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The diplomatic history of small to medium-size states during the post- World War Two era is an emerging historiographical topic that complicates the study of the Cold War era and provides an important corrective to the overwhelming focus on how great powers interacted with and on Africa. In the process of forging a strong international identity, the emergence of newly independent African states created the perfect opportunity for a variety of states with limited resources to engage with a new group of countries. Africans could be invited to study or train, foreign advisors could be sent to the continent, or foreign aid and diplomatic support could be provided. Irish diplomats chose mostly the last option. Kevin O’Sullivan’s *Ireland, Africa and the End of Empire* offers a needed, well-researched, and engaging intervention into the relationships between smaller European states and newly independent African countries. In this diplomatic-focused history, O’Sullivan demonstrates the complicated narrative of the Irish relationship with Africa through an examination of the Katanga Crisis, Biafran War, and debates over minority rule in southern Africa. This engagement provided Ireland the space to emerge diplomatically and increase its importance on the international scene. O’Sullivan helps change the focus of diplomatic history during the 1960s and 1970s from one on agendas driven by the Cold War to smaller states with their own plans to shape the African continent.

With the experience of being colonized and having to struggle for independence, Ireland is able to forge strong connections with the developing world. O’Sullivan makes a strong case in highlighting the considerable influence Ireland enjoyed in Africa considering its size and lack of experience in the realm of diplomacy. However, as O’Sullivan demonstrates throughout his work, this special link was a fragile balancing act with the Cold War looming in the background. Irish diplomats needed to consider their complicated relationship with Great Britain, their desire to obtain membership in the European Community, and ties with the Nordic “fire brigade” countries (198).

Additionally, in the process of showing Ireland’s delicate balancing act, O’Sullivan highlights a number of additional complicating factors, including the Irish need for trade with southern Africa, meager resources to devote to the cause, and a public with widely varying interests in Africa. By concentrating their diplomatic efforts on Africa, Ireland proves itself to be a “global citizen” and responsible member of the European Community (198). Shifting their support from political considerations in the immediate post-war era to foreign aid by the

1970s, Ireland evolves from being a devotee of United Nations policies to an active member of the “fire brigade” involved in the Afro-Asian solidarity movement to an important player in African affairs moderated through the European Community.

O’Sullivan is at his strongest when examining specific case studies as illustration of Ireland’s unique relationship with particular areas of Africa. He demonstrates a mastery of these complicated events and is able to provide a new and interesting perspective, especially regarding Ireland’s role in the Katanga Crisis. To my knowledge, Ireland’s role in the Katanga Crisis has been largely unexamined, even though the country played an important role in dealing with the crisis, provided military support, and learned from their engagement, to the extent that it shaped Ireland’s response to future African issues. O’Sullivan also provides insight into how Ireland dealt with the Biafra crisis and demonstrates the dilemma the country faced in balancing its desire to recognize the Biafra government against the need to rescue missionaries and protect future relationships with the Nigerian state. He shows how Ireland’s involvement in Biafra allowed the country to foster an independent foreign policy and increase the public’s concern over Africa. This engagement possessed important consequences, as the public began advocating for a more transparent approach to foreign policy initiatives.

The source material O’Sullivan engages with is impressive. In addition to using traditional newspaper accounts and mining archival sources, he seamlessly incorporates his own interviews with and published memoirs of a variety of Irish diplomats and leaders involved in the events. Another strength of the book is the use of non-governmental organization archival material, as it moves the narrative outside of formal diplomatic channels. By successfully using an impressive quantity of non-state material, O’Sullivan highlights the evolution of early NGOs, complicates our understanding of Ireland’s ties to the continent, and shows the degree of the Irish’s public interest in Africa.

While the book provides an excellent overview of Ireland’s long and varied relationship with the continent, several small issues need mentioning. O’Sullivan makes a strong case about the importance of small states in international diplomacy and shows the struggle of developing and maintaining an independent diplomatic relationship. Yet, he could have elaborated the importance of this case study with regard to the end of the British Empire. Readers remain unsure how Ireland’s diplomacy complicates our understanding of the decolonization process, and the demise of the British Empire requires a more explicit and developed response. A large body of literature exists on this topic, and although O’Sullivan cites this literature in the bibliography, he could have engaged with it to a higher degree in order to provide a more forceful interjection in the historiography. Additionally, African voices would have been beneficial, especially when dealing with the

fascinating example of rescuing Irish missionaries on the ground during the Biafra conflict. Here, we see an important group caught between two opposing forces, which served to complicate the Irish response. The inclusion of such material could easily support the idea that Africans were certainly using their emerging connection with Ireland for their own agendas, just as Ireland needed Africans, and thus were more active participants in this evolving relationship.

The study of Ireland's engagement with Africa that O'Sullivan provides is an important intervention in diplomatic history. While diplomatic historians will benefit the most and appreciate the backdoor diplomatic maneuvering and intrigues, those interested in the Biafra crisis will also be satisfied. Overall, O'Sullivan provides an important contribution to diplomatic, Irish, Cold War, and African history as Ireland sought to carve out its own particular place and forge its own diplomatic relationships. Now, a sequel is needed that looks at Irish responses in a more neoliberal world and how HIV/AIDS responses mobilized the Irish population and elicited new diplomatic and aid-driven responses.

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