

H-France Review Vol. 18 (July 2018), No. 152

Dominique Barjot and Thi Hoai Trang Phan, eds., *Économie et Développement Durable: Héritage Historiques et Défis Actuels au sein du Monde Francophone*. Paris: Société française d'histoire des outre-mers, 2016. 294 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. 15.00€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-85970-054-6.

Review by Simon Jackson and Gemma Jennings, University of Birmingham.

In March 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron launched a drive to re-energize *la Francophonie*, the global cultural ensemble defined by the use of the French language, and a much contested legacy of French colonial empire.[1] The impact of his thirty-three proposals to develop a plurilingual and democratized version of the Francophone world remains to be seen, but his rhetorical efforts to de-connect *la Francophonie* from its colonial past are critically contextualized by this volume, which makes clear the enduring influence of French empire on its former colonies after independence by exploring the varied and specific trajectories of individual economic activities.

Operating broadly at the intersection of business history and imperial history, the volume, the result of a 2012 conference, brings together a cast of mainly younger scholars around the institutional center of gravity of the Centre Roland Mousnier at the University of Paris IV, La Sorbonne, and under the intellectual leadership of Dominique Barjot, Jacques Frémeaux and the late Daniel Lefeuvre, a group of senior scholars marked by the historiographical influence of Jacques Marseille and anchored in the economic history of French Algeria.[2] Divided into two sections, on energy and then on agricultural/industrial raw materials, the volume's wealth of case studies will provide valuable empirical material to historians of North and Sub-Saharan Africa especially, but also to those working on South-East Asia and numerous other aspects of the French colonial situation and its aftermaths.

The volume joins significant recent work on the economic history of French colonial empire by Samir Saul and Muriam Haleh Davis, among others, and rests primarily on the exploitation of a range of state and business archives, such as those of Saint Gobain and Michelin.[3] With some exceptions, the voices heard across the fifteen chapters are those of male, elite, French capitalists and managers or politicians, more rarely those of post-independence national leaders and very rarely those of ordinary colonized subjects or citizens. Generally speaking, the volume's analytical focus is the interface of the imperial/post-imperial state with capitalist interests, its spatial framework is a loose version of *la Francophonie* as a palimpsest of colonial empire, and its methodological commitments those of a rigorously empirical economic history in search of variation at the level of individual firms. If the volume's preface by Michel Guillou hypothesizes

a future “economic *Francophonie*...a laboratory for the construction of a humanist globalization” (p. 10), and the volume’s introduction by Dominique Barjot and Thi Hoai Trang Phan invokes the classic tropes of modernization theory to diagnose a process of economic “catching up” by the francophone former colonies of South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa today (p. 12), the chapters themselves make clear that the legacies of colonial empire, for metropole and colonies alike, are not easily left behind.

Part one is a collection of seven chapters exploring energy development across the former French Empire over the twentieth century, introduced by Dominique Lefeuvre. The introduction provides an effective contextual and analytical orientation, succinctly outlining evolving colonial policy towards energy resources across its territories and introducing the notion of the energy sector as a “*terrain privilégié*” in the perpetuation of French links to its former colonies throughout and after the process of political independence, providing a space for technical co-operation and bilateral business interests (p. 34). These themes are well developed in the following three chapters, contributions from Jacques Frémeaux, Alain Beltran and Dominique Barjot, which focus on the role of the French state and French companies in the development of the oil industry across metropole and colonies, primarily in Algeria. Frémeaux’s chapter centers the relationship between Saharan oil reserves and Algerian independence, examining late colonial policies towards Saharan oil exploitation, and exploring how these shifting prerogatives shaped the independence negotiations and the eventual agreement reached in the Évian Accords. Frémeaux argues that the structures of the oil industry established by the accords provided a privileged and mutually beneficial connection between the two states, until the economic and political shifts of the early 1970s. This emphasis on continuity, further expounded in the following two chapters, moves away from the traditional historicization of decolonization as a significant rupture and watershed moment—from an economic perspective at least. Marta Musso’s work on the history of the Algerian national oil company, Sonatrach, offers an additional perspective to this argumentation, employing the notion of an ongoing “economic decolonization” to differentiate between formal independence and an operational and meaningful resource sovereignty emerging in the early 1970s.[4]

Beltran’s chapter further develops these themes, focusing specifically on the interaction between the oil politics of the French state and the strategies and organization of the oil sector across the metropole and colonial territories between 1919 and the 1970s. The chapter highlights particularly how postwar geopolitical concerns fueled a search for oil in France and overseas that resulted in a predominately state centered industry, of which state and part-state-owned organizations such as the Bureau de recherche de pétrole (BRP) and the Société Nationale de Recherche et d’Exploitation de Pétrole en Algérie (SN REPAL) are emblematic. By weaving together the oil histories of France and French colonies, the account highlights the oil industry’s development as complex and bidirectional process, extending beyond the period of colonial rule.

Barjot’s article adds further depth to these histories of the oil industry, taking as its focus the Franco-Algerian oil company SN REPAL, considering how the organization both influenced and was shaped by the French state’s political prerogatives between 1946 and 1972. Consistent with Frémeaux and Beltran’s arguments, Barjot underlines the endurance and immutability of structures and relationships inherent within the oil industry at political independence. He utilizes an in-depth approach to provide a unique perspective on everyday lived experience within the oil sector, considering, for example, corporate culture and staffing structures, which Barjot argues created a uniquely “Algerian” organization (pp. 68-70). This is a valuable addition to a

histography that has concentrated on the operations and consequences of the oil industry at the level of high politics and macroeconomics, and begins to consider how oil labor interacts with and impacts social constructions and values—which, as authors such as Touraj Atabaki have shown, is an important and evolving area of research. [5].

The remaining four chapters of this section are wider in focus, exploring energy development, more broadly conceived, across Indochina, Madagascar, Tunisia and Cameroon. Trang Phan's chapter examines the history of the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas (BPPB) in Indochina in the early twentieth century, first carefully contextualizing the discussion within a close analysis of the role of mining within the Indochinese economy of the 1920s and 1930s. The second half of the chapter moves onto a detailed study of the BPPB's archives, using this previously underexplored source base to examine the bank's approach and investments in this sector. In its exploration of the bank's strategies and the processes of negotiation surrounding industrial projects, the chapter highlights both the breadth of actors involved in energy development as well as the complex interchanges between these actors. In contrast, Bearitsoa Rakotoniana's chapter discusses state energy policies in Madagascar between 1958 and 1972, a shift in focus which facilitates an examination of the secondary exploitation of natural resources—in this case the refining of foreign oil for export. Rakotoniana's approach provides a new perspective to this book and to discussions of the oil sector more generally, which have tended to focus predominately on oil producing countries—exemplified by the “oil curse” literature discussed below. It helpfully opens new questions about the operation of energy production within a broader, potentially more global framework, systematically incorporating refining sites and transport nodes.

Mohamed Sassi's discussion of energy strategies in Tunisia similarly focuses on the post-independence era. He contrasts the economic policies pursued under presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali and argues that ongoing weaknesses within these ostensibly antithetical strategies, primarily a lack of investment in refining, simultaneously limited oil income and created a dependence on oil imports, with significant repercussions for social and economic development. The chapter therefore adds an important nuance to wider discussions of the so-called “oil curse”, which links national oil reserves to economic instability, by both centralizing the role of the state in determining the outcomes of oil exploitation and moving beyond the focus on oil extraction. [6]

Finally in this section, Édvy-Claude Okalla-Bana examines the role of Électricité de France (EDF) in the electrification of Cameroon between 1932 and 1974, focusing on the development of energy networks and the provision of hydroelectric energy. The chapter examines how the organization's role and strategies developed as state policies evolved and argues that EDF played a key role in the development of an effective energy infrastructure. Spanning the pre- and post-independence periods, the chapter illustrates how the energy sector beyond the oil industry continued to provide an important vector of interaction between France and former colonies until the early 1970s, thus further expounding some of themes discussed by Barjot, Frémeaux and Beltran.

Part two concentrates on industrial and agricultural raw materials, and the standard watershed of decolonization is repeatedly nuanced in this section too, with the legacies of colonial monoculture for independent states a continuous theme, as well as the variety of colonial trajectories illuminated by company-level analysis, thus mitigating general theses of colonial

empire as a crutch or a brake for the metropolitan economy at large. The section's eight chapters are prefaced by Philippe Mioche's brief introduction, which observes that although the Francophone world provides the ostensible framework for the volume, these chapters broadly point towards a revitalized economic and social history of North-South relations across linguistic fields, and flags the history of the Africanization of expertise and human resources as areas of research opened up by the contributions he summarizes.

Cécile Coursi ras-Jaff's chapter opens the section with a comparative study of two cement companies, Lafarge and Poliet-Chausson, showing how the former's long-established position in Algeria enabled it to ride out the crisis of the Great Depression while the latter was obliged to retreat to the metropole after gambling on rapid African expansion in the 1920s boom. The chapter argues nicely that Jacques Marseille's influential theory of the colonial markets as props to metropolitan industry during the Depression does not hold uniformly.[7] But here, as throughout the volume, a greater emphasis on the culture of the commodities of empire, along the lines of Mona Domosh's work for example, would have been welcome--how did Lafarge's products come to be "known and appreciated" (p. 168) in Algeria, through marketing and advertising for example?[8] Equally, Coursi ras-Jaff notes the role that the materiality of cement played in corporate calculations--the shift from jute to paper sacks (p. 164) and the dampness caused by long-distance transport were both factors businesspeople invoked for investment in local production in Morocco--and it would have been helpful to hear more about the interface of calculative capitalist reason and the shifting properties of the commodities themselves.

 ric Panthou's chapter on the Michelin rubber plantations in Vietnam, constructed through the Michelin archives, the Vietnamese national archives and the French colonial archives at Aix-en-Provence, stands out in the volume for its excellent portrait of labor conditions and corporate technocracy on the enormously profitable plantations. Using corporate manuals and memoirs to capture the textures of Michelin's "private government," to borrow Elizabeth Anderson's term, he shows how Taylorist and agronomic experimentation by Michelin, matched by colonial state support for the company at the expense of smaller planters, combined to expose Vietnamese migrant workers to brutally exploitative labor conditions, organized around piece-work and a constant quest to lower costs.[9]

Two chapters on aluminium follow, with Marco Bertilorenzi's focused on the Eurafrikan politics of the metal in the 1950s, and Philippe Petitpas evaluating the international strategy of the Alcan company across the twentieth century. Bertilorenzi, in one of the chapters best situated in the historiography, seeks to contextualize 1980s theories of African underdevelopment by examining the failed plans to create a Eurafrikan aluminium system in the 1950s, to coordinate European investment and extraction in Africa, and exclude North American influence. He very effectively tracks the fatal tensions between global corporate strategies, political-economic rationales of European integration and US expansion, and the centripetal tendencies of discreet imperial formations. In sum, if the chapter shows convincingly how European integration fostered the re-imagining of Pan-European economic spaces in Africa in the 1950s (p. 200), it also reminds us that national-imperial logics and national governments remained powerful. Bertilorenzi, however, closes his analysis with formal Guinean independence and does not really discuss anti-colonial nationalist or Pan-Africanist ambitions with regard to aluminium.

Petitpas, meanwhile, tracks the activities of Alcan, one of the vertically integrated “big six” aluminium giants. Petitpas pays closer attention than Bertilorenzi to Sékou Touré’s efforts to keep the refining of bauxite from Boké and the hugely rich Sangaredi deposits inside Guinea. He also extends his analysis forward through the end of the twentieth century, examining Alcan’s increasingly international profile, its corporate re-engineering at the hands of McKinsey and other consultants, and its ventures in French aluminium retail products. Perhaps too sanguine about the ecological advantages of a metal that, as Mimi Sheller notes, requires 3 percent of world electricity supply to smelt, Petitpas nevertheless provides a fascinating business history of the firm, with the operations of late or post-colonial international management consultants a clear avenue for future work.[10]

Again with a focus on Guinea, Hildete de Moraes Vodopives tracks the Brazilian mining company Vale’s rise and global expansion, concentrating on its massive iron mining projects at Simandou. The chapter’s oblique angle on the Francophone and otherwise generally North-South framework of the volume is welcome. Notably, Vodopives picks out the significant role of recent Guinean politics in resisting Vale, as the 2010 election of Alpha Condé (with the first democratic mandate since independence in 1958) brought a focus on corruption in the mining sector, an invitation to George Soros’s Open Society Foundation to advise on mining governance, and a Guinean demand that Vale conform to the international Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (pp. 230-231).

Régine Perron’s chapter, meanwhile, zooms out to consider the European Union’s commercial and development relationship with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries signatory to the Lomé and then the Cotonou commercial agreements. From the Treaty of Rome to the Doha round of the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, Perron traces Europe’s shifting bilateral commercial relationships around raw materials and agricultural produce and shows the gradual fading from prominence of developmental priorities as anti-Soviet Cold War pressures diminished. Perron usefully emphasizes the continuing salience of regional commercial blocs, and the failures of WTO liberalization and “globalization” drives. She also flags, in the manner of Daniel Speich-Chassé’s work, crucial technopolitical shifts, such as US support for the exclusion of agricultural products from GATT rules (to protect US farmers), and the adoption of world commodity prices in the 1950s and 1960s, set by financial markets with little regard to real conditions.[11]

Indeed, this geopolitics of commercial protection and selective liberalization casts its shadow over the histories examined by Joseph-Pierre E. Diouf and Bearitsoa Rakotoniaina who, in the final chapters, look at agricultural and economic development in post-independence Senegal and Madagascar respectively. Diouf discusses the rise and fall of groundnut monoculture in Senegal, setting this trajectory into political, social and environmental contexts effectively, and characterizing the crop as a regressive, toxic legacy of colonial rule. His chapter stands out for its critical emphasis on the actions and agency of post-independence leaders such as Mamadou Dia and Léopold Senghor, with the latter, for all his recent burnishing as a “moderate” hero of late-imperial federalism and Francophone culture, cast firmly as the villain of the piece, too ready to cater to a conservative provincial notability at the expense of the peasantry and the country’s ecology and economy alike.[12]

Rakotoniaina, meanwhile, (in a second contribution to the volume), examines Madagascar’s troubled agricultural history in the years after independence, underlining the continuing

influence of French power and the persistence of older methods of farming. Less fleshed out than many of the other chapters, and somewhat un-reflexively deploying a modernization framework that presents most Malagasy as “dependent on tradition and prisoners of their culture” (p. 272), the chapter nevertheless provides a helpfully de-centered view of the effects of the European Common Agricultural Policy.

Overall, in spanning a range of geographic, temporal and spatial contexts, this collection illuminates the complexity and importance of economic linkages across the colonial and post-independence Francophone world. The intersections between corporations, the French state, and at times, local and national actors provide an empirically rich insight into the mechanisms of energy and industrial development, and well situates these within wider economic contexts. The inclusion of local actors within the analysis, however, is all too infrequent and the work would be further strengthened by incorporating the views and actions of colonized peoples and post-independence states, whose agency is often missing, implying a passivity that belies their complex and highly formative role; the relative exclusion of nationalist or Pan-African engagement with aluminium in Guinea is just one example of this. Methodologically, a greater emphasis on the cultural history of economic life, or on the salience of material culture, would have opened up the theoretical possibilities of the collection. The structure in places is also a little unbalanced—the dedication of three consecutive chapters to the early decades of Algerian oil exploitation for example, creates some overlap, and the collection is strongest in its discussions of evolutions up until the early 1970s. With some exceptions, analysis of a more contemporary period is limited. However, in its exploration of the development, maintenance and evolutions of economic networks across the colonial and post-independence periods, the collection provides a valuable perspective on the interface between politics and economics, and makes clear that *la Francophonie* today, despite Macron’s rhetoric, cannot realistically be considered in isolation from its economic origins in colonial rule.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Michel Guillou, “Préface”

Dominique Barjot and Thi Hoai Trang Phan, “Introduction générale. Économie et développement durable : héritages historiques et défis actuels au sein du monde francophone”

Part One

Daniel Lefeuvre, “Introduction”

Jacques Frémeaux, “Enjeux politiques du pétrole algérien (1945-1962)”

Alain Beltran, “Les stratégies des entreprises pétrolières françaises dans le monde francophone (de l’entre-deux-guerres aux années 1970)”

Dominique Barjot, “La SN Repal : un acteur original de la politique pétrolière française (1946-1972)”

Thi Hoai Trang Phan, “La stratégie de la Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas dans le secteur minier indochinois”

Bearitsoa Rakotoniaina, “Les enjeux énergétiques à Madagascar de 1958 à 1972 : l'exemple du pétrole”

Mohamed Sassi, “La stratégie énergétique en Tunisie depuis 1956”

Édy-Claude Okalla-Bana, “EDF et l'électrification du Cameroun (1932-1974)”

Part Two

Philippe Mioche, “Introduction”

Cécile Coursieras-Jaff, “Poliet et Chausson et l'outre-mer : une stratégie française”

Éric Panthou, “Organisation scientifique du travail et progrès agronomiques : quelques bases du succès économique et du particularisme des plantations Michelin au Viêt-Nam”

Marco Bertilorenzi, “L'Eurafrrique de l'aluminium. Enjeux économiques, technologiques et politiques des projets de l'industrie de l'aluminium en Afrique Francophone dans les années 1950”

Philippe Petitpas, “La stratégie internationale d'Alcan”

Hildete de Moraes Vodopives, “La stratégie internationale du groupe Vale : le cas de Simandou, en Guinée, 2010”

Régine Perron, “L'Europe et les Pays ACP : l'aide publique au développement de Yaoundé à Cotonou”

Joseph-Pierre E. Diouf, “Développement économique du Sénégal et cycle de l'arachide (1960-1970)”

Bearitsoa Rakotoniaina, “La stratégie de développement agricole à Madagascar (1958-1972)”

In memoriam : Daniel Lefeuvre

NOTES

[1] Marc Semo, “Emmanuel Macron défend une francophonie plurielle,” *Le Monde* Mar. 20 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2018/03/20/emmanuel-macron-la-francophonie-est-une-sphere-dont-la-france-n-est-qu-une-partie_5273810_823448.html (cited 14 June 2018).

[2] Dominique Barjot, “Hommage. Jacques Marseille,” *Entreprises et histoire* 59/2 (2010):138-139.

[3] Muriam Haleh Davis and Thomas Serres, eds., *North Africa and the Making of Europe: Governance, Institutions and Culture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018); Samir Saul, *Intérêts économiques français et décolonisation de l'Afrique du Nord (1945-1962)* (Geneva: Droz, 2016).

- [4] Marta Musso, "Taking Control: Sonatrach and the Algerian Decolonization Process" in Moses Ochonu ed., *Entrepreneurship in African History: A Historical Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), pp.173-191.
- [5] Touraj Atabaki, "From 'Amaleh (Labor) to Kargar (Worker): Recruitment, Work Discipline and Making of the Working Class in the Persian/Iranian Oil Industry," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84 (2013):159-175.
- [6] For a discussion of the different political and economic facets of the 'oil curse' model see, for example, Michael L. Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).
- [7] Jacques Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: Histoire d'un divorce* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2005, new ed.).
- [8] Mona Domosh, *American Commodities in an Age of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
- [9] Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk About it)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).
- [10] Timothy James LeCain; "Review of Mimi Sheller. *Aluminum Dreams: The Making of Light Modernity*," *American Historical Review* 120/3 (2015):1064-1065.
- [11] Daniel Speich-Chassé, "The Roots of the Millennium Development Goals. A framework for studying the history of global statistics," *Historical Social Research* 41/2 (2016):218-237.
- [12] Richard Drayton, "Federal Utopias and the Realities of Imperial Power," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37/2 (2017):401-406.

Simon Jackson & Gemma Jennings
University of Birmingham
S.Jackson.1@bham.ac.uk
GKF332@bham.ac.uk

Copyright © 2018 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.