

Washington and Lee University

The Fall of France as Viewed from French West Africa

Department of History

by

Kavita Merry DeVaney

Lexington, Virginia

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## INTRODUCTION

The opposing reactions produced by the emergence of the Vichy regime and the signing of the Second Armistice at Compiègne in the aftermath of the fall of France have been heavily recorded. While the métropole was willing to accept French defeat and German occupation, French Africa revolted against the idea of capitulation. This produced a curious circumstance in which colonial subjects appear as the keepers of the flame for the ideology preached by the colonizing power. Actions of habitants of French West Africa demonstrate that their loyalty to republican France surpassed verbal claims. From 1939 to 1940, 100,000 Africans from FWA – the majority of whom were Senegalese – joined the French army to aid in the defense against Germany.<sup>1</sup> While some desertions were recorded, they were not widespread. In addition, African pledges of loyalty to France, some of which were published in colonial propaganda, flooded in from throughout the colony.<sup>2</sup> The fall of France and the establishment of the Vichy regime produced consternation among both the overseas French administration, and the general population of FWA. The two groups who had most adopted French ideology and culture, the *assimilés*, and *évolués*, found it the most difficult to understand why France had surrendered to Germany without a fight. They were more than willing to continue the Battle for France from a base in Africa, and many voted with their feet by joining General Charles de Gaulle's Free French. By some reports 65 percent of the Free French forces originated from FWA.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, Robert Paxton reports that habitants of metropolitan France almost unanimously offered their support to Vichy France, and that resistance to the regime was rare.<sup>4</sup> The actions taken by

French West Africans indicate that their allegiance extended to more than a mere acceptance of French leadership, but a real conviction in the ideology of republican France that could not coexist with capitulation to Germany. The aim of this thesis is to examine what information and ideas were imparted to FWA to make its habitants carry such a devout loyalty to republican France.

Studying this social phenomenon gives us valuable insight to understanding why World War II was a watershed for French colonialism in Africa. Prior to the war, no significant movement for independence in FWA materialized. However after the war, most colonies began to agitate for freedom. The role played by French surrender to Germany is instrumental in this change. West Africans considered the armistice a betrayal of both their personal sacrifices to the empire and a revelation of the fallacy of republican French ideology. During the period of the signing of the armistice, colonial propaganda offered contradictory messages on whether or not defeat should be accepted. Only the installation of Pierre Boisson's repressive regime as governor general of French Africa definitively brought FWA into the fold of Vichy.<sup>5</sup> The fact that Vichy was only instituted through force in West Africa further proved its illegitimacy. During the war, the collusion between Vichy and Germany provoked support for de Gaulle's Free French. However, the collaboration proved iconoclastic to the ideology of republican France. When the Fourth Republic was instituted at the war's end, many Africans proved unwilling to once again place their belief in the idea of a united French Empire.

Other works that focus on the colonial perception of the fall of France deal with French East Africa (FEA) which immediately joined the Free French after the defeat of France. They create a contrast between FEA and FWA, which is portrayed as loyal to Vichy. However, this

perception is based upon the politics of the governor general of French Africa, Pierre Boisson. As recorded by Ramognino, Akpo-Vaché, Ginio, and Paxton, Boisson proved to be an avid adherent of the ideology preached by Vichy, and instituted his own form of Pétanism in the colonies.<sup>6</sup> Another source for the perceived fidelity to Vichy is derived from the demonstrations of loyalty produced by the British bombardment of the French fleet at Mers-El-Kébir, in Algiers in July 1940, and the bombing of Dakar on 23 September, 1940. While these events rallied support to Vichy due to the loss of both African and European lives,<sup>7</sup> it is often overlooked that these sentiments may have been a flash in the pan compared to the long-standing loyalties to republican France that had been inculcated through decades of colonial propaganda and sacrifices of the colonies to the empire. The existing body of research on the acceptance of Vichy by the colonies tends to present therefore a drastic change of allegiances in FWA between the start of the Battle for France and the signing of the armistice. In the aftermath of World War II, reports surfaced about the hardships and restrictions faced in FWA under Vichy. Unhappiness with the regime is also documented through the statistics – the significant participation of West African soldiers in the Free French. However it would appear that no significant work has been done to examine *what* the French leadership was asking of their colonial subjects – i.e. a reversal of loyalties from a democratic, republican regime to a totalitarian, authoritarian government under siege. Placing this simple question under consideration makes it apparent why French West Africa lost its faith in its colonial master.

As my exploration focused on the message colonial leaders imparted to FWA, I studied the colonial propaganda of the period. The most unified cache of information presenting a progression of how this message evolved was the Senegalese newspaper *Paris-Dakar*. As I began my research before the outbreak of war, the form of the newspaper changed over the

period of time I studied it. Before the war it had the appearance of a typical newspaper, with articles focusing on a variety of events – concerning both the global sphere, and the smaller community of Dakar. It was however very much the creation of propagandists as articles praising the empire and the benefits of colonialism regularly appeared. Upon the outbreak of war, the length of *Paris-Dakar* was reduced to two pages. During this period it assumed the appearance of a propagandist tract with each article focusing on developments in the war, or demonstrations of loyalty to the empire as she engaged in combat. While figures are not available for the distribution of *Paris-Dakar*, the targeted readership of the newspaper consisted of a very select group of individuals. It was clearly written for the upper class, educated, urban population of Dakar. As indicated by the name, it was distributed in the capital of Senegal - Dakar. Therefore, there is very little in the newspaper that targets the rural majority of the population. Also, due to its publication in French, it was directed toward the educated elite of the population. The last indication provided of the readership of *Paris-Dakar* are the advertisements that appeared in the paper. They clearly target the upper class with a substantial disposable income as they advertise luxury items such as champagne, flights to Paris, cars, and refrigerators.

The narrow audience of *Paris-Dakar* imposed some limitations on my research. I was unable to gauge the reception of the outbreak of World War II, or the establishment of Vichy in the countryside, or other urban centers of FWA. However, as the newspaper never mentioned agitation in other regions of the colony, I assumed that the remainder of the population followed the example set by Dakar by mutely, if unwillingly, conforming to the dictates of the regime. Also, because the press was strictly censored during this time period, the true opinions of the population remain uncertain. As the newspaper was very much a tool of the propagandists, it was not be a forum of debate for the colonial subjects. The lack of direct evidence on the

mindset of the population led to me to draw informed assumptions about the reception of the news of war and capitulation to Germany, given the factual information documented. Secondary sources consulted were the works of British, American, and French historians. In many instances, the fall of France in FWA was only treated in detail in the introductory passages of the books, serving as background material for the establishment of the Vichy regime in West Africa. However, these were still valuable sources of information as they provided a broad overview of the period before, during, and after World War Two. All citations of *Paris-Dakar* in the paper are personal translations of French to English.

My paper follows a chronological trajectory, commencing with the build-up to World War Two, moving through the *drôle de guerre*, and finally the Battle for France. Chapter I shows how the colonial regime prepared their subjects for the eventuality of war, while emerging from a period of social agitation in FWA. Focus was placed on attempts to assuage West Africans that the horrors of World War One would not be repeated. The main themes of the propaganda during this period were a celebration of the *mise en valeur* of the colonies as Europe faced the bellicose ambitions of Hitler in Poland. Chapter II presents a France still attempting to appease Hitler, but becoming more cognizant of the fact that another conflagration is going to materialize. Therefore, greater emphasis is placed on fostering the loyalty of the colonies to the ideology of republican France. The morality of the French Empire, along with her alliance with the British Empire are presented as the bulwarks against the brutal and savage Third Reich. Chapter III marks the entrance of the war into French territory during the Battle for France, and the final capitulation of France to Germany. This chapter focuses on the drastic shift in the propaganda as the colonies are first presented with the image of a strong, war-ready nation, and



must then face the reality of a weakened, defeated government. It concludes by examining the divergent opinions held by citizens of the métropole and the colonial subjects in FWA.

## CHAPTER I

### BEFORE THE STORM

The period preceding the outbreak of World War II is marked by the unwillingness of the French Empire to go to war. Citizens in both the métropole and the colonies were weary of conflict and were just beginning to recover from the devastation and shock of World War I. The imperative in the colonies was to retain control of the populations, especially after a spate of riots and uprisings from 1934-1939. Therefore, colonial propaganda attempted to reassure the population with assurances that war would not materialize. However, the ambitions of Hitler were not so easy to control, and France soon faced the prospect of another wartime mobilization. In order to maintain the loyalty of her subjects, the propagandists issued statements on the *mise en valeur* of the colonies, reminding the colonies of the reciprocal benefits they reaped by belonging to the French Empire. A juxtaposition was also created between the noble French colonial methods of *assimilation* and the brutal, racist tactics displayed by Germany's Third Reich. However, even as Germany was beginning to gather her troops at Poland's border, France continued to extend hope that her peaceful, diplomatic tactics would find a way of appeasing the bellicose Germans.

#### 1914-1918: The Legacy

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#### Pre-World War Two Legacy

The colonial French government's approach to the build-up of World War Two owes much to the legacy of the price Africa had to pay during the First World War, as well as the

disappointed promises of the inter-war years. France was the only European power to use African troops on the European Front, they were the only Western nation for whom the idea of the creation of a *force noire* held much cachet. The principal element of the *force noire* was the Senegalese *tirailleurs*<sup>1</sup> and the vast majority of the 235,000 African soldiers recruited to the war effort from 1914 to 1918 originated from West Africa. Of these, about 30,000 died during military operations; however this figure does not account for those who went missing, or those who returned to Africa either as invalids or less severely wounded.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, 135,000 wartime workers for French factories were recruited from Africa.<sup>3</sup> Due to their unique situation, Africans serving their empire often faced racism and derision as they came into contact with American troops, who still maintained segregation between the races in their army, and British troops who disapproved of the idea of arming a potentially dangerous and retaliatory force. The racism of the German soldiers was sometimes expressed through physical viciousness, as during the first engagement between West African and German troops in October 1914 along the banks of the Yser, where the Germans decimated nine out of the ten battalions of *tirailleurs*.<sup>4</sup> At the end of World War One, having fought and sacrificed for their empire, the African soldiers returned home only to find that their situation as inferior subjects of the colonial regime was the same as it had been before August 1914.

Though the election of the left-wing Popular Front in May 1936 appeared to bring with it the promise of colonial reform and liberalization,<sup>5</sup> the new government was hampered from acting in the colonies due to the political conservatism of the colonialists.<sup>6</sup> This conservatism was given further credence through the development of a number of highly dynamic and popular movements, most notably in Algeria, that favored complete independence over any offers of equality of rights.<sup>7</sup> The conservative noose was further tightened when the French authorities

sensed a small revolution upon the nomination of the African leader, Félix Eboué to the post of governor of Guadeloupe in 1936 and Chad in 1938.<sup>8</sup> The colonies of West Africa, most notably those of Senegal and Dahomey, who had access to an active and varied press, expressed their discontent with their situation through the organization of indigenous political parties and groups.<sup>9</sup> The leaders of these groups were *évolués*, a class of young, wealthy, Western educated African men who felt as though their accomplishments and successful integration into French culture should grant them certain privileges and rights.<sup>10</sup> The sentiments of the *évolués* manifested themselves through an epidemic of social agitation across Senegal from 1936 to 1938.<sup>11</sup> Demonstrations and strikes were held across all areas, from the construction and metal industries, to the business sector, the railways, and to public works. However, *évolués* did not call for independence from France, merely for the Popular Front's promises of equality to be upheld in West Africa.<sup>12</sup> One example of these groups is the Foundation of the French Federation of Young Africans (FFJA), created on February 11, 1939.<sup>13</sup> The goal of this group was stated as safeguarding the interests of its members within the cadre of legality; as such it represents the formation of an opposition toward the colonial regime, but one that still respected the administration's legal system.<sup>14</sup> Despite the relative moderation of the demands of the *évolués*, the political situation in Senegal only became tenser as evidenced by the fusillade of Thiès on 27 September 1938 in Dakar. This conflict between strikers and soldiers in the colony's capital left six dead and sixty wounded.<sup>15</sup>

Sensing that a change had to be made, the French government recalled governor Marcel de Coppet to Paris and replaced him with the younger, and more liberal, Léon Cayla in 1939.<sup>16</sup> While Cayla was perceived as being more left-leaning, he too, reverted to a political conservatism upon facing the same problems as his predecessor: the demands of the *évolués*, a

shortage of workers, and a return to social order after the fusillade of Thiès.<sup>17</sup> However, Cayla was able to bring with him a fresh approach to dealing with colonial discontent. Rather than an outright prohibition of organizations such as FFJA, he placed members under close surveillance and created obstacles to any further growth.<sup>18</sup> Cayla's politics were aided by developments in Europe as the threat of war with Germany became apparent. The difficulties faced by the colonial regime during the interwar period posed the problem of French control in Africa in a new light. With the upsurge of German hostilities, the redress of this problem became more important, as it became imperative to maintain the loyalty of the colonial subjects to the empire. The propaganda of this period played a crucial role in accomplishing this task.

#### ***Mise en valeur and loyalty of the colonial empire***

In following the necessity of the erasure of partisan fights to preserve the "union sacrée," the colonial administration instituted a severe repression of the press.<sup>19</sup> *Paris-Dakar* therefore became the mouthpiece of the colonial regime, rather than a venue for the évolués to air their grievances and opinions. It remains, however, a useful source for discovering how the colonial regime tried to maintain the order, loyalty, and support of its West African colonies. The primary goal of the colonial regime was to foster a spirit of loyalty to the empire. However, the war was still dealt with in an abstract manner, as the authorities did not wish to unduly alarm the population, or create the impression that they were once again being asked to make the ultimate sacrifice. Yet, as France had already discovered during the First World War, the home front would rely on the overseas empire for support. A special emphasis was placed on the relationship of reciprocal benefit that existed between the colonies and the métropole in the hope

of creating a sense of moral obligation in the African populations – prompting them to willingly aid the nation that had given them so much.

The degree of calm and assuredness found in the attitude professed during the months and even the days leading to the outbreak of war in Europe appears frightening given the benefit of hindsight. While the Senegalese press dutifully contained reports of German mobilization and the rounds of negotiations being held in an attempt to ward off the German invasion of Poland, they appear as a mere reportage of events that would in no way affect the well being of the France's African empire.<sup>20</sup> No reference is made in *Paris-Dakar* of attempts to recruit Senegalese troops for a conflict with Germany. Even materially, no preparations were taken in Africa to create a stockpile in case of war. The first mention made of French armament is an advertisement dated August 8, encouraging readers of *Paris-Dakar* to purchase wartime bonds at an interest rate of 3.5 per cent.<sup>21</sup> Only on August 25, did the newspaper report, "due to the very tense international situation, the French government has decided to complete the military measures already taken in recalling a supplementary contingent of reservists."<sup>22</sup> These reservists referred to French soldiers in Europe, and thus eight days before the declaration of war, African colonial subjects were told that war, if it did break out, would leave them unaffected. The removal of African subjects from the threat of violent conflict made them more willing to support France through another war effort. Therefore, the impression created was that the war would remain an abstract and distant event – requiring only the spiritual loyalty of the colonial subjects.

In contrast to these ostensibly tardy mentions of war preparations, the propaganda increasingly stressed traditional themes of French colonization. The *mise en valeur* of the

colonies was referred to on an almost daily occurrence as early as May 1939. Tied in to this theme was the idea that the destiny of the colonies and the homeland were inextricably connected. *Paris-Dakar* stated on May 21, "the edification of the empire will remake the greatness of the nation."<sup>23</sup> In this way, France acknowledged the importance of her colonial subjects, giving them a sense of responsibility and ownership for what befell the empire and homeland as a whole. Later, the same article repeats this message, albeit in a more pessimistic tone, stating : "the threat of war that weighs over Europe weighs equally over lands further away, having connected to her their destiny."<sup>24</sup> The colonial administration's treatment of the colonies and the homeland as an undivided whole fits into the general colonial theory practiced by the French – assimilation.<sup>25</sup> Under this theory, certain French colonial subjects could honestly look toward becoming full-fledged French citizens through the adoption of French culture and language. Nowhere did this theory have more concrete proof than Senegal – home to the four communes of Gorée, Dakar, Rufisque, and Saint-Louis.<sup>26</sup> These communities were the four oldest colonial towns of French West Africa, and in 1848, the Second Republic extended the rights of full French citizenship to their inhabitants, termed *originaires*.<sup>27</sup> These conditions accorded the *originaires* voting rights and granted them the right to elect a deputy to the Assembly in Paris.<sup>28</sup> The fact that until independence, the deputies of the Four Communes were always African, demonstrates the extent to which these rights were maintained.<sup>29</sup> During the 1880s, France expanded her colonial rule, and upon facing opposition from French locals, these same rights were not extended to the newer colonies.<sup>30</sup> However, the promise remained that with the passage of time, and a deeper acceptance of French culture, newer African subjects could also attain the status of *originaire*.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to this policy of assimilation, France also envisioned herself as performing a *mission civilisatrice* whose principle dictated that it was Europe's duty to bring civilization to the benighted peoples of Africa and Asia.<sup>32</sup> As such, colonial officials took it upon themselves to introduce the advances of the Western world to their subjects. One of the most evident ways to accomplish this goal was through the education of young West Africans. France created a system of colonial schools in which the medium of education was French, and imparted by teachers who were either French themselves, or who were the products of the same system.<sup>33</sup> The program of these schools was cultural as it was scholastic. During the week of 14 June, the administration introduced a colonial week to "better introduce to all the young French people of the empire (West African schoolchildren included) the political and economic role played by the greatest France in the world." At the regional school of Thiès, Senegal, the director of the school stated, "We form a large family whose members inhabit the five parts of the world. Under the French peace each African and Asian can now work and enjoy the fruit of their efforts." He continued, saying that the role of the schools was the creation of an educated elite who would work toward the future preservation of the faith and belief in the French empire.<sup>34</sup> Thus indoctrinated into the idea of the importance and strength of the French empire from a very young age, future generations of colonial subjects were raised to be accepting and loyal members of the system that had nurtured and educated them.

Provisions were also made for the more mature colonial subjects. For those who lacked a formal education, a new professional school in Dakar opened in May 1939. This institution served the dual purpose of adult education, while also providing the trained labor force necessary to further develop the local industry.<sup>35</sup> In this way, France could not be accused of keeping her subjects in a state of ignorant backwardness, or of retarding the economy of her colonies to



benefit the mainland. West Africans were also reminded of the scientific and medical advances that the rulers had introduced to the colonies. A headline on May 5 announced, "In fifteen years France has regenerated the indigenous races through a considerable hygienic and sanitary work in West Africa." A more detailed listing of these advances included the opening of clinics, the training of indigenous nurses, and the creation of mobile health teams.<sup>36</sup> Like any other colonial power, France had an interest in reminding her subjects continually of the improvements her reign brought to the indigenous peoples. However, as the decades of colonization progressed, it became necessary for France to show an evolution in their contributions. As the African population became more educated, and better able to understand the workings of politics and governance France faced the conflicting task of displaying a movement toward the extension of greater responsibilities to her African citizenry, while also maintaining the rationale for her continued rule.

To this end, France relied heavily on the ideal of the development of a united, worldwide empire. An example of this logic is found in the August 6 article by former deputy to Cocochinia, Ernest Outrey entitled "The Defense of the Empire." He acknowledges, "though millions have already been spent throughout the colonies for their material advancement and defense, there is still much work to be done to achieve a harmonious development. On the economic and social plan, there is still a long task to accomplish: our possessions are not at the age of majority and they still need us to manage their affairs with vigilance and perseverance."<sup>37</sup> Thus, France was portrayed as first providing the basic needs of her colonial subjects, but rather than subsequently allow them to flounder on their own, she additionally took it upon herself to guide the colonies through the longer, and more complicated process of building a liberal, democratic state.<sup>38</sup> Colonial propaganda specifically evoked the French introduction of these

higher values to African society stating, "it was France who inculcated in them (the African colonies) the idea of liberty, and developed in them the most beautiful conceptions of life."<sup>39</sup>

These arguments for the maintenance of the colonial empire were presented with an equal amount of fervor to both the African and the French populations. During the period of economic difficulties following World War One, especially upon the onset of the Great Depression, many in France began to doubt the value of holding onto a colonial empire that some perceived more as an economic drain than a benefit.<sup>40</sup> Those in the colonial party therefore had an interest in demonstrating that the colonies played a vital role in the economic and ideological potency of France.

As the prospect of conflict with Germany loomed larger, the material value of the colonies was emphasized to an increasing degree. The same Ernest Outrey remarks upon the colonies as a "source of richness and elements of strength and security that would be a powerful supplement from a military point of view in case of a worldwide conflagration."<sup>41</sup> In the eventuality that conflict did erupt, Africa's role was supplier of raw materials and foodstuffs to France. The Minister of the Colonies, George Mandel "invited the governor general and the governor of the colonies to intensify the propaganda in favor of the possessions placed under their authority, with the aim of strongly demonstrating their agricultural, industrial, and mineral richness."<sup>42</sup> Also highlighted was the benefit to the colonies of performing their role: France was able to show statistically how her importation of raw materials from the African colonies had increased during the interwar years, and that "the commerce France conducted between the métropole and her colonies had passed a quarter, and was approaching to account for a third of the empire's entire global commerce."<sup>43</sup> This commerce bolstered the value of Africa both ideologically and economically. The colonies were seen as "retarding and to a certain extent

regulating, the effects of the current economic worldwide crisis (the Great Depression) in France.”<sup>44</sup> Also alluded to were the material benefits that this increased exchange brought to the colonies themselves. Algeria was cited as the largest importer of French goods, and “the capacity of the colonial market to absorb French products was a function of the enrichment of the colonies themselves.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Threat of Germany**

Though France’s *mission civilisatrice* and her official policy of assimilation were not recent additions to the colonial ideology, additional emphasis was placed on their benefits during the prewar period. By insisting upon the rewards her rule had brought to Africa, France aimed to foster an increased sentiment of loyalty in her subjects, thereby relegating any subversive messages of independence to the background, while at the same time creating a strong drive in her African populations to come to the defense of the Empire. In the case where this gentler tactic of propaganda did not work, a repression of the press was also instituted. Though the actions of the colonial administration did reduce the freedoms promised to the inhabitants of Dakar, its leaders escaped with impunity by calling upon the tense international situation. They additionally defended themselves by stating a need to protect their subjects from pro-German propaganda. The publication of *Mein Kampf* provided a clear declaration of the threat the African races would face if Hitler ever gained hegemony over Europe.<sup>46</sup> This menace was especially potent to African Muslims, to whom France accorded a substantial degree of liberty. A May 10 issue of *Paris-Dakar* clearly presents the choice of the African Islamists between “a German conception that thinks nothing of the equality of the races and possesses an inhumane philosophy of Hitlerian neo-paganism” and “France who defends her subjects, not wanting that

they become the slaves of racism and is representative of the spirit of humanity through the dedicated amelioration of human misery through civilizing generosity.”<sup>47</sup>

West Africans certainly remembered their mistreatment at the hands of German soldiers during the First World War, and France aimed to profit from these painful recollections by creating a dichotomy between their mode of colonization, and that of Germany. An article reviewing “The True French Overseas Tradition” by Pierre Dominique portrays France as approaching “the problem of relations between whites and men of color through a tradition of friendship, respect, and a chance for the better protection of the conquered people through association.”<sup>48</sup> The form of association practiced by France even went as far to produce “*métissage*, an object of horror for the racists who readily accused France of negritude.”<sup>49</sup> This method of colonization presented France as breaking with conventional theories of colonialism as well as those of Hitler, Mussolini, and even Chamberlain.<sup>50</sup> However, France declared herself willing to sustain these criticisms, as her *métissage* would “produce remarkable effects throughout the empire.”<sup>51</sup> Even the “barrier in Africa posed by Islam was more illusory than real because Islam was universalist, after all, exactly like Christianity which served as the moral base for the majority of the French.”<sup>52</sup> In demonstrating her singularity as a colonial master, through her kindness and tolerance, France set herself above the other colonizing powers. This made the African populations feel fortunate to be colonized by a power willing to sacrifice herself to the censure of the rest of Europe for the benefit of a foreign race. Another contrast created was that between France’s republican, democratic government and the totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany. The signing of a trade agreement between Germany and Russia on August 23 made this task easier.<sup>53</sup> While the threat of a communist uprising did not exist in French Africa to the same extent that it did in Europe, French propagandists made use of the scare tactic implied by

the rise to power of a communist, totalitarian regime, known to practice the subordination of her own population. The proposed partnership between the world's two totalitarian powers created a siege mentality in West Africa, channeling all energies toward a repulsion of these enemies of democracy and freedom, giving rise to headlines such as "In Front of the Totalitarians."<sup>54</sup>

Though the West African populations were ready to demonstrate a fear and hatred toward Germany, they may have hesitated to believe that she was once again preparing for war, especially a war pitting her against the same powers that defeated her just over twenty years ago. To this end, reports began to be published in Dakar of a growing German movement aimed at discrediting France and Great Britain. At the beginning of August 1939, most German activity was portrayed as subversive and underground. On August 2 *Paris-Dakar* implied that Hitler was spying on Great Britain by dispatching spies disguised as "observers."<sup>55</sup> One week later, the newspaper published findings revealing a German funding of the Irish terrorist movement for freedom in Great Britain. These allegations made the German government an active accomplice of the plot, as "German legislation did not permit that any currency could be sent abroad without the specific consent of the government of the Reich."<sup>56</sup> By aiding the terrorist movement, the German government directly "prevented a pacific solution to the problem"<sup>57</sup> in Great Britain. By making Germany the enemy of peace and order, France set the stage to show that she was a power not to be trusted, and that the liberal democracies had to be on their guard against her subversive actions.

### **The imminence of war – German ambitions on Poland**

As the German army increased the mobilization against Poland during August 1939, the warnings of the danger she posed to freedom and liberty in the rest of Europe and her

possessions increased in insistency. During the interwar period, both Britain and France pledged themselves to align with Poland to insure her freedom.<sup>58</sup> In August 1939 with Hitler's troops gathering at Poland's borders, these two powers were called to join together to honor their agreements. Despite the fact that Britain and France had a history of animosity, especially in the colonial sphere, France presented their alliance against the totalitarian regimes as natural, due to their shared tradition of political democracy and liberalism. France was also anxious to prove that she was a nation capable of honoring her promise to a fellow democracy under threat. To this end, she presented, along with Great Britain, a "Front de la Paix" aimed at rebuffing and impeding any German incursions into Polish territory.<sup>59</sup> As implied by its name, "Front of Peace", this alliance was not merely designed to protect Poland through military means, but also to preserve peace in Europe. Reports of French activity against Germany appeared at times to be more anxious to maintain a state of calm than actively call Hitler to task for his subversive activity. As reported on August 27, Prime Minister Edouard Daladier declared himself "ready to do all that is humanly possible to save the peace."<sup>60</sup> France, and her populations, had no interest in entering another bloody conflict. Therefore, great care was taken when walking the fine line between aiding Poland in her plight before German aggression, and assuring the West African population that their manpower was not needed to wage war against an enemy already proven to be brutal and racist. In *Paris-Dakar* the situation was presented as being "certainly particularly serious," but care was taken to remind the population "that France and Great Britain were great powers, allies loyal to their commitments and partisans, and resolved toward the maintenance of peace."<sup>61</sup>

Despite these assurances of peace however, it was impossible for France to ignore the very real possibility of war. The propaganda therefore presented Germany as the aggressor, a

nation and a regime unrelenting in its pursuit of gaining more power and territory. Germany was portrayed as “aiming to discredit the Front of Peace.”<sup>62</sup> Doing this would remove the hope of the smaller and weaker nations of Europe, namely Poland, Hungary, and the Balkan States, that France and Great Britain possessed the will and the capacity to effectively come to their aid. This tactic was aimed at convincing these territories to voluntarily place themselves under the command of the Third Reich. As “particular attention was paid to diminishing the prestige of Great Britain and France, the Front of Peace was presented as a bluff, not carrying any real value.”<sup>63</sup> In order to defend herself against these attacks on her honor and military might, French propaganda issued counter-statements citing her esteem and confidence in her populations, “convinced that the propaganda and provocations of Germany would amount to nothing.”<sup>64</sup> However, a war of words did not halt German ambitions, and in order to maintain the support of her West African subjects, France worked to convince them that despite the use of all diplomatic tactics, Germany was heading unremittingly into war. On August 23, *Paris-Dakar* reported, “were it not for lack of technological readiness, Germany would have already thrown the dice toward her dreams of conquest.” The rationale of Joachim von Ribbentrop, foreign minister of Germany, was presented as forcing the capitulation of Poland as she was attacked from three sides. In this way, the Reich would obtain freedom of movement, and a sufficient supply of cereals, carbon, and petrol. It was the start not only towards revenge but towards glory and domination.”<sup>65</sup> Faced with this game where Hitler was prepared to play “le tout pour le tout,” it was impossible for France and Great Britain to “honorably defend their ally without entering into war.”<sup>66</sup>

The image French propagandists created of the war was ominously close to reality as Jean-Pierre Duret described the German tactic of *guerre foudroyante* – lightning war or

blitzkrieg as early as August 1939.<sup>67</sup> Germany had already used this tactic to great effect in Austria and Czechoslovakia during 1938 and 1939, “reducing the enemy’s defenses to cinders in a few hours, destroying once flourishing villages, and pulverizing strategic, tactical belts.”<sup>68</sup> According to Duret, the success of blitzkrieg relied upon the “broken morale of the victim” rendering impossible any physical resistance. He calculated that if the Germans made the mistake of using blitzkrieg on a people “supported by an excellent army, a good aviation fleet, and benefitting from the moral support of the entire country, the tactic would lose sixty percent of its theoretical effectiveness.”<sup>69</sup> He thus proposed that France protect herself from Germany by bolstering her military forces, but also by “creating a physical and moral protection of the army and nation against the attack.”<sup>70</sup>

The construction of this strong, Empire-wide morale was France’s primary line of defense against Germany. It prompted headlines such as “Wait, Arm, and See what Comes.”<sup>71</sup> While the last week of August 1939 witnessed a movement toward greater military mobilization, the tone continued to be subdued as the international situation was described merely as “very tense” on August 25<sup>72</sup>, and August 26 saw a “partial mobilization.”<sup>73</sup> Given that France declared war on Germany on September 3 1939,<sup>74</sup> these preparations for war appear lukewarm at best. They mesh well however, with the pride that France derived from maintaining her “Common sense and calm” as West Africans were advised to do in the face of the “serious international situation.”<sup>75</sup> Information emanating from unofficial international sources was criticized for being “exaggerated and alarmist...and the diverse rumors circulating quickly amplified and deformed the situation.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, France even one week before the outbreak of war continued working toward controlling her colonial subjects, and reassuring them that they had no reason to fear that a European war would affect them again. The same attempt to abate the concerns of the



colonial populations appeared to apply to France's position on the situation at the home front. The Polish prime minister reported on the startling calm he witnessed in France during a transit through Paris on August 29.<sup>77</sup> This same vision of French quietude was repeated on August 30 as "the French remained calm, and mobilization was only vaguely visible."<sup>78</sup> While at this point war could only be a foregone conclusion, the French government saw its populations' primary task as placing their ultimate trust in the officials promised to defend them, and remaining calm and confident in the strength of their Empire in the face of Hitler's blasphemous bellicose ambitions. Unfortunately for the French Empire, the defeat of the Third Reich would not be achieved so neatly, and a conflict that was hoped to be reconciled through diplomatic appeasement would bring the French Empire to her knees.

LA DROLE DE GUERRE

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#### Fostering African loyalty

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## CHAPTER II

### LA DROLE DE GUERRE

Though France did not engage in any significant military engagements during the *drole de guerre*, her propaganda tactics display an intensification of attempts to prepare the colonies for active combat. The first step was to foster, as much as possible, a spirit of loyalty to the empire. France portrayed herself somewhat under a situation of crisis by creating restrictions on communications and publication with FWA. However, as these measures were taken under the aegis of protecting the colonies, France once again presented herself as a protector and “fatherland.” France also placed the strength of her defenses in the moral righteousness of her ideology. This was joined together with the same spirit of freedom and civilization found in Great Britain, with whom France aligned herself. Heightening the noble ideology of France was the contrast created with the brutal wartime tactics of Germany. These were increasingly expounded upon as propagandists created a direct connection between the material and moral strength of a nation. This created the confidence in Africans that the virtuous soldiers of the French empire had nothing to fear from the savage German hordes.

#### Fostering African loyalty

The outbreak of war between France and Germany occurred on September 2, 1939 upon the German invasion of Poland. Through a series of pacts and alliances, both France and Great Britain pledged themselves to come to Poland's aid in the eventuality of war.<sup>1</sup> Despite the

declarations of war, neither side launched a significant attack upon the other. What materialized instead was a lull in the fighting that became known as the Phony War, or in France, "*la drôle de guerre*."<sup>2</sup> The aim of both parties from September 1939 until May 1940 was to negotiate an end to the war that would not embarrass either side.<sup>3</sup> To achieve this, the Allied powers, France and Great Britain, were willing to sacrifice Poland to Germany in the hope that Hitler would be appeased, thereby avoiding the engagement and bloodshed of their own soldiers and territories. However, prior French propaganda backed its government into a corner. It had already spent significant effort to portray France as the protector of democracy and freedom, and to create an image of Germany as a bellicose nation, preying upon innocent, peace-seeking Poland. The behind-the-scenes machinations of the *drôle de guerre* could not be revealed, especially to the subject populations of the empire whose loyalty had to be maintained. France accordingly took a more warlike stance, mobilizing troops<sup>4</sup> and rationing food and raw materials<sup>5</sup> in an effort to maintain the image of France keeping her pledge, and coming to the aid of Poland.

One of the most noticeable wartime reductions is the decrease in length of *Paris-Dakar*. The newspaper published notice of this reduction on September 8 stating, "concerns about the lack of paper and the delicate working conditions necessitated the limitation of the presentation of the paper to two pages."<sup>6</sup> It was further promised that lack of space would not hamper the diffusion of accurate and authorized material to the population of Dakar. Throughout the war, the French authorities made a strong effort to assure readers in Senegal that they were receiving all possible information. A declaration made by the General Commissioner of Information stated, "When there is something to tell you, we will tell you, except if it is against France. Never think that our silences are because we wish to hide something from you."<sup>7</sup> He further bolstered his argument by comparing the superior length and quality of the current wartime

communications to those provided to Africa in 1914. The goal of this attempted appeasement was to reduce African interest in seeking information from outside, unauthorized agents. This form of information gathering was viewed with suspicion: it spoke toward a doubt in French African minds as to the strength of their homeland. It also left the colonies more vulnerable to the enemy's propaganda, which no doubt exaggerated their position during the war, at the expense of France. Such ill-received news was sure to spark rumors and incite panic – leading the population to despair over the demise of the empire sooner than necessary. *Paris-Dakar* published the public's response to this request the following day. It reiterated that the loyal subject's job was to “accept with confidence the loyal declaration of the Commissioner of Information...[and] no matter our desire to know, we can only be satisfied in listening to those who have the official mission to inform us. In the life that is currently ours, common sense demands that we wait to be informed.”<sup>8</sup> Though the author of this article remains anonymous, it is written in such a way that the readers could safely assume that he was a fellow Senegalese. Therefore, his acceptance of the demands of the colonial regime was presented as the model to follow.

Tightened control of the press worked in tandem with other measures adopted to control the systems of communication in the colonies. These included the prohibition of private telegraphic correspondence with Germany, a ban against the use of coded or foreign language in telegrams, and restrictions placed on telephone and radio usage.<sup>9</sup> The restrictions placed upon *Paris-Dakar* are particularly noteworthy as they served the dual purpose of censoring the population of Dakar, and also streamlining the propagandist tactics used by French authorities. With less space available, there was a lack of opportunity for the newspaper to publish editorial

letters or dissenting opinions, thereby creating the appearance that the entire population was in agreement with the official stance on wartime developments.

As was normal under such tense international conditions, as soon as an event touched France, messages of fidelity and absolute faith in the complete and definitive victory poured in from all corners of the empire.<sup>10</sup> On September 8 *Paris-Dakar* published an article observing the demonstrations of loyalty held in the different parts of the French colonial empire, from Indochina to Dakar. The rulers of Amman, Cambodia, Laos, as well as the Sultan of Morocco pledged their aid and solidarity to the French Republic. In Dakar itself, central roads and squares were blockaded so that demonstrations of the ardor the populations of black Africa held toward their homeland could be fully expressed.<sup>11</sup> One week later the newspaper published an open letter from a resident of Saint-Louis describing the Muslim community's commitment to the protection of France against Germany. This letter provides valuable insight into the official Muslim stance on the war. It describes a reunion held at the Grande Mosquée at Pointe Nord in Dakar where the imam preached to a congregation of a thousand worshipers on the importance of "good Muslims arming themselves to fight alongside their European brothers." The imam made mention of the debt Muslims owed France as she had "protected the Muslims of French West Africa (FWA), and constructed for them mosques, schools, and hospitals." This attitude was placed in opposition with the savage German scorn of blacks who were enemies of freedom. He concluded his message by saying that "to defend France was to defend the religion of the prophet."<sup>12</sup>

This letter demonstrates a number of significant themes of wartime policy and attitudes in FWA. First, it shows the reliance of the colonial administration upon a network of traditional

African political and religious leaders to transmit information emanating from the colonial authorities to the masses of the populations.<sup>13</sup> These leaders, such as the imam, were appointed, enthroned, promoted, or dismissed according to their docility and effectiveness in obtaining the cooperation of their followers.<sup>14</sup> While the significance of these actors was much greater in the countryside and villages, they were also present in urban society, as evidenced by this religious gathering in Dakar. Their importance did not go unnoticed by colonial leaders; Governor Deschamps remarked that they had become veritable "functionaries," absorbed by the colonial system.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the war these traditional functionaries assured the recruitment of troops the supply of agricultural products, and the collection of taxes.<sup>16</sup> It can be assumed that their importance and the scope of their activities grew as the number of French-born personnel in FWA declined during the war. At the beginning of the war, there was one French person for every 550 to 600 Africans.<sup>17</sup> War mobilization skewed the ratio even more in favor of Africa as half of the French personnel working in political affairs and administration were called home.<sup>18</sup> While direct evidence of this reliance on African leaders was not expressed in official colonial propaganda, it does find voice in the open letters published by loyal Senegalese in *Paris-Dakar*.

Another theme central to the speech of the imam is the French portrayal of the German threat. As discussed in the previous chapter, Senegal was just exiting a period of open agitation against her colonial masters, and emotions still ran high; leaving open the threat that calls for independence in the colonies would be made. During the time of war, this was the last thing that France looked forward to, as she relied upon her colonies as a source of men and supplies to support the European front. Furthermore, she lacked the military capacity to conduct war with Germany, while at the same time instituting an active campaign of repression in Africa. Propaganda remained, therefore, the most efficient tool for controlling the African populations.

While France's attitude toward her colonies could be regarded as paternalistic, it paled in comparison to the threat Germany posed to the entire moral, cultural, religious, political, and economic system in FWA.<sup>19</sup> This led the native populations to the conclusion that it was better to forget about agitating for greater freedoms during the war years, and offer their wholehearted support to the war effort in order to avoid the worst of all possible futures – colonization by Germany. At the same time, pains were taken to once again remind Africans of all that French colonization had contributed to their material well-being. This sentiment carried more weight in the cities than in the countryside. The urban centers benefited the most from French efforts to create an infrastructure and social services in the form of hospitals and schools.

Another example of this form of propaganda, comparing French paternalistic kindness to German brutality, appears in a September 22 article entitled "Peaceful Conquests." The author of the article makes the claim that "contrary to the brutal methods that were applied by other colonizers, French colonization was more commercial than politic, seeking to influence rather than to command [ . . . ] The most often, chiefs and tribes warmly welcomed the explorers who came to open scientific, industrial, and commercial activity with France."<sup>20</sup> In this way, the goal of French colonization was stated as bringing greater economic prosperity and technological advances to the backwards peoples of Africa. While this article was printed, an opposing vision of Germany was concurrently created. During the lead-up to the war, France had already emphasized German brutality and racism, but her actions in Poland gave further support to this image. A September 17 article described the "systematic bombardments that destroyed entire Polish cities, piling up the cadavers."<sup>21</sup> More detailed manifestations of atrocities were decried as Germany, "In scorn of the elementary laws of humanity, massacred the elderly, women, and children, mowing them down with machine guns, and shooting at them from point-blank

range.”<sup>22</sup> A later article published on November 2 gave details on the “frightening conditions reigning in the Nazi concentration camps, and on the barbaric acts committed by the Nazis even at the exterior of these camps.” It was recognized, even at this early date, that the victims of these camps were “men entirely innocent of all crime, but who had been arrested because of their race, religion, or political opinion.” The article also cited some specific examples of the punishments the detainees had to endure such as “twenty-five lashes of the whip for a minor infraction such as drinking water during the work day which lasted sixteen hours.”<sup>23</sup>

The success of French propaganda in inciting fear among the African populations is best documented by the number of Africans incorporated into the French army. Between September 1939 and June 1940, 100,000 men enrolled in the French armies, far exceeding the estimate of 50,000 men.<sup>24</sup> This rush to enroll stemmed from the African mindset, conditioned to believe in the immediate and very real issue of preserving Africa, and the world, from Nazism. French propaganda was also successful in creating the belief that the fate of West Africa was intrinsically connected to the success or failure of the European homeland, therefore, the defeat of France, would have dire consequences for FWA, especially when faced with the inhumanity of German barbarism. Secondary tactics were also used to inspire African men to enroll. Promises were made of the right to vote for those who served, and the career and material benefits of being a French soldier were advertised in illustrated tracts, financed by commercial businesses.<sup>25</sup> This is not to say however that resistance was completely absent from the mobilization processes. When a group of évolués refused to be enrolled as *tirailleurs*, they were presented with the choice between submission or execution. These men became the seventh regiment of Senegalese *tirailleurs* of Dakar.<sup>26</sup> News of this resistance was not reported upon however, as it would have broken the image of a united and loyal population. More common



were reports such as the one on the mobilization in Morocco, published on September 9. The article describes how men who had not even been required to enroll, such as reservists who had not yet been called up, were “presenting themselves in droves to civil and military officials so that they could be placed at the disposition of their country.”<sup>27</sup> In evoking examples of Africans who were eager to pick up arms for the European homeland it was hoped that more would follow their example. On September 20 *Paris-Dakar* remarked upon the high number of African men who had enrolled in the army stating, “their number [of enlistees] is already superior to the total number recruited during the last war.”<sup>28</sup> The economic mobilization of the colonies was just as remarkable as the article also claimed “in a few months the colonies would bring to France a superior quantity of material supplies than the total amount that had been sent from 1914 to 1918.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Alliance with Great Britain**

Another significant development to occur during the *drôle de guerre* was the emergence of a tight alliance between France and Great Britain. The history of the First World War, where the two empires had been central to the formation of the Triple Entente rendered their collaboration in the face of this new German threat only logical.<sup>30</sup> On the African front, association between the two empires had an even deeper history as the indigenous populations of British West Africa (BWA) and FWA maintained their traditional cultural, religious, and ethnic ties though a fluid migration of nomadic cattle herders and commercial exchange between the territories.<sup>31</sup> In Africa, cooperation between the two powers took the form of an open exchange of information concerning propaganda and suspect individuals; administrative visits between BWA and FWA continued as normal. The British veterans services also continued to send

vaccinations to French soldiers, and French African soldiers attempting to escape conscription by fleeing to BWA were returned to FWA upon apprehension.<sup>32</sup>

The creation of the image of France and Great Britain as an undividable entity began at the very onset of war. On September 2, *Paris-Dakar* stated that France and Great Britain possessed a large fleet that would be indispensable to their control of the seas.<sup>33</sup> By speaking of the fleets of these two nations as one unit, France suggested that what was Britain's was hers and vice versa. This attitude of a joint pool of military resources was evoked more concretely on December 2 when *Paris-Dakar* stated that "the military and political victory of France and Great Britain leans upon the vast resources of two empires." A September 14 article reports upon the fraternity between the two armies, describing the arrival of British troops into France amid an indescribable enthusiasm. The Tommies (the popular name assigned to British soldiers since World War One) received a warm welcome in all the villages they crossed. "The presence in France of this splendid army that was prepared to enter in battle alongside the French army produced an effect that words were powerless to describe."<sup>34</sup> The goal in so loudly proclaiming the Franco-British alliance was to reassure the French populations that they were not alone in their fight against Germany. Care was taken, of course, to confirm the readiness of French armies for battle, as was done on September 23 when Prime Minister Daladier announced "Our [France's] armies had the material means to resist and to vanquish; they had courage, they had science, and they had faith."<sup>35</sup> Joining together with another renowned military power – Great Britain - could only reinforce the belief and support for the military prowess of France.

### The importance of moral righteousness

More important than sharing military might with Great Britain was the common moral heritage of the two powers. Throughout the war, much of France's support derived from her noble position as defenders of peace, liberty, and justice, and the loyalty of her subjects to this belief. In a September 21 call to arms of the Senegalese citizens, young men were encouraged to enroll themselves in the army in order to defend the "immortal principles of human dignity and individual freedoms" and to ensure the protection of the heritage of France as she entered into war again "so that relations between men and nations could be governed by law and not force."<sup>36</sup> It only made sense then, that as France's closest ally, Great Britain was portrayed as sharing her same moral backbone. This idea was not without historical relevance as both empires had developed into beacons of democratic government since the conclusion of World War One, offering the protection of individual freedoms – at least to citizens in the homeland. The liberties afforded to native-born citizens were therefore extended – at least in paper and thought, in not in practice– to the colonial subjects, especially during times of war. In any instance, the protections offered by the Allies to their colonial subjects far exceeded any expectations of the treatment that Africans could hope to receive at the hands of Germans.

Given this shared moral background, *Paris-Dakar* often published speeches and declarations pronounced by British officials and generals in lieu of quoting French sources. Until June 1940, it was accepted that the official British position was equally acceptable and applicable to France. One of the earliest statements of this rationale appears on September 15 when *Paris-Dakar* published a speech given by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to the Chamber of Commons in which he declared that "there was a complete similarity of views

between the French government and ourselves.”<sup>37</sup> Later in the war, a joint British and French task was more clearly defined as “to make respected the tested values of western civilization, to give a new life to her cultural heritage derived from Greece, Rome, Christianity, and modern science.”<sup>38</sup> This Franco-British solidarity grew stronger as the powers faced a common threat in the form of Germany. In presenting themselves as champions of democracy and freedom, they became the vanguard for all democracies, while Germany was portrayed, more and more as the universal threat. An example of this is a December 3 article discussing the common danger faced by all democracies, and how “the protective Franco-British alliance assembled around itself the races that wished to live.”<sup>39</sup>

### **German immorality**

If Britain and France perceived their strength as deriving from their moral high ground, the weakness of Germany originated in her corruption and treachery. Therefore, substantial effort was taken to portray Germany in the worst possible light. As previously discussed, this tactic provided support to the Allies by striking a chord of fear, but it also served as a morale builder by indicating to the subject populations that a nation as corrupt as Germany could not possibly hope to win a definitive victory against the powers of freedom and civilization. Examples of German treachery ran rampant from the first day of the war. On September 8, Germany opened hostilities upon the Allies by torpedoing the *Athenia*, a commercial ship.<sup>40</sup> The civilians who perished in this attack were described as victims of murder, and a parallel was drawn between this action and the torpedoing of the *Lusitania* during the First World War. However, this attack was described as even more “hideous to the universal conscience...as it was impossible to ignore that the *Athenia* did not have aboard arms and munitions, but Canadian and

Jewish refugees.”<sup>41</sup> The image of German conduct only worsened as the war progressed, and as previously discussed, acts of barbarism in Nazi concentration camps became fodder for anti-German propaganda published in Senegal. In November it was reported that the British had just published a “white book” revealing not only “the atrocities committed by the Nazis”<sup>42</sup> but also the fact that “German had actively sought to create war in Europe.” This conclusion was drawn upon a compilation of documents concerning Franco-British relations from March 15 to September 3.<sup>43</sup> This discovery echoed the claims made at the beginning of the war when President Daladier issued a speech on September 8 stating, “the responsibility for fallen blood would fall entirely upon Germany,” and “France and England had multiplied their efforts for the maintenance of peace, in issuing a last call to reason.”<sup>44</sup> This bloodthirsty quest for war and conquest was seen as going against the tenants of enlightened civilization, and Germany, by so actively pursuing her desire to enlarge her territory was perceived as a backwards specter of barbarity and chaos. Further proof of Germany’s desire to go to war at all costs came in the form of a reminder of the 1934 treaty of non-aggression that German had signed with Poland in 1934.<sup>45</sup> Her current invasion of Polish territory provided one more example of how Germany could not be counted upon to act honorably and keep her word.

Further support for Germany’s dishonorable character came from a criticism of the propaganda she disseminated to both her own people and the populations of the Allied nations. A September 13 article entitled “German Shrewdness” accused Germany of playing a double game that on one hand appealed to German mothers to “make a stand against an enemy that would take their children,” and on the other, “was in the process of doubling the strength of her forces gathered at the border of a peaceful and weaker Poland.”<sup>46</sup> This characterization of German propaganda was the direct opposite of what French propaganda claimed to be, as it was

promised that France would provide her citizens with accurate and trustworthy information as the war progressed. Also questioned was the degree of support that the Germany government and army received from its citizenry. While France applauded the fact that the entirety of her citizenry openly supported her war effort, the support the German people displayed toward their government was discounted due to the fact that they were being lied to and did not fully understand the extent of their government's actions. This also led to an interesting situation whereby the German people were, to a certain extent, not held complicit for the brutality and treachery of their leaders. This differs from other forms of propaganda in which the entire enemy nation, leaders as well as the general population, is portrayed as inherently evil or violent.

The hypocrisy of official German propaganda was further developed to make her leaders appear as bold-faced liars. A September 9 article used cold, hard facts to show that Germany lied when she claimed it "was necessary for her to go to war to feed her population and supply herself with raw materials."<sup>47</sup> Using the studies conducted by a British economist, the article showed that Germany was in fact producing more food and raw materials during the years leading up to the war than she had in 1929 – the year of her highest recorded productivity. By presenting her counter-argument in scientific terms, French propagandists made it appear that their information was irrefutable and that anything contrary to their findings was pure fabrication.

The clearest attack against German propaganda was a December 2 article juxtaposing French and German methods of propaganda. The article describes the self-serving character of Germany stating, "German propaganda uses Germany culture to establish her hegemony. It does not fight for anything but German values." In comparison to this, "French propaganda proclaims

and maintains human values.”<sup>48</sup> In this way, France once again positioned herself as fighting for humanity and civilization against Germany, which by default was perceived as aiming for the opposite goals.

Germany’s choice of allies was also called into question as she aligned herself with the communist U.S.S.R. This alliance stood to be criticized in two parts as communism in and of itself was ill perceived by the Western democracies, as evidenced by France’s dissolution of the communist party on September 23.<sup>49</sup> Also because Germany had been one of the first nations to decry communism,<sup>50</sup> she was perceived as a turncoat upon her creation of an allegiance with the U.S.S.R. This alliance was presented as yet one more facet of Germany’s double-faced character. *Paris-Dakar* revealed on September 9 that the agreement to divide Poland between Germany and the U.S.S.R. was not the result of recent negotiations, but rather a long-standing pact between the two nations that had existed since September 1937 – two years earlier.<sup>51</sup> The perception of this agreement as a traitorous act was evoked again on September 19 where the Soviet penetration of Poland was described as being the “coronation of a treason.”<sup>52</sup>

This allegiance between two such corrupt nations – Nazi Germany and the communist U.S.S.R – did lend a certain degree of hope to the French cause. Predictions were made that these two allies would grow increasingly wary of one another, especially as their territories became closer together.<sup>53</sup> As stated in a September 20 article, “The U.S.S.R understands perfectly the consequences that must logically result from her neighboring with Germany [. . .] in knowing this, the mobilization ordered by Stalin [. . .] presents her in Poland with an imposing deployment of forces that the Germans must take into account.”<sup>54</sup> One day later, *Paris-Dakar* reported on the growing rivalry between Hitler and Stalin for the Baltic States and Ukraine.<sup>55</sup> It

was hoped that as each nation recognized the threat in the other they would react violently, provoking a war to erupt between the U.S.S.R and Germany. In this way, the alliance between the two totalitarian regimes would terminate in their mutual destruction, thereby saving the remainder of the democratic and peaceful world from conflict. These hopes appeared to hold some cachet especially as December 1 witnessed the breaking off of relations between the U.S.S.R. and Germany over the issue of Soviet intentions in Finland.<sup>56</sup>

The end goal of French propaganda in uncovering Germany's acts of betrayal and dishonesty was to indicate how her moral weakness would manifest itself in material weakness. This cause and effect pattern was evoked within the first two weeks of the war. On September 9 *Paris-Dakar* reported that Germany was already "experiencing privations that carried her back to the days of 1917." It was reported that "the restrictions adopted by the German government since the beginning of the conflict (on September 2) corresponded to those felt under the German empire in 1917 (during the height of World War One)." These restrictions were felt in raw materials, foodstuffs, and petrol – essentially affecting all sectors of life and German industry.<sup>57</sup> The Senegalese press followed up reports of these privations with images of a Germany citizenry and armed forces that were already discontent with the hardships of war. On September 13, *Paris-Dakar* reported that the "German people were beginning to understand the amplitude of the sacrifices the war would impose." The picture presented of the state of morale in the German armed forces was even direr as claims were made of German soldiers deserting the army and crossing over the Rhine into France. One soldier was reported as saying, "Build a bridge across the Rhine and you will see German soldiers taking advantage of their chance to come to you by the thousands."<sup>58</sup>



The goal of this propaganda was of course to create a sense of hope in the French populations that armed conflict would not even materialize. With Germans beginning to understand the full cost of going to war, along with their growing distrust and discontent with their corrupt government, French populations might be lured into supposing that they would be spared the trials of another long, costly conflict. By extending a glimmer of hope to the African populations, that once the moral strength of the French empire remained intact, she would successfully ride out this difficult period, France assuaged the fears of her colonial subjects. The alliance with Great Britain further reassured the colonial subjects because it demonstrated that the French Empire was not alone in her stance against Germany. Moral righteousness again played an important role in the presentation of this alliance, as France displayed that her alliances furthered the objectives of global civilization and peacefulness.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BATTLE FOR FRANCE

The Battle for France began with the highest of hopes for the Allied Powers. Though Hitler had successfully invaded the Low Countries, France remained firm in her belief that the “impregnable” defensive of the Maginot Line and her reputed military leaders would save the nation from invasion and capitulation. The main theme of colonial propaganda remained constant from May 1939 - loyalty to a noble homeland who stood as the champion against a savage and brutal Germany. The Italian entrance into the war on the side of Germany in June 1940 further bolstered this message as previous Italian actions in Ethiopia provided a clear image to Africans of what their destiny would be at the hands of the Axis powers. Therefore, FWA was unprepared to accept the reversal of colonial propaganda that occurred when the métropole began to consider signing an armistice with Germany. Both the general population of FWA and Cayla’s colonial administration voiced this reluctance as they had accepted and adhered to the noble ideology defining the French Empire. Only the nomination of Pierre Boisson to the post of governor general assured the Vichy regime of FWA’s allegiance. However, Boisson’s acceptance of the armistice could not speak for the loyalty of the population, who remained susceptible to the message presented by General Charles de Gaulle’s Free France.

### Hope in the face of military defeat

The German invasion of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg on 10 May 1940<sup>1</sup> definitively put an end to the Allies' hopes of avoiding full-fledged combat with Germany. Until this point in the war, hope had remained that Hitler could be appeased, and that he would satisfy his lust for more territory through the appropriation of the small Eastern European states. However as his army gradually moved across Europe, inching ever closer to the powerful Western democracies, it became apparent that he intended to hold firm to his quest of world hegemony. *Paris-Dakar* marked the first major military engagement between French and German forces on May 11 by evoking the "sentiments of fraternity that unite the populations of the FWA closer than ever to their homeland."<sup>2</sup> The same article also carried a reminder of what was at stake in the war: the battle was portrayed as "determining the destiny of humanity."<sup>3</sup> These two themes – loyalty to the homeland, and the portrayal of the French empire as the guardians of civilization against the barbaric threat posed by the Germans – are an ongoing theme throughout France's engagement against Germany.

French propaganda portrayed Hitler's decision to invade the Low Countries as more than mere wartime tactics; his actions were decried as "banditry" and a "violation of the Law of Nations" as "the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg have constantly affirmed their neutrality."<sup>4</sup> In this way, *Paris-Dakar* asserted that no one in Europe could be safe from the ambitions of Hitler. The geopolitical situation of the newly invaded territories was also significant because it brought the war to France's doorstep. Up to this point, France had managed to avoid all conflict. Now however, she was presented with no other option but to fight to assure her own liberty. In this way, the African populations of her empire were assured that

their sacrifices during the war were not taken lightly, but that their manpower was necessary for the very survival of their homeland. Further support for the Allies came from the ultimate Catholic moral force – on May 13, a telegram from the Pope to the King of Belgium was released in which the Pope spoke out against the actions of Germany and voiced his support for the Allies.<sup>5</sup> A final source of moral authority to be repeated throughout the war was the support of the American president Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Though the United States entered the war after the French armistice with Germany, the moral and material support pledged to the Allies before this period served as “irrefutable proof”<sup>6</sup> that the French Empire was fighting on the right side.

Though *Paris-Dakar* continually made mention of French and British military strength – both in terms of morale and material – the reality of German advances across Europe could not be hidden from the populations. Issues of the newspaper from this period present how the French Empire attempted to maintain the morale of the French citizenry, while at the same time conceding that she had encountered defeat on the battleground. A May 19 article portrays the German army as being overextended. A day of rest granted to the Germans was “probably spent restocking their tanks...but it is difficult in a single day to repair the numerous mechanical accidents that the tanks and cars have suffered over the course of the six preceding days. It is yet more difficult to give complete reprieve to men for whom the mental and muscular stress must have been extreme after the engagements and marches without rest.”<sup>7</sup> In this way, *Paris-Dakar* stated that Germany was pushing herself and her armies too hard, and the fast progress she was making across Europe would soon be checked as she gradually ran her forces into the ground. This message functioned at many levels. It displayed how the ambitions of the Third Reich led to the brutal mistreatment of her own people and it pointed to a potential weakness in the

German war effort. Finally, it extended a last breath of hope to the populations of the French Empire that war including them could yet be averted.

*Paris-Dakar* assured its readers that France would be protected from a German invasion, or could at least buy more time to prepare for an invasion through the stronghold of the Maginot Line.<sup>8</sup> This was a line of various military defenses constructed along the French border with Germany and Italy. It was thought that Germany would be dissuaded from a direct assault on France due to the fortifications and would invade France through a neutral Belgium instead – buying France more time to prepare her mobile defenses.<sup>9</sup> Hence, *Paris-Dakar* mentioned repeatedly the efforts spent to further bolster this line of defense. Unfortunately for France, while Germany did take the predicted route of invading through Belgium, she did so through a gap in the line at the Ardennes, while also conducting an extensive airborne assault. These two factors rendered the defenses of the Maginot Line essentially useless against German invasion.<sup>10</sup>

According to *Paris-Dakar*, another source of French military strength was her leaders. *Paris-Dakar* began to publish a series of articles in June 1940 paying homage to the moral and military greatness of leaders such as General Maxime Weygand, who was named Supreme Commander of the French forces in May 1940, and Marshal Philippe Pétain. Militarily, these men had already proven themselves, as they had become famous while defending France during World War I. In particular, Pétain was described as “one of the most perseverant artisans of the victory.”<sup>11</sup> Pétain’s famous phrase “Ils ne passeront pas” (They shall not pass) – regarding the German assault on Verdun during World War One – was reiterated.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, these leaders embodied all the best French values. In the words of one article, “For the French, Pétain remained above all the benevolent, humanitarian leader, who healed the wounds of the army

after the failure of the Nivelle offensive (during World War I), and who through his example, his understanding, and his call to the purest virtues of the race engaged the troops in the decisive test of 1918 after having unceasingly felt the vicious cuts of the German advance.”<sup>13</sup> By casting the military leadership in the role of heroes and the saviors of not only French territory, but also French values, the propagandists aimed to reassure the colonial populations that their fates were in good hands. They also reiterated the French colonial theory of assimilation by grouping the entirety of the empire’s population – European as well as African – into one bloc. Thus, they reminding Africans that they had a vested interest in what happened in the métropole despite their physical distance from France.

Additionally, because these same leaders had already defeated the Germans once, there was no reason to doubt that they could not do so again. In fact, a May 23 article reminded the French populations that their armies “had suffered a great surprise from the disloyal army [during World War I] – the use of poison gas – and we finished by dominating.”<sup>14</sup> The message was clear: the French Empire had faced far worse odds than she presently did and that victory would be hers again “if it was the will of each Frenchman, if each soldier understands the immense role that he plays, if each worker working twelve hours a day bends over with ferocious passion on his machine tool, if each man and each woman understand the grandeur of the hour that we are living.”<sup>15</sup> In this way, even as reports of German victories continued to abound, French propagandists aimed to demonstrate to the populations that those on the morally stronger side would always win – but this victory was dependent upon the effort of each and every citizen of the empire, not just the great military leaders that France had at her disposal.

However, as Germany continued to gain ground across Europe, quickly subduing the Low Countries and entering French territory, the hope for victory grew increasingly dim. As propagandists still worked to uphold the image of a strong Allied military front, the reportage of two significant military capitulations preceding the Battle of France sought to remove the stain of failure from French efforts. The first of these losses was the surrender of Belgium to Germany on May 28.<sup>16</sup> The decision of the Belgian king, Léopold III, to “lay down his arms”<sup>17</sup> was viewed as an act of betrayal not only of his own people, but also of the Allies, “whom he had called to his aid to defend his country against the barbaric hordes.”<sup>18</sup> *Paris-Dakar* portrayed Léopold III as destroying the heritage of his family, stating, “from the knightly king (Léopold III’s father) succeeded the criminal king [...] Léopold III has broken the connections that unite his people, he is no longer considered a governor. The decision of the King does not commit the Nation.”<sup>19</sup> *Paris-Dakar* judged his actions yet more harshly because they were perceived as going against the general will of his people. The suggestion that the surrender of Belgium was the whim of a traitorous and weak king absolved France from any blame associated with the German advance through Belgium. The selfishness of Léopold III was expounded upon to such an extent that the readers of *Paris-Dakar* could draw the conclusion that no degree of French aid would have made a difference in his decision to capitulate to Germany – therefore the loss was not due to a lack of French might, but rather the moral weakness of a foreign king.

The second highly publicized retreat was the Evacuation of Dunkerque that took place from May 27 to June 5.<sup>20</sup> *Paris-Dakar* described the evacuation in laudatory tones, stating, “the evacuation of troops took place under satisfactory conditions,”<sup>21</sup> and the “actions of the army in the north would remain an example of heroism in the annals of the French and British armies.”<sup>22</sup> Upon consideration of the fact that this operation was in fact a setback for the Allies, the

celebratory tone of its success appears misplaced. However, France was not alone in praising the Dunkerque Evacuation. Politicians in Great Britain too praised the event more highly than was merited – causing even the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill to remind his House of Commons that “wars are not won by evacuations.”<sup>23</sup> Also missing in *Paris-Dakar* were any sentiments of frustration with Great Britain as some opined that British soldiers received preferential treatment during the evacuation.<sup>24</sup> These claims only surfaced after the Franco-British rupture, upon the signing of the French armistice with Germany. For the moment, *Paris-Dakar* claimed that the alliance was as strong as ever, and that the British and French forces acted and were treated as one unit. The efforts of propagandists to hide the extent of the losses from FWA were further aided by the distance between Europe and Africa. Because Africans could not witness first-hand the devastation on the battlefield, no attempt to change the tone of French military bravado was made.

Any doubts the African population still held concerning German barbarism were dispelled on June 6 after the first German bombardment of Paris. Reports quickly came from the capital of “total war, hospitals in ruins, health trains destroyed, ambulances embedded with projectiles, collapsed schools, destroyed churches, and convoys of refugees that were systematically gunned down.”<sup>25</sup> Despite these dire reports, subjects of the empire were instructed not to despair as this would directly play into the hands of the German aggressors, whose “goal was to break the morale of Paris [...by] targeting women, the elderly, and children.”<sup>26</sup> *Paris-Dakar* echoed further reminders of all that France – and the rest of the civilized world - stood to lose through capitulation to Germany: “the result of this battle would determine the destiny of the world for the next hundred years. What was this destiny? Another Middle Ages of Germany hegemony,”<sup>27</sup> or the victory of democracy and civilization? This



victory was still being portrayed as a viable possibility as *Paris-Dakar* published periodical reports of the destruction of German machinery. On May 19 it was reported that one thousand German airplanes had been destroyed.<sup>28</sup> By June 1 this figure had risen to three thousand airplanes and 40 percent of German tanks.<sup>29</sup> In addition to these numbers, French subjects received reassurance that "German reports of gains in battle were fictitious and, unbelievable exaggerations."<sup>30</sup> The German success over the Netherlands and Belgium was now portrayed as playing in her disfavor, "as Allied airplanes were now permitted to fly over Holland and Belgium, placing the northern industrial regions of Germany within range of French and British air raids."<sup>31</sup> This development led to the "destruction of 50 percent of all German industries, 60 percent of all heavy and arms factories, and 57 percent of exportation manufactures in the periphery surrounding the frontier between France and Germany."<sup>32</sup>

### **Significance of the Italian-German alliance**

A final black mark was Germany's alliance with Italy and their invasion of France on June 10, 1940.<sup>33</sup> Italy's entrance into the war was viewed as nothing more than political opportunism on the part of Benito Mussolini, the fascist dictator of Italy. He had openly voiced the opinion that his country was not yet ready for war, yet he was determined to claim his seat at the treaty conferences.<sup>34</sup> His primary aim was to expand the Italian North African Empire by claiming British and French territories. Therefore, when it became apparent to him that German victory in France was likely, he joined in the fight in order to gain a part of the spoils.<sup>35</sup> These considerations did not go unnoticed by Allied observers as they claimed that "Germany must have fallen extremely low to join together with a nation such as Italy."<sup>36</sup> The Italian soldier also fell to the derision of the propagandists as he was described as "the worst soldier in the world"

and it was declared that "Mussolini would never be able to make heroes out of his fascists."<sup>37</sup>

The press was equally harsh to the Italians, stating that "in the fight between civilization and the pagan hordes of the Reich, the Fascist government had chosen the most difficult moment for the Allies to side with the Germans, this cowardice had the goal of obtaining the plunder that the Reich would deign to accord to Italy. In fact, what Italy would receive was the scorn of the world."<sup>38</sup>

The Italian conquest of Ethiopia during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War from October 1935 to May 1936 had already produced this scorn. The invasion of the Ethiopian Empire by the Kingdom of Italy marked the first military action taken by Mussolini to expand the territorial holdings of Italy. It was remembered for its illegal use of mustard gas and phosgene by the Italian armed forces, as well as the cruel and repressive colonial regime instituted in Ethiopia at the war's end. Italy's actions in Ethiopia violated a number of treaties and peace agreements that she had signed. One of the most important was the Kellogg-Briand Pact of the League of Nations in which signatories promised, "to safeguard peace and spare the world the incalculable losses and human suffering that inevitably follow in the wake of war."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the discrepancy of military strength between the Italian and Ethiopians forces was evident from the start. By Italian estimates, Ethiopians had a poorly equipped army, consisting of 500,000 men, armed with nothing more than spears and bows, or badly outdated weapons from 1900.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, Italian units contained 680,000 well-equipped soldiers. This figure does not include the Italian soldiers already in East Africa, numbering around 620,000, or the units that arrived during the war.<sup>41</sup> In addition to this already substantial advantage, Italian forces heavily used mustard gas in both artillery and aerial bombings, despite having signed the 1925 Geneva Protocol, banning the use of such methods of chemical warfare. The deployment of gas was not restricted

to the battlefield. The Italians also targeted civilians, as part of their attempt to terrorize the population.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, gas attacks were conducted on Red Cross camps and ambulances.<sup>43</sup> Though Mussolini and his generals sought to cloak the operations of chemical warfare in secrecy, the denunciations issued by the International Red Cross and foreign observers revealed the use of gas to the world.<sup>44</sup>

Once conquest was complete on May 7, 1936 and Italy annexed the Ethiopian Empire to her already existing African colonies, creating Italian East Africa (AOI)<sup>45</sup>, the atrocities against Ethiopians continued. Recurring guerrilla campaigns against the Italians and Italian reprisals marked the Italian occupation. On February 18, 1937, a failed assassination attempt on the Governor General of AOI, Marshal Rudolfo Graziani, resulted in the retaliatory execution of an estimated 30,000 persons – including about half of the younger, educated Ethiopian population.<sup>46</sup> Further acts of repression included the continued use of mustard gas against civilians, forced labor camps, the installment of public gallows, and the summary execution of hostages and enemies to the Italian regime.<sup>47</sup> Racism also occurred on a less violent scale as Italians decreed miscegenation to be illegal. The regime enforced racial separation, including residential segregation, as thoroughly as possible.<sup>48</sup> This practice juxtaposed directly with the equalizing and homogenizing French theory of assimilation. The castigation of Italy on the world stage for these actions culminated in her condemnation by the League of Nations on December 11, 1937. Mussolini responded by withdrawing his company from the organization. Thus began the isolation of Mussolini and Fascist Italy from the Western Democracies. Due to the geographical proximity of Ethiopia and Senegal, readers of *Paris-Dakar* were aware of Italy's barbaric conduct in Africa. It represented, in a concrete fashion, everything that French ideology fought

against. Germany's alliance with Italy therefore solidified the African perception of the Germans as brutal savages.

Also, the already substantial Italian military presence in Africa made engagement in war a very viable possibility in FWA, prompting the Governor General of FWA, Léon Cayla, to issue a special warning for the colonies to be on the lookout for any subversive Italian activity.<sup>49</sup> The indigenous leaders of French Africa from Senegal, Niger, and Guinea responded to this alert with proclamations of "indignation against the actions of Italy," "their complete devotion to the motherland," and "their confidence without reserve in the victory of the Allies."<sup>50</sup> More than any other open letters of support, these voiced a real understanding of the threat facing the empire. Citizens of FWA needed only to look to the example of Ethiopia to see what constituted a "bad" colonial leader. This reinforced their belief and loyalty to the noble ideology of the French empire. However, the British Royal Air Force (RAF) raids on Libya were the closest military engagement to approach Senegal during the Battle of France. From the very beginning, Italian action in North Africa encountered difficulties, and the success of the RAF in Libya in keeping Italy on the defensive<sup>51</sup> distracted the African populations, at least for a time, from the difficulties that France was experiencing on the home front.

### **The divide between the métropole and FWA**

On June 13, *Paris-Dakar* reported that the French government had removed itself to Tours in order to maintain her sovereignty from the quickly advancing German army, all young men were also "invited to depart from the Parisian zone,"<sup>52</sup> presumably to avoid capture by German forces. On June 14, Paris was declared an open city, indicating that capture was imminent and that French forces had abandoned all defensive efforts in the hope of avoiding

German destruction of Paris as they marched into the city.<sup>53</sup> Governor General of French East Africa (FEA), Pierre Boisson, delivered the news of German entrance into Paris to Dakar on June 15. In his address he reiterated the same sentiment as his June 10 Speech of Leopoldville. He clearly affirmed the willingness of the colonies to continue the war from Africa, while also reminding the colonial powers – France, Belgium, and Great Britain – of their civilizing mission and duty toward the colonies, a duty that was now especially important as it was under direct threat from Hitler and the German invasion.<sup>54</sup> The sentiment evoked in this declaration demonstrates the ideological gap between the French colonial administration and the leadership in Europe. At the same time that Boisson called for the creation of a further line of defense, the métropole started the debate on whether or not to sign an armistice with Germany.

On June 18 the colonies received yet one more shock – France declared a military government upon the resignation of the Prime Minister Paul Reynaud and his cabinet. Marshal Pétain was chosen to immediately form a new government.<sup>55</sup> On the same date however, *Paris-Dakar* still held out hope that France could survive this affront. Claims stated that “Germany had exhausted her resources in the present offensive, and the enormous reserves of the French and British Empires along with those the that United States had placed at the disposition of the Allies constituted a strength that would play a large role in the following weeks.”<sup>56</sup> Additionally, the strength of the Franco-British alliance was portrayed as strong as ever as “the British Empire offered a solemn pact to the French Republic, placing the resources of the two countries into a common pool.”<sup>57</sup> The two nations would bear in common all the burdens of the war. An Englishman would be a Frenchman as a Frenchman would be an Englishman.”<sup>58</sup> Rumors of French surrender were decried as “absolutely false, as French troops continued to persevere in their resistance to the invader.”<sup>59</sup> Governor General Cayla voiced his extreme pleasure “to

witness the ardent desire of the populations of FWA to fight bitterly with all strength until the final victory had been achieved." *Paris-Dakar* repeated this declaration the following day as "FWA affirmed its faith in the victory and proclaimed her will to fight until the end."<sup>60</sup> Opinion in FWA held therefore that the French Empire had a variety of paths from which to continue the war, even after the German capture of Paris. The will of Senegal's population, and its leader, Governor General Cayla, landed firmly in the camp of continuing the fight against Germany, either as an independent empire from a base in Africa, or as a joint entity with the British Empire. A June 23 letter composed by Ibra Thiaw, a colonial councilor, made this apparent by stating "there are not a thousand solutions, there is only one: the fight until victory or the glorious death that will make the immortality of a noble nation."<sup>61</sup> General Charles de Gaulle echoed these same sentiments on June 21 in a radio address to the populations of French Africa. He reminded the Empire that "France was not alone – she has a vast empire that could form a bloc with the British empire who holds the sea and continues the fight [...] This war is not limited to the unfortunate territory of our country, this war is not decided by the Battle of France, this war is a global war, and there still remain ways for us to vanquish our enemy."<sup>62</sup> He terminated his address by inviting all the French military leaders and specialists willing to fight for their empire to join him in Great Britain to organize a continuation of the fight.

Attitudes in the métropole however shifted toward another direction as on June 20 a Spanish intermediary organized a meeting between the French and German governments,<sup>63</sup> and on June 21 the "French government designated the representatives who would negotiate the conditions of an armistice with the government of the Reich."<sup>64</sup> Whispers of the ideology of the Vichy government, soon to be termed Pétainism, began to appear in the colonial press. On June 21 an article by Joseph Denais in *Paris-Dakar* blamed the defeat of France on "generals who had

been made for times of peace.”<sup>65</sup> He accused France of “being paralyzed in a torpor for a number of years as we reduced the amount of time consecrated to work, and minimized our efforts.”<sup>66</sup> He also criticized recent politicians “who judged it opportune to support our quest for pleasure, the horror of effort, and the permanent insurrection against all constraints.”<sup>67</sup> This “cult of false idols”<sup>68</sup> that had existed in France for the past twenty years was perceived as the reaction against the trials of World War One, and it had betrayed “the past France of glorious traditions, who was rich in all the virtues and all the merits accumulated over the course of centuries by her heroes and scholars.”<sup>69</sup> The defeat of France was her punishment for “whoring after modernity.” Frenchmen attributed their past greatness to a balanced society and economy that valued the virtues of craftsmen and peasants. The departure from these values as urban life and industry had eroded the national moral fiber, resulting in the downfall of the empire.<sup>70</sup> The decline in France’s birthrate – demonstrating a lack in the importance of the family – was the clearest statistical proof of this degeneration.<sup>71</sup> Marshal Pétain, France’s new leader, strongly reiterated this message in a speech on June 25. He indicated that above all, a lack of children caused France’s defeat. He compared France to her heyday in the time of Napoleon I when “France was one of the most inhabited nations of Europe and the French army was one of the most important amongst all armies.”<sup>72</sup> He concluding his speech saying that “What was once possible yesterday (during World War One) is no longer possible today.”<sup>73</sup>

Defeat was therefore seen as the first step to moral regeneration. This was a chance for the Empire to rebuild herself, to rise up anew from the ashes, discarding the decadent practices that had allowed for her defeat in the first place.<sup>74</sup> The objective of this new message was to move the focus of the French populations away from fighting an outside enemy, and to look inward, to examine what could be fixed within the empire itself. Therefore, the goal should not

be to continue the war against Germany, but to call for an early peace in order to maintain, at the very least, France's territorial identity. It was for this reason that a message appeared in *Paris-Dakar* on June 23, censuring the speech of General de Gaulle, stating that "he had no position to communicate with the public [...] and his declarations must be considered as unauthorized."<sup>75</sup>

At the same time that these considerations were voiced to the empire, France made public appeals for aid to the international, democratic community. *Paris-Dakar* issued a call stating "if the other democracies recognized that France did not only fight for herself, but for the civilized world, they must make a gesture to symbolize their support of the fight against tyranny."<sup>76</sup> The perceived failure for this aid to materialize fostered a feeling of bitterness in France. On June 23 an article entitled the "Death of International Morale" criticized the allies and the neutral countries stating "modernized people prefer the sweet comfort of neutrality to risks and adventure, and the poverty of independence holds for them fewer charms than a well-assured retirement home. Are you surprised after this that so few countries enrolled voluntarily under the banner of law and liberty?"<sup>77</sup> On June 26, the despair of being forced to defend herself turned to anger, as *Paris-Dakar* stated "our crime was our generosity to wish for the wellbeing of humanity at our own expense [...] the sole interest of France will be henceforth our only law."<sup>78</sup> Sentiments such as these further pushed the French empire to seek for a way of existing independently of any aid from the other Allied nations or the United States, further convincing her government of the need to make a play for peace with Germany. They also provided an explanation of how the supposedly mighty French army had fallen to a German invasion. Because Africans were so removed from the battlefield the only evidence they received of France's military capacity is that which *Paris-Dakar* published. All the prior propaganda had



expounded upon French military preparedness – therefore necessitating a military reason for the shock of defeat.

On June 22, 1940, France and Germany signed, signaling the cessation of French and German hostilities.<sup>79</sup> In Africa, the conditions of the armistice remained unclear as *Paris-Dakar* reported on June 25, that “no information from official sources has been released [...] the document presented to the ministers remains entirely secret [...] officials esteem that the transmission of information on the current situation must be suspended in order that the commentaries do not become more arbitrary.”<sup>80</sup> However, the colonial press demonstrated a significant degree of independence by reporting an article from the *American Herald Tribune*, dating from the same day, providing the colonial population with the American estimation of what the conditions of the armistice agreement would be.<sup>81</sup> This difference in comportment between the colonies and the métropole was also witnessed in the words of Governor General Cayla who announced on June 26 “I declare that in no case will I yield an inch of the territory of the federation.”<sup>82</sup> While he did not go as far as General de Gaulle who denied the legitimacy of Pétain’s government in his radio address of June 18, Cayla’s declaration illustrates an autonomous sentiment<sup>83</sup> from those held in métropole that approaches subversiveness to the Vichy regime as he was in no position to be making such bold statements, especially as the decision of which lands fell into German hands was not under his jurisdiction.

### **Regime change and acceptance of the armistice by FWA**

Despite Cayla’s profession of respect for the new government in which he described it as “the most pure at the present time” and recognized the pressure under which Pétain was placed “as he sought to examine the conditions under which we can honorably end the carnage that does

not respect either women, or children,"<sup>84</sup> the new Vichy Regime remained unconvinced that Cayla could bring FWA into its fold as it signed an armistice agreement with her former enemy. Therefore, on June 25, the Vichy regime demoted Cayla to Governor General of Madagascar and named Pierre Boisson as his replacement.<sup>85</sup> It additionally orchestrated the first major reorganization of French Africa since 1910, uniting FWA and FEA into one entity. This served the dual purpose of dislocating the elaborate arrangement of two neighboring governor-generals, and also offering Boisson a hearty award for assuring the support of French Africa for the Vichy government.<sup>86</sup> The evidence remains unclear as to whether Boisson's decision to side with Pétain was the result of bribery or a more ideological sentiment, but it is notable that he made his decision to support Vichy on the same day he received news of his promotion.<sup>87</sup>

The announcement of Boisson's approval of the armistice with Germany on behalf of FWA was published in *Paris-Dakar* on June 27. This event culminated in the publication of the terms of the armistice which granted the French government "the freedom to choose its seat in the non-occupied territory of France, and if it desires, to move back to Paris."<sup>88</sup> In this way, at least the appearance of French sovereignty was maintained and she presented to her colonies an agreement that refrained from making her a mere puppet government of the Third Reich. References to France's diplomatic relations with Great Britain and the United States further emphasized that Vichy was indeed "the only legal government according to the French construction and parliamentary procedure."<sup>89</sup> The United States was portrayed as more friendly to this new arrangement than the British as "American diplomatic circles appreciate the difficulties faced by the new French government and showed a certain disappointment in the criticism thrown by Churchill against the government."<sup>90</sup>

Regime change and formal acceptance of the armistice however were insufficient incentives to change the opinions of the general population of FWA. The publication of a British refusal of the French decision to join with Germany in *Paris-Dakar* demonstrates that the wishes of the colony still remained very much on the side of continuing the fight. The British article expressed the hope that “the French Empire to whom we have for such a long time been allied to in peace and war [...] will continue to fight beside her allies. Depending entirely on the genius of the French people and her judgment, we will do everything possible to maintain contact with her.”<sup>91</sup> The unwillingness of the colonies to accept the new situation with Germany directly contradicts the attitudes of French citizens in the métropole as they gave their almost undivided support to Vichy and the signing of the armistice.<sup>92</sup> There are a few possible reasons for this difference. One is a geographical explanation. Due to the physical distance between Africa and the actual sphere of conflict, the majority of the African populations remained physically unaffected by the hardships of the war – their lands did not become devastated battlegrounds, and their populations did not have to fear the air raids of the German *Luftwaffe*. This enviable situation made it easier for colonial subjects to pledge their support to the French Empire, as the war remained conceptual and distant to a certain extent. Another reason is that the African citizens did have a real loyalty to the ideology of republican France. The Senegalese had sacrificed their soldiers to this ideal during World War One, and did so during the current conflict, until the signing of the armistice. Also, the prior propaganda campaign in the colonies had been successful in inculcating sentiments of loyalty and unity to the empire. The habitants of the métropole were presented with the opposite image of the political in-fighting and social fragmentation that characterized the Third Republic.<sup>93</sup> Because political activism was so strongly discouraged in the colonies, different ideologies – most noticeably communism – did

not develop to foster discontent with the current government. Additionally, the colonial administration was formed primarily of conservative, military men. These were men who had made their own sacrifices to the French empire, and therefore their personal rule in the colonies reflected their belief in the importance of order, unity, and most importantly, the greatness of the French empire.

The Vichy betrayal of French ideology resulted in the creation of an active resistance force in French Africa. Throughout the war, Pétain and his government – including Boisson – were regarded as traitors, akin to Léopold III, who ironically had been heavily censured by the French press upon his capitulation to Germany in May 1940. Further credence for this agitation against Vichy France came from the formation of the Free French by General de Gaulle. By supporting de Gaulle in his continued fight against Germany, the colonies claimed that they supported the “true France,” not the illegitimate puppet state symbolized by Vichy. FWA’s early acceptance to join with Free France in November 1942<sup>94</sup> proves the devotion of the colonies to their cause. This “capitulation” occurred before the Battle of Stalingrad had been decided – it ended in February 1943. The Battle of Stalingrad, often cited to be the turning point in the war, marks the moment when the Axis powers began to loose ground after encountering their first large-scale defeat in Russia. By joining with the Allies while victory was still uncertain, French Africa demonstrated that she really was willing to fight until death, or until victory in order to preserve her noble ideal of the French Empire.

## CONCLUSION

The consideration of World War Two as a watershed for French colonialism in Africa has inspired the research of a myriad of scholars on methods of French colonialism, French ideology, and the kaleidoscopic political situation in both France and Africa from the 1930s to the 1960s. This paper was inspired in part by a reading of these suppositions of what went wrong in an empire desperate to retain her portion of the "Scramble for Africa." Though it falls neatly into the realm of European history, I wished to explore how French actions in Africa affected her colonial subjects. Therefore, an emphasis was placed on how Africans received the news of their empire's participation in another world war, and to what extent they were expected to follow the developments of the conflict. What I discovered was that the French empire refused to create a distinction between the métropole and the colonies. Once war broke out, the only news reported on were events that touched the European war effort and how Africans could demonstrate their loyalty to the empire. This conflation of homeland and colony falls perfectly within the French practice of *assimilation* with her colonies.

As demonstrated in Chapter I, the colonial regime portrayed *assimilation* as only bringing benefits to the colonies. Because French West Africa was facing a difficult time, where she was simultaneously exiting from a period of social agitation and facing the growing threat of conflict with Germany, the *mise en valeur* of the colonies was heavily expounded upon. In order to maintain calm in FWA officials also stressed the efforts of appeasement toward Hitler. They could not however completely ignore the very real possibility that war would erupt; therefore

Germany was portrayed as a territory-hungry, bellicose nation. The juxtaposition of these two images assuaged the war-weary empire that France and her leaders were doing everything possible to avoid conflict – and thus fulfilling, to the best of her capacity, her role as paternalistic protector of her subjects.

The hope that peace could still be maintained stretched into Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939. As discussed in Chapter II, the period known as the *drôle de guerre* witnessed a further bolstering of republican French ideology. The empire was awakening to the imminent arrival of war and colonial leaders took measures to prepare for conflict. Knowing that she would have to depend on her West African colonies for men and material during the war, France presented her strengths as her moral righteousness and her alliance with Great Britain. The latter was important both in terms of morale and material as the British Empire possessed the most powerful naval fleet in the world, as well as other substantial military forces. The British people were also presented as forming a "brotherhood" with France as the two empires stressed the importance of civilization, freedom, and democracy, at home, as well as in their colonies. This alliance was contrasted with Germany's Third Reich, which was portrayed as sacrificing the well being of its native citizens and soldiers to satisfy the regime's territorial ambitions.

French West Africa thus faced the German incursion into the Low Countries with a firm belief that the moral righteousness and military force of her empire would defeat the savage and corrupt Germans. At the beginning of the conflagration, opinion in the métropole and the colonies was identical. Together, they faced the German advance through Belgium and the Evacuation of Dunkerque with the hope that the tide would turn. However, upon the German entrance into Paris on June 14, 1940 they adopted divergent positions. Metropolitan France

stood in approval of surrender to Germany and signed an armistice, permitting German occupation of France and the establishment of the authoritarian Vichy regime. FWA however, found capitulation a bitter pill to follow, especially in light of Germany's alliance with Italy, who had already demonstrated significant brutality against Africans during her invasion of Ethiopia in 1936. The population also could not understand why republican France was so prepared to forsake her moralistic ideology, for which thousands of Senegalese had fought for during World War One.

The eventual acceptance of FWA of the armistice agreement and Vichy could only be solidified through the nomination of Pierre Boisson as governor general of French Africa. Through his totalitarian and Pétainist ideology he insured that FWA pledged allegiance to Vichy. However, the general population remained discontented with this decision and during the war many Senegalese defected to the side of the Free French. One of the consequences of Vichy and the armistice at the end of the war was a distrust of further claims of French republicanism. Therefore, even though de Gaulle recognized the contribution Africa had made to the liberation of France and offered political, social, and economic reforms to the colonies at the Brazzaville Conference in January 1944,<sup>1</sup> the colonies began to organize their claims for freedom.

## NOTES

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## Conclusion

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