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H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Adekeye Adebajo, ed. *From Global Apartheid to Global Village: Africa and the United Nations*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009. xxviii + 664 pp. \$66.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-86914-172-1.

Reviewed by Ryan M. Irwin (Ohio State University)

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Apartheid, Act II

Adekeye Adebajo opens *From Global Apartheid to Global Village* with a bleak vision of our contemporary world. Mankind, in his words, is faced today with a system of “global apartheid” that separates the rich North from the impoverished South, and sucks life from the ideals of justice and equality that animate the world’s one true universal organization—the United Nations. Adebajo quotes South Africa’s former president Thabo Mbeki to reinforce this point, but the maxim is recognizable to anyone familiar with Africa’s ambiguous place in the postcolonial world, having formed already the conceptual scaffolding of work by Kwame Nkrumah (*Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* [1965]), Walter Rodney (*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* [1972]), and Ali Mazrui (*UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. 8, *Africa since 1935* [1999] and with Michael Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa* [1984]), among many others. One should not, in other words, approach *Global Apartheid to Global Village* with the expectation of new insight on the political, social, or cultural paradoxes of independent Africa.^[1] Adebajo’s edited volume, featuring contributions from thirty different scholars, activists, and policymakers, is a treatise on historical injustice with its eyes fixed firmly on the political present.

Global Apartheid to Global Village is the first scholarly book to tell the story of Africa at the United Nations. Its scope is difficult to describe, in part because the volume covers such an eclectic range of topics. After two introductory essays, focused principally on current events, the

project delves into a diverse series of thematic contributions, which provide summaries of key UN organs, actors, and processes; present arguments about the nature of human rights, peace, and security; and examine the actions of the United Nations’ various development programs, funds, and offices. For the most part, these essays are interesting and well composed. The reader is treated to primers on the Trusteeship Council and the International Court of Justice, as well as thoughtful ruminations about Chapter VII of the UN Charter, UN peacekeeping in Namibia and Angola, and the role of African women at the United Nations. Taken collectively, the contributions point toward a coherent thesis: while African activities have modified aspects of the United Nations’ agenda, they have not altered fundamentally the structures of world order. Not all of the authors suggest how to fix this problem, but those who do gravitate toward a comparable set of policy recommendations: Africans need a greater voice at the UN Security Council, more control over UN spending, and greater authority to direct UN cultural programs. Political power in New York City, the argument goes, will help Africa’s representatives break down the wall between the rich North and the poor South, and establish a more equitable, sustainable “global village” for future generations.

It is not difficult for a historian to criticize a book like *Global Apartheid to Global Village*. With a handful of notable exceptions, the essays tend to attach themselves firmly to the well-trodden colonizer/colonized bi-

nary. Twenty years ago this would not have been a problem. However, beginning in the 1990s, a host of scholars—eager to transcend the limits of area studies and move beyond the interpretive strictures of the Cold War era—began highlighting the historical instability of this framework. They illuminated instead the complex interactions between empires, international organizations, and nation-states in the twentieth century.[2] Adebajo's volume does not engage this scholarship. Absent here, for instance, is any consideration of the United Nations' deeply ambiguous origins.[3] Nor do the authors investigate the contested meanings of terms like "sovereignty," "development," and "freedom." [4] By focusing so closely on African actions at the United Nations, and framing this inquiry explicitly around the challenges facing African diplomats today, the authors tend to flatten the historical specificity that characterized Africa's relationship with the international community between the 1960s and 2000s. There are a number of excellent exceptions, such as Christopher Saunders's essay on UN peacekeeping, Tor Sellström's piece on the Trusteeship Council, and Francis Deng's interesting chapter on the sovereignty of responsibility. However, on the whole, the contributions in *Global Apartheid to Global Village* do not so much narrate Africa's recent engagement with the world as they draw selectively on the past to buttress political assertions about the present. Put simply, the book is not a work of history.

Considering the fact that Adebajo is not a historian, this criticism probably deserves to be placed in its proper context. In fact, if one chalks up the book's "problems" to pedagogical free will, a useful set of insights emerge from its multifarious essays, relevant not only to scholars of Africa but also to historians interested in decolonization, foreign relations, and international civil society. Adebajo's volume is one of the first, for instance, to acknowledge the existence and importance of the so-called African Group. Formed on the eve of second-wave decolonization, the African Group was the UN General Assembly's most assertive lobbying force in the early post-colonial years. Composed of African diplomats united by a desire to influence world affairs, this group energized the efforts of the Afro-Asian bloc, spearheaded the fight against the white regimes of southern Africa, and authored many of the resolutions that altered the United Nations' formal stance toward racism, colonialism, and crimes against humanity. Most academics have either missed or dismissed this story, partly because of the recent methodological push to focus on local African voices and experiences, and partly because these diplomatic ini-

tatives cut across the archival collections used most often by international historians. However, the African Group deserves to have its story told. The United Nations was a vital intellectual and political incubator within the Cold War—a place that organized and then redefined international norms, and laid the foundation of the rights revolution that transformed global politics in the final decades of the twentieth century—and the African Group sat at the center of these macro-historical trends.

Equally important, *Global Apartheid to Global Village* speaks to scholars interested in the story of the third world. Slowly but surely, as international historians have begun to update their research agendas in the post-Cold War world, attention has fixed more firmly on the transnational place of nonalignment, anticolonialism, and antiracism. For example, the past decade has seen the publication of award-winning works on both the military interventions orchestrated by superpowers in the latter half of the twentieth century and the efforts of non-Western activists to counter these developments throughout the Southern Hemisphere.[5] Adebajo's volume contributes to this discussion by reminding scholars that bonds of third worldism overlapped frequently with a host of other ethnic, racial, and intellectual markers. The protagonists of *Global Apartheid to Global Village* are, first and foremost, African. Their relations with each other are fragmented, and their connections with advocates of pan-Asianism and pan-Arabism appear contested and transitory. Despite the rhetorical ubiquity of anticolonial nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, in other words, the third world—both as a physical place and as an imagined political project—was always immensely complicated, susceptible to cross-cutting political considerations, as well as financial, ideological, and temperamental fault lines. Does that mean that international historians should abandon their burgeoning interest in the global South? Hardly. It reminds us simply that we need to reflect carefully on the political specificity of international discourse, and chart skillfully how, where, and why transnational connections formed and fragmented in the historical past. *Global Apartheid to Global Village* is a useful tool toward this end. For scholars of Africa in the world, it deserves to be read widely.

Notes

[1]. For context, see Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Kwame A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Homi Bhabha, *The Lo-*

cation of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994); E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Bertrand Badie, *The Imported State: The Westernization of the Political Order* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); and Prosser Gifford and William Roger Louis, eds., *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power, 1960-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

[2]. For an especially influential volume, see *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997). For excellent reworkings of the colonizer/colonized binary over time, see Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965); Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978); and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1986).

[3]. See Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); and Paul Kennedy, *The Parliament of Man: The Past, Present and Future of the United Nations* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006).

[4]. See, among others, Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); James Gerguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven:

Yale University Press, 1998); *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); and Jackson, *Quasi-States*.

[5]. Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007). For other useful texts, see Forrest D. Colburn, *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); D. K. Fieldhouse, *The West and the Third World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); G. H. Jansen, *Non-alignment and the Afro-Asian States* (New York: Praeger, 1966); Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India, and Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 38-39; Tony Smith, "New Bottles for New Wine: A Pericentric Framework for the Study of the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 24 (Fall 2000): 567-591; Peter Willetts, *The Non-Aligned Movement: The Origins of a Third World Alliance* (London: Frances Printer, 1978); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Michael Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945-1969* (Armonk: Sharpe, 1999); Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination* (Boulder: Westview, 1988); James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); and Brenda Gayle Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

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