

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of this University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA Licence which allows you to:

- Access and download a copy
- Print out a copy

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this module or course of study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Title of extract: **Liberation or Decolonization**

Name of Author: **Ferro, M.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Colonization: a Global History. Ferro, M.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Routledge**

Pages scanned: **305 - 343**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Sustainable Development in an Era of Globalisation CSPH4028**

Name of Designated Person
authorising scanning:

Date authorised: 04.10.16.

Moodle/Powerpoint

LIBERATION OR DECOLONIZATION

Decolonization, the "change of sovereignty", was not due solely to peoples' struggles for liberation. As early as the sixteenth century, during the first wave of European expansion to the Americas, there were movements in the mother countries against slavery and the slave trade. Together with others, Voltaire asked: "What do the colonies profit us?" Such questioning and criticism had very limited effects.

Indirectly the rivalries among the powers also helped peoples and nations to loosen the hold upon them of the colonizing states. That was the case with Siam and China in the nineteenth century. But, they also had other secondary effects which took a long time to be felt.

In the twentieth century, one finds the same factors at work, though in different forms. But, after 1945, the pressure of the two Great Powers did contribute to bring colonization to an end. In this context the Suez crisis (1956) played a big role.

Lastly, the implosion of 1989-91 in the former USSR constitutes one of the features of the crisis that overtook the regime – though it is questionable if the consequences of this crisis have fulfilled the expectations of the non-Russian populations.

The role played by the movements of resistance to colonial domination has varied according to the different periods of history. Independence movements were vigorous at the time of the conquest, as much in black Africa, for example, as in Vietnam. Sometimes they quietened down later as a result the policies enacted by the conquerors, or as a result of the effects of evangelization. Then, subsequently, they reasserted themselves with renewed power, especially after the end of the Second World War, when a second colonial occupation became the order of the day, an occupation which was more concerned with profits and sought greater control of all the aspects of the agricultural production. This dramatic change was particularly evident in tropical countries: Kenya, Malaysia.

In French North Africa great was the political disappointment of the Arabs who felt they had been shabbily rewarded for the loyalty they had shown during the two wars. Their nationalism was rekindled, though some

might have believed it had been on its way out. Actually it had never been completely extinguished. From 1945 on the colonists' opposition to any type of reform revived it.

At the same time, colonizers, especially the English, came to rely on social groups which had existed before their arrival, or on new ones which they had fostered, and on their good will. If these groups resisted, defaulted or rebelled, ultimately the colonial power found itself disarmed. This was a process which developed, by stages, in India, perhaps even, for France, in Morocco and Tunisia, and culminated in violence in Malaysia and Kenya. There is no need to mention the case of territories where – as in Algeria – the very idea of a native participation in the direction of the country was not entertained.

However, left to themselves, the liberation movements were rarely able to defeat the occupier militarily, though such was the case in Burma, Vietnam and Kenya. The military inferiority of the colonized was far too great, especially in black Africa, and the conclusion of a military confrontation could prove to be fatal.

There is another feature of liberation movements that is worth mentioning: their internal divisions, especially between collaborators, those who opposed collaboration, and those who tried to steer a middle course. A further characteristic feature consists in the oppressed being oppressors in their turn – in the USSR the Georgians maintained their hold over the Abkhaz – to the extent that divisions among the colonized peoples could be stronger than their unity in the face of the colonizer: for example, the Muslims and non-Muslims of Nigeria and of Sudan, the Azeris and the Armenians in their confrontation with the Russians.

Finally, in some cases, the metropolitan policy was able to delay or channel the rise of nationalism: the British set up the West Indian Federation, the South Arabian Federation, and France organized the French Union.

Conversely the outcome of colonization influenced the mother countries themselves, and not only with regard to colonial issues. Very early, during the conflict with the American colonists, Burke and Locke had become aware of the adverse effect of colonial domination on the democratic tradition of the English. Much later, during the Third Republic the colonial question became the pretext for political divisions in France: it led to the sacralization of the republican system, to the rallying together of the monarchists. Moreover, for their part, the colonial peoples or those who were fated to experience European domination did not fail to notice that their resistance had triggered a revolution in Russia in 1905 and, in France, a coup in 1958, the creation of the OAS and the putsch staged by the generals. Moreover Salazar confided to Pierre Messmer, a minister in De Gaulle's government, that his regime would collapse if the Portuguese empire fell (personal communication to Marc Ferro).

The point of view of the intellectuals: were the colonies profitable?

It is worth asking whether or not imperialism was a profitable venture. It is a question the enormous scope of which still preoccupies the minds of politicians and historians. Thinking minds raised this question very early; but it became crucial only in the twentieth century.

The first inkling was given by the British experiment with free trade on the eve of the First World War. Up to the middle of the nineteenth century the structure of trade between the mother country and the colonies remained that of mercantilist times, of the Navigation Acts. Customs preferences lasted till then. But then a marked change took place. Britain had become highly industrialized; she sold her manufactured goods in exchange for raw materials. India topped the list, accounting for a third of all colonial trade: she exported drugs, dyes and luxuries. The main commodities were Indian indigo, sugar from the West Indies, and wood from Canada. In return the Empire receives one third of British exports. But these exports reached a state of stagnation (F. Crouzet, 1964, pp. 290ff).

The turnaround first came about as a result of Britain's growing need for food products as a result of the conversion of the country to industrialization and of its demographic growth (from 21 million in 1851 to 41 million in 1911). In addition to these needs, Britain had to be supplied with rubber, later with oil. The settlement colonies – like Canada, Australia and New Zealand – also had a large share of this trade: they contributed wheat, meat, and so on. But two new developments intervened to accelerate the change in the structure of trade: the lowering of maritime freights (by from 50 to 75 percent) resulting from the use of steamships and the building of railways which spearheaded the British colonization of Canada, Australia and of India. A massive investment of British capital made the construction of the railways possible: 60 percent of the capital collected in London between 1865 and 1894 was diverted to that effect. Still it was the local entrepreneurs who ensured the development of the production: the main function of British capital was to lay down the groundwork for economic take-off and growth.

It goes without saying that the export of capital was carried out to the detriment of investments in Britain itself. But that enabled the new countries, especially the dominions, to develop and to buy British goods. The crack in this system of trade occurred when Canada began to receive its equipment supplies from the United States.

The settlement colonies were the ones to benefit most from this new development. The share of the Empire in British imports went from 1 percent to 25 percent for meat, from 0.5 to 48 percent for wheat. But it went down for sugar, especially sugar from the West Indies, because of competition with European beet sugar; for coffee because Brazil got a

larger share than Ceylon (Sri Lanka); for indigo, eliminated by chemical inventions. Overall, between 1854 and 1913, the Empire's share of total imports scarcely increased, from 22 to 25 percent. But a turnaround occurred at the expense of the former possessions. Accordingly the share of imports from the Empire showed proportionately little increase in relation to imports originating from other places, though its worth had quadrupled. On the other hand, the value of exports to the Empire had increased eightfold.

The important feature of this system of trade is that imperial commerce grew, even though the exports of capital abroad decreased. If the share of the Empire went down during periods of general prosperity (for example, 1868-72), it increased during depressions, thus acting like a safety valve.

Especially in Canada, the progress of foreign competition in imperial markets was real, from the moment when the imports from the Empire no longer consisted, as they did earlier, mainly of the textiles, but of equipment goods, which happened as soon as colonial countries had railways. Electrical equipment, machines and automobiles came most often exclusively from Britain. On the other hand if the dominions sold foodstuffs and raw materials, the dividends they brought in went also in part back to Britain.

Thanks to this system Britain found herself at the centre of a global network of multilateral transactions and settlements, whereas previously these had been simply segmental. The first partnership between Britain and her colonies had culminated in a serious crisis, that is, American independence. But the second partnership ensured the hegemony of the City and accordingly guaranteed imperial self-sufficiency, that is, the Empire's autonomy with regard to the rest of the world.

It is partly illusory to see a correlation between economic progress and the policy of territorial expansion. True, at the time of Disraeli or of Chamberlain, they were synchronous phases. But, in the final reckoning, what mattered most was the Empire's role as a relay, which did so much to assure the world dominance of the English economy. After all, with the exception of South Africa, the territories which were annexed during the time of expansionist hysteria were almost all areas devoid of any particular economic interest. Psychological motivations were more powerful than mere economic ones.

However the situation underwent a complete reversal with the Great War, and still more with the Crash of 1929. To withstand the depression and resist foreign competition, attempts to give shape to the dreams of imperial isolation were made, especially after the Ottawa accords. The aim of these dreams was imperial self-sufficiency. But soon the self-insufficiency of the Empire became the cause of the economic decline of Britain. As a matter of fact Britain followed a policy which was doomed to failure when

she persisted in depending on her strictly colonial Empire, at a time when the Empire of the Dominions was increasingly becoming more and more independent. It had become impossible for Great Britain to "shut herself up within such a closed system" (A. Siegfried). The decline was hastened by the ordeal of the Second World War.

In 1939 Great Britain still engaged in an "inter-nations" commerce comparable with that of the United States and had an industrial base as highly developed as that of Germany. At any rate, London was the best place for the export of capital. The all-out mobilization required by four years of war transformed the country which even became the debtor of its imperial possessions. For instance, India which not long before had been a debtor, henceforth had a credit of one billion pounds sterling. Furthermore the cold war and the conflicts in the Middle East continued to burden the budget while industrial competitors, Italy, Germany and Japan, could rebuild their economy without being hampered with these burdens. According to Hugh Dalton, Chancellor of the Exchequer, the economic and financial crisis of the end of the forties was a major factor in the disengagement of Great Britain from India, Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Palestine. Economic weakness and the cost of military operations liable to slow down the nationalist movements further hastened many a departure after 1960.

Elsewhere these difficulties had a cumulative effect, by a sort of inverse process. It became imperative to turn towards the tropical colonies particularly in order to obtain raw materials or finished products – so that they need not be paid for in dollars. This led to strict control over the production of some of these countries, especially Malaysia with its rubber, black Africa also. That policy became known as the "second colonial occupation". Associated with the sterling zone, these countries were tied to the British economy with the result that they became grouped with countries like Australia, South Africa and India which till then had economic links only with London. But Britain had to pay the price of conceding them local powers which rendered them semi-independent. Malaysia, Nigeria and Ghana were on their way to independence from the middle fifties on, without this process being directly attributed to the weakness of the notion of suzerainty. Its consequences were "oblique".

Whatever may have been the reservations linked to the decision by Great Britain to join in the reconstruction of Europe in 1961, it nevertheless indicates a relative disengagement from the Empire, despite "imperial preference" continuing to be the dogma and the law of the British government. From 1950 to 1970 Great Britain's trade with her Empire went from half to a quarter of the totality of her trade. There was a global reorientation, a sort of economic disengagement which testified to a relative lack of interest in an outmoded system of relations. Its place was taken by an interplay of more dynamic connections with European,

American or Japanese partners. And thus came to an end a global world system of which Great Britain had been the mainspring.

The new situation therefore did not require the maintenance of the overseas dependencies in the straitjacket of the old political system. The multinationals could henceforth profitably substitute themselves for it.

In France the economic aspect of the colonial problem is more drastically analysed, in terms of the "cost" which the Empire represented. Questions were raised as to whether up to 1930 the Empire had been a "good bargain": in 1913, for its conquest, it had cost per year 20 percent of the current expenses of the state; its preservation and its management accounted for nearly 7 percent of these same current expenses, that is, the expenses for police, officials, and so on. It was a time when the Banque d'Indochine was making profits at the rate of 69 percent, the mines of Ouagla made profits at the rate of 120 percent. From 1913 to 1929 the Empire became the first commercial partner and the biggest financial trader. It was a financial burden on the State; it yielded big returns to the private sector.

Yet the 1929 Crash ushered in a process that started to separate the mother country from the Empire. This was, in the first instance, due to the decline of the industries which had their best outlet in the colonies: textiles, agribusiness. It was also due to an inversion of the pattern: during the glory days when colonial imperialism coexisted harmoniously with a dynamic economy, public opinion more or less ignored the colonial experience; it rallied round to it later on, at the very moment when a part of the business world was moving away from it. But had the burden really been shed?

For its part the State was embarked on a policy of sacrifices. For example, in North Africa, from 1948 to 1951, direct metropolitan financial aid increased fourfold. During the same period 15 percent of French investment went overseas, reaching 20 percent in 1955. Jacques Marseille has computed that 9 percent of the revenue paid by French taxpayers went on expenses incurred overseas. But "far from exhibiting the scope of this financial effort, it seems on the contrary that the French administration went out of its way to hide it" (pp. 93-153). Such practices fed the growing misunderstanding between native elites and French representatives: according to one of the latter the "moral" benefits were not equal to the sacrifices freely made. The fact is that most of the time the populations were not aware of these sacrifices, considering that in North Africa, for example, most of the benefits of these efforts went to the colonists, to the officials themselves, above all to the companies. Naturally the whole population shared in some of that beneficence. But that share could not be assessed. On the other hand, the standard of living of the colonists rose, over three generations, higher than that of the Arabs, higher even than that of the metropolitan French. How could such an advantage be measured?

Simultaneously the portion of the colonial imports coming from the mother country had risen from 27 percent in 1938 to 44 percent in 1952. In France 450,000 people worked for the overseas market. One of the arguments of the defenders of the Empire was precisely that its loss would trigger a tidal wave of unemployment.

Overall the financial groups maintained, in relation to the colonial problem, a cautious waiting attitude. A few rare groups may have been in favour of independence: like the Walker group, the mines of Zellidja, allied to the Morgan bank. But most of the big groups remained neutral, while the middle- and small-sized groups, like the majority of the colonists, were generally opposed to independence.

The latter, in chorus with all those who were left from the "colonial party", denounced the defeatism of the mother country. According to Gabriel Puaux, member of the Central Committee of Overseas France, this criticism did not refer only to Communists or anti-colonialists, but to "defeatists" of every kind. The metropolitan administration also had its defeatists who deemed that the colonial burden was too onerous: they feared that the mother country would reduce its own investment at home.

This was the argument which became known as "cartierism", a theory which, unlikely as it seems, was enunciated in *Paris-Match*, which popularized it. Others – Pierre Moussa, Raymond Aron – had already made similar statements; but these did not receive any publicity.

Raymond Cartier's idea was that neither Switzerland nor Sweden, themselves stable and prosperous countries, had ever had a colony; and Holland, which did not have an Empire any more, had subsequently become richer than it ever was in the past. "[Holland] lost her colonies in the worst conditions, when it was taken for granted that her existence depended on the East Indies, a collection of treasures, oil, rubber, rice, tea, coffee, tin, coprah, spices . . . After only a few years she has acquired more prosperity and well-being than ever before. She would not be in the same situation today if, instead of modernizing her factories and reclaiming the Zuiderzee, she had to build railways in Java, to cover Sumatra with dams, to pay family allowances to the polygamous men of Borneo."

The waste observed by Raymond Cartier during an investigation in black Africa lay at the source of those formulas which became instant hits: "It would have perhaps been better to establish an Office of the Loire than an Office of the Niger, to build in Nevers the super-hospital of Lomé, and in Tarbes the Lycée of Bobo-Dioulasso."

Georges Bidault denounced those who, in France, had "an accountant's vision". Nevertheless he made it clear that, with regard to Algeria, Saharan oil would tilt the scale in favour of the beneficiary.

The identity of the nation and the role of the dependencies*France*

A host of political groups opposed those who believed that the greatness of France would survive economic withdrawal and lay in the preservation of her moral role. They opposed the "abandonment", the "decline" of the nation. Since the defeat of 1940, even a little earlier, since the colonial exhibition of 1931, they had seen the Empire as the arena which would enable France to rediscover her greatness. What was a necessity for Pétain was equally a necessity for De Gaulle who, at Brazzaville, promised reforms, but to be carried out within a republican framework. Moreover it was during the decades 1930 to 1950 that films and writings poured out in praise of French colonization and of its achievements. As late as 1954 François Mitterrand stated that "from Flanders to the Congo there is the law, a single nation, a single parliament".

During the Cold War the defence of national integrity was presented as part of the struggle against "the Soviet threat", against Communism, an attitude forged in the fire of the Indochinese war, for Ho Chi Minh was an associate of the Comintern prior to 1943, and had always belonged to the Communist Party. Consequently in defending her Empire, France was able to pose as the guardian of the West and of its civilization. When the colonial revolt broke out in the Maghreb, the defence of France was presented also as the preservation of republican order in the face of world revolution. That is what the military leaders thought; they did not want to "sell France off". But certain politicians, like Jacques Soustelle, for example, displayed a blend of the reformist with the counter-revolutionary and the Jacobin. Soustelle knew very well that in Algeria France had neither done her duty nor introduced the reforms which would have given legitimacy to her presence. He also claimed justice for the Arabs, as did Albert Camus: "When a Frenchman of Algeria is called Pierre, he has a claim on our affection because he has always belonged to us; when he is called Antonio, he has a double claim, because he has chosen to live among us; when he is called Rachid, he has a triple claim, for we have dragged him along a difficult and dangerous path." But as soon as the Arabs refused to acknowledge his justice, Soustelle believed that they were being manipulated, first by the USSR and Communism, and afterwards by Nasser.

Those were the views which were generally entertained by the Right, as much by political leaders like Georges Bidault, as by writers, though with some shades of difference, such as the novelist Jacques Laurent, or the historian Raoul Girardet. Soon, this resistance movement was joined *volens volens* by leaders who were dragged along by the cycle of war and of repression, leaders who ranged from Martineau-Deplat to Mitterrand,

including even the socialists Guy Mollet and Robert Lacoste, at least as regards Algeria. As a result this political orientation in France prevailed over the facts.

With De Gaulle, the decolonizing act sprang from the power of the Republic. But it was not anti-colonialism that initiated this change. Change came from the struggles for liberation, in Algeria especially. Nor does black Africa owe any heavy debt to anti-colonialism. But it is certain that here, thanks to Gaston Defferre and to De Gaulle, a work of decolonization was accomplished.

Great Britain

The pride of being the masters of a vast empire did exist, but the attitude in the mother country varied, depending on whether the territories had white populations or not. Two views of the British Empire existed: first, that of Lord Curzon who made India into the jewel in the crown; second, that of Lord Milner who envisaged a Commonwealth populated only by whites (which implied concern neither for the Indians of Canada, nor for the aborigines of Australia, nor for the Maoris of New Zealand). Thus violent reactions to the anti-British movements occurred particularly when the subjects of Her Majesty were directly concerned: in Cyprus, in Gibraltar, in Kenya, in Rhodesia, or in the Malvinas-Falklands.

Besides the loss of prestige of the House of Lords, the democratization process of the post-war period, the institution of the Welfare State in particular, have devalued the virtues which the Empire represented. Sentimentality has replaced virility, the Empire has become a charitable enterprise as well as a source of income. The turnaround has been total.

For genuine social democracy, with the institution of the Welfare State, was incompatible with imperialism. Only economic withdrawal, with the savings that it generated, made the Welfare State possible. Many people in Britain revived an old idea and assumed as a certainty that *the Empire had provided the ruling class with the foundation which had enabled it to perpetuate itself in power*. Moreover since the beginning of the nineteenth century the heirs of Cobden, even of Gladstone, were convinced that wars were henceforth the legacy of imperialist rivalries. Thus the Labour Party made its difference felt over the colonial question when, after the Second World War, it made concessions to the national movements in India and in Palestine in 1947-48. It is true that it had no choice. Later it proclaimed that it was not hostile to the Empire but to the "adventurist" policy embodied by Anthony Eden during the Suez Crisis, and that it favoured a Commonwealth which would perpetuate the greatness of Great Britain without compromising her bonds with the coloured peoples. The difficult moment came with the Central African crisis at the beginning of the sixties when white racism in Rhodesia called for a semi-disengagement which

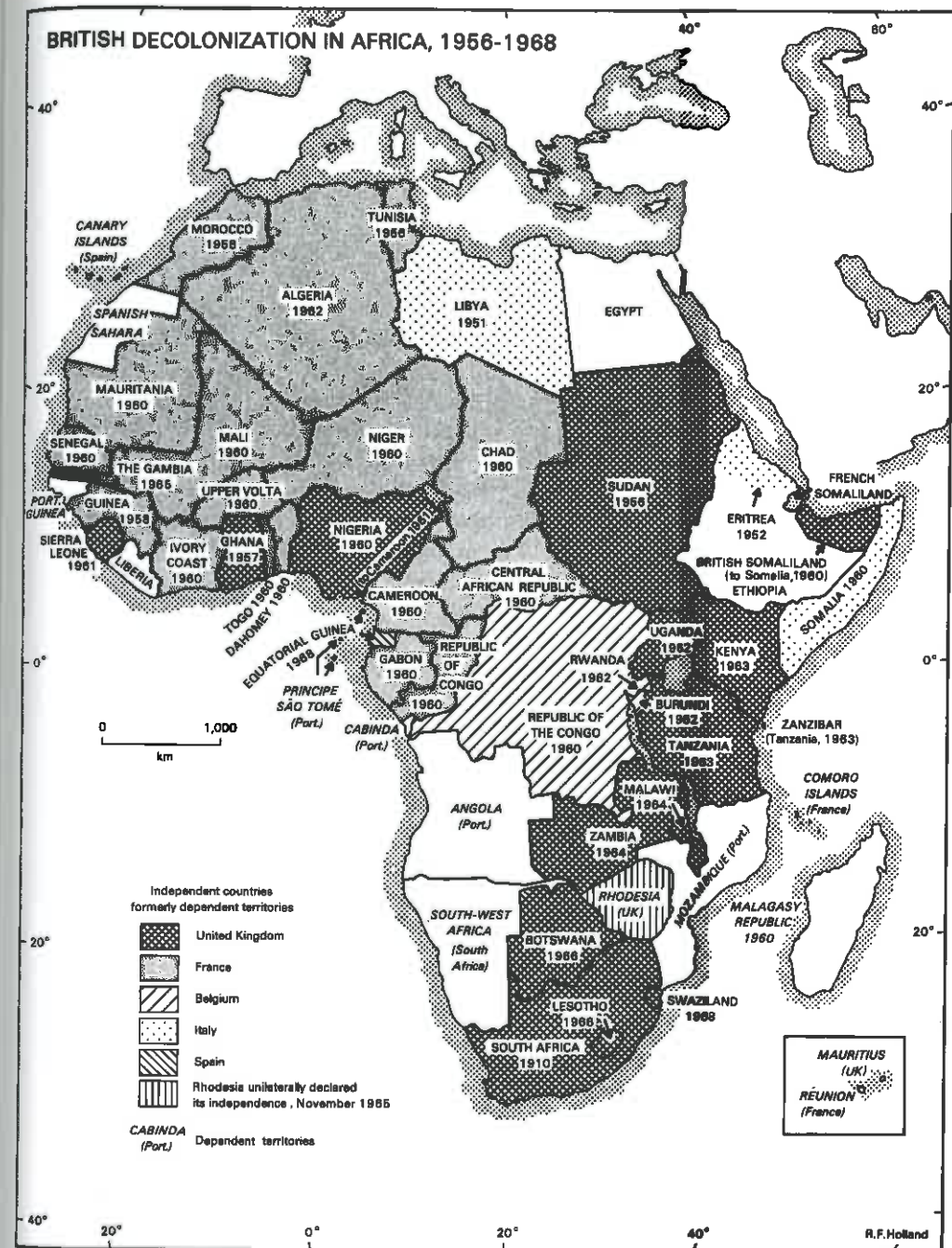
proved to be difficult to put into practice. Additionally the unilateral proclamation of independence by the Smith government was opposed by the Labour Party which thereby earned the condemnation of the British in the rest of the Commonwealth.

The Conservatives, in power from 1951 to 1964, had had to endure the most humiliating defeats. The first was the "departure" from Australia and from New Zealand, as a result of an alliance with the United States from which Great Britain was excluded (the Anzus pact of 1951). It was a delayed effect of the strategic choice made by Churchill during the Second World War, when the defence of Singapore was given priority over that of Australia, for which the Australians never forgave him. The other defeats were the Mau-Mau uprising in Kenya (1952); the creation of the Central African Federation; the Suez fiasco (1956) and the termination of the British presence in the Middle East coinciding with the fall of King Faisal in Iraq (1958); the independence of Malaysia and of Ghana, of Sierra Leone, of Tanganyika (1957-61), then of the West Indies (1962). In Suez, egged on by Lord Amery, Anthony Eden was led to intervene against Nasser: he lost the battle which ended with Harold Macmillan recognizing Egyptian ownership of the canal.

Henceforth the Conservatives had to bow to the necessity of disengagement with the difference that, in contrast with the Labour Party, they were never suspected of having tried to liquidate the Empire.

In the case of Great Britain, as in that of France, external pressures were not wanting in speeding up the process that led to disengagement and to decolonization. During the Second World War the United States, independently of the role played by Japan, had added its voice to the threats that faced the Empire by openly denouncing the policies followed in India by Stafford Cripps and Churchill "where they were perpetuating the colonial system". It is true that the riots which followed the arrest in 1942 of Gandhi owed nothing to the Americans. But, for the first time, the British Government saw its powerful ally formulate a criticism, a challenge, a threat. The Americans assumed they were totally innocent of any imperialist vocation and scarcely imagined that their policy in Latin America was a variation of indirect colonialism. Nevertheless they preached morality to the colonial powers: it was a way to attempt to substitute themselves for them. That is what occurred in the aftermath of the Suez crisis.

French domination equally had to confront the same external threat as did its rival, which, during the war, had tried to take over from it in the Levant and in Madagascar. Defeated France was indeed vulnerable, and in her Empire too. But Bourguiba, the Sultan of Morocco and Ferhat Abbas had taken the same decision as did Ho Chi Minh: opposition to the fascist threat and subsequent reliance on the Americans, in order to extract hoped for concessions from France. In November 1942 Murphy



Source: A. N. Porter, *Atlas of British Overseas Expansion*, Routledge, 1994

had talks with Ferhat Abbas, just as Roosevelt had with the Sultan of Morocco. But, more concerned with winning the war, the Americans merely committed themselves to words. The colonists discerned correctly that their future was being threatened. Accordingly, at least in Morocco, they did not hesitate to attribute to the action of the Americans the events of 1950–52.

In Algeria, the colonists attributed it to the action of the Soviets to Communism. But then no one could foresee that Americans and Russians were to join hands, at Suez.

The international context: Suez and the twilight of empires

Three things led to the disappearance of the empires: the demands of the colonized peoples; the calling into question, in the mother country, of the advantages of expansion; lastly external pressure, stemming from rivals or new emergent powers that presented a challenge.

The rising power of the United States and the USSR, and the assertion of Arab nationalism thus came together, during the Suez Crisis, to signal the decline of the French and British empires, which was already in an advanced stage, but then became irreversible.

It is moreover paradoxical that, while the centuries old rivalry between France and England had promoted their rise to power and contributed to the development of their empires, their joining together for the first time on a colonial issue led to their collapse.

At the beginning of the fifties the Cold War was at its height. No longer having its hands tied in Korea, the United States was on the verge of intervening in Vietnam. Claiming to have been duped in the Yalta agreements, the Americans found that after China the Middle East was about to swing to the East, to Communism. The alarm bell had rung in Iran where Mossadeq had nationalized the oil industry. The Shah was restored to his throne, but in 1954 the USSR and Syria signed an agreement for the sale of arms, indicating that the USSR was moving towards the "warm seas" and the oil zones of the East.

The American leaders were swayed by the Riga spirit, that is, they were influenced by Balts opposed to the Yalta accord. They evinced an unconditional distrust of Soviet expansionism. Led by John Foster Dulles, they worked out the policy of containment aimed at surrounding the USSR, and Communist China, with a network of military alliances, backed up by a range of bases under American control. The aim was to stop the forward march of Soviet expansionism, which has already won control of Eastern Europe, North Korea and China, and of the Communist parties which were active in Iran (Tudeh), in Egypt, in Indonesia. In the West this role devolved upon NATO, in the Far East on SEATO, in the Middle East on the Baghdad Pact.

From then on adherence to this pact, the spirit in which countries participate in it, constitute the criterion for the American government's evaluation of its partners. For example, the rejection in 1954 by the French National Assembly of the treaty for the defence of the European community gave rise in the United States to a lasting mistrust of France. The effects were felt in the Suez crisis. In the Middle East the Americans relied on the British to win the agreement of Iraq and of Jordan. They themselves negotiated the adhesion to that pact, which was then called MEDO (Middle East Defence Organization) of Iran, Turkey and Egypt.

Dulles also met with Nasser. The political climate was favourable as the Egyptian military had built up contacts in the United States in anticipation of their putsch against King Farouk who tilted towards England. But when Dulles evoked the need for the "free world" to unite against the USSR, Nasser replied that "for him, the solidarity of the free world connotes imperialism and domination". He would only join the MEDO "once the English had left" (Heikal, H. *Les Documents du Caire*, Paris, 1973, pp. 9–43).

For the Americans the test was adhesion to the MEDO. The test for Nasser was the supply of arms, to drive away the British or wage war against Israel. With Dulles vacillating over the supply of arms, Nasser placed his order with the Soviets, *via* the Chinese. So as not to provoke the Americans the Russians had the order fulfilled by Czechoslovakia. The era of bid and counter-bid had started.

"They supply them with arms, we shall offer them prosperity", was Dulles' reaction, referring to Nasser's dream project, the construction of the great Aswan Dam. It represented a huge cost: one billion dollars. The World Bank allocated 200 million in hard currency, Britain and the United States 70 million each. It was still below the projected outlay even if the IBRD increased its participation. But the conditions imposed by the World Bank implied a sort of control over the expenditure of the Egyptian state which unfortunately recalled the 1880s when, as a result of its indebtedness, Egypt was forced to accept the suzerainty of France and of Britain, subsequently of England alone. Nasser rejected these conditions, despite the efforts of Eugene Black, the director of the IBRD. Then he repeated his action of the preceding years and asked for Russian help. At the same time he launched himself in a series of gestures "unfriendly" to the United States: recognition of Communist China, military pact with Syria. Dulles thought that a clash with Egypt would have no serious impact on the supply of oil to the West. Badgered by the Chinese lobby close to Chiang Kai-shek and the Jewish lobby favourable to Israel, careful not to offend the rest of the Arab world, while preserving the trust of the British who thought that the concessions made by the IBRD were improper, on 19 July 1956 Dulles cancelled the loan and justified it on the ground of the untrustworthiness of the Egyptian debtors. Nasser was surprised by

the "insulting" manner of the cancellation more than by the cancellation itself, which he expected, and which was followed by that of the British.

Two days later Nasser responded to this humiliation by announcing that, to finance the Aswan Dam, he was nationalizing the Suez Canal Company. Suez was to pay for Aswan.

This coup was aimed at Britain, more than at the Americans. But Nasser was not aware that France too identified herself with Suez. For the help which Egypt was bringing to the FLN this thunderous nationalization provided the Guy Mollet government with an unexpected pretext to intervene. The speech announcing the nationalization actually had a provocative tenor: "I began by finding in Eugene Black another Ferdinand de Lesseps, and my mind took me back to that time when Egypt, with 11 percent of the shares, committed itself to provide 120,000 workers, in order to complete works which cost us 8 million pounds . . . The Egyptian Company which was then created to serve Egyptian interest brought to England 100 million dollars of which we received only 3 million . . . We shall take back our rights, for the canal is the property of Egypt . . ." And, to the ovations of the crowd, Nasser ended his speech with a loud burst of laughter (*L'Economiste égyptien*, 29 July 1956).

La Voix des Arabes, an outfit supplied by the CIA, transmitted this burst of laughter to the Maghreb, to Paris, to London where it provoked anger.

The Britain of Anthony Eden was not reconciled to playing second fiddle to the United States. The twilight of the Empire was evident to one and all and, starting in 1947, the evacuation from Egypt had become the very symbol of that decline. The British believed they had twice "defended" Egypt and the Suez Canal: in 1917 against the Turks, in 1942 against Rommel and the Italians. The argument of the British was that Egypt had never been free since the time of the Pharaohs: it had been successively occupied by the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Turks, the French. They captured it in order to defend it (cf. Valentine Chirol, *The Egyptian Problem*). But during the Second World War, the Egyptians felt they could dispense with that "protection", as was demonstrated by the noisy demonstrations that greeted the victories of Rommel in 1941. As a result the British deemed, once the war was over, that they had to evacuate Egypt. But, after their departure from Cairo in 1947, they obtained a concession whereby Ismailia and the Canal Zone could be militarily reoccupied to forestall an external threat against Turkey or the Arab world. This was aimed against the USSR, but it also appeared as a pretext.

Even though the evacuation had been carried out well within the agreed deadline, the relationship the British had with Generals Neguib and Nasser, who had come to power after the putsch in July 1952, very quickly deteriorated. In Suez and in Egypt the British wanted to continue playing the role of privileged patrons and to keep Egypt in their game plan. They

looked down upon the new leaders, whom they did not control, as upstarts. They hoped to discredit them and to make them pass for dictators as they had suppressed the political parties: the Wafd in particular, the Communist Party. Further they were persecuting the Muslim Brotherhood – which had actually tried to assassinate Nasser. The ill will generated by the Aswan project was a feature of this policy. In fact the English felt that their evacuation of Egypt had been a retreat enforced under constraint, not the result of an agreement concluded with a partner. For their part Neguib and Nasser stepped up their hostile gestures against the allies of England, especially Iraq and the "insolent festivities celebrating the departure of the last English soldier" only added to the fury of the former occupiers.

At any rate Britain immediately reacted by recognizing Sudanese independence. The procedure went through no delay; it bore no comparison with the procrastinations which London manifested towards India, Egypt or Malaysia. The intention of the British was transparent. It was to cut the umbilical cord that bound Egypt to Sudan for, by a clever use of the procedure of self-determination, Nasser would have liked to maintain a sort of Sudano-Egyptian condominium, that is, to return to a past when Sudan had supplied "land for the Egyptian colonists, soldiers for their army, security for the water of the Nile". That is, Sudan would have become a dependency again, as in the days of Ismail.

The celebration of Sudanese independence, the commemoration of the heroic death of Gordon Pasha – so many demonstrations which exasperated the Anglo-Egyptian conflict. Like many members of the military, Nasser maintained links in Sudan. Accordingly he tried by all means to delay the date of the independence, seeking the help of pro-Egyptian sects like the Ansars and the Khatimas. But he could not overtly proclaim the colonialist ambition of Egypt at the very moment when, in confronting the "imperialist" West, he wanted to pose as the eulogist of the right of nations to dispose of their own destiny.

"Why do you oppose the Baghdad pact?", Eden asked Nasser when he met him. "Because it divides the Arab world", Nasser replied. The successor of Churchill was unwilling to grasp that the Egyptian Colonel's project consisted in regrouping the Arab countries, then the Islamic peoples, and ultimately the African continent. It seemed a crazy scheme and the combination of an expansionist urge with intransigence and anti-democratic policies made Nasser look like a "new Hitler" to Eden and other Western leaders. First, the British minister could not conceive that it was possible to have any policy other than to join the West or the Middle East. Secondly, he assumed that the heart of the Arab world lay in Iraq, not in Egypt, and he relied on Bagdad to rebuild its unity, for his benefit. Nor could Eden see that to ask Egypt to emulate Turkey or Iran – which had adhered to the pact – represented an insult to a country which had freed

itself from the Turks and considered the Persians as rivals in the Arab world.

That is how the Bagdad pact "divided" the Arab world. On one side, was Iraq, linked with the enemy, or treacherous Turkish or Persian rivals. On the other side, was Egypt, allied to the truly Arab countries, Syria and Yemen, without the intervention of a foreign power. To that end Egypt had had to get rid of those who collaborated with the British, by toppling King Farouk and the WAFD, something which Noury Saïd could not do in Baghdad. Nor could the King of Jordan do so while he had by his side his army commander Glubb Pasha, an arabized Englishman. Only Ibn Saud of Arabia, with his oil and his control over the Holy Places could *also* represent the Arab world. But Nasser and his free officers represented a new Arab world of the intellectual or military middle class, not the old world of burnouses and of feudalism. The new stood against the old, which explains the attraction which the Nasser revolution exerted on the Syrian or Iraqi lower middle classes, so well expressed in the film *Les Murs*. Consequently, with the rising popularity of Nasser whose fame swelled with every Western affront, King Hussein of Jordan refused to join the pact which Bagdad had just signed with Ankara. At the same time Yemen signed a pact of mutual assistance with Egypt. Indeed for the British Nasser was the Number One enemy. Nasser knew it and he got ready to face reprisals for the nationalization of the Suez Canal. He was expecting France to join in. But he was surprised by the intervention of Israel.

In his *Bloc-Notes*, François Mauriac wrote: "When the last British soldier left the Canal Zone, some Frenchmen gloated and said: 'Ha, ha, the British too!' Just as there were Englishmen in the Colonial Office who rubbed their hands with satisfaction on reading the news coming from Algeria . . . But the departure of the last Englishman from Suez is a big defeat for France . . . and all the blows which we are receiving in North Africa strike at the British too" (p. 405).

Twenty-five years later, did François Mitterrand remember Mauriac's judgement when he became the first to express his endorsement of Great Britain's action in the Falklands crisis?

Whatever may be the case, François Mauriac was right. The mission of Christian Pineau was designed to thumb the nose at the British when he called on Nehru and then on Nasser. He spoke nice words to Syria which was under threat from Iraq led by Noury Saïd, and he tried to win the good offices of Nasser in the Algerian situation, but in a spirit of friendship. Twenty years later Christian Pineau acknowledged the limitations of his mission when he said: "In fact I had not established a close link between the policy to be adopted in the Arab countries and the Algerian question." Like Eden he too was unaware of the Arabo-Islamic renaissance and persisted in his thinking of the West-East relationship, in seeing the problem within the old colonial perspective. In Paris it was well known, ever since the

discoveries of Soustelle in the Nememcha that Nasser had links with the "rebels". But it all seemed to be normal and Pineau accepted "the word of honour of Nasser who assured him that he did not have FLN cadres on his territory". He mentioned it in the Parliament.

The testimony of Nasser is interesting because it shows that Pineau, no more than Eden, could understand him: "He tried to reach an agreement with me for a solution of the Algerian problem. But I told him that I was not responsible for the Algerian revolution . . . Only the Algerians had started it; it emerged from within. I have not promised him not to help the Algerians. I told him: 'It is our responsibility to help our Arab brothers everywhere.' He asked me about the military training of the Algerians, about sending Egyptians to Algeria. I replied there were no Egyptians who were fighting with the Algerians . . . that there were no Algerians receiving training at that time" (March 1956).

A few days later, with the resumption of this training, French intelligence took delight in making this information public and in exposing Pineau to ridicule, for which he did not forgive Nasser. Moreover, at the time when Robert Lacoste, who had replaced Soustelle, announced the arrival of 100,000 men in Algeria and the "last quarter hour" of the "rebels", *The Voice of the Arabs* broadcast information which represented Nasser as the defender of the Algerian cause. This news has a massive impact at a time when the majority of the Algerian Muslims were still lacking in self-assurance, when the values of integration still appealed to a large number, when even the goals of the FLN were not known. The association of the FLN struggle with Islamo-Arab cause acted like a leaven, like a lever, raising the masses to new heights of fervour. The news of an Egyptian landing in Collo in August 1955 showed to what extent myth had become a part of the situation. The Arabs believed in it. So did Soustelle who in Philippeville had mistaken the eulogists of independence for Egyptian propagandists.

The goal of the French leaders was to sever the umbilical cord with the Arab and Islamic world. They believed that once Nasser was struck down, the insurrection would be quickly eliminated. And what a new affront to France when, in July 1956, Nasser nationalized Suez, "a French masterpiece", inaugurated by Empress Eugénie, associated with the name of Ferdinand de Lesseps. *Le Monde* had this headline: "A challenge". *Le Quotidien* proclaimed: "He has acted like Hitler, he shall perish like Hitler." And it added: "The canal must be reoccupied."

The fact is that France relied on Israel to accomplish this task.

Assuredly Nasser did not expect that to happen. He himself wrote about it after the event. For, after his alliance with Syria and with Jordan, especially after the departure of the British, he could not assess the extent to which Israel had become apprehensive of being encircled, of being attacked from the south bereft of the protective buffer of the British forces. Additionally Nasser thought that the British would never accept Israel's

help, as that would be the surest way to alienate the Arab world. Indeed the British did not want an alliance with Israel. When the war actually started they even proposed bombing Tel Aviv as a subterfuge to mask their collusion with Jerusalem, something which Israel refused. But London had to yield and accept this alliance under pressure from Paris which, after having supplied Israel with arms to compensate for the supplies made to Nasser by the "Czechs", deemed that in the face of the common enemy Israel could serve as a rearguard ally. France laid this down as a condition for her intervening on the side of the British.

"Without the intervention of France and the assurance of England, the war in Sinai would certainly never have broken out", says Shimon Peres. He negotiated the arms supplies and later the conventions of Sèvres, which were concluded with Bourghès-Maunoury, Pineau, Eden and Selwyn Lloyd (October 1956) (cf. Abel, Thomas. *Comment Israël fut sauvé*, 1978).

Behind these accords loomed the shadow of Munich.

In Paris, many people thought that Nasser was the source of the difficulties which France was then experiencing in Algeria. For others he was only a pawn on the Soviet chessboard. For others still he was a new Hitler whose expansionist power had to be nipped in the bud. After all those capitulations – in Indo-China, in Tunisia, in Morocco – and, in an earlier time, those of the Anschluss, of the remilitarization of the Rhineland, there was no question of surrender, no going back to before 1939. In this pattern Israel, facing Hitler, played the role of little Czechoslovakia. Eden did not think otherwise: for twenty years he had been marked by a Rhineland complex and saw Nasser's hand everywhere, from the dismissal of Glubb Pasha in Jordan (which was true) to the Mau-Mau rebellion in Kenya (which was not true).

Above all Nasser struck at the sensitive spot of Great Britain; one third of her ships plied through the Canal. There was a threat to oil supplies. Like Churchill, Eden did not want Britain to become "a new Holland". Despite the risks of an intervention, supported by Israel, he would intervene.

Military action was thereupon envisaged. For the moment it appeared impossible. With its nuclear arsenal and its forces specially trained and equipped to serve in the colonies, Britain could not muster an *ad hoc* corps for this type of contingency. Nor could France, as she was mired in Algeria. The bitter memory of the failed parachute attack on Arnhem, in September 1944, paralysed the initiatives. In Great Britain Eden was inhibited by the reserve of the Labour Party which wanted to act only with the approval of the United Nations. On the contrary, France was urged to act by everybody with the exception of the Communists and of those who belonged to the circle of Mendès France. For a socialist government the question boiled down to dissociating the interests of the country from those of the shareholders of Suez, so as to have a reasonable pretext

justifying the elimination of Nasser. The same Robert Lacoste who said that in Algeria the victorious fight against the fellaghas had reached "its last quarter hour", also said "that the war in Algeria would be inconclusive if Nasser triumphed in this crisis which he has himself brought about".

This mood lasted for a short while because, against all hope, Eisenhower informed Eden, and Dulles told Pineau, that other ways had to be sought to force Nasser to toe the line: the United States would see to that happening. For the United States it was simply a matter of the free passage of ships, dissociating the nationalization from its context. They held that Nasser "had the right to nationalize the Company". At the same time, while the French and the English recalled their pilots – to show the inability of the Egyptians to run the piloting of ships through the Canal by themselves – Dulles set up an "Association of the Users of the Canal". Such a development deprived the French and the English of their ability to act, since it promised not to act by using force.

Nasser began to wonder what the American attitude meant. Dulles made it plain by elucidating that "he refused to identify the policy of his country with the defence of the interests of the former powers".

This affront recalled to London the words of Roosevelt on the occasion of the riots in India in 1942 and of Gandhi's arrest. This led the British government to think the unthinkable: collaboration with Israel, which France had been handling for a long time. That was how in secret the Sèvres conventions were concluded.

It was a weighty decision on the part of Israel. But "such an opportunity would never recur". The idea was to let Israel attack Egypt, then to intervene to save the peace. In this way, in the view of the Arabs, the Western powers would not be "tarnished" by collaborating with Israel. Ben Gurion and Shimon Peres yielded to this humiliating proposition because it "ensured the security of Israel". As for France and Britain, "they would recover their influence in the East". The idea was to win the war without waging it, by letting the Israelis take the initiative, while the large Franco-British armada would only be left with taking over the task.

According to plan the Israelis invaded the Sinai on 29 October 1956. Taken by surprise the Egyptians took to flight. As had been decided, Dayan's tanks stopped at Akaba. As had been decided the English air force moved into position and so did the French support. A double ultimatum was sent and Israel complied. What was not foreseen was that Nasser would don the garb of a martyr, attacked by Israel. For, in the eyes of the Arab world the Anglo-French did not want to appear to back the Jewish State and their landing was planned for 6 November 1956. This delay proved to be fateful, for the entire United Nations was stirred up by the Arab States, and Dulles had a resolution passed against this intervention. On the 5th, Bulganin in his turn sent a threatening "Note" to Guy Mollet, to Eden, to Ben Gurion, to say that the USSR was ready to

use all the modern forms of destructive weapons if the expedition were not brought to an end.

Meanwhile the Anglo-French troops had landed; they were progressing towards Suez. But they had to stop, with London and Paris yielding to the injunctions of the U.N., of Washington and of Moscow.

This disaster of the first magnitude, a real "diplomatic Dien Bien Phu", brought discredit to those who were responsible for it. Eden was the first to go; he resigned and abandoned politics. Then it was the turn of Guy Mollet, who tried to recall the positive aspects of the adventure: he had saved Israel.

In fact, even though they were bitter about having been stopped on the way to success, the Israelis felt some gratitude towards France for an operation which contributed to the survival of their state which was viewed to have been under a threat.

To Great Britain the 1956 crisis showed that from then on she had lost her great power status and could no longer act without the support of the United States. In confirmation of this collapse the British troops left Bagdad following the fall of Noury Said in July 1958. Besides this defeat loosened the bonds which London had maintained with its former imperial possessions, in particular India under the leadership of Nehru who had sternly denounced the return of offensive "colonialism". Above all in the Arab world the fall of Great Britain was indicated by the adoption by a certain number of countries of the "Eisenhower doctrine", which assured them of American assistance "in case of a threat coming from a power under the control of Moscow and of the Communists". This was aimed at Syria, which was friendly to Nasser, equipped by the USSR and had designs on Lebanon. This was a significant turnaround for a year earlier it was Iraq that threatened to absorb Syria.

Thus it was Suez that marked the end of the colonial regime of Great Britain in the Arab world.

The contest had decisive and paradoxical consequences for France and for the Algerian national movement. Independently of the resentment felt by the military who, after the defeats of Indo-China, of Morocco, of Tunisia, begrudged the regime for not knowing or daring to act to the bitter end in Suez (it quickly became known that Bulganin could not put his threats into practice and they were used to mask the intervention in Budapest); and independently of the part played by that failure in the fall of the Fourth Republic, it had immediate consequences in Algeria, where Nasser's victory inflamed the Muslim masses as he moved rapidly to internationalize the problem. Most of the Arab and Asian countries had rallied to the Algerian cause. Only Lebanon stood apart.

But it was a paradox that the victory of Nasser generated mistrust in the sensitive patriotism of the FLN leaders who feared lest Egypt would, this time too decisively, intervene in their affairs. An operation of disengagement followed as well as a *maghrebization of the Algerian problem*.

more precisely, it was the transfer to North Africa of the centre of gravity of Algerian actions. Hence Tunis became the seat of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic, with the result that the relationship between Bourguiba and France worsened. In actuality, because of Suez the Lacoste-Bourgès-Mollet line of policy-making culminated in a "maghrebization of the war", while the Mendès-Savary-Defferre alternative would have opted for a "maghrebization of the peace" by setting up a federation of the three North African states to counterbalance, in the West, the influence of Egypt and of the Arab League.

Above all Suez actually led to the emergence of the Third World. It had, in particular at Bandung, already given notice that it was a separate, independent entity, but mainly in order to take advantage of the rivalry between the two world powers. This was a concern which gained primacy over the need to affirm its identity and the legitimacy of its specific development. For the participants in the Bandung Conference disposed of limited means, except the threat of shifting from one camp to the other – a policy which the East and the West called "bargaining".

The first new thing to come out of the Suez crisis was that from then on the deprived nations possessed an asset: the canal, which had been taken by force from the West. Soon they had a second: oil, which Mossadeq had been unable to wrest completely from the great powers.

But more important still is the fact that, far from straying away towards Communism, as a certain determinist vision of history had predisposed them, the Islamic countries were on the contrary turning away from it, as much as, if not more than, from the Western model. Not only were they asserting their Islamic and national calling (Arab, Algerian), but they showed that a society can produce a history which belongs specifically to it and a history which identifies itself with that of a community, Islam. The world had seen in Nasser the guide and the hero of this regeneration. However, the unity of the Arab world, which was speeded up by the union of Egypt and Syria, failed to achieve its purpose, in spite of Suez and the establishment of the United Arab Republic. Egypt could never be a unifier like Piedmont or Prussia. Can it be that the Arab world has a feeling of solidarity in its relationship with others, rather than in an identity specific to it? It found it in the war against Iran, which is a Muslim country. But it was divided during the war against Iraq. The time for Arab unity seems to be gone forever.

The Suez crisis brought about also a stiffening of the attitude of the Algerian French, as well as of the military: a consequence which led to the coup of 13 May 1958,¹ while spreading the Algerian problem over the whole of North Africa. In the face of the turn taken by the colonized peoples' struggles for freedom, De Gaulle's attitude was uncertain. It was not known even to those who were close to him. In Great Britain the decolonization had destabilized the Conservatives; Anthony Eden had resigned.

When one compares the reactions and the careers of Churchill and of De Gaulle, one finds that they shed light on what became, subsequent to 1958, a policy of decolonization initiated by the mother country. In Algeria it came about as the result of a war. But the situation was different in French or English black Africa and in the other parts of the British Empire, where negotiation prevailed over armed struggle. The mother countries contributed to this process, so strong had been their reaction to the events in the Near East. It was as if Europe had stepped aside. Henceforth the two Great Powers ruled the world, and the Third World was coming into its own.

Churchill and De Gaulle in the face of decolonization

"I did not become His Majesty's Prime Minister to preside over the liquidation of the Empire", Churchill said during the Second World War. For the Empire was his glory and ever since *The River War*, his first great text on colonization, written in 1899, he had done nothing but condemn the excesses of patriotism, jingoism, though he was supposed to be a Tory. During the Boer War, he denounced the firebrands like Kitchener, even while the war was on. Yet his perception of India was always that of an old imperialist. "On seeing what has happened in Ireland, and what goes on in Egypt, one cannot blame those who ask for concessions in the distant possessions . . . But, in India, Great Britain must remain a real power." Actually Irwin and Baldwin wanted to concede dominion status in order to keep India better. Churchill thought that such a project was a wild dream, that concessions should not be made. Later he realized that the appeasers in India were the very ones who were also the appeasers with Hitler. He was a romantic against the realists who, in the India Defence League, joined Rudyard Kipling in organizing those characters – the "Colonel Blimps" who were the butt of ridicule in literature – who were intent on forming the UBI (Union of Britain and India). He fought the India Bill, not so much for political reasons, but because the Empire represented the history of his country, and above all of his youth. He thought that at a time when the danger of Hitler's militarism was on the rise, and when nationalism was spreading everywhere, the granting of dominion status to India by men like Baldwin and Hoare would lead to concessions which would weaken the country. But, in the Conservative Party, Churchill got only 356 out of 838 votes. His excessive language on several occasions contributed to the decline of his relationship with India. "It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half naked up the steps of the Vice-Regal palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor" (23 February 1931).²

Yet, after the vote on the India Act (1935) Churchill changed his attitude towards Gandhi. He appreciated the Harijan strikes (conducted with the collaboration of Muslims) as an indication of the nobility of the Indian leader's views. But he exploded when, after the United States entered the war, Roosevelt opines that the Atlantic Charter should also apply to India. The pressure was so great that Churchill, with bad grace, sent Stafford Cripps with proposals which were rejected. But they gained time. Still Churchill understood that one day India would have to be granted independence. He himself organized the Simla conference to get ready for the inevitable.

His task was fulfilled by the Labour Party which succeeded him.

But he had strongly opposed the idea of granting dominion status while the war was still on. He said as much to Tej Bahadur Sapru, a moderate of the Congress Party. In his war cabinet no one dared broach the subject: Winston Churchill was himself a sort of "one man Indian Defence League" in his own government. At Yalta he was resolutely opposed to Roosevelt's proposal of the ancient colonies becoming mandated territories of the future United Nations. Churchill retorted: "I do not agree with a single word of the President". Under no circumstances would he tolerate forty or fifty nations poking their nose in the affairs of the British Empire. He would not budge an inch on this question. "What would you say if the Crimea were to be internationalized to serve as a summer residence?" he asked Stalin. When Roosevelt observed that India, like the United States between 1783 and 1789, could gradually elect her representatives and become a democracy, he replied that neither the problems nor the times could be compared. Did this mean that he did not believe that the Indians could practise democracy, or were his words those of a senile man (Lord Amery) who wanted to preserve the "India of nostalgia"? On 20 December 1946, Lord Attlee who had succeeded him, spoke of the future of Burma "which had to decide on its own fate either within, or outside, the Commonwealth", Winston Churchill, now the Leader of the Opposition, rose and said:

We have held Burma since 1885. We have followed its affairs with attention. My father was responsible for the annexation of Burma . . . We defended them as well as we could against the Japanese invasion, but we were not successful. It was only after a tremendous campaign of three years of heavy fighting that the Japanese were driven out, and the country was liberated from the invaders' hands . . . This evil process, which has been attended by disasters of which at present we are only on the threshold, and which will to a large extent occupy or dominate the mind and attention of the present Parliament in the months and years to come, is now quite needlessly extended to Burma. I cannot see why this should be done, unless it

is to try to induce the Burmese representatives to come over here and discuss this matter with us. This haste is appalling. "Scuttle" is the only word that can be applied . . . We are seeing in home affairs the unseemly rush of legislation, disorganizing our national life and impeding our recovery, legislation thrust upon Parliament at break-neck speed . . . He [i.e. Prime Minister Clement Attlee] has in fact shorn Burma away from the British Crown by what is being done. That, at least, is a matter of which notice should be taken, if it be only passing notice, even in this period when we are getting so accustomed and indurated to the process of the decline and fall of the British Empire.

One does not find the same consistency in De Gaulle. His pronouncement on the Empire suffered a sea change in the face of a new situation, the Algerian war, where he finds himself to be the main player. Those who brought him to power – Jacques Soustelle more than any other – relied on his past actions to imagine that he would repeat them. They were mistaken and, like the *piets-noirs* or others, believed that he had betrayed them. On the other hand, De Gaulle's *Mémoires* reconstruct history in such a way that it establishes a continuity between his views and his reactions to the event.

During the war De Gaulle and Churchill were openly in league with each other. Against the Americans they formed a common front on the colonial question. Undoubtedly events in Syria had roused the old antagonism between the two countries,² which nearly ended with a split. But it was only a tragic "episode". In reality the Soviet ambassador in Algiers, Alexandre Bogomolov, reached an unambiguous diagnosis, in a correspondence with Stalin, dated 19 January 1944: "It is evident that De Gaulle is getting rid little by little of the Giraudists . . . that the English (not the Americans) will send arms to the Resistance and that there is a *basic Anglo-French agreement* [Bogomolov's italics] in North Africa as well as in the Middle East. Churchill supports De Gaulle against the Americans so that the past misunderstandings will be forgotten . . . Consequently the Anglo-Saxons are certainly often in league against Soviet Union, but *not on the colonial problems* in which Great Britain seeks an alliance with France against the Americans. De Gaulle understands this very well and he fully supports England against the Americans (quoted in Ferro, 1987).

If the speech at Brazzaville (30 January 1944) marks a milestone, it is because it was delivered in the presence of Africans and it dealt with the problem of the status of the colonies. Its contents, however, are vague: "to exercise French sovereignty on new foundations". It did not even refer to belonging to the Empire. That was taken for granted. With hindsight, one finds that De Gaulle used that speech as a charter for the future. Indeed it was a novel gesture, as was the ordinance of December 1943 which enlarged the number of Algerian Muslims who would enjoy full citizenship

rights, a development which the colonists had to accept with bad grace. Again it was De Gaulle who decided to bring 63 overseas deputies to the Constituent Assembly, out of 522 members, 25 of whom represented the colonies. Among them were Houphouët-Boigny (Ivory Coast), Léopold S. Senghor (Senegal), J. Raseta (Madagascar), Aimé Césaire (Martinique); and 11 representatives of the UDMA of Ferhat Abbas to the second Constituent Assembly. However De Gaulle did not disapprove of the Sétif incident: he only blamed Yves Chataigneau. If, in Indo-China, he shows his sympathy for Jean Sainteny and for Leclerc, it was nonetheless Admiral d'Argenlieu who was his man on the spot. Yet the latter was the man who broke off from Ho Chi Minh.

During the time spent in the wilderness, from 1947 to 1958, the foundation of the RPF (*Rassemblement du Peuple Français*) seems to have had as its origin the need for France to have recourse to an alternative, in case the decline of the Empire proceeded at a faster pace, and its placement under American supervision. On more than one occasion De Gaulle outlined his conception of the French Union, and every time he indicated his preference for an evolution towards internal autonomy. But he strongly reaffirmed the need to preserve Algeria as French: it was the "environment of uncertainty" of the 1947 status which shocked him, so much so that he "succumbed to overstatement". It is difficult to accept those statements in the *Mémoires*, written after 1960, where the General seems to suggest that it would have been better to allow the situation to evolve towards the formation of an Algerian State. There is nothing to confirm this in his utterances of that period.

After having declared and reiterated that, in Indo-China, the French were engaged in the same fight as the Americans' in Korea, against Communism, De Gaulle, in 1954, believed that it was necessary to deal with the enemy and he did not disapprove of the agreements signed by Pierre Mendès France at Geneva. As regards North Africa, that is, Tunisia and Morocco, he opted for a policy of association, punishing those guilty of crimes unworthy of France. He did not speak of abandonment. But he thought that the good solutions were beyond the reach of the "present regime".

Churchill had expressed and repeated the same opinion. That is, on the French side, what Michel Debré and Jacques Soustelle thought while taking part in the coup of 13 May 1958. At this moment, however, De Gaulle told the *piets-noirs*: "I have understood you." They knew no more than others how the General would act. They were at the same time cautious, worried, and confident. De Gaulle criticized the previous governments not for their abandonment – except of the bases in Morocco, but for the absence of any policies on their part. What would his be?

By saying straight away that only one category of inhabitants lived in Algeria, "fully-fledged French citizens having the same rights and the same duties", De Gaulle was not announcing the declaration of 16 September

1959, as indicated in his *Mémoires*, he was actually reformulating the idea of integration, except that it was not clear whether or not France and Algeria formed one entity, that is, with 100 Algerian deputies in Paris. The pieds-noirs who were shouting "Soustelle, Soustelle" understood De Gaulle well. But by speaking of 10 million French in Algeria, he reverted to the immersion of the pieds-noirs in an Arab majority. The speech at Mostaganem – "Long live French Algeria" – maintained the ambiguity. But whenever he evoked the Algerian personality, since he associated Algeria and France, the choice was clear even if it was not explicitly spelled out. The words carried weight and, after having spoken of self-determination, he finally, in 1960, called for the Algerian Republic and for Algerian Algeria. He broke with Jacques Soustelle, with the Algerian French: "the softness of the oil lamps, the splendour of the sailing ships". As the call to "the peace of the brave" did not have an immediate effect, the General indirectly pointed to the path he intends to follow by allowing Mali – Senegal and Sudan – to accede to independence (June 1960).

Watching the haggard faces of the colonists who, on the huge white ship anchored in the harbour of Batavia, in 1947, were leaving the Dutch East Indies for good, few could have guessed that they foretold the fate of the French of Algeria fifteen years later.

Still a few had a premonition of the coming tragedy: for example, Albert Camus, half-Algerian, half-Oranian, who said that "between justice and his mother", he would choose his mother. For him justice meant the rights of the Arabs scoffed at by the colonists and by the French administration. He was one of the first to come to their defence and for this his fellow-citizens bore him a grudge. But he could not stomach the Algerian crisis culminating in the forced departure of the colonists, of his mother – indeed, he could not accept it. His statement drew the anger of the intellectuals, of Jean-Paul Sartre first among them, who scorned him for not having "a sense of history" (1957).

De Gaulle had this sense of history and he knew that Algerian independence was inevitable. It is a moot question whether he anticipated the consequences for the French in Algeria. At any rate, the nationalists of the FLN had let everyone believe, during the years 1950–56, that in an independent Algeria all the French would have rights equal to those of the other inhabitants of the country. It seems that, at the Soummam conference, a change was made on that point. The OAS widened the gulf which separated the two communities, with the Algerians doing nothing to bridge it.

Always prompt – and rightly so – to denounce torture, the metropolitan French never had a word to condemn terrorism. It was thought that terrorism was the answer to colonial terror – so much the worse for the victims of that terrorism.

De Gaulle had initiated a process for the end of the war. As the military operations had not ended, far from it, with a Dien Bien Phu, he had established contact with Si Salah, then with the FLN. To hasten the conclusion of the deal, he used the term "Algerian Republic", announced a referendum on self-determination, in which the "yes" won by 75 percent of the votes cast, 69 percent in Algeria where the large cities voted "no". Bidault and Soustelle had left De Gaulle (8 January 1961).

It is then that General Salan, with Generals Challe, Jouhaud and Zeller, thought the right moment had come to organize a coup with the underhand support of the OAS (Organisation de l'Armée Secrète), undoubtedly created on the initiative of Robert Martel, Lagailarde and Susini, the men of the day of the barricades. De Gaulle ordered a call-up; the putsch failed. But the OAS survived as a terrorist organization which kills "whomever it wants to, whenever it wants to, wherever it wants to". During the summer of terror and counter-terror the number of victims and incidents multiplied: the autumn of 1961 became for some of the French of Algeria – whom the OAS had not assassinated – a time of hope. They hoped for the failure of the negotiations that had started in Evian. Then began a series of attacks which spread to the mother country: more than 100 in January–February 1962 in France; more than 800 in Algeria, due in part to the FLN, in part to the OAS, in part to the anti-OAS.

To the ceasefire and the Evian agreements of March 1962, which recognized the independence of Algeria and were approved by a referendum, the OAS responded with terror and scorched earth, controlling Bab-el-Oued and making of it a sort of Fort Chabrol and burning the library of Algiers. Yet, despite its orders and the intensification of the fighting, the exodus had started as soon as the putsch failed, Challe and Salan were arrested, and Soustelle and Bidault disappeared. The exodus of the pieds-noirs was at its height in April and May 1962, while the army, in order to cover their departure, abandoned part of the harkis to their tragic fate. Another part was brought back to the mother country. On the *Chanzy* and the *Ville d'Oran* the repatriated settlers sang the refrain of Edith Piaf: "Non, je ne regrette rien" ("No, I have no regrets") before Enrico Macias sang of the nostalgia of "his lost country".

De Gaulle and the decolonization of black Africa

As early as 1956, during the Suez crisis, De Gaulle had told the crown prince of Morocco, Moulay Hassan: "Algeria will be independent, whether we like it or not. But it is a question how to bring it about." "It will be long, there will be some rough stuff, a lot of it", he had told Jean Amrouche. And there was. And arduous was the path that led to the Evian agreements, as was later the struggle against the new putsch of the generals. Had General Challe, in 1962, called upon the pied-noir civilians, the crisis

would have been more tragic. But he did not want to follow General Salan in that direction and the OAS was smashed.

Mitterrand and Deferre: two precursors

In black Africa decolonization was carried out more easily. De Gaulle could accomplish it, without any real bloodshed, because the predecessors had already initiated the process. In some way the pioneer in the mother country was François Mitterrand who, at the Ministry of Overseas France, put into practice the principle *ad augusta per angusta*. On one hand, he managed to establish close links with the leaders of the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (African Democratization Union) of Houphouët-Boigny by separating him from his friends, the fellow-travellers of the Communist Party, like Arboussier. On the other hand, as the Minister of Overseas France, he conducted a policy "up to the point of no-return thanks to the indifference of metropolitan circles and to general ignorance". It is true that in black Africa bringing about a representative or pseudo-representative political existence did not clash with the power of the colonists, who rarely settled. "The understanding of the UDSR, the political sense which it manifests, and the trust which it shows in us have decided the course of events in French black Africa", said Houphouët-Boigny (1955). Accordingly the African leaders of black Africa collaborated on equal terms with the metropolitan political parties, which was not the case with Algeria. The UDSR was not the only example, since the SFIO also collaborated closely with the rival party of the RDA, the *Indépendants d'Outre-mer* (Overseas Independents) of Léopold Sédar Senghor, who enunciated the idea of an African Federal Republic. But the SFIO was much less adventurous. In Parliament it was strong and the African deputies were less important to it than to the UDSR.

It was during the quiet lull of 6 February 1956, in Algiers, that Gaston Deferre, a socialist, gave expression to the philosophy of a policy which proved to be a success. "Too often, beyond the seas, the French have given the impression that they are not able to act at the right time, and we have been the hostage of events . . . If, in black Africa, we succeed in *getting ahead* [my italics] of them, we shall be able to reestablish in this country an environment of trust and concord."

That was the blueprint, the plan of which had been elaborated by Pierre-Henri Teitgen. Deferre saw to its adoption "knowing that the populations of black Africa are following attentively the events in North Africa". The reform granted universal suffrage and a single electoral college to all the territories of black Africa and of Madagascar. It provided for the creation of elected government councils the members of which would be "ministers", and for extended powers for the elected territorial assemblies. In this way the powers of the governors-general were reduced

and the legislative power of each territory increased. Senghor described this project as a "balkanization". For Houphouët-Boigny it was "walking before running". For the Africans it was a phase, but they were divided on the form of independence and the nature of the bonds which would unite them among themselves and to France.

Gaston Deferre had called for a "restoration" of the climate of trust. Among the African leaders some were anxious and reserved in view of the uprising and the harsh repression in Madagascar, the exile of the Sultan of Morocco, the emergence of the fellaghas in Tunisia and later in Algeria. They were also apprehensive, within their own ranks, of the cultural gap being too wide between, on one side, the political elites motivated by ideologies and integrated with French partisan conflicts, and, on the other side, the protest ethnic movements, independent and uncontrolled, recalling the characteristic situation that prevailed in the Portuguese colonies. For their resolve to remain within the French cultural zone was unambiguous. They testified to it by merely paying lip service to the Panafrikan movement. The black elites were intensely active in the area of French political life, but they were equally impatient to enhance their power within their own territory, before anyone could, as in Guinea, denounce the "complicity" between certain party leaders and the traditional chiefs.

On the other hand, the United Nations had begun to express its reservations about French colonial policies. At first it did so in regard to the territories under supervision: Togo and Cameroon. Togo became an independent republic, then in association with France. But, in 1958, Togo again appealed to the U.N. which called upon the Government of Félix Gaillard to accept the principle of a popular vote to resolve the question of independence. This was decided by a vote in September 1958. Independence was for 1960. The effect of these events was that they did not culminate in the reunion of the Ewés of former British Togo and those of former French Togo, as had been demanded by the leaders of the country such as, for example, Sylvanus Olympio.

The reunification of the two parts of Cameroon posed the same problem. While the north of the country wanted to associate itself with Nigeria, the south wanted to have a union with the "French" Cameroon. The vote of the populations, under the aegis of the U.N., made this solution possible. However, in "French" Cameroon the protest movement against the supervising power was more violent than in the rest of black Africa. In 1955, the existence of 84 political parties testified to the entrenchment of the political stakes in a population comprising a number of ethnic groups the formal unity of which had been brought about by the occupier. As early as 1948, political life had been dominated by one party, the UPC (Union des Peuples du Cameroun). It was a revolutionary party, closely allied to the Communists, but at the same time tied to the anti-colonialist circles of

Cairo. The UPC displayed its nationalist impatience by means of the violent riots of 1955 which, following the banning of the UPC, gave rise to terrorism and armed conflicts which lasted till 1960. In her confrontation with the UPC of V. M. Nyobé, France relied on the moderate parties led by a Muslim from the north, Amadou Ahijo. He succeeded in obtaining U.N. help for an end of French supervision. But France connived in his success. The outcome was that, paradoxically, independence was viewed by the UPC and a part of the population as a sort of betrayal. And it rekindled the civil struggles from the very day of its proclamation.

As can be seen, with the exception of the prolonged guerilla war waged by the UPC in Cameroon, decolonization in francophone black Africa proceeded by means of negotiation, with the U.N. or nationalist movements taking the initiative. It is noteworthy that before situations became irreversible, French politicians were able to take appropriate action or bring forth, on the spot, forces hostile to a violent separation, for instance, Ahijo in Cameroon.

Accordingly surprise greeted De Gaulle when he offered the Africans and the Malagasies the choice between a free association and secession. But earlier the ground had been sufficiently well prepared for him to take the risk. Actually he showed towards black Africa an affection stemming perhaps from the time of Brazzaville – which got a chilling response in Algiers – and out of 810 speeches delivered during the period 1940–69, 246 or 30 percent refer to black Africa. “We are proceeding towards an immense community of associated peoples”: he kept on repeating this expression which could offend neither Senghor nor Houphouët-Boigny. It was a vaguer concept than that of a federation. “It is a historical vehicle to move from one age to another.” “France likes large concessions which bring a return”, he said in a further reference to black Africa.

De Gaulle did not choose a roundabout way to implement this policy: he did not encounter the same obstacles as in Algeria. Besides he was dealing with negotiators who did not have the same resentment against France as the Arabs had.

On 28 Septembre 1958, the vote on the Community produced 7,471,000 yes votes, and 1,120,000 no votes, of which 636,000 were from Guinea. Sékou Touré had rejected a choice being “granted” to him. He had replied with a “No”, with the result that the Community comprised, beside France, 12 States with internal autonomy. But, even before the common institutions had started to function, some states were already forming new groups – Senegal and Sudan formed the Federation of Mali – which demanded independence a year after having accepted to join the Community. Others followed suit, in spite of the resistance of Houphouët-Boigny who preferred a lasting Franco-African community. “They are leaving, they are leaving”, said De Gaulle. He let them go.

The Belgian Congo and the Gold Coast: a contrast

The shock wave of Suez had a direct impact on the events in the Middle East and in the Maghreb. While it also had a stimulating effect on the black African movements, it did not prompt them in all circumstances to provide unflinching help to the FLN. Despite the appeals the FLN made to them, the black African movements were distrustful of Arab Islam. But the shock wave showed Europeans that a new era had begun.

It was startlingly so for the Belgians who, in Congo, had been till then living in total ignorance of that decolonization process which did not seem to concern them. They could afford to do so for the country had been calm from 1945 to 1959, and the number of residents had risen from 35,000 to 115,000. Further, their sanitary policy being a good example of their achievements, the Belgians were convinced that they were the best of all colonizers. Again, the schools, well maintained by the Church, were proliferating and most of the time acted as the instruments of social progress. But the teaching was for the most part of a religious nature and few Africans attended universities in Belgium. Forced labour had given place to patronage. The number of cadres, known as “evolved ones”, was fast rising in the towns, the Belgian administration attempted to control the phenomenon by instituting a “civil merit” card. To obtain this card became the main objective of the educated population. That is why a certain torpor apparently prevailed in the country when the urban riots of January 1959 broke out. The Belgians were unprepared for this eventuality. But it led them, in view of the events occurring elsewhere in the world, to bring the colonial system to an immediate end. “Belgium intends to transform the Congo into a democratic country capable of exercising the prerogatives of sovereignty and of deciding on its own the particulars of its independence.” The surprise was total; so was the turnaround. Neither the rest of the world, nor the Africans anticipated such a total break away from the past. A political chasm had opened in front of partners who had not been prepared to bridge it.

In the French or English possessions of Africa decolonization benefited the native military – the main beneficiaries – the officials and the political leaders. But nothing of the sort occurred in the Congo where the Belgians continued to rule from Brussels over a country which was moving towards independence. Only the Church had managed to dissociate itself from the former colonial power. By 1960 there was no longer a state, nor anything else in its place. A concatenation of conflicts started, accompanied by unheard-of violence, directed first against the Belgian officers. The era of violence persisted through several wars between the Kasavubu government and the Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, a revolutionary Marxist; and later by the secession of Katanga which became a separate State under the aegis of Moïse Tshombé.

The way was open to an internationalization of the conflict.

For the Belgians the nightmare crisis of 1959 was indeed the "exit from a fairy story".

The contrast with the independence of the Gold Coast (Ghana) is enlightening for anyone who watches the newsreels which show the celebrations of 1957. In a festive atmosphere, that night, African statesmen and elegant black and British ladies danced the biguine, while in the distance dugouts illuminated *a giorno* floated off Accra, to the rhythm of wild music. The word "Liberty" resounded like a leitmotiv and pictures of Nkrumah and of the Queen of England stood side by side, illuminated.

The Colonial Office had remembered the lesson learnt in India, in Indonesia, in Vietnam. Scarcely had he arrived in the Gold Coast than Arden Clarke, the Governor, had Nkrumah out of prison and allowed him to win the elections. What an example that was! It may be conceded that the British officers of the Colonial Office had a weakness for the nationalist movements of West Africa. Their leaders had studied and done well at Oxford or in the United States; they took part in the mainly anglophone Panafrican movement and seemed to be closer to the British tradition than the white South Africans of Johannesburg or even of the Cape, who criticized the policies of London, which they deemed to be too much in favour of the emancipation of the blacks. Rightly or wrongly the British looked with greater suspicion upon the movements of East Africa, a region closer to the Arab world, where the conflicts among blacks, Indians and whites seemed to be unsurmountable. They too had to be resolved for the British retreat in the Middle East placed Africa in the front line. Stafford Cripps had observed that "the future of the sterling zone henceforth depends on Africa's ability to develop itself".

It was in East Africa that the contradiction appeared to be most glaring. On one hand, there were the demands of a reactivated economic development – which has been called the new colonization – associated with the globalization of markets and requiring, as a corollary, a penetration of the colonial system up to the furthest hinterland and the most distant villages. On the other hand, there was the ill disciplined will to transfer the direct or indirect administration to a budding representative system. But, at that level, the traditional chiefs and the new leaders, merchants, teachers, representatives of excluded ethnic groups, began to oppose one another. In Uganda, in Tanganyika and in Kenya these contradictions generated a nationalism and a vigilance on the part of the conflicting groups which placed their constituents under close watch. In view of the different ethnic groups increasingly asserting their representativeness and of the colonist lobby which started organizing itself, London came to the conclusion that to move forward too slowly was worse than making haste. Nevertheless four years separate the independence of Tanganyika, and six years that of Kenya, from that of Ghana (1957).

1960 had been the year of Africa. The British had been successful in their decolonization in the west of Africa. But their failure in the east was evident. Here the British had vacillated between their two policies: either to keep the white minority in power, even if they numbered only a handful; or to transfer power to the natives, even if they "do not know" or do not want to use the institutional instruments bequeathed to them by the colonizer.

Still it was independent Africa which impelled the black and Indian movements of South Africa, in particular the ANC (African National Congress) of Nelson Mandela. Founded in 1912, this movement had had to endure an increasingly bloody repression by South African governments, especially after 1947. By 1974 President Vorster had completed the institutionalization of the racist system of apartheid, the fundamentals of which had been explicitly borrowed from Nazi theories, in which the Afrikaners had found the justification for their actions. As the ruling party since 1948, the National Christian Party could accordingly enact laws while putting into practice a policy of exclusion the symbol of which was the internal passport, the prohibition of mixed marriages.

Black and Indian resistance stiffened under the influence of the books of Frantz Fanon and of the Black Panthers' writings and actions in the United States. Relying on the same argument the idea of an armed insurrection began to grow given that, to the non-violence advocated by the Church, the government responded by means of repression. The Soweto massacre of 1976 represented one of the more dramatic moments of this confrontation. However, the very powerful white unions which had for a long time been anti-black as well as anti-employers, were evolving along a line more favourable to the union idea of the defence of the deprived.

The United Nations' condemnation of the politics of apartheid, the exclusion of South Africa from the U.N., its leaving the Commonwealth, were the several ordeals which prompted an increasing number of whites to join the ranks of the liberals, who at that time were still few in number. It was also observed that in Zimbabwe black power had been able to protect the interests of the whites. However, the blacks were divided among themselves, with the Zulus denouncing the hegemony of the Xhosa and that of the ANC.

Thereupon President De Klerk decided that there was a need to change the politics of the day. He freed Nelson Mandela who had been imprisoned for more than twenty years. This set into motion a process which, in 1994, culminated in the organization of free elections for all, on the basis of one man, one vote. They brought in a black majority and the assurance of participating in the government of the country.

The former USSR: an implosion more than an explosion

There did exist, within the USSR, national movements bent on separation, particularly in the Baltic republics, but also in Ukraine, in Armenia and in Georgia. But during the time of Brezhnev, then of Andropov, even of Chernenko, everyone thought the idea of independence was simply a dream. That was an expression which the Balts used while under Gorbachev the liberalization of the Soviet state was already under way.

According to Gorbachev a Union Treaty was to initiate a process of decolonization, a scheme which gave wings to the nationalist movements roused by the free elections of 1989. While the "reformers" opposed the "traditionalists" – they were also called the *Narodnyi Front* and the *Intern Front* – the Armenians shouting "Karabakh, Karabakh" ushered in the resurgence of ethno-nationalist aspirations which had been assumed to be outmoded or suppressed.

From that time on a vast nationalist movement swept across the Soviet Empire from one end to the other. Gorbachev found himself in the classic situation of the Head of State who, in order to perpetuate and preserve the cohesion of the entire empire, is forced to make concessions to those who are most pugnacious. To prevent a conservative coup, Gorbachev acted like De Gaulle who had entrusted the army to Salan, or Kerenski who entrusted it to Kornilov: he filled his government with traditionalists in order to better control them. They were the ones who staged the coup.

The important point is that Boris Yeltsin succeeded in turning the situation around. His goal was certainly to substitute himself, as the President of Russia, for the President of the USSR. But his tactic resulted in decolonizing the USSR and causing it to disappear. In actuality, by proclaiming the sovereignty of Russia within the USSR, then by getting out of it after dissolving the Communist Party, he gave the different republics their *de facto* freedom. The republics followed suit with each of them transforming the structures of the USSR into an empty shell and leading its president to resign. Then Russia invited the independent republics to associate themselves with her. Some did, some did not. Thus was born the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), without Georgia (which joined in 1993), and without the Baltic Republics. At the same time, within the Federation of Russia, the movement which had been launched led some Republics – Tatar, Chechen – to reconsider their bonds with Moscow.

On the whole, however, the "centrifugal" movement was initiated by the centre. It was an unprecedented event in history.

Shaken as if by an earthquake the USSR was fractured. Yet, from 1993 on, it seemed that the cracks were being filled and some of the ancestral bonds were being sealed anew.

The expression "putsch" does not apply to the conservative coup of 1991 since the plot was hatched by civil or military leaders who represented the

system and were in fact in charge of its administration. But after the failure of that coup the situation in the CIS and in the other states raised many questions. Following the break-up of the USSR and the disintegration of the Communist Party which used to cement its organization, common characteristics nevertheless outlasted the old unity insofar as none of the present republics is free from certain general phenomena such as the breakdown of the economic infrastructure. This situation extends even to the Baltic states. These phenomena include the permanence of the political establishment, with 30 to 90 percent of the personnel remaining active, depending on whether they are located close to or far away from Moscow: a feature which makes all the difference between this and most of the former popular democracies. The network of power structures and of intra- or trans-republican complicities also survives. Specific situations have arisen where there have been interethnic conflicts – in Moldavia, in the Caucasus, in the Baltic States, in Central Asia. Moscow deemed these to be dangerous to the extent that the recall of the Russian army to the Republic of Russia became a priority. Yet even as late as 1992 Moscow was finding plenty of reasons to delay this repatriation from the different popular democracies, in order to perpetuate the myth of a military presence in Eastern Europe. The same action could follow in the Kurile Islands.

Behind the struggle for power between Yeltsin and the Parliament, in the Republic of Russia, other conflicts often spill over the frontiers of the states born of the former USSR. At times they strengthen the return to an individual identity, at other times they neutralize it. This is due to several, often paradoxical, facts which deserve to be itemized in order to assess their effects.

To understand how they function we shall, contrary to custom, proceed from the periphery to the centre (cf. Ferro, *Les Origines de la Perestroïka*, Ramsay, 1990, pp. 107ff).

The first proposition The Muslim republics were self-governing before the proclamation of their independence. That is, when Gorbachev arrived on the scene, the leaders of Uzbekistan were Uzbeks, those of Azerbaijan were Azeris, and so on. Gorbachev was surprised that the security forces did not intervene to stop the massacres of the Armenians. He was told that "Azeris were not going to shoot at Azeris in order to protect Armenians". The security forces in Azerbaijan were "Azeri" rather than "Soviet". Another example: hardly had Gorbachev replaced an opponent of perestroika in Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan than riots broke out. Gorbachev did not realize that the opponent was a Kazakh and his replacement Russian. In other words the republics were gradually becoming independent. That was true also of Armenia and of Georgia.

The second proposition Independence did not necessarily imply a will to separation on the part of the Muslim republics. They did not specifically

want separation in the same way as, for example, Tunisia or Morocco did, when during the 1950s, in conjunction with Paris, they organized their separation in stages. On the contrary, in Central Asia there was a sort of *inverted separatism*, that is, the leaders of the republics strove to exert a pressure on the central institutions of the former USSR. For example, Pavlov, Minister of Finance – he took part in the 1991 coup – entertained close links with the Uzbek State apparatus and its mafia.

Given these conditions it is not surprising that, during the conflict which opposed Gorbachev to Yeltsin, in the year preceding the coup, the leaders of the republics sided with Gorbachev. They were against Yeltsin because, with the proclamation of Russian sovereignty he was actually setting in motion a process which would culminate in the separation of every republic. And that would entail the republics losing the advantages possessed at the Centre. Nor is it surprising that, on the whole, the republics or at least their bureaucracies supported the leaders of the coup.

The third proposition In Russia perestroika was perceived as a policy of openness to freedom. But in the Muslim republics it was felt as a danger for the future of the traditional social relations which, in some way, Communism had perpetuated: the President of the Soviet was often a former khan, etc. Moreover with glasnost Moscow was “uzbekanizing” the underworld traffic. Under the pretext that the opium poppy was being cultivated in Uzbekistan, Islam as a whole was criticized as soon as it staked its claims for mosques, while the central power openly flirted with the Orthodox Church. Any claim made in an Islamic country was viewed as a sign of a possible allegiance to Iran. Such an attitude on the part of the Russians resulted in the development of an Islamic political movement and all sorts of variations of a political Islam, the different types of which have reinforced the identity of each republic in relation to its neighbour. This process covers the Shi’ite fundamentalism prevailing in Tajikistan and the seemingly secular Islam of Azerbaijan, not to mention Sunni or other variations. The strengthening of the identity of each republic acts simultaneously against the reunification of “Turkestan”, as well as against the absorption of the entire Islamic area by its great neighbours: Turkey, Iran or Pakistan. It may be further stressed that the *tempo* of the Islamic Revolution in Iran or elsewhere, and that of the crisis agitating the Soviet Republics did not coincide. Without any doubt, this staggering of political developments has averted the irreversible drift of Soviet Islam towards these three countries.

The fourth proposition The republics lying on the southern perimeter find themselves in a post-colonial situation, in the sense that the withdrawal of the Russians preceded the proclamation of independence by a long way. The exodus of the Russians continues apace, without any drama: in

different circumstances it would have been called a *successful decolonization*. Then some of the Republics have kept “their” Russians or called upon new Russian “advisers” to aid them. Only Kazakhstan offers a different picture: here the Russians are as numerous as the Kazakhs, the responsibilities are, at all levels, equally divided and thus arises a situation which creates permanent inter-ethnic conflicts.

Conversely, in some republics which have become independent, especially in the Caucasus, the ethnic conflicts between Armenians and Turks-Azeris have resurfaced, with greater violence than before the Russian or Soviet era. And here we find an original situation. In their concern to liberate themselves from the Russians, the Georgians were not aware that they were exercising a sort of colonial power over the Abkhaz. Thus we are back in a pre-, not a post-colonial situation, with the Russian once again acting as arbiters in disputes breaking out on their borders.

The fifth proposition The observations made about the Muslim or Caucasian republics take on a particular significance when one notes that in *Russian* Siberia one comes across the same kind of phenomena. At the Siberian meeting held at Krasnoyarsk, in the spring of 1992, one delegate said “we are not going to separate from Russia, but from its government”. Another delegate stressed that the meeting was viewed as a means of exerting pressure on Moscow. These are two characteristic features: on the one hand, the heads of the administration, the representatives of Moscow, were absent from the meeting. This signified a growing conflict between the central authority and the representative institutions. But, above all, it was out of fear of being associated with the “separatists” that the *national* Republics of Siberia (Republics of Tuva, Yakut and Buryat) explained and justified their absence. The Evenks emphasized that they intended to proceed from territorial autonomy to national autonomy, but this within a Russian, not a Siberian, framework.

When set against the second proposition, these facts make it quite plain that, in the spirit of the demands which were made, the national problem does not necessarily contain an ethnic component, nor does it seek a solution in separation while harbouring ulterior motives. For example, among the Balts the will to separate was the prime mover of the Lithuanians. At the beginning of perestroika the Estonians were violently anti-Russian and yet did not dare formulate their willingness to separate. Yet very quietly and globally this separatist will swept along all the Balts, the Georgians, the Ukrainians, even the Armenians. In short, separatism swayed the Christians, while elsewhere the trend was less apparent. On the other hand, within Russia the Republic of the Tatars wants to be sovereign, that is, its leaders, whether Tatar or Russian, want full freedom to dispose of their resources as they wish. In Siberia the same claim is made by Russians and Yakuts or Buryats.

Within the CIS it is therefore the question of hostility to the concentration of power and the problem of centralization at all levels of decision-making which are the common parameter of all the national or colonial situations. In a certain way one witnesses the return of the old antagonism which has always existed between, on one hand, the central power identified, at the time of the Communist Party, with its administration and, on the other hand, the representative institutions, whether the *zemstvos* prior to 1917, or the Soviets, afterwards. However, neither the *zemstvos*, nor the Soviets were ever able to go beyond the competence of a reduced local administration, whatever the competence of the elected representatives (*zemstvo*), or their real representation (*soviet*). As is well known, the history of the USSR can be explained, from 1917 onwards, by an absorption of the powers at ground level – the expression of a direct democracy – by the power at the top – which eulogizes and practises democratic centralism. In 1988 Gorbachev wanted to infuse new life in the Soviets, that is, to give back to the representative organs their rights and abilities. In 1993–94 Yeltsin eliminated them. What does this contradiction mean?

The real problem is that at both the top and at the bottom there is an ignorance of the sharing of power. For example, Yeltsin has undertaken to appoint representatives of the president in the territories and regions – the *namestnik*, the emissary – while the governor is also appointed by Moscow. Consequently no real local autonomous administration exists. The Mayor of St Petersburg, Sobchak, does not hesitate to say that these Soviets are useless, because they are powerless. "In fact their only capacity is to scuttle the decisions". To simplify: in 1917, the local Soviets were illiterate or uncultured, but the elected members had all the power. Today they comprise educated and competent individuals, but they have no juridical or other capacity, except that of *countering* the power at the centre.

Accordingly the elected representatives at the base of the pyramid dream of being able to legislate, execute, judge. But they too know nothing about sharing power. In the face of the powerlessness of the base, the centre legislates and also executes. The problems of identity only constitute a *mobile variable* of the problem of power. That is our **sixth proposition**.

The problem of the conflict between the central authority and representative power at the base – yesterday, the soviets and tomorrow some other – comprehends many other problems, which would be extinguished if the local institutions were recognized as genuine executive powers. Till now the composition of the local authorities has gone through the least change since the days of perestroika and of the coup of 1991. But today the system of local powers serves as the backbone of the opposition and of identity-based separatism, of opposition to reforms. Eighty percent of the presidents of the former Soviets come from the Party apparatus. They could be eliminated after the bloody trial of strength which occurred in September 1993 between Yeltsin and the Parliament.

A strange development! The nomenklatura tries to avenge itself by moving through the channels of representative power for the sake of the interests of the citizens in their own region. This provokes an identity reaction and at times an anti-centralist nationalism. Hence Yeltsin must make concessions to the opponents of the free market, to the very ones who only yesterday were bent on shooting Gorbachev down. Yeltsin thus puts into practice the policies of his fallen rival and predecessor.

These propositions do clearly indicate that the return to identity, or the birth of a nation, linked most often to ethnic or ethno-linguistic or even religious considerations, can be associated with genuinely governmental, or political, or simply ideological considerations, whether these cut across the preceding ones or not. In Chechenia and in Omsk, in Murmansk or in Kuban, the tendency towards autonomy cuts across all the relevant particulars, independently of the ethnic composition of the populations in question.

All this would suggest that a nation is a permanent and at the same time a transitory formation.