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Guia Migani, *La France et l'Afrique sub-saharienne, 1957-1963: Histoire d'une décolonisation entre idéaux eurafricains et politique de puissance*. Bern and New York: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2008. 295 pp. Notes, tables, bibliography and index. €34.90 (pb). ISBN 978-90-5201-382-4.

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In the wake of the Second World War France was forced to re-assess its imperial status. The statutes of the new French Union, born with the Fourth Republic in 1946, insisted that metropole and empire remained indivisible. At the same time, however, it was clear that the bonds of old empire could not hold. Indeed, the French government spent much of the next two decades navigating the bloody and humiliating battles for independence in Indochina and Algeria. French colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, in contrast, did not collapse into widespread violence on this scale. Instead, as Guia Migani documents here, decolonization was largely achieved in the former French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa and Madagascar through a series of devolutions of power. While not uncontested, this relatively smooth transition occurred within the context of other French—and, importantly, African—political alignments and reconfigurations in the post-war world. Migani's work takes seriously this intersection between the politics of decolonization, the emergence of an increasingly bipolar Cold War world, and the foundational years of European unity.

In what is largely a political and economic history of a shifting relationship, Migani seeks to understand “comment l'évolution des relations franco-africaines a influencé la politique étrangère française et le processus d'intégration européenne” (p. 17). She argues that the “Eurafrican ideals” which informed French policy toward sub-Saharan Africa at the beginning of the period under study gradually gave way to a more pragmatic, Gaullist “power politics” by the early 1960s. In France proponents of Eurafrica were convinced that the two continents were complementary—primarily connected through economic interdependency—and that the conjoined land mass was of great strategic importance, offering a “third way” out of the Cold War. The idea of Eurafrica frames the argument, forming a link between layers of analysis which take the reader from Franco-African relations and French negotiations with the other founding nations of European unity, to French perceptions of U.S. and Soviet policies toward Africa and the developing world.

After an overview of how French governments attempted to manage the “problem” of the Overseas Territories (as the colonies were renamed as part of the new Union) during the Fourth Republic, Migani begins her work in 1957, the year that the European Six signed the Treaty of Rome, inaugurating the European Economic Community. Nineteen fifty-seven was also the year that the *Loi-Cadre* was implemented in the French Overseas Territories. Migani describes the *Loi-Cadre*, which gave African politicians more power over domestic policies in the individual territories, as the beginning of a “politique de décolonisation” in French sub-Saharan Africa (p. 25). In chronological chapters, the author examines de Gaulle's short-lived Franco-African Community, which lasted from 1958-1960, the emergence of a politics of cooperation between France and most of its former sub-Saharan colonies after independence in 1960 and finally French struggles to balance its “special” African connections with new commitments to the developing world more generally as well as to Europe. Ending with the negotiation of the Yaoundé convention in 1963, which renewed former colonies' membership of the EEC as now independent “associated states,” Migani concludes that as the imperial relationship came to an

end, the attempt to retain political and economic links to former colonies south of the Sahara was not a contradiction, but rather intrinsic to French claims to global power and even leadership in the post-war world.

While much of the ground covered in the early chapters, especially on the stages of decolonization, has been laid out more comprehensively elsewhere, the real strength of the work lies in the author's careful tracing of the connections between the internal French problem of managing the transition to independence and the wider shifts of geopolitics.

These connections begin with the focus on Eurafica. The notion of Africa as a natural sphere of influence for a united Europe was a powerful political tool for France. Ultimately, this idea became the basis for French insistence that the Overseas Territories must be incorporated into the European Economic Community as associated states. France gained the most from association when it became a part of the Treaty of Rome in 1957; it allowed the French government to reconcile the colonial past with a European future through an EEC instituted trading zone, reduced tariffs on imports from associated states to Europe, and [created](#) an investment fund for these territories that amounted to \$581.25 million. This was a crucial way of reducing what was increasingly seen by the French public as a "colonial burden;" France, along with West Germany, contributed \$200 million to this fund, but the French Overseas Territories received \$511.25 million, [by far the majority of the fund](#) (p. 59). As Migani importantly points out, French leadership in persuading the other five European powers to agree to association was also a way to thwart German domination of the EEC.

A significant focus of Migani's work is the role Charles de Gaulle played in transitioning France into its new international roles. As with the Fourth Republic in 1946, the birth of the Fifth Republic and de Gaulle's return to power as President in 1958 brought with it a re-interpretation of the imperial relationship, with the "Community" now replacing the "Union." Importantly, however, the new Community was to be a choice for the Overseas Territories, with de Gaulle embarking on a tour of Africa to campaign for a "yes" vote in the months leading up to the referendum. The West African territory of [Guinea](#) was the only one to vote "no," and immediately felt the consequences of de Gaulle's frequently threatened termination of all French assistance. For the territories that remained, the demand for decolonization quickly intensified as they watched [Guinea](#) join the United Nations and the former trusteeships of Cameroon and Togo attain independence without losing their links with France. Unable to forestall this pressure, de Gaulle acceded to independence in 1960 and in so doing "il a réussi a convaincre l'opinion publique métropolitaine que l'indépendance des territoires africains était la consequence logique de l'oeuvre de colonisation française" (p. 132).

This "colonial work" continued into independence as France signed cooperation accords with its former territories, ensuring aid and at the same time guaranteeing French influence; importantly over military and cultural affairs. Migani convincingly shows that for France the accords were a means of claiming responsibility for a specific part of the world and thereby keeping ex-colonies out of East-West conflicts (p. 157). Both of the superpowers were affirmed anti-imperialists, but neither of them took a great deal of interest in sub-Saharan Africa until the later 1950s, when colonial regimes were visibly crumbling. Generally, even after independence the continued primacy of links with France prevented Cold War incursions into Francophone Africa; although [Guinea](#), which sought aid from the Soviet Union at independence, was one important exception to this.

In one of the most interesting parts of the book, Migani explores the connections between the Cold War, Africa, and Western aid for development. In 1959 de Gaulle proposed Western collaboration with the Soviet Union for the provision of aid to the developing world. This proposal exposed the sharp divergences between French and American perspectives on competition with communist powers, as the U.S. quickly rejected any suggestion of working with the USSR. More importantly, the episode was indicative of de Gaulle's attempt to establish French leadership in the Third World, especially in the

wake of the Algerian war. As Migani shows, de Gaulle attempted to argue that the colonial experience and especially the policy of cooperation had moved France beyond merely its African commitments and become the model of a “global politics” (p. 254). The problem with this was that France could not simultaneously claim to be the arbiter of North-South relations and maintain a preferential relationship with its former African colonies, as many Latin American countries pointed out. In the end the Yaoundé Convention reduced EEC privileges to former colonies in 1963, but did not abandon them. For de Gaulle this was an important compromise between a vision of French global power that embraced the entire third world and Eurafrikan ideals that privileged Africa.

Migani’s work is centered on French policy, but she employs a wealth of archival sources to elucidate the international dimensions of French actions. Documents from National Archives in Britain, the United States and Italy as well as the archives of the European Union, amongst others, take the reader on a fascinating journey through the diplomatic debates of the leading Western powers as France attempted to negotiate its African and global commitments.

The book is less successful in its exploration of the viewpoints of African politicians and governments in these discussions. We very rarely hear the words of African actors, despite a short section at the end of the book that emphasizes African agency in the process of gaining independence. Indeed, the tendency here is to read political decisions made in various African territories through French eyes: for example, in her discussion of the impact of de Gaulle’s pro Community speech in Madagascar Migani paraphrases de Gaulle’s biographer P-M de la Gorce; “de Gaulle a utilisé les mots État et indépendance: c’est ce que la population malgache voulait entendre et c’est aussi probablement la seule chose qu’elle se rappellera au moment du vote” (p. 75). It would have been helpful here to have some sort of confirmation from a Malagasi source that de Gaulle’s statements were indeed what local people “wanted to hear.” A similar lack of interrogation is evident in Migani’s assertion that the instability provoked by decolonization in Guinea and the Belgian Congo reveals that “quand l’indépendance est préparée sans l’assistance de l’État colonial, la situation peut rapidement dégénéérer” (p. 251). Migani does not mention the role played by France and Belgium in provoking this “situation” through their rapid and bitter withdrawal from these colonies. While the French perspective is understandably the focal point of this work, the absence of a more nuanced picture of African actions and the motives of the colonial state leads to a somewhat unbalanced interpretation of the events of this period.

Related to this, Migani seems to come to the conclusion that decolonization was largely a “successful,” managed process in French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa. This argument has been undermined by Tony Chafer who has instead emphasized the haphazard French response to African demands and the heterogeneous nationalist movements that were rarely represented by African political leaders who were loyal to France.[1] The most problematic consequence of Migani’s reading is the absence of any suggestion that the continued connection between France and its sub-Saharan African colonies after independence, though useful for France, might not have been entirely helpful to what Chafer describes as its sub-Saharan “client states.” This, it seems to me, might have been how Eurafrikan ideals lived on in other, less official and more questionable ways.

In several places there is ample opportunity to open this line of analysis. Migani notes, for example, that de Gaulle often implied that the “civilizing mission” was in fact still being pursued after independence. She also explains that former colonial administrators became diplomatic officials to the post-colonial states. Such maintenance of influence has led several scholars and political commentators to reframe Ivorian politician Félix Houphouët-Boigny’s positive incarnation of the relationship: *Françafrique*, in a more cynical light; often as *France à fric*. One consequence of this has been to bring to light French machinations in various former colonies, including French support of corrupt African leaders and implication in the Rwandan genocide.[2] Jacques Foccart, whose papers are used throughout the book, was an advisor on African policy for de Gaulle, Georges Pompidou and Jacques Chirac, and has been a key figure in some of the more unsavory dealings that critics of *Françafrique* have sought to uncover.

Migani, however, treats the post-colonial politics of cooperation only as a mutually beneficial neat package, representing “une vraie convergence d’intérêts” between the French and new African leaders who “reconnaissent à la France une position spécial dans leur pays; en contrepartie ils bénéficient de l’aide financière et de l’assistance technique française” (p. 251). Some acknowledgment of later accusations of neo-colonialism, particularly in the conclusion where Migani briefly considers the downward spiral of Francophone African countries since independence, would have been a welcome addition to a work that aims to explore the global repercussions of decolonization.

Those seeking a comprehensive discussion of nationalist movements in sub-Saharan Africa and their role in pressing the French government toward independence might be best served elsewhere. The real strength of Migani’s analysis is its insistence upon the international context within which decolonization in Francophone sub-Saharan Africa must be understood. As a new perspective on the basis of French international power in the post-war period, and a contribution to a growing field that seeks to globalize traditional diplomatic history, this is an important work.[3]

NOTES

[1] Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France’s Successful Decolonization?* (New York: Berg, 2002).

[2] François-Xavier Verschave, *La Françafrique, le plus long scandale de la République* (Paris: Stock, 1999). More recent works on this subject have questioned the extent to which *Françafrique* continues to exist: Tony Chafer, “Chirac and *la Françafrique*: No longer a Family Affair,” *Modern and Contemporary France* 13 (2005): 7-23 and Antoine Glaser and Stephen Smith, *Comment la France a Perdu L’Afrique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2005).

[3] For more on this new diplomatic history and French decolonization see Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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