

Thomas, Martin. *The End of Empires and a World Remade: A Global History of Decolonization*. Princeton, NJ & Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2024. 672 pages. Hardcover, \$39.95.

In his new book, Martin Thomas offers a global history of decolonization as the collapse of empires came, as he framed it, with a fundamental reorganization of the world. The struggles of decolonization did not come easy; they became international and transnational global campaigns of moral disarmament¹ against colonial injustice. The author narrates the integral link between two life-changing processes of decolonization and globalization. He traces the connections between the end of formal empire and the acceleration of global integration, market reorganization, cultural exchange, and migration. In addition to an introduction and a conclusion, the book is organized into two parts: Part I (Globalizing Decolonization), comprising Chapters 1-3, and Part II (Tracing Paths to Empire Destruction), comprising Chapters 4-15.

Martin Thomas shows how, in the wake of empire collapse, decolonization triggered international coalitions, partitions and wars across Asia, Africa and Latin America, and reshaped the patterns of interaction between the Global North and Global South. Globalization dangled to the decolonized greater access to essential resources and wider networks of influence, but neocolonial influences reinforced economic inequalities and imperial forms of political and cultural domination. The book draws out the most important aspects of decolonization, including ‘rights question,’ ‘violence question,’ and the interplay between decolonization and globalization. Regarding the latter, Thomas argues that while decolonization was accelerated by globalization, the end of empires facilitated globalization’s reach in terms of economic, political, and cultural linkage. Put differently, just as the nineteenth-century imperial expansions determined the globalization wave that attended them, decolonization in the second half of the twentieth century spurred even wider globalization.

In the author's narration, decolonization as a global cause gained steam between 1959 and 1974, beginning with the Cuban revolution of 1959 and extending with the successive decolonization of African colonies in the 1960s. It behooves mention that decolonizing actors recognized that political independence was not enough; there was a need to go beyond 'flag independence.' Hence, economic sovereignty and the capacity to sustain human security were integral to the meaningful self-determination of postcolonial states. But most newly independent states found their sovereignty weakened by an international economic order, embodied in the Bretton Woods Accords and stiffened by Cold War rivalries, which subjugated postcolonial states as subservient ideological partners to the economic demands of the rich North.

Furthermore, Thomas noted that decolonization was, by and large, violent. The end of empires caused disruptions in the authority structures of colonial administrations, in system frameworks for managing the colonies, as well as in the techniques and processes of colonial exploitation. Colonial authorities resorted to, in some cases, brutal violence to intimidate those seeking an end to colonial subjugation. Which, in turn, galvanized the organized resistance of anti-colonial freedom fighters. The author discussed in detail anti-colonial struggles, among others, in Algeria and Vietnam against French colonial authorities, the Malayan Races Liberation Army (MRLA) resistance against the British in South Asia, and the Mau Mau resistance movement against the British in Kenya. With respect to the latter, Kenya's racialized system of land ownership under the colonial administration energized the resistance movement. While local Kikuyu were not allowed to farm independently, settlers in the highlands required more agricultural labor as they expanded their land seizures. This guaranteed a steady supply of farm hands. In effect, Kikuyu farmers became landless laborers, living on the margins of settler estates. Landlessness, resentment at eviction, and racialized day labor became unbearably

explosive. As it were, insurgent pressures elicited counterinsurgent repression (p. 163). Colonial authorities claimed exclusive control of the use of force to maintain order. The availability of weapons and people's familiarity with them increased, ostensibly due to processes of militarization, conscription, and demobilization between the two World Wars and thereafter.

Thomas highlighted notable fallouts emanating from the end of empires, including transnational debates about the meaning and importance of human rights formulations and international laws as instruments of decolonization. Also notable are the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman empires after World War I, as well as the territorial partitions and forced removal of peoples following decolonization in Vietnam, Korea, Palestine, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Punjab and Kashmir from British India, and Biafra from Nigeria. As Thomas put it, "Partition violence illustrated how imminent decolonization fueled tensions between the local majority community and minorities of different ethnicity or religion" (p. 187). The initial concern focused on what was done to people as groups, whether Indian Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus or Palestinian Arabs and Jewish settlers. The attention later shifted to the fate of persons in terms of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse of individuals during partition violence. In addition to large-scale attacks, everyday violence included the abduction of women and girls, rapes, forcible conversions, and other aggravated assaults on refugee families by hostile majority group members.

Minorities and the displaced faced chronic insecurity, as exemplified by the traumatic experience of Palestinian Arabs, Indian Muslims, Chinese and Tamils in Malaysia, Berbers in Algeria, Western Saharans of Morocco, Alawite and Druze religious sects in Syria, and Yazidi, Assyrian and Christian minorities of Iraq. This is a reminder that the end of empire intensified their susceptibility to discrimination and bodily violence. Throughout the colonies, colonial

administrations and some of their postcolonial successors utilized guilt by association through collective punishment, inflicted on families and kinship groups of people accused of antiregime activity. Despite the UN General Assembly's efforts to protect civilians through the 1949 Geneva Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, rights abuses remained endemic in decolonization conflicts. By making civilian populations in dependent territories and those who took up arms to resist colonial rule marked an important transition in the decolonization process. Nonetheless, what is clear was that colonial authorities claiming the right to govern dependent populations did not protect them.

Thomas contended that even after flag independence, development ideas of the imperial powers, including disease eradication, increased agricultural output and labor productivity were designed as persistence of colonialism in new guises. Imperialists perceived development as a magic bullet, which only they could provide, and a way to legitimize colonialism, not end it. Thomas summed it up thus: "Empire represented the imposition of foreign imperial control.... Decolonization was a process of several moving parts: the withdrawal of European rule, the takeover of governmental apparatus by anticolonial nationalists, the pressures of Cold War rivalries, and the efforts by minority groups in decolonizing states to assert separate claims to nationhood" (p. 335). To Thomas's credit, *The End of Empires* is a significant contribution to the literature of colonialism and imperialism. The 287-page notes and bibliography are a testament to the author's extremely impressive research.

1. Moral Disarmament was proposed to the League of Nations, by Auguste Zaleski, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, with the objective of encouraging international cooperation and understanding to ensure that war between nations could no longer be possible.

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