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Kate Marsh and Nicola Frith, eds., *France's Lost Empires: Fragmentation, Nostalgia, and la fracture coloniale*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011. viii + 175pp. Notes and bibliography. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-7391-4883-9.

Review by Robert Aldrich, University of Sydney.

Study of the memory of colonisation and the overseas empire has become a significant sub-field in the larger area of French colonial history, which itself constitutes a key area in contemporary work on French history, an enormous change from a decade or so ago. The ten essays in this volume, written by young historians (some still completing their doctoral theses) and first presented at a conference in Liverpool in 2008, testify to that interest in the history of the French empire and, as Kate Marsh puts it in her introduction, to the "afterlives" of the colonies. The novel idea is to examine, through its manifestation in culture and politics, nostalgia for colonies that France lost with the dissolution of the first colonial empire (Saint-Domingue and the chimera of a French empire in India, as well as French Canada) and also Algeria. The authors suggest that such colonial nostalgia continued to pain the body politic even long after France was forced to retreat from its far-flung domains.

Following Marsh's introduction, the volume opens with one of the best essays in the collection, Yun Kyoung Kwon's work on accounts by slave-holding planters from Saint-Domingue who returned to France after the island's black majority declared independence in 1804. This particular group of *rapatriés* who, with their dependents, numbered as many as eight thousand, is often forgotten. The author shows how they benefitted under the Restoration from noble connections and cleverly employed publishing and lobbying in order to advance ultimately vain demands for the reconquest of Haiti. Paris finally recognised its independence in 1825 and offered compensation for their losses. Kwon's deft handling thus links together the planters' bitter recriminations and wistful nostalgia, efforts to portray themselves as victims of the Haitian revolution, and political activism alongside debates concerning slavery and abolition in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Four chapters concern *Inde française*, an often overlooked corner of the French empire. Defeated by the British in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the French were left with five small *comptoirs* (Pondichéry, Karikal, Yanaon, Mahé, and Chandernagor) and a few minuscule *loges* that, ironically, would remain French preserves until a few years after the decolonisation of British India. Akhila Yechury's outstanding essay, though it focuses less on the memory of the colonies than do others in the volume, provides a fascinating study of the anomalies of French enclave rule on the outskirts of the Raj. It highlights a complex court case involving arcane judgements over the boundaries of jurisdiction between British and French territory and subjects. The case is worthy of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta and Yechury's reconstruction shows what can only be considered as the madness of colonialists drawing lines on the map, as well as the pathetic French determination to keep a few footholds on the subcontinent. Other essays on India, by Nicola Frith, Indra N. Mukhopadhyay and Kathryn Dale, reflect on portrayals of the 1857 "Sepoy Mutiny" in French literature, the depiction of India in novels by such writers as Jules Verne and Alexandre Dumas, and the use of images of the *comptoirs* in 1930s advertising.

Further chapters in *France's Lost Empires* take other examples of the continuing heritage of colonialism in French life. Albert Camus' posthumously published *Le Premier Homme* is John Strachan's subject; Claire Eldridge looks at Carnoux-en-Provence, a *commune* where *pieds-noirs* created a bastion in the Midi (and where three-quarters of votes now go to the Front National); and Sophie Watt reflects on the nostalgia for *Algérie Française* in the films of Alexandre Arcady. An even longer-term effect of colonialism is explored in Olivier Courteaux's chapter on the way that de Gaulle's historical perspectives on New France inflected his view of Canada, leading to his carefully planned "Vive le Québec libre!" in Montréal in 1967. Courteaux intriguingly connects de Gaulle's posturing both with the "loss" of France's African empire a few years before his visit to Québec and the French colonial eviction from Canada two centuries previously.

Marsh and Frith's collection closes on a high scholarly note with a particularly thoughtful piece by Emile Chabal on "neo-republicanism" in contemporary France, and especially the concepts of *fracture sociale*, *intégration*, and *laïcité*. Attempts to reconstruct a sense of republican unity in the midst of colonial memory wars and socio-political strife, and the debates they engendered, point up, Chabal argues, the persistent importance of the idea of the nation in France. They also show the necessity (and lack of great success) in defining what that is and should be in the early twenty-first century.

These essays underline the significance of empires won and lost to the French narrative and the sense of France's place in the world. Earlier this year, there was controversy in France, reported in the international press, when one of the officials of the football world was reported to say that France should refrain from recruiting too many non-European players (an echo of Jean-Marie Le Pen's comment several years ago that the French soccer team was too black). One player, Benoît Assou-Ekotto, a Frenchman of Cameroonian background who now plays for Tottenham Hotspur, was quoted in the *Guardian Weekly* of 20-26 May 2011: "France has, at its heart, a problem where it has been unable or unwilling to accommodate the sons and daughters of its former colonies, even though France enriched itself greatly from the relationship. That's hard to accept and it's what sits at the base of what is dysfunctional in France." "Dysfunctional" is a strong word, but the idea merits reflection.

The objective of *France's Lost Empires* is not to undertake such a project but to chart certain memories of empire, and indeed some of the delusions of empire that nostalgia produced, and to contribute to the debate on a *fracture coloniale* in France. Saint-Domingue, of course, was not the near utopia that planter *rapatriés* pretended, no more than was Algeria the promised land of milk and honey that *algéraniste* and *piéd-noir* novels and films have imagined. France never really had a consequential imperial domain in India, and the French would not have been the benign and nurturing colonisers of the subcontinent that nineteenth-century novelists dreamed when they compared their compatriots to the British. Much later, many Québécois were rather puzzled to be shuffled under the wings of French guardianship by de Gaulle strutting around as the *coq gaulois*. Yet the memory of Nouvelle France, Saint-Dominique and *Inde française* (and the later colonies as well) continued to haunt generations of the French long after the fleur-de-lys flag or the tricolour was lowered, just as the idea of imperial grandeur and the unqualified beneficence of colonialism, in a different fashion, shimmers as a mirage to many in present-day France.

France's Lost Empires makes a contribution to our understanding of the legacy of empire by exploring some of these cases of imperial nostalgia. The challenge with such studies is to connect representations of the *colonies perdues* to the way in which nostalgia is manipulated by particular social groups. There is also a need to beware of assuming that a colonial plot in a novel or an image of a picturesque French possession used as an advertising gimmick necessarily struck, or strikes, a widespread colonialist chord among those who came into contact with such a pointer to empire. Several of the essays here might have strengthened their arguments about such connections. One can also think of other examples that might have been included in the overview of colonial nostalgia. How did the French remember, for instance, Mauritius or the *concessions* in China and what contemporary afflictions of *nostalgérie* and yearning for Indochina or other colonies can one diagnose?

This is a compact volume, with the text of the essays (minus footnotes and references) totalling only about 110 pages, a book for which the publishers charge a very hefty price. This means that most readers will simply photocopy chapters from a copy in their library or borrowed on inter-library loan. But those interested in particular areas of the French empire, or the general phenomenon of the place of colonialism in French society and culture, will find valuable essays here to attract them.

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Emile Chabal, "*La République postcoloniale?* Making the Nation in Late-Twentieth-Century France"

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