

Africans and war in Vietnam:

Global protest, liberation politics
& transnational soldiers



9:30am - 4pm (BST)
Weds 26th & Thurs 27th
June 2024

Online and in person at Rothermere American Institute,
1a South Parks Road, University of Oxford.
To register, email: africa.vietnamwar24@gmail.com



Conference aims

This conference seeks to create a new research agenda about Africa's entanglements with wars in Vietnam by convening hitherto siloed scholars of America, Africa and Vietnam. As one of the twentieth century's defining geo-political events, the French and American wars in Vietnam shaped a generation and transformed Cold War statecraft, military struggles, protest movements and everyday political ideas across the world. Despite these global effects, Africans' diverse engagements with the conflict have been written out of academic debates and popular histories, as is true of much "global" history from World War One to the scholarship on "The Sixties".

Africans were not just a footnote in the history of Vietnam's struggles against French rule and American intervention. From the over 180,000 African military combatants in French colonial armies to the continent's iconic post-colonial leaders who attempted to mediate peace in southeast Asia, Africans played a central role in the conflicts in Vietnam that grabbed the world's attention. These wars were not only shaped by Africans, they also shaped political and social change on the continent. They fired the imaginations of protestors, sparking street demonstrations and ideological debates about the meaning of decolonization and liberation and the direction of global political change; shaped the military strategies and thinking of anti-colonial armies from Algeria to South Africa; and inspired right-wing conservative forces – particularly among southern African white minority regimes – to build new global constellations of anti-communist solidarity.



A meeting of the General Algerian Workers' Union (UGTA) in the 1960s, with the banners reading 'Down with American Imperialism' and 'Long live solidarity between the Algerian and Vietnamese peoples'. From the personal archive of Ouardia Belanteur, one of the first Algerian women to study at Soviet universities in the 1960s, who is part of Natalya Benkhaled-Vince's oral history series, *Generation Independence*: <https://generation-independence.com/the-lands-of-my-father.html>

Conference programme

Day 1 - Weds 26 June 2024



Introductions and Welcome (9:45am)

Dan Hodgkinson & Uta Balbier

Panel 1: “The Vietnamese Fight was our Fight”: anti-war protest and Third Worldist solidarities (10:15am-11:45am)

1. “Foreign Fronts? Vietnam and the Move to the Left in Cold War Uganda, 1964-1970,” by **Adrian Browne** (independent scholar) and **Luke Melchiorre** (Universidad de los Andes, Colombia)
2. “Senegal and the Vietnam War: Revisiting the 1960s,” by **Omar Gueye** (Cheikh Anta Diop University, Senegal)
3. “Disentangling Decolonizations in Campus Activism: Africa in America, Vietnam in Africa,” by **Andrew Ivaska** (Concordia University, Canada)

Discussant: Jocelyn Alexander (University of Oxford, UK)

Coffee break (11:15am-12:15pm)

Panel 2: Languages of Liberation: Visions, Ideas and Rhetoric

(12:15-pm-1:45pm)

1. “The Visual Legacies of Vietnam in West African Filmmaking” by **Dan Hodgkinson** (Oxford University, UK)
2. “Vietnam as the Test Case for Pan-African Peace: Kwame Nkrumah’s Peace Mission to Vietnam and the Indivisibility of Anti-Colonial Freedom (1957-1966)” by **Frank Gerits** (Utrecht University, the Netherlands)
3. “Armed Propaganda and People’s War: Vietnam and South Africa in Transnational and Comparative Perspective” by **Thula Simpson***** (University of Pretoria, South Africa).

Discussant: Natalya Benkhaled-Vince (University of Oxford, UK)

Lunch (1:45pm-2:30pm)

Keynote Lecture (2:30pm-4:00pm)

“Art as Weapon: Vietnamese Communist Cultural Diplomacy in the American War” by **Pierre Asselin**

Chair: Uta Balbier (University of Oxford, UK)

*** denotes remote participation.

Picture above: Tanzanian students protest against US involvement in Vietnam, 31 July 1968 in E. Burton, "Frontline Citizens: Liberation Movements, Transnational Solidarity, and the Making of Anti-Imperialist Citizenship in Tanzania," *International Review of Social History*, 69:S32 (2024).

Conference programme

Day 2 - 27 June 2024



Panel 3: War in Vietnam and Its Afterlives: the politics of the intimate and everyday (10:00am-11:30am)

1. “The legacy of war and the promise of love: the cultural impact of Senegalese families of Vietnamese descent” by **Mamadou Fall** (Cheikh Ana Diop University, Senegal)
2. “Everyday Vietnam in post-independent Algeria” by **Natalya Benkhaled-Vince** (Oxford University, UK)
3. “Containing Viet Minh Intelligence Tactics”: Colonial Troops, French Military Anxieties and Sexual Regulation in the First Vietnam War” by **Marie Robin** (Columbia University, USA)

Discussant: Aincree Maame-Fosua Evans (University of Oxford, UK)

Coffee break (11:30am-11:45pm)

Panel 4: Anticolonial Worldmaking and the Vietnam War: Cold War geopolitics and non-aligned diplomacy (11:45pm-1:15pm)

1. “Dead End Diplomacy: Nyerere, Nkrumah, and Asymmetric Sincerity in the Commonwealth Peace Mission to Vietnam” by **Paul Bjerk***** (Texas Tech University, USA)
2. “Global Solidarities: How the Vietnam War Shaped African Anti-Imperialism Worldmaking” by **John Dotse** (University of Toronto, Canada) and **Maxwell Boguepene** (University of British Columbia, Canada)
3. “It is easy to accept...that in war these things often happen:” the failure of rhetoric as a strategy of war in the Ojukwu’s experience of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970” by **E.O. Ojelabi***** (Texas Tech University, USA)

Discussant: Suzanne Enzerink (University of St. Gallen, Switzerland)

Lunch (1:15pm-2pm)

Panel 5: Global Revolutions: Vietnam in African revolutionary imaginaries (2pm-3:30pm)

1. “Many Vietnams in One Africa: People’s War and the Pursuit of African Unity, 1954-1978”, **J.J. Byrne***** (University of British Columbia, Canada)
2. “Fanon and the Vietnamese”, **Chris J. Lee***** (The Africa Institute, UAE)
3. “‘A second Vietnam’: Liberation Struggles in Africa and Mao’s ‘continuous revolution’ (1955-1958),” **Jodie Yuzhou Sun***** (Fudan University, China)

Discussant: Ruth Shoo (University of Oxford, UK)

Closing Remarks (3:30-4pm)

Luke Melchiorre and Natalya Benkhaled-Vince

Picture above: Modibo Keita meets Kennedy in the Whitehouse in 1961 in D. Hodgkinson & L. Melchiorre, "The Vietnam War in Africa" in A. Sedlmair (ed.) *Protest in the Vietnam War Era* (2022).