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Elisabeth Vihlen McGregor, *Jazz and Postwar French Identity: Improvising the Nation*, Lanham, Lexington Books, 2016. 290 pp. \$105 (hb). ISBN 978-1-4985-2876-4

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In the field of history of jazz in Europe, France ranks among the most researched countries. Since 1996 and the publication of Tyler Stovall's seminal *Paris Noir*, several publications have significantly broadened and deepened our knowledge about the diffusion of jazz in France during the first half of the twentieth century.^[1] Other scholars have delved into the post-Second World War period in studies of jazz in France encompassing the entire twentieth century^[2] while, as McGregor explains, Colin Nettlebeck^[3] and Tom Perchard^[4] have focused exclusively on the post-1945 years, each in his own way. The former has delved into jazz music and writings by French musicians and critics, whereas the latter has explored the impact of jazz on different expressions of French culture, such as cinema and literature.

McGregor adopts another approach complementary to Nettlebeck's and Perchard's. By using "the rhetoric and cultural practices surrounding jazz as a means of better understanding different facets of postwar French identity" (p. xvii), she takes jazz and debates around jazz as expressions revealing "crucial aspects of French society" (p. xvii). In this regard, her approach can be paralleled with that of Jordan, which also considers jazz as a focal point for the debates around the nature and definition of French identity during the twentieth century. McGregor's book concentrates on subjects already familiar to French jazz historians and unavoidable in the aforementioned research focusing on the interwar period: the relationship between France and the United States, the process of Americanization, generational conflict, racism, and the different conceptions of French identity. However, McGregor's book is the first to study the relationship between these themes and jazz during the 1950s and the 1960s. What is more, it is remarkable in addressing topics less frequently (if not rarely or even not at all) addressed in French jazz studies: jazz and gendered norms, jazz and the colonial empire, and the debates about rights for minority populations.

Another praiseworthy quality of this book is its thematic organisation. Rather than proposing a chronological approach, which may have made the presentation of the aforementioned subjects less clear, McGregor devotes each chapter to one them and presents the point of view of three groups—jazz musicians, jazz critics and jazz fans. Their opinions are documented thanks to close and thorough scrutiny of the two main French jazz journals of the 1950s and the 1960s: *Jazz Hot* and *Jazz Magazine*.

The first chapter (“*Le Monde du jazz*”) recalls the emergence of the Hot Club de France—the first fan-based organisation in the country—in the 1930s and the role of the Zazous community in occupied France. It then provides the reader with a map of the partnerships and rifts existent in the world of French jazz from 1945 to the end of the 1960s. The well-known opposition between traditionalists (led by Hugues Panassié) and modernists (led by André Hodeir and Lucien Malson) is presented in an original way: McGregor tackles the role of these respective groups (the latter being the more active and dominant) in the different media which took part in the diffusion of jazz and jazz knowledge in France: the press, radio, and (more briefly though not less interestingly), records and venues hosting jazz concerts or events.

The title of the second chapter, “The Gendered Jazz Public,” augurs an exciting reflexion on the predominance of males in the French jazz community, and of masculinity in jazz discourse, experiences, and expectations. Instead, it opens with a sociological approach to jazz audiences in the two decades following World War II (pp. 44–54). Drawing on polls and surveys on the cultural tastes on the French, McGregor demonstrates convincingly that, before rock’n’roll and the *yéyés*, the vogue of jazz during the postwar years was linked to the emergence of *youth* as a new cohesive group and social category in France. Contrary to rock’n’roll, however, jazz only gathered the socially and culturally privileged fringe of the younger segment. A small fringe, but also a predominantly male one since “youth” was often envisioned as masculine (p. 54). Indeed, women were still expected to assume domestic responsibilities and remain “within the boundaries of traditional forms of recreation” (p. 55). McGregor then explains that gender stereotypes created along with jazz in the United States were adopted in France. As a result, French female jazz critics Madeleine Gautier, Barbara Belgrave and Annette Leloir were systematically kept at a distance from the centre of the field of jazz criticism and thought of as “connected to jazz through men” (p. 70). By the same token, French jazzwomen were seldom given consideration. Singer and pianist Mimi Perrin was an exception since she earned critical acclaim as early as the beginning of her career as leader of the Double Six group, in 1956. Here, the reader might still feel hungry because he would like to understand *why* Perrin was an exception. Was she given special attention and recognition on musical grounds or on socio-cultural ones? Such questions, as well as the rest of McGregor’s interesting findings in this chapter, would deserve to be put into perspective with Marie Buscatto’s inquiry into the place of French women in contemporary jazz.[5]

Chapter three questions the place and role of race in jazz criticism and, more precisely, explores “how antiracist thought evolved among white French citizens, who were rather oblivious when it came to recognizing and addressing discrimination in their own country” (p. 80). The examples of Jacques Hess’s, André Hodeir’s, Frank Ténor’s and Lucien Malson’s jazz criticism shows that the jazz community acted as a vanguard, insofar as was one of the first to advocate for antiracism and civil rights, even if they were more prompt to denounce racial discrimination in the United States than to apply their criticism of racism to blatant examples observable in metropolitan France and in its Empire. This thought-provoking chapter leaves only one question open, which has more to do with McGregor’s own categories, when she speaks of a “*franco-français* majority” (p. 79). Does she oppose this majority to French people descending from immigrants? In this case, and knowing that one third of French citizens descend from immigrants, if we go back only three generations, how many generations must we take into account in order to count them in the “*franco-français*” category?[6] Does McGregor assimilate the “*franco-français* majority” to “white” people, as she mentions “white French jazz critics” on the line below (knowing that most immigrants in France are “white”)? In that case, must we consider that “non-white” people could

not be “*franco-français*,” when part of them claim to be recognised as such? Whatever answer is given to this question, this chapter is particularly interesting because it shows indirectly that jazz discourses cannot be taken as a mere reflection of the state of French culture at a given period. Certainly, the place of women in the French jazz community epitomises inequalities between men and women in France. But, on the contrary, the attitude of French jazz critics towards racial problems is the opposite of the “growing racism of the postwar period” (p. 117). Granted, one could wonder if racism in France was really becoming more widespread than during World War II. Be that as it may, this chapter shows that a close examination of jazz discourses in France can give nuance to existing cultural histories of France.

Chapter four (“More than an American Music”) focuses on the relationship between jazz and French cultural identity: “French supporters of jazz did not view this music simply as an American creation but as an art form that had become part of their own cultural milieu” (p. 153). McGregor shows that jazz was set apart from the rest of American mainstream culture at a time—the early 1950s and the 1960s—when “French anti-Americanism...peaked” (p. 126). This assertion could be discussed since Richard Kuisel has shown that resistance to American culture was not necessarily an expression of anti-Americanism.[7] That said, her study of Hugues Panassié’s, André Hodeir’s and Charles Delaunay’s writings perfectly shows that jazz was not seen as a threat to French way of life, but as a means of “invigorating French culture” (p. 128).

The following chapter goes one step further and questions the debates and discourses about the existence of a national (French) jazz. McGregor states that the majority of critics and jazz musicians agreed that, on a stylistic level, speaking of “French jazz” was a misuse of language. Here, the reader may wish that the author had engaged the subject more deeply by proposing critical approaches of the texts she quotes and, more importantly, by confronting them with the *music* of French jazz musicians. Otherwise, the researcher can only take for granted what the actors under study affirm. Apart from the works of musicians such as Django Reinhardt and André Hodeir, who were recognised as having a voice distinctive from American jazz, French musicians “still had not created a ‘school’ of their own” (p. 163). However, “French jazz” does exist on a professional level, thanks to various unions, the history of which is retraced in the last part of the chapter. Here national identity was put forward in order to protect French jazz musicians from international—especially American—competition.

“And what of Empire?” This question, which is at the core of chapter six, is also one of the most original of this book since the history of jazz in French colonies, from the 1920s to their independence and through the postcolonial era, remains a *terra incognita* for historians, musicologists, and jazz amateurs, even if it was first tackled by Jeremy Lane in the “Coda” of his 2013 book “Jazz after Empire.”[8] McGregor’s study does not encompass the whole French Empire; instead, one aspect of this history is the jazz life in selected French colonies. McGregor takes the example of Algeria to show that the jazz community was mainly made of members of the “*colon* community” (p. 202), from which talented jazz musicians emerged, most notably Martial Solal and Errol Parker (aka Raphaël Schécroun). McGregor then puts forward an interesting paradox: whereas most French jazz critics supported the American civil rights movement, these same critics ignored the discrimination between French *colons* and Arabs and Berber people, before and during the Algerian war. In 1962, near the end of this war, French soldier and *Jazz Magazine* reporter Jean Crestet notes only the difficulties faced by the French jazz community in Algeria (p. 204), without mentioning the dramatic situation. Such findings should encourage discussion of the status of jazz discourse and jazz taste. Rather than always

looking for jazz's connection with political and cultural issues (or disconnection in this case), might it be possible that it is, at least in some degree, *independent* from these issues? In other words, can discourse about music remain partly *autonomous* from politics, race, and culture? It may well be that Crestet does not mention Arab and Berber people in his article about jazz in Algeria because *jazz*, and not the political situation, is his subject matter. But this does not necessarily mean that Crestet does not care for their situation and for racial inequalities in Algeria. Another major aspect of the study is the mobilisation of French jazz musicians by French governmental institutions in order to bolster the ties between France and its former colonies and overseas department. The examples of Maxime Saury's 1963 and 1965 tours in Africa, under the patronage of the Ministère de la Coopération and the network of Centres culturels français, are presented as initiatives mirroring the American State Department programme begun in 1956 in order to send jazz musicians abroad and promote American cultural values, in the context of Cold War. Perhaps this comparison would have gained more credibility if McGregor had grounded it more firmly on archival materials. Other occasional initiatives such as Jef Gilson's 1968 tours in La Réunion and Madagascar, in collaboration with local cultural centres, played a role in maintaining cultural links between France, former colonies, and DOM-TOM. This tour led to the promotion of French jazz in Madagascar and Madagascan music in metropolitan France. Nevertheless, it was not part of a larger consistent programme, and McGregor is right in pointing out that, compared to American programmes, jazz occupied a much less important place in French cultural diplomacy.

In spite of the absence of some important bibliographical references in French (such as Buscatto's research, as mentioned below, but also Olivier Roueff's 2013 book), a tendency to focus exclusively on sources drawn from the press and a lot of typos in French bibliographical references in notes (due to a lack of vigilance from the editor), *Jazz and Postwar Identity* is an important and thought-provoking book which provides a huge amount of new information about the history of jazz discourse in France during the 1950s and 1960s.[9] Undoubtedly a major contribution in the field of French jazz studies, it puts forward topics such as gender and the situation of jazz in the French Empire (and then former Empire) on which research still needs to be carried out. For these reasons, McGregor's book is a landmark that will certainly pave the way for further research on jazz in France after 1945 and provide a necessary complement to Rashida Bragg's book published the same year.[10]

NOTES

[1] Constant-Martin and Roueff, *La France du jazz. Musique, modernité et identité dans la première moitié du xx^e siècle* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2002); Jeffrey Jackson, *Making Jazz French. Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Jeremy Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism: Music, "Race" and Intellectuals in France, 1918-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013); Laurent Cugny, *Une histoire du jazz en France. Tome i: du milieu du xix^e siècle à 1929* (Paris: Outre Mesure, 2014); Martin Guerin, *Adieu New York, bonjour Paris ! Les enjeux esthétiques et culturels des appropriations du jazz dans le monde musical savant français (1900-1930)* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Université Paris-Sorbonne-Université de Montréal, 2015).

[2] Ludovic Tournès, *New Orleans sur Seine. Histoire du jazz en France* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); Deborah Mawer, *French Music in Conversation. From Debussy to Brubeck* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014); Andy Fry, *Paris Blues: African American Music and French Popular Culture, 1920-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

[3] Colin Nettlebeck, *Dancing with de Beauvoir: Jazz and the French* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004).

[4] Tom Perchard, *After Django. Making Jazz in Postwar France* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

[5] Marie Buscatto, *Femmes du jazz. Musicalités, féminités, marginalités* (Paris : CNRS éditions, 2007).

[6] Gérard Noiriel, *Atlas de l'immigration en France* (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2002), p. 11.

[7] **Richard** Kuisel, "L'américanisation de la France (1945-1970)," *Les Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* (En ligne) 5(1990), <http://journals.openedition.org/ccrh/2889>, and Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French. The Dilemma of Americanisation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[8] Jeremy Lane, *Jazz and Machine-Age Imperialism*, pp. 180-200.

[9] Olivier Roueff, *Jazz. Les échelles du plaisir. Intermédiaires et culture lettrée en France au xx^e siècle* (Paris: La Dispute, 2013).

[10] Rashida K. Braggs, *Jazz Diasporas. Race, music, and migration in Post-World War II Paris* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2016).

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