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## Empires

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# Empires

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In the spirit of this book, examining three postwar periods from the vantage point of colonial empires, or of former colonies, is a useful way to test the framework of a European-focused chronology. This alternative perspective reveals that times of intense violence or outright war took place outside of Europe during what we may have considered until now times of peace, or interwars. In other words, the rhythm of peace and wartime, or violence and peace, differs significantly when seen from the former empire.

Is it then possible to juxtapose European and non-European chronologies so that they might be analysed together? And can the notions of postwar periods and aftermaths of war create a common canvas for exploring the history of Europe along with that of its (former) possessions, or should they be seen as mutually exclusive histories? In order to address these questions, this chapter will explore 1989, 1945 and 1918 by focusing on non-European regions that were, or came to be under European colonial rule during the first postwar period that we are concerned with, that following the First World War. These territories are mainly located in Africa, the Arab World and Asia, and by 1989 had become independent. This chapter will examine the nature of each event - 1989, 1945 and 1918 - from the perspective of the (former) colonial empires, and discuss whether or not each of them is indeed a postwar period. This exploration is a first step toward a connected history of the postwar periods, as it also sheds light on the nature of the relations between Europe and the rest of the world from colonial to post-colonial times, but also on the relation—whether causal or not— between European and non-European events by following the movement of violence, arms and troops from European-centred world wars to colonial and postcolonial world wars.

## 1989

The premise of this book, which is to consider 1989 as a postwar period in its own right (in particular in Europe where the war was cold), raises in turn the question of the nature of the event in the Global South where it was *all but* cold, and in particular in the recently decolonized countries. Can 1989 be considered the end of a war, and the beginning of a postwar period?

In Europe and the USSR, “1989” was a major event, and was indeed reminiscent of other endings to wars, in part due to the dramatic succession of events, and the theatrical unity of time and place. In the transition from war to peace and the rearranging of the world, new opportunities opened up, pushing individuals and groups to struggle for a place within the new society in the making. Hope for the future grew alongside both a sense of bereavement for the world that was being pushed back into the past, and anxiety that the change may not be for the best, or even for the better. The collective fervour, the sense of liberation, the immediate gain in terms of freedom to move across what used to be impermeable borders, and the lifting of the pressure of police apparatus were equally evocative of an ending of war. Was there a similar phenomenon – either in the shape of single event, or a wave of comparable events – in the Global South?

### Iron curtain and bamboo curtain

The main region in which the collapse of the iron curtain might have had an equivalent is Eastern Asia, where the divide between the blocs was sometimes described as a “bamboo curtain”. In communist China, students had been involved in demands for political reform and their movement, followed by intellectuals and workers, led to large demonstrations and hunger strikes having a revolutionary feel comparable to what was taking place in Europe. Indeed, these were followed by the Tiananmen Square demonstration that began on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1989. The martial law implemented on May 20<sup>th</sup> and on June 4<sup>th</sup>, and the army’s intervention and killing of demonstrators blocked the process of political reform. In South-East Asia, Vietnam and Laos remained politically communist, despite dramatic liberalisation of their economy: to this day, together with China, they represent three of the handful of countries in the world that remain single-party socialist states claiming attachment to communism. In this context, and despite the dramatic economic reforms experienced in Vietnam or China, there was no event comparable to what was taking place in Europe.

## A continent in transition

Things are different when examining Africa in 1989. Let us begin with Benin, which for several years was considered the pioneer of the democratic movement in Africa, and a model of transition.

In January of 1989, students demonstrated in Cotonou and Porto Novo, demanding payment of their scholarships. But under the regime of military-installed President Mathieu Kérékou, the government was bankrupt. The president made political concessions, but demands developed to include better treatment of political detainees. By December of 1989, the president announced that the People's Revolutionary Party of Benin would no longer be committed to Marxism-Leninism, and that the country would move to multipartism.<sup>1</sup> A new constitution was adopted by referendum, general elections were planned for February 1991 and presidential elections for March, during which Mathieu Kérékou was trounced by Nicéphore Soglo, a former World Bank official.

The end of Kérékou's Marxist-Leninist regime is of course reminiscent of events in Europe, both in timing and nature. Moreover, there were direct influences, as the end of communist regimes in Europe increased pressure on Kérékou to give in to popular demands. However, some ingredients in the Beninese transition were specific to the Third World, the most important being the issues of national debt, rescheduling of debt, and increased foreign pressure via two Bretton Woods institutions that came into their own in the 1980s: the World Bank, and the IMF, whose structural adjustment plans Benin signed in June 1989. In the 1980s the question of debt was becoming central, to the point where Nigerian writer (and 1986 Nobel Laureate for literature) Wole Soyinka, argued in favour of cancelling the debt of African states as both reparation for the slave trade and a necessary step to allow them any chance at economic development. Such adjustment plans forced states to drastically cut social spending, thereby upsetting state-led economies and fuelling discontent.

By December 1994, 35 sub-Saharan countries had undergone some form of regime change. Not one state still formally claimed to be a single-party regime,<sup>2</sup> and competitive elections and leadership turnover had taken place in many countries. The most famous regime transition was the unlocking of the stalemate in South Africa, though the South African situation had its own peculiarities due to the nature

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Bratton and Nicholas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

of the regime and to the high level of violence in the preceding years: in 1990, the ban was lifted on the African National Congress, and the first democratic elections were organized in 1994. Not only can the South African case be considered the end of a civil conflict in its own right due to the level of violence in the years prior, but also, influenced as it was by transitional situations elsewhere and with its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it developed as a model of transition from civil war to peace. In most other African cases, transitions were democratic, and electoral competitions had sometimes taken place as early as 1985-1989 (in Botswana, Gambia, Mauritius, Senegal, Zimbabwe). Throughout the continent there was a revolutionary dimension to the political ferment that brought about reforms; in turn, rapid reforms fuelled a revolutionary atmosphere.

The economic crisis, with the added pressures of the international “adjustment plans”, weakened the states’ social support; the emergence of new forms of mobilisation and new demands now extended to encompass culture, language, and minority groups, and even to religion. The creation of new parties, organizations, and new spaces for public debate fuelled the atmosphere of ebullience and effervescence that had begun earlier in the 1980s, even before the end of the Cold War. In several countries, popular discontent and demands, as well as the possibilities created by political reform, engendered both a climate of uncertainty or fear – particularly of the threat of military coup, violence, or war, and one of enthusiasm for the creation of new organisations, parties or associations, new forms of expression and popular involvement in the public sphere. In the recently independent nation-states, the compromises born from independence seemed stymied and no longer able to sustain regimes without some measure of democratic transformation.

### [The Middle East connection](#)

In the Middle East and North Africa, Algeria was the only country to be chronologically in sync with sub-Saharan African countries: throughout the 1980s, it experienced a series of popular protests contesting the single-party regime, while facing economic and financial difficulties worsened by the collapse in the price of oil in 1985. International pressure and economic reform drove discontent and political demands, until the youth riots of October 1988 forced the government to end the single-party regime in 1989. In a revolutionary atmosphere, the rise of political Islam in the form of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was dramatic.

It was exacerbated by the international context of the Second Gulf War led against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in January and February 1991. The war followed the occupation of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 by the Iraqi army. One factor contributing to this was Iraq's rising debt—reminiscent of the rising debt which was strangling African countries—, a debt chiefly owed to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The US decision to intervene militarily in Iraq, approved by the UN Security Council, was to a large extent explained by concerns over Saddam Hussein's threats to Saudi Arabia. However, the very possibility of intervention was created by the new balance of powers that followed the end of the Cold War. Iraq had long been an ally of the USSR, and—along with the other similar Arab regimes such as Syria—an irritant for American foreign policy. This new military intervention by a Western power in the Middle East caused significant outrage in the region, and was a watershed moment for many political movements. Osama Bin Laden's career is in that respect revelatory: he was born to a respected family of Saudi Arabia and raised with the Sa'ud princes. After the Red Army took Kabul in 1979, he settled in Peshawar where he developed training camps for Arab combatants. In 1990, he first offered his services to the Sa'ud ruler, before breaking with the regime after it had requested US military intervention. The fact that Afghanistan-based combatants thus turned against Saudi Arabia as well as against the United States (who had supported them in the struggle against the Soviets) had vast consequences, as Bin Laden continued to train Jihadists and export Jihad, most successfully to Bosnia, Egypt and Algeria.<sup>3</sup> In Algeria, the FIS gained significant momentum during the Second Gulf War, as it managed to revamp the figure of formerly secular, Ba'athist foe Saddam Hussein as a champion of Islam, and a victim of neo-imperialist intervention in the Middle East. In so doing, it reclaimed part of the Ba'athist, Arab-nationalist legacy, which had until then been the prerogative of the left.

After the FIS victory in local elections in the summer of 1990, the party was prevented from assuming power through general elections by a military coup in January 1991. The country began its descent into a decade-long civil war between armed jihadi groups and the national army. While other countries in the MENA region experienced some level of internal pressure for political change, Islamist contestation and even jihadi violence, as well as economic turmoil and international pressure, they nonetheless resisted change until 20 years later and the "Arab Revolts" of 2011.

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<sup>3</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, Revised edition (I.B.Tauris, 2006), 299–323.

Algeria's version of 1989 calls into question the chronology and nature of the event in several ways. With the Iranian revolution of 1979 serving as a model for the FIS, and combatants trained in Afghanistan spreading both ideological content and military experience to the armed jihadi groups, the aftermath of 1989 was connected to 1979 in a way that was not obvious in sub-Saharan Africa.

### The other World War

On the African continent, Algeria was hardly the only country to face violence in the wake of political change. The transition away from autocratic single-party regimes did not always go smoothly: elections and political competition were at times linked to (and often considered the cause of) new forms of violence, in which culture, language and ethnic lines of divide played an essential role. Upsurges of violence during competitive elections became a common feature of African politics. In Burundi, after 27 years of military dictatorship, elections were organized 1993: the assassination of newly elected Hutu president Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993 by Tutsi soldiers led to several years of civil war. And in Rwanda, narratives of the Tutsi survivors of the genocide identify the multiparty system put in place by the constitution of 1991 as the starting point of yet another episode in the recurring anti-Tutsi violence that had begun as early as 1959, an episode which ultimately led to the 1994 genocide.<sup>4</sup> Turmoil in both countries was one of the causes for the largest conflict of all: Rwanda and Burundi became involved, along with Uganda, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia and non-African economic interests, in a five-year war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a war sometimes dubbed "the Great African War" or "the African World War" (1998-2003). This conflict developed in the wake of the first Congolese war, during which Laurent-Désirée Kabila had overthrown Mobutu and seized power. That war had claimed between 3.9 million and 5.4 million casualties, whether through combat, disease or famine, making it the deadliest conflict since the Second World War. For many, the two events form but one war.<sup>5</sup> One of the main arguments for labelling the Great African War a world war is the scale of foreign intervention. The timing and form of foreign intervention (or lack thereof) - notably French "Opération turquoise" - in Rwanda was obviously critical.

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Hatzfeld, *Dans le nu de la vie* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Gérard Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe*, Reprint edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Filip Reyntjens, *The Great African War: Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996-2006*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

By the same token, intervention in the Congo involved a number of Western players, namely the USA, but also France and Great Britain, who were both involved in enhancing the EU military power in Africa, as well as non-European economic interests.<sup>6</sup> However, making the Great African War a direct consequence of the collapse of the bipolar system would ignore the interconnection of regional dynamics, neo-imperialist forms of intervention, and attempts by former colonial powers such as Britain, France or even Belgium to protect or regain their influence on the continent. While all of these must be understood in the context of the post-Cold War, the end of the Cold War alone cannot adequately explain them.

### Provincializing the European “1989”

In many African countries, there was indeed a hope for democratisation and political transition, though this was not the case for MENA countries, nor for East and South-East Asia once the political transition in China had been thwarted by repression. In turn, the relationship between this (mostly African) process and the European 1989 must be considered. While the European 1989 fuelled the transition in several countries, there were specific Third World, African, and post-colonial - not to mention neo-imperialist - dynamics at play. Focusing on 1989 from outside of Europe therefore has the effect of “provincializing Europe” and places the fall of the Iron Curtain as one of a series of world events leading to the transition of a number of political regimes. Moreover, the notion of 1989 as an end of war is strangely reversed in the non-European context: rather than an end of war, it appears to have been the beginning of a period of violence and wars. Seen from outside Europe, and more specifically from Africa, 1989 was not the end of a war but the start of a period of war that culminated in the war in the Congo, a war comparable in scale to the European world wars of the twentieth century.

## 1945

Before jumping backwards to the previous postwar period under scrutiny in this volume, a precautionary question needs to be posed. Identifying 1989 as the end of *something*, for instance as the breakdown of the post-colonial compromise that sustained the new parties that had achieved independence and the strong regime born from independence, begs us to identify the beginning of the cycle which ended

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<sup>6</sup> Catherine Gegout, ‘The West, Realism and Intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo (1996–2006)’, *International Peacekeeping*, 27 April 2009.

in 1989. Is it possible that 1945 is the beginning of that which ended in 1989? And if not, then what is the founding event, of similar or greater magnitude that we may be missing by following a European-centred framework? But, let us begin with our opening question: is 1945 an end-of-war in the colonial empires in the same way that it is in Europe? Or —as was the case with 1989— is it the start of period of violence and war outside of Europe?

### 1945: end of war, or beginning of war?

Because of the simultaneity of the end-of-war celebrations and the reactivation of colonial violence by imperial powers aiming to reassert their domination over their colonies, the most emblematic date and place to launch this discussion is May 8, 1945 in the French Empire, where two simultaneous events took place.

In Algeria, a series of demonstrations throughout the country had begun on May 1<sup>st</sup>, and culminated with the celebrations of the end of the war, on May 8. In the east, in Sétif and Guelma, demonstrations turned into anti-European violence after demonstrators were shot by French troops. Repression of the colonized population lasted for several weeks, involving army, police, and European militias. Cities were bombarded from warships at sea. The toll is unknown, but was in the tens of thousands.

This event obliterates other episodes that are nevertheless essential to understanding its meaning. In the French protectorate of Syria and Lebanon, where treaties of independence had been signed in 1936 that were never enforced, frustration increased during the War, as the Free French occupied the territories but refused to grant independence despite General Catroux's June 1941 promises.<sup>7</sup> Warships were sent to Beirut in May 1945, sparking violence against the French troops and a wave of strikes in the main cities of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo. To regain control, General Oliva-Roget ordered bombardments; the bombing of Damascus was particularly devastating. It was only in April 1946 that French troops left the region, and that both countries finally achieved independence.

The chronology of May 8, 1945 for the French in Algeria and Syria is striking due to simultaneity and symbolism. While in other countries the chronology is less neat and more complex, it nonetheless also reveals how the World War fuelled nationalist movements and shaped their demands precisely at the time when colonial powers

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<sup>7</sup> Anne Bruchez, 'La fin de la présence française en Syrie : de la crise de mai 1945 au départ des dernières troupes étrangères', *Relations internationales* 122, no. 2 (2005): 17.

aimed to regain control: in Madagascar for instance, the uprising only began in March 1947, following campaigns for self-determination based on explicit reference to the Atlantic Charter of 1941 and the Brazzaville Conference of 1944. Significantly, its leaders expected Americans and British to pressure France into granting the country its independence. It was only in 1960, however, that Madagascar finally became independent.

### 1945: transitions and continuities

As was the case in Africa and the Middle East, the colonial powers' desire to reassert their imperial domination during the final moments of the World War was obvious in East Asia, where Japan had expanded to occupy large parts of the pre-war colonial empires, including the Indochina peninsula, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines.

The World War had galvanized nationalist movements, circulated new ideas —such as those contained in the Atlantic Charter of 1941—, led the imperial powers to promise more, and raised demands of the dominated peoples. Not only had Japanese occupation undercut the influence of the former imperial powers —both effectively and symbolically—, but the Japanese had also developed a powerful anticolonial rhetoric, and based their authority on mobilisation of the masses. In Indonesia, during their three-and-a-half-year occupation, the Japanese government had promised independence, even allowing nationalist leader Sukarno to travel the country and give nationalist speeches aiming to mobilise for the war effort.<sup>8</sup>

The end of the World War was the time to reassert the threatened authority of the imperial powers: Allied troops set to the task of reinstating civilian administrations in the Japanese-occupied territories. The US-led Southwest Pacific Command reoccupied the Philippines in 1945. Hopes stirred by the end of the war, and uncertainties around transition —which are characteristic of immediate postwar periods— created in Indonesia as elsewhere, interstices that encouraged nationalist movements to undertake bold moves. On 17 August 1945 —when news of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings were still only a rumour— Indonesian nationalist leaders Sukarno and Hatta declared independence, and announced the creation of a government. At the head of the South East Command (SEAC), Lord Mountbatten had set out with both British and British Indian troops to reoccupy the

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<sup>8</sup> Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 96.

country, leading to the bloody Battle of Surabaya of November 1945, during which the city was heavily shelled. The conflict, which began in 1945, lasted until the agreements reached in August 1949 in The Hague.

Individual careers, such as Lord Mountbatten's, reveal the continuities between World War and wars of independence. Appointed Supreme Allied Commander of SEAC by Churchill, the British officer had overseen the re-conquest of Burma concluded just before the end of the war, and later that of Indonesia that continued beyond the end of the war.<sup>9</sup> Faced with the changed attitude of the civilian populations and the new dynamics of the nationalist movement, officers such as Mountbatten transformed aims of operations from winning the war against Japan to re-colonization. But this transfer from World War to colonial war violence is not uniquely military in character. In Algeria, one of the key players of the May 1945 repression was sous-préfet André Achiary. Raised in Algeria, he joined the Resistance during the War, supporting the landing of 8 November 1942 (in November 1943, he received the "médaille de la Résistance" from the hands of General de Gaulle.). After the May 8 demonstrations in Guelma, he organized a European militia and an illegal Tribunal de Salut public, perpetrating extra-judicial executions of hundreds of men.<sup>10</sup>

The transition from World War to colonial wars raises many questions. For countries such as France or Great Britain, involving their armies in such theatres of conflict *de facto* delayed the return to civilian life for men who had become ill-adapted to peacetime. Just as empires had in the past provided a destination for those seeking economic opportunity or adventure, for the brutalized metropolitan societies at the end of the Second World War, they offered an opportunity to continue to wage war. For civilians involved in resistance movements, or simply unable to cope with life in peacetime after the intensity of war years, empires allowed them to pursue war and violence at a safe distance from the metropolis. The pattern of French wars is a striking example of continuous warfare from the World War of 1939-1945, through the war in Indochina (1946-1954), to the Algerian war (1954-1962). The return of most Second World War veterans was thus delayed until 1962, with each war inheriting the army and men left by the previous, and adding its own specific experiences. It is

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<sup>9</sup> T. A. Heathcote, *British Admirals of the Fleet: 1734-1995* (London: Pen and Sword, 2002), 183–190.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Pierre Peyroulou, *Guelma, 1945 : Une subversion française dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009), 94–98.

therefore necessary to rethink the correlation between wars in Europe (and more generally the Global North) and wars in the Empires.

In recent years, research has emphasized the way imperial violence was imported into Europe, with its techniques, know-hows and levels of cruelty ‘from colonial genocide to holocaust’.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the 1904-1905 massacres of the Herero and Nama population of what is now Namibia by the German colonial troops were “rediscovered” in 1985 and classified as a genocide, leading academics to discuss continuities between colonial violence and violence of the Second World War.<sup>12</sup> Many of the practices of war, artefacts and tools of violence were suddenly seen to have been invented, tested or perfected, in the laboratory of the colonial possessions. Yet examining 1945 from the colonies reverses this perspective, and the directionality of the flow of violence, with levels of violence, war, and brutalization also moving from the Europe-centred World War to the Empire. The way in which conduct of colonial conflict was conceived and accepted by European societies was unmistakably branded by the intensity of the experiences of the World War that was just ending; empires offered outlets to the brutalized societies, their armies and weaponry, and played an essential role in the way the European postwar was managed.

### 1945 as a beginning: War, peace, independence and revolution.

This leaves us with two questions. The first is how to qualify the new period that starts in 1945 in order to understand the nature of 1945 itself.

Seen from the colonial empires, is 1945 solely, or mostly understandable as the beginning of the Cold War? In the empire, the Cold War was not so cold, as the superpowers waged proxy-wars that contributed to the state of atomized, asymmetrical wars. The French war in Indochina that began in 1946 and for which the US came to bear most of the financial brunt in the context of the Cold War, or the Korean War in 1950, both of which can be read in the context of the advent of Communist China in 1949, show how the Cold War interfered and intertwined with wars of independence. Moreover, the possibility of playing one superpower against another offered nationalist movements a historic window of opportunity for success in their struggle against imperial powers.

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<sup>11</sup> See for example Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, *Coloniser, Exterminer : Sur La Guerre et l'État Colonial* (Paris: Fayard, 2005); and Henning Melber, ‘How to Come to Terms with the Past: Re-Visiting the German Colonial Genocide in Namibia’, *Africa Spectrum* 40, no. 1 (2005): 139–48.

<sup>12</sup> Casper W. Erichsen and David Olusoga, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide and the Colonial Roots of Nazism*. David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, Main (Faber & Faber, 2011).

Nevertheless, as writes Mark Philip Bradley, decolonization should by no means be reduced to the Cold War: “the global move toward decolonization was rooted in local particularities that long preceded, ran parallel with, and ultimately persisted beyond the Cold War”.<sup>13</sup> The non-aligned movement, which began to organize in Bandung in 1955, aimed to avoid entering a not-so-Cold war, as well as maintaining the possibility of benefitting from the conflict between superpowers, both of which had pledged anticolonialism—in the case of the US, after its own colony of the Philippines was granted independence in 1946—or claimed to support peoples’ emancipation—as did the Zhdanov doctrine. In the two decades following 1945, during which over forty states were born, such conflicts also have everything to do with independence.<sup>14</sup>

The question stemming from this re-evaluation of 1945 as the beginning of a new period of war, rather than a postwar period, is that raised in the introduction to this section: can another postwar period be identified between 1989 and 1945, while a majority of countries from the Global South were achieving independence, many of them through wars, episodes of war, or violence?

The relationship between independence and war in turn raises a number of queries. For one thing, respective attainments of independence were hardly synchronized in one single event: from the independence of the Philippines in 1946, through that of India in 1947 of most African countries in the 1960s, and as late as independence of the Portuguese colonies in Africa in the 1970s and even of Namibia in 1990, there is no meaningful or definitive date that encapsulates these events in the collective.

Nor was independence always synchronized with wars and uprisings. In Kenya, independence was achieved in 1963, four years after the end of the Mau Mau uprising (1952-1959), and therefore technically, it was not achieved through war. In other cases, the chronology is even more confusing: in Indonesia, while the Dutch only granted independence in 1949 after several years of conflict, they now officially recognize the 1945 Declaration of Independence, thus blurring the distinction between pre- and post-independence war even further. Moreover, not all independence was achieved through war, and in several cases, where there was a

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Philip Bradley, ‘Decolonization, the Global South, and the Cold War, 1919–1962’, in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 464–85.

<sup>14</sup> Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War in the Third World* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2013), 1.

war, it happened following actual independence. Palestine was the object of a partition plan, voted by the United Nations on November 30, 1947 to end British colonial domination over the territory. The various names given to the 1948 war that followed this plan and Ben Gurion's declaration of independence, are revealing of what is at stake: in Hebrew, it is the war of liberation (*Milkhemet HaShikhrur*), or the war of independence (*Milkhemet Ha'Atzma'ut*), whereas in Arabic, it is the catastrophe (*Nakba*). While the war sanctioned the end of British colonial rule over Palestine, it forged the new nation-state of Israel on the demise of the still-born state of Palestine. As happened elsewhere, the creation of one state implied the abortion of other possibilities: in Palestine it was the potential of one state for two peoples, or of two states for two peoples; in India and Pakistan the partition precluded the possibility of a single state; in the Arabic-speaking countries, it was the dream for a unified Arab nation that disintegrated once and for all in the aftermath of the Second World War. In other words, peri-independence wars were not always war *for* independence, but rather wars that forged states.

Rare are the countries that experienced no violence at all in the period between 1945 and their independence, no war-after-the-war, and therefore no after-war. In a complex period, with a multiplicity of conflicts that had to do with the struggle for independence as well as with the Cold War, what we have in fact is a multiple event that carries considerable symbolic power.

Even in countries in which independence was not achieved through war, narratives of independence — one is tempted to say myths of independence — follow a pattern. The main model of such a narrative is the Algerian war for independence, considered in the Third World as the mother of all independence events, as is revealed by the (Third-) worldwide popularity of Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine's film *Gamila al-Gaza'iriyya* (1957), which turned war hero Djamila Bouhired into a Third-World and revolutionary icon in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Arab World, where she is still immensely popular to this day. The Algerian war for independence, led by the FLN, contributed symbolically as well as materially both to simultaneous struggles for independence and to those that came later. Rendered into words (most strikingly by Frantz Fanon), photographs and film, it also provided previous independence events with a narrative model influencing the way violence, armed struggle, and revolution were emphasized, and gave Independence a collective date: 1962. Along with the Indochina war against France, and the Vietnam War against the United States, it contributed to a highly militarized aesthetic of liberation struggles, visible in

William Klein's 1969 film *Panaf*, and in revolutionary art of South American guerrilla movements, as well as North American radical political movements such as the Black Panther Party.<sup>15</sup>

Taking independence as an end-of-war therefore risks falling afoul of the myth, considering all countries to have followed the same model and glossing over the diversity of the pathways to independence. Indeed, recent works have underscored in several cases the distance between the myth and the actual process of independence and state building.<sup>16</sup> But taking the myth seriously is also necessary for understanding its historical reality, and the potency of the militarized cultures that developed in the Global South from the 1950s to the 1970s. It is also essential to understanding how the period that begins with independence are periods of transition, opportunity and utopia equivalent to other postwar periods under scrutiny in this volume, bearing in mind that the resonance of independence as an event beyond the newly independent countries themselves. The left-wing movements of Central and South America, the radical and revolutionary movements of North America and even the youth movements that crystallized in 1968 in Europe demonstrate how independence constitutes a world history events.

### 1945, 1979 and 1989

To the question of "when does the cycle that ends in 1989 begin?" we now have another possible answer. In the African countries, where 1989 appeared to be the collapse of the compromise that sustained the strong regimes born from independence, the beginning of the cycle is not 1945, but rather may indeed be independence itself. This chronologically complex event of independence, for which "1962" could be used only as imperfect shorthand, is arguably (in the sense that it is *worth arguing*) an end-of-war, followed in each individual situation by a postwar enmeshed in the processes of state- and nation-building.

However, 1989 is yet another imperfect date to signify the collapse of the post-independence consensus. For one thing, we have seen it to be effective mainly in the sub-Saharan African context. Secondly, 1989 crystallized the energy and contestation that had been developing throughout the 1980s. Finally, when examined from the former imperial territories as a time of crisis of the independent states born after the

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<sup>15</sup> Sam Durant, ed., *Black Panther: The Revolutionary Art of Emory Douglas*, 1 vols. (New York: Rizzoli, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> For a recent example see Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014, 2014).

Second World War, 1989 must be integrated in a more complex chronology, or series of events of which it is neither the first nor the last. The last wave of African independence events (the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique, Angola and Cape Verde obtained their independence in 1975, Zimbabwe obtained its independence from Great Britain in 1980) brought to a close the “age of independence” and weakened the third-worldist dynamics of the existing states. The tipping point between the age of independence and their progressive weakening is more clearly marked in North Africa, the Middle East and Southwest Asia: while the revolution had previously been considered necessarily socialist and third-worldist, the Iranian revolution of 1979 provided the new revolutionary model of a successful Islamist revolution, thus bolstering Islamist movements throughout Muslim majority countries; the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan provided them with a training field and an experience of combat that would strengthen them for decades to come. The occupation of the Grand Mosque of Mecca by an armed group contesting the regime of the Sa’ud family in November and December 1979, or the much less dramatic occupation of the Institute of Law in Algiers by Islamist students the same year are only examples of the emergence of Islamist movements, and were part of much broader, multifarious state contestations that developed in the 1980s. In other words, it is not unreasonable to consider 1989 as the apex (or perhaps an apex) of the process that began with the end of the age of revolution and independence in 1979.

## 1918

In travelling backwards towards the previous postwar —that of the First World War beginning in 1918— we come to the time when European domination was reaching its peak, and Europe and its non-European possessions were the most synchronized. Here again, widening the scope beyond Europe is revelatory of the nature of the event worldwide, and raises the question of whether what was in Europe the end of a war was for colonial empires the beginning of the period of conflict that would bring these empires to a close.

By pitching colonial powers against each other, the First World War opened up new territorial opportunities for European powers, and offered the chance for a last minute scramble for territory, reshuffling the cards between winners and losers of the war. The fact that only days after the declaration of war (even before landing in

France), British forces attacking German Togoland is illustrative of the strategic importance of imperial territories during the conflict.<sup>17</sup>

Early on in the war, the Ottoman Empire had been an object of competing Franco-British aspirations. The better-known attempt to divide up the Ottoman Empire between the Entente powers was the Sykes-Picot agreement, signed as early as May 1916 between British and French representatives. However, the Ottoman Empire proved a more difficult enemy to defeat after its success in the Dardanelles, leading the British to encourage the notorious “Arab revolt” in order to divide Arabs and Turks. They supported Sharif Hussein of Mecca and his sons, Faisal and Abdallah, in their political and territorial claims. During the war, imperial powers—and in particular those nations that had acquired their colonial territories in more recent times—were confronted with uprisings. This was the case in Libya, where the Italian conquest had only taken place in 1911-1912: during the War, the region of Misrata revolted and managed to maintain a semi-autonomous status for several years. By the same token, the Portuguese were faced with revolts in Angola and Mozambique, which they suppressed. Nevertheless, despite such significant episodes and the changing of hands of many territories, European domination over the empire was never threatened: British and French key possessions of Algeria, Egypt, India, and Indochina remained firmly in hand.

The long postwar period, and the numerous treaties that aimed at resolving the conflict and organizing peace sanctioned new positions, reflecting a new balance of powers on the ground. The process of settling the war was not only the opportunity to redistribute pre-existing colonial territories, but also to assert European hegemony over new non-European territories. This involved drawing new borders, creating new (dominated) states, inventing legal forms of domination, and waging new wars of conquest.

### **Demobilization, brutalization, and circulation of violence**

In the colonial empires, the Great War had been a time of mobilisation, circulation of men, ideas and political practices. Intense labour and combatant mobilisation led to increased movement. The British Raj, for example, provided 1.4 million men organized into the British Indian Army, composed of British and Indian soldiers,

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<sup>17</sup> A. S. Kanya-Forstner, ‘The War, Imperialism, and Decolonization’, in *The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press, 2000), 231–62.

which fought mainly in the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the conflict, Morocco under French protectorate provided the French army with 45 000 infantrymen and auxiliaries, many of whom had enlisted for economic reasons. The postwar and demobilization meant that they would either return to their countries, or go on to wage the colonial conflicts that riddled the interwar period. The British Indian Army, which had been heavily committed in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Palestine during the war, stayed on in Palestine until the end of the British Mandate in 1948; it had also been deployed to the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919.

Many French colonial troops fought in Syria during the repression of the Great Revolt of 1925-1927. Some of them also fought with the French army in the Rif War in Morocco, wherein the Moroccan combatants of Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi opposed Spanish troops (from 1921 to 1926), and later French troops as well (from 1925 to 1926). The careers of those generals who led Europeans armies in Morocco emphasize the role of the Riffian conflict as a precursor of the Second World War, in connection with the development of authoritarian regimes in Europe: on the Spanish side, the army was led by Miguel Primo de Rivera and Francisco Franco, and on the French side by Philippe Pétain, all of whom would play crucial roles in the future of both Spain and France. But as we did when examining 1945, we can here again reverse the directionality of violence and brutalization to consider Rif as the sequel to the First World War, during which the weaponry that had been developed in Europe was perfected, notably by the use of Yperite (mustard gas) bombs as well as other chemical weapons. Aerial bombings—the first of which is considered to have taken place in 1911 in Libya during the Turkish-Italian war—developed during the Great War and were one of the weapons of choice during these “wars after the war”. This was the case during the Riffian war, but also in Afghanistan: aerial bombings had been used heavily to quash an uprising on the Afghan-Indian border in 1917, and the third Anglo-Afghan war of 1919 war is known for the heavy bombings of Dacca, Jalalabad and Kabul.<sup>19</sup> During the Iraq revolt of 1920, the British forces used aerial bombings as a form of “aerial policing” to repress populations using fewer of the (Indian) troops on the ground, causing upward of 6000 Iraqi casualties as opposed to 500 British and Indian combatants. Both public opinion and British politicians saw

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<sup>18</sup> Dr Partha Sarathi Gupta and Dr Anirudh Deshpande, eds., *The British Raj and Its Indian Armed Forces, 1857 - 1939: With an Introduction by Narayani Gupta* (New Delhi ; New York: OUP India, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Sven Lindqvist and Linda Haverty Rugg, ‘Bombing the Savages’, *Transition*, no. 87 (2001): 48–64.

this method of warfare as unpleasant, but it was made more acceptable by distance from the metropolis and by the racial representations of the targeted populations.

All in all, 1918 functioned similarly to 1945 in terms of the relationship between the postwar and the empires. Violence and combat continued despite the end of the war, with World War morphing into colonial conquest (rather than reconquest as was the case in 1945), and colonial territories serving as lands of opportunity for the military professional to pursue their careers. They also allowed European armies to absorb all of those whose rapid demobilization might cause political unrest, in particular the numerous colonial troops.

### **Postwar and the manufacturing of dominated states**

The resolution of the war took place over a period of five years through peace treaties, several of which dealt specifically with the colonial territories or former Ottoman Empire territories now under European domination: the Versailles Treaty of June 1919, the Sèvres treaty of August 1920 (following the San Remo conference of April 1920), and the Lausanne Treaty in July 1923. This postwar period was both a period of transition, change and instability as well as a period branded by attempts at imposing a new order. Instability extended well beyond the war, and was apparent through the number of ongoing conflicts. These were either directly or more loosely connected to the First World War, not only because imposing order and peace took time, but also because of aspirations to prolong the state of war, and to gain more ground before borders solidified.

In the postwar period, international relations came to be organized around a new player: the League of Nations, which was created in 1920 as a result of the Versailles Peace Conference. Territorial reorganization, and imposition of a new postwar order took place in an atmosphere imbued by the ideas of the Wilsonian era.

During the war, empires had provided a labour force that travelled to the metropole, filling in the places left vacant by mobilized Europeans. Both in the army and in civilian jobs, the experiences of suffering institutionalized forms of racism, as well as being exposed to metropolitan European cultures, had lasting effects on the development of new ideas and political practices. Circulation within the empires developed anticolonial consciousness and deepened nationalist ideas, and many of those who had travelled became agents of the spreading of new subversive ideas. A case in point of such political and social ferment is that of Nguyễn Tat Thanh, the future Hồ Chí Minh, who, having lived in London during the time of the War,

moved to Paris in 1919, in order to be close to the growing Vietnamese community. In the postwar period, he developed his political writings, joined the French socialist party, and made contact with the Communist International. It was from Paris that he created the communist network in Vietnam itself.<sup>20</sup> Several of the political parties that would later be instrumental in achieving independence in their respective countries were created in the 1920s by emigrant workers, as is the case of the *Étoile Nord-africaine*, created in Paris in 1926. Many of them referred directly to the new concepts that framed international relations. The *Destour* party, for example, was created in Tunisia in 1920 by men who explicitly referred to Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and the notion of self-determination. Forms of political practice revealed the belief in a new spirit of international relations: petitions, letters sent to European parties (or to Woodrow Wilson in person), delegations to Paris or London. The very act of negotiating and treaty-signing created new opportunities for international contact, when representatives of various territories, generally carefully chaperoned by "their" imperial power, met in Paris with the (mistaken) expectation that they could determine their own future. The image of Faisal bin Hussein's delegation to Paris, which included T.E. Lawrence, is well known. But the Egyptian *Wafd* delegation was also present, despite opposition of their British handlers, with its leader Saad Zaghlul. The group's arrest upon their return to Egypt and subsequent deportation to Malta was one of the causes of the 1919 revolution. The *Wafd*, which had developed during the war as an informal organization was to become one of the most influential parties in the history of the country.

Under the auspices of the new League of Nations, the postwar period was characterized by the invention of a new legal territorial entity, the mandate, that was to be applied to the peoples defined in article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations firstly as people living in territories having lost sovereignty in the past war ("those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them"), and secondly by their inability to govern themselves ("peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world").

According to the Treaty of Versailles, German territories were to be entrusted to victorious powers. Germany's western African empire, consisting of the Cameroons and Togoland, was therefore divided between France and Britain. German East

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<sup>20</sup> P. Brocheux, *Ho-chi-minh* (Paris: Les Presses de Sciences Po, 2000), 18.

Africa was shared between Britain (Tanganyika) and Belgium (Ruanda-Urundi). Finally, German South-West Africa was mandated by the League of Nations to South Africa, until the independence of Namibia in 1990. The Pacific also saw similar reallocation of formerly German territories, as German New Guinea became a League of Nations mandate under the administration of Australia (it remained so until 1949), while the Pacific territories north of the equator were mandated to Japan (until the Second World War).<sup>21</sup>

This system allowed the carving up of Ottoman territories into smaller territorial units of state-like dimension (Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Jordan). These territorial entities were in fact much smaller than the Hashemite dream of an Arab kingdom. Their very creation, along with the British support for Zionism following the Balfour Declaration of 1917, were signs that Hashemi Arab nationalism was defeated and must now to adapt to these new, multiple and small territories, subject to European domination under the mandate system. The careers of the Hashemi brothers are significant for their attempt to adapt to the new order that was emerging: Faisal, former leader of the “Arab Revolt”, was proclaimed king of the Arab Kingdom of Syria in March 1920 by the Syrian National Congress government. However, the San Remo conference of April 1920 granted France the League of Nations mandate over Syria, and following the Franco-Syrian war (and the Syrian defeat at the Battle of Maysalun, on 24 July 1920), Faisal was ousted from power. Following the Cairo Conference of March 1921, he was made king of Iraq, under British domination, and his continued attempts to reunite Iraq and Syria were repeatedly thwarted by the mandate system and the existence of new borders and states. Even at the time, academics working in politics and international relations questioned the discrepancy between the principles of the mandate system, and the imperial powers’ behaviour in the territories mandated to them. One of them was Philip Quincy Wright, whose work reflects his interest in the issue of maintaining peace, but questions the mandate system and the way its spirit and legality is distorted to wage war.<sup>22</sup>

While there were a few new, Middle East States that were created outside of the mandate system, these were also under close European supervision, as in the case of the emergence of the Sa’ud dynasty. Prior to the war, Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa’ud had been recognized by the Ottomans Wali of Nedj. However, when, after his 1922 trip to

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<sup>21</sup> William Roger Louis, *Great Britain and Germany’s Lost Colonies, 1914-1919*, (Oxford, Clarendon P, 1967).

<sup>22</sup> Quincy Wright, *Mandates under the League of Nations*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930); Quincy Wright, ‘The Bombardment of Damascus’, *The American Journal of International Law* 20, no. 2 (avril 1926): 263–80.

the region, Amin Rihani published *The Arab Kings*, he gave equal importance to Husayn of Mecca, Imam Yahia of Yemen and Abd al-Aziz Ibn Sa'ud. By the time the book was published in 1925, the balance had shifted, as Ibn Sa'ud asserted his authority. He conquered Hijaz and took Mecca, and signed an agreement with the British to delineate the borders of his kingdom; in 1927, the Jeddah agreement prevented the Sa'uds from claiming territories of other British-protected kingdoms. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia was officially proclaimed in 1932 and was one of the poorer states in the world until the discovery of oil reserves in 1938. By that time, oil companies were ready to insure hegemony of the North over the kingdom.

The most surprising feature of these postwar states is how durable they have proven. Since the Arab Spring of 2011, and even more so since the creation of ISIS (the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham organization, *aka* Daesh) in June 2014, considerable attention has been given to the carving up of the Ottoman Empire by European powers in the wake of the First World War. The idea was expressed that the Middle East countries were artificially – and badly – forged by Europeans, with the logical conclusion that powers foreign to the region should suppress the “children of England and France” as one author called Syria, Jordan, Iraq, as well as Israel, and the permanent non-state of Palestine and redesign, hopefully better, new territorial entities.<sup>23</sup> However, while imperial powers were at work fashioning borders and states in the postwar period, more recent historiography has shown that local dynamics should not be written out of this process.

These depict the postwar not merely as European powers inventing and applying new forms of domination, but also show populations at a very local level seizing the possibilities offered to them by the new lexicon of international relations (and notions such as “self-determination”, “nation-state”, “minority”, or “nationality”) to develop their own strategies, forward demands, and transform their own identities which were discussed in the process of defining their nationalities.<sup>24</sup> The end-of-war treaties, and the mandate system opened up questions of nationalities, which each new dominated-state had to manage during the interwar period. After the Lausanne treaty of 1923 officially ended the dependency of Syrians and Lebanese on the Ottoman state, nationality codes were adopted in both countries in 1925 to manage the transition from Ottoman nationality, previously defined in 1869, to state-

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<sup>23</sup> David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Owl Books, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Benjamin Thomas White, *Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: Politics and Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

nationality. Even in older states, this was the time to create nationalities. In Tunisia in 1914, against the better judgment of the French authorities, they had to create a definition of Tunisian nationality in order to prevent Muslim immigrants from Algeria or Libya claiming French or Italian nationality; this would have blurred the racial divide between “European” and “native”.<sup>25</sup> Tunisian nationality would later become a powerful tool in the hands of the nationalist movement.

With the mandate system as the favoured instrument of hegemony during this period (as the protectorate had been at the end of the nineteenth century), the postwar period saw the birth of a latticework of new and dominated states that proved surprisingly durable, because—despite their contradiction with local aspirations—they framed the anti-imperialist struggles within the perimeters of states, which would rapidly transform into national frameworks.

## Conclusion

This regressive exploration of three postwar periods as seen from the (former) imperial possessions reveals a finer chronology where postwar periods are never ends of war, but rather the start of new periods of wars: in 1945 and 1918, these are wars of conquest, re-conquest, or for the preservation of the colonial order. Likewise, 1989 signals the beginning of a new era in which the risk of war (civil wars, wars waged by the sole super-power, and even World War) is increased. But this examination also inscribes 1989 as part of a longer timeline: in the Arab world and Africa, 1989 appears to be both the child of 1979 as well as the anticlimax of 1962. Viewing 1989 as simply the end of the Cold War now appears as only one of the possible interpretations of both the date and the events.

What this exploration has also revealed is the alternation of wars waged by the Global North at home, and those waged in their empires, or in countries born from an independence movement. The journey backwards, and more particularly the milestones of 1945 and 1918, bring to light that, when it comes to waging war, colonial possessions have been used by the North in two ways. First, they have served as training and experimentation grounds for weaponry and tactics that were later put to use in Europe-centred conflicts. Secondly, these territories have also been used to manage transitions back to peace after major wars, allowing imperial powers

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<sup>25</sup> Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

to handle their demobilization processes (by selectively committing their troops to new conflicts and thus delaying their return home and the troubles that would ensue), and to put to use in faraway lands the equipment and ammunition amassed during the World War.

This in turn brings us back to our understanding of 1989, by raising the question of the involvement of countries from the global North in conflicts in the South since 1989. How much of the involvement of European forces in the African Great War had to do with the necessity to put to use the men, equipment and know-how that would otherwise have been made redundant by the end of the Cold War? And how much of the United-States' decision to attack Iraq in 1991 can be explained by the need to find outputs for the war industry, now that the Cold War was over?

Such hegemony over the Global South has outlasted political independence events and assumed new shapes and forms. As made abundantly clear by the 2003 war in Iraq, as well as the 2011 intervention in Libya, it now seems to involve the possibility of dismantling states born of independence, and thereby contributing to the increased level of world insecurity.