

Sovereignty and Struggle: Africa and Africans in the Era of the Cold War, 1945-1994. Jonathan T. Reynolds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. ISBN: 9780199915125

This small volume is yet another contribution to Oxford University Press's "African World Histories" series. It joins other texts—*Transatlantic Africa, 1440-1888*; *Cosmopolitan Africa, 1700-1875*; *Colonial Africa, 1884-1994*; and *Africanizing Democracies, 1980-present*—which collectively constitute an alternative approach to textbook publishing, edited and curated by Trevor Getz. Reynolds, who is the co-author of the widely used *Africa in World History* survey text, is perhaps the most obvious choice to contribute to this series. In *Sovereignty and Struggle*, Reynolds uses the conventional narratives of political economic change, which have long defined historical scholarship and textbook writing on this period, as a sort of springboard to explore a number of critical questions about the potentials and limitations of sovereignty for Africans in the context of global conflict and geopolitics.

The first several chapters of the text lay out more familiar narratives of political and economic development. Chapter One situates the various pathways to decolonization within the politics of violence and transnational socioeconomic and cultural change generated by World War II. Chapter Two highlights the promises and challenges of postcolonial development in light of global structures of economic inequality and neocolonialism. Chapter Three details the ways in which Cold War conflicts created space for Africans to explore and assert alternative structures of political economy. However, as Reynolds argues, Cold War geopolitics also provided a new structure through which Western powers sought to assert their control over newly independent African states.

While these narratives are well trod in Africanist historiography and textbook writing, in their organization, these chapters provide helpful pedagogical tools. In detailing the ways in which "Africans went about getting and using sovereignty in the years following 1945" (xviii), Reynolds seeks to balance the political and the personal, the success and the failures, the possibilities and the limitations of this era of profound global change. In doing so, he places contemporary narratives about African decline (or Afro-pessimism) in perspective, creating possibilities for engaging students in critiquing popular images of Africa. However, these frameworks also critique popular assumptions about the meaning of "sovereignty", situating African experiences within global structures of violence, inequality, and decolonization.

The last two chapters provide alternative narratives of freedom—the freedom of cultural expression through music, and the freedom of movement through modern transport technology. These chapters highlight the cosmopolitan nature of African experience. Africans, Reynolds argues, participate in a 20th century modernity that is both aspirational and ambivalent, local and global.

By using the language of "freedom" (vs. "sovereignty") in these last two chapters, Reynolds suggests a tension that exists throughout the text but which remains undefined. The earliest nationalist leaders during and after the Second World War articulated their aspirations through the language of a freedom defined by "self-government" and "anti-colonialism". The years after political independence, however, highlighted the limits of self-government. Sovereignty was far from guaranteed, and postcolonial leaders were left questioning what independence and freedom

really meant for themselves and their people. This text provides helpful material with which to explore these issues—arguably the central issues facing Western and non-Western peoples in the 20th century. Coupled with the *Colonialism in Africa* text, *Sovereignty and Struggle* could serve as a textbook for introductory survey courses in the history of colonial and postcolonial Africa. Placed in conversation with other case studies, this text could also serve as a textbook for World History courses, bringing Africans into conversations about global processes.

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