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John T. Ducker: Beyond Empire: The End of Britain's Colonial Encounter, London: Bloomsbury, 2020, 424 pp.

Reviewed by
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The year 2020 was when *decolonization* finally became a major issue in the public sphere and academia. Today, one can find a call to "decolonize" for nearly every discipline or aspect of society. John T. Ducker's *Beyond Empire* deals with the decolonization of the British Empire. It mainly focuses on Africa in the 1950s and 1960s with excursions to other places like India, the West Indies, or Malaya. Surprisingly, however, Ducker's argumentation, literature, and source material look like it was published in the 1960s and not 2020 by the academic imprint of a major publisher. The book is a fine example of what Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000, p. 8) calls the historicist position of the "not yet". According to Chakrabarty, this position proclaimed self-rule as the best way of governing but at the same time confined Asians and Africans to the "imaginary waiting room of history" (ibid.). The anti-colonial activists confronted this position, saying "now" and demanding immediate independence. Especially after India's independence in 1948, it became increasingly clear that colonial rule in Africa was coming to an end. The line of conflict ran between those who demanded immediate independence and those who wanted to slow down the process and relegate independence to a distant vision in an uncertain future – a kind of carrot to keep the colonized moving and cooperating. This book is in the latter camp and argues that independence came too fast and more time under British guidance "to complete the job" (p. 322) would have benefitted the colonized.

It reads like earlier apologetic texts by former colonial officials defending – in retrospect – their positions, motivations, and views on the just-ended colonial project. Ducker does not engage much with the critical historical literature of the last decades but mainly draws on the colonial archive and secondary literature from the decolonization period. The African nationalist school of the 1960s and 1970s and the post-colonial approaches of the 1980s and following are absent. Consequently, Africans are portrayed mainly as passive or irrational and not as conscious, self-reflexive historical actors. Tellingly, the first (of the very few) African intellectuals cited are supposedly arguing for the "re-

introduction of a form of colonialism" (p. x; this is not a direct reference, but referring to a *Times* article from the 1990s). There are thus worlds between the meaning of decolonization in the book (Britain preparing its colonial subjects for "responsible government" in the British way) and today's calls to decolonize. Debates around "decoloniality" are a fundamental epistemological challenge, that is to say, a radical revision of the way we think (cf. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Grosfoguel, Mignolo, et al.).

In the narrative and argumentation of the book, all of this is non-existent. When race, one of the crucial aspects structuring colonial societies, is mentioned in the book, it is only in reference to anti-colonial politicians who were attacking white dominance and thereby arousing "racial feelings". Instead, the British Empire is painted as a colour-blind, multiracial polity where only personal merit and formal education were decisive. However, the powerful position from which the evaluation of "merit" was done remains unmentioned. Whiteness retains its powerful position as the "unmarked and unnamed marker" (cf. Frankenberg). This portrayal of the British Empire rests on the myth of equal opportunities without questioning the power imbalances underlying the definition of norms and standards.

Ducker unfolds his Eurocentric narrative against a backdrop of tribal, traditional Africa where, he wrongly claims, "coherent state structures" were absent (p. 7), thereby completely ignoring African empires, kingdoms, or city-states. The brief first chapter sketches a continent devoid of complex political organizations, defined by traditional customs, stasis, and irrationality. This contrasts with the modern (read Western) world of enlightenment, science, education, and progress. It brushes over the complexities and dynamism of pre-colonial Africa, homogenizing the continent by describing everything as "tribes" – from the clan structures of Somalia to the kingdoms of Uganda. In chapter 2, he presents his central argument, starting from the premise that the actual "goal of British colonial policy" from the very start was "the end of British control" (p. 12). In this line of argumentation, the empire had nothing to do with exploitation, global dominance, or racism. In contrast, colonial rulers went abroad to build states and economies and educate elites who could eventually take over the country as soon as they were ready. The book's main argument is that it was too early when they rushed to independence.

The third chapter focuses on the expansion of formal education in the British colonies in Africa up to independence. It is one of the empirically thickest chapters, giving insights into the development of schools, colleges, and universities. However, the main problem remains: the ignoring of other forms of learning before and besides the formal British-dominated system and the disregard for African educators and scholars as well as their perspectives. Education is technically seen as unilaterally given to Africans, first by benevolent missionaries, then by colonial administrators who want to help build independent nation-states.

The fourth chapter focuses on the institutional developments in different colonies. It is mainly based on the biographies of former British governors, taking their interpretation for granted. There are interesting insights, like the discussions around fed-

eralism in the detailed section on Nigeria; yet again, the African historiography since independence is overlooked. For example, the Tanganyika section makes no use of Julius Nyerere's published speeches nor of the Dar es Salaam school historiography (Ranger, Iliffe, Kimambo, and Temu), let alone the newer post-colonial revisionist history (Monsoon, Sunseri, and Brennan). Instead of taking African agency into account, we only see the perspective of the outgoing colonial administration. African nationalists are only an aggravating factor rushing to independence while being entirely unprepared.

The fifth chapter engages with the localization of the civil service. Country by country, Ducker spells out the process of the gradual replacement of British officials with people from the colonies. Again, he argues that the process was too fast and that not enough qualified professionals were available, leading to deterioration and loss of expertise. The next chapter focuses on external influences and compares Britain with other European imperial powers. Especially the French case is contrasted unfavourably with the British, arguing that France lacked a clear nation-building strategy and simply abandoned its colonies after the failure of creating a federation. The British Empire's nation-building was cut short by the changing international opinion, especially the rise of US power, the United Nations, and critique from newly independent India.

Chapter 7 gives an overview of the British mainstream press on colonial issues. It underlines the arguments made throughout the rest of the book, but it does not make a coherent point. It instead reads like an annotated bibliography of British reporting on colonial issues without direction. While it often simply reiterates the book's core argument (independence came too early), it touches upon some interesting issues (e.g. federation and independence conflicts) but provides no context. This chapter's primary use could be for researchers who want to survey the public debates around colonial issues in Britain in the 1940s and especially the 1950s.

Here as elsewhere, some interesting points are touched upon but not developed: for example, how British officials learned from the earlier experiences in India and the transfer of this knowledge to Africa. There had been too many university graduates in India and not enough adequate jobs for them, leaving the ambitious students disgruntled. This issue shows an interesting take on the topic of education and development. It is not simply the case that an ever-expanding educational system automatically leads to a thriving economy. Instead, a large group of well-educated but unemployed youth can be vital for political activism, unrest, and change. Another interesting topic for comparative analysis is the idea of "qualified franchise" – regulations determining who is allowed to vote and who is not. A revealing interplay of race, class, and gender becomes apparent in the varying regulations developed in the run-up to independence. The franchise was often based not simply on racial categorizations – especially in the last years of the empire – but instead all men could vote when their income or capital surpassed a certain threshold. Sometimes this was coupled with educational qualifications, like literacy tests or English fluency. De facto, not only was this aimed at excluding most Africans from the voter

roll, but it also shows the close interlinkage of race and class and disenfranchised poor whites. Like the building ordinances in Dar es Salaam segregating the city through building standards (not through openly racial criteria), racism in the liberal British Empire worked under the guise of other – apparently objective – criteria. All this is material for interesting comparative studies.

While Ducker draws extensively on historical source material (mainly from the National Archives in London), the book does not meet the standards of historical writing. It gathers much stimulating material and quotes at length (there is also an extensive appendix with colonial-era documents), but the references to the sources are insufficient. The endnotes are thrifty as they often only give the signature of the files and nothing else. Some paragraphs and pages come without references at all, although it is clear from the context that they were closely written along a primary source. Other references are even plain wrong (e.g. fn. 44 on p. 126) or dubious (e.g. the only reference for the section on Arabia/Aden [pp. 91–92] is the endnote "Personal Information"). Apart from this sloppiness, Ducker writes too close to the sources. He does not critically distance himself from the colonial officials' viewpoint but takes their reports as facts without scrutinizing, evaluating, or triangulating with other sources (let alone from different perspectives). A critical reading of colonial archives "against the grain" (or, to borrow from Ann Laura Stoler, "along the grain") would reveal a completely different picture. A serious consideration of African perspectives would have shown something else and exposed the importance of colonial racism as a central structural element. Additionally – and somehow related to the insufficient referencing – the editing of the whole book is most dissatisfying. To pick out just a few examples, on page 298, one paragraph is printed twice with minor word alterations. A sentence on page 22 (without quotation marks) reappears on the next page as a quote. On page 301, the abbreviation UTP is written out as "United National Party" and not "United Tanganyika Party". A careful editor should have remarked this, and even more importantly, the lack of structure and missing conclusions drawn from the chapters (e.g. chapter 6 just fizzles out on p. 259).

Taking all this together, I would recommend this book only to scholars who want to cover the whole range of discourses on British decolonization. For anyone else, I would point towards other works on the decolonization period like Fred Cooper's synthesis *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present* or Prasenjit Duara's collection *Decolonization. Perspectives from Now and Then*, to mention just two entry points into this vast and exciting field.