

African Relations with Eastern Europe, 1950s-1990s:

Chris Saunders, Helder Adegar Fonseca, and Lena Dallywater (eds.). *Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Africa: New Perspectives on the Era of Decolonization, 1950s to 1990s* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023). 372 pp., hardback. (Dialectics of the Global, vol.15). ISBN 978-3-11-077926-4, £77.50, e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-078775-7 (£77.50) e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-078790-0, £77.50), ISSN 2570-2289 (£77.50)

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This interesting and wide-ranging collection of essays is a second volume by this cross-national trio of editors. It follows an earlier book, *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East': Transnational Activism 1960-1990*, also published in the series 'Dialectics of the Global.' Most of the contributors are historians but there are also chapters by geographers and political scientists; two of the authors are South Africans, two are Russians, and others come from Eastern European backgrounds. The unifying theme of the collection is 'the East-South axis of interconnections and exchanges' (p.2), with 'East' understood as eastern Europe and 'south' as Africa (including the west and the north of the continent). The editors are perhaps unduly modest about their objective, which is to 'produce insights' – what the reader actually gets is fascinating detail about organisations such as, for example, the World Federation of Trade Unions, and the life histories of various individuals.

The series focuses on three aspects of globalisation – competing projects; the universalising claims of such projects; and spatial changes that have resulted, in terms of both integration and fragmentation. Within this framework, the editors group the chapters under three headings – Lusophone Connections, Southern African Entanglements, and Euro-African Complexities. They acknowledge the impact of Odd Arne Westad's influential book *The Global Cold War*

(2007) in creating the intellectual space in Cold War studies for accounts of the role of local actors rather than the two superpowers. Local actors include not just decolonising states and liberation movements, but also the so-called 'satellite' states of the socialist bloc, whose interactions with African nations were driven in varying degrees by their own interests rather than merely diktats from Moscow (p.4).

In a short review it is not possible to comment meaningfully on all the individual texts in a collection of fourteen chapters, many dealing with new themes. There are three chapters on Angola: how Angolan movements chose partners in the early 1960s; UNITA's relations with China and the USSR; and the role of Czechoslovak *cooperantes* after independence. Alba Martin Luque's contribution on Yugoslav filmmakers in Mozambique is original in providing an analysis of 'visual solidarity' with FRELIMO's struggle. Luque locates the activities of these cineastes, operating perilously in the liberated zones, within 'battles for information' (p.103) which reframed Mozambican political discourse – visually as well as textually – in a deconstruction of the dominant colonial narrative of 'civilisation' and 'modernisation'. Matteo Grilli writes about relations between the socialist bloc and political parties in Lesotho, particularly the Basutoland Congress Party. He comments that 'only a handful of studies deal specifically with communism in Lesotho and the relationship between Basotho parties and the socialist world' (p.200-201).

The editors have cast their net wider than in their previous volume dealing with Southern Africa. Radoslav Yordanov's chapter on relations between the Warsaw Pact countries and Libya is to be welcomed in dealing with a country sitting 'at the nexus between sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East' (p. 215), and thus lying beyond an imaginary 'Tropical Africa'. Working with diplomatic materials from socialist bloc archives, Yordanov identifies the

Gaddafi regime's preoccupation with building 'Islamic socialism' as a sticking point in relations with the ideologically-orthodox Warsaw Pact countries. Sergei Mazov of the Institute of World History in Moscow examines Soviet cooperation with the Federal government in Nigeria during the war against secessionist Biafra, 'a taboo subject' at the time and still apparently 'a guarded secret' (p.289-290). Nonetheless, Mazov deploys Russian and US sources to discuss the reasons why the Soviets opted to support the Federal side, and the opportunities that they believed the situation offered the USSR – wrongly as it turned out – to improve bilateral ties.

Inevitably, some topics are not covered, although it would be churlish to complain. There is no chapter dedicated to socialist bloc engagement in the Congo crisis, nor to Ghana under Nkrumah, nor, perhaps most importantly, to the Ethio-Somali war of July 1977 to March 1978, an important episode in a territorial conflict dating back decades and continuing to the present day. The Soviet Union judged the Somalis to be behaving recklessly in provoking the fighting, and supported the Ethiopian Marxist regime, intervening with hundreds of 'advisers'. This played a role in the US abandonment of 'détente', with Brzezinski remarking that prospects of arms limitation had been buried in the sands of the Ogaden.

The present European political climate has already impacted on the broad international cooperation that produced this volume. In their introduction, the editors mention that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had 'repercussions in... scientific collaboration' and lament that some of their colleagues were 'actively hindered or prohibited from publishing or participating' in the project (p.3). Indeed, two of their contributors even withdrew chapters 'for fear of being misunderstood' – a circumstance that is to be deeply regretted.