

LUNDT, Bea/ MARX, Christoph (eds.). 2016. Kwame Nkrumah 1909-1972. A Controversial African Visionary. (Historische Mitteilungen der Ranke-Gesellschaft – Beiheft 96) Stuttgart: Franz Steiner. 208 pp. ISBN: 978-3-515-11572-8.

reviewed by

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“The years of Nkrumah’s rule are still a bone of contention” (p.7). Writing these words in the introduction, the editors of this volume, Bea Lundt and Christoph Marx, emphasise the subtitle’s claim to discuss Nkrumah as *A Controversial African Visionary*. The publication of the volume in 2016, 50 years after the overthrow of Nkrumah, also hints at this claim. Ten contributions by historians from Ghana, Germany, Austria and the USA open up a variety of themes in Nkrumah’s political biography. To bundle the contributions, the editors subdivide the volume into three sections. The first section, *Vision and Politics* deals with Nkrumah’s conceptions of politics and its implementation in Ghana. The second section, *Opposition and Coup* focuses on Nkrumah-opposing forces during his active political career in Ghana between 1948 and 1966. The third section, *Evaluation and Memory* approaches Ghanaian debates on Nkrumah’s place in history as “opinions on Nkrumah and his rule oscillate between extremes” (p.14).

Although the themes of the sections are quite intelligible, two contributions are not assigned convincingly to their respective section. Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu’s article “Kwame Nkrumah and the Agricultural Development of Northern Ghana” (p.109-118) is an examination of Nkrumah’s agricultural policy between the vision of state farms and the failure of their implementation. Assigning the article to *Opposition and Coup* is misleading, because the author discusses ‘opposition’ to Nkrumah only in terms of general scepticism as “most northerners did not subscribe to the idea of an immediate independence” (p.111). Ntewusu’s article sheds some light on the sparsely illuminated field of agricultural and livestock policies in Northern Ghana during Nkrumah’s reign.

Assigning Harcourt Fuller’s article to the last section, *Evaluation and Memory* is also debatable. In “Atomic Africa: Modernization, Technological Nationalism, and ‘Scientific Standstill’ in Kwame Nkrumah’s Ghana and

Beyond 1957-Present" (p.185-204), Fuller assesses Nkrumah's policies on energy, technology and science. On the one hand, the author examines the planning of concrete projects, and on the other hand, Nkrumah's ambitions in making science and technology accessible to Ghanaians. To illustrate the importance Nkrumah ascribed to technology for 'national development,' Fuller annexes an instructive collection of postage stamps that were printed during the Nkrumah-era. While Fuller's examination of the Nkrumah-years is appealing, the promise of the title to include Ghana's energy policy until the present is not kept except for the conclusion in which Fuller hastens through five decades of energy and science policy.

Arno Sonderegger's "How the Empire Wrote Back: Notes on the Struggle of George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah" (p.19-38) proliferates a nuanced account of Nkrumah's pan-African and anti-colonial vision and its inspirations. An insightful close reading of the writings and biographies of the two men reveals the intellectual echo of Padmore in Nkrumah's writings and strong personal ties between the two visionaries. Sonderegger argues that they shared the vision of a far-reaching pan-African unity as a tool of anti-colonialism, but differed in the assessment of the nation-state in that vision.

In "Nkrumah and His 'Ideological Institute' at Winneba" (p.39-49) Kofi Darkwah focuses on the role of the institute for ensuring the "socialist ideological education for the CPP" (p.41) and anti-colonial nationalists from other parts of Africa. Using still-available documents of the institute (a great deal has been destroyed after the overthrow in 1966), Darkwah reports notable findings on intra-institutional procedures like courses offered or on the social backgrounds and the political roots of students and teachers in the training programs at Winneba to the reader.

In her contribution "Women during the Nkrumah-era" (p.49-63) Cyrelene Amoah-Boampong discusses the role of women for and in the Nkrumah-era. She argues that women, as Nkrumah-affiliated voters, as CPP functionaries or as Nkrumah-promoting traders, played a crucial part in the nationalist cause. With Ghana being independent, Nkrumah appointed women to high-ranking positions in the new state and induced reforms to foster gender equality. Amoah-Boampong's starts her article by outlining female political power in precolonial Ghana and its deterioration during colonialism. In framing the years of the nationalist struggle as a "renewed awakening of women's political activism from its precolonial slumber"

(p.57), the author claims a certain continuity between precolonial and post-1945 Ghana, which, however, is misleading. Political power in precolonial Ghana was held by women of royal backgrounds or socio-economic elites. Nkrumah's appeal however, as the author herself states, included all women. The claimed continuity therefore overlooks the different meanings of social differences among Ghanaian women in the two historical periods under discussion.

The article by Kwame Osei Kwarteng and Mary Owusu (p.67-89) in the second section *Opposition and Coup* is a solidly argued and cogent portrayal of oppositional parties to Nkrumah's CPP during 1951 and 1960 (when Ghana became a single-party state). The authors suggest a periodisation of the oppositional forces, depending on the effective number of opponents to Nkrumah. "[I]nitial single opposition" between 1949 and 1951 (p.73), covers the attempts of the UGCC to exclude Nkrumah and the CPP from the spheres of political power, whereas phases of "ubiquitous opposition" (p.75) characterise the political spheres of Ghana between 1951 and 1960. Contextualising Nkrumah in Ghanaian politics is also the aim of Nana Yaw B. Spong's article "Framing Contentious Politics in the Gold Coast. The Nkrumah Contingency 1948-1951" (p.89-108). Based on the theoretical framework of Charles Tilly's and Sidney Tarrow's "contentious politics" in social movements, Spong aptly stresses that resistance to colonialism cannot be reduced to Nkrumah, but goes back to social movements in the 1830's. However, conceptualising Nkrumah's political engagement as social movement limits the scope of Spong's analysis to the years between 1948-1951. He defines social movements as the articulation of political demands by people "who have no regular access to the corridors of power" against people in these corridors (p.90). With Nkrumah appointed as Leader of Government Business, he and the CPP fall out of this theoretical frame after 1951, although their access to the corridors of powers was far from being unrestricted (Davidson 2007 [1973]: 84-85).

Jonathan Otto Pohl examines the role of the United States of America in the coup d'état that overthrew Nkrumah. In "Nkrumah, the Cold War, the 'Third World', and the US Role in the 24 February 1966 Coup," (p.119-133) he uses documents from the CIA and US State Department that were declassified and published by the US government since 1999. The formerly inaccessible documents prove that the US administration knew one year ahead that a coup was planned and welcomed it. Although the CIA's exact

contribution to the coup cannot be uncovered by the used sources, Pohl shows that the US administration put enormous economic and diplomatic pressure on Nkrumah by letting the US-Ghana relations further deteriorate. Despite his well-researched examination of the declassified documents, Pohl does not relate his findings to Nkrumah's considerable conclusions on his overthrow, the role of the CIA in the coup (Nkrumah 1969 [1968]: 49-51) and the US-pressures laid on Ghana (Nkrumah 1969 [1968]: 95-96).

Felix Müller's "Ghanaian Intellectuals and the Nkrumah controversy 1970-2007/8" (p.137-152), the first contribution of the third section, *Evaluation and Memory*, addresses the contentious memory of Nkrumah in Ghanaian intellectual writing. Through a rich and illuminating biographic approach of the intellectuals and a close reading of their writings, Müller discerns three phases in intellectuals' memory of Nkrumah. The memory of Nkrumah's reign started off from harsh condemnation and an emphasis on liberal and democratic values (1969-75) and moved on to a hesitant intellectual rehabilitation (beginning in 1979) following Nkrumah's political rehabilitation. Müller criticises the unbalanced, worship-like attempts to further rehabilitate Nkrumah after 2007. His contribution shows convincingly that "Nkrumah's memory has served as a means of making sense not only of the past but also of the present and future" (p.151).

Although she focuses on a different source – Nkrumah's statue – Carola Lentz's findings also strongly suggest the importance of Nkrumah's memory in shaping the present. Her meticulously researched article "A Lasting Memory: The Contested History of the Nkrumah Statue" (p.153-184) consists of two parts: a documentary account of the conflict-ridden process of planning the monument and a reconstruction of the post-1966 controversial negotiations of its place in Accra. Protest against Nkrumah found its articulation in vandalism against the monument during his reign and in 1966. The unveiling of a new Nkrumah-statue at Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park in 1992 does not mean that the statue and Nkrumah himself found an uncontested and immutable place in Ghana('s public memory), but that the "monument wars" are articulated in forms more subtle than vandalism.

The volume intends to re-evaluate Kwame Nkrumah's achievements for Ghana and the controversial debates on these achievements during and after his reign. The attempt to present a balanced perspective on Nkrumah to the reader is achieved in the majority of contributions. Especially the

articles in the sections *Opposition and Coup* and *Evaluation and Memory* refer directly to Nkrumah's controversial role in Ghanaian politics. The arrangement of two contributions in the volume is debatable and some arguments on female political activism and on Nkrumah's political engagement framed as social movement are misleading. Nonetheless, the variety of approaches and addressed issues benefits anyone interested in Kwame Nkrumah's political life, Ghana's post-1945 history, intellectual history, the politics of memory or special fields of Ghanaian policy like agriculture or energy.

References:

- Davidson, Basil (2007 [1973]): *Black Star: A View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah*. London: James Currey.
- Nkrumah, Kwame (1969 [1968]): *Dark Days in Ghana*. New York: International Publishers.