

On page 271 of *Fight or Flight*, Martin Thomas points out the unfortunate coincidence of Archbishop Makarios's incarceration in 1956 in a house in the Seychelles named *La Bastille*. Three years earlier, it was the failed Messalist march on the Place de la Bastille that had set off the shift of repressive measures in Algeria to the capital of metropolitan France. It is this eye for detail which makes Thomas's book such an engaging read. But it is also these cruel ironies which underline his central theme – the ways in which British and French experiences of decolonisation were intertwined, “their [late-colonial] successes or failures reverberating through one another's empires time and again” (349).

Throughout this ground-breaking study, Thomas is always mindful of the contrasts between British and French decolonisation. Cyprus was a special case given that Greek and Turkish involvement made Britain's eventual flight easier. The huge scale of the Algerian conflict dwarfed anything undertaken by the British, and the war's scarring of domestic politics and security operations was unprecedented. Indeed, by the 1960s, the severity of the Algerian campaign, and its internationalisation, convinced the British of the counter-productive nature of late-colonial repression. Britain's flight from India in the late-1940s, as opposed to France's fight in Indochina, was distinguished by five factors: consistent leadership, civil-military agreement, greater freedom of domestic political manoeuvre, failure of earlier initiatives, and hardnosed cost-benefit calculations. This painful learning curve, which France lacked, and the realisation that escape from empire (as in Palestine too) could have minimal metropolitan repercussions, made future British flights “immeasurably easier to contemplate” (118). In Indochina, meanwhile, an obvious difference with Malaya was Chinese communist logistical support for the insurgency from 1950, transmogrifying the Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh's tiger into an elephant to match the French mammoth. In other words, Malayan decolonisation was never as internationalised as Vietnam's. Concurrently, Anglo-French colonial collaboration was limited – the British instinctively distanced themselves from heavy-handed French fights, and ‘perfidious Albion’ was indeed complicit in the loss of the Levant.

Yet, what makes Thomas's study such an important and original contribution to the literature on European decolonisation is the subtle and deft identification of the commonalities. The British and the French, argues Thomas, travelled the end-of-empire highway together, not necessarily in tandem, but certainly in parallel lanes. For a remarkably long time after 1945, both London and Paris clung to an “enduring belief that imperial possessions could – and should – be retained” (352). Drawing on his expertise on the 1920s and 1930s, Thomas also highlights how the shift from assimilation to association in the inter-war French empire was akin to Britain's lauding of ‘indirect rule.’ Furthermore, the Amritsar massacre in India and the Saya San rebellion in Burma emphasise that “extreme state violence” (35) was not confined to the French inter-war colonial experience. After 1945, notwithstanding the big thinking inherent in the French Union, and its declared abolition of colonial status, there would actually be more change of personnel and practice in colonial administration in the British Empire. Even so, the imperial reformism and partnership rhetoric of London and Paris were very similar. Despite the apparent dichotomy between an integrationist French Union and a devolutionary Commonwealth, both embodied a remarkably ambitious “supra-nationalism” (95). Both “hit the same rocks” (74) when rhetoric was turned against reality by colonial peoples – trade unionists and nationalist politicians especially.

Drilling down to Southeast Asia, the Malayan Union demonstrated that Britain could plan just as grandly as the French, the difference lying only “in the speed with which Britain's imperial rulers dropped such schemes once they became unworkable” (161). French

violence to try and bring about the new order in the immediate post-war era – in Vietnam especially - was not that exceptional either when compared with Britain's dirty war in Malaya. Indeed, the much-lauded 'Malayan model' was "far more violent" and "less cogent" than is usually appreciated (163). And, in both Malaya and Vietnam, left-of-centre regimes in London and Paris sanctioned the initial clampdown. Moreover, a commonality in both British and French counter-insurgency campaigns was that "local insurgents were variously treated as criminal, territories, rebel, or traitor; never as recognised combatants with commensurate rights under international law" (289). The frequent consequence was appalling human rights abuses, most infamously in Algeria and Kenya. The role of the subaltern 'poor white' in both French and British 'settler' in Africa is another important and overlooked similarity. On the other side, Algeria's Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) applied "merciless violence" (311) akin to the Irgun in Palestine or the Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston (EOKA; National Organization of Cypriot Fighters). Meantime, the common fight at Suez in 1956, which turned out to be a damp squib due to President Dwight Eisenhower's foreclosure, derived from a shared belief amongst inner circles in both London and Paris that "decisive action was essential to arrest their declining imperial position" (171). This combined with a common fear of an Arab domino effect, and shared war-time memories of the apparent folly of appeasement. Nor did the consequences of the botched Egyptian invasion dampen imperial determination: Britain shifted its military attention 'east of Suez,' and France stepped up the campaign in Algeria. For the British, too, in Kenya, counter-insurgency operations would be increasingly focussed in an urban setting. Meanwhile, Thomas successfully debunks the image of serene and controlled decolonisation for both Britain and France in West Africa, as "imperial managerialism" was "overtaken by events" (251). In the 1960s, right-wing Conservative Party support for Rhodesia's white-dominated regime echoed the "political and inter-generational conflicts apparent in France at the close of the Algerian War" (341).

Exquisitely phrased throughout, the text is packed full of original insights – for example, on the significant role in decolonisation of the end of deference both in Europe and in the colonies, or, that "[u]nderstanding the end of empire should not begin with the consequences of the Second World War but with the colonial crisis that prefigured it" (17). The important chapter on Madagascar demonstrates that the rebellion there – much neglected previously by historians of decolonisation – "set the Fourth Republic on the road to increasingly violent post-war fight strategies that tore apart not only Malagasy society but of Vietnam and Algeria as well" (205-6). On the Cold War dynamics of decolonisation, Thomas reminds us that the "Suez crisis... proved that Washington's whip-hand packed a killer punch, but anti-imperial US interventionism remained the exception and not the rule" (19). Back to Vietnam, the Bao Dai 'solution' to give a quasi-independence to a new State of Vietnam "pointed up the inherent inadequacies of French Union reformism as a whole," notably "the untenable halfway house between colonial control and national independence" (129). For the British in India and Palestine, meanwhile, "the unworkable combination of fight and flight strategies... contributed to worsening inter-communal clashes and the descent into partition and war soon afterwards" (96). Indeed, in the endgame of decolonisation, it was often competing nationalisms which were calling the shots. In Kenya, "the uncomfortable truth" was "that the war was increasingly waged between Kenyans, on Kenyan terms" (233-4). The Nyasaland Emergency of 1959, that prefigured the break-up of the white-dominated Central African Federation, demonstrates that "[f]ight and flight were becoming stark alternatives, not reciprocal elements that could be combined" (235). And, in his excellent conclusion, Thomas reminds us that the "bitterest" of decolonisation fights would morph into prolonged internationalised proxy wars from the 1960s to the 1990s (369).

At times, Thomas's narrative reads like a political and military thriller – for example, in the discussion of the Algerian hijack of 1956 (in which the FLN's exiled leadership en route to a peace conference in Spain was captured over Algerian airspace) (181-3). In synthesising a vast secondary literature, while also drawing upon extensive original research in the primary sources, this book will surely become a required jumping-off point for students and scholars wishing to tackle European decolonisation in the future. Indeed, there are themes and concepts here which can now be applied and tested in the Dutch, Portuguese, Belgian, and Spanish end-of-empire arenas.

It seems to me, however, that a central element in Britain's 'flight' strategy is underplayed in Thomas's analysis. By the 1960s, he tells us that Britain's "determination to cling on eventually crumbled under the weight of hostile external scrutiny, the greater economic pull of European trade, and lack of public enthusiasm for costly colonial fights" (283). But surely a vital ingredient in the decolonisation soup was also the anaesthetic that was the Commonwealth ideal for British politicians, civil servants, business leaders, and public opinion alike. Into the 1970s, there remained an enduring vision that the UK could still play a 'Third Force' role in the world as *primus inter pares* in the ex-colonial club, and this was a discourse which curiously united both left- and right-wing political opinion. Indeed, the term 'flight' suggests a definite end-point and no turning back. But often this was not how the British conceived of their withdrawals from New Delhi, Kuala Lumpur, or Lagos. It was hoped that there would be ongoing constructive engagement as a prop to British global influence, explaining the great lengths gone to by the Attlee government to preserve India's membership in the Commonwealth when it became a republic in 1949. In this regard, more perhaps could have been made of France's attempts to salvage economic and strategic interests in its decolonisation settlements. Fleeting, we hear of "cherished base rights" in Morocco (182), and the antics of Jacques Foccart, the Gaullist networker and initiator of many a coup in post-colonial *Francafrique* (359). I wonder therefore how far the "dream of *Eurafrique*, the economic and cultural integration of France and [former] French black Africa" (261), superficially achieved with blanket political independence in 1960, sugared the pill of withdrawal from Algeria. Indeed, even in Algeria, where the FLN had clearly won and de Gaulle's flight strategy was influenced by his embrace of a nuclear future, a lot of French negotiating energy was expended during 1962 attempting to secure military and commercial rights. But perhaps these are subjects for another comparative study of how British and French interests fared in the post-colonial situation, and how ex-imperial influence waxed and waned in the Commonwealth and in the Francophone world.