

Scholarly Review Essay

THE PROJECTION AND PERFORMANCE OF GHANAIAN NATIONHOOD

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Jeffrey S. Ahlman. *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana* (New African Histories). Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017. vi + 322 pp. Illustrations. Acknowledgements. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$32.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-821-42293-9.

Harcourt Fuller. *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State: Kwame Nkrumah's Symbolic Nationalism* (African Histories and Modernities). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. xxvii + 262 pp. Illustrations. Foreword. Acknowledgements. Timeline. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$90.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1-137-44858-3.

Jacob U. Gordon, editor. *Revisiting Kwame Nkrumah: Pathways for the Future.* Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2017. xv + 330 pp. Illustrations. Preface. Appendices. Index. \$39.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-569-02478-2.

Bianca Murillo. *Market Encounters: Consumer Cultures in Twentieth-Century Ghana* (New African Histories). Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2017. xv + 248 pp. Illustrations. Acknowledgements. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$32.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-821-42289-2.

Paul Schauert. *Staging Ghana: Artistry and Nationalism in State Dance Ensembles* (African Expressive Cultures). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. xvi + 342 pp. Illustrations. Preface. Acknowledgements. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$30.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-253-01742-0.

Jesse Weaver Shipley. *Trickster Theatre: The Poetics of Freedom in Urban Africa* (African Expressive Cultures). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. xii + 284 pp. Illustrations. Acknowledgements. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$35.00. Paper. ISBN: 978-0-253-01653-9.

Kate Skinner. *The Fruits of Freedom in British Togoland: Literacy, Politics and Nationalism, 1914–2014* (African Studies). New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xv + 298 pp. Illustrations. Acknowledgements. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$85.00. Cloth. ISBN: 978-1-107-07463-7.

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Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah have an enduring allure among Africanists, and for good reason. Ghana was the first European colony to win independence in sub-Saharan Africa, and Nkrumah was the first democratically elected leader of an independent decolonized nation. He was magnetic, cosmopolitan, and educated, but also thin-skinned and authoritarian. After blazing a trail for independence struggles around the continent and becoming a hub for exiles (Carpenter & Lawrance 2018) the world over, Ghana stumbled early in independence. Nkrumah was a remarkably charismatic leader and orator, and a prolific author and philosopher, with an almost cultic following, even today. He was also deeply flawed. An intolerant authoritarian, he cozied up to African demagogues (such as Guinea's Sekou Touré). He bullied, bribed, and cajoled British Togoland into a union with the Gold Coast (with British support) that many Togolandians did not seek in any form. And his liaisons with foreign-born women sat uncomfortably with many Ghanaians who yearned for a more "traditional" communitarian leader. Today Ghana has recaptured some of its erstwhile dynamism and global leadership, and the rehabilitation of Nkrumah's fraught legacy that began in the early 1980s under the presidency of J. J. Rawlings has continued apace since the foundation of the Fourth Republic in 1992. But Ghanaian disgruntlement about the uneven impact of neoliberalism, growing poverty, and the inequities of the delivery and distribution of resources, especially in parts of the north and the Volta region, continues to simmer.

In view of this ongoing reappraisal of Nkrumah's economic and political legacy within the Ghanaian public, the paucity of meaningful, scholarly, or critical appraisals of Nkrumah and the party he led, the Convention People's Party (CPP), is puzzling (see Bob-Milliar 2014). For critical appraisals of Ghanaian nationhood and nationalism more generally, the foundational texts surely include Dennis Austin's *Politics in Ghana*, Martin Staniland's *Lions of Dagbon*, Paul Ladouceur's *Chief and Politicians*, and Jean Allman's *Quills of the Porcupine*, among others. Notwithstanding these observations, there is much yet to be narrated in the projection and performance of Ghanaian nationhood, nationality, and national identity, particularly extending beyond Nkrumah's relatively brief suzerainty of sub-Saharan Africa's path-blazing democratic black-ruled republic. For this reason alone, the seven assembled works reviewed herein, encompassing historical and performance studies, speak to each other in terms of a collective focus on socioeconomics and cultural nationalism, offering a critical re-reading of the impact and legacy of Nkrumahist projections of statehood and statecraft across the colonial and postcolonial divide. Additionally, in their individual approaches, each book tries to account for ways in which Ghana was enacted, instantiated, performed, coerced, and sustained through its oftentimes tumultuous history. With more than sixty years of independence in the rearview mirror, Ghana and Ghana studies scholarship is rapidly diversifying to account for the very divergent experiences of an array of Ghanaian and Togolander-cum-Ghanaian social sectors in the making of nationhood and national identities.

The abundance of new intellectual riches on Ghana is exciting, and each of these seven volumes offers important new perspectives, data, and theorizations which should interest scholars far beyond West Africa. Jeffrey Ahlman's highly engaging monograph, *Living with Nkrumahism*, stands apart from the vast new corpus of Ghana studies scholarship for its bold and clear vision of Nkrumah and Nkrumahism as something akin to a Weltanschauung. Ahlman observes that Nkrumahism was a worldview, one both encompassed and eclipsed by the nation. This book is neither a biography nor a national history; rather, it is the story of an unfolding, expanding, and unraveling ideological force and political drama. Ghana barreled toward independence beginning around 1951, but it was hardly unstoppable. Studies of Ghanaian nationalism and independence, beginning with Austin, have stressed the twists and turns, the contingency of elections, and tense public debates over constitutional structure and civil rights. In some respects, it is a clever nod to popular histories of Ghana which at times essentialize the forcefulness of nationalism, but Ahlman maintains a focus on the multi-faceted nature of anticolonial activity, tensions between the so-called "verandah-boys" (see Bob-Milliar 2014) versus the elite and educated who assumed they would inherit the nation.

Ahlman takes apart the political tempest of Ghana in the 1940s and 50s and cleaves Africans broadly and Ghanaians specifically from prevailing stories and received wisdoms about decolonization that have centered on elite rivals or Gold Coast-British imperial tensions, to reveal the historical processes of ambition, negotiation, and frustration with Nkrumah, the CPP, and the increasingly authoritarian, centralized, and unstable independent state. Gold Coast nationalism is positioned in a longer timeframe, but Ahlman's primary interest and the bulk of the original research examines the post-independence period. Nkrumah was a Pan-African socialist (see Williams 2015), and as his vision for the nation was all-encompassing and all-consuming, he waged struggles on multiple fronts, ultimately to his own detriment. Via six chapters, examining variously the Ghana Builders Brigade, the operations of the Bureau of African Affairs, and the activities of the Young Pioneers, among others, Ahlman elucidates how Ghanaians of many stripes found roles for themselves and a sense of belonging and purpose, if only fleetingly.

Insofar as it offers a nuanced account of the early and profound politicization of government and bureaucracy, Ahlman's study will possibly become foundational to nationalism and decolonization scholarship, sitting alongside works by Jean Allman (1993), Susan Geiger (1997), Elizabeth Schmidt (2005), Meredith Terretta (2013), and others. Bridging the colonial/postcolonial division, a disrapture of increasing interest to historians and performance studies, he argues for the intrinsic importance of gender, youth, and the politico-social institutional spaces inhabited by budding nationalists. Ahlman argues that while Nkrumah's ideology was constant and unremitting during his decades-long reign, his party was acutely aware of and responsive to the shifting global and pan-African terrain that

threatened the Nkrumahist revolution. The relationship between national and Pan-African visions is an underdeveloped historiography, and Ahlman points to the centrality of leadership, socialism, *and* youthful experimentation and dynamism to the emergence of Ghanaian notions of independence, decolonization, and real economic autonomy. His decolonizing framework and colonial/postcolonial bridging chronology reminds us that Nkrumah began to consolidate power long before independence, but to do so required a massive marshalling of support among youth, women, and modernizing constituencies who joined clubs, parties, societies, and bureaucracies. Ahlman draws the reader in with layers of case studies, ordered mostly chronologically, all the while avoiding the pitfalls of biography-cum-hagiography. The coherence of a metonymic argument centered on Nkrumah, coupled with the seamless integration of gender within the analytical framework, brings the Ghanaian national project into sharp focus.

Nkrumah inserted himself into every aspect of political and social life, and as a result there is a vast corpus of Nkrumahist material beyond traditional archives, much of it untapped, in parastatal archives. In a not dissimilar vein to Ahlman, Harcourt Fuller's *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State* explores how Ghana was "symbolically constructed, expressed, and contested in the public domain" through official materials (2). He draws on quotidian yet relatively overlooked archival sources, such as documentation from the Ghana Post Company, Cedi House (the national bank, stock exchange, and mint), the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, the Information Services Department, and other national vehicles—often housed in marginalized archival repositories—along with Nkrumah's voluminous personal writings and speeches. Armed with this, he articulates a clear argument about the intrinsic role of national imagery—what he calls "symbolic nationalism" (12)—in the formation of and contestation over nationhood. Fuller is interested in the visual, ephemeral, and semiotic, and in this respect, his book constitutes a highly original and readable contribution to the burgeoning literature on Ghanaian nationhood. Like the fine-grained reading of Ghanaian highlife (Plageman 2012) and hiplife (Shipley 2013), the zeal and creativity of Fuller's remarkably profitable archival recovery project is indisputable; but I found myself craving deeper engagement with recent scholarship comparing regional alliances and tensions, relations abroad, and domestic political and economic motivations.

Interestingly, debates around and planning for a number of the nationhood symbols Fuller considers, such as postage stamps and coinage, began prior to independence, and they are thus particularly helpful for exploring the transitional phase of Ghanaian history from mature colony to the first decolonized independent nation in black Africa. Echoing Janet Hess (2001), Fuller frames Nkrumah's reliance on Western national traditions as both an effective merging of European and African practice-as-propaganda and a nimble and subversive cultural "appropriation" (17, 24). And while Fuller has a playful approach to some of what he calls "banal symbols" such as flags and coats of arms, he reveals the highly politicized and ethnicized

debates over representation, and in particular how new national emblems were deployed to undercut “tribalist” anxieties, albeit accompanied by rather authoritarian legislative and executive tools. But the history of symbols and symbolism is also revealed as the historical underbelly of anti-Nkrumah and anti-CPP resistance. Paralleling Allman’s (1993) approach, Fuller congeals the contestation over image and language in stamps, crests, and anthems into familiar anti-colonial paradigms (removing Queen Elizabeth II) and classic ethnic frameworks (such as various iterations of Asante nationalism and the Ga Aborigines Society). He also offers examples that sit more comfortably with fraught pan-African debates, the creative anachronism of the mythical Ghana hypothesis, and an anti-heroic current of defiance to the emerging cult of personality around Nkrumah.

The inherent importance for historical inquiry lies with the fact that much of this soft materiality of modernity (see Bloom et al. 2014) was cheap to produce, contained exceptional and immediately recognizable detail, and circulated rapidly to the entire nation and beyond, albeit unevenly, based on socio-economic and geographical considerations. As Janet Hess (2000, 2001) and Peter Alegi (2010) have shown, symbolism and branding were fundamental concerns to new African nations that burst onto the international arena and struggled to unshackle colonial templates and establish themselves as recognizable and significant. Early Ghanaian historiography focused on creating a “usable past”; the first generation of Ghana-born Ghanaian historians, such as Albert Adu Boahen (1932–2006), rendered the nation into view by recovering oral historical narratives and deciphering national meaning in traditional stories. Fuller builds effectively on this by visualizing this instantiation and its destruction in waves of post-Nkrumah iconoclasm and reinstantiation; but in this regard, I found myself wishing for larger and better resolution photographs of the stamps, monuments, and currency. Enhanced images might have provided the opportunity for more in-depth discussion of these artistic and cultural renditions of nationhood.

Paul Schauert’s new *Staging Ghana* suggests that rendering a visible nation, one recognizable to both national subjects and an international audience, was almost a daily obsession for Nkrumah. The microlevel involvement of Nkrumah is central to Schauert, who approaches the question of Ghanaian nationhood through the study of national dance ensembles, that is, ensembles that purport to express a national identity or narrative. Based on riveting ethnographic data from two ensembles—the Ghana Dance Ensemble and the National Dance Company—Schauert connects the legacy of Nkrumah’s interest in the arts and his cultivation of the “African Personality” as a mirror of the first independent African nation on the world stage, to the present-day performance of nationhood in a much more globally aware and highly competitive international market. Resonating with Fuller, Schauert describes how Nkrumah “appropriated” (79) cultural symbols for national and international political ends to “disempower” local political leaders and to “legitimate” the Ghanaian nation. His “African

Personality” sought to unify Ghanaians at home and in the diaspora, but if nationhood was an organizing device, it never quite attained a hegemonic status. In the complexities of membership and participation in ensembles along with the composition and performance of repertoire, he reveals how debates about what constitutes “Ghana,” “Ghanaian,” and “national” shift, conflict, and trip over one another in “distinct and overlapping ways” (195).

Ghana is multi-ethnic—some, such as Ngūgī wa Thiong’o, would say multinational—and certainly multilingual, and both ensembles grapple(d) with how to comprise a “national matrix” (239) on a national and international level while at the same time attempting to engage with “cosmopolitan” spectators who expect to see an authentic “Africa.” Schauert takes a constructivist approach to questions of “authenticity,” locating it in social discourse. The ensembles are global cultural ambassadors, but their cultural products are shaped by specific demands and particular desires, both national and international, to see representations of “tradition.” Tensions and disagreements abound about representation and competing visions of Ghana, some of which we also see in Jesse Weaver Shipley’s research. The older ensemble, Ghana Dance, recreated many dances first “collected” during research in the 1960s and 70s. But as Schauert observes, framed as traditional they become “immemorial, ethereal, and mythical” (105), even rendered static. Reductivism reigned, and some dances, such as “Akan Ceremonial Dance Suite,” “Dagomba Dance Suite,” and “Anlo Dance Medley,” still part of the repertoire, were viewed as “cultural pollution” (96) by custodians of cultural knowledge. In one particularly fascinating discussion, Schauert chronicles a disagreement between the internationally renowned Akan-Ghanaian choreographer Mawere Opuku and an Anglo-American educator, Drid Williams, over authentic Ewe *agbekor*, a polyrhythmic dance which originated as a precursor to battle.

In spite of the legacy of Nkrumah, alternative visions of the multi-ethnic Ghanaian nation percolate from below. In contrast to the Ghana Dance Ensemble, National Dance developed a reputation as exploratory, experimental, and forward-looking. Originally a splinter (194) of Ghana Dance Ensemble, National Dance functioned from 1992 to 2015 under Francis Nii-Yartey, who “used his mind to change things” (115) and, in his words, created “new traditional dance,” of what otherwise might be considered contemporary dance inspired by tradition. The late Nii-Yartey was acutely aware that much of his audience, domestic and global, came to see *Ghana* (whatever and however that could possibly be rendered in performance), but he endeavored to project a dynamic and provocative interpretation. In both ensembles, to be sure, dancers and choreographers remain deeply concerned about how Ghana is represented both nationally and abroad. And they must also contend with the intense and debilitating work conditions under which they labor. Schauert’s focus on the discipline and punishment of contemporary dance students in the pursuit of “professionalism” (122) is followed by a discussion of staging the Ghanaian nation and the surreptitious interplay of registers. Beyond the rigors of performance and

practice, we learn that artistic directors have an almost Nkrumahist total authority over the individual performers' capacity for advancement, promotion, recognition, and the opportunity to tour abroad (158). Echoing Kate Skinner's discussion of how repressive Nkrumahist nationalism forced individuals to recognize that their personal and family advancement depended upon an embrace of Ghana as defined by the 1957 borders incorporating British Togoland, dancers can only reap material gain from their labors within a fiercely micromanaged commercial environment. Ideologies and manifestations of Ghanaian nation and nationhood compete in a market of ideas.

Bianca Murillo's *Market Encounters* reveals an entirely different rendition of the Ghanaian national narrative, through the lens of consumption and economic activity. Her highly original socioeconomic history of retail business and its contribution to the emergence of ideas of nationhood, autonomy, and capitalism begins with the story of an economically motivated riot in Accra in 1948. Since Judith van Allen's (1972, 1976) foundational analyses of the 1929 Ogu Umunwanyi in Oloko, Bende, Nigeria, such spectacular instances of violence, many seemingly oblivious to colonial authorities, have been cleaved apart revealing complex economic, social, political, and cultural undercurrents (Bastian 2001; Lawrance 2003; Grillo 2018). For Murillo, like van Allen and others, the riots were about injustice; about failed promises, inflation, and hoarding. The riots, and the boycotts that staggered on afterward, reveal a widely held view that rather than appeal to Africans as consumers with legitimate market demands, interest, and knowledge, private European trade houses largely did the bidding of the colonial regime. But the tumult also serves as the segue to some of the most fascinating and thoughtful conjecture by Murillo, namely, who were the consumers in the Gold Coast? She deftly explores commodity distribution channels to uncover local conceptualizations of ideas of sale, resale, and wholesale to reveal indigenous notions of value and rationality, as well as racism and patronizing imperial attitudes.

Building on foundational work by Claire Robertson (1990) and Gracia Clark (1994), Murillo reveals how consumption (as distinct from marketing) is simultaneously consumer politics and deeply gendered, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. She situates her analysis within the meanings and possibilities of writing a history of economic activity via strategies of survival and accumulation in unstable politico-economic contexts. The book opens with the most densely archival chapter echoing timeworn African historiographical traditions and evaluates what markets consisted of in colonial Gold Coast, and what vendors and merchants knew or thought they knew of their consumers. It then moves to intermediaries, recasting the terminology to examine the relatively marginalized role of economic middlemen in the shifting commercial terrain in late colonial West Africa, as companies consolidated and European firms adjusted to the growing middle class and urban markets. This is followed by a case study of the first department store in Ghana, Kingsway, as a vehicle for exploring modernity and nationhood

through prosperity, materiality, and consumption-generating campaigns, and a chapter on Ghana's first global economic showcase, the world trade fair staged shortly after the overthrow of Nkrumah. The book concludes with a survey of economic life during the series of military juntas of the sixties and seventies, exploring scarcity and smuggling, and tying these experiences to the dramatic political swings in Ghanaian life from the early 1980s to the present day.

Perhaps most importantly when read within a collection of Ghana studies scholarship, Murillo's set of case studies recasts the Nkrumahist national paradigm along economic and gendered lines. While the longer *durée* of the study both predates modern Ghana and eclipses Nkrumah's reign, it nevertheless imparts insight into the nature of Nkrumahism, insofar as sociocultural life is also an embodied economic experience, and Nkrumah sought to insert himself into every possible space. The everyday is recentered around shifting and complex national debates, and in this respect the chapter on Kingsway is most illuminating.

And so, it is refreshing to have newly published material with which to reevaluate Nkrumah's contribution via Jacob Gordon's edited collection, *Revisiting Kwame Nkrumah*. Gordon has collected original interviews, along with scholarly and familial reflections and research focusing on Nkrumah's life and times from U.S. and Ghanaian collections. We learn much about Nkrumah via his contemporaries, including his education (133–35) and his pre-political life (61–64), as well as his creative sociocultural influences and ideas (70), from Gordon's direct and uncompromising interview technique. The formative years, preceding independence and prior to the coup d'état that toppled Nkrumah in 1966, are revealed in a new critical light (32–34) through the eyes of Joseph Adomako. The machinations of George Padmore at the Bureau of African Affairs and Nkrumah's day-to-day diplomacy are rendered tangible in the memories of K. B. Asante and former ambassador Ebenezer Debrah. Samia Nkrumah's thoughtful and emotional interview sheds important light on the impact of Nkrumah's overthrow on the family in exile (87–89). Kwame Arhin's tantalizing religious interpretations of Nkrumah's "communing" with Mami Wata both startle (109) and yet echo popular sentiment then and now (see Appiah 1990) about the magico-religious aura enveloping *Osagyefo*.

In some of the secondary scholarly reflections, such as that by Ama Biney, there is space for critique of Nkrumah's authoritarian tendencies (126) and misguided optimism, and a recognition that he saw political freedom as ultimately a temporal project to be subordinated to an economic reinvention, such as his desire to shift Ghana from primary raw commodity production to an exporter of manufactured goods within a larger Pan-African goal of self-reliance. Other contributions, such as that of Joseph Holloway, position Nkrumah as the telos of a staid masculine pan-African awakening. At times, however, leading questions (69, 88, 108) facilitate interviewees' straying into faultless hagiography (25, 45, 72–76), muddled Pan-Africanist ideology (63–65, 128–38), and even bold untruth. Nkrumah is portrayed as

a “humble” misunderstood prophet (57–59, 128) by colleagues and as an anti-imperialist socialist visionary by his family members (83). Gordon seems all too willing to overlook incontrovertible evidence of basic human rights violations (112). Contra Ernesto Yeboah’s recollection of “lies” (268) he was made to regurgitate during his childhood school years, Nkrumah did introduce a one-party state via constitutional amendment in 1964 and authorized the imprisonment of many political dissidents without trial under the 1958 Preventive Detention Act. While full of novelty and originality—such as the intervention of former University of Ghana Vice Chancellor Akilagpa Sawyer, reflecting on post-Nkrumah iconoclasm—and valuable for future scholars of Ghana and Nkrumah’s legacy and the broader contours of Pan-Africanism, the collection is also troubling insofar as historical revisionism (67) is too frequently unquestioned by the interlocutor/editor.

In scope, scale, and tone, Jesse Weaver Shipley’s outstanding study of Ghanaian national theater—*Trickster Theatre*—is a fitting companion to Ahlman’s study and Kate Skinner’s *Fruits of Freedom*. Shipley argues that the Akan-language *anansesem* (spider/trickster tales) informed an aesthetic of adaptation whereby cultural performance manifested nationhood, in the sense that a subversive ambition and ambiguous cunning were projected globally as a mark of Ghanaian identity. A shared cultural tradition was a founding pillar of Nkrumahism and the Nkrumahists’ projection of “Ghanaian” and “African” on the continent and beyond, and *ananse* (spider/trickster) “became an adaptable icon” (14) for cultural nationalism. As trickster tales migrated from Akan lands to other parts of the world via the transatlantic slave trade and the emergence of the African diaspora, it is not difficult to see how they could both transcend and exemplify the nation. But Shipley goes much further to recover the genre b(l)ending and improvisational substrate of trickster tales as a medium for the development of popular and formal Ghanaian theatre. The book consists of two parts: the first is a historical narrative of the development of theater and various national iterations through independence and into the early 1980s, extending the work of Catherine Cole (2001); the second examines contemporary (“millennial”) performances of Ghana and Africa, culminating with a backstage meditation on Nkrumah’s rehabilitation. Shipley’s broad sweep begins in the Gold Coast Colony with the early story of performance and brings us into the post-Rawlings democratic restoration.

For Shipley, Ghanaian identity and Ghanaian-ness is an embodied contradiction. The trickster is a hustler whose life embodies competing notions of tradition and modernity, urban and rural, and colonial/anti-colonial, among others. Playful, absurd, transgressive, and parodic, the ananse reveals social anxieties, personal desires, and public perceptions of nationhood. Similarly, as Shipley observes, Ghanaian theater, unlike other postcolonial African theater, “is built on indirection” (16). Based on ethnographies of theatre troops and archival research, Shipley in part one tackles the historical development of theater in Ghana. He first highlights British and European depoliticizing designs on African tradition and nationalist

resistance to tradition as an “impediment” (49) to modernity. Inserted into this long-established binary is the birth and growth of Achimota College—of enduring interest in Ghana Studies—which both essentialized and objectified traditional culture and served as a mirror against which modernizing elites (such as the teachers explored by Coe 2005) could contemplate and adjust themselves. He then examines the National Theatre Movement during Nkrumah’s primacy, as a debate between universalizing (read European) and Africa-centric (national) performance aesthetics as represented in, respectively, Joe de Graft and Efua Sutherland. For Sutherland, whose approach ultimately prevailed, modern Ghanaian theater brings traditional idiom to inform and “inspire” (66) artistic creativity.

Because of the collapse of theater and arts education post-Nkrumah, the next chapters move swiftly into the Nkrumahist revival period of the Rawlings era, and the central figure of the book is revealed to be Mohammed Ben Abdullah, a former minister of art and culture and founder of the Chinese-built National Theatre. From the 1980s to 1990s, Ghana’s commitment to national theater shifts dramatically from socialized support to neoliberal self-reliance in the global marketplace. Part two thus examines the enduring legacies of the national theater’s aesthetic, cultural, and financial debates via four millennial stagings, among them Abdullah’s most famous play, *The Witch of Mpoti*. Shipley draws on his own multivalent shifting role as performer/participant/scholar and employs a “double-voicing” (149, 165) reading to reveal the contradictory notions of “Ghanaianess” within Ghanaian national theater. This mesmerizing work reminded this reader that, just as Nkrumahism and neo-Nkrumahist ideologies have come and gone, Ghanaian theater’s central figure, the trickster, signifies “the impossibility of definite perduring interpretation.” Ghanaian theatre, like Ghanaian nationhood, is unstable but also most “successful” when it remains “unclear” (117).

In stark contrast with Gordon’s collection, Kate Skinner’s authoritative study of a community of Ghanaian and Togolese political activists and their failed political objectives addresses the darker underbelly of Ghanaian nationalism and Nkrumah’s authoritarianism. *The Fruits of Freedom* is thus a powerful antidote to Gordon’s wishful historical revisionism. Skinner focuses on the roles of education, literacy, schooling, and employment, examining Gold Coast education policy, which emphasized mass education from World War Two onward. As universal primary schooling and adult literacy campaigns gained ground rapidly, nationalist rhetoric and campaigning shifted to meet this growing familiarity with writing. Skinner addresses the perceived need for, and widespread deployment of, repressive measures to extinguish alternative visions of nationhood and nationalism. Her imaginative and compelling political history revisits terrain examined by Paul Nugent (1996, 2003), D.E.K. Amenumey (1989) and others, and provides a new and nuanced interpretation of the failed Togoland reunification attempt, a project that continues to have political rumblings today. Her innovative approach, drawing on rich oral historical interviews, as well as

colonial and postcolonial archives, political pamphlets and other paraphernalia, and chants, articulates for education (and teachers and “school leavers” in particular) a central role in the development of a set of diverse, and oftentimes conflicting, political projects in British Togoland (and to a lesser extent French Togoland).¹

In some respects, Skinner’s methodology is a hybrid of the interests of Ahlman, Schauert, Fuller, and Shipley: song, chant (think Vail & White 1983), and propaganda are examined for the ways they not only projected and performed the Ghanaian national, but simultaneously erased British Togoland as a distinct political entity. British Togoland is now within Ghana, but many constituencies in the Volta region continue to grieve their failed national project and fantasize about future iterations of autonomy. And her painstaking method bears fruit: Skinner offers a new explanation for the failures of Togoland reunification, and, for nationalism generally (see van Walraven 2013). Education provides an entirely new avenue for the understanding of failed nationalist projects. Moreover, historical injustices pertaining to the political transformation of the region in the 1950s continue to manifest themselves in important and relevant ways in Ghana and Togo today. In the latter portion of the book, by drawing on interviews with refugee communities and diplomatic archives, Skinner provides an engaging and creative solution to many of the perils associated with post-colonial history, particularly in countries fraught with violence and political upheaval. She develops a strikingly new approach to postcolonial history by juxtaposing rival narratives from residents of a region that became a new borderland. This approach underscores how dissidents often speak more forthrightly in exile (Lawrance 2018; McDougall 2018), and that the content of their interview is intimately tied to the immediate political context, and often the political party in power.

Projections and performances of Ghanaian nationhood remain vibrant occupations in contemporary Ghana. The recent struggles over who should be represented on the new cedi notes, the scale of corruption in the judiciary, the protection of monuments and historical buildings in the face of massive private investment in property and new construction, and the cementing of Accra’s role as a West African regional hub for international business and humanitarian operations are but four of the current debates that implicate Nkrumahist heritage and the sequence of constitutional iterations since Nkrumah’s overthrow. More than sixty years after independence, Ghana continues to challenge and inspire scholars seeking to document and analyze the historical and contemporaneous debates about what constitutes the nation and who can speak for and represent Ghana at home and abroad. The works reviewed here offer provocative reconsiderations of the domestic iterations and international implications of the shifting, rebuilding, annexing, and reshaping Ghanaian nation state. And what looms largest in all of these new works, unsurprisingly, is the enduring legacy of Kwame Nkrumah.

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Note

1. In the interest of full disclosure, I provided a pre-publication blurb for this book.

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