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**AUTHOR:**John Aerni-Flessner<sup>1</sup>**AFFILIATION:**

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor of History, Residential College in the Arts and Humanities (RCAH), Michigan State University, USA and Research Fellow, Department of History, University of the Free State

**EMAIL:**

aerniFL1@msu.edu

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**BOOK REVIEW**

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Alessandro landolo, *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955-1968*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022. 312 pp. ISBN 978-1-5017-6443-1.

Alessandro landolo's first book examining the history of development assistance that the Soviet Union provided to Ghana, Guinea, and Mali starting in the late 1950s is an impressive piece of research. The book is a solid addition to international and transnational histories that have helped deepen our understanding of the Cold War and decolonisation eras in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Making the case that the Soviet Union was attempting to pioneer a new statist but non-communist style of development in West Africa, the book makes an interesting and important intervention in the growing literature examining development on the African continent in the mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century. While retaining a focus on the Soviet Union and its policy makers, as befitting a Soviet specialist, landolo also conducted significant research in both Ghana and Mali, as well as in North America and Europe. This extensive archival work ensures that this Cold War story does not merely relegate Africa and African leaders to a supporting or ancillary role in the global conflict. Rather, the leaders of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali emerge as the significant players on the global scene that they were in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The focus of the book is on the Soviet Union and how its policy changes and personality battles played out in West African development planning and implementation from 1955 to about 1964. The main argument is that the Soviet Union was looking to export a new model of development

to West Africa that would “disrupt existing trade relations with the West” (8) and allow Ghana, Guinea, and Mali to be “showpieces” (9) that would help convince other states to adopt the Soviet developmental model. The Soviets chose to work with these three states because of the willingness of the leaders to look for aid from sources other than their former colonial rulers. Further, given their relatively small populations and economies, especially compared to other emerging states like India or Indonesia, Soviet planners saw an opportunity for a relatively small investment to pay off quickly. The Soviet Union in the late 1950s under Nikita Khrushchev believed it was exporting a “distinctive approach to modernisation” (15) and development that was emblematic of the confidence Soviet leaders were projecting, and they saw the West African states as relatively blank slates on which to project their model.

The chapters nicely articulate Soviet priorities and how Soviet policymakers, who had almost no previous experience working on the African continent, came to see West African countries as the place to make their paradigm-defining interventions. While the book does give a brief outline of political developments in West Africa, most Africanist readers of this journal will find little new in the summaries of the literature and might even find them wanting. The early chapters, for instance, rely heavily on the Cambridge History in Africa series which, while important, is a bit dated. When explaining the careers and motivations of Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, and Modibo Keita, the book does a better job of incorporating newer literature.

The chapters on the individual projects in each of the countries are the strength of the book. Here landolo goes into great detail on how Soviet policymakers both saw their efforts in planning and then how their plans played out in practice. It will be no surprise to scholars of development to find that there was an often-immense gap between what was planned and what actually transpired on the ground. However, documenting it in detail, especially by drawing on Soviet archives, is still important and will help those who work on West Africa better understand some of the earliest post-colonial development efforts there.

Overall, the book admirably succeeds in explaining Soviet aid to West Africa in the period of decolonisation and putting that narrative in conversation with larger histories of development. As an international/transnational history, the book does a good job of making sure that local events are contextualised and supported with rich archival sources. It also succeeds in framing Soviet aid to West Africa in relation to contemporaneous Western and Chinese development efforts across Africa and the globe.

For readers of this journal, however, the value of the book will likely primarily lie in the extensive deep dig into the Soviet archives. Few Africanists are also Soviet specialists, so this book can open new understandings for those investigating the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and its contacts in Africa in other contexts. Complicating the idea of “Superpower Rivalry,” the book nicely points out that, just like better-studied Western policies toward Africa, Soviet policy vacillated. Knowing and understanding the interplay of various entities within the Soviet Union will help scholars better nuance writing on foreign aid, development efforts, and the Cold War from an African-centric perspective. Those looking to find the ways that Africans who were not national leaders experienced Soviet development, as much of the more recent scholarship on the histories of development in Africa has done, will not find much here.<sup>1</sup> In the context of landolo’s focus on Soviet policy and West African leaders, of course, this is to be expected, but armed with his new information, Africanists can profitably use this book to construct a more nuanced picture of how people on the ground in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali came to experience and understand Soviet development. The book will help those scholars answer the question of whether the distinctions drawn in the book between “capitalist” development exported from the West and “statist” development exported by the USSR mattered to those on the receiving end of development assistance.

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1 See, for example, K Moskowitz, *Seeing like a citizen: Decolonization, development, and the making of Kenya, 1945-1980* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019); M Saeteurn, *Cultivating their own: Agriculture in Western Kenya during the “development” era* (Rochester: Rochester University Press, 2020); A Wiemers, *Village work: Development and rural statecraft in twentieth century Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019).