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# The Warfare – Welfare Nexus in French African Colonies in the Course of the First and Second World War

Carina Schmitt\*

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**Abstract:** »*Krieg und Wohlfahrt in französisch-afrikanischen Kolonien im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*«. The effect of warfare on welfare state development in Western democracies has been a matter of growing interest among scholars. The question of how mass warfare influenced social reforms in former colonies on the other hand, has been completely neglected. This is astounding, considering the fact that most European colonial powers relied on colonial troops to maintain the colonial order, to conquer new territories, and to repress struggles for independence and colonial revolts. This contribution addresses the role of the military, warfare, and conscription for the provision of social protection in former French African colonies, particularly in French West Africa from the beginning of the 20th century until shortly after World War II. French African colonies are most likely cases to exhibit such an effect, as no other imperial power militarized its colonial societies to the extent France did. The results show that World War I and the introduction of mass conscription did not lead to any systematic handling of social issues in French West Africa. However, the militarization and the experience of the First World War formed soldiers and veterans as a societal group that started to demand social rights. This development paved the way for later social changes and major reforms in the course of World War II such as the introduction of uniform pensions for soldiers throughout the Empire and the expansion of education and health services.

**Keywords:** Conscription, colonies, military, world war, French West Africa, social reforms.

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## 1. Introduction

The effect of warfare on welfare state development has received growing interest among scholars. Mass warfare is assumed to create a huge demand for social protection that states were well-placed to fill, leading them to provide income for invalids, war victims, and the survivors of fallen servicemen. More-

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over, soldiers have to be reintegrated into society via employment, education, and housing programs during military demobilization. Mass warfare also triggered enhanced state capacities, furnished governments with new policy jurisdictions, and propelled democratization in several countries. Together with the tremendous pressures generated by long-lasting war-related social problems, warfare pushed the adoption and reform of social protection programmes.

Recent studies have done groundbreaking work on the warfare-welfare nexus (Obinger and Petersen 2017; Obinger and Schmitt 2018; Obinger, Petersen, and Starke 2018; Obinger 2020, in this volume) and very well describe and elaborate the role of the military for welfare state emergence and consolidation in Western societies. In contrast, the question of how mass warfare influenced social reforms in former colonies has been completely neglected. However, most European colonial powers largely recruited soldiers from their colonies in both World Wars. Colonial troops were deployed to maintain the colonial order within the colonies, to conquer new territories, and to repress struggles for independence and colonial revolts.

While almost all European colonial powers relied on colonial soldiers, no imperial power militarized colonial societies to the extent France did. France was the only power that introduced universal male conscription in a colonial context. For French officials, African soldiers seemed to be a cheap possibility to increase the number of soldiers and to encounter fears of depopulation in France itself. French colonial troops were heavily deployed on European grounds to defend the metropole and served in all parts of the Empire (Crowder 1965, 485; Echenberg 1991, 173). Other colonial powers were much more reluctant to militarize the colonial societies since arming and training a large group of “potentially rebellious colonial subjects” was seen as a high risk strategy and a threat for the colonial order (Echenberg 1991, 5).

This leads to the question whether the relationship between warfare and welfare that has been identified for Western societies is similar in a colonial context. Did militarization and mass warfare also push social reforms in former colonies or can warfare and military service in colonial societies be better described as “blood tax” (Echenberg 1975, 172) and an immutable burden of colonialism?

This article addresses the role of the military, warfare, and conscription for the provision of social protection in former French African colonies, especially in French West Africa.<sup>1</sup> French West African colonies could be seen as most likely cases against the background of their comprehensive militarization by

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<sup>1</sup> The different French African colonies had different legal statuses leading to different entitlements to political and social rights (e.g., Algeria was seen as part of France itself). Also in the case of French West Africa, the single colonies had slightly different positions within the French Empire (e.g., the Four Communes in Senegal). To reduce complexity, I treat French West Africa as a homogenous territory.

France. I mainly focus on the period from 1912, the date male conscription was introduced in former French colonies, until the direct aftermath of World War II. The paper does not aim at providing a complete systematic overview of all social reforms or all possible mechanisms between the military, warfare and conscription on the one hand and social reforms on the other. It is rather a first step towards generating more insights into a relationship that has been completely disregarded in previous research.

The results show that the introduction of mass conscription and World War I did not result in any systematic handling of social issues in French West Africa. Only some punctual expansions in the education and health sector were implemented by the French colonial power without major changes of the colonial order. However, even though there have been no *direct* effects in form of major social reforms, the militarization of colonial societies formed soldiers and veterans into a societal group, which began to develop and articulate demands for social rights. This development paved the way for later social changes during the course of World War II, and therefore rather *indirectly* influenced social reforms at a later stage.

In contrast to World War I, the contribution of African soldiers in World War II had *direct* effects on welfare by heralding major political and social transitions in the aftermath of the war. Uniform pensions for soldiers were introduced throughout the Empire, the inferiority of colonial subjects was at least formally abolished, education and health services were expanded, and family allowances as well as sickness schemes for workers in the formal labor market were introduced. The heavy reliance on African soldiers during World War II clearly pushed social reforms, as it was impossible for France to keep the colonial system as it had been before. However, both World Wars also had restraining effects on social reforms which mainly were caused by the colonial context.

The remainder of this article is as follows: The next section describes the development of French West African colonial troops until the end of the inter-war period. The subsequent section summarizes the main direct and indirect consequences of warfare on social reforms in the aftermath of World War I. Section four elucidates the development of colonial troops during the Second World War. Subsequently, I describe the major social reforms in the aftermath of World War II. A final section concludes.

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## 2. The Recruitment of African Soldiers until the Eve of the Second World War

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### 2.1 Militarization until the End of World War I

The history of French military policy in their West African colonies goes back to 1857 when the first regiments of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalaïs* (Senegalese Rifles) were established. The main rationale for establishing the Senegalese Rifles was that France needed soldiers for extending political control across West Africa (Echenberg 1975, 172; Ginio 2017, 3). “Senegalese Rifles became the generic term for Black African soldiers in the French colonial army” (Echenberg 1975, 174).<sup>2</sup>

In the following decades until the beginning of the 20th century, the nature and size of the Senegalese Rifles did not change to a great extent. They were mainly used to secure and govern French West Africa. This changed when French officials decided in Paris, in line with the expansion of the colonial project, that the Senegalese Rifles’ deployment should be extended. After having established a basic colonial order and administrative structure in French West Africa, Senegalese Rifles would henceforward also be used to defend the French Empire, as well as to conquer and gain control over new territories. For this project, a large number of soldiers was needed (Echenberg 1991, 28). The necessity to increase the number of soldiers fueled the discussion on introducing conscription since it became clear that the need of manpower could not be reached with a voluntary system of recruiting soldiers, especially since the army competed with the economy for abled-bodied men.

One further main rationale for debating conscription in the French African colonies was that French politicians and military officials feared the decrease of the French population in the motherland, in light of shrinking birth rates in combination with the need for soldiers. One of the nightmares for French officials was the superiority of the German population and the depopulation of France leading to a power imbalance and to a military advantage for the German army (Doerr in this volume; Echenberg 1975, 179). Introducing conscription in their colonies seemed to be one instrument to save French soldiers’ lives and to realize military and population policy goals at the same time.

One step in the direction to militarize the colonial societies and recruit African soldiers was the decree of 1904,<sup>3</sup> which stated that in case of insufficient volunteers, conscription might be applied (Buell 1965, 5). Three years later, a

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<sup>2</sup> Besides of the Senegalese Rifles, the *Armée d'Afrique* existed, which was mainly the army of Northwest Africa and responsible for the occupation and defense of North Africa, including Algerian, Tunisian, and Moroccan conscripts (Ginio 2017, 4,5).

<sup>3</sup> Decree of November 14, 1904.

commission was established that was instructed to evaluate the possibilities for introducing universal conscription in the African colonies to be able to obtain the manpower needed. The commission was headed by General Charles Mangin, a well-known general who travelled to Algeria to investigate the possibilities for conscription in North Africa (Buell 1965, 5f). General Mangin had a clear vision of creating a black army. In his book “La Force Noire” published in 1910, he stated that falling birth rates might make it necessary to use African soldiers for the defense of the motherland and not only for the defense of the Empire in overseas territories. He declared that black troops would constitute an important factor in a European war (Mangin 2011, Ch. 1 and 2). Mangin was one of the most enthusiastic proponents of an African army emphasizing its great potential.<sup>4</sup>

However, before WWI there was no agreement on the “value” of the African soldiers in terms of physical and mental fitness (Lunn 1999), and implementing conscription was not uncontroversial. Nevertheless, the fraction that was in favor of conscription was more influential. As a consequence of Mangin’s study and investigation, the French parliament passed a decree in February 1912 enabling and authorizing conscription in French West Africa, Algeria,<sup>5</sup> and Tunisia (but not in Morocco) if the numbers of volunteers were considered to be too low<sup>6</sup> (Koller 2008, 115). Under this directive, natives between the ages of 20 and 28 could be conscripted for a term of four years. The Governor-General of French West Africa Ponty declared in 1912: “This generous contribution of French West Africa [...] marks a new phase in the colonial policy of France in Africa” (Buell 1965, 7). This can be seen as the birth of “La Force Noire” as “the backbone of the colonial army” (Ginio 2017, 4).

During the First World War, France needed more soldiers, especially in the second half of the war. The French Prime Minister George Clemenceau therefore initiated massive recruitment campaigns in 1917. He ordered a large levy and instructed Blaise Diagne, a Senegalese politician and the first black person in the French National Assembly to implement it. Blaise Diagne who had the trust and respect of many French West Africans was very successful in recruiting ‘colonial subjects’<sup>7</sup> and achieved the fulfillment of the new levy without large resistance.

Overall, a total of 845,000 natives served in the French army during the war (including North Africa, French West Africa but also Indochina, cf. Buell

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Mangin himself had rather the vision of a voluntary army than of an army including colonial conscripts.

<sup>5</sup> Algeria was not seen as a colony but rather as part of the motherland itself.

<sup>6</sup> Conscription had previously been applied to Madagascar and Indochina.

<sup>7</sup> Colonial subjects (*sujets français*) were colonial people subject to the Code de D’Indigénat. The Code de D’Indigénat determines the inferiority of colonial people to French citizens (*citoyens*) and deprives them of many of the liberty and political rights.

1965, 10). From French West Africa, 170,891 soldiers were sent to the military forces (Ginio 2017, 6). They were deployed mainly on the Western front and were involved in all major battles at the Marne, at the Yser, at the Somme and at Verdun (Koller 2008, 119). They formed part of the Gallipoli operation and fought in the Balkans and were involved in the occupation of the German Rhineland after World War I (Scheck 2012, 503). 185 of 1,000 Black African soldiers were killed during war (Echenberg 1985, 364). The First World War marked the transformation of the French black army and the Senegalese Rifles into a mass army.

## 2.2 Introduction of Peacetime Conscription until World War II

Against the background of the huge losses of manpower in France and the need for demobilizing French soldiers to build up the economy in the motherland, colonial troops and African soldiers remained largely mobilized after World War I. In the light of Diagne's success in recruiting African soldiers during World War I, Clemenceau decided to maintain conscription in peacetime (Conklin 1997). As a consequence, in 1919 universal peacetime conscription was introduced in the French African colonies. This was a further landmark with regard to the militarization of colonies. Conscripts had to serve three years (in contrast to French citizens for whom military service only lasted two years at that point in time; Buell 1965, 10).<sup>8</sup>

In the light of the problems the French had with the African soldiers during World War I, French military officials decided to at least partly amalgamate and integrate African regiments with Metropolitan French ones. They also started to organize committees to prepare African soldiers for their duties in France (Echenberg 1985, 367f). The French officials tried to improve the image of being a colonial soldier serving France and launched propaganda campaigns to levy the greatest possible number of natives under the colors. One further objective was that after their military service colonial conscripts return to civil life "better educated, better disciplined, knowing our language better and more fit consequently for all kinds of work" (Buell 1965, 11).

The hopes associated with a French African army were huge. However, problems started when it came to the implementation of universal peacetime conscription. Recruiting soldiers was extremely difficult. Efficiently applying the French bureaucratic system to the African colonies would have required a working administrative structure that did not exist in the colonies. For example, solely compiling the recruitment tables where no birth records were available was extremely challenging and work-intensive.

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<sup>8</sup> For the French, the length of the military service was reduced to 18 months in 1923 (Buell 1965, 10).

Due to the lack of a well-functioning administrative structure, the French military was dependent on the help of the native chiefs (Buell 1965, 13). Therefore, canton chiefs had to present conscripts to the recruiting commissions until 1926.<sup>9</sup> This fact generated possibilities for abuse from the very outset (Echenberg 1975, 183). Chiefs, for example, presented young men from lower social strata, especially from the group of domestic slaves to French recruitment officers (Suret-Canale 1971; Koller 2008, 115). Those who could avoid military service in the French African army did so and the native population used all possible forms of circumventing conscription, such as hiding in the bush or fleeing to the British Empire (see following subsection and Koller 2008, 115).

One further problem was that the majority of natives were classified as physically unfit for military service. In some districts, only 10% of the potential conscripts were seen to be physically fit enough. One example illustrates the problematic situation: In Bougouni in French-Sudan, the total potential of the census list was 2,514 men. Five percent did not report to the board and, of 2,377 men who did report, 2,052 (or 81%) were found medically unfit (Echenberg 1975, 185). Thus, only 14% of over 2,500 remained.

In 1926, the use of conscription was broadened by creating the second portion (*la deuxième portion*). With the establishment of the second portion, potential native conscripts listed on the recruitment tables were separated into two groups. The first portion was sent to the army for three years. The second portion was used for compulsory work and forced labor typically in infrastructure projects. The decision as to who forms part of the first and second group was drawn by lot. Whereas slavery was officially abolished after the Berlin conference 1884/85, the second portion opened the possibility to circumvent this prohibition.

The following Table 1 shows the total recruitment figures for French West Africa in 1926 (Echenberg 1991, 59):

**Table 1:** Recruitment in French West Africa in 1926

Men on list	188,455
Men examined	148,776
Unfit or exempt	107,748
Absentees	39,679
2nd Portion	28,391
1st Portion	10,539

Source: Echenberg 1991, 59.

Of 148,455 men examined, 107,748 were considered to be physically unfit, accounting for more than two thirds. In total, about 20% of all men on the list

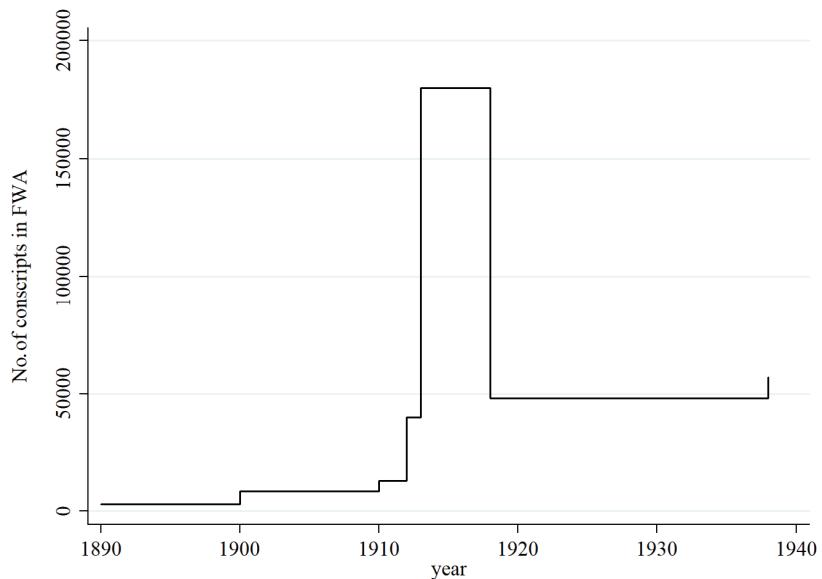
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<sup>9</sup> After 1926, the *commandants de cercle* were responsible for producing the recruitment lists (Echenberg 1975, 183; Buell 1965, 7).

could be conscripted serving in the army (5.5%) or as second portion (ca. 20%).

The following figure illustrates the development of recruiting colonial subjects for military service in French West Africa from 1890 until the beginning of World War II. The figure clearly demonstrates that the number of conscripts strongly increased with World War I and remained during the interwar period at a constant level massively above the pre-war figures.

**Figure 1:** Recruitment in French West Africa from 1890 until 1939



Source: Own figure based on information provided by Echenberg (1991).

In sum, the recruitment ratio of native soldiers was extremely low. On average, only about 10% of potential conscripts actually served in the army, making conscription a highly inefficient system. The hopes associated when introducing conscription were much higher than what was effectively possible (Crowder 1965, 260).

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### 3. Effects of World War I and Conscription on Social Reforms

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The impact the First World War had on French African colonial society was tremendous. The evidence of war effects was obvious for African people as

thousands of men did not come home. Those who returned had often experienced colonial wars, served in uncomfortable outposts of the Empire, and came back disabled. African families were separated and diseases induced by recruitment, such as tuberculosis and pneumonia, spread among African people. But did the militarization of the French African colonies, the introduction of mass conscription, and the devastations caused by the war result in social reforms in the colonies as it was the case in the mother countries?

### 3.1 Direct Effects on Social Reforms

As in Western democracies, concerns about the education and health of colonial rank-and-file soldiers were discussed in the French army, especially against the background of the low recruitment rates in the colonies. The French military agreed after World War I that the recruitment ratio had to be improved. Mangin, as the main representative in favor of a Black Army and with the vision of generating “La Force Noir,” promoted the creation of a native military elite getting the same training as French citizens. However, even though French officials in general were aware that training natives was necessary to improve the efficiency of the recruitment system they were very reluctant to educate natives in same way as the French military. Nevertheless, expanding education services seemed to be without alternative.

In 1921, the *École Spéciale des Sous-Officiers Indigènes* was created (Echenerg 1991, 66) offering an inferior officer’s training for Africans. Furthermore, special primary schools were established in the 1920s, called *Écoles des Enfants de Troupe* (EETs). They were an instrument of giving special opportunities to the sons of active soldiers and veterans who had priority access to these schools (*ibid.*). However, the education level was low at EETs and the main objective was to create African sergeants and not high ranked military personnel.

Besides expanding education services, medical schools were built and Africans were trained for being assistant doctors to counter the problems arising from high unsuitability rates. The most prominent medical school was established in 1918 in Dakar to train Africans as auxiliary doctors, midwives, and pharmacists to provide primary and preventive care. These educated natives were among the most sophisticated Africans during that period and often involved in the subsequent national political independence movements.

The expansion of medical services was one mean to achieve survival and conquest as well as encounter fears of depopulation (Lasker 1977, 281). The main objective of “[c]ampaigns against epidemics, the reduction of infant mortality, development of hygiene and other preventive measures, the establishment of hospitals and mobile health teams” (Lasker 1977, 284) was to “faire du nègre” (Chailley 1968, 432) in order to realize political and military colonial objectives. Expenditure on health services increased in some parts tremendous-

ly. For example, in the Ivory Coast, the health spending was raised from 3.5% in 1900 of the colony's budget to 20% in 1940 (Lasker 1977, 284).<sup>10</sup> Expanding medical services were also seen as necessary to progressively assimilate Africans within the French civilizing mission (Conklin 1997).

However, conscription and warfare not only pushed the expansion but also had negative effects on the provision of health care services, for example. Implementing conscription implied that resources for basic health provisions for the society were diminished. Recruiting soldiers was an enormous effort for the medical service, which had to inspect the potential conscripts over months. This means that health services were bound to military requirements and services for the army. Recruitment operations absorbed to a large extent the time of doctors who otherwise could be devoting their time to productive medical work (Buell 1965, 15).

### 3.2 Indirect Effects on Social Reforms

Besides the direct influence of warfare on the medical and education sector, conscription and war created demands for social reforms among veterans and soldiers. French officials were aware of this mechanism. When recruiting African soldiers and sending them to the European frontier in World War I, French officials debated whether this recruitment could force the demands of African soldiers for the extension of civil rights to colonial subjects (Ginio 2017, 6). Colonial soldiers who have seen the wider world and fought side by side with French citizens with civil and social rights could resist going back to a simple serving role.

Conscription, however, did not only push the demands for social rights among veterans and soldiers but also within the society in general. Conscription "caused an enormous amount of damage to African societies, and in some places it sparked intense resistance to colonial rule" (Mann 2005, 414). Joost van Vollenhoven, General Governor of French West Africa in World War I, argued that forced recruitment increased the danger of armed uprisings (Echenerberg 1975, 180). One factor that further pushed the resistance to colonial rule and the demand for social reforms was the introduction of the second portion. The second portion had to serve a period as long as the military service working in public infrastructure projects (Cooper 1996, 38). The second portion was typically even less rewarded than the first portion, which further pushed the resistance to the colonial power among this group.

Even though this resistance did not lead to the creation of major veterans' or soldiers' lobby groups, it marked the point of departure for social unrests and the demands for social rights in the course of World War II.

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<sup>10</sup> However, it has to be noted that the colonies had to finance this mainly on their own in the interwar period.

However, one indirect effect of warfare that rather hampered social reforms was the drain of able-bodied men. This drain was not only caused by the military service and casualties but also by the flight of potential conscripts. Rumors were spread about brutal recruiters and Europe as a battleground drenched in blood that motivated a great number of able-bodied men to leave for the Gold Coast at the announcement of recruitment operations (Buell 1965, 17). The closer a colony was to the frontier of other colonial Empires, the higher the percentage of absentees. In Niger, for example, the average percentage of absentees between 1923 and 1946 was almost 40% (Echenberg 1991, 71).

In the entirety of French West Africa, the average rate of potential conscripts who fled in this period was 18.5%. “Thousands of men were drained off by the war, others were fleeing with their families and communities to British West Africa to escape recruiters” (Echenberg 1985, 180). The drain of able-bodied men had massive consequences for the power resources and possibilities for coalition building among actors typically favoring social reforms. In 1917, the situation became so bad that Van Vollenhoven reported to the minister of colonies that “to extract from this country yet another few thousand men, we will set it aflame, drench it in blood, and we will ruin it completely” (Crowder 1965, 262).

The recruitment and drain of potential conscripts had also negative economic effects. Private companies typically competed with the army for able-bodied men. As a consequence, conscription automatically reduced the potential labor supply, which had already been insufficient beforehand (Buell 1965, 15). Companies were discouraged by the lack of labor force and an unhealthy commercial climate dampened capital investment. “Peacetime conscription did contribute to the continuing stagnation of West Africa after the war” (Echenberg 1985, 182).

Moreover, reducing the incentives for private companies to invest in the French colonies also negatively influenced the value added in the colonies, and therefore the resources available for social reforms and basic social services. The agricultural sector was especially affected by conscription fostering shortages in food or losses of crops. Recruits were often taken from the rural areas, as companies in some cases successfully lobbied that farmers and able-bodied men in rural areas were recruited to not further reduce the labor force in the cities (Crowder 1965, 262).

### 3.3 Summary

Even though World War I and the militarization of French colonial Africa had some positive direct and indirect effects, no major changes in social service provision after World War I took place. World War I created a large amount of veterans and disabled whose needs were almost completely neglected. Conscription Laws of 1912 and 1919 simply aimed at obtaining more soldiers

without great investments in the colonies. French officials did not want to spend more resources than necessary on education and health of the soldiers.

In contrast, training native African officers in a similar way to French officers was seen as dangerous for the remaining imperial French order. There have been some discussions on reforming the treatment of colonial subjects, but there was no systematic attempt for social reforms after WWI. However, it can also not be stated that there was no effect at all. The effects were rather indirect and subtle and paved the way for a change in social affairs in the course of World War II.

The insight that the French military objectives could not be reached without African soldiers, as well as the sprouting demands for social reforms and the increase of resistance against colonial rule, built the point of departure for later reforms. Moreover, the veterans and soldiers emerged as a societal group as well as political actor in the colonial state (Mann 2006, 98).

However, these positive effects were offset by negative consequences. For example, the drain of able-bodied men who were potential young industrial workers either due to flight or service in the army or in the second portion was tremendous and significantly reduced the possibilities for the colonial society to fight for social reforms and the improvements of working conditions. Hence, the First World War brought little benefit to the Africans (Crowder 1965, 266). It is not until World War II that direct consequences of warfare on welfare would become reality.

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#### 4. The African Soldiers during the Second World War

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World War II marked a new chapter in the history of the French Black African Army, as the contribution of African soldiers to the French Army during World War II was significantly higher than ever before. From the outbreak of the war until the fall of France in 1940, around 100,000 soldiers were mobilized in French West Africa in addition to a standing army of 50,000. Many soldiers were deployed on the European continent to defend the French border.

Units of the Senegalese Rifles were massively affected by the war during the second phase of the German offensive when French positions along the Somme River were attacked in early June 1940. Massacres were committed and executions by the Germans were ordered when Senegalese Rifles were captured. The situation changed when France was occupied by the German army in 1940 and the regular French army was neutralized. Around 90,000 soldiers from French Africa became prisoners of war (Scheck 2012, 502f). Half of them were sent to camps in Germany.

The occupation of France by the Germans, the collaboration of the Vichy regime with Hitler Germany, and the resistance of the Free French Forces under Charles de Gaulle led to a bizarre situation. Half of the African army was

recruited by the Vichy regime and the other half by the Free French, i.e., Africans under Vichy command fought against Africans under Gaullist command. Some of the African colonies became neutral territory, such as French West Africa, while others supported the Free French Movement, such as the French Federation of Equatorial Africa. It was mainly the Governor-General of each colony who determined the course.

For the Free French forces, the Black African rank-and-file soldiers were of utmost importance from the very outset and de Gaulle heavily relied on African soldiers. For a long time, the Free French forces consisted predominantly of African soldiers, with a first territorial basis in Chad, where Governor Eboué supported de Gaulle's Free France from the very outset.

In 1943, French West Africa became one of the main providers of African soldiers for the Free French forces. French West Africa was initially neutral when Germany occupied France, but changed its position and started to support the Free French in 1943. An additional 100,000 soldiers were recruited to serve under de Gaulle and the troops fighting under Vichy command was increased from 50,000 to 100,000 men (Crowder 1965, 489f; Ginio 2017, 15).

In sum, 200,000 black Africans participated in either the Free French Army or under the Vichy command, representing 20% of the total French forces. African soldiers in that period were deployed in Allied campaigns in Italy, Southern France, and Germany and were involved when Free French forces landed in Normandy (Scheck 2012, 506). Conservatively estimating, from the 200,000 Black Africans who were recruited during the Second World War, around 12% have ended up as "*morts pour la France*" (Echenberg 1985, 365).

In 1944, de Gaulle decided to whiten the army (*blanchissement*) and suddenly withdrew Black African soldiers from the frontier. It is assumed that in the prospect of the upcoming victory, de Gaulle wanted to give the success to the French young men and not to the colonial conscripts. However, the consequence was that many African soldiers were accommodated in camps suffering shortages in food and clothes, waiting for being shipped to Africa. The transfer of African soldiers was a very difficult logistical challenge. While French soldiers had the possibility to return directly home after the Allied victory, African soldiers had to wait months before being granted the possibility to return home. This further increased the frustration of African colonial soldiers (Echenberg 1985, 373).

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## 5. The Effects of the Second World War on Social Reforms

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While World War I unfolded only indirect or marginal consequences for social welfare, the situation was different in the aftermath of World War II. The fol-

lowing section discusses the effects that mass warfare had on social reforms shortly after the war.

### 5.1 Indirect Effects on Social Reforms

The role of the African soldiers in the Second World War was of utmost importance. Particularly, the fact that the Free French Forces mainly relied on African soldiers and started the liberation of France from Algier and Brazzaville reflects the crucial role of the colonial army. This importance also changed the understanding of the African soldiers themselves. They became increasingly sensitive to their rights, and no longer accepted treatment as inferior colonial subjects while sacrificing and fighting with the French soldiers side by side. The fact that French and native soldiers were in close contact made native soldiers progressively more aware of the rights that French soldiers had.

Even though the declaration of war against Nazi Germany triggered waves of solidarity across native and French soldiers, the inequality between both groups was no longer tolerated by the native soldiers (Scheck 2012, 507). The sensitization of soldiers and the experience that French soldiers were better off made the slogan ‘equal sacrifices equal rights’ popular among colonial soldiers (Echenberg 1991). Furthermore, native soldiers not only came in contact with French soldiers but also with black American soldiers, who had more rights. This contact to Americans and Europeans changed the political attitudes of African soldiers. It also fueled the spread of certain ideological concepts such as democracy and equality, and fostered the awareness and hope to overcome colonial rule and to realize human rights (Saldin 2018). Hence, in the course of World War II, aspirations for citizenship and equality were created among soldiers questioning the colonial order and picking up what was planted in the aftermath of World War I (Scheck 2012).

The frustration about the inferiority of rights the African soldiers had was intensified after the liberation of France in 1944. While the French soldiers were sent home, African soldiers had to stay in repatriation camps under bad conditions. Soldiers started to rebel against their conditions and France increasingly feared loss of control over African soldiers. “The mood of the veterans was explosive” (Scheck 2012, 507).

Initially, France tried to repress African veterans’ revolts. One event marked a turning point in this policy, the brutal response to the soldiers’ revolt in Camp Thiaroye close to Dakar in 1944. About 1,300 veterans revolted due to a delay in payment in the camp. French soldiers brutally suppressed the rebellion and killed 35 veterans and seriously wounded the same number of people. It was unacceptable to colonial soldiers that African soldiers were killed by the French military after having sacrificed several years of their lives for France (Ginio 2017, Ch. 1).

Thiaroye was a rebellion against the inferior treatment of African soldiers and initiated more riots by veterans. It was clear to French officials that suppressing revolts of veterans and soldiers would not work in the long run. Moreover, due to the merits of African soldiers in the French army, more and more French militaries started to support the idea of brotherhood in arms and to honor native soldiers for their military service.

Against this background, the colonial soldiers and veterans became an increasingly powerful group. This was further sustained by the fact that France still needed soldiers to defend the Empire, e.g., in the independence war in Indochina. It became clear that France had to establish social reforms in order to appease veterans and soldiers on whom France was dependent to some extent and who became progressively more difficult to control (Ginio 2017, 24). The soldiers' protests also pushed the creation of veterans associations that emerged after the war fighting for equal social rights (Echenberg 1985, 375). The most powerful veterans organization, "Anciens Combattants et Victimes de Guerre de l'Afrique Occidentale Francaise," was established in Dakar in 1945.

One further indirect effect that pushed the adoption of social reforms was the reorganization of the colonial order after the war. At the Brazzaville Conference, where the most important leaders of the Free France met in 1944, de Gaulle stated, "that it was in the colonies that Free France found her refuge and the starting point of her liberation" (Crowder 1965, 499). The promise to restructure the colonial order and to work out a new framework for colonial people "was a direct response to the military efforts of the colonial subjects in aid of his Free French forces" (Echenberg 1985, 379). In Brazzaville, the new France committed itself to a series of reforms. For example, it was promised that the Code de Indigénat, i.e., the set of rules that defines colonial people inferior to French citizens, should be abolished. Moreover, de Gaulle stated that forced labor (also in the form of the second portion) should also be eliminated within five years after the war.

Even though de Gaulle never thought of abolishing the colonial order in general, he aimed at restructuring the Empire (Crowder 1965, 499f; Echenberg 1991, 104). As a consequence of the Brazzaville conference, the new constitution which was passed in 1946 (Fourth Republic) created the French Union no longer consisting of French colonies but rather of French overseas territories. A bill was passed (*Loi de Houphouet-Boigny*) named after a member of the "Commission des territoires d'outre-mer" that abolished the Code de Indigénat and forced labor (Ginio 2017, 9). The abolishment of the Code de Indigénat also implied the introduction of the freedom to associate which was prohibited for colonial subjects beforehand.<sup>11</sup> This abolishment allowed for the creation of

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<sup>11</sup> In 1937, limited freedom to associate was introduced, but it only lasted until 1940 when it was abolished by the Vichy regime.

political parties and political activity and led to the establishment of labor unions. However, most of these unions were highly bound to the unions in the metropole (Orr 1966). Nevertheless, the new constitution marked a massive change in power resources and actor constellations within the colonies.

However, the military always kept its ambiguous character. On the one hand, ex-soldiers were a group that demanded the implementation of social reforms, while on the other hand, colonial troops kept the colonial Empire together, repressed social unrests, and were necessary to fight the rising number of independence wars such as in Indochina or Algeria. Moreover, France tried to use the military as intermediaries between the metropole and the colonial society in order to retain the colonial order.

France even supported the creation of veterans associations after the war to relax the situation. For example, colonial soldiers were used for bush tours in rural areas and for military celebrations for the urban population. The bush tours started in the early 1950s to promote the Empire and to monitor threats for the colonial order (Scheck 2012, 507; Ginio 2017, 67). French military authorities attempted to use veterans as a bridge to the population of French West Africa to demonstrate that the principle of equality was ensured (Lasker 1977; Ginio 2017). Hence, the military suppressed other actors and processes that would have been important in the fight for social reforms.

## 5.2 Social Reforms after World War II

What happened concretely in terms of social reforms? Financial compensation in the form of pensions was the most important state assistance to ex-soldiers. Thousands of African veterans waited ten years or more to be paid their pensions. French officials recognized that a crisis was at hand and therefore established a registration campaign headed by Henri Liger in 1948. His task was to conduct a census to register the claims of veterans and their families for delayed payments and other forms of compensation. Especially in the light of the experience of Thiaroye, the French saw it necessary to analyze soldiers' perceptions and living conditions (Ginio 2017, 23). Liger made around 250,000 dossiers, examined the situation of the 175,000 veterans in French West Africa, and settled around 160,000 cases. Despite this effort, "it remained true that five years after the war 40 percent of the veterans and their families were still awaiting resolution of their claims" (Echenberg 1991, 160) and around 100,000 cases in French West Africa still remained unsettled.

One very important reaction to the Liger report, and itself a highly symbolic signal, was the decision of the French government to subscribe to the principle of paying equal pensions to veterans in the metropolis and the colonies. Consequently, the equality law was passed in 1950, guaranteeing uniform pensions for all soldiers in the Empire to ensure the loyalty of colonial soldiers. The extension of rights of metropolitan veterans to veterans of the colonies also

implied financial assistance that was offered to war orphans and children of African war invalids and ex-prisoners of war.

Significant sums were spent on the increasing pensions and on social assistance to both soldiers and veterans (Ginio 2017). It is the first example of metropolitan legislature automatically implemented in the colonies, which would have been completely impossible within the “old” French colonial order. Veterans were entitled to privileges hitherto inaccessible by colonial subjects. This reform therefore reflected the new colonial thinking (Ginio 2017, 39f). One rationale for paying pensions to the colonial military was the hope that these military forces would help the colonial system to survive.

Even though the law on equal pensions also caused resentments, for example, due to the delayed extension to disabled veterans, it was nevertheless a milestone. The extension of rights to all veterans throughout the empire became exemplary for other groups of the society and inspired colonial trade unions in the fight for the same rights as French workers. For example, railway strikers in the post war period relied on the veterans’ discourse of equality for sacrifices with the slogan, “equal work – equal pay.” The veterans’ cross class alliances with trade unions and students after the Second World War also challenged the colonial system and threatened the political stability.

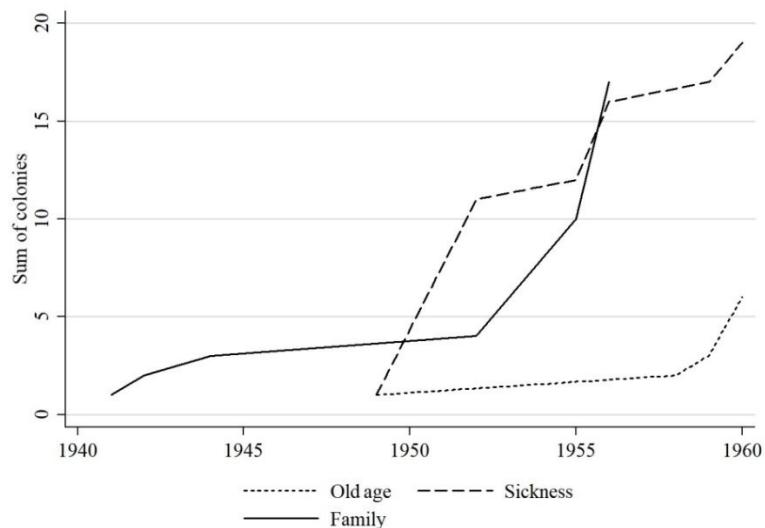
Aside from pensions, reforms were also implemented in the education and health sector. The military educational system created in 1923, Écoles des Enfants de Troupes, for sons of career soldiers, was extended in 1953 to youth whose fathers had fulfilled their military duties. Once they graduated, they had to enlist and serve in the army for five years. Children whose fathers died in combat got the status of *pupilles de la nation*, which included rights such as educational scholarships and care of basic needs. Moreover, the health sector was expanded, e.g., by increasing the number of medical posts and mobile teams and increasing health expenditure. To once again take the Ivory Coast as an example, the amount of money spent in the health sector increased from 34.7 to 699.9 million francs between 1940 and 1952 (Ginio 2017, 48ff; Lasker 1977, 285).

Moreover, shortly after World War II a fund, Fonds D’Investissement pour le Développement Économique et Social (FIDES), was created to support the social and economic development in the colonies. FIDES was passed in 1946 after only little debate, and it aimed at investing in basic infrastructure after World War II (Crowder 1968, 501; Cooper 1997, 70). The first systematic handling of the labor question and social protection of workers in former French colonies, however, was then passed after several years of discussion with the Code du Travail in 1952 (*Loi N° 52-1322*). It guaranteed basic social security benefits to workers for those employed in formal wage employments.

This definition of labor excluded quite large groups of society such as occasional workers or typical economic activities of women. Unemployment benefits or benefits in case of work injury were not regulated at all within the code.

Even though large parts of the society were still excluded from basic social services and even though the implementation of the code was more difficult than expected, many social security programs became reality in the aftermath of the code and it can be seen as one central milestone for the provision of social services in dependent territories (Cooper 1996, 1989; Schmitt 2015).

**Figure 2:** Introduction of Social Security Programs in French Colonies



Source: Self-coded information based on USSSA (2016-2018).

Figure 2 shows the number of French African colonies that have introduced a general retirement, family, or sickness scheme until 1960. It can be observed that most social security programs in these three branches have been introduced shortly after World War II and more concretely after the Code du Travail. Sickness schemes had been implemented mostly directly after the war and family allowances mainly after the Code du Travail. Before World War II, no general old age, sickness, or family scheme existed in French African colonies.

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## 6. Conclusion

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The influence of mass wars on welfare in Western societies has been very well described in recent studies. The relationship between warfare and social reforms in formerly dependent territories, however, has received almost no attention in comparative welfare state research. This is astounding considering the fact that most European colonial powers relied on colonial troops to defend the

colonial order and some of the mechanisms between warfare and welfare should also apply for a colonial context. This article focuses on the role of the military, conscription, and war on social reforms in former French colonies, concretely in French West Africa.

No other colonial power militarized the colonial societies to the extent France did. The militarization of French West Africa goes back to 1857 when the Senegalese Rifles were established as a relatively well-paid elite army. The Senegalese Rifles were transformed into a conscript army in the course of World War I. In 1919, France even introduced (peacetime) universal conscription to supply the French army with soldiers. France very much relied on African soldiers in both World Wars to defend the colonial Empire throughout the world but also the metropole at home.

This contribution shows that in the aftermath of World War I, we do not observe major social reforms or organized expressions of demands for social rights. However, even though World War I did not *directly* fuel major social reforms it nevertheless had subtle, *indirect*, and long-term effects. The militarization and the experience of World War I formed soldiers and veterans as an integral part of the colonial society beginning to demand equal rights as their French brothers in arms. However, the colonial system with its Code de l'Indigénat and the notion of the inferiority of colonial subjects was too deeply rooted to allow for substantial societal changes. But even though the First World War did not result in key social reforms and the contribution of African soldiers in the First World War had gone unrewarded, the indirect effects laid the foundation for the successful fight for social reforms in the course of World War II.

In the aftermath of World War II, the voice of African soldiers and veterans could no longer be ignored. France had to make concessions to maintain the colonial order resulting *directly* in major social, economic, and political reforms (Crowder 1968, 490). One fundamental shift away from the old colonial thinking marks the introduction of equal pensions for colonial soldiers in 1950. Moreover, the education and health sector were expanded and general family allowances, as well as sickness schemes, were introduced in almost all former French African colonies. Even though social protection in dependent territories might have been addressed anyway at some point in time, the Second World War in combination with universal male conscription clearly pushed the implementation of social reforms.

Of course, this process was also facilitated by the fact that social security was supported intensively by International Organisations, such as the International Labour Organization, in the course of World War II. However, the military always kept its ambiguous character. On the one hand, the African army pushed the implementation of social reforms; on the other hand it was also the vehicle to promote the colonial idea, to monitor political activities, and to repress movements of independence in order to remain the imperial order.

When comparing the effects that warfare had on social reforms in former colonies to those in the European countries, it can be observed that even though some of the mechanisms such as military concerns about the health and education status of soldiers also hold in a colonial context, there is one fundamental difference. The military in a colonial context is a much more heterogeneous actor with very different preferences and resources than it is in the motherlands themselves. The military leadership consisted of French citizens concerned with France and the French soldiers, while the native rank-and-file soldiers were colonial subjects with inferior rights whose lives were not equally valued. Moreover, French politicians were not as dependent on the political loyalty and acceptance of the colonial society as it was on the French. The peculiarities of a colonial context mitigate some of the effects identified for European countries.

One further aspect should receive more scientific attention: the introduction of peacetime conscription and militarization not only had effects on social reforms but also on the economic and societal development. It can be argued that the massive militarization and integration of generations of young men into the military service and absorbing them from their home society did long lasting harm to the economy and society that still might influence what we see today.

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