

TRAINING DIPLOMATS OF POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN STATES



LEVERHULME
TRUST _____



In the past century, decolonisation saw numerous newly independent countries enter international society as sovereign states. The need to rapidly develop foreign services, particularly among African states, stimulated the creation of several new training programmes for multinational cohorts of junior diplomats. At a time when diplomacy itself was changing, through professionalisation and the growth of multilateralism, these programmes represented an important site for the codification and transmission of knowledge and skills. They were also sites to build soft power, to forge international solidarities, and to (re)enact and resist Western liberal norms in diplomatic practice and internationalism.

Our project, based in King's College London and Oxford University and funded by the Leverhulme Trust, has taken a historical and geographical approach to postcolonial diplomatic training to broaden understandings of how spaces and practices of training shaped diplomatic norms, networks and exclusions. We draw on:

1. Over forty interviews with former trainers and trainees
2. Thirty-two archival collections across nine countries, which included curricula, examination papers and correspondence between trainers, directors, and trainees.

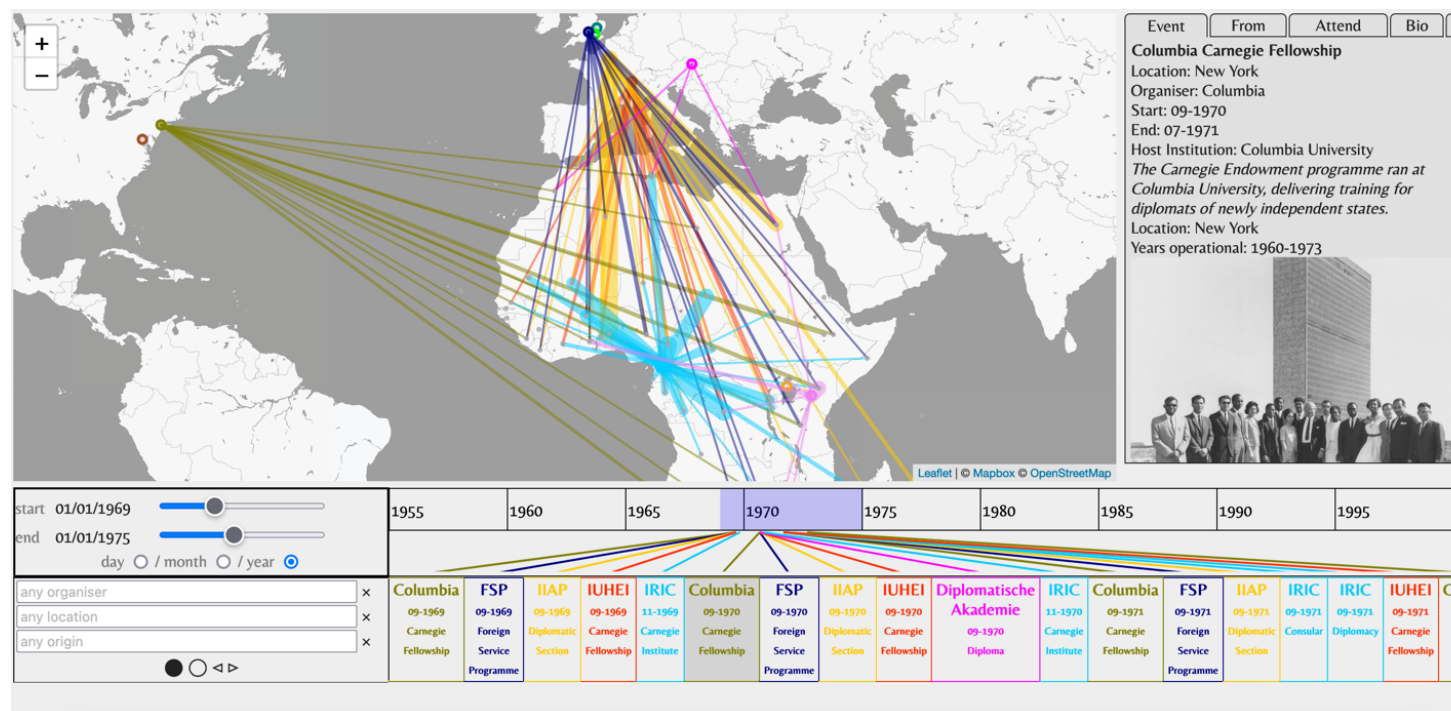
In the crucial period around independent statehood many African states relied on external training provision. New university-based courses, often with strong links to host states and international organisations, arose to fulfil this need. Most of the programmes we have identified kept student lists, which we have digitised and transformed into a web-based map visualisation.

NETWORKS

Networking emerged as a key function of training. Trainees built lasting relationships with one another that would often last throughout their careers. Trainers were aware of this and encouraged the formation of social bonds through excursions and frequent socialisation. For example, courses in Africa were framed by their directors as an opportunity for continental unity:

“I AM SURE THAT THE FRIENDSHIPS FORMED AT MAKERERE WILL NOT BE AN INSIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN MAKING A REALITY OF PAN-AFRICANISM”.

Makerere Principal Yusuf K. Lule, 13th July 1964



The interactive map visualises over 3000 African trainees attending programmes for diplomats of newly independent states 1955-1997 Available to view at: <https://www.diplotraining.org/data-visualiser>

Analysis of the map visualisation reveals that the first dedicated diplomatic training courses for African diplomats after independence took place in the Global North. This enduring postcolonial pattern of core and periphery is further broken down by language and colonial heritage: the diplomats of Francophone states largely trained in Paris and Geneva, whilst those of all other states largely trained in London, Oxford and New York. This pattern points to an uneven process of socialisation within liberal international society.

SPACES

The importance of networking and socialisation meant that trainees were also frequently taken on visits to

international organisations and private sector actors in Europe and North America. In one year, 1963-64, Carnegie fellows in Geneva went on five extended trips, to visit: Brussels and Paris, Switzerland, Poland and Austria, Yugoslavia, and Tunisia. A large part of a report on the Carnegie fellows' excursion to Brussels centred on the lunches, dinners and cocktails, where “fellows could speak at more length” with the directors of various relevant branches of the European organizations based there. During this same year the fellows were, themselves, visited by other African students of diplomacy being trained in Paris.

Such visits were important for the experience of *place* and well as for meeting people. Place mattered to the construction and transmission of diplomatic knowledge, and the qualities of these places - the hospitality of the host city, the offices of international institutions, the conference rooms of multilateral negotiation - to our understanding of the *where* of diplomatic practice as well as the what and how.



Carnegie Fellows visiting a Swiss factory in 1961

We found that diplomatic training courses assumed that there were essential diplomatic skills to be acquired – including Western diplomatic etiquette – which could be learned through role-play, cultural exposure, and simulation. Such programmes were readying trainees to represent their states within a liberal international world order, albeit one where Western states would continue to dominate. However, an important tension emerges: whilst African diplomats sought diplomatic knowledge and socialisation into international society as a source of empowerment, they also began to change the system, partly as a result of putting into practice what they had been taught, and partly in reaction to it.

DEVELOPMENT

The decade of decolonisation in Africa, the 1960s, was also termed the ‘development decade’. An alternative diplomatic narrative focused on countering asymmetry in the global economy grew up around UNCTAD and the G77, and was reflected in early UNITAR training on “development diplomacy”. Training programmes moved to Africa from the early 1970s, where engagement with the economic realities of diplomacy after decolonisation was radically prioritised in the more Africa-centred curricula of the International Relations Institute of Cameroon and Nairobi Diplomatic Training Programme.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

Diplomatic training is a necessarily political enterprise which articulates international and pedagogical relationships. It has been, and remains, a vehicle for soft power and network building. It makes space in which to both (re)enact and resist hegemonic (Western liberal) norms in diplomacy and internationalism.

CONTACT

If you would like to know more, or have something to contribute to this ongoing work, please get in touch by visiting our website and following us on X/Twitter:

<https://www.diplotraining.org> @diplotraining

The website contains short informative blogs on various topics, interactive data visualisations and more.