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Progress, Change & Development: Francophone Perspectives

The articles that follow in this issue represent a selection of the papers that were presented at an international conference held at the University of Portsmouth on 4-6 June 2015, under the title, *Progress, Change and Development*, organized by Margaret Majumdar and Joanna Warson. This conference gathered scholars from different spheres such as academia or civil society who presented papers concerning a wide range of cultural areas (Algeria, Yemen, Russia, Northern Ireland, France, etc.). Overall, one of the most remarkable achievements of this conference was the originality of its engagement with space and time. Indeed, the confrontation of arguments and perspectives did not only take place in the discussions following the presentations themselves, with different standpoints depending on the period and place concerned, but also in the very encounter of the points of view of the scholars themselves, based on their background and trajectory. Some of them had first-hand experience of the events they recounted and analysed while others reflected on these very same topics with the perspective given by their acquaintance and engagement with the research that has been devoted to them – the two not being exclusive of each other. This dynamic between empirical and theoretical knowledge had a very positive effect on the atmosphere of the conference itself and on the originality and quality of the debates following the presentations. In that regard, the latter were very lively and rooted in concrete and practical issues.

While the theme of the conference was wide-ranging and covered a variety of historical, theoretical and cultural topics, the texts chosen for this issue have been selected because they deal with some of these questions as they relate to the Francophone world in particular. Interestingly, a fair number of these papers engage with issues related to the legacy of French colonialism. This is to be understood as a reminder of how strong and persistent an impact the French colonial empire has had over the Francophone world. At the same time it is also a reminder of how crucial and pregnant these issues are within academic debates and for contemporary historiography, beyond the sole case of the Francophone sphere.

Several of these papers relate to developments in North Africa at the time of decolonization and in the early stages of independence. The historian Ryo Ikeda gives us an analysis of the political options and choices made in the process of Tunisian independence, in the context of what was happening in geopolitical terms elsewhere in the world in the early to mid-1950s. While he analyses the impact of institutions and their policies on the process of independence and, as a consequence, on nationalism, Catherine Lévy engages, albeit in Algeria, with the same issue ‘on the ground’. She has written a first-hand account of her experiences as a *piéd rouge* in Algeria in the early 1960s and highlights some of the economic and social issues regarding the reorganisation of agricultural production. She also discusses political and cultural issues, particularly as they relate to education and women. Beïda Chikhi takes up the thread at the point where Lévy ends to provide a picture of the cosmopolitan, progressive, revolutionary climate of the Boumedienne years and the way this was reflected in the cultural and literary production.

This first set of papers introduces, from different standpoints related to North Africa, the question of decolonisation as the rejection of the legacy of the colonial power or the appropriation and adjustment of this very legacy to a new setting. In short, it raises the issue of agency in the postcolonial world. Following this point, while addressing economic matters

in Francophone Africa, Vincent Duchaussoy provides an informative analysis of the economic and financial processes operating in the West African Franc zone from independence to the 1990s, adding a further important strand to our understanding of developments in Africa in the postcolonial period.

After these reflections on institutions (international organisations, national political organisations, culture and finance) and independence, Catherine O'Connell and Laëtitia Boqui-Queni concentrate their research on social processes, peoples and identity on two islands that have maintained their connection to metropolitan France into the present day – the Pacific island of New Caledonia in the case of O'Connell, with Boqui-Queni concentrating on the Indian Ocean island of La Réunion. Small though these territories may be, they are nonetheless the site of important processes of interaction, hybridity, domination and contestation, reflecting the diversity of their different population strands and the confrontation of conflicting notions of cultural identity and political empowerment.

Finally, continuing the theme of subjectivity with regard to identity building processes introduced by the previous two articles, Margaret Majumdar reflects on the thinking of Frantz Fanon – rooted in psychoanalysis – , its influence during the time of the Algerian War and wider decolonisation process and its relevance to the present day.

While the perspectives underlying these texts are very different, what unites the subject matter is the underlying preoccupation with history as progress. While some accept the ideals of modernity, freedom and economic, social, political amelioration and focus their critique on the deficiencies of their implementation to date, others channel their work more to unpicking the unintended effects of historical change, challenging received wisdom to date and the analysing the cultural processes and products through which many of the ensuing contradictions are articulated.