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Claude Liauzu, *Histoire de l'anticolonialisme en France du XVIe siècle à nos jours*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2007. 304 pp. Preface, notes, appendices, indices. 24.50 € (pb). ISBN 978-2-2003-5093-2.

Review by John Strachan, Lancaster University, UK.

Born in Casablanca (although he made his academic career in France), the late Claude Liauzu (1940-2007) belonged to a group of creole intellectuals whose existence represented one of the more interesting—not to say positive—aspects of the French colonial presence overseas. Much of Liauzu's early life played out in the context of the anti-colonial struggle; after the decisive break that came with Algerian independence in 1962 his work centered on European relationships with the non-European world (particularly North Africa) and the decolonization of French politics, society and historiography. A very prolific historian, Liauzu's *œuvre* is also a fine example of *engagé* scholarship.

Few students of modern France will be unfamiliar with the controversy surrounding the Law of 23 February 2005. Crucially, this legislative acknowledgement of France's "positive" role overseas included an article requiring French educators to teach colonial history in precisely these terms. At a time when more sober assessments of the Algerian colonial past seemed to be gaining ground, this intervention threatened a return to the narrow, polemical, and what Benjamin Stora famously described as "gangrenous" debates over the Algerian War of Independence.[1]

Liauzu played a central role in the opposition to the offending law (repealed in part in 2006), a cause which, as Jean-Claude Liauzu points out in his preface to the present, posthumous volume, continued to animate the author at the time of his death. In an article written for *Le Monde diplomatique* in 2005 Liauzu raises a number of important questions all of which reappear in different forms in *Histoire de l'anticolonialisme en France du XVIe siècle à nos jours*. First, how should we make sense of the various paradigms of colonial remembering—how to navigate between *nostalgie*, *fracture* and *repentance*? Second, what role should be played by historians (and what, if any, should be the role of the state) in the historicization of the colonial past? Finally, how to define the *exception française* in all of this—what was it about the republican episteme that lent French colonial (and anti-colonial) ideas their unmistakable hue?[2]

Beginning with Las Casas and Montaigne, *Histoire de l'anticolonialisme en France du XVIe siècle à nos jours* offers a survey of French anti-colonial thinking through the Enlightenment and Revolution, the early years in Algeria, and the Halcyon days of empire in the late-nineteenth century. The final three chapters address the twentieth-century decline and fall of France overseas and the relationship of anti-colonialism to socialism, the Popular Front, and the wars in Indochina and Algeria. Christian in its origins, an increasingly laicized anti-colonialism acquired a diversity of economic, social and theoretical dimensions. "Colonialism", we discover, was coined by the liberal economist Gustave de Molinari in 1895 and 'anti-colonialism' eight years later by Charles Péguy (p. 13).

Liauzu's ambivalence towards recent developments in French colonial historiography—which in their emphasis on terms like fracture, repentance and catharsis are inclined to represent France as a wounded postcolonial subject—is illuminated, in part, by his attitude to historical anti-colonialism.[3] Nowhere,

he argues, should it be understood as a unified (or even coherent) set of ideas. Though colonialism was always, inevitably a battle for meaning, and always a contested field (as Michel de Certeau brilliantly pointed out), Liauzu's emphasis is firmly on the heterogeneity of its opponents.[4] In fact, he argues, anti-colonialism mirrored closely its colonial nemesis insofar as it was most often to be found *minoritaire, cantonné* and at the margins of contemporary epistemology. The opacity of Tocqueville's positions on Algeria, and the often esoteric quality of Jean-Paul Sartre's collisions with Albert Camus and Raymond Aron, offer good evidence for these claims.[5] In the case of Diderot, his support for certain forms of colonization *as a vehicle of enlightenment* casts doubt on the virtue of grand narratives in which the *philosophes* are seen as harbingers of colonial emancipation (p. 26).

At the heart of his approach to the postcolonial *guerres de mémoire* lies Liauzu's understanding of the *devoir d'histoire*. If anti-colonialism can be understood as a series of nebulous, though connected, ideas, there was, nonetheless, a certain consistency over the *longue durée*. There is too little written on this tradition in French scholarship, despite the contributions of two of the great *doyens* of twentieth-century colonial historiography, Charles-André Julien and Charles-Robert Ageron.[6] Liauzu alludes to Marc Bloch, approvingly, as compelling evidence of the leading role that historians can, and should, play in the political domain.[7] Julien was equally radical in his conflation of politics and history.[8] And it is not without a certain pride, one suspects, that Liauzu identifies France as the fulcrum of colonial debates and aspires to continue in this vein.

Another recurrent theme is the complex and unpredictable relationship between French republicanism and colonialism/anti-colonialism. There were always tensions, however nuanced, between those who believed in the universality of the principles of 1789, and in the assimilationist project as the means to realize them, and those who saw in colonialism their antithesis. Others differed on more pragmatic grounds (the *revanchiste* focus on Germany, for instance). Jules Ferry's imperial adventures, we are reminded, gave rise to a curious and not-altogether-holy alliance of republican anti-colonialists from across the political fault-lines of his day (p. 14). Liauzu's own search for a new postcolonial humanism is, at the very least, a sincere attempt to test again the limits of this republican project, and to chart a course between Eurocentric and Third-worldist commonplaces.

Histoire de l'anticolonialisme en France du XVIIe siècle à nos jours has the inevitable strengths and weaknesses of an encyclopedic work that addresses more than five centuries of anti-colonial thought. I was often left wanting to hear more about particular anti-colonialists (though this is no doubt a strength of the book if it encourages further reading). Frequent and extensive quotations occasionally hamper the flow of the argument and give the feel of a "reader." There are a few editorial errors which are unfortunate given the likely uses of the volume in an undergraduate context—Las Casas was not alive in the eighteenth century (p. 18) and Adam Smith was no *anglais* (p. 25). Quibbles aside, I learnt new things about *Algérie française* (North Africa is given the lion's share of the text) and was encouraged to think again about the peculiarly French nexus of colonialism and republicanism. If this work of synthesis is not entirely successful it is precisely because Liauzu makes a modest and ultimately compelling case for the limits of French anti-colonialism.

NOTES

[1] Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991).

[2] Claude Liauzu, «Une loi contre l'histoire », *Le Monde diplomatique*, April 2005, p. 28.

[3] Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire (eds.), *La fracture coloniale: la société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005); Daniel Lefeuvre, *Pour en finir avec la repentance coloniale* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006).

[4] Michel de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), opening pages.

[5] On Tocqueville see Alexis de Tocqueville, *Sur l'Algérie* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003); *Writings on Empire and Slavery* (ed. Jennifer Pitts) (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

[6] Charles-André Julien, *Une pensée anticoloniale : positions 1914-1979* (Paris: Sindbad, 1979); Charles-Robert Ageron, *L'anticolonialisme en France de 1871 à 1914* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973).

[7] Liauzu, « Une loi contre l'histoire », p. 28.

[8] See especially Julien, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord. Tunisie. Algérie. Maroc* (Paris: Payot, 1931).

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