and Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maëlstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999), Chapter Two.

processes. French West African citizens became involved in the debates surrounding military service for West African colonial soldiers as part of a growing political consciousness in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

Sacrifice and exploitation were important to understanding French West Africa and more specifically West African soldiers' contribution to the French war effort. However, no one has yet undertaken a serious appraisal of how the bifurcation of *originaires* and *indigènes* in the French armed forces affected the ways in which West African soldiers engaged with the French military and the French imperial state. Several historians have argued that *indigènes* suffered at *originaires*' gain.<sup>10</sup> Empirical evidence demonstrates that both *originaires* and *indigènes* soldiers were disadvantaged by and benefited from their particular status. There are distinct ways in which *indigènes* and *originaires* sought autonomy, or assistance, from the French imperial state. In the case of Pierre Salla below, we see how instrumental the Blaise Diagne laws were in managing the timbre of these relationships as West African recruits shifted from one legal category to another. Historians have also overlooked the peculiar ways in which the Blaise Diagne legislation affected how women engaged with the French imperial state as their soldier/husbands enlisted in the armed forces and mobilized to metropolitan France. The particular civic status of their soldier/husbands was fundamental in wives' abilities to leverage themselves against, and within, the French colonial state. These women assessed the degree to which they could call upon the French imperial state to assist them with family allocations and in resolving personal matters specific to multi-wife households. This chapter sets the political scene for understanding why the Blaise Diagne legislation was ratified during the Great War, then takes a profound look at how *originaires*, *indigènes*, their families, and the French imperial state navigated this legislation for the remainder of the Great War.

### **Recruitment, *Originaires* Politics, and Blaise Diagne during WWI**

The declaration of war in the summer of 1914 encouraged new recruitment drives in West Africa that took advantage of the recruitment practices already in place since the 1912 Recruitment Law. Because of that law and France's imperial endeavors in North Africa, there already existed a pool of experienced *tirailleurs sénégalais* available for mobilization to France. At the onset of WWI, there were approximately 4,200 West African troops serving in Morocco,<sup>11</sup> two battalions in Algeria, and one battalion in Madagascar.<sup>12</sup> According to Bakary Diallo, at the outbreak of World War I, many of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in Morocco had already finished their tours of duty in the French colonial military. Diallo contended that patriotism inspired many *tirailleurs sénégalais* to re-enlist without taking the leave owed to them. By deploying directly to France, these men could "devote all of their senses to a sacred work, to

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<sup>9</sup> G. Wesley Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> Iba Der Thiam, *Le Sénégal dans la guerre 14-18* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines du Sénégal, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Clayton, *France, Soldiers, and Africa* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1988) 95.

<sup>12</sup> Éric Deroo and Antoine Champeaux, *La Force noire: Gloire et infortunes d'une légende coloniale* (Paris: Talliendier, 2006), 50. Each battalion had roughly 600 men in it.

respond to the call of the *Mère-Patrie*.<sup>13</sup> Not all West Africans had the same attitude towards military service and France, and after the first two recruitment drives of 1914 and 1915, the French colonial administration needed to new ways to attract West Africans to military service in addition to the quota-based conscription system. The chart below represents recruitments of *originaires* and *indigènes* compiled by the French military in West Africa during WWI.<sup>14</sup>

Year	Senegal	Haute-Senegal/Volta	Guinée	Côte d'Ivoire	Dahomey	Mauretania	Niger	Total
Sept-Oct 1914	1400	5000	2000	1000	400			9,800
Jan-May 1915	1000	5000	2000	1800	1000			10,800
May-Oct 1915	800	224	1764	1019	411	181	200	4,619
Oct 1915 - Apr 1916	7506	20537	7628	7874	4413	1157	2798	51,913
Nov 1916 -Apr 1917	1783	4556	2482	2720	590	200		12,331
1918	7920	33261	10491	7038	2746	476	878	62,810
Totals	20,409	68,578	26,365	21,451	9,560	2,014	3,876	152,273

The large spikes that occurred in West African recruitment can be attributed to Blaise Diagne. The legislation that he pushed through French National Assembly in 1915 and 1916 and his personal involvement in the last recruitment drive of 1918 increased the number of West Africans obligated to serve, as well as motivated many to voluntarily enlist. In total, recruitment campaigns during the First World War provided the French military with roughly 170,000 West African men. The legislation that Blaise Diagne pushed through French National Assembly, in 1915 and 1916, instantly obligated roughly 6,000 to 7,000 male *originaires* to serve under the French flag.<sup>15</sup> During the 1918 recruitment campaign, Blaise Diagne toured West Africa with military recruitment boards and encouraged able-bodied men, through patriotic and Republican ideals, to enlist in the French army. The French reported that nearly 63,000 enlisted during 1918 alone.

The men recruited into the *tirailleurs sénégalais* came from all over French West Africa, which was a colonial federation administered by France. During the war, Bamana-speakers and Malinké peoples from Haute Senegal, Haute Volta, French Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire dominated the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>16</sup> Most *tirailleurs sénégalais* spoke a variety of Mande

<sup>13</sup> Diallo, *Force-Bonté*, 113. *Mère-Patrie* is a French phrase that evokes a sense of heritage to the French motherland.

<sup>14</sup> Study conducted by the Governor-General of the AOF on recruitment, signed by Merlin, 6 January 1922, 4D6V81, ANS. The clerical and mathematic errors in the chart were retained from the archival document. Haute Senegal/Volta was broken up into Soudan (present day Mali) and Upper Volta (present day Burkina Faso) after the conclusion of WWI.

<sup>15</sup> Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maëlstrom*, 72.

<sup>16</sup> "Au sujet des troupes noires," signed by Lieutenant Lautrou, 29 August 1913, 3H692, SHDT.

languages and received instruction in a pidgin language unique to the *tirailleurs sénégalais* that was a mixture of simplified French and Bamana.<sup>17</sup> Until the Blaise Diagne legislation, the men of the Four Communes of Senegal also served in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Senegal was the westernmost colony in French West Africa, and within the colony of Senegal there were four municipal regions—Saint-Louis, Gorée, Dakar, and Rufisque—that made up the *Quatre Communes de plein exercice* (Four Communes of full rights). The inhabitants of the Four Communes were the extreme minority of French West African populations, were known as the *originaires*. *Originaires* were awarded French citizenship as early as the mid-nineteenth century due to the politics of abolition, the politics of the Second French Republic, and the *originaires*' assumed assimilation to European ways. Citizenship was awarded on the basis of their birth within the boundaries of the Four Communes. Thus, *originaires* were the only West Africans to gain French citizenship through the hazards of birth. Most other West Africans, known as *indigènes*, or colonial subjects, had to naturalize through discriminating bureaucratic channels.

*Originaires* men had political representation in Paris, access to French courts, and access to French public education. *Originaires* also possessed an exclusive legal status, the *statut personnel*, that was anomalous to French law or the *Indigénat*. This personal statute permitted *originaires* to utilize civic and legal institutions that were parallel to those of the French colonial state. *Originaires* could manage their civic affairs through Muslim tribunals, and could practice polygyny as regulated by their religious beliefs. Muslim tribunals and polygyny contravened several stipulations in the French Civil Code—particularly monogamy and secularism. In order to eliminate this exceptional legal practice, the French colonial government of the twentieth century increasingly threatened *originaires*' special status.<sup>18</sup> Rebecca Shereikis argued that this shift occurred because the French needed Muslim and cosmopolitan West Africans to accommodate the spread of French colonialism, but by the turn of the twentieth century the French colonial state sought to make all Africans in AOF equal in their inequality to the French.<sup>19</sup>

Two pieces of legislation passed in 1912 sought to remedy some of the conflicting aspects of *originaires*' exclusive status with French and colonial law. This legislation also sought to increase West Africans' obligations to the French colonial state, while reducing the French colonial state's obligations to West Africans—particularly *originaires*. In February of 1912, a special decree outlined a new system of military recruitment that was based on fulfilling recruitment quotas at municipal levels (*cercles* in French). This military legislation was one of the results of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Mangin's lobbying for a "Black Reservoir" of soldiers in French West Africa.<sup>20</sup> At first glance, this military legislation did not concern *originaires*, but it became a primary point of contention with the onset of World War I. The second piece of legislation, passed in August 1912, came from the desk of AOF Governor-General William Ponty in an effort to create legal and civic equity in West Africa. This local decree revamped the

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<sup>17</sup> Cécile Van den Avenne, "Utiliser et décrire la langue bambara en Afrique de l'Ouest sous domination française. Pratiques linguistiques missionnaires et militaires" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society, Paris, France, June 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Crowder, *Senegal: A Study of French Assimilation Policy* (London, England: Meuthen & Co., 1967), 18.

<sup>19</sup> Rebecca Shereikis, "From Law to Custom: The Shifting Legal Status of Muslim *Originaires* in Kayes and Médine, 1903-1913," *Journal of African History*, 42 (2001), 276.

<sup>20</sup> Described in greater detail in Chapter Two.

legal system to place all *indigènes* within the same legal framework and went on to define West African French citizens as only those who had gone through the formal naturalization process. The first aspect of this local decree did not explicitly affect the *originaires*, but it “challenged the privileged status of *originaires* as ‘citizens’” because after its ratification, *originaires* would be subject to native courts outside of the boundaries of the Four Communes.<sup>21</sup> *Originaires* strongly reacted to the second aspect of the decree because it challenged their birthright. By late 1913, *originaires* politically mobilized against these legislative challenges to their civic status. They sought to back a candidate for their deputy seat in the upcoming elections for French National Assembly, who would defend and secure their legal and civic rights.

This candidate became Blaise Diagne. Diagne’s candidacy challenged the reigning political order of the Four Communes, where Bordeaux and Creole businessmen had previously dominated the candidature for deputy seat.<sup>22</sup> Diagne had been born on Gorée Island and was an *originaire*, but he had spent the majority of his adult life in the imperial civil service. In 1912, Diagne was employed as a customs clerk in Martinique. When crafting his political platform, Blaise Diagne sought to protect *originaires*’ exceptional legal status and he advocated for more political rights, more civic responsibilities, and less unfair taxation for all West Africans. During his campaign, the civic responsibility of military service became linked to the protection *originaires*’ rights. Due to their insecure status after the 1912 local decree, *originaires* could not serve in the metropolitan armed forces or in the French Foreign Legion. Many viewed the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as beneath them because it was reserved for *indigènes*. Thus, West Africans and Frenchmen proposed to Diagne that citizenship could be conditional to mandatory service in the French metropolitan army, which was already a requirement of all French males upon their twentieth birthday.<sup>23</sup>

Blaise Diagne bartered *originaires*’ civic rights for military service shortly after his election. Fortuitously, Diagne took his seat at the French National Assembly four months prior to Germany’s declaration of war on France in 1914. World War I engendered a shifting political landscape that enabled Blaise Diagne to introduce and ratify legislation that empowered the *originaires*. Diagne manipulated France’s need for greater manpower in their protracted armed conflict with Germany and won concessions for political and civic rights for West African *originaires* with the Blaise Diagne Laws of 1915 and 1916. Blaise Diagne argued in National Assembly that if the French government granted *originaires* inalienable citizenship in an unambiguous language, then *originaires*, like all other male French citizens, would be civically obligated to soldier in the French military upon reaching twenty years of age.

### ***Originaires* in the Wake of the Blaise Diagne Legislation**

The Blaise Diagne Laws instituted distinct political, social, and cultural differences between *originaires* and *indigènes* West African soldiers serving in the French armed forces. The first law, passed on October 19, 1915, officially removed *originaires* from the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. After that date, *originaires* would serve in the ranks of the French metropolitan forces, whereas *indigènes* would continue serving in the colonial army, under the communal title *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The language of the 1915 Law was ambiguous in awarding full

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<sup>21</sup> Sherekis, “From Law to Custom,” 275-6.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal*, 154.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

citizenship rights to *originaires* and their offspring, thus members of the *originaires* educated elite pushed for clarity. Conversely, agents of the French military and political administration remonstrated against this law because of the indiscriminate accordance of civic rights to polygynous West African *originaires*. In order to eliminate ambiguities and assuage anxieties, Blaise Diagne introduced another piece of legislation to the French National Assembly and on September 29, 1916 the French Assembly ratified it. The 1916 Law unambiguously stated, “The natives of the Four Communes of Senegal and their descendants are, and will remain, French citizens obligated to the military obligations previously defined in the Law of October 15, 1915.”<sup>24</sup>

The Blaise Diagne Laws were the result of a renegotiation of citizenship in exchange for military service. The political, social, and cultural ramifications of these laws were evidenced in the subsequent months, as recruitment campaigns brought West African *originaires* and *indigènes* into closer contact with the French colonial state. The legislation introduced by Blaise Diagne reopened old debates, among members of the French colonial administration, who acted as though they had been blindsided by this legislation. Their protests largely rehashed issues prevalent to the Mangin debates from five years earlier. The colonial administration also complained because the onus of locating and enlisting eligible *originaires* fell on French officials in AOF. Determining who was and who was not an *originaire* was an arduous negotiation of imperfect and incomplete colonial administrative records. Further, the military had to impose this new military obligation on *originaires* who were no longer resident in the Four Communes, French West Africa, or even the African continent. The French military’s administration became further embroiled in non-military affairs during the interpretation and execution of these laws because of their economic obligations—the allocation of military pay, benefits, and healthcare—to *originaires* and their polygynous families.

For these reasons, French military officers and colonial administrators questioned the legitimacy, as well as applicability, of the 1915 and 1916 Laws. They championed their previous policies, which emphasized equality for West Africans—all equally subjects of empire. According to some, the new Blaise Diagne Laws negated their previous “Republican” values of egalitarianism because new legislation discriminately awarded political and civil rights to the minority fortuitously born within the territorial confines of the Four Communes.<sup>25</sup> In 1915, Governor-General Clozel explained the irony in enfranchising men born in the Four Communes, whereas, no matter what could be argued, those sons of the Bambara of Soudan, or those of the Nagots of Dahomey, could not have the same rights. Moreover, a woman from Guinée or Côte d’Ivoire, brought to Dakar or Saint-Louis for prosecution of a crime, could give birth by accident during her trial, and her offspring would gain French citizenship *ipso facto*.<sup>26</sup> Because of the contestation over West African’s citizenship and social status, historian Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch found that although *originaires* gained French citizenship, the backlash against the

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<sup>24</sup> “Law extending the dispositions of the military law of 19 October 1915 to the descendants of *originaires*,” 29 September 1916: *JORF*, 1 October 1916, 8667-8668.

<sup>25</sup> For further information on the Republicanism of colonial policy in French West Africa, please see the introduction in Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Ideal of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Letter from the Governor-General of AOF to the Minister of the Colonies, 9 December 1915, 4D23, ANS.

Blaise Diagne Laws demonstrated how West Africans would never gain recognition as French nationals.<sup>27</sup>

The surfacing debates and snags in the recruitment of *originaires* exposed numerous problems in colonial bureaucracy and in French colonialism more generally. In late 1915, Pierre Salla approached his French commanding officer at a military training camp in Senegal and insisted on his immediate discharge. Salla claimed that even though he had enlisted in the French military as an *originnaire* from Gorée, he had been born in Sokhone, a village outside of the Four Communes near the Saloum River Delta.<sup>28</sup> Thus, *indigène* was his true civil status, and he was unqualified to serve in the French military or to be deployed to France during World War I. Salla had enlisted as an *originnaire* after the ratification of the first Blaise Diagne Law, and finding military life distasteful, he exposed his incorrect status to the French colonial administration. Salla preferred to be relegated to *indigènes* status and to be at the mercy of the conscription-based quota recruitment system. Judging from other historical literature and archival sources, Salla was correct in his assessment that he would have a better chance to avoid military service as an *indigène*, as opposed to being an *originnaire*. In the end, Salla was excused from military service because, after official investigation, the French military found Salla had been born in Sokhone. As a result of this military inquiry, Salla was sent to prison for falsifying his identity.<sup>29</sup>

The inquiry into Pierre Salla's case revealed that several layers of fraudulent manipulation at regarding his fabricated *originnaire* identity. His parents, Marc Sall and Anna Thienou Diagne had inappropriately filed Pierre Salla's birth certificate with the civil service in Gorée. The registration of Salla's *originnaire* identity was pinned to a cavalier African civil servant, Samuel M'Baye, who was further accused of registering many births of *indigènes* as *originnaires* of Gorée. M'Baye was unavailable for questioning in this case because he was dead. A French administrator from Thiès, providing evidence for the case, confirmed that that M'Baye's malfeasance was more common than not in the Four Communes. The administrator reported to have worked with several West African civil servants who claimed false origins on Gorée Island. Evidently, French citizenship was seen as valuable, particularly to those *originnaires* who already benefitted from it. Thus, it was customary practice for *originnaires* to register their children's birth certificate in the Four Communes, even if they were born outside of the Four Communes. In outing himself to the French military, Pierre Salla's case pointed out that some Senegalese men no longer wanted *originnaire* status once it was linked to military service, and that they were willing to forfeit French citizenship in order to escape their military obligations. The official inquiry into Pierre Salla's civic status occurred between the ratification of the 1915 and 1916 Blaise Diagne Laws. Thus, at the conclusion of the inquest, Salla was an *indigène* due to his birthplace, but within less than a year, the Blaise Diagne Law of 1916 would have made Pierre Salla an *originnaire* because of his inheritance.

In addition to Pierre Salla's case, the Governor-General of the AOF mentioned that there were thirty-five other tricky cases in Gorée.<sup>30</sup> The particular case of Malick N'Diaye exposed

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<sup>27</sup> Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "Nationalité et citoyenneté en Afrique Occidentale Française: Originaires et citoyens dans le Sénégal colonial," *Journal of African History*, 42 (2001): 285-305.

<sup>28</sup> Handwritten letter from Pierre Salla to the Administrator of Thiès, 4 December 1915, 4D26, ANS.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from the Attorney General of the Judicial Service of AOF to Governor-General's Service for Civil and Muslim Affairs, 8 March 1916, 4D26, ANS.

<sup>30</sup> Letter signed by Clozel, 23 March 1916, 4D26, ANS.



layers of corruption and forgery on the part of N'Diaye's family and colonial medical professionals. As mentioned in Chapter Two, recruit substitution was a means to protect important West African men, like the heirs to traditional titles, from military service in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. *Originaires* did the same. In an egregious abuse of a minor, the family of Malick N'Diaye presented a fourteen-year-old youth, by the name of Amadou Mery, to a recruitment board in the place of their son. Malick N'Diaye, according to his birth certificate was twenty-eight years old at the time of his enlistment in January 1916. The medical doctors examining Amadou Mery (posing as Malick N'Diaye) found physical evidence pointing to the adolescence of the new recruit. When questioned, members of the N'Diaye family vociferously claimed that the man presented was twenty-eight years old.<sup>31</sup> The fact that the N'Diaye family could convince medical practitioners in the employment of the French colonial state that a fourteen-year-old boy was really twice his age suggested that money exchanged hands behind the scenes. This case came to light because Amadou Mery decided that military service did not suit his taste. He was discharged from the military. Archival records are silent regarding any punishment for the N'Diaye family or the medical professionals.

The case of N'Diaye/Mery emphasizes how distasteful military service was to some *originaires*, and how *originaires* families would go to extreme lengths to protect their sons from being sent off to the trenches of World War I. The French military was incapable of catching all of the cases where West Africans circumnavigated the legal distinctions between *originaires* and *indigènes*. In both the Salla case and the N'Diaye/Mery case, the French military and colonial administration only became aware of the liberties taken by people in its employment—civil servants and medical experts—because *originaires* recruits did not like soldiering. The Salla and N'Diaye/Mery cases signaled cultural differences between how the French military and African communities envisioned the role of the individual in society. The French military saw recruits as decision-making individuals, who had dependants in the form of wives or descendents. From the viewpoint of African communities, household heads and local political leaders made collective decisions regarding whom in the family was most appropriate for military service. Tellingly, the French military had registered Amadou Mery's enlistment as voluntary. In reality, Mery had been coerced by his extended family members to take Malick N'Diaye's place because he was the son of the second wife and born outside the Four Communes.

The French pinned the blame of the majority of these errors of identification on West African cultural practice and West African civil servants. In an effort to curb malfeasance and corruption on the part of their West African employees, a military official proposed that France rescind the plenipotentiary powers it had allotted to local West African agents, particularly the Muslim tribunals in Saint-Louis. He had been moved to this stance because of the results of a recent inquest performed in Saint-Louis. Lieutenant-Colonel Cor had found that many of the Muslim magistrates in Saint-Louis were guilty of accepting graft, and that many were unqualified to serve in their positions.<sup>32</sup> As a result, Muslim tribunals, and other sanctioned indigenous courts and institutions came under fire and were portrayed by colonial administrators as compromised civic institutions that falsified documents or were inattentive to detail.<sup>33</sup> In reality, the French knew, and were learning anew, their inability to maintain an idealized version

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<sup>31</sup> Letter from the Lieutenant-Governor of Saint-Louis to the Governor-General of AOF, 10 February 1916, 4D26, ANS.

<sup>32</sup> Letter signed by Angoulvant, October 1916, 4D27, ANS.

<sup>33</sup> Letter from the Lieutenant-General of Saint-Louis, 1915, 4D26, ANS.

of French bureaucracy in West Africa. West Africans in their employment understood the limits of French authority over their individual actions as functionaries of the state.

French ideas of bureaucracy and legality did not map well onto the political and social beliefs of West African societies. Weberian conceptions of civic bureaucrats greasing the wheels of a state without personal gain, or involvement, was difficult enough in France. As demonstrated in the cases above, civil servants in the colonial state were susceptible to giving and receiving favors, which fell more in line with cultural values of accumulating social capital in patron-client relationships in West Africa. By no means did all West African civil servants violate French understandings of bureaucracy. However, West African intermediaries had a great deal of power in the lives of *originaires* and in controlling and corroborating information flows within the French colonial administration.<sup>34</sup>

Aside from cavalier intermediaries, the greatest hurdles in locating *originaires* came from irregular, incomplete, or missing documentation, which resulted from name changes and birth date or place errors. Many of these “errors” made in the civil administration’s records were, in fact, representative of spaces of maneuverability for the newly designated West African citizens of France. Shortly after the ratification of the 1915 Law, the French military posted the names of *originaires* eligible for service in public spaces in the Four Communes. The men listed on these recruitment rosters were expected to voluntarily come forward and report for duty. Senegalese Lieutenant-Governor Antonetti claimed that of the 9,000 names listed on *originaires’* recruitment rosters, perhaps 1,500 would be located.<sup>35</sup> By his estimation, three-quarters of the Saint-Louis population practiced name-switching. West Africans often went by names that were not on their birth certificates, which complicated the recruitment process. The French interpreted name-switching as a tactic of *originaires* to evade their new obligation to serve in the military, even though it was a cultural practice prior to 1915.

In November of 1915, Diabé Diaye approached a large placard in the dusty Place Faidherbe in Saint-Louis. The placard displayed lengthy hand-written lists of West African *originaires* men who were immediately obligated to military service. Diaye was a veteran of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and had already served the French military in West Africa. In 1915, he was a policeman in Saint-Louis. It was likely that he qualified for this position as a result of his veterans’ status. Wondering if he would be required to re-enlist in the French army, he scanned the lists of conscripts for his name. He did not find his name and found its absence odd. Diaye’s puzzlement on that sunny day in Place Faidherbe represented another example of name-switching that the colonial state could not account for. Diaye realized that he did not know what name his family had filed with his birth certificate. Diaye visited his families’ elders to ascertain the name on his birth certificate, but their responses were inconclusive. They provided him with several possible names, which he took to the Saint-Louis civil records office to find if any of those names were registered on his birthday with his parents’ names. He was unable to locate a birth certificate that matched the name of his mother and father, thus took it upon himself to re-enlist as an *originaire* soldier under the name Mafal Diagne. This name corresponded with his birthday and father’s name, but not his mother’s name. Unfortunately, this policeman had already served four years in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* under the name Diabé Diaye, which would

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<sup>34</sup> For further exploration of this topic see Lawrence, Benjamin N., Osborne, Emily Lynn, and Roberts, Richard L., eds. *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), Introduction.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Raphael Antonetti to Governor-General Clozel, 18 November 1915, 4D25, ANS.

have more than satisfied his civic obligation to the French military. A ranking French official further noted that it was legally impossible to connect the Diabé Diaye with Mafal Diagne.<sup>36</sup>

If the French thought there were gaping holes in the civil record in the Four Communes, they would stumble upon larger pitfalls with the 1916 Blaise Diagne Law. With the extension of *originnaire* status to the descendants of people born in the Four Communes, the French colonial government found itself wading into deeper, and more confusing waters. *Originnaire* status was inherited matrilineally and patrilineally, which meant that there were many new *originnaires* available for military service after 1916.<sup>37</sup> By virtue of the 1916 Law, the Governor-General of AOF estimated that there were 500 *originnaires* in Senegal, 1000 in Upper-Senegal-Niger, sixty in Guinea, twenty-five in Côte d'Ivoire, ten in Dahomey, six in Niger, and ten in Mauritania.<sup>38</sup> The first complication in locating those 1600 *originnaires* was that many of *originnaires* living outside of the Four Communes were unaware of their new political rights and military obligations. Second, in order to find *originnaires* born, or residing, outside of the Four Communes, the French colonial administration depended on local political institutions and leaders, who were not in the employment of the colonial state. This opened a wide space of maneuverability, allowing for layers of intermediaries to control knowledge regarding birth, residence, age, physical appearance, and names. Protective webs of contradictory or missing information enabled *originnaires* to escape military service, as well as allowed *indigènes* to pose as *originnaires* in order to gain citizenship. A third complication was that the French relied on their imperial competitors—Britain and Portugal—to aid them in locating *originnaires* in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, and Nigeria.

### **Problems of Cultural Difference and Integration: Questioning *statut personnel***

The 1915 and 1916 Blaise Diagne Laws intensified French colonial scrutiny of local bureaucratic institutions and West African civil servants, but in each of those cases reform was possible. However, difficulties stemming from cultural difference in the ranks of the metropolitan army, at least in the eyes of some French officials, were insurmountable. According to some French officials, the integration of black Muslim West African *originnaires* into the French metropolitan army would obstruct troops' consistency and confidence in one another. The voices arguing in this vein were largely of the same ilk as those objecting to the use of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Morocco. Racial, social, and cultural differences were stressed as divisive and insurmountable because of primordial differences between dyadic pairings, like African/European and Muslim/Christian. Islamic practices, in particular, were portrayed as incompatible with professional military life, which brought *originnaires'* *statut personnel* under severe military scrutiny. The Blaise Diagne Laws had bartered military service for incontrovertible citizenship for *originnaires* without ceding their exclusive rights to Muslim tribunals and practicing polygyny. Even though there were vocal members of the French

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<sup>36</sup> Letter from Lieutenant-Governor Antonetti in Saint-Louis, to Governor-General Clozel of AOF, 2 January 1916, 4D25, ANS.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Lieutenant-Governor of Senegal to the Governor-General of AOF, 19 December 1916, 4D23, ANS.

<sup>38</sup> Letter concerning the application of the Law of September 1916, signed by Clozel, December 1916, 4D23, ANS. Upper-Senegal-Niger is modern day Mali and Burkina Faso, and Dahomey is currently Benin.

military and colonial administration opposed to the privileges of the *statut personnel*, in practice, the colonial military respected *originaires* polygynous rights throughout the Great War. The following section analyzes French colonial policy, versus implementation, regarding practices protected by the *statut personnel*, as well as how this affected women married to *originaires*.

The major points of divergence between being civic Muslim or civic Frenchmen hinged on marital practice and secularism. According to Islamic law, Muslims could practice polygyny and for many practicing Muslims there was an immutable intertwinement of religion and state. According to French law, the French state recognized monogamous marriages. Within the French Republic there was a separation of church and state. As early as 1857, a French ministerial decree transgressed these distinctions between French and Muslim laws. In 1857, West African residents in Saint-Louis could use Muslims tribunals over the “matters that related to personal status” even if they were French citizens.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the *originaires*’ religious, marital, and civic affairs would be exempt from French Civil Code. This decree sanctioned the parallel and simultaneous existence of two legal systems and two sets of civic rights for *originaires*. Due to these abnormalities, the *statut personnel* came under attack at the turn of the twentieth century, and the Blaise Diagne legislation protected it with mandatory military service. After 1915, representatives of the French colonial military were drawn into problems in interracial metropolitan units and marital problems resulting from the dispersals of family allocations to multi-wife households.

Members of the French military surmised that the integration of West Africans, particularly Muslims, into the ranks of metropolitan troops would undermine infantrymen’s cultural uniformity, social congeniality, and skill consistency. *Originaires* soldiers would don French uniforms, earn the same pay and pensions, share sleeping quarters, and dine with metropolitan troops. French military officials feared that deep-rooted socio-cultural differences between West Africans and metropolitan Frenchmen would cleave the troops in two, particularly around the dinner table, where French troops regularly consumed alcohol and pork.<sup>40</sup> *Originaires*’ education and training could require French military leaders to spend extra time and energy on unique problems arising from cultural misunderstanding and racial prejudice. Other problems would surface due to commonly practiced racial segregation in AOF. When military forces traveled by rail, train carriages were racially homogenous, thus African *originaires* soldiers could not accompany white troops in first class. Perhaps accidentally, Diagne’s legislation challenged these racial barriers in the military and compelled the French colonial army to grapple with the misapplication of French Republicanism in the Four Communes. Lieutenant-Governor Antonetti, one of the more vehement detractors in the debates ensuing the Blaise Diagne laws, predicted that *originaires*’ daily intermixing with Frenchmen would negatively impact *originaires*. If forced into the ranks of the metropolitan army, Antonetti feared West Africans would lose their familial, communal and religious values. Evidently, he was not a proponent of French assimilation theories.

*Originaires* soldiers in the ranks of the metropolitan army lifted eyebrows and caused some friction in social practice throughout the rest of the colonial period. Instead of this pointing

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<sup>39</sup> Mamadou Diouf, “French Colonial Policy of Assimilation and the Civility of the Originaires of the Four Communes (Senegal): A Nineteenth Century Global Project,” *Development and Change* 29 (1998): 690.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Lieutenant-General Antonetti in Saint-Louis to Governor-General Clozel of AOF, 2 January 1916, 4D25, ANS.

to the general failure of military conformity, it instead denoted French colonial officials' admission that policies of assimilation failed in the Four Communes.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, it signaled how an idealized vision of nineteenth century French culture could never completely erase West African cultural practices, even among those who had had the most contact with Europeans. Mamadou Diouf argued that *originaires* rejected assimilationist models, and instead chose their own methods of hybridized acculturation as a means to maintain individual and collective identity in the Four Communes.<sup>42</sup> The *statut personnel* protected that unbridgeable gap between legally coded French civic practice and socially coded West African norms. *Originaires* also maintained their privileged social and legal position *vis-à-vis* other West Africans and the French through their *statut personnel*. Case studies below demonstrate how *originaires* soldiers, and their polygynous households, maintained their autonomy to the French Civil Code, as well as how used their privileged status to coax the French military to sanction and safeguard their multi-wife households.

Family allocations often drew the French into the personal affairs of *originaires* soldiers. After the 1915 Law, the fixed allocation for the *originaires*' wives was thirty-seven francs and fifty centimes per month. This was more than double the allocation dispersed to *tirailleurs sénégalais*' wives. Many agents of the French military claimed *originaires*' wives' pay was excessive compared to that of metropolitan wives. Due to the differences in economies of scale, *originaires*' wives' pay had more purchasing power in West Africa than metropolitan soldiers' wives had in France.<sup>43</sup> Agents of the French military could not reduce the allowances for *originaires*' wives, but they did attempt to regulate, standardize, and redesign how *originaires*' families received and shared the military's allocation. Due to France's growing interest in controlling allocations, *originaires* soldiers could persuade them to settle their marital affairs in their absence. Polygynous *originaires* soldiers framed their marital problems through the misappropriation and distribution of family allocations. Once officially involved, the French military became entangled in issues regarding marital legitimacy, as well as Muslim and customary laws related to social ranking among wives in polygynous households. Given all of the military rhetoric attacking Muslim soldiers' integration into the metropolitan army, it was surprising that the French colonial military negotiated between the parallel sets of law in order to ensure fiscal equity among wives and their offspring in polygynous households.

In 1915, the Governor-General of AOF conjectured that only two to three percent of the wives of mobilized *originaires* had been married according to the stipulations of the French Civil Code. This meant that, if *originaires* soldiers were married, most of them had celebrated their union through Muslim or customary practices. The existence of three legal systems in West Africa, French Law, *sharia*, and the *Indigénat* provided *originaires* soldiers and French officials plenty of leeway in managing legal and fiscal issues in soldiers' polygynous households.<sup>44</sup> Local decrees and French Civil Code often contradicted one another regarding polygynous families

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<sup>41</sup> For work on French policies of assimilation, please see Crowder, *Senegal: A Study of French Assimilation Policy*, and Raymond Betts *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

<sup>42</sup> Diouf, "The French Colonial policy of Assimilation," 676.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from Clozel, Governor-General of AOF, to the Lieutenant-Governor of Senegal, 14 December 1915, 4D28, ANS.

<sup>44</sup> *Sharia* in Islamic law based on the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed. The *Indigénat* was a French legal system for colonial subjects in which regional colonial administrators made laws as they saw fit.

rights. Therefore, there were standardized procedures for recognizing multi-wife households or regulating the distribution of the military's family allocations to sets of wives. As a result, the French colonial state was receptive to *originaires* soldiers' appeals for assistance in solving personal matters among their wives.

The French colonial administration in AOF made several pronouncements regarding how to allocate funds to *originaires* wives, but none of them became law. In 1916, the Governor-General of AOF asserted that only one wife of polygynous *originaires* soldiers should receive military allocations and claimed that *originaires* should be able to choose which wife would receive an allowance from the military.<sup>45</sup> He also claimed *originaires*' children, irrespective of their mother, should receive the fifty-centimes guaranteed to French soldiers' offspring.<sup>46</sup> With his suggestion, the colonial administration demonstrated how it meant protect the paternal priority of West African servicemen and deny funds to all of the mothers of *originaires*' children. The Governor-General's suggestion also rejected wives' financial claims upon the colonial state, but reaffirmed the colonial state's connection with children who would have been bastards in the purview of French Civil Code. Prioritizing soldiers' offspring over wives had resonance with the way that the French colonial army treated *mesdames tirailleurs* in Morocco in the previous chapter. The Governor-General's suggestion did not become law, and *originaires*' family allocations remained inconsistent into the interwar period. French legislators could modify the amount and the means of allocations for *originaires*' multi-wife households as late as 1922.<sup>47</sup>

The specific example of Ali N'Diaye demonstrated how polygynous *originaires* took advantage of the French military's irregular policies in regulating family allocations in order to induce the French state to assist in his family affairs.<sup>48</sup> Ali N'Diaye was a polygynous *originaire* born in Saint-Louis. He had two wives: the first was Bineta Gueye, and the second was Makhoni N'Diaye. Makhoni N'Diaye had given birth to a daughter in early 1917. According to local custom, the first wife in a multi-wife household retained the lion's share of authority and responsibility in that household, particularly in the absence of her husband. Thus, Bineta Gueye was awarded Ali N'Diaye's family allowance and was expected to distribute some of this money to Makhoni and her new infant. Most likely due to jealousies and bad blood between the women, Makhoni N'Diaye was being denied her share of Ali N'Diaye's family allocation. In an ideal world, Ali N'Diaye would have been present to regulate this injustice, but since he was stationed in France, he relied on the French military to make an official inquiry into the distribution of his family allowance. After an official inquest, a French military commission decided that Ali N'Diaye's allocation must be split equally between his two wives.<sup>49</sup> This verdict was fascinating because it revealed the degree to which the French military would protect *originaires*' rights to polygynous practices. In the absence of the male head of household, the French military would safeguard Islamic principals requiring the polygynous Muslims split their attention and finances equally among their wives. As a citizen and a West African, Ali N'Diaye

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from the Lieutenant-Governor of Senegal to the Governor General of the AOF, 6 January 1916, 4D28, ANS.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from Clozel, the Governor-General of AOF to the Lieutenant-Governor of Senegal, 5 January 1916, 4D28, ANS.

<sup>47</sup> Extract from the register of sectional deliberations meeting, 4 November 1924, 4D61V89, ANS.

<sup>48</sup> This soldier was referred to as Ali and Aly throughout the documents related to this matter.

<sup>49</sup> Verbal proceedings of the commission convened to manage allocations, 8 January 1917, 4D28, ANS.

could persuade agents of the French military to act on his behalf in protecting marital practices that conflicted with French Civil Code.

In the case of Seïdou Saar, his wives approached the French administration in Senegal in order to resolve their dispute concerning the apportionment of Saar's family allocation. Seïdou Saar was an *originnaire* serving in France. Both of his wives, Binta Saar and Fatou Diouf, believed they were entitled to receive family allocations from the French military. Archival evidence suggests that Fatou Diouf recognized her inferior social position, as a second wife, but that it did not preclude her from receiving a partial family allocation. Diouf brought her case to the French military, which led to the involvement of the Attorney General of French West Africa. The Attorney General answered Fatou Diouf's appeal by sifting through legal precedent in local West African decrees, French Civil Code and the Blaise Diagne legislation. The Attorney General did not refer to *sharia* or local tradition. This is curious, since local convention would have shed some light on Muslim *originnaires*' social practices and judicial traditions pertinent to partitioning finances within multi-wife households. In accordance with West African French legal precedent, the Attorney General concluded that if the French state legally sanctioned Seïdou Saar's marriages, then the French military should split Saar's family allocation between Binta Saar and Fatou Diouf.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately his decision was not implemented because further inquiries found that neither woman had legally wedded Seïdou Saar according to French, Muslim, or traditional means. Since Binta Saar was resident in Seïdou Saar's home at the time of the inquest, she was selected as the sole recipient of Saar's family allocation.<sup>51</sup>

The cases of Ali N'Diaye and Seïdou Saar reveal the slippery nature of the French military's involvement in *originnaires*' marital problems, wives' relations and the distribution of allocations. Wives and *originnaires* soldiers seeking financial and personal benefit from the military state framed their marital problems—wifely hierarchy and paternal right—through the distribution of military allocations. In doing so, they sought to gain an advantage through the judgment of the military courts. The military's decision regarding allocations carried authority and finality, but its involvement in the personal affairs of *originnaires* was dangerous because the French military discriminated against wives it deemed illegitimate.<sup>52</sup> The individual interpretations and personal involvement of various French administrators demonstrate that the French colonial state was inconsistent in dealing with West African polygynous citizen-soldiers. The 1915 and 1916 Blaise Diagne Laws and the *statut personnel* prevented the French state from imposing French social, cultural, and civic ideals on *originnaires* soldiers. The case of the *indigènes* enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* was a related, yet different story.

### **Balancing the Benefits and Detriments of *Originnaires* and *Indigènes* Status**

The Diagne legislation led to a transformation in how *indigènes* were recorded in official records. After 1915, the designation “*militaire*” in military passports would be replaced with “*indigène*,” which clearly indicated their native status and exclusion from the civil, military, and

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<sup>50</sup> Letter from the Attorney General of the AOF to the Governor-General of the AOF, 24 January 1917, 4D28, ANS.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from the Governor-General of the AOF to the Attorney General of the AOF, 6 February 1917, 4D28, ANS.

<sup>52</sup> This idea is revisited at length below with the wives of *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

social benefits of French citizenship.<sup>53</sup> This name change hints at the negative and pejorative connotations that became associated with *indigènes* after the Blaise Diagne legislation. In the French armed forces, *indigènes*' treatment, training, and compensation were exponentially worse than *originaires*. Curiously, in a colonial system where *indigènes* received less legal and financial benefits, there were some advantages to maintaining *indigène* status as opposed to being an *originaire*. Pierre Salla was a case in point, since he voluntarily denied his French citizenship in order to escape mandatory military service. Maintaining autonomy from the state and military service sometimes outweighed the civic benefits of *originaires* status. The French colonial state had far less contact with *indigènes* and also intervened in their personal affairs less often. In order to analyze the benefits and detriments of having one civic status versus the other, the following section addresses recruitment practices, service obligations, salaries, and family allocations.

During World War I, the Recruitment Law of 1912 continued to regulate *indigènes*' incorporation into the French colonial army through a quota-based conscription system.<sup>54</sup> Circulating recruitment boards drastically increased the number of recruits that they procured due to the need for soldiers in France. In order to curtail the number of men evading military service, the French military passed a new measure stating that if there was a draft dodger from a specific village, that village was required to "reimburse" the missing recruit.<sup>55</sup> Pointedly, this law legalized the practice of substitution, which West Africans had been employing since 1912 to replace important men with expendable community members. The reimbursement law acknowledged and ceded more authority to traditional leaders and *chef de cercles* and *chefs de cantons*.<sup>56</sup> During the crisis of war, the French colonial military preferred soldiers to fill the ranks, as opposed to control over the recruitment process. Due to these changes in recruitment practices and rumors about fatality rates in France, military service became unambiguously unpopular for all levels of society in AOF by the end of 1915. The French colonial military pinned the blame on the local political leaders that they had entrusted with political authority. The French military accused the local notables of fraudulent behavior, like embezzling the cash bonuses of new recruits and recruits' families' monthly allocations of fifteen francs.<sup>57</sup> Migration remained an obstacle to recruitment throughout the Great War. The intensification of recruitment after 1914 convinced many people living in French West African to immigrate to a neighboring, non-francophone colony. In 1918, it was estimated that nearly 100,000 people had migrated to foreign territories to avoid conscription.<sup>58</sup> Substitution, migration, and other tactics were viable options for *indigènes* to escape military conscription.

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<sup>53</sup> Note for the Head of the Military Cabinet from the Head of the Service for Muslim and Civil Affairs, 8 October 1915, 4D3V81, ANS. *Militaire* means military man.

<sup>54</sup> I address this at length in Chapter Two.

<sup>55</sup> An appended document addressed to the Governor-General of the AOF from the Commander of the Legion of Honor, September 1915, 4D3V81, ANS.

<sup>56</sup> *Chefs de cercles* and *chefs de cantons* were rural administrative heads recognized by the French in AOF.

<sup>57</sup> Note for the Head of the Military Cabinet from the Head of the Service for Muslim and Civil Affairs, 8 October 1915, 4D3V81, ANS.

<sup>58</sup> Note from the Minister of War's Council to the Minister of the Colonies, 12 January 1918, 4D3V81, ANS.



The French proposed various measures to sanction or curb those practices, but more importantly by the beginning of 1918, they turned to a familiar figure to lead a recruitment campaign across AOF. The French imperial government enlisted the assistance of Blaise Diagne to lead the final recruitment drive of the Great War.<sup>59</sup> Prior to arriving in Dakar to take up this task in February of 1918, Diagne secured a position in the French colonial administration that rivaled the Governor-General in terms of power and authority. Diagne reported directly to the Ministers of War and the Colonies, which circumvented the authority of the Governor-General and prompted Joost Van Vollenhoven's resignation. Diagne also won new entitlements, privileges, and possibilities for *indigènes* who voluntarily enlisted in the French colonial army. *Indigènes* that enlisted during the 1918 recruitment campaign would receive greater signing bonuses, family allocations, and were exempted from taxes while serving under the French flag. The 1918 *tirailleurs sénégalais* recruits were promised employment in the colonial administration after their military service. Diagne had also won new legal provisions that improved veteran *indigènes'* ability to naturalize as Frenchmen.<sup>60</sup> One of the major achievements of the 1918 recruitment drive was convincing traditional political leaders to enlist their sons in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, which finally erased the connection between the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and base social origins in West Africa.<sup>61</sup> By the end of the recruitment drive, roughly 63,000 men had enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Most of these fresh recruits would not deploy in France because the war ended prior to the completion of their basic training.

Prior to the 1918 recruitment drive, each administrative district of the AOF provided a certain number of recruits, which did not account for population disparities between rural and urban areas. *Indigènes* were compelled, conscripted, or volunteered for a minimum of three years of service with the French colonial military. They, unlike the *originaires*, were legally required to serve outside of the AOF. *Originaires* received enlistment and re-enlistment bonuses that were greater than those of *indigènes*, and they also had a better chance of survival during their tours of duty. In an ironic twist of civic designation and military service in the colonies, *originaires* enjoyed salaries and bonuses that were inverse to metropolitan troops. Metropolitan troops received pay increases while serving outside of mainland France. As citizens, *originaires* were also paid more while serving outside of France, which meant they received higher salaries at home in the Four Communes. If *originaires* served in the cold battlefields of France, they were paid daily wages according to their rank—soldiers received .75 francs, corporals 3.85 francs, and sergeants received monthly salaries of 428 francs. If serving in the AOF, *originaires* soldiers received 1.5 francs, corporals 6.5 francs, and sergeants received monthly salaries of 702 francs.<sup>62</sup>

*Indigènes* serving in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* received higher wages when they served outside of AOF, but their salaries never came close to those of *originaires*. In AOF, daily wages for *indigènes* soldiers were .75 francs, corporals 1.15 francs, and sergeants 2.10 francs. These wages increased to 1, 1.5, and 2.5 francs when *indigènes* served in the metropole. *Originaires*

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<sup>59</sup> This recruitment campaign is detailed in Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maëlstrom*, 73-81, Johnson, *The Emergence of Black Politics in Senegal*, 191-195, Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 42-46, Michel, *Appel à l'Afrique*, 226-235.

<sup>60</sup> Johnson, *Emergence of Black Politics*, 194.

<sup>61</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 46.

<sup>62</sup> "Comparison entre la situation militaire des originaires et celle des indigènes," undated, 17G233V108, ANS.

received 250 francs when they were discharged and the *tirailleurs sénégalais* only received fifty francs. After their service, *originaires* were guaranteed civilian employment and *originaires* who had served twenty-five years were assured a full pension. Those who served fifteen years were awarded a proportional pension and *originaires'* widows could receive half of their pensions. After 1918, there was legislation promising *indigènes* employment in the colonial state after their service. Veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were also entitled to pension after fifteen years of service, but their pensions were roughly a third of *originaires'* pensions.<sup>63</sup> In financial terms, the *originaires'* military service had greater returns than *indigènes'* military service.

In terms of education, training, and promotion, *originaires* had advantages over *indigènes* because *originaires* could attend French military academies and upon graduation they entered the French military as an officer or sub-officer. *Indigènes* ascended the ranks based on seniority and merit. Articles in the 1915 Diagne Law promised *originaires* the rank of sub-officer—sub-Lieutenant, Lieutenant, and Captain—if they were fluent and literate in French. After 1915, *originaires* serving in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were transferred to metropolitan units and retained their equivalent rank and seniority.<sup>64</sup> Those who had already signed up for five to six year service agreements could not reduce the length of their service, but could be awarded the monetary difference between *tirailleurs sénégalais* and *originaires* signing bonuses.<sup>65</sup> In terms of basic amenities, *originaires* were guaranteed individual cots, mats, sheets, blankets and mosquito nets. *Indigènes* had access to metal, wood, or concrete bunks and would receive sufficient bedding as regulated by their military camp. *Originaires* ate the same food as Europeans, and those who were Muslim were reimbursed for the wine rations that they did not consume.<sup>66</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais* ate separately from *originaires* and their meals were basic starches and small amounts of protein. No soldiers ate well on campaign or in the trenches.

### **Harsher Engagements with *Tirailleurs Sénégalais'* Wives**

This division between *originaires* and *indigènes* also affected the ways in which the women and wives affiliated with West African soldiers interacted, and benefited, from the French imperial state. The examples provided above demonstrated that the French military supported *originaires'* polygynous households, as well as the fact that they were available to assist the wives of *originaires* soldiers. The French military's treatment of *tirailleurs sénégalais'* wives was in some cases similar, but in others radically different. The basic fiscal differences between *originaires* and *indigènes* soldiers' salaries also existed in their family allowances, which circumscribed wives' spending power, political leverage and their social status. *Indigènes'* wives received fifteen-franc monthly allowances only if their husbands were deployed outside of AOF.<sup>67</sup> Due to the far greater number of *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in the ranks of the French Armed forces, there were many more *indigènes* wives than *originaires* wives. Their small number in the archival record indicated that they preferred to remain outside

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Report addressed to the President of the French Republic regarding the Law of 1915, 4D23, ANS.

<sup>65</sup> Note signed by Lieutenant-Governor Antonetti, 20 October 1915, 4D23, ANS.

<sup>66</sup> "Comparison entre la situation militaire des originaires et celle des indigènes," undated, 17G233V108, ANS

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

the machinations of the colonial state, were potentially unaware of the allocations due to them, it was difficult for these women to access the colonial state for various reasons, or that they collected their money and that was it.

Of the few archival cases involving the wives of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, the French colonial military policed infidelity, settled marital disputes, and dealt with allocation issues. In cases of clandestine remarriage or unofficial divorce, the colonial state asserted the patriarchal privilege of *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in France over their wives living in West Africa. Unsurprisingly, officials in the French colonial state took less issue with *tirailleurs sénégalais*' polygyny than their wives' polyandry or polyamory. As a result, dissatisfied wives of *tirailleurs sénégalais* were more apt than wives of *originaires* to circumvent the French colonial state through remarriage and divorce without alerting their soldier/husbands. In enforcing monogamy on *tirailleurs sénégalais*' wives, the French colonial military traipsed into unfamiliar West African social and cultural conventions. The colonial state also opened itself up to other requests by soldiers, and their wives, in regulating marital disputes—like bridewealth claims. This section provides an analysis of how West African women developed survival strategies in the absence of their husbands.

During WWI, the French colonial army became embroiled in *tirailleurs sénégalais* wives' survival strategies by reading them as amoral and abnormal martial practices. The French archives labeled acts of polyamory and polyandry as “illegal” remarriages and “illegal” divorces, in order to couch their enforcement of monogamy and male privilege on the part of *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>68</sup> In most military documents concerning *tirailleurs sénégalais*' wives, there were references or hints regarding their questionable marital status and their unfaithful sexual behaviors. In the French colonial archival record, all of the cases of “illegal” remarriage and divorce were linked to wives of *indigènes*. This may indicate that women who had married *tirailleurs sénégalais* chose to engage the state less often in their personal choices regarding their sexual partners. These women also had less to benefit from the French colonial state, so they clandestinely chose new romantic partners after the prolonged absence of their husbands in France. The French military and their first soldier/husbands condemned these new romantic relationships because these West African women had circumvented the state and their husbands' authority in civic and personal matters.

The French military became concerned with “illegal” remarriage because they believed that wives' fidelity improved *tirailleurs sénégalais*' morale. The paternalistic French state construed West African soldiers' contributions to the war effort as sacrificial and patriotic. The French military construed their unfaithful wives as unpatriotic, capricious, and self-serving. For many West African women, their soldier/husbands were shipped out of AOF and they received no information regarding their whereabouts for several years. Their “illegal” remarriages were strategies to secure affection, a father for their children, and/or a living partner. Their lack of deference to French law indicated their ignorance or aversion to it. The French labeled their new romantic relationships as “illegal” remarriages because wives of *tirailleurs sénégalais* continued to collect monthly allowances linked to their first soldier/husband. In choosing not to notify their soldier/husbands or the French colonial military of their new romantic relationship, these women gained financial stability from the military and emotional benefits from their new romantic partner.

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<sup>68</sup> Throughout this section “illegal” will remain in quotes in order to denote that the French colonial state, not the women involved, saw their actions as unlawful and warranting reprimand.

In one example of an “illegal” remarriage case, Sergeant Mamadou Bâ found himself in a convalescent institution in Menton, France at the end of WWI. Sergeant Bâ had had very little contact with his wife since he mobilized in 1915. His wife, Aissatou N’Diaye, wrote to him from Dakar on August 28, 1918, to inform him that she had decided to marry another.<sup>69</sup> Instead of responding to his wife, Sergeant Bâ’s wrote to a French military official in AOF to request the state’s intervention his behalf regarding his wife’s decision. In the inquest, the colonial army found that Aissatou N’Diaye had collected fifteen francs per month from the French military as her wifely allocation since Bâ’s deployment to France. Between 1916 and 1917, Aissatou N’Diaye moved in with a day laborer, Bilaly Diallo, who had given her sixty francs in bridewealth. As a result of the French colonial state’s investigation into her private life, Aissatou N’Diaye returned sixty francs to Diallo and moved out of his residence.<sup>70</sup> While this could be interpreted as her recognition of her own wrongdoing, it was probable that N’Diaye felt there would be negative repercussions from the state regarding her marriage to Bilaly Diallo. In October of 1918, the French Minister of the Colonies decided to legally obstruct women, who had been married to *tirailleurs sénégalais*, from marrying anew without the death certificate of their former husband in hand.<sup>71</sup> Several Lieutenant-Governors called for legislation barring the wives of *tirailleurs sénégalais* from divorce in general.<sup>72</sup> The Lieutenant-Governor from Zinder called for the expansion of military energies to prevent the wives of *tirailleurs sénégalais* from living with other men, specifically other unmarried *tirailleurs sénégalais* who were encamped in West Africa.<sup>73</sup>

Another case of remarriage brought before the French colonial state involved a women named Sikilegui and her soldier/husband Sergeant Sale. After Sergeant Sale shipped out to France, Sikilegui did not receive a word from her husband for over four years. On the assumption that he was dead, Sikilegui married another officer in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, Corporal Sinemane Sylla, under the pseudonym Fatouma Taraore. Sikilegui/Fatouma Taraore collected two wives’ allocation from the French military for both of her marriages. After Sergeant Sale returned to West Africa and found his wife married to another, he requested that the French colonial administration assist him in remedying the problem. The Lieutenant-Governor of Côte d’Ivoire called for the annulment of the second marriage.<sup>74</sup>

In the cases of Aissatou N’Diaye and Sikilegui/Fatouma Taraore, the French colonial state dealt swift justice in order to rectify errors in financial allocations to West African women connected to *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The colonial state also supported the paternal priority of their colonial soldiers in cases where they believed West African wives were embezzling family allocations. French administrators construed the unfaithful wives of West African servicemen as gold-digging fair-weather friends.<sup>75</sup> When considered through the viewpoint of these women, financial gain and physical security primary motivations for some women to remarry discretely,

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<sup>69</sup> Also referred to as Madame Ousitou N. Diaye in these documents.

<sup>70</sup> Governor-General of AOF to the Minister of the Colonies, 6 March 1919, 4D71, ANS.

<sup>71</sup> Minister of the Colonies to the Governor-General of AOF, 29 October 1918, 4D71, ANS.

<sup>72</sup> Lieutenant-Governor at Porto-Novo (Dahomey) to the Governor-General of the AOF, 14 November 1915, 4D71, ANS.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from Mourin in Zinder to the Governor-General of AOF, 8 November 1915, 4D71, ANS.

<sup>74</sup> Letter signed by Angoulvant in a file entitled “les femmes et le mariage,” 28 June 1918, 4D88, ANS.

<sup>75</sup> Report from Bamako, from the Lieutenant-Governor of Haut-Sénégal-Niger to the Governor-General of AOF, 12 October 1915, 4D71, ANS.

but there was a chance that these women did not see their new marriages as acts of polyandry. Information flows between France and West Africa inconsistent throughout World War I. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* and their wives were probably illiterate. Many wives received no news of their soldier/husbands throughout the war. Conceivably, they assumed them dead in the trenches and sought new companionship. Remarriage was feasible tactic in comparison with certifying the death of their soldier/husband with the French colonial state.

In contrast to “illegal” remarriages, which were carried out through the circumvention of the colonial state, divorce occurred when *tirailleurs sénégalais* or their wives preferred to involve the French colonial administration. When wives brought divorce cases to French colonial courts, they deliberately entangled the French colonial state in their private affairs in order to gain from its involvement. Wives forced the hand of the military to adjudicate and arbitrate matters that the army was largely unfamiliar with, for example the return of bridewealth. Sergeant Biram Sakho and Anttia Cissé were divorcing in 1918. Due to Sergeant Sakho’s employment in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, Cissé appealed to the colonial administration to assist her in resolving the return of 1,110 franc bridewealth. Cissé claimed that she should have received family allowances from the military during Sakho’s tours of duty. Sakho had withheld the lion’s share of these funds from her, which had negatively impacted their child’s well-being. Cissé had received only ninety of the 870 francs that were allocated to her by the French military—meaning her husband had pocketed 780 francs. As a result of a judgment in her favor, the French colonial administration required her to return only 320 francs of her bridewealth, which awarded her 780 francs compensation for her husband’s negligence.<sup>76</sup> This example serves as a reminder of how West African women sought adjudication from the colonial state when seeking divorce because they calculated more lucrative and positive outcomes through the colonial state than through traditional processes of arbitration.<sup>77</sup> This case also portrayed how the French colonial state could overrule the authority of *tirailleurs sénégalais* if they embezzled state funds. Unfortunately, as with most complex West African processes informed by local convention, the colonial state reduced the exchange of bridewealth to a financial transaction of negligible social and cultural value.

### **Migrating Wives and Transportable Difficulties**

The French colonial archival record demonstrated that its functionaries were willing to assist the wives of *originaires* soldiers, whereas, the wives of *tirailleurs sénégalais* were more often treated as people to discipline because they were inclined towards infidelity and alarming behavior. The French colonial state treated the wives of *originaires* soldiers and *tirailleurs sénégalais* in line with their husbands’ legal categories, which revealed the prejudices of the state, as opposed to whether the states’ assumptions regarding the collective wayward behavior of female colonial subjects were valid. The increased recruitment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* during WWI brought the French military into greater contact with the female dependents of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, who made their marriages visible through migration to and squatting around military encampments. The following section addresses the migrations of women

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<sup>76</sup> Correspondence, 11 October 1918, 4D71, ANS.

<sup>77</sup> For other examples see Richard Roberts, “Representation, Structure, and Agency: Divorce in the French Soudan at the beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of African History* 40, 3 (1999), 389-410.

following their soldier/husbands, who became integral elements in the landscapes of military bases and port cities. Through migration, these women established claims to their husbands, as well as claims to allocations from the French colonial army.

The growing presence of these women in the peripheries of military bases became a growing sanitary, social, and moral concern for the French military. The French colonial military had not anticipated the migrations of soldiers' female partners, and other women, to military bases during the Great War. These migrations fit into several trends occurring in West Africa in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1905, there were massive migrations occurring in the western Soudan as slaves left their masters in search of their natal homes, or new opportunities.<sup>78</sup> Women were a major part of this migration of emancipated slaves and many women used marriage as strategy for security and a means to accumulate responsibility, authority, and durable family connections.<sup>79</sup> Recently freed female slaves often attached themselves to *tirailleurs sénégalais* and military posts in the West Africa interior, as domestic servants and wives.<sup>80</sup>

During the recruitment campaigns for Moroccan pacification, the French colonial army used wifely accompaniment as a marketing tool to boost enlistment rates. This practice limitedly continued during WWI for *tirailleurs sénégalais* bound for North Africa. However, the majority of freshly recruited *tirailleurs sénégalais* were destined for war in Europe and wives were not allowed to accompany *tirailleurs sénégalais* to France. Thus, the wives who followed their soldier/husbands to military encampments and port cities were often stranded in those locations. These women squatted in impermanent settlements in the peripheries of military grounds and lived off of their family allowances and other casual employments. They became integral members of impermanent communities that provided *tirailleurs sénégalais* with services and diversions while they were on leave. These communities, which thrived off the regular replenishment of West African troops, became an eyesore and a question of sanitation for the French colonial military. The most alarming casual employment of the women living in these communities in the periphery of military encampments was sex work.

In Dakar, it was often unclear as to whether all of these women were wives of *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed abroad, or if their were unmarried entrepreneurs capitalizing on the escalating presence of young, single, men in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Disregarding marital status, the French military blamed these women for the growing cases of venereal disease among soldiers station in Dakar. One particular site, the village of L'Abattoir, appeared frequently in the archival record as a source of embarrassment and concern for the French colonial military.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Richard Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants, and Slaves: State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), Chapter Five and Richard Roberts and Martin Klein, "The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Soudan," *Journal of African History* 21 (1980): 375–94.

<sup>79</sup> Marie Rodet, *Les Migrantes ignorées du Haut-Sénégal (1900-1946)* (Paris: Karthala, 2009), Chapters Four and Five, and Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves and Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (New York: Lilian Barber Press, 1993), Introduction.

<sup>80</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, Chapter Two, and Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in West Africa*, 74-75 and 80-1. Also J. Malcolm Thompson, "Colonial Policy and the Family Life of Black Troops in French West Africa, 1817-1904," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23 (1990): 423-453.

<sup>81</sup> L'Abattoir translates to "the slaughterhouse" in English.

L'Abattoir village was located adjacent to the Madeleines military base on the Western shore of the Cap Verde peninsula. Created in 1913, L'Abattoir village was first populated by butchers of Wolof, Toucouleur, and several other ethnicities. During WWI, the influx of soldiers inspired the migration of merchants, wives, and other entrepreneurs to this small village. The majority of these women came from villages in the West African hinterland, in contemporary Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso, which meant they had traveled great distances overland and probably lacked familial and community support in Dakar. If they were legally recognized as a wife, they collected fifteen francs a month from the French army, which, in Dakar's inflated economy, did not cover their monthly expenses.<sup>82</sup> In order to provide for themselves, and their children, these women formed communities on the peripheries of the Madeleines military base, engaged in casual labor, and relied on networks of support within the village.

Most buildings in L'Abattoir village were constructed out of scrap wood and topped with salvaged sheet metal. During WWI, there were approximately ten merchants/shopkeepers in L'Abattoir village who sold libations—predominantly wine and adulterated gin—to *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed nearby and the women lodging in the village. The French military believed that up to fifty landlords operated in the village, who exploited *tirailleurs sénégalais*' wives with high rents. A room with a bed leased for twelve to thirteen francs a month, and a room without a bed ranged between seven and a half to ten francs per month. Lodging alone nearly exhausted their monthly fifteen-franc allowances, which compelled many women to participate in the growing cash economy. Some sold roasted groundnuts and fried millet pastries, but these activities rarely accrued enough revenue to afford basic amenities in Dakar.<sup>83</sup> Many of these women entered the labor economy by selling domestic services that included cooking, entertaining, and sex. Much like the Nairobi women historicized by Louise White in *Comforts of Home*,<sup>84</sup> West African women in L'Abattoir village joined the capitalist economy by providing domesticity to soldiers. In exchange for payment, these women took on temporary domestic roles of wife and provider for their clients. They gained some financial security by contracting casual, yet sustained, relationships with *tirailleurs sénégalais*. By establishing enduring relationships with soldiers, these women fashioned a precarious web of economic and social security.

The French colonial military challenged the presence of these women with medical discourses that depicted them as contagion carriers, threats to the psychological stability of young *tirailleurs sénégalais*, and a blight upon the military landscape. These accusations provided grounds for reducing and eliminating the presence of these women in the periphery of the military camps. Their removal from L'Abattoir village would directly counter their claims of belonging to the military and would compromise their marital claims. The French colonial army also challenged these women by investigating marital legitimacy and accused these women of immorality. The French military depicted all of the women living in L'Abattoir village as promiscuous. Once the colonial military convinced itself that the women living in L'Abattoir village committed acts of adultery, French officials proposed methods to eliminate their presence. One member of military personnel suggested that the wives should be removed and

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<sup>82</sup> Letter from the inspector general of Health and Medical Services, 12 May 1917, 4D71, ANS.

<sup>83</sup> A report for the Colonel Hérisson, 17 August 1916, 4D71, ANS.

<sup>84</sup> Luise White, *Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), Introduction.

sent back to their villages of origin.<sup>85</sup> Razing L'Abattoir village was a drastic proposal that never came to fruition.<sup>86</sup> One suggested non-violent tactic was to simply deny these women access to their family allocations in Dakar. Thus, wives would be required to travel to the village where their husbands were recruited in order to access monies due to them.<sup>87</sup> The military did not take into consideration that these women may not have been from the same village as their husbands. Bureaucracy was another means to non-violently displace women living in L'Abattoir. Agents of the colonial military, in cooperation with the local police, eventually entered L'Abattoir village and attempted to remove any woman who could not provide identification papers that linked her to a *tirailleurs sénégalais*. In the end, the French military had to act delicately with the wives of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* residing in the peripheries of military encampments because these women could act as agents of anti-recruitment if they were maltreated by the French through forced removals.

This caution was merited because not all women living in the periphery of military bases had recently come from the West African hinterland for entrepreneurial opportunities. Some of these women were *mesdames tirailleurs* who had repatriated from North Africa after the deaths of their husbands, or their husbands' deployment to France from Morocco.<sup>88</sup> During the Great War, these former *mesdames tirailleurs* became wards of the French colonial state. However, due to their official affiliation with the colonial state, they were not treated as vectors of venereal disease or general threats to the health of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Unlike the women squatting in L'Abattoir village, these women were the state's responsibility and the colonial administration could swiftly relocate them to their villages of origin without severe social repercussions. In one example, a military headquarters had housed 2,596 women, who were wards of the colonial state or married to *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed abroad. Over the course of a couple of months, 572 were transferred to the authority of the civil state, 1,997 were repatriated to their village of origin, and seventeen were reunited with their husbands.<sup>89</sup>

## The End of a War and a Conclusion

The Blaise Diagne Laws brought systemic social, cultural, and political changes to the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* by bifurcating West African troops according to their status as *originaire* or *indigène*. The civic and social hierarchies that accompanied the bifurcation of West African soldiers into the metropolitan and colonial armies extended into the marital relations of these soldiers. The division of residents of France's sprawling colonial West African federation into citizen and subject soldiers had wide-ranging effects on the social status of *tirailleurs sénégalais*. This bifurcation of West African troops also led to *originaires'* increasing invisibility in the archives because they were incorporated into metropolitan troops and dropped a title "*tirailleurs sénégalais*" or "*troupe noires*" that easily distinguished in the

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<sup>85</sup> Letter from the General Inspector of Sanitary and Medical Services, May 1917, 4D71, ANS.

<sup>86</sup> Colonel Hérisson in a report on the villages neighboring the military camp of the 4<sup>th</sup> RTS, 17 August 1916, 10N109, ANS.

<sup>87</sup> Correspondence from the military cabinet of Senegal, from the General Inspector of Health and Medical Services, May 1917, 4D71, ANS.

<sup>88</sup> I address these women at length in Chapter Two.

<sup>89</sup> Pinneau to the Minister of the Colonies, 7 February 1916, 4D71, ANS.



archival record.<sup>90</sup> *Indigènes*, on the other hand, retained the official title of *tirailleurs sénégalais* until the late 1950s. Even today, among West African veterans of the French colonial army, the arbitrary privileges and benefits awarded to *originaires* soldiers continue to resurface in pleasantries, jokes and anecdotes. Many *tirailleurs sénégalais* veterans referred to *originaires* as “toubabs noirs,” or black Frenchmen, which alluded to how the division between citizens and subjects carried weight in the twenty-first century.<sup>91</sup>

In order to understand the repercussions of Blaise Diagne Laws of 1915 and 1916, this chapter has broadly dealt with how renegotiating citizenship during the crisis of the Great War echoed into the mobile recruitment boards, then rebounded into the households of West African women married to citizen and subject soldiers. The negotiations and debates around the exclusive *statut personnel* continued into the interwar period, and ironically so did the tour of duty of the roughly 63,000 *tirailleurs sénégalais* enlisted in the last recruitment drive of 1918. Blaise Diagne’s personal involvement in the final recruitment effort for the Great War yielded a mass of troops who had all signed on for at least three years. The bulk of these *tirailleurs sénégalais* had received cursory training in the last months of the war, and as they were no longer needed in mainland France, they were diverted to empire. The following chapter returns us to the imperial narrative of this dissertation, as it follows *tirailleurs sénégalais*, and their romantic interests to Morocco, Madagascar, and newly acquired French possessions in the Levant—Syria and Lebanon.

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<sup>90</sup> *Troupes Noires* means Black Troops.

<sup>91</sup> Toubab is Wolof for European foreigner, in this case the French.

## Chapter Four: The *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* and the Interwar Period

In 1926, at the age of sixty, the widow Fatamata Bambara appealed to the Governor-General of Madagascar to assist her in going home. Fatamata Bambara left her home in French Soudan in the mid-1890s to accompany her husband to Madagascar. Her husband was a *tirailleurs sénégalais* participating in France's conquest of Madagascar. Afterwards, the couple stayed on in Madagascar because Fatamata's husband found work in construction. After thirty years in Madagascar, the widow hoped to return to West Africa to live with her adult children and her grandchildren.<sup>1</sup> The Governor-General of Madagascar declined to allocate funds for Bambara's international passage to French Soudan. The colonial state's refusal to finance the homecoming of a *tirailleurs sénégalais*' aged widow signaled a shift in how colonial administrators felt responsible for the wives and widows of *tirailleurs sénégalais*. This decision was also indicative of larger policy shifts affecting the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and occurring in French empire during the interwar period.

This chapter analyzes how the institution of *tirailleurs sénégalais* evolved in a historical period characterized by financial crisis. One French historian characterized the 1920s and 1930s as the "Hollow Years" in order to indicate how France's devastated economy affected all aspects of society in the interwar period.<sup>2</sup> The global depression certainly affected France's efforts to invest in its empire, yet the *tirailleurs sénégalais* revealed that the French colonial military embarked on several ambitious projects to reconfigure their imperial institutions and their presence in France's imperial possessions. The interwar period witnessed a refashioning of West African servicemen's role in empire, as well as their growing presence as guardians of empire in Morocco, Syria and Lebanon. After World War I, West Africans were permanently quartered in North Africa, the Levant, and Madagascar, which is why cross-colonial relationships flourished during the interwar period and why *tirailleurs sénégalais* became synonymous with the French colonial state among imperial populations.

This chapter is broken up into four sections in order to examine how *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their dependents' interactions with the French colonial state exhibit the austerity of the period, as well as paradoxical ambitions of France towards its empire. The first examines the aftermath of the Great War in order to understand the lessons learned from the war and how they affected France, colonial soldiers, and West African civilians' relationships to one another. The subsequent section analyzes the legislative changes shaping the future of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, which incorporated the lesson learned from the Great War. The French decided to professionalize the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and establish military preparatory schools in West Africa. In something of a countermove, the French also decided to preferentially recruit in regions of AOF where populations had had less contact with France or Islam. The colonial army strategically selected men from ethno-linguistic groups whose "innate" martial skills had not been blunted by contact with either civilization. The first decision was part of France's effort to reinvest in empire and improve imperial policies regarding the welfare of colonial populations.

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence between Fatamata Bambara, the Governor-General of Madagascar, and the Governor-General of AOF, 13 September 1926 to April 1927, 4D61V89, ANS.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Weber, *The Hollow Years: France in the 1930s* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994).

The second decision was the result of France's post-war efforts to overcome their vulnerability after four years of war. The French sought to reconstruct their socio-cultural preeminence in empire by reifying a racialized colonial order.

During the interwar period, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* became permanent occupying forces in Syria, Morocco, and Madagascar. The third section addresses how the aforementioned paradoxical impulses were evident in *tirailleurs sénégalais*' participation in minor conflicts in Morocco and Syria—the Rif War and the Djebel Druze Uprising. The fourth section further advances the themes of austerity and paradox by examining how the professionalization of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* led them to seek romantic relationships with colonial women in Syria, Morocco, and Madagascar. The international migration of female colonial subjects and families to AOF resulted in the contested integration of these women into West African communities.

### **Changes to the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* in the Post-War Period**

At the end of the Great War, nearly 200,000 West African men had been mobilized for the French war effort. The French military orchestrated a large-scale demobilization of *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their rapid repatriation from France to West Africa. Of the 63,000 *tirailleurs sénégalais* recruited in the last year of the war, many were diverted from France to the French-occupied Rhineland, the Balkans, and France's new Mandate territories—Syria and Lebanon. The French military was intent to channel West African troops away from mainland France due to the cost of maintaining them in the metropole and due to a new desire to re-establish France's cultural hegemony in its empire. Shrinking state budgets also affected how the French colonial military carried out their post-war programs to reorient and redefine *tirailleurs sénégalais*' role in French empire.

The intensification of contact between French nationals and colonial soldiers during the Great War inspired the French to rapidly remove *tirailleurs sénégalais* from French soil. During the war, colonial soldiers came to the metropole en masse and observed French people unconnected to the colonial state. These soldiers could assess the quality French civilization and culture without the distortions of colonial propaganda. World War I was a watershed moment in dissolving myths of French social and cultural superiority that were fundamental to Republican colonial rhetoric.<sup>3</sup> The war presented France to its empire at its most vulnerable and inadequate moment. Michael Adas demonstrated that World War I overturned the French civilizing mission because of the atrocities that West African and Asian soldiers witnessed in the trenches of World War I.<sup>4</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais*' sexual conquests in the metropole also threatened the elevated status of France because miscegenation threatened racial hierarchy and the very core of French society.<sup>5</sup> French women played a multitude of roles in *tirailleurs sénégalais*'

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<sup>3</sup> This is a reference to how the French Third Republic's civilizing mission in empire, which is treated in Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Ideal of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), Introduction.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Adas, "Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology," *Journal of World History* 15 (March 2004): 63.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Fogarty *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914-1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 228 and Yaël Simpson Fletcher, "Unsettling Settlers: Colonial Migrants and Racialized Sexuality in Interwar Marseilles," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities* ed. Antoinette Burton (New York: Routledge, 1999), 80-94.

deployments in France—*marraines de guerre*, friends, companions, lovers—yet, the French government singled out the last; particularly transactional sex.<sup>6</sup>

French sex workers threatened the financial security of *tirailleurs sénégalais* and the exalted image of itself that France projected to its colonies. French military administrators admonished *tirailleurs sénégalais* who wasted their pay on women, frivolous goods, and services because soldiers returned to West Africa destitute, accompanied with nothing but their memories of the “the good eating distributed regularly by women with loose morals that they met at the exits of military barracks.”<sup>7</sup> Repatriating soldiers, who reported to other soldiers and their home communities that French women paid West Africans for sexual encounters, were even more disconcerting.<sup>8</sup> This last rumor contrasted the physical superiority of West African men to the weakened paternalistic French state, which compounded France’s degraded image in AOF. In order counter this interpretation of West African prowess, the French took the moral high ground. They claimed that *tirailleurs sénégalais* were incapable of becoming Frenchmen and had only latched onto the defects and vices of French civilization during the Great War.

While they awaited passage to AOF, *tirailleurs sénégalais* engaged in the leisure activities common to soldiers and seaman in port towns and military encampments. The soldiers spent their severance pay on luxury items and services that were unavailable in West Africa. The colonial army was wary of West African soldiers’ frivolous expenditures, like gold teeth, because they feared that soldiers would squander their money before they shipped home.<sup>9</sup> Oddly, the colonial military required *tirailleurs sénégalais* to self-finance their boat travel to AOF, which meant they could bankrupt themselves and end up wards of the French state if they spent all their military pay.<sup>10</sup> Bankruptcy was a rare outcome for *tirailleurs sénégalais* awaiting passage home. Most soldiers were intent to return to West Africa and re-establish themselves in their communities in a manner that displayed their newfound wealth. Repatriating West African veterans of World War I sought to rapidly accumulate dependents, livestock, and plots of land for cultivation.<sup>11</sup>

Returning veterans had also accumulated military skills and basic French education while employed in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Instead of capitalizing on their skills, the French colonial state preferred that repatriating soldiers assimilate to their former ways of living. The French entitled this process “resenegalization.” Since veterans were encouraged to return quickly to their natal villages, West African families and communities dealt with the brunt of this work. “Repatriating soldiers were often insolent with local French representatives, but it was far worse

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<sup>6</sup> *Marraine de guerre* means godmother of war in French. During the Great War, this was an institutionally encouraged relationship akin to “pen pals” where French women corresponded with and sent presents to French forces—including colonial troops.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from the Lieutenant-Governor of Côte d’Ivoire to the Governor-General of the AOF, 22 August 1920, 5D6V14, ANS.

<sup>8</sup> “L’État de l’Armée de l’Afrique Occidentale Française,” page 8, 25 March 1925, fmcote74, CAOM.

<sup>9</sup> Colonel Breveté Jean Charbonneau, *Balimatou et Compagnie: Zigzags à travers le vaste Empire Français* (Paris: Charles-Lavauzelle, 1934), 113.

<sup>10</sup> General announcement to the colonies from the Minister of War, 10 May 1921, 4D61V89, ANS.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Lieutenant-Governor of Côte d’Ivoire to the Governor-General of the AOF, 22 August 1920, 5D6V14, ANS.

with their parents and families. They insulted their elders and viewed them as savages, who knew nothing, and knew of nothing.”<sup>12</sup>

The reincorporation of World War I veterans into West African communities was initially characterized by precarious and irregular intersections of competing values between local elites and returning soldiers. However, the bumpy readjustments leveled out as memories of the war faded.<sup>13</sup> Veterans’ erratic behavior was threatened local political authority and social conventions. Most West African communities were meritocratic and gerontocratic societies, where people accumulated authority and prestige through age and distinction. Repatriating veterans challenged these traditional means of organizing society because they felt their military experiences had incontrovertibly elevated their prestige and authority. Some veterans were incapable of “re-senegalizing” to village life and sought employment and opportunity in new locations, particularly regional towns.<sup>14</sup> Most West African veterans were not guaranteed employment in the colonial state, but many took advantage of the connections and skills they had acquired in the military to secure intermediary roles in the colonial administration. In these pivotal positions, veterans could amass responsibility and wealth by playing both ends against the middle.<sup>15</sup>

In the years following the Great War, some French colonial administrators were interested in appeasing the difficulties caused by repatriating veterans in order to market military service to communities reeling from the return of World War I veterans. The French hoped that by managing their returning veterans, they could retain the confidence of local West African leaders. Many of these veterans were shell-shocked or physically impaired, which led West African communities to protect their youth from military service because they equated colonial soldiering with the loss of able-bodied community members. While the casualties of war were a frightening possibility, equally unnerving was the return of sons whose values had radically changed as a result of their exposure to war, foreign lands, and military life. Military recruiters in 1920 strove to promote military service as a means to instill young West African men with an appreciation for hierarchy and labor. In bemused response, one African elder requested that the French colonial military also invest in reconditioning repatriating veterans, who no longer respected their elders, had deplorable morals, and lived like parasites on the community.<sup>16</sup>

## **Redefining an Institution**

The Great War taught the French military, West African soldiers and West African civilians many lessons regarding the nature of colonialism. In examining political and military

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<sup>12</sup> Annex to an annual report on AOF, “État d’esprit des tirailleurs libérés (1920),” unsigned, 4D3V81, ANS. This quote comes from Adjunct Yoro Kouloubaly.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West Africans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 64.

<sup>14</sup> Joe Lunn found that nearly one third of repatriating veterans relocated in the aftermath of the Great War. *Memoirs of the Maëlstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999), 206.

<sup>15</sup> This is demonstrated by the fictional veteran protagonist in Amadou Hampaté Bâ, *The Fortunes of Wangrin*, trans. Aina Pavolini Taylor (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Letter from the Lieutenant-Governor of Haut-Senegal-Niger to the Governor-General of AOF, signed by Olivier, 13 March 1920, 4D3V81, ANS.

legislation relevant to West African servicemen in the postwar era, one can read the lessons learned by the French colonial military and West African communities during the Great War. While grappling with near financial insolvency, the French debated new legislative measures that would redefine the role of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in empire. These measures addressed how to reconfigure mutual obligations between soldiers and the French colonial state. French administrative and colonial agents also debated the number of West African troops to maintain as permanent forces. They also discussed how to better market colonial soldiering to West Africans, as well as how to improve their military education.

The colonial army's post-war investment in the reorientation and professionalization of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* occurred in tandem with France's move to reestablish its colonial prerogatives and repair its image in empire. Gary Wilder's description of contradictions of French imperial nation-state in the interwar period is useful in understanding the paradoxical forces at work in the redefinition and reorientation of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>17</sup> Wilder argued that the interwar period could be defined by antinomy because the French claimed to promote the universality of Republican rights, while simultaneously employing discriminatory racist policies in its empire. In the debates about the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the aftermath of World War I, fiscal constraints caused paradoxes to exist in the aspirations for and realities of *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The French colonial military made a stab at improving the colonial institution, but hamstrung themselves because they wanted recruits with less exposure to French civilization so that they would be less willful.

In deciding the fate of the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, there were several proposals aired and debated. There was a call to gradually reduce the number of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, and then abandon the institution completely. Another proposal called for the development of a reserve of 25,000 *tirailleurs sénégalais* that would be divided between Europe, France, and North Africa. Another 28,000 would be dispersed across AOF and AEF.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, a compromise was forged between the two proposals.<sup>19</sup> The decree of July 19, 1919 maintained the quota-based conscription of West African *indigènes* at a level of 12,000 to 14,000 per year. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* continued to be required to serve at least one of their service years outside of AOF. As of 1921, active West African servicemen were fanned out across the globe, with 3,200 in France, 3,000 in Morocco, 2,500 in the Levant, 500 in Algeria, 300 in Tunisia, and 3,500 designated to occupy the Rhineland.<sup>20</sup> Minimum service requirements remained at three years and *tirailleurs sénégalais* were divided into active soldiers and reservists. This division between reservist and active soldiers played a large role in quality of the troops serving in foreign colonies and France. West African men realized that if they were reservists, they could remain in sub-Saharan Africa, which was initially preferable. As the interwar period

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<sup>17</sup> Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en AOF (1914-1919)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982). 420.

<sup>19</sup> For further information consult Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 47-51.

<sup>20</sup> Response to a questionnaire distributed by General Charles Mangin, from Dakar, 17 September 1921, 5D17V14, ANS.

wore on, reservists realized their name was a gloss for forced state labor, which rendered colonial soldiering undesirable.<sup>21</sup>

The French colonial army maintained the quantity of West Africans serving in it, while West Africans and French recruitment practices engineered the quality of soldiers enlisting in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Throughout the interwar period, West African men avoided military service through the same tactics employed after the ratification of the 1912 Recruitment Law.<sup>22</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, there was a decrease in the amount of reported draft dodgers, which indicated that the West African populations crafted subtler tactics of evading recruitment or that the French military was better at supervising recruitment practices. Even if the latter was true, it was clear that mobile recruitment boards were indifferent to the injustices built into the recruitment system—like dishonesty on the part of rural colonial intermediaries. As late as the mid-1920s, a French commanding officer in Morocco surmised that one of his soldiers, Bossou Guilavogui, had been forced to enlist because Guilavogui's father was not on good terms with his *chef de cercle*.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the interwar period, at the village level, coercion still played a large role in recruitment practices.

The legislative debates concerning the future of the French colonial military predominantly affected the *indigènes* of West Africa serving in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The Blaise Diagne legislation of 1915 and 1916 filtered the *originaires* of the Four Communes from the colonial military institution and channeled them into the French metropolitan army. Their removal from the *tirailleurs sénégalais* made them difficult to trace in the archival record. The *originaires* were French citizens and required by law to serve in the French military. As a result, their entry into the French armed forces was much more straightforward. The benefits of soldiering in the French army, as opposed to the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, were described at length in Chapter Three.

*Originaires* were educated in the public schools and in the Four Communes. During World War I, *Tirailleurs sénégalais* were rarely exposed to French education until they signed up with the military. There were minor improvements made during the interwar period to improve the basic and vocational education of *tirailleurs sénégalais*. After 1919, a training academy for *indigènes* officers opened in a military camp in Fréjus, which was a camp specifically for North African and sub-Saharan African *tirailleurs*. This institution would have been a great opportunity for West Africans to advance in the ranks of the colonial army, but *tirailleurs sénégalais*' enrollment was negligible. There were also three military schools in West Africa that offered basic education and technical training to West African adolescents interested in pursuing military careers. These schools, entitled *Écoles des Enfants de Troupe* (EET), were reserved for the sons of soldiers and important political figures. Class sizes were tiny compared to the number of soldiers in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>24</sup> Many of the students also required social connections to enroll, like the sons of chiefs or veterans. Aside from these exclusive institutions, it was nearly impossible for *tirailleurs sénégalais* to advance beyond lower ranks of the colonial army. Given the financial restrictions of the interwar period, most of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* received cursory training. In order to stem the flow of untrained West Africans into Morocco, it was proposed that *tirailleurs sénégalais* should have four months of training in AOF prior to

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<sup>21</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 61.

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter One for more details.

<sup>23</sup> Charbonneau, *Balimatou et Compagnie*, 101.

<sup>24</sup> Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 66-68.

deploying to foreign territories.<sup>25</sup> In 1929, of the 2,500 young French Guinean soldiers who enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, only twenty-five could speak passable French, and ten could write in the language.<sup>26</sup>

The composition of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* drastically shifted in the aftermath of the Great War. The soldiering skills of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* irregularly improved because the French military preferentially recruited outside of urban areas and in regions with little Islamic presence. With little exposure to Islam or the French, most of these recruits were illiterate and unskilled when they enlisted. These *indigènes* were presumably easier to train and manipulate. The French colonial military began to prefer soldiers who were less assimilated and accustomed to French ways because they felt that West Africans' instinctive warrior qualities were blunted by their exposure to the vices of Frenchmen. By the mid-1920s, several French officials concluded that Bambara troops from French Soudan were no longer the glorified warriors of former times. Bambara people were the ethno-linguistic majority in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* since the late nineteenth century. In the war's aftermath, Bobo, Mossi, Djerma, and several groups from French Guinea were preferred for recruitment.<sup>27</sup> Due to the changing demographics of the West African men enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, there was a suggestion to change the title of "*tirailleurs sénégalais*" to "*tirailleurs africains*."

The ethno-linguistic groups targeted by the French in the interwar period were the same populations who increasingly viewed military service as a career option. The following chart, from 1933, demonstrates an increase in the percentages of *tirailleurs sénégalais* who volunteered for military service.<sup>28</sup>

	Senegal	French Soudan	Guinea	Côte d'Ivoire	Haute-Volta	Dahomey
Career soldiers	37%	36%	92%	81%	52%	37%
Drafted	63%	64%	8%	19%	48%	63%

These numbers portray that attitudes towards military service were evolving among West Africans during the interwar period. The French had feared that unruly and disfigured veterans of World War I would negatively impact postwar recruitment, which it did. However, by 1933, the war's memories had faded and the *tirailleurs sénégalais* had lost some of its lethal characteristics. A drought extending across the West African Sahel was another explanation for increases in voluntary enlistment during the 1930s.

It is clear that during the interwar period, the ethno-linguistic composition of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* evolved because of the French colonial army's interests in professionalizing their troops. Budgetary constraints thwarted the French colonial military's ability to uniformly and markedly improve the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Antithetically, they recruited West Africans who had little exposure to the French, which would require more investment to bring their basic skills to a minimal standard. The composition and quality of *tirailleurs sénégalais* also shifted throughout the interwar period in tandem a reorientation of

<sup>25</sup> Document defining the rules regarding the deployment and repatriation of colonial troops in empire, 20 September 1922, slotfomI-4, CAOM.

<sup>26</sup> Charbonneau, *Balimatou et Compagnie*, 101.

<sup>27</sup> Report on the Rif, 25 March 1925, fmcote74, CAOM.

<sup>28</sup> Report from the General Commandant of the Troupes du Groupes of the AOF, Freydenberg, 28 February 1933, 5D57V89, ANS.



their role in French empire. The next sections address the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' role as guardians of empire in colonial conflicts in Morocco and Syria. In the Rif War and the Djebel Druze conflict, West African servicemen protected and substantiated France's political control of those regions.

## Guardians of Empire in Morocco and Syria

While repatriating veterans of the Great War were renegotiating their place within their natal communities, soldiers mobilized in the last 1918 recruitment drive were renegotiating their expectations of military service. Many of the 1918 recruits were diverted from their original destination in the French trenches to the German Rhineland, North Africa, the Levant, and Madagascar, where they became members of permanent forces. Fresh recruits were also deployed more often in empire than in France. The immediate post-war years were characterized by a disorganized replacement and redistribution of soldiers in Europe and in French Empire.

The *tirailleurs sénégalais* participated in this chaotic process. In mid-1920, the 10<sup>th</sup> RTS was redirected from Europe to the Levant between their departure from Dakar and their arrival in Marseilles. The regiment suspected as much, and rumors spread from the West African officers to the infantrymen. The regiment united against the idea of deploying to the Levant, and delegates among West African NCOs, as well as a delegate from each ethno-linguistic group represented the regiment in a meeting held with the unit's French command. The delegates explained that the 10<sup>th</sup> RTS would disembark at no destination save Dakar.<sup>29</sup> The discussion between West African representatives and French officers took up the entire afternoon, until the French officers convinced the troops they had no choice in the matter and that they respected their soldiers' input. In order to appease their anxieties, the 10<sup>th</sup> RTS' departure for Syria was delayed by twenty-four hours. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were quartered and deployed in in Morocco and Syria throughout the interwar period.

### Morocco

Throughout the Great War, Morocco served as a training ground and a layover for troops moving between West African and European ports. During the interwar period, France renewed its efforts to bring confederate Moroccan clans to heel in rural, mountainous regions. This was partially a project to pick up the thread of "pacification" and partially France's opposition to the Beni Ouriaghel clan's militarized endeavors to create an economic and politically autonomous region in the Rif Mountains. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* participated in the Rif War between 1924 and 1927. The deployments of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' in Moroccan conflicts during the 1920s evidenced France's paradoxical visions the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in French military strategy and imperial security.

The Rif War was a backwater skirmish that began in a northern Moroccan mountainous region known as the Rif.<sup>30</sup> The bulk of the Rif was administrated by the Spanish, who had political claims to the northern Moroccan littoral. In 1912, when Morocco formally became a protectorate of France and Spain, the boundary separating their administrative zones in northern Morocco was a winding line loosely based on several rivers snaking through the Rif Mountains

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<sup>29</sup> Daily report concentrating on June 1920 to April 1922, 16H333, CHETOM.

<sup>30</sup> Rif in Arabic means countryside, and in Morocco it signifies the mountainous region just south of the Mediterranean coast.

between Sidi Kacem and Taza. This boundary cut just south of a territory occupied by the Beni Ouriaghel clan, who initiated a series of military skirmishes on the northern side of the border with the Spanish Army in 1921. Over the course of several years, hostilities mounted and spilled south into the French protectorate. Once the French became involved, the Beni Ouriaghel clan's rhetoric evolved to an anti-colonial discourse in order to attract the allegiance of neighboring clans.<sup>31</sup>

Abd el-Krim was the recognized leader of the Beni Ouriaghel's rebellion against colonial domination. Due to the growing support for Abd el-Krim, French forces crossed into the Spanish zone to establish a line of defense in 1925. West African and Algerian *tirailleurs* were a large percentage of this initial force and they were predominantly used as manual laborers to construct posts and blockhouses at high points along a seventy-five mile long line of defense, which extended from Biban to Taza.<sup>32</sup> A Rifian counter-attack came mid-April of 1925 exposed France's poor military strategy in constructing vulnerable, stand alone, posts that were easy to sever from supply routes and potable water sources. This counter-attack initiated a prolonged military engagement between people living in the Rif Mountains and the French military, which was made up of colonial soldiers and Legionnaires in order to void bad press in France. Resident-General Lyautey also preferred to use non-metropolitan French soldiers because they were more affordable and expendable than metropolitan infantrymen.<sup>33</sup> The French military rapidly escalated their forces in Morocco and sixty-two percent of their soldiers were *tirailleurs* from North and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>34</sup> Between April and December of 1925, the French lost 11,419 soldiers, the bulk of which were *tirailleurs sénégalais*, *tirailleurs algériens*, and members of the French Foreign Legion.<sup>35</sup>

Due to their reliance on North and West Africa colonial subjects in a conflict bordering on anti-colonial, the French colonial military feared the transmission of anti-colonial and communist propaganda from Rifians to their colonial troops. The French feared that "communist missionaries," who had taken up the plight of the Beni Ouriaghel clan would use Islamic affinities to infiltrate the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>36</sup> The military increased surveillance on *tirailleurs sénégalais* officers, who were assumed to be the most vulnerable to fundamentalist Islam, communism, and anti-colonial ideologies.

The political motives of the Rif War encouraged the French colonial military to recruit more heavily in non-Islamic regions of West Africa so that troops would be less receptive to propaganda veiled by overtures of religious fraternity.<sup>37</sup> At Ain Matouf, one post along the defense line cutting across the Rif Mountains, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were reported to have

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<sup>31</sup> Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco*, 127.

<sup>32</sup> David S Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif: Abd el Krim and the Rif Rebellion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), 171.

<sup>33</sup> Lyautey was Resident-General, the highest military and political rank in France's Morocco Protectorate from 1912 to 1925. The Rif War ended his career in Morocco. Report from General Poeymirau in Midelt to the Resident-General Lyautey, 18 August 1918, 3H220, SHDT.

<sup>34</sup> Moshe Gershovich, *French Military Rule in Morocco: Colonialism and its Consequences* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 80-1.

<sup>35</sup> Walter B. Harris, *France, Spain, and the Rif* (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1927), 247.

<sup>36</sup> Letter addressed to the Governor-General of AOF, 22 December 1927, 5D6V14, ANS.

<sup>37</sup> Report entitled, "L'État de l'Armée en Afrique Occidentale Française," 25 March 1925, fmcote74, CAOM.

bantered with the enemy. Rifians had encircled Aïn Matouf for fifteen days and assumed that the surviving *tirailleurs sénégalais* were suffering from hunger and thirst. The Rifians called to the West Africans “Hey, brothers! With the French you eat dog and jackal; with us, you’d have good eatin’!” A *tirailleurs sénégalais*, in a fit of loyalty and wit, riposted, “We also have vittles for you, our bullets.”<sup>38</sup> This exchange glaringly portrays France’s fears of Rifians propaganda as well as their confidence that their *tirailleurs sénégalais* still believed in the French colonial order. It remains unclear if this was a story concocted by French officers for colonial myths regarding *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ loyalty to France.

Several French officers’ wrote memoirs about commanding *tirailleurs sénégalais* in this Rif War. Their books deliberately exaggerate *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ unwavering loyalty to France and their respect of French colonial cultural hierarchy. Another example from the post at Aïn Matouf, which echoed back and forth between the archives and two separate sets of military memoirs, was a Rifian allegory that reached epic proportions. At the end of a lengthy battle, all of the Rifian assailants and all commanding French officers were dead. The survivors included a metropolitan French infantryman and several *tirailleurs sénégalais*, a couple of whom outranked the Frenchmen named Berger.<sup>39</sup> According to French sources, the ranking *tirailleurs sénégalais* told Berger, “You are the only white person left, and thus, you command, and we will follow.”<sup>40</sup> In this tale, *tirailleurs sénégalais* reaffirmed the racial hierarchy the French found essential in maintaining colonial military order. The idea that white Frenchmen had right to rule over African peoples and other imperial populations was evident the fact that the French were using West African soldiers to quell an uprising in rural Morocco. The Berger story takes this idea a step further and shows how West Africans acknowledged and substantiated France’s entitlement to rule.

In another example from a nearby post at Beni Derkoul, Lieutenant Pol Lapeyre preferred commanding *tirailleurs sénégalais* because of their stereotypical innate strength and their ability to withstand hardship. His confidence in their resilience in abject conditions was nearly homicidal. Inaccurately branded a hero, twenty-year old Lieutenant Pol Lapeyre commanded the post of Beni Derkoul, which was defended by a unit consisting of thirty-four *tirailleurs sénégalais*, two West African sergeants, one French under-officer, and two French artillerymen—all members of the 1<sup>st</sup> RTS.<sup>41</sup> By May of 1925, Rifians cut the telegraph lines to the post, and Lieutenant Pol Lapeyre communicated with French command by heliograph.<sup>42</sup> A French mobile resupply unit was able to thread its way to the post and found the remaining survivors drinking stagnant water and consuming rotting meat. Pol Lapeyre, in a fit of hubris, commended the steadfast nature of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* under his command, and declared, “With men such as these, we will be able to hold until the end. No one will flinch.” Within a month, the post was completely cut off from resupply. By the second week of June, potable water had run out at Beni Derkoul, and most of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* had dysentery.<sup>43</sup> In the

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<sup>38</sup> Charbonneau, *Balimatou et Compagnie*, 202

<sup>39</sup> One of the main reasons I believe this story is an allegory is the simple fact that the surviving French soldier’s surname translates to “shepherd.”

<sup>40</sup> Erwan Bergot, *La Coloniale: du Rif au Tchad, 1925-1980* (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1982), 33.

<sup>41</sup> Bergot, *La Coloniale*, 15.

<sup>42</sup> A heliograph is means of communication that transmits messages by reflecting light with a movable mirror.

<sup>43</sup> Bergot, *La Coloniale*, 21-29.

end, Rifians besieged Beni Derkoul, and Pol Lapeyre blew up the post in order to avoid the mutilation and dismemberment of his men. In this heroic epic, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* become martyrs for the glory of a madman unwilling to cede an inch in backwater colonial skirmish that the French public barely knew about.

The above examples portray how *tirailleurs sénégalais*' participation in the Rif War was part of France's efforts to remake its image in empire during the interwar period. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were often disappointed with their role as guardians in empire. West African servicemen renegotiated their expectations of military service. Many West African *indigènes* enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* with the expectation of seeing France—its national symbols and its women. Instead in the mid-1920s, these soldiers found themselves at the mercy of poor military strategy and dying in the mountains of the Moroccan Rif from nutritional disorders and light injuries. At the post of Dar Emich, a *tirailleurs sénégalais* insubordinately interrupted his superior in the midst of a supplies check. The French soldier, Peron, was listing the post's most immediate needs to a resupply unit—cartridges, water, and fresh provision. Soky Kamara, an injured *tirailleurs sénégalais* lying prone near Peron, requested strawberries be added to the list. Embarrassed at Kamara's disobedience, Peron explained to the resupply unit how he had told Kamara that in his home province of Bretagne they harvested strawberries during the spring. Kamara had expected to see France during his stint in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and feared dying prior to setting foot in France.<sup>44</sup> Peron had consoled him by telling him about the exotic fruits of France.

In Morocco, *tirailleurs sénégalais* experimented with aspects of French military culture and Moroccan cultural traditions. The Rif War created an exceptional space in which young West African soldiers challenged and reproduced the social conventions of their natal communities. During holidays, *tirailleurs sénégalais*—Muslims included—consumed palm wine and French wine. One French commander commented on the hasty muttered pardons from Allah as they became less than sober.<sup>45</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais* carried out Sufi religious celebrations, which included improvised percussion instruments and singing. Many *tirailleurs sénégalais*, Muslim or otherwise, wore amulets during their military deployments in Morocco.<sup>46</sup> Due to the presence of Muslims among the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and Moroccan civilians, the French colonial military feared fundamental Islam's infiltration into the ranks.<sup>47</sup> However, insurmountable socio-cultural barriers frustrated cultural exchange between Moroccans and West Africans. Linguistic differences obstructed communication and the gulf between civilian and soldier inhibited social exchange.

The French military limitedly assisted *tirailleurs sénégalais* in maintaining some of their cultural practices. In an effort to accouter *tirailleurs sénégalais* with culturally important items, the sister-in-law of Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Mangin—Mademoiselle Cavaignac—arranged to have seven panniers of West African kola nuts sent to Morocco and distributed among West

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>45</sup> Charbonneau, *Balimatou et Compagnie*, 202.

<sup>46</sup> Pierre Bordes, *Dans le Rif: carnet de route d'un marsouin* (Paris: Imprimiers de missions Africaines, 1927), 20.

<sup>47</sup> Report from the Minister of War to the provisional General Commandant of troops in Morocco, 6 October 1934, and Letter from General Huré to the Minister of War, 24 October 1934, 3H236, SHDT.

African soldiers.<sup>48</sup> Cavaignac estimated it would cost roughly 50,000 francs per month to distribute ten kola per month to each *tirailleur sénégalais* serving in Morocco in 1926. Kola nuts are highly caffeinated and were ritually used among West Africans to stimulate long and important discussions. Most *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in Morocco came from oral cultures and in their leisure, they tended to congregate and entertain one another with conversation, storytelling, and jokes. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* of the same ethno-linguistic groups sought each other out in order to conserve cultural memories and to reproduce the vestiges of home on the mountainsides of Morocco. Fueled by their imported kola nuts, *tirailleurs sénégalais* spent long evenings riddling with one another or mimicking their commanding officers. Those infantrymen who were literate were asked to read, and reread letters sent to soldiers in Morocco from West Africa.<sup>49</sup> Friends and family remained important to *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in the Rif, and many soldier amassed huge bundles of knickknacks and trinkets to take back to West Africa as souvenirs.<sup>50</sup> The French military funded the transport of these items.

## Syria

While some *tirailleurs sénégalais* fought in the Rif War, others were deployed to southern Syria to quell a nationalistic uprising in the Djebel Druze.<sup>51</sup> The French military had an open exchange of information between the two conflicts because they both occurred in the mountainous regions of predominantly Arab and Muslim countries. The *tirailleurs sénégalais*' experiences in Syria were different from those in Morocco. However, *tirailleurs sénégalais* had been present in Morocco since 1908 and had assisted the French in integrating the territory into empire. In the 1920s, populations in Syria and Lebanon were as yet unaccustomed to their French Mandate status. France's political overtures for the Levant had begun during the Great War.<sup>52</sup> The French and British wartime governments signed the Sykes-Picot agreement in May of 1916, which detailed their plans to divide the region in the event of an Allied victory. After the war, the League of Nations recognized and promulgated this agreement by entrusting Syria and Lebanon to France as Mandate territories.

The French took on their role of administrating Syria and Lebanon by increasing their military and political presence in the region. Some of the 63,000 *tirailleurs sénégalais* recruited in 1918 were diverted to serve in the Levant. The number of colonial soldiers steadily increased in the interwar period and by 1936 there were four battalions of *tirailleurs sénégalais* who served as a permanent force in the Levant as part of the *Armée du Levant*, or Levantine Army.<sup>53</sup> From early on in the interwar period, France's military presence in the Levant far outweighed the number of French bureaucrats and civilians. The French erroneously thought they could manage

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from Governor-General of AOF to Lieutenant-General Martin, 11 December 1926, 5D57V89, ANS. I explain in Chapter One Mangin's pivotal role in the history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

<sup>49</sup> Bordes, *Dans le Rif*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Charbonneau, *Balimatou et Compagnie*, 201.

<sup>51</sup> Djebel in Arabic means "mountains," and this region is located in southernmost region of Syria, resting near the border with Jordan.

<sup>52</sup> The origin of the word "Levant" is French and has meanings connected to where "the sun rises." The Levant is generally the region along the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean that extends into the interior until reaching the borders of Iraq.

<sup>53</sup> Maurice Albord, *L'Armée française et les États du Levant, 1936-1946* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2000), 26. Four battalions equaled roughly 2,400 men.

their new territories through an administration heavily reliant on the military coercion and indigenous political leaders. French Mandate personnel enticed local leaders to participate in the new French administrative bureaucracy, as well as discredited threatening traditional leaders. Due to the erratic reconfiguration of Syrian administrative districts and the displacement of unruly traditional leaders, dissidence grew in the southern landlocked state of Djebel Druze. This sentiment grew into opposition, and then open revolt spearheaded by Sultan Pasha al-Atrash in August 1925. In response, the French military imported colonial troops to carry out prolonged guerilla warfare for twelve months.<sup>54</sup>

The competing logics of interwar French colonialism and French military strategy were evident in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* disembarking in Syria. The French desired to lower their military expenditures by employing colonial soldiers who were more affordable. They also expected West Africans poorly trained in French and French military order to absorb all the training necessary to deploy in Syria within four months. Some *tirailleurs sénégalais* were not supplied with proper uniforms until they left West Africa. Unaccustomed to French military boots, one soldier named Boiso Lago approached his commanding French officer with a complaint that his footwear was too tight. Upon inspection, it became clear the Lago had accidentally switched his boots and was wearing the right boot on his left foot, and vice versa.<sup>55</sup> The cursory language training that *tirailleurs sénégalais* received in the interwar period proved fatal for colonial soldiers in the Djebel Druze because they could not easily communicate across ethno-linguistic groups in dangerous situations.<sup>56</sup> Given their limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with the trappings of the French military, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* innovated basic French to name novel items. When the colonial army dispensed mittens to their West African troops, they called them “hand socks.”<sup>57</sup>

In Syria and Morocco, there was evidence that the troops continued to congregate according to their ethnicities, particularly around mealtimes. French officers in Syria paid attention to the segregation of Muslims and Christians among the ranks, which may have been more worthy of note in Syria because of the regions long history with both world religions. There would have been ample churches and mosques in Syria for *tirailleurs sénégalais* to frequent when they were on leave. In general, the minority Christian population in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* often kept their distance from Muslim soldiers.<sup>58</sup> However, in secular events, religious and ethnic divisions eroded as the troops united under the umbrella term “*tirailleurs sénégalais*.” In one example from Syria, Sergeant Seydou Bangoura invented a choreographed dance for a celebration, where troops coordinated their movements and sung refrains of “Easy does it Senegal!! Easy does it!”<sup>59</sup> Military service was capable of creating a social identity that was supra-ethnic for the *tirailleurs sénégalais* participating in the Syrian campaign.

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<sup>54</sup> Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 20.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>56</sup> In a dossier concerning the Bataillon de Marche de Tirailleurs Sénégalais du Levant (BMTSL) Historique 1925, 1926, 1927, 16H39, CHETOM.

<sup>57</sup> Raoul Desjardins, *Avec les sénégalais par delà l'Euphrate* (Paris: Callmann-Long, 1925), 77. “Chaussettes de main” in French.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-84.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 285. In French, “Doucement! Sénégal! Doucement!”

Populations in Morocco and Syria viewed the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as a homogenous group of men from sub-Saharan Africa. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* were highly visible among the ranks of the French military due to their distinct outfits and their outward appearance, which was different from French and Arab troops. The French military believed that the *tirailleurs sénégalais* would suffer less racial derision in Syria than Morocco because of the Levant's position at the crossroads of three continents and its exposure to many different cultures.<sup>60</sup> There was little evidence of racial slurs directed at West African troops in the military archives, but there was a strong civilian reaction to the presence of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the Levant. Elizabeth Thompson portrayed the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' presence in Syria as part of a broader nonconsensual relationship, where Syrians spurned any vestige of France's presence. Syrians articulated this sentiment through a discourse of vulnerability where the *tirailleurs sénégalais* became affiliated with the savagery, masculinity, and violent power of the French colonial state. West African troops became one of the symbols that Syrians used to delegitimize French colonial presence. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were the scapegoats for many of the wrongs committed by the French military during the Djebel Druze crisis, which was further manipulated by nationalist Syrian propaganda that melded "men's gender anxieties with outrage at French domination."<sup>61</sup> Another blow to Syrian's masculinity were the consensual romantic relationships between *tirailleurs sénégalais* and Syrian women.<sup>62</sup>

The *tirailleurs sénégalais* became guardians of empire during the interwar period. Their imperial deployments in Syria and Morocco during the 1920s demonstrated how there were conflicting missions for French empire and the colonial military institution. The proliferation of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* was underwritten by a French colonial administration restricted by the financial austerity of the 1920s and 1930s. West African troops were more affordable than other colonial troops or metropolitan troops, but they also needed more training in the French language and in French warfare. Evidence from the battlefields of the Rif War and the Djebel Druze show that the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were embroiled in two paradoxical projects: professionalization of imperial troops and the re-trenchment of colonial cultural hierarchies. The deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in these colonial conflicts and their permanent quartering in Morocco, the Levant, and Madagascar had some surprising results.

## International Love and Migration

Since the mid-nineteenth century, West African women provided marital and domestic services for *tirailleurs sénégalais*. By the interwar period it was rare to see West African women traveling with West African infantrymen outside of AOF. A very limited amount of West African women would continue to accompany their soldier/husbands to Morocco until the 1930s. This was a privilege restricted to officers in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>63</sup> The removal of West African women from imperial battlefields was the result of the French colonial military's

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<sup>60</sup> Dossier on the Druze "insurrection" and the use of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in 1925, 15H25, CHETOM.

<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 48-9.

<sup>62</sup> The next section of this chapter deals with cross-colonial romantic relationships.

<sup>63</sup> Report from the General Commandant of the Troupes du Groupes of the AOF, Freydenberg, 28 February 1933, 5D57V89, ANS.

measures to professionalize their colonial troops. Budgetary constraints of the interwar period reduced the French colonial state's ability to provide transport for *mesdames tirailleurs* and their children. In order to reduce the military's responsibilities to the dependents of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, recruitment boards in West Africa also preferred to enlist unmarried soldiers. The French military provided sexual services to their troops in the form of military brothels in imperial locations, but *tirailleurs sénégalais* also sought romantic companionship outside these establishments. The rest of this chapter is about those cross-colonial relationships and how the fate of these relationships were bound up in the austerity of the interwar period. By analyzing the experiences of the wives of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, one can observe the transformation of a once benevolent colonial state into an indifferent state.

The case of Fatamata Bambara (mentioned in the introduction) uniquely portrayed the evolution of the colonial state's attitude towards the female companions of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Bambara had been part of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' invading forces in France's conquest of Madagascar in the mid-1890s. Her role as a domestic companion and provider of the military's auxiliary services was crucial to France's integration of Madagascar into its empire. Fatamata Bambara was the West Africa widow of Bakari Sidibé, a *tirailleur sénégalais*. After the conclusion of his military service, Sidibé found work in construction in Madagascar. He died in 1902. Since his death, Fatamata Bambara had been self-employed, selling coffee and tea to European and West African workers near the Gallieni Tunnel. She was also the ward of her brother, Samba Konaté, who had come to Madagascar at the same time as the couple. In 1926, at roughly sixty years of age, Fatamata Bambara appealed to the French colonial government in Madagascar to assist her in returning to French Soudan so that she could live out the rest of her life with her children—Fatro and Aisatra, who were both adults by that time. By alluding to the fact that Fatamata Bambara was post-menstrual and beyond working age, the Governor-Generals of Madagascar and AOF decided her transportation was not worth the budgetary expense.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, instead of allowing a woman who had contributed to the conquest of Madagascar to return home, she was abandoned to her own wits in Madagascar.

By the interwar period, women like Fatamata Bambara were no longer allowed to travel with their *tirailleurs sénégalais* husbands to Madagascar. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*' presence on the island since the years of conquest had led to greater intermarriage and romantic relations between West African men and Madagascan women. In the 1920s, there was an effort, on the part of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, to recover the children of these unions. Most of these children were not legitimate in the sense that *tirailleurs sénégalais* were not officially married to their mothers. There was no evidence in the archives of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* wishing to recover the Madagascan mothers of these children. Government officials from all over West Africa and Madagascar debated the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' requests. The Minister of the Colonies faulted the French colonial military for this issue because they had exclusively stationed unmarried *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Madagascar.<sup>65</sup>

The Lieutenant-Governors of West African colonies contributed to these debates with pseudoscientific conclusions that were propped by their amateur knowledge of West African sociology, anthropology, pediatric psychology, and ethnology. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*' paternal

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<sup>64</sup> Correspondence between Fatamata Bambara, the Governor of Madagascar, and the Governor-General of AOF between 13 September 1926 and April 1927, 4D61V89, ANS.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from the Governor-General of AOF in February of 1926 and letter from Minister of the Colonies to the Governor-General of AOF, 26 November 1926, 4D61V89, ANS.



right to these children was never questioned, but the fear of the children's cultural rejection by West African communities weighed heavily in their decisions.<sup>66</sup> One supportive voice claimed that *tirailleurs sénégalais* often spent time on leave in Dakar, and he had personally witnessed many cross-ethnic marriages, which bespoke the adaptability of foreign women and children to cosmopolitan Senegalese cities. The Lieutenant-Governor of Mauretania asserted that the colonial government should support the paternal prerogative of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, but nursing infants should not be separated from their mothers. The Lieutenant-Governor of Haute-Volta humanistically suggested obtaining permission from the Madagascan mother before recovering the children.<sup>67</sup> The Lieutenant-Governors of Côte d'Ivoire and French Guinea were opposed to transporting these children to AOF because of fiscal constraints and the general poor treatment of children in West Africa. They claimed West African polygyny and xenophobia would inhibit the children's integration into AOF.<sup>68</sup> In the end, the Governor-General of AOF sided with the Lieutenant-Governors of Côte d'Ivoire and French Guinea and opposed the transportation of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' children from Madagascar to AOF.

Some of the Lieutenant-Governors' ideas regarding West African xenophobia came from the unsuccessful integration of Syrian and Moroccan wives in West African communities. Several of these women approached the colonial state in the 1920s seeking financial assistance to return to their colonies of origin. These women were at the mercy of the colonial state because they had very little community or family support after leaving their husbands. Like Fatamata Bambara and the Madagascan children, these Syrian and Moroccan women were in a poor position to win financial rewards from a poor French colonial state. However, their cases were held in a slightly different regard because of France's interwar interest in reestablishing a racialized colonial hierarchy. The French colonial state assumed that Arab women were racially and culturally incompatible with West African rural societies. Many colonial administrators interpreted these women as white. This meant that Arab women's romantic relationships with *tirailleurs sénégalais* in West Africa weakened Frenchmen's view of themselves as different and more civilized than West Africans.

Fatou Diallo and Fatoum Haidara, both Moroccan women from Fez, had moved to Senegal with their soldier/husbands in 1920. Six years later, both women had divorced and were living on public charity in the streets of Dakar. The administration in Dakar found the situation embarrassing, but instead of funding their passage to Casablanca on one of the many military vessels traveling between the two cities, they petitioned the Resident-General of Morocco to fund their return.<sup>69</sup> This way, the AOF could remove two impoverished white women from the streets of Dakar and pass the financial consequences onto Morocco. Zaira Bint Sidi Mohammed, moved from Morocco to Mauretania with her *tirailleurs sénégalais* husband, Amady Diara. Once in Guidimaka, Mohammed suffered from her husband's cruelty to such a degree that her in-laws attempted an intervention. Mohammed requested and received a divorce, which rendered her homeless and without finances. In a fit of empathy, the Lieutenant-Governor of

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<sup>66</sup> Letter signed by Fourier, from the director of military services in Paris, 21 December 1925, 4D61V89, ANS.

<sup>67</sup> Correspondence from the Lieutenant-Governors of Senegal, Mauretania, and Haute-Volta to the Governor-General of AOF, 4, 5 and 6 January 1926, 4D61V89, ANS.

<sup>68</sup> Correspondence from the Lieutenant-Governors of Côte d'Ivoire and French Guinea to the Governor-General of AOF, 14 January and 8 February 1926, 4D61V89, ANS.

<sup>69</sup> Letter to the Resident General of the French Republic in Morocco, 21 May 1926, 4D61V89, ANS.

Mauretania sent her home on the colony's dime.<sup>70</sup> In his letter to the head of AOF, he beseeched the Governor-General to prohibit the relocations of non-native female colonial subjects to AOF. He also called for a law requiring permission from a military administrative council before *tirailleurs sénégalais* could marry in foreign colonies.

The vitriolic Raphaël Antonetti, Lieutenant-Governor of Côte d'Ivoire, was a vehement opponent to the "exodus" of Syrian women relocating to AOF with their *tirailleurs sénégalais* husbands. He cited the example of Fadona Selim El Thomi as reason for mandating pre-marital counseling in Syria for women contemplating marriage with West African troops. El Thomi had moved to Côte d'Ivoire in 1923 with her thirteen-month old child and her husband, Sékou Maiga—a career-soldier of fifteen years.<sup>71</sup> In the coastal capital of Abidjan, El Thomi had lived for a time as a housekeeper at the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' military camp in Abidjan. When her husband's service ended, she traveled up country with him to his ancestral community. According to Antonetti, El Thomi's racial difference from Ivoirians and her presence in the interior disrupted the organic functioning of Maiga's natal community. He referenced another Syrian woman, Kadidie, who had been discarded by her *tirailleur sénégalais* husband. Kadidie had been consigned to the brother of her husband in Marseilles. The brother facilitated Kadidie's passage to Abidjan, then Bouaké, where he abandoned her. Antonetti further claimed that Syrian women were reduced to a state of quasi-servitude in West Africa.<sup>72</sup>

Female French subjects, or *indigènes*, were considered the wards of their male relatives, husbands, or the colonial state. These women, and their children, were not allowed to emigrate unless they had the permission of their husbands or male heads of household.<sup>73</sup> Colonial policy established a clear, paternalistic order in this set of permissions, which were landmines of bureaucracy for women and children who desired to be with their families. During the 1920s and 1930s, the wives and children of *tirailleurs sénégalais* floating in empire were at the mercy of an increasingly financially shrewd colonial administration. In the interwar period, colonial administrators emphasized the negative cultural aspects of West African communities to resolve inter-racial international familial issues that would not have occurred if the *tirailleurs sénégalais* had not served the French colonial military in empire. The fate of these French colonial women was ultimately tied up in their ability to adapt to new cultural environments, manage their marital relations, and their ability to petition the penny-pinching paternalistic French colonial state.

## Conclusion

These women's movements across empire mirrored the expanded use of *tirailleurs sénégalais* to new imperial frontiers, as well as their repatriations and demobilizations to AOF. Soldiers' international marriages were also a result of contradicting interests on the part of the French colonial regime to improve its empire through the civilizing mission, and an interest to

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<sup>70</sup> Letter from the Lieutenant-Governor of Mauretania to the Governor-General of AOF, 25 August 1923, 4D61V89, ANS.

<sup>71</sup> In this correspondence, Fadona Selim El Thomi is also referred to as Selim El Thome. Sékou Maiga is also referred to as Serou Mayouka.

<sup>72</sup> Letter from the Lieutenant-Governor of Côte d'Ivoire to the Governor-General of AOF, 12 September 1923, 4D61V89, ANS.

<sup>73</sup> Report addressing "projet de réglementation de l'émigration et de la circulation des indigènes de l'Afrique Occidentale Française," 12 November 1925, 4D61V89, ANS.

deny colonial subjects' equality with Frenchmen. The effort to professionalize the *tirailleurs sénégalais* also ran up against a tight colonial budget. The Rif War and the Djebel Druze Uprising provided venues through which to understand the changes within the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Roughly 250,000 *tirailleurs sénégalais* served in the French colonial army during the 1920s and 1930s as reservists and active soldiers.<sup>74</sup> The ethno-linguistic makeup of the troops shifted as the colonial army intentionally recruited more West African men from the forest belt, and as West Africans' attitudes towards colonial military service oscillated throughout the interwar period. *Tirailleurs sénégalais'* experiences during their interwar tours of duty revealed that they exploited their foreign service to transgress the socio-cultural limits of their home communities, and that they found new community within the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

The imperial history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* contradicts interpretations of the interwar period as a barren, or unproductive period. For West African soldiers, the 1920s and 1930s offered new opportunities and new frontiers. As guardians of empire, West Africans became directly responsible for the maintenance and protection of French Empire. Their service abroad would have great consequence at the outbreak of World War II. Between 1940 and 1945, French colonial empire was divided between the interests and control of Free France and Vichy. West African soldiers who enlisted during the interwar period were stranded in North Africa and Levant after 1940 and subject to the quixotic transformations in global allegiances precipitated by World War II.

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<sup>74</sup> Marc Michel, "L'Armée coloniale en Afrique Occidentale Française," in *L'Afrique Occidentale au temps des Français* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1992), 73.

## Chapter Five: African Colonial Soldiers Divided by World War II

Publications regarding West African servicemen's contributions to World War II and hardships experienced at the hands of Europeans in that conflict have grown in the past quarter century. However, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and *originaires* soldiers' experiences in divided French empire have rarely entered historical literature on West African soldiers or World War II. France's declaration of war in September 1939 against Germany found thousands of French colonial sub-Saharan African soldiers serving across French empire. An additional 100,000 West Africans mobilized towards the war effort between September 1939 and the Fall of France in June of 1940.<sup>1</sup> After France's capitulation, many of the sub-Saharan Africans serving in France were taken as German POWs or repatriated to AOF. West African soldiers serving in French empire came under the administrative power of Vichy, which was a southern French government headed by Marshal Pétain, in collaboration with Nazi Germany. Vichy gained the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and the imperial spaces that they served in. Free France emerged in London to continue France's struggle against Axis powers. The competition between Vichy France and Free France over empire included the rights to West African soldiers' labor. This chapter analyzes the history of West Africans who experienced the reversals of World War II and Vichy in empire.

By focusing on the experiences of West African servicemen in empire, this project avoids an overtly national, European or post-colonial reading of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in World War II. Recent historical narratives concerning the *tirailleurs sénégalais* focus on those troops who were present in France at the time of its surrender to Germany. West African troops became entangled in Germany's occupation of France and recent historical literature demonstrates how their experiences are important to critiquing French or German narratives of the war.<sup>2</sup> Historians who map the *tirailleurs sénégalais* onto European nations' histories limit our understanding of the institution's crucial role in World War II battles occurring in empire. Imperial readings of World War II too often focus on the unidirectional flow of policy from Vichy France into French empire.<sup>3</sup> In terms of West Africa, Ruth Ginio and Catherine Akpo-Vaché have historicized Vichy, or more generally the politics of World War II in West Africa, but their histories are rooted to the physical space of West Africa.<sup>4</sup> In order to understand how West Africans contributed to and experienced the war, one must take into account the lateral moves of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in empire. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were affected by policies emanating

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<sup>1</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), 88.

<sup>2</sup> Here I am thinking specifically of Raphael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Armelle Mabon, *Prisonniers de guerre indigènes: Visages oubliés de la France occupée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> See Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001) or Martin Thomas, *The French Empire at War, 1940-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Ginio, *French Colonialism Unmasked: The Vichy Years in French West Africa* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006) and Catherine Akpo-Vaché, *L'AOF et la Seconde Guerre mondiale (septembre 1939-1945)* (Paris: Karthala, 1996).

from France, as well as the political context of West Africa and the colonies they served in during the war. West African soldiers demonstrate how all of these imperial responses, spaces, and policies were interconnected, but disorderly.

In order to provide a basic understanding of the mercurial political shifts of World War II, this chapter begins with a schematic explanation of World War II chronology in French empire. This physical location of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in empire had great consequences for their experiences in the war at varying moments. The political division of AOF and AEF between Vichy and Free France led to the deployment of sub-Saharan African soldiers against one another in the Levant. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in the Levant experienced acute schizophrenia and paranoia because they were traded back and forth between different Frances three times during the war. West African *originaires* serving in French Indochina dealt with another result of the Vichy/Free France split—abandonment. French Indochina was gradually isolated from France as Japan's presence in the region grew. Deserted by the French colonial state, West African *originaires* soldiers invested in relationships with Vietnamese civilians for protection. Finally, this chapter engages with postwar colonial uprisings that involved *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the aftermath of World War II. These events in Senegal, Algeria, Madagascar, and Morocco portrayed the failure of the French state to reconcile its empire its weakened position in the war. The uprisings across empire also illustrate how, by 1947, *tirailleurs sénégalais* symbolized French colonialism to imperial populations across empire. These case studies add complexity to historical readings of World War II, as well as demonstrate that *tirailleurs sénégalais* were in a position to experience all of incoherence and messiness of World War II.

### **West African Soldiers into a Shifting Vichy World**

The following section lays out a schematic history of the political shifts occurring in France and in its empire during World War II. This explanation is intentionally oversimplified in order to outline the bifurcation of French empire between Vichy and Free France and their allegiance to Axis and Allied powers.<sup>5</sup> West African servicemen stationed in the far-flung corners of empire uniquely experienced the French schisms of World War II. France's declaration of war against Germany in the fall of 1939 found *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in the North Africa, AOF, AEF, Madagascar, the Levant, and Europe. *Originaires* were likely to be founding those locations attached to *tirailleurs sénégalais* units. *Originaires* were also deployed wherever metropolitan troops were stationed, like Indochina.<sup>6</sup> In the winter and spring following the declaration of war, many West African soldiers were recruited and mobilized for the war effort. In the summer of 1940, German forces marched on Paris and Marshal Philippe Pétain sued for peace. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June in 1940, France and Germany signed an agreement that cleaved mainland France into two administrative zones. German forces occupied and controlled the northern half of France and Pétain's collaborationist government administered southern France from the spa town of Vichy. France's overseas colonies and possessions fell

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<sup>5</sup> Axis forces were Germany and its allies. Allied forces were those openly opposed to Germany—Britain and its colonies, Free France, and later the USA and the Soviet Union.

<sup>6</sup> The deployments of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in empire come from observations of documents in files 16H333 and 15H160 at CHETOM, and the index for the 7U series located at SHDT. The statement regarding the positioning of *originaires* is based on the fact that they were French citizens and served wherever French soldiers deployed.

under the administration of Vichy. France's surrender and collaboration engendered strong reactions on the part of the French military.

France's former undersecretary of national defense, Charles de Gaulle, declared the armistice and Pétain's puppet government invalid. On June 18, 1940, de Gaulle made an appeal to French military men, via the BBC, to join him in London in order assist Free France's sustained fight against German forces.<sup>7</sup> Amadou Mahtar Mbow, an *originnaire* was studying at Saint Malo (a French technical military academy) in Brittany when Pétain sued for peace with Germany. The academy was in the process of dismissing its students when Mbow heard de Gaulle's appeal and decided to make for London. He changed his mind because of his visibility as a black man in northern France. Germany occupied northern France and monitored major French ports along the English Channel, which would have most likely led to Mbow's capture and imprisonment. He, instead, found his way back to Dakar.<sup>8</sup> In West Africa, *tirailleurs sénégalais* protested against France's surrender.<sup>9</sup> French colonial administrators stationed in Africa initially voiced their support in continuing the fight against Germany. However, North Africa's administrative acknowledgement of the armistice led many others to accede Germany's victory over France and the subsequent inauguration of the Vichy Regime.

An official decree from Vichy on June 25, 1940 merged AOF and AEF into a single administrative unit—*l'Afrique Française* (French Africa). Pierre Boisson, former Governor-General of AEF, became the High Commissioner of France's colonies in sub-Saharan Africa and relocated to Dakar in July 1940 in order to administrate them.<sup>10</sup> A month later, a challenge to this arrangement resounded from Chad—AEF's largest colony. Félix Éboué, a career colonial administrator born in French Guyana, had been governor of Chad since 1938. At the time, it was the highest rank in the colonial administration held by a man of sub-Saharan African descent. Since the Fall of France in June, Éboué had indicated his willingness to align with and assist neighboring English colonies (Nigeria and Sudan) in the war effort against Germany. With Boisson far away in Dakar, Éboué teamed up with British and Free France forces in Leopoldville to orchestrate a *coup d'état* in the AEF administration. After their success, Vichy supporters were carted to neighboring Niger (the closest colony in AOF) and supporters of Free France were promoted to important positions within AEF's government.<sup>11</sup>

Although AEF was in many ways France's least important colonial federation before the war, its defection to Free France provided de Gaulle with a toehold in Africa, as well as springboard for rallying other colonies to the Free France cause. De Gaulle travelled to Africa in September of 1940 in order to convert administrators of the francophone Africa to the Gaullist cause. He strategically avoided North Africa, whose administration was still reeling from the British attack on Mers-el-Kebir, Algeria, which had resulted in 1,300 French casualties. De Gaulle's dependence on Britain would not have won him much support. In late September of 1940, Charles de Gaulle travelled to Dakar to convince High Commissioner Boisson to abandon Vichy and pledge West Africa's resources—including its *tirailleurs sénégalais*—to Free France.

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<sup>7</sup> BBC is the British Broadcasting Corporation.

<sup>8</sup> Amadou Mahtar Mbow, interview, Dakar, 27 January 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Akpo-Vaché, *L'AOF et la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Ramognino, *L'Affaire Boisson: un proconsul de Vichy en Afrique*. Paris: Les Indes savants, 2006, 75-83.

<sup>11</sup> Bruce Fetter, "Changing War Aims: Central Africa's Role, 1940-41, as Seen from Léopoldville," *African Affairs* 87 (July 1988), 386.

In order to emphasize his refusal, Boisson trained the arsenals of Dakar and Gorée on Free France's military vessels and planes. Rokhaya Nam, a young female resident of Dakar in 1940, witnessed the bombardment of Dakar from the Plateau, which was the administrative center of AOF.<sup>12</sup> Nam was confused by the seemingly self-destructive nature of unleashing Dakar's armaments on planes bearing French flags. Her bewilderment demonstrated the degree to which West African residents of Dakar were unaware of France's political schizophrenia in 1940. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in empire were also subject to this confusion.

The separate political allegiances of AOF and AEF had great consequence for French empire. After defeat in Dakar, de Gaulle continued to Gabon, where he drew on the support of Éboué to draw all of AEF to the side of Free France.<sup>13</sup> On November 12, 1940, de Gaulle named Félix Éboué Governor-General of AEF. Félix Éboué's administration raised roughly 40,000 equatorial African troops, and steadily increased the export of raw materials, particularly rubber, for the war effort.<sup>14</sup> AEF's new recruits were also labeled *tirailleurs sénégalais*. At the end of 1940, De Gaulle and Free France raised 40,000 *tirailleurs sénégalais*, whereas Vichy France sent 35,000 *tirailleurs sénégalais* back to West Africa as a result of German pressure on Pétain to repatriate and demobilize colonial troops.<sup>15</sup> These men were incorporated into High Commissioner Boisson efforts to protect the borders of AOF from Allied forces.<sup>16</sup> The *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in AOF and other parts of empire in 1940 would serve the interests of Vichy until individual colonies fell to Allied Forces. The French Mandate territories of Syria and Lebanon surrendered to Allied Forces in the summer of 1941. The Indian Ocean Islands of Madagascar and Réunion left Vichy in the summer and fall of 1942. North African territories surrendered to Allied authority after prolonged conflict between November 1942 and March 1943. Pierre Boisson ceded control of West Africa to Allied forces in December of 1942. Indochina remained under the sovereign control of Vichy until 1945, when Japan militarily seized control in March of 1945. Germany officially surrendered to Allied forces in May of 1945.

The experiences of West African servicemen in empire further complicate the narrative of World War II in empire because they illustrate that the trading of colonies between two Frances lacked the swift decisiveness and finality that the political summary evokes. In sub-Saharan Africa, there were individual soldiers and civilians who responded to the call of de Gaulle by migrating to neighboring British West African territories in order to enlist in Allied Forces. During August of 1940, a boatload of Ivorian *tirailleurs sénégalais* en route to France from Abidjan were waylaid at the Gold Coast and integrated into British colonial troops.<sup>17</sup> Due to the extension of the institution's misnomer to troops originating from AEF, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* transgressed the divisions of empire. The incorporation of sub-Saharan African

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<sup>12</sup> Rokhaya Nam, interview, Dakar, 22 January 2011.

<sup>13</sup> In 1940, AEF consisted of the modern countries of Chad, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, and Gabon.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Weinstein, *Éboué* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 268.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 118.

<sup>16</sup> Nancy Lawler, *Soldiers, Airmen, Spies, and Whisperers: The Gold Coast in World War II* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002), 21-2.

<sup>17</sup> Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle*, trans. Jonathon Griffin and Richard Howard (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998), 111-112.

troops into Allied Forces would come to a head in the Levant, where regiments of “*tirailleurs sénégalais*” would face off under the opposing banners of Allied and Vichy forces.

### Sorting it out in Syria and Lebanon

The French colonial military had stationed *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the French Mandate territories of Syria and Lebanon since the aftermath of World War I. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the French military regularly replenished West African soldiers stationed in the Levant and there were *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in Syria and Lebanon when France declared war on Germany in 1939. After the armistice, these troops were serving under the banner of Vichy and Axis Powers. Most of the permanent ground forces in the Levant had enlisted in French Forces in the late thirties and had rallied against Germany after 1939. Confusingly, after they were under the administrative authority of Vichy, and by extension Germany, they continued to sport the same French uniforms and to report to the same commanding officers. However, their training and objectives were revised from preserving France’s mission in the Levant to include defending the region from Allied Forces—Free France and Britain. As a result of this policy, the sub-Saharan African soldiers serving in ground forces in the Levant fought against other *tirailleurs sénégalais* integrated into Allied forces.

At the beginning of June 1941, Allied Forces, including a regiment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* recruited in AEF, began a campaign against Vichy forces in the Levant.<sup>18</sup> Vichy forces lost. By the end of the month, those *tirailleurs sénégalais* who had mobilized against Germany in 1939, then consigned to Vichy mid-1940, would once again serve the Allied cause and be told that their common enemy was Germany. The primary objective of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*—maintaining order in the Levant—went unchanged. However, the presence of Britain in the Levant added new possibilities and anxieties for sub-Saharan African soldiers accustomed to serving France. Syrian and Lebanese political activists manipulated the crises of World War II and the presence of the British to agitate for political independence. The head of the British military in the Levant, Major-General Edward Spears, believed that Syrian and Lebanese people deserved their independence from French colonial exploitation. Spears felt that there were too many Vichyists left in the French colonial administration and that their troops caused too many problems with the indigenous population.<sup>19</sup> Many of the ranking *tirailleurs sénégalais* were well-attuned to the fact that British-led Allied forces were marginalizing French colonial troops from the most important events in the Levant.<sup>20</sup> The following section historicizes how these soldiers managed the confusion amidst arbitrary directives issued from France, Vichy, and British-led Allied forces. Whether or not the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the Levant fully grasped international politics of World War II, they understood that there were great power shifts at work, and they attempted to use them for their own benefit.

Prior to World War II, there were a minority of troops from AEF serving in the ranks of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Levant. The majority of those AEF troops were Sara peoples from

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<sup>18</sup> These troops, largely composed of Chadian soldiers, served in the Regiment of Tirailleurs Sénégalais from Tchad (RTST) within the First Division of Free France.

<sup>19</sup> Major-General Sir Edward Spears, *Fulfillment of a Mission: The Spears Mission to Syria and Lebanon, 1941-44* (London: Leo Cooper, 1977), 159-160.

<sup>20</sup> A. B. Gaunson, *The Anglo-French Clash in Lebanon and Syria, 1940-45* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), 7.



Chad. Sara troops were nearly exclusive to the *Regiment des Tirailleurs Sénégalais du Tchad* (RTST), who were raised under Éboué's administration for Allied Forces, and deployed in the Levant. This meant that troops from the same Chadian communities found themselves on opposite sides of World War II in the Levant, and then subsequently in the same military units. After the Allied takeover of the Levant, the RTST were integrated into the French ground forces they had just been at war with. Sara soldiers were often singled out in the archival record as troops who consistently acted subversively to French military command after 1941. Their disobedience was unsurprising when understood from the standpoint of the Sara *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Many probably saw themselves as liberators of Vichy Syria, who were then amalgamated with their defeated enemies.

The Sara troops' new officers directed them away from military action in coastal Lebanon to Hims, a region north of Lebanon in Syria, for training exercises.<sup>21</sup> A group of soldiers from Chad categorically refused to board military vehicles bound for that region. Their French officer reported that Chadian soldiers claimed Hims was a region full of harmful spirits. The officer connected their claim with recent meteorological conditions that were typical to February in the Levant—low temperatures, sleet, and cold winds. Unfavorable weather may have accounted for the Chadian soldiers' aversion to Hims, but climate would not explain why these troops had reported collective hallucinations during the night of February 25-6, 1942. The Sara *tirailleurs sénégalais* maintained that there had been a subtle, abnormal, wind during the night that triggered vivid nightmares among the troops.<sup>22</sup> The French reporting officer disregarded the episode as collective delusion. Sara *tirailleurs sénégalais*' marked recalcitrance occurred because they were chafing at the bit for action and did not want to be put out to pasture in the Syrian countryside. They were aware of Britain's marginalization of the French military in the Levant.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of the cause, Sara troops' disobedience challenged French military lore that the Sara were one of the most pliant martial races of France's sub-Saharan African colonial empire.<sup>24</sup>

Troops' disobedience was not limited to the Sara. In march of 1942, seventy-two *tirailleurs sénégalais* of unreported ethnicity refused to leave Beirut for training maneuvers in Naqoura, a small seaside town in southern Lebanon. Three West African sergeants took up arms and marched resolutely to headquarters in order to make demands upon commanding French officers. These *tirailleurs sénégalais* under-officers were acting mutinously and the impetus for their rebellion was linked to the co-existence of France and British forces in the Levant. These *tirailleurs sénégalais* officers, from Senegal and French Soudan demanded full employment and proposed their transfer to troops under the direct command of the British.<sup>25</sup> In comparison with the incident involving Sara troops above, the West African officers had a different solution for inactivity. When the Sara had refused to deploy to Hims for training, they proposed fighting against the British in Lebanon as an alternative. This meant that the Sara were aware of Britain's intentional domination and marginalization of French colonial troops in the Levant, which meant

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<sup>21</sup> On contemporary maps, the Hims region is spelled Homs.

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Delange, chief commandant of the French Free Forces in the Levant, 27 February 1942, 4H369, SHDT.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Delange in Beirut, 27 February 1942, 4H369, SHDT.

<sup>24</sup> René Lemarchand, "The Politics of Sara Ethnicity: A Note on the Origins of the Civil War in Chad," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 20 (1980): 453-454.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from Langlois, 22 March 1942, 4H369, SHDT.

more to them than the fact that France and Britain were Allies. The Senegalese and Soudanese officers were frustrated with military busywork, but felt that they could escape boredom in Naqura by serving the British.

The rapid amalgamation of Allied sub-Saharan African troops and former Vichy sub-Saharan African troops inhibited the emergence of respect for authority within the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The troops from AEF suddenly found themselves under the command of sub-officers from West Africa and serving side-by-side with a motley assortment of West African ethno-linguistic groups. As a result, sub-Saharan African troops serving under the title “*tirailleurs sénégalais*” used their cultural differences to establish a hierarchy of superiority. According to French sources, bullying along ethnic lines often led to eruptions of violence among troops and caused tensions with the local populations. In March of 1942, twenty-one Chadian Sara soldiers alerted a commanding officer that they no longer wanted to be part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marching Battalion because they were an ethnic minority in a unit predominantly made up of soldiers from Cameroon and AOF.<sup>26</sup> As a minority, they felt mistreated by their officers from AOF, whom the Sara claimed were intimidating and persecuting them. The locally fermented brew, *arak*, was often cited as a catalyst for violent conflict among *tirailleurs sénégalais* of different ethnicities.<sup>27</sup>

The RTST troops’ pronounced dissatisfaction also stemmed from salary and provision issues once they were incorporated into French ground forces in the Levant. Troops originating from regions in contemporary Central African Republic and Congo were not awarded indemnities promised to them. Recruiting agents under Éboué had promised these troops inflated signing bonuses in order to encourage voluntary enlistment, but French forces in the Levant were not awarding those troops their due.<sup>28</sup> Soldiers from AEF, who had served under the British Allied Forces in the Levant, were provided poorer quality cuisine under the French command. In July of 1942, *tirailleurs sénégalais* acted insubordinately towards their sub-Saharan African commanding officers, which was linked to the fact that troops were receiving insufficient rations of sugar and rice.<sup>29</sup> Under the British they had also received spicy peppers in their daily food rations. French forces had not repeated this gesture, even though they were aware of sub-Saharan African troops’ appreciation of this particular condiment. In order to avoid further incident, the French provisioned the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Syria with black pepper and red chili pepper.<sup>30</sup>

As troops of occupation with little to do, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* increasingly came into conflict with other troops and local populations. One event occurred outside a military brothel that involved thirty intoxicated *tirailleurs sénégalais* and two Lebanese chauffeurs employed by the French colonial army. In the ensuing confusion, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* attacked a West African under-officer, Captain Massa, who had attempted to intervene in the conflict. Massa

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<sup>26</sup> Report on morale (Month of June 1942), 4H400, SHDT.

<sup>27</sup> Report signed by Captain Louvel, in a folder entitled “Affaire escadron noir (soudanais) incidents ERAA, HOMS, et DAMAS 20 mars 1942,” 16 March 1942, 4H369, SHDT.

<sup>28</sup> Report on morale from the month of September from the Headquarter of Free French Forces in the Middle East, 1942, 4H400, SHDT.

<sup>29</sup> Report on Morale (Month of July 1942), 4H400, SHDT.

<sup>30</sup> Report on morale (troops and services during the month of August 1942), 17 September 1942, 4H400, SHDT.

was forced to defend himself with his belt until other French officers arrived on the scene.<sup>31</sup> Syrian and Lebanese civilians increasingly viewed French occupation as illegitimate and demonstrated against the French regime. Famine, drought and elections had inspired protests and violent demonstrations in most major cities in the Levant throughout 1942 and 1943.<sup>32</sup> The French employed the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to carry out acts of violence and brutal reprisals against civilians.<sup>33</sup>

Even though the *tirailleurs sénégalais* participated in these heinous acts in the 1940s, Syrian and Lebanese civilians sought to infiltrate French colonial troops and spread ideas about social justice. The civilians intended to subvert French power by turning their colonial troops against them. French officers believed sub-Saharan African troops were particularly vulnerable to local influence because of the chaos of the war.<sup>34</sup> Since the *tirailleurs sénégalais* had ample amounts of free time, they fraternized with the local population and were receptive to their criticisms of French colonial rule. Local civilians illustrated to the *tirailleurs sénégalais* that all colonial peoples were mistreated by the French. They claimed that the French equally denigrated Syrians, Lebanese, and sub-Saharan Africans by referring to them as “dirty” Bedouins and “dirty” Negroes.<sup>35</sup>

Since the campaign to “pacify” Morocco in 1908, the French colonial military had feared that Islam could facilitate the transmission of subversive ideas from civilian populations to Muslim *tirailleurs sénégalais*. This was increasingly becoming a reality during World War II. Many of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* hailing from the Sahel regions were progressively becoming Muslim throughout the twentieth century. There were Arabic speakers among the Sara troops serving in the Levant. The French military were concerned with troops’ conspicuous Muslim practices, which included how often they frequented local Muslim notables’ households and mosques. Local Islamic leaders paired anti-colonial sentiment with Islamic teachings in order to encourage Muslim sub-Saharan African troops to question their role in the Levant, and more broadly in French colonialism.<sup>36</sup> The French justifiably feared that *tirailleurs sénégalais* would enter into alliances with local civilians that could outweigh their obedience to French colonial military order.

*Tirailleurs sénégalais* also sought religious instruction and protection from religious leaders indigenous to the Levant as well as some spiritual leaders with roots in sub-Saharan Africa. In one incident, the French arrested a civilian Cheikh of sub-Saharan African origins who had been distributing spiritual and religious materials to *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>37</sup> When arrested, he possessed *arak*, the local liquor distilled from coconut palm or rice, and small bits of

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<sup>31</sup> Report from Captain Massa, an officer of the special forced station in Homs, 12 February 1942, 4H369, SHDT.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 233. Since the Syria and Lebanon were Mandate territories, their civilians could participate in elections and choose representatives for the Mandate government.

<sup>33</sup> Spears, *Fulfillment of a Mission*, 110, 230, 237-8, 239.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from General Causud in Beirut, 25 March 1942, 4H369, SHDT.

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Delange, chief commandant of the French Free Forces in the Levant, 27 February 1942, , 4H369, SHDT.

<sup>36</sup> A report on an incident provoked by a groups of black troops, 13 May 1942, 4H369, SHDT.

<sup>37</sup> A Cheikh, or sheikh in its Anglophone transliteration, is a leader in a Muslim community.

paper bearing religious prescriptions.<sup>38</sup> These talismans, or *grisgris*, were common spiritual items among Sufi Muslims from West Africa. In this case, these small pieces of paper contained spiritual instructions for soldiers to protect themselves against from unfortunate incidents.<sup>39</sup>

Due to these types of incidents, the French realized they were unable to maintain loyalty, confidence, or coherence among their troops from different regions of their sub-Saharan African colonies. By 1942, a growing number of sub-Saharan infantrymen had reached the end of their three-year tour of duty. These soldiers notified their French commanders that they no longer required military training and acted insubordinately as a result.<sup>40</sup> The French felt they should hastily repatriate troops to sub-Saharan Africa or transfer them to ongoing campaigns in North Africa, but they were hamstrung by Britain's authority over their decisions. Replacements for sub-Saharan African troops came slowly, since Allied campaigns in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt occurred throughout 1942 and 1943 and blocked the shipment of troops to the Levant. In April of 1944, fresh troops from French Soudan and Upper Volta finally arrived from AOF.<sup>41</sup> By August, September, and October of 1944, there was an exodus of *tirailleurs sénégalais* repatriating to sub-Saharan Africa. In order to expedite the removal of troublesome troops from the Levant, the French began to diagnose troops with medical disorders. French military medical staff awarded medical leave to *tirailleurs sénégalais* suffering from homesickness, depression, and anger disorders, which did not normally merit medical evacuation.<sup>42</sup> As late as September 1945, even with the rapid repatriations, there remained some *tirailleurs sénégalais* who had been part of the 1939 recruitment class or had exceeded the legal age limit to serve in the armed forces.<sup>43</sup>

The repatriation of sub-Saharan African troops and the restoration of a regular postal service near the conclusion of World War II enabled new flows of information between sub-Saharan Africa and the Levant.<sup>44</sup> Noteworthy information circulating among *tirailleurs sénégalais* networks concerned further wrongs committed by the French colonial government. In Abidjan, customs agents seized all of the civil effects of West African troops demobilizing from the Levant. This meant that the presents and other luxury goods that *tirailleurs sénégalais* had purchased with their military pay in Damascus were possibly beyond recuperation. French commanding officers in Syria found themselves being held accountable for those customs officials by *tirailleurs sénégalais* still stationed in the Levant, who had received this news via telegram. Repatriating soldiers also found that their families had been paying taxes to the French colonial administration during the war. This was in direct conflict with one of the conditions of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' military contracts. Those families' whose sons or husbands had enlisted

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<sup>38</sup> *Arak* is similar to the palm wine made in tropical West Africa, which is often used in non-Muslim spiritual ceremonies.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from General Cazsud in Beirut, 25 March 1942, 4H369, SHDT.

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Colonel Tournadre, 3 October 1943, 4H400, SHDT.

<sup>41</sup> Reports on troop morale in the troops station in the Levant from March and April 1944, 4H400, SHDT.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from the Commissioner of the colonies to the Commandant in Chief, General of the Army, 1 September 1943, 4H400, SHDT.

<sup>43</sup> Report on Morale from the month of September 1945 (page seven), 29 October 1945, 4H400, SHDT. *Tirailleurs sénégalais served terms of three years*. The legal limit for infantrymen was forty.

<sup>44</sup> There was no mention in the archives of troops' awareness of events at Thiaroye and Sétif, which I will address below.

during the course of the war were exempted from paying colonial taxes.<sup>45</sup> News of the events at Thiaroye went unmentioned in the French military archives, which means that they were either edited out of official reports, or repatriating *tirailleurs sénégalais* were not aware of them.<sup>46</sup>

### **In Isolation in French Indochina?<sup>47</sup>**

Before addressing uprisings in the aftermath of World War II, this section addresses those *originaires* soldiers serving in Southeast Asia during the Vichy era. The presence of *originaires* soldiers in Vietnam punctuated the surprising ways in which West Africans participated in the imperial settings of World War II. The Southeastern Asian front of the war was a unique site for exploring the political reversals of the war because of the separate set of international actors involved in the region. Indochina came under the administrative power of Vichy after the Fall of France. Due to its distance from France and its proximity to Japan, Indochina was gradually integrated into Japan's economic and political sphere. West African *originaires* experienced Japan's takeover of Indochina in particular ways because they were identified as black French soldiers. *Originaires* stranded in Indochina developed relationships with Vietnamese civilians and depended on those relationships to escape persecution at the hands of the Japanese. This section picks up the thread of *originaires*' role in empire and provides case studies of how *originaires* soldiers coped with the inadequacies of Vichy in Indochina. The experiences of these West African soldiers importantly sets up a foundation for the following chapter, which addresses West African soldiers in the French-Indochinese War.

At the beginning of World War II, there were *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in many regions of French empire, but they had not yet been deployed in French Indochina. Due to their exclusive status as French citizens, West African *originaires* had been present among the regular units of the French Army in Indochina since the beginning of the interwar period. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*, who were allotted the status of colonial subject, were not deployed in Southeast Asia until 1947 during the French-Indochinese conflict. The French military had debated the deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in French Indochina since the Yen Bai mutiny of 1930. This mutiny had been spearheaded by Vietnamese *tirailleurs* and some French military men felt it would be wise to bring in colonial soldiers with no allegiances to the Indochinese population. Since the *tirailleurs sénégalais* had proven their mettle in Madagascar, North Africa, and Syria-Lebanon, military representatives discussed permanently stationing West African regiments in French Indochina. French officers opposed to the idea of deploying *tirailleurs sénégalais* in French Indochina cited a range of evidence for their case. Their reasoning was propped up by French racial stereotypes, which they merged with French presumptions of how Vietnamese populations viewed people with sub-Saharan ancestry. According to the French, the use of West African troops in Indochina would have negative affects on local populations, particularly women.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Report on the morale during the month of December 1945, 26 January 1946, 4H400, SHDT. Please see Echenberg's "Paying the Blood Tax" for a better understanding of the *impôt de sang*.

<sup>46</sup> Thiaroye's importance is addressed the final section of this chapter.

<sup>47</sup> French Indochina included the contemporary nations of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Vietnam was further divided into Tonkin in the north, Annam in the central region, and Cochin China in the south.

<sup>48</sup> Maurice Rives, interview, Paris, 16 June 2008.

There was greater contact between civilian women and the French military in Indochina than in most of its other colonies. Arabo-Islamic cultural norms segregated women and men in France's Mediterranean colonies, which limited contact between civilian women and French soldiers. Compared to Arab women, Indochinese women were freer to circulate in public spaces and had greater contact with the French. In addition to casual encounters, the French military provisioned military brothels for its soldiers in French Indochina.<sup>49</sup> The voice of one of the military's employees in this sex industry made its way into the debates regarding the deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in French Indochina. A Vietnamese Madam lodged a complaint with a French military officer regarding a black Martinican French soldier's patronage of her brothel. The Madam claimed that the physical disparity of sexual organs between Vietnamese women and black men was cause for alarm. The physical discomfort experienced by a Vietnamese sex worker had impaired her ability to work for several days. The madam demanded regulations against black troops' patronage of her brothel. As ridiculous as it may seem, the French military put enough stock in this incident to publish it in a military journal in the interwar period. Both Vietnamese and French opinions in these debates lumped sub-Saharan Africans and the African diaspora, i.e. Martinican troops, in the same racial category. One informant believed that France's desire to preserve Vietnamese women delayed the deployment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in French Indochina until there was great need for French forces in 1947.<sup>50</sup>

As French citizens, West African *originaires* soldiers had served in French Indochina since the aftermath of the World War I. The enduring relationships they had with civilian women in Indochina would provide them with the trappings of family life and safeguarded them from the rapid changes of World War II in Indochina. Jean Gomis was born to a career West African *originaire* soldier and a Vietnamese mother in 1933 in French Indochina. He spent the first thirteen years of his life growing up as a military brat among French soldiers' families and his mother's relations in northern and southern Vietnam. Due to the second Blaise Diagne Law of 1916, Jean Gomis, by birth, was a French citizen because he inherited his father's *originaire* status and grew up a French citizen. Atypically, *originaire* Jean Gomis grew up speaking French and Vietnamese, and to this day speaks Wolof (the most widely spoken language in Senegal) very poorly. Gomis spent his infancy and early adolescence attending French public schools with French ex-patriate children and Vietnamese children in Indochina. Gomis' father had intended to return to West Africa for a visit with his family when Jean was old enough to manage the two-month boat ride to Senegal. The Second World War interrupted these plans and Gomis' family was forced to remain in Indochina until 1946.<sup>51</sup>

The Fall of France in June of 1940, led to decreasing contact between divided France and French Indochina. However, the administration in French Indochina, headed by Admiral Jean Decoux, enthusiastically applied Vichy policies within the state-controlled sectors of French Indochina. Consequently, Jean Gomis experienced the implementation of Vichy ideology in his early public schooling, and to this day remembers all the words to "Maréchal, Nous Voilà!"<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Michel Serge Hardy, *De la morale au moral des troupes ou l'histoire des B.M.C 1918-2004* (Panazol: Lavauzelle, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Maurice Rives, interview, Paris, 16 June 2008. Rives provided photocopied materials from his private archives to explain this phenomenon.

<sup>51</sup> Jean Gomis, interview, Dakar, Senegal, 9 February 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Jean Gomis, interview, Dakar, Senegal, 25 January 2011. "Maréchal, nous voilà!" meant "Marshal Pétain, we are here!" which carries connotations of patriotism, allegiance, and loyalty to Vichy France.

This was the anthem of Pétain's National Revolution and was sung by public school children in French Indochina in the same fashion that children attending public schools in the United States recite the pledge of allegiance every day. There were also staged spectacles promoting Pétain's National Revolution, and its motto of Patrimony, Work, and Family, to the popular masses of French Indochina.<sup>53</sup> Jean Gomis experienced the social and organized education of Vichy during his formative young life—between seven and twelve years of age—more intensely in Indochina than he would have if he had been growing up in Dakar.<sup>54</sup> The cultural aspects of Vichy jumbled together in Jean Gomis' memory. However, he distinctly remembered March 9, 1945 as one of the most devastating moments of his youth. It was the day that Japan violently overthrew Vichy in French Indochina.<sup>55</sup>

Japan's unchallenged imperial expansion into Indochina resulted from Vichy France's negligence of its Southeast Asian territories. The energetic implementation of the cultural components of Pétain's National Revolution belied Vichy's diminishing investment in French Indochina's state infrastructure and military. The short supply of political directives and military operatives made Vichy in Indochina vulnerable to Japan's expansionist interests. Shortly after June of 1940, Japan compelled the French in Indochina to cede economic control and border security to Japan. At this early date, the Japanese allowed Vichy French representatives to maintain political and administrative authority in the region. The presence of Japanese troops in Indochina increased throughout World War II, and on March 9, 1945, the French-Indochinese colonial administration ceded its power to the Japanese military. This came as a result of the Japanese military's *coup de force*, which included bombardments of major cities, interment of French military forces (including West African *originaires*), forced relocations of French civilians, and eventually the installation of Bao Dai at the head of an "Empire of Vietnam."<sup>56</sup> These acts successfully severed most contact between the French living in Indochina and the rest of the world. It was not until after Japanese surrender that Allied Forces attempted to reestablish French colonial authority in the region in August 1945.

March 9, 1945 also rang importantly in the memory of Ninh Beye, née Nguyen. Ninh Nguyen met her West African husband, Ibrahima Beye, at a dance hall in Haiphong in 1939. Major Vietnamese urban areas, like Saigon, Hanoi, and Haiphong, were sites where leisure activities and nightlife enabled intermixing between soldiers on leave and the local civilian population. In the dance halls and night clubs, French soldiers, including West African *originaires*, intermingled with Vietnamese women. Nguyen had not originally wanted to date a black French soldier, but Ibrahima Beye energetically pursued Ninh Nguyen and his determination won her over. Ibrahima Beye was an *originnaire* from Saint-Louis who deployed to French Indochina at the end of the interwar period in order to serve his obligatory two-year service in the French Army. Indochina's severance from the rest of the Francophone world led to the indefinite extension of Beye's tour in Indochina. While Beye was stranded by the politics

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<sup>53</sup> Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, Chapters Six and Seven.

<sup>54</sup> I am drawing these conclusions after a close reading of Ginio *French Colonialism Unmasked*, Chapter Four and Jenning, *Vichy in the Tropics*, Chapters Six and Seven.

<sup>55</sup> Ironically, Japan and Vichy France, through its connection with Germany, were both considered Axis powers.

<sup>56</sup> For more information on the details of this Japanese military maneuver please see Michel Huguier, *De Gaulle, Roosevelt et L'Indochine de 1940 à 1945* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010), Chapter Eight.

of World War II in Indochina, his prolonged stay enabled the development of his relationship with Ninh, their marriage, and the growth of their family.

By 1945, Ibrahima Beye frequently spent the night with Ninh and their first child in a domicile largely paid for through Ibrahima's regular military pay and family allowances. Ninh Beye clearly remembered the bombardments of that night because she ran for shelter through the streets of Haiphong with her young daughter tucked under her arm, while the sky lit up in explosions. After the events of March 9, 1945 Ninh and Ibrahima Beye's family was threatened by Japanese patrols, aerial bombardments, and the threat of internment for Ibrahima. Japan rounded up French soldiers and placed them in POW camps throughout March 1945. Japanese intelligence was aware of Ibrahima Beye's recurrent nights at Ninh's residence. A few days after the bombardments, Japanese troops came to Ninh's door looking for her husband—explicitly asking for the black French soldier.<sup>57</sup> Ibrahima was out at the time and Ninh, hiding her mixed-race child, claimed that she was unmarried and that no black man lived with her. Had her husband been present, it is likely that Ibrahima would have been rounded up and interned in a Japanese camp like other *originaires* and metropolitan troops serving in Indochina. Once Ibrahima returned to the house, he and Ninh developed a plan to smuggle him out of Haiphong.

In order to secret Ibrahima out of the Japanese-occupied city, Ninh dressed him in stereotypical Vietnamese women's clothing—flowing trousers covered with a shin-length tunic. Ninh claimed that Ibrahima could pass as a woman in the cover of darkness because he had lost a great deal of weight over the course of the war. Japan had imposed strict rationing measures on the Indochinese population after 1940. In order to increase its own food security, Japan extracted a large percentage of Indochina's rice harvest, as well as other food stuffs. French soldiers, being cut off from European supply lines, were at the mercy of the civilian population's good will. Rationing and reduced food security had led to Ibrahima's weight loss, which enabled him to fit into a Vietnamese woman's tunic. Dressed as a woman, Ibrahima escaped from Haiphong by swimming across the Haiphong River at night. He found safe haven among Ninh's relatives outside of town. Ninh and Ibrahima were reunited after Japan surrendered to Allied Forces in late 1945. They relocated to Senegal in 1947, when it was once again possible to travel between Southeast Asia and Africa.

Although the number of West Africans in French Indochina during the war was few, their experiences enrich the broader history of West African servicemen in empire between 1939 and 1945. In Vietnam, West African soldiers had greater personal and intimate relationships with local populations, which demonstrated how soldiers, given certain circumstances, built families and communities across colonial and cultural divides. Their romantic relations demonstrated collaboration and cooperation between agents of the French colonial state and indigenous populations who lived through Japan's occupation of French Indochina. The West African *originaires'* isolation from the rest of French empire and West Africa kept the news of Thiaroye and other uprisings from reaching them. However, as Jean Gomis concluded, the events of Thiaroye had more currency in referencing the exploitative nature of French colonialism than in the history of World War II.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Both Ninh Beye and Jean Gomis claimed that the Japanese were racist regarding West Africans serving in the French Army in Indochina, interviews, Dakar, 27 February 2008 and 2 February 2009.

<sup>58</sup> Jean Gomis, interview, Dakar, Senegal, 25 January 2011.



## Sacrifice, Massacres, and Victims of History

After the conclusion of World War II, West African soldiers participated in several violent uprisings across empire. This section engages with the massacre of repatriating *tirailleurs sénégalais* at Thiaroye and the historical literature on Thiaroye and sub-Saharan African POWs of World War II. By juxtaposing interpretations of this particular crisis with other imperial uprisings in empire, this section argues that the events at Thiaroye were representative of a broader, empire-wide, disappointment with French colonialism. The reversals of Vichy had taught French colonial populations about the fickle and arbitrary authority of France. Uprisings in Thiaroye, Senegal, Sétif, Algeria, Moramonga, Madagascar, and Casablanca, Morocco fit together as challenges to colonial authority, *tirailleurs sénégalais* were involved in each uprising.

On December 1, 1944, thirty-five of *tirailleurs sénégalais* were shot to death by French military agents while awaiting their military pay, in transit, at the Thiaroye military camp located in the outskirts of Dakar. This massacre occurred because repatriating troops mutinied against their French commanding officers. The murdered men were part of a contingent of 1,280 West African soldiers, many of which had been POWs in Germany, in the process of returning to their villages of origin in the West African interior. Repeatedly denied indemnities and back pay in France and then in Dakar, these *tirailleurs sénégalais* lashed out at their French superiors. The French military responded by opening fire on them, which resulted in thirty-five dead, thirty-five injured, and thirty-four arrested *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Those arrested were tried and convicted in military court for rebellious acts against military authority. The arrested received one- to ten year-sentences in prison. They all benefited from general amnesty in 1947, but five had already died in prison.<sup>59</sup>

The events at Thiaroye have been commemorated in poetry and film, as well as nationally orchestrated ceremonies in Senegal in order to remind audiences of France's exploitation of West Africans during the colonial period. Léopold Sédar Senghor's poetry and Ousmane Sembene's film, *Camp de Thiaroye*, represent unambiguous critiques of French colonial military actions against *tirailleurs sénégalais* in 1944.<sup>60</sup> Historians of West African soldiers have framed the Thiaroye mutiny as a labor issue<sup>61</sup> or as an event illustrating the failure of negotiations and reciprocity between France and its colonial soldiers.<sup>62</sup> Academic publications engaged in memory work have questioned the disconnect between popular representations of Thiaroye, memory, and history.<sup>63</sup> These articles have proliferated as Thiaroye

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<sup>59</sup> For reports of the events, and their aftermath, please see file13G17V17 at ANS.

<sup>60</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Tyaroye," "Aux Tirailleurs Sénégalais Morts pour la France," "Prière des Tirailleurs Sénégalais," *Hosties Noires* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1948) and Ousmane Sembene, *Camp de Thiaroye* (New York: New Yorker Films, 1988).

<sup>61</sup> Myron Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye: The Senegalese Soldiers' Uprising of 1944" in *African Labor History*, eds. Peter C. W. Gutkind, Robin Cohen, and Jean Copans (London: Sage Publications, 1978), 109-28.

<sup>62</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 116-119.

<sup>63</sup> Njeri Ngugi, "Presenting and (Mis)representing History in Fiction Film: Sembène's "Camp de Thiaroye" and Attenborough's "Cry Freedom," *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 16 (2003) 57-68, and Laura Rice, "African Conscripts/European Conflicts: Race, Memory, and the Lessons of War," *Cultural Critique* 45 (Spring 2000): 109-150, and Julien Fargettas, "La Révolte des tirailleurs sénégalais de

has become linked to contemporary politics surrounding the freezing of West African veterans' pensions. Historians of the relationship between France and its colonial soldiers in World War II have picked up this thread and have woven it into histories on West African POWs and the events at Thiaroye. Though France's massacre of *tirailleurs sénégalais* merits this scholarly attention, it has narrowed our understanding of how West African soldiers experienced World War II.

Among recent historical publications dealing with West African soldiers in World War II,<sup>64</sup> there are two monographs that specifically characterize *tirailleurs sénégalais* as victims of World War II, French amnesia, and colonialism. Raphael Scheck's *Hitler's African Victims* and Armelle Mabon's *Prisonniers de Guerre "Indigènes"* (*indigènes* POWs) seek to resurrect the experiences of West African POWs in Germany and France in order to fill gaps in European narratives of World War II.<sup>65</sup> Scheck and Mabon's work is reconstructive because they argue that West African POWs have largely been forgotten by World War II historiography and contemporary popular memory of the war. In portraying West African soldiers as the forgotten casualties of history, Scheck and Mabon echo the contemporary politics surrounding veterans' pensions debates and the politics proffered by contemporary West African presidents.<sup>66</sup> By critiquing the memory and popular history of World War II in France and Germany, Scheck and Mabon reproduce a post-colonial reading of the West African POWs that has more to say about European countries and their racial ideologies than the soldiers themselves. These monographs perpetuate European primacy and authority in ultimately shaping West Africans' experiences in World War II. Thiaroye punches above its weight in the literature on the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, which has accommodated a blanket assumption that West African servicemen represent the quintessential victims of an abusive colonial regime torn asunder during World War II.

As we have seen in the previous parts of this chapter, there are other narratives and experiences that parallel the POW historiography and merit further research. In addition to Thiaroye, there were other colonial uprisings against the French that also involved *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Due to the imperial campaigns perpetrated by the competing forces of Free France and Vichy France in World War II, colonial populations witnessed the schizophrenia of the war on their doorsteps. Vichy and Free France fought the majority of their battles in empire because of Germany's chokehold on mainland France. The arbitrariness and incoherence of war led colonial populations to question France's right to rule its empire in the aftermath of World War II. The *tirailleurs sénégalais'* skepticism regarding the French military's intention to recompense their time as POWs led them to open revolt against military order. In the years immediately following armistice, Algerians, Madagascans, and Moroccans also led small-scale uprisings against the French colonial state. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* participated in the suppression

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Thiaroye, entre reconstructions mémorielles et histoire," *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire*, 92 (Oct.-Dec., 2006): 117-130.

<sup>64</sup> Please see bibliography for full details. Éric Deroo & Antoine Champeaux's *La Force Noire*, Kébé, Mbaye Gana Kébé's *Tirailleurs de France*, Dominique Lormier's *C'est nous les Africains: l'épopée de l'armée française d'Afrique, 1940-1945* and Joseph Conombo, *Souvenirs de Guerre d'un "tirailleurs sénégalais."*

<sup>65</sup> Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims* and Armelle Mabon, *Prisonniers de guerre indigènes*.

<sup>66</sup> I address Abdoulaye Wade's campaign for Senegal's veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the conclusion.

of the events in Sétif, Algeria. In Moramonga, Madagascar and Casablanca, Morocco, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were targeted in these rebellions.<sup>67</sup>

*Tirailleurs sénégalais* had served as occupying troops in Algeria since 1910. On May 8, 1945, which was the same day that Allied forces acknowledged the unconditional surrender of Germany, Algerians marched in the streets of Sétif. Located in the High Plateaus of northeastern Algeria near Constantine, this region was known for its opposition to colonial rule. In May of 1945, the people of Sétif were protesting their exploitation under colonial rule and calling for the release of Messali Hadj—an Algerian labor organizer imprisoned in France. The brutal repression of this event led to many deaths, and there were reports of Algerians shot in the back while fleeing the scene.<sup>68</sup> Sub-Saharan African soldiers participated in the concerted repression of the protest, and at one point it was estimated that they shared responsibility of massacring 6,000 Algerians.<sup>69</sup> While their role in this massacre was minor, their participation in it broadens our understanding of *tirailleurs sénégalais* after World War II, and how they transgress the binary pairing of aggressor and victim in colonial massacres. Obviously, West African soldiers had little room to oppose their orders, but Algerian populations fleeing the protest acknowledged that *tirailleurs sénégalais* were agents of the repressive colonial state.

There was no question in Morocco and Madagascar of civilian populations' view of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as symbols of French colonialism. During March and April of 1947, Moroccan and Malagasy civilians directly targeted *tirailleurs sénégalais* in demonstrations against forms of colonial oppression. In both Madagascar and Morocco, *tirailleurs sénégalais* had been part of invading colonial forces in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their images were bound up in the memory of French conquest and the *tirailleurs sénégalais* had become permanent ground forces in both colonies after the dust of conquest had settled. Unsurprisingly, they became targets of colonial unrest in Moramonga and Casablanca in 1947.

During the night of March 29-30, Madagascan peoples, some of whom were World War II veterans, attacked the French military base at Moramonga.<sup>70</sup> Moramonga, located at the southern tip of Madagascar, was a cantonment where *tirailleurs sénégalais* were quartered in impermanent housing structures: predominantly thatched huts. Since West African troops were sheltered in highly flammable housing, they were more vulnerable to the Madagascan people set on destroying the camp. These straw huts were set on fire and those *tirailleurs sénégalais* who did not die from smoke inhalation were killed by their own weapons or by arms purloined from the French military's magazine.<sup>71</sup> According to French reports, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* interpreted the Moramonga uprising as an attack specifically targeting West African soldiers. Considering the violent history of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Madagascar, this was not an

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<sup>67</sup> These massacres are addressed by Yves Benot, *Massacres coloniaux, 1944-1950: la IVe République et la mise au pas des colonies françaises* (Paris: La Découverte, 2001).

<sup>68</sup> Recently dramatized in Rachid Bouchareb, *Hors-la-loi* (France: Tessalit Productions, 2010).

<sup>69</sup> Charles-Robert Ageron, "Les troubles du nord-constantinois en mai 1945: Une tentative insurrectionnelle?" *Vintième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 4 (October 1984), 36, and Jean-Louis Planche, *Sétif 1945: Histoire d'un massacre annoncé* (Paris: Perrin, 2006), chapter entitled, "Les Massacres du 8 mai," as well as file 16H333 at CHETOM.

<sup>70</sup> CAOM, FMcote74, Rapport d'ensemble sur les événements de Madagascar, undated, fmcote74, CAOM.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

unfounded assumption.<sup>72</sup> During the initial night of the attack, thirteen *tirailleurs sénégalais* were killed, and twelve injured. Instead of appeasing troops' outrage, French officers unleashed *tirailleurs sénégalais* to retaliate in a blind state of anger. These *tirailleurs sénégalais* attacked villages in the environs of Moramanga, razed domestic structures and massacred a number of Madagascan civilians who had probably not participated in the uprising.<sup>73</sup>

Only a week later, there was another attack upon *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Casablanca, Morocco. On April 8 1947, *tirailleurs sénégalais* were confined to their barracks in interior Moroccan cities of Fez and Meknes for fear of civilian reactions to events taking place in coastal Casablanca over the evening of April 6, 1947.<sup>74</sup> A public quarrel between a female Moroccan civilian and a *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Casablanca's red light district, led to the deaths of sixty-three people and 118 seriously wounded.<sup>75</sup> April 6, 1947 was Easter Sunday, and the majority of West African soldiers serving in Casablanca were on holiday leave. Thus, when civilian Moroccan men responded to the quarrel in the red light district by attacking off-duty *tirailleurs sénégalais*, there were dozens of West African soldiers who reciprocated the violence. Several *tirailleurs sénégalais* responded to the event by opening fire on the Moroccan crowd that had gathered around the ensuing brawl. This was not an isolated incident. Violent clashes between North African civilians and *tirailleurs sénégalais* were not limited to the events in Sétif and Casablanca described in this section. Low-level clashes between North African civilians and *tirailleurs sénégalais* were often reported and trivialized by French officers throughout the twentieth century.<sup>76</sup> This points to deeper historical trans-Saharan relationships that are linked to narratives of slavery status and racialized social hierarchy in North Africa. Another interpretation of the events in Casablanca may be that be linked to Arab paternalism since many of these conflicts arose near locations where Maghrebi women were engaged in military sex work.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

In all three uprisings, Algerians, Moroccans, and Madagascans viewed *tirailleurs sénégalais* as agents of French colonialism. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* played many roles during, World War II and in its aftermath and straddled the binary categories allotted to colonial peoples. The segregation of French imperial political allegiances into Vichy and Free France led to *tirailleurs sénégalais*' deployment on either sides of that political divide: making them Allied and Axis troops simultaneously. The most perplexing result of AEF's unique rally to de Gaulle

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<sup>72</sup> For further information regarding prejudices of Malagasy towards West Africans as a result of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' military deployments in Madagascar, please see Amadou Ba, "Les 'Sénégalais' à Madagascar: Militaires ouest-africains dans la conquête et la colonization de la Grande Île (1895-1960)," (doctoral thesis, Université Paris-VII, 2010), Chapter entitled "Entre stigmatization et integration par les Malgaches."

<sup>73</sup> Report signed by Pellet, the Director of Military Affairs, 29 May 1947, fmcote74, CAOM.

<sup>74</sup> Journal de Marche du 5ème RTS, Dossier 1, 8 April 1947, 7U2827, SHDT.

<sup>75</sup> "GRAVE INCIDENTS entre Sénégalais et marocains," *L'Echo du Maroc*, 8 April 1947.

<sup>76</sup> Conclusion drawn from my observations of the French military archives and many interviews with West African veterans.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from General Breuillac in Algiers, 27 April 1945, as well as Letter from Lieutenant Mercadal, 3 April 1945, 1K294, ANS.

and Free France was the encounter of sub-Saharan African French colonial soldiers under the separate banners on the battlefields of Syria. An engagement with the local populations led to exchanges between civilians and soldiers regarding Islam and anti-colonial ideologies. West African soldiers serving in French Indochina formed relationships with the civilian populations in order to weather the Japanese eclipse of Vichy power in Indochina. Romantic relationships between West African *originaires* and Vietnamese women during World War II set a foundation for the proliferation of these relationships during the French-Indochinese War.

The importance of West African soldiers' participation in imperial conflicts during World War II has been marginalized by the contemporary politics of France's neo-colonialism in West Africa and the debates surrounding *tirailleurs sénégalais*' pensions. The place of Thiaroye and images of West African POWs in the recent historiography and memory has obscured West Africans' role in World War II. This chapter has shown how sub-Saharan African soldiers' roles in French empire add provocative layers to the narrative of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in the war. And in doing so, it becomes clear that the *tirailleurs sénégalais* should not be limited by national or post-colonial readings of the war because these projects distill their experiences in the war to suit a particular teleological agenda.

## Chapter Six: West Africans in Indochina, 1945-1954<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the French-Indochinese War, Senegalese soldier Alioune Fall was employed as gravedigger near the border of the Seventeenth Parallel in Vietnam. Fall was not digging fresh graves. He was exhuming the corpses of soldiers who were “mort pour la France.”<sup>2</sup> In 1954, France was rapidly withdrawing from northern Vietnam at the request of the newly independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Independent Vietnam required the French to remove their presence from Vietnam’s independent soil, which included fallen soldiers. Fall’s recollection of Vietnam’s acrimony towards the withdrawing colonial state, and its soldiers, intimated the violence and intimacy of the nine-year-long French-Indochinese War. This war began in the aftermath of World War II because of France’s weak position in Indochina and the rise of popular support for Ho Chi Minh, who had declared Vietnamese independence in September 1945. When the French attempted to reassert their authority in Indochina, they found themselves in a full-scale guerilla war with the indigenous population.

In the history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ imperial deployments, the French-Indochinese War was fascinating because of the nature of guerilla warfare, advances in military technology and psychology, as well as Indochinese culture and landscapes. Aside from Madagascar, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in empire had predominately deployed in Arab regions—North Africa and the Levant. The openness of Vietnamese culture and the physical and social freedom of women in Indochina drastically altered how sub-Saharan African soldiers interacted with the civilian populations that they were at war with.<sup>3</sup> The French-Indochinese War was the first large-scale anti-colonial war that they participated in. For the first time, West African soldiers confronted the ironies of being colonial subjects suppressing other colonial subjects’ calls for political sovereignty. Agents of the Vietminh specifically targeted France’s colonial soldiers serving in Indochina with anti-colonial propaganda.<sup>4</sup> The French military countered with radio broadcasts in Wolof and the Bureau of African Affairs, which monitored troops’ morale. For the first time, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were the focus of two major propaganda campaigns determined to win their loyalty to opposing causes. These psychological campaigns demonstrated the degree to which the French military became interested in managing the psychological health of their West African soldiers.

This chapter frames sub-Saharan Africans’ deployments in Indochina within the paired themes of intimacy and violence. Due to the absence of battlefields in guerilla warfare, the

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<sup>1</sup> French Indochina included the contemporary nations of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Vietnam was further divided into Tonkin in the north, Annam in the central region, and Cochinchina in the south.

<sup>2</sup> “Mort pour la France” means “Died for France.” Found in Mamadou Sellou Diallo, “Itinéraire d’un Ancien Combattant de la deuxième guerre mondiale, de la guerre d’Indochine et de la guerre d’Algérie.” (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic year 2003-2004).

<sup>3</sup> In this chapter I employ sub-Saharan African soldiers, in place of West African soldiers because of the greater use of troops from AEF in the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

<sup>4</sup> The Vietminh was a political and military nationalist organization for that had been formed during Japan’s occupation of Indochina. This organization became affiliated with communism during the Vietnamese-American conflict, and was rebranded Vietcong—literally Vietnamese communists in Vietnamese.

*tirailleurs sénégalais* lived among civilian populations, which made them vulnerable to ambush and surprise attacks. Their close proximity to civilians also facilitated exchanges of a romantic nature. The chapter appraises how soldiers were prepared for the particularities of the French-Indochinese War—prior to their deployment and once they were on the ground in Vietnam. West Africans’ deaths, alcohol abuse, disease, and desertions were a direct result of under-preparation, the violence of guerilla war, and the intimacy that soldiers shared with the Vietnamese population. The endurance of the romantic relationships that West Africans shared with Vietnamese women transgressed the political divisions and chronological boundaries of the war. After 1954, the integration of soldiers’ interracial families to West Africa illustrated how the French-Indochinese War had surprising and lasting effects in West Africa.

### Preparing for Indochina

As mentioned in Chapter Four, *originaires* soldiers served in French Indochina as early as the 1920s. At that time, the French debated deploying *tirailleurs sénégalais* there, but ultimately decided against it. These debates resurfaced after Ho Chi Minh’s declaration of Vietnamese independence. General Charles de Gaulle opted against using sub-Saharan African troops in Indochina for similar reasons raised in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> De Gaulle’s opponents countered his decision by citing Britain’s successful use of sub-Saharan African troops in Burma and underlined the fact that the need for military manpower in Indochina rendered *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ skin color a mute point.<sup>6</sup> Training camps in France and West Africa began preparing West African troops for Indochina, and the first *tirailleurs sénégalais* arrived in Hanoi and Haiphong in Tonkin, in 1947.<sup>7</sup> From that point forward, sub-Saharan Africans’ presence dramatically increased during the conflict.<sup>8</sup>

Year	French	Foreign Legion	North Africans	Africans	PFAT	Totals	Africans’ % of total
January 1946	59,985	7,121				67,106	
January 1947	51,175	11,131				62,306	
January 1948	51,530	12,259	10,787	2,260	713	77,549	2.9%
January 1949	43,633	11,741	13,591	5,813	757	75,535	7.7%
January 1950	46,767	17,868	25,478	12,015	868	102,996	11.7%
January 1951	48,145	16,664	22,892	13,281	1,018	102,000	13%
January 1952	56,917	19,893	32,861	17,445	1,294	128,410	13.6%
January 1953	56,158	19,224	29,553	17,072	1,629	123,636	13.8%
January 1954	53,109	18,224	36,720	19,731	2,080	129,864	15.2%

In observing these numbers and percentages, one must note that the French metropolitan troops and West African *originaires* had entered the military as part of their legal and civic

<sup>5</sup> Michel Bodin, *La France, et ses soldats, Indochine, 1945-1954* (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 1996), 49.

<sup>6</sup> “Note sur les effectifs nécessaires en Indochine,” 9 December 1945, 15H113, CHETOM.

<sup>7</sup> Tonkin was the northern region of Vietnam, where the majority of fighting took place.

<sup>8</sup> “Forces Françaises Terrestres en Extrême Orient, 1946-1953,” 15H113, CHETOM. PFAT is an acronym for the French Army’s female personnel.

obligation to the French state; however, those who deployed to Indochina had done so voluntarily.<sup>9</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais* who signed up as “volunteers” had no choice regarding where they were deployed. Those who had not enlisted as voluntary soldiers, were technically not supposed to serve in Indochina, which led to the retooling of France’s recruitment efforts in West Africa.

The following section analyzes *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ motivations for enlisting in the French colonial military, as well as how the general composition of the organization shifted in the aftermath of World War II. Juxtaposed with the 1944 massacre at Thiaroye, the increasing number of West Africans who signed up voluntarily for military careers directly after World War II was perplexing. There was an available pool of re-enlistees because of the repatriation of POWs and the dissolution, transfer, replacement, and reorganization of seven regiments at the end of World War II.<sup>10</sup> One would have thought that the intrigue surrounding Thiaroye would have discouraged volunteers for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The French passed laws to make volunteering for military service more attractive and they made an effort to convert conscripts to volunteers at the end of their first year of service.<sup>11</sup>

There were other factors playing into West Africans’ decisions to enlist in the colonial military during the French-Indochinese War. As in previous recruitment drives, African intermediaries—particularly *chefs de cercles* or *chefs de cantons*—benefitted from coercing young men into the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>12</sup> During the French-Indochinese War, these intermediaries recorded recruits’ status as “volunteer” when the opposite was true.<sup>13</sup> *Chefs de cercles* and *chefs de cantons* accumulated favors and monetary bonuses for producing volunteers for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Marketing was another new effort to recruit volunteers for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The French colonial military funded public spectacles in West Africa that included parachutist demonstrations, photo expositions, speeches by veterans, and film screenings. Some of the titles of the films selected for these viewings were *The Battle of Tonkin*, *Our Soldiers in Black Africa*, and *The Nights of the Army*. Archival evidence suggests that these screenings were poorly attended, and those who did attend were women, children, and drowsy veterans.<sup>14</sup>

Informants for this project cited additional reasons for enlisting in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, which illustrated that young West African men in 1940s and 1950s viewed the colonial military as a tool to create an optimal future. Military service aided recruits in securing social independence and accumulating responsibility. The president of the veterans association in Dakar believed that many *tirailleurs sénégalais* enlisted in the colonial army during the

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<sup>9</sup> Jacques Dalloz, *The War in Indo-China 1945-1954*, translated by Josephine Bacon (Dublin, Ireland: Gill and Macmillan Ltd., 1990), 103.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Bodin, *Les Africains dans la guerre d’Indochine, 1947-1954* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000), 15-16.

<sup>11</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), 108-110.

<sup>12</sup> *Chef de cercles* and *chefs de cantons* were West African local leaders of rural districts, whose authority was buttressed by the French colonial administration. Furthermore, they acted as recruitment agents for the colonial military.

<sup>13</sup> Koly Kourouma, interview, Dakar, 13 November 2007 and Massaly Solabé, interview, Ziguinchor, 5 March 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from the Governor of Soudan to the Governor General of the AOF, 29 May 1954, 17G520V143, ANS.



Indochinese war for financial gain and to quench wanderlust.<sup>15</sup> Other veterans claimed they had a taste for military life or were attracted to powerful image of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' uniform.<sup>16</sup>

Omar Diop recalled that he had volunteered for the French military due to a woman. As an young adult, Diop found employment with an uncle working on the installation of the electrical line between Bambey and Fatick in Senegal. After a year of work, he returned to Thiès in 1954 to marry the woman he had had a crush on during adolescence. The day he arrived in Thiès was the day of her wedding to a veteran of the French-Indochinese War. In response to this disappointment, Diop enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to emulate the man who had married his intended.<sup>17</sup> Amady Moutar Gaye enlisted in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in order to assert his personal autonomy from his father, who was a veteran of World War II. In order to prevent Gaye's enlistment, his father hid his birth documents. Amady Moutar Gaye negotiated this hurdle and enlisted by orally providing his civic and genealogical information.<sup>18</sup>

*Tirailleurs sénégalais* volunteers found growing opportunities for education and military training upon their enlistment. In 1949, Babacar Bâ and Ousmane Socé Diop, the Senegalese deputy to the French National Assembly, proposed to increase the opportunities for sub-Saharan Africans in the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, which led to the reorientation of the *Écoles des Enfants de Troupe*, or EETs.<sup>19</sup> After the Great War, EETs were established in Saint-Louis, Bingerville, and Kati to educate the sons of active and veteran *tirailleurs sénégalais*. EETs were supposed to indoctrinate these male youth in military order and teach them passable French language skills. The EETs increased the number of recruits available for officer positions in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. After 1949, the EETs transformed into *Écoles Militaire Préparatoire Africaine*, or EMPAs.<sup>20</sup> These military schools would offer more rigorous training in technical skills like radio operation, automotive mechanics, and French. EMPAs expanded their applicant pool beyond the sons of elites and soldiers. Many West Africans were eager to attend these schools because of the new skills offered there and because room, board, and tuition were subsidized by the military. Even though the EMPAs were supposed to be more inclusive, positions were limited and social connections continued to have importance in the application process.

Proposed in 1949, the EMPAs were anticipated to go into affect by November of 1953. During the interim, the French military broke ground on a new EMPA in Ouagadougou, which was a primary school that prepared students to attend EMPAs in Saint-Louis or Bingerville. Saint-Louis was a modern educational facility for secondary education, where students could acquire the equivalent of a high school diploma. Bingerville was a school of technical training where matriculating students attained an Industrial/Professional Certificate. Finally, Kati was a primary school that prepared students directly for military service, or the Ouagadougou EMPA.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Alioune Kamara, interview, Dakar, 27 June 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Koly Kourouma, interview, Dakar, 13 November 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Omar Diop, interview, Thiès, 12 December 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Allasane Fall, "Itinéraire d'un Ancien Combattant de la Guerre d'Algérie," (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2004-2005).

<sup>19</sup> Letter from the General of Division in the AOF, Desbordes, to the Minister of Overseas, 25 May 1949, 4D77V100, ANS.

<sup>20</sup> EMPA was Military Preparatory School for Africans.

<sup>21</sup> Note from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Office of the État-Majeur, 29 September 1953, 4D78V100, ANS.

Thus, on the sliding scale of prestige and quality of education, Saint-Louis was on the high end of the spectrum and Kati at the other end. Upon graduation from the EMPAs, students were obligated to serve for five years in the French colonial military—in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* or in colonial artillery and infantry units (RAC or RIC). A handful of highly successful cadets could apply to exclusive French metropolitan military academies, like Saint-Cyr or Saint Maixent, which were normally reserved for metropolitan Frenchmen and *originaires*. Enrollment in the EMPAs for the 1953-4 year broke down as follows:<sup>22</sup>

	Bingerville	Saint-Louis	Ouagadougou	Kati	Total
Country of origin					
Senegal	17	19	6	7	49
Côte d'Ivoire	28	14	25	20	97
Haute-Volta	26	21	51	37	135
Soudan	19	13	14	39	85
Guinea	22	34	7	8	71
Dahomey	10	16		4	39
Togo	5	7		5	17
Niger	13	3	2		18
Totals	140	127	105	130	502

The majority of *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in the French-Indochinese War did not attend an EET or an EMPA. Their training occurred predominantly at West African military bases and in a five-week intensive training course at Fréjus—a military camp in southern France specially dedicated to colonial troops.<sup>23</sup> Training ideals and realities differed significantly. During the French-Indochinese War, military instruction, firing practice, and guerilla warfare training were highly irregular across *tirailleurs sénégalais* units. Due to the swift mobilization of colonial troops, training camps in West African and southern France were overcrowded and *tirailleurs sénégalais* were the runt of the litter.<sup>24</sup> In 1951, an officer in Indochina commented “Africans arrive with the instruction acquired in their territory of origin. At Fréjus they hardly engage in anything, save forced labor.”<sup>25</sup> One skill that the French military grossly neglected was giving *tirailleurs sénégalais* swimming lessons or familiarizing them with water operations. Many of the accidental deaths of *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Indochina were related to drowning, and many foot and skin diseases resulted from marching in water for extended periods of time.<sup>26</sup>

During the French-Indochinese War, the French military placed greater emphasis on educating troops in French comprehension and literary skills. By the late 1940s, *tirailleurs sénégalais* were instructed with primary education textbooks made explicitly for West Africans. The *Mamadou et Bineta* series, first published in the 1930s, were aimed at students who learned

<sup>22</sup> Announcement from Division General Nyo of the AOF, 10 September 1953, 4D78V100, ANS.

<sup>23</sup> Morale report, 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester 1951, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>24</sup> Bodin, *Les Africains dans la guerre d'Indochine*, 36-37.

<sup>25</sup> Report on Africans' morale, 2 January 1951, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>26</sup> From my observations of morale reports in the 15H and 16H series at CHETOM, as well as general impression from interviews with veterans.

orally and by rote memorization.<sup>27</sup> A retired French Colonel, who commanded *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Tonkin, recalled that French officers were required to enforce a daily reading hour for colonial troops. Colonel Rives did not comment on whether or not officers diligently followed this directive.<sup>28</sup> Rives claimed that by the end of the French-Indochinese war, the majority of *tirailleurs sénégalais* could speak passable French and that Bambara was no longer the *lingua franca* of the sub-Saharan African colonial units.

During the French-Indochinese War, the French colonial military changed the names of the units that the *tirailleurs sénégalais* served in. Prior to 1945, the majority of *tirailleurs sénégalais* served in regiments or battalions (RTS and BTS). In Indochina, they were organized in Marching Battalions (BMTS and BMAOF) or incorporated into Colonial Infantry Regiments (RIC). The first two types of battalions clearly identified its membership by tacking on the TS, for *tirailleurs sénégalais*, or AOF, for French West Africa. The RIC allowed for the mixing of colonial soldiers within one, roughly 1,800 soldier military unit. Within RICs, North African and West African troops were segregated in order to indulge cultural differences and racial hierarchies that the French respected between North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans.<sup>29</sup>

The French also accommodated cultural hierarchies existing among sub-Saharan African soldiers. For example, an Obi soldier from Haute-Volta could not command a Wolof-speaking soldier from Senegal. The French colonial army also tried to arrange their troops in such a way that African officers were the same ethnicity as the bulk of their soldiers.<sup>30</sup> The ethno-linguistic composition of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* continued to evolve during the French-Indochinese War. Ethno-linguistic groups in the forest belt and the southern Savannah continued to swell the ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as Wolof and Bambara peoples decreased in number.<sup>31</sup> Surveys conducted among veteran POWs of the French-Indochinese War suggest that Guinean soldiers eclipsed French Soudanese soldiers, and the French colonial military was relying more heavily on troops recruited from AEF.<sup>32</sup>

## Learning the Lay of the Land

Troops were expected to cohere during the long voyage from Dakar, or Marseilles, to Indochina. During this month-long voyage, they were also informed of Indochina's political, geographic, topographic, and cultural landscape.<sup>33</sup> The picture that the French painted of politics in French Indochina was intentionally reductive and polarizing. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* learned of the major cities of combat and leisure—Haiphong, Hanoi, and Saigon—and that the majority of

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<sup>27</sup> A. Davesne, *Les Premiers Lectures de Mamadou et Bineta* (Paris: Librairie Istra, 1961) and *Nouveau syllabaire de Mamadou et Bineta à l'usage des écoles africains* (Paris: EDICEF, 1986).

<sup>28</sup> Maurice Rives, interview, Paris, 16 June 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Questions concerning this matter were raised and analyzed in Chapter One.

<sup>30</sup> Maurice Rives, interview, Paris, 16 June 2008 and “Fiche d’attention du Général, Chef de l’État Majeur Inter-armées et des Forces Terrestres,” undated, and Morale report on African units, 1<sup>st</sup> Semester 1953, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>31</sup> The ethno-linguistic groups swelling the ranks were Voltaïques, Mandinka, and Mossi peoples spread out across Haute-Volta, eastern French Soudan, Côte d’Ivoire, and Guinea.

<sup>32</sup> The AEF consisted of the contemporary nations of Gabon, Chad, Central African Republic, and the Republic of the Congo. Surveys can be found in 10H445, SHDT.

<sup>33</sup> Alioune Kamara, interview, Dakar, 27 June 2006.

fighting occurred in northern portion of Vietnam, known as Tonkin. Laos and Cambodia were often treated as afterthoughts. The Vietnamese political landscape was very messy. In March of 1949, the French had signed an agreement with Bao Dai to head the State of Vietnam, which counterbalanced Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam.<sup>34</sup> Bao Dai was a puppet of the French colonial military state, which was further financed by the United States and other Western Powers. Ho Cho Minh's declaration for independence was anti-colonial in its intents, but as the war deepened the Vietminh were linked with communist ideologies because of support they received from their Chinese neighbors to the north. *Originaires* soldiers, NCOs and other soldiers fluent in French were better informed of international politics by print media and conversations with French officers. The majority of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* learned about the French-Indochinese War by fighting in it.

Based on the anecdotes that veterans recalled from Indochina, the features of the landscape loomed larger than international politics bearing up French Indochina. The Indochinese landscape varied from the West African Savannah and Sahel. Water was one of the most prominent aspects in veterans' memories of Indochina, whether it was terrestrial or descending from the sky. Water in Indochina was a constant, dangerous threat to *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Southeast Asia is known for its heavy summer rainfall, which often comes down in blinding downpours and violent storms. One West African veteran described Indochina as having "moving ground" due to frequent mudslides and flash floods.<sup>35</sup> Drownings and illnesses resulted from landslides and flash floods. The *tirailleurs sénégalais* were required to stand or march in water, sometimes thigh-deep, for over twenty-four hours at a time. This led to skin diseases and podiatric problems. Ingesting contaminated water was an everyday affair because the military was not able to supply *tirailleurs sénégalais* with functioning water filtration systems that led to dysentery and other intestinal disorders. The frequency of these maladies fueled rumors that their adversaries poisoned water sources.<sup>36</sup> The Vietminh were also blamed for sabotaging water collection apparatuses at rivers, where *tirailleurs sénégalais* gathered water with plastic containers tied to cords. The Vietminh were accused of cutting the cords, which left soldiers without potable water.<sup>37</sup>

Water concealed enemies and other hazards. Several veterans and French propaganda posters conveyed that agents of the Vietminh used water as camouflage to attack French posts and troops. Vietnamese opponents used bamboo shoots as breathing tubes and could therefore exist underwater, nearly undetectable, for hours. One veterans recalled an example in which *tirailleurs sénégalais* were fired upon by Vietnamese village women tending their rice paddies. A group of *tirailleurs sénégalais* passed through their village on a reconnaissance mission, and once the soldiers had their backs to the women, the women dipped into the paddy water and retrieved concealed rifles. They opened fire on the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and injured a couple.

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall, "Introduction," in *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 8. During World War II, the Japanese named Bao Dai emperor of Vietnam.

<sup>35</sup> Samba Diba, interview, Thiès, 12 December 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Report on morale, 2 September 1952, 7U2858, SHD. and Yaya Danfa, interview, Ziguinchor, 6 March 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Salamata Bâ Fall, "Itinéraire de Khadim Ndiaye, Ancien Combattant 1946-1954." (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2002-2003.)

After squeezing off a couple of rounds, the women replaced the weapons in the water and continued their agricultural labor.<sup>38</sup>

Veterans' also claimed that the Vietminh mobilized the flora and fauna of Indochina against *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Pythons hid in rice paddies, riverside vegetation, and trees from which they could drop onto passing *tirailleurs sénégalais* companies. In addition to pythons, scorpions were dangerous, but they paled in comparison to water buffalo. One veteran maintained that Vietnamese water buffalo were tools of anti-colonial warfare. These bovine creatures were typified by their long, curved horns, which they used to gore soldiers after they had marched past the grazing animals.<sup>39</sup>

*Tirailleurs sénégalais*' human adversaries, the Vietminh, were formidable. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* faced opponents that seemed omnipresent and omnipotent. Veterans spoke of the Vietminh with the utmost respect because the Vietminh were excellent soldiers capable of enduring extreme deprivations. Members of the Vietminh were thought of as superhuman soldiers who fought without eating or sleeping.<sup>40</sup> Veterans also accused the Vietminh of unnecessary cruelty and of generating fratricide among Indochinese people. The Vietminh often attacked under the cover of darkness, and used the natural landscape—dense forests, mountains, and caves—as their cover. There were networks of underground tunnels that the Vietminh built and expanded upon during French-Indochinese war.<sup>41</sup> From these strategic positions, the Vietminh attacked *tirailleurs sénégalais* at all hours of the day, which left West African soldiers sleep-deprived and underfed.<sup>42</sup> The constant threat of surprise attack also had detrimental effects for soldiers and the number of reported suicides among *tirailleurs sénégalais* rose in Indochina.<sup>43</sup>

West African soldiers had difficulty distinguishing between civilian and military operatives.<sup>44</sup> The Vietminh was a grassroots organization that relied on local populations, for medical aid, nourishment, and concealment. Women and children often contributed to the anti-colonial war by acting as intermediaries and auxiliaries for the Vietminh. The Vietminh also engaged in tactics that took advantage of commonly held ideas regarding gender and warfare. In one instance a group of men, dressed as women, attacked a unit of *tirailleurs sénégalais* with grenades.<sup>45</sup> Elderly women also participated in the war, and were known to transport weapons in their handbags.<sup>46</sup> The most threatening agents of the Vietminh, according to French propaganda, were the women that sought the romantic attention and patronage of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, who might have been acting as double agents.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Samba Diba, interview, Thiès, 12 December 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Alioune Kamara, interview, Dakar, 27 June 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Aliou Mbodj, interview, Paris, 21 June 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Tom Mangold and John Penycate, *The Tunnels of Cu Chi* (New York: Ballantine, 1985). Although this book refers to the American-Vietnamese conflict, it addresses Vietminh military tactics that began in the French-Indochinese war.

<sup>42</sup> Yoro Sow, "Itinéraire d'un Ancien Combattant aux Guerres d'Indochine et d'Algérie: Djigal Faye né en 1926." (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2005-2006).

<sup>43</sup> Military psychology will be dealt below. Ibrahima Ndour, "Itinéraire d'un ancien combattant." (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2005-2006).

<sup>44</sup> Yaya Danfa, interview, Ziguinchor, 6 March 2008.

<sup>45</sup> JMO of the 32<sup>nd</sup> BMTS in the sub-sector of Phu-Lo, 1 April-30 June 1954, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>46</sup> Amadou Sall, interview, Dakar, 5 December 2007.

<sup>47</sup> I deal with these women at length below.

## Keeping Track of Soldiers

“Loss” was a catchall term that the French used to describe a variety of complex, detailed processes that took *tirailleurs sénégalais* out of commission. Medical evacuations occurred for physical and mental health reasons. Sub-Saharan African troops were sent to Cap Cam Ranh and Cap Saint-Jacques military bases in order to psychologically rehabilitate. Those with physical injuries were often hospitalized somewhere in Vietnam, then sent to France if they could not recover. Veteran Aliou Sarr, after stepping on a landmine, bounced around Vietnam, southern France, and finally received his prosthetic leg when he returned to Dakar.<sup>48</sup> Missing soldiers were often assumed dead due to the hazards of the landscape and capricious nature of battle. There were quite a few accidental deaths and drownings assigned to *tirailleurs sénégalais* who went missing.<sup>49</sup> The French army did not recuperate the bodies of soldiers, which led to erroneous recording-keeping. In at least one case, an African soldier was recorded among the missing dead and he was still present in the ranks of his military unit.<sup>50</sup> Since maintaining record of soldiers was slipshod while they were on campaign, the dead and the missing were often confused with deserters or POWs.

According to Michel Bodin, the losses of African troops serving in Indochina, between 1947 and 1954, were as follows:<sup>51</sup>

Year	Officers	Under-Officers	Troops	Total	Total African effective	% Of total African effective
1947		8	108	116	Unreported	N/A
1948	1	12	171	184	2,260	8.1%
1949	1	23	324	348	5,813	6.6%
1950	2	58	745	805	12,015	6.7%
1951	2	50	847	899	13,281	6.8%
1952	2	44	956	1,002	17,445	5.7%
1953		51	1,084	1,135	17,072	6.6%
1954		61	1,242	1,303	19,731	6.6%
TOTAL	8	307	5,477	5,792		

By comparison, the statistics for the losses of French troops were 5,398 officers, 13,121 under-officers, and 21,151 troops between 1945 and 1954. The losses of French troops was roughly 15.1% of the total French effective, which revealed that African soldiers were not dying in greater percentages than French people.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Loba Ba, “Itinéraires des Anciens Combattants: Souleyemane Hanne, Aliou Sarr, et Ousmane Sarr,” (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2002-2003).

<sup>49</sup> Michel Bodin, *Les Combattants français face à la guerre d’Indochine, 1945-1954* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998), 209.

<sup>50</sup> “Additifs et Rectificatifs au Listes de Pertes Antières au 8 Juillet 1952,” 22 July 1952, fmdam286, CAOM.

<sup>51</sup> Bodin, *Les Africains dans la guerre d’Indochine*, 212. Percentage of total troops calculated with CHETOM, 15H113, Forces Françaises Terrestres en Extrême Orient, 1946-1953, chart reproduced above.

<sup>52</sup> Michel Bodin, *Les Combattants français face à la guerre d’Indochine, 1945-1954* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998), 209.

Exploiting the French military's inability to account for missing troops, some *tirailleurs sénégalais* crossed enemy lines to join up with the Vietminh. Veterans had mixed feelings about desertion in Indochina. Some viewed desertion as an act of cowardliness and others read it as a sign of bravery. The second opinion was particularly prominent among Guinean veterans. None of this projects' informants admitted to desertion, but the circulating rumors were fascinating. One veteran explained how *tirailleurs sénégalais* could join forces with the Vietminh. Under the cover of darkness, a soldier slipped out of a French military post and when he neared a Vietminh encampment, the absconding soldier waved a white handkerchief to indicate his peaceful intentions. He would then negotiate his integration into the Vietminh.<sup>53</sup> West African veterans hypothesized that there were very few *tirailleurs sénégalais* who deserted, but those who did were aware that the *Vietminh* did not execute their POWs. Thus, deserting *tirailleurs sénégalais* knew that they could weather the war in Indochina with the Vietminh.<sup>54</sup>

Among Guinean veterans, there was a respect for those *tirailleurs sénégalais* who had crossed enemy lines. These veterans shared a celebrated tale of one Guinean soldier, General Zaoro, who had deserted the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to join the Vietminh. His dedication to the Vietminh led to his rapid promotion and he became a general among the ranks of the Vietminh. Rumor glorified General Zaoro for his fearlessness, mercilessness, and wit, particularly in his dealings with *tirailleurs sénégalais* who continued to loyally serve the French. Zaoro intentionally sought to convert other sub-Saharan African soldiers to the Vietminh by giving them the opportunity to escape ambushes. When General Zaoro was going to attack a particular post defended by *tirailleurs sénégalais*, he would send a messenger the night prior to warn them that "General Zaoro would be taking his coffee with them the following morning."<sup>55</sup> This warning permitted *tirailleurs sénégalais* to make decisions regarding their loyalties. Guinean veterans asserted that many readily submitted to General Zaoro because of their common origins. Guinean veterans also claimed that the Vietminh funded General Zaoro's repatriation to Guinea after 1954, where he was fêted as a war hero.

Deserters were often confused with POWs, which means the official numbers of POWs and deserters were skewed. One veteran intimated that some deserters took advantage of the chaos of evacuation following the Fall of Dien Bien Phu. These deserters reported to the French military and claimed that they were POWs. These crafty men had designs on catching a ride back to West Africa.<sup>56</sup> According to the Vietminh, they had detained 686 *tirailleurs sénégalais*, whereas the French claimed that number was closer to 1,040.<sup>57</sup> The French colonial army conducted a survey of 680 sub-Saharan African POWs in 1954 and 1955 in order to determine the affect of the war on them.<sup>58</sup>

Archival documents and veterans demonstrated that once in captivity, sub-Saharan African POWs were not particularly mistreated by the Vietminh. In fact, the Vietminh abused *tirailleurs sénégalais* in some of the same ways that the French treated them as colonial soldiers. The French reported that the Vietminh assigned *tirailleurs sénégalais* with the worst work in the

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<sup>53</sup> Aliou Mbodj, interview, Dakar, 31 December 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Morale report of the head of the 29<sup>th</sup> BMTS, Portal, 6 March 1951, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>55</sup> Thierno Conté et al., interview, Conakry, 23 February 2009.

<sup>56</sup> "Synthèse, sur le moral de militaires africains du CFEO," during the 1<sup>st</sup> Semester 1055, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>57</sup> Morale report on the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 1951, signed by Panier of the 30<sup>th</sup> BMTS, 18 June 1951, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>58</sup> 10H424, SHDT.

POW camps, that they were beaten with bamboo rods, and that they consumed food lacking in sufficient salt.<sup>59</sup> At Fréjus, the French assigned the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to hard manual labor instead of properly training them. There were also reports that *tirailleurs sénégalais* suffered from bouts of beriberi and other diseases affiliated with malnourishment in Indochina because the French did not provide them with proper nutrition.<sup>60</sup> Living in a POW camp did not sound particularly different, and at least the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were no longer on edge regarding ambushes and threatening flora and fauna. Of the 680 veteran POWs that the French interviewed, few made comments about the nature of their imprisonment. Those who did, detailed six to seven hour workdays that included two-hour long midday breaks. Their dietary regimen consisted of rice and dried fish, few leisure activities, and mandatory education sessions.<sup>61</sup>

Like the French, the Vietminh segregated colonial soldiers from metropolitan French soldiers in POW camps. Instead of using this tactic to respect racial hierarchy like the French, the Vietminh bifurcated troops to better serve the dissemination of their anti-colonial propaganda.<sup>62</sup> The Vietminh tailored their propaganda for the *tirailleurs sénégalais* by focusing on their shared colonial identity as mistreated subjects of the French. The Vietminh hope to fan the flames of military disobedience among POWs and active *tirailleurs sénégalais*. In one attempt to inspire soldiers to defect to the Vietminh, they sent messages to *tirailleurs sénégalais* that there were anti-colonial riots in Dakar in 1951. The Vietminh promised that if soldiers deserted, they would finance their repatriation to West Africa.<sup>63</sup>

The French colonial military believed in the powers of the Vietminh's propaganda. They observed that liberated West African POWs were contaminated with poor spirits because of "Marxist" re-education programs. The French viewed anti-colonialism as part of communist ideology. In order to contain the spread of Vietminh propaganda via liberated POWs, the French mandated several weeks of rest and permanent contact with loyal, obedient African troops.<sup>64</sup> The French military often refused to reintegrate liberated POWs into active army units before they had taken an extended leave of absence in their colony of origin.<sup>65</sup> In order to monitor the effects of this propaganda, the French colonial military increasingly trespassed into *tirailleurs sénégalais*' corporeal and psychological health. This also included scrutiny into their romantic and domestic relations with Indochinese women. In Indochina, the French colonial military intertwined *tirailleurs sénégalais*' psychological health with their relations with women.

In order to improve their understanding of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' performance in Indochina, the French colonial military inaugurated the Bureau of African Affairs (BAA) in 1952. This was a special military unit that specifically dealt with incidents involving West African soldiers. The BAA was structured in a way that mirrored the colonial system in West Africa. A French metropolitan officer oversaw the bureau and sub-Saharan African officers staffed and managed the offices, and they were held accountable for the majority of the legwork.

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<sup>59</sup> Report on the morale of Africans freed by the Vietminh, 13 November 1954, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>60</sup> Report penned by Lieutenant Tamsir Ba of the BCSC, 20 March 1954, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>61</sup> 10H424, SHDT.

<sup>62</sup> Bodin, *Les Africains dans la guerre d'Indochine*, 172-173.

<sup>63</sup> Morale report on the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 1951, signed by Panier of the 30<sup>th</sup> BMTS. 18 June 1951, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>64</sup> Report on the morale of Africans freed by the Vietminh, 13 November 1954, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>65</sup> List of losses prior to February 4, 1952, list number 79721, 17 March 1952, fmdam286, CAOM.



The BAA's offices were organized hierarchically. The central BAA in Saigon was directed by Captain Gerard, who was seconded by an African officer—Captain Guedou. Captain Guedou was the field agent responsible for observing and reporting on all African troops stationed in southern and central Vietnam, as well as Laos and Cambodia. The other official centers of the BAA were in Hanoi and Haiphong, in Tonkin, and headed by Captains Keita and Soglo respectively.<sup>66</sup> A sub-Saharan African secretary and orderly were attached to each location. From its inception, the BAA was underfunded and dependent on other departments and offices with the French military.<sup>67</sup> There were more problems than the BAA's agents could handle and they lacked the authority to discipline metropolitan soldiers who mistreated *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Transportation, when available, was lent to the BAA by the Bureau of Muslim Affairs. The central office of the BAA, in Saigon, shared office space with the Bureau of Muslim Affairs. The bureaus in Tonkin lacked physical offices.

The African agents selected for the BAA were officers in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* or *originaires*. Aside from being a ranking sub-Saharan African soldier, the prerequisites for these positions were fluency in French and an assumed innate proficiency in West African cultures. The French believed that sub-Saharan African officers could assess and provide insights into sub-Saharan Africans' morale without additional training in psychology or sociology. Agents of the BAA regional offices were required to periodically visit troops on campaign and make general assessments on their performance, obedience, and attitudes—particularly flagrant subversive behavior and violent behavior, like suicide. Agents were also required to visit the sick and injured, to assist liberated POWs, and to receive, transmit, and follow-up on individual *tirailleurs sénégalais*' personal requests. The trimestrial reports filed by Captains Guedou, Keita, and Soglo portrayed how they embodied the roles of guidance counselors, therapists, secretaries, and psychologists. Their observations kept the French military in the loop regarding *tirailleurs sénégalais*' inter-personnel relations, alcoholism, and sex.

### **Racism, Binge Drinking, and Women**

French officers, soldiers, and members of the Foreign Legion verbally abused *tirailleurs sénégalais* with racial slurs and derogatory language. One particularly incendiary phrase combined Wolof and French—*sales-bougnouls*—to insult *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>68</sup> French officers referred to their sub-Saharan African troops as “bon enfants,” which demonstrated *tirailleurs sénégalais*' minor status, as well as the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were not equal with other troops.<sup>69</sup> Within hearing distance of a group of *tirailleurs sénégalais*, a French non-commissioned officer claimed that he would rather command pigs than Africans.<sup>70</sup> This would

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<sup>66</sup> As an interesting aside, Captain Soglo became Benin's Chief of Staff of the National Army after independence and led a coup d'état in 1963.

<sup>67</sup> Instruction concerning the functioning of African Affairs in Indochina, 12 April 1952, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>68</sup> Annual report on the morale of Africans, signed by Captain Guedou, 13 January 1953, 10H420, SHDT. *Sales* in French means dirty, and *bougnouls* is a derogatory grammatical modification of Wolof to indicate a black man. Wolof speakers would not refer to themselves as *bougnouls*.

<sup>69</sup> Report on morale from 1 June 1952, 10H363, SHDT. Battalion Chief Cabestan claimed that *tirailleurs sénégalais* still remained good children.

<sup>70</sup> Summary of an inspection on morale of Africans between 2 to 15 August 1951, signed by Guedou, 10H420, SHDT.

have been particularly insulting to Muslim soldiers who abstained from consuming pork. French military higher-ups were often dismissive of African soldiers' sensitivity to racism, which only exacerbated tensions between sub-Saharan African troops and French servicemen in Indochina.<sup>71</sup> These insults adversely affected *tirailleurs sénégalais*' morale and caused violent and fatal repercussions. There were several documented cases where *tirailleurs sénégalais* committed homicide or suicide.<sup>72</sup>

Some *tirailleurs sénégalais* took to binge drinking as a means cope with the stresses of the French-Indochinese War. Binge drinking progressed to alcoholism, which was detrimental to soldiers' physical health and morale. One French officer estimated that at least ten percent of a *tirailleurs sénégalais* battalion were alcoholics and forty percent habitually consumed alcohol. Another estimate, claimed that ninety percent of the African effective in Indochina, and one hundred percents of African NCOs drank alcohol occasionally.<sup>73</sup> The French blamed the metropolitan troops and Foreign Legionnaires, who set a poor example with their excessive alcohol consumption.<sup>74</sup> French recruitment boards in West Africa were also at fault because they preferred soldiers from in regions with less contact with Islam. West African Muslims may have been more opposed to drinking alcohol. In order to prevent *tirailleurs sénégalais* from spending their military pay on *choum*, the French launched a propaganda campaign that reminded *tirailleurs sénégalais*' of their dependents in West Africa, who depended on their remittances.<sup>75</sup>

Another threat to *tirailleurs sénégalais*' morale was their physical health. The French military believed that any combination of traumatic stress, climate, difficult terrain, and battle conditions negatively impacted sub-Saharan African soldiers' physical and psychological health. In some of these cases, French negligence was the source of health issues that could have been avoided. Due to the combination of ill-fitting boots and extensive marches in water, *tirailleurs sénégalais* were plagued podiatric maladies.<sup>76</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais* were particularly susceptible to respiratory infections, and continued to be plagued by beriberi because they were consuming too much rice and nothing more. In one case, a French military medical professional examined a group of ailing African troops and discovered that the majority had beriberi. A couple of them had the tumor-like lesions of tertiary stage syphilis. Had *tirailleurs sénégalais* received better education regarding sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and sexual health, the French military may have prevented the death of one *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The others diagnosed with syphilis were sent to France or West African for treatment and recovery.<sup>77</sup>

The French colonial military often blamed the transmission of STIs on local "clandestine" Indochinese women and/or contaminated military brothels (BMC). Clandestine

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<sup>71</sup> Morale report on the 3/24<sup>th</sup> RMTS, 18 December 1954, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>72</sup> Letter written by Captain Drabo 18 and 20 January 1954, another reported in a letter dated 28 March 1954, and the final in a report from Captain Guedou concerning the 31<sup>st</sup> BMTS on 19 May 1953, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>73</sup> Morale report 1<sup>st</sup> semester 1953, signed by Baudenon of the 1/24<sup>th</sup> RMTS, 1 December 1952, and a morale report, signed by Cabestan, commandant of the 1/24<sup>th</sup> RMTS, 1 June 1952, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>74</sup> Morale report 1<sup>st</sup> semester 1952, signed by Linard, 16 June 1952, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>75</sup> Pamphlet entitled, "African Soldiers: A bit of Advice!" 10H242, SHDT. Choum was a locally produced alcoholic beverage made of fermented rice that was often infused with essences.

<sup>76</sup> Morale report, signed by Captain Martin-Jarrand, commander of the 26<sup>th</sup> BMTS, 9 December 1952, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>77</sup> Morale report on African troops during the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester 1952, signed by Captain Salmon, 10 April 1952, 10H420, SHDT.

women were those who had romantic relationships with *tirailleurs sénégalais*, but were not under the official management of the BMC. These women were threatening to the French military because they could be double agents of the Vietminh or carriers of communicable diseases. Medical professionals in Indochina prescribed BMCs as a means to proactively combat STIs. The BMCs in rural military posts were referred to by the adjacent town's names. The large brothels in Saigon carried much more exotic names, like Buffalo Park or Ice Cream Palace.<sup>78</sup> In BMCs, the French managed transactional sex and could oblige soldiers to use prophylactics.<sup>79</sup> The French military use propaganda and threats to discourage soldiers from seeking women outside of the BMCs, but many *tirailleurs sénégalais* did not like the BMCs. The preferred romantic relationships with a little more substance, through which they could build social relationships.<sup>80</sup>

The BMC was a place of contestation because local communities condemned the use of Vietnamese women as sex workers. The military dealt with this issue by relocating women from one region to another so that their social connections with the local community were minimal.<sup>81</sup> BMCs were also sites where the various soldiers serving the French came into conflict with one another. In one case, a groups of Vietnamese soldiers, who were French partisans, savagely assaulted a soldier from Niger because he had been frequenting the services of a Vietnamese soldier's preferred lady. This quarrel continued to manifest throughout the following day and resulted in injuries for twelve Vietnamese soldiers and five *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>82</sup> In another example, a *tirailleurs sénégalais* killed his sub-Saharan African lieutenant because he found out that he was sharing his Indochinese girlfriend with him.<sup>83</sup> Given its problems, the French military believed that the BMC provided an outlet for sexual tensions that otherwise led to sexual assaults perpetrated by French colonial forces in the Vietnamese villages.<sup>84</sup> One veteran claimed that he unconditionally avoided women in Indochina because of the problems associated with them.<sup>85</sup>

*Tirailleurs sénégalais* often sought romantic relationships with Indochinese women outside of BMCs. The French military was apprehensive of this because they feared the possibility of intimacy between *tirailleurs sénégalais* and female double agents of the Vietminh. The French believed that *congaïes* spread Vietminh propaganda, which inspired disobedience and desertion on the part of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.<sup>86</sup> *Congaïes* were Indochinese women, unaffiliated with the BMC, who had enduring sexual relations with occupying French forces. In many instances, the French claimed that these women were troops' concubines, who simulated

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<sup>78</sup> Jean Gomis, interview, Dakar, 2 February 2009.

<sup>79</sup> Michel Serge Hardy, *De la morale au moral des troupes ou l'histoire des BMC, 1918-2004* (Panazol: Lavauzelle, 2004), 121.

<sup>80</sup> Report from the 1<sup>st</sup> semester 1952, signed by Captain Malet, of the 30<sup>th</sup> BMTS, 15 June 1952, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>81</sup> Circumstantial report from under-lieutenant Baba Famory, African Officer of the 27<sup>th</sup> BMTS, regarding an event occurring from 21 April to 1 May 1951, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>82</sup> "Incident entre les elements Viet-namiens et Africains," signed by Soglo, 8 June 1954, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>83</sup> Morale report from the sub-sector of Phu-Lang-Thuong, signed by Mouret of the 26<sup>th</sup> BMTS, 4 December 1952, 10H363, SHDT.

<sup>84</sup> Maurice Rives, interview, Paris, 16 June 2008.

<sup>85</sup> Solabé Mansaly, interview, Ziguinchor, 5 March 2008.

<sup>86</sup> The spelling of this word in archival documents varies from *congaïe*, to *congaye*, to *con gai*. I have chosen the first spelling. When quoting, I will follow the archival source.

domestic partnership that bordered on co-habitation. Frank Proschan explained that, “*Con gai* simply means ‘young woman, girl, female child,’ but its semantic in the French discourse shifted over time from ‘woman’ to ‘wife’ to ‘mistress’ to ‘whore’, ultimately accomplishing linguistically to the degradation of all womanhood to whoredom.”<sup>87</sup> Archival documents portray how the *tirailleurs sénégalais* understood how these meanings simultaneously coexisted during the French-Indochinese War. Due to their indeterminable loyalties, the French military also construed *congaïes* as dangerous. The French military blamed protracted liaisons between *congaïes* and African troops for the decrease in military discipline (particularly irregular absences), alcohol abuse, and desertion for love.<sup>88</sup> Another undesirable outcome of sexual relations between West African troops and local women in Indochina were interracial children, labeled “Africasian” by the French.

The French military was unable to completely prohibit romantic relationships between *tirailleurs sénégalais* and Indochinese women. The French were also unable to proscribe all contact between Indochinese civilians, agents of the Vietminh, and *tirailleurs sénégalais*. When on leave, sub-Saharan African soldiers frequented local businesses and dancehalls, which made their movements predictable and easier for the Vietminh to exploit. In one report, a soldier was attacked while attempting to pick up a suit from a tailor.<sup>89</sup> Conversely, one veteran commented that *tirailleurs sénégalais* had a good rapport with Indochinese civilians, which was evidenced by the number of marriages between them.<sup>90</sup> In one example, befriending members of the local population benefitted *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Veteran Mamadou Diallo decided to make the acquaintance of an elderly Indochinese woman because he claimed he sought someone to educate him in local customs. Due to their friendship, she warned him of a Vietminh plot to attack *tirailleurs sénégalais* who frequented a local nightclub. Diallo believed that he avoided injury and potentially death as a result of her advice.<sup>91</sup>

### **Investing in Distractions to War**

Mamadou Diallo avoided incident for one night, but his account showed how acute the threat of attack, on duty and in leisure was for *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in Indochina. In order to assuage troops’ anxieties, the French military provided distractions on a grand scale. Prior to the French-Indochinese War, the French military had attempted a range of measures to improve *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ morale. The “negro villages” of the Moroccan campaign, the distribution of kola nuts, and impromptu cultural celebrations of World War II were trumped by the French military’s efforts in Indochina. After 1945, there was a new military initiative to provide *tirailleurs sénégalais* with West African cultural items and separate spaces specifically dedicated to West Africans’ leisure. These efforts were guided by the morale reports submitted by the BAA, as well as by examples that were already in place for North African and European

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<sup>87</sup> Proschan, Frank, “‘Syphilis, Opiomania, and Pederasty’: Colonial Constructions of Vietnamese (and French) Social Diseases,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 11, No. 4, October 2002, p. 614.

<sup>88</sup> SHD, 10H420, report from Captain Drabo, 16 December 1954.

<sup>89</sup> Report signed by Captain Keita, concerning the 26<sup>th</sup> BMTS, 22 March 1952, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>90</sup> Mamdou Bernard Ndiaye. “Itinéraire d’un ancien combattant de la guerre d’Indochine, 1954-1962,” (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure, Academic Year 2005-2006).

<sup>91</sup> Cécile Ndioné, “Itinéraire d’un ancien combattant: Mamadou Diallo” (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2005-2006.)

troops. In their efforts to provide *tirailleurs sénégalais* distractions of their own, the French championed and entrenched the cultural differences between peoples from the various regions of their empire.

The French military generated print media and radio broadcasts for their soldiers serving in Indochina with encouraging messages and reports detailed French successes. By 1953, a French broadcasting service, Radio Hironnelle, programmed a daily half-hour emission dedicated to African troops.<sup>92</sup> The wife of a Senegalese *originaires* officer, Marie-Désirée Diagne, spoke on the air to encourage West African troops and provide them with “feminine encouragement.”<sup>93</sup> These emissions were in Wolof, which was odd considering Wolof speakers made up a tiny fraction of the sub-Saharan contingent serving in Indochina. The French were able to occasionally diversify the languages offered through this program during the 1954 celebration of New Year’s Eve. Radio-France-Asia and Radio-Dakar collaborated to record personal family messages in Dakar for Senegalese troops stationed in Indochina.<sup>94</sup> While the gesture seemed to be directed at all *tirailleurs sénégalais*, it showed once again, a remarkable favoritism for the minority of Senegalese soldiers, particularly *originaires*, serving in Indochina.

In an effort to create something of a culturally oriented leisure club for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, a representative of the French military proposed the creation of two “African Houses,” which would be cultural centers filled with French media dedicated to sub-Saharan Africa: musical recordings of West African music, and popular leisure activities—like cards and checkers. The African Houses were designed in an architectural style imitated the Sahelian mosque in Djenné, Mali, which had also served as a prototype for mosque at the military camp in Fréjus.<sup>95</sup> These African Houses were projected for construction in Saigon and Haiphong, but they never came to fruition because the Indochinese conflict ended in 1954. Even though the buildings were never constructed, the military made efforts to distribute cultural items to West African troops. Kola nuts, West African drums, picture magazines like BINGO, and pop musical recordings circulated among *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in Indochina. The military also distributed pre-fabricated care packages from West Africa and imported tomato paste and West African spices for *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ alimentation.<sup>96</sup> The French military made a surprising effort to condone religious practices and funded the pilgrimage of a Muslims sub-Saharan African lieutenant, in 1952, and twenty *tirailleurs sénégalais* infantrymen, in 1955, to visit the holy sites of Mecca and Medina during the month of Hajj.<sup>97</sup>

The French encouraged *tirailleurs sénégalais* to maintain contact with their families in West Africa. Even though most *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their families were illiterate, the French sponsored letter writing campaigns among soldiers and in West African communities. Intermediaries—French and African—aided in composing letters, which fundamentally revised correspondence in order to promote a positive picture to the intended recipients. Military

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<sup>92</sup> SHD, 10H420, report from Captain Keita, 29 April 1953.

<sup>93</sup> Sophie Diagne, interview, Dakar, 8 December 2007,

<sup>94</sup> ANS, 4D76V100, an untitled piece of paper in a folder dated February 1954

<sup>95</sup> Letter from the General of Armed Forces Navarre, 25 September 1953, 4D76V100, ANS.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Intendance to the Superior Commander of Armed Forces AOF-Togo, 7 October 1952, 4D76V100, ANS and Report from Captain Keita, 25 April 1953, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>97</sup> Synthesis of morale reports concerning African military men during the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 1955, 10H420, SHDT, and Letter from General Salan to the Commander of Ground Forces in Indochina, 17 July 1952, 4D76V100, ANS.

censors also blacked out certain types of information, like deaths and divorces, which negatively affected the morale of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The flawed international banking system that delivered soldiers' remittances to their families was also a source of concern for the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. This wiring service often failed to deliver money orders to rural locations in AOF, and soldiers held their French superiors in Indochina accountable.<sup>98</sup>

### **Evacuating Troops, Legitimizing Marriage, and West African Integration**

Before the French military could repair the problems in their international wiring service, the French-Indochinese War ended in 1954. With the Fall of Dien Bien Phu, the civilian population of Indochina routed France, and North African and sub-Saharan colonial troops were present to witness its defeat. At the Geneva Conference, the international community recognized Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia's political sovereignty. Vietnam was divided at the Seventeenth Parallel, which served as the boundary between Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Emperor Bao Dai's Republic of Vietnam in the south. This division led to large-scale migrations and evacuations for Vietnamese people and French forces. Pro-communist forces and Vietminh supporters generally migrated to the north and French military forces, anti-communists, and French sympathizers evacuated south. Due to stipulations agreed upon at the Geneva Conference, the French were required to withdraw to south of the Seventeenth Parallel within three hundred days of the conference's conclusion on July 21, 1954.<sup>99</sup> Alioune Fall's employment as a gravedigger demonstrated how literally the French took this requirement. The French colonial government also offered to transport south the northern Vietnam residents who feared Ho Chi Minh's communist government. One French officer estimated that at least 150,000 of the 400,000 people residing in Hanoi alone would request assistance to evacuate south.<sup>100</sup>

The French military also dealt with locating, processing, and evacuating French forces, which included POWs, soldiers' Indochinese wives and children, during those 300 days. There were *originaires* soldiers and *tirailleurs sénégalais* who desired to leave Indochina with their wives and children in tow. The following case studies grapple with the ways in West African soldiers' romantic relationships weathered the conclusion of the French-Indochinese War. The violence and intimacy of this war led to marital unions, desertions, and transnational migrations. The choices made by West African soldiers and the Indochinese women illuminated a variety of difficulties for cross-colonial lovers in the aftermath of a violent war of decolonization, as well as the problem of integrating stateless wives and children into West African societies. Their romantic relationships were challenged at every step of the journey by French bureaucracy, Indochinese cultural values, and West African expectations of repatriating soldiers.

Romantic liaisons between Indochinese women and sub-Saharan African soldiers often led to semi-monogamous relationships, which were regarded as marriages by both partners of the union, although not officially recognized by the French colonial civil administration. Several Senegalese veterans admitted to emulating married life in Indochina, then losing contact with their partners and offspring when transferred to another combat zone or shipped back to France

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<sup>98</sup> One example among many, Morale report on the period between April 1<sup>st</sup> and June 30<sup>th</sup> 1954, signed by Captain Dutilh, 30 June 1954, 10H420, SHDT.

<sup>99</sup> Dalloz, *The War in Indo-China 1945-1954*, 300.

<sup>100</sup> CAOM, Spce74, "BQR NVN n° 15h/RG du 10 juillet 1954, 'Évacuation Delta,'" 10 July, 1954.

and West Africa.<sup>101</sup> The limitations of telecommunications, reliable postal services, and proficiency in a shared language made maintaining contact with Indochinese women and children difficult. The experiences of *tirailleurs* and *originaires* soldiers varied quite drastically regarding how they made their marriages official, as well as how they openly socialized with Vietnamese people. *Originaires*, French officers, and Vietnamese partisans lived side by side, in interracial marriages, in military family housing throughout the conflict. Their families shared in celebrating major holidays and frequently paid each other social calls. One Senegalese woman born to two *originaires* parents in Hanoi, had photo albums full of ornate weddings between West African *originaires* and Vietnamese women that occurred prior to and during the French-Indochinese war.<sup>102</sup> There were many marriages between *originaires* and Vietnamese women that survived the Fall of Dien Bien Phu.

The whirlwind, multi-staged evacuation from Tonkin to Saigon, then Saigon to France and the African continent often ruptured *tirailleurs sénégalais*' relationships with their Indochinese partners and children. The legislative and bureaucratic process for legalizing romantic unions and registering children was complex and difficult to access. Several *tirailleurs sénégalais* extended their tours of duty in Indochina in order to file and receive the proper paperwork validating their marriages with local women.<sup>103</sup> In Indochina, marriages were processed by the civil administration. Colonial soldiers were required to make formal requests through the military chain-of-command prior to receiving marriage certificates. The intertwining of the colonial military and civilian regimes around the issue of *indigènes* soldiers' marriage in foreign territories was a result of the complexities that arose in the interwar period with the integration of foreign women into AOF. The colonial state's also had a financial obligation to *tirailleurs sénégalais*' families and dependents.<sup>104</sup> If sub-Saharan African soldiers formally married Indochinese women, the military was obligated to increase their monthly salaries so that soldiers could support their families. Official marriages also obligated the French military to provide transit for their family to West Africa.

Prior to evacuating *tirailleurs sénégalais* from Indochina, the French military funded the surveying and registration of unions between West African soldiers and Indochinese women. Agents of the Bureau for African Affairs were in charge of this complex process, where multiple voices converged to locate, register, and convey interracial families to West African and French destinations. The end of the French-Indochinese War separated and ruined some families. Indochinese women's relatives exerted pressure on them to remain in Indochina, while sub-Saharan African soldiers claimed paternal rights to their children. In some cases, children accompanied their fathers to West Africa and definitively lost contact with their mothers. In other cases, Indochinese women abandoned their mixed children to French social programs, like orphanages, in order to avoid the shame of having a bastard, mulatto child. Several West African soldiers visited orphanages to adopt abandoned mixed children and brought them to West Africa.<sup>105</sup> There were also examples cited by veterans that described some *tirailleurs sénégalais* who took advantage of the chaos of evacuation to desert in 1954 to remain with their

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<sup>101</sup> Alioune Sow, interview, Saint-Louis, 15 January 2008, and Bakary Bieye, interview, Ziguinchor, 6 March 2008.

<sup>102</sup> Sophie Diagne, interview, Dakar, 8 December 2007.

<sup>103</sup> SHD, 10H420, report from Captain Drabo, 16 December 1954.

<sup>104</sup> Urbain Diagne, interview, Dakar, 26 February 2008.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

wives and children. There was rumored to be one Guinean soldier who had five children with his “unofficial” Indochinese wife. He never returned from Indochina.<sup>106</sup>

The Fall of Dien Bien Phu reversed the ways in which the French military treated the romantic relations between *tirailleurs sénégalais* and Indochinese women. Throughout the conflict, archival documents portrayed French officers’ derision towards these liaisons. After the Fall of Dien Bien Phu, the French were willing to assist those women who had formed relationships with soldiers during the nine-year conflict. Urbain Diagne, an *originaire* officer who worked with the BAA, claimed that the French military promised to fund the international transport of “Africasian” children, but did not guarantee that of the mothers. Agents of the BAA registered the children and told their mothers to bring them to port in order to board boats embarking for France. Many women could not part with their children and refused to show up at the docks on assigned mornings. A rumor circulating among Senegalese veterans claimed that the independent Ho Chi Minh government endeavored to retain the children fathered by West Africans as part of a program to eugenically engineer a taller race of Indochinese people.<sup>107</sup> Women, who brought their inter-racial children to port, parted with their children in hysterics. Veteran Bacary Bieye opined that these women would have thrown themselves in the sea if there had not been a barrier at the pier.<sup>108</sup>

In interviews, Indochinese wives and their (now adult) children lingered on the voyage from Indochina to West Africa. This voyage symbolized a severance from the experiences, places, and people they had known, as well as the genesis of their lives in a new world that was circumscribed by their husbands’ social and familial networks. Asstou Bâ, was merely a girl of eleven when she left Indochina for Senegal. Her recollection of the voyage to West Africa was that of a child fascinated by the rapid changes around her.<sup>109</sup> Another woman, the daughter of a Senegalese/Vietnamese union, was eighteen when her family fled Indochina for France. She viewed her family’s relocation as an expulsion because the Vietminh had quite literally given the French “a good spanking.”<sup>110</sup> Her mother, Madame N’Diaye, concurred that the Fall of Dien Bien Phu was the beginning of her permanent exile. She left Indochina with eight children, all fathered by her Senegalese husband and raised in Saigon until 1954. Madame N’Diaye’s elderly mother moved with the family to Dakar and never saw Indochina again. During the voyage, Madame N’Diaye recalled counseling the *tirailleurs sénégalais* who had left their Indochinese wives, pregnant or with small children, in Indochina.<sup>111</sup>

Once these immigrating Indochinese women arrived in Senegal, they employed a variety of strategies to integrate into Senegalese society. Often the greatest barriers to integration were their in-laws, who viewed them as illegitimate wives. Several daughters of one Vietnamese/Senegalese family assured me that there were constant complex social and familial pressures for veterans of the French-Indochinese War to divorce their Southeast Asian wives and begin afresh with a Senegalese wife in order to raise a proper Senegalese family.<sup>112</sup> During the

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<sup>106</sup> Bakary Bieye, interview, Ziguinchor, 6 March 2008.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibrahima Ndour, “Itineraire d’un ancien combattant,” (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2005-2006.)

<sup>109</sup> Asstou Bâ, interview, Dakar, 2 February 2008.

<sup>110</sup> Hélène N’Diaye, interview, Dakar, 22 February 2008.

<sup>111</sup> Anne-Marie Niane, *L’Étrangère* (Paris: Éditions Hatier International, 2002), 12.

<sup>112</sup> Hélène N’Diaye, interview, Dakar, 22 February 2008.



1950s, Senegalese marriages were considered a union between two families, which was brokered by male heads of household. Returning married veterans' had disregarded this customary practice, which illuminated one reason why Senegalese families viewed Indochinese women as illegitimate wives. In Indochina, it was common practice that a groom would move into the household of his wife, but it was quite the opposite in Senegal. Indochinese women coped with this by living near, yet apart from their in-laws. They often had difficulty in establishing clear boundaries between their nuclear and extended family. A particular discrepancy, which often led to bitterness between these Vietnamese women and their in-laws, was the sensitive issue of money-lending and mutual financial dependence. Senegalese in-laws made claims on the military pensions and widow's pay that were allotted to West African veterans and their Indochinese wives by the French government.<sup>113</sup>

Vietnamese women were also unsettled by cultural differences between Vietnam and Senegal, and defied social rules in order to retain autonomy from their in-laws and maintain their Vietnamese culture. Vietnamese women were available to West African soldiers in Indochina because Indochinese cultural norms did not constrain them from circulating outside of their homes in mixed company. Conversely, Senegalese women's physical mobility was more constrained by conservative and gendered social norms. Many of the Vietnamese war brides sought part-time jobs outside of the home in order to supplement their household's income. However, none of these women could gain a toehold in occupations traditionally occupied by Senegalese women. Some Indochinese women engaged in fashioning and trading Southeast Asian jewelry and many specialized in making Vietnamese food, like *nem*, and sold it informally from their homes.<sup>114</sup>

Other cultural choices, like religion, language, and style of dress determined the degree to which these women were accepted by their husbands' communities. Some of the Indochinese wives converted to Islam, particularly Buddhists or those who had not formally practiced organized religion prior to moving to Senegal. Asstou Bâ, who was adopted by a Senegalese soldier, was raised by his family in Kaolack. They raised her as a Muslim and she spoke Wolof better than she spoke French and rarely donned Vietnamese clothing except for large cultural events, like Vietnamese New Year. Conversely, one Catholic Vietnamese bride refused to convert to Islam as part of an effort to preserve her, and her children's, cultural heritage. Madame N'Diaye also refused to don a *grand boubou*, and until the end of her life, wore a traditional Vietnamese tunic.<sup>115</sup> Her eight children speak Vietnamese and French better than Wolof, even though many of them spent their formative years in Senegal. The Vietnamese population in Senegal made efforts to organize and celebrate their expatriate community, especially Vietnamese holidays like Têt.<sup>116</sup> The generation currently in their fifties, especially those who spent their formative years in Indochina, relished their difference from Senegalese people due to their exceptional physical characteristics, poor Wolof skills, and privilege.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> H  l  ne N'Diaye, 22 February 2008, Asstou B  , 2 February 2008, and Ninh Beye, 27 February 2008 all interviews conducted in Dakar.

<sup>114</sup> Sophie Diagne, interview, Dakar 19 March 2008. *Nem* is a fritter filled with vegetables and meat, chicken, pork, or seafood.

<sup>115</sup> A *grand boubou* is an outfit made up of yards of expensive cloth and exquisite embroidery work, which denotes the social position of woman in Senegal.

<sup>116</sup> I attended one such event--Indochinese New Year on February 8, 2008, in Dakar S  n  gal.

<sup>117</sup> Jean Gomis, interview, Dakar 2 February 2009.

Many Indochinese war brides expressed a desire to some day return to their native land. However, during the 1950s and 1960s colonial politics, cold-war politics, and economic restraints prohibited their travel to Southeast Asia. The majority of the Indochinese war brides were considered French subjects after their expatriation from Saigon. As West African countries transitioned into independence after 1958, many of these women lost their claims to French civil status and became citizens of the country in which they were resident at the time of independence. The majority of those interviewed in Dakar with Vietnamese ancestry had secured their French citizenship, or double nationality, through diplomatic connections and marriage.<sup>118</sup> The women living in West Africa were legally severed from the colonial system that had been a part of their existence since birth, but also the system that had brought their husbands into their lives. After 1960, these wives had little choice in accepting the newly independent Senegalese government, and their weakened political ties to Vietnam, and the French government. Madame N'Diaye summed up her position; “Upon my arrival to Dakar, I harbored the hope of one day returning to Vietnam. This idea has since been abandoned. The Senegalese soil is now somewhat mine, since it shelters the roots of my descendants.”<sup>119</sup>

## Conclusion

The Vietnamese women and the interracial families that returned to West Africa were one of the unexpected outcomes of the French-Indochinese War. France’s defeat by a colonial population mobilized by nationalistic ideals was another. Some West African soldiers that served in French Indochina came away with a new perspective regarding their own place within French empire. During the French-Indochinese War, the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* evolved into a tool for defending France’s claims against colonial subjects violently suing for independence. The ethno-linguistic composition of the soldiers reflected heavier recruitment in the West African Savannah and AEF, as well as new efforts to recruit “volunteers” for Indochina. New educational opportunities increased troops ability to speak French and their technical skills. The first skill also increased their ability to converse and form relationships with civilians. West Africans’ ability to read and speak French made them the focus of propaganda campaigns emanating from the Vietminh and the French. The French military invested more heavily in *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ morale in order to maintain their allegiance and enhance soldiers’ performance on battlefields.

Regardless of troops’ performance on the battlefields, the French ceded their authority in French Indochina after the Fall of Dien Bien Phu in May of 1954. The sub-Saharan African troops who survived the conflict came away with a better French skills, technical skills, psychological problems, and families. Those soldiers who wished to continue their careers within the ranks of the colonial army would have a new assignment before the year ended. The explosive beginning of the Algerian anti-colonial conflict occurred on November 1, 1954. Some *tirailleurs sénégalais* were directly sent to Oran or Algiers from Saigon. The following chapter uses the French-Algerian War as the setting where many *tirailleurs sénégalais* began their final demobilization and decolonization.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., and Felicité N’Diaye and Anne-Marie Niane, group interview, Dakar, 25 February 2008.

<sup>119</sup> Niane, *L’Étrangère*, 21.

## Chapter Seven: Decolonizations and the End of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, 1954-1962

Near the beginning of the French-Algerian war, the French employed Franz Fanon as a psychiatrist in Algiers. Among the case studies presented in the final chapter of his seminal critique of colonialism, *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon included case notes regarding a European police inspector who sought psychiatric help to understand why he physically abused his family. During the interview, the inspector recounted the methods he employed to extract information from Algerian prisoners. This violent process not only wore prisoners down, it also physically fatigued the torturers. “In the end your fists are ruined. So you call in the Senegalese. But they either hit too hard and destroy the creature or else they don’t hit hard enough and it’s no good.”<sup>1</sup> This quote drew me into this research project. France’s employment of West African colonial troops in torture chambers in the French-Algerian War was shocking when I first encountered them there. When included in the final substantive chapter of this dissertation, there is nothing particularly unusual about the French military deploying *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Algeria in the 1950s. The French had deployed *tirailleurs sénégalais* in Algeria since 1909 in parallel with their early deployments in Morocco. The French-Algerian War was complex conflict of decolonization in itself, but also provided the political landscape that catalyzed the decolonization and demobilization of sub-Saharan African troops.

By the mid-1950s, France’s empire was rapidly shrinking. Algeria and its sub-Saharan African colonial federations—AOF and AEF—were France’s last claims to imperial power. The former erupted in war in 1954, which heavily influenced the relationship between France and AOF and AEF. Anti-colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria prompted the French to redesign their relationship with sub-Saharan Africa. This came with the ratification of the Loi Cadre (Enabling Law) in 1956, which promoted an “africanization” of the middle and senior levels of the West African colonial state and army. In 1958, the French Colonial Referendum intended to redefine the relationship between France and its overseas territories by awarding more autonomy to colonial populations. In the voting process, French Guinea rejected the reconfiguration of empire and won immediate independence. The independence of Guinea in 1958 had importance consequences for the *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in Algeria because a large percentage of them were from Guinea. The ensuing processes of surveying and repatriating Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais* to Conakry set a precedent for the complete dismantling of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* with general West African independence in 1960. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*’ delayed demobilization illustrated how West African soldiers’ experiences in decolonization were unique because of the position that they had occupied as intermediaries in French colonialism.

The institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* transgressed the chronological boundaries of the colonial period because West African soldiers were coveted for their military skills. Since national defense was important in establishing national sovereignty, nascent West African countries fought to recuperate their nationals from the battlefield of Algeria between 1958 and 1962. Independent West African countries and France quarreled over access to *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ labor. West African soldiers felt allegiance to the French military and to the newly forming nations in former AOF. West African independence placed colonial soldiers on the

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 269.

threshold of uncertainty because it presented new alternatives that threatened their military careers and endangered their ability to receive veterans' benefits. West African independence also offered them numerous opportunities in enterprising West African nation-states. The experiences of repatriating West African soldiers during decolonization questions the championing of West African political independence as the incontrovertible solution to the shortcomings of colonization.

### **A Terribly Different Algeria?**

The French-Algerian War literally began with a bang when coordinated explosions erupted across Algeria on the morning of November 1, 1954. These bomb attacks targeted police stations, army barracks, and other colonial state infrastructure. The Front Libération National (FLN), or National Liberation Front, claimed responsibility for the attacks alongside a rallying call to Algerians to mobilize against the French colonial state. These attacks came only six months after the Fall of Dien Bien Phu in Indochina and came to signify the onset of another lengthy French colonial conflict. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* had been stationed in Algeria as early as 1909 and their presence would increase significantly after 1954.

Algeria's unique historical position in French national and imperial history affected the nature of the war, which in turn affected *tirailleurs sénégalais*' experiences in Algeria. Coastal Algeria had been a part of French empire since 1830. European and Mediterranean settlers, known as *colons* or *pieds noirs*, had settled the littoral regions of Algeria since the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> By the twentieth century, Algeria was politically part of France, as opposed to its empire. Algeria's minority *colon* population dominated the local economy and government.<sup>3</sup> The majority of the Algerian population had experienced political disenfranchisement, social marginalization, and territorial alienation. The French-Algerian War accentuated the divisive animosity and uncertainty among the various Algerian social categories, political partisans, educated elites, and militants, which gave the conflict the appearance of fratricidal war.<sup>4</sup> The French colonial military deployed West African servicemen in this conflict.

Many of the West African veterans interviewed for this research project served in Indochina and Algeria. When asked to describe the latter, they often framed their Algerian service by contrasting it to Indochina. Since some West African soldiers were directly transferred from Saigon to Algiers or Oran, the disparities between the two anti-colonial wars struck them quite starkly. In Indochina, the majority of fighting occurred in rural locations, and veterans remembered the major cities of Saigon, Hanoi, and Haiphong as spaces of relaxation and leisure.<sup>5</sup> In Algeria, urban environments were battlegrounds between representatives of the militarized branch of the FLN and French paratroopers until the end of 1957.<sup>6</sup> During 1957, General Massu and eight thousand paratroopers moved into Algiers and held the city hostage

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<sup>2</sup> For further information on this process, see David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> *Colons* and *pieds noirs* were references to colonists and their descendants who lived in Algeria.

<sup>4</sup> For a personal account see Mouloud Feraoun, *Journal 1955-1962: Reflections on the French-Algerian War*, trans. Mary Ellen Wolf and Claude Fouillade (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Alioune Kamara, interview, Dakar, 27 June 2006.

<sup>6</sup> The FLN, or National Liberation Front, was the major political movement in Algeria between 1954 and 1962.

while the French military ferreted out Algeria dissidents.<sup>7</sup> By the beginning of 1958, large-scale Algerian resistance against French colonialism was pushed to rural areas. Disorganized mountain fighting continued in the mountainous regions east and west of Algiers (Oranais and Kabylia), as well as to the south in margins of the Sahara. Throughout this conflict, the Algerian *moudjahidines* relied heavily on the civilian population for supplies, shelter, and financing in the cities and the mountains.<sup>8</sup> *Moudjahidines* sought refuge in civilian spaces, which meant that this war was fought in cultivated fields, urban streets, and kitchens. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* found themselves facing weapons that ranged from rifles to kitchen utensils.<sup>9</sup>

The violence of the French-Algerian War and its uninhibited transgression of public and private spaces adversely affected the *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in Algeria. Similar to the Indochinese War, the French colonial military monitored West African troops' morale in order to prevent psychological problems. In 1955, the military's Psychological Bureau proposed a special division for sub-Saharan Africans, which would act more dynamically than the BAA in Indochina. The West African agents in the Psychology Bureau would be responsible for the production of all media—journals, periodicals, and photos—for spaces of leisure where *tirailleurs sénégalais* congregated. These agents also organized motivational film screenings and radio programs targeting West African troops on Radio-Algeria. They were also supposed to monitor *tirailleurs sénégalais* and manage the importation and distribution of kola nuts and West African musical recordings.<sup>10</sup>

Although the African division of the Psychological Bureau was proposed in 1955, archived reports from African agents Tiemoko, Tiecoura, Triande, Conde, and Fofana began in 1959. Prior to the formal employment of these agents, French commanders managed *tirailleurs sénégalais*' morale. Early reports on sub-Saharan African troops' psychological health illustrated the particular problems that veterans of the French-Indochinese War suffered from in Algeria. Those West African soldiers who transferred to Algeria from Indochina, without taking leave in West Africa, were hospitalized more often with Algeria for psychological problems.<sup>11</sup> One *originnaire* veteran described the bouts of amnesia that occurred at onset of his psychological episode, which landed him in a racially segregated military hospital in Constantine.<sup>12</sup> He was discharged and repatriated to Saint-Louis because of his inability to recuperate.

The heavy use of torture and the bitter savagery of the French-Algerian conflict negatively impacted seasoned *tirailleurs sénégalais* veterans of Indochina. As portrayed in the Franz Fanon citation above, *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in Algeria were assigned some of the dirtiest work of that war. West African colonial soldiers were also subject to propaganda and counter-propaganda from the French military and FLN, both of which manipulated atrocious

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<sup>7</sup> Massu's assault on Algiers was portrayed in Gillo Pontecorvo's film *The Battle for Algiers*.

<sup>8</sup> *Moudjahidine* is an Arabic term that means freedom fighter. *Maquis* was a French word used to describe these people, which was a neologism coined for the underground French resistance to German occupation in World War II. Originally *maquis* meant scrub brush.

<sup>9</sup> Yoro Sow, "Itinéraire d'un Ancien Combattant aux Guerres d'Indochine et d'Algérie: Djigal Faye né en 1926," (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2005-2006).

<sup>10</sup> Document concerning the Psychological Bureau for the Chief of Headquarters, 5 November 1955, 1H2454, SHDT.

<sup>11</sup> Report from Orsini, 9 May 1956, 1H2454, SHDT.

<sup>12</sup> Alioune Sow, interview, Saint-Louis, 23 January 2008.

events to win the loyalty of *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The militarized wing of the FLN, the National Liberation Army (ALN), welcomed *tirailleurs sénégalais* deserters. *El Moudjahid*, the official publication of the FLN, enticed them with anti-colonial and pan-African propaganda.<sup>13</sup> A photograph accompanying an article in *El Moudjahid* entitled “The Algerian Conflict and African Anti-colonialism” portrayed sub-Saharan African soldiers posed next to ALN soldiers. The subtitle read, “African fraternity forged in the Algerian *maquis*.”<sup>14</sup> This article juxtaposed African solidarity with an accusation against the French military for falsifying events in order to incite animosity between *tirailleurs sénégalais* and Algerians. In April of 1956, three sub-Saharan African soldiers were killed in a clash with a contingent of the ALN in Bône, in eastern Algeria. According to the article, the French recovered the cadavers, horribly mutilated them, presented the corpses to *tirailleurs sénégalais* back at camp, and then blamed the post-mortem butchering on Algerians. Counterclaims regarding this brutal incident demonstrate how the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were targeted by two sets of propaganda that manipulated the most vicious events of the war.

The general operation of military brothels and the health of the sex workers were interconnected the French military’s efforts to provide psychological support for West African servicemen in the Algerian War. The French constructed military brothels and often stocked them with young women from poor villages. Agents of the Psychology Bureau updated headquarters on military brothels in morale reports. These reports included details on mobile BMCs, which were military brothels that traveled with *tirailleurs sénégalais* units.<sup>15</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais*’ romantic relations with Algerian women were often limited to the BMC.<sup>16</sup> In Algeria, contact between civilian women and *tirailleurs sénégalais* was circumscribed by social convention, which restricted the physical movements of women outside of private spaces. A few rumors ran through archival documents regarding Algerian women and acts of espionage. One veteran also stated that the FLN sent the *tirailleurs sénégalais* young Algerian women to get them drunk and extract information.<sup>17</sup>

If casual contact with women was rare in Algeria, the inverse was true for Muslims *tirailleurs sénégalais* seeking a means to expand on their religious beliefs. By 1956, one report estimated that roughly sixty percent of sub-Saharan African troops serving in North Africa (Morocco and Algeria) had culturally self-identified as Muslim. However, it was estimated that only thirty percent were practicing Muslims.<sup>18</sup> Sub-Saharan African troops’ ability to attend mosque and respect the pillars of Islam depended on the rhythms of war and where they were stationed in Algeria. One veteran reported that he feared for his personal safety when he

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<sup>13</sup> Articles in *El Moudjahid*, or the freedom fighter, were predominantly written anonymously. However, it is a commonly held belief that Franz Fanon authored many of these articles after he joined the FLN’s cause in exile, in Tunisia.

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous, “Le Conflit Algérien et l’Anti-colonisme africain,” *El Moudjahid*, 11, 1 November 1957.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Laporte, 1/3ème RIC, 7 May 1956, 1H2454, SHDT and Morale report from Tiecoura, 28 November 1959, 1H2455Bis, SHDT.

<sup>16</sup> Military Brothel.

<sup>17</sup> Papa Samba Gueye, “Itinéraire d’un Ancien Combattant: la Parcours de Samba Ndiaga Diop Tirailleur de la Guerre d’Algérie (1954-62),” (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2005-2006).

<sup>18</sup> Report on “l’état d’esprit des troupes africaines,” H. Pierre, 3 May 1956, 1H2454, SHDT.

attended daily prayer because of the ubiquitous threat of ambush and attack.<sup>19</sup> Mosques were considered safe havens, but walking to them without weapons or company was considered foolhardy.

Some Muslim veterans viewed their military service in Algeria as a period of exception in their religious life. The climate and the rhythms of battle emboldened Muslim sub-Saharan African troops to engage in behaviors unaffiliated with Islam. As one veteran put it with a wink, “Adding whiskey to one’s coffee was mandatory for survival in the mountains of Algeria.”<sup>20</sup> The whiskey acted as insulation for the freezing temperatures, as well as a social lubricant. In addition to providing Muslims with whiskey, the French colonial military also provided Muslim *tirailleurs sénégalais* with rams for annual Eid El-Kebir celebrations.<sup>21</sup> *Originaires* sub-officers in camp were allowed to abandon their uniforms on Tabaski and wear traditional West African dress.<sup>22</sup> As in Indochina, the French also sent a select few to Saudi Arabia to complete Hajj during the Muslim month of pilgrimage. The French military adapted to West African soldiers’ religious needs during the French-Algerian War and they also provided new opportunities for *tirailleurs sénégalais* within military order.

### **Improving Soldiers and Reorganizing Empire during the Algerian Crisis**

Between the spring of 1956 and the autumn of 1958, events in North Africa heavily influenced France’s imperial and military policy, which in turn affected West African troops. In the spring of 1956, France relinquished its protectorate status in Morocco, which had been *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ training ground and international layover since 1908. As a result of the new power shift, *tirailleurs sénégalais* found themselves verbally and physically attacked by emboldened Moroccan civilians.<sup>23</sup> On the heels of Morocco’s independence, the French passed the Loi Cadre in June 1956. This legislation aimed to empower sub-Saharan Africans within colonial military and civic institutions. The Loi Cadre enabled the “africanization” of the middle ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, a name change, and the removal of racial barriers in West African troops’ promotion within the military’s hierarchy. During 1957, the brutality of the Battle for Algiers and the political intrigue surrounding the war in Algeria caused the fall of the Fourth French Republic. General Charles de Gaulle reclaimed French premiership in order to resolve the Algerian question and France’s failing relationship with its dwindling empire. In September of 1958, French colonies voted in an empire-wide Constitutional Referendum regarding their inclusion in a colonial federation. If colonies approved the federation, they managed their internal affairs, but ceded ultimate sovereignty to France. This section weaves the results of the Loi Cadre in 1956 and the Constitutional Referendum in 1958 into the history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

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<sup>19</sup> Youssouf à Lô, interview, Dakar, 20 November 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Sanga Samb, interview, Saint-Louis, 16 January 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Eid-El-Kebir is a Muslim holiday where sheep are sacrificed in the twelfth month of the Muslim calendar to commemorate the sacrifice of Abraham. This holiday is called Tabaski among most West Africans.

<sup>22</sup> Demba Sao, interview, Thiès, 18 December 2007.

<sup>23</sup> János Riesz and Joachim Schultz, eds., *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* (New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1989), 268.

The Loi Cadre, facilitated a marked improvement upon the French colonial armed forces' professionalization of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. After 1956, the French colonial military increased educational opportunities in French West Africa. In the aftermath of World War II, West African politicians Babacar Bâ and Ousmane Socé Diop had called for an improvement in the mission and quality of education in West African military preparatory schools (EMPAs). By 1953, the reorganization of the EMPAs in Saint-Louis, Kati, Ouagadougou, and Bingerville had begun. These institutions predominantly provided basic education, military training, and technical instruction to West African *indigènes*. Matriculating students were required to join the armed forces for five years after the completion of their studies and would walk into sub-officer positions, which included sergeant, corporal, or warrant officer. The Loi Cadre empowered the colonial military to break ground on an officers' school for *indigènes* at Fréjus. EFORTOM, or an officer's training school for soldiers from France's overseas territories, welcomed its first class of students in October 1956.<sup>24</sup>

With the creation of this EFORTOM, it was possible for *indigènes* to enter the colonial army in positions where *originaires* could conceivably be their underlings. *Originaires* were not allowed to attend EFORTOM since they were French citizens. *Originaires* veterans were frustrated by this barrier because of the general consensus in the 1950s that EFORTOM was less rigorous than French military academies, which were the military educational institutions that *originaires* were eligible for.<sup>25</sup> The Loi Cadre and EFORTOM had leveling effects upon the distinct differences created by the 1915 and 1916 Diagne Laws regarding how *originaires* and *indigènes* served in the French military. However, the graduating classes at EFORTOM were a severe minority of the West African *indigènes* enlisted in the French armed forces.

The Loi Cadre enabled another movement towards equality within the French military system. On December 1, 1958, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were scheduled to lose their pejorative misnomer and were integrated into infantry regiments of the Marines (RIMa). An event worth great celebration among West African servicemen since it symbolized a leveling of prestige between metropolitan and *originaires* troops with West African infantrymen. However, the results of the Constitutional Referendum trumped this major triumph. The Constitutional Referendum occurred across empire on September 28, 1958. The French had expected all of their colonies to approve the reorganization of the empire. If the simple majority of a colony's populations voted against the Constitutional Referendum, the colony could sue for political independence.

*Tirailleurs sénégalais* voted in the elections wherever they were stationed in empire. They also participated in monitoring the polling process and providing security for ballots across Algeria.<sup>26</sup> For the most part, veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving in Algeria claimed they had voted to remain in the French Community. The majority of colonies in AOF also voted for membership in the French Community. In six of eight colonies over ninety percent of their voters chose to remain under the political tutelage of France. In Niger, less than eighty percent voted remain in French empire. In Guinea, less than five percent voted "yes" in the

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<sup>24</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991), 123.

<sup>25</sup> Urbain Diagne, interview, Dakar, 6 February 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Evidenced throughout the 16H series at CHETOM, but one specific reference is JMO of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 5<sup>th</sup> RTS from July 1<sup>st</sup> to September 10<sup>th</sup> 1958, 29 September 1958, 16H329, CHETOM.



Constitutional Referendum.<sup>27</sup> Guinea's singular and overwhelming rejection of the French Community, historically credited to Sékou Touré and his supporters, opened up the road to rapid Guinean independence. Guinea's rejection of the Constitutional Referendum opened debates concerning Guinean troops' discharge from the French colonial army and France's obligations to them.

### **Guinean Soldiers in Decolonization: An Exception and a Template**

Guinea's accelerated decolonization from French colonial empire had profound bearing on the lives of Guinean colonial soldiers, and subsequently, on other West African soldiers as AOF became independent in 1960. Guinea was the sole French colony to reject France's Constitutional Referendum, which led to the country's independence, with Sékou Touré as its president, within a matter of days.<sup>28</sup> Sékou Touré insisted that the French army pull out of Guinea by the first of November 1958, which was only one month after Guinea's independence. A veteran from Ziguinchor, Senegal who had been present in Conakry during the Constitutional Referendum, claimed Touré kicked him out of Guinea weeks after the vote.<sup>29</sup> Due to his open support for Algeria's FLN, Touré also called for the immediate demobilization and repatriation of Guinean soldiers fighting in Algeria. The French military offered individual Guinean soldiers serving in Algeria the opportunity to continue their military service to its contractual conclusion or, conversely, to rupture their military service contracts, demobilize and repatriate to Guinea.<sup>30</sup>

Voting took place among Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais* during October 1958. If Guinean soldiers chose to remain in the French colonial army, they would continue their posts, then France and Guinea would negotiate their transfer to the Guinean National Army. If they chose to rescind their contracts, they would be free of their military obligations after January 1, 1959. The consequences of either choice was not apparent as early as October of 1958. The polling process and its consequences were seemingly straightforward, but Guinean soldiers' voting experiences varied widely according to their physical location in French Empire. Their location in Empire and their degree of authority affected how much information Guinean soldiers could access in order to make their decisions.

According to military documents from Algeria, Guinean soldiers' collective reaction to independence was one of surprise and distress. They were described as anxiety-ridden because they feared unemployment.<sup>31</sup> French archival military documents emphasized that Guinean soldiers would suffer as a result of siding with Sékou Touré. From the perspective of Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais*, a future in Guinea, albeit uncertain, may have looked quite attractive in contrast to the dirty work of the French-Algerian War. Guinean veterans interviewed in Conakry admitted voting "yes" in the Referendum in 1958 because they connoted a "no" vote as contrary

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<sup>27</sup> Tony Chafer, *The End of French Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 179.

<sup>28</sup> For more details see in Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005), Chapter Seven.

<sup>29</sup> Solabé Mansaly, interview, Ziguinchor, 5 March 2008.

<sup>30</sup> "Note de Service," 4 October 1958, 1H1398, SHDT. Also contains examples of the forms used in this voting process.

<sup>31</sup> "Point de vue du SSDNFA/G X°RM Sur l'évolution du morale et de l'état d'esprit au course de l'année 1958," 16 December 1958, 1H2413, SHDT,

to military duty. However, in the second round of voting, which concerned their military careers, they framed their choice to quit the military through the language of Guinean nationalism and solidarity. The people of Guinea had resoundingly chosen independence, and veterans claimed they wanted to support the Guinean people by returning to Guinea to build the new nation.<sup>32</sup> Their voting choices exemplified the mixed feelings of colonial intermediaries who appreciated their colonial work, yet valued political sovereignty. In order to return to Guinea, they reconciled Sékou Touré's incendiary anti-French political platform with personal, romanticized memories of their military service.

In September/October of 1958 there were at least 4,000 Guineans soldiers in Guinea, of which roughly 2,000 were on leave. Three thousand Guinean troops were stationed in the rest of AOF and 4,500 were deployed in North Africa, which totaled up to nearly 12,000 Guineans serving in the *tirailleurs sénégalais* during the Constitutional Referendum and subsequent voting process. Of those troops stationed in Guinea, only 392 (less than ten percent) opted to remain in the French army. It was speculated that roughly ten percent of those 7,500 Guineans serving outside of Guinea would also opt to remain in the military.<sup>33</sup> Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in Guinea in October of 1958 did not uniformly participate in the voting process. Veterans claimed that the bulk of Guinean soldiers present in Guinea in October of 1958 were discharged from the army without any choice in the matter.<sup>34</sup> Serving in Algeria in 1958, Mr. Diallo, a Guinean veteran, explained that he was not given the choice to continue with the French military.<sup>35</sup> He was sent back to Guinea without discussion in 1959. In order avoid to disorder among the ethno-linguistically mixed ranks of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, the French expedited Guinean repatriations. The French military removed Guineans from Algeria as early as November 1958.<sup>36</sup> Another Guinean veteran, who was serving in Algeria in 1958, voted twice regarding the severance of his military career as a result of commanding officers' confusion as to whether the vote was majority rule, or to be based upon individual choice.<sup>37</sup> The voting and repatriating process was plagued by misinformation and high emotions. One veteran described repatriating Guinean soldiers embarking in Algeria with in tears on their faces.<sup>38</sup>

The confusion of Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais*' demobilization also existed in their civic belonging. Those soldiers who elected to remain in the French military entered into a citizenship netherworld, where they were neither French, nor Guinean. The French Minister of Overseas Territories decided that Guinean soldiers present in Guinea at the moment of independence automatically lost claims to French citizenship. This was a blanket decision that affected all Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais* stationed in Guinea, whether they chose to remain with the French Army or not. Guinean soldiers serving abroad in other AOF colonies or in French empire, were allotted an undefined status, where the French considered them Guinean, but Touré's government had not confirmed their Guinean citizenship. The Guinean soldiers stationed abroad in 1958, who voted to remain in the French colonial military, were allowed to

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<sup>32</sup> Thierno Conté, interview, Conakry, 23 February 2009.

<sup>33</sup> "Evolution de la Situation en Guinée du 29 septembre au 30 novembre," Page Four, AncColAOF-232, ADN.

<sup>34</sup> Thierno Conté, Mr. Kourouma, and Yaya Camara, interview, Conakry, 24 February 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Mr. Diallo, interview, Conakry, 24 February 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Express message signed by General Raoul Salan, 30 September 1958, 1H1398, SHDT.

<sup>37</sup> Thierno Conté, interview, Conakry, 23 February 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Yaya Camara, interview, Conakry, 25 February 2009.

apply for French naturalization. The tediousness and length of the application process exponentially multiplied the ambiguity and instability of their unregulated civil status.<sup>39</sup> During the four years following the Constitutional Referendum, the rest of the AOF decolonized, the Algerian War ended, and the French dissolved its colonial army. If these Guinean servicemen had not applied for and received French citizenship by 1962, the French wanted to repatriate them to Guinea, which, by that point, was a particularly hostile environment to veterans of the French colonial army. Hundreds of Guinean soldiers were stranded in France, as late as 1964, with nowhere to repatriate to.<sup>40</sup>

Some of these Guinean soldiers applied for refugee status and/or citizenship in other West African countries in order to acquire a sense of stability and a permanent residence. Koly Kourouma was one of the Guineans who chose to remain in the French colonial army in the aftermath of the Constitutional Referendum. He made this decision in Algeria. Kourouma chose to complete his military career in the French army because of he wanted to collect a full military pension. He also had privileged information that he had received from family members who held civil service positions in Conakry. His relatives had advised him to continue his military career due to the uncertainty of Touré's independent regime.<sup>41</sup> Because he remained with the French Army, Koly Kourouma spent the years following the Constitutional Referendum stationed in Mali, Niger, and Senegal. In 1961, the French called for the repatriation of Guinean soldiers because they were liquidating West African soldiers from their defunct colonial army at the conclusion of the Algerian conflict. Koly Kourouma knew Sékou Touré was especially suspicious of exiled Guinean veterans due to their choice to remain with France in 1958. In 1961, Kourouma was a member of a group of Guinean soldiers who requested that the French military assist them in securing a stable future in Senegal or Guinea. They requested that the French military forge a treaty between France, Guinea, and Senegal that would protect them as they repatriated to Guinea. Since this was impossible, they also appealed to the Senegalese government to grant them resident alien status and rights to purchasing property in Senegal. The Senegalese government allowed them to purchase land in Senegal and agreed to let them apply for naturalization.<sup>42</sup>

Kourouma could not return to Guinea in 1961 because in the years following the Constitutional Referendum, Sékou Touré's government became overtly suspicious of Guinean veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in and outside of Guinea.<sup>43</sup> Touré forbade Guineans who remained in the French colonial army to enter Guinea because he wanted all vestiges of the French army removed from Guinea. As early as 1960, there was a conspiracy to remove Sékou Touré from power, in which Guinean veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* had a hand.<sup>44</sup> Touré's

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<sup>39</sup> Letter from Ministre d'Outre-Mers to the High-Commissioner of AOF, 23 October 1958, AncColAOF-43, ADN.

<sup>40</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 142.

<sup>41</sup> Oumar Mbaye, "Itinéraire d'un ancien combattant de l'armée française: Koly Kourouma." (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2005-2006.)

<sup>42</sup> Koly Kourouma, interview, Dakar, 17 July 2009 and Law 61-10: *Journal Officiel du Sénégal*, 15 March 1961.

<sup>43</sup> Koly Kourouma, interview, Dakar, 17 July 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Sidiki Kobélé Kéïta, *Des Complots contre la Guinée de Sékou Touré (1958-1984)* (Conakry: Les Classiques Guinéens, 2002), 64.

paranoia affected Koly Kourouma in 1963 when Kourouma was aboard a military vessel heading to the Congo. The vessel docked at Conakry in order to refuel and resupply. At this moment there was a coup d'état in Togo, and its president, Olympio Sylvano, was assassinated. Sékou Touré correlated the coup attempt in Togo with his own safety. Touré forced Koly Kourouma's captain to release the names and documents of all Guineans aboard the vessel docked at Conakry. Afterwards, port officials and military police insisted that the Guineans disembark for questioning. Fortunately for Koly Kourouma, his captain refused and fled the port.

The repercussions of this event would again affect Kourouma seven years later because of a Portuguese-led aggression on Guinea from neighboring Guinea-Bissau in November 1970. Guinean refugees, exiles, and veterans living in neighboring countries assisted in this attempt to destabilize Guinea.<sup>45</sup> Koly Kourouma never confirmed whether he had participated in these hostilities, but his name showed up on a list of conspirators. Consequently, Sékou Touré demanded Kourouma's extradition from Senegal in order to put him on trial in Guinea. Léopold Sédar Senghor, president of Senegal at the time, declined. In 1972, Koly Kourouma naturalized as a Senegalese citizen.<sup>46</sup> Koly Kourouma was unable to set foot in Guinea until 1984, after Sékou Touré's death. Kourouma's personal history demonstrated how Guinean veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were vulnerable to the whims of decolonizing state powers after the 1958 French Constitutional Referendum. These individuals solicited multiple entities in order to secure a social contract and political protection after Guinean independence.

Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais* who elected to return to Guinea in 1958 were not guaranteed personal security by their choice quit the French military. Military ships carrying Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais* to Guinea left Oran and Algiers throughout December 1958. According to the claims of some French officers, these Guinean repatriations were not occurring rapidly enough. During the month of November 1958, the language used to describe Guineans in military documents rapidly shifted from paternalistic to disparaging. The impetus for this evolution was collective disobedience on the part of Guinean soldiers awaiting repatriation. Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais* informed officers that they would only report to manual labor and guard duty assignments. They refused to risk their lives in combat for France with repatriation on the immediate horizon.<sup>47</sup>

Their defiance of military order was contagious and affected the obedience of other West African troops. In November 1958, the French military in Algeria established two collection centers/work camps in Oran and Algiers in order to quarantine repatriating Guineans from the rest of the African units. Once the majority of Guineans had departed, the French idealized those Guineans who had remained in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. They were construed as evidence of the success of French colonialism. One report went so far as to conclude that non-Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais* had *de facto* proven their loyalty to France because their colonies of origin had voted to remain in the French Community.<sup>48</sup> Those Guineans who had repatriated were labeled "bad memories" or "cowards."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>46</sup> Decree 72.875 of the Republic of Senegal, 17 July 1972, ANS.

<sup>47</sup> Telegram, 2 November 1958, 1H1398, SHDT.

<sup>48</sup> "Note de Service," from General Marguet to General Salan, 6 November 1958, 1H1398, SHDT.

<sup>49</sup> "Synthèse des rapports sur le morale des troupes sur le moral des troupes d'Outre-Mers d'Algérie in 1959," dossier 2, 1H2415, SHDT.

Repatriating to Guinea in 1958 and 1959 was anything but an act of faint-heartedness. Young Guinean veterans had to create a new political relationship with independent Guinea and find new economic security while managing their economic and political relationship with their former patron—the French military. Many of the repatriates were disappointed with Sékou Touré’s regime and were generally uneasy because many veterans were under state surveillance.<sup>50</sup> Some Guinean veterans were witch-hunted by the government because they were suspected of spying for the French. They were spuriously labeled conspirators and considered threats to national security.<sup>51</sup> An article in *Liberté*, a state-owned Guinean newspaper, which made a call to veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to break with their former identity as colonial intermediaries. In order to function within the independent Guinean state, they were encouraged to “undergo a total reconversion and integrate themselves to the people and the party.”<sup>52</sup> Due to propaganda of this nature, one Guinean veteran demobilized to Guinea, then fled to Senegal in 1959. He claimed that Sékou Touré believed that veterans’ role in independent Guinea was one of development, but those who disagreed with his particular vision for development were silenced.<sup>53</sup>

The alliances and associations that Guinean veterans made once they returned to Guinea were important for their survival. During Sékou Touré’s twenty-six year reign there were several conspiracies to overthrow his government led by expatriate and repatriate Guineans. As early as 1959 there were rumors circulating in Conakry that dissidents were gathering in the mountains of Fouta Djallon to amass power against Touré’s government.<sup>54</sup> In April of 1960 these men, with the assistance of exiled Guineans in Senegal and the French, were caught conspiring to overthrow the Guinean government. This affair was named after Jacques Foccart, who was the Secretary General of the French Community. The Foccart Affair symbolized France’s attempt to continue meddling in Guinea’s political affairs. The conspiracy negatively impacted the political relationship between Guinea, Senegal and France and affected the social security of repatriated and repatriating Guinean veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Ten years later, Portuguese agents attacked Guinea from neighboring Guinea-Bissau in cooperation with exiled Guineans from neighboring West African countries. This event has become known as the Aggression of November 1970, which led Sékou Touré to call for the extradition of Koly Kourouma. Due to Touré’s spy network’s infiltration into the heart of the conspirators, the Guinean government was able to capture twenty-three members of the Aggression on the Guinea-Bissauan border. Twenty-one of the captives were Guinean veterans of the French army who were exiled in Senegal and France.<sup>55</sup>

Sékou Touré’s government successfully thwarted several attempted coups, but it had difficulty managing the financial relationship that veteran *tirailleurs sénégalais* had with their former employers. Delivering pensions to veterans in independent Guinea was contested by

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<sup>50</sup> Koly Kourouma, interview, Dakar, 17 July 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Mr. Kourouma, Mr. Diallo, and Yaya Camara, interview, Conakry, 24 March 2009, and Koly Kourouma, interview, Dakar, 17 June 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Lamine Haidara, “Chez les Anciens Combattants,” *Liberté*, 28 May 1959.

<sup>53</sup> Alioune Diop, “Itinéraire d’un Ancien Combattant de la guerre d’Algérie: Boubacar Baldé,” (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2004-2005.)

<sup>54</sup> Kéïta, *Des Complots contre la Guinée de Sékou Touré*, 59. Fouta Djallon is a mountainous region in the interior of Guinea.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

French and Guinean governmental representatives. According to archival documents, the French explicitly defined its financial obligations to Guinean veterans by the costs of repatriation and the protection of Guinean soldiers' rights to their pensions.<sup>56</sup> Guineans soldiers serving in France and North Africa in 1958 were also entitled to military pay up to a month after they boarded vessels to Conakry. There was also a pledge of severance pay, which varied depending on the amount of time a soldier had served outside of Guinea.<sup>57</sup> Guinean veterans who served between fifteen and twenty-five years in the French military were at liberty to liquidate their pensions upon leaving French territories.<sup>58</sup> The delivery of these cash rewards was mediated by bad blood between France and Guinea. Many veterans accused Sékou Touré's government and the French military for malfeasance and obstructing the delivery of funds to veterans.

In order to receive pensions, disability pay, and widow's allocations, Guinean veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* needed a standardized system through which to transfer funds from the French treasury to a banking entity on Guinean soil. In discussions concerning the Guinean veterans' military pensions in June 1959, the French government proposed the creation of a veterans' office in Conakry where veterans could recuperate the money owed to them.<sup>59</sup> Guinea refused to grant France control over the delivery of these pensions. Touré wanted the French to deposit the pensions in the Guinean Treasury and then the Guinean government would distribute the funds to veterans. The French insisted that French representatives be involved in order to ensure veterans' reception of their full pensions.<sup>60</sup> Touré refused because he did not want French agents on Guinean soil. He also wanted to control Guinean veterans' pensions in order to assure their unwavering loyalty to the Guinean state. The cause for the fallout between Touré and the French delegation remains a mystery to Guinean veterans, though most veterans blame Touré for jingoistic pride and France for acting like a dog licking its wounds. Due to this stalemate, Guinean veterans did not receive their pensions between 1959 and 1977, when Sékou Touré managed an arrangement with Giscard d'Estaing's French government.<sup>61</sup> This pension battle affected the registration of Guinean veterans, many of whom up to today remain unregistered.

The Constitutional Referendum in 1958 set off a series of events that led to the immediate decolonization of Guinea, as well as the demobilization of Guinean troops from the French army. France and Guinea were not prepared to deal with whirlwind of consequences following Guinea's rejection of the French community. The demobilization and repatriation of Guinean soldiers was unique among the *tirailleurs sénégalais* because it occurred separately, first, and was tied up in the hostile anti-colonial politics of Sékou Touré's independent government. Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais*' transition into independence set a poor standard and generated the language through which the French military protected and abandoned other West African soldiers as their countries became independent in 1960.

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<sup>56</sup> Note signed by Brebisson and Carles, 4 October 1958, 1H1398, SHDT.

<sup>57</sup> Mr. Kourouma, Mr. Diallo, and Yaya Camara, interview, Conakry, 24 February 2009.

<sup>58</sup> "Notes de Service n°7 256 en date du 4 octobre 1958, relative à la situation dans la Métropole ou en Afrique du Nord," 2 November 1958, SHDT, 1H1398.

<sup>59</sup> "Note d'attention au Général des Forces Armées," July 1959, AncColAOF-43, ADN.

<sup>60</sup> "Note relative aux négociations avec la Guinée," 4 July 1959, AncColAOF-43, ADN.

<sup>61</sup> Thierno Conté, interview, Conakry, 23 February 2009.

## General Decolonization and Soldiers as Pawns?

In February and March of 1959, the French military filled the gaping holes left by repatriating Guinean soldiers in Algeria with African troops transferred from Côte d'Ivoire, Dahomey, and Senegal.<sup>62</sup> However, this was only a temporary solution to deficiencies in French manpower in Algeria because general West African independence was on the horizon. Guinea's rejection of the 1958 French Constitutional Referendum served as a catalyst for AOF's precipitate decolonization and an obstacle to West African federalism.<sup>63</sup> While the embryonic independent Guinean government grappled with the extrication of its nationals from the battlefields of Algeria, representatives from Senegal, French Soudan, Dahomey, and Haute-Volta met in early 1959 to discuss and engineer the Mali Federation within the French Community.<sup>64</sup> Attrition over the course of these meetings reduced the member colonies to Senegal and French Soudan. The Mali Federation fell apart in late August of 1960, roughly a month after it became independent from France. Due to the failure of francophone West African unity, each nascent country dealt singularly with France regarding the repatriation of soldiers from the French military. Nascent West African countries inherited the bad blood generated by Guinea's swift extrication of its nationals from the military, but they were able to manage the process with varying degrees of diplomacy.

During the Mali Federation's negotiations for independence with France, between January 18 and April 4, 1960, the French military promised the Mali Federation 5,000 servicemen, predominantly of Soudanese and Senegalese origin, as well as 2,500 armed policemen.<sup>65</sup> These soldiers were designated to assist the Mali Federation in recruiting, training, and educating new enlistees for its future federal army. Arguments regarding the construction of a federal military and the integration of soldiers transferring from the French military catalyzed the dissolution of the Mali Federation. Mamadou Dia, of Senegalese birth, was the Vice-President of the Mali Federation and Chief of Security and Defense. Dia named Colonel Amadou Fall as Chief of Staff of the Mali Federation's military. Modiba Keita, of French Soudanese origins, exercised his higher political authority as President of the Mali Federation. Keita nominated Colonel Abdoulaye Soumaré for the position. Both of the appointed colonels were Senegalese, had graduated from Saint Maixent (a French military academy accessible to *originaires*) and were decorated, seasoned officers in the French Army. Colonel Abdoulaye Fall's credentials were impeccable, but he was uninterested in challenging the tenets of the French colonialism.<sup>66</sup> Keita's candidate's politics were more in line with his anti-colonial stance,

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<sup>62</sup> "Note de Service," 30 December 1958, 1H1398, SHDT. This document predicted the transfer of 1,000 men in February 1959 and 1,219 in March 1959.

<sup>63</sup> Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 173-177.

<sup>64</sup> The French Community consisted of the states that had approved the Constitutional Referendum in 1958.

<sup>65</sup> Séké Mody Cissoko, *Un Combat pour l'unité de l'Afrique de l'Ouest: La Fédération du Mali (1959-1960)* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines du Sénégal, 2005), 175, and "Compte rendu," 30 November 1960, 5H61, SHDT.

<sup>66</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 69.

and Soumaré had designs for drastically reducing the Mali Federation's military dependence on France.<sup>67</sup>

As Head of Security and Defense, Dia was insulted by Keita's maneuvers and refused to co-sign Soumaré's nomination. Dia unofficially resigned from his ministerial duties and used his newfound leisure to mobilize military support in Senegal against Keita, who was from Soudan. Dia called on assistance of well-known religious leaders, like Seydou Nourou Tall, to rally Senegalese opinion against the Soudanese politicians residing in Dakar.<sup>68</sup> During the night of August 19-20, 1960, Senegalese military police placed all Soudanese members of the Mali Federation under house arrest in Dakar. These political prisoners, which included Modiba Keita and Colonel Soumaré, were escorted by Senegalese policemen to the Dakar train station the following morning. They were transported to Kayes, which was a city just east of the border between Senegal and Soudan. Once the Soudanese prisoners were over the border, Senegal declared its defection from the Mali Federation in conjunction with naming itself the Republic of Senegal. Léopold Sédar Senghor became president with Mamadou Dia playing the dual role of Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense in the new Senegalese government. He named Colonel Amadou Fall to the head of the Senegalese Army. Modiba Keita would go on to become the first president of Mali. Colonel Soumaré became the head of Mali's national armed forces.

The failure of the Mali Federation in August 1960 signaled the collapse of supranational political authority in newly independent West Africa. The former members of the Mali Federation, Mali and Senegal, were in the best position to negotiate their disentanglement from France. They had already opened talks with the French within the Mali Federation. Senegal and Mali could also map their independent governments onto the remnants of the French colonial administration, which had been profoundly developed in those two countries when compared to the rest of French West African territories. These were also the regions of former AOF that had had the deepest historical relationship with the French colonial army, thus Senegal and Mali could exploit military encampments and infrastructure leftover from the colonial regime.<sup>69</sup>

In August 1960, Léopold Sédar Senghor was elected president of independent Senegal, with Mamadou Dia serving as the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense. Dia's role in the Mali Federation as mediator with the French Army continued in the independent Senegalese state. His demands on the French military led to the accelerated demobilization of Senegalese troops and their transfer to the Senegalese Army. By April 14, 1961, there were only 2,700 Senegalese troops left in the French Army. Nine hundred were serving in France or Algeria, and approximately 1,800 were serving in, or on leave in, Mauritania and Senegal. According to French sources, as of 1961 all of the West African servicemen left in the French military were volunteers. These servicemen were probably the best educated and trained career soldiers, who were coveted by the French and the Senegalese.<sup>70</sup> Instead of demanding the immediate repatriation of Senegalese cadets enrolled in French military schools, Dia requested a timeline for their graduation.<sup>71</sup> Dia was patient regarding the transfer of Senegalese soldiers from the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>68</sup> Mamadou Dia, *Afrique: Le Prix de la liberté*. (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 2001), 142. Seydou Nourou Tall was the Senegalese representative of the Tijanniyya Muslim brotherhood. He had worked with the French colonial regime during recruitment campaigns in World War II.

<sup>69</sup> Pierre Messmer, *Les Blancs s'en vont récit de décolonization*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 88.

<sup>70</sup> "Citoyens Sénégalais en service dans l'armée française," 14 April 1961, VP237, ADN.

<sup>71</sup> "Fiche à l'attention du Consul des Ministres," 22 September 1960, VP237, ADN.



French army because he wanted them to exploit all of the opportunities that the French military offered before assigning them important positions in Senegal.

Modiba Keita became the president of independent French Soudan, which retained the name Mali after Senegal's departure from the Mali Federation. Prior to the dissolution of the Mali Federation, France had already agreed to repatriate the majority of French Soudan's 2,050 soldiers from Algeria.<sup>72</sup> The Soudanese soldiers serving in other territories in AOF would be transferred from the French Army to that of Mali shortly afterwards.<sup>73</sup> Keita grew impatient and demanded the immediate return of all Malian soldiers serving the French in Algeria.<sup>74</sup> This request was motivated by Keita's ideological convictions concerning neo-colonialism and his political support for the FLN. Near the end of 1960, Keita increased his demands, and requested the complete liquidation of the 4,500 Soudanese soldiers left in the French armed forces. Keita was more interested in spurning the French and terminating France's exploitation of Malian nationals, than finding suitable employments for repatriating soldiers. When asked how he would integrate the soldiers into independent Mali, Keita declared, "They will return to their villages."<sup>75</sup> The French Army's knee jerk reactions to Keita's aggressive demands were expressed through patriarchal and protective language typical to French colonialism. The French army was concerned with safeguarding Malian veterans from the fate of Guinean veterans. There were claims that the French offered these Malian soldiers the option to remain in the French army,<sup>76</sup> but some soldiers reported not having the option to remain in the French military.<sup>77</sup>

The negotiations for the transfer of West African troops from the French army to Côte d'Ivoire, Haute-Volta, Niger, Dahomey, and Mauretania varied radically according to individual state's needs, as well as how quickly the states fostered political unity and built national defense systems. According to archival documents, there was no mention of specific efforts, on the part of the French, to protect these soldiers or offer them the opportunity to continue their military careers to completion. Unlike Guinea, Senegal, and Mali, the new nations of Haute-Volta and Côte d'Ivoire were very cautious regarding the incorporation of young veterans into their nascent countries. Haute-Volta's first president, Maurice Yameogo, demanded that the French scale down the size of repatriating Voltaïc battalions and decelerate their homecoming.<sup>78</sup> Yameogo's slow development of national defense allowed his political opponents leverage to conspire against him and recruit young Voltaïc veterans. Maurice Yameogo was imprisoned in 1966 after a popular insurrection, which led to the provisional government of Lieutenant-Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana—a veteran of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

The first Ivoirian president, Houphouët-Boigny, was eager to push young repatriating veterans out of the major urban areas since there was a great need for physical labor in the

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<sup>72</sup> "Fiche au sujet rapatriement eventual des Soudanais en service en AFN," 9 September 1960, 5H61, SHDT.

<sup>73</sup> "Note à l'attention de la Ministre des Armées," 30 November 1960, 5H61, SHDT.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from the Secretary of State to the Minister of the Armies, signed by J. Foyer, 28 September 1960, 5H61, SHDT.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from P. Winaux, 7 November 1960, 5H61, SHDT.

<sup>76</sup> "Note à l'attention de la Ministre des Armées," 30 November 1960, 5H61, SHDT.

<sup>77</sup> Mann, "Violence, Dignity and Mali's New Model Army," 68.

<sup>78</sup> Letter from Maurice Yameogo to a representative of France in Ouagadougou, folder labeled "Haute-Volta," 16 August 1961, ADP-Dakar 417, ADN.

growing cacao export business. The bulk of Ivoirian veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were back in their villages and engaged in the cash crop economy after August 7, 1960.<sup>79</sup> After Dahomey became independent August 1, 1960, it would experience nine military-led coup d'états attempts between 1963 and 1992. The Dahomeyan Army Chief of Staff, Colonel Soglo, a former agent of the Bureau of African Affairs in Indochina, led the first in 1963. He would again take control of the politically ailing country from December 1965 until December 1967. In Niger, there were attempted military coup d'états in 1974, 1976, 1983, 1996, and 1999. Veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* participated in some of these coups.<sup>80</sup>

### **Soldiers' Management of Decolonization**

Former *tirailleurs sénégalais* used a variety of strategies to manage their severance from the French military and their integration into nascent West African countries. A certain few among the young veterans were in a stronger position to manage their rapid decolonization and integration into national armies and the burgeoning national economies. Due to their training, education, and better access to information, officers and former *originaires* could capitalize on the confusion of French decolonization and West African independence. In the example of Guinea's decolonization, individual soldiers were given the option to remain in the French colonial military in order to complete their military careers and receive full pensions. This offering came out of the French military's shock at Guinea's rejection of the French Community. This choice would only be offered to a select few soldiers when the rest of AOF decolonized and the conditions surrounding that choice were slightly different. The following section deals with a parallel issue to completing military careers—West African soldiers' citizenship. Some repatriating veterans had the opportunity to attain French citizenship or dual citizenship, which they used as leverage in the post-colonial world.

Literate and ranking West African soldiers were better attuned to the politics of decolonization than the majority of West African infantrymen. During the last years of the Algerian conflict, West African troops' proximity to urban areas in Algeria also affected their understanding of events in West Africa because of greater exposure to print and broadcast media, as well as circulating rumors. One Senegalese veteran said that he was completely uninformed regarding the decolonization process because he was stationed in rural Algeria when Senegal became independent.<sup>81</sup> Another Senegalese veteran of the French-Algerian War claimed that West African soldiers were at least aware of the political quarrels between Mali and Senegal during 1959 and 1960. Those West Africans conscious of their countries' decolonization were anxious because they were far away from their nascent countries at the moment when the most lucrative and distinguished governmental positions were being meted out. Contrarily, those who were less cognizant of their countries' negotiations with France feared political independence because they did not want to be confronted by a choice like Guineans in 1958. According to

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<sup>79</sup> Nancy Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of WWII*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 234-5.

<sup>80</sup> McGowan, Patrick J. "African military coup d'état, 1956-2001: frequency, trends, and distribution," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41, 3 (2003): 363-4.

<sup>81</sup> Sanga Samb, interview, Saint-Louis, 16 January 2008.

French military documents, the completion of their military careers in the French Community's Army was among the most prominent concerns of this second group.<sup>82</sup>

By the end of 1960, West African troops' and French officers' relations were devolving in Algeria because of the unresolved nature of West African troops' status in the waves of decolonization and repatriation. There was an assumption that West Africans, knowing demobilization and repatriation were imminent, were indifferent to military hierarchy and rebelled against authority.<sup>83</sup> French officers were also apprehensive that West African officers and soldiers would no longer respect the racial hierarchy, as well as the colonial order, that preserved Frenchmen's socio-cultural superiority.<sup>84</sup> French officers blamed the influence of political propaganda originating from West Africa and the FN for sub-Saharan African soldiers' increasingly subversive and hostile attitudes. In response, the French promoted writing campaigns in West Africa, where they assisted family members of soldiers in writing letters that encouraged soldiers to remain in the French Army until they had finished their military careers.<sup>85</sup> Local French representatives and African intermediaries (who were often veterans of the French Army) aided these families in composing the letters. The French heavily influenced, and may have forged, the contents of these letters.

Judging from historical sources, ranked soldiers had some influence over the timing of their repatriation to West Africa because of their experience and training was valued by France and West African countries. By 1960, French military officials had consented to transfer the majority of Senegalese and Soudanese officers to their national armies with the exception of those cadets enrolled in French military academies. The French were not forthcoming in offering a timeline for these soldiers' repatriation because the military wanted to retain half the African officers serving in North Africa in order prevent power vacuums in Algerian units predominantly made up of West African troops. The French military retained at least one officer and sixty Malian and sixty Senegalese soldiers in each RIMa.<sup>86</sup> The Senegalese and Soudanese soldiers given the option to remain in Algeria had the greatest technical skill and high educational levels. These servicemen were precisely the soldiers that nascent West African countries sought after independence in order to build their nation's national defense systems.

With Senegal's accession to political independence on June 20, 1960, the French declared that all people born in the territory of Senegal, who were present in Senegal on that day, were automatically Senegalese citizens.<sup>87</sup> This legal declaration rendered *originaires* and *indigènes* civic equals in the eyes of their former colonial power because *originaires* were no longer considered French citizens. Many *originaires* were displeased with their depreciated status and many petitioned the French state to acquire anew, or "reintegrate," as French citizenship in the aftermath of Senegalese independence. Senegalese soldiers serving abroad on July 20, 1960 were accorded more opportunity to naturalize, or "reintegrate" as French citizens.<sup>88</sup> Those *originaires* and *indigènes* veterans who pursued French citizenship, or dual citizenship, claimed

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<sup>82</sup> "Rapport sur le moral sur l'année 1960," 12 November 1960, 7U2793, SHDT.

<sup>83</sup> "Synthèse des rapports sur le moral des Troupes d'Outre-Mers d'Algérie en 1959," 1H2415, SHDT.

<sup>84</sup> "Rapport sur le moral," 8 November 1961, 7U2793, SHDT.

<sup>85</sup> "Synthèse des rapports sur le moral des Troupes d'Outre-Mers d'Algérie en 1960," 1H2415, SHDT.

<sup>86</sup> "Décision," signed by Pierre Messmer, 28 September 1960, 5H61, SHDT.

<sup>87</sup> Youssouf à Lô, interview, Dakar, 28 March 2008, and Mr. Kourouma, interview, Dakar, 17 July 2008.

<sup>88</sup> Jean Gomis, interview, Dakar, 25 January 2011. Since *originaires* were French citizens during the colonial period, they reintegrated into the French state, as opposed to naturalized after independence.

that they sought French citizenship because there was more certainty within the French state. They also felt that with French citizenship, they could benefit from the Senegalese state as well as their former colonial power.<sup>89</sup> Retaining French citizenship was a means to preserve their intermediary, exclusive status in a post-colonial world.

The French government provided a chaotic bureaucratic system through which *originaires* and non-*originaires* veterans could resolve issues with French citizenship. One veteran claimed that there was an unofficial six-month window after independence within which former *originaires* could obtain citizenship, even though they legally lost their civil status/claims at independence.<sup>90</sup> There was a sense of urgency in securing citizenship during 1960 and 1961 because the French erected new obstacles to citizenship as their boundaries receded north of the Mediterranean Sea. A law modifying the French Code of Nationality, published in July 28, 1960, set out explicit, yet enigmatic, oaths to French citizenship that emphasized secularism.<sup>91</sup> Establishing a residence in a French territory was another stipulation of naturalization. Prior to 1960, many *originaires* easily met that requirement. However, with independence, the very ground they had been born on shifted from French to Senegalese hands.

The French were circumspect in offering French citizenship to their decolonizing West African soldiers. Instead, they saw it as an opportunity to tighten restrictions on the cultural practices and privileges once awarded to Muslim and/or polygynous French West African citizens. With the erasure of the Four Communes and the *statut personnel*, the French civil service in West Africa could compel applicants to conform to the socio-cultural prescriptions of the French Civil Code. French citizenship became a reward for those West Africans who could best demonstrate their ability to perform French cultural ideals. *Originaires* could no longer entrench themselves behind their exclusive *statut personnel* and maintain their cultural difference to the majority of French citizens.<sup>92</sup> However, the social connections they had accumulated during the colonial era proved useful after independence. *Originaires* veterans were predisposed to have easier access to French citizenship due to their greater exposure to standardized education and their social connections with agents of the former French colonial state.

The most educated and experienced military men were granted more leeway in securing employment and advantageous citizenship in the evolving political and economic landscape of independent West Africa. Officers and *originaires*' dual allegiances gave them footing in both France and their countries of origin, but reduced the authority of their voices in the formation of new nations in West Africa. Thus, some West African officers and soldiers continued living in a suspended space that was neither colonial nor independent for years after independence. One example was Bamba Ndiaye, a Senegalese military cadet, who attended Saint Maixent until 1964, then directly transferred to the Senegalese army.<sup>93</sup>

The French extended an option to West African elite soldiers where they officially transferred to national West African armies, then request leave in order to complete their military service in the French army. If their home countries agreed to this arrangement, *originaires* and

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<sup>89</sup> Urbain Diagne, interview, Dakar, 2 February 2008.

<sup>90</sup> Youssouf à Lô, interview, Dakar, 8 January 2008.

<sup>91</sup> Law 60-752 of 28 July 1960: *Journal Officiel de la République de France*, 28 July 1960, 7040.

<sup>92</sup> "Note sur le loi 60-752 du 28 juillet 1960," ADP-Dakar 482, ADN.

<sup>93</sup> Sidy Al Moctar Ndiaye, "Itineraire d'un Ancien Combattant: Colonel Bamba Ndiaye." (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic year 2005-2006).

West African officers could retain their career benefits in the French military, as well as gain a toehold in their fledgling home countries.<sup>94</sup> These soldiers could also acquire West African citizenship and maintain a formal relationship of employment with the French military. Those few West African soldiers who managed to acquire dual citizenship had dual obligations to serve in French and West African armies. They could not fulfill these duties simultaneously, so there were further disputes regarding whom the soldiers would serve first.<sup>95</sup> West African officers who opposed their transfer out of the French Army could also petition to remain in the French Army and serve as a commanding officer within the French military units stationed in their West African country of origin. Colonel Amadou Fall, whose role in the dissolution of the Mali Federation is addressed above, exploited this opportunity.<sup>96</sup>

Former *tirailleurs sénégalais* infantrymen, without great technical skills and social connections, found their repatriation to West Africa much more straightforward. They were not offered the opportunity to complete their military careers and their access to French citizenship was much more limited. They were counted among the 10,000 African troops that the French military wholesale repatriated from North Africa between 1961 and 1962. Sub-Saharan African infantrymen were typically less proficient and literate in French than their officers, which may explain the degree to which they were uninformed of the reasons for, and consequences of, the truncation of their military service and their accelerated repatriation. These infantrymen were also under-informed regarding the proper channels through which to access and surmount French and nascent West African states' bureaucracy in order to secure their path in either. There were few channels through which unranked and non-*originnaire* soldiers could access French citizenship. These former *tirailleurs sénégalais* rarely naturalized without social connections and considerable diligence. West African veterans who decided to naturalize years, or sometimes decades, after West African independence found that the complexities of obtaining French citizenship multiplied exponentially over time.

The decisions that young West African veterans of the French army made regarding citizenship echoed into their families' lives. At independence, debates regarding the "legitimacy" of West African veterans' wives and children re-emerged as the decolonizing French government saw an opportunity to withdraw support from polygynous soldiers' multi-wife households. By forcing West African veterans to naturalize, or "reintegrate," through official channels, the French state could legally limit veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to monogamy. There were a few cases where lax French administrators were accused of awarding French citizenship to polygynous veterans without negotiating a single legal formality.<sup>97</sup> The majority of polygynous West African citizenship candidates stationed in France found other means to skirt monogamy. Since many veterans frequently visited or resided in Senegal for extensive periods of time, veterans contracted additional marriages celebrated and sanctioned according to local custom and Senegalese law. The first wife and her children legally benefitted from French military pensions, family allocations, and widow's pay, and the second wife could

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<sup>94</sup> "Situation de l'Adjudant-Chef DIALLO Abdoul," November 1960, Dossier 2, 5H61, SHDT.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from Paris to the President of Senegal, with reference to correspondence from 19 September 1960, VP440, ANS, and Letter from Lucien Pave to Maurice Couve de Murville, 4 January 1964, ADP-Dakar 481, ADN.

<sup>96</sup> "Compte-rendu," 30 November 1960, 5H61, SHDT.

<sup>97</sup> "Note pour l'Ambassadeur de l'Ambassade de France, consulat général de Dakar," 27 December 1963, ADP-Dakar 482, ADN.

not. Although there were legal obstacles regarding how the second wife could gain allocations from the French government, the amount of social and familial pressure she could exert on the first wife and her husband to share these allocations were more negotiable. The second wife, depending on her families' social standing and ethnicity, could also be perceived more legitimate and deserving by West African social conventions.<sup>98</sup>

The intricacies of decolonization also opened a gaping hole through which soldiers' wives, who were formerly indirect clients of the French colonial state, disappeared. At independence, these women lost access to legal benefits they held during the colonial period. With the advent of independence, the networks through which wives maintained these rights were indelibly altered. Their increasingly limited access to the French military made soldiers' wives more vulnerable to the whims of negotiations between independent West African and French governments. In order to protect soldiers' and veterans' wives from slipping into a legal black hole, the French Ambassador to Senegal encouraged agents of the French government to refrain from closing the naturalization process to these vulnerable women.<sup>99</sup> This was particularly pertinent to those Vietnamese women who had immigrated to France and West Africa with their soldier/husbands at the conclusion of Dien Bien Phu. Their husband's decisions regarding citizenship heavily affected their Indochinese wives' mobility and rights in the post-colonial world.<sup>100</sup>

## Conclusion

In February of 1958 in the pages of *El Moudjahid*, an author made a plea to West African politicians; "The ministers and deputies who do not dare to energetically denounce the use of African soldiers against another colonized people, allow brothers to kill each other for the great amusement of French racists."<sup>101</sup> This quote clearly demonstrated the ways in which *tirailleurs sénégalais*' service in Algeria could be perceived as antithetical to the anti-colonial ideologies of the FLN, Sékou Touré, and Modiba Keita. However, the author disallowed for a more nuanced understanding of West African soldiers' investment in their military careers, their intermediary position in French colonialism, and the balancing of their obligations to the French colonial army and nascent West African states. This chapter has demonstrated that West African servicemen do not fit neatly into the broad, binary categories of colonizer and colonized because demobilizing West African soldiers relied on their dual allegiances to navigate the cross-currents of decolonization.

The French-Algerian War was the unlikely backdrop for many West African servicemen's transition out of subject-hood into citizenship. Some *tirailleurs sénégalais* entered an interminable liminal state where they were no longer members of the French Community, nor citizens of West African countries, yet still soldiers. One of the greatest paradoxes of this chapter was the ways in which *tirailleurs sénégalais*' colonies of origin won political independence through negotiation, while West African men stationed in Algeria fought against Algerian people battling for political sovereignty. The legislative moves of the period were last

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<sup>98</sup> This is evident in the case of Indochinese wives, which is addressed in Chapter Six.

<sup>99</sup> Letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Diplomatic Agents of France in Foreign Posts, 5 May 1956, ADP-Dakar 482, ADN.

<sup>100</sup> Hélène N'Diaye, interview, Dakar, 22 February 2008.

<sup>101</sup> "L'Afrique noire face au colonialisme français," *El Moudjahid* 18, 15 February 1958.

ditch efforts on the part of the French to provide West African soldiers and colonies with a greater degree of professionalization. With the Loi Cadre of 1956, the French proposed to “africanize” the civil service in AOF, as well as provide better technical education and officer training to *indigènes* serving in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Guinea’s rejection of the Constitutional Referendum in 1958 signaled the beginning of West African independence. For *tirailleurs sénégalais*, the Constitutional Referendum signaled the onset of a confusing transition out of the colonial military.

Demobilizing West African soldiers challenge our understanding regarding the finality of West African independence, the division between the colonial and post-colonial eras, as well as the utility of those terms. The French continued to rely on West African soldiers for several years after 1960. The French also continued to have a meddling hand in the affairs of West African states, particularly when funding former West African veterans to participate in *coup d’états* against unfriendly governments in Guinea and Haute-Volta. Due to their historical connections with the French, veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* have a contested and misconstrued legacy that transgresses the division between the French colonial period and independence. We will see in the conclusion that fifty years after West African independence, veterans remain in a unique position to exploit their historical relationship with France.

## Conclusion: Veterans and their Contemporary Links to the Colonial Past

“La France, ce n’est plus la mère-patrie, mais c’est l’amer-patrie.”<sup>1</sup>

“France, it’s no longer the motherland, but it’s the bitter homeland.”

Alioune Nar Fall, a career soldier who served in World War II, Indochina, and Algeria, once gave credence to French colonialism’s construction of France as the motherland for its imperial subjects. In his retirement in independent Senegal, Fall’s attitude towards France evolved with the politics surrounding West African veterans’ pensions. Alioune Fall’s observation illustrated his disappointment with the failure of reciprocity between veterans of the former *tirailleurs sénégalais* and the former French colonial state. The above quote also fits within the contemporary politics of several West African states and signals a dramatic shift between those states’ relationships with veterans in the 1960s and the last ten years. As we saw in the last chapter, nascent Guinea, Mali, and Côte d’Ivoire were intent to sever *tirailleurs sénégalais* veterans’ affiliation with France in order to reorient them towards a nascent national identity. In contrast, twenty-first century West African statesmen have had cause to place new emphasis the ways in which France and French colonialism continue to weigh upon the present.

Paradoxical critiques of France’s contemporary relationship with West Africans and West Africa illustrate that neo-colonial relationships are simultaneously welcomed and condemned in the twenty-first century. The French military’s intervention in the violence ensuing Côte d’Ivoire’s recent contested elections is one example. After the elections, the Ivoirian population contested the transparency and legitimacy of the elections’ results. The incumbent, Laurent Gbagbo, refused to step down because of evidence of voter fraud. The international community recognized Allasane Ouattara as Côte d’Ivoire’s new president. The French military conducted air strikes on Gbagbo supporters’ strongholds. The domestic and international community questioned what France’s stakes were in the outcome of the election. France’s indubitable support for Ouattara has made him a less viable candidate for many Ivoirians interested in developing their nation without the aid of Western nations.

Nearby, in Senegal, the current government has made contradictory efforts to sever and reaffirm its nationals’ relationship with France. Until this year in Senegal, the French military continued to own and operate two military bases on prime pieces of Dakar’s real estate. With the closing of one of them, the rumor around Dakar was that President Wade had demanded that French reduce their presence in Senegal. Whether this move was to reclaim valuable beachfront property or a step in the direction of terminating Senegal’s current relationship with France was unclear.

The memory of French colonialism and France’s neo-colonialism in contemporary West Africa are contested and complex. Many West African politicians have taken a political stance

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<sup>1</sup> Mamadou Sellou Diallo, “Itinéraire d’un Ancien Combattant de la deuxième guerre mondiale, de la guerre d’Indochine et de la guerre d’Algérie,” (Thesis, École Normale Supérieure du Sénégal, Academic Year 2003-2004).



that condemns France's relationship with West Africa as exploitative in the past and the present. If Abdoulaye Wade's government is moving towards an expulsion of France's presence in contemporary Senegal, their campaign for the pensions of *tirailleurs sénégalais* veterans counteracts that gesture. Wade demands that France recognize and increase their financial responsibilities to ties to their veterans in West Africa. Of all West African presidents, Abdoulaye Wade has been particularly active in linking veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* with the colonial and neo-colonial exploitation. Wade has manipulated pensions debates to illustrate to the modern Senegalese public that France continues to exploit men who defended France at its weakest moments in the World Wars.

Until very recently, West African veterans of the French Armed Forces received pensions that were notably less than French metropolitan veterans' pensions. These inequities were instituted in the first years of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* because Faidherbe's government made their salaries lower than metropolitan soldiers. These disparities became even more obvious when the French military legislated the distinct financial differences for *originaires* and *indigènes*.<sup>2</sup> During the colonial period, *originaires* and French metropolitan infantrymen received pensions that were triple those of *indigènes*. When *originaires* lost their citizenship status with West African independence, they also lost that financial margin. The *originaires*' specific and significant loss of financial benefits is ignored by the political discourse surrounding the "freezing" of West African veterans' pensions. This process refers to the fact that West African veterans' pensions have remained at the 1960 levels, while French veterans' pensions have increased in the past fifty years to account for increasing costs-of-living and inflation.

In the efforts to equalize the pensions between French and West African veterans, a discourse has emerged to blame the French for prolonging the exploitation of West Africans who served in their colonial army. Surprisingly, the political negotiations that froze West African veterans pensions with independence in 1960 were orchestrated with the input of West African politicians. West African leaders in the Mali Federation agreed to stipulations that led to the French Finance Law of 1960. In this law, former French imperial citizens who had served the colonial state—in this case West African colonial soldiers—would have the base rates of their pensions frozen at 1960 levels in perpetuity.<sup>3</sup> Purportedly, Senegalese and Malian leaders agreed to this decision so that former French colonial servicemen would not receive pensions greater than the pay of West African civil servants employed in independent West African states.<sup>4</sup> In the conversations I had with and about veterans, this fact was mentioned only once. The contribution of West African leaders to the "freezing" of pensions in no way absolves the French from their unfair financial treatment of their overseas veterans. The 2007 film, *Indigènes*, catalyzed public French debates regarding pensions because it dramatized the contemporary impoverished state of North African veterans of World War II. The French government scheduled the equalization of pensions for the beginning of 2011.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Detailed in Chapter Three.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 142.

<sup>4</sup> These allegations were raised by veteran Alassane Wade, interview, Ouakam, 23 January 2008. He specifically mentioned Valdiodio Ndiaye (Former Minister of the Interior of AOF) as having signed the legislation.

<sup>5</sup> "Pensions d'anciens combattants: Français et étrangers bientôt traités à égalité." *Libération* 13 July, 2010.

These politics surrounding veterans' pensions have trickled into historical portrayals of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and have distorted the relationship between the French colonial military and West African servicemen. As military employees of the French colonial state, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* lived the paradoxes of colonial intermediaries. They were interested in maintaining the power of the colonial state in order to further their own financial security and personal autonomy. At the onset of independence, West African veterans of the French Armed Forces maintained economic and civic relationships with France while contributing labor and expertise to the construction of fledgling West African countries. Veterans did not interpret their continued reliance on France as hypocritical to the mission of independent West African states. By building relationships with two patrons, West African veterans insulated themselves from the failure of either relationship. Their strategic alliances confuse the portrayal of West African independence as an exacting severance of relationships between West Africans and France.

The importance of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to appraise the legacy of French colonialism had echoed into popular consciousness in contemporary West Africa. When I began research for this dissertation in Dakar, most people I spoke with—academics, veterans, and even taxi drivers—encouraged and urged me to work on the history of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The World Wars, the massacre at Thiaroye, and frozen pensions were often the historical events and problems that they thought I should tackle. The popular desire for a revisionist history that aired the exploitative nature of France in Senegal was the result of an official state project launched by Abdoulaye Wade at the beginning of his presidency.<sup>6</sup> Previously, veterans were celebrated once annually on Veterans' Day. Abdoulaye Wade's administration commemorates France's Senegalese veterans three to four times per year with parades and ceremonies. These public events increased the Senegalese public's awareness of the issue of veterans' pensions, as well as, France's unjust historical and contemporary treatment of its West African veterans.

Another of Abdoulaye Wade's objectives in commemorating West African veterans is self-promotion. Known for numerous prestige projects during his tenure, Wade has also made a name for himself as a defender and celebrity of veterans' rights.<sup>7</sup> Ceremonial photographs of Abdoulaye Wade pinning medals to aging veterans in white flowing *boubous* have been reproduced in academic and popular forms. Wade's involvement in the commemoration overtly implies that he is remedying France's negligence of its West African veterans. This media blitz on Senegal's veterans has contributed to broader political claims regarding the injustice of France's historical and contemporary relationship with Senegal. Through Wade's efforts, the veneration of Senegal's veterans has shoehorned the *tirailleurs sénégalais* into nationalist Senegalese and French historical narratives.

The projection of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as a national cause trivializes the fact that Senegalese men were never a majority in the colonial military institution. By linking Senegalese veterans with the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, the president's efforts also efface the importance of the division between *originaires* and *indigènes*. The emphasis placed on veterans' sacrifices in the World Wars is another inaccuracy promoted in state-sponsored

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<sup>6</sup> While conducting research in Senegal, there was a state-funded project regarding the history of *tirailleurs sénégalais* that employed archivists, historians at the national teaching college, at the University Cheikh Anta Diop, and the Museum of the Armed Forces.

<sup>7</sup> This has led to a publication co-authored by Awa Ndiaye and Mbaye Gana Kébé, *Un président au service des tirailleurs*, which celebrates Abdoulaye Wade, and other West African presidents, more than the *tirailleurs sénégalais*.

commemorations. This dissertation has illustrated that the World Wars were significant to the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, but by no means paramount to its history. The *tirailleurs sénégalais*' role in empire was dynamic and multi-faceted, but Wade's discourse has reduced them to heroes of war and victims of the French. Saluting veterans' role as collaborators or intermediaries of French colonial violence is not congruent with Wade's political agenda. Abdoulaye Wade latched onto the political discourse of sacrifice because of inspiration he found in recently published commemorative works that emphasize the contribution of West Africans to French efforts in the World Wars and the injustice of veterans' pensions.<sup>8</sup>

The pension debates have obscured many aspects of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' history that this dissertation has found incredibly fascinating and essential to the analysis of this institution's role within West African and French colonial history. Beginning in the 1850s, the *tirailleurs sénégalais* were agents of imperial expansion who aided the French in expanding its frontiers on several continents. During the twentieth century, West Africans' role in empire and at home in West Africa would shift considerably as they were tapped to assist the French in North Africa, the Levant, Madagascar, and Indochina. In these international endeavors, West African forged livelihoods that were exceptional to lives that they would have led in their natal communities. Veterans were marked by their experiences of war and military life, which led them to be both desirable and undesirable community members in colonial and post-colonial West Africa. Importantly, West Africans' military service in empire broadens French colonial historical narratives that focus on the linear exchange of information between the French metropole and West Africa.

*Tirailleurs sénégalais*' wives and female companions demonstrated how important cross-colonial exchange and the lateral movements of people and information were in reproduction of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The formative role that women played throughout the institution's existence became obvious in through the *tirailleurs sénégalais*' imperial history. These women were also indirect clients of the French colonial state and through their husbands, they leveraged their demands for family allocations and divorce. The sacrifices that colonial women made for their husbands and for the institution of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* are also absent from the mainstream discourse on veterans' sacrifices for the French.

As I concluded research for this dissertation in 2009, the pension debates were unresolved and West African veterans had developed strategies to secure better pensions than those regulated by the French Finance Law of 1960. Those who had secured French citizenship in the aftermath of independence could access the pensions awarded to metropolitan veterans. Others took advantage of a loophole, which maintained that if West African veterans maintained a residence in France, they could receive pensions that were equivalent to those of metropolitan veterans. This was based on the notion that the cost-of-living in France was higher than West Africa, and veterans needed the increased pensions to finance the difference. Some West Africans veterans moved permanently to France and continue to maintain their families there. Other West Africans circulated between Paris and Dakar with the seasons. Senegalese septenarians and octogenarians travel to the suburbs of Paris and spend their summers in the milder Parisian climate and returned to Senegal for the winter. These elderly men share

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<sup>8</sup> Abdoulaye Wade, in *Un Président au Service des Tirailleurs Sénégalais*, 10, cited Charles Onana, *1940-1945 Noirs Blancs Beurs: Libérateurs de la France* (Paris: Éditions Dubois, 2006) and Maurice Rives and Robert Dietrich, *Héros Méconnus 1914-1918 et 1939-1945: Memorial des Combattants d'Afrique Noire et de Madagascar* (Paris: Association française Frère d'Armes, 1990) as inspiration.

apartments in Bondy where they split rents and squat in apartments with other veterans and their descendants in order to receive greater pensions.<sup>9</sup>

Exceptionally, Senegal has been one of the most politically and financially stable West African nations since independence in 1960. Nevertheless, some Senegalese veterans have gone to great lengths to take advantage of a distant colonial relationship, which offers them financial advantage in a contracting global and national Senegalese economy. Veterans in their seventies and eighties continue to support several generations of their descendants. There is a great deal of casual labor, underemployment, and unemployment in contemporary Senegal, which impels veterans to continue seeking greater financial rewards at a time when they should be enjoying their retirement. In linking their annual migrations to Abdoulaye Wade's pronounced role in the pension debates, it is in Wade's interest for Senegalese veterans to gain international recognition. If veterans win sympathy and better pensions, they will add to the wealth of Senegalese households and buttress families from the dire job market in Senegal.

Veterans' increased pensions, as of February 2011, contribute to a growing, unmonitored and untaxed, foreign made income that Senegalese communities depend on for their survival. The Money Gram and Western Union stations scattered throughout the Senegalese countryside financially link families to their sons and husbands, who are working in Europe, the United States, and other corners of the globe. The remittances sent by modern migrant laborers to Senegal probably represent the majority of Senegal's annual income.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary families and international migrant laborers are probably unaware that the *tirailleurs sénégalais* began the trend of wiring money to their loved ones during the colonial era. Ironically, as veterans, they continue this trend by drawing on their military pensions. The need for veterans' pensions in contemporary Senegalese households illustrates that France failed its West African veterans. This need also demonstrated how contemporary francophone West African states and the global economy have failed veterans' descendants. Contemporary unemployment and underemployment in West African countries is extremely high. West African veterans maintain their relationship with France in order to support younger generations who cannot find work and build families. Their veteran status is a strategy to benefit from a relationship of clientship with an old colonial employer. As veterans, West African French colonial soldiers continue to complicate the legacy of French colonialism in West Africa.

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<sup>9</sup> Evidence from interviews conducted with Senegalese veterans and from ADP Dakar 482, ADN.

<sup>10</sup> Amadou Mahtar Mbow, interview, Dakar, 27 January 2011.

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