Diplomacy and Nation-Building in Africa: Franco-British Relations and Cameroon at the End of Empire. Melanie Torrent. London: I.B. Tauris Press, 2012.
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In many ways, the study of decolonization ranks as one of the newest frontiers for historians of Africa. Only in the last decade or so have sufficient numbers of scholars begun to tackle the history of decolonization in Africa, examining the myriad causes, processes, and effects of the undoing of Empire. Melanie Torrent has now added to a growing body of literature concerned with the nuances behind the unmaking of colonial rule in Africa. In *Diplomacy and Nation-Building in Africa: Franco-British Relations and Cameroon at the End of Empire*, Torrent explores the complex processes involved in decolonization in Cameroon. Torrent's choice of Cameroon is original and quite compelling. When Germany lost World War I, its African territories became League of Nations mandates (and in 1946, the mandates became Trust Territories when the United Nations replaced the League). France and Britain split the administration of Germany's Kamerun: France administered a much larger Cameroun while Britain administered two territories, the Southern Cameroons and the Northern Cameroons. As such, Cameroon's process of decolonization was unique because the Cameroonian nation would be built upon "two very different European legacies" (3). Torrent argues that in order to understand the processes of decolonization and nation-building in Cameroon, we cannot simply compare French and British "retreats from empire" (5). This is an important contribution; decolonization was not simply the exit of European colonial apparatus. Rather, Torrent examines the "consultations, frictions, connections, compromises and agreements that brought into contact French, British and Cameroonian politicians and diplomats during the transfer of powers" (5). In this way, *Diplomacy and Nation-Building in Africa* takes as its main focus the bilateral and multilateral talks, conferences, and negotiations that characterized Franco-British-Cameroonian relations between 1959 and 1975.

In Chapter 1 ("The Reunification Dialogue"), Torrent discusses the debates and negotiations that led to the termination of the French and British mandates in Cameroon. Between 1959 and 1961, a series of bilateral and multilateral talks between officials from the Cameroons, Europe, and the United Nations eventually concluded that French Cameroun would unite with the Southern Cameroons while the Northern Cameroons would join Nigeria. Chapter 2 ("Out of Commonwealth Dynamics: Cameroon's Retreat from Britain's International Legacy") situates this dual heritage within Cameroon's "unique experiment in nation-building" (99). French Cameroun was very much a Francophile zone. France had nurtured and maintained strong cultural links with Cameroun—French was the dominant language and African officials often traveled to Paris. Conversely, no such cultural links and affinities characterized the former British mandate, where the British presence had always been thin and few Africans spoke the English language. Torrent demonstrates how an independent, unified Cameroonian state attempted to balance these divergent linguistic legacies by officially becoming a bilingual state. Despite independence, both the British and the French also sought to maintain their imperial influence through the Commonwealth and the French Community, respectively. Connections with France, however, continued to dominate the Cameroonian state, which increasingly pulled away from relations with the British Commonwealth. Of course, this

did not mean that Cameroonian officials cooperated with the French unquestioningly. In Chapter 3 ("Francophone Diplomacies: Opportunities and Dangers for the Cameroonian State"), Torrent turns her attention to the ways in which Africans reassessed French policy by "taking more distance with France and initiating contacts across the colonial divides" (140). Her discussion of Canadian-Cameroonian connections is particularly striking. Chapter 4 ("New Partnerships: the Stakes and Limits of Integration in Cameroon and Europe") then assesses how "bilingualism as a political project had become more blurred" (204). As the government of Cameroon negotiated language-training programs (in English and French) in order to foster regional and global connections, Britain and France competed, to varying degrees, for more influence in Cameroon. Finally, Chapter 5 ("The Cameroonian Bridge? Elusive Multilateralism in a Globalising World") explores the ways in which Cameroon relied on its Franco-British heritage as a means toward building international influence.

One of the strengths of *Diplomacy and Nation-Building in Africa* is the mere choice of Cameroon as case study. The very complexity of decolonization in Cameroon makes this text truly unique. Here, we can see not how a single European power negotiated independence with its former colony, but rather how two colonial powers collaborated with African leaders as well as with each other to negotiate independence and foster post-colonial diplomatic relations. Second, few scholars have focused on the diplomatic talks that undergirded the process of decolonization among the former mandate/Trust Territories, specifically. Torrent's work illustrates the ways in which former Trust Territories experienced the processes of decolonization very differently from non-Trust Territories. Further—and perhaps most interesting—Torrent argues that the study of decolonization does not only tell us about the society that is decolonizing: it also sheds light on "the redefinition of French and British identity at the end of empire" (5). One of the reasons this book is important is that it examines not only the influence that France and Britain exercised in Cameroon during decolonization, but also the influences that they had on each other. Far from being a singularly Cameroonian experience, the varied experiences of decolonization must be acknowledged as a process in the reformulation of Cameroonian, British, and French identities. Finally, Torrent's exhaustive research stands as testimony to the ways in which scholars can reconstruct the processes of decolonization using a broad spectrum of archives across several continents. Torrent mined archives in Cameroon, France, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, as well as the records of the Commonwealth of Nations. The scope of her archival base is extensive, and she must be lauded for merging these sources into a coherent narrative of decolonization.

This particular use of sources, however, also points to one of the most glaring weaknesses of the text. In a study that spans 1959–1975, where are the voices of the Cameroonians? It is surprising that Torrent did not conduct interviews with men and women who lived through this period in Cameroon's history. The exclusive reliance on archival material also means that *Diplomacy and Nation-Building in Africa* privileges the voices and experiences of elite, male politicians, to the omission of a range of other, non-political, non-elite voices. For instance, Torrent spends much of the book discussing the various French and British language and teacher training programs, but we are left to wonder how Cameroonian men (and women?) on the ground experienced this particular tool of diplomacy. A second omission in the text is any thorough discussion of the Cold

War. Again, in a study that spans 1959–1975, one would expect to hear more about Soviet influences in the region—or even *rumors* of Soviet activity in the region. Torrent does allude to Cold War tensions and rivalries here and there, but I found myself wanting to hear more about how those tensions prompted the very French and British actions in Cameroon that she does spend so much time discussing.

Diplomacy and Nation-Building in Africa is designed for scholars who have an extensive knowledge base of international, diplomatic history. It would also be a useful resource for scholars who work in Cameroon, in particular. It has no place in assigned high school or even undergraduate course readings—the subject matter is so specific and the writing style so dense that it would overwhelm students in either World History or African History courses. Undergraduates in any discipline would need too much background information to make this book accessible. It could, however, be used in teaching a graduate level course, perhaps for graduate students working in Cameroon or on issues of international diplomacy during decolonization. Alternatively, it would be a wonderful resource for a teacher who is trying to build a more dynamic, complex picture of the processes involved in decolonization in their lectures.

Joanna Tague, Denison University