

THE GHANA JOB

Opening socialist Hungary to the “developing world”

Why was Hungary interested in the decolonized “developing world”? What does this episode of Eastern European history tell us about shared postcolonialities, transnational interconnectivity, and semiperipheral positioning or development strategies? My research introduces why and how socialist Hungary decided to develop foreign economic relations with decolonized countries, which in turn facilitated a new orientation towards the world and the emergence of Hungarian development expertise towards developing countries.

My research investigates the history of the Centre for Afro-Asian Research (CAAR) founded at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1963 (Institute for World Economy, IWE from 1973) parallel to similar institutions established internationally at that time. CAAR was established as a government think tank by József Bognár, who was close to Primer János Kádár and was hugely important in Hungarian reform economics and foreign economic policy-making in the 1960s and 1970s. CAAR's and later IWE's associates promoted export-oriented growth, sought potential foreign development models and comparisons, and formulated new geo-

graphical development concepts as alternatives to Cold War categories of “capitalist” and “socialist” worlds in order to reposition Hungary in the world economy.

CAAR actually evolved from the “Ghana job” in 1962. During his Eastern European round-trip in the summer of 1961, president Kwame Nkrumah asked Bognár and his team of economists to develop the First Seven-Year Plan of Ghana (1964). In the Nkrumah period, the pan-Africanist, African socialist, and Non-Aligned country of Ghana became a transnational hub of various experts and intellectuals, and a contested site not only of conflicting and intertwined “socialist” and “cap-



The Hungarian delegation of development economists arrive in Accra in January 1962 to work on Ghana's First Seven-Year Plan. From left to right: Tamás Bácskai (Bognár's assistant, associate professor), Péter Kós (first ambassador), Kwame Nkrumah (President of the Republic of Ghana), József Bognár (chief advisor), Gábor Székely (Bognár's assistant, economic engineer). Source: József Bognár, “Két hónap Ghánában,” Magyar Hírek (1 May 1962): 1–2.



Ghanaian president Kwame Nkrumah in Budapest, 28 July 1961. Source: MTI Photo: Jenő Pap. © MTVA



The meeting of Primer János Kádár and Kwame Nkrumah at a summer resort in Balatonaliga, Hungary. Source: Kalmár György, Arany Ghana (Budapest, Kosuth Könyvkiadó, 1964). 289.

italist” views on development, but also of intensive cooperation and competition between Eastern Bloc countries in asserting their influence on the decolonized world. With Bognár's assignment, the issue of “poorly developed countries” ignited the globally comparative reconceptualization of Hungarian development histories, and led to exporting the Hungarian model to the “Third World,” based on anti-imperialism, socialist solidarity, and shared histories of colonialism and underdevelopment.

In this context, I interpret the “Ghana job” from postcolonial and world-systemic perspectives as entangled in complex transnational relations. Ghana had a decisive role in opening semiperipheral Hungary towards the global periphery during the 1960s by generating a field of development expertise, which in turn enabled entrance into a new market of transnational development consultancy.

Want to know more?

Ginelli, Z. (2018): Hungarian Experts in Nkrumah's Ghana. Decolonization and Semiperipheral Postcoloniality in Socialist Hungary. *Mezosfera*, 5.: Refractions of Socialist Solidarity, ed. Eszter Szakács. Budapest: tranzit.hu. <http://mezosfera.org/hungarian-experts-in-nkrumahs-ghana>

Ginelli, Z. (2017): Opening the Semiperiphery: Hungary and Decolonization. Research Report for the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives, Budapest. 48 p. https://www.academia.edu/34361794/Opening_the_Semi-Periphery_Hungary_and_Decolonisation <https://kritikaifoldrajz.hu/2017/04/27/opening-the-semi-periphery-decolonisation-and-socialist-hungary>

Ginelli, Z. (2017): Speaking from the Semi-Periphery: Decolonizing Knowledge Production in Socialist Hungary 1960s-1980s. <https://kritikaifoldrajz.hu/2017/02/25/speaking-from-the-semi-periphery-decolonizing-geographical-knowledge-production-in-socialist-hungary-1960s-and-1980s>

1989 after 1989: Rethinking the Fall of State Socialism in Global Perspective <http://1989after1989.exeter.ac.uk>

Socialism goes Global - <http://socialismgoesglobal.exeter.ac.uk>

Features

Interviews with former CAAR associates and foreign policy experts. Archival materials from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Planning Office, and the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives.

Acknowledgments

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MEET ME IN MY SESSION!

FRIDAY 9.00-10.30 AM - Room J
HOS10 - Global Histories of Geography 1930-1990
Chair: Ruth Craggs

Zoltán Ginelli
Historical geographies of the “quantitative revolution”:
Towards a transnational history of central place theory

#Istand
withCEU

I stand for the freedom of Hungarian science against government attacks on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Central European University. I am not a “Soros agent.”

ICHG
WARSAW
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**Zoltán
GINELLI**

Independent Researcher
PhD Candidate

Photo: Dániel Borovi

Zoltán Ginelli is a critical geographer and historian of science from Budapest, Hungary. He worked as an assistant researcher at the Institute for Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and as an assistant for the Leverhulme Trust-funded research project “1989 after 1989: Rethinking the Fall of State Socialism in Global Perspective” based at Exeter University (2014–2018). His research focuses on the historical geographies of scientific knowledge, transnational and global history, world-systems analysis, and postcolonial and decolonial theory. His dissertation studies the transnational history of the “quantitative revolution” in Cold War geography and spatial planning. His main work is on the history of Hungarian geography, and his current research focuses on socialist globalization and the changing relations between Eastern Europe and the “Third World.”

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