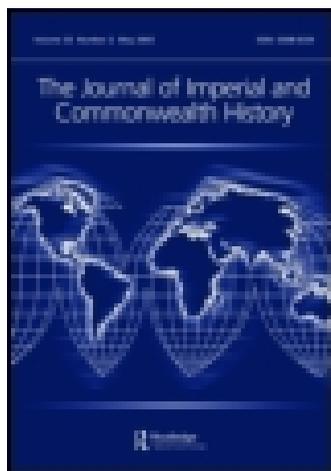


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Le syndrome Foccart: la politique française en Afrique, de 1959 à nos jours by Jean-Pierre Bat

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BOOK REVIEW

Le syndrome Foccart: la politique française en Afrique, de 1959 à nos jours

JEAN-PIERRE BAT

Paris, Folio, 2012

828 pp., ISBN: 9782070356751 (€14.30 paperback)

Le Syndrome Foccart examines the official and unofficial links woven by French politicians and the ruling elite of former French colonies in Africa between 1959 and 2011. In this book, Jean-Pierre Bat has mined the archives of the French presidents since 1959 and those of Jacques Foccart to analyse in detail the personal relationships underpinning *Françafrique*. His main argument is that Foccart was at the origin of a nebulous network which tried to keep French influence intact in Africa after decolonisation. Carefully cultivating his image of power behind the throne, Foccart created methods, which, according to the author, prevailed until the end of the 1990s.

Bat, who trained as an archivist and an historian, has a very thorough knowledge of his primary sources as he is currently in charge of the presidents' files at the French National Archives. This explains how *Le syndrome Foccart* is able patiently to reconstruct the day-to-day mechanisms of the Franco-African networks. This is a particular strength of Bat's book as most studies examine only infamous events such as the Elf case or Angolagate by just connecting them to the loose concept of *Françafrique*. In his monograph, the author skilfully exposes the involvement of the postcolonial ruling elite of France and its former African colonies while examining the role played by French agents lurking in the shadows of the Fifth Republic.

Largely influenced by the history of French domestic political life, Bat divided his study into three chronological sections. The first one deals with the period when Foccart was secretary for African and Malagasy Affairs at the Élysée (1959–74). This period was essential as it saw the emergence of official and unofficial methods which became the basis of Foccart's system until his death. Foccart or 'Monsieur Afrique', Bat argues, did not have a unified African policy as he dealt with each newly independent African country on a case-by-case basis. By promoting personal links between himself, his agents and African presidents, Foccart's ultimate goal was to preserve France interests in its former colonies. For him, the end justified the means and the '*pax gallica*' had to be imposed through secret service agents (SDECE) sent to African countries to support friendly regimes (e.g. Raymond Bichelot

in Ivory Coast) or to instigate coups. Stationed at Abidjan, Jean Mauricheau-Beaupré embodied this pragmatic and cynical policy as he not only sent agents to the former French colonies but also oversaw mercenaries fighting in Katanga or Biafra. This section gives many details about Foccart and his networks but certainly more could be written about Charles de Gaulle's personal responsibilities in this neocolonial system.

The second section of Bat's book (1974–94) shows how Valéry Giscard d'Estaing still played the role of '*gendarme d'Afrique*' as he used the French army to support his allies and continued to develop political tools already conceived during Georges Pompidou's presidency (Franco-African summits and Francophonie). The new president had a different style from his predecessors though. He was, for example, responsible for the end of Foccart's official position at the Elysée (which did not mean the end of his officious role). In fluid prose, the author analyses the personal role played by Giscard in the rise of Jean-Bédél Bokassa as emperor of the Central African Republic or the 1970s Chadian civil war and its 1980s aftermath. The 1981 election of François Mitterrand, the first French socialist president, did not radically change the methods used in Africa. Although Foccart's networks disappeared from the political scene, the appointment of the president's son, Jean-Christophe Mitterrand, as secretary for African and Malgasy affairs, revealed once again the importance of personal relationships in the conduct of French politics in Africa (he was nicknamed '*Papamadit*' or '*Daddytoldme*').

Quite strikingly, the third section of the book (1994–2011) follows the rhythm of French political life. For example, the author discusses economic policies decided in Paris (CFA Franc, cooperation and so on) and the 1990s trials (Elf, Angola). Bat also rightly mentions the end of the Cold War as one of the defining moments in the political life of many African countries but his analysis remains focused on the French political scene. For example, the third section shows how the 1994 Biarritz summit demonstrated the new French commitment to multi-party democracy in Africa in exchange of continued military support. It might have been interesting to learn more about African reactions to these declarations. Having said that, Bat also provides a carefully written summary of the French involvement in Rwanda before, during and after the 1994 genocide. This chapter can also be read as a useful analysis of the ongoing French political and intellectual debates on the Rwandan genocide. Old habits die hard and the return of Foccart as Jacques Chirac's special advisor in 1995 shows how ancient methods were still used until Foccart's death in 1997. This period was nonetheless the beginning of a new era as the Ivorian crisis proved that French politicians and Nicolas Sarkozy in particular had to re-invent French politics in Africa.

Many historians will read *Le Syndrome Foccart* as it is an incredible mine of information on *Françafrique*. Specialists in intelligence studies will find this book fascinating as it retraces the history of French intelligence agencies but also of men who were accountable only to Foccart. Scholars interested in French imperial history will also find it a very useful tool for understanding a complex political context in relation to French policies in Africa. An important final point is that this book is affordable

as it was published as a paperback. For those willing to read Bat's argument in English, he has recently made a contribution to *Francophone Africa at Fifty*.

Reference

Bat, Jean-Pierre. 'Jacques Foccart: Eminence Grise for African Affairs.' In *Francophone Africa at Fifty*, edited by Tony Chafer and Alexander Keese. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013.

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