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**BOOK REVIEW**

Decolonisation and Regional Geopolitics: South Africa and the “Congo Crisis”, 1960-1965, London and New York, Routledge, 2019. 37 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-815-35279-2

Lazlo Passemier's *Decolonisation and Regional Geopolitics: South Africa and the “Congo Crisis”, 1960-1965*, examines South Africa's relationship with the Congo, and the crisis that engulfed the latter between 1960 and 1965. Always alive to the local, regional, continental and international geopolitical factors, Passemier explores a series of factors that shaped South Africa's policy and posture as Congo's *La pagaille*, unfolded over five short but intense years. For at least two reasons, the 1960s marked an important turning point in the history of Africa. First, it marked the period when some countries attained independence from different European countries, while those that remained under colonial began to push for self-government. Second, the 1960s witnessed the intensification of the Cold War between the United States of America (USA) and its western allies on the one hand, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and its backers in the east on the other. It is not surprising that much of the available literature on the Congo Crisis and the role of external influence has generally been limited to how Cold War dynamics shaped the nature and the texture of international involvement in the Congo during this period. Thus, to the extent that it focusses on the role of an African country and the regional factors that shaped its involvement in the Congo, this book makes a refreshing and timely contribution to the existing literature on the Congo Crisis. The book departs from the usual narrative that discusses developments in the Congo

within the context of the country being merely a battleground for world super powers as they sought to gain a stronghold in southern Africa, and the African continent more generally.

Passemiers's book offers a comprehensive and extensive discussion of the various imperatives that defined South Africa's involvement during the period under review. Beyond the interests of the South African apartheid government, he effectively unpacks the "perceptions of nationalist movements, opposition parties, and members of the public were equally significant in shaping South Africa's connections to the Congo Crisis" (p. 12). In exploring the South African connection in the Congo Crisis, the book sets out to achieve three objectives: revealing the nature of South Africa's involvement, determining the rationale behind this involvement, and understanding the lens through which South Africa viewed the crisis in the first place (p. 12). While these objectives are well spelt and are largely achieved in this book, the sequencing of themes often creates a gap between related ideas that are discussed in the book. More could have been achieved if the book had first explored South African perceptions on the crisis as it unfolded, then proceed to discuss how these perceptions informed the nature of the country's involvement in Congo as the crisis evolved. This notwithstanding, the book effectively and convincingly delineates the internal, political and geopolitical imperatives that filliped South Africa to intervene in the manner it did in the Congo.

The book is divided into four parts, each focussing on a specific theme relating to the Congo Crisis and South Africa's involvement. Barring the last one, each part consists of at least two chapters which help to develop themes discussed therein. Part 1 of this book consists of two chapters which provide the introduction, background and context of the Congo Crisis. They set the stage for a discussion of South Africa's entrance in the Congo in Part 2. The first chapter of the book gives an introductory note which spells out the focus of the manuscript, neatly locating it within existing literature on the international and continental dimensions of the Congo Crisis. Noting that although intracontinental intervention was probably the most consequential, Passemiers notes that African involvement in the Congo Crisis has been relegated to the academic fringes by scholarship, itself an irregularity the book seeks to rectify.

The second chapter offers a contextual background to the political turbulence that characterised the First Republic in the Congo between 1960 and 1965. It traces the historical processes that led to the granting of independence to Congo by Belgium, before expertly delineating the political developments that took place in the period following the granting of independence. The rise of Kasavubu and Lumumba as the first President

and Prime Minister respectively is explained, and the circumstances leading political instability – particularly the mutiny by soldiers and the secession declarations by Moïse Tshombe's Katanga – almost immediately after independence are unpacked. A further secession attempt by South Kasai, under the leadership of Albert Kalonji, escalated the turbulence, ultimately leading to the Congo having four different governments at the same time. Political developments leading to the fall-out between Kasavubu and Lumumba and subsequent execution of the latter and his allies are narrated with admirable clarity. In outlining these events, the author makes a convincing exposition of the attitudes, position and actions of various international players, namely Belgium, the United Nations, the USA, the USSR and, more importantly, influential African countries that had already gained independence such as Ghana, Guinea, Morocco, Tunisia, among others. Passemiers divides African countries into three categories – radicals, moderates and conservatives – and convincingly explains how this categorisation affected the position taken by these countries as they intervened in the Congo (p. 7).

Chapter two thrashes out the nexus between local political dynamics and the international dimension during the two rebellions (the Kwilu and Eastern Rebellions) that took place in 1963. Moreover, it discusses the developments that led to Tshombe assuming the premiership and how his decision to seek assistance from Belgium and America further divided Africa along the aforementioned ideological fault-lines (p. 34). The chapter ends with an outline of the power struggle between Kasavubu and Tshombe from which neither came out victorious as Mobutu staged a *coup de tat* in which he declared himself head of state and banned party politics for five years. By briefly but effectively outlining the Congolese *La Pagaille*, Part 1 of the book amply prepares the reader for a discussion of South Africa's involvement in the crisis.

Part II of this book explores the nature of South African involvement in the Congo Crisis. It examines the many ways in which South Africa became entangled in the Congo, tracing it from the period leading up to Congolese independence and at each stage throughout the tumultuous first five years of independence. It consists of chapters three, four and five, which are chronologically arranged to cover the years 1960 to 1965. Chapter three begins with a discussion of the immediate pre-independence period in the Congo and explains the economic reasons behind South Africa's willingness to maintain diplomatic ties with newly independent Congo, despite consistent criticism of apartheid policies by leading Congolese political figures in the run-up and immediately after independence. The ensuing frosty relationship thus pushed South Africa to entertain and render unofficial support to Tshombe and Kalonji who fronted secessionist aspirations for Katanga and South Kasai,

respectively (p. 62). This chapter demonstrates that Pretoria “continued to foster its economic ties with Katanga right until the end of the secession” (p. 65) and also sent equipment to Katanga that it knew would be used for military purposes (p. 66). Perhaps more importantly, South Africa was willing to send mercenaries to Katanga despite publicly distancing itself from such developments. As Passemiers suggests, these developments set a stage for hostility between the Central Congolese government and South Africa, especially after Tshombe’s government in Katanga was dismantled in 1963.

Chapter four discusses the role of South Africa in Congo between 1963 and 1964, a period that was characterised by new Congolese Prime Minister, Cyrille Adoula’s efforts to forge an alliance that would assist yet to be independent countries in Southern Africa to attain independence. Adoula aimed at forging alliances with liberation movements in Southern African countries such as Angola, Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Namibia to provide technical and logistical support in their quest for independence. It is within this context that the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) of South Africa maintained contact with the Congolese government, further marginalising the apartheid regime. Passemiers ends this chapter with a brief but illuminating discussion of the circumstances that led to the collapse of the alliance by 1964. This chapter builds on the previous one by showing how, after supporting Tshombe and Kalonji’s short-lived secession from Congo, the South African government was pilloried continuously by the central Congolese administration which, instead used its nationalist persuasions to forge alliances with liberation movements in the region.

The last in Part II, chapter five explores the nature of South Africa’s involvement in the Congo between 1964 and 1965, a period when Tshombe transformed himself from a secessionist leader to Prime Minister of the Central Government in Congo and now fronting nationalist sentiment in the country. This chapter locates South African involvement within this context, suggesting that Tshombe’s links with South Africa during the Katangese secession could have played a role in his decision to enlist the services of white “mercenaries” from South Africa and Rhodesia to quell dissent from within Congo. This move, as Passemiers convincingly demonstrates, further divided African countries with some viewing Tshombe as betraying the anti-colonial project by working closely with apartheid South Africa and the racist minority regime in Rhodesia. Thus, the chapter gives compelling evidence – hewn mainly from primary sources – that Tshombe’s premiership of the Congo, though brief, provided a window of opportunity for the South African government to reconnect with the Congolese government, before Mobutu’s coup in 1965.

The major infelicity with chapter five, and indeed Part II of this book is while the discussion of the internal developments in the Congo is laudable, very little is said to explain the why South Africa was eager, first to support Katangese secession and, second, to support Tshombe as Prime Minister. While these issues form the bedrock of the next section of the book, the reader is left with some unanswered questions in this section of the book. Moreover, very little is said to explain why Tshombe seemed to have had an affinity for apartheid South Africa in his political activities during the five years under review. This notwithstanding, Part II of this book is quite informative, and makes a solid exposition of the nature, form and extent of South African involvement in Congo during the first half-decade of independence in Congo, and the Congolese internal dynamics that facilitated it.

Part III of this book delineates and untangles the internal, regional and international interests and imperatives that shaped South Africa's involvement in the Congo. It consists of two chapters, both of which discuss South African motives and perceptions as it handled the Congo during the five years. Chapter six first discusses South Africa's motives in supporting Tshombe's secession project in Katanga, noting the regional geopolitical dynamic in which the rest of Southern Africa was undergoing unrest as the liberation movements pushed for independence. Thus, Tshombe's increasingly pro-West stance in the Katanga would create a buffer zone against the anti-segregation sentiment that was growing in the region. (p. 143). Passemiers also illustrates how the central government condemned South Africa in Congo not only during the time of the Katangese secession but also when Congo attempted to create an alliance for liberation movements. Ultimately, Passemiers compellingly argues that the South African government's involvement in the Congo was driven by an enduring motive to insulate itself from anti-apartheid forces locally and internationally.

Chapter seven examines the perceptions of various political actors and sectors of South Africa to developments in the Congo. At this stage, the book pays more attention to Lumumba and Tshombe and the divided opinions and perceptions they generated in South Africa, and the factors that shaped them. The author is quick to explain how these two individuals became the rallying point for mutually competing groups in South Africa. In fact, as Passemiers views it, the Congolese Crisis became a reference point for black South Africans and anti-apartheid forces who warned the government that events in the Congo could be replicated in South Africa (p. 195). Thus, the Congo Crisis developed to become a battleground for competing political forces in South Africa, and this, in turn, influenced the nature and form of the country's involvement in Congo. This section of the book eruditely articulates the rationale, motives and perceptions that influenced South Africa's

involvement in Congo, expertly unpacking the local and international factors that influenced South Africa. However, one gets the sense that some of the issues need to have been discussed in the previous part of the book. While the thematic structure of the book is sensible, some of the questions raised in Part II could have been best answered within that section of the book.

Consisting of only one chapter, Part III of this book provides the conclusions and reflections on the internal and external dimension of the Congo Crisis, always locating South Africa within each scene. It ties down all the major arguments made in the book and reinforces them succinctly and convincingly. Using a battery of primary sources and actively engaging secondary literature, the author demonstrates that South Africa and, indeed, the rest of Africa played perhaps a more influential role than the often touted role of Cold War politics among the major world superpowers. In this regard, the book makes a welcome and refreshing contribution to knowledge on the Congo Crisis, and it is bound to sit comfortably among the most influential works that have been written on the local, regional and international geopolitical dimensions of the crisis in Congo during the First Republic.