
H-France Review Vol. 24 (March 2024), No. 26

Emily Marker, *Black France, White Europe. Youth, Race, and Belonging in the Postwar Era*. Ithaca N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2022. xii + 261 pp. Map, notes, bibliography, and index. \$39.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9-78-1501765605; \$26.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-1501775888; \$25.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9-78-1501765612.

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The ways in which projects of colonial reform and European unification were interconnected across the post-war decades in France, as elsewhere in Western Europe, has been an increasing focus of historical study in recent years. The common-sensical notion that the abandonment of empire in the face of nationalist opposition was compensated for by the pursuit of (West) European integration has been replaced by a recognition that the two projects were in many ways interlinked—or, as Emily Marker prefers to term it, “entangled” (p. 7). Her impressive and wide-ranging monograph uses the prism of educational reform, and more generally the construction of postwar elites, as her means of exploring the complexities of this process. In doing so, Marker succeeds in making a significant contribution to the record of both colonial and European history, with implications that stretch well beyond the particular case of France.

Her starting point is London; or more exactly the wartime exile institutions of Free France, which became the focus of colonial and European projects of reform and new thinking. Through their responsibility for the colonies of francophone Africa, Free French ministers and officials, such as the Minister of Education René Cassin, became the driving force for plans for the reform and development of colonial education, which were prominently displayed at the Brazzaville Conference of January 1944. At the same time, Cassin and his colleagues participated in the study groups and commissions which proliferated among the exile governments in London, discussing plans for the transnational reconstruction of Europe which they intended should pre-empt the resurgence of the nation-state conflicts of the recent past. In these ways, the colonies and European reconstruction became, by the end of the war, a much more tangible priority in the policies and future ambitions of France.

This interconnectedness of national, European, and colonial plans for reform endured after the war. The creation of a new elite of Black African students, formed in French institutions and mentalities, was intended to provide France with a legitimating tool for the retention of its edifice of colonial rule, while deterring the threats variously posed by subaltern nationalism, Anglo-American cultural and political ambitions, and from the 1950s the emergence of a more militant spirit of Islam in the Global South. The most immediate obstacle was, however, one of resources. As Marker well demonstrates, the ambitious projects conceived by colonial

administrators and expert commissions far exceeded the meager budgets of the French authorities. Moreover, the ultimate goal of educating a new African elite was cut across at every turn by the vested interests of white populations, and fears of the political ambitions that would be generated by a new African elite. Even the relatively modest goal of creating a university in Dakar was repeatedly deferred, and, when it was eventually established, remained subordinated to metropolitan institutional oversight. The consequence was that most African students seeking a university education moved to France, sometimes with government scholarships, but often through their own means. There, the visibility of increasing numbers of African students provoked much anxiety among the authorities, in which political fears of their radical nationalist or communist affiliations, merged with long-standing racist anxieties about the social or sexual danger that they supposedly posed to European students and the wider population.

Lack of resources was therefore only the most visible obstacle to colonial educational reform. Much more profound was the way in which the reality of an educated and articulate (male) African citizen was at odds with the racial hierarchies and ways of thinking solidly established in French minds and institutions in Africa and in Europe. Marker demonstrates that these mentalities were not legacies of the imperial past, but were rooted in the war years and the immediate post-war decades. The European movements, conferences, and institutions that proliferated following the Second World War rejected the racial categories employed by the Third Reich and Vichy; but, in doing so, they adopted a new language of European civilization that was both white and Christian. According to this perspective, France formed part of a distinctive European heritage characterised by its linguistic and historic diversity but united by a common set of cultural values. Perhaps most striking in the French context was how this concept of Europe embraced Christianity. The mentality of an intransigent *laïcité* was abandoned in favour of what Marker terms a “culturalization” of Christianity (p. 66). Catholicism, especially in its post-war progressive form, became part of the heritage of European identity, while also becoming more white.

As Marker elucidates through her study of institutions and associations committed to the ideal of a common European home, this rhetorical construction of Europeanness increased the distance between France and Africa at the same time as it insisted on its raceless but white character. This divergence was well demonstrated by the fate of *Eurafrique*. Seen from France, the dreams of a new partnership or fusion of Europe and Africa embodied the spirit of planning which prevailed in the postwar years, promising a shared future of economic growth, grandiose infrastructural projects, and social modernisation. However, for a newly self-conscious African elite, influenced by the more militant politics of the Global South, *Eurafrique* appeared to be little more than the repackaging of imperial exploitation in new clothes. Thus, at the end of the 1950s, France and its African colonies reached an unexpected parting of the ways, which, as Marker says twice, led to “the astonishingly rapid” disaggregation of France’s African empire (p.185, p. 214).

Marker’s monograph therefore contributes powerfully to the recent literature which has presented the end of the French empire as an unintended outcome. Decolonization was neither willed, nor anticipated; it was instead, as Todd Shepard demonstrated through his influential study of the aftermath of the retreat from Algeria, a retrospective rationalisation of a sudden divorce. [1] But Marker goes beyond other recent studies by analysing the interconnectedness of histories of empire and European integration across the period from the 1940s to the early

1960s. By transgressing the invisible frontier which still exists between colonial and European histories of the mid-century decades, she uses her wide-ranging researches in the archives of the colonial authorities and of European movements, as well as the writings and speeches of leading figures of the age, to demonstrate that empire and Europe did not exist in separate mental and institutional boxes. Instead, they formed part of the wider ambition of French elites—metropolitan and colonial, secular and Christian, left and right—to build a future out of the ruins of the present.

This ambition to transcend what one might term either/or histories of empire and Europe from the 1940s to the 1960s has its weak points. At times one cannot help but feel that Marker strives too hard to build connections between institutions and individuals that had relatively little in common. Moreover, in doing so, she often ends up relying too heavily on the insubstantial rhetoric of elites rather than the attitudes of the masses, or the actions of institutions. But these shortcomings are outweighed by the way that Marker prompts us to think about how the mid-century decades constituted a distinctive era, which is best thought of as both European *and* global. This has an evident importance for the French case, where the war years created a durable nexus between the African empire, Algeria, and the metropole which persisted across the post-war decades. But it has many parallels in the experiences of other European states. The collapse of the Italian empire amidst military defeat, the Dutch reluctant retreat from the East Indies, the belated Belgian scramble to leave Congo, and the British crabwalk towards the end of empire were all cases where there was no fenced border between the imperial and the European. Instead, these processes were intertwined in many ways; and, as Marker argues in her epilogue, remain so in the twenty-first century. That reality should also guide the way in which we write their history.

NOTE

[1] Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

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