

In what follows, I reconstruct the *mélange* of communism, Pan-Africanism, Nasserism, and Maoism defining the cultural production of Graham's late career. After sketching the Cold War milieu in which Graham maneuvered, this chapter examines two discrete phases and projects in Graham's late career, both marked by instability, itinerancy, and ideological persecution: her position as Ghana's

first director of television and her relocation to Egypt and subsequent adoption of Nasserism and her new persona as a critic of Middle East politics and propagator of Arab-African unity.

The reconstruction of this eccentric ideological trajectory, I argue, reveals an ambitious project to inscribe and instantiate a geopolitical power bloc—socialist modernity in the Third World—arrayed against the adversarial forces of racial liberalism and anticommunism. What is more surprising, however, is the degree to which Graham's writings also "revised" official doctrines among her putative nonaligned and Communist allies in directions more congruent with her own geopolitical vision. In other cases, Graham's valorization of communism represents an insidious and tactically clever attempt to hold this sphere accountable for its anticolonial commitments. In this respect, an element of play accompanies her commitment to an ostensibly masculine geopolitics of heroic transformation characterized by revolutionary, charismatic leadership.

Nonetheless, certain dilemmas flow from her commitment to this vision. The hagiographies and encomia she wrote of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Paul Robeson, Du Bois, Mao Zedong, Julius Nyerere, and others foreground at least two difficulties: first, with respect to her treatments of actual revolutionary leaders, it is easy to dismiss Graham as a pawn, a mouthpiece of a regime, a "useful idiot" in this or that situation. Second, despite Graham's concern, for example, about the location of women in Egyptian and Chinese society, her adulation of male charismatic leadership seems incongruent with narratives of black feminist internationalism. Both her advocacy of socialist modernization and her fidelity to narratives of masculine individual transformation implicate her in the belief that "Nations develop in a teleological manner according to modernization and Marxist theories alike," as one commentator puts it, and in this process "men are the bearers of the modernizing gene."<sup>4</sup>

Graham's version of partisanship, dramatized in the narratives of heroic male leaders and in the promulgation of wars of national liberation, implies a normatively masculine and nondemocratic tradition. In *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership*, Erica R. Edwards challenges what she sees as the valorization of charismatic, predominantly male authority at the center of African American culture and

politics. Black political formations, according to Edwards, have typically produced violent models of charismatic leadership that foreclose alternative and potentially more democratic political arrangements. Edwards argues that “charisma is founded in three forms of violence: the historical or historiographical violence of reducing a heterogeneous black freedom struggle to a top-down narrative of Great Man leadership; the social violence of performing social change in the form of a fundamentally antidemocratic form of authority; and the epistemological violence of structuring knowledge of black political subjectivity and movement within a gendered hierarchy of political value that grants uninterrogated power to normative masculinity.”<sup>5</sup> In this account, charisma constitutes at once a mythology (constructed around male charismatic leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X) and a political fiction (the idea that such leadership is necessary for black political progress) but also, more insidiously, a form of desire: the yearning among many African Americans for a redemptive politics that a charismatic leader is presumed to shoulder.

But in the postwar era, when so many of Graham’s anticolonial contemporaries—finding themselves suddenly on the wrong side of the Cold War divide—were assassinated or overthrown, it is important not to dismiss the affective and concrete political transformations enabled by charismatic authority, particularly since this authority was so intimately tied with the aspirations of sundry individuals, mass publics, and transnational collectivities. “As the 1960s and 1970s progressed,” Ann Douglas notes, “colonialism gave way not to independence, but to neocolonialism, and many of the charismatic leaders and intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s were systematically assassinated, deposed, or died young, sometimes in mysterious circumstances. I think of Felix Moumié, Patrice Lumumba, Amílcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, Richard Wright, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and even John and Robert Kennedy.” Douglas suggests that the consequences of these extinguishments are difficult to calculate and impossible to overstate, insofar as the hopes and transformative possibilities invested in the likes of Malcolm X, Nkrumah, and Fanon also perished along with these figures. It “is hard to imagine or to overestimate the

effect of such losses,” Douglas continues. “Independence in Africa is ‘represented by certain men,’ Fanon wrote in his impassioned elegy for his friend Lumumba. We should not be too quick to deconstruct or disbelieve his statement.”<sup>6</sup>

For Graham, whose own fate was tied to these leaders, history assumed the character of quicksand: the moment or sequence of events when what seemed like relatively stable political ground begins to shift beneath one’s feet. When a postcolonial government confidently appoints a comrade to a significant position on one day, the possibility exists that on the next day this government might be overthrown, its leadership assassinated or drawn into war. The quicksand of history—from the ouster of Nkrumah, which prompted Graham’s departure from Ghana, to Nasser’s death, which precipitated her exit from Egypt, to U.S. anticommunism, which alienated her from the United States—compelled Graham to adapt to constantly shifting geopolitical circumstances, from which she characteristically emerged in positions of remarkable influence.