Introduction

> Far from the ideas for which Ghana stood being discredited, they have been proved for all to see as correct and as charting the inevitable path which Africa must.
>
> Kwame Nkrumah, *Dark Days in Ghana*, 159

Before daybreak on March 1966, in a lush small town called Dunkwa-on-Offin, women traders of the Ghana National Trading Corporation, the United African Company, and the Ghana Fishing Corporation adorned their bodies with white clay and calico. Calico represented "victory."[1] Dunkwa-on-Offin sits halfway between Kumasi – the capital city of the formerly powerful Asante Kingdom to its north – and Cape Coast – the former colonial capital of the British Gold Coast.[2] The women were celebrating the events from the previous month. On February 24, Ghana's leader Kwame Nkrumah was en route to Hanoi, Vietnam, to visit Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh via China when the National Liberation Council (NLC) instigated a military coup d'état.[3] Nkrumah's government collapsed. His statues and edifices followed suit. The Chinese embassy was ransacked; some of its personnel were attacked. Violence continued on the streets of Ghana, "anyone who resisted them (NLC) was brutally shot. . .. Even young children were hit with rifle butts."[4] The NLC burned any literature on socialism, communism, or Nkrumah. The

[1] Janet Hess and Nii O. Quarcoopome, "Spectacular Nation: Nkrumahist Art and Resistance Iconography in the Ghanaian Independence Era: [With Commentary]," *African Arts*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 17.

[2] The town sat at the heart of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

[3] Kwame Nkrumah, *Dark Days in Ghana* (London: Panaf, 1968), 9.

[4] Ibid., 25–26.

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women were not alone in celebrating the downfall of Nkrumah's government. Pass-book traders, wide-eyed and impressionable high school students, and Christian and Muslim congregationalists flanked them.[5] Unlike Nkrumah's return to Colonial Ghana from the United Kingdom (UK) in January 1957, a few months before independence (March 6), where he was greeted by his supporters dressed in calico and dancing and singing to drums,[6] the women traders in Dunkwa-on-Offin sang in support of the NLC.[7]

The Dunkwa-on-Offin crowd moved to the public cemetery and conducted a "mock burial" to signify the end of the demonstration and the death of Ghana's socialist and Cold War projects. As the sun bore down on their sweaty and electrified bodies, the participants buried a coffin containing the "corpse of the 'Dead Nkrumah.'"[8] Soon thereafter, the attendees at Dunkwa-on-Offin and their sympathizers passed a resolution condemning the Ghanaian socialist and socialist state capitalist projects and visions. The resolution praised the NLC for saving Ghana "from the hypocritical capitalist Kwame Nkrumah and his clique." Amongst other complaints, the writers maintained that Nkrumah amassed a handsome fortune while "shouting socialism at the top of every house in Africa."[9] S. K. Newlove-Mensah, the founder and principal of Universal Technical College: Institute of Engineering Science and Technology at Dunkwa-on-Offin, wrote to Lieutenant General Joseph Arthur Ankrah, the chairman of the NLC, that he was "grateful to God and happy to note that the 'unsocial socialist' regime of Kwame Nkrumah is no more."[10]

Fifty years later, in a very different political environment, and across the world, Nkrumah's political leanings were characterized and remembered strikingly differently. In late October 2016, I attended Donald

[5] Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD)-Cape Coast, RG 1/13/18, March 6, 1966, letter from the Principal Universal Technical College of Dunkwa to the Administrative Officer/District Education Officer (J. W. K. Essien).

[6] Hess and Quarcoopome, "Spectacular Nation," 17.

[7] PRAAD-Cape Coast, RG 1/13/18, Nana Yaw Pong II (Abuakwahene at the Denkyira Traditional Area).

[8] PRAAD-Cape Coast, RG 1/13/18, March 6, 1966, letter from the Principal Universal Technical College of Dunkwa to the Administrative Officer/District Education Officer (J. W. K. Essien).

[9] PRAAD-Cape Coast, RG 1/13/18, March 5, 1966, "Resolution Passed by Workers, Students, Market Women and Other Organizations in Dunkwa in Support of the National Liberation Council."

[10] PRAAD-Cape Coast, RG 1/13/18, March 7, 1966, S. K. Newlove-Mensah to the Chairman of the National Liberation Council.

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J. Trump's presidential rally in Golden, Colorado, in the United States (US), as an ethnographic observer. As I was departing, an old white man, wearing a National Rifle Association shirt, approached me and asked if I was from Africa. I nodded at him hesitantly, wondering where this line of questioning was heading. With extra impetus, he quickly followed up with: Are you from Ghana? As I responded yes, he proceeded to speak to me excitedly in Twi, a Ghanaian language. Confused at the turn of events, my Twi deserted me momentarily. We spoke for a bit, and he provided me a brief biography. He was a former air force pilot in Ghana in the 1970s. Presently, he and his wife were vigilantes (volunteer police auxiliaries) in Colorado in the summers, and they lived in Florida during the other times of the year. When I told him about my research topic, he said: "Ahh, Nkrumah, yes, that Communist!" I replied, "Well. . ." He smiled and then retorted: "fine, the socialist!" This encounter spurred me to consider how Ghana's and Nkrumah's relationship to leftist ideologies continued to be relevant, popularized, circulated, debated, and mischaracterized in various circles.

Together, the two vignettes spurred a few questions: What was an "unsocial socialist"? And how could Nkrumah and his comrades both be *hypocritical capitalists* and *unsocial socialists*? What was the distinction, if any, between conceptions of Nkrumah as a communist or socialist? And what did these (mis)characterizations do for our understanding of the historical period? Indeed, those questions underpin this project. *Socialist De-Colony* argues that the leftist circles within Ghana were neither hypocritical capitalists nor unsocial socialists. Instead, it demonstrates that the Ghanaian state pursued an economic policy that was *both* capitalist and socialist. This approach was neither heretical nor novel. Instead, its conceptual antecedent can be traced to Black Marxists' historicization and understandings of Vladimir Lenin's political economic ideas and the Soviet political-economic experiment of the 1920s, the New Economic Policy (NEP).

* * *

Under Nkrumah's leadership, Ghana was both the first avowedly socialist 20th-century African state and the first to implement state policies to that effect.[11] This represented an ideological rupture in the history of the

[11] PRAAD-Cape Coast, RG 1/13/18, Nana Yaw Pong II (Abuakwahene at the Denkyira Traditional Area). The new leaders chose the name Ghana to link it with the formidable 7th–13th-century Ghana Empire, located mainly in present-day Mali and Mauritania. J. B. Danquah argued that present-day Akans migrated from the Empire of Ghana. See

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region and the Black world. While Nkrumah was a key component of this break, he was not by any stretch of the imagination its sole progenitor or driver. Newspaper columnists, writers, ministers, students domestically and abroad, foreign and domestic technicians and bureaucratic officials, teachers, laborers, trade union officers, and others of this great society played crucial roles in envisioning, contesting, writing, and realizing the socialist utopia into existence.

While we think we know the ending to this narrative, we must not forget the moment of unbridled optimism that embraced Ghanaians and the Black world when people heard and danced to Ghanaian highlife musician E. T. Mensah's lyrics, "Ghana, we now have freedom (freedom); Ghana, land of freedom…" on Independence Day, March 6, 1957. Historian Ashley Farmer described Nkrumah's Ghana as a paragon of Black Power's potential. Black activists globally were "animated by the idea that they were witnessing the 'unparalleled degeneration' of 'white power.'"[12] To his Alabama congregation suffering unfreedom and white supremacist brutality, Martin Luther King Junior preached that "Ghana tells us that the forces of the universe are on the side of justice."[13]

Socialist De-Colony exhumes the ideas and ambitions of the figures who participated in the project of transforming a formerly colonial society. In this sense, this book is also an intellectual and cultural history of Ghana. Although these figures were arrested, beaten, denounced, vilified, and some even killed sixty years ago for their visions, this project takes seriously the utopias and desires they articulated and implemented. Those dreams and ideas offer us an alternative world and a different set of possibilities for and of political and economic emancipation that have been foreclosed or limited. Amidst an era of societal disillusionment and hopelessness in expansive political, intellectual, and social projects, returning to their stories allow us to dream, to believe in Black and African liberation again, and to, perhaps, live anew with that purpose and focus.

Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, "A Note on the Origins of Ghana," *Africa Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 205 (October 1952): 319–323. Rebecca Shumway cautions that the political and ethno-linguistic groups under the umbrella of Akan are not monolithic. They are diverse and complex. See *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, NY: The University of Rochester Press, 2011).

[12] Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 127.

[13] Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 84.

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To make sense of and historicize these possibilities, this book unpacks, rethinks, and ties Ghana's Cold War and political-economic projects within larger socialist and Marxist debates from multiple ideological and geographic vantage points. It is the first monograph to do so. It treats Africans – at all levels of society – as key components and constructors of global and local intellectual, economic, and diplomatic histories. This book then argues that the people in Ghana tried to forge a socialist state-capitalist society that would navigate the perils of fundamentally transforming a colonial economy, creating a new citizenry (Black subject), and a new African. Their project was being conducted in the chaos of American and Soviet attempts to dominate global geopolitics, Western European powers' efforts to maintain their economic empire and power through political mechanisms or murderous campaigns, and the colonized and formerly colonized people's efforts to obtain freedom and sovereignty through Third World alliances and nation-state efforts.[14]

Crafting these multiple projects filled our characters with anticipation and excitement about what was and what could be. It was a tabula rasa of sorts. The slate was not completely wiped clean, however. There were underlying societal divisions based on gender, hierarchy, and access to capital, markets, and Western education. However, there was an unprecedented and expansive space to write a new future and implement new ideas. These figures jumped on this opportunity. They were determined to

[14] Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Lise Namikas, *Battleground Africa: Cold War in the Congo, 1960–1965* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Piero Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Marco Wyss, *Postcolonial Security: Britain, France, & West Africa's Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Su Lin Lewis and Carolien Stolte, "Other Bandungs: Afro-Asian Internationalism in the Early Cold War," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 30, No. ½ (June 2019): 1–20; Nathan J. Citino, *Envisioning the Arab Future: Modernization in US-Arab Relations, 1945–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Sayuri Guthrie Shimizu, *Creating People of Plenty: The United States and Japan's Economic Alternatives, 1950–1960* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2001); David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Christopher Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

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create and redefine the very meaning of Black independence and statecraft. To craft this new frontier, the leftist circles in Ghana scrutinized the plight of other socialist nations across the world. In this way and amidst this adventure, the Soviet Union, as a physical space and an intellectual construction, helped shape discourses on what could and might be. I call this the Ghana–Soviet space. It is both an epistemological concept and a mobile site. While intellectuals and leftist circles in Ghana looked at the Soviet Union as an ideological and economic mirror of what was possible, the socialists in Ghana also understood their project, as what Christopher Lee and Adom Getachew argue, as "worldmaking,"[15] or what C. L. R. James defined as "revolutionary."[16] Unlike the Soviet, Yugoslavian, and Chinese socialist projects and visions, I argue that the Ghanaian project's explicit attempts to decolonize and delink its economy and its political formation away from white supremacist structures and the imperial and colonial powers, not just the vaguely defined world capitalist economy, made it unique. Racial and political-economic decolonization were intertwined and could not be easily disentangled. While we could read them as separate ongoing parallel projects, they were both leading to Black emancipation – at the geopolitical and individual level.

Consequently, this book's engagement with and treatment of Soviet ideas extends into Ghana's relations with the Soviet state. However, the Soviet connection ebbs and flows within this narrative depending on its particular relevance for my actors. As a powerful geopolitical state, Ghana turned to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and other countries, to demonopolize its society and political economy away from British political and financial control. Yet, in seeking assistance from the Soviets, this book shows that Ghana's leaders did not relinquish their sovereignty. They were not mere geopolitical puppets.[17] One of this book's central arguments is that to make sense of Black freedom and

[15] *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher Lee (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 2010); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[16] C. L. R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (London: Allison & Busby, 1977).

[17] Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Sergey Mazov, "Soviet Policy in West Africa: An Episode of the Cold War, 1956–1964," in *Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounters*, ed. Maxim Matusevich (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007), 293–314; David C. Engerman, "The Second World's Third World," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter 2011): 183–211.

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statecraft during the Nkrumah era we must seriously grapple with Ghana–Soviet relations outside of the ideological diatribes that presently consume it. Ghana–Soviet relations before and during the Nkrumah era influenced, enabled, and disrupted Ghana's twin socialist and decolonization projects and Black liberation.[18]

The Ghana–Soviet space was a site of contested liberation, opening and closing unforeseen possibilities for many. Its geographic parameters and scope were vast. It operated on numerous continents. While it was international, it was also deeply local. And they became sites of intense knowledge production. Through intimate personal relationships and within the pages of state memoranda, newspapers and journals, and engineering and geophysical maps and infrastructure plans, Africans and Soviets produced and co-produced knowledge about each other, their environments, and African and Black liberation and socialist and Soviet statecraft.

Diplomatically, socially, and economically, the Ghana–Soviet encounter was neither abstract nor irrelevant. It penetrated the people's lives in real ways. Ghanaians at all levels of society employed and manipulated Ghana–Soviet spaces to make a host of claims for themselves, to the state, and to the world. They were at once affective spaces for pleasure and pain, love and hate. This space and encounter was neither static nor dominated by one party or entity. At different moments, power waned between participating groups. Exploring the Ghana–Soviet space permits us to interrogate whether the USSR was as an imperial or decolonial power, or perhaps both.[19]

Indeed, revisiting the intricacies of the Ghana–Soviet relationship during and before the Nkrumah years reveals that the Black state's leaders exercised restraint, judgment, and prudence in their dealings with the communist power. This can be seen in presidential correspondences, diplomatic exchanges, workers' petitions, technocratic policy drafts, and student protests and concerns. Ghana's leaders engaged with the Soviet state with eyes wide open. They were not naïve. Nor were they dupes. The Ghana–Soviet relationship was not simply conducted at the presidential or

[18] Newer works have also started taking on this challenge, albeit from a regional or Soviet-centered perspective. See Alessandro Iandolo, *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022).

[19] Following the works of Choi Chatterjee, *Russia in World History: A Transnational Approach* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

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diplomatic level. Every day Ghanaians, its press and literary classes, and its technocrats helped engineer the policies and political realities of the day.

My focus on social diplomatic history also distinguishes *Socialist De-Colony* from other Afro-Cold War texts. This monograph is not only interested in how Ghana's leaders, those at the top, shaped Ghana's foreign policy but how those without state-sanctioned power, students for instance, shaped Ghana's foreign policy actions and global geopolitics. It was dialectical and dialogical. They pushed the Ghanaian government to respond in unforeseen ways that it perhaps hoped to avoid. *Socialist De-Colony* argues that a study of Ghana–Soviet relations, a study of African states during the middle of the 20th century, must also unravel the many social, economic, geopolitical, political, and personal trade-offs that befell upon the everyday person and its consequences for African independence. Africans at all levels of society shaped and remade the 20th century under the glare of white supremacy and imperial and colonial economic systems.[20] Underneath the overlapping layers of Cold War diplomacy and rhetoric are the compelling lives of the Africans who made this moment in world and African history exciting, full of fantastical experimentation, hope, and despair. I expand and narrow the camera's focus to capture distant and seemingly disparate ideas and peoples to bring them together to underscore their interconnectivity and the importance of Africans at all levels of society in shaping the Cold War landscape and how it is remembered today.

In an increasingly multipolar 21st century with blocs competing and jockeying for African favor and votes, a return to the Nkrumahist moment allows us to see how Africans navigated and negotiated another multipolar moment in world history.[21] Thus, the local and geopolitical events underpinning relations between Ghana and the Eastern bloc permit a deep dive into the importance of race in international, diplomatic, and Cold War histories, the nature and astuteness of African realpolitik, and

[20] Elizabeth Schmidt, *Cold War and Decolonization in Guinea, 1946–1958* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007); Pedro Monaville, *Students of the World: Global 1968 and Decolonization in the Congo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).

[21] Stephen M. Walt, "America Is Too Scared of the Multipolar World," *Foreign Policy*, March 7, 2023; Lenin Ndebele, "How China Is Wooing African Countries," *News24*, August 30, 2022; Abraham White and Leo Holtz, "Figure of the Week: African Countries' Votes on the UN Resolution Condemning Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *Brookings Institute*, March 9, 2022; "Kremlin Attempts to Buy Votes of African Countries at UN: RU Independent Media," *TVP World*, April 2, 2023 or February 4, 2023.

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how activists and technocrats on the ground shaped international and domestic policy decisions and Cold War industrial projects.

* * *

Returning to the Nkrumah period is also important in reclaiming the importance and value of African and Black leadership. Arguments of the "failure" of Nkrumah's Ghana have provided some with the platform to disparage Black sovereignty. In these narratives, African leaders seeking to demonopolize their societies from Western colonialism and markets have been labeled fools, puppets, and mentally unfit.[22] These characterizations of Nkrumah have taken hold in many academic and popular discourses on Ghana, shaping our understandings of these leaders and this moment.

These attacks represent broader onslaughts on Black people's ability to govern themselves and be equal participants in the new world order. "I have yet to meet any Africans," claimed American Louisiana senator Allen J. Ellender on December 2, 1962, "who have the capability to run their own affairs and I have never yet seen any area where the Africans built up anything for themselves. It is always the whites who are responsible for any progress made in Africa." The following year, the American senator argued that Washington DC was a "cesspool," revealing how Black people were "incapable" of governing.[23] This position has continued to hold resonance to the present day. In 2007, colonial apologist and historian Niall Ferguson argued in "The Good Old Days of Colonialism" that the Soviet security agency, *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* (Committee for State Security; KGB), deceived Nkrumah and that Nkrumah's government were "dupes." Ferguson maintained that "in virtually every case (Botswana is the sole exception), former British colonies in sub-Saharan Africa have fared worse under independence than they did under British rule."[24] Ferguson concludes that the whites governed Black people better than they could govern themselves.

[22] Russell Warren Howe, "Did Nkrumah Favour Pan-Africanism," *Transition*, No. 27 (1966): 13; W. Scott Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy 1957–1966: Diplomacy, Ideology, and the New State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 186, 419.

[23] "Africans Protest Slur by Ellender: 20 Nations' Envoys Object to Charge of 'Inability' Envoys of 20 African Nations Protest Slur in Ellender Talk," *The New York Times*, June 20, 1963.

[24] Niall Ferguson, "The Good Old Days of Colonialism," *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 2007.

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The current US president Donald J. Trump is another supporter of this position. In his first term in 2018, Trump quipped that no country with a Black leader has been successful and that Black and African countries were "shithole[s]."[25] Consequently, revisiting the economic project and political imagination of Nkrumah's government and its apparent "success" or "failure" is important for dispelling historical and contemporary white supremacist ideas about Black and African governments and their leaders.

Before I dive into the global importance and implications of Ghana's economic project, I want to summarize briefly the nature of the Ghanaian economy at independence on March 6, 1957. At independence, the Ghanaian economy was largely agrarian. Ghana's largest export commodity was cocoa, with gold following closely.[26] The United Nations' (UNs') 1958 *Economic Developments in Africa 1957–1957* report noted that Ghana was the "world's biggest producer of cocoa" and "account [ed] for about 30 per cent of total world output."[27] Ghana's coffers, budget, and industrial ambitions were dependent almost entirely on the foreign currency earnings cocoa exports mobilized. In addition, in 1957, Ghana possessed very few industrialized cities and industries. Its more economically developed and profit-generating areas were largely concentrated in the south, from Kumasi, located slightly in the central part of the country, toward the southern, coastal areas. Moreover, American and British capital and firms, such as the United African Company (UAC) and Barclays Bank (then known as Colonial Bank), dominated Ghana's economy, often discriminating against Black Colonial Ghanaians. Lebanese and Syrian migrants to Ghana also held key intermediary positions within Colonial Ghana's economy, leading to anticolonial boycotts against them in the late 1940s.[28] While many held positions in mines, artisanal

[25] Ali Vitali, Kasie Hunt, and Frank Thorp V., "Trump Referred to Haiti and African Nations as 'Shithole' Countries," *NBC News*, January 11, 2018.

[26] Gareth Austin, "The Emergence of Capitalist Relations in South Asante Cocoa-Farming, c. 1916–33," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (1987): 259–279.

[27] The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1958, *Economic Developments in Africa 1957–1957*: *Supplement to World Economic Survey, 1957*, pp. 10–11.

[28] Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, "Race, Identity and Citizenship in Black Africa: The Case of the Lebanese in Ghana," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (2006): 307–313; Bianca Murillo, "'The Devil We Know': Gold Coast Consumers, Local Employees, and the United Africa Company, 1940–1960," *Enterprise & Society*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2011): 317–355; AVP RF: d. 720, op. 2, por. 6, pa. 1, env. 2, June 11, 1958, Makarov to the European Department of the Soviet Union; Gareth Austin and

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occupations, and farming, local traders, taxi drivers, and market women occupied another slice of the nation's economy. They made, bought, or sold commodities such as cloth, shea butter, food products, and appliances or offered services to people.[29] So, it was this largely foreign controlled and primarily nonindustrialized economy that Nkrumah's government was trying to overhaul.

Indeed, *Socialist De-Colony* demonstrates that even contemporaneous British and American accounts dismissed outlandish reports that Ghana was a Soviet satellite or that the Ghanaian economy was struggling due to the mismanagement of its leadership.[30] After studying Ghana's economic situation and its business environment, the Bureau of International Commerce in the US Department of Commerce noted in July 1964 that

Chibuike Ugochukwu Uche, "Collusion and Competition in Colonial Economies: Banking in British West Africa, 1916–1960," *The Business History Review*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (2007): 1–26; Tetteh A. Kofi, "The Elites and Underdevelopment in Africa: The Case of Ghana," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 17 (1972): 97–115, 100. Led by Chief Nii Kwabena Bonne II, Colonial Ghanaians led a boycott of Syrian, Lebanese, and European traders in 1948.

[29] John D. Esseks, "Government and Indigenous Private Enterprise in Ghana," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1971): 11–29; Margaret Peil, *The Ghanaian Factory Worker: Industrial Man in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Brenda Chalfin, *Shea Butter Republic: State Power, Global Markets, and the Making of an Indigenous Commodity* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Gracia Clark, *Onions Are My Husbands: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Ralph E. Beals and Carmen F. Menezes, "Migrant Labour and Agricultural Output in Ghana," *Oxford Economic Papers, New Series*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (March 1970): 109–127; Beverly Grier, "Pawns, Porters, and Petty Traders: Women in the Transition to Cash Crop Agriculture in Colonial Ghana," *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter 1992): 304–328; Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016); Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Polly Hill, "The Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 1961): 209–230; Polly Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963); Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005); Gareth Austin, "Cash Crops and Freedom: Export Agriculture and the Decline of Slavery in Colonial West Africa," *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (April 2009): 1–37.

[30] Robert Legvold argues that as Ghana's economy entered a period of steep decline that the Soviet ambassador held "direct access to and power over Nkrumah." See Legvold, *Soviet Policy in West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 239, 246. Similarly, Alessandro Iandolo maintained that the Soviets blamed the "incompetent" and "unreliable" African leaders for their failure to export a socialist economic developmental model to Ghana. See Iandolo, "The Rise and Fall of the 'Soviet Model of Development' in West Africa, 1957–64," *Cold War History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2012): 684.

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Since independence, a substantial investment has been made by the Government [of Ghana] in basic economic and social facilities such as roads, railroads, harbors, housing, schools and hospitals, providing a solid foundation for future industrial development. Some progress has already been achieved in the diversification of agricultural and the development of light industries. Special emphasis is placed on making the country self-sufficient in food production, thereby conserving foreign exchange for developmental works.[31]

British officials came to a similar conclusion. In 1964, British officials admitted that "there is considerable agreement that the fundamental economic basis of the country is sound and that in two to three years' time the tide may have begun to turn, both because the increase in local industrial and agricultural production will have made it possible to reduce imports, and because exports will have increased." Privately, British officials admitted that Ghana's economy was fundamentally sound *due to* and not in spite of the state's (socialist) economic policies. One British official even noted that "Ghana has been guilty of some (but not a great deal in total) [sic] unnecessary prestige expenditure."[32] Astute observers dismissed accusations, which have taken a life of their own, that the economic projects in Ghana were wasteful and the result of megalomania.[33] Instead, the British admitted that "the principal fault has been that" Ghana

has pushed-on desirable and worthwhile expenditure rather faster than she can afford. Ghana's Government is desperately anxious to modernize the country and to raise the standards of living with the least possible delay. There are some, including voices in the Bank of England, who consider that the end justifies the means. Moreover there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the country or its economy.[34]

Although Nkrumah did not know it at the same time, his assessment that "far from the ideas for which Ghana stood being discredited, they have been proved for all to see as correct and as charting the inevitable path which Africa must follow" was correct.[35] Indeed, one could hardly

[31] Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Garland R. Farmer Papers, Box 26, July 1964, "Business Firms – Ghana," by the Bureau of International Commerce in the US Department of Commerce.

[32] The British National Archives (TNA), DO221/19, February 12, 1964, V. E. Davies to J. D. Hennings.

[33] Tony Killick, *Development Economics in Action: A Study of Economic Policies in Ghana* (London: Routledge, 1978); James A. Robinson and Ragnar Torvik, "White Elephants," *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 89 (2005): 197–210.

[34] TNA, DO221/19, February 12, 1964, V. E. Davies to J. D. Hennings.

[35] Nkrumah, *Dark Days*, 159.

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accuse the employees of the Bank of England or the US Bureau of International Commerce of possessing communist or socialist economic or political sympathies. Yet, the US Bureau of International Commerce informed US companies and private entities that Ghana was an attractive place to do business precisely because it was putting in "a substantial investment" into its basic infrastructure. Investments the British neglected during the colonial era. Indeed, it was these figures, looking at the entire and complex economic picture in Ghana, who offered glowing assessments that the socialist revolutionaries in Ghana were transforming their society for the better. They were, indeed, transforming a colonial economy into a modernized, self-sufficient, industrialized state.

The Black government's only fault, if any, was its desire and steps to raise its people's standard of living, to invest in roads, schools, and hospitals, and to modernize its economy too rapidly. The fear of Black political-economic independence, then, was the imperialist world's biggest fear, and it was this vision for which the Ghanaian state has been derided. Ghana's dual socialist and capitalist policies and business-like relations with the world's powers were unashamedly upending imperial and white supremacist world orders. It was becoming financially and politically independent. Ghana was becoming successful; it was learning to stand on its own feet – too quickly for some people's liking. As the first independent Black sub-Saharan country, Ghana's ability to show the world that when given the chance Black people were capable of managing themselves would undercut the lie that Africans and their descendants needed white tutelage. For the imperial and colonial governments, a successful Ghana, particularly, a flourishing Black socialist nation could and would have radical domestic repercussions and geopolitical implications. Thus, the idea of Ghana's success or failure was crucial to global Black liberation. Its actors knew this. And, from the beginning and until today, a struggle has waged on about how to interpret and frame the events in Ghana.

THE POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN ARCHIVE AND SOURCES

This book deeply engages with Ghanaian, Russian, British, and American archives. Its working languages are English and Russian. From a methodological standpoint, while *Socialist De-Colony* embraces calls to use

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non-African archives to locate events about postcolonial Africa,[36] it rejects what I call "postcolonial African archival pessimism," the argument that postcolonial African archives are too disorganized or ill-kept to be of much, if any, value in telling postcolonial African and Cold War histories. I question historians' failure to examine local African archives as well. Perhaps, I daresay that, the near deliberate or benign occlusion of postcolonial African archives is worrisome for the future of postcolonial African historiography. At its crux, postcolonial African archival pessimism suggests that the postcolonial African archive is too fragmented, jumbled, and messy to be of substantial value to historians in contrast to the often amply funded and smoothly run archives across Europe and the United States, which provide wide-ranging, convenient, and speedy harvests of archival material for historians. Indeed, my own research included such archives.[37]

Yet, underlying this argument is a critique of the postcolonial African state, implying that it is either incapable or uninterested in producing, organizing, storing, and preserving documents in a manner that Western-trained scholars can easily access and readily dissect.[38] To put it another way, we might even, say, argue that Western-trained scholars are trained

[36] Other scholars have engaged in non-African archives in conjunction with postcolonial African archives to produce transnational African histories. I embraced this approach in Nana Osei-Opare, "Uneasy Comrades: Postcolonial Statecraft, Race, and Citizenship, Ghana-Soviet Relations, 1957–1966," *The Journal of West African History*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2019): 85–112. See also Marcia C. Schenck, *Remembering African Labor Migration to the Second World: Socialist Mobilities between Angola, Mozambique, and East Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); Natalia Telepneva, *Cold War Liberation: The Soviet Union and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire in Africa, 1961–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022); Stephan F. Miescher, *A Dam for Africa: Akosombo Stories from Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022); Monique Bedasse, *Jah Kingdom: Rastafarians, Tanzania, and Pan-Africanism in the Age of Decolonization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Jean Allman, "Phantoms of the Archive: Kwame Nkrumah, a Nazi Pilot Named Hanna, and the Contingencies of Postcolonial History Writing," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 118, No. 1 (2013), 104–129; Eric Burton, "Navigating Global Socialism: Tanzanian Students in and Beyond East Germany," *Cold War History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2019): 63–83.

[37] Louise White, "Hodgepodge Historiography: Documents, Itineraries, and the Absence of Archives," *History in Africa*, Vol. 42 (2015): 317.

[38] Others have relied on nonelite personal collections to circumvent the problems of the colonial and postcolonial archive. See Kate Skinner, "Local Historians and Strangers with Big Eyes: The Politics of Ewe History in Ghana and Its Global Diaspora," *History in Africa*, Vol. 37 (2010): 142; Stephan F. Miescher, "The Life Histories of Boakye Yiadom (Akasease Kofi Abetifi, Kwawu): Exploring the Subjectivity and 'Voices' of a Teacher-Catechist in Colonial Ghana," in *African Words, African Voices*, eds. Louise White,

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not to see the postcolonial African archive because we are taught to see the archive through the epistemological concerns of Western Europeans and its colonial logics since the postcolonial archive is fundamentally an artifact of the colonial world and Western in form. Thus, I am committed to decolonizing parts of my own Western thinking in order to re-see the postcolonial archive and reclaim the voices of Africans scattered throughout them. I am not making a blanket suggestion that archival access is uniformly accessible or that pertinent documents exist across the African continent. Governments and archivists can and do limit access to sources, waste researchers' time, and reclassify or even destroy documents.[39] These problems are not unique to African history.[40] Yet, despite this pessimism, a new generation of scholars are committed to (re)claiming the value of postcolonial African archives.[41] While acknowledging the challenges these archives pose, these works and this book also highlight the value and possibilities of postcolonial African archives in rethinking

Stephan F. Miescher, and D. W. Cohen (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 162–194.

[39] While scholars like John Straussberger have seen value in local African archives in writing political histories, they argue that postcolonial African governments – as in the case of Guinea – are actively destroying documents. See J. Straussberger, "Fractures and Fragments: Finding Postcolonial Histories of Guinea in Local Archives," *History in Africa*, Vol. 42 (2015): 299–307.

[40] Soviet and Russian historians face similar archival hurdles, yet rarely dismiss the centrality and importance of Russian archives in constructing Soviet and Russian histories. See Sergey Mazov, "Soviet Aid to the Gizenga Government in the Former Belgian Congo (1960–61) as Reflected in Russian Archives," *Cold War History*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2007): 426; Rhiannon Dowling, "Soviet Women in Brezhnev's Courts," *Russian History*, Vol. 43, No. 3–4 (December 2016): 245–274; Brandon Shechter, *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World II through Objects* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

[41] Moses E. Ochonu, "Elusive History: Fractured Archives, Politicized Orality, and Sensing the Postcolonial Past," *History in Africa*, Vol. 42 (2015): 287–292; Samuel Fury Childs Daly, "The Survival Con: Fraud and Forgery in the Republic of Biafra, 1967–70," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (2017): 129–144; Samuel Fury Childs Daly, *A History of the Republic of Biafra: Law, Crime, and the Nigerian Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Katherine Bruce-Lockhart, "The Archival Afterlives of Prison Officers in Idi Amin's Uganda: Writing Social Histories of the Postcolonial State," *History in Africa*, Vol. 45 (2018): 245–274; Nana Osei Quarshie, "Cocoa and Compliance: How Exemptions Made Mass Expulsion in Ghana," *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 4 (January 2024): 1–19; Alexander Keese and Annalisa Urbano, "Researching Post-independence Africa in Regional Archives: Possibilities and Limits in Benin, Cabo Verde, Ghana and Congo-Brazzaville," *Africa*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (2023): 542–561; Ryan Colton, "Petitioning and Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission Good Citizens, Bad Citizens, and Performing the Moral Economy," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (2024): 754–772.

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and constructing postcolonial histories from the voices of nonelite persons.

Many Africanist scholars have often argued that one has to read against the grain to try and locate the voices of elite and nonelite Africans in the largely colonial and imperial archive. Others have turned to oral history,[42] spirit possession and religious invocation,[43] and shrines.[44] I do not rule out or dismiss these instrumental approaches that reveal the views of Africans. In following historians Bianca Murillo and Jeffrey S. Ahlman's method, however, by traveling past the main archive in Ghana's capital, I unearthed thousands of local and regional state and party documents, which reveal the views of ordinary Africans and help us to understand how state-building was a dynamic and negotiated process involving everyday people.[45]

These documents allowed me to challenge ideas of the "missing" postcolonial African archive or the idea that the voices of the non-elite are absent within the postcolonial African archive.[46] The sources that I examine represent vast swaths of society. From the top-down, I examine the Ghanaian presidential cabinet agenda meeting minutes; Russian, British, Ghanaian, and American ambassadorial reports, letters, and memoranda; British and American espionage dispatches; and letters

[42] Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison Press 1985 [1965]; *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History*, ed. Joseph C. Miller (Folkestone: Dawson/Archon, 1980); *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral* History, eds. Louise White, Stephan F. Miescher, David William Cohen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Belinda Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900–1983* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991).

[43] Andrew Apter, "On African Origins: Creolization and Connaissance in Haitian Vodou," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (May 2002): 233–260; J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[44] Andrew Apter, "History in the Dungeon: Atlantic Slavery and the Spirit of Capitalism in Cape Coast Castle, Ghana," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 122, No. 1 (February 2017): 23–54.

[45] Bianca Murillo, *Market Encounters: Consumer Cultures in Twentieth-Century Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017); Jeffrey S. Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017).

[46] Others like Moses E. Ochonu and Alois Maderspacher have discussed the importance of the African colonial archives in creating and rewriting histories of colonial Africa, and how the voices of Africans are located in said archives. See Moses E. Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009); Alois Maderspacher, "The National Archives of Cameroon in Yaoundé and Buea," *History in Africa*, Vol. 36 (2009): 453–460.

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between Ghana's president and the Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev. From the middle, I examine Soviet autopsy reports, district and regional labor reports from Ghana, letters between global Black Marxists, and newspapers from Ghana, Russia, and Britain. I also use white and African American newspapers and the Ghanaian ruling party's socialist magazines, *The Spark* and *The Party Chronicle*. Furthermore, from the bottom-up, to capture the everyday texture and experiences beyond elite classes, I utilize neglected sources such as petitions, complaints, and grievance letters from non-elite Ghanaians.[47] These documents were often written in the idioms of Ghana's socialist project and Pan-African program. Through these documents, workers made legible their claims to citizenship, restitution, and humanity and made themselves visible to the government and the archive. These letters humanized the workers; they were no longer mere production parts or economic statistics, but individuals with concerns and expectations. Francis Cody has argued that to submit a petition "is to engage fields of political power" and to yield oneself directly to the power of the state bureaucracy and "governmentality."[48] Yet, petition writing was also a means to hold power brokers accountable. The act of writing produced new structures of governance and relationship vectors between the state and its citizens. This book is then part of, what historian Emma Hunter calls, the "'textual turn' in African history."[49] It relies heavily on written documents from different authors, states, empires, and entities to make sense of the period.

[47] Chima J. Korieh, "'May It Please Your Honor': Letters of Petition as Historical Evidence in an African Colonial Context," *History in Africa*, Vol. 37 (2010): 84, 87; Jennifer Hart, "Motor Transportation, Trade Unionism, and the Culture of Work in Colonial Ghana," *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 59, No. S22 (2014): 187; Sean Moroney, "Mine Worker Protest on the Witwatersrand, 1901–1912," in *Essays in Southern African Labour History*, ed. E. Webster (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978), 37–39, 41; Oliver Coates, "'The War, Like the Wicked Wand of a Wizard, Strikes Me and Carry Away All that I Have Loved': Soldiers' Family Lives and Petition Writing in Ijebu, Southwestern Nigeria, 1943–1945," *History in Africa*, Vol. 45 (2018): 73; Kevin P. Donovan, "Disciplining Citizens and Commodities: Economic Crimes and Accusations in 1970s Uganda," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (2024): 240–258; Titilola Halimat Somotan, "Popular Planners: Newspaper Writers, Neighborhood Activists, and the Struggles against Housing Demolition in Lagos, Nigeria, 1951–1956," *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (2023): 243–267.

[48] Francis Cody, *The Light of Knowledge: Literacy Activism and the Politics of Writing in South India* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 172.

[49] Emma Hunter, *Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania: Freedom, Democracy and Citizenship in the Era of Decolonization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 28.

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The multiplicity and breadth of my sources allow me to write a comprehensive history of Ghana's twin decolonization and Cold War projects and to show how global, national, and local histories can be written at different registers. Thus, I zoom in and out from the bottom to the top; the story of the diplomat, the president, the truck driver, the security guard, the foreign and domestic technician, the student, the laborer, the trade union officer, and the educated revolutionary are all key parts of this postcolonial Ghanaian, African, and Cold War story. *Socialist De-Colony* hopes, then, to both offer a roadmap on how we might construct postcolonial African and Cold War histories and to leave readers with a strong impression that postcolonial African archives are an immensely rich treasure trove of viewpoints and sources.

* * *

Socialist De-Colony offers then several interventions. First, it takes seriously the Ghanaian state's economic policies during the Nkrumah years. By so doing, it shows a coherence to Ghana's economic program often lost in diatribe, Cold War bipolar thinking and frameworks, and in questions over the competence of Black and African leaders. Contrary to the scholarship and general assumptions of Nkrumah's political-economy philosophy, the Ghanaian state explicitly sought out foreign capital and private investment – in essence, capitalism. Alongside capitalist development, however, it promoted and articulated a socialist policy that sought to defang capitalist exploitation. This dualistic economic model was neither a new nor a heretical Marxian policy. In fact, it was a policy based upon Black Marxists' deep engagement with the history of the Soviet Union's political economy in the 1920s and their understanding of Lenin's works (see Chapter 4).

Second, this book argues that anti-Black racism and white supremacy were not abstract or ephemeral ideas in colonial and decolonizing Africa. Instead, they were central not only to how Black leaders understood the world but also how they acted and responded to other nation-states. We must insert race into the analytical category of the Cold War to make sense of the lived realities and political thinking of Black leaders. The Black characters that dominate this book from the 1940s to 1960s were wary of white empires. The USSR fell into this category. At the international level, they framed their socialist project as stupefying the legacies of white supremacy – an export and extraction-orientated economy that demeaned Africans in global affairs. At the local level, it meant correcting

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and lambasting anti-Black racist incidents at work, school, and places of leisure. This was a call for a bolder, more equitable world, where white supremacy was exposed, shamed, and bludgeoned to death. This was not simply an ideological battle between capitalism and communism or the Eastern and Western bloc, but a fight for Black freedom (see Chapters 1 and 3).[50]

Third, the book reimagines Ghana's constitutive parts, emancipates Ghana from its physical landscape to consider Ghana as a mobile space, and frees Ghana from a singular big-man narrative. Nkrumah, Accra, the Akans, the Akan-speaking regions, and Southern Ghana are decentered and disentangled from Ghana.[51] While this book occurs during the Nkrumah era, this story is not only about Nkrumah or his personality.[52] While Nkrumah's ideas, policies, and biography are woven into this history, it is not the central purpose of the book. Neither is it about whether Nkrumah was authoritarian or foreclosed democratic openings.[53] In addition, I move between the different regions, religious faiths, and ethnicities to underscore how the crafting of socialism in the Black state and its impact on Cold War allegiances and policies were contested by a range of people in Ghana and around the world. Ghana's physical boundaries were not the sole arenas where being (or becoming) Ghanaian were contested or where the new state exercised its new powers. *Socialist De-Colony* then also pushes scholars to think about the formation of citizenship and nationality not simply as a top-down,

[50] Jemima Pierre, *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[51] Kate Skinner, *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland: Literacy, Politics and Nationalism, 1914–2014* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Benjamin Talton, *The Politics of Social Change in Ghana: The Konkomba Struggle for Political Equality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Emmanuel Akyeampong, *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana c. 1850 to Recent Times* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).

[52] Ama Biney, *The Political and Social Thought of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Basil Davidson, *Black Star: A View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah* (Rochester: James Currey, 1973); David Apter, "Nkrumah, Charisma, and the Coup," *Daedalus*, Vol. 97, No. 3, (Summer 1968): 757–792; Henry L. Bretton, *The Rise and Fall of Kwame Nkrumah: A Study in Personal Rule in Africa* (London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966); Jeffrey S. Ahlman, *Kwame Nkrumah: Visions of Liberation* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2022).

[53] David E. Apter, *Ghana in Transition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); David Rooney, *Kwame Nkrumah: Vision and Tragedy* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 1998).

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state-driven initiative, but also as a bottom-up process that galvanized and bonded everyday people across regions and parts of the globe (see Chapters 2, 3, and 6).

Fourth, this book argues that Ghana was a vibrant hub of socialist ideas, where an economy of socialist ideas was being advertised, theorized, and circulated in Ghana and from Ghana to the world. Socialist theorists in Ghana believed that knowing the particularities of Ghanaian society could transform global socialism and rescue socialism from its Western-centric and imperial self. Socialist theorists from around the world, from Cuba's Castro to Rumania's Dumitru Dumitrescu to the Soviet's Ivan Potekhin, and others, penned rivaling theories of socialism in the Ghanaian literary world. Both as a physical site and intellectual space, Ghana became a fulcrum of a global exchange of socialist visions and debates. Moreover, everyday people in Ghana were at the forefront of deciphering and theorizing what socialism was in Ghana and in Africa. They led discussions about what to call socialism in Africa and Ghana (see Chapter 5). However, these debates were not just about nomenclature but over the very meaning, ownership, and visions of socialism in Africa.

The openness and frequency of socialist debates in Ghana were truly a remarkable testament to Black political and intellectual liberation. Under a suppressive intellectual tradition, the British had deliberately repressed, confiscated, and blocked literature and discussions of Marxism, communism, and socialism within its colony (see Chapters 1 and 3). Consequently, with the ever-lurking fear of the colonial security apparatus and imprisonment, socialist debates in Colonial Ghana were pushed and conducted underground. Thus, the animated debates on socialism in the postcolonial Ghanaian literary arena were revolutionary. They represented a break with Ghana's history and its political and intellectual culture and traditions. Through socialism, people in Ghana sought to transform society irrevocably. The existence of these debates was, in effect, a revolution and the embodiment of the freedom of expression and political thought. The debates about the nature of socialism in Ghana were not uniform; they were heavily contested. Through socialism, people in Ghana were situating Africans and their histories within world historical frameworks. They were rethinking the historicity of Africa – explicitly critiquing the Hegelian paradigm of Africa, and of Africa south of the Sahara as outside of the human spirit (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Another theoretical framework that links this book is the "provinciality of freedom," and particularly of Black freedom and African liberation. During the colonial and neocolonial eras, Black freedom at the

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international, state, institutional, and individual level was precarious. The Black figures that populate this book never took freedom for granted. It was a constant struggle; and they operated continuously within an axis of tension and fear. The source of their fear was never fixed; it was a moving target. At times it was the white supremacist international order. Other times it was the Ghanaian state itself, sexism, or ethnic chauvinism. And at other times, it was local and foreign companies and capital. Indeed, the Black figures in this story understood that Ghana's political independence was not the pinnacle of freedom but a point along a treacherous and windy road towards it. There was never any respite. They had to be awake and vigilant constantly. They existed in a paralysis of attentiveness.

BOOK OUTLINE

The book is broken down into six chapters, which are split equally into two parts – Part I "Ghana–Soviet Entanglements" and Part II "Socialist Dreams." In a kaleidoscopic fashion, each chapter opens a different window into the socialist project in Ghana, Ghana's relations with the Soviet Union (which disappears in some chapters), and the ambiguity of Black freedom. At times, the viewpoints in the chapters seem contradictory but they reflect the contested politics of the era and our actors' constantly evolving positions.

A note on periodization, the crux of the book centers on the events and moments that were key to the actors in question. Thus, the heart of the book starts from 1917, the beginning of the Bolshevik Revolution in the Russian Empire, to 1966, when Nkrumah was overthrown and the end of Ghana's socialist experiment. However, the epilogue skips from 1966 to the late 1980s, and then goes until 2024. I try not to impose Western or Eastern historical movements or events as key moments of departure or historical grounding within this text unless my actors also found those particular episodes transformative and worthy of debate and analysis.

Chapter 1 examines the fragility and unenviability of Black independence. It shows how Black Marxists and anticolonial figures navigated and negotiated Soviet and communist linkages from the 1940s to the 1960s against attempts by white Western imperial and colonial powers' attempts to weaponize the term "communism" to suffocate anticolonial movements. Once politically independent, the chapter shows that the Ghanaian government's wariness of hastily establishing relations with

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the Soviet government arose not only from Western pressure but from genuine fears of swapping one set of white colonizers for another. Concerns over anti-Blackness and white supremacy shaped who Ghana perceived were its "friends." Ghana's leaders' attitude to the Soviets shifted due to the Soviet's stance on colonialism and the situation in the Congo – which became a weatherglass on one's position on Black sovereignty. The chapter then questions the totalizing analytical purchase of using the Cold War paradigm to understand the relationship between Black African nations and white empires – whether capitalist or communist – during the 20th century. It posits that a framework highly attentive to race and racism in international relations and diplomatic history must also be employed to understand the diplomatic actions of African states during this period. By so doing, Chapter 1 follows other pioneering works to argue that Ghanaians and the early African states had agency and dictated the paces and contours of their relationship with the USSR and other white imperial states.[54]

Chapter 2 interrogates the Cold War politics of African–Soviet technoscience and infrastructure development projects between Ghana and the Soviet Union through the Cotton Textile Factory and the Ghana–Soviet Geological Survey Team. These engagements were supposed to embody Ghana's new postcolonial socialist modernity and highlight the benefits, opportunities, and possibilities of Soviet partnership. The chapter also demonstrates how pro-Soviet and Eastern bloc stories in the Ghanaian press were not simply intended to offer hagiographic praise or to support Nkrumah's commitment to geopolitical nonalignment. Instead, they were part of a concentrated movement to dismantle the myth of Western technoscientific and cultural superiority and anti-Soviet bias, which were introduced and reinforced by Western colonial education and rule. In addition, Chapter 2 focuses on the relationships, expertise, livelihoods, and contestations of and between the technicians,

[54] Maxim Matusevich, *No Easy Row for a Russian Hoe: Ideology and Pragmatism in Nigerian-Soviet Relations, 1960–1991* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003); Sam C. Nolutshungu, "African Interests and Soviet Power: The Local Context of Soviet Policy," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1982): 397–417; Abena Dove Osseo-Asare, *Atomic Junction: Nuclear Power in Africa after Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Andy DeRoche, "Asserting African Agency: Kenneth Kaunda and the USA, 1964–1980," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (2016): 975–1001; Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization*; Asif Siddiqi, "Shaping the World: Soviet-African Technologies from the Sahel to the Cosmos," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2021): 41–55; Telepneva, *Cold War Liberation*.

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bureaucrats, and local Ghanaian actors who were tasked with overseeing the actual success of Ghana–Soviet relations. Last, it demonstrates how everyday Ghanaians employed Ghana–Soviet spaces to make citizenship claims by demanding rights and protections against ethnic discrimination and abuse.

Chapter 3 argues that the virulent racism Ghanaians – students, diplomats, and workers – faced in the East, the West, and in Ghana were vital in creating and shaping a global Ghanaian national consciousness, where none had existed previously. These were, what I argue, "Racial Citizenship Moments." Calls for protection to the Ghanaian state against racism in many walks of life were central to articulating ideas of citizenship and (re-)framing the state's duty to its people. This bottom-up nationalism and social diplomacy shaped the functions of the Ghanaian state apparatus, both domestically and internationally. In addition, the chapter also seeks to dispel the myth that racism functioned "differently" in the Eastern bloc. It moves past the idea of Soviet and Eastern European exceptionalism, particularly its estrangement from the processes and movement of white supremacist ideas. The spread of people and ideas – a truism in life – meant that the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were not inoculated from white supremacist ideas. While the Communist Bloc's foreign policy statements and private diplomatic cables expressed racial equality and solidarity, through the trope of "Black Peril," I show how anti-Black racism in the Eastern Bloc looked uncannily familiar to other parts of the globe and how its reproduction in the Eastern Bloc was devastating to Black people.[55]

Chapter 4 adds another intellectual dimension and genealogy to Nkrumah's political-economic philosophy by arguing that he was aware of Lenin's state capitalist ideas. It rethinks the nature of the Ghanaian

[55] For some works exploring anti-Black racism in the USSR, see Constantin Katsakioris, "Burden or Allies?: Third World Students and Internationalist Duty through Soviet Eyes," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2017): 539–567; Constantin Katsakioris, "Students from Portuguese Africa in the Soviet Union, 1960–74: Anti-Colonialism, Education, and the Socialist Alliance," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2020): 142–165; Jeff Sahadeo, "Black Snouts Go Home! Migration and Race in Late Soviet Leningrad and Moscow," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 88 (December 2016): 797–826; Sean Guillory, "Culture Clash in the Socialist Paradise: Soviet Patronage and African Students' Urbanity in the Soviet Union, 1960–1965," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (April 2014): 271–281. Furthermore, see the forthcoming special issue on Blackness in "Slavic, Eurasian, and Eastern European Studies" in the *Slavic Review*, coedited by Sunnie Rucker-Chang and Nana Osei-Opare.

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economy to argue that it functioned within a state capitalist, mixed economic framework. Moreover, this chapter examines how people understood the duality of Ghana's socialist and capitalist economy – its socialist state capitalist project – and its applicability to Ghana's conditions and the postcolonial world. It demonstrates that Nkrumah's Ghanaian political economy was not a contradictory Marxian policy but was embedded within Black Marxists' understandings of Lenin's writings and actions. In so doing, *Socialist De-Colony* merges the non-overlapping intellectual and geographic spaces of Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" and Cedric Robinson's "Black Marxism" with Maxim Matusevich's "Africa and the Iron Curtain."[56] It shows how the cultural and intellectual interchange of ideas between and amongst Black thinkers moved beyond the Atlantic circuit and how ideas from the East simultaneously heavily mediated and impacted them.

Chapter 5 excavates the debates leftist and socialist thinkers in Ghana had about the brand of socialism they were building and its relationship to religion, morality, Black freedom, and precolonial African history. These debates were intended for a domestic *and* global audience. Ghana's physical landscape and its literary media became key sites for socialist and leftist thinkers worldwide to articulate and address the most consequential questions facing socialist thought at the time. The chapter argues that debates surrounding how to define and historicize socialism in the African context were not simply intellectual exercises and disputes over labeling rights but offered a tangible way, a theoretical analytic, for Africans to revisit, debate, and offer a critical appraisal of African historiography and societies and Africa's place in world history. By rethinking and (re)historicizing histories of exploitation and violence in Africa, socialists in Ghana were simultaneously decolonizing and rescuing socialism from itself. Socialism then was more than a fashionable lexicon or moniker to curry favor with certain geopolitical groups. Not only were

[56] Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Maxim Matusevich, "Expanding the Boundaries of the Black Atlantic beyond the Iron Curtain: African Students Encounter the Soviet Union," in *Afroeuropean Configurations: Readings and Projects*, ed. Sabrina Brancato (London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 58–80; Maxim Matusevich, "Expanding the Boundaries of the Black Atlantic: African Students as Soviet Moderns," *Ab Imperio*, No. 2 (Summer 2012): 325–350; Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000 [1983]); Steffi Marung, "Out of Empire into Socialist Modernity: Soviet-African (Dis)Connections and Global Intellectual Geographies," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2021): 56–70.

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the socialist theorists in Ghana domesticating socialism, they were remaking it globally; they were Marxist–Socialist worldmakers. Last, the chapter also highlights how the domestication of socialism resulted in the rise of Christian nationalism in Ghana.

The final chapter examines the lives, intellectual discourses, and working conditions of those who were supposed to build socialism. Workers in Ghana embraced and subverted the socialist visions the state and its leftist supporters imagined. Despite the state and leftist intellectuals championing themselves as a worker's party and embodying workers' rights, laws were passed to handicap workers' ability to unionize and strike outside of state channels. Yet, this chapter shows that despite these measures, workers used their voices, feet, and letters to highlight the contradictions and the limitations of a postcolonial African government and its socialist intellectuals that both championed their rights and wanted to give them the reigns of the economy. The workers used ingenious techniques to resist and negotiate the power of the state and capital. Liberation came from the workers and not entirely from the state. Workers understood that their positions were tenuous and that true liberation was only possible in coordination and conjunction with each other. Black liberation was not a solo affair. The workers believed that their liberation was linked up with the survival and success of Black labor worldwide. Events and time, perhaps, would prove them right. The chapter complements histories highlighting African workers' centrality – through their letters and feet – in articulating the contradictions and aspirations of postcolonial African states and socialism.

The epilogue returns to the major themes discussed throughout the book. In addition, it examines the contemporaneous nature of Ghana–Russia relations, particularly through the lens of anti-Black violence and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It also looks at the continued contestation between Ghanaians and their emissaries abroad, particularly the Ghanaian embassy in Russia, and Ghanaians' continued use of protest domestically to seek better rights and economic benefits under Ghana's most recent administrations. The epilogue demonstrates that while Nkrumah and the explicit debates and discourses on socialism that consumed Ghana in the 1960s have almost vanished, their ghosts continue to shape Ghanaian society.

This book seeks to neither discredit nor credit the path Ghana took but to put it within its proper historical context. The book's title, *Socialist De-Colony*, underscores the reality that decolonization and the crafting of socialism were projects that were never completed, nor, perhaps, could

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they be. They were decolonizing the European socialist world from its anti-Blackness. The historical figures within this book believed that socialism was a vehicle to decolonize African historiography, situate African societies within world historical processes, and to repossess the wheels of their destiny from the European imperial powers – whether they espoused capitalist or communist slogans. Yet, for these actors, decolonization did not mean a rejection of all European ideas or customs. Such an intellectual standpoint would have been a repudiation of themselves since many were trained in the West and co-opted ideas that originated in Europe.[57] Ultimately, this story, then, is a retelling and reclaiming of other lives, activism, and movements lost in the archival record and historiography. It is a story about the treacherous path towards, perhaps, a unicorn, Black freedom in the twentieth century.

[57] Literary theorist Ato Quayson reminds us and this book agrees that it is both ahistorical and impossible to explore 20th-century African or Western modes of knowledge separately since neither is "completely pure." African societies "appropriate, borrow, challenge, steal, and rehash (among other things) external factors in the struggle to achieve a coherent understanding of their place in the world." One could not locate "an African gnosis" or understand the "peculiar African postcolonial condition" outside of this "flux and intertextuality." Ato Quayson, "Protocols of Representation and the Problems of Constituting an African 'Gnosis': Achebe and Okri," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 27 (1997): 140. See also Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 175–184.

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