Bernard Forjwuor. *Critique of Political Decolonization.* Oxford University Press, 2023. 320pp. ISBN: 978-0198871842

Thirty years after independence in the 1960s, African countries were in severe economic crisis. Where in 1975, Africa's external debt stood at around USD18bn, by 1995 its foreign debt-stock had risen to USD220bn (Ajayi and Khan, 2000). At the end of the last millennium, political debate across the continent, with many countries having had to negotiate global debt relief agreements, began to question how these countries had arrived here.

An old, still standing, argument, famously articulated by Kwame Nkrumah (1965), explained the seeming conundrum of politically independent states that were, yet, economically constrained by pointing at a new form of colonialism. Neo-colonialism, Nkrumah told, now took hold in the prescriptive domination of institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, and the United Nations.

Later, African philosophers, like Kwasi Wiredu would argue for a fuller diagnosis in which the contemporary status of the formerly colonized was theorised to emanate from a failure at decolonization of more fundamental kinds (Wiredu, 1996). In addition to the political decolonization of territorial independence, a further, *conceptual,* decolonization that included more rigorous decolonizations of religion, language, and culture, would be required.

Layered over eight chapters, Bernard Forjwuor's intellectually accomplished *Critique of Political Decolonization* takes aim at the view that underlies both aforementioned arguments. This is the view, still at the core of much contemporary theoretical scholarship on decolonization, that sees political independence as coterminous with political decolonization. It is the view that if there is more freedom to be had by the ex-colonised beyond the assumed decolonization of political independence, it is because there is a further, more robust, kind of decolonization to be secured.

Fojwuor's arguments refute this view of political decolonization by disturbing the notion of political decolonization as, itself, a possibility for theory and practice that, on the author's account, remains internally, conceptually, tethered to the normative terms of colonialism's own procedure. Irresistible as contemporary reconstructions of the decolonial might be, therefore,— Forjwuor takes the arguments of Gary Wilder (2015) and Adom Getachew (2019) as two prominent examples (pp. 30-35)—to the extent that they do not require the fundamental rejection, and dissolution, of the existing international order, then these remain, merely, modern iterations of the same colonial process by which the global order has been structured.

The book's first two chapters (and chapter 7) are dedicated to outlining Forjwour's view of colonialism's all-encompassing nature and elaborating a Foucauldian deconstructive approach to theoretical and historical analysis and critique of the concepts and processes with which the book is most concerned. These are: political independence, political decolonization, colonialism, and liberal democracy. The book's remaining substantive chapters flesh out a throughgoing approach to critiquing the political terms through which what Forjwuor holds to be a singular normative account of these ideas have been carried out— that is, through international law and the Charter of the United Nations (pp. 36-66), through the liberal spectre of democracy (ch. 5), and finally, through neoliberalism (ch.6).

Across the book, the socio-political context of colonial and Independence Ghana serves as its main empirical reference point, and provides Forjwuor the substantive historical framework through which the author exposes his broader theoretical arguments. In chapters three and four, for instance, an examination of indirect colonial rule in Ghana lends the concrete structure on which Forjwuor makes tangible the entryway to his deconstructive account that not only did

former colonies, African and not, not achieve political decolonization at independence, some of them (those colonised by indirect rule) cannot logically be thought to have gained even their political independence at independence (pp. 63-4). Since, in requiring no territorial occupation for its administration, colonialism's formal end bequeathed not political independence to such states but simply a postcolonial licence to self-governance on the same domestic (colonial) terms as before (ch.4).

Anyone with a modicum of familiarity with contemporary governance in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, and so on, needs little convincing that all the end of formal colonization in indirectly ruled territories achieved was the deracialization of oppression. Now, the subordination of the majority population is effectively achieved through colonially instantiated law by its own elite (Mamdani 1996). An elite whose rule is granted and legitimated (in many cases, literally) through colonial inscription (pp. 90-131).

What, more broadly, emerges from Forjwuor's accounting is the understanding that it is not just the contemporary condition of postcolonialism in former indirect-rule territories that is compromised by the colonial. In every other case too— settler, slave, and hybrid —even where the notion of a postcolonial political independence makes deeper sense with the cessation of the applicable colonial territorial procedure— the socio-political terms that structured formal colonialism determined, also, independence notwithstanding, the political terms of the postcolonial. Further— through the homogenising operation of the Bretton Woods institutions, the UN, and other institutions that uphold the global regime of politics and capital— these same (not new/neo) terms (liberal democracy, chief among them) continue to structure and determine the acceptable conduct of decolonial freedom by the formerly colonised.

Underlying the book's thesis about the totalising nature of colonialism is a deeper argument about the reason why colonialism's harms are not undone simply by the closure of its formal territorial practice. For Forjwuor, it is because they are harms, the procedure for which is, embedded into all subsequent organization and conduct of the colonised themselves. The methods of initial subjugation, which are not unique to colonialism, are, also, not the most fundamental part of colonization's own logic. That the colonised become structurally incapable of existing without reproducing the political and ethical terms of power, and of intellectual and behavioural conduct, that defines the historical condition from which, by their own contemporary associations, they now seek an escape, is part of colonialism's own justification. In other words, the specific feature, and harm, of colonization is to make, out of the lives of the colonized, the unending resource for their own oppression, exploitation, and self-humiliation.

Those, then, who imagine that political decolonization was achieved at independence, for settler and non-settler states alike, and that further avenues of decolonization are required and achievable by merely the legalised constitution of the postcolony, misunderstand the nature of colonialism, the nature of its harms, and the nature of what is required for its redress. As such, they misunderstand what is meant by political decolonization in the first place.

A truly decolonial world, on Forjwuor's terms, would be, in its normative and political ideals, an unsettled one and, therefore, one that was radically, ethically, inclusive. On Forjwuor's reading, the question that theorists of decolonization are really called to answer is this: what is to be done about the kind of power whose very condition is continuously—coterminously— justified by, and with, the existence and action of those upon whom it has been enforced? And what does, or can, it mean to decolonize societies to whom the colonial is a foundational constituent?

These questions matter if, for instance, we think that the fundamental harms of colonialism are distinguishable from those that are the outcome of other violations of power (Ypi, 2013; Valentini, 2015). They matter, also, if we think their correction requires specified attention. Forjwuor's arguments give us a real clue that they are and that they do.

Within the complexity of Forjwuor's Foucauldian argumentation is a simple thesis—the project of political decolonization, proper, is the project of restoring the moral and ethical freedom, and radical (not liberal) democratic will of previously colonised societies that cannot be condensed merely to legalised sovereignty or to territorial autonomy. It is a project on which the value and character of each place's other, political, freedoms will rely. Indeed, full political liberation is not simply the first step towards full decolonization, it is the sum of what a truly decolonised, and therefore rectifying, global justice requires.

The critique I have for Forjwuor that is most pertinent here is as follows: the book's analysis seems to, further, consign outside the meaningful bounds of history's procedure, iterative or otherwise, the contemporary actions, ideas, and very identity of being, of former colonial entities which, Forjwour tells us, cannot, in any substantive sense, be extricated from colonialism. The implication for the formerly colonised, is that even the possibility, in the present, of being an independent, not indifferent, constituting part of the political and ethical terms governing modern society does not exist. All that is open to such places is nothing like an authentic agency, but the work merely of political critique. Certainly, the latter provides the basis for the work of adaptation, disruption, maybe also, of imagination. But it gives us nothing with which to fill that imagination.

My criticism here is not about whether Forjwuor fulfils part of his stated ambitions to take seriously *Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò*'s caution (2022) that in the current decolonising enterprise, the lives— historical and contemporary —of the formerly colonised should not be made even less legible than they have been already. Rather, by the book's own terms, it seems ironic that in employing a genealogical method of reading history whose aim, against the rigid fabrications of academic disciplinarity, is to show the myriad ways in which the past is imbricated with the present and vice versa, that the formerly colonised (despite the major portion of their own history predating the moment of European colonization) should be, substantively, conceptually, written out of it.

Further, while Forjwuor would like us to reconceive of political decolonization as the most fundamental repudiation and reversion of colonialism, it is unclear, by what resource of historically isolatable self-understanding the formerly colonised should proceed such as to make the revolt/reversal *conclusively* decolonial. Lastly, if we imagine that colonialism does not run the whole gamut of human exploitative experience, no matter how difficult may be their conceptual disentanglement in the contemporary world, then by what other positive criteria will we know that we have arrived at the *true* moment of political decolonization?

The book's commitment to an anti-normativity means that it is unlikely, on its own, to answer these questions. And it is, perhaps, unfair to expect it to, precisely because what Forjwuor is most asking for is that, if what we really want *is* a more just world, that we get comfortable with the discomfort of not being able to concretely prescribe what the world should look like. My sympathy for this view is nearly inexhaustible. Yet, just as Forjwuor, himself, disavows Audre Lorde's warning (p.23) that one cannot bring down the master's house with his tools, so also does the book's own methodological commitments seem to do a disservice— which, surely, matters to justice —to the formerly colonized who seek, even in critique, precisely their own influence in prescribing the world.

Nevertheless, in an area of theoretical scholarship that is receiving ever greater numbers of participants, Forjwuor's book succeeds in disturbing many of the accepted categories and assumptions that have come to secure much debate and analysis of the de/post-colonial. The book provokes in ways that the growing quantity of scholarship in this area should, but does not always. This means that while the intricate terms of the book's Foucauldian analysis are likely to be of interest mostly to other Foucauldians, its substantive arguments ought, nonetheless, to deeply engage anyone, philosophy specialist or not, with an interest in fundamentally reordering the political, intellectual, and ethical terms that structure the world in aim of its more just, if decidedly unclear, future.

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