

Ruth Ginio, *The French Army and its African Soldiers: the years of decolonization*. Lincoln NE: University of Nebraska Press (hb US\$60 – 978 0 8032 5339 1). 2017, 282 pp.

French West African soldiers' contribution to both World Wars has been the subject of a major revival in historical scholarship; their story has also been absorbed within French political and cultural discourse, as evinced by Rachid Bouchareb's 2006 film *Indigènes* and the emergence of the subject in French hip-hop. Ginio's major work intervenes in both the academic and popular debate, forcing us to examine France's African soldiers in their full complexity. Her subject is timely, as France's policy of intervention in Africa comes under increasing public scrutiny, but her analysis also constitutes a major intervention in the study of militaries across Africa.

Drawing on Cooper's emphasis on the multiple forms of possibility beyond nationhood available to late colonial societies across the continent, Ginio shows how the focus on the postcolonial predicament of veterans obscures changes in soldiering across West Africa between 1945 and 1960. To take a dramatic example, Section 71 of France's 1960 Finance Law froze veterans' pensions in newly independent countries (p. 197). This unjust move came to define veterans' postcolonial organizing. Yet an emphasis on the postcolonial inequality represented by Section 71, Ginio contends, obscures the still more significant fact that pensions between white French and black African soldiers had become equal in the first place, itself an unprecedented achievement.

In fact, the late colonial period witnessed unprecedented intervention in the lives of combatants by the French military. Ginio provides many examples: the Bureau des Affaires Africaines was founded in 1952 to monitor soldiers' morale (p. 91). Military officials attempted to organize Hajj pilgrimages (p. 125) for fighters and civilians alike in an effort to shape their evolving notion of an *islam noir* (p. 126) that supposedly separated Africans from Arabs. Psychological strategy likewise led the military to subject West African citizens to lengthy and tedious propaganda films that had been made for domestic French audiences, such as *Nos soldats en Afrique noire* (p. 152). These interventions were inextricably related to the key role played by Africans in the French decolonization wars in Indochina and Algeria, a history that may still be unfamiliar to historians of Anglophone Africa. The French army struggled to police African morale in the face of sustained Viet Minh propaganda; their efforts included a 1953 radio transmission in which the wife of a Senegalese officer gave 'feminine encouragement' to motivate soldiers (p. 93), and the licensing of military bordellos in an anxious effort to dissuade Vietnamese women from settling down with Senegalese soldiers (p. 98). Their experiences in Indochina were coloured by poor food, varieties of army racism, and the dangers caused by grossly inadequate combat training at the Fréjus camp in southern France; so great was their suffering that Ginio observes that the 1,040 Africans who languished in Viet Minh POW camps faced conditions 'not at all dissimilar' to those in French military service (p. 101). The 25,000 African soldiers serving in Algeria witnessed even more sophisticated attempts by the National Liberation Front (FLN) (p. 109) due to their shared religion and appeals to their 'shared oppression' (p. 114). The arid Algerian climate, likened by one French soldier to Dante's Inferno, also led angry West African soldiers to complain: 'Go eat your sardines elsewhere, you miserable colonizers' (p. 110).

The domestic climate in the AOF (the federation of French West Africa) after the Loi Cadre soon became the army's 'own local struggle', as French civilian officials turned to the military to control local populations (p. 170). This response

led to a blurring of distinctions between civilian and military authority, as represented in the cases of the Officers of African Affairs, or the district guards who compared their civilian employment to the conditions in the military (p. 168). These changes mirrored developments in France, where the army played a key role in the return of De Gaulle after the collapse of the Fourth Republic in 1958 (p. 173). The military reacted with anguish to Guinea's independence from the AOF in October 1958 (p. 174), leading to a hasty French administrative retreat that one official likened to an amputation (p. 179). The military was also closely implicated in the collapse of the Mali federation in August 1960 (p. 181), which saw its officers obeying African politicians rather than answering to generals in France (p. 182). African sovereignty over the military 'was gained gradually', with independence in no way eliminating French control, as is evident through defence agreements, military intervention and military assistance agreements (p. 184).

This work marks a major reassessment of military service in Francophone Africa, but its analysis also challenges much scholarship on colonial militaries throughout West Africa. Ginio's emphasis on the diversity of soldiers' motives in choosing military service, the complexity of their political opinions and the intrusion of the military into civilian life raise important challenges to the way in which military service has been conceptualized. Geographically, this book also takes the study of African military history beyond national or continental boundaries; Ginio follows soldiers' experiences to Europe and Asia, while revealing how these regions are indispensable to our understanding of developments in West Africa itself.

Minor criticisms include the relatively scant coverage of soldiers' family lives, as well as of the Islamic intellectual context of French interventions in the Hajj. Arab and African Islamic responses to the French assertion of difference between *islam noir* and global Islam also constitute a fascinating subject at the margins of the present study; but these points in no way detract from the importance of this book. Ginio's discussion of decolonization adopts a more international lens than Mann's and Echenburg's definitive contributions, as it engages with the broader intellectual, cultural and political history of French decolonization, such as Le Sueur's account of Algerian intellectual history and Slight's study of the colonial dimensions of the Hajj, as well as Hall's analysis of race in Islamic West Africa.

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Alicia C. Decker, *In Idi Amin's Shadow: women, gender, and militarism in Uganda*.

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Idi Amin's fearsome regime is popularly known yet academically under-studied. While most accounts of the presidency of the Ugandan dictator focus on his erratic behaviour and the politics of his administration, Alicia C. Decker reframes his eight-year regime around the role of gendered ideologies and the experiences of Ugandan women. Decker argues that Amin deployed gendered rhetoric and militarized action strategically 'to consolidate political hegemony and maintain a certain performance of power' (p. 93). Rather than a deranged madman,