CHAPTER 12

SLAVES INTO SOLDIERS: SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE TIRAILLEURS SENEGALAIS

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The origins of France's colonial army in West Africa are commonly dated from the creation of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais by Governor Louis Faidherbe in 1857 (Boisboissel 1956: 48). In fact the roots of the African Tirailleurs are much older. They can be traced back to the first years of company rule in seventeenth century Senegambia, when British and French military recruiters took on local Africans as soldiers and sailors in order to augment European units which formed the core of the small company detachments (Boisboissel 1956: 47-48).

During the course of the nineteenth century the Tirailleurs underwent several transformations, as Table 12.1 indicates. At the beginning of the post-Napoleonic era in 1820,

TABLE 12.1

GROWTH OF THE TIRAILLEURS, 1820-1914

Year	Size	Year	Size	Year	Size
1820	23	1862	900	1900	8,400
1823	125	1867	1,000	1902	8,639
1827	200	1872	625	1904	9,000
1831	400	1882	1,200	1911	11,980
1839	150	1886	1,600	1912	12,920
1848	250	1888	2,000	1913	14,790
1852	350	1891	2,400	1914	17,356
1857	500	1893	5,087		
		1895	5,987	1920s	48,000

Sources: Abadie 1937: 210-216; A.N.S. 2G12/7 and 4D143/100.

Black African soldiers constituted only a small fraction of the 383 man Bataillon d'Afrique, as French forces in the small enclave of Senegal were then labelled. In 1823 the first all African company of 125 men was formed. There then followed very slow growth to mid century, a rise during Faidherbe's tenure in the 1850s, a decrease thereafter, until a rather sharp increase occurred in the conquest decades which ended the century. A dramatic growth then took place during the years of military occupation from 1900-1904, and especially after the introduction of civilian rule after 1904, until, by the beginning of 1914, the Tirailleurs had come to include almost 18,000 men organized in six regiments. While political decisions lay behind each of these shifts, it is also clear that recruitment methods and policies contributed dramatically to these changes. A brief examination of the Tirailleurs Army in its three phases before the First World War is in order.

Rachat: The System of the Early Years

Early recruitment occurred in the same random way that obtained for local labor generally (Davis 1970: 28-29). Much of it involved slaves, though the free mulatto sons of European and African unions sometimes found employment as well. The Wolof word for sailor, laptot, came in time to be generic in Senegambia for a military employee of the French, but the term had higher status when it was associated with local merchant marine employment (Boisboissel 1956: 48). Pure military labor, consisting largely of chore and fatigue duties, remained the preserve of the slaves and others of servile origin.

The first departure from this practice occurred in 1819 when the Ministry of Marine ordered the recruitment of "companies of colour" who would enlist in return for a signing-on bonus or premium.[1] These men were attached to the French units of Senegal. In fact, this premium was paid to their masters, and the men then were indentured to army service for a period of from twelve to fourteen years; instructions even specified that purchase prices should not exceed 300 francs.[2] This purchase system, called rachat, was to remain in place for most of the nineteenth century (Zuccarelli 1962: 420-461; Renault 1971: 5-80). Table 12.2 indicates the varying prices paid for indentured soldiers and the regions where they were obtained. As with the slave trade generally, the market rather than government edicts determined prices paid and sources tapped for such soldiers.

The steady demand for African soldiers can be explained in part by death rates for the European troops among whom they served. Thus, in 1815, within six months of the despatch of

TABLE 12.2

ORIGINS AND PRICES OF SLAVES PURCHASED FOR THE TIRAILLEURS

Date	Region	Price	Details
1820	Gorée	400 francs	30 garrison soldiers for duty at Gorée
1820	Galam	150 fr.	
1828	Bissagos	350 fr.	
1831	Bakel	325 fr.	bought by Galam Company
1833	Bakel	335 fr. or less	Galam Company paid less and turned profit.
1839	Bissao and Cacheo	300 fr.	bought by le Sieur Marbeau
1853	Casamance	200 fr.	

Sources: Faure 1920: 5-108; A.N.S. 2B5, 1B17, 2B15, 2B18.

seventy-five French military cadres to Senegal, some fifty-seven had died (Boisboissel 1956: 52). Colossal European death rates were partly a function of the poor quality of the soldiers as well as the hostile disease environment. For instance, the four hundred soldiers sent out to Senegal in 1819 were on penal duty, "ramassis d'ivrognes et de marauders, d'hommes turbulents et profondément vicieux," wrote Colonel Schmaltz, commander in Senegal at that time. They were men who "se livrent à des excès de tout genre,"[3] and, worse, men serving in Senegal without fixed terms. These men believed, perhaps correctly, that they would die in Senegal unless they could be sent home for medical reasons, and many tried deliberately to make themselves ill enough to be repatriated and still survive.

Soon the need for Africans to replace such unreliable troops was augmented by yet another novelty, the exporting of West African soldiers to fight wars of conquest and occupation in other corners of the expanding French empire. In 1827 some two hundred Wolof soldiers were sent to Madagascar, followed in 1831 by the despatching of 220 troops to Guiana.[4]

The practice of buying slaves to satisfy expedient needs for military labor was not without its difficulties. Apart from its cost, the rachat system was an embarrassment and a contradiction as Western Europe moved closer to abolitionist principles (Zuccarelli 1962: 438-439). The Marbeau affair in the early 1840s was particularly scandalous, since it implicated the highest levels of government. The governor of Senegal licensed Marbeau, a French trader, to purchase slaves

for the military in Portuguese regions of Guiné. The affair came to light when the British Anti-Slavery Squadron captured him en route to Bissao and confiscated his ship (A.N.S. 2B18, 1B31; Faure 1920: 82-83).

The emancipation of slaves as a result of the 1848 revolution further complicated French recruitment of African soldiers by means of rachat. The Emancipation Act explicitly prohibited the practice, and the military bravely stated its intention to rely upon volunteer soldiers from among the free population of Saint-Louis, if necessary through a formal conscription law modeled after the existing practice in France (Renault 1971: 23).

The immediate impact of emancipation was a recruiting crisis. In the three years following 1848, only three volunteers came forward, hardly enough to meet the two hundred minimum required to maintain garrison strength (A.N.S. 2B28). Free Africans of military age, in their twenties and thirties, were said to find military labor degrading, especially as the army was the preserve of slaves and ex-slaves and the pay poor in comparison with wages for laptots, for example (Faure 1920: 95). An inter-ministerial commission assigned in 1851 to study the future of the colony concluded that the tried method of rachat would have to be preserved, and to be used alongside the volunteer system, one requiring fourteen years of service and the other seven (Hargreaves 1960: 99-101). It was clear enough that rachats would have to provide the bulk of the recruits when, by 1854, the quota of African soldiers was raised to the then unprecedented figure of 750 men, two hundred of whom were to be despatched abroad to Mayotte, Madagascar, Martinique and Guiana. To raise such numbers, the French had to draw on slave purchases in Sedhiou in the Casamance and even Gabon. To avoid any repetition of incidents with the British, ministerial orders called for naval officers on war ships to bring back the indentured soldiers (Faure 1920: 98).

When Louis Faidherbe became Governor of Senegal in 1854 with ambitious plans to expand French territorial control in the Senegal valley and beyond, his first task was to address the crisis in military recruitment. Determined to conduct not one but two military campaigns a year against French opponents up-river, Faidherbe needed more soldiers, and, like his predecessors, he realized that the disease factor made the despatch of European troops too costly (Davis 1970: 40). Unlike previous governors, however, Faidherbe believed that African soldiers could become effective combat soldiers, not simply indentured military laborers ("captifs-hommes-de-corvee" was the evocative French phrase used) (Boisboissel 1956: 54). He therefore began a lengthy campaign to transform the status of the African soldier from indentured military laborer to fully fledged regular combat soldier.[5]

Faidherbe's efforts were rewarded when Napoleon III signed the decree of 21 July 1857 creating the famous Tirailleurs Sénégalais.[6] The decree brought local troops in Senegal to battalion strength by doubling the existing companies from two to four, and by segregating the Africans into their own units, with their own distinctive uniforms. Apart from the formal separation of units, terms of service were to be virtually identical to those of European units. Rules and regulations of regular Navy Infantry regiments were to apply with regard to allowances and retirement pensions, and the battalion was to be headed by a Major, with officers and non-coms drawn from regular Navy Infantry regiments. One significant difference highlights the rationale for the entire reform. The pay of Tirailleur soldiers was to be excluded from normal Navy stipends and instead was to be determined locally by the Governor of Senegal and his officials. Faidherbe had shrewdly and accurately calculated that this economy would appeal to planners and politicians in Paris.

Faidherbe relied on a combination of measures to attract Africans to fill the expanded ranks.[7] The new uniform was colorful and designed to lure young men. Degrading physical labor was to be severely limited; the men were to be infantry soldiers, their days taken up with training for this task. Most importantly, the regular stipend was to be raised from previous levels, and incentive bonuses were to be paid not only as lump sums to first time recruits as had been the system under rachat (the money going to the former master) but also to veterans who were encouraged to re-enlist for up to four year terms. Without completely excluding rachat, Faidherbe hoped in this fashion to move gradually to a volunteer professional army which attracted recruits through a combination of material and ideological incentives.

While we cannot be sure of which incentives proved the most effective, in combination Faidherbe's reforms certainly achieved their goal. By the beginning of 1858 he had his four companies at full strength; moreover only 160 of the five hundred men were holdovers from earlier days when rachat was virtually the exclusive technique used.[8]

One new incentive was implicit in the greatly expanded Tirailleurs, the promise of booty. Faidherbe personally took a rigorous moral line against taking spoils of war, but he was not able to eradicate this practice (Renault 1971: 21, 24). On the contrary, the prospects of being on the winning side and of taking booty were obvious to Africans who had the taste and skills for the military vocation. This phenomenon became especially apparent during the expansion of the Tirailleurs during the conquest decades at the end of the century. Nevertheless, rachat did not disappear immediately; on the contrary it remained the prime method of recruitment despite Faidherbe's distaste for it. After his departure, the number of Tirail-

leurs actually shrank for a time, and then remained constant for the next twenty-five years, during which time rachat was practiced regularly.

New Methods of Recruiting during the Conquest Era, 1886-1903

In a formal sense, the rachat system had ceased by 1882 as the French no longer purchased slaves on the open market for the Tirailleurs (Boutillier 1968: 515). In its place, three new forms of recruitment enabled the Tirailleurs to grow to the proportions necessary to carry out the conquest of West Africa. Two of these methods, the payment of an enlistment bonus to a slave's master, and the incorporation of prisoners-of-war, porters, and African peasants, were marked by at least as much coercion as the discredited technique of rachat. The third method, the exercise of a career choice by what might reasonably be called the first free mercenaries of the Tirailleurs, represented somthing new.

In 1868 Faidherbe's successor, Pinet-Laprade, inaugurated the first of these new practices, the transfer of enlistment bonuses to slave masters as a means of terminating their ownership over their human property (Renault 1971: 21-22). Enlistment bonuses rose from 100 fr for a seven-year contract in 1853 to 300 fr for the same term in 1894, before falling off slighty by 1905 (Table 12.3).

While this modified form of purchase resembled the old rachat system, Pinet-Laprade made it clear that it enabled the administration to avoid dealing directly with slave traders while offering the former slave the opportunity of formally

TABLE 12.3

ENLISTMENT BONUSES, TIRAILLEURS 1853-1904

Year	Bonus	Bonus per Year
1853	100 fr for 7 year contract	14 fr
1868	200 fr for 7 year contract	29 fr
1880	240 fr for 6 year contract	40 fr
1881	300 fr for 7 year contract	43 fr
1894	300 fr for 7 year contract	43 fr
1905	120 fr for 4 year contract	30 fr

Sources: Boutillier 1968: 529; Faure 1920: 98, 104; A.N.S. 4D29, 4D30.

ending his dependence on his master, even if the army was to become his new patron:

> La nouvelle combinaison n'est qu'un encouragement donné à se racheter; en effet la prime de 200 francs est la valeur la plus élevée d'un esclave mâle complètement formé et bien constitué. . . . Je vous autorise à avancer aux captifs qui voudront se racheter la somme nécessaire pourvu qu'elle n'excède pas 200 francs, et cela au moment ou ils embarqueront sur le bateau à vapeur pour venir à Saint-Louis, afin qu'ils puissent indemniser leurs maitres.[9]

As demand for soldiers outstripped supply, particularly in the active years of conquest in the 1890s, French commanders were given a wide degree of latitude in their recruitment methods. In the region of West-Volta, east of Sikasso in 1897, for example, the French commander Major Caudrelier, faced with the task of commanding and occupying a hugh region only recently devastated by Samori's forces, ordered each chef de poste to recruit soldiers into regular service to bring the Tirailleurs to battalion strength (six hundred men) (Marceau 1911: 13). One junior officer took the directive to justify the seizure of a caravan of porters of roughly three hundred men arriving with supplies. He locked the exits, brought out Tirailleurs uniforms, and after two months of drill, had two combat companies of former porters. Several men apparently adjusted well enough to have re-enlisted and were still in service in 1904 when they participated in the occupation of the Ivory Coast.

Royal slaves, who were also incorporated, are difficult to classify. Some of these slaves (called diomba in the various Mande states) were commanders of slave soldiers (sofa) who had become rich and powerful in the service of West African notables, much in the fashion that the Ottomans confided great power and wealth to their military slaves (Curtin 1975: vol. 1, 35-36; Bazin 1975: 135-181). Many owned slaves in their own right. One French eye-witness reported that the diomba and their sofa soldiers who were taken as prisoners steadfastly refused freedom and requested a privileged status with the French (Guillaumet 1895: 156). Presumably they hoped to preserve the same status within the French system as they had earlier achieved. During the conquest years, French practice gave them some reason to expect these favors. Initially at least, the diomba retained their weapons and continued to keep the wives, children, and even slaves they had acquired from their former masters. Emancipation would have also implied freedom for their dependents (Guillaumet 1895: 156).

The third technique, the incorporation of West African career soldiers, represented the inter-play of coercion and free will. Some African army leaders were no doubt attracted

by the superior weapons of the French, their winning record, and the promise of sharing in the spoils of war. This seems, for example, to have been the motive of Babato, a Zaberma slave raider in the Voltaic region (Duperray 1984: 63-66) and of the defeated remnant of the Maraka forces of Al-Kari of Boussé of the same region (Echenberg 1969: 531-561). Oral traditions indicate that many of these leaders brought their entire units into French service, and they were enlisted, no questions asked, by the manpower-short French commanders of Haut-Sénégal et Niger in 1898.[10] Another case, this time with fewer options, was that of officers of Samori Touré. After his capture by the French in 1898, several of his sons and lesser commanders were incorporated into the Tirailleurs and sent to Saharan outposts as a test of their loyalty.[11] As leaders turned their coats inside out, many of their slave soldiers followed suit, no doubt with little or no consultation.

By these methods, the Tirailleurs were able to triple in size in the chaotic years of the conquest period. Nevertheless, in spite of the predominant coercion involved, a few Africans were beginning to exercise choices, opting for military service in preference to the alternative of tilling the soil or obtaining occasional wage labor. In this process a new phenomenon was emerging. Members of the traditional ruling families of West Africa were beginning to join the predominantly servile Tirailleurs, entering the ranks as non commissioned or even native officers.

Transition to Partial Conscription, 1904-1912

The size of the Tirailleurs continued to increase exponentially in the first years of civilian rule after 1904 (Table 12.1). By the beginning of 1914 the Tirailleurs consisted of 18,000 soldiers in six regiments, well before the enormous manpower needs of the First World War had even begun to be a factor. Four elements were at work in producing this growth. First, the conquest itself was by no means over by 1904, and effective occupation of much of the Ivory Coast had yet to be achieved. Second, occupation troops were needed over the vast regions of Haut-Sénégal et Niger, still under military administration in 1904, a sure indication that what the French termed "pacification," but what was in reality African resistance to conquest, was not yet over. Third, in regions conquered some time before, such as the Senegal and Niger valleys, occupation and police functions were still required. Dakar, the new federal capital, became a military center as well, with a permanent regimental garrison of three thousand men installed there (Abadie 1937: 47). In short, the French had discovered that it required more men to hold the huge territories encom-

passed within French West Africa than it had to conquer the area.

Fourth, as French colonial expansion proceeded apace elsewhere in Africa, the decision was taken at the highest levels in Paris to use the Tirailleurs as an expeditionary force outside West Africa (Michel 1982: 6-7). The despatch of African soldiers elsewhere had long been a secondary function to the primary task of maintaining order at home in West Africa. Now that West Africa was becoming secure, the use of the Tirailleurs as an expeditionary force to help create and then defend the empire abroad became a more important commitment. Indeed the Tirailleurs played an important and controversial role in the conquest of Morocco, the last venture of French expansion in Africa (Michel 1982: 15-39). Tirailleurs constituted between 9-15 percent of the entire French conquest army of Morocco, with dramatic increases occurring for the years 1912 and 1913 (Table 12.4).

TABLE 12.4

COMPOSITION OF THE FRENCH CONQUEST ARMY OF MOROCCO, 1908-1913

Year	Total Forces	European Troops	Algerian and Tunisian Troops	Black Africans (Tirailleurs)	Percentage (Tirailleurs)
1908	10,476	4,260	4,872	1,344	13
1909	7,325	3,681	2,532	1,112	15
1910	6,228	3,314	2,166	748	12
1911	17,819	10,094	5,945	1,780	10
1912	41,065	23,882	13,314	3,870	9
1913	61,692	35,867	17,573	8,252	13

Source: Ministère de la Guerre, 1922.

These increased manpower needs could not be met by the old rough-and-ready techniques of recruitment. The rachat method had effectively ended by the 1880s, and wholesale incorporation of defeated soldiers and prisoners became impractical once the major African armies had been defeated and dismantled. Perhaps a trickle of recruitments could be procurred as owners put their remaining young slaves forward to tap the enlistment bonus. Perhaps also some refugees from the villages de liberté (settlements of ex-slaves and fugitives) and from the slave exodus at Banamba and elsewhere produced some new recruits as well (Bouche 1968: 108; Roberts and Klein 1981: 375-394). But

the period following the creation of the French West African federation in 1904 marked an unprecedented economic expansion, and demand for labor made a career in the Tirailleurs far less attractive than in the conquest era. Jobs opened up on the railways, in the towns and ports, and in capitalist agriculture (Roberts and Klein 1981: 393). In such circumstances the Tirailleur recruit's starting daily wage of 50 centimes, roughly half that of the daily laborer's wage, was hardly a strong attraction.

Signs of a recruiting crisis were evident after 1904. When the time came for Tirailleurs to be sent to Morocco, the army was forced to offer a special overseas bonus to meet its short term commitments there (Marceau 1911: 12). Despite assurances by advocates like Colonel Charles Mangin (1910: 81) that West Africa was "un reservoir intarissable" of military manpower, the shortage of men in 1912 prompted Governor Ponty to take an important and unprecedented step (Michel 1982: 30). With Mangin's support, Ponty enacted a law calling for partial conscription. Perhaps no one anticipated the significance that the First World War would give this legislation. On the basis of the 1912 law, close to 200,000 Africans served as Tirailleurs during the War (Michel 1982: 483). Thereafter, beginning in 1919 with a new peacetime conscription law, obligatory universal military service for African males became the dominant characteristic for most of the colonial period (Echenberg 1975: 171-192). In effect a small conquest army of slave mercenaries had been transformed into a mass army of draftees drawn from virtually all strata of West African society.

Geographic and Ethnic Origins

French recruitment in the nineteenth century not only guaranteed a predominance of slaves and other men of servile origin, but the methods of obtaining recruits also resulted in a regional concentration and the reliance on specific ethnic groups. In the early years of recruiting, cost and availability rather than regional or ethnic preferences dominated French practice. By the 1840s, Governor Bouet-Willaumez found it difficult to recruit in western Senegal (Faure 1920: 85-87). Recruits from the upper Senegal valley seemed as vulnerable to the unhealthy climate of the town of Saint-Louis as were Europeans, a circumstance which the governor blamed on malignant sea breezes. And former slaves from the Wolof states of Cayor and Walo deserted military service too easily. Consequently Bouet-Willaumez's regime turned to the Bambara states of the interior as a source of slaves. By mid century, Bambara recruits were singled out for their military "qualities":

> Among others, those who belong to the Bambara race are, it may be said, as good as white soldiers, as they have the advantage over them of being immune to all the hardships of the climate.[12]

In the helter skelter recruiting of the conquest era no statistics on regional, let alone ethnic, origins of recruits were compiled. Nonetheless the French preference for Bambara is clear, although there were recruits from a wide variety of other ethnic groups, too. One experienced French officer, Captain Marceau, writing in 1911, indicated that two-thirds of all recruits were Bambara (Marceau 1911: 3). The Bambara Tirailleur, wrote Marceau was "un rude gaillard qui complètent toutes les fortes vertus guerrières, mais que n'éclaire malheureusement pas une très vive intelligence" - in short, a complaint, stolid peasant soldier obedient to his new French masters. In contrast, the Wolof soldier was spoiled by his long association with France and had become "snob de la caste" towards other Africans whom he regarded as "sauvages." "C'est un nègre des 'Droits de l'homme'; c'est un citoyen sans cité; c'est un électeur qui dédaigne nos uniformes: il n'est plus guère bon pour 'faire tirailleur.' Aussi, même au regiment de Saint Louis, trouve-t-on peu de Ouolofs." Marceau (1911: 2-3) believed that the best officers came from the ranks of the Tukolor: "C'est un guerrier d'essence. C'est un soldat de vocation qui ne se plie malheureusement pas toujours de bonne grace à notre discipline militaire." Apart from the obvious subjective basis, what is remarkable about such opinions is that they were so long lasting, in part no doubt because they were self-fulfilling. As late as the 1950s officers were repeating the homilies of Marceau and of Mangin regarding "warlike races" (Boisseson 1956). Mangin (1911: 1-37), for example, had doubted whether people of the forest regions had the discipline and physical stamina to make good Tirailleurs. Mangin's strong influence on military policy, together with the fact that forest zones were the last to be occupied by the French, meant that only after 1919, when universal male conscription was systematically introduced, did forest peoples begin to form a modest minority in the Tirailleurs (Echenberg 1980: 430 et seq.).

As Bambara came to dominate the ranks and non-commissioned grades, the Bambara language became, alongside the "petit-nègre" French that the military insisted upon, the colonial army's vernacular language. New recruits from Bambara and related Mande-speaking regions of the savanna came to find the army a more hospitable institution than did, say, Agni speakers from southern Ivory Coast. Thus patterns established in the formative years were to hold sway decades later.

If we cannot be certain quantitatively of the ethnic composition of the early Tirailleurs, we can at least suggest

regions where recruiting was most intensive. These corresponded with areas of greatest population density, and often, where the percentages of slaves were also high. As the data on slavery compiled by the Federation in the years from 1903-1906 1906 indicate, cercles with slave populations of at least 50 percent were also well represented in the army (Boutillier 1968; Roberts and Klein 1981). These included, in the Soudan, Bafoulabé, Kita, Bamako, Siguiri, Nioro, and Sikasso cercles; in Guinée, Odienné, Kankan and Dinguiray; in Ivory Coast, Kong; in Senegal, Bakel (Boutillier 1968: 518-520, 527-529).[13] Though not an area of heavy slave concentration, the densely populated Mossi plateau in Upper Volta furnished its share of recruits as well, but only once conquest was completed after 1900.

Recruitment of Well-born

"Prince Anabia, il n'y a pas de différence entre vous et moi que du noir au blanc" (anon. 1964: 15). While such hyperbole from no less a personage than Louis XIV to one of his African officers was probably apocryphal, it helps us recognize that not all Africans who served in the French military were of servile origin. Various French governments from the Ancien Régime through the nineteenth century used Africans as officers. Here again, Faidherbe's policies and the reform of 1848 departed from earlier practices. Faidherbe, a believer in the Jacobin ideology of assimilation and of a democratic army, made his thinking clear in a speech he gave while awarding the rank of second lieutenant to one Alioun Sall, a Sénégalese soldier who had distinguished himself in the Tirailleurs. Just as the army had been the vehicle of advancement for many French officers, Faidherbe himself included, the Tirailleurs played a similar role for some Africans. Upward mobility through the army ranks was also a convenient solution to a personal problem. Faidherbe's own illegitimate son, whose mother was a Khassonké concubine, eventually became a "native officer" in the French Army (anon. 1964: 15-23). In his public address, Faidherbe observed:

> Ce poste a été crée spécialement pour recompenser les nombreuses preuves de dévouément que M. Alioun Sall nous a données depuis le commencement de la guerre. Cette nomination a, en outre, une signification plus générale: elle montre que, même en ce qui concerne les positions élevées de notre hiérarchie sociale, la couleur n'est plus une cause d'exclusion et c'est dans ce sense que la population noire doit la comprendre....
>
> La carrière sera ouverte à eux comme à tous les autres, et aux mêmes conditions. Les plus capables

> arriveront seuls. Ceux qui s'obstinent à préférer l'ignorance à la civilisation resteront dans les rangs infimes de la societé, comme cela a lieu dans tous les pays du monde (anon. 1964: 16).

If one source of officers for the Tirailleurs was the emerging African bourgeoisie, including illegitimate sons of French officials like Faidherbe and Duranton, it cannot be said that the army was a popular option for this group. Adekempi Thompson, the son of a merchant from Dahomey, was another exception; he made himself a respectable career in the army, but he was a rare representative of this emerging class (anon. 1964: 18). In reality, educated young men of the middle classes were not attracted to a career which was dominated by an overwhelming number of people of slave origin, leavened perhaps by a minority of native officers representing the old African nobility, but with French officers dominant at junior, intermediate and senior rank. As one administrator noted after 1918, heads of free families had been reluctant to see their sons serve and had availed themselves of opportunities to secure exemptions for them (Kersaint-Gilly 1924: 474). Instead, it was from among the chiefs, themselves often appointed rather than hereditary, that sons were sent as volunteers. This intake of sons of chiefs, whether old or new notables, was particularly strong after the so-called Diagne levy of 1917 (Michel 1982: 223-238). To that point the chiefs had kept their sons out, but the fear grew that in doing so, they were allowing power to pass to the sons of their former servants.

During the transitional years of conquest and after, one very important source of African officers came from among the ranks of the defeated African notables. Two sons of Samori Touré enlisted in the Tirailleurs at the outbreak of war in 1914 and brought with them many of their clients; one served as a Second Lieutenant, the other as a sergeant. Both were killed in 1915 and were replaced by two more brothers who volunteered. By war's end, approximately twenty of Samori's sons had served in the Tirailleurs.[14] Similarly, Bouna, a son of the Wolof resistance figure Ali Bouri N'Diaye, volunteered for service in 1914 and was made an officer in the Legion of Honor soon afterward (Mademba 1930: 51). A son of Mamadu Lamine, the Senegalese rebel, also served, while the most distinguished military record of all was achieved by Captain Abdel Kader Mademba, a grandson of Al-Hajj Umar Tall and a Mangin protege (Mademba 1930: 51).

Opposition to Recruitment

The Tirailleurs paid a price for such a dubious mixture of recruits. A collection of armed men consisting in large part

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. Slave soldiers in traditional armies had been given to excess and were generally disliked in the Senegambian and Niger valleys (Curtin 1975: vol. 1, 35-36). Now, soldiers were not only "captifs de blancs," they were regarded by many as mercenary renegades (Frey 1888: 86; Bonnetain 1894: 67).

The low status of the Tirailleurs produced few volunteers from the higher strata of African society, a situation the French tried to rectify on occasion. One shortlived experiment in 1890 was the creation of a separate battalion of mounted men of free birth, to be named the Chasseurs Sénégalais.[15] It was suggested at the time that the prestige of a cavalry unit, its confinement to well-born men, and the promise of booty were sufficient to induce recruitment and that no enlistment bonus was needed, another indication incidentally that the bonus was clearly recognized as a form of purchasing a slave soldier. Over the years, French recruiters listed a variety of reasons to explain the reluctance of the population to volunteer for military service. It was noted that Muslim leaders in particular discouraged their followers from military service because it meant exposure to the French and their Christian ways.[16] Other reasons mentioned were the dislike of fatigue duties, of which there were too many, that young non-commissioned officers and African cadres were transferred too often, and, finally, that those Africans under French cultural influence simply did not find the military career attractive.[17]

Thirty years later, French authorities began to recognize economic disincentives as among the more fundamental factors. Thus, in 1907, the Lieutenant Governor of Guinée noted that while Muslim leaders in particular continued to be firmly opposed to military service, and held back their children and clients, a more important factor was the greater attractiveness of alternative employment.[18] African youths were said particularly to dislike the long voyages and uncertainties of service abroad, whether in Congo or Madagascar, but most importantly, they wanted to stay in the colony and take on better paying jobs; he cited the case of railroad construction in regions such as Kouroussa, where labor was in short supply. In this cercle, of the fifteen recruits supplied in October 1907, most were in fact Bambara originating from Ségou, the inference being that they were probably slave-strangers. In a word, the Governor believed that economic changes had made the Tirailleurs economically unattractive:

> On pourrait dire aussi que le metier de tirailleur n'a plus pour les noirs le même attrait qu'autrefois alors que les soldats qui revenaient de "faire colonne" rapportaient des captifs et du butin.[19]

Daily Life and Conditions of Service

Fragmentary evidence offers some picture of daily life and conditions of service in the Tirailleurs in the early years. It is possible to offer some indication of such variables as casualty rates from combat and disease, diet, family life and wages.

A fundamental reason for the expansion of the Tirailleurs had been the severity for European soldiers of the West African disease environment. While Africans enjoyed the benefits of inherited and acquired immunities over their European counterparts in the army, it also appears that they took better care of themselves. Faidherbe, when planning his African army, had advised against issuing a daily wine ration to African soldiers. He urged that its value of 30 centimes daily be given in supplemental food rations instead. The African soldiers, whether Muslim or not, were not consumers of wine and would sell their wine rations to French soldiers, who "seront ivres du matin au soir et mourront de la dysenterie. L'ivrognerie est ici la cause de la mort de la moitie des soldats blancs. En outre, il n'y aura plus de discipline."[20]

Of course, disease was a constant danger for Africans as well. One epidemic occurred in 1896, immediately prior to the despatch of soldiers to Madagascar. Cerebro-spinal meningitis attacked thirty-five recruits, of whom five died, while an unspecified number were hospitalized with pneumonia. The head of the Service de Santê feared that the epidemic might spread wherever soldiers served, but that proved not to be the case.[21]

As in most armies, in the Tirailleurs death from disease usually outpaced mortality from combat operations. Among the soldiers fighting in the conquest of Morocco in 1911-1912, there were 155 deaths from disease compared with sixty-two killed and seventy wounded in combat. The overall mortality rate for Africans in that year was approximately fifteen per one thousand, which compared favorably with the death rate of seventeen per one thousand for Europeans in the same military theatre.[22] Neither overall casualty rate was particularly high.

In the conquest of West Africa itself, the considerable differences in military technology had much to do with combat casualties. In this respect, Africans serving in the Tirailleurs were much better off than their African opponents. A young French soldier, Orsat (in Descostes 1893: 25-34), in his letters home to his family in France, provided graphic testimony to the differing technologies. First, his description of the Gras repeating rifle, model 1884, which was standard issue by the 1890s:

> Tu n'as pas idée de l'effet du fusil Gras: une balle dans la tête enlève tout le crane, une balle dans la

> poitrine fait dans le dos un trou de la grandeur d'une assiette, les membres sont hachés et les os brisés d'une façon lamentable (Orsat, in Descostes 1893: 32).

On the other hand, African arms caused Orsat little concern:

> Heureusement que les blessures de leurs balles ne sont, en général, pas dangereuses; ils n'ont que des balles de fer martelé qui doivent être tirées de bien près pour produire un mauvais effet (Orsat, in Descostes 1893: 34).[23]

If the wounds inflicted in West African campaigns were not usually fatal, they were nevertheless real and cumulative. Orsat tells us that the section of the company he commanded consisted of forty men, no less than thirty-six of whom had been previously wounded in battle (Orsat, in Descostes 1893: 25). Other references to casualties indicate that certain French combats were worse then others. Frey, discussing various Senegal campaigns, rated the following as worst: Dialmath in 1855 cost 150 men killed or wounded; Guémou in 1859, 136 casualties; Sabouciré in 1878, sixty-seven casualties (Frey 1888: 58). The Dahomean campaigns in the early 1890s cost heavy losses of 251 killed and 371 wounded, though these figures may have included irregulars as well as regular forces. At the siege of Sikasso against Babemba, the French lost two officers and forty-two soldiers killed, and over one hundred wounded (Balesi 1978: 13, 18).

Soldiers' diets differed considerably from what West Africans customarily ate. From an early date, rice, not then a common food in the West African savanna, was the staple daily ration for soldiers. An early mention of rice occurs in 1827 for African troops serving in Madagascar.[24] By 1829, the staple was listed as either millet or rice, together with fresh meat, prepared by local Africans at 10 A.M. and a second meal at 4 P.M. (Faure 1920: 51). Service abroad could mean changes. Thus in Guiana, the staple became either 500 grams of rice or 750 grams of cassava, 250 grams of cod, salt beef, or fresh meat (Faure 1920: 60). During the 1880s, the French were importing rice from Indochina to feed their soldiers. To cut costs, the Tirailleurs began requisitioning millet from conquered territories, and after 1895, imports of rice dropped off. Total imports of goods to Soudan show a decline from 1,200 tons in 1894-1895 to half that amount in the following year (Gatelet 1901: 488-489). Millet warehouses were ordered built throughout the occupied regions. An official account in 1903 acknowledged that local millet requisitions were still going on, even though by that date the practice of "informal" requisitioning had been prohibited in favor of a systematic tax organized by civilian administrators (Gouvernement-Générale de

l'A.O.F. 1904: 3). By 1911, the daily ration was once again rice (500 grams), together with 400 grams of fresh meat, and small quantities of coffee, sugar, cooking oil, and salt. Firewood was also issued to individual soldiers and their families (Marceau 1911: 37).

In the early nineteenth century, African soldiers complained about being forced to live in barracks away from their families (Faure 1920: 86). By Faidherbe's day, soldiers were allowed to live off base with their wives, to go home for meals, and to come to camp only for daily drill and exercises.[25] In the garrison town of Saint-Louis, for example, home of the First Regiment of Tirailleurs Sénégalais, European officers and men lived in the barracks of the military camp N'Dar-Tonte, while Africans lived off base (Faure 1920: 90).

Even on campaign it was clear that Africans lived quite separately from their European officers. One account from Sousou country in Guinée indicates that African soldiers actually set up their living quarters outside the wall of the French fort (d'Octon 1890: 112). Orsat (in Descostes 1893: 29-30) gives a typically colorful description of the African soldier and his family on campaign:

> Maintenant le camp est presque fini; c'est très drôle, les tirailleurs se fond des cases en paille, carrées, bien alignées, et là dedans vivent leurs femmes et leurs enfants, leurs captifs, tout un monde. En marche, tou ça suit de loin la colonne et arrive à l'étape pour piller le mil et faire le couscous du tirailleur.

Women clearly played an important if dependent role in the life of an African soldier in the Tirailleurs. They tended to the needs of their husbands or masters in numerous ways; as mothers for the soldiers' children, as cooks and accountants performing daily miracles on the meagre salaries and rations, and sometimes even as companions in battle. In the harsh conditions of desert combat at Adrar on one occasion, munitions carriers fled in panic and the women took up the munitions and supplied the decimated lines of their husbands with cartridges (Marceau 1911: 36). They were the hardest workers on campaign. As soon as the bivouac began, they were to be seen collecting firewood, lighting fires, carrying water and meals to the men on guard duty, and of course, cooking (Marceau 1911: 36; d'Octon 1890: 111). Their role as companions and entertainers was also recognized, through performances of music and dancing and through sexual favors. The French encouraged family life in the camps, seeing in women and children a force for stability, and a situation much to be preferred to the problems presented by prostitution and camp followers. Typically, the wife of a soldier was part of the convoy, cooking not only for

her husband but for his bachelor friends, in charge of and responsible for camp property. So militarized did women become that they acquired the status and prestige of their husbands, a trait perhaps common in many armies. One old Africa hand among French officers describes the case of a group of indignant army wives, one hundred strong and led by the wife of the African adjudant-chef, start off on a march to Bamako, some 300 kilometers away, "afin d'aller porter "clamaison" (reclamation) au colonel" over the abusive action of a young officer. The officer, totally contrite, was forced to back down rather than let this happen (Ferrandi 1930: 90).

Around the military camps in West Africa there quickly sprang up small centers of African civilians. These camp followers were sedentary artisans and even long distance kola and other merchants, all living from the needs of the barracks economy. In general the French found these activities salutory, but worried about "boys" and former cooks with bad records, as well as women of low morals, tending to congregate in these camp towns (Ferrandi 1930: 91-92).

Overseas service, of course, meant a break with the family, as dependents were not allowed to accompany the soldiers. By 1910 the French were offering a 30 franc a year increase in the enlistment bonus for volunteers, perhaps in an effort to make overseas service compensate for the absence of family (Marceau 1911: 12).

Soldiers' wages did not compare favorably with civilian rates in French West Africa. The first reference to a daily wage, in 1827, set pay at 5 centimes a day for rank-and-file soldiers.[26] Clearly this must have been a singularly unattractive rate because only eighteen months later the base pay had become 25 centimes a day (Faure 1920: 51). Not until the dust had settled from conquest, and the spoils of war that accompanied victories, did wages increase. In 1910 the base pay for soldiers in the Tirailleurs was 60 centimes a day, or 250 francs per annum, roughly half the pay of daily wage laborers and one quarter the wage earned by civilian policemen (Marceau 1911: 36). Still another potential disadvantage for soldiers was the French army's practice of withholding 25 percent of salary to be paid out as a lump sum upon discharge (Marceau 1911: 37).

On the other hand, two potential benefits were extended to the African military which day laborers did not enjoy. First, the soldier and his family were exempt from head taxes as long as he was in service (Lassalle-Séré 1929). The second perquisite was a pension plan, provided by the decree of 1889, but only to those Africans who served in the Tirailleurs for twenty-five years; only in 1904 did a second decree allow a proportional pension for those with fifteen years of service (anon. n.d.: 11, 15). While such stringent rules limited benefits to a small minority, in 1910 303 soldiers, or 3

percent of the 12,000 man Tirailleurs, had twelve years or more of seniority and were likely to qualify eventually for a proportional pension.[27]

Conclusion

Even if relatively few soldiers qualified for the perquisites of army service, these benefits had ideological as much as economic significance. They marked the beginning of a process of social differentiation that characterized government service during the colonial period. The married, westernized veteran of fifteen years' military service could install himself and his family in a quarter of one of the new colonial towns springing up all over West Africa and live comfortably with his pension, augmented perhaps by some government employment reserved for veterans (Echenberg 1980: 445-446). Such an individual was a far cry from his slave soldier predecessor who watered gardens and tended goats in the old French forts of the coast and river.

To be sure, the social origins of most soldiers were rooted in slavery. As late as 1918 one astute colonial official, Kersaint-Gilly (1924: 474), estimated that the army was still 75 percent of slave origin, and he may very well have been correct. But there are two points that follow from this estimate that may not be obvious at first glance. First, it is worth stressing that one out of every four soldiers by 1918 was free born. We have seen that a minority of well born Africans had been a part of the Tirailleurs from its inception. But by 1918 new factors were at work to leaven the social mix of the force. Blaise Diagne's recruitment drive of 1917 had persuaded African notables to allow their sons to volunteer, or else risk a future in which their former slaves would out-rank them. In addition, universal conscription, even with its many loopholes, brought recruits into the army from acephalous populations where there had been fewer slaves.

More importantly, a focus on the social origins of soldiers begs the question of what these soldiers had become by 1918. Those soldiers who made the army a career were becoming a part of one of the biggest class transformations of the French colonial era, the creation of a petty bourgeois salariat. This transformation, moreover, was one that French authorities applauded. They saw the advantage in differentiating an African military from its peasant origins by extending to this class fraction inexpensive but symbolic rewards of status and privilege: uniforms and military discipline; exemptions from head taxes; medical care for themselves and their families; access to special schools for their children; proportional pensions; and low level jobs in the colonial bureaucracy. Such rewards helped French authorities maintain

social control by raising their loyal troops above the mass of West Africans, even as this policy exacerbated already existing social contradictions within African society.

NOTES

1. Schmaltz to Ministre de Marine, 4 September 1819, Archives Nationales du Sénégal (hereafter A.N.S.), 2B4.
2. Ministre de Marine Portal to Schmaltz, 22 March 1820, A.N.S. 2B5.
3. Schmaltz to Ministre de Marine, 27 March 1820, A.N.S. 2B5.
4. Ministre de Marine Comte de Chabrol to Gouverneur de Sénégal, 31 July 1827; and 1B17, Ministre de Marine Baron d'Haussez to Gouverneur de Sénégal, 5 March 1830, A.N.S. 1B14.
5. Faidherbe to Ministre de Marine, 16 December 1857, and same to same, 25 August 1858, A.N.S. 2B32.
6. Faidherbe to Ministre de Marine, 16 December 1857, A.N.S. 2B32.
7. Faidherbe to Ministre de Marine, 25 August 1858, A.N.S. 2B32.
8. Faidherbe to MInistre de Marine, 25 August 1858, A.N.S. 2B32.
9. Gouverneur Pinet-Laprade to commandants de poste at Dagana, Podor, Aéré, Soldé, Matam, Bakel, and Médine, 11 April 1868, A.N.S. 3B80.
10. Interviews with Adama Diara of Warou, Burkina Faso, 31 March and 5 April 1967, cited in Echenberg, 1969: 557.
11. Lt. Gov. Poiret to Gouverneur-Général of A.O.F., 7 February 1920; A.N.S. 17G43, this letter and others in the dossier recount the services to the French cause rendered by the family of Samori Touré.
12. Hargreaves 1969: 99; editor's translation from A.N.S.O.M. Senegal, XIII/3/c.
13. Lt. Gov. Guinea to Governeur-Général, A.O.F., 28 October 1907, A.N.S. 4D30.
14. Lt. Gov. Guinea to Gouverneur-Général A.O.F., 7 February 1920, A.N.S. 17G43.
15. Sous-secretaire d'état des colonies au Gouverneur du Sénégal, 4 July 1890, A.N.S.O.M. Senegal, XVI, 66a.
16. Projet de rapport sur le recrutement des Tirailleurs, Saint-Louis, 15 July 1882, A.N.S. 4D29.
17. Projet de rapport, A.N.S. 4D29.
18. Lt. Gov. Guinea to Gouverneur-Général A.O.F., 28 October 1907, A.N.S. 4D30.
19. Lt. Gov. Guinea to Gouverneur-Général A.O.F., 28 October 1907, A.N.S. 4D30.

20. Faidherbe to Ministre de Marine, 16 November 1857, A.N.S. 2B32.
21. Gouverneur-Général to Ministre de Marine, 2 May 1896, A.N.S.O.M. Senegal XVI, 36.
22. Rapports d'ensemble, Troupes de Groupe, 1912, 1913, A.N.S. 2G12/7.
23. Ironically, Orsat himself was killed in the Soudan in 1890 when he was shot in the heart at very close range.
24. Ministre de Marine Comte de Chabrol to Gouverneur Senegal, 31 July 1827, A.N.S. 1B14.
25. Faidherbe to Ministre de Marine, 16 December 1857, A.N.S. 2B32.
26. Ministre de Marine Comte de Chabrol to Gouveneur de Sénégal, 31 July 1827, A.N.S. 1B14.
27. Général Commandant Supérieur Caudrelier to Lt. Col. Mangin, Dakar, 6 July 1910, A.N.S. 149AP4.

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