

Phantoms of the Archive:
Kwame Nkrumah, a Nazi Pilot Named Hanna, and the
Contingencies of Postcolonial History-Writing

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IN MARCH 1962, AS THE WEST AFRICAN nation of Ghana marked five years of independence from British colonial rule, the country's most popular newspaper, the *Daily Graphic*, introduced readers to yet another in a long list of high-profile international visitors. This visitor, however, was not the usual diplomat, artistic performer, or anticolonial freedom fighter. A prominent headline and accompanying photo announced her as "The Woman Who Dares the Heavens."¹ And who was this daring woman? She was, according to the news story, the famous West German pilot Hanna Reitsch, who was visiting the nation's capital, on President Kwame Nkrumah's invitation, to "advise" the government on flight and gliding. In addition to providing brief biographical information, which noted Reitsch's "carrying out [of] dangerous test flights" during the war and the fact that she had been awarded the Iron Cross First Class, the "highest German decoration," the article focused primarily on the reason for her visit to Ghana and her notably demure appearance. "Anyone who has heard of Hanna Reitsch," journalist Edith Wuver informed local readers, "would expect her to be tall and perhaps masculine in build. But she is only a small woman, hardly above five feet and feminine in every way . . . Hanna has the feminine approach to her profession."²

What the journalist did not mention—nor any of her colleagues in the national news service who covered the visit—was that Flight Captain Hanna Reitsch was not just an extraordinary woman pilot, "feminine in every way," in a profession dom-

This article began life as a short paper delivered at the "Revisiting Modernization" conference held at the University of Ghana in 2009. Over three years, it has been expanded, recast, and reconfigured in dialogue with colleagues at numerous gatherings: the Love and Revolution II and III conferences in Minneapolis and New Delhi; the African Studies Seminar at Emory University; the History Seminar at Johns Hopkins University; and the Archives of Post-Independence Africa conference in Dakar. In addition to those audiences, I wish to thank Jeffrey Ahlman, G. Arunima, Sara Berry, Peter Bloom, Antoinette Burton, Shefali Chandra, Clifton Crais, Divya Dwivedi, Andrea Friedman, Jane Guyer, Patricia Hayes, Anne Hugon, Premesh Lalu, Pier Larson, Takyiwaa Manuh, M. J. Maynes, Stephan Miescher, Gary Minkley, John Mowitz, Tim Parsons, Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, Ciraj Rasool, David Roediger, Pamela Scully, and Corinna Treitel. I extend a special thanks to Bernhard Rieger and Matthias Röschner for helping me navigate Hanna Reitsch's papers in Munich.

¹ *Daily Graphic*, March 7, 1962.

² *Ibid.*

inated by men.³ In the post–World War II era, Reitsch was best known for her very close connection to Adolf Hitler. Perhaps most famously, in the last days of the war, she undertook a dramatic flight into Berlin, landing near the Brandenburg Gate under heavy Soviet army fire. Colonel-General Robert Ritter von Greim (reputedly Reitsch’s longtime lover) had requested that she fly him to a meeting with Hitler, who intended to make von Greim the head of the Luftwaffe. Reitsch spent two days in the Führer’s infamous bunker and was one of the last to leave alive. Although initially given a vial of poison by Hitler, she was subsequently ordered to fly out with von Greim in a last-ditch effort to reconstitute the Luftwaffe. She did so—departing under Soviet fire heavier than that which had greeted her two days earlier. Reitsch’s was the last German plane to fly out of Berlin in the final days of the war. Shortly thereafter, both she and von Greim were captured by Allied forces. Reitsch was held and interrogated by U.S. military intelligence for eighteen months; von Greim committed suicide.⁴

After her initial visit to Ghana in 1962—a visit covered almost daily in the press—Reitsch would relocate there and devote her considerable energies to setting up a gliding school about fifteen kilometers from the capital, Accra, in the small town of Afienuya. The West German and Ghanaian governments jointly supported her work. During Reitsch’s years in Ghana, however, her notorious past did not feature once in the regular and extensive media coverage given her school by the daily press. Rather, she appeared as just one of the many energetic and devoted expatriates, from a diverse range of places and political persuasions, who were assisting with the work of nation-building and modernization in Nkrumah’s newly independent state. Yet those individuals, for the most part, seemed to share at least some part of Nkrumah’s nationalist and pan-Africanist dream—George Padmore, Conor Cruise O’Brien, W. E. B. and Shirley Graham Du Bois, Geoffrey Bing, and Maya Angelou, to name just a few.⁵ How do we fit Flight Captain Hanna Reitsch into this list? How might we connect lofty dreams of flight and modernization in what was known as the “Black Star of Africa” to someone remembered by many and to this very day as an unrepentant Nazi and an “apologist for the Third Reich”?⁶

These are not, as it turns out, simple questions—certainly not for a historian of

³ Reitsch was the first woman to fly a helicopter, a jet, and a rocket. She held multiple awards in gliding—for altitude and endurance—and she was the first woman to glide across the Alps. She served as a test pilot on several Nazi bomber planes, as well as on the rocket-propelled Komet, and she was one of only two women to whom Hitler awarded the Iron Cross First Class.

⁴ For biographical information on Reitsch, see Judy Lomax, *Hanna Reitsch: Flying for the Fatherland* (London, 1988); Dennis Piszkiwicz, *From Nazi Test Pilot to Hitler’s Bunker: The Fantastic Flights of Hanna Reitsch* (Westport, Conn., 1997); Hanna Reitsch, *The Sky My Kingdom: Memoirs of the Famous German World War II Test-Pilot* (London, 1958); Bernhard Rieger, “Hanna Reitsch (1912–1979): The Global Career of a Nazi Celebrity,” *German History* 26, no. 3 (2008): 383–405. At the end of the war, Reitsch’s father killed her mother, her sister and her sister’s children, and then himself, rather than face the prospect of living under Soviet rule.

⁵ George Padmore served as Nkrumah’s chief adviser on African affairs until his death in 1959; Conor Cruise O’Brien served as vice-chancellor of the University of Ghana from 1962 to 1965; W. E. B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham Du Bois settled in Ghana in 1961 and became Ghanaian citizens (W. E. B. Du Bois worked on the *Encyclopedia Africana* project, and Shirley Graham Du Bois, after her husband’s death in 1963, became the founding director of Ghana TV); Geoffrey Bing served as Nkrumah’s legal adviser from 1955 to 1966 and as Ghana’s attorney general from 1957 to 1961; Maya Angelou resided in Ghana from 1961 to 1964 and taught at the University of Ghana’s School of Music and Drama.

⁶ Rieger, “Hanna Reitsch,” 383.

Africa's postcolonial past. Almost immediately, they generate yet further and often fundamental questions—about historical evidence, about archives (their locations and their temporality), and about the very writing of postcolonial African histories. Beyond the question of how an infamous Nazi pilot could animate Ghana's early nation-building and modernization initiatives, there is the labyrinth of postcolonial documentary evidence that is exposed by the search itself: the layers and locations of evidence, the traces, the silences, and the dead ends. As fifty-year anniversaries of African independence come and go (seventeen former British, French, and Belgian colonies in 2010 alone), it is time to think more critically and imaginatively about what we might term "Africa's postcolonial archive," about the documentary record with which the continent's postcolonial/national histories can and will be written.

Scholars, especially of South and Southeast Asian history, have, of course, debated at length the nature of the "archive," but their focus has been almost exclusively on the colonial archive, as it was constituted by the imperial state.⁷ Africanists have, until recently, engaged that earlier archive debate only marginally.⁸ For the most part, they have considered the biases of the colonial archive a methodological given and have focused their attention on seeking out and developing alternative kinds of evidence, especially in the form of oral traditions and life histories. As Frederick Cooper wrote in his important contribution to the 1994 *AHR* Forum on Subaltern Studies, scholars of Africa's past have tended to greet critical reflections on the colonial archive by theorists such as Ranajit Guha "more as sound practice than a methodological breakthrough. African historians cut their teeth in the 1960s on the assertion that colonial sources distorted history . . . and they saw the use of oral sources—as well as reading colonial documents against the grain—as putting themselves on the path to people's history."⁹ Africanist historians of the colonial period, in other words, have been more concerned with seeing "how far one could push with non-documentary sources," especially oral sources, than with considering whether colonial records allow the subaltern to speak.¹⁰ There are of course exceptions to this characterization. The works of Cooper himself, along with historians such as Luise White and William Cohen, well demonstrate Africanists' ability to

⁷ See especially Nicholas B. Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive," in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia, 1993), 279–313; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002); Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, N.J., 2009); Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form," in Carolyn Hamilton et al., eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town, 2002), 83–100. See also Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (New York, 2003).

⁸ Several recent and important exceptions can be found in Hamilton's *Refiguring the Archive* and in Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C., 2005).

⁹ Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (December 1994): 1516–1545, quotation from 1528. "African historians, since the 1960s," Cooper has written, "have trumpeted that oral tradition is the antidote to the Eurocentrism of the written record—popular memory set against elite documents." Cooper, "Memories of Colonization: Commemoration, Preservation, and Erasure in an African Archive," in Francis X. Blouin, Jr., and William G. Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2006), 257–266, quotation from 257.

¹⁰ Cooper, "Conflict and Connection," 1528.

creatively “read” the colonial archive both against and along the grain.¹¹ But it is also true that, as area-based scholars, Africanists have contributed far more to comparative, theoretical discussions of oral sources, “voice,” agency, and subjectivity than they have to critical examinations of or theoretical engagements with the colonial archive.¹²

But as historians take up the challenge of writing postcolonial and new national histories, do Africanists have something to contribute to discussions of the documentary archive, or will our primary methodological contributions to the discipline of history continue to be in the realm of the “oral,” the material, or the performed? For the postcolonial period, we are grappling with documentary sources no longer penned, categorized, or deposited by a colonial officer or his missionary counterpart. Does that matter? If colonial archives, as Stoler has argued, “are products of state machines . . . technologies that reproduced the states themselves,” do the national archives of Africa’s postcolonial states simply reproduce or mimic those originary colonial archives?¹³ Are they, to borrow from Nkrumah, essentially neocolonial archives—the public buildings and the files within, which, according to Achille Mbembe, are the “organs of a constituted state”?¹⁴ Or are they a beast of a very different order, presenting both new possibilities and new challenges for the writing and the teaching of African history?

There are three different registers in which the story of Kwame Nkrumah and Hanna Reitsch can be told, based on three different sets of written evidence. In the first instance, the details of Reitsch’s time in Ghana can be reconstructed through the use of both published and public primary documents. Next, a range of secondary sources can allow us to contextualize and enrich that story by placing it within a global discussion of flight, air-mindedness, and modernity. But we can also follow Nkrumah’s and Reitsch’s shared tale along a twisted trail of mislabeled and unlisted files in Ghana’s “national” archive and into a vast transnational network of repositories, extending from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Munich, Germany. Tracing the strange story of Kwame Nkrumah, Hanna Reitsch, and the Afienea Gliding School

¹¹ See, for example, David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago, 1994); Frederick Cooper, “Africa’s Pasts and Africa’s Historians,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 298–336; Cooper, “Conflict and Connection”; Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997); Hamilton et al., *Refiguring the Archive*; Nancy Rose Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Durham, N.C., 1999); Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000).

¹² The literature on this score is massive, but see, only by way of example, Susan N. G. Geiger, “Women’s Life Histories: Method and Content,” *Signs* 11, no. 2 (1986): 334–351; Isabel Hofmeyr, “*We Spend Our Years as a Tale That Is Told*”: Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chieftdom (Portsmouth, N.H., 1994); Karin Barber and P. F. de Moraes Farias, eds., *Discourse and Its Disguises: The Interpretation of African Oral Texts* (Birmingham, 1989); Joseph C. Miller, ed., *The African Past Speaks: Essays on Oral Tradition and History* (Hamden, Conn., 1980); Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating Our Pasts: The Social Construction of Oral History* (Cambridge, 1992); Charles van Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894–1985* (New York, 1996); Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (London, 1965); Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, Wis., 1985); Luise White, Stephan Miescher, and David William Cohen, eds., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington, Ind., 2001).

¹³ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 28. See also Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995); and Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” in Hamilton et al., *Refiguring the Archive*, 19–26, here 23.

¹⁴ Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” 19.

in these three registers exposes not only the dispersed, destroyed, fragmented, and accidental nature of independent Africa's documentary archive, but the very illusion of a postcolonial "national archive." While it is an illusion worthy of consideration by all historians of the formerly colonized world, it is not without its implications for those concerned with global power and the consolidation of postwar nation-states generally, including those of the U.S., the USSR, and China, and with the challenge of crafting histories less anchored in or dependent upon the archiving technologies of the modern state.

LET US BEGIN BY EXAMINING that first layer of documentary evidence: published Ghanaian newspaper accounts and Reitsch's own memoir, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah* [*I Flew for Kwame Nkrumah*]. From these sources we learn that Nkrumah first heard of Reitsch from the Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, under whose patronage she had set up a gliding school in India in 1959. In a January 1962 letter, Nkrumah invited Reitsch to Accra to meet with him and other government officials in order to consider establishing a similar flight school in Ghana.¹⁵ During her visit in March, Reitsch met with Nkrumah on several occasions, as well as with members of Parliament, the commander of the Ghanaian Air Force, the head of the Young Pioneers (the youth group of the ruling Convention People's Party [CPP]), and members of the Accra Gliding Club, making plans to open a flight school on the site in Afienya where the club operated. She also met with Major-General S. J. A. Otu about selecting three young officers who could study to be gliding instructors in West Germany, at that government's expense.¹⁶ Although the initial plan for the school to open in January 1963 turned out to be overly optimistic, Reitsch was back in Ghana in February 1963, and over the next months she oversaw the construction of buildings for instruction, eating, carpentry and mechanic workshops, a hangar, and accommodations for staff and up to forty students. She and her organizing committee also established the Ghana National Aero Club, so that Ghana could affiliate with international pilot associations. From the beginning, Reitsch's work was closely tied to powerful figures in the government and military. The minister of defense, for example, became the chair of the Aero Club, and the ministers of education and transport became vice-chairs. The leader of the Young Pioneers and the head of the Air Force also sat on the club's executive committee.¹⁷

Although Reitsch was in Afienya every day to supervise the work there, she was accommodated, at Ghanaian government expense, in Accra, in what was known as "Asante House"—the rather infamous palatial residence built by Krobo Edusei, a former government minister whose extravagances had led to his dismissal.¹⁸ From there, she made the daily drive to the school site in a red Volkswagen Karmann Ghia lent to her by Nkrumah's wife, Fathia.¹⁹ Her work was also well-supported by the West German government, which, in the context of the Cold War, was seeking to

¹⁵ Hanna Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah* (Munich, 1968), 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25. The quoted passages from Reitsch's memoir were translated into English by Leah Chizek and Corey Twitchell in the German Department at Washington University.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 40–41.

¹⁸ For her account, see *ibid.*, 42.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 41–43.

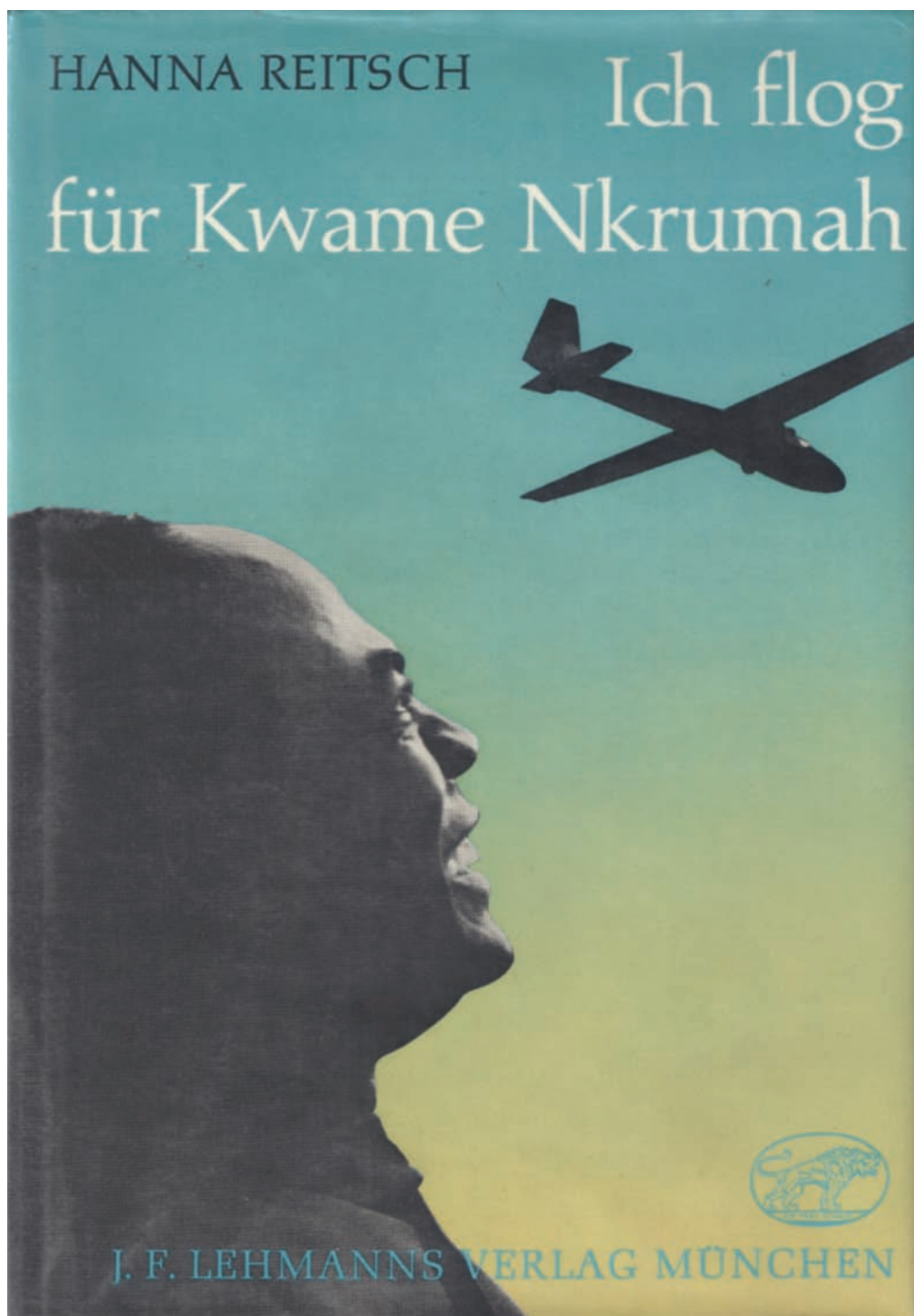


FIGURE 1: Jacket of Hanna Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah* (Munich: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1968).

make its “development policy,” as Bernhard Rieger has written, “an important tool for forging ties with new states in Africa and Asia.”²⁰ As a “supposedly unpolitical expert” on gliding and aviation, Reitsch not only supervised construction at the Afi-nya site, she also gave lectures throughout the capital, speaking before Parliament, at the university, and before youth groups and women’s organizations as part of her recruitment drive.²¹

On May 18, 1963, even though construction was not yet complete, the Afi-nya school was officially opened, and “anyone who was anyone,” according to Reitsch, “showed up.”²² In attendance were members of the international press corps, West German and Ghanaian dignitaries, ambassadors from foreign missions, chiefs and their advisers, and representatives from the Young Pioneers. The West German ambassador, on behalf of his government, presented a glider, christened *Akroma* (“The Hawk”), to President Kwame Nkrumah, and Nkrumah, in turn, “dedicated the glider to the youth of Ghana and wished all those who would fly in it ‘many hours of enjoyment, recreation and spiritual upliftment.’”²³ As a Ghana newsreel reported live, after the dedication of the glider, spectators were treated to a “magnificent aerobatic display” by the woman responsible for the establishment of the school, “that famous German air pilot Flight Captain Hanna Reitsch.” “With the establishment of a national gliding school,” the newsreel continued, “one can be sure that the youth will pick up the challenge and head for the sky.”²⁴

Over the next three years, the school’s achievements were chronicled in the papers (often on the front page or with a center spread and multiple photos)—from construction of the new hangar, to graduation ceremonies, to the visits of various foreign dignitaries.²⁵ By the time of the school’s first anniversary in May 1964, it was training future flight instructors, as well as flight students, and had established a program with the Ghana Air Force to train officer cadets.²⁶ In fact, at the first-anniversary celebration, the school coordinated with the Air Force in presenting an elaborate air show featuring gliders, as well as planes and jets, that flew to the program site from the International Airport in Accra.²⁷ It was on this first anniversary that Nkrumah provided the school with its motto: “To dare, to do, to serve.”²⁸ It was clear to everyone, Reitsch remembered, that the gliding school was Nkrumah’s “pet

²⁰ Rieger, “Hanna Reitsch,” 393.

²¹ The phrase “supposedly unpolitical expert” is Rieger’s; *ibid.*, 404.

²² Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 47.

²³ *Ghanaian Times*, May 20, 1963. “Visit Afi-nya Gliding School,” Ghana Newsreel Side One, box 49, tape 23, Kwame Nkrumah Papers, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. [hereafter Nkrumah Papers].

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See, for example, *Daily Graphic*, July 10, 1963, July 22, 1963, October 18, 1963, November 5, 1963, December 3, 1963, March 13, 1964, April 30, 1964, May 21, 1964, June 12, 1964, November 15, 1964, December 3, 1964, June 25, 1965, October 2, 1965, October 25, 1965, November 23, 1965, December 2, 1965, December 3, 1965; *Evening News*, March 22, 1965, December 2, 1965, December 3, 1965; *Ghanaian Times*, May 17, 1963, May 20, 1963, June 13, 1963, August 17, 1963, October 12, 1963, December 9, 1963, February 18, 1964, April 24, 1964, May 13, 1964, May 21, 1964, May 23, 1964, September 3, 1964, September 28, 1964, October 13, 1964, October 26, 1964, February 10, 1965, February 23, 1965, March 22, 1965, March 26, 1965, May 10, 1965, May 25, 1965, October 25, 1965, December 3, 1965.

²⁶ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 113. See also *Daily Graphic*, May 21, 1964.

²⁸ *Ghanaian Times*, May 21, 1964. See also *Daily Graphic*, May 21, 1964; and Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 113.

project.”²⁹ The press at the time certainly agreed. Wrote a *Times* staff reporter shortly after the anniversary celebration, “surely no institution in Ghana today deserves praise for its wonderful achievement and its unparalleled capability to infuse the spirit of adventure more into our youth than the National Gliding School at Afienya near Tema . . . the credit goes to Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah whose foresight gave birth to the school.”³⁰

Not all of Reitsch’s energies were focused on gliding itself. Very early on, when she realized that many students were not particularly enamored with the idea of flight, she turned her attention to model-building, which became a core component of the school’s mission. Initially, model kits were imported from West Germany, but by 1965 they were being assembled locally, and the building of model gliders was fully incorporated into the curriculum.³¹ In addition, the school began conducting model-building workshops for other schools—beginning with Achimota and then Tema Secondary—and moved on from there.³² The idea behind this effort was that eventually the students would be able to instruct others in model-making, and in turn they would introduce “their future student pilots to the theoretical physics of flight as well as to its application in practice by flying models.”³³ By the beginning of 1966, model-making had been initiated at ten secondary schools in Ghana, and an additional twenty schools were to be added in March 1966. “As far as I know,” Reitsch wrote in her memoir, “Ghana was unmatched in this respect by any other country in the world.”³⁴

It is worth noting at this juncture that Reitsch’s efforts—despite her general concerns with children’s education—were not aimed at challenging Ghana’s gender regimes or at opening up a space for female gliders.³⁵ Despite being a member of the “fairer sex,” as she termed herself, she had no interest in training women glider pilots, even at a time when women were beginning to have a small presence in the Ghanaian military. (The first women soldiers completed training for the women’s auxiliary of the Ghana Armed Forces in October 1963.)³⁶ She believed that in Ghana, “women and girls had numerous other important tasks [before them] in order to prepare themselves for raising children, to acquire the mental skills necessary for educating their children, to learn to create a tasteful home, and to become partners in marriage—which they by no means were.”³⁷

As a project very much focused on young men, then, the Afienya Gliding School became a public centerpiece of Nkrumah’s modernization efforts, second only to the ongoing construction of the Akosombo Dam, with which it vied for headlines in the daily papers. It increasingly coordinated with the Air Force, not only in model-building, meteorology, and the training of air cadets, but in grand spectacles of flight

²⁹ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 113.

³⁰ *Ghanaian Times*, May 23, 1964. The story sits right above another miracle-of-modernization tale—that of “The Man-Made Volta Lake and Its Benefits.”

³¹ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 64–65, 132–135, 159–160, 201.

³² *Ibid.*, 61, 132.

³³ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.

³⁵ Despite the claims of a headline in the April 15, 2012, *British Guardian*, “Hitler’s Pilot Helped Ghana’s Women to Fly,” Reitsch had absolutely no interest in training young women in aviation.

³⁶ *Ghanaian Times*, October 14, 1963.

³⁷ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 103, emphasis added.



FIGURE 2: Nkrumah and Reitsch at the flight school's first anniversary. From Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 35.

performed for a “spellbound” public.³⁸ In October 1964, the school and the Air Force put on a display in honor of Air Force Day.³⁹ Several months later, in March 1965, Ghana’s first air show took place at the Accra International Airport. It was a massive display, whose aim, according to Reitsch, was to “familiarize the population with aviation and awaken young people’s interest in it. Moreover, it should strengthen the Ghanaians’ self-confidence—they all had reason to be proud of what they had already achieved through hard work in the few years since their independence.”⁴⁰ The display was widely and extensively covered in the press on the following Monday, with one of the highlights being Reitsch’s “breathtaking aerobatics” in the presidential glider, *Akroma*.⁴¹ As the *Evening News* reported, “The success of the show is a pointer to the fact that the country’s socialist programme being executed by the Party and the Government under the leadership of Osagyefo is really bearing fruits.”⁴²

But Afienva was not just a part of Nkrumah’s nation-building project. By 1965, the gliding school was increasingly envisioned as part of his pan-African agenda for African unity, for building a United States of Africa. “Since our school had . . . become the ‘pride of Ghana,’” Reitsch recalled, “the President had announced in 1965 that a tour of the school was to be part of every official state visit from then on.” (The president of Gambia was the first to make an official state visit.) In addition, as early as March 1965, plans were underway to organize a youth camp at Afienva to coincide with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit in October. Reitsch explained that her plan was for youth leaders from throughout the continent to have the “opportunity to experience gliding for themselves, as well as to try out model-making.”⁴³ She attended the opening of the OAU and in her memoirs writes of the profound impact of that experience:

Deeply impressed, the words of Dr. Du Bois, the great Pan-African fighter who died in Accra in 1963, came to me as I drove home after the ceremony. He once wrote: “There can be no doubt that Kwame Nkrumah is, more than anyone alive at present, the voice of Africa. He expresses the thoughts and ideals of the Dark Continent and makes it clear to everyone that this continent will move into the frontlines of world events.”⁴⁴

Several dignitaries visited Reitsch’s school, and an air display, again combining the efforts of the Afienva school and the Air Force, was presented in connection with the October OAU summit.⁴⁵

With the close of 1965 and the beginning of 1966, the school’s achievements continued to be heralded in the press. In November, two Ghanaian glider pilots established a national record for four and a half hours of non-stop flight, and three

³⁸ *Ghanaian Times*, March 22, 1965.

³⁹ “Air Force Day” (printed program), October 24, 1964, Record Group [hereafter RG] 17/2/94, Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Accra, Ghana [hereafter PRAAD]. See also Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 151; and *Ghanaian Times*, October 26, 1964.

⁴⁰ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 152–158, quotation from 152–153.

⁴¹ On that occasion, her glider nearly crashed. She was able to land safely, but “I myself was paralyzed by pain, the audience by fear.” *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴² *Evening News*, March 22, 1965.

⁴³ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 164.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 163–164. I have not been able to trace the source of the quote or to check its accuracy.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 161, 165. See also *Daily Graphic*, October 25, 1965; and *Ghanaian Times*, October 25, 1965.

teachers in training flew model planes to a height of 1,600 feet.⁴⁶ When Nkrumah visited the school in early December, the *Evening News* story declared: “Patriotic Able-Bodied Ghanaians: They Set Out with Wings as Eagles.” Center-page coverage in the December 4 *Daily Graphic* included multiple photos, with shots of a new glider being assembled by students, Air Force pilots completing their training, and models being constructed.⁴⁷ In her memoir, Reitsch described the momentum she believed the school had achieved. Plans were well-developed for model-making to be introduced into all secondary and middle schools, so that all students would “learn to work nimbly with their hands . . . they would learn endurance, precision, cleanliness, and self-discipline.”⁴⁸ She had arranged for a physical education expert to visit the school weekly in order to introduce sports. She had also organized yoga instruction for the students (perhaps an artifact of her time in Delhi) and literacy classes for the townspeople in Afienya. A meteorological observation station was about to go into operation. But all of these plans, as she wrote, “came to an end with the coup” on February 24, 1966.⁴⁹ The Afienya Gliding School was one of the first CPP projects shut down by the new military government, the National Liberation Council, in the wake of Nkrumah’s overthrow. Shortly thereafter, Reitsch and her two German compatriots were deported to West Germany.⁵⁰

BUT PUBLISHED NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS and Reitsch’s memoir tell us very little about how or why this former Nazi pilot became a critical player in the grand narrative of Ghanaian nation-building and modernization. Indeed, for the contemporary reader, the memoir is quite unnerving, as it moves seamlessly from quoting Du Bois and extolling Nkrumah’s foresight and the promises of pan-African unity to describing the “uncomplicated *joie de vivre* . . . and the simple naturalness of . . . Ghanaians.”⁵¹ While Reitsch writes of a profound epiphany in her understanding of race, as a result of her work in India and then Ghana, it is an epiphany filtered through a modernizing and profoundly racist discourse about what is “natural,” what is “lacking,” and how “progress” can be achieved. Indeed, many of her passages resonate powerfully with the postwar racial revelations of Leni Riefenstahl, the famous Nazi filmmaker-turned-ethnographic photographer of the Nuba. Reitsch writes, for example, “For me, the blacks had occupied a sphere that lay somewhere much lower than that of white men. Earlier in my life, it would have never occurred to me to treat a black person as a friend or partner or to invite him into my parents’ home.” She describes being seized by a “feeling of guilt” about what she describes as her “presumptuousness and arrogance.” “Apart from an equivalent level of education and intelligence, I encountered among these people values that we virtually no longer possess: reverence and kindness, humanity and true brotherliness, the capacity for religious

⁴⁶ *Daily Graphic*, November 23, 1965.

⁴⁷ *Daily Graphic*, December 4, 1965.

⁴⁸ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 201.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵⁰ See *Ghanaian Times*, March 8, 1966; and *Evening News*, March 7, 1966. For her description of the coup and the events immediately after, see Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 205–216.

⁵¹ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 16.

experience, and deep faith.”⁵² In an especially revealing section of her narrative, Reitsch describes her fondness for, and the great success of, one of her first flight students, an African American youth named Kwesi who had spent his first ten years in the U.S. For Reitsch, it was Kwesi who “proved” that, given exposure to the forces of modernization and technology, anything is possible. He became an “instructive” example, in her words, that disproved the “beliefs” held by Europeans. “The technology and civilization in the U.S., as well as the exposure to the people and their customs, bestowed upon [Kwesi] . . . qualities that we found lacking in the Ghanaians who came to us for instruction. Especially important are discipline, the ability to react quickly, technical know-how, and a sense of purpose.” After only two weeks of instruction, Kwesi was “advanced enough” to venture out on his “first solo flight.”⁵³

Several Europeanist scholars have sought to make sense of Reitsch’s work in Ghana, although most of them are far more concerned with her role in German history—especially her flying exploits during the war and her days in Hitler’s bunker—than with her years in India and Ghana, which usually appear as footnotes to the main narrative of her life.⁵⁴ Some, including Dennis Piskiewicz, argue that Reitsch was drawn to Nkrumah and Nehru by the same “pathology that led her to her friendship with Hitler”: in other words, she was drawn to “charismatic” and “authoritarian men.”⁵⁵ Others explain her Ghana years in terms of her efforts to rebuild a reputation that had been severely damaged by her association with the Nazis. As she herself opined in the postscript to her memoir *The Sky My Kingdom*, “The slurs continue to this day whenever my name appears in a newspaper. I was and still am, again and again, put into a political arena where I never belonged . . . [T]hese so-called eyewitness reports ignore the fact that I had been picked . . . because I was a pilot and a trusted friend, and instead call me ‘Hitler’s girl-friend.’”⁵⁶ Judy Lomax, for example, in her sympathetic portrayal *Hanna Reitsch: Flying for the Fatherland*, describes a patriotic but naïve Reitsch who got entangled in a political world that she did not understand: “Her admiration for Nkrumah was perhaps as politically naïve as her acceptance of Hitler, but was based on a far closer acquaintance. Unwittingly, and as usual with the most sincere of motives, Hanna had again set herself on a political stage.”⁵⁷

The most recent treatment of Reitsch, an insightful 2008 article by Bernhard Rieger in *German History*, sets out to explain precisely how a woman with Reitsch’s history in the Third Reich could go on to a successful global career during the height of decolonization and the Cold War. Rieger finds his answers in the “global obsession with human flight,” gliding’s public image as a “peaceful technology,” the politics of decolonization and modernization in the context of the Cold War, and the constitution of a German diaspora of technological experts, which allowed for the reha-

⁵² Ibid., 29–30. See Leni Riefenstahl, *The Last of the Nuba* (New York, 1974); and Rainer Rother, *Leni Riefenstahl: The Seduction of Genius* (New York, 2002).

⁵³ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 30, 31.

⁵⁴ Reitsch is portrayed in several films about the Second World War: *Operation Crossbow* (1965).

⁵⁵ Piskiewicz, *From Nazi Test Pilot to Hitler’s Bunker*, 125.

⁵⁶ Reitsch, *The Sky My Kingdom*, 219–220.

⁵⁷ Lomax, *Hanna Reitsch*, 180.

bilitation of Nazis and Nazi sympathizers and the diffusion of technology after the Second World War.⁵⁸ In his view, Reitsch

turned Ghana into a site of personal atonement as part of a private displacement strategy that diverted attention from her problematic past by underlining her purportedly compassionate character. Moreover, due to Germany's loss of overseas possessions in 1919, she did not have to wrestle with the issue of colonialism. Africa, then, provided an ideal arena for Reitsch's efforts at moral self-reinvention: it allowed her to parade herself as a racially unprejudiced humanitarian, thereby sidestepping the very political questions of responsibility and guilt that marred her biography.⁵⁹

Still, if Ghana constituted the "ideal arena" for Reitsch's efforts, it was no *tabula rasa* upon which she could simply write the script for her new rehabilitated life. If Ghana worked for Reitsch, how and why did Reitsch work for Ghana? What did those Afienya dreams entail for Ghana? For the ruling CPP? For Nkrumah himself?

The public story as we have constructed it so far, when placed in a comparative, transnational context, provides some compelling answers. Both Reitsch (b. 1912) and Nkrumah (b. 1909 or 1912) were born into an era when aviation prowess was the real "index of national vitality and thus national destiny."⁶⁰ By the mid-1930s, when Nkrumah moved to the United States and Reitsch was establishing her career as a pilot in Germany, aviation was "a crucial part of the modernist experience," and "air-mindedness" featured centrally in the public consciousness of both countries.⁶¹ As Peter Fritzsche has written, "airplanes and airships were the measure of nations at the beginning of the twentieth century, distinguishing not only European genius from an African or Asian mean, but also the truly great powers among the European nation-states."⁶² That flight would therefore become central to Ghana's modernization discourse should come as no surprise. It was hard-wired into the modernist master plan. Indeed, more than any other technological innovation of the twentieth century, as Fritzsche has written, aviation clarifies for us the powerful connections between "national dreams and modernist visions."⁶³ Nkrumah and the CPP's national dreams in the postwar era were very much entangled with what James Scott has termed a "high modernist" vision—"a strong . . . muscle-bound version of . . . self-confidence about scientific and technical progress." That progress—instantiated in and measured by dams, hydroelectric plants, industries, and mechanized farming,

⁵⁸ Rieger, "Hanna Reitsch," 386, 404.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁶⁰ Nkrumah explains that the priest who baptized him recorded his birth year as 1909, but his mother had always calculated his birth year as 1912; *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (London, 1957), 1. Peter Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers: German Aviation and the Popular Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 2.

⁶¹ For a comparison of air-mindedness in the U.S. and Germany, see Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers*, 134. For related sources on air-mindedness and the spectacle of flight, see Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900–1950* (New York, 1983); David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: An Essay on a Militant and Technological Nation* (Basingstoke, 1991); Scott W. Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia* (Cambridge, 2006); Jonathan F. Vance, *High Flight: Aviation and the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto, 2002).

⁶² Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers*, 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 5, 3.

but also gliders, flight, and air-mindedness—was capable, so the argument went, of catapulting Ghana into the arena of competing nation-states.⁶⁴

Gliding, which was to play such an important role in Ghana's modernizing vision, had its own specific history. What Reitsch imbibed as a young pilot in the 1930s resonated profoundly and directly with Nkrumah's own lived experiences and with his plans for building a modern Ghana with the First Republic. In Germany, gliding had "served as a congenial allegory for nationalist revival" even before the rise of National Socialism. By the time Reitsch took her first flight in 1932, it was viewed as "preparing young students for the reckonings of the machine age. Observers honored gliding for promoting technical thinking and providing affinities to the 'technological age.'"⁶⁵ During the Third Reich, gliding and model-making were added to the curriculum of most schools based on the belief that gliding "taught all sorts of virtuous lessons about self-reliance and patriotism" and that model-building provided "invaluable lessons in craftsmanship, collaboration, and persistence."⁶⁶

As Nkrumah moved toward building socialism after the inauguration of the First Republic in 1960, he viewed the mobilization of youth around projects of self-reliance, patriotism, and discipline as of paramount importance. The founding of the Young Pioneers in 1961 was aimed at facilitating youth mobilization and severing connections with the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides—organizations that were viewed as reinforcing imperialist connections with Britain. In profound ways, the discourse surrounding the Pioneer movement echoed the very same "virtues" that Reitsch had been exposed to in her own youth. As former Pioneer M. N. Tetteh has written, the Pioneer Code of Discipline emphasized patriotism, discipline, obedience, honesty and morality, punctuality, respect for state property, reliability, comradeship, love of work, fieldcraft, and self-control.⁶⁷ With Hanna Reitsch in place, these codes of conduct could be inculcated into Ghana's youth as they stood in the vanguard of Ghana's modernization, ready—with motors or without—to "take to the sky." As Nkrumah explained in 1963, gliding "is an education in itself," which "develops in men and women qualities of self-discipline, a sense of adventure, self-reliance and responsibility. These are qualities so necessary in the building of personal character and in the general development of a new nation like Ghana."⁶⁸

⁶⁴ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn., 1998), 4.

⁶⁵ Fritzsche, *A Nation of Fliers*, 123.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 201–202.

⁶⁷ M. N. Tetteh, *The Ghana Young Pioneer Movement: A Youth Organisation in the Kwame Nkrumah Era* (Accra, 1999). Interestingly, Tetteh completely excludes Reitsch from his account and provides a very different chronology for gliding in Ghana. He considers gliding central to the training of the Young Pioneers, but argues that Pioneer gliding began in Takoradi before it moved to Afienya (80–81). In addition to the Code of Discipline, the Young Pioneers pledged to "live by the ideals of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Founder of the State of Ghana, and Initiator of the African Personality. To safeguard by all means possible, the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State of Ghana from internal and external aggression. To be always in the vanguard for the social and economic reconstruction of Ghana and Africa. To be in the first ranks of men fighting for the total liberation of and unity of Africa, for these are the noble aims guiding the Ghana Young Pioneers. As a Young Pioneer, I will be a guard of workers, farmers, co-operatives and all other sections of our community. I believe that our dynamic Convention People's Party is always supreme and I promise to be worthy of its ideals." The pledge is quoted in Robert Yaw Owusu, *Kwame Nkrumah's Liberation Thought: A Paradigm for Religious Advocacy in Contemporary Ghana* (New York, 2005), 133–134.

⁶⁸ *Ghanaian Times*, May 20, 1963.

One year before the 1966 coup that overthrew Nkrumah, a long article in the *Ghanaian Times* laid out in detail the necessary connections between youth, flight, and nation-building. It began by noting that most Ghanaians were probably wondering, “What is the need for gliding: what benefit does one derive and what are the prospects for those taking to gliding?” The answers were simple and straightforward and are worth quoting in full:

Gliding helps to produce men of character who must be needed in Ghana today to implement the policies of the Government. A nation is not judged only by its fortifications, its material resources and skyscrapers. It is also judged by the quality and character of its citizens and that is exactly the aim of the Gliding School. To be a successful glider pilot requires the qualities of self-discipline, reliability, punctuality, courage and humility.

These qualities are vital for nation-building and especially so in a developing country and it is hoped that the Gliding School will be the nursery from which will bloom modest young men of virtue and self respect.

Secondly, gliding encourages air-mindedness in the youth. With the establishment of the school, the youth of Ghana will also acquire the skills for the mysteries of “the world above the ground . . .”

The third and most important role of the Gliding School is that it serves as a link between the Armed Forces, particularly the Air Force and one could rightly say that it is a pre-initial training wing of the Air Force, that is it gives the first “taste of the air” to the Air Force cadets.⁶⁹

In many ways, then, Reitsch’s work at the gliding school resonated powerfully with Nkrumah’s modernizing agenda. Not only did the school help to inculcate discipline and courage in the nation’s youth, it served to build a national military, with air capabilities, to replace the colonial army of old. As Rieger notes, “gliding was . . . by no means merely a romantic form of soaring in the wind . . . it provided a cost-effective means of training and research that proved integral to civil and military aviation.”⁷⁰ Gliding, as part and parcel of a high modernist vision, was thus critically situated at the core of both nation-building and the consolidation of state power.

The connections between the high modernist visions of Nkrumah and Reitsch underscore two perhaps obvious but fundamental points. First, when those connections are set in a global and comparative context of nation-building and modernization, Reitsch appears not as some strange anomaly in the story of African nationalism, African liberation, and pan-Africanism, but as part of a broad transnational process whereby German technological expertise, for which many in the world hungered, was dispersed across the globe in the postwar era. (Let us not forget the former Nazi aeronautical engineers who populated the U.S. space program!) That expertise was inextricably linked to what John Kelly and Martha Kaplan have called “the routinization of the nation-state” after 1945.⁷¹ Reitsch’s presence in Ghana, therefore, makes absolute sense, not only and simply because of her own personal quest for refuge and rehabilitation, but because the message she brought and the modern baggage she carried fit, for the most part, quite comfortably, and

⁶⁹ *Ghanaian Times*, February 23, 1965.

⁷⁰ Rieger, “Hanna Reitsch,” 388.

⁷¹ John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan, *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization* (Chicago, 2001), 9.

in many ways predictably, within the borders of Nkrumah's aspiring high modernist state. Secondly, the fact that Reitsch-in-Ghana makes sense only in this transnational, postwar context has important implications for how we can imagine or understand the constitution and the expanse of Africa's postcolonial archive. At the very least, it suggests that the documentary sources for reconstructing African postcolonial histories extend well beyond the depositories of "national archives"—whether of the postcolonial nation-state or of the former colonizing power. In other words, tracing the technological and ideological genealogies that connect "nationalist dreams and modernist visions" globally—including in and through Nazi Germany—should propel historians to new and perhaps unexpected places, to new archive possibilities, which in turn might shift the contours of postcolonial history-writing in quite dramatic ways.

IN THE SPECIFIC CASE OF Kwame Nkrumah, Hanna Reitsch, and the Afienya Gliding School, then, what and where are the primary documentary sources for telling a far more complicated postcolonial story—a story that is both deeply and specifically national and yet profoundly global? As Antoinette Burton has written, "Crucial to the task of re-materializing the multiple contingencies of history writing is the project of historicizing the emergence of state and local archives; interrogating how archive logics work, what subjects they produce, and which they silence in specific historical and cultural contexts."⁷² None of the contemporary documentation on Reitsch and her school that circulated in the public sphere within Ghana (newspaper accounts or programs from various events) makes mention of her Nazi past or of her connections to Hitler. She is simply a member of that strange and diverse cast of expatriate characters who worked to fulfill some of Ghana's early modernization dreams. But when we look to the Ghana national archive, which is now called the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD)—to class listings, government documentation, and the ministry files, minutes, and correspondence upon which many of us hope to rely for constructing more nuanced historical narratives—we find that the record is spotty at best. After the coup that ended Nkrumah's rule in 1966, the military ransacked Flagstaff House, the seat of presidential power, and most of the executive files, including the correspondence of Nkrumah and many of his closest colleagues, were carted off and subsequently disappeared. To date, very few documents from Ghana's Ministry of Defense have made their way into the national archive.⁷³

Although military rule wreaked havoc on the official national archive of Ghana's First Republic—and has thus profoundly circumscribed the kinds of histories that can and will be written—soldiers were not as systematic or as thorough in their confiscation and destruction as one might imagine. There are two collections now at the PRAAD in Accra that are giving current researchers their first look at the inner workings of Nkrumah's government.⁷⁴ Indeed, some extremely sensitive materials,

⁷² Antoinette Burton, "Introduction: Archive Fever, Archive Stories," in Burton, *Archive Stories*, 1–24, quotation from 9.

⁷³ RG 14, Ministry of Defense, PRAAD.

⁷⁴ The two new series are RG 17/1 and RG 17/2. They both consist of a rather haphazard collection

which undoubtedly would have been reclassified by a government archivist in the 1960s as “top secret” and placed on a fifty- or one-hundred-year hold or even “destroyed by statute,” have accidentally survived in bits and pieces in the national archive. In addition, not a few of the scores of expatriates who were drawn to Ghana in the 1960s (Reitsch included) have written memoirs and deposited their papers in archives across the globe—at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center at Howard University in Washington, D.C., the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the University College Dublin, the Deutsches Museum in Munich, and Rhodes House in Oxford, to name just a few. (Unfortunately, there has not been a sustained or systematic effort to archive, publicly or privately, the papers of Ghanaians who were politically active during these same years.)⁷⁵ These scattered fragments—either buried in mislabeled files in Ghana’s national archive or dispersed in what might be called its “shadow archive”—do not only and simply “fill in the gaps” in a linear story of modernization and nation-building. In many cases, the fragments destabilize a “high modernist” narrative and point toward new history-writing possibilities—possibilities far less anchored in, far less dependent upon, and thus far less likely to be overdetermined by the archiving apparatus of the postcolonial nation-state.

We can begin, for example, with Reitsch’s own papers, which were placed on deposit by her family in the archives of the Deutsches Museum in Munich after her death in 1979.⁷⁶ Although very little documentation on the Afienua school has survived in Ghana, Reitsch’s papers contain extensive official correspondence (including Ghana government correspondence not available in Ghana) that meticulously documents the establishment of the school. Included are Nkrumah’s original correspondence with Reitsch and expansive government correspondence about the buildings at Afienua, the importation of gliders and modeling kits, West German funding, and the training of Ghanaian students both in West Germany and in Ghana. Indeed, much of the official Ghana government documentation cited by Reitsch in her memoir is available in Munich; almost none of it is available in Accra.⁷⁷ Admittedly, much of Reitsch’s material appears to have been very carefully vetted, so

of original records, published documents, and correspondence from Flagstaff House. RG 17/2 was originally thought to constitute the papers of the Bureau of African Affairs. The first listing for the series is therefore SC/BAA. It is currently being renumbered as RG 17/2. In addition, there are truckloads of files in the various ministries, many dating back to the First Republic, that have survived Ghana’s succession of military coups but have not yet made their way into the government archival repository.

⁷⁵ In addition to official government collections in Britain, the U.S., and elsewhere, the papers of private individuals who spent extensive time in Ghana are incredibly rich. See, by way of example, the papers of St. Clair Drake, William Alphaeus Hunton, and Julian Mayfield at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; the Kwame Nkrumah Papers at the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center; the Conor Cruise O’Brien Papers at University College Dublin; or the Shirley Graham Du Bois Papers at the Schlesinger Library. Of course, there are countless collections of private papers held by Ghanaians in Ghana, but these remain in the hands of family members and have yet to be put on public deposit. To my knowledge, there has been no sustained or coordinated effort by the university or the national archives (PRAAD) to collect and archive the private papers of key political actors from the early independence era to the present.

⁷⁶ NL 130, Hanna Reitsch Papers, Archiv des Deutschen Museums, Munich [hereafter Reitsch Papers]. Several boxes in the collection, for example, 130/112, 114, 115, and 116, were made available to researchers only in 2009.

⁷⁷ See especially *ibid.*, NL 130/28.

that it adheres closely to the published/public narrative of institutional modernization, but it is surely worthy of some methodological reflection that the bulk of documentation for telling this particular story of nation-building is not located in the nation in question!

Although there is very little in Reitsch's own papers to indicate just how controversial her presence in Ghana indeed was, there is at least one letter, sent to her in July 1965 by an anonymous "Nkrumahist," that accuses her of being involved in "spying activities" and acting in "alliance with the agents of imperialism." It warns that she is "unconsciously preparing the ground for [her] . . . own demise."⁷⁸ There is one small fragment of similar evidence in a mislabeled correspondence file originally seized by the military from Flagstaff House in 1966 and now on deposit in Ghana's national archive. In an unpublished letter to the *Ghanaian Times*, someone who signed himself "A Comrade" notes that the newspaper might be interested to learn that there are some "high ranking Nazis now in high places in Ghana." The writer suggests that the *Times* "find out what you can about that Glider Woman, Hanna Reitch [*sic*], a famous test pilot in Hitler's Luftwaffe, now teaching young Ghanaians." The author then directs the paper to William Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* and asks, "What is she doing in Ghana, among the *Untermenschen* she so despised twenty-five years ago?" A marginal note written on the letter, probably by someone in Flagstaff House, suggests, "This may be from a nosey-poker."⁷⁹

But evidence from Ghana's transnational shadow archive reveals that Reitsch's presence was especially controversial among members of the large African American community who had settled in Ghana beginning in the mid-1950s.⁸⁰ As Julian Mayfield describes in his unpublished memoir "Tales of the Lido":

Many of us were thrown off our balance when . . . the President himself announced that he had invited Hannah [*sic*] Reitsch to be the director of Ghana's new gliding school. Miss Reitsch, some readers may recall, was the crack Nazi woman test pilot, and one of the last persons to see Adolf Hitler alive. Indeed, she had flown to the Fuehrer's Berlin bunker and urged him to let her fly him out to safety. According to her account, she argued, "The Fuehrer must live so that Germany can live." Then she prepared herself with poison and grenade to die with her beloved leader. Now here she was in black Africa, a little over 15 years later, about to take over the training of some of Ghana's youth. None of us at my level knew how to handle this. It was not our country, and nobody had asked our opinion anyway. We wanted to give Nkrumah the benefit of the doubt, but that was stretching loyalty too far. She was a frail, little gray woman whose hand I shook at Shirley Graham's house before I knew who she was. A few nights later when Shirley telephoned Ana Livia [Mayfield's wife and a physician] to say that her house guest, Hannah, had a terrible headache and was there anything my wife could do, she answered, "I don't treat Nazis," and hung up. I think Hannah Reitsch was one of the strangest of the strange people who passed through Ghana.⁸¹

⁷⁸ "Nkrumahist" to Hannah [*sic*] Reitsch, July 5, 1965, NL 130/28.1, *ibid*.

⁷⁹ "A Comrade" to Mr. Harry Nimbus, *Ghanaian Times*, Accra, February 22, 1964, SC/BAA 402, PRAAD. *Untermenschen* literally translates as "under-man" or "under-human" (subhuman). It was a term widely used in Nazi Germany for those deemed to be of the "inferior races."

⁸⁰ For an excellent account of this community, see Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006).

⁸¹ Julian Mayfield, "Tales of the Lido," 74–75, box 14, file 11, Julian Mayfield Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Yet other evidence—again from transnational “shadow” collections—reveals that there were those both within and outside Ghana’s African American community, including Shirley Graham Du Bois, who knew of Reitsch’s past but did not share Mayfield’s feelings, and who in fact nurtured close friendships with Reitsch, including well after the 1966 coup.

Both Reitsch and Du Bois were members of Nkrumah’s inner circle and had direct access to him on a daily basis. They were also very close to Erica Powell, his private secretary. How was Reitsch’s Nazi past understood by those who became her closest confidantes in Ghana? Again, the transnational shadow archive offers some interesting answers. A letter from Shirley Graham Du Bois to Nkrumah in 1968 (one of many between the two that speak of their common affection for Reitsch) provides a clear sense of their shared understanding of this “dear innocent”:

Hanna truly lives high in the heavens, among the stars, above gleaming mountain tops. *Flying is her life*. To her the crags and rocks and tortuous tangles through which you and I must struggle look very small and insignificant. Hanna simply does *not know*. Her total ignorance about her own country was clearly indicated when she was with us. They completely fooled her!⁸²

Indeed, in the years after the coup, Shirley Graham Du Bois and Reitsch kept up their friendship, and many of their letters, through 1975, are among the correspondence now collected in Du Bois’s papers at the Schlesinger Library.⁸³ In October 1968, Du Bois spent considerable time with Reitsch in Germany, traveling through the countryside with her and helping her to revise an English edition of *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, which was never published.⁸⁴ In describing Hanna to Nkrumah during this visit, Du Bois wrote, “She is so sweet . . . and trusting. It almost makes me cry. How wonderful it would be if the world were what she thinks it is!”⁸⁵ When Reitsch had a fairly serious gliding accident in July 1969, Du Bois flew from Cairo to be at her side and reported to Nkrumah, “Here I am in Frankfurt visiting our precious Hanna. Yes, she is lying flat on a hard board for five weeks already, but her magnificent soaring spirit is untouched.”⁸⁶

⁸² Shirley Graham Du Bois, Peking, to Kwame Nkrumah, June 28, 1965, box 3, file 57, Kwame Nkrumah Papers, emphasis in the original. There is also a good deal of correspondence between Du Bois and Nkrumah in the Shirley Graham Du Bois Papers at the Schlesinger Library [hereafter Du Bois Papers]. See especially box 22, files 15, 16, 17. In one letter to Du Bois, Nkrumah (who at that time, presumably for security reasons, signed his letters “Rodnick”) wrote of Reitsch, “I am glad you had a nice time with H. You are right; she is a marvel, only sometimes her persistence and impatience get on my nerves a bit.” Kwame Nkrumah, Conakry, to Shirley Graham Du Bois, November 2, 1968, box 22, file 17. After the 1966 coup, Nkrumah and Du Bois also developed a close and, for a time, very intimate relationship, which included Du Bois visiting Nkrumah in Conakry. See especially box 22, Du Bois Papers.

⁸³ Du Bois died in 1977. Reitsch died two years later. See especially boxes 19, 20, 21, and 22, Du Bois Papers. Perhaps for security’s sake, Du Bois sometimes addressed her letters to “Anna,” not “Hanna,” or to “My Dear Little Friend.”

⁸⁴ Extensive correspondence on the manuscript, including a roughly translated English version, can be found in NL 130/120 and 121, Reitsch Papers.

⁸⁵ Shirley Graham Du Bois, Frankfurt, to Kwame Nkrumah, October 10, 1968, box 3, file 57, Nkrumah Papers. For Du Bois’s description of her work on the manuscript, see also Du Bois, Cairo, to Nkrumah, October 17, 1968, box 3, file 57; Du Bois, Cairo, to Nkrumah, August 23, 1969, and August 5, 1969, box 3, file 58.

⁸⁶ Shirley Graham Du Bois, Frankfurt, to Kwame Nkrumah, July 29, 1969, box 3, file 58, Nkrumah Papers.

June Milne, Nkrumah's research assistant, publisher, and literary executor, wrote of Reitsch in similar terms in the introduction to her edited collection of Nkrumah's correspondence from his years of exile in Conakry:

Hanna was no diplomat. Nor did she have a great deal of political knowledge . . . If she was convinced of anything . . . Hanna would vehemently and repeatedly express her views, which could be tiring as well as irritating. But when she committed herself to any person or to any project, her loyalty and courage were limitless. If Nkrumah had asked her to fly him to Accra when she visited him in Conakry, she would gladly have faced the extreme danger. As her friend Erica Powell, once said to me, "If I was stranded at the North Pole, Hanna would come and get me out."⁸⁷

That Reitsch was a precious innocent who had been caught in a tangle of political forces she could not possibly understand was clearly a view shared by at least some who knew her in and through her time in Ghana.⁸⁸

But what of Nkrumah? What were his thoughts about Reitsch? The few bits and pieces of his correspondence that survive in Du Bois's papers echo this perspective on "precious Hanna."⁸⁹ From the German Foreign Office archives, Rieger cites a report from the West German ambassador suggesting that "Nkrumah himself held an ambiguous attitude to Hitler" and that he "saw in Reitsch a 'great humanist' devoid of 'ideological fixations,' and 'above all politics.'"⁹⁰ There is certainly nothing in Reitsch's papers to indicate otherwise. Indeed, for the most part, it is difficult for the historian to follow any official documentary trail, within or beyond Ghana's borders. Part of the problem is the loss of the official records and correspondence that were destroyed in the wake of the 1966 coup. There is, in other words, no "presidential library" in Accra housing the documentary minutiae of Nkrumah's years in office, and Nkrumah makes no mention of Reitsch in his published work. But here and there, scraps of evidence have survived—although there are none in Reitsch's own papers—which not only detail a very close and affectionate relationship between the two, but also point to the purposeful destruction of correspondence by a range of individuals, especially after the coup, that might lend insight into the more intimate aspects of their association. From Reitsch's published memoir, we know that in March 1966 she flew to Conakry, in disguise, to see Nkrumah and report to him "what had happened in Ghana."⁹¹ Milne describes this trip as Reitsch's one and only visit to Conakry, and a most unfortunate one because of her "lurid descriptions of the 'jubilation' of Ghanaians at his overthrow."⁹² Milne acknowledges that Nkrumah and Reitsch wrote to each other over the years, and that Reitsch sent him food parcels and "the rose bushes which bloomed in the large concrete pots lining the verandah at Villa Syli" in Conakry, but that is where Milne ends the story of the

⁸⁷ June Milne, comp., *Kwame Nkrumah: The Conakry Years, His Life and Letters* (London, 1990), 14.

⁸⁸ As we have seen, it was the explanation that Reitsch herself professed in the postscript to *The Sky My Kingdom*, and which her primary biographer, Judy Lomax, echoed in her account.

⁸⁹ Kwame Nkrumah, Conakry, to Shirley Graham Du Bois, August 5, 1969, box 22, file 17, Du Bois Papers.

⁹⁰ Rieger, "Hanna Reitsch," 401 and n. 106, citing report from Ambassador Lüders to Auswärtiges Amt, March 25, 1963, B94/1081, Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin, Politisches Archiv.

⁹¹ Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 217.

⁹² Milne, *Kwame Nkrumah*, 14. Cf. Reitsch's account of the visit in *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 217–218.

relationship.⁹³ She states that among the papers Nkrumah left behind in Conakry, there was one letter from Reitsch, as well as a postcard, but no copies of the letters that Nkrumah wrote to Reitsch.⁹⁴

However, Milne also notes in her introduction that when she visited Reitsch in Frankfurt in 1978, Reitsch showed her a “pile” of letters from Nkrumah, “hand-written on the familiar blue airmail paper Nkrumah used in Conakry,” but when Milne returned to Frankfurt after Reitsch’s death in 1979, Reitsch’s brother told her that he had not found a single letter from Nkrumah among Reitsch’s letters. “I can only surmise that she destroyed the letters herself,” Milne wrote, “or arranged for them to be destroyed after her death, probably by her faithful housekeeper and secretary, Fraulein Walter.”⁹⁵ Certainly none of these letters are currently available in Reitsch’s papers in Munich. But what of her letters to Nkrumah? Milne reports that she found almost nothing in Conakry, although she “was not surprised to find . . . so little evidence of their correspondence . . . For Nkrumah kept personal letters himself, and from time to time burned them.”⁹⁶ Nkrumah’s destruction of personal letters is corroborated by another of his close women confidantes, Genoveva Marais, who wrote in her 1972 memoir, *Kwame Nkrumah: As I Knew Him*, that he “destroyed most of them, careful not to leave the smallest shreds and fragments to be picked up by others.”⁹⁷

We can surmise, then, from Milne that there was an extensive correspondence between Nkrumah and Reitsch (and we can infer the same from references in Shirley Graham Du Bois’s correspondence with Nkrumah), and yet there are also strange inconsistencies in Milne’s story and in the evidence that, as literary executor, she has left us. Oddly, in the very papers Milne deposited at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, and out of which she drew her compilation for *Kwame Nkrumah: The Conakry Years*, there are in fact two very long letters from Reitsch to Nkrumah and several letters, businesslike in tone, from him to her, regarding her Ghanaian memoir and the number of his letters that had reached her, and also enclosing a copy of W. E. B. Du Bois’s autobiography.

In her edited compilation, Milne includes a letter that Reitsch wrote to Nkrumah on December 13, 1970. It is extremely interesting to compare the original with what Milne chose to publish. The published version is brief and heavily edited; we are presented with three short paragraphs that describe Reitsch’s reaction to the news that the Portuguese had invaded Guinea from Guinea-Bissau and her concern for

⁹³ Milne, *Kwame Nkrumah*, 14.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14–15. At present, it is not possible to determine whether Nkrumah’s letters were actually destroyed or have simply not been released, though I suspect they were destroyed. As noted above, a fairly thorough collection of Reitsch’s papers is on deposit in the Archiv des Deutschen Museums in Munich (NL 130), but even among the materials made available in 2009, there are no *personal* letters of the type described by Milne and no post-1966 correspondence with Nkrumah.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁷ Genoveva Marais, *Kwame Nkrumah: As I Knew Him* (Chichester, 1972), 80. There was much speculation in the early 1960s about Nkrumah’s relationship with Marais. She herself was arrested shortly after the coup. In a *Life* magazine article, she was described as “Nkrumah’s slender mulatto mistress”; “Newsfronts: Nkrumah’s Friends Are All in Trouble,” *Life*, March 18, 1966, 45. In her memoir, she writes: “I feel that I am peculiarly suited to write about him because I was his friend . . . In fact, he wanted to marry me and I could have been his wife. I preferred instead to be his special confidante, in the widest sense of the term”; *Kwame Nkrumah*, 2.

Nkrumah's safety.⁹⁸ No opening salutation or closing is included. Yet the original is a lengthy handwritten letter that begins "Dearest BB"—a pet name Reitsch used that was an abbreviation of "Big Bush." (He, in turn, called her "LB," or "Little Bush.") She goes on to describe some of the lectures she had given about Ghana and a surgery she had had to undergo and then shares news about common friends. She expresses her worries about Nkrumah and about what she should send him for Christmas. "In the beginning of your exile," she writes, "it was easier for me to know—I really do not know what to do. If you would send me a list what you want, I would be soooooo happy!!! Enough for today. I am always with you—thinking of you—praying for you, loving you and—being worried about your safety. With deepest love, Ever, Your LB/LG."⁹⁹

It would be easy enough to accept Milne's characterization of this relationship, or at least the evidence she has left us of the relationship, if it were not for the files and files of cables, also now on deposit at Howard, that catalogue a very close, ongoing relationship right through to 1971—the year before Nkrumah died in Romania. Cables flew back and forth between Conakry and Frankfurt (or wherever Reitsch was at any given time), often several times a week. Through these frequent communiqués, the two kept track of letters and parcels sent and received. Sometimes they addressed each other as "BB" and "LB"; sometimes they resorted to pseudonyms, which Nkrumah often used in other correspondence because of the problem of mail tampering. He would sign off as "Sana," the name of his protocol officer and interpreter, and she would sign off as "A. Walter," her secretary and housekeeper.¹⁰⁰ Some examples, out of the hundreds of those cables, include:

VERY HAPPY 158 AND 159 ARRIVED THANKS BEAUTIFUL PHOTOS LOVE SANA

MANY THANKS CAN OPERATE RECORDER LISTEN TO TAPE ALONE WONDERFUL CONGRATULATIONS HAPPY WRITING MUCH LOVE SANA

HAPPY 28 ARRIVED MUCH LOVE EVER LB

BUSH PARCEL ARRIVED TODAY HAPPY THANKS LOVE LB

THANKS CABLE LAST RECEIVED LETTER DATED 26 FEB WORRIED LOVE LB¹⁰¹

Obviously, the cable messages are ambiguous at best, but they at least suggest, among other things and contrary to what Milne reports in the introduction to her book, that Reitsch may very well have visited Conakry on more than one occasion.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Milne, *Kwame Nkrumah*, 385.

⁹⁹ Hanna Reitsch, Frankfurt, to Kwame Nkrumah, December 3, 1970, box 7, file 82, Nkrumah Papers. I have not puzzled out what "LG" stands for. As for the origin of the nickname "Bush," there are not many clues. Lomax notes that Reitsch read Nkrumah's autobiography before going to Ghana for the first time in 1962 and formed a "favourable impression of a 'son of the bush'"; *Hanna Reitsch*, 168.

¹⁰⁰ On the various pseudonyms that were devised, see Milne, *Kwame Nkrumah*, 7.

¹⁰¹ The cables can be found in boxes 10, 11, 12, and 13, Nkrumah Papers. The specific cables cited here are Sana to Mrs. A. Walter, October 20, 1967, box 11, file 9; Sana to Mrs. Walter, September 2, 1967, box 11, file 9; LB to Sana, March 12, 1968, box 13, file 12; LB to Sana, March 16, 1968, box 13, file 10.

¹⁰² See especially "Bush" to Reitsch, July 30, 1966, box 10, file 55, Nkrumah Papers; Sana to A. Walter, March 20, 1967, box 11, file 4; Sana to A. Walter, July 12, 16, and 20, 1967, box 11, file 7. Note also that in *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, Reitsch intimates that she visited Nkrumah in Conakry on several occasions: "Every time my plane departed and Osagyefo saw me off, he radiated the same benevolence and poise" (218).

In what remains of Nkrumah's correspondence in Ghana—correspondence that was lost, for the most part, when the military ransacked Flagstaff House in 1966—there is some surviving, fragmentary evidence of a growing intimacy between the two. A few personal letters from Reitsch to Nkrumah survive in the SC/BAA series in Ghana's national archive from the period in late summer 1965 when Reitsch returned to Germany for medical treatment for what turned out to be hepatitis A. In these letters, she addresses him as "B." In the first, written from Rome on her way to Frankfurt, she thanks him for the "lovely little pink rose" he sent to her before her departure. It "was during the whole flight my consolation and joy and I will keep it pressed and dried with me until I am safely back."¹⁰³ In her next letter, sent August 27, 1965, from Frankfurt, she tells him of her diagnosis: "it seemed impossible . . . when I heart [*sic*] this only tears were running over my cheeks, like a little girl. To come back to you and to all my so deeply beloved work for you, is my only burning wish."¹⁰⁴ In a letter dated September 2, 1965, she thanks him for his unexpected phone call and promises to listen to the doctors. She signs off, "Ever yours, Hanna." In a postscript, she sends a request:

B.- I have a great burning wish: Lying here for several weeks means quite a long time. Could you make me the *great joy* and send me this black leather foto-etui, which I gave you before my departure, in which you wanted to put copies of the fotos of the children. And when it would be possible, put in it some fotos from *you*. It is a very unmodest wish? Perhaps with diplomatic mail or via Frankfurt Kettenhofweg 55 you could send it. I would be deeply happy to have those fotos near me. Yours. H.¹⁰⁵

That is the last piece of personal correspondence we have between them until the days after the coup.

Clearly bits and pieces of documentation such as these, dispersed across the globe in shadow archives or randomly batched in mislabeled or unlabeled files in Ghana's national archive, raise certain kinds of questions that we will likely never be able to answer: Were Reitsch and Nkrumah lovers? Was there a cover-up of some sort, a conspiracy of silence? If so, who was complicit? In many ways, the answers to such questions are beside the point. As Mbembe has observed, "destroying or prohibiting the archive has only provided it with additional content."¹⁰⁶ What these destroyed letters and evidentiary fragments also, and more importantly, do is expose the uneven expanse of what constitutes, in fact, Ghana's postcolonial archive—its hidden corridors and unlikely repositories. They propel us to track new evidentiary pathways that are not always self-evident and to interrogate the contingencies of postcolonial history-writing. This postcolonial archive is not the easy and direct descendant of the colonial archive project. It is not a "national archive." It does not reside in one place, or even two or three. It is a global, transnational archive, ranging from Accra to Beijing, from New Delhi to Frankfurt, from Moscow to Bucharest, from Tel Aviv to Harlem. The archival skills that Africanist historians have honed in London, Aix-en-Provence, and Lisbon—in Accra, Dakar, and Luanda—surely require refashioning in order to meet the linguistic, logistic, financial, and conceptual challenges posed

¹⁰³ Hanna Reitsch, Rome, to Kwame Nkrumah, August [n.d.], 1965, SC/BAA 402, PRAAD.

¹⁰⁴ Hanna Reitsch, Frankfurt, to Kwame Nkrumah, August 27, 1965, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁵ Hanna Reitsch, Frankfurt, to Kwame Nkrumah, September 2, 1965, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits," 23.

by this vast shadow archive, much of it generated by the transnational policing mechanisms of the Cold War surveillance state.¹⁰⁷ The promising work of a new generation of scholars is already demonstrating the power and possibility of archival work that moves beyond the older area studies, colony/metropole template, but far too many graduate programs and funding opportunities in the U.S. (the Fulbright Program, for example) remain tied to a “fieldwork” model that limits archival work to the national archive of the postcolonial state and the former imperial power.¹⁰⁸ And for scholars based at often underfunded African institutions, the challenges posed by transnational shadow archives are especially formidable. If nothing else, surely research centers and funding agencies need to rethink, in elastic and perhaps dramatic ways, just what area studies “fieldwork” means when some of the most important documentation for a postcolonial African history project sits in Havana, New York, or Moscow.

And if evidentiary fragments such as the ones recounted here help to reveal the expanse of postcolonial “shadow” archives, they also provide insight into the constitution, the nature, the illusion of the “national” archive, and its vexed relationship to the postcolonial state. For Mbembe, one of the leading theorists of the postcolonial archive, the state and the archive are forever locked in an ambivalent embrace: “On the one hand, there is no state without archives—without its archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state.”¹⁰⁹ At least in Ghana’s case, the state has not adopted the same role as the colonial state in naming, preserving, categorizing, classifying, withholding, or destroying its records. As importantly, it appears to be either unable to do so or uninterested, especially compared to its predecessor, in the archives’ panoptic potential. Multiple, abrupt changes in state power, military rule, economic structural adjustment, and the underfunding of civil service and records management have profoundly affected the constitution of the state’s archive to the degree that one is sometimes left wondering whether the postcolonial state requires archival technologies to exercise rule and reproduce its power, as Mbembe suggests, or, alternatively, whether the primary symptom of what eventually becomes a “failed state” is its inability to deploy archiving technologies.

In either case, for Ghana the bottom line is the same: many official state records, through willful destruction or as a result of negligence or deterioration, have been lost forever. Others have never made it out of a department or ministry and into the state archiving process at all. And yet others, which would or should have been destroyed or at the very least withheld, because of their top secret classification by one set of state actors, have survived subsequent coups by other state actors and IMF-conditioned structural adjustment plans—hidden, perhaps, in an unmarked file in

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison, Wis., 2009).

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, Ohio, 2010), especially James R. Brennan, “Radio Cairo and the Decolonization of East Africa, 1953–64,” 173–195. See also Meredith Terretta, “Cameroonian Nationalists Go Global: From Forest *Maquis* to a Pan-African Accra,” *Journal of African History* 51, no. 2 (2010): 189–212. Gaines’s *American Africans in Ghana* powerfully demonstrates for both Americanists and Africanists the global expanse of the postcolonial archive.

¹⁰⁹ For a very different set of questions, see Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” 23.

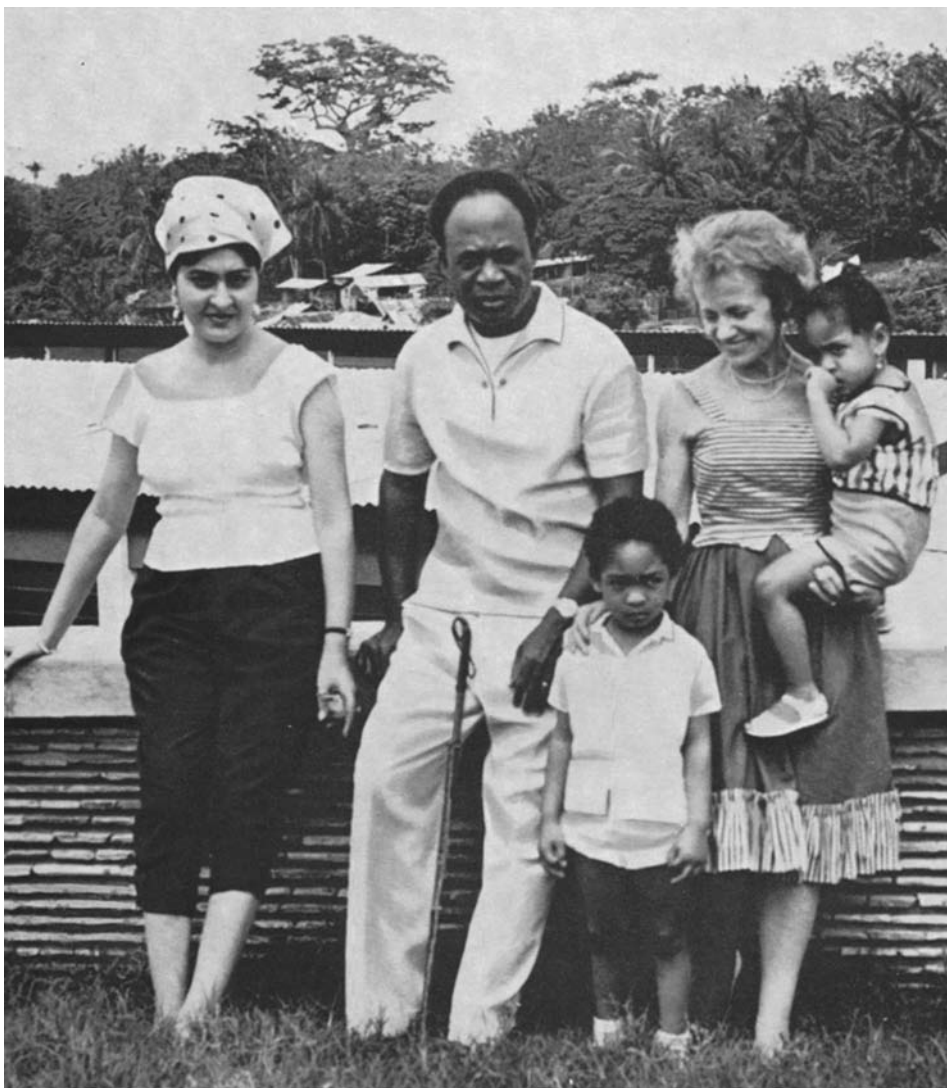


FIGURE 3. Reitsch with Nkrumah, his wife (Madame Fathia), and their two children, Gamal and Yabah, on Easter. From Reitsch, *Ich flog für Kwame Nkrumah*, 18.

the state's national archive. In Ghana, these records constitute, in many ways, an accidental archive, for the state has been far less involved in shaping how we can and will remember Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, than, for example, June Milne, Hanna Reitsch, and Shirley Graham Du Bois have been. Indeed, if South Asian histories, as the Subaltern Studies Group began to argue in the 1980s, were overdetermined by the archiving colonial state, then surely—answering a set of very similar questions—we might conclude that postcolonial African histories may very well be underdetermined by the postcolonial state, which has so often been incapable of or uninterested in deploying an archive, *its* archive, as a “technology of rule.”¹¹⁰

And if the postcolonial African state and its “national” archive are not in a po-

¹¹⁰ Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” 83.

sition to burden history-writing, what are the possibilities and the contingencies for writing postcolonial histories, including histories of the state? If our search for Nkrumah, Reitsch, and the meanings of motorless flight reveals anything, it is that the destroyed, fragmented, accidental, and dispersed nature of Ghana's postcolonial archive, while it precludes certain kinds of history-writing, may allow for other and new forms of history-writing that are far less subject to the archiving technologies of a panoptic nation-state. If we avoid the unlabeled files, the hidden corridors, and the unlikely shadow repositories of this expansive, dispersed archive, the relationship between the world's leading pan-Africanist and Nazi Germany's most famous female pilot remains locked inside a simple narrative of motorless flight, nation-building, technology, and modernization in the postwar world—a linear narrative that is strikingly and profoundly un-human. Nkrumah stands, perhaps just as he intended when he set afloat bits and pieces of his personal correspondence on the veranda at Villa Syli, as the two-dimensional man: the Modernizing Man, the Revolutionary Hero. His story can contain no sadness, no desire, no longing or loss. It is stripped of emotion and affect—a cold, hard tale of Cold War development politics. But if we refuse to be fooled by the idea of a “national” archive, if we seek out those fragments of evidence not just by perusing the archival categories and lists but by scouring the strange unlabeled files, tracing the expansive and often surprising networks of people, and following the unexpected pathways through that globally dispersed shadow archive, we might catch glimpses of some of the phantoms within—faint, but in all of their human dimensions. We might even begin to imagine histories of states and of state power in which there is interpretive and exigetic space for affect and sentiment, for devotion and desire. A decade ago, and in the context of colonial history-writing, Ann Stoler reminded us that “matters of intimacy” were “matters of state.”¹¹¹ The story of Kwame Nkrumah, Hanna Reitsch, and the wonders of motorless flight point to the obverse: that “matters of state” could also be “matters of intimacy,” and that there are stories of decolonization, of modernization, and of nation-building that can be told—perhaps are best told—when freed from the archiving imperatives, the technologies of rule, of a singular postcolonial nation-state.

¹¹¹ Ann Laura Stoler, “Matters of Intimacy as Matters of State: A Response,” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (December 2001): 893–897.

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