
H-France Review Vol. 23 (May 2023), No. 77

Megan Brown, *The Seventh Member State: Algeria, France, and the European Community*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022. 368 pp. Notes, references, and index. \$39.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780674251144.

Review by Andrew W. M. Smith, Queen Mary, University of London.

In 1950, a *Daily Herald* cartoon by the British artist David Low recalled a runaway romance capped with a hasty marriage over the anvil at Gretna Green. [1] The eloping couple were France and Germany, sealing their tryst over the anvil of European coal and steel after the Schuman declaration. In such a rushed marriage, it is perhaps understandable that the guest list was a short one (only British and American figures attend in Low's drawing), but we should perhaps pause to question who was not invited. In *The Seventh Member State*, we hear more from some of those excluded from the nuptials. In the Assembly of the French Union, the Algerian representative Abdennour Tamzali criticized Algeria's exclusion as a form of "concubinage" (p. 75). Senegalese Senator Ousmane Socé Diop also accused France of trying to "bring Africa as a marriage gift to Germany" (p. 76). In turn, Léopold Senghor argued that if France and Germany *were* to be joined in a "marriage of convenience," French Union citizens should not be "wedding gifts or the dishes that bear the brunt during household spats, or dolls to entertain the children of the estate." Instead, arguing for meaningful colonial reform, Senghor proposed those overseas citizens should play the role of "pages who carry the bride's veil" (p. 93). Low's cartoon, however, depicts the role of page already occupied by the blushing Ernest Bevin, carrying Germany's veil and representing British interests in the forging of European cooperation. Britain, it seemed, was to be more readily welcomed at this imagined ceremony than France's empire and, indeed, the French départements on the other side of the Mediterranean.

As post-war realities settled around Cold War tensions, French diplomats tried to reduce the cognitive dissonance between what they saw as France's rightful mastery over its empire and its position as a modern, post-war Republic. Algeria sat oddly within this changing picture. Officials simultaneously maintained that it was an indivisible part of France while manifestly treating it as an extension of France's empire. By way of example, Brown shows how the 1947 *statut organique* in Algeria seemed to promise greater liberalisation within the framework of an evolving French empire, only to maintain strict and explicitly racialised limits to that representation. We also see politicians like Tamzali trying to force a reflection on hypocrisies of the imperial nation-state, asking how Algeria could be an integral part of the French economy yet also be excluded from the Coal and Steel Community, or indeed how it could be integrated into NATO but not Europe (p. 102). As Brown reminds us, "Tamzali was not a mere foil to French officials. He *was* a French official" (p. 71). Brown's excellent book, based on her doctoral dissertation, explores

this ambiguity in Algerian sovereignty fully and to fascinating effect: trapped between fine French words and strong French policing, what sort of future was possible for Algeria in the post-war world?

When exploring this sort of historical contingency, the emphasis is not on counter-factual arguments but rather reconstructing the ideational context in which discussions of possibility took place. Indeed, mooted possibilities of postcolonial state formation has shaped a vibrant historiographical field, pioneered by Gary Wilder and Frederick Cooper, and Brown's book is a valuable contribution to this debate.^[2] *The Seventh Member State* studies this wider moment of possibility in Algerian and French sovereignty and the competing tensions which swirled around it over the course of some thirty years, between the end of the Second World War and the revision of Algeria's relationship to the European Economic Community in 1976. Official French attitudes naturally shifted with the alternating governments of the Fourth Republic, the denouement of the Algerian war which had ushered in its downfall, and then the trumpeted return of de Gaulle, alongside the wider global developments which shaped these changes at the top.

What Brown demonstrates so elegantly is how weighted the scales were against meaningful colonial reform, while erstwhile imperial titans reckoned with post-war revisions of status and renegotiated their place in the world. As Muriam Haleh Davis astutely notes in *Markets of Civilization*, "postwar economic reforms were articulated in the long shadow of empire."^[3] Brown's excellent book tests one such project, measuring it against the possibilities of Eurafrican federation through a diplomatic and bureaucratic lens. Rather than a "history of opening and possibility" (p. 252), Brown contends, this is a history of foreclosure. Indeed, Senghor's suggested solution to carve out some agency for France's former subject peoples in the "marriage of convenience" was to create a "chambre des peuples," fashioning a democratic tool to represent and defend the interests of France's empire while sovereign realities were rewritten in Europe. In a stark indication of why such moments of possibility were foreclosed, Brown notes that "Senghor's proposal was ignored" (p. 93). Such deafness to reform revealed the realities of the late colonial state. As the voices of the Global South became more audible on the diplomatic world stage after Bandung, as France continued to fight its wars of decolonization first in Indochina then in Algeria, "voices from beyond Europe became impossible to ignore" (p. 98). Indeed, Tamzali was no dupe in his pondering of imperial hypocrisies, and he could clearly argue that "Eurafrican policy directly translated into Algerian exclusion and disenfranchisement, to the benefit of non-French European peoples" (p. 102). If citizenship was to become a force for change in the French empire, in the style of Senghor's proposal or as imagined in the late colonial revisions of the Algerian polity, the French state would need to commit to an integrative process of reform in its colonies or be prepared for further military conflict. As the realities of what colonial reform would cost and entail became clear, the possibility of French officials sanctioning it became vanishingly remote. Brown shows us that for all the dreams of unification, the history of violent colonial domination was not something to be easily forgotten or quickly overcome.

At heart, this is a story of creative ambiguity and its unravelling. Like the 1956 *loi cadre*, the implications of Algeria's legal ambiguity could be cast as a valuable tool for trying to salvage some better version of empire or noted for their tawdry use as a political expedient to frustrate anti-imperial forces. Attempting to reconcile the integrative ideals expressed in favour of European unity alongside the exclusionary logic of racial and religious prejudice was as challenging at the birth of a united Europe as it remains in contemporary discussions of policing

Europe's borders (as an image of a British newspaper espousing anti-immigrant rhetoric in Brown's conclusion illustrates). Brown explains well how such early discussions flowed from a French belief that maintaining its colonies were a fundamental right, yet also a "matter of survival" (p. 92), constructing both a moral and practical mandate in the minds of policymakers. The colonial assumptions that had justified empire remained influential and, as Brown notes, "the coding of Algerians as racially 'other' was a process that began before European integration and continued afterward" (p. 253).

The "complexity and ambiguity" (p. 28) of Algeria's role in the French state emerged from the waking dream of territoriality, which treaties defined against the realities of exclusion, and for which France sought European diplomatic support to shore up its continued presence. The French insistence on naming Algeria in the Treaty of Rome, signed during Algeria's War of Independence, ensured both European recognition of territoriality and that the entanglements of empire would not be unpicked until long after 1962. Yet Algerians were not without agency in this process, and as Brown argues, Algerian officials under the Ben Bella administration attempted to leverage this legal position after independence to extract positive outcomes for their citizens, from some labour mobility across the nascent European Economic Community to preferential tariffs and access to markets (p. 177-178). Nor were other European states blind to the possibilities created by Algerian independence, and Brown notes West German and Italian engagement with Algeria before and after independence, as well as the unravelling of the Algerian wine industry as a legacy of French influence.[4]

As Brown explains in her conclusion, "the EU's history cannot and must not be told without a discussion of the place of empire in its forerunners' foundational treaties and institutions" (p. 251). This is especially interesting in relation to Franco-British relations, both in the pertinence of Brexit to this Algerian story, but also in the national histories which surrounded discussions of European integration. There are echoes of the Franco-British "co-imperialism" described by Martin Thomas and Richard Toye, wherein national interest and imperial ambitions that had clashed for over a century were revalued amidst a wider realignment in light of the failures of the Suez crisis.[5] Brown's coverage of doomed debates around the formation of the European Defence Community illuminates such moments where changing political priorities were inflected with lingering imperial attitudes. Indeed, as she argues, "debates about European integration were never just about export markets or military organization" (p. 91). Brown points to Dutch reactions to De Gaulle's veto of British entry to the EEC as a particularly clear indication of how racialised definitions of belonging in Europe ultimately trumped political dreams of integration (pp. 202-203). Europe, defined through its institutions, could muster an appetite for Algerian markets and territory, yet—despite the fine words that marked ceremonies of integration—it struggled to stomach the Algerian people themselves.

Brown is a talented writer and the book is clear-eyed and direct in its prose. While it seems trifling to highlight in a work of outstanding scholarship, the sub-headings and titling throughout the book were a joy—offering concise, elegant, and often humorous summations of argument that engage the reader's imagination. In five tightly argued chapters, Brown's book takes a state's-eye view of nations in transformation, drawing together a range of archival sources from across French institutions as well as European papers from Florence. This broad range of sources creates an excellent insight into the intersections of imperial project and continental consolidation, and we begin to glimpse not just the political briefs provided to bureaucrats negotiating the European project, but the long-running assumptions that shaped their priorities

beyond the page. This is a fascinating example of—as Anne-Laura Stoler put it—reading against the archival grain to understand the “colonial common sense” that shaped French policy. [6]

Algeria’s status as the “seventh member state” of a fledgling European Union was a legal fiction born of reconciling imperial ambitions with Cold War realities, yet it remained suggestive of a rescaling of Europe. The promises dangled in front of Algerians in the late 1950s—of greater equality, representation, and dignity within the context of a French-dominated sovereign community—were phantoms at best, or at worst they were traps to bedevil the realisation of independence. Beyond the historical specificity of this case study, however, what Brown’s work illuminates so clearly are how overlapping conceptions of belonging in Europe remain informed by imperial structures despite their salutary and liberal language of integration, and that the gap between these ideas continues to leave ambiguities ripe for political exploitation.

NOTES

[1] David Low, “Runaway Romance Over the Anvil,” *The Daily Herald*, May 12, 1950. British Cartoon Archive, LSE7752. <https://archive.cartoons.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=LSE7752>.

[2] Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014); Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[3] Muriam Haleh Davis, *Markets of Civilization: Islam and Racial Capitalism in Algeria* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2022), p. 2.

[4] Indeed, Italian officials were active before independence, negotiating with the FLN to try and ensure access to oil. See Marta Musso, “‘Oil will set us free’: the hydrocarbon industry and the Algerian decolonization process,” in Andrew W. M. Smith and Chris Jeppesen, eds., *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?* (London: UCL Press, 2017), pp. 62-84. On Algerian wine, Brown cites Owen White, *The Blood of the Colony: Wine and the Rise and Fall of French Algeria* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021).

[5] Martin Thomas and Richard Toye, *Arguing about Empire: Imperial Rhetoric in Britain and France, 1882-1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 194.

[6] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 1.

Andrew W. M. Smith
Queen Mary, University of London
a.w.smith@qmul.ac.uk

Copyright © 2023 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 edistribution/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 republication 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