The United Nations and Decolonization after World War II

International Conference

New Orleans, Tulane University, June 8-9, 2017

Call for Papers

In current debates about the origins of the United Nations (UN), it is commonly understood that the organization was conceived as an instrument for the defense of the colonial powers’ interests. Guided by colonial paternalism, the UN established a distinction between “non-self-governing territories”, which were entitled solely to self-government, and the “trusteeship system”, which intended to conduct the colonies to independence. While the UN Charter stipulated that the colonial powers had to transmit technical and statistical information in respect to the conditions in the non-self-governing territories, it only established mechanisms for international supervision concerning the territories placed under the trusteeship system.

Even though it is accepted that the UN Charter represented a concession to the colonial powers, the consequences of its request stated in Chapters XI-XIII to prepare the non-self-governing territories for self-government and the trust territories to independence were far-reaching. Through an empirical evolution, the demand for technical and statistical information and the supervision of the trusteeship system legitimized the aspirations of the colonized peoples. With the development by state members of evolutive interpretations of the Charter took place a progressive institutionalization of the idea of self-determination in which other international actors were also involved. Gradually, the UN helped to endorse an association between the idea of self-determination and the right of the colonized peoples to choose their own destiny.

The main colonial powers – United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, South Africa and the United States – were unable to escape the UN scrutiny. But the efforts of the UN were far from being straightforward, since not all colonial powers conceded to its resolutions. The resistance compelled the organization to develop new procedures and to enlarge its structure, establishing organs devoted exclusively to the study of the circumstances in the colonial territories.

Recent work exploring this dynamic has increased our understanding of both the achievements and the limits of the UN support for the independence of colonized territories. In an effort to expand this work and promote dialogue between scholars exploring the subject, we invite participants to a conference organized around the topic of the UN involvement in struggles for independence after World War II.

The conference will take place in New Orleans, at Tulane University, on June 8-9, and we welcome proposals for 20-minutes presentations regarding these and other topics:

- The UN contributions for the advancement of the idea of self-determination;

- The commitment of the Afro-Asian majority in shaping the UN debates regarding colonialism;
- The colonial powers reactions vis-à-vis of the UN involvement in the colonial questions;

- The influence of the Cold War in the UN activities towards the colonies;

- The impact in the UN of decisions concerning colonialism taken in other forums such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO);

- The colonial issues addressed by the UN referring to non-self-governing territories and the trusteeship system;

- The performance of the UN organs and the international civil service in colonial questions.

Abstracts (200 words) and short CV (250 words) should be submitted to: unanddecolonization@gmail.com

The deadline for application is April 15, 2017.

The notification of acceptance will be communicated on April 30, 2017.

The organizers foresee the publication of the communications.

Organizers:

Aurora Almada e Santos (Tulane University)

Jessica Pearson-Patel (Macalester College)

Nicole Eggers (Loyola University)

Scientific Committee:

Elisabeth McMahon (Tulane University)

Laura Rosanne Adderley (Tulane University)