2015 elections, and the predicament of the regime whose “primary organizing principle has become centralism … [posing] a continuous threat to the … Constitution” (p. 246). Among these threats, the author identifies the legislative and procedural gaps and mishaps that aggravated localized resentment that triggered ethnic rivalries and fueled anti-federalist sentiments (pp. 246–251). Part 4 (Chapters 11 and 12), sums up author’s conclusion that Ethiopia’s three-decades long federalist project is flawed but can be rectified by an opening up of the political space for pro-democracy dissenting voices (pp. 257–299). The author calls on the EPRDF to “end its seizure of the state … [and to] … build institutions with relative independence from any incumbent, responding to citizens needs rather than partisan politics” (p. 298).

Mulugeta Gebrehiwot Berhe sheds light on the multiple predicaments facing the drivers of the EPRDF’s hybrid state-building project caught between constitutionally mandated federalist procedures and entrenched centralist traditions of federalist aspirations and centralist strategies. This is an important book for policymakers and analysts seeking to understand background to the 2020–2021 inter-elite war that has pitted the post-1991 architects of an asymmetrical federalist state-building experiment against the proponents of traditional centralists.

RUTH IYOB
University of Missouri—St. Louis,

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In the context of French empire, the term mariage à la mode du pays traditionally applied to temporary sexual and domestic unions between European men and indigenous women in the colonies that the men conquered, ruled, and exploited. French military officials eventually came to apply this same term to the conjugal unions between colonized women and the West African soldiers they employed, known as tirailleurs sénégalais, denigrating and often mischaracterizing these partnerships in myriad ways. But as Sarah J. Zimmerman shows in this remarkable book, the term and many other aspects of these unions beg numerous questions that reveal a great deal about French colonialism, gender, sex, race, African family and social traditions, soldiering, and much more: What does “marriage” mean? What is a conjugal “style” or “manner” (mode), and how does it depend on location, or “country” or “region” (pays)? And, critically in imperial service that spanned from West, Central, and North Africa, to Madagascar, to Europe, to Southeast Asia over more than a century, to what pays does the term refer, and from which of several pays might legitimate participants hail? Moreover, in a context that begins in colonial territorial constructions, moves through the metropole, and ends in decolonized, newly-independent nation-states, what does pays even mean? By the end of this sophisticated, layered, deeply-researched, and ambitious study, readers will see that the answers to these
questions are complex and multi-faceted, but well-worth pursuing if one wants to recover the lived experience of women and men who negotiated the fraught circumstances of war and violence, empire and nation, sex and marriage.

*Militarizing Marriage* begins by situating developing conjugal traditions among the *tirailleur sénégalais* in the context of colonial conquest and the transformation of the institution of slavery in late nineteenth-century French West Africa. Soldiering was a way out of enslaved status for some men, and coerced or voluntary marriage to these men “emancipated” African women—not into the public sphere as it did for their husbands, but “into the private sphere or household” (p. 31). And yet, as Zimmerman traces the deployment of the *tirailleurs* in violent colonial conquest in Congo, Madagascar, and Morocco, one could easily characterize the activities of the “mesdames tirailleurs” (as the men’s conjugal partners were known) as soldiering, since these women and their households traveled on campaign as well. The French army deemed this familial presence essential to maintaining the soldiers’ morale and to prevent the troubles that sometimes erupted when the *tirailleurs* sought *mariage à la mode du pays* among the local population—though the men did this often enough as well. This was, of course, out of the question when West African men traveled to Europe to fight for France in the world wars. Concern to maintain white prestige and imperial power led French officials to limit contacts between African men and European women, but the same sorts of concerns led the army for the first time to prohibit soldiers from bringing their families on campaign, both in Europe and in other areas of the French empire. Soldiers and their families developed strategies for maintaining conjugal relationships at a distance, and the French state’s insistence on validating and privileging “legitimate” marriages as heteronormative and monogamous, within nuclear families (through policies on family allocations and pensions, for instance), pushed social and familial behavior further from indigenous African traditions. The book ends with an examination of Afro-Vietnamese families forged in the Indochinese war of decolonization, affective and kinship ties that posed complex challenges to both French official and African social expectations, and a consideration of the broader effects of decolonization, including West African participation in the Algerian War, on marriage and strategies of family survival. Zimmerman notes that the persistence of debates over pensions due to soldiers and their wives, and the continued collection of these pensions, testify powerfully to the durability and centrality of the conjugal choices and traditions developed by these women and men.

It is impossible to do real justice to a work as nuanced and comprehensive as this in a brief review. The author’s notable achievement is to have drawn deeply and widely from archival and oral sources to present a narrative in which the intimate stories of individual women and men come alive, while at the same time providing a complex analysis of broader political and social developments of critical importance to understanding the manifold and intertwined iterations and legacies of colonial, gendered, and militarized power.

RICHARD S. FOGARTY

*University at Albany, SUNY*