Cultivating Cold War friendships
Romanians' and Yugoslavia’s engagement with peoples of the global south, 1965-1989

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Abstract
Beginning in the late-1950s, Romania moved away from the Soviet orbit and towards the West. Central to this process was the reformulation of communism along nationalist lines—further elaborated under Nicole Ceaușescu during the 1960s and 1970s. Romania’s promotion of national sovereignty applied not only to countries in the socialist bloc, but also to the Global South as the Romanian state proclaimed its support of national-liberation movements and newly independent nations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Part and parcel of this process was the establishment of diplomatic relations, economic accords, and student, worker, and cultural exchange programs. Through such exchanges Romanians became familiar with peoples from the Global South. As a corollary, socialist media sought to acquaint Romanians with people from these regions by featuring their struggles for national independence and victories over “imperialist barbarity.” In so doing, socialist propagandists worked to forge an imagined community of (ideally socialist) brothers and sisters devoted to peace, freedom, and equality.

This panel explores how the Romanian state and ordinary Romanians engaged with the Global South and its peoples from the mid 1960s through 1989. Specifically, it focuses on student and youth exchange programs between Mozambique, Chile, Cuba, and Romania as well as Romanians’ responses to the war in Vietnam. By analyzing Romania’s relationship with peoples from the Global South, the panel goes beyond the geopolitical and economic dimensions of the Cold War to consider its cultural and everyday manifestations. It also highlights the role played by seemingly peripheral, “second world” countries in global diplomacy and in issues related to development.

Chair / Commentator
Bogdan C. Iacob (New Europe College)

Panelists
Diana Georgescu (University College London)
Iolanda Vasile (University of Coimbra)
Madigan Fichter (Holy Family University)

Papers
Diana Georgescu: A Black Sea summer to remember: Global South youth as symbolic currency in Romania’s Cold War diplomacy
Navodari, Romania’s flagship international youth camp on the Black Sea Coast, welcomed thousands of teens of “all nationalities” annually, from 1965 through 1989. This presentation focuses on state-sponsored youth exchanges during Nicolae Ceaușescu’s rule, exploring the role that youth from “developing” countries in the post-colonial world played in furthering the regime’s cultural diplomacy. Drawing on archival research in Bucharest, Washington, London, and Amsterdam, the presentation examines how the Romanian Pioneer Organization sought to expand and showcase its contacts with leftist organizations in Europe and with select Global South youth organizations in Asia, Latin America, and Africa to strengthen its internationalist credentials and enhance its international standing. These sources will be
juxtaposed against interviews and camp reports by foreign delegations to provide a view from below of these international encounters. Despite being heavily shaped by propagandistic goals, the international youth camp at Navodari was not merely a stage for Ceaușescu’s diplomatic ambitions. The sheer flow of people, cultures and ideologies passing annually through its gates ensured that the camp functioned as a transnational site of encounters, where guests, including Global South youth, could pursue alternative internationalist pedagogies and agendas. By providing an insight into Cold War encounters, this study opens up broader questions about the ways in which socialist countries in the Eastern Bloc positioned themselves in the emerging post-colonial geography of the world.

Iolanda Vasilе: Mozambique and the Socialist Republic of Romania: Soft power and socialist friendship

In 1979 the Ceaușescus undertook their first official friendship visit to Mozambique. This was part of the already famous Africa tours, designed to enhance relations with independent countries on the continent. While scholars have analyzed relations between Sub-Saharan Africa and the Eastern bloc, most investigations focus on economic and military issues. However, personnel exchanges were also an important component of these relationships. The mutual interests between countries such as Romania and Mozambique allowed many African students to be educated in Eastern Europe. Similarly, Romanians traveled to Mozambique during the late 1970s and 1980s for professional purposes. Drawing on official and private photo archives, oral history interviews, and other official documents, this paper focuses on Romanian cadres and professors that ‘chose’ to work in Mozambique, analyzing their experiences in the country. In so doing, it maps relations between socialist Romania and Mozambique, providing a ground-level view of Romanian foreign policy and Mozambique’s first years of independence.

Madigan Fichter: Imagined solidarities: Yugoslavia student activism and revolution in the Global South: 1965-1975

This paper examines the impact of the revolutionary movements of the Global South on Yugoslav student activism in the 1960s and 1970s. Yugoslav youth regularly engaged with topics such as the war in Vietnam and the politics of the Caribbean, Middle East, and Africa sometimes through officially sponsored “friendship clubs” and conferences, and in less official capacities, such as unapproved anti-war demonstrations. Officially approved conferences and meetings provided Yugoslavs with an opportunity to directly interact with representatives of these foreign movements and to make concrete contributions via blood plasma drives and fundraisers. This paper will argue, however, that for the Yugoslav youth of the 1960s and ’70s, the most passionate form of engagement with the Global South can be seen in examples such as Sarajevan students carrying Che Guevara’s portrait during a 1968 demonstration against Yugoslav officials, or from students vandalizing the Belgian Embassy during a march protesting Congolese President Patrice Lumumba’s death in 1961. The Global South’s greatest impact on Yugoslav student activism was, therefore, in providing inspiration and symbolism for their own protest movements, and in providing reasons for students to launch their own anti-war and anti-imperialist protests when official responses seemed insufficient. Unofficial engagement with foreign revolutionary movements was less direct than that provided by official forums, but it allowed Yugoslav students to imagine that their own protest movements were part of a wider movement opposed to authoritarianism and imperialism everywhere.
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