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BOOK REVIEW

Frank Gerits. *The Ideological Scramble for Africa: How the Pursuit of Anticolonial Modernity Shaped a Postcolonial Order 1945-1966*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023. 318 pp. ISBN 978-1-5017-6792-0.

Offering an Africa-centered perspective, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa* challenges the prevailing scholarly view that the Cold War shaped the postcolonial order. Frank Gerits argues instead that in the two decades following World War 2 (1945-1966), the competition between capitalists and communists was only one of multiple ideological struggles. More significant was the battle between North and South, that is, the struggle between imperialists, who championed European cultural norms, and liberationists, who respected African cultural values.

During this period, both capitalist and communist elites claimed that African minds, hearts, and souls were the cause of underdevelopment. They attempted to implement policies that destroyed important aspects of African cultures, arguing that dire measures were necessary for successful modernisation. Liberationists, in contrast, rejected postcolonial neo-imperialism as fundamentally racist. They competed with the United States, Europe, and the Soviet Union for African hearts and minds, resisting the neocolonial order that Ghanaian liberationist Kwame Nkrumah described as being in office, but not in power.

Gerits argues that Eastern and Western scholars have overlooked the ways in which Africans' resistance to foreign models and their postcolonial visions of nation-building and race altered imperial and Cold War structures.

Successful African resistance meant that external actors were unable to export their models wholesale. Nor have scholars paid adequate attention to the ways in which alternative African models influenced other parts of the decolonising world.

Basing his claims on evidence gleaned from 46 archives and 10 university collections in Africa, Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, and the United States, Gerits views the post-1945 world through a liberationist lens. He argues that liberationist agendas shaped international diplomacy by limiting the ability of external powers to impose their will. While accepting economic and military aid from both East and West, liberationists rejected many aspects of their ideologies. Pan-African liberationists created federations of African states as bulwarks against empires of exploitation (colonialism), liberty (capitalism), and equality (communism). Because their models influenced other parts of the global south, Gerits asserts, this focus alters our understanding of the dynamics of the postcolonial world. A corrected view of the past is essential if we are to understand the crises in the world today, many of which have origins in the wrongs committed during the colonial era.

Featuring case studies from West, Central, Southern, and East Africa, Gerits offers evidence of continent-wide patterns of African cultural destruction by imperialists and African counter-attempts to implement alternatives that championed Africa-centered routes to modernity. He shows how African-led movements in each of these geographical areas adhered to nonalignment, refusing to choose between East and West, and shifted the focus to the struggle between North and South. This struggle remains the most salient one today.

According to Gerits, the "scramble for African hearts and minds" went through several phases. The Western psychological modernisation project, prominent in the immediate aftermath of the war, was deemed a failure by the 1950s. Western elites then turned their attention to socioeconomic modernisation through technological interventions. However, these projects dramatically elevated the cost of colonial rule. Decolonisation according to neocolonial models pushed many of the costs initially absorbed by Western powers onto the newly independent states.

The majority of African colonies achieved political independence in the 1960s. While most new states complied with the neocolonial agendas of the capitalists, some embraced liberationist development models, while a handful attempted to implement communist alternatives. Adhering to the notion that "if you are not with us, you are against us," capitalists attempted to undermine countries that had chosen the liberationist path. As a result, by the 1970s, many of those that had chosen that route were disillusioned by its

failed promises. They became more vulnerable to Cold War encroachments. During the 1970s and '80s, the struggle between capitalist and communist models dominated international diplomacy, and countries in the global south increasingly chose one or the other, accepting the "package deals" that liberationists of the 1950s and '60s had rejected.

Gerits concludes that our ability to understand and address the world's current problems, including the impact of climate change, the unequal distribution of wealth, deadly pandemics, instability caused by human migration, and the growing suppression of democracy and human rights, we must understand their origins and evolution. We need to know "how liberation shaped the North and how different iterations of liberation structured the South. [Investigating these issues] should therefore be at the heart of our study of international relations past and present" (187).

In conclusion, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa* is a thoroughly researched volume that makes an important contribution to our understanding of international history during the post-World War 2 period. It is highly recommended for college and university libraries, scholars, and students.