Spring 5-2012

African Agency in the Rally of French Equatorial Africa, August-November 1940

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AFRICAN AGENCY IN THE RALLY OF FRENCH EQUATORIAL AFRICA, AUGUST-NOVEMBER 1940

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

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2012

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ABSTRACT

From August to November 1940, the territories of French Equatorial Africa rallied to Charles de Gaulle's self-proclaimed Free French government in London, rather than the Vichy government set up after the German defeat of France in June. While this episode concerns European actions in European-ruled colonies, African actors pervade the story, especially as soldiers. Africans constituted the indirect audience of all the rallies by living in the territories whose policies were affected. Africans served as actors in the role of soldiers. As soldiers, African actors exhibited agency both in actions taken during operations and by their presence in the colonial military. African audiences also demonstrated agency in their responses to actions in the rallies and circumstances around them, though their exclusion from many public forums limited the extent to which they could influence policy or document their efforts. Though Africans did not direct the rallies in AEF, they significantly influenced the outcomes within the constraints set up by the colonial system.

Keywords: Free France, World War II, French Equatorial Africa, French Empire

Dedicated to my grandfather, Barnie E. Reeves

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must acknowledge the God in control of all history who broke into human history most powerfully through his son, Jesus Christ. May all peoples rally to him!

Dr. Chris Bierwirth's presentation at a Phi Alpha Theta banquet prompted me to consider this a viable research project, and his Kentucky Institute for International Studies program in Caen, France allowed me to journey to France to conduct research. Dr. Eric Reed provided me confidence to venture into French archives and invaluable input on how to shape a better argument, write a better paper, and become a better historian. Western Kentucky University Study Abroad's Worldtopper scholarship, the Student Government Association's study abroad scholarship, and an Honors Development Grant enabled me financially to study and travel in France.

Thanks also to Pierre and Catherine Mocquot, my wonderful host family in France, as well as their friend Christine, who allowed me to stay in her swank Nice apartment while I weathered out a transit strike on the way to archives at Aix-en-Provence. Thanks also to Selina Langford and Ken Foushee for their invaluable help tracking down rare articles and books on an esoteric historical subject; Interlibrary Loan is the lifeblood of thorough scholarship!

Finally, I must thank my family for their support during my voyage in France, and always. Thank you.

VITA

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On August 26, 1940, French Guyana-born Félix Éboué stood alongside the military commander of the French colony of Chad as the commander announced that Chad would align itself with Charles de Gaulle's self-proclaimed French government in London, rather than the French government under Marshal Pétain set up at Vichy after the German defeat of France in May-June 1940. At 2 AM the next morning in neighboring French-ruled Cameroon, two envoys from Charles de Gaulle landed along with less than thirty Frenchmen in canoes on the docks of Douala. With a few key allies in the port city, he seized control of the city and proclaimed himself in control of the entire colony, which he announced would henceforth be aligned with de Gaulle. On August 28, 1940, another Gaullist envoy crossed from Léopoldville (now Kinshasa) in the Belgian Congo to Brazzaville in French Moyen-Congo, announcing that he too would take power in the name of de Gaulle after an armed insurrection ousted the pro-Vichy governor. The next day in inland Oubangui-Chari (now Central African Republic), the governor announced his territory would also align with Charles de Gaulle, prompting a brief battle for control of the territorial capital with a pro-Vichy army officer. The one remaining territory in this federation of French Equatorial Africa (AEF), Gabon, announced its alignment with de Gaulle on the 30th, only to retract it the next day. Only

after a prolonged military campaign from its neighboring colonies would Gabon also align itself with Charles de Gaulle.[1]

Publics outside France and Central Africa have rarely heard of this early chapter in the Second World War, and it has generated almost no historical scholarship in English. Even within French literature and the limited English-language historiography, more has been written analyzing the rule of Pétain's Vichy government in French West Africa (AOF)[2] and other theaters,[3] with little attention paid to the territories of AEF.[4]

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[1] For broad accounts of these events in widely available published sources see: Edgard de Larminat, *Chroniques irrévérencieuses* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 134-161; Brian Weinstein, *Éboué* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 230-251; and Jean-Louis Crémieux-Brilhac, *La France Libre. De l'appel du 18 juin à la Libération* volume 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 140-150. Online accounts are also available through the Fondation de la France Libre website: For Brazzaville, see M.J. Rochette, "La « maison des conspirateurs » ou les dessous du coup d'État de Brazzaville," extract from *Revue de la France Libre*, no. 75 (February 1955), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/maison-conspirateurs.php (accessed April 3, 2012). For Cameroon, see Général Roger Gardet, "Le ralliement du Cameroun à la France Libre (27 août 1940)," extract from *Revue de la France Libre* no. 207 (août-septembre-octobre 1974), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/ralliement-cameroun-fl.php (accessed April 3, 2012); Médécin-général inspecteur Guy Chauliac, "L'AEF et le Cameroun se rallient," extract from *Revue de la France Libre*, no. 288 (4e trimester, 1994), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/aef-cameroun.php (accessed April 3, 2012); for Chad, "Le Tchad et le Congo," extract from *Revue de la France Libre*, no. 156 bis (June 1965), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/tchad-et-congo.php (accessed April 8, 2012).

[2] One might characterize this phenomenon as a Vichy Syndrome in reverse: fixation on the Vichy Empire, with little critical attention to the Gaullist Empire. The reasons for this, perhaps rooted in the conflation of the wartime Gaullist narrative of resurrection with De Gaulle's Fifth Republic presidency of decolonization, need further exploration. On Vichy's role in administering AOF, see: Ruth Ginio, "Marshal Petain Spoke to Schoolchildren: Vichy Propaganda in French West Africa, 1940-1943," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33:2 (2000): 291-312; William I. Hitchcock, "Pierre Boisson, French West Africa, and the Postwar Epuration: A Case from the Aix Files," *French Historical Studies* 24:2 (Spring 2001): 305-341; Ruth Ginio, "Vichy Rule in French West Africa: Prelude to Decolonization?" *French Colonial History* 4 (2003): 205-226; and Harry Gamble, "The National Revolution in French West Africa: *Dakar-Jeunes* and the shaping of African opinion," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 10:1+2 (2007): 85-103. For a territorial focus across the Vichy and Gaullist periods, see for example Jean-Noël Loucou, "La Deuxième guerre mondiale et ses effets en Côte-d'Ivoire," *Annales de l'Université d'Abidjan* 8 (1980): 181-207. On AOF's involvement with Gaullism, see: Denise Bouche, "Le retour de l'Afrique Occidentale Française dans la lutte contre l'ennemi aux côtés des Alliés," *Revue d'histoire de la Deuxième guerre mondiale* no. 114 (1979): 41-68; Nancy Lawler, "Reform and Repression under the Free French: Economic and Political Transformation in the Côte d'Ivoire, 1942-45," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 60:1 (1990): 88-110; Nancy Lawler, "The Crossing of the Gyaman to the Cross of Lorraine: Wartime Policies in West Africa, 1941-1942," *African Affairs* 96:382 (January 1997): 53-71; Ruth Ginio, "French Colonial Reading of Ethnographic Research: The Case of the 'Desertion' of the Abron King and its Aftermath," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 42:166 (2002): 337-357.

[3] On Vichy's imperial policies generally, see: Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: The National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press,

At face value, the preceding narrative appears as a European story told in the context of a European war, only by happenstance taking place on African soil. While it is a story about Europeans' actions in European-ruled colonies, African actors pervade the story, especially as soldiers.[5] Therefore, this study will examine these events[6] from an African perspective. Without an African perspective on August-November 1940, we lose the voices of the majority of those involved and impacted, French society retains a false image of European officers operating in a vacuum, and African postcolonial societies fail to capture the critical role Africans played in determining their territories' alignment in the Second World War.

Even though the traditional French narrative of national resurrection prefers to root itself in the bravado and will to power from a set of supermen headed by Charles de Gaulle, the oft-ignored Africans' voices deserve hearing as integral parts of the history of the Second World War. One European colonist in Cameroon tried to discourage his African interpreter from involving himself in the controversy, saying that "you stay here. It's not the same for you."[7] By asking such men to die for the cause of France, though,

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2002), especially chapter 1, "Vichy's Colonial Empire in 1940: A New Colonial Vision," pp. 9-31; Jacques Cantier and Eric Jennings, eds., *L'Empire Colonial sous Vichy* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004); and Hubert Bonin, Christophe Bouneau, et Hervé Joly, eds., *Les entreprises et l'outre-mer français pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Pessac: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 2010).

[4] Bernard Lanne claims that the history of July-August 1940 alone demand a book to themselves. Bernard Lanne, "Le Tchad pendant la guerre (1939-1945)," in Charles Robert Ageron, ed., *Les Chemins de la décolonisation de l'Empire colonial français* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1986), 441.

[5] Some very good scholarship (again, mostly in French), has been done concerning Africans in the First World War, most notably by Marc Michel. Work on African involvement in the Second World War has tended to focus on Africans serving in Europe, notably: Myron Echenberg, "'Morts Pour La France': The African Soldier in France During the Second World War," *The Journal of African History* 26:4 (1985): 363-380; and on African POWs, Armelle Mabon, *Prisonniers de guerre « indigènes »: Visages oubliés de la France occupé* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

[6] Known as the *Trois Glorieuses* (Three Glorious Days) of August 26-28, 1940, and the military conquest of Gabon.

[7] Jacques Kuoh Moukouri, *Doigts noirs : « Je fus Écrivain-Interprète au Cameroun »* (Montréal: Les éditions à la page, 1963), 80.

the pro-Charles de Gaulle Free French, or Gaullists,[8] made Africans a part of that story. The Gaullist Guy Chauliac recognized this in writing that "AEF recommenced the fight with African soldiers, two months after the [French] defeat," thereby earning the right "to leave its name in the history of France."[9]

This study stems from European archival materials rather than African sources, representing a key limitation. However, the preliminary conclusions culled only from European records make the case for further research in Africa, and set an agenda for that research, including examination of local press and retrieval of oral histories. As Jérôme Ollandet noted, previous historical works have "only presented one version of events, that of the colonizer," and "the portion of history of this era that remains unwritten is that of the natives." Where his work has begun to fill that gap in French, this paper hopes to continue in English.[10]

Two kinds of rallies occurred in AEF. In Chad and Oubangui-Chari, governors already in place effected what may be dubbed 'bureaucratic' rallies, simply reorienting their colony's policy toward de Gaulle. In Cameroon, Moyen-Congo, and Gabon, external actors took power by force, ousting pro-Vichy governors and replacing them with Gaullist governments, in what might be called 'military' rallies, since soldiers intervened to topple the pro-Vichy governments. The rallies involved two kinds of people: actors whose actions affected the rallies, and audiences with whom the participants came into contact. This study identifies audiences as important because

[8] The terms Gaullist and Free French, in opposition to Vichy French, are contemporary terms, and will be used interchangeably throughout this study.
[9] Médécin-général inspecteur Guy Chauliac, "L'AEF et le Cameroun se rallient," extract from *Revue de la France Libre*, no. 288 (4e trimester, 1994), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/aef-cameroun.php (accessed April 3, 2012).
[10] Jérôme Ollandet, *Brazzaville capitale de la France Libre : Histoire de la résistance française en Afrique (1940-1944)* (Brazzaville : Éditions de la Savane, n.d.), 9.

observers' and bystanders' reactions demonstrated whether they accepted the legitimacy of the rallies and offers clues into the way they made sense of the confusing conflicts going on around them.

Africans constituted the indirect audience of all the rallies by living in the territories whose policies were affected. Africans participated as soldiers in the rallies of Moyen-Congo, Oubangui-Chari, and Gabon. As soldiers, African actors exhibited agency both in actions taken during operations and by their presence in the colonial military. African audiences also demonstrated agency in their responses to actions in the rallies and circumstances around them, though their exclusion from many public forums limited the extent to which they could influence policy or document their efforts. Though Africans did not direct the rallies in AEF, they significantly influenced the outcomes of the rallies as participants in the rallies and as audiences of the rallies.

CHAPTER TWO

AFRICAN ACTORS IN THE RALLIES

Africans did not begin efforts to rally the colonies of AEF to Charles de Gaulle's Free France. Henri Laurentie, the aide to Félix Éboué who helped orchestrate the rally of Chad, attested that the Free French rally movements were in fact executed "outside of the native population"[11] and the rallies were "conceived and led by the Europeans."[12] This truth does not preclude all African agency, since the colonial power structures European Gaullists operated in excluded Africans. Indeed, a recent study of the Free French movement noted the difficulty inherent in discussing the motivations of African soldiers, since their de facto rallies under their commanding officers rested "in the logic of the colonial system," that "the behavior of European officers dictated that of the majority of the colonial soldiers under their authority."[13] Studying African soldiers particularly, Éric Deroo and Antoine Champeaux claim that African soldiers obeyed their military commanders and "followed them and joined the Gaullists."[14] This study argues that in the very act of not making a choice, by simply following their officers, Africans determined their own behavior, albeit constrained by the colonial system.

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[11] "Témoignage de Monsieur le Gouverneur LAURENTIE Délégué adjoint de la France à la commission du "Trusteeship" témoignage recueilli par Melle GOUINEAU, le 19 octobre 1948 à Versailles (O.N.U.)" p. 16. Found in Archives Nationales de la France [hereafter AN] AN 72AJ/225/1/pièce 2.
[12] Henri Laurentie, "L'Empire au secours de la Métropole," p. 15. Found in archives at the Mémorial de Caen [hereafter Caen] Caen FL 70(2).
[13] Sébastien Albertelli, *Atlas de la France Libre : De Gaulle et la France Libre, une aventure politique* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2010), 14.
[14] Éric Deroo et Antoine Champeaux, *La Force Noire : Gloire et infortunes d'une légende coloniale* (Paris: Tallandier, 2006), 185.

In the bureaucratic rally of Chad, for example, the choice to rally to de Gaulle was made by French colonial officials, a stratum that excluded Africans. Europeans, and the European-educated appointee Éboué, not Africans, initiated contacts with General de Gaulle in London to arrange for a Gaullist alignment, since Africans could not have made official contacts with British Nigerian officials.[15] Europeans, not Africans, participated in the often contentious debates over whether or not to comply with the Vichy government's armistices with Germany and Italy, because no one concerned themselves with the African population's opinion.[16] The small 'war council' that met in Fort-Lamy on August 26 to confirm Chad's rally to de Gaulle consisted of Europeans, excepting the Guyanese Éboué, but certainly not Africans, whose opinions were neither sought nor consulted.[17] This account of African non-action in Chad's rally tells less about African opinion than about the exclusion of African opinion from political policymaking during the colonial era, so Africans cannot be condemned as inactive in the movement given they were not consulted or empowered to make their voices heard.

Though Africans were excluded from political and military policymaking, they were intimately involved in policy implementation, since Europeans valued Africans as soldiers to execute their decisions even though they did not value them as active citizens

[15] Laurentie, "L'Empire au secours de la Métropole," 10-11. Caen FL 70(2).
[16] For example, European residents of Fort-Lamy shouted down Boisson, en route to Dakar to be appointed 'High Commissioner for French Black Africa,' as a "bastard" and "traitor" on July 20, 1940. Cf. "Témoignage de Monsieur le Gouverneur LAURENTIE," 6. AN 72AJ/225/1/pièce 2. That those involved in this incident were Europeans is specified in Félix Éboué, "Note sur la situation Politique et Militaire du Tchad," (July 27, 1940), appended in telegram from Éboué to de Gaulle, 3. AN 72AJ/538/2/2 (Le Tchad, Divers Notes – Correspondences). Similarly, a European officer, Moitessier, did not engage the African soldiery but rather the European officers when he accosted them in early August, asking "what the hell are you doing here, if you're Gaullists?," "Témoignage de Monsieur le Gouverneur LAURENTIE," 7. AN 72AJ/225/1/pièce 2.
[17] "Témoignage de Monsieur le Gouverneur LAURENTIE," 8. AN 72AJ/225/1/pièce 2. Jonathan Derrick, "Free French and Africans in Douala, 1940-41," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 10:2 (June 1980), 61-62 makes similar observations about the non-consultation of anti-German Cameroonians by the Free French operatives at Douala.

making valuable contributions to policymaking. As Pierre Messmer cogently summarized, throughout the rallies "no one asked the Africans because no one thought of them."[18] Thus, Africans could not serve as actors in the bureaucratic rallies where non-African policymakers affected the rally, but could serve as soldiers in the military rallies. Africans had penetrated the colonial institution of the military voluntarily and by conscription: African recruits comprised the majority of the soldiers stationed in AEF in 1940. These soldiers, only about 30,000 for all of sub-Saharan Africa, constituted mere "sovereignty forces" to serve as enforcers of "political order and charged with assuring the security of the territory."[19] With such a tiny aggregate population, the participation of even small numbers of soldiers could prove decisive in physically securing important administrative posts.

Small glimpses of Africans taking direct action to mobilize their fellow soldiers for the Gaullist cause come from Oubangui-Chari. In Oubangui-Chari on July 21, a handful of African soldiers joined French reservists in the Bangui garrison in seizing arms from a depot around 6 PM and fleeing toward Cameroon in hopes of reaching Nigeria and supporting the British war effort.[20] On August 29, when interim governor de Saint-Mart announced to Oubangui-Chari's pro-Vichy military commandant that he would follow Brazzaville in rallying to de Gaulle, "the native troops of the Bangui garrison…had passed over to de Gaulle's side" due to the influence of two African men, Georges Koudoukou (known as "the father of the riflemen" for his long service and fatherly role among his colleagues), and Sarah Mouniro (who came from a chieftaincy

[18] Pierre Messmer, *Les Blancs s'en vont: Récits de décolonisation* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), 16.
[19] Eugène-Jean Duval, *L'épopée des tirailleurs sénégalaises* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 239.
[20] Pierre Kalck, *Histoire de la République Centrafricaine: des origines préhistoriques à nos jours* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1974), 260. More details on this extraordinary event would likely be available in local Bangui press.

family).[21] More research, particularly in Central African Republic, needs to be done in order to flesh out the implications of these fascinating instances of African insubordination at a critical juncture.

Most participation by Africans came as soldiers followed the orders of their officers, either executing coups against existing governments for Gaullist officers or defending those governments for pro-Vichy officers. Thus, in Moyen-Congo, soldiers' cooperation with their Gaullist officers' insurrectionism proved critical on August 28, with soldiers opting for compliance with their officers. African troops' effective compliance with their officers facilitated the conquest of Gabon, but notable examples of non-compliance with pro-Vichy European officers provide valuable insight into African agency during the rallies. Africans' presence in the colonial military demonstrated a limited degree of agency, as did their choices to obey their officers whether they aligned themselves with de Gaulle or Vichy.

Compliance in Brazzaville

In Brazzaville, the Gaullist conspirators had seen the African soldiers as the key to the operation's success, particularly due to their Sara ethnicity. The French military commanders considered the south Chadian Saras passive civilians but ferocious warriors, an ideal combination for colonial military leaders. As a more recent study of the complex Franco-Sara relationship recounts, "French administrators never abandoned their

[21] Jean-Christophe Notin, *1061 Compagnons: Histoire des Compagnons de la Libération* (Paris: Perrin, 2000), 170.

preference for this southern ethnic group."[22] Known as 'the beautiful race' (*la belle race*) for "their proverbial physical fitness," the French favored the Sara as conscripts because they were seen as "docile and passive...useful particularly as a reservoir of manpower."[23] One eyewitness even traced the stable rally of Chad to the extreme discipline of the Chadian Sara.[24] Contained within the passive colonial, though, the French mobilized and mythologized the martial spirit of the Sara, with one recruiter reminiscing on these "magnificent types, nearly giants."[25] During the Gabon campaign, French commanders felt the need to restrain their Sara soldiers, since "if the Sarra [sic] Tirailleurs were once let loose in a major combat it might be difficult to restrain them."[26] Fellow Africans also identified a particular ferocity and arrogance in the Sara, with rumors spreading that "they had made common cause with the French in their war against the Germans, and in the course of this war they had deployed their talents as devastators of countries and rapists of women."[27] These common French and African observations lead us to see a deeper cultural affinity toward participation in the rallies among Sara troops. Such affinities do not preclude individual soldiers' ability to make choices, but certainly strongly shape the context in which Sara soldiers would choose to cooperate with French

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[22] Mario Azevedo, "The Human Price of Development: The Brazzaville Railroad and the Sara of Chad," *African Studies Review* 24:1 (March 1981), 1. Azevedo, 8-9 demonstrate French attachment of importance to their opinion during the Congo-Océan construction.
[23] René Lemarchand, "The Politics of Sara Ethnicity: A Note on the Origins of the Civil War in Chad," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 20 (1980), 453.
[24] Colonel Jacques Florentin, "Les confins sahariens du Tchad et le colonel Leclerc," in *Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique Française Libre 1940-1942 Actes du Colloque International 12, 13, et 14 novembre 1987* (Paris: Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque, 1988), 415.
[25] Joseph Kessel, quoted in André Casalis, "Adrien Conus," extract from *Revue de la France Libre*, no. 310 (4e trimestre 2000), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/adrien-conus.php (accessed April 3, 2012).
[26] Entry for October 15 [1940], War Diary, French Equatorial Africa, 20 Military Mission, October 1940. Found in United Kingdom National Archives [hereafter UK], WO 178/4, "Military Mission Brazzaville, 1940 Oct-Dec."
[27] Henri-Richard Manga Mado, *Complaintes d'un forçat* (Yaoundé: Éditions CLE, 1970), 48.

officers and engage in martial activity. Rather than dismissing agency, these ethnographic observations inform how certain Africans might have made their choices.

Gaullist authors often specify the ethnicity of the Sara soldiers under Major Raymond Delange, stranded in Brazzaville en route for France when the armistice intervened, whereas Gaullist writers rarely specify ethnicity elsewhere. Thus, General de Larminat's memoirs identified the Chadian battalion as "constituted of the best Sara soldiers."[28] Notin also took note of the Chadian troops' Sara ethnicity, calling them "ardent warriors."[29] Lieutenant Muracciole, writing in 1948, claimed a kind of inherent loyalty to the French officers, claiming "Delange could count on his detachment of Sara soldiers."[30] Husson also recognized the strength these crack forces gave to Delange, and thus attempted to disperse the battalion on August 27 to preclude any plot by Delange.[31] Beyond the European's ethnic assumptions, a geographical loyalty appears to have been at work, since a Gaullist officer deployed to mobilize his Sara troops to seize the Governor-General's palace found that they complied readily on hearing of their native Chad's rally.[32]

Beyond mere Sara determinism, Africans of several ethnicities executed the operation to topple Husson. Africans also defended Husson, since Sicé points out that "riflemen [typically referring to African conscripts, known colloquially as *tirailleurs*, or riflemen] patrolled in the city and others kept guard at intersections" in order to inhibit

[28] Larminat, 148.
[29] Notin, 167.
[30] Lieutenant J. Muracciole, "La Conquête de la Base Africaine," in Louis Mouilleseaux, ed., *La France et son Empire dans la Guerre*, v. 1 (Paris: Éditions Littéraires de France, 1947), 90.
[31] A. Sicé, *L'Afrique Équatoriale Française et le Cameroun au Service de la France (26-27-28 août 1940)* (Paris: Presses Univérsitaires de la France, 1946), 153.
[32] Muracciole, "La Conquête de la Base Africaine," 90.

any clandestine uprising.[33] Delange made effective use of his African soldiers, however, dispatching at least one African corporal to seize the munitions store in Brazzaville on the 28th; the corporal happened to be Jean-Bedel Bokassa, later President (and erstwhile emperor) of the Central African Republic.[34] After seizing the munitions, Delange and his European subordinates distributed arms to the non-dispersed Sara troops and seized control of the military camp outside Brazzaville. Likewise, one of Delange's lieutenants led a group of Sara riflemen to attack positions around the Governor-General's office, making the military operation forcing General Husson's surrender an African execution, albeit under European command.[35]

African soldiers actively participated in the rally of Brazzaville by obeying their Gaullist officers even as those officers' orders turned Africans' guns against other Europeans. Europeans traced this compliance to the soldiers' Sara ethnicity, a claim which would necessitate greater research in Chad and the former AEF territories through oral histories and family memory to trace back the motivations of the participating soldiers.

Non-compliance in the Gabon Campaign

The Gabon conflict, sometimes characterized as a Franco-French conflict to highlight the fratricidal nature of the conflict between the Gaullists and pro-Vichy forces, also entailed an Afro-African conflict, as African soldiers under the command of both sides battled one another under the orders of their competing officers. Cameroonian and

[33] Muracciole, "La Conquête de la Base Africaine," 90.
[34] Stanislas Mangin, "Histoire : L'action de force de Delange à Brazzaville en août 1940," *Le Monde* 23-24/5/76: 9. AN 72AJ/225/1/pièce 9b.
[35] Sicé, 154-155; Blanche Ackermann-Athanassiades describes the African personnel in her *France-Libre, Capitale : Brazzaville* (Paris: Éditions La Bruyère, 1989), 56-57.

Congolese soldiers fought and won the conquest of Gabon, since these formed "the core recruits of the first battalions" constituted by the new Gaullist administrations in those colonies to complete the rally of AEF.[36] African compliance had progressive results in at least one case, since Africans participated in the highly skilled tasks of the air force, usually reserved for Europeans, during the Libreville operation, in addition to their participation as part of the Gaullist military forces.[37]

More interestingly, however, certain instances of non-compliance by soldiers in the Gabon campaign provide insight into the agency retained by African soldiers even under European command.

Throughout the Gabonese campaign, pro-Vichy French officers abandoned colonial towns, leaving African soldiers without commanders. These African soldiers usually remained and rallied to the Gaullist forces. Thus, after the bombing of Mitzic by Gaullist planes, British observers noted that the European officers and colonists abandoned the town, fleeing toward Libreville or Spanish Guinea (now Equatorial Guinea), while "native troops…[started] to rally at Mitzig [sic]."[38] The Mitzic example of African soldiers failing to follow their officers attests to a African soldiers' agency to adjust to the evolving military situation. Thus, the soldiers in Mitzic opted not to resist the oncoming Gaullist forces, perhaps influenced by the exercise of air power against Mitzic. Even in opting not to act, though, the African soldiers demonstrated agency by making a choice, and their choices proved demonstrably different from the choices made

[36] Jean-Noël Vincent, "Les Aventures du Patriotisme, ou de l'Origine, du Recrutement, des Motivations des Forces Françaises Libres" (Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre; Communication présentée dans le cadre du 103e Congrès National des Sociétés Savantes Metz-Nancy avril 1978), 7. AN 72AJ/238/1/pièce 3.
[37] L. Etchegoyen (Chef de Bataillon), *Historique des Forces Français Libres* t. 2 : « Ralliements : 18 juin 1940 – 31 décembre 1941 » (Londres : France Libre Commissariat National à la Guerre, mai 1942), 91. Caen FL 50(2): C.
[38] Telegram A appended to entry for October 29, 1940, War Diary, September 1940. UK WO 178/10. Also noted in the entry for October 30, 1940, referring to the African troops as "Vichy Senegalese."

by their European officers. The Mitzic operation reflects African agency to resist the Gaullists as well, though, since sixty partisans attacked the "convoys from the back," injuring two officers and delaying the advance into Mitzic.[39]

The Gaullist siege of Lambaréné repeated the pattern established at Mitzic. African troops fought on both sides of the conflict, as "four native companies from Brazzaville" laid siege to Lambaréné, while "around eight companies of natives" defended the town.[40] As at Mitzic, once the Gaullist attack began in earnest, "the officers abandoned their troops."[41] Gaullist accounts claim that this abandonment was the cause of the subsequent pillage of the city before the Gaullist forces occupied the city. Adolphe Sicé, surgeon general at Brazzaville, directly connects the two events, claiming the officers' flight left "the administrative post to be pillaged."[42] Raymond Waag, a bitter pro-Vichy prisoner writing from an anti-Gaullist perspective, reverses the attribution, claiming "the Gaullists" sacked "all the stores of the town," a pillage in which "the Europeans participated, along with their [African soldiers]." He seems to write with disgust of how "diverse merchandise was taken, to be sold, to the natives, by the [African soldiers]," and claims one Gaullist officer even approved Africans raiding a wine cellar, saying "they are doing well."[43] British observers fail to mention any pillage, however, noting that "native troops [were] wandering around Lambaréné without arms."[44]

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[39] Etchegoyen, 77. Caen FL 50(2): C.
[40] Ibid., 78. Caen FL 50(2): C.
[41] Ibid., 81. Caen FL 50(2): C.
[42] Sicé, 172. Also in Etchegoyen, 81. Caen FL 50(2): C.
[43] Letter from Raymond Waag (prisoner at Lambaréné) to Maréchal Pétain (April 23, 1941), p. 16. Found in Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer [hereafter ANOM] ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale). Also, Raymond Vacquier, *Au temps des factoreries (1900-1950)* (Paris: Karthala, 1986), 289, claims that Chadian Saras pillaged Lambaréné shops and homes, but applauds the Gaullist regime for repaying the victims.
[44] Telegram appended to entry for 6 November 1940, War Diary, French Equatorial Africa, 20 Military Mission, November 1940. UK WO 178/4, "Military Mission Brazzaville, 1940 Oct-Dec."

Whatever may have happened at Lambaréné after the European officers abandoned it, Africans made conscious decisions not to follow their European officers in flight, preferring to remain in the city either to enjoy rare freedom of movement or to capitalize on the chaotic situation to gain material benefit.

One of the most interesting incidents uncovered in French archives comes from Booué, a town along the Ogooué River, captured by the Gaullists on October 23, 1940. The Gaullist account claims that in Booué on October 22, the pro-Vichy administrator Goedert dispatched three Africans (Mombo Kombila, Marcel M'Fain, and Emmanuel Ango) to notify a nearby post about Gaullist forces and movements. Upon arriving in Booué, the Gaullist commander noted the absence of the three Africans and dispatched three other African soldiers (Goma, Youdengué, and Lebissa) to retrieve them. Goedert, however, claimed that one of the Africans, Mombo Kombila, had fled the outpost of his own accord.[45]

The oral transcripts appended to the Gaullist commander's report on the incident give a glimpse into the relations between and among Africans and Europeans in wartime Gabon. The Kombila case will be considered first, with the largely separate M'Fain case considered second.

Kombila claims he visited Goedert's office the night of October 22, having been summoned by Emmanuel Ango, a detainee being used as a writer for Goedert's office, on Goedert's behalf. At Goedert's office, Goedert ordered him "to walk to Touka [a post downriver from Booué] tonight," paying attention "to not have yourself arrested by the guards that the new whites have brought here." "If the guards from Libreville are not at

[45] "Rapport du Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules, de l'État-Major du Commandant Supérieur des Troupes de l'A.E.F., chef du détachement de Booué à Monsieur le Commandant Supérieur des Troupes de l'A.E.F. Brazzaville" (October 29, 1940). ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.

Touka" he should continue all the way to N'Djolé, a larger post farther downriver, in order to "leave [a letter, written in Alsatian] with Monsieur Hommel." He encountered no soldiers of any kind throughout his nighttime march to Touka, and arriving there around 10 AM on October 23, discovered that the soldiers stationed there had only gone as far as Boleko, between N'Djolé and Touka, but then turned around to return to N'Djolé. Despite Goedert's orders to take his messages as far as N'Djolé, Kombila "decided to return to Booué," and during the course of his return he was hailed by the three Gaullist-dispatched searchers, with whom he returned voluntarily to Booué.[46] Thus, Kombila deliberately chose not to go as far as N'Djolé, perhaps reflecting an apathy about the need to fight and die for a certain segment of the French colonists against another segment of the French colonists. Kombila's story is corroborated by the testimony of Staff Sergeant Goma, a fellow Bapounou (or Punu), who certified that Kombila "made no difficulty in coming to Booué with the two guards and myself."[47] Another guard who helped Goma in tracking Kombila offers a nuance to Kombila's story, however, adding that he started his return to Booué because he "had not wanted to go any farther and push toward N'Djolé."[48] As Goma's other companion, Youdengué, put it, Kombila simply "preferred" to forego a long trip to N'Djolé.[49]

[46] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Kombila Mombo, devant Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules" (October 24, 1940), pp. 4-5 of annexes to Desbiey's report of October 29, 1940. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[47] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Goma, devant Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules" (October 24, 1940), p. 1 of annexes to Desbiey's report of October 29, 1940. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187. Also certified by Lebissa, who claimed "he was very well behaved and never made any difficulties about following us" to Booué: "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Lebissa, devant Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules" (October 24, 1940), p. 2 of annexes to Desbiey's report of October 29, 1940. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[48] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Lebissa," p. 2. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[49] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Youdengué," p. 3. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.

Separate from the case of Kombila, the M'Fain case further demonstrates how Africans could navigate the seemingly regimented world of the colonial military to serve their own interests and meet their own needs. Marcel M'Fain claims that he was dispatched, as he had been several times before, by Monsieur Fontaine, chief administrator of the Djouah département, to retrieve deserters. Returning to Booué by way of his home village (where he visited his wife), he met a messenger who instructed him not to return to Booué. Despite this order, M'Fain continued, arriving the next day in Gbanda. In Gbanda, he claims that he met Emmanuel Ango, "a prisoner who served as writer for the major's office." M'Fain claims that Ango gave him a letter from Goedert to deliver to the sergeant commanding the reinforcement force en route from N'Djolé to Booué. M'Fain also claims that Ango specified that he was instructed to travel by night to avoid being seen "by the guards that the new whites led from Moyen-Congo." M'Fain claims he accompanied Ango as far as Booué, but was sure to avoid detection by the post's guards. Then, after darkness fell, M'Fain began working his way back toward N'Djolé, avoiding the main road to avoid being sighted by Gaullist troops, but en route heard news that the reinforcement column had turned back to N'Djolé, allowing the occupation of Booué "by the Sara from Moyen-Congo" to stand unchallenged.[50]

Another soldier, a Sara named Nouba, was dispatched on October 22 to compel M'Fain to return after word came to Booué that he had stopped returning to Booué and changed course to go to N'Djolé. Nouba caught up with M'Fain around 6:30 PM on October 23 in a village along the route to N'Djolé, and M'Fain returned to Booué without

[50] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: M'Fain Marcel, devant Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules" (October 26, 1940), p. 7 of annexes to Desbiey's report of October 29, 1940. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.

protesting.[51] M'Fain admitted in interrogation to carrying a letter in Alsatian addressed to "M. Hummel" at N'Djolé.[52]

Ango claims that on October 22 around 5 PM, he went to Goedert's home, where his boss had been home sick, to report on the day's events. He claims that Goedert, relaying orders from the chief of the département Fontaine, sent him to tell all the recently departed regional messengers not to return to Booué. He claims that Goedert gave him two lists, 50 francs, and ordered him to retrieve Mombo Kombila, which he did. He claims that he entered with Kombila, witnessing Goedert give him a letter to deliver to the commander of the reinforcements coming to Booué from N'Djolé. After being pressed by the interrogator, Ango admits that around noon that day, he had gone to a village only five kilometers from Booué, where he found M'Fain with his wife, and delivered another letter from Goedert, to be taken to the reinforcements en route also.[53]

In terms of the triangular relationship of Ango-M'Fain-Goedert, all of the competing claims do not entirely line up. For instance, M'Fain claims that he met Ango at a village (Gbanda) two days after meeting his wife at another village (Mangaba), seven hours' walk from Booué.[54] However, Ango claims that he met M'Fain in a village only five kilometers from Booué (Ebaganda), where M'Fain was with his wife, and he makes no mention of M'Fain accompanying him back to Booué.[55] Moreover, Ango's presence in Booué the evening of October 22 is confirmed by the testimony of Kombila, who

[51] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Nouba, devant Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules" (October 26, 1940), p. 6 of annexes to Desbiey's report of October 29, 1940. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[52] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: M'Fain Marcel," p. 7. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[53] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Ango Emmanoueul, devant Lieutenant d'Infanterie Coloniale Desbiey Jules" (October 28, 1940), p. 8 of annexes to Desbiey's report of October 29, 1940. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[54] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: M'Fain Marcel," p. 7. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[55] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Ango Emmanoueul," p. 8. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.

corroborates that he was summoned by Ango to Goedert's house, although Kombila claims that the administrator Fontaine, as well as a French doctor, was present with M. Goedert,[56] while Ango claims that they entered to find Goedert alone.[57] The M'Fain-Ango stories compare even more ambiguously when one considers that M'Fain claims to have heard the order not to return to Booué from a different messenger in his wife's village of Mangaba,[58] while Ango claims to have communicated this message to a variety of messengers in the near vicinity of Booué.[59]

What actually happened from October 22-23 in Booué and in the villages between Booué and N'Djolé seems less important than the fact that M'Fain and Ango crafted particular versions of the events in order to provide space for their own activities: M'Fain to visit his wife, and Ango to account for fifty francs he claims were given him by an ailing Goedert, but which are mentioned nowhere else in accounts of the events and of which even Ango does not provide the alleged purpose. Especially given his status as a prisoner, he commands less credibility than Kombila, who appeared to have cooperated with the relevant authorities at each step of the way. Even Kombila shows himself not terribly concerned with executing his orders exactly, preferring not to continue all the way to N'Djolé but to return to Booué on his own initiative and against the orders of Goedert (corroborated by Ango's account of the conversation between Goedert and Ango[60]). Each of these Africans, even or especially amid the uncertainty of fratricidal Franco-French conflict, find space within which to retain some freedom and flexibility.

[56] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Kombila Mombo," pp. 4-5. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[57] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Ango Emmanoueul," p. 8 ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[58] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: M'Fain Marcel," p. 7. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[59] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Ango Emmanoueul," p. 8. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[60] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Ango Emmanoueul," p. 8. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.

These Africans obeyed orders selectively: Kombila opting not to continue to N'Djolé and M'Fain opting to continue toward Booué despite claiming he was ordered otherwise.

The African perspectives communicated in these depositions give some small clues into how the African soldiers involved conceived of the contemporary conflict. Both M'Fain and Kombila claim that Ango and Goedert, respectively, referred to the Gaullist invaders as 'the guards' brought in by the "new whites." The racialized (white) rather than nationalized or politicized (French or Gaullist, respectively) term applied to the opponent may reflect that Africans viewed their colonial dominators less as French, German, pro-Vichy or pro-de Gaulle, and more as previous and current rulers. Thus, the invaders are referred to as "new whites," with their African military forces seen as "brought" or "led" into Gabon.[61] M'Fain even assigns an ethnic specificity to these troops, describing Booué as occupied by the Sara specifically, though the fact that he was retrieved by Nouba, identified as a Sara, might have contributed to this characterization.[62]

The substantial documentary evidence for this militarily minor, if not insignificant, incident reveals that behind the larger military movements within Gabon, Africans operated on their own agendas within the fluid situation, negotiating a new position for themselves in the wake of the Gaullist takeover. For instance, Kombila felt the need to justify his own choices in his deposition to the Gaullist lieutenant, thus assuming that he had agency in the situation. He uses the argument that he obeyed the superior at hand, since "Monsieur Goedert being my direct superior, I had no reason not

[61] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: M'Fain Marcel," p. 7; and "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Kombila Mombo," p. 5. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[62] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: M'Fain Marcel," p. 7; and "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Nouba," p. 6. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.

to obey him and so I departed immediately."[63] M'Fain also felt the need to defend himself, unprompted, by claiming that he "did not know what that letter contained," when presented with the Alsatian letter found on his person by Nouba.[64]

These Africans assumed their own agency within the contemporary situation to the extent that they felt the need to defend the rationale behind their actions, or preempt accusations of cooperation with the pro-Vichy administrators. Since such factors were present in such a minor case, historians should explore the possibility of other stories of African agency, at least during the military operations in Gabon. Further examples may not have the same official documentation, but oral and local historians in Gabon may be able to discover other examples of African activity outside European control during this period. The chaos of wartime may have been liberating to these African soldiers, providing a window of opportunity to follow their own paths, even if just for an evening or two, beyond the regimentation of European colonial control.

The Background of Compliance

Even when, as in Brazzaville and in much of the Gabon campaign, African soldiers simply followed orders, we can look more generally at the reasons why Africans would become soldiers for a European army to trace the agency of Africans. This examination reveals both constraints on African agency, in the form of colonial compulsion into military service, and non-coercive influences on African agency, in the form of real social benefits motivating Africans to accept rather than rebel against

[63] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: Youdengué," p. 3. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.
[64] "Procès-Verbal de Déposition de Témoin: M'Fain Marcel," p. 7. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187.

systemic coercion. In 2009, Jean-François Muracciole summed up this duality well when calling African soldiers "authentic Free French but false volunteers."[65]

The French system of volunteer soldiers in fact rested on coercion farmed out to the French-appointed chiefs. Recruitment only rested "in theory on voluntary engagement."[66] Bernard Lanne, discussing voluntarism in Chad, conflates how Sara "were generally volunteers" with the fact that "constraint had to be used – exercised by notables and chiefs."[67] Each French-appointed African chief was accountable for a quota of soldiers (like any other raw material to be exploited out of Africa), leading many chiefs to designate certain men for recruitment to appease the pressure from the colonial officials, who would also pressure Africans in their villages to enlist, "without having the time to say goodbye to [their] parents."[68] European officials were able to guarantee, with certainty, that pressuring the African elite would stimulate the resumption of recruitment so that "the requested number of recruits will be attained."[69] One French colonist depicted this process in a more benign form, telling how marching through Cameroon his forces would wait at important towns for "more or less voluntary candidates" selected following "the decision of their village chief."[70]

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[65] Jean-François Muracciole, *Les Français libres: L'autre Résistance* (Paris: Tallandier, 2009), 30.
[66] Dominique Lormier, *C'est Nous Les Africains: L'Épopée de l'Armée Française d'Afrique 1940-1945* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2006), 22.
[67] Lanne, 443.
[68] Mabon, 22. Method of joint French colonial official-African chief recruitment confirmed in Pierre Boisson, Circulaire (February 16, 1940), p. 3. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/198 (Politique indigene, 1940-1941). See also the account of recruitment into forced labor in Manga Mado, 12-13, in which the author's uncle (a chief) designated him for service, and he complied out of familial obligation in addition to the political pressure wielded by his uncle.
[69] Territory of Tchad to Gouvernement Général de l'A.E.F., "Rapport Politique" (February 22, 1940), p. 4. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/4D/4/50.
[70] Marc de Possesse, "Souvenirs d'un ancien de la France Libre de la force 'L' – groupe nomade de Barkou, de la 2ème Division Blindée du III R.M.T., de la 9ème Cie la 'Nueve'" (recorded at Paris, December 25, 1992), p. 4. Caen TE 361. Also in Vincent, 9. AN 72AJ/238/1/pièce 3.

Recruiters created terror, such that "scenes of panic were frequent in the villages, fleers entering the brush and veritable manhunts organized in order to conscript them."[71] One Brazzaville resident claims that "during the War, Brazzaville was completely dominated by fear," "the sight of [soldiers] sent people scurrying into the bush," and "men sought medicines that might protect them against recruitment" due to the "forced enlistment of soldiers."[72] One Cameroonian author uses language evocative of the European slave trade, describing how "broad-shouldered, athletic natives were picked up and tied with a cord around their waist" to be led off to France.[73] The Gaullist forces certainly used as much brutality as earlier French administrations, using "all means, including the most brutal, to enroll Africans in the French army."[74]

Even in the face of overwhelming pressure through the French colonial system, Africans retained a certain degree of agency through their ability to flee.[75] For example, one community in Oubangui-Chari, left in limbo by the political upheavals of summer 1940, migrated back and forth across the Chari River between French AEF and the Belgian Congo as the authorities on each bank alternatively recruited or eased recruitment as their governments exited and entered the war amid the defeat of both metropoles.[76] Richard Joseph certified that flight remained an option, albeit a desperate

[71] Muracciole, *Les Français libres,* 63.
[72] Phyllis M. Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 49.
[73] Théodore Ateba Yene, *Cameroun, Mémoire d'un Colonisé* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1988), 40.
[74] Charles Onana, quoted in Duval, 242-243.
[75] As Boisson begrudgingly acknowledged, noting that "populations, who tend to escape control," flee "in order to avoid satisfying their duties in all areas." Pierre Boisson, Circulaire of February 16, 1940, 16. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/198 (Politique indigene, 1940-1941).
[76] Chef de Subdivision de Koruango (Département de la Ouaka, Oubangui-Chari), "Rapport sur activité des Colonies étrangères" (December 1940), p. 1. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/197.

one, for Cameroonians seeking to escape the privations of colonial rule.[77] The famed sociologist Georges Balandier noted Africans' frequent recourse to "escape to some part of the country that was less strictly controlled" in the face of heavy government demands, showing Africans' ability to enter zones freer of European control than others.[78] Catholic missionaries also noted this propensity, which accelerated markedly after the declaration of war in 1939.[79]

Africans' ability to flee the arm of the state limited the success of French coercive recruitment. As Jacques Valette notes, all their brutality only put 16,000 men at the disposition of the Free French authorities in AEF, a small number next to the 139,000 mobilized for service in Europe from across sub-Saharan Africa in 1939.[80] The French ability to coerce African military service became weaker still in the desert versus the riverine regions of Chad. On the one hand, the nomadic Islamic groups of the north "superbly ignored Free France" whereas most of the Free French recruiting came from the Saras, who had been particularly victimized and targeted in French racialist conceptualization, depicting them as passive but warlike, particularly big children in the French racializing mindset.[81]

Despite the coercive nature of the system, there are reasons Africans might join the colonial army of their own accord. As Lormier pointed, the army "could represent a chance to find a certain dignity" bringing value outside of a second-class status as an

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[77] Richard A. Joseph, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the U.P.C. Rebellion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 28.
[78] Georges Balandier, translated by Douglas Garman, *The Sociology of Black Africa: Social Dynamics in Central Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1970), 173-174.
[79] Gilles Héberlé, *L'Église catholique au Cameroun et les missions des prêtres du Sacré-Cœur de Saint-Quentin* (Issy-Les Moulineaux: Imprimerie Saint-Paul, 1960), 27.
[80] Jacques Valette, *La France et l'Afrique : L'Afrique subsaharienne de 1914 à 1960* (Paris: SEDES, 1994), 99-100.
[81] Muracciole, *Les Français libres,* 63. Cf. also Azevedo and Lemarchand.

object of colonization with "wages, medals, [and] the prestige of a uniform."[82] Pensions after 15 years of service for career soldiers,[83] the promise of social mobility through acquiring French language skills, basic job skills, and the wages, which accumulated over a career might provide the bedrock for urban financial independence after the completion of service.[84] Phyllis Martin, extensively studying Brazzaville society during the colonial era, has noted that "not least among the reasons for looking for employment with whites was that clothing often came with the job," such as the red fez of the tirailleurs, which "still commanded respect when it was worn by veterans or by the local police."[85] Marc de Possesse, observing recruitment in Cameroon late in the war, corroborates Martin's claim, noting their joyous reactions to receiving mere rags since "it was the first time any of these men had owned anything," ignoring the possibility of alternative conceptions of ownership that might have been prevalent, but nonetheless confirming a desire for acquisition among those he observed.[86] Acquiring these goods is noted as a draw by another author, who also notes the fact that Africans serving in the army escaped forced labor.[87]

Studying recruitment in late 1939 in French West Africa, Isabelle Bournier and Marc Pottier cite the unexpected application of 100,000 over the goal of 50,000, as recruits were inspired by "a spirit of adventure," a desire to see other countries, "the desire to escape from misery with the future wages, [and] the sense that military

[82] Lormier, 19.
[83] Muracciole, *Les Français libres,* 63.
[84] Vincent, 9. AN 72AJ/238/1/pièce 3.
[85] Phyllis M. Martin, "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville," *The Journal of African History* 35:3 (1995), 408 and 413.
[86] de Possesse, 4. Caen TE 361.
[87] Mabon, 22.

hierarchy was less unequal than colonial order."[88] Such an optimistic view also cites the amorphous 'loyalism,' but even if not all these cases were voluntary, these emotions could be assumed to motivate young men to volunteer for war in Africa as elsewhere. Jean-Bedel Bokassa, future president (and erstwhile emperor) of the Central African Republic, was motivated by a desire to see the world, following his grandfather's advice that observed that "the men who joined the French army learned as much as if he had lived three lives" and his own admiration of "soldiers, uniforms, and the exploits of great generals."[89]

Some Africans also pursued French military service in pursuit of ulterior liberation, since veterans could "obtain the full French citizenship, under certain conditions," although the actual consummation of this ambition was rare.[90] Indeed, Henri-Richard Manga Mado depicts his enlistment in the French military as "liberty."[91] Such political motivations for voluntarism appeared most often in Cameroon. Paul Soppo Priso, the force behind the pro-French Jeucafra movement in Cameroon (discussed below), may have pursued his agenda of African recruitment in Cameroon in order to pursue this equalizing agenda. For example, Pierre Messmer remembered arriving in Douala in October 1940, seeing black men carrying signs insisiting they enlist as "French soldiers: Yes," not as "[African] Riflemen: No."[92]

Thus, Europeans in Cameroon were loath to recruit Cameroonian natives directly until the desperation after the Armistice, hoping to prevent Cameroonian acquisition of

[88] Isabelle Bournier et Marc Pottier, *Paroles d'Indigènes : Les soldats oubliés de la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Librio, 2006), 19-20.
[89] Brian Titley, *Dark Age: The Political Odyssey of Emperor Bokassa* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 8.
[90] Lormier, 22.
[91] Manga Mado, 76.
[92] Messmer, 16-17.

French rights.[93] This limitation placed on Africans' rights even to sacrifice their lives in military service attest to the retention of racist French views, despite their official assimilationist ideology, such that one Senegalese recruit complained that "we were never considered wholly French," an obvious disappointment when high aspirations were tied to an idealized egalitarian military.[94] Some Africans genuinely volunteered. For example, in Cameroon, Richard Joseph noted that "although they were not required to undertake military service under the terms of the Mandate, many still volunteered and participated in the campaign led by Leclerc against the Italians in Libya."[95] The African interpreter Jacques Kuoh Moukouri remembered real voluntary service among his compatriots, who "engaged as volunteers," in such numbers that Leclerc had to urge patience among the volunteers.[96] The voluntarism of the few should not discount the coercion of the many, or vice versa.

Even if Africans merely followed the orders of their officers, their presence in the colonial army reflected a degree of agency, although that agency was limited by the coercive system of recruitment practiced in French colonies.

[93] "Observations du Gouverneur Louis Sanmarco," in *Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique Française Libre 1940-1942 Actes du Colloque International 12, 13, et 14 novembre 1987* (Paris: Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque, 1988), 74.
[94] Mabon, 23-24.
[95] Joseph, 48.
[96] Kuoh Moukouri, 81.

CHAPTER THREE

AFRICAN AUDIENCES IN THE RALLIES

The African residents of the French colonies in AEF made up a passive audience of the political events of 1940. Without political power, and unless they were in the military, without the power of force, these Africans were not consulted in the battles over the territories' foreign policies. Africans demonstrated agency in their responses to Gaullist actions, both by affirming those actions and responding with indifference. Indifference reflects agency, even if unconscious, rejecting a Eurocentric view for one more concerned with Africans' own interests. Africans used the same kind of *attentisme* that metropolitan Frenchmen did, awaiting whether the Germans would prove victorious or not before deciding whether to cooperate with the Vichy government. One European colonist in Moyen-Congo described Africans' attitudes in those terms, noting that during the crisis of May 1940, "the natives, more detached, waited for 'what would come,' as they had always done in the brush, amid the too-often repeated changes of administrators."[97] Also, anti-Axis sentiment may have motivated the affirmations offered by Africans to the Gaullist victories, differentiating that sentiment from a necessarily pro-French sentiment.

[97] Jean de Puytorac, *Retour à Brazzaville, une vie au Congo* (Paris: Zulma, 1995), 286.

African Awareness

Historians should avoid the fallacious conclusion that Africans remained ignorant of how events in their native colonies and the colonial metropole affected one another.[98] Particularly in the urban, capital cities, Africans made note of events going on in far off Europe. One Brazzaville woman claimed that "we had always followed the development of events in France passionately."[99] Jonathan Derrick, a historian of Douala, claims that "in Douala, at least, Africans were well aware of events in Europe."[100] Particularly after the outbreak of war in 1939, and then into the fall of France in 1940, Cameroonians' awareness of the international situation was "more abundant and more various" than ever before.[101] Indeed, news of the French defeat in June 1940 led many Cameroonians to say that the Germans would return, and Africans who had cooperated with the Germans during their rule began to teach German to would-be future collaborators.[102] In rural areas, African awareness faded, as Lanne notes that only a small number of Chadians in 1940 "had information on the outside world."[103] Even in Chad, though, the African population became "privy to events thanks to eavesdropping servants and cooks."[104]

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[98] For example, Pierre Messmer claims that Africans had neither the means to receive information nor the techniques to diffuse information. Both conclusions are false, predicated on an assumption of African limitation. Messmer, 16-17.

[99] Andrée Blouin in collaboration with Jean MacKellar, *My Country, Africa: Autobiography of the Black Pasionaria* (New York: Praeger, 1983), 141. Raymond Dronne used the same language, talking about how "not only the small nucleus of French officers, but also the Cameroonian riflemen and workers" followed the news from France: Raymond Dronne, "Les raisons d'un ralliement," extract from *Revue de la France Libre*, no. 187 (October 1970), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/raisons-ralliement.php (accessed April 3, 2012).

[100] Derrick, 66.

[101] Engelbert Mveng, "L'œuvre de Leclerc au Cameroun et la contribution des Camerounais à l'effort de guerre," in *Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique Française Libre 1940-1942 Actes du Colloque International 12, 13, et 14 novembre 1987* (Paris: Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque, 1988), 63.

[102] Kuoh Moukouri, 73.

[103] Lanne, 441.

[104] Médecin-Général Inspecteur Guy Chauliac, "Souvenirs du Tchad," in *Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique Française Libre 1940-1942 Actes du Colloque International 12, 13, et 14 novembre 1987* (Paris: Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque, 1988), 260. Africans did not always receive or transmit factual information, though, as discussed in Ollandet, 17-20.

African workers in European homes often disseminated information from the press, reading discarded magazines and newspapers and overhearing conversations, demonstrating the diffusion of information in colonial circles thanks to the close proximity of African ears with European mouths.[105]

Africans also paid attention to European internecine politics in the colonial capitals. Thus, in the days before the coup d'état in Brazzaville, colonist Jean de Puytorac's African friends "asked [him] to warn them. Warn them of what? I wondered. Their responses proved to me that they were aware of what was coming."[106] In Brazzaville, the Africans perhaps paid better attention than some Europeans, as in the case of Blanche Ackermann-Athanassiades, who sent an African servant to warn a hapless customs manager not to take his normal route home since the coup plotters blocked it to isolate the governor-general.[107] In Cameroon, Jacques Kuoh Moukouri remembered how the villagers knew of a development in the Gaullist-Vichy conflict before he himself did, as a bureaucrat within the colonial power structure.[108]

Indifference and Self-preservation

Africans often proved indifferent to the outcome of the Franco-French struggle. Their *attentisme* corresponds to other populations under occupation, simply waiting to join the winning side in order to maximize survival. Thus, Pierre Messmer noted that "the Africans were passive" since they viewed the conflict among Frenchmen simply as

[105] Martin, "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville," 409.
[106] de Puytorac, 303.
[107] Ackermann-Athanassiades , 57.
[108] Kuoh Moukouri, 76.

"'white business' in which it was wise not to get oneself mixed up."[109] A French observer remembered how Cameroonian soldiers shrugged off the Vichy-Gaullist conflict, attributing it to "the ways of whites," unknowable and irrelevant to their opinions.[110] Messmer recounts an Africanization of the war as "a war among white tribes which [Africans] have been dragged into."[111]

African indifference proved a boon to the Gaullists who raided the Cameroonian port of Douala over the night of August 26-27, although it represented worldviews firmly out of line with the European Gaullists' fixation on a French conflict. As Émile Tutenges notes in his memories of the Douala raid, when the canoes landed at the docks of Douala, the Frenchmen "saw a small group of native customs officers, pistols at their belts," but when Tutenges approached their chief, he was obeyed immediately, allowing the Frenchmen to enter the city in a highly unconventional manner, and eventually seize control of the territory. Tutenges attributes his success to the fact that he wore a French uniform, unquestionably obeyed by the African 'subject,' although the possibility remains that these customs officers were able to surmise the illegality of these Europeans' actions, like the canoe rowers had done, but chose to comply nonetheless. Earlier in Tiko, a similarly unquestioning (British) Cameroonian guard had permitted these Europeans to retake their confiscated arms for the raid, which Tutenges also evaluates as a racialist deference, since "the prestige of the European, at that time, was very much real."[112] Fratacci, one of the raiders, overcame the dozen Africans guarding

[109] Messmer, 15.
[110] Gardet, "Le ralliement du Cameroun à la France Libre (27 août 1940)," http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/ralliement-cameroun-fl.php (accessed April 3, 2012).
[111] Messmer, 14.
[112] Colonel Émile Tutenges, "Souvenirs sur le ralliement du Cameroun et du Gabon (Août-Novembre 1940)," *Espoir* no. 59 (June 1987), 23. Also in Etchegoyen, 16. Caen FL 50(2): C.

the Post Office, finding them sleeping, but their sergeant recognized Fratacci, who promptly said "It's you, sergeant! We're very glad!" before going back to sleep, deferring to the known European.[113] The African's poor performance may indicate a subtle form of colonial resistance, or at least indifference and finding space within the imperial system for personal freedom.

Securing Yaoundé after seizing control of Douala depended more on the obedience and compliance of African soldiers, notably those under the command of Leclerc's collaborator Major Dio. These African troops, under orders from their European officers complying with Gaullist objectives, actually executed the orders to secure Yaoundé.[114] This operation comprised an interesting incident, as the African soldiers under Gaullist command occupied the Yaoundé police station, which had been vacated by the pro-Vichy police chief while he searched for the Gaullist culprit who cut the telephone lines from Yaoundé to Douala overnight to permit the Gaullist occupation. Returning to find his office occupied by African soldiers, the police chief immediately declared himself a Gaullist – though the fact that the soldiers were African may not have been important.[115] Nonetheless, the incident represents a reversal in the traditional colonial power relationship, as African soldiers exerted power over a European colonist, ironically one charged with guaranteeing law-and-order.

African indifference also aided the Gaullists in September when a small core of Gaullist Europeans and Africans executed a ruse to force the surrender of the port, enabled by deference shown to the Europeans by African soldiers. Walking into a full company of African soldiers gathered in the city center of Mayumba to defend it from

[113] Notin, 166.
[114] de Possesse, 3. Caen TE 361.
[115] Ateba Yene, 35-36.

Gaullist attack, the African soldiers, although faltering initially on not recognizing these Europeans in particular, saluted them and allowed them to pass. The African soldiers saluted the Gaullists, seeing only French officers, not Gaullists.[116] The passivity and deference of African soldiers to their European officers evidenced in this incident, as in the incidents in the Douala raid, seem to suggest an African indifference to which Frenchmen were in command. As Ollandet commented, "the issue simply involved a change in master,"[117] and another African agreed, remembering how he and his compatriots "recognized that 'the white is the same,' whether he be English, French, or German."[118]

Such indifference proved wise in retrospect for Africans living with the Gaullist administrations, which did not differ radically from pro-Vichy administrations. For example, one consequence of the Free French establishing Douala as their post-rally capitol for Cameroon was the requisitioning of urban Africans' homes and bodies. Ateba Yene tells of his father, Hermann Yene, hosting Pierre Messmer (later prime minister of France under Georges Pompidou from 1972-1974) and two other Gaullist officers in their home, leaving the Yene household in a hastily-constructed hut. The symbolism of a European forcing a Westernized, "evolved" African out of his urban, 'modern' home into a hut, thus reversing France's professed 'mission civilisatrice' in the interest of European comfort, is deeply ironic. Beyond reclaiming the home, the European soldiers also claimed the bodies of Douala's women. Cameroonian historian Théodore Ateba Yene

[116] Etchegoyen, 19. Caen FL 50(2): C. A similar incident unfolded at Port-Gentil, as recounted in Maurice Jourdan, "Un épisode de la campagne du Gabon Novembre 1940 Port-Gentil (Gabon) tombe pour la 1re fois," extract from *Revue de la France Libre* no. 185 (mars-avril 1970), available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/episode-campagne-gabon.php (accessed April 3, 2012).
[117] Ollandet, 28.
[118] Manga Mado, 12.

recounts the spectacle of "the forced gathering of all the young, chesty, virgin women in order to throw them into the [military camp]" for the pleasure of the legionnaires. The Gaullists, at least for Douala, merely represented another episode of European exploitation of Africans' territory, here in the most domestic spheres.[119]

The African audience to the Gaullist rallies of 1940 also acted for self-preservation. Thus, Félix Éboué seemed to identify sentiments among the African population turning against the armistice accepted by the Vichy government, if only for economic self-interest. In a telegram to Pierre Boisson on July 29, Éboué complained that the "native population" was "troubled by high prices" and by the rumor beginning to spread that France "was undertaking war against England."[120] Writing to de Gaulle two days before, on July 27, Éboué worried that "the indecisive attitude of the leaders created disarray which has now reached even some aware elements of the native population."[121] From these hints, we can see that the European-educated Éboué took note of native unrest in light of the instability of colonial life after the defeat of the metropole. Looking at these comments from a different angle, we see Africans disturbed not for the sanctity of the French empire but concerned about the effects of political instability on their personal economies and wellbeing. A later French historian, examining French censors' notes on African correspondence during this time period, noted little concern with the political situation, and more concern with personal and financial questions.[122] Likewise, Africans demonstrated agency around the attack on Libreville, as natives fled en masse from

[119] Ateba Yene, 38.
[120] Telegram from Éboué to Gouverneur-Général (Brazzaville) (July 29, 1940), in "Rapport des télégrammes de Boisson, été 1940," p. 78. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale).
[121] Félix Éboué, "Note sur la situation Politique et Militaire du Tchad," 2. AN 72AJ/538/2/2: "Le Tchad, Divers Notes – Correspondences."
[122] Charles-Robert Ageron, "La France coloniale de 1939 à nos jours," dans Jacques Thobie, Gilbert Meynier, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, et Charles-Robert Ageron, eds., *Histoire de la France Coloniale : 1914-1990* (Paris: A. Colin, 1990), 331.

Libreville in late October, hoping to avoid the conflict and accept the new rule of the Free French forces.[123]

Affirmations of the Gaullist Victory

Africans also demonstrated agency in choosing to affirm, through public celebrations, the Gaullist victories in AEF. Though retrospective on the rallies as a series of fait accompli, Africans nonetheless demonstrated agency whether they sought to please the new administrations or expressed genuine approval. The Gaullist regime saw these demonstrations as critical, given its tenuous legal and geographical claim to represent the French state. Moreover, if the public had opposed the military actions with protests or non-compliance, the audacious rallies would have failed. The Gaullists needed the African audiences to accept the rallies, and Africans did. Although they excluded Africans from any role in determining the orientation of their homelands, the Gaullists expected African leaders to "declare their loyalty to whoever won," and "they did so."[124]

Cameroon, having been colonized by Germany before the Great War in 1914-1918, seems to have followed the ongoing crisis in Europe more closely than other parts of AEF. The Vichy envoy Platon, visiting Cameroon in late July, would have little incentive to overplay an African Gaullism, making his report to Boisson all the more interesting. He claims that around "80% [of the European population] is resolutely on the side of the English," which Governor-General Brunot claimed echoed the "same sentiments [which] animate the native population." Brunot may have had reason to exaggerate an African discontent with this decision in order to bolster his excuse for

[123] Telegraph #30-652/2, October 30, 1940, cited in Etchegoyen, 76. Found in Caen FL 50(2): C.
[124] Derrick, 62.

bowing to 'public pressure' in aligning Cameroon thus far with the British Cameroons and British Nigeria.[125] Pro-Vichy Raymond Waag visited Gaullist Yaoundé on September 11, 1940, and in his missive of early 1941 to Pétain, he notes with disgust how "here, everyone is 'GAULLIST' and shows it," even the "Cameroonians, [who] wear coats of arms with the Cross of Lorraine" [the emblem of Free France].[126] When the newly formed Free French forces from Britain landed in Douala after failing to land in Dakar in late September, one of the French officers remembered later how even "the schoolchildren (some miniscule, which made them seem even more black!)" lined the streets, "waving their little flags."[127] Africans demonstrated agency, participating in affirming the Gaullist victories whether because they thought it was expected or because they genuinely affirmed the victories.

In Moyen-Congo, anecdotal evidence indicates the presence of at least some genuine political feeling in favor of Gaullism. A. Sicé recounts being approached by several Africans in Brazzaville on June 23, 1940. The older Africans, old coworkers of Sicé's at the Pasteur Institute in Congo, Health Service employees, and the Senegalese chief Amadou Diop, asked Sicé to explain why France had signed an armistice with Germany. They recounted that the armistice "had not only surprised but devastated the native population," who thus "supplicated that [the French] whom they know well not abandon" them.[128] In Poto-Poto near Brazzaville, Diop showed Sicé a placard

[125] Telegram from Boisson to Cabinet (Vichy) (July 29, 1940), in "Rapport des télégrammes de Boisson, été 1940," 82. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale).
[126] Letter from Raymond Waag (prisoner at Lambaréné) to Maréchal Pétain (April 23, 1941), 8. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/5D/187 (La Deuxième Guerre mondiale).
[127] Capitaine Desjardins, "En Afrique avec De Gaulle (septembre-novembre 1940)," *Espoir*, no. 51 (1988), 17.
[128] Sicé, 86.

proclaiming "We want to stay French," which Sicé cites as "irrefutable proof of the loyalism of these blacks of Africa who stayed so deeply attached to France."[129]

The city of Brazzaville greeted Charles de Gaulle with genuine enthusiasm, as recounted by several Free French eyewitnesses, although their propensity to exaggerate the popular nature of these events must be taken into consideration. Sicé claims that the "European town and the African villages were taken out en masse" to the airstrip to greet de Gaulle on October 24, and that among the many "natives waving the flag" was Diop, surrounded by subordinates waving the "We want to stay French" placard. Sicé perhaps betrays exaggeration when he goes on to justify this occurrence, explaining that "the enthusiasm of the natives was assuredly spontaneous."[130] Another French resident of Brazzaville, Blanche Ackermann-Athanassiaous, confirms Sicé's depiction of the reception, also writing that Brazzaville "in full" came to the airstrip to welcome de Gaulle, including "the enormous crowd from the two villages of Bacongo and Poto-Poto," the native districts of Brazzaville.[131] Jean de Puytorac also certified the presence of a "crowd of natives, who came by the thousands," at the arrival of de Gaulle.[132]

Genuine Anti-Axis Sentiment among Africans?

Some accounts claim that Africans fought for the French, not out of pro-French sentiment, but in opposition to Germans and the Nazi ideology. Indeed, some less prominent narratives of events in AEF claim that Africans were motivated to fight,

[129] Sicé, 141; Ackermann-Athanassiades, 104, certifies that Diop spoke of "how happy he was to participate in the works of De Gaulle."
[130] Sicé, 183.
[131] Manuscrit de Madame Blanche ACKERMANN-ATHANASSIAOUS, "À l'ombre de la Croix de Lorraine," transmis en 1961 par l'auteur (Brazzaville), pp. 40-41. AN 72AJ/225/1/pièce 5. Also in her 1989 book, 60-62.
[132] de Puytorac, 307.

particularly in Gabon, by being told that they were fighting Germans there, even when those arguments were patently untrue. The pro-Vichy Aumasson, president of the Gabonese Chamber of Commerce, claimed while in Dakar as an exile of the Gaullist military victory in Gabon that the six hundred "Saras" fighting in Gabon had been told that "Libreville was defended by the Germans."[133] Another contemporary, with less interest in contradicting the Gaullist account, corroborates this claim, saying that "the opening of hostilities [in Gabon] rested…on a lie as shameless in its development as mysterious in its origins," that the forces were going "to fight in Gabon important forces of the Axis, Germans and Italians."[134] The assumption of higher Sara motivation to fight Germans rather than wicked Frenchmen shows actual anti-Axis sentiment among the Africans.

Particularly in Cameroon, anti-German sentiment was indeed expressed before and during the war, which might be expected to continue into the period of the Armistice. The Cameroonian Union, "composed of 'European and native chiefs'" formed in 1938 to "defend the interests of Cameroon," sending identical letters to British Prime Minister Chamberlain, U.S. President Roosevelt, and French premier Daladier "protesting against any possible return of territory to Germany."[135] Their letter contains a decidedly anti-German strain, claiming that "we have known German domination and we have no wish to return to a country which persecutes our race [presumably, black Africans]."[136] More importantly, the French Cameroonian Youth (Jeucafra), formed in 1938 with French

[133] "GABON 1940 : Une page d'histoire" (April 11, 1941) [Transmis par Mr Maillat; Texte de la conférence prononcée à Dakar en avril 1971 par M. Aumasson ex-président de la Chambre de Commerce de Libreville sur les evènements survenus au Gabon en novembre 1940], p. 4. AN 72AJ/225/1/pièce 8.
[134] Louis Préclin, *Pointe-Noire sous la Croix de Lorraine : Vaudeville Équatorial* (Paris : Promotions et Éditions, 1967), 113.
[135] Ateba Yene, 20.
[136] "Cameroon Natives' Protest," *The Times* (London), October 29, 1938, 11.

funding in order to counter a pro-independence movement, had as a secondary goal to stand in opposition to Germany's return to Cameroon, albeit with the pro-French goal of integration into the French Empire as a colony rather than an officially League of Nations-mandated territory.[137]

Anti-German sentiment had merit in French Cameroon, given memories of "abusive acquisitions, particularly through falsified contracts" and forced labor, volunteers being short since "the reputation of the plantations was not good."[138] The historical memory of a previous colonization would be a legitimate source for decision-making, since even people only 30-40 years old would have lived through the contentious years of Franco-German debate over the return of Germany's 'lost colony,' and "the conquered [Cameroonians], just like the conquerors [the French], integrated a variable international dimension into their history."[139] Richard Joseph, studying political conditions in Cameroon in the 1970s, confirms that "much hardship was suffered by Camerounians under German rule" and that even sixty years later, "in nearly every region of Cameroun…a particular German administrator is remembered for the barbaric depths to which he descended in bringing civilization to the 'primitives.'"[140] At least one Duala chief, Paraiso, opposed Germany out of vengeance against German appropriation of his family's property during their rule.[141]

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[137] Joseph, 39-41.
[138] Marc Michel, "Les plantations allemandes du mont Cameroun, 1885-1914," *Revue française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer* 57:207 (1969), 193 and 199.
[139] André Martel, "L'Afrique Française Libre support d'effort de guerre française et allié 1940-1942," in *Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique Française Libre 1940-1942 Actes du Colloque International 12, 13, et 14 novembre 1987* (Paris: Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque, 1988), 90.
[140] Joseph, 21.
[141] Gardet, "Le ralliement du Cameroun à la France Libre (27 août 1940)," available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/ralliement-cameroun-fl.php (accessed April 3, 2012). Also in "Le ralliement du Cameroun," extract from *Revue de la France Libre* no. 12 (octobre-novembre 1948),

Africans feared German colonization outside of Cameroon, also. Although Gaullists obviously carefully selected certain anecdotes, the anecdotal evidence constitutes evidence nonetheless, even if not representative of the full picture. Sicé claims that the signature of the Armistice with Germany created "unquestionable anxiety" since "they remembered the arrival of the Germans" in 1911-1914, colonizing the so-called 'Bec de Canard' as compensation for Morocco after the Second Morocco Crisis in 1911. Fearing German re-colonization, Sicé claims that the African leaders in the villages around Brazzaville came to him "beseeching that we, French that they knew well, not abandon Equatorial Africa and its inhabitants to the Germans."[142] Another Gaullist account, explicitly propagandistic (serving as material for the Free French lobby in the United States during the war), cites another anecdote from a chief in Logone on the Cameroon-Chad border, saying "I know the Germans" and that "they killed my father's people."[143] Both of these examples, it should be noted, concern direct colonial contact with the Germans in and around Cameroon, making German rule a more concrete reality rather than a mere conceptualization. However, Africans had no illusions about French rule, either, despite its brutality being glossed over by Gaullist sources, making a Franco-German choice an ambiguous one at best.

One account from an African author captures the ambiguity of the choices for Africans in Cameroon. A Fang community on the Gabon-Cameroon border remembered the German rule in Cameroon as "more brutal and inhuman than the French system," especially resenting the Germans' award of "quasi-absolute" power, allegedly alien to the

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available at http://www.france-libre.net/temoignages-documents/temoignages/ralliement-cameroun.php (accessed April 3, 2012).

[142] Sicé, 86.

[143] "French Colonial Policy," *France Forever* 11 (July 1944), back page. Caen FL 71 (II-)

Fang leadership structure, to an already artificial ethnic-based leadership created by the colonial power to serve as an intermediary with the Africans. As implied in the statement that German rule was only "more brutal and inhuman" than French rule, the French period was no utopian colonial paradise. Rather, the French retained the same German-appointed chiefs, but reduced their "exaggerated" powers. For this community, the French represented the lesser of two evils.[144] In light of Nazi racial ideology denouncing Africans as "sub-humans," French imperialism would certainly seem the lesser of two evils.[145]

In the aftermath of the Gaullist rally in Cameroon, though, this narrative does seem to be supported by African actions. The Gaullist lobby in the United States quoted an anonymous Logone chief at the Cameroon-Congo border to support the claim of African opposition to Germany, citing him saying that "I know the Germans" and "they killed my father's people," whereas "the French made us free."[146] Similar arguments are expressed by Muracciole, who points out parenthetically, but suggestively, that the Africans "still remembered the German occupation," and by Adolphe Sicé, who claims rather idealistically that France replaced German rule, characterized by "methods of force and oppression, punctuated by acts of barbarism and inhumanity, which had always characterized the Germanic spirit and tendency."[147] Raymond Dronne, explaining why African soldiers under his command continued to fight through claimed that they

[144] Tsira Ndong Ndoutoume, quoted in Mireille Nzenzé, *L'Armée Française en AEF de 1919 à 1958* (Villeneuve, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1998), 206. Kuoh Moukouri, 66, recounts similar sentiments from a similar episode.
[145] Lormier, 31.
[146] "French Colonial Policy," *France Forever* 11 (July 1944), back page. Caen FL 71 (II).
[147] Sicé, 34.

"retained a dismal memory of German domination," key to their decision to follow him as he opted for Gaullism.[148]

Anti-Nazi and anti-German sentiment in Cameroon would appear to be paralleled by anti-Italian sentiment in Chad, bordering Italian Libya. A colonial report from February 1940 notes that, despite mobilization and its conscription of troops, there had been "no exoduses [across the border]," but rather movement "returning into Chad" since "native life is more easy in French Territory [Chad] than in Libya where grain and meat are rare and expensive."[149] Refugees from Libya were particularly eager to fight, as the initial enthusiasm for the war "still persists" in early 1940, the French needing to hold back the local bey, who led his community to "accept reluctantly, the idea that they would not return, arms in hand, to Italian territory."[150] This report cites certain Toubbou from Libya requesting permission to settle in French territory in order to avoid Italian war conscription and deprivation, deemed greater than in French Chad, and perhaps hoping also to avoid a war between France and Italy, which natives believed was imminent.[151] The French administration claimed to draw strong support from the Islamic leadership of northern Chad, noting that localized "religious leaders…are absolutely devoted to us," perhaps in response to or creating the greater attention "given to the events [of war in Europe]."[152]

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[148] Notin, 154-156. Also in Colonel Raymond Dronne, "Le ralliement du Cameroun : Récit d'un acteur," in *Le Général Leclerc et l'Afrique Française Libre 1940-1942 Actes du Colloque International 12, 13, et 14 novembre 1987* (Paris : Fondation Maréchal Leclerc de Hauteclocque, 1988), 379.
[149] Territory of Tchad to Gouvernement Général de l'A.E.F., "Rapport Politique" (February 22, 1940), 6. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/4D/4/50.
[150] Ibid., 3. Found in ANOM AEF/GGAEF/4D/4/50.
[151] Ibid., 7. Found in ANOM AEF/GGAEF/4D/4/50.
[152] Ibid., 5 and 7. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/4D/4/50. Deroo and Champeaux, 160, recount similar use of Islamic clergy to propagate anti-Nazi views in Senegal.

As for the majority of people, though, the February 1940 snapshot of Chad gives the sense of deep-seated apathy about the war, which retained "little attention" for the "masses,"[153] who accepted the war with "fatalism," desiring that the war would confine itself "among the whites," with even a Franco-Italian armistice welcomed in order to end the war.[154] One upshot of this apathy was that contempt for Italians eclipsed the already dim view of Germans in Chad, even if there was little positive attachment to the French.[155]

[153] Territory of Tchad to Gouvernement Général de l'A.E.F., "Rapport Politique" (February 22, 1940), 6. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/4D/4/50.
[154] Ibid., 7. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/4D/4/50.
[155] Ibid., 7. ANOM AEF/GGAEF/4D/4/50.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Africans participated in the rally of AEF to General de Gaulle, even if they did not plan the operations. Africans also constituted the audiences of the rallies, serving as important legitimizers for the Gaullist project to reconstruct a French polity outside the metropole. In both these roles, Africans exhibited agency, making conscious choices to control their own actions and affect the situations around them.

African soldiers obeyed their Gaullist officers, toppling governments in Gabon and Moyen-Congo (Brazzaville). African soldiers involved in the Gabon campaign also exploited the confusion of the situation to set their own agendas. African soldiers also obeyed Gaullist invaders, enabling the capture of Douala and several towns during the Gabon campaign. The indifference of Africans to their European commanders, and of African publics to which regime governed them, gives us insight into the limitations of colonialism. Even in a total war where Europeans could mobilize the martial bodies of Africans as soldiers, they could not capture their minds and prompt Africans to invest themselves morally or nationalistically in the defense of France. The ability of Africans to evade the French state through migration also attests to limits to the French empire's capacity to control the lives of its subjects.

This study does not attempt to minimize the intrusiveness of the colonial experience, which exercised itself in forced conscription, appropriation of female bodies

for European soldiers, and far greater pains through forced labor projects in the years after AEF's rally. Rather, this study attempts to highlight the spaces within which Africans retained and exercised agency, such as through migration or in the vacuums produced in chaotic military situations such as those in Gabon. Likewise, this study attempts to focus on African voices to see rationales behind why Africans would act certain ways, such as reasons behind Africans joining the French colonial military, or reasons why Africans might opt to support the lesser evil of French continuation rather than risk the threat of German takeover. This study found limits in its European texts and archival research, but the presence of such clear African agency in even a Eurocentric research process reveals the necessity for further research, especially in Central Africa itself. Africans have often been voiceless in African history, less because they did not speak and more because no one listened. Thus, studies by African and other historians in Africa, particularly probing into oral histories, could reveal new perspectives on the events of 1940 and nuance our understandings of Africans' involvement in the Second World War. I hope that this study will be the first step in such a process.

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