

Africa and the Global Cold War

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Datum, Ort: 05.07.2018–06.07.2018, Erfurt
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Building on new research trends, this workshop challenged the perception of the Cold War as a struggle exclusively between the superpowers and their ideological views.¹ The participants rather sought to understand the Cold War in Africa as a history of many regional struggles, various actors and national interests. For this purpose, the program focused on the role of international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development projects.

After the Second World War, a steadily increasing number of African countries were able to participate in international organizations for the first time. The global process of decolonization had a strong impact on the agenda of the United Nations (UN), since former colonies could now prompt the international community to discuss their concerns. Furthermore, with the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, African states created a platform to facilitate the achievement of consensus and speak with one voice on the international stage whenever possible.

The power shifts in international politics resulting from the growing number of newly sovereign African states challenged the (former) colonial powers and the new superpowers. Portugal, for example, defied demands to relinquish its claims to rule over its colonies for a long time, despite fierce demands to do so in the UN. To explain the persistence of the Portuguese opposition, NIELS SCHLIEHE (Hamburg) stressed the weaknesses of the UN in the context of the Cold War. Due to its close diplomatic cooperation with other European powers and the geostrategic value of the Azores islands for the United States, Portugal managed to always have at least one of the three Western Powers in the Security Council on its side. Thus, despite the

support for the liberation movements in the UN Decolonization Committee and the General Assembly, the Portuguese strategy of ignorance was sufficient and the UN proved to be of secondary importance for the decolonization process of Portugal's African empire. CHRISTIAN METHFESSEL (Erfurt) presented examples of the changing rhetoric of Ethiopia in the United Nations. Ethiopia was one of the pioneer states to bring the question of decolonization on the agenda of the UN. Furthermore, under Haile Selassie Ethiopia's positions in the UN were increasingly shaped by ideas of Non-Alignment and Afro-Asian solidarity. However, after the Ethiopian revolution of 1974 and Mengistu Haile Mariam's rise to power, solidarity with the Soviet Union became a crucial factor for Ethiopian foreign policy, as expressed in a strong Cold War rhetoric during Ethiopian speeches in the General Assembly.

African ideological conflicts and power politics complicated the foundation of the first continental international organization, the OAU. In the early 1960s, the pan-African notions of some state leaders stood in opposition to the aspirations of others to continue a close cooperation with the former colonial powers. The desire to bridge the ideological divisions during the Congo crisis resulted in the foundation of the OAU in 1963. MICHAEL PESEK (Hamburg) showed that under these conditions the OAU often had difficulties to forge a consensus among the African states and prevent the internationalization of conflicts, as was the case during the crisis following the decolonization of Angola and the Ogaden War. In his comment, THOMAS SPIELBÜCHLER (Linz) also stressed the multiplicity of debilitating factors, especially pointing to regional conflicts between states and rebel groups with different ideologies and political goals. The OAU thus could rarely enforce its core principles, such as neutrality and non-interference. Subsequently, a debate emerged on the significance of the OAU for the Cold War in Africa. Was it a history of failure considering the incapacity of the or-

¹ Bernd Greiner / Christian Th. Müller / Dierk Walter (Eds.), *Heiße Kriege im Kalten Krieg* (Studien zum Kalten Krieg, Bd. 1), Hamburg 2006; Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge et al. 2005.

ganization to play a constructive role in conflict management on the continent? Or is this an insufficient perspective, considering that the OAU throughout its history offered a platform that enabled communication among the African states and helped to prevent the outbreak of a crisis comparable to the Congo conflict that set the foundation of the OAU in motion?

The crisis of the post-colonial states in Africa and their continental organization led to a power vacuum, which not only attracted foreign interventions by non-African states, but also fostered activities of non-state actors. Thus, NGOs became increasingly important on a political and social level. Based on the Ethiopian famine in 1984/85, a tragedy exacerbated by the socialist reforms of the Derg regime and the policies of the Western powers, AYCHEGREW HADERA HAILU (Mekelle) showed how NGOs could influence the course of events by generating international attention for the famine and thereby pressuring Western government to support the famine relief. However, he also addressed critical voices who argued that the NGOs worked profit-oriented in this exceptional situation. In his presentation on repatriations in the Horn of Africa, FLORIAN WAGNER (Erfurt) highlighted the importance of local non-state actors such as the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA) and the Relief Society of Tigray (REST) in the 1980s – a contribution not mentioned when the UNHCR declared the „decade of repatriation“ in 1992. In her comment on this panel, SONJA DOLINSEK (Erfurt) stressed the importance of studying NGOs as part of an international history of the Cold War in Africa, while encouraging greater definitional clarity in relation to the term „NGO“, which, as a negative term, may not capture the wide range of actors, practices and forms of civil society engagement in their specific local and transnational contexts and interactions. Furthermore, questions concerning the conditions under which an appeal to a global audience is (or is not) successful need to be asked.

Socialist states promoted their model of development as a way to address some of the problems of post-colonial states, but also seeking to increase their influence on the continent. For example, the German Democra-

tic Republic (GDR) forged strong links with several African states. In Ethiopia, it offered assistance and pursued economic cooperation projects. Discussing perspectives for prospective research on the relations between the GDR and Ethiopia, IRIS SCHRÖDER (Erfurt / Gotha) highlighted how the GDR media depicted this relationship to win prestige on a national and international level. In contrast, ANNA WARDA (Potsdam) presented an under-researched aspect of GDR influence in Africa: how the Ministry of State Security supported Mozambique and Zanzibar in the development of secret service agencies. Warda thus broadened the perspective from a focus on economic activities to include the field of state security, which aimed at monitoring the local situation and influencing it in favour of the GDR.

However, the extent of outside support for African socialist actors varied greatly. With the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a liberation movement fighting the Derg regime in Ethiopia, FESSEHA BERHE GEBREGERGIS (Mekelle / Gotha) provided an example of a Maoist (later a Marxist-Leninist) organization that deliberately observed „self-reliance“ as a guiding principle. Although there was some assistance from foreign governments, the TPLF became a fairly self-supporting organization, repeatedly stating that it depended on the people of Tigray for resources. Discussing development ideologies of the Global North, HUBERTUS BÜSCHEL (Groningen) emphasized the similarities between West German „help for self-help“ and East German „International Solidarity“. Proponents of both concepts assumed that this kind of development aid could build upon pre-colonial social and economic traditions in Africa and obtain higher acceptance in the local population. At the same time, these concepts served West and East German self-representations as highly developed donor countries and were connected with political pressure (as in the West German case the Hallstein-Doktrin). While Büschel stressed similarities, FRANZISKA RANTZSCH (Erfurt) highlighted East German peculiarities. In her talk on the GDR's recruitment of contract workers from Mozambique, she showed how the principle of „mutual benefit“ had indeed

an impact on the government's policy. This reliance on a basic socialist principle was also intended to set the own development approach apart from the West German politics.

During the discussion, a recurring question was how to best conceptualize the Cold War from the vantage point of African history. Should we only speak of the Cold War when external powers intervened on the continent? Alternatively, can we describe the conflicts between the more radical and the more conservative African states as a „copied Cold War“? Is it sufficient to assume that everything that happens in Africa in this period is Cold War history? In this regard, MICHELLE MART (Reading / Erfurt) suggested the compromise to consider the Cold War better as a „framework for international politics.“ However, AYCHEGREW HADERA HAILU (Mekelle) pointed out that there were ideological conflicts in Africa. National issues, cultural and ethnic conflicts, or, as in the case of Ethiopia, the establishment of state socialism were important internal factors not to be ignored.

Overall, the many gaps and opportunities of historical research on the Cold War and Africa became clear during the conference. Especially national, cultural and social aspects in Africa still deserve more attention. In his final comment to the workshop ACHIM VON OPPEN (Bayreuth) pointed out the need of a systematic analysis of the effects the Cold War in Africa had on the history of the Global North. A promising field of research was identified in the study of the interactions between the Global North and Africa during the Cold War.

Conference Overview:

Aychehrew Hadera Hailu (Mekelle) / Christian Methfessel (Erfurt) / Iris Schröder (Erfurt / Gotha): Welcome and Introduction

Panel 1: International Organisations and the Cold War in Africa I: The United Nations

Nils Schliehe (Hamburg): Portugal's Wars in Africa: Decolonization, the Cold War, and the United Nations, 1961-1975

Christian Methfessel (Erfurt): Ethiopia in the United Nations: Between Afro-Asian Solidarity and Cold War Rhetoric

Comment: Michelle Mart (Reading, PA / Er-

furt)

Panel 2: International Organisations and the Cold War in Africa II: The Organisation of African Unity

Michael Pesek (Hamburg): Cold War Crises and the Organisation of African Unity: The Angolan Civil War and the Ogaden War

Comment: Thomas Spielbüchler (Linz)

Wrap-Up Discussion Day 1

Panel 3: International Organisations and the Cold War in Africa III: Non-Governmental Organisations

Aychehrew Hadera Hailu (Mekelle): NGOs and Relief Operations in Ethiopia in Cold War Context

Florian Wagner (Erfurt): Repatriations in the Horn of Africa: Governmental and Non-Governmental Initiatives in the Age of the Cold War

Comment: Sonja Dolinsek (Erfurt)

Panel 4: Ideological Conflicts and Development Politics in Africa I: Building Socialism in Africa

Iris Schröder (Erfurt / Gotha): The German Democratic Republic, Ethiopia, and the Making of a Socialist State

Anna Warda (Potsdam): The East German Ministry of State Security in Zanzibar and Mozambique: The GDR, the Cold War, and the Global South

Comment: Thomas Lindenberger (Dresden)

Panel 5: Ideological Conflicts and Development Politics in Africa II: Concepts of Development and Cooperation

Fesseha Berhe Gebregergis (Mekelle / Gotha): The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), Socialist Ideology, the Concept of „Self-Reliance,“ and the Cold War in the Horn of Africa

Hubertus Büschel (Groningen): West-German Help for Self-Help and East-German International Solidarity in Africa: Cold War Governmentality and Development

Franziska Rantzsch (Erfurt): The Concept of

„International Solidarity“ and the German Democratic Republic's Recruitment of Contract Workers from Mozambique

Comment: Christiane Kuller (Erfurt)

Final Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Introductory Note

Achim von Oppen (Bayreuth)

Tagungsbericht *Africa and the Global Cold War*.
05.07.2018–06.07.2018, Erfurt, in: H-Soz-Kult
22.01.2019.