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Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A Short History*. Translated by Jeremiah Riemer. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017. xi + 252 pp. \$27.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-6911-6521-9.

Review by Jessica Lynne Pearson, Macalester College.

Over the past fifteen years, the number of books exploring the history of decolonization has grown exponentially. This is due in no small part to the support provided to junior scholars in the field by the International Seminar on Decolonization, envisioned by Wm. Roger Louis, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and supported by the National History Center and the Library of Congress. Over the course of ten years, the seminar supported the work of 150 scholars, who gathered—fifteen at a time—to spend the month of July in Washington D.C., conducting research, refining old arguments, and exchanging new ideas.[1] New work in the field of decolonization history, much of which emerged from the seminar, includes topics that range from decolonization and development in Lesotho to feminism in Nasser’s Egypt.[2]

Yet despite the swift evolution of decolonization as a field of study, and the growing number of graduate and undergraduate courses on the subject taught in colleges and universities across the country, there are relatively few books that can serve as an accessible introduction to the topic for students or for professional scholars of history who are encountering decolonization in their work for the first time.[3] What scholars, teachers, and students of the end of empire have long needed is a book that can do for decolonization history what Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper’s *Empires in World History* did for the history of empires.[4] Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel’s *Decolonization: A Short History* is that book. First published in German in 2013, it is described by the book’s authors in the 2017 English-language edition as “Part introductory survey, part historical essay” (p. ix). Rather than provide an overview of the history of decolonization through an exploration of decolonization in different regions of the world or in different colonial empires, Jansen and Osterhammel employ a more analytical approach to explaining the end of empire.[5]

What is decolonization? This question is often met by puzzled expressions from students and professional historians alike. Does decolonization connote the official granting of independence by a colonial government to a former colonial territory? Or does it signify, rather, a broader, more nebulous process—a shift that involves not only political institutions, but also economies, cultures, and mindsets? Even harder to pin down is the answer to the question: “When did it start? And when, if ever, did it end?” (p. viii). Instead of attempting to provide definitive answers, the authors of this book work instead at unpacking the questions. Even more importantly, though, they do it in a way that is accessible even to scholars or students who are engaging with the history of decolonization for the first time. *Decolonization: A Short History* is divided into seven chapters that each employ a unique framework for exploring and analyzing the end of empire. Using a *longue durée* approach that traces the process of decolonization from the origins of anti-colonial nationalism after the First World War to the present, this book delves into the more “systemic aspects” of the process that brought about the end of empire across the globe.

The book's first chapter, "Decolonization as Moment and Process," explores the myriad definitions of the word "decolonization." "Decolonization," the authors explain, "is a technical and rather undramatic term for one of the most dramatic processes in modern history: the disappearance of empire as a political form, and the end of racial hierarchy as a widely accepted political ideology and structuring principle of world order" (p. 1). Decolonization was not only a process that shaped individual territories that acceded to independent statehood. It also signified, they argue, a broader shift in international political norms, helping to create a world in which "any kind of political rule that is experienced as a relationship of subjugation" has been irrevocably delegitimized.

Beyond its clear explanation of the multi-faceted definition of decolonization, chapter one also offers two extremely useful "toolkits" for analyzing the end of empire. First, Jansen and Osterhammel provide an extensive list of questions for the historian, arranged under the headings "Characteristics of the late colonial era," "External conditions," "The course of the decolonization process," and "Short- and medium-term consequences." Questions include, for example: "How relevant was pressure from third parties (United States, Soviet Union, United Nations, non-aligned movement, world public opinion, etc.)?"; "Who prepared and decided on a constitution?"; and "How did the colonial past impact the cultural situation after independence?" (pp. 27-28). The second toolkit explores five possible explanations for *why* decolonization happened in a given territory. These include: the purposeful transfer of power by a metropolitan government; the success of national liberation movements; the desire of a colonial power to shift its position to one of unofficial (neo-) colonialism; an attempt by the colonial government to shed financial or military burdens; and the shift in global politics that took place as a result of the Cold War, leaving no "room for the old European strategies of securing power by colonial control over the widest possible expanse of territories" (pp. 29-31). While these "toolkits" will undoubtedly be of use to scholars of the end of empire, they will be particularly helpful for graduate students and advanced undergraduates embarking on original research in the field of decolonization history.

The second chapter moves away from the "What?" and the "Why?" of decolonization—explored in chapter one—to the question of "When?" This chapter, entitled "Nationalism, Late Colonialism, World Wars," provides a nuanced overview of the way that the First and Second World Wars, along with the founding of the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations, played in accelerating the end of empire. Drawing from a number of case studies, this chapter explores the origins of anti-colonial nationalist movements in the era of World War I, the internationalization of colonization that accompanied Wilson's Fourteen Points, and the calls for colonial reform that followed the conflicts of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945. The third chapter of the book then turns to the question of *how* decolonization came about. In this chapter, "Paths to Sovereignty," Jansen and Osterhammel investigate the "intensive phase" of decolonization that took place in the wake of the Second World War. This chapter traces the timeline of decolonization, starting with the end of empire in South Asia, and ending with the dissolution of the last strongholds of empire: in Portuguese and Spanish Africa, and in the settler colonies of Rhodesia and South Africa.

In the next three chapters, the authors shift their analysis to an exploration of the ways in which colonialism and decolonization shaped the world we live in today: economically, politically, and intellectually. Chapter four, "Economy," details the myriad ways that imperialism shaped the global economic system. Colonial rule, according to Jansen and Osterhammel, "introduced new infrastructure, opened up new spaces of trade and migration, created new job and commercial opportunities, changed gender roles and work practices [and] frequently familiarized people with a modern monetary system" (p. 119). Even more interesting than these shifts themselves, though, was the fact that anti-colonial movements and new independent governments made little effort to reverse these shifts. If decolonization did little to alter the economic order created by empire, it did radically alter the global political order. In "World Politics," the fifth chapter of the book, Jansen and Osterhammel argue that decolonization "can be situated at the intersection of the East-West conflict and the North-South antagonism" (p. 144). Connections between the Cold War and decolonization abound, starting with the coterminous origins of the Soviet Union and the first anti-colonial nationalist movements.

Connected to these political developments was an emerging set of intellectual movements and cultural frameworks. Chapter six, “Ideas and Programs,” provides a thorough overview of the most important debates in the intellectual history of decolonization. This chapter explores the role that leading intellectuals—men such as Aimé Césaire, Marcus Garvey, Franz Fanon, Jomo Kenyatta, Gandhi, Edward Said, Léopold Senghor, and Ho Chi Minh—played in imagining the end of empire. These important thinkers of the twentieth century played a crucial part in “naturalizing decolonization,” in thinking through the possible forms that independent statehood could take, and in helping to forge a collective identity among the members of the revolutionary “Third World” (pp. 165-166). The final chapter of the book, “Legacies and Memories,” offers some final reflections on the meaning of the end of empire and the legacies of decolonization.

The scope of this book, in short, is impressive. Jansen and Osterhammel adroitly navigate both the individual stories of different countries and empires and the broader scholarly debates that encompass those stories. *Decolonization: A Short History* is an invaluable contribution to the field of decolonization history, a quintessential introduction to the end of empire for students and scholars alike. [6] It could be easily read alongside Todd Shepard’s outstanding primary source reader *Voices of Decolonization* and would provide an excellent framework for a course on the history of empires in their final hour. [7]

NOTES

[1] Amanda Moniz, “A Decol Community: Forging Connections among Citizens of the World at the Decolonization Seminar,” *Perspectives on History* 52.6 (2014): <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/september-2014/a-decol-community> (accessed January 7, 2018). Also see Lori Watt, “The Seminars on Decolonization: A Brief Look Back,” *Perspectives on History* 49.8 (2011): <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/november-2011/the-seminars-on-decolonization> (accessed January 7, 2018).

[2] See John Aerni-Flessner, *Dreams for Lesotho: Independence, Foreign Assistance, and Development* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, forthcoming 2018); and Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser’s Egypt* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011).

[3] Notable exceptions are Dane Kennedy, *Decolonization: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) and Raymond Betts, *Decolonization* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[4] Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[5] For a more comparative perspective, see Martin Shipway, *Decolonization and Its Impact: A Comparative Approach to the End of the Colonial Empires* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2008); and L. J. Butler, Bob Moore, and Martin Thomas, *Crises of Empire: Decolonization and Europe’s Imperial States, 1918-1975* (London: Hodder Education, 2008).

[6] On teaching decolonization, see Marian J. Barber, “Bringing Scholarship to Life: Decolonization in the Classroom,” *Perspectives on History* 51.4 (2013): <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2013/bringing-scholarship-to-life-decolonization-in-the-classroom> (accessed January 7, 2018), as well as Matthew Heaton’s response: “On Decolonization in the Classroom,” *Perspectives on History* 51.5 (2013): <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2013/on-decolonization-in-the-classroom> (accessed January 7, 2018).

[7] Todd Shepard, *Voices of Decolonization: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2015).

Jessica Lynne Pearson
Macalester College
jpearso4@macalester.edu

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