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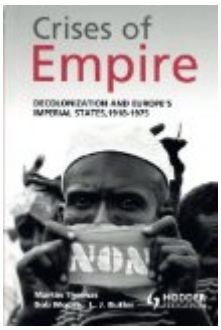

Martin Thomas, Bob Moore, L. J. Butler. *The Crises of Empire: Decolonization and Europe's Imperial Nation States, 1918-1975.* London: Hodder Education, 2008. xiii + 457 pp. $39.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-340-73127-7.

Reviewed by Marc Becker

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In the preface to his 1961 manifesto *I Speak of Freedom*, Ghanaian independence leader Kwame Nkrumah argued that it was important for Africans to study the example of South America as they struggled for their independence. In contrast, rather than looking to the global South, in *Crises of Empire* authors Martin Thomas, Bob Moore, and L. J Butler turn to Europe's metropolitan core to understand third world decolonization efforts between the end of the First World War and 1975. The result is a lengthy and dense text that communicates more about Europe's internal politics than emerging developments in the colonial world.

The purpose of *Crises of Empire* is to help students understand twentieth-century decolonization efforts in Europe. The authors note that most of the existing studies focus on the British, and their stated goal is to bring in the French and Dutch examples as well as reflections from the Portuguese and Belgian empires. They note that "decolonization" was an academic rather than a policy term, but that this is a useful concept for understanding these developments.

The book begins with a discussion of Britain's colonial empire. The cost of defending the empire during the Second World War, this book argues, was the empire itself. After the war, the British left India largely unscathed--this did not lead them to reassess their colonial project. In Africa, conservatives attempted to manage Ghanaian independence. Rhodesian decolonization, however, became the most difficult issue as it challenged British commitment to multiracial societies. The authors note that the 1982 invasion of the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands) indicated that Britain's lingering imperial impulses had still not disappeared.

The second section examines the French empire, and its contradictions between liberal ideals and its colonial project. The French fictitiously cast their possessions as overseas territories rather than colonies. Notably, even French leftists tended to be in favor of the empire. Colonial re-

forms were designed to consolidate and rationalize imperial rule. Perhaps the most famous French colony in the twentieth century was Algeria, which France governed as a department rather than a colony. The brutal Algerian independence war provides for one of the best discussions in the book.

The final section positions the Dutch decolonization process in terms of its inward looking attitude and reliance on the British during the Second World War. After the war, the Dutch were desperate to regain colonial control over Indonesia rather than give in to nationalist demands. The Dutch, however, underestimated nationalist impulses, pushed their case too far, and in the process lost opportunities to regain their colonial control. In New Guinea, the Dutch attempted to hold on to a colony with little economic value. The United States and Australia supported the Dutch colonial overlords against a perceived communist threat even as the colony became a liability. Despite its rhetoric, both here and elsewhere, the United States preferred a continuation of colonial empires to the threat of communism under an independent country. The Dutch decolonization process remains incomplete, with the last vestiges of its colonial empire still present in the Caribbean.

Rather than a comparative study, ***Crises of Empire*** is really three separate books with individual sections authored by each contributor: Butler on the British, Thomas on the French, and Moore on the Dutch. Thomas contributes a final chapter on Belgian and Portuguese Africa in which he notes that these histories were much more bloody and chaotic than the other decolonization models. But even this chapter extends the discussion rather than highlighting key comparative themes across the various case studies. The introduction briefly mentions dependency and modernization theories, but the volume largely lacks unifying themes or factors that the authors consciously pull as a central thread throughout the book. While not a truly coauthored work, it does have the significant advantage of drawing on the strong expertise of multiple scholars and the unique insights they bring to the material.

My biggest concern with this volume, however, is the perspective that it brings to the issue of decolonization. The discussions are largely contextualized in terms of domestic power struggles in Europe and international cold war concerns, and we learn more about European power politics than independence movements in the colonies. While the book includes extended discussions of parliamentary debates in Europe, few colonial voices emerge in the conversation. This is unfortunate, because the authors are aware of significant variations between the colonies and acknowledge in the introduction that those variations were vital factors in determining the different outcomes. A more serious engagement of what these developments look like from the point of the view of the colony rather than the empire would have significantly contributed to understanding these variations.

The final chapter on Belgian and Portuguese Africa is partially framed in terms of a cold war context and U.S. fear of Soviet-friendly states emerging in the region. The chapter, as well as the rest of the book, contains little discussion of how Nkrumah as well as other nationalist leaders, such as Patrice Lumumba and Amílcar Cabral, were moving toward socialism as a way to lead Africa forward and keep their multiethnic societies from collapsing into fratricidal chaos. Thomas briefly mentions Cuban military support in the Congo and Angola, but significant South-South alliances receive little exploration. These alliances undeniably placed strong pressure on Europe's moves toward decolonization, and are worthy of another book.

The question of sources is also of concern. As is typical of books designed to be used as texts, ***Crises of Empire*** draws principally on secondary

material, with relatively few primary sources or archival investigations being brought into the study. Unfortunately, the sources are also overwhelmingly European in their focus. Although the colonial world contributed a significant intellectual production during the twentieth century, the authors have largely silenced these voices in this work.

The book might also have been strengthened with a broader historical framework, curiously missing, with some exceptions, in a volume penned by historians. Although the focus of this volume is on the twentieth century, as Nkrumah noted, these developments can be contextualized in terms of the collapse of Iberian empires at the beginning of the previous century. Perhaps more curious is a failure to mention the Haitian Revolution waged against the French, given that the French are a major case study in the current volume under review.

Furthermore, in terms of the authors' historical interpretations, they seem to assume that the process of decolonization must have turned out the way it did, with little interrogation of how the decisions of various actors influenced these outcomes or what other possible outcomes or models might have developed. Examining this history from the perspective of the global South, situated in the context of successful liberatory struggles in Latin America, casts this history in a different light. Finally, while the authors present this volume as a text for students, it does assume a certain amount of background knowledge. Rather than an introductory text, it works best for its detailed and in-depth discussions of internal political discussions in Europe and how those impulses contributed to twentieth-century decolonization processes.

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