

**Parrot, R. J. *Dream the Size of Freedom: How African Liberation Mobilized New Left Internationalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2025. 478 pp.**

In *Dream the size of freedom: How African liberation mobilized new left internationalism*, R. Joseph Parrot examines how the struggles in Lusophone Africa against Portuguese imperialism engaged a new generation of activists in the United States in solidarity with the Global South. These New Left activists used nationwide protests and a boycott of Gulf Oil, an American corporation with major investments in Lusophone Africa, to petition the government to change their policy. Parrot studies the diplomatic correspondence between the US and Portugal to assess their reactions to the activities of the NGOs. The Portuguese used access to the Azores airbase and anti-communist appeals to win over the Executive branch throughout much of the Cold War. After the Carnation Revolution, when the MPLA emerged victorious in Angola, American NGOs convinced their Congressional allies to stop the Ford administration from intervening. This created a backlash where a New Right emerged driven by a renewed effort to confront Soviet-backed governments. As Parrot argues, the last fifteen years of the Cold War were dominated by the debate over intervention in the Global South between the New Left and New Right.

What seems to be engaging about his approach is that Parrot explores the transnational history connecting the African continent and the United States during the period of decolonisation beyond just the Anti-Apartheid Movement. Many previous histories explored this field through a lens of state actors whereas Parrot's approach effectively examines the actions of NGOs and their effects on state actors. Indeed, Parrot demonstrates how the struggle for Lusophone African nationalism bridged the period from Sharpeville in 1960 until Soweto in

1976 spurred on a second generation of protests around apartheid. Also, grassroots activism around the African Liberation Day protests, the Gulf Oil boycott, as well as the Clark amendment laid the groundwork for strategies and techniques that activists used to even greater effect in the 1980s to force Reagan's hand on sanctions. For example, Massie's work, *Loosing the bonds* (1997) while an impressive history of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, it fails to explore the full nexus of NGOs involved. NGOs like MACSA, SAC, ALSC, CCLAMG, and many others that were involved in the struggle for Southern Africa that included both Lusophone Africa as well as the struggle in Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia, are unmentioned in Massie and prominent in Parrot.<sup>1</sup>

Parrot also explores the complex dynamics of the multiracial New Left Internationalists that many scholars have explored from a solely African American context. For example, in *Race for sanctions: African Americans against apartheid*, Francis Njubi Nesbitt concentrates almost entirely on the Anti-Apartheid Movement and African American NGOs like TransAfrica (Nesbitt, 2004). While an African American NGO like TransAfrica was incredibly important, Nesbitt fails to recognise other NGOs who also contributed to getting sanctions passed over Reagan's veto. A much more nuanced examination of African American participation in US foreign policy can be found in Brenda Gayle Plummer's works *Rising wind* (1996) and *In search of power* (2013), which examine the period 1935-1974, looking at the variety of concerns of African American activists across the political/ideological spectrum while acknowledging the contributions of other multiracial NGOs to the process. To me it seems that Parrot combines the best aspects of the analysis of Borstelmann (2001) with the methodology of scholars like Iriye (2002), as well as Keck and Sikkink (1998). Borstelmann examined how domestic race relations affected US foreign policy and how events in the Third World affected domestic race relations, but NGOs and their contributions, outside of those concerned with domestic race relations, were largely ignored. It is obvious Parrot drew inspiration from Iriye as well as Keck and Sikkink, as those scholars are the foremost authorities on the emergence of NGOs, as well as how networks of activists could interact with and influence international politics.

While I agree with Parrot that George Houser and the ACOA were slower to recognise the primacy of the MPLA in Angola over the FNLA-GRAE, prior to the late 1960s, which frustrated younger activists of the New Left, I disagree about

<sup>1</sup> MACSA is Madison Area Committee on Southern Africa; an important regional organisation that published a widely read newsletter, MACSA News. SAC is Southern Africa Committee out of New York City; they published the Southern Africa magazine, a central organ of the movement. ALSC is African Liberation Support Committee; they started the African Liberation Day protests. CCLAMG, Chicago Committee for the Liberation of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, was an important regional organisation that worked with ACOA and others in the movement.

the motivations behind that decision. Parrot argues it stems from the fact that the FNLA was anti-communist and that fit ACOA's stance in the early Cold War. However, this seems to overlook some factors. If anti-communism was the motivating factor behind Houser's decision, then why did ACOA immediately embrace the other Soviet-backed, Tri-Continental CONCP parties in Guinea-Bissau/Cabo Verde (PAIGC) and in Mozambique (FRELIMO). My forthcoming chapter demonstrates that ACOA was an early supporter of Lusophone African nationalism, within a nexus of NGOs that would only expand by the mid-1960s.<sup>2</sup> For example, Houser first met Cabral at the Second All African Peoples Conference in Tunis in 1960 and then kept up a correspondence with the PAIGC at their HQ in Conakry, Guinea, where ACOA pledged their support in solidarity with their cause. As Parrot acknowledges, Houser worked with Eduardo Mondlane for over a decade in the US before he became the leader of FRELIMO, and ACOA supported FRELIMO's cause from the start. From my reading of the sources and interviews with several of the participants, I think Houser's hesitancy boiled down to loyalty, perhaps misplaced, to the first Angolan liberation leader he had met (he met Holden Roberto in 1954), as well as a decision by Houser as Executive Secretary of ACOA to not take sides in a struggle where no one faction was truly in control. All three of the Angolan movements (FNLA-GRAE, MPLA, and UNITA) split into factions at several points during the struggle; how could ACOA risk backing the wrong side and potentially damaging their relationship with the eventual victor? The compromise of recognising MPLA primacy while keeping contact with FNLA and UNITA was a pragmatic effort to maintain relationships long established until a winner emerged. By the early 1970s, it became crystal clear that the New Left activists were right to back the MPLA over FNLA and UNITA as covert aid by apartheid South Africa to FNLA and UNITA became known; but in the late 1960s that was not so obvious.

Overall, *Dream the size of freedom* is scholarship that participants at the grassroots, such as those who contributed to the oral history of the movement *No easy victories: African liberation and American activists over a half century, 1950-2000*, would appreciate as a fair assessment of their contributions (Minter et al., 2008). It represents a range of voices and sectors of the movement without privileging any particular person or organisation. For those interested in the role of NGOs in US policy debates this is a worthy contribution. It is also a well-researched analysis of the Africa policies of the US government and the debate of that policy

<sup>2</sup> Peterson, Zachary (forthcoming), "Non-governmental organizations support for Amílcar Cabral and the PAIGC in the United States". In Victor Barros and Aurora Almada e Santos (Eds.), *Amílcar Cabral and the PAIGC's binational struggle for the independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde*. Routledge.

between the Congress and the President. And, for those interested in the trans-national origins of the domestic struggle between the New Left and the New Right, this is also a worthwhile contribution.

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