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Robert Michael Morrissey, *Empire by Collaboration: Indians, Colonists, and Governments in Colonial Illinois Country*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. x + 352 pp. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-8122-4699-5.

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Illinois Country is the name given to a shared French-Indian territory located in the heart of early North America. Since its colonial settlements stood at the crossroads of several empires and comprised very few settlers and slaves, it has, until today, mostly given birth to a local historiography which is more or less strongly connected to the historiographies on French Canada, Louisiana, the Upper Country, and/or the U.S. trans-Appalachian West. Because of its provocative argument about the alternative way some colonial empires were formed and operated, *Empire by Collaboration* is the first book focusing specifically on the Illinois Country that has the potential to bring this fascinating case study out of the historiographical margins.

While most historians of early North America have taken the Atlantic turn, the author does not make any reference to the Atlantic world or to Atlantic studies. At the same time, the study fuels the renewed interest in the French Atlantic that the development of Atlantic history has propelled in the U.S. among historians of colonial North America and the Caribbean. However, the book mixes two historiographical approaches: imperial history, on the one hand, and continental or borderlands history, on the other, two fields conceived most of the time as competitors, not as complements to Atlantic history. The focus on empire does not impede Morrissey from considering the points of view of both Indians and colonists in the same way. The book is a good example of the possibility of combining imperial or colonial history with the new Indian history which has sought, since the 1970s, to take fully into account Native Americans as genuine historical actors and to revise the history of their encounter with Europeans accordingly. In contrast, the author is less at ease with integrating and understanding the point of view of slaves of African descent.

Morrissey argues that the history of empires is not always a history of domination and resistance or accommodation. Instead, the colonial situation could bring into contact equal partners, none of whom were in a position to impose domination, as was often the case in the borderlands.^[1] If they did not share the same goals, they did have an interest in collaborating with each other. For a French audience, the term collaboration, which is reminiscent of World War II, may have a pejorative meaning, but Morrissey does not claim that the partnership among the various actors caught in such a colonial situation aimed at implementing the project of colonial domination supported by imperial authorities. Everybody collaborated, including the central power in the metropole and its colonial representatives, and they did it “consciously” (p. 7) and “often intentionally” (p. 8), as collaboration appeared to be the best, most pragmatic choice. Pragmatism drove this empire by collaboration. In Morrissey’s view, collaboration cannot be confused with accommodation because the different sides understood each other. Such a stance allows Morrissey to distinguish himself from Richard White and his highly influential

concept of middle ground, which rests on the development of creative misunderstandings across cultural groups.[2]

In the case of the Illinois Country, Morrissey sees the colonial situation as an encounter between and among the Indians, the colonists, and the French, British or American imperial governments. The colonists collaborated in that, while they had started to establish their colonial settlements without the approval and consent of the French crown from the 1680s, they did not later oppose the administrative and military incorporation of the Illinois Country into Louisiana in 1717, as they were able to impose the continuation of their system of socio-cultural alliance sanctioned by Christian unions with the Illinois. Likewise, after the Illinois Country was ceded, with the whole eastern bank of the Mississippi River except for New Orleans, to the English crown by the treaty of Paris in 1763 and then seized by the Americans during the War of Independence, the colonists actively engaged in a campaign of petitions to demand more government.

As for the Illinois Indians, they embraced the alliance with Onontio (the French governor) not because they were in a position of dependency and subordination, but because it served their own imperialist ambition and project of domination over other Native American nations. For instance, while the French wanted initially to include the Foxes in the Gallic alliance, they had to accept their exclusion and a war against the enemies of the Illinois. Finally, the French crown collaborated with both the colonists and the Indians because this collaboration allowed it to impose its sovereignty over a territory that had geopolitical importance and to maintain an alliance with many Algonquian nations that it could use against the English. All things considered, it is the French monarchy that appears to have been in a less powerful position and that had to react to rather than to initiate the way the political game developed. Out of this general collaboration developed a “stable” and “functional” colonial order, marked by a prosperous commercial economy based on racial slavery, one of the most long-lasting political and military Franco-Indian alliances, and a French-Illinois Christian community based on a network of interracial kinships and fictive kinships.

At first sight, this argument appears very attractive. Moreover, the book is very well crafted, researched, and written. The author has managed to find new archival material, such as the Illinois-French dictionary compiled by Jesuits or the letters and petitions sent to the British and then American authorities. He has thus collected an impressive array of primary sources, comprising both the well-known administrative correspondence between the colony and the metropole from the Colonial archives and the less often used correspondence between the Louisiana governor and the commandant of the Illinois Country in the 1750s kept in the Vaudreuil papers, and he has exploited this material according to several methodologies, including network analysis. The *longue durée* of the book is also a tour de force. The environmental history of the region in the first chapter explains first the rise and fall of the Mississippian civilization at Cahokia between the seventh and fifteenth centuries and then the migration and settlement of the Illinois to take advantage of the bison economy by the early seventeenth century. The trans-imperial history in the rest of the book does not focus solely on the French period, but also explores how the situation evolved with the cession to Great Britain and then the conquest by Virginia.

Despite these admirable qualities, however, I have to disagree with most of the premises on which the book is built, as they defy its purpose. The way Morrissey frames his subject and reads the local situation is at odds with his project of considering Indians as genuine historical actors and of demonstrating their position of power. It also impedes him from analyzing the complex ways imperialism and colonialism worked in the borderlands.

Rather than studying the interaction between the French and the Illinois, Morrissey seeks to “explore the interaction of peoples and governments” (p. 4). This aim is closely linked to the confusing way he uses the concepts of empire and colony. In *Empire by Collaboration*, New France, which theoretically comprised Acadia, Canada, and Louisiana although each of these three territories was run independently

by the metropole, is not viewed as one colony belonging to the early modern French empire which included other colonies and outposts in the Caribbean, in Western Africa, and in the Indian Ocean. Rather, New France or French North America is considered as an empire in itself (“their North American colonial empire,” p. 4). Consequently, Morrissey calls “imperial” what would be more commonly labelled “colonial.” For instance, when the author writes about “imperial decrees” (p. 156), he does not refer to decrees that were valid for every colony of the French empire, but decrees promulgated by metropolitan or colonial authorities for the sole colony of Louisiana. This choice of vocabulary also explains why the Illinois Country, once it had been administratively incorporated into Louisiana, is described as an “imperial colony” (p. 108).

Moreover, as the first sentences of chapter two make clear (“At the dawn of the 1690s, the French empire included an unintentional colonial outpost in the Illinois Country. Containing Jesuits, fur traders, Indians, [...]”, p. 63), Morrissey is not interested in analyzing the construction of an “empire.” The existence of a North American “French empire” is taken for granted even at a time when Louisiana had not yet been settled, and the French crown tried to limit colonization to the St. Lawrence Valley. Likewise, Morrissey assumes that the construction of a fort and the presence of a few missionaries and fur traders immediately turned the Illinois Country as a whole into a “colony” (“La Salle’s colony,” “the Illinois colony,” p. 59-60). For a very long time, however, the Illinois Country remained a shared French and Native American world and a zone of contact between two sovereignties, those of the French and the Illinois.[3]

Throughout the introduction, Morrissey writes about the colonists and the Indians together as if they formed a political tandem and shared the same interests. For instance, he mentions that “even at the very founding of the official colony, when imperial officials were faced with a group of colonists and wayward former Indian allies living in the middle of the continent with no government and no laws, they wrote that they were powerless to oppose it” (p. 8). As he projects onto both the Illinois Indians and the illegal fur traders what imperial officials were denouncing only about the *coureurs de bois*, he implicitly asserts that they were in the same position towards imperial authorities, confuses absolutism with imperialism and colonialism, and ignores the Illinois’s own system of political power.

When, more generally, Morrissey examines the “interaction between peoples and governments,” mobilizing the concepts of “people” and “government” rather than society and state/non-state political system, positing “governments” as exterior to “peoples,” merging in the category of “peoples” both French colonists and Indians, and considering only one “government,” successively the French, British, and American imperial governments, he chooses to overlook the issue of sovereignty and political organization and incorporation. Therefore, he cannot recognize that the situation in which the Illinois and the French were caught was inextricably colonial. The very act of settling violated the sovereign rights of Indians on their own land and partook of a project of colonial domination which was not only supported and implemented by the imperial government, but also by all kinds of historical actors. Although missionaries and fur traders were on occasion at odds with the imperial central power and had their own agenda, they were nonetheless agents of empire. The structural divide was not between all the inhabitants of the Illinois Country, whatever their ethnic identity and the imperial government, but between the French and the Illinois.

In the same way, when Morrissey writes that the result of this empire by collaboration was a “functional colonial order,” one can wonder for whom this order functioned. When he includes, for instance, the successful commercial agriculture based partially on slave labor as one element of this “functional colonial order,” he simply forgets the Indians and the slaves. The Illinois did not benefit from the development of this commercial agriculture. Their own way of living was increasingly disrupted by the multiple consequences of the close and demanding presence of the French. As for the slaves, Morrissey acknowledges that they suffered from domination and violence as no other actors did, but he claims that

“in a place like Illinois, as in other borderlands situations, most people—even slaves—had options” (p. 8). It is far from clear, however, what having options means when this expression refers to slaves.

Apart from the premises on which the book is based, other issues appear throughout the narrative. I will focus on two of them. First, in contrast to a Eurocentric perspective on early North American history, Morrissey opens the book not with the arrival of the Europeans but earlier: “The history of empire in Illinois must begin with Native efforts to exploit power in the borderlands” (p. 14). In the first chapter, he analyzes the expansion and transformation of the Illinois as they moved to the region to which they would give their name. Although he never uses the expression “Illinois Empire” as Pekka Hämäläinen has done for the Comanche, he follows the lead of this historian when he describes the Illinois as “aggressive” and “opportunistic” “colonizers” willing to use “violence” to impose their “domination.”^[4] Their migration and settlement are viewed as a process of “conquest” and “invasion.” The Illinois sought to control a new territory, but also the regional trade, emerging “as merchants, middlemen, and go-betweens.” Their adoption of bison hunting led to the creation of larger villages united by kinships, a new gendered division of labor, the development of polygamous households, and the expansion of slavery as women were valued as laborers to process the hides and meat. When these new Illinois started to be attacked by the Iroquois in the 1650s, they responded with belligerence, pushing war and slavery to new heights that did not exist before contact. This rise to power did not cease in the 1670s and 1680s, when the French arrived in the region, the period examined in chapter two. Although the Illinois were defeated by the Iroquois, Morrissey argues that “this period marked the height of their power” (p. 41) based on an increasingly “militaristic culture” and an expansive “slave economy.” The French alliance helped the Illinois to become “some of the most powerful people in North America” (pp. 63–64).

Despite fascinating pages about the adoption of bison hunting, this new heroic narrative is not without problems. First, to sustain such an exceptionalist claim about the Illinois, comparisons with other hegemonic Indian groups such as the Iroquois, Osage, Powhatan, and Lakota Sioux are needed. Second, this interpretation tacks onto the Illinois concepts borrowed from European political culture, such as “empire” or “colonization,” without ever exploring the way power and authority were conceived and legitimized, and political decisions were made among the Illinois.^[5] Likewise, Morrissey provides very little evidence justifying the “market-oriented logic” of the Illinois, especially since there is still a strong debate among ethno-historians about the significance of exchange among Native Americans. Finally, the author tends to confuse slavery and adoption, the two fates that could befall war captives. Slaves were deprived of the protection Native kinships conferred. They did not occupy the same positions and were not treated in the same way as people who were adopted and thus integrated within networks of kinship, even if the expansion of the practice of adoption generated tensions within the kinship system.^[6] Merging slavery and adoption leads the author to confound Illinois expansionism and French colonialism instead of understanding Indians on their own terms. Yet, not viewing the Illinois as “colonizers” does not detract in any way from the fact that at the time of their direct encounter with the French they were clearly in a position of power compared to other Native American groups and the French.

A second issue involves the way Morrissey examines the colonists through the concepts of Creole, culture, and community. Throughout the book, colonists are identified as “Creoles.” On the one hand, the author qualifies all the settlers of French descent in North America as “Creoles.” In the introduction, for instance, he mentions the “Creole Crescent stretching from Louisiana to Quebec” (p. 3) or “their Creole compatriots in New Orleans” (p. 3).^[7] On the other hand, he also uses the term to define a new “culture” specific to the Illinois Country, whose most salient characteristics were interracial marriage and racial slavery. In Chapter 6 entitled “Creolization and Collaboration,” he argues that “the people of Illinois were not reconstructing an old world, they were creating a new one. Scholars have coined the term ‘creolization’ to refer to the process whereby colonial populations invented new cultures, lifeways, politics, and identities as they adapted to new conditions on the ground. In the 1720s, the inhabitants of

Illinois became Creoles by creating a culture that was not conservative but pragmatic and even exploitative. Social and economic patterns in Illinois defined an idiosyncratic colonial community” (p. 140).

With such a definition of creolization, there is not one colonial society in the Americas that could not be labelled “Creole.” Thus, why define only the French and not the English as Creoles in North America? Furthermore, although creolization happened everywhere, elites of European descent continued to claim their Englishness, Frenchness, Spanishness, etc., which shows that culture and identity cannot be conflated. In Greater Louisiana, including in the Illinois Country, locally born settlers hardly ever self-identified as Creoles, but they were sometimes assigned a Creole identity by the king’s representatives and sword and pen officers and priests born in the metropole. Nevertheless, for Louisiana local authorities and settlers, the Illinois Country was often viewed not as a Creole but as a Canadian enclave, as the sociopolitical tensions in the first decades of colonization were not between metropolitans and Creoles, but between French and Canadians in the whole Mississippi Valley.[8] It would have been more useful to study the practices of identification developed by historical actors instead of projecting on them a category of difference that was mobilized in very complex ways at the time.

Morrissey insists on creolization because he wants to dismiss the representations that British and American authorities, merchants, and settlers had about the inhabitants of Canadian and French descent when the Illinois Country was incorporated into the British Empire and then Virginia after the Seven Years War. They saw them as traditional and conservative peasants deprived of any entrepreneurial spirit and submissive to the French absolute monarch. Because he lets historical actors define the terms of the debate, the author does not address the crucial question of the social and cultural continuities and discontinuities between metropolitan and colonial societies and between the various colonial societies in French North America. He treats the Illinois Country as a cultural isolate which was immune to external influences. Yet, even when the first fur traders and *coureurs de bois* decided to settle among the Illinois Indians and started to cultivate wheat without the approval of the crown in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, they did not live in isolation.

As Morrissey underlines without grasping the significance of this fact, it remained a “world in motion” (p. 147). The Illinois Country was always closely connected to Canada and, after its later foundation, to Lower Louisiana. Although the local society and economy presented idiosyncratic features, it is impossible to understand local sociopolitical dynamics without integrating the Illinois Country within a larger colonial or imperial framework. Most noticeably, the local elite of Canadian or French descent who emerged over time increasingly drew their resources, including their symbolic resources, from the whole empire. They shared the same political culture as royal officials and other elites in French North America, recognizing the king’s service as the most honorable condition. They also followed the way this political culture evolved over the eighteenth century, questioning the relationship between the king and his subjects. Hence, they did not partake of a different sociopolitical world.

What makes a “community” or a “culture” in a colonial situation? Interracial marriage and racial slavery did not define “Illinois’s culture.” They were not permanent or long-lasting cultural practices or values, but contingent political, social, and economic phenomena that did not affect all the villages of the Illinois Country, whether Illinois or French, after their separation. In the same way, Morrissey has a tendency to consider what happened in Kaskaskia, on which he focuses, as representative of the whole region and to overlook the social heterogeneity and tensions within each French village. The chronology of these phenomena was also different: Illinois-French marriage did not last and characterized mainly the period between the late 1690s and the 1730s. African slavery developed from the 1720s with the integration of the Illinois Country into Louisiana and, although it expanded over time, it always coexisted with other forms of labor as settlers had difficulty acquiring slaves from the lower Mississippi Valley.

I will focus here on the French-Illinois marriage. Although Morrissey pays attention to historical evolution, he claims that a long-lasting French-Illinois Christian community based on a network of interracial kinships and fictive kinships formed and persisted before and after the separation of the French and Illinois villages after the arrival of colonial officials in 1719. Even before 1719, however, what existed was rather one or several Native American communities that tolerated the presence of a demographic and social minority of French missionaries and fur traders turned into farmers in some of their villages. Although some chiefs and women, in particular, adopted Christianity, not all Illinois Indians were Christian practitioners at the time, even among the Kaskaskias, and their version of Christianity did not have the same meaning for them as for the French.[9] The Christian unions that were celebrated by the missionaries between some Illinois women and French men concerned only a small section of the Illinois population, once again even among the Kaskaskias. Except for these few unions, the French missionaries and fur traders had to comply with the Illinois's way of living and governing themselves. Moreover, the situation changed after 1719 when new French villages were created, the French and Illinois villages were separated, new French migrants coming from Lower Louisiana arrived in large numbers, and commercial agriculture developed rapidly. How could the Illinois and the French form a single community when each side was ruled by its own system of political power and followed its own set of social and cultural norms, including its own version of Christianity? What linked these groups was not their belonging to the same community, but the alliance which manifested itself in many different ways (presents, the fur trade, unions, religion, and war).

Even within the French villages after 1719, this idea of a French-Illinois Christian community is questionable. As Morrissey demonstrates, Native American wives and their mixed-race children who stayed in the French villages were not discriminated against, but their social integration was at the price of their Frenchification. They had to behave as French people were supposed to do, and the *métis* children had to marry within the French villages, not the Illinois ones. Even though those children were sometimes identified as *métis* by outsiders such as the commandant Macarty, their unions with people of French descent were not seen locally as interracial marriages because they passed as French. Despite the early significance of *métissage*, the French villages of the Illinois Country did not claim a French-Illinois or *métis* identity. Moreover, the number of mixed marriages involving Native American women coming from outside (the Illinois villages nearby or other more remote Native American groups) fell dramatically after the 1730s, while the Illinois suffered from heavy demographic decline and social and cultural disruption, two phenomena on which Morrissey does not dwell.[10] Although the Illinois and the French maintained a long-lasting alliance, they were also caught in a relationship of power, difference, and exclusion.

There would be many other things to say, which testifies to the richness of *Empire by Collaboration*. While my understanding of the history of the Illinois Country is very different from that of Morrissey, I thank him for bringing to light this important case study and for launching a debate that, I hope, will be useful for scholars and students interested in the early French Empire and, more broadly, the interplay of imperialism, colonialism, and slavery in the Americas.

NOTES

[1] Unlike Morrissey, I use the concept of “colonial situation” as defined by Georges Balandier, “La situation coloniale: approche théorique,” *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* 11 (1951): 44-79.

[2] Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[3] For an analysis of the construction of empire in the region during Louis XIV's reign, see Gilles Havard, *Empire et métissages. Indiens et Français dans le Pays d'en Haut, 1660-1715* (Sillery and Paris: Septentrion and Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003). For a study of the way the French

Crown understood the place of Native Americans within the empire, see Gilles Havard, “Les forcer à devenir Cytoyens’. État, Sauvages et citoyenneté en Nouvelle-France (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle),” *Annales HSS* 64, no. 5 (2009): 985-1018. For a more general view of the region as a shared French and Indian world, see Robert Englebort and Guillaume Teasdale, eds., *French and Indians in the Heart of North America, 1630-1815* (East Lansing and Winnipeg: Michigan State University Press and University of Manitoba Press, 2013).

[4] Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[5] Similar critical comments have been made by Gilles Havard about *The Comanche Empire*. Gilles Havard, “Empire indien et rénovation historiographique: à propos de Pekka Hämäläinen, *L’Empire comanche*” [Paris, Anarchasis, 2012] *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, 2013, consulted on line on December 9, 2015: <https://nuevomundo.revues.org/65518>.

[6] For a different view on exchange and slavery among Native Americans, see Gilles Havard, *Histoire des coureurs de bois* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2016).

[7] Jay Gitlin has been influential in popularizing the use of the category Creole to define the French settlements and populations of the Upper Mississippi Valley. In his book about the Americanization of the region, he writes about a “Creole corridor”: Jay Gitlin, *Bourgeois Frontier: French Towns, French Traders, and American Expansion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). As in Louisiana, the concept is mobilized by both historians and non-professional residents interested in contesting an Anglo-centric view of North American history in order to promote the region’s local history for political and economic reasons, including tourism.

[8] Cécile Vidal, “Caribbean New Orleans: Urban Genesis, Empire, and Race in the Eighteenth-Century French Atlantic,” (HDR dissertation, Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2014), pp. 643-718.

[9] Christopher Bilodeau, “‘They honor our Lord among themselves in their own way’: Colonial Christianity and the Illinois Indians,” *The American Indian Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2011): 352-377; Tracy Neal Leavelle, *The Catholic Calumet: Colonial Conversions in French and Indian North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

[10] Joseph Zitomersky, *French Americans—Native Americans in Eighteenth-Century French Colonial Louisiana: The Population Geography of the Illinois Indians, 1670s-1760s* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1994); Cécile Vidal, “Les implantations françaises au Pays des Illinois au XVIIIe siècle” (Ph.D. dissertation, EHESS, 1995); Sophie White, *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

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