

## Cold War and Decolonization in Lusophone Africa

### *Cold War Liberation: The Soviet Union and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire in Africa, 1961–1975*

By Natalia Telepneva. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2022. Pp. xxi + 277. \$95.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9781469665856); \$35.95, paperback (ISBN: 9781469665863).

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Threading the line between global and social history, this book is about military diplomacy and socialist solidarity in the heat of the Cold War. It opens a new frontier in the history of decolonization by utilizing the archives of the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European states that were declassified in recent decades. The book joins a growing body of scholarship that is examining the contours of socialist solidarity between Africa and the global communist world in the twentieth century, from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, to Cuba and China, including leftist circles in Western Europe. Such links include, among others, economic and military cooperation, education, cultural exchange, and labor migration (mostly of Africans to Eastern Europe). Although it was generally known that socialist solidarity and internationalism played a key role in Africa's decolonization, our understanding of this process was limited to the perspectives of African nationalist actors. Natalia Telepneva has done a great service, especially for students of Lusophone Africa, by revealing the perspective of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries which played a significant role in the Lusophone Africans' struggles against colonialism. Telepneva's key argument is that African revolutionaries in Portuguese Africa were the agents of their emancipation, not puppets in the power games of the Cold War. Revolutionaries successfully navigated the narrow confines of international diplomacy to secure important support from the Soviet Union and the communist bloc, while managing to keep options open in the Western camp.

The book follows the overtures of a small group of African leaders who, in conjunction with dedicated Soviet bureaucrats, managed to bring down the last European colonial empire in Africa. The first two chapters set the stage for the plot line that runs through the book. Chapter One contextualizes the revival of Soviet internationalism under Khrushchev and introduces the profiles of what the author calls 'mediators of liberation' — that is, the men and women of the Soviet bureaucracy who carried out the mission of spreading socialist revolution in Africa. Contrary to the first generation of mediators, who were fewer in number and locked in the confines of the old Stalinist Comintern, a new generation of young and ambitious cadres rose to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s to take advantage of the winds of change sweeping across Africa as colonial empires collapsed one after the other. Energized by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization efforts and African decolonization, this new generation seized the opportunity to foster contacts with African revolutionaries and drive home their ideological principles of socialist solidarity.

The second chapter shifts the attention to Portuguese Africa and introduces the cast of characters that led the revolutionary struggles against the Portuguese, namely Agostinho Neto and Mário Pinto de Andrade of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA); Amílcar Cabral of the Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), and Eduardo Mondlane, Marcelino dos Santos, and Samora Machel of the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO).

The chapter shows how the neo-fascist regime of Portugal under Antonio Salazar and racially segregated and highly policed urban spaces shaped the political activism of African revolutionaries. Unlike their contemporary counterparts elsewhere in Africa, anticolonial and nationalist activists in Portuguese Africa were compelled to operate from exile. Working from Senegal (PAIGC), Congo (MPLA), and Tanzania (FRELIMO), they took advantage of the Cold War to build alliances in the socialist camp where they found a ready and willing group of young cadres determined to make a mark in the world. The subsequent chapters explore how these two groups — the Soviet mediators of liberation and Lusophone African revolutionaries — interacted as they worked to bring down the Portuguese empire in Africa. Starting from Angola where the anticolonial uprising began in 1961 and moving to Guinea Bissau (1963) and Mozambique (1964), the author charts the diplomatic channels between Africans and the Soviets (including their satellite-allies, especially Czechoslovakia) and the military and financial support that ensued from their interaction. This is done with impressive attention to details: when and who made the contact (Chapter Three); how military assistance and training were established and resources secured (Chapter Four and Five); how the Soviet mediators and their superiors viewed the power struggles within and among African anticolonial movements; and how they navigated the Sino-Soviet split and the challenges of détente (Chapter Six).

In leveraging the Cold War and seeking support from both sides of the iron curtain, African revolutionaries were competing with rivals who also sought to present themselves as legitimate freedom fighters, as well as to navigate disputes that often pitted their patrons against each other. We learn that Cabral, for example, relied on personal diplomacy with Soviets, Czechs, and Cubans, each of whom had conflicting ideas about the best way to fight the Portuguese, and may have been tempted to finance the rivals of the PAIGC. The leaders of FRELIMO, by contrast, had to thread the more contentious line between the Soviets and the Chinese while making sure that none of their military and financial aid went to their rivals. Telepneva establishes a revealing contrast: both PAIGC and FRELIMO were successful in navigating the complicated waters of the Cold War, while the MPLA found it difficult to completely isolate their two main rivals, UNITA and FNLA, both of which earned a measure of support from the MPLA's patrons. MPLA's diplomatic failure paved the way for the anticolonial rivalry to spill over and evolve into a protracted civil war after decolonization. While scholars of Lusophone Africa will not be surprised by these findings, the contours of these diplomatic meanders are new and refreshing. They illustrate the extent to which interpersonal relations and individual talents were important assets in a contentious and competitive political field dictated as much by global dynamics as local circumstances.

Because the book is centered around the diplomatic lives of African political leaders and their socialist patrons, the narrative is heavily dominated by male figures. We read very little about women, especially those who accompanied their partners in their diplomatic exploits or on their own as part of the various missions for the women's league summits which were an important feature of socialist solidarity and internationalism in the 1960s and 1970s. All the three nationalist movements that dominate the narrative had women's leagues and their leaderships travelled extensively to Eastern Europe and the larger socialist world. There is, for example, no discussion of Josina Machel, the wife of FRELIMO's president, who sojourned in the Soviet Union in 1970 for medical treatment — an example of the other dimensions of socialist solidarity that ensued from diplomatic engagements and political alliances. The absence of women in this story may be the function of the archive, whose logic shapes the structure of the book. This point takes nothing away from what is otherwise a well-crafted and stimulating book. Written with great economy, this is a welcome addition to the histories of decolonization in Lusophone Africa and Africa in general. It makes for an excellent reading for both undergraduate and graduate teaching.