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Thomas Borrel, Amzat Boukari Yabara, Benoît Collombat and Thomas Deltombe, *L'Empire qui ne veut pas mourir. Une histoire de la Françafrique*, Paris, Seuil, 2021, 1008 p.

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Note from the editor: selected reviews from an anglophone readership

How does the issue of "Françafrique" engage our Anglophone colleagues? Is it a new Franco-centric imperial debate, or a tool for analyzing postcolonial relations? The editorial team invited three historians from Anglo-Saxon universities to review part of the work. While the entirety of the book is not covered, these perspectives provide an account of the reception of "Françafrique" beyond the Francophone world and help disseminate this debate among Anglophone readers. Despite our efforts, we regret not being able to present viewpoints from the African continent.

Introduction and Part One "La Françafrique en germe (1940-1957)" - Gregory Mann

Taking the introduction and the first part of *L'Empire Qui ne Veut pas Mourir* on its own—as the editors of *Revue d'Histoire Contemporaine de l'Afrique* asked me to do—entails confronting a curiously uneven collection of articles tracing French-African political life at the acme of its integration in the 1940s and '50s. This experiment in synecdochal reading, in taking the part as a whole, provokes questions about the approach adopted in this work, as well as a reflection on historical writing about Africa in French. Although most of this part of the book implicitly reads history backwards from the present, one may as well begin at the chronological beginning.

For the editors of *l'Empire Qui ne Veut pas Mourir*, *Françafrique* – the titular empire that, like every other empire, "does not want to die" – has roots as deep as the *ancien régime*. Thus we begin with a brief but useful chapter on French "colonial ideology" since the eighteenth century. Even in these early pages, the chapter is the odd man out, but it reveals a pattern. It demonstrates that debates about assimilation, association, and even decolonization emerged alongside France's modern empire in Africa as early as the 1830s conquest of Algeria; French critics of the imperial project made both economic and moralizing arguments against it; and some recognized that the violence of colonial conquest risked "decivilizing" the soldiers who conducted it. A chapter like this one represents two very different streams of historical writing simultaneously. One is an intellectual history of anti-colonialism in France. This is a robust lineage, sufficiently well-known that even Emmanuel Macron claimed it, citing Albert Londres and André Gide in his inaugural speech on the African continent, in Ouagadougou in

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2018. The other stream of historiography, curiously intermingling with the first, is a classically imperial history, one that begins with metropolitan ideologies. The author may take as her point of departure Colbert, Diderot, or de Tocqueville (or any other commentator, depending on where she chooses to dip her foot in the stream). The reader will be reminded that colonial ideology has a long history, if a rather circular one. This type of history will only gingerly work its way out to the empire – that is to say, to the world. Its practitioners will suppose that violence is the messy consequence of imperial ideology at work, with racism as its unfortunate corollary, much as some amount of friction saps the workings of any machine, or any signal contains some noise. The revisionists, here grouped *en masse* in 1008 pages, will insist that racism and violence are integral to empire – that the friction is the output, that the noise is the signal – although the more nuanced amongst them will understand the fungibility of these terms. In *L'Empire...*, the truism that racism and violence are part and parcel of the imperial heritage is presented as an argument. That ought to tell us who the editors imagine their audience is. Dear reader, it's not you, and it's not us. We are the eavesdroppers lingering in the shadows of Jean Paul Sartre's metaphorical campfire, listening as the Natives debate in increasingly strident tones[1]. This time, the Natives are French. They are arguing with each other. We listen in, as Sartre urges us to do. We learn that all of them together place Paris near the center of the world.

What else do we learn? Three things. First, we learn that the *Françafrique* project is less Gaullist than it has been depicted; rather it is the product of the liberal ("in the broad sense of the term") strand of colonial government (p. 14). That is to say, it is the post-war culmination of a project within France of both the conservative Right, as represented by Charles De Gaulle and his acolytes, notably Jacques Foccart, and the socialist, institutional Left, as represented here by François Mitterrand. Taking a step back, we learn, second, that *L'Empire...* is a book of French history. France is its object, and France – or some of idea of France, tottering as ever between republic and empire – is what's at stake. The book therefore fits into a long (and honorable) French tradition of imperial history from the Left. Indeed, one of the early exemplars of that tradition, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, co-authored a chapter herein. Over half a century ago, Coquery-Vidrovitch's work on concessionary companies in Congo-Gabon broke new ground historiographically, forcing a reconsideration of the relationship between capital and state in the imperial periphery[2]. This was a story that played out in Africa. It was not a story *about* Africa. Idem *L'Empire...* Third, we learn – indeed, we're repeatedly told – that *L'Empire...* straddles history and journalism. These are of course two different things. History is attentive to structure, contingency, and causality, while journalism has a commitment to explaining the contemporary world, often based on narrative, anecdote, and the politics of personality. The editors bear an unhealthy grudge against academic history, and this may be because good history offers, at least implicitly, a theory of change. Journalism bears no such burden, and it leaves a large place for the kind of *faits divers* that academic historians often disdain. It is comfortable with correlation, sustains few claims about causality, and moves easily between the two. Given all that, it's hard to resist placing *L'Empire...* in a long line of works of journalism – passing upstream through, say, Ernest Milcent, author of works like *l'A.O.F. entre en scène*, or even Joseph Roger de Benoist, of *Afrique Nouvelle* – and continuing further into the past, through the turgid waters of the muckrakers, Gide and Londres, where we encounter Macron[3].

Like Milcent – who is less an exemplar than a point where we've dipped our foot in stream – the form of journalism-cum-history represented by much of *L'Empire...* leans toward a history of political parties and personalities, some of them outsized, some of them belonging to small men in big roles. Where *L'Empire...* disappoints, however, is in engaging with the actual wrangling of the often petty, transactional politics of the 4th Republic, both in the hemicycle and in the territories from which its representatives hailed. This produces, almost inevitably, the kind of history that intends to be radical and critical, but proves to be incurious. African deputies and party leaders take the stage – a metaphor used by both Milcent and the editors – but while Milcent sees them as actors striding it, *L'Empire...* portrays them as puppets of France (*sic*) which can "*continuer à tirer les ficelles en coulisse*" (p. 60). France acts; Africa reacts. In this line of analysis, the end of the *indigénat*, the adoption of a penal code, the extension of citizenship within the French Union – all of these legislative achievements become simple gifts from above. But wait, the reader asks, did African citizens do nothing but open their palms? Where is the struggle? The laws of Lamine Guèye and Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1946, the *Code du travail* of 1952, equal pay

[1] See Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Fanon Frantz (1961), *Les damnés de la terre*, Paris, Maspero.
[2] Coquery-Vidrovitch Catherine (1972), *Le Congo au temps des grandes compagnies concessionnaires, 1898-1930,* Paris, Mouton.
[3] Milcent Ernest (1958)*, L'A.O.F. entre en scène*, Paris, Témoignage Chrétien.

for soldiers, veterans, and civil servants, an ever-expanding electorate, women's relatively precocious suffrage… This is a list of legislative victories, not gifts from above, and not "carrots" to be weighed against the proverbial "stick" of violence and repression (p. 43). It may be fair to say that, in the post-war years, African deputies along with their allies were "playing the [political] game" in French institutions (p. 57). The point is that they were winning it. One could argue that this was a fool's game, that it was rigged, and that the deputies and their partisans were either dupes or cynics. I don't argue that myself, and I don't know what the proof would be, other than retroactive reasoning and *parti pris*. As it stands, the argument here is convoluted: African politicians played a fool's game, but they somehow won it; the prize was too expensive for the French treasury to pay, and decolonization was the only answer (p. 14-15). In this argument, the fools not only beat the house, but bankrupted it. That's quite a feat. I'd like to see the cards.

Underlying this line of argument is a kind of reflexive contempt for the African elite. This is an old story, but the editors' acidic response to a review of the book in *Politique Africaine* suggests that it's not a thing of the past[4]. One version of it might be the radical African students' position in the 1950s, crystallized in the Fédération des Étudiants d'Afrique noire en France (FEANF), built on suspicion and disdain for a cohort of politicians that was older, more cautious, and less credentialed than they were. We might associate another, softer version of this line of argument with René Dumont and his thesis that *L'Afrique noire est mal partie* in large part due to the avarice and lack of imagination of its leadership[5]. That line of interpretation was picked up and recycled across a whole raft of work, notably in debates around modernization, whose theorists quickly found their faith in the elites to have been misplaced, and reacted with contempt. With roots as deep as the colonial contempt for those the British dubbed "Natives in trousers," this line of argument appears perennial, and it has the hardy characteristic of confirming prejudice on both the Right and the Left. It brings us to the claim that the RDA was "*surtout l'appareil des élites politiques africains*" (p. 115). Taken at face value the proposition that the RDA was, above all, a tool of the African political elite may be true, but only in its circularity. The RDA leaders—a wide range of often fiercely opposed strategists, tacticians, and activists – *became* the political elite because they were able to hold together in a fractious coalition – one that included Sékou Touré, and Modibo Keita, as well as Houphouët-Boigny, but never Senghor – long enough to win elections and advance a common program. They didn't begin as a political elite and then form the RDA; they became a political elite because they won, translating a nascent and inchoate form of social capital – one of several, competing forms, and not the most powerful – into political capital, and eventually into institutional power. That is not a plot. It's politics. By and large, they were good at it. Witness Houphouët-Boigny's complicated relationships with Mitterrand and de Gaulle, relationships in which, as Thomas Deltombe demonstrates, his loyalties proved fungible and over the long run, he got most of what he wanted (Ch. 7). Maybe the fact that these RDA politicians were clever tacticians explains why, to the dismay of one author, they never quite imitated Kwame Nkrumah and the pan-Africanist Congress in Manchester in 1945 (p. 113). Why would they? They held the inaugural RDA conference in Bamako in 1946, and – check the record – went on to preserve and maintain a stronger basis of African unity than Nkrumah ever established on his own[6]. The kind of work that argues the contrary – history in a straight line – leaves us saddled with the belief that in the end France gave independence to "*les leaders africains qui la réclam[aient] le moins*" (p.61). Parse this statement, then try to count on your hand the territories in which this is even arguably true.

In the end, the point is moot. *L'Empire…* is not trying to offer a history of African independence. Rather, it offers a history of mutual dependence, of the kind captured in the term "*Françafrique*". "*Françafrique*" works as a term – a fusion in which each word begins to swallow the other, neither one standing alone – precisely because it condenses the concept of a reciprocal but uneven integration, a "system of mutual corruption" amongst elites, as Achille Mbembe once termed it[7]. The term "*Françafrique*" captures our imagination, and it corresponds to much that we think we see. Does it matter that its meaning has changed over time? Of course it does, but such changes happen organically. For Houphouët-Boigny, "*Françafrique*" was an aspiration, a cousin to an older Eurafrican project. For two generations of activists, at least since the publication of François-Xavier Verschave's *Françafrique*,

[4] Sandrine Perrot, « Autour d'un livre : L'Empire qui ne veut pas mourir. Une histoire de la Françafrique », *Politique africaine*, 2022. Online publication. URL : https://doi.org/10.58079/sy1z
[5] Dumont René (1962), *L'Afrique noire est mal partie*, Paris, Seuil.
[6] The creation of the OAU was less a win for Nkrumah than a compromise, at best, with Hailie Selassie.
[7] Mbembe Achille (2007), "L'Afrique de Nicolas Sarkozy", *Mouvements*, 52 (4), p. 65-73.

it has represented an abomination, an anti-democratic, hydra-headed hegemon[8]. We're summoned by the editors of *L'Empire...* to convert it once again into an analytic term defining an object of study. Yet to do so would be to practice history poorly. The meaning, the positive valence, that Houphouët-Boigny gave the term captures a moment precisely. The fact that its polarity has reversed, that it is now used almost exclusively as a negative term, is evidence of its concision and its appeal. Capturing those changing meanings, which englobe the history of the concept, would be the work of good history. Whether or not the term originated with Houphouët-Boigny is immaterial, a picayune concern that matters no more than, for instance, the fact that Aretha Franklin did not write "Respect." The reasons why certain terms, like certain songs, stick or fade, adhere to particular speakers or become part of a broader zeitgeist, are themselves historical[9]. "Françafrique" is not unique in its complicated history. The term "*décolonisation*" was not coined in the 1950s, but in the 1830s, in order to argue that a pacific relationship would bring more trade than would conquest (p. 80-81). The argument obviously failed; the term fell out of use for decades. Likewise, the phrase "*la France Noire*" did not emerge in a post-*sans papiers*, post-2005 moment, but in 1894. It referred to Africa, but not a diaspora. The term "*néocolonialisme*," which sprinkles *L'Empire...*, clearly did not mean the same thing to Kwame Nkrumah as it did to the editors of *Présence Africaine* in 1955 and '56 (p. 131, p. 132-33) – and it may not have meant the same thing in those two consecutive years either, depending on whether the journal's editors were attacking Léopold Sedar Senghor or Michel Poniatowski. For Nkrumah the predicate of neocolonialism, a confiscated independence, was sovereignty itself. In that light, Senghor's neocolonialism came too soon; sovereignty at that time looked to be a long way away. The context matters, just as it matters that when Henri Fonfrède coined the term "*décolonisation*" in 1834, he also argued that the act of conquest would "*décivilise*" the French Army. In this, he foreshadowed by over a century Aimé Césaire who – from quite a different perspective – taught us that colonization was decivilizing and dehumanizing, a process of "*chosification*," because the colonizer lost his humanity in seeking to deprive another of it. Cesaire's successors, Fanon and Mbembe, take the same idea to argue the opposite point. Words and their meaning, concepts and their valence, shift over time. This kind of conceptual history is a game of fine footwork and tight corners. To play it, you'd need a kind of finesse lacking from, say, a reading of Cesaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* that holds that "the references to communism disappeared," even though it frames the argument (p. 145)[10]. You'd need to think like an historian.

The editors of *L'Empire...* proudly assert that the volume's strength lies in its breadth, its heterogeneity, and its ambition. Indeed, all those traits are to be saluted. But the real question is whether a book like this one, a chunky collection of essays and vignettes—another weighty tome that looks to have the last word – feeds a debate, like another knotty stump on a long-burning campfire, or smothers it like a sodden blanket. Judging by the first part of the book, I suspect the latter. In this case the smoke, like the sparks, may be lost in the night. Happily, dear reader, we are not Sartre's eavesdroppers. We are not condemned to linger on the outskirts of the campfire. We can keep walking under the starlight. We may see more clearly by it.

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Part Three "La folie des grandeurs (1969-1981)" - Roel van der Velde

This massive book by Borrel et al. covers seven decades of history concerning French colonial and neo-colonial empire-building in Africa, from 1940 to the present, encompassed by the term "*Françafrique*".

The third of the book's six parts is titled "*La folie des grandeurs (1969-1981)*". It is slightly shorter than the other five parts, containing an introduction and just seven chapters and four thematic parts. Part three performs a bridge function connecting the de Gaulle and Mitterrand Presidencies discussed in Parts Two and Four. In the 1970s the neo-colonialist "system of predation" (p. 14) established in the 1960s was forced to adapt to meet growing international condemnation and the fervour of African decolonisation and reassertion.

Through ruthless and sometimes dramatic steps undertaken after decolonisation, De Gaulle, his key advisor Jacques Foccart and others had achieved a stable French backyard, or *pré carré*, in West and Central Africa. Part 3 discusses new pressures on this previously established "spider web of close ties" (p. 281) and its responses during the 1970s. After de Gaulle's passing in 1970 new operators adjusted old practices, as the Cold War began to encroach upon the French *pré carré*. In the face of growing assertiveness among African leaders and disgruntled peoples after a first decade of quasi-independence, Françafrique revealed its resilience and its limits.

The introductory chapter begins with the aftermath of the failed French attempt to sustain armed secession of the oil-rich Nigerian province of Biafra. With this fiasco begins the turbulent decade of the 1970s: Détente and the Chinese resurgence, the end of the Bretton Woods system of currency exchange in 1971 and the seismic 1973 oil crisis, the collapse of the Portuguese Southern African empire in 1974 triggering a proxy war in Angola, just as the Vietnam conflict concludes in 1975. Amidst such upheaval the three strategic objectives of French African policy remain: to service national energy needs, maintaining the *pré carré*, and exploiting France's sphere of influence.

A central tenet of the book is to push back on the personification of Jacques Foccart, de Gaulle's key advisor on African relations, as the root of French meddling. Before 1970, his machinations had ensured that West-African decolonisation was more a "re-composition" than a "dismantling" of structures of French state influence (p. 16). The 1970s saw new management presiding over the existing network of friendships and treaties. At the Élysée, Jacques Foccart's own role was first curtailed, then clipped.

President Pompidou (1969-1974) removed Foccart's post as Secretary for African Affairs, and President Giscard d'Estaing (1975-1981) replaced him with Foccart's assistant, René Journiac, in 1974. These steps were informed by international turmoil, but certainly also by domestic political jockeying. This *défoccartisation* did not end the *système Foccart*, it merely dethroned its namesake[11]. In turn, Foccart retained his political influence, exploiting his network among African leaders and French corporate interests.

The seven chapters outline the changes within the principal structures and practices securing French domination over its ostensibly independent colonies: military intervention, monetary tutelage, intelligence, and the capture or co-optation of African regimes through African allies, French mercenaries, and technical advisors. These tools of neocolonialism preceded the 1970s, but their growing visibility in this period justifies their discussion in Part Three rather than Part Two. The final chapter covers African voices protesting against the accumulated injustices of "*Françafrique*", and the cynical efforts by French publishers and institutions to stifle these

[11] Bat Jean-Pierre (2012), *Le syndrome Foccart. La politique française en Afrique, de 1959 à nos jours*, Paris, Gallimard, p. 433.

voices.

The first chapter discusses French well-known military cooperation treaties agreed with newly independent African states in 1960. This had required a choice regarding French military guarantees and technical assistance, in doctrine, training, and equipment. The "whirlwind of reform" (p. 376) that constituted the renegotiation of these treaties in the early 1970s was achieved and kept in deepest secrecy. Reference is made to recent French scholarship on the rebalancing of Franco-African relations, and French implication in African state security and complicity in its repression.

The second chapter covers the CFA monetary regime, which secured French dominance of African state resources. Through its near-total control of African states' foreign exchange reserves currencies the French Treasury effectively retained control over their monetary policies and their balances of trade. In the early 1970s a decades-long cycle began, of a chorus of African criticism of the Treasury followed by cosmetic institutional changes. While CFA's reach was finally reduced in 2020, the political impact of monetary dependence endures to the present day.

The middle chapters explore a changing of the guard of key operatives within the French system. The rhetoric of Pompidou and especially Giscard for a more consensual, and personal Franco-African approach run in parallel with an increasingly diversified network of networks at the root of muddled decision making. Chapter three revisits the intelligence actors, and especially Foccart's rivalry with the new pro-American spy chief, Alexandre de Marenches, who welcomes his replacement with Foccart's pupil Rene Journiac (p. 397). The chapter outlines Marenches' appropriation into SDECE of Foccart's old networks, like the dormant Service Action, and new intelligence liaisons, like the Safari Club.

Chapter four illustrates another instrument of coercion: mercenaries. A pool of French former officers provided clandestine paramilitary force to protect -and intimidate- France's clients. The literature has not always recognized their continued link to the French executive, ascribing failure to soldiers of fortune (p. 407). The 1960s had seen major attempts to occupy dependent mineral-rich regions in Katanga and Biafra. Thereafter, men like Bob Denard began organising commercially, rigging the game on behalf of French oil companies and African leaders. By 1980, a string of publicised fiascos had sapped the sinister image of the French *mercenariat*.

The fifth chapter demonstrates the growing dilemmas and opportunities created by the loosening grip of the Elysee upon African heads of state. It showcases French relations with President Mobutu Sese Seko of the Democratic Republic of Congo, at a time when French reflexes became increasingly unpopular in a more assertive African landscape. As head of a former Belgian colony, Mobutu enjoyed a measure of autonomy against French strong-arming, through his CIA sponsors and his exceptionally mineral-rich country. Instead, Mobutu was befriended by President Giscard d'Estaing as an ally and a custodian of French economic interests. In return, Giscard chose to condone Mobutu's cultism and repression, and ordered military interventions in 1977 and 1978 to save his regime.

The sixth chapter discusses "cooperation", understood here narrowly as French technical civilian assistance to African states in accordance with agreements made upon their independence. By 1980 a diaspora of 200,000 French nationals existed in Subsaharan Africa. Where ex-colonial administrators had adopted a coarse paternalism, a younger generation of French ex-pats advocated the empowerment of local workforces. As the chapter notes, their disagreements were moot. Both generations continued to enjoy the perks of advancement within persisting colonial hierarchies, perpetuating abusive behaviour and exploitation of local populations.

The latent African voice is explored in the final chapter. After 10 years of quasi-independence local populations were disillusioned with the rampant corruption, repression, neocolonialism, and those responsible. Chapter seven contextualised several outstanding African writers, novelists, and filmmakers whose works expressed resistance against such practices. Authors saw their publications destroyed, censured or ostracised by French literary gatekeepers. As the supporting Box observes, this *literature de combat* was feared by French clients like Mobutu, and it had real impact upon the Elysee's relationships.

In line with the instructive aims of the book, the bibliographies at the end of each chapter represent a useful sample of authoritative general works and more recent books and articles on related topics. Further research is supported by visual aids on chronology and themes, quick links to other chapters, and boxes highlighting related themes at the end of five of the chapters. These boxes do a great job in providing the reader with a sense of the historical (mis)representations of *Françafrique*, for example on journalism and censorship.

Even in such a robust compendium choices must be made, and in Part Three the emphasis is on the French experience. As a result, the larger tapestry of the Cold War remains at distance. While this dimension is served by suggested readings, a separate chapter could have examined the impact of the wider proliferation of international conflict in the 1970s[12]. Such a chapter would also have allowed a greater stage for recent work done by anglophone authors listed in the main bibliography. Authors like Anna Konieczna and Joanna Warson[13] are quoted (p. 336) on the wider perspectives of French (southern) African policies that ran alongside *Françafrique*. One can think of arms trade and military interventions, themes which are situated well, but which do receive short shrift. As Riina Turtio's book has explored, foreign military assistance and Cold War competition served to heighten security dilemmas for West-African military state-builders[14].

The majority of francophone general readers will not be bothered too much by these points. The main contribution of the book is in locating and situating "*Françafrique*" as a phenomenon and as a historical process. The book argues that paradoxically, the political desire to exorcise the secret practices of the past may actually risk normalising those inherited public practices which continue unabated, such as the "functioning neocolonialism" of the CFA system[15]. This third part is instrumental in demonstrating the practices that had served Foccart, how they survived, and would become normalised without him.

In setting some boundaries on what is delivered in Part 3 of this book, we should recognize its exemplary introduction and integration of many relevant themes. As an invitation to further study, this section equipes the reader quickly with the knowledge to engage with books that do presume prior contextual knowledge. It is for this approach that the book will be celebrated and consulted as an impressive reference work for students and scholars alike.

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Part Four "La fausse alternance (1981-1995)" - Tony Chafer

« Sans l'Afrique, il n'y aura pas d'Histoire de France au XXIe siècle » – François Mitterrand, 1957
« Sans l'Afrique, la France descendra au rang de puissance du tiers [monde] » – Jacques Chirac, 2008
« La France, avec l'Europe, aimerait être encore plus impliquée dans la destinée [de l'Afrique]… » – François Hollande, 2013.

The book is divided into six parts, organised chronologically, with the first part covering the origins of *Françafrique* (1940-1957) and the final part covering the period 2010-2021. Part 4, which is the subject of this review, explores France's relationship with Africa during François Mitterrand's two terms as president from 1981-1995. However, in order to understand the roots of Mitterrand's approach to Franco-African relations it is useful to read Part 1, Chapter 7, which reviews Mitterrand's term as Minister for Overseas France from 1950-1951. During this time Félix Houphouët-Boigny's political grouping, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA), was persuaded to terminate its affiliation to the Communist Party and to link up instead with Mitterrand's small centrist/centre-left party, the Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance (UDSR). As Deltombe notes, "*le groupe UDSR-RDA apparaît rétrospectivement comme un embryon françafricain*" (p. 153).

The overarching theme of part 4 is continuity or, as the sub-title to the chapter puts it: "*La continuité dans le "changement"*". To illustrate this, the authors underline the continuity with the policy of previous Fifth Republic presidents[16]. They also point out that, during the period of *cohabitation* between Mitterrand as president and Jacques Chirac as prime minister (1986-1988), while there was jockeying for position, there was no fundamental disagreement on the substance of policy (p. 499). Perhaps more surprising, Mitterrand's approach to Africa was endorsed by "*ce diable de M. Pasqua*", as Mitterrand is reported to have called the former Interior Minister[17].

This continuity is rooted in what the authors call the French "national-colonialist tradition" (p. 462), of which Charles De Gaulle and Mitterrand are two of the founding figures, despite Mitterrand's attempts to portray himself retrospectively – and in contrast to De Gaulle – as a precursor of African emancipation. In reality, he was as determined as De Gaulle to maintain France's position and influence in Africa, as the quotation at the head of this review makes clear[18]. However, this did not prevent him from attempting to portray himself as a moderniser in Franco-African relations, which he again sought to do when, after his election to the presidency in 1981, he appointed, as a token of his commitment to change, the *tiers-mondiste* Jean-Pierre Cot as Minister of Cooperation (the post-colonial successor ministry to the Ministry of Overseas France). However, Cot only lasted some 18 months in the post and was sacked in January 1983, with the President stating: "*C'est moi qui détermine la politique étrangère de la France, pas mes ministers*" and six months later reassuring Paul Biya, who had just replaced Ahmadou Ahidjo as Cameroon's president, that "*il n'y a pas de hiatus dans la politique africaine de la France avant et après 1981*" (470). A recurring theme is thus the continuity of policy, masked by a discourse of change and renewal[19].

Four other themes are covered in Part 4. Much of the literature on *Françafrique* gives pride of place to the role played by De Gaulle's "Mr Africa", Jacques Foccart, and his *réseaux d'influence* with African political leaders

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[16] This idea also features in Chafer, Tony and Keese, Alexander (eds) (2013), *Francophone Africa at Fifty*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, and in Chafer, Tony and Majumdar, Margaret (2024), *Handbook of Francophone Africa*, London, Routledge, which includes chapters on French colonial rule in Africa and its legacy (Keese), *la Françafrique* (Chafer), Francophonie in Africa (Majumdar).

[17] Charles Pasqua was Interior Minister in Jacques Chirac's government during the period of "cohabitation" from 1986 to 1988, and again from 1993 to 1995 in Edouard Balladur's government during the second period of "cohabitation". His obituary in the *Guardian* described him as a 'a totem of the French right, influential in shaping its hardline policies', notably on immigration, Charles Pasqua obituary, 9th July 2015.

[18] Mitterrand François (1957), *Présence française et abandon*, Paris, Plon, p. 237.

[19] Later presidents have similarly ambivalent discourses: Charbonneau Bruno (2008), "Dreams of empire: France, Europe, and the new interventionism in Africa", *Modern and Contemporary France*, 16(3), p. 279-95 ; Cumming Gordon, D. (2013), "Nicolas Sarkozy's Africa policy: change, continuity or confusion?", *French Politics*, 11(1), p. 24-47 ; Chafer Tony (2024), "Macron's Africa policy: promises, practices and path dependencies", in S. Collard (ed), *Revolution Revisited: the Limits of Political Change in France under Emmanuel Macron*, London, Routledge, (forthcoming).

and in the French secret services[20]. Mitterrand did not seek to eradicate these often-shadowy networks, but rather to replace them with his own. In May 1981 he appointed Guy Penne, dean of the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Paris VII, as his "Mr Africa". According to the authors, on his first day in the office, Mitterrand's special advisor, Jacques Attali, welcomed him with the words "*Bonjour, monsieur Foccart*" (p. 464)! At first sight, he was not an obvious choice to be Mitterrand's African affairs advisor, but from Mitterrand's perspective Penne's great advantage was that he was a trusted ally and a freemason. Freemasons have a long history of playing an important role in Franco-African relations, dating back to the colonial period (p. 505), and Mitterrand undoubtedly saw the freemasons as a useful way of bypassing the Foccart networks and creating his own networks of influence. President Omar Bongo, for example, was Grand Master of two masonic lodges in Gabon and Congo's president, Denis Sassou Nguesso, is also a freemason. Another advantage of the freemasons, for Mitterrand, was that their networks were a useful bulwark against US influence in France's African *pré carré* (p. 513). More on this below.

Second, a central concern for Mitterrand was the maintenance of "order" and "stability" in the *pré carré*. According to his long-term collaborator, Hubert Védrine, this was rooted in the 'pragmatic' view that a rapid move towards democratisation would quickly reignite ethnic tensions within the artificial national borders that are a legacy of colonial rule, resulting in the destabilisation of the incumbent regimes (p. 472) and threatening the continuation of French influence. The authors identify two key vectors of the French-inspired order in Francophone Africa during this period: military interventions and the Elf oil company. Prior to his election, Mitterrand had condemned French military interventionism in Africa as "too linked to economic interests", characterising the new French approach under his presidency as "*présence oui, ingérence non*" and claiming that "*La France n'est pas le gendarme de l'Afrique*" (p. 474). However, this rapidly changed and in 1983 he launched Operation Manta in Chad, which was replaced by Operation Epervier in 1986 (subsequently subsumed within the regional Operation Barkhane in 2014). This was to be the first of some 20 military operations undertaken in Africa during Mitterrand's presidency[21]. The rationale given was that, firstly, France could not simply abandon Chad after 75 years of "*vie commune"* with that country and, secondly, that France needed to intervene to reassure other Francophone African leaders that they would continue to benefit from French military support (p. 475). Two key pillars of policy under previous presidents – the priority attached to the "containment" of Libya's expansionist policy under its leader Muammar Gaddafi through military support for Chad and resistance against any US interference in France's African *pre carré* – did not therefore change under Mitterrand[22]. The same was true of Elf. Its status as an oil company was unusual, insofar as it had been established to ensure continued French access to cheap oil in sub-Saharan Africa after Algeria gained its independence. It represented "*le prolongement de la politique étrangère de la France dans les "pays du champ" "* (p. 534) and had become, in effect, a "state within the state" with its own 'Monsieur Afrique' (André Tarallo), its own *réseaux d'influence* and its own secret services. Mitterrand did not take the risk of trying to change this. While Elf's corrupt practices that were endemic during this period are well-documented thanks to the court cases subsequently brought against many of the company's leading figures, the authors emphasis here the role played by the company in maintaining "order" and "stability" in France's African *pre carré* through the sponsoring of puppet opposition parties, the provision of protection to Francophone African leaders, and the illicit funding of French political parties.

Third, the authors draw attention to the importance of "grandeur" and the maintenance of "credibility" in underpinning Mitterrand's approach to Africa. Geopolitics, rather than economic interests, are central here. In order to achieve this objective, it was essential to counter the influence of "les Anglo-Saxons" (for which read the US), who were seen as the greatest threat to the continuation of French influence in Africa. Indeed, the authors

[20] Jacques Foccart was a close collaborator of General De Gaulle during World War II. When De Gaulle returned to power in 1958, Foccart became his adviser on African affairs at the Elysée palace. He subsequently advised presidents Pompidou and Chirac on African affairs and played a key role in maintaining France's sphere of influence in sub-Saharan Africa after political independence.
[21] For a study of the drivers of France's 2013 military interventions in Mali and the Central African Republic, see Erforth Benedikt (2020), *Contemporary France security policy in Africa*, London, Palgrave Macmillan ; Gazeley Joe (2022), "The strong "weak state": French statebuilding and military rule in Mali", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding,* 16(3), p. 269–86.
[22] For a comprehensive recent study of French military policy in Chad, see Powell, Nathaniel K., *France's Wars in Chad: Military Intervention and Decolonization in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

claim that Mitterrand had been obsessed by "*le complexe de Fachoda*"[23] (the "Fashoda syndrome") since the 1950s and that keeping "*Les Anglo-Saxons*" out of France's African *pré carré* was the key driver behind his support for the dictator Hissène Habré in Chad until 1990 and for the genocidal regime of Juvénal Habyarimana in Rwanda from 1990-1994. As the authors state, from 1990-1994: "*La France mène bien une guerre aux côtés du président Habyarimana sans le dire officiellement*" (p. 596). Nathaniel Powell, in a recent book, has drawn attention to the way in which the military interventions launched in Africa by France in the name of stability have often ended up achieving the exact opposite[24]. French support for the Habyarimana regime is perhaps the most egregious example of this, leading as it did to the killing of a million Tutsis and moderate Hutus and destabilising neighbouring Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), provoking conflicts that have led to the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives[25].

The fourth theme that emerges from this part – and that underlies much of the analysis – is the adaptability of *Françafrique*. The imminent demise of *la Françafrique* has been announced many times but, as the authors show, it has demonstrated remarkable durability, thanks above all to its ability to adapt to new situations[26]. Perhaps the most telling example of this is the adoption of prime minister Edouard Balladur's so-called "Abidjan doctrine" in 1993, which required Francophone countries to sign an agreement with the IMF and World Bank on financial and market reforms as a condition of continued French support, which was followed by the 50% devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994. Many commentators saw this as marking the end of France's "special relationship" with Africa, but as the authors point out, "*La Françafrique s'est parfaitement adaptée aux recettes néolibérales*" (p. 488). This was not only because France had, thanks to the devaluation, doubled its financial clout in Africa – because it could now fund twice as many activities with the same amount of French francs – but also because of the way in which French companies, well-established in Francophone Africa, were able to exploit the opportunities presented by the forced fire-sale of African publicly-owned companies, from public utilities such as water and telecoms to banking, food processing, energy and rail, to enhance their balance sheets, increase their market dominance and entrench French economic and financial influence. Major French companies thus benefited handsomely from the "neoliberal turn" in French African policy during the Mitterrand presidency.

In conclusion, part 4, like the rest of the book, is well-researched and extraordinarily well-documented. The authors successfully demonstrate the adaptability of *la Françafrique*. They show the paternalist, colonialist mind-set towards Africans of Mitterrand and his close associates and collaborators and document the consequences of this mind-set. They also show how, for all his protestations to the contrary, he broadly shared this mind-set with right-wing presidents, such as De Gaulle, Giscard d'Estaing and Chirac, who preceded or followed him. It is not therefore difficult to understand why there are clear continuities in French Africa policy between what came before and after the Mitterrand presidency. Our understanding of these continuities could have been further enhanced by an analysis of the structural constraints that, alongside ideas of grandeur and of maintaining "order" and "credibility", have made it so difficult to bring about substantive change in French Africa policy. Finally, the perverse consequences of the pursuit of "stability" and "order" are well documented, but more systematic analysis of the respective roles of key actors within France's governing elites, for example the relative importance and interactions of the Elysée palace, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Treasury, the secret services and private sector actors in shaping and promoting this agenda, would have been welcome[27]. Nonetheless, its nearly one thousand pages ensure that the book is, and will remain, an essential point of reference for anyone seeking to understand the mechanisms of France's "special relationship" with Africa from the late colonial period to the present day.

Tony Chafer

[23] The "Fashoda syndrome" refers to an incident that occurred at Fashoda (Sudan) in 1898, when Lord Kitchener's troops forced French troops under Captain Marchand to withdraw. This diplomatic incident subsequently came to be considered in French nationalist circles as emblematic of 'English' perfidy in Africa.

[24] Powell N., *France's Wars in Chad…*, *op cit*; See also Powell, Nathaniel K. (2017), "Battling instability? The recurring logic of French military interventions in Africa", *African Security*, 10(1), p. 47–72.

[25] Chafer Tony (2005), "Chirac and 'la Françafrique': no longer a family affair", *Modern & Contemporary France*, 13(1), p. 7–23.

[26] Chafer Tony (2024), "Beyond *Françafrique* – the state of relations between France and Africa", in Europa Regional*, Africa South of the Sahara*, London, Routledge.

[27] One can also think about the role of other actors such as the European Union. Adebajo, Adekeye and Whiteman, Kaye (eds) (2012), *The EU and Africa. From Eurafrique to Afro-Europa*, London, Hurst.

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