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Stéphanie Soubrier, *Races guerrières: Enquête sur une catégorie impériale 1850-1918*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2023. 443 pp. Illustrations, maps, and graphs. €26.00. (pb). ISBN 9782271137760; €2.00. (eb). ISBN 9782271137764.

Review by Michael A. Osborne, Oregon State University and University of California, Santa Barbara.

Races guerrières examines the construction and fate of an idea. It offers a deep dive into the papers of General Charles Mangin (1866-1925) and other military archives. The centerpiece is the genesis and impact of Mangin's influential book on colonial manpower and military recruitment, *La Force noire*.[1] *La Force noire* appeared as France was struggling with declining population growth and worries over the fitness of its military, in the face of a united Germany's all too evident superior military, industrial strength, and growing population. In Great Britain, similar fears and collective astonishment at its army's poor performance in the Second Boer War resulted in an investigation by an Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration whose report of 1904 found more than one in three candidates unfit for military service.[1] By the time Mangin's book appeared, the world's two largest colonial powers were pondering a common question: could African troops be used not only to police their respective empires but also to assist, in some function, European forces should war arise in Europe?

The first two chapters of Soubrier's book recount France's engagement with Algeria and the use of Senegalese auxiliaries to bolster French forces in Senegal. The term "warrior races" had been used prior to the 1850s but was not yet a trope in recruitment practices. Soubrier reads Mangin's book as a study with two purposes: the first, an after-the-fact justification for recruiting colonized men into the French forces; the second, a guide for future recruitment. By 1910, Africans had long served in colonial forces and some Algerians were billeted in Paris. Additionally, Africans could be found on naval vessels and in military arsenals. The second purpose of *La Force noir* is at the heart of Soubrier's analysis, which probes Mangin's impressionistic racial hierarchy of Africans and other colonized peoples seen as most or least able to conduct war, work in factories, and police the empire.

Mangin was an old colonial hand who would also see service in World War I and participate in policing the Rhineland after hostilities ended. At the time he authored his study, he had served in Sudan, Mali, North Africa, Tonkin, and Senegal. Thus he had first-hand experience with many of the peoples and places of the French empire. He was also not alone in his perspective on Africans and their use in wartime. Great Britain also invented ethnic labeling schemes linked to perceived fitness for war. England, for example, imported similar ideas of castes of bellicose races from its

experience in South Asia and applied them to its African holdings.[2] In France, supporters and opponents of using African troops, both in the colonies and the metropole, took to the press. For example, Captain Hippolyte Marceau of the 134th Infantry promoted the use of African troops in the colonies but demurred on their use in Europe.[3] Although Senegalese troops had participated in French colonial wars since 1857, their possible use in European conflicts was only broached around 1900.

Earlier French studies of military recruitment were many and *Races guerrières* positions the army medical geographer Jean-Christian-Marc Boudin's mid-nineteenth century analysis of French national recruitment statistics as a primary inspiration for *La Force noire*. This may be so, but whereas Boudin's studies are replete with departmental maps of France documenting everything from lightning-strike deaths to the epidemiology of hernia, goiter, and other health conditions that rendered potential recruits unfit for military service, *La Force noire* was more general in scope and had no maps of utility for recruiting Africans. Instead, Mangin displayed his findings in tables in a fashion more akin to the numerical method of vital statistics championed by Alexandre-J.-B. Parent-Duchâtelet's studies of prostitution in Paris. Boudin opposed French settler colonialism on the basis that racial characteristics were mostly fixed and that European were incapable of adapting to live in the tropics. A polygenist and follower of the influential physician and anthropologist Paul Broca, who collected and measured human skulls and investigated the fecundity in mixed-race individuals, the views of both men on the fixity of race and physiology became widely known through the activities of the Société d'Anthropologie de Paris.

Soubrier's chapter three treats the category of warrior races as a Franco-African co-construction and recounts Mangin's May to November 1910 mission to West Africa to assess African origins, history, bellicosity, level of civilization, ability to feel pain, and other attributes deemed proper for military service. The warrior race idea comes off as a highly subjective amalgam of African ethnicities, languages, physical characteristics, constitutions, prejudices, and modes of life. It was annealed under the pen of Mangin's companion, Captain Charles-Joseph-Alexandre Cornet, who later accompanied Mangin on a campaign to southern Morocco. As Soubrier notes, colonial vetting and recruitment practices were fluid and less rigorous than those found in the metropole. A valuable chapter four compares the perceived warrior and non-warrior races of Africa with other colonized peoples. In each case, French investigators established ethnic hierarchies. Indochinese peoples in general, for example, were thought to be like Africans in terms of physical abilities but more intellectual and thus more suspect in terms of loyalty. The French, however, elevated mountain-dwelling Annamite peoples to the warrior race pantheon in hopes of using them to control other ethnicities in the region. In the Indian Ocean colony of Madagascar, ethnographic studies of the Hova peoples categorized them as Asian in origin and viewed them as the least appropriate group for military service in a list of fifteen ethnicities.

The following two chapters review issues of masculinity and present differing views of West Africans in the popular press, postcards, and photographs taken by Prince Roland Bonaparte. The botanist, book collector, and polymath Bonaparte, who served as president of both the Société de géographie and Société astronomique de France, as well as, for a year, honorary president of the Société française de photographie, was a well-known promoter of science. Like Mangin, he was fascinated with racial hierarchies and was a student of the diversity of the human family. This

interest may have assisted Mangin's program in informal ways as Bonaparte could circulate similar perspectives on humankind from within the firmament of French science. Most certainly Mangin needed allies, as William Merlaud-Ponty, then governor-general of French West Africa, balked at the idea of warrior races as a basis for the differential recruitment of Africans and instead preferred a more inclusive approach. Mangin took to the press and also defended his ideas before the Société d'anthropologie de Paris in 1911. Simultaneously, France deployed companies of West African troops to Algeria and Morocco. Fear of the Islamic religion may have figured into recruitment equations as the Bambara peoples, heavily represented in the West African contingent sent to Algeria, were animists and viewed as a bulwark against the Islam. In a similar vein, General Théophile Pennequin imagined an army composed entirely of Indochinese, although not one founded on the idea of warrior races. According to Soubrier, the scheme failed, in part, because the Indochinese had been labeled as non-warrior races.

A final chapter takes the story forward into World War I and its aftermath and asks how, if at all, notion of the warrior race influenced the recruitment and employment of colonized people in the war. About 80 percent of colonial troops who fought in World War I were from West and North Africa. According to John Keegan, in 1914, some 33,000 Muslim Algerians were serving in the Army of Africa. An additional 170,000, most of them conscripts, joined the French forces and about 36,000 of them died. Africans were also the first to suffer a German chlorine gas attack in 1915.[4]

Senior managers of the war never adopted a definition of a warrior race but still embraced aspects of Mangin's scheme, including the general idea of employing those categorized as non-warriors, rather than West Africans, in factories and support functions. However, subsequent studies found that Malagasy and Indochinese troops were tenacious fighters and performed better than predicted by Mangin's scheme. After the Battle of the Somme in 1916, which claimed more than a million casualties among German, British, and French troops, French manpower needs required a less selective approach to recruitment. At war's end, African troops had proven their worth to the Republic, and in 1919 the French instituted compulsory military service for West Africans. Like other scholars, Soubrier concludes that it is nearly impossible to calculate with accuracy the toll of morbidity and mortality on colonial troops and compare it with figures for French troops. Much depended on how long an individual fought and when and where they fought. Africans were often pulled from the battlefield during the winter months, and total mortality varied by year, although 1915 to 1917 saw the highest levels. One estimate by Joe Lunn posited that Africans who fought during these three years had a rate of mortality three times higher than French soldiers.[5] Soubrier concludes that African troop mortality was higher than that of their French counterparts but likely less than Lunn's estimate.

Specialists in World War I and colonial history will benefit from reading this book. Especially valuable are the sections Soubrier has reproduced from Mangin's manuscripts and other archives. The terrors of trench warfare and modern weaponry compromised the effectiveness of all French forces, but it must have been especially terrifying for many Senegalese soldiers whom investigators noted were unable to distinguish incoming German exploding shells from outgoing French cannon fire. The volume includes a bibliography but unfortunately lacks an index.

NOTES

[1] Charles Mangin, *La Force noire* (Paris: Hachette, 1910).

[2] *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration,* 3 vols. (London: H.M.S.O., 1904).

[3] Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, "'Damnosa Hereditas': Ethnic ranking and the martial races imperative in Africa," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 3 (1980): 393-414.

[4] Hippolyte Marceau, *Le Tirailleur soudanais* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1911).

[5] John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998), p. 214.

[6] Joe Lunn, "'Les Races Guerrières': Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34 (1999): 517-536.

Michael A. Osborne
Oregon State University and University of California, Santa Barbara
Mike.Osborne@oregonstate.edu

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