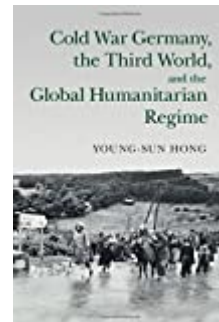


Young-sun Hong. *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 439 pp. \$126.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-09557-1.



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The leader of the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) medical team in the Congo in 1960, Wolf Weitbrecht, argued that "there is no communist or capitalist treatment for malaria; it must be combatted medically according to the most recent advances in medical science." Access to medical care for the people, on the other hand, "depends to be sure on the particular social system, and this choice belongs to the Congolese themselves" (p. 168). However, as Young-sun Hong's study amply demonstrates, things were hardly so simple when it came to the two German states' attempts to provide humanitarian aid in the global South during the early Cold War. She depicts their efforts through the mid-1960s in both Korea, Indochina, Algeria, the Congo, and Tanzania, as well as by means of East German health exhibitions in the Third World, West German developmental aid, and the recruitment of Asian and especially South Korean nurses to work in the Federal Republic's hospital system. Despite the antagonism between their states, for example, East and West German health workers found it sensible to collaborate in the Congo when stationed in the same area. More importantly, the bipolar framework is merely a starting point for Hong's investigations. She writes, "I have chosen to narrate topics that cut across the scalar divisions of the global and the local and the hierarchies

implicit in them" and which therefore are "capable of mediating between the global logic of superpower rivalry and local conflicts, which are implicated in this rivalry, but which cannot be reduced to it" (pp. 2, 3). In this regard Hong is concerned with the decolonization process and the legacies of colonialism. Following other scholars like Matthew Connelly, she agrees that decolonization was one of many important independent global developments in the mid-twentieth century that complicated and regionalized the East-West conflict.[1] Her special focus is the "postwar humanitarian regime" of humanitarian, developmental, and aid programs that helped define the global North's relationship with the South but which was "grounded" in notions of race and civilizational difference (p. 3). Fittingly, she begins her book by referring to William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick's *The Ugly American* (1958), and speculates what would happen if one supplemented the "ugly" Americans and Soviets with equally "ugly" East and West Germans. Would the Sarkhanites, Lederer and Burdick's fictional protagonists in the developing world, actually note significant differences between any of them?

Her first chapter describes the "postwar humanitarian regime," which was initially established by the Western powers through the United Nations (UN) and its orga-

nizations like the World Health Organization (WHO). As with international law in general, international humanitarian law was based on the notion of state sovereignty and therefore intrinsically resistant to addressing the problems created by colonial war, national liberation struggles, and decolonization crises (p. 19). National liberation struggles were defined as domestic affairs outside the scope of such law, although the decolonization process increasingly challenged this idea as revolutionaries appealed to the international community for recognition and assistance. Moreover, since the Western powers linked underdevelopment and disease to the threat of communism, they came to see humanitarian crises in Asia and Africa primarily as security problems. Both developing countries and the Soviet bloc distrusted the WHO, for example, the former because they suspected its experts were agents of neocolonialism and the latter because it was dominated by Western states and their political agendas. However, when the Soviet bloc started to become actively involved in supplying humanitarian and developmental aid to developing countries around 1956, including through the WHO, it was also based on the assumption that these countries would benefit most by allying themselves with the communist camp. In this sense, and also in terms of viewing the Third World as an *Other* in relation to its own vision of modernity, the Soviet bloc's humanitarian efforts were not too different from the West's.

Many of the case studies in Hong's book, including the Koreans, North Vietnam, and the general discussion of West German developmental aid in chapter 7, blur the line between humanitarian aid to the global South and long-term developmental and medical projects, but there is a good reason for this. Humanitarian aid or assistance is normally understood as emergency support provided to populations affected by natural or man-made catastrophes, including armed conflict. Due to the imperatives of the East-West struggle and the long-standing cultural attitudes among Northerners, both communist and non-communist, Hong asserts that it was nonetheless impossible to neatly separate humanitarian from developmental aid in the sense of their dynamics and motivations. The expression *global humanitarian regime* in her title can have a number of meanings. It may refer generally to international standards for human rights and their enforcement, including the rights of groups like refugees. But it also has been used recently by critics, for example policymakers in states like India, who believe that humanitarian aid and the norms for distributing it are yet another way that the rich states of the North (in this

case also acting through UN agencies) try to influence the global South.[2] This last usage is very much in Hong's sense and seems to reflect common practice during the Cold War era. In her own study she describes, for example, how the French successfully denied aid to Algerians thought to be sympathetic to the National Liberation Front (FLN) rebels until the latter managed to gain increasing international recognition. A recent systematic overview of American disaster assistance between 1964 and 1995 concluded that US allies were more than four times more likely to receive aid than non-allies.[3] Humanitarian aid was and is seldom given solely for humanitarian purposes.

Hong's focus on German activities in the global South on a level besides that of traditional political and economic relations is most welcome. In particular, one of the great services of the book is that it illustrates how the Federal Republic of Germany was active globally in the humanitarian sphere long before the era of the Social-Liberal Coalition (1969-82). Hong also demonstrates how humanitarian aid provided by both German states was couched in attitudes of cultural superiority and neocolonialism. East German efforts to bring modern European-style housing to both North Korea and East Africa were criticized in those places for being both too expensive and unsuited for local conditions. The GDR's medical programs in those countries as well as in North Vietnam encountered difficulties because its health workers assumed the superiority of Soviet-bloc medicine and dismissed indigenous practices and traditions. The West German hospital in Pusan, South Korea, in the 1950s suffered from similar attitudes, amplified by the fact that many of its doctors were former Nazis, and its efforts were so flawed that they eventually became a cause of scandal in the Federal Republic. Asians and Africans who traveled to either of the Germanys for medical training or, in the case of Asian nurses recruited by West Germany, work had difficulty acclimating and finding acceptance. Moreover, they frequently found their German education or employment-based experiences unsatisfactory because they were too limited to be of use back home, despite their hosts' assumptions to the contrary. The Asian nurses, for example, were overqualified for the type of work often menial labor which their West German employers considered appropriate.

What also comes through repeatedly in Hong's book is how governments in the South dealt with the failings of German aid. For example, her final chapter focuses on the inter-German competition to provide new housing, hospitals, and other types of aid to Zanzibar

and the Republic of Tanzania starting in 1964. By the end of the decade not only had many of the construction projects gone unrealized, but local authorities also reached the conclusion that Chinese medical workers stationed in the countryside and using traditional methods were far more effective than their East German counterparts with their high tech, hospital-centered system of medicine. Hong writes that East and West German aid workers who demonstrated clear neocolonial attitudes or who created scandals in their host countries sometimes were called to task by their governments, press, or other actors, and clear bonds of solidarity developed between East German aid workers and their hosts in North Korea and elsewhere. Nonetheless, Hong is correct both in warning against romanticizing the East German experience in the developing world as well as in calling attention to the persistence of an attitude of cultural superiority among the German protagonists (p. 320).

However, several caveats are in order. If there was a global humanitarian regime through the mid-1960s, the two Germanys were not major actors in it. Both states were preoccupied with the German question and other European affairs, and early in the Cold War neither was able or willing to devote significant resources to humanitarian and developmental aid. Hong illustrates how East German projects abroad were frequently frustrated due to economic problems at home, and she recognizes that West Germany only started major international aid programs around 1960, largely in response to American pressure. It would be interesting to extend Hong's analytical framework into the 1970s and 1980s. Both German states had become much more significant actors in the developing world by then, and the direct role of the public in providing humanitarian aid to developing countries would reach new heights in the form of West German charitable giving and the latest versions of the GDR's solidarity campaigns.

In one key respect it also is debatable that by the mid-1960s, East German medical and developmental aid programs [in the global South] stripped the Hallstein Doctrine of much of its substance (p. 249). Under the Hallstein Doctrine, West Germany threatened to break diplomatic relations with any state that recognized the GDR. It is true that various West German observers, in and outside of government, viewed these East German activities with great concern. The isolation campaign against the GDR embodied in the Hallstein Doctrine was becoming more and more difficult to manage successfully in the global South. The problem only became worse after the Federal Republic itself became an active donor of in-

ternational aid over the course of the 1960s and therefore more exposed to blackmail on the part of recipient governments. However, the situation proved manageable. In particular, the Bonn government decided that many East German activities in the South that did not involve formal diplomatic relations were tolerable and became increasingly reluctant to invoke the Hallstein Doctrine in general. Ironically, the GDR also now faced increasing demands for loans and other assistance from the developing world in response to the new West German largesse. Most importantly, only in 1969 did Cambodia, Egypt, Iraq, South Yemen, Sudan, and Syria grant East Germany what it most wanted by establishing formal diplomatic relations with it. Although the Hallstein Doctrine was also abandoned that year, other Third World states did not rush to recognize the GDR, and it would take until the mid-1970s until that state had a global diplomatic presence.^[4] The Federal Republic was simply the more desirable international partner.

Hong ends her book with a discussion of the achievements of the transnational turn in German history (p. 318). As someone who works in the fields of both international and German history, I have no problem with approaches that question the centrality of the nation in human history and the related teleological narratives surrounding the nation state. The trouble is that Hong too easily slides from criticizing a nation-centered historical approach to a state-centered historical approach when the organized activities of states are in fact so often central to her own study (p. 318). If a decentering of national sovereignty (which I take to mean a recognition both that states are not the only important global actors or forces and that states themselves are not the unified billiard balls we stereotypically associate with realist theory in political science) is one of the central achievements of transnational analysis, this is hardly a new insight (p. 317). In fact, Hong is so successful in demonstrating the multiple levels of global interaction that her transnational phenomena are often overdetermined. For example, are the global exchanges of medical technology after 1945 (p. 29), or the professional experiences made in Soviet-bloc hospitals in North Vietnam (p. 129), or the idea of development itself (p. 20) best described as transnational or international or multinational? Did East Germans working in North Korea in the 1950s (p. 69), or members of the West German Young Socialists seeking ties with youth in other countries who were also outraged over the Algerian war (p. 142), or South Korean nurses protesting their treatment in the Federal Republic (p. 251), develop a transnation-