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INTRODUCTION

Ending Empire and Remaking the World

DECEMBER 1963 FOUND BARBARA Castle in Kenya. Labour Party politician, writer, and parliamentary voice of Britain's leading anticolonial pressure group, the Movement for Colonial Freedom, Castle arrived in Nairobi on the 10th. She was there to celebrate. Hours after her arrival, Castle attended a multiracial 'civic ball'. Diary entries record her thrill at what was to come: 'Atmosphere so gay: races mixing equally and naturally—so diff. from the old Kenya! I twisted and jived uninhibitedly and I felt like a 20 yr old'.[1] The next day brought wildlife-watching before another night of celebration. The evening began with drinks on the terrace of the Lord Delamere Bar, once an exclusive settler haunt, now, in Castle's oddly colonialist metaphor, the 'Piccadilly Circus of a world society'.[2] Six hours later, Castle was an honored guest at the Uhuru (Freedom) Stadium for Kenya's independence ceremony. Other British dignitaries included Anglican priest and antiracism campaigner Michael Scott, Oxford anthropologist and Colonial Office adviser Margery Perham, the departing colonial governor Malcolm MacDonald, and Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh. The duke took the salute of a King's African Rifles parade marching to the strains of "Auld Lang Syne." Jarringly inappropriate, the traditional invocation of a freezing Scottish new year was meant to convey the warmth between hosts and visitors. Besides, the regimental band knew it well—they were required to play it often. The music done, MacDonald offered Britain's congratulations to Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, as the Union Jack was lowered for the last time on the stroke of midnight, December 11, 1963.[3]

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The imperial choreography of an end to empire was one thing, but the lived experience, for ordinary Kenyans and honored guests alike, was rather different. Castle arrived late. She got stuck in a traffic jam of cars and minibuses convoying people to the stadium. Anxious not to miss out, she tore her clothes clambering over a fence, to find thousands already celebrating with singing and dances of their own. The band was drowned out. So too was the Duke of Edinburgh's whispered aside to Kenyatta just before that flag came down: 'Want to reconsider? There's still time'.[4]

Ten years earlier, thousands of Nairobi residents had faced beatings, expulsion, and internment, accused of association with Mau Mau in a war against British colonialism. Kenyatta had been locked up for much of it but emerged on the side of the conflict's 'loyalist' winners.[5] Was December 11, 1963, a celebration of victory or the burial of a traumatic, divisive past? Arguably, it was neither. Beyond Kenya, ceremonies of this type were commonplace in the early 1960s.[6] Formal declarations of independence were supposed to mark something definitive, a societal transition from one political condition, colonial dependency, to another, sovereign independence. Liberation from discriminatory foreign rule was meant to enable authentic freedom, both individual and collective.[7] But decolonization was not a single event, once accomplished, forever done. Processes of ending empire and breaking with colonialism were messier, more attenuated and less final than independence ceremonies suggested.

Ending Empire?

Empires, until relatively recently, were everywhere.[8] A minimalist definition of what they were is the foreign enforcement of sovereign political control over another society in a delimited territorial space. But that's not enough. Describing the varieties and degrees of imperial influence, and the lived experience of empire, demands more than such coldly geopolitical terms. Eurocentric or Westphalian notions of sovereign independence tied to statehood and international legal recognition were difficult to translate to colonial spaces, where relational politics, religious loyalties, and kinship obligations suggest more layered, pluralistic attachments to multiple sources of authority.[9] Economic influence, sometimes exercised without 'formal' political dominion, could be crucial. Most importantly, the 'political control' over territorial space fails to capture the fragilities of colonial governance, its unevenness across vast geographical areas whose territorial limits were often porous. Movements of people, goods, money, ideas, and beliefs were impossible to confine within a single colonial

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polity.[10] The tensions between movement and restriction, between cosmopolitanism and compliance, between private spheres of life beyond colonialism and lives constrained by it, would lend decolonization local variegations that nationalist political schema rarely captured.

For most of those affected by it, opposing empire was more visceral than ideological. The constraint of rights and opportunities was part of something bigger, the restriction of freedoms—to move, to associate, to own certain things, to practice one's culture. These limitations were, and are, what makes colonialism possible. More a pervasive social condition than an exact political relationship, the colonialism of empire describes not just the maintenance of unequal political relations between a controlling imperial power and a dependent society, but the socioeconomic hierarchies, the cultural discriminations, and the racial inequalities such relations entail.[11]

Imperialism, understood as the ideas and practices of empire, lingers on. So do numerous silences and occlusions surrounding it, a consequence of what one analyst has described in a British governmental context as a systematic 'deprioritizing of empire'.[12] Empires may no longer dominate global politics, but multiple colonial legacies endure.[13] Some are so invidious that they cry out for our attention: acute inequalities of global wealth, uneven access to the resources essential to human security, and the persistence of societal racisms. In other ways, searching out colonialism's imprint seems easier. Less than half a century ago, foreign colonial rulers were still geographically widespread. The job is to work out how much changed when they left or were compelled to go. Elsewhere, empire's impact is more oblique but remains imminent even so. From the use of land and the extraction of resources to borders and administrative structures, the language and patterns of global commerce, and the social and cultural identifications that people make, our contemporary world is inflected with recent imperial history.

This is where decolonization comes in. It stands alongside the twentieth century's world wars, the Cold War, and the longer arc of globalization as one of the four great determinants of geopolitical change in living memory.[14] The chapters to come suggest that decolonization was one globally connected process. Their cumulative argument is that we cannot understand decolonization's global impact by examining individual empires or single colonial histories. Decolonization worked as much across nations, empires, and boundaries as within them. It proceeded by forging new global connections that reordered relations between First World, Second World, and Third.[15] Colonialism's devastating impact on

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the 'Fourth' World of indigenous peoples and first nation communities was replicated in their sublimation within a broader 'Third World' designation. Decolonization, indeed, is why this three worlds construction came to be used in the first place. Usually portrayed as disintegrative, decolonization was anything but. Instead, decolonization is intrinsically connected to globalization, whether that is conceived as a process of increasing global connectivity or as competing ideological visions of how the world might be reconfigured through economic, cultural, and political exchange. The conditions and possibilities of globalization—or rival globalizations—assured the supporters of decolonization greater access to essential resources, to wider networks of influence, and to global audiences. But globalization could also hinder. Its neoliberal variant has reinforced economic inequalities and facilitated imperial forms of influence, making decolonization harder to complete.[16] The first section of this book tries to explain why the deck was so heavily stacked against newly independent nations.

Ending empires occasioned many of the longest wars of the twentieth century, reminding us that decolonization was more than a political contest.[17] It energized different ideas of belonging and transnational connection, of sovereignty and independence and the struggles necessary to achieve them. Late colonial conflicts spurred other connections as the colonized 'weak' built transnational networks of support to overcome the military and economic advantages of 'strong' imperial overseers. Insurgencies spread. The counterinsurgencies that followed triggered rights abuses whose global exposure left empires shamed and morally disarmed. In its violence as in its politics and economics, decolonization reshaped globalization just as globalization conditioned decolonization.[18]

This book is about what brought down European overseas empires, whose constituent territories were separated by oceanic distance but conjoined by global processes of colonialism. The opening three chapters deal with ideas and concepts. The first concentrates on what decolonization means and when it occurred, examining its twentieth-century chronology. The second chapter addresses the relationship between decolonization and globalization. And the third considers alternatives to decolonization, revisiting debates over the rights and wants of people living under colonial rule. Scholars familiar with the panoply of reformist engagement with empire, with proposals for different governing structures and pooled sovereignties, and with diverse viewpoints that were never simply 'anticolonial' remind us that decolonization was not a foregone conclusion.[19] We know that claims to nationhood built on various models of sovereign independence eventually prevailed. But what contexts made these outcomes more likely?

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My attempt to answer this question accounts for the transition from part I to part II of this book.

Beginning with chapter 4, my attention shifts toward factors which, it seems to me, were crucial in triggering European colonial collapse. Briefly summarized, they are these:

- issues of political economy;
- the global weight of anticolonial opposition and rights claims;
- the transformative aftereffects of two world wars;
- territorial partitions;
- the violence of those fighting to end empire and those fighting to keep it; and
- the vulnerability of the colonial civilians at the epicenter of decolonization.

The list could be much longer. Questions of identity and culture, gender and ethnicity, ideology and ethics are each central to the factors I've highlighted. So are other, perhaps more familiar matters of geopolitics, international organization, and a globalizing Cold War. It would also be wrong to assume that identifying causes makes prioritizing among them easy. The problem, of course, is that the conventions of historical analysis demand such differentiation. So the dilemma for anyone attempting to compare how and why European empires were brought down is twofold: first, to distinguish between major and minor in teasing out causes, and, second, to avoid the oversimplification of a complex historical process by ascribing too much transformative power to a single factor. This is a difficult line to tread. Decolonization was pluri-continental, supranational, and globally comparable at the same time as it was locally specific and highly contingent.[20] These traits are not contradictory. Its local iterations might defy generalization, but decolonization had distinctive patterns nonetheless. I've tried to strike a balance here. I make frequent use of archival sources to make the case, although the work of other scholars in history and social science figures prominently throughout. My aim in identifying particular triggers and their consequences is to keep those global patterns in view without losing sight of the people caught up in the decolonization process.

Remaking the World?

Placing decolonization within a temporal frame, beginning with the First World War and ending somewhere in the 1970s, makes good sense insofar as the great majority of formal decolonizations occurred at some point

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within these years.[21] But there are gaps. Colonies still exist. Economic dependencies are real. Attitudinally and emotionally, colonialism is with us still.[22] Twentieth-century decolonization was transformative even so. It lent political coherence to the global South as a transregional bloc united in its rejection of the white racial privilege that for so long underpinned rich-world politics. As applied to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, that shorthand term 'global South' encompassed a wide spectrum of nations and dependencies, from middle-income countries to colonial territories. For all that, the global South was identifiable less by geography than by shared opposition to the colonialist interventions and discriminatory practices of imperial powers. For its constituent territories, ending empire was integral not just to the rights claims or freedom struggles of particular nations, but also to changing the north–south dynamics of rich world and poor. As historian Angela Zimmerman has suggested, by the early 1900s the global South was evident in a 'colonial political economy' at once tied to, but kept distinct from, rich-world capitalist economies by the racial hierarchies of colonialism. Put differently, it was not the equator but rather what W. E. B. Du Bois identified as 'the color line' that separated global South from global North.[23]

In the 120 years or so since Du Bois mapped out the global color line, the collapse of formal colonial control, the end of empires, or, as specialists usually term it, decolonization has reshaped the world's political geography. Its impact on political culture—on the ways regimes, governments, and social movements justify their behavior—has been equally profound. Whatever the arguments about its finality, rejecting colonialism was the necessary precursor to the creation of new nation-states, new ideological attachments, and new political alignments in much of the global South. For some, that rejection did not produce support for decolonization but, rather, for alternate claims to political inclusion, social entitlements, and cultural respect: aspirations thought to be achievable within rather than beyond the structures of empire. For others, anticolonialism demanded a fuller decolonization—of politics, of economies, and of minds. These more radical and rejectionist objectives implied profound social transformations, placing decolonization within a spectrum of revolutionary change.[24]

The historical record lends weight to this revolutionary reading of events. Decolonization fostered bold experiments in social, racial, and gender equality. It changed prevailing ideas about sovereignty, citizenship, and collective and individual rights.[25] Its contestations stimulated new types of social activism, innovative forms of international cooperation between governments, and a global surge in transnational networking

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between nonstate actors, activist groups, and those that colonialism otherwise excluded.[26] Some of the ideas involved were locally specific, but many more were shared, borrowed, or adapted among the peoples caught up in fights for basic rights, for self-determination, for the dignity of cultural recognition.[27]

So where are we? If decolonization was once depicted in reductive terms as the sequence of high-level reforms leading to a definitive constitutional transfer of power, it now risks being freighted with so many elements that it loses coherence. At one level, this book's purpose is thus a basic one: to rethink what decolonization is. The end of empires catalyzed new international coalitions and diverse transnational networks in the second half of the twentieth century. It triggered partitions and wars. It challenged ideas about individual and collective rights, and which mattered most. And it shaped the ways in which globalization gathered momentum. Decolonization, in other words, signifies the biggest reconfiguration of world politics ever seen.

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