an interface with a new world, a "toolbox" that staged certain forms of modernity' (823), following the work of Brian Larkin and others.[3] Yet even as Goerg documents the rapid expansion and diversification of cinema in the 1950s, we are left uncertain as to how this cultural phenomenon shaped and was shaped by the dramatic social, economic, and political changes experienced by West Africans during this period — including the rise of nationalism. Given the broad sweep of this study and the fragmentary evidence available to reconstruct cinema experience, this is perhaps inevitable. More detailed local studies may succeed in illuminating more fully the many meanings of cinema for the millions of West Africans entranced by the movies. For now, *Tropical Dream Palaces* will remain a landmark in historical studies of cinema and the social and cultural worlds of colonial Africa, and future scholars will owe a very large debt to Odile Goerg.

doi:10.1017/S0021853721000426

Congo, the Cold War, and the United Nations

Dag Hammarskjöld, the United Nations, and the Decolonisation of Africa

By Henning Melber. London: Hurst Publishers, 2019. Pp. 184. £30.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9781787380042).

Christopher J. Lee

Lafayette College

Keywords: Democratic Republic of the Congo; decolonization; United Nations; Cold War; international relations

The year of 1961 remains one of Africa's most difficult periods, punctuated by the deaths of Patrice Lumumba in January and Dag Hammarskjöld in September. Both died under shadowy circumstances that have been reinvestigated in the decades since their mutual passing. Both represented specific possibilities about the future of the Congo and the African continent more generally. The myth of Lumumba has continued to grow after his assassination; he has become a symbol of postcolonial pan-Africanism cut short by Cold War rivalries. In contrast, the celebrity of Hammarskjöld has receded, with his presence in public memory divided between a reputation for being a skilled and committed diplomat versus the image of an insensitive bureaucrat who failed to assist Lumumba, even aiding his enemies. Henning Melber sets out to reverse this decline by separating fact from fiction and moral principle from political expediency.

Melber is the former director of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in Uppsala, Sweden. His study is a brisk one, covering Hammarskjöld's life in eight chapters totaling less than 130 pages, excluding notes, bibliography, and index. It is a book well suited for teaching. A key challenge is not only restoring the dimensions and meaning of Hammarskjöld's role as the second Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), but also faithfully capturing the atmosphere of the time. Hammarskjöld ascended to this high-profile position in 1953 at the age of 47. His temperament, consisting of a mix of experience balanced by steadfast moral principle, matched the

[3]See B. Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC, 2008).

spirit of the profound global changes then occurring with empires in retreat and a new generation of postcolonial leaders coming into the foreground. As detailed in Chapter 2, Hammarskjöld's sense of duty originated in childhood and largely came from his father, a law professor who was involved in the negotiations for Norway's independence in 1905 and later served as Sweden's prime minister. A career in civil service appeared fated, and the younger Hammarskjöld subsequently had 'a comet-like career' in the Swedish government (13).

The UN, however, posed an unusual set of challenges. Seeking to surpass the failures of the League of Nations, the UN encountered political complexities from the start, with the issue of decolonization being primary. As discussed in Chapter 3, the UN Charter was ambiguous on this matter. It recognized the principle of self-determination, which obligated UN members to promote the 'well-being' of their colonial subjects, including the promotion of different forms of 'advancement' and acknowledging 'the political aspirations of the people' (19). Yet the UN also declared its own institutional limits with regard to intervening in matters internal to its member states. The upshot is that these guidelines created space for interpretation by member states, liberation movements, and UN officials alike. Hammarskjöld quickly began to implement a personal vision in this capacity. Melber describes him as articulating an ethical foundation for linking diplomatic principles, such as nonintervention, to a more human scale of individual rights and dignity. Hammarskjöld's convictions guided him through a highly ideological Cold War landscape, though their limitations quickly came to the surface. A doctrine of 'strict neutrality' could work under peaceful circumstances of economic assistance, but it faltered under situations of conflict (61).

Hammarskjöld experienced early success during the 1956 Suez Crisis with Gamal Nasser's agreement to the presence of a UN peacekeeping force. The Congo proved far more complicated. The Belgian-supported secession of Katanga resulted in another UN peacekeeping mission, albeit one constrained in its ability to subdue the breakaway province. Feeling betrayed by the UN, Lumumba sought Soviet support to legitimate his political leadership and stabilize the situation, a decision ultimately leading to his murder by Belgian and CIA-supported operatives. The UN force, which had been guarding his residence, failed to protect him. Lumumba's death deepened the crisis, and Hammarskjöld's belief that the Congolese people alone should determine their future appeared increasingly simplistic. Hammarskjöld died on the night of 17–18 September, when his flight crashed en route to Ndola, Northern Rhodesia, in an effort to negotiate an end to the Katanga secession. Though Melber asserts an intention to decenter the Congo, this crisis unavoidably shaped Hammarskjöld's posthumous legacy.

To conclude, Melber's book is a compelling one, based on assiduous research, which avoids slipping into hagiography. While he frequently defends Hammarskjöld from critics, he also underscores his moments of 'wishful thinking' (61). Melber does intervene in specific academic debates — namely, he dismisses Samuel Moyn's argument that human rights discourse did not matter until the 1970s and Mark Mazower's contention that the UN was limited in its effectiveness vis-à-vis decolonization. Indeed, the promotion of the UN as a 'space for counter-narratives' is a principal concern for Melber (26). He ultimately compares Hammarskjöld to Albert Camus — another committed observer who faced a world that denied the luxury of moral contemplation. It is an apt comparison. Camus's failure to achieve political neutrality in Algeria parallels Hammarskjöld's struggles to bring a pragmatic ethical vision to bear on the UN's decision making. Both suffered fates of accidental death, with critics defining their afterlives. Though Hammarskjöld will continue to have detractors, Melber provides a forceful counterargument that explains how Hammarskjöld embodied a short-lived zeitgeist and why his application of an ethical vision to international diplomacy remains pivotal today.

doi:10.1017/S0021853721000372