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Samir Saul, *Intérêts économiques français et décolonisation de l'Afrique du Nord (1945-1962)*. Geneva: Droz, 2016. 763 pp. 69.00€. (pb). ISBN 978-2-600-01899-9.

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Scholars often conjoin two of the big stories of post-1945 France—decolonization and the *trente glorieuses*.^[1] This linking of the two is premised on the idea—one that has often been traced back to the journalist Raymond Cartier in the 1950s and given academic authority by the economic historian Jacques Marseille in the 1980s—that the retreat from empire relieved France of an economic burden and facilitated the country's unprecedented prosperity. The main objective of Samir Saul's latest book is to refute the idea that French capitalism simply outgrew French empire. Saul submits that the driving force behind decolonization was neither French capitalism nor the French state; instead, credit is due to the independence movements. "Capitalism was not," Saul concludes, "an agent of decolonization" (p. 713).

In a book that spans over 700 pages, Saul tells the story of investment and enterprise in French North Africa during the tumultuous years of decolonization, all the while highlighting the particular trajectories of the colony of Algeria and the protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia. Instead of capital fleeing North Africa, Saul discovers it trying to hang on. In some cases, public and private investment even increased. In this way, Saul explodes any lasting beliefs about the inevitability of decolonization and takes aim at some of France's leading economic historians of empire, notably Marseille, who charted the "divorce" between the metropole and the colonies starting in the 1930s, and his student Daniel Lefeuvre, who called Algeria "chère," meaning both sentimentally "dear" and economically "expensive."^[2] To counter the image of a necessarily unprofitable and unviable empire, Saul organizes his book around three axes: state efforts to remedy the economic problems that were afflicting North Africa; business activity in the region during the turbulent 1950s; and the place of economic questions in the negotiations over political independence.

Early in the book, Saul takes a macro-level view of the North African economies and their relationship to the metropole, and the reforms that policymakers proposed following World War II. For policymakers, the region's economic problems stemmed from the old "colonial pact," in which the colonies provided raw materials to and traded primarily if not exclusively with the metropole. The metropole's development thus depended on North Africa's underdevelopment. State officials, French business, and independence movements all called into question the colonial pact during the Great Depression and World War II. During the Depression, markets contracted, which hurt business; then, in World War II, the Germans occupied the industrial

regions of northern France, leading some business interests and politicians to push for industrialization in North Africa in case of a future war. Unsurprisingly, while French politicians and business wished to carry out reforms so as to maintain the North African territories, the nationalist movements hoped for outright independence.

Saul rightly integrates the economic plans for North Africa into the more familiar narrative of Paris-centered *dirigisme* after World War II. Histories of economic planning often stop at metropolitan borders,^[3] which reinforces the assumption that French colonies no longer held economic value by the 1950s. Saul discusses in detail the Maspétiol, Delavignette, and Pellenc reports, the *Perspectives décennales*, and the Constantine Plan. Such plans, however, became increasingly difficult to execute as the war escalated in Algeria and France's future there became increasingly uncertain. As Saul puts it: "Economic development and armed conflict do not go together" (p. 112).

The middle parts of the book are the most original, if not tedious, as Saul moves from macroeconomic planning to micro-level case studies of many of the businesses and economic sectors in North Africa. In all, Saul studies 154 businesses and includes chapters on steel, electricity, agriculture, fishing, construction, infrastructure, transportation, finance, commerce, mining, and oil and natural gas in order to understand "the performance of capital that was mobilized within each business" (p. 381). One of the surprising takeaways is that business activity did not decline in North Africa after World War II, despite an unfavorable political context. Some sectors performed brilliantly, others less so; but none wished to leave. Why would they? The overall rate of profitability ranged from 12 to 66 percent for Algeria and from 13 to 65 percent for Morocco and Tunisia (p. 715). There was thus no economic decay that prompted French capitalists to find new markets, as some historians have suggested.

Saul's discussion of oil is perhaps the most interesting of his case studies, given how little of the energy source was found in metropolitan France, its centrality to fueling the *trente glorieuses*, and its power as a political instrument on the international stage. Building an oil industry also requires long-term investment, which indicates just how committed French business continued to be in North Africa. One of the French state's aims after World War II had been to create a national oil industry to free itself from the Anglo-American "trusts." French geologists therefore scoured the colonial earth in search of oil supplies. In 1956, as the war intensified in northern Algeria, geologists discovered oil in the Sahara. The case of oil nicely demonstrates Franco-Algerian relations as colonial Algeria transitioned to independence. Algeria was set free, but France continued to have a majority share in Algerian oil until 1971. Political sovereignty was separate from economic sovereignty.

Arguably one economic sector merits more of Saul's attention. No industry represented the colonial pact, as well as the material and symbolic power of French empire in North Africa, like the wine industry. European settlers had planted vines in all three countries, but it was in Algeria that the industry became big business. Under French rule, Algeria became the world's largest wine exporter. And nearly all of this wine was exported to an already surplus-ridden France. Intense competition existed among metropolitan, Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian producers, which complicates simplistic binaries between metropole and colonies. It follows that wine would be a good way to gauge efforts to modernize North Africa. How did the state try to make North Africa's economies less competitive and more complementary with the metropole? How did wine producers adjust to the modernizing imperative? To be fair, references to the wine industry are

scattered throughout the book, but it is not given the sustained discussion some may hope for.[4] Saul notes the difficulty of tracking down many of the archives of agricultural businesses (p. 304), especially in fragmented industries like that of wine, but wine producers were noisy in newspapers like *Algérie agricole et viticole*.

The book ends with an analysis of the politics of independence and its consequences for French economic interests. The nationalist movements, not the French state or business, paved the way toward independence. In all three North African territories, French officials and businesses sought ways to maintain their economic activity. Interestingly, political independence became the means “to safeguard,” even “reinforce,” French economic interests (p. 711). In this way, Saul’s analysis provides an opportunity to rethink the chronology of “decolonization.” Historians see 1962 as a pivotal year, and indeed it was, as the French economy transitioned from empire to the European Economic Community. But this reorientation elides the persistence of economic, and therefore political, ties between France and its former colonies, whether through *Françafrique* or *Eurafrique*. [5] There is still much work to be done on France’s postcolonial relations with North Africa in particular, and Africa in general.

Saul adds to our understanding of decolonization and its relationship to modern France in two important and interrelated ways, firstly by illuminating the economic side of decolonization and secondly by illustrating the need for more work on the economic history of empire and how it relates to France’s modern development. The historiography on decolonization has tended to focus on its political dimensions. [6] This is perhaps due to the historians’ focus on state archives and the clear importance of the politics of decolonization. But it is also due to the fact that relatively few historians have accessed business archives. Saul makes use of both state archives and business archives, which gives us a richer and more complete picture of the economic history of decolonization.

Still, Saul could do more to put the political back into the economy. Unfortunately, he largely isolates the economic and business history of French North Africa from its social, cultural, and political environments. [7] Too often in Saul’s analysis, French business activity comes off as uncontested. Business relations with labor is an especially glaring omission. Did not French business contribute to the maldistribution of resources and wealth that galvanized the independence movements? One wonders about the workforce behind the infrastructure building, or about who manned the mines and extracted the resources. How was social and racial inequality created and/or perpetuated by business activity? Did French business activity become a source of resistance to and rejection of French colonial rule? Saul repeats throughout that decolonization was a political event, not an economic one, but how did French business contribute to the economic conditions that caused distress on the ground and that inspired the growth of the nationalist movements? Admittedly, questions such as these may be difficult to find answers to in company archives. Saul devotes less attention to the military and the police archives, where such insights might be found.

The second contribution of Saul’s work is that it provides powerful evidence of the need to devote more study to the economic history of empire and to include empire in standard accounts of French economic history. There is, quite surprisingly, a pattern in surveys of modern French economic history either to exclude the empire or to move it to the margins, a tendency that has been stronger in the English-speaking world than in the French. [8] This marginalization is perhaps the result of the timing of historical trends as well as of a prevalent belief that colonies

were a waste of time and money. With the cultural turn of the 1980s, economic history fell out of favor. And when economic history had more practitioners before the 1980s, colonies had often been seen as largely external to France's development. Saul's book shows clearly how important the colonies were for many economic actors at the time, well through the years of decolonization and into the period of political independence. Only a retrospective view that sees the metropole's economic successes coinciding with and following decolonization allows the historian to conclude that colonies made France backward. For this reason, his book should challenge standard accounts of French economic history by emphasizing the significance of empire and decolonization to France's modern development.

Criticisms aside, Saul's work is an impressive undertaking. It is an indispensable read for historians who wish to gain a fuller understanding of the dynamics involved in North Africa's decolonization, and also for those who want to reconsider the importance of colonies to the development of the modern French economy. For these reasons, this volume begs further comparative studies of the economic history of decolonization, both within the French empire and between European empires. For most readers, the book's length and density will likely relegate it to "reference book" status; but for specialists who want the ins and outs of business and economic activities in French North Africa, Saul's meticulous research will render a great service. Most of all, Saul's book encourages a return to political economy in the hope that old approaches may throw new light on the making of modern France.

NOTES

[1] From economic historian Jacques Marseille's *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: Histoire d'un divorce* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1984); to comparative literature scholar Kristin Ross's *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995).

[2] Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français*; and Daniel Lefeuvre, *Chère Algérie: La France et sa colonie, 1930-1962* (Paris: Flammarion, 2005).

[3] There are exceptions to this claim, such as Muriam Haleh Davis, "Restaging Mise en Valeur: 'Postwar Imperialism' and the Plan de Constantine," *Review of Middle East Studies* 44 (2010): 176-186; and Lefeuvre, *Chère Algérie*.

[4] The Algerian, and North African, wine industries are starting to attract more attention. See Giulia Meloni and Johan Swinnen, "The Rise and Fall of the World's Largest Wine Exporter, and Its Institutional Legacy," *Journal of Wine Economics* 9 (2014): 3-33; Owen White, "Roll Out the Barrel: French and Algerian Ports and the Birth of the Wine Tanker," *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 35 (2017): 111-132; Nessim Znaïen, "Le vin et la viticulture en Tunisie coloniale (1881-1956): Entre synapse et apartheid," *French Cultural Studies* 26 (2015): 140-151; and my forthcoming book, *The Sober Revolution: Appellation Wine and the Transformation of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018).

[5] Phillip C. Naylor examines the continued economic, social, cultural, and political ties between France and Algeria in *France and Algeria: A History of Decolonization and Transformation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000); for Eurafrica, see Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (New York:

Bloomsbury, 2014); and Megan Brown, "Drawing Algeria into Europe: Shifting French Policy and the Treaty of Rome (1951-1964)," *Modern and Contemporary France* 25 (2017): 191-218.

[6] The literature on this topic has grown rapidly over the last couple of decades. Three classics are Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Irwin Wall, *The United States, Algeria, and the Fall of the Fourth French Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[7] Some of today's most exciting work in economic history seeks to embed markets into these environments. Owen White and Elizabeth Heath call for an emphasis on the "economic life" of empire in "The French Empire and the History of Economic Life," *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 35 (2017): 76-88.

[8] Two classic economic surveys in English say very little about the place of empire in French economic development. See Richard F. Kuisel, *Capitalism and the State in Modern France: Renovation & Economic Management in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Tom Kemp, *The French Economy, 1913-1939: The History of a Decline* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972).

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