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## Representations of the *tirailleur sénégalais* and World War I

David Murphy

The Getty's ACHAC collection reveals to us some of the dominant imagery of French colonialism, imagery that was at one time an everyday feature of life in France.<sup>1</sup> As was famously demonstrated, however, by the almost complete absence of colonial tropes from Pierre Nora's monumental historical project on France's *Lieux de mémoire* (Realms of memory),<sup>2</sup> this once semi-ubiquitous presence of a colonial imaginary fell prey to a postcolonial amnesia that saw traces of the nation's colonial past gradually effaced from the collective memory. One major exception to this process has been the figure of the colonial infantryman, the famed *tirailleur sénégalais*, who remains arguably the most iconic figure of French colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa. The image of a cartoonish, wide-eyed, smiling *tirailleur* has adorned packets of the popular Banania powdered chocolate drink for more than a century (fig. 1). The *tirailleur* utters his pidgin French slogan "Y a bon," which is often now translated as "sho' good," as translators significantly search for an equivalent in the lexicon of the American Deep South before the Civil Rights Movement. An awareness of its racist charge is not new: even Léopold Sédar Senghor, the great poet of Negritude, whose writing and politics consistently sought to overcome the divide between colonizer and colonized, angrily declared in a 1948 poem, "I will tear down the Banania smiles from every wall in France."<sup>3</sup>

The continued use of both image and slogan today—not just on the product packaging, but on postcards, posters, plates, and other forms of memorabilia readily available in virtually every tourist shop in Paris—may seem at first glance to denote a form of postmodern pastiche. However, the ways in which both word and text have

been used with little need for transformation in order to create horrendous racist memes circulating on the internet about black public figures, such as former French justice minister Christiane Taubira, indicate clearly that familiarity may have dulled their racially charged nature for many but it has not erased it.

The chapter examines the extremely rich collection of images of the *tirailleur* from the First World War held in the GRI'S ACHAC collection. In so doing, it will also briefly discuss the development of a set of visual codes around the *tirailleur* from the era of colonial conquest in the late nineteenth century to the Great War. As will be demonstrated below, the First World War was the crucial period in the evolution of the image of the *tirailleur*, which transformed him from savage, colonized other into a brave, smiling warrior fighting to defend the imperial homeland. Indeed, the *tirailleur sénégalais* became an iconic figure in France in the aftermath of the First World War, whose familiar face and colorful uniform—in particular, the bright red chechia hat—featured in drawings, postcards, photographs, posters, and other material contained in the ACHAC collection. Visual representations of the *tirailleur* were also accompanied by a flowering of literary ones, both fictional and nonfictional: two of the most popular examples are *La Randonnée de Samba Diouf* by the best-selling authors the Tharaud brothers and the very successful episodic novel by Raymond Escholier, based on the life of one of the *tirailleurs* he encountered, the eponymous *Mahmadou Fofana*.<sup>4</sup>

The chapter will explore in some detail the various types of images used to depict the *tirailleur sénégalais*.<sup>5</sup> My approach, however, is also informed by my research on a First World War veteran, Lamine Senghor (no relation to Léopold Senghor), who became a leading figure in the communist-inspired anti-colonial movement in the 1920s, and who used his status as a former *tirailleur* to legitimize

his critique of empire. My chapter thus concludes with an attempt to situate the figure of the militant *tirailleur* in relation to dominant representations of the black colonial infantryman: How might this militant *tirailleur* disrupt our received ideas of the colonial soldier as seen in the images of the ACHAC collection?

#### The Origins and Development of the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, 1857–1914

The first *tirailleur sénégalais* regiments were formed in 1857, when the French governor general of Senegal, Louis Faidherbe, recognized the desirability of creating a corps of devoted African troops who were accustomed to the sweltering heat and harsh terrain of the African interior. The *tirailleurs* took their name from the original location where they were founded but they would in fact go on to play a key role in the conquest of France's vast West African Empire; and, as new colonies were conquered, this created a new reservoir of men from which troops could be drawn. (The word *tirailleur* is a standard French military term designating an infantryman.)<sup>6</sup> Working in the service of the imperial project, the *tirailleur* would quickly become associated with the excess and randomness of colonial violence—from the burning of villages to the severing of limbs—and the ACHAC collection contains several visual representations of this violence.

A postcard titled *The French Army in Morocco* presents a grimly comic picture of a barefoot but otherwise fully uniformed *tirailleur* with puffy cheeks, exaggeratedly swollen lips, and wide, staring eyes. In his grotesque claw of a right hand—distorted so that it appears to have six digits, his elongated simian fingers visually referencing the racial imaginary of the period—he holds up for closer inspection a handful of ears seemingly cut from the heads of Moroccan rebels (see fig. 2). In his left hand, he holds the long knife, the infamous *coupe-coupe*, with which

we assume he has hacked these ears from his victims. The caption reads “Sho good Moroccan ears. Make good fetish”; its echo of the *Banania* ‘Y a bon’ slogan indicates that it is a postwar image probably dating from the 1920s, when France was faced with a major rebellion in the Rif Mountains of Morocco. The looped earrings visible in the soldier’s earlobes, the sagging chechia cap on his head, and his bare feet contrast with the rest of his pristine uniform. These elements situate the *tirailleur* as a primal figure, associated with savagery and superstitious beliefs. He is also, however, grotesquely comic, simultaneously a violent figure and a figure of fun; and, as we shall see below, even though there was a transformation in the representation of the *tirailleur* during the war, this duality would survive.

This French military use of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* to violently quash revolt in not only sub-Saharan Africa but also other parts of the continent and farther afield—for example, the *tirailleurs* were heavily involved in attempts to suppress the independence struggles in French Indochina in the early 1950s and in Algeria later in the same decade—led to the *tirailleurs* becoming figures of hate for many colonized peoples. This dominant image in the colonies of the *tirailleur* as a willing servant of empire is perhaps best expressed in a famous short story, “Sarzan,” by the Senegalese author Birago Diop. The eponymous Sarzan (a corruption of *sargent*) is a former *tirailleur* sent by the French colonial authorities to act as a district commander in his homeland. Convinced of the superiority of French culture, he seeks to forcibly drag the local villagers into modernity by destroying their fetishes, an act for which he is punished by these same supernatural forces that cause him to lose his mind.

The ambiguity of the colonized’s attitude toward the *tirailleurs* around the mid-twentieth century is also illustrated by the (literally and figuratively) shifting fortunes of a monument to the colonial infantry’s contribution to the First World War.

Placed in the middle of a roundabout in central Dakar in 1923, the monument, which would affectionately become known as Demba and Dupont, features a *tirailleur* and a white French soldier, whose left arm is draped in friendship around the shoulders of his African brother-in-arms (fig. 3).<sup>7</sup> In the era of independence, however, the image of friendship depicted in the monument, located in front of what was now the national parliament, was perceived by many to celebrate collaboration with the colonizer, and in 1983 the statue was removed by the government. Two decades later, attitudes had evolved once more and under Abdoulaye Wade, who was president of Senegal from 2000 to 2012, the monument was re-installed on a roundabout in front of the old colonial train station, close to the port entrance, as part of a wider recognition of the complex position occupied by the *tirailleurs* as both agents and victims of empire.<sup>8</sup>

#### The *tirailleurs* and the First World War

By the early twentieth century, fifty years after the creation of the first battalions, the *tirailleur sénégalais* had become a relatively familiar figure in certain parts of the French press. He was, however, a figure associated exclusively with the empire: with the advent of the First World War, the *tirailleur* became a figure inextricably linked to the story of the imperial homeland. The idea of countering Germany's demographic advantage over France, through the creation of an African army drawn from France's new colonies to fight in an anticipated European war, had first been developed by General Charles Mangin in his 1910 volume *La force noire*. This proposal met with initial opposition from various military and colonial authorities for two main reasons: first, many considered it unwise to bring Africans to Europe to kill white men (racial solidarity trumping nationalist sentiment); and, second, it was feared that a major recruitment campaign in Africa might prove destabilizing to the colonial status quo.

However, the scale of the killing on the battlefields of Belgium and northern France in the first year of the war quickly led the French military high command to reconsider.

Marc Michel, in his authoritative account of African participation in the war, states that over 200,000 sub-Saharan African troops were raised during the war while approximately 130,000 saw active service in France with 34,000 killed, many in the latter stages of the conflict from 1916 onward.<sup>9</sup> In the interwar period, the estimates (in the absence of reliable historical research) for the number of troops who saw action and those killed were vastly overinflated: for example, left-wing, anti-colonialist critics of the war regularly claimed that over 100,000 *tirailleurs* had died. Nonetheless, there is considerable evidence that they were often used as shock troops in that later period when they were deployed more widely, some historians believe, with the unstated aim of sparing white French lives (although others, such as Marc Michel, reject such claims).<sup>10</sup> Pap Ndiaye succinctly and convincingly summarizes the case of those who believe that black lives were used to save white ones: “French losses were at their worst in the first twenty-two months of the war, after which they declined globally, while the death rates for *tirailleurs* followed the opposite trajectory, reaching their peak in 1918. At that point in time, the *tirailleurs* were being deployed with the clear objective of saving French lives.”<sup>11</sup> Whatever view one takes about how they were used, there is no doubt that as the war progressed, the *tirailleurs* were an increasingly significant element of French military strategy.

The bravery shown by the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in landmark battles at Verdun and elsewhere, as well as the direct human contact between ordinary French people, soldiers and civilians, and *tirailleurs* stationed in France, created a series of new frameworks in which images of this colonial soldier could be constructed. The *tirailleur* could take his place in the gallery of French military types in official and

unofficial military propaganda, while previous images of the savage *tirailleur* could be recycled as celebrations of the mighty warrior fighting on “our” side. Now that the *tirailleur* was a real person whom one might meet in the streets of Paris or Lyon or even provincial France, there emerged whole series of portraits designed to express his humanity. Perhaps most importantly, in place of the dominant image of the bloodthirsty *tirailleur*, the image spread of the *tirailleur* as a big child who smilingly served France, most infamously, as we saw above, in the imagery for *Banania*, but present also in, for example, a wide range of postcards of the period. Let us now look more closely at some examples of these different forms of representation.

#### Figure of Violence, Figure of Fun

Despite the overall change in tone, much of the imagery that emerged in the context of the war can clearly be situated within the broad continuity of images of the *tirailleur* that had emerged over preceding decades. For example, the ACHAC collection contains a watercolor of a *tirailleur* charging into battle, dated August 1914, when the war began with such soon-to-be-shattered French optimism (fig. 4). The soldier leans forward, his rifle, bayonet fixed, pointing in front of him; his eyes are wide, his broad lips are parted to reveal an almost snarling white mouth and his neck muscles bulge. Indeed, his whole body bristles with a menacing energy. The caption below the image reads ‘Y a bon’ but this is no smiling, overgrown child: this is a ferocious warrior. Several decades of caricature of the savage *tirailleur* are here harnessed to the cause of defending the homeland: the *tirailleur* may be a savage, but to the French of 1914, he is now our savage.

The ferociousness of this image is something of an exception, however. More often, the images in the ACHAC collection are informed by the mix of violence and

comedy that was discussed above as central to the representation of the *tirailleur* in the colonies. In a comic sketch (fig. 5), we see a smiling, barefoot *tirailleur* charging toward a cowering, unarmed German soldier. The *tirailleur*'s rifle, bayonet attached, is menacingly close to his enemy's midriff while the German's legs are crossed, his arms folded, and tears spring from his eyes: he is presented as weak and, quite literally, in danger of losing his manhood before this specimen of cheerfully violent masculinity. The caption reads "Oh! No, not the bayonet!," capturing the myth that had spread of the prowess of the *tirailleur* in hand-to-hand combat; the *coupe-coupe*, often used by the *tirailleurs* in close combat, is clearly visible hanging from his belt. His vivid red lips and trademark cap contrast sharply with the sniveling red nose of the tearful German.

A pencil sketch (fig. 6) features yet another barefoot *tirailleur* with bayonet fixed to his rifle, this time crossing a militarized rural landscape (gun turrets are visible in the distance), where he has encountered two cows with human heads, both helmeted and heavily whiskered German soldiers. The *tirailleur* smilingly looks over his shoulder at the viewer as the caption reads in pidgin French: "That no good food... That rabid cow!"

If the humor in these images is directed in large part against the cowering Germans, other cartoon sketches focus more specifically on the *tirailleur* himself as a figure of fun. In a color sketch (fig. 7) of a snowy landscape, a group of *tirailleurs* is in a trench while two white French soldiers stand above them. As one of the *tirailleurs* looks up uncomprehendingly, the commanding officer tells the saluting junior officer: "In this weather, you'll have to bleach them to take them on patrol." This gag is clearly made in part at the expense of the black soldiers but is the joke solely on them? The junior officer's wide staring eyes and the fact that the

commander's back is turned to us, revealing none of his facial features, opens up at least the possibility that the viewer is being invited to laugh at the latter's stupidity. Wherever the humor of the cartoon is supposed to lie, the image reminds us that French attitudes toward the *tirailleur*, despite their evolution, still existed within a racially hierarchical framework: even when on our side, his difference marked him out as a potentially alien presence in the French context.

### *Tirailleurs* as Soldiers

Alongside this comic imagery, there exist whole series of images celebrating the *tirailleurs sénégalais* as a disciplined military force, and the ACHAC collection contains many such examples. There are semi-official color sketches lithographs of different regiments within the French Army that appear to have been sold as collector's items. In a print featuring the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, listed as plate 212 (fig. 8), eight soldiers in two rows face forward, standing to attention but still semi-smiling. Two white French officers, a captain and a flag-bearing lieutenant, are the central figures of authority: they both wear moustaches but are given distinct facial features. Of the six black soldiers (two ordinary *tirailleurs*, two sergeants, and two musicians), however, only two—perhaps even three—different faces are apparent. Far from the savage/comic *tirailleur* charging barefoot across the battlefield, they are dressed in full uniform, boots on their feet. Their status as soldiers here outweighs their status as Africans.

In a very different register, we find an image from a series entitled Soldiers of Verdun (fig. 9). In this black-and-white lithograph, a *tirailleur* leans forward to bear the weight of a full kit bag. Instead of the iconic red chechia, he wears a tin helmet and army boots: far from the exotic, barefoot figure of the images analyzed earlier in

this chapter, this is the *tirailleur* as a man of the Western front, bogged down in the muddy trench warfare of a northern European winter. He is trudging across a desolate, war-torn landscape with broken tree stumps, damaged buildings, and sandbags strewn across a scarred battlefield. It is significant that such an image should emerge in relation to the Battle of Verdun, for it was the recapture in December 1916 of the supposedly invincible Fort de Douaumont (lost to the Germans earlier in 1916), led by a regiment of *tirailleurs*, that helped to create the myth of France's colonial troops as heroic warriors who could achieve wonders against all the odds. This *tirailleur* is not an epic hero, however; he is presented as an ordinary *poilu*, as the French called their infantrymen; he is a grunt, a foot soldier whose ordinariness only serves to highlight the extent of his bravery. In such images, we finally begin to see attempts to imagine the *tirailleurs* as fully rounded human beings rather than as colonial types.

#### Glimpses of a Shared Humanity?

One of the most invaluable sources that we possess regarding the preoccupations and attitudes of *tirailleurs sénégalais* during the Great War is Lucie Cousturier's memoir *Des inconnus chez moi*, first published in 1920.<sup>12</sup> Cousturier was a minor Neoimpressionist painter who had taken no particular interest in either colonialism or Africa until, in the spring of 1916, the French army opted to build its main metropolitan base for the *tirailleurs* on the doorstep of her country retreat in the small Mediterranean town of Fréjus. Although sub-Saharan African soldiers were generally deemed natural warriors, the French army considered that they were unsuited to the rigors of winter warfare in Europe and, from 1916 until the end of the war, the *tirailleurs* were sent to Fréjus for the duration of the winter.<sup>13</sup> In the latter part of the war, the period covered by Cousturier's memoirs, sub-Saharan African troops

suffered very heavy casualties; the men she encounters have seen terrible things and dread their return to the battlefield.

At first, Cousturier was as fearful as her neighbors at the arrival of thousands of these potentially savage strangers (as her knowing title suggests), but her initial concerns were quickly overcome as she got to know many individual *tirailleurs* and she soon established an informal school for them in her home, where she gave classes in basic reading and writing skills. Cousturier's book provides a general picture of the *tirailleurs* as a group, but focuses in particular on specific soldiers with whom she enjoyed a close relationship. The identity that she is most keen to project through her narrative is that of a war godmother ("marraine de guerre") to all of her *tirailleurs*: *marraines* were young or middle-aged French women who had volunteered to correspond with soldiers in the French army, including *tirailleurs*, acting as surrogate sisters or mothers, and some would take these young African men under their wings during periods of leave. However, partnering French women with young African men inevitably led in some instances to more intimate relationships than had been envisaged by either the Church or the army and support for the scheme quickly cooled. As the war progressed, a more general fear developed regarding the interaction of colonial men and French women. Colonial troops on leave from the front line could socialize with French women, while in the factories, women occupying industrial posts in the absence of conscripted French men often worked alongside imported labor from French Indochina. With very few black women on French soil at that time, interracial relationships became an inevitable emotional and sexual reality.<sup>14</sup> The offspring from these relationships is perhaps the most tangible but neglected legacies of *tirailleurs* in France.

When the camp in Fréjus was opened, Cousturier was in her mid-forties, a married woman with an adult son, and would have been at least twenty years older than most of the *tirailleurs* whom she meets. Her attitude is primarily maternal, looking after her “boys” and giving them the education that the colonial system denies them. In the process, she becomes a firm advocate of a type of colonial reformism, then gaining ground particularly on the French left, that views full assimilation of the colonies as the route to progress. Her memoir is remarkable for the period in its attempt to draw out the individual nature of those *tirailleurs* whom she grew to know and love best, but the reader must always remain attentive to the potential extent to which these individuals constitute projections of her general view of the “African mind,” which are still largely framed by contemporary notions of the simplicity and naïveté of Africans.

Cousturier’s book illustrates the interest that had emerged during the war in understanding the *tirailleurs* as individuals. Equally, one of the most fascinating components of the ACHAC archive is the group of portraits designed to capture the humanity of these young men. For the first time, large numbers of ordinary French people were encountering individual Africans and this led in part to a more human response to them. There are many watercolor and pencil sketches of individual *tirailleurs* that seem to have no other design than to capture the often troubled humanity of those who have known the death and destruction of trench warfare. Some take the form of postcards, while others are part of collectable series. A charcoal lithograph of a wistful-looking *tirailleur*, hands gripped on his rifle, its butt planted on the ground, as he looks off into the mid-distance (fig. 10), is part of a series entitled *Les Poilus*, once again indicating that, at least in some quarters, France’s black

African troops had become a relatively normalized component of the general French war effort.

The ACHAC collection also features a wide array of photographic portraits of *tirailleurs*, some of which take the form of postcards: these can feature individuals or groups of friends (fig. 11), sometimes including white French companions. Although the men are almost always in full uniform, they often adopt relaxed poses, arms draped in friendship across the shoulders of their companions. Almost all have been shot in domestic settings, generally in front of what appear to be small *pavillons*, or detached houses, many of which must have been the homes of the soldiers' war godmothers. Whereas before the war the *tirailleur* had been associated with a faraway Africa, he was now part of domestic reality for many French people.

#### The Militant Tirailleur

On 24 November 1924, the former *tirailleur sénégalais* Lamine Senghor made his entry on to the French political scene when he appeared as a witness for the defense in a libel trial, at the Tribunal de Paris, which, for a few days at least, situated the participation of colonial troops in the First World War as central to public debate.<sup>15</sup> The antagonists at the heart of the trial were the most infamous black Frenchmen of their day: the plaintiff, Blaise Diagne, was a deputy in the French parliament representing the four communes of Senegal. The main defendant, René Maran, had for several years been a controversial figure in French life after he was awarded the prestigious *Prix Goncourt* in 1921 for his novel *Batouala*, which in its preface had provided one of the most scathing denunciations of French colonialism in recent times. Despite the conflict that led to the trial, little separated Diagne and Maran in terms of their fundamental attitude to French colonialism: both believed profoundly in

France's "civilizing mission" and they argued for the full assimilation of black people into French culture. Maran's critique of Diagne effectively accused him of having betrayed the Empire's civilizing mission, treating these African soldiers as cannon fodder who had been sacrificed on the altar of the deputy's own personal ambitions.

As with so much of the racial and anti-colonial politics of the 1920s, however, the fault line between the two men centered on the "blood debt" that France was deemed to owe to its colonial troops who had played such an important role in the First World War.<sup>16</sup> Diagne was to become a central figure in the recruitment of the *tirailleurs* as the war dragged on in seemingly interminable fashion: in January 1918 he accepted an invitation from Prime Minister Clemenceau, desperate for the extra troops that might finally bring the war to a successful conclusion while limiting the loss of further French lives, to lead a recruitment tour in French West Africa. By the time of the libel trial in 1924, Diagne's role in the war effort meant that he had become a figure of hate for some, especially among radical black activists. Promises made about black participation in the war leading to reform of the colonial system, as well as an increased access to rights and citizenship, had proven illusory. It was in this context, in October 1924, that Maran published the article "Le bon apôtre," in the black newspaper *Les Continents*, in which he accused Diagne of having received "a certain commission for each soldier recruited."<sup>17</sup> Diagne promptly sued Maran for slander.

Lamine Senghor's testimony at the trial presented French society with a troubling image of the *tirailleur sénégalais*. His intervention projected the *tirailleur* as a man who had been radicalized by his experiences and who would now devote himself to the denunciation of colonial injustice. We do not have access to Senghor's actual testimony but, shortly after the trial, he would write a general account of it for

the radical newspaper *Le Paria* (The pariah): “Instead of attempting to prove precisely how much the great slave trader [Diagne] received for each Senegalese he recruited, they should have brought before him a whole procession of those blinded and mutilated in the war. . . . All of these victims would have spat in his face the infamy of the mission that he had undertaken.”<sup>18</sup> Senghor’s views on the suffering endured by colonial soldiers were given authority by his own status as a war wounded. In April 1917, his battalion had been gassed near Verdun, and Senghor had suffered terrible injuries from which he never fully recovered; he would die of tuberculosis in late 1927. His position as a war wounded effectively opened up a space within 1920s France in which otherwise controversial or radical ideas could be given a hearing. Indeed, this topic would remain central to almost every article and speech he would write. The fact that he had fought for France made it that much more difficult for the French authorities to dismiss him as a subversive, which surely did not escape the French Communist Party leaders who decided to promote him within the movement’s ranks. The newspaper lost the trial but the incident cemented a profound change in the perception of Diagne: previously seen by many blacks as a defender of his race, his status as a deputy constituting proof of the promises of assimilation, he now came to be regarded as a traitor to the black cause. For the radical black movements of the next few years, Diagne was the *bête noire*, often caustically dismissed as a white Negro or, in an echo of the charge made against him by Maran, decried as a slave trader: somewhat ironically, he became virtually the sole figure around whom disparate black groups could unite in opposition.

In early 1927 Lamine Senghor enjoyed his crowning moment of glory, which sealed his reputation as the leading black anti-colonialist of his day, when he was invited to speak at the inaugural meeting of the League against Imperialism (LAI) in Brussels (10–14 February 1927).<sup>19</sup> The LAI was largely a communist initiative, but in its initial phase it sought to rally all anti-colonial forces together. In his speech at the Congress, Lamine Senghor launched into a vehement attack on imperialism as a

renewed form of slavery: imperialism cannot hope to bring civilization to the colonies for it is an inherently unjust system of domination. Senghor denounces the cruel treatment of the colonized, the violence, forced labor, and the iniquity and double standards of the pensions paid to colonial veterans of the First World War: “You have all seen that, during the war, as many Negroes as possible were recruited and led off to be killed. . . . The Negro is now more clear-sighted. We know and are deeply aware that, when we are needed, to lay down our lives or do hard labor, then we are French; but when it’s a question of giving us rights, we are no longer French, we are Negroes.”<sup>20</sup> The speech was a huge success not solely in the Congress hall but around the world: W. E. B. DuBois’s *The Crisis* reported Senghor’s words approvingly in its July 1927 edition,<sup>21</sup> the author having discovered a translation of the speech in the 15 May edition of *The Living Age*.<sup>22</sup> In a fascinating article published just a few months after the Congress, Roger Baldwin, the director of the American Civil Liberties Union, cited Senghor as one of the most eminent of the “men without a homeland,” those political exiles who had made Paris their home in the interwar period.<sup>23</sup> Little more than two years after his first public appearance, this young man from Senegal had managed to carve out a position as a radical spokesman not only for black people in France but also internationally.

However, a few short months later Lamine Senghor’s health failed, as his war wounds took their toll on his ravaged body. With his death, the image of the radical *tirailleur* would quickly fade. However, a photograph of Lamine Senghor taken at the Brussels Congress in February 1927 lives on as a reminder of the radical potential of the colonial soldier who turns against the empire he had so loyally served. In what is clearly a restaging of Senghor’s powerful oration to the assembly, the photograph (fig. 12) captures him at a lectern, fist raised in defiance. This image would be

republished in numerous black journals, newspapers, and anti-colonialist publications around the world. In Senegal, it forms a mural that adorns the entrance of a school bearing the name of Lamine Senghor in his hometown of Joal, and has been incorporated into the iconography of the country's radical left-wing tradition (Lamine Senghor was a hero to almost all radical left-wing Senegalese students of the 1960s and 70s). The image disrupts received ideas about the *tirailleur* that informed the dominant imagery analyzed above and illustrates the radical oppositional power of the *tirailleur* re-imagined as opponent of the empire.

The imagery in the ACHAC collection is a vivid reminder of the complexity of the position occupied by the *tirailleurs* within the colonial context. The French response to their participation in the First World War positions these men as willing servants of empire. As is demonstrated by these images, however, this visual response was wide and varied, ranging from caricature to patronizing patriarchalism to attempts at locating a sense of shared humanity. The *tirailleur* could be a smiling child, a savage warrior, a figure of fun or a disciplined and brave soldier, just like the millions of ordinary French 'grunts.' Or, as in the case of Lamine Senghor, the *tirailleur* could be the sworn enemy of colonialism, his experience of war and his encounter with Europe sowing the seeds of the empire's ultimate demise.

Murphy

**Representations of the *tirailleur sénégalais* and the First World War**  
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*Captions*

Fig. 1 Advertising image from 1920 for Banania

Fig. 2

*The French Army in Morocco, Postcard*

ACHAC collection, box 3, file 26Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Fig. 3 The First World War Memorial in Dakar, Senegal  
Also known popularly as 'Demba and Dupont'  
Photograph by the author

Fig. 4  
*Tirailleur sénégalais, Sho' Good*. Lithograph.  
ACHAC collection, box 23, folder 4, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Fig. 5  
*Oh! No, Not the Bayonette!* Lithograph.  
ACHAC collection, box 23, folder 4, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Fig. 6  
*That No Good Food... that Rabid Cow!*, Postcard  
ACHAC collection, box 3, file 26  
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Fig. 7  
*In this Weather, You'll Have to Bleach Them to Take Them on Patrol*, postcard  
ACHAC collection, box 3, file 26  
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Fig. 8  
*The French Army, tirailleurs sénégalais, 1914-18 War*. Lithograph.  
ACHAC collection, box 23, folder 2, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Fig. 9  
*Soldiers at Verdun, the tirailleur sénégalais*, (Postcard)  
ACHAC collection, box 3, folder 25, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Fig. 10  
*Les Poilus [The Grunts], tirailleur sénégalais*. Lithograph.  
ACHAC collection, box 23, folder 4, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Fig. 11  
Photograph of two tirailleurs. Postcard.  
ACHAC collection, box 3, file 33  
Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute.

Fig. 12 Lamine Senghor at the Brussels Congress of the League against  
Imperialism, February 1927  
Photograph taken from the conference proceedings (Deutscher Verlag, 1927), p.114

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- <sup>1</sup> See ‘Guerres africaines de la France: 1830–2017. L’empire des armées’, *Les Temps modernes* 693 (April–July 2017)
- <sup>2</sup> Pierre Nora, ed., David P. Jordan, trans. ed., *Rethinking France: Les lieux de mémoire*, 4 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999–2010).
- <sup>3</sup> Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Oeuvre Poétique*. (Paris: Seuil, 2006), p.55
- <sup>4</sup> See Roger Little, ed., *Les tirailleurs sénégalais vus par les blancs: Anthologie d’écrits de la 1<sup>re</sup> moitié du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: L’Harmattan, “Autrement Mêmes,” 2016), for an anthology of writings on the *tirailleurs* from the first half of the twentieth century.
- <sup>5</sup> The French historian Eric Deroo has written widely about French representations of the *tirailleur* in this period. See Eric Deroo, *La Force noire: Gloire et infortunes d’une légende coloniale* (Paris: Tallandier, 2006); and Eric Deroo and Sandrine Lemaire, *Les tirailleurs* (Paris: Seuil, 2010). This chapter is indebted to his work.
- <sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive history of the *tirailleurs*, see Myron J. Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The “tirailleurs sénégalais” in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Oxford: James Currey; Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991). Focusing more specifically on the *tirailleurs* and the two world wars are: Joe Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of World War One* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann; Oxford: James Currey, 1993); Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); and Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
- <sup>7</sup> For analysis of the shifting debates around the statue, see Ferdinand De Jong, “Recycling Recognition: The Monument as *objet trouvé* of the Postcolony,” *Journal of Material Culture* 13, no. 2 (2008): 195–214.
- <sup>8</sup> The growing recognition of the massacre of at least thirty-five *tirailleurs* by the French army at Thiaroye demobilization camp, just outside Dakar, in December 1944, is the best example of this victimhood.
- <sup>9</sup> Marc Michel, *Les Africains et la grande guerre: L’appel à l’Afrique (1914–1918)*. (Paris: Karthala, 2003).
- <sup>10</sup> Michel, *Les Africains et la grande guerre*.
- <sup>11</sup> Pap Ndiaye, *La Condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2008), 133, my translation.
- <sup>12</sup> For an overview of different aspects of Cousturier’s engagement with the *tirailleurs* in the context of early twentieth-century French colonialism, see Roger Little, ed., *Lucie Cousturier, les tirailleurs sénégalais et la question coloniale* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008), and David Murphy, “Love, Trauma and War: the *tirailleurs* sénégalais and sexual-racial politics in 1920s France,” *Irish Journal of French Studies* 13 (2013): 111–28.
- <sup>13</sup> In fact, the main pressure on the war government to exclude African troops from winter combat came from Blaise Diagne, the Senegalese deputy to parliament, whose role in relation to the First World War will be discussed below.
- <sup>14</sup> For more on the sexual politics surrounding the *tirailleurs*, see Tyler Stovall, “Love, Labor and Race: Colonial Men and White Women in France during the Great War,” in *French Civilization and its Discontents: Nationalism, Colonialism, Race*, ed. Tyler Stovall and Georges van den Abbeele (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003), 297–31.

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- <sup>15</sup> For a brilliant account of this landmark trial, see Alice L. Conklin, “Who Speaks for Africa? The René Maran-Blaise Diagne Trial in 1920s Paris,” in *The Colour of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, ed. Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 302–37.
- <sup>16</sup> The best account of black radicalism in this period is Philippe Dewitte, *Les Mouvements nègres en France 1919–39* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1985).
- <sup>17</sup> *Les Continents*, 15 October 1924, cited in Lamine Senghor, *La Violation d’un pays et autres écrits anticolonialistes*, ed. David Murphy, pp.109-10.
- <sup>18</sup> Lamine Senghor, *La Violation d’un pays et autres écrits anticolonialistes*, ed. David Murphy (Paris: L’Harmattan, Collection “Autrement Mêmes”2012), 33–34.
- <sup>19</sup> The LAI’s, full name was the League against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression.
- <sup>20</sup> Senghor, *La Violation d’un pays et autres écrits anticolonialistes*, 61, 63.
- <sup>21</sup> ‘The Browsing Reader’. 1927. *The Crisis* (July), 160.
- <sup>22</sup> ‘A Black Man’s Protest’. 1927. *The Living Age*, 332:4306 (15 May), 866-68.
- <sup>23</sup> Roger N. Baldwin. ‘The Capital of the Men without a Country’. *The Survey* 1 August 1927, pp.460-68.