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Andrew W.M. Smith and Chris Jeppesen, eds., *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?* London: UCL Press, 2017. xi + 242 pp. Notes, select bibliography, and index. Open Access PDF ISBN: 978-1-911307-73-0; £15.00 (pb). ISBN: 978-1-911307-75-4.

Review by Emily Marker, Rutgers University--Camden.

Andrew Smith and Chris Jeppesen's new edited volume, *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?*, is the latest addition to a burgeoning literature on the history of European empires in Africa after World War II and the particular logics, practices, and imaginaries of postwar colonialism. Until the early 2000s, the study of postwar empire in its own right had been overshadowed by an enduring interest in earlier eras of imperial history on the one hand, and subsumed into teleological narratives of decolonization on the other. This is decidedly no longer the case. The meteoric rise of global and contemporary history--twinned sub-fields that home in on the postwar conjuncture as a crucible of our global present--has made experiments with new imperial political forms in the 40s and 50s look vitally important for better understanding the contemporary world and thinking more creatively about future possibilities. The postwar pivot has been especially pronounced in scholarship on French Africa, but this volume is an important reminder that the quest to redefine Europe-Africa relations and reimagine imperial futures after 1945 was a thoroughly transnational undertaking that occurred in France and Britain alike.[1]

The transnational emphasis of the volume draws heavily on Martin Shipway's comparative work on decolonization, particularly his notion of a "late colonial shift" in the perceptions of both colonizers and colonized about the nature and value of empire and competing visions of what the future might hold.[2] Smith and Jeppesen propose the themes of development, contingency, and entanglement to tease out how those futures were imagined, and why some succeeded and others did not. These three themes, they argue, illuminate the unruly tangle of local pressures and global forces that shaped the decolonization process in France, Britain and Africa, and help us identify the limits of what was actually possible amid the "mass of swirling possibilities" created by the late colonial shift (p. 172).

These themes serve as the organizational structure of the volume, beginning with the most straightforward: development. The essays in this section explore how the postwar turn to development generated new opportunities for negotiation and often exposed the limits of colonial authority, even as many developmental initiatives of the period laid the groundwork for the continuation of colonial relations after flag independence. Charlotte Riley traces debates about development within the British Left through the transition from late colonial development to postcolonial "overseas aid." She highlights deep continuities in the Labour Party's approach to development, which became the basis of Britain's ongoing engagement in Africa after formal independence and an important part of Britain's postimperial international identity. Marta Musso's chapter, on the other hand, emphasizes rupture. She explores how international competition to develop the oil industry in the Sahara upended France's "Eurafrican" development and integration schemes for Algeria, in which hydrocarbons in the Sahara would secure energy independence for the nascent European Economic Community in a new global economy that was

transitioning away from coal. Rather than promote further integration, the discovery of vast reserves of oil and natural gas in the Sahara in the 1950s empowered Algerian nationalist leaders to cultivate allies elsewhere and effect a radical and lasting break with both the French colonial state and French oil companies. While Riley's and Musso's cases differ on the issue of continuity versus rupture, both of their chapters show how ideas about development in this period challenged, and in some cases eroded, state sovereignty.

The remaining two sections are anchored by abstractions whose lack of specificity some readers might find challenging. The second section emphasizes "contingency" with a pair of essays that retrace the local, global, and "ideational" contexts in which individual decisions were made and transnational networks were formed during the period of late colonial shift. Andrew Smith's chapter offers a contextual reading of three documents from the French colonial archive that offer competing visions of France's future in Africa. Inspired by Ann Stoler's work on "colonial common sense," Smith seeks to recover the "expired contingency" in this material to help us better understand "the future imperfect," or the historical conditions that made those futures imaginable in that moment (pp. 88-89). Robert Skinner then explores how the context of African decolonization shaped a "flexible and responsive" human rights discourse in transnational anti-Apartheid activism (p. 111). He traces an evolution within that discourse from an emphasis on individual rights and self-determination in the 1950s and early 60s to more capacious definitions of universal rights in explicitly social and economic terms as the process of decolonization accelerated.

The final section of the volume considers the theme of "entanglement" at the end of empire across time and space. Chris Jeppesen tracks shifting British attitudes toward duty and service as recruitment for the Colonial Service plummeted in the 1950s. He shows how the old ethos of empire was repackaged as a commitment to humanity as new groups like the Voluntary Service Organization offered alternative opportunities for service and overseas adventure after formal independence. While Jeppesen points to enduring entanglements over time, Joanna Warson focuses more on entanglements across space. Her chapter explores networks of labor, kinship and trade in West Africa in the late colonial period that crossed imperial borders. French officials' initiatives to provide for French nationals in Britain's African colonies, Warson argues, prompted the systematic expansion of the French presence in Africa beyond the bounds of empire, and set the stage for broader French engagement on the continent after independence (p. 170). The postwar turn to development plays a significant role in both chapters, and Jeppesen and Warson also emphasize "contingent" factors in their narratives.

Taking the volume as a whole, the editors and contributors all seem to elaborate a triangular dynamic among the volume's key themes: developmental initiatives created new "contingencies" and "entanglements," which, in turn, often functioned as conjunctural and/or structural limits on late colonial development projects and alternative futures for Europe and Africa more broadly. In their brief conclusion, the editors concede that development, contingency and entanglement overlap and intersect as analytical categories. They suggest this creates a "productive tension for understanding the ways in which imperial legacies lingered and structural inequalities persisted, even as new languages of liberation gained an ever greater audience" (p. 175). Perhaps. For this reader, however, this conceptual vocabulary, as the organizational scheme and throughout the body of the text, detracts from the analytical clarity of the volume's big interventions and the analytical payoff of individual contributions. (That these terms all have adjectival forms and frequently appear as pairs like "entangled developments," "contingent entanglements" and "developmental contingencies," muddies the waters further still.) Such imprecision is a real shame, because the editors and contributors all clearly have their fingers on the pulse of the latest twists and turns in the rich, vibrant and flourishing field of postwar empire.

Specialists will greatly appreciate the depth and breadth of the interdisciplinary scholarship Smith and Jeppesen use to build their densely-layered analytical framework in the introduction. The way they

integrate such a diverse body of theory and historical research into a single driving problematic is truly impressive, even if they make their analytical moves so economically and at such a rapid clip that readers less familiar with the literature might find the discussion a lot to take in all at once. This is offset by Michael Collins' long historiographical essay at the beginning of the first section, which presents a detailed and accessible overview of the evolution of the field. Together, the overviews and exhaustive bibliographies in Collins' opening chapter and the editors' introduction are indispensable reading for anyone looking to get up to date on the tremendous outpouring of work on postwar empire in Africa in recent years.

The volume closes with a short response essay by Martin Shipway. He draws attention to the fact that the essays in the volume all reflect "the perspective of imperial or (soon-to-be) post-imperial actors," although he stresses that not all of the voices in the volume were "imperialist." As Shipway notes, we encounter a wider cast of characters in these essays than we typically meet in studies on the "late colonial mind," including human rights activists in northern England, American and Italian oil executives, and recruiters and potential recruits for overseas service (pp. 182-3). Nevertheless, the conspicuous absence of African actors and experiences keeps the analysis in the volume removed from realities on the ground, which is not without its consequences.

At the most basic level, that distance means that minor slips in language can perpetuate enduring misconceptions about French and British colonization in Africa. Consider Warson's use of "francophone Africans" as shorthand for Africans from France's African territories throughout her chapter. When she writes that by 1946 there were "approximately one million francophone African migrant workers" in British West Africa (p. 159), she gives the impression that there were many millions of French-speaking West Africans in this period, which was not the case. Specialists will know that, but others might not. With no dedicated chapters featuring individual African actors, African milieus or African life, there is nothing in the volume to counterbalance this misleading picture. Indeed, the few Africans who are mentioned by name and cited—Léopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, and the Guinean artist Keïta Fodéba—only briefly appear as bookends in the introduction and conclusion.

A clearer understanding of what postwar colonial Africa was really like is crucial in light of the volume's central claim that we should take the alternative futures envisioned during the period of late colonial shift seriously. Moreover, the exclusive focus on French and British visions of the future undermines one of Smith and Jeppesen's most valuable insights on where the field needs to go next: more sustained and focused engagement with *what actually happened* and *what was really possible* amidst all of the "swirling possibilities" of the postwar opening.<sup>[3]</sup> As they keenly note in their conclusion, we still need to unravel "the link between imagining and *acting* the end of empire" (p. 175), but we will never truly understand that link unless we fully engage with African actions, experience, and desires.

In spite of these limitations, this ambitious volume represents a significant step forward for the field. As is often the case with rich and stimulating work, the volume gestures towards more themes than I have space to properly address in this review. These include shifting terrains of temporality, spatial scales, and state sovereignty, which together raise important questions about the relationship between decolonization and globalization. By bringing all of these crucial issues into the same frame, *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa* is sure to inspire new thought-provoking research.

#### LIST OF ESSAYS

Andrew W.M. Smith and Chris Jeppesen, "Introduction: Development, Contingency and Entanglement: Decolonization in the Conditional"

Michael Collins, "Nation, State and Agency: Evolving Historiographies of African Decolonization"

Charlotte Lydia Riley, “‘The Winds of Change are Blowing Economically’: the Labour Party and British Overseas Development”

Marta Musso, “‘Oil Will Set Us Free’: the Hydrocarbon Industry and the Algerian Decolonization Process”

Andrew W.M. Smith, “Future Imperfect: Colonial Futures, Contingencies and the End of French Empire”

Robert Skinner, “The Dynamics of Anti-Apartheid: International Solidarity, Human Rights and Decolonization”

Chris Jeppesen, “‘A Worthwhile Career for a Man Who is Not Entirely Self-Seeking’: Service, Duty and the Colonial Service During Decolonization”

Joanna Warson, “Protecting Empire from Without: Francophone African Migrant Workers, British West Africa and French Efforts to Maintain Power in Africa, 1945-1960”

Chris Jeppesen and Andrew W.M. Smith, “Conclusion: the Conditional as a Category”

Martin Shipway, “Afterword: Achilles and the Tortoise: the Tortoise’s View of Late Colonialism and Decolonization”

#### NOTES

[1] Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution. Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: the Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: the Road to Nongovernmentality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[2] Martin Shipway, *Decolonization and Its Impact: A Comparative Approach to the End of Colonial Empires* (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2008).

[3] For sharp critiques on the privileging of the imaginable over the possible in the extant literature, see a pair of recent reviews of Gary Wilder’s and Frederick Cooper’s work. On Wilder, see Musab Younis, “Against Independence,” *London Review of Books* 29, no 13, June 29 2017; on Cooper, see Richard H. Drayton, “Federal Utopias and the Realities of Imperial Power,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37, no 2 (2017).

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