

# H-Diplo | Robert Jervis International Security Studies Forum

## Roundtable Review 15-44

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

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## Introduction by Paul Betts, University of Oxford

Alessandro Iandolo's *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968* was published in 2022, and was awarded the W. Bruce Lincoln Prize for the best first monograph in Russian History as well as the Marshall D. Shulman Prize for the best monograph on the international relations of the USSR, both from the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies. These prizes recognize that the book provides something new in international history. It explores the complicated relationship between the Soviet Union and the newly decolonized West African states of Ghana, Guinea and Mali. This was part of Moscow's great thrust southward in the 1960s, as the Kremlin sought to win new partners in West Africa with offers of military assistance, economic aid and cultural fellowship. Iandolo shows how Soviet leaders forged their own idea of Africanism, as economic modernization and non-capitalist development emerged as a new language of solidarity between the Second and Third Worlds in the Age of Decolonization.

His is a rich story of first encounters between peoples who historically had little to do with one other, and it was the Cold War that forged their new connections, which ran the gamut from hope, investment, misunderstanding and disappointment. Yet this is no starry-eyed tale of long lost Cold War relations; rather, Iandolo also chronicles the limitations and failures of these cross-cultural economic projects, tracking the transition from ploughshares into debt shares as a case study of Soviet-West African relations. No less significant is the way in which Iandolo integrates African actors and voices into his history, revealing how African elites from these three countries dealt with the Soviet officials in a variety of ever-changing and at times quite tense ways. On offer is a truly transnational rereading of Cold War international history from a fresh regional perspective, which goes a long way in shedding light on the hothouse development—and dramatic deterioration—of East-South solidarities, as well as on how the dynamics of Cold War bilateralism operated in various postcolonial settings.

The reviewers note the great value and contribution of Iandolo's book. Chris Miller praises the book as a “nuanced, archivally driven account of the role of ideology in economic development thinking in the Cold War,” and an “exemplary model of how to study development simultaneously as the history of ideas and of economic processes.” Radoslav Yordanov writes it as a “meticulously researched and competently written scholarly account that is a welcome addition to the booming literature on East-South relations through the Cold War.” Its novelty is spotlighted by other reviewers too, especially in terms of the issues of regional development and periodization. Michelle D. Paranzino describes it as “a fascinating and compelling account” that “provides a model for how detailed regional studies challenge us to rethink the categories and assumptions that have traditionally defined our understanding of the Cold War writ large.” For Kristy Ironside, *Arrested Development* “subtly proposes a new way of periodizing the Soviet leadership's economic thinking, not just vis-à-vis the world economy but at home” as well. Ismay Milford goes even further, noting that Iandolo “makes a fresh contribution to the ongoing reappraisal of the so-called Third World in the global Cold War,” as he “masterfully weaves together multiple perspectives” in analysing the different actors on the ground. Jeremy Friedman adds that it “provides an illuminating narrative about the give-and-take between Moscow and its West African allies,” concluding that “countries like Ethiopia, South Yemen, Mozambique and Nicaragua need their own Iandolos.”

All of the reviewers also underline the premium that Iandolo assigned to ideology in this intercultural encounter, and they also draw attention to its broader implications for reconsidering the Cold War history of the region. That said, several concerns are raised about areas that might have been explored in more depth and detail. Milford, for example, would like to have seen greater attention to the “inter-dependence” of these cases to the extent that they interacted with one other in a mutually learning process. Friedman argues that at times the book “creates ambiguity regarding some of its claims” (including the role of heavy industry) and in places “is overambitious with its conclusions.” Yordanov would “have enjoyed seeing more connections made with the Horn and Southern Africa which were begging to be made.” How this history has been

remembered (or not) in post-Soviet Russia is another theme that might have been developed more. In any case, all of the reviewers laud the book's fair-minded tone and strong revisionist spirit. Milford captures the sentiment by concluding that Iandolo's book is a "model for writing new histories of Cold War cooperation that adopt neither the cynicism nor romanticism that for a long time tainted the field," all the while refusing "to treat developmental aspirations and economic realities as two separate worlds." As noted here and elsewhere, *Arrested Development* is a very welcome and timely reminder of the power and prospect of red globalism not so long ago.

### Contributors:

**Alessandro Iandolo** is Lecturer in Soviet and Post-Soviet History at University College London. His first book, *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968* (Cornell University Press, 2022), won the W. Bruce Lincoln prize and the Marshall D. Shulman prize from the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.

**Paul Betts** is Professor of Modern European History at St Antony's College, Oxford, and is the author of several books, including *Ruin and Renewal: Civilizing Europe after the Second World War* (Basic Books (US)/Profile (UK), 2020) and *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (OUP, 2010). He has co-edited eight books, and a co-written book (with James Mark, et al.) on *Socialism Goes Global: Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the Age of Decolonisation*, which appeared in 2022 with OUP.

**Jeremy Friedman** is an Associate Professor at Harvard Business School. Previously he was the Associate Director of the Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy at Yale University. He received his PhD from Princeton in 2011. His books include *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, (UNC Press, 2015) and *Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World*, (Harvard University Press, 2021). His current project traces the history of the New Left in a global context from 1956 to 2011.

**Kristy Ironside** is Associate Professor of Russian History and William Dawson Scholar at McGill University. She is the author of *A Full-Value Ruble: The Promise of Prosperity in the Postwar Soviet Union* (Harvard University Press, 2021). She is currently at work on a book on the entry and exit of McDonald's from the Russian market, examining the country's economic transformation from the late Soviet period to the present through the lens of the multinational fast food chain's presence there.

**Ismay Milford** is a historian of East Africa's global connections, based at Freie Universität Berlin. Her first book, *African Activists in a Decolonising World: The Making of an Anticolonial Culture, 1952–1966*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2023.

**Chris Miller** is Associate Professor at the Fletcher School and author of *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology* (Scribner, 2022), a geopolitical history of the computer chip. He previously wrote three other books on Russia, including *Putinomics: Power and Money in Resurgent Russia* (UNC Press, 2018); *We Shall Be Masters: Russia's Pivots to East Asia from Peter the Great to Putin* (Harvard, 2021); and *The Struggle to Save the Soviet Economy: Mikhail Gorbachev and the Collapse of the USSR* (UNC Press 2018).

**Michelle Paranzino** is an Assistant Professor in the Strategy & Policy department at the US Naval War College. She earned her PhD in History at the University of Texas at Austin and is the author of *The Cuban Missile and the Cold War: A Short History with Documents* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2018). She is currently working on a book about Ronald Reagan and the War on Drugs.

**Radoslav Yordanov** completed his doctoral studies at Oxford University, defending a thesis on Soviet involvement in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1947–1991. This thesis served as a basis for his first monograph, published in the Harvard Cold War Book Series. Following visiting stints at the Russian Academy of Science’s Institute of World History and Columbia’s Harriman Institute, Radoslav joined the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies where he has completed his second book on the Soviet Bloc-Cuban relations during the Cold War. At the Davis Center Radoslav is also currently working on a new project aiming to conceptualize the relationships between the former Soviet Bloc states and the Third World, using a broad range of newly declassified materials from Eastern European archives. His work has appeared in *The Journal of Cold War Studies*, *Third World Quarterly*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, *International History Review*, *International Affairs*, *Estudios Públicos* and *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*.

## Review by Jeremy Friedman, Harvard University

As the Cold War recedes further into the past, the urgency of the geopolitical clash between the United States and the Soviet Union has diminished in the minds of scholars, to be replaced by a focus on economic development. Historians such as Sara Lorenzini, David Engerman, Artemy Kalinovsky, and others have turned the focus to aid projects and other attempts at modernization, largely in the so-called “Third World,” though in the case of Kalinovsky’s excellent book on Soviet Tajikistan, a sort of internal “Third World.”<sup>1</sup> This new direction in the literature, however, has given rise to a crucial debate: how dissimilar, really, were the development strategies of East and West, Communist and capitalist? Both sides advocated planning, at least in the early stages of development, as well as some role for market forces, and both sides seemed to be following a similar blueprint, even competing for the same projects at times—dams, railroads, power plants, etc. Some, therefore, are inclined to look at the evidence and ask, was all the rhetoric about capitalism versus communism really just for show? Though this might be the product of a relatively recent focus in the literature, it is essentially a new version of an older debate. Going back to Herbert Marcuse’s discussion of “convergence theory” in the 1960s and even earlier, many during the Cold War argued that the capitalist and Communist systems were never truly as different as they seemed.<sup>2</sup> Some, often those who were sympathetic to socialism or Marxism of some variety and wanted to put some distance between their own beliefs and the Soviet system, cast doubt on whether the Soviet Union was ever really socialist, or rather whether it was simply trying to find a shortcut to modernization in order to compete in a hostile world.<sup>3</sup> Alessandro Iandolo, in *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1964*, emphatically insists that, despite some superficial similarities, these development projects were profoundly different, and that that difference had its root in ideological conviction on both sides. As he puts it, despite the persistent inclination of historians to destabilize binaries, “some binaries are very resistant,” including “state versus market, collective versus individual, [and] ultimately Soviet versus Western” (230).

Iandolo’s work offers an exceptionally well-researched and highly readable account of Soviet aid projects and relationships with the West African countries of Guinea, Ghana, and Mali, a story well-known to Soviet historians from the works of Sergey Mazov and others,<sup>4</sup> but one that Iandolo successfully markets to a broader audience that is interested in the history of development, modernization, and growth in the Global South, three words that Iandolo uses as synonyms. The breadth of Iandolo’s research, along with the width of his frame, are the two central attractions of the book. His use of Ghanaian, Malian, and French archives enables a fully two-sided picture of these relationships, a standard that is still difficult to achieve even in works on Western aid projects, let alone Soviet ones where the logistical and linguistic barriers are higher to begin with. He also consulted the archives of multiple Soviet institutions, avoiding the trap some historians

<sup>1</sup> See David Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), see the H-Diplo roundtable at <https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XX-12.pdf>; Artemy Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), see the H-Diplo roundtable at <https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XX-46.pdf>; Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), see the H-Diplo roundtable at <https://issforum.org/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XXI-41.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Societies*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); See also John Kenneth Galbriath, *The New Industrial State*, (Kolkata: Signet, 1968); Jan Tinbergen, “Do Communist and Free Economies Show a Converging Pattern?,” *Soviet Studies* Vol. 12 No. 4 (April 1961), 333-341.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); Theodore H. Van Laue, *Why Lenin? Why Stalin?*, (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1971); Moshe Lewin, *Russia/USSR/Russia: The Drive and Drift of a Superstate*, (New York: The New Press, 1995)

<sup>4</sup> Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956–1964*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); See also Jeremy Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2015), 60-100.

fall into of over-reliance on a specific actor in the foreign policy process, thereby enabling him to tell a story that weaves together the strands of economics, politics, and diplomacy. The result is a story not merely of aid projects but comprehensive relationships in which the reader learns as much about the “pull” factors—the political, economic, and ideological visions and agendas of Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, Modibo Keita, and even ministers in their governments who were not always on the same page—as the “push” factors—the motivations of those in Moscow who were seek to impact the development trajectories of the newly independent postcolonial states.

Iandolo’s work primarily focuses on the Khrushchev era in Soviet politics (1953–1964), which coincided with the height of Soviet enthusiasm for development of the “Third World,” though his focus on this era leads him to somewhat unfairly diminish Soviet involvement in the Global South during other periods, including the Comintern activities in the 1920s, and the Brezhnev-era attempts to build socialist systems around the world. He asserts in the introduction that ideology was both central to the Cold War and to the motivations of Soviet leaders in their engagements with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, arguing that they were chosen because their small size made it possible to imagine a reasonable investment producing a comprehensive transformation, and because their leaders were ideologically inclined towards socialism. Soviet engagement was not, therefore, prompted either by a desire for allies and influence here, nor by a desire for goods, markets, or profit. He buttresses this claim with evidence of the ways in which Soviet and Western engagement was different, particularly with regard to interest rates and claims on equity. He ties the transformation to the concept of the “non-capitalist path,” one well-established in the existing literature, focusing primarily on the expansion of the state sector as the distinguishing feature of this model. From this base, he provides an illuminating narrative about the give-and-take between Moscow and its West African allies, showing how at times the latter’s economic ambitions exceeded the former’s, while diving into detailed discussions that demonstrate how colonial legacies continued to create obstacles despite strong political will on both sides. In particular, his elaboration of the mechanics of Ghana’s cocoa trade, which created problems despite Soviet willingness to pay a higher price for the crop, as well as his explanation of the currency situations in each country and Soviet involvement, are good examples of the kinds of economic difficulties that would contribute to the ultimate failure of these development efforts.

Though the depth of detail provided by Iandolo is the product of admirable research, there are times when it creates ambiguity regarding some of his claims. He asserts in the introduction that “heavy industry did not feature” in “the type of economic modernization sponsored by the USSR in West Africa,” which is defined as including mining among other things, but he goes on to discuss in at length the Soviet geological expeditions and major infrastructure projects included in the aid agreements that ate up a considerable portion of the credits (7). He also quotes a Soviet expert as saying that one of the key objectives of Soviet modernization, in contradistinction to that of the West, was to “facilitate the creation and the strengthening of concentration centers of industrial proletariat” (112). More fundamentally, though Iandolo repeatedly emphasizes that Soviet leaders were attempting to build “noncapitalism” or “socialism” in West Africa, but not “Communism,” he does not define these terms or their relationship to each other, especially in the Soviet lexicon. After all, it will be recalled that it was only in 1961, after most of these aid agreements were signed, that the Soviets even adopted a program to build Communism—by 1980. Meanwhile, the 1960 Moscow Statement that officially enshrined the “noncapitalist path” and the “state of national democracy” as the international Communist movement’s objectives for the postcolonial states,<sup>5</sup> which Iandolo does not mention, invoked those as temporary stages on the road to socialist revolution. Without that context, the reader is left a little confused when the Soviets criticized Ghana for being “still far from real “scientific socialism,” for example (161). Was “scientific socialism” supposed to be the objective, and, if so, on what timeline, and what was it supposed to entail? More broadly, Iandolo’s argument that the initial aid agreements

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Friedman, *Shadow Cold War*, 57-58.

did not envisage a full transition to a Soviet-style economy begs the question of what would have happened if they had succeeded? What was the hoped-for result, 10, 20, or 50 years down the road?

These questions point to some of the limitations of the book, which, despite the depth and quality of the research, is at times a bit overambitious with its conclusions, though they are provocative and will help frame debates for future scholars. Scholars will continue to engage with the questions of how different development models were framed, what their objectives were, and what they achieved. Is the import substitution model, associated with protective tariffs and rapid industrialization, really a good point of comparison for Soviet development aid? What is the proper role of planning in development, and how much is it inseparable from the growth of the state sector? What Iandolo has done is provide an excellent model of the kind of work that needs to be replicated to fully understand the role that socialist countries played in the story of development in the twentieth century. Countries like Ethiopia, South Yemen, Mozambique, and Nicaragua need their own scholars like Iandolo. With rising geopolitical tensions, this kind of work is becoming ever more difficult, especially with regard to Russian and Chinese archives, but as the Belt and Road Initiative demonstrates, to give only one example, it is only becoming more necessary.

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 Review by Kristy Ironside, McGill University
 

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On first glance, it is hard to understand how the Soviet economic system could ever have been seen as desirable. The Soviet Union's industrialization came at a huge cost, not least in terms of human suffering, and it was unevenly realized across the country. In Soviet Central Asia, it did not even begin in earnest until the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Collectivization never provided enough food to feed the population and turned the country's peasants against the Soviet system.<sup>2</sup> The abolition of private trade and distribution of all resources through a centrally planned system contributed to both chronic and acute shortages, inefficiencies, low productivity, and popular discontent.<sup>3</sup> Structural problems, in other words, were baked into the Soviet economic system from the start, eventually contributing to its demise. Who would voluntarily choose this?

Alessandro Iandolo asks us to put aside what we know about the Soviet economic system in retrospect, and imagine, for a moment, what it looked like in the mid-to-late 1950s, from the vantage point of the leaders of newly decolonized West African countries and to Soviet leaders. As he so convincingly shows in this meticulously researched book, there was much to commend the Soviet model. The Soviet Union was able to move from being a predominantly rural and agricultural society to an urban and industrial one, achieving high literacy and education rates. Most importantly, it did all of this in a very short period of time, and without the help of loans from foreign, predatory capitalists. In short, there was much to find appealing in the Soviet approach to economic development, especially to West African leaders like Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Guinea's Sékou Touré, and Mali's Modibo Keita, who possessed radical political inclinations to begin with. The Soviet government sought to cultivate them as allies through the provision of development aid aimed at modernizing their economies.

But this is not only a book about the Soviet Union's Cold War attempt to shore up relations with African states through foreign aid and cultural exchanges, a subject that has received a fair amount of scholarly attention already.<sup>4</sup> One of the most important contributions of Iandolo's book, and the one I will focus on here, lies in the field of economic history. As Iandolo argues, "the USSR's aim in West Africa was not to replicate itself or to lay the foundations of communism...the agreements signed with Guinea, Ghana, and Mali aimed to build a large state sector in the economy and to disrupt existing trade links with the West" (8). This book thus contributes to a growing field of research that has demonstrated the importance of foreign trade considerations to the Soviet leadership, beginning with Oscar Sanchez-Sibony's *Red Globalization*.<sup>5</sup> It also

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<sup>1</sup> On Central Asia's late industrialization, see Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> As Lynne Viola writes: "Collectivization was a Pyrrhic victory, achieved at great cost and human tragedy... the October Revolution and the Stalinist industrial and military infrastructure of the USSR were, from the start, built upon a peasant foundation inadequate to sustain a proletarian revolution and too weak to maintain its country's superpower status into the late twentieth century." See Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 240.

<sup>3</sup> Elena Osokina, *Our Daily Bread: Socialist Distribution and the Art of Survival in Stalin's Russia, 1927-1941* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> See, for example: Maxim Matushevich, *No Easy Row for a Russian Hoe: Ideology and Pragmatism in Nigerian-Soviet Relations, 1960-1991* (Trenton, N. J.: Africa World Press, 2003); Constantin Katsakioris, "The Lumumba University in Moscow: Higher Education for a Soviet-Third World alliance, 1960-91," *Journal of Global History*, Vol. 14, No. 281 (2019): 281-300; Natasha Telepneva, *Cold War Liberation: The Soviet Union and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire in Africa, 1961-1975* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).



subtly proposes a new way of periodizing its economic thinking, not just vis-à-vis the world economy but also at home.

Iandolo begins with the Soviet-West African relationship in the run-up to Nikita Khrushchev's ascent to power after the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, covering some familiar ground for Soviet historians that may be less so for African historians and historians of international development. As Iandolo points out, many Africans fundamentally saw the Soviet Union as an economic success story and as an alternative to Western capitalism because of its ability to overcome its "backwardness." Like other foreigners in the first half of the twentieth century, even including many Westerners, they were intrigued by its creation of a fully planned economy. On the flipside, while Joseph Stalin was in charge, the Soviet government was ambivalent, at best, about the developing world, viewing it as stuck in, or not sufficiently removed from, the capitalist-imperialist mode of production to embrace socialism. After his death, however, and as Khrushchev came to power, Soviet leaders began to reorient their foreign policy toward "peaceful coexistence" with the West and expanding socialism beyond the USSR and Eastern Europe through means other than war (25-26). That means was economic development.

Here is where Iandolo's argument veers off into perhaps less familiar terrain even for Soviet historians, most of whom approach the Soviet economy through the paradigm of failure. Khrushchev, Iandolo emphasizes, genuinely "had confidence in socialism as an economic system. He believed that it was the best possible system to organize society and production, and that it had the potential to replace liberal capitalism" (26). In Iandolo's interpretation, Khrushchev "wanted to confront the West on a terrain where he believed the USSR had better chances of prevailing. The point was not to defeat the West on the battlefield, but in terms of living standards and technological achievements" (27). At this point, there was reason to be confident, as Iandolo emphasizes: the Soviet economy was growing and living standards were rising, even if they lagged behind those of the West. The Soviet state was investing in large-scale infrastructural projects like the Angara hydroelectric dam that was designed to spread industrial modernity eastward.

Khrushchev also had good reason to believe that socialist principles could take root in West Africa despite the absence of a recognizable proletariat and the proper economic conditions. He had a less dogmatic understanding of Marxism than Stalin, who bought into Marx's rigid understanding of historical stages of development and refused to make concessions to countries without advanced industrial economies and large working classes, governed by "ideologically unreliable nationalists"; as Iandolo writes "[a]s long as Stalin was in charge, the Third World could never be a priority for the Soviet Union" (43). Khrushchev, by contrast, believed that the Soviet Union could be a partner in the development of decolonizing countries, helping them to overcome the economic deficits that imperialism had left them with, not least because the Soviet Union itself had undergone its revolution at the wrong starting point according to Marxist orthodoxy (52).

Moreover, instead of helping West African states become socialist in a narrow Soviet understanding of what that meant, Khrushchev-era Soviet officials and experts set a more modest goal: helping these governments to build large state sectors while leaving space for functioning markets (57). Here, Iandolo's argument dovetails neatly with that made by Jeremy Friedman in his recent monograph, *Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World*, in which he highlights the surprisingly flexible attitude the late Soviet leadership and expert class took toward nationalism, religion, and mixed economic methods in the Third World as it attempted to figure out how to export the revolution.<sup>6</sup> The Soviet Union also seized the opportunity that such development projects offered to win points in the Cold War, presenting itself as a benevolent partner in building up Third World countries rather than continuing their imperial economic exploitation under a new

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<sup>6</sup> Jeremy Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2021).

guise like former colonial powers Britain and France or the quasi-colonial United States (58). That entailed distributing loans with low interest rates and long terms, accepting flexible payment arrangements including the use of local currencies and barter, and leaving local partners in charge of projects once they were completed (59).

After initially struggling to find their way in at mid-decade, the Soviets managed to establish a foothold on the continent in the late 1950s (90). African leaders visited the Soviet Union, Soviet experts visited West Africa, and their discussions produced promising economic cooperation agreements and public declarations of friendship. Although the Soviets never managed to completely displace Western former colonial actors in Ghana's, Mali's, and Guinea's markets, especially in the case of Ghana's cocoa market, their new trade relationships challenged the dominance of French and British commercial interests there. They began cooperating on the construction of massive infrastructural projects like dams, ports and railways, as Iandolo charts in Chapter 4. These were crucially needed to support the broader goals of industrialization and modernization, and especially of improving agriculture. Khrushchev-era Soviet advisers pushed not for full economic self-sufficiency but an industrialization strategy that encouraged international trade links in the short-term and import-substitution in the long term (134-35). By the early 1960s, the Soviets were pouring millions of rubles into West African development projects: as Iandolo provocatively suggests, "in the early 1960s, the economies of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali could hardly function without the Soviet Union" (128).

The Soviet-West African "love affair" was not destined to last, however. This can be attributed to persistent differences: while Soviet leaders could tolerate Nkrumah's, Touré's, and Keita's idiosyncratic understandings of "socialism," which amounted to "virtually total control over development... manag[ing] all modernization projects on West African soil," they had a harder time reconciling their leadership cults and ideas like Pan-Africanism with Soviet socialist ideology (115). Despite their anti-imperial rhetoric, Soviet development officials trucked in racist stereotypes of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali as "premodern societies stuck in the fifteenth century and abandoned to their destiny by the former European rulers," presenting the Soviet Union as "benevolent and generous, and therefore ready to share its knowledge and experience, guiding its new friends toward modernity they could not otherwise reach on their own" (137). In keeping with the findings of Julie Hessler, among others, Iandolo stresses that the experiences of Africans who visited the USSR, especially as students, under the various cultural and academic exchange schemes that the cooperative agreements produced, were not uniformly positive.<sup>7</sup>

But economic considerations were ultimately paramount in explaining why the Soviet-West African relationship broke down in the early 1960s according to Iandolo: after 1961, there was a growing sense of impatience on the Soviet part with the pace of development initiatives in Africa, as well as frustration at the limited returns on Soviet investments. Impractical gigantic and prestige projects hogged resources, went over budget, and generated delays, or were never completed (164). Increasingly, the Soviet government showed "limited availability to come to its ally's rescue" when things went awry (172). Both sides blamed each other for the slow rate of progress (176). Trade agreements often proved to be economically irrational, contributing to growing suspicion and resentment. Barter agreements, for example, got around deficits of hard currency, but sometimes proved to be "a burden for state coffers on both sides." In the case of Malian peanuts, for example, the Soviets marked them up by 20 percent above market price to balance the terms of their exchange, an arrangement that functioned well until Malia ran out of peanuts and began to accrue debts to the Soviet Union (182-184).

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<sup>7</sup> Julie Hessler, "Death of an African Student in Moscow: Race, Politics, and the Cold War," *Cahiers du Monde Russe*, No. 47, No. 33 (2006): 33-63.

The mood was also changing on the part of the Soviet leadership by the later stages of Khrushchev's leadership. Iandolo suggests that "a resurgent West abroad, especially after a new administration entered office in Washington, combined with declining growth rates at home, made the Soviet leadership reconsider the opportunity of investing lavishly in places like Ghana, Guinea, and Mali" (147). This was not just due to geopolitical factors: Iandolo elaborates that, in a climate of slowing growth rates and social discontent about declining living standards inside the Soviet Union, "the idea of pouring resources into the Third World to build development appeared to many in the Soviet leadership like an extravaganza that the USSR could not afford" (150). (Soviet leaders were not alone in this sentiment: it was not uncommon for Soviet citizens, who balked at the austerity measures taken in the early 1960s to correct for negative economic trends, to criticize Khrushchev for wasting money on the Third World that could be better used at home.<sup>8</sup>) By the time leader Leonid Brezhnev visited Guinea in 1961 as leader of the Supreme Soviet, a tacit pessimism was perceptible in Soviet statements about modernization projects there, a sign of the changing tide (155).

The Soviet government's increasing stinginess when it came to West African development projects coincided with political troubles on the part of the leaders of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, who faced varying degrees of challenges to their authority that were exacerbated by their economic problems. Although Soviet disinvestment was not alone to blame, the "reduced Soviet commitment to Ghana, Guinea, and Mali," in Iandolo's view, "ravaged their economies and brought them to collapse" (196). Western governments, in turn, showed little interest in replacing what the Soviets had once eagerly provided, leading the West African leaders to eventually turn to organizations like the International Monetary Fund and China, with limited success (198-206).

I will leave it to others to comment on the extent to which Soviet investment in West Africa was decisive for these countries' economic development and modernization. But it strikes me that Iandolo has hit upon a very important point with this book about Soviet economic thinking writ large, using the example of Soviet-West African relations as a case study. By the early 1960s, a new logic took hold in the Soviet Union, one that stressed not only pragmatism but economism, or the ascendancy of economic over ideological factors. This manifested in the Soviet-West African relationship, as Iandolo clearly shows. "Commercial viability never motivated Soviet trade policy toward Africa during the Khrushchev era," he observes, but this changed under Brezhnev when "buying and selling disregarding world prices was no longer appealing in Moscow... the Soviet Union... lost interest in the establishment of a state-led development model in the Third World, which had previously guided Moscow's involvement in West Africa. This is what killed trade with Guinea and Mali" (188).

Although Iandolo ends his story officially before the Brezhnev period, his book presages in many ways what came next. The pursuit of mutually beneficial trade characterized Soviet dealings with the outside world under Brezhnev, and, by the early 1970s, the Soviets began to reach out to the capitalist world in ways that would have been unthinkable under Stalin and Khrushchev, such as proposing joint ventures and technical assistance deals with multinational firms. There was a new emphasis on obtaining hard currency revenue after Soviet oil production took off. The Soviet leadership listened more to economic experts when it came to both domestic and world economic developments, as Yakov Feygin charts in a forthcoming book, and these experts proposed the implementation of mixed socialist-capitalist methods not just in the developing world, but also right at home.<sup>9</sup> In sum, Iandolo has not only shed light on the Soviet-African economic relationship here, but also provides us with a new way of periodizing the Soviet leadership's understanding of the place in

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<sup>8</sup> Kristy Ironside, *A Full-Value Ruble: The Promise of Prosperity in the Postwar Soviet Union* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2021), 158.

<sup>9</sup> Yakov Feygin, *Building a Ruin: The Cold War Politics of Soviet Economic Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2024).

the world economy of the USSR, as well as the evolution of their commitment to the Marxist “world-historical” stages of development—which should have seen them put market considerations behind, not in front, of them as they moved closer to the Communist finish line.

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 Review by Ismay Milford, Freie Universität Berlin
 

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*Arrested Development* charts the visions, practices and mishaps of Soviet economic cooperation with Ghana, Guinea and Mali in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Iandolo argues that, despite being relatively minor in global economic terms, these cases are fundamental to our understanding of the Soviet search for Third World development. Tracing the short lives of Soviet-West African trade, infrastructure, and agriculture agreements, the book explains that the Soviet Union pursued a distinct “noncapitalist” vision in West Africa which was characterised by the co-existence of state and market and the primacy of economic growth. The rise and fall of Soviet-West African relationships, for Iandolo, has little to do with the export of Communism and disillusion with its promises (as contemporaneous Western observers often imagined) and everything to do with how shifting economic circumstances played out for the various parties involved.

Iandolo’s book, based on research for his 2012 PhD, makes a fresh contribution to the ongoing reappraisal of the so-called Third World in the global Cold War.<sup>1</sup> This scholarship, perhaps most clearly since the publication of Odd Arne Westad’s 2005 *The Global Cold War*, has fundamentally revised the narrative of a Communism-versus-capitalism, ideological “battle for hearts and minds.”<sup>2</sup> The historiographical emphasis has shifted towards differing proposals for paths to economic modernity—and a recognition that decolonising states had their own economic and developmental visions, as well as a degree of leverage to insist that states in the East and West took these visions seriously.<sup>3</sup> The response of some historians of Soviet foreign policy, Iandolo explains, has been to point out the weakness of Soviet economic power on the world stage and to suggest that its engagement with Third World states was merely a survival strategy for trade integration.<sup>4</sup>

Iandolo nuances the narrative on both fronts: the Soviet Union’s project was an economic one, but its proponents did not think that it made short term economic sense; they understood that there would be acknowledged financial losses for the sake of a longer term strategy. Moreover, as chapter 2 describes, it was simultaneously an intellectual project stretching back to the start of the Khrushchev era that involved a collection of thinkers, institutions, and meetings on the Soviet side, all of which worked to elaborate an “ideologically acceptable” way of engaging with these countries despite the absence of viable communist parties (54). Importantly, the model for economic growth that Soviet functionaries described as noncapitalist was, in part, a response to the demand for a “blueprint for modernisation” among leaders in Ghana, Guinea and Mali, specifically one that reduced dependency on (ex-)colonial powers and promised better standards of living for ordinary citizens (61). The implication for the broader discussion on Second–Third World interactions is that, in terms of visions for development in West Africa, there was considerable common ground that did not rely on Communist doctrine.

Two major achievements stand out. First, the narrative masterfully weaves together multiple perspectives. Iandolo is a historian of the Soviet Union, and he makes clear that this is a book about

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Iandolo, *Soviet Policy in West Africa, 1957–64*, PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Notably, George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar Es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108990721>; Jodie Yuzhou Sun, *Kenya’s and Zambia’s Relations with China 1949–2019* (Boydell & Brewer, 2023); Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Soviet policy, but his serious engagement with historiography on and archives in West Africa means that the priorities of and constraints upon West African actors (not only the “father figures” of each nation state, but relevant ministers and advisors too) are thoroughly considered. The space given to British, French and US commentary (and archives, partly out of necessity) is justified when read in this context. Historians of West Africa may not find new insights on Ghanaian, Guinean or Malian state-building, but certainly they will find an original account of the informed decisions made on Soviet cooperation—and these clearly were informed decisions. The hesitancy of Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah was shaped by the anti-communism and pragmatism of close advisors, but the ultimate appeal of the Soviet model stemmed from Nkrumah’s determination to diversify agricultural exports and overcome the monopoly of the British Cocoa Marketing Company (72-75). French business monopolies were less of an issue in Mali and Guinea, but the barter deals offered by the Soviet Union (exchanging raw agricultural produce for machinery and technicians) made sense for similar reasons: all three states lacked hard currency and were trying to balance imports and exports (79, 94). The Soviet Union was even obliged to buy produce above the market value and to make a percentage of payments in (precious) hard currency in order for the West African governments to accept deals.

Second, *Arrested Development* makes economic structures and the intellectual projects surrounding them entirely legible to readers without any foundation in economic history. This is not only valuable in its own right: it lays important groundwork for the core of the book, where the richness of Iandolo’s source material (especially from Soviet archives) about the unfolding of projects “on the ground” emerges most clearly. Chapters 4 and 5 chart, respectively, the implementation of cooperation agreements and their stalling. The two phases overlap, underscoring the fleeting nature of a shared vision: by the time West African delegations became inspired by Soviet Central Asian farms in the early 1960s, Soviet growth was already slowing; the Congo crisis in 1960-1961 both convinced West African leaders to make a radical break with colonial powers and revealed the limits of Soviet agency on the continent. Most compellingly, we see that the small picture also mattered. West African civil servants reported faulty machinery and a shortage of translators while Soviet planners criticised West African prioritisation of hotels and stadiums, often alluding to racist stereotypes (196) that would also imbue accounts of African development ‘failure’ elsewhere for decades to come. Underlying these factors was a shared “gigantism” of the 1950s that left no space for adaptation, neatly demonstrated in the case of ambitious mineral prospecting plans that faltered at the challenge of transporting machinery to rural areas (164-9). These chapters offer an excellent example of the potential for histories of development to highlight space for manoeuvre within global structural constraints, rather than reproduce success and failure narratives.

Both of these achievements—the weaving together of multiple perspectives and the skilled analysis of the relationship between economic structures and day-to-day disappointments—come with their own challenges. The careful comparison from so many vantage points of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali do not allow for a full understanding of the interdependence of these cases. Hints emerge when we see how Malian planners looked towards Guinea after it voted to pursue a separate path from the *Communauté Française* in 1958. But on the whole we are left wondering whether the decisions that Nkrumah, Sékou Touré or Mobido Keita took on Soviet cooperation were shaped by those of the other two leaders, especially in the context of the union between the states. Perhaps the accessible archives give little away, but a similar interdependence might have been apparent from the Soviet side. Did Soviet economists take notes on an experience in Ghana and apply them to Guinea? Did problems with the low yield of peanuts in Mali provoke scepticism about the promises of cocoa in Ghana? These questions are secondary to the ones that Iandolo grapples with more directly, but they could have implications for how we understand this rise-and-fall story, and addressing them would support the case for treating these three countries together in the book.

Meanwhile, the strength of analytical dialogue between Soviet theorising and West African outcomes raises the question of missed opportunities to engage with concepts like alternative globalisations and global socialism that have emerged elsewhere in the conversation on Cold War cooperation—some of which were

admittedly published too recently for Iandolo to have engaged with them.<sup>5</sup> The economic focus that drives Iandolo's narrative is entirely convincing, and his reasons for leaving cultural cooperation to other scholars (15-18) are well taken. But what version of the global Cold War does the story of Soviet noncapitalist development in West Africa imply? Does it corroborate Steffi Marung's analysis of time and space in Soviet Africanist thought?<sup>6</sup> Productive conversations between global history approaches (multiple and amorphous as they are) and the domains of international history are increasingly shaping Cold War scholarship.<sup>7</sup> But this book seems tacitly cautious about this direction of movement—perhaps for good reason. One place for probing these questions might have been Chapter Six, where the legacies of Soviet projects in West Africa are discussed with reference to military coups on the African continent and the Sino-Soviet split—a moment of apparent reduction in both the timeframes and spaces that characterised aspirations of cooperation across Cold War blocs.

*Arrested Development* is a model for writing new histories of Cold War cooperation that adopt neither the cynicism nor romanticism that for a long time tainted the field, refusing to treat developmental aspirations and economic realities as two separate worlds. Historians of international development and of African states in the postwar global order, especially, will benefit from Iandolo's engaging analysis of the Soviet perspective, as well as the Russian-language publications and sources that he makes accessible to an English-language readership. This book is an exciting and cleverly crafted read. Mention must be made, finally, of some entertaining chapter headings: "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie"; "Captains Courageous"...

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<sup>5</sup> James Mark and Paul Betts, *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization*, Oxford Scholarship Online (Oxford: University Press, 2022); *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War*, ed. by Eric Burton and others (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021); James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung, *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020); *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War*, ed. by Anna Calori and others (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> Steffi Marung, "Leninian Moment? Soviet Africanists and the Interpretation of the October Revolution, 1950s–1970s," *Journal Für Entwicklungspolitik*, 33.3 (2017), 21-48.

<sup>7</sup> *The Lives of Cold War Afro-Asianism*, ed. by Carolien Stolte and Su Lin Lewis, Global Connections: Routes and Roots (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2022).

Review by Chris Miller, Tufts University

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Alessandro Iandolo's *Arrested Development* provides a deeply researched and innovative account of the Soviet Union's thinking and practice of economic development as it interacted with three different newly-independent West African governments in Guinea, Mali, and Ghana during the 1950s and early 1960s. It argues that the Soviet Union sought not to replicate Soviet Communism abroad, but rather to build a Soviet model of development that "mixed elements of a planned system" with "pillars of a traditional market economy" (2).

"State investment and collective organization dominated the Soviet vision of development in West Africa," Iandolo argues, but this vision did not require the abolition of private property or the collectivization of agriculture (2). Instead, "Soviet strategy mirrored import-substitution development efforts" in countries like South Korea and Taiwan, "but did so with a socialist orientation, always prioritizing state over market" (2).

Iandolo adopts a definition of development that was used by the subjects of his research. He argues that both Soviet officials and their partners in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali saw development in materialistic terms: "boosting agricultural production, increasing basic industrial output, improving living standards measured using traditional indicators (life expectancy, number of houses, schools, roads, hospitals, etc)" (3). He demonstrates a substantial degree of alignment between the Soviet and West African definitions of development, at least at the outset of the partnerships. "In essence," he argues, "the Soviet and West African leaders equated development with economic growth" (3), because both Soviets and West African leaders believed that growth was good, and because they believed it was necessary for true political independence.

*Arrested Development* makes four primary contributions to the literatures on Cold War-era international history, the history of development ideologies, and the history of economic growth. First, it provides a deeply researched piece of Cold War history scholarship that draws substantially on archives in West African archives in a sustained fashion. In addition to extensive research in Soviet/Russian, French, British, and U.S. archives, *Arrested Development* draws widely from source material from Guinea, Ghana, and Mali, providing an analysis of discussions of Soviet-West African official relations and intellectual exchange that is rooted in an exceptionally diverse source base. There are still far too few archivally driven studies of Soviet relations with West Africa, and *Arrested Development* adds meaningfully to scholarly knowledge in this sphere.<sup>1</sup>

Second, Iandolo provides an unprecedentedly deep and detailed analysis of Soviet foreign economic development thinking during the 1950s and 1960s. In particular, he examines the complex interplay between Soviet academics, the Foreign Ministry, the International Department of the Communist Party, the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and economic cooperation authorities. *Arrested Development* provides a detailed, archivally driven account of the bureaucratic politics that shaped Soviet politics and ideas about development in newly decolonized countries such as Ghana, Guinea, and Mali.

In particular, Iandolo provides a subtle analysis of the concept of a "non-capitalist path of development" that was honed by Soviet academics and officials as they sought to devise a development strategy for newly decolonized countries (52). *Arrested Development* explores how Soviet officials like Boris Ponomarev and Rostislav Ulyanovsky collaborated and competed to establish these theories, which were intended to provide a development path that Soviet officials believed was realistic and would also avoid some of the "excesses" of

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<sup>1</sup> Important works bringing new archival findings to this sphere include Natalia Telepneva, *Cold War Liberation: The Soviet Union and the Collapse of Portuguese Empire in Africa, 1961–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023) and Sergei Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956–1964* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010).



Stalinist development. Drawing on published Soviet articles, archival documents, and the memoir literature, *Arrested Development* provides an unparalleled account of the origins of this concept of a “non-capitalist path.”

Yet *Arrested Development* is not solely about ideas. In contrast to much of the recent literature exploring ideologies of development, *Arrested Development* also explores the realities of development, defined—just as the historical subjects in question defined it—in materialist terms. As Iandolo describes his method, he “investigates development as work of shovel, brick, and mortar” (2). Many recent accounts of development thinking—either analyzing high Cold War modernization theory, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank thinking, or contemporary economic analysis—treat economic development as primarily a political question. In doing so, such accounts implicitly or explicitly posit that deconstructing the politics of development can shed light on its realities. It is certainly true that political factors like ideologies and interest groups shape whether a given program of “development” is defined by, for example, the building of schools or the construction of bridges. The politics of development definitely shapes where bridges are built and what types of people can go to school.

However, *Arrested Development* does more than simply explore ideologies of development (which, as mentioned above, it does with subtlety and in detail.) It also grounds these debates in the realities of development: the unavoidable facts of trade deficits, railway bottlenecks, commodity flows, electrical production, and refining capacity. These were the context in which development efforts sought to work. They were also the metrics by which Soviet leaders measured the efficacy of development efforts in West Africa.

By placing ideologies next to realities—like the fact that in 1960 there were only 138 tractors in the entire country of Mali—*Arrested Development* goes beyond simply exploring ideas, demonstrating the interplay between shifts in ideas and their real world impact (108). This interlinkage between ideas and realities, Iandolo suggests, is critical to any history of development over time because ideas about development change as new information emerges about the impact of different policies and strategies.

As Iandolo puts it: “The construction of a road made no sense without considering the need to transport agricultural commodities, whose production had to be boosted through collective farms and whose workers had to be trained in a newly built polytechnic institute. The capital, expertise, and organizational principles for such enterprises came from the Soviet Union” (2). Ideology and politics shaped the prioritization of road building, the collectivization of farms, and the curriculum of polytechnic institutes. Yet the existence of roads, the crop yields on farms, and the construction of polytechnic institutes were measurable quantitatively. The Soviets assessed success or failure with reference to these metrics. To some extent the Soviet development push into West Africa failed because Soviet development efforts failed on their own criteria. The development push ended in part when West African leaders began either prioritizing their own domestic political survival or asked the Soviet Union to undertake efforts that Soviet experts thought were simply impossible.

Iandolo contrasts Soviet policy with the other recommendations that West African governments received, which provide examples of paths not taken. For example, West Indian economist Arthur Lewis frequently appears in the book as an economic advisor who presented alternative strategies to the Soviet recommendations, which shared some similarities to them but differed in two key ways: Soviet officials were more skeptical of foreign capital and more committed to state investment as opposed to domestic private capital. The example of Arthur Lewis illustrates both the real choices that existed for West African policymakers and the economic realities—poorly mechanized agriculture, limited infrastructure, low literacy rates, etc.—that almost any economic growth effort would have had to address.

Fourth and finally, *Arrested Development* provides a nuanced, archivally driven account of the role of ideology in economic development thinking in the Cold War. On the one hand, Iandolo pushes against the claim that the West and the Soviet Union were promoting different systems in the Third World.<sup>2</sup> The Khrushchev-era USSR was not trying to convince newly-free countries to collectivize or to abolish private property. Far from it. Soviet leader Nikita “Khrushchev’s idea of development was typically bread-and-butter,” Iandolo writes, quoting the Soviet leader as having told Guinean President Ahmed Sékou Touré in 1959 that “people want to eat, they want clothes, shelter, and if you do not provide these, you will not keep your influence in the country” (112).

Yet though both the USSR and the West were competing to provide bread-and-butter development outcomes, they were doing so in somewhat different fashions. The Soviet model in West Africa, which involved investing in the mechanization of agriculture while trying to build light industry, was quite similar, Iandolo notes, to import substitution industrialization efforts taken by Western Cold War clients like South Korea or Taiwan. “There was nothing inherently socialist or capitalist,” Iandolo writes, “in the way a dam was to be built, rice cultivated, or fish caught. There were, however, crucial differences between how the socialist world and the West imagined that a dam could be financed, a farm be administered, or a new fishing community be organized.” The difference was “the extent the state should participate in the economic life of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali” (227). Ideas played a role in these divergent development strategies, but the key difference in ideas was not the centrality of class struggle but a somewhat more technocratic disagreement about the role of the state. In sum, *Arrested Development* presents a subtle story about the interplay of ideas, politics, realities, and interpretations of those realities. In doing so, it provides an exemplary model of how to study development simultaneously as the history of ideas and of economic processes.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Arne Westad, *Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, 2011).

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 Review by Michelle D. Paranzino, US Naval War College
 

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For too long, scholarship of the Cold War focused almost singularly on Washington's security concerns in Europe, which was viewed as the primary theater of what was in reality a global conflict. Due to the pioneering contributions of Odd Arne Westad and others, the orthodox narrative no longer dominates the field, and much attention has been devoted to the so-called "Third World," even if we reject the normative use of that term.<sup>1</sup> Although many scholars have contributed to our collective knowledge of how the Cold War played out in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, much of this scholarship is governed by more traditional conceptions of national security and thus tends to focus on major crises, conflicts, and "hot" wars like in Vietnam. Recently, historians have begun to engage more deeply with questions of economic development and modernity, and Alessandro Iandolo joins scholars like David Engerman and Jeremy Friedman in exploring the complex processes, consequences, and obstacles to building socialism in the developing world.<sup>2</sup>

*Arrested Development* opens with an anecdote about a Ghanaian official's December 1958 conversation with a Soviet delegate in Accra, in which the former touted the "miracles" of Soviet development and suggests that "all Africa must follow this path" because "forty years ago, the Soviet Union was like Africa" (1). Iandolo proceeds to essentially deconstruct the logic underlying this conversation, but rather than focusing on a series of case studies—as has been the norm in scholarship on socialist development—he "looks at the search for development as a holistic phenomenon whose many branches are impossible to understand separately and must be taken as parts of a whole" (2). To that end, the book "investigates the initial ambition that led to the design of joint Soviet-West African development projects, their implementation on the ground, and their eventual abandonment" (2). Although he does not neglect the importance of ideology, Iandolo argues that the overarching Soviet aim in West Africa was "fostering rapid growth through state investment to catch up with more advanced economies in the short term" (8). Building socialism was still viewed as the ultimate long-term goal, but was subordinated to short-term economic growth and relegated to an unspecified period in the future.

Iandolo pursues an ambitious agenda in this book—"to cover the points of view of virtually all actors involved in the search for economic modernization in West Africa" (12). The methodological difficulties of doing so are substantial. Archival access to relevant documents in Africa and the former Soviet Union is still restricted, and obtaining accurate statistical data is nearly impossible given the way that numbers were manipulated by nearly all involved parties in service of political aims. Given these obstacles, Iandolo deserves praise for assuming the burdens of this research project and for producing such a fascinating and compelling account despite all odds. His attentiveness to the agency of African actors in the face of stark power asymmetries is especially praiseworthy.

Following a historical overview of the leadership transition from Soviet leaders Joseph Stalin to Nikita Khrushchev and their very different approaches to the developing world, Iandolo explores the origins and complexities of Soviet-West African economic relations. In Ghana, the legacy of a colonial economy that was dominated by a single export—cocoa—limited economic independence even after the advent of formal political independence from Britain (72). Broadly speaking, three factors worked in the USSR's favor in developing diplomatic relations with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali: Moscow's own persistence, the vacillating

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<sup>1</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); on Latin America and the "Third World," see Thomas C. Field, Jr., Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà, *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark H. Haefele and Michael E. Latham, eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Jeremy Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021).

missteps of the Western powers, and “perhaps most important, the preferences and decisions of local elites in West Africa” (91). Yet there were a number of factors working against the USSR in its efforts to help develop West African economies; Iandolo notes that Soviet trade itself was “downright colonial” (138). Indeed, as some Latin American leaders, perhaps most famously among them Ernesto “Che” Guevara, came to realize, trade within the socialist bloc at times replicated colonial exploitation. Instead of assistance to rapidly industrialize the Cuban economy, which was what Guevara argued for as Cuba’s Minister of Finance, the Soviets ultimately encouraged continued reliance on a mono-crop economy revolving around sugar production.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Soviet advisers and technicians tended to move into the positions vacated by formerly colonial officials.

Iandolo makes clear that Soviet economic policy towards West Africa was motivated neither by the desire to rapidly build a centralized command-style economy nor by the viability of commercial investment. Rather, the value of West Africa to the Soviet Union in the global Cold War was as a symbol of what state-led economic growth could accomplish. To a significant degree, this was dependent on political will from the very top of the Soviet power structure, and it therefore ultimately fell victim to Khrushchev’s ouster. In a strategic atmosphere characterized by costly commitments abroad and a weak economy at home, Leonid Brezhnev’s leadership lacked the resolve to make further investments in West Africa (219). Many of the development projects that the Soviets had spearheaded were either abandoned or completed only decades later. One of Iandolo’s most significant contributions is to show that West Africa was a region where the “zero-sum game” or the “tail wagging the dog” narratives of small actor agency during the Cold War do not hold up—“what the Soviet Union had dropped, the West would not pick up” (202). In this sense, the book provides a model for how detailed regional studies challenge us to rethink the categories and assumptions that have traditionally defined our understanding of the Cold War writ large.

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<sup>3</sup> See Helen Yaffe, *Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

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 Review by Radoslav Yordanov, Harvard University
 

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This is a brave new book.<sup>1</sup> Not for its assertions—by today’s standards it sports a mature argument and offers an impressive but not unseen scope of archival research—but for how it phrases them and how it coaxes the reader into deep thinking through a carefully-designed system of *paratextual* elements (put simply, the title itself and a series of cinema, literature and music-inspired chapter titles and headings that aid but also twist the meaning of the text-proper). I wholeheartedly admire Iandolo’s originality and the publisher’s green-lighting the approach; whether it appeals to all readers of the book remains to be seen. I learned a lot from the book itself through its original presentation, which, despite its at-times hurried prose, made me stop and look around for clues to decipher Iandolo’s mental puzzles and thus make connections that I would have otherwise skipped.

Iandolo’s subliminal textual approach is to build this puzzle-like narrational matrix to reach out to the somewhat forgotten academic *bomo ludens*, lost in the perennial search for utmost seriousness and gravitas, that often come at the expense of style, clarity, and reader’s enjoyment. Yet, Iandolo is a scholar and enjoys his scholarly pursuits (I am looking at you, Buster!) building a carefully researched intricate story that aligns the West of Africa to the recent scholarly accounts that reexamine Soviet Union’s dealings with the Southern and Eastern tips of the continent by bringing the theme of development along with Moscow’s preferable military and diplomatic means of engagement with the post-colonial world.

The book starts off as a tongue-in-cheek autobiography, in which the author lists the considerable journey leading to this book. Iandolo even mentions a very well-known figure to those who have had the “chance” to work in the Russian foreign ministry (MID) archive, who goes by the name of “Sergei Pavlov” (ix) and is a true representative of the post-Soviet school of archive keeping which shares some of former President Trump’s wishful-thinking document management strategies. While the latter imagined he could declassify documents only by thinking about doing it, the representatives of the former school believe they can simply do the reverse—reclassify them through the same thought process. Yet, we learn that the author had a good experience with said “Mr. Pavlov,” a bright spot for an institution that we learn from the author, with the same tongue-in-cheek-ness (and rightfully so), is “more interesting from the outside than from the inside” (34).

Following this introspective journey, the book continues on the surface as a biography of an aspiring, yet feeble quasi-imperial subject, the Soviet Union, while Iandolo’s text itself reads as a web of metaphorical pop-culture references, scrupulously intertwined into an irony-ridden readout of the ill-fated travails of Moscow’s ill-advised attempts at improving its standing away from its borders. In the opening chapter, aptly named “Farewell to Arms,” Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev is shown as redirecting the Soviet economy after the *cholera* of war, to borrow Ernest Hemingway’s plot device as a metaphor,<sup>2</sup> into a new realm under the aegis of the strongmen of the day, those *kukuruzza* crusaders (cf. 29) who were bound to reinvent the Soviet world supplanting military might with agricultural heights never seen in human history. Out of this uber-optimistic attempt on the part of Soviet leaders to rediscover their economic worthiness for the world, we embark on their expansive, yet blueprint-lacking journey, in which Moscow sought to devise schemes to win the hearts and minds of the ‘brave new that was unfolding before their eyes.

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<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: While the author and I share some overlapping paths, in that we were both supervised by Dr. Alex Pravda at Oxford, and were at Columbia University and at the Davis Center at the same time, I disclose no conflict of interest that would have impaired my impartiality in this review.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Hemingway *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929).

In places, Iandolo's prose feels somewhat hurried. After the excellent opening chapters that set up the narrower Soviet and broader world context in the 1950s, the setting of the local scene in the "First Contact" chapter delivers a somewhat abrupt change of pace. This approach is not without its merits, though. For example, I was criticized for delivering a structurally over-complicated story of three decades of Soviet-Horn of Africa<sup>3</sup> relations by weaving parallel narratives for both countries. Not all readers have the patience or time to wade through often confusing non-linear narrative paths, one must admit. Thus, Iandolo's picture-in-picture format, to its credit, is not only clear but also avoids a slower-paced deeper story-telling that would include broader time and space-consuming contextual remarks, which some might find outright distracting.

Yet, once it delves into "the heart of the matter," the story doubles down on a hefty dose of oblique influences, particularly with the way pop cultural references are interwoven with the narrative, which one may trace to the patriarch of twentieth-century Italian academia, Umberto Eco.<sup>4</sup> Thus, *Arrested Development's* rich pop-culture sub-textualism reads as not your ordinary run-of-the-mill history book. Iandolo teases your patience and intelligence with his narrational pendulum swinging between Accra, Conakry and Bamako in metronomic precision as he throws an eclectic selection of literary, cinematic, music and pop-culture references from writers like "Papa" Hemingway, Graham Greene, Chinua Achebe, and Aldous Huxley, to films like *First Contact*, *The Exorcist*, *Star Wars*, *Coda*, the title-bearing legendary sitcom, and musicians like the eponymous Afrocentric hip-hop collective, Ray Charles, the Pet Shop Boys, Pantera, the list goes on... decades of Billboard charts, all-time Rotten Tomato's favorites and seasoned Literary Nobel Prize winners are the limits here. This intellectual vortex glazes and confuses the senses and Iandolo transforms our reading exercise into a metaphor-excavation experience, which sips as fast as espresso but digests as slowly as a gulp of limoncello.

To me, this culture-rich extra layer serves a highly utilitarian purpose. I will not go over all references here as Iandolo did a marvelous job of hiding them well, heightening the bar for our symbol archaeology. Following Iandolo's breadcrumb trail of references, I found that in the "things fall apart" section, apart from the reference's obvious meaning, which signals the Soviet relations with the local actors heading south, by transcoding Achebe's masterpiece,<sup>5</sup> we see Ghana, Guinea and Mali as the fearless, industrious Okonkwos facing the Browns-turn-Smiths Soviets, with which the author further strengthened the argument of the locals' fearing the neocolonial undertones of the Soviet developers.

Another breadcrumb we find along our trail in the thick West African jungle is the "vulgar display of power" section. It is a short, yet confidently written part of the narrative, looking at the growing East-West competition in the continent. On the surface, we have two superpowers engaging in a vulgar power show; yet

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<sup>3</sup> Radoslav Yordanov, *The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa during the Cold War: Between Ideology and Pragmatism* (The Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series) (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016). For the structure criticism, see Margot Light's take in a forum on the book in "Perspectives on the Soviet Union and The Horn of Africa during The Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2020), 219.

<sup>4</sup> While widely accepted as a heavyweight in literary criticism, see his *I limiti dell'interpretazione* (Milano: Bompiani, 1990) [In English: *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1990)], semiotics, see the seminal *Trattato di semiotica generale* (Milano: Bompiani, 1975) [In English: *A Theory of Semiotics*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976] and social, political and intellectual commentaries (*How To Travel With A Salmon: and Other Essays*, translated by William Weaver (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1990), Umberto Eco is internationally known as a prolific novelist. With his groundbreaking *Il nome della rosa* (Milano: Bompiani, 1980) [In English: *The Name of the Rose*, translated by William Weaver and published in the US by Harcourt in 1983], the *Il pendolo di Foucault* (Milano: Bompiani, 1988) [In English: *Foucault's Pendulum*, translated by William Weaver, London: Secker & Warburg, 1989], as well as his subsequent novels, he sought to bring semiotics closer to the wider audience, delivering provocative texts replete with literary and historical references and metaphors, and multilayered narratives.

<sup>5</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: William Heinemann, 1958).

some readers may recall the infamous scene in the 1973 movie *The Exorcist* that Iandolo's heading title alludes to. Taking this cue we get a more nuanced reading of the worsening superpower conflict as both Washington and Moscow actually stopped short of delivering a "vulgar display of power" as they could not make the colonial shackles disappear, just as Pazuzu, the demon which possessed Regan MacNeil, refused to break the ropes tying her to the bed on the urging of Father Damien Karras, who was summoned to exorcise the demon from her. As part of the power-play with Father Karras, Pazuzu initially refused to untie Regan claiming that doing so would be a "vulgar display of power" that would not play to his advantage.

Iandolo's *metaphor of the eye* is also lodged in the bread-basket of survival with an abundance of cocoa and peanuts thrown in the process. While he never spells it out, in those early post-colonial years, West Africa needed as much a development blueprint as one of survival, and the Soviets acted as a sort of empire of basic instincts seeking to provide the means for it, being far from the moral heights, it sought for itself as an empire of justice, to borrow Arne Westad's depiction.<sup>6</sup> This harrowing reality returned with a vengeance in the seventies, as after their West African fiasco in the sixties, the Soviets realized they could not provide either the bread or the cake, redoubling the USSR's greatest export potential in serving another, yet more destructive, survival instinct, flooding the continent with AK47s, T54s, S200s and whatnots.

And here we naturally come to the "arrested development" theme, so masterfully encrypted in the book's title. However, at the prima vista, one may ask when reading about the Soviets' botched developmental experiments on the heels of their high initial expectations whether "*Curb Your Enthusiasm*" would have been a more fitting title. And again, we come to the dual-helix metonymy. There's one famous scene from the pilot of *Arrested Development*, the sitcom in which the fallen-from-grace Lucille Bluth, confronting her new realities of life *sans* glam, blurted a phrase that was her ticket to the sitcom's Hall of Fame vowing she would rather be dead in California than alive in Arizona. While Iandolo's *Arrested Development* is nowhere as remotely connected to the Golden or the Copper States, in the "things fall apart" chapter we meet grumpy Igor (Kolosovskii that is, the then deputy head of MID's Africa department, [150]), who is a stark reminder of a cohort of inept and aloof Soviet diplomats (the Cubans, for example, had one of those too, in the guise of Ambassador Aleksandr Soldatov<sup>7</sup>) whose behavior and limited interest in those less-developed locales would make one think they would be rather dead in Moscow than alive in, say, Bamako, Conakry or Accra (or Havana in Soldatov's case).

I found the "coda" to be the volume's strongest element, which is distantly connected to my modest exploration of Soviet-Horn relations, thus allowing me to link more clearly what has happened in the West with what later happened in the East of the African continent. Trusting the structure, Iandolo offers a very insightful closing to his opus, which reads more as a cliffhanger than an anti-climactic halt to his journey. True to the book's dual-layer narration in which one is invited to seek the paratextual meaning within, the coda hints at the tone-deafness of Soviet leaders to African nations' needs, and thus the author rightfully suggests that they are shifting to new areas of cooperation with their African comrades. Thus, the Soviet Union's failed developmental model was replaced with what they could provide best—the means of destruction. As with every cliffhanger, this calls for a sequel, and I read *Arrested Development's* coda as a teaser to an even darker opus to follow the global unhappy-go-unlucky travails of the erstwhile Soviet empire.

There is little more one can ask from Iandolo's *Arrested Development*. Yes, I would have enjoyed seeing more connections made with the Horn and Southern Africa. Yes, I wish the author framed Moscow's exploits in

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<sup>6</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 39-73.

<sup>7</sup> See more about A. Soldatov in Nikolai Leonov, *Raúl Castro: Un hombre en revolución* (Barcelona: Edhasa, 2018), 135.

West Africa more clearly as a (mis)stepping stone to its further endeavors in the continent. For example, we learn from Iandolo that the Soviet loans “carried favorable conditions,” being a “real blessing” for Third World governments (59). However, as I have shown in Ethiopia, the loans were subjected to closer scrutiny by the imperial regime. Evident in this respect is the highly publicized 1959 loan of 90 million rubles the Soviets with much fanfare provided the Haile Selassie regime. It remained largely unused by the Ethiopians because of the numerous strings attached, as they saw it, and due to their fear of the loan leading to an increase of Soviet influence in the country.<sup>8</sup> We also know that much of Soviet conduct in the rest of the continent in the late 1960s onwards was informed by their ill-gotten West Africa economic-cum-developmental dealings. A bit more nuance would have gone a long way when discussing the utility of the Soviet economic terms that were provided to the West African governments. For example, Soviet leaders might have seen them as ‘favorable,’ but it is debatable whether those terms were then in the realm of possibilities for the recipient states, which expected free support rather than long-term loans. I also enjoyed reading and found very useful Iandolo’s references to important recent works by Oscar Sanchez-Sibony and Tobias Rupprecht, among others,<sup>9</sup> that deal with the global and particularly Latin American dimensions of Soviet foreign conduct. The ebb and flow between Moscow, its Eastern European allies, and Cuba is another case in point that further strengthens the contentious East-South relations, as these countries clashed over how they should frame their cooperation, and whether it should be portrayed as solidarity assistance or trade based on mutual interest. Havana sided with the former formulation, while the Soviet Union’s allies bid for the latter.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these small quibbles, one must acknowledge that the book is a meticulously researched and competently written scholarly account that is a welcome addition to the booming literature on East-South relations through the Cold War, which, in its narrower regional geographic coverage, would confidently sit next to Sergei Mazov’s seminal study on the bookshelf of any library.<sup>11</sup> Arguably, various generations of readers may receive the book differently; the book’s reference-aided narrative may not appeal to baby boomers and early Gen X-ers. Ultimately, while the book lacks the breadth and depth of historical narratives like those by Adam Ulam or Stephen Kotkin, it may appeal to Millennials and Gen Z-ers with its brevity and originality, thus making it a suitable addition to undergrad courses as well.<sup>12</sup>

As a photographer at heart and historian by training and inspired by Iandolo’s original story-telling, I am availing myself of the opportunity to make a photography-based history appraisal of my own. Approaching this account, if it needed to be expressed in visual terms, despite Iandolo’s paratextual quirks, one should not expect to see any Oliviero Toscani-esque graphic provocations. Instead, the author frames a no-nonsense

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 1 of *Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa*, where I discussed at length this issue. See more on the Ethiopian fears of Soviet bloc penetration in R. Yordanov, “Fishing in the Desert: Unravelling the Soviet Bloc’s Economic Activities and Intelligence Gathering in Ethiopia in the 1960s, with Particular Reference to Bulgaria,” *The International History Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (2021), 109-21.

<sup>9</sup> Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Tobias Rupprecht, *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> More on this Soviet Bloc-Cuba contention I covered in Yordanov, “Bittersweet solidarity: Cuba, Sugar, and the Soviet bloc,” *Revista de Historia de América*, No 161 (2021): 215-40 and “Cuba and the Soviet Bloc: Searching for the Last Guardians of Socialism,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (2012):1171-94. This topic will be also discussed at more length in my forthcoming monograph on Soviet Bloc-Cuba relations during the Cold War.

<sup>11</sup> Sergei Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956–1964* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Adam Ulam’s *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (New York: MacMillan, 1965) and Stephen Kotkin’s *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).



Felice Beato-style travel reportage venturing into the West African jungles, mingling with cocoa and peanut pickers, and larger-than-life post-liberation local leaders, creating snapshot images of countries, peoples, and events that were unfamiliar and remote to most people in Europe, the Soviet Union and North America at the time.

Response by Alessandro Iandolo, University College London

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I would like to thank Jeremy Friedman, Kristy Ironside, Ismay Milford, Chris Miller, Michelle Paranzino, and Radoslav Yordanov for their insightful reviews, and Paul Betts for his introductory remarks. I have had the privilege to meet all of them, and I greatly admire their work.<sup>1</sup> I am also grateful to the H-Diplo team for organizing this roundtable.

Publishing something is always a journey of discovery. I am often surprised by how differently readers react to *Arrested Development*, with some praising what others disliked and vice versa. I am pleased that, in this case, all the roundtable participants appreciated some elements of the book—its breadth of archival research, focus on materiality, interactions with literature on the Soviet Union and on the Cold War, and its pointing to a possible research agenda for the future. In this space, I will reflect on the comments of the reviewers and I will answer the queries they raise.

Kristy Ironside and Chris Miller engage *Arrested Development*'s arguments on their own terrain, and both highlight aspects that are particularly meaningful to me. As Ironside notices, the book is premised on treating the Soviet economy not as an inevitable failure but as a system that went through phases of expansion and contraction. She connects *Arrested Development* to broader trends in the historiography on the post-war USSR and, more specifically, the Soviet economy. In the 1950s, Soviet economic growth was inspiring, especially from the vantage point of Accra, Bamako, and Conakry. Looking at the USSR from perspectives that are far from those which Soviet historians most often use can open the door to new interpretative frameworks on Soviet history. I am delighted that Ironside, a leading historian of the Soviet economy,<sup>2</sup> shares this view.

As her review makes clear, there was an inflection point in the way the Soviet Union understood its place in the world during the second half of the 1960s. The optimism of the previous decade, which led to engagements such as the ones in West Africa I explored in *Arrested Development*, was gradually replaced by decisions based on minimizing costs. What was at the root of this change? New leaders, slowing growth rates, challenging international conditions, and the creeping contagion of economic liberalism all played a role. *Arrested Development* reveals that the effects of these changes in the Soviet worldview were as visible in Gouina and Nzérékoré as they were in Novocheerkassk and Tbilisi.

Like Ironside, in his review Miller steps away from a narrative that is centered on failure. He places my book in dialogue with literature on the history of economic development, and he frames the Soviet partnership with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali as a moment in the longer history of state-driven economic development. This is exactly how I see the book myself. The decade of interaction between the USSR and Ghana, Guinea, and Mali that I explore in the book was not an isolated moment. It was part of the long process of establishing and consolidating the state as the main agent of economic change in the twentieth century. The Soviet Union was instrumental in this process in two ways. First, the USSR itself was a political and economic system

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Betts, *Ruin and Renewal: Civilising Europe after the Second World War* (London: Profile Books, 2020); Jeremy Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2022); Kristy Ironside, *A Full-Value Ruble: The Promise of Prosperity in the Postwar Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2021); Ismay Milford, *African Activists in a Decolonising World: The Making of an Anticolonial Culture, 1952-1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Chris Miller, *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology* (New York: Scribner, 2022); Michelle Paranzino, *The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War: A Short History with Documents* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2018); Radoslav Yordanov, *The Soviet Union and the Horn of Africa During the Cold War: Between Ideology and Pragmatism* (Lanham, Mass.: Lexington, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Ironside, *A Full-Value Ruble*.

dominated by the state. Moreover, the Soviet Union was a major international actor that promoted state-driven approaches to economic management abroad. *Arrested Development* focuses on this second aspect.

In this context, failing was an inevitable element of the story. According to the parameters set by Ghanaian, Guinean, Malian, and Soviet engineers, economists, and politicians, most of the joint efforts did not achieve what they were supposed to. Yet, failure is not always an end point. The Soviet and West African determination to organize the economy collectively and publicly, often against all odds, is at the heart of the story that *Arrested Development* tells. After the end of this story, the same organizational and political principles that had guided Soviet-West African cooperation continued to inspire state-directed attempts at economic modernization in future decades.

Thinking about economic development in the twentieth and twenty-first century, the tension between believers in the market and supporters of the state never ended, despite the failure of many experiments that pointed in either direction. In the political and intellectual universe of those who favored the state to pursue economic development, the legacy of the USSR as an international actor loomed large. Cooperation with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali during the 1950s and 1960s was a foundational moment in the establishment of the Soviet Union as such an actor. I am grateful to Ironside and Miller for concentrating on these aspects.

Jeremy Friedman praises the archival research on which the book is based, and he expresses appreciation for my insistence that Soviet and Western development efforts, despite superficial similarities, remained fundamentally different. At the same time, he wonders what exactly the projected end goal that justified the USSR's involvement in West Africa was, and what its ideological underpinnings were. Friedman also points out that industrialization still occupied an important place in Soviet economic cooperation with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali.

The Soviet leadership maintained that a transition to socialism was the end goal of the USSR's engagement in West Africa. In theory, economic cooperation with the USSR should have accelerated the transformation of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali into industrialized economies with a large proletariat, which in turn would usher in the transition to full socialism. However, the time horizon for these changes was never specified. To what extent was the Soviet leadership comfortable working with bourgeois states, even for an indeterminate length of time?

Thanks in no small part to Friedman's research, we know a lot more about the relative flexibility of successive Soviet governments.<sup>3</sup> Many Soviet partners in Africa, Asia, and Latin America were not socialist societies, and many of their leaders did not subscribe to Marxism-Leninism. Yet, the Soviet government supported them. In part, this was due to reasons of conviction—the Soviet belief in the possibility of transition toward socialism, with a little help from the USSR. In the context of competition with China and the United States, Soviet support for non-socialist allies was also based upon reasons of convenience.

The governments of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali did not define themselves and the societies they ruled as socialist. While Mali's President Modibo Keita, Ghana's Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah, and Guinea's President Ahmed Sékou Touré took inspiration from many elements of the socialist tradition, they maintained that their political philosophies were different. Soviet observers routinely criticized them for what they regarded as ideological hollowness. Yet, Soviet support continued. Nonetheless, it is unclear whether the Soviet personnel who were involved in West Africa believed a transition to socialism via industrialization actually possible. Reports, memoirs, and minutes of conversations suggest that many Soviet people, from the

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<sup>3</sup> Friedman, *Ripe for Revolution*; Friedman, *Shadow Cold War: The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

political leadership to technicians working on the field, struggled to imagine Ghana, Guinea, and Mali as anything other than agricultural societies, and believed them to be destined to remain so indefinitely. Racist prejudices played a large role in shaping Soviet imaginaries, and so did the Soviet obsession with the West as the idealized benchmark of everything. These are themes I plan to investigate more in detail in future research projects.

The point about heavy industry is well-taken. Indeed, mining and the construction of large-scale infrastructure featured prominently in Soviet cooperation with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. What complicated the picture, however, was that Soviet planners envisaged infrastructure such as dams and roads as instruments to boost agricultural productivity through mechanization and better distribution. Moreover, Soviet economists regarded mining and mineral prospecting as instrumental to allow Ghana, Guinea, and Mali to sell pricier commodities on the international market—gold and diamonds rather than cocoa beans, fruit, and peanuts. While industrialization certainly featured in Soviet involvement in West Africa, it is less clear whether industry was assumed to foster transition toward a different economic structure.

Ismay Milford expressed appreciation of the book, noting that historians of Africa may need to think about the Soviet Union more, and welcomed my titles and sub-titles. She calls for more attention to the interconnected histories of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali after independence, and she wonders how my book engages the work of historians from the “Socialism Goes Global” project.

To what extent did the first post-independence governments of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali plan their development strategies in connection with one another? This is an excellent question, but one that would be better posed to historians of West Africa. Soviet politicians and advisers tended to treat Ghana, Guinea, and Mali as homogenous societies. Rhetorically, they were careful to stress the differences between the three countries, but the economic recipes they suggested were almost identical. As *Arrested Development* details, officials from Ghana, Guinea, and Mali did consult each other on economic matters, and some of the most ambitious construction projects they undertook required coordination among the three governments. Moreover, Ghana and Guinea established a political union in 1958, and Mali joined it in 1961. While Soviet observers regarded the Ghana-Guinea-Mali union as aspirational and of no political consequence, the contacts between the three West African governments were significant.

Nevertheless, treating Ghana, Guinea, and Mali’s histories as inescapably interconnected may not always be the best approach. I do so in *Arrested Development* because the focus of my analysis is the Soviet Union. From the Soviet point of view, Ghana, Guinea, and Mali were the only states in the region that were interested in establishing meaningful economic cooperation with the USSR. This made them special, and connected to each other, in Soviet eyes. Today’s historians, however, should not necessarily take their cue from Soviet observers. In some cases, Ghana, Guinea, and Mali’s links with other states in the region, rather than with each other, may have been stronger. In other cases, networks that transcended national borders may be more relevant for historical analysis. I am glad that *Arrested Development* can be part of this conversation, but the final word on connections and misconceptions between Ghana, Guinea, and Mali rests with specialists of the region.

Milford would like to know how my book interacts with the work of the “Socialism Goes Global” team, and in particular with a journal article by Steffi Marung. I feel somewhat uneasy including a review in a review of a review, but such a direct question demands a direct answer.

As a researcher, I have benefited greatly from interaction and exchange with multiple members of the “Socialism Goes Global” team. Their most recent book came out just a few months before *Arrested*

*Development*, when my book was already in production.<sup>4</sup> *Socialism Goes Global* makes two broad arguments. The first is that socialist ideas and practices about culture, the economy, and society represented an alternative to thinking and policies that came from the West, and they were hugely influential in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. *Arrested Development* corroborates this narrative in a specific time and space. Soviet and West African politicians, specialists, and workers imagined an economy governed by principles that were different from those that their Western counterparts recommended. They tried their best (and sometimes their worst) to put these principles into practice.

The second argument in *Socialism Goes Global* is that the states and societies of Eastern Europe were just as influential as, and perhaps more than, the Soviet Union in establishing an alternative to Western liberal capitalism. *Arrested Development* is more cautious on this point. My book shows that the USSR had a larger economic presence than other socialist states active in West Africa, and it explores the distinctiveness of Soviet ideas about economic development. In this, my book and *Socialism Goes Global* follow different paths. Of course, debates between historians of the USSR and of Eastern Europe about who had the most interesting socialism are nothing new, and I am excited to be part of this discussion with such inspiring interlocutors.

Marung's article, which Milford cites in her review, is a knowing dissection of the use Soviet "Africanists" made of the ideas and legacy of the October Revolution.<sup>5</sup> Ghana, Guinea, and Mali barely feature in it. This is not surprising given that Marung focuses mostly on the late 1960s and 1970s, a period of far less extensive Soviet engagement in West Africa compared to the previous decade. Scholars from the Institute of Africa saw the 1917 Bolshevik revolution as a defining moment for anti-imperialism in general and in Africa in particular, following Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin's famous arguments for self-determination. In the interpretation of Soviet Africanists, the October Revolution also contained the input for the type of economic modernization and state building that they believed newly independent states in Africa needed.

This latter aspect is where Marung's work intersects my own more directly. Interestingly, in the context of *Arrested Development*, the New Economic Policy (NEP) may occupy a more prominent role than the Bolshevik revolution. While October was constantly invoked in Soviet official rhetoric, planners and economists who worked on West Africa made ample use of both categories and ideas that they identified with the NEP era. Anxious to overcome the legacy of Stalinism, Soviet officials turned to a time they idealized in terms of promise and experimentation. During the Khrushchev era, the Soviet determination to mix the state and the market in Africa, Asia, and Latin America may owe more to the 1920s than to 1917. This is another stimulating dialogue that I hope to continue.

Radoslav Yordanov's review was a pleasure to read. He not only decodes all my wordplays and oblique textual references, but often turns them on their head to show what he appreciated about *Arrested Development* and what he would have done differently. Yordanov is right to point out that my book does not aim to rewrite the history of Soviet relations with Ghana, Guinea, and Mali. This is a well-known story, at least since Robert Legvold's account from 1970.<sup>6</sup> *Arrested Development* reframes the story as one primarily about economic development, and not diplomacy or security. Therefore, some traditional Cold War categories of analysis need an update.

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<sup>4</sup> James Mark, Paul Betts, et al., *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

<sup>5</sup> Steffi Marung, "Leninian Moment? Soviet Africanists and the Interpretation of the October Revolution, 1950s–1970s," *Journal Für Entwicklungspolitik*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2017): 21–48.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Legvold, *Soviet Policy in West Africa* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970).

In her review, Michelle Paranzino emphasizes how narratives based on the ability of relatively small states to play off larger Cold War powers against each other have limited traction in the context *Arrested Development* covers. Capacity mattered, but precise ideological choices mattered even more. Paranzino and Yordanov both note that while Soviet aid packages, including trade deals, may have seemed convenient, they still carried vexing clauses. Yordanov mentions the case of a 1959 Soviet loan to Ethiopia, whose government ended up not using most of the funds for fear of unwelcome interference from the USSR. Paranzino reminds readers of the Soviet Union's trade with Cuba, which left the Havana government dependent on Soviet purchases of sugar.

The fear of exchanging dependence on England and France for dependence on the Soviet Union was strong in West Africa, too. For example, Nana Osei-Opare has investigated the concerns that many Ghanaian officials, including Nkrumah himself, harbored about initiating an unequal economic relationship with the USSR, which many in Accra viewed as an imperialist power.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the governments of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali decided to pursue cooperation with the Soviet Union. The key was ambition. Given the scale of Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, and Keïta's economic development plans, they needed significant external support. Given the precise ideological direction that they wanted to give development—collectivist and state-driven—the Soviet Union was the best (least bad?) available partner.

Western governments and international organizations had financial and technical capabilities that often exceeded those of the Soviet Union. Yet, the Western ideological outlook was different from that of the Soviet Union. The governments of Ghana, Guinea, and Mali approached the USSR for development projects that they deemed to require more state than market. In cases where more market was preferable, the US and its allies were more logical partners. Either choice carried potentially troublesome strings attached and the risk of dependency. Such dilemmas were based on competing visions of economic development, rather than opportunity or security concerns.

Finally, a word about photography. Yordanov finds my book closer to the straightforward photojournalism of Felice Beato rather than Oliviero Toscani's conceptual provocations. I'm not sure how I feel about the work of Toscani, whose provocations aimed to sell more t-shirts for a multinational corporation, but photojournalism can be conceptual too. *Arrested Development* may have been born as an “f/8 and be there” type of project, in which sources mattered more than concepts. However, the book evolved into something much more influenced by abstract ideas. Jonas Bendiksen, whose work mixes realism with abstract themes, is the photographer who inspired me the most while writing the book. His haunting images are probably the best visual representation of the legacy of the Soviet model of development.<sup>8</sup>

I am delighted to have been invited to be part of so many conversations by all reviewers. Their work has inspired me a great deal for *Arrested Development*, and I am looking forward to continuing our dialogue. I would also like to extend a special thanks to all readers who got this far!

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<sup>7</sup> Nana Osei-Opare, “Uneasy Comrades: Postcolonial Statecraft, Race, and Citizenship, Soviet-West African Relations, 1957–1966,” *Journal of West African History* Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 2019): 85-111.

<sup>8</sup> Jonas Bendiksen, *Satellites: Images from the Fringes of the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Aperture, 2006).