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Reading the BUMIDOM along the Archival Grain

Abstract: This article uses Ann Stoler's methodology of reading along the archival grain to examine a selection of records held in the Archives départementales de la Guadeloupe about the BUMIDOM (Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer). The Bureau was in operation between 1963 and 1982 and brought people from Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and French Guiana to work in mainland France. Following Stoler's methodology, I examine the written documents and correspondence of the BUMIDOM administrators which reveal the Bureau to be a highly regulated and controlled institution. The Bureau acted as a means for the government to assert control over its citizens from the overseas departments, and it thus illustrates the mechanics of biopower as theorized by Michel Foucault. The article demonstrates that significant insights about the BUMIDOM can be gained by examining colonial archives as what Stoler describes as 'condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources'.[1]

Keywords: BUMIDOM, migration, French Caribbean, biopower, coloniality

On 23 April 1963, the BUMIDOM (Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer) was formally established by Reunionese député (and former prime minister) Michel Debré. This migration scheme was in operation between 1963 and 1982 and brought approximately 160,000 people from Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and French Guiana to work in mainland France.[2] The Bureau was created for numerous overlapping economic, demographic, and political reasons. High birth rates and unemployment rates in the overseas departments were putting pressure on economic resources, while mainland France needed a workforce to rebuild infrastructure following World War II. For many people living on the islands, however, the political aspect was more salient. As Kristen Stromberg Childers shows, they believed that the French government specifically encouraged young people to work in mainland France to restore control over immigration and to reduce demands for independence among the politically-engaged youth; a worrying phenomenon for the government as it had already lost many of its colonies in Africa and Asia during the 1940s and 50s.[3] Prospective migrants had to apply to be given state assistance for their passage, and this application took the form of a 'dictée' and 'calcul' tests, character tests, and a medical examination. They also had to specify whether they wanted to join a particular company through direct recruitment, enrol in a training scheme, or join their family through the family reunification programme. Once their application was accepted by the Bureau, they received a 'bon de transport' which enabled them to travel one-way to the metropole by plane or boat. Upon their arrival they were taken to the BUMIDOM office on Rue Crillon in the fourth arrondissement of Paris. They received a small amount of money before travelling to their workplace or training centre, but for many, this work was low-paid and in sectors at the bottom

[1] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 20.
[2] As Myriam Paris points out, a similar number migrated from the French Caribbean to mainland France beyond the constraints of the BUMIDOM scheme, assisted by family or friends who had already settled there. See Myriam Paris, '"Contre tous les pouvoirs": le Militantisme intersectionnel de féministes réunionnaises émigrées en France (années 1960–1970)', *Revue d'histoire*, 146.2 (2020), pp. 95–107, p. 96.
[3] Kristen Stromberg Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace: National Identity, Decolonization, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 178–79.

of the social hierarchy, such as transportation and the domestic service sector. They also had difficulties finding housing, as many landlords and housing agencies refused to deal with Black Antillean tenants.[4] Many settled in Paris and Île-de-France, leading Martinican anthropologist Alain Anselin to describe the capital as 'la troisième île' of the French Caribbean, although Caribbean communities also emerged in other large urban centres such as Marseille and Lyon.[5]

In October 2022, I travelled to Guadeloupe to immerse myself in the Archives départementales de la Guadeloupe, as part of a larger project on the history and cultural memory of the BUMIDOM. These archives are located in the small commune of Gourbeyre, just outside the administrative capital of Basse-Terre on Basse-Terre island. Months earlier, I had applied for a 'dérogation' to be able to access a selection of the personal dossiers of Guadeloupeans who had migrated through the BUMIDOM, with the hope of learning more about individual trajectories of migration. These dossiers have already been important sources of information for historians and social scientists in France and the French Caribbean, and Stephanie Condon, Monique Milia-Marie-Luce, and Sylvain Pattieu, among others, have used these personal files to analyse the gendered and racialized experiences of BUMIDOM participants from the perspective of the individuals themselves.[6] I chose to look at a selection of dossiers from 1966 to 1967, 1977 to 1978, 1976 to 1977, 1977 to 1978, 1982 to 1983, and 1988 to 1999, thus focusing on the beginning, middle, and end-points of the BUMIDOM operations, as well as examining files dating from the period after the BUMIDOM had officially closed down in 1982. I sought to investigate whether the application process changed over time, and whether there were significant differences in the process when the Agence national de travail (ANT) was created in 1982, following the closure of the BUMIDOM. The 'dérogation' was eventually approved, a significant success not only because of the lengthy process of applying for the exemption, but also given the ways in which France carefully guards its colonial records.[7] Examining this material, it was fascinating to see correspondence between prospective migrants and BUMIDOM officials about the application process, and to trace the personal stories of people who were willing to give up their homes and their families in search of the 'better life' they had been promised across the Atlantic. Yet what also struck me was that in these boxes, nestled between the dossiers, was evidence of correspondence between officials based in the different BUMIDOM offices, either in Guadeloupe itself or in mainland France. In this correspondence, the officials not only discussed specific details about the situation of individual migrants and their applications, but they also raised practical questions about the operation of the Bureau as a whole. Furthermore, this evidence emphasized the coloniality of the BUMIDOM project in surprising ways.

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[4] For a discussion of the impacts of the BUMIDOM on housing policies, see Sylvain Pattieu, 'The BUMIDOM in Paris and its Suburbs: Contradictions in a State Migration Policy, 1960s–1970s', *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 10.1 (2017), pp. 12–24.

[5] Alain Anselin, *L'Émigration antillaise en France: la troisième île* (Paris: Karthala, 1990), p. 8.

[6] See, for example, Stephanie Condon, 'Entre stratégies individuelles et stratégies de l'État: le genre de l'émigration antillaise dans les années 60', *Clio: Femmes, genre, histoire*, 51 (2020), pp. 119–41; Monique Milia-Marie-Luce, 'De l'outre-mer au continent: étude comparée de l'émigration portoricaine et antillo-guyanaise de l'après-guerre aux années 60' (unpublished doctoral thesis, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 2002); and Sylvain Pattieu, 'Un traitement spécifique des migrations d'outre-mer: le BUMIDOM (1963–1982) et ses ambigüités', *Politix*, 116 (2016), pp. 81–113.

[7] Fabienne Chamelot explains that even though France passed a law in 2008 stipulating that archival documents over fifty years old had to be made public, a subsequent law was passed in 2011 revealing that top-secret documents had to be declassified before they could be made public, slowing the process down. Critics of the government see this as a means to block access to colonial records, particularly to fraught historical events such as the Algerian War. See Fabienne Chamelot, 'Secret Colonial Archives or a Government Losing Control? Revisiting IGI 1300', trans. by Phoebe Hadjimarkos Clarke, *Critique d'Art*, 58 (2023), pp. 137–55, p. 138.

This article analyses documents and correspondence from the BUMIDOM archives through Ann Laura Stoler's approach of reading colonial archives *along* rather than *against* the grain. In *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (2009), Stoler argues that rather than examining the personal stories found in the archives in order to recuperate individual voices and give them back their agency, as postcolonial scholars have begun to do, it is equally productive to analyse the ideologies of colonial administrators through their writings and texts. This reveals, according to Stoler, much about the 'epistemological and political anxieties' at the heart of that particular colonial project (in her case, the Dutch colonization of the East Indies).[8] By considering the contradictions and disparities in the material produced by people holding power in the colonial regime as ethnographic data, Stoler seeks to trace the 'unexplored fault lines, ragged edges, and unremarked disruptions to the seamless and smooth surface of colonialism's archival genres'.[9] Following Stoler's methodology, in this article I explore the sentiments and epistemologies of BUMIDOM officials through their written documents and their correspondence to each other, rather than examining the personal stories of individuals who used the services of the BUMIDOM via their personal dossiers, or examining the official reports produced by the Bureau.[10] In so doing, I reveal the anxieties of the governmental officials at the head of the BUMIDOM who were eager for the Bureau to be a highly regulated and controlled institution so that they could assert control over citizens from Guadeloupe, Martinique, and La Réunion.

The BUMIDOM thus illustrates the mechanics of biopower, a process which, according to Michel Foucault, shapes how human bodies are managed and controlled in society.[11] Foucault defines biopower as 'a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations'.[12] For Foucault, biopower is a form of social and political power which seeks to protect and manage populations, but it can become a harmful manifestation of power, resulting in the subjugation and even elimination of marginalized groups, as scholars such as David Macey and Mika Ojakangas have observed.[13] Taking a more radical, decolonial approach to Foucault's concept of biopower, and drawing on Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's work on the state of exception (in which the state can transcend the rule of law for public good), Achille Mbembe examines how the state not only has the power to control a population, but also has 'the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die'.[14] Mbembe terms this form of power 'necropolitics', a mechanism which has emerged through the creation of the colony and the slavery plantation but which has continued in the contemporary period through genocide, war, and violence during large-scale conflicts. Necropolitics operates by confining certain populations in order to govern, harass, and potentially kill them, normalizing an atmosphere of fear, violence, and subjugation so that

[8] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, p. 20.
[9] Ibid., p. 52.
[10] For a discussion of the official reports produced by the BUMIDOM, see Antonia Wimbush, 'Colonialism, Race, and Caribbean Migration', in *Colonial Continuities and Decoloniality in the French-Speaking World: From Nostalgia to Resistance, Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Sarah Arens, Nicki Frith, Jonathan Lewis and Rebekah Vince (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2023), pp. 83–100.
[11] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
[12] Ibid., p. 137.
[13] David Macey, 'Rethinking Biopolitics, Race and Power in the Wake of Foucault', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26.6 (2009), 186–205; Mika Ojakangas, 'Impossible Dialogue on Bio-Power: Agamben and Foucault', *Foucault Studies*, 2 (2005), pp. 5–28.
[14] Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. by Steve Corcoran (Durham; North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 66.

certain groups 'are kept alive, but in a *state of injury*'.[15] Necropolitics also implies a surveillance on individuals for extractive purposes, so that the state can benefit economically from the exploitation of these groups.[16] This certainly chimes with the experiences of many BUMIDOM participants, who were often underpaid and forced to work very long hours in precarious conditions.

By examining the correspondence between BUMIDOM authorities, this article also explores how the BUMIDOM operated for some as a place of work, governed by colonial ways of thinking. Strictly speaking, the BUMIDOM archives are not *colonial* archives, and thus they do not operate in the same way as the Dutch colonial archives analysed by Stoler. The BUMIDOM was implemented in France's postcolonial era, and Martinique, Guadeloupe, Réunion, and French Guiana have been French overseas departments since the departmentalization law was passed in 1946. However, the overseas departments are *de facto* colonies for many people living there, given that they continue to be plagued by economic, social, and political inequalities in relation to continental France. For instance, the social protests, which brought life to a halt on the islands in early 2009, were a direct response to the escalating costs of living and a demand to break the economic and political dependence on France, but they also 'addressed the lingering social legacies of colonialism and slavery, particularly the racial hierarchies that persist on the islands and the discrimination felt by local workers', according to Yarimar Bonilla.[17] Social unrest also affected the islands more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people protested against the vaccine mandate and the economic consequences of this for families living in some of France's poorest departments.[18] The French government was, in fact, accused of spreading racism and colonial ideology during the pandemic when, on 22 May 2020, it published a poster on social media encouraging social distancing in the Antilles by recommending a space of 'cinq ananas' between individuals.[19] The colonial systems of thought at the heart of the migratory policies of the BUMIDOM, and which have been called out by scholars such as Félix Germain and François Vergès, are thus still highly visible today.[20] Before analysing how coloniality is manifested in the correspondence between political and administrative figures working for the Bureau, we must first pay attention to the ways in which the provenance and intended purpose of the documents not only condition their use but also exemplify power imbalances between mainland France and the overseas Caribbean departments.

The BUMIDOM Archives: Power and Representation

The files relating to the Bureau are now mostly housed in the Archives nationales de France in Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, although some files which are concerned with specific overseas departments are stored locally in their departmental or territorial archives. The disparate nature of the collection, spread across different archives in different geographic spaces of France's extended territory,

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[15] Ibid., p. 75 (author's emphasis).

[16] Ibid.

[17] Yarimar Bonilla, *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 2.

[18] See AFP, 'Guadeloupe: blocages et manifestations contre le pass sanitaire', *Le Point*, 19 November 2021, https://www.lepoint.fr/sante/guadeloupe-l-acces-au-chu-bloque-par-des-manifestants-19-11-2021-2452830_40.php [accessed 8 April 2024].

[19] Jean-Christophe Gay, 'L'épidémie de Covid-19 en France d'outre-mer', *Géoconfluences*, 2020, p. 3, https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03583482/document [accessed 8 April 2024]. The poster was taken down the day following the public outcry.

[20] Félix F. Germain, *Decolonizing the Republic: African and Caribbean Migrants in Postwar Paris, 1946–1974* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2016); and Françoise Vergès, *Le Ventre des femmes: capitalisme, racialisation, féminisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2017).

makes it more difficult to consult documents and track the content of the files. Moreover, the files have been deposited by different governmental administrative bodies. The Ministère de l'Equipement, the Ministère d'Outre-mer, the Ministère de l'Intérieur, the Ministère des Affaires sociales, the Ministère des Transports, and the Ministère de Postes et Télécommunication all held files relating to different aspects of the BUMIDOM's operations, and they have each deposited different amounts of material. This makes it all the more complex to access documents related to the BUMIDOM because researchers must first know which government body deposited them in order to be able to search for them in the archive's catalogue. These boxes mostly contain policy documents and governmental reports about the BUMIDOM operations. Written by governmental officials, these documents emphasize the positive contribution of the Bureau in helping individuals from the overseas departments to achieve 'social promotion'. In a report evaluating French migratory policies dated 28 November 1978, officials from the Direction des affaires économiques, sociales et culturelles described the project as one which would contribute 'à la solution des problèmes démographiques intéressant les DOM, en liaison avec les administrations et organismes qualifiés, en favorisant l'implantation en métropole de travailleurs volontaires et de leurs familles, dans une perspective de *promotion sociale*'.[21] Yet, while some individuals did experience an improvement in their quality of life, for others, migration to the metropole was another form of precarity because they found themselves in unstable employment and poor living conditions. Migration was thus not a means for social advancement for all, despite what administrators stressed in their official reports. In addition, the boxes contain newspaper clippings which denounce the exploitative nature of the BUMIDOM and the lack of clear information given to participants about what to expect upon arrival in the metropole. For instance, the heading of one such article, published in Lyon's daily newspaper *Le Progrès* on 2 February 1974, reads '[l]'Emigration des Antillais et Guyanais en France: trop d'illusions et pas d'informations honnêtes pour les immigrés', and describes how people felt let down by the Bureau because the work and housing situation offered to them did not correspond to what they had been promised.[22] The fact that officials have collected and preserved these articles which criticize the Bureau demonstrates that they were eager to know exactly what kind of information was circulating about the BUMIDOM in the press to ultimately preserve the reputation of the government agency. These boxes also contain correspondence about the application process between officials and prospective 'migrants', the term used by administrators about people moving to mainland France (even though they were French citizens rather than international migrants).

While researchers do not need to seek permission to access these boxes, located primarily in the Archives nationales, they have to submit a request to access individual files containing personal information about BUMIDOM participants, such as their date of birth and address, their employment situation, and their health records if these dossiers date from less than fifty years ago. Some of these dossiers, however, have been mixed up with the policy documents found in other boxes, and so while, in theory, permission is needed to access the personal files, in practice, some can be consulted relatively easily. It is quite common to find private correspondence mixed in with administrative files in public archives, as documented in accounts of research methodology.[23]

[21] Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Archives nationales de France (AN): 19840442/7, Évolution et bilan de la politique de migration dans les départements et dans les territoires d'outre-mer, 28 November 1978, p. 1 (my emphasis).
[22] AN: 19840442/7, 'L'Emigration des Antillais et des Guyanais en France', *Le Progrès*, 2 February 1974.
[23] See Michael Jones, 'From Personal to Public: Field Books, Museums, and the Opening of the Archives', *The Journal of the Archives and Records Association*, 38.2 (2017), pp. 212–27; and Marybeth Gaudette, 'Playing Fair with the Right to Privacy', *Archival Issues*, 28.1 (2003–2004), pp. 21–34.

Indeed, scholars have pointed out the ethical implications of reading documents to which access is meant to be protected.[24] Conversely, the archives have not fully caught up in making accessible the documents which should be available to researchers, which means that the personal files from 1971 and 1972 cannot yet be consulted. Among these personal files are examples of correspondence between BUMIDOM officials which form the primary evidence for this article. What is particularly interesting about these files is that their contents vary. Some contain the initial application form filled out by the individual, some house medical records and the 'enquête sociale' undertaken by the social worker to assess whether individuals were professionally and morally 'suited' to life in the metropole, and others comprise letters sent by administrators informing individuals of particular decisions about their journey. Some contain all these documents while others are more limited in size – whether these documents have been lost, destroyed, or were not preserved in the first place is unclear. What has also not often been kept are the letters sent from individuals to BUMIDOM officials, and again it is not obvious why these documents are missing. Perhaps the sheer volume of correspondence received by the Bureau was simply too much for administrators to manage. However, as we will see below, they did keep highly detailed lists of all the letters they received, suggesting that they placed importance on keeping track of the requests made by individuals, even if they did not keep hold of the letters themselves. Carolyn Steedman contends that historians examine archives 'for what is not there: the silences and the absences of documents always speak to us'.[25] In this case, the absences are the personal stories, the demands, and the requests of the individuals who used the services of the BUMIDOM, and their voices are mediated by the politicians and officials responsible for the running of operations. These dossiers thus act as 'sites of epistemological and political anxiety', and tell us as much (if not more) about the concerns of politicians and administrators as the anxieties and desires of individuals wanting to migrate to the metropole.[26]

The dossiers of BUMIDOM participants have only been discovered by researchers relatively recently. Condon explains that the Agence national pour l'insertion et la promotion des travailleurs d'outre-mer (ANT), the administrative body established in 1982 to oversee migration from the overseas departments when the BUMIDOM was closed down, had planned to destroy these personal files when it moved its premises from central Paris to Pierrefitte-sur-Seine in 1994.[27] Invited by the director of the ANT to conduct research at the offices, Condon succeeded in persuading officials of the value of the dossiers for future research, and so a sample of 10% was retained, equating to 30,000 dossiers (documents from complete years were retained, although the above-mentioned article does not provide any information as to why specific years were selected).[28] It is unclear what has happened to the rest of the BUMIDOM files which were transferred to the ANT; presumably they have been destroyed. The unavailability of evidence is a great loss to researchers carrying out work on the demographic profile of those who used the services of the BUMIDOM to migrate to mainland France, or who visited its offices upon their arrival. As Pattieu remarks, these personal files are invaluable because they allow researchers to 'aller au-delà du discours public du BUMIDOM et de comprendre comment les populations concernées, même

[24] Heidi A. McKee and James E. Porter, 'The Ethics of Archival Research', *College Composition and Communication*, 64.1 (2012), pp. 59–81.
[25] Carolyn Steedman, 'Something She Called a Fever: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust', *American Historical Review* 106, 4 (October 2001), pp. 1159–80, p. 1177.
[26] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, p. 20.
[27] Condon, 'Entre stratégies individuelles et stratégies de l'État', p. 125.
[28] Ibid., p. 125.

sans adhérer explicitement à l'opposition directe des mouvements indépendantistes, ont pu contourner ou détourner les politiques auxquelles elles étaient soumises'.[29] Work is ongoing to uncover the contents of these 30,000 dossiers. For example, the MIGRINDOM project, led by Audrey Célestine, is undertaking a prosopographical analysis of the dossiers in order to better understand the commonalities and differences between individuals who used the services of the Bureau throughout its operation.[30]

This archival material, whether policy documents, official correspondence, or personal dossiers, forms part of governmental archives, and thus their selection, preservation, and potential destruction has been determined by the French state. The archive is 'not a piece of data, but a status', according to Achille Mbembe, because it is a compilation of written documents which are deemed to have the status as 'archivable'.[31] In this instance, it is the French government which has imbued the archive with power through processes of selection and discrimination and has decided which documents about the BUMIDOM archivable and which ones are not. Jacques Derrida argues that these technical questions of collection and preservation, a process he terms 'archivisation', are crucial in shaping the history and memory of an event: he states that 'l'archivation produit autant qu'elle enregistre l'évènement'.[32] Archives do not only preserve historical documents to inform future research about events of the past, but, according to Derrida, they also construct relationships between the past, present, and future. As historians such as Richard Evans, Randolph Head, and Arthur Marwick have also pointed out, archives are not objective records of the past, but they document history from a particular perspective or through a specific lens, depending on who created the archive and for what purpose.[33] Given that the French state has created and shaped the BUMIDOM archives, it has been instrumental in determining the ways in which the Bureau has been recorded as a historical event and has been remembered (or forgotten) by French and Caribbean societies. As I have argued elsewhere, the French government has been reluctant to engage in practices of memorialization regarding the BUMIDOM because this would mean acknowledging that the Bureau operated on racial lines, and would thus contradict universalist republican values.[34] The erasure of migration histories from the overseas departments to mainland France has thus occurred in the public sphere – the lack of discussion about the BUMIDOM in school curricula and textbooks and in the French museum space attests to this – but also in the archives.[35]

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[29] Pattieu, 'Un traitement spécifique des migrations d'outre-mer', p. 85.

[30] See the project website: https://migrindom.hypotheses.org/presentation [accessed 8 April 2024]. Prosopography is the study of a group of people who share similar characteristics. The project thus seeks to build a collective biography of BUMIDOM participants by studying a selection of their personal dossiers.

[31] Achille Mbembe, 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits', in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. by Carolyn Hamilton et al (Dordecht; Boston; London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), pp. 19–26, p. 20.

[32] Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), p. 141.

[33] Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History,* 2nd edn (London: Granta, 2000), pp. 103–28; Randolph Head, 'Archives: Preserving the Documentary Past', in *Engaging with the Past and Present: The Relationship between Past and Present across the Disciplines*, ed. by Paul M. Dover (London; New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. 158–7; and Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1989), pp. 220–25.

[34] Antonia Wimbush, 'The Windrush and the BUMIDOM: The Memorialization of Caribbean Migration', *Memory Studies*, 16.5 (2023), pp. 1328–1342.

[35] In an unpublished interview with me on 19 December 2022, the Guadeloupean graphic novelist Jessica Oublié explained that the BUMIDOM is not currently a compulsory part of the school curriculum, but that teachers can incorporate it into their history lessons at secondary level. There is currently no national museum or exhibition in mainland France or the overseas departments which commemorates the BUMIDOM. The new permanent exhibition at the Musée national de l'histoire de l'immigration in Paris, which opened on 17 June 2023, does have a small section on the BUMIDOM, but there is little historical detail about the Bureau in the exhibition. Instead, a selection of the original panels from *Peyi an nou* (2017), the graphic novel by Oublié and Marie-Ange Rousseau, are shown alongside

These governmental archives are sites which confirm and reinforce state power over citizens in the overseas department, because it is governmental officials who have selected what to preserve and what to efface. The individual records themselves are also reflective of state hegemony, in that they impose 'control and order on transactions, events, people, and societies through the legal, symbolic, structural, and operational power of recorded communication'.[36] As the following analysis, which adopts Stoler's approach of reading archival material along the grain, will show, the BUMIDOM records were designed to keep track of migrants in the process of migration and record how much financial assistance was given so that the state could assert control over its citizens of colour.

BUMIDOM Correspondence: Reading Along the Grain

Examining the covers of the personal dossiers of individual migrants, we can see how applications were framed by administrators. Each individual was allocated a specific number so that administrators could track who was travelling to and from the metropole and from which 'siège', and this number was quoted on all correspondence between prospective migrants and officials as well as on the cover of the application dossier. Other information about the candidate's name, occupation, and any training they would require was also recorded on the cover, along with details about the 'placement proposé'. For those who were involved in direct recruitment or were being sent to one of the training centres (for instance, in Crouy-sur-Ourcq, where women were trained to work in domestic service), specific information about the company or the location of the training centre appeared on the cover. For those who were joining their families in mainland France through the family reunification programme, the acronym 'AF' was used. The date of their departure was recorded, along with information about the plane or boat on which they would be travelling. In addition, administrators had to select whether the 'prime de trousseau', the small allowance offered to BUMIDOM participants to help them to buy the clothes they would need on their arrival in the metropole, had been awarded or refused, and they had to record the amount given. This ranged between 50 and 200 Francs (equivalent to between 76 and 303 Euros today), although it is not clear (on the cover or anywhere else in the dossier) why some migrants received more money than others.[37] Finally, if the application for financial and administrative assistance had been refused, this was also recorded on the cover of the dossier, with more information about the motives for this refusal in the file itself. For example, on the cover of dossier number 36/1819, dated 25 November 1966, the term 'rejeté' is written next to 'Crouy-sur-Ourcq'. Inside the dossier there is a letter from the social worker dealing with this case, sent to the Director of the BUMIDOM office at Basse-Terre on 20 June 1967, which explains the reasons for this rejection: the female migrant was asked to find a more suitable guardian for her children as she had planned to leave them with a friend, herself a single mother to five young children who, it was deemed, would not be able to cope with the responsibility of looking after two more children.[38]

The covers of these individual files speak to the anxieties of the BUMIDOM administrators who had to keep detailed records of how much money was being spent by the BUMIDOM office and who was benefitting from this service. The BUMIDOM was initially

one archival document explaining the creation of the Bureau. See https://www.histoire-immigration.fr/collections/le-bumidom [accessed 13 July 2023].

[36] Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory', *Archival Science*, 2 (2002), pp. 1–19, p. 13.

[37] The equivalent amounts in Euros have been calculated by the historical currency calculator fxtop.com.

[38] Gourbeyre: Archives départementales de la Guadeloupe (ADG): 1027 W36.

planned to last for only four or five years, as the office had been given a limited budget and had to control quite strictly who could benefit from financial assistance from the state, particularly in the first few years of its operation.[39] Beyond financial considerations, the file covers also show that the operations were highly regulated and controlled in other ways. At a glance, officials could see who had applied to the BUMIDOM and for what purpose, and they could track whose application had been accepted or rejected. These records enabled the French state to assert control over its citizens of colour from the overseas departments. Foucault's notion of biopower is helpful here to analyse how this level of control operated. For Foucault, biopower is not repressive in its objectives but seeks to bring order to a population through frameworks such as schooling, political policy, and migration, institutions which, according to him, do not explicitly present themselves as being oriented around power.[40] He argues that populations are subjugated not only through traditional institutions of state power, such as the police, but also by what he considers to be less obtrusive forms which nevertheless administer and monitor individuals.[41] Postcolonial scholars, such as Mbembe, have challenged the notion that these frameworks are not explicitly associated with power. Indeed, Mbembe argues that institutional facilities such as detention centres, refugee camps, and educational institutions are sites of necropolitics, in which people are kept alive – albeit 'in a phantom-like world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity' – because of their use 'as an instrument of labour'.[42]

The BUMIDOM operated as an instrument of power as called out by Foucault and Mbembe. It did not openly appear to be an institution designed to monitor the Caribbean population – and indeed, it presented itself as a mechanism for social promotion, evident in some of the policy documents analysed earlier in this article. Yet the covers of the individual files demonstrate the level of monitoring and control exerted by BUMIDOM officials over its participants. More specifically, the Bureau had to keep its own detailed records of who was arriving in the metropole and who was leaving, both through the scheme and under their own auspices, because the population census organized by the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE) did not provide sufficient detail about these movements.[43] The census enabled governmental officials to track this migration to a certain extent because the place of birth and place of residence was recorded; if these two locations were different it was concluded that an individual had migrated between two censuses. However, the specific year of their migration was not recorded. Moreover, the censuses of 1968, 1975, and 1982 did not make any distinction between migrants who received financial and administrative support from the BUMIDOM and those who did not.[44] The Bureau thus had to keep its own records if it wanted to have a clearer idea of the movement of French Caribbean citizens within the French territory. The detailed records about BUMIDOM participants demonstrate that their movement was as tightly regulated as it would have been if they had not been French citizens and had arrived from beyond the nation

[39] Childers, *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace*, p. 178.
[40] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 140.
[41] Ibid., p. 141.
[42] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 75.
[43] The INSEE was created in 1946 with the purpose of organizing the national census and producing indices to determine inflation and other financial indicators. The census occurs every seven to nine years in France.
[44] Marine Haddad, 'Migration from French Overseas Departments to Metropolitan France: What Can We Learn about a State Policy from the Censuses, 1962–1999', *Population*, 73.2 (2018), pp. 181–216, p. 193. Haddad explains that in the overseas departments, the census took place a year earlier than in the metropole during the BUMIDOM era, in 1961, 1967 and 1974 (p. 191). This does not occur today and the censuses relating to mainland France and the overseas departments take place in the same year. However, they are still published and archived separately (p. 192).

state of France. Efforts to control these migratory trajectories mirror practices targeted at foreign nationals arriving in France during the BUMIDOM era. Amelia Lyons and Phillip Naylor have studied the case of Algerians migrating to France in the period following Algerian independence.[45] However, the motivations for controlling the migration of these two groups were quite different. While the government encouraged Antillean migration, albeit within a limited framework with limited resources, it was anxious not to facilitate large-scale Algerian migration in order to avoid future debates about Algerians' rights to settle in France.[46] The divergent ways in which these two migrant groups were treated highlights the different preoccupations and anxieties of the post-colonial state regarding migration from previously colonised territories in contrast to migration from territories that were (and still are) under French control.

Other documents which display the extent to which the movement of Antilleans was tightly controlled include the 'livres courrier départ'. These notebooks contain lists of the letters sent by both prospective migrants and those whose application had been approved to the administrators of the different BUMIDOM offices (most offices were located in the departmental capital, although Guadeloupe had two, one in Pointe-à-Pitre and one in Basse-Terre). These detailed, handwritten lists record the dossier number, the date the letters were sent, details about the sender and receiver, and the subject matter of the letters.[47] The lists are significant for the details they reveal about the lives of prospective participants. For instance, some wrote to the administrators asking for information about work options and opportunities to join their family through the 'regroupement familial' programme, while others enquired about the value of the 'prime d'équipement'. Others still, whose migration had already been approved, wrote to administrators in order to give back their 'bon de transport', the transport voucher offered by the BUMIDOM in cooperation with Air France in exchange for passage on a flight to Paris Orly airport (or a ship to Le Havre or Marseille in the early days of the operations) because they no longer wanted to leave. It was often women who cancelled their affiliation with the BUMIDOM, either because they were pregnant and therefore could not travel, or because the situation of their family had changed and they could no longer leave their children in Martinique and Guadeloupe.[48] This data reminds us that migrating through the BUMIDOM was a voluntary act – people were not forced to enrol in the scheme and they could cancel their migration at any time – however, given the dire socio-economic circumstances on the islands, many felt they had no real choice but to leave. However, if we approach these lists through Stoler's practice of reading along the archival grain, we also learn a lot about the attitudes and behaviours of the BUMIDOM officials. The fact that the authorities not only preserved the letters sent by individuals but also kept detailed notes of all the correspondence demonstrates the highly regimented and controlled nature of the Bureau. These lists reveal that BUMIDOM officials were eager to monitor and control all information that participants received, so that they could shape public discourse about this inter-departmental migration. The authorities were clearly aware that information about this scheme was circulated among Antilleans through word-of-mouth, as those who had already benefitted from this scheme encouraged family and friends to take advantage of the financial and administrative assistance offered by the BUMIDOM to join them in mainland France. In order to encourage participation

[45] Amelia H. Lyons, 'French or Foreign? The Algerian Migrants' Status at the End of Empire (1962–1968)', *Journal of Modern European History*, 12.1 (2014): pp. 126–45; and Philip Naylor, *France and Algeria: A History of Decolonization and Transformation* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000).
[46] Lyons, 'French or Foreign?', p. 132.
[47] ADG: 1027 W2. This box contained lists of correspondence from 1966 to 1973.
[48] ADG: 1027 W2, Courrier arrivé, 1971.

and avoid any resistance among Antilleans who may have been critical of the exploitative and extractive nature of the scheme, officials were eager to control very carefully all correspondence received by (prospective) migrants, so that the latter would present the BUMIDOM in the most positive light possible.

The BUMIDOM files also provide evidence that shows that the Bureau was a significant employer in Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Réunion, and also in mainland France. It was an institution and a workplace, with its own rules, regulations, and ways of operating. It offered many different services to French citizens from the overseas departments, meaning that there were numerous branches and sections of this institution. People working for the BUMIDOM ranged from secretaries and administrators who organized paperwork and corresponded with prospective migrants; to social workers and employees who carried out psychotechnical tests to verify that individuals would be able to adapt to metropolitan life; and to doctors who examined prospective migrants to check that they were in good health before emigrating. The use of psychological and medical tests to select migrants is a further example of biopower, in which the state regulates the collective body in order to make a population live and behave in a particular way. Only individuals who were deemed to be in good health and 'of sound morals' were allowed access to financial and administrative support to migrate to metropolitan France, thereby enabling the state to control Antillean bodies. Moreover, archival documents indicate that running the bureau was a significant operation in terms of cost and organisation, thus confirming the institutional, colonial nature of the scheme. Antillean and Reunionese people, as French citizens, had the right to migrate to the metropole without requiring any kind of visa or formal paperwork, and they did not need to be channelled through the Bureau. The fact that a scheme was established at significant cost to the French government over an eighteen-year period demonstrates the extent to which the state wanted to monitor and regulate these migration flows, even if the primary purpose of the scheme was to supply labour to the metropole. All the outgoings and income related to the BUMIDOM project were carefully noted, and budgets were monitored carefully. A letter sent from the Departmental Director R Le Gallic to a governmental representative on 29 September 1969 detailed the amount requested for October 1969; this included 700,000 Francs (equivalent to 946,937 Euros today) for renting the office in Pointe-à-Pitre and 1,064.70 Francs (1,440 Euros) for the office in Saint-Claude, in addition to 500 Francs (676 Euros) for office equipment and 1,000 Francs (1353 Euros) for telephone and telegram services.[49] Correspondence between administrators and politicians also centered around the need to improve the infrastructure of the BUMIDOM offices and expand the office spaces as more people arrived at the centres.

The increase in the numbers of individuals seeking to migrate to the metropole also meant that more money was spent on workers' salaries. The escalated financial costs of the BUMIDOM operations is visible in correspondence between administrators. A letter sent on 1 April 1968 from the director of the department of Guadeloupe to the head of insurance company La Préservatrice set out the total salaries of everyone who worked for the BUMIDOM in the Basse-Terre office in 1966 and 1967; this total increased from 70,406.04 Francs (95,243 Euros) in 1966 to 162,649.52 Francs (220,026 Euros) in 1967.[50] This increase in the amount of money spent on workers' salaries was clearly due to the rise in individuals who wanted to migrate through the scheme, as it became more widely known through family networks. As the numbers of people wanting to emigrate from

[49] ADG: 1027 W8 'Migrants partis'. The equivalent amounts in Euros have been calculated by the historical currency calculator fxtop.com.
[50] ADG: 1027 W6.

Guadeloupe to mainland France increased, more doctors, social workers, and psychotechnicians were needed to assess their suitability for work. Furthermore, in order to increase the personnel working for the BUMIDOM the government was obliged to recruit metropolitan French doctors through the 'volontaires de l'aide technique' system, a type of voluntary national service which targeted students or young, mostly male, workers with little professional experience to work in education, the medical sector, administration, or the private sector in France's overseas departments. This scheme was managed by the Ministère des Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer rather than the Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, which meant that it was based on 'une politique "d'assimilation" et non plus de "coopération"'.[51] An example of this policy can be found in a letter sent on 30 October 1969 from the Departmental Director of Guadeloupe to the Prefect of Guadeloupe, informing him of the arrival of a doctor through this voluntary national service scheme on 15 November 1970.[52] This doctor was described as a white man from 'la métropole', thereby corresponding in profile to the other officials occupying positions of power in the BUMIDOM office who were 'coupé de la masse de la population par sa mode de vie comme par sa culture'.[53] Whether by employing white civil servants to run the operations or by encouraging young white and predominantly male workers to come to Martinique and Guadeloupe through voluntary work schemes, the BUMIDOM was a workplace governed by coloniality. This arrangement is a striking example of the 'génocide par substitution', famously denounced by Aimé Césaire in the Assemblée nationale on 13 November 1975. Césaire was talking specifically about French Guiana, using rather extreme language to take the French government to task for sending poor Guyanese people of colour to the metropole to carry out menial tasks in transportation, health care, and domestic service, and in exchange, hiring white metropolitan citizens of a higher socio-economic status to occupy positions of power in French Guiana. These same arguments can be applied to the case of Martinique and Guadeloupe, in which it was the white, metropolitan French professionals who were ultimately responsible for the decision making in the BUMIDOM offices. The BUMIDOM offices were therefore colonial in their operations, as they relied on extracting labour from Guadeloupeans and Martinicans of colour which added to their oppression and subjugation.

Conclusion

Stoler argues that historians should not only pay attention to the content of the archive but should also reflect on archival form, which she defines as 'prose style, repetitive refrain, the arts of persuasion, affective strains that shape "rational" response, categories of confidentiality and classification, and not least, genres of documentation'.[54] This allows researchers to consider archives as a process of document production, collection, and archivization which is always governed by power dynamics, rather than as objects to be examined independently from the context in which they were produced. This article has followed Stoler's approach by examining a variety of document genres from the BUMIDOM archives, held at the Archives départementales de la Guadeloupe. Acknowledging the value in examining details from the personal dossiers of BUMIDOM participants in order to centre the lived experiences of those who actually migrated through the scheme, it has nevertheless moved away from this method. Rather, it has considered

[51] Esprit, 'Volontaires à l'aide technique en "France d'outre-mer"', *Esprit*, 394.7/8 (July-August 1970) : pp. 138–50, p. 138.
[52] AD: 1027 W8.G
[53] Esprit, 'Volontaires à l'aide technique', p. 144.
[54] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, p. 20.

documents and letters produced by and sent to the authorities responsible for the running of the Bureau in Guadeloupe, thereby reading 'along the archival grain'. This reading method has enabled an examination of the motivations for the creation of the BUMIDOM scheme in the first place. The material reveals that the BUMIDOM operated as a colonial institution, as the migration of citizens of colour from Guadeloupe and Martinique was highly regulated and controlled in an illustration of Foucault's concept of biopower and Mbembe's subsequent theorization of necropolitics. It also demonstrates that the BUMIDOM was a workplace for many. Concerns of officials centered around practical details of the operations – such as how to finance salaries and improve the infrastructure of the BUMIDOM offices. They also wrote about individual migrants and kept detailed records of people whose dossiers were incomplete or needed attention: those who had cancelled their affiliation with the Bureau for personal reasons; those whose application had been rejected for health reasons; and those who did not pass the 'enquête social'. It would be beneficial to expand this research in time and geographic scope, to investigate if the coloniality of the BUMIDOM as an office changed over its eighteen-year life span, and to interrogate if these colonial continuities were more apparent in Guadeloupe than in other departments where the Bureau also operated. The BUMIDOM archives are a rich resource for historians and scholars working on the history and demography of twentieth-century France, for they tell us much about the power relationships between the so-called centre and periphery, and the colonial continuities that continue to exist between them today.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Colonial Impotence: Virtue and Violence in a Congolese Concession (1911–1940). By BENOÎT HENRIET. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2021. 191 pp. Hb. £74.50. ISBN: 978-3-110-64878-2.

De Gruyter's *Africa in Global History* series is to be highly recommended, with it continuing to produce insightful, readable, and well-presented studies of African history. Benoît Henriet's latest book is no exception, with his contribution making a very important new addition to this burgeoning list. Like Daniel Tödt's fine recent monograph in the series, *The Lumumba Generation*, Henriet's own study also focuses on the Belgian Congo.[55] Yet, his interest is not on the African bourgeoisie. Rather, he examines the establishment and maintenance of a string of 'circular' concessions founded by the English businessmen known colloquially as the Lever Brothers and in particular by William Lever (hereafter 'Lever') in the early twentieth century (pp. 35–38).

Lever wanted to design a Congolese subsidiary that could replicate what he saw as his paternalist success in Port Sunlight, Liverpool, this time in the vast Belgian colony whose administration was keen to rehabilitate its reputation after the 'red rubber' atrocities of the Free State era (1885–1908). He set about enacting this plan after his signing of a Convention with the colonial regime in 1911 that eventuated the formation of the *Huileries du Congo Belge* (HCB). These kinds of imperial imaginings, or 'tropical utopias,' in which white European/American industrialists tried to socially engineer their own brand of siloed modernity in equatorial regions, were disturbingly common at the turn of the century. Henry Ford created 'Fordlandia' in 1928, for example, just as Dr. Jean-Joseph David tried his luck with the idea in the Haut-Nyong district of Cameroon in the 1930s and 40s (p. 30). As Henriet suggests in his first chapter, though, such impositions were often planned with precious little prior knowledge of the societies and terrain upon which they would be imposed (p. 32). And, despite usually being planned as refuges against forced labour, they ironically turned into the exact opposite (p. 31).

Henriet's study takes the reader through the history of Leverville in particular, the name Lever gave to one of the five circular concessions granted to HCB in 1911. He charts Lever's history from its foundation until 1940 – although its post-war and post-colonial trajectory is usefully charted in the book's conclusion (pp. 169–177). Central to the book's argument is the idea of the Lever Brothers and their colonial allies as being impotent (p. 12). Drawing on Achille Mbembe's (2001) conception of colonialism as 'phallic,' Henriet argues that while colonial capitalism as manifested by HCB may have resulted in the drafting of plans and the giving of orders, these largely 'failed to materialise' (p. 14). He asserts that 'the inability of colonialists to master their environment and to exert control on colonial subjects led to frustrations' and, further, that 'colonial impotence threatened the very existence of imperial designs' (ibid.).

In chapters two and three, Henriet explains how African resistance led to colonial impotence in a way that usefully draws on Florence Bernault's (2019) understanding of colonialism as 'a field of power as well as of transactions, where "myriad of deals, exchanges, and transfers determined each day (11)."[56] In the second chapter, for instance, he suggests that colonial administrators collected taxes only intermittently during the period under discussion with some even leaving their chief posts without authorisation (p. 57). Unsurprisingly, therefore, 'the apathy

[55] Daniel Tödt, *African Bourgeoisie and Colonial Distinction in the Belgian Congo* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter GmBH, 2021).
[56] Benoit Henriet, *Colonial Impotence: Virtue and Violence in a Congolese Concession (1911-1940)* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter GmBH, 2021), p.11.

of lower-ranking functionaries further impeded the already fragile grip of the administration on the Kwango district' (p. 57). The *villages doublures*, or hamlets created by Leverville workers and their families away from their 'home' chieftainship, also served as a means of escaping colonial demands for taxes and labour (p. 77). As important as active resistance was, the silences that greeted Belgian officials as they tried to investigate what they believed to have been potential uprisings were also significant. In the third chapter, therefore, Henriet examines the colonial fear of *Lukusu*. This was a 'secretive and rapidly disseminating anti-witchcraft practice' (p. 71) that officials feared could reach the size and scale of the *Tupelepele* uprising that started in 1931 (p. 19). When attempting to investigate, however, officials struggled to get answers from those they interrogated. Manisa, who the administration described as a 'clan chief,' for example, simply denied any untoward activity when questioned by Gustave Weekx, the territorial administrator in charge of Kamtsha-Lubue, in 1953 (p. 72).

HCB and the Belgian administration struck back, of course. Giving details reminiscent of Osumaka Likaka's work on the operation of the cotton industry in the Belgian Congo during roughly the same period, Henriet's fourth chapter details the various ways in which HCB attempted to maintain a disciplined, cowed, and productive workforce.[57] As with the colonial cotton industry, violence was at the core of HCB's everyday pattern of labour relations even if this was not how the subsidiary was initially envisaged. Fruit sentries, or African intermediaries who monitored palm plant cutting and production, rarely hesitated to mete out violence on those they believed were impeding production (108). And archival traces suggest that 'aides and porters . . . were often occupied, however informally, by fruit cutters' female and underage relatives' (p. 113). All told, there were discomforting similarities between the labour practices involved in the HCB concession(s) and those under the old Léopoldian Free State system (p. 108). A reading of the fifth chapter, on how the HCB concession(s) were an embodied experience, with privation and discomfort a common experience suffered by palm cutters, only serves to underline this point (pp. 120–145).

While HCB oppressed African resistance throughout their time in the Belgian Congo, another of their targets was the environment itself as Henriet deftly explicates in his sixth chapter (pp. 146-168). Spurred on by competition from Southeast Asian plantations, Lever radically altered his business model in the Congo in 1933 in an attempt to win his 'war on nature' and turn a profit in the Belgian Congo (pp. 146, 162). As well as working 'hand in hand with public-funded agronomists to develop new breeds of oil palms,' he decided to replace the palm groves based on naturally growing fruits, with plantations (162–163). Here, the idea of scalability was paramount as HCB envisaged 'the planting of 30,000 hectares of Elaeis . . . in less than twenty years . . . [including] 12,000 hectares in Leverville' (p. 163). But the seeds that the *Institut National pour l'Etude Agronomique du Congo Belge* (INEAC) developed 'were ill-adapted to the Kwilu's ecosystem' with the region's dry seasons slowing 'down the tree's growth' (p. 167). Plantations were 'slow to take off, difficult to maintain, and brought disappointing harvests,' therefore. Chapter 6 is theoretically informed by Anna Tsing's pathbreaking work on the Matsutake mushroom to show how Lever's failed plantation scheme drew on capitalist modernists' belief that 'everything on earth – and beyond – might be scalable' but it crucially failed to realise its vision.[58]

There is a lot here, in other words. Henriet has brought some of the latest and best

[57] Osumaka Likaka, *Rural Society and Cotton in Colonial Zaire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).
[58] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), p.40, cited in Henriet, *Colonial Impotence*, p.168.

historical thinking on colonialism in Africa to bear on HCB's history and during a crucial period in the tenure of the Belgian Congo. He is to be congratulated for the lucidity with which he explains how theoretical notions of transactions, embodiment, and impotence can shed new light on the Lever plantations in the Congo. Given the clarity with which complex concepts are discussed, undergraduates and post-graduates, as well as specialists, who are thinking of writing extended research projects on not only the Congo but colonial capitalism and occupation in general will benefit from reading it. This book neatly complements other recent studies of private companies who operated in the Congo, such as the wonderful *Rainforest Capitalism* by Thomas Hendriks, which emphasise the fact that, even when conjoined with colonialism, capital could not simply conquer all before it.[59] Rather, corporations frequently failed even to make ends meet.

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French Decadence in a Global Context: Colonialism and Exoticism. Edited by JULIA HARTLEY, WANRUG SUWANWATTANA and JENNIFER YEE. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022. x + 287 pp. Hb. £95.00. ISBN: 978-1-80207-056-9.

In the opening of his seminal work on the matter, David Weir notes that the problem with Decadence is that 'the word itself is annoyingly resistant to definition'.[60] Jennifer Yee takes a similar position in the Introduction to this edited volume, and the ambiguity of the Decadent subject is expanded through the nine chapters which follow. While Decadence is well-known for its use and abuse of exoticism and Orientalism, few studies have been dedicated to the complex interplay between Decadence and colonialism. While this is not surprising given the urban origins of Decadence, Yee reminds us that 'European cosmopolitanism cannot be fully understood without taking into account the context of colonialism' (p. 2). Given the ambiguity of Decadence, Yee's introduction sets out a coherent framework which runs through the volume. At its core, the term Decadence is synonymous with decline, and Yee begins the Introduction by identifying Decadence with the perceived national decline of France at the *fin de siècle*. Yet, it was also expanding its borders and colonial assets. It is here that Yee locates a bipartite ambiguity in the 'mission civilisatrice' of France. How can a France which is degenerate 'civilise' the Decadent Other? Likewise, how can a Decadent Other rejuvenate a 'civilised' France? Decadence, when seen through colonial eyes becomes a *pharmakon* in which 'the remedy and the poison itself are indistinguishable' (p. 14).

The authors included in this collection interrogate this ambiguous and ambivalent correlation between Decadence and colonialism. Richard Hibbitt argues in Chapter Four that Octave Mirbeau's representation of the cruelty of China in *Le Jardin des supplices* (1899) reveals the author's anticolonialist philosophy and his reservations about the 'flawed concept of progress in the *fin de siècle*' (p. 118). Similarly, in Chapter Six, Aurélien Lorig demonstrates how anarchist writers criticised colonialism as a violent method of subjugating the individual to imperialist concerns. Although these authors were painfully aware of France's shortcomings, they argued that 'colonialism dehumanizes both the colonizer and the colonized' (p. 170), while 'hold[ing] up a mirror to the contemporary Parisian society that the narrator had left behind' (p. 109). However,

[59] Thomas Henriks, *Rainforest Capitalism: Power and Masculinity in a Congolese Timber Concession* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2022).
[60] David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 1.

in Chapter Five, Vladimir Kapor explores two networks of colonial literature which positioned themselves on opposing ends of this argument. Following a discussion of the anti-Decadent settlers who extoled the rhetoric of national regeneration in their journal *La Grande France* and the more overtly Decadent manifesto of *Les Français d'Asie*, he brings these disparate groups together under the banner of *littérature coloniale* due to their 'shared aim: the aesthetic renewal of French literature' (p. 138). Hélène Marquié also studies this effect that Decadence had on art in Chapter Eight, exploring how the arrival of exotic dances and dancers 'was decreed to be the cause, but also the consequence' of a perceived decline in French dance (p. 204).

A vein that emerges is the inevitable interplay between Decadence, colonialism, and gender. In Chapter One, Sam Bootle explores the gendered connotations of colonial materiality. Whereas the coloniser and the collector were invariably male, Bootle argues that 'there was a gendered divided between women's supposedly frivolous, consumerist acquisition of decorative objects, and men's supposedly serious, erudite endeavour of gathering artefacts for study' (p. 36). This gendered divide takes on a macrocosmic significance through Bootle's discussion of a Buddha statue which becomes a symbol of the conquering yet 'castrated' (male) West. Julia Hartley also subverts this assumption in Chapter Three by positing that Decadent literature simultaneously compares the imagined decline of society with that of the ancient Middle East, while also challenging gender norms of the time. As Hartley suggests, 'Ancient Persia thus emerges as a distant other that […] readers can see as a fellow decadent empire, a lost ancestor and a society in which women faced the same challenges as in their own' (p. 95).

As such, gender becomes an ambiguous partner to colonialism. Wanrug Suwanwattana's Chapter Nine explores Saigon, which is presented as a modern example of colonial success, yet also a despotic centre of foreign decadence. This ambiguity takes on a gendered meaning in her discussion of *congais* (concubines). Drawing a binary between the *congai-bibelot* and the *femme fatale*, Suwanwattana argues that these women represented 'at once the "tool" and the "threat" to the colonizer's identity' (p. 235). Similarly, Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo suggests in Chapter Seven that Judith Gautier's portrayal of an atavistic India seems to offer France an escape from its Decadent reality. However, this 'undoes both colonial authority and the unity of the white man' (p. 179) due to the Dionysian and feminizing influence of India. This reversal of colonial fortunes also can be seen in Chapter Two, in which Jenai Engelhard Humphreys discusses the recent reworkings of nineteenth-century anxieties surrounding French identity in the work of Michel Houellebecq. This time, it is France whose Decadence is 'neutralized' (p. 48) in a reversal of the colonial paradigm that far-right agitators continue to rally against under the pretence of a so-called *grand remplacement*.

The breadth of this volume, composed of work from early-career researchers to established senior academics will be of interest to scholars of Decadence and Postcolonial Studies alike, those who work on gender and sexuality, as well as undergraduate and post-graduate students. Its major contribution, as Suwanwattana eloquently puts it, is 'to reframe Decadence as a global movement […], situating it within both international and local historical contexts' (p. 252). Ultimately, it provides us with a tool to rethink how we approach both (Post)Colonial and Decadent literature in the nineteenth century and beyond by challenging accepted paradigms of these fields.

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