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**The Force of Culture  
Transforming Relations between France and West Africa  
1914-1939**

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## **Abstract**

The presence in France of thousands of West Africans enlisted to fight in the First World War transformed public opinion in the metropole about them, bringing to life France's colonial enterprise like never before and discrediting long-standing images of black Africans as uncivilized "savages." In West Africa, to the existing imperial order of military, economic, cultural, and linguistic subjugation, the French added the social devastation of mass, forced conscription of men, and the cruelty of Europe's Great War. The goal of this dissertation is to bring to light the social realities of this experience by illustrating that the wartime encounters between West African and French people irrevocably altered these two groups' perceptions of each other. I hope to illustrate the force of culture as instrumental in changing relations between France and West Africa from the outbreak of the First World War to the eve of the Second.

Chapter One discusses French and West African stereotypes of one another in the years leading up to the war, how the African soldiers ("tirailleurs sénégalaïs") became involved in the conflict, and introduces the notion of language as a powerful means by which to exert cultural control. Chapter Two examines primary accounts of wartime interactions between French, West Africans, Americans, and Germans which provide important insights into perceptions of the tirailleurs. Chapter Three, a close reading of autobiographical books by Lucie Cousturier, a French woman, and by Bakary Diallo, a former tirailleur, enhances our understanding of the nature of the encounters between French civilians and West African soldiers.

**Chapter Four explores interwar French society's newfound interest in African cultural elements, illustrating the phenomena of the interconnectivity of this interest in French culture and of the domestication of these imports by the French. Chapter Five focuses on French West Africa in the interwar years, discussing the impact of the tirailleurs' participation in the war and the lessons they learned about the French and the true nature of colonization. Central to this chapter are former tirailleur Lamine Senghor's condemnations of France's treatment of the tirailleurs and his efforts to reestablish the honor of his race.**

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## **Note on Terminology**

Terms such as “savage,” “barbarian,” “primitive,” “uncivilized” and “backward,” used throughout this dissertation, refer to common perceptions of the period discussed and should be read as if in quotation marks.

### **French Army**

During the colonial period, the French army contained three parts: the *Armée Métropolitaine* (Metropolitan Army), the *Armée d'Afrique* (Army of Africa), and the *Troupes Coloniales* or *La Coloniale*, which is named the *Troupes de Marine* before 1900 and after 1957. The Metropolitan Army was comprised of French conscripts whose duty it was to defend metropolitan French territory. Since there were sometimes doubts as to whether or not these conscripts could be required to serve outside France, in general they would only be sent abroad if they chose to go or if the legislature approved the assignment. (“France” included Algeria and sometimes Morocco and Tunisia.) Given these restrictions, France’s imperial ambitions necessitated the development of other forces, and the Army of Africa and *La Coloniale* became increasingly important beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The Army of Africa, which dates from 1830, included white European-only regiments: the *Chasseurs d'Afrique* (cavalry units), the infantry *Zouaves*, the *Légion Étrangère* (Foreign Legion), and the *Infanterie Légère d'Afrique* (a few battalions of petty offenders). It also included other, mostly indigenous units: Algerian, Tunisian and

later Moroccan cavalry *Spahis*, and the light infantry *Tirailleurs* (also Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan). In addition, the Army of Africa contained a few mixed units with metropolitan Frenchmen, the Moroccan *Goums*, and the *Compagnies Sahariennes* (Saharan camel companies).

*La Coloniale* dates from the seventeenth century, when units were formed to garrison colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, and other areas of the French Empire. Metropolitan *Coloniale* regiments, the *Coloniale Blanche*, were recruited mostly from volunteers but also included conscripts and volunteers from the Caribbean in particular, where citizenship rights had been granted. The *Tirailleurs* regiments (*Sénégalais*, *Malgaches*, and Indochinese and Pacific units) were comprised of French subjects from various colonies. (See Clayton 6-7 and Huré)

### French West Africa

In 1914, *l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (A.O.F.), or French West Africa, consisted of a federation of seven colonies and territories. The five colonies were administered by civilian governors, while the two territories remained under military administration until 1920. The capital of French West Africa was Dakar, Senegal. The colonies were: *Sénégal* (Senegal); *Guinée* (Guinea); *Côte d'Ivoire* (Côte d'Ivoire – the French name is considered the official one today); *Dahomey*, modern-day *Bénin* (Benin); and *Haut-Sénégal-et-Niger*, later called *Sudan* and *Haute Volta*, and now Mali and Burkina Faso respectively. The territories were *Mauritanie* (Mauritania) and *Niger* (Niger).

## Tirailleur Sénégalais

While *tirailleur sénégalais* has been translated as “African sharpshooter” or “skirmisher,” I find these terms to be inadequate and sometimes even misleading. I will therefore be using the original French words and spelling. However, since *tirailleur* and *tirailleur sénégalais* are important parts of the working vocabulary of this dissertation, they will not be italicized or otherwise set apart from the English text. By World War I, the Tirailleurs Sénégalais troops consisted of soldiers from all parts of French West Africa, not just Senegal, but in keeping with tradition these terms will be used interchangeably.

The noun *tirailleur* comes from the verb *tirailler* (1560), meaning either to tug at someone repeatedly and violently (transitive form) or to shoot a firearm frequently, wildly, and often ineffectively (intransitive). *Tirailler* can also refer to the actions of soldiers in shock troops, who lead an attack, firing erratically and at will. It derives from the verb *tirer* (to shoot or to pull). As early as 1578, the noun *tirailleur* referred to a person who tugged someone this way and that, or to a person (soldier or not) who was a bad shot. By the 1800s the military term *tirailleur* referred either to a soldier who fought in the front lines, or to a native soldier in a colonial troop, e.g. *tirailleurs algériens*. It is unclear whether the word *tirailleur* was applied to indigenous soldiers because of their use as shock troops, their inability to use firearms effectively (at least initially) – both of which have been alleged and disputed – or for some other reason.

## **Introduction**

The First World War's devastating effects on the French have long overshadowed the impact of the presence in France of 134,000 of the 200,000 West African soldiers recruited for the war effort. With hindsight, we can see that the war and the cross-cultural exchanges it engendered represent a unique moment in history. The Africans' presence in France transformed public opinion in the metropole about them, bringing to life France's colonial enterprise like never before and seriously discrediting long-standing images of black Africans as uncivilized savages.<sup>1</sup> In West Africa, to the existing imperial order of military, economic, cultural, and linguistic subjugation, the French added the social devastation of mass, forced conscription of men, and the cruelty of Europe's Great War. These traumas, combined with the eye-opening experiences of the African soldiers in metropolitan French civilization, set the stage for a series of changes in the relationship between France and its West African colonies, ultimately culminating in the collapse of the imperial order.

My objective in this dissertation is to bring to light the social realities of this experience by illustrating that the encounters that occurred during the war between West African and French people irrevocably altered these two groups' perceptions of each other. As the French came to know the West African soldiers who were brought to reinforce metropolitan troops their long-standing view of them as savages, and often even cannibals, was replaced by a more humanized but still racially influenced conception of

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<sup>1</sup> See the Note on Terminology regarding my use of terms such as "savage" throughout this work.

them as overgrown children. While this shift has been acknowledged in passing by scholars such as Marc Michel and Joe Lunn, the way in which it happened has not been explored in-depth. Furthermore, I have discerned a second perceptual change in France, which took place during the years immediately following the war, as a new version of the old savage image appeared. Due to their wartime contact with Africans, the French were unable to revert completely to the prewar uncivilized-savage stereotype, but in their search for cultural rejuvenation in the wake of the war they turned to the cultures they now realized existed in Africa. Similarly, for many of the West African soldiers the myth of the white man as invincible had been disproven during their first experiences on the battlefield, and they took this insight home with them. Heartened by their personal connections with French civilians and imbued with a new awareness of the inequities of the colonial order, they began to challenge the existing balance of power even before returning to Africa.

New directions in scholarship today, rather than viewing the colonial situation solely through European eyes, have argued for “careful interrogation of the relationship of colonial state to metropolitan state” (Cooper and Stoler 4) and for continuing efforts “to reintegrate the history of the colonies into that of the metropole” (Conklin 4). The new multidisciplinary lens focused on the colonial empires has encouraged scholars to mine the vast array of non-archival sources for clues to the inner workings of the colonial machine. (See for example Clancy-Smith and Gouda, Spurr) In his introduction to Double Impact: France and Africa in the Age of Imperialism, G. Wesley Johnson argues that “new perspectives for interpreting the colonial history of the first six decades of the

twentieth century are needed” if we are to understand the reciprocal influences between France and its Empire. (7) By “placing France and its colonies in the same historical frame” as Alice Conklin has suggested doing (253), and making use of a wide range of published sources I offer an original approach to the analysis of some of these reciprocal influences.

This dissertation draws upon a wide array of sources, many of which cannot easily be categorized as military histories, documentaries, novels, or autobiographies, since many of the authors cross the boundaries between established genres as they present and support their narratives. It focuses on these often obscure and forgotten texts in order to anchor large-scale cultural change in the immediacy of wartime personal contact and exchange. As indicated by the title, I hope to illustrate the force of culture as instrumental in changing relations between France and West Africa. The dates 1914 to 1939 clearly indicate that my study begins with the outbreak of World War I and the entry of West African soldiers into this conflict, and continues through the interwar years to end on the eve of the Second World War.

Previous scholarship regarding the participation of African soldiers in World War I has focused more on the methods and results of their recruitment and conscription than on the contact between these African soldiers and the French people during the war, or the changes brought about as a result of this contact. Shelby Cullom Davis’s 1934 Reservoirs of Men: A History of the Black Troops of French West Africa, one of the earliest outside studies of the tirailleurs’ participation in the war, is largely devoted to the development, conscription and organization of the African troops. His chapter “On

European Battlefields, 1914-1919" provides little information regarding the tirailleurs' performance during the war, or the conditions under which they lived and served in France. Davis refers to a body of French literature extolling the actions of these soldiers, but immediately relegates these texts to a footnote, passing them over in favor of his main interest: the post-war economic development of the colonies. (163) Raoul Girardet, in his classic L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962 (1972) skips over the war years entirely, moving rapidly from the approach of the war to the height of French colonialism, generally agreed upon as the 1931 Colonial Exposition. He too only alludes to "une innombrable littérature [qui] avait exalté la bravoure et l'abnégation des combattants 'indigènes', les traits les plus touchants de leur héroïsme et de leur fidélité" (178). Charles John Balesi's 1979 From Adversaries to Comrades-in-Arms: West Africans and the French Military, 1885-1918 includes only one chapter regarding the Africans fighting in France, being devoted primarily to the history of General Mangin's *Force noire* and of French recruitment policies.

The most complete work to date, Marc Michel's 1982 L'Appel à l'Afrique: contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en A.O.F. (1914-1919), draws heavily upon archival sources to establish a clear and thorough account of recruitment and resistance, the tirailleur battalions, and the economic participation of the colonies to the war effort. Michel provides invaluable information detailing the tirailleurs' actions in various battles and their lives in the camps, but qualifies the contacts between African soldiers and French people as only limited and superficial. Myron Echenberg's 1991 Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalaïs in French West Africa, 1857-1960 focuses on

conscription, stressing the uniqueness of France's use of colonial soldiers in Europe during World War I and covering much more than the time period discussed here. One other important work regarding the tirailleurs sénégalaïs' participation in the war is Joe Harris Lunn's 1993 dissertation, "Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War."<sup>2</sup> Lunn conducted some 85 interviews with veterans and witnesses, and used their responses in his discussion of recruitment, memories of combat, contacts with the French, and the war's legacy in Senegal. Lunn's combination of these oral histories with the existing written record adds a new dimension to the previous scholarship, offering a unique perspective on the experiences of West Africans during the war.

As this overview of the major works regarding French West Africans and their participation in World War I illustrates, the existing historiography has been dominated by military and economic concerns. Although published personal accounts of wartime interaction between the French and tirailleurs sénégalaïs have been mentioned in passing, their significance as documents that provide valuable information about public perceptions regarding colonization, culture, and race has been largely ignored. The impacts of the tirailleurs' wartime presence in the metropole on post-World War I French and West African societies have been largely overlooked and merit investigation. When scholars have studied aspects of post-war life in France or in West Africa, they have focused on specific issues: for example the French fascination with jazz (Jackson) or with

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<sup>2</sup> This work has just been published (1999), but since the book was not yet available to me all of my citations are from the dissertation.

African-inspired art (Blake), or social changes in Africa resulting from conscription (Summers and Johnson).

In order to set the stage for the transformations illustrated in this dissertation, I begin in Chapter One by discussing French and West African stereotypes of one another on the eve of the war and how the Africans came to be involved in the conflict. By examining the “simplified” French which the military insisted that the tirailleurs use, I introduce the notion of language as a powerful means by which to exert cultural control. During the war, many thousands of Africans were exposed for the first time to the French language, being forced to learn at least a few words of army vocabulary, and came into unprecedented contact with “real” French civilization. The importance of language acquisition to the French notion of assimilation did not escape the notice of many West Africans, but the only version of French to which the army gave them access confined them to a linguistic no-man’s land. Whereas the First World War has been seen as a pivotal moment in the formation of a French national identity, since many French conscripts from rural areas still spoke regional dialects until French brought them together in the trenches,<sup>3</sup> the war’s impact on African realizations of the true nature of

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<sup>3</sup> See in particular Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914, in which Eugen Weber documents the importance of both schools and military service during the late nineteenth century to the spread of the French language throughout France and the slow move away from regional dialects. Weber asserts that “The war of 1914 saw the culmination of [this] process, though not its end. With vast numbers of refugees set in motion and soldiers from every part of the country serving together, millions were forced to use French on a daily rather than a sometime basis” (78). See also pages 67-94, 292-339, 471-496. Pierre-Jakez Hélias, in his memoirs entitled Le Cheval d’orgueil, describes his own realization as a boy during the years following World War I of the importance of being able to understand and speak French rather than only his native Breton. See especially pages 190-253, which give details regarding his experiences in school.

their colonial subjugation and of the usefulness of learning the French language has not been adequately addressed.

In my second chapter, I examine several documentary-like texts which were published during and just after the war by French people, several of whom had fought alongside or commanded African soldiers on the European front lines. These works range in style from fairly straightforward military history to elegiac homage to the fallen, and offer valuable firsthand accounts of African participation in specific battles and of contact between French and Africans. They reveal a great deal about contemporary stereotypes of black Africans, and about public opinion regarding the direction France's civilizing mission should take in the years after the Great War. Well-known scholars of the war have made very limited use of these texts, approaching them as they do army archives or factual histories of the war, without analyzing the rhetoric and underlying motives of their authors. However, when read as the very personal and biased stories that they are, these works provide important insights into French perceptions of the tirailleurs and their presence on French soil.

In my third chapter, a close reading of Lucie Cousturier's Des inconnus chez moi (1920) and of Bakary Diallo's Force-Bonté (1926) offers an inside look at encounters between French and Africans, mostly on the home front during and just after the war. These two autobiographical texts provide rare, detailed information about friendships that developed between French civilians and West African soldiers and, as such, a different angle from which to observe the very personal reactions of individuals to such meetings at this unique moment in history. Cousturier, a French woman, came to know many

tirailleurs personally as she taught them French in her home near Fréjus in the south of France, the site of a major military training camp for African conscripts. Diallo, a tirailleur from Senegal who spent a good deal of time in various hospitals, encountered many different French people during his years in France. He was so successful in his efforts to learn the French language that he wrote Force-Bonté, the only known account of a West African's experiences in France during this period.

My close reading of Cousturier's and Diallo's texts together brings to light their deeper significance and enhances our understanding of the nature of the contact between French and West African people during the war, of individuals' reactions to this contact, and of the power of culture. Diallo's memoirs have long been dismissed as simple unabashed adoration of France, yet when resituated in the context of colonial domination and the havoc of war, his book reveals itself to be more complex and subversive than originally thought. To date, very few scholars have treated Diallo's work seriously, and few have mentioned Cousturier's. Yet these texts are extremely valuable records of personal interactions between two groups of people who had previously only known stereotypical portrayals of one another.

This unprecedented in-depth examination of these encounters during the war provides the basis for a discussion of the changes in the relationship between French and West African people during the interwar years. In my fourth chapter, devoted to France in the interwar years, I explore French society's newfound interest in African or African-inspired cultural elements, and illustrate the phenomenon of the interconnectivity of this interest in music, dance, literature and art. Suffering a post-war sense of disillusionment

and cultural deterioration, many French people openly embraced primitive dances and musical forms such as jazz in their efforts to reinvigorate their struggling society. Yet even as many French people sought these infusions of vitality precisely because of their primitiveness, they slowly but surely took possession of them, transforming them into “French” cultural manifestations as they incorporated them into their lives.

At the same time, despite the fact that the cultural exchanges of the war years had altered the French public’s perceptions of black Africans and of the importance (or lack thereof) of the colonial mission, the French administration forged ahead with its economic development plans, stressing the importance of maintaining the empire and increasing its profitability. Yet it ultimately failed to awaken an imperial consciousness in the minds of the French people, even as they flocked to the enormously popular Colonial Exposition held in Paris in 1931. It was only on the eve of another major European conflict that the public would again rally in support of the Empire, and in particular of another influx of colonial soldiers, as they did at the outbreak of World War I.

In the final chapter, the focus turns to French West Africa in the years following the war. The demobilization and repatriation of the surviving tirailleurs was not at all seamless, as veterans demanded that promises made to them upon their entry into the army be filled and that their pensions be paid. Returning home to families that had never expected to see them again, they brought with them new knowledge about the French and metropolitan civilization, and a new awareness of their place in the colonial order. Imparting these newly discovered facts to other members of their societies, seeking employment opportunities formerly closed to them, and often either unable or unwilling

to assume their prewar lives, these veterans made colonial administrators very anxious during the interwar years.

In France, the tireless efforts of one former tirailleur, Lamine Senghor, to call attention to the plight of the veterans and of the colonized people in general also raised concern among metropolitan officials. Perhaps considered too aggressive by the members of the Négritude movement, his endeavors were not acknowledged by them, yet the roots of this literary group are found in his struggles during the interwar years. In this chapter it becomes clear that the crisis of identity occasioned by Africans' attempts to reconcile their desire to realize the illusion of assimilation proffered by the French with their conflicting desire not only to retain their own cultural heritage but also to establish its value in relation to other cultures was not experienced only in the post-World War II or post-independence eras. This discussion of the impact of the tirailleurs' participation in the war and of the lessons they learned about the French and the true nature of the colonial project is of necessity very different from Chapter 4's illustration of the French public's whirlwind fascination with African cultural elements.

Despite the fact that the encounters described here between French and West Africans only came about as a result of forceful conscription by a colonial power into a brutal war, they triggered an unforeseen series of cultural and perceptual transformations which were unimaginable at the onset of the war, and whose implications have yet to be fully grasped. As such, this study seeks to lend a new dimension to our understanding of the specificities of this unique moment in history, when for the first

**time thousands of “regular people” from both sides of the colonial divide had the opportunity to learn about each other firsthand.**

## Chapter 1

### **From Savages to Soldiers: On the Eve of War**

#### **La Mission civilisatrice**

Although the French encounter with black Africans may have begun as early as the thirteenth century, most French people still knew little about Africans until the eve of the twentieth century. (Cohen, *French Encounter* 4) During the seventeenth century the French became more acquainted with West African coastal peoples by establishing tenuous trade relations in Saint-Louis (1630s), and many medieval myths about Africa were set aside, such as the existence of dragons and animals against which men could not defend themselves. Yet these myths were only replaced by an overall negative view of the African, based largely on cultural and linguistic misunderstandings. By the early eighteenth century, the few Frenchmen who had met Africans had only done so in the context of the slave trade. (29-32)

As Europeans traveled more widely around the world, especially in the Americas and Asia, their contacts with various peoples increased greatly, but long-standing “myths of African savagery” and the practical difficulties of travel to the interior of the continent hindered exploration of Africa. (62-63) While the Africans were most often characterized as being idle and barely able to reason, as lacking imagination, and as debauched and without religion (65-67), they were sometimes depicted as the “Noble Savage,” especially by opponents of slavery. Still, even those who preferred this image had

reservations about the Africans, and the concept of the Noble Savage remained mostly a literary convention. (70-73)

The French word *civilisation*, which would soon become so important to France's colonial ambitions, dates from the mid-eighteenth century, and quickly evolved to refer to "le mouvement collectif et originel qui fit sortir l'humanité de la barbarie" and then "l'état de la société civilisée" (Bénéton 33). From the moment of its coinage the term was widely employed, and *civilisation* could be used to justify French expansion and colonization, alongside arguments promoting Africa for mercantilist reasons and as a place of settlement. As Philippe Bénéton explains in *Histoire de mots: culture et civilisation*, the idea of civilizing the savages reflected Western imperialist notions, and resolved the apparent contradiction between two visions of history: one which integrated all peoples in the same movement of *civilisation*, and another which divided them into two groups – savage peoples and civilized ones.<sup>1</sup> During this period backward societies were still considered capable of evolving: "The civilizing process [...] could be effected by continual contact between Europeans and Africans. Frenchmen could act as tutors, speeding up the evolutionary process" (Cohen, *French Encounter* 176). Of course, there were certain advantages for the Europeans as well, namely commercial ones, as the African continent provided an untapped population of potential consumers.

Along with the idea of progress and perfection, *civilisation* during the nineteenth century also carried with it value judgements and evoked "ce qu'il y a du bien dans une

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<sup>1</sup> Bénéton 34-35. Bénéton cautions that while "Cette conception optimiste et impérialiste de la civilisation est sans aucun doute la conception dominante du temps, [...] elle n'est pas malgré tout unanimement acceptée," by such people as Rousseau and Voltaire. (35)

société" (Bénéton 43). The European tendency to view western civilization as "the" civilization meant that people without it were savages and barbarians. French colonialism was also influenced by ideals of the French Revolution, which were invoked to justify on moral grounds the subjugation and economic exploitation of foreign lands. (Miller, "Unfinished Business" 111) The Revolution, as Alice Conklin points out, had "convinced the French that they 'were the foremost people of the universe,'" and that they were duty-bound to spread their ideals to other peoples. This facilitated the leap from ideology (the savages *could* be civilized) to action (they *should* be civilized – and by France). (Conklin 17) As Bénéton notes, the concept of *civilisation* became "l'un des éléments essentiels de l'idéologie coloniale" and colonization could be considered the means by which backward peoples could be encouraged and helped to progress. (48-50).

Intricately entwined with colonization and the supremacy of European civilization was the doctrine of assimilation, which dated from the mid-seventeenth century but only became central to French colonial policy during the early years of the Third Republic. (Betts 20) The notion of assimilation encompassed two important elements: "the idea of basic human equality and the value of education as a corrective to environmental differences" (Betts 15) and, along with the French idea of their mission to civilize, would have a lasting impact on policies throughout the French Empire. (Betts 28) Language was crucial to the concept of assimilation: as Christopher Miller puts it, "the royal road to civilization is the French language, whose actual materiality is taken as an embodiment of values and skills" ("Unfinished Business" 115).

France's defeat in 1870 and subsequent crisis of self-confidence mark a turning point for the nation, as "le souci du réveil national devient la préoccupation première" (Bénéton 51). Colonization remained justifiable because of its *mission civilisatrice*, and the arguments of politicians in favor of colonial expansion (such as Jules Ferry) won out over those who favored a nationalism based on reconstituting France's violated territory (such as Clemenceau).<sup>2</sup> The imperialism of the 1890s represented a concerted effort to regain France's status as a great power as the French greatly extended their presence in West Africa, branching out from Senegal and other outposts to acquire large areas of territory including Dahomey, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Upper Volta.

During this "scramble for Africa" the French public was able to learn a great deal about the continent and its conquest, thanks to the burgeoning penny press and illustrated press, and ethnographic exhibitions. In studying these media William H. Schneider has discerned two images of Africa during these years: the "Africa of Exploitation" and the "Africa of Conquest." The exploitation image focused on the natural resources available in Africa, stressing the need for European civilization to put these to use and the opportunity to endow the Africans with European material and cultural advantages. (156) Faced with the Africans' evident resistance to French rule, the French sought ways to explain their hostility, using the racial generalizations and scientific theories of the late nineteenth century. The "Africa of Conquest" image reinforced the old stereotypes of barbarism and savagery, and the new illustrated press and exhibitions introduced this negative impression to its widest audience ever. (162-163) As Schneider notes, "what

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<sup>2</sup> See Girardet, *Nationalisme* 97-115 for information on these competing conceptions of nationalism in the 1880s.

started as a temporary explanation of African resistance,” with regard for example to armed conflict in Dahomey, “soon grew to become a general explanation of all African behavior” and ultimately tied in with the notion “that Africans had inherent biological limitations” (167-168). The veracity of these stereotypes would be challenged during the First World War with the French population’s first opportunity to see for themselves what explorers and colonists had been telling them about the Africans.

Out of growing nationalisms within nineteenth century Europe and new knowledge about the different belief systems and customs of other peoples grew the need to distinguish between a plurality of civilizations, under the umbrella of the overarching, dominant concept of “la civilisation.”<sup>3</sup> Additionally, by the late nineteenth century, scientific advances had slowly won out over earlier notions of the fundamental equality of all peoples, and colonial theorists determined “that certain important inequalities exist among races and peoples [ . . . ] soon [denying] the possibility of assimilation and [insisting] on a policy in keeping with the discrepancies among human societies” (Betts 59). One of the most well-known proponents of evolutionary and other scientific ideas was Gustave Le Bon, who in 1894 published Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples.<sup>4</sup> In this text he argued that “Chaque race possède une constitution mentale aussi fixe que sa constitution anatomique” (9), and he provided a “Hiérarchie psychologique des races.”<sup>5</sup> In Le Bon’s estimation, there was an “abîme mental” separating the races

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<sup>3</sup> Bénéton 40-42. See also Cohen, French Encounter 212-213.

<sup>4</sup> By 1927, this text was in its twelfth edition. (Widener 23)

<sup>5</sup> Le Bon divided humanity into four categories. “Les races primitives” such as the Australians were practically animals; “les races inférieures” such as blacks were capable only of acquiring the rudiments of civilization; “les races moyennes” included the Chinese and semitic peoples; and finally “les races supérieures,” indo-europeans, were the only ones capable of important advances in the arts, sciences and industry. (25-26)

(26), and therefore he denounced assimilation and tried to demonstrate “the need to respect native institutions and to seek a new and more scientific doctrine of colonial policy which accorded with the facts” (Betts 68-69). Earlier the Compte de Gobineau, in his Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines (1853-1855) had “synthesized French thought on race,”<sup>6</sup> emphasizing the importance of ethnicity, arguing “que la question ethnique domine tous les autres problèmes de l'histoire, en tient la clef, et que l'inégalité des races dont le concours forme une nation, suffit à expliquer tout l'enchaînement des destinées des peuples” (Gobineau 29).

Pronouncements such as those of Gobineau and Le Bon, realizations that African societies were enormously different from European ones, and the Africans’ often tenacious challenges to French efforts to overpower them led the French to “fall back on the racist conviction that Blacks in fact were not assimilable” (Cohen, French Racism 311). The policy of association came into vogue as a way to give local administrators more responsibility (Betts 107) and also took into account scientific notions that “races and peoples must and do evolve in their own particular national and cultural environments” (23). Association provided for a sort of fraternity, but not complete equality, and included important economic aspects which encouraged cooperation between the natives and the administration. The moral obligation of France’s *mission civilisatrice* was not abandoned, only modified, and the two theories of assimilation and association coexisted during the first several decades of the twentieth century.

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<sup>6</sup> Cohen, French Encounter 217. Cohen does mention that “Gobineau was rarely read in France” but “faithfully reflected the ideas on race of his predecessors and contemporaries.”

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries anthropologists and administrators such as Maurice Delafosse, Louis Faidherbe, General Gallieni, and Marshal Lyautey, who experienced sustained contact with West African peoples, gained a more “sensitive and sympathetic understanding of African institutions and societies.” Delafosse served as a colonial administrator in Côte d’Ivoire, Sudan and Senegal, and “was one of the first French anthropologists who combined theoretical and methodological knowledge with on-the-spot-research.”<sup>7</sup> He published several books in which he argued that African civilizations were not inferior to western civilization, and advocated ruling Africans through their indigenous political structures. William Cohen cautions that despite the efforts of Delafosse to improve the Africans’ image, little changed in the minds of the general population, which lagged behind the anthropologists since the prevailing racist view still predominated in colonial novels, school textbooks, and encyclopedias until after World War II.<sup>8</sup> One extremely popular textbook, first published in 1877, was Le Tour de la France par deux enfants by G. Bruno, whose real name was Augustine Fouillée and who was married to the well-known philosopher and sociologist Alfred Fouillée. (Ozouf 306) The text includes an illustration depicting the four races of man, placing “la race noire” at the bottom, after the white, red, and yellow races. (Bruno 184)

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<sup>7</sup> Cohen, French Racism 310. In 1939 Léopold Sédar Senghor referred to Delafosse as “le plus grand des africainisants en France,” specifying that by this he meant “le plus attentif” (“Ce que l’homme noir apporte” 26).

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, French Racism 311. See also Fanoudh-Siefer. Alice Conklin points out that few of Delafosse’s ideas were put into practice by administrators, at least until Clozel obtained the position of Governor General of French West Africa in 1915. (175-176)

The highly exoticized representations of West Africans offered to the French public at expositions from the 1880s onward reinforced long-standing popular perceptions of the Africans as savages with animal-like qualities, since “Bizarre customs, ferocity, and savagery were emphasized to attract and entertain crowds” (Schneider, W. 136-149). Although in the eighteenth century a few thinkers had preferred to view the Africans more as big children than as animals (Cohen, French Encounter 243), the “traditional European predisposition to find animal-like qualities in Africans” prevailed until the twentieth century. (Schneider, W. 147) However, once the general French population finally met Africans outside the expositions and got to know them, their views changed. As Cohen briefly notes, in these personal relations French people “often departed from the negative stereotypes; if they held ideas about black inferiority, these did not prevent them from being friendly to Africans.”<sup>9</sup>

Information regarding Africans’ impressions of French people upon their first encounters is hard to find, since studies of the conquest period tend to focus on the European experience.<sup>10</sup> Martin Klein does cite one explorer as writing in the 1820s: “I found that Africans, like ignorant Europeans, are fond of talking about what they do not understand. These Negroes believed that Europeans live exclusively upon the water; that they have neither land, houses nor cattle [ . . . ]” (28). In his interviews with Senegalese veterans of World War I, Joe Lunn did find that West Africans “generally agreed in their negative characterizations of the colonizers.” Those who had had very little exposure (if

<sup>9</sup> Cohen refers in passing to Lucie Cousturier’s and Bakary Diallo’s books, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 3 below. (French Encounter 284-285)

<sup>10</sup> See for example Klein, M., Islam and Imperialism in Senegal; Roche, Histoire de la Casamance; Robinson, Chiefs and Clerics.

any) to Europeans were struck by the color of their skin, found their language incomprehensible, and noticed that “they also ‘made signs on paper’ which some had never seen done before.” Lunn adds that “Under such circumstances, many – like others elsewhere in the world at the initial moment of contact with Europeans – questioned whether they were human at all,” and some came to the conclusion that they were not. In remote areas, “the African image of Europeans assumed spiritual dimensions that inevitably elicited abject fear.”

West Africans who had known Europeans longer did view them as human, but “the specter of Europeans nevertheless continued to inspire deep-seated apprehension because of the incontestable power they wielded over Africans.” Lunn argues that in the minds of those with the most contact with the French, they were viewed as less fearsome but “their increased proximity led to a heightened awareness of the servile character of [Africans’] relations with the *colonies*.” The overall theme of these varying images of the French “stressed the impotence of the Senegalese in the face of their colonial masters,” and left a “profound psychological impact” on them. (Lunn, "Memoirs" 59-63)

It is precisely these impressions of the French, and the perceptions that the French had of the West Africans, that would be strongly challenged by their encounters during the World War I, since these two groups’ first opportunity to have close, personal contact with each other occurred during the war years. Ironically, it was the very reasoning which brought the West Africans to France during the war that would be undermined by these encounters, since race-based “scientific” attitudes toward Africans which held that they were physically able to withstand severe conditions of climate and pain contributed in

large part to the decisions involving the constitution of *La Force noire* on the eve of World War I.

### **La Force noire**

West Africans were first recruited to French military service during the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although African auxiliaries had been employed by trading companies as early as 1926. (Balesi 2) In 1765 some were organized into the short-lived *Corps des Laptots de Gorée*,<sup>11</sup> followed by other corps such as the *Volontaires du Sénégal* (1789). By the mid-1800s more forces were being organized in West Africa, including a company of freed slaves from the Four Communes called the *Tirailleurs Sénégalaïs* (c. 1848). Although in 1853 another, larger, company of *tirailleurs sénégalaïs* was raised, these soldiers acted as auxiliary units to mostly French ones. In 1857 Louis Faidherbe, Governor of Senegal from 1854-1865, obtained an imperial decree creating a corps of *Tirailleurs Sénégalaïs*. (Clayton 334) Two regiments of *tirailleurs sénégalaïs* were created in 1884 and 1892 and participated in France's campaigns of conquest in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1890s: Dahomey, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Oubangui-Chari, Chad, as well as Madagascar. (335)

Even in these early days of *tirailleur* recruitment the French tended to consider certain ethnic groups to be more desirable for military service than others. Despite Faidherbe's preference for volunteers, the system of *rachat* (in which money was paid to the masters of men who became indentured to the army for twelve to fourteen years) was

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<sup>11</sup> *Laptop* is a Wolof word meaning "sailor."

the primary method of recruitment throughout much of the nineteenth century. (Echenberg, "Slaves" 312) Thus French recruitment both "guaranteed a predominance of slaves and other men of servile origin," and "resulted in a regional concentration and the reliance on specific ethnic groups" (320). The predominance of "royal slaves, war captives, and people largely of low social origins, led by sons of former warlords, aroused considerable unpopularity among the African population," and contributed to general reluctance to volunteer for service. (324) By the middle of the nineteenth century Bambara recruits were deemed to be the best soldiers, comprising two-thirds of all recruits in 1911, whereas the Wolof were viewed as "spoiled by [their] long association with France and had become 'snob de la caste' towards other Africans whom [they] regarded as 'sauvages'." Soldiers of Toucouleur ethnicity were considered excellent soldiers, but were not as amenable to French military discipline as the Bambara. With so many Bambara in the ranks, the Bambara language became the *lingua franca* of the tirailleurs sénégalais, until supplanted by *petit nègre* or *français tirailleur*. (321)

A few years before the outbreak of World War I a *Coloniale* officer,<sup>12</sup> Charles Mangin, proposed the creation of a much larger *Force noire* to be used not only in these kinds of operations, but also in the Metropole should the need arise, basing much of his argument on this history of successful use of black troops in Africa and their racial characteristics. Mangin (1866-1925) was born Metz (Lorraine) into a Catholic family with a long tradition of military service, and was greatly affected by his family's exile from Lorraine following France's defeat in 1870. His family connections gained him a

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<sup>12</sup> See the Note on Terminology for an overview of the organization of the French Army during this period.

position in the *Coloniale* in Africa with Louis Archinard, then *Commandant supérieur* of the Sudan and later commander of the entire Colonial Army (1904-1911), and he participated in Marchand's Fashoda expedition in 1898-1899.<sup>13</sup>

In 1908 Mangin, then a colonel, began seriously formulating his ideas about using African troops more widely than ever before. His first proposal was not well-received by military officials, but Mangin persevered with the support of William Merlau Ponty, Governor General of French West Africa from 1908 to 1914. Ponty even proposed his own plan for organizing the recruitment of West Africans, which led to Parliament's agreeing to experiment with a *force noire* by sending a battalion to Algeria in early 1910. Mangin's book *La Force noire* was published in 1910 while he was in Africa studying the precise military capacities of French West Africa,<sup>14</sup> and upon his return the campaign in favor of his plan increased in intensity.

*La Force noire* begins with a discussion of the declining population of France, a worrisome topic for the French which Mangin attributes to a certain "égoïsme" on the part of both men and women. He argues that families are opting to have fewer children for selfish reasons, and as usual in the wake of 1870 he draws comparisons between France's natality and mortality rates and those of Germany. In his opinion the natural solution to this population crisis is to make use of the military resources available in the colonies, just as the Romans did. Mangin's repeated references to the Romans illustrate the growing "fascination with ancient Roman grandeur" (Betts 43) and the views of many

<sup>13</sup> Chapter 4 of Balesi is devoted to Mangin and the *Force noire*. See also Chapter 1 of Michel, *Appel* as well as Barrows, "The Impact of Empire on the French Armed Forces, 1830-1920."

<sup>14</sup> See Michel, *Appel* 21-33 for information about this mission and the information Mangin gathered.

French imperialists that France's colonial theories were closely related to those of Rome.

(27) Similar connections between the Roman Empire and France's colonial ambitions were also made during the 1920s and 1930s, in particular by Louis Bertrand, who viewed France's activities in North Africa as the continuation of the Roman conquest of the same region.<sup>15</sup>

In supporting his proposal, Mangin notes that some have raised the question as to whether or not France can impose military service on non-citizens, to which he responds that even in civilized nations like England and the United States, "jamais aucun lien ne s'est établi entre les obligations militaires et le suffrage populaire, universel ou restreint." He argues that "Les puissances coloniales ont toujours employé leurs sujets d'outre-mer sans lier en rien les droits qu'elles leur accordaient et les devoirs qu'elles leur imposaient" (94-95). This issue would come up again in 1918 when the French, in need of a large number of African soldiers, would offer the possibility of acquiring citizenship as an enticement to enlist.

After describing the use of black troops from the time of Ancient Egypt to the present, including Algerian soldiers fighting for France in 1870, Mangin moves to a discussion of French use of Senegalese soldiers during the conquest and pacification of various parts of Africa. The most interesting part of La Force noire in the context of this study is his chapter on "La Valeur" of the Africans, in which Mangin enumerates the qualities of the black soldiers that make them an excellent source of additional military manpower for France. Repeating a claim frequently made by proponents of colonization,

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<sup>15</sup> See Bertrand's "Préface" to the 1925 anthology Notre Afrique.

he asserts that “les luttes permanentes ont imprimé à la race noire, depuis les âges les plus lointains, un caractère guerrier qu’elle conservera forcément pendant de longs siècles” and that it is only thanks to the intervention of the French that the many peoples in West Africa have stopped their continual warfare. (228). This line of reasoning was also used during the war, to justify the Africans’ contribution to the war effort. The text of a poster from the war years reads “Les colonies ravagées par l’esclavage, la maladie, les luttes intestines sont délivrées par les Français. Les indigènes, en retour, s’offrent pour défendre la France attaquée.”<sup>16</sup> Not only did this reinforce the popular notion that France had delivered the peoples of Africa from their continual state of warfare and illness, but it also clearly suggested the corollary that the Africans were grateful and wished to show their appreciation for the French now faced with their own war.

In publicizing and promoting his plan for a *force noire* Colonel Mangin gave a talk before the *Société d’anthropologie de Paris* in March 1911 in which he explained some of the results of the scouting mission he had just undertaken in French West Africa. He eliminated from consideration the populations of French Equatorial Africa on the grounds that they were still too primitive, focusing instead on “les 12 millions d’habitants de notre Afrique Occidentale, avec lesquels la Mission d’Étude des Troupes noires vient de prendre contact” (“Utilisation” 81). The published text of his speech includes a table of the various races, followed by an explanation of each race’s military usefulness. Luckily

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<sup>16</sup> Reproduced in the catalog for the 1996 exhibit “Mémoires d’outre-mer: les colonies et la Première Guerre mondiale” at the Historial de la Grande Guerre in Péronne, France. The image is undated in the catalog, but the year 1914 does appear in the image. (*Mémoires d’outre-mer* 12-13)

for Mangin, he seems to have been able to discern militarily desirable qualities in nearly all the populations he discusses.

Mangin subdivides the Mandingue race into “familles” including Malinké, Bambara, Saracolé, Sénégalaïse, Sénoüfo, Nigérienne, Soussou, and Nord Forestière, and states that this race provides “nos meilleurs soldats” because its a long history of warfare and strong resistance to French conquest under the guidance of military leaders such as Samory. He considers the Voltaïque peoples<sup>17</sup> to be “plus arriérés que les Mandingues,” even as he notes the splendor of the Mossi empire and its resistance to the French presence. As soldiers, though, Mangin concludes that they are not terribly different from the Mandingues. (86-87) He describes the Centre-Africaine families as being intelligent and commercial, and of course concludes “Là encore nous avons donc une excellente source de recrutement” (87-88). He reasons that if the military value of a race can be deduced from the numbers of French they killed in resisting colonization, then the Baoulés, part of the Achanti race, “tiendraient le premier rang parmi les races à soldats.” Mangin specifies too that the Dahomean tirailleurs, also in this racial group, “comptent parmi nos meilleures troupes” (88). Having already eliminated the equatorial peoples, Mangin also leaves aside the Côtier race (Casamance, Guinée, Côte d’Ivoire families) because “L’état arriéré de leur civilisation ne nous permet pas d’escampter l’utilisation de ces races dans nos corps de troupes indigènes,” but he is reluctant to exclude them completely. He cites a local administrator as indicating that some of these tribes are still at war with the French and others are as yet unknown, but that eventually they should be

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<sup>17</sup> Comprised according to Mangin of the Mossi, Bariba, Gourounsi, Lobi, Bobo, and Habbé families. I have copied Mangin’s spelling of these terms.

available as a military resource. (88-89) In fact, during the war the French did encounter a good deal of trouble when conducting recruitment drives in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

Mangin summarizes the common characteristics of all these indigenous peoples as they apply to the West Africans' military usefulness, concluding:

Voici donc les éléments principaux de formation du soldat noir: une âpre et rude nature, les nécessités du portage, les hérédités guerrières, le mépris de la douleur, fruit d'un tempérament peu nerveux et de l'éducation, le groupement patriarcal. Nous comprenons pourquoi ce soldat noir est endurant aux longues marches, à toutes les intempéries et à toutes les privations, pourquoi il est brave, pourquoi il est discipliné. (89-90)

He also notes that they admit the superiority of whites and are absolutely devoted to their commanding officers, and argues that the army would be a good place for them to receive something of an education, both military and commercial: "Au régiment, l'indigène acquerra des notions qu'il gardera toute sa vie et qui en feront un précieux agent de notre influence; il fournira à toutes les entreprises coloniales l'élément contremaître qui fait leur défaut; habitué à nos produits, il en répandra l'usage" (91). Mangin adds that in battle their fatalism makes them more useful than civilized peoples who often exhibit an "extrême nervosité," and by the end of his talk confidently asserts that "au point de vue militaire, le noir est mieux qu'un soldat utilisable, c'est un soldat d'élite" (91, 95).

Mangin also noted the hierarchical nature of African society in his explanation in La Force noire that the soldier naturally looks to his commanding officer for inspiration and guidance, and "C'est donc une discipline très paternelle qu'il faut donner aux

tirailleurs, des chefs qui s'imposent par le prestige des services rendus" (240). Not without racist underpinnings, this paternalism illustrates the tendency of officers and others who had had sustained contact with West Africans to view them as overgrown children as opposed to completely uncivilized savages. Despite his paternalism Mangin still draws heavily on long-standing preconceptions and generalizations regarding Africans, such as their endurance and ability to withstand severe hardships, and noting further that unlike Europeans they adapt well to various climates, as evidenced by their flourishing population in the United States.<sup>18</sup> Yet once West Africans were brought to France to fight in the war it quickly became apparent that they were not able to withstand the extremely cold and wet conditions of winter in the trenches of the front lines, and each year the army was obliged to move them to camps in the south of France until springtime in a practice called *hivernage*.<sup>19</sup>

As he concludes his treatise Mangin reasons that it is France's duty to establish this *Force noire*:

L'organisation des troupes noires, c'est la civilisation de l'Afrique régénérée, c'est le couronnement de notre œuvre. Quand une nation a commencé à écrire un tel chapitre dans l'histoire de l'humanité, elle a le devoir de l'achever; elle a le droit d'appeler à sa défense tous ses enfants, même ses enfants adoptifs, sans distinction de race. (350)

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<sup>18</sup> *Force noire* 247-248. Using population statistics and temperature ranges for such states as South Carolina, Indiana, and Montana, he concludes that "la race nègre peut vivre et prospérer dans des climats dont la température moyenne est inférieure à 9° et supporter éventuellement de grands froids" (251).

<sup>19</sup> See Michel, *Appel* 363-368. It is worth noting that this is the same word used to speak of animals kept in stables during the winter months and sent out to pasture during the warmer seasons.

As Marc Michel explains, Mangin artfully manipulates “le chauvinisme français si sensible à l’époque” and evokes an image of the “bon sauvage” fighting against the old enemy, Germany. (*Appel* 12) Like many of those who wished to exploit France’s colonial territories and peoples, Mangin made use of those scientific arguments which supported his plans, taking them out of context if necessary, and conveniently setting aside those that did not suit him. This made it possible for him to view the Africans as subordinate beings and ferocious savages on the battlefield while simultaneously portraying them as “bon sauvage” enough for use on French soil. Despite opposition from the socialists, Jean Jaurès in particular, and some high-ranking members of the military, including Captain Paul Azan and General de Torcy, a version of Mangin’s plan was eventually accepted. Later Azan would lament that the *force noire* “fût ‘un de ces projets qu’il ne faut pas discuter sous peine de se faire traiter de mauvais Français.”<sup>20</sup>

In La Force noire Mangin calculates that of a West African population exceeding 10 million inhabitants (269) France could very reasonably demand 10,000 to even 12,000 men annually, but he proposes the slightly lower figure of 7,000-7,500 men for the moment. (283) Yet as Echenberg notes, by 1912, after two years of the experimental use of West Africans outside French West Africa “it had become obvious that the colony was having difficulty supplying even 5,000 volunteers,” and at Ponty’s suggestion the French administration enacted a system of partial conscription February 7, 1912.<sup>21</sup> Decisions

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<sup>20</sup> Michel, *Appel* 12, citing a 1912 article in La France militaire.

<sup>21</sup> Echenberg, Colonial 29. In his 1934 Reservoirs of Men Shelby Cullom Davis states that “This decree remains one of the great milestones of black troops and was the first official recognition of Mangin’s and Ponty’s plans for an organised black reservoir.” Davis indicates that both Mangin and Ponty favored voluntary enlistment over conscription, and that Ponty reiterated this to his Lieutenant Governors in West Africa. (134-138)

regarding numbers of men to be recruited from various regions seem to have been based largely on Mangin's assessment of the population. Echenberg states that "Early censuses were extremely crude guesses rather than systematic enumerations," specifying that aside from a few densely inhabited areas, "French West Africa was in fact thinly populated" and suggesting that Mangin's demographic calculations were not particularly accurate.

**(Colonial 29)**

### **Recruitment and Resistance**

The February 1912 decree introduced to French West Africa a military obligation, and established the essential elements of this obligation for the duration of the war.

(Michel, Appel 30) The decree provided for three means of constituting this force: "par voie d'appel, d'engagements volontaires et de rengagements," leaving it up to the discretion of the governor general of French West Africa to establish the details of the actual recruitment.<sup>22</sup> The first applications of this law, in 1912 and 1913, resulted in the recruitment of about 16,000 men, mostly from Haut Sénegal et Niger. (Michel, Appel 31) By the outbreak of war in Europe the much-hyped *Force noire* had not quite come to fruition yet, but even so in late summer 1914 Ponty offered to the French government 6,600 men within a month. This offer was quickly accepted and the troops were sent to Morocco to replace French contingents called back to France. Ponty then assured the administration that "'l'enthousiasme serait extrême si (les) populations étaient informées

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<sup>22</sup> Journal officiel de la République Française (hereafter abbreviated JORF), 10 February 1912, 1347-1348.

que les indigènes sont admis à l'honneur de se battre en France,''" and again his offer was accepted and three battalions left immediately for France. (43-44)

With the first West Africans on their way to Europe, the recruitment effort in French West Africa took on a new urgency, and as Michel notes "la contribution militaire prit très vite un caractère de lourde contrainte et c'est de cette manière que la guerre fut d'abord ressentie par les populations d'A.O.F." (44). Ponty reduced the term of service from four years to two and added some incentives such as a bonus for service outside West Africa and money for tirailleurs' families. (45) The recruitment effort for September 1914 to October 1915 yielded 32,000 men, despite the native populations' various forms of resistance: "Fuites d'individus, parfois de villages, en brousse ou vers les colonies étrangères, désertions, recours à la corruption, refus ouverts mais non armés, toutes ces manifestations se multiplièrent dès septembre 1914" (50). In many areas up to nine out of ten men presented were unfit for service, causing administrators to remark upon the bad attitudes of the chiefs, who were often responsible for gathering together eligible men upon the recruiters' arrival. Although the presentation of sickly or old men constituted another form of passive resistance to conscription, these first recruitment drives also revealed the appalling state of hygiene and nutrition in areas severely affected by famine, epidemics, alcoholism, and leprosy. (53) Not all resistance was passive, though: an armed revolt in the region of Bélédougou, north of Bamako in Sudan, began in February 1915 when a chief refused to provide any men, and quickly spread to surrounding villages. Sometimes advancing only house-by-house, the French, reinforced by newly recruited tirailleurs, finally put an end to the bloody affair in April. (54-57)

Toward the end of 1915 the French army feared a deficit of 365,000 men for the spring, a problem whose solution Mangin and his supporters argued lay in the colonies. Mangin believed that France could extract upwards of 500,000 soldiers from throughout the empire, including 300,000 from West Africa in just a few weeks. (74) Local administrators vehemently disagreed, calculating that the most they could expect in 1916 was 25,000, half of the entire 50,000-man "réservoir" according to Governor General Clozel. (77) Another decree regarding recruitment (October 9, 1915) reflected the hope of some in Parliament that new financial incentives would encourage volunteerism and permit a move away from conscription.<sup>23</sup> Yet, as Michel notes, Clozel indicated to his lieutenant governors that "les engagements devraient être 'en principe' (et non exclusivement) volontaires, leur laissant, en fait, 'carte blanche' et les invitant à s'affranchir des textes antérieurs et des règlements existants" (81). An article in L'Afrique française notes that the authors of the decree restrained from fixing the number of men to be recruited, but as Michel states the government was asking for 50,000 men, the maximum number put forward by Clozel.<sup>24</sup>

Despite continued passive and armed resistance, the 1916 recruitment drive proved to be more successful than hoped, with 52,000-53,000 men recruited. The parliamentarians' preference for voluntary enlistment seems to have been almost completely ignored, since Clozel wrote to the inspector general that only 7,000 of these men were really volunteers. (Michel, Appel 84) In an effort to make enlistment as

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<sup>23</sup> "Développement" 328, also in JORF, 14 October 1915, 6367-6368. See also Michel, Appel 81 and Conklin 146.

<sup>24</sup> See "Développement" 330 and Michel, Appel 84.

attractive as possible, administrators organized “des ‘réjouissances populaires’ destinées à donner aux opérations de recrutement une ‘sérénité confiante’” and emphasized the prestige of the uniform, making sure new tirailleurs were quickly outfitted whenever possible. (83) Just as they had in 1914-1915, chiefs sought ways to avoid presenting their best and healthiest men, offering in Clozel’s words the “‘déchet de la population,’” which was often enrolled anyway because of increasingly permissive medical exams and reductions in the height and weight requirements. (85) The number of desertions rose during this wave of recruitment, and the problem of migration into neighboring British colonies continued, for example in Côte d’Ivoire where men were simply rounded up and chiefs were pressured, and a veritable “chasse à l’homme” resulted in 21% more recruits than expected. (89)

In October 1915 the obligation of military service was extended to the *originaires* (indigenous inhabitants) of the Four Communes, who because of their peculiar legal status were not subject to the February 1912 law regarding indigenous troops or to the March 1905 law regarding recruitment of French men with full civil and political rights.<sup>25</sup> Blaise Diagne, a native of Gorée elected Deputy to the National Assembly in May 1914, realized that *originaires*’ “support for recruitment [. . .] could be exchanged for concessions from the metropolitan government regarding the future of French rule for the

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<sup>25</sup> Balesi 80. The special status of the Four Communes was a result of the long history of a minority French presence there. In 1833 the local inhabitants of Saint-Louis and Gorée were granted the same rights as French citizens, and though these rights were suspended under the Second Empire they were restored in 1871. In 1872 they were conferred the same municipal laws as France, as were Dakar and Rufisque some fifteen years later. The Four Communes were also the first areas of West Africa in which the French established schools based on the metropolitan model. (Conklin 76-77) In the years preceding the First World War, “the new federal administration, though willing to admit that the *originaires*’ special electoral privileges gave them a legal status distinct from that of the federation’s other inhabitants, was not prepared

évolués and for all Africans.”<sup>26</sup> The first of two important laws proposed by Diagne was passed on October 19, 1915, establishing that *originaires* were subject to military service but that they would be “incorporés dans les troupes françaises,” not the tirailleurs sénégalaïs.<sup>27</sup> This resulted in the enrollment of nearly 6,000 *originaires* in April 1916, but was also viewed in the Four Communes as a step toward civic equality with the French. In fact, the second Diagne law (September 29, 1916) did establish their citizenship, stipulating in its only article that “Les natifs de communes de plein exercice du Sénégal et leurs descendants sont et demeurent des citoyens français soumis aux obligations militaires prévues par la loi du 19 octobre 1915.”<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that Parliament was aiming only to address the matter of military service with respect to *originaires'* descendants living outside the Four Communes, and essentially inadvertently provided both *originaires* and their descendants with citizenship.<sup>29</sup> This development was noticed in particular by évolués in Dahomey, who tried unsuccessfully to obtain the same privileges.<sup>30</sup>

Even with Dahomey on the verge of rebellion and entire villages fleeing to British territory during the 1915-1916 recruitment drive, the French had a much greater problem to contend with from November 1915 to July 1916 as the inhabitants of western Volta

automatically to recognize them as citizens of the Republic” (Conklin 151). See also Cohen, *French Encounter* 120-127.

<sup>26</sup> Conklin 155. Conklin defines the évolués as “a new class of French-educated, predominantly Muslim, African clerks [...] working in Dakar for the federal agencies or a large trading company” (151).

<sup>27</sup> *IORF*, 21 October 1915, 7569.

<sup>28</sup> See *IORF* 1 October 1916, 8667-8668 or, in *L'Afrique française*, “Service militaire” 407.

<sup>29</sup> Conklin 155. Since it is the tirailleurs sénégalaïs who are the focus of this study, the natives of the Four Communes will not be discussed in detail. For further information about their participation in World War I, see especially Iba der Thiam, *Le Sénégal dans la guerre 14-18 ou le prix du combat pour l'égalité* as well as Balesi; Michel, *Appel*; Lunn, “Memoirs”; and Conklin.

<sup>30</sup> See Michel, *Appel* 92-94 and Manning 256-257.

openly revolted. The area involved covered over 60,000 square kilometers and 500,000 people, and by the end of this long and bloody uprising, several thousand French and Africans had been killed, over 160 villages destroyed, and military occupation instituted. In exploring the causes of this revolt, Michel concludes that it seems “indéniable que le recrutement en fut bien la cause déterminante parce qu’elle rencontra un terrain favorable, préparé à l’explosion par les abus et la médiocrité du personnel administratif noir et blanc” in this society radically opposed to tight administrative control.<sup>31</sup> With tirailleurs sénégalais increasingly visible in such battles as the Somme and Verdun in 1916, the French public was certainly aware of their involvement and bravery, but knew little about revolts or the methods used to recruit soldiers in West Africa. (117) Shelby Davis too asserts in a footnote that “Official accounts barely mention war-time black recruiting, or characterize it as ‘orderly and quiet’. News from the French colonies was strictly censored during the war” (144 note 1).

Despite uprisings in Dahomey, increasing problems in tirailleur camps in Africa with regard to food supply and serious illnesses, and new incidents of trouble caused by veterans already returning from France, the French launched yet another recruitment drive in December 1916. African veterans of World War I were bringing home knowledge about the French and French civilization, introducing a new and often insolent mentality to the populations in Africa. With the possible exception of Governor General Joost Van Vollenhoven, administrators were not prepared to deal with this issue when it first arose in 1916, and the situation only worsened at the war’s end when thousands of

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<sup>31</sup> Michel, *Appel* 111-112. Michel gives a detailed explanation of this revolt (100-112), which covered approximately the entire western half of present-day Burkina Faso.

tirailleurs were demobilized. At the end of 1916 France was in desperate need of men, so recruitment in West Africa could not be halted and the French government called for 12,000 more men to be enlisted. (Michel, *Appel* 125) This drive netted 12,182 men, despite the fact that “l’exaspération des populations était évidente” and resistance had continued. (126-127) Van Vollenhoven, only in his position at the head of French West Africa since May 1917, actively lobbied to obtain the cessation of recruitment and finally succeeded in October. Arguing that it was impossible for the region to provide any more men because there were practically none left and the people had been pushed to their limit, Van Vollenhoven proposed that French West Africa be closed as a reservoir of soldiers but opened “en tant que réservoir à produits indispensables à la vie économique de la Nation.”<sup>32</sup>

Although recruitment was halted thanks to Van Vollenhoven’s efforts, it was quickly resumed only a few months later against his wishes. However, the 1918 recruitment drive marked a shift in strategy as the French tried to move away from coercive methods toward more persuasive ones. According to Joe Lunn, as a result of the developments in the Four Communes the notion of conscription in West Africa “became suffused with novel aspirations for the future” for the *originaires* in particular, and changed from a blood tax to a struggle for rights, launching “nothing less than a fundamental redefinition of the relations that had previously existed between the colonizers and the colonized” (“Memoirs” 126-127). Eight decrees in January 1918 laid out a series of reforms and concessions to recruits and their families, marking the

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<sup>32</sup> Michel, *Appel* 133. Regarding French West Africa’s economic participation throughout World War I, see *Appel* 139-218.

government's first recognition that "la participation militaire devait entraîner une transformation des rapports entre la métropole et ses colonies" (Michel, *Appel* 226-227) These decrees called for volunteer enlistment and reenlistment (but included the *appel* as well), slightly modified the system of financial compensation of families of recruits and added exemption from taxes and from the *indigénat*.<sup>33</sup> These measures also provided tirailleurs with the possibility of acquiring French citizenship,<sup>34</sup> and created sanatoriums for sick tirailleurs and both an agricultural school and a medical school for West Africans. Tirailleurs were certainly aware of these dispensations, and after the war administrators were faced with social disruptions as a result of some members of the population benefitting from these special privileges.

In early 1918 the number of men sought was set at 47,000, and for the first time the recruitment effort included French Equatorial Africa as well. Georges Clemenceau, *Président du Conseil* as of November 1917, was responsible for this decision, having determined that military issues took precedence over economic ones and that reinforcements were needed until the arrival of the Americans. (Michel, *Appel* 223-225) Clemenceau chose the African deputy Blaise Diagne to lead the recruitment effort, appointing him *Commissaire de la République* and further infuriating Van Vollenhoven,

<sup>33</sup> This judicial code, in force throughout the colonies, gave administrators summary power to imprison or otherwise discipline natives accused of a variety of offenses, such as refusing to pay taxes or committing disrespectful acts toward the authorities, among many others. See Buell 1016-1020 and Suret-Canale 331-336 for more information about the *indigénat* system.

<sup>34</sup> Regarding citizenship, the decree stipulated that "Les militaires indigènes originaires des colonies de l'Afrique Occidentale Française et de l'Afrique Equatoriale Française, non citoyens français, qui, ayant servi pendant la durée de la guerre, auront obtenu à la fois la Médaille militaire et la Croix de guerre, pourront obtenir la qualité de citoyen français," as could their wives and children, providing that the soldier also formally renounced his Muslim personal status and was recommended by the local administrator. ("Recrutement indigène" 32) See also Michel, *Appel* 426 note 46.

who resigned.<sup>35</sup> Diagne's mission, from February to August 1918, took him to Senegal, Upper Senegal and Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Dahomey and Guinea, and his entourage included several black officers such as Abdel-Kader Mademba, "the only African subject to reach the rank of major and hold a regular commission in the French Army before the Second World War," and "probably the best known African military intermediary during the interwar period both in French and African circles."<sup>36</sup>

The Diagne mission "was designed to dispell African fears about the fate of the recruits, to offer positive incentives for enlisting, and to prepare the way for the mobilization of men," and proved to be very successful. Diagne obtained the support of important chiefs and also spoke at public gatherings throughout the colonies, "emphasizing the enhanced prestige Africans had acquired through service in the army as well as the concessions he had obtained from the French" (Lunn, "Memoirs" 183-187). The considerable resistance offered by West Africans during earlier recruitment drives was mostly absent in 1918 since "this drive seldom inspired the terror elicited by

<sup>35</sup> In January 1918 Van Vollenhoven tendered his resignation after learning that Blaise Diagne's 1918 recruitment drive had been fully organized behind his back, without his knowledge or consent, and against his initial recommendations. While this act has been interpreted by some as demonstrative of Van Vollenhoven's desire to see the natives treated with respect (see Suret-Canale 136-138 and Lamine Senghor's La violation d'un pays, in which he alludes to this), others see it in a different light. Marc Michel and Iba Der Thiam argue that Van Vollenhoven resigned not because another recruitment drive was to take place but because his own demands were not met – he wanted military reinforcements, airplanes and weapons in case of uprisings as well as diplomatic assistance in convincing the British and the Portuguese to recruit troops in their colonies to discourage flight from French West Africa into these areas. Mincing no words, Thiam writes, "La preuve est donc faite que si Van Vollenhoven s'était, un moment, érigé contre la décision de ses supérieurs, de lever de nouvelles troupes, ce ne fut à aucun moment, par amour de l'Indigène ou de ses intérêts. Nous le voyons, en effet, réclamer des moyens de destruction massive et susciter même l'enrôlement d'autres Indigènes que leurs colonisateurs avaient peu ou prou tenus, jusque-là, en dehors du conflit" (153). See also Michel, "Genèse" 443-444, and see Echenberg, Colonial 43-44 for information about Van Vollenhoven's initial opposition to another recruitment drive.

<sup>36</sup> Echenberg, Colonial 38-39. For a discussion of Mademba's career, see Colonial 38-42. For further information about Diagne's mission, see Thiam 149-160; Michel, Appel 230-235 and "Genèse"; and Lunn, "Memoirs" 177-193.

previous ones" (188), but flight from recruiters continued and desertions once enlisted were not negligible. When the recruitment drive ended in late summer 1918, a total of 77,000 men had been enlisted: 63,000 from French West Africa and 14,000 from French Equatorial Africa, significantly more than expected. (Michel, *Appel* 243, 255-259)

Once in France, tirailleurs seem to have been subject to race-based sorting by military authorities, but Michel states that "il est impossible, faute de documents, de préciser les modalités." Referring to events which occurred in 1916, he writes that "Le commandement, ne paraît pas avoir renoncé aux stéréotypes distinguant les 'races guerrières', manding (bambara, malinke), sérèr, toucouleur... des 'races fragiles', peule, baoulé, gouro, sénufo."<sup>37</sup> Michel explains that the geographical origins of the members of the battalions reveal this, since men from Senegal, Haut-Sénégal et Niger and Upper Guinea were used on the front lines, while any "malingres" and men from Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire went into the *bataillons d'étape*. (*Appel* 299) Toward the end of 1916, it was suggested that this kind of classification by race should be abandoned, since "'tous les Noirs peuvent faire de bons soldats'" (305). Yet Michel notes that at least until 1918 "l'amalgame des 'races' dans les bataillons de ligne constitua plus une décision de principe qu'une réalité" (314), and although a system of racial mixing was proposed by the *Directeur des Troupes Coloniales* in 1918, Michel could find no evidence regarding the application of these directives. (325)

Throughout the war tirailleurs sénégalaïs were amalgamated with white soldiers, mostly other *Coloniale* troops, but in 1918 some also saw combat amidst metropolitain

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<sup>37</sup> Michel, *Appel* 299. Michel's spellings vary from those of other authors, and have been cited as they appear in his text.

troops. Both Balesi and Michel cite the lack of any definitive doctrine regarding black-white amalgamation policies, and explain that troops seem to have been mixed and unmixed according to commanding officers' needs at specific times.<sup>38</sup> Michel explains, for example, that in 1914 the 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion de Tirailleurs Sénégalaïs (B.T.S.) included 781 black soldiers and 51 white (mostly officers), and he indicates that on the regimental level there was generally a higher percentage of whites and that these proportions would change later. On the front the uniforms of the West African soldiers hardly differed from those of the white *Coloniale* soldiers, the tirailleurs' red *chéchia* being hidden during operations. (289)

In an effort to help worn-out French soldiers and increase African soldiers' participation their amalgamation was reorganized in 1915. "Ainsi, pour la première fois, les bataillons sénégalaïs furent disloqués de manière à permettre l'organisation de bataillons amalgamés à raison de deux compagnies blanches pour deux compagnies noires" (295). Michel laments, "Les documents ne permettent malheureusement pas de savoir comment fut vécue cette nouvelle fraternité d'armes," and also comments that this system makes it very hard for historians to follow the tirailleurs' actions. (295) Some commanding officers did not warmly welcome the tirailleurs into their ranks, maintaining the stereotypes mentioned earlier and fearing that they were not going to be particularly useful on the front lines.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Until 1918 the officers commanding tirailleurs were virtually always white. Michel notes that there had been some black officers during the conquest period, but in 1914 there were a few *originaires* and even fewer non-citizen West Africans in some position of command. This changed in a limited way in 1918, thanks in large part to the efforts of Mangin. (*Appel* 325)

<sup>39</sup> One such general, Berdoulat, later wrote the preface to a text discussed below, Coulibaly: les sénégalaïs sur la terre de France. Clearly patting himself on the back for having managed to make use of these

Although this system seems to have worked for a time, and was even recommended by a general who had previously objected to it (Blondlat – who proposed a period of adjustment before actual amalgamation), in 1917 questions again arose about the mixing of white and black soldiers. (Michel, *Appel* 314) Different suggestions were made, but in the end no decision, and amalgamation until April 1917 was essentially improvised by commanding officers of the various *Corps d'Armée Coloniale*. (314-315) In May 1917 a note from the General Headquarters reminded officers that the B.T.S. were combat units and that they were not to be used as porters or workers, and specified that they were to be “attribués aux unités blanches coloniales ou métropolitaines sans distinction pour constituer le quatrième bataillon des régiments européens.” The tirailleurs were to remain in their units except when in battle, when “ils seraient dissociés car il importait tout d’abord d’encadrer solidement les Sénégalais par des éléments blancs” (321). Commander in Chief Pétain generalized this organizational system but in the fall the debate began again, with some commanders of tirailleurs complaining that their troops were being placed under the authority of officers who did not know them. Headquarters relented and “On revenait au laxisme antérieur,” though many battalions were mixed according to the instruction in the note, and several were loaned to metropolitain troops. (323)

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undesirable soldiers, Berdoulat writes of the black soldier “Jamais l’adage ‘Tant vaut le cadre, tant vaut la troupe’ n’a été aussi vrai que pour lui” (3).

### **Une prison verbale**

Amalgamation, and even before that military instruction, required that the French soldiers and the West African ones be able to communicate with each other on at least a rudimentary level. Although officers who had spent time in West Africa and had commanded tirailleurs sénégalais before World War I had often learned some Bambara to facilitate communication, the use of so many Africans in France made it necessary that they know some French. As Mangin pointed out in 1911, "tous les noirs véritablement utiles n'ont pas passé par nos écoles primaires" ("Utilisation" 91) – mainly because there were so few of these at that time. Although schools had been established as early as 1855, such as the *École des fils de chefs* (or *École des otages*) set up by Faidherbe, they were reserved for chiefs' sons. Additionally, much as happened during the wartime recruitment, "using an astute strategy of resistance, the chiefs often sent their slaves' sons instead" (Miller, "Unfinished Business" 118).

Jean Suret-Canale explains that education in West Africa had largely been left to the missionaries, and what lay schools there were at the turn of the century were concentrated in Saint-Louis, Gorée, Dakar, and Libreville (Congo). (371-372) He adds that while there were schools in outlying areas, only those "in the main towns can be considered primary schools in the normal meaning of the term. The village schools, and those run by the rural missions, were largely improvised, and so lacked any stability," often closing unexpectedly. (373) In 1907 in French West Africa there were "seventy-six village schools, thirty-three regional schools (two-thirds of the circles had no school facilities) and twelve urban schools," and in 1914 "the total number of pupils was

estimated at 17,000 in French West Africa.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it would appear that Mangin was right to assume that most of his prospective soldiers had not attended school.

In an effort to help fill the army's evident need for these men to understand and speak some French, in 1916 a military publishing firm produced a guide for officers entitled Le français tel que le parlent nos tirailleurs sénégalais. This pamphlet codifies the grammar of *petit nègre*, a language which "nos tirailleurs noirs au contact de leurs instructeurs européens ont créé." Although the author refers to this language as "petit nègre" and as "langage tirailleur" once each in his introductory statement, throughout the rest of pamphlet he refrains from assigning it a name, artfully distancing it from French. (For simplicity's sake, and since it is a version of French, I am referring to it as *français tirailleur*, as does Manfred Prinz in "Überlegungen zur Sprache der 'Tirailleurs.'") The anonymous author explains his goal:

Nous allons essayer de dégager ces règles; leur connaissance facilitera la tâche des nombreux gradés européens versés dans les troupes noires, leur permettra de se faire comprendre en peu de temps de leurs hommes, de donner à leurs théories une forme intelligible pour tous et d'intensifier ainsi la marche de l'instruction. (5)

The two most important principles are (1) always to use the same word to refer to the same object or idea, and (2) to give the same simple grammatical form to the French phrase as would be given in "tous les dialectes primitifs de notre Afrique Occidentale"

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<sup>40</sup> Suret-Canale 375-376. He also notes that "In 1945 it was estimated that in all areas the proportion of illiterates among the population exceeded 95 per cent. In French West Africa the percentage of children of school age who had some schooling was 3.34 per cent" (391).

(5). The guide is divided into three sections: the first discusses the parts of speech, gender, number and so on; the second explains sentence structure and gives many examples; and the third offers suggestions for how to build the tirailleurs' vocabulary.

Part one begins with the article, using examples from Bambara to illustrate the fact that in West African dialects there is no definite article. In *français tirailleur* articles are to be avoided, since tirailleurs are prone to assuming that the article is part of the word itself, which leads to their saying "mon latête" for "mon tête."<sup>41</sup> The "mon" here, rather than "ma," can be explained by the fact that all inanimate objects are masculin in *français tirailleur*, and "S'il s'agit d'un être animé, nous formerons le féminin en ajoutant au masculin le mot femme" to arrive at the African way of speaking. As such, "une jument" must be "cheval-femme," and "une chienne" is "chien-femme." (7-8) Not only do nouns not have genders, but they must also always be singular. To indicate a large quantity of something, the noun should be followed by "beaucoup" or "trop," the latter being the better choice, and pronounced "trope." A small quantity of something is indicated by the noun followed by "un peu" pronounced "un pé," but if the objects can be counted it is acceptable to indicate the number, by saying for example "Çà y en a moutons trois" (8).

In discussing adjectives, the author explains that in order to replicate the Bambara structure the phrase "y en a" must be used.<sup>42</sup> Thus, "Le bon tirailleur obéit toujours"

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<sup>41</sup> The author notes later that there are certain words such as "route" that tirailleurs are accustomed to saying with the article, such that they form one word: "laroute." The words for parts of the body follow this same convention: "mon lebras, mon lajambe, mon latête, etc..." (7, 18).

<sup>42</sup> He explains that in Bambara "ka," the equivalent of "être" is used, and as such the phrase "un enfant bon" in Bambara is "dén akagni" which translates into "un enfant (que) il est bon." In French "l'usage a traduit *a ka* par *y en a*, et *a ma* [the negative form], par *y en a pas*." (8-9)

becomes “Tirailleur y en a bon, lui toujours obéir.” The demonstrative adjectives, “Ce, ces, cette, etc., se traduiront uniformément par: *ça* ou *y en a là*,” and the possessive adjectives are reduced to just “mon,” with things like “sa maison” being translated into “case pour lui” and the plural “mes camarades” into the masculin semi-plural “mon camarades.” As with many statements in *français tirailleur*, these should always be accompanied by a gesture indicating of what or of whom one is speaking. (9)

Counting seems to be of major importance for the tirailleurs, as the reader is instructed to make sure they articulate numbers as best they can and, in the interest of assuring their correct pronunciation, to avoid having them all count out loud together.

(10) Only the masculin forms of personal pronouns are used (*lui* and *eux* covering females), although “Pour les troisièmes personnes, il est préférable, si l’on veut être sûr d’être bien compris, de remplacer le pronom personnel par le nom qu’il représente ou bien encore de tourner par: *Çà y en a là* (celui ou ceux qui sont là).” The example given demonstrates how quickly this supposedly simplified version of French can in fact become complicated: “Ils sont mauvais: *Ça y en a là y a pas bon.*”<sup>43</sup> Since the possessive pronouns in *français tirailleur* are the same as the personal pronouns, constructions requiring them are not much easier: “Le mien: *ça y en a pour moi.*” The author adds, “Même remarque que plus haut pour ce qui est des gestes à faire en parlant” (11-12). These frequent references to the necessity of accompanying speech with various gesticulations could be interpreted as a tacit admission that *français tirailleur* results in some very convoluted and virtually incomprehensible sentences. However, the author

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<sup>43</sup> “Me voici,” noted here as well, remains simple: “Voilà moi,” though it seems completely unnecessary to have come up with a new way of expressing this.

does seem convinced that since it is based on “tous les dialectes primitifs” of their homeland this is not a very hard form of French for the tirailleurs to learn, and that if they cannot understand it without hand signals this is due to the tirailleurs’ own lack of mental acuity.

Whereas the use of pronouns becomes increasingly tortuous, verbs are in fact simplified in *français tirailleur*: they are used in the infinitive, with the personal pronouns. In the present, “je pars” becomes “moi partir,” and in the past “je suis parti” becomes “moi y a partir” supplemented with a word that reinforces the past tense, such as *hier*. The future, “conjugated” just like the present, is also accompanied by some indication of time. For example: “Tu partiras dans deux jours: encore deux jours toi partir,” but the author is careful to specify that a short pause is necessary between “encore deux jours” and “toi partir” – “Le tirailleur comprend ainsi au ton qu'il s'agit d'un acte futur.” The imperative, too, consists of “toi partir,” with both tone of voice and the requisite gesture helping to transmit the message. Thanks to the well-known “Banania” illustrations, which date from the war years,<sup>44</sup> perhaps the most widely recognized form of *français tirailleur* or *petit nègre* is the phrase “y a,” the equivalent of the verb “être.” The example given in the pamphlet, “Je suis malade,” which becomes “moi y a maladi,” appears to indicate that tirailleurs tend to pronounce “malade” as “maladi” but the author

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<sup>44</sup> According to Jean Garrigues, author of *Banania: histoire d'une passion française*, this powder (a mixture of banana flour, cocoa, barley and sugar) was concocted by a former journalist and banker named Pierre-François Lardet around 1912. (16) Garrigues states that Lardet first thought of associating the tirailleurs’ “Y a bon” with Banania as World War I was beginning, and that from the end of 1915 on the images were widely distributed. (43) Laurent Gerveteau, in “De bien trop noirs dessein” includes what he describes as the “Première affiche représentant un tirailleur sénégalais pour la marque Banania,” dating it 1917 (125). In “L'image du soldat noir” Marc Michel dates what appears to be the same image in 1915 (90), and Garrigues too places it around 1915. (32)

does not give any information about pronunciation. The verb “avoir” in the sense of “posséder” is translated by “y a gagné” or “y en a gagné” (13-14).

Prepositions and conjunctions in *français tirailleur* are simple, since there are none. The possessive is also relatively easy, with the possessor of the object being placed before the object: “tirailleur fusil.” The author admits that most tirailleurs would probably also understand the reverse, but would have to invert the words in their heads, and he recommends: “Mieux vaut leur éviter cette peine, si l’on tient à être rapidement compris” (15). In terms of syntax, he writes that all the languages of French West Africa are very straightforward, with sentences composed of a subject, verb, and complement. (15) Finally, “oui” and “non” are to be used as usual in French, but the author suggests avoiding asking questions in the negative form, such as “N’as-tu pas un fusil?/Toi y en a pas gagné fusil?” because of the confusion that could result. The use of inversion as an interrogative form is also not encouraged – “le ton seul indiquera l’interrogation” (16).

In the second part of the pamphlet the author elaborates on sentence structure, advising the use of as few words as possible and of words without many syllables (“Eviter les mots comme ‘réverbération’”) and counseling against the use of homonyms, which lead to misunderstandings. Following this brief discussion are thirteen pages of translations of instructions that tirailleurs must be able to understand, such as the tasks of a sentry. For example: “Elle [la sentinelle] doit voir et entendre” is translated as “Sentinelle y a besoin faire manière mirer, lui y a besoin faire manière entendé tout.” Luckily explanatory information is included alongside these translations, such as: “faire manière=tâcher, s’efforcer” and “mimer=voir, regarder.” As evidenced even by some of

the short sentences cited above, *français tirailleur* can quickly become complicated, and often the French instruction is much shorter than the translation. For example, under the heading “Exécution du mouvement/Comment y a besoin avancer” one command is: “Au commandement de: ‘Halte!’, se jeter à terre le plus rapidement possible, dans la position couchée, se redresser légèrement pour voir le but et le terrain en avant. Se porter ensuite en rampant sur l’alignement des camarades si on ne s’y trouve déjà.” Despite the fact that this already uses only infinitives (as French instructions tend to do), it must be translated:

Quand chef y a commandé Halte! tirailleur y a besoin faire ‘couchez-vous’ vite, vite, même chose lui y a tombé, lever un peu son tête y a moyen mirer lebut (où ça lui y a besoin tirer). Y a moyen mirer terre en avant, y a moyen mirer place en avant. Quand tirailleur y arrêté, si lui y a pas faire aligné avec son camarades, lui y a besoin faire manière ‘marche rampante’ pour y aligner lui avec son camarades. (23-24)

The pamphlet includes many other examples of this sort, which do not need to be cited here, the point about the often ridiculous complexity of *français tirailleur* having been made. As will be seen throughout chapters two and three below, this supposedly simplified French was widely used by the military, French civilians, and the tirailleurs themselves. Despite the fact that the army taught this form of French to tirailleurs and tried to limit their contact with civilians, many tirailleurs clearly had occasion to hear “real” French spoken, and their recognition of the fact that they were granted access only to a manufactured French did not endear the French military to them.

Le français tel que le parlent nos tirailleurs sénégalais is not meant to be an exhaustive study or dictionary, and intends rather to demonstrate that important instructions for tirailleurs can be rendered comprehensible to them using a relatively restricted number of words. One major linguistic aspect of the encounters between the French and the West Africans upon which it does not touch is the use of the informal “tu” by the French when speaking to Africans. As Anthony Clayton explains in France, Soldiers and Africa, the use of “tu” by officers when speaking to tirailleurs was “common (but not invariable)” (13). In a note Clayton expands somewhat on this, adding that while its use was often imbued with a good degree of paternalism it also grew out of the fact that many African languages did not include the same informal/formal distinction of address. (392 note 21) A Bambara grammar book dating from 1932 does state that “Le tutoiement est de règle en bambara. La 2<sup>e</sup> personne du pluriel existe, mais elle ne s’emploie jamais pour une personne seule.”<sup>45</sup> Although the author of the *français tirailleur* pamphlet could therefore have used this grammatical feature of Bambara to justify the elimination of the formal “vous” in *français tirailleur*, he does not do so. I would argue that the use of “tu” probably arose out of French colonizers’ feelings of superiority, and sometimes paternalism, and simply became the norm.

Additionally, I contend that *français tirailleur* was purposefully codified in order to deny tirailleurs access to the French language which represented the primary, or at least initial, means by which they could have put the theory of assimilation into practice. Although the author carefully refrains from referring to it as even a version of French,

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<sup>45</sup> Delaforge 8. A 1913 Bambara grammar book does not prescribe *tutoiement*. (See Sauvant, Manuel Bambara)

and the need for this “simplified” language is couched in terms of African inability to learn “real” French, it seems clear that the army’s actual intention was to keep the tirailleurs linguistically removed from the civilian population, thereby limiting their chances of realizing assimilation. The significance of language and the problems of identity that arise in populations on whom an outside language has been imposed are clearly visible in much of the literature being written even today by writers in formerly colonized nations. Yet in the case of the tirailleurs, it was not an actual language which they were taught, but a simplified and to many, insulting, version of it. This affront to their dignity and thinly veiled attempt to keep these Africans separated from French civilization and people would play an important role in the transformation of many tirailleurs’ view of the French, and of the army in particular.

## Chapter 2

### **“Ils ont bien mérité de la Patrie”<sup>1</sup>**

#### **The Tirailleurs in World War I**

During and just after the war, a number of popular documentary-like texts were published by French people who had fought alongside or commanded African soldiers on the European front lines. This chapter focuses on five of these books, published between 1917 and 1922, which offer valuable firsthand accounts of African participation in specific battles and of contact between Africans and French.<sup>2</sup> They reveal a great deal about French stereotypes of black Africans, illustrating the transition from the general prewar view of Africans as savages to the wartime perception of them as overgrown children. Despite this shift, the descriptions of tirailleurs in these texts are clearly still influenced by the belief that the Africans are glad to fight for France, “la mère patrie” and bringer of civilization to their land. What several of these authors add, though, is an insistence that the French owe the tirailleurs a debt of gratitude for their participation in the war. This notion of a repayment of sorts conflicts with the image of the Africans as being thrilled to have the opportunity to repay France for freeing them from the ravages of illness, ethnic warfare, and general barbarism. Additionally, this debt is linked only to the Africans’ physical participation in the war, not the continent’s economic

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<sup>1</sup> Séché 235-56. Cited below in context. Charles-Robert Ageron quotes Gaston Doumergue, Minister of Colonies, as saying “Les colonies ont bien mérité de la patrie,” but does not give a date or source for this. (“Colonies” 34)

<sup>2</sup> See Davis, S. 163 note 1 for a list of books about the tirailleurs and the colonies, which includes the texts studied in this chapter and some others which are not directly relevant to this discussion.

contributions, which suggests that the notion of a debt arose out of the contact between French and West African people during the war.

Several of the books studied in this chapter describe in detail the great battles of World War I, such as Verdun, Chemin des Dames, and the Somme, the later publications referring to and quoting the earlier ones. Without going far into the details of the military history, this chapter examines these accounts of tirailleurs' conduct during the war. Some scholars have suggested that the Africans' behavior was not always exemplary, and that they panicked and fled during attacks or were generally bad shots.<sup>3</sup> However, texts such as Léon Bocquet and Ernest Hosten's Un fragment de l'épopée sénégalaise: les Tirailleurs noirs sur l'Yser (1918) or M. Dutrèb's Nos Sénégalais pendant la Grande Guerre (1922) almost go overboard in the other direction, continually applauding the bravery and fidelity of these "grands enfants" and their single-minded devotion to their French superiors. Bocquet and Hosten went so far in their praise of the Africans that nearly all of their concluding paragraphs were censored by military authorities.

The question of the actual effectiveness of the tirailleurs with respect to the eventual outcome of the war is not important here, my focus being instead what their lives were like in World War I Europe, what kinds of experiences they had, and what they learned about and taught the French people they encountered. In the course of their daily close contacts with the tirailleurs sénégalaïs, several of these authors had many occasions to notice the Africans' use of the French language and their desire to learn French, and even to become teachers themselves. At times overtly, and at others

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<sup>3</sup> See Horne 309 and Davis, S. 123-24.

inadvertently, these texts speak not only to the tirailleurs' thirst for knowledge and their admiration of mother France and the French people, but also to the authors' opinions regarding the intelligence of these "grands et naïfs enfants" (Gaillet, Deux ans 63).

This chapter begins with an introduction to each text and its author(s), and then explores the character traits typically attributed to the tirailleurs and these soldiers' experiences in France on and off the front, as portrayed in these books. French reaction to their colonial subjects' participation in the war effort is also contrasted in this chapter with American views regarding African-American soldiers, who fought in limited numbers in France as well. The reception accorded American black soldiers by the French differed greatly from the treatment they received within their own army, just as white American soldiers' views of the Africans conflicted with those of the French. The chapter ends with the German reaction to the tirailleurs' presence, particularly during the occupation of the Rhineland, and how it is portrayed in the only one of these texts to discuss this aspect of the Africans' involvement in the war, Dutrèb's Nos Sénégalais pendant la Grande Guerre.

## **“On prend là un grand bain d’héroïsme”:<sup>4</sup> Books about the tirailleurs (1917-1922)**

### **Coulibaly: les Sénégalaïs sur la terre de France (1917)**

As demonstrated by the first of these five texts, by Léon Gaillet, it is difficult today to find information about the authors, some of whom seem to have been either obscure or intent on remaining unknown. Reviewers of Gaillet’s 1917 book do not give any background about Gaillet himself, other than that he was a *Sous-lieutenant d’Infanterie Coloniale* (stated on the cover of the text) and that he served with tirailleurs (clear from the text itself).<sup>5</sup> The author of his preface, though, is better known. General Berdoulat (1861-1930) first served with the tirailleurs tonkinois, fought in Conchinchina and later went to West Africa, Sudan, and Madagascar. As *Général de division* he took command of the *1er corps d’armée colonial* in France in 1915 (though he was reluctant to do so),<sup>6</sup> and led successful attacks at the Somme and other battles, receiving several citations during the war. Berdoulat’s brief “Lettre-préface” to Coulibaly lends credibility to the little-known Gaillet’s text. He praises Gaillet’s portrayal of the Africans as “le grand enfant”<sup>7</sup> and claims that Gaillet’s description does justice to the Africans: “Honneur à Coulibaly et aussi honneur à vous, qui avez su lui rendre justice, et mettre en relief sa bonne et belle figure dans cet excellent livre” (4). Today of course, but also even

<sup>4</sup> The citation comes from Lucien Boudet’s characterization of Bocquet and Hosten’s Un Fragment de l’Épopée sénégalaise. (45)

<sup>5</sup> See Arréat and “Bibliographie.”

<sup>6</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, Michel notes that upon being assigned battalions of tirailleurs Generals Berdoulat and Blondlat expressed the belief that the tirailleurs were insufficiently trained and that they should only be used as reinforcements. (Appel 299)

<sup>7</sup> The reason for the use of the singular here will become clear below.

in comparison to other texts published during the war, Gaillet's depiction of the Africans is clearly culturally biased, prone to fantasy, and exotic.

Gaillet's own preface, which follows Berdoulat's letter, is addressed "à Coulibaly," who initially seems to be an African whom Gaillet has come to know personally. Using the informal "tu" Gaillet explains that he understands Coulibaly's "âme obscure et enfantine" and that he is now convinced that "les âmes n'ont point de couleur." Gaillet considers it his duty not to keep this revelation to himself, but rather to prove to others "que tu [Coulibaly] n'es point si noir qu'on t'a fait et surtout que tu paraîs être, à ceux qui seraient tentés de juger de toi par la couleur de ta peau" (5). This statement leads the reader to believe that Gaillet is about to debunk the major stereotypes of his day about the black "savages" currently fighting in World War I.

However, as Gaillet explains in his next introductory pages, "Au Lecteur," the name "Coulibaly" does not in fact refer to a particular individual, but rather to "le noir type."<sup>8</sup> Gaillet has a weakness for this name, and has become accustomed to using it to refer to Africans in general: "Il me semble maintenant que ces quatre syllabes expriment mieux que d'autres la gaucherie puérile, à la fois drôle et touchante, de (le nom vient de lui-même, vous voyez)... Coulibaly." He goes on to state that the Black is really a "grand enfant," and that this "primitif" appears "singulièrement emprunté et gauche quand nous lui imposons les conditions de notre vie civilisée" (9-10). Gaillet also finds Coulibaly to be inevitably comical, and cautions the reader that he should understand that Coulibaly's

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<sup>8</sup> Gaillet's use of the name "Coulibaly" in this way is similar to the name "Fatma" or "la fatma" was used during the colonial period to refer to female domestic servants in North Africa.

lifestyle before coming to France was very different. While his closing words here appear rather derogatory, Gaillet does not seem to intend them to sound malicious:

Rions donc de Coulibaly, amusons-nous de sa gaucherie plutôt que de nous en fâcher – et, au lieu de le mépriser, apprenons à le connaître et à lire dans son cœur. Il n'y perdra rien, ni nous non plus peut-être. C'est la seule attitude vraiment humaine, celle que je demande à mon lecteur de prendre avec moi. (11)

When understood in the context of 1917 French society, this admonition to the reader is somewhat novel, in that it encourages the reader to remain open-minded and to learn about these African soldiers and their psychology, rather than becoming impatient with them for being so different.

Coulibaly consists of a series of descriptive sketches of various aspects of the African soldiers' personalities and of their lives on and off the front. In the beginning Gaillet admits that when he was first "versé aux bataillons Sénégalaïs" he was less than enthusiastic: "Obligé d'être constamment en contact avec lui j'éprouvais à son égard de la répugnance. J'étais sensible à ses défauts, je n'avais pas encore découvert ses qualités" (16). Yet after fighting with the tirailleurs at the Somme and wintering with them in the St. Raphaël area, he learned more about them. "Ma sympathie s'accroît chaque jour pour lui et me permet de mieux le comprendre. Et il me semble que, déjà, je le connais suffisamment pour parler de lui et souhaiter qu'il soit mieux connu" (18). In a sketch called "Les trois étapes de Coulibaly" Gaillet reveals his attachment to the stereotypes of his time: the first stage is one of animality and uncleanness. In the second Coulibaly

meets the French and gradually unlearns his bad habits: “il apprend à se moucher autrement que dans ses doigts [. . . et] il s’applique à faire ‘petit chemin’ sur sa tête: ‘même chose toubab.’”<sup>9</sup> In the third stage Coulibaly all too often finds himself with “Européens vulgaires” and quickly becomes “un dépravé” thanks to their bad influence, but Gaillet wishes to help Coulibaly avoid sinking to this level: “qu’il reste le bon enfant de la brousse à qui l’on a appris simplement à faire bonnes manières, – le bébé qui balbutie avec une gaucherie charmante le bonjour du matin et dont une parole de bonté réjouit l’âme innocente!” (20). The second, child-like stage of Coulibaly’s development is clearly preferable in Gaillet’s view, and it is only once he is in contact with the good French people that he attains this stage. Additionally, it is the vague “Europeans” who are responsible for corrupting him, not specifically the French, who as Gaillet’s public knows, are only trying to civilize these unfortunately backward peoples.

In describing the different personalities of tirailleurs Gaillet sporadically abandons his policy of using the name “Coulibaly” to refer to all Africans, and gives the nicknames of some individuals of his acquaintance who embody the personality types listed, such as “Bébé,” “Forte tête,” “Cendrillon,” “Boy,” “Un intellectuel,” and “Un ‘savage.’” Gaillet does not explain why he uses the English word “savage” instead of the French word. It may be a way of distancing himself from the prevalent notion that the Africans were savages, since in his text it is clear that he views them more as children. Gaillet also tries to describe the true inner nature of Coulibaly, but bases his information only on his own observations and inferences. He is confident that simply by observing

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<sup>9</sup> Gaillet, *Coulibaly* 19-20. “Faire petit chemin sur sa tête” means to make a part in his hair. *Toubab* is the word used by tirailleurs for “European” or white person, and comes up frequently in these texts.

Coulibaly's gestures and listening to his broken French he can know what it is like for the Africans in France and can feel what they feel.

A 1918 review of Coulibaly in the Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger focuses mainly on the information Gaillet provides in the chapter "Ce que pense et sent Coulibaly," not questioning Gaillet's conclusions in the least. The reviewer is particularly intrigued by the "âme mystérieuse du noir" as revealed by Gaillet:

Mystique, crédule, il [Coulibaly] l'est comme tous les primitifs; rêveur surtout, avec une note personnelle de résignation et d'abandon, où se trahit le fond de la misère humaine, et que nous rend une page poignante de M. G.: *Complainte*. Nous regrettons de ne pouvoir transcrire cette page, qui nous livre l'âme mystérieuse du noir, pour la première fois peut-être.

(Arréat 162-63)

Here the reviewer singles out the sketch entitled "Complainte," which is a particularly sad piece, in which Gaillet describes a group of tirailleurs waiting to go on duty at a police post, sitting on their cots listening to the rain outside. One begins to sing a "chant monotone," and Gaillet explains:

Coulibaly nous livre dans cette lente chanson le secret de son âme mystérieuse. Il ne paraît pas heureux de vivre, il ne l'aurait pas souhaité: vivre c'est peiner et souffrir. Pas un mouvement de révolte chez lui, mais une résignation plaintive et désolée. Il accepte d'avance toutes choses et tout lui est indifférent, l'existence comme la mort. Et le chant continue, navrant... le chant lamentable des condamnés à la vie... (75-76)

It is odd that the reviewer would have singled out this piece as the most revealing, given that it is so different from the others and that Gaillet intended the text as a whole to be more light-hearted and informative than depressing. In this citation, as in others to be discussed later, Gaillet's text hints that the situation in which the tirailleurs had been placed by the French might have been the cause of their sadness and resignation, rather than some mystical, innate indifference to life.

After describing scenes of Coulibaly's life both on and off the battlefields, Gaillet includes two pages addressed to the colonial officers, saying "Coulibaly a fait ses preuves. Mais à qui donc le devons-nous?" (148). Clearly, he feels it is only thanks to the officers who command the tirailleurs that these African soldiers have been able to do much of value in France during the war. This notion, highlighted in the "Lettre-Préface" by General Berdoulat,<sup>10</sup> appears to varying degrees in all of the texts about the tirailleurs sénégalaïs. Although the officers were certainly instrumental in training the Africans and in maintaining order on the field, as these texts show the tirailleurs themselves certainly demonstrated a good deal of their own initiative and bravery.

### *Deux ans avec les Sénégalaïs (1918)*

Léon Gaillet's second book, *Deux ans avec les Sénégalaïs*, is very different from *Coulibaly*, and clearly illustrates a transformation in his opinion of the tirailleurs. While these two texts are ostensibly about the tirailleurs sénégalaïs, they are also just as much about the evolution of Gaillet's own perceptions of these West Africans. *Deux ans* reads

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<sup>10</sup> Berdoulat's self-congratulatory remark about this is cited in Chapter 1.

much more like a journal than Coulibaly, and even though it includes similar observations regarding the character traits of the Africans they are more detailed and personalized. In Deux ans Gaillet interacts much more with the tirailleurs, and is a participant in the events rather than just the observer he made himself out to be in Coulibaly. The story begins with Gaillet's first encounter with the tirailleurs, at the camp near Fréjus, giving a more detailed description than that found in Coulibaly, but reiterating his initial lack of enthusiasm regarding this assignment:

Nous acceptons notre sort sans nous en réjouir. Nous les connaissons si peu, ces braves noirs! [ . . . ] Dans nos esprits nous retrouvons la vision assez confuse d'êtres laids, légèrement difformes, un peu grotesques, se ressemblant tous, mal habillés, marchant avec une raideur comique et redressant d'une façon exagérée leurs têtes grimaçantes uniformément coiffées de chéchias rouges. (8)

Here Gaillet manages to summarize in one sentence the major stereotypical images of his day, and admits that they constituted his opinion of the Africans at first too. It is clear here that his first impression of the tirailleurs was not that they resemble children, but that they are grotesque and savage-like. It is only once he comes to know them that he revises this opinion to view them more as big children. As the book progresses (chronologically, for the most part) Gaillet describes teaching some French to tirailleurs, training them to fight, watching them play games or dance during their time off, and then discusses life on the front.

Partway through his two years with the West Africans Gaillet has, in spite of himself, become attached to some of the tirailleurs – and in particular to one named Ousmane. When Ousmane’s best friend Tiakone dies, Gaillet gives a touching eulogy for this “humble soldat noir,” and Ousmane happily agrees to become his orderly after this kindhearted tribute to his friend. Gaillet becomes close enough to Ousmane that he comforts the tirailleur when his older brother dies and visits him in the hospital when he gets pneumonia. When Gaillet is temporarily assigned to a European battalion, Ousmane comes with him despite being uncomfortable around so many white soldiers. They treat him kindly, but when Gaillet is later permanently transferred to a European formation he determines that Ousmane should not accompany him:

Inévitamment désorienté, devenu un peu gauche au milieu de soldats français n’ayant point ses habitudes et ne parlant point sa langue, il ne pourrait me rendre, malgré sa bonne volonté et son dévouement, tous les services dont j’aurais besoin dans mes nouvelles fonctions. [ . . . ] Je me décidai donc, non sans regret, à le laisser dans sa compagnie [ . . . ]. (55)

Gaillet’s description reveals that his attitudes toward the Africans, or at least toward some individuals, has changed now that he has developed personal relationships with them. He implies that Ousmane is not always “gauche,” but only becomes so when in unfamiliar surroundings, and he knows Ousmane tries hard to complete his duties. Unfortunately, when Gaillet leaves he cannot find Ousmane to say goodbye, but the next day he walks back to the village to talk to his former orderly, who is very happy to see him. As Gaillet

departs Ousmane says sadly: ““Quand moi, y aura revenir Sénégal, y aura toujours mirer toi avec mes yeux et mon cœur”” (56).

Gaillet gives Ousmane’s name to a schoolteacher in Meilhan who had written him to say that her students had been captivated by excerpts she had read to them from Coulibaly, and that her class of thirteen girls wanted to adopt a tirailleur. Gaillet’s decision to give the name of “mon fidèle Ousmane, mon humble ami noir” (58) to the schoolteacher illustrates again his attachment to his former orderly and his desire to give him some compensation for his suffering in France. The unlucky Ousmane had not received any citations or medals, having always been sick or wounded when they were handed out. Near the very end of Deux ans, Gaillet writes,

Il m’arrive souvent de penser à lui. Le sort l’a si peu gâté, ce petit orphelin! Il a connu tous les maux de la guerre. Il a vu son ami succomber à la maladie; son grand frère est mort en son absence; l’officier à qui il était attaché l’a quitté. Triste destinée que la sienne!

Une revanche lui était due. Elle lui fut offerte. (59-60)

Although Gaillet was not there when Ousmane received the letter and care package from the schoolgirls, his “petites marraines,”<sup>11</sup> he imagines the tirailleur’s “sourire d’enfant” as a sergeant explained to him where this surprise came from: ““Y a pitits, pitits gosses écrire ça à toi.”” He guesses that Ousmane “dut éprouver un grand réconfort et se sentir prêt pour de nouveaux sacrifices” (59-60). Gaillet admits that the teacher’s request for a specific tirailleur’s name forced him to individualize “cet insaisissable Coulibaly,” and

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<sup>11</sup> *Marraines de guerre* were women who sent letters and care packages to soldiers during the war.

writes that adopting Ousmane Kamara “c’était adopter vraiment Coulibaly” (59-60).

Even though Gaillet is associating Ousmane with Coulibaly in this instance, I would argue that because of his evident personal connection with Ousmane he does not generally view them as being interchangeable, and that he only equates them in the context of the schoolgirls’ request. Ousmane is a specific tirailleur, with a first and last name, and whose personality and individual needs Gaillet is in the habit of taking into consideration throughout this book.

In closing *Deux ans*, Gaillet does not forget to give a good deal of credit to the officers who work with the tirailleurs, and he understands that everything in France is foreign to the Africans and that it is very hard for them to communicate with the French.<sup>12</sup> Gaillet has clearly revised his earlier opinion of the Africans, but he does continue to speak of them as “grands et naïfs enfants” and “primitifs au cœur bon et simple” (63). In his last paragraph he invites the reader to remember the debt France will owe these brave soldiers once the war is over, and says that it is France’s duty to accomplish the instruction and the education of Coulibaly, revealing here his belief that the Africans will advance:

Éveillons son intelligence et laissons-lui sa simplicité. Et un jour, cessant d’être un enfant il deviendra à son tour un homme: nous aurons fait ce miracle. Et l’homme noir se penchera avec émotion, filleul reconnaissant et respectueux, vers la France, sa grande marraine. (64)

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<sup>12</sup> He explains, “Chez nous tout les dépayse: la nature, les gens, le genre de vie, les mille détails de notre civilisation qui leur reste étrangère. Notre langue, ils ne peuvent la comprendre quand elle est parlée correctement, même avec simplicité. Communiquer avec nous est pour eux une entreprise laborieuse, et ils souffrent souvent de tout ce qu’ils ne peuvent pas nous dire” (Gaillet, *Deux ans* 62).

*Un fragment de l'épopée sénégalaise: les Tirailleurs noirs sur l'Yser (1918)*

Another text from 1918 further encourages the reader to recognize the magnitude of the Africans' contribution to the war effort and to thank them appropriately. Written by Léon Bocquet and Ernest Hosten, *Un fragment de l'épopée sénégalaise* is a lyric tribute to the tirailleurs who fought at Dixmude. Hosten (d. 1932), archivist of Dixmude,<sup>13</sup> and Bocquet (1876-1954), a prolific poet, novelist, and translator, also collaborated on another book about Dixmude, *L'Agonie de Dixmude: Épisodes de la Bataille de l'Yser (1916)*, which includes references to the African soldiers but does not focus solely on them. Along with these works about the war Bocquet wrote *Courages français: récits d'évasions de la grande guerre* (1921), and published several volumes of his own poetry, a book about the poet Albert Samain, novels, and translated novels from English to French. He also contributed to the political and literary journal *Revue Bleue*, mostly writing about poetry, but also penning a short story in 1920 called "La tristesse du Sénégalais" printed at the same time in the American journal *The Living Age* as "The Soul of a Senegalese."<sup>14</sup>

*Un fragment de l'épopée sénégalaise* is dedicated to a tirailleur named Mamadou-Sangha, who according to Bocquet and Hosten "avait besoin qu'on l'aimât, car il avait laissé quelque part, près du Dhiolibia immense dans la Nigritie mystérieuse, la compagne de sa jeunesse" (5). Interestingly, the sad Senegalese of Bocquet's short story, though

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<sup>13</sup> Boudet 44. Ernest Hosten also wrote *Dixmude et ses environs* and published an annotated compilation, *Documents inédits concernant l'histoire de France* (both 1902).

<sup>14</sup> Though no indication is given regarding the translator, given Bocquet's own experience it is quite possible he translated the story himself.

named Demba, has the same problem, and the two narratives begin very similarly. The lyricism and rich vocabulary characteristic of Un fragment are evident from the first page. Continuing their description of Mamadou-Sangha, they write:

Pareil à un grand enfant égaré dans le labyrinthe inextricable de nos mœurs, de nos coutumes, de nos raffinements d'Européens et halluciné par l'éénigme insoluble du destin qui l'avait jeté dans l'enfer de la plus épouvantable des guerres, il traversait parfois des heures d'indicible tristesse. (5-6)

While Bocquet and Hosten do not go so far as to generalize all Africans under one name, they do frequently refer to them as children, as “ces belles forces de la nature et de l’instinct” (6), as “images de la primitive humanité” (7), and speak of “leur vie ignorante” (8). The book is also dedicated to all the other tirailleurs “aux patronymes exotiques,” many examples of which are listed. (6-7) Illustrations by Lucien Jonas<sup>15</sup> show specific African soldiers, sometimes indicating a tirailleur’s name and ethnic group, and reinforce the individualized nature of Bocquet and Hosten’s descriptions as opposed to Gallet’s *Africain-type* in *Coulibaly*.

Bocquet and Hosten note that both the Belgian and white French army contingents present at Dixmude have been written about,

mais, sur l’héroïsme sublime des troupes noires qui furent les mâles et précieux auxiliaires de Français et des Belges en ces circonstances uniques

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<sup>15</sup> Jonas (1880-1947) had been a student at the École des beaux-arts de Paris, and had had many expositions at the Salon in the early 1900s. During the war he made drawings for the Journal and L’Illustration from both on and off the front lines, and executed portraits of generals and admirals for the Musée des Invalides. (Blémont 766-767)

où se jouait le sort de deux patries, rien. [...] Personne encore ne s'est constitué l'historiographe attentif de ceux qui, venus du continent africain où s'est installée notre civilisation, surent peiner et mourir pour notre cause et par amour pour la France. Et pourtant! (11)

To the authors, it shows ingratitude and injustice on the part of the French to remain silent regarding the contributions of the tirailleurs (12) and this book is their way of bringing to everyone's attention the importance of the Africans' participation in Flanders. Throughout the text the tirailleurs are described as fighting for love of France, and Bocquet and Hosten do not shy away from depicting the African soldiers as brave, ingenious, and hard working. Specific examples of their characterizations of the tirailleurs and of the tirailleurs' accomplishments on the battlefield will be discussed later in this chapter, but it is important to note here that Bocquet and Hosten's tribute to the tirailleurs sénégalais was so full of praise that fairly large chunks of the last few pages were deleted by wartime censors.

Newspaper censorship in France was established August 3, 1914, and the *Bureau de la presse* made little effort to hide the results of its work, frequently leaving such large blanks in printed pages. (Collins 5-8) France's system of "two-headed censorship," in which the war ministry censored anything of a military or diplomatic nature, and the interior ministry censored publications covering domestic politics, quickly became confusing and in 1917 the military eliminated civilians from the process. While the government denied that political censorship existed, the press began to protest more strongly in 1915 and Parliament tried unsuccessfully to limit censorship in 1915-16. (12-

14) In 1915, a confidential twenty-eight page booklet called “La Circulaire No. 1000” was distributed to censors throughout France and “listed all areas subject to censorship, including books, postcards, posters, drawings, photographs, brochures, and of course, newspapers.”<sup>16</sup> With regard to the large blanks at the end of Un fragment de l'épopée sénégalaise, the following directive listed under the heading “Africa, Troops of” in “Circulaire No. 1000” might well supply an explanation: “Do not [let pass reports] extolling their value to the detriment of other troops.”<sup>17</sup> While it is impossible to know whether or not Bocquet and Hosten made any derogatory remarks about French troops (unlikely, given the laudatory nature of their earlier Agonie de Dixmude), they do go farther than most in their praise of the African troops at the end of Un fragment. The final two pages of the book are almost entirely blanked out, with the word “censuré” printed a few times, but the remaining sentence in the middle gives a clue to the tenor of these lines: “La France se doit de manifester mieux sa reconnaissance à ces défenseurs méconnus de sa juste cause en ne distinguant plus, entre ses soldats, les indigènes et les autres. Il importe que l'assimilation s'achève..... censuré.....” (63). Simply by placing the tirailleurs on equal footing with the *poilus* Bocquet and Hosten might have crossed the line, and it is possible that the last censored sentences may even have suggested post-war measures giving the colonies more freedom and/or equality than the government was willing to consider.

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<sup>16</sup> Collins 14-15. The booklet was updated in May 1916, and from 1915 to 1918, 573 directives were issued covering a wide variety of topics. (15)

<sup>17</sup> Collins 16. The information in brackets was added by Collins.

After the war's end, books about the war itself continued to be published – so many that by 1921 “pullulaient les livres sur la guerre. On était fatigué d'entendre parler d'elle.”<sup>18</sup> As noted at the beginning of this chapter, few books about African troops in France were published during this time. The two remaining ones about the tirailleurs' participation in World War I to be discussed here are Alphonse Séché's 1919 Les Noirs, d'après des documents officiels and M. Dutrèb's 1922 Nos Sénégalais pendant la Grande Guerre.

#### Les Noirs, d'après des documents officiels (1919)

Alphonse Séché (1876-1964) was a prolific writer who explored nearly every genre except the novel. His Le désarroi de la conscience française (1913) described the state of French society on the eve of World War I and in his best-selling Les Guerres d'enfer (1916) he anticipated the uses of airplanes and tanks that later became central to World War II. (Bourgoin 59-60) Discussions of his work, such as François Jean-Desthieux's 1923 critical biography and Daniel Bourgoin's 1965 article in the journal La Table Ronde make almost no mention of his 256 page book about the Africans, Les Noirs, d'après des documents officiels. (The title only appears in the bibliography of Jean-Desthieux's book.) Even though Séché had no military credentials of his own, and unlike Gaillet did not fight with the Africans,<sup>19</sup> Les Noirs, like Coulibaly, gains credibility via the author of its preface: General Mangin.

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<sup>18</sup> Boudet 48. Boudet was the author of a book about Léon Bocquet.

<sup>19</sup> According to Bourgoin, when the war broke out, “l'âge [38] et la santé de Séché ne lui permettaient point d'y participer” (59).

Mangin devotes much of his preface to an outline of his own efforts to have his concept of *la Force noire* accepted, and does not hesitate to assert that had his advice been heeded earlier the war would have been shorter:

Vainement dès 1907 j'ai essayé de faire admettre que les tirailleurs sénégalais pourraient contribuer à la défense nationale. [.] Si l'organisation de ces ressources avait été réalisée avant 1914, leur rendement aurait été quatre ou cinq fois plus élevé et leur transport effectué avant que la lutte sous-marine ait pris toute son intensité. Ce fort million d'excellents combattants aurait certainement abrégé la guerre, diminué nos pertes et modifié les conditions actuelles de la Victoire. (8-9)

In fact Mangin hardly mentions Séché's text, but does thank him for sharing with the French people descriptions of events during the war, of the Black soldier's devotion to his superiors, of "son courage indomptable et son amour reconnaissant pour le Pays qui l'a délivré de l'esclavage et lui a donné la Paix Française," and like Gaillet, Bocquet and Hosten, Mangin also refers to a "dette de reconnaissance" which France owes these soldiers. (10)

For his part, Séché speaks frequently, and highly, of Mangin in the first chapter of *Les Noirs*, "L'Armée Noire." He goes into somewhat more detail about Mangin's efforts to convince the army to make use of African soldiers, and echoes the tone of Mangin's preface: "Pour n'avoir pas voulu faire confiance au général Mangin, l'administration de la guerre encourut de lourdes responsabilités" (16). Séché briefly mentions the pathetic results of the army's first, poorly planned efforts at recruitment, citing a letter from a

captain in Senegal regarding the state of his new troops, some of whom were nearly blind, others missing fingers, and many simply sickly-looking. (17-18) Séché also discusses which races are more suitable for battle: Bambara, Toucouleur, Wolof, Mossi, Peuhl, and others; and those which are not: such as Serer, Sousou, Baoulé. He notes that because of the climate and general “dure existence” near the Sahara, northern Africans have already undergone “une sélection<sup>20</sup> qui les rend plus aptes à la transplantation en dehors de la zone équatoriale,” though even they too should probably only be used during the summer months in Europe. (18-19)

Unlike some of his predecessors, such as Gaillet (in Coulibaly especially), Séché does deserve credit for taking into account the mental state of these Senegalese soldiers, reminding his reader of the “désarroi moral” of young French soldiers first joining their regiments, and judging that it must have been even worse for the Africans:

Or, voici de pauvres êtres frustes, qui n’ont jamais quitté leur coin de terre, qui n’ont vu les blancs que de loin et sous les couleurs du conquérant et du leveur d’impôts!... On les rassemble, on les rudoie, on les embarque, on les encaserne, on les couvre de vêtements qui gênent tous leurs mouvements [ . . . ]. (22)

Séché is not in the least surprised that under these conditions the Africans recruited to fight at the beginning of World War I did not measure up to the tirailleurs of the years before the war, and while he allows that the Africans are not perfect, he places the greatest amount of blame on the army administration. He includes an article he wrote in

<sup>20</sup> Note the use of a very Darwinian term here.

February 1916 for L'Armée Coloniale – one that had not been published, thanks to the censors – in which he lists four major mistakes made by the Army in recruiting the tirailleurs.<sup>21</sup> At the end of this chapter, Séché, like Bocquet and Hosten, brings up the notion of a debt owed to the tirailleurs, and briefly mentions that despite the army's general incompetence regarding them, they managed to prove themselves on the battlefield and “on peut dire qu'ils ont droit à notre reconnaissance et qu'ils ont bien mérité de la Patrie” (25).

Much of Les Noirs is devoted to descriptions of the tirailleurs' participation in battles such as the Somme, Dixmude and Verdun. Yet Séché also addresses some of the stereotypes about Africans or about the colonies and shows how, much to his surprise, these preconceptions are often proven wrong. For example, he notes that although it is most likely true that the vast majority of the tirailleurs are unconscious of their role in the larger war, there are exceptions, and “on aurait tort de généraliser” (28). Séché writes that he has tried his best to provide the essential elements of the attacks he recounts, remaining conscious of his audience, “le grand public.” He notes that others may do better later, but that he will at least have been “le premier à acquitter une dette de reconnaissance, envers les collaborateurs noirs de nos armées” (234). While Séché does not cite either text by Gaillet, he does use Boussenot's 1916 La France d'Outre-Mer participe à la guerre, and in his chapter about Dixmude he frequently cites Bocquet and Hosten's L'Agonie de Dixmude, which mentions the Senegalese. He does not appear to

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<sup>21</sup> The mistakes were: (1) not listening to people like Mangin from the beginning, (2) trying to make up for lost time too quickly once Mangin's ideas were accepted, (3) recruiting Africans by force, and (4) not using capable Africans as officers and using whites with no experience with tirailleurs sénégalais as their commanding officers. (Séché 24)

have been aware of Bocquet and Hosten's Un Fragment de l'Épopée sénégalaise, published in 1918.<sup>22</sup>

In a chapter entitled "L'âme du Sénégalaïs" Séché tells many anecdotes about the Africans, generally trying to demonstrate their childishness, their sentimentality, their "primitivité d'esprit." For him it is only natural that the immature Senegalese people should exhibit these characteristics, "les peuples jeunes ayant précisément ces traits propres à la jeunesse: naïveté, ignorance qui s'étonne, générosité, enthousiasme du cœur, crainte et bravoure conjugées" (50). He also emphasizes the importance of the tirailleurs' attachment to their officers, and that of the officers' sensitivity to their nature:

un chef qui ne "connaît pas manière", qui ne sait pas se faire aimer de ses hommes n'en tire rien. Avec les noirs, une grande fermeté s'impose; par contre, on fermera les yeux sur bien des petites fautes. Il faut être paternel. [. . .] Pour le Sénégalaïs, l'officier est tout. [. . .] ici, plus qu'ailleurs, tant vaut le berger, tant vaut le troupeau. (58-59)

This notion of the officer's critical role in leading tirailleurs arose before and during the war, brought up by generals such as Mangin and Berdoulat, and is a common theme among the writers discussed here.

In a chapter about the Fréjus training camp for tirailleurs, Séché begins with a poetic description of the camp at four in the morning, as the soldiers are beginning to stir.

Le ciel est d'un bleu électrique. [. . .] Il fait frais; le sable est humide. Une grande paix règne sur le camp. [. . .] Des tirailleurs, figés et grelottants,

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<sup>22</sup> Les Noirs was published sometime after late April 1919, since Mangin's preface is dated April 22, 1919.

montent la garde, emmitouflés dans leur capote. Fantômatiques et légères,  
les montagnes échevelées de l'Esterel s'évoquent, sur la droite. (60-61)

Although much of Séché's chapter about the camp consists of similar depictions of the surrounding countryside, he does also write about the tirailleurs' activities and their life there. His account is one of few about life at Fréjus,<sup>23</sup> and is very valuable despite the fact that Séché's own sense of cultural superiority is clearly visible throughout. He goes into some detail about the tirailleurs' experiences at the firing range, where many find themselves unable to close one eye to aim and push their *chéchias* over the eye instead before slowly preparing to fire: "Opération douloureuse qui dure souvent cinq minutes, dix minutes pendant lesquelles les gradés s'exaspèrent" (68-69). At the Fréjus camp the tirailleurs also enact mock battles, learn to dig trenches, go to school, eat food similar to that which they would eat at home, and go into town on Sunday afternoons. Séché is particularly taken with their mosque and gives a fairly lengthy description of the prayer ritual.

Séché's final chapter, "Les Noirs sur la Côte d'Azur – Deux hôpitaux de Sénégalaïs," provides many details about their lives at the two main hospitals reserved for Senegalese, in Marseilles and Menton. As with his chapter about the Fréjus camp, here again Séché is the only author of the period who provides so much information about this aspect of the tirailleurs' lives in France. In his opinion, it is good for the Africans to have their own hospitals: "Cet isolement leur est de tout point profitable. Les noirs sont là entre eux, moins dépayrés, plus en confiance; ils échappent au contact des troupes

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 5 for citations from descriptions of tirailleur life at Fréjus around 1930 from articles by Paul Catrice and Marguerite Harrison.

métropolitaines, contact dont les mauvais effets furent trop souvent constatés” (236). He notes that it is just as important for the doctors and nurses to be kind to these “enfants naïfs et affectueux” as it is for the military officers to treat them well: “Ce qu’un gradé n’obtient pas par la menace, les sœurs et les infirmières l’obtiennent par la douceur. [...] Il faut seulement de la patience, car les noirs ne comprennent pas toujours ce qu’on attend d’eux, et il est malaisé de les plier à certaines règles contraires à leurs habitudes” (238). This final chapter, and thus the book itself, ends abruptly, with no concluding remarks by Séché. The reader has no definite indication of what Séché intended his message to be, but it is possible that he was trying to remain as objective as he could, providing documents, interviews with tirailleurs, and descriptions so that the reader can come to his own conclusions regarding the *Noirs* in France. His concern seems to be not so much to offer praise for the tirailleurs or thanks for their efforts as to provide documentation for posterity.

#### Nos Sénégalais au service de la France (1922)

The last of these texts written during or just after World War I about the tirailleurs, M. Dutrèb’s 1922 Nos Sénégalais au service de la France is even more focused on documentation than Séché’s, and since Dutrèb does not appear to have had any personal contact with tirailleurs, the interviews and poetic descriptions characteristic of *Les Noirs* are absent. Instead, Dutrèb’s text recounts the events of many of the same battles with often dry precision, reproducing award citations and quoting official reports. The name “M. Dutrèb” appears to be a pseudonym for a “Marthe Du Bert,”

"Marthe" being a woman's name.<sup>24</sup> Other texts from this period ascribed to Dutrèb and/or Du Bert also have military subjects, such as Generals Mangin, Marchand, and Galliéni; the occupation of Tonkin; and the tirailleurs. Yet why a woman of the period would have written such texts and how she obtained the necessary materials and access to these high-ranking military officials remains a mystery.

In the case of Nos Sénégalais, both the author's previous publications and the preface attest to the reliability and credibility of this source. The preface, written by General Mangin (who was presumably happy to do so, after Dutrèb's flattering biography of him), does not focus on his own efforts regarding *La Force noire* as much as that of Les Noirs. Instead, now that the war is over Mangin takes this opportunity to advocate the use of the Africans in peacetime activities: "ce livre, qui a l'excellent résultat de montrer aux Français toute la valeur de leur empire colonial, en hâtera-t-il l'exploitation pour les œuvres de paix comme pour celles de guerre, qui, outre-mer, se tiennent étroitement." In this vein he mentions railways, irrigation projects, and agriculture, but does not forget to bring up the usefulness of the army. He reiterates his prewar assertion that it is in the army that "le jeune indigène apprendra notre langue et se formera aux idées françaises," since the population is too spread out to make schools a viable option. Again, with regard to the content of the book he is prefacing, Mangin says little, but does appreciate the chapter devoted to enemy fears about the Senegalese. For him, the German propaganda campaign against the black troops "est un nouvel hommage à la valeur de

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<sup>24</sup> Both Balesi and Michel give the first name "Maurice" for Dutrèb, but I have not seen this anywhere else.

tous nos Africains," and he relishes the fact that the tirailleurs performed so well that the enemy thought there were many more of them than there really were. (n.p.)

Dutrèb begins her book with some information about West Africa before the arrival of the French, the colonial effort, the military value of the Senegalese, and Mangin. She then methodically discusses major battles in the next six chapters, including the Somme, Verdun, Chemin des Dames, and the Eastern Front, among others. These chapters are detailed, both from the point of view of military maneuvers and that of the tirailleurs' living conditions during the war. She even includes two Senegalese songs, sung during marches, and likens them to "certaines pages de l'Illiade et de nos chansons de geste" – an unusual affirmation of the literary merit of African oral literature.<sup>25</sup> Dutrèb clearly admires the heroism of these soldiers, and as she notes early on, she intends this book to be

un reflet, et aussi un hommage rendu à leur valeur, un souvenir adressé à ceux qui, retournés dans leurs terres natales, pensent souvent à la Grande Patrie que la France incarne pour eux, une fleur jetée sur la tombe de ceux qui, après avoir défendu son sol, dorment en lui leur dernier sommeil. (22)

The final three chapters of Nos Sénégalais are the most interesting to this study: "La Victoire," "Les Calomnies," and the very brief "Le Triomphe." In "La Victoire" Dutrèb boldly attributes much of the French success to the tirailleurs: "c'est la fièvre de la victoire, la victoire qui s'annonce complète, foudroyante et à laquelle nos Sénégalais

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<sup>25</sup> Dutrèb 81-86. The first song is provided both in the original language and in French, with footnotes clarifying certain concepts. The second is only in French. The only other song I have come across is reproduced by Marc Michel, and dates from the 1915 revolt in Béléougou (Appel 55), but there may well have been others.

prennent une large part. L'ennemi ne recule pas, il fuit, avec une allure de panique” (161). She maintains that those tirailleurs who take a moment to consider the situation realize that a victorious France is also greatly beneficial to them: “car, seule des nations civilisées, elle admet l'égalité pour ses fils de couleur,” though she also notes that many of them cannot understand all of this: “mais tous avec la sorte de divination des simples, sentent à quel point ‘il y a bon!’” Referring to the mixing of regiments, she also mentions the “adieux touchants” between black and white soldiers who had fought together. (162)

In citing several *Ordres* which attest to the bravery and excellent battlefield conduct of tirailleurs, Dutrèb recounts that she asked Marshal Foch whether or not he had mentioned these soldiers in his *ordres du jour*. In another testament to the credibility of this author, she received a letter in reply from Foch stating:

“Si je n'ai pas eu l'occasion, dans un ordre du jour, de féliciter les soldats noirs pour leur héroïsme pendant la guerre, je suis heureux de profiter de celle que vous m'offrez pour déclarer combien j'ai admiré leur merveilleux courage, leur indomptable ténacité, leur élan fougueux et combien j'ai apprécié leur profonde loyauté et leur absolu dévouement.”

(165)

Dutrèb's chapter on “Les Calomnies” discusses and refutes some of the German propaganda against the tirailleurs during the occupation of the Rhineland. While the specific nature of this propaganda will be discussed at the end of this chapter, it is important to note Dutrèb's own opinion regarding the insults directed at the black soldiers and the French tendency to remain silent in response:

il était urgent que les documents irréfutables qui ont lavé nos nationaux de couleur des accusations infâmes soient au plus vite réunis. Il sied maintenant de les voir publier dans le monde entier. En face de notre inaction, de nos lenteurs, la haine allemande se multiplie. Faisons hautement justice de ces calomnies. (181)

For her it is a duty to the Nation for the French to maintain the honor of their sons if they expect to conserve the glory of France. (181)

Dutrèb's final chapter, "Le Triomphe," only a few pages long, evokes the victory parade in Paris, when officers, soldiers of all different parts of the army, and even tirailleurs marched and were cheered by the crowd. After the Marshals, the *chasseurs*, the *marsouins*, the *poilus*,<sup>26</sup> come the tirailleurs:

Soudain, une musique plus grêle: la nouba!... Raides et fiers, l'orgueil dans les yeux et le rire aux dents, ce sont eux, nos braves tirailleurs, auprès de leurs officiers blancs. Les noirs!... Les noirs!... Les fleurs tombent en pluie... les vivats redoublent et le cri, le même cri du cœur: Vive la France!... Vive nos poilus!... (186)

In closing, Dutrèb does not forget to give the usual credit to the officers, Mangin in particular, but also mentions the devotion and discipline of the tirailleurs themselves. She notes that before 1914 these "enfants du soleil" were already the "fils de la France" but that now the crowd has greeted them in the same way as all the other soldiers, as "enfants

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<sup>26</sup> *Marsouin*, a kind of porpoise, was used to refer to soldiers in the *Troupes de Marine*. *Poilu* was the term commonly used to refer to metropolitan French soldiers of World War I. For extensive information on the various sectors of the French army, see Anthony Clayton, *France. Soldiers and Africa*.

de France." Implicitly acknowledging a "dette de reconnaissance" like the other authors discussed here, she attaches the same value to the heroism and sacrifices of the tirailleurs as to those of the French soldiers, and clearly implies that the French public does as well.

### **"Nos Français au visage d'ebène":<sup>27</sup> The tirailleurs in France**

Having examined the authors' personal histories and the overall tone of each of these five texts, we can now look more closely at what they actually say about the tirailleurs and explore how the West Africans are portrayed in them. Each of these books offers a wealth of information and every effort has been made to select representative examples from them. First, three character traits commonly attributed to the tirailleurs both in the texts and in the period in which they were published, will be addressed: their childishness and primitiveness, their devotion to their officers, and their bravery and initiative in battle. Secondly, since these books offer the few published records of tirailleur life in the training camps and in hospitals, and of their encounters with civilians in towns, this valuable information will be examined as well. Lastly, a discussion of the use of tirailleurs as shock troops and different descriptions of particular events on the front at such battles as Chemin des Dames and Verdun will clarify the nature of the tirailleurs' participation in World War I, as perceived by these authors.

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<sup>27</sup> This quote is from Dutrèb 113.

### *Character traits of the Africans*

The fact that French people with fairly extensive contact with or knowledge of the tirailleurs tended to view them more as children than as savages has been demonstrated above. Some of the authors dwell on this characterization of the tirailleurs more than others, such as Gaillet, who often focuses on their childishness in Coulibaly, for example devoting an entire sketch to a description of a tirailleur labelled "Bébé."<sup>28</sup> While the unnamed individual soldier who is the subject of this portrait is "tout jeune," given Gaillet's penchant for creating composite characters it seems safe to say that at least some of this description would, in Gaillet's mind, have been applicable to other tirailleurs. Bébé's face is naive and innocent, and he does not talk so much as "balbutie," the verb commonly used to refer to childrens' first attempts at speaking. Regardless of who he is talking to, he never fails to say "bonjour madame," and "il met dans cette unique formule toute sa politesse." Gaillet writes that Bébé "a remarqué que les blancs, – j'allais dire les grandes personnes – lisent le journal" and therefore he too buys it: "il reste en contemplation pendant de longs moments devant les lignes imprimées qu'il regarde le plus souvent à l'envers." Gaillet imagines that when Bébé is put through his paces in training he must be thinking that he is playing soldier with his little friends from the village, and ends this piece touchingly (and paternally): "Je souhaite qu'il garde longtemps cette illusion, et qu'à la suite d'une campagne heureuse on lui donne la croix, comme à un petit enfant bien obéissant" (25-26).

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<sup>28</sup> As mentioned above, Gaillet's concept of an amalgamated African is often weakened by his descriptions of personality traits exhibited by individuals, such as "Bébé" and "Forte tête," etc.

In other instances Gaillet makes more general remarks regarding the capacities of the African soldiers:

Entre cette humanité à l'état d'enfance et notre civilisation beaucoup trop complexe pour elle, l'écart me semblait trop grand. Coulibaly était incapable de profiter de celle-ci. Il ne pouvait lui emprunter que des habitudes superficielles et mauvaises. C'est chez lui, dans son pays, dans son milieu que j'aurais voulu le voir pour bien l'apprécier. A notre contact il se déformait et se gâtait inévitablement. Il cessait d'être lui-même sans pouvoir devenir, au vrai sens du mot, un civilisé. (17)

While the verb tenses in this passage indicate that Gaillet might have changed his mind in the meantime (these lines refer to his first meetings with the tirailleurs), in fact all he admits to having gained during his time with them is “sympathie” and, in his opinion, enough of an understanding of Coulibaly to write about him and to wish that he were better known by others. (18, cited earlier)

In his chapter “Ce que pense et sent Coulibaly,” Gaillet includes three pages about “Correspondance,” in which he discusses the letters Coulibaly sends home to his family. Though Gaillet does not say what language is used for the letter, it seems that it is French,<sup>29</sup> since Coulibaly goes to his sergeant and explains “gauchement, péniblement, ce qu'il veut que sa lettre contienne” and the sergeant writes it for him.<sup>30</sup> Gaillet is clearly

<sup>29</sup> In *Deux ans* Ousmane dictates a letter in *français tirailleur* to Gaillet. The content of Ousmane's letters is judged banal by Gaillet, but he also admits that “dans leur simplicité naïve, elles laissaient de côté les détails sans importance pour ne dire que les choses essentielles: le respect du devoir, la fidélité du souvenir, le charme de l'amitié” (23).

<sup>30</sup> As Gaillet says, “très peu de noirs, bien entendu, sont capables d'écrire eux-mêmes. Ceux qui s'y hasardent obtiennent des résultats médiocres (soyons indulgents), et parfois très amusants” (*Coulibaly* 62).

not impressed by these short letters: “D’abord, [Coulibaly] a peu d’imagination, et les termes lui manquent. Il ne lui vient pas à l’esprit de donner sur sa vie quelques menus détails qui pourraient intéresser ceux de là-bas. C’est un simple, il fait tout simplement.”

The letters mainly include greetings to family and friends, “qu’il énumère consciencieusement en ayant l’air de chercher à ne pas en oublier.” Séché too recounts a similar anecdote, in which a tirailleur repeats the only word at his disposal, “bonjour,” over and over: “il le répète pour chacun de ceux auquels il pense et qu’il nomme afin de témoigner qu’il n’oublie personne” (54). Both authors seem unaware that this might be a cultural tradition and mark of respect. Gaillet goes on to discuss the fact that Coulibaly also writes to French people he has met while camped near villages, and his joy at receiving letters from these people as well as from his family. (62-62)

In remarking that Coulibaly writes that he is “beaucoup content d’eux [ceux qu’il aime]” Gaillet notes parenthetically the exact language used – “‘content trop’ selon sa formule” (17) – completely disregarding the fact that it was the army who imposed this kind of construction upon the tirailleurs. The army’s insistence on only teaching the tirailleurs *français tirailleur* is almost certainly also to blame for the lack of imagination and limited vocabulary mentioned by Gaillet. Significantly, Gaillet himself uses *français tirailleur* when speaking to African soldiers, both in Coulibaly (139) and Deux ans (51). For Séché’s part, he feels sorry for the French officers who are forced to speak this simplified language: “Je plains les sous-officiers européens réduits, pour la plupart, à s’exprimer en petit nègre, même lorsqu’ils donnent des instructions aux gradés

indigènes" (73), though does not say how he feels when he himself uses it (as on pages 31, 63, 252).

In the first half or so of Deux ans, Gaillet still refers to the tirailleurs as children, for example describing Tiakone as an "enfant naïf et insouciant" (37). In discussing preparations for the front, he mentions the awkwardness of the tirailleurs' efforts to put on the strange clothing: "Il fallait les prendre les uns après les autres et les habiller comme des enfants" (25). Later, in reference to the close friendship between Ousmane and Tiakone he remarks, "Oh! le puissant lien que l'amitié des simples!" (37), but in the latter half of his second book Gaillet concentrates more on the narration of events and on his rapport with Ousmane, revealing that his attitude toward the tirailleurs has changed a great deal since he wrote Coulibaly.

Alphonse Séché also views the tirailleurs as children, but considers this characteristic to go almost without saying, preferring to focus on other aspects of their personalities: "Grand enfant, je l'ai dit, le Sénégalaïs est susceptible, sentimental, orgueilleux" (49). Each time he meets a tirailleur disfigured by some war injury, Séché feels both pity and gratitude. After all, "ce n'est qu'un noir. Pour beaucoup d'entre nous le noir mérite une pitié relative, en rapport avec sa sensibilité, son intelligence et le mobile qui [en] fit un soldat" (26). He disputes the apparently common belief that the Senegalese are mercenaries, quoting Pierre Mille: "Ce n'est pas pour quelques pièces d'argent qu'ils portent si glorieusement la chéchia rouge et le fusil. Ils sont soldats parce qu'ils croient, parce qu'ils en sont sûrs, que la France est invincible" (27). Séché's entire chapter devoted to "Le loyalisme des Sénégalaïs" continues in this vein, mentioning a

conversation with a tirailleur, Moro Diallo, who explains why he will fight to the death to defeat the Germans, ““Français, vois-tu, c'est mon père; Français, c'est mon mère; Français, c'est mon frère”” (33).

While Séché focuses on the blind confidence that the French officers inspire in their tirailleurs (27-28), others interpret the gestures of individual tirailleurs as testament to their devotion to France and to their officers, the second important character trait frequently mentioned in these books. In Deux ans, Gaillet recounts an incident in which Ousmane is wounded in the leg and refuses his assistance:

Mais il a deviné mon intention et de la main, énergiquement, il me fait un geste qu'il répète avec insistance, et ce geste signifie: “Laisse-moi, je t'en prie. Ne t'occupe point d'Ansoumani Kamara;<sup>31</sup> il est perdu pour la bataille. Qu'importe la douleur qu'il endure! Qu'importe sa vie! Continue à veiller sur mes compagnons de lutte, sur Tiakone Kamara; tous n'attendent qu'un signal pour repartir. Si tu te levais, une balle pourrait t'atteindre, toi aussi, laisse-moi donc souffrir et me débattre, solitaire, sur la terre française imprégnée de mon sang.” (33-34)

It is amazing that Gaillet is able to infer so much from what must have been a few waves of the hand, which call to mind the frequent gesticulations required when speaking *français tirailleur*. While Bocquet and Hosten also include a similar episode, quoting a letter from a captain who witnessed the gesture and interpreted it, this captain's

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<sup>31</sup> This is Ousmane's full name.

interpretation is more restrained. During a battle he sees a tirailleur whose face is so horribly wounded it cannot even be bandaged, and he realizes that he knows the soldier.

“Redressant sa haute taille, il [le tirailleur] me prit la main, qu'il porta à son front, puis sur son cœur; ensuite, il désigna du doigt sa pauvre tête mutilée. Je compris qu'il s'excusait, le malheureux, et j'interprétais ainsi son geste: ‘Je voudrais bien servir encore; ma volonté est à vous, Français. Je vous aime; mais je ne peux plus rien. Je vais mourir, regarde-moi.’”

The officer interprets further, “‘Regarde-moi!’, c'est-à-dire, je n'ai pas failli au devoir et à la peine, je meurs en héros” (55-56).

In another noteworthy coincidence, Gallet and Bocquet and Hosten refer to specific tirailleurs as dogs loyal to their masters. In Coulibaly, Gallet mentions by name several Africans who visit him (it is not clear where he is, but his wife seems to be with him), such as “Tiakoné Kamara, dit ‘même chose girafe’, à la bouche d'anthropophage, et le gros Bila Taraoré, toujours bruyant et expansif.” His first orderly, Djeba Sabi, also visits “pour ‘saluer madame’ et nous dire bonjour!” Gallet muses, “Ah le bon, le fidèle chien de garde! Je ne peux le revoir sans émotion. Chez ce géant si soumis il n'y a que bonté et résignation. Son attitude est toujours la même. Sa vie s'inspire de principes sûrs et invariables” (132).

In Bocquet and Hosten's example, during a battle Second-Lieutenant Pujol entrusts a tirailleur, Bagnée N'Drop, with his bag, telling him to carry it to the camp on the left bank of the Yser where they will meet up later. Three hours after this, the officer is wounded and has no bandages left, having used the last of them on another soldier. As

he asks around for some cotton, “un tirailleur s’approche en rampant et lui remet son paquet. Stupeur du sous-lieutenant qui reconnaît Bagnée N’Drop.” He demands to know why the tirailleur (“imbécile”) is there instead of on the other side of the river, and ““Hé, réplique N’Drop sans s’émouvoir, moi pas connaisse si ti rentrer; si t’y a besoin couverture t’à l’heure, personne moyen passer; le pont y a foute le camp, moi alors venir donner mon mien à ti. Et voilà!”” Bocquet and Hosten explain that the “brave Soudanais” had given the items to another soldier, and “de fossé en fossé, il était revenu, ventre à terre – c’est le mot – au milieu de la bagarre, pistant son officier, comme un chien fidèle à son maître, à travers la zone dangeureuse battue par tous les feux de l’ennemi.” By way of conclusion they add, “C’est vingt traits de ce genre qu’il faut citer à l’honneur des noirs” (52-53).

In an even more touching, and death-defying, episode cited by Dutrèb, another lieutenant who was well-liked by his men is killed and buried on the field under a simple wooden cross. Though the landscape, on the eastern front near Gallipoli, is mostly barren of vegetation, a few days later one tirailleur notices three little wildflowers growing in the battlefield. “Ses yeux s’allument, il s’élance, et, bravant mille fois la mort, il les cueille, pour aller le soir les déposer pieusement sur la tombe du chef regretté.” Dutrèb sums up nicely the significance of this act, and the devotion of the tirailleurs in general:

Dévouement du tirailleur pour son chef, attachement de l’officier au tirailleur, respect de la volonté d’une part, souci paternel de la compréhension de l’autre, bravoure et estime réciproque, c’est tout cela qui doit unir le corps au cerveau, c’est-à-dire le tirailleur à son officier; car

pour le Sénégalaïs on ne saurait trop y insister et y revenir: le chef est non seulement l'exemple, mais encore l'affection, la justice et surtout la pensée dirigeante qui doit s'incarner en ses hommes.<sup>32</sup>

With regard to the third character trait exhibited by many tirailleurs and highlighted in these books: bravery, other authors make similar statements, often combining it with the importance of the officers' example. According to Gaillet, "en fin de compte, tout dépend du chef. Coulibaly ne demande qu'à s'attacher à celui qui le commande, à avoir confiance en lui, à faire comme lui" (80). However, in his description of "Un brave," in the chapter about life on the front lines, Gaillet takes a moment to reveal the bravery and initiative of one tirailleur, Ousman Sall, "un grand diable de Toucouleur intelligent et énergique." Sall had repeatedly told Gaillet, "'Toucouleur y a pas avoir peur; avec nous seulement y aurait moyen toujours avancer,'" a quality he illustrates admirably in this example. During a particularly fierce fight in heavy machine gun fire, many officers and soldiers are hit. Gaillet writes, "Ousman Sall, sergent indigène, n'apercevant plus aucun chef, prend le commandement des Sénégalaïs qui restent et essaie de les entraîner. Une balle l'atteint au bras, il avance quand même." Arriving by his wounded captain's side, he announces that he too is injured but will continue on anyway, inspiring his officer to shake his hand and say "'Viens mon vieux, tu es un brave.'" But he refuses to stop: "Mais le devoir appelle; Ousman, redressant sa haute taille, superbe d'allure, s'élançe de nouveau en criant de toute ses forces: 'En avant,

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<sup>32</sup> Dutrèb 149-150. The last words, from "la pensée" to the end, are in bold in the original.

Sénégalais', et bientôt il disparaît dans la fumée et la poussière suivi de ses héroïques compagnons de lutte" (**Coulibaly 85-86**).

Bocquet and Hosten also cite examples of bravery and ingenuity on the part of the tirailleurs, both during battle and during brief rests on the front. For example, they describe a scene in which the soldiers are in the trenches in Flanders, holding a defensive position in a light, cold, incessant rain. The shivering Africans become increasingly depressed and disenchanted:

A la nostalgie des chauds horizons quittés s'ajoute le spleen à mourir d'un paysage dououreux et d'un ciel sans rayonnement. Du tréfonds d'eux-mêmes, ils sentent monter le grand malaise inconnu, inexplicable, fatal, qui submerge d'une marée d'ennui leur cœur enfantin et ignorant. (22)

In an effort to warm them up and distract them, someone comes up with the idea of having the Senegalese fix up the trenches in which they are stuck. This turns out to be a good solution, and offers the tirailleurs an occasion to demonstrate their ingenuity:

Les Sénégalais sont ingénieux. Ils savent à merveille utiliser pierres, branchages, paille, étoffe et infimes débris pour édifier des cagnas solides. Ce fut salutaire et roboratif. [ . . . ] Et dans les faces de bronze fermées et tristes le large rire s'épanouit de nouveau sur les dents blanches. (23)

A different incident, this one in battle, shows the tirailleurs' bravery, but also some foolhardiness. Bocquet and Hosten have no qualms about saying flatly: "Les Sénégalais sont merveilleux de bravoure," and they mention one soldier in particular who

while under both cannon and machine gun fire is reprimanded by his African sergeant because he “ne peut s’empêcher, de temps à autre, de ‘saluer’ balles et shrapnels au passage.” The sergeant lectures him: “T’as pas fini faire silhouette, paraissant et disparaissant? De quoi ti as peur? Si c’est la balle, ton tête il est gris comme la terre, personne là-bas y a voir toi. Si c’est canon, t’en fous, y a trouver ti aussi bien dans le trou.”<sup>33</sup>

For Séché too, the Senegalese soldiers’ bravery is an important asset: “Partout où les troupes coloniales et, en particulier, les troupes noires attaquèrent, sur la Somme, les traits d’héroïsme se multiplièrent” (163). He notes that the Germans try hard to thwart them, and typically fail. Speaking about battles at Dixmude he writes,

Espérant les terroriser, les Allemands, chaque fois qu’ils se sont trouvés en face d’eux aux tranchées ou en rase campagne, les criblèrent de projectiles de tous calibres. Jamais les tirailleurs n’ont reculé. Chose curieuse, ils appliquent d’eux-mêmes ce qu’on leur a enseigné: ils cherchent souvent à se soustraire aux coups de l’artillerie par une fuite en avant. (108-109)

Even though many of the tirailleurs arrived on the front lines still very inexperienced, as shown in this last quote they did all have some degree of prior exposure to weaponry and training in European war tactics.

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<sup>33</sup> The last sentence about this episode reads, “A peine a-t-il achevé cette fière leçon de maintien, qu’un éclat lui fracasse la mâchoire” (49). The “lui” is somewhat ambiguous, and though it probably refers to the sergeant, it could refer to the other soldier as well.

*Off the front: the tirailleurs in training, in the hospital, in towns*

Many of the tirailleurs drafted for service in World War I received training at camps in the mild climate of the south of France such as the one at Fréjus, where they also spent the winters once the army realized they could not withstand the freezing temperatures at the front lines in the north. While those who had already seen combat in Morocco and other arenas of French colonial defense and expansion were well prepared and had provided impressive examples of tirailleur prowess used by proponents of the *Force noire*, the new African soldiers were woefully lacking in military expertise. In camps like Fréjus, the tirailleurs were instructed on how to build trenches, march in formation, attack as a group, shoot firearms, and understand and speak some French.

Alphonse Séché's chapter "Le camp de Fréjus" offers some details regarding the tirailleurs' activities and training, but as noted above Séché devotes quite a bit of this chapter to descriptions of the surrounding landscape and ambiance. He also points out that "on tousse, on tousse énormément. La toux est la grande musique au camp de Fréjus" (62), referring to the fact that many Africans caught pneumonia, bronchitis, and other respiratory ailments in the cold, rainy or snowy trenches on the front lines. Even the southern climate caused problems for some, as Gaillet describes in "Frileux": "L'hiver est triste, froid, pluvieux sur cette côte d'Azur [...] Coulibaly supporte malaisément ce climat trop rigoureux pour son organisme habitué à la chaleur du Sénégal." He quotes an African sergeant as telling him, "Si vous voulez nous faire bon travail, faut vous débrouiller pour avoir soleil" (Coulibaly 128).

On a tour of the camp, Séché is accompanied by a translator, Moussa Diallo, who takes him behind Fréjus, to the fields where the tirailleurs are engaged in a mock battle. Since they have not yet been given any ammunition, the soldiers yell “Feu!” every time they would shoot at the enemy. They seem to be trying very hard to understand their orders: “Ils n’ont pas l’intelligence rapide, mais ils sont appliqués. Quoi qu’il en soit, ces ‘coups de feu de bouche’, si je puis dire, produisent un effet assurément inattendu. On croirait que les noirs se commandent ‘feu’, à eux-mêmes!” (67). Despite their best efforts, the tirailleurs only seem to succeed at being “comiques de gaucherie” and exasperating their officers: “Ils lèvent des bras énormes et raides, prennent des écartements de jambes exagérés, – à moins qu’ils ne puissent plier les genoux, – font des sauts d’un mètre, en hauteur, perdent l’équilibre... C’est un spectacle de cirque, un ‘numéro’ réglé par Foutit et Chocolat!”<sup>34</sup>

Séché’s description of the tirailleurs learning how to aim their guns (cited earlier) is followed by a short explanation of their reaction to trench-building exercises. In contrast to Bocquet and Hosten’s example of tirailleurs who are very good at repairing trenches, Séché only observes them having great difficulty with the shovels and pickaxes, and writes that “Ils méprisent, d’ailleurs, ces raffinements de la guerre européenne; les tranchées – ils prononcent *trancées* – sont ‘manière blanc’ qui les stupéfie.” Given that it must horrify them to think that they will soon find themselves huddled in similar narrow

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<sup>34</sup> Séché 68. Georges Footit and Chocolat were circus performers in the late 1800s and early 1900s at the *Nouveau-Cirque* in Paris. In *Histoire illustrée des cirques parisiens d’hier et d’aujourd’hui* the author Adrian notes that Chocolat was a black man (58), and includes a photo of them. (56) The artist Toulouse-Lautrec knew Footit and drew both him and Chocolat on a few occasions. See the drawings “Chocolat, scène comique” (Toulouse-Lautrec plate 37), “Footit en danseuse (1894)” (Julien plate 12), and an 1894 lithograph “Footit et Chocolat” (Witrock plate 87 and Adriani plate 104).

ditches, unable to get at the enemy in his own trenches, Séché is not particularly surprised by their reaction. (69-70)

Although these aspects of the tirailleurs' training were certainly crucial in terms of their fighting capabilities, for this study the most interesting portion of their stay at Fréjus is the time they spent learning French. Séché briefly mentions the camp school, where when he visits some Africans are repeating the days of the week – "Dimanche est lancé comme un cri," because this is their day off. Another group is learning the names of officers, also repeated many times: "Le caporal fait répéter les mêmes mots indéfiniment. Sa patience n'a d'égale que la difficulté des Sénégalais à retenir ce qu'on leur enseigne" (72-73).

In Coulibaly, Gaillet includes a piece entitled "Coulibaly apprend à lire," in which Coulibaly buys children's school books and learns the alphabet rather quickly. After that, progress becomes more difficult, and only the most gifted come to understand the children's stories they read. This brief mention speaks to the fact that tirailleurs were not completely isolated from French society, and had the opportunity to locate and purchase books. It also illustrates the desire of at least some Africans to learn "real" French and to read. Not all of them seem to have been very successful though: one tirailleur, Bilali Mouenpaga, spends a great deal of time practicing out loud linking the consonant "p" with different vowels: "pa," "pe," and so forth – Gaillet notes wryly, "Il y a de quoi être confondu." He speculates that if the tirailleur continues at this rate he will go far, but unfortunately when they meet again six months later Bilali is still working on the same thing, and Gaillet gamely pretends to be very impressed. (117-118)

In Deux ans, Gaillet himself gains experience teaching tirailleurs, some of whom do better than others.

Aux moins avancés nous enseignions les mots les plus usuels en exigeant d'eux une prononciation aussi correcte que possible. C'étaient de beaucoup les plus nombreux. Ceux qui étaient déjà "dégrossis" apprenaient les lettres et s'exerçaient à lire. Enfin l'élite: deux sergents, trois caporaux et un tirailleur de première classe étaient initiés à l'art de représenter les sons au moyen de l'écriture. Je fus chargé de m'occuper tout spécialement de ces derniers. (9-10)

Here again, the tirailleurs demonstrate a great willingness to learn, but make slow progress (in Gaillet's opinion). The sergeant Ousman Sall, mentioned above, and the tirailleur Yaya Sidi<sup>35</sup> want to learn to write and pronounce new words. Though Soriba Silla copies words perfectly, the corporal Baba Taraoré writes words from memory, but his spelling is sometimes "étrangement fantaisiste." Yet another, Bana Kamara, an older veteran who had fought for Samory but later joined the French, nods his head and repeats familiar words he hears, and occasionally solemnly graces with his careful signature whatever paper is at hand. (13) The pamphlet Le français tel que le parlent nos tirailleurs sénégalais makes no mention of teaching tirailleurs to read and write, and Gaillet does not specify whether they are learning *français tirailleur* or French.

This small group of advanced students is the exception, and the rest of the tirailleurs seem to be lumped under the category of "les maladroits." For some, it is all

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<sup>35</sup> In Coulibaly, in a piece entitled "Jugement de Coulibaly sur les 'Toubabs'" (49-51), Yaya Sidi is called "l'intellectuel," which implies that he is also the subject of the piece entitled "Un intellectuel" (35-37).

they can do to grasp the numbers in their gun sights, for example: “Tamba Tolli lui-même, un Bambarra particulièrement paresseux, consentait à ouvrir les yeux – et c’était de sa part un effort exceptionnel – pour regarder les figures bizarres que je proposais à son attention, et à sortir de son mutisme habituel pour essayer de les nommer.” Some of the worst students “étaient desservis par une mémoire infidèle qui les obligeait à réapprendre le lendemain ce qu’ils avaient appris la veille” (13). In the end, nearly everyone learns what they need to, except Tamba Tolli and Tiakone Kamara, who are soon joined in this remedial class by new recruits. Marc Michel briefly notes that “Des cours plus élaborés ont existés” and that “‘dames-volontaires’ s’employèrent aussi à instruire les soldats noirs selon d’autres méthodes,” but gives no further details. ([Appel](#) 373) The much greater success of an informal school in a civilian woman’s home, outside the Fréjus camp and attended voluntarily by many tirailleurs in training there, is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 below, in conjunction with the only existing autobiography written by a tirailleur himself.

During their time away from their training exercises and French lessons the tirailleurs had opportunities to play games, dance, and make music. Gaillet includes descriptions of different games and dances in both Coulibaly (see “Danses” 123-124, and “Tam-Tam” 125, and in Deux ans 17-20), and he clearly recognizes the value of these chances to relax. “Les Sénégalaïs oublaient les durs travaux de la vie militaire et le pays natal que beaucoup déjà n’avaient point vu depuis plusieurs années et où ‘leurs moussos’ les attendaient. Pendant quelques minutes ils vivaient dans un monde de rêve [ . . . ].”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Gaillet, Deux ans 18. In a footnote Gaillet indicates that “leurs moussos” refers to “femmes.”

When wounded or sick and in a hospital, the tirailleurs also play cards and other games, passing the time until they are released. Séché tries to explain one game, called “ouali,” which involves a board with small hollows and marbles or stones that are moved from one hollow to another, but even though he suspects that it is “d'une simplicité enfantine” he is at a loss to explain what the rules might be.<sup>37</sup> Before hospitals reserved for tirailleurs were established in southern France beginning in 1916 (Michel, *Appel* 389), injured and sick African soldiers were sent to hospitals all across the country, just like French soldiers, with the result that there was “pas d'hôpital de petite ville qui n'ait eu son Sénégalais.” The arrival of a tirailleur was of course the talk of the town, and the African quickly became an “enfant gâté.”<sup>38</sup> Even as late as 1918 the *Direction des Troupes Coloniales* remained concerned about the tirailleurs’ close contact with French nurses, although one high-ranking official at the Minstry of Colonies had argued in 1917 that little long-lasting harm would come from these relationships. (Michel, *Appel* 390)

As noted above in a citation from Séché’s chapter about two tirailleur hospitals, Marseilles and Menton, he found it to be a good idea to keep the Africans away from metropolitan troops, often considered to be a bad influence. Séché notes in passing that “les tirailleurs sénégalais, à l’instar des troupiers de chez nous, sont ‘carottiers’” and that “le ‘tireur au flanc’ n’est pas réservé aux troupes blanches” (242). However, by the end of this chapter it is clear that he fears the influence of the nurses the most:

Cette question des infirmières auprès des tirailleurs est, au reste, plus complexe qu'il ne paraît. On ne saurait traiter les indigènes comme l'on

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<sup>37</sup> Séché 250. This seems to be the game also called *mancala*, *wouré*, or *awalé*, etc.

<sup>38</sup> Séché 235. Regarding these hospitals see Séché 235-56, Balesi 106-7, and Michel, *Appel* 368-70.

traite des troupiers français. Les femmes ont le tort de ne point faire suffisamment la différence. [. . .] Les soins dont elles entourent les blessés et les malades sénégalais sont incomparablement supérieurs à ceux que donnent des infirmières militaires. [. . .] Elles influent sur le moral des noirs et, sans le savoir, elles modifient leur mentalité au point de la déformer complètement [. . .]. (255-256)

As Michel explains, “Ce sont certainement les blessés et convalescents des formations sanitaires de la Côte d’Azur qui trouvèrent le plus d’occasions de rencontres avec les civils,” since they interacted with medical personnel on a daily basis and with civilians at least twice a week. (Appel 387)

Although these authors do not discuss the influence of catholic nurses in particular, the story of one such woman was published in 1927.<sup>39</sup> This nurse, Alice Munet, first encountered tirailleurs sénégalais in November 1914 as they arrived at Hôpital 205 in Menton (127).<sup>40</sup> She is described as being “maternelle et guérisseuse” (139), and although she is certainly dedicated to helping the tirailleurs recover from their illnesses and wounds, she also devotes a great deal of energy to teaching them about Jesus: “avec tous les petits soulagements matériels apportés aux pauvres corps douloureux, Alice se donna la tâche d’éclairer, d’instruire et de toucher leur cœur” (144). Munet worked at several different hospitals in the area, and though she learned the Ten Commandments and some prayers in Bambara, she also seems to have spoken a good

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<sup>39</sup> No author is given for the book, but it may be the *Supérieur général des Missions Africaines de Lyon*, P. J.-M. Chabert. The story seems to be based largely on Munet’s journal entries.

<sup>40</sup> Inspired by her work during the war, in 1922 Munet founded the *Petites servantes du Sacré-Cœur, missionnaires catéchistes des Noirs en Afrique*, but died before the group went to Africa.

deal of French with the tirailleurs. (159) The attachment many of her patients/potential converts felt for her is clear, and when she herself became severely ill “de fidèles noirs venaient chaque soir, après la soupe, demander de ses nouvelles. [ . . . ] ils se chauffaient un moment, se sentaient chez eux, mais demeuraient silencieux et tristes” (177).

The Marseilles hospital, in a converted public school, “was known for its maternal care, scrupulous cleanliness, and intransigent discipline” (Balesi 107), while Hôpital 52, at Menton, was installed in the Carlton Hotel and run by Dr. Maclau, a colonial officer whose methods were not at all like those of Munet. Without sacrificing cleanliness and quality of care, Maclau’s hospital offered a completely different experience: “Je ne dirai pas [ . . . ] qu’il est plus *sauvage*, mais il est plus colonial,” in the delicate phrasing of Séché. (236) The atmosphere at Menton was that of “a Sudanese village, complete with games, drums, palavers, and even a touch of witchcraft” (Balesi 107). Maclau refused the aid offered by the Red Cross nurses, since in his opinion they weakened the Senegalese, made them vain and undisciplined, and more or less de-senegalized them. (Séché 256) His program of “re-senegalization” was intended to rid the tirailleurs of the egos and pretensions they had developed during too much contact with whites (especially French women) in other hospitals.

Le contact des blancs leur a été néfaste: Gâtés par les infirmières, admirés par la population, ils ont acquis d’eux-mêmes une opinion que leurs mérites ne justifient pas toujours. Ils entendent être traités comme des Européens; ils regardent les autres noirs avec pitié sinon avec mépris; ils

laissent croître leurs cheveux, font la raie sur le côté et se refusent à manger la cuisine indigène. (Séché 246-47)

Despite his insistence that the Africans be separated from Europeans and “re-senegalized” (or reminded of their humble origins and relieved of their inappropriate sentiments of equality with whites), Maclau did not permit his patients to be treated poorly or insulted, and posted a notice on the wall to this effect. The notice read:

L’officier d’administration, commandant le détachement, prescrit formellement à tous les infirmiers sous ses ordres, d’avoir pour les Sénégalaïs malades ou blessés en traitement à l’hôpital complémentaire n° 52, non seulement tous les égards dus à leur état, mais encore d’avoir pour eux toute la condescendance possible, précisément parce qu’ils sont incapables de se faire facilement comprendre. Il insiste particulièrement pour *qu’aucune parole désobligeante* ne leur soit adressée.

L’inobservation de ces prescriptions sera très sévèrement punie.<sup>41</sup>

Léon Gaillet also includes some observations about tirailleur life in a hospital not far from Cannes, which based on his descriptions of the area seems to be n° 66, at Fréjus.<sup>42</sup> Gaillet describes how upon first arriving Coulibaly gets a bed and is treated with “peinture d’iode,” as Gaillet implies a tirailleur would say when referring to *teinture d’iode*. (129) With regard to hospital beds, Séché recounts a short anecdote in which he

<sup>41</sup> Séché 245-46. Also cited (in English) by Balesi 107.

<sup>42</sup> Gaillet’s references to being “sur la route de Cannes” and on a plain dominated by the “sommets de l’Estérel” (*Coulibaly* 129) indicate a location nearer the camp at Fréjus. His trip to visit Ousmane in a hospital “près de Fréjus” in *Deux ans* could be referring to this same anecdote. (50) For information about *Hôpital Sénégalaïs No. 66*, see Balesi 107. He writes that the statistics of this hospital are the only ones available today.

asks a tirailleur what he thinks of his bed: ““Y a bon?”” and the tirailleur says that it is good, adding ““Y a pas petit’ bêtes,”” prompting Séché to remark, “Une couche sans vermine est évidemment une nouveauté estimée” (239).

Once he begins feeling better, Coulibaly finds he misses life at the camp, his “compagnons de peine,” and his officers, and is impatient to leave the hospital. However, he is then judged capable of helping the nurses with some tasks, and gets to apply the “peinture d’iode” to new arrivals.<sup>43</sup> Soon he is allowed to leave: “Et la voiture d’ambulance le ramène au camp, tout heureux de retrouver ses camarades, de reprendre ses habitudes et de se sentir libre” (Gallet, Coulibaly 131). Of course, the tirailleurs are really not free, in or out of the hospital, but given the sight of the ever-growing cemetery next to the hospital, it may well be that they were happy to leave.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps the closest the tirailleurs come to actual liberty during the war is on Sunday afternoons at the training camp, when they seem to be free to do as they please. Marc Michel writes that in the Saint-Raphaël-Fréjus area the tirailleurs were “assez étroitement encadrés,” whereas in Menton they had a great deal of freedom, especially in 1918 and 1919. He cites a camp administrator as saying that the tirailleurs “arpentent les rues de Menton jusqu’à deux heures du matin... Le dimanche, ils peuplent les cafés, traînent un peu partout dans une tenue très négligée et en criant un peu trop jusqu’à une heure avancée [...]” (Appel 389). Gallet’s piece, “Le dimanche de Coulibaly” describes the typical Sunday, which starts with Coulibaly rising “un peu plus nonchalamment que

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<sup>43</sup> Alice Munet also taught “des sujets particulièrement intelligents, actifs et sérieux” how to help her with other patients, especially with their bandages. (197)

<sup>44</sup> Gallet mentions the cemetery in both Coulibaly (128) and Deux ans (50).

de coutume" and taking his time getting dressed. Later he leaves, alone or with a friend, "faire perminade' à Saint-Raphaël."<sup>45</sup> If he has some money, he might buy a lemonade, but most often "Coulibaly préfère circuler à travers la ville et 'mirer belles boutiques'" (126). While Gallet writes that "le marchand de volailles reçoit souvent sa visite. Coulibaly s'informe des prix, compare, se décide et sort de la boutique, portant sous son bras une volatile effarée" (127), Séché specifies that "les sardines à l'huile font fureur, ainsi que le lait concentré" and that "la parfumerie a aussi beaucoup de succès" (74-75). Gallet addresses part of his account to Coulibaly himself, when remarking that the "photographe ambulant" has lots of customers: "Attention Coulibaly! ne remue pas la tête, regarde bien le point indiqué, déride-toi un brin en pensant à ton village et à ceux qui bientôt là-bas 'feront rassemblement' selon l'expression qui t'est chère, pour contempler ton image arrivée de France!" (127).

Both Gallet and Séché talk about a bazaar set up near the camp, where the tirailleurs can buy pipes, tobacco, nuts, chocolate, and knick-knacks.<sup>46</sup> In Deux ans Gallet goes into more detail about the tirailleurs' Sunday afternoon activities: Yaya Sidi likes to go to Saint-Raphaël "mirer belles boutiques" et aussi 'belles madames,' but Ousmane prefers just to stroll around the bazaar, where he often meets young French children.

Les bambins avaient tôt fait de lier connaissance avec les noirs; quelques-uns s'enhardissaient jusqu'à plaisanter avec eux et à les taquiner. Les

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<sup>45</sup> In a footnote Gallet translates "faire perminade" as "faire promenade." (126)

<sup>46</sup> Séché 74 and Gallet, Deux ans 20-21. Michel notes that for a while some merchants at the outskirts of the camps did a brisk trade in alcohol, but the army put a stop to that and tried to limit the number of merchants by requiring that they obtain authorization to sell at the camps. (Appel 389)

tirailleurs en paraissaient ravis; ils se laissaient faire en riant eux aussi de leur bon rire d'enfant. Ousmane tout particulièrement aimait ces petits Européens, ces petits ‘toubabs’ [ . . . ]

Il allait vers eux, il leur souriait, et les ‘pitits gosses’, devinant un ami, venaient lui prendre la main. Ousmane les conduisait vers les boutiques brillantes, leur achetait des arachides, des dattes, du chocolat [ . . . ]. (21)

Returning to the camp, Ousmane often then joined other tirailleurs in card games, almost always winning – according to Yaya Sidi, Ousmane “connaissait beaucoup manière jeu.” Gallet ends by noting that tirailleurs in prison, the French children at the bazaar, and Ousmane’s best friend Tiakone were often the lucky beneficiaries of his winnings, though he sent the majority of the money home to Sénégal. (22)

The story of the catholic nurse Alice Munet also includes references to tirailleurs befriending French children, attributing this both to their “âmes si semblables” and the fact that many tirailleurs had children of their own whom they had not seen since their entry into the army. “Ils leur souriaient doucement ces grands et terribles tirailleurs, les caressaient lorsqu’ils s’y voyaient autorisés et aimaient à leur acheter des bonbons.” An anecdote about one tirailleur, Marius Logo,<sup>47</sup> mentions his friendship with a young, blond boy, recounting that after Logo had moved from Menton to Saint-Raphaël the boy wanted to visit him. The boy’s parents take him to search for Logo, and after “de longues recherches dans ces camps multiples où fourmillaient des milliers d’indigènes,” they find Logo. The boy jumps up and hugs Logo, but the joyous occasion is quickly marred: “Un

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<sup>47</sup> Logo only receives the first name Marius-Joseph upon his baptism, having been converted to Catholicism by Munet. (134)

colonial présent ricana: ‘Tu n’as pas peur, petit, de devenir noir toi aussi?’ Alors la joie naïve de Logo s’éteignit: il déposa l’enfant et, se relevant, protesta dans une calme et fière indignation: ‘C’est pas vrai!... Petit, pas devenir noir’” (Alice Munet 187-188).

In Deux ans, Gaillet relates some of his and the tirailleurs’ experiences in the north of France when their battalion was moved relatively far from the front lines for an extended period of rest. As they travel away from the front, they pass through partly destroyed villages, where only a few women, children, and elderly men remain. Tiakone Kamara sees an old man, “assis mélancoliquement sur un tas de décombres, contemplant sa demeure à demi ruinée” and offers him a franc, ““Lui, disait-il, y a même chose mon papa”” (36). Other tirailleurs give the children chocolate and sugar. The battalion arrives in Canly, in the Oise region, and settles in for a month-long stay, initially much to the chagrin of the locals:

Les habitants ne paraissent pas tout d’abord très satisfaits d’être obligés de loger des noirs. Mais cette mauvaise impression dure peu. Les indigènes se montrent si dociles, si polis, si empressés à rendre service! Ils ont tôt fait de gagner la sympathie de cette brave population paysanne. Leurs hôtes les gâtent comme des enfants. Ils désirent que le séjour des Sénégalais parmi eux se prolonge le plus possible. (36-37)

Even during this rest the tirailleurs are put through their paces every day, and perform very well. As they return to town, “ils défilent fièrement, tandis que les habitants accourus sur leur passage les regardent en souriant” (37). According to Marc Michel situations such as this, when groups of tirailleurs either stayed in towns for a period of

rest or were quartered in towns near the front in Alsace, Lorraine, and other regions, offered yet another occasion for tirailleurs and civilians to come into contact with one another. (*Appel* 388)

*On the front: the tirailleurs' performance in battle*

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the tirailleurs were not to be used as porters or workers but rather as combat troops, as many of them were indeed employed throughout the war. Yet there is little consensus as to how the tirailleurs were actually used in battle: in a few of the texts about the tirailleurs there are mentions of their use in the first wave of assaults, but most scholars today agree that the tirailleurs were not used as shock troops or cannon fodder in World War I. Although articles and books from the period often do refer to these soldiers as shock troops, Tyler Stovall states that “Recent scholarship has largely demolished the belief that France systematically used African soldiers as ‘cannon fodder’ during the war” (*Paris Noir* 19). Charles-John Balesi too flatly asserts that “The myth of the *tirailleur* as cannon fodder does not survive an analysis of the facts and figures” (121). According to Marc Michel there were certainly some officers who viewed the Africans’ role as “‘d’épargner dans la mesure du possible du sang français.’” Still, he remarks that the price paid by the African forces “ne fut pas plus élevé que celui qui fut payé par leurs camarades d’infortune; qu’il fut absolument égal en proportion à celui des fantassins blancs des tranchées.” In Michel’s opinion there was a greater injustice: “Ajoutons que le froid et la maladie à l’arrière tuèrent autant que les combats. En ce sens, seulement, il est permis de parler d’une légende de ‘chair à

canon'" ("Troupes" 15). In L'Appel à l'Afrique, Michel mentions the "puissance de choc" attributed to the African soldiers,<sup>48</sup> as well as reports from officers at the end of the war, in which the tirailleurs were judged to be most useful in direct attacks, "pour 'agir, en un mot, comme un boulet de canon...'" (Oddly, here they are the cannon ball, rather than the cannon's target.) The general opinion in these reports was that "les troupes noires devaient toujours être considérées comme des troupes de choc" (Michel, Appel 332).

In The Price of Glory Alistair Horne describes an incident at Verdun, emphasizing the inexperience of "Mangin's beloved African troops," who were dreaded by the Germans but eventually decimated by their machine guns anyway:

These [African troops] arrived at Verdun in September, were entranced like children by the novelty of the 'firework display', and then propelled into a minor attack to see what they could do. At once they ran amuck, beyond all control of their officers, captured some German positions and butchered the survivors. Then the Germans recovered their nerve and set up a machine gun. The wretched Africans, never having been under such fire before, incapable of understanding where all the bullets were coming from, all grouped together in their bewilderment. (309)

Michel writes that it was after this bloody fiasco that Mangin, who was in charge of these men, "réorganisa l'emploi des compagnies sénégalaises laissées désormais en seconde

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<sup>48</sup> See for example pages 306, 315, 321.

ligne, intercalées entre les autres unités de choc," made up of *Légion, Zouaves, Chasseurs, and Coloniaux.* (Appel 303)

In his France, Soldiers and Africa, Anthony Clayton also refers to the idea of the tirailleurs as shock troops as a "legend," saying that it arose out of the highly unsuccessful and costly offensive at Chemin des Dames in 1917 organized by Nivelle and Mangin, in which

poorly trained battalions were poured into the attack in conditions of unusual cold and mud, with inadequate artillery preparation, and with shortages of grenades, ammunition, food and water. [ . . . ] Casualties were exceptionally severe [ . . . ]; critics of Mangin accused him of butchery, and a legend that France deliberately used Africans as cannon-fodder was born.<sup>49</sup>

Clayton points instead to the use of the *Régiment de Marche de la Légion Étrangère* as "an elite shock assault unit" at the Somme in July 1916, Reims in April 1917, and on the Meuse from August to December 1917. (232) Clayton mentions the belief, held by Mangin and others, "that as the African Negro's less developed nervous system rendered him impervious to anticipatory anxiety and only little frightened, so Sénégalaïs battalions should be used in an assault shock role" (338). Toward the beginning of his very pro-Mangin text, Alphonse Séché alludes to this as well, explaining that the Senegalese

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<sup>49</sup> Clayton 340. In the wake of this disaster Mangin was relieved of his duties for a time and the events were scrutinized. Eventually he was reinstated by Clemenceau. (See Michel, Appel 318-321; and Mangin's biography Le Général Mangin, written by his son, pages 207-238.)

exhibit a total absence of fear and “un mépris absolu de la mort tenant sans doute autant à ce que le Sénégalaïs est dépourvu de nervosité, qu'à la vertu de ses croyances” (42).

Later Séché addresses the issue of using the tirailleurs as shock troops, but determines that they are simply not as effective as a French infantry charge:

On veut que les Sénégalaïs soient une troupe de choc. N'est-ce point surtout parce qu'on les sacrifie plus volontiers que nos soldats? Lorsqu'ils réussissent à aborder l'ennemi, ils sont terribles, mais disons-le, s'ils vont en avant baïonnette au canon, on ne saurait comparer cette ‘marche’, exécutée le plus souvent avec un admirable mépris du danger, à la poussée irrésistible d'une charge d'infanterie française. (106)

At the beginning of his chapter about the Somme, he brings up this topic again, implying that the tirailleurs are being used in this capacity after all. He writes that everywhere that there was hard work to be done during the war, the “hautes silhouettes bronzées” of the tirailleurs could be seen, since “L'honneur d'avoir été employés comme troupes de choc leur valut d'être toujours au bon endroit, là où il y avait beaucoup à ‘donner’ et beaucoup à ‘recevoir’” (150).

Dutrèb occasionally mentions shock troops at the Somme as well, noting at one point that some tirailleurs were “adjoints aux troupes de choc,” but does not indicate whether or not those troops were also African. (45) In another example, she quotes a report of activities at Verdun written by Mangin, in which he notes that “partout ils [les Sénégalaïs] font preuve d'allant et d'impétuosité dans le choc, même contre des mitrailleuses en action.” Mangin continues, specifying that the inexperienced tirailleurs

were mixed with European soldiers so that each battalion consisted of one indigenous and three European companies, and that the tirailleurs were placed in the second line. “Mais, après avoir atteint le premier objectif, la seconde ligne passa la première, puis la dépassa et marcha sur l’objectif définitif. Ces compagnies indigènes se trouvaient ainsi en première ligne après avoir executé, sous le feu, une manœuvre assez délicate” (Dutrèb 64). This is the same battalion of tirailleurs who, just six weeks before, had scattered during an attack and ended up accidentally shooting each other after the Germans, “affolés,” took off running. The tirailleurs missed an easy chance to take prisoners, and later were found giving each other orders, fencing with their bayonets (while still under fire) and in general doing victory dances. “D’autres lançaient des grenades dans des trous et se penchaient sur le bord pour voir l’effet de l’éclatement.”<sup>50</sup>

Despite the fact that such inexperienced tirailleurs, the vast majority of whom had certainly not volunteered to join the army, frequently found themselves in horrible conditions, they clearly learned from their mistakes and also proved themselves to be “reliable in the period of mutiny in the French Army that followed Nivelle’s disastrous 1917 offensive.”<sup>51</sup> Although Balesi states that “no mutiny occurred in the Senegalese units” (109), Michel, Clayton, and Séché agree that the 61<sup>st</sup> battalion did in fact cause a minor disturbance. Of these three authors, Michel gives the most information about this episode, but in the end he states that “Ce fut une révolte d’hommes exténués, dégoûtés des combats sanglants et inutiles, de l’affreuse vie des tranchées et la révolte d’une unité

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<sup>50</sup> Dutrèb 61-62. Michel also describes this incident. (*Appel* 303)

<sup>51</sup> For information regarding the mutinies in general, see Guy Pedroncini, *Les Mutineries de 1917*. He makes one reference to tirailleurs (87), simply noting that there was some incident in a regiment of Senegalese.

valeureuse, trop constamment mise à l'épreuve." The 5<sup>th</sup> battalion, stationed with the 61<sup>st</sup>, did not make any move to mutiny, nor did any other black troops. (Appel 352)

Séché's account of this episode is very much like Michel's, but includes a hint of Séché's personal opinion as well. He begins by reminding the reader of the excellent performances of the 61<sup>st</sup> in 1916 and 1917, mentioning a citation they received in 1916.<sup>52</sup> Arguing that this battalion deserved another citation after their July 29 attack at Hurtebise, Séché says "elle ne l'obtint pas, sous prétexte que le 13 août, elle refusa de marcher." Séché agrees with the battalion chief Malafosse's determination that they were justified in refusing to move, since they had already been pushed "au delà des limites de la résistance humaine" and had not been allowed enough time to rest. He cites Malafosse, "Quelle est la troupe européenne – écrit-il – qui aurait d'ailleurs pu marcher après avoir exigé d'elle un effort semblable à celui que le 61<sup>e</sup> bataillon avait fourni depuis le 27 juillet dans un secteur aussi marmité que celui d'Hurtebise pendant cette période?" (Séché 226). Though Dutrèb does mention the "rare violence" of the German counter-attack at Hurtebise, and that it was principally directed at the 61<sup>st</sup>, she makes no mention of any kind of mutiny. (75) More significantly, Clayton mentions that once this minor tirailleur mutiny was contained, "the Tirailleurs along with (but not more than) other dependable

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<sup>52</sup> Séché does not give any details about this citation, but one which includes the 61<sup>st</sup> Battalion of Tirailleurs Sénégalaïs does appear in Dutrèb's text: "Energiquement commandé par le lieutenant-colonel Durand, le 37<sup>e</sup> R.I.C. [Régiment d'Infanterie Coloniale], comprenant le 61<sup>e</sup> B.T.S., s'est particulièrement distingué les 9 et 10 juillet 1916, par la ténacité et la vigueur de ses attaques. A enlevé de haute lutte cinq lignes successives de tranchées et une position très forte, qu'il a conservée malgré les contre-attaques furieuses de l'ennemi. A fait 100 prisonniers" (49). It is very likely that Séché is referring to this citation.

units were used to restore discipline in those metropolitan units in which discipline had broken down.”<sup>53</sup>

Although Michel asserts that these tirailleurs had not been influenced in their decision to rebel by metropolitan troops who were undertaking a much larger mutiny during the same period (*Appel* 351), there were many times when French and African soldiers were in close contact and affected each other. In one somewhat ghastly episode recounted by Bocquet and Hosten, tirailleurs and French troops on the front together take advantage of the abundance of livestock, especially pigs, roaming around the area to supplement their rations. Only the Muslims refrained from “toute cette chair impure.” Then, on their rounds one night, a white sergeant and several black soldiers come upon a group of pigs gorging themselves on the bodies of German soldiers left on the field.

Horrer! [ . . . ] Du coup, il ne fut plus question d'améliorer l'ordinaire.

Encore tout émus de cette épouvantable découverte, les Européens décidèrent sans hésitation de faire comme les musulmans et de s'abstenir désormais de la viande des bêtes immondes. [ . . . ] Au milieu des blancs consternés, un tirailleur s'esclaffait. Comme on s'étonnait de cet excès d'hilarité, le brave Sénégalais, tout fier de cette victoire inattendue du Koran, expliqua: ‘Ah! ti connaissais pas que cochon même chose que charognards. Quand ti vas Soudan, ti manges pas charognards. Faut pas ici manger aussi. Ti vois Mohamed y connaissait bien cochon, li!’”

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<sup>53</sup> He goes on to say that “They were also on a very few occasions used to separate other colonial frictions, involving Indochinese, Somalis or Malagasis. The dependability of the wartime Sénégalaïs led to their increased use in imperial roles after the war was over” (345).

As Bocquet and Hosten aptly note, “Il n'y avait évidemment rien à répliquer à cette logique nègre. Et Mahomet avait raison!” (34-36)

Another anecdote, much less unpleasant, from the front which also involves food is also told by Bocquet and Hosten. Soudou-Gueye, a tirailleur known for his “exactitude,” is charged with carrying a pot of soup to a company of Africans in a trench. Though he has not appeared even by the latest hour expected, no one worries because the enemy has been quiet. Suddenly, shots are fired from the opposing trench, meaning that someone on the tirailleurs’ side is visible to the enemy. They turn and see Soudou, who is no less than 2 meters tall: “Le grand diable, dressé de toute sa gigantesque stature, le nez en l'air, avance à pas comptés portant sa marmite pleine aussi religieusement qu'une châsse de saintes reliques. Autour de lui la fusillade de l'adversaire redouble.” His comrades shout at him to get down, but he does not, and miraculously arrives safely – “Voilà, moi!” – much to the relief of the others. He explains that he had tried to come earlier but had fallen into a shell-hole, spilling the contents of the pot, had then gone back to mix up a whole new batch, and was determined to get it to them safely. (24-27)

In a similar incident, cited by Dutrèb, another tirailleur is given precious cargo: a basket of eggs. Baka Dioumbia’s lieutenant warns him, “Et tu sais..., gare si tu les casses!...” All of a sudden a bomb blows up right next to them, and the lieutenant orders everyone to take cover. When he gets up again, he finds that everyone has obeyed except Dioumbia, “qui, droit comme un i, long comme un cierge, et grave comme un pape, sans sourciller, tient son panier d’œufs.” The officer demands to know why he ignored the order to get down, “Mais, ma yeutnant, reprend l’autre avec calme, toi dire d’abord y a

pas cassé œufs, puis toi dire après y a couché par terre!... Alors moi y a pas cassé œufs!"'

Dutrèb summarizes: "Là, encore, respect absolu de la consigne, mépris absolu de la mort" (101-102). Séché also tells this story, with some small variations, but comes to the same conclusion: "C'est insensé et c'est magnifique. Parce qu'il 'y avait service', Daba Doumbia n'aurait pas risqué de casser les œufs dont il avait reçu le précieux dépôt – même pour éviter d'être tué" (45).

Anecdotes such as these, of tirailleur loyalty and bravery on the battlefield, abound in these texts, as do examples of their heroism. One episode from Dixmude involves a German act of treachery at an inn called the *Maison Rouge*. One morning a car flying the Red Cross flag comes across from the enemy side, and though the French are suspicious, given the Germans' previous misuse of this banner, they let the car pass. Nothing seems to happen, and it soon returns. In the middle of the night they discover what had happened, when they are fired upon from the inn behind them. At dawn the Senegalese attack, and

en dépit de la grêle de balles qui pleut, se ruent à l'intérieur. Ah! ce ne fut pas long! Les Allemands n'eurent plus qu'à jeter leurs armes, lever les bras en signe de reddition, supplier 'Kamarad!', pour éviter le nettoyage complet. *El hámdou lillah!* Et c'est en chantant que les vainqueurs rentrèrent dans nos lignes.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> "*El h'amdou lillah!*" is translated in a footnote as "Louange à Dieu!" (30-31). A slightly different version of this episode is cited by Séché, in a long footnote which cites Bocquet and Hosten's *L'Agonie de Dixmude* as one source. (Séché 118-19)

Although some of the tirailleurs were Muslims and the army tried to keep the others from drinking alcohol (for example, it was not available near the Fréjus camp),<sup>55</sup> Dutrèb does cite one example, in which both tirailleurs and French soldiers help themselves to wine in a cellar in Reims. She jokes, “Blancs et Noirs burent à la Victoire, burent encore, inlassablement, et, si ce n’était pour fuir un jeu de mot trop facile, nous oserions dire que blancs et noirs – par une solidarité touchante – étaient tous devenus gris...” The French soldiers loosen their clothing a bit, but the Senegalese, “se souvenant de la brousse où l’on n’a pas la faiblesse, en cas de trop forte chaleur, de se charger de vêtements inutiles, avaient jeté au vent tous ces encombrants vestiges de la civilisation,” keeping on only their pants and ammunition straps. The group is enjoying itself immensely when suddenly they come under attack and are “soudain dégrisés.” Before the French can react, six Senegalese soldiers dash forward bayonet in hand, screaming at the tops of their lungs. “[E]t les Boches, devant ces six grands diables, nus comme la vérité, mais formidables comme la vengeance, se sauvent, pris de panique et n’osent, eux, près de 300, s’attaquer à ces six héros!” (Dutrèb 99-100). There are other stories of a few tirailleurs beating back many more Germans in these texts, including one in which a tirailleur single-handedly surprises and captures six Germans (Dutrèb 99), and another in which a tirailleur is killed, but is found surrounded by the bodies of six enemy soldiers (Gallet, Deux ans 53).

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<sup>55</sup> See Séché 74 and Michel, Appel 389.

In another testament to their loyalty and sense of duty, Dutrèb cites an occasion at Chemin des Dames in which the troops were attacked not only by the Germans but also by inclement weather, but never stopped working.

Les éléments ajoutent leur fureur à celle du canon sous la pluie et sous la mitraille, les Sénégalaïs n'en continuent pas moins à organiser le secteur, dans ces boyaux changés en canaux de boue, où les hommes s'enlisent jusqu'à mi-corps!

Si rudes que de telles épreuves aient pu sembler à des fils du soleil, leur courage, leur bonne volonté ne se démentirent pas un instant. (79)

Though not always recognized for their efforts, the Senegalese did obtain citations throughout the war, many of which are cited in full by Dutrèb. She also recounts a special honor enjoyed by the 66<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Tirailleurs Sénégalaïs, which had been supporting the 68<sup>th</sup> B.T.S. at Verdun near the very end of the war, and had successfully surpassed its objective and seized considerable enemy firepower.

Le B.T.S. avait donc mené l'action par ses seuls moyens, au milieu d'autres unités sénégalaïses, et avait complètement réussi dans sa mission.

Il fut cité à l'Ordre de l'Armée, fut l'objet de nombreuses récompenses et reçut les félicitations du général commandant le C. A. exprimés devant le Président de la République, venu à Bras quelques jours après, passer la revue des éléments noirs qui avaient pris part à l'offensive.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Dutrèb 124. The President at this time would have been Poincaré.

There are many more examples of tirailleur bravery on the battlefield that could be discussed here, as well as citations received that could be reproduced, and these tirailleurs clearly made an excellent impression on their French superiors as well as on French civilians they encountered in hospitals or towns. Additionally, when regiments of African soldiers mixed with white French regiments, as happened frequently, in general they accomplished their goals effectively together. However, while the French military and civilian population may have been won over by the tirailleurs' friendliness, loyalty, and bravery, others were not necessarily persuaded that it was a good idea to use African soldiers in a European war. The American and German reactions to the tirailleurs and to black American soldiers offer sharp contrast to the generally warm reception accorded black soldiers of any nationality by the French people.

#### **“La ‘honte blanche’”:<sup>57</sup> American and German reactions to the tirailleurs**

##### *White and black American soldiers in France*

Tales of the African soldiers' activities on the battlefields of Europe were also known in America, but “reports varied as to the efficiency of these troops in battle. Early in the war, a white American reporter wrote that such troops could not possibly be of any value in modern European warfare, and that only in desperation could France delude itself into using them” (Barbeau and Henri 17). White and black Americans read these reports from different perspectives, with the whites seeing only affirmations of “what

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<sup>57</sup> The quote is from Dutrèb 124, and comes from a post-war German publication's assertion that what has been called “la ‘honte noire’” (in German, the “Schwarze Schande”) is in fact “la ‘honte blanche.’”

they already believed, that Negroes were virtually useless in combat." Blacks, however, "regarded all reports as favorable to black troops" (19), and from the beginning of the war "America's black press had publicized the use of black troops by both France and Britain, highlighting their successes to support demands for the inclusion of African Americans in the United States Army."<sup>58</sup> As did French accounts of the period, American ones often described the tirailleurs as excellent shock troops: "Black writers featured stories of French Negro troops who were such fierce fighters that they were being used exclusively as shock troops."<sup>59</sup> In 1918 an American corporal wrote a letter home relating a conversation he had had with a French man about the African troops: "One day I was talking with a Frenchman and he said 'Americans, bons amis, comme les Senegals.' The Senegal troops are the most savage of the French troops and fight without quarter. Half savages, they take no prisoners and fight bitterly to the end" (Campbell, 19 May 1918). On another occasion Corporal Campbell saw French colonial soldiers: "We saw soldiers in all kinds of uniforms. The English Tommies and the Arabs and other french [sic] colony soldiers present a weird appearance. It would make you think of a moving picture rehearsal,"<sup>60</sup> but he does not mention having fought alongside them.

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<sup>58</sup> Stovall, *Paris Noir* 20. Regarding British use of non-white troops, Echenberg summarizes: "While it is true that Great Britain used colonial troops from the nonwhite tropics as well as from the European dominions overseas in both world wars, the British studiously avoided assigning nonwhite troops either for home defense, to oppose a European enemy, or to occupy enemy territory" (*Colonial* 5).

<sup>59</sup> Barbeau and Henri 19. See also "Negro in the War"; Williams 228-229 for a citation for the 157th Division written by Pétain and 238-239 for a citation which mentions "assaulting troops"; and Scott 277, for a letter written by an American lieutenant regarding German views of black troops, American and African.

<sup>60</sup> Campbell, 21 November 1917 I-2. He was presumably in Paris, since he writes "I received a pass for the largest city in the country." A portion of this letter was cut out by censors, but the few missing lines do not seem to have contained information about these soldiers.

According to Dutrèb, Americans did fight in conjunction with tirailleur battalions on at least one occasion, at Verdun, when they worked in liaison with both the 68<sup>th</sup> and 67<sup>th</sup> B.T.S.<sup>61</sup> When the United States entered the war, both President Wilson and General Pershing insisted that American troops not be amalgamated into French or British troops, preferring to mobilize an army “that would fight under its own flag with its own commanders and staffs, develop its own logistical system, conduct operations according to its own doctrine, and fight in its own sector of the Western Front” (Trask 124). However, France’s desperate need for troops later “forced Pershing to permit the temporary attachment of a few American divisions to the British and French armies” in 1917. (125) In early 1918, Pershing had four regiments of black soldiers, mostly National Guard, who were arriving in France but not yet attached to a division, and he offered them to General Pétain:

“If agreeable to you, they might be assigned by regiments for training and service with such French divisions as you may care to designate. [ . . . ] It would of course be understood that they are to be available at any time for withdrawal to the American forces for such duty as may be required, although circumstances might make it possible to leave them with you indefinitely.” (Pershing, 6 January 1918 262)

Pétain accepted these troops “very willingly” (Pétain, 11 January 1918 266), and after some initial confusion when the regiments seem to have been assigned to labor duties –

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<sup>61</sup> While Dutrèb makes no mention of the Americans’ actual contribution to this battle, only mentioning them in passing (121), she does go into detail about the tirailleurs’ successes. This episode is cited above, where the 66<sup>th</sup> B.T.S. receives a citation and the visit of the French President.

this was cleared up by Pershing who specified “These regiments are not to be used as labor troops but to be placed at disposition of French for combat services in French divisions” (Pershing, 15 February 1918 271) – they took their places in the spring of 1918. These regiments, though known as the 93<sup>rd</sup> Division did not in fact make up a full division, and remained with French brigades, “apparently not lent but transferred to the French army, and forgotten until after the Armistice. They were the only American regiments completely integrated into the French army” (Barbeau and Henri 112). The 92<sup>nd</sup> Division, composed of black draftees and veterans of the Spanish-American War, also fought in France, moving toward the front in late summer 1918. (145) This division did not do as well in combat as the 93<sup>rd</sup>, having not been particularly well-trained. In addition, many of its white officers resented being assigned to command African Americans, berating and even misleading them on many occasions. (See Barbeau and Henri) Tensions between American whites and blacks came to France with the army, and caused problems between the Americans and the French. Despite the American army’s best efforts to keep them isolated, black soldiers did enjoy a good deal of contact with French people, both military and civilian, which reinforced their belief that France was a much friendlier society for black people than America.

As America prepared to enter the war, many blacks volunteered, despite widespread discrimination and segregation within the American army, laying to rest fears that they might “resist the call to fight for the white America that had oppressed them.” In fact, it was white Americans who more “vehemently opposed a black draft [ . . . ] in the South especially [where] it was feared that military service would make black laborers

less docile and might lead to dangerous black militancy after the war" (Barbeau and Henri 34). Black draftees were accepted, since the army needed men, but many more of them were put into labor units than into combat troops. Over 150,000 blacks worked as stevedores during the war, in "the engineer regiments, the depot brigades, and the service, labor, and development battalions. Some officials have said that the Negro stevedore rendered the most magnificent service of any Negro organizations in France" (Williams 138-139). Many men who tried to join the combat units were deemed unfit, either physically or mentally, but since "almost no weakness could win them exemptions from their draft boards," they were assigned to labor units. (Barbeau and Henri 89)

Also called the "Service of Supply" or "S.O.S., " these soldiers unloaded ships at French ports such as Brest, St. Nazaire, Bordeaux, le Havre, and Marseilles, built warehouses and barracks, and even repaired "roads and railroads on the front lines, unarmed and fully exposed to enemy shellfire."<sup>62</sup> Despite often miserable conditions – "they plunged through the deep mud of the camp and city, without boots. On the dock they handled the cold steel and iron without gloves" (Hunton and Johnson 98) – these men often amazed both white American and French observers with their speed and efficiency.<sup>63</sup> The little free time accorded these workers was carefully monitored by white officers, who tried hard to limit contact between them and the French. For nearly a year at

<sup>62</sup> Stovall, *Paris Noir* 8-9. For contemporary accounts regarding the stevedores, see also Scott 315-327; Sweeney 239-245; Williams 138-155; Hunton and Johnson 96-110; and DuBois, "Essay" 64-65.

<sup>63</sup> For example, after dockworkers in Liverpool had taken over a month to unload a particular ship, it was later routinely sent to a French port instead, for (black) Americans to unload: "It turned out that on the first arrival 10,000 men and supplies were unloaded and the ship coaled and sent back in four days. On the second arrival the same task was completed in three days; the third arrival in 48 hours, and the fourth arrival in 44 hours. In each case, 5,000 tons of coal had to be put on this large transport and loaded [ . . . ] far out in the harbor." (Scott 323)

the second largest supply depot in France, there was an order in force which said “All colored enlisted men of this command are hereby confined to the limits of the Camp and Depot until further advised,” and instances in which black men broke the rule and went to nearby towns were quickly ended by the Military Police. (Williams 151) Accounts written during and just after the war record many such instances of discrimination, illustrating the significant difference between American and French treatment of non-white soldiers.

The French texts about the tirailleurs do not demonstrate racism such as was found in America at the time, yet they do show that despite their usefulness to the war effort, the Africans were still considered to be inferior to the French. At the same time, though, the contacts between the French and the tirailleurs sénégalaïs inspired in the minds of many French people a feeling of debt toward these soldiers. However, it is important to note that the soldiers were not the only colonials to come to France during World War I. There were also many *indigènes* who worked in factories, often substituting for French laborers who were called into battle. In marked contrast to the treatment accorded the tirailleurs, these colonial workers experienced racism and had a very antagonistic relationship with the French. In his article “The Color Line behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War,” Tyler Stovall discusses the very different reaction to these workers:

Whereas the colonial soldier became a positive symbol of the international effort to free France from German aggression, the colonial worker became a negative symbol of all, especially shirkers, who profited at the expense

of the average French person. Racial violence in wartime France was not directed indiscriminately against all nonwhites, therefore, only against those seen as a threat to French interests.<sup>64</sup>

Oddly, even though this violence against non-white workers in France resembled aspects of race relations in America (see Stovall for examples), Americans tended to view the French as having “no tradition of race prejudice” (Barbeau and Henri 113). As Stovall explains in Paris Noir, African Americans who went to France for World War I felt that Parisian society “offered a life free from the heavy burden of white racism so omnipresent in the United States.” He adds that their introduction to France during the war “showed [America’s] black citizens one place where racial equality already seemed to exist, making the concept of color-blind France a rallying cry for a new day across the Atlantic” (24).

White Americans feared that the French would be too friendly to the black soldiers, and they were not pleased with the integration of black troops with French ones, since “treating blacks as equals was considered to have the most sinister implications for the future, when the black soldiers went home to the states” (Barbeau and Henri 114). When it was not possible to prevent their contact outright, American officials tried to teach French officers and civilians how to behave toward the blacks. In August 1918 a document came out of the American Expeditionary Force Headquarters detailing the

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<sup>64</sup> Stovall, “Color Line” 766. “Colonial workers” refers to people from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, China, Indo China, and Madagascar. (758) I emailed Professor Stovall to find out whether or not any sub-Saharan Africans might have been used as colonial workers as well, and he replied: “As far as I can tell, no sub-Saharan Africans were employed as laborers in France during the war; colonial officials feared further depleting the local population, and there were some doubts about whether or not black Africans were civilized enough to work in factories.” (Stovall, Re: Questions)

recommended behavior: "Secret information concerning black American troops." Of course, it was no longer so secret once published in French and English in The Crisis in May 1919. As the short introduction preceding this reproduction of the document explains, its aim was to give the French "an exact idea of the position occupied by Negroes in the United States," and since it represented "American and not French opinion [ . . . ] when the French ministry heard of [its] distribution, they ordered such copies to be collected and burned."<sup>65</sup> The tract explained that "the French public has become accustomed to treating the Negro with familiarity and indulgence" and that this is an affront to Americans, who "are afraid that contact with the French will inspire in black Americans aspirations which to them [the whites] appear intolerable." It goes on to conclude that French and black officers should absolutely not be encouraged to fraternize, that black American troops should not be too highly praised, and that the native French population should be kept from "'spoiling' the Negroes" (DuBois, "Documents" 16).

In his 1923 book Charles Williams, "Special Investigator of Conditions among Negro Soldiers in the World War," gives examples of other story things French people were told by Americans trying to scare them, such as "Negroes cannot be treated with common civility" and "They are uncivilized and have tails like monkeys." Williams states that "Certainly two-thirds of the difficulties experienced by the colored soldiers in France were due to American resentment of the attitude of the French people in receiving

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<sup>65</sup> DuBois, "Documents" 16. See also Williams 72; Scott 442-444; Barbeau and Henri 114-115; and Stovall, Paris Noir 14-15. Michel notes that Blaise Diagne denounced this tract, and that General Vidalon, second-in-command of the French military staff headquarters, quashed it before it was ever distributed. (Appel 390).

them on equal terms, and especially of the kindly disposition of the French women" (73). However, as Williams and other authors of the period demonstrate, black American soldiers and French people did meet, and in fact enjoyed each other's company.

White Americans soldiers' discriminatory tactics do not seem to have been restricted to black Americans, and there are some accounts of violence against non-white French soldiers. Addie Hunton and Kathryn Johnson, two black American women who worked in France during the war, wrote a book about their experiences: Two Colored Women with the American Expeditionary Forces (1920) in which they mention some of these incidents. They note that after the Armistice there were frequent riots between American whites and French people, including one in St. Nazaire in April 1919 in which several people were killed:

It grew out of the fact that a white French woman and a colored Frenchman entered a restaurant frequented by American officers [ . . . ] An insinuating remark concerning the woman was overheard by her brother, who understood English, and immediately resented it. The restaurant was demolished in a free-for-all fight, which grew in proportions until the French people mounted a machine gun in the middle of the public square, to restore order.<sup>66</sup>

In another incident, this one in Nantes, an American M.P. shot and killed a "colored French soldier [ . . . ] under the guise that he thought that the Frenchman was a colored American deserter disguised in French uniform." Johnson also notes that during her stay

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<sup>66</sup> Hunton and Johnson 191. The authors do not give any further information about this "colored Frenchman" – it is unclear if he was African or Caribbean, and whether or not he was a soldier.

in Brest there were frequent conflicts, some of which "were said to have occurred because of insults offered to colored Frenchmen." These incidents too degenerated into deadly riots. (192).

A book from the period includes a photograph of "American and French colonial colored soldiers in a French trench,"<sup>67</sup> and another documents a meeting between a black American soldier and a French colonial soldier in St. Nazaire. Describing this encounter Floyd Gibbons, a war correspondent for the Chicago Tribune, wrote that the French colonial soldier was "a colonial black from the north of Africa and of course had spoken nothing but French from the day he was born," and that the American black crossed the street to talk to him but was momentarily thrown by the man's use of French. "The American Negro's mouth fell open. For a minute he looked startled, and then he bulged one large round eye suspiciously at the French black while he inwardly debated on the possibility that he had become color-blind." He continued to try to communicate with him, but "The puzzled French Negro could only reply with another explosion of French interrogations, coupled with vigorous gesticulations. The American Negro tried to talk at the same time [ . . . ]" until he finally gave up, saying "'this is sure some funny country. They got the ignorantest colored people here I ever saw.'"<sup>68</sup>

Although this particular encounter was not particularly constructive, there were many other occasions where black Americans and white French soldiers and civilians did

<sup>67</sup> Scott between pages 112-113. It is hard to tell from the photo which soldiers are American and which are French, and only one soldier appears to be white. The caption reads: "Here is a photograph right from the front, an unusual picture showing how the trenches really looked. These are American and French colonial colored soldiers in a French trench."

<sup>68</sup> Gibbons 70-72. Also reproduced in Sweeney 133-134.

manage to communicate with one another successfully. In his 1919 History of the American Negro in the Great World War William Sweeney, a contributing editor of the Chicago Defender, frequently mentions the fact that black Americans got along well with French people. Regarding the regiments who were brigaded with French units throughout the war, he says the black Americans and “the French poilus [ . . . ] became great friends” (76). Echoing the prevailing American opinion that France was a color-blind society, he later notes,

Between the French and the colored troops the spirit was superb. The French poilu had not been taught that the color of a man's skin made a difference. He had no prejudices. How could he have, coming from a nation whose motto is LIBERTY, FRATERNITY, EQUALITY? He formed his judgment from bravery and Manhood and Honor. The Negro soldiers ate, slept and drank with the poilus. They were happy together.

(149-150)

According to Sweeney, French generals also “knew no color distinction and could see no reason why a Negro should not command his own race troops if he had intelligence, courage and military skill,” a much different view than that held by the American army. He points out that in French history there are “brilliant examples” of Africans not only commanding other Africans, but whites as well, and that this did not seem to have caused any problems. (188-189) Charles Williams also gives similar examples, remarking that “During the service with the French there were always the most cordial relations,” and he reproduces some of the citations awarded black troops by the French. (227-229) He

comments that French civilians were puzzled by the treatment black Americans received at the hands of whites, “and would ask why such strange relationships existed between comrades in arms from the same country” (73).

In their firsthand account, Addie Hunton and Kathryn Johnson tell anecdotes of French and black American camaraderie as well. Letters from mayors from all over France included testimonials that the black soldiers “were better behaved than the white soldiers” (85). They write that “The French people are affectionate and demonstrative, which corresponds to the deep emotional spirit of the colored American,” and that the French particularly enjoyed the black soldiers’ music – something that would become even more apparent after the war’s end. (197) Hunton and Johnson remark that on occasion the white Americans’ concerted effort to minimize cultural exchange between blacks and the French was somewhat successful, but “later the French knew better” (103) and “deeply resented” being told how to behave, especially in their own homes. (188-189) Although these women were not surprised to experience American prejudices while in France, they state that “the relationship between the colored soldier and the French people is more or less a story colored by a continued and subtle effort to inject this same prejudice into the heart of the hitherto unprejudiced Frenchman” (182-183). In the end this campaign seems in fact to have backfired, and as a result of it and the many post-war riots there developed some animosity between the French and the Americans. Hunton and Johnson cite articles from both the United States and England regarding this – the British one includes the following statement: “At the present moment the Americans are regarded by the ordinary Parisian as a barbarian nation [ . . . ] The nation which a year ago

was the most popular nation in Europe, has become in Paris a burden almost too grievous to be borne" (194).

### *German propaganda against black soldiers*

During the war black American soldiers seem to have been assailed by propaganda and rumor from all sides, since the white Americans were trying to keep the French from treating them too indulgently and the Germans were enacting "insidious plans to bring about disaffection among them by emphasizing racial discriminations, injustices, and the like" (Scott 346). Hunton and Johnson reproduce a flyer dropped on the 367<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiment (92<sup>nd</sup> Division) from German aircraft in the Vosges in September 1918. Addressed "To the Colored Soldiers of the United States Army," it began "Hello, boys, what are you doing over here? Fighting the Germans? Why? Have they ever done you any harm?" The flyer went on to ask many rhetorical questions about the quality of life for blacks in American society: "Can you get into a restaurant where white people dine?" and stated, "You have been made the tool of the egotistic and rapacious rich in America [...] Don't allow them to use you as cannon fodder" and encouraged them to join the German side.<sup>69</sup>

The Germans feared both the tirailleurs and the black American soldiers a great deal, and were certainly not discouraged from doing so by either the French or the Americans. According to an account cited by Scott from two American airmen who had been prisoners in Germany,

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<sup>69</sup> Hunton and Johnson 53-54. A slightly different version is quoted by Sweeney 235-236. Both Sweeney and Barbeau and Henri (149) note that this seems to have had little effect on the black soldiers.

"The Germans had learned that the American colored soldier, while not brutal like the Senegalese and Algerians, were even harder, more scientific and more dangerous fighters. They were men who fought with precision – fought like trained veterans – were good in trench warfare, in raids, or in attack – any way they were ordered to fight, while the Senegalese and Algerians were best in attack – being dashing, whirlwind fighters in attacks, or as shock troops." (277)

Examples of Germans being awestruck by tirailleurs in action or fleeing them in fear are included in texts such as Séché's *Les Noirs*, but it is Dutrèb who makes the most frequent references to the Germans' fear and propaganda. Her chapter on "Les Calomnies" brings to light not only some of the German propaganda campaign during the early part of the Rhineland occupation, but also rebukes the French for not responding adequately to the accusations regarding the tirailleurs.

Since the French frequently mixed black, white and other colonial troops together, it is hard to determine exactly how many West Africans were stationed in Germany. According to Sally Marks, in her article "Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience," "the only true blacks stationed in the Rhineland were a brigade of Senegalese and a few Sudanese, who left on 1 June 1920," but there were also Malagasies, North Africans, and some soldiers from the Caribbean. (298).

Keith Nelson asserts in "The 'Black Horror on the Rhine'" that French records show that approximately 10,000 "fully black units" were posted on the Rhine, but he seems to be combining Malagasy and Senegalese troops, and notes that "it is worth emphasizing, and

the Germans never tired of pointing out, that many of the *North Africans* were so ‘black’ as to be indistinguishable from Negroes” (611). Marks specifies that a 1920 investigation by the commander of the American army of the Rhine, General Henry T. Allen, found that “black troops in Germany from January 1919 to 1 June 1920 averaged 5,200 men and other non-white forces 20,000 men.” She writes that French records “indicate averages for *all* indigenous troops at 10,000 between December 1918 and May 1919, 35,000 from May 1919 to March 1920, [ . . . ] about 25,000 until June 1920, and 20,000 thereafter,” concluding that at the start of 1921 the total number of indigenous troops in Germany was 18,626 (22% of the French force), and that these troops were Malagasy, North African, and Annamese. (Marks 299)

Despite the fact that “German propaganda portrayed [the indigenous troops] as coal black savages from the African jungle” (Marks 298), an American writer named Louis Gannett who toured the occupied area in the spring of 1921 was convinced that “there [is] no such thing as a ‘Black Horror’ on the Rhine” (Gannett 733). In his article he agrees with reports that “the Germans resent the presence of colored troops,” and mentions that although there were many stories of German women marrying black soldiers, he “could trace no cases” (734). Gannett also quotes two conflicting statements from officials of the city of Ludwigshafen. The mayor told him: “‘The French say we are boches, uncivilized, barbarians. Good. They are the bearers of culture. Good. Ach, but so far as we can see the only culture they bring us is venereal disease and the black troops.’” However, the police inspector offered a very different view, in which Gannett puts more faith:

"The colored troops make no trouble for us. [ . . . ] they have no special dislike or scorn of us as Germans, and they treat us exactly as they would treat French, or English, or American civilians. When there is military arrogance to complain of it is rather the white troops, who are conscious of themselves as French and of us as Germans, who consciously consider us an inferior people, and sometimes make it evident in their bearing." (734)

Regarding the mayor's mention of venereal disease, Dutrèb cites this as one of two major accusations directed at the Africans: "De quoi les Boches les accusent-ils? 1° D'être un danger de contamination par la tuberculose, la syphilis et la maladie du sommeil." She dispenses with this insult quickly, discussing vaccination measures and statistics to indicate the blacks were in fact slightly healthier than the white soldiers. Addressing venereal disease in particular she makes her own accusation: "Quant à la syphilis, elle est tellement répandue de l'autre côté de la frontière, que les autorités rhénanes (et nous devons les en remercier) ont, dès le premier jour de notre occupation, mis notre service de santé en garde contre elle" (172).

Dutrèb then moves on to the second main German accusation levelled against the tirailleurs: "2° De commettre des attentats de toutes sortes, vols, coups et blessures, viols et assassinats" (172). She considers this one easy to refute as well, and begins by calling into question the credibility of non-German journalists who spread these rumors, adding, "Par contre, les réfutations émanent de personnes les plus dignes de foi" (173). Often the victims of the alleged assaults refused to press charges or retracted their statements (174), and as Sally Marks explains,

A rather modest number of rape charges were brought by German women.

A minority of these were founded, but most were frivolous. Some were brought by prostitutes trying to look respectable, others by willing women trying to deny their willingness. Blackmail lay behind some, while French financial indemnification in proven cases provided a motive for others.

The vast majority either fell apart on investigation or were withdrawn.

(302)

With regard to women's accusations in particular, Dutrèb and other writers of the time specify that it was often the women themselves who were "shamelessly running after the French soldiers, and that the colored men seemed to have a particular attraction for them" (Barker 596). Gannett writes,

It is sufficient to walk through the Stadtgarten at Ludwigshafen or along the river at Mainz on a summery evening and to see how many benches are occupied by young German girls and French soldiers of all colors to realize how easily such relationships may begin. (734)

Both J. Ellis Barker, a British publicist, and Dutrèb cite a report sent to the Secretary of State by General Henry T. Allen, commander of the American forces on the Rhine. Allen wrote,

"The attitude of certain classes of German women has been such as to incite trouble. On account of the very unsettled economic conditions, and for other causes growing out of the World War, prostitution is abnormally engaged in, and many German women of loose character have openly

made advances to the colored [French] soldiers. [ . . . ] At Ludwingshafen, when the seventh Tirailleurs left for Frankfurt, patrols had to be sent out to drive away the German women from the barracks, where they were kissing the colored troops through the window gratings.”<sup>70</sup>

Dutrèb cites another American authority as having declared ““que les prétendues histoires d’atrocités noires n’avaient pas leur origine dans les régions occupées, mais à Berlin, et semblaient n’être pas autre chose que de la propagande antifrançaise”” (174-175). Sally Marks notes that the propaganda was indeed “suspiciously synchronized in the German press,” and did not really begin until later stages of the occupation: “Curiously, there was no protest or propaganda during the first year of the occupation, though the number of these troops was at its peak. Perhaps protest was deemed unwise before the treaty terms were set” (310). Barker, who was in Germany in the summer of 1920, makes a similar observation, saying that it is “remarkable that during the first year and half following the armistice no complaints were made about the misdeeds of the black soldiery,” yet there were many in 1920 and 1921, just as “Germany was trying to evade the [ . . . ] indemnity arrangement” (594).

In discussing French reaction, or lack thereof, to the German accusations, Dutrèb begins by explaining the silence that has been the typical French response, saying that the French have too often decided that it is better to say nothing than to lower themselves to the level of the accusers. In her opinion, though, “La propagande allemande dispose de trop de fonds, elle déploie trop de zèle et emploie trop de moyens – dont les plus bas ne

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<sup>70</sup> Barker 596-597. Quoted in part, and in French, by Dutrèb 175-176.

sont pas exclus – pour que le silence dédaigneux, si noble puisse-t-il être ou paraître, soit une réponse suffisante” (171). Dutrèb therefore takes upon herself the task of laying out in the open “la mauvaise foi de l’adversaire [ . . . ] dans toute sa bassesse” in order to establish clearly “l’honorabilité des Noirs” (171-172). She commends the French parliament for adopting “à l’unanimité un ordre du jour reconnaissant la fausseté des ‘accusations intéressées par la propagande allemande, en ce qui concerne l’attitude et la situation sanitaire des troupes de couleur,’” and applauds the work of the *Comité d’assistance aux troupes noires*, whose member Camille Fidel published a pamphlet entitled “La réfutation de la campagne d’accusations contre les troupes françaises de couleur, en territoires rhénanes occupées” (1922).<sup>71</sup>

After rebutting the major accusations directed at the tirailleurs by the Germans, Dutrèb does admit that, to their credit, “tous les Allemands n’ont pas trempé dans ce mensonge. Beaucoup, au contraire, ont tenu à ne pas en être cru solidaires.” She writes that mayors, police captains, and other officials have corroborated her claim “que toutes les plaintes partaient non des provinces occupées, mais de Berlin même,” and that they have voiced protest against the unfair exaggerations of the German press. (177) While Dutrèb states that she could give many examples of German newspaper articles and letters that demonstrate the “bonne conduite de nos noirs, disent leur douceur avec les enfants et leur respect de la faiblesse féminine,” she prefers to come back to the original topic of this chapter: “notre contre-propagande” (177). In her opinion it is the French

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<sup>71</sup> Dutrèb 177 note 1. Also mentioned in Nelson (619 note 66), as are two other pamphlets: “‘La campagne contre les troupes noires’ (Mayence, 1920), and ‘Français de couleur sur le Rhin’ (Mayence, 1921)” (Nelson 620 note 67).

people's duty, both to the subjects of this propaganda and to the Nation itself, to defend the tirailleurs and to prove the Germans wrong. “[C]ar si la force, à certaines heures, ne peut être cimentée que par le sang de ses fils, c'est leur honneur maintenu sans tache qui, plus encore que leur sang et que leur mérite, conserve sa gloire intégrale” (177).

## Conclusion

Despite the best efforts of both the German press and many white members of the American military to disseminate rumors and thwart encounters, at the end of World War I the French had come to know Africans and African Americans much better than ever before, and clearly appreciated their aid in the war effort. As the texts by Gaillet, Bocquet and Hosten, Séché, and Dutrèb demonstrate, there were many positive encounters between tirailleurs and French *poilus* and civilians throughout the war years. Although the effect of these exchanges is hard to measure, Gaillet himself provides an excellent example of someone whose first meeting with tirailleurs was greatly influenced by his preconceived notions, but who made enormous strides in understanding the Africans and becoming friends with them during their time together. When combined with the effects of French encounters with black American soldiers, these contacts with tirailleurs had important consequences in the post-World War I era.

The notion that France owed a debt to the tirailleurs for their heroic contributions to the war grew out of the contacts between the French and the West Africans, and could be substantiated by the citations and medals received by tirailleur battalions. Yet the tirailleurs' very presence in France had been attributed to their desire to thank France for

freeing them from slavery, sickness, and warfare, which implies that at the war's end a balance would have been achieved. The personal contacts between French and West Africans threw off this neat exchange as they humanized these formerly savage colonial peoples, destroying old stereotypes in the minds of many French people. However, this idea of a debt owed as a consequence of the "blood tax" was problematic for a colonial power, whose only imperial duty before had been to the ideals of the *mission civilisatrice*. In the aftermath of a war which devastated the French population and economy this debt was quickly obscured by other, national, concerns, but nonetheless manifested itself in the cultural preoccupations of France in the 1920s and 1930s.

## Chapter 3

### “Tirailleurs et Ropéens”

#### **Bakary Diallo and Lucie Cousturier: A Human and Literary Encounter**

In studying what kinds of contact the West Africans might have had with French civilians, Joe Lunn distinguishes between two types of “spaces” in which encounters could have taken place: public and private. He argues that in outdoor public places, such as roads, parks, and markets, tirailleurs tended to travel in groups and contacts were brief, with one tirailleur generally acting as “spokesman” for the group. (“Memoirs” 353) Similarly, tirailleurs often went in small groups to indoor public places, such as brothels, casinos, and theaters, and their presence in restaurants, bars, and cafés was on the whole “tolerated if not well received, and some became well acquainted with the proprietors” (355). With regard to private spaces, notably French citizens’ homes, Lunn contends that invitations were rarely extended to tirailleurs, whereas *originaires* were somewhat more likely to be on close terms with French people. He explains the significance of these visits:

Occasionally invited by chance acquaintances, but more often by French soldiers with whom they had become familiar, and especially by their *marraines de guerre*, such encounters, which might be prolonged, offered the best opportunities for becoming more acquainted with French life through close personal interaction. (357)

As mentioned earlier, tirailleurs and French civilians also met and established relationships of varying degrees while the soldiers were recuperating in hospitals. Despite the fact that the army tried to regulate tirailleurs' forays into the midst of the civilian population, for example in the Saint-Raphaël and Fréjus area restricting (in theory) their free time to Sunday afternoons, as Michel admits, "les camps ne furent jamais des mondes complètement fermés" (Appel 387-388). He mentions Lucie Cousturier's story as evidence of "les multiples occasions de nouer des contacts qu'eurent les tirailleurs" (388), and later also cites Bakary Diallo's illustration of "La prise de contact entre civils français et tirailleurs" (392, 396). These two texts are the subject of this chapter, which builds upon Chapter 2's demonstration that close contact between West Africans and French people (primarily those in the military) during the war itself considerably altered their prewar perceptions of one another. This chapter moves off the front to discuss how French civilians also began to revise their earlier opinions of Africans as they came to know them.

In 1920, Lucie Cousturier (1870/6-1925),<sup>1</sup> a painter and writer, published an autobiographical account of her meetings and ensuing friendships with many tirailleurs in the south of France and her successful efforts to teach them to read and write in French. Her anti-military and pro-African prejudices are clearly visible throughout Des inconnus

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<sup>1</sup> Cousturier's year of birth is cited by some as 1870 (Bénézit and Busse 37) and by others as 1876 (Édouard-Joseph 328). For the scant biographical information I have found, see Édouard-Joseph, Bénézit, "Revolution in Form," and Maus, most of whom refer mainly to her work as an artist. Cousturier herself mentions that her brother-in-law was "Paul C., ancien gouverneur de la Guinée Française" (111), and recounts that he came to her house for lunch in March 1918 and discussed the possibility that some of her students were descended from cannibals. (135-136) He is listed in the Dictionnaire de biographie française, which states that he was *Gouverneur des Rivières du Sud* while Ballay was Governor of Guinea. It attributes to him the construction of the city of Conakry (1889) and adds that he established a telegraph network, roads, and railroads.

chez moi, the only one of her books to describe such interactions with Africans in France. She later published two other books about her encounters with Africans, this time during her travels in Africa: Mes inconnus chez eux: mon amie Fatou, citadine and Mes inconnus chez eux: mon ami Soumaré, laptot (both 1925).<sup>2</sup> After the war Cousturier forwarded to Jean-Richard Bloch, then editor of the publishing firm Rieder, an autobiographical work written by a former tirailleur, Bakary Diallo. Diallo (1892-1978), a Peul born in M'Bala, Senegal worked as a shepherd before joining the army in 1911. First sent to Morocco, he was next transferred to France when the war broke out, and was severely wounded in November 1914.<sup>3</sup> Diallo's memoirs, Force-Bonté (1926), are the only published account of a West African's experiences in France during and after World War I.

Both Diallo's and Cousturier's texts are extremely valuable sources because they provide firsthand accounts of personal interactions between French civilians and African soldiers. Their descriptions of various meetings, and most importantly of their own reactions to these encounters enable the reader today to gain a clearer understanding of the unique situation engendered by the combination of the arrival *en masse* of France's colonial subjects and the violence of World War I in France. The authors deliberately refrain from discussing the atrocities of the war itself, limiting themselves mainly to non-violent encounters. Cousturier was not herself involved in the war (though she

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<sup>2</sup> Since these two texts are not directly relevant to this discussion, all citations of Cousturier in this chapter will be from Des inconnus chez moi.

<sup>3</sup> Further details of Diallo's biography are provided throughout this chapter. See also Cornevin "Bakary Diallo."

occasionally visited soldiers in the hospital)<sup>4</sup> and notes that her students do sometimes discuss the war with her, but only out of politeness. In essence, they tell her and other French people what they want to hear: “le bonheur de la France et les soldats qui marchent bien, c’est salutation bonne pour les Français seulement,” just as they tell their commanding officers they are ready and willing to go to the front even though they would much rather not go.<sup>5</sup> In Diallo’s case, the bulk of his story is comprised of his musings about the human condition, connections between peoples of all ethnicities, and the French people he befriends in hospitals and in the civilian world. Examples from their texts illustrate the nature of encounters between “Tirailleurs et Ropéens”<sup>6</sup> and show that even though they were brought together as a result of a violent conflict, individuals from both sides of the colonial divide were able to make personal, human connections.

As the first tirailleurs began to arrive in France, French people gave them contradictory welcomes. When Bakary Diallo disembarked in Sète in 1914, he and his fellow soldiers were greeted warmly:

Nous traversons la ville, musique en tête, par un tel défilé que les enfants, jeunes garçons et fillettes, trouvent agréable de suivre le mouvement. On dirait d’ailleurs que la population de Cette [sic] toute entière tient une belle promesse qu’elle s’était sans doute faite de nous fêter. Des cris de “Vive la France!” et “Vivent les Sénégalais!” nous pénètrent

<sup>4</sup> See for example Cousturier 271, where she visits a student at the Fréjus hospital, reserved according to her for Africans with tuberculosis.

<sup>5</sup> Cousturier 212. Michel cites one officer complaining in May 1916 that the tirailleurs wanted to go home, and “ils manifestent volontiers ce sentiment devant des gens étrangers à l’armée tandis qu’ils le cachent soigneusement à leurs chefs” (*Appel* 300).

<sup>6</sup> This is from Cousturier’s somewhat phonetic transcription of a conversation she had with a tirailleur and student of hers, Ghibi Tangara. (188)

profondément. Certains hommes se détachent de la foule et viennent nous serrer les mains. Je les entends dire: "Bravo les tirailleurs sénégalais! Vive la France!..." (95)

However, as the army began lodging tirailleurs for the winter months in the south, in towns such as Fréjus, the local inhabitants did not always offer such pleasant receptions. In the preface to *Des inconnus chez moi*, Cousturier explains that she found herself "tout à coup en présence d'êtres inconnus, au sujet desquels ni mon expérience personnelle ni la science en général n'ont pu me fournir de renseignements" (7). She notes that the term "nègre," used pejoratively by colonizers, symbolized "la frénésie brutale, la laideur satanique et autres chimères nocturnes" (8), a description that did not seem to apply to the Africans that she met, and that therefore did not belong in the title of her book. She writes that she then considered the designation "tirailleurs sénégalais" but rejected it because of the myths associated with it at the time, in which "le tirailleur sénégalais y est un soldat-Diable ou soldat-Bête qui croque les ennemis et lèche les pieds de son chef" (9). As she and her neighbors watched the military build the training camp of Fréjus, they felt "contre ces envahisseurs du Sud, nos défenseurs improvisés, une colère peu patriotique" (11). In the beginning, "en avril et mai 1916, nous faisions à nos futurs amis un large crédit d'horreur. Tous les paysans l'ouvraient avec nous. Il n'était pas de crime qu'on ne leur avançât" (13). However, as the locals become more used to the presence of the tirailleurs in their area, they stop calling them "singes," and the women, "même les plus ignorantes du monde, étant plus fines que les sous-officiers de l'armée coloniale, elles renoncèrent, dès le premier bonjour échangé avec les étrangers, à dire: 'ce sont des

singes' pour affirmer: 'ce sont des enfants'." It does not take long for them to distinguish between the character of the Africans and that of the French soldiers, as demonstrated by a local woman's insistence that it was not the Senegalese who stole her peaches and that they had never stolen anything, but that there were "bien d'au-tres sol-dats ici pour vo-ler et pour fai-re croi-re que ce sont les Sé-né-ga-lais qui l'ont fait."<sup>7</sup>

### **"Chaudes poignées de mains":<sup>8</sup> Contacts between French and Africans**

Before any such meaningful encounters between French and Africans during World War I could occur, both groups had to shed their preconceived notions and prejudices. Cousturier makes a few brief references to prevailing sentiment regarding Africans: "Ma famille et moi nous savons encore, hélas! en 1917, ce que c'est que les hommes de race noire, car nous avons lu Gobineau et divers livres d'explorateurs et de gouverneurs de l'Ouest africain" (43). Her doubts about the capacity of people in positions of authority to measure accurately the level of intelligence of their subordinates reveal her anti-military attitude, and lead her to conclude that it is no surprise that "les colonisateurs, augmentés des tomes de Gobineau et de l'arsenal militaire, religieux, commercial et gouvernemental moderne, n'aient pu découvrir l'intelligence des nègres nus" (123).

Although not all the African soldiers had as much contact with civilians as Bakary Diallo seems to have had, and in fact some may never have met non-military French

<sup>7</sup> Cousturier 17. The hyphens were included by Cousturier to depict the speech pattern of this elderly provençal woman.

<sup>8</sup> Diallo 165. Cited below in context.

people, “many had extensive opportunities for interaction.” Whenever they were able to escape the discipline and isolation of the army “the soldiers were usually much freer to express themselves and to learn about the French and the broader aspects of their society” (Lunn, “Memoirs” 349). It was not enough, however, simply to leave the camp and meet locals of neighboring towns, since the nature of the relationships between soldiers and civilians was inevitably affected by issues such as the soldiers’ “comparative facility with the French language; whether they were wounded or not and, if so, how severely; and the image of individual soldiers in French eyes” (350).

For Lucie Cousturier, it was not so much the image of individual soldiers as that of the army in general which prejudiced her against these invaders from the south. At the beginning of Des inconnus chez moi she complains bitterly about the army’s destruction of the landscape and old stands of olive trees, and their construction of ugly barracks and hospitals. (11-13) Cousturier is at first reluctant to house any officers in her home, yet when she meets Lieutenant Duret she is pleasantly surprised by his estimation of the soldiers. Duret tells her, ““Il faut faire un peu de crédit à ces orphelins; il faut leur laisser le temps d’apprendre nos coutumes et, dès à présent, il faut avouer qu’ils sont remarquablement discrets dans leur occupation de cette région au nombre de trente mille”” (24). He stays with her family, and after his departure is replaced by Lieutenant Sandré, who also surprises Cousturier with his similarly progressive notions regarding the tirailleurs. (43) Despite such conversations, her original opinion of the colonial officers is sometimes proven true, as in the case of a young captain, a product of the Saint-Cyr military school, who expresses dismay at seeing *provençal* women chatting and laughing

with tirailleurs: ““Quelle inconscience! Quelle manque de dignité déplorable! La conséquence? c'est que les noirs ne nous saluent plus. [. . .] Que m'arrivera-t-il au cours d'une action, si je n'ai pas mes hommes dans ma main?”” (44-45) This captain's view coincides with that of officials in high places, who feared “l'affaiblissement du moral des tirailleurs” more than “les atteintes au ‘prestige du Blanc’” (Michel, *Appel* 390).

Although Cousturier and her family try to remain open-minded and not to believe the common stereotypes of their day, they do go through a period of adjustment as they become acquainted with their new neighbors. She admits that in October 1916, she had the same reaction as some of her Parisian friends, but that it quickly changed: “Quand j'affirme à tels de mes amis qui tombent de Paris à Fréjus, en plein pays noir, que je perçois maintenant autant de dissemblance entre des Guinéens, par exemple, qu'entre des Français, ils trouvent ma prétention insupportable” (24). Early on, Métey Saar, Lieutenant Duret's orderly and the first tirailleur the Cousturiers get to know well, helps Cousturier's husband Jean collect pine cones. Duret promises Jean another tirailleur will come to help him the next day, and when he arrives Jean assumes they have never met. At the end of this second day, after having given his helper the same instructions, offered the same refreshments, and having gotten the same exact replies, Jean becomes suspicious. He asks the man's name, and is surprised to hear “Métey”: ““Métey?... ils s'appellent donc tous Métey?... qu'est-ce que cela signifie? Ce n'est pourtant pas toi qui es venu hier avec moi?”” The tirailleur responds, ““Si, y a moi!”” with his trademark smile. Duret explains that Métey Saar probably did not wonder why Jean was repeating the same instructions the second day, being used to hearing the same thing over and over

again from white men during his military exercises. (25-28) Interestingly, the Cousturiers' young son François has no such difficulties in recognizing the soldiers he has already met. In Paris, François had developed his own sort of game, in which he "collected" French noses, so in St. Raphaël he switches to collecting African noses, and only has trouble identifying tirailleurs in the dark! (29)

As they get to know Lieutenant Sandré's orderly, Saër Gueye, the Cousturiers learn more about the differences between their culture and that of the African soldiers. Lucie Cousturier rapidly becomes accustomed to hearing the tirailleurs call her by the familiar "tu," and in fact enjoys dropping all pretense of rank, class or age with them. When Gueye asks her what her first name is, and then proceeds to call her "Louise"<sup>9</sup> instead of the "Madame" she expects, Cousturier makes an offhand remark about this to Sandré, who is not pleased: "'Je suis sûr de la pureté de ses intentions, mais il ne peut ignorer nos usages à ce point.'"<sup>10</sup> From then on, Gueye calls her "Madame," but like all the other soldiers he continues to address her as *tu*. (37-38) Throughout the book, Cousturier uses the informal form when speaking with the tirailleurs, but does not make any other comments about this practice.

Later, another linguistic and cultural issue arises, this time between Cousturier and Baïdi Dialo, the tirailleur who may represent Bakary Diallo in this memoir.<sup>11</sup> After his lesson one day, the enthusiastic Dialo tells her "'Je viendrai tous les jours, pour

<sup>9</sup> In the book Cousturier refers to herself as "Louise" instead of "Lucie".

<sup>10</sup> The *français tirailleur* pamphlet, which is silent on the use of *tu*, also does not make any references to how tirailleurs should address either officers or civilians. Sandré's comment suggests that at least the tirailleurs who were in contact with civilians, such as officers' orderlies, would have received some instruction on forms of politeness in French.

<sup>11</sup> See below, "Le tirailleur fou de grammaire," for further information.

écrire!'" At that point in her relationship with the tirailleurs, in late summer 1917, Cousturier did not realize this expression was not meant to be taken literally, and meant instead “‘tant que je pourrai’ ou ‘tant que tu voudras’ ou, plus exactement: ‘je viendrai toujours avec plaisir.’” She commits the offense of replying to Dialo that she is not home every day but that he should come Sunday, not knowing at the time that “C’était à peu près comme si, à un: au revoir! j’avais répondu: le plus tard possible!” Unlike another tirailleur, who never returned after the same *faux pas* on her part, Dialo understood her intentions, and did come back. (62-63) He also goes to the movies with Cousturier and François, and on his second visit is introduced to ice cream – ““Il est trop fraîche, un peu, mais bien bonne quand même.”” (64-64)

At Cousturier’s urging, Baïdi Dialo brings a friend of his to her house, Corporal Ahmat Paté. One of her most determined students, “Ahmat serait entré dans la caverne d’un tigre ou dans la chambre de son général même, si on lui avait assuré qu’on y apprit à lire” (67). He quickly earns the nickname “le dictionnaire” and is constantly watching the French way of accomplishing various tasks with an eye toward bringing new and improved methods home with him. He notices that in France farmers dry grass to feed their livestock during the winter, and he wants to learn how to do this before he leaves. Paté has other items on his agenda as well: ““Lait, dit-il encore, toute le monde, à Podor, il laisse perdre, trop; mais moi, avant retourner, y a moyen connaître manière pour faire tous les fromages, même chose en France”” (70). Not only does Paté learn from the French, he also delights in explaining to the Cousturiers various details of his culture in response to their questions.

Il entre, au gré de notre curiosité, dans les moindres détails de la construction d'une case, de la cuisson du couscous, de l'édification d'une famille musulmane. Ses grandes mains façonnent idéalement l'argile, imitent l'avancée du toit 'même chose casquette', tendent à la vapeur une semoule imaginaire, comptent la somme d'argent ou le nombre de bœufs qu'un garçon doit donner pour l'acquisition d'une femme. (70-71)

During a ten-day leave in Sainte Maxime, Paté immediately makes his way to the local school, and "lui, géant, il s'assied sans honte sur le banc des tout petits enfants." Before returning to the front, in April 1918, Paté asks Cousturier to send some of his money to his family, and to encourage his wife to send their children to school. His death that summer at the Marne greatly saddens the Cousturiers, who had become quite attached to him: "Nous avons perdu ce jour-là l'homme le plus sincère et le plus simple que j'aie encore rencontré, celui dont la pensée était si directe, qu'elle nous brûlait en nous atteignant, comme si elle n'avait pas su prendre le détour des mots, avec celle de tout le monde." (73-75)

Aside from the occasional unimpressive student, the vast majority of Cousturier's encounters with the tirailleurs are positive, and remain within the boundaries of "proper" social contact between the sexes and between a teacher and her students. Near the end of *Des inconnus chez moi*, however, she goes into detail about her slightly uncomfortable relationship (implying sexual tension) with one student, Macoudia M'Baye. He first comes with Damba Dia, one of Cousturier's favorite students, and she soon discovers that he would much rather draw than learn to read or write. Unlike most of the other

tirailleurs, M'Baye does not know Jean or François, since they are in Paris when he first visits the house. Just as many before him have done, he comes and goes as he pleases, so that sometimes Cousturier finds him sitting at the dining room table when she returns home. One day, she enters and he says nothing – “C'est la première fois qu'un tirailleur manque à me dire bonjour.” Somewhat taken aback, she decides not to greet him either, and simply places a flower in front of him, asking if he would like to draw it. Still silent, M'Baye takes up paper and pencil and begins to draw, but Cousturier is uncomfortable: “à partir de ce jour-là, j'étais un peu troublée quand il venait seul” (259-62).

Macoudia M'Baye also tends to overstay his welcome, again making her nervous, and forcing her to invent ways to get him to leave without offending him. She settles upon the trick of packing up some chocolate, figs, or peaches and giving them to him – not for him, as he would refuse them, but rather for his friends, at which point he is obliged to take the items. “Heureusement que Macoudia avait des camarades et que, pour eux, il fallait bien qu'il se laissât charger les mains et que, les mains chargées, il partît. [ . . . ] Sinon la course que je le priais de faire, les mains chargées, auprès de ses camarades, qu'est-ce qui aurait pu mouvoir Macoudia?” (263-64) Cousturier writes that it occurs to her much later that he might have thought it odd that she so freely offered food, drink, and conversation, but nothing more:

il devait à la fin trouver bizarre ma conception de l'hospitalité, laquelle proposait tant de choses dispendieuses et médiocres et omettait les plus magnifiques et qui ne coûtent rien.

**Il devait être attristé de ma bêtise, et sans doute se disait-il que, si les rôles s'étaient renversés et qu'il eût à me recevoir, il m'aurait offert de l'amour, aussi simplement qu'une boisson fraîche. (264)**

When M'Baye comes to her house for the last time, the day before he is to return to Senegal, they are again alone together. He agrees to draw the clock she offers as a model, but keeps rubbing his eyes with his hands and his handkerchief. After a while she realizes that he is crying and tries for a moment to maintain her composure, but soon they are both openly weeping, the soldier still drawing and Cousturier sewing. They sit and work together until late in the evening, and once his sketch is finished he rises.

**Il sanglote bien fort maintenant, appuyé debout à l'un des battants de la double porte. L'épanouissement en coupe, de ses jolies mains enferme son visage avec le mouchoir neuf que je lui ai donné. Il n'a plus besoin de se raidir, désormais; sa journée est finie; il se laisse secouer simplement, souplement, par sa peine. (268-69)**

These shared and unrestrained emotions bring about a release of the sexual tension that had been evident between them, as well as an end to her discomfort. Cousturier writes,

**Il ne m'avait rien demandé, je ne lui avais rien donné; mais par la magie des larmes, c'était, maintenant, comme si tout se fût accompli [. . .], et pour la première fois, Macoudia pouvait me trouver généreuse en s'en allant, les mains chargées de même manière que les autres soirs. (269-70)**

Macoudia M'Baye is one of the few tirailleurs who did not come to Cousturier's house to learn to read and write, and yet it is clear to Cousturier that his visits have

enriched both their lives. Neither he nor the other soldiers Cousturier regularly sees seem apprehensive of such close contact with white people. On the contrary, they are quite open and friendly with her and her family. For example, on M'Baye's first visit he watches his friend Damba Dia and Cousturier watering plants and promptly follows suit, taking to this task so zealously that Cousturier has to stop him from watering the trees outside her property. (259) Early on in the book, a group of tirailleurs comes just to look at her rabbits, and after spending some time laughing at the rabbits' antics, "ils partent avec des: merci! et l'air de gens qui n'ont pas perdu leur journée" (20-21). Soon after the tirailleurs' arrival in Fréjus, the local people experienced a rash of bizarre incidents in which an African soldier entered a house, performed some useful or generous task, and then left. For example, one day a soldier simply came into the Cousturier's house, sat down with their cook and started to help her prepare some vegetables. In another incident, a soldier went upstairs to the bedside of a sick man, sat with him for a while, and then gave him something to drink. "Il a abordé successivement tous les cultivateurs au travail et leur a demandé de lui prêter l'outil qu'ils tenaient pour s'essayer à en faire usage lui-même." At first the locals were convinced a crazy soldier was on the loose in their town, but as they realized that the descriptions of the perpetrators did not match, they determined that "le soi-disant fou est, non pas tel Africain en particulier, mais un bon nombre d'entre eux, les plus simplement humains, ceux qui s'abandonnent à aimer, comme les leurs, toutes les maisons humaines" (21-22). Evidently, these Africans had none of the fear of Europeans mentioned by some of Joe Lunn's interviewees, and in fact were eager to make contact with French civilians and to experience some of their home

life. Additionally, they seem to have been more free to come and go while stationed at the camp than Michel suggests, since throughout Cousturier's account tirailleurs drop by unexpectedly all the time – in the evenings, on weekends, and so on.

In the same way, Bakary Diallo does not have any preconceived assumptions about the French, and is more surprised than anything the first time he sees a white person: "Je suis étonné, je les regarde et les entends parler; comme je ne les comprends pas, je me sens plus étonné encore." When he asks who these people are, he is told, "Il y en a qui sont bons, intelligents." (9) The black man who tells him this, however, hesitates before making this statement. Diallo notes: "après un petit silence, il parle," giving the reader the first glimpse of the underlying message of Diallo's text. This simple statement by his interlocutor and the pause that precedes it imply that there are many more whites who are not "bons" or "intelligents." Later, once he has joined the army, he experiences a few specific instances in which he feels mistreated by the military, but for the most part his text abounds with examples of the generous and caring nature of the French people he befriends.

Just after his arrival in France, and the warm welcome offered by the population of Sète, Diallo meets a young girl, six or seven years old, who shakes his hand. He promises himself he will see her again, and does, to her great delight. Little Simone Baudry and her mother invite him to their home, and each evening for the next eight days he goes to visit them. Diallo admits to being surprised by their friendliness: "Bonheur à moi, j'ai une sœur de France... Je ne croyais pas trouver l'amitié des blancs pour les noirs" (97-98), but he does not mention any of the preconceptions held by some of the

veterans interviewed by Joe Lunn. In fact, right from these first days in France, Diallo seems almost obsessed with the idea of “fraternité” – speaking for example of the “noble mission de fraternité” and of the “frères noirs” of the tirailleurs who want to experience the same connection with the French that he himself is lucky enough to know. (97-101) For him, even the differences among African peoples bring them together in a deeper solidarity (Prinz 247), and reinforce the fact that they, along with the French, are all bound together by their common human condition.

When he takes leave of the Baudry family to go to the front, Diallo is overcome with emotion but maintains his composure. After all, he thinks, “Comment le tirailleur sénégalais que la patrie appelle pleurerait-il au moment du départ?” (102) His experience in the European trenches represents only a fraction of his book, since he was severely injured on November 3, 1914 at Sillery and evacuated.<sup>12</sup> His experiences in hospitals tend to be quite positive, and he even briefly extols the virtues of chloroform. (109) At the hospital in Épernay, he is frequently checked on by the *médecin-major* Jacquemart, and wonders why he seems to be getting special treatment.

Il vient fréquemment le matin et le soir, me serre la main, me questionne sur mon état, demande si je désire quelque chose, recommande aux infirmières de prendre double soin de moi. Je sais qu'il n'y a pas de différence de traitement à faire entre les blessés qu'il soigne et je me demande ce qui peut ainsi lui donner cette bonté doublée à mon égard. Le

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<sup>12</sup> Marc Michel, who interviewed Diallo in January 1973, gives a few details: “il fut évacué après une nuit d'attente et resta 24 jours dans l'inconscience à l'hôpital Lariboisière.” Michel indicates that Diallo wrote Force-Bonté between 1915 and 1917, revising it four or five times, before giving it to Lucie Cousturier, who passed it on to Jean-Richard Bloch at Rieder. (Appel 362 note 102)

tact qui lui fait renforcer sa bienveillance pour ma pauvre personne, vient-il de ce que je suis seul Africain avec des Européens dans la salle? (109-10)

He regrets that he could not speak at the time (because of his jaw injury), since he would have liked to thank the doctor. All the nurses at Épernay are also caring and attentive, and when he is moved to the hospital at Neuilly-sur-Seine they mail him “un petit paquet soigneusement attaché” containing his *grigris*,<sup>13</sup> which had been left behind. Not only are the nurses nice to him, but Diallo also receives visits from French women who came to talk with the injured and brought chocolate, tobacco, and other gifts. Women like Mme Wilfort and Mlle Germaine Thoury comfort Diallo and in one instance, the motherly attentions of Mme Wilfort encourage him not to give up hope after a particularly traumatic operation leaves him in a great deal of pain. (114-17)

Even outside the hospital Diallo finds that “comme le ciel qui couvre l’étendue de la terre, la bonté française se voit partout” (117). One day as he gets off the tram a man asks Diallo for his name and address, which he readily provides, thinking the man is an officer in civilian attire. Soon after, the man drops off a package for Diallo containing a military medal and a note offering “ce petit souvenir en témoignage de mon admiration et de mon respect pour un des courageux défenseurs de la France” (117-18). Unprovoked and generous acts such as this further reinforce Diallo’s belief (which on the surface seems unshakable) in the overall kindness and fraternal spirit of the French, and illustrate

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<sup>13</sup> *Grigris* are amulets. Before leaving for Morocco Diallo had visited the marabout Tierno Samba to obtain these protective talismans. (41-43) Some of Cousturier’s students also carry or wear *grigris*.

not only contact between French and West Africans but also the gratefulness of many French people toward the tirailleurs.

One less positive encounter with a French man brings to the forefront some of the underlying bitterness in Diallo's story. Having received such a severe injury and undergone many operations to his jaw, Diallo has to be careful about what he eats. When he arrives at the hospital in Menton, he requests a special diet from "M. le Major G...," who inexplicably erupts in anger even though he had examined Diallo days earlier and was already aware of his problem. Diallo, always carefully observing, simply watches the man become redder and more agitated: "Au lieu de me mettre en colère aussi, je me contentais d'observer les effets de cette vibration des sens. La colère est une force extraordinaire. Elle prend un homme, le secoue, l'agit comme elle l'entend et le laisse ensuite déçu de son mouvement." Oddly, though he is imprisoned for four days as a result of this incident, Diallo's only reaction is to decide that "il nous arrive à nous-mêmes de faire des choses que notre conscience n'aurait jamais crues possibles," effectively excusing the officer's unexpected and violent outburst. (129-31)

As the young officer fresh from Saint-Cyr indicated to Cousturier, the army was not generally pleased to see friendships develop between tirailleurs and civilians, and tried to keep contacts to a minimum. However, during their stays in hospitals tirailleurs did establish relationships with French people, especially women, and not all tirailleurs could be sequestered in hospitals reserved just for them such as the one in Menton run by Dr. Maclau under his strict policy of "re-senegalization." Referring to a hospital in Fréjus, Lucie Cousturier portrays this concept of re-senegalization in a very unflattering

light: “Les blessés et les malades sénégalais sont désormais parqués à Fréjus dans des étables sales, en planches ou en briques, mais bien défendues contre toute contamination française. Cela s’appelle la resénégalisation comme qui dirait de la recatéchisation dans la peur” (214-15). Bakary Diallo spent some time at Maclau’s hospital,<sup>14</sup> and mentions an occasion during which groups of tirailleurs are playing music, dancing, and enjoying games outside when the Doctor and his family pass by. Everyone sits up straighter and salutes the “père des tirailleurs,” who returns the salutes, somewhat surprised by this reception. “Son visage rayonne de la bonté paternelle qui lui a fait décerner ce titre de papa, le plus beau et le plus digne des hommes” (Diallo 131-34). Diallo evidently liked and respected Maclau, though I contend that a close reading of Force-Bonté, informed by the social realities of this period, reveals that Maclau’s re-senegalization efforts were lost on him and that Diallo was not as naïve and gullible as he might appear.

Diallo was granted French citizenship in 1920, but did not receive the promotion he had hoped for, since from a military point of view he was still not considered French. His brief reference to the “tribulations” he went through as he tried to sort out his military situation and his straightforward, chronological account of these difficulties stand out as another bitter encounter with the army bureaucracy. (148-49) When he arrives in Marseilles thinking he will soon leave for Dakar, he finds that the War Ministry has placed more obstacles in his path, and laments, “Ce fut pour moi un désastre moral.” He distinguishes, though, between military France and the true France, telling himself: “tu connais la France, dans son intérieur général; les injustices militaires que tu a senties ne

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<sup>14</sup> He was also at hospital n° 66, at Fréjus, but makes no comments regarding conditions there. (145).

sont que des accidents de ta vie, comme cela arrive; mais devant elles se redresse, haute et belle, la France généreuse" (152-53). While he waits for the military to come to some decision regarding his situation, Diallo works for a time as a porter at a Monte Carlo hotel.

Finally he decides to return to Paris to resolve these problems in person, but does not have enough money for the trip, or a place to live in the city. He thinks about the friends he has made throughout France, and feels confident that he can call upon a Marcel Perrier to wire him some money. Once in Paris, he spends a week searching for a room, not wanting to impose on more friends: "la vie était très chère pour tout le monde et l'idée me faisait honte d'avance, de solliciter même un prêt de mes connaissances, qui sans doute avaient aussi grandement besoin d'argent" (156-57). He is eventually forced to request an advance on his pay from Mr. Gaveau, for whom he was soon to begin working.<sup>15</sup> One day he stops in to say hello to a friend, Mme Hasselmans, and the two of them talk for a long time. She asks him about his situation, and offers suggestions as to how he should conduct himself and what will be expected of him once he starts his job with Gaveau. When she asks if he has found lodging, he replies that he has looked everywhere but that he has "tombé sur la crise du logement!" Mme Hasselmans immediately offers him a room, which he gladly accepts. (157-160)

The kindness of these friends and others is cherished by the ever-appreciative Diallo, who remembers them fondly toward the end of his book. He recalls snippets of conversations, lunches, and visits with families in various parts of France – Montpellier,

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<sup>15</sup> According to Balesi, Mr. Gaveau manufactured pianos. (158 note 112) Balesi notes that Diallo's friends seem to have been almost exclusively middle- or upper-class.

Paris, Manosque, Marseilles, and many different hospitals. Describing a visit to the Dufour household, Diallo writes, “un sourire, un baiser, une tasse de café chaud avant le petit déjeuner, quand je serai sorti du lit dont la douceur me retient encore. On va voir la famille Vitou. La voilà, aimable; échange de baisers, présentation aux amis, charmants amis” (163). He visits with the Corlieu family, Henri Corlieu being the “papa adoptif” who had given him the medal:

On m’entoure! Affection... Affection toujours! [...] Nous parlons de la France et de ses colonies. On me parle de mes frères noirs sénégalais. Des mots doux, des sourires affectueux. On me demande si j’ai reçu des nouvelles de mes parents. [...] “Au revoir Diallo, revenez nous voir bientôt, vous nous ferez toujours plaisir.”

Chaudes poignées de mains. (164-65)

These few incidents, chosen from among the many encounters between Africans and French civilians in both Cousturier’s and Diallo’s texts, illustrate that despite the best efforts of the army there were possibilities for substantial non-military contact during and after World War I. As Joe Lunn found during his interviews, “some Senegalese formed lasting friendships with their French comrades based upon mutual respect, and their relationships were often maintained long after the war ended” (“Memoirs” 364). Though Lunn stresses that soldiers from the Four Communes were the most likely to have had the opportunity to develop such close associations, overall these contacts were “substantial enough to contribute toward altering both French and Senegalese prewar perceptions of each other” (360).

Of course, meaningful contacts between Africans and French were only possible once the language barrier was broken. Diallo's first experiences with a French family, the Baudrys, are difficult for him precisely because, as he says, "je ne peux pas dire en français mes pensées entières" (101). In the next section, both Cousturier's and Diallo's efforts to bridge this linguistic divide and arrive at significant inter-cultural communication are explored in detail.

### **"Le tirailleur fou de grammaire":<sup>16</sup> French lessons**

Lucie Cousturier remarks that had she been burdened with the popular opinion that Africans' intelligence developed until they were thirteen and then promptly began to atrophy, she would never have tried to teach an African of twenty-eight how to read and write French – especially someone who had already spent seven years using "le déformant jargon des tirailleurs" (60-61). Cousturier compares the mental aptitudes of her students to the line graph depicting European versus African intelligence proposed by a Doctor Cureau in his 1912 book Les sociétés primitives de l'Afrique équatoriale:

Son ouvrage s'orne [. . .], au chapitre de l'intelligence, d'un graphique exprimant par des courbes les évolutions comparées des cerveaux d'hommes blancs et noirs.

La première de ces courbes représente une intelligence, la blanche, progressant graduellement avec les années, vers les cieux, pour y planer comme un ange, tandis qu'au-dessous, une autre, la noire, saute trop

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<sup>16</sup> Cousturier 128. This refers to Mekhtar Saar, a Toucouleur tirailleur and one of Cousturier's students.

brusquement en l'air comme un diable pendant l'enfance pour retomber et ramper sur la terre vile dont elle ne pouvait longtemps s'éloigner.

(Cousturier, Des inconnus 123)

Cureau's medical discourse, common to the colonial period, clearly uses science to justify the notion that Africans are primitive, childlike beings. In his analysis of the graph, the doctor writes that as soon as the African reaches the age of twelve,

il se fige dans son infantilisme d'homme primitif. Désormais, il ne dépassera plus le degré où l'a conduit le progrès rapide de ses jeunes années. Celui même qui a reçu l'éducation européenne n'en retient que le vernis, un décor purement extérieur, qui recouvre, sans l'influencer, la trame intime de son âme rudimentaire. (Cureau 72)

Cousturier concedes that her students would not be able to associate ideas in the same way as would "jeunes hommes entraînés à nos matches d'intellectualité," but asserts that "de 1918 à 1919, en une seule année, l'activité cérébrale de mes élèves de tous les âges s'est incroyablement précipitée" (124).

Throughout Cousturier's book it is clearly the tirailleurs' enthusiasm for learning that enables them to make the rapid progress that she documents. When they come to her house to begin their lessons, they all understand some French, and speak at least rudimentary *français tirailleur*, and it is this supposedly simplified French that Bakary Diallo too first learns when he joins the army in 1911. Cousturier paraphrases parts of the 1916 pamphlet Le français tel que le parlent nos tirailleurs sénégalais, dryly noting an

example of the effect of this reduction of the language and again displaying her disdain for the military:

Le résultat est que cette phrase: "Je pioche fort", se dira correctement, sinon élégamment, d'après la grammaire coloniale: "Moi y a faire manière outil lapioche avec mon lamain deux trope trope."

Nous voici loin d'un balbutiement, et nul primitif ne saurait revendiquer une aussi mirifique invention, bien conforme d'ailleurs au génie des hommes à qui l'on doit l'attitude du garde à vous... (104-5).

The verb "balbutier" (seen here in noun form), was used by Léon Gaillet in Coulibaly, and also appears in Jean-Richard Bloch's preface to Bakary Diallo's Force-Bonté: "C'est au Maroc et en France qu'il a commencé a balbutier le français" (1), and further underscores the view, strongly held by those who knew them during the war years in particular, of the tirailleurs as children.

At the time, many French people had no qualms about using *français tirailleur* with the Africans, whom they considered incapable of learning "real" French, and it almost certainly never occurred to the vast majority of them that the Africans might be offended by it. However, two of Cousturier's students bring to light the fact that not all tirailleurs acquiesced to French efforts to keep them in their "prison verbale" (106). Though her Malinké students had not objected to *français tirailleur*, and in fact "le trouvaient très approprié à l'humilité de leur ambition et de leurs besoins," two Tomas from Guinea, Mamady Koné and Fodé Bamba, come to her to learn how to express more

complex ideas, forcing her to reevaluate her teaching methods and expectations of her students.

Ils viennent me demander un remède à l'impuissance qu'ils ont éprouvée jusqu'ici à se faire comprendre en France. Je me sens consultée comme un médecin par des malades angoissés, je sais que, s'il est des remèdes à de tels maux, que personne n'a reconnus, il me faudra les inventer. (100-1)

These two students try their best to avoid using the typical “y a ...” expressions, as can be seen in a letter to Cousturier from Fôdé Bamba:

*Ma chère Madame,*

*Je été pas content quitter cé (chez) vous Madame je vous prévenir. Je été vous dire bien bonjour. Je suis pas beaucoup content pour ale (aller) notre part. Je ve (veux) pas quitter cé (chez) vous, mais cé la visse (l'avis) qui commande, cé pour sent (cela) que jé partir; hier soir je suis est pas venir parce que nous sommes crové (corvée) aujourd'hui nous été passé larvie (la revue) Sénéral (du général) nous sommes porter gros sake sur le dont (dos) nous été beaucoup fatigués.<sup>17</sup>*

Cousturier remarks that although this letter may seem grotesque to a French reader, “elle témoigne d'une divination surprenante de notre langue,” because of Bamba’s attempts to use verbs with their auxiliaries, and because his native language does not contain a mute “e.” (102) She launches another attack at the military, pointing out that in their zeal for

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<sup>17</sup> Cousturier 128. In a note accompanying the first of many such letters cited by Cousturier, she indicates “L’original ne porte pas d’accent, presque tous les accents que l’on trouvera dans les lettres que j’ai reproduites sont ajoutés, ainsi que la ponctuation, pour en faciliter la lecture” (50). The clarifications in parentheses are also hers.

recruitment it had never occurred to them that these soldiers might want to speak French in France. “C'est même la preuve de la perfection d'une machine militaire de ne pas secourir la vie, puisqu'elle est faite, à l'inverse des autres institutions, pour la détruire” (103). I argue, however, that the military's recourse to *français tirailleur* might not have been so accidental, and that in fact the army, and probably the colonial administration as well, was intent on keeping the tirailleurs confined in this *prison verbale*.

Once it became clear to the local population in and around places like Fréjus, Saint-Raphaël, and Menton that this *français tirailleur* was an adequate means of communication for the military, the civilians also used it to address the African soldiers. Cousturier recounts that when she ran errands with some of her students, speaking French with them, shop keepers and customers would go so far as to translate her French into *français tirailleur*, laughing derisively. She describes the Africans' reaction: “Les noirs ont appris, par les rires, que leur langage les ridiculise: ‘c'est français seulement pour tirailleurs,’ reconnaissent-ils tristement. Un de mes élèves, plus malveillant, assure que ‘c'est des mots trouvés par les Européens pour se foutre des Sénégalaïs’” (105). These instances illustrate that while many French people could be grateful to the tirailleurs for fighting on the battlefields, they still drew a distinction between appreciating them and accepting them as equals. In this example, the shopkeepers and customers make a point of keeping the Africans “in their place” by refusing them access to “real” French.

In response to Mamady Koné's and Fodé Bamba's obvious desire to learn correct French, Cousturier changes her pedagogy, taking into account that her students had little time in which to learn, and could be called away to the horrors of the trenches at any

moment. Although she first worked under “cette conviction absurde et universelle que ‘les nègres sont incapables d’abstraction’,” she soon abandons this assumption. (107) When Fôdé Bamba buys a very small new notebook, he asks Cousturier to write words in it for him to study during his free time. Given such a restricted amount of space, she decides simply to write out twenty verbs conjugated in different tenses. Unsure of how he would react to this “skeleton” of the language, she is pleasantly surprised:

Mais voilà qu’il témoigne d’émerveillement. Il exulte d’avoir découvert la parole. Il bâillait, la veille encore, sur l’élision; il a pris, en un jour, l’entrain des écoliers espiègles. Comme ceux-ci, de leur pupitre, tirent un henneton, Fôdé tire de sa poche son carnet de verbes et se livre, devant ses camarades intrigués, au jeu de la conjugaison.

Ce que je tenais pour un pensum est une débauche et la réputation de l’école s’établit dans le camp. (107-8)

Just a month or two later, in February 1918, new students were coming to her house every day requesting to be taught verbs! Cousturier’s syllabus, designed to be completed in the two months left before the tirailleurs’ departure for the front in the spring, went as follows: oral and written conjugation of verbs in the *présent, passé composé* and *futur*; study of the auxiliaries; study of the gender and number of nouns and adjectives; study of articles. (110) Clearly, this course of study runs counter to that recommended in Le français tel que le parlent nos tirailleurs sénégalais, to put it mildly.

This new pedagogy works well for Cousturier and her students, enabling many of them to learn a great deal of French in a short period of time, as shown in their letters to

her from the front. Her successes make it possible to imagine that her students could have gone on to master the written and spoken language had they been able to stay in her class longer or had extensive contact with other helpful French people. It is unclear whether or not Bakary Diallo was actually a student of Cousturier's: both Joe Lunn and Charles-John Balesi claim that Diallo was one of her students, and Balesi adds that Diallo did not name Cousturier in his book.<sup>18</sup> However, Diallo does in fact mention "Vénérable Dame Lucie Cousturier" and recalls among other things the "humaine disposition qui poussait [son] âme libre" (167). Cousturier, for her part, does not include a *Bakary Diallo* in her book, though *Baïdi Dialo*'s biographical information is similar to Diallo's. Although she makes no reference to having done so, it is possible that she changed his name in the book, as she did her own.

The authorship of *Force-Bonté* has been attributed in varying degrees to Diallo, Cousturier, and Bloch. Before this issue can be addressed, the text itself must be examined. In it we find many references to Diallo's enthusiasm for learning to read, write, and speak in French. As he is joining the army in February 1911, he watches a white officer writing: "La rapidité avec laquelle son écriture se multiplie me donne envie de l'imiter. Ce n'est pas possible tout de suite; mais 'j'apprendrai plus tard', c'est une impression fort dans mon être" (28). During their training, he and his fellow tirailleurs learn sounds and words, at which point Diallo (a frequent daydreamer) lets his mind wander: "Je pense à cette carrière humaine dans laquelle nous vivons tous, séparés

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<sup>18</sup> See Lunn, "Memoirs" 513 note 1 and Balesi 158 note 124. Lunn does not indicate a source for this information, though it could be Balesi's text. As I have found mistakes in Balesi's notes, such as this one regarding Diallo's mention of Cousturier, I hesitate to accept his statement regarding Cousturier's naming of Diallo. Balesi did conduct an interview with Diallo in 1974, though he rarely cites it in this text.

malgré nous par la diversité de langages qui auraient dû n'être qu'une unité universelle” (34-35). Days later, left to guard a doorway, he notices a clean white wall and, remembering the officer writing, decides to imitate him, unfortunately choosing the wall as his “paper.” Naturally, he is punished as soon as the commander sees this. (37-38)

As Diallo and his battalion travel by boat from Senegal to Morocco, his friend Demba Sow wishes they could write down Diallo’s musings: ““je regrette que tu ne saches pas lire et écrire, soit le sénégalais, soit le français, afin de pouvoir mettre sur le papier le sens de tes pensées, certainement bonnes à connaître pour toutes les têtes.”” Diallo reminds him of the wall incident, declaring, ““Je suis décidé à connaître le français. Il faut que j’arrive à écrire, lire et parler la langue que parlent nos chefs blancs,”” and demonstrates some of the *français tirailleur* that he has already learned. (50-51) In Fez, a friend of his writes down the alphabet for him, and one day his captain finds him assiduously studying how to write “France.” Captain Coste addresses Diallo in *français tirailleur*: ““C’est bien, Bakary, moi content de toi; toi connais lire France, toi bon garçon, bon soldat”” (85-86). In an article about the French spoken by tirailleurs, the critic Manfred Prinz mentions this encounter, implying that the captain’s use of *français tirailleur* is not condescending:

In *Force-Bonté* the quotations in tirailleur-French show an obvious connection with the author’s unequivocal admiration and deep respect for the French culture. Bakary Diallo’s first attempts at speaking French, honestly quoted by the author in all their imperfection, are seen as steps in the learning process, of which the reader has before his eyes the crowning

glory, in the form of the novel. Even the imperfect state of his French does not keep Diallo from entering into an almost friendly conversation with his Captain, during which he learns and experiences a mutual human closeness with him. In the situation described, it is by no means discriminatory that the Captain himself holds the conversation with Bakary in *français tirailleur*; rather this gesture is proof of the superb, humane personality of his superior.<sup>19</sup>

However, I would argue that when understood within the larger context of the tirailleurs' experience in France as depicted by both Cousturier and Diallo such "gestures" do in fact seem to be overwhelmingly discriminatory, paternalistic, and condescending. As shown above, Cousturier's students found this simplified French offensive and many of them took every opportunity to learn "real" French, and Diallo's own concerted efforts to learn to express himself clearly in French indicate his rejection of *français tirailleur* as an adequate and appropriate means of communication.

Despite the fact that the injury he sustained on the front was to his jaw and required numerous operations, Diallo's hospital experiences seem to have provided him with many opportunities to speak French. He was frequently moved from one hospital to another, taking a kind of "Tour de France" via the wartime health-care system. Although this amounts mostly to a Tour of the Paris Hospitals, after his brief stay in the Reims area he does spend a fair amount of time in the south of France, in and around Menton, Fréjus,

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<sup>19</sup> Prinz 253. My translation. Although in the original German Prinz uses the term "Tirailleur-Französisch" instead of the French "*français tirailleur*," he does use this French term earlier on this page and in other instances in this article.

Marseilles, and Montpellier. It would be unrealistic to assume that Diallo had read G. Bruno's enormously popular Le Tour de la France par deux enfants, first published in 1877 and re-edited many times, but a coincidental and intriguing parallel can be made between these two texts. Bruno's book is the story of two orphan boys from Lorraine who go off in a quest to find their uncle and to maintain their French citizenship just after France's devastating war with Prussia. Their travels take them all over France, and they meet many different people who teach them about their *patrie*. They learn to love mother France and realize that all her children, even those in the colonies, are all working for the good of the *patrie*.

In Force-Bonté Diallo experiences much of the same good will as do André and Julien during their journey, and he takes every opportunity to observe the French, as well as to learn the French language.

Je vous ai vus pendant la guerre et pendant la paix. Je vous ai étudiés du matin au soir, en toutes occasions, durant ces périodes. Vos infirmières et vos docteurs auprès des blessés, les vôtres et les nôtres, n'ont jamais établi la moindre différence entre leurs malades. J'ai observé des plus minimes faits aimables de milliers des vôtres: civils, hommes, femmes, enfants [ . . . ] Vous m'avez changé, je vous le jure, la tête, le cœur, l'esprit et l'âme.

(Diallo 168)

Diallo's many contacts with French civilians in various parts of France have taught him that even though the French army may not be particularly hospitable, the population is. This insight enables him to distinguish between the army and France in general. Much

like André and Julien, Diallo has endured war-related hardships, but his ensuing travels around the country have reinforced his desire to be a part of this nation. Yet where Diallo's text departs sharply from Bruno's is in his ultimate realization that he will never be permitted to join the French population as an equal, and that the offer of assimilation is in the end not genuine. Always under the thumb of the military, which preferred to keep the tirailleurs distanced from the French, Diallo will never be "French," and the bitterness that comes from this discovery runs beneath the surface of his story.

Diallo refers often to visits by French friends, who even followed him as he moved from one hospital to the next. It is during a conversation with one of these friends, Mlle Albertine Velty, that he notices the amount of progress he has made in learning French. This first long monologue of Diallo's starts out in a combination of French and *français tirailleur*, but the French gradually improves to end with grammatically correct sentences, even using the future tense. Diallo remarks, "Il me semblait qu'au fur et à mesure que je parlais, les mots français se succédaient plus facilement dans ma tête. [ . . . ] Je parlais très doucement, l'instinct modérait ou accentuait le timbre de ma voix, suivant telle ou telle de mes explications" (122-23).

Diallo worked hard to learn French, since he had decided that "il est indispensable de connaître le français" (146) if the goal of assimilation is ever to be attained. Regardless of whether he actually was one of Cousturier's students or "had no formal education and was completely self-taught" (Michelman, "Beginnings" 12), he does seem to have been successful in his quest to break free from *français tirailleur*. A letter from

Diallo to Jean-Richard Bloch, dated May 27, 1926 and sent after Diallo had received the first copies of Force-Bonté, is written in excellent French:

*Pourrais-je vous dire suffisamment tout le bonheur que me cause,  
aujourd'hui, votre grand cœur... je suis très fier de vous avoir rencontré  
sur la terre... Je voudrais vivement vous revoir au milieu des vôtres. Fixez-  
moi le jour que vous voudrez. Je ne manquerai pas d'être auprès de vous  
alors... Ma famille est loin de moi. La douceur de la vôtre la remplacera.  
J'ai grand besoin de l'expression d'affection familiale.<sup>20</sup>*

Naturally, it is possible that Diallo had help writing the letter or that someone edited it for him, though there are no indications of either. As some of the tirailleurs' letters cited by Mme Cousturier toward the end of her text are quite good, containing many fewer mistakes than letters written in the early days of her school's existence, it was clearly possible for these African soldiers to learn a lot of French during their short and turbulent stay in Europe. One of her best students, Damba Dia, who stayed with the Cousturiers in Paris after the war, wrote her in July 1918:

*Ma chère amie,*

*Je fais réponse tout de suite à votre journal daté du 1<sup>er</sup> juillet. Il m'a fait  
beaucoup de plaisir parce que vous m'avez raconté beaucoup d'chose.  
L'exercice de grammaire est très difficile cé pour ça que j'ai trouvé un  
camarade européen pour m'aider mais seulement sé la dernière fois, il est*

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<sup>20</sup> Cited by Cornevin in "Bakary Diallo" 38-39 and in Littératures 137. In the latter, Cornevin thanks Madame Bloch for providing him with copies of the correspondence between Diallo and Bloch. Assuming Cornevin did not edit the letter before including it in his work (which he does not appear to have done), the ellipses used in it recall Diallo's punctuation throughout Force-Bonté.

*mort. L'exercice maintenant je les fera moi-même. Il faut bien m'expliquer les mots: et, est, c'est, que je trouve partout. Alor aujourd'hui après-midi y avait des obus qui tombent juste à côté de nous. Heuresement il n'a pas claté. [ . . . ] (208)*

Although Dia's French is not perfect, it is a far cry from *français tirailleur*, given his use of pronouns such as "il," articles, plurals, the *passé composé*, imperfect and even his good guess about the future tense ("faira"). He is obviously still taking every opportunity to better his command of the language and his request for an explanation of the difference between *et*, *est*, and *c'est* reveals that Dia has been attentively studying French. Additionally, his mention of a European soldier (presumably French) helping him with his grammar exercises offers an example of close, friendly contact between West African and French soldiers on the front.

Later in the year, another student, Ghibi Tangara, arrives at the Cousturiers' house to practice reading – even though it is the day after the Armistice and he had celebrated the entire night. Cousturier is surprised:

– Je pense, lui dis-je, qu'aujourd'hui ton lit sera bien meilleur pour toi que la chaise de l'école!

[Tangara] – Non, l'école il est bon, toujours. Moi, je suis content bien pour lire tout de suite.

– Tu est fou? Tu as trop sommeil! Tu ne peux plus ouvrir les yeux.

– Si, moi y a moyen lire un peu, un peu, maintenant, insiste-t-il.

Cousturier is clearly touched by his enthusiasm: “N'est-ce pas moi qui ai vu, sans aller en ville, le plus beau spectacle de la fête: ce garçon, courbatu par vingt-quatre heures de joie bruyante, qui ouvre son livre scolaire et se met à lire, pendant une demi-heure [ . . . ]?”  
 (218-19)

It is only against this backdrop of enthusiasm and determination that we can begin to consider the question of the authorship of Force-Bonté, and offer any convincing argument in support of Bakary Diallo. As noted above, we cannot be sure from these texts whether or not Diallo was one of Cousturier’s students. However, Jean-Richard Bloch begins his “Avertissement” to the 1926 edition of Force-Bonté by saying that it was Cousturier who forwarded Diallo’s manuscript to him. (1) Their involvement in the editing and/or writing of Force-Bonté has been speculated upon by many scholars, but the consensus today is that Diallo did write the book. Roland Lebel’s brief mention of Diallo in his 1931 Histoire de la littérature coloniale en France takes for granted that Diallo authored the book: “Les indigènes eux-mêmes commencent à écrire et fournissent leur témoignage direct; avec *Force-Bonté*, de Bakary Diallo (1926), apparaît le premier roman produit par un vrai noir d’A.O.F.; c’est une date dans notre littérature africaine.”<sup>21</sup>

A 1928 article in La Revue indigène casts no doubts on the authorship of the text, nor on Diallo’s ability to write such a work: “il achève d’apprendre notre langue avec l’aide bienveillant et bénévole de professeurs, ses compagnons d’hôpital. Il la possède, il l’écrit facilement. Alors, de lui-même, il entreprend de raconter sa vie.” The author conveys the enormous value attached to the French language, writing that Diallo “est

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<sup>21</sup> Lebel, Histoire 143. See also Midiohouan, “Tirailleur” 142-43 for a well-organized overview of criticism of Force-Bonté from 1926 to the 1980s, including citations from earlier texts by Lebel.

ravi, il possède le véhicule de la pensée" (Bourdarie 129-30). This article includes a postscript which mentions that Force-Bonté received a thousand-franc prize from the *Académie des sciences coloniales*. The minutes of the February 2, 1928 meeting of this group give further information about this. Bourdarie, as *Secrétaire perpétuel*, presented Diallo's book as "une singulière et heureuse replique à Batouala"<sup>22</sup> and an excellent example of France's moral successes in the colonies. He suggests that Diallo should be awarded some money, arguing that he seems to have little inclination to work: "il a été expulsé de sa tribu parce qu'il ne travaillait pas. Il passait son temps à rêver aux étoiles, et à se demander quelle étaient l'origine du monde." Bourdarie hopes that the *Académie* can have "une influence sur sa vie en le dirigeant vers le cadre des interprètes où il pourrait se livrer à des études sur le folklore local."

Pierre Mille fully supported Bourdarie's proposal, noting that Diallo's book is remarkable not only for his use of French but also the story itself. He added that at first he doubted Diallo had really written it himself, but explained that "Bakary Diallo m'a apporté ses brouillons et j'ai constaté que, sauf certaines corrections qui ont été faites par l'imprimerie, l'ouvrage est véritablement de celui qui l'a signé." An unidentified member asked how Diallo learned French, to which Mille replied,

"Il a d'abord appris le français parmi les tirailleurs sénégalais. Puis, quand il est arrivé en France, il a été en relations avec des professeurs

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<sup>22</sup> Batouala, by René Maran, was published in 1921 and won the Prix Goncourt that year. Its preface, in which Maran strongly criticized colonization, caused an uproar, and his descriptions of the natives in the story itself were not always particularly flattering. Maran (1887-1960) was born in Martinique of parents from Guyane. Since his father was a colonial official, the family later moved to Congo and Maran was educated in France. He wrote not only Batouala but many other novels, biographies, and poetry, winning other prizes in the 1940s and 1950s. See Carbet.

d'université qui se sont intéressés à lui et l'ont fait travailler. Il a conservé beaucoup de relations dans ce monde qui est des plus honnêtes et des plus dévoués."

Basing his decision largely on Mille's statements, the president of the *Académie* closed the discussion by putting to a vote the proposal to award Diallo a sum of money, which was adopted. ("Séance du 2 février 1928" 76-77) This award and the proceedings out of which it arose are not cited by any of the critics who have argued for or against Diallo's authorship of Force-Bonté.

Many years later, in his preface to the 1985 edition of Force-Bonté the Senegalese scholar Mohamadou Kane pronounced it impossible for Diallo to have written the book: "De toute évidence, de 1911 à 1926, Bakary Diallo n'a pas pu apprendre le français au point d'écrire un roman alors que, de 1911 à 1918, il était occupé à apprendre le métier des armes, à guerroyer et, après, à soigner ses blessures" (Kane viii). However, this contention falls apart if it is true, as Michel states, that Diallo was injured and evacuated from the front in November 1914 and never fought again. Kane argues with Fredric Michelman's point that in their own writings the anti-racist Cousturier and the leftist Bloch "hardly view French colonialism in a flattering light" (Michelman, "Beginnings" 11), saying that "l'histoire abonde d'exemples où des hommes de droite et des hommes de gauche inversent leurs rôles" (Kane viii), and that therefore Bloch could easily have penned Force-Bonté. To underscore his assertion that Diallo wrote the book, Michelman refers to his own interview with Robert Delavignette, a former colonial governor-general, director of the colonial school, and a writer himself, noting that Delavignette is

"convinced that B. Diallo, whom he knows personally, is unquestionably the author of *Force-Bonté*" ("Beginnings" 17 note 12). Kane, however, disputes this as well, preferring to imagine that Diallo and his life story simply provided the raw material for some other, unnamed, writer.

Kane characterizes Dorothy Blair as "prudente" in her discussion of the question of *Force-Bonté*'s authorship in her 1976 *African Literature in French*. (ix) Blair is obviously suspicious of Diallo and his connection to Cousturier, declaring that

this book would be a remarkable *tour de force* on the linguistic and  
stylistic score alone, if it were the unaided and spontaneous composition  
of an ignorant herdsman, whose total knowledge of French was derived  
from his service in the armed forces and his sojourns in military hospitals  
and convalescent camps. (16)

Blair also talked with Delavignette and others who knew Diallo, and writes that although Diallo's speech was sometimes hard to understand as a result of his jaw injury, these people did "confirm his gentle, rather melancholic, poetic nature, which seems consistent with the lyrical outpourings of his prose." Blair somewhat reluctantly drops the issue, noting that Delavignette "rejects the idea that *Force bonté* could have been 'ghosted' by a member of Rieder's staff" (*African Literature* 17), and moves on to René Maran's *Batouala*. Interestingly, in her 1984 *Senegalese Literature: A Critical History*, Blair seems to have resolved the question of authorship, and in her few pages about Diallo includes an updated version of the same material published earlier. Here she states that "*Force bonté* is a linguistic and stylistic *tour de force*" (43), briefly mentions that Diallo learned French

during his service in the army, and remarks that he was “adopted” by Cousturier, who “encouraged him in his reading” (42). From this point forward the general consensus among critics has been that Diallo did write Force-Bonté, and while János Riesz does not accuse Diallo of plagiarism in his article examining just such accusations against other African authors, he does remind us “that a book is generally not the work of a single person, that there are those who stimulate as well as those who sponsor, that normally there is influence by the editor and publisher,” and that authors often seek advice from others as they write. (“Audible Gasps” 88)

We can draw from this three conclusions: one, that none of the critics who doubted Diallo’s authorship was able to provide any evidence to support such claims; two, that those who knew Diallo personally were sure he was capable of writing the book; and three, that Lucie Cousturier’s many examples of tirailleurs who learned to speak, read and write French in Des inconnus chez moi allow us to deduce that Diallo could have done the same. The discussion of the members of the *Académie des sciences coloniales* and the additional facts that Diallo worked as an interpreter (admitted even by Kane) and translated his own poem, “M’Bala” (1949), from Peul into French permit us to put this issue to rest.<sup>23</sup>

The importance of Diallo’s and Cousturier’s texts as eyewitness accounts of mutually beneficial and almost wholly positive encounters between French civilians and African soldiers as a result of World War I has been clearly demonstrated. The examples

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<sup>23</sup> For Diallo as an interpreter, see Cornevin, Littératures 136; Blair, Senegalese Literature 42; and Kane xi. Diallo’s translation of “M’Bala” is mentioned in Blair, African Literature 18; Blair, Senegalese Literature 44; and Cornevin, Littératures 138. The poem and its French translation were published in Présence Africaine 6 (1949): 128-133.

presented so far, however, have only hinted at these authors' biases and underlying messages, which are at the core of their works and are crucial to our understanding of Cousturier's and Diallo's significance today. Diallo is very representative of his generation, few of whom attended colonial schools and were instead introduced to the French and their *mission civilisatrice* via the violence and brutality first of conscription and then of World War I. The tension evident throughout his text between his desire to believe in the French offer of assimilation and his rejection of this deceptive colonial rhetoric also mark him as a West African of the first half of the twentieth century.

**“Abordons ce texte avec le respect qu'il mérite”:<sup>24</sup> Recognizing the significance of Diallo's and Cousturier's texts**

It is evident in Bakary Diallo's text that he is quite aware of the colonial doctrine of assimilation as taught by the army, and critics have accused him of blindly embracing it: “L'armée eut sur Diallo la même influence que l'école coloniale sur d'autres romanciers de l'entre-guerres. Il y a été nourri de l'idéologie colonialiste du meilleur cru et a restitué dans son livre l'image du nègre telle que désirée par le colonisateur” (Midiohouan, Idéologie 68). This idea that Diallo in a sense “sold out” and presented his readers with an image of Africans that was in line with colonial theories and expectations has been suggested by other critics, but I argue that there is an underlying subversiveness to his text which reveals his true beliefs.

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<sup>24</sup> Bloch 3, referring to Force-Bonté.

Force-Bonté was favorably received by supporters of France's colonial efforts, who regarded it as the expression of "le vrai visage de la France coloniale" which would allow France to forget "le coup de pied de Batouala" (Bourdarie 130), in which the main character becomes aware of the abuses of the colonial system. The black intellectual community of Paris reacted to the publication of Force-Bonté with "un silence géné," considering it "une honte pour la race."<sup>25</sup> René Maran, author of Batouala, wrote Jean-Richard Bloch saying that Diallo's book produced upon him "la plus fâcheuse impression" and accusing Diallo of "servialité" and "conformisme bêlant et béat" (Midiohouan, "Tirailleur" 144). Though the publication of Force-Bonté "par son caractère exceptionnel, pouvait difficilement passer inaperçu dans le monde africain de Paris," the text was dismissed as offensively pro-colonial by that community, and eclipsed by Batouala until independence in the 1960's. (Midiohouan, "Tirailleur" 143-46) By that time, this "skeleton in the African family closet" (Michelman, "Beginnings" 16) was only remembered with hostility as the ignominious work of a collaborator. (Midiohouan, "Tirailleur" 146)

Ironically, in his preface to Force-Bonté Jean-Richard Bloch hints at the possibility that Diallo had an underlying agenda. He first suggests, "abordons ce récit avec le respect qu'il mérite, mais lisons-le avec plaisir et douceur." His next statement regarding the care Diallo takes not to condemn or judge the French elicited a negative reaction from the author of an article in L'Afrique française, "Les romans africains de 1926." According to Bloch, "Le seul danger que je vois dans ces pages réside

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<sup>25</sup> Midiohouan, "Tirailleur" 144. Midiohouan does not cite specific sources for this reaction to Force-Bonté.

précisément dans le soin que leur auteur apporte à ne point condamner, à éviter de nous juger, à faire prédominer partout l'amour sur la rancune” (3). The author of the article quotes this very sentence, and asks, “Condamnation sur quoi? Rancune contre quoi?” He argues that proof of Diallo’s and the other tirailleurs’ true sentiments toward the French are summed up by their goodbye to a captain who is returning to France from Morocco: ““Toi bon capitaine, *bon Français.*”” The author, having added the italics for emphasis, concludes, “On n’invente pas cela, ni la délicatesse ni l’attachement admiratif exprimé par ce témoignage, qui ne justifie pas les réserves du préfacier” (Ladreit de Lacharrière 562). It is worth noting here that this particular officer, Captain Coste, is portrayed by Diallo as having been very nice to his tirailleurs. At one point he thanks Diallo for catching him as he stumbles into a ditch (17), and he is the one who paternally encouraged Diallo in his effort to write “La France” as he began to learn French.

Ladreit de Lacharrière does not mention Bloch’s next lines, but would certainly not have agreed, since for him the merit of Diallo’s book lies in its educational value for *les Blancs*, because they can learn “quels gestes sont civilisateurs” (562). In contrast, Bloch cautions:

Nous savons que nous ne méritons pas tous les éloges qu'il nous décerne.  
 Qu'au moins notre cœur se serre en découvrant ici, dans son ingénuité, ce  
 que les Africains de nos colonies attendent de nous. Qu'au moins il naisse  
 en nous, devant cette aveugle confiance, cette ardente espérance, la  
 résolution de mériter cet amour et cette admiration dont, au fond de nous-  
 mêmes, nous nous sentons si peu dignes. (3)

Here Frederic Michelman's reasoning that neither Bloch nor Cousturier could have written Force-Bonté becomes important again. Mohamadou Kane rejects Michelman's determination that "it seems highly doubtful that L. Cousturier would have written such an emotional panegyric of France's *mission civilisatrice* or that J.-R. Bloch would have published it had she done so" ("Beginnings" 11). While Kane contends that either one of them could easily have set aside his or her convictions to write this more "patriotic" text (viii), I argue instead that both Bloch and Cousturier saw in Diallo's work his underlying current of subversiveness. Already sympathetic to the plight of the Africans and interested in debunking the myths of the *mission civilisatrice* and the possibility of assimilation, Bloch and Cousturier were perfectly placed to publish this lone tirailleur voice.

Much as Dorothy Blair regrets to admit it, she too seems to discern something deeper in Diallo's book: "paradoxically, in spite of Diallo's apparent naiveté in the face of the reality of the colonial situation, his *Force bonté* does mark the beginnings of the colonized black man's awareness of the conflict between the values of the old ways of African life and those of the West" (*Senegalese Literature* 44). The most recent study of Force-Bonté, by János Riesz, focuses on Diallo's experiences in Morocco: "it is astonishing that literary critics have hardly mentioned the chapters that depict Bakary Diallo's participation in the battles in Morocco from May 1911 to the outbreak of the World War in the fall of 1914, those that arguably make up the very essence of his

experiences as a *Tirailleur Sénégalais*.<sup>26</sup> While it is true that Diallo's time in Morocco represents nearly all of his exposure to the physical violence of war, my focus here is not the war itself, but rather the opportunity for personal encounters with and close observation of metropolitan French people afforded Diallo in his capacity as tirailleur, on active duty or not. Riesz allows for an emphasis on this aspect of Force-Bonté: "in the final analysis, Bakary Diallo is not so much concerned with defending the French colonial system as he is with overcoming those obstacles that divide and separate human beings and turn them into enemies" ("Tirailleur Sénégalais" 166). The first since Bloch to treat Diallo with true respect,<sup>27</sup> Riesz maintains that Diallo "rejects and repudiates the role of 'grand enfant' assigned to him" (171), and concludes by suggesting that maybe "a place should be created for him in the 'pantheon of African literature' after all" (176).

It is not difficult to see why Diallo has long been condemned as an apologist for the French colonial theory of assimilation, and for that of association as well. His repeated insistence on the subject of fraternity, intense desire to learn the French language, acquisition of French citizenship, and his jobs as an interpreter with the Commissariat des Troupes Noires de Blaise Diagne<sup>28</sup> and later as *chef de canton* in Senegal<sup>29</sup> all lead us to believe that Diallo was an excellent example of a colonial subject

<sup>26</sup> Riesz, "Tirailleur Sénégalais" 160. As French control over West Africa became more stable and secure, the tirailleurs sénégalaïs began to be used in other areas of the Empire, such as Morocco, helping first in conquest and then in defense. (Echenberg, Colonial 27 and Michel, Appel 15-16)

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Mbelolo ya Mpiku, in his unpublished 1968 thesis "Le Roman sénégalais de langue française: la période de formation (1920-1952)," also considers Diallo to be an important figure in the history of African literature.

<sup>28</sup> See Michel, Appel 362 note 102 and Balesi 139-40 note 72. Michel says that Diallo held this position in 1917-18. It is not mentioned in Force-Bonté, which was apparently written between 1915 and 1917 and later revised several times.

<sup>29</sup> According to Cornevin, when Diallo left France he returned to his hometown in Senegal: "Il va désormais vivre à M'Bala. Il sera chef de canton du Dimar-Nomade et finira officier de la légion

who understood the system and used it to his advantage, even making the transition from the prevailing colonial theory of assimilation to the newer association. Diallo's unpleasant experiences with the military administration have often been cited by critics as the only "notes discordantes" in his book. (Diop, "Figure" 43)

There are, however, other incidents and conversations in the text which illustrate the tension between Diallo's desire to achieve the assimilation theoretically offered by the French and his ultimate rejection of this doctrine as he realizes the offer is not genuine. The importance of silence in Force-Bonté as a way of hinting at opinions or thoughts left unstated has been mentioned above, the first time Diallo sees a white person. Diallo's interest in observing people has also been noted, and comes up frequently in the book. For example, as Captain Coste is preparing to leave his tirailleurs and return to France, Diallo says: "Ses bienfaits nous obligent beaucoup à aimer et à honorer sa race française, qu'il a su noblement, irréprochablement, représenter parmi nous, qui l'étudions silencieusement" (89). Obviously, on the surface this can be read as adoration and praise on the part of the tirailleurs, although here as in many other places in the text Diallo seems to be exaggerating to the point that we cannot take him seriously. More important is the very end of his sentence: the Africans' constant, silent observation and study of the Europeans is significant, and suggests a justification for European fears that Africans would learn too much from this contact with whites in Europe and could become a threat to the colonial project.

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d'honneur, Président des anciens combattants" ("Bakary Diallo" 39). Midiohouan cites Diallo's departure from France as February 6, 1928. ("Tirailleur" 140)

Diallo frequently makes brief references to the idea that all men, black and white, are equals and should be treated as such, implying that under the current system they are not. For example, “il nous paraîtra beau au contraire de juger que tout être qui possède un esprit et un cœur possède raison et esprit de décision...” (82). Later, as he talks with his friend Albertine Velty in a hospital, he tries to understand why she leaves his bedside when other friends of his come to visit. Velty, embarrassed, explains that she is not of the same social or economic class as some of his other visitors, and withdraws to avoid feeling inferior or making any social *faux pas*. Diallo tells her that in the future she should stay and not be uncomfortable, and that “l’Afrique aussi a hommes, femmes et tout, pas mêmes costumes, pas mêmes pensées, mais ils sont quand même hommes ou femmes, pas davantage. Costumes ou habits, pas mêmes mots, pas mêmes manières, mais tous sont bons, utiles et, peut-être, de même prix...” (122). The ellipses in both of these citations are Diallo’s, and seem to invite the reader to reflect a moment on his statements and to question his or her own actions regarding people considered by many to be inferior, such as the Africans. This kind of appreciation of cultural differences and at the same time of the value of each culture would later be taken up by other West Africans, such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, as well as by a few interested French, such as Maurice Delafosse.

In other instances Diallo makes more direct assertions, often regarding the army’s manner of treating its soldiers. Early on in his training, in Africa, he and his fellow tirailleurs are being instructed in marching techniques and the manipulation of their weapons. About their commanding soldier Diallo says, “son seul défaut est de frapper un

pauvre homme qui, ignorant de tout du militaire et venu pour apprendre, ne peut être jugé fautif pour les erreurs relevées dans sa manœuvre. Ce n'est point et ne sera jamais par des gifles qu'on fait un bon serviteur" (33). The combination of the two negatives "ne...point" and "ne...jamais" makes for a very strong statement, reproaching the French for their recourse to violence when training these willing and eager volunteers. Although Diallo and his comrades in arms seem to have volunteered, as noted in Chapter 1 there were many tirailleurs who were forced to join the ranks of the *Force noire*. Midiohouan notes that "On ne se fait plus aujourd'hui aucune illusion sur ce qu'il en était réellement de ce volontariat. Nous ne nous attarderons donc point sur la liberté de choix dont ils disposaient, si l'on sait, par ailleurs, que ceux de leur âge restés en Afrique étaient versés au compte du 'travail public obligatoire.'"<sup>30</sup> Diallo later remarks, in phrasing which also has the ring of an African proverb translated into French, "il est inutile de faire admettre par force ce que la conscience ferme n'accepte pas" (63).

In *Force-Bonté* Diallo also includes a running commentary against racism and for a reconciliation between the French and the Africans. For example, the day he and his friend Demba Sow join the army, the soldier Mamadou Racine tells them: "Tous ces hommes devant vos yeux sont de diverses races. Ils ne sont point différents pour autant, car la fraternité les unit dans la ville comme dans la brousse" (31-32). Later, Diallo finds himself in a new group of soldiers, all of whom are Wolof. They agree that "les Ouolofs et les Peulhs sont des frères," and Diallo muses that "le Peulh et le Ouolof, en effet, ne doivent être qu'un comme tous les hommes" (34). His repeated references throughout the

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<sup>30</sup> Midiohouan, "Tirailleur" 134-35. Cousturier also refers to this – see for example pages 53, 195, 261.

text to everyone being “brothers” and “men” place him squarely within the assimilationist rhetoric of the day. The difference, however, between his interpretation and that of the French is that Diallo for a time actually believes he can achieve assimilation and brotherhood with the French, whereas the French (at least the army and colonial administration) never quite intended for the Africans to get that far. Next he reflects upon human nature: “La constitution de la nature humaine (à part les couleurs) n'est-elle donc pas la même chez tous les hommes? Pour moi, Bakary, je crois qu'elle est identique” (35). Diallo clearly suggests that, aside from skin color, all people are in essence the same, and thus of equal value. He is also not in favor of abandoning his African culture to take up the French one, as dictated by the theory of assimilation, and a fact which has escaped many critics to date. Ideally, he could remain true to his own cultural heritage and be considered an equal with the French, and not be prohibited from learning about French culture or the language. For example, in Morocco, Diallo takes an opportunity to note the diversity of African peoples and traditions, emphasizing their equal importance, and also valorizing the oral literatures of various African cultures. (61)

His description of the effect of French influence in Senegal is telling in its word choice:

**Avoir des relations avec les Français, c'est apprendre à aimer ce qu'ils aiment. Les Sénégalais se sont bien transformés. Leurs idées, leurs goûts, leurs manières d'agir, les désirs et les plaisirs qu'ils avaient conservés et se transmettaient de générations en générations n'ont pu résister aux procédés de la France. Ce n'est pas que nos habitudes n'étaient pas**

convenables, au contraire. Mais il est loyal de reconnaître à la France une finesse particulière.<sup>31</sup>

Soon after this slightly bitter comment regarding the power of the French civilizing mission, he makes another that seems to contradict it: “Estimons-nous heureux [ . . . ] d’être serviteurs de la France [ . . . ] Il nous est possible, en toute sincérité d’acquérir son savoir et sa manière de vivre. [ . . . ] Aimons-la [ . . . ] et nous verrons son cœur, son âme, son esprit s’ouvrir pour nous instruire” (80). Here it is clear that Diallo wants to believe in the French offer of assimilation. However, when this is read with comments such as those in the preceding quotation, the tension between Diallo’s acceptance and rejection of assimilation becomes evident. Diallo was certainly not the only West African to find himself faced with this dilemma in the wake of World War I, and although the black community in mid-1920s Paris and later the writers of the Négritude movement would distance themselves from him, they too experienced the same conflict.

On two occasions, before Diallo and his friend Demba Sow are separated into different battalions,<sup>32</sup> they discuss their situation and their relationship with the French. Both times Diallo expresses an opinion against the existing order, while Sow tries to convince him that he should not complain and that they are quite fortunate. In one example, Diallo feels sorry for two horses turning a mill, like two “slaves”:

“Ces êtres, dits animaux, me font grande peine parce qu’ils ne peuvent pas exprimer aux êtres dits humains ce qu’ils pensent. Rien qu’à les voir ainsi, on se rend compte, réellement, qu’il y a dans leurs cerveaux beaucoup de

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<sup>31</sup> Diallo 76-77. Emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup> These two close friends are separated just before they are both sent to France. (Diallo 93-94)

chooses qu'il eût été bon de savoir pour dissiper leurs souffrances.

**Malheureusement les humains croient que les animaux n'ont été créés que pour être mis de la sorte en leur pouvoir.” (58)**

Diallo's reference to the unfortunate situation of these horses can be compared to that of Africans like Diallo and Demba Sow. The incapacity of the horses to speak is comparable to the Africans' inability to speak French, and thus to communicate with their “masters.” Demba Sow's response continues the analogy:

**“Que veux-tu faire contre le silence de ces pauvres diables? Que veux-tu faire contre le profit que les hommes tirent d'eux? Tu n'y peux rien.**

**Même si les animaux parlaient, les hommes n'auraient pas pitié, tant que les forces ne seraient pas égales entre eux et, si les bêtes ne deviennent pas semblables à l'homme, elles resteront toujours en son pouvoir.” (58)**

He clearly explains the reasons for opting to assimilate: they cannot do anything to stop the colonists from profiting from them, they have realized that even if they learn French the colonists will not be sympathetic to their plight, and so they must try to remake themselves in the French image if they can have any hope of one day escaping their domination. In Force-Bonté, Demba Sow tends to speak in the voice of France and of the *assimilés*, and in playing this important role tries to teach Diallo the officially recommended path. Diallo, however much he would like to believe that this path will lead to success, ultimately rejects it in favor of this endeavor (Force-Bonté) to convince

the French that the Africans are already their brothers and their equals, and that they should not be forced to abandon their cultures to remain forever subservient to France.<sup>33</sup>

One final example, another animal analogy, again demonstrates the unpraiseworthy conduct of the French. At the tirailleur camp at Fez, Diallo and some other soldiers are fishing in the river. One soldier asks another why he catches fish by offering them worms, and he responds that he is teaching them to eat. He is then asked, “Et pour quelle raison te dévoues-tu à les éduquer ainsi?” – a question which provokes laughs from the others.

Mais le plaisir tout d'un coup s'arrête. Il ne rit plus. Il regarde autour de lui pour contrôler l'attention générale, et dit: “C'est pour pouvoir leur montrer le soleil.” Mais tandis que nos frères riaient, un ami pensait...

Nous sommes méchants de retirer de l'eau ces pauvres petits, qui meurent opprêssés par le feu du soleil et étranglés par le fer courbe que l'homme misérable a su inventer. Ne devrions-nous pas comprendre leur droit à la liberté, par notre propre besoin de vivre? (83-84)

This incident, like the one about the horses, can be interpreted as an analogy of the colonial situation. Thus the “feu du soleil” becomes the deadly fusillades of the war, and the “fer courbe” European guns and cannons. Worse yet, an African in the culture and civilization of France is a fish out of water.

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<sup>33</sup> A similar exchange between Diallo and Sow occurs later, with Sow equating the Africans to birds with plucked wings and suggesting that Diallo think much less if he doesn't want to become forever an “étudiant tourmenté.” (Diallo 75)

Interestingly, this fish out of water analogy bears a striking resemblance to one used by Gustave Le Bon against the theory of assimilation in his *Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples*. Arguing that the colonies should be governed by systems like their own, not by institutions imposed upon them by the metropole, Le Bon wrote: “Autant vaudrait tâcher de persuader aux poissons de vivre dans l'air, sous prétexte que la respiration aérienne est pratiquée par tous les animaux supérieurs” (104). While I am not suggesting that Diallo read Le Bon's text, it seems possible that this is more than a coincidence. Given that many of Diallo's French friends were of higher classes in French society, I think it is reasonable to suggest that at least one of them could have been familiar with the well-known Le Bon's ideas. Therefore, it is plausible that during any of Diallo's lunches or longer stays with these friends he could have been introduced to such ideas in conversation, possibly even when discussing the Africans' current situation.

Rather than being castigated for trying to better his personal situation by working within the confines of the dominant system or for writing a stylistically imperfect book, Diallo should be commended for deftly weaving his subversive message into his simple and naive-sounding story. His text is far more complicated and nuanced than previously suggested by critics, who have noted his assimilationist tendencies but not the underlying antiracist and pro-equality commentary, much less his rejection of assimilation. Although Force-Bonté is the only available work by a tirailleur about his life in France during and just after World War I, and thus represents our only firsthand glimpse of these men's experiences, we can also look to Lucie Cousturier for further information regarding the opinions of some of Diallo's compatriots.

Cousturier's anti-military sentiments have been brought to light above, as has her strong interest in the welfare and education of the African soldiers fighting in France's war. Despite the fact that she, like her fellow French citizens, tends to speak of the tirailleurs as children, she still demonstrates an enormous amount of respect and concern for them and their well-being. Cousturier addresses individual tirailleurs by their first names, but in her book also includes their last names, a mark of respect not accorded Africans by everyone, such as Léon Gaillet in *Coulibaly*. In *Des inconnus chez moi* she not only documents her very successful efforts to teach many tirailleurs to read and write in French, she also provides for them a forum to voice some of their objections to their treatment by the French. As noted above, some of the Africans expressed to her their dismay and resentment regarding the consistent French use of *français tirailleur* when addressing them. In other instances various students of Cousturier's open up to her about their situations.

Ghibi Tangara, one of her most resolute students, gives the prevailing opinion on General Mangin and his efforts to establish the *Force noire*: “Colonel Mangin, j'étais connaître lui, bien gentil pour parler tous les tirailleurs; mais Mangin général, je connais pas lui; seulement, beaucoup des camarades ils sont dire que lui, général Mangin, il a commencé mauvais depuis la guerre, lui y a faire foutus tous les Sénégalais” (188). Tangara also later explains how he came to join the army, illustrating the kinds of methods to which recruitment officers resorted:

“Moi, jamais engager. Ils sont forcer moi pour faire soldat. Français, 1912, ils faire chercher tirailleurs partout pour Maroc. Dans les forêts-là tout

près mon village, pas moyen pour trouver garçons, tous cachés. Alors, commandant du cercle il va commander grande chasse pour les bœufs sauvages. Tous les garçons contents pour chasser, tous sortir pour courir partout. Après, tous rassemblés devant les bœufs qui tués. Dans ce moment-là, officier il va prendre noms de tous les garçons avec nom de ton parent, avec place de ton maison pour plus laisser sauver personne. C'est comme ça qu'ils sont prendre moi pour soldat."

He continues, telling Cousturier that although he was flushed out by this ruse he was not taken by force. However, after three days of refusing to join the army voluntarily, he was told that his mother would have to go in his place, and only when the soldiers came to imprison her did he agree to become a soldier. He maintained contact with his mother via letters, but she died soon after his departure for Morocco. (195-96)

Later, Ghibi Tangara experiences problems similar to Diallo's, as he tries to work his way through the administrative process to return to Senegal. The Major to whom he was attached deviously fixes his paperwork so that instead of being sent home as he requested, Tangara is actually scheduled to be sent to the major's hometown of Espalion, to work for him there. Tangara receives his papers, and as he is carrying them to the office in Saint-Raphaël he glances at them, and realizes that they say "permission en France," instead of Senegal as he is expecting. A friend of his helps him decipher the document – "Lui m'a expliqué bien comment Monsieur Major il était écrire pour forcer moi quand même à rester ici. Parce que, si moi j'étais porter papiers-là dans le bataillon, moi fouti pour ma permission Sénégal." He brings the papers to Cousturier, who notes

with irony, “Et moi qui n’avais jamais pu lire sans sourire ces épisodes de nos romans historiques où l’on voit des courriers portant eux-mêmes à destination le pli qui renferme leur condamnation à mort! Je n’en sourirai plus désormais” (223-25). Amazingly, Tangara insists ““Faut pas croire moi fâché avec la France, fait-il tendrement à voix basse, ni avec Monsieur Major.”” Just a few lines later, however, it becomes clear that he is indeed angry with the officer for not believing him when he said he would gladly return to work for him after just a two month stay in Senegal: ““Mais jamais lui a voulu croire; c’est pour ça, moi toujours fâché avec lui; c’est ça moi je pense toujours, pas autre chose”” (226).

Despite this trick on the part of his officer, Tangara has developed such an attachment to him that he finds it difficult to leave his service. On a separate occasion, Cousturier’s students explain to her how the army goes about conditioning the tirailleurs to obey and even to revere their commanding officers. The method is similar to that used to train guard dogs: the soldiers are starved of affection and repeatedly beaten physically and mentally by the army and attach themselves immediately to the first kind person.

Si l’épouante et le réconfort sont savamment dosés, l’hallucination du sujet va jusqu’à lui faire prendre son capitaine pour son père, sa mère, ou le Bon Dieu. On comprend que soit fatal à cette illusion un changement trop fréquent d’officiers, comme il est arrivé dans cette dernière guerre; ou encore la rencontre de mères véritables, comme il est arrivé dans certains hôpitaux.

It is apparent to Cousturier that by indoctrinating these soldiers in this brutal manner, the army actually paved the way for the kind nurses in hospitals to become the “nefarious” influence they did. She cites Tangara as an example of a tirailleur who transferred his affection “*due réglementairement à son capitaine*” to a nice woman who took care of him when he left the hospital in Bordeaux, and notes that this is why the army quickly decided to segregate Africans into hospitals like the one at Fréjus. (214-15)

In other instances Cousturier’s students tell her of the poor conduct of their fellow soldiers, the French *poilus*. Amadou Hassan, who had been in the habit of sending her letters made up of fragments copied from his schoolbooks, one day writes something of his own inspiration, “soit faute de bibliothèque, soit parce que son inspiration personnelle s’est substituée impérieusement à tout autre texte.” His letter reads:

*Mon cher ami, nous sommes 2<sup>e</sup> ligne dans petit village qu'il pas trop logné (éloigné) a paris 20 kilomètr alors tous l'éropéen ils son gange dé permission pour allé perminade (promenade) en ville cé sénégalais seulement qui son gagne pas. le francés ils son dire le sénégalais qu'il faut donné cou de lamain pour gagné laguer alor tous le tirayer son mourir en france mais le francés ils sont regardé nous comme le sanimaux mais mon chere Madame le Sénégalais sont mié (mieux) que leropéen... (207-8)*

Cousturier does not comment on Hassan’s poignant stream of pent-up resentment toward the Europeans, but his belief that the tirailleurs are “better than” the Europeans is corroborated in other parts of her text. Early on in her relationship with the Africans she already notices that “les Sénégalais n’ont pas cent ruses, comme les poilus, pour alléger

les misères du service [. . .] Qu'un accident arrache l'un d'eux à sa compagnie, dans tous les cas il veut y rentrer. Fût-elle à la pire place sous les balles, elle lui apparaît comme un refuge" (46-47). Much later, she spells out the difference between the tirailleurs and the *poilus*: "Peu importe à un Français de changer de bataillon pourvu qu'il regagne l'arrière. Peu importe, au contraire, à un Sénégalais, d'aller au front ou à l'arrière pourvu qu'il regagne son bataillon" (213). Despite the over-generalization and exaggeration of this statement, it does reflect a belief held by others as well that the tirailleurs were very brave and loyal on the battlefields, as amply demonstrated in the literature published during and just after the war.

The theory of assimilation plays a more obvious and important role in Bakary Diallo's text, but a reference to it by Cousturier illustrates her disdain for this policy:

l'assimilation dessert l'originalité si l'on en juge par toutes les compositions de bons élèves, surtout par celles, peintes ou sculptées, des salons officiels. Si l'enseignement ne détruisait pas fatallement le génie, on ne pourrait concevoir une pareille quantité d'hommes, ayant librement choisi le métier de peintres, qui soient aussi totalement dépourvus de dons picturaux. (133)

Revealing that she has not completely abandoned some of the stereotypes of her day, she prefers the Africans in their innocent simplicity to the learned yet stifled Europeans. Faced with Mamady Kôné's reluctance to practice writing sentences using the verb "aimer" – he is uncomfortable applying it freely to mundane objects and takes a few days to work up the courage to use it in a sentence – Cousturier wonders if "le fait de

comprendre difficilement n'est pas un signe d'intelligence." If this is true, she reasons, then the word "incompréhension" should be replaced with "inquiétude" and the word "intelligence" with "originalité." Cousturier considers herself lucky to have been granted the opportunity to get to know personally these African soldiers, clearly superior in her mind to European ones. (133-34)

## Conclusion

This in-depth consideration of Cousturier's and Diallo's crucial texts provides us today with a much clearer understanding of the nature and effects of the personal encounters which did in fact occur between "Tirailleurs et Ropéens" during and after World War I. In publishing his memoirs Diallo became the only voice of the tirailleurs sénégalaïs, aided in the dissemination of his message by Cousturier's efforts to give other African soldiers their voices, by teaching them French and by including their words in her book. Not only does this study prove wrong Shelby Cullom Davis' 1934 assertion that "the Senegalese tirailleurs have no spokesman [ . . . ] no black has left the historian materials with which to work" (11), but it also demonstrates that even today it is important to liberate these voices from the control of imperial rhetoric.

Ironically, despite her best efforts to free the tirailleurs from at least their linguistic subjugation by the army and its *français tirailleur*, Cousturier may have only further strengthened this domination by encouraging these individuals to improve their grasp of the French language. This may have deepened the belief of some, like Diallo, that it would be possible in the end for them to achieve assimilation. However, as

Diallo's ultimate, though somewhat reluctant, rejection of assimilation shows, it would never be enough just to learn the language of the master.

## **Chapter 4**

### **“La folie noire”<sup>1</sup>**

#### **The Interwar Years in France**

Having examined how West Africans came to be involved in World War I, how they were perceived by both civilians and the military during the war, and how some tirailleurs and French civilians developed close friendships and a mutual respect for each other, our focus now turns to the years after the war. This chapter explores the legacy in France of the tirailleurs’ participation in World War I from a cultural standpoint, focusing on the explosion and interconnectivity of interwar interest in Africa and things perceived to be African. While art historians and other scholars have demonstrated certain links between modernist art and the jazz phenomenon, the idea that the presence of the Africans in France during the war had a larger impact on interwar French society has not been adequately addressed by recent scholarship.

Members of the artistic, ethnographic, and political arenas of French society were pursuing interests in the colonies during the years leading up to the war, but I argue that these interests became much more widespread and fashionable after the war because of the new direct connections with Africa established by individual members of French society. As a consequence of personal encounters during the war, French perception of the West Africans had transformed them from savages into children, yet in the interwar

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<sup>1</sup> This is the title of an article by Miguel Zamacois in *Les Annales politiques et littéraires* (December 6, 1925). See below for citations from this article.

years they were once again relegated to the status of savages. In my opinion, the first change in terminology, from savage to child, exemplified the new attitude toward West Africans. This enabled the French to befriend the tirailleurs, give them presents, and welcome them into their lives during the war. Their demotion during the interwar years back to savages – although now savages with interesting art and music – reflects the French peoples' need to absolve themselves of the debt owed the tirailleurs for their participation in the war. Simultaneously, this perceptual shift helped to satisfy French society's postwar need for an infusion of inspiration and vitality into a culture severely traumatized by the war itself.

The years immediately following the war were characterized by a “profound sadness” (Rearick 37) as the French struggled to cope with the enormous loss of life and the physical destruction of their land. Countless memorials to the fallen *poilus* were erected all across the countryside during the 1920s, but at the same time “The *années folles* or ‘crazy years’ were a time of madcap living it up for some people” as they tried to forget the war. (43) As Charles Rearick notes, “After the early twenties the producers of popular culture turned away from the subject of the war” (60), catering to the people who “wanted to forget the darkness and pain and sacrifices of the war” (68). I argue that what Rearick calls “The Wish to Be Elsewhere” also played a large part in French interest in Africa during these years, as movies, books, and even music and dance provided them with a means to satisfy this need for *dépaysement*.

It is significant that the tirailleurs themselves were almost completely absent from 1920s French society – after having been repatriated soon after the war, they seem to

have been largely forgotten as the French struggled to recover. Although there were tirailleurs present at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, it was only much later, on the eve of World War II when France found itself in need of soldiers to face the growing threat of Hitler's Germany, that the idea of their military usefulness in Europe again became important. Paradoxically, it is during the 1920s that the French turned to idea of the "primitive" for inspiration and distraction, demonstrating a new cultural (but essentially imaginary) connection to black Africa. This wave of interest in this part of the colonial empire was not limited to mere collecting of African art or writing of colonial-themed novels, since as the French discovered and enjoyed African things they also transformed them. The French appropriation of African forms in art and music for example, represents a certain taming or civilizing, not of the African but of his cultural products. This sort of reverse assimilation continued throughout the 1920s and culminated in the 1931 *Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris*, at which all the elements discussed below were blended into one huge exotic, yet civilized, spectacle.

Oddly, at just the moment when the French began to assimilate African cultural manifestations into their own society, the *Parti colonial* and the *Groupe colonial* in Parliament shifted away from advocating assimilation of the Africans to the more economically-based program of association with them. Not a political party in today's sense of the term, the *Parti colonial* was really more of a lobby or political interest group. Initially organized in the 1890s, the *Parti colonial* "comprised the members of various societies,<sup>2</sup> each with an interest in a particular area or a particular aspect of French

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<sup>2</sup> Two of the most important of these many societies were the *Comité de l'Afrique française* (founded in 1890), which hoped to effect the unification of France's colonies in Africa, and the *Union Coloniale*

expansion. For the most part these members were professional men – journalists, writers, businessmen and politicians" (Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, "French 'Colonial Party'" 101-2). In Parliament, the *Groupe colonial de la Chambre*, formed in 1892, included legislators of widely varying interests, often linked only by their membership in the *Parti colonial*.<sup>3</sup>

During the years before World War I, "two characteristics of the *parti colonial* stand out above all others: its diminutive size and its enormous influence" (126). However, perhaps the *Parti's* greatest failure had been its inability to inspire passion for colonization within French society at large – something that Andrew and Kanya-Forstner argue was accomplished in four years by World War I, after which "the image of the *tirailleur sénégalais* charging the enemy lines remained imprinted on the mind of every French schoolboy" (128).

The *Groupe colonial* "began the inter-war years in a position of real influence and a mood of considerable optimism" under the leadership of its president Albert Sarraut, who also became minister of colonies in 1920. (Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, "Groupe Colonial" 842-44) During these years the *Parti colonial* saw as its task to create "une mentalité impériale" in France, but was unable to obtain either the moral or financial support it needed from the administration. (Ageron, "Colonies" 35) Despite French people's new awareness of the colonies and the support they had provided during the

*Française* (1893), which focused on business interests in the colonies. See Ageron, *France coloniale* 157; Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, "French 'Colonial Party'" 102-3; and Persell 26-36. Persell gives a list of financial, commercial and industrial enterprises associated with the *Union Coloniale Française*, such as the Banque de France, the Chemins de fer coloniaux, Armand Colin et Cie, the Compagnie française des cables télégraphiques, and Hachette et Cie, among many others. (30-31)

<sup>3</sup> Persell analyzes the composition of the *Groupe colonial* based on members' constituencies, political affiliations, business affiliations, parliamentary and government assignments, and professions. (54-74).

war, national enthusiasm for French colonialism and the *mise en valeur* of the colonies did not last long. “The pressing need for capital to rebuild at home and increasing tensions between settlers and native populations throughout the empire rendered the blandishments of the propaganda societies less and less relevant” (Persell 141).

In the mid-1920s, despite suggestions from some regional councils (such as in Allier) and chambers of commerce (in Nancy) that the government consider selling some of its colonies, there was a slight rise in parliamentary interest in the Empire, due in part to the *guerre du Rif*. (Ageron, "Colonies" 43) Growth in commercial activity between France and the colonies during this period also helped to stimulate interest in France's overseas possessions.<sup>4</sup> Toward the end of the 1920s, in a climate of renewed interest, the *Parti colonial* determined that the time was right to start a campaign of colonial propaganda.

This time, however, rather than focusing as they had in the early 1920s on the *mise en valeur* of the colonies and the amount of money the French would have to spend to implement this program, they presented the colonies as a source of profit and of power. Beginning in 1927, the government instituted at Albert Sarraut's suggestion “une semaine nationale de propagande coloniale,” aimed at the public at large and including radio broadcasts, public conferences, and colonial-themed publications. After the success of the film La Croisière noire (1926), more documentaries and propaganda films were produced

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<sup>4</sup> Ageron cites a few figures: “Le commerce de la France avec ses colonies, qui représentait en valeur 12,2% de son commerce total en 1913, 11,9% en 1920 et 11,4% en 1924, progressait après 1925, atteignant désormais 13,5% du total en 1926, 14,4% en 1928 et 15,1% en 1929. En cette année 1929 où les échanges avec les colonies atteignirent leurs chiffres maxima de l'entre-deux-guerres en monnaie constante, la France dirigeait vers ses colonies, dépendances et mandats, 19,3% de ses exportations et y achetait 12,4% de ses importations. Cela représentait presque un doublement des échanges de 1913, pour un empire il est vrai agrandi” (“Colonies” 43). See also Persell 153-57.

and filled theater seats. (Ageron, "Colonies" 45-46) Books such as Gide's Voyage au Congo (1927) also sparked public interest in the colonies (despite its unfavorable depiction of colonization), as did those of Paul Morand, André Demaison and others. (46-47) The press, not only in Paris but throughout France, also began to include the colonies as a regular topic in newspaper columns, and the celebrations around the 1930 *Centenaire de l'Algérie* also contributed greatly to press and public interest. (49)

Yet despite Albert Sarraut's impassioned pleas in his 1931 book Grandeur et servitude coloniales and the hype surrounding the *Exposition Coloniale* of the same year, public support for the colonial project seems to have faded quickly (again) once the exhibits were packed up. The same economic crisis that hit France in the early 1930s also took its toll on the Empire, even though the *Parti colonial* had been promoting it as the last great export market. A brief and belated effort in 1931 on the part of the government to stimulate the financial situation in the colonies helped little. This last failure of the *mise en valeur* campaign ended the influence of the *Groupe colonial* in Parliament, and it did not reorganize after the 1932 elections. (Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, "Groupe Colonial" 845) Having misread French people's interest in cultural aspects of the colonies just after the war as a sign of their willingness to invest in the development of the Empire, the *Parti colonial* brought about its own demise by so ardently advocating *mise en valeur*.

**“Alors la mode s’en empara avec indiscretion”:<sup>5</sup> French society absorbs African culture**

This chapter explores this interest in cultural aspects of the colonies, illustrating how African cultural creations and ones perceived to be African were discovered, discussed, experienced, and appropriated by French society in the interwar years, especially in the 1920s. As Miguel Zamacoïs, author of a 1925 article for the *Annales politiques et littéraires* put it,

Une des caractéristiques, si j’ose dire, caractérisées, des ‘temps nouveau’, c’est le goût de l’exotisme dans tous les domaines, et c’est, particulièrement, l’espèce de ‘folie noire’ qui, inoculée aux hommes blancs, il y a quelques années déjà, est en train de s’intensifier avec une vigueur dont commencent à s’émouvoir les faces pâles abritant encore un cerveau équilibré, et que l’inquiétude pâlit davantage de jour en jour.

(591)

Zamacoïs insists that he is not the enemy of the Africans, and imitating *français tirailleur* he writes, ““Moi commencer par dire à vous moi pas du tout ennemi du nègre et reconnaître lui pas être obligatoirement côtelette à crocodile et bon pour existence inférieure”” (591). He is, however, completely appalled by French society’s overwhelming fascination with the *nègre*, his music, his dances, in short with the whole “*folie noire*.” Although some did agree to varying degrees with this opinion, many others participated enthusiastically in this new trend. Yet as they did so, the French undertook a

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<sup>5</sup> This is from Malherbe, “Chronique,” and is cited below in context.

transformation and taming of the more wild, savage, or frenetic aspects of the music, dance and art that they perceived to be coming straight from the “jungles” of Africa. The verb “s’emparer de,” used by Henry Malherbe in a 1929 article about jazz, accurately sums up this process, as it refers to taking possession of something and making it one’s own, which is exactly what the French did during the 1920s with regard to cultural objects either from Africa or thought of as being African.

### *La Musique nègre*

As the Parisian art collector and gallery owner Paul Guillaume demonstrated by scheduling his *Fête nègre* to coincide with an exhibit of African sculptures, French people in the 1920s were interested in more than just the plastic arts of black peoples. A recent work by an art historian on the close connections between modernist art and popular entertainment in the interwar years explains that

from fauvism and cubo-futurism to surrealism and purism, many of the artists deeply involved with African sculpture were also keenly aware of African-American music and dance and responded to them in images. [ . . ] Moreover, the artists, writers, and musicians who participated in *le tumulte noir* were very much a part of the generations for whom the new musical rhythms and dance steps were inseparable from profound changes in more than their artistic tastes. (Blake 2-3)

In the artistic world as well as in French society in general, “the term *l’art nègre* was as likely to call to mind the music and dance of black America as it was to evoke the

sculpture of black Africa" (5). For Stéphen Chauvet, author of Musique nègre (1929) and of Les arts indigènes des colonies françaises (1924), this close link between art and music is indispensable to an understanding of *l'âme nègre*. If one has not been to Africa, Chauvet recommends a certain mental preparation in order to appreciate this music fully:

il faut, à l'aide de nombreuses lectures et méditations, pouvoir se figurer l'ambiance africaine et se remémorer les grands facteurs religieux, sociaux, individuels..., qui ont joué un rôle, plus ou moins important, dans la genèse desdits airs de musique. On peut même dire que la connaissance des autres arts nègres, la sculpture entre autres, est indispensable pour apprécier la musique nègre, car tous les arts se tiennent et s'expliquent réciproquement [...] et qu'ils extériorisent, qu'ils objectivent les mêmes aspirations, conscientes et subconscientes, de l'âme nègre. (Musique 13-14)

In Musique nègre Chauvet focuses on African music, explaining in detail the various instruments used by different peoples, and including the scores for many *airs de musique* gathered by André Gide, René Trautmann, Dr. A. Cureau and others. Although the artistic community was interested in African music such as that described by Chauvet, French society in the interwar years was on the whole much more fascinated by an African-American music: jazz.

Accounts differ as to who first introduced jazz to France, but they tend to agree that this occurred during World War I. Tyler Stovall gives precedence to the drummer Louis Mitchell from Philadelphia, who played jazz concerts in Paris in late 1917 with his

band, the Seven Spades. (*Paris Noir* 37) Others point to the bandleader James Reese Europe, whose band the Hellfighters was attached to the 369<sup>th</sup> US Army Infantry Regiment of the same nickname. When this band toured France, in 1917-1918, entertaining soldiers and civilians alike, "The uniqueness of [their] music took the French by surprise. Since his orchestra played many tunes already familiar to audiences, the novelty was not what Europe performed, but how he and his band played (Jackson 27)" For others, jazz first arrived via Parisian nightclubs.<sup>6</sup>

Even as the French tried to determine what jazz was exactly and where it had come from they began the process of "s'emparer de," either by claiming it as their own or by transforming it into something French. According to some, jazz was American and the word itself came from a Chicago musician named Jasbo Brown whose fans encouraged him by yelling "“Encore Jasbo!”" or the shortened "“Encore Jazz!”" This account, which dates from 1924, indicates that "Jazz et sa bande, autrement dit le jazz-band" moved to New York, and that in 1918 their imitators came to Europe, where "ils furent fureur."<sup>7</sup> Yet in 1932 the Belgian poet, lawyer, and jazz enthusiast Robert Goffin offered other possible explanations for the origins of the term "jazz." He pointed to an Irving Schwerké

<sup>6</sup> Jackson 31. Cœuroy and Schaeffner write that "En France, le jazz a été importé en 1918, sous forme embryonnaire, au Casino de Paris" (105). See also Hoerée 214. A 1946 text, *La Musique en France entre les deux guerres, 1919-1939* simply notes, "Il arriva dans les bagages de l'armée américaine" (Dumesnil 54). Harvey Levenstein, author of *Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age* (1998) skips over this debate: "Although the origins of jazz in Paris are obscure, its popularity among the French seems connected with a general infatuation with Africa and *negritude*, at least among the 'in crowd,' which was fed by postwar disillusionment with the rational-industrialized world. In 1921, Paris night spots began importing African American jazz musicians for the French patrons, parenthetically giving some Americans their first real exposure to that music form" (243).

<sup>7</sup> Schneider, L. 223-24. See Bauér 343 for the same story, using the spelling "Jazbo." According to Cœuroy and Schaeffner this story is possible, but they also mention a New Orleans expression "Jazz them, boys (qui correspondrait à *Hardi, les gars*)" (101).

as having fixed “avec assez de discernement le berceau du jazz à la Nouvelle-Orléans, vieille ville française,” and as having declared “que le mot jazz est la racine du mot français jaser et que le jazz serait un caquetage” (44). Goffin clearly labels him as a good patriotic Frenchman, but Schwerké was actually an American from Wisconsin.<sup>8</sup> In an article in Le Temps reviewing Goffin’s book, an unimpressed Henry Malherbe pointed out this and other mistakes and inconsistencies.<sup>9</sup> After citing several other possibilities, including one which emphasizes jazz’s African roots, holding that the term derived from “le patois des nègres en leur pays natal: l’Afrique,” Goffin concludes that “on ne connaît rien de précis quant à cette étymologie et ce sera d’ici quelque cent ans une belle besogne pour les linguistes et les épigraphistes. D’ailleurs que nous importe [...]” (46-47). Not only were various etymological origins attributed to the word “jazz,” the meaning of the word varied as well: “Jazz was, after all, seen as both a form of dancing and a music to dance to; the distinction was not always clear in the minds of audiences where the music and the dancing were often equated” (Jackson 31). Further confusing the issue, people perceived differing degrees of American, African, and even European influence on this music, and frequently failed to differentiate between Africans and African-Americans when speaking about jazz and musicians. Jackson has noted that “with African roots, jazz

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<sup>8</sup> Although he spells the name “Swerke” Goffin does appear to be referring to Schwerké. Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians lists Schwerké (1893-1975) as having been born and educated in Wisconsin. He went to Paris in 1921 and was the music correspondent for the Chicago Tribune and the Musical Courier from 1921-1940. In 1927 he published privately Kings Jazz and David (Jazz et David, tois), comprised of twenty-seven studies (some in English and some in French) on music and modern musicians, including jazz. After spending the Second World War in Switzerland, Schwerké returned to Wisconsin. (Slonimsky)

<sup>9</sup> Malherbe, “Plaidoirie” note 2. Malherbe also complained, “Il fait de la musicologie délirante. [...] Nous attendions d’un avocat de sa qualité qu’il dépouillât le dossier du jazz avec autrement de calme et de clairvoyance.”

could easily be seen as a ‘primitive’ music coming from a part of the world that France was still trying to civilize in the interwar years. In a reversal of the ‘civilizing mission,’ jazz music was bringing primitivism to France” (6).

The aspect of jazz that seems to have caused the most comment and controversy was its rhythm, so different from that of European music up to the interwar years. Writing for the prestigious Revue musicale in 1924, the American composer Marion Bauer summed it up nicely: “Le rythme est une manifestation physiologique et matérielle, ce qui reste du sauvage dans l’homme. Aujourd’hui on constate un retour au rythme, à la brutalité, au bruit, réaction contre une période de préciosité et d’intellectualisme.” She continued, however, revealing an underlying bias hinted at throughout the article: “Le ‘jazz’ est le véritable enfant de l’époque; mais il ne faut pas oublier qu’il est aussi l’enfant des bas-fonds du monde civilisé et qu’il provient des couches inférieures de la société” (36). Although Bauer was not the only one to voice such an opinion, her statement stands out as being particularly categorical. Despite the fact that she alludes to typically French views of racial hierarchy, her attitude may well have been influenced by American racism of this period as well. Unlike that of other critics, she does not base her statements on an in-depth study of the qualities and structure of the music itself, but mostly on her image of the people who play it. While Bauer admits that “le ‘jazz’ a de l’avenir” (36), ethnomusicologist André Schaeffner and critic André Cœuroy go farther in their estimation that jazz is here to stay: “En vain fermera-t-on l’oreille au jazz. Il est vie. Il est art. Il est ivresse des sons et des bruits. Il est joie

animale des mouvements souples. Il est mélancolie des passions. Il est nous d'aujourd'hui" ("Romantisme" 224).

As Schaeffner and Cœuroy note at the beginning of this 1926 article, "le jazz a provoqué des colères. De violentes controverses se sont élevées sur sa valeur d'art, sur sa portée, sur son influence" (221). In an effort to understand the public's true feelings regarding this new music, in 1925 Schaeffner and Cœuroy conducted a survey in *Paris-Midi*, and received overwhelmingly favorable responses.<sup>10</sup> They reprinted some of these responses at the end of their 1926 book, simply titled Le Jazz.<sup>11</sup> As Jackson has rightly noted, this book is in fact not so much about jazz itself as about its roots and "the musical qualities believed to be possessed by all blacks, regardless of when or where they lived."<sup>12</sup> It explores the passage of various musical elements and instruments from Africa to America in such chapters as "Du tambour au *balafon*," "Le rythme chez les nègres," "Du *balafon* au xylophone," "Banjo," and "Naissance du jazz." As do many of their contemporaries, Cœuroy and Schaeffner link jazz to the earlier negro spirituals,<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This survey consisted of three questions: (1) "Le Jazz-Band est-il pour vous 'de la musique'? De quel ordre sont vos impressions devant le jazz?" (2) "Exerce-t-il une influence sur l'esthétique contemporaine et plus particulièrement sur les formes musicales?" (3) "Pensez-vous que puisse se créer une musique de Jazz originale et indépendante, obéissant à ses lois propres?" (Cœuroy and Schaeffner 116-117) Jackson specifies that they surveyed "musicians, artists, critics, and men of letters" (129), but in Le Jazz Schaeffner and Cœuroy only state that they asked their questions of "une large audience" (116). In his article refuting many of their assertions, Arthur Hoerée states that the survey was limited to "'spécialistes en vue'" (215).

<sup>11</sup> The responses reproduced in the book are all from composers and others with a clear interest in music, for example: Lionel de la Laurencie, Président de la Société de Musicologie; Albert Roussel, Compositeur; André Tessier, Musicologue et historien de l'art; Jacques Heugel, Éditeur de musique et homme de lettres. (115-136)

<sup>12</sup> Jackson 129. Jackson states that "Asserting both jazz's African roots and its connection with other kinds of black American music such as spirituals, *Jazz* is more an early ethnomusicological study of a racially based *musique nègre* than an explanation of jazz" (129). In contrast, Jackson describes Robert Goffin's above-mentioned Aux frontières du jazz as "the first book-length work in French that treated jazz as it actually existed in the 1920s [...] Goffin explored the history and character of jazz generally before offering a series of miniature portraits of the various performers of the 1920s" (133).

<sup>13</sup> See for example Bauer 33 and Jeanneret 25.

describing it as “tantôt [l’]envers brutal des cantiques spirituels des nègres, tantôt leur couple équivalent instrumental” (96). According to Cœuroy and Schaeffner, the original, African roots of this “musique américaine d’inspiration primitivement nègre” cannot be denied. (107)

A favorable review of Le Jazz, published in the February 1927 Revue Pleyel, a music journal, convincingly explains what it is about *musique nègre* in general, not only jazz, that makes Europeans uncomfortable. The author, Boris de Schloezer, differentiates between the European and African conceptions of music, saying that for Europeans music is

un ornement, une distraction, ou, tout au plus, une sorte de sublimation de la vie, une transposition de la réalité sur un plan idéal. Tout l’effort de la culture musicale européenne a consisté à purifier le son musical, à le débarrasser du bruit, à le détacher de la réalité, en en éloignant tous les éléments qui pouvaient rappeler son origine ‘naturelle’ et ses sources physiologiques.

In complete contrast, “la musique chez les Noirs, aussi bien en Afrique qu’en Amérique, remplit une fonction vitale; le Nègre joue, chante et danse comme il respire, comme il marche, comme il prie et travaille,” and Schloezer adds that “L’art ici fait partie de l’existence pratique, il est intimement lié à la vie et ne peut en être détaché” (160). He reasons that Europeans are somewhat unnerved by this music because “la musique nègre effarouche constamment notre pudore et découvre cette nudité primitive que nous avions si bien réussi à dissimuler” (160). He notes that the only way Europeans have been able

to accept this music into their society is by deforming its essential character and enclosing it in music halls.<sup>14</sup> Many French people of the 1920s appreciated and enjoyed jazz precisely for its wild and “primitive” rhythms and sounds, and felt that it offered inspiration and a new vitality to their own culture, stressed and in decline in the wake of the war. Yet even as they enclosed it in music halls and French musicians transformed it into a French musical form, at least one critic voiced the opinion that the roots of jazz were European and that it had never really been an African phenomenon in the first place.

This critic, Arthur Hoerée, published an article also called “Le Jazz” in the October 1927 Revue musicale, a few months after Schloezer’s review of Le Jazz. Hoerée’s main argument, which he defends at great length, is that jazz is not a specifically African or African-American form of music, but that “le jazz [ . . . ] se trouve à l’intersection de plusieurs races, de plusieurs cultures et, parmi ses éléments hétérogènes ne compte, au demeurant, que deux sixièmes d’apports nègres et encore, un de ces deux éléments, le rythme, est commun aux Arabes.”<sup>15</sup> He states his position clearly: “Contrairement à l’idée répandue, je ne tiens pas le jazz pour une expression essentiellement nègre, mais pour une interprétation nègre d’un art de race blanche et d’origine européenne” (221), and goes on to explain this by analyzing the six elements of the foxtrot (which he defines as a musical form that uses the specific technique of jazz).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This sort of modification works both ways, however, and he reiterates Schaeffner and Cœuroy’s assertion that *les Nègres* recently appropriated European instruments and musical forms and deformed them to reintroduce “les joies de l’être physique, ses douleurs, les rythmes de son labeur et de ses danses” (Schloezer 161).

<sup>15</sup> Hoerée 215. For Hoerée even the issue of rhythm is questionable, since it is unclear whether the blacks of Côte d’Ivoire (who as slaves brought rhythm to America) borrowed it from the Arabs or vice versa.

<sup>16</sup> Hoerée 221 note 1. The six elements he describes are: *l’usage nègre de la batterie, le rythme nègre, la mélodie, l’harmonie, la chanson, and la mise en œuvre*.

Hoerée concedes that “les premiers jazzs<sup>17</sup> étaient nègres,” but disputes whether they were playing “de la musique nègre” and insists that in any case white musicians immediately and perfectly imitated them. (237) Arguing that jazz is rooted in a confluence of mostly white musical tendencies (admittedly assembled by Americans), Hoerée permits himself to state that “le jazz n'est donc plus un art nègre, mais en marge de l'art nègre,” and counsels that “ceux qui détestent l'art nègre peuvent donc ne pas détester le jazz. Il a évolué, s'est perfectionné, est susceptible de renouvellement: il est vivant” (239-40). Hoerée seems intent on minimizing the influence of black people on a form of music he considers to be fundamentally European. By asserting that jazz's roots are in European music and that it is only “une interprétation nègre” he virtually negates the African qualities of jazz which the public is applauding. In essence, Hoerée's argument is geared toward justifying a racist's enjoyment of a musical form that has been popularized by black musicians and remains dominated by them. In the November 1927 issue of the *Revue musicale*, André Schaeffner responded to Hoerée's lengthy discussion, criticizing his refusal to “saisir en de tels ‘éléments nègres’ la majeure partie de ce qui a proprement constitué le jazz” (“Réflexions” 73).

Regardless of the precise proportion of “éléments nègres” to “éléments européens” in strict musicological terms, it is clear that most French listeners perceived jazz to be a black musical style, and embraced it as emblematic of the *années folles* in which they lived. Outside these musicologists' and composers' circles, jazz was making a

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<sup>17</sup> Given the grammatical context in the original French sentence, the word “jazzs” here refers to musicians who played jazz. Though this usage does not appear to have been widespread, it points to the overall confusion surrounding jazz, and to the malleability of the word.

larger impact on French society, which often experienced it in music halls and bars in conjunction with dances such as the charleston. A July 1926 article in Le Temps, "Rythmes et nègres," talked about the conquest of Europe by the charleston and jazz:

Le jazz, ses trépidations et ses danses, l'accouplement inattendu de ses instruments qui consacrent la primauté du saxophone ont submergé littéralement la vieille Europe. Elle n'a offert aucune résistance. Surtout elle n'a rien trouvé par elle-même pour s'opposer à cette invasion. (R., "Rythmes et Nègres")

This reference to French culture's perceived inability to resist this "invasion" points to the general sense of France's moral and cultural decline in the wake of World War I. Additionally, the "vieille Europe" was being overrun not only by jazz and the charleston but this conquest was also enormously facilitated by increasingly prevalent modern technology. In January 1928 Pierre MacOrlan, sounding both alarmed and impressed, wrote of jazz's infiltration into people's homes, via the phonograph and radio:

La musique populaire, celle qui nous vient d'Amérique et qui nous impose son rythme pénètre dans la plupart des appartements à la ville et à la campagne. La T.S.F. et le phonographe sont des infatigables agents de propagande et si les jeunes filles de mon village s'essayent à danser le charleston ce n'est pas par snobisme mais par plaisir. [. . .] Un jazz-band, enregistré dans un bon disque qui tourne sur un bon appareil, est un dynamisme extraordinaire que l'on fait entrer dans son domicile. (195)

Writing for *Le Temps*, Henry Malherbe chronicled his own unease regarding this phenomenon, and hoped for an eventual return to “la musique des civilisés.” He too observed that jazz is everywhere:

Dans un milieu de grande tradition, à Pont-Audemer, j'ai entendu un jazz-band, venu à gros frais de Paris, résonner pendant une nuit, à l'occasion de fiançailles. Ce n'est pas seulement dans les théâtres, les dancings, les restaurants et les cafés qu'éclatent sans arrêt ces chants aigus et pressants. Voici qu'ils sont devenus aussi les musiques obligées des fêtes familiales.

("Chronique")

Malherbe also mentions the phonograph and radio as important vehicles of transmission of this music since the early 1920s: “Alors la mode s'en empara avec indiscretion. De tous côtés, théâtres, orchestres grands et petits, phonographes et appareils de T.S.F. nous instruisirent de cette branche populaire de la musique américaine.”<sup>18</sup> References such as these which attribute jazz to America do not contradict the perception of jazz as “African,” since during these years the musicians who played jazz were almost always black. The fact that they were also American was a technicality that did not bar many from attributing to this music a substantial African heritage brought to America during the slave trade.

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<sup>18</sup> Malherbe, "Chronique." Regarding the prevalence of radios during this period, Jackson explains that "Radio became an established medium in the early 1920s [...] and] by the end of the 1920s, there were some 500,000 radios throughout France. Reflecting patterns of performance in other venues, jazz music soon became part of regular radio broadcasts [...] (Jackson 106). Jordan notes that a glance at weekly radio guides in 1925 reveals "listings for 'Radio-Jazz' in the programs of almost every station, both state controlled and private" (139). By the end of 1939, there were some 4,700,000 radios in French households. (Rearick 219)

With the onset of the Depression and the departure of many American tourists and musicians from France, the furor over American jazz abated somewhat, and in 1932 Malherbe wrote of jazz: "il a légèrement perdu en vogue. Ses charmes paraissent assez usés. Dans la plupart de nos villes d'eaux, nous ne sommes plus mitraillés nuit et jour par les pétardants orchestres noirs" ("Plaidoirie"). From a high of 1,910,000 foreign tourists in France in 1929, the number fell to 390,000 in 1935, making it increasingly difficult for the French "to insist that the worldwide economic problems would not seriously afflict France" (Rearick 127). With rising unemployment came an upsurge of xenophobia, directed more at immigrants than tourists, such that "By the end of 1931 French musicians were beginning to picket and to interrupt foreign orchestras, explaining to sympathetic bystanders the desperate conditions that justified their actions" (Weber, Hollow Years 91).

Jazz did not by any means disappear, though, and as Jackson has noted it simply underwent a transformation. Already in the late 1920s Jean Wiéner, Darius Milhaud and other avant-garde musicians had begun to play jazz in ways that made it seem more familiar to French ears. A 1931 conference given by Gérard Bauër had a musical component, during which Ray Ventura's band, made up of white musicians, played traditional French songs in a jazz style:

Après avoir fait entendre, avec le succès le plus vif, les plus jolis airs de chez nous, c'est-à-dire les vieilles chansons de France qui sont dans toutes les mémoires: *Les Cloches de Nantes, Malbrough, Au Clair de la Lune*, etc., antiques refrains qui, passant par son jazz, prennent un éclat, une

couleur, un rythme incomparables, l'orchestre de Ray Ventura donne maintenant une sorte de pot pourri irrésistible: *Trente Ans d'Opérette au Jazz.*<sup>19</sup>

The audience thoroughly enjoyed the performance: “Le public s’amuse, s’enthousiasme, entraîné dans le tourbillon joyeux de cette jeunesse chantante, dansante et menant un train d’enfer. Collégiens et chef sont acclamés, rappelés, acclamés encore” (Bauér 347). The whiteness of Ventura’s and other bands represented an important transformation, and a move away from “the equation of jazz with black musicians” which held that “a truly authentic jazz band was [ . . . ] presumed to consist only of musicians with dark skin.”<sup>20</sup> Despite the increasing prevalence of white jazz musicians in France during the 1930s, even in 1934 some purists expressed uncertainty regarding their ability to write good, authentic jazz, noting that “le jazz est pour nous un produit essentiellement exotique” and doubting that a French composer could write jazz without years of experience:

Si le jazz donne jamais quelques œuvres de haute valeur (il en a déjà donné), elles viendront d’un homme du jazz qui en aura composé toute sa vie [ . . . ], et non pas de quelqu’un qui fera peut-être un ou deux essais dans un genre difficile et très éloigné de sa propre mentalité; ou bien, quoique cela me paraisse peu vraisemblable, d’un Européen qui consacrera à l’étude du jazz les quelques années nécessaires. (Pesquinne 280)

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<sup>19</sup> Bauér 347. The band is pictured with the conference proceedings.

<sup>20</sup> Jackson 127-28. In 1924 there had even been a court case in which the courts ruled in favor of the Empire theater, which had canceled a concert because one of the black players of the jazz band had been replaced by a white musician after falling ill. (Jordan 184)

French musicians' adaptation of jazz, begun in the late 1920s with trends such as Wiéner and Doucet's jazz renditions of classic French songs, continued during the Depression years as foreign musicians were perceived to be threatening the livelihoods of French ones.

The response was for French musicians to publicize their own ability to play jazz, especially in the nascent jazz press. Associating jazz in the minds of French audiences with French players became a way to preserve the scarce resources of Depression-era economics for the French themselves. (Jackson 149)

In this vein, throughout the 1930s Hugues Panassié's *Hot Club de France*, "France's premiere jazz appreciation society, disseminated jazz music to new audiences across the country. Through these changes in the performers, in the music, and in the listenership, French jazz musicians and fans created their own domestic jazz culture," thereby ensuring the continuing popularity of jazz in France even today. (2)

This taming of a music that at the beginning of the 1920s had been wild, primitive and only played by black musicians clearly demonstrates French society's appropriation of an art form perceived as being African. It mattered little that the people who introduced jazz music to France were really Americans, since in so-called color blind France if the musician was black, he was African, and thus his music was straight from the "jungle." Efforts by some, like Arthur Hoerée, to suggest that jazz had borrowed liberally from European music were few and far between, and can be considered both an early attempt to possess this popular musical style in the sense of Malherbe's "s'emparer

de" and a way of enabling racists to explain their appreciation of jazz. At the same time, the fact that French musicians played a domestic (and domesticated) version of jazz from the 1930s on enabled jazz to survive the dying of the "folie noire" trend from both an economic and a cultural standpoint.

### *Les Dances sauvages*

Decades before the jazz craze hit Paris, the French had been exposed to other forms of African-American music and dance. A "Note sur les principales danses modernes" in the 1932 book Les Spectacles à travers les ages explains that "on pourrait presque dire que les danses ont précédé l'engouement du public pour les arts exotiques. C'est ainsi que le *Cake-Walk* a précédé la découverte de l'Art Nègre" ("Note" 358). In the 1890s, the music hall show producer Gabriel Astruc had introduced the cakewalk to France, "claiming that by so doing he had brought *musique nègre* to Paris" (Jackson 88). According to the critic Gustave Fréjaville, "le cake-walk, en 1903, fut une véritable initiation du public parisien à la choréographie spéciale des noirs d'Amérique" (Fréjaville). This high-stepping, strutting dance was originally performed by plantation slaves to parody their owners, but "Not understanding the sarcasm, the owners instead offered a cake to the best dancer," and later, "in high-society cakewalk contests, the winner would 'take the cake'" (Jackson 19). Though at first the cakewalk was performed to marching tunes, ragtime music soon became a popular accompaniment to this dance. In the opinion of critic André Levinson, ragtime "positively dazzle[d] European audiences," and "This dancing, with its automaton-like quality, its marvellous flexibility

and rhythmic fantasy, is as impossible for us to reproduce as it is astounding to us to watch" ("Negro Dance" 287).

Just as whites differed from blacks in their conceptions of music, blacks were perceived as driven to dance by some primitive instinct, and adjectives such as "endiablé" and "possédé" were frequently used to describe them when they danced. Gérard Bauër offered the following explanation, very restrained in comparison to others of the period:

la musique et le chant s'accompagnent, chez le noir, de mouvements instinctifs. L'élément musical se glisse pour ainsi dire, dès qu'il prend vie, dans leurs pieds. La danse accompagne naturellement ces rapsodies [.] . . .  
Ce n'est plus une musique, cela devient une transe, un état d'insensibilité et d'oubli. (342)

Miguel Zamacoïs was openly horrified by this kind of "activité ahurissante," mingling references to scalping, sorcerers, and antelope-skin drums:

Les orchestres de nègres firent fureur, dont les participants (je n'ose pas dire les musiciens) excellaient dans ce tapage à rythme, de danses de scalp, de vociférations de sorciers, pratiqué chez eux à coups de calebasses remplies de cailloux, de bâtons entre-choqués et de tambours en peau d'antilope. (592)

Zamacoïs expresses a good deal more outrage regarding "la folie noire" than Levinson does, although the latter too expressed concern about the "devil-ridden European idlers" who "tend to retrograde towards the primitive" ("Negro Dance" 293). Levinson worried that "Au point de vue de notre civilisation, l'emprise nègre est, certes, un symptôme de

décadence de l'esprit européen" ("Loin du bal"). Despite the fact that their objections to "la folie noire" vary in scale, these two critics do agree that this wave of interest in so-called African music, dance, and art is a symptom of the decadence of European civilization. As such, it needs to be furiously combatted (Zamacoïs) or put into perspective and sampled with restraint (Levinson). Levinson does acknowledge that "jazz is henceforth admitted into the hierarchy of the arts," and that it will probably soon become the subject of scholarly study at the Sorbonne ("Negro Dance" 282), but he cautions that "we should not [ . . . ] jump to the conclusion that because of [his] extraordinary rhythmic gift alone the Negro dancer or musician should be taken seriously as an artist" (288).

Yet for those searching for an infusion of vitality desperately needed by a society struggling to find its bearings in the aftermath of the war, these musical forms and new dances provided a welcome source of inspiration. Ragtime dancing and then the foxtrot and charleston soon rivalled in popularity traditional French dances and other imports such as the Argentinian tango. André Warnod, in his 1922 *Les bals de Paris* explains that the difficult tango was for the serious dancers, whereas "le fox-trott fut vite à la portée de n'importe qui. De là sa vogue soudaine, absolue, générale. Il n'était plus permis de ne pas savoir danser, apprendre le tango demandait trop de temps, donc vive le fox-trott" (280). According to Warnod, next came the shimmy, cursed by dance instructors but admired by observers when demonstrated by Americans at the Ba-Ta-Clan. (283) During the war, the government had frowned upon dancing, "but the end of the war brought a thirst for

enjoyment, and [ . . . ] people danced everywhere, in nightclubs, cabarets, restaurants, tea-rooms and cafés – even at home” (Johnson and Johnson 28).

Warnod describes *dîners dansants*, occasions on which people moved tables aside even before dinner to dance to jazz bands: “On dansait en attendant le premier plat, on avalait au galop quelques bouchées, on repartait pour un nouveau fox-trott, le tango commençant vous empêchait de terminer le poisson et c'est la bouche pleine qu'on se mettait au paso doble...”<sup>21</sup> Soon people intoxicated by dance took it upon themselves to dance even at home: “On dansait le matin en peignoir, et en pyjama, [ . . . ] on dansait en s'habillant pour aller au dancing,” all to music played on the phonograph. (306-307) Warnod also describes *surprises-party*, in which a large group of revelers would converge upon some unsuspecting person’s residence, and in no time at all move the furniture, roll up the rugs, and start dancing.<sup>22</sup> Thus not only did French society “s’emparer de” both jazz and the dances associated with it in music halls and bars, but individuals’ own homes also were taken over and transformed into open spaces where zealous revelers could enjoy themselves.

The writer Michel Leiris also referred to these kinds of parties in a 1984 interview: ““after the war, with the vogue for *les surprises-parties*, I can say that, like most of the young people of my generation, I went dancing a great deal. We formed a small band of friends who went to the dance halls almost every night”” (Haggerty 98).

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<sup>21</sup> Warnod 302. See also Bertaut 272.

<sup>22</sup> Addressing the startled host of such an occasion, he recommends that even though they have descended upon you as you relax by the fire in your pyjamas, “C'est bien simple, passez votre smoking et amusez-vous avec vos hôtes imprévus. Tout le monde vous regarde et rit sous cape de votre surprise. Faites contre mauvaise fortune bon cœur. [ . . . ] Au fond vous n'êtes pas si mécontent que cela” (Warnod 311).

Such American-run nightclubs as Zelli's, Chez Florence, Le Grand Duc, and Bricktop's clustered near the Place Pigalle as Montmartre came to resemble New York's Harlem. "Both areas were the centers of the local black populations, and places where whites intent on exotic slumming could come to experience black culture" (Stovall, *Paris Noir* 43-44). Leiris fondly remembered Bricktop from her days at Le Grand Duc, saying that he frequently went to clubs in Pigalle and Montmartre: "The one I was at most often was called Le Grand Duc. The proprietor was an American colored woman, nicknamed Bricktop. [...] She was a fascinating person, truly an astonishing individual."<sup>23</sup>

In 1928 a different kind of bar opened, this time in Montparnasse on the rue Blomet: the Bal Nègre. "Like Bricktop's, it attracted people of all races and all walks of life with live music and dancing that continued till the wee hours of the morning. [...] More important, the Bal Nègre featured orchestras from the French West Indies" (Stovall, *Paris Noir* 97). While the club catered mostly to people from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and other Caribbean islands, African Americans also came to enjoy the music and to explore different aspects of black culture. As Stovall has noted, "the Bal Nègre is a good example of an important theme in Parisian African American life during the early 1930s: a strong curiosity about different forms of black culture from throughout the world." He adds that for African Americans in Paris during this period, "Black culture was a source of pride, not shame, and many thought its African source should therefore be explored and championed" (*Paris Noir* 99).

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<sup>23</sup> Haggerty 101-2. Bricktop and Josephine Baker became close friends once Baker came to Paris. (Rose 72)

Despite the fact that he refers to this club as the “Bal des Café-Crèmes [sic],” George F. Paul’s 1931 article in Abbott’s Monthly, “The Gayest Dance in Gay Paree!” gives many details about the club’s origins<sup>24</sup> and atmosphere.

Two hundred couples pack the floor, so that there is scarcely room to dance. Here are mostly white women, French, with an occasional German, English, Scandinavian, Spanish and other races of Europe. [. . .]

But it is the dark women that give the real verve and color to this melange. There they sway, tall ones and thin, fat ones and short, various blends of maroons and browns shading to a deepest black. They are well dressed, their costumes striking. (60)

They dance to “the jangling music, imbued with some subtle jungle influence,” as one woman in particular enters the room: “straight from the jungle is she [. . .] she moves with a stately grace, the dignity of a wild animal” (60). For Paul the whole scene is somewhat intimidating, even though it is enclosed inside a club:

Here is all that is primitive in man under the glaring lights of a Paris night, dancing to the tune of harsh and grating sounds in a hot and sticky atmosphere reeking with the heavy odors of many bodies, of tobacco and alcohol and varied perfumes. Here is a performance to which the jaded rich come crowding, and the little seamstress from around the corner. [. . .]

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<sup>24</sup> Paul describes the history of the “Bal des Café-Crèmes” as beginning when the Martinican owner of a rue Blomet establishment (called by Paul both a “wine-shop” and a “bistro”) invited his friends to gather there one evening, intending to ask them to support him in his political aspirations. Someone started singing, and soon everyone was dancing: “It was the greatest gathering of people of color from that far-away island ever held in Paris. They became as in the olden days, and danced ‘native.’” As this grew into a weekly event, the owner abandoned his political goals as “the stream of money almost overwhelmed him,” and he devoted his attention to the club. (Paul 5-6)

Thus has the jungle marched on Paris. (60)

A drawing by Sem,<sup>25</sup> “Le bal de la rue Blomet,” depicts white women dancing closely with black men whose lips and eyes are exaggerated, as in many images of the period, such as those by Paul Colin.<sup>26</sup> Michel Leiris also remembered going to the Bal Nègre with friends, but only to observe: ““we didn’t go there to dance. We went there to bask in the exotic ambiance, to listen to West Indian music and to watch the others dance”” (Haggerty 98).

Nightclubs and dance halls were not the only places offering opportunities to listen to jazz and watch dancing, there were also the music halls, found throughout Paris. (Jackson 95) According to Jules Bertaut, “The music hall became the most advertised diversion of the city” at a time when “The negro invasion was at its height, headed by that extraordinary phenomenon Josephine Baker, the black Bacchante, the unchained primitive savage who led the frenzied cohorts of the post-war world” (278-280). As journal and newspaper articles from the mid-1920s demonstrate, Baker was viewed as “a modern yet also a ‘primitive,’” and “her uninhibited sexuality as she danced both pleased and troubled, but its disturbing effects were mitigated by the French readiness to view her as a specimen of the African savage” (Rearick 81).

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<sup>25</sup> Sem, whose real name was Georges Goursat (1863-1934), drew caricatures of writers, theater personalities, and the upper class. In one of Paul Colin’s lithographs in *Le Tumulte Noir*, Sem “is transformed into a bespectacled monkey whose every limb and appendage are in the swing (pl. 8). It appears that Sem – French spelling of Shem, Noah’s oldest and favorite son, and supposedly father of one of the three human races – has so fallen under the spell of the black craze that he has fulfilled the naysayers’ prophecy and regressed to a simian state” (Gates and Dalton 11).

<sup>26</sup> See Johnson and Johnson 56-57. Whereas the opening of the Bal Nègre is dated by most as 1928, the Johnsons date this image as 1923. Sem clearly wrote in the lower right corner “Le bal de la rue Blomet” but no date is visible. Klein dates the “vogue du Bal nègre, rue Blomet” in 1924. (373) For examples of similar depictions of blacks by Sem see “Les Montparnos” (Johnson and Johnson 44), and in Paul Colin’s work, see Johnson and Johnson 68 and Colin plates 32, 33, 39, 42, 43, 44 in particular.

Born in St. Louis in 1906, by the time Josephine Baker reached Paris in 1925 she had performed on Broadway with Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake's Shuffle Along, in which as a member of the chorus line she stole the show: "She seemed to move every part of her body in a different direction at once. She clowned outrageously, unable to stop herself. [ . . . ] The effect of her performance was to mock the very idea of a chorus line [ . . . ] audiences loved her."<sup>27</sup> After also performing in Sissle and Blake's Chocolate Dandies, Baker was recruited to be part of a new show being organized in Paris, the Revue nègre. When the French choreographer Jacques Charles revamped the show shortly before it opened, Baker earned a prominent role as Charles designed a "more authentic black dance," the "Danse sauvage." (Rose 5-6 and Kear 49-50) This dance, performed by Baker and her partner Joe Alex, "was slightly comic and highly erotic: scanty costumes consisting primarily of feathers, suggestive movements, and 'jungle music' dramatically aided them in eroticizing their glistening brown bodies" (Gates and Dalton 7). The painter Paul Colin was hired to create posters advertising the Revue nègre, and his initial image greatly helped to launch both Baker's career and his own.

Three bold colors: black, red, and white. Three figures: Josephine Baker – hair slicked back, arms akimbo, dancing the Charleston – in the limelit apex of a pyramid completed by a black musician in tuxedo and a black tap dancer in bowler hat. Big red lips; big black and white eyes, hers like olives, theirs like parking meters: features often used to make blacks look bewildered and bestial, here make the entertainers appear alert, spirited,

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<sup>27</sup> Rose 57. Rose gives a good account of Baker's life and performances. For others (which differ slightly), see for example Kear, and Gates and Dalton.

"with-it." One clear idea reinforced by expressive typography: energetic, rhythmic, boldly new entertainers have arrived. Paris took to the idea at once.<sup>28</sup>

After the *Revue nègre*'s preview performance, attended by journalists and celebrities like the reigning French star of the music hall Mistinguett, the artist Léger, the art dealer Paul Guillaume, and many others, Michel Georges-Michel wrote an article for the cultural daily newspaper *Comœdia* about the evening. The article, accompanied by two sketches of dancers, gives some of the spectators' remarks: "'Bravo!' crie Léger," "'C'est stupéfiant,' dit Mlle Sorel" (an actress), "'C'est cubiste,' dit Mlle Renouardt" (a cabaret performer), and ends by noting that "il n'y eut qu'une jalouse, [...] et ce fut tant mieux, car ce fut Mistinguett."<sup>29</sup>

Mistinguett's jealousy was probably justified, since Josephine Baker quickly became a hot topic in Paris, and later displaced Mistinguett from her usual place at center stage for a time. Nearly every article about Baker's performances at the *Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* referred to her dancing as "frénétique," "endiablé," "primitif." Another article published the day the *Revue nègre* opened (October 2, 1925) quoted the director of the music hall, who felt that "Tout le monde n'aimera peut-être pas cela, mais l'art nègre est tout de même quelque chose, puisque les plus grandes artistes du monde en ont vanté la puissance sans cesse jaillissante" (H. "Avant 'La Revue Nègre'").

<sup>28</sup> Gates and Dalton 9. The poster is reproduced on page 4 in black and white, and in color in Johnson and Johnson 68.

<sup>29</sup> Georges-Michel. According to Jordan, "One of the most entertaining accounts of the social carnival animated by Jazz in 1924 was in a column by Michel George-Michel [sic] in *Comœdia* entitled 'M.G.-M.'s Jazz-Band.' The column was a weekly impression of scenes which he witnessed at Jazz venues all over France, each of which carried greater social over-tones" (125). The article cited here is from that column. For more on the preview see Rose 8-9, who cites parts of Georges-Michel's article (in English).

Several other articles published in Comœdia between October and December 1925, the months during which the Revue nègre played first at the *Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* and then at the *Théâtre de l'Étoile*, point to the primitive, seductive nature of Baker's performance. Yvon Novy's October 4 article qualified the spectacle as a "révélation":

Cette débauche, cette frénésie de couleurs: l'épilepsie acrobatique de gestes contournés en spirales hallucinantes, détendus en brusques jets désarticulés; cette fièvre trépidante, ce mouvement vertigineux scandé par un rythme obsédant, implacable, d'une sûreté prodigieuse, d'une régularité métronomique, n'avaient jamais été atteints avec une intensité égale.

In his October 8 article Gustave Fréjaville also invoked "trépidation" and "frénésie," and remarked that the various "tableaux qui se succèdent, dans leur ingénuité savoureuse, tour à tour violents et mélancoliques, nous transportent vraiment 'ailleurs', nous dépaysent [.. .].]" At the same time the show fully captured the audience's attention: "le rythme du jazz s'impose peu à peu aux spectateurs comme aux acteurs, s'insinue jusqu'au fond de notre être, et fait participer chacun de nous au mouvement des danses et des divertissements." Fréjaville seemed particularly taken by the jazz, which "ne cesse d'animer ce spectacle de son souffle démoniaque et de sa frénésie nuancée."

By October 12, André Levinson could assert that the Revue nègre was "l'événement de la saison," and he noted that the homogeneity and discipline of this spectacle *improvisé* "prouve les dons exceptionnels de la race noire" ("Paris ou New York?"). Also referring to the show in racial terms, Raymond Petit argued in the Revue

musicale that the music came from within the race itself: "On constate ici à quel point la musique nègre émane, non pas d'individualités séparées, mais du fond même de la vie d'une race encore très proche à la nature." Petit's statements leave no doubt that Baker and the other black performers were viewed as "savages," and not at all as "children" like the tirailleurs during the war. The Revue nègre called to Petit's mind "une sorte d'épopée collective, familière, grotesque, sauvage et assez sensuelle, où le fond même, assez trouble parfois, de l'existence, se manifeste directement en rythme, et par là prend une valeur universelle" (60). While Levinson does not wax quite so philosophic, he does draw a direct link to the *art nègre* so popular during this same period, through some of Baker's poses during the "Danse sauvage": "les bras entrelacés et élevés dans un simulacre phallique évoquent tous les prestiges de la haute statuaire nègre" ("Paris ou New York?"). At this point in her career, Baker and her choreographers actively incited these kinds of reactions and associations with "savage" Africa, though this would change by the end of the decade.

A couple of weeks later, Paul Brach wrote that "Ce qui est indiscutable, c'est que ces nègres nous séduisent," and offered thanks to the *revue*'s participants:

Joséphine, Douglas, et vous, roseaux pâles ou sombres, qui, délaissant la chaleur d'un fleuve tropical, êtes venus respirer, sur les bords de la Seine, notre vie grise et fatiguée, nous vous remercions de nous avoir distraits par la grâce de vos naïvetés. Sans malice, inconscients, avec vos voix, vos gestes, vos grimaces, vous parodiez notre tumulte, nos dé raisons et vous couvrez d'une housse de bruits notre inquiétude présente.

Here Brach gives one of the reasons the *Revue nègre* and all things African were so popular during the 1920s – they offered a completely new set of images on which the French could focus in the wake of a devastating war and in an increasingly mechanized age. Yet others, such as Levinson, added the “immense vogue de ce spectacle” with its “instinct déchainé,” “hystérie sauvage” and “débordement sensuel” to the list of symptoms which revealed the degeneration of western civilization as Europeans succumbed to this “triomphe des nègres.” (“Loin du bal!”) Writing in response to Robert de Flers’ virulent attack in *Le Figaro* against the *Revue nègre*, Levinson asserts that the triumph of the *nègres* is a defeat for the Europeans not because the performers are bad, but because they are good. De Flers, *Directeur Littéraire* of *Le Figaro* and a member of the *Académie française*, called the *Revue nègre* “l’offense la plus directe qu’ait jamais reçu le goût français.” He went on to say that this “lamentable exhibitionisme transatlantique [ . . . ] semble nous faire remonter au singe en beaucoup moins de temps que nous n’avons mis à en descendre.” In his opinion the spectacle is worse than *endiable* or *primitif*, it is *dégénéré*: “L’humanité qui nous est ainsi présentée nous apparaît, à vrai dire, non point du tout primitive, mais dégénérée, ce qui est fort exactement le contraire.”

Although Levinson does express some concern regarding the state of a European civilization over which the *nègres* have triumphed, De Flers is clearly sounding a much louder alarm. What disappoints Levinson about the *Revue nègre* is that “the savage has turned into a city rowdy. The ceremonial sacred character of the dance ritual has entirely evaporated from what has become a mere divertissement, offered to the white idlers of the world’s capitals.” He differentiates slightly between Baker and “the Negro dancers of

today," contending that Baker, "by her extraordinary and disturbing genius, is able with one bound to join her savage forefathers and with another to go back to our common animal ancestors" yet the other dancers are simply professional performers. While the white admirers of such spectacles "tend to retrograde towards the primitive, the Negroes themselves seem to progress, as we understand the term" ("Negro Dance" 292-3). Not only are the Europeans exhibiting an unsettling interest in the primitive, but the "savages" they would emulate are making strides toward a more civilized state. Levinson's fear regarding the "folie noire" in general is reminiscent of the Comte de Gobineau's assertions throughout his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* that such mixing of races leads to the degeneration of the superior race, and illustrates the longevity of such racist theories in the minds of members of the French population.

Josephine Baker's next show, *Folie du Jour*, at the *Folies-Bergères* beginning in April 1926, does not seem to have elicited as much reaction as the *Revue nègre*, some of the novelty having doubtless worn off.<sup>30</sup> Still viewed in racial terms, in the supposedly color-blind France, Baker was described as a "diabresse" when dancing the charleston and compared to "un joli animal" – even to a monkey, since her facial expressions include "une grimace agréablement simiesque, due notamment à la proéminence des mâchoires" (Rouveyre 414). While the author of this article characterizes the audience as being "calme," possibly because of a general "ébahissement" but looking oddly similar to "une vache qui regarde passer un train" (415-16), the American e. e. cummings

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<sup>30</sup> As Phyllis Rose indicates, there were negative reactions based on the nudity in *La Folie du Jour*, not on race: "A furious attack on the 1926 Folies show came from an anti-pornography group which regretted that foreigners would think badly of France because of the nudity. Simultaneously, it blamed foreigners for debasing French entertainment: they alone could afford it and their taste was so appallingly low" (99).

describes another audience's different reaction. During the second act, when Baker was lowered from the ceiling in a huge egg and then danced a charleston, "Cries of 'disgusting' mingle with gasps of 'how shocking!' and wails of 'how perfectly disgusting!'" Horrified ladies cover their faces or hasten from the polluted environs. Outraged gentlemen shout, stamp or wave their arms angrily" (116). Cummings does not indicate whether these horrified people were French or American, but he himself seems to have been more impressed than appalled.

Yet just as in the late 1920s and early 1930s jazz music was appropriated by French musicians and basically became "French," so Josephine Baker underwent a transformation during the same period. Enjoying enormous popularity, despite growing resentment against foreign entertainers and the onset of the Depression, Baker continued performing at the *Folies-Bergères* in 1927. In January 1928, while bidding farewell to Paris before her second European tour, she began her performance by dancing some of her usual routines, but then changed costumes and emerged in an elegant dress to sing a song in French. Rose notes the audience's reaction: "Everyone understood. Look how much progress she has made, they said. Look how assimilated she has become, how domesticated, how civilized" (121-2). When Baker returned to Paris in 1929, she began performing in Paris qui remue at the *Casino de Paris* (temporarily ousting Mistinguett) and worked on completing her transformation into a French *chanteuse*. As Phyllis Rose explains,

In marked contrast to the caricatured negritude of Paul Colin's 1925 poster for the *Revue Nègre*, the only allusion to Baker's race in Zig's poster for

the 1930-31 Casino de Paris show is a slight caramelizing of the skin. This image of Baker and the matching one of her on the cover of the program – in which the leopard [“Chiquita”] stands on its hind legs offering a beribboned bouquet – represent her complete transformation from a black novelty act into a Parisian music-hall star. (144)

Even though the theme of Paris qui remue was France’s colonial empire, and its run coincided with that of the *Exposition coloniale*, one of the songs Baker sang was “J’ai deux amours,” which let her claim both her country (the U.S.) and Paris, but whose lyrics she sometimes changed from “Mon pays et Paris” to “Mon pays c’est Paris.”<sup>31</sup>

Baker’s own transformation from savage, *endiablé* dancer to sophisticated French *chanteuse* as she followed the tide of opinion perfectly exemplifies French culture’s appropriation of art forms perceived to be African during the interwar years. Observing that the vogue of *la folie noire* was drawing to a close at the end of the 1920s, Baker openly civilized her image to make it coincide with the public’s interests. French people’s enclosing of music and dance in homes, bars and music-halls during these years illustrates the phenomenon of “s’emparer de” as they welcomed savage music and dance into their culture by domesticating them. The childlike image of the tirailleur seems to have been completely overtaken by those of frenetic, scantily-clad savages catering to a French public which was in desperate need of distraction from the difficulties of life after a devastating war. In literature, however, tirailleurs and Africans in general did maintain a certain level of visibility during the interwar years. In keeping with this trend of

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<sup>31</sup> See Rose 147 and Kear 69-70.

depicting Africans as savages rather than as children, much of the literature and many of the films set in the colonies presented supposedly realistic but actually exoticized images of them.

### *Le Cinéma et la littérature coloniaux*

The freedom and escape from daily life that could be experienced while dancing the charleston or listening to the outrageous rhythms of jazz music also manifested themselves in other forms of entertainment, such as cinema and literature. With the growing popularity of film in the late 1920s, the stationary images and colonial themes prevalent in literature quickly made their way into the cinemas, where audiences could imagine themselves to be a part of “the exciting drama of a Frenchman or a small group engaging in decisive action for greater France” far removed from the difficulties of everyday life in the metropole. As Charles Rearick has noted,

Throughout the 1930s a stream of both documentary and feature films brought views and vicarious experiences of that larger world to French audiences. In the late thirties one-third of French films were set outside France. Featured most often were hot climes, especially the deserts of Africa and the Sahara above all – the ‘mysterious Sahara,’ as it was commonly called. (172)

Documentary films, such as those studied by Alison Murray in her 1998 dissertation “Framing Greater France: Images of Africa in French Documentary Film, 1920-1940” were recognized by promoters of the colonies as being particularly useful, and “several

hundred documentaries were shot in A.O.F. and A.E.F. during these years. Consequently, most of what the average Frenchman in the metropole had seen of *l'Afrique Noire* at the cinema was essentially documentary in nature" (41).

As Murray demonstrates, ethnographic films were also being made during this period, for example by Marcel Griaule and Francis Aupias, but these were not widely seen by the public. Aupias' films were banned because of his "vehement criticism of the forced labor he had seen in Dahomey and which he did not hesitate to publicize" (120). Griaule's Au pays des Dogons and Sous les masques noirs (1935) were "the first serious ethnographic films made in French West Africa" and depicted peoples he had encountered earlier in Mali during the Dakar-Djibouti expedition. (109)

Some other films came out of similar expeditions, such as Voyage au Congo (1928) – from which Gide's well-known book also came – and La Croisière Noire (1926) which "followed daring drivers racing from Morocco to Madagascar, encountering a fascinating diversity of African peoples along the way" (Rearick 172), and which was a great success (Oms 104). Other box-office hits included Au Coeur de l'Afrique sauvage (1922) and L'Atlantide (1921, re-released in 1928), which was based on a popular novel published in 1919 by Pierre Benoît about "a Frenchman in the Sahara falling under the spell of a local femme fatale and suffering terrible consequences" (Rearick 172-73). In 1935 even Josephine Baker starred in a colonial-themed film, Princess Tam-Tam, set in Tunisia. The popularity of these and later films, such as the 1936 L'Appel au silence, in which the French hero tries to bring the Islamic natives back to Christianity and which "drew the biggest crowds on record and won the *Grand prix du cinéma* in 1936"

(Hayward 150), demonstrates that the French public enjoyed seeing depictions of colonial life, regardless of how accurate they may have been. Since not everyone could travel to Africa like many writers or colonial administrators, these films provided a means for escape from daily life and a fascinating view of living, moving, colonizing Frenchmen and savage Africans in exotic settings. Paul Morand referred to this sarcastically: “Quand les anciens voyageurs racontaient qu’ils avaient vu en Afrique des êtres aux lèvres démesurées, des hommes-échassiers, des femmes à queue, ou des pygmées, ils ne mentaient pas, le cinéma l’a prouvé” (Paris-Tombouctou 247).

Films also showed animals in their natural settings, but ironically many of those who actually traveled to the colonies could not find them there. Lucie Cousturier, in a book about her own travels in Africa, briefly mentions her dismay at not seeing the large groups of wild animals so often shown in films. (Mes inconnus...Fatou 148) Always popular with children, animals were almost the sole characters of an important series of children’s books first published in the early 1930s, those about Babar the elephant. Even a quick glance at the illustrations in the first Babar story, Histoire de Babar, le petit éléphant (1931), reveals images of a tropical forest contrasted with an organized town and naked, uncivilized elephants versus elegant people and Babar in clothes. Before the end of this book, Babar has been chosen as the elephants’ new king, since “Il revient de la ville, il a beaucoup appris chez les hommes” (Brunhoff, J. Histoire 42).

In a short essay at the end of the 1979 edition of this book, Laurent de Brunhoff (son of Babar’s Belgian creator Jean de Brunhoff and author of many Babar books after his father’s death in 1939) does not discuss to what extent his father drew from the

colonial themes prevalent in the 1930s, but others have seen a close correlation between the Babar stories and French colonization of the interwar years. For Ariel Dorfman, Babar's story is simply the coming to fruition of the European colonizers' dream and, aware of this, Brunhoff

must have sensed the need to substitute for real history, full of accusations and contradictions, the colonial history which in 1931 was still going on right before his eyes, a parallel, ideal history, a version of the westernization of those barbaric territories as he hoped his children would one day see it. (25)

Dorfman notices a link "between nudity and clothing, between backwardness and development" as the elephants revert to their primitive state whenever they are without clothing. (28) Just as the *évolués* of Dakar look down on savages from the interior, the dressed and civilized elephants look down on the rhinos who "are a long way from accepting the foreign customs of the Old Lady" (34). There are, however, also the requisite cannibals, who capture Céleste at one point during Le Voyage de babar (15), and who look very similar to the black musicians portrayed by Paul Colin, and whose skirts could even be likened to Josephine Baker's famous banana skirt. In the next book, Le Roi Babar, the "Chanson des éléphants" is reproduced, complete with musical score and incomprehensible lyrics like "Patali dirapata/Cromda cromda ripalo," just like so many African songs in Stéphen Chauvet's Musique Nègre. (Brunhoff, J. Roi 21)

In addition to children's books like the Babar ones, some comic strips of the 1920s and 1930s also included African characters and themes. Even during the war a

tirailleur named *Zizi Bambou* appeared in *Les Souliers de l'Allemand*, depicted with enormous lips and speaking *petit nègre*.<sup>32</sup> In 1916, in *Bécassine pendant la Guerre*, Bécassine had become the *marraine de guerre* for a tirailleur from Tombouctou named Prince, who she feared was “trop potage” – meaning “anthropophage.” Yet much like Lucie Cousturier and her neighbors, once she met him she corrected her misconceptions, and even posed for him as he painted her portrait. (Pinchon 56-57) In the early 1930s, *Zig et Puce* went on an expedition inspired by the *Croisière Noire*: “le raid de l’auto amphibie Furette est l’occasion de faire découvrir aux jeunes lecteurs les différents territoires de l’Afrique française,” and in another instance they attended the 1931 *Exposition Coloniale*. “Ici la représentation des deux personnages africains participant à l’Exposition est marquée par de vieux préjugés. Saint-Ogan reprend le thème du cannibalisme, si cher aux caricaturistes du début du siècle” (Holo 75). This exploitation of the old image of the African as a cannibal in the middle of the interwar years exemplifies the French predilection for viewing the African as savage rather than child during this period.

The one comic strip from this period which endures even today is Hergé’s *Tintin au Congo*, originally published in 1931. In this installment of Tintin’s adventures the Belgian boy-journalist travels to Congo and “en s’embarquant, Tintin emporte avec lui des stéréotypes sur l’Afrique que l’expérience viendra confirmer. Loin de changer au contact de la réalité, il impose son point de vue aux indigènes et ceux-ci le lui renvoient, d’une façon caricaturée” (Apostolidès 21). The Africans are presented as children, and

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<sup>32</sup> This ran on May 4, 1916 in *Les belles images*, according to Holo (75).

Tintin's primary goal is to educate them. (22) Hergé covers all aspects of the current colonial situation, as it becomes clear that Tintin

aurait tôt fait de pacifier complètement la région s'il ne se heurtait à des forces hostiles qui sont de trois sortes: d'une part, la paresse des Africains qui les empêche de travailler comme des Blancs; d'autre part, la haine que lui vouent les élites locales dépossédées de leur prestige; enfin, les mauvais Blancs qui profitent de l'ignorance des indigènes pour exploiter à leur profit les richesses de l'Afrique. (Apostolidès 23)

In Tintin au Congo, as in so much colonial imagery of this period, the natives are depicted with oversized lips, are generally wearing a mishmash of clothing – some European, even army uniforms, some in tattered native garb – and of course they speak *petit nègre*.

Of course, films and children's books were not the only places where French people could find exciting and entertaining depictions of Africans: in the 1920s especially the body of colonial literature continued to expand. In 1925 Roland Lebel published the first of two important works about this literature: L'Afrique occidentale dans la littérature française (depuis 1870), discussing recent literature about the French West African colonies and hoping to encourage an even greater public to read these texts. He begins his preface by acknowledging the current interest in the colonies, attributing this in large part to the war: "La guerre a puissamment contribué à étendre le mouvement de curiosité qu'on notait déjà avant 1914 et qui, depuis, n'a cessé de se développer en faveur de nos possessions d'outre-mer" (vii). He explains that it is in light of the current vogue in

France for novels about the colonies that he has undertaken to examine this literature.

Much of this text is devoted to “La littérature de voyage et de conquête” and “La littérature technique,” such as ethnographic and linguistic studies, and Lebel seems intent on getting his reader up to date on the texts published lately in these domains. In his third section, “La littérature d’imagination,” Lebel begins to define what it means to be an *écrivain colonial* or to write a *roman colonial* – definitions more clearly laid out in his second book, *Histoire de la littérature coloniale en France* (1931).

Even today perhaps the most frequently cited text of the corpus of colonial literature is Pierre Loti’s 1881 *Roman d’un Spahi*. Lebel and other literary critics of his period accorded Loti a special place, viewing this book as a turning point. Loti is the most important writer of *la tradition exotique*, “l’initiateur qui dirigea les regards vers les pays nouveaux, et c’est à lui que l’on doit la première connaissance exacte et colorée de nos colonies renaissantes” (*Histoire* 71). For Marius-Ary Leblond,<sup>33</sup> whites who grew up in Réunion and considered themselves to be Africans, Loti represents the last of the exotic writers, and it is the duty of the next generation to go further:

avec Loti est mort tout un genre de l’exotisme français [ . . . ] les nouveaux écrivains qui ont vécu dans les pays qu’il a décrits, Tahiti ou le Sénégal par exemple, se sont montrés très durs pour lui, et ils ont été là fort injustes parce qu’ils demandaient à ce marin des lendemains de 1870 ce

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<sup>33</sup> Marius-Ary Leblond, often also referred to as Marius et Ary Leblond, were Georges Athénas (Marius), born in the capital of La Réunion in 1877, and Aimé Merlo (Ary), born in Saint-Pierre in 1880. When they met at school in their teens, they discovered they were cousins. Aside from their study of the *roman colonial* cited here, Marius-Ary Leblond wrote numerous colonial-themed novels, poems, as well as literary criticism. See Cazemage, *La vie et l’œuvre de Marius-Ary Leblond*.

qu'il faut exiger seulement de la génération qui succéda à la sienne: les patientes et profondes analyses, la science de l'observation, l'étude exacte des rapports sociaux. (15)

Writers like Loti and those who came before him are all considered by Lebel to be the precursors of the new colonial literature. In his 1931 book, he discusses the same three literary categories as in his previous text, but with regard to *la littérature d'imagination* is careful to distinguish between works by simple tourists visiting the colonies and those by "ceux qui sont nés là-bas ou par les immigrés qui ont fait de la colonie leur seconde patrie" (79). It is the job of the latter, the *écrivains coloniaux*, to write "des œuvres exactes, des œuvres locales, inspirées par la colonie et exprimant cette colonie, des œuvres écrites non pas pour le divertissement mais pour l'instruction du public" (82), rather than the Loti-esque impressionistic sketches of the *tradition exotique*.

The admonitions of the Leblonds and of Lebel seem to point the writer in the direction of a more technical style, given the requirements of careful observation and public instruction, yet the examples they eventually cite are literary in nature. However, the "story" of any given novel seems almost to be secondary to the more important duties of the colonial writer: *dépayser* the reader both physically and morally, by faithfully reproducing the locale and offering evocative and non-superficial portraits of the indigenous peoples (Lebel, *Histoire* 82-83), and to provide accurate propaganda in favor of the colonies to increase the public's understanding of them (Leblond 60-61). For Louis Bertrand (1866-1941), well-known to Lebel and the Leblonds as one of the creators of the *roman colonial*, it is also a matter of injecting more reality into the old tradition of

exoticism: “Sans rejeter et sans condamner absolument le vieil exotisme, on souhaiterait de le compléter. On voudrait lui donner une âme, qui lui manque souvent, un cerveau surtout, lui ouvrir les yeux et l'esprit à une foule de spectacles, de réalités et d'idées” (12).

In much the same way that supporters of the civilizing mission and the *Force noire* drew upon France’s “Roman inheritance” (Betts 43), Bertrand suggested that the French colonization of Africa (Algeria in particular) was the continuation of the Roman conquest of the same region, and that the present colonization efforts were therefore a recuperation of France’s rightful heritage. (Déjeux 150) In his preface to the 1925 literary anthology Notre Afrique he asserts that it is time to recognize an Algerian literature, written by people who differ from tourists in one important respect (also stressed by Lebel and the Leblonds): “c'est qu'ils sont, en Afrique, les fils du sol, c'est qu'ils y sont chez eux [. . .], et on ne saurait trop y insister. Et ainsi c'est *leur* pays qu'ils nous décrivent” (15). Citing as examples Marius-Ary Leblond and fellow Algerianist author Robert Randau, Bertrand makes it clear that he is referring to whites, not the indigenous peoples, though they may one day arrive at the whites’ level: “Espérons que l'indigène d'Afrique y viendra de plus en plus, et qu'en tout cas, il retournera de lui-même à la source commune où s'abreuvaient ses ancêtres latins et arabes [. . .]” (20-21). Bertrand’s assertion that these white writers are only describing their own country, as the Leblonds felt they were doing too, offers yet another example of French “s'emparer de” as these people claim even the designation “African” as their own.

In French West Africa there was no movement similar to the Algerianist one, but there was still a considerable literature for Roland Lebel to discuss in his two studies of colonial-themed works. In his books Lebel does not treat all authors or all texts equally, and continuously offers his own judgements regarding the value and accuracy of the stories, not basing his opinions on literary merit. In essence, a “good” *roman colonial* is one in which the Africans are portrayed as well-behaved and loyal French subjects, and any book which deviates from this standard receives little praise from Lebel. His goal seems to be to establish a canon of colonial-themed works that show the *mission civilisatrice* not only in practice but as being successful, and he therefore displays a clear preference for texts that show the *indigènes* from the French colonials’ perspective.

As such, the only praise Lebel is willing to accord René Maran’s 1921 Batouala, véritable roman nègre is that the *reaction* to this book upon its publication “a au moins eu pour conséquence d’attirer l’attention et la curiosité sur les populations indigènes et de permettre à plusieurs ouvrages de littérature coloniale, principalement aux romans africains, de toucher plus sûrement le public métropolitain.”<sup>34</sup> In his second book, Lebel glosses over René Maran’s contribution even more quickly, noting that “l’auteur met en scène uniquement des populations arriérées de l’Oubangui, et qu’on doit se garder des généralisations hâtives,” and indicates his preference for André Demaison’s Diatô, roman de l’homme noir qui eut trois femmes et en mourut (1923) as “une histoire purement

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<sup>34</sup> Lebel, *Afrique* 217. He mentions specific texts written in response to Batouala, such as René Trautmann’s Au pays de “Batouala”: Noirs et Blancs en Afrique (1922) and Gaston Joseph’s Koffi, roman vrai d’un noir (1922).

indigène, vue du côté indigène, et pensée avec la mentalité indigène.”<sup>35</sup> Clearly, since Batouala presents the colonial enterprise in an unflattering light, it could not be called a “good” *roman colonial* by Lebel. In contrast, Lebel gives Bakary Diallo’s text a more favorable mention, undoubtedly because in his day many proponents of colonization read it as an excellent example of assimilation at its best. (*Histoire* 143).

A much better *roman colonial* than Batouala, according to Lebel, is Jean and Jérôme Tharaud’s La Randonnée de Samba Diouf (1922). Although Robert Cornevin maintains that André Demaison actually wrote this book,<sup>36</sup> according to Lebel the Tharauds wrote it using extensive personal documentation provided by Demaison. The fact that the Tharauds, who themselves had not been to Africa, could be considered to have written a more authentic *roman colonial* than René Maran, a Martinican who had lived in Congo, is rather astounding. Yet for Lebel, Maran’s crude telling of the story of some ungrateful savages simply cannot compare to “l’histoire de Samba Diouf [et les] tribulations de ce type parfait de paysan d’A.O.F. que l’aventure d’un héritage à recueillir, puis l’aventure plus extraordinaire encore de la guerre des toubabs, font sortir de son village, et qui cède doucement à la destinée” (Lebel, *Afrique* 220-221). Most important to Lebel’s judgment that La Randonnée is a more authentic *roman colonial* is

<sup>35</sup> Lebel, *Histoire* 142. He was not alone in according Maran only a glance – in 1937 André Billy relegated Maran to a short paragraph in his La littérature française contemporaine, saying that “Les mérites littéraires de *Batouala* sont minces. La langue en est maladroite et le sujet même du roman n'est pas toujours une excuse à son extrême crudité” (102).

<sup>36</sup> See Cornevin, “André Demaison” 387 and Littératures where he explains in a footnote: “Comme en témoigne la note écrite par le général Charbonneau dans le texte d'une causerie faite à la Société de Géographie commerciale le 21 février 1967: ‘En réalité, le véritable auteur de *La randonnée de Samba Diouf* était non les Tharaud, mais André Demaison lui-même, comme Jérôme Tharaud, en présence d'André Demaison, en a fait l'aveu à Kindia en 1929 au général Jean Charbonneau’ (*Revue économique française*, 1967, n° 2, p. 36)” (Cited by Cornevin, Littératures 135-136 note 1).

that the Tharaud brothers were careful to conserve “dans leur intégrité les détails précis de la vie des noirs, les anecdotes significatives [. . .], et ces réflexions, ces incompréhensions, ces façons de sentir et de parler (la vérité des dialogues est surprenante) qui peignent l’âme nègre” and with which Demaison had provided them.

(221)

Another colonial-themed novel of this period was Pierre Mille and André Demaison’s 1924 La femme et l’homme nu, the story of a tirailleur (Tiékoro) and a Russian exile (Vania) who become romantically involved while in the St. Raphaël/Fréjus area, but whose romance suffers under the disapproving eyes of the French colonial community in Dakar after the war. In both of his books Lebel relegates this text to footnotes, probably uncomfortable with the romance between a European and an African, and referring to it as one of two “cas exceptionnels.”<sup>37</sup> In his earlier text, Lebel outlines the plot of La femme et l’homme nu, but portrays Tiékoro as losing interest in Vania when they are in Dakar: “il est repris par son pays et par ceux de sa race, heureux de se replonger tout entier dans son milieu primitif” (Afrique 223 note 1). Lebel conveniently neglects to mention the colonials’ complete rejection of Vania and their abuse of Tiékoro, still a soldier subject to their close watch.

La femme et l’homme nu begins with a long first section which takes place in Africa, and after enlisting in the army and being sent to fight in France Tiékoro goes through many of the same steps as the tirailleurs discussed earlier: learning French (110) but still speaking “enfantinement” (136), parting his hair (115), and wanting to become

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<sup>37</sup> Lebel, Histoire 141 note 3. The other book is Mme. Faure-Favier’s Blanche et Noir (1928) about “une petite provinciale apparentée à un nègre.”

civilized like the French (130). In St. Raphaël, where the wounded Tiékoro is hospitalized, most people do not react much to the sight of the tirailleur and the Russian woman strolling in the street, clearly a couple, but their occasional encounters with French army officers are not too pleasant. In one instance, officers refer to Tiékoro's parents as "singes" and cause a scene in a café by demanding to be served before Tiékoro and Vania, after which the tirailleur is blamed and spends two weeks in prison and the whole corps receives its repatriation orders. (162-63)

Vania follows Tiékoro to Dakar, where their relationship causes a scandal and she is forced to rent a house when no hotel will give her a room. They are caught between the open animosity of the French colonials and the slightly tentative backing of the *évolués*. Tiékoro is brutally attacked by a group of blacks, and Vania comes to her senses and realizes what a mistake she has made. Upset and ashamed, she winds up on a boat back to Marseilles as, unbeknownst to her, Tiékoro gets on a train heading to his own village. As Vania is welcomed back into white society on the boat Tiékoro reverts to his savage ways, walking the final stretch home barefoot and regaining his natural state:

Chaque pas que faisait Tiékoro dans la forêt éloignait son esprit du passé, période fulgurante qui lui semblait un rêve fantastique. A chaque étape, dans les rares villages où il se reposait, son âme véritable rentrait en lui, chassait l'âme d'emprunt qui s'était emparée de la place. (249-52)

Interestingly, the verb "s'emparer de" appears here, referring to Tiékoro's attempt at assimilation but also calling to mind the sort of reverse assimilation taking place in French society during these years.

What must have bothered Roland Lebel about La femme et l'homme nu is that it does not show “l’homme nu” only in his native habitat and subject to French domination, but instead allows the savage from the interior bush to get disturbingly close to actual civilization. While Tiékoro does not ever really become civilized, he clearly tries to and proudly wears not only the French army uniform, but one made for him by a tailor in St. Raphaël (and paid for by Vania) which gives him “l’allure de ces officiers de l’armée noire américaine” and the accompanying leggings and shoes complete his transformation: “Il ne douta plus d’avoir franchi en hâte plusieurs des barrières qui le séparaient encore des hommes porteurs des Pouvoirs” (160-61). Maintaining some decorum by keeping the characters slightly removed from their own society, Pierre Mille and André Demaison are careful to specify that Tiékoro’s European mistress is not French but Russian, and therefore herself a borderline savage according to many of the period. Still, this story of interracial love is rare for the time, if not unprecedented. Unlike Demaison’s Diatô, a “good” *roman colonial* in Lebel’s opinion because “Ce roman nous offre une reconstitution d’un état d’âme indigène dans toute sa vérité (Afrique 223), La femme et l'homme nu receives no such praise, apparently not “realistic” enough. Yet this novel may provide clues with regard to the experiences of and more personal relationships between tirailleurs and civilians in France during the war.

Another author Lebel does not care to discuss is Paul Morand, whose Paris-Tombouctou he accords one sentence, and whose Magie Noire he glosses over in a footnote. (Histoire 135, 135 note 1) Magie Noire, a collection of short stories published in 1928, reveals some of the fears people had during the interwar years as Morand

explores the dangers of contemporary culture and of the colonies, warning of the real possibility of degeneration as a result of close contact with Africa, or even African-influenced music and dance. For example, the story "Adieu New-York!" tells of a young woman named Pamela Freedman, who looks white but is rumored to have at least some *sang nègre* in her veins. She embarks on a cruise to Africa with fellow Americans, and once they all hear that she may be part black, they ostracize her and trick her into missing the boat after their first stopover, in Côte d'Ivoire. Originally thrilled to be getting her first view of Africa and *la grande forêt*, she is horrified to find that she has been stranded there, with no hope of leaving for months. Slowly she grows accustomed to this life, staying with the local Corsican administrator (her first step down) and eventually becoming friends with more and more Africans. At the end of the story she is taken to a native celebration by a servant (who is really the rich son of a chief), and quickly strips off her European clothes and succumbs to the savage power of the scene:

Adieu New-York! Paméla Freedman rentrait dans le ventre de l'Afrique.

Elle ne valait plus cent millions de dollars, elle valait trois bœufs comme les autres femmes. On la vit se frapper les paumes, pliée en deux à chaque cadence, pieds joints, jambes collées, croupe tendue, comme les négresses, maintenant l'une d'elles. (240)

Her earlier exposure to and enthusiastic enjoyment of jazz music in Montmartre seems to have predisposed her to this kind of descent: "Elle retrouvait dans ce tam-tam aux sons mats le même engourdissement, la même extase qu'à Montmartre elle demandait au jazz, à l'heure des grandes orgues de l'ivresse..." (239). Pamela's moral decline and rejection

of modern life in favor of the primitive life in Africa is clearly linked here with French society's current fascination with jazz and its related dances.

Although travel literature does not properly fall under the category of *roman colonial*, as demonstrated by Lebel, it was a popular form during the interwar years, and a few examples permit us to illustrate some of its themes. While Paul Morand's 1928 Paris-Tombouctou is an entertaining read, Lucie Cousturier's two-volume series, Mes inconnus chez eux: mon amie Fatou, citadine and Mes inconnus chez eux: mon ami Soumaré, laptot (both 1925) is more tedious, and André Gide's Voyage au Congo (1927) is openly anti-colonial. A series of five articles in the newspaper Les Continents in 1924 reveals that Cousturier went to French West Africa on behalf of the Ministry of Colonies to undertake an “Étude du milieu indigène familial et plus spécialement du rôle de la femme indigène au point de vue de l'influence qu'elle exerce sur la formation morale des enfants” (Cousturier “Rapport”). The five installments seem to reproduce the entirety of her report to the Minister of Colonies, and in the first she indicates that she stayed “successivement au Sénégal, en Guinée française, et au Soudan” between September 1921 and July 1922.<sup>38</sup>

In the two 1925 books about this trip Cousturier, traveling with one of her former students, Mamady Kôné, generally tries to secure lodging in the natives' part of towns, to observe their way of life. She feels that it is necessary to go a little native to understand them and their needs:

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<sup>38</sup> This would seem to prove wrong Bakary Diallo's assertion that Cousturier never went to Africa. (See Mbelolo 85, also cited by Midiohouan “Tirailleur” 139.)

Il faudrait manger un peu noir, penser un peu noir; il faudrait avoir besoin de l'industrie, de l'opinion, de l'art, de l'amitié, de l'amour social et sexuel des noirs, et non pas rechercher seulement, comme aujourd'hui, leurs mains, propres à délivrer des matières premières, pour que soit connue la nature de la soif vitale du beau jardin d'Afrique et pour qu'elle soit étanchée. (Mes inconnus...Fatou 173)

The section of Mes inconnus chez eux: mon ami Soumaré, laptop entitled “La forêt du Haut-Niger,” first published separately in Belgium in 1923, is the most interesting, and the 1923 publication includes illustrations and sketches made by Cousturier, such as one of Mamady Koné, and others of women and children, or of people dancing.<sup>39</sup>

Occasionally anti-colonial, speaking for example of “la civilisation délicate que nous détruisons” (Forêt 56 and Mes inconnus...Soumaré 169), Cousturier actually seems somewhat bored by her trip and annoyed by things like being transported uncomfortably in a hammock that swings too much. While Cousturier criticizes Europeans for denigrating and destroying indigenous customs and trying to prove the inefficacy of various fetishes so they can take them home as art without remorse, she herself obtains some statues by equally devious means. She has her interpreters, in collusion with the *séficheurs*, replace original sculptures with new ones so that she can have the old, “real” ones! (Mes inconnus...Soumaré 255) In the end, though, she maintains that during her trip she has been impressed by the natives she encountered, not disappointed. In response to

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<sup>39</sup> Cousturier, Forêt, see for example pages 4, 18, 25, 27, 41, 63. A 1924 article in Les Continents by Léon Werth discusses Cousturier’s works to date, including this one, praising her depictions of the Africans and anticipating the forthcoming ones (the two Mes inconnus volumes).

French colonials' typical question: "Vous avez du éprouver de grandes désillusions à voir les nègres tels qu'ils sont, m'ont dit les personnes qui avaient notion de mon livre Des inconnus chez moi, inspiré par les tirailleurs sénégalaïs observés en France," she disagrees: "Il m'a bien fallu avouer que non seulement ils ne m'avaient pas déçue, mais qu'ils m'avaient émerveillée" (260).

Gide, known for his anti-colonial sentiments, is at the same time not always as kind to the natives as Cousturier can be: "Les nègres nus crient, rient et se querellent en montrant des dents de cannibales" (14). As for the whites, he notes that "Moins le blanc est intelligent, plus le noir lui paraît bête" (21), and later explains the surprise of a group of natives when he and his fellow travelers insist on paying for some eggs: "'Les blancs, quand ils viennent, ils prennent tout et ne donnent rien', disaient les gens d'un autre village, tout étonnés de nous voir payer les œufs qu'ils nous apportent." Gide does mention that not all whites act this way, but gives a few examples of "la lésinerie de certains blancs à l'égard des indigènes" (211-12 note 1).

In contrast, Paul Morand repeats many of the standard views of French colonization, saying for example that "Il y a vraiment dans notre civilisation coloniale africaine une harmonieuse entente entre deux races, que je n'ai jamais rencontrée ailleurs." He admits that the natives now have to pay taxes, but argues like many others of his time that the natives are much better off than they were before thanks to French intervention, which put an end to "[les] razzias, [les] massacres collectifs, [les] exécutions en masse de jadis" (Paris-Tombouctou 145-46). In another instance, he insists that the French are color-blind and as such differ greatly from the British: "pour les

Français, tout nègre de nos colonies qui remplit certaines conditions légales est considéré comme Français; quelque effort que fasse un nègre des possessions anglaises pour s'élever, *jamais il ne sera considéré comme Anglais*" (255). Morand also mentions the "excellent livre sur les sociétés primitives de l'Afrique équatoriale" by Dr. Cureau,<sup>40</sup> and in referring to African art, music, and dance reveals his awareness of and participation in current cultural trends in France. He recalls the African masks displayed by art collector Paul Guillaume (180), buys a mask for Picasso: "La tête du monstre est si belle, rouge et noire, colorée en deux tons, fendue d'une crêmaillère sculptée en plein bois, que je l'achète pour étonner Picasso" (186), and later buys some more masks for himself, noting that the natives willingly sell new models of inferior quality but "se dessaisissent très difficilement de leurs masques anciens, qui sont fétiches" (212). Morand had also been to the *Bal nègre* in Paris, and after mentioning this launches into a lengthy discussion of how the French have adopted "les modes nègres," or as he prefers to look at it: "Ce qu'il faut dire, c'est qu'étant descendus à une certaine manière de concevoir la vie, nous nous y rencontrons désormais avec tous ceux qui sont fidèles à leurs instincts" and the *nègres* have triumphed over the Europeans. (269)

Much like André Levinson, Morand associates the current fascination with the *nègres* and their art, music, and dance with the degeneration of French society, and worries that the Europeans and the Africans are exchanging places. According to Morand, as the Africans have learned about European civilization and grown more accustomed to it, a "mystérieuse loi d'équilibre" has forced the French to go in search of

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<sup>40</sup> Morand, *Paris-Tombouctou* 221-22. Lucie Cousturier also mentioned this book in *Des inconnus chez moi*, but only to express her disagreement with Cureau's conclusions.

that which the Africans have abandoned: “Nous montons à bord de ces bateaux qu’ils ont laissés vides et nous partons vers leur ancien pays” (Paris-Tombouctou 271) while the *Noirs* make themselves at home in a Europe which now welcomes “un monde nouveau, éclairé avec violence, scintillant, brutal, tout en surface, en vanités, aux tons crus, aux propagandes hurleuses” (270).

By virtue of the fact that writers such as Paul Morand mention jazz music, the *Bal nègre*, and movies, or that André Gide’s book Voyage au Congo came out of an expedition that also produced a film, or that books like those about Babar present colonial themes in ways easily understood by children, the literature and cinema of the interwar years reveal the interconnectedness of French society’s interest in things African. Additionally, they permitted French adults and children to escape their daily lives and retreat to the jungle, where they could experience vicariously the excitement and *dépaysement* of the colonies. The enormous popularity of many of the films released during these years demonstrates the public’s keen desire to escape modern life and reinforces the idea that it was to the “primitive” that they turned for inspiration and distraction. Roland Lebel’s evident attempts to judge colonial-themed novels based on their depictions of the French and the natives represent a thinly disguised promotion of France’s colonial ambitions, and the texts he refuses to discuss, such as La femme et l’homme nu or Magie noire are the most revealing of French society’s fascination with Africans and of some peoples’ fears that France’s cultural decline was directly connected to this “folie noire.”

### *L'Art nègre*

From 1911 or 1912 until late 1918, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire and the art collector Paul Guillaume were good friends, sharing a growing interest in primitive art and collaborating on an album of reproductions called Sculptures nègres (1917) and Guillaume's art journal, Les Arts à Paris.<sup>41</sup> In his own writings about African art, Apollinaire often focused on "l'influence que l'art nègre pouvait exercer sur les artistes européens" (Blachère 36). The writer Blaise Cendrars, too, had been fascinated by *séfîshes* and *gris-gris*, collecting them in Africa and Brazil as he explored voodoo, magic and sorcery. (94) For Cendrars, "la poésie nègre est [...] inspiratrice d'une technique littéraire et d'une utilisation originale du langage," a concept he illustrated in his own poetry, into which he incorporated African words as early as 1914. His Anthologie nègre, published in 1921, also reflects his and others' view that European literature could be reinvigorated by an infusion of ideas from Africa (104), and mirrors similar developments in the art world.

Even before the outbreak of World War I, members of French art circles had also been interested in primitive art and societies. Robert Goldwater, in his pioneering 1938 text about primitivism and modern painting, explains that Gauguin and other artists of the nineteenth century represent a "preparation" for primitivism, since "Though still archaizing rather than primitivizing in the manner of the twentieth century, they employed the knowledge of a variety of styles new to their period, in an attempt to

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<sup>41</sup> For more information about Guillaume's association with Apollinaire, and about the magazine Les Arts à Paris, see Giraudon.

recapture a certain kind of simplicity.”<sup>42</sup> The Fauves, such as André Derain (1880-1954), Henri Matisse (1869-1954), and Maurice Vlaminck (1876-1958), also collected tribal objects in the early 1900s, but “it was primarily with Picasso and the Cubists, whose works reflect a direct focus on both the expressive and plastic character of particular tribal objects, that primitivism entered its twentieth-century phase.”<sup>43</sup> In his 1907 painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) was inspired in part by African masks or sculptures, and although this painting was not publicly exhibited until 1937 at the Paris *Exposition Universelle* (Hamilton 235), its fame “spread quickly through the little world of advanced artists in late 1907, and with it tribal art became an urgent issue” (Rubin “Modernist” 13). Regardless of what African objects Picasso may have seen before his first visit to the *Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro*, in the spring of 1907, this visit clearly played an important role in his appreciation of these art forms.

When Apollinaire died in 1918, Guillaume was well-established within the art community, and had not only his journal but also a famous gallery and a large network of

<sup>42</sup> Goldwater xxii. The 1938 title of this text was *Primitivism and Modern Painting*. In the 1967 edition (used here), Goldwater notes that the original Introduction, from which this citation is taken, has not been changed. (xvii) According to Jocelyne Rotily, Goldwater was a member of the *Société des Africanistes*, founded in 1931 by Paul Rivet “dans le but d’étudier l’Afrique du point de vue ethnique” (349 note 247). See below for more information on the *Société des Africanistes*.

<sup>43</sup> Rubin “Modernist” 7. The art-historical term “primitivism,” applied to Gauguin, the Fauves, and Picasso, dates from 1897-1904 and initially reflected mid-nineteenth-century understandings of the “primitives” as fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italians and Flemings, but artists were also using it to refer to many non-Western arts (Peruvian, Javanese, etc.), but not yet to African or Oceanic arts. (2) Early in the twentieth-century, the term shrank in meaning and scope, and “‘Primitive art’ simply became increasingly identified [...] with tribal objects,” African and Oceanic art in particular. By the 1920s, “primitive” had become a generic term for tribal art, mostly African and Oceanic, but sometimes pre-Columbian (Aztec, Incan, etc.) as well. In Parisian circles “primitive art” came to be synonymous with *l’art nègre* during this same period. (3) In American English, the meaning of “primitivism” was broader, such that in the 1930s with regard to art history it meant ““the adherence to or reaction to that which is primitive,”” and it is in this way that Goldwater used it in his 1938 text. When applied today to artists such as Gauguin or Picasso, the term “primitivism” refers instead to a Western artistic phenomenon, and not to the arts of “primitive” peoples.

contacts. As the war ended, he was also able to take advantage of the public's changed attitude toward Africans to promote greater interest in *l'art nègre*.<sup>44</sup> During the war the French had developed "a certain curiosity about the customs of these people who had fought fiercely and were now joyful partners in the victory celebrations," and the publicity Guillaume generated as he catered to the public's interest "would play an important role in making 'Negro' art fashionable" (Paudrat 157).

The fascination with *l'art nègre* during the interwar years reflects French interest in the artistic productions of a part of the Empire.<sup>45</sup> In Goldwater's estimation, artists were not the first to "discover" African and Oceanic art at the beginning of the twentieth century: "the way to the appreciation of primitive art had been prepared within ethnology itself by ethnological champions, so that the artists were only adding fuel to a slow-burning fire" (42). However, Goldwater explains that during the years 1915-1925 the general public was also largely interested in primitive sculpture, and that this popular approval had, "in its uncritical appreciation of primitive production, gone beyond the ethnologists' considered appraisal, and really belongs more properly to the history of European taste for the primitive than to the study of indigenous art" (38).

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<sup>44</sup> Even though Paul Guillaume did use the English translation "negro art" (sometimes written with a capital "N") in an address he gave in English in 1926, I will be using the French *art nègre* following Rubin's example: "The usual translation of 'art nègre' as 'Negro art,' loses something of the pejorative flavor of the French 'nègre' (as in 'travail de nègre,' for example). This connotation notwithstanding, many cultivated French still use the term 'art nègre' although they might eschew the word 'nègre' in other contexts" ("Modernist" 74 note 11).

<sup>45</sup> Although much of *l'art nègre* is made up of masks and sculptures, many of which were originally created in religious and social contexts and not necessarily as pure "art," I will refer to them as "art" for simplicity's sake. As will be seen below, during the 1920s and 1930s some people did promote the study and display of these objects within their original contexts, while others saw no need to situate them with regard to their native cultural environs.

In May 1919 Guillaume and André Level, critic and author of such texts as L'Art nègre et l'art océanien (1919, written with Henri Clouzot), organized the *Première Exposition d'Art Nègre et d'Art Océanien* at the Gallerie Devambez in Paris. Although this was not exactly the first such exhibit,<sup>46</sup> “the abundant comment it aroused and the throngs of people it attracted entitle it to be called unprecedented” (Paudrat 157). In an essay called “L’Art nègre,” first published in 1920 and then in 1922 in Propos d’atelier, the writer and critic André Salmon mentions this exhibit, saying that it “a rendu brusquement familière au public, et presque populaire, l’inquiétude des artistes modernes devant les productions des imagiers africains ou océaniens.”<sup>47</sup> A *Fête nègre* held at the *Théâtre des Champs-Elysées* and also organized by Guillaume, coincided with this exposition. A few years later Guillaume described this festival and its audience:

we read from the poetry of the negro and played negro music on ancient instruments, dances in the exact rhythm of the archaic ceremonies of the Gabon forests. All the eminent Parisians, artists, thinkers, the wealthy, the powerful, made a point of being there. There were ministers of state, ambassadors from several great nations, women of the greatest beauty and the most exalted titles, the most distinguished personages of Paris [. . .].

Before this gallery of kings I said: “The spirit of modern man – or of

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<sup>46</sup> An exhibit in May and June of 1913 at the Galeries Levesque was the first to display African sculpture and refer to it as such. Another exhibition, possibly organized by the *Société des Mélanoophiles*, was supposed to be mounted in 1913 but did not take place. The *Exposition d'Art Indigène Africain* (May-July 1914), sponsored by a charitable organization called *Le Souvenir Africain*, enjoyed “wide publicity in the religious and patriotic press.” Finally, November-December 1916 saw an exhibit in Montparnasse of works by Matisse, Picasso, and Modigliani, as well as some 25 Negro fetishes from Africa and Oceania, provided by Guillaume. (Paudrat 152-155)

modern woman – needs to be nourished by the civilization of the negro.”

Applause without limit testified to the enthusiasm of my audience's  
agreement. (14)

In 1923 Guillaume contributed items from his collection to the *Exposition de l'Art Indigène des Colonies Françaises*, held at the Pavillon de Marsan and prepared by a committee including Level, Clouzot, René Verneau, the writers Pierre Mille and Marius and Ary Leblond, and Maurice Delafosse, professor at the École Coloniale and director of the Economic Bureau of French West Africa. This exhibit included not only statues, but also jewelry, fabrics, instruments, and basketworks, arranged geographically.<sup>48</sup>

Written upon popular demand, a guide to the exposition was so hastily put together that it could not include photos of objects actually exhibited, and instead shows similar items provided by various collectors, and even by the author himself. (Chauvet, *Arts* 1 note 1)

In introducing the guide, author Stéphen Chauvet laments the lack of a French colonial museum which in his opinion, if it existed,

rendrait les plus grands services pour l'instruction de tous nos  
compatriotes, pour la documentation de nos artistes et de nos commerçants  
exportateurs, et provoquerait, chez de nombreux adolescents, l'éclosion  
d'une vocation coloniale dont eux-mêmes et leur patrie ne pourraient que

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<sup>47</sup> Although Salmon places this exposition at the “début de l'hiver 1919-1920,” and not the spring of 1919, he does seem to be speaking about the May event, as he also mentions the Fête nègre which coincided with it. (115)

<sup>48</sup> Paudrat 160. This exhibit specifically excluded objects from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. (Chauvet, *Arts* 5)

profiter largement; enfin il suggérerait des méditations philosophiques bien utiles! (5)

He sums up nicely the benefits of a colonial museum to society as a whole, though it is unclear what exactly he means by “méditations philosophiques” – he could be suggesting a rethinking of the colonial situation, speaking about art, or perhaps hoping to provoke reflections on the primitive versus the civilized.

In 1926, Guillaume (by then a well-known collector) and Thomas Munro, the educational director of the Barnes Foundation (PA, USA), collaborated on a book entitled Primitive Negro Sculpture.<sup>49</sup> Goldwater cites this text, noting that the authors “value Negro sculpture entirely for those qualities of abstract, geometrical composition they find it has in common with the best modern art” (38). This statement leads us to believe that Guillaume and Munro made no attempt to provide a cultural context for this art, which is in fact not wholly true. The first chapter of Primitive Negro Sculpture, “Its Relation to African Life,” is “devoted entirely to a sketch of the racial, geographical, social and religious background” of this art, which the authors recognize some of their readers might like to know:

It is natural that anyone interested in the figures themselves should be interested also in the subjects, and in the sort of people that made them: how the African lived, what god or being he intended to portray, in what strange rites he used the mask or fetish one is looking at. Beyond a doubt,

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<sup>49</sup> This text was later published in French (1929), although the French version did not include the last two chapters: 3, “Its [Primitive Negro Sculpture’s] Chief Traditions” and 4, “Its Relation to Contemporary Art.” (Paudrat 162)

since art is intimately bound up with the rest of life, these facts have largely determined the forms his art assumed. But just how these influences work is a tremendously intricate question; one can only guess at it [...]. (7)

Rather than focusing on Guillaume and Munro's sketch of the cultural background of this art, Goldwater has stressed their assertion that "to bear such matters constantly in mind tends to confuse one's appreciation of the plastic qualities themselves." Their brief attempt to satisfy more ethnographically-minded readers notwithstanding, Guillaume and Munro's primary goal in Primitive Negro Sculpture is "to consider the plastic qualities of the figures – their effects of line, plane, mass and color – apart from all associated facts" (7). Interestingly, they suggest that rather than using what little anyone knows about the "negro mind" to understand negro art, "the order may well be reversed; negro art is perhaps the most revealing source we shall ever have for understanding the primitive negro mind." They conclude, "What, in short, more significant of the negro mentality than its products?" (11)

Guillaume and Munro begin their study by acknowledging that it was the explorers and ethnologists, as well as the occasional missionary, who first noticed and collected the "'hideous little idols' of the savages," and that artists only viewed these figures as "clumsy, misshapen attempts at reproducing the human form" (1). They argue that by 1907, however, "the European art-world was ready to discover African sculpture" (130), and "painters who were trying to produce certain new effects on canvas [...] suddenly found that similar effects had been achieved with remarkable success in

primitive African art" (1). They mention Gauguin, whose subjects were "taken from savage life" and whose paintings "were beginning to popularize in a new form the perennial longing of civilization for the primitive." Guillaume and Munro specify that Gauguin's and others' innovations

did not lead directly to the interest of artists in negro art, but paved the way for its popular reception. Through the acquirement of new tastes, it was being realized more clearly than ever before that strange, apparently structureless things might, when looked at afresh, come to seem strikingly beautiful, and to disclose a new kind of structure. In particular, it was being realized that primitive arts often possess a vigorous inventiveness, a direct sensuous power that sophisticated art may do well to emulate. (130)

In an address at the Barnes Foundation in April 1926, Guillaume discussed the new interest in African art, mentioning the fact that it was Parisians who seemed to have embraced this "discovery" the earliest and the most wholeheartedly:

It is characteristic of the open-mindedness, the hospitality to new ideas and living forces, which is a part of the temper and tradition of France, that the fertilizing germ provided by negro art should first have been assimilated in Paris. France, always quick to go to the heart of things through coverings, entanglements, outward appearances, readily grasped the significance of the negro statues which had so long seemed mere playthings of savages. These statues, at first studied only by the anthropologist and antiquarian, have in the short space of twenty years

played a role no less important for our age than was the role of classic art  
in inspiring the Renaissance. (13)

In Primitive Negro Sculpture, Guillaume and Munro assert that “today it is impossible to deny [this newly discovered art’s] importance as an influence on contemporary art and the number is considerable of critics who place it among the world’s great sculptural traditions” (2). While Guillaume, as a collector, gallery owner, and the organizer of several exhibits of African and modern European art certainly had a vested interest in encouraging the public to take notice of these art forms, and thus may occasionally have overstated his case, his point of view was shared by such critics of the arts as André Salmon, Henri Classens, Henri Clouzot, and André Level.

Even in the years preceding the First World War artists such as Picasso had been influenced by African and Oceanic sculptures and masks, and as these objects became more easily accessible to the general public their impact only became more apparent. According to Rubin, “in their collecting, the Cubist artists showed a marked preference for the art of Africa,” while the Surrealists preferred Oceanic art.<sup>50</sup> Regardless of the specific interests of the Cubists, Dadaists, or Surrealists, for many French people “African culture seemed to embody a lush, naive sensuality and spirituality that cold, rational Europeans had lost. Consequently, blackness became the rage in Paris during the 1920s.” (Stovall, Paris Noir 31) In their chapter concerning primitive negro sculpture’s “Relation to Contemporary Art” (as of 1926), Guillaume and Munro point to Modigliani,

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<sup>50</sup> He attributes this difference to the fundamental differences between Cubism and Surrealism, saying that “Cubism, like African art, was rooted – despite varying degrees of abstraction – in the concrete reality of the visible world; Surrealism, like much Oceanic art (at least in Melanesia) opted primarily for the world of the imagined, for the depiction of the fantastic rather than the visually derived” (Rubin “Modernist” 41).

Soutine, Lipchitz, and others as “[owing] an obvious debt to negro art,” as their works “exemplify the power which the anonymous artists of the jungle are exerting upon the mind of a race widely separated from them in blood, civilization, geography and time” (133). In Guillaume and Munro’s estimation, “in an age when more than one voice has been heard to say that sculpture is obsolete, and the plastic arts exhausted, negro art has brought creative forces that may prove to be inexhaustible” (134).

For the critic Henri Classens, the French passion for anything that is new or unknown explains in part the current vogue of *l’art nègre*, but “ne suffit pas à justifier l’admiration que certains professent pour les productions des Noirs qui seraient, à les entendre, les formes les plus parfaites de l’art” (314). In “En Marge de l’Exposition coloniale: la valeur et le sens des sculptures et des peintures des noirs” he worries that by attributing to the creators of this art the same intentions as those of European artists, admirors of this art might be taking for “des chefs-d’œuvre ce qui n’est que la marque de l’inhabiléité,” explaining that the Africans’ artistic techniques are “à un stade encore rudimentaire” (314). Not opposed to studying *l’art nègre*, Classens simply argues for a more appropriate and culture-specific approach, saying that “Étudier les sculptures et les peintures des Noirs sous le jour de la critique d’art, c’est peut-être le plus sûr moyen pour ne pas les comprendre.” For him the question should not be to discover what meaning these objects suggest to Europeans, but rather “quel sens les Noirs leur attribuent” (314).

While Classens argues for this moderated appreciation and culture-specific understanding of *l’art nègre*, Henri Clouzot and André Level take a slightly different stance in their article “A propos de l’Exposition coloniale: l’art fétichiste africain,”

advocating the inclusion of this art in the Louvre's collection. They mention *l'art nègre*'s influence on European painters and sculptors of the period, and suggest that the Africans' artistic products are perhaps not really so different from those of Europeans after all: "Mais leurs créations sont-elles si différentes des nôtres, ou tout au moins de celles, officiellement admises aux honneurs des musées nationaux [ . . . ]?" The text is accompanied by illustrations specifically chosen by the authors to "faire ressortir plutôt les affinités que les dissemblances de la statuaire noire avec celle que nous sommes accoutumés à contempler." They end their article with an appeal to the Louvre: "Souhaitons que le Louvre, le plus éclectique des musées, puisqu'il a ouvert des salles aux œuvres archaïques de l'Asie persane, mongole, chinoise, en consacre bientôt une à l'art, tout aussi archaïque, de la partie du monde où notre domaine colonial n'est primé par aucun autre" (Clouzot and Level 12-14).

These articles by Classens and Clouzot and Level both date from 1931, and their titles clearly point to their connection with the ongoing *Exposition coloniale de Paris*, at which people could see many examples of *art nègre*. Not only did this art impact European artists, it also made a strong impression on another community of artists in Paris: African-Americans. As Tyler Stovall notes, "African American artists were very conscious of the African inspiration of cubism, and several used their time in France to become better acquainted with African art, integrating some of its themes into their own work" (*Paris Noir* 64). In Paris, these artists "learned to reemphasize the importance of black artistic expression," and

made numerous references to African art, both in the form and in the content of their own works. Many portrayed people from Africa and the Caribbean, often using live models. The sculptures of Nancy Prophet exemplified this fascination with Africa and Africans. *Congolesse* (1931) is an elegantly simple bust of an African figure. The head's strongly African features and its contemplative, dignified gaze affirm the richness of black culture. (102)

Stovall specifies that none of these African American artists traveled in sub-Saharan Africa during this time, and thus their sole exposure to West African art (and people) occurred in Paris. For them, as for many European artists, the *Exposition coloniale* provided the best opportunity to experience the exotic and to gain inspiration for their work, and "reinforced the view of Paris as the gateway to Africa" (101-102). The *Exposition coloniale* offered the chance to view many sculptures and artifacts from Africa, regardless of whether artists used this chance to embark on a return to their roots, as in the case of some black Americans,<sup>51</sup> or to gain inspiration in their efforts "to expand beyond the confines and closure of Western culture," as in the case of the Surrealists and others. (Stich 15)

As the French public indulged its fascination with African-inspired music and dance, and flocked to see films shot in exotic locales, writers and artists also incorporated

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<sup>51</sup> Not all black American artists followed this trend: "pour certains Noirs américains, l'idée d'être perçu comme un héritier direct du patrimoine artistique africain faisait resurgir la peur d'être traité et considéré comme un 'sauvage'" (Rotily 344). Tyler Stovall notes that Henry Ossawa Tanner "made no use at all of such influences in his painting," though he does not indicate whether or not Tanner refused to do so to avoid being considered a "savage" (*Paris Noir* 102).

elements of African culture into their own works. All were seeking an infusion of vitality and rejuvenation at a time when French society was trying to repress the trauma of the war.<sup>52</sup> As their influence could be seen in the works of more and more European artists these objects previously considered to be “the playthings of savages” and only studied by ethnologists or haphazardly collected by missionaries were elevated to the status of “art,” possibly even art worthy of inclusion in the Louvre. Whether simply replicating elements of African statuary in their own artistic creations, or out-and-out taking African statues back to France with them (often by duping the Africans), the predilection for “s’emparer de” can also be discerned in French society’s attraction to *l’art nègre*. Increasingly interested in learning about the Africans who had produced these artistic objects, many French people welcomed this infusion of sensuality, spirituality, and creativity into their culture, but still often paid more attention to the plastic qualities of *l’art nègre*. At the beginning of the 1930s there was a growing tendency in ethnology circles to situate these objects within their original social contexts, both to teach the public about the cultures from which they came and to save them from the grasp of artists and art dealers.

#### *La Mission Dakar-Djibouti and the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro*

As French society demonstrated an increased desire to know about and to experience some measure of life in the colonies, as artists sought inspiration, and as travel to these previously inaccessible locations became easier, ethnographers began to organize scientific expeditions to collect information and objects from the colonies. In the early

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<sup>52</sup> See Golan ix.

1900s, “nothing [had] guaranteed, *a priori*, the ethnographer’s status as the best interpreter of native life – as opposed to the traveler, and especially the missionary and administrator, some of whom had been in the field far longer and had better research contacts and linguistic skills” (Clifford, *Predicament* 26). However, during the 1920s and 1930s a new movement within the discipline encouraged ethnographers to do intensive fieldwork, changing the nature of their job and distinguishing them from these travelers, missionaries, and administrators. “By the mid-1930s one can fairly speak of a developing international consensus: valid anthropological abstractions were to be based, wherever possible, on intensive cultural descriptions by qualified scholars” (25). Thus, much like literature of the period (at least in Lebel’s opinion), responsible ethnography also necessitated serious, scientific observation.

Expeditions in the 1920s and 1930s differed from most of those undertaken in the late 1800s in one important respect: they tended to be much more focused on learning about the areas covered and on collecting objects than on conquering territory and subjugating the natives. In the interwar years it was no longer necessary to be prepared to pacify the locals using armed force, and explorers also had more technologically advanced means of transportation at their disposal. However, not all expeditions conducted during this period were specifically ethnographic in nature – the Citroën Central African Expedition, for example, mainly set out to drive across the Sahara, though it did have some secondary goals.

The expedition across the Sahara organized by André Citroën in 1925 represents an excellent example of the combination of technical prowess with some ethnographical

fieldwork.<sup>53</sup> Setting out to cover over 12,400 miles of varying terrain, this expedition required convoys carrying supplies of food and gasoline to travel in advance to locations in the Sahara, Niger, Chad, Oubanghi-Chari, and the Belgian Congo. The purpose of this expedition differed from that of the first one, undertaken in 1923:

This time it was not a question of carrying out a rapid and, as it were, a sporting attempt, but of making a collection of important artistic, scientific, and economic data, and of fulfilling the different missions which had been entrusted to the expedition by the Minister of the Colonies, the Under-Secretary of State for Aeronautics, the National Museum of Natural History, and the Geographical Society of France.

(Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil 12)

An additional goal, clearly connected to the promotion of tourism, was to study “the junctions intersecting the line from Algiers to Timbuctoo as far as Tchad, and their ulterior prolongation to Khartoum” so that future travelers could trek all the way “from Algeria through western Africa, Tchad, Khartoum, Egypt, and Marseilles” (Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil 12).

The collection of scientific data during the 1925 Citroën journey does not seem to have been taken too seriously, since the ethnographical studies were conducted by Alexandre Iacovleff (or Jacovleff), who was not an ethnographer but a painter who had

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<sup>53</sup> In 1923 Citroën had organized a first crossing of the Sahara by automobile, which had “demonstrated the possibility of establishing rapid communications between Algeria and western Africa [...] and] permitted one to foresee the possibility of employing the motorcar as a means of exploration across the world, and particularly the Black Continent” (Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil 9-10). Georges-Marie Haardt was “the managing director of the Citroën factories and the head of the expedition.” Louis Dubreuil is identified in this book chronicling the 1925 trip as “his faithful companion” (12).

traveled extensively in Asia. Some of Iacovleff's portraits from the mission were reproduced in the September 1926 issue of Vanity Fair. One of the captions indicates that "A score or more of these [portraits] are now being shown at the Charpentier Gallery in Paris, where they have aroused much interest. The entire collection was sold after the third day of the exhibition" (Iacovleff 75). The medical officer accompanying the expedition undertook its zoological aspect, collecting "no less than three hundred mammiferous specimens, eight hundred birds, and fifteen thousand insects" (Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil 13).

Aside from the work of Charles Brull, the engineer in charge of the vehicles, probably the next most important job was that of cinematographer. The well-known director Léon Poirier and the operator Georges Specht produced "twenty-seven thousand meters of film, representing fifty films of records, and six thousand photographs" (13). According to Alison Murray, Poirier's documentary of this expedition, La Croisière noire (1926), was very popular with audiences, who were expecting it:

They had heard the expedition reports as it went along, seen the press interviews with its members when they returned, read Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil's 300-page published memoir of the journey, and seen the full-page photo spreads that were splashed all over the film magazines of 1926. [. . .] The film is action-packed from beginning to end: from festival to lion hunt to the final arrival at the Indian Ocean, the travelers, and the viewer, are constantly on the move. It is doubtless partially this

rich variety and brisk pacing that gained it so much popularity with reviewers and audiences of its day. (154-55)

Another expedition which took place during the interwar years, Marcel Griaule's 1931-1932 *Mission Dakar-Djibouti* introduced Griaule to the Dogon people of Sanga (Mali) whom he would later film, but as noted above Griaule's films were much more ethnographic in nature.<sup>54</sup> As opposed to the Citroën undertaking, the Dakar-Djibouti Mission had as its main purpose ethnographic research and collecting. Traveling on foot, by horseback, in cars, and on the water, the expedition passed through Senegal, Soudan, Haute-Volta, Dahomey, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroun, Tchad, Moyen-Congo, Oubangui-Chari, Belgian Congo, and Ethiopia.

Griaule's two-part report published in the new *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*<sup>55</sup> in 1932 explained the itinerary, as well as the material results (observations and collections), the "résultats moraux" (contact with colonial functionaries and natives), identified the members of the ethnographic team, and listed a number of possible publications for which documentation had been gathered.<sup>56</sup> Griaule's team investigated

<sup>54</sup> See Murray 106-118 regarding these films – *Au pays des Dogons* and *Sous les masques noirs* – and Griaule's staging of certain events, paying of dancers, and careful editing. Though filmed in 1935, these documentaries were not released until about 1938. (243 note 2)

<sup>55</sup> Founded in 1931, the *Société des Africanistes'* goal was "l'étude scientifique de l'Afrique et de ses habitants depuis les époques les plus anciennes jusqu'à nos jours" ("Statuts de la Société des Africanistes" 5). Its members, who had to be sponsored and voted in by a majority, included General Gouraud, *Gouverneur militaire de Paris* and the first president of the society; Georges Hardy, director of the *École Coloniale* and a vice president of the society; Marcel Griaule, *Secrétaire général adjoint* of the society; Harper Kelley; Maurice Leenhardt, Michel Leiris; Lucien Lévy-Bruhl; Marcel Mauss; Théodore Monod, assistant at the *Muséum d'histoire naturelle*; Paul Morand; Marcel Olivier, *Gouverneur Général des Colonies*; Charles Ratton, a well-known dealer of *l'art nègre*; Paul Rivet; Georges-Henri Rivière; and others from the United States, Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Italy, Uruguay, Belgium, and the colonies. (5-20)

<sup>56</sup> Some later publications include: Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, "Calebasses dahoméennes," *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 5.2 (1935): 203-246, and Michel Leiris and André Schaeffner, "Les rites de circoncision chez les Dogon de Sanga," *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* 6.2 (1936): 141-161.

the practices of circumcision and excision, religious institutions, and agricultural, fishing, weaving and other techniques. They studied languages and dialects, documenting the existence of many unknown to Europeans at the time, and gathered more than a thousand stories and songs. The expedition's collection of all kinds of objects from the areas visited was destined for the *Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro* in Paris, and included over 3,000 items such as dolls, masks, sculptures, calebashes, musical instruments, household utensils, knives, and arrows, as well as 70 skulls and bones and 1,000 photographs of individuals. Animals, insects, butterflies, and mammal embryos were collected for the *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle*. Demonstrating a clear desire to keep lasting records of the expedition, Griaule also notes some 3,000 photographs, developed in the field and accompanied by explanatory notes (as were the ethnographic objects), 1,600 meters of film documenting ceremonies from various angles, over 120 linguistic, ethnographic and musical recordings, as well as several hundred tracings or sketches of drawings and wall decorations.<sup>57</sup> Griaule also tried to form relationships with the local colonial administrators, in the hopes that they would later be able to provide additional objects, help with later expeditions, and share research of their own. Each administrator was given a copy of a brochure entitled "Instructions sommaires pour les collecteurs d'objets ethnographiques," which had been prepared by Marcel Mauss, Marcel Griaule, and Michel Leiris. (Griaule 116-18)

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<sup>57</sup> Not all of the paintings found on walls were simply traced, sketched, or photographed by Griaule's team – some were peeled off the walls and taken back to France: "members of the Mission Dakar-Djibouti persuaded local authorities in Ethiopia (so, at least, claimed Gaston-Louis Roux, a painter attached to the expedition) to accept Roux's copies – reproductions executed in more durable oils – in exchange for the fragile tempera originals 'acquired' [from the church of Saint Antonios in Gondar] for the Musée de l'Homme. The surplus generated by the replication of the image remained behind in Africa; Paris obtained the authentic item." The mission brought back sixty square meters of murals from Gondar. (Herbert 53)

Marcel Mauss was a professor at the Paris *Institut d'Ethnologie* who strongly advocated fieldwork as the best means for accomplishing ethnographic research, though he himself had never done any, and who greatly influenced Griaule. (Clifford, Predicament 62) Several of the administrators with whom Griaule established contact in Africa expressed an interest in taking classes at the *Institut d'Ethnologie* once they returned to France. This institut had been founded in 1925 by Maurice Delafosse, Marcel Mauss, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and Paul Rivet, and marked the first time that "the discipline of ethnology was associated with a university" in France. (Conklin 196) It had three main goals: (1) "former [...] des observateurs instruits et avertis pour l'étude des indigènes," (2) "fournir aux voyageurs et aux coloniaux, à leur retour dans la métropole, les moyens et les facilités pour la mise en valeur de leurs collections et de leurs notes," and (3) "publier sous forme de monographies soigneusement éditées et largement illustrées, les études dues à ces collaborateurs."<sup>58</sup>

Two of the Institut's students accompanied Griaule on the Dakar-Djibouti Mission, and were important members of his ethnographic team: Michel Leiris and Jean Mouchet. Leiris was the secretary-archivist of the mission and also specialized in "l'étude des sociétés d'enfants, des sociétés séniles et des institutions religieuses" (Griaule 120). Leiris's L'Afrique fantôme, published in 1934, is his account of this expedition, though it is very different from those of travelers like Gide, Morand, or Cousturier. As James Clifford notes, in it Leiris "refuses to narrate the scraps of experience, publishing them *tel*

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<sup>58</sup> R., "Institut d'Ethnologie" 379. Classes offered in the 1926-1927 academic year included "Descriptive Ethnography" (taught by Mauss), "Physical Anthropology" (Rivet), and others such as "Races of the French Colonies" (Verneau) and "Dialects and Customs of French West Africa" (Labouret) which were available through various branches of the University of Paris. ("Institut d'Ethnologie" 343)

*quel*, in chronological series – as if this could solve the ultimate dilemma of giving public form to personal experiences without betraying their peculiar lived authenticity”

(Predicament 167). Jean Mouchet, the other Institut student on Griaule’s team, had studied at the *École nationale des langues orientales vivantes*, and was in charge of the linguistic aspect of the expedition. Two other important members of the core team were Eric Lutten, who observed native techniques and rites and was responsible for the filming, and the ethnomusicologist and jazz enthusiast André Schaeffner. Schaeffner was the secretary of the *Société du folklore français* and the former *secrétaire artistique de l’Orchestre symphonique de Paris*, and undertook the musicographic and choreographic observations and made the many recordings of the Dakar-Djibouti Mission. (Griaule 120)

Envisioned by Griaule as a way to collect objects and information for serious study rather than just as *art nègre*, the Dakar-Djibouti Mission provided for the *Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro* and the *Bibliothèque nationale* an enormous quantity of items. The directors of the museum, Paul Rivet and Georges-Henri Rivière, who had helped to fund the mission, wrote an introduction to the surrealist magazine *Minotaure* 1933 special issue describing the wealth of “butin” brought back by Griaule. Clearly grateful, they add that “L’exposition des richesses scientifiques et artistiques dues à l’énergie et à la sagacité de Marcel Griaule et de ses compagnons permet au public d’évaluer l’ampleur d’une telle entreprise.” They stress that Griaule’s work “sera un précieux facteur d’émulation” and “constituera un élément de tout premier plan dans le développement des sciences ethnologiques,” noting the link between the Griaule mission and the museum’s current reorganization project. (“Mission” 5)

A major reorganization of the Trocadéro museum had been seen as necessary since at least the end of the war, when then-director René Verneau published an article in L'Anthropologie describing the sorry state of the facilities. The building, originally built for the Exposition of 1878 for ethnographic displays, was badly in need of money, heat and appropriate display cases for its collection of over 100,000 objects. (Verneau 547) Verneau had been reduced almost to begging for funding from the administration, stressing the fact that the museum was enjoying “une grande vogue auprès du public,” on good days welcoming some 6,000 visitors, since, as he put it, “il paraît que la mode est actuellement à l'exotisme” (556-57). While he noted the usefulness of the museum to scientists, he also called attention to its benefits for “artistes qui traitent des sujets exotiques, [ . . . ] les commerçants exportateurs qui désirent entrer en relations avec les populations dont ils ont besoin de connaître les goûts” as well as for industrials who “peuvent puiser des inspirations dans nos salles et même y trouver de beaux modèles d'objets qu'il leur suffirait de copier” (557).

In 1928 Paul Rivet, one of the founding members of the *Institut d'Ethnologie* and a well-known scholar-politician interested in New World anthropology and cultures, took over as director of the *Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro*. Familiar with the work of Georges-Henri Rivière, “a music student and amateur of jazz who would become France's most energetic ethnographic museologist” and who had organized the first

popular exhibition of pre-Columbian art in France, Rivet hired him to help reorganize the Trocadéro.<sup>59</sup>

Rivet and Rivière's 1930 article in Outre-Mer, revue générale de colonisation explains in detail the many aspects of their initial restoration project. Their first step was to attach the museum to the anthropological section of the *Museum national d'Histoire naturelle* (1928), which resulted in a substantial increase in funding, both from the government and from visitor entry fees (previously not charged). ("Réorganisation" 139-140) The museum was enlarged by annexation of a wing of the building, and was equipped with central heating and electric lighting. New display cases were ordered and the library's holdings substantially augmented and recatalogued using the Library of Congress' system. (142-43)

Until Rivet and Rivière's reorganization, the collections of the Trocadéro had been

a jumble of exotica. Its arrangements emphasized 'local color' or the evocation of foreign settings: costumed mannequins, panoplies, dioramas, massed specimens. [...] Since the collection lacked an up-to-date scientific, pedagogical vision, its disorder made the museum a place where one could go to encounter curiosities, fetishized objects. (Clifford, Predicament 135)

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<sup>59</sup> Clifford, Predicament 127. In 1929 Rivière had created a magazine of modernist culture, Documents: Doctrines, Archéologie, Beaux-Arts, Ethnographie, to which Michel Leiris (among others) contributed. (Lebovics 155)

However, after having visited similar museums all over Europe and America,<sup>60</sup> Rivet and Rivière devised a new system of identification and labeling of the over 150,000 items in the museum's possession. The objects were then displayed "suivant les règles de la muséologie moderne, sans entassement, avec un étiquetage soigneux, facilement accessible au public, des cartes géographiques indiquant l'emplacement des tribus et des cartes de répartition des objets les plus caractéristiques" ("Réorganisation" 144). Rivet and Rivière expressed the desire to turn the museum into "le grand établissement d'enseignement populaire et de recherche scientifique qu'il doit être, de mettre en valeur toutes ses incalculables richesses et de le rendre digne de l'admirable effort colonial de notre pays" (148). Their emphasis on the museum's role as a place for the public to learn about France's colonial project and their clear desire to cater to the scientific community contrast sharply with Verneau's willingness to indulge his public's taste for the exotic during the early years of "folie noire."

After the reorganization of the Trocadéro museum, completed in 1934, Rivet obtained permission to build an entirely new facility in the same location, to combine "under a single roof the technical laboratories from the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle and the Institut d'Ethnologie, formerly housed at the Sorbonne" (Clifford, Predicament 138). Thus "in August 1935 the Trocadéro Museum closed its doors and construction of the Palais de Chaillot began on the site. In May 1937 [...] an ethnology museum bearing the new name that Rivet had insisted upon, the Musée de l'Homme, opened its doors" (Lebovics 35). According to Robert Goldwater,

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<sup>60</sup> See Lebovics 37.

although Rivière protested that the ethnographer must treat all his objects alike, the Trocadéro held numerous exhibitions which in effect were exhibitions of art. (Benin, 1932; Dakar-Djibouti, Marquesas, 1934; Eskimo, 1935.) These divisions were preserved in its reorganization as the Musée de l'Homme in 1937-39 and 'excellent' objects continued to be singled out for their aesthetic qualities at the same time as their use and meaning were carefully explained. (9-10)

With the advent of more prescribed methods of ethnographic study during the interwar years, *l'art nègre* was to a large extent removed from the artistic domain and treated more scientifically. Thus the *Musée de l'Homme* could focus its attention on the contexts from which the objects displayed came, even as it took care to appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities of museum goers. The members of expeditions like Griaule's saw it as their duty to preserve the customs and rituals of the peoples they encountered, by filming and otherwise recording them, but at the same time they had no qualms about taking the ancient originals of certain wall paintings to Europe and leaving the natives with copies, proving themselves to be men of their time as they lived the verb "s'emparer de."

#### *L'Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris, 1931*

The 1931 Colonial Exhibition in Paris is often considered to represent the height of French colonialism, but it also illustrates the most concerted effort of the *Parti colonial* to convince an apathetic public of the usefulness and necessity of the Empire.

Curiously, at the same time it marks the culmination of the decade-long period during which the French tried their hardest to forget the horrors of World War I by turning to the exotic and the primitive for inspiration and distraction. Romy Golan has described it as “the idyllic dream of escape from domestic gloom” (115). Yet despite the excellent attendance numbers<sup>61</sup> of the Exhibition and the organizers’ focus on the economic and psychological benefits of having a colonial empire, the proponents of colonization were ultimately unable to awaken a *conscience impériale* in the minds of the French.

Given the history of the Exhibition and the difficulties encountered by its first organizers, it is remarkable that it eventually became the enormous enterprise, and success, that it did. Governor General Marcel Olivier, *Délégué Général à l'Exposition*, wrote an article for the Revue des Deux Mondes<sup>62</sup> outlining “Les Origines et les buts de l’Exposition coloniale.”<sup>63</sup> Once an acceptable location had finally been agreed upon, the *Bois de Vincennes*, further disputes arose regarding the stipulation that no trees be chopped down at Vincennes and the faltering exposition was put in the hands of Marshal Lyautey, the new *Commissaire général*. As Lyautey called for an extension of the Métro to reach Vincennes the opening was delayed yet again, this time until 1931, and the

<sup>61</sup> According to Hodeir and Pierre, “le bois de Vincennes reçut 8 millions de visiteurs dont 4 de Paris et sa banlieue, 3 millions de provinciaux et 1 million d’étrangers... sans compter la vente de faux tickets d’entrée aux abords de l’enceinte” (101). These numbers are not to be confused with the number of tickets sold, between 33 and 34 million, since tickets were sold in sets of four, and on some days each person had to present four tickets to enter. (See Ageron, “Exposition coloniale” 577 and “Colonies” 51-52.)

<sup>62</sup> Between May and November 1931 the Revue des Deux Mondes published a series of ten articles about the various pavilions of the Exposition, and four additional articles including this one and another by Olivier, and one each by Pierre Mille and Paul Morand. Six other articles, all about art at the Exposition and by Robert de la Sizeranne, make up another series published during the same period.

<sup>63</sup> Olivier explains that an exposition had been foreseen in 1914, to be held in 1916, but that the war intervened and eventually it was decided that there would be a first national colonial exposition in Marseilles in 1922 and then an international one in Paris in 1925. The Marseilles exposition was successfully mounted, but with the *Exposition des Arts décoratifs* opening in Paris in 1925, the international colonial exhibition was postponed to 1928.

*Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris* finally welcomed its first visitors on May 6.<sup>64</sup>

For Olivier, as for many of his fellow proponents of empire, the Exposition was to have both an economic and a moral component, since its ultimate purpose was to educate the French about their colonies. “Montrer le vrai visage de la colonisation à ceux qui l’ignorent ou qui n’en connaissent qu’une image déformée, c’est là le premier objectif que se propose l’Exposition,” but this was only part of the point. (“Origines” 54) Even as Olivier asserts that colonization is at its best when not solely a commercial enterprise – “les défaillances collectives ont disparu à partir du jour où les pays colonisateurs substituèrent à des vues exclusivement mercantiles un programme d’action qui tient compte de la notion de solidarité humaine et des devoirs qu’elle implique” – he also emphasizes the economic fruits to be reaped in the colonies (and of which the public at large is not sufficiently aware). (54-5) Additionally, in this time of economic and moral crisis he proposes the colonies as France’s savior:

Ainsi donc la colonisation, née de l’esprit de domination, apparaît, en fin de compte, comme un instrument de paix. C’est le *deus ex machina*, chargé de mener la pièce à bonne fin, de permettre à la civilisation occidentale d’échapper au suicide, et mieux encore, de se régénérer. (56)

This vision of colonization as a way for Western civilization to regenerate itself is linked to the public’s fascination with the “primitive” as a source of vitality and inspiration throughout the 1920s. Olivier and the Exposition’s organizers tried to parlay into active

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<sup>64</sup> Olivier, “Origines” 46-49. See also Lebovics 62-63 as well as Hodeir and Pierre 11-28 for more background on French expositions in general, this one, and Lyautey’s involvement.

support of colonization the French peoples' interest in Africa as demonstrated by their enjoyment of African or African-related art, music, dance, literature and cinema.

The Guide Officiel of the Exposition, written by André Demaison, includes all the information a visitor might need: directions to the *Bois de Vincennes* and modes of transport available, a suggested itinerary through the exhibits, and the locations of post offices, *bureaux de tabac*, medical facilities, restaurants, and various attractions. (5-15) In his introductory "Adresse au visiteur," Demaison guesses that it is primarily his curiosity which has drawn the visitor to the Exposition, and a desire to "[se] rendre compte par [lui]-même des valeurs qui [lui] sont proposées, et à juger sur des données précises" (17). He insists that the organizers consider him, the *cher Visiteur*, "comme un homme de bon goût" and that therefore he will not find here "une exploitation des bas instincts d'un public vulgaire," but rather "des reconstitutions de la vie tropicale avec tout ce qu'elle a de vrai pittoresque et de couleur" (18). Like so many others, Demaison reminds the visitor that it is only thanks to France that the peoples represented at the Exposition have been delivered from their former state of war, famine, sickness, and general backwardness. Now the definition of "coloniser" no longer has to include conquest: "A l'heure actuelle, coloniser veut dire: *faire commerce d'idées et de matières, non point avec des êtres grevés de misère physique et morale, mais avec des gens aisés, libres et heureux*" (19-20).

At the *Cité des Informations* of the Exposition, visitors could get "des renseignements généraux capables d'éclairer [leur] esprit" as well as more specific inventories of the economies, production, administration, transports, and so forth of

French colonies. (25-27) About the exhibit of *l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (stop 16 on the recommended itinerary), Demaison first explains where French West Africa is, and then declares: "C'est là qu'habitent 13.500.000 des plus beaux Noirs de l'Univers."<sup>65</sup> As Gabriel Angoulvant<sup>66</sup> notes in his article for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* series about the pavilions, this exhibit is divided into two parts: "d'abord une exposition didactique, [. . .] ensuite une reconstitution aussi parfaite que possible de la vie indigène en pays noir" (836). His assertion that French West Africa is "la colonie la plus précieuse pour sa prospérité et sa sécurité" (835) may explain why Demaison spends a fair amount of time helping the visitor navigate this section and learn all there is to learn about this part of the empire. Angoulvant reminds his reader that this part of Africa is not as far away as one might think, thanks to cars and airplanes, and that while the people who live there are perhaps the least evolved, they are the most loyal. From an economic standpoint, the various products of French West Africa

répondent mieux à nos besoins, et les mille liens des intérêts économiques trouvent, pour s'y nouer, les conditions les plus favorables; enfin nous pouvons puiser dans ce pays une partie de notre sauvegarde extérieure,

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<sup>65</sup> Demaison 69. Although the Exposition included exhibits from all over France's empire as well as from those of other European nations (except Great Britain) and the United States, here I am only discussing those parts related to French West Africa as well as some regarding French Equatorial Africa.

<sup>66</sup> Olivier explains that Gabriel Angoulvant was *commisaire général* during the planning stages of the *Exposition coloniale*, and that it was he who obtained permission to hold the Exposition at Vincennes. However, in 1927, just as some of the major obstacles had been overcome, "un vote de la Chambre sur les incompatibilités parlementaires l'oblige à quitter le commissariat général" ("Origines" 48-9). In this article about the French West Africa exhibit, Angoulvant continually offers his opinion on how things could have been done better – "Voilà ce que j'aurais voulu voir afficher. . .", "Celle-ci aurait gagné à être conçue et exécutée. . .", "je souhaiterais. . .", "Quel dommage que. . .", etc.

sans craindre que se tournent contre nous les armes dont nous lui aurons appris le maniement... (Angoulvant 835)

While in the Guide Officiel André Demaison discusses at length the commercial strides made in French West Africa and all that this region has to offer, in his section on French Equatorial Africa he includes very little such information. Since the tribes of this area are “à peine sorties de l’obscuré sauvagerie,” the pavilion devoted to them focuses more on their art and its relation to European art than on their current economic participation: “l’art indigène tient une place importante à cause de l’influence qu’il eut sur notre dernière époque artistique, avide de simplification et de régression volontaire” (79). Yet Demaison has high hopes for Equatorial Africa –

Cependant les possibilités de l’A. E. F. sont immenses. Le chemin parcouru dans le sens du progrès humain est déjà grand: il le sera bientôt davantage. [...] Hier encore, c’était la barbarie cachée dans les ténèbres des forêts. Aujourd’hui de grands rais de lumière y ont pénétré, les chaînes sont brisées, les regards sont moins sournois. L’Afrique Équatoriale Française était une colonie mal partie: nous pouvons maintenant lui faire confiance. (81)

We can almost see these rays of light emanating from *la France généreuse* and the Enlightenment-based *mission civilisatrice*, penetrating into the deep, dark forests of far-away central Africa. The people are free – their chains broken – and the change in their attitude is already visible. Demaison suggests that it is only a matter of time before

**Equatorial Africa becomes as useful and reliable as French West Africa, and the people there show their gratitude to France.**

Clearly for both Demaison and Angoulvant the economic possibilities of French West Africa are of primary importance, and the visitor to the Exposition must understand this. But, he must also take a look at the “village des ‘fétichistes’” (Demaison 75), where “on se trouve transporté au cœur de l’Afrique noire, au milieu des indigènes, dans le cadre où ils ont coutume d’évoluer” (Angoulvant 838). Whether the public’s interest in these exotic places and still-evolving peoples signified the degeneration of French civilization, as some argued, or was a manifestation of their attempts to revitalize an already troubled society, as many others argued, the fact remains that the Exposition aimed to please both camps. Angoulvant complains, however, that his compatriots are “trop portés à ne considérer que l’exotisme des spectacles et à négliger ce qui fait la raison d’être d’une grande manifestation comme l’Exposition coloniale internationale de 1931” (853).

He seems to have been right, since most writers not involved with planning the Exhibition and all its official documentation did put more emphasis on the exotic atmosphere and the sense of *dépaysement* visitors felt while wandering the grounds at Vincennes than on the economic lessons they were supposed to be learning. Pierre Mille’s article for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, “A l’Exposition coloniale: vue d’ensemble,” certainly does not begin with any discussion of trade and industry in the colonies, though this does come later. Drawn in by the Angkor-Vat temple, he soon sees the exhibits of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa, as well as “un grand

village nègre où se dressent des cases reproduisant les originales et si intéressantes demeures coniques, en forme d'énormes obus, du territoire de l'Oubangui-Chari" (266-267). Although there seems to have been little differentiation between how the people and the animals were exhibited to the public, for André Demaison it is really only in the *Parc zoologique* that the visitor to the Exposition will find himself *dépayssé*, since the animals are presented in their native habitats and without fences to mar the view: "Assis à la terrasse du restaurant, vous pouvez vous croire à la lisière d'une forêt, dans un coin de savane, en bordure d'un marécage; ou encore dans ce Paradis perdu que la haine et la méfiance ne fréquentaient jamais" (143).

Coming upon the zoo himself, Paul Morand also describes this sensation of really being in the colonies: "Je longe le Bois de Vincennes, lorsque surgit soudain devant moi un rocher grouillant de babouins hurleurs. Où suis-je? En Haute-Volta? Au Siam? [...] Entre les marronniers, j'aperçois de rouges pylônes hérisssés; est-ce Fort-Lamy, Djenné, Ségou?" ("Rien" 329) While Morand does agree with people like Olivier that "les colonies ne sont plus un luxe, mais une nécessité intérieure" in this time of financial crisis (332), this is not his primary concern as he enjoys the colonies' visit to the metropole. Instead, he focuses on the altered image of the colonies which is presented to the public – the image of a healthy, bug-free tropical paradise:

Ainsi s'offrent aux Parisiens sédentaires des Tropiques sans moustiques ni venins, sans soifs ni fièvres, un Vincennes sans vampires, un lac Daumesnil, - frère cadet du Tchad, – sans alligators. [...] Il est bon que l'homme soit trompé; les grandes choses sont à ce prix; il faut qu'il

continue à croire que l'Équateur n'est que papillons, îles flottantes, lianes affectueuses, mouches de lumière, apéritifs dans des rocking-chairs, brise mesurée des pankas, couchers de soleil, perroquets et orchidées. (330)

Even as the colonies are portrayed in Paris complete with natives in villages and a zoo, the entire scene has been staged for the benefit of the French audience – it has been cleaned up and civilized.

Live shows were performed by natives brought to France as entertainers: “Des indigènes de toute race, venus par centaines des Tropiques féconds, tienne à vous dévoiler les secrets et les fastes de leurs réjouissances diurnes et nocturnes” (Demaison 197). While Demaison insists on the tastefulness of these spectacles, one observer writing for the Revue musicale criticized them precisely for their lack of taste. The author remarks that the French are perhaps more familiar with “les barbaries africaines” than with the old civilizations of Asia, given that “Le jazz et la folie des temps contemporains nous ont curieusement rapprochés des races noires encore secouées par la magie” (A., “Musique et spectacles” 349). It seems that what he hoped to see in the spectacles was “la vie de ces êtres forcenés et possédés” rather than just the same old *tam-tams et danses*, though he admits that they were nonetheless impressive. (349) The author deplores the fact that “avec des éléments d'une rare beauté, avec tous ces indigènes qu'il fallait voir chez eux dans la pureté et individualité de leur race, on a fait des ‘revues’, du music-hall exotique. Lourde faute, erreur offensante” (350). Thus even at the *Exposition coloniale*, where France's colonized peoples are supposedly displayed in their native habitats (just

like the animals in the zoo), their “authentic” performances have been altered and confined within the rules of a European-style show.

All over France, and at the Exposition as well, the cinema has provided the public with opportunities to escape daily life by catering to their curiosity about and fascination with exotic lands and peoples. Morand attributes what knowledge people do have of the colonies in part to the airplane, which “nous libère de cette indifférence géographique qui explique bien des défaillances coloniales aux siècles passés,” but the real thanks go to the cinema.

Le documentaire, les décors exotiques, la poésie du dépaysement,  
l’apparition sur l’écran immaculé des peaux cuivrées ou ombrées,  
constituent maintenant chaque soir, jusque dans les banlieues, jusqu’au  
fond de nos villages, un thème colonial continu, une propagande  
pressante. (“Rien” 331-32)

Although Demaison mentions African art, he does not discuss it at length in his Guide Officiel, preferring to emphasize the commercial side of the Exposition. However, Robert de la Sizeranne wrote a series of articles about art for the Revue des Deux Mondes during the run of the Exposition.<sup>67</sup> In the third installment, “La Renaissance des arts indigènes,” La Sizeranne laments the declining practice of traditional artisanry in many colonized areas, but attributes to the French a recent revival of these older methods. In West and Equatorial Africa, for example, “Les régions fétichistes, peu à peu déshabituées

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<sup>67</sup> Three of these are not relevant to this discussion: those concerning “Le Temple d’Angkor et l’Art Khmer,” “Les Dieux d’Angkor et leurs cortèges,” and “Les Fauves et leurs images,” which is about depictions (throughout the history of European art) of animals like those found at the Exhibition zoo.

**des objets servant à leur culte, ne produisaient plus les formes d'art anciennes" (578).**

When France first realized that these art forms “constituaient un trésor,” indiscriminate collectors bought anything and everything, thereby inadvertently discouraging the true artisans from remaining faithful to their original ways. (579-80) However, La Sizeranne explains that there is luckily a small but growing group of French admirers (including Stéphen Chauvet) of these art forms who are telling the natives ““Ne nous imitez pas!” pour les détourner des nouveautés occidentales” (580). As evidenced by some of the works on display at the Exposition, the situation is improving:

en parcourant les salles de Vincennes où sont groupées les œuvres dues à cette renaissance, ou au moins à cette reviviscence, des arts indigènes dans nos ‘provinces’ d’outre-mer, nous retrouvons plus d’une fois le goût individuel, l’accent du territoire, le contrôle de l’œil et de la main, – tout ce qui, en un mot, dans nos provinces d’en deçà des mers, est à peu près disparu. (582)

By intimating that the colonies are essentially provinces of France, La Sizeranne suggests that the revitalization of some of the arts in those regions of the world can be considered part of France’s own artistic and cultural resurgence. The colonies are contributing to the regeneration of French culture, but in a specific way, slightly removed from French culture itself.

La Sizeranne does appreciate the artistic products from these French “provinces,” but in the last installment of his series he vigorously stresses that Europeans should not be drawing inspiration from them for their own art. For him the Exposition is an excellent

opportunity to teach the French about the colonies and to “fixer nos idées sur l'exotisme” (“Bon et mauvais” 615). However, in the domain of the *Beaux-Arts*, under no circumstances do Europeans have anything to learn or borrow from the peoples represented at the Exposition. He allows that “Il y a dans ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler ‘l'art nègre’, des choses curieuses” (615), but in his closing paragraph makes his point forcefully:

Ainsi, ce que nous pouvons emprunter aux exotiques, ce sont leurs outils, non leurs idées. Leurs arts indigènes sont à louer et à encourager pour tout ce qu'ils nous apportent de subtil et de précieux chez les uns, de naïf et de barbare chez les autres, de spontané, de traditionnel et de consciencieux chez tous. Rien ne serait plus absurde que de sacrifier quoi que ce soit de notre idéal pour nous assimiler le leur ou pour nous inoculer leur naïveté primitive. Nous ne devons ni les mépriser ni les suivre. (616)

This hints at Gobineau's belief that cultural mixing leads to the degeneration of the superior culture, and La Sizeranne clearly warns against the *folie noire* of the past decade. The natives should be encouraged to continue their primitive ways rather than becoming French via assimilation, and the French should maintain their cultural superiority and distance by being careful not to appropriate too much from these naïve primitives.

In the opinion of anticolonialists there was much more to decry about the Exposition than the music and dance spectacles. In a tract dating from just before the opening of the Exposition, “Ne visitez pas l'Exposition coloniale,” a group of surrealists including André Breton, Aragon, Paul Éluard and others summarized three major themes

of anticolonialism in general: “le rappel du massacre/sacrifice des noirs africains dans les tranchés de la guerre de 1914 [ . . . ], l’exploitation des indigènes et surtout le travail forcé, enfin les troubles qui ne sont encore que des escarmouches coloniales” (Hodeir and Pierre 112). The surrealists and the communists together mounted an anti-imperialist exposition, “La Vérité sur les Colonies,” which ran from October 1931 to February 1932. According to Marcel Cachin, director of the communist newspaper L'Humanité, in the first of the three rooms of this exhibition photographs and statistics relative to the so-called “mise en valeur” of the colonies were presented. “Il y est rappelé par l’image et par les chiffres ce que fut à l’origine la guerre coloniale avec ses sauvageries et ses cruautés impitoyables. Puis ce que furent et ce que demeurent le travail forcé, l’exploitation de l’indigène, le portage, l’utilisation militaire du mercenaire.” The second room focused on the U.S.S.R., but the third again highlighted the French colonies, by displaying “de magnifiques spécimens de l’art primitif des indigènes.”<sup>68</sup>

Between August and November/December 1931 several articles appeared in a pro-Soviet newspaper, Le Cri des Nègres, decrying the Exposition and advertising the Counter-Exposition. The author of one such article denounced “cet étalages de choses factices, ces ridicules exhibitions de pauvres êtres cueillis à force de subtilités et de mirobolants appâts” and declared that nowhere at the Exposition could be seen “le chef de village accompagné du gendarme qui exproprie ou torture les administrés” or other abuses suffered by natives in the colonies. (Saumane) Other issues included photographs

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<sup>68</sup> Cachin 1. See Hodeir and Pierre 125-34 and Ageron, "Exposition coloniale" 571-3 for more information about this counter-exposition.

of “Ce que l’on ne montre pas à l’Exposition coloniale de Vincennes”: forced labor, recruitment officers choosing men.<sup>69</sup>

Despite the efforts of the surrealists and the communists to dissuade people from attending the Exposition, public opinion was not particularly affected by the anticolonialists. As Charles-Robert Ageron explains, “Selon la préfecture de police, cette campagne aurait été un échec total et tel rapport du P.C.F. intercepté par un indicateur en expliquait les raisons: ‘On se heurta à une paresse et à une mauvaise volonté systématique touchant au sabotage” (“Exposition coloniale” 572). In contrast, the *Exposition coloniale* seemed to have brought the French people closer to an understanding of “l’idée coloniale” in six months than they had been in the past fifty years, in Governor General Olivier’s estimation. However, he admits that it would be too much to ask of the average French person to expect him to have acquired a “sens impérial” after only this exposition, but

Du moins, l’Exposition a-t-elle mis sous les yeux de ce même Français une représentation concrète et vivante de son empire colonial. [. . .]

Souhaitons simplement qu’à l’avenir, les questions coloniales se heurtent chez lui à moins d’indifférence, moins d’ignorance, moins de parti pris.

("Philosophie" 283-4)

As can be seen from this limited discussion of what was in reality an enormous enterprise, the *Exposition coloniale* incorporated all the elements of African culture as they had been appropriated and transformed by 1920s French society: the *art nègre* on

<sup>69</sup> See the September, October, and November/December 1931 issues.

display in the pavilions, the spectacles of *musique nègre* and *dances sauvages*, the sometimes exotic but mostly economics-laden literature freely available, the screening of documentaries about the colonies, the ethnographically influenced presentations of cultural objects. Coming at the end of a decade-long wave of interest in things African, the *Exposition coloniale* marks the climax of this vogue for everything *nègre*, this *folie noire*, and offers the most complete manifestation yet of “s’emparer de.” Not only were there musical performances and art exhibits, but there were reproductions of entire villages from various colonies, including “authentic” inhabitants supposedly living their real lives. Of course, as the buildings were designed and built certain liberties were taken to make their design more exotic, as Ageron notes: “Plusieurs pavillons dits de style local furent de libres interprétations, non des reconstitutions fidèles” (“Exposition coloniale” 574). France’s entire colonial empire (and some of other nations’ colonies) was reduced to its exotic and economically desirable essentials and enclosed within the confines of the park at Vincennes for the enjoyment of the French public.

## Conclusion

While it would seem logical that French society’s interest in cultural aspects of West Africa would have led to a complementary interest in developing the colonial project in at least this area of the Empire, this does not seem to have occurred, since despite the efforts of the *Parti colonial* and all the hype surrounding the *Exposition coloniale*, public support for the colonial project faltered once again in the 1930s. Ageron does not attribute the 1932-1935 decline in support to the efforts of the communists and

the anarchists to sabotage the *Centenaire d'Algérie* and *Exposition* festivities, but rather to straightforward economic factors. He explains that

producteurs coloniaux et producteurs métropolitains se trouvaient désormais en concurrence sur le marché rétréci de l'Empire. Le slogan de l'Union coloniale: 'Acheter colonial, c'est acheter français' sonnait faux aux oreilles des associations agricoles métropolitaines qui voyaient dans le riz ou le tapioca un substitut du blé, dans la banane ou les agrumes des rivales des fruits français, dans les vins et les blés d'Afrique du Nord des concurrents dangereux. ("Colonies" 57)

In addition, the raw materials so touted by Sarraut in Grandeur et servitude coloniales were too expensive: "*Acheter colonial, c'est acheter deux fois plus cher.* Les matières premières utilisées par l'industrie française coûtaient 113 F le quintal quand elles venaient des colonies, 64 F quand elles venaient de l'étranger" (58).

The ultimate failure of the Colonial Lobby to awaken a "conscience impériale" in the minds of the French during the interwar years can, I believe, be attributed to the fact that their emphasis on the economic *mise en valeur* of the colonies ran counter to French society's need for its own revitalization after a devastating war and to a general interest in the cultural productions of black Africa's colonized peoples. The worldwide depression, combined both with French society's successful appropriation of many elements of African culture into its own cultural system and the end of this primitivist trend sealed the fate of the Colonial Lobby's campaign in the early 1930s.

The two images of Africa that Cohen argues coexisted in the late 1800s, “Africa of Conquest” and “Africa of Exploitation,” seem to be present in the interwar years too, but in different form. During the 1920s especially, the “Africa of Conquest” became much more symbolic, and its setting changed: whereas initially this meant conquering territory on the African continent, it can be used to describe African cultural elements conquering French culture, such as discussed throughout this chapter. As is evident from the examples presented here, many people welcomed this as an infusion of vitality, while others decried it as an illustration of the degeneration of a superior culture. By the early 1930s, the French penchant for enclosing and civilizing had tempered this conquest and turned these African cultural elements into French ones. The “Africa of Exploitation” image so heralded by the organizers of the Colonial Exposition was more stridently proffered than ever before as a solution to the increasingly worrisome economic problems of the metropole and the larger world community, but ran head-on into the retrenchment of the 1930s.

Despite the dissolution of the *Groupe colonial*, Ageron notes a revival of support for the maintenance of a French colonial empire from about 1935. In the Popular Front government of Léon Blum, Léon Archimbaud helped to reconstitute a colonial lobby, but Blum encouraged a change in terminology from “Empire” to “la France d’outre-mer.” The colonial press followed this trend, many titles changing their names to incorporate the term “outre-mer.” Additionally, a special department at the Ministry of Colonies was created to oversee a new wave of propaganda, and a number of books hailing the greatness of the Empire were published as well. (Ageron, “Colonies” 60-63) What is

important about this late 1930s upsurge of official promotion of the colonies is its connection to the increasingly obvious possibility of another war with Germany. Should such a war start, the assistance of colonial troops would be indispensable to France, and as such these pro-colonial manifestations can be seen as being geared primarily toward preparing public opinion for the use of colonial troops in another European conflict.

## Chapter 5

### **“La chute du mythe de l’homme blanc”<sup>1</sup>**

#### **The Interwar Years in French West Africa**

By setting my discussion of the interwar years in France within the overall context of the *Parti colonial*'s efforts to promote a French *conscience impériale*, I have tried to demonstrate both the gap between government officials' projects and the people's interests, and the prevalence of African influence on the very interconnected cultural manifestations of this period. Although it would be desirable, for reasons of cultural comparison and overall parallelism, to discuss here the same aspects of life in interwar French West Africa, this not at all easily accomplished. In fact, it is the same fascination with the *nègre* and French government projects in West Africa that make such a study so difficult, since it remained a politically and culturally subjugated region throughout this period and well beyond.

An interesting and ironic phenomenon takes place during the interwar period: at the same time that French proponents of colonization were actively trying to encourage the awakening of a *conscience impériale* in the minds of the French people, the West Africans were beginning to vocalize a new *conscience de race*, effectively exhibiting their own new *conscience impériale* or new awareness of their position in the imperial order. The goal of this chapter is to illustrate the fact that this *conscience de race* is a direct consequence of the tirailleurs sénégalaïs' participation in the war and their contact

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<sup>1</sup> This phrase comes from Amadou Hampaté Bâ's memoirs, and is cited below in context. (Bâ 470)

with French people and civilization during the war years. This new racial awareness has most often been tied to the Negritude movement, whose most prominent members (Césaire, Damas, and Senghor) came together in Paris in the mid-1930s but did the bulk of their work in this domain after the Second World War. Another important aspect of Negritude is that it involved primarily a French-educated élite from both Africa and the Caribbean, and as such cannot be relied upon to speak for the vast majority of uneducated tirailleurs sénégalaïs or other populations whose contact with the French was very different.

Bakary Diallo's Force-Bonté is the only surviving record of an African's experiences in the war of 1914-1918, and perhaps the only one ever written at all. There are few known published French-language works by West Africans during the interwar years, and the majority of those that exist today were written by members of the French-educated élite, not the returning tirailleurs. Pierre Alexandre, a former colonial officer in Cameroon and Togo, discusses the problem of African sources in an article about the relationship between native chiefs and members of the colonial administration, noting that "we have at our disposal only a very limited amount of African material which may be used" (3). Joe Lunn agrees that it is only the western-educated élite who left such written records, and further notes that "accounts by other Africans [besides Diallo] – including personal letters and official correspondence – are extremely rare and provide only fleeting glimpses into the nature of the soldier's experience" ("Memoirs" 500). In the course of his own research Lunn interviewed African veterans, seeking to "circumvent, through recourse to oral history, the limitations that have arisen due to the

**lack of written source materials by Africans" (502). The significance of Lunn's interviews has become even more apparent since the death in November 1998 of the last surviving African veteran of World War I, Abdoulaye Ndiaye.<sup>2</sup>**

**The impact of the First World War on French West Africa was not only felt by the tirailleurs themselves, but also extended to African society when they returned home. Dissatisfaction regarding their repatriation and low pensions combined with their newfound knowledge about the white man often led tirailleurs to question French authority more frequently and more openly than ever before. Their experiences had changed them, physically and emotionally, and French officials and African communities alike quickly perceived the difficulty with which many tirailleurs rejoined the population which had remained in Africa. As Melvin Pages writes,**

**for these African combatants, and for the families and villages they left behind, the Great War was not merely a European conflict. It was instead a maelstrom of gigantic proportions, one which pulled them – many for the first time – into a world of diverse races and experiences, wreaking havoc with the societies of their ancestors. ("Introduction" 1-2)**

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<sup>2</sup> Ndiaye, of Thiowor, Senegal, died at age 104 the day before he was to receive the *Légion d'honneur* in his village on November 11, 1998. (Bernard) This made the front page of *Le Monde* on November 12, and was accompanied by a cartoon by Plantu which depicted in the background a grinning, chéchia-wearing, waving tirailleur. See "C'était le dernier tirailleur sénégalais."

### **“Le réveil des nègres”:<sup>3</sup> African society in transformation**

This chapter discusses the political issues and social changes arising from the homecoming of the veterans and explores how these were compounded by the fact that in 1919 the French instituted a system of peacetime conscription in Africa. Forced labor as well as the exposure of new groups of recruits to European civilization during tours of duty in France further endangered the security of France’s colonial project in West Africa. As will be seen, West Africans, emboldened by their new knowledge of the French and metropolitan civilization, increasingly challenged the status quo. One former tirailleur living in France in the mid-1920s, Lamine Senghor, worked tirelessly to encourage his fellow Africans to assert their rights and to resurrect the honor of their race. As a disabled, decorated veteran who acquired his knowledge of French much like Bakary Diallo did, he plays a pivotal role in this chapter as a crucial link between two groups of Africans: the elite and the masses.

Furthermore, by tracing Lamine Senghor’s influence on Claude McKay, who in the minds of African and Caribbean intellectuals of the 1930s was one of the most important writers of the Harlem Renaissance, we can see how some Africans during these years were trying to establish a connection between the elite and the masses. Yet the experiences and needs of these two groups differed too widely for any significant *rapprochement* to occur during the interwar period, as Léopold Sédar Senghor’s statements at the end of the 1930s demonstrate. The tension between being true to one’s African roots and proving one’s worth according to European measures is explored to

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<sup>3</sup> Title of an article by Lamine Senghor, cited below.

some extent in McKay's novel Banjo but even more so in Ousmane Socé's novels. Socé's characters seem to be in a perfect position to realize the benefits of French education and civilization, but are in the end unable to survive even in a society which combines both French and African cultural elements. In this chapter, the chain of influence established from the tirailleurs to Lamine Senghor, to Claude McKay, to Léopold Sédar Senghor and Ousmane Socé demonstrates in a unique way the extent of the impact of the tirailleurs' participation in the war.

### *Retour en Afrique*

Despite the fact that a good deal of information exists about how the tirailleurs sénégalaïs got into World War I, little has been written about their repatriation and lives immediately after the war. Marc Michel devotes only a few pages of his L'Appel à l'Afrique to this aspect of the tirailleurs' participation in the war effort, and in From Adversaries to Comrades-in-Arms Charles John Balesi only mentions their return home in passing. Joe Lunn's interviews with veterans of the war and a few articles, such as Summers and Johnson's "World War I Conscription and Social Change in Guinea" are currently the best sources for this information.

Even as tirailleurs sénégalaïs were stationed in Germany from 1919 to mid-1920, many of the remaining surviving tirailleurs were being sent home to Africa. Michel, making use of conflicting statistics regarding tirailleur losses during the war, estimates that some 30-31,000 tirailleurs from French West Africa had been killed or labeled missing by the end of the war. Although he notes that "ces chiffres font du contingent

noire d'A.O.F. l'un des plus éprouvés et représentèrent 21,6% à 22,4% de l'effectif venu en Europe," he adds that West African tirailleur losses were no higher than French infantry losses (22.9%). (*Appel* 407-8) According to Michel, "il faut donc rejeter l'image d'une Afrique vidée de sa substance où la mobilisation n'aurait laissé dans les villages que vieillards, femmes et enfants," though he adds that "il ne faudrait pas tomber dans l'excès inverse et ne voir dans l'effort de mobilisation qu'une péripétie exagérément grossie" (423).

Although Michel's reason for comparing French infantry losses with overall tirailleur losses must be that these troops fought together under the same conditions, it seems unfair to compare the entire population of tirailleurs with only a segment of the French army population. Additionally, he mentions that since most of the tirailleurs recruited in 1918 saw little or no combat, they should really not be counted among those tirailleurs who actually fought, namely approximately 100,000 men. This drastically changes the percentage of tirailleur losses, elevating it to nearly 30%. When this is compared to overall French losses, 1,400,000 killed or missing, which represents 17.6% of the 7,935,000 mobilized, the tirailleurs' contribution seems more significant. Despite the fact that the number of soldiers recruited from French West Africa did not represent as large a percentage of the population as in France, the fact that the vast majority of tirailleurs were rural and probably from the agricultural sector suggests that the impact on the home population in Africa may have been more severe than in France, where losses were evenly spread over the various sectors of the economy.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The French population at the time of the most recent census (1911) was 39,605,000, of which the war mobilization amounted to 20%. In French West Africa the population was approximately 10,000,000

At the end of the war, with 120,000 tirailleurs sénégalais stationed in various regions outside West Africa, including 60,000 in France,<sup>5</sup> the government repatriated them at a rate of some 4,000 per month in 1919, but demobilization of the tirailleurs was not completed until 1920 when those recruited in 1918 were released. Some tirailleurs were given special permission to remain in France, under certain conditions: "pour être démobilisé en France, il fallait demander un stage de perfectionnement professionnel, faire des études supérieures, être naturalisé ou père d'un enfant né d'une union avec une métropolitaine."<sup>6</sup> As Lunn notes, the demobilization process did not always move quickly, since it "included issuing discharge papers to each of the soldiers and the reappropriation of their military equipment (and particularly their rifles)." Adding to the delay was the fact that there was not always enough space in the ships available, which "sometimes sparked protests from disgruntled soldiers" ("Memoirs" 386). In September 1919 tirailleurs in Saint Raphaël, waiting to go home, briefly vented some of their frustration: "As French General Guerin inspected the troops, he was bombarded with shouts of, 'We want to go home!' [...] The General tried to calm the Africans, but had

(Michel gives 10,700,000), so the total war mobilization of tirailleurs, 192,220, represented 2% of the population. See Michel Huber, *La Population de la France pendant la Guerre*, for extensive information. See also Colin Dyer, *Population and Society in Twentieth Century France*, in which he states that of the French population "Nearly every occupation lost approximately 10 per cent of its numbers in the war," though it is also clear that the highest number of French losses was in the agricultural sector. (41) See the Appendix at the end of this dissertation for recruitment statistics in France's colonies.

<sup>5</sup> There were also 26,000 in Algeria and Tunisia, 13,000 in Morocco, and 21,000 in the Orient, according to Michel. (*Appel* 408) Shelby Cullom Davis gives slightly different numbers, saying that in January 1919 "there were 133,000 black troops under arms, divided as follows: 60,000 in France, 10,000 in the Near East, 15,000 in Algeria and Tunis, 11,000 in Morocco, 18,000 as *corps d'occupation* in French West Africa, 7,000 in French Equatorial Africa, 2,000 in Cameroun, and 10,000 recruits of 1918 in French West Africa" (166).

<sup>6</sup> Michel, *Appel* 426 note 23. Michel does not give an indication as to how many tirailleurs might have been granted such authorization.

his cape torn off and was jostled about. He was finally rescued by his aides [ . . . ]."<sup>7</sup>

Although some have characterized this event as a mutiny, Michel holds that this is an exaggeration. He does note, however, that "il est certain que les jeunes soldats maintenus sous les drapeaux longtemps après la victoire dans une Europe troublée pouvaient prêter attention aux propos de leaders plus 'radicaux' que leurs aînés."<sup>8</sup> Another problem that became apparent as the tirailleurs were demobilized was the number of disabled and severely ill. For example, the soldiers transported to Africa on a hospital boat in February 1919 included 60 severely disabled, 55 with tuberculosis, 58 with leprosy, 111 with various illnesses and 94 who had gone insane. Of the 48,936 tirailleurs Michel counts as having been repatriated in 1919, 2,229 or about 5% were ill or disabled. (Appel 409)

The Governor General of French West Africa in 1917-1918, Joost Van Vollenhoven, tried to develop ways to help the tirailleurs effect the transition back into their home societies. His ambitious program included three measures destined to help the veterans and their families readjust after the war: assistance for the disabled, material advantages, and civic privileges. In camps such as the one at Thiaroye<sup>9</sup> African veterans were to get help with their professional reeducation while the administration "s'assurerait des bonnes conditions du retour au village où le tirailleur devrait même trouver une case et un champ défriché" (Michel, Appel 409). These paternalistic ideas of Van

<sup>7</sup> Report from Le Courier Colonial cited in Johnson, Emergence 198. Michel cites Johnson's mention of this incident. (Appel 418)

<sup>8</sup> Michel, Appel 418; Midiohouan, "Lamine Senghor" 156; and "La Ligue est en deuil" refer to these events as a mutiny.

<sup>9</sup> This camp is better known for the bloody uprising of December 1944, when African ex-POWs of World War II being repatriated clashed with their French officers over back pay and demobilization premiums. See Echenberg, Colonial 100-104. These events are also the subject of the 1988 film Le Camp de Thiaroye by Sembène Ousmane.

Vollenhoven's were for the most part abandoned in 1918, when interim Governor General Gabriel Angoulvant declared that the *camps d'invalides* "ne répondent ni aux besoins ni aux aspirations de nos tirailleurs libérés," and instructed his administrators simply to send disabled veterans home, or if they did not specify a home village, to place them in *cases d'hospitalité* and give them a plot of land and 8 to 15 francs if they needed them.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of material advantages, at first tirailleurs demobilized after four years of service outside French West Africa received four months leave with pay or 150-350 francs without leave. Once a general decision had been made in August 1919 non-*Originaire* tirailleurs having served at least three months were to receive 100 francs, plus 10 francs per month in a combat unit and 5 in other units. In October another decree established at 400 francs maximum the amount accorded the families of tirailleurs killed in combat. It is important to note the wide discrepancies between the amounts of money accorded tirailleurs and those accorded French soldiers. The conditions on which pensions were based were the same for colonial and French troops, but the sums of money were very different. For example, a soldier from French West Africa with a 10% disability received a 38 F bonus, whereas a French soldier of the *Armée de terre* received 240 F; a tirailleur with 50% disability received 190 F, a French soldier 1200 F; and at 100% a tirailleur earned 410 F and a Frenchman 2400 F.<sup>11</sup> A table in the newspaper La Voix des Nègres in January 1928 compared French and West African pensions for

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<sup>10</sup> See "Tirailleurs réformés" 235-235. Also cited by Michel, Appel 409.

<sup>11</sup> Tirailleur and French soldier pensions were provided for by different laws, and the sums were based on other factors not included here, such as number of children. See Lassudrie-Duchêne, Les pensions de la Guerre, d'après la loi du 31 mars 1919 et d'après les lois antérieures, from which these figures were taken.

soldiers living in France and having one child, asking “Pourquoi un tirailleur Sénégalais, mutilé de la ‘Grande Guerre’, domicilié en France, reçoit-il une pension 6 à 8 fois moins forte que celle payée à un Français de la métropole de la même mutilation et du même pourcentage d’invalidité?” (“Pourquoi sommes-nous infériorisés?”) Jean Suret-Canale notes that African veterans of the First World War as well as West Africans in police forces in the colonies received “miserable” pay and that their retirement pensions were calculated “so as to assure retired men just remuneration for their former services, but not enough to allow them to remain idle and thus deprive the territory of precious manpower” (340-341).

Although as Michel remarks, an initial sum of money received upon demobilization “pouvait contribuer à l’euphorie des démobilisés ou distraire les familles de leur peine,” neither the feelings nor the money lasted long. “Il fallait attendre ensuite le paiement des pensions d’invalidité ou des rentes viagères et vivre d’avances; pour beaucoup, pour la majorité, il fallait retourner au village sans pension, ni aide particulière” (Appel 410). In a 1998 interview shortly before his death Abdoulaye Ndiaye, the last surviving African veteran, disclosed that he did not even know he was entitled to any sum at all until many years after his return home: “Trente années durant, l’ancien combattant n’a pas touché un centime de compensation. [ . . . ] Il n’a appris qu’en 1949, par les tirailleurs de 39-45 de retour de France, qu’il avait droit à deux pensions, l’une d’invalidité, l’autre d’ancien combattant” (Bernard 8). Though Michel makes no reference to such a circumstance, it is certainly possible, even probable, that there were other veterans who were similarly unaware of the pensions owed them by France.

Another aspect of plans to reintegrate returning tirailleurs into their home societies and at the same time encourage others to enlist involved giving disabled veterans hiring preference for certain jobs, an idea which had been considered since 1915. Eventually, in March 1920, a list of jobs was established, although the positions were open to all veterans, not just the disabled.<sup>12</sup> Important civic privileges had been accorded the tirailleurs in the January 14, 1918 decrees, such as the possibility of acquiring French citizenship and exemption from the *indigénat* and from the obligation of paying taxes. Even though these privileges were not officially revoked later, "dans la pratique, les administrateurs s'évertuèrent à ramener les Anciens Combattants au régime commun plus ou moins rapidement."<sup>13</sup> Interim Governor General Angoulvant also worried about social tensions that could arise as a result of these benefits and privileges for veterans, noting in a May 4, 1918 circular to his administrators that many chiefs had substituted their captives or slaves for their own children during the recruitment drives, and were now seeing these men returning "transformés, chargés d'honneurs, remplis de prétentions que justifient souvent les services rendus et le sang versé. Ce fait risque de provoquer, dans les vieux cadres de la société indigène, des perturbations. . ." ("Politique indigène"). Even during the war, long before the Africans were allowed to go home, officials had expressed concern that they would be corrupted by contact with French people and that French prestige would be compromised by tirailleurs' new views of the French. As Tyler Stovall has noted, colonial laborers too

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<sup>12</sup> Michel, *Appel* 411. Michel also provides a list of the positions available to veterans, and explains some of the requirements for the three categories of jobs. (411-412)

<sup>13</sup> Michel, *Appel* 413. For the January 14, 1918 decrees relating to exemption from the *indigénat* and taxes, see "Recrutement indigène" 32.

were seen as potentially open to the same corruption, so officials had tried to keep them separated from French workers.

They [officials] feared that colonial laborers would learn bad habits from French colleagues; not only might they gain a taste for strong drink and white women, but exposure to local workers might give them experience with strikes and unions. Such ‘contamination’ would limit their utility for the French war effort but, above all, would risk upsetting established hierarchies in the empire itself by returning to the colonies a seasoned body of revolutionaries.<sup>14</sup>

In his May 1918 circular, Angoulvant addressed this issue with regard to the tirailleurs returning to French West Africa. Beginning by noting that although the indigenous populations were indeed supposed to make a slow, controlled evolution under the guidance of the French, he explained that the war had unfortunately greatly accelerated this process and even “dérouté toutes nos prévisions.”

En appelant nos sujets à coopérer à l’effort militaire sans précédent, qui se donne sur les champs de bataille d’Europe, elle [la guerre] provoque l’expatriation, puis le retour d’indigènes qui auront été en contact avec des populations européennes, des civilisations supérieures, et nous devons espérer que, de ces rapprochements, ils rapporteront autre chose que des souvenirs vulgaires ou des idées pernicieuses. (“Politique indigène”)

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<sup>14</sup> Stovall, "Color Line" 746. Although these colonial workers were Indochinese, Chinese, Algerian, Tunisian, and Malagasy, the same concerns applied to the tirailleurs sénégalais.

Just as French officials had feared, it seems that many tirailleurs did return to Africa with new perceptions of the French: “For many Africans, Europeans would never seem the same; as one missionary author put it, the war had been, along with the slave trade one of ‘two great major disillusionments’ Africans had experienced since the coming of Europeans in the fifteenth century” (Page, “Introduction” 18). In “Memoirs of the Maelstrom” Lunn includes an overview of the attitudes of the veterans he interviewed, and some direct quotes relating specific experiences. He explains for example that on their trip home the Africans were freer and able to relax, but “many of the men also bridled at being treated by outgoing *colons* as they had been before their departure from Senegal. Indeed, the soldiers’ insistence on being accorded a new degree of respect from Europeans sometimes led to confrontations with them” (“Memoirs” 386-387).

In addition to the incident in the St. Raphaël/Fréjus area mentioned above, others related to demobilization occurred as the veterans waited in the camps in Africa. Tirailleur protests and refusals to disperse occurred in Haut-Sénégal and Niger, Côte d’Ivoire, Dahomey, and Guinea, and in May 1919 at the train station in Dakar about a hundred soldiers on leave “bousculèrent et malmenèrent des employés et des gradés” (Michel, Appel 414). Soldiers in Kouroussa, Guinea waiting to be demobilized repeatedly demonstrated their exasperation with the poor conditions in the camp and their irritation at being payed less than promised: “More or less serious incidents were occurring daily amongst the rank and file – absolute refusals to obey, insults and frequent taking of the law into their own hands.” When an epidemic of smallpox in the camp led to an order not to leave, “The order was simply impossible to enforce. A crowd of African mutineers

attacked an officer in the camp, Lieutenant Curien, who saved himself by firing his pistol. He was then pursued by 400 enraged soldiers" (Summers and Johnson 32). Administrators blamed this incident and the lack of punishment associated with it for other uprisings that then broke out in the region surrounding the camp. As a result of these events,

Many *anciens combattants* were arrested and then released by the *commandant de cercle* for fear of escalating a conflict between veterans and *gardes de cercle* which the latter seemed likely to lose. [ . . . ] Disorder reigned [in the two villages involved], the Governor reported, as a result of the 'exaggerated desires for independence' to which the return of the *ancien combattants* had given birth. (33)

Despite the fact that armed force was sometimes necessary to put down these uprisings, the administration still hoped in 1919 "que les démobilisés finiraient par se fondre dans la masse paysanne, que, 'replongés dans leur ancien milieu, ces déracinés reviend(raient) assez rapidement à de meilleurs sentiments.'" Yet even in 1920 veterans continued to express their dissatisfaction: in Daola, Côte d'Ivoire on November 11 several hundred men refused to participate in ceremonies celebrating the Armistice, and in Djenné, Soudan in the fall of 1921 some three hundred veterans protested to speed up the process of pension payment. (Michel, Appel 414) Michel downplays the significance of these incidents, arguing that administrators exaggerated in their reports about them. However, others such as Summers and Johnson have posited the opposite, saying for example that "the evidence on this period [late 1919 in Guinea] is mostly vague and

perfunctory, for the authorities were anxious to play down the significance of these events as far as possible. From all over the territory they were receiving reports of disturbances involving *anciens combattants*.<sup>15</sup>

As Michel states, “on n’enrégimenta pas de gré ou de force 200.000 hommes sans bouleverser la vie quotidienne, les structures sociales et les mentalités des populations qui parfois n’avaient eu jusque-là qu’un contact épisodique avec le colonisateur.” He holds that upon their return the veterans encountered more problems within their home environments than with the colonial administration, and tended to remain somewhat removed from their societies. (423) As the army had feared before the war, the tirailleurs were changed by their experiences, and their new mentalities made reintegration into their home societies very difficult.

#### *Une nouvelle mentalité*

In December 1920 Martial Merlin (Governor General 1919-1923) gave a talk regarding the overall situation in French West Africa to the *Conseil de Gouvernement de l'Afrique occidentale française*. He began by discussing the *anciens tirailleurs*, explaining that at the end of the war their

“réintégration était particulièrement délicate. [. . .] Lorsque rendus à leur pays d’origine, il a fallu reprendre les habitudes anciennes, réintégrer des cadres sociaux dont la notion avait été fortement ébranlée dans leur esprit,

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<sup>15</sup> Summers and Johnson 31. Michel remarks in a footnote that he does not agree with all of Summers and Johnson’s conclusions in this article, but does not specify to which ones he objects. (Michel, *Appel* 427 note 61)

l'œuvre ne s'est pas fait sans quelques difficultés. [...] Le passage par la vie militaire déracine profondément les indigènes. Il les différencie sensiblement de leurs congénères en leur créant de nouvelles habitudes, une mentalité nouvelle plus rapprochée des nôtres" ("Situation générale" 97).

Joe Lunn also makes reference to this "mentalité nouvelle," concluding from his interviews that as the tirailleurs returned home to their families "their new outlook was manifested in a series of ways, ranging from subtle alterations in their behavior to more profound changes in their attitudes." Some of the most noticeable transformations seen in the veterans were that they "returned wearing 'European clothes' instead of the traditional *boubou*, many mixed French words with their mother tongues, some smoked tobacco, and nearly all 'kept papers.'"<sup>16</sup> Young men returning from the war, armed with new knowledge of the world as well as an independent source of income (whether a one-time sum or an ongoing pension), disrupted the old traditions by marrying earlier and forming their own households, ultimately contributing in large part to the "fission of many larger family units, as well as an undermining of the internal hierarchies upon which their cohesion was based" ("Memoirs" 430).

When the veterans told their stories, often it was their new familiarity with the Europeans more than their battlefield exploits that interested their families and neighbors.

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<sup>16</sup> Lunn, "Memoirs" 392. Lunn does not specify, but veterans must have had identity papers and other documentation relating to their demobilization and pensions. Most other members of the rural population would probably not have had such papers. Nancy Lawler explains the great care taken by World War II African veterans to preserve their military papers. (242)

(Person 106) During their tour of duty in Europe, many tirailleurs had learned interesting things about France and the French, and

most members of their communities were eager to learn about their experiences: their lives in the army; what the war was like; and especially their impressions of Europe and the *Tubabs*. Although this attention sometimes aroused the envy of elder kinsmen, their knowledge also proved beneficial, particularly in dealings with the French. (Lunn, "Memoirs" 393-394)

As Lunn found in his interviews with veterans, they "frequently acted as cultural intermediaries for their communities," for example being asked to serve as interpreters for chiefs dealing with French administrators. (394) Merlin advocated this, suggesting that it would be beneficial from an administrative standpoint if some returning tirailleurs took on a new function in their society: "*Pliés à la discipline militaire, accoutumés à nos manières d'être et d'agir, ils peuvent devenir pour notre administration d'utiles auxiliaires dans les fonctions de notables ou chefs de village.*" By selecting only those veterans who were deemed capable of handling such responsibilities and were well-regarded by their communities he hoped to demonstrate to the natives the importance that the French attached to the *devoir militaire*, thereby making later recruiting drives easier. ("Situation générale" 97) According to Jean Suret-Canale the colonial administration "tried to turn this superiority complex [...] to its own advantage, and against the mass of their fellow-Africans," giving them decorations ("in the absence of adequate pensions"), and selecting orderlies, guards, and sometimes chiefs from among them. (341)

Governor General Angoulvant's fears that former captives who returned to their villages with new prestige would upset the pre-existing social order proved to be well-founded, as Lunn documents:

Having survived as combatants overseas, many returning *captifs* refused to resume their former obligations to their masters and migrated with their families elsewhere. Indeed, the founding of autonomous villages comprised of slave descendants in Saloum dates from the early 1920s [ . ]. In this respect, the egalitarian impulse acquired by many soldiers in the army applied not only to the French but to the prewar internal social hierarchies among Africans as well. ("Memoirs" 427-428)

According to Echenberg, the number of former captives in the army was not insignificant: "As late as 1918 one astute colonial official, Kersaint-Gilly, estimated that the army was still 75 percent of slave origin" ("Slaves" 329). In Guinea, some former slaves did wish to live in their prewar villages, but "were quite adamant in refusing to accept their former status" (Summers and Johnson 34). Lunn concludes that for most tirailleurs who decided not to live in their home villages<sup>17</sup> the reasons behind their decision were mostly related to their individual family situations and to their social status within the community, with most peasants going home but many aristocrats and former captives moving elsewhere. As Governor General Merlin noted, some tirailleurs opted for city life upon their return: "Certsains de ces tirailleurs, qui n'ont pas pu se réadapter à leur ancien milieu social, sont venus grossir la population des villes, où ils ont trouvé des

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<sup>17</sup> Basing his calculations on the experiences of the veterans he interviewed, Lunn determined that about one-third of those sent to France did not return to live in their former homes after the war. (431)

conditions d'existence se rapprochant plus sensiblement de celles qu'ils avaient rencontrées en France" ("Situation générale" 97). Those who chose to abandon their prewar lives often took jobs in the French sector of the economy: "Some were employed in the public sector as medical assistants, policemen, or market guards; others worked in the new towns along the rail line as agents for the major European export firms; and still others earned livings as carpenters, lorry drivers, and mechanics" (Lunn, "Memoirs" 434). Although these veterans generally settled on these careers because of their knowledge of the French and the French language, others were drawn to them because of the new outlook with which they had returned. Lunn quotes one tirailleur explaining his choice:

"My mind was changed in France by my experience. [And this] was the will of God. [But] when I came back [to Africa], if I had gone back to my village, I would have talked about my experiences during the war. And the people of the village would not [have] understood the [things] I was explaining to them. They would have thought I was trying to show them that I knew more things than they [did]. So that's why I preferred to stay here [in Thiès and accept a job as a policeman]."<sup>18</sup>

These Africans working in the French sector of the economy, whether in administration or commerce, also "created a small, but discernably new, social class" (429). Echenberg has noted a similar development with regard to tirailleurs who stayed on in the military: "Those soldiers who made the army a career were becoming a part of one of the biggest

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<sup>18</sup> Lunn, "Memoirs" 434. The words in brackets were added by Lunn.

class transformations of the French colonial era, the creation of a petty bourgeois salariat" ("Slaves" 329). Thus while some tirailleurs certainly must have been able to assume their prewar lives when they returned, many either had difficulties accepting their former status or chose to pursue new directions in lifestyle and employment that distanced them even further from their home societies.

The return of the tirailleurs made such an impact on their families and villages that many years later one Malian who would have been in his late teens at the time, Amadou Hampâté Bâ,<sup>19</sup> remembered it in his memoirs:

Quand les rescapés rentrèrent au foyer en 1918-1919, ils furent la cause d'un nouveau phénomène social qui ne fut pas sans conséquence sur l'évolution future des mentalités: je veux parler de *la chute du mythe de l'homme blanc* en tant qu'être invincible et sans défauts. Jusque-là, en effet, le Blanc avait été considéré comme un être à part: sa puissance était écrasante, imparable, sa richesse inépuisable, et de plus il semblait miraculeusement préservé par le sort de toute tare physique ou mentale.

(470)

In African Perspectives on Colonialism A. Adu Boahen notes that conscription during the war had provoked anger which lingered after the war's end, and that when fighting alongside the French, African soldiers had discovered "that the whites were not superior beings or supermen after all but just ordinary human beings who could be even more

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<sup>19</sup> Amadou Hampâté Bâ (1900-1991) grew up in Mali, attending both the French and coranic schools, and later became a civil servant in the colonial administration. In addition to Amkoulli and the second volume of his mémoires, Qui mon commandant!, he also published numerous African stories and won several literary prizes.

cowardly than the African and who could therefore be challenged after the war" (77).

Lunn's interviews with veterans are very revealing in this regard as well. Kande Kamara, a Guinean veteran of the war,

believed that the soldier's ordeal marked a crucial watershed in the relations between Africans and Europeans. Recalling that before the war "the white man considered us animals – beasts," he contrasted his view with the outlook of a later age and proudly asserted: "If we hadn't fought, if we – the black people – hadn't fought in western wars, and been taken overseas, and demonstrated some ability of human dignity, we wouldn't have been regarded today as anything."<sup>20</sup>

Amadou Hampâté Bâ too recalled that during the war the tirailleurs had come to realize that in fact not all white people were physically or morally perfect. This discovery, combined with their indignation at receiving much lower pensions than their white counterparts, angered them:

Quand ces tirailleurs rentrèrent au pays, ils racontèrent, au fil des veillées, tout ce qu'ils avaient vu. Non, l'homme blanc n'était pas un surhomme bénéficiant d'on ne savait quelle protection divine ou diabolique, c'était un homme comme eux, avec le même partage de qualités et de défauts, de force et de faiblesse. Et quand ils découvrirent que leurs médailles et leur titre d'ancien combattant leur valaient une pension inférieure de moitié à celle des camarades blancs dont ils avaient partagé les combats et les

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<sup>20</sup> Lunn, "Kande Kamara" 48. This interview is not part of Lunn's "Memoirs of the Maelstrom," which focuses on Senegalese tirailleurs.

souffrances, certains d'entre eux osèrent revendiquer et parler d'égalité.

C'est là, en 1919, que commença à souffler pour la première fois un esprit d'émancipation et de revendication qui devait finir, avec le temps, par se développer dans d'autres couches de la population. (Bâ 470-471)

Not only did the tirailleurs receive lower pensions than French combatants, but upon their return they expected to see fulfilled the appealing promises many of them had been made during the conscription process.

Tirailleurs returning to Guinea seem to have caused the most trouble for the administration, having been offered certain “rewards in terms of improved social and political status” as compensation for their military mobilization. (Summers and Johnson 27)

Even in 1917 the Lieutenant-Governor complained bitterly about the *anciens combattants*' behavior:

“They come back demanding a job as an *agent* or a guard. They are always hanging about the *Poste*, always wearing their military uniforms. They are parasites and get angry when one cannot give them all jobs, claiming that they were promised jobs like this before they left France. . . . Their indiscipline is notorious and we have to intervene continually to restore order [ . . . ] There are going to be an awful lot more of them coming home soon and their dispersion all round the interior could have explosive consequences – not only because of their new mentality but because they are privileged [ . . . ]” (28)

Adding to the problem was the fact that during his visit to Guinea on his 1918 recruitment drive Blaise Diagne had made more promises, “securing allowances for the families of conscripts, [. . . and demanding] that servicemen should be at least partially exempted from the *indigénat*.” As mentioned earlier, the *indigénat* exemption was granted, and as a result according to Summers and Johnson, “the French, having through the conscription process created a social climate favourable to conflict and dissidence, now deprived themselves of an important instrument of social and political control” (29).

In Guinea veteran agitation had begun even before the Armistice, for example as a Senegalese veteran led a February 1916 dockworkers’ strike, which was followed by similar strikes in June and August. Although there had been strikes in Guinea before the war, those of 1916 and later were of a different nature, and “The colonial authorities were in no doubt that exposure to European influence was responsible for this development” (30). Tirailleurs did have contact with French workers during the war, for example when employed in army workshops or along rail lines, and as Michel notes “les Noirs purent y fréquenter d’une manière assez continue des ouvriers, des employés et des paysans” (Appel 388). This had made authorities nervous, and in fact some incidents did arise in France during the war. In September 1916 tirailleurs working at the Bordeaux-Saint-Jean train station went on strike for seven days for salary reasons, and this movement spread to Perpignan and other areas in the south of France. (391) Although Michel downplays the significance of these incidents because they were not the result of union influence, the fact remains that tirailleurs were in contact with French workers and learned much about the potential usefulness of such tactics. In Guinea, a strike in August 1918 was reported

to have been caused by “some native soldiers on leave, under the sway of ideas and tendencies which they had brought back from their contact with French workers” (Summers and Johnson 30). In another incident in 1919 a tirailleur on leave took it upon himself to stop a group of construction workers building a road and explain to them “that in France the natives [sic] were very well treated, paid and fed, without any constraint to do any work.”<sup>21</sup>

A 1921 report about Guinea in *L'Afrique française*, the journal of the *Comité de l'Afrique française*, explained that the war, the measures of the decrees of January 14, 1918, and the return of the veterans “ont une influence certaine sur la mentalité de nos indigènes.” The article continues, mentioning strikes in Conakry in 1919 by dockworkers and then also by workers in other industries, and warning that the natives and the chiefs were certainly aware of their new rights:

Les indices sont donc assez nombreux d'une évolution sociale; aucun cependant n'est encore nettement caractérisé. Il y a dans la masse des indigènes une sorte de travail moléculaire, qui ne sait comment se traduire en paroles, et qui est encore inhabile à se manifester en actes. ("En Guinée française" 57)

The strikes in Conakry spread to railway workers, and when one colonizer's plantation workers went on strike for four days, “*anciens combattants* were very much in evidence.” As Summers and Johnson note, “This suggested to the Lieutenant-Governor ‘the ease

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<sup>21</sup> Summers and Johnson 31. The “sic” is Summers and Johnson’s.

with which the workers can allow themselves to be dragged along by a couple of agitators who have seen how strikes work in France”” (30).

The societal changes resulting from the tirailleurs’ return to families who hardly expected to see them again and from their resentment about having been recruited and, despite their heroism, shoddily treated upon demobilization were exacerbated by the administration’s own policies and failure to honor the promises made during the recruitment drives. Additionally, the tirailleurs’ exposure to French civilians and French civilization made it very difficult for them to reassimilate into their home societies. While not specifically referred to as a *conscience de race* or *conscience impériale* in texts from the period, their new mentality and new attitude toward the French clearly indicates a sea change in the colonial relationship. Yet the French persisted in trying to reestablish the status quo of the prewar years, and exacerbated the situation by introducing even more West Africans to French civilization through peacetime military conscription – sending many recruits on tours of duty in the metropole and abusing the remainder as a labor pool.

#### *Continued Conscription and Forced Labor*

Even as Africans who had fought alongside French soldiers in Europe were encountering difficulties reintegrating into their home societies, the French administration decided to enact a peacetime conscription law which would remain virtually unchanged until the 1950s.<sup>22</sup> Important demographic considerations such as a low birthrate and

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<sup>22</sup> See Echenberg, Colonial and Nancy Lawler’s *Soldiers of Misfortune* for information about the tirailleurs in the Second World War and after.

heavy losses in manpower in the war, a pressing need to get French workers back into the economy, and the desire to maintain a large standing army contributed to France's decision not to demobilize all the tirailleurs sénégalaïs and in fact to augment their numbers. Minister of War Clemenceau rationalized opting for a conscript army rather than one composed of volunteers using three reasons: conscripts were cheaper than volunteers, there was doubt as to how many Africans would actually volunteer in the aftermath of the war, and since French West Africa had offered (in his opinion) little resistance to conscription during the war it could continue to provide men. (Echenberg, Colonial 43)

As noted earlier, the important concessions made to tirailleurs recruited during the 1918 drive – freedom from taxation and the *indigénat*, and the possibility of acquiring citizenship – were mostly abandoned in practice, though not officially revoked. Although the 1919 Conscription Law does make certain adjustments to the sum of money given to tirailleurs upon their enlistment, it does not mention taxes, the *indigénat* or citizenship.<sup>23</sup> Yet the report signed by Henry Simon, Georges Clemenceau and L.-L. Klotz<sup>24</sup> introducing the law and explaining the motives behind it does refer to the measures accorded the recruits of 1918. The report notes that the demands of the war had compelled France to seek substantial reinforcements from Africa and that "Des dispositions spéciales ont donc été prises qui ont permis de généraliser les appels et qui

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<sup>23</sup> See in particular "Titre V: Avantages concédés aux militaires indigènes, Chapitre 1er: Primes, hautes payes et indemnités" of the 1919 law in JORF 5 August 1919, 8209 and JORF 17 January 1918, 679 also available in "Recrutement indigène" 32.

<sup>24</sup> Simon was Minister of Colonies, Clemenceau *Président du Conseil* and Minister of War, and Klotz Minister of Finance.

ont donné des résultats très satisfaisants." Significantly, it continues: "Toutefois, ces dispositions n'ont qu'un caractère essentiellement *temporaire* et les décrets correspondants, en particulier celui du 14 janvier 1918, cesseront, en règle générale, d'être applicables dès que la paix sera signée."<sup>25</sup> This official recognition of the limited time during which these privileges would be enjoyed by tirailleurs sénégalais only supports Marc Michel's point that administrators in the colonies did their utmost to bring the tirailleurs' status back in line with that of other natives, as it certainly does not appear they would have been dissuaded from doing so by the French government.

In 1920 an interministerial commission chaired by Mangin studied various factors to determine how many soldiers French West Africa could provide each year, arriving at a range of 12,000 to 14,000 and projecting a standing force of 55,000 men. Echenberg goes into detail about this demographic survey and the fact that the commission relied on crude censuses and "largely subjective assumptions" and applied to the African population demographic data from the French and possibly even German populations. (Colonial 50) Additionally, the army was competing with business interests for the same able-bodied men, and "The pseudoscientific element of the demographic survey conducted by the interministerial commission was a shoddy exercise that in the end produced a result consistent with what the conflicting competitors for West African labor needed" (47-51). Quotas were set for each region, and mobile draft boards established to effect the actual recruitment.

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<sup>25</sup> Emphasis added. See JORF 5 August 1919, 8208. Also reproduced (though not in letter form and without names) in "Nouveau statut" 288.

In the early years it was not widely known by Africans that passing the medical exam did not automatically enter them into the military, so when officers asked those who had passed if they would like to volunteer there were some who did step forward. By the mid-1920s, however, everyone understood that it was better to hold back and hope they would not be chosen for service, and the number of volunteers at this stage in the process was much lower. (58-60) Volunteers were subtracted from the region's quota, and then a lottery divided up the remaining eligible men into two groups. As stipulated by the 1919 law, the "first portion" went into the army for three years, and the "second portion" constituted a reserve force. For most of the 1920s the second portion recruits simply went home, having fulfilled their military duty by appearing before the draft board and being put into the reserve. "In the late 1920s, however, especially in the Sudan and parts of Upper Volta, men of the second portion were conscripted into labor brigades to serve for two or three years in works declared by the French authorities to be of a public nature" (61). However, this quickly became a very unappealing option, and later potential recruits actively tried to get into the first portion.

In his discussion of French recruitment procedures, Echenberg explains that the system "was biased against rural, less privileged groups," as both African communities and business interests "worked to protect the more highly skilled or more highly ranked" (62). Although there were reasons for upper class families to send sons to serve in the army – for example "A good service record and the acquired ability to speak some French might very well help a returning veteran get appointed to a chiefship" – high-ranking members of African society remained a minority in the army. Another social

group too was underrepresented in the army: the middle class, French-educated Africans, although it was argued that they would only have been troublemakers anyway, given their nationalist leanings. The fact that the army remained predominantly lower class “had serious consequences for the kind of training given to Africans in the Colonial Army. Soldiers of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalaïs* began and ended as infantrymen” (63).

Despite the fact that the 1919 Conscription Law did provide punishments for avoiding recruitment or helping others to do so, West African resistance to recruitment continued in the interwar years much as it had during the war. In colonies like Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire a form of passive resistance involved migrating into colonies like Portuguese Guinea or Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast, under British rule.<sup>26</sup> Other factors too motivated Africans to make these “protest migrations,” such as taxes and the *indigénat*, but when Assinie refugees from Côte d’Ivoire living in the Gold Coast were interviewed in 1917 “conscription was emphasized as the most decisive single influence” on their decision to move. (Asiwaju 584) The French viewed these migrations as being the result of socio-economic attractions like “the search for more fertile agricultural soil, better job opportunities, the menace of natural disasters such as locust swarms, famine and epidemics, and ethnic links,” rather than as an objection to their colonial practices influenced by the fact that British rule might be slightly preferable to French. The British do not seem to have been inclined to send the migrants back to French territory, relishing their gain and the French loss – and in fact during the 1930s “the French in the Ivory Coast were particularly annoyed with their British colleagues in the Gold Coast, who not

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<sup>26</sup> See Michel, *Appel* 50-54.

only failed to co-operate in returning emigrants to their homes, but also gave what the French considered to be undue publicity to migrations into British territory" (Asiwaju 581).

In the late 1920s and the 1930s the use of the second portion of recruits as a labor force and other methods of extracting labor from natives also prompted protest migrations. A decree in 1926 gave each area governor the option of using the second portion as a labor force, and in October 1927 Soudan was the first to decide to take advantage of this opportunity. Two-thirds of the 1,500 men conscripted in 1928 were assigned to a Niger dam project, and the remaining third to the Thiès-Niger rail line. In late 1929 a similar measure planned by administrators in Dahomey met with resistance in the form of migration over the border into Nigeria and extremely high absentee rates in the 1930 levy. (Echenberg and Filipovich 538-540)

In addition to using military conscripts as labor, between 1914 and 1939 in at least some areas the administration in French West Africa also made use of forced day laborers (system of *prestations*) and contract laborers who received essentially token salaries of about 1 franc a day. (Cordell and Gregory 214) Sometimes entire villages would be relocated to secure workers for projects such as "road construction and maintenance in places of relatively sparse population, and to force Africans to abandon their home environments, where inaccessibility made administrative control difficult and anti-colonial opposition relatively easy."<sup>27</sup> Compulsory crop cultivation also adversely affected such areas as Upper Volta, Mali, and Niger, where in the late 1920s and early

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<sup>27</sup> Asiwaju 588. Cordell and Gregory refer to this as "land colonization schemes." (218)

1930s this policy “led to the flight into the Gold Coast of no less than 80,000 French subjects.”<sup>28</sup>

A huge irrigation project on the Niger River in Soudan which required an enormous quantity of manpower to build was begun during the mid-1920s and continued until after the Second World War.<sup>29</sup> As part of this project, in 1932 the *Office du Niger* was created to direct the construction of a huge dam at Sansanding, which was to provide water to almost a million hectares. (Echenberg and Filipovich 535) Half of the labor force used to construct this dam came from the second portion of the annual military recruitment, and the other half was made up of requisitioned labor and some volunteers. (537) Working conditions were harsh, as conscripts did hard construction labor nine hours a day six days a week, and the supervisors had powers essentially equal to those of the colonial governor. In an inspection in the mid-1930s it was found that the “mortality rate had risen from 1.5 per cent in 1932 to nearly 2.7 per cent in 1934. Every man interviewed by the Inspector complained of constant hunger; and nearly all confessed to having been beaten” (544). Even before arriving at the work site the conscripts were likely to endure cruel treatment: in 1936, even though distances over 50 kilometers were supposed to be traveled by truck or rail, “Some three hundred worker recruits were marched the entire five hundred kilometers from Ouahigouya to [the work site] at Markala, a journey that took them five weeks to accomplish” (543).

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<sup>28</sup> Asiwaju 590. See also Crowder and Ajayi 246.

<sup>29</sup> Echenberg and Filipovich 530. The irrigation of this much land would also have required a large number of farmers, some 2.5-3.5 million, which critics argued could not be supplied to this area, in the “inland Niger delta which for centuries had been dessicated and depopulated” (535).

In a 1933 book, Le travail obligatoire dans les Colonies africaines, author René Mercier complained about the time wasted during such travels: “Un temps considérable est perdu dans les allées et venues des colonnes de travailleurs réquisitionnés parfois à plusieurs semaines de marche des chantiers,” adding that “Fréquemment, en effet, nous l’avons vu, la main-d’œuvre est recrutée à des centaines ou même des milliers de kilomètres des chantiers” (113-114). Although Mercier recognized the depression workers could feel at being removed from their homes for long periods of time, he was more concerned about their abandoning the few moral beliefs they had and descending into alcoholism. After enumerating other moral and social consequences of *le travail obligatoire*,<sup>30</sup> Mercier concludes that they are not really so bad:

Cependant, et quoi qu’on ait dit, nous croyons que toutes ces conséquences économiques, morales, sociales, tant individuelles que collectives, ne suffisent pas à condamner le travail obligatoire, car, d’une part, elles ne sont pas absolument fatales, ni irrémédiables et, d’autre part, elles ne sont pas imputables rigoureusement à la contrainte: beaucoup d’entre elles se retrouvent identiques à propos de l’emploi de la main-d’œuvre volontaire. (118)

French authorities tended to view the use of the second portion of conscripts in terms of “a contribution to France’s civilizing mission,” and Mercier’s book argues for this practice “as a means of teaching the work ethic, while the colonial press went so far as to say that

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<sup>30</sup> Mercier preferred the term “le travail obligatoire” to “le travail forcé,” writing that the latter too easily provokes inaccurate “visions de bagne” (7).

second-portion workers, ‘freed from their natural indolence’, would become the envy of other Africans” (Echenberg and Filipovich 539).

As with the recruitment demands in general, Africans who were conscripted into the second portion often expressed their protest in the form of migration – absenteeism and desertion were common. Yet sometimes their opposition was more flagrant, as Echenberg and Filipovich note: “A few desperate Africans dared to challenge the colonial system directly. In 1929 there were four separate labour protests among second portion workers assigned to railway work at Kale, Kayes, Thiès and Dinguiray.”<sup>31</sup> Almost ten years later, in 1938, three Africans refused to serve in the second portion and were punished: “Sentenced to prison terms ranging from six months to five years, followed by five years’ banishment from Soudan, the three men at their trial stated that they would rather ‘do ten years as soldiers than serve as second portion labourers’” (Echenberg and Filipovich 547).

Although flight from the recruiter was the most significant form of migration relating to conscription during this period, Myron Echenberg describes two additional forms of migration in French West Africa that resulted from conscription. One involved soldiers in the first portion, of whom some would spend their three years in French West Africa but “a majority would be shipped overseas to France itself, or to garrisons anywhere in the vast French empire.”<sup>32</sup> The third form of migration mirrored a tendency already seen at the end of the war, as former soldiers “chose to settle in the administrative

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<sup>31</sup> Kale and Kayes are in modern-day Mali, Thiès in Senegal, and Dinguiray in Guinea.

<sup>32</sup> In a footnote Echenberg states that “It should be noted that no *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* units were stationed on French soil until the 1930s,” but gives no further information. (*Colonial* 189 note 42)

or regional centers of FWA rather than to return to their ancestral villages" (*Colonial* 70-71).

A 1931 article by Paul Catrice in the catholic journal *Études* discusses the presence of *troupes indigènes* in France during the interwar years, and indicates that some "52,583 indigènes nord-africains et coloniaux" were stationed in the metropole as of October 1930, six regiments of which were tirailleurs sénégalaïs. (390, 400) The focus of his article is not the services rendered by these troops or their military value, but rather "les conséquences politiques, sociales et même religieuses" of their use in France. Catrice writes, "Nous trouverons ici encore un nouvel aspect de cette 'invasion pacifique de l'Orient': la France devient le lieu de rencontre des Africains et des Asiatiques" (388). During the war tirailleurs sénégalaïs had experienced more contact with French people than was good for them (in the army's view), and the same was true for soldiers stationed in France during the interwar years.

Echoing the sentiments of others before him, Catrice laments

La facilité avec laquelle ils [les soldats indigènes] purent s'amuser avec des femmes françaises, le nombre important de liaisons ou même de mariages qui furent contractés et la honteuse débauche systématique de tout autre façon et, comme toujours, le spectacle des vices ou des faibles côtés l'emporta sur celui des qualités.

Interestingly, Catrice openly admits that former tirailleurs are some of the products of colonization of which Europeans do not have occasion to be particularly proud, since the repercussions of the vain and lazy attitudes acquired through the Africans' close contact

with whites are evident: “détachement de toutes les traditions, mépris affiché des chefs indigènes et de leurs décisions, révolte plus ou moins ouverte contre l’autorité coloniale” (395). He worries about communist propaganda already affecting these troops and liable to spread its influence into the indigenous populations (397) – a well-founded fear, as evidenced for example by the tireless efforts of the former tirailleur Lamine Senghor to awaken his brethren to the wretchedness and unfairness of their situation.

These 50,000 or so soldiers from all over the empire were clustered mainly around Bordeaux and Marseilles (because of the climate), in the Paris area, and near the German and Italian borders. (400) Living for the most part in small towns,

Ces soldats indigènes sont en contact direct avec les Français, ils en pénètrent les habitudes, les petits côtés, les vices surtout; ils en arrivent bien vite à douter de la supériorité du colonisateur; tandis qu’ils font découvrir aux paisibles citadins des horizons des mondes nouveaux. (401)

Catrice mentions their presence at the *Exposition coloniale* at Vincennes as well, and opines that in Fréjus area, “c’est presque comme une Exposition Coloniale continue: plusieurs milliers de soldats indigènes, plus nombreux que les habitants de la ville, une nouba entraînante qui nous initie à des harmonies nouvelles [ . . . ]” (402).

A 1930 article in an American magazine, *Travel*, goes into great detail about a “Colonial Fête” held at the Fréjus camp, during which the “Marseillaise” was followed by “a savage melody – one of the African Noubas” (Harrison 35). The author, Marguerite Harrison, recounts how she and her husband happened to be in the area and decided to attend the *fête* out of curiosity, having seen the tirailleurs during the war: “I had seen

them with the Army of Occupation on the Rhine, shivering in their great coats through a cold German winter, and I had always felt that their lot was a hard one until this summer when I saw them in their headquarters at Fréjus on the Riviera not far from Toulon."

Harrison describes the camp, explaining that "the climate of Southern France is particularly adapted to these children of the tropics [ . . . ] There, incredible as it may seem, they are at home" (34). She describes the *fête* at length, and seems to have thoroughly enjoyed everything: music, dancers, gladiators, spearfights, boxers, wrestlers, gymnasts, tom-tom players, and the pageant mimicking the Sultan of Dahomey's cortège. At the end of the show they meet the commanding officer, Colonel Lame, and arrange to take a tour of the camp the next day.

Like Harrison, Catrice notes the presence of a mosque for the soldiers in his short description of the camp at Fréjus. Being catholic, he seems slightly upset by this: "Cette mosquée, inaugurée en décembre 1928, [ . . . ] est destinée aux soldats noirs dont on ne semble pas s'être trop inquiété de savoir s'ils étaient tous musulmans [ . . . ]," and complains that it seems much easier for the muslim soldiers to practice their religion than for the catholics. (406) He also peevishly remarks that although Lucie Cousturier's Des inconnus chez moi offers "d'utiles observations sur le contact des soldats noirs avec la France et sur la réaction de leur esprit devant les spectacles nouveaux qui se présentent à eux," it is in his opinion unfortunate that she chose such a secular and even atheistic approach to teaching the Africans. It is not at all surprising that Catrice much preferred the saintly efforts of Alice Munet with regard to hospitalized tirailleurs. (405) Harrison too notices the camp mosque, but she inquires about the non-Muslims as well, and her

guide the Colonel's aide assures that "they have their medicine men and their witch doctors and their fetishes" (58).

Harrison is clearly very impressed by the Fréjus camp, and by the French effort in general to train and teach these soldiers, who she writes "are not forced relentlessly into the European mould. They do not have an alien culture foisted on them." While she does remark that "When they go back to their villages they take with them the knowledge of many useful things, and assume an air of vast superiority over their homestaying brethren," and that "They lord it in the villages," she does not view this as a negative effect of their stay in France. More than anything, Harrison is pleased to see that "they are not spoiled by attempts to assimilate strange customs, manners and ideals," and that all across France's vast empire "every effort is being made to preserve the native life and culture" (58). It is doubtful that she intended her final sentence to be as ironic as it is today: "It will be interesting to observe [the French colonial Empire's] fruits in the future when the inevitable awakening of national consciousness takes place among the tribespeople of Africa as well as among the more cultured natives of France's Asiatic possessions" (58).

Although Marguerite Harrison seems convinced that these soldiers stationed in Fréjus were living much as they would have been in their home villages, Paul Catrice is more realistic. He quotes some articles from La Dépêche coloniale unfavorable to the tirailleurs' presence in France, such as one entitled "Plus un Sénégalais est intelligent, plus son séjour chez nous exerce sur lui une mauvaise influence" (403). Catrice remarks that "La plupart des spécialistes des questions militaires et surtout des fonctionnaires

coloniaux sont d'ailleurs tout à fait hostiles à ce séjour en France, auquel ils voient de graves inconvénients d'ordre politique et d'ordre moral" (403). As noted above, he was well aware of the growing influence of communist propaganda among the colonized in France. One former tirailleur sénégalais in particular, Lamine Senghor, worked hard during the mid-1920s to spread just this kind of propaganda among any and all colonized peoples. Senghor's crusade against the shoddy treatment of the tirailleurs sénégalais and the use of forced labor in Africa and his mission to resurrect the honor of the black race were a crucial first step toward not only the development of Negritude, but also ultimately toward independence.

*Debout les nègres: Lamine Senghor*

Although the best-known members of the Negritude mouvement are the well-educated Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, Aimé Césaire of Martinique, and Léon Gontron Damas of French Guiana, a self-taught former tirailleur named Lamine Senghor has only recently come to be recognized as their important precursor. Although several theses including information about his life and political activities were written during the 1970s and early 1980s,<sup>33</sup> it seems that his allegorical text La violation d'un pays (1927) was lost until 1984, when it was uncovered in Dakar by a Senegalese researcher, Papa Samba Diop. Since this time, very little has been written about Lamine Senghor and La violation d'un pays, but in the context of this study he is a pivotal figure because his

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<sup>33</sup> Guy Ossito Midiohouan gives some information about these theses. ("Lamine Senghor" 154-55)

experiences in France as a tirailleur led to his militant anticolonial activities during the 1920s.

Accounts of Senghor's life vary somewhat, beginning with dispute over his place of birth – cited variously as Kaolack, Dakar,<sup>34</sup> and Joal. According to both Diop and Midiohouan, the most credible research indicates he was born in Joal, Senegal on September 15, 1889 to a family of Serer farmers. He seems to have left home in 1912 and looked for work in Dakar, but “Analphabète, ne connaissant que le travail des champs, il ne trouve pas mieux qu'une place de domestique qu'il occupe jusqu'à la Grande Guerre” (Midiohouan, "Lamine Senghor" 156). Although Senghor then joined the army, it is unclear whether or not he really volunteered to do so – Midiohouan calls him an “engagé volontaire” but puts the expression in quotes (156), and Langley says he “was recruited into the army” (Pan-Africanism 302). Senghor served in France from 1915-1919, earning the rank of sergeant and a military decoration, the *Croix de Guerre* (Steins 284), and sustaining wounds and a gas attack which severely impacted his health.

According to Midiohouan, Senghor “aurait pris part à la mutinerie de Fréjus en 1919” (156) - an incident whose status as “mutiny” has been called into question – but Langley writes that “he refused to participate in a mutiny of Senegalese infantrymen at Fréjus” (302). While Midiohouan does not give a source for this bit of information, he bases much of his biographical sketch on a 1979 brochure about Senghor published by the *Front Culturel Sénégalais*. Langley, who cites Senghor’s obituary in La Race Nègre, must be referring to the following sentences:

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<sup>34</sup> Cornevin, Littératures 150; Langley, Pan-Africanism 302; and his obituary in La Race Nègre, “La Ligue est en deuil” give Kaolack as his birthplace, and Steins (284) gives Dakar.

Ai-je besoin de rappeler ici ses faits d'armes, sa brillante carrière au front, son attitude lors des mutineries des tirailleurs sénégalais à Fréjus, ses démêlés avec des officiers parmi lesquels je retrouve le colonel Lame, commandant en 1917? Dirai-je tous les souvenirs du grand drame qu'il nous contait en souriant? ("Ligue est en deuil")

I would hesitate to translate this reference as indicating a refusal to participate in these events. In my opinion, there is no contradiction between Senghor's having demonstrated bravery and valor on the battlefield and then having serious misgivings about the army's treatment of him and his fellow tirailleurs as they waited (too long) to be repatriated. Even though the obituary indicates that he was little interested in politics at the time, the mention of earlier disputes with commanding officers and the image of him smiling as he recounts these events only add credibility to the notion that he might indeed have supported, if not instigated, some type of rebellious activity at this time.

The next point of controversy in Lamine Senghor's biography is whether or not he was or became a French citizen. The importance of his place of birth becomes apparent here, since if it is Dakar he would, as an *originnaire*, automatically have been a citizen and might not have been obliged to join the tirailleurs sénégalais, depending on when he did so.<sup>35</sup> Although Martin Steins states unequivocally that Senghor "était 'citoyen' et non 'sujet'" because he was born in Dakar (284), Midiohouan states that he undertook to obtain French citizenship upon his return to Senegal just after the war, and

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<sup>35</sup> The timing of this would have been important because the Blaise Diagne law of October 19, 1915 obtained the incorporation of *originaires* into French troops, and the second Diagne law, passed on September 29, 1916 legislated on their citizenship.

succeeded in July 1920. (156) Christopher Miller, using Iba der Thiam's 1982-83 dissertation as his primary source, holds that "Senghor falsified his birth records, claiming to have been born in Dakar, not Joal" in order to obtain French citizenship.<sup>36</sup> According to Midiohouan, as a result of Senghor's vociferous denunciations of France's treatment of the former tirailleurs and policies of using forced labor in the colonies, he became the Minstry of Colonies' Enemy Number 1, and "C'est alors que, estimant qu'il a acquis frauduleusement son statut de citoyen français, l'administration engage une procédure pour le lui retirer" (158). In a footnote Miller states that "Senghor's fraud was discovered by the authorities in 1925, but proceedings against him were nullified by a statute of limitations" (Nationalists 217 note 46). In an article about the Comintern and anti-colonialism J. D. Hargreaves indicates parenthetically that Senghor "was able to evade police action by claiming the status of French citizen by virtue of birth in Dakar, a claim which the French authorities were eager to refute."<sup>37</sup>

Senghor was repatriated in 1919, but returned to France in either 1921 or 1922 and took a job as a postman. Midiohouan argues that his main goal was to return to Senegal with his French wife, Eugénie Comont, and that when he approached the administration for free passage to Africa he "vient ainsi à tomber dans les griffes du C.A.I. (Contrôle et Assistance aux Indigènes), service de renseignements du Ministre des Colonies qui l'utilise comme indicateur." In this capacity Senghor allegedly furnished the

<sup>36</sup> Miller, Nationalists 24. Thiam's dissertation is entitled "L'Evolution politique et syndicale du Sénégal colonial de 1840 à 1936" (Ph.D. diss., Université de Paris I, 1982-83). Midiohouan mentions it in his survey of theses as well.

<sup>37</sup> Hargreaves, "Comintern" 259. It is unclear to what police action Hargreaves is referring here, though it appears to be connected to Senghor's activities in the Communist Party and his candidacy in a municipal election.

C.A.I. with reports enabling them to track the activities of Africans in Paris, and in particular those belonging to the newly established *Union Intercoloniale* (alternately abbreviated U.I. and U.I.C.), “organisation fondée en juillet 1921 par les colonisés hostiles au système colonial” (Midiohouan, “Lamine Senghor” 156). No other source that I have seen gives this information, and in fact Papa Samba Diop maintains that Senghor actually founded the U.I. (“Texte” 124), although Langley asserts that it was founded by Hô Chi Minh. (Pan-Africanism 293 note 21) In Midiohouan’s account Senghor became the *secrétaire adjoint* of the U.I. in November 1924 and ended his collaboration with the Ministry of Colonies. (157) For his part, Miller writes that Senghor “was under constant surveillance by the French government, which documented his every move,” and again cites Thiam, who quotes a government agent as saying that “many blacks already look upon him as their future liberator . . . Since the arrival of Senghor in our port, there is a certain effervescence in native quarters. It seems that urgent measures must be taken against this agitator” (24).

All accounts do agree, however, that Senghor was active in the French Communist Party in the early 1920s, and in his obituary he is said to have been refused repatriation to Senegal in 1923 because “On craignait que le communiste Senghor ne fit une propagande dangereuse parmi ses compatriotes” (“Ligue est en deuil”). According to Langley, he took some classes at the Sorbonne in 1922 and then became a communist because the administration had refused his request to return to Africa,<sup>38</sup> but Midiohouan says instead that he attended the *École Coloniale Communiste* founded in February 1925,

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<sup>38</sup> Langley, Pan-Africanism 302. Miller also mentions the Sorbonne. (Nationalists 24)

and that Senghor had learned to read and write after the age of 26, while he was in the army. He specifies that it was at this school that Senghor learned the fundamental principles of marxism, and that “Ce fut la seule école qu'il fréquenta dans sa vie et qui en fit le premier cadre communiste africain de Paris” (157). Philippe Dewitte writes that classes at this school, located in the *Maison des syndicats* in the 19<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris, were often canceled for lack of students, and that it closed in April 1925. (107)

In May 1925 Senghor was presented by the *Bloc ouvrier-paysan* as a Communist candidate for the 13<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement of Paris in a municipal election. According to an article in the short-lived newspaper Le Paria, published by the U.I. in 1922-1926, “les indigènes, si ignorants soient-ils, se réveillent à la lutte des classes. [ . . ] Las de souffrir de l'état d'infériorité sociale où ils étouffent, ils veulent leur place à la lumière, et une part égale des droits dont jouissent d'autres hommes.” The article briefly explains Senghor's candidacy:

La candidature de Seinghor [sic], ce sera une protestation vivante de centaines de milliers d'Africains, que Diagne, pourvoyeur de chair noire, a vendu aux bouchers de 1914. Mutilé de la guerre du ‘Droit’, Seinghor, mieux que tout autre, saura dénoncer les infâmes d'un gouvernement esclavagiste qui veut rétablir le travail forcé, en militarisant tous les nègres afin de parer à la pénurie de main-d'œuvre qui sévit dans les exploitations cotonnières. (Djazairi 1)

According to Langley, Le Paria “was one of the newspapers classified by the French colonial authorities as ‘newspapers of subversive tendency published both abroad and in

France,"" and it was even found in Porto Novo, Dahomey, where disturbances occurred in 1923. (Pan-Africanism 293) Christopher Miller notes that the U.I. "was dominated in succession by Antilleans, Indochinese, and North Africans; [but] sub-Saharan Africans [. . .] played a small role" – with the exception of Lamine Senghor. The U.I. and Le Paria maintained a moderate position of anti-colonialism, deciding to "“camoufler le drapeau rouge' afin de ne pas effrayer les sympathisants" and to keep readers from associating the paper with the image of a man with a knife between his teeth, which would evoke memories of Bolshevism at the end of World War I. (Dewitte 100) Additionally, it appears that Lucie Cousturier actively supported Le Paria, since a notice in the paper announcing her death thanks her:

Nous sommes profondément éprouvés par la mort de notre camarade  
Lucie Cousturier. Ecrivain remarquable et grande amie des indigènes  
coloniaux, l'auteur du beau livre: 'Les [sic] Inconnus chez moi', fut un  
grand cœur, qui inlassablement apporta à notre groupe et à notre organe  
son aide matérielle et morale. (La Direction du Paria)

Senghor was very critical of Blaise Diagne, and volunteered to be a witness against him in a libel suit which Diagne brought against René Maran and Jean Fangeat, the editor-in-chief of another newspaper, Les Continents, in November 1924.<sup>39</sup> Diagne was objecting to the October 1924 article entitled "Le bon Apôtre," "which described

<sup>39</sup> This paper was owned by the founder and president of the *Ligue Universelle de la Défense de la Race Noire*, Kojo Tovalou Houénou, a Dahomean educated in Europe. See Langley, Pan-Africanism 290-302 for further information. According to Eslanda Goode Robeson, an American who interviewed Houénou in Paris in June 1932 he had both a law and a medicine degree, had fought in World War I in the French army, and had worked as official physician to both the Ballet at the Opera and the Firemen of Paris. ("Black Paris I" 17-18)

[him] as an agent of French colonialism and accused him of receiving a commission for the black troops he had recruited during the war." Senghor testified about "the irregular methods of recruitment of black troops during the war, and complained of the low wages they were paid" (Langley, *Pan-Africanism* 299). An unsigned article in *Le Paria* following Diagne's victory in the suit<sup>40</sup> suggested that perhaps they should have resorted to more direct and heartrending methods:

Au lieu de s'attarder à prouver à combien de centimes près le grand négrier touche par tête de Sénégalaïs qu'il recrute, il aurait fallu faire passer devant lui toute une procession d'aveugle [sic], de mutilés. Ceux dont la face est horriblement défigurée, ceux qui souffrent d'atroces douleurs internes; et les orphelins, et les veuves [. . .]

Toutes ces victimes lui auraient craché à la face toute l'infamie de la mission qu'il avait accomplie. ("Un procès nègre")

Despite his defeat in the municipal election (he received 965 votes), his arrest in June 1925 for protesting the Rif war and an attempt on his life just days later, Senghor remained committed to his "combat pour la défense de ses frères de race et pour l'indépendance des peuples colonisés" (Midiohouan, "Lamine Senghor" 157). In the April-May 1925 issue of *Le Paria* he published an article announcing "La solidarité prolétarienne entre européens et indigènes," in which he discussed the "magnifique grève de quatre jours" by the Dakar-Saint-Louis railway line workers. He praised the European

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<sup>40</sup> The editor received "a suspended sentence of six months' imprisonment, plus a fine of 2,000 francs" (Langley, *Pan-Africanism* 299). See also two *Continents* articles, one in French and one in English: "Le procès fantôme" and Russell, "M. Diagne prosecutes 'Les Continents.'"

workers for refusing an increase in their own salaries which would in essence have been financed by a reduction in the Africans' salaries. In the end, Senghor reported, "La compagnie, soutenue par le gouvernement, fut obligée de donner entière satisfaction aux grévistes, soit 450 francs par mois aux Européens, 250 à 450 francs aux indigènes, suivant l'importance des postes occupées par ceux-ci" (Seinghor). Later in 1925 Senghor published an article in Le Paria against the policy of forced labor in the colonies, asking, "C'est ça la reconnaissance de 'la Mère patrie' envers ses enfants 'chair à canon' de 1914 à 1918 [. . .] C'est ça la réalisation des promesses prodiguées par les recruteurs Diagne et Angoulvant en 1917-18?" ("Travail forcé")

Senghor travelled around France speaking on behalf of colonial workers, in the summer and fall of 1925 stopping in Lille, Lyon, Alès, Toulon, Fréjus, Bordeaux and Strasbourg. As Midiohouan notes,

Il déclare être devenu révolutionnaire parce que la France n'a pas été reconnaissante envers les soldats qui ont combattu pour elle. Si l'on a envoyé, dit-il, les tirailleurs sénégalais à Madagascar, au Dahomey et ailleurs, si on leur a appris à faire la guerre, on ne leur a donné aucune instruction. ("Lamine Senghor" 157)

Having been a member of the Dahomean former tirailleur Kojo Tovalou Houénou's *Ligue Universelle de la Race Noire* since 1924, Senghor took over the *Ligue* in 1925 when Houénou was arrested in Togo for a "rash attempt [. . .] to 'liberate' Dahomey with some black Americans."<sup>41</sup> He renamed it the *Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre*

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<sup>41</sup> Langley, Pan-Africanism 300. Houénou had spent time in Harlem and other US cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland, where he addressed meetings of Marcus Garvey's radical Universal Negro

(C.D.R.N.) and in June 1926 embarked on “une tournée dans les grands ports français pour sensibiliser les tirailleurs” and succeeded in making the C.D.R.N “la première organisation nègre à sortir des cercles intellectuels parisiens pour toucher l’intellectuel soudanais comme le docker soninké.”<sup>42</sup> It was around this time the Senghor also resigned from the Communist Party, mainly because it was ignoring the plight of sub-Saharan Africans, but his “attachement [ . . . ] au mouvement communiste reste bien réel” (Dewitte 111).

In an article in the April 1926 issue of Le Paria, Senghor discusses at some length “Le réveil des nègres,” mentioning the efforts of the C.D.R.N. to reclaim and revalorize the term “nègre.” He argues that judging by the imperialists’ treatment of “nègres” one could arrive at the following definition: “être nègre, c’est n’être bon qu’à être exploité jusqu’à la dernière goutte de son sang ou être transformé en soldat pour la défense des intérêts du capitalisme envers et contre tous ceux qui oserait gêner à leur extension.”<sup>43</sup>

Later in the same article Senghor elaborates:

Nous, nous nous faisons honneur et gloire de nous appeler Nègres, avec un grand N majuscule en tête. C'est notre race nègre que nous voulons guider

Improvement Association (U.N.I.A.). (See Langley, Pan-Africanism 293-298.) In 1921 Houénou published “chez l’auteur” a text that Miller describes as “a study in ‘theological phonetics’” called L’Involution des métamorphoses et des métémpsychoses de l’univers in which “The preoccupation with phonetics slowly reveals itself to be an elaborate screen over more political and cultural arguments; the book seems to be a convoluted allegory concerned with African participation in the world order established by European colonialism” (Miller, Nationalists 52).

<sup>42</sup> Midiohouan, “Lamine Senghor” 158. According to Langley, another of the officials of the C.D.R.N. was the Sudanese former tirailleur Tiémoko Garan-Kouyaté, “a Communist, who was then a student of literature at the university of Paris, but was active in political circles like the *Club International des Marins* (through which revolutionary literature reached black sailors)” (Pan-Africanism 303).

<sup>43</sup> Yangor I. Although this article is signed “Lamine Yangor” I believe it was written by Senghor, because of the reference to the C.D.R.N. and the use of the phrase “aux fin fond des brousses” which also appears in La violation d’un pays (1). The names “Yangor” and “Senghor” are also phonetically very similar.

sur la voie de sa libération totale, du joug esclavagiste qu'elle subit. Nous voulons imposer le respect dû à notre race, ainsi que son égalité avec toutes les autres races du monde: ce qui est son droit et notre devoir. [. . .]

L'heure du réveil des Nègres – trop longtemps endormis – a sonné.

(Yangor 2)

This illustrates Senghor's mission to resurrect the honor of the black race, a concept later taken up and expanded by the writers of the Négritude movement, though typically not attributed by them to Lamine Senghor.<sup>44</sup> A similar article, signed "Le Comité" appeared on the front page of the first issue of the C.D.R.N.'s journal La Voix des Nègres (January 1927).<sup>45</sup>

Following ideological disputes with other members of the C.D.R.N. in May 1927 Senghor created the *Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre* (L.D.R.N.) and its journal La Race Nègre "pour maintenir allumée le flambeau de la lutte pour l'indépendance des nègres qui risquait de s'éteindre avec la victoire des 'assimilationnistes' au C.D.R.N."<sup>46</sup> In the first issue of La Race Nègre (June 1927) there is an article by a former tirailleur named Baba Diarra, written in *français tirailleur* mixed with some words in an African language. While the content of the article is significant, denouncing French treatment of tirailleurs during and after the war, linguistically the article is also very interesting. Dewitte argues that its inclusion in the newspaper represents "l'affirmation d'une dignité

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Miller demonstrates how Léopold Sédar Senghor "in his own version of intellectual history, has tended to erase his debt to this earlier labor of the 1920s – or to show no awareness of it at all" (Nationalists 33).

<sup>45</sup> The by-line of another article on the same page designates Senghor as *Président du Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre*.

<sup>46</sup> Midiohouan, "Lamine Senghor" 158-159. See also Langley, Pan-Africanism 303-310 for more information.

retrouvée,” and Miller concurs, stating that “the dialect is turned against those who might see it as a sign of inferiority, and *petit nègre* becomes a means of resistance.”<sup>47</sup> I would argue, however, that it is used to illustrate the miserable language which the tirailleurs were reduced to using, its scant vocabulary being augmented with words from the tirailleur’s native language. This “language” taught the tirailleurs by the army is not a means of resistance, but a *reason* to resist colonial domination, which is not only physical and economic but also linguistic. In the text of his article Diarra points out, for example, the physical abuse of tirailleurs in the army (not only at the hands of the enemy) and the injustice of their measly pensions, and the language he is forced to use in his attempt to communicate with a French-speaking audience makes his linguistic subjugation painfully evident.

Before his death in November 1927 after years of suffering the effects of the gas attack during the war, Lamine Senghor published the allegorical pamphlet La violation d’un pays, which was distributed both in France and in the colonies.<sup>48</sup> This pamphlet, published according to Miller “by a house belonging to the PCF [Parti communiste français],” included a preface by Paul Vaillant-Couturier, future editor-in-chief of L’Humanité. (Nationalists 25) Both Midiohouan and Miller explore the resemblance of this text to African oral literature, an aspect of the pamphlet to which Vaillant-Couturier alluded in his preface as well: “Il faut que le récit vole de bouche en bouche et que les vieillards, au seuil des cases, le racontent le soir aux femmes et aux jeunes gens.”

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<sup>47</sup> Dewitte 158; Miller, Nationalists 44.

<sup>48</sup> Midiohouan, “Lamine Senghor” 159. Philippe Dewitte notes that this pamphlet was mainly distributed in the metropole, and that copies destined for the colonies were for the most part confiscated. (161)

La violation d'un pays is regarded as a *texte à clef*, in which Blaise Diagne in particular can be seen, but as Midiohouan argues, this story is also

le témoignage d'un militant sur son aventure personnelle. Rongé par la maladie [...] et sentant sa fin proche, Lamine Senghor cherchait sans doute à partager sa riche expérience avec ses camarades de la Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre et, en tant que leader, à définir à leur intention l'orientation à donner aux combats futurs. Ainsi perçu, le texte prend la dimension d'un testament politique. ("Lamine Senghor" 163)

The story begins like a fairy tale, with "Il y avait une fois," and describes a happy family living in Africa "aux fins fonds des brousses." One day the children see a boat on the river, and a man disembarking who has "la figure si pâle qu'on aurait dit la peau d'un poulet déplumé" (8). He gains the trust of the locals and sells them his merchandise, which seems to consist mostly of items from "le distillateur et l'armurier" but oddly none from the pharmacist or the bookseller. (10) When "L'homme pâle" prepares to leave (with all the goods he has collected from the locals) he takes aside one young man, Dégou Diagne, and tells him that if he brings one of his brothers in secret to the boat he will receive a wonderful gift. Diagne is seduced by the proposition: "L'orgueil de posséder un fétiche que personne n'aurait dans tout le pays et l'ensorcellement de cet homme, qui ne parlait pourtant pas la langue de Dégou Diagne! avaient agi sur son âme, et avaient fini par le subjuger" (13).

Early the next morning Dégou Diagne takes two of his brothers to where the man is waiting, and is given a long instrument made of wood and iron, some little iron balls

and black powder as the man quickly ties up one of the brothers. The other brother tries to run away, but Dégou Diagne takes up the *fétiche/gun* and uses it as the man has demonstrated – killing his brother. “L’homme pâle” departs with the remaining brother while Dégou Diagne returns to his village “avec l’esprit corrompu plein de mensonge qu’il avait appris à l’école de ‘l’homme pâle’ avant leur séparation” (16-17) and invents a story about a monster to explain the loud noise and the disappearance of his brothers. “L’homme pâle” (also known as “Bourgeois”) is celebrated upon his return to his homeland, his “petit garçon dont le corps était d’une couleur d’ébène” is greatly admired, and his compatriots plan similar excursions. “Quant à Dégou Diagne, il portait sur son épaule et en son fétiche le prix de trahison et de l’assassinat de ses frères,” and thus began the slave trade. (18)

In the second chapter, “La Domination,” more white men come, including priests, and the locals are invited onto the boats where in their drunken stupor they sell their brothers and sisters for “fétiche[s] à cracher du feu” (21). When more boats come two years later, the locals want nothing to do with the white men, but are attacked and forced to realize that “les armes de leurs adversaires étaient plus ‘civilisées’ que les leurs.” As the pale man, the “Bourgeois,” declares himself the king of their land they become an enslaved people. (22)

In the third chapter, “La Reine Pâle,” war comes to the pale people’s land as problems arise between “La Reine République” and “Germain Bourgeois.” To reinforce her army, the *Reine République*

fit appel aux sujets du roi ‘Colonialisme’ en leur promettant la suppression des lois iniques d’esclavagiste-modernisé, qu’elle faisait appliquer dans leur pays.

Qu’ils seraient désormais, considérés comme les vrais citoyens de son propre pays, avec lesquels ils fraterniseraient pour défendre les droits et la liberté des peuples à disposer d’eux-mêmes. (25)

Although some of the subjects are inspired by these appealing promises and volunteer to help, most of them refuse to do so because they fear the promises will not be kept and because the war itself is none of their affair. However, “La reine forcée par ses intérêts à renforcer son armée, employa la manière forte, contre la raison des sujets du ‘roi Colonialisme’. On recruta de force” (26). The Queen sends her most devoted “ebony colored slave,” clearly representing Blaise Diagne, to encourage his brothers to join the army: “Le bon bougre, escorté d’une armée de soldats de sa couleur, tous galonnés et médaillés à poitrine débordée... encadré d’officiers, de sous-officiers et caporaux à figure pâle [...] employa tout ce qu’il avait d’éloquence dans le ventre” (26). Speaking in the language of the *homme pâle* rather than in the language of the land, he fails to inspire confidence in his listeners and they run and hide. “Et par la chasse à l’homme dans les bois, le bon patriote à couleur d’ébène, recruta pour sa reine aimée, plusieurs dizaines de milliers de ses frères” (26). In an overt reference to Joost Van Vollenhoven’s resignation at this time, Senghor writes that even some of the white men were offended by this system and preferred to go and die in battle than support it.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> As noted earlier, however, Van Vollenhoven’s motives were in reality not quite so admirable.

The final chapter, “La Révolution,” is the shortest but the most important to this discussion. First the survivors of the war try in vain to remind the queen of her promises during the recruitment. In response she not only refuses to fulfill the promises, but determines that “il fallait que tous ses sujets bronzés, pâles et jaunes fissent un peu de pénitence: En redoublant les impôts à lui payer, travailler un peu plus et moins payés, d’acheter leur nourriture et payer leur loyer un peu plus cher et de manger moins!!!” (29) The subjects are not the only ones experiencing hard times though, as the “citoyens pâles” are struggling with misery, hunger, tuberculosis and too much work. Some of them decide to revolt, and send their emissaries to convince the other slaves (in the colonies) to join them in their fight by explaining to them the realities of their situation. “Vous voyez! disaient-ils, vos mutilés de la guerre pour la Reine sont payés un sixième de ce qu’est payé un mutilé de chez nous, de même mutilation, même blessure ou même maladie [ . . . ]” (30). Finally their anger reaches such a level that it explodes (on a Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>):

la révolution éclata de concert avec les citoyens pâles, les vrais nationaux de la Reine. Les royaumes renversés; la reine fut envoyée pêcher des huitres dans la mer du néant et le roi Colonialisme fut livré à l’ange de la mort. Le soleil venait de se lever et c’était le jour de la libération.

Les esclaves devinrent libres! les citoyens de chaque pays dirigèrent le Gouvernement de leur état. Ils formèrent *l’alliance fraternelle des pays libres.*

**VIVE LA RÉVOLUTION!!! (31)**

Although the events leading to the colonies' eventual independence did not unfold quite as Senghor predicts (or at least hopes for) here, it is important to recognize that he correctly anticipated some kind of uprising. Given Senghor's earlier active association with the Communist Party, and the many articles in Le Paria declaring solidarity between colonized peoples and the Russians, this reference to revolution could be suggesting actions along the lines of those undertaken by the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution in 1917.<sup>50</sup>

In both "La Reine Pâle" and "La Révolution" Senghor's bitterness and anger toward France for having treated the tirailleurs sénégalaïs so poorly are plain to see, and the story line and descriptions echo points made in his earlier articles. Grammatical errors and awkward turns of phrase could certainly be highlighted throughout this text, but as with Bakary Diallo and the many tirailleurs who wrote letters to Lucie Cousturier it would be unfair to focus on these flaws. The self-taught Senghor's goal was clearly not to write a work of literary excellence, but rather to make a strong political and moral statement condemning France's treatment of him and his fellow Africans under the banner of the *mission civilisatrice*. Even as he directed his tale to a largely illiterate African listenership, Senghor was also most likely aware of the literary efforts of two of his compatriots, Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne and Bakary Diallo. La violation d'un pays can therefore also be read as a response to these two authors.

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<sup>50</sup> See Dewitte regarding Senghor's communist activities. Examples of articles in Le Paria include "Bolchevisme et Colonies"; "Hommage à la Russie soviétique par les peuples coloniaux" by Nguyen-O-Phap; and "Vive le premier état prolétarien! La reconnaissance des Soviets par les Impérialismes" by Ng The Truen, all from 1924.

Ahmadou Mapaté Diagne was a Senegalese schoolteacher and the secretary of the *Directeur de l'enseignement en A.O.F.*, Georges Hardy, and his Les trois volontés de Malic (1920) is a children's story about the installation of a French school in a small African village. Malic, a young boy, is enthralled by the school and wants desperately to attend classes (his first wish). Finally permitted to do so by his mother (who insists he also attend the coranic school), he demonstrates great promise (receiving a book – his second wish), goes on to a technical school, and eventually returns home to be a blacksmith (his third wish) – an occupation not highly regarded in his society. As Frederic Michelman notes, Diagne's primary focus in this text is "the prejudice of caste,"<sup>51</sup> which Malic overcomes by sheer perserverance and by patiently explaining to his elders that "Ce n'est plus le moment de parler d'origine et de caste. Les hommes ne se distinguent plus que par le travail, par l'intelligence et par leurs vertus." Despite the reservations of his grandfather Yakham who warns, "Ta tête contient trop d'idées neuves. Nous voulons bien que tu ailles à l'école, mais nous ne désirons point que tu penses comme les Toubab" (27), by the end the village has been transformed into a thriving economic center.

Clearly, the openly pro-French stance taken by A.M. Diagne is at odds with everything for which Lamine Senghor stood, and Midiohouan gives an example in which Senghor responds to a specific point in Les trois volontés de Malic: "l'on observe que si Malic, grâce à l'école coloniale, devient un homme instruit, responsable et utile à sa communauté, Dégou Diagne, par contre, n'y apprend que le crime et la traitrise"

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<sup>51</sup> See Michelman, "Beginnings" 7-9.

("Lamine Senghor" 166). While Dégou Diagne does not actually attend a French school like Malic does, when he kills his brother Senghor does refer to his having learned to fire his gun at "l'école de l'homme blanc" (cited above). This link between the school and firearms training calls to mind Mangin's assertion that it is "au régiment que le noir pourra recevoir l'enseignement primaire d'une façon utile" ("Utilisation" 91), and speaks to the fact that for many West Africans their military instruction constituted their only "schooling" by the French up to this time.

It is interesting to note that Senghor seems to have focused on the negative aspects of the pale man's school in contrast with the fine life Malic leads once he is French-educated, and not aligned himself with A.M. Diagne's theme of the prejudice of caste. Yet Malic, however much he talks about the value of work, does nothing to change the social system in which he lives – other than improve his personal situation. In fact by the end his cousin Mafal, who never took his studies seriously, recognizes "la supériorité de Malic" and is nice to him. Good bourgeois-wannabe that he is, Malic saves his money and "tend souvent la main à ses voisins malheureux" and enjoys helping his relatives in their old age. (28) Reading A.M. Diagne's short story from Lamine Senghor's perspective, it is easy to see why he might have chosen the name "Dégou," given its homonyms "dégoût" and "d'égout,"<sup>52</sup> and although the character Dégou Diagne cannot be equated exactly with either A.M. Diagne or Blaise Diagne, the choice of surname was surely not coincidental either.

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<sup>52</sup> These homonyms are suggested by Riesz, "Refus" 12.

Bakary Diallo's Force-Bonté would most likely have been just as unpalatable to Lamine Senghor as Les trois volontés de Malic, even when read as a subversive and anti-French text, as I have done. As noted earlier, at the time of its publication, Diallo's text was rejected by Africans in Paris as a disgrace to the black race whereas the French colonialists viewed it as an excellent example of assimilation in progress. When understood in their historical and social context these reactions are perfectly valid, since on the one hand an increasingly militant and anti-colonial African community would have little interest in exploring the possibilities of assimilation (or collaboration) in the aftermath of the war, and on the other the French colonial community would have every motive for lauding the success of its civilizing mission. Thus even if Senghor and the other members of his circle had been open to a reading of Force-Bonté that recognized the bitterness which is present in the text (and I doubt that they were), the much more overtly critical Senghor would still have reacted to it with the ferocity of La violation d'un pays.

Aside from Christopher Miller's recent attempt to resurrect La violation d'un pays, there has been virtually no discussion regarding the pamphlet's influence on later writers, primarily because it was unknown or at least unavailable to researchers for so many years. Senghor himself has not been recognized as a very important figure in the interwar years, probably due to the confusion surrounding his biographical information and the fact that his other writings appeared only in hard-to-find, short-lived periodicals. A brief yet significant reference to him in an English-language novel, Banjo by Claude McKay, has even been misunderstood as a reference to the much better-known Léopold

Sédar Senghor. By bringing to light the connections between Lamine Senghor and Claude McKay, a prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance, we can gain a clearer understanding of the genesis of the Negritude movement.

*Claude McKay's Banjo: Linking One Senghor to the Other*

The activism of W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey in America helped to spawn a literary, artistic and musical movement centered in New York's Harlem neighborhood. As Tyler Stovall notes, both literature and jazz music were vital components of "the creative enterprise of the Harlem Renaissance." Yet in the face of racist 1920s America, "the hope of equality for African Americans [ . . . ] proved false, and while the Harlem Renaissance celebrated black creativity, its leading lights always portrayed racism as the central theme of the black experience in America" (*Paris Noir* 29-30). For many writers, musicians and artists the only choice was to leave the United States and live abroad, and many of them went to France: Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Jessie Fauset, Gwendolyn Bennett, Countee Cullen, and others. In France they encountered Africans – often for the first time – and their impact on African and Caribbean writers of the interwar years and beyond has long been recognized.

Born in Jamaica in 1889, Claude McKay<sup>53</sup> was a well-known poet before he moved to the United States in 1912. Despite the fact that he lived in Europe from 1922 to 1934, the most important years of the Harlem Renaissance, and only became an American citizen in 1940, McKay is still considered "one of the great forces" helping to

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<sup>53</sup> In most French-language texts McKay is spelled "MacKay."

shape the New Negro Movement" (Davis, A. 33) In his autobiography A Long Way from Home McKay mentions not only having known Lamine Senghor in Marseilles, but also reading La violation d'un pays. McKay was introduced to Senghor by another Senegalese, a former soldier who had earned enough money working in the United States after the war to return and open his own café in Marseilles.<sup>54</sup>

This Senghor was also a war veteran and a Negro leader among the Communists. He was a tall, lean intelligent Senegalese and his ideas were a mixture of African nationalism and international Communism. Senghor was interested in my writing and said he wished I would write the truth about the Negroes in Marseilles. I promised him that I would some day.

He gave me a little pamphlet he had written about the European conquest of Africa. The sentiment was quaint and naïve, like the human figures stamped on old-fashioned plates. (McKay, Long Way 278)

McKay goes on to recount a later conversation between Senghor and the café owner about African leaders marrying white French women and whether or not this was detrimental to their cause. Both Senghor and the café owner had French wives, and the owner brings up the situation of Blaise Diagne (also married to a French woman), arguing that if he were married to a black woman it might "be propaganda helping our women and our race." McKay describes Senghor as being undecided about this – he "said that his countryman's idea was interesting and he would have to think the subject over

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<sup>54</sup> This café owner seems to have been an *originaire* and was therefore probably not a tirailleur sénégalaïs – McKay explains that "His family in Goree was old, large and important" and that he had a relative working in Paris as a civil servant as well as a sister in Dakar who worked as a nurse. (McKay, Long Way 278)

from another point of view." McKay seems not to have contributed to the conversation at all, remarking at the end of his account, "Sentimentally, I was confused; intellectually, I was lost" (280-281).

McKay's mentions of Lamine Senghor in his autobiography are significant in part because he singled out only a few of his acquaintances from this period. (Fabre 100) Yet its importance becomes even more apparent just a few pages later, as McKay writes of a friend who says upon parting "'I hope you'll write a successful book.'" This reminds McKay of Senghor's earlier wish: "I said I'd like to do a good book. And right then I remembered Senghor, the Senegalese, begging me to write the truth. I settled down to work and began *Banjo*" (288). Michel Fabre explains the significance of *Banjo* (1929) to the African and Caribbean community right from the moment it became available:

Of all the writings by Afro-Americans of the Harlem Renaissance available to French-speaking blacks, the most influential was undoubtedly Claude McKay's novel *Banjo*. This work not only depicted relationships between the races but analyzed in detail the disputes, as well as the solidarity, within the black diaspora. It also attempted to rehabilitate the primitive versus so-called civilization.<sup>55</sup>

Tyler Stovall too has noted McKay's importance with regard to what later became the Negritude movement, saying that McKay had a greater influence on this movement than

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<sup>55</sup> Fabre 152-153. First published in English in 1929, *Banjo* was soon published in French (1931). (See Smith 47 note 1.) Although Fabre writes that the *Revue du Monde Noir* published a long excerpt of the novel in 1930 (154) this is incorrect, as the only six issues of this journal appeared between November 1931 and June 1932, and while a few of McKay's poems are printed in the *Revue*, there are no excerpts of *Banjo*.

any other African American writer who came to Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. Stovall argues that in his writings McKay “outlined a perspective on black culture and life that prefigured many of the key themes of *négritude*,” and points specifically to *Banjo*, which “more than anything else written by an African American in this period, embraced a conception of blackness that strongly attracted the young African and Caribbean students of Paris” (*Paris Noir* 108-109).

It is noteworthy that Lamine Senghor in at least some way inspired Claude McKay to write *Banjo*, which in turn inspired many African and Caribbean intellectuals of the 1930s and beyond. Despite Senghor’s mainly political objectives and McKay’s reservations regarding the merits of *La violation d’un pays*, we can still trace the growth of the importance of valorizing the black race and African culture from Lamine Senghor through McKay’s *Banjo* to one of the major figures of *Négritude*, Léopold Sédar Senghor.<sup>56</sup> Although the struggle for freedom from colonial oppression is of primary importance throughout Lamine Senghor’s limited writings he is also one of the first to try to resurrect the “race nègre.” In his article “Le réveil des nègres,” after explaining what it has come to mean to be “nègre” thanks to the imperialists (cited above), he announces that the *Comité pour la Défense de la Race Nègre* is reclaiming the name “nègre”:

nous qui ne renions pas notre descendance directe ou indirecte de la race  
nègre, nous ramassons ce nom dans la boue où vous le traînez. Nous en  
ferons notre symbole! [ . . . ]

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<sup>56</sup> Lamine and Léopold Sédar Senghor may have been distant cousins. Steins states in a footnote that L.S. Senghor told him in an interview that they were cousins (Steins 284), and Senghor’s biographer Hymans writes that they were “distant cousins” (14), but Robert Comevin disputes this, writing that “Il ne semble pas que Lamine Senghor ait été apparenté à L.S. Senghor” (“Du Sénégal” 71).

**Que ceux qui le sont et qui ne veulent pas être appelés nègres, forment une cinquième race ou s'arrangent comme ils l'entendront: c'est leur droit, c'est leur affaire! Mais qu'ils ne salissent pas l'objet de notre vénération en déformant le nom de nos grands, de nos aïeux, de notre race. (Yangor 1-2)**

Just over a year later, in an article entitled “*Debout les Nègres*” about the newly created L.D.R.N. Senghor explains that its organizers are “des jeunes pleins de courage et de volonté pour la défense des intérêts et l’honneur de notre pauvre race martyre,” again linking his battle against imperialism to the notion of reestablishing the honor of the black race.

Midiohouan argues that in addition to waging an ideological battle in La violation d'un pays Senghor was also engaged in “une lutte pour l’identité culturelle” which he expressed via the structure of his story – “c’est vers la source vive de la littérature orale qu’il s’oriente pour donner libre cours à sa sincérité.” Yet if Senghor had as little formal education as Midiohouan says he did, learning to read and write while in the army and studying marxism at the *École Coloniale Communiste*, his exposure to much French literature is somewhat unlikely, rendering self-evident Midiohouan’s statement that “Senghor ne s’embarrasse pas des modèles littéraires occidentaux” (“Lamine Senghor” 166). Despite Vaillant-Couturier’s reference to oral literature in his preface to Violation, it seems more plausible that Senghor just naturally gravitated to a form more typically associated with oral literature, rather than actively choosing this form in order to make a cultural point. Regardless, Lamine Senghor’s mission to redefine the name “nègre” and

resurrect the honor of his race constitutes a clear step toward the recognition of a valid African cultural heritage.

For McKay's part, it is through the intellectual Ray in Banjo that he conveys his message about black African culture. The novel takes place on the beach and in the "Ditch" of Marseilles:

white men, brown men, black men, Finns, Poles, Italians, Slaves, Maltese, Indians, Negroids, African Negroes, West Indian Negroes [ . . . ] all dumped down in the great Provençal port, bumming a day's work, a meal, a drink, existing from hand to mouth, anyhow any way, between box car, tramp ship, bistro, and bordel. (6)

The story revolves around a motley group whose main members are Banjo, the leader named for the instrument he plays, Malty (a West Indian), Ginger, Dengel (a Senegalese), Bugsy, and Ray, but many others drop in and out of their group as the novel progresses. As Fabre notes, in Banjo McKay dispels certain illusions about black life in France, demonstrating that there was indeed French prejudice against blacks, much as both Americans and "Africans intent on assimilation insisted it did not exist" (153). As Ray explains to a young American friend,

"The French are never tired of proclaiming themselves the most civilized people in the world. They think they understand Negroes, because they don't discriminate against us in their bordels. They imagine that Negroes

like them. But Senghor, the Senegalese, told me that the French were the most calculatingly cruel of all the Europeans in Africa.”<sup>57</sup>

Evoking the image of Josephine Baker and jazz musicians so prevalent in the minds of the French during these years, at another point Ray thinks to himself that “white people were never more contemptibly vulgar than when a Negro entered a white place of amusement. [ . . . ] It was as if the black visitor [in Europe] could not be seen in any other light but that of a funny actor on the stage. (191-192) On yet another occasion, as Ray and the group are dining in a nicer restaurant than they can usually afford, a white man at a table near them keeps making annoying remarks to them. Speaking in French, Ray tells him to stop and when the man says he is not being polite Ray responds, ““When we don’t let you condescend to interrupt us, we’re not polite, and if any of us had tried to do the same thing with your party we would be impudent blacks,”” which puts an end to the exchange. (297)

Another theme of McKay’s and illusion he wanted to dispel is that of solidarity among blacks from all over the world. (Fabre 153) In the bar owned by the Senegalese ex-soldier the group has a conversation about “the hostile feeling that existed between the French West Indians and the native Africans,” which is quickly expanded to include not

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<sup>57</sup> McKay, *Banjo* 267. In his article “Rereading *Banjo*” Smith incorrectly indicates that in this citation McKay is referring to Léopold Sédar Senghor. (52) Even without the additional information McKay gives in *A Long Way from Home* about meeting a Senghor (which includes the mention of his being gassed during the war), it can be determined that this does not refer to L.S. Senghor. On the last page of *Banjo* McKay includes the designation “Marseilles-Barcelona, 1927-1928.” Biographical information about L.S. Senghor states that he first arrived in France in October 1928, to attend the *Lycée Louis-le-Grand* in Paris, making McKay’s chances of meeting him before finishing *Banjo* very slim. He also was not married until 1946, and this first marriage was not with a white woman. (Hymans 259-262)

only racial tensions in America but also interracial marriage. Ray brings up the case of Senghor:

"Take Senghor and his comrades in propaganda for example. They are the bitterest and most humorless of propagandists and they are all married to white women. It is as if the experience has oversoured them. As if they thought it would bring them closer to the white race, only to realize too late that it couldn't." (202-207)

This whole conversation is very similar to the one McKay relates between Senghor and the café owner in A Long Way from Home, though this one is longer and involves more people. McKay appears to have mulled over the remarks by Senghor and the café owner in the meantime and formulated his own opinion against using such methods to effect a *rapprochement* between the races.

It is in some ways remarkable that Léopold Sédar Senghor and other Negritude writers openly acknowledge a debt to Claude McKay, because at times in Banjo he seems to be attacking their way of life. In my opinion McKay seems to align himself more with the likes of Lamine Senghor, not so much with his politics as with his desire to rehabilitate the image of the black and with his condemnation of white treatment of blacks. Ray meets a student from Martinique who disapproves of René Maran's Batouala and refuses to associate with Africans, arguing that since their arrival in France blacks in general are no longer respected. Ray launches into a long explanation of why the student is wrong to try to separate himself from other blacks. Whereas in Ray's opinion the only way to achieve the "racial renaissance" the educated blacks are talking about is to join

forces with "the common people [ . . . ] who furnish the bone and sinew and salt of any race or nation," the student disagrees, saying that he is interested in this racial renaissance "but not in going back to savagery." Ray's response to this echoes sentiments expressed by Lamine Senghor: "'Getting down to our native roots and building up from our own people,' said Ray, 'is not savagery. It is culture'" (McKay, *Banjo* 199-200).

L.S. Senghor ended a talk he gave in Dakar in 1937, "Le problème culturel en A.O.F.," by quoting this very statement from *Banjo*. Yet when understood within the larger context of McKay's novel, this statement does not seem to fit very well with the rest of Senghor's talk. It is as if Senghor forgot the bulk of the dialogue between Ray and the Martinican student, in which Ray continues, launching into a tirade against the community of black intellectuals:

"You are like many Negro intellectuals who are bellyaching about race," said Ray. "What's wrong with you-all is your education. You get a white man's education and learn to despise your own people. [ . . . ]

"Then when you come to maturity you realize with a shock that you don't and can't belong to the white race. All your education and achievements cannot put you in the intimate circles of the whites and give you a white man's opportunity. [ . . . ]

"You're a lost crowd, you educated Negroes, and you will only find yourself in the roots of your own people. [ . . . ]" (200-201)

Senghor's 1937 address centers on the issue of culture, as indicated by the title, but views education as the primary means for solving the problem of culture in French West Africa.

He defines “la Culture” as “une réaction raciale de l’Homme sur son milieu, tendant à un équilibre intellectuel et moral entre l’Homme et son milieu,” and argues that “la Culture se sert, pour réaliser son idéal, de *l’Enseignement*, qui est l’étude des civilisations d’un peuple défini” (12). For L.S. Senghor, unlike for Lamine Senghor, “si nous voulons survivre, la nécessité d’une adaptation ne peut nous échapper: d’une *assimilation*. Notre milieu n’est plus ouest-africain, il est aussi français, il est international; pour tout dire, il est *afro-français*” (14). He argues in favor of bilingual education, and suggests that the proper reaction to the teaching of “nos Ancêtres les Gaulois” in African schools might not be to eliminate it altogether, but rather to change the pedagogy and study in-depth “comment un peuple, parti de ses Ancêtres les Gaulois et des ténèbres de leurs forêts, s’élève, peu à peu, à travers chutes et tâtonnements, vers la lumière et la liberté” (17).

Senghor does seem to move closer to McKay when he says that “Les intellectuels ont mission de restaurer les *valeurs noires* dans leur vérité et leur excellence, d’éveiller leur peuple au goût du pain et des jeux de l’esprit, par quoi nous sommes *Hommes*” (19). At one point in *Banjo* Ray goes from categorically hating European society and civilization “because its general attitude toward the colored man was such as to rob him of his warm human instincts and make him inhuman” to reconciling his own Western education with his feeling of duty to his race:

it was not easy for a Negro with an intellect standing watch over his native instincts to take his own way in this white man’s civilization. But of one thing he was resolved: civilization would not take the love of color, joy,

beauty, vitality, and nobility out of *his* life and make him like one of the  
poor masses of its pale creatures.

However, by the time Ray reaches the end of his thought process on this dilemma, he has determined that “Rather than lose his soul, let intellect go to hell and live instinct!” (163-165). In contrast, L.S. Senghor, at least in 1937, seems more interested in building some kind of cultural and educational *entente* between France and West Africa and forever linking the two groups of people together than in actively promoting African cultures as valuable solely because of their own merit. In a 1939 text, “Ce que l’homme noir apporte,” he continues largely in this vein, discussing for example the African influences on European art and music of recent years. Yet by using some of the same terms French critics did when speaking about African art and music – “le Nègre [ . . . ] C’est le rythme incarné” (37) – Senghor only reinforces this cultural connection between Africa and France. Still, these two texts are some of his earliest ones, and obviously only offer his opinions of the late 1930s. Over the course of his long literary and political career his outlook certainly changed, as for example he began to weave African words into his poetry, but his later views are not relevant to this study.

Clearly there is a wide gulf between Lamine Senghor’s “quaint and naïve” call to revolution and Léopold Sédar Senghor’s 1937 address, in which he not only advocates a certain assimilation but does so using the Socratic method (as he explains at the beginning) and sophisticated French. Yet through Claude McKay’s Banjo we can gain a deeper understanding of the exchanges between blacks of all nations and backgrounds in France during the interwar years, and of how African and Caribbean intellectuals began

to formulate what eventually was called the Negritude movement. Although the Martinican Aimé Césaire, who was in close contact with both L.S. Senghor and Léon Gontron Damas during the 1930s, devised the term "Négritude" only in 1939, it is to McKay that these writers give credit for the ideas it embodies. In an interview Césaire has said of *Banjo* "Ce qui m'a frappé dans ce livre [ . . . ], c'est que, pour la première fois, on y voyait des nègres décrits avec vérité, sans complexes ni préjugés" (Kesteloot 80). Senghor has stated that "Claude MacKay peut être considéré, à bon droit, comme le véritable inventeur de la *Négritude*. Je ne parle pas du mot, je parle des valeurs de la Négritude" ("La poésie négro-américaine" 116). Léon Damas, the native of French Guiana in "the celebrated triumverate of early *négritude*, Césaire-Damas-Senghor" (Shapiro 224), has also recognized the importance of McKay's writing: "A partir de ce bain de jouvence que fut pour nous la lecture de *Banjo*, suivi de *Home to Harlem*, de *Banana Bottom*, sans parler de ses poèmes, nous allions de révélation en révélation, découvrant d'autres terres que les nôtres, d'autres Afriques en vue [ . . . ]" (Racine 185).

The widely differing experiences of Lamine Senghor and Léopold Sédar Senghor within the colonial system easily account for their nearly opposite opinions on the course of action West Africans should be taking during the interwar years. For Lamine Senghor, an uneducated former tirailleur severely debilitated in the war, it was necessary to reject completely the white domination over Africa, right the wrongs committed against his people, and establish a position of equality for the black race within the larger world community. Conversely, for the very well-educated Léopold Sédar Senghor too young to participate in the First World War (though he did fight in the Second), the path to an

ultimate valorization of black culture involved a certain degree of assimilation and compromise. Certainly L.S. Senghor's approach would have been not only repugnant to Lamine Senghor, but also impossible given his social status and level of education.

There is a tension not only between the attitudes of these two Senghors but also within the educated black community of L.S. Senghor, as noticed by Ray in Banjo. For them it is very difficult to reconcile their desire to be accepted as educated people by the white community and their reluctance to renounce their cultural heritage completely. Some attempted to do so, as did Ray, who "wanted to hold on to his intellectual acquirements without losing his instinctive gifts." Yet as Banjo draws to a close, Ray admits that he has "found that to be educated, black and his instinctive self was something of a big job to put over," and he realizes that he feels a closer affinity with the "black boys" like Banjo and the others, who "represented more than he or the cultured minority the irrepressible exuberance and legendary vitality of the black race" (322-324). The Senegalese author, veterinarian, and politician Ousmane Socé Diop explored this dilemma as faced by Africans both in Africa and in France in two novels, Karim, roman sénégalais and Mirages de Paris, and in the latter not only referred to Banjo but also took up some of its themes.

### *Ousmane Socé*

Ousmane Socé Diop, generally referred to as Ousmane Socé, was born in Rufisque in 1911, and attended both the coranic and French schools. He later earned his *baccalauréat* in philosophy in Dakar, and attended the *École Normale William Ponty*. As

Joseph ya Mpicku Mbelolo explains, Socé “fut parmi les premiers étudiants noirs envoyés en France pour y poursuivre l’enseignement supérieur,” and though he wanted to attend medical school the authorities would only offer aid toward the pursuit of a degree in veterinary medicine, which he obtained. Mbelolo also notes Socé’s participation in the early years of the Negritude movement and the periodical L’Étudiant noir, and his discovery of Maran’s Batouala and McKay’s Banjo. While in France Socé wrote both Karim (1935) and Mirages de Paris (1937), apparently writing the latter during his free time while a student at the *École militaire de Cavalerie de Saumur*. After returning to Africa Socé worked as *Inspecteur vétérinaire* and then from the mid-1940s until his death in 1973 he held various positions in the government of Senegal.<sup>58</sup>

In Karim, roman sénégalais, which won the *Grand Prix littéraire des écrivains de la Mer et de l'Outre-Mer* in 1948 (Mbelolo 120), Socé explores the problems faced by a young African man trying to reconcile his own ancient cultural heritage with the new European influences surrounding him. The characters in Karim have very different issues to deal with than the vast majority of West Africans during this period, because they are among the few living not only in cities, but in Saint-Louis and Dakar, two of the Four Communes. Although on the surface their relatively easy access to French education and their constant contact with French culture may seem beneficial, it soon becomes clear that it is not a simple matter to leave one culture and join another.

At the start of the novel Karim Guèye is 22 years old and the proud holder of a *Certificat d’études* from the French school, working as an accountant at a commercial

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<sup>58</sup> Mbelolo 119-122. This thesis was completed in 1968-69 and therefore does not contain information about the last few years of Socé’s life.

establishment. He is very generous with his money, giving it to friends whenever they ask, and when he meets a beautiful woman, Marième, he spares no expense in courting her. Karim quickly finds himself in financial trouble, even taking advances on his salary and going into debt with several shopkeepers after spending large sums on guitar players, griots, tips, and clothes, all to impress Marième and her mother. After a big annual Muslim celebration, she and Karim are clearly a couple, but Karim is worried about the presence of another man, Badara. He finds out that Badara is courting her, and vows that he will leave her if he finds them together again. Marième's mother, however, forbids her from refusing the attentions of the wealthy Badara, and Karim ends their relationship soon after.

He consults a marabout, who gives him a *gris-gris* and assures him, ““S'il plaît à Dieu, Marième n'aura d'autre époux que toi”” (61). Bouyed by the marabout's counsel, Karim resolves to stop wasting his money and to save for his wedding, and he and two friends decide to move to Dakar because it is too difficult to save money in Saint-Louis. “Ils avaient trop d'obligations envers les amies, les griots, et même envers les personnes rencontrées la première fois. La mentalité sociale veut qu'une personne qui travaille aide les autres, même les fainéants” (62).

From the moment he arrives in Dakar, Karim is “rempli d'admiration pour Dakar, la ville jeune, moderne, un prolongement de la métropole” (70). He quickly finds employment and lives a quiet life at his uncle's house. Two months later he and his friends go to a social gathering in Rufisque, where he meets a divorcée, Aminata. Lavishing attention on her, he succeeds in winning her away from another man, but soon

finds himself in financial straits again. Abdoulaye, the teacher with whom he shares a room at his uncle's house, loans him money and encourages him to spend his time more wisely, reading and learning rather than succumbing to the pleasures of the tam-tam or the *bons mots* of the griots. He breaks off with Aminata, and applies himself to more intellectual pursuits, borrowing books from Abdoulaye. He enjoys La Randonnée de Samba Diouf, Le Roman d'un Spahi, and Batouala, and he regrets that "Elle était pauvre la littérature africaine, la plus susceptible, cependant, de plaire au lecteur indigène moyen."<sup>59</sup> Karim also reads European literature: Les Trois Mousquetaires, Victor Hugo, Corneille, and so on, and his "changement moral se doublait d'un autre purement vestimentaire. Les boubous et le fez musulman, d'autrefois, se virent disgraciés et remplacés par un complet veston, par un casque colonial" (103).

Although Karim takes quickly to this new Europeanized life, meeting new friends and experiencing a different side of Dakar than before, he and his friends struggle with their choices: "Au fond, ils hésitaient tous à rompre définitivement avec le vieux Sénégal, pour épouser les mœurs d'Europe, dont certaines s'imposaient." Here Socé introduces his notion of a *civilisation métisse*, noting in a long footnote that the African contribution to this mixed civilization consists of raw materials of all sorts: industrial, artistic, musical, and "enfin le sacrifice de nos soldats qui ont versé leur sang partout avec une magnifique abnégation pour la sauvegarde de la Civilisation et de la liberté des hommes" (105-106 note 1). Within the text Socé explains that the outside elements of this *civilisation métisse*

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<sup>59</sup> Socé, Karim 102. Note that none of these texts was actually written by an African. I suspect there is a bit of irony in this statement and that Socé is trying to encourage other Africans to write literature for the "lecteur indigène moyen."

consist of “apports matériels et intellectuels, nécessaires à notre adaption dans le courant de la vie mondiale, dont nous faisons désormais partie intégrante” (106). Mbelolo notes that during the mid-1930s Socé was proposing the idea of “métissage culturel” as the “seule solution valable au drame des Africains” (122).

Karim meets Marie N’Diaye, who is Senegalese and catholic, and they travel to Gorée for a catholic festival in which Marie is participating, trying to remain discreet because Marie is actually engaged to someone else. When Karim misses work that Monday, too tired from the long night of dancing to foxtrots, waltzes, and jazz in Gorée, he nearly loses his job. Full of pride and feeling insulted by his boss’s reprimands, he quits, and then discovers that it is difficult to find another position in this time of economic crisis. With his uncle’s help he lands a job doing inventory for three weeks in factories in the bush, and while on his trip he realizes how different life is outside the Four Communes – “c’était la vie humaine réduite à sa plus simple expression” (125).

Upon his return he learns that Marie is pregnant, and they briefly discuss marriage but recognize the problems with this, given the fact that she is catholic and he muslim. While Karim tries unsuccessfully to figure out a solution, Marie obtains a concoction that terminates the pregnancy, solving the matter. Soon after, Karim falls ill with malaria and dysentery, probably contracted while he was out of the city, and only recovers after a stay in the hospital. He rediscovers his faith, and then receives a letter from a friend in Saint-Louis informing him that Badara has gone bankrupt and fallen out of favor with Marième. Karim immediately decides to return home, arriving in Saint-Louis with money and his European clothes: “Karim acquit un accroissement de prestige: il était nanti de

nombreux costumes et possesseur de beaucoup d'argent" (140). At first too proud to seek out Marième and reconcile with her, Karim sees her at a gathering and the next day renounces his European clothing and goes back to wearing a *boubou*. "Le milieu faisait la convenance de l'habit: il était aussi singulier de traîner un boubou dans une société vêtue à l'euroéenne, que d'endosser un complet-veston étriqué et sans majesté, dans une société habillée à la musulmane" (145). He pays a visit to Marième, they reconcile and are soon married according to muslim customs. Karim also does not forget to go thank the marabout who had counseled him and prayed for him two years earlier.

Socé seems to blame social customs for most of Karim's troubles: in Saint-Louis, his friends and girlfriend constantly ask him for money, he spends a lot of time and cash at social gatherings and in fact leaves the city to escape this, but in Dakar he encounters similar problems while involved with Aminata, another traditional Senegalese woman. Then, once he abandons these cultural practices and becomes Europeanized, he falls in love with a catholic girl and finds himself stuck in an impossible situation, the only solution for which is an abortion. Once he returns to Saint-Louis and marries Marième he is beside himself with joy, having reacquainted himself with his muslim faith and abandoned his European ways. Socé also seems to consider Karim's troubles to be mostly the mistakes of youth, and while in the end Karim does not seem to have been harmed by his foray into a *civilisation métisse*, he does not seem to have gained much either.

In Socé's second novel, *Mirages de Paris*, similar themes appear but with a much different ending. The majority of the story takes place in Paris, after the main character Fara leaves Senegal to attend the *Exposition coloniale*. A good student at the French

school, Fara absorbed all he could, and wanted more than anything to go to France: “Le plus cher souhait de Fara était de voir cette France dont il avait appris, avec amour, la langue, l’histoire et la géographie” (15). Although he is thrilled when he leaves for Paris, he feels a twinge of sadness, wondering whether or not he will ever come back:

Reverrait-il un jour ses parents, ses amis d’enfance? N’entendrait-il plus jamais les tam-tams turbulents? [ . . . ]

Fara eut comme le pressentiment que jamais plus il ne reverrait cela.

Ce glissement du navire en avant vers un pays immense et prestigieux qu’il ne connaissait pas, ce glissement qui l’éloignait toujours de sa patrie l’effrayait maintenant. (20)

Finally in Paris, Fara embarks on a tour of all the monuments he has learned about, and comes to view both the city and his own culture in a new light: “Ce qu’il venait de voir avait, en plus, l’avantage de jeter sur sa culture même une lumière nouvelle. Sa présence à Paris, au bout d’une journée, détruisait d’un coup, dans son esprit une multitude de conceptions erronées.” He had never realized there were so many workers in Paris, and wonders where the people from the books he read are – the “mousquetaires, chevaliers et dames à crinolines” (31-32).

After a disconcerting ride on the Métro, Fara arrives at the Exposition, where he explores the pavilions and runs into some friends from Africa. He spots three young French women going to the French West Africa pavilion and decides to try to join them. Fara offers to be their guide, a service which they decline at first, but the persistent Fara finally gets them to listen to his explanations. All three of them have misconceptions

about Africa: “L’une d’elles avait annoncé que Dakar était la capitale de Madagascar; une autre demandait si les cannibales étaient nombreux à Dakar et Jacqueline croyait qu’on marchait nu au Sénégal” (41-42). Fara and Jacqueline agree to meet a few days later, and despite some reservations on her part based solely on the reactions of other people to seeing them together, she determines that regardless of his race she likes him as a person, and they begin dating.

Ambrousse, a friend of Fara’s who works at the Exposition, goes with them one night to the *Bal nègre*, where Jacqueline is surprised to see more white patrons than black. She also has never seen so many black people in one place, and Fara lectures at length on the differences in their features. “Fara fit découvrir à Jacqueline dans la foule des Noirs, si peu différents en apparence, des Africains, des Haïtiens, des Mauriciens. On eût dit que la ‘Cabane Cubaine’ était un musée d’ethnographie noire où chaque peuple avait envoyé un spécimen” (55-56). The next day, in love with Jacqueline but feeling rejected by her, Fara struggles with a bout of depression, acutely suffering “le sentiment de son dépaysement. [. . .] Fara sentait que cette foule blanche l’assimilait mal. Elle n’arrivait à le tolérer qu’à force de bienveillance” (63). It only gets worse when he attends a conference about Africa, and is completely floored by the speaker’s ignorance about his subject. “Il fallait beaucoup d’audace pour parler de l’Afrique quand on en avait vu si peu. Ce fut ahurissant lorsque le conférencier donna un aperçu psychologique du Noir. [. . .] A la fin de la conférence, Fara était électrocuté sur sa chaise” (67).

As the Exposition comes to a close and most of the Senegalese who traveled to Paris for it prepare to go home, Fara decides to stay on, hoping that the relationship

between him and Jacqueline will develop further. Yet it is also Paris itself which keeps him from leaving:

Il était atteint du même mal que cette jeune fille de province qui préfère être domestique dans une grande maison plutôt que de s'enterrer dans son village natal [ . . . ] Mal dangereux, lorsqu'il survenait en pleine crise de croissance, au moment où l'adolescent se transforme en homme et que se cristallisent les tendances de son caractère qui domineront sa vie. (73-74)

Fara and Jacqueline do continue their relationship, and eventually he is invited to her home for lunch (as a friend and not alone). Jacqueline's parents are polite to him (though Mr. Bourciez tries to get him to drink wine even though he is muslim), but he realizes that "Un abîme séparait Fara des époux Bourciez. Entre lui et les jeunes, il n'y avait qu'un fossé de coloration d'épiderme; certaines idées et certains sentiments communs formaient des ponts qui leur permettaient de se répondre, par-dessus le fossé, en maints endroits" (91).

The parents' true feelings become clear, of course, when Jacqueline tells them soon after that she and Fara are in love. "Son père manqua d'étouffer de colère; l'audace de sa fille lui parut monstrueuse. Elle avait osé se lier à un nègre; elle avait osé l'avouer, et, par surcroît, elle essayait de l'introduire dans la famille! C'était trop fort" (93). Even with the support of her mother Jacqueline is unable to convince her father to accept this liaison, and eventually leaves home to be with Fara. One last attempt by Mr. Bourciez to convince Fara to break off the relationship fails, and they rent an apartment and begin their life together. Fara's pride is hurt by their rejection of him, but he resolves not to be

intimidated: “Dans un sursaut d’orgueil, il se disait qu’il tiendrait tête à l’Europe; il se poserait en homme sur tous les plans de la vie et si, malgré tout, les préjugés le brimaient, son âme se poserait en égale et continuerait à protester jusqu’au jour du jugement dernier!” (108)

Jacqueline decorates their apartment with as many African things as she can – “les rideaux brodés de la Samaritaine se mariaient aux pagnes soudanais” (108) – creating their own enclave of *civilisation métisse*. Fara’s friends Ambrousse, a former sailor; Sidia, a philosophy student; and Medoune, a literary student, often come over to eat and talk. Others, less worldly wise and less educated, also come, but they are uncomfortable and speak *petit nègre*. Socé notes that this diverse group of Africans would not have associated in Africa, being of different social spheres, but

En Europe, ils vivaient en promiscuité, en un même bloc. [ . . . ] Paris était une ‘cour d’appel des Noirs’. Leurs vedettes n’avaient rencontré la parfaite impartialité qu’à Paris. Et des pays les plus éloignés du monde, beaucoup d’entre eux subissaient le mirage de Paris, en rêvaient comme d’un eldorado de justice ou de succès suprêmes... (116)

This view of Paris as the only place where blacks could live without experiencing prejudice echoes the views of many Americans and African Americans during this period, and even the views of many French people as well. This description of Paris is also similar to Claude McKay’s descriptions of Marseilles, or at least of the Ditch, but Socé (with his habit of foreshadowing) makes sure to use the term “mirage” and leaves the sentence unfinished, the outcome uncertain.

Fara and Jacqueline's life together becomes difficult as he has trouble finding work, his grandiose scheme to start an import-export business never getting off the ground. When Jacqueline becomes pregnant, Fara decides that if the child is a boy he will name him Sidia, after his friend the intellectuel. He pays Sidia a visit to give him this news and as he enters he notices all the books on the shelves –

Outre les maîtres français de la littérature contemporaine, Sidia avait les écrivains marquants de la littérature coloniale: *Les Nègres de Maurice Delafosse...* *Paris-Soudan-Tombouctou* de R. Delavignette, le *Livre de la Brousse* de René Maran, [...] *Oiseau d'ébène* d'André Demaison...,

and of course Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, and poetry by Langston Hughes. (145) Despite his enthusiasm about reading when he was young, Fara seems to have abandoned this habit, apparently preferring to live the culture rather than read about it or read its products anymore. Sidia, rather than being excited about being the baby's namesake, mentions the fact that the child will be *métis*. For Fara this is not a problem, but in Sidia's opinion it is something that should have been avoided:

"Il ne faut pas que nous, élite noire, nous ayons des enfant [sic] métis. Ceux-ci retourneront à la race blanche un jour ou l'autre. Et la race noire qui a tant besoin de cadres, se trouvera écrémée de génération en génération; ainsi elle ne pourra jamais se guérir du mal qui l'étouffe et l'affaiblit, le manque d'organisation et de chefs." (146)

This causes an argument between the two friends, with Fara even accusing Sidia of being worse than Hitler,<sup>60</sup> and maintaining that every race and every civilization is already *métisse*. In Fara's view, “il se forme en Afrique noire, comme cela s'est fait chez tous les peuples, à une époque donnée de leur histoire, un véritable accouplement avec un pays plus avancé en civilisation, et d'où naîtra l'Afrique nouvelle” (148).

Although the viewpoints expressed by Sidia and Fara do not exactly mirror those defended by the various characters in *Banjo*, they are certainly similar in places. Fara and Ray notice the same discrimination and have similar encounters with some white people, yet at the same time Fara seems to have fallen into the trap of hoping that by being in a relationship with a white woman he can come closer to the white race, an experience that Ray points out did not work out for Senghor. Sidia too, however, also takes a step in this direction, by specifying that although he will only marry a Senegalese woman, she must be catholic and educated. Despite this, Sidia comes the closest to putting into practice Ray's idea, quoted by L.S. Senghor, about building up from one's own people. Fara, whose views are closely aligned with those of L.S. Senghor and Socé himself, prefers to take advantage of the fact that “Pour la première fois, dans son histoire, notre pays vient d'être ouvert largement à un des plus grands courants de civilisations qui se soient éclosés sur la terre” (148).

Socé clearly seems to have been influenced by McKay's ideas in *Banjo*, but rather than simply replicating them in his own work he adapts them to fit his own characters'

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<sup>60</sup> Miller briefly discusses the significance of Sidia's having a copy of *Mein Kampf* on his bookshelf and Fara's accusation: “Sidia [...] represents a separatist point of view that was current in African circles in Paris in the 1930s, involving at certain moments even a flirtation with Hitler's ideas about racial purity, from a black point of view” (*Nationalists* 86). See also Dewitte 333-345.

situations. Mirages de Paris is also just as autobiographical a work as Banjo, as both Socé and McKay themselves struggled to reconcile the various cultural influences in their lives. Socé manages to bring Fara and Sidia back together on the point of education (echoing L.S. Senghor to a degree), as they agree that Senegalese women must receive the same educational opportunities as men if they are to make any advances (an extremely progressive notion for this period). Back on good terms with Sidia, Fara mentions that if the baby is a girl she will be named “Fatou” after Jacqueline’s favorite doll. (152) This name is revelatory – earlier in the book Jacqueline mentions that her favorite, and black, doll was “Fatou Gaye” (85), which is the name of the black mistress of the Spahi in Pierre Loti’s Le Roman d’un Spahi. These two references demonstrate Socé’s awareness of this text and of the fact that a well-off French woman would likely have read it, Jacqueline’s mention of Fatou having the additional benefit of foreshadowing her interracial love for Fara.

Jacqueline has trouble toward the end of her pregnancy, and dies soon after giving birth to a healthy baby boy, her mother at her side. Fara is devastated and too overcome with grief to attend the funeral, though all of his friends go. Some time later Jacqueline’s father reconciles with him, admitting that he opposed their relationship because of appearances but arguing that it would still have been better for both of them if they had stayed within their races. Ambrousse, seeing his friend so sad, encourages him to return to Senegal, explaining that although it takes time to adjust after having been in Europe it can be done. Fara decides to leave, and when he goes to the Ministry of Colonies to request repatriation he finds Sidia doing the same.

This time they do not argue, and in fact agree that it is time for the average African to take charge of his own life and make something of it, as Fara says: “si le citoyen moyen s’obstine à vivre et à penser comme nos ancêtres de la tribu, l’effort des députés n’aura servi à rien. Ce sera comme un champ fertile où l’on n’aura rien semé” (179). By the end of the book Socé seems to take a stand against the choices made by people like Banjo and his friends, to live by whatever means they can and not do anything to change the society around them. Fara wonders how these kinds of people have managed to get where they are:

“Comment expliquer que des jeunes gens qui, en Afrique, n’auraient osé s’avilir, en fussent arrivés là? Il est vrai que, là-bas, on les prenait au sérieux. *L’Europe n’avait pas voulu les prendre au sérieux; eux aussi ne la prenaient pas au sérieux.* Ils s’adaptaient à leur nouvelle condition comme les animaux [ . . . ] L’essentiel était de vivre, de se conserver...”

(182)

Although Socé seems opposed to the kind of selfish life led by Banjo and most of his friends, and chosen by Ray at the end of *Banjo*, the end he bestows upon Fara is ignominious. Fara, waiting to be repatriated, wanders around Paris, thinking about his life. He realizes that in his desire to lead an independent life he has forgotten that he must also face his responsibilities head on and make difficult choices: “Il manquait, à lui et à la plupart de ses frères, la vertu essentielle pour mener le combat de la vie: une volonté capable de prendre une décision malgré quelques échecs inévitables” (185). Crossing a bridge over the Seine, Fara hears “un réveil de tam-tam” from the water and sees his last

"mirage de Paris," Jacqueline beckoning to him from the water, and he jumps in to join her.

Clearly Fara has been very adversely affected by his experiences with French civilization, having fully immersed himself in it, unlike Karim who only tasted the colonial French civilization. Just as Ray suggests in *Banjo*, simply being in a relationship with a white woman cannot bring an African man closer to the white race, as evidenced by Mr. Bourciez's rejection of Fara. Paris presents itself as the land of acceptance and liberty for the black man, but for Fara the deception is clear from the very first day he tours the city, and it only gets worse as he experiences discrimination and hears people (even his beloved Jacqueline) make very erroneous statements about Africa.

Fara's biggest problem, which he recognizes at the end, is that he is weak. "D'autres Noirs avaient pu maintenir leur équilibre comme 'Ambrousse' qu'aucun déboire européen ne pouvait abattre; le philosophe Sidia aussi qui, ses études terminées, allait retourner en Afrique" (185). Fara lacks the pride in his race and his culture that would have enabled him to survive in Europe, or at least to make the difficult decision to return to Senegal before losing his identity. In contrast, Karim succeeds in life because he is able to recapture his grasp on his African identity before he loses it altogether in Dakar. His reconnection with his faith, his return to Saint-Louis, his change in clothing back to the *boubou* and his marriage to Marième lead him to more happiness than he can imagine, but also mark the end of his youth: "La vie de garçon de Karim était à jamais enterrée" (149).

## Conclusion

On the surface, the problems faced by Ousmane Socé's characters seem worlds away from those faced by Lamine Senghor and his audiences. Although they are from two completely different backgrounds and speak for two very different groups of West Africans, both Socé and Lamine Senghor have the same ultimate goal: to reestablish the honor of the black race. By the end of *Mirages de Paris* we have certainly gone a great distance from the situation of the tirailleurs returning home in 1920. Yet, as we have seen, Ousmane Socé is in some ways indebted to Claude McKay, who in turn was inspired in part by Lamine Senghor. Senghor's experiences during and just after the First World War and his indignation at the treatment he and his fellow Africans received in thanks for their efforts on behalf of France are at the heart of his mission to effect *le réveil des nègres*. Thus even though his conception of *conscience de race* is different from that of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Ousmane Socé and other Negritude authors, they are all ultimately working toward this same end, using the means at their disposal.

As they discovered that their treatment by the French at the end of the war was so very different from all that many of them had experienced during the war itself, the tirailleurs sénégalaïs felt increasingly bitter and indignant. This sentiment, combined with their return to Africa and the institution of peacetime conscription and its corollary, forced labor, led directly to significant changes in West African society. Lamine Senghor, self-appointed spokesperson for the beleaguered tirailleurs, launched a concerted and virulent attack on the French for their behavior, condemning the entire colonial project and foretelling its end in one small pamphlet. His encounter with Claude McKay inspired

the Harlem Renaissance text which had the most influence on the Negritude movement, and as such various interpretations of Senghor's call for the *réveil des nègres* are found throughout the works of the Negritude writers, such as those of Ousmane Socé. Yet the quick and clean ending of La violation d'un pays was not quite accurate, and in fact it can be said that even today West Africans and people of all formerly colonized nations are still struggling to assert their own cultural identities in the *alliance fraternelle des pays libres* Senghor wished to see.

## Conclusion

The fact that the tirailleurs were once again remembered on the eve of another conflict with Germany reveals that the French public only showed measurable interest in the colonies themselves in times of national distress. As Andrew and Kanya-Forstner note, "Except in moments of international crisis, the French people and their parliaments were almost totally apathetic to foreign and colonial affairs" ("French 'Colonial Party'" 126). While their article only discusses the period from 1885 to 1914, this statement holds true for the eve of World War II as well, when France would once again call upon its colonized peoples to defend *la mère patrie*. The *dette de reconnaissance* from the early 1920s had long since been forgotten, overrun by *surprises-party* and frenetic jazz bands in city bars and at family gatherings in the country. The images of child-like tirailleurs offering chocolate to young French children and fighting heroically alongside *poilus* on the battlefields of France had been replaced by cannibals on the outskirts of Paris at the Colonial Exposition (in the world of *Zig et Puce*). Expeditions like that of Marcel Griaule had only reinforced the view of the colonies as a place from which to take objects and draw inspiration, the peeling of paintings off walls justified by the argument that the natives were incapable of preserving them. As the French public explored the colonies vicariously, by watching films or reading novels and comic books and attending the Colonial Exposition, they conveniently forgot about any debt they might owe the surviving tirailleurs or those families who had lost loved ones to the war.

Despite the efforts of literary critics like Roland Lebel, museum directors like Paul Rivet and Georges-Henri Rivière, or the organizers of the Colonial Exposition to teach the French about their colonies and to inspire in them a *conscience impériale*, the public managed to avoid committing itself to the development of the colonial empire. Certainly aware in the years following the war that France had far-flung colonies, that they were populated by people like the tirailleurs, and that these people had intriguing cultures, French people took what they needed to rejuvenate their own culture called into question after the devastating conflict. Despite governmental officials' despair that the French had no *conscience impériale* and did not support the economic development of the empire, the public's taking and domesticating of elements of culture perceived to be African does illustrate imperial behavior. The twist, however, is that this behavior manifested itself within the metropole and inside French culture, such that opponents of *la folie noire* saw it as evidence of a superior society being weakened by an inferior one. This reverse assimilation was not at all what proponents of empire had had in mind when they promoted the *mission civilisatrice*, and was viewed by some as a serious threat.

Just as the French peoples' exposure to Africans and to their cultures was instrumental in changing their views of these formerly completely uncivilized savages, so the Africans' exposure to metropolitan French civilization and people radically altered their perceptions as well. The myth of the white man as invincible had been destroyed under hails of bullets in the trenches, and the notion that all French people were like colonial officials had been disproven by the kind welcomes of civilians and compassion of medical personnel throughout France during the war. For the first time thousands of

West Africans could compare their situations with those of people living in France, and came to the obvious conclusion that they and the other peoples throughout the colonized regions of the world were being exploited. Their poor treatment upon demobilization and repatriation, the institution of peacetime conscription and then the abuses of forced labor confirmed what they had realized upon meeting the French, and led them to question the existing order.

Although the efforts of Lamine Senghor to mobilize his fellow West Africans and to establish their equality with the French were not successful during his lifetime, his struggle was acknowledged by Claude McKay and, at least implicitly, by the writers of the Négritude movement. Ousmane Socé's suggestion of a *civilisation métisse* as a way around the impasse faced by well-educated West Africans trying to further their peoples' goals from within the French system represented another attempt to reach the same end of reestablishing the honor of the black race. Yet Socé's method alone, like that of Léopold Sédar Senghor and others, illustrates their imprisonment in the colonial order, as they were obliged to use the French language and to make cultural compromises that Lamine Senghor refused to consider.

Despite the fact that they rejected any association with him, Bakary Diallo was the first to face these issues head-on and to acknowledge the conflict between his desire to become as French as possible and his reluctance to abandon his native culture and heritage. By resituating Diallo's experiences into the times in which they were lived and by linking his story with those of his fellow tirailleurs I have tried to illustrate that he was one of many, and that his treatment at the hands of critics over the years has been unjust.

Whether or not he was one of Lucie Cousturier's students, her story greatly helps to illuminate Diallo's situation but also reveals her unintentional contribution to the linguistic subjugation of many tirailleurs.

Cousturier's efforts to teach tirailleurs French were clearly not intended to strengthen France's imperial grasp of them – on the contrary, she felt she was liberating them. She was, indeed, freeing them from the purgatory of *français tirailleur*, making it much easier for them to communicate with her and with any other French people who agreed to let Africans speak real French. This helped to perpetuate the notion that by acquiring the French language these West Africans could make strides toward becoming French, but Diallo's experiences with the military administration even after he became a citizen made it clear that this was going to be more difficult than it had appeared in theory. Additionally, as her own use of a former student as a guide and translator during her travels in Africa demonstrates, she was also making it somewhat easier for people like her to explore and enjoy France's dominions during the interwar years.

At the end of the 1930s, with Germany again posing a threat to France's security, the tirailleurs sénégalaïs were once more required to fight on behalf of *la mère patrie*. In General A. Duboc's 1939 book, Les Sénégalaïs au service de la France, the notion of Africa as a reservoir of men reappears as a solution to France's ever-present population problems. In his preface to this book General Benoit concludes by arguing that "notre Afrique Occidentale peut fournir, dès le début d'une guerre, un effectif d'hommes instruits [...] supérieur à l'effectif total des sénégalaïs fournis par la colonie pendant la Grande guerre," calling this a "réserve précieuse et unique" which the French would be

fools to leave untapped. (15-16) Duboc rehashes the history of French use of African soldiers since their earliest days, including suggestions as to how they could be better recruited, organized, instructed, and employed. Not an unconditional supporter of tirailleurs, he carefully explains their weaknesses, such as difficulty learning French and poor marksmanship. (44-46) Duboc's need to depict the Africans as inept and of unequal value (depending on ethnic group) reveals that little progress had been made with regard to the treatment of tirailleurs by the colonial army. Still, he places on their officers much of the blame for any ineffective tirailleurs, and seems primarily concerned with correcting the mistakes that were made during the First World War.

Duboc willingly admits that during the 1914-1918 conflict tirailleurs learned some things they should not have:

Pendant la dernière guerre, le contact avec les ouvriers au cours de leur passage dans les usines, l'accueil qu'ils reçurent de certaines femmes ont eu pour résultat de leur montrer nos tares sociales et de détruire les légendes qui nous plaçaient, dans leur esprit, sur un véritable pédestal.

First he argues that this "mauvaise impression" was only temporary, but then in the same sentence he suggests that it "sera vite oubliée si nous savons mettre, dans nos relations avec eux, tout le tact et toute l'aménité qu'elles doivent avoir." In a book dedicated to illustrating how useful these largely incompetent Africans could be if the army learned from its earlier mistakes and revised its methods, this suggestion seems completely out of place. Yet Duboc quickly corrects this apparent incongruity: "A l'avenir, il importera de ne plus considérer notre tirailleur sénégalais comme un être à part, mais de l'assimiler à

l'Européen en tout ce qui sera possible, pour flatter son amour-propre" (140). In this statement the idea of "assimilating" the Africans to the Europeans not only leaves no room for the Africans to maintain their own identity and can only be done "insofar as possible," but worse yet this charade is only recommended as a way of stroking the tirailleurs' egos.

In her study of World War II tirailleurs from Côte d'Ivoire, Soldiers of Misfortune, Nancy Lawler's interviews with veterans reveal that recruitment practices and the treatment of tirailleurs by the army were very similar to those experienced by the 1914-1918 tirailleurs. Lawler makes too few references to the experiences of the World War I West African contingents and later tirailleurs' perceptions of them for conclusions to be drawn as to whether or not any soldiers called to service in 1939-1945 were influenced by their predecessors. She notes that "The existing body of scholarly work on the *tirailleurs* of the AOF in the 1939-45 period is remarkably sparse," Echenberg's Colonial Conscripts being the only other study of West African participation in World War II. (3) Echenberg also does not make many comparisons between the experiences of First and Second World War tirailleurs, except to downplay the significance of the formers' discontent in the years following the war. (147) I suspect that the effects of these wars on West African individuals and societies are more closely tied than scholars have acknowledged or even discovered to date. Even though they did not effect large-scale political changes visible to the outside world, as some of the World War II tirailleurs may have helped to do, the changes that did come about as a result of the World War I tirailleurs' exposure to French civilization should not be discounted.

It would appear that not only does the African experience in World War II remain a largely unstudied episode, but that there are also many parallels to be made regarding African participation in these two European wars. Lawler recounts how she tried to help many veterans finally obtain their pensions in the mid-1980s: “along with my tape recorder, cameras, cooler, and assorted writing materials, I now traveled from village to village with a complete set of official regulations and application forms,” and she “came to know every *sous-préfet* in the region” as she escorted veterans to their offices to acquire the necessary documentation. (233) As evidenced by the case of Abdoulaye Ndiaye, some World War I veterans only found out about their pensions long after their demobilization, and there were most likely countless others who were unable to claim the money owed them for lack of paperwork or other obstacles.

The issue of language and the forced use of *petit nègre* also emerge as important factors in the World War II tirailleurs’ experiences. Myron Echenberg relates the stories of two schoolteachers: M’Baye M’Bengue, an *originaire* from Dakar, and Doudou N’Dao, a subject born in Kaolack. Despite the fact that they had both graduated from the *École William Ponty* and were schoolteachers, N’Dao was forced “to join other *Tirailleur* subjects from the provinces to eat ‘native food’ from a communal bowl and to sleep on a hard board or a straw mat with only his kit bag as a pillow.” In contrast, M’Bengue “was served *café au lait* each morning with other citizens” and slept on a cot surrounded by mosquito netting. Echenberg describes that both N’Dao and M’Bengue “share bitter memories over their treatment as educated Africans,” and includes an example from the *originaire’s* experiences:

M'Bengue was asked to teach French on Saturdays to *Tirailleurs* on a voluntary basis, but was ordered to use “petit nègre” in his classes. When he objected to his officer, he was mocked the next day “as Mister artist who wants to speak French like the French,” and from that point he refused to do this voluntary work.

It is painfully evident from this incident, surely not isolated, that in 1939-1945 the French army tried hard to replicate the conditions of life which tirailleurs had suffered in 1914-1918. Echenberg notes that M'Bengue and N'Dao “found the *petit nègre* of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* an exaggerated symbol of their one-year purgatory under the colors,” and they also blamed the army “for what they understood to be the widespread use of *petit nègre* in Côte d’Ivoire, where they had heard that even ministers spoke this slang” (116-117). Nancy Lawler makes a passing reference to the fact that during her interviews “when it came time to talk of purely military matters, the veteran often, despite a gap of almost half a century, reverted to barrack-room French, *parler tirailleur*” (6), which testifies to the longevity of this imposed “language.”

The problem of language for Africans today is eloquently addressed by Abiola Irele in a chapter entitled “African Literature and the Language Question” in The African Experience in Literature and Ideology (1990). Irele notes that many African nations have adopted as their official languages European ones, a fact which “can only be regarded as a measure of convenience, arising out of the circumstances of the colonial experience, and not as a logical response to the truth of the African situation” (48). It is exceedingly difficult for an African writer to express the cultural entirety of his or her experience in a

literature written in a language that lacks certain terms, expressions, syntax, or other elements inextricably linked to his or her native culture. As Irele puts it, “no amount of ‘proverbialization’ of the European language can remove the fact that the qualities sought for belong originally and are really truly at home in the African language” (51). Additionally, by publishing in a European language an author dramatically limits his or her audience to an educated elite who “move and live in a dim region of cultural and linguistic ambiguity” and excludes the masses to whom this literature is not accessible. (49-50) While these problems may not seem to be the direct result of the imposition of *petit nègre* on tirailleurs during the two world wars, Bakary Diallo and Lucie Cousturier’s students, who strove to liberate themselves from this *prison verbale*, were fighting a similar battle. Unfortunately, their only recourse was to French, one of the European languages with which many African writers and their nations continue to struggle today.

Although it is not terribly surprising that this linguistic dilemma still exists in post-colonial Africa, one would hope that over eighty years after the Great War the contributions of those who fought and died for France could be commemorated without being colored by stereotypes supposedly long since disavowed. Yet in the catalog of a 1996 exhibition at the *Historial de la Grande Guerre* in Péronne, France, Mémoires d’outre-mer: les colonies et la Première Guerre mondiale the apparent impossibility of an unbiased remembrance becomes clear. The cover and the chapter dividers of the catalog alone are revelatory: the illustrations are taken from a 1916 children’s book about a boy’s toy soldiers leaving to fight a war. The soldiers, *spahis* and *tirailleurs*, are figurines, like chess pieces, mounted on little pedestals and wearing colorful uniforms. Though I would

imagine the implication was unconscious, these illustrations lend themselves to the interpretation that France's colonial soldiers were, and still are, viewed as game pieces to be moved around the map based on the needs of the players. Sometimes the figurines are neatly lined up in formation, or being reviewed by clearly French soldiers, and in other instances they are falling over, or even dismembered with slightly dismayed expressions on their faces as they wait for the nurse (whose feet are free) to patch them together.

Although the text of the catalog is couched in terms of recognizing and paying a debt to all the soldiers from France's colonies during World War I, at times the sincerity of this expression of thanks seems to be compromised by a lingering sentiment of colonial paternalism. The introductory statement of the *Commissaire de l'exposition*, Véronique Harel, is entitled "Reconnaissances de dettes!" and Harel writes that the ideas of "Dettes de sang, dettes d'argent, dettes d'honneur" guided the organizers throughout the preparation of the exhibit. Yet she feels a need to reassure the reader that "Il n'est pas trop fort d'employer le terme de dette même s'il peut déranger," and falls into the old trap of exoticism as she writes that "nous avons voulu leur rendre hommage et partir à la découverte des 'Mémoires d'outre-mer'" and that the exhibit "a fait naître une immense curiosité pour ces hommes 'venus d'ailleurs'." The fact that the text and images of the catalog are framed between a quote from the Tharauds' *La Randonnée de Samba Diouf* and one from a poem entitled "Civilisation!!!" only intensifies my impression that the *reconnaissance de dettes* is limited and shadowed by colonial nostalgia. The Tharaud quote has the tirailleurs saying in part, "En vérité la mort n'est rien. Si c'est pour aider les Toubabs à faire la guerre qu'on nous a conduits ici, qu'ils nous fassent lever!" while the

excerpt from the poem reads “Ô Barbares que la Bonté / de notre Europe élève / A titre de publicité / A l’œil, vers un beau Rêve. / Aimez ces Humains Supérieurs / Qui, avec des sauvages, / Auront fait des hommes meilleurs / Policés et... plus sages...”<sup>1</sup>

In the first chapter of the catalog, “La plus grande France” written by Marc Michel, he tries for the most part to keep a certain distance between himself and his topic by marking loaded terms with quotation marks. For example, he puts quotes around “la plus grande France,” “colonies,” and “colons,” but oddly not only fails to separate *colonisés* from the text but does separate “citoyens” when speaking of *originaires*. While his account of the facts cannot be disputed, though the history is simplified for this limited space, he offers a very “French” view of the situation, and unfortunately reiterates some of the rhetoric of the period he is discussing. At the end of this first chapter he writes that in Africa just before World War I “la plupart peuvent se réjouir de la *Pax gallica* qui s’étend un peu partout. La guerre ne règne plus, les paysans peuvent produire et commencent à se laisser aller aux mirages de la consommation apportés par l’Europe: ils peuvent acheter” (23). This ties in nicely with the poster reproduced at the start of his chapter, which depicts spear-wielding Africans raising their arms to volunteer for service, along with some statues of *art nègre* and colonizers doing good works. The text of the poster, “Les colonies ravagées par l’Esclavage, la Maladie, les Luttes Intestines sont délivrées par les Français. Les indigènes, en retour, s’offrent pour défendre la France attaquée” (12-13), is echoed by Michel in the last lines of “La plus grande France”:

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<sup>1</sup> This poem, like most of the images reproduced in the catalog, is not dated. The author is indicated as “Adjudant G. Labrunie,” which appears to be a pseudonym for Gérard de Nerval (1808-1855), but I have been unable to confirm this.

Au total, il est possible d'affirmer qu'existe partout, à des degrés divers et quoiqu'on ait dit, un véritable loyalisme envers la France dont les colonisés perçoivent le message fondamental au-delà des réalités coloniales. Ainsi s'explique le paradoxe apparent de leur participation sincère à la défense de la mère patrie quand l'heure de l'épreuve est venue.

(23)

With none of these words in quotes, and no hint of irony or sarcasm, the reader can only marvel that a historian who in 1982 published the most complete work on the participation of French West Africa in World War I, including descriptions of fierce and bloody resistance to conscription, would feel comfortable making such a statement in 1996.

Despite the overwhelming disparity in the availability of documentation, I have tried throughout this dissertation to provide as balanced a study as possible and attempted to avoid privileging either France or West Africa. It is, however, impossible for me to remain completely objective and impartial, since from the documents I have chosen to examine to the words I have used to discuss them I too reveal whatever unconscious biases I have. Still, by bringing to light the social realities of the French and West African experience of World War I and the interwar years I hope that I have helped to clarify an important part of the colonial period and that my work can incite further investigation and illumination.

## Appendix

	<b>Recruitment (# of men)</b>	<b>% of population</b>	<b>% of total recruitment</b>
<b>Mauritanie</b>	<b>2,014</b>	<b>0.96%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Sénégal</b>	<b>20,591</b>	<b>1.73%</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Haut-Sénégal et Niger</b>	<b>72,042</b>	<b>1.31%</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Niger</b>	<b>3,876</b>	<b>0.35%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Guinée</b>	<b>30,204</b>	<b>1.61%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	<b>22,270</b>	<b>1.47%</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Dahomey</b>	<b>10,223</b>	<b>1.21%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>161,220</b>		<b>100%</b>

**Table 1. World War I Recruitment Statistics: French West African Colonies**  
 Compiled from information given by Marc Michel. He gives his margin of error regarding the total number of men recruited as  $\pm 3\%$ . ([Appel 403-408](#))

	<b># of men</b>
<b>Total Recruitment</b>	<b>161,220</b>
<b>Soldiers recruited before 1914</b>	<b>31,000</b>
<b>Total Tirailleurs</b>	<b>192,220</b>
<b>Soldiers from the Four Communes</b>	<b>7,200</b>
<b>Total Soldiers FWA</b>	<b>199,420</b>

**Table 2. Total World War I Mobilization from French West Africa**  
 Compiled from calculations by Michel. ([Appel 404](#)) Michel points out that these figures are not definite, given the discrepancies in reports dating from during and just after the war, and the lack of accurate records of colonial participation in the war effort. The soldiers from the Four Communes were incorporated into metropolitan units.

	<b>Recruitment (# of men)</b>
<b>North Africa</b>	<b>293,756</b>
<b>French West Africa and Four Communes</b>	<b>170,891</b>
<b>Indochina</b>	<b>48,922</b>
<b>Madagascar</b>	<b>41,355</b>
<b>"Old colonies" (Antilles, etc.)</b>	<b>22,695</b>
<b>French Equatorial Africa</b>	<b>17,910</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>11,191</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>607,256</b>

**Table 3. World War I Recruitment Statistics: French Colonies**

Statistics compiled by Baron Lyons de Feuchin for a 1924 government publication, cited by Michel. (Appel 404) Michel does not explain the fact that the total of the numbers given is actually 606,720. He notes that Lyons de Feuchin's estimations are low, especially for French West Africa, but that they still permit interesting comparisons to be made regarding recruitment from the different parts of the French Empire. These figures exclude colonial laborers recruited (from Indochina, China, Algeria, Tunisia, and Madagascar) to work behind the lines.

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