Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

ARTICLE

Rethinking the late colonial state in Africa through diplomatic training

Ruth Craggs[1] (iD), Jonathan Harris[2] (iD) and Fiona McConnell[3] (iD)

[1]Geography, King's College London, UK; [2]History and Geography, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland and [3]Geography and Environment, University of Oxford, UK
Corresponding author: Ruth Craggs; Email: ruth.craggs@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper focuses on diplomatic training as a site for exploring the tensions in late colonialism around sovereignty and self-government. Training for the diplomats of soon to be independent states was understood by imperial governments as an ambiguous issue in this period immediately pre-independence: it offered the potential for the former metropole to sustain power and influence within a rapidly changing world, whilst at the same time challenging the very foundations of imperialism by empowering the diplomats of soon to be independent African states. Drawing on archives in France, the UK, and the US, as well as a newly recorded oral history interview with one of the first cohort of Ghanaian trainees, we focus on the development of diplomatic training from ad hoc responses to requests to a more formalised programmes provided by imperial powers and the United States, and tensions and competition between providers and over the content of the courses. We focus primarily on the Gold Coast/Ghana, contextualised within wider experiences of African colonies in both the British and French empires. We demonstrate that training for diplomats provides novel insights into the temporalities, spatialities, and agency that characterised the late colonial state.

Keywords: Late colonialism; decolonisation; diplomatic training; Gold Coast; Ghana

Introduction

On the 9 March 1960, just 13 months before Sierra Leone was to become independent, Aaron Emanuel of the United Kingdom's Colonial Office wrote to the Colonial Governor Sir Maurice Dorman on the question of trained diplomats for the new state:

> If Sierra Leone is granted independence in 1961 it is essential that they should be sure to have adequate trained staff to fill the few missions referred to … [in] your letter. *An independent state with inadequate overseas representation would make very poor impression on the outside world which takes not a little convincing that the transfer of sovereignty is a reality.*[1]

Across Africa, formal decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century saw the (more or less) gradual transfer of power beginning with internal functions of state. Defence and foreign

---

[1] "Sierra Leone training 1960-1," 9 March 1960, The National Archives UK (hereafter TNA) FCO 141/14334, emphasis added.

policy were always the last functions to be formally handed over from colonial to postcolonial administrations. The singular importance of control over foreign policy and diplomatic activity lies in their direct underpinning of sovereign power; power that was hitherto wielded by the imperial metropole. Therefore, whereas so-called 'Africanisation' often proceeded more gradually (over years) in other sectors of government and business, preparing external affairs for independence was a fraught exercise and one held back until the very last minute, when dates were set for independence.[2] Diplomatic training was understood by imperial governments as an ambiguous issue in this period immediately pre-independence: it offered the potential for the former metropole to sustain power and influence within a rapidly changing world, whilst at the same time challenging the very foundations of imperialism by empowering the diplomats of soon to be independent African states.

Emanuel's comments that open this article highlight something at the heart of debates about diplomacy in the lead up to decolonisation – that it was both practically *and* performatively important.[3] Diplomats of newly independent states would represent their new polities internationally, making material and symbolic interventions in the international sphere. This paper focuses on diplomatic training as a site for exploring the tensions in late colonialism around sovereignty and self-government. The empirical discussion focuses primarily on the Gold Coast/Ghana, reflecting its crucial position as the first British colony in Africa to gain independence. The final part of the paper broadens out to explore discussions about diplomatic training across African countries that were formerly part of the British Empire, alongside the approach of France to its colonies on the continent.

In what follows, we draw on diverse European and American archival materials[4] alongside an oral history interview we conducted with one of the first Gold Coast/Ghana diplomats to receive training from the UK government, as well as a 1969 publication for which many of this cohort were interviewed.[5] The first part of the article examines early requests from the Gold Coast Government in the years leading up to independence for support with diplomatic training. We then address how later cohorts of Ghanaian diplomats were trained, around and just after independence, and how these diplomats were viewed by the government of independent Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah. Finally, the paper explores how early *ad hoc* training for African diplomats provided by the British government developed, in response to growing demand and increasing competition from other global powers, into a more formalised programme. We conclude by arguing that diplomatic training can provide a useful lens for understanding the late colonial state. In particular, we demonstrate that training for diplomats provides novel insights into the temporalities, spatialities, and agency that characterised the late colonial state. First, contestations over training provision between former imperial powers and anti-colonial leaders offers valuable insights into the distinct temporalities of the late colonial state in terms of being stuck in limbo, facing demands for speed and requests for slowness. Second, training highlights the diverse geographies of late colonialism, from the multi-scalar connections that characterised the late colonial state, including networks of (anti)colonial and Cold War geopolitics, to the

---

[2] On Nigerianisation of the civil service and banking, see A. L. Adu, *The Civil Service in New African States* (London: Routledge, 2023); Stephanie Decker, "Decolonising Barclays Bank DCO? Corporate Africanisation in Nigeria, 1945–69," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 33, no. 3 (1 September 2005): 419–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530500185894.

[3] Fiona McConnell, Terri Moreau, and Jason Dittmer, "Mimicking State Diplomacy: The Legitimizing Strategies of Unofficial Diplomacies,", *Geoforum* 43, no. 4 (2012): 804–14, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2012.01.007.

[4] UK National Archives (TNA), The London School of Economics (LSE), the French *Archives Diplomatiques*, the Archives of American Art and the Joseph E. Johnson Papers at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library. The latter two collections contain correspondence related to American actors' involvement in diplomatic training.

[5] W. Scott Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy 1957-1966: Diplomacy, Ideology, and the New State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); Interview with Richard Akwei, 18 April 2023, Accra.

physical spaces of classrooms and study tours where the skills of diplomacy were learned. Third, diplomatic training foregrounds the nature and extent of African agency within the developmental projects of the late colonial state.

The place of diplomacy in the late colonial state

Historians have argued over the power and extent of the colonial state.[6] Mahmood Mamdani and Crawford Young both highlight its overall force, though with an emphasis on practices of cultural coercion and outright violence respectively, whilst Jeffrey Herbst emphasises the "weak capabilities and modest ambitions of colonial states."[7] Where there is more agreement, is in the way that the colonial state attempted – often successfully – to isolate colonised peoples from one another and from the wider world. Most notably, Frederick Cooper has posited the idea of colonial 'gatekeeper' states, which had "weak instruments for entering into the social and cultural realm over which they presided, but...stood astride the intersection of the colonial territory and the outside world."[8] These dynamics were often magnified as the colonial state approached its terminal point.

In his 1999 article "What Was the Late Colonial State?" John Darwin provided what he called six 'routes' to 'lateness' – factors that might both differentiate late colonial states from earlier versions of colonial rule and explain why colonial rule came to an end. These included the proactive developmental nature of colonial states after 1945, an increasing drive towards the centralisation and regularisation of power, and concomitant with these aspects, a dense state increasingly enmeshed within "the lush growth of para-political institutions."[9] When power seemed to be ebbing, late colonial states often became focused on state security and increasingly utilised violent repression.[10] Alongside these, and most pertinent for our argument, were two further aspects. First, that those in power – and those seeking to claim it – understood that independence was coming: the late colonial state was a "self-consciously transitional institution bridging 'real' colonialism and the coming age of independent statehood."[11] And second, that the nature of the colonial state's external relationships were changing. As Darwin puts it:

> The classic colonial state lay in a frozen world with heavy-duty insulation separating it from the heat and light of international diplomacy. Its lines of communication ran to the metropole and back. No foreign power could be represented diplomatically.[12]

However, by the middle of the twentieth century, colonial states were increasingly open to external influences, through war-time mobility, travel for education, and the ideological

---

[6] Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control - Second Edition* (Princeton, United States: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[7] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism.*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History Ser. (Princeton: University Press, 2018); Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, 80.

[8] Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[9] John Darwin, "What Was the Late Colonial State?," *Itinerario* 23, no. 3–4 (November 1999): 73–82, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115300024578. 77.

[10] Though Herbst suggests that the numbers of security forces at the disposal of the colonial authorities remained small even in what he calls 'the terminal period' of colonialism, there is broad agreement on the brutal nature of colonial rule throughout and especially towards the end of European rule in Africa. Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*, 79; Darwin, "What Was the Late Colonial State?"

[11] Darwin, "What Was the Late Colonial State?" 79.

[12] Darwin. 80.

scramble of the Cold War.[13] Nevertheless, they remained represented officially only through the metropole.

In this increasingly open 'bridging' state, how and when could diplomats be trained? If such training explicitly aimed to further remove this colonial 'insulation', to what extent could diplomatic training take place without plugging late colonial states and their soon-to-be leaders into new networks which threatened to short-circuit the power of the metropole? Whilst the late colonial state is known for its interventionist, developmentalist character – training academics, doctors, teachers, civil servants and 'experts' of all kinds to fulfil roles in an independent state – training diplomats challenged the foundations of the colonial state itself by raising the question of sovereign independence.

Literature from History and International Relations about colonialism and decolonisation has historically focused on "high politics, strategic rationale and, above all, the decision-making power of politicians and bureaucrats at the imperial centre."[14] Even nationalist histories often reinforced this emphasis on political elites.[15] A more recent wave of scholarship has focused on the 'experts' of empire: the professionals on the ground whose knowledge – architectural, agricultural, scientific and educational – materialised the developmentalist policies of the late colonial state.[16] Whilst still often concentrating on the experiences and contributions of Western 'experts,' this literature begins to people the late colonial state with those delivering policy, rather than formulating it. This shift in perspective also provides some space for the contributions of colonised peoples to be recognised, both as crucial intermediaries and as guides with no formal training but myriad expertise, and, later, as a first generation of trained professionals in areas such as planning, agriculture and medicine.[17]

Spaces of professional education and training can provide a useful lens on late colonialism and decolonisation, by bringing to the fore the individual experiences, mobility and agency of (formerly) colonised people, alongside imperial policy, nationalist demands and super-power rivalry.[18] A particularly productive area has been an examination of

[13] Darwin, 79, 80; Piero Gleijeses, "Decolonization and the Cold War," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, ed. M. Thomas and A. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 477–96; Sandrine Kott, "Cold War Internationalism," in *Internationalisms; A Twentieth-Century History*, ed. Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[14] Michael Collins, "Nation, State and Agency: Evolving Historiographies of African Decolonization," in *Britain, France and the Decolonization of Africa: Future Imperfect?* (London: UCL Press, 2017), 17–42.

[15] Both Ochwada and Guyot-Réchard make this point. Hannington Ochwada, "Historians, Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism: Myths and Realities," in *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, ed. Thankdika Mkandawire (London; New York: CODESRIA Books, 2005), 193–208; Bérénice Guyot-Réchard, "Stirring Africa towards India: Apa Pant and the Making of Post-Colonial Diplomacy, 1948–54," *The International History Review* 44, no. 4 (4 July 2022): 892–913, https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2022.2093941.

[16] Brett. M. Bennett and Joseph. M. Hodge, *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800-1970* (Springer, 2011); Uma Kothari, "Authority and Expertise: The Professionalisation of International Development and the Ordering of Dissent," *Antipode* 37, no. 3 (2005): 425–46, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0066-4812.2005.00505.x.

[17] Ruth Craggs and Hannah Neate, "What Happens If We Start from Nigeria? Diversifying Histories of Geography," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 110, no. 3 (3 May 2020): 899–916, https://doi.org/10.1080/24694452.2019.1631748; Matthew M. Heaton, "Thomas Adeoye Lambo and the Decolonization of Psychiatry in Nigeria," in *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800–1970*, ed. Brett M. Bennett and Joseph M. Hodge, Britain and the World (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), 275–96, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230320826_13.

[18] J.F. Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma, and G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education* (Accra: Association of African Universities, 1996); Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (University Rochester Press, 2004); Timothy Livsey, *Nigeria's University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Sarah Stockwell, *British End of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

international scholarships for students from colonised and formerly colonised countries.[19] For example, Ngozi Edeagu has demonstrated the value of a prosopographical approach (collective biography) in order to capture the individual and collective experiences of Nigerian students in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.[20] In our account, we draw from the strengths of this literature, paying attention to the experiences, motivations and agency of those receiving diplomatic training.

Education and training also lays bare the wider intersections of late colonial and Cold War geopolitics.[21] The US government and private philanthropic foundations such as Rockefeller, Ford, and Carnegie - whose aims Inderjeet Parmar argues broadly mirrored those of the State Department - channelled millions of dollars into higher education in Africa seeking to build soft power abroad.[22] This included international scholarships to bring students from Africa to the U.S. to study, as well as broader cultural and educational programmes on the continent.[23] In this they competed both with the Soviet Union and with the former colonial powers, such as Britain and France, which also provided large-scale funding for education and training.[24] Competition therefore both reflected Cold War alliances and cut across them. This 'cultural assistance' aimed to create postcolonial elites friendly to East or West, but also, more subtly, to produce epistemic communities that reinforced certain world views. For example, Giles Scott-Smith has shown how, with funding from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundation, the Hague Academy of International Law, in the Netherlands, played a normative role encouraging a transition from empire into a liberal international world order.[25]

Beyond dualistic Cold War competition, recent work has demonstrated the increasing influence of international and regional organisations in the process of decolonisation and postcolonial state-building. Eva-Maria Muschik has convincingly argued that the United Nations (UN) played an important role – through its programs put into practice on the ground by its Secretariat (made up of civil servants) – in the "transformation from a world of empires to one of nominal nation states."[26] More than that, these programs shifted the meaning of state-building in late colonial and postcolonial states from "a unique political or

[19] Alice Garner and Diane Kirkby, *Academic Ambassadors, Pacific Allies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019). Ludovic Tournès and Giles Scott-Smith, "A World of Exchanges," in *Global Exchanges; Scholarships and Transnational Circulations in the Modern World*, ed. Ludovic Tournès and Giles Scott-Smith (New York: Bergbahn, 2018), 1–29; Constantin Katsakioris, "Creating a Socialist Intelligentsia," *Cahiers d'études Africaines* 2, no. 226 (2017): 259–88, https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafricaines.20664.

[20] Ngozi Edeagu, "Educating a Transnational Postcolonial Elite," *Diasporas. Circulations, Migrations, Histoire*, no. 37 (9 February 2021): 79–94, https://doi.org/10.4000/diasporas.6285.

[21] Jonathan Harris, "Geopolitics of Decolonization: Carnegie Endowment's Diplomatic Training Program 1960–73," *Geoforum* 154 (2024): 104067, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2024.104067.

[22] Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[23] Parmar; Livsey, *Nigeria's University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development*; Corinna R. Unger, "The United States, Decolonization, and the Education of Third World Elites," in *Elites and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jost Dülffer and Marc Frey, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), 241–61, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230306486_13; Frank Gerits, "Hungry Minds: Eisenhower's Cultural Assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa, 1953–1961," *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 3 (June 2017): 594–619, https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhw059.

[24] Constantin Katsakioris, "The Lumumba University in Moscow: Higher Education for a Soviet-Third World Alliance, 1960-91," *Journal of Global History* 14, no. 2 (2019): 281–300; Katsakioris, "Creating a Socialist Intelligentsia;" Livsey, *Nigeria's University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development*.

[25] Giles Scott-Smith, "Attempting to Secure an 'Orderly Evolution': American Foundations, The Hague Academy of International Law and the Third World," *Journal of American Studies* 41, no. 3 (December 2007): 509–32, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875807003970.

[26] Eva-Maria Muschik, *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945-1965.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 2.

historical process" into "a universal technical challenge."[27] In a similar vein, Guy Fiti Sinclair has described the UN's technical assistance in the field of public administration, provided during decolonisation, as a "technology of stateness."[28] Whilst until the 1960s many of those delivering this training on behalf of the UN were British, French and American – often, in the first two cases with direct experience in colonial administration – their interests and politics did not necessarily map neatly on to their nationalities.[29] Nevertheless, their broad technical knowledge and versions of best practice often reflected and reproduced western liberal internationalism, as in other forms of international education, training, and assistance in this period.[30] Training, and other forms of more mundane bureaucratic experience and practice often overlooked as purely technical, were important in the making and undoing of the late colonial state.[31]

In this rich literature on the intersections of education and empire, decolonisation, and the Cold War, focus has fallen primarily on statebuilding within the borders of late colonial and decolonising states – developing what was known as the 'manpower' to run an independent country. But statebuilding also required the training of those who would represent new states externally. Training for diplomats – key actors in the performance and practice of international relations – is only just starting to become an area of academic interest.[32] This is despite a strong body of literature that demonstrates the crucial contribution of diplomats in decolonisation. For example, in their studies of Algeria, before, during, and after the war of national liberation from France, Alina Sajed, Matthew Connolly and Jeffrey James Byrne have all highlighted the crucial role of international connections including diplomatic linkages.[33] Connolly describes the war as a 'diplomatic revolution' won through securing international support through the work of quasi diplomats working in national capitals rather than through military victories.[34] Byrne shows how after independence, through its own diplomats, and its hosting of others from the decolonising world, Algeria was positioned as a central player in the emerging 'third world' project.[35] Such insights demonstrate the importance of diplomats both before and after decolonisation, and the extent to which this value was understood by anticolonial leaders at the time.

If diplomats were understood to be key players in representing and influencing the shift from the colonial state to emerging sovereign nation in a postcolonial world, then their

---

[27] Muschik, 6.

[28] Guy Fiti Sinclair, "Forging Modern States with Imperfect Tools: United Nations Technical Assistance for Public Administration in Decolonized States," *Humanity* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 55.

[29] Muschik, *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945-1965.*

[30] Sinclair, "Forging Modern States with Imperfect Tools;" Scott-Smith, "Attempting to Secure an 'Orderly Evolution';" Livsey, *Nigeria's University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development*.

[31] Muschik, *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945-1965.* On mundane labour and postcolonial diplomacy, see Ruth Craggs, "Subaltern Geopolitics and the Post-Colonial Commonwealth, 1965-1990," *Political Geography* 65 (2018): 46–56.

[32] Jonathan Harris, Ruth Craggs, and Fiona McConnell, "Understanding Diplomatic Training from the Global South: Transnational Networks and (Post)Colonial Connections," *Diplomatica* 5, no. 1 (8 May 2023): 121–29, https://doi.org/10.1163/25891774-bja10098; Elsa Bugnon, "Voyage d'études de Futurs Diplomates Des Pays Émergents En Formation à Genève: Une Opportunité Pour La Suisse de s'exposer," *Traverse* 25, no. 1 (2018): 172–79; Elsa Bugnon, "La Formation de Jeunes Diplomates Des Pays Nouvellement Indépendants à Genève Dans Les Années 1960: Une Collaboration Entre La Dotation Carnegie et l'IUHEI," *Relations Internationales* 177, no. 1 (2019): 99–110.

[33] Alina Sajed, "Between Algeria and the World: Anticolonial Connectivity, Aporias of National Liberation and Postcolonial Blues," *Postcolonial Studies*, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2023.2127655; M. Connolly, *A Diplomatic Revolution; Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization and the Third World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[34] Connolly, *A Diplomatic Revolution; Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era*; Mohammed Harbi, *Les Archives de La Révolution Algérienne* (Paris: Jeune Afrique, 1981).

[35] Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization and the Third World Order*.

training warrants greater scrutiny. In examining early discussions of training for African would-be diplomats, as well as the experiences of those diplomats themselves, in this article we demonstrate how training became a site where the desires, demands and concerns of the late colonial state – and its soon-to-be-citizens and leaders – converged, alongside the interests of the increasingly divided international community. Diplomatic training reflected wider tensions in late colonial state-building and decolonisation, as well as hopes and fears for the postcolonial world. The next section discusses some of these anxieties and expectations through a focus on early requests for training in the Gold Coast, and highlights some of the distinct temporalities of the late colonial state.

'Premature' requests or delaying tactics: diplomatic training and timelines for independence

At the end of March, 1953, F.D. Webber of the British Colonial Office wrote to his counterpart in the Foreign Office with the following request:

> We have been asked by the Gold Coast Government whether it would be possible for one of their junior officers to be attached to the Foreign Office for a short time at the end of this year to acquire some experience of diplomatic procedure.

He went on to clarify:

> The external relations of the Gold Coast are still of course the responsibility of Her Majesty's Government and insofar as they are dealt with in the Gold Coast it is through a Minister of Defence and External Affairs who is one of the three European officials in an otherwise African cabinet... As the Gold Coast moves towards fully responsible government the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs may be called upon to perform an increased range of quasi-diplomatic duties... The Ministry lack experience in these matters and are conscious of the need for better knowledge of the diplomatic protocol involved.[36]

He concluded by asking whether 'their man,' an English Administrative Officer who would be on leave in England later in the year, could spend a month at the Foreign Office to gain experience in the area of diplomatic practice? The Foreign Office replied several months later to say that this was fine, but that a series of interviews with protocol staff, rather than an attachment, might be more appropriate. They sign off, "the usual security checks" will need to have been carried out, and he will be bound by the Official Secrets Act.[37]

By September, however, alarm bells were ringing. J.H.D. Dickson, the Administrative Officer in question had provided a list of questions on behalf of the Gold Coast Government that needed answering. Crucially, these ranged far beyond the relatively safe terrain of protocol and instead focused on the thorny issue of the relationship between sovereignty and representation abroad. As T.B. Williamson of the Colonial Office wrote, in a letter marked "secret and personal:"

> Some of the points in the list ... went considerably beyond the mere procedural and protocol matters mentioned earlier ... and they raised questions which, as you

---

[36] F.D. Webber to D.V. Staines, letter, 31 March 1953 TNA CO 554/402
[37] A.T. Lamb to F.D. Webber, letter, 30 June 1953 TNA CO 554/402.

yourself no doubt recognise, in substance concern the progressive transfer of responsibility for the external affairs of the Gold Coast from the U.K government to the Gold Coast Government.'[38]

UK Ministers were at that point discussing constitutional proposals for the Gold Coast and therefore the Colonial Office was wary:

we felt we must be extremely careful about how far we went.... To have turned him loose on the Foreign Office, and still more on the C[ommonwealth] R[elations] O[ffice] or a High Commissioner's Office in London, with the list of questions which you enclosed might have been very risky, and have led to all sorts of wrong conclusions being drawn here, especially at the present stage of Gold Coast affairs.[39]

Williamson gives the example of Question 5 ('but one example' of inappropriate questions): 'Is it proper for the Gold Coast to have any form of representation in a foreign country before achieving full self-government? If so, what should be the nature of that representation?' The letter concludes that:

we have talked the matter over with Dickson here, and have asked him to keep the list of questions in his pocket... We realise that once the constitutional instruments are amended and the Gold Coast reaches the final transitional stage before self-government, help may well be needed from the UK Government to prepare the Gold Coast for assuming responsibility for its external affairs, including possibly the training of selected officers of the Gold Coast Public Service for membership of an ultimate Gold Coast Foreign Service. *But we think it would be premature to anticipate this by informal enquiries here at the level and in the manner suggested by the enclosure to your letter.*[40]

This minor incident highlights something of the thinking of the UK government in the period of late colonialism. Whilst technical training was viewed as relatively unproblematic – focused on issues of protocol and procedure – anything beyond this could be seen as challenging imperial power and questioning the timelines towards full independence. The final line in the letter cited above is telling – a mere four years before decolonisation there was no plan for diplomatic training on the part of the UK government. Indeed requests for support were viewed as threatening and as premature. Prematurity is a key recurring concern in the imperial archives – it crops up regularly in correspondence in this period surrounding diplomatic training and representation.[41] Moreover, the Colonial Office saw no need for scaling up training responses to reflect the speed of likely decolonisation, confidently stating in 1954 that 'they could at the moment foresee no further similar requirement in respect of other Colonies beyond the commitments in respect of Malaya and the Gold Coast. Nigeria was likely to be next on the list but this was looking a long way ahead.'[42]

In addition, training itself could be seen as a delaying tactic. Kwame Nkrumah, the anti-colonial nationalist and first leader of independent Ghana, was explicit about this. Richard Akwei, one of the first Gold Coast/Ghana diplomats to receive training from the UK government reflected on this narrative in Nkrumah's campaigning discourse:

---

[38] T.B. Williamson (CO) to E. Norton Jones, letter, 18th September 1953, TNA CO 554/402

[39] T.B. Williamson (CO) to E. Norton Jones, letter

[40] T.B. Williamson (CO) to E. Norton Jones, letter, Italics added.

[41] See for example, M.G. Smith to A.F. Morley, 24th April 1954. TNA FO371/108182

[42] Interdepartmental discussions on attachments of colonial cadets to UK posts overseas. TNA FO371/108182.

His message to the people was, well, what are you fighting for? Independence? What are you waiting for? ... [The more gradualist anglophile nationalist] leaders, they say we want to have the good civil service, a good hospital, a good legal institution, this and this and this, all the modern infrastructure of the modern state before independence, which was reasonable. I mean, they were persuasive, because we didn't have many qualified people at the time. But [Nkrumah's] message to the earlier leaders was: 'Why are you wasting time asking for people to be trained to man engineering departments, medical departments, legal departments, what do you want? Political independence! So seek ye first political independence and all other things will be added to unto you.'[43]

There were then, distinct temporalities at work in the late colonial state. Training could be perceived as threatening to the late colonial state, and requests as hurrying independence. But the need for training could also be a way of stretching out the timelines of decolonisation, and therefore challenged by anti-colonial leaders. Delaying, waiting, and hurrying prematurely, these were the temporalities experienced and put to work in the late colonial state.

Placing the first diplomacy trainees

Whilst requests for training were viewed as premature in 1953, by 1955, plans were afoot to train the first cohort of diplomats for independent Ghana. The first group, including Ebenezer Moses Debrah, Alex Quaison-Sackey, and Richard Akwei, were drawn from the senior administrative civil service in the Gold Coast. According to Scott Thompson, who interviewed many of them for his 1969 book *Ghana's Foreign Policy,* they were "among the country's most worldly and sophisticated men." This implied that they were educated to a high level within British and colonial institutions; many had already been to university in London, Oxford and Aberdeen even prior to travelling to the UK for diplomatic training. Discussing the selection process, Richard Akwei noted that he was recruited by Amishadai Larson Adu, who had been his former House Master at Achimota School in Accra, a prestigious establishment modelled on British public schools (Adu was himself first a colonial administrator and later a senior international civil servant for independent Ghana). This method of recruitment underlines again the close relationship between the British colonial state, its spaces of education, and the first generation of Ghanaian diplomats.[44]

The UK training in 1955-1956 included courses undertaken at the London School of Economics (LSE), alongside placements with UK Embassies and High Commissions. Whilst it is not clear why the LSE was chosen, significant factors might have included its central London location, close to the Foreign, Commonwealth Relations, and Colonial Offices, and Commonwealth High Commissions, and its new International Relations department, led by the young, dynamic Geoffrey Goodwin.

The LSE courses were theoretical and Western oriented. For example, in the 1960-61 course bibliography there are very few authors from the global south listed: two works by the Indian diplomat K.M. Panikkar, and the Caribbean economist Arthur Lewis (listed alongside Walt Rostow of Modernization Theory fame), in the section on "problems of economic

---

[43] Interview with Richard Akwei; in his autobiography, Nkrumah writes "Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all other things shall be added unto you." Kwame Nkrumah, *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London: Nelson, 1957), 146.

[44] Oral history interview 18 April 2023. On this relationship see Ngozi Edeagu, "Living on the Fringes: Boarding Secondary Schools in Nigeria and the Paradox of Colonialism," in *Global Perspectives on Boarding Schools in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,* by Daniel Gerster and Felicity Jensz (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 237–60, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-99041-1_11.

development."[45] Although there was no sense of overt political inculcation or meddling within the course, one member of the first cohort of trainees recalled that they were left with the message that "they [the British] were good - and we were not to forget this."[46] As Scott Thompson notes, whatever trainees felt about the specific training, "These men, then, were heirs to the Western tradition in diplomacy."[47]

Nevertheless, the trainees' time in London did have a political impact unforeseen by those providing the course, coinciding as it did with the Suez crisis. As Thompson documents, "One said that if he had lacked consciousness as an African, or Afro-Asian before this, he did not after. Another said that 'It became clear during Suez that the British would go to any lengths to protect their interests; thus we had to make clear we would use every weapon we had to protect ours.'"[48]

As with many political leaders and students from the British Empire, the UK was not a new place for many of the first diplomatic trainees from Ghana and beyond. The setting for training in London was familiar and offered opportunities for sociability, as well as political networking and activism.[49] It also opened up the trainees to the racism of British society, most explicitly through the informal colour bar still at play in many hospitality venues, housing, and in the discrimination and victimisation of the police.[50] Imperial capitals could be hostile places for diplomats in training.[51]

The placements in British embassies that followed the university course were also a matter of contention. Lengthy deliberations between Whitehall officers about the perceived risks of accommodating these African cadres demonstrated the enduring racial logics that still held in this late imperial moment. First, despite the express wishes of the Gold Coast Government, the idea of sending an African trainee to the British Embassy in Washington was resisted by British diplomats, given the 'social difficulty' they might encounter due to the colour bar on the one hand, and the possibility that they might spread anti-British propaganda on the other.[52] This situation became increasingly untenable given plans for other (white) diplomats from Africa to be offered placements in Washington. Highlighting both the overt racism of the Colonial Office, and a keen awareness of how this would be received in Africa, the British Ambassador to the U.S. Sir Roger Makins was warned that "It will be difficult to sustain the position that we are willing to have a Counsellor attached to your Embassy from the Central African Federation but not willing to deal similarly with a blackamoor from the Gold Coast."[53] Meanwhile an attachment to the Monrovia embassy was partly refused on the (rather patronizing) grounds that it was:

> not large enough to provide any worthwhile experience for Gold Coast trainees. There
> might also be political objections, either because the Liberians tried to corrupt the

---

[45] Details of LSE Foreign Service course 1960-61 enclosed in a letter to Andrew Cohen at the Colonial Office from G.L. Goodwin of the LSE, 24th July 1961. TNA CO 1017/638

[46] Author's interview, in Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy 1957-1966: Diplomacy, Ideology, and the New State.*, 19.

[47] Thompson., 20.

[48] Thompson. 20.

[49] Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century*, The California World History Library 22 (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015); Hakim Adi, "West African Students in Britain, 1900–60: The Politics of Exile," *Immigrants & Minorities* 12, no. 3 (1 November 1993): 107–28, https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.1993.9974821.

[50] A. J. Stockwell, "Leaders, Dissidents and the Disappointed: Colonial Students in Britain as Empire Ended," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 3 (1 September 2008): 487–507, https://doi.org/10.1080/03086530802318730.

[51] For example, in Paris, some Algerian trainees were arrested on the basis of their historic role in the National Liberation War. See Harris, Craggs, and McConnell, "Understanding Diplomatic Training from the Global South."

[52] Washington representative, unsigned note, 30th March 1954. TNA FO371/108182

[53] C.B. Shuckburgh to Sir Roger Makins, letter, 20th August 1954. TNA FO371/108182

trainees' British allegiance or on the other hand because the Liberians showed their jealousy of an emergent Gold Coast.[54]

In September 1954, an interdepartmental meeting agreed that trainees should be placed in politically 'safe' missions such as in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and "posts in the Iron Curtain and NATO countries and newly independent countries," and "posts where a colour bar existed or there was a notoriously smart society" - one critical of the UK - should be avoided.[55] These deliberations had taken months, delaying the placements of these Gold Coast cadets to late 1956, after they had spent their year studying at the LSE from 1955.

Having completed a degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics at Oxford, followed by experience in the Gold Coast Civil Service, Richard Akwei was in his 30s by the time he was selected for diplomatic training and was allowed to skip the LSE course. Instead, he proceeded directly to an attachment at the British High Commission in Ottawa for around nine months in 1955-6, for what he described as a 'crash course'. Akwei reflected on this experience:

> They were very, very nice, very helpful. I was attached to different sections of the High Commission to expose me to what I would likely face as a diplomat for Ghana. And so I was in the political section, in the economic section, in the protocol section, all under the guidance of these officers of the embassy... I was already in the senior public service of Ghana, so much of the training was similar to what I was experiencing in Ghana. So it wasn't very difficult. The subject matter changed. The nuances changed, what diplomats were expected to do, and what was advisable for them to do and how they would meet situations and what your function was, which is to represent your country, but particularly the president, and your foreign minister, and then to write memos, and even study memos which have come into the mission, and which had gone out of the mission and I was even taken into the telex room ... to give me an understanding of what they did.[56]

Akwei was also given "the literature on diplomacy to read' including retired British diplomat Ernest Satow's classic *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice* – "it was like the bible" - first published in 1917.[57] Whilst Akwei had gained some understanding of diplomacy during his undergraduate degree, this reading was more practical, focusing on diplomatic skills with a strong emphasis on protocol. This version of protocol prioritised Western diplomatic performances, and little space was afforded to questioning them. Reflecting on his training attachment in Canada in a recent interview, Akwei noted that:

> [when] we went to dinner parties, we observed more or less the Western style. There were not many African nations in Ottawa in those days. In fact, I don't recall even socialising with any African departments...the texts, recommendation on protocol was there, but it was based on European [ideas]. It was later, when we were actual diplomats for Ghana, that I discovered that protocol was more or less what is acceptable to your government.[58]

---

[54] M.G. Smith to A.F. Morley, letter, 24th April 1954. TNA FO 371/108182
[55] Attachment of Malayan and Gold Coast Foreign Service Trainees to United Kingdom Posts Overseas, meeting notes. TNA FO 371/108182
[56] Interview with Richard Akwei.
[57] Ernest Satow, *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice* (London: Longmans, 1917).
[58] Interview with Richard Akwei.

In the Ghanaian case, this included embracing of Kente cloth as national dress, as part of a knowing diplomatic performance of Ghanaian-ness and difference from the West, which became as Akwei remembered "a source of attraction."[59] Akwei's official portrait for the Ghanaian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, where he served from 1967 until 1972, shows him in national dress (Figure 1).

Overall, Akwei concluded, "the training was necessary. I found it was necessary. Because it first exposed you to what you were likely to confront in the outside world after independence of any country."[60] Diplomatic training offered valuable technical know-how with which to engage with the international community. Knowing how to perform in the international arena, dominated by Western and colonial voices, was important, even if these performances could later on be challenged and amended to assert alternative visions for the world.[61]

Despite – or in fact because of – their training, this first group of Ghanaian diplomatic trainees were viewed with suspicion by Kwame Nkrumah. Drawn from a colonial elite favoured and promoted by the British colonial administration, this group were perceived as not sharing the pan-African and radical anti-colonial ideologies or experience of the new leader. Nkrumah considered the civil service "absolutely British in substance and nature."[62] Richard Akwei described these dynamics, whilst not associating himself with them directly:

> the [Colonial] administration preferred to deal with the earlier politicians who are more anglophile than Nkrumah. Nkrumah had the American background, the American style, and he was maybe not as elegant as the former leaders. The former leaders were professional men. Very British, well dressed, well spoken, they wrote

Figure 1. Richard Akwei representing Ghana at the United Nations. https://www.ghanamissionun.org/past-ambassadors/ (courtesy of Richard Akwei)

---

[59] Interview with Richard Akwei. On Ghanaian political dress more broadly, see Abena Dove Osseo-Asare, "Kwame Nkrumah's Suits: Sartorial Politics in Ghana at Independence," *Fashion Theory* 25, no. 5 (29 July 2021): 597–632, https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704X.2021.1878591.

[60] Interview with Richard Akwei.

[61] F. McConnell, "Performing Diplomatic Decorum: Repertoires of 'Appropriate' Behavior in the Margins of International Diplomacy," *International Political Sociology* 12, no. 4 (2018): 362–81.

[62] Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (London: Heinemann, 1963), 87.

beautiful memos. And they could hold their own with the British who were in charge. But their method was gradualism.[63]

Nkrumah was focused on achieving full political and economic independence for Ghana, beyond the formal transfer of power, and as such, was suspicious of the continuing influence of the UK.[64] He viewed institutions like the civil service, alongside universities and multinational corporations, as "part of the apparatus of imperialism... which had to be decolonised."[65] Nkrumah was also suspicious of the practice of studying abroad, which he felt could strip African students of their local connections and critical awareness of their own position. Drawing on his own experience of education in the US and the UK, he argued that "The colonial student can be so seduced by [the Western philosophies] ... that he surrenders his whole personality to them. When he does this, he loses sight of the fundamental social fact that he is a colonial subject."[66] Reflecting these wider suspicions of studying abroad, and of British influence in particular, in the late 1950s, Ghana made much less use of the UK diplomatic training opportunities than Malaya, despite becoming independent in the same year. As Alec Clutterbuck of the Commonwealth Relations Office noted: "This is partly political (Ghana tends to turn rather deliberately away from a good many of the activities she pursued in her Colonial days)."[67]

The professional diplomats trained in London would initially miss out on the most prestigious and important roles as, reflecting these suspicions, before independence in 1957, Nkrumah's government announced that all "ambassadors are appointed by the party in power and are therefore political appointees."[68] However, whilst in other arenas – such as the Bureau of African Affairs - Nkrumah pursued a more radical international agenda supporting liberation movements across Africa[69] - his government retained a Foreign Service with diplomats working within international norms, rather than rejecting the Western diplomatic system altogether, and many of those trained at the LSE went on to take senior roles within this.

Training took would-be diplomats from Ghana and across Africa to spaces familiar to many in the colonial elite of the late colonial state: the educational spaces of London and Oxford. These spaces characterised this period of the developmental colonial state and they helped to both constitute it and hasten its ending, as they contributed to the opening up of colonies to wider global networks, and to the imagining of independent futures.[70] Moreover, these training spaces provided the rationale for the continuation of colonial rule (the need to create an education elite ready to run an independent state), whilst simultaneously providing some of the connections through which decolonisation could be hastened. In this sense, these spaces of education were a part of two of Darwin's "routes to lateness,"[71] being a part of the developmental state (albeit in the metropole), and helping to prise open the

---

[63] Interview with Richard Akwei.

[64] Adom Getachew, "Kwame Nkrumah and the Quest for Independence," *Dissent* 66, no. 3 (2019): 33–40.

[65] Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education*., 95.

[66] Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization and Development with Particular Reference to the African Revolution* (London: Heinemann, 2009 [1964]), 3.

[67] Alec Clutterbuck to Sydney Caine, letter, 6th May 1960. TNA CO1017/638

[68] Thompson, *Ghana's Foreign Policy 1957-1966: Diplomacy, Ideology, and the New State*., 20.

[69] Matteo Grilli, *Nkrumaism and African Nationalism: Ghana's Pan-African Foreign Policy in the Age of Decolonization* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91325-4.

[70] Adi, "West African Students in Britain, 1900–60: The Politics of Exile;" Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[71] Darwin, "What Was the Late Colonial State?"

late colonial state to other influences through the connections of studying and attachments in London and other capitals. The next section will explore how diplomatic training provided a route to support and influence from other world powers beyond the former imperial power.

'A political act in the first magnitude':[72] Competing to train diplomats

Despite Nkrumah's reservations about overseas diplomatic training, by the end of the 1950s there was, across Africa, an increasing demand for training, reflecting the speed and success of the independence movements. What began as ad hoc, individual responses – such as to the request of the junior officer from Gold Coast in 1953 – became slowly more codified. By the late 1950s the UK government could offer that colonial diplomats-in-training join the Foreign Office/Commonwealth Relations Office training it held for its own British recruits for a month every September; be assigned overseas attachments to British or other Commonwealth Missions abroad; or undertake ad hoc protocol training, especially aimed at those "responsible for ceremonial arrangements for the celebration of their countries' Independence, and thereafter for protocol matters."[73] They could also undertake special language training, or a course at the LSE, as the first cohort of Ghanaian diplomats had done, or at Oxford or Cambridge on adapted versions of the courses previously aimed at British colonial administrators.[74] For training courses and attachments, trainees were encouraged to bring their wives if possible, because of what the Colonial Office called "the importance of the wife's role in the social, representational side of diplomatic life."[75] Diplomats themselves were assumed to be men, though occasionally women did come for training.

This menu of options was developed in large part in response to competition from elsewhere. Nervousness about competition is a recurring theme in the correspondence between British officials in this period and reflects broader concerns about geopolitical positioning in the period of late colonialism, decolonisation and the Cold War.[76] America with its 'high pressure salesmanship' was seen as the largest threat,[77] but there were other more concerning competitors too. For example, F.M. Thomas, a colonial officer writing from Zambia just before independence in 1964 noted that:

> In my previous letter I wrote about the stage reached with our Foreign Service Training, and asked that the Department of Technical Co-operation might treat our requests for assistance as a matter of urgency and priority. I said the hawks were gathering, and that there was a grave danger, in view of the pressures being put upon our Ministers, that they would be driven to abandon their natural inclination to obtain staff and training from Britain... Delays such as this on the part of H[er]. M[ajesty's]. G[overnment]., however good the reasons, only open the door to others (such people as Loft of the African-American Institute, for instance) to say nothing of the Israelis,

---

[72] Hoffman to Johnson, letter, 16th July 1961, Ruth Jett Papers Box 3, Archives of American Art.

[73] Foreign service training, undated, 1961. TNA CO1017/638.

[74] Stockwell, *British End of the British Empire.*

[75] Foreign service training, NB: Subsidiary courses of training for diplomats' wives were put on at Oxford University and IHEOM throughout the 1960s.

[76] Livsey, *Nigeria's University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development.* See for example A.H. Poynton to Sydney Caine, letter, 21st April 1960, TNA CO1017/638; Copy of Letter from G.L. Goodwin to the Director, 6th July 1960, TNA CO1017/638.

[77] Copy of Letter from G.L. Goodwin to the Director.

the Yugoslavs, the Poles, the Czechs and the Egyptians, all of whom have had emissaries here recently and who are thus in a position to force Kaunda into accepting more help from them, in default of British help, than he really wishes to take.[78]

Whilst the letter writer downplayed the agency of Kenneth Kaunda, independent Zambia's first leader, this account nevertheless illustrates concerns over a loss of influence through competition from other states offering 'help.' Diplomatic training was viewed as a valuable source of soft power, and part of a global reordering in the wake of decolonisation and the Cold War. Leaders like Kaunda, meanwhile, could play on the anxieties of competing global powers to extract an improved training offer and diversify their countries' sources of foreign aid.[79] Zambia's first diplomats trained in the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and Tanzania, while Zambia also hosted a regional training seminar in Lusaka upon independence in the autumn of 1964. This training was funded by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, delivered by LSE staff, and attracted trainees from across Southern and East Africa, demonstrating the diversity of the provision and sources of funding leveraged.[80]

Competition could also potentially threaten the timelines of decolonisation as envisaged by the late colonial state. The U.S. was often seen as meddling by the colonial powers, in ways that might hasten decolonisation. According to Joseph Johnson, President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, he made sure not to mention his organisation's 'Program for Diplomats' to any British or French colonial officers as he toured Africa in early 1959: "I just had the feeling that this would not be a good idea."[81] This plan for diplomatic training, developed with the State Department's knowledge, pre-empted independence in a way that threatened the power of the late colonial state.

French diplomatic records from 1960, when the Carnegie programme[82] began to recruit participants, indeed convey a sense of alarm at this 'foreign intervention' in France's *communauté*, and a certain amount of surprise that independent governments would accept training other than that offered by France.[83] At a high-level meeting in early 1961, French bureaucrats agreed that "if we want to avoid one day having to abandon the training of African diplomats to foreign interventions like that of the Carnegie Endowment, we must have at our disposal a university-like organisation up to the task".[84] The solution was to bring in a 14-month, formal programme of diplomatic training at the *Institut des Hautes Etudes d'Outre-Mer* (IHEOM) at considerable expense.[85]

---

[78] F. M. Thomas to S. P. Whitley, letter, 20th April 1964 TNA FO141/14115. George Loft was a Quaker based in Southern Rhodesia working for the American Friends Service Committee, and close to Kenneth Kaunda.

[79] Benedict Mtshali, "The Zambian Foreign Service 1964-1972," *The African Review: A Journal of African Politics, Development and International Affairs* 5, no. 3 (1975): 303–16.

[80] Dag Hammarskjold Foundation Foreign Service Seminar 14th September to 10th October 1964, Geoffrey Goodwin Staff file, LSE Archives.

[81] Joseph E. Johnson Papers: Africa Diary, 19th June 1959, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library.

[82] For a detailed analysis of the Carnegie 'Programs in Diplomacy', see Harris, "Geopolitics of Decolonization: Carnegie Endowment's Diplomatic Training Program 1960–73."

[83] Stages diplomatiques: Stagiaires de la dotation Carnegie, Archives Diplomatiques, 1089INVA/196

[84] J. Foyer to M. Couve de Murville, 27th January 1961, Archives Diplomatiques, 1089INVA/196 (author's translation)

[85] IHEOM mirrored the elite school for the French civil service, the *Ecole Normale d'Administration* (ENA), and came under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister's office. It was preceded by the *Ecole Coloniale* and *Ecole Nationale de la France d'Outre-Mer* (ENFOM) and was itself succeeded by the *Institut Internationale d'Administration Publique* (IIAP) from 1966.

Later the same year, while the Algerian *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FLN) were still fighting a bitter war of liberation against France, the Carnegie Endowment admitted two of its members to its training course on diplomacy. This was controversial, as one Carnegie board member cautioned:

> for an American foundation to support FLN candidates just at the time when extremely difficult negotiations are under way between the FLN and the French government, would be precisely the kind of endorsement the FLN has wanted to receive from the US, and the kind of blow France has been afraid of receiving from her main ally. It is [...] a political act of the first magnitude.[86]

However, the other Carnegie board members justified the move partly in terms of gaining a competitive advantage in the context of the Cold War:

> we recognized that this action would have beneficial consequences with respect to future conduct of Endowment Programs in Diplomacy vis-a-vis Africa and other 'neutralist' governments.[87]

What is clear, then, is that diplomatic training under late colonialism was viewed as a valuable soft power resource jealously guarded by imperial powers, but increasingly claimed by states achieving independence, and other international actors. This training was thus an important but often overlooked part of a global reordering in the wake of decolonisation and the ongoing Cold War. However, the effects of training provision were unpredictable, and offered opportunities to both former colonising and decolonising states, as well as individuals making their way in international politics during this transformational period. In doing so, it provided another route to the openness of the late colonial state described by Darwin.[88]

Conclusion

What, then, does a focus on diplomatic training tell us about the late colonial state? In a way it tells us a familiar story – of uncertainty, of unknown timelines, of ad hoc, short-term thinking – in a way that helps to disrupt the narrative of smooth and orderly transition promulgated by colonial apologists. Diplomatic training reflected and magnified wider trends. It was part of late colonial statebuilding but because of its sensitive nature – it provided the means for late colonial subjects to perform independence on an international stage, as well as leading to security concerns and worries over foreign and especially socialist influences – these ambiguities and contradictions were further amplified.

This paper has demonstrated how a focus on diplomatic training provides new insights into the temporalities, spatialities, and (restricted) agency of the late colonial state. First, as the analysis above has demonstrated, the discussions by British actors in the Colonial Office and allied departments, as well as in colonial capitals, demonstrated the tensions and anxieties of the late colonial state, looking forward, nervously, to independence and furiously trying to maintain some measure of control. In some ways education and training provided a reason for the extension of timelines for independence - the late colonial

---

[86] Hoffman to Johnson, 16th July 1961.

[87] Finkelstein to Barrett, 28th June 1961, Ruth Jett Papers Box 3, Archives of American Art.

[88] Darwin, "What Was the Late Colonial State?"

state as developmental state - though at the same time it unsettled these timelines and sped them up. This contributes to the theorisation of the late colonial state by highlighting the specific temporalities that dominated it: waiting, demands for speed, requests for slowness.[89] These temporalities were experienced by colonial citizens, nationalist leaders, colonial administrators, and diplomatic trainees. Politicians like Nkrumah deliberately harnessed these frustrations over slowness and demanded urgency – independence now, training later. Training – beyond the diplomatic – is a unique category through which this temporality was experienced, and through which it can be studied.

Second, diplomatic training draws attention to the multi-scalar connections of the late colonial state. It provides another avenue through which to understand the increasing openness of colonies heading towards independence – the variety of new global networks, anticolonial, pan-African, but also dominated by the ideological struggles of the Cold War. Diplomatic training armed new diplomats with some of the technical skills and recognition needed to plug their newly independent countries into the formal international sphere, from which colonial governments had, increasingly ineffectively, aimed to keep them insulated. Late colonial diplomatic training was assuredly 'technical' but inherently political. Just as new histories of development in this era are demonstrating how questions of technical assistance and 'manpower' are anything but dry and neutral, despite their labels,[90] so too diplomatic training should be understood as a key site within which colonial and neo-colonial competition for power during and after decolonisation can be assessed.

Beyond this though, specific spaces dominated colonial subjects' experiences of the late colonial state. Darwin's account of the late colonial state is not attentive to these spaces in which colonialism was enacted, experienced and challenged, despite these being central to many of the routes he describes. What spaces were created by, and in turn constituted the developmental state, the open state, the security state? What was the geography of the late colonial state in and beyond the borders of the colony? Diplomatic training – alongside other forms of education and training – provided the physical spaces – in classrooms, attachments, study tours and the informal spaces in between – for connections to be made, and agency asserted, reproducing and challenging the broader politics of late colonialism. Training often took place in the European capitals of soon-to-be former empires. Whilst academic discussions of the late colonial state often remain rooted in the institutions of government, it was frequently experienced in spaces of higher education and training in both the colonies and Europe.[91] A focus on training provides new spaces to think about the experience of late colonialism and expands the geographies of the late colonial state to also include the imperial capitals in Europe as well as newer destinations for education such as the US.

Third, much work on the late colonial state – including our own – relies substantially on the records of the colonisers. The concerns of the UK Colonial Office and their officials come through clearly in the archives recording the discussions and debates about

---

[89] On states in waiting for independence, see Fiona McConnell, *Rehearsing the State: The Political Practices of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).

[90] Muschik, *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945-1965.*; Corrie Decker and Elisabeth McMahon, *The Idea of Development in Africa: A History* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), https://press.princeton.edu/books/hardcover/9780691180151/global-development; Alessandro Iandolo, *Arrested Development: The Soviet Union in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali, 1955–1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022).

[91] Livsey, *Nigeria's University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development.*; Craggs and Neate, "What Happens If We Start from Nigeria?"

the nature, value, and dangers of training. But a focus on the training itself and how it was valued by those African diplomats who participated also makes space to examine the nature and extent of African agency within the late colonial state. Trainees did not passively accept the knowledge imparted, sometimes viewing it as useful technical know-how, other times dismissing it - passively by failing to attend, or more actively by criticising the course or refusing to sit exams. Some failed to take their studies seriously, whilst others fundamentally challenged their tutors' prior perceptions. And whilst states on both sides of the Cold War competed for students and influence, individuals and soon-to-be-independent African states made strategic decisions, hoovering up as much training as they felt useful, often paying less attention to the venue and its ideology than to the skills and prestige that the training might impart.[92] Many of the anxieties recorded in the British colonial archives reflect the increasing agency of those who would lead the newly independent states.

Late colonial states were brought to an end, and new states made to emerge, through the labour of many – including diplomats and diplomats in training. As Bérénice Guyot-Réchard has recently noted, "diplomacy in the context of decolonization entailed intense political, emotional and intellectual labour, and this labour shaped foreign policy."[93] Diplomats played a key role in decolonisation and in "worldmaking after empire," therefore diplomatic training provides a useful window through which to understand one of the influences on their practice, and to recentre the agency of Africans in bringing to an end the late colonial state.[94] John Darwin's 'routes' to the 'lateness' of the late colonial state provide a good starting point for theorising this period, but his and others characterisations of this era do not explore the specific temporalities and spatialities that characterised and constituted late colonialism.[95] Diplomatic training provides a useful lens through which to examine more carefully these dynamics, and in doing so, to bring to light the agency of the elite African political class who dominated after independence.

Ruth Craggs is Professor of Political and Historical Geography at King's College London and was Principal Investigator on the Leverhulme Trust funded project 'Training Diplomats of Postcolonial African States: 1957-1997'. Her work focuses on the intersections of decolonisation, geopolitics and expertise. She has published widely in geography and history journals, including on the Commonwealth and African universities. Her first monograph, *Decolonising Geography? Disciplinary Histories and the End of the British Empire in Africa, 1948-1998* (co-authored with Hannah Neate), was published in 2023.

Jonathan Harris is Assistant Professor of Human Geography in the School of History and Geography at Dublin City University. His research examines the geopolitical assemblages of diasporic and educational settings, with a particular focus on Francophone postcolonial contexts. He was the postdoctoral researcher on 'Training Diplomats of Postcolonial African states: 1957-1997'.

---

[92] On this in the context of education more broadly, see Eric Burton, "Decolonization, the Cold War, and Africans' Routes to Higher Education Overseas, 1957–65," *Journal of Global History* 15, no. 1 (March 2020): 169–91, https://doi.org/10.1017/S174002281900038X.

[93] Guyot-Réchard, "Stirring Africa towards India," p. 294.

[94] Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*.

[95] Darwin, "What Was the Late Colonial State?;" Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*.

Fiona McConnell is Professor of Political Geography at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom. She is interested in changing geographies and practices of diplomacy, with a particular focus on the diplomatic role of non-state actors. Working with the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), she has examined the barriers faced by stateless communities in engaging with diplomacy and developed training materials for 'unrepresented diplomats'. She was Co-I on the project 'Training Diplomats of Postcolonial African States: 1957–1997' with Ruth Craggs and Jonathan Harris.