

Multiple Futures through Time

Working Group B

5 December 2013

The Future We Want!

The Somalia We Want, Annalisa Urbano

Annalisa Urbano's presentation examines the development and contestations of a pro-Italian colonialism group in Somalia.

The Sierra Leone We Want, Christine Whyte

In *The Sierra Leone We Want*, Christine Whyte examined the contested nature of decolonization in Sierra Leone – how did Sierra Leoneans frame their claims for a different vision of the future of Sierra Leone?

The Kenya We Want, Dieter Neubert

This presentation traces the evolution of the idea of 'The Kenya We Want' from a colonial-dominated development plan to ideas about political re-structuring.

Dreams of a post-colonial future: The three presentations were related by a common thread of the variety of dreams of independence. In Kenya, the mainstream elite imagined a future where economic development and independence would solve emerging political problems. In Sierra Leone, rural labourers and ex-slaves protested against the collusion of the colonial powers with corrupt chiefs in the handover of power. In Somalia, a vision of Italian Somalia was promoted to counter notions of progressive British rule. This topic is an emerging theme in contemporary discussions, where previously repressed heroes and dissenting perspectives are being re-integrated into political discourse.

An open moment: The period around independence, or transfer of power is particularly key to examining visions of the future. At these junctures, more possibilities and opportunities were open and we have the chance to examine a multiplicity of political visions. Transnational ideas emerged of federated states in West Africa, while in Kenya independence brought discussions over the need for more federalism and the pressing problem of land. In Somalia, the presence of the United Nations as an actor in the process of the transfer of power provided a powerful international target for lobbying groups. The Kenyan example also provided a window to look how visions of the future developed over time, through the evolving development plans. In particular the focus shifted from economic development in 1962 to political change in the 1990s.

Translating the nation-state?: While this was a period where opportunities were opened, the colonial state held a pervasive influence over contemporary schemes and visions. In Kenya, discussions were dominated by representatives of the state, in Somalia economic interests in plantations led to Italian investment in the pro-Italia front, while in Sierra Leone, colonial investigation into protests shaped post-colonial responses. In each of our examples, despite the diversity of visions of the future, the European nation-state ended up as the key model for the post-colonial political organization. But the question arises – how was this concept of the homogenous and united nation-state translated in the African context? There were attempts to follow this model – for example, the attempted adoption of KiSwahili as a national language in Kenya – but for the most part the artificially created boundaries of the colonies failed to fit into the idealized model of one language, one people, one nation.