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Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon. *Continental Drift: Britain and Europe from the End of Empire to the Rise of Euroscepticism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 601 pp. $39.99, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-07126-1.

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British Euroscepticism has puzzled even the most well-informed observers, including various US secretaries of state. Dean Acheson's remark in the early 1960s that Britain had "lost an Empire and not yet found a role" has acquired particular prominence, but George W. Ball in fact offered an even less flattering judgment in his memoirs. Britain had "not yet adjusted to reality," he wrote in 1982, "no longer an empire, it was now merely an island nation on which the sun not only set, but set every evening—provided one could see it for the rain."[1] Both of these judgments fit neatly into a familiar picture of Britain's postwar elite caught up in imperial nostalgia, failing to confront the harsh new realities of being a medium-sized European power. Yet, while the link between the end of empire and the rise of Euroscepticism has frequently been evoked in the public debate, there has not been any systematic attempt by historians to connect these two seemingly separate yet distinctly intertwined phenomena. This is precisely what Benjamin Grob-Fitzgibbon, former professor of history at the University of Arkansas and now Foreign Service officer for the US Department of State, sets out to do in his timely study *Continental Drift: Britain and Europe from the End of Empire to the Rise of Euroscepticism.*

The book's main argument is clear and appealing, if somewhat familiar: it was the experience of decolonization and declining international influence that stimulated the rise of British Euroscepticism. In the late 1940s, Grob-Fitzgibbon argues, "politicians, civil servants and the public at large viewed British identity as both an imperial one and a European one," since they saw "no contradiction between being an imperial power, part of the English-speaking Atlantic world and a European nation" (p. 6). Indeed, as the book rightly points out, from the seventeenth century onward "to be European *was* to be imperial" (p. 8). Yet, as Britain's retreat from empire during the 1950s and 1960s coincided with the establishment and consolidation of the European Economic Community (EEC) on the continent, these two strands of British identity were increasingly seen as incompatible or even contradictory, triggering a "Euroscepticism ... that became impossible to separate from nostalgic neo-imperialism" (p. 7). Aptly enough, the book's seventeen chapters are therefore divided into two main parts: the first part ("Imperial Europeans") covers the period from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to the founding of the EEC in March 1957; the second part then looks at the rise of post-imperial Eu-

rosceptics from the late 1950s onward to the mid-1990s.

Rather than focusing exclusively on the interrelations between decolonization and European integration, Grob-Fitzgibbon seeks to offer a broader overview of postwar British foreign policy, embedding the "European story" firmly within the wider contexts of Anglo-American relations, decolonization, and the Cold War. In so doing, the book offers a wide-ranging narrative history, focusing mainly on the thoughts and actions of key political actors—an approach particularly effective when Grob-Fitzgibbon explicitly seeks to uncover the interrelations of the two seemingly separate areas of Europe and empire in the mind-sets and "mental maps" of British politicians and officials. With regard to the late 1940s, for example, he skillfully shows how Winston Churchill's and Ernest Bevin's views on the European (and German) question were remarkably similar, thereby also revealing the many different ideas and schemes for postwar European cooperation that were floating around at the time. Combined with Grob-Fitzgibbon's skilled writing and hand for the amusing historical detail, the book makes for an entertaining and vivid read; its use of biographical case studies to reveal the importance of cultural narratives and ideas is particularly effective. Indeed, the methodological set-up is not entirely dissimilar to Hugo Young's critically acclaimed and highly influential 1998 study ***This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair***—which, surprisingly, is not listed in the bibliography.

The downside of such a broad approach to the topic, however, is that Grob-Fitzgibbon does not really follow through the main theme of interrelations between Europe and empire consistently. Instead, the reader is presented with a much more general narrative of Britain's postwar relationship with European integration, many parts of which already are well known to scholars of postwar British history and bear little direct relevance to the (post)imperial dimension. To be sure, the book makes excellent observations and arguments in those instances where links between empire and Europe are discussed explicitly. The divergent attitudes toward the proposed European Defence Community between British and Commonwealth leaders in the early 1950s, for example, are highly interesting, as is Grob-Fitzgibbon's analysis of the ideological assumptions behind Margaret Thatcher's infamous Bruges speech in 1988. Other sections, by contrast, are less strong. Most of the discussion of Britain's first application to the EEC in 1961-63, for example, retells much of the well-known evolution of British policy from "Plan G" to the Free Trade Area proposal and then to the eventual application in August 1961. Similarly, the Thatcher chapters get buried in lengthy discussions of economic policies, the fallouts over Britain's contributions to the European Community (EC) budget, and simply intra-party politics. In this regard, it does not help that the book's narrative relies mainly on primary sources: while it makes for a lively and engaging read, many stories and events will already be familiar to readers of previous works on "Britain and Europe," some notable ones of which are missing from the bibliography.[2]

Given that most of the book offers a much more general history of British attitudes toward European integration since 1945, it is also surprising that its main argument then attributes so much importance to the role of post-imperial mind-sets in shaping British policy. An almost causal—and somewhat deterministic—link between the end of empire and rise of Euroscepticism is assumed from the very beginning, drawing mainly on the prominence of such ideas in contemporary British political discourse. Yet it is by no means certain that these two phenomena were in fact as inextricably and necessarily intertwined as the introduction postulates. Numerous historians have in recent years investigated the various historical junctions and turning points where different roads could have been taken—

roads that may well have led to very different outcomes both at the time and for subsequent British attitudes toward Europe.[3] The same applies to the alleged importance of "empire" in the minds of British politicians and policymakers. While imperial legacies certainly shaped perceptions of Britain's past and future international role, several works in recent years have revealed how the actual policymaking process toward European integration was in fact a highly elaborate process shaped by myriad other international, domestic, political, and economic factors as well.[4] Indeed, another prominent historian of the British Empire, Bernard Porter, has recently claimed that there were "no logical reasons why ex-imperialists *had* to be anti-European," suggesting at least "a dozen other possible explanations too."[5] None of the explanations that follow necessarily contradict Grob-Fitzgibbon's central thesis, but closer engagement with at least some of them might have made for a more balanced argument —one that pays greater attention to the role of contingency and agency, as well as to the ways in which post-imperial narratives frequently interacted and clashed with various other competing narratives floating around at the time.

Overall, the book offers a vivid, well-written, and entertaining general narrative of British attitudes toward European integration since 1945. But it does not really deliver on its central promise to explain "how the British evolved from being a nation of imperial Europeans to one of post-imperial Eurosceptics" (p. 7). A tighter focus on the specific connections between Europe and empire, as well as closer engagement with previous works on British policies toward European integration, might have helped to turn this into a more focused and thus ultimately more compelling book. Nonetheless, many of Grob-Fitzgibbon's arguments are intriguing and suggestive; they may well provide a fresh impetus for future research on Britain's postwar relationship with Europe and the wider world.

Notes

[1]. George W. Ball, ***The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs*** (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1982), 209.

[2]. Indeed, there have been entire books written about the development of this historiography. See Oliver Daddow, ***Britain and Europe since 1945: Historiographical Perspectives on Integration*** (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). For an excellent brief overview, see James Ellison, "Britain and Europe," in ***A Companion to Contemporary Britain 1939-2000***, ed. Paul Addison and Harriet Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 517-538. Notable omissions on the late 1940s, for example, include Anne Deighton, ***The Impossible Peace: Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945-1947*** (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); William Hitchcock, ***France Restored: Cold War Diplomacy and the Quest for Stability in Europe, 1945-1954*** (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and John W. Young, ***Britain, France and the Unity of Europe 1945-1951*** (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1984).

[3]. Regarding the first application, for example, Anne Deighton and Piers Ludlow, "'A Conditional Application': British Management of the First Attempt to Seek Membership of the EEC, 1961-3," in ***Building Postwar Europe: National Decision-Makers and European Institutions, 1948-63***, ed. Anne Deighton (Basingstoke: Macmillian Press, 1995), 107-122; and Mathias Haeussler, "The Popular Press and Ideas of Europe: The Daily Mirror, the Daily Express, and Britain's First Application to Join the EEC, 1961-63," ***Twentieth Century British History*** 25, no. 1 (March 2014): 108-131.

[4]. The most authoritative and extensive study remains Alan S. Milward, ***The United Kingdom and the European Community***, vol. 1, ***The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy, 1945-63*** (London: Psychology Press, 2000). See also John W. Young, ***Britain and European Unity***, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), or James R.

V. Ellison, "Accepting the Inevitable: Britain and European Integration," in *British Foreign Policy 1955-64: Contracting Options*, ed. Wolfram Kaiser and Gillian Staerck (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 171-190.

[5]. Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 301, 300.