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# Introduction

## *Villages and States in Twentieth-Century Ghana*

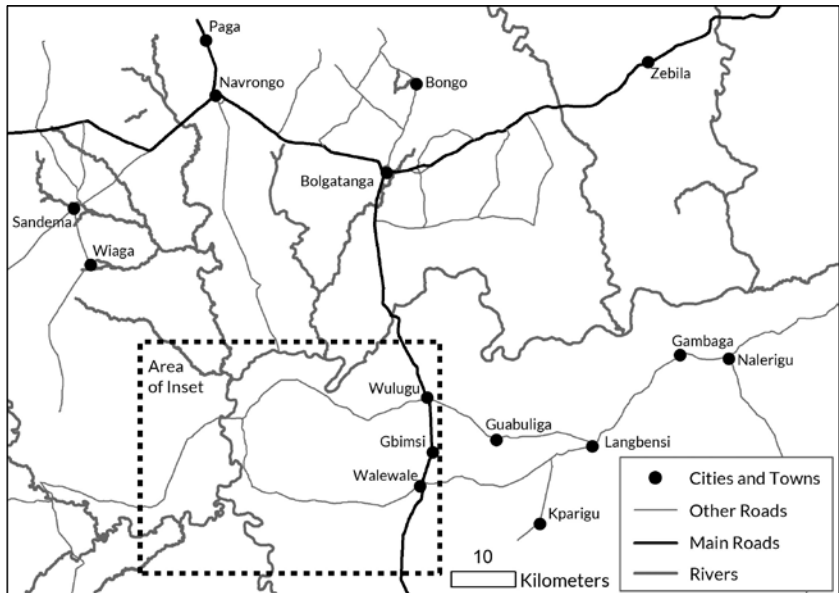
IN THE early twenty-first century, when residents or visitors rode market trucks, motorbikes, or 4x4s on the bumpy forty-five-minute ride from the district capital of Walewale to the small settlement of Kpasenkpe, they were surrounded by evidence of village development projects. Entering Kpasenkpe, they would pass the Kpasenkpe Health Center, built in the 1970s and more recently restocked and staffed by the Ghanaian government and Columbia University's Millennium Villages Project that ran from 2012 to 2016. Continuing into town, they would pass boreholes and hand-dug wells constructed with funds from Oxfam and the international Christian nongovernmental organization World Vision in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. At the market site in the center of town, they would see a baobab tree surrounded by market stalls that were first built in the 1950s as part of the first wave of community development initiatives in the region. Past two churches and a mosque, they might take a path that leads to the primary and middle schools, which were first established by the colonial and nationalist governments of the 1940s and 1960s, then revamped with school gardens in the 1970s, and rebuilt by World Vision as part of a community development project in the 1980s. Following the main road out of town, they would reach the White Volta River, spanned, since 2007, by a bridge funded by the French and British governments and built on contract by a Chinese engineering firm. Glancing to their right from the new bridge, they might notice the pillars of a bridge that was half-built in the

1950s and 1960s, called locally “Nkrumah’s bridge,” and be reminded that new ideas are rarely, well, new. Regardless of the decade, the government in power, and the source of funding, almost all these structures were built, without pay, by Kpasenkpe residents themselves. The road itself holds the longest such history, having been cut initially in the 1920s by Kpasenkpe residents who did the back-breaking work of clearing trees under a colonial regime of forced labor.

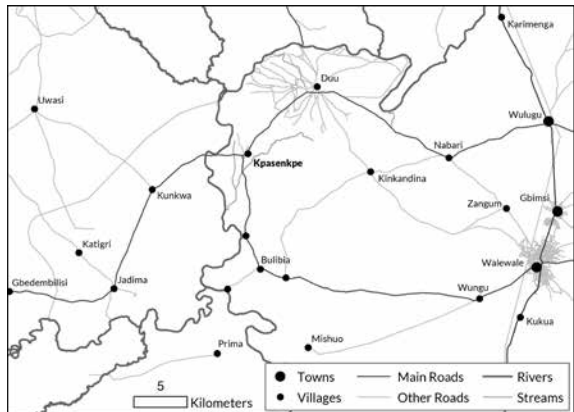
For residents and others who know the place, Kpasenkpe’s public infrastructure tells a story of governments come and gone, of personal and professional relationships, and of both the hard work and contestations inherent in pairing outside funding with demands for local self-help. Elders’ brutal stories of colonial forced labor still hang over current residents, as do fond memories of working with neighbors on a shared project, and the bitter disappointments about hoped-for transformations that never came. For visitors from state or nongovernmental agencies that sponsor such projects, however, the emphasis can be quite different. Regardless of how familiar these visitors might be with Kpasenkpe or how well they might know the details of its history, when contemplating the area’s future there is little room for these memories. Like generations of developers before



MAP 1.1.1. Ghana.  
Map by Nicholas Cuba.



MAP 1.2. Kpasenkpe and surroundings. Map by Nicholas Cuba.



them, they come to classify Kpasenkpe as just a northern village, like many others, where another new project has the potential to take shape.

In many ways, Kpasenkpe is indeed like other northern Ghanaian settlements. Here, as in other villages in hinterland regions of the global South, the stuttering, project-based system of village development is a large part of what “the state” looks like.<sup>1</sup> With an economy built on small-scale agriculture and a history of relatively stable local politics, states have rarely spent time or money on instruments of violence, redistribution, or export production here. Instead, despite the end of colonial rule and dramatic swings in postcolonial political and economic life, many of the central mechanisms and foci of statecraft remained the same. Through colonial, civilian, and

military rule, and under nominally capitalist and nominally socialist regimes, Kpasenkpe residents saw wave after wave of governments ask for their labor as a means or an end for something they called “development.”

In other ways, Kpasenkpe stands out from its surroundings because of the concentration and longevity of development work. It arguably qualifies as what Ben Jones has called a “project village,” a place where “development agencies ha[ve] focused their efforts.”<sup>2</sup> Repeatedly over the decades, agents of thinly staffed and poorly funded government and nongovernmental agencies fanned out from regional and district capitals to identify a handful of villages in which they could set up small-scale projects that would stand for development in the region as a whole. Kpasenkpe was often one such place. Beginning in the early 1940s, Wulugunaba Sebiyam, the young chief of Kpasenkpe and a self-styled “progressive,” began to court new colonial interest in, and funding for, northern Ghana’s development.<sup>3</sup> Over the five decades of his chieftaincy, the Wulugunaba and, increasingly, members of his family, established Kpasenkpe as a place where developers could raise labor and enact various schemes of village development, swiftly and with minimal trouble. By the late twentieth century, agents of state, international, and nongovernmental agencies would likely have worked with colleagues who had family ties to Kpasenkpe and surroundings, most likely the sons and daughters of the Wulugunaba, all of whom went to school and many of whom pursued careers in civil service and development work. Over the years, the national actors and goals of development changed from colonial and nationalist proponents of community development to agricultural extension officers intent on creating a Ghanaian “green revolution” and then to World Vision International’s project of “transformational development.” In Kpasenkpe, residents and leaders made space for both continuity and local innovation as developers came and went.

This book is not a history of a particular village. Instead, I situate this story in Kpasenkpe to illustrate how multiple actors, institutions, and performances have reinforced the centrality of village development in the practice and rhetoric of rural statecraft. The book argues that the dynamic between particularity and generalizability—between the story of how Kpasenkpe residents and leaders fought for its projects and the fact that projects were always conceived for a generic number of villages—is what makes this detailed local history so revealing of the central and enduring dynamics of twentieth-century government in rural hinterlands. Small settlements like Kpasenkpe are frequently referred to colloquially as villages (*tinkpanya* in Mampruli) in Ghana, and Ghanaians use references to an ancestral village or hometown to tell complex and layered stories about belonging, identity, and history.<sup>4</sup> A

variety of actors in this book, however, decided to minimize this complexity by invoking an alternate image of undifferentiated rural space occupied by interchangeable villages. They did so because it was a convenient way to allocate or attract limited resources, to highlight or downplay struggles over power, and to forge national and international networks. The treatment of the region as a sea of villages was always combined with the scarcity of funding and attention characteristic of government in a rural hinterland. This dynamic resulted, paradoxically, in the creation of an uneven landscape in which certain rural spaces and people became particularly tied to regional, national, and international institutions of development. Meanwhile, developers' consistent demands for community self-help allowed systems of labor extraction to remain the backbone of rural development.

Local actors were not passive recipients of developmentalist visions, and as this book endeavors to show, it was largely through daily practices at the district and village level that the conditions for both continuity and change were forged. District and regional officials, working under conditions of scarcity, leaned on fictions of village homogeneity and interchangeability in order to make decisions. Local leaders and constituents, for their part, learned and tested what claims they could make on the government and what they would need to demonstrate in return. As the stakes of development increased over the twentieth century, the urgency of this work grew, even as residents of Ghana's North found it more and more difficult to contest the underlying marginality of their concerns to successive governments.

Focusing on a variety of village-level projects in a hinterland region over several decades offers a number of contributions to the historiographies of development and statecraft in Africa and the global South. First, the book uses long-term, historically grounded, rural research to tell a story that de-emphasizes the sweeping plans and pronouncements of governments and focuses instead on the piecemeal, contingent, and largely improvised ways in which both development and states are enacted and experienced. Long-term studies of development as a twentieth-century project in Africa tend to focus on big projects and national plans, while small-scale studies are prone to center on specific projects and cover relatively limited time frames. In contrast, this book uncovers long-term patterns of interaction around local labor and leadership that are all but invisible in the context of individual projects or eras. This scope reveals how the daily work of rural people and local officials helped create the conditions and shape the terms on which development continued as a state practice.

Second, my choice of scope and method offers readers new entry points into longstanding discussions about power and discourse in development.

Since the 1990s, an important strain of scholarly focus has been to reveal the discursive apparatuses created by development initiatives. Scholars have shown how development projects naturalize and depoliticize structures of power by constructing their own objects and categories of analysis. With few exceptions, however, these studies have taken snapshots of discursive regimes in particular projects and eras. In contrast, *Village Work* follows the example of a handful of works that trace how categories of development have been created and contested over time. I use this historical perspective to answer Paulla Ebron's call to bridge gaps between analysis of performance and representation, a method that allows us to see how "high players as well as low" become "enrolled in the rhetorics, the stances, and the subject positions" that development entails.<sup>5</sup>

Third, this book positions rural development at the heart of rural statecraft in the twentieth century. While there is frequent recognition that rural areas represent a key arena of development and poverty reduction, debates about twentieth-century African statecraft and its relationship to development have been almost exclusively waged on the level of central government policy, large projects, or aggregate indicators. This book, in contrast, argues that development in Africa has not become statecraft exclusively when states have had a grand plan. Instead, most people made sense of developmentalist government as they experienced it over time, from projects that were accompanied by little to no external fanfare or critique. The stories in this book show people figuring out how to interact with government institutions for which they were only sporadically a concern, and from which they often wanted to attract the right kind of attention and avoid the wrong kinds of demands. I argue that this experience is not the absence of something called "the state" but instead reflects a particular mode of governing, which I term "hinterland statecraft," that allowed for village development to emerge and endure as a central piece of government. Over time, bureaucrats, leaders, and residents invested in and improvised with the categories of village development and self-help. Along the way, they shaped twentieth-century government in ways that unsettle common ideas about how and by whom states are made.

Fourth, by centering its history of twentieth-century statecraft on village development projects, the book draws attention to the continued role of unremunerated labor in mediating relationships between governments and the governed. This theme has received comparatively little attention in studies of both development and statecraft, particularly in the postcolonial period. State officials, chiefs, and development practitioners used labor to implement and legitimize development work, while rural people

repeatedly tested the political possibilities of labor by complying, resisting, and leveraging their work to make demands.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, this is a book about how certain people were able to use “local” development projects to cultivate translocal, national, and international networks of state engagement. While studies of small-scale development projects have offered excellent explorations of development projects’ effects on local differentiation by class, gender, and education, they have tended to pay less attention to the differential ways that rural people accumulated ties to structures of development over time and across projects. The book’s attention to the institution of chieftaincy as well as to the family network of Wulugunaba Sebiyam shows how developmentalist states have both driven and been driven by disparities along lines of lineage, gender, and schooling. At the same time, the book’s attention to one family network over a long period of time helps show how rural people built varied and enduring networks that could both exacerbate and unsettle growing inequities in state engagement and attention.

The book delineates four broad eras in which particular logics of development and labor extraction configured relationships among residents of Ghana’s North, local leaders, and agents of government. In the interwar period, the colonial state pursued the simultaneous (and often incompatible) goals of forced labor, fiscal stringency, and political quiescence. It was out of the quintessentially colonial tensions among these objectives, along with residents’ obvious and widespread resistance to forced labor, that colonial officials developed a cheap, flexible, and resilient model of governing that downplayed the particularities of rural places and required unpaid labor as a condition of spending. Second, the book considers the period that began in the early 1950s and continued through independence in 1957 until the coup against Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah, in 1966, a period termed locally “Nkrumah’s time” that corresponds roughly to what Frederick Cooper calls “the development era” for the continent as a whole.<sup>7</sup> In these years, as development became both a popular demand and a legitimating ideology of states, both colonial and nationalist governments embraced a globally popular framework of village development and self-help labor. Village development backed by unremunerated labor became an adaptable mode of statecraft that could operate in the face of ongoing tensions between the demands of developmentalism and the continued treatment of certain regions as economic and bureaucratic hinterlands.

The third period spans the late 1960s and 1970s, a time of struggle and contradiction across the continent in which, as Greg Mann argues for the Sahel, “no single over-arching narrative can embrace all of the processes



at work.”<sup>8</sup> In northern Ghana, two simultaneous global trends shifted the ground on which development struggles were waged. The global economic crises of the 1970s tightened already strained development budgets and intensified political upheaval. Meanwhile, the North became one of the hinterland regions across the continent on which governments and international lenders pinned hopes for an African “green revolution” that would follow perceived agricultural successes in Asia and Latin America. As citizens and local officials navigated crisis and opportunity, they improvised on existing models of development, leadership, and self-help, transforming them into malleable templates for engaging ever-changing configurations of government. The book ends with the period of the 1980s and early 1990s, when World Bank– and IMF–mandated structural adjustment programs dismantled state development agendas across the globe and when, in their wake, a growing army of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) found themselves with ample opportunities to take up village development. While scholars have often studied the neoliberal era in isolation, I use the illustrative example of World Vision International’s work in Kpasenkpe to show how citizens, officials, and NGO staff drew on what were by then familiar models of exchanging labor for scarce resources—work that grew ever more urgent as village projects became the dominant form of government in the region. By 1992, on the eve of Ghana’s return to party politics and as mainstream development institutions embraced a depoliticized vision of participation, residents of Ghana’s northern regions were deeply engaged with the state, but they also faced powerful institutional mechanisms that discouraged dissent and demanded specific performances of village leadership and community support.

#### DEVELOPMENT AT SCALE AND IN PRACTICE

Scholars have long identified the “marvelous ambiguity of the word development” to alternately denote a naturalized process, an idealized model of change, a goal of state policy, and a justification for state intervention to achieve it.<sup>9</sup> Those who wish to study development as a social and political process are thus faced with myriad options about how to define their scope, materials, and methods of analysis. On the macroscale of empire and nation, scholars have examined the long intellectual and political history of the concept of development. This literature reveals remarkable continuities in the long-term relationships among racial and political hierarchies, resource extraction, and knowledge production in development, at the same time that it emphasizes the development concept’s capacity to

allow multiple people and institutions to pursue parallel as well as competing political, social, and intellectual projects.<sup>10</sup>

Drawing on these insights, my work takes a deliberately open approach to defining what development entails. The book focuses on the small-scale projects that have been labeled “development” in Ghana’s rural North—schools, clinics, roads, water projects, market structures, and interventions in community development and small-scale agriculture—not because they stemmed from a coherent theory or stable plan for development, but because they have been the focus of a tremendous amount of government involvement in rural hinterlands across the global South. At different times, the bundle has taken on different labels for governments—“amenities,” “basic needs,” “small-scale public goods,” or “village-level interventions,” to name a few. For Kpasenkpe residents, these projects have also been associated with terms and ideas of improvement (*maaligu*), enlightenment (*ninneesim*) and help (*sunɔ̃mi*). What emerges from this view is not so much a tightly bound “apparatus” of village development as it is a field of interaction where multiple actors pursued multiple agendas over long periods of time.

By departing from historians’ tendency to focus on the large-scale or high-profile projects that preoccupied central governments and commanded the attention of admirers and critics, the book demonstrates the value of what Leslie Hadfield and John Aerni-Flessner term “localizing the history of development.”<sup>11</sup> In recent years, a number of excellent studies of large-scale development projects that spanned colonial and post-colonial eras have brought attention to their exploitation of people and environments as well as the mixed opportunities they created for Africans to engage with states.<sup>12</sup> Other scholars have drawn attention to how the paradigms that underpinned such initiatives went far beyond them, pointing out how, for example, idioms of modernization were shared between and among colonial and postcolonial states and their broader publics.<sup>13</sup> Villages often enter conversations about development only in the cases where states became particularly preoccupied with them, most notably when Tanzania embarked on its high-profile project of *ujamaa* villagization. While the rich scholarship on *ujamaa* contains robust and important debates about the relationship between theory and practice and about the nature and extent of state control, it remains bounded by the temporal and geographic scope set by the architects of the project.<sup>14</sup>

As Hadfield and Aerni-Flessner argue, examining less high profile local projects helps to decenter national governments and international

agencies, “forc[ing] us to consider, with equal importance, the role played by ‘lay people’ in . . . contestations over development.”<sup>15</sup> This insight, long known by anthropologists and critical development studies scholars who have produced a wide array of insightful studies on the local politics of development, has recently been taken up by historians of Africa’s twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> With few exceptions, both clusters of works are closely bounded in time, with anthropologists largely focusing on the neoliberal era and with historians focused on the middle part of the century.<sup>17</sup>

Following a range of village development projects over a long period of time led me to questions about the discursive and conceptual categories that underpin development work, principally the category of “village” as a unit of development. Decades of poststructuralist analyses have shown that the creation and re-creation of development fictions in official documents is not misunderstanding but instead serves as what James Ferguson termed an “anti-politics machine,” in which universal categories help developers naturalize the existing structures of state power and present systems of inequality as “simple, technical problems.”<sup>18</sup> More recently, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni has drawn on postcolonial and decolonial theory to think of development discourse as part of ongoing “global imperial designs” that combine regimes of knowledge production and material exploitation.<sup>19</sup> As Tania Murray Li argues in her sweeping study of “the will to improve” in Indonesia, however, discursive regimes are never really separate from the worlds they create. Instead, we need to examine what she terms the “witches brew of processes, practices, and struggles” that emerged, over time, when discursive and institutional attempts to depoliticize meet the “practice of politics.”<sup>20</sup>

*Village Work* also builds on scholarship that historicizes the global intellectual and diplomatic roots of the idea of village development. In the years following the end of the Second World War, as the model of “tribal” governance invoked by indirect rule became increasingly untenable as a basis for administration, colonial administrators found a powerful new way to draw older ideas of rural community into emerging discourses of development. As Nicole Sackley and Daniel Immerwahr both argue, the midcentury idea of community development gave governments across the globe a new “universal category.”<sup>21</sup> The idea of the village accommodated social scientific interest in rural modernization at the same time that it assured administrators that plans for rural change would contain the forces of development in stable social units, knowable by experts, and applicable across geographies of empire, nation, and the Cold War theaters of

the Third World.<sup>22</sup> In Ghana, as elsewhere, the category proved portable enough to be taken up by anticolonial nationalists and the independent government they created. In this long-term view, “village development” became what Cornwall terms a “fuzzword,” referring to the way that buzzwords become “concepts that can float free of concrete referents, to be filled with meaning by their users” and that are thus able to “shelter multiple agendas, providing room for maneuver and space for contestation.”<sup>23</sup>

The village concept that emerged in the interwar era, hardened in the midcentury, and continues through the present has relied on two central imaginaries. First was an idea of each village as a homogenous, bounded, and often unchanging or isolated community. This imaginary has, rightly, received a good deal of scholarly criticism, some (but only some) of which has filtered into recent development discourse.<sup>24</sup> In order for the idea of village development to be put into practice, however, a second imaginary had to be at work: the idea that villages are the same. For developers to extrapolate lessons from individual rural development projects, the places in which they took place needed to be imagined as representative of a more generalized set of social, political, and economic structures.

As this book shows, state agents’ role in shaping a village imaginary has gone beyond the pages of official documents. Practitioners, confronted with the urgency of enacting policies in real circumstances, worked to create useable fictions, not simply tidy ones. In this view, common ideas and practices emerged over time, shared by colonial and nationalist officials, agricultural extension workers in the 1970s and 1980s, and the nongovernmental organization employees that have in recent decades come to dominate the development scene on the continent. *Village Work* focuses less on the plans that these actors produced and more on the relationships that underpinned their day-to-day practice. The book follows Nana Akua Anyidoho’s suggestion that development projects be understood in terms of “sense-making,” in which both policy makers and ordinary people make decisions about how to interact based on accumulated ideas and experiences.<sup>25</sup> As illustrated throughout these chapters, development fictions became useable because a wide range of people decided to use them.

Governments in twentieth-century Ghana rarely sought to explicitly define or structure village space.<sup>26</sup> Instead of pinning down what “village” meant, officials found it useful to build in several ambiguities: about the criteria by which communities would be identified, about the demands that could be placed on villagers, and about what success or failure in one village would mean for the region as a whole. Throughout the twentieth

century, it was rarely seriously imagined that governments could reach all settlements in northern Ghana with the roads, schools, clinics, and wells that constituents increasingly demanded. Instead, planners looked for certain villages where projects could be undertaken easily and then hoped, imagined, or pretended that further spending or spontaneous community action would follow in surrounding areas. Planners searched for “project villages” precisely because they recognized that they were different from other spaces. In doing so, development practitioners both acknowledged and suppressed the realities of rural difference. The situation in which any village (but not all villages) could be a site for development encouraged competition and inequality. In the region overall, critiques and challenges to the model of village development were inhibited by the scarcity and transience of projects that were, themselves, often in high demand. Within villages, scarcity and competition also had the effect of suppressing critique, thus encouraging rural people to reaffirm development tropes of homogenous, consensual communities.

#### DEVELOPMENT, LABOR, AND HINTERLAND STATECRAFT

This book shows village development schemes to be a forum for statecraft, by which I mean the formation of systems that organize how people interact with governments. On a broad scale, the centrality of development to African statecraft has been clear. As Kwesi Prah argues, development has been an “obsessive object” of African governments and elites, remaining an “espoused *raison d'être*” despite wide variation in political and developmental ideology across the continent and over time.<sup>27</sup> For much of the period discussed in this book, from the midcentury to the early 1990s, debates about development and African states followed the focus of both national governments and international institutions on central governments, large projects, and macroeconomic processes and indicators. Then, over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s, as the World Bank and other development institutions looked to counter growing criticism and explain failures of structural adjustment, they located responsibility in the internal workings of African states.<sup>28</sup> As Thandika Mkandawire shows, the focus on “good governance” that emerged from this era selectively drew on scholarship that cast the institutions and practices of African governments as the root of development failures and interpreted scholarship in such a way that it would not challenge fundamental tenets of the neoliberal agenda.<sup>29</sup> In the end, this vilification of African states reinforced the austerity agenda of structural adjustment while intensifying reliance on

development mechanisms that would bypass central governments, either via decentralization policies or by funding development through bilateral, nongovernmental, and civil society organizations.

Despite this “local turn” in development thinking, recent development efforts have reflected scant attention to how government has been practiced over time, particularly at regional and local scales.<sup>30</sup> A range of critical examinations shows that new projects often ignore or exacerbate relations of power at the local level, though in the scholarship, as well, the focus is rarely on long-term dynamics.<sup>31</sup> *Village Work* extends the time frame through which we examine the local life of development in order to show how small-scale projects were woven into the twentieth-century practice of rural government over decades. In this view, developmentalist statecraft was neither created merely by governments nor simply imposed on the governed. Rather, it was jointly constructed over time through the interactions between them.

I use the phrase “hinterland statecraft” to characterize patterns of government that extend from the colonial period on into the present. The marginality of hinterland regions has made them the frequent targets of development projects, but states have rarely imposed a strict vision of developmentalism. With few exceptions, central governments allocated few resources and exercised little close oversight of small-scale projects. If government agents could keep relative peace, maintain the basic economic and political hierarchies, and report something that they could call success, they were given wide latitude to define how and where projects took place. *Village Work* tells stories of people making do, working with the tools they have and improvising on the margins. A key insight of the book is that improvisation is just as necessary for district officials and project leaders as it is for the so-called targets of development. Strapped for resources and hoping to show progress, these actors cultivated productive ambiguities over the terms of progress and relied on usable fictions like the idea that villages were, for the purposes of government, interchangeable.

Most of all, developers required villagers to work. Throughout the twentieth century, governments and local leaders relied on residents to provide unremunerated labor for development, molding cement blocks, carrying water and stones, and plastering walls. Reinvented in the late colonial period to replace labor taxes, this labor has gone by different names, first as “communal labor,” and then “self-help,” and in more recent development projects simply “participation.” Developers imagined that rural

residents would contribute labor as a kind of political engagement: as a tribute to chiefs, as a service to the nation, or because of “community spirit.”

Scholars have demonstrated that at some key historical moments, states have cast village development labor as evidence of support for unpopular policies and have mobilized the idea of participation to suppress critique and preserve existing structures. A cluster of recent works on the relationship between forced labor and developmentalism under colonial rule across the continent demonstrates that the idea of communal labor emerged in the 1920s and 1930s as a rhetorical and legal strategy of colonial governments that faced mounting critiques of forced labor. Benedetta Rossi, Opolot Okia, and others provide clear evidence that force and compulsion, often enacted by chiefs, could maintain a range of activities under the guise of development.<sup>32</sup> Decades later, in the 1990s and 2000s, the World Bank and other international development institutions coopted radical ideas of participation to rebrand their policies in the face of discontent over structural adjustment programs and to justify continued liberalization of markets and reductions in state funding.<sup>33</sup> Other scholars have noted that, at different historical moments, unremunerated self-help labor appeared as part of more sustained efforts to reshape mechanisms of popular participation. Scholars of the early postcolonial period, for example, have uncovered a range of strategies adopted by self-help laborers as they attempted to cope with the ambiguous links between labor and citizenship in developmentalist nation-building projects.<sup>34</sup>

Despite these insights into specific eras, scholars have struggled to understand why states continued to rely on unremunerated rural labor across decades. *Village Work* traces the pathways of coercion that bridged the colonial and developmentalist orders and allowed for continued appropriation of labor over the course of the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> Looking at the practice of self-help over several decades shows how and why local people and officials repeatedly invested in constructs of development, even as they came to see their limitations as a form of politics. As a historian, the most intriguing and challenging aspect of studying collective unpaid labor is interpreting people’s labor contributions in terms that neither replicate the assumptions of developers (who read labor as support) nor assume a priori that all labor was the result of state control. Historians are drawn to conflict for various reasons. At a basic level, conflict tends to produce documents and, at a broader level, it reveals the fault lines of social interaction. In contrast, successful calls for labor leave no such traces.

Why did men and women in Kpasenkpe and surrounding areas respond to collective calls to dig wells, mold blocks, and plaster walls? Residents may have shown up because of the threat of punishment by chiefs, the government, or both. A series of laws consistently reproduced a 1930s-era exception for “minor communal services” in the definition of “forced labor,” allowing states and local leaders to enforce collective labor exactions. Records of this enforcement are few and far between, of course, but it is difficult to imagine that the threat of repercussions for refusal was not widely experienced and known, particularly in the colonial period. Alternately, residents may have shown up to engage with chiefs or government officials. Responses to labor requests could serve as a relatively low-cost way to demonstrate support (or opposition) for certain leaders or regimes and, conversely, to make demands on these leaders for reciprocity. Last, residents may have shown up because they simply supported the projects on which they were asked to labor—needing a school or a well, they responded to demands that they build it. This book is full of examples of each of these dynamics. In their recollections of performing unremunerated labor, Kpasenkpe residents offered accounts that included multiple motivations, often at the same time, revealing how individuals navigated development demands in ways that defy singular explanations and simple dichotomies between coercion and choice.

If we step back from the stew of individuals’ motivation for contributing or refusing labor, however, we can instead ask what labor allowed people, as individuals and collectivities, to do and to demand. In other words, we can begin to see the possibilities and limitations that self-help labor presented as a form of twentieth-century political action. Like other forms of state appropriation, governments treated constituent contributions of labor as both budgetary necessities and as demonstrations of belonging and support—for chiefs, for the state, or for a project itself, and often for all three combined. Unlike most forms of taxation, however, labor demands were always both envisioned and enforced as collective exactions on an undifferentiated set of villagers. Developers showed remarkably little interest in determining which people came out to perform labor or in how this labor was raised. Collective, project-based demands had the effect of building in individual flexibility and variation. They also circumscribed the options for rural people to link their contributions and refusals of labor to larger political goals. As long as local leaders could muster a group of laborers for an allotted time, developers would read these performances as representing the support of the whole community, no matter how many



people stayed home out of protest or lack of interest. Furthermore, when citizens performed or refused labor to oppose leaders or assert support for alternate orders, their efforts were easily read as narrow support or rejection of a certain project, rather than part of a larger agenda.

Even if we limit our vision to the politics of development funding, we can see how collective, village-level labor extraction had a depoliticizing effect. Over time, rural people came to know that developers expected performances of community support, and that without it there were limited options for attracting a school, a well, or a road. In this context, it is easy to see how thinking of coercion and threat of punishment on an individual level limits historians' perspective and how structures of funding and consistencies in official ideology could constrain people's options in ways that are not easily reflected in documents on specific projects or articulated by individual participants. Reasonably, people in various places tended to channel their energy into competing for projects, rather than calling attention to the overall scarcity of development resources. Meanwhile, officials and politicians could use examples of labor from disparate village projects, regardless of their scope, as evidence that they were developing the region as a whole and with popular support.

#### CHIEFS, FAMILIES, AND STATES

While development schemes often imagined and treated rural villagers as undifferentiated and "local" populations, for some Kpasenkpe residents village projects became a way to cultivate careers and reputations that connected them to regional and national centers. The book spends a lot of time on the topic of chieftaincy and with Kpasenkpe's long-serving chief, Wulugunaba Sebiyam, as well as the men and women associated with his compound as wives, siblings, and children. Institutions of chieftaincy offer important windows into the ambiguities of colonial and postcolonial statecraft. In part because of ongoing discussions about the relationship between statecraft and the concept of tradition, scholars of chieftaincy have had to think flexibly about the ideologies, discourses, and practices of local politics. In the Ghanaian context, several scholars have worked to uncover mechanisms by which chiefs retained or captured political and economic relevance over the course of the twentieth century, focusing especially on claims to land and belonging.<sup>36</sup> In a variety of contexts elsewhere on the continent, historians have shown the ways that chieftaincy became imbricated in the politics of development projects as chiefs alternately courted and criticized the work of developers.<sup>37</sup>

Less attention has been given to the practical ways in which chiefs became involved in the daily bureaucracy of development projects and to how performances of technical competence and local mediation became key elements of chiefly authority in the decades after the end of indirect rule and as chiefs navigated the postcolonial period. As a result, scholars have tended to see a recent resurgence of chiefly influence as a consequence of neoliberal statecraft, showing how donor-enforced reforms across Africa in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s (policies under the labels of structural adjustment, good governance, and decentralization) allowed chiefs to cultivate outside recognition and participate in an invigorated “politics of custom.”<sup>38</sup> *Village Work* shows how the long history of chiefly engagement with development forged patterns that have been ripe for intensification in the twenty-first century.

Kpasenkpe is located in the heart of the old kingdom of Mamprugu, where Mamprusi kings centralized their authority from the late seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries by incorporating groups of traders and spiritual specialists, regulating the slave trade, and managing tributary relations with the expanding Asante state to the south.<sup>39</sup> Under colonial rule, the Mamprusi chiefly hierarchy held on to claims to local authority by nimbly engaging with colonial administrative structures and performing administrative functions.<sup>40</sup> By the 1930s, colonial officials came to rely on chiefs who demonstrated an ability to command “followers” and undertake projects on “their own initiative.” When these roles crystalized into the concept of “progressive chieftaincy,” they allowed chiefs to remain both indispensable and palatable to post-World War II planners, nationalist politicians, and successive postcolonial states that looked to implement (but often not pay much for) development projects in the North.

These aspects of chieftaincy can be understood as a repertoire of roles and scripts that chiefs accumulated over decades and that they could use to engage with multiple audiences. In the text, I sometimes use the language of performance—particularly the idea of scripts and improvisation—to describe the interactions among chiefs, constituents, and developers. Over the course of the twentieth century, chiefs sometimes took on roles as clients of powerful outsiders. Casting themselves as both agents of change and custodians of community stability, chiefs found ways to remain relevant to the daily work of developmentalist statecraft even as its representatives and demands transformed by the decade. At other moments, chiefs took on a role as hosts, paving the way

for newcomers' work and expecting that developers conform to locally recognized roles and responsibilities.<sup>41</sup> Paying attention to these performances of leadership, *Village Work* offers a framework for understanding the longevity of chiefly authority that relies on the work that chiefs have done, rather than their perceived relationship to concepts like tradition or modernity. In addition, the book shows how chiefs' ability to perform these roles has implicated wider networks of people and cemented personal and professional connections between chiefs and state and non-governmental organizations.

Wulugunaba Sebiyam was chief of the Kpasenkpe division for fifty years, from 1942 to 1992. He appears frequently in the pages of this book, as do members of his wider family network. Their careers often anchor my discussion of wider connections among development, statecraft, and chieftaincy as well as the role of family, schooling, and gender in shaping rural people's engagement with village development. Moving to the more granular narrative of one chief and one family network allows me to explore how the institution of chieftaincy and the practice of family evolved over decades of engagement with development projects, often in ways that both resulted from and reproduced differential opportunities and life courses based on people's lineage, gender, and schooling.

In the first decades of his chieftaincy, Sebiyam's embrace of progressive chieftaincy relied on a network of people whose life paths brought them into little formal contact with developmentalist states. The labor of men and women who came to the chief's compound as his wives and brothers supported the expansion of farming and schooling that became central to Sebiyam's engagement with successive colonial and postcolonial states. In later decades, Kpasenkpe continued to be an attractive site for village projects because of the work of family members other than the chief. As increasing numbers of Sebiyam's siblings and, eventually, all several dozen of his sons and daughters attended school and many took up jobs in the civil service and nongovernmental organizations, they accumulated expertise in development work and strengthened Kpasenkpe's connections to national development networks.

Stories of the Sebiyam family network disrupt imagined divisions between "local" elites and "outside" developers. Locally, Sebiyam's brothers served as local council president and local tax collector, and his sister worked on Nkrumah-era community development projects. His children, at some point, became headmasters of every successive school in Kpasenkpe, served as local representatives of major political parties and

every government that has emerged in postcolonial Ghana, and family members became the local organizers for the locally influential international NGO World Vision and a variety of successive “village” projects by other organizations. Sebiyam’s siblings and children who started their careers locally became district and regional directors of education and social welfare. His eldest son became a minister of state and a university professor. Large networks of daughters and sons forged careers in medicine and education. As family members made careers in civil service, politics, and international development, they forged connections among siblings and with aunts and uncles that allowed them to weather the political and economic volatility of late twentieth-century Ghana. In turn, connections that crisscrossed the country raised family members’ abilities to act as “local” hosts for successive governmental and nongovernmental village development projects.<sup>42</sup>

What should scholars take from the evidence of the close involvement of so many Sebiyam family members with village development? A rich range of literature explores how efforts at “grassroots” or “decentralized” development often entrench, rather than disrupt, local hierarchies and inequality.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, tracing Kpasenkpe’s chiefly family illustrates one way that village development reproduced inequality by lineage and schooling. Developers’ search for leaders who were at once “local” and “progressive” often allowed educated family members to take an outsized role in development practice in Kpasenkpe, both because of their individual experience and training and because of the connections they forged with one another. In doing so, they increased distinctions between themselves and other Kpasenkpe residents (including many in their own family network). Scholarship on development and rural differentiation forms an important counternarrative to the imaginaries of village development projects, which too often relied on assumptions of homogeneity within villages. However, models that would decry the story of Kpasenkpe’s chiefly family as “nepotism” or “capture” have the effect of treating familial connections as a deviation from some imagined norm, rather than seeing them as a key way in which rural constituents have navigated developmentalist states.<sup>44</sup>

Anthropologists and historians have long appreciated that family networks are deeply important in the ways that people, in Africa and elsewhere, have navigated the century more broadly, and there is extensive literature on contemporary family networks, particularly with regard to transnational migration.<sup>45</sup> As historians such as Emily Lynn Osborn have

aptly shown, the idea that state and family are “separate spheres” is a colonial construct, and one that has left a long legacy in policy making as well as scholarship.<sup>46</sup> By following the accumulated engagement of one family network, this book brings forward the claim that, at least in northern Ghana, the separation of family and state was never a practical reality, especially for chiefs. Moreover, developers’ inability to recognize the centrality of family networks often had the perverse effect of both heightening and obscuring mechanisms of differentiation within and among rural settlements. This book suggests that scholars and practitioners of rural development should take family networks, like village projects, to be a key site where statecraft happens.

Within and beyond the Sebiyam family, differentiation by lineage and schooling intersected with the gendered enterprise of twentieth-century statecraft. Developers’ ideas about villagers and village life shaped how men and women across the region encountered the state. Colonial gender ideologies made men and boys the primary targets for forced labor requisitions as well as agricultural interventions and government schooling. While postcolonial regimes often paid lip service to addressing the resulting inequalities in schooling and access to agricultural inputs, they often reinforced them in practice. For example, “green revolution” interventions in the 1970s and 1980s continued to imagine “key farmers” as men, despite widespread recognition of the importance of women as cultivators.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, both governmental and familial ideas about gender continued to limit girls’ access to schooling. When postcolonial village development programs self-consciously aimed to reach women and girls, they often did so in ways that reinforced colonial gender binaries, as is evident in the antinudity campaigns of the Nkrumah era (chapter 3). Throughout the period, developers identified men as their primary interlocutors, with the exception of initiatives that specifically sought to reach women.

Interviews showed the range of ways that men and women in Kpasenkpe navigated and reflected upon the gendered aspects of village development. Men in Kpasenkpe could make use of developers’ ideas to reinforce local hierarchies. For example, when Sebiyam created a new (male) titled elder position for “chief farmer” in the 1940s, he drew resources to the area while bolstering colonial ideas that both leadership and farming were men’s work. Interviews also helped draw attention to the gaps between the ways that developers imagined gender hierarchies and the realities of village life. For example, evidence from several successful

women farmers in Kpasenkpe reveals that, while agricultural extension activities in the town were focused on men, women were adept at using familial and commercial networks to access government-subsidized inputs. Additionally, Kpasenkpe residents' ideas about gender and labor shaped their interaction with village development projects. For example, when women organized Amasachina self-help initiatives in the 1970s, they did so by drawing on common mechanisms for organizing women's labor on farms and in compounds.

Gender mattered in the chiefly family as well. Wulugunaba Sebiyam made the unusual decision to send both his sons and daughters to school. While this decision makes his family something of an anomaly among Kpasenkpe residents and among chiefly families across the region, it also means that tracing his children's careers helps to illuminate the different paths available to educated men and women in successive eras of the post-colonial civil service.<sup>48</sup> Sebiyam's prosperity as a farmer was also somewhat unusual in Kpasenkpe (though less so than his emphasis on girls' education). In contrast to families that relied more heavily on women's farm labor, Sebiyam's wives successfully used normative ideas that women did not farm as a way to protect their labor and invest resources in individual trading enterprises. Like in other compounds across Ghana, however, this power declined over the course of the late twentieth century, as wives invested increasing amounts of labor and resources to support their children's feeding and schooling. Studying family networks can help illuminate how people navigated the twentieth century not only as women and men but also, as Christine Okali puts it, as "spouses, siblings, offspring, and parents."<sup>49</sup>

#### SOURCES AND METHODS

At present, the proliferation of development agencies in northern Ghana is obvious even from casual observation. On my daily walk to the archives in the regional capital of Tamale, when I began this research in 2008, I passed a corner where a large sign for a local NGO Youth Alive was surrounded by a cluster of international, bilateral, and other local agencies: the Government of Ghana's Northern Region Poverty Reduction Programme, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the international NGOs Basic Needs and Action Aid (see fig. I.1).

For someone familiar with the literature in development studies, the North's development scene evidenced what Charles Piot, looking at a similar cluster of signs in northern Togo, terms "NGO fervor," flourishing in West



FIGURE 1.1. Street corner in Tamale, northern Ghana, 2008. Author's photo.

Africa's poorest regions in the wake of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>50</sup> As my work went on—over fifteen months of research between 2008 and 2011 and shorter visits in 2013, 2015, and 2019—I became increasingly aware of the continuities between present practices and the waves of development interventions Ghanaians had navigated in the preceding decades. As these successive waves are within the living memory of many people in northern Ghana, I became interested in meeting people who had this depth of experience. I decided early on to spend several weeks moving between archival work in Tamale and a stay in Walewale, the current capital of one of the districts that kept surfacing in my archival research. Splitting my time in Walewale between the West Mamprusi District Assembly and the offices of the prominent NGO World Vision, I spoke with staff about their careers and observed the kinds of questions and struggles that came up in current work as agencies sought to optimize slim budgets and show success in small-scale projects.

It was through this initial research that I first began to think about villages, like Kpasenkpe, that emerged in both streams of research—places where activist local leaders and a long-standing web of connections to state agents seemed to make development work endure. As I turned from work in the district capital to research in Kpasenkpe itself, I followed the networks (both official and personal) that had connected the town to national

and international institutions of development practice. Interviews and daily conversations in Kpasenkpe—with about one hundred different residents over five years of visits—focused on personal and occupational histories, and I learned a great deal about both the shared and divergent ambitions and struggles that shaped individuals' lives. I always began by explaining my interests, and conversations often tended toward discussions of the specific past projects about which individuals either knew the most or, often, about which they had the strongest opinions. A surprising strength of this method was that I realized a lot of people had much to say about previous development projects, both in praise and critique. Like development planners, people in Kpasenkpe were interested in evaluating past projects, and, like development planners who have worked for more than a few years in the business, they were often simultaneously jaded about the litany of past failure and hopeful for future success. As it became clear that I had no hand in bringing developers to town, I turned out to be an adequate sounding board for the kinds of reflections that developers themselves rarely hear.<sup>51</sup> I appreciated the candor with which a variety of town residents told stories about how development had shaped—or not—the town as well as their own lives.

When I embarked on this project, I realized that I could not imagine tracing local-state relationships without grounding my understanding in a particular place and set of people. However, there are real risks of using this scope while trying to challenge an idea that villages are all the same. I frequently found myself asking (and being asked) if Kpasenkpe was “representative” of other villages in northern Ghana, Africa, or around the world, even as I realized that I needed to question and historicize that desire to generalize. Instead of making Kpasenkpe representative of the region's villages, I aim to illustrate the links that connected village development in Kpasenkpe to regional, national, and international processes of statecraft. These specific links are, of course, particular to Kpasenkpe, but the mechanisms of connection are not. So, between trips to Kpasenkpe, I returned to Walewale, Tamale, and Accra to find oral historical and documentary sources that illuminated Kpasenkpe's connections to district, regional, and national capitals. As I tried to understand how Kpasenkpe had become a site for a series of development initiatives over time, I worked extensively with documentary material housed in official archives, individual ministries, and the frequently uncatalogued files of the West and East Mamprusi District Assemblies. So as to position Kpasenkpe's politics of development in conversation with other northern settlements, the book also draws on



a database I created of over two hundred petitions sent to district and regional officials across Ghana's North from 1957 to 1992. This material also led to fifteen interviews with former and current staff of local government bodies, the Ministry of Agriculture, and World Vision. Throughout my research, I used documentary evidence to shape the questions that I asked of the people I spoke to, and vice versa. In interviews, my familiarity with the archives and secondary literature allowed me to offer time lines and interpretations that either prompted specific memories or allowed people to dispute my interpretation of the written record and comment on the arguments of other historians.

It was here, as I traced Kpasenkpe's history of development, that I began to realize the depth of influence exercised by the family of the former chief of Kpasenkpe, a network that articulated in complex ways with official channels of development practice. At the same time, and on a more personal level, I found myself engaging with members of the Sebiyam family, often before I knew of their family connections. As I learned more about family history, I began to understand the variety of ways I had encountered family members in my initial research—in archival records and among Ghanaian academics and civil servants. I realized that I was the latest in a long string of outsiders interested in development for whom Kpasenkpe had become a site and the Sebiyam family had acted as hosts. From this realization, I found it necessary to make these connections the subject of my research by turning my attention to historical dynamics that made such associations long lasting.

My interest in speaking with people who had been most involved with village development initiatives meant that my selection of people to speak within Kpasenkpe often reflected the biases of lineage, gender, and schooling that characterized village development in the region overall. Of the 106 Kpasenkpe residents with whom I spoke, 32 were in the chiefly family, including Sebiyam's wives and brothers' wives (14), siblings (10), and children (8). In the rest of my seventy-plus interviews in Kpasenkpe, I attempted to interview a large percentage of residents who had lived in the village between 1942 and 1992, a period in which Kpasenkpe's population ranged from seven hundred to thirteen hundred residents.<sup>52</sup> I paid particular attention to people who were remembered as being notably involved in development initiatives, either as leaders or participants. I sought out women who had been involved in development initiatives, either as leaders or participants, but even then, my interviews reflected the gender biases of development, with women making up about 30 percent of

the Kpasenkpe residents with whom I spoke. Twenty interviews were with men who, by the time of my interviews, had become titled elders, chiefs, or regents. As scholars of Mamprugu point out, in the historically multi-ethnic Mamprusi political system, distinctions among elders (*kpaamba*), commoners (*tarima*), and recent immigrants (*saama*) are often fluid and change over time. In addition, disputes over who can claim descent from ruling lineages are common.<sup>53</sup> Since my interviews were not focused on matters of descent or ethnic identification, I have decided not to adopt Mamprusi terminology with reference to particular people. However, I do include traditional titles when referring to individual people if they specified that this was how they would like to be named in the book.

In my interviews with members of the Sebiyam family network, I focused most heavily on interviews in Kpasenkpe itself, where I met and interviewed extended patrilineage members, including Sebiyam's brothers, sons, daughters, and select others. I also spoke to Sebiyam's wives and brothers' wives who were still alive and residing in Kpasenkpe at the time of my research. Beyond Kpasenkpe, I was more selective and (somewhat artificially) focused on the network of Sebiyam's direct children, of whom I spoke to sixteen outside of Kpasenkpe, as well as one nephew. I traced networks to regional and national centers most closely, speaking to his children currently residing in Walewale, Tamale, and Accra. Where possible, I supplemented interviews with documentary evidence from district and regional government and NGO documentation.

The book's strength in following networks of engagement with development, particularly through the chiefly family, also limited my interviews in important ways. Kpasenkpe is quite a small place, and I was clearly networked through members of the chiefly family which, as the book points out, included people active in multiple aspects of traditional, governmental, and nongovernmental authority. As a result, though I interviewed a large number of people, I was unlikely to hear about certain subjects, such as disputes over chieftaincy. While I heard more than a few critiques of Sebiyam and his family members, it is also possible that some interviewees muted their appraisals.

Ebron reminds us that interviews often enact the performances that scholars wish their interlocutors to discuss.<sup>54</sup> Certainly, as a stranger who had come to talk about development, I fit into a familiar script. Like other strangers, I relied on local hosts, working primarily with two research assistants and interpreters whose positions and reputations also shaped the course of the research.<sup>55</sup> Solomon Dawuni Sebiyam, with whom I worked

over several years, is one of Wulugunaba Sebiyam's sons, but he is also someone whose biography and personal struggles led him to develop local networks and relationships that often placed him outside the dominant arenas of familial influence. As I moved to interview a wider set of Kpasenkpe's elders, I worked with Seiya Namyoya Enoch, a young part-time teacher who has cultivated an interest in elders' stories. We were sometimes perceived as a surprising combination of listeners: an outsider interested in complaints about past development projects rather than setting up present ones, a family member whose path through town and the late twentieth century had kept him from the centers of local leadership, and a young person who cared about history. Our conversations were shaped by the combination of the predictability of our roles—an interested outsider, a local host—and the oddity of our task. While some avenues of inquiry were closed off, this dynamic allowed for often vibrant and multifaceted conversations about the local structures and dynamics of development and the familial, professional, and personal relationships that had connected local people to larger networks.

#### ORGANIZATION

*Village Work* is organized chronologically, but it also makes connections across scale, weaving stories of Kpasenkpe and its chiefly family with stories of local and regional government and of national and international trends. Along the way, the book traces a genealogy of village development and hinterland statecraft that begins with colonial strategies for labor extraction and administrative austerity, continues through experiments in self-help and labor extraction in the late colonial, nationalist, and post-nationalist eras, and ends with the hardening of village development and self-help labor as the primary focus of rural statecraft in the neoliberal era.

Beginning the book with a regional view, chapter 1 charts the emergence of hinterland statecraft in northern Ghana in the interwar period, showing how systems of labor extraction for development and models of progressive chieftaincy emerged out of the dynamics of colonial forced labor. Colonial officials combined force and flexibility as they endeavored to commandeer northern labor for roads in the face of limited budgets and widespread resistance. By the 1920s, officials used an imaginary of undifferentiated villages to direct resources and attention to chiefs who could appropriate labor “on their own initiative,” a practice that also provided cover as international critiques mounted against forced labor. Over time, chiefs learned to work with and around the contours of the hinterland

state. The last section of the chapter shows how certain northern chiefs forged new models of rule, laying down scripts of progressive chieftaincy that linked labor extraction to new ideologies of development and incorporated them into performances of modernization, largesse, and power.

Chapters 2 and 3 bring the focus to Kpasenkpe as a wide range of residents as well as a young chief and his family navigated the confluence of development, decolonization, and nation building in the 1950s and 1960s, a period that is commonly referred to as “Nkrumah’s time,” for Ghana’s first president. Chapter 2 shows that the colonial government and the Nkrumah state used a framework of village development—combining models of progressive chieftaincy, demands for self-help labor, and a fiction of undifferentiated rural space—to serve a variety of ideological, political, and practical needs. Residents used arguments about village development and small-scale funding to affirm, contest, or alter the shape of government in the emerging independent state. In Kpasenkpe, Wulugunaba Sebiyam and residents worked to attract development funds, imbuing labor and leadership with ideas of modernization and help while remaining attuned to the demands of a shifting political landscape. Nkrumah’s time was marked by local improvisation and innovation, but struggles over the terms of village development and self-help labor also worked to reinforce their centrality, setting the boundaries of what residents of Ghana’s northern regions could demand of the new Ghanaian nation.

Shifting the lens to the chief’s family, chapter 3 shows how village development work became enmeshed in the careers and family dynamics of those who became agents of state-led development. As Sebiyam’s educated siblings and children began to build regional and national careers, they also came back to Kpasenkpe as the face of the state, shoring up a connection between chieftaincy and development amidst the uncertainties of decolonization and nationalist politics. In the family, like the town, engagement with development relied on labor. Men and women who entered Sebiyam’s compound as wives and brothers rarely interacted directly with development projects, but it was their work on family farms and in the compound, as well as their ingenuity in maintaining family stability, that made development a family enterprise.

Chapters 4 and 5 continue to trace the story of village development through regional trends as well as granular histories of Kpasenkpe and its chiefly family. Chapter 4 turns to the years of national political and economic upheaval that followed Nkrumah’s ouster in 1966. In these years, increasingly desperate governments looked on the northern hinterland as

a place of untapped agricultural potential, partnering with international and donor agencies to subsidize and distribute “green revolution” technologies. It was a paradoxical time in the rural North, and the chapter traces how agricultural spending reached into the daily lives of farmers even as residents faced governments that could not build the roads, schools, or clinics they might have hoped would accompany increased state attention. Using district-level budgets, ministry records, petitions, and oral histories, this chapter maps out a surprisingly vibrant period of rural engagement with developers and governments. In Kpasenkpe and the region more broadly, village projects became unmoored from well-defined, state-centered networks, and officials, leaders, and constituents used performances of self-help and village leadership in a variety of political and economic projects, to demonstrate support or opposition to chiefs and elders, influence disputes over administrative and traditional boundaries, or attract funds from officials and international sources. The multiplicity of strategies people employed in the period is nowhere more evident than in the chief’s own family network, where wives, brothers, and children used family connections to navigate both uncertainty and opportunity.

Chapter 5 shows how experiences from the previous decades allowed officials, leaders, and constituents to cope with the fundamental contradictions of the early neoliberal era, when the self-styled revolutionary PNDC government of J. J. Rawlings implemented World Bank–supported structural adjustment programs. In the rural North, neoliberal reforms slowly dismantled agricultural programs and the government turned to a flood of nongovernmental actors to undertake village development work in the face of state austerity. In Kpasenkpe, this dynamic was dramatized by its 1986 selection for a community development project by the international Christian NGO World Vision. Reanimating older models of community responsibility and local initiative, PNDC and World Vision officials used demands for self-help to depoliticize the scarcity and competition that undergirded programs of “people’s power” and “participatory development.” In turn, local PNDC cadres, church officials, and constituents used performances of leadership and labor to navigate this complex terrain, solidifying Kpasenkpe’s reputation as an attractive site for developers and reprising the Wulugunaba’s role as host to development projects. A focus on this work, alongside a section on the growing network of educated members of the chiefly family, allows for an inversion of an image of village residents as simply local clients of outside developers, showing instead how village labor and leadership became

enmeshed in regional, national, and international networks of expertise and employment.

The book concludes by bringing its detailed long-term analysis of village development to bear on recent debates about the impact of neoliberal restructuring on the politics of development in rural Africa. Rather than a sharp break with the past, I suggest that recent decades have forced rural people to rely even more heavily on existing repertoires of performance and strategies for engaging governments and nongovernmental organizations. As the book overall shows, these strategies have drawn rural people and leaders into wide-ranging local, regional, and national networks even as they have reinforced the centrality of models of community cohesion and local initiative. Together, these dynamics suggest a new perspective on Ghana's much-heralded stability in the 1990s and 2000s.