

Recycling Colonial Comparisons: A Transimperial History

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Abstract

This chapter demonstrates that judgmental comparison-making between a presumably clearcut British and French style of colonial rule in the late colonial period did not disappear with the end of formal colonialism. Rather, such comparisons, involving both the British and the French, persisted for various, ultimately often political reasons after the end of empire. This chapter focuses on two groups who were central to replicating and reshaping how one empire knew and represented the other: postcolonial professional historians and development experts.

Keywords: transimperial, postcolonial professional historians, development experts, Comparisons, Britain, France

He [Julius Kiano, Kenyan Minister of Trade] made some observation on the way the French colonized not only countries but the minds of their inhabitants, unlike the British who at least left the inhabitants free to think for themselves.¹

Assimilation or respect for African ways of thinking? Direct or Indirect rule? Such old comparisons between empires resurfaced in the context of the 1975 Lomé convention negotiations at a time when Britain had just entered the EEC and tried to convince its former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa to join the trade and development aid arrangements that the European Economic Community (EEC), pushed by France, had concluded with the former French colonies in the 1960s. The continuation of such comparisons, the way that they were instrumentalized politically even after their original context had disappeared during decolonization, is the main object of this chapter. Ann Stoler has argued that colonial comparisons should be analyzed for themselves:² indeed, the way that they are constructed, the way that they are used

¹ Archives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (AFCO, PRO, Kew)/30/1706, report by Duff, High Commissioner in Kenya, May 18, 1973.

² Ann Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001), 829–65.

by imperial governments or post-colonial governments may reveal one's identity and one's political interests at one time in history. More generally, as Heinz Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka have remarked, comparing is not a neutral act. Because "comparisons underestimate the multi-dimensionality, contingency and openness of historical situations," "they tend to insinuate that certain developments and structure are normal." These idealized structures or developments are eventually "used as benchmark in the study of different national and regional cases." This may lead to "the thesis of backwardness of one case compared to the other."³ Comparisons, in this case, are judgmental, used to valorize one nation, region or—as in this chapter—colonial government form over another. They help to hierarchize and rank empires.⁴

I will show here how this hierarchy of empires during and after decolonization was the result of interactions and hierarchies among those who produced and conveyed that comparative knowledge in France and Britain: either colonial or ex-colonial officials; academics; civil servants and politicians. A transimperial approach⁵ will help to see how these actors exchanged and competed within specific international and national contexts and networks. The fact that some of these actors (British ones) were more influential in certain arenas, like the Permanent Mandate Commission of the League of Nations, or were part of prestigious institutions, like Oxford University, may explain why their comparative knowledge prevailed in the long term over others (French in this case). It may also explain how their version of comparisons—and the implicit ranking of empires that it carried—survived more easily after decolonization, making the French—or British—colonial government and post-colonial relationship with Africa, a special/exceptional case.⁶

Starting from this hypothesis, and tackling this fascinating story of continuity, my paper has two parts. I first summarize my previous work⁷ and analyze how

³ Heinz Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 8.

⁴ On this idea of hierarchies of empire, see Daniel Hedinger and Nadine Heé, "Transimperial history-connectivity, cooperation and competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16, no. 4 (2018), 429–568.

⁵ Hedinger & Heé, "Transimperial history."

⁶ On the idea of exceptionality in imperial history, see Paul Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910," *Journal of American History* 88 (2002), 1315–53.

⁷ Véronique Dimier, *L'idéologie des méthodes coloniales en France et en Grande-Bretagne des années 1920 aux années 1960*, Travaux et Documents du CEAN, n° 58–59, 1998, I. E. P. de Bordeaux; "L'internationalisation du débat colonial: rivalités franco-britanniques autour de la commission permanente des mandats," *Revue d'Histoire Outre-Mer* (2002), 333–60; "Direct or Indirect Rule: propaganda around a scientific controversy," in *Promoting the colonial idea: propaganda and vision of empire in France*, ed. Tony Chafer Amada Sackur (London: Palgrave, 2002); *Le gouvernement des colonies: regards*

certain French and British academics and politicians made, for ultimately political reasons, colonial comparisons (French Direct vs English Indirect Rule) in the interwar period. I analyze the way that these comparisons were constructed, contested, or confirmed by scientific demonstration in the 1920s, the way that they were used through the Permanent Mandate Commission of the League of Nations and served to enhance or undermine the legitimacy of France and Britain as colonial powers in the interwar context of increasing competition between empires.

In Part II, I study to what extent the British version of these comparisons survived in the 1950s–60s, well after the context in which they were originally produced and used. Indeed, I argue that decolonization formed a new favorable ground on which for them to flourish. Competition between empires and the need/quest for legitimacy may not have ended with the era of independence. Last but not least, I will explore how these comparisons were—as the quotation opening this text illustrates—recycled for other purposes, in policy fields where the competition between former colonial powers or elites within nation-states precisely persisted, like immigration and development.

In this sense, the current chapter is part of my more recent research on the continuity between colonial and post-colonial times in the context of EEC development policy.⁸ This continuity has received increased attention in recent years by historians.⁹ Comparing empires has also led to a number of innovative works in the scientific literature, among which are the recent book by Martin Thomas and Richard Toye on French and British colonial rhetoric and Melanie Torrents on French and British colonial rule in Cameroon.¹⁰ Since I first published my work (1998, 2002, 2004) on French and British colonial comparisons, other studies have further elaborated and confirmed some my hypotheses as to the effect of

croisés franco-britanniques (PUB, 2004); “On good colonial government: lessons from the League of Nation,” *Global Society* 18 no. 3 (2004), 279–99.

⁸ Veronique Dimier, *The Invention of a European Development Aid Bureaucracy: Recycling Empire* (London: Palgrave, 2014).

⁹ Elisabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Joseph Hodge, “British colonial expertise, post-colonial careerism and the early history of international development,” *Journal of Modern European History* 8 no. 1 (2010), 24–44; Sarah Stockwell, *The British End of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). See also for earlier work on this topic: Giuliano Garavini, *After Empires. European Integration, Decolonization and the Challenge from the Global South, 1957–1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Herman Lebovics, *Bringing the Empire Back Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ Martin Thomas and Robert Toye, *Arguing about Empire: Imperial Rhetoric in Britain and France, 1882–1956* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Melanie Torrent, *Diplomacy and Nation Building in Africa. Franco-British Relations and Cameroon at the End of Empire* (London: Tauris, 2012).

internationalization of the colonial debate on the production of comparative knowledge.¹¹ Except for Mizutani Satoshi, however, few have made colonial comparisons the main and only object of their analysis.¹²

Unlike those works, my approach here will be purely constructivist.¹³ I analyze comparisons as a discourse which was constructed as part of the production of a certain knowledge, at a certain time in history and by certain actors who used them in a specific political and international context. I skirt the question as to whether there were indeed differences or similarities between the French and the British way of governing their colonies, colonizing, decolonizing, and developing.

Part I: “The Myth of the Contrast?”¹⁴

Hard facts may have wrested so many concessions from the old extreme policy of assimilation that the French have been able to rename it association, but the assimilating genius of France survives. ... The Frenchman does not preserve native culture because he does not share our respect for it. To him it is barbarism. ... He will not now deliberately kill indigenous authority but why should he seek to keep alive what offends equally his conceptions of humanity, efficiency and centralisation?¹⁵

This quote comes from Margery Perham, reader of colonial administration at Oxford University (1935–1948), biographer and friend of Lord Lugard, in 1914–1919 Governor of Nigeria, and the so-called “inventor” of Indirect Rule. She drew up her conclusions after a long research project financed by the Trust Travelling Fund (November 1931–April 1932), which allowed her to visit several French and British colonies in West Africa, among which Cameroon, a former German territory that in 1918 was divided and transformed into a French and British mandated

¹¹ Miguel Bandeira Jeromino, *The Civilising Mission of Portuguese Colonialism, 1870-1930* (London: Palgrave, 2015); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians. The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Pierre Singaravélou, “Les stratégies d’internationalisation de la question coloniale et la construction transnationale d’une science de la colonisation à la fin du 19^{ème} siècle,” *Monde(s)* 1 (2012), 135–57; Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹² Mizutani Satoshi, “Anticolonialism and the contested politics of comparison: Rabindranath Tagore, Rash Behari Bose and Japanese colonialism in Korea in the inter-war period,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16, no. 1 (2015) <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/cch.2015.0005>.

¹³ On the constructivist approach see the Introduction of Dimier, *Gouvernement*.

¹⁴ By reference to Semakula Kiwanuka, “Colonial policy and administration in Africa: the myth of the contrast,” *African Historical Study* 3, no. 2 (1970), 295–315.

¹⁵ Margery Perham, “A contrast of policies,” in *Colonial Sequence, 1930-1949: a Chronological Commentary upon British Colonial Policy especially in Africa* (London: Methuen, 1967), 74.

territory of the League of Nations mandates. Such comparisons were not new in the 1930s. British officials already used them in the nineteenth century to criticize the so-called French policy of assimilation in Algeria.¹⁶ The latter was unfavorably contrasted to the decentralized and pragmatic British system set up in India after the Indian Rebellion in 1857, which put an end to the ambition of extending British liberal democracy in its empire and replaced it by the broad idea of respecting native customs and institutions, of favoring the evolution of ‘natives’ in their own way under British supervision. Such system was also praised at the end of the nineteenth century by some French theoreticians and politicians like Jean Louis de Lanessan, Jules Harmand, and Joseph Chailley-Bert, who aimed to change French official policy from assimilation to ‘association,’ especially in the newly acquired colonies in Africa and Asia.¹⁷ Hence their tendency, for political reasons, to use and reinforce the same comparisons. When *association* (the use of local chiefs and respect for native customs) eventually became in 1905 official French doctrine, those comparisons took more subtle forms, at least on the British side. As Lucy Mair, 1932–1956 lecturer in colonial administration at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and anthropologist, remarked:

The French administration like all others have been driven by necessity to utilise the service of subordinate chiefs. These officials are called chiefs, but until quite recently there has been little attempt to select for the position persons whose authority is traditionally recognised and none at all to develop the exercise of their authority along traditional lines. A deliberate policy of suppressing those native authorities who were powerful enough to constitute a potential danger of French authority, combined with a failure to recognise the existence of any authority in tribes which were not highly centralised and with the general indifference of the fate of indigenous civilisation, have made any idea of Indirect Rule in the Nigerian sense inconceivable. The tendency of the French administration to think in terms of grand general schemes applicable to the whole federation of colonies simultaneously militates against any recognition of local differences of cultures.¹⁸

This consensus among British academic analysts of colonial government was, however, no longer accepted universally in the 1930s. Especially on the French side, some, like Maurice Delafosse, were quick to react, and argued that “there are *clichés* that are systematically used without being questioned and confronted to

¹⁶ Alex Middleton, “French Algeria in British imperial thought, 1830–70,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 16, no. 1 (2015), 10.1353/cch.2015.0012.

¹⁷ Raymond Betts, “L’influence des méthodes hollandaises et anglaises sur la doctrine coloniale française à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle,” *Cahiers d’histoire* 1 (1958), 33–50.

¹⁸ Lucy Mair, *Native Policy in Africa* (London: Routledge, 1936), 209.

reality.”¹⁹ This was the case according to him for the so-called superiority of the British in colonial government and for comparisons praising their pragmatism, decentralizing system, and capacity for respecting chiefs and customs. An anthropologist, former colonial administrator in French West Africa, and from 1909 to 1926 teacher of colonial government at the Ecole coloniale that was set up in 1887 to train colonial officials for sub-Saharan Africa and Indochina, he described his own experience as territorial officer in the French Sudan in a book titled *Broussard ou les Etats d'âme d'un colonial* (1922). He argued that Indirect Rule was not typically British, no more that direct rule, centralization, and attempts at assimilation were typically French. The same conclusions were made by two other teachers at the Ecole coloniale, Henri Labouret and Robert Delavignette, both former colonial officials and respectively an anthropologist (1927–1947) and director of the Ecole coloniale (193–1946). Delavignette stated that:

We are tempted to translate ideas on native policy into the classical debate: assimilation or association. In fact experience in Black Africa is full of contradictions and exchanges between these two theories. France, who is considered as assimilationist as she made some Senegalese people voters for her parliament, respected at the same time their Muslim personal status, didn't she? England, who colonizes without assimilation, anglicized black men from the Gold Coast by transforming them into collaborators in her plantations and trade, into clerks at the University of Achimota and opponents to Her Majesty's Government in Accra, didn't she? Assimilation or association? There is no definite choice between the two. Assimilation or association: both formulas are often combined and their dosage evolve with the dexterity of the actors concerned and with the course of events.²⁰

For Labouret, too, those comparisons were “a trend of collective mindset against which no one is able to fight.” “The English remained convinced that a complete policy of assimilation is still on the table in the Republican France (...). Following similar errors, our neighbors are persuaded that they were the first to invent in 1900 the principles of Indirect Rule to be applied in the septentrional provinces of Nigeria.”²¹ He himself, however, tried to show the contrary, especially in his book on Cameroon published in 1938 as a result of six months of field work under the patronage of the French Ministry of Education and the International Institute of African Languages and Civilisations. This work was meant to be presented to the tenth conference of the Hautes Etudes Internationales organized in Paris in

¹⁹ Maurice Delafosse, «Menus propos,» *Dépêche coloniale*, August 10, 1925.

²⁰ Robert Delavignette, *Service africain*, 4th ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), 87–88.

²¹ Henri Labouret, “Protectorat ou administration directe. Direct or indirect rule,” *Afrique française* (1934), 289.

1937, whose subject was the economic importance of the colonies and the peaceful resolution of international conflicts. This conference was convened at a time when German ambitions in Africa, especially on their former colonies (like Cameroon), were more and more threatening.²²

Interestingly, Perham and Labouret visited the same place, Cameroon, with the same intention, to study colonial administration and native policy on the ground. However, they returned with very different conclusions as to the similarities or differences between French and British methods of governing the ‘natives.’ Both knew each other and met: Perham invited him to a summer school that she organized in the period 1937–1938 at Oxford University, and they were both active members of the International Institute of African languages and civilizations in London. Like Delavignette and Mair, they actively participated in training institutions and programs for colonial administrators, i.e., the *Ecole coloniale* in France or the Colonial Administrative Service Courses organized in Oxford and Cambridge from the end of the 1920s. They also contributed largely to the development and teaching of a “science of colonial administration” whose purpose was to learn from other empires’ experiences. Implementation of native policy and colonial administration had to be studied in their day-to-day working, that is, mainly at the local level, where the colonial administrators dealt directly with ‘native’ societies. The approach had to be comparative: one had to compare the colonial principles and practices of the different colonial powers and see what worked. In theory, methods were inductive: colonial administration had to be analyzed in the different colonies through field work. In practice, however, a deductive and determinist approach was used on both sides to reach different conclusions. Britain’s liberal and aristocratic culture or ‘character’ led to Indirect Rule, while French Republicanism and universalism led to Direct Rule for the British authors. According to Perham, for example, “our tradition of local government, sympathy with aristocracy, our beliefs that institutions grow and are not made (Burke), our dislike of extreme and oppressive measures”²³ all led to Indirect Rule. “The further I carried the comparison (with the French) the more I realised that our system of indirect system is at its best the expression of our kind of liberalism as the French is of their very different kind. Or rather our system results from our conservatism with its sense of historic continuity and (respect) for tradition and partly from our liberalism with its respect for institution and wishes of the people.”²⁴ She concluded: “I think the French are temperamentally and politically unsuited to handle our methods of

²² Henri Labouret, *Le Cameroun*, Centre d’Etude de Politique Etrangère, travaux des groupes d’études, publication 6 (Paris: Hartman, 1938).

²³ Private Archives of Margery Perham (PAMP), Oxford Library, b 230, 18, 17.

²⁴ PAMP, box 230, 7, 21.

ruling through the chiefs.”²⁵ For French authors, elements in national characters could lead either to Indirect Rule or Direct Rule/assimilation: coming from a provincial background in Burgundy, Delavignette was proud to celebrate the “little French *patries*,” those regional cultures rooted in the souls of the countryside, against the French assimilationist tendencies of Paris.

It was not by pure chance that both Perham and Labouret chose Cameroon as their object of study to confirm their hypothesis. Cameroon, like Togo, Tanganyika, and Ruanda-Urundi, was a B Mandate, i.e., a former German colonial territory, which according to Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, were not “yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world.” They were to be ruled by the winners of the war, here, France and Britain, under the supervision of the League’s Permanent Mandates Commission—which included, among others, representatives of the mandate powers—and according to the League’s principles. These principles were quite imprecise and could lead to different interpretations.²⁶ They sanctioned the idea that colonies were not mere properties to be exploited, but were inhabited by peoples whose “well-being and development form a sacred trust of civilisation.” The main objective of the mandate governments was to assure this well-being through good government and, as the word “not yet” presumed, was to educate these peoples towards self-government, even though no deadline was set. In this sense, their rule had to be more educational and liberal than repressive and authoritarian. Still different interpretations could be possible as for the methods to be used. Education could take the form of the progressive introduction of democratic elections; or it could be translated into methods similar to Indirect Rule. Looking through the Mandates Commission’s minutes, one quickly realizes that the second interpretation did in fact prevail among its members. Indirect Rule was considered the most liberal and progressive way to govern natives: it meant to govern through their representatives, i.e., the traditional chiefs, which supposedly was the incarnation of a government by the people for the people. What went unnoticed was the fact that this kind of system was introduced in India as a conservative ploy to avoid any evolution towards a liberal parliamentary democracy.²⁷ The prestige of Lord Lugard, the so-called inventor of “Indirect Rule” and British representative to the Commission from 1922 to 1936, and the fact that he could orientate the debates of the Commission into this direction, largely contributed to this course of events.²⁸ The system of Indirect

²⁵ Margery Perham, *West African Passage: A journey through Nigeria, Chad, and the Cameroons, 1931-1932* (London, Boston: Peter Owen, 1983), 190.

²⁶ See Dimier, *Gouvernement*, 201–202. Pedersen, *Guardians*, elaborated further on this work.

²⁷ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

²⁸ See Dimier, *Gouvernement*, 201–202. Pedersen, *Guardians*, elaborated further on this work.

Rule was officially given recognition by the Commission in 1927²⁹ after a brilliant intervention at the eleventh session by Donald Cameron, another theoretician of the system and then governor of Tanganyika, who described Indirect Rule as a “democratic system.”³⁰ In these circumstances, to present French colonial administrators as incapable of Indirect Rule, as the British analysts did, was in fact to accuse them of being unable to rule in a liberal and educational way and to abide by the League of Nations principles. Mirroring the scientific controversy between Labouret and Perham, French representatives, for their part, were prompt to react and contradict these hypotheses.³¹ In the case of the Mandates Commission, the disagreement about possible differences or similarities between the systems of colonial administration similarly dealt with a specific mandate, French Cameroon, and gained in momentum in the 1930s, i.e., at a time when Germany was claiming back her former colonies, especially French Cameroon,³² and France and Britain were quarreling to decide which mandates, under French or British rule, would be sacrificed to appease Germany. As I remarked elsewhere, the fact that France did not send to the Commission representatives who could match Lugard’s influence and aura did not help to disavow the British version of facts.³³

The fact that both political representatives within the Mandates Commission and specialists in colonial administration engaged in the same controversy reveals the new legitimacy process engendered by the League of Nations mandate system in the 1920s, a process that involved the necessity of resorting to science.³⁴ By setting up some common principles officially accepted by the mandate powers and by

²⁹ Report on the work of the Commission during the 11th session, June 20–July 6, 1927, O.J. of the League of Nations, October 1927, submitted to the Council on September 8, 1927, 1259–60.

³⁰ Minutes of the Permanent Mandates Commission, 8th meeting, 11th session, June 27, 1927, *OJ of the L.N Debated of the P. M. C.*; C 348. M 122. 1927 VI, 62.

³¹ Minutes of the Permanent Mandates Commission, 10th meeting, 9th session, June 14, 1926, C 174. M 144. 1926 VI, 62–63, 78; 20th meeting, 9th session, June 21, 1926, 141; 28th meeting, 22nd session, November 24, 1932, C 772. M 364. 1932 VI, 204–207; 2nd meeting, 30th session, October 27, 1936, C 500. M. 313. 1936 VI, 22–23, 29–34. Annual report of the French government on the administration of the mandates in the Camerron territories, 1936 (Paris: Imprimerie Lahure, 1936), 42.

³² For more information on the German claims, see Philippe Essomba, *Le Cameroun entre la France et l’Allemagne, de 1919 à 1932*, Thèse pour le Doctorat, 3e cycle (histoire des relations internationales), Université des Sciences juridiques, politiques et sociales de Strasbourg, 1984, 49–54. See also Pedersen, *Guardians*.

³³ Dimier, *Gouvernement*, 206, 222; Dimier, “On good colonial government.” See also, Pedersen, *Guardians*.

³⁴ Only the B mandate is considered here. Great Britain was given Tanganyika and part of Cameroon and Togo. France was given the other parts of both of these territories. To have more information concerning the Mandate system, see *Le système des mandats, origines principes et applications*, Genève, Publication SDN, n°89 (1945).

which one could judge their government towards native peoples in their mandated territories, but also by extension in their colonies, the League made moral sanction and criticism easier, all the more so because these criticisms could be made publicly in a political forum, the Permanent Mandates Commission. As a supra-national organization, the Commission did not have any means to enforce the League principles and sanction possible infringements. Still, the mandate powers had to prove regularly to this Commission that they were governing their territories according to the League principles. The proofs given had to be real evidence, practical results, and facts presented in an annual report that included answers to a questionnaire devised by the Commission. In this context, it is worth noticing that Labouret and Perham were both connected with the League of Nations. As part of their research work and training, they both spent time looking through the Mandate Commission minutes and reports. Perham even went to Geneva and was later presented by Lord Lugard as a potential successor to Lord Hailey, the British representative to the Commission between 1936 and 1939. Labouret worked in the French Colonial Office, the *Direction des Affaires Politiques*, where he was responsible for the mandates during 1926–1927.

The legitimacy process in which they were involved could have led to greater co-operation between the scientists and politicians of both countries. Indeed, in some fields like health or food security for example, it led, in the 1940s especially, to some collaboration as a way to answer criticisms by the newly born UN organizations.³⁵ But in our case, it rather reinforced the rivalry between France and Great Britain, each fearing, and at the same time, fueling criticism that could undermine their own colonial rule.³⁶ The construction and political use of comparisons were part of that process and historical context.

Part II: Comparisons Recycled

One may have expected these comparisons to disappear with a new historical context, i.e., once colonization was over. But nothing of the sort happened. Rather, they resurfaced during 1963–1964, first in the works of two historians: Michael Crowder, a British historian specialized in African studies who had been teaching in several Nigerian universities (1968–1978) and who in 1964 was on a visiting fellowship at Berkeley University, in the USA; and Hubert Deschamps, himself a former colonial

³⁵ Pedersen, *Guardians*; Vincent Bonnet, *La pauvreté au Sahel: Du savoir colonial à la mesure internationale* (Paris: Karthala, 2011); Jessica Lynne Pearson, *The Colonial Politics of Global Health: France and the United Nations in Postwar Africa* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

³⁶ Albert Sarraut, *Grandeur et servitude coloniales* (Paris: Sagittaire, 1931), 120–21.

official in Madagascar and colonial governor, who had been teaching at the *Ecole coloniale* that was renamed *Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-mer* in 1945 and at the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques of Paris*, the newborn postwar institution meant to train the French political elite. In 1962, he was elected professor at the Sorbonne for the newly created chair in modern history of Africa. For Deschamps, “most of your [Lugards’] compatriots, with a refreshing naivety, imagined that assimilation has always been the unequivocal aim of the French colonization.”³⁷

Refuting this “clear Manichaeism,” Deschamps argued that “assimilation has rarely been the official colonial doctrine of France.”³⁸ Using, like his detractors, culturalist schemes, he admitted that this doctrine corresponds to “profound trends which are quite common among the French people,” most notably “logic reasoning” and “universalism,” typical of the eighteenth century. However, taking some distance from the same culturalist approach, he argued that this universalism was quickly replaced on the ground by the “experience of facts” met by colonial officials. “In Black Africa, wherever we found them, and except in rare case of open conflict or absence of clear traditions, we have kept them, enthroned them and made them our superior agents, like the English did and for the same reasons: they were useful for the conquest, the administration and the economy (...). A man as knowledgeable as Maurice Delafosse taught us at the *Ecole coloniale* a doctrine which was close to yours: safeguarding the native institutions while ensuring their evolution within their natural framework.”³⁹ He concluded by arguing that Britain itself did transfer to the newly independent states in Africa its parliamentary traditions with all their historical decorum: the mace, the wig, the speaker, and the loyalty to her Majesty. “This was the English type of assimilation.”⁴⁰ The same arguments would be developed later on in a massive book on Africa in the twentieth century that he wrote in collaboration with Jean Ganiage, himself professor at the Sorbonne from 1961 and the holder of the only existing French chair on the history of colonization.⁴¹

Engaging with Deschamps’s article, Crowder insisted that “there were such fundamental differences between the French and British systems [of colonial administration in Africa] that, even if both made use of ‘chiefs,’ primarily it is not possible to place the French system of native administration in the same category as British Indirect Rule. It is true that both powers had little alternative to the use

³⁷ Hubert Deschamps, “Et maintenant Lord Lugard?,” *Africa* 33, no 4 (1963), 294.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 296.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴¹ Jean Ganiage, “Hubert Deschamps et Odette Guitard,” *L’Afrique au XXI^{ème} siècle* (Sirey, 1966). In this book, he wrote the second part on West Africa. See more specifically *ibid.*, 316–19.

of existing political authorities as a means of governing their vast African empires, and in most cases, these authorities were headed by chiefs. What is important is the very different ways in which these authorities were used. The nature of the position and power of the chief in the two systems was totally different and as corollary, so were the relations between the chief and the political officer, who was inspired in each case by very different ideals.”⁴² After a lengthy demonstration and referring directly to Perham’s and Mair’s work, he concluded that “the French explicitly changed the very nature of the powers of the chiefs and that his functions were reduced to that of a mouthpiece of orders emanating from outside.” “In general, the French system of administration deliberately sapped the traditional powers of the chiefs in the interest of uniformity of administrative system.”⁴³ “The difference has much to do with difference in national character and political traditions. While few would disagree that the British were inspired by the concept of separated development in their African territories, there is still much debate as to how far France were inspired by the concept of assimilation even after its formal abandonment as official policy in favor of a policy of association.”⁴⁴

This controversy resurfaced at a time when in the 1960s a new question and battle of legitimacy appeared. The UN *Declaration* affirmed the right of all peoples to self-determination and proclaimed that *colonialism* should be brought to a speedy and unconditional end. As Deschamps himself noticed,⁴⁵ the Declaration for the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples adopted by the UN assembly in December 1960, and the following decolonization process posed a crucial question: which colonizing power better prepared African states for self-government and eventually for independence? Here as well, the British version seems to have prevailed, even among some French historians, at least those who were not specialists on West Africa.⁴⁶ There may be several reasons, or rather hypotheses, for this situation. As Carolyn Elkins has remarked, British officials and press during decolonization “carefully constructed [British] colonial image” contrasting it with “the brutal behavior of other European empires in Africa” and forgetting about

⁴² Michael Crowder, “Indirect Rule: French and British Style,” *Africa* 3, no 43 (1964), 197. Italics in the original.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 200–201.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁴⁵ Hubert Deschamps, *La fin des empires coloniaux* (Paris: PUF, 1950), 113.

⁴⁶ For some other examples, see Patrick Rostellini, *Histoire de France* (Paris: Hatier, 1990), 66, 80; Maurice Agulhon, *Histoire de France. Vol. 5: La République de 1880 à nos jours* (Paris: Hachette, 1990), 50–55, 231, 402–404; René Rémond, *Notre siècle, 1918–1998* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 94–95; Georges Duby and Robert Mandrou, *Histoire de la civilisation française, 17e–20e siècles*, vol. 2 (Paris: Colin, 1968), 340–42; Michel Mourre, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique d’histoire* (Paris: Bordas, 1986), 1066.

their own violence in Kenya.⁴⁷ Hence, the “narrative of the British empire as the all-defining model for all others’ remained prevalent.”⁴⁸ The large publicity that accompanied the horrors of the Algerian war of independence and, by contrast, the great capacity of the British government to hide similar facts about Kenya’s decolonization may have given new ammunition for this narrative.⁴⁹ It gave more credit to the thesis that France, because of its assimilation policy—which in fact was, at the political level, very limited in the case of Algeria,⁵⁰—was less able to prepare colonies for independence and that British Indirect Rule, also applied in Kenya.

This thesis is largely asserted by Jean Louis Miège, a French historian specialist in Morocco, lecturer at the University of Rabat in the period 1957–1961, and then professor at the University of Aix-Marseilles. In *Expansion européenne et décolonisation, de 1870 à nos jours*, European expansion and decolonization from 1870 to the present day, he remarked that “by tradition, the English system of Indirect Rule is opposed to the French system of assimilation and centralization,” an opposition that he does not question. “In France, the doctrine was that of assimilation, which should lead to the progressive creation of French departments [French administrative territories] in the colonies. (...) Despite diverse attempts, Direct Rule, in its various forms, remains the mark of French colonization.”⁵¹ Hence, “ill informed, a big proportion of the [French public] opinion stuck to the fiction of the assimilation ideal and only accepted independence because of the Algerian drama.” By contrast, “the very transformation of the Empire into Commonwealth, the development of the principle of trusteeship and *self-government* as dictated by Lugard prepared to independence” and helped the English public opinion to better accept this outcome.⁵²

Similarly, famous French historians like Georges Duby, member of the Académie Française and Professor at the Collège de France (1970–1991), argued that “at no point did the [French] political leaders seem to have interpreted the precursor signs preliminary of the revolts in the colonies. Faithful to the myth of assimilation and of a ‘greater France,’ they were not able to understand that the liberal reforms could only be appreciated if they were part of a process of

⁴⁷ Carolyn Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning. The Untold Story of British Gulag in Kenya* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 306.

⁴⁸ Hedinger and Héé, “Transimperial history,” 430.

⁴⁹ Elkins, *Reckoning*, chapter 9; Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ Adria Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism. Anti-colonial Protests in the French Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵¹ Jean-Louis Miège, *Expansion et décolonisation de 1870 à nos jours* 1st ed. (Paris: PUF, 1971), 220.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 332 (italics in the original).

independence.”⁵³ Maurice Crouzet, author of several books on world civilizational history, also argued that decolonization in the French Empire was initiated with “neither doctrine nor method.” Because the French “could not depart from the assimilationist ideal [...] there was no colonial policy in France between 1945 and 1960, only a series of compromises imposed by events to a Republic that remained late to react to evolutions which she was not able to anticipate, orientate or even perceive.” By contrast, Britain continuously referred to “a doctrine and method,” that of trusteeship, which meant “leaving the colonies when they would be able to administer themselves,” on the same model as that which was applied to the white dominions. This led to a peaceful evolution.⁵⁴ Henri Grimal, working on decolonization, developed the same argument.⁵⁵ In the British Empire, the “way to autonomy was cautious, controlled and led to a final outcome which was likely to satisfy the principle (of self-determination) and the interest of the metropolis.” Indirect Rule “created certain conditions in favor of political evolution.”⁵⁶ In the French Empire, he argued, controversy went on about the possibility of assimilation and the desirability of association. “The formula which was most frequently applied was much subjugation, very little autonomy and a hint of assimilation,” which led to “immobilism as a rule.”⁵⁷

The other factor that may have given long-term credit to the British version of facts may be the academic position of those who carried out those comparisons in the 1920s–30s and the fact that the English version of comparisons created in the 1960s–70s a large consensus among English-speaking historians. Besides, as noted by Daniel Hedinger and Nadine Heé, most books on empires after decolonization focused on the British Empire,⁵⁸ which may have given the English version a large audience. In this sense, the hierarchization of empires accompanied hierarchies of universities, knowledge, and languages during and after colonization.

On the British side, both Perham and Mair worked at prestigious, globally well-recognized universities. Their analysis was confirmed by Raymon Buell, professor at Harvard, who himself wrote his massive book, *the Native Problem in Africa*, after a survey of several months in Africa.⁵⁹ Well after decolonization, Perham’s work was further given large publicity by one of the few British historians specialized in British colonial administration, Antony Kirk Greene, a

⁵³ Georges Duby, *Histoire de la France. Les temps nouveaux, 1852 à nos jours* (Paris: Larousse, 1972), 200.

⁵⁴ Maurice Crouzet, *Le monde depuis 1945*, vol. 2 (Paris: PUF, 1973), 941–49, 964.

⁵⁵ Henri Grimal, *La décolonisation* (Paris: A. Colin, 1965), 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 55, 59.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁸ Hedinger and Heé, “Transimperial history,” 430.

⁵⁹ Raymon Leslie Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1928), 86, 270.

former colonial official in Nigeria who ended his career as professor in history at St Antony's College in Oxford University from 1967 to 1981.⁶⁰ The British version of comparisons was also relayed, sometimes with some nuances, by anglophone historians who worked on compared colonialism, like David K. Fieldhouse, the Vere Harmsworth Professorship of Imperial and Naval History at the University of Cambridge.

Fieldhouse's 1956 book, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth century*, which was in 1973 translated into French, juxtaposed the French and British systems of rule in West Africa, too.⁶¹ The latter, he argued, was based on decentralization and autonomy through Indirect Rule, which "allowed to non-Europeans to take part in their own administration without weakening the British control."⁶² "Total cultural assimilation," political uniformity and incorporation (based on the image of the Republic one and indivisible) and bureaucratic centralization from Paris were the ambitions and dogmas of the French Empire, even though practical difficulties forced the French to recognize the principles of association as an "expedient" and "mediocre substitute."⁶³ Centralized control "was efficient"⁶⁴ and "native administration" directly "derived from the assimilation ideal,"⁶⁵ which led to an autocratic form of government. The author admits that, like in the British Empire, varieties of administrative practices were tried in the different colonies. In West Africa, however, Direct Rule, at least the subjection of the remaining chiefs to the colonial administrators who appointed them according to their needs and not the hereditary principles, "constituted the norms."⁶⁶ Whether Direct or Indirect Rule, neither style of colonial government led to a sufficient preparation for independence, he concluded, however.

Similar conclusions were drawn by Lewis Gann and by Peter Duignan (a Hoover Institute Fellow) who in the period 1969–1974 edited the five-volume *Colonialism in*

⁶⁰ Antony Kirk Greene, "Le roi est mort, vive le roi," in *Etats et société en Afrique francophone*, ed. Daniel Bach and Antony Kirk Greene (Paris: Economica, 1993), 13–33. Also: Antony Kirk Greene, "Entente cordiale ou enquête coloniale. Margery Perham hands down her suspended judgement," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37 (2009), 119–26; *The Principles of Native Administration in Nigeria: Selected Documents 1900–1947*, edited and introduced by A. H. M. Kirk-Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

⁶¹ David Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1956).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 258. His bibliography includes books by Lugard, Perham, Mair, but also Deschamps for the French part.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 274.

Africa, 1870–1960 series with Cambridge University Press.⁶⁷ They admit that both French and British in Africa displayed “assimilationist tendencies,”⁶⁸ but concerning the use of chiefs, they summarized Crowder’s version, even though they quote in the footnotes Deschamps’ article as well. They also concluded that both France and Britain engaged in “decolonization unplanned and uncoordinated,” but after decolonization, “the various French African leaders on the whole developed greater fellow feeling [with the French] than their counterparts in British Africa. (...) French culture imprint remained profound.” This was due to the fact, among others, that “their countries had been administered under a common scheme in the past. (...) The French culture was so pervasive that French speaking African leaders often encountered great difficulty in meeting British Africans on a common ground.”⁶⁹ This argument would be developed later on by British officials and scholars, as we shall see, which led to the idea of French “exceptionality” in relation to African countries and elites.⁷⁰ This idea, as the British version of comparisons, was also conveyed by anglophone elites of former British colonies in Africa. Daniel Bach, a French political scientist specialized in Africa, summarized the situation well in the introduction of a volume that he edited with Anthony Kirk Greene. While the latter insisted in the same volume on the usual difference between French and British colonial rule,⁷¹ Bach remarked that “referring to his contacts with Francophones, the great Yoruba politician (Chief Awolowo) found himself choked by the ‘assimilation’ of the Francophone elites and their French cultural referent, all the while forgetting he had just been participating in a ceremonial which was as much British as the toga he wore, but also that more generally his status as lawyer meant he was wearing a curled wig when he presented himself among his peers.”⁷²

More generally, the British version of comparison was given a supplementary scientific aura by anglophone specialists of West Africa, especially Cameroon. Consider Victor Le Vine, author of a major book on Cameroon from mandate to independence published by the University of California Press; Anthony Asiwaju, professor at Lagos University from 1962 and one of the most prominent Nigerian historians; Peter Geschière, professor of Anthropology at the University of Leiden and Amsterdam in the period 1988–2002; Shelon Gellar on Senegal and Philippe

⁶⁷ Lewis Gann and Peter Duignan, *Burden of Empire: An Appraisal of Western Colonialism in Africa South of Sahara* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968), 218–22.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 222; for a reference to Crowder’s and Deschamps’ article quoted above, see *ibid.*, 218.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 313, 341.

⁷⁰ Tony Chafer, “Franco-African relations: no longer exceptional,” *African Affairs* 101 (2002), 343–63.

⁷¹ Greene, “Roi.”

⁷² Daniel Bach, “Introduction,” in *Etats et société en Afrique francophone*, 3.

Mawhood, himself a former colonial official in West Africa.⁷³ Delafosse, Labouret, and Delavignette are rarely quoted by these authors, and when they are, their work is misinterpreted. For example, Shelton Gellar's book on Senegal argued that Delavignette hated the traditional chiefs because they perpetuated autocratic rule.⁷⁴ Ganna and Duignan quoted him to argue that a uniform organization was implemented in all African French colonies: the exact contrary of what Delavignette showed!⁷⁵ The only historian who wrote extensively on the French colonial service and the Ecole Coloniale, the American, William Cohen, confirmed that "the British colonial service, which was imbued with the tradition of the gentry had a nostalgic sympathy for the local chiefs, while the French colonial administrators, most of whom came from the middle and lower middle classes had a bourgeois disdain for feudalism and monarchism. The national traditions of the services were very different: the English believe in the virtues of local rules; in France local rule was considered a centrifugal force threatening the unity of the nation. In France, until recently, centralization has been considered a good and local rule a perilous system."⁷⁶ The only anglophone scholar who began to question that version was Raymond Betts,⁷⁷ whose 1955 PhD from Grenoble University, *La doctrine coloniale française entre 1890 et 1910: de l'Assimilation à l'Association*, was in 1961 translated into English as *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory*.

In France itself, Bett's conclusions were seconded by the right wing historian, Raoul Girardet, Professor at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris from 1957 and author in 1972 of a major synthesis, *L'idée coloniale en France: 1871-1962 (The French*

⁷³ Anthony Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule, 1889-1945. A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism* (London: Longman, 1976); Sheldon Gellar, *Structural Changes and Colonial Dependency. Senegal, 1885-1945* (London: Sage Publication, 1976), 24-25; Peter Geshiere, *Village Communities and the State. Changing Relations among the Maka of South-Eastern Cameroon since the Colonial Conquest* (London: Kegan Paul, 1982), 152; Victor Le Vine, *The Cameroons from Mandates to Independence*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 89; Philippe Mawhood, "Applying the French model in Cameroon," in *Local Government in the Third World*, ed. Philippe Mawhood 2nd ed. (Pretoria: African Institute of South Africa, 1993), 187-210.

⁷⁴ Gellar, *Structural Changes*, 24-25; see also Aristide Zolberg, *One Party Government in the Ivory Coast* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 96.

⁷⁵ Gann and Duignan, *Burden of Empire*, 218.

⁷⁶ William Cohen, "The French colonial service in West Africa," in *France and Britain in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, ed. Gifford Prosser and Louis Roger (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 497. See also Cohen, *Rulers of Empire: the French Colonial Service in Africa* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Publications, 1971).

⁷⁷ Raymond Betts, *La doctrine coloniale française entre 1890 et 1910: de l'Assimilation à l'Association* (Thèse pour le Doctorat, Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Grenoble, 1955).

colonial idea: 1871-1972).⁷⁸ Girardet was one of the few French historians during the 1960s–70s to refer to Delavignette, Delafosse, and Deschamps' work.⁷⁹ In his book however, Delavignette's work is mostly used to describe colonialism as a humanist and legitimate project that should have been defended. While a resistant during World War II, Girardet had supported the Organisation Armée Secrète against the independence of Algeria. In the context of the polarization of historians around the Algerian war, quoting colonial officials like R. Delavignette may have been most unwelcome and considered as inappropriate or biased by those who held more radical views (Charles André Julien) or centrist positions (Charles Robert Ageron, University Paris XII).⁸⁰ In any case, it was unlikely to give credit to Delavignette's work.

Besides, the legitimacy and intellectual influence of Delafosse, Labouret, and Delavignette may have been limited by the fact that they taught at the *Ecole coloniale*, a professional institution largely detached from French universities that disappeared during decolonization. Thanks to Deschamps, their version of the facts reached the Sorbonne. But one may note that the main French historians working on colonization were specialists of North Africa, and hence unlikely to quote material from Cameroon or West Africa. A case in point was Charles André Julien—the holder, in France, of a chair specialized in colonial history, at the Sorbonne (1947–1961) and a famous anti-colonialist, he specialized in the Maghreb.⁸¹ So did his successors, Ganiage, Miège, and Ageron.⁸² Those who, like Henri Brunschwig, taught more broadly on the French Empire—in his case at the *Ecole coloniale* in the 1940s and then at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris—focused on the expansion period of the colonies (till 1914) and on decolonization.⁸³ In 1963, Brunschwig noted that few critical works existed on the period in between, that is on colonial administration:

⁷⁸ Raoul Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France: 1871-1962* (Paris: Table Ronde, 1972). He does not quote Betts in this book, however. Labouret is not quoted probably because he collaborated during World War II.

⁷⁹ Girardet, *Idée*, 159–60 185, 320.

⁸⁰ As Catherine Coquery Vidrovitch noted, the political position of the main French historians who worked on colonization just after decolonization ranged from conservatism (Miège, Ganiage, Girardet) to these more radical views: Coquery Vidrovitch, *Enjeux politiques de l'histoire coloniale* (Marseille: Agone, 2009), 27.

⁸¹ Charles André Julien, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine 1. La conquête et les débuts de la colonisation 1827-1871* (Paris: PUF, 1964); *Histoire de l'Afrique blanche* (Paris: PUF, 1966); *Une pensée anticoloniale* (Paris: Sindbad, 1976).

⁸² Jean Ganiage, *Les origines du protectorat français en Tunisie* (Paris: PUF, 1959); Jean Louis Miège, *Le Maroc* (Paris: Arthaud, 1952, 1956); Charles Robert Ageron, *Politiques coloniales au Maghreb* (Paris: PUF, 1973 [English: *Colonial Politics in Maghreb*]); *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine (1871-1954)* (Paris: PUF, 1979 [English: *History of Contemporary Algeria 1871-1954*]).

⁸³ Henri Brunschwig, *Mythes et réalités de l'impérialisme colonial français* (Paris: A. Colin 1960); idem, *L'avènement de l'Afrique Noire* (Paris: A. Colin, 1963).

the only books that he quoted were anglophone, including Lord Hailey's *African Survey* (1938), a classic on the reform of the British colonial administration.⁸⁴

Last but not least, historians who after Deschamps worked on Tropical Africa, like Coquery Vidrovitch, Professor at the university of Paris VII from 1971 to 2001, who in the 1970s was one of the young specialists on African history whose work since then has been recognized internationally, hardly referred to Delafosse, Labouret, and Delavignette. Her view about the differences between French and British colonial administration is much more nuanced than Miège's, for example.⁸⁵ But she only used Delavignette to explain the absolute power of the *Commandant de Cercle* (District Officer) and hence the coercive aspect of the French colonial state.⁸⁶ Jacques Lombard, an anthropologist and sociologist recruited in 1965 as lecturer at the University of Dakar and adjunct director of the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), quotes Labouret to support his own argument about the arbitrary nomination of the traditional chiefs in the French West African Empire; he thereby confirmed the distinction between a French doctrine based on assimilation/Direct Rule and the British doctrine of Indirect Rule. Even if he and others, like Gérard Gonac, Law Professor at the Sorbonne from 1987, admits that in practice both empires used Direct and Indirect rule, they tend to give credit to the British version.⁸⁷ Not before the end of the 1990s was Delafosse, Delavignette, and Labouret's work rediscovered by a new generation of French historians,⁸⁸ after a twenty-year period of relative absence of colonial studies in France.⁸⁹ A renewed interest in

⁸⁴ Brünshwig, (1963), 209.

⁸⁵ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Afrique Noire. Permanences et ruptures* (Paris: Payot, 1985), 117–20. See also Daniel Bourmaud, *Histoire Politique du Kenya. Etat et pouvoir local*, (Paris: Karthala, 1988), 814; Jean Suret Canale, "La fin de la chefferie en Guinée," *Journal of African history* 7 (1966), 461; Bach, "Introduction," 3.

⁸⁶ Coquery-Vidrovitch, *Afrique Noire*, 126. She was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington D.C. in 1987, at the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton University in 1992, and at the Humanities Research Center, University of Canberra at the University of Canberra in 1995.

⁸⁷ Jacques Lombard, *Autorités traditionnelles et pouvoirs européens en Afrique Noire* (Paris: Presses FNSP, 1967), 36; Gérard Gonac, ed., *Les institutions administratives des Etats francophones d'Afrique Noire* (Paris: Economica, 1979), 95.

⁸⁸ Jean-Loup Amselle and Emmanuelle Sibeud, ed., *Delafosse. Entre orientalisme et ethnographie: l'itinéraire d'un africaniste (1870-1926)* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1998); Bernard Mouralis and Anne Piriou, ed., *R. Delavignette, (1896-1976) savant et politique* (Paris: Karthala, 2003). I contributed to both these volumes.

⁸⁹ On this point, see the very good Coquery Vidrovitch, *Enjeux*.

colonial history by anglophone historians like Alica Conklin, Frederick Cooper, and John Hargreaves led to further developments on this front.⁹⁰

The last factor which may have contributed to maintaining the British version of those comparisons alive may have been their repetitive use, for political reasons, by French and British actors. For example, they were instrumentalized by diverse French politicians in more recent debates about policies dealing with migrants. In the 2017 presidential election campaign, the extreme-right politician, Marion Maréchal Lepen, defended the Republican principle of assimilation, against what she considered the failed anglophone experience of multiculturalism: migrants have to fully accept their integration into the French culture or leave. By contrast, Alain Juppé, from the right wing, Union Pour un Mouvement Populaire, defended a policy of “integration” within a French nation united around the Republican principles but diverse culturally speaking; he took the Commonwealth, and especially Canadian laws, as his example.⁹¹ In both cases, comparisons with the so-called anglophone model, deriving from Britain’s colonial past experiences, was used to defend or criticize current domestic French policies. Some academics working on French migration policies also used them,⁹² referring to colonial past experiences as a determinant factor in explaining the perpetuation of assimilationist Republican ideals and practices. Like in the old colonial debates, they have been in turn criticized for oversimplifying the reality of policies which had been more complex than purely assimilationist and constructed in specific contexts.⁹³

⁹⁰ Fred Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize. The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); John Hargreaves, “La décolonisation, styles français et britanniques,” in *Etats et société en Afrique francophone*, 11–24. See also later works by E. Foster, *Faith in Empire: Religion, Politics and Colonial Rule in French Senegal, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily L. Osborne, and Richard L. Roberts, ed., *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

⁹¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2016/09/14/l-identite-heureuse-histoire-d-une-formule-devenue-une-marque-de-fabrique_4997377_4854003.html; <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2015/02/03/25002-20150203ARTFIG00176-marion-marchal-le-pen-valide-la-theorie-du-grand-remplacement.php>. See also the debate: Lepen against Juppé, October 2, 2014, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4yeqbn>.

⁹² See for example: Elisabeth Buettner, *Europe after empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). See also the chapter by James F. Hollifield, “France: Republicanism and the limits of immigration control,” in *Controlling Immigration. A Global Perspective*, ed. Waynes A. Cornelius et al. (Stanford: Stanford University, 2004), 184–214.

⁹³ See remarks and commentaries on James F. Hollifield’s chapter by Charles P. Gomez, *Controlling Immigration*, 214–18. See also Mary D. Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), which questions the assimilationist tendencies in French migration policies during colonial times.

Another field in which the British version of colonial comparisons resurfaced under new disguises is development, in the context of the EEC and the 1975 Lomé convention signed with the African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries. This convention succeeded the former Yaoundé Convention concluded by the EEC in 1963 with former French and Belgian colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa. It included Commonwealth territories, i.e., ex-British colonies in Tropical Africa, the Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP). Both conventions comprised trade agreements and a European Development Fund whose aim was to finance development projects proposed by the ACP states. The European Development Fund (EDF) was directly paid by the member states and run by the supranational body of the EEC, the European Commission. The functioning of the EDF and the way that projects were appraised by the European Commission remained a matter of permanent controversy between the fonctionnaires of the European Commission and those of the UK Overseas Development Administration (or Ministry) (ODM),⁹⁴ which managed UK development aid. The latter repeatedly criticized what it considered to be a mismanagement of the fund, arguing that projects were chosen for political reasons rather than for their possible role in alleviating poverty, one of the aims of the Lomé Convention. The criteria, they said, were secret and had nothing to do with projects' potential social and economic impact. Since the EDF was built in the 1960s under the direction of Jacques Ferrandi, a former French colonial official who became director of the EDF, the British concluded that the French "must bear a considerable responsibility for the practices which became established under EDF I to III, under Ferrandi's direction (...) The problem stems from the notoriously different French concept of the relationship between donor and recipient. The French expect and, on the whole, receive a political quid pro quo from 'their' ACP countries. They are therefore more ready to go along with the political demands of the latter"⁹⁵ or even to orient these demands in a very directive way, as remarked by the High Commissioner in Kenya in the quotation introducing this chapter. This kind of new Direct Rule was meant "to maintain good relations with the ACP governments in order to preserve stability and safeguard supplies of raw materials: they [the French within the European Commission] are simply not much interested in the quality of the projects,"⁹⁶ meaning here the quality in terms of potential social and economic impact.

⁹⁴ Véronique Dimier, *The invention of A European Development Aid Bureaucracy: Recycling Empire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), chapter 5, 6. This agency became a full-fledged ministry under the Labour government in 1964 (ODM), and under the Conservatives was folded into the FCO as ODA, then went through various institutional re-organizations.

⁹⁵ AFCO,9/426, letter from DJE Ratford to Broomfield, August 23, 1977.

⁹⁶ AFCO 9/426, note by Baxter (ODM), August 77: brief for the Minister's meeting with Mr Pronk, Netherland Minister for development cooperation, August 29, 77.

Making these comparisons was a strategic device for ODM fonctionnaires. As the UK development budget was used for both domestic and international aid, they had an interest in criticizing the EDF to preserve their own budget lines and maintain their legitimacy. They were helped by diverse scholars, notably from the Overseas Development Institute,⁹⁷ who tried to demonstrate that the British did development in Africa very differently from the French and indeed much better than them. Not by chance, the main case that Adrian Hewitt used in the 1970s to exemplify his viewpoint was the Cameroon and the Trans-Cameroon project, a railway project started during colonial times and resumed in the 1960s through a mix of French/US/EDF funding. He argued that “the net benefits to Cameroon of this allocation of EDF funds (...) are extremely slim, if one disregards the political objective of physically integrating the North with the rest of the country (...). Why then was so much allocated to railways, with the approval of the EDF committee?” The answer was that such projects reinforced the political status quo of “a new, uncertain African government, endorsed by France but not authorized by plebiscite according to the normal UN rules for trust territories, fighting a civil war in the Bamiléké area, and committed to integrating over one million people in an area previously administered by a wholly foreign power, Britain, into the fabric of a Yaoundé-dominated Cameroon.” “Judged against the current criteria of aid effectiveness (sustained economic development and increases in local administrative competence and improvement in the lot of the poor) the EDF aid allocation mechanism seems to have missed the mark, predominantly because it failed to adapt to new circumstances and new development priorities.”⁹⁸ At a time when the legitimacy of donors (some of which were former imperial powers) was increasingly linked to projects’ potential effectiveness and to more and more precise and measurable criteria as defined by experts like Hewitt, the World Bank, or UN agencies,⁹⁹ the old tendency to compare, judge, and valorize oneself at the expense of others resurfaced and became again part of the political strategies at the national and international level.

In the case of the ODM and the EDF, these political strategies were undermined by a disturbing fact, however. “Some of the projects that we [the ODM] have put forward on behalf of British dependencies have been just as bad as those put [forward] by the French.”¹⁰⁰ Behind these “inconsistencies” lay the necessity, for other British ministries, especially the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to satisfy their clients amongst British

⁹⁷ The ODI was largely financed by the ODA/ODM.

⁹⁸ Adrian Hewitt, “The European Development Fund as a development agent: some results of EDF aid to Cameroon,” *ODI Review* 2 (1979), 51–55.

⁹⁹ See on the setting up of these criteria by the UN from the 1950s and onwards and the reaction of colonial powers like France: Bonnacase, *Pauvreté*; Lynn Pearson, *Colonial Politics*.

¹⁰⁰ AFCO 9/427, letter from Baxter to Bridger, June 26, 1978.

former colonial and overseas territories. They also wished for Britain “to maintain good relations with developing countries in order to preserve stability and safeguard the supply of raw materials.”¹⁰¹ Eventually, the British Permanent Representation in Brussels asked ODM officials “not to exaggerate the difference between our approach and that of our partners”¹⁰² for the sake of a better collaboration with the European Commission and the French there, but also for the sake of British reputation.

Indeed, comparison in this case was a double-edged sword, as officials in the Commission could easily reverse them, insisting on similarities. As an ODM official put it, “I am concerned that in the eyes of the Commission and other member states our position in the EDF Committee may be becoming weaker as a result of what they would see as inconsistencies. On two occasions recently the Commission has been able to point up instances of UK bilateral aid projects where we have failed to adhere to the very principles that we press for in the EDF Committee. I do not think there is anything we can do about this. We can only hope that the majority of ODM projects do in fact fully demonstrate our policy aims, e.g., good management, economic justification, benefit to the poorest, etc. If the Commission are able to find other instances of ODM bilateral practices falling short of ODM policy our credibility to the EDF committee is undoubtedly going to be quite seriously undermined.”¹⁰³

Conclusion

Colonial comparisons could be elastic in time and space as they served old and new political purposes. Stressing or minimizing differences formed part of legitimacy battles that accompanied the internationalization of the colonial debate. These tactics survived decolonization as new battles of legitimacy arose that were linked to international development or home policies towards migrants. As a matter of fact, the 1930s controversy between French and British specialists in colonial administration that resurfaced during decolonization between academics specialized in West Africa, like Crowder and Deschamps, was part of that process. The very fact that post-colonial historians, including French ones, have forgotten about this controversy, may make us forget to what extent these comparisons were constructed and should be handled with caution. In the same way, referring to national culture or character as a superior entity that persists over time and could explain differences or similarities in colonial policies of the past and in decolonization

¹⁰¹ AFCO 426, letter from Maitland (UK Permanent Representation in Brussels) to Preston, (Permanent Secretary, ODA), September 29, 1977.

¹⁰² Maitland to Preston.

¹⁰³ AFCO 9/427, letter from Sands Smith to Baxter, June 23, 1978.

processes as in post-colonial experiences of the present, may be misleading. It may marginalize other, more important explanations linked to socio-economic contexts. If nations are “imagined communities,” as Benedict Anderson¹⁰⁴ famously argued, then national cultures were as constructed as the comparisons themselves. This may result in a broader question: to what extent were comparisons part of the construction of national identities, either French, British, or those of the post-independent nation-states in Africa or elsewhere?¹⁰⁵

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¹⁰⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

¹⁰⁵ Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons. Nationalism, South Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998).

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