

Popular Resistance and Anticolonial Mobilization

The War Effort in French Guinea

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This chapter focuses on the Second World War and its impact on the French West African territory of Guinea (Figure 23.1), where the war effort and experiences of war inspired the anticolonial agitation that ultimately led to Guinea's independence in 1958. These events played out in the context of a divided France. Following Germany's invasion of France in May 1940 and its victory on the battlefield in June, three-fifths of France was occupied by the Nazis, while a collaborationist regime headquartered in Vichy controlled the rest. A substantial number of French citizens refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Vichy regime. Some resisted Nazi occupation in a broad-based underground movement; others swore allegiance to the Free French government-in-exile and continued to fight the Axis powers on the battlefield. Throughout the French empire, imperial subjects made enormous contributions to the French war effort serving both Vichy and the Free French. African populations played a critical role, contributing labor, resources, and lives. At the historic January 1944 Brazzaville Conference in the French Congo, Free French president General Charles de Gaulle stressed the importance of Africa in sustaining France during the war: "Up to the present, it has been largely an African war," he declared. "The absolute and relative importance of African resources, communications and contingents has become apparent in the harsh light of the theatres of operations."¹

¹ Quoted in Jean Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa: 1900-1945* (New York: Pica Press, 1971), 485. See also Charles de Gaulle, *The War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle: Unity, 1942-1944* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 208.

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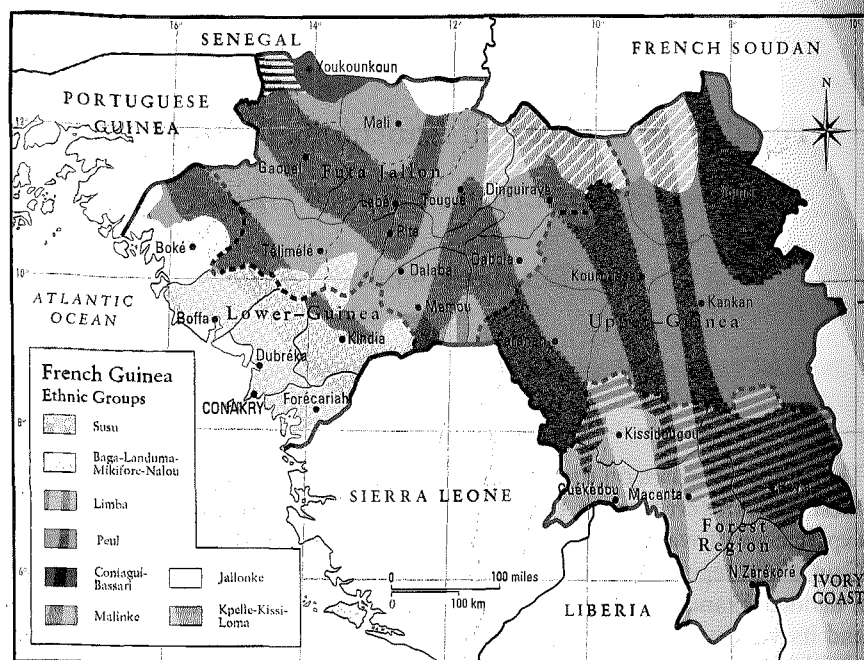


FIGURE 23.1. Map of French Guinea. Cartographer: Malcolm Swanston. Reprinted by permission from *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939–1958*, by Elizabeth Schmidt. Copyright 2005 by Elizabeth Schmidt. Published by Heinemann, a division of Reed Elsevier, Inc., Portsmouth NH. All rights reserved.

Although this claim was made more than a half century ago, there has been surprisingly little investigation of the contributions of African societies to the French war effort, the impact of the Second World War on African populations, and the implications of wartime experiences for post-war anticolonial agitation.² Military veterans have been an exception to this generalization. Since the 1960s, many scholars have argued that African soldiers were radicalized by their wartime experiences, were exposed to new

ideas, formed relatively egalitarian bonds with European soldiers and civilians, and witnessed the weaknesses of imperial powers. After the war, they demanded compensation for their sacrifices, which they translated into political, economic, and social terms. Some veterans' movements sought colonial reforms; others cast their lot with political parties that ultimately aspired to national independence.³ More recent scholarship has begun to focus on the African home front. Ruth Ginio has explored the economic impact of Vichy rule on African societies and the wartime protests of religious leaders and demobilized soldiers. Catherine Bogosian Ash has examined French Soudan's conscripted labor army (the second portion of the military contingent) and demonstrated how labor recruits invoked the language of rights and citizenship in the postwar period. Alexandra Jacobs has analyzed popular resistance to canton chiefs in Upper Volta, where rural constituents, often led by military veterans, protested wartime taxes, military recruitment, and labor demands. Nancy Lawler and I have drawn connections between wartime experiences on the home front and postwar anticolonial activities.⁴

important gap in the literature; however, it concentrates almost exclusively on the British colonies.

³ For British Africa, see Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 73–77; Okete J. E. Shiroya, “The Impact of World War II in Kenya: The role of ex-servicemen in Kenyan nationalism,” Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University (1968); Eugene P. A. Schleh, “The post-war careers of ex-servicemen in Ghana and Uganda,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 6 (1968), 203–20; G. O. Olusanya, “The role of ex-servicemen in Nigerian politics,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 6 (1968), 221–32; David Killingray, “Soldiers, ex-servicemen, and politics in the Gold Coast, 1939–50,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 21 (1983), 523–34; Adrienne M. Israel, “Measuring the war experience: Ghanaian soldiers in World War II,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 25 (1987), 159–68; Adrienne M. Israel, “Ex-servicemen at the crossroads: Protest and politics in post-war Ghana,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30 (1992), 359–68; Geoffrey I. Nwaka, “Rebellion in Umuahia, 1950–1951: Ex-servicemen and anti-Colonial protest in eastern Nigeria,” *Transafrican Journal of History*, 16 (1987), 47–62; Timothy H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999); and David Killingray with Martin Plaut, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2010). For French Africa, see Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1991); Nancy Ellen Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune: Ivoirien Tirailleurs of World War II* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992); and Gregory Mann, *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴ Ruth Ginio, *French Colonialism Unmasked: The Vichy Years in French West Africa* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Catherine Mornane Bogosian, “Forced labor, resistance and memory: The deuxième portion in the French Soudan, 1926–1950,” PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania (2002), 189–218, and Catherine Bogosian Ash, Chapter 6, this volume; Alexandra Maria Jacobs, “La question des chefs: Canton chiefs, contested authority, and rebellion in colonial Upper Volta, 1934–1946,” B.A. honors thesis, Harvard University (2008); Nancy Lawler, “Reform and repression under the Free French: Economic and political transformation in the Côte d’Ivoire, 1942–45,” *Africa*, 60 (1990), 88–110; and Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist*

² In the war's aftermath, de Gaulle downplayed Africa's critical role in the war effort, convinced that France needed to retain its empire to resume its great power status. His three-volume war memoirs make only passing reference to the presence of sub-Saharan African troops in the war theaters. Their role in the defense and liberation of France and the role of the African home front are not mentioned. See Charles de Gaulle, *War Memoirs: The Call to Honour, 1940–1942* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), 106–107, 111, 132, 136; *The War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle: Unity, 1942–1944* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 35, 110–112, 164, 205–206, 208, 277, 322; *The War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle: Salvation, 1944–1946* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 32, 36, 38. An exception to the scholarly neglect of the African home front is David Killingray and Richard Rathbone's edited collection, *Africa and the Second World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986). Focusing on military conscription, forced labor, and crop requisitions, this collection fills an

Focusing on Guinea, one of eight French West African territories, this chapter investigates the impact of the war effort on the communities the soldiers left behind. It examines the effects of military conscription, the emergence of widespread resistance to state demands, and the harnessing of local discontent to a broad-based anticolonial movement in the postwar period. In the colonies, mobilization for the war effort was not voluntary. The colonial state imposed stringent demands on the indigenous populations, hitting rural populations especially hard. The wartime burden of military conscription, forced labor, and crop requisitions, compounded by extreme shortages and inflation, generated immense popular hostility toward the colonial state. Rural cultivators, finding it increasingly difficult to provide for their families, resisted the onerous labor and crop exactions. Forced laborers, embittered by poor pay and working conditions, deserted their work sites in droves. Whole villages absconded across territorial boundaries to avoid military and labor recruiters. Military veterans, who returned home with a new sense of confidence and entitlement, took the lead in articulating rural grievances. This chapter demonstrates the ways in which wartime exactions, imposed by government-appointed chiefs, sparked widespread resistance, laying the groundwork for rural rejection of chiefly authority in the postwar period and, by extension, and colonial rule more generally.

This case study makes three contributions toward a new understanding of Africa and the Second World War. First, it reperiodizes the war. In French West Africa (FWA), the war began in 1939, but it did not end in 1945. It continued for another decade, as labor conscripts and military veterans agitated for rights, wages, and benefits resulting from their wartime services. The war finally ended in 1955, when veterans' demands had largely been accommodated. By that time, however, anticolonial protests that began during the war had taken on a life of their own, as new demands and grievances propelled them onward. Moreover, the phases of the war differed for Africans and Europeans. For Africans, the significant events occurred in 1939, when the war effort was launched and intensified demands were made for military and labor conscripts and requisitioned crops; 1940, when African soldiers were demobilized after the fall of France; 1942, when the colonial administration in FWA transferred its allegiance from Vichy to the Free French, and even greater burdens were imposed on the local populations; 1944, when African soldiers were again demobilized following the liberation of France; 1950, when the Equality Law was passed, mandating an unprecedented degree of parity in the treatment of French and African veterans, and the conscripted labor army was officially abolished; and 1955, when veterans' demands were finally met.

Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005). For the home front in British colonies, see John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 436-484; and Ashley Jackson, *Botswana, 1939-1945: An African Country at War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 121-213.

Second, this study reevaluates the privileging of West African veterans as the instigators of postwar anticolonial protests. Clearly, the veterans' role in political agitation was significant in some colonies; however, returning soldiers also gained special prominence as a result of their greater visibility and emotional appeal.⁵ They were war heroes who had given their blood for France, and their cause was quickly embraced by African politicians. They engaged in highly visible urban protests that captured the attention of the public and the administration. They had a public voice and left records in the form of letters, newspaper articles, and testimonies to government commissions. Their stories have been more accessible than those of other participants in anticolonial movements and, as a result, have carried greater weight. In postwar Guinea, military veterans were important actors on the home front. They often assumed leadership roles, but they did not "educate" the rural populace or instigate rural resistance. Rather they took the lead in ongoing protests against the chiefs and the burdens imposed by the war effort. This chapter highlights the roles of the "silent" people on the home front, whose protests during the war laid the groundwork for postwar anticolonial activities.

Third, this study reperiodizes the "postwar" nationalist movements. It argues that the anticolonial agitation from which the independence movements emerged was not a postwar phenomenon. Rather, labor unrest and resistance to the chiefs, who enforced colonial demands for taxes, labor, and military recruits, all began during the war.

Military Conscription

Military conscription and the wartime experiences of African soldiers were important factors in the evolution of Guinea's postwar anticolonial

⁵ Although scholars generally agree that West African veterans were key players in postwar agitation for social and economic rights, considerable debate surrounds their role in nationalist movements. Olusanya and Killingray argue that veterans, as an identifiable group, did not play a significant role in postwar Nigerian or Gold Coast politics, despite their early protests concerning postwar conditions. Israel, in contrast, contends that Gold Coast ex-servicemen played important roles in postwar anticolonial protests, which ignited nationalist mobilization. Killingray and Plaut maintain that most returning British African veterans, though angered by their poor treatment, were primarily concerned with claiming a better place in colonial society. It was African intellectuals, rather than the military rank-and-file, who attempted to harness soldiers' grievances to the nationalist cause. Lawler, in contrast, describes Ivory Coast veterans joining the Ivorian branch of the RDA in large numbers, while Echenberg shows how the loyalties of French West African veterans changed as the French government strove to win their allegiance. In the French Soudan, Mann argues, African veterans were courted by the RDA, and most were won over by government efforts to meet their demands. Olusanya, "Role of ex-servicemen in Nigerian politics"; Killingray, "Soldiers, ex-servicemen, and politics in the Gold Coast"; Israel, "Ex-servicemen at the crossroads"; Killingray and Plaut, *Fighting for Britain*, 203-35; Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune*, 203-30; Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 146-63; Mann, *Native Sons*, 116-45.

movement. Since the passage of the Conscription Law of 1919, all male subjects of the French empire were obliged to serve three years of military service. Every year from January to March, a mobile draft board moved through each of Guinea's nineteen administrative circles, inspecting and registering recruits. During the Second World War, an estimated 18,000 to 20,000 Guinean men from a population of some two million were forcibly recruited into the French armed forces, while another 38,153 were assigned to the second portion of the military contingent, building and maintaining railroads, airfields, ports, and roads. Under threat of sanctions, canton chiefs were required to provide the stipulated number of conscripts.⁶

Taking their place among hundreds of thousands of recruits from across the empire, French West African soldiers (Tirailleurs Sénégalais) played a major role in the French armed forces. Some 250,000 to 350,000 were drafted during the Second World War, and an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 died. They served France before its fall in 1940 and subsequently fought for both Vichy and the Free French. They were engaged in operations in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, and the vast majority served in the infantry. Although the French High Command denied that African troops were put at greater risk to preserve French lives, Africans were often on the front lines and covered the retreat of French soldiers. In 1940, Africans constituted nearly 9 percent of the French army serving in France. In the spring of that year, the forces that attempted to hold the line against the German onslaught included large numbers of French West African troops in five colonial infantry divisions. In the final days of May, French West African troops protected the retreating French and British forces as they made their way to the beaches of Dunkirk for evacuation to Britain. Other Tirailleurs fought on in central France, along the Loire River, and in Lyon. In late June, the Battle of France ended with a French surrender. At least 3,000 French West African soldiers were executed by Germans after their capture; another 48,000 were taken prisoner, including 9,000 from Guinea. Conditions in the prison camps were treacherous, and thousands of African prisoners of war died in captivity. Some were massacred in the camps. Others died of hunger, malnutrition, cold, and disease, especially tuberculosis, pneumonia,

and other pulmonary illnesses. Thousands of other African soldiers were repatriated. These veterans were among the first to experience, and protest, disparate and discriminatory treatment.⁷

In late 1940, disturbances broke out among military veterans in Kankan and Kindia in Guinea, and in other French West African territories. These incidents foreshadowed others that would follow French liberation, most notably the Thiaroye uprising of December 1944, in which 1,280 demobilized soldiers were harshly repressed by colonial soldiers and police. In the 1940 Kindia case, African soldiers who were not imprisoned after the fall of France were scheduled for repatriation. Before leaving the European mainland, they were informed that they would receive their back pay in metropolitan francs in Dakar as well as any accrued savings and demobilization bonuses. In Dakar, however, Guinean soldiers were told that their money awaited them in Conakry. In Guinea's capital, the governor promised that they would be paid by the circle commandants in their home districts. Not surprisingly, when the men reached the Kindia barracks, a few hours inland from Conakry, they were on edge. When the Kindia circle commandant also failed to pay them, hundreds of angry soldiers attacked him and overran the town. Other colonial troops, as well as civilian police, were called in to put down the disturbance. One Tirailleur died, another was wounded, and 335 were arrested. Thirty-one received prison sentences of five to twenty years "for 'outrages' against a superior officer."⁸

Despite the demobilization of 1940, the war was not over for African soldiers. After the French defeat, General de Gaulle rallied the Free French, assembled an army, and continued the struggle. While French Equatorial Africa (FEA) joined the Free French, French West Africa remained under Vichy authority until the end of 1942, when it switched sides. Military conscription continued under both regimes, although it was significantly heavier under the Free French. From the fall of France in June 1940 until

⁶ Rapport politique annuel, 1941, 2G41/21; Rapport politique annuel, 1942, 2G42/22; Rapport politique annuel, 1943, 2G43/19; Rapport sur le travail et la main d'œuvre de la Guinée Française pendant l'année 1943, Conakry, July 24, 1944, #994/IT, 2G43/25; Rapport sur le travail et la main d'œuvre de la Guinée française pendant l'année 1944, Conakry, 2G44/30; Rapport politique annuel, 1947, 2G47/22; Rapport général d'activité 1947-1950, présenté par Mamadou Madéira Kéïta, secrétaire général du PDG au premier congrès territorial du Parti Démocratique de Guinée (section Guinéenne du Rassemblement Démocratique Africain), Conakry, October 15-18, 1950, #271/APA, 17G573, Archives Nationales du Sénégal (hereafter ANS), Dakar; Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 50-54, 83-84; Sidiki Kobélé Kéïta, *Le P.D.G.: Artisan de l'indépendance nationale en Guinée (1947-1958)* (Conakry: INRDG, Bibliothèque Nationale, 1978), vol. 1, 96.

⁷ Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune*, 28-29, 75-81, 88, 93-114, 118; Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 88, 96, 97, 193 n. 40; Myron Echenberg, "'Morts pour la France': The African soldier in France during the Second World War," *Journal of African History*, 26 (1985), 364-65, 364 n. 6, 367-72; Alistair Horne, *To Lose a Battle: France 1940* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969), 549, 551, 554, 557; Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17-60; and Scheck, Chapter 22, in this volume. Some scholars using French archival materials contend that approximately half of all African prisoners of war died in captivity. Scheck, who has supplemented these sources with German ones, argues that 5% of French colonial prisoners, including Africans, died in the camps. Raffael Scheck, "French Colonial Soldiers in German Prisoner-of-War Camps (1940-1945)," *French History*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2010): 420-46.

⁸ Myron J. Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye: The Senegalese soldiers' uprising of 1944," in Peter C. W. Gutkind, Robin Cohen, and Jean Copans (eds.), *African Labor History* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1978), 112-13; Ginio, *French Colonialism Unmasked*, 126; Mann, *Native Sons*, 109, 114-15.

its liberation in the summer of 1944, French West and Equatorial African soldiers constituted the most important elements of the Free French forces. Tirailleurs Sénégalais helped to defeat Italian and German troops in North Africa from 1940 to 1943. They joined Allied forces in the invasion of Italy in the summer of 1943 and southern France in August 1944. The 20,000 African soldiers who participated in the landings in southern France constituted 20 percent of Free France's First Army. In the fall of 1944, Tirailleurs helped to liberate Toulon, Marseilles, the Rhone River valley, and Lyon.⁹

By the end of 1944, France had been freed from German occupation. While French soldiers celebrated with their countrymen, tens of thousands of African troops, including recently freed prisoners of war, were herded into prison-like camps in central and southern France. Food, shelter, and clothing were miserably inadequate, and the situation was worsened by the confiscation of uniforms. Whereas French soldiers were given back pay and discharged, African soldiers waited for months in transit camps, where they were denied their wages and subjected to tough military discipline. According to Myron Echenberg, forced labor was routine, with former prisoners exchanging German "stalags for French military camps; hard labor in the German war industry for construction work under French military supervision." Adhering to the stipulations of the 1929 Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war, the Germans had paid African workers minimal wages, but the French authorities continued to deny them the back pay owed for the period of their imprisonment.¹⁰

As in 1940, miserable conditions and discriminatory treatment led to a number of incidents, fifteen of which have been recorded. Grievances focused on inadequate food, clothing, and shelter, and failure to receive back pay, demobilization premiums, and prisoner of war hardship bonuses similar to those of their French counterparts. Reports of unrest aboard Africa-bound troop ships deeply concerned French authorities. To avoid a large concentration of indignant soldiers in Dakar, Free French Commissioner for the Colonies René Plevin ordered the French West African governor-general to repatriate the returning troops as quickly as possible, warning that "the [former] prisoners of war may be a factor in stirring up discontent among the people."¹¹

⁹ Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune*, 93, 149, 154-55, 168, 171-78; de Gaulle, *War Memoirs*, vol. 1: 83-84, 88-94; vol. 2: 67, 110-11, 152, 322-23; vol. 3: 111-13, 36, 151-52; Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 87-88, 98; Echenberg, "Morts pour la France," 364, 374; Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism*, 469.

¹⁰ Quote from Echenberg, "Tragedy at Thiaroye," 113-14. See also Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 97-99; Echenberg, "Morts pour la France," 372-74; Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune*, 104, 108, 193-94, 196.

¹¹ Quoted in Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune*, 194.

Indeed, the wartime experiences of the Tirailleurs Sénégalais had a strong impact on the veterans' later political development.¹² Many had their first taste of integration when African and metropolitan companies were combined to form Régiments d'Infanterie Coloniale Mixtes Sénégalais. African soldiers had lived and fought side by side with Frenchmen, experiencing a semblance of equality in combat that was unthinkable at home. Their experience with French civilians had further leveling effects. Accustomed to a highly stratified and segregated colonial society, Africans found that in the metropole, French people were generally hospitable and welcoming. They provided African soldiers with food, clothing, and entertainment and invited them into their homes. African soldiers drank and conversed with Frenchmen in local cafes. Some even found French girlfriends and wives. Many African soldiers believed they had fought more courageously than their French counterparts, and the magnitude of their sacrifices inspired many of their postwar demands for official recognition and just compensation. Despite their sacrifices, African soldiers suffered from degrading and discriminatory treatment on their return home, underscoring the point that while they had fought to liberate France, they themselves were not free. Moreover, having witnessed French defeat, they had learned that the imperial power was indeed vulnerable. These lessons had important ramifications for their subsequent involvement in the postwar anticolonial movement.

Crop Requisitions

Wartime military recruitment had a major impact on life in the rural areas, as well as on the men conscripted from the countryside. The draft removed large numbers of able-bodied young men from the rural areas, seriously affecting economic production. Thousands of conscripts died. Many who returned were severely disabled. Others came home with infectious pulmonary ailments or venereal disease. In conjunction with military conscription, African civilians were subjected to a harsh system of forced labor, working for a united France until its defeat in June 1940, for the Vichy government through November 1942, and for the Free French until the war's official end in 1945. Under all three regimes, civilians were compelled to collect or cultivate crops considered crucial to the war effort. If state-imposed quotas were not met, chiefs were sanctioned with dismissal, imprisonment, or even the abolition of their cantons. As a result, chiefs exerted extreme pressure on their subjects, forcing them to comply with government demands. Providing for the urban populations of Guinea and France as well as the military, men and women in the countryside were forced to intensify their agricultural production. They were taxed in rice, millet, fonio, and maize, as well as

¹² The following discussion summarizes the findings of Echenberg, Lawler, and Mann.

beef, potatoes, fruits, vegetables, honey, pepper, coffee, and tobacco. They furnished wild rubber, wax, cotton, sisal, and indigo, as well as vast quantities of oil-producing plants for fuel, lubricants for military and industrial use, cooking, and soap production.¹³

French West Africa's shift in allegiance from Vichy to the Free French in late 1942 brought no relief. To meet the needs of the growing war effort, the Free French governor-general of FWA called for the "intensification of production of vegetable oils, rubber and all products useful for the war."¹⁴ Under Free French authority, quotas for rubber, food crops, and military and civilian labor increased dramatically. Rubber production in Guinea grew from 944 tons in 1942 to 1,323 tons in 1943. Likewise, the production of oil-bearing palm kernels increased from 7,131 tons in 1942 to 17,000 tons in 1943. Rice production rose from 2,000 tons in 1942 to 13,474 tons in 1943. The same year, Guinea shipped 200 tons of sisal for the manufacture of rope and sacks to the Allies. If the desired products were unavailable locally, rural dwellers were forced to meet their quotas with overpriced goods purchased on the black market. In 1941, under Vichy authority, Kissidougou circle furnished nine tons of rubber to the state, most of it purchased outside the circle. The residents of Dialakoro canton rendered 566 kilos of rubber, 476 kilos of which had been purchased elsewhere. Similarly, the people of Tinki canton were forced to buy 345 of 360 kilos of rubber that were delivered to the government.¹⁵ In 1943, under the Free French, Jacques Richard-Molard wrote,

One *cercle* is required to produce so many tons of liana rubber, even though there is no liana in their territory. The native is therefore forced to travel on foot, sometimes very far, to buy rubber elsewhere, regardless of cost, in order to escape the hand of "justice." He must sell this to the commandant at the official price, which is many times lower than the purchase price. Another *cercle* is

taxed in honey. None is produced there. The commandant is punished for telegraphing his government: "AGREE TO HONEY. STOP. SEND BEES."¹⁶

Forced to abandon their own fields to produce commodities for the state, rural people suffered nutritional deficits. Food rationing was introduced, and in some regions, famine occurred. During the first year of Free French rule, nearly all the rice produced in Guinea was designated for export. Despite the local shortage of beef, 8,400 head of cattle were exported to Sierra Leone for consumption by Allied soldiers and civilians working in the port of Freetown. Less labor intensive – and less nutritious – crops were consumed locally, while the more desirable crops were requisitioned for the war effort.¹⁷

Forced Labor

Mandatory crop production was supplemented by other forms of forced labor. With consumer goods in short supply, Africans had little incentive to volunteer for wage labor. Faced with a growing labor crisis in both the public and private sectors, the colonial administration resorted to compulsion. Once again, chiefs were expected to provide the requisite number of "volunteers." During the war years, tens of thousands of able-bodied men and women were taken from their homes and forced to work as the state saw fit. During the last year of Vichy rule (1942), Kouroussa circle provided "490 labourers for the Conakry-Niger railway line (tree-felling at Nono and Tamba); 80 labourers for the Baro plantation (Kankan circle); 80 labourers for the Delsol plantation; 15 labourers for the African Banana plantation; 40 labourers for the Linkeny banana plantations; 200 labourers for public works at Kankan; 100 labourers for charcoal burning at Conakry; 100 labourers for road-repair work – making a total of 1,105."¹⁸

During the first year of the Free French regime (1943), more than 20,000 Guineans were compelled to engage in forced labor on behalf of European interests. Men were forced to cut and haul wood to fuel the Conakry-Niger railway. Men and women built roads, labored on European-owned coffee and banana plantations, and toiled in the fields of colonial officials, while tens of thousands of Guinean men were sent to work in the peanut fields of Senegal. Thousands of men were substituted for motorized vehicles when severe shortages of coal and gasoline resulted in the reintroduction

¹³ Rapport politique annuel, 1941, 2G41/21; Rapport politique annuel, 1942, 2G42/22; Rapport politique Annuel, 1943, 2G43/19; Rapport politique annuel, 1947, 2G47/22; Rapport général d'activité 1947-1950, PDG, October 15-18, 1950, 17G573, ANS, Dakar; Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 84, 88; Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *French West Africa* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 227, 314, 316, 386, 388, 390; Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 159; Jacques Richard-Molard, *Afrique Occidentale Française* (Paris: Éditions Berger-Levrault, 1952), 65-168; Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism*, 462, 477-79, 481-82; Jean Suret-Canale, "La fin de la chefferie en Guinée," *Journal of African History*, 7 (1966), 472-75.

¹⁴ FWA Governor-General Pierre Cournarie, quoted in Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, 159.

¹⁵ Rapport politique annuel, 1943, 2G43/19, ANS, Dakar; Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism*, 476, 480; Suret-Canale, "Fin de la chefferie en Guinée," 472-73; Kéita, *P.D.G.*, vol. 1, 144-45; Richard-Molard, *Afrique Occidentale Française*, 166; Lawler, *Soldiers of Misfortune*, 207; Thompson and Adloff, *French West Africa*, 29.

¹⁶ Quoted in Ruth Schachter Morgenthau, *Political Parties in French-Speaking West Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 9.

¹⁷ Rapport politique annuel, 1941, 2G41/21; Rapport politique annuel, 1943, 2G43/19; Rapport sur le Travail... 1944, 2G44/30; Rapport sur le Travail... 1945, 2G45/21, ANS, Dakar. For Freetown's role in the war, see Howard, Chapter 10, this volume.

¹⁸ Kouroussa Archives, Political Reports, August 25, 1942, quoted in Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism in Tropical Africa*, 472.

of head portage. The amount of labor needed to transport export goods was enormous. For instance, 600 workers had to walk for twelve days to transport one ton of rice to a railway station 300 kilometers from their home.¹⁹

Taxed in food, which depleted their own reserves, and labor, which hindered their own productivity, the Guinean population was also required to purchase "voluntary subscriptions" to support the war effort. In 1943, these subscriptions were valued at nearly one hundred million francs. There was little pretense that the subscriptions were freely given. Chiefs pressed their subjects to contribute in cash and kind, and in official reports, such "donations" were grouped with taxes, forced labor, and the obligatory provision of foodstuffs.²⁰

Wartime Resistance to Colonial Institutions

Active opposition to the colonial state began during the war. Individual workers resisted intolerable working conditions – and the principle of forced labor – by deserting their workplaces and returning home. In 1943, the inspector of labor reported massive desertions from European-owned plantations in Lower Guinea as a result of low wages and inadequate rations. Woodcutters on the Conakry-Niger railway took advantage of their relative isolation and lax supervision to abandon their work sites. Official documents reported the widespread exodus of rural populations, as whole villages absconded across territorial boundaries to avoid taxes, compulsory rubber collection, forced labor, and military recruitment. Lower Guinea residents fled into Portuguese territory to avoid furnishing rice and rubber. In the forest region, the population evaded military recruiters by crossing the border into Liberia. In 1943, one Futa Jallon subdivision lost more than 8,000 inhabitants to Senegal. By the end of the war, approximately one-tenth of the population of the Upper Guinea subdivision of Faranah had fled. Some 7,000 to 8,000 people had migrated from N'Zérékoré circle in the forest region to Liberia, depopulating all of the frontier cantons. In Forécariah circle (Lower Guinea), 5,000 to 6,000 people abandoned their homes between 1941 and 1946.²¹

¹⁹ Rapport politique annuel, 1941, 2G41/21; Rapport politique annuel, 1942, 2G42/22; Rapport politique annuel, 1943, 2G43/19; Rapport sur le travail... 1943, 2G43/25; Rapport de tournée effectuée du 27 janvier au 9 février par M. Chopin, Administrateur des Colonies, Inspecteur du Travail, dans les cercles de Conakry-Kindia-Forécariah, April 2, 1943, 2G43/25; Rapport sur le travail... 1944, 2G44/30; Rapport sur le travail... 1945, 2G45/21; Rapport sur la main d'oeuvre en Guinée, July 13, 1946, 2G46/50, ANS, Dakar.

²⁰ Rapport politique annuel, 1943, 2G43/19, ANS, Dakar; Rapport politique annuel, 1948, Guinée française, cercle de Gaoual, subdivision centrale, 1E38, Archives de Guinée (hereafter AG), Conakry; Kéita, P.D.G., vol. 1, 144; Suret-Canale, "Fin de la chefferie," 474–75; Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism*, 483–84, 490 n. 49.

²¹ Rapport politique annuel, 1941, 2G41/21; Rapport politique annuel, 1942, 2G42/22; Rapport politique annuel, 1943, 2G43/19; Rapport de tournée... April 2, 1943, 2G43/25;

Colonial authorities worried that local disenchantment might escalate into generalized political discontent. As the war drew to a close, the fear of anticolonial agitation in the countryside increasingly trumped other government concerns. The intensified hardships of the war effort had led to a crisis in chiefly authority. Although rural populations had long resented the chiefs for their role in colonial administration, the war effort brought matters to a head. Since state demands for labor and commodities were enforced by the chiefs, the people held them responsible for their plight. During the war, rural dwellers throughout the territory engaged in widespread resistance to wartime exactions. They refused to pay taxes, perform unpaid labor, and provide crops on demand. Rather than meet their quotas, they sold their crops on the black market and smuggled them into other territories. After the war, rural resistance continued. This time, however, it occurred within the context of the political ferment that gave rise to the anticolonial nationalist movement.²²

During the first postwar decade, the political scene in Guinea was dominated by the Guinean branch of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), an interterritorial alliance of political parties with affiliates in most of the fourteen territories of FWA, FEA, and the United Nations trusts of Togo and Cameroon. The RDA's success in Guinea was largely due to its focus on groups that had begun to mobilize themselves during the war, particularly military veterans, agricultural producers (both male and female), and workers.²³ The RDA initially captured the loyalty of many veterans by championing their claims; however, the French state battled for the veterans' allegiance and gradually met their demands. By the mid-1950s, African veterans had largely reconciled with the colonial regime and withdrawn from the political scene. When independence came in 1958, military veterans were no longer a significant political force within the RDA.

Military Veterans

Military veterans, who were largely of rural background, were among the first Guineans to join the RDA. They often took the lead in postwar

Rapport sur le travail... 1943, 2G43/25; Rapport sur la main d'oeuvre en Guinée, July 13, 1946, 2G46/50; Rapport annuel du travail, 1946, Conakry, February 15, 1947, #66/IT.GV, 2G46/50; Rapport politique annuel, 1946, #284/APA, 2G46/22; Rapport politique annuel, 1947, 2G47/22, ANS, Dakar.

²² Rapport politique annuel, 1941, 2G41/21; Rapport politique annuel, 1946, 2G46/22; *Revues trimestrielles des événements*, 1er trimestre 1947, June 17, 1947, #143 APA, 2G47/121, Exposé sommaire de la situation politique de l'Afrique occidentale française et du Togo au 30 mai 1945, June 26, 1945, 2G45/105; Situation politique de l'AOF... mois de février 1945, 2G45/105, ANS, Dakar; interview with Léon Maka, Conakry, February 20, 1991.

²³ Urban women, who were central to postwar political movements, are not considered in this chapter.

agitation against colonial institutions.²⁴ Although they had long served as the backbone of the colonial administration, African soldiers were politicized by their wartime experiences, as discussed earlier. Paying heed to the French rhetoric of universalism imbibed during their wartime service, and campaigning under the banner "Equal sacrifices = Equal rights," they demanded pay and benefits equal to those of metropolitan soldiers.²⁵ As one colonial administrator observed, "The African military veterans continue their efforts to benefit from the same rights as metropolitan military veterans. This question, which is taking long to be resolved, especially in that which concerns the payment of different pensions to Africans according to their origin, is creating a malaise in this milieu."²⁶ According to a police informant in Conakry, Guinean veterans decried "the oblivion in which the military veterans of Guinea find themselves (lack of employment, negligence of the responsible authorities concerning payment of disability and retirement pensions, the granting of decorations and awards, etc.)."²⁷ Police in Kankan noted that former Tirailleurs were making "energetic demands concerning their pension arrears."²⁸ The N'Zérékoré circle commandant worried about the continued loyalty of a large group of military veterans in his area who "complain, and for good reason, [about] the incredible delays in the regularization of their pensions."²⁹

As long as the parity issue was not resolved, there was the possibility of serious unrest. Returning veterans constituted an influential group within the French West African federation. Five years after the war's end, there were some 16,222 Second World War veterans in Guinea alone. Military veterans were among the few Africans accorded the vote in the postwar political order, and they formed a significant proportion of the African electorate. While some former soldiers migrated to the urban areas and became players in the regional and ethnic associations that formed the nucleus of postwar political parties, the vast majority returned to their rural villages, where they quickly began to challenge local authority structures.³⁰

Anxious to move beyond its urban base, the RDA championed veterans' demands in the political arena and followed their lead in the countryside.

Veterans' grievances provided fertile ground for political organizing. The soldiers' wartime sacrifices – and the consequent debt owed by France – figured heavily in the party's postwar demands. Building upon preexisting discontent, the RDA called for equality of rights, wages, pensions, and other benefits for all servicemen, no matter what their race, civil status, or national origin. In the overseas territories and in metropolitan France, the RDA rapidly assumed the role of spokesman for the veterans' cause. French army intelligence noted that throughout the French West African federation, veterans were "profoundly influenced" by the RDA and were joining the party in large numbers. In Guinea, veterans were represented on the executives of nearly all local RDA committees, and there was substantial overlap in the membership of RDA and veterans' associations.³¹

The RDA also brought international attention to veterans' grievances. Their claims were frequently discussed in the columns of *Réveil*, the organ of the interterritorial RDA. Its May 13, 1948, issue reprinted a resolution presented in the Assembly of the French Union by RDA councilors, French Communists, and their allies. Recounting the veterans' continuing struggle for equal rights, the resolution urged the government "to put an end to the shocking inequalities existing between the pensions paid to military veterans of metropolitan origin and those paid to [veterans] from the Overseas Territories."³² In April 1949, RDA deputy from Niger Hamani Diori introduced an amendment in the French National Assembly to guarantee pension equality for all military veterans. Two months later, RDA deputies in the National Assembly proposed a "unified statute" for all soldiers and veterans serving France that would ensure equality for all military veterans in wages, pensions, loans, and all other monetary matters. Although both proposals were defeated, they helped to establish the RDA's reputation as an advocate for veterans' rights.³³

In Guinea, the RDA's focus on veterans' affairs increased the organization's popularity in all parts of the territory. In July 1947, the police reported that large numbers of veterans were joining the Kindia RDA subsection in Lower Guinea.³⁴ In Kankan (Upper Guinea), 300 military veterans

²⁴ For further discussion of military veterans' political activities in the postwar period, see Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses*, chapter 2.

²⁵ Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 104. See also Situation politique de l'AOF... mois de janvier 1945, 2G45/105, ANS, Dakar; Renseignements, situation des anciens combattants, commissariat de police, Kankan, May 22, 1950, #518/PS/I, 1E42, AG, Conakry. For labor's embrace of French universalism, see Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, 178, 184, 290.

²⁶ Gouverneur du Sénégal, Rapport politique, 4ème trimestre, 1949, 21G101, ANS, Dakar.

²⁷ Renseignements, March 12, 1947, #177/C/PS, 2Z5, 504/2, AG, Conakry.

²⁸ Rapport mensuel, mois de mars 1950, commissariat de police, Kankan, 1E42, AG, Conakry.

²⁹ Rapport politique annuel, 1949, cercle de N'Zérékoré, 1E39, AG, Conakry.

³⁰ Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 140, 145, 149, 128, 155; Morgenthau, *Political Parties*, 55–56, 401; Thompson and Adloff, *French West Africa*, 58–60.

³¹ Quoted in Renseignements objet: groupements politiques, January 13, 1948, Services de Police, Kissidougou, 17G573; Renseignements A/S réunion publique organisée à Kindia le 1er février par le R.D.A., February 2, 1948, #159/55 C, 17G573; Renseignements de Kankan, A/S passage Léon Maka, militant R.D.A., October 13, 1949, #2048, C/PS/I, 17G573; Rapport politique annuel, 1955, #281/APA, 2G55/152, ANS, Dakar. See also, Renseignements A/S réunion publique organisée à Kindia, le 6 Avril 1947 par le R.D.A., ca. April 7, 1947, #320/C, 5B43; Renseignements, March 3, 1947, 2Z5, 504/2, AG, Conakry; Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 143, 151–53, 157–58; Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses*, chapter 2.

³² "Justice aux anciens combattants," *Réveil*, May 13, 1948.

³³ Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 152.

³⁴ Renseignements A/S section R.D.A. Kindia, July 1, 1947, 504 A. #575 G, 17G573, ANS, Dakar.

requested RDA membership cards when RDA militant Léon Maka toured the area in October 1949.³⁵ In the Futa Jallon, the RDA sought members at the Labé air field and used veterans' organizations as a launching pad for its recruitment drives.³⁶ The military police in N'Zérékoré reported that military pensions were an important theme in RDA election campaigns. In preparation for the March 1952 Territorial Assembly elections, the RDA had rallied military veterans under the banner, "Equality of military pension rates for Europeans and Africans." The veterans who supported the RDA had once been the epitome of loyalty to France and its institutions, the military police lamented, adding: "If one considers that these same servicemen, in years gone by, formed the reinforcements of the canton and village chieftaincies, it is to fear that in the days to come, the latter will meet with certain difficulties in the exercise of their functions."³⁷

Challenging the Chiefs: Military Veterans

Indeed, in the rural areas, military veterans led popular challenges to the chiefs, who had enforced the government's war effort, threatening the very basis of colonial authority in the countryside. They rapidly emerged as a self-styled elite whose worldly experience, access to cash income and consumer goods, and command of the French language gave them a new status. Although many were the descendants of slaves and other low-status groups, they aspired to leadership positions and "big man" stature previously denied to them. They rapidly entered into fierce competition with the traditional aristocracy. Some sought appointments in place of chiefs they deemed corrupt, abusive, or ineffectual.³⁸ After the war, recalled RDA militant Ibrahima Fofana, "Men from slave families came back home as lieutenants and colonels. And when the opportunity arose, they presented themselves to the colonial administration as candidates for canton chieftaincies. The French, of course, were pleased, considering these men to have served France well. Often, the military veterans were appointed as chiefs."³⁹

³⁵ Kankan, A/S passage Léon Maka, October 13, 1949, 17G573, ANS, Dakar.

³⁶ Renseignements objet: Activité du R.D.A., May 11, 1948, Services de Police, Labé, 17G573; Renseignements objet: groupements politiques, June 10, 1948, 17G573; Renseignements A/S activité politique, July 18, 1951, #1040/490, C/PS.2, 17G573, ANS, Dakar.

³⁷ Gendarmerie, En Guinée Française, September 12, 1951, 17G573, ANS, Dakar.

³⁸ *Revue trimestrielle*, 1er trimestre 1947, 2G47/121; *Revue trimestrielle des événements*, 2ème trimestre 1947, October 11, 1947, #273 APA, 2G47/121; *Revue trimestrielle des événements*, 3ème Trimestre 1947, December 5, 1947, #389 APA, 2G47/121; Rapport politique annuel, 1947, #271/APA, 2G47/22, ANS, Dakar; interviews with: Léon Maka, Conakry, February 25, 1991; Ibrahima Fofana, May 5, 1991; Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism*, 374-75, 377, 384, 388; Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts*, 11-19, 136, 138.

³⁹ Interview with Ibrahima Fofana, May 5, 1991. See also, Gaoual, Rapport politique annuel, 1948, 1E38, AG, Conakry.

Whereas some veterans aspired to become chiefs in place of existing authorities, others attempted to undermine the chieftaincy as an institution and to install alternative power structures. They helped to organize rural resistance to unpaid compulsory labor – and to the village and canton chiefs who enforced it. When forced labor was abolished in 1946, certain types of involuntary labor, including "customary" dues owed to the chiefs, were specifically excluded from the law's provisions. Although characterized as "traditional" practices, many so-called customary obligations originated in the colonial era. When the administration declined to include unremunerated labor for the chiefs in the forced labor ban, rural Africans simply refused to work. Military veterans often spearheaded this type of resistance.⁴⁰

In other cases, veterans undermined chiefly authority by usurping chiefly functions. In the postwar period, rural resistance to the chiefs frequently focused on their role as tax collectors. According to Maka,

[the veterans] took the initiative to detach from the chieftaincies. They formed committees to collect taxes and send the taxes directly to the circle commandants, bypassing the chiefs who enriched themselves from these taxes. Instead of giving the taxes to the village chiefs and the canton chiefs, they sent them directly to the circle commandants – in order to undermine the chiefs and to keep some of the money in the area [for local development]. As a result, the influence of the chiefs diminished. It no longer had any importance.

Military veterans began this process. The RDA thought it was a good idea and decided to have village committees that would make the village chiefs redundant. Why the military veterans? Because they were the people who had traveled, served in France. They had seen how whites acted at home and in the colonies. They saw that there was a difference. They always had a white commander, even if they were competent to do the job for themselves. They understood the system of colonization, and they were angry.

Maka recalled that "former Tirailleurs were usually at the core of RDA actions. They protested before the chiefs, before the circle commandants."⁴¹ As esteemed men in their villages, who did not bow down before chiefs and colonial officials, veterans were in a prime position to mobilize for the RDA.

Although military veterans were early leaders in the anticolonial struggle, they had withdrawn from the political scene by the mid-1950s. The Liger campaign of 1948–1952, which resulted in the registration of tens of thousands of French West African veterans and the settlement of financial demands, the Equality Law of 1950, and subsequent administrative actions largely satisfied veterans' demands. Better off than the majority of

⁴⁰ Rapport sur la main d'œuvre en Guinée, July 13, 1946, 2G46/50; Rapport politique annuel, 1946, 2G46/22, ANS, Dakar. See also, Macenta, Rapport politique annuel, 1948, 1E38, AG, Conakry; Thompson and Adloff, *French West Africa*, 230, 492.

⁴¹ Interview with Léon Maka, February 25, 1991.

their compatriots, many Guinean veterans retreated from anticolonial agitation and, from the mid-1950s, again became stalwarts of the colonial administration.⁴²

Challenging the Chiefs: The RDA

Just as the RDA channeled and articulated veterans' grievances, it also focused on those emanating from the rural war effort. The party threw its support behind agricultural producers who refused to fulfill forced labor demands, pay taxes to the chiefs, and recognize chiefly authority more generally. Responding to rural dwellers' complaints and speaking on their behalf, the RDA expanded beyond its original urban base into the countryside. Like the military veterans, the RDA zeroed in on the chiefs' continued use of involuntary labor. The party charged that since forced labor had been outlawed in 1946, rural residents should no longer have to work for the chiefs without pay. Consequently, the RDA actively encouraged the passive resistance campaign already under way in the rural areas. From the early 1950s, police records are filled with reports of RDA villagers refusing to work in the chiefs' fields, to construct and maintain their huts, or to perform other services. In October 1951, the military police charged that the RDA was establishing alternative authority structures in the rural areas that circumvented village and canton chiefs. RDA village committees collected taxes and usurped other chiefly functions. In response, the chiefs cracked down hard, targeting RDA activists and rigging elections against them. The party's ability to penetrate and hold the populous rural areas was contingent on subverting chiefly power. As a result, the antichief campaigns became the centerpiece of the RDA's rural strategy.⁴³

Forced by growing unrest to implement empire-wide reforms in 1956, France introduced local self-government in the overseas territories. In

⁴² Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses*, 52–54.

⁴³ Rapport Hebdomadaire, September 17–23, 1951, Services de Police; Fiche de Renseignements, ca. October 19, 1951, Gendarmerie nationale, Détachement de l'A.O.F.-Togo, Dakar, #181/4R; Revues trimestrielles, 3ème trimestre 1951, November 24, 1951, Services de Police, Guinée Française; Comité directeur, Parti Démocratique de Guinée, Conakry, à gouverneur (Conakry), February 29, 1952; all in 17G573, ANS, Dakar. See also, PDG, Comité directeur, Conakry, Rapport à la délégation du Comité de coordination et groupe parlementaire RDA, Assemblée Nationale, Paris, #1, January 14, 1952, dos. 7, carton 2143, Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence; Gaoual, Rapport politique annuel, 1947, 1E37, AG, Conakry; interview with Léon Maka, February 25, 1991; Sékou Touré, "Contre tout travail forcé," *La Liberté* (March 1, 1955), 3; Claude Gérard, "Incidents en Guinée française, 1954–1955," *Afrique Informations*, 34 (March 15–April 1, 1955), 5–7; "Élections législatives partielles de Guinée," June 17, 1954, in P.D.G.-R.D.A., *Parti Démocratique de Guinée, 1947–1959: Activités – Répression – Élections*, Centre de Recherche et de Documentation Africaine, Paris; Elizabeth Schmidt, *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946–1958* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), chapters 2 and 3; Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses*, chapter 4.

Guinea, the RDA, which had successfully weakened the chiefs in the rural areas, swept the March 1957 territorial elections and dominated the local government that was established in May. In short order, the new government implemented a number of reforms that both benefited its popular base and diminished the influence of chiefs and notables. Most significantly, in December 1957, it abolished the despised institution of the canton chieftaincy.⁴⁴ Although the RDA government had taken charge of the situation, the abolition of the chieftaincy was, in Jean Suret-Canale's words, the "end result of a profound popular movement... the legal consecration of a popular revolution."⁴⁵ The suppression of this institution, and its replacement by elected local councils that included low-status citizens, had tremendous political ramifications. Throughout the 1950s, the chiefs had used their significant coercive powers to manipulate elections to the RDA's detriment. Had they survived, the canton chiefs could have forced a very different outcome to the September 1958 referendum that led to Guinea's independence.

Worker Mobilization

African workers, like military veterans and agricultural producers, bore the burdens of the war effort. Wartime exactions had provoked general discontent in the rural areas, including widespread desertion from forced labor sites. Disenchanted with low wages and inadequate rations, workers absconded from both European-owned plantations and public works sites. Men cutting wood for the Conakry-Niger railway, who worked in isolated areas with relatively little supervision, were especially prone to flight. When forced labor was abruptly outlawed in 1946, rural workers abandoned their work sites en masse. The circle commandants and administrative heads of service were informed of the new law on April 24. By April 26, rural workers were deserting their stations in droves. According to Inspector of Colonies H. Pruvost, as "the news spread like wildfire into the depths of the bush," local authorities feared the loss of large numbers of laborers from the plantations, mines, and major public and private work sites. Between April 26 and the end of June, more than 20,000 forced laborers in both the public and private sectors deserted their workplaces. In the forest region and parts of Upper Guinea, the inspector of colonies continued, "all the work sites and all the projects, small or large, were immediately abandoned in an explosion of enthusiasm, at the announcement of free labor.... In many places, the workers departed en masse, without even waiting for the pay that was due to them."⁴⁶ Inspired by the forced laborers' actions, voluntary workers also

⁴⁴ Kéita, P.D.G., vol. 2, 66–67; Suret-Canale, "Fin de la chefferie en Guinée," 459, 490.

⁴⁵ Suret-Canale, "Fin de la chefferie en Guinée," 460, 490, 493.

⁴⁶ Inspecteur des colonies (Pruvost), Mission en Guinée, Rapport sur la main d'œuvre en Guinée, Conakry, July 13, 1946, #116/C, 2G46/50. See also Rapport annuel du travail, 1946, 2G46/50, ANS, Dakar.

broke contract and returned home. When all 1,000 forced laborers quit the Sérédou quinine plantations in the forest region, the administration called out the second portion of the military contingent, which had been explicitly excluded from the forced labor ban, to ensure the continued production of the crop. Second portion draftees provoked a number of incidents and demanded a clarification of their status. If they were military personnel, they should be placed under the command of military officers and treated like their French counterparts, with equal rights and obligations. If they were civilian employees, they should be treated like voluntary workers, their wages and benefits determined by collective bargaining agreements; moreover, since forced labor had been abolished, they should be accorded the right to return to their homes if they chose.⁴⁷

The impositions of the war effort and the continued practice of forced labor in the rural areas had led to massive workplace desertions. Profiting from this ferment, metropolitan-based trade unions, particularly the French Communist Party-affiliated and RDA-associated *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), began to organize urban workers into local branches. While they focused on the urban rather than the rural areas, trade unions attempted to harness the popular discontent unleashed by the war. Promoting the workers' cause as its own, the RDA successfully drew trade unionists into the party.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Although military veterans were early leaders in the anticolonial struggle, they had withdrawn from the political scene by the mid-1950s. Once the government met their major demands, military veterans were better off than most other Guineans. When offered the option of voting for independence in September 1958 or remaining in a French-dominated community, many Guinean veterans opted to stay with France. When Guinea voted overwhelmingly for independence, some *Tirailleurs* relocated to other territories and joined the French army there.⁴⁹ Once the veterans had retreated into the

⁴⁷ Inspecteur des colonies, *Rapport sur la main d'œuvre en Guinée*, July 13, 1946, 2G46/50; *Rapport annuel du travail*, 1946, 2G46/50; *Revue trimestrielle*, 1er trimestre 1947, 2G47/121, ANS, Dakar. See also Thompson and Adloff, *French West Africa*, 230, 329–30, 492; Babacar Fall, *Le Travail Forcé en Afrique-Occidentale Française (1900–1945)* (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1993), 283–85; Bogosian Ash, "Forced labor, resistance and memory," 189–218; Bogosian Ash, Chapter 6, this volume.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of the RDA and trade union activities in the postwar period, see Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses*, chapter 3.

⁴⁹ A major concern for veterans was the security of their pensions. Although France continued to pay the veterans' pensions after Guinea voted for independence in 1958, this issue had not yet been resolved at the time of the referendum. Mann, *Native Sons*, 140–42. See also William Attwood, *The Reds and the Blacks: A Personal Adventure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 116.

background, agricultural producers and workers, whose political engagement also began during the war, and urban women, who came to the fore in its aftermath, played increasingly prominent roles.

This chapter makes several contributions to the historiography of Africa and the Second World War. It reperiodizes the war and reevaluates the privileging of veterans in the postwar nationalist movements by highlighting the actions of civilians, whose wartime protests on the home front laid the groundwork for postwar anticolonial activities. It reperiodizes the "postwar" nationalist movements, arguing that the labor unrest and resistance to colonial authorities that culminated in those postwar movements all began during the war. Finally, it shows how the RDA, French West Africa's most powerful political movement during the first postwar decade, rode the wave of discontent resulting from the harsh exactions of the war effort. In Guinea, the RDA was successful largely because it focused on groups that had mobilized themselves in response to the wartime impositions. When this movement took a nationalist turn, however, the alliance began to shred. Once their particular demands were satisfied, African veterans withdrew from a movement that, through the promotion of African independence, threatened their mutually beneficial relationship with France. Other anticolonial activists, including male and female agricultural producers, workers, and urban women, continued the struggle until political independence in 1958.