DECOLONIZATION

A SHORT HISTORY

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by way of contraction. After decades or (especially in the British case) centuries with a prevailing imperial orientation toward the outside world, the metropoles found themselves trimmed back to a status as "ordinary" European nation-states. The abandoned centers became more European than ever, not just in their political and economic orientations but also according to their self-image. At the same time, owing to migration, their societies at home achieved a degree of plu- [illegible] y had previously only encountered in remote [illegible].

LEGACIES

Decolonization dramatically changed the contemporary world. It had tremendous effects on the lives of a large portion of the world population and altered the ways in which international power can be legitimately exercised. It seems reasonable that many people try to understand the structures and problems of today's world by looking back on this historical juncture. The legacies decolonization bequeathed are no less complex, ambiguous, and multifaceted than the process itself.

A widespread way of assessing these legacies is not to approach them directly but to define them negatively: with regard to what decolonization—by intention or by default—did *not* change. It is hard to ignore the long-lasting marks the colonial past has left on formerly colonized countries, on the ex-metropoles as well as on the international system. Colonial legacies are so diverse, their specific occurrence and composition so varied, and their interpretation so contested that it is difficult to make general statements. A full inventory would range from the Queen as head of state, the Commonwealth,

and the African and Pacific Franc zones to territorial borders, legal systems, or constitutional patterns; from religious cultures, consumption, and sports preferences to official languages, educational systems, and infrastructures (or lack thereof); from the destruction or preservation of ecosystems to migration patterns and strong armies. Some of them (e.g., urban landscapes) are tangible and obvious, others, often the more tenacious among them, intangible (e.g., the ideological outlook of administrative and political elites). Some (e.g., agricultural monocultures, business networks, or weak governmental structures) proved to be more burdensome for the new states than others (e.g., industrial plants, cricket, or a different time zone). To make things even more complicated, these colonial legacies rarely appear in a pure form, and they have been subject to debate and to change over time. It was easier a few years after independence to identify certain international inequalities, social or ethnic conflicts, public institutions, or political practices as aftereffects of alien rule than it was after several decades. And it is hard to imagine that many people still identify English as a world language with the British Empire that was the prime vehicle for spreading English across the planet.

The topic of colonial legacies can be of purely anecdotic interest. It strips off this antiquarian character when it is considered against the backdrop of economic distress and underdevelopment; of military coups, political instability, and authoritarianism; of civil wars and ethnic violence that engulfed many countries of the former colonial world within one or two decades after independence. The search for colonial legacies is inextricably linked to the question of whether, and to what extent, they help to explain posterior developments or

even the current situation of postcolonial countries. This analytical question also has a political counterpart: the debate about the former colonial powers' lasting responsibility for the fate of their ex-territories.

There is no simple and general answer to this question. The highly diverse nature and intensity of colonial rule, the manifold paths to independence, and the different trajectories afterward (not all of them ending in failure) show a muddled picture. While quite a few postcolonial ethnic or religious conflicts clearly have roots in the colonial period, there is no general correlation between a country having a colonial past and that country experiencing outbursts of large-scale violence in the second half of the twentieth century.[5] And while different colonial regimes left distinct marks on structurally similar regions, a specific form of colonial rule does not determine a particular political regime in the present.[6] Hence, the fact that the colonial past still puts its imprint on the contemporary world does not mean that it has determined it thoroughly. To fully understand how the colonial past shapes the present, we need to go beyond mono-causal models and abstract categories. A more diachronic approach is necessary that looks into *how*, in each single case, these colonial legacies were transmitted and incorporated into the postcolonial order and how they changed their meaning over time.[7]

This approach may even help to revisit the question of decolonization's specific legacies. Defining these legacies only in negative terms tends to obscure decolonization as an actual historical process. In each single case, this process produced a specific mixture of rupture, change, and continuities. In some areas—such as with regard to the developmental impetus—

continuities prevailed and locked together the late-colonial period and the early postcolonial years in a broader transformational period. The ways in which this transformational process played out, and the deals, decisions, and arrangements made over its course, left deep marks on the postcolonial world up to the present. For sure, there was no historical path-dependence from the critical moment of independence. The long-term outcome was never independent of the course of events unique to each specific decolonization, but it was also always related to further developments within the postcolonial state and its international environment.[8]

Decolonization's most generalizable legacy is certainly the primacy of political nationhood as opposed to other forms of constitutional, economic, or cultural emancipation. With only a few exceptions—partition in India and Palestine, unification in Somalia and Cameroon—decolonization did not create new territorial entities. Most borders—and the conflicts they entail or generate—were not the product of decolonization. Decolonization's momentous legacy consists in having translated borders between colonial states into international borders between nation-states. The result is that almost 40 percent of the length of all international borders today have been originally drawn by Great Britain and France.[9] Decolonization clearly took a different course than the imperial collapse in the wake of the First World War. Whereas the 1919–20 Paris peace provisions sought to provide international stability through the creation of ethnically homogeneous nation-states, the midcentury arrangements aimed at a stable postcolonial order based on the sanctity of the already existing territorial organization. Except for very few cases (Bangladesh

and recently South Sudan), attempts at secession from postcolonial states have failed—not least due to the lack of international recognition.[10]

This does not mean that the postcolonial international order has been a success story. Coupled with the promise of self-determination, the colonial-turned-into-national borders have proven an explosive legacy. Particularly in the first decades after independence, violent border disputes and expansionist ambitions of some states (e.g., Indonesia, Morocco, Ethiopia, Somalia, Jordan) have challenged the postcolonial order. From the inside, new national borders have been no less fiercely contested by groups spread over several states (e.g., the Kurds, West African Hausa, and Saharan Tuareg) and by conflicts between different population groups over political and economic dominance in the independent states. Several conflicts, of which quite a few had already emerged or even been stirred up under colonial rule, culminated in mass killings, secessionist movements, and waves of what one might call "decolonization migration": emigration and refugee movements that were directly triggered by the decolonization process and its aftermath.[11] And yet, the multiethnic and multireligious outlook of many states at the moment of independence alone cannot account for the widespread instability of postcolonial states. The only early attempts at creating more homogeneous national units through partition, in British India and Palestine, have resulted in two of the longest-lasting postcolonial conflicts. One of the most disastrous state disintegrations in the past couple decades occurred in Somalia, one of the ethnically most homogeneous states in Africa. Finally, the fact that quite a few political compromises tailored during the decolonization era (such as in Lebanon or in Nigeria) became a catalyst of sectarianism should not obscure the recognition that others (e.g., in Mauritius) turned into rather successful systems of balancing interests in plural societies.

Potential conflicts arising from colonial borders and multiethnicity were not the only or, in many cases, the foremost challenges the newly independent states had to face. Some countries achieved political independence under circumstances of political, social, and economic disruption, chaos, and mass violence. But also those new states that were more fortunate had to grapple with the particular structures and weaknesses of their late-colonial predecessors. Full political sovereignty—not to speak of economic or cultural self-determination—did not materialize with the hoisting of a new flag and the election of a new government. All postcolonial states remained dependent on outside economic and military support and foreign investment. The dependence was rarely as obvious as in the neocolonial arrangements in Iraq in 1932 and the Philippines in 1946, or in "Françafrique," which has become the common term for the amalgam of political and business networks and military support linking France and authoritarian leaders and elites of many postcolonial states in Francophone southern Africa.[12] But also in most other cases, longstanding economic and political networks and patterns did not disappear with independence, or they reemerged in the form of foreign technical experts and political advisers.

With only a few exceptions and despite their diverse paths to independence, the political and economic development of

most Asian, African, and Caribbean states fell short of the high-flying hopes and promises, of the optimism and enthusiasm so characteristic of the moment of decolonization. The new age of universal emancipation, prosperity, and progress did not materialize. In a way, the era of decolonization thus ended as it had slowly emerged at the end of the First World War: with a surge in expectations and their dramatic disappointment. While it is hard to ascertain to what extent this was avoidable and who was to blame, this widespread disillusionment had a tremendous impact on the way decolonization is being retold and remembered. It has disrupted certain guiding ideas, such as the belief in the manageability of development or the conviction that a thorough political and economic independence would necessarily lead to more equality or higher living standards. Alternative paths abandoned in the course of the historical process (such as federal or supranational schemes) now appear to some observers as missed chances. And still, the hopes and promises, decolonization's utopian "surplus," are also among its lasting legacies that would endure authoritarian turns and economic hardship. The struggles against colonial rule provided inspiration for movements all over the world fighting against discrimination, for equal rights, or for self-determination, however defined.

REPERCUSSIONS

Recently, it has been asked with increasing frequency: in what manner and to what extent did the possession of colonies affect the different metropoles? The positions taken on this matter are highly divergent: they range from the theory of a minimal impact, which regards colonial expansion as a matter pursued by a few interest groups and otherwise ignored

by an indifferent majority, to the conception of maximal impact, which views empires and colonial rule as constitutive for the nations of Europe.[13] A simple and uncontested answer to this question is not possible. The degree and form of colonial repercussions varied according to the field of activity under consideration (e.g., politics, society, economy, culture), the historical moment in time, the colony, and the metropole.

This also applies to the consequences of decolonization for the metropoles. It stands to reason that the loss of extremely important colonies (e.g., Indonesia, Algeria, Belgian Congo, Korea) also affected the metropoles to a great extent. *How* such impacts turned out exactly, however, can only be established by adopting a perspective that is thematically, socially, and historically differentiated and that does not neglect interactions with other macro-processes like European integration or the Cold War.[14] As with the former colonies, each single metropole experienced decolonization with a specific mixture of continuity, change, and rupture.

There were great variations in the political consequences of decolonization. In some countries, such as Great Britain, the process of decolonization was supported by a relatively broad consensus among the political elites.[15] In every instance where decolonization was accompanied by major domestic conflicts, this led to a restructuring of the political landscape. This was most obviously the case in France and Portugal, where the end of colonial rule also manifested itself as a crisis of the metropolitan state. Starting in 1958, and in the wake of the Algerian war, a rapid restructuring of France's governing institutions toward a strengthened presidential democracy took place. In Portugal, democratization and decolonization were inextricably linked to each other in the program of the

1974 "Carnation Revolution." A different kind of common problem was the integration of political-administrative elites and soldiers from the colonies. There were striking continuities of personnel in the field of postcolonial development policy; in France, there was a high concentration of former colonial officials in the newly created Ministry of Culture.[16]

Economically, the metropoles emerged from decolonization unscathed. This was also related to a general shift of emphasis in foreign economic relations. In the case of Japan, this meant a stronger orientation toward the United States; in Europe, orientation toward the European single market, a shift that had begun *prior to* the great wave of decolonization and that afterward more than compensated for declining foreign trade with the ex-colonies. If this meant that the West European boom promoted decolonization in the *long run*, in the *short run* it could also have the opposite effect: the economic boom placed tiny Portugal in a financial position where it was able to brace itself for a long time against independence for its African colonies. The reorientation was clearer in the case of the European Economic Community (EEC) founded in 1957, which since the 1960s acquired ever greater importance for its member states; the buildup of the Common Agricultural Policy in particular also contributed to the weakening of post-imperial economic relations.[17] There was symbolic meaning to the first British EEC application, which took shape after the 1956 Suez debacle and occurred in 1961 at the high point of African decolonization. While Britain's efforts at joining the Common Market (which eventually succeeded in 1973) were never uncontroversial, and while they did not completely call into question the United Kingdom's strong economic (and political) orientation toward the Commonwealth since 1945, they did permanently attenuate that orientation.[18]

When it comes to its social repercussions, a question that needs to be addressed is how decolonization relates to the migration movements that turned Western Europe after 1945 from a net source of emigration into a continent with a positive migration balance.[19] The precise role and importance of decolonization varied from country to country. The connection is most obvious with regard to decolonization migration, or the involuntary migration movements triggered by decolonization. The majority of these movements were not in the direction of Europe: they either followed territorial partitions (as in India and Palestine) or else were movements into neighboring countries, to Israel (as with many North African Jews), or countries farther away in the South; many British settlers from Kenya and Central Africa ended up heading to South and Southwest Africa. Yet the metropoles also became an important destination for decolonization migrants.[20] For Western Europe, their number is estimated at five to eight million. As a rule, these were settlers who had frequently lived overseas for several generations, to some extent also indigenous "collaborators" or military auxiliaries and other minority immigrant groups (e.g., South Asians in East Africa) who were fleeing political repression, dispossession, or violence after independence. Japan's imperial breakdown triggered similar population transfers. Until the end of 1946, about five million Japanese soldiers and civilians were repatriated to Japan under US guidance.[21] With the "repatriated" European (and Japanese), there emerged a new, often neglected type of migrant, usually also a unique legal status.

The metropoles were affected by decolonization migration in different ways. Decolonization migration was particularly dramatic in cases where it coincided with military demobilization: in Japan and Italy in 1945, France in 1962, and Portugal

in 1974–75. The largest wave of civilian migration went to France, where the French from Algeria (later often referred to as *pieds-noirs*) constituted the dominant group. Also important were the *retornados* who left Angola and Mozambique for Portugal, as well as the migrants from Indonesia and the Dutch Caribbean who headed to the Netherlands. Even if they arrived in Europe under what were often chaotic circumstances, their socioeconomic integration went by and large smoothly—at least with regard to those who were considered of European descent. Contributing to this fairly easy adjustment were the postwar economic boom and government programs for integration as well as a kind of "postcolonial bonus": many of the migrants were already equipped with the metropole's citizenship and cultural capital (such as language and education).[22] Some of the decolonization migrants, above all the *pieds-noirs*, developed specific group identities and established themselves as sociopolitical actors to be reckoned with.

While the labor migration to Western Europe that intensified after 1945 ran parallel to decolonization, it was not triggered by it. If we measure its "colonial" dimension according to how large the share of labor migrants from colonial territories was in each case, major differences come to light: in France and Great Britain, the share was relatively large; in Belgium and Japan, it was quite small. Parallels show up in the legal regulations surrounding "colonial" labor migration and their growing severity. In many metropoles, colonial immigrants after 1945 enjoyed certain advantages, such as visa waivers and easier access to citizenship. In a mixture of imperial traditions and bilateral relations with the new states, these kinds of regulations often outlasted decolonization, yet they

were gradually revoked. In a series of laws starting in 1962, Great Britain began restricting nonwhite immigration from the Commonwealth; and in 1964, France implemented a quota on migration from Algeria.[23] In cases where labor immigration had been closely linked to the colonial empires, decolonization "registered as a broadly social process" that had an impact on the classification of population groups and on the reconfiguration of social relationships in the emerging postwar welfare states.[24]

It seems reasonable to suggest that we view migration movements and the conflicts associated with them as a symbol of Europe's more general post-imperial contraction. Yet, this symbolic meaning should not be overdone. While the "reflux" of settler populations was indeed seen by contemporaries as a demographic withdrawal, it was offset by new forms of emigration in the context of international cooperation and development policy. In the 1970s, for example, there were more French officials posted to the former French West Africa, in addition to French private individuals, than ever before.[25] The conflicts experienced by European immigration societies are only in some cases related to migration from ex-colonies, most notably in today's France. In general, such conflicts tend to represent a broader experience, in that the integration problems of "plural" societies are not (or rather no longer) restricted to the colonial situation.

The cultural repercussions of decolonization have become a central topic in recent debates. Historians have started to trace the possible impact the end of empire had on areas as diverse as literature, popular culture, museum collections and exhibitions, art production and consumption, and schoolbooks.[26] The background to this is the hard-to-answer question

of how strong an impact colonial possessions had on the mentalities and mindsets of the metropoles. With respect to decolonization, this translates into the no less difficult question about how and when these mental ties between metropole and former colony dissolved. Usually it is the inertial force of colonial cultures and mindsets that is the focus of attention. Thus, for example, well into the 1950s and to some extent even beyond, a vague reference to empire continued to shape British popular culture.[27] At the center of the debate are the increase of racist and xenophobic reactions against non-European immigrants since the 1960s. In the light of the colonial past, these responses are sometimes interpreted as a persistence of colonial mental patterns, and sometimes as a collective psychological reaction to the "trauma" of decolonization.[28] As important as it is that colonialism not be absent from a history of racism, theories of this kind pose problems about how to specify the exact mechanism of action at work: colonialism was not the only context in which racism was practiced, and forms of racism and xenophobia marked European societies long before decolonization. The arguments about the colonial dimensions of xenophobia are also part of the fierce debates over public memory that have taken hold of many European countries over the last several years.

MEMORIES

Decolonization bequeathed shared and divided memories. On the one hand, these often relate to a past that most of the countries of Asia, Africa, and Western Europe have in common, that they share in an inclusive sense. On the other hand, decolonization marks the starting point at which these memories came to be cultivated and hence divided (up) mainly within a framework exclusive to each individual nation-state. Occasionally, this kind of segmentation happened in very concrete ways because of how archives, monuments, and other repositories of memory were redistributed in the course of the decolonization process. Yet, these memories were split up not only between different states but also between groups inside the countries themselves. In many postcolonial states, this compartmentalization has been a source of conflicts over memory.

In both former colonies and former metropoles, each country's particular decolonization process as well as subsequent developments contributed to shaping memories. In almost all the new states, remembering the colonial period and decolonization was strongly influenced at first by postcolonial nation-building. With different and shifting emphases, the path to independence constituted an important element in the emerging symbolism of the state and the official politics of remembrance.[29] Almost everywhere, independence day became the most important official holiday, if the anticolonial liberation struggle did not actually determine the entire (secular) holiday calendar. Parallel to this, in many places, a canon of national heroes emerged that found expression in schoolbooks, monuments, street names, and other media. The identity of these heroes did, however, vary greatly: from the flesh-and-blood "father of the nation" to the anonymous liberation army.

Even in the most dramatic cases of decolonization, constructing a postcolonial politics of remembrance was a lengthy, often gradual procedure. In India, up to the present day, many symbolic remnants of the British Raj have remained untouched and only barely been complemented with memorials to Indian victimhood under colonial rule.[30] In Congo-Zaire,

it took years following independence before people got around to toppling Belgian monuments and searching for "authentic" names, symbols, and points of reference. Even in Algeria, the scene of a genuine revolutionary war of liberation, colonial monuments and patterns of French commemoration frequently lingered on and were later absorbed in an emerging cult of national martyrs.[31] These slow transformations were also related to the way that conflicts and processes of marginalization that had started during the struggle for nationhood continued after independence in disputes about which conception of the national past should become hegemonic. In these processes, memories of violence—such as of forced migration or violence between rival nationalist movements—took considerably longer to emerge than official heroic memories. Nation-building was in fact often linked to attempts at concealing memories of the violence that accompanied it. Many societies are still grappling with finding appropriate framings for these disturbing memories, an often painful process in stark contrast to other recent tendencies toward rather depoliticized, commodified versions of the colonial past, consumed by tourists and local aspiring middle classes.[32]

Apart from these kinds of commonalities, there is strong variation in the concrete relationship between the colonial past and the politics of remembrance. First, the significance that this past is accorded in symbols of the state turns out to be extremely different from case to case. During the fiftieth-anniversary celebrations of independence in Africa, for example, the relationship of some Francophone countries to the former colonial power was articulated more clearly than was the case in former British colonies.[33] Never does the colonial

past constitute the only resource for a given country's politics (and policy) of national history and identity. Second, the image of the colonial period varies greatly between individual cases. Even when one system of colonial rule has a strong structural resemblance to another, as with the Japanese in various parts of East Asia, each experience is "remembered" and assessed quite differently in retrospect: as deplorable "colonialism" in South Korea, as helpful "modernization" in Taiwan.[34] Third, it is impossible to extrapolate from a concrete instance of decolonization to the way that this is later remembered. While the Algerian war of independence, for example, has functioned since 1962 as the symbolic center of gravity for the FLN state, the Mau Mau rebellion remained a marginal topic in official Kenyan memory for several decades after independence.

The greatest differences show up with regard to the former metropoles. While political decolonization was happening, government agencies in the metropoles were keen to maintain their prerogative to control how the events should be interpreted and to shape the formulas that would later be used to remember them.[35] In general, part of the metropoles' post-imperial nation-building included renunciation of a past that quite often had come to be regarded as disturbing. In Japan, the US occupation and the Cold War facilitated a fade-out of the imperial record.[36] In general, an active policy of "repressing" the past was unnecessary to turn public attention away from colonial history. Usually it was enough that government agencies and private lobbies abandoned their efforts at popularizing the colonies among the metropolitan population. In addition, in several countries, grappling with sensitive topics other than the colonial past (e.g., the dictatorships in

Spain and Portugal or the Vichy regime in France) seemed or still seem more pressing for many.

There has been a considerable upsurge in debates and government initiatives surrounding the colonial past in several European countries and Japan since the 1990s.[37] The focus of many debates, particularly those that receive great media attention, are moments of colonial violence: the Mau Mau uprising, the Algerian war, the assassination of Lumumba, Italy's use of poison gas in Ethiopia, the Japanese massacre in Nanjing, the German-Herero war in Namibia. Since the turn of the millennium, the governments of Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands have recognized with great symbolic gestures their countries' responsibility for slavery. These kinds of developments are inadequately described by the frequently invoked formula about a "return" of a collectively "repressed" past. Rather, what underlay these changes was a set of complex and, in part, extremely contested social processes in which the states are just one participant among many. Governments frequently confront a variety of historical actors (repatriated settlers, veterans, etc.) who mobilize in order to influence official commemoration, to be recognized as victims, and partly also to obtain material compensation. In many countries, the debates about memory have also been tied in with questions of discrimination, xenophobia, and the problems of integration faced by immigration societies. In France, an outright "memory war" has erupted in which present-day conflicts are framed with reference to the colonial past.[38]

The international arena has also proven a driving force in this recent memory boom. Over the past few years, some countries have engaged in a diplomacy of remembrance about their historical entanglements, a dialogue in which governments and civil societies relate to each other. This is particularly obvious in Japan, where the upsurge in colonial memories was associated with the reinsertion of the country in the East Asian regional context after the end of the Cold War.[39] Since then, people in Seoul and Beijing keep a meticulous watch on how Japanese war atrocities in Asia are commemorated in Tokyo. Yet, also in other contexts, demands for reparations or symbolic gestures of apology arise every now and then, making the memory of colonialism and decolonization an element of soft diplomacy across the North-South divide. The division of roles between ex-metropole and ex-colony, however, is not always clear: demands for an accurate reappraisal of war crimes during the decolonization of Indonesia have recently found little favor among either the conservative Dutch or the Indonesian government.

Showing up in these struggles around the past is an even more general tendency toward a "duty to remember" the negative aspects of a nation's history, a trend that since the 1980s has been closely linked with the internationalization of Holocaust commemoration.[40] This also helps explain why debates about colonial pasts are often full of talk about "crimes against humanity" or "genocide." South Africa, with its Truth and Reconciliation Commission from the 1990s, became a frequently copied model, even in postconflict settings that are not colonial. The growing international remembrance of colonialism, however, has not led to transnational forms of commemoration comparable to the World Wars or the Holocaust. Most debates between former colonizing and colonized countries remain in a bilateral framework. At last, the profound delegitimization of colonial rule has arrived in the realms of public memory: "colonialism" today has sometimes become

an abstract code word for any kind of "alien" meddling and for all kinds of conflict between those who are cultural strangers to each other—be they inhabitants of different continents or only of one single country.

NOTES

1. DECOLONIZATION AS MOMENT AND PROCESS

1. That "foreignness" is a construct that changes with mentalities and linguistic usage is shown (for the period before 1945) by Christian Koller, *Fremdherrschaft: Ein politischer Kampfbegriff im Zeitalter des Nationalismus* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2005).
2. Prasenjit Duara, "Introduction: The Decolonization of Asia and Africa in the Twentieth Century," in Prasenjit Duara (ed.), *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–18, quote at 2.
3. On the history and career of the word, see Charles-Robert Ageron, *La décolonisation française*, 2nd ed. (Paris: A. Colin, 1994), 5; Todd Shepard, *Voices of Decolonization: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014), 8–10. The most extensive discussion of Bonn's use of the term is Stuart Ward, "The European Provenance of Decolonization," *Past and Present* 230 (2016): 227–60, esp. 233–46.
4. See Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.