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Remembering the *Tirailleurs* *Sénégalais* and the Great War: Oral History as a Methodology of Inclusion in French Colonial Studies

JOE LUNN

Pendant la Première Guerre mondiale plus que 140 000 Ouest-Africains ont été recrutés dans l'armée française de force et ont servi comme combattants en Europe. Cet essai examine un aspect crucial de cette unique rencontre interculturelle: la manière de commémorer les soldats de cette guerre. Ce thème est exploré dans trois contextes temporels et interprétatifs: (1) représentations coloniales françaises au sujet du rôle des Africains en temps de guerre antérieur à 1960, (2) les conventions françaises d'autrefois qui sont mises en question par les historiens des années 1960 à la fin des années 1980, et (3) la révélation des hommes derrière les masques du mythe colonial pendant les quinze ans précédents. L'accent de la dernière section sera mise sur la contribution de l'histoire orale à révéler—après presque 75 années de silence—contre-interprétations africains au sujet de leurs expériences en temps de guerre. En faisant ainsi cet essai illustre des tendances récentes dans l'historiographie interculturelle et dans l'interprétation du passé colonial franco-africain en général.

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Introduction¹

In the mythology of the Great War, the battle of Verdun symbolized France's resolve to persevere in the face of German aggression. The climax in the struggle, and the moment that exemplified the ascendancy of French arms, occurred on 24 October 1916 when Fort Douaumont, popularly regarded as the strongest defensive position on the western front, was recaptured from the Germans. Launched in a dense fog, the assault was hidden from view until midday, when the haze lifted and revealed on the slopes of the citadel the African troops who had formed the vanguard of the attack.²

Though the men who stormed Douaumont represented only a handful of the more than 140,000 West Africans who were recruited into the French army and served as combatants in Europe between 1914 and 1918, for decades thereafter the character of these soldiers' personal experiences remained as obscure as the fate of their colonial comrades in the morning mist of Verdun.

This essay examines one crucial aspect of this unique cross-cultural encounter between Africans and Europeans: the fashion in which the soldiers' wartime participation has been remembered. More specifically, this theme will be explored within three temporal and interpretative contexts: (1) French colonial representations about the Africans' wartime role prior to 1960, (2) the challenge to many of these older French conventions posed by historians from the 1960s to the late 1980s, and (3) the revelation of the men behind the masks of colonial mythology during the previous decade and a half. Emphasis in this last section will be placed on the influence of oral history in finally revealing—after nearly 75 years of silence—African counter-interpretations about their wartime experience. In so doing, this essay will also illustrate broader trends in the interpretation of the French colonial past.

French Myths about West African Participation in the War, 1916 to the 1960s

Wartime Representations

In the summer of 1916, large numbers of West African troops were introduced as combatants on the western front for the first time. This policy was prompted

by the gravity of France's military situation, and in particular by the staggering losses—amounting to more than 62 percent of all wartime casualties—suffered by the French Army during the first 22 months of the conflict.³ Confronted with this crisis, the French government implemented the controversial prewar plan to tap the alleged manpower reserves of its West African colonies—the so-called *force noire*—in order to augment *la patrie*'s declining military strength.⁴ During the final two-and-a-half years of the conflict, this course of action resulted in a massive influx of over 200,000 West Africans into Europe—a temporary enforced migration between the two continents never surpassed in scale over a comparable duration before or since.

The implementation of this new policy, and the unavoidable cross-cultural encounter it prefigured, confronted the French government with a conundrum. Prewar French images of Africans—derived from long standing stereotypes, but reinvigorated by the colonial conquest two decades earlier; endorsed by most physical anthropologists; and widely disseminated by the new mass press—were bloodcurdling. Incorporating the pseudoscientific racist assumptions commonplace in Western thought during the era, Europeans stigmatized Africans as being biologically inferior and driven by “ferocious,” “savage,” and “animal-like” impulses that offended all “civilized” conventions.⁵ As such, the prolonged presence of large numbers of African troops on French soil was unlikely to be welcomed by metropolitan civilians.

Confronted with this situation, the government responded in two ways: it attempted to minimize contacts between the French population and Africans to the extent that military priorities permitted, and it sought to allay public fears by fostering more congenial stereotypes about the soldiers. Drawing on older, alternative French images about the “noble savage,” as well as the more recent paternalistic characterizations propagated by advocates of *la force noire*—which stressed positive attributes of the soldiers, including their loyalty to France, their incontestable bravery, and their childlike innocence—the government appealed to the patriotic fervor of the war years and encouraged the diffusion of these differing African stereotypes in official parlance and public discourse. The latter included works by a series of journalists and novelists whose books about the African soldiers appeared during the war or soon thereafter, including Alphonse Seche, Lucie Cousturier, Leon Gaillet, and the brothers Jean and Jérôme Tharaud, who were later elected to the *académie française*.⁶ These authors, all of whom

examined the Afro-European wartime encounter from the vantage point of French discovery, projected more humane images of Africans than ever before, albeit within a paternalistic context.

The work of Gaillet—a metropolitan lieutenant serving in an African battalion, and the first memoirist to publish his accounts—was representative. Gaillet's two books, *Coulibaly: Les Sénégalais sur le terre de France*, and *Deux ans avec les Sénégalais*, appeared in 1917 and 1918 respectively. In them, the author recounts his initial repugnance on meeting the soldiers, deploring their "savagery," their "bestiality," and their physical resemblance to "great monkeys." Gradually, he begins to distinguish between different African "races" (which are alternatively judged to be "brave," "loyal," or "intelligent"), and eventually even between individuals. He speaks of some of the men having adopted "white manners," although the true qualities of their "heart" derive from the "good nature of the primitive."⁷ Eventually he concludes that Africans are "great children," but because of their "sacrifices" on behalf of France—their "godmother"—the "infants" will one day become "men."⁸

Official pronouncements also embraced this new, more sympathetic imagery and, in their expressions of public gratitude for the sacrifices made by African soldiers on behalf of France, looked to a new day in the evolution of postwar colonial relations. The French mood of 1918 was captured by the official decree authorizing the undertaking of additional military recruitment in the colonies:

It is necessary to make them [the Africans] understand that this victory, which will save our race, will also save theirs; to assure them, beyond which they will not henceforth be able to doubt, that their generous spirit [of sacrifice] constitutes a debt that France recognizes and which it will fully acquit itself of one day. [In sum, it will lead to] confidence between the races, the penetration of civilization, material progress, and economic prosperity.⁹

In the aftermath of victory, French attitudes toward the African soldiers that fought on their behalf—whether expressed by the government or by members of the public at large—were significantly altered. In place of the older, harsher stereotypes dating from the conquest, softened images appeared, engendered by closer and more extensive wartime contacts as well as widespread expressions of public gratitude. Nevertheless, though the gulf that separated prewar and postwar French attitudes was large, characterizations of Africans after the

conflict were still marked by a paternalistic outlook based on an uncritical acceptance of images derived from the military, as well as on older exotic literary images of the oriental “other,” which, in turn, betrayed a fundamental ignorance about the soldiers’ experience.¹⁰

Postwar Representations

This new image of West Africans was immediately apparent in postwar iconography, glorifying the soldiers’ military contribution and exalting the visionary French leaders who were instrumental in bringing it about. In Paris, the foremost advocate of *la force noire*, General Charles Mangin, had a statue raised in his honor on the Rue Oudinot, near the Ministry of Colonies.¹¹ Though few in number, similar memorials were erected on the battlefields where the soldiers fought in northeastern France, as well as in some colonial cities.¹² In these efforts to honor the Africans’ contribution to the national defense, however, the soldiers themselves remained an impersonal abstraction. French colonial administrators and military commanders were listed by name and lionized for their exploits; the soldiers they recruited or led invariably remained anonymous. The message this prioritization implied was clear: Africans, though now acclaimed for their selfless devotion to the mother country and their positive personal attributes, required French leadership to realize their collective destiny (see figure 1).

Faith in France’s “civilizing mission” (and the alleged benefits of colonization that it appeared to legitimize) remained largely unchallenged after the war.¹³ Indeed, precisely because of the pervasiveness of these collective assumptions, a realistic accounting of the soldiers’ experience remained masked by conventions of colonial mythology—with its emphasis on the glorification of the colonizers and, hence, impossible. This phenomenon, and the mindset it bespoke, was exemplified in the historiography of African wartime participation that appeared from 1920 until the 1960s.

Foremost among these constraints was an emphasis on “imperial history,” with its focus on the deeds of the colonizers instead of on the culture being colonized.¹⁴ In a series of postwar works—including those by Jean Charbonneau, Yves de Boisboissel (both of whose books were published in conjunction with the opening of the Exposition Coloniale Internationale de Paris in 1931), Maurice Dutreb, and Françoise Ingold—the recounting of the African experience in Europe is almost invariably seen from a French vantage point.¹⁵ Indeed, the



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Figure 1. Postwar French iconography: “Demba and Dupont” in Dakar (early 1980s before it was removed). Note the relationship between the two figures, the laurel “Dupont” holds aloft before “Demba,” the plaque showing the profile of a French governor-general, and especially the absence of any African names commemorating the dead (as was customary on virtually all postwar memorials in Europe).

sole exception to this rule is the memoir of the Senegalese soldier Bakary Diallo, whose *Force-Bonté* was only published with the assistance of his French patron Cousturier, herself a painter and writer and the sister-in-law of a prominent colonial official.¹⁶ Emphasis was also placed during this period on the primacy of written sources, while the French prohibition against consulting archival documents before 50 years had elapsed since the event (or the death of the principal) prevented detailed examination of the ways in which Africans had been used during the war. Finally, there was a methodological bias in Western academic institutions against the use of oral evidence, which effectively precluded using the testaments of most African soldiers, who were not only nonliterate, but frequently did not communicate in French. The situation created as a result of this outlook—as well as the methodological prejudices implicit in it—was well described in 1934 by Shelby Cullom Davis, the pioneering academic historian treating the West African role in the war:

The Senegalese *tirailleurs* have no spokesman. Governors, *chefs de bataillon*, Ministers of Marine, explorers, missionaries and stray travellers mention now and then bits of their history, but no black has left the historian materials with which to work. Hence a history of the Senegalese *tirailleurs* of French West Africa is seen only through French eyes, despite over 300,000 black *tirailleurs* and over a million fathers, mothers, wives and sweethearts whose lives have been intimately affected by the influence, often indirect, of the French recruiting agent. [In this regard] one letter of complaint, one heart rent plea for mercy from a *tirailleur's* pen would be valued more than the multitude of decrees and administrative details enacted in Paris.¹⁷

French Myths under Challenge: Historiography from the 1960s to the 1980s

Collective French mentalities about Africans, and the myths that underpinned them, came under serious challenge from the late 1950s onward. These new attitudes coincided with political trends as European governments divested themselves of their colonies and West Africans reclaimed their independence. In France, decolonization, and especially defeat in Algeria in 1962, contributed to a psychological distancing—amounting to collective “amnesia”—about *la*

patrie's colonial past; conversely, the reclamation of sovereignty by the colonized fostered a new era of optimistic self-confidence among Africans.¹⁸ These broader changes were also reflected in the historiographical trends during the next 25 years—exemplified by the new emphasis on “area studies.” Academically, the impulse toward decolonization led to the emergence of African history as an independent discipline. This development, in turn, posed a challenge to earlier Eurocentric imperial interpretations of the African past and led to the publication of scholarly works intent on revising the older paradigm, or alternatively, to rear-guard actions fought to defend it.

Methodologically, this period witnessed the preeminence of the *Annales* school in France, with its emphasis on social history rooted in rigorous archival research. In an African context, as colonial archives were opened for the first time, and the 50-year rule in France gradually expired for materials dating from the War of 1914–1918, emphasis on heretofore unexamined written sources assumed methodological primacy. This, in turn, led to a significant decline in the colonial hagiography of the past, with its emphasis on the deeds of leading individuals, and instead to an emphasis on political and social history from above, as the wartime experience of West Africans was revealed through the written records compiled about them by French administrators, military officers, politicians, and other officials overseeing the colonial war effort.

This new trend was exemplified in the work of a series of eminent historians who made pathbreaking contributions with their scholarship. Michael Crowder, a British expatriate and “naturalized” Nigerian teacher—like Roland Oliver, J. D. Fage, and Jacob Ajayi, one of the pioneering generation of academic African historians—was a faculty member during the 1960s and 1970s at a series of West African universities, including Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, and at the Universities of Ife, Ahmadu Bello, and Lagos in Nigeria. Later a joint editor of the *Journal of African History* and a specialist in the colonial era, he was one of the first historians to gain access to the recently opened French wartime archives, and in a series of articles based on administrative records and reports, he emphasized the brutality with which the French recruitment drives were conducted in West Africa, the revolts they inspired, and the administrative difficulties confronted by a handful of colonial administrators in satisfying the ever-increasing metropolitan demands for African soldiers.¹⁹

Offering a more traditional counterpoint to Crowder's new African-oriented interpretation was the French (and later naturalized American) historian Charles

Balesi. A former officer during the Algerian war, this soldier-turned-scholar presented a neo-imperial assessment of the African wartime experience. Relying primarily on the archival record, his book *From Adversaries to Comrades-In-Arms* (1979) was methodologically significant in one important respect: it was the first work to incorporate a handful of oral interviews with African veterans.²⁰ In only three pages in his monograph, Balesi focused on the *anciens combattants*' recollections of their relationships with French civilians, and especially with French women who befriended soldiers during the war, known as *marraines de guerre*. He used these interviews to confirm that many Africans had positive and wide-ranging types of encounters with civilians (and especially female ones) during the war, and cited these oral histories as proof of the absence of French racism. In Balesi's words: "They [the African soldiers] adamantly insisted that they had never felt any racial discrimination [in France]."²¹

Three years after Balesi's work was published, Marc Michel's magisterial *L'Appel à l'Afrique* appeared in 1982.²² Condensed from a four-volume *Thèse d'État*, which was the result of an exhaustive search of French and British wartime archives, methodologically it was firmly grounded in the *Annales* tradition of social history. Consulting a vast array of military, political, diplomatic, commercial, and departmental administrative correspondence, Michel constructed a pathbreaking overview of the war's impact on Africans. Commencing with the prewar metropolitan debate over implementing the controversial plan for raising *la force noire*, he chronicles in minute detail the military and commercial demands made upon l'Afrique occidentale française (AOF), the varied responses these exactions prompted, and the deployment of the African troops at the front, as well as their encampment and contacts with French civilians behind the lines. Like Balesi, Michel stresses the relative lack of racism among the French compared to their wartime allies (and especially the Americans), and seeks to dispel the charge—first raised by the African deputy from the Four Communes of Senegal, Blaise Diagne, in 1917—of the widespread misuse of African troops by some French commanders, and the elevated casualty rates they suffered compared to their metropolitan counterparts.²³

A professor at the Université de Paris, and later director of the Institut d'histoire des Pays d'Outre-Mer at the Université de Provence, Michel also experimented with ways to reach beyond the archives. He tried using sociological questionnaires to consult African witnesses about wartime events, especially the rebellion against French recruitment in Upper Volta in 1916. Although

recognizing the limitations of relying primarily on written documents recorded through European eyes, he remained skeptical about the reliability of using oral histories to convey an African vantage point about wartime events. Elaborating on the methodological shortcomings of oral interpretations, Michel emphasized the principle counterargument used by archival scholars against employing them: “Illustrating in a definitive manor the images that black soldiers brought back home of France is difficult given the nearly total absence of documents and the difficulties of interpretation of current witnesses, removed by 60 years from the events [they discuss].”²⁴

A second major archival study was published by the Canadian social historian Myron Echenberg in 1991. A “second generation” African historian trained in the oldest such program in the United States, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Echenberg’s work adopted a broader temporal scope than Michel’s *Colonial Conscripts*, which received the African Studies Association’s Herskovits Award in 1992, focused on the military institution of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* from 1857 to 1960, instead of exclusively on the First World War.²⁵ Though relying primarily on French written records, it also made use of sociological questionnaires and ten oral interviews with Africans. And like Davis and Michel before him, Echenberg too laments the absence of other memoirs like Bakary Diallo’s and the “paucity of official records . . . providing first hand African accounts . . . of the *Face of Battle*.”²⁶ This long-standing historical constraint that frustrated historians for more than half a century was, however, about to change.

The Men behind the Masks: Assessing African Views of their Wartime Experience, 1980s to the Present

Following the initial impetus of the first generation of scholars in the 1960s to establish African (and African American) history as legitimate fields of study in European, North American, and African universities, these programs flourished and evolved into independent and well-established disciplines by the 1980s. This development coincided with the transition of oral history from a marginal and experimental methodology in the 1960s, when the African historian and linguist Jan Vansina first published *De la tradition orale* (1961), into a widely accepted research technique and academic discipline, exemplified by the founding of the Oral History Association, the appearance of the *Oral History Review* in 1973,

and the subsequent profusion of scholarly works employing this methodology.²⁷ Hence, the earlier reliance on the written record as the principle, if not the exclusive, source for historical interpretation (and the bias against other sources it implied) came increasingly under challenge. Instead, through recourse to linguistic, literary, and anthropological techniques of analysis, all artifacts derived from language itself, archeology, and oral history and traditions gradually became accepted as useful tools for interpreting the past. Moreover, among oral historians themselves, there was a gradual transition from the circumspect citing of testimony that could be checked against archival records in the 1960s, to an enhanced emphasis by the 1990s on the collection of oral histories as unique sources—communicating factual information about the past, to be sure, but also offering original and valuable insights about the outlook of peoples communicating them.²⁸

These broader historiographical trends from the late 1980s onward mirrored the gradual “rediscovery” in France of its colonial past. They also reflected the new assessments of the role played not only by Francophone Africans during the Great War, but also by Africans during both world wars, as well as the earlier wars of conquest and later decolonization. Though continuing to emphasize archival research, a series of new works—including those by Melvin Page (1987 and 1999), David Killingray (1986 and 1999), Nancy Lawyer (1992), Timothy Parsons (1999), this author’s *Memoirs of the Maelstrom* (1999), and more recently, Brigitte Reinwald (2005) and Gregory Mann (2006)—also sought to reorient the focus of earlier accounts by providing a “view from below” of the lived reality of the African soldiers’ wartime experiences through increasing recourse to oral history and traditions.²⁹ This new emphasis was also exhibited in broader, increasingly well-informed cross-cultural interpretations of the Franco-African (or African American) exchanges during the colonial era, emerging in the 1990s in the works of Michael Osborn (1994), Patricia Lorcin (1995), Tyler Stovall (1996), Frederick Cooper (1996), Sue Peabody (1996), Alice Conklin (1997), and Daniel J. Sherman (1999), to name but a few.³⁰ No longer constituting monocultural critiques perforce constrained by Eurocentric interpretations of the meaning of the colonial conquest and superficial conceptions of subject peoples, these works were informed by the reciprocal views each culture had of the other, and, hence, were mediated by a dialogue about the meaning of the imperial past. Indeed, this recognition of the reciprocal impact of colonizer and colonized on one another constitutes a central aspect of “postcolonial” or “new colonial” history.³¹ But the starting point for

this reassessment was the unmasking of older myths about the colonial “other” commencing in the 1960s and gaining momentum with the introduction of new methodologies of inquiry in the last decade of the twentieth century. In short, the faces long obscured behind the masks of colonial convention and ontological bias began to be revealed in all their collective humanity.

The impact of this new approach—which benefits from the use of oral history in conjunction with archival research as a methodology of inclusion in French colonial studies—may be exemplified in a sampling of interviews collected by this author between 1976 and 2001 among West African veterans, members of their families, and other witnesses. Included also are some of the conclusions that may be drawn from them, which would otherwise be inaccessible. After locating the veterans, normally through their regional Office des anciens combattants, interviews in their primary language were conducted using the following field techniques: initial questions were general and open-ended; subsequent questions referred to previous responses, thereby allowing the respondent to structure the interview in accordance with the themes he (or she in the case of witnesses) wished to raise; and only rarely, and at the conclusion of interviews often lasting many hours over several days, were unmentioned topics of particular interest to the interviewer touched upon. Interviews were recorded on audio cassettes, which were deposited with the Archives nationales du Sénégal for use by future scholars.³² A few brief biographical sketches illustrating the type of information not otherwise obtainable through the archives may be summarized as follows:

KANDE KAMARA (in Susu): Guinean *tirailleur* from a ruling lineage, who volunteered against the wishes of his father to join the French Army out of a sense of masculine pride and martial sense of duty. In his account he equates the voyage to France with the transatlantic transport of slaves to the New World, compares the inexplicable realities of combat in the trenches to the loss of innocence accompanying sexual discovery, and relates the prominence of Africans in the *avant garde* during the war as harbingers of the political changes that would later come during his lifetime. When it initially appeared in *Africa and the First World War* in 1987, Kamara’s “life history” represented the first personal account of the war published by an African veteran since Bakary Diallo’s memoir in 1926.³³

SARA NDIAYE (in Wolof): A peasant from Pout, Senegal. Confronted by French demands in 1915 to provide one son from his compound for the army, his father

chose to send him because, in the painful logic of the time, his death would imperil the family's future well-being less than that of his more mature elder brother, who remained at home. Serving exclusively on the western front, he was severely wounded twice (on the Somme and in Champagne) and returned to Senegal in 1918 as a *mutilé de guerre*. Obligated to employ others to help him cultivate his fields after the war because of his physical disability, he remained lastingly embittered toward the French, who, he indignantly recalled, failed to teach him even the rudiments of their language while he was in their army.³⁴

OUSMANE DIAGNE (in French): The son of a farmer and fisherman from Dakar who studied accounting at the French professional school on Gorée before the war and was literate. As an *originaire* of the Four Communes of Senegal (and hence recognized as a French citizen after the passage of the Diagne Laws of 1915 and 1916), he enlisted in the army with his friends despite the protests of his family. He served as a combatant in Thessaloniki and on the western front and was eventually promoted to sergeant. After the war, he returned to Dakar and served as general secretary of the Senegalese Association des anciens combattants. On the eve of his death, he returned to his wartime service in his subconscious, and though his final words were unintelligible to his children, they were uttered to the tune of a military march he had performed as a soldier.³⁵

THIAM N'DING (in Serer): A domestic slave from Kebe Kaham, Senegal, whose mother had been seized as a captive by Wolof raiders. Recruited on the eve of the war as a replacement for his "uncle's" (master's) son, he was severely wounded in the Cameroons, suffering the loss of a leg. Decorated and released from the French Army, he was repatriated to Senegal, where he was manumitted from his former servile obligations and became a Mouride convert. Despite the loss of his leg during the fighting, he felt that his personal sacrifice was worthwhile because, in his words, "it is always better to be free."³⁶

IBRAHIMA THIAM (in Wolof): A leather worker (a casted lineage) from Thiaral, Senegal. A *talibe* of Ibra Fall, he was married and residing in Dakar when he was recruited in 1918 as part of the Mouride contingent offered by the founder and spiritual leader of this Islamic brotherhood, Ahmadou Bamba. Adhering to Bamba's powerfully symbolic injunction to "Go! And come back!" (the marabout had himself twice been exiled overseas by the French, only to return to

Senegal), Thiam offers an exceptional insight into the religious faith of Muslim soldiers, including the text of the *Khassaides* they recited in the trenches when death threatened.³⁷

MASSERIGNE SOUMARE (in Wolof): Son of the third wife of the French-appointed *chef de canton* from Foundiougne, Senegal. Recruited into the army in 1915, when his father, who had served the French as an interpreter and tax collector before being designated a cantonal chief, was told to furnish a son from his family as an example to others. Served exclusively on the western front, where he was twice wounded and hospitalized, and was eventually promoted to sergeant. Attended school in Kaolack with the future African nationalist Lamine Senghor and, because of his fluency in French and other West African languages, also served as a Senegalese interpreter on wartime *conseils de guerre*. Subsequent interviews with his son, Yossouffa, illustrate the indignation felt by many Senegalese who, despite the sacrifices made by their fathers (or forefathers) to defend France, are frequently treated poorly as Africans by the French authorities in the metropole (see figure 2).³⁸

SOUAN GOR DIATTA (in Djola): A peasant from Diembereng, Senegal, who witnessed the futile armed resistance in this village to French recruitment demands. Fled to sanctuary with relatives in The Gambia, but was captured and imprisoned when he returned to his village six months later.³⁹

COUMBA KEBE (in Labé): Griot (oral historian from a casted lineage) from Sedhiou, Senegal. She recounts the flight of young men from her village to nearby Portuguese Guinea, as well as the seizure of her brother by recruiting agents. She also provides a woman's view of how African life was affected by the war—by the prayers and sacrifices offered on behalf of the departed soldiers by their loved ones, by the reception that awaited them when they returned home, and by the many ways their lives were adversely affected by their experience.⁴⁰

DEMBA MBOUP (in Wolof): Griot who was born in Rufisque (and hence an *originnaire*) but reared in Thiès, Senegal. Enthusiastically enlisted in the army when called with his friends in 1915, he served as a combatant in Thessaloniki and on the western front, notably at Soissons, Reims, and Craonne (all of which contain postwar monuments to the Senegalese). Severely wounded by shrapnel



COURTESY OF THE MASSERIGNE SOUMARE FAMILY



COURTESY OF THE MAMADOU DJIGO FAMILY

Figure 2. Masserigne Soumare, circa 1916.

Figure 3. Mamadou Djigo, circa 1917.

in the legs in October 1918, and decorated with the *Médaille militaire*, he spent the next year and a half convalescing in France. Upon his return to Senegal, he was employed in a series of government odd jobs before moving to Dakar in 1942, where he worked at the *Hôpital principal*, making, among other things, artificial limbs for *mutilés de guerre*. Subsequent interviews with his children and grandchildren illustrate the wide array of possible interpretations about the war's significance for the Senegalese—ranging from the event that secured the family's future material well-being, to a useless sacrifice.⁴¹

DABA DEMBELE (in Wolof): A peasant from Penisout, Mali. He was forced to enter the army, probably in 1914, and recounts how young men were marched in coffles with ropes around their necks to the recruiting stations. Fought at the Dardanelles, on the western front, and in Thessaloniki; never wounded. A *déraciné*, he became alienated from his family and village after returning from the war and emigrated to Thiès, Senegal, where he became employed in the police force.⁴²

DIOULI MISSINE (in Pulaar): He was the only son of a farmer and fisherman from Guia, Senegal. Forced to enter the army against his will, he recounts seeing

Bambara recruits aboard his ship jump into the sea as they lost sight of their homeland. Initially sent to the Dardanelles, he later fought extensively on the western front, notably on the Somme, the Aisne, and at Verdun.⁴³

MAMADOU DJIGO (in Pulaar): The son of a Senegalese marabout and an *originnaire* from Dakar, he was an enthusiastic volunteer in 1915. Literate in French and decorated with the *Médaille militaire* and the *Croix de guerre* for his bravery, he was promoted to lieutenant in 1918. He was a *grand mutilé de guerre*, having lost an arm in the fighting on the western front. He was also among the African shock troops that stormed Fort Douaumont at Verdun in the morning mist of 24 October 1916 (see figure 3).⁴⁴

WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM ORAL MEMOIRS SUCH AS THESE? IN CONTRAST with the previous paucity of archival information about the soldiers (or older stereotypical French literary conventions), the diversity of the soldiers' individual social backgrounds and the range of their experiences—as well as the frequent interrelationship between the two—is striking. Moreover, in addition to offering compelling insights into the personal impact of the First World War on individual Africans, the use of oral histories also sheds light on the collective experience of the colonized that are often inaccessible through French written sources. For instance, prewar African images emphasizing the coercive aspects of French colonialism—ranging from cosmological assessments of Europeans as “spirits” to secular and social explanations of their treatment of Africans as “slaves”—come into sharper focus. Colonial recruitment methods—and especially how these demands were met by Africans below the level of French official consciousness, whether through the sacrifice of younger sons, the selection of domestic slaves or strangers, or the sending of those bereft of elder kinsmen to protect them—become more apparent.⁴⁵ Similarly, the differing attitudes of the *originnaires*, for example, who fought as French citizens in metropolitan units, and *sujets*, who did not, are illuminated. And the soldiers' interpretations of their experiences overseas are often singularly revealing—the tangible factors (whether in the holds of ships transporting them to an unknown world, or during combat amid the death and misery of the “*première ligne*”); the intangible factors (interpretation of dreams, religious faith, masculine identity, etc.) that sustained them through this ordeal; or their wide-ranging contacts with French



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Figure 4. Interview situation, 1982. Left to right: William Ndiaye, Joe Lunn, Allasan Kane.

soldiers and civilians, and the changing attitudes toward the “other” that were engendered on both sides.

Finally, in addition to shedding light on the multiple ways individual soldiers thought, felt about, and understood their personal experience, the use of oral history—and especially the preservation of “life histories” encompassing the entire span of one’s existence—reveals how individuals’ later lives, for instance their access to postwar employment, their claims to civic rights, or the receipt of their variable disability and combatant pensions, were affected by the war. As such, the collection of oral histories and traditions about the soldiers’ fate provides a cacophony of different voices about their experiences between 1914 and 1918 that complements the thousands of written memoirs compiled by European veterans in the years after the guns fell silent (see figure 4).⁴⁶ But it also affords a glimpse into how succeeding generations of their families were affected—for good as well as for ill—by the eventual bequest of their diverse wartime legacies.

But this African view from below not only elaborates upon the written testaments left by other combatants; when combined with the archival view from above, it offers a more complete picture of the impact of the Great War on Africans, as well as the character of their interaction with Europeans, than has ever before been possible. In this regard, the efforts of historians in the *Annales* tradition, like Marc Michel, to call into question the validity of using such oral sources on the grounds that they may be “[un]representative,” and that their “authenticity” is doubtful because they were recorded long after the war and hence are subject to “deformations of memory,” are unpersuasive.⁴⁷

As a series of eminent oral historians, including Vansina, Luise White, and David William Cohen, have argued, written archival records—and especially those compiled by European colonial officials—suffer no less than African oral histories and other nontraditional types of evidence from constraints that historians need to take into consideration when weighing their validity.⁴⁸ More specifically, the European compilers of the archival record were very few in number and often ignorant of the cultures (not to mention the languages) of the peoples they described; their accounts were suffused with European prejudices and, especially when personal career considerations entered into play, often inaccurate or intentionally distorted.⁴⁹ Moreover, with regard to the key issue of memory, archival reports—despite their many other limitations—were also compiled at a distance from events. Indeed, as Vansina first pointed out in his discussion of short-, medium-, and long-term memory patterns and their significance for historical inquiry, in most instances both the archival record and oral histories are derived from long-term memory and, hence, present similar ontological problems of interpretation.⁵⁰ Finally, in the guise of asserting methodological rigor, historians rejecting the use of oral history would preclude Africans from speaking about *their* lives and dismiss the veterans’ testimony—not on a point-by-point basis, but as a fundamentally and universally flawed source for interpreting *their* past. This stance is insupportable.

Conclusion

The elevation of the oral memoirs of often nonliterate peoples to methodological parity with the written records of their former European overlords brings us full circle and constitutes an important component in what Frederick Cooper has

called “the rise, fall, and rise of colonial studies.”⁵¹ In this respect, the historic progression during the past 90 years from official and semi-official French public representations of the African soldiers, to the opening and publication of the wartime archival record, to the inclusion of the oral histories of the African participants themselves in historic discourse, mirrors the transition in metaphorical status from Africans as colonial children remaining mute, to independent adults capable of self-expression. In so doing, this gradual transformation has presented an ever more varied, complex, and truthful rendering of the past, not only by incorporating different cultural perspectives, but also by showing how the lives of Africans, no less than Europeans, were affected (and often distorted) by the events that engulfed them. Indeed, this broader change in collective mentalities, and the methodological implications it entailed for historians, was an essential prerequisite for the new vantage point afforded by postcolonial studies.

In this regard, the acceptance of oral history as an empirical methodology facilitates cross-cultural historiography, leading to a fuller understanding of the past; indeed, in many instances this enhanced appreciation is accessible only through recourse to oral sources. This new awareness does not necessarily lead to “shocking” revelations about the character of French colonial rule, because the recounting of the past is no longer a monologue, but instead based on the interplay of multiple voices. This cacophony heralds the end to former masquerades between colonizers and colonized in the hagiography of imperial history; now, a fuller awareness of the myths and masks used in the past allows us to discard them, and permits the faces of the participants—with their distinctive individuality and shared humanity—to come into sharper focus. In short, it enables us to more fully appreciate the abiding influence of the interaction between cultures brought about by the First World War, as well as throughout the colonial era.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the plenary session of the French Colonial Historical Society/Société d'histoire coloniale française in May 2001.
2. On the symbolism of the recapture of Fort Douaumont during the battle of Verdun, see Jean Renoir's classic film *Grand Illusion*, 1937. On the specifics of the attack on the fort, see Alfred Guignard, “Les Troupes noires pendant la guerre,” *Revue des Deux Mondes*,

- 15 June 1919, 866–68. On its significance in postwar French memory, see Antoine Prost, “Verdun,” in *Realms of Memory*, ed. Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 377–402; and Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
3. French losses (including dead, missing, and prisoners) between August 1914 and June 1916, before West African troops were deployed on the western front in large numbers, amounted to 62.26 percent of the eventual wartime total. See “Rapport Marin,” *Journaux officiels de la République française. Documents parlementaires* 2 (1920), annexe 633, 74. On the strategic implications of this situation, see Douglas Porch, “The Marne and After: A Reappraisal of French Strategy in the First World War,” *Journal of Military History* 53 (1989): 363–85.
 4. See Charles Mangin, *La force noire* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1910).
 5. On physical characterizations of Africans within the French scientific community, see, for instance, *Bulletins et mémoires de la Société d’anthropologie de Paris* (Paris: Librairie de l’Académie de Médecine, 1909–1910). On the origins of these pseudoscientific racist assumptions about Africans, see William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530–1880* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980). On prewar French anthropology, see Jennifer Michael Hecht, *The End of Soul: Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); and Jean-Claude Wartelle, “La Société d’Anthropologie de Paris de 1859 à 1920,” *Revue d’Histoire des Sciences Humaines* 10 (2004): 125–71. On the postwar shift in French anthropology away from an emphasis on physical anthropology and the science of “race,” see Alice Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Ethnographic Liberalism in Paris, 1920–1950* (forthcoming). On the popular dissemination of these negative stereotypes during the quarter century before the First World War, see William H. Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870–1900* (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1982). On the contradictions between republican egalitarianism and French racial assumptions about non-European peoples during the colonial era, see Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).
 6. See Alphonse Siché, *Les Noirs d’après des documents officiels* (Paris: Payot, 1919); Lucie Cousturier, *Des inconnus chez moi* (Paris: La Suene, 1920); Leon Gaillet, *Coulibaly: Les Sénégalais sur la terre de France* (Paris: Jouve, 1917); Leon Gaillet, *Deux ans avec les Sénégalais* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1918); and Jérôme and Jean Tharaud, *Le randonnée de Samba Diouf* (Paris: Plon, 1922). Biographical sketches of Gaillet, the Tharaud brothers,

- and Cousturier, who was an exceptionally compassionate and perceptive writer about the soldiers, are included in Brett A. Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 17–31.
7. Léon Gaillet, *Coulibaly: Les Sénégalais sur la terre de France* (Paris: Jouve, 1917), 15–22.
 8. Léon Gaillet, *Deux ans avec les Sénégalais* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1918), 64. On Gaillet's work, also see Nicole M. Zehfuss, "From Stereotype to Individual: World War I Experiences with *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*," *French Colonial History* 6 (2005): 137–58.
 9. *Journal officiel de la République française. Lois et décrets*, January 1918, 678; translation by the author.
 10. On the theme of exoticism, see Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire*; and Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).
 11. It was later destroyed by the Nazis during the occupation, but replaced by a new statue in 1954. See Elizabeth Cambell Karlsgodt, "Recycling French Heroes: The Destruction of Bronze Statues under the Vichy Regime," *French Historical Studies* 29 (2006): 143–81.
 12. Memorials commemorating the African contribution to the French war effort were erected after the war on the Aisne and at Reims in France, and in Dakar, Rufisque, St. Louis, and Bamako in West Africa. On First World War memorials and their symbolic significance, see Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire*; Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France*; Eric J. Jennings, "Monuments to Frenchness? The Memory of the Great War and the Politics of Guadeloupe's Identity," *French Historical Studies* 21 (1998): 561–92; Gregory Mann, "Locating Colonial Histories: Between France and West Africa," *American Historical Review* 110 (2005): 409–34; George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003); and Robert Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums, and Colonial Memorials* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
 13. Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).
 14. Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 40–60.
 15. Jean Charbonneau, *Les contingents coloniaux: Du Soleil et de la Gloire* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1931); Yves de Boisboissel, *Peaux noirs, coeurs blancs* (Paris: Fournier, 1931); Maurice Dutreb, *Nos Sénégalais pendant la Grande Guerre* (Metz: R. Ferry, 1922); Françoise

- Ingold, *Les troupes noirs au combat* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1940). On the Colonial Exposition of 1931, see Thomas G. August, *The Selling of the Empire: British and French Imperialist Propaganda, 1890–1940* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985).
16. Bakary Diallo, *Force-Bonté* (Paris: Rieder, 1926). Also, see Cousturier's memoir, *Des inconcus chez moi*, and Guy Ossito Midiohouan, "Le tirailleur sénégalais du fusil à la plume: La fortune de Force-Bonté de Bakary Diallo," in "Tirailleurs Sénégalais": *Zur Bildlichen und Literarischen Darstellung Afrikanischer Soldaten im Dienste Frankreichs—Présentations littéraires et figuratives de soldats africains au service de la France*, ed. János Riesz and Joachim Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 133–51.
 17. Shelby Cullom Davis, *Reservoirs of Men: A History of the Black Troops of French West Africa* (1934; repr., Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 11–12.
 18. Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France*.
 19. Michael Crowder, "West Africa and the 1914–1918 War," *Bulletin de l'Institut fondamental d'Afrique Noire*, Sér. B, 30 (1968): 227–47; and Crowder, "Blaise Diagne and the Recruitment of African Troops for the 1914–1918 War" (1967), in Crowder, *Colonial West Africa: Collected Essays* (London: Frank Cass, 1978), 104–21. On Crowder, see J.F.A. Ajayi and J.D.Y. Peel, eds., *Peoples and Empires in African History: Essays in Memory of Michael Crowder* (London: Longman, 1992).
 20. Charles Balesi, *From Adversaries to Comrades-in-Arms: West Africa and the French Military, 1885–1981* (Waltham, Mass.: Crossroads Press, 1979).
 21. *Ibid.*, 226.
 22. Marc Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique: Contributions et réactions à l'effort de guerre en A.O.F. (1914–1919)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982). This work was recently republished in a modestly revised edition as *Les Africains et la Grande Guerre: L'appel à l'Afrique (1914–1918)* (Paris: Karthala, 2003).
 23. *Ibid.*, 344–50, 358, 403–8. On Diagne's condemnation of many generals' use of African troops at the Chemin des dames as "human material to be massacred," see the quotation by M. Berthou in *Annales de la Chambre des Députés* (1922), 1671. On the theme of French racism and the debate over comparative French and African casualty rates, see Joe Lunn, "'Les Races Guerrières': Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34 (1999): 517–36.
 24. Michel, *L'Appel à l'Afrique*, 391.
 25. Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann; and London: James Currey, 1991).
 26. *Ibid.*, 1, 38.

27. Jan Vansina, *De la tradition orale* (Sciences de l'homme, Annales no. 36) (Tervuren: Musée royale de l'Afrique centrale, 1961). On the history of oral history during the 40 years since the publication of Vansina's book, see Luise White, Stephan F. Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).
28. *Ibid.*; and Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, eds., *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2003).
29. Melvin E. Page, ed., *Africa and the First World War* (London: Macmillan, 1987); Melvin E. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1999); David Killingray and Richard Rathbone, eds., *Africa and the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1986); David Killingray and David Omissi, eds., *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700–1964* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999); Nancy Ellen Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992); Timothy H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1942–1964* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann; Oxford: James Currey, 1999); Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann; Oxford: James Currey; Cape Town: David Philip, 1999); Brigitte Reinwald, *Reisen durch den Krieg: Erfahrungen und Lebensstrategien westafrikanischer Weltkriegsveteranen* (Berlin: Verlag, 2005); Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006). Also see Iba Der Thiam, *Le Sénégal dans la Guerre 14–18, Ou le prix du combat pour l'égalité* (Dakar: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines du Sénégal, 1992); Bakari Kamian, *Des tranchées de Verdun à l'église Saint-Bernard: 80,000 combattants maliens au secours de la France (1914–18 et 1939–45)* (Paris: Karthala, 2001); and Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
30. Michael A. Osborne, *Nature, the Exotic, and the Science of French Colonialism (Science, Technology, and Society)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Patricia Lorcin, *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Stovall, *Paris Noir*; Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sue Peabody, *There Are No Slaves in France: The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*; Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France*. Also,

- see the citations in “Writing French Colonial Histories,” ed. Alice L. Conklin and Julia Clancy-Smith, *French Historical Studies* 27 (2004); and Alice L. Conklin, “Histories of Colonialism: Recent Studies of the Modern French Empire,” *French Historical Studies* 30 (2007): 305–32.
31. See, for instance, Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*; and Mann, “Locating Colonial Histories.”
 32. On field techniques, see Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Jan Vansina, eds., *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann; Oxford: James Currey, 1996); and Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). My insistence on the importance of recording interviews (unless requested not to do so by informants) as an act of historical recovery for use by other scholars differs from the “low impact” technique preferred by Gregory Mann, which downplays the importance of recording lest this appear “imperious” and distort responses. See Mann, *Native Sons*, 11–15.
 33. Kande Kamara, Bumbuna, Sierra Leone. Preliminary interview conducted by Joe Lunn and Joseph Opala; subsequent taped interview conducted September 20–23, 1976, by Opala. See also Joe Lunn, “Kande Kamara Speaks: An Oral History of the West African Experience in France, 1914–1918,” in *Africa and the First World War*, ed. Melvin E. Page (London: Macmillan, 1987), 28–53; and Joe Lunn, “Male Identity and Martial Codes of Honor: A Comparison of the War Memoirs of Robert Graves, Ernst Jünger and Kande Kamara,” *Journal of Military History* 69 (2005): 713–35. See also the chapter “Empires at War” in Svetlana Palmer and Sarah Wallis, *A War in Words: The First World War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 212–31.
 34. Sara Ndiaye, Pout, Senegal, May 30–31, 1983.
 35. Ousmane Diagne, Dakar, Senegal, 4, 14, 16, 17, 19 March, 19 April 1983. Subsequent interview about his life after the war and his death with his son, Birahim Diagne, Dakar, Senegal, 18 December 2001.
 36. Thiam Nding, Kaolack, Senegal, 2 July 1983.
 37. Ibrahima Thiam, Touba, Senegal, 14 July 1983.
 38. Masserigne Soumare, Koundheul, Senegal, 7 July 1983. Subsequent interview and photo courtesy of his son, Youssoufa Soumare, Dakar, 22 November 2001. On Lamine Senghor, see Robert Cornevin, “Du Sénégal à la Provence: Lamine Senghor (1889–1927), pionnier de la négritude,” in “Mélanges André Villard,” *Provence historique* 25 (1975): 69–77.
 39. Souan Gor Diatta, Diembereng, Senegal, 23 June 1983.
 40. Coumba Kebe, Ziguinchor, Senegal, 22 June 1983.

41. Demba Mboup, Dakar, Senegal, 11, 14, 15, 25–29 April, 3 May 1983; subsequent interview with his daughter, Adja Negoye Mboup, and grandson, Mamadou Gueye, 20 September 2001. Also see Joe Lunn, “France’s Legacy to Demba Mboup? A Wolof Griot (and His Descendants) Remember His Military Service during the Great War,” in *Race, Empire, and the First World War*, ed. Santanu Das (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2009).
42. Daba Dembele, Thiès, Senegal, 17, 27–29 May 1983.
43. Diouli Missine, Guia, Senegal, 30 June 1983.
44. Mamadou Djigo, Dakar, Senegal, 11–13 October 1982; 15 April 1983.
45. On the significance of elder kinsmen, based on oral histories and traditions collected in Bandia, Senegal, see James F. Searing, “Conversion to Islam: Military Recruitment and Generational Conflict in a Serer-Safèn Village (Bandia), 1920–1938,” *Journal of African History* 44 (2003): 73–94.
46. On comparisons between postwar memoirs written by European soldiers and the life histories of African veterans, see Lunn, “Male Identity and Martial Codes of Honor,” and also Lunn, *African Voices from the Great War: An Anthology of Senegalese Soldiers’ Life Histories* (forthcoming).
47. Marc Michel, “Senegalese Soldiers in World War I,” *Journal of African History* 42 (2001): 139–40. See also Michel, *L’Appel à l’Afrique*, 391.
48. White, Miescher, and Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices*.
49. On the inaccuracies contained in colonial archival records, and their shortcomings as sources compared to African oral histories and traditions for interpreting the history of the Murides in Senegal, see James F. Searing, *‘God Alone Is King’: Islam and Emancipation in Senegal* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann; Oxford: James Currey; Cape Town: David Phillip, 2002).
50. Vansina, *De la tradition orale*; and Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). On individuality, memory, orality, and history, also see Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). On the specific theme of long-term memory and significant life events, see Francesca Cappelletto, “Long-Term Memory of Extreme Events: From Autobiography to History,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9 (2003): 241–60.
51. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 33.