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Alessandro Iandolo, *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968*. Cornell University Press, 2022, 312 pages. ISBN: 9781501764431.

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Following the second wave of decolonization after World War II, building a prosperous, technologically advanced economy based on state investment, public ownership, and collective enterprise was a widespread dream among the first generation of postcolonial elites. The Soviet Union was the perfect guiding star to direct this process in Africa. A gigantic conglomerate of different lands, peoples, cultures, and traditions, the USSR had managed to turn itself into an industrialized superpower, following decades of revolution, war, and social and economic change. The much-publicized Soviet narrative of victory over “backwardness,” possibly the most important founding myth of the USSR itself, exercised an immense power of attraction over the first post-independence leaderships of West Africa.

The novel *Arrested Development* is organized into six chapters, plus a conclusion. Chapter 1 looks at the Soviet Union in the mid-1950s, emerging from decades of Stalinism and ready to launch a series of political and economic reforms that captured the attention of many newly independent nations. Chapter 2 investigates the USSR’s rediscovery of the Third World under Khrushchev, both in terms of theoretical speculation and practical engagement. Chapter 3 explores the path that led Ghana, Guinea, and Mali to become radical Third World states and the birth of their relationships with the Soviet Union. Chapter 4 analyzes the elaboration of a model of development for the region, looking at modernization projects in infrastructure, agriculture, and light industry. Chapter 5 deals with the implementation of the said model and, crucially, with everything that went wrong. Chapter 6 details the abandonment of the model and the USSR’s disengagement from the African region. Finally, *Arrested Development* concludes by discussing the general themes of the book and offering some reflections on the long-term legacy of Soviet engagement with West Africa.

Throughout this work, its author Alessandro Iandolo critically examines the process that was expected to fulfill the ambition of some West African countries in economic development following the Soviet Union's socialist model. Hence, the book's core concept is development, as an ideal end goal to be achieved through a process of "modernization." Specifically, this book critically looks at the Soviet attempt to export a model of development based on socialist principles to Ghana, Guinea, and Mali between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s. In West Africa, as in most of the Third World at the time, the Soviet model of development was not the only possible approach. The USSR and its allies held a vision of development that tended to prioritize building up the state as the main instrument of modernization. By contrast, the Western world, including both the United States and the European former colonial powers, espoused a vision centered on market competition and private investment. The contest between these two archetypal approaches to modernization constitutes the analytical methodological and backbone of *Arrested Development*. To analyze this idea, Iandolo's book focuses primarily on the practice of development. Although the "elusive origins of development"—its intellectual roots—are academically explored with regard to the Soviet tradition, the book investigates development as a work of shovel, brick, and mortar. The author rightly highlights that the colonial relations based on dependency that characterized the old world of empires had to be cut in favor of a new order that prioritized independence and equality. We are told that, obtaining this change without development was impossible and that this is why Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, and Keita, together with other first-generation postcolonial leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Jawaharlal Nehru in India, and Sukarno in Indonesia, tended to regard the conquest of modernity as an integral part of the struggle for independence.

Iandolo observes that, in the short run, the Soviet project was the establishment of a model of economic development based on the state, of which Ghana, Guinea, and Mali represented ideal test cases. However, this situation was different from classic Soviet-style communism as state and market were expected to coexist. As Iandolo points out the Soviet Union supported and focused primarily on transport and energy infrastructure and boosting agricultural productivity. Iandolo's *Arrested Development* explains readers that the Soviet model for West Africa was difficult to situate on the Cold War divide. Specifically, Iandolo explains how even Soviet analysts and scholars themselves struggled with how to define and understand what they were doing in West Africa and elsewhere. Most agreed that the conditions in the Third World were not suitable for the establishment of so-called scientific socialism. The book emphasizes that the West African model deviated from Soviet-style communism in several significant ways, but it was still far from the type of capitalism sponsored by the West. The contest between these hybrid models was more complex than a simple Cold War between two ideal types of societies.

It should be noted that the source base for this important historical book is necessarily international. *Arrested Development* is based on primary sources from archives, libraries, and private collections in France, Ghana, Mali, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This aim was to cover the points of view of virtually all actors involved in the search for economic modernization in West Africa including the governments of the USSR (Russia), Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, international organizations, private businesses, the governments of Britain, France, and the United States, and leading economists who acted as consultants. *Arrested Development* is a book rich in details and anecdotes. As a rule, this work relies on archival documents while memoirs serve to add color or texture. In terms of methodology, this book refrains from making arguments based on numbers. When figures are used, this decision is usually to give the reader an idea of magnitude, intensity, or scope—purely descriptive in nature. In these cases, figures refer only to the specific context in which they were created. When the book makes comparisons over space or time using numbers, these are taken from the same source—usually from Angus Maddison’s monumental statistical handbook. Any such comparisons remain incredibly problematic and should be taken as a rough indication.

The foci of this book are economic cooperation and the political exchanges that made it possible. *Arrested Development* presents the fullest possible picture of the complex entanglement of Soviet and West African ideas, hopes, projects, and failures. It builds on these pioneering and path-breaking studies, aiming to further a dialogue between historiography on the USSR and on West Africa. It cannot, however, replace historical analysis focused specifically on Ghana, Guinea, and Mali.

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