

Kwame Nkrumah and the Dawn of the Cold War (The West African National Secretariat, 1945–48) by Marika Sherwood. London: Pluto Press, 2019. 208pp.

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Marika Sherwood's *Kwame Nkrumah and the Dawn of the Cold War (The West African National Secretariat–1945–48)* offers a fresh account of the impact of the Cold War on Pan-Africanism. The current repertoire of research on Kwame Nkrumah, Pan-Africanism and independence era in West Africa is silent on both the impact of the Cold War on the liberation struggle and the role that the West African National Secretariat (WANS) played in challenging colonialism and racism. Thus, the contributions of the WANS, as interrogated by Sherwood, to the independence era, All-African People's Conference series, Conference of Independent African States and the founding of the Organization of African is very important.

The book covers in detail the impact of the Cold War on the struggle for independence in Africa, the development of Pan-Africanism in West Africa and the role that the WANS played in combatting the onslaught of pervasive attacks against their mission. The WANS' dedication to the liberation and unification of West Africa was outlined in their objectives in a key pamphlet, "West Africa is One Country: Peoples of West Africa Unite". These were:

1. Supply information... with a view to realizing a West African Front for the United West African National Independence
2. Educate the peoples, especially the working classes, in the imperialist countries concerning the problems of West Africa
3. Foster a spirit of national unity and solidarity within West Africa for the purpose of combating the menace of artificial territorial division now in existence
4. Engineer the formation of an All-West African National Congress (p.42).

The objectives of the West African National Secretariat, Sherwood points out, were not unique as many organizations highlighted in the book operated using similar ideas. Herein lies the uniqueness of Sherwood's text – her ability to connect the collective ideology of different organizations that were challenging colonialism and racism over space and time.

The book makes several critical points about the Cold War actors in the independence struggle and the responses of WANS to these interventions. First, it points to the aggressive tactics which Cold War actors such as the USA and

Britain used to hinder the development of a West African Union. Even after the so called “Atlantic Charter” in which it was agreed that all men/women have the right to choose the form of government under which they will live, there was push back by Western powers to maintain control of their “colonies”. The text does a great job of outlining the many ways in which this charter was merely a piece of paper with signatures. The manuscript suggests that throughout this period there was active sabotage against organizations like the West African National Secretariat.

Second, this book accentuates the important role that organizations outside the continent had on the struggle for independence. It spends two chapters focusing on the work and impact of the WANS and its relationships to organizers in the UK, France, USA and West Africa. For instance, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) led by W.E.B. Du Bois, the Universal Negro Improvement Association led by Marcus Garvey and the African Students Association all based in the United States contributed to the fight against colonialism. These institutions were part and parcel of the army of organizations that engaged in the battle of ideas so prevalent during the Cold War. Each of these organizations had a print organ that was the primary source of producing propaganda that was spread by popular media. The organizations used their voice during strategic moments like the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco to challenge the continued support for colonialism in Africa. Many organizations tried to attend this meeting but were denied access. The NAACP and other organizations sent official statements to the U.N. demanding that they support an end to colonialism.

Other important organizations were the West African Student Union (WASU) and Pan-African Federation (PAF) which Kwame Nkrumah was engaged with almost immediately after his arrival in the U.K. The WASU was an important organization for Nkrumah and his contemporaries. The study groups of the WASU set the stage for the push for West African unity and eventually African unity. According to Sherwood the WASU directly confronted the Secretary of the Colonies in a memorandum stating that they were demanding, “internal self-government for the next ten years” (p. 31). Unfortunately, the government did not reply to this request. The PAF primarily organized the all-important 5th Pan-African Congress (PAC) in Manchester which was a catalyst in the independence of many African states.

Third, it brilliantly highlights the use of print media not only as an avenue to promote Pan-Africanism in West Africa but more importantly the nuances of the cold war and the weapons used to combat it. The print media, pamphlets and direct correspondence by WANS and other organizations spoke to the larger African nation and the Western powers including the United Nations. The newspapers, pamphlets and direct correspondence specifically called for the end of colonialism

and racism and more importantly they offered an alternative. The alternative that they offered was self-government and unity starting in West Africa. These instruments of struggle became so critical to the battle of ideas that many of them were banned.

The print media served as a vehicle to politically educate the larger African nation. The correspondence and pamphlets targeted international organizations, Africans with access to higher education and institutions that were benefiting from colonization and/or complicit. The text emphasized the role of *The Crisis*, *The Gold Coast Observer*, the WANS' s newsletter "*The New African*", *The Pittsburg Courier* and *Ashanti Pioneer* in providing political education for everyday Africans. They familiarized readers with the most recent developments in the independence struggle. Used as a weapon in the battle of ideas, for instance *The Pittsburg Courier* on the 26th of April and 2nd of June circulated critiques of the founding of the U.N. The article titled, "*The Conference was a waste of time...Just words, words words*" challenged the legitimacy of the founding conference specifically if the body would not take a stance against colonialism.

This book is an important addition to the literature on Nkrumah and Pan-Africanism. Through the lens of the WANS, it shows the evolution of Kwame Nkrumah' s Pan-African ideology and the impact of the Cold War on West Africa' s quest for unity. It extends the bounds of research on Kwame Nkrumah and provides space for future research on countless other organizations in the Pan-African struggle.

Reference

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