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Postcolonial security: Britain, France, and West Africa's Cold War

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Mohamed Chamekh

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BOOK REVIEWS

Postcolonial security: Britain, France, and West Africa's Cold War, by M. Wyss, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, 352 pp., hardback, £75.00, US\$100.00, ISBN 978-0198843023; eBook, £54.17, ISBN 978-0198843023.

Marco Wyss's book *Postcolonial security: Britain, France, and West Africa's Cold War* sheds light on the Franco-African and Anglo-African security relationships in the Cold War era. As the author puts it, the objective of the book is to 'contribute to the burgeoning study of the Cold War in Africa' (21). Wyss starts by underlining the discrepancy between Britain and France's post-colonial security roles in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. He argues that France remains a major neo-colonial actor in Africa while Britain 'decolonised' its foreign policy vis-à-vis its previous colonies.

Part I of *Postcolonial security* deals with the postcolonial defence agreements and cooperation between Britain and Nigeria, and France and Côte d'Ivoire. The first section tells the story of Britain's defence agreement with Nigeria in 1960. In this context, Wyss stresses the strategic importance of West Africa for Britain's imperial strategy with the Cold War that was then raging, the imminent loss of India and the Middle East, and the accelerating decolonisation process. This explains, according to Wyss, Britain's quest to safeguard a defence agreement with Nigeria, which was quite controversial given the rise of Pan-Africanism, a growing non-aligned movement, decolonisation, and opposition in Nigeria to the agreement. Nevertheless, Britain remained committed to this agreement despite the fact that the Nigerian opposition decried the 'pact' as a 'neocolonial scheme' (60).

In the second section, looking at France, Wyss notes that Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the leader of the Ivorian independence movement, declared independence in 1960 without entering into a defence agreement with France – and that, despite this, he sought France's support to protect his regime after independence. According to Wyss, France used this security role to maintain its influence in the country, a role that Paris wanted to use as 'leverage' to bring Côte d'Ivoire into cooperation agreements after independence. Wyss contends that a common denominator for Britain and France was the fact that both countries were 'lucky', as they dealt respectively with Anglophile and Francophile leaders in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire who 'wanted to secure the protection and military assistance of the former colonial power for their independent future' (88) at a time when Britain and France were ready to accommodate the demands of their former colonies to sustain their influence and strategic interests in West Africa.

In Part II, Wyss explores the ramifications of the security relationships between Britain and Nigeria and France and Côte d'Ivoire in the post-independence era. For Britain, Wyss emphasises the fact that the special relationship between Lagos and Britain did not last for long. By the late 1960s, the defence agreement was contested by the opposition, who considered the pact a 'neocolonial scheme' (97) and a 'proof of the Balewa government neocolonial collusion with the British and alignment with the West' (97), a factor which, according to the opposition, put Nigerian independence at stake in an era characterised by the rise of Pan-Africanism, neutralism, the French atomic tests in the Sahara and the fall of Patrice Lumumba in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Wyss contends that London found the defence agreement with Lagos not worth the trouble, which was why

Britain agreed to abrogate the agreement, but maintain friendly relationships with the pro-Western Balewa government.

For France, Wyss concludes that while the accusations of ‘neocolonial collusion’ forced London and Lagos to give up on formal and close defence relations, Paris and Abidjan actually colluded and established a truly neocolonial security relationship. In Côte d’Ivoire, President Houphouët-Boigny was paranoid about his security and that of his regime, and this factor made him seek agreements and cooperation with Paris. The author points out that Houphouët-Boigny’s security policy in the end helped France to preserve its strategic interests in Côte d’Ivoire.

Wyss uses Part III to focus on Anglo-Nigerian security relations after the abrogation of the defence agreement and Franco-Ivorian security relations in the same era. In Nigeria, the Balewa government started looking for other sources of military training and assistance, which they found in West Germany, and in Commonwealth nations, like India, who provided the expertise required to organise and ‘Nigerianise’ their security forces. Wyss concluded that despite the fact that this was a ‘major setback’ (154) for Whitehall in Nigeria, it was accepted on the grounds that the government of Balewa did not venture beyond the Western bloc. However, Wyss interprets it as evidence of the agency of the Balewa government, which ‘was in the driving seat’ (185).

Conversely, Côte d’Ivoire remained, thanks to the Francophile Houphouët-Boigny, under the French security umbrella. Wyss concluded that unlike Nigeria, where armed forces evolved from ‘imperial antecedents’ (187), the Ivorian armed forces developed from France’s colonial forces in Africa. He stresses the fact that Houphouët-Boigny’s security and defence agenda was in line with Paris’s neocolonial strategy and that Houphouët-Boigny wanted the French military presence in Côte d’Ivoire to be ‘extended, rather than reduced’ (219). Houphouët-Boigny sought to play on France’s fears of American interference in Côte d’Ivoire by showing that he had alternatives in Washington or Moscow. This pressure explains Paris’s ceding to Houphouët-Boigny’s demands for more military hardware and assistance as well as, according to Wyss, for France to contain ‘Israel’s influence in the Ivorian security sector’ (190).

Wyss deals in Part IV with the British and French perceptions of American foreign policy in Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire. In this regard, he concludes that Britain considered Washington a partner in a Cold War struggle that could provide much needed aid ‘to sustain, rather than supplant, Britain’s influence in its colonies’ (229). According to the author, this explains the constant growth of US aid to Nigeria after the abrogation of the defence agreement with London in 1962, which he argues was mainly to prevent a possible Nigerian move eastward.


Wyss argues that Paris, unlike London, viewed Washington’s role in Africa with much more suspicion and that consequently relations between both countries were marked by rivalry. Wyss argues convincingly that French fears gave Houphouët-Boigny substantial leverage with Paris as he managed to obtain significant concessions from the French by promoting Washington as an alternative source of assistance. This helped the Ivorian president to get extra military assistance and ensure the continuation of the French presence in Côte d’Ivoire at a time when France was withdrawing its troops and closing its bases in Africa, from 1963 onwards. Wyss considers the French reaction a result of the fear of being replaced by the Americans and a quest to safeguard its neocolonial interests in Côte d’Ivoire and Africa in general, a mission which was facilitated by the Francophile Houphouët-Boigny.


Postcolonial security provides a prototype of a Cold War history written from below. It brings into the limelight the role of two African leaders in shaping the security relationships in the Cold War era. However, despite the fact that Wyss highlights the agency of the Nigerians and the Ivorians in shaping their relationships with the metropolis, he downplays the role

of the Nigerian opposition, which was pivotal in shaping the Balewa government's defence policies and in remoulding the British–Nigerian defence relationship. The role of the opposition also undermines Wyss's argument for the readiness of Britain to 'decolonise', especially at a time when Britain continued neocolonial initiatives in other parts of Africa.

Above all, this book makes a valuable contribution to the history of the Cold War in Africa and informs our understanding of the way African countries managed their security relationships in a Cold War environment. On the whole, Wyss's book offers major insights into the history of Africa in a crucial period of world history and opens avenues of research, especially as far as the Cold War in other parts of Africa is concerned.

Mohamed Chamekh
University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Ibra, Oman

 alshamekh29@gmail.com

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9859-5000>

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Migration beyond capitalism, by Hannah Cross, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2021, 210 pp., hardback, £55.00, €62.20, US\$41.10, ISBN 978-1-5095-3594-1; paperback, £17.99, €20.40, US\$31, ISBN 978-1-5095-3595-8; Open eBook, £16.99, €18.99, US\$24.13, ISBN 978-1-5095-3596-5.

Migration beyond capitalism by Hannah Cross is an ambitious intervention using a broad engagement with cases of resistance and oppression from across the world, arguing that it is capitalism that drives migration. The book has a strong Anglo-American focus due to the in-depth case studies explored in the UK and USA, however, there are also global examples used throughout the book. A key message is that freedom of movement cannot be fought for without also arguing for the right to remain, to stay in your home and to not be forced to migrate due to capitalism, labour patterns or ecological disasters (4). Cross emphasises that we must work to interrupt the patterns that compel people to move, forcing people from their communities (4) into exploitative and violent working conditions. Additionally, Cross asserts that when the left focuses on migrants' contributions to society, it reproduces and colludes with the very patterns of displacement that capitalism's need for cheap labour drives. She contends that in order to 'usurp capital's war on people and the environment' (7), a radical reimagining and revaluing of labour is needed that will stop reinforcing the toxic narratives of capitalism. The book also argues that visions of more collective societies and of another world tend to ignore overexploited migrant labour (9). However, this fails to consider that in feminists' visions, in everyday demands, we evoke a future where all labour is valued equally and the caring labour (disproportionately carried out by women, the load borne heavier by Black women and women of colour) is shared, valued, and removed from exploitation. There is a missed opportunity to go further, radically engaging with and describing more vividly the impact and the need for a feminist–Marxist approach. Despite this omission, the work is a valuable