

BOOK REVIEW

Bernard Forjwuor. *Critique of Political Decolonization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. 304 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$110.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780198871842.

Bernard Forjwuor provides an original critique of the existing decolonial studies literature, using the case of Ghana in *Critique of Political Decolonization*. The book is a modified version of his dissertation and evaluates the concept of political decolonization in Ghana. The book is divided into seven chapters, and the introductory chapter begins with many questions about concepts such as decolonization, freedom, independence, and justice. These are all broad questions that deserve in-depth research to answer. Forjwuor discusses Ghana's political independence from Britain and questions the continuity of colonialism in the country. He also criticizes liberal democracy as a concept, liberal democracies, and their "legitimate" plundering and exploitation of African resources after the Berlin Conference of 1884–85. The methodological approach of the book is based on theoretical and genealogical grounds, which is what Michel Foucault called the "history of the present," and its epistemological approach is post-positivist. He critically reexamines Ghana's independence and liberation, predicated on liberal democracy.

In Chapter Two, Forjwuor discusses self-determination and political decolonization as products of the Enlightenment and Eurocentric approaches to politics. He argues that postcolonial political processes still contain coloniality, which "renders the meaning of political decolonization not only ideologically redundant but also materially bankrupt" (22). He discusses various approaches to the concept of political decolonization from the studies of Achille Mbembe, Adom Getachew, Jansen Osterhammel, and Kwame Nkrumah. Chapter Two includes a critical analysis of the self-determination rule; it suggests that colonies should have had a right to self-determination in accordance with their precolonial community structures. The UN Charter or Resolution 1514 contributed to the dependency of African peoples on the foreign political systems of the West. This chapter presents different types of colonial regimes; it considers Ghana as an indirect rule of British colonial territories, and evaluates "independent" Ghana as a failure that ended with the persistence of coloniality.

Chapter Three discusses indirect rule in general, beginning with a lengthy discussion of Hegel's argument about Africans having "a childlike status" (71). The development of the mechanism of colonialism is the primary concern of this chapter. It also analyzes the origins of indirect rule in European history and its advantages for colonizers. Forjwuor argues that Africanization is a way of legalizing colonial rule with the help of democracy and "a new configuration of colonialism that will later be embedded in postcolonial democratic politics" (95).

Chapter Four deals with the mythic expressions of political decolonization and the meaning of political independence in Ghana. Forjwuor believes that the 1957 Act “reaffirms rather than dismantles the colonial” (120), and he suggests that “the 1957 Act, 1957 constitution, and Nkrumah[’s] political position seem to have been restrained by an overriding colonial dictation” (124). In Chapter Five, Forjwuor criticizes liberal democracy and its applications in Africa. He thinks that Western liberal democracy “usurps the place of the universal ideals of freedom through colonial and racial violence” (151). Liberal democracy in Africa has become a colonial contract and has been helpful for the continuation of coloniality in Ghana. The agreements between African countries and the European Union or the IMF’s Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) complement the colonial contracts of Western liberal democracies.

Chapter Six is a critique of the triangle of colonialism, liberal democracy, and neoliberalism. Forjwuor takes an Afrocentric view of Western institutions, policies, and states. For example, he discusses that in the existing literature, the Washington Consensus was imposed to reduce the role of the state. He also sees neoliberalism as a tool for creating new dependencies of independent nations on Western liberal democracies. Ghana applied Western liberal principles to its policies long before the SAP, and neoliberalism was unnecessary to solve the country’s economic problems. In Chapter Seven, he discusses different conceptions of “constituent power” using the ideas of Antonio Negri, Carl Schmitt, and Emmanuel Sieyès. In the book’s conclusion, he explains “what the book is doing differently from most postcolonial approaches” (257) as he looks for “alternative ways of defining and accounting for the reconfigurations of colonialism” (260). Forjwuor evaluates liberal democracy as colonial democracy or governance from an Afrocentric perspective. Lastly, he challenges Eurocentric normativity and its concepts of self-determination and liberal democracy.

The book contributes to the literature on political decolonization with an original critique. Forjwuor wisely uses Ghana as a case study of the continuation of coloniality in Africa or other postcolonial communities. Building a discussion on indirect rule is another original approach of the book, as it can be seen as the weakest form of colonialism. There are many repetitive footnotes to the same author in different parts of the book. I understand that Forjwuor benefits from the ideas of prominent writers on decolonization, but he primarily relies on the original studies rather than on their interpretations. This is the author’s way, but sometimes it feels like a need for more depth on the subject discussed. The book is a timeless study because it shows how coloniality has persisted in postcolonial communities since independence. I can recommend it to scholars of political theory, African studies, and especially decolonial and postcolonial studies.

Sinan Baran 

Kirsehir Ahi Evran University, Kirsehir, Turkey
sinan.baran@ahievran.edu.tr

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