

BOOK REVIEW

Ryan Shaffer, ed. *African Intelligence Services: Early Postcolonial and Contemporary Challenges*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021. 294 pp. \$121.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1538150825.

African Intelligence Services: Early Postcolonial and Contemporary Challenges, edited by historian Ryan Shaffer, is an important contribution to the scholarly literature on the making of early postcolonial African states. In contrast to the literature on intelligence services in the West, there is little peer-reviewed literature (certainly little written in English) on the entangled relationships of intelligence services with the diverse political, social, cultural, and other complex realities that have shaped them. Shaffer attempts to shift that needle, and his book can be recommended as essential reading for those wanting a broad introduction to the evolution of the power dynamics surrounding African intelligence services.

The book consists of eleven chapters, each serving as a case study of an African intelligence service (or cluster of intelligence services) created out of the struggles, compromises, or contestations of the late colonial era. The authors have approached their subject matter with rigor, drawing on primary sources such as archival records of declassified intelligence documents, memoirs of intelligence officers, interviews, and official documents.

The first chapter, written by Shaffer, provides an analysis of Kenya's Special Branch, from colonialism through to the first decade of independence. Readers familiar with British colonial history will recognize how the colonial surveillance system, interwoven with colonial policing (notorious for its violent suppression of anti-colonial resistance) metamorphosed into the intelligence services of the early post-colonial period. Several other chapters in the book trace the emergence of intelligence structures to the history of British colonialism on the African continent: Chapter 4 on the Rhodesian counterinsurgency; Chapter 7 on the Sudanese intelligence services; Chapter 8 on intelligence in Botswana; Chapter 9 on South Africa's apartheid and post-apartheid intelligence services; and Chapter 10, which assesses intelligence in Nigeria after military rule in the 1990s.

The book also explores the impact of Portuguese, German, and Belgian colonial rule and American influence on intelligence histories in chapters


on the post-colonial intelligence services of Tanganyika and Zanzibar (Chapter 2); Mozambique and Angola (Chapter 3); Rwanda (Chapter 5); and Liberia (Chapter 6). Each story is unique, yet there are common themes, one being the role that colonial intelligence structures played in suppressing the nationalist independence movements.

Another theme running through the book is that while political power may have changed hands with decolonization, the intelligence apparatuses of the new states were often modeled on the structures that had existed under colonial rule. This assimilation, unsurprisingly, resulted in the post-independence African intelligence services being used to suppress dissenting voices rather than supporting the international ambitions of the new states' governments. When political competition in the new states intensified, it was all too easy for the ruling elites to use the intelligence apparatuses as instruments of domestic political surveillance and control and to suppress dissent, rather than as instruments of foreign policy.

Nevertheless, the book also sheds light on how some African states in the early postcolonial period exercised agency in relation to Cold War geopolitical rivalries. Several chapters challenge the narrative of victimhood that often pervades accounts of early African post-colonial state-making. Instead, they depict post-colonial leaders as having a sense of statecraft and an ability to manipulate their relationships with metropolitan actors, using the intelligence services to suit their political ambitions. The chapter on newly independent Mozambique and Angola explores the relationships established through their intelligence services with socialist allies that included the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Cuba. Similarly, the chapter on Tanganyika and Zanzibar explores the nascent relations of these territories with Bonn and Berlin in the context of the inter-German competition of the Cold War.

The book is rich in empirical detail, analytical depth, and conceptual diversity. If there is a drawback, it is that not all of the colonial influences are unpacked in equal detail. For example, the French colonial influence on the emergence of postcolonial intelligence services in francophone Africa is certainly not covered as extensively as the British influence on former British colonies. It is nevertheless a remarkable book. More authors should take inspiration from Shaffer's excellent anthology, which shows that it is possible to write empirically rich and conceptually insightful studies about African intelligence services, debunking the narrative that excessive state secrecy makes this an unattainable goal. The book leaves one with the hope that it is only a matter of time before we see even more such texts on African intelligence services in the scholarly literature.

doi:10.1017/asr.2023.43

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