Uncovering Radical Histories

Anna Budu-Arthur's Everyday Politics of Decolonization and Transnational Solidarity

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On October 5, 2021, I traveled to Sekondi-Takoradi, an important nucleus of anticolonial agitation in what was then the British colony of the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana), to interview Anna Budu-Arthur about her brother, nationalist and activist Nana Kobina Nketsia IV.[1] Over the course of my interview, however, I discovered that Budu-Arthur, a largely unknown figure, had played important roles in Ghana's independence struggle as well as its nation-building and Pan-African projects. As a political organizer and seamstress, Budu-Arthur tirelessly spread the message of self-governance to her peers, relocating to the United Kingdom in 1955 to assist Gold Coast nationalists studying at the University of Oxford with cooking, sewing, and other essentials. After Ghana gained its independence in 1957, Budu-Arthur moved to London, where she worked as a clerk in the education section of the Ghanaian High Commission. During her time in London, she formed close relationships with prominent African American activists, most notably Maya Angelou. Together, these two friends played a pivotal role in popularizing *kente*—vibrant hand-woven strips of silk and cotton—as a powerful symbol of Pan-African solidarity. Kente eventually became the most recognizable African textile across the Black diaspora. Although Budu-Arthur left behind no political writings, her oral recollections have profound implications for gendered postcolonial histories. They demonstrate how the

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construction of a "self"—outside the pages of an autobiography or memoir—can significantly shape the writing of a country's history.[2]

Budu-Arthur's story is not simply part of a broader project of recovering and recentering African women within nationalist and decolonization discourses. Rather than assuming that African women have always been written out of history, her story reveals the ways in which African women have been active agents in the production of history and acted as repositories of their country's gender history. What happens, then, when we examine Ghana's story of decolonization and postcolonial history from the perspective of women? How does such a starting point influence the process and the writing of its history? What consequences does that have for the way that historians tell the story of independence and decolonization in Ghana or how we discuss the African diaspora and its significance? How does Budu-Arthur's account add to our evolving understanding of African decolonization, nation-building, and Pan-Africanism? The answers to these questions get at the heart of what decolonization meant to women like Budu-Arthur. Through this approach, I show that women have not always been at the margins of African history-making. Put simply, women were marginalized not because they were not historical actors but largely because national historiographies were almost exclusively male centered and relied predominantly on the written record. For this reason, I turn to other kinds of modes and mechanisms for recounting history.

Bringing Budu-Arthur's life history into focus contributes fresh perspectives to the literature on women and decolonization, which focuses primarily on women's organizations or highlights other kinds of feminist activism.[3] Here is a life history of a woman who, even though she did not fit the category of "ordinary woman" due to her family and social network, exemplifies women's commitment to the cause of independence. Budu-Arthur's biography also sheds light on the spaces from which women were able to engage in the decolonization process. Moreover, her experiences as a Gold Coast resident of Sekondi-Takoradi and her firsthand experience of discrimination profoundly shaped and broadened her knowledge and understanding of freedom. Furthermore, her transnational alliances and friendships underscore the importance of expanding historical analysis of African nationalist and cultural icons beyond the framework of the nation-state.

This article uses the life and work of Budu-Arthur to tell a different and largely unknown history of Ghana's decolonization. In so doing, it builds on the work of historians who have reshaped the ways we think about African women's contributions to nationalist and postindependence movements.[4] Historian Jean Allman, for example, notes that when Ghana celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, Hannah Kudjoe, the country's most prominent woman nationalist in the struggle for independence in the 1940s and 1950s, was completely absent from the list of heroes who were "publicly honored by street naming ceremonies, the unveiling of statues, and historical reenactments."[5] In fact, not a single woman was honored. Allman asks,

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"By what processes, over the course of only half a century, did an extremely high-profile nationalist leader, a 'woman worthy,' get disappeared?" Allman's question highlights the political processes that authorize and facilitate such erasures. She argues that "by tracing disappearance and by reconstructing the agnotological fissures that lead to sanctioned forgetting . . . we can at least begin to construct different, alternative forms of feminist historical knowledge. We can begin to imagine histories in which the disappeared are not always and forever silenced."[6]

Galvanized by Allman's work and other scholarship on African women and nationalism, I use oral histories, testimonies, maps, photos, a funeral program, and paraphernalia exchanges, particularly of kente, from Budu-Arthur's personal archives to center her work in historical studies because her activities—like those of most African women—are not located in traditional archives.[7] Moreover, the article expands the evidential base of modern African women's history through visual culture analysis.[8] The sources I use allow me to move beyond a binary conception of the history of decolonization as merely the relation between the oppressor and the oppressed by interrogating how Gold Coast women viewed their conditions, made their choices, and constructed their beliefs about the wider world.[9] Budu-Arthur embodies how not to see the colonial encounter with its political and cultural institutions as a binary or as radically oppositional to African ideals and practices. Instead, and most significantly, she, like many Africans, appropriated colonial ideas for her own purposes.

To this end, this article contends that for Budu-Arthur and most Gold Coast women, decolonization was not an abstract concept but an idea inscribed in everyday lived experience. These women deployed various mundane means such as grassroots mobilization and the sharing of traditional African food and clothing to advance the cause for self-governance and Pan-Africanism in Ghana and across the African diaspora. Specifically, Budu-Arthur's articulation of decolonization and race stemmed from her experience of Sekondi-Takoradi's segregated colonial urban spaces and the city's role as an exit point for colonial raw materials and cash crops such as gold, timber, cocoa, and rubber. The colonial government also brought cheap laborers from various parts of Africa and the African diaspora to build the port and railway, and some Africans moved to Sekondi-Takoradi in search of better economic opportunities.[10] Budu-Arthur, like most other denizens of Sekondi-Takoradi, witnessed colonial racism and economic exploitation. It is therefore not surprising that the city became a hub of anticolonial agitation and Pan-African solidarity in the interwar period.

Given this political context, it is not surprising that Budu-Arthur had a more capacious understanding of decolonization—one that was not limited to Ghana but connected to political solidarity with the African diaspora and Black women activists. In that sense, kente, which embodied Ghanaian nationalism and high fashion, served as an important material connection between Budu-Arthur and Maya

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Angelou, and more broadly, between Ghanaians and African Americans in the 1950s and 1960s. As an embodiment of Ghanaian and Black diaspora pride and unity, kente became an important article of diplomatic gifting in the Africana world around the period of independence and going forward, making the textile the most popular fabric of African origin. For this reason, kente encodes an important archive of the intellectual history of Black political activism. Ultimately, my conversations with Budu-Arthur reveal previously untapped insights into an evolving understanding of the gendered dynamics of decolonization, transatlantic solidarities, and the optimism and disappointment that accompanied African independence.

Sekondi-Takoradi's Segregated Urban Landscape and the Fight for Self-Governance

At the end of the nineteenth century, British colonial planners and architects designed Sekondi-Takoradi's urban layout in ways that upheld colonial power relations and racial logics.[11] The visible segregation between European and African neighborhoods, along with spatial divisions, reinforced racial hierarchies. These divisions were bolstered by the rise of racialist social evolutionary thought, which underpinned Europe's growing global hegemony in the late 1880s. Furthermore, colonial infrastructural projects such as the harbor and railway in Sekondi-Takoradi reveal how capitalism often shaped colonial architectural designs and urban spaces to serve imperialist interests by organizing space to maximize colonial exploitation and profit. In fact, Sekondi-Takoradi was home to the Gold Coast's first railway (1898–1903) and deep-water industrial port (1928), which enabled the colonial government to effectively transport raw materials and natural resources to Europe and the Americas. While the colonial government sought to craft colonial cities like Sekondi-Takoradi to assert their domination, they struggled to effectively impose their visions of town planning on urban spaces.[12] Interracial relations and unions between Gold Coast Africans and Europeans often undermined these spatial arrangements and created serious anxieties for the colonial administration.[13]

The racist urban design of Sekondi-Takoradi informed Budu-Arthur's understanding of decolonization as a series of events centered on ending British colonial racial segregation, discrimination, and economic exploitation. The tranquil environment into which she had been born on July 8, 1922, had dissipated by the time she came of age. Sekondi-Takoradi already had a clear racial demarcation, with white areas labeled "European Residential Area," "European Hospital," and "Golf Course," and shaded areas labeled "African Township," "African Hospital," and "African Residential Area" (see fig. 1). Budu-Arthur's great-grandmother Baahema Ekua Kwaidu, a revered community leader, led the forced migration of the Amangyina Kona Ebiradzi Ebusua (family) from European Town to Essikado (British Sekondi) in the late nineteenth century.[14] Essikado was approximately seven miles away from European Town. The colonial government evicted Budu-Arthur's family

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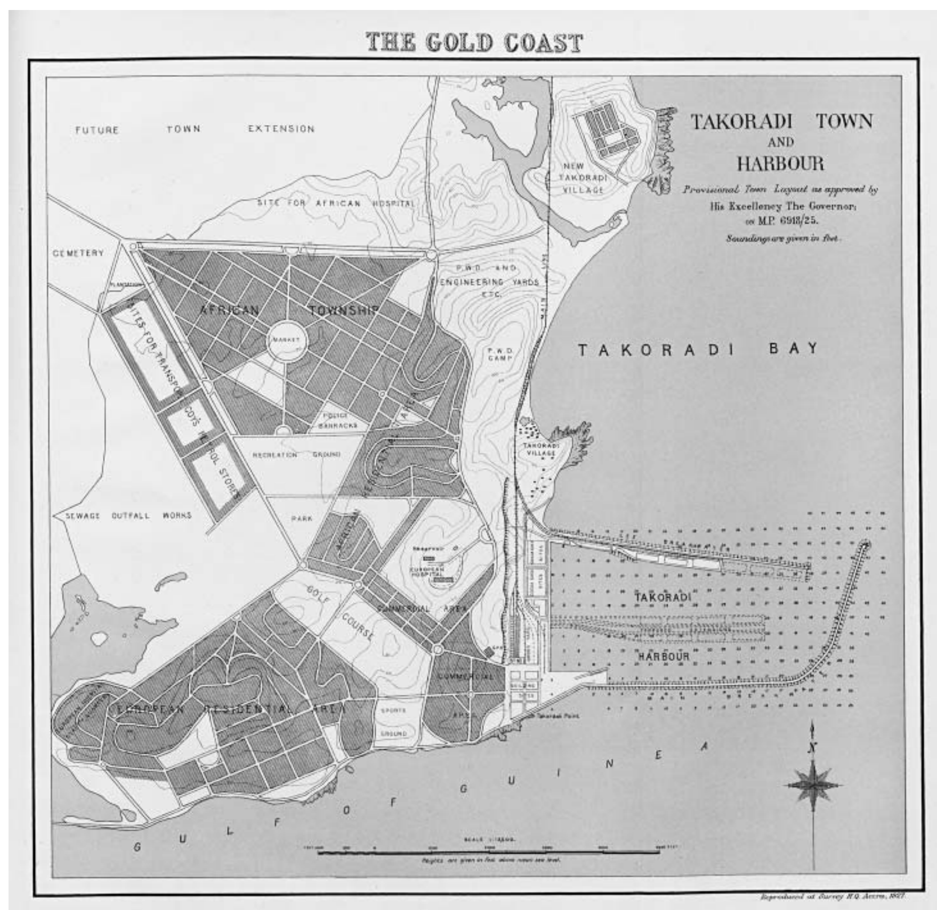

Figure 1. "The Gold Coast—Takoradi Town and Harbour" (1927). Courtesy Basel Mission Archives.

and others to make way for the construction of the harbor and railway, as well as the creation of European Town. These projects led to the forced removal of Africans without any sort of compensation and the destruction of their historic local buildings and family houses.[15] Africans were permitted to work only as servants and clerks in European Town. The police barracks located between African Township and African Residential Area served as a surveillance site and ensured that the movements of Africans were closely monitored by colonial police (see fig. 1). This was the world in which Budu-Arthur grew up. Thus, she began to think of decolonization as a way to break from colonial, political, social, and economic domination.[16]

At the same time, Budu-Arthur articulated colonial liberation not as a simplistic division between whites and Africans, but rather as the eradication of oppressive colonial political, social, and economic structures. For her, independence meant "liberating ourselves from the whites, picking up the good things we can

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learn from them, and letting go of the things which aren't good."[17] For instance, she applauded the ways in which, during colonial times, after a person swept the floors, they would collect the rubbish and place it in incinerators to keep the environment clean. She was referring to colonial social institutions that regulated social life, such as sanitation inspectors. For these reasons, she posited that decolonization did not necessarily entail a cultural break from the colonial past insofar as such practices were deemed beneficial to the development of the postcolony.

Budu-Arthur's interactions with her family and mentors further shaped her conceptualization of decolonization and political education. Her brother, Nketsia, the *Omanhene* (paramount chief) of Essikado, informed her of the ways the colonial government was economically exploiting Africans. He told her that the colonial administration constantly overworked, heavily underpaid, and rarely promoted Africans. Based on his observations as a worker at the customs office, he shared his sadness about how Africans were forced daily to package and load gold and other natural resources on British ships to help sustain European economies to the detriment of the Gold Coast. Grace Ayensu, a trader and the first woman President of the Sekondi-Takoradi Consumers' Cooperative Society, systematically educated Budu-Arthur on how the British unfairly taxed and exploited market women. On August 4, 1947, Nketsia and Ayensu helped found the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), one of the first major political parties in the Colony. That same year, the United States–educated and London-based activist Kwame Nkrumah accepted the invitation to serve as the party's General Secretary. The UGCC was mostly composed of upper-middle-class lawyers and businessmen who came from generational wealth and who insisted on a gradual approach to independence.[18] Nkrumah, Nketsia, and Ayensu, however, advocated for immediate political independence. Because they differed significantly in their views on how and when to attain independence, Nkrumah, Nketsia, and Ayensu left the UGCC to form the Convention People's Party (CPP) on June 12, 1949. The CPP promoted a more nonelitist grassroots approach to political mobilization. Budu-Arthur engaged in conversations with political activists—including Nkrumah, who became Ghana's first president, and Ayensu, who was eventually elected as one of the first women to Parliament—both of whom came to her house to discuss anticolonial ideas. These conversations expanded Budu-Arthur's knowledge of colonialism and the import of decolonization.

In addition to Budu-Arthur's proximity to anticolonial conversations, she was also deeply shaped by a strong matrilineal upbringing. Her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother were prominent market women leaders, and she joined in their discussions as they strategized on opposing unfair colonial taxes and navigating a colonial world that greatly shifted ideas of work, marriage, motherhood, and family.[19] Her mother, Mary Budu-Arthur, served as the Herring Queen of the Fishmongers Association, and she used her position to challenge discriminating colonial economic policies and that shaped Budu-Arthur's own sense of equality and justice.

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At the same time, the women in her family also taught her the family's and community's histories. Since Budu-Arthur's family were Akan, they practiced matrilineality, so descent was traced primarily through their mother's lineage. In the Gold Coast more broadly, domestic space had a profound influence on decolonization. The home provided Gold Coast nationalists with a cover from the gaze of colonial authority to discuss anticolonial and anti-imperialist ideas unreservedly. In these private spaces, women like Budu-Arthur and her matriarchs played a pivotal role in advancing anticolonial sentiments.[20] For example, many Gold Coast women political activists were traders. African market women were a major political force that played a vital role in the continent's decolonization efforts by significantly financing and spreading the message of political independence.[21] The home also functioned as an archive and "a material witness to history"; African women occupants like Budu-Arthur served as archivists and record keepers of the Akan traditional customs and decolonial histories and critical agents of political mobilization.[22]

Under the mentorship and influence of her matriarchs, Budu-Arthur posited that the most effective way to challenge British colonial power and the dominant elite groups fighting for sovereignty was through mass mobilization. In the early 1940s, Budu-Arthur helped establish the Essikado Youth Association (EYA), an organization committed to community health and political activism. The EYA financially supported the Fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945.[23] Unlike previous Pan-African Congresses, most participants of this gathering were trade unionists, farmers, businessmen, and revolutionaries.[24] These attendants stressed the importance of the working masses' involvement in political movements.[25] Additionally, they demanded immediate colonial independence and argued that they must wage the struggle for total emancipation in Africa.[26] The EYA also financially contributed to the formation of the Gold Coast Trades Union.[27] Through the EYA, Budu-Arthur traveled around Sekondi-Takoradi determinedly spreading the gospel of self-governance that she had received from *Nananom* (the elders). She informed people that immediate independence was critical to address their pressing economic, social, and political conundrums and to build a better and more prosperous future for themselves and their families. Additionally, she helped distribute the CPP's political pamphlets and flyers, organized political rallies, and collected donations to support their political goals throughout various rural areas.[28] Furthermore, she worked closely with her mother, Ayensu, and Adwoa Aba (also known as Ama Nkrumah), a local trader and prominent CPP political leader, to organize the market women. Through their interactions, they successfully educated these women about the ills of colonialism and shared the CPP's political objectives.[29]

However, Budu-Arthur's family paid dearly for their involvement in anticolonial agitations. In 1950, Nkrumah organized Positive Action Campaigns (PACs), a series of political protests and boycotts designed to undermine the colonial

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enterprise. Nkrumah drew a massive support base from Sekondi-Takoradi, drawing on the city's railway workers and other working-class residents' decades-old history of anticolonial strikes. Budu-Arthur and her family members were instrumental in implementing the PACs. In response, the colonial government assaulted her and her family members, ransacked and vandalized their home, and took their personal property. Ama Soma, a native of Sekondi and a grassroots activist, recalled that about thirty policemen ferociously beat an unarmed crowd in and outside of Nketsia's palace and smashed its glass windows.[30] Although Nketsia was not at home at the time, the police arrested the paramount chief upon his arrival and beat him into a coma.[31] The colonial court gave Nketsia a three-year prison sentence and fined him two hundred pounds.[32] Recalling that moment, Budu-Arthur painfully stated that "a lot transpired. One of my great-grandparents died out of grief. We were all sad. We held a demonstration."[33] The massive demonstrations throughout the colony forced the British to organize an election and to release the political prisoners. The CPP won a landslide victory in the 1951 General Election, with Nkrumah elected as the Gold Coast's first prime minister. Nkrumah later wrote that there were "cheers in honour of the released men; for with me had also been freed . . . Nana Kobina Nketsia."[34] For Budu-Arthur, the price of political decolonization was also personal. As her family members reported to me, "This dark period of colonial resistance left an indelible mark on Auntie Anna's unwavering belief in justice and freedom."[35]

The racist urban design of Sekondi-Takoradi and colonial policies imbued in Budu-Arthur a clear understanding of the colonial government's construction of race, one that advanced the idea of white superiority and African inferiority. In other words, the colonial government made it explicitly clear that to be African was to be inferior to Europeans. Thus, Gold Coast Africans' rejection of colonialism was also an explicit opposition to white supremacy and its attempt to racialize Africans as the "Other." "African" in the Gold Coast and British West Africa was synonymous with a shared global Blackness which Black people constructed in response to European racism, enslavement and the slave trade, and their legacies around and across the Atlantic. Africans embraced African identity in ways that overlapped with their primary or more dominant local ethnic and national identities. While the racial category of *African* was synonymous with a form of local Blackness, it was very distinct from North American or Latin American Blackness. In the United States, racial identities were far more fundamental, functioning differently from those of colonial Africa where Europeans remained a tiny minority, even in settler colonies like South Africa or Rhodesia. In these different racialized colonial and postcolonial contexts, the meanings and practices of race evolved according to specific political, social, and economic processes and logics. Some recent works have argued that Ghanaians were oblivious to race and colonialism-imposed racial hierarchies.[36] Such discourses overlook the scholarly contributions of African

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intellectuals, such as J. E. Casely Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation* (1911). They also neglect the consistent discussions of race and racism in the Gold Coast press from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s.[37] In fact, in 1926, Hayford, a resident of Sekondi, wrote a letter to W. E. B. Du Bois, the foremost African American man of letters, "concerning the future of the African race."[38] Because of the racial and political realities of Sekondi-Takoradi, its members, including Hayford and Budu-Arthur, generated and articulated their understanding of race based on their lived experiences. Yet scholars of the African diaspora largely disregard the intellectual contributions of African thinkers to the global discourse of race, Blackness, and empire. In fact, living in a port town, in particular, heightened Budu-Arthur's awareness of global Black culture and the international circulation of Black cultural forms in the transatlantic. For Budu-Arthur, one could not divorce the importance of the place of Africa from the discussion of race, Blackness, and empire.

Champion of African Culture: The Oxford Years, 1955–1957

In line with her matriarchal figures, Budu-Arthur also turned to the domestic space to promote decolonization. She saw Ghanaian cuisine and clothing as effective vehicles to reinforce African pride and identity and to facilitate and foster cross-cultural exchanges between whites and Blacks and within the diverse Black community. Focusing on Budu-Arthur's role in the project of decolonization allows us to acknowledge her labor as critical to the struggle for liberation. In 1955, Budu-Arthur boarded a ship from Sekondi to Britain. Her final destination was the University of Oxford, where her brother Nketsia was completing his BA and getting ready to start his doctorate in social anthropology. He had begun his undergraduate studies at Oxford in 1952, a year after his release from prison. Their father's death created an economic vacuum, which made it financially difficult for the younger Budu-Arthur to finish her secondary-school education.

Nonetheless, their mother convinced Nketsia to send for his sister so that she could acquire technical skills that would enhance her job prospects. At the time of her arrival, there were about four other Gold Coast women whose husbands were graduate students at Oxford, and most of them studied midwifery in the city. Budu-Arthur, however, opted to become a seamstress (see fig. 2). Dressmaking was a product of colonial and missionary education, intended to socialize women to become good wives and to sartorially express Christian modesty.[39] However, most colonial-educated young ladies weaponized dressmaking for the project of political, intellectual, and cultural decolonization. Dressmaking allowed them to repurpose African fabrics to accommodate their cosmopolitan fashion tastes and sensibilities.[40] Dressmakers of Budu-Arthur's generation used kente to embody Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist ideas, African pride, and African expressive cultures.[41] As I will later elaborate in the section on kente, Budu-Arthur was critical to this process. While in

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Figure 2. Anna Budu-Arthur with her first sewing machine, ca. 1957. Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of Anna Budu-Arthur and family.

Oxford, she helped cook, clean, and sew clothes for the city's African and non-African residents. Her services allowed most African male students to focus on their education, and many of these students secured important private and government positions, upon returning to their home countries. Nketsia, for example, became a government minister and the first African vice-chancellor of the University of Ghana. Budu-Arthur's supportive and diverse roles remind us of the overlooked and underappreciated labor Black women undertook to help advance global Black liberation.

For Budu-Arthur, clothing and cuisine performed two important functions: as visual expressions of self-determination and nationhood and as part of cultural diplomacy and dialogue. She cooked Ghanaian foods for white British scholars, students, and their families. She recalled that Nketsia's white friends asked her "to cook for them and . . . [they] ate everything. I was thinking the whites didn't like our foods; they were the ones that ate most of the food."[42] She believed that cultural exchanges would undermine racist representations of Africa and its peoples.

Budu-Arthur also played a vital role in the intellectual decolonization of the study of Africa by contesting racist ideas about Africa and its people. This was a period where most European scholars still believed that African history did not exist, and that the continent and its peoples were not worthy of academic attention. In 1963, less than ten years after Budu-Arthur left Oxford for London, Hugh Trevor-Roper

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publicly dismissed the importance of African history. In his speech, which was published two years later, the Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford asserted that "undergraduates . . . demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. Perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness . . . and darkness is not the subject of history."[43] Such statements were not uncommon at Oxford at the time of Budu-Arthur's sojourn there. During their dinner gatherings, Budu-Arthur, her brother, her sister-in-law Drusilla Budu-Arthur, and their guests discussed African culture and history from a nonracist perspective. While Nketsia was part of the Ghanaian government committee which included two other Oxford-educated male scholars who recommended to President Nkrumah in 1960, a year after Nketsia had returned from Oxford, to establish an institute of African Studies (IAS) in Ghana, it is worth noting that Budu-Arthur and Drusilla had actively engaged in "the dialogues that led to the establishment of African Studies at the University of Ghana."[44] As Allman rightly notes, "Ghana's Institute of African Studies . . . w[as] not only integral to the consolidation, articulation, and archiving of an 'African Revolution,' but to the transformation of African Studies, of how, where, why, and by whom knowledge about Africa was produced."[45] Yet, the government and the University of Ghana records only credit Nketsia, Kojo Botsio, the Minister of Agriculture, and Thomas Hodgkin, a British, Oxford-trained scholar.[46] Thus, when we use nontraditional archives and oral interviews to analyze Ghana's history of decolonization and postcolonial history from the perspective of women, we realize that Ghanaian women like Budu-Arthur and Drusilla were foundational to Nkrumah's intellectual decolonization projects.

At the same time, Budu-Arthur's encounters in Oxford reveal the diverse range of experiences that racialized minorities encountered. She had fond memories of her time in Oxford and interactions with British students, scholars, and residents. While Budu-Arthur felt accepted by the larger white community, she was not blind to the fact that some African women had extremely negative encounters with their British neighbors. The horrific experiences of her friends underscored the importance of working to end racial discrimination both in the colonies and in the metropole. Budu-Arthur opined that improving race relations between whites and Blacks would be foundational in fulfilling the objectives of decolonization.

Despite Budu-Arthur's beliefs that cross-cultural exchanges could lead to better race relations, her ideals may have overlooked how the structural and systemic racist policies that upheld white hegemony also perpetuated anti-Blackness. Throughout Britain, African peoples faced disproportionate discrimination with regard to housing, employment, and access to public resources.[47] For example, most property owners refused to rent to Britain's Black residents and visibly placed signs such as "No Coloureds" in their windows.[48] A 1952 survey revealed that 60 percent of landladies rejected applications from nonwhite tenants.[49] Moreover,

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even though the British Nationality Act of 1948 granted Commonwealth migrants complete British citizenship—the right to migrate, settle, and work in the metropole—they were constantly policed by the state. These racist and xenophobic immigration policies surveilled, restricted, and disenfranchised Britain's Black Commonwealth migrants.[50] By 1961, the British government passed laws limiting the influx of Black migrants.[51] The ubiquitous ways in which racist British policies transcended the borders of the metropole and the colonies entrenched among colonized peoples in Britain the idea that decolonization was a concurrently local and global project aimed at ending British colonialism, imperialism, and anti-Blackness.

Forging Transatlantic Bonds: Anna Budu-Arthur and Maya Angelou

Traveling allowed Budu-Arthur to diagnose decolonization as an international phenomenon. The individual and separate journeys of Budu-Arthur and Maya Angelou eventually brought them together beneath the wider umbrella of decolonization. In the late 1960s, Angelou briefly visited London. While there, she stayed with Budu-Arthur at the recommendation of Nketsia, with whom Angelou had developed a close friendship with during her stay in Ghana from 1962 to 1965. Angelou was part of a group of about two hundred exiled African Americans who relocated to Ghana to help with its nation-building and Pan-African liberatory aspirations.[52] At the time that Angelou came to London, Budu-Arthur was working as a clerk in the education section in the Ghanaian High Commission in addition to being a self-employed seamstress. It was at Budu-Arthur's home where Angelou began working on her first autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which, according to Angelou, Nketsia had "insisted that I must" write.[53] Budu-Arthur's home served as a critical node for African intellectuals, diplomats, political activists, and anti-apartheid freedom fighters to discuss and debate issues around Africa's ongoing struggle for independence.[54] Budu-Arthur introduced Angelou to many people in her network, including Leslie Griffiths, a member of the British Labour Party and the House of Lords. Griffiths writes in his autobiography, *A View from the Edge*, "It was Anna, while still living in London, who'd introduced Margaret and me to Maya Angelou and enabled a friendship to flourish between us. We saw each other whenever she was in London and we still send each other samples of our latest writing."[55] Budu-Arthur recalled that Angelou frequently visited London with her friends, including Julian Mayfield, and that was how she came to know many of them.[56] Angelou's stay in London marked the inauguration of a lifetime friendship and sisterhood between the two women.

Navigating the racist, sexist, classist, and patriarchal world as non–college educated Black women, Angelou and Budu-Arthur found emotional support in each other and others in their circles. In the acknowledgments of her 1986 autobiography, which narrates both her joyous and painful experiences in Ghana, Angelou gave "thanks to Anna Budu-Arthur for being a constant sister."[57] Budu-Arthur spent

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Figure 3. Picture from one of Budu-Arthur's visits with Angelou and her family. The kente stole Angelou (left) holds in her lap and the African tapestry Budu-Arthur (right) displays were gifts from Budu-Arthur to Angelou. Photograph reproduced with the kind permission of Anna Budu-Arthur and family.

every Thanksgiving with Angelou's family and friends in the United States.[58] During one of those visits in the 1970s, Budu-Arthur gave Angelou a tapestry depicting an African woman simultaneously carrying a baby and a large load of objects (see fig. 3). The art piece conveyed the significant and often unseen and unacknowledged labor of Black women. In November 2001, Angelou gifted Budu-Arthur a plaque with the inscription "Sister Anna, Beloved, Joy. Since we met all those years ago, your friendship has been a precious thread—refining, enriching, and strengthening the fabric of my life."[59] Budu-Arthur opened her home to Angelou, listened actively, cared patiently, and cooked for her as she navigated moments of joy and hardship. For Angelou, Budu-Arthur was a vital cornerstone, an irreplaceable confidant, and a sister who played a critical role in her life.

Budu-Arthur's visits to the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, coupled with her experiences in colonial Sekondi and Britain, reminded her of the intimate relationship between racism and decolonization. On one of her visits to North Carolina, where Angelou had relocated in 1981 to become the Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University, Budu-Arthur, Angelou, and an African American male friend entered a restaurant to have a meal before Budu-Arthur's return flight to London. Budu-Arthur vividly recounted, "We sat down at the restaurant to eat something. Ten minutes didn't pass; all the whites in the restaurant went out."[60] In response to her visible shock, the male friend told her, "Anna, experience is the best teacher, its school fees are huge," reminding her of the ongoing racism in the United States.[61] Despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,

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the US South remained hostile to African Americans and retained its racist and discriminatory practices. The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 intensified existing racial frictions across the country. In North Carolina, tensions surrounding school desegregation escalated into racial violence, most notably when the city of Wilmington closed Williston Industrial High School, a prominent and well-respected Black institution, and laid off its Black teachers, principals, and coaches as part of the 1968 US Supreme Court's decision to expedite school desegregation. Amid the racial unrest that ensued, ten young African Americans were wrongfully convicted of arson and sentenced to 282 years in prison in 1971.[62] The restaurant incident was one of many encounters that Budu-Arthur had with the ugliness of American racism in the 1970s and 1980s. Nonetheless, she noted that she had had similar experiences in Germany and Italy. Travel enabled Budu-Arthur to view decolonization as a global project to end racism in the United States, Africa, and Europe.

Amid these political tensions and unrest, Budu-Arthur also found comfort in Angelou and her circle of sister-friends. The term sister-friend originates from the African American community in the United States. Within this context, the term *sister* is racialized, signifying a degree of affinity—"she's one of us." Adding *friend* deepens this bond, suggesting not only racial solidarity but also a connection akin to familial ties. This nuanced relationship embodies a particular form of solidarity among Black women, aligning with themes explored in Black feminist literature, especially within the framework of US Black feminism.[63] Photos from Budu-Arthur's personal archives and conversations with her reveal the ways in which Angelou brought her into her larger network of Black women, including Oprah Winfrey and Dolly McPherson, the first full-time African American female faculty member at Wake Forest University (see fig. 4). Budu-Arthur and McPherson also developed a close friendship. Budu-Arthur spent more time in Winston-Salem, finding solace and enrichment in her circle of sister-friends. While their friendships sustained them, it was their individual commitments to decolonization that had initially brought them together.

Kente: A Transatlantic Cultural Broker

For many Ghanaians and African Americans, African clothing, particularly kente, was critical for identity making and asserting Africanness or Blackness.[64] Ghanaian women, most notably Ghana's first professional fashion designer, Juliana "Chez Julie" Kweifio-Okai, who had trained in Paris, was one of the first to radically reimagine how to repurpose kente to suit cosmopolitan fashion tastes.[65] Coastal tailors such as Chez Julie and Budu-Arthur turned to a textile long associated with Asante royalty and repurposed it for their nationalist and Pan-African agendas. These women were influenced by Nkrumah's call for Ghanaians to embrace the African personality. African cultural pride and nationalism was to be expressed sartorially, and kente

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Figure 4. Photo of Budu-Arthur taken in the 1980s or 1990s with friends in Winston-Salem, North Carolina including Dolly McPherson (second from left; Budu-Arthur is immediately to the right of McPherson).

became one of the means of expressing these ideals. During and after the struggle for Ghana's independence, Nkrumah wore various clothing from different ethnic groups to foster unity and to construct and promote Ghanaian "identity." In fact, on the eve of Gold Coast independence, Nkrumah and his cabinet minister all wore *fugu*, an attire originating from the Northern Territories of the colony. During the independence celebration, Nkrumah wore kente with patterns from Asante, but he wore with a shirt the manner in which southern coastal Ghanaians wore theirs (see fig. 5). At the height of the US Civil Rights and Black Power movements, Black activists wore African clothing, including kente, to reject Eurocentric norms and Euro-American claims of Black inferiority and to project Black power and royalty.[66]

Kente symbolized the transatlantic bond between Angelou and Budu-Arthur. The gifts of kente stoles seen in photos (see fig. 3) visually depict the long relationship that African Americans have had with Ghana, and how kente and particularly stoles made of that textile became a critical component of African American identity. In Britain, Budu-Arthur used kente to promote African cultures among peoples of African descent. In the United States, Angelou's book *Kofi and His Magic* popularized kente among African American children.[67] The two women's love and use of kente across their different creative and political projects shows how this

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Figure 5. Portrait of Gold Coast graduate students and their families celebrating Ghana's Independence Day. Budu-Arthur sits in the front row at the far right. Several of Budu-Arthur's relatives also appear in the photo, including her younger sister (front row, second from left), who studied midwifery.

Ghanaian fabric served as an expressive symbol of African American pride in their cultural heritage. Kente not only served as a cultural unifier between Ghanaians and African Americans but also embodied sartorial expressions of their self-determination in an era of decolonization.

In particular, Budu-Arthur viewed kente as an aesthetic tool of decolonization to reconstruct the image of Africa in the western imaginary. For centuries, many European explorers, colonialists, and intellectuals portrayed Africa as a primitive, backwards, "dark continent" devoid of history and culture. Two years after she arrived in Oxford, the Gold Coast gained independence on March 6, 1957. She recalled that many Black people and other colonized peoples treated Ghanaians with great respect because of what Nkrumah stood for—African liberation. They marked the historical occasion by wearing their kente, taking pictures to archive the moment (see fig. 5). Since Ghanaians mostly wore tailored kente cloths on special occasions such as weddings and funerals, their decision to wear the cloths on Ghana's Independence Day demonstrated nationalist self-determination and pride.

Interestingly, kente functioned as a vehicle through which people could communicate political messages, a tangible expression of the African personality first

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Figure 6. Nana Kobina Nketsia (standing), chairman of the University Council at the University of Ghana, confers an honorary degree on W. E. B. Du Bois. Courtesy Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

articulated by West Indian Pan-Africanist Edward Blyden, and popularized in the 1950s and 1960s during the struggle for independence. During this era of self-determination, kente became an important cultural broker between Africans and African Americans. During Ghana's independence celebration, Nkrumah wore the *Obi nkye obi kwan mu si* kente as he danced with Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent. This particular kente denoted forgiveness and tolerance of the "one who strays into your path," and as historian Abena Osseo-Asare writes, wearing it was "an artful jab at a former colonial oppressor."[68] On February 23, 1963, Nketsia, in his capacity as chairman of the University Council at the University of Ghana, conferred an honorary degree on W. E. B. Du Bois (see fig. 6). Du Bois's use of the kente stole that Nketsia gave him at the 1963 event would popularize its usage in African American graduation ceremonies in subsequent years. As a seamstress, Budu-Arthur used different kente patterns to communicate the hopes and aspirations of African peoples. The use of kente by Nketsia, Du Bois, Chez Julie, Angelou, and Budu-Arthur illustrate the crucial political role of the textile. More importantly, it shows how these two Ghanaian siblings—a traditional chief (Nketsia) and a dressmaker (Budu-Arthur)—were both instrumental in the popularization of kente among African Americans and in advancing Ghana's cultural decolonization.

Optimism and Pessimism: Black Women and the Decolonization Endeavor

Although Ghana's decolonization project was rooted in liberatory politics, Kwame Nkrumah grew increasingly authoritarian in the 1960s. By 1964, Nkrumah had declared Ghana a one-party state, and his iron-fisted rule caused many African American Pan-Africanists to leave; those who stayed had to constantly prove their loyalty to the president, and the Nkrumah regime increasingly surveilled African Americans.[69] Uncomfortable with Nkrumah's increasing authoritarianism and alarming censorship, Angelou wrote that "Ghana was beginning to tug at me and

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make me uncomfortable, like an ill-fitting coat."[70] These political conditions almost certainly frustrated Angelou, who left Ghana in 1965. Nkrumah's authoritarian turn and Angelou's subsequent departure reveal how the aspirations and ideals that accompanied decolonization became increasingly difficult to actualize.

Observing from Britain, Budu-Arthur opined that Ghana's decolonization, while committed to Black liberation, also included a dimension of violence imposed on some of the most marginalized citizens—the very individuals who independence claimed to liberate. When the news of Nkrumah's overthrow on February 24, 1966, reached London, Budu-Arthur recalled, "We all rejoiced upon hearing the news because coming to the end of Dr. Nkrumah's reign, things were not going well. . . . He did well. He did some, but he didn't do it all."[71] For Budu-Arthur, Nkrumah had betrayed the message of liberation that inspired her to join the cause to dismantle the bondage of colonialism and white supremacy. Two years before the coup, Nkrumah had removed her brother from his academic position when he refused to dismiss professors whom the president believed were "engaged in subversive activities prejudicial to the security of the state and would therefore have to be deported."[72] Budu-Arthur's reactions deepen our understanding of the complexities of nation-building and the consolidation of the nation-state following independence. In Ghana, as in several other African nations, this was marked by the shift to authoritarianism through the imposition of one-party politics, censorship, and the marginalization of dissenting voices.

Scholars of Africa have long debated and grappled with the ways in which decolonization has shaped the continent's political, economic, and social structures. The literature on African decolonization tends to privilege Ghana in its analysis because of its status as a pioneer independent African state and the center of African liberation. Kwame Nkrumah's 1943 essay "Education and Nationalism in Africa" is one of the earliest discourses on Africa's decolonization. Nkrumah writes:

> Human history has been dominated by two things: the quest for bread and the quest for human rights. Today we hear the deep strong voice of Africa in this quest for human rights. And for the first time in American history, Africa is no longer the land of mystery. Africa is likened to the golden sun that, having sunk beneath the western horizon, still plays her part in the world which she helped enlighten. This has been brought about by a global war which has eliminated the distance between all continents and made the people of all countries' neighbors.[73]

Nkrumah's critical role in Africa's decolonization is undebatable. However, male African nationalists in general have consciously and unconsciously created a postcolonial archive of decolonization as a male-led endeavor. Consequently, the scholarship on Africa's road to emancipation has predominantly focused on male leaders such as Nkrumah, Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, Léopold Senghor of Senegal,

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Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya. This does not suggest that women were absent from the extensive list of activists and theorists of decolonization. Instead, it highlights how men dominated the political scene and were captivated by the pursuit of self-governance and how official histories tend to focus on male actors.

Budu-Arthur's story raises an important question: How do we assess the history of Ghana's decolonization when both colonial and postindependence archives predominantly privilege the voices and narratives of Ghanaian men? The foundational work of scholars of African women's nationalism provides a compelling starting point. These scholars have centered the work and contributions of African women in the struggle for independence as well as stressed the significance of using nontraditional archives such as songs, oral interviews, and personal archives, coupled with fragmented documents found in government and institutional archives, to challenge the political processes that facilitate and authorize the erasure of women from academic and dominant public discourses on African decolonization. By examining how Budu-Arthur employed African cuisines and sartorial choices to promote independence, self-determination, African pride, and Pan-Africanism, we can challenge the dominant narrative of Africa's decolonization as a male-imagined, -driven, and -executed project. While the Ghanaian government did not acknowledge and honor women during the country's fiftieth anniversary festivities, ordinary Ghanaians did. The Ghanaian community, and by extension the larger Black community, honored Budu-Arthur in London with the "Mother Africa Matriarch Extraordinaire Award" for inspiring so many through "her unwavering dedication to family, community, and social justice."[74] Such recognition reveals the ways that everyday Ghanaians also organized celebrations that countered the state's hegemonic narrative about the country's history for independence.

Moreover, Budu-Arthur's account demonstrates how Africans theorized decolonization based on the colonial and imperial structures that shaped and governed their daily existence. Her lived experiences in Ghana, the United Kingdom, and the United States informed her various and changing conception of decolonization. For example, as a British colonial subject living in a segregated city in the Gold Coast, Budu-Arthur viewed decolonization as the demise of British colonial racial segregation, discrimination, and economic exploitation and a vehicle to promote self-governance and Black solidarity. For Budu-Arthur, decolonization was not simply an end of empire or imperialism. Rather, it was about building a more equitable world and fighting against any form of oppression, including critiquing Nkrumah's authoritarianism. Commenting on Africa's current and ongoing difficulties, she asserted that decolonization has yet to fulfill its ultimate objective—a truly free and equitable society. She lamented that "bribery and corruption . . . have become part of us. That's very bad. Can you not see that too?" Her statement demonstrates that she does not simply view Africa's struggle for self-determination as a binary between Africans and the West but as one that accounts for African agency,

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exemplified by the very question she posed: "Can you not see that too?" Nonetheless, she ventured that "the next generation might be better than ours. Perhaps due to lack of education on these things that's why we face this. I'm positive the next generation would turn out to be better, for everyone can read and write to help them know what is good and the vice."[75] For Budu-Arthur, political education is fundamental to achieving the objectives of decolonization. Thus, she insisted that Ghanaians educate themselves about how the West has created structures that facilitate and authorize the exploitation of ordinary Africans, which corrupt and unempathetic African leaders perpetuate. Moreover, she opined that if Ghanaians used their work and the different spaces they find themselves in to advance the cause of African liberation, the continent will remain true to its quest for self-determination.

Bright Gyamfi is a historian who writes on African intellectuals who worked to transform and radicalize the study of Africa in academic and intellectual centers around the Atlantic. His work has appeared in the *Journal of African American History*, *African Studies Review*, Africa is a Country, and The Conversation. His research has been supported by several organizations, including the NEH, the SSRC, the Fulbright-IIE, Northwestern University, the University of California, and the University of Notre Dame.

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1. Sekondi-Takoradi comprises the twin cities Sekondi and Takoradi.
2. Barber, *Africa's Hidden Histories*; Allman, "The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe," 30.
3. Makana, "Women in Nationalist Movements in Africa."
4. Allman, "The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe," 13–35; Sackeyfio-Lenoch, "Women's International Alliances in an Emergent Ghana," 27–56; Opong, "Rewriting Women into Ghanaian History 1950–1966"; Bouka, "Women, Colonial Resistance, and Decolonization," 1295–1313.
5. Allman, "The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe," 13.
6. Allman, "The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe," 31.
7. Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses*; Byfield, *A Great Upheaval*.
8. Hayes and Minkley, *Ambivalent*.
9. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.
10. Janzen, "Tensions on the Railway," 388–405.
11. Social and physical spaces are not neutral or passive units but are actively shaped and influenced by human practices, ideologies, and power structures. See Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.
12. Plageman, "Colonial Ambition," 317–52.
13. Ray, *Crossing the Color Line*.
14. Budu-Arthur, "Funeral Programme," 3.
15. Plageman, "Recomposing the Colonial City," 1017.

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16. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 5, 2021.
17. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 5, 2021.
18. Bourret, *Ghana*, 167.
19. Osborn, *Our New Husbands Are Here*.
20. Allman, Geiger, and Musisi, *Women in African Colonial Histories*.
21. Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses*; Ama Soma, interview by author, Sekondi, April 15, 2022.
22. Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive*, 7.
23. Budu-Arthur, "Funeral Programme," 5.
24. Most of the participants in the previous Pan-African Congresses had been lawyers and doctors.
25. Adi, *Pan-Africanism*, 126.
26. Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism*, 171–72.
27. Budu-Arthur, "Funeral Programme," 5.
28. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 5, 2021.
29. Grace Thompson, interview by author, Sekondi, April 16, 2022.
30. Ama Soma, interview by author, Sekondi, April 15, 2022.
31. Ashon, "Nana Kobina Nketsia IV," 6; Agyekum, *The Gold Coast*, 33; Nana Kobina Nketsia V, interview by author, Sekondi, October 5, 2021.
32. Swanzy, "Quarterly Notes," 188.
33. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 5, 2021.
34. Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom*, 22.
35. Budu-Arthur, "Funeral Programme," 5.
36. Pierre, *The Predicament of Blackness*.
37. See Benjamin Talton's critique of Pierre's work, "Race Politics in Ghana."
38. Hayford, "Letter from J. E. Casely Hayford to W. E. B. Du Bois."
39. Hansen, *African Encounters with Domesticity*.
40. Hesse, "'A Modest, but Peculiar Style,'" 269–91; Allman, *Fashioning Africa*.
41. Richards, "'The Models for Africa,'" 8–21.
42. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 5, 2021.
43. Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe*, 9.
44. Budu-Arthur, "Funeral Programme," 5; Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 5, 2021.
45. Allman, "Kwame Nkrumah," 202; Gyamfi, "From Nkrumah's Black Star to the African Diaspora," 682–705.
46. *Report of a Discussion of the Interim Committee for African Studies November 10, 1959*, 1.
47. Unlike in the United States, there was no legal segregation in Metropolitan Britain. African American anthropologist, actress, and civil rights activist Eslanda Goode Robeson noted, "Here in London they could, as respectable human beings, dine at any public place." However, private entities did practice segregation and forbade Blacks. Draper, "Did London Have Segregation?; Martin Duberman, *Paul Robeson*, 88.
48. Tuck, *The Night Malcolm X Spoke at the Oxford Union*, 81.
49. Tuck, *The Night Malcolm X Spoke at the Oxford Union*, 83.
50. Perry, *London Is the Place for Me*, 5–7.
51. Perry, *London Is the Place for Me*, 7.
52. Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*; Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*.
53. Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*; Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 6, 2021.

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54. Budu-Arthur, "Funeral Programme," 5.
55. Griffiths, *A View from the Edge*, 166.
56. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 6, 2021.
57. Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*.
58. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 5, 2021.
59. Angelou to Budu-Arthur, November 2001, Anna Budu-Arthur personal collections, Sekondi.
60. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 6, 2021.
61. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 6, 2021.
62. Janken, *The Wilmington Ten*.
63. Bryant, "Sister Friends," 110–20.
64. Doran, *Wrapped in Pride*; Boateng, *The Copyright Thing Doesn't Work Here*.
65. Richards, "The Models for Africa."
66. Boateng, *The Copyright Thing Doesn't Work Here*, 125; Tate, "When Glamour Was African," 73–90.
67. Ross, *Wrapped in Pride*, 170–71.
68. Osseo-Asare, "Kwame Nkrumah's Suits," 598.
69. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana*; Amoh, "The Dilemma of Diasporic Africans," 545.
70. Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, 147.
71. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 6, 2021.
72. O'Brien, "Autonomy and Academic Freedom in Britain and Africa," 91; O'Brien, *Memoir*, 290.
73. Nkrumah, "Education and Nationalism in Africa," 32.
74. Budu-Arthur, "Funeral Programme," 6.
75. Budu-Arthur, interview by author, Sekondi, October 6, 2021.

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