

---

H-France Review Vol. 10 (June 2010), No. 87

Pascal Cauchy, Yvan Combeau, and Jean-François Sirinelli, eds. *La quatrième république et l'outre-mer français: Actes du colloque tenu au Centre d'histoire de Science Po, les 29 et 30 novembre 2007*. Paris: Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-mer, 2009. 157 pp. ISBN 9782859700454.

Review by Jeremy Rich, Middle Tennessee State University.

Anti-colonial struggles in Algeria and Vietnam and the challenges of maintaining a global empire proved to be major difficulties for the short-lived Fourth Republic, and helped lead to its demise in 1958. This collection of essays by French historians reveals the complexities of colonial policies in this turbulent era. Instead of allowing the establishment of the Fifth Republic to dominate their narratives, the authors take the Fourth Republic's engagement with colonial issues seriously in its own right. Although it is clearly the result of a collection of disparate presentations rather than a coherent overview of the period, this study does have valuable insights to share. Readers should keep in mind that the book is much more firmly anchored in metropolitan France than various individual French territories, and that every chapter focuses entirely on political history.

Not surprisingly, the fractured state of French politics in this era is a common issue that helps to hold the entire volume together. While most members of the SFIO shared with their colleagues in the Radical Party and right-wing coalition partners a paternalist faith in a benevolent colonial administration, Noëlline Castagnez notes how rival wings formed within the SFIO after the debacle of Dien Bien Phu between those disillusioned with maintaining the empire and the majority of the party's leading figures. Guy Mollet's decision in 1956 to appease  *pied noir*  demands in Algeria further shattered any hope of coherent policies within the SFIO. Bernard Droz furnishes another example of the consequences of the Fourth Republic's revolving door of governments. Discussions of reforming the French Union between 1946 and 1956 were commonplace amongst ministers, but very few politicians did more than pay lip service to the need for change before the  *loi-cadre*  law of 1956 greatly decentralized links between various colonies and departments with metropolitan France. The centrist Mouvement Republicain Populaire was given the position of Minister of Colonies, a reflection of the declining importance of the position, especially as the MRP was fraught with dissension. Droz argues that a certain coherence of colonial policies did emerge before 1956, but only largely out of inertia. Except for Algeria and Vietnam, colonial issues only rarely surfaced as crucial issues.

With relatively few systematic efforts to create policies that applied to the entire empire coming from the cabinet, the Fourth Republic inadvertently gave individual colonial administrations and ministries great leeway in developing policies. Yves Combeau explains how the French parliament voted as early as March 1946 to grant Réunion the status of a department, without actually defining how this status would be radically different from its previous position as a colony. The results were "a missed opportunity," in Combeau's words. In French Polynesia, Frédéric Angleviel investigates how a seemingly radical nationalist party failed to inspire a radical challenge to continued French rule. The French Foreign Ministry may have felt a bit ignored in discussions of overseas territories, but it sought alternately to promote France as a "third force" in Asia to check both the Sino-Soviet bloc and the American coalition and to claim French rule in North and Sub-Saharan Africa would check the spread of Soviet influence. Pierre Grosser's review of French diplomatic negotiations involving the empire is the

single strongest contribution in the entire book, particularly as he brings together insights from English, French, and North American scholarship. He notes how Michael Connelly's thesis that the French government wished to avoid a multinational solution to France's colonial problems in Algeria could be applied throughout the entire empire, even as French diplomats scored some successes in making multinational interventions serve their own purposes at times.

The French empire furnishes such a large canvas that no single work could provide adequate coverage, especially a collection of essays. Perhaps because of the lengthy historiography on the Fourth Republic's role in North Africa and Southeast Asia that exists, most of the essays only selectively mention events in these areas. The Antilles, French territories in India, and most colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa receive limited attention. However, Frédéric Turpin and Yves Santamaria note in their respective chapters on center-right parties and the PCF respectively that Félix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast skillfully managed to shift his wing of the RDA party's allegiances from the Communist camp to the USDR center-right party.

Only one chapter could be considered problematic in this entire collection. Francis Simonis' chapter is ambitiously titled "L'administration coloniale," but relies on one novel written by a former colonial official to buttress a small amount of state correspondence used to support his broad generalizations. Even then, he fails to provide context for a debate over the appointment to the civil service of a veteran of Indochina who had been transferred to Ubangi-Shari (Central African Republic) over a local African politician. While the colonial novel in question furnishes interesting commentary on the rise of Barthélemy Boganda's MESAN nationalist party, Simonis views the debate of the two officials as an example of a generational divide with no reference to the actual political situation in the colony. One might see this complaint as simply the frustration of an Africanist reviewer, but if one is going to take seriously ties between empire and metropole, then monolithic presentations of French Africa will not help matters.

Several general problems must be mentioned. The recent resurgence of French colonial studies, exemplified by Pascal Blanchard's edited volumes *La fracture colonial* and *Culture colonial en France*, are not adequately addressed in any of the essays. It is one thing for researchers based in France to largely ignore contributions by English and North American historians. However, the authors' neglect of important contributions by French authors on the French empire is much harder to understand. On a minor note, these essays also assume their readers already have a thorough understanding of the Fourth Republic's convoluted coalitions and multitude of notable politicians. A chart with a list of common abbreviations and a short chronology of major events during the Fourth Republic would have made this volume more accessible to readers less well-versed in this era than the contributors.

This book will be only useful to a limited audience in regards to teaching. Instructors should consider assigning several chapters, rather than the entire book. Muracciole's graceful coverage of metropolitan French political views of the empire will be very useful for graduate students studying decolonization and French politics in the mid-century. Likewise, graduate students of French history should be exposed to Gosser's contribution, since his essay is an excellent example of a study that effectively weaves together anglophone and francophone scholarship. Although much has already been written on the PCF's role in the Algerian and Vietnamese colonial struggles, Santamaria's essay might be useful as a means to explore less commonly mentioned aspects of the role of the empire in PCF policies, especially in Cameroon and North Africa. Santamaria also furnishes some tantalizing hints of Communist efforts to claim that North Africans living in France did not deserve French citizenship, which would make for interesting comparisons with the treatment of Algerian immigrants after 1962.

All in all, *La quatrième république et l'outre-mer français* offers a valuable, albeit limited, contribution to the historiography on French colonialism in the twentieth century. Perhaps it will inspire a more accessible study along the lines of Nicholas Thomas' recent survey of the French empire between the wars.[1]

## LIST OF ESSAYS

Jean-François Sirinelli, "Avant-propos"

Pascal Cauchy, "Introduction"

Jean-François Muracciole, "L'Empire colonial au sortir de la guerre"

Bernard Droz, "L'impossible réforme de l'Union française"

Yvan Combeau, "La départementalisation. Le cas de La Réunion"

Frédéric Angleviel, "La IVe République et l'évolution politique et institutionnelle des quatre territoires français du Pacifique"

Maria Romo-Navarette, "La présidence du Conseil"

Francis Simonis, "L'administration coloniale"

Pierre Grosser, "La décolonisation et la diplomatie française durant la IVe République: quelques pistes de réflexion"

Yves Rodrigue, "La IVe République et les ministres chargés de l'outre-mer (1947-1958): témoignage"

Frédéric Turpin, "Les 'synergies politiques' du centre et de la droite en matière d'outre-mer: doctrines et pratiques"

Noëlline Castagnez, "Les socialistes français face à la décolonisation: l'idéologie à l'épreuve des faits"

Yves Santamaria, "'Même le diable porte pierre.' Le PCF et l'Empire sous la IVe République"

## NOTES

[1] Nicolas Thomas, *The French Empire Between The Wars* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2006).

Jeremy Rich  
Middle Tennessee State University  
jrich@mtsu.edu

Copyright © 2010 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.

ISSN 1553-9172