

# Introduction



## French African Soldiers and Female Conjugal Partners in Colonial Militarism

**I**N DECEMBER 1887, A CONTINGENT OF *TIRAILLEURS SÉNÉGALAIS* captured Mamadou Lamine Drame. The tirailleurs sénégalais were West Africans serving in the French colonial army. Mamadou Lamine Drame was a revolutionary West African jihadist leader whose campaigns to create a Muslim state based in Bundu occurred at a time in which the French colonial government, based in Saint-Louis, sought to bring the Senegal River valley under its formal rule. These incompatible visions of West African expansion led French military leaders to cast Drame as a religious zealot and enemy of the state. After his dramatic capture and murder, French military officials oversaw the distribution of Drame's conjugal partners—wives and concubines—to tirailleurs sénégalais.<sup>1</sup> These women became the “wives” of West African colonial soldiers because French officials believed that the transfer of women from the vanquished to the victors followed local martial and marital customs, as well as assuring these women's welfare in a politically unstable environment.<sup>2</sup> As soldiers' wives, these women became members of a large civilian contingent supporting African troops participating in France's conquest of inland West Africa. Some likely traveled with tirailleurs sénégalais to overseas deployments in French Congo and Madagascar in the following decade.

Seventy years later and 7,500 miles to the east in Hanoi, Abdou Karim Bâ, a French West African soldier, adopted Vuti Chat. Vuti Chat was a hospitalized eleven-year-old Vietnamese female war orphan of the French

Indochina War (1945–54). When the war concluded with Vietnam's independence, Abdou Karim Bâ was one of roughly twenty thousand West African soldiers deployed in the region. In 1956, Abdou Bâ moved Vuti Chat from Hanoi to Kaolack, Senegal. The French colonial military facilitated the relocation of members of *tirailleurs sénégalais'* Afro-Vietnamese households from Southeast Asia to their colonies of origin. Chat was one of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Vietnamese women and children who relocated to West Africa in the 1950s. Bâ's mother and sisters raised Chat and, at age seventeen, she became Bâ's wife.<sup>3</sup> Chat and Bâ married in 1962, when the French Empire that had once connected West Africa and Southeast Asia no longer existed. Senegal became Chat's home and her foster family became her only kin. In 2008, Asstou Bâ, née Vuti Chat, was a childless widow, a socially marginal member of her husband's extended kin, and an infrequent participant in the diasporic Vietnamese community in Dakar. Due to Asstou Bâ's connection to the French military, she secured French citizenship during Senegal's decolonization and continued to collect a widow's pension.

These two examples of militarized conjugality bookend the imperial career of *tirailleurs sénégalais*. The first French governor of colonial Senegal, Louis Faidherbe, inaugurated the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in 1857. This locally recruited fighting force paralleled transformations in French colonialism's form and function in West Africa and French Empire over the subsequent century. West African soldiers served in the expansion, maintenance, and defense of France's empire in West Africa, Equatorial Africa, Madagascar, North Africa, the Levant, and French Indochina from the 1880s to 1962. Across the history and geography of modern French Empire, *tirailleurs sénégalais* advanced conjugal strategies and engaged in marital relationships with women at home and abroad. The coexistence of manifold marital practices and "customs" in French colonial militarized spaces influenced the processes through which civilian women and girls became the wives of West African soldiers. The French military managed African soldiers' sexuality, conjugality, and marital legitimacy in a range of consensual and nonconsensual war-front (and home-front) interactions with female civilians because soldiers' sexuality and their households were crucial to the operation of French colonialism. The French colonial military played a significant role in shaping masculinity, femininity, domesticity, patriarchy, and sexual behaviors among members of African military households in West Africa and across French Empire.



MAP 0.1. Modern French Empire. Map by Isaac Barry

Vuti Chat and the former conjugal partners of Mamadou Lamine Drame evidence an evolution in *tirailleurs sénégalais*' conjugal and marital practices. In the 1880s, French military officials witnessed the distribution of captured women to their local military employees—providing tacit sanction to a purported indigenous custom that shared characteristics with female domestic slavery. By the 1950s, military and civilian administrations coordinated their management of soldiers' marriages, soldiers' adoption of foreign children, and long-distance travel accommodations for members of their cross-colonial households. Over the decades, the French colonial military and state gradually took jurisdiction over the processes through which African soldiers' female conjugal partners and households acquired legitimacy. The French colonial military developed martial traditions emphasizing masculinity and celebrating family men. Gender, wives, and households were vital components of these ideals. Military officials progressively policed the boundaries of propriety related to *tirailleurs sénégalais*' sexual practices and partners.

Cynthia Enloe has noted that “women's myriad relationships to militaristic practices and to the military are far less the result of amorphous tradition or

culture than they are the product of particular—traceable—decisions.”<sup>4</sup> *Militarizing Marriage* traces the evolution of women’s relationships with the tirailleurs sénégalais in order to demonstrate that sexuality, gender, and women were fundamental to violent colonial expansion and the everyday operation of colonial rule in West Africa and French Empire. To varying degrees, members of African military households and French colonial officials determined whether conjugal relationships were, or could become, legitimate marriages. Gender, heteronormativity, and racial order influenced processes of legitimation, and contestations over conjugal legitimacy shaped colonial welfare policies and military strategy. Tirailleurs sénégalais’ conjugal practices and marital traditions evolved within nineteenth- and twentieth-century French colonialism. Vuti Chat and the former wives and concubines of Mamadou Lamine Drame illustrate that women were essential to the articulation of French militarism and colonialism.

MILITARISM, GENDER, AND TIRAILLEURS SÉNÉGALAIS

Mamadou Lamine Drame’s former conjugal partners and Vietnamese migrant wives demonstrate the importance of studying gender and militarism in African and French colonial history. Amina Mama and Margo Okazawa-Rey write that colonial militaries “relied on military force, deployed along with a formidable array of political, economic and cultural technologies of violence, thus militarising the societies they conquered and governed in ways that extended far beyond the barracks, into the very fabric of peoples’ lives.”<sup>5</sup> West African soldiers’ participation in the expansion and maintenance of the French colonial state had extensive gendered effects in their home-front communities and in foreign war-front societies. Simultaneously, soldiers’ female conjugal partners (and their communities) influenced colonial military practice and policy. Tirailleurs sénégalais’ households were at the center of diverse interests and stakeholders, which collectively illustrate the dynamic relationship between gender and militarism in the history of African colonial soldiers. According to Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via, militarism “is the extension of war-related, war-preparatory, and war-based meanings and activities outside of ‘war proper’ and into social and political life.”<sup>6</sup> Gender, or perceptions of sexualized and embodied difference, has a dynamic relationship with militarism. In multivalent and concerted ways, gender and militarism inform military and civilian norms and practices. Alicia Decker

and Patricia McFadden have each pointed out that in postcolonial African examples, state militarism often involved, in Decker's words, a "reassertion of manhood undermined by colonial rule."<sup>7</sup> Colonial rule may have undermined the feminine and masculine authority of colonized civilians, but it certainly could bolster the masculine authority of African men enlisted in colonial militaries. *Militarizing Marriage* tracks soldiers' sexuality and conjugality to illustrate how African servicemen and the colonial military contributed to new iterations of gendered relations in West Africa and French Empire.

This book builds on an extensive historical literature dealing with African colonial soldiers that has gradually taken up the concerns of gender, sexuality, and militarism. Early publications concerning African colonial soldiers tended to glorify European officers, African enlistees, or important battles. In doing so, these older works reproduced narrow visions of what militaries were and what they did in colonial Africa.<sup>8</sup> "New" military histories, which deal with wide-ranging themes of war and society, portray the lived experiences of colonial soldiers. Many of these works include women, but they have a tendency to relegate them to the domestic realm or cast them as minor characters in soldiers' social worlds.<sup>9</sup> A number of studies have focused on soldiers' wives and households in order to understand how colonial statecraft and African housecraft operated in tandem.<sup>10</sup> Africanist military historians query how masculinity, patriarchy, and soldiering work together to produce discourses concerning African and colonial "martial races."<sup>11</sup> With an eye toward gender, Gregory Mann's *Native Sons* captures the complexity of active and retired tirailleurs sénégalais' navigation of shifting social, political, and economic forces in West Africa and French Empire.<sup>12</sup> Michelle Moyd's *Violent Intermediaries* illustrates that women and gender were integral to Askari ways of war and soldiers' participation in the everyday violence of German colonialism.<sup>13</sup> *Militarizing Marriage* joins a small field of works that address forced conjugal association, sexual violence, and female subjugation in colonial and postcolonial military histories of Africa.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, this book follows their lead and incorporates the concepts prevalent among studies of gendered violence in colonial and postcolonial conflicts.<sup>15</sup> West African soldiers' conjugal and marital traditions serve as the unit of analysis through which to understand how "war making . . . relies on gendered constructions and images of the state, state militaries, and their role in the international

system” over the course of decades and across diverse geographies of French colonialism.<sup>16</sup>

Militarized women have long borne the title “civilian.” Civilian is a deceptive term which often reinforces false gendered distinctions between combatants and noncombatants, as well as trivializing the degree to which women are involved in war.<sup>17</sup> West African “civilian” women were auxiliary combatants, sutlers, and domestic laborers while accompanying their husbands to colonial conquest in West Africa, Congo, Madagascar, and Morocco through the First World War. The inclusion of African women in these colonial campaigns contradicts common narratives about the masculinization of nineteenth-century Western European armed forces. Historians have shown that women commonly provided essential services to land-based armies prior to the 1850s.<sup>18</sup> Afterward, the nationalization and professionalization of North Atlantic militaries led to the erasure of female civilians from state-funded armies.<sup>19</sup> These trends paralleled the modernization of the industrial-military complex and the emergence of the male citizen-soldier as an ideal model for civic membership in North Atlantic countries.<sup>20</sup> Dominant moral discourses concerning feminine propriety compelled state armies to progressively displace civilian women from military spaces. By the late nineteenth century, North American and western European armies were predominantly devoid of wives and female camp followers.<sup>21</sup> These symbiotic male soldier/female civilian relationships continued to exist in the European armed forces on the “fringes of empire.”<sup>22</sup> Contrary to this narrative, *Militarizing Marriage* locates the colonial frontier at the center of late nineteenth-century European military practices. French military officials condoned tirailleurs sénégalais’ conjugal traditions, which indicates the existence of paradoxes at the heart of military policy and colonial militarization in West Africa. Colonized African women and men lived these paradoxes as they became new members of an expanding French army.

Tirailleurs sénégalais’ conjugal practices and marital traditions produced African military households. The contravention of premarital heterosexual practices and gender-based violence were among the constitutive processes that produced military households in West Africa and French Empire. The literature concerning forced conjugal association and gender-based violence in contemporary African conflicts offers historians theoretical and methodological tools to reexamine the intersection of warfare, gender-based violence,

and conjugality in the African colonial past.<sup>23</sup> Contemporary feminist concerns with the globalization of militarism provide models for interrogating French imperial militarism and how the colonial army managed sexual violence and conjugality in war-front interactions.<sup>24</sup> Military officers seldom viewed *tirailleurs sénégalais*' sexual exploits as transgressing normative sexual behaviors affiliated with the colonial military. In rare, egregious cases, French officers took disciplinary action against West African soldiers for gender-based violence, but those measures did little to protect female colonial subjects from future transgressions. Militarization increased the vulnerability of women and their communities in French Empire. Combined with colonialism, militarization circumscribed female colonial subjects' and/or their guardians' ability to hold colonial soldiers accountable for violating local marital customs or normative sexual practices.

The presence of the French colonial army compromised the ability of traditional authorities—relatives and community leaders—to manage sexual relationships between *tirailleurs sénégalais* and civilian women. This had many consequences. Some communities and individuals encouraged women to enter into conjugal relationships with West African soldiers in order to mitigate the effects of conflict and conquest. Vulnerable and enterprising women could have seen military marriage as a strategy to leave previous marriages or domestic slavery, or to provide some stability in the upheavals accompanying colonial conquest and conflict.<sup>25</sup> Military officials became de facto authority figures in regulating the conjugal affairs of local women and *tirailleurs sénégalais*. Significantly, the military established and maintained state-funded brothels for their troops. In these spaces of transactional sex, they monitored troops' sexual behavior and discouraged conjugal or romantic inclinations.<sup>26</sup> In official correspondence related to soldiers' conjugality, military officials avoided terms like sexual enslavement or forced marriage to describe *tirailleurs sénégalais*' conjugal relationships. To do so would have opened the colonial army up to civilian, metropolitan, and international criticism.

Throughout much of the colonial period, the French military operated outside international, French, and colonial laws aiming to improve the conditions of women. Antislavery acts in 1848 and 1905, the 1926 Slavery Convention, as well as the French Family Code, the Mandel Decree of 1939, and the Jacquinet Decree of 1951 all aimed to shore up women's rights—the latter pieces of legislation setting minimum marriageable ages and requiring future

brides' consent to marriage. French military officials often lacked the political will to enforce international and colonial statutes in relation to tirailleurs sénégalais' conjugal relationships with female colonial subjects. Instead, they operated through a corpus of marital tradition formed within the military, sourced from African soldiers' natal communities or from female conjugal partners' societal norms. The military's ad hoc application of pluralistic traditions and laws serves as historical prologue for contemporary debates in supranational bodies, like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court, that attempt to define, regulate, and adjudicate gender-based violence in recent African conflicts.<sup>27</sup>

The continuum of consent and coercion is useful for conceptualizing gender-based violence and war crimes in the colonial past. Consent assumes equality among individuals, as well as the ability of those individuals to give consent in contracts—like those pertaining to sexual intercourse or marriage.<sup>28</sup> French military officers wielded great authority in adjudicating conjugal disputes between tirailleurs sénégalais and colonized women—none of whom were fully endowed with rights vis-à-vis the colonial state. French military officials enforced the conjugal prerogatives of their military employees, following pervasive assumptions that colonized women were incapable of consent to marriage or of individual choice. Accordingly, female colonial subjects' "consent" was diffused across members of their lineage group and their community, who policed the boundaries of propriety and social reproduction. Military officials took for granted that fathers and communities maintained patriarchal authority over daughters and that husbands held ultimate authority over wives. Colonialism contributed to the extension of male and state authority over women's mobility via social institutions like marriage.<sup>29</sup> However, the French military frequently allowed tirailleurs sénégalais to violate these social prescriptions.

The use of marital terminology to describe tirailleurs sénégalais' conjugal relationships camouflaged the potentially illegitimate (and sometimes violent) means through which these relationships came into being. French military officials' use of "marriage" and "wife" shielded the ways in which the military allowed soldiers to contravene local traditions or international conventions regarding the rights of women and the institutions of marriage. In doing so, the French colonial military condoned conjugal relationships that soldiers, women, their respective communities, and French law would not

sanction. There are few examples in which archival or oral evidence suggests that all individuals and collective bodies agreed that African military households were legal or legitimate marriages.

The use of the term “wife” to refer to *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ female sexual partners is deceiving due to the manifold meanings embedded in the French word *femme*. *Femme* directly translates to both “wife” and “woman.” Written sources and informants predominantly employed *femme* over *épouse* (female spouse) to refer to *tirailleurs sénégalais*’ conjugal partners, which masked the degree to which state agents, women, or soldiers assigned legitimacy to the marital status of women. Depending on context, the word *femme* was an umbrella term for any number of the following meanings: official or unofficial wife, girlfriend, concubine, female slave, sex worker, or domestic partner. Military officials used *femme* to refer to women maintaining monogamous relationships with soldiers, as well as to cast aspersions on West African soldiers’ extramarital, polyamorous, and polygynous romantic partners. As a result, throughout this book, the word “wife” remains imprecise, contested, and ambiguous—even when lacking scare quotes. I use “conjugal partner” throughout this book because the conditions of colonialism and militarism undermined the ability of *tirailleurs sénégalais* and female colonial subjects to consent to practices affiliated with matrimony. These conditions also prevented willing partners from legitimizing their conjugal unions with the state, or according to their own conventions.

The subjugation of women was essential to the manifestation and articulation of military power and colonial rule. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*’ households, when considered as part of a longer tradition of martial matrimony, illustrate the ways in which gendered power operated through institutions of the colonial military, the civilian state, and individual actors in diverse geographic contexts. The conjugal relationships that *tirailleurs sénégalais* sought while serving in empire are comparable to Susan Zeiger’s observation of twentieth-century American soldiers’ overseas conjugal behaviors, which “existed in a matrix of warfront interaction between American soldiers and local women that encompassed courtship and dating, consensual and coerced sexual intercourse, informal and commercial prostitution, and sexual assault.”<sup>30</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais* introduced new forms of marriage to French Empire because conquest and foreign rule altered local tradition around women’s sexuality and conjugality. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* represented a particular kind of

racialized, masculine power harnessed to French colonial order. West African soldiers' conjugal practices and marital traditions illustrate that ideologies of militarism and sexuality shaped social order from the nineteenth-century frontiers of French colonial conquest to wars of decolonization.<sup>31</sup>

MARRIAGE AT THE CONVERGENCE OF  
MILITARIZATION AND FRENCH COLONIALISM

The women distributed to *tirailleurs sénégalais* as wives in Bundu and Vuti Chat's journey from war orphan to expatriate to wife collectively demonstrate that establishing households and legitimizing conjugal relationships were significant life events during West African soldiers' military service. Households and marriage were integral components of political history in West Africa and French Empire, just as they were sites of intimate and emotional exchange.<sup>32</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais* households' domestic economy was bound up in France's imperial and military political economy. Instead of shoring up boundaries between the public and the private, African military households transcended these categories. They also eroded distinctions between military and civilian populations. Across eighty years, the French colonial military and state increased their direct involvement in soldiers' conjugal and marital relationships. Members of *tirailleurs sénégalais* households and the French colonial military modified prenuptial rites, altered pathways to marital legitimacy, and ultimately formed their own marital traditions. These traditions permit historians to take stock of continuity and change in multiple fields of inquiry because marriage is a multifaceted site of historical production.

Marriage became a key site of contestation where stakeholders—wives and husbands—disputed their obligations to their spouses and to the state. Individuals and states, via marriage, struggle over social reproduction and the articulation of state authority in the most intimate spheres of the human experience.<sup>33</sup> Marriage is a means to extend kinship networks, build new economic and social connections, and encourage social and biological reproduction. Religious rites, cultural practices, and legal obligations affiliated with marriage are geographically specific and historically contingent. In the case of *tirailleurs sénégalais* and female colonial subjects, marriage could secure legal status, provide access to military resources, and legitimize their children. Efforts to legitimate and/or invalidate these intimate encounters encompassed challenges to colonial power and complex contestations concerning marital

traditions and rights. The military allocated resources to soldiers' wives and dependents when their relationships conformed to heteronormative, gendered, and racialized ideals of marriage. The colonial state approached West African soldiers' conjugal unions as important sites of moral order, which could normalize tirailleurs sénégalais' war-front sexual behavior. There were great risks and consequences for couples seeking to make their conjugal relationships legible to the French colonial army and/or state.

West African soldiers' conjugal practices and the gendered power relationships within African military households were part of colonial martial custom. Martin Chanock's seminal work notes that custom is a crucial index of identity.<sup>34</sup> Historians have used this point to debate the teleological traps and specious fixity affiliated with tribal identities.<sup>35</sup> The tirailleurs sénégalais was a military institution with a corporate identity historically tethered to French West Africa. The tirailleurs sénégalais was also a global institution, whose members reacted to and incorporated conjugal practices and marital customs from other regions of French Empire. Chanock's work also demonstrates that marriage was a key site to witness the codification of marital customs during the colonial period, a codification that shored up male authority and extended control over women.<sup>36</sup> Colonial courts and administrators took center stage in subsequent debates concerning the gendered power surrounding the transformation of marital traditions.<sup>37</sup> Few historians have interrogated colonial militaries' contribution to customary law. The tirailleurs sénégalais was an explicitly patriarchal institution and a violently coercive force that managed soldiers' customs related to sexuality, conjugality, and marriage. Colonial soldiers and their families were on the front line of what Emily Burrill has identified as the colonial state's marriage legibility project. African soldiers sought the military's sanction for marital legitimacy in order to acquire state-allocated benefits for their households. However, as the military narrowed and fixed definitions of military marriages through policy and decree, these marriages diverged from civilian West Africans' conjugal traditions.<sup>38</sup>

African military households sat at the convergence of West African, French, and military traditions of marriage within spaces of colonial conflict. African soldiers, their conjugal partners, and French officials had different ideas about prenuptial rites and what constituted legitimate marriage. In West Africa, marital rites differed according to community and were

influenced by local and global religious beliefs—predominantly Islam. West African communities practiced polygyny and monogamy. Family organization occurred along matrilineal and patrilineal lines and extended beyond the nuclear family. Prenuptial customs for legitimate marriages could include the exchange of gifts, labor, or marriage payments. The socioeconomic rank, caste, or slave status/ancestry of prospective conjugal partners altered the ways in which individuals and communities observed premarital rites.<sup>39</sup>

The French colonial army made overtures toward codifying West African marital practices before the civilian colonial state made marital custom its prerogative. The military's goal was to recognize a limited set of practices that would make *tirailleurs sénégalais*' marriages more legible to military officials. The exchange of bridewealth was an early, favored standard for recognizing legitimate marriages in West Africa. As the colonial state and its military officials wedged diverse West African marital practices into French colonial and military traditions, they stripped them of value and complexity. Officials measured African marital traditions against definitions of marriage culled from French tradition and civil code. In late nineteenth- and twentieth-century France, marriage was often celebrated through Christian religious ceremonies and registered with a "secular" state. French marriage fell within the realm of civil affairs, which the state presided over in order to maintain its own authority and patriarchal power over women, primogeniture inheritance, and parents' authority over their children.<sup>40</sup> Marriages registered with the French state were monogamous, and, as a consequence, the French military rarely recognized or financially supported West African soldiers' second or subsequent wives. French military officials narrowed and rigidified "marital legitimacy" but stopped short of static definition. Their efforts steadily nudged *tirailleurs sénégalais*' marital practices away from West African and French civil customs toward marital traditions evolving within the French colonial military.

Military officials referred to an older French Atlantic marital tradition—*mariage à la mode du pays*—in order to describe *tirailleurs sénégalais*' conjugal behaviors when deployed in colonial frontiers of Africa and Madagascar. *Mariage à la mode du pays* was a conjugal tradition typified by African women forming temporary, though often protracted, sexual and domestic relationships with European merchants, administrators, and military officials.<sup>41</sup> Governor Louis Faidherbe infamously participated in a relationship of

this nature with Dioucounda Sidibe, a fifteen-year-old Khassonké woman.<sup>42</sup> Sidibe lived with him in the governor's mansion in Saint-Louis and gave birth to their son, Louis Léon Faidherbe, the same year that Governor Faidherbe created the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in 1857. Temporary interracial conjugal unions continued into the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, particularly with colonial officials serving in the interior of West Africa. However, the practice decreased in the more visible quarters of colonial society during the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> French military officials used *mariage à la mode du pays* to describe *tirailleurs sénégalais*' conjugal unions, which condoned male soldiers' prerogatives in accessing conjugal labor and indicated the temporary nature of these unions. Further, these observers assumed that the sexual behavior of young soldiers, who lacked their elders' supervision, was representative of conjugal norms in West Africa.<sup>44</sup> Within military convention, the phrase *mariage à la mode du pays* became a rhetorical means through which to debase African soldiers' marital practices and their sexual moral economy in West Africa and in French Empire.

Paradoxically, military officials also believed that *tirailleurs sénégalais* were natural "family men."<sup>45</sup> African soldiers' ability to create families and shape colonial and local ideas about marriage were paramount to normalizing the manifestation of colonial power in intimate spheres. Embedded in this presumption were *tirailleurs sénégalais*' heteronormativity and preference for matrimony, which stand in contrast to French metropolitan concerns about the carnal desires of African soldiers in France during and after the world wars.<sup>46</sup> Despite counterexamples, colonial officials were convinced that *tirailleurs sénégalais* preferred conjugal relationships over transactional sexual experiences in military-maintained brothels or single-occurrence (often nonconsensual) sexual encounters. The "family man" ideology was powerful in its ability to transform nonconsensual, coercive sexual encounters into legitimate marriages and characterize *tirailleurs sénégalais* as male heads of household.

The French colonial military employed another patriarchal concept, the male-breadwinner model, to direct allocations and benefits to the members of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' nuclear households.<sup>47</sup> French military officials refused to recognize West Africans' households as nodes within extended networks of biological and fictive kin. During the Great War, the military began to require formal documentation of soldiers' marital status and members

of their nuclear households—whether their marriages occurred prior to or during their service. Wartime legislation ushered in new forms of state welfare for active-duty soldiers, veterans, and their families. In the 1920s and 1930s, metropolitan France expanded its welfare state and initiated a veritable boom in benefits for heteronormative, racialized, and gendered citizens in metropolitan France.<sup>48</sup> This trend extended into empire and was most conspicuous in tax abatements and familial benefits promised to *tirailleurs sénégalais*' households. Colonial soldiers achieved basic benefits and tax relief decades before other colonial laborers and employees.<sup>49</sup> With the extension of formal state assistance to West African military households, the French army awarded legitimate status to soldiers' first wives, while divesting itself of responsibilities for subsequent wives—even though African soldiers' legal status allowed them to practice polygyny. In limited cases, *tirailleurs sénégalais*' children, irrespective of their mothers' wife order, could access state funds before reaching puberty. These measures created bureaucratic and fiscal relationships between soldiers' wives and children that flowed through African soldiers, which reinforced the male-breadwinner household model. This patriarchal construct cast military wives as nonearning household members and endowed soldiers with authority over their wives' interactions with the military or colonial state.

The extension of benefits to West African households occurred at a time when the French colonial military reduced the number of West African wives traveling within empire. As a result, the interwar period witnessed an uptick in *tirailleurs sénégalais*' cross-colonial relationships and requests to relocate foreign wives to West Africa. West African soldiers initiated these conjugal relationships without the approval of their families and/or often without the input of their future in-laws. In the absence of family oversight of these unions, the military was the primary entity capable of legitimating cross-colonial conjugal relationships. Even with the military's formal recognition of marital legitimacy and the funding of foreign wives' long-distance relocation to West Africa, cross-colonial couples faced the discerning scrutiny of West African communities. Foreign women experienced gendered and racialized discrimination in their new homes. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*' extended kin contested foreign war brides' legitimacy.

“War bride” was a commonly used term to describe the foreign wives accompanying repatriating American soldiers who served in twentieth-century

conflicts—particularly from theaters of war affiliated with World War II and Vietnam.<sup>50</sup> War brides in the United States were defined by their relationship to powerful state institutions and their marital relationships with active soldiers.<sup>51</sup> The relationship between tirailleurs sénégalais' war brides and the colonial state was crucial to their households' survival since their long-distance relocations separated them from the kin and social communities that had sustained them prior to marriage. Cross-colonial military marriages bound foreign wives and tirailleurs sénégalais to state authority, even while conjugal partners contested that power. Even today, tirailleurs sénégalais' widows, like Vuti Chat, collect pensions from the French state. These regularly distributed allocations evince the reciprocal ties between a defunct French colonial state, its veterans, and their wives and/or widows.<sup>52</sup>

#### MOBILE SUBJECTS BUILDING EMPIRES

The tirailleurs sénégalais and their households were protagonists in an international colonial enterprise stretching from West Africa to Southeast Asia. African and other colonial soldiers have become a means through which to appraise and critique nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonialism. Histories of African soldiers are often geographically limited to a single colony, interrogate the history of a single ethnolinguistic group, or focus on the colonizer/colonized binary. The historiography of African soldiers widens out at the world wars.<sup>53</sup> African veterans of these global conflicts have featured in twenty-first century controversies concerning the legacies of colonialism, which has inspired historians to investigate tirailleurs sénégalais' place within transnational public history and collective memory. Images of soldiers on popular French breakfast cereals, the haunting iconography of war, and the Thiaroye Massacre are flash points that prompt questions about France's debt to its African veterans and African countries formally colonized by France.<sup>54</sup> This rapt attention to ten years of tirailleurs sénégalais' history blinks us to the colonial institution's longevity and its importance in shaping French Empire for more than a century. *Militarizing Marriage* joins the work of other scholars who have recently begun to acknowledge the importance of West African soldiers' participation in building and defending empire.<sup>55</sup>

Tirailleurs sénégalais' lived experiences, their conjugal partners, and their families tell us much about the nature of colonialism. From the perspective of military households, we can query the theoretical constructions of colonial

binaries, intermediaries, and the boundaries of subjecthood. Historians have identified indigenous African employees as social actors and colonial intermediaries in order to complicate interpretations of imperial power that rely on dichotomies like colonized/colonizer, subject/citizen, or African/European. Scholarship on intermediary concepts and actors has tended toward the historicization of men due to the gendered nature of colonial education and employment. The female conjugal partners of *tirailleurs sénégalais* provide an opportunity to examine women's contribution to the articulation of colonial governance, economies, and traditions. Military wives and households offer historians a means to address the ambiguous and inconsistent manifestations of gendered colonial power.<sup>56</sup> Colonial rule's daily operations would not have been possible without female and male colonial subjects who took advantage of the "new opportunities created by colonial conquest and colonial rule to pursue their own agendas even as they served their employers."<sup>57</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais*' motivations to become members of the French colonial army were innumerable and complicated by individuals' history and social context.<sup>58</sup> *Tirailleurs sénégalais* could have been seeking autonomy from their elders, resources to build households, or the ability to defy the constraints of communal authority. The means through which female colonial subjects became soldiers' wives were equally complex, with varying degrees of volition and consent. These women could have sought conjugal relationships with *tirailleurs sénégalais* in order to liberate themselves from the authority of their community, leave previous husbands, or for wanderlust.<sup>59</sup> The social and material interests of colonized women and men making up military households influenced the articulation of French colonialism for a century.

*Tirailleurs sénégalais* and their wives challenge the traditional chronologies affiliated with the onset, conclusion, and legacies of colonialism. For the former wives of Mamadou Lamine Drame, colonialism began with perfunctory nuptials and forced labor as military auxiliaries prior to the formalization of colonial rule in the upper reaches of the Senegal River. For women like Vuti Chat, colonialism ended not with Vietnam's independence in 1954, but in 1960 in Senegal—though she continued to collect a widow's pension from the postcolonial French state into the twenty-first century. Some *tirailleurs sénégalais* experienced decolonization three times—in Indochina, in Algeria, and in their home colonies. Their pensions served as a cause célèbre

in postcolonial criticism in the 2000s. For many participating in these debates, French colonialism was an ongoing and palpable twenty-first-century experience.

The *tirailleurs sénégalais* and their marital traditions occurred within the Third, Fourth, and Fifth French Republics. The heralded universalism of French Republican law did not extend into *tirailleurs sénégalais*' households.<sup>60</sup> The majority of women and men in African military households were colonial subjects. The legacies of colonial exploitation were bound to the historical status of colonial subjecthood. *Tirailleurs sénégalais* and their conjugal partners lived in and traversed colonial contexts where they were beholden to ambiguous and shifting legal statuses and regimes. Cross-colonial households demonstrate that the ad hoc interpretation and application of colonial law—related to marriage—in West Africa could inform legal practices in other regions of French Empire. Legal practice or its exception was not tethered to a particular colony. For example, West African marital customs, which were in constant revision in order to accommodate local colonial rule, also informed soldiers' marital practices in Madagascar or Vietnam.

Via *tirailleurs sénégalais*' conjugal relationships, *Militarizing Marriage* expands the geographic horizons of West Africans' colonial history and places emphasis on the migration of female colonial subjects across empire. Women are often cast as "passive" migrants, which results from misrepresentations of women's (especially African women's) agency in initiating conjugal relationships or long-distance migrations.<sup>61</sup> Migrant female conjugal partners and *tirailleurs sénégalais* were part of elaborate systems of imperial labor migration involving the blunt manifestation of colonial power. Their imperial "presence and activities performed the crucial and complicated race-work and sex-work that contributed to racially hierarchizing and engendering 'free' labor" in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century French Empire.<sup>62</sup> West African colonial soldiers and their female conjugal partners sought to fulfill their own desires and sociocultural traditions while performing the work of colonialism. Concerns for the domestic realm were often central to the ways in which active soldiers labored for the colonial state and maintained conjugal relationships in and across empire.<sup>63</sup> Interests in maintaining shared household responsibilities and fulfilling domestic labor obligations motivated colonized women to do the same.

African military households participated in south-south migration. These trans-imperial movements challenge the core-periphery model of colonial history, where information and historical causality flow unidirectionally from the French metropole into its colonies. Studies of imperial migrant households tend to focus on the circulation of Europeans in empire.<sup>64</sup> The historical cross-colonial movements of West African soldiers and their female conjugal partners reveals connections and exchanges among radically different people brought together by war and colonialism. During the period covered by the first half of this study, migration “en famille” was a mechanism that provided official recognition of soldiers’ conjugal relationships. After World War I, cross-colonial migration became a consequence of, not a precursor to, legitimate marriage. The long-distance migrations of soldiers’ foreign wives demonstrated their independence, adventurousness, and willingness to transgress traditional expectations as much as it demonstrated their subjugation, victimization, and vulnerability in French colonial empire.

Trans-imperial relocation was a constitutive element of women’s transformation from conjugal partner to legitimate wife. *Militarizing Marriage* follows female and male colonial subjects who traversed the terrains of imperial “bourgeois culture” and left their footprints in the drying concrete of colonial marital policy and imperial ideas related to racial order.<sup>65</sup> West African, inter-African, and interracial/cross-colonial military households relied on the colonial state for legitimacy because their marriages occurred within imperial labor schemes and outside the bounds of their own marital traditions. By financing the cross-colonial migration of African military households, colonial officials bound them to state power and authority.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, soldiers’ households were crucial to state security and military strategy in the international/imperial sphere.<sup>67</sup> This colonial history of long-distance marital relationships and mobile conjugal partners antedates, but is informed by, literature on contemporary West African migrants and their transnational households.<sup>68</sup>

The diverse racial, ethnic, and geographic origins of tirailleurs sénégalais’ wives challenged imperial racial order and influenced how the military determined West African soldiers’ household legitimacy. Conjugal unions between European men and colonized women have received scholarly attention due to a growing interest in the confluence of race, sexuality, and power in colonial history.<sup>69</sup> The product of these unions, métis, “mixed” race, or

interracial children are the focus of a number of recent publications historicizing colonial policy and the social integration of these minority colonial populations.<sup>70</sup> The interracial relationships between West African soldiers and colonized women from other parts of French Empire have received less attention, even though their conjugal relationships unfolded in arenas where dense and dangerous transfers of colonial power transpired.<sup>71</sup> This may have much to do with how contemporary historians have inherited the racial, “ethnic,” and national constructs that the Europeans produced to organize their empire.<sup>72</sup> According to colonial logic, West African soldiers’ cross-colonial conjugal relationships with Malagasy or Congolese women did not result in interracial children because French officials lumped all sub-Saharan Africans into the same race. *Militarizing Marriage* makes plain that tirailleurs sénégalais’ inter-African, interracial, and cross-colonial relationships with women from the African continent and other parts of French Empire merit the same types of nuanced examination typical to studies of race and sexuality in colonial history.

#### SOURCES AND METHODS

Women and households were crucial to military and political expansion in French Empire, yet the women affiliated with tirailleurs sénégalais seemed to be “without history,” or, at best, on the periphery of colonial and/or military history.<sup>73</sup> *Militarizing Marriage* draws upon a wide range of sources to foreground women, as well as recovering lived experiences and institutional traditions connected to tirailleurs sénégalais’ conjugal households. Early chapters rely on archival documents and French officers’ memoirs found in twenty archival institutions located in six countries. I read these texts across ministerial and geographical divides to better understand how tirailleurs sénégalais’ conjugality broadly influenced the daily operation of colonial militarism. The prevailing ontologies of the colonial era marginalized women and households from the “high politics of governments and states,” even though female actors and their conjugal unions are crucial to the colonial state’s most “masculine” and violent institution—the French colonial army.<sup>74</sup> Tirailleurs sénégalais’ conjugal unions, marital legitimacy, and sexuality, rare as they appear in the colonial archive, were important to imperial statecraft.

The voices of female and male colonial subjects at the center of this study rarely appear in military and colonial documents, and, when they do,

are often distorted. Members of *tirailleurs sénégalais* households were the stakeholders most invested in, and vulnerable to, the decisions recorded in the archives. The discriminating and ambivalent power of the French colonial and postcolonial state is evident in archival materials. Once assembled in the archives, military documents conveyed “authority and set rules for credibility and interdependence; they help select the stories that matter.”<sup>75</sup> African military households were minor concerns in military policy and fiscal expenditures, whereas military policies regulating marital legitimacy and family allocations had great import on the integrity and prosperity of these households. Inherent biases in the representation of women and colonial subjects typified the “grain” of the archive.<sup>76</sup> Gaps in information and the silences surrounding soldiers’ conjugal practices and the quotidian domestic activities of their families were profound. Reading the archives “against the grain,” or thinking comprehensively about contexts, individual and collective motivations, as well as risks taken to achieve optimal futures, allows for a more comprehensive representation of military families’ lived experiences of war, separation, and migration.

Memoirs authored by French military officers, soldiers, adventurers, and entrepreneurs contain anecdotes concerning *tirailleurs sénégalais* households that offer sociocultural information that lies beyond the purview of officialdom. Imperial discourses on race and gender influenced how these colonial authors produced African military households in texts aimed at European audiences. African soldiers, veterans, military wives, and widows seldom published memoirs, though there are important exceptions.<sup>77</sup> Memoirs opened wider portals of observation into the intimate worlds of African military households. They collapsed public and private spheres, which affords opportunities to understand how households, the state, and the states’ employees mutually influenced each other.<sup>78</sup>

*Tirailleurs sénégalais*’ and their conjugal partners’ life histories inestimably enriched this study. I accessed life histories via unpublished master’s theses at the *École Normale Supérieure* (ENS) in Dakar, which were the result of a state-funded oral history project aimed at recovering the experiences of Senegalese veterans.<sup>79</sup> The majority of the master’s theses were organized around formulaic questions and served the particular interests of the ENS History Department, the Senegalese archives, and governmental efforts to make veterans of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* more visible in a postcolonial

world. Nevertheless, ENS master's theses contained valuable lines of inquiry that extended the scope of my research. Master's students interviewed veterans in languages other than Wolof or French in familial and rural contexts. I also collected life histories via sixty interviews with veterans, widows, and their adult children in Senegalese cities, Conakry, and Paris. Interview formats varied. I asked a wide range of questions about military service, interactions with civilians, and conjugal behaviors. Informants organized their historical experiences of war and marriage into personal narratives and global processes that continue to have bearing upon their lives. Their experiences of militarization and conjugality in French Empire were much more dynamic than the ways in which military records portrayed them.

The majority of my informants served in, or had conjugal partners who deployed to, French Indochina or French Algeria. I met veterans and widows through associational networks linked to regional veterans' bureaus. As a result, veteran or military widow status were integral components of their identities. When I conducted interviews between 2006 and 2011, the international scandals surrounding African veterans' frozen pensions reached a series of crescendos in France and its former empire.<sup>80</sup> Journalists, authors, and other historians preceded me into the courtyards and private homes of West African veterans. This media and academic attention predetermined aspects of the interviews that I later conducted with veterans and their families. Women and men were primed to speak about the injustices of paltry pensions, widows' allocations, and the negative legacies of colonial rule. Through conversation, I came to understand that their underlying concerns about pensions were less about historical injustices and more about maximizing resources for their families—past and present.

I interviewed veterans in public and domestic spaces. Other veterans, family members, and neighbors moved through or lingered in interview spaces, and their presence modified my interview questions and shaped the types of memories shared by veterans, widows, and their children. Irrespective of venue or community, veterans rarely framed their cross-colonial conjugal relationships as nonconsensual, initiated through violence, or transactional. Normative moral standards, and the erasure of historical excesses, prevented veterans from speaking candidly of military brothels and overseas sex workers. My gender, as well as my status as a foreigner and guest in veterans' homes, influenced how veterans recalled and reassembled the sexual relationships

of their past. How they conveyed the past was directly influenced by the contemporary cultural prescriptions that maintain social decency between people of different ages, genders, and nationalities.<sup>81</sup> Contrary to sociocultural dictates regarding discretion about sharing others' private information, or *sutura* in Wolof, some interviewees divulged details about themselves and other veterans that were not part of public discourse in their communities.<sup>82</sup> Individuals circulated gossip and rumor to damage the reputation or diminish the credibility of other informants.

Oral sources did not prove to be a panacea for the biases of the colonial archives.<sup>83</sup> Historians have warned us about the ability of statist narratives to “suppress alternative narratives and challenges,” as well as to shape the production of a counternarrative to the colonial state's archives.<sup>84</sup> Inadvertently, the “statist” narratives influenced how I identified informants, how I formulated my research questions, and how my informants organized and shared information.<sup>85</sup> Veterans' and widows' memories relied on the tangible reminders and external props generated by the state during their military service in order to recall and reconstruct their life histories.<sup>86</sup> Military decorations and official papers were the hooks upon which veterans hung their military careers. When describing courtship, conjugal relationships, and marriage that occurred during their military service, veterans built their affective histories upon the tours of duty listed in military passports—fished out of the deep pockets of their boubous or pulled from precariously balanced stacks of aging documents. Corporeal scars were also evidence built into chronologies of sacrifice, romance, and survival. Despite these personalized and intimate means of recalling the past, veterans often defaulted to *tirailleurs sénégalais'* marital traditions to refer to former female conjugal partners as wives—whether they achieved legitimate status or not.

Historians once believed that Africans' life histories could lead to the recovery of an “authentic” African past distinct from the colonial histories that subjugated them.<sup>87</sup> *Militarizing Marriage* demonstrates that African and colonial epistemologies are mutually constitutive.<sup>88</sup> These arguments echo historical concerns regarding the recuperation of African customs and traditions across the colonial divide. West African colonial soldiers' conjugal traditions portray that continuities accompanied the great ruptures once affiliated with the onset of colonialism. Scholars now understand that colonial rule could not destroy precolonial African traditions, nor alter them

beyond recognition, due to the limits imposed on evolutions in African traditions.<sup>89</sup> Tirailleurs sénégalais' marital traditions extended beyond the precolonial/colonial/postcolonial divides. Contemporary interests in the legacies of French colonialism influence how veterans and their households fit in collective memory and public history. Adding the former wives of Mamadou Lamine Drame or Vuti Chat to this history accounts for the gendered legacies of colonial militarism and requires us to think more broadly about the history of the tirailleurs sénégalais and the legacies of Africans' military service in empire.

#### MILITARIZING MARRIAGE: AN ORIENTATION

*Militarizing Marriage* is chronologically and geographically organized to take account of tirailleurs sénégalais' conjugal practices across eighty years of military service in French Empire. Collectively, the following chapters track the evolution of African soldiers' conjugal traditions throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. West African troops and their households heralded the onset of French colonialism and outlived its formal demise. As Myron Echenberg writes, "rather than being a caricature of colonialism, African soldiers were, perhaps more than any other groups, a mirror of colonialism and a reflection of its more basic contradictions."<sup>90</sup> By focusing on the French colonial military's treatment of African soldiers' conjugal partners and households, the gendered contradictions of colonialism come into fuller view. The women affiliated with tirailleurs sénégalais reveal how the universalism espoused by French Republican governments wavered at the intersection of gender, race, and colonial subject status. African military households result from legal exception and parallelism. The following chapters account for idiosyncratic themes salient to policy and practice specific to time and place in French Empire.

The governor of Senegal, Louis Faidherbe, inaugurated the tirailleurs sénégalais in 1857 at a time when Napoleon III's Second Empire dedicated more resources to spreading France's influence in Africa and Asia. The French Third Republic (1871–1940) used these troops to expand France's modern empire. This constitutional government inherited the universal principles of the French Revolution (liberty, equality, and fraternity), but did not extend these values to the new imperial populations of French Empire.<sup>91</sup> The contradictions inherent to Republican colonialism are at the foundation of the early

expression of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' conjugal traditions in nineteenth-century West Africa. Chapter 1 highlights the French colonial military's reliance on domestic slavery and coerced labor in France's conquest of inland West Africa during the 1880s and 1890s. The recruitment of *tirailleurs sénégalais* and soldiers' acquisition of female conjugal partners contravened a major goal of colonialism in West Africa—slave emancipation. In para- and postconflict settings, French military officials maintained an ambivalent stance toward the means through which these soldiers obtained conjugal partners, formed households, and improvised marital legitimacy. In the swirl of colonial militarization, women's vulnerability heightened and consensuality became moot. *Tirailleurs sénégalais*' conjugal traditions formed at the confluence of these trends, which served as the shifting foundation for military policies and practices concerning the legitimacy of *tirailleurs sénégalais*' households for decades to come.

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, West African military employees extended France's rule in Congo and Madagascar. Chapter 2 interrogates how geographically distant settings affected *tirailleurs sénégalais*' ability to establish and maintain conjugal households. Long-distance migration and military officials' perceptions of sociocultural similarity and difference affected African military households' marital legitimacy. In an era when the French metropolitan army discouraged the presence of civilian women in official military spaces, the colonial military funded the relocation of West African women and households to new frontiers of empire. The military also encouraged *tirailleurs sénégalais* to engage in conjugal relationships with Congolese or Madagascan women. Outside of West Africa, concerns around soldiers' conjugal and marital legitimacy increased. Military officials perceived African military households composed uniquely of West Africans as legitimate. In foreign lands, these households became more dependent on the military for their survival, welfare, and repatriation. In Congo and Madagascar, *tirailleurs sénégalais*' inter-African or socioculturally heterogeneous conjugal households inspired multiple stakeholders to contest their legitimacy. Many of these inter-African military households followed prenuptial practices typical to West African conquest. As these practices moved into African empire, observers described *tirailleurs sénégalais*' sexual and conjugal practices with a vocabulary related to sexual assault and female enslavement.

The French military deployed West African soldiers and their West African wives—*mesdames tirailleurs*—in Morocco from 1908 to 1918. Morocco was one of the final territories integrated into France’s overseas empire via military conquest. The debates surrounding the use of African military households in North Africa demonstrate that the French Third Republic believed in racial difference and hierarchy within empire. Chapter 3 examines how perceptions of racial difference influenced military officials to police boundaries between “North” African women and “sub-Saharan” African soldiers. They promoted *mesdames tirailleurs* as essential members of *vil-lages nègres*. These “Black Villages” were racialized, segregated, and surveilled quarters within French military encampments in Morocco.<sup>92</sup> French military officials justified the deployment of West African military households in Morocco with references to the *abid al-Bukhari*—a historical Moroccan military institution made up of dark-skinned Moroccan military families. The comparisons drawn between the *abid al-Bukhari* and the *tirailleurs sénégalais* balanced upon perceptions of their shared sub-Saharan African origins, slave ancestry, and martiality. The Moroccan campaign, despite its contradictions, convinced the French Ministries of the Colonies and War to permanently invest in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*—on the eve of the Great War.

Chapter 4 examines critical transformations in French West African soldiers’ marital traditions between 1914 and 1918. More than 170,000 West Africans mobilized in the war effort—conspicuously without their conjugal households. Instead, their wives remained in West Africa and dealt with new bureaucracies of wartime assistance. Citizenship status determined military wives’ access to the state’s resources. Senegal’s first black deputy to the French National Assembly, Blaise Diagne, introduced wartime legislation that guaranteed French citizenship to a coastal Senegalese demographic minority—*originaires*. *Originaires*’ wives and children were eligible to receive the same benefits as metropolitan French soldiers’ families, while the majority of West Africans remained colonial subjects, served in the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, and received fewer benefits. Soldiers’ citizenship/subject status and their polygynous practices challenged the French state’s extension of social welfare into the colonial military. French military officials examined and debated the similarities and discrepancies among customary, Muslim, and French marital practices. Ambiguities in marital policy and family allocations extended into the interwar period.

After the Great War, *tirailleurs sénégalais* served as occupying forces in North Africa, Madagascar, and France's newly acquired League of Nations mandate territories Syria and Lebanon. During the interwar period, *tirailleurs sénégalais* increasingly expected administrative assistance for their households at home and abroad. Chapter 5 examines evolutions in how military officials supported long-distance West African households and cross-colonial households. After 1918, the colonial military provided West African soldiers with a means to maintain households across long distances via separation indemnities, tax abatements, and other allocations. Cross-colonial households were interracial and made up of conjugal partners from different French territories who often possessed different politico-legal statuses. Imperial authorities debated jurisdiction and relevant marital customs for recognizing the legitimacy of these hyphenated military households. Evidence in this chapter demonstrates that the military found interracial military marriages irksome and that some cross-colonial households were more undesirable than others. In the aftermath of World War II, the military (in coordination with civilian government officials) used its control over oceanic travel, communication, and law to prevent mainland French women from joining their demobilizing conjugal partners in West Africa.

In stark contrast, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Vietnamese women and Afro-Vietnamese children relocated to West Africa during and after the French Indochina War (1945–54). Chapter 6 examines Afro-Vietnamese conjugal households in Southeast Asia and West Africa. These households experienced World War II, the Vichy regime, Japanese occupation, the French Fourth Republic, and the beginning of anticolonial war in rapid succession. Afro-Vietnamese couples and children provide a means to understand the articulation of gendered and racialized colonial power during wars of decolonization. In this chapter, the “peripheries” of French Empire demand that we rethink the operation of race, sexuality, and family outside of the colonizer/colonized binary. In Vietnam, *tirailleurs sénégalais*' conjugal traditions adapted to the French military precedent, in which military personnel believed that Vietnamese women were sexually available to them via casual, transactional, romantic, and conjugal relationships. The French military attempted to regulate African soldiers' sexual relationships with local women by sanctioning transactional sex and discouraging “clandestine” romantic relationships. Their efforts failed. The French Indochina War came home with

veterans, their Afro-Vietnamese children, and their Vietnamese brides. Once in West Africa, soldiers' extended families contested the incorporation of foreign war brides and interracial children into their communities—making their own arguments about conjugal legitimacy.

The epilogue appraises African military households' experiences in the final decades of the *tirailleurs sénégalais* and the legacies of this military institution in the twenty-first century. The French military introduced measures to professionalize the *tirailleurs sénégalais* in step with the restructuring of empire at the beginning of the French Fourth Republic in 1946 and the Fifth Republic in 1958. The French-Algerian War (1954–62) created the context for this constitutional transition, which altered the civil status of people residing in French Empire. In 1958, West African soldiers integrated into the French marine corps. In the same year, French Guinea became independent, which had great consequence for Guinean *tirailleurs sénégalais* serving France in Algeria. The life history of Guinean career soldier Koly Kourouma provides a harrowing tale of negotiating the decolonization of French West Africa. West African independence catalyzed discussions concerning the legal status of veterans and their benefits, which impacted West African widows and military households. After a half-century of political independence, the legacies of war and colonialism continue to affect veterans' households. West African veterans have become living symbols of the injustices and legacies of French colonialism, yet their families continue to look to postcolonial France for financial support.