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Cold War Africa and China:

The Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau and the Rise of Postcolonial Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Comparative Literature

by

Duncan McEachern Yoon

2014

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2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Cold War Africa-China:

The Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau and the Rise of Postcolonial Literature

by

Duncan McEachern Yoon

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Dominic Thomas, Chair

This dissertation argues for an alternative history of postcolonial literature anchored in the cultural exchanges of Africa and Asia. The project claims a strong, but tenuous Africa-China imaginary emerged during 1960s decolonization through the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau founded in 1957. Analysis of their anthologies of world literature reveals an early crystallization of a postcolonial aesthetic rooted in Afro-Asian expressions of solidarity. As a result, the Bureau's Sino-Soviet split in 1966 would magnify Africa as a contested ground of "literary" realpolitik. This dissertation locates the emergence of postcolonial literature outside of a colony's relationship to a colonial metropole. Also, it reexamines Cold War literary networks from a postcolonial perspective. African engagement with Chinese literary theory thereby yields a provocative South-to-South vector of decolonization's aesthetic history.

The dissertation of Duncan McEachern Yoon is approved.

Shu-mei Shih

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o

Gil Hochberg

Dominic Thomas, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

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Vita

Duncan McEachern Yoon has a BA in English and French from DePauw University and an MA from Dartmouth College. He served as a Fulbright Scholar to South Korea in 2004.

Introduction

This dissertation argues the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau (AAWB) provides an alternative genealogy of postcolonial and world literature anchored in the transnational cultural relations of a Cold War Third World. Beginning in 1960, the Bureau adopted a controversial Maoist-inflected cultural platform. Many African writers involved in the organization would appropriate this cultural policy for their own national liberation projects. These interpretations brought about strong misreadings of Maoist literary theory during decolonization movements in the 1960s.¹ As such, an Africa-China imaginary emerged which was both grounded in the solidarity of cultural struggle, and fraught by Cold War realpolitik. The project rereads the Cold War from outside American and Soviet perspectives. It also locates the emergence of postcolonialism outside of the colonies' relationship with the colonial metropolises.² Moreover, it provides a cultural historicization of China's current and often contentious presence in Africa.

The first chapter claims the Bureau's inaugural 1957 conference in Tashkent explicitly sought to redefine world literature through the rehabilitation of African and Asian definitions of humanism. It also contends Maoist literary theory represented a provocative, if flawed, alternative for many African writers due to its definition of the role of literature as a catalyst for a new society. As a result many postcolonial writers, including Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, misread Maoist theory as an example of a non-Western humanism.

¹ See Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* wherein he writes, "[...] the anxiety of influence comes out of a complex act of strong misreading, a creative interpretation that I call 'poetic misprision'" (Bloom xxiii). Also his next work, *A Map of Misreading*.

² The project uses the term "postcolonialism" in reference to Ato Quayson's usage in his Introduction to *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*: "Despite the designation of postcolonialism as a field of discursive practices as opposed to the temporal supersession of colonialism, the collective attempt to outline a literary history of postcolonial writing foregrounds certain conceptual and methodological difficulties for the elaboration of such a history. The *time* and *inception* of the colonial and how they are understood as process as opposed to singular ruptures is decisive for both determining the literary writing that is taken to fall under the rubric of postcolonialism and the criticism that sees itself as doing justice to such writing." (Quayson 6).

This chapter applies Fredric Jameson's notion of "symbolic Maoism" to re-periodize the global sixties according to an Afro-Asian transnationalism (Jameson 188). Accordingly, "symbolic Maoism" was not Maoism as it existed in China. Rather, the chapter shows how Maoism *became* symbolic when it was interpreted by outside actors in a variety of global contexts. African writers' encounter with "symbolic Maoism" did not make them Maoist. Instead it demonstrated the range of ideas entangled in African definitions of postcolonialism during the period.

The first chapter also claims the Bureau was an intervention against what Ato Quayson calls "colonial space-making" (Quayson 16). The Bureau defined decolonization as more than just a simple linear movement forward into independence. Such a "concept of history" brought together disparate geographies in order to define postcolonialism as a simultaneous negotiation across multiple politico-cultural contexts (Jameson 180).

The second chapter contends the Bureau's anthologies of poetry published in 1963 and 1965 were examples of "third world literature," compiled according to the Bureau's Maoist-inflected cultural platform. Close readings of poets such as Dennis Brutus, Kofi Awoonor and Mazisi Kunene reveal the anthologies represent an early crystallization of a postcolonial aesthetic rooted in Afro-Asian expressions of solidarity. It also argues this aesthetic sutured literature to politics in order to write for a local audience committed to the lived reality of decolonization's struggle. Furthermore, this chapter argues the collapsing together of art and anti-colonial struggle embodied what Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* called "combat literature" (Fanon, *Wretched* 159).

The second chapter also shows how the Sino-Soviet conflict would split the Bureau in 1966 into Chinese and Soviet factions. This split produced a "socialist scramble" on the African

continent. While Soviet literary models played an important role, the chapter argues “symbolic Maoism” played as crucial a role for African writers during the period. As a result, definitions of postcolonialism were no longer based primarily in a relationship between colonizer and colonized. Instead, the AAWB oversaw the emergence of postcolonialism as a politico-aesthetic category that was not only anchored in but also constructed through South-to-South transnational exchanges of the Cold War period.

The third chapter steps out of the Bureau’s history to explore the appropriation of “symbolic Maoism” by Léopold Sédar Senghor, beginning with his debate with Jacques-Stéphan Alexis at the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1956. Through an analysis of Senghor’s imaginary of China in his 1961 collection *Nocturnes*, the chapter argues for a new South-to-South cultural vector through which to read the emergence of Senghor’s postcolonialism. For Senghor, Maoist theory represented an alternative model for culture and development that whatever its ultimate deficiencies, was predicated on the importance of translation and cultural difference. As such Senghor’s “Maoism” was an endorsement of the symbolic value of a non-Western national model that was not a blatant copy of Western universalism. He would exploit this symbolic power of an alternative as he implemented his own project of African socialism in Senegal.

The final chapter returns to the history of the Bureau post split into Chinese (AAWB) and Soviet (Permanent Bureau) factions. It argues Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who received the Permanent Bureau’s Lotus Award in 1973, provides a cipher through which to read African involvement during the latter years of the organization. Ngũgĩ’s grappling with the crisis of representation during the period provided a local, African example for the Bureau’s tenuous linking of ideology and aesthetics within a transnational framework.

As such, it also argues Ngũgĩ's controversial decision to write in Gikuyu was taken up within the horizontal vector of Afro-Asian solidarity. The Permanent Bureau's magazine, *Lotus*, provided an extensive forum for transnational debates concerning the politics of language. Although the Bureau's cultural platform was no longer Maoist, *Lotus* would continue to take a firm stance on the critical role of culture to political struggle. The chapter concludes with close readings of Ngũgĩ's imaginary of China in his novels *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*. While Chinese involvement in the Bureau had faded, these readings suggest "symbolic Maoism" still provided a provocative alternative for African writers after independence.

This dissertation's goal is not to endorse the controversial legacy of Maoism. Neither is it to ignore the failures of Third World solidarity in the face of Cold War realpolitik, nor deny the centrality of the vertical relationship with the colonial metropole to definitions of postcolonialism. Furthermore, the importance of the Soviet influence on the AAWB is crucial, but lies outside the scope of this project.³ Instead, this dissertation explores the horizontal vector between Africa and China, which maps an alternative constellation of decolonization and its cultural productions. Whatever its ultimate failures, Maoist literary theory represents a provocative intervention into mid-twentieth century debates concerning the role of literature and art in African definitions of postcolonialism. In sum, the project argues for an alternative periodization of postcolonialism embodied by the South-to-South cultural exchanges of the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau: a "third world literature."

³ Please see Rossen Djagalov, "The People's Republic of Letters: Towards a Media History of Twentieth-Century Socialist Internationalism." Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 2011.

Chapter 1

From Bandung to Conakry: Symbolic Maoism and Afro-Asian Solidarity (1955-1960)

*At this vital juncture in world history
we proclaim our unshakeable resolve
to play our positive and decisive role
in shaping the destiny of the world
of which we constitute the great majority,
taking mankind along the high road of independence,
liberty, prosperity and peace, putting an end
to colonialism and imperialism,
which have brought about injustice, destitution and ruin. [...]
We are determined to destroy all obstacles
along this road of freedom and ensure
that there shall never be a return to the past.*

*Declaration of the Second Afro-Asian
Peoples' Solidarity Conference
Conakry, Guinea. April, 1960.*

Introduction

This chapter will explore the origins of the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau (AAWB) in the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) and the Africa-Asia Conference of Bandung in 1955. In particular, it will outline the beginnings of a Cold War Africa-China imaginary rooted in the transnationalism of Afro-Asian solidarity. It will also explore Fredric Jameson's notion of "symbolic Maoism" as a "shadowy but central presence" in the formation of the AAWB (Jameson 188). It will show how this "symbolic Maoism" was misread by many leftist intellectuals and writers, including Aimé Césaire, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Frantz Fanon. This chapter will not argue these pan-Africanists were Maoist. Their commitments to a transnational humanism run counter to such an association. Instead, these "horizontal" comparisons reveal a new South-to-South vector along which to read Cold War history and the genealogies of world

and postcolonial literature. The adoption of controversial Maoist cultural policies at both Tashkent and Conakry will set the stage for later chapters, which discuss its appropriation by African writers as an alternative, if flawed, model for national culture. Moreover, this chapter will argue the AAPSO's announcement of a new epoch in world history, the postcolonial, was concerned with a recuperation of humanism through Third World cultural production. Finally, it will turn to Fanon's involvement in the AAPSO and the unlikely comparison of his notion of "combat literature" with Mao Zedong's definition of "revolutionary literature." These comparisons will help map an alternative, if provocative, history of postcolonialism anchored in the cultural exchanges of Africa and Asia.

Bandung Anxieties

The Bandung Conference was held in the eponymous city in Indonesia on April 18th-24th in 1955, and is widely regarded as the first summit of Africa-Asia during the Cold War period. This section will not rehash the arguments of many books and articles written about the conference other than to highlight its commitment to non-alignment, decolonization, and humanism.⁴ Although they did not use the term, the conference provided a preliminary definition of postcolonialism through its commitment to "Bandung Spirit." Delegates described this spirit through an affirmation of Asia and Africa as "the cradle of great religions and civilization which have enriched other cultures and civilizations while themselves being enriched in the process [and] are based on spiritual and universal foundations" (Asian-African 31). This cultural resolution attempted to renew pre-colonial cultural solidarity through an emphasis on Afro-Asian definitions of humanism. It was akin to what Aimé Césaire described in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) as a "humanism made to the measure of the world" (Césaire, *Discourse* 73).

⁴ See, in particular, Christopher Lee, *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*.

For the delegates, this redefinition of humanism would lead to a rehabilitation of the cultural difference colonialism had denied. However, even if the idealism of pre-colonial solidarity elided the historically less than mutual economic and cultural exchanges between the two continents, the colonial interruption had supplanted this history with its own explicit, and perhaps more importantly, recent exploitation. As such, Sukarno, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Zhou Enlai, among others, were primarily interested in the immediate political effects of a renewed Afro-Asian solidarity. In this sense, one of the most important consequences of the conference was to exhibit a unified Third World front against the persistence of colonialism across the globe.

In his 1956 account of the Bandung conference, *The Colour Curtain*, Richard Wright defined “Bandung spirit” as a transnational humanism: “a racial and religious system of identification manifesting itself in an emotional nationalism which was now leaping state boundaries and melting and merging, one into the other” (Wright 121). Wright, who lived in Paris at the time, pointed to three forces in play at Bandung: race, religion, and the nation. As such, Bandung spirit resided in the amalgamation of categories of difference under the rubric of an “emotional nationalism.” Wright’s articulation of racial difference through a renewed sense of religiosity problematically endorsed an “emotive” difference of the Third World. Yet for Wright, if Africa and Asia were to produce new links of solidarity, then their catalyst was found in affectivity, that is, to rephrase Wright, in an emotional *transnationalism*. The political utility of Bandung spirit meant to move horizontally along transcolonial lines of affiliation wherein the cultural domain would provide the necessary dynamism. As a result, vibrant cultural policies would become a critical issue at both Bandung and the first AAPSO conference in Cairo in 1958.

While much of Bandung’s rhetoric was one of humanistic solidarity, the conference was not without its anxieties concerning Cold War geo-politics. With the absence of the Soviet

Union, excluded on geographic grounds, many looked to China as the would-be harbinger of ideological dissension. A skeptical Wright would write “the main pre-conference speculation centred about Red China: How close really was Peking to Moscow? Would Chou En-lai grab the opportunity to use the conference as a whipping-post for United States policy in Asia and the Pacific? Would jealous conflicts develop between Nehru and Chou En-lai? Were Asian and religious loyalties thicker than ideologies?” (Wright 111).

However, Zhou Enlai surprised many delegates with his commitment with Nehru to the solidarity principles formulated earlier in 1954 at Bogor: “If we seek common ground in doing away with the sufferings and calamities under colonialism, it will be very easy for us to have mutual understanding and respect, mutual sympathy and support, instead of mutual suspicion and fear, mutual exclusion and antagonism” (Asian-African 21). This conciliatory stance strategically inserted China’s own history of semi-coloniality into the larger history of colonialism in different parts of Asia and Africa. Zhou sought to show that China not only shared this history, but could also be looked to as a leader of Third World anti-colonialism.⁵ Yet Wright maintained that as socialism had once turned from Europe to Asia, it would now begin to work its way into Africa. He wrote that Zhou Enlai “by promising to behave, had built a bridgehead that had found foundations not only in Asia but extended even into tribal black Africa” (Wright 138). For Wright, non-alignment was a pretext for the spread of the socialist bloc to Africa by both the Soviet Union and People’s Republic of China. Their goal would be to convince proponents of non-alignment that a third path to development could not ignore socialist critiques of colonialism

⁵ Pan-Asian solidarity emphatically fell apart with the Sino-Indian border war in 1962. The Bureau’s solidarity was, from the beginning fraught with the parochialism of Cold War national interest, which would come to a head with the Sino-Soviet split. The Bureau would often serve as a public forum for this and other jingoistic polemics. As such, one of the tangential concerns of this article is to ask whether China, through the rhetoric of Third World solidarity, was and is in the process of what John G. Ikenberry has called “international order building.” See Ikenberry’s *After Victory*.

as a form of capitalism. Wright feared this argument would prove more effective if not explicitly stated at the conference. Zhou's example of China's semi-colonial history might then provide fodder to the spread of socialism to the African continent.⁶

Wright's anxiety about Maoism was not unfounded. The attraction of Maoism as an alternative form of socialism resonated with many black leftists during the fifties and sixties because it not only provided a handbook for guerilla warfare, but also represented the first reformulation of Marxism by a non-industrialized and non-Western nation state. Furthermore, it was different than Soviet models because it located class struggle in an alliance between the urban proletariat and rural peasantry. China's Great Leap Forward from 1958-61—although later revealed as a famine producing disaster—would initially be interpreted during the period as an attempt to skip the materialist stages of history.⁷ These stages were based on urban industrialization as a precursor to socialism. By asserting development could skip directly to a socialist stage, many Third World leaders saw in Maoism the possibility of a fresh economic start outside of capitalist models. In 1956, one year after Bandung and one year before the AAPSO's inaugural meeting in Cairo, Maoism represented the only government-backed non-Western socialism.

⁶ China's role in the AAPSO and its relationship to international organizations has always been a contentious issue. See Shu-mei Shih's article "Race and Revolution: Blackness in China's Long Twentieth Century," for a discussion of China's shifting role from colonized victim to global power in the contemporary moment. Similarly, the Comaroffs put it well as they describe the fraught demarcation between the global North and South: "[...] if brute economic development is the primary criterion, where are we to place those powerhouses to which we keep returning [like] China, which greatly profits from playing in the interstices between worlds. And has interpolated itself into *both* north and south without being truly either, all the while promising, some time off into the future, to alter the political economy, and the geo-sociology, of the entire planet" (Comaroff 46).

⁷ When working within the history of "failures," especially as it concerns the 1960s, Fredric Jameson's remarks in the opening of his essay "Periodizing the 60s" seem appropriate: "Nostalgic commemoration of the glories of the 60s or abject public confession of the decade's many failures and missed opportunities are two errors which cannot be avoided by some middle path that threads its way in between. The following sketch starts from the position that History is necessity, that the 60s had to happen the way it did, and that its opportunities and failures were inextricably intertwined, marked by the objective constraints and openings of a determinate historical situation [...]" (Jameson 178).

An arresting case-in-point is Aimé Césaire's resignation from the French Communist Party in his *Letter to Maurice Thorez* in 1956.⁸ Although not present at Bandung, Césaire writes, "In any case, it is clear that our struggle—the struggle of colonial peoples against colonialism, the struggle of peoples of color against racism—is more complex, or better yet, of a completely different nature than the fight of the French worker against French capitalism, and it cannot in any way be considered a part, a fragment, of that struggle" (Césaire, Letter 147). Césaire's resignation signaled a fundamental break in the capacity of European Marxism to address itself to the racialized "other" in the Third World. As such, Césaire was at pains to demonstrate the collusion of race with class in the anti-colonial struggle. Because the colonial system represented the apex of European industrial capitalism for Césaire, the inability of European communists to accommodate the colonial world demonstrated their inability to overcome cultural and racial difference as historical elements within and beyond class. For Césaire, the fact the French working class continued to be the organization's primary focus ignored the history of global colonialism; the French factory could only exist due to the pervasive system of resource extraction from the colony. The alienation of the factory worker in the metropole was, for Césaire, dependent upon the exploitation, racism, and dehumanization of the colonial subject.

Wright's anxiety at Bandung is thereby succinctly stated by Césaire towards the end of his letter in 1956: "There exists a Chinese communism. Without being very familiar with it, I have a very strong prejudice in its favor. And I expect it not to slip into the monstrous errors that have disfigured European communism" (Césaire, Letter 150). This turn away from the colonial metropole and towards China—however ironic given historical hindsight—pinpointed the failure of European socialism to address colonialism. In his dissatisfaction, Césaire pointed to a non-

⁸ Césaire and Wright were already a part of a team of collaborators at *Présence Africaine*. As such, much of thinking regarding these questions was of a fundamentally collective nature.

Western experiment that claimed to have shed colonial racism and implemented a socialism predicated on historical, cultural, and linguistic difference. As a socialism from a country with its own semi-colonial history, Maoism was as seductive an idea—for all its “oriental” exoticism and alleged successes—as any leading up to the mass decolonization of the sixties. Césaire’s letter thereby signaled a crisis in French, and possibly European Marxism as a whole. The rising presence of Maoism-as-alternative, however misguided, deepened the divide between first and third world negotiations of socialist solidarity.⁹

Jameson’s Concept of History and *Symbolic Maoism*

Fredric Jameson’s 1984 article, “Periodizing the 60s,” is especially relevant to this context of Cold War solidarities. Following Louis Althusser, he writes “as old-fashioned or ‘realistic’ historiography became problematic, the historian should reformulate her vocation—not any longer to produce some vivid representation of History ‘as it really happened,’ but rather to produce the *concept* of history” (Jameson 180). For Jameson, this concept of history is made of four levels: “the history of philosophy, revolutionary political theory and practice, cultural production, and economic cycles” (Jameson 179). Later in the same essay Jameson continues to describe his concept of history as the “problem of some ‘unified field theory’ in terms of which such seemingly distant realities as third-world peasant movements and first-world mass culture (or indeed, more abstractly, the intellectual or superstructural levels like philosophy and culture generally, and those of mass resistance and political practice) might conceptually be related in some coherent way” (Jameson 205). Jameson’s periodization of the 60s thereby relies on a myriad of factors that stretch synchronically across historical, economic, and cultural spheres. It

⁹ For the ramifications of Maoism in the American context please see Robin D.G. Kelley’s “Black Like Mao” in Fred W. Ho and Bill Mullen. *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*.

is this entanglement of people, ideas (both economic and cultural), and geographies that produces a comprehensive, yet flexible definition of a concept, and in turn, periodization.

Ato Quayson explores a similar “concept of history” in his own formulations of “colonial space-making” as “defined by a sets of relations that were structurally produced and contested across a series of interrelated vectors throughout the colonial encounter” (Quayson 16).¹⁰ These frameworks helps rethink periodization outside a set of linear or chronological circumstances that posit independence as the decidingly banal hinge in the designation of the postcolonial. As will be discussed below, the Afro-Asian solidarity movement in many ways embodied, to modify Quayson’s phrasing, an “anti-colonial space making.”

Also reminiscent of Raymond Williams’ “structures of feeling,” this methodology takes into account variables from across the synchronic board.¹¹ If periodization is a concept rather than a linear slog forward, then it is possible to trace cultural currents of a period across various geo-political contexts. As such, this section will explore what Jameson, in that same essay, coins as “symbolic Maoism” in relationship to Afro-Asian solidarity represented by the AAPSO and AAWB. It will also argue the lion’s share of the AAWB’s cultural work was to formulate a concept of postcolonialism, and by extension, history, from a Third World perspective. Through their writer summits and publications, the Bureau brought together disparate vectors—Maoism, pan-Africanism, humanism, transnational solidarity—to produce an “emergent” postcolonial

¹⁰ Quayson makes a particularly effective case for what he calls “colonial space-making” in the introduction to *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*: “[...] colonial space making is first and foremost the projection of sociopolitical relations upon a geographical space. Colonial space-making is ultimately about the distribution of social and political goods along axes of power and hierarchical relations and is the result of a series of interconnected and highly complex procedures and instruments. It is undergirded by assumptions, metaphors and bureaucratic practices all of which interact with a given social environment to produce hegemonic relations of power. While the hegemonic relations of power and the ideas and assumptions undergirding them may be challenged, the platforms upon which the relations take shape are as much cultural and symbolic as they are political and spatial” (Quayson 16).

¹¹ See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

aesthetic. This aesthetic was linked to cultural struggle in the historical moment of decolonization and its incipient neo-colonialism.

Jameson never explicitly defines his term “symbolic Maoism,” preferring to describe it as a “shadowy but central presence” in his 1984 essay (Jameson 188). As such, “symbolic Maoism” is not Maoism as it was implemented in China. It exists when it is “read” into existence by an outside actor. For example, it resides in the ubiquitous image of Mao as a central component of revolutionary kitsch, or in the many interpretations of his “little red book.” As a symbol it is then “indefinite, but richly—even boundlessly suggestive in its significance” (Abrams 396). The “symbolic” in “symbolic Maoism” is thereby its capacity to operate as a cipher. Maoism *becomes* symbolic through its interpretation into a variety of contexts. For many scholars including Jameson, the primary example is the French Maoism of the 1960s. However, for this argument it resides in its appropriation by the AAWB during the fifties and early sixties.

Maoism has often been the object of en vogue exoticism—a revolutionary model from the “Orient” that produced inspiration for films such as Jean-Luc Godard’s *La Chinoise*. In the same breath, it has evoked strong opposition to which the many debates over its controversial legacy can attest. Within intellectual history, scholars have often dismissed it as a pseudo-philosophical system that does not further the leftist genealogies of Luckacs, Adorno, Lenin, Trotsky among others (Alain Badiou proving the lasting exception). These interpretations are justifiably uncomfortable with accounts of lived experience in Maoist China. With all of its controversies, famines and iconoclasms, it was one of the most sustained experiments in socialism outside of the West. The fact that Maoist thought was enacted on-the-ground has produced contradictory responses within different contexts: from the romanticization of the

“oriental” struggle, to the hesitation to critically engage with Maoism due to the history of famines and purges during the period.

However, Chris Connery’s 2007 article, “The World Sixties,” explores Mao’s thought in a global context. He defines, “global Maoism” as “a set of dispositions and tendencies that informed political life and liberatory dreams across a broad spectrum” (Wilson 96). He continues by identifying its various traits: thirdness, theories of contradiction, anti-revisionism, centrality of the peasantry, devaluation of intellectuals, voluntarism, and cultural revolution. These departures, while defamiliarizing for many Western leftists, resonated with the historical circumstances of many actors across the colonized world. Here was a theory of class struggle that was both critical of Europe and did not take it as a primary point of departure. In fact, Maoism was predicated on applying class analysis to the cultural, linguistic, and historical differences of China. With its history of Confucianism, the New Culture Movement of May 4th, as well as its own anti-colonial war against the Japanese, the emergence of Maoism was as complicated and entangled with Chinese intellectual history as it was with the genealogies of European Marxism.¹² This section cannot pursue an in-depth analysis of each of these differences. However, reading Maoism as integral to Chinese history, rather than a derivative of Western thought, shows why it engaged so many Third World actors during the period: these actors often dealt with similar issues of politico-cultural difference.¹³

To sum up, Maoism *becomes* symbolic through the process of interpretation across a range of global contexts. As such, it is not “Maoism” as it existed in China. Rather, “symbolic Maoism” operates as a series of interpretations or strong misreadings of image (Mao as icon) and

¹² For a discussion on the emergence of Maoism out of a range of socialisms, including a sustained engagement with anarchism in 20th century China, see Arif Dirlik’s seminal work, *The Origins of Chinese Communism*.

¹³ Some of the key primary documents and speeches by Mao are “Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society,” (1926) “On Contradiction,” (1937) “On Practice,” (1937), “On New Democracy” (1940) “Talks at the Yanan Forum of Literature and Art” (1942) to name a few of the most influential texts of a large and controversial corpus.

text (Maoism as a set of tenets).¹⁴ One example of “symbolic Maoism” is its adoption as the initial cultural platform of the AAWB. Other examples include the referencing of Mao by figures such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o.¹⁵

However, to engage with Maoism while thinking through specific projects of national culture does not make these thinkers Maoist. Rather, what is at stake is to reread the emergence of postcolonialism through its linkages with the Afro-Asian solidarity movement, and specifically, the encounter with Maoism. Following Jameson then, this article will show how the Bureau appropriated “symbolic Maoism” as they formulated their concept of postcolonialism.¹⁶

AAPSO Cairo, 1957 and the Creation of the Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau

The Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization held its first meeting from December 26th, 1957 to January 1st, 1958 in Cairo Egypt, with over five hundred delegates from forty-eight different nations in attendance. After Bandung, it was the single largest meeting of Africa-Asia

¹⁴ Shu-mei Shih’s article “Is the *Post-* in Postsocialism the *Post-* in Posthumanism?” provides not only an exhaustive account of humanism’s discursive permutations within the Chinese intellectual landscape during the 20th century, but also a response to Jameson’s article “Periodizing the 60s.” Concerned both with the suppression of humanistic thought after the Hundred Flowers Movement and its reemergence with Wang Ruoshui in the 1980s, Shih also emphasizes the magnitude of such a misreading of Mao in the first world: “Given [the history of the Anti-Rightist Movement], which can be partially interpreted as a history of defensive reaction against Marxist humanism, how and why Mao’s China came to be seen as a socialist alternative to Stalinism by left-leaning intellectuals in Europe at this time—leading to the immense following Mao and the Cultural Revolution garnered throughout the global 1960s—says more about Left romanticism of some sort than true understanding either of Maoism or of China under Mao” (Shih, Post 33). Shih bases a discussion of this “Left romanticism” on Jean-Paul Sartre’s trip to China in 1955 and his consequent exuberant support of the Maoist project. This first-world misreading of Mao as a Marxist humanist is fascinating for its third world implications. In this sense, Leftist romanticism of Mao in both first *and* third world contexts produced a symbolic imaginary, which served as a paradoxical means through which to promote an anti-colonial humanism.

¹⁵ See, for some examples, the debate on the uses of Maoist literary and cultural theory between Senghor and Alexis at the First Congress of Black Writers in *Presence Africaine*. Frantz Fanon’s 1958 article in *El Moujahid* included in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays*. Also, within the literary realm, the repeated references to Mao in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s socialist realist novel, *Petals of Blood* (1977).

¹⁶ The AAPSO and AAWB brought together a variety of vectors, exchanges and influences including Soviet influences, pan-Asianism, pan-Africanism, and increasingly, the influence of the Tri-continental and the Cuban experience. It is not the chapter’s intention to deny the influence of these factors on the organization and their conception of postcolonialism, but rather, to indicate the Maoist presence as a provocative, but often elided part of a global South network of exchange and appropriation.

and constituted a turn towards materialist definitions of anti-colonial struggle. If Bandung announced the arrival of the postcolonial onto the global scene, Cairo announced the arrival of postcolonialism's encounter with leftist internationalism. Conducted in a flurry of languages from around the world, the conference's proceedings were published in three different *lingua francas*: English, French and Arabic. In this sense, the AAPSO, from the beginning, was entangled with questions of the politics of language. While the languages of English and French demarcated the extent to which colonial empire had spread across Africa and Asia, they also, albeit paradoxically, created a space wherein the universalist aspirations of Enlightenment humanism were interrogated in their own right. In fact, as would become increasingly apparent at later summits including Tashkent and Conakry, the implementation of a transnational humanism coupled with a commitment to an anti-colonial politics would form the platform of the AAPSO.

In his opening address, the president of the conference, Anwar El Sadat brought the AAPSO directly into the legacy of Bandung. He also presented an argument based on Hegel's master and slave dialectic as one of the reasons for Afro-Asian solidarity:

The idea of Afro-Asian Solidarity did not emanate out of naught, so as to be born and see daylight at Bandung all of a sudden. But before materializing as an historical event, it was an impression and an innate volition instinctively developing in the mind of the colonized and the exploited—the human being whom imperialism had reduced to a typified specimen of a subjugated species and bondsman recognizable in every colonized country. Indeed the idea of solidarity was deeply rooted in the hearts of those subjected peoples, continually aspiring through diverse national movements to smash the fetters of bondage and redeem their salvation. In the course of time these national movements were destined to meet, to consolidate and to react with one another, purposefully in some instances, but unconsciously and spontaneously in the majority of cases. (AAPSO, Cairo 9)

El Sadat interpreted the historical legitimacy of the AAPSO as rooted in the psychology of the colonized subject. Specifically, in Hegel's "bondsman" from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. As such, El Sadat conceived of the AAPSO as a response to the tradition of Enlightenment thought.

Furthermore, he also conceived of it as an engagement with the discourse of colonial taxonomies. By calling the colonized both a “typified specimen of a subjugated species” and “bondsman recognizable in every colonized country,” El Sadat responded to both the history of Enlightenment philosophy and its application in colonial anthropology (AAPSO, Cairo 9). By locating the seeds of resistance in the psyche of the colonized, El Sadat endorsed an oppositional politics that was both affective and cultural. He urged for a turn from the “struggle to the death” of Hegel’s master and bondsman to a relational solidarity between the bondsmen themselves.¹⁷ National self-determination was thereby part and parcel to a cultural politics that sought out the colonialism of Afro-Asia as a basis for its solidarity. Of particular interest was the notion that “national movements” rather than cohesive nation-states were “destined to meet, to consolidate, to react with one another” (AAPSO Cairo 9). This network of national movements revealed that the formation of a postcolonial national culture could rely on exchanges between countries that did not re-inscribe Hegel’s dialectic of master and slave. After Bandung, the AAPSO represented the *transnationalization* of independence movements from a space that emphasized cultural difference as a means to decry colonial power dynamics. Member states were thereby, from the start, embroiled in both the internationalism of AAPSO politics and the transnationalism of its cultural policies.

If as El Sadat stated, Afro-Asian solidarity was “a natural psychological factor,” then the consequent idealism that emerged from such a linkage negotiated the difficult terrain of applying this affectivity to politics (AAPSO, Cairo 9). For Youssef El Sebai, Secretary General of the

¹⁷ By looking to a transcolonial solidarity between bondsman, El Sadat’s statement stands as a revision of Hegel’s “struggle to the death” of two, independent self-consciousnesses. Hegel’s argument presupposes that any encounter between two individuals, or self-consciousnesses, may be reduced to a dynamic of raw power, that is, one self-consciousness will ultimately assert his superiority over the “other,” rendering it his “bondsman.” Within the colonial context, this concept would be treated at length by Frantz Fanon in his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1956). It is thereby a possibility that Anwar El-Sadat in 1957 had been exposed to Fanon’s work.

Conference, the discourse of human rights served as the realm wherein this idealism and practicality coalesced:

If we stand firmly, resolutely and faithfully and insist on equality, on the suppression of racial discrimination and on giving human beings their rights, irrespective of colour, of race, of sex or religion; if we stretch out our hands to back each other, and install in our hearts the faith that we can do much for this world of which, we form the biggest part; if we realize our value and our capacity to use that value for the realization of the aspirations for which the world is yearning; if we do all this, there is no doubt that we would have done something really good not for ourselves alone but for the whole world. (AAPSO, Cairo 20)

With this statement, El Sebai placed the discourse of human rights as it concerned race, gender and religion, firmly at the center of the summit's idealistic solidarity.¹⁸ The logical step between the application of human rights and a recuperation of a transnational humanism was negotiated by a rehabilitation of "Afro-Asian culture." The Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, as the cultural wing of the AAPSO, took as its central mission the marshaling of culture and civilization as integral to a transnational humanism. The cultural resolutions at Cairo state:

Noting that culture is the fundamental principle in the life of nations, being the principle which awakens the conscience of man, strengthens his spirit, elevates his moral standards, betters his mind and opens up wide vistas in the fields of material intellectual and spiritual production; [...] Noting that civilization is a common heritage which no one nation can monopolize and to which all men have an inherent right, and that all nations should cooperate whole-heartedly to develop, enrich and propagate it to the utmost possible extent, so that all men, regardless of their race, colour, environment or religion may partake of its benefits [...]. (AAPSO, Cairo 59)

In many respects, the AAPSO conceived of itself as a human rights organization concerned with the implementation of fair economic exchanges during the postcolonial period, which would clear a path for Third World development. As such, the delegates viewed national cultural concerns as equally important in the recognition of human rights across the Third World. This

¹⁸ Both Anup Sing of India and Guo Moruo of China would reiterate the doctrine of Pancha Shila and its five principles of peaceful co-existence, which both Indian and Chinese delegations had previously endorsed at Bandung. Predictably, the PRC's own national interests would surface in political resolutions concerning their inclusion as a member state of the United Nations.

emphasis meant the AAPSO viewed the rehabilitation of Afro-Asian culture as important a concern as any economic policy.¹⁹ However reductive, the transformation of “tradition” into a “modernity” was one of the central stakes of the AAPSO’s cultural policy. Because so much of the colonial project had denied the category of “human” and by consequence “civilization” to the colonized world, the emphasis on a recuperation of these, albeit Western, categories meant the AAPSO had identified the ideological grounds through which colonialism self-perpetuated. While these assertions that culture “awakens the conscience of man” and “elevates his moral standards” were highly idealistic and characteristic of a universalist tendency in Enlightenment philosophy, it was the commitment to a humanism redefined through the diversity of cultures and their exchanges within the Third World that served as the catalyst for the AAWB’s formation (AAPSO Cairo 59).

In response to the imperative of “cultural cooperation,” the AAWB was born. The delegates recommended “the exchange by member nations of scientists, men of letters, artists, students and cultural and educational organizations, as well as the holding of periodical and **ad hoc** cultural conferences” (AAPSO, Reports 9). At the heart of these “cultural conferences” was the encouragement of “translation to and from the languages of member countries, and the establishment in every member country of a planning body to co-ordinate the translation movement” (AAPSO, Reports 60). These Third World translation and cultural exchanges would attempt, however briefly, to move the organization past Cold War divisions of American and Soviet blocs. They would also attempt to move past the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized. Although they did not explicitly use the term, the AAWB would conceive of postcolonial

¹⁹ The AAWB was just one organization among many others under the AAPSO umbrella. In addition to the Writers Bureau, the AAPSO also established societies of journalists, women, youth, and economists.

literature through a de-emphasis on the colonial dynamic in favor of a commitment to Third World vectors of translation and exchange.

Although the Soviet Union would have a significant influence on the AAPSO, including hosting the first writers conference in Tashkent in 1958, the delegates did not initially conceive of the organization as part of the Soviet bloc. Instead, they harbored concerns, which originated at Bandung, over issues of non-alignment and Third Worldism. While the Sino-Soviet split would later reveal the ideological fissures in the AAPSO, in 1957 the AAPSO dedicated itself to giving unified voice to the refutation of colonialism on both economic and cultural levels. The AAPSO's Bandung origins meant the Soviet Union, in citing their territories in central Asia, had appealed to the geography of "Afro-Asia" in order to join. In this sense, the later ideological divisions within the AAPSO were not between traditional Cold War blocs, but rather between the Soviets and the Chinese. In particular, leftist-leaning African politicians, writers and intellectuals would have to negotiate this difficult terrain of Cold War realpolitik.

In a *Special Cultural Report* given by the Chinese delegate Chu Tunan titled, "Promotion of Cultural Exchange Between the Countries of Asia and Africa," he referenced the importance of historic Afro-Asian cultural ties linked to Mesopotamia, the Silk Road and Buddhism. Of particular importance for Chu was the notion that the common history of colonialism had stifled cultural development:

The Asian and African peoples desire neither to nullify nor exclude anything that is useful in Western Culture, but we will [not] tolerate the colonial type of 'culture.' [...] On the one hand, they viewed with contempt and conspired to nullify the great historical cultures of our countries, impos[ing] the term of 'backwardness' on us thus aiming to deprive us of our national self-confidence. They engaged in wanton destruction of our cultural monuments and shameless looting of our precious cultural relics. On the other hand, they spread wherever they went their decadent 'culture' thus to poison us at the roots, paving the way for further aggression. They tried in every way to sow dissension among the Asian and African countries, and erected barriers to cut off cultural exchange among us. (AAPSO, Reports 343)

While ironic for the historical iconoclasm of the May Fourth Movement's "occidentalism," as well as the later excesses of the Cultural Revolution, in 1957 Chu maintained that the overall effect of global colonialism was the negation of any alternative definitions of civilization and the "human." In general, the AAPSO at Cairo sought to show how the discourse of human rights was part of a transnational humanism. However, here Chu attempted to demarcate the differences between humanism as a product of Western thought and humanism as a product of the history of South-to-South exchange.²⁰ Paradoxically coming after the crackdown on the Hundred Flowers Movement in 1956, Chu's statements demonstrated the PRC's maneuvering for political solidarity through cultural exchange. Furthermore, Chu's speech would seemingly endorse the AAPSO's general stance concerning the global application of human rights through transnational humanism: "when we speak of the new civilization of mankind, we definitely regard the culture of the world as a whole" (AAPSO, Reports 346). As a result, China shored up its diplomatic image as a non-Western country committed to decolonization and the development of new nations across the Third World. This sustained presence of the Chinese delegations at AAPSO conferences would help produce a Third World imaginary of China as an alternative to Soviet and Western models.

²⁰ This redefinition of humanism from a materialist perspective would, as Raya Dunayevskaya asserts, form the basis for Mao's response to the "Hundred Flowers" campaign and later critique of Khrushchev during the Sino-Soviet split: "The specter that has been haunting Mao since both the Hungarian Revolution and the "Hundred Flowers" campaign manifested opposition *from the Left*, is that of Marx's Humanism. As the Sino-Soviet conflict first unfolded, the attacks on Humanism were hardly noticed because Mao made sure that each such use of the word was preceded by the word *bourgeois*. He was fighting Khrushchev as a 'bourgeois humanist,' a 'revisionist'" (Dunayevskaya 181).

The notion of “alternative modernity” would also become a flashpoint in Chu’s speech.²¹

While the association of the nation with modernity was not new, what resonated for the delegates lay in the linkage of these terms under the notion of decolonization and development:

We are striving to build our countries as countries with modern science and culture. It is our firm belief that the peoples of Asia and Africa, who had fought bravely against the colonialists over every inch of our territory and who have either already acquired independence and freedom or are acquiring it today certainly are able to develop our fine cultural tradition, build our modern culture and thereby make new contributions to human civilization. (AAPSO, Reports 344)

In this sense, the birth of new culture movements meant to form an alternative project of modernity within semi-colonial or postcolonial contexts.²² Moreover, rather than understand modernity as linked exclusively to the nation, Chu promoted a modernity that was transnational in conception. These national independence movements would bring about cultural exchanges between Afro-Asian nations in order to speed the process of decolonization. While Maoism was ultimately at odds with discourse of humanism, the PRC’s official stance at the AAPSO was to promote Afro-Asian solidarity through the affirmation of a decolonized entrance into modernity. Furthermore, the explicit attempt at cultural rehabilitation through the AAWB’s exchanges would create a paradoxical space wherein realism, modernism and indigenous forms served as the basis of what is now considered to be postcolonial literature.²³ The aesthetic

²¹ Dilip P. Gaonkar writes: “One can provincialize Western modernity only by thinking through and against its self-understandings, which are frequently cast in universalist idioms. To think through and against means to think with a difference—a difference that would destabilize the universalist idioms, historicize the contexts, and pluralize the experiences of modernity” (Gaonkar 15). For an extensive discussions of this term as well as its limitations also see Mark A. Wollaeger, and Matt Eatough. *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*; Satya P. Mohanty *Colonialism, Modernity, and Literature: A View from India*; Doyle, Laura, and Laura A. Winkiel. *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*; Jean and John L. Comaroff. *Theory from the South or, How Euro-America is Evolving toward Africa*.

²² For a discussion of modernism in the Chinese historical context, see Shu-mei Shih’s *The Lure of the Modern Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937*.

²³ For a further discussion of the relationship between postcolonialism, modernism, and realism see the *Modern Language Quarterly*’s special edition “Peripheral Realisms.” In the introduction Jed Esty and Colleen Lye write: “Yet political nonalignment for the Third World writer in fact entailed an agnostic stance, with both modernist and realist forms usable for anticolonial expression. In revisiting the question of peripheral realism, this special issue thus reasserts the aesthetic range of non Euro-American literary practice beyond that of conformity to an

consequences of such a world-view would be the subject of the first Afro-Asian Writers Bureau conference later that year in Tashkent.

Tashkent, 1958 and Third World Literature

The first Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan from October 7th to 13th, 1958 took the turn to third-worldism and its relationship to anti-colonial struggle into the realm of culture and aesthetics. The role of writers in decolonization and national culture projects dominated the proceedings beginning with the "Appeal to the Writers of the World:"

We the writers of Africa and Asia, have come together here in Tashkent and have discussed issues of importance to us, writers, and to *world literature*. We are gratified that the writers of our countries, heirs to the great humanist traditions of the noble ancient civilizations of Asia and Africa, are continuing to contribute both to the development of the cultures of the modern world, and to the progress of humanity. (Afro-Asian Writers 23). (my emphasis)

At Tashkent, world literature was understood as a cultural embodiment of a Third World postcolonialism. Furthermore, its usage serves as an intervention into the typical genealogy of world literature which begins with Goethe's 1827 coinage of the term *Weltliteratur* and then moves to discussions of the effects of contemporary globalization on literature.²⁴ The AAWB fills in a large gap in this genealogy by providing an alternative literary history rooted in the experience of decolonization, namely, in a "third world literature." The conference's definition of third world literature valorized non-Western histories through cultural exchanges and

international modernist style and its offshoots (fabulism, oral literature, metahistorical allegory, magical realism). It seeks to restore to view the agency of the Third World writer freed from the role of repeating forms pioneered elsewhere in earlier times" (Esty 269). It was at these crossroads of indigenous traditions, national proclivities towards realism, and the anti-teleological critique of modernism that the AAWB attempted to conceive of an aesthetics based on South-to-South exchanges.

²⁴The long list of scholarship over the past twenty-five years includes but is not limited to Edward Said's *Orientalism*; Charles Bernheimer's edited volume *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism*; Franco Moretti's article "Conjectures on World Literature" in the *New Left Review*; David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?*; Gayatri Spivak's *Death of a Discipline*; Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters*; Christopher Prendergast's *Debating World Literature*; Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell's *Shades of the Planet: American Literature As World Literature*; Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas' *A Companion to Comparative Literature*.

promoted these traditions as examples of humanism. They viewed national cultural movements as a means through which to rehabilitate the category of humanism on a global scale. Frantz Fanon would take up this notion in his closing speech at the next AAPSO conference in Conakry in 1960 and later would explore it in depth in *The Wretched of the Earth*.²⁵ While Aimé Césaire did not participate in the conference, Fanon's speech, as well as the "Appeal to the Writers to the World," resonated with the aforementioned call in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) for "a humanism made to the measure of the world" (Césaire 73).²⁶

Even within this new geographic paradigm, the delegates still engaged with European Enlightenment conceptions of cultural "spirit." They would also deal with the relationship between cosmopolitanism and the role of the writer:

It is the first time in history that the intellectuals of our two great continents [...] have all come together in one place to represent the elite of the new unbounded spirit, the spirit of 1,500 million human beings. Our peoples who represent almost the 2/3 of humanity are heirs to the greatest and most ancient civilisations and cultures. [...] Man wrought the first material and spiritual weapon: the written language. (Afro-Asian Writers 24)

This statement is explicit in its attempt to validate the cultural differences of Africa and Asia through an emphasis on the collective spirit of transnational solidarity. Furthermore, the delegates were aware they "represent[ed] the elite of the new unbounded spirit," and

²⁵ One of the key definitions of this "new humanism" is found in Fanon's chapter "On National Culture" in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "This new humanity, for itself and for others, inevitably defines a new humanism. This new humanism is written into the objectives and methods of the struggle. A struggle, which mobilizes every level of society, which expresses the intentions and expectations of the people, and which is not afraid to rely on their support almost entirely, will invariably triumph. The merit of this type of struggle is that it achieves the optimal conditions for cultural development and innovation" (Fanon 178). For a discussion of the AAPSO speech and its relationship to Aimé Césaire see my essay "The Global South and Cultural Struggles: On the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization" in *Journal of Contemporary Thought*. Global South Cultural Dialogue Project: Forum on Indian Literature to World Literature.

²⁶ Another key text for this definition of humanism is Léopold Sédar Senghor's defense of negritude in 1970 wherein while he acknowledges negritude as "the sum of cultural values of the black world" he also modifies this static definition with a more flexible model: "it is essentially relations with others, an opening out to the world, contact and participation with others. Because of what it is negritude is necessary in the world today: it is a humanism of the twentieth century" (Senghor 196). It is with this sense of a certain flexible set of cultural values and their "relational opening to the world" that this chapter understands the term humanism in regards to the AAWB.

consequently, of the profoundly cosmopolitan nature of the organization (Afro-Asian Writers 24). As with its articulation of an alternative geography of world literature, the conference at Tashkent signaled an alternative geography of cosmopolitanism located primarily in the Third World.²⁷ After Tashkent, the Bureau would have meetings in Bali, Beijing, Cairo and Beirut. These alternative geographies of cosmopolitanism provided a new framework for the imagining of postcolonialism in Africa and Asia. As such, literature, as the first “material and spiritual weapon,” would occupy a privileged space in projects of decolonization and subsequent attempts to form a national culture (Afro-Asian Writers 24). Through the Bureau’s conferences, these literary exchanges would also provide the cultural glue which held together Afro-Asian solidarity. The delegates at Tashkent would describe the role of literature and art as a means to promote a vision of modernity anchored in the particularities of cultural difference. As a result, the organization’s commitment to recuperating a non-Western humanism provided a forum through which definitions of postcolonial literature *as* world literature began to form.²⁸ Furthermore, these cultural exchanges provided a crucible wherein a concept of postcolonialism emerged through discussions on third-worldism, Maoism, pan-Africanism, humanism, world literature, and national culture.

The presence of a large Chinese delegation demonstrated the extent to which the PRC sought to present China—much as Zhou Enlai did at Bandung—as a cultural model for the Afro-Asian world. Zhou Yang, then vice-minister of culture and vice-director of the CCP’s Department of Propaganda, would give a speech endorsing this position:

²⁷ See Neil Lazarus’ “Cosmopolitanism and the Specificity of the Local in World Literature,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. March 2011 vol. 46 no. 1 p. 119-137.

²⁸ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o addresses this in *Globalectics*: “The postcolonial is at the heart of the constitution of Goethe’s world literature, and even in theory, it indeed constitutes the nonimperial heart of the modern and postmodern” (Ngũgĩ, *Globalectics* 55).

We absorb the essence of the culture of other countries on the basis of our special national conditions and needs, and assimilate it for the creation of our own. Since liberation we have rid our soil of imperialism and the poison of feudal-comprador culture, and we are today carrying on cultural exchanges systematically and on a large scale. We are modestly learning from the strong points of other peoples. (Chou 16)

Zhou invokes Enlightenment notions of “spirit” through his focus on the absorption of other cultural “essences” across the world. This identification of a cultural “essence” is problematic in that it reduces the diversity of cultures to a nationalistic framework. However, Zhou’s emphasis on a shared knowledge based on mutual cultural exchanges embodied the Bureau’s focus on the formation of national consciousness. It was in this context of decolonization that Zhou located the creative power of a transnational cultural discourse. His rhetoric promoted a national consciousness that sought to reversal colonial hierarchies through Afro-Asian transnationalism. This formulation promoted a cultural turn away from the colonial metropole for affirmations of postcolonial identity and to new lines of affiliation found in the AAWB’s third-worldism.

Besides Zhou, the Chinese delegation included famous writers such as Mao Dun, Ba Jin, and the wife of Lu Xun, Zhu An. However, Zhou’s speech at Tashkent demonstrated the lengths to which the PRC would go to uphold a foreign policy line of transnational solidarity. While not explicitly endorsing humanism in his speech, the cultural process he describes not only resonated with the humanist overtones of Tashkent, but also, and perhaps more importantly, presented China as a possible model for other nations in the development of their national cultural discourses. The large Chinese presence at Tashkent marked a significant moment in the PRC’s diplomatic policies during the Cold War. It represented an opportunity for Maoist notions of the role of art and literature to occupy a global stage. The PRC’s political jockeying that had began at Bandung had now found its way into the cultural sphere as “literary diplomacy.” As such, two points of discussion that would dominate the conference were issues of language and audience.

With speeches by the Angolan delegate, Mário de Andrade on the politics of language, Efiua Sutherland on the status of literature in Ghana, and even W.E.B. Du Bois (whose talk was titled, “I am African, I am American,”) it became clear that the issue of audience lay at the heart of the conference’s agenda. To whom and for whom was the writer supposed to write? What would be the function of ideology in such an aesthetic? And what style of literature did this moment of history demand? De Andrade put it in linguistic terms: “the study of literature in African countries” is suppressed because “African languages are not permitted in any institutions and establishments,” due to “the politics of assimilation [that] has expanded everywhere. Because of this, Angola has not been able to put forth in written form our traditional African literature and the rich patrimony of our culture” (Tachkent 11). While referencing the country’s rich tradition of oral literature, de Andrade attacked the colonial hierarchy of language which reflected the power dynamics of colonialism itself. This assertion was provocative within the international framework of Tashkent, which out of necessity took English and French as the primary languages of communication. De Andrade’s desire to validate indigenous languages and narratives within the context of anti-colonial struggle put into relief the crisis of representation facing the Bureau and its cultural platform.

While de Andrade succeeded in bringing the question of literature’s audience to the forefront of the conference, it would be the famous Chinese writer, Mao Dun, who would provide a preliminary answer. The Chinese delegates at Tashkent had left a China in the full throes of the Great Leap Forward. The PRC sought to skip the capitalist stages of industrialization with an emphasis on rural collectivization and the development of agricultural and industrial sectors. While in historical retrospect the Great Leap Forward is considered an economic catastrophe, in 1958 delegates viewed it as an alternative path of development. This

notion of China as “Third World model” contributed to why Mao Dun’s speech received such an enthusiastic response both during the conference and in the subsequent Soviet press coverage.²⁹

In his speech, titled “For National Independence, the Undertaking of Humanity’s Progress, and its Relationship to the Struggle of Chinese Literature” Mao Dun first gave an outline of the 1919 May Fourth Movement in China. He then presented an argument for the role of the writer according to Mao Zedong’s *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Art and Literature*.³⁰

While already influential in China, Mao Dun’s speech represented the first time Maoist literary theory was promulgated on such a global scale. At Tashkent, the speech would provoke the national imaginations of many writers and intellectuals across the Third World. Mao Dun began:

Throughout the whole country in recent years, over seven hundred writers have gone down to the countryside, to the mines, and to the troops. They go because they know, fundamentally, that if you do not go down and mingle with the working people and understand their thoughts and emotions, then it will be impossible to create a true and consummate depiction of the worker’s mental outlook. Furthermore it will be impossible to reflect the earth shaking nature of our present era. (Tashigan 56)³¹

According to Mao Dun, a work of literature had to reflect a people’s “consciousness,” which was assumed to be intrinsically revolutionary. The writer’s role was to tap into this consciousness and awaken it through the imagining of alternatives, which would then bring about a transformation

²⁹ “The representatives of the Asian Communist countries in general were given every opportunity to propagate the achievements of a Communist society, but pride of place was taken by the Chinese delegation. The speeches made by its leader Mao Tun were published in *Literaturnaya gazeta* under the heading ‘Let us Set an Example of Unity,’ while the Soviet press generally stressed Mao Tun’s importance at the conference. Moreover, both *Pravda* and *Literaturnaya gazeta* devoted considerably more space to him in their reports than to any of the other participants” (Soviet Affairs 19).

³⁰ One of the most famous adages from the *Talks* is: “There is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics. Proletarian literature and art are part of the whole proletarian revolutionary cause; they are, as Lenin said, ‘cogs and wheels’ in the whole revolutionary machine” (Denton, *Talks* 474).

³¹ “最近一年来，全国有七百多作家深入到农村，工矿，部队中去。因为他们深深知道，如果不进一步深入人民中间，理解劳动人民的思想感情，将无法在创作上更真实，更完美地描绘出劳动人民地精神面貌，也就无法反映出这个惊天动地的时代。” (My translation) This is a paraphrase of Mao’s *Talks*: “China’s revolutionary writers and artists, writers and artists of promise, must go among the masses; they must for a long period of time unreservedly and wholeheartedly go among the masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers, go into the heat of the struggle, go to the only source, the broadest and richest source, in order to observe, experience, study, and analyze all the different kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art. Only then can they proceed to creative work” (Denton, *Talks* 470).

of their environment.³² The audience for such a literature was not an intellectual elite but rather, the rural peasantry. The writer sought to reflect this “mental outlook” through a shared experience of their quotidian (Tashigan 56). This approach would typify the aesthetics of China’s Cultural Revolution in the next decade. Such a didactic definition of literature meant the writer occupied a privileged position within the hierarchy of cultural struggle. The assertion that the writer must learn from the peasant by going “down to the countryside,” produced a tension between a literary elite and an uneducated peasantry (Tashigan 56). Yet, such a radical shift in audience was a response to de Andrade’s grappling with the politics of language.³³ This focus on the peasantry as source and audience for cultural struggle provided a preliminary answer to Tashkent’s central question concerning the relationship between art, politics, and the role of the writer.

Mao Dun continued with a quote from a Chinese worker: “where there is labor, there is poetry” (Tashigan 56).³⁴ This adage brought together and, in so doing, redirected the disparate strands running through the conference. For many delegates, it resonated with the commitment to humanism because it sought to validate the day-to-day culture of the most marginalized figures under colonial rule: the rural peasantry. While initially Tashkent’s humanism had been associated with an affirmation of cultural difference in the “Appeal,” Mao Dun’s speech lent this

³² Mao continues in the *Talks*: “Writers and artists concentrate on such everyday phenomena, typify the contradictions and struggles within them, and produce works that awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm, and impel them to unite and struggle to transform their environment” (Denton, Talks 470).

³³ Mao provocatively asks towards the beginning of his *Talks*, “The first problem is: literature and art for whom?” And later, “Our literary and art workers must accomplish this task and shift their stand; they must gradually move their feet over to the side of the workers, peasants, and soldiers, to the side of the proletariat through the process of going into their very midst and into the thick of the practical struggles and through the process of studying Marxism and society. Only in this way can we have a literature and art that are truly for the workers, peasants, and soldiers, a truly proletarian literature and art” (Denton, Talks 464, 467).

³⁴ “哪里有劳动， 哪里有就有诗。” (My translation)

humanism a distinctly materialist inflection.³⁵ Such a materialist turn created a template for a new culture based on factors similar to Jameson's categories of the "concept of history."³⁶ Because so many delegates were also involved in national liberation movements, this "symbolic Maoism" provided a framework for national culture that emerged out of the immediate context of anti-colonialism. Rather than view such an aesthetic as overly determined by politics, which could (and would) asphyxiate cultural production, many of the delegates at Tashkent sought out a definition of culture that took anti-colonial struggle as its starting point. This "poetics of labor" provoked the delegates to think according to a "concept of history." They began to conceive of national culture as a revolutionary practice which would help end the economics of colonialism. Because Mao Dun located this in the "poetics of labor," the delegates interpreted the speech as an alternative theory of culture based on a stylization for the contemporary moment of struggle.

W.E.B. Du Bois would mount the podium after Mao Dun to give, according to the press coverage, a similarly stimulating address. He decried capitalism as "stuck in an impasse from which it will never emerge," and appealed to "the whole of humanity in order that all humanity may live a happy and active life" (Tashkent 15).³⁷ Du Bois' presence opened up an additional vector in the transnationalism of Tashkent: transatlantic pan-Africanism. In this sense Tashkent represented one of the critical confluences of pan-Africanism and "symbolic Maoism" within the genealogy of postcolonialism. These affective links forged at Tashkent gave Du Bois a fascination with the China during his last years. Before his death in Ghana in 1963, he would

³⁵ For a discussion on why Maoism is *not* a humanism, Marxist or otherwise, see Raya Dunayevskaya *Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1973. However, within the context of the AAWB as well as the Chinese diplomatic imperative to present themselves within the context of Third World solidarity, Maoism was systematically misread as humanistic.

³⁶ That is, the "history of philosophy, revolutionary political theory and practice, cultural production, and economic cycles" (Jameson 179).

³⁷ "Le capitalisme [...] s'est engagé dans une impasse d'où il ne sortira plus. Nous devons donner tout ce que nous pouvons à l'humanité tout entière pour qu'elle vive d'une vie heureuse, active. Le socialisme sera édifié dans le monde entier." (My translation)

visit China in 1959 during which he received the grand but selective tour of the country during its infamous Great Leap Forward. Du Bois returned, enthusiastic about the role China in leading

Third World development:

What is the secret of China in the second half of the twentieth century? It is that the vast majority of nearly a billion human beings has been convinced that human nature in some of its darkest recesses can be changed if change is necessary. I used to weep for American Negroes as I saw through what indignities and repressions and cruelties they had passed, but as I read Chinese history these past months and had it explained to me stripped of Anglo-Saxon lies, I know that no depths of Negro slavery in America have plumbed such abysses as the Chinese have seen for the last two thousand years or more. They have seen starvation and murder, rape, and prostitution, sale and slavery of children, and religion cloaked in opium and gin for converting the heathen. (Du Bois 346)

Du Bois based his imaginary of China on the solidarity derived from the history of colonialism, which stretched from the African-American experience of the transatlantic slave trade all the way to the opium wars of Qing dynasty China. Characteristically of Du Bois, he also read this historical solidarity through racial difference. In this sense, the “color line” of his famous *The Souls of Black Folks* now demarcated the lines of decolonization across the Third World. This misreading of Maoism would provide a model for other pan-Africanist imaginaries of China.

The affiliations produced at Tashkent, embodied in speeches by de Andrade, Mao Dun and Du Bois, enacted Jameson’s “concept of history” read through the multiple valences of Afro-Asian solidarity. However, for the AAWB, the acuity of the historical moment of decolonization meant their definition of postcolonialism included factors not as prevalent in its later emergence as an academic method. One example is South-to-South vectors of intellectual, cultural, and economic exchange during the Cold War. The importance of Afro-Asian solidarity, however fraught with the parochial national interests of realpolitik, provides an alternative framework to think through issues of postcolonialism that does not rely almost exclusively on a colony’s relationship with the colonial metropole. Specifically, later chapters will map how “symbolic

Maoism” functioned within this framework. The goal, however, is not to analyze the controversial Maoist legacy in China itself. These debates have been had at length in other forums.³⁸ Rather, this and following chapters will focus on how “symbolic Maoism” functioned along with a variety of other factors, including pan-Africanism, in the formation of the Bureau’s cultural platform.

While the cultural platform would become more cohesive after the second Writers’ Conference in Cairo in 1962, the conference at Tashkent had formed criteria that would characterize the Bureau’s concept of postcolonialism up through the publication of its second poetry anthology in 1965. These included: the equal importance of cultural struggle along with the political and economic; a privileging of Afro-Asian solidarity over a vertical relationship with the colonial metropole; the Third World’s engagement with “symbolic Maoism”; non-alignment; an emphasis on indigenous languages and culture; questions of audience; a commitment to human rights and humanism; and the importance of translation and cultural exchange to formulations of a third world literature. This concept of postcolonialism would serve as a springboard for the delegates’ own national culture projects as well as an inchoate definition of what is now often termed as “alternative modernity.”

Looking East: AAPSO 1960 Conakry, Guinea

The AAPSO’s second summit in Conakry, Guinea from April 11th-15th, 1960, marked a distinctive turn in AAPSO politics. While professing allegiance to non-alignment as it emerged from Bandung, the AAPSO had, from the beginning, aligned itself more with the socialist bloc.

³⁸ See Rebecca Karl’s *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History*; Paul Clark *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*; Moby Gao’s controversial, *The Battle for China’s Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution*; Slavoj Žižek’s provocative introduction to Mao Zedong in *On Practice and Contradiction*. Maurice Meisner’s *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait*. Cambridge. There are also a host of biographies, provocative and critical, of Mao’s legacy that constitute a whole field of study in and of themselves.

However, after the first AAPSO meeting in Cairo, and the first AAWB meeting in Tashkent, the choice of Ahmed Sékou Touré's Guinea for the second summit meant the AAPSO had begun to tilt hard left. Not only was Sékou Touré closely aligned with Maoist China, but Guinea had also chosen the most radical path to national independence from France.³⁹ Declaring independence in 1958, Sékou Touré had rejected the more conciliatory lines taken, for example by Senghor's Senegal, which advocated and maintained trade and cultural ties with the French metropole. Determined to break with conditions that produced neocolonialism, Sékou Touré promoted a policy of Eastern-looking self-sufficiency.

With seventy delegations present from countries around the world—including Patrice Lumumba's *Mouvement National Congolais*—as well as delegates from cultural bodies like *Présence Africaine*, the Conakry summit became an immediate hot bed of anti-colonial sentiment.⁴⁰ Frantz Fanon served as the head of the FLN delegation from a war-torn Algeria. He was also Vice President of the conference itself, providing the closing speech on behalf of the African continent. His incendiary speech at the All-African People's Conference in Ghana in 1958, the speech "On National Culture" at the Second Congress of Black Writers the next year in Rome, as well as his friendship with Sékou Touré, had catapulted the Martinican born psychiatrist onto the Afro-Asian stage in the late 1950s as one of the most well known anti-colonial voices. This intense period of international solidarity was also the period during which Fanon was to complete his magnum opus, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

³⁹ A large Guinean delegation visited the PRC in September of 1960, which the newspaper *Renmin Ribao* hailed as "A New Stage in Sino-Guinean Friendship and Cooperation." They write of Sékou Touré's speech: "However, as President Toure said in Peking, although the imperialists slander China and seek to isolate the Chinese people from African political consciousness, 'the Africans know where the truth lies;' imperialist slanders and smears against New China 'can only stimulate the friendship and solidarity that already exist between the countries of Africa and Asia in general and in particular the country of the great Chinese people'" (Peking, Sino-Guinean 8).

⁴⁰ Other notable delegates were, Liao Cheng-Chih from China, Mirzo Toursun Zade from the U.S.S.R., Jaramogi Oginga Odinga from Kenya, Diallo Abdoulaye, the Secretary General of the All African Peoples Conference, Youssef El Sebai from the United Arab Republic, and Rameshwari Nehru from India.

In his opening speech, Sékou Touré returned to issues of humanism expressed at Bandung and Tashkent:

We are determined to bring about the victory of the human and spiritual values of our societies that must no longer be relegated to the sidelines of World history. In this view which is that of the Afro-Asian people that of all the under or non-developed countries and finally that of all the progressive and democratic forces in the world, it is not so much the countries of such and such a colour, of such and such religion, of such and such a continent that can triumph, as the whole of mankind jointly united in this new enterprise of human renewal. (AAPSO, Conakry 12-13)

This speech demonstrated the extent to which discourses of humanism and decolonization continued to dovetail as the all-important 1960s decade of decolonization approached. While Mao Dun, W.E.B. Du Bois, and others had provided this connection at the first AAWB conference in Tashkent, the AAPSO had now made this convergence of anti-colonial politics and humanism one of the main tenets of the organization. Sékou Touré's speech not only maintained the Third World's critique of a Eurocentric conception of world history, but also made explicit the variables of difference—racial, religious and geographic—upon which the West had predicated the colonial system. By interrogating the notion of periphery and center—those “sidelines of World history”—Sékou Touré turned to the developing Third World as a new paradigm of solidarity based upon a reciprocal recognition of human dignity and culture (AAPSO, Conakry 12).

While the AAPSO would soon encounter, in the form of the Sino-Soviet split, an era of Cold War realpolitik and its requisite national parochialism, it was precisely this early push in favor of the “margins speaking to each other” that created such a powerful anti-colonial imperative and imaginary. In particular, the AAPSO's adoption of the rhetoric of humanism allowed for a new politics based upon South-to-South affiliations. The definition of what constituted human dignity, which was increasingly read through the nation, was no longer

completely reliant upon Western reciprocation. Many member countries of the AAPSO would use this Third World solidarity, including China, to manipulate the United Nations through the promotion of national sovereignty recognition. The AAPSO provided a Third World mechanism, which appropriated the discourse of humanism through human rights, in order to have political and economic ramifications for all members of the U.N.

In addition to national sovereignty recognition, Sékou Touré drew attention to the imminent specter of neocolonialism in Africa: “Independence guided by remote control, granted independence, such are the new formulas, dear to a neo-colonialism, the ultimate aim of which consists in maintaining the state of subjection of our people behind the screen of African powers” (AAPSO, Conakry 14). Prophetic in its immediate implications for many African liberation movements, Sékou Touré’s would insist new nations would need to fight against a continued colonial presence in the postcolonial period. This assertion revealed his application of materialist historiography to not just the period of decolonization, but also to the postcolony. Such a theorization of class within the postcolonial period would be taken up and expanded upon by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The dissemination of Mao’s own writings concerning combatting neocolonialism would also provide a theoretical starting point for both Fanon and Sékou Touré in the early 1960s.

Youssef El-Sebai, the secretary general of the AAPSO who would later become integral to the formation of the Bureau’s literary journal *Lotus*, would also give a speech. He asserted that the continued refusal of the PRC’s official recognition by the U.N. was an example of the denial of human dignity through the denial of national sovereignty:

It is preposterous, and reflective of a rather low level of intelligence to imagine that any solution of the peace problem is possible by ignoring the 650 millions of the People’s Republic of China. The persistent refusal of the most reactionary war-mongering

elements in the U.S. to deny recognition to the reality of the PRC has been one of the contributing factors to the continuation of world tensions. (AAPSO, Conakry 38)

El-Sebai would later head up the Soviet-influenced Cairo office of the AAWB after the Sino-Soviet split. As such, his endorsement of the PRC's national interest through the AAPSO provided an instance of just how committed the international body was to South-to-South anti-colonial solidarity in 1960. The United Nations' refusal to officially recognize the PRC was interpreted by the AAPSO as a denial of Third World "sovereignty." The PRC's maneuvering within the AAPSO would ultimately result in the vast majority of African nations recognizing it as the representative to the United Nations. In fact, the U.N.'s eventual recognition of the PRC on October 25th, 1971, was due mainly to the vast majority of African states voting in its favor, which attained the two-thirds majority necessary to pass the resolution. In short, the PRC's political jockeying through solidarity against anti-colonialism allowed them to draw upon the larger discourse of humanism and human rights as a means to attain UN recognition.⁴¹

El-Sebai continued with a long litany of what the AAPSO deemed as critical human rights issues: South African apartheid, continued Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Guinea-Bissau, the Algerian war, the reunification of Korea and Vietnam, Palestinian occupation, and above all, nuclear disarmament. He then stated "it was inevitable that the Afro-Asian soul, which for a brief span of its ancient history found itself lost, should again reawaken and assert itself" (AAPSO, Conakry 28). As discussed previously, this emphasis on an essentialized, Afro-Asian "personality" or "soul" is a problematic reduction of a vast diversity of languages and cultures. However, El-Sebai's "Afro-Asian soul" was entangled more with the historical moment of decolonization than with an ultimate belief in a fundamental similarity between Africa and Asia.

⁴¹ The PRC's ultimate role in the AAPSO is a contentious issue. Whether the PRC was only manipulating the AAPSO for its own national interests, or whether there was in 1960 a real affective connection with other Third World countries is subject to debate. However what is patently clear from the PRC's involvement in the AAPSO is a promotion of not only its diplomatic vision, but also its cultural one.

The idealism of such a reduction can be read as an exercise in transnational naïveté. Yet it can also be read as an exceptional moment in the history of decolonization. The prolonged existence of various outposts of European colonialism in every part of the Third World had, in the wake of World War II, begun to crumble at an ever-increasing rate. The AAPSO's idealistic solidarity would help form the critical mass that pushed movements for decolonization over the tipping point. The AAPSO would use the discourse of human rights in order to reveal the inherent hypocrisy of a colonialism that championed one version of humanity over another.

The cultural resolutions adopted at the conference reflected this commitment to a validation of transnational humanism through a mutually affecting South-to-South cultural dialogue. Emerging from the cultural goals of the AAWB's meeting in Tashkent, the cultural resolutions adopted in Conakry embodied the desire within the AAPSO to define the role of literature and culture in relationship to decolonization and nation-building. On one hand the conference at Tashkent had announced a commitment to transnational humanism as the guiding policy of its writers and artists. However, the ecstatic reception of Mao Dun's speech dovetailed discourses of humanism, such as Pan-Africanism, with what this chapter has defined as "symbolic Maoism." This conflation would demarcate one of the ideological battle lines during the Sino-Soviet split. However, the 1960 summit at Conakry furthered the notion that symbolic Maoism was somehow compatible with Third World negotiations of humanism. In fact, due to both the overwhelming positive reaction to Mao Dun's speech and the consequent adoption of Maoist-inspired cultural policies at the AAPSO's summit in Conakry, Maoism was misread as an example of Third World humanism.

One of the most Maoist-inflected statements from the resolutions at Conakry lies in the privileging of culture within the realm of Third World politics:

Our politics is notably more cultural than that of the West, in a sense that we make use of all the dimensions of our being in making our political demands. [...] Our politics is cultural because it does not mean to us a simple conflict between two opponents anxious to conquer and dominate; but we struggle to create a new order the setting up of which is inspired by the suffering of all those who have known slavery, racial discrimination, colonialism and imperialism. Our cultural aspirations are far more fundamental for our political actions than the power of the West which has: depersonalized us and so altered our institutions. (AAPSO, Conakry 83)

This suturing of politics to cultural production at Conakry would bring about a turn to a revolutionary aesthetic as a necessary component of anti-colonial struggle. The resolutions also maintained that culture served as the primary locus for revealing the limitations and fissures of a colonial ordering of knowledge. Furthermore, they also pushed for an understanding of culture within the transnational context of decolonization. That is, this new, Third World order necessitated both a politics of culture and a cultural politics. Their *politics of culture* was the series of horizontal exchanges embodied by the AAWB's first meeting in Tashkent and its promotion of a revolutionary aesthetic. The institutionalization of such a position within the context of the Cold War allowed for the promotion of a Third World cultural solidarity through the AAPSO itself. The politics of culture was thereby understood as the institutional attempt by the AAWB to reorder the colonial power dynamic within the larger international system of diplomatic relations (cultural or otherwise) in order to take into full account the legal implications of human rights applied on a global scale. In short, it was an attempt to "de-occidentalize" institutions through a "repersonalization" of the Third World (AAPSO, Conakry 83). On the other hand, a *cultural politics* meant to envision postcolonial national culture as not fixed within a Hegelian paradigm of master and slave. This understanding of aesthetics took a transnational humanism as its core component. As a result, the appropriation of symbolic Maoism by the AAWB in 1958, and its confluence with pan-Africanism, allowed for the institutionalization of both within the cultural politics of emerging Third World nations.

As at Tashkent, part of this definition of cultural politics was answering the pertinent question of audience. Because the humanism that emerged out of Bandung, Cairo and Tashkent took a paradoxically militant turn at Conakry, there was a pronounced anxiety over *whom* the writer in a national liberation context should address: “Less and less writers work for the mere pleasure of Western readers, more and more we seek to deserve above all the confidence of our people within the context of our struggle for the restoration of our dignity. The writers, however, as well as the artists, are scattered, isolated and conditioned by European individualist tradition” (AAPSO, Conakry 84). Part and parcel to the discourse of transnational humanism was the writer’s role to help restore “dignity” to a people. For many delegates this dignity was rooted in essentialist notions of an “Afro-Asian personality,” which was to find an outlet in a redefinition of literature’s audience. Because so many writers were “isolated and conditioned by European individualist tradition” there was a conscious effort for the resolutions to address the politics of language previously brought up in discussions at Tashkent (AAPSO, Conakry 84). To turn away from the West and towards the “Afro-Asian people” as an audience meant to enter the problematic ground of authenticity *qua* indigeneity, as well as to complicate the cosmopolitan nature of the organization. While this idea would form the basis for later debates over the status of the Europhone African novel (Achebe) and indigenous language forms (Ngũgĩ), what is important to point out was the existence of this problematic as early as 1958—largely before any discussion of what is now considered the invention of postcolonial literature as a category. Furthermore, it represents an intervention into contemporary paradigms of world literature, which posit a continued anxiety over the circulation of texts as both commodities of globalization and as metonyms of Third World culture. In this sense, the Tashkent and Conakry conferences represented an attempt to formulate a conception of world literature that, while

entangled with the history of colonialism and the consequent Cold War, emanated from the epistemology of the Third World. The later activities of the AAWB, while imbricated with Western Enlightenment paradigms à la Edward Said, as well as the continued colonial haunting of publications in Euro-phone languages, moved the question of audience to a squarely postcolonial context. Moreover, this tension between whether a national culture would be predicated upon a transnational cosmopolitanism, an indigenous peasantry, or both, stands an alternative way to understand the emergences of postcolonial studies and world literature. Rather than continually read these notions from the perspective of its emergence in the 1980s and 90s in the Western academy, the AAPSO and the AAWB represented Third World formations of a postcolonial aesthetic *as* world literature beginning in the late 50s and early 60s.

Of all the cultural resolutions adopted at Conakry that were tinged with Maoist vocabulary, the following is the most striking for its resonances: “No work of art, no artist attained a degree of importance unless this work or that artist expresses the aspiration of our masses. These aspirations and that struggle are, in effect, characteristic of our time. Our century is that of the developing world, only artists who are fully conscious will be immortalized” (AAPSO, Conakry 84).⁴² Not only was this statement reminiscent of Mao Dun’s speech at Tashkent, but it also brought a symbolic Maoism into the heart of the organization’s cultural platform. If the artist’s role was to express the “aspiration of the masses” in the “developing world,” then the cultural politics of a transnational humanism took a markedly militant turn at Conakry. Art and literature’s role was thereby to develop a combative consciousness—both by the artist and by the masses. According to this resolution, the artist’s work had to “educate” the

⁴² Mao writes in his *Talks* “We should tell [the specialists] that no revolutionary writer or artist can do any meaningful work unless he is closely linked with the masses, gives expression to their thoughts and feelings, and serves them as a loyal spokesman. Only by speaking for the masses can he educate them, and only by being their pupil can he be their teacher” (Denton, *Talks* 473).

masses, rendering them a politically aware “people.” This didactic conception of literature was both an attempt to embody the historical and material conditions of Afro-Asian national liberation, as well as bring the politically militant directly into Third World cultural production.

It is within this appropriation of symbolic Maoism that Frantz Fanon gave a speech titled “In the Name of Africa,” during the closing session of the AAPSO Conakry summit. The speech not only marked Fanon’s deep commitment to a transnational anti-colonial struggle, but also placed his emergence within the organization squarely within its turn towards a radical politics and poetics. The speech itself, which was addressed on behalf of the African continent *to* Asia as a whole, can be read as an enactment of the mutually-affecting gaze of one “wretched” of the earth to another. This gaze of solidarity, which lay outside, yet was in refutation of the colonial framework, demonstrated Fanon’s movement beyond both the racial binary of white / black and the political binary of first / third. Within the 1960s context of African decolonization, it embodied the political goals of the Third World:

Since it is my privilege to speak on behalf of Africa, I wish to address our Asia comrades. We, Africans, say that we wish to break, one after the other, all the chains of imperialism and colonialism. Your voice, like an echo, replies that this is also your target. We, Africans, say that national independence is incompatible with the persistence of more or less disguised forms of foreign oppression. You, comrades of Asia, say just the same. You also quite understand that economical development, cultural exchange and the enrichment of the human mind are conditioned by the taking over of the entire national responsibilities by the conscious and well-organized people. We, Africans, have never ceased to defend this viewpoint. (AAPSO, Conakry 121)

Fanon’s role as a *porte-parole* of the African continent reflected the contradictory landscape of authenticity *qua* indigeneity discussed earlier in regards to the politics of language. It was precisely both Fanon’s “blackness” and his role in the Algerian revolution—rather than his language (French) or education (again, French)—that identified him as a legitimate representative. In this sense, the discourse of authenticity as indigeneity was troubled from the

beginning of African decolonization and reflected the deeply cosmopolitan nature of many liberation movements, including the AAPSO itself. The speech affirmed Africa and Asia's shared history of colonialism and imperialism. Fanon's insistence on decrying the imminence of neocolonialism not only echoed Sékou Touré's opening remarks, but also presaged its exhaustive diagnosis in *The Wretched of the Earth*'s chapter, "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness." Humanistic in impulse, Fanon continued to locate development—both economic and cultural—as promoted through the national project by a "conscious and well-organized people," which within the context of Conakry resonated with a materialist historiography (AAPSO, Conakry 121). It also meant Fanon was committed to the organization of a liberation party, which would embody the anti-colonial struggle.

Besides this emphasis on the necessity of a liberation party, Fanon—similar to the symbolic Maoism of the summit's cultural resolutions—sutured culture to the politics of decolonization:

You, brothers from Asia, invite us to defeat the historical mystification that aims to present a certain culture as the peak of universal culture. And through your work, through your research and by means of your triumphs, you have proved that universal culture, the conception of man to the size of the world, have only just started. We say: This is exactly what we wanted to affirm. (AAPSO, Conakry 121)

Fanon's focus on the "historical mystification" of colonialism not only echoed Sékou Touré's opening remarks, wherein he equated this mystification with the creation of "an inferiority complex in the colonized man," but also presented culture as the restorative locus of the colonized psyche (AAPSO, Conakry 14). This all-inclusive Asian "you" provided the necessary affective solidarity for the disaggregation of colonial hierarchies of culture. It also allowed for a speculation as to which Asian imaginary Fanon referenced in his assertion that it was through Asia's "research and by means of [its] triumphs" that an affirmation of global culture emerged.

This “conception of man to the size of the world” was in fact almost a verbatim quotation of Césaire’s “humanism made to the measure of the world,” which this chapter discussed previously (Césaire, Discourse 17). With this speech, Fanon moved past Cold War divisions between American and Soviet camps. Moreover, Fanon’s focus on the history of colonialism in Asia necessarily pushed his rhetorical gaze towards the example of anti-colonial struggles in South, Southeast and East Asia—and in particular, to China.

In an article written in *El Moudjahid* in 1958 on the All-African Conference in Accra, Fanon displays a similar impulse as other pan-Africanists by looking towards China as a possible example for liberation movements on the African continent: “Asia is now liberated from colonialism and territories like China, afflicted, it seemed, until now with an absolute wretchedness, are creating a new kind of civilization, an authentic one, which concerns man and which opens limitless prospects for his enhancement” (Fanon, Toward 153). For Fanon, this Africa-China imaginary is grounded in, as with Aimé Césaire in his *Letter to Maurice Thorez* and W.E.B Du Bois presence at Tashkent, the assumption that the history of a semi-colonial China provided the affective links necessary to form a bond of Third World solidarity against colonialism. The cultivation of this affective solidarity was in fact one of the primary reasons for Chinese diplomatic presences at every major international conference beginning with Bandung and the AAPSO meeting in Cairo. Fanon’s speech at Conakry can thereby be read as an African response to these diplomatic overtures.⁴³

⁴³ Fanon’s involvement in the Algerian war of independence and prominent role with the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN) as both revolutionary theorist and unofficial diplomat to Ghana, meant that China’s recognition of the Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne (GPRA) within days of its announcement on September 20th, 1958 was fundamental in producing a reciprocal affirmation to Algerian claims of national self-determination. In fact, the PRC’s backing of the GPRA signaled an early departure from the Soviets as Moscow did not extend recognition to the GPRA at that time. Ten weeks later, while Fanon attended the All-African People’s Conference in Accra from December 5th to 13th, a high level GPRA delegation was flown to Wuhan during the Sixth Plenum of the CCP Central Committee and met with Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Chen Yi to discuss establishing diplomatic

Fanon continued his speech by asserting that while it may have shocked the West to see Africa reach out to Asia, rather than to other leftist leaning contingents within the West, it was because “we talk the same language, that in reality we are very very near to each other, that we want the same things and that we fight the same enemies” (AAPSO, Conakry 121). The crux of the Afro-Asian solidarity movement thus lay in Fanon’s rhetorical idealism, which embodied the political exigency of decolonization. The AAPSO represented a united Third World front, however tenuous, in the face of an already teetering colonialism. By reducing the histories of Africa and Asia to the determination of a colonial interruption, Fanon employed precisely the correct global scale to contest further colonial exploitation. He echoed the AAPSO summit in Cairo that had proclaimed: “this unanimity is in itself significant” (AAPSO, Cairo Introduction). In short, the idealism was practical. In this context, his notion that Africa and Asia “speak the same language,” was not just a gestured cosmopolitanism underscored by the irony of his use of French; rather it was the language of solidarity against a systematic and pernicious underdevelopment of Third World economics and culture (AAPSO, Conakry 121).

Fanon ends with what can be ironically characterized as a militant call to humanism:

They have tried to make the world against us and without us. Well, this enormous vacuum we shall fill together. We shall together enlarge humanity, that is Man. We shall together build Man and the human mind, modify the soil, the trees, the mountains and the rivers. Woe betide those who would try to delay us! For we, Asians and Africans, have decided, here in Conakry, to break them. LONG LIVE ASIA. LONG LIVE AFRICA. LONG LIVE UNIVERSAL PEACE AND CULTURE! (AAPSO, Conakry 121)

Fanon thereby located the AAPSO squarely in the interstices of the Hegelian conception of history. He asserts the West has failed to construct a world in its image due to the dehumanization of the “other” during colonialism. This failure, in line with Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*, demonstrates the moral bankruptcy of colonialism, including its economics.

relations as well as, although less explicitly, military aid. See Bruce Larkin, *China and Africa, 1949-1970: The Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China*.

However, for Fanon it was not enough to begin the construction of an alternative world order without a militant engagement with the colonial empire; it was necessary to reveal colonialism's failure through the struggle of decolonization. It is through this controversial militancy that Fanon saw the opportunity for national liberation. His point was that the Third World—specifically, Africa and Asia—would succeed where European colonialism had failed. For Fanon development was the modification of “the soil, the trees, the mountains and rivers,” through the construction of an alternative modernity (AAPSO, Conakry 121). Furthermore, it was precisely within colonialism's denial of human rights and humanism that the resolve of Fanon's new humanism emerged. As controversial as this humanism-through-violence became, it was based on Third World unity against colonialism and neocolonialism. It was this call to unity that allowed Fanon to end with the paradoxical “breaking” of the West in order to attain a “universal peace and culture” (AAPSO, Conakry 121). This uneasy coupling of militancy and humanism at Conakry was embodied in both the adoption of symbolic Maoism as the AAPSO's cultural policy and in Fanon's Afro-Asian “call to arms.” The conference at Conakry demonstrated the extent to which delegates from newly formed Afro-Asian nations were committed to moving along lines of affiliation outside of the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized. These horizontal exchanges helped lay the groundwork for an alternative conception of postcolonialism.

Fanon's “Combat Literature” in Afro-Asian Contexts

Fanon's relationship with Guinea-Conakry and its controversial leader, Ahmed Sékou Touré, has not elicited much scholarly attention. As with comparison's with Maoist China, reading Fanon within such a context must negotiate the difficult terrain of historical hindsight. While Fanon has become one of the pillars of postcolonial studies, Sékou Touré's regime in Guinea would devolve into dictatorship. The goal in this final section is not to take away from

the long legacy of Fanonian humanism. Rather, it is to elaborate upon the wide range of encounters that made up Fanon's life in those last years leading up to the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth* and his death. Even in his attempt to anticipate the relationship between neocolonialism and the "national bourgeoisie," Fanon's work can be characterized as frozen in a state of anticipation. He would not witness Algerian independence, nor the widespread disillusionment with postcolonial governments across the Third World. However, many of his lasting contributions to the theorization of decolonization were worked through during these last years before his death. This section will consider two passages from *The Wretched of the Earth*: his close reading of Fodéba Keita's *African Dawn*, and his later theorization of "combat literature." It will argue it is possible to read Fanon's seminal work "horizontally," namely, through an engagement with both Guinean and Chinese cultural theory.

Fanon begins his famous chapter, "On National Culture," with an epigraph from Sékou Touré's speech at the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome, 1959: "It is not enough to write a revolutionary hymn to be a part of the African revolution, one has to join with the people to make this revolution. Make it with the people and the hymns will automatically follow" (Fanon, *Wretched* 145). Reminiscent of the Bureau's cultural resolutions formulated at Tashkent, Sékou Touré would fully endorse a partisan literature read through an application of materialist historiography to the Guinean context. For Sékou Touré, "outside of this single struggle there is no place for either the artist or the intellectual who is not committed and totally mobilized with the people" (Fanon, *Wretched* 145). Here is Sékou Touré's own critique of "art for art's sake" in favor of an art charged with political relevance. In his following commentary, Fanon asserts that each generation must rise to their historical circumstances in order to articulate a new stage of history. In particular, he distinguishes between the previous generation that

“fought the best they could with the weapons they possessed at the time,” and the current context, which is “in the heat of combat” and is of a “fundamentally different international situation” (Fanon, *Wretched* 146). Fanon would use this theme of combat and its relationship to national culture in his analysis of the dramatic poem, *African Dawn*.

In a rare foray into literary criticism, Fanon close reads a dramatic poem by Sékou Touré’s soon to be minister of culture, Fodéba Keita. Sékou Touré’s purge and execution of Keita in 1969 lends this example a tragic irony. However, Fanon’s importance to the postcolonial literary field necessitates an engagement with one of his few instances of literary analysis. In fact, Fanon deems the poem so essential “to reflect on demystification and combat” that he quotes it in its entirety (Fanon, *Wretched* 163). Keita’s dramatic poem recounts the story of Naman, a peasant farmer who is conscripted into the French army during World War II. Naman survives the war only to be gunned down on his way back to Guinea by the French police during a racist dispute: “But one month later Corporal Moussa, a great friend of Naman’s sent this tragic letter to Kadia: ‘It was dawn. We were at Tiaroye-sure-Mer. In the course of a major dispute between us and our white chiefs in Dakar, a bullet struck Naman. He lies in Senegalese soil’” (Quoted in Fanon, *Wretched* 166). Fanon writes that he has “chosen this long poem because of its undeniable pedagogical value” (Fanon, *Wretched* 167). While specific to the Guinean context, Fanon is at pains to situate the text within a global historical framework: “this is Sétif in 1945, Fort-de-France, Saigon, Dakar, and Lagos. All the ‘niggers’ and all the ‘filthy Arabs’ who fought to defend France’s liberty or British civilization will recognize themselves in this poem by Keita Fodéba” (Fanon, *Wretched* 167). Fanon’s insists upon reading this encounter between a colonial subject and colonial force as metonymic for the current political climate across the Third World.

This geography stretches from the Caribbean, to Africa and Asia, highlighting Fanon's commitment to transcolonial solidarity.

Fanon also writes that within the poem "there is a constant obsession with identifying the exact historical moment of the struggle, with defining the place of action and the ideas around which the will of the people will crystallize" (Fanon, *Wretched* 163). Fanon defines national culture as derived from acute moments of political struggle. While the poem is specific to the Guinean context, Fanon locates the power of these instances of struggle in their resonance across colonized cultures. In contrast with definitions of culture vis-à-vis *négritude*, which often mobilized a pre-colonial past as a means to rehabilitate African culture, Fanon locates the formation of culture within the struggle for liberation itself. In drawing on a collective experience of loss due to colonial wars, Fanon calls for an aesthetics of action which is intended to awaken a national consciousness.

For Fanon, national culture is stylized to the acuity of decolonization's historical moment, which produces what he will define as "the combat stage where the colonized writer, after having tried to lose himself among the people, with the people, will rouse the people. Instead of letting the people's lethargy prevail, he turns into a galvanizer of the people. Combat literature, revolutionary literature, national literature emerges" (Fanon, *Wretched* 159). In this passage, Fanon describes how a writer stylizes for the moment of anti-colonial struggle. The description of this process is strikingly similar to a passage from Mao's *Talks* wherein he states "China's revolutionary writers and artists [...] must for a long period of time unreservedly and whole-heartedly go among the masses of the workers, peasants and soldiers, go into the heat of the struggle" (Mao 82). Although Mao is writing from the context of early 1940s China, and Fanon from an increasingly acute Algerian context in 1959, both writers define the role of the

writer from a class standpoint. According to such a materialist historiography, the writer must derive his or her aesthetic from the lived reality of the rural peasantry and workers. This radical shift in literature's subject matter and audience enacts the historical parallels the AAPSO used to form their cultural platform. It also provides a way in which to read the seemingly disparate geographies of China and Algeria together according to Jameson's "concept of history." While the geographic contexts seem incompatible, the historical circumstances of both Mao and Fanon have resonances. Mao wrote his *Talks at the Yenan Forum of Literature and Art* in 1942, towards the end of a protracted guerrilla war against Japanese occupation. Fanon was similarly committed to the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) and its protracted war against French colonialism. Within this context of anti-colonial struggle both writers define the role of literature as an act of affiliation across class lines in order to awaken a national consciousness.

The similarities in their descriptions of the role of the writer are also found in their respective definitions of "revolutionary literature" (Mao) and "combat literature" (Fanon). Mao asserts that "revolutionary literature and art should create a variety of characters out of real life and help the masses to propel history forward" and that "writers and artists concentrate such everyday phenomena, typify the contradictions and struggles within them and produce works which awaken the masses" (Mao 82). Fanon writes that "combat literature [...] calls upon a whole people to join in the struggle for the existence of the nation [...] informs the national consciousness, gives it shape and contours, and opens up new, unlimited horizons [...] it is resolve situated in historical time" (Fanon, *Wretched* 173-4). In their respective anti-colonial contexts, the writer mobilizes the culture of struggle in order to imagine the new nation. In particular for Fanon, the transition to combat literature begins when the writer stops writing for the colonizer and instead turns to the local population as an audience. In imagining the

postcolonial nation, the writer is a catalyst for the emergence of a new historical epoch. This conception of literature not as a rewriting of history, but rather, as an articulation of a possible history, prioritizes the power of revolutionary affect. Literature, rather than a reflection of historical circumstance, can intervene into and help bring about a new set of circumstances. Paradoxically, this turn to the “realism” of peasants and workers under colonialism would produce a romanticization of the anti-colonial struggle. This aesthetic would form the basis of the anthologies of poetry the AAWB would compile in 1963 and 1965. While Fanon was never a Maoist, these resonances provide a grounds for the comparison of these two figures within the larger context of the Afro-Asian solidarity. Moreover, it provides an alternative, if provocative, history of postcolonialism which takes the horizontal affiliations of the “wretched of the earth” as its point of departure.

Conclusion

This chapter has chronicled the emergence of the Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau as the cultural wing of the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization in 1958. Through a discussion of the Africa-Asia conference of Bandung, the first AAPSO conference in Cairo, and the first AAWB summit in Tashkent, it has argued for the reading of pan-Africanism alongside symbolic Maoism to map an alternative constellation of postcolonialism. In particular, it has contended the Bureau, as historical event and as intellectual genealogy, provides a way to read postcolonialism as a “concept of history.” Through a discussion of Fanon’s involvement in the AAPSO conference at Conakry, and the theoretical resonances of his “combat literature” with Mao’s “revolutionary literature,” the chapter also argues this “Afro-Asian” comparison provides another way to analyze postcolonialism’s encounter with a materialist historiography. However,

instead of locating these lines of affiliation through an exclusive relationship with the colonial metropole, this chapter has explored how a “horizontal” comparison of Africa and Asia reveals how the delegates of the AAPSO and AAWB sought to “ensure that there shall never be a return to the past” (AAPSO, Conakry 117).

Chapter 2

From the Congo Crisis to Sino-Soviet Realpolitik: The Afro-Asian Writers Bureau's Colombo Period (1961-1966)

*But why in God's name are they all out to get him?
Look what they've thought up now: Patrice is a communist.
And by protecting him, I'm giving aid and comfort
to the Communist International. That's nonsense.
Patrice a communist! I remember the look on his face that time,
in the midst of our worst trouble with the Belgians,
when I suggested a telegram to Khrushchev.
Do you know what he said? 'It's impossible, Mr. President.
They're already saying that I've sold out to the communists.*

-Kala-Lubu from Aimé Césaire's *A Season in the Congo*

Introduction

Aimé Césaire's historical drama *A Season in the Congo* was not published until well into the Congo's civil war in 1966. However, it remains striking for its almost complete departure from Césaire's characteristic surrealist mode, as well as its deft commentary on Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961) as both symbolic and tragic hero.⁴⁴ In Césaire's attempt to rewrite history, he has Lumumba's Prime Minister, Kala-Lubu (based on Joseph Kasa-Vubu), interrogate the Cold War ideological divisions with which Lumumba must negotiate. Throughout the text, Césaire presents Lumumba as an autonomous, albeit hubristic agent. The play concentrates on the unfolding of Congolese independence during the closing months of 1960 and the disintegration into civil war in early 1961. There is special emphasis given to Césaire's reformulation of Lumumba's "Black Rain," speech, and his perplexing death scene wherein the quasi-mythic last Congolese leader before Belgian colonialism, Msiri, kills Lumumba in a fit of

⁴⁴ Lumumba was leader of the *Mouvement national congolais* and negotiated the independence the Republic of the Congo, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, from Belgium in 1960.

rage against his democratic secularism. The play, in many ways, is intent on representing both Msiri and Lumumba as the political bookends to Belgian colonialism.

However, Césaire's insistence on recasting Lumumba as an autonomous agent, who, according to the character, Kala-Lubu, was at pains to hold himself out of a commitment to either Cold War camp, is significant for its implicit endorsement of Third-Worldism. As discussed in the previous chapter, Lumumba served as the head of the *Mouvement National Congolais*' delegation to the Second Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization conference held in Conakry earlier in 1960. It is possible to read Lumumba's involvement in the AAPSO as strictly an attempt to garner socialist-bloc support for Congolese independence—which the AAPSO readily gave. However, his exposure at the conference to the militant humanism espoused by Frantz Fanon meant that Congolese independence could provide a significant crucible wherein the Afro-Asian solidarity movement would find both political and aesthetic inspiration. Césaire's representation of a strategic Lumumba—as both moderate negotiator and incendiary radical—provides an arresting filter through which to read multifarious African reactions to Cold War politics.

This chapter will explore the years leading up to the Bureau's split along Sino-Soviet lines in 1966. As with other chapters, the goal is not to endorse the controversial legacy of Maoism, nor argue the AAWB was an explicitly Maoist organization. Rather, the analysis will focus on the appropriation of symbolic Maoism within the AAWB's platform in its publication of two anthologies of poetry in 1963 and 1965. Through an analysis of conference proceedings and poems, this chapter will argue the Bureau compiled examples of "third world literature" that negotiated pan-Africanism, symbolic Maoism, and Fanon's definition of "combat literature." It will also show how these anthologies represent a crystallization of an early postcolonial aesthetic

that walked the difficult lines between “literature” and “propaganda” and in so doing, demarcated the parameters of a Third World “print culture” anchored in Afro-Asian expressions of solidarity.⁴⁵ As a result, this chapter will contend the Bureau formulated an alternative conception of postcolonialism that was based in the transnational cultural exchanges of Africa and Asia.

In terms of economic support, China began to pull back from the African continent as the decade wore on due to the domestic woes that resulted from the catastrophic Great Leap Forward, the virulence of the Sino-Soviet split, and the distinctive turn inward with the advent of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Yet, during the early 1960s it stepped up its rhetorical commitment to Afro-Asian solidarity, the literary strategies of a symbolic Maoism, and albeit paradoxically, the “revolutionary humanism” promoted at the Second Afro-Asian Writers Bureau Conference in Cairo in 1962.⁴⁶ In particular, with the Congo Crisis and its martyred leader, Patrice Lumumba, the PRC and AAWB had found a moralistic high ground from which to both denigrate neo-colonialist interests and promote an aesthetic vision of Third-Worldism. All of these would become increasingly fraught with the realpolitik of dueling Soviet and Chinese contingents in the mid-sixties. In February of 1961 the Peking Review reported protests in Tiananmen Square over Lumumba’s death, mass rallies “throughout the city in mourning for the Congolese martyrs,” as well as diplomatic cables by Zhou Enlai to Lumumba’s MNC successor, Antoine Gizenga (Peking Review Storm 14). These affirmed the PRC’s “position of

⁴⁵ See Dominic Thomas *Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa*.

⁴⁶ Larkin writes in *China and Africa*: “Just as economic strictures forced China to cease many forms of action abroad, the murder of Patrice Lumumba created new opportunities in the Congo (L). There was some prospect that a radical Congolese government would be formed to wrest power from Léopoldville. Displaying characteristic caution, and unable to assume large-scale economic commitments, China lent her support to the Gizenga government in Stanleyville but refrained from making costly commitments. Although events in the Congo did not yield results pleasing to China, the example of separatist action against Léopoldville was endorsed. Peking’s posture toward the Congo in 1961 was even more significant when viewed as a prelude to decisive action in 1964” (Larkin 55).

recognizing the Government led by [Gizenga] as the sole legal Government of the Republic of the Congo,” and even committed to establishing “diplomatic relations with your country and exchange diplomatic representatives of the rank of ambassador” (Peking Review Storm 14, China Ready 10).

In an Extraordinary Session of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Council in January of 1961 in Cairo, the AAPSO further appropriated Lumumba for the larger cause of Third World solidarity: “The problem of the Congo is the problem of all Afro-Asian peoples and of all peace loving peoples in the whole world. Today, on the soil of the Congo, the fate of all peoples will be decided. No body can stand neutral in such a struggle” (AA Bulletin Vol. 3 No. 2). The political and symbolic significance of Lumumba’s death and the ongoing Congo Crisis would become one of the mainstays of AAPSO and AAWB summits through 1964. It would even inspire a large part of the first volume of a poetry anthology published by the Bureau in 1963. The appropriation of Lumumba as a martyr in the struggle against colonialism and neocolonialism provided one of the most powerful rallying points for Third World solidarity during the period and significantly impacted AAWB debates on the nature of cultural struggle. During both the first meeting of the Afro-Asian Permanent Bureau from January 3rd to 10th , 1961, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and the preparatory meeting for the second Writers Conference from February 27th to March 2nd 1961, discussions concerning the aesthetic goals and platform of the organization took place against the backdrop of the Congo Crisis.

The delegates called upon “all Afro-Asian writers to extend their full support to the just struggle of the Congo people headed by Premier Patrice Lumumba,” and later, after “the legally elected Prime Minister Mr. Patrice Lumumba was assassinated by the imperialists and their agents,” urged all “African and Asian countries and freedom loving nations to recognize and

fully support henceforth the Government of Gizenga as the only legitimate Government of the Congo” (AA Writers Documents 38, 42). After the adoption of a Maoist-inflected cultural platform at Tashkent in 1958 and Conakry in 1960, the global nature of the Congo Crisis furthered the organization’s commitment to a cultural struggle that interpreted the historical context of decolonization and anti-imperialism through the filter of Afro-Asian solidarity. Echoing previous resolutions, the committee vowed to defend “the African personality and Asian personality in the face of the West,” through a commitment to the translation of “cultural language” and “political thought which animates the Afro-Asian peoples” (AA Writers Documents 32). Above all they placed emphasis on a transnational humanism, which would reformulate the “specific problems of our people in their present crises” because “our problems [...] are not exactly the same as those that preoccupy Western consciousness anxious above all to dominate our world” (AA Writers Documents 32). Through these resolutions, the AAWB asserted that it was not just enough to rehabilitate non-Western cultures in the face of Western imperialism; instead it was necessary to mobilize this transnational humanism within the acute context of cultural struggle and decolonization.

The Second Afro-Asian Writers Conference, Cairo 1962

The Second Afro-Asian Writers Conference was held in Cairo, Egypt from February 12th to 16th, 1962 and can be considered the apogee of the united front of the AAWB.⁴⁷ While the Sino-Soviet split would soon come to dominate the AAPSO’s next meeting in Moshi, Tanzania in 1963, the 1962 conference was explicitly concerned with the role of the writer within cultural struggle. In particular they focused on the importance of translation “in strengthening the spirit

⁴⁷ There had been a previous emergency meeting held in Tokyo, March 27th-30th, 1961 as a response to the Japan-U.S. Security treaty. However, besides decrying the occupation of Japan and the urge for nuclear disarmament, the substance of the meeting did not substantially differ from previous preparatory sessions.

of solidarity of Afro-Asian peoples and the promotion of cultural exchanges amongst them” (AA Writers Documents 41). This commitment to South-to-South translation practices would produce a number of anthologies of poems, short stories, and folk tales published in China and other countries. It also served as inspiration for the non-affiliated Afro-Asian Book Club, which was published out of Lahore, Pakistan during the late 1960s. Besides these satellite projects, the AAWB proposed the creation of a literary magazine title *The Call*, and would begin preparation for the publication of two volumes of Afro-Asian poetry, which would be published in 1963 and 1965. For the AAWB, these exchanges represented an unprecedented literary movement that, although they did not use the term, began to formulate the basis for what is now understood as postcolonialism. However, their definition of the postcolonial was anchored in South-to-South transnational exchanges, rather than in any explicit relationship with the colonial metropole.

For them, the Afro-Asian movement “constitute[d] a repercussion of the powerful awakening of consciousness for the liberty and the independence of millions of Afro-Asians [...] thanks to the enlightenment of many unknown writers, men of letters and other celebrities such as Rabindranath Tagore, Lu Hsun, Sadruddin Aini, and Taha Hussein” (AA Writers Documents 52). By citing these writers in their commitment to cultural struggle, the AAWB cast itself as a proponent of a secular humanism. This coupling of humanism with the struggle for decolonization meant definitions of postcolonial national culture were entangled with the transnationalism of Afro-Asian solidarity. One of the persistent characterizations of postcolonial literature presupposed that the formerly colonized identity was conceived of almost exclusively through a Hegelian dichotomy of master and slave.⁴⁸ The AAWB’s commitment to South-South cultural and intellectual exchanges provided a new, alternative genealogy to the formation of

⁴⁸ This is the subject of numerous texts on the psychology of decolonization including Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965), Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955).

postcolonialism, one that worked through the horizontal affiliations and solidarity of Afro-Asia in the construction of identity and nation.

For the AAWB, it fell to the writer and his or her privileged role as instigator, provocateur, moral compass and increasingly, revolutionary. Given the politically charged nature of the early 1960s—the Congo Crisis, the threat of nuclear war, decolonization movements, to name a few—the delegates at the AAWB faced the daunting task of reconciling the humanism formed at the Africa-Asia conference at Bandung in 1955 with what they deemed as the growing need for culture to represent the lived realities of anti-colonial struggle. In short, to be both the “witness and active factor of these transformations” (AA Writers Documents 53). The adoption of Maoist-inflected cultural policies at Conakry was meant to provide a template for concerted action across the Third World. The idea that the cultural realm did not influence foreign policy and vice versa was an anathema to the Bureau:

To be worthy of its representativity and to justify its responsibility before history, the Afro-Asian Writer must be the authentic expression of the aspirations for independence and freedom expressed on the other hand by the sacrifices and struggle of his people. Nothing must separate the struggle of the writer from the political or revolutionary battle of his people. The Afro-Asian writer must be ‘engaged’ in the field of recovery of its culture national independence (sic), as well as in the field of social liberation. (AA Writers Documents 56)

The fronts of political and economic struggle were part and parcel to the struggle along the cultural front. Moreover, because of the emphasis on the recuperation of non-Western cultures as repositories of a transnational humanism, the AAWB argued that Third World foreign policy and economic initiatives required filtering through cultural difference. This filtering would mean art and literature could reflect the lived historical condition of the “people.” Materialist definitions of the people as a political entity were thereby recast within a cultural context. To be engaged with the people not only meant to participate in their anti-colonial struggle, it also meant to

produce a literature that both valorized cultural difference and mobilized that difference for the awakening of a national consciousness. For the AAWB, the role of literature and the writer, and of art and culture in general, was thereby intimately linked to politics.

Defining the role of the writer as cultural conduit and anti-colonial actor was both an asset and limitation for many Afro-Asian writers. Within the African context, a whole generation of authors including Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ousmane Sembène, would work with this notion of “engaged literature”—primarily using a realist aesthetic to critique colonial and neo-colonial structures of exploitation.⁴⁹ However, the sustained dissemination of Maoist cultural tenets through the AAWB beginning in 1958 allowed for an intervention into the literary history of African literature of decolonization and independence. Rather than see the influence of an “engaged literature” as inherited exclusively from the European metropole, through an analysis of the AAWB’ summits and publication of anthologies and literary magazines, it is possible to reinterpret the trajectory of aesthetic exchange and transformation through South-to-South literary relations. Definitions of cultural struggle and literary strategies were thereby inflected with the textures of multiple non-Western spaces. The implementation of an “engaged literature” as a subversive, anti-colonial aesthetic, did not arrive exclusively out of the literary traditions of colonial Europe. These questions are central to this project and will endeavor to highlight the multiple ways in which trends in early postcolonial African literature originated in South-to-South cultural exchanges with the Soviet Union, India, and especially in the early 60s, Maoist China. For the Bureau, in particular, the historicity of decolonization meant that an aesthetic, which reflected of the “lived reality of the people’s struggle,” was the most relevant and potent mechanism in the creation of postcolonial national culture.

⁴⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre’s introduction to *Les Temps Modernes* (1945) for the origin of this term. He writes that, “the writer is *situated* in his time; every word he utters has reverberations. As does his silence” (Sartre, Introduction).

The AAWB viewed itself as an ideological counter to bourgeois definitions of art, as well as the literary conscience of the Third World's Cold War. The writer's privileged position within this intellectual vanguard meant that due to his or her education and consequent exposure to the "influence of misleading ideologies," it was necessary for an increased "vigilance and a constantly closer link with the masses" (AA Writers Documents 56). This iteration of Mao's dictum to "go down to the countryside," at the Cairo conference demonstrated the extent to which fighting the Cold War's cultural front was just as important as political and economic concerns: "The Afro-Asian writers must exert all efforts to eliminate all sort of colonialist-inspired literature harmful to the mind and the fighting will of his people" (AA Writers Documents 56). The battle for the people's minds would be waged through the "use [of] their pens as [their] weapons," in order to "take part in the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles of the people" (AA Writers Documents 58-9). This highly militant interpretation of the role of literature in anti-colonialism read as if it were taken almost verbatim from Mao's *Talks at the Yen-an Forum*. Yet, perhaps the best term to describe this notion of literature as weapon is Frantz Fanon's notion of "combat literature," discussed in the previous chapter, which was published the same year as the conference. Given the historical backdrop of the Congo Crisis, and the looming threat of nuclear war, the AAWB's urge for cultural weapons not only reflected the paucity of technological resources at their disposal, but also presented a moral argument for the preservation of non-Western culture under the rubric of transnational humanism.

The aesthetic platform of the Bureau can thereby be characterized as straddling the line between a critical realism defined by Omafume F. Ongoge as "a literature that is *engaged* with the contemporary reality in a critical way" and a socialist realism that "implies the artist's or writer's fundamental agreement with the aims of the working class and the emerging socialist

world” (Onoge, 36). The Bureau’s debt to the genealogy of socialist realism can be traced back to the Union of Soviet Writers’ coinage of the term on May 23, 1932 in the *Literaturnaia Gazeta*. This definition of socialist realism posited that “the sincere writer offer a historically concrete presentation of reality in its revolutionary development,” and that “artistic representation of reality should combine with the task of achieving ideological change and educating workers according to the principles of Socialism” (Robin 40). This didactic interpretation of literature would be expanded upon by Mao to include the rural peasantry in order to adapt it to a non-Western and specifically, Chinese context. As such the Bureau’s aesthetic operated at a crossroads of subversion and didacticism. Literature was meant to subvert the colonial structure by pinpointing its injustices in previous and contemporary contexts. It was also meant to be didactic in that the Bureau prescribed a set of tenets concerning the ethical and moral responsibilities of art and its commitment to the people, and increasingly, the party.⁵⁰

The paradox of such an aesthetic is it that it operated along the fringes of what is considered “literature” or “literary,” and what is considered “propaganda” or “official literature.” Dominic Thomas articulates the complexity of this paradox: “the hasty dismissal of official literature for its predictability is linked to widely held notions of what constitutes “Literature,” namely, the criteria we bring to our appreciation and understanding of a text, and which subsequently lead us to hierarchize and canonize various productions” (Thomas 26). He continues that “these texts should be viewed as products of complex network of social relations” and “in that capacity they offer a valuable insight to a given sociological and historical reality” (Thomas 27). The Bureau’s activities as a “network of social relations” can thereby be understood as forming part of a transnational “print culture,” of which literature (as subversion)

⁵⁰ See Lenin’s 1905 *Party Organization and Party Literature*, and of particular relevance to this chapter, Mao’s 1942 *Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art*.

and propaganda (as didacticism) were brought together within a Third World conception of postcolonialism as a “given sociological and historical reality” (Thomas 27).

This tension between this “revolutionary” literature and humanism would come to characterize the Bureau’s cultural platform in the early 1960s. In order to accommodate this tension they promoted the idea that “only a virile humanism, a revolutionary humanism, a humanism free of all demagoguery will give to the writers his right to be real by those he loves, and those who love him. Esteem is earned. There is but one criterion for the true creator: to be attentive to the anger and the wisdom of the people. From the people thus respected and served will talent be born” (AA Writers Documents 57). The rehabilitation of culture espoused at Bandung and its accompanying definitions of global humanism had been transformed at Cairo into a more militantly inflected version due to the appropriation of a literary and symbolic Maoism. With the anti-colonial movement gaining steam in the early sixties, a humanism that concentrated on a general cataloguing of non-Western culture did not adequately address the combative nature of the historical moment. By combining the revolutionary struggle with the desire to valorize the cultural histories of the non-Western world, the AAWB had endorsed the necessity of “armed” cultural struggle. This literary militancy drew, in characteristic Maoist form, from the “anger and wisdom of the people” (AA Writers Documents 57). The difficulty of the militant writer to serve as conduit of both the will and culture of the people, meant that instead of making a list of the cultural heritage of the past, as in for example, Senghorian definitions of *négritude*, the writer was supposed to draw from the situations of the immediate anti-colonial struggle. Culture was not understood as a repository of artifacts from the ancient past; rather it was meant to embody the contemporary convergences of history, that is, of a paradoxical humanism *through* revolution à la Fanon.

The specific incarnations of national culture would provide the template through which the humanism of Bandung would find its revolutionary outlet. The AAWB thought national struggle embodied the contemporary moment and as such, insisted on a humanism defined by the cultural struggle for independence: “[it is necessary] to take over the cultural traditions of their fatherland to liquidate the imperialist and colonialist cheap culture which poisons the minds of their peoples,” and later, “we, Afro-Asian writers, will unite firmly in this sacred struggle to pave the road for the creation and the development of our national culture” (AA Writers Documents 59). Of course, this tradition of the manifesto would prove to be a recurring feature of “African / world” writing, all the way up to the *Manifeste pour une littérature monde en français* in 2007. For the Bureau, any cultural repository of the past had to be reformulated to help move the anti-colonial struggle forward. A postcolonial national culture was both a politically engaged, historically relevant, and for the delegates at the conference, anchored in the cultural exchanges and horizontal relationships between writers and politicians from the Third World. One way to avoid the colonial relationship that “poisons the minds of [our] peoples” was to focus on the solidarity derived from the denial of the colonial relationship (AA Writers Documents 59). This recalibration of national culture formation along South-to-South lines demonstrated the importance of these alternative models of national modernity. In short, it was no longer necessary or even desirable to take the West as the exclusive referent for development and national consciousness. While this process had begun at Bandung, and had been continued through Tashkent and Conakry, the Cairo conference of 1962 could point to the flurry of new nations across Afro-Asia as proof of the power of such an idea.

The Cairo conference also reiterated the importance of translation and the politics of language to this process of national formation. However, rather than focus on the abandonment

of “their own mother-tongues and speaking the language of the colonisers” the AAWB would “encourage the movement of translating books written by national authors in the Afro-Asian countries in foreign languages into national languages and other Afro-Asian languages” (AA Writers Documents 60, 62). This push for translations directly between global South languages represented one of the first concerted efforts to create vectors of cultural exchange outside of a colonial framework. In this way, alternative modernities would move along linguistic vectors that privileged indigenous expressions over colonially-inflected ones. The European center would no longer exclusively mediate discussions of postcolonial identity.

However, even within this idealistic space of translations between non-Western geographies, the efficacy of the use of colonial languages such as English and French would continue to haunt the organization. Although many translation projects were begun under the auspices of global South exchange, the Bureau itself would publish primarily in English, French, and in its later incarnation with the literary magazine *Lotus*, Arabic. The valorization of indigenous languages at Cairo was not necessarily read as an outright rejection of Western languages: “The translation should be done for national authors whether their works are in their vernaculars (and that is preferable) or in any other European language” (AA Writers Documents 70). The delegates at the conference seemed to recognize the impossibility of returning to a pre-colonial linguistic moment; instead they sought to valorize the space of indigenous languages through a reemphasis on local culture formations. As such, the Bureau positioned itself at the point of linguistic entanglement.⁵¹ Yet, it is important to point out their commitment, through the

⁵¹ This chapter uses the term entanglement in reference to Achille Mbembe’s 2001 book, *On the Postcolony*: “As an age, the postcolony encloses multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate on another, and envelope one another: an *entanglement*” (Mbembe 14). Although Mbembe refers to the postcolony itself as an entanglement of *durées*, I hope to demonstrate how the Bureau’s cultural platform during the *age* of decolonization was itself also entangled in multiple trajectories and *durées* that moved along axes and networks outside of an exclusive relationship with the West.

emphasis on indigenous languages, to the abolishment of linguistic hierarchies. It was less important that a writer used a European language than whether there existed an equal valorization of indigenous languages. In fact, at this juncture it was even preferable to use an indigenous rather than European one.

The Bureau also passed a resolution concerning the status of oral languages: “To transform spoken languages used by some Afro-Asian peoples into written languages choosing the convenient and suitable alphabet for them and to establish the grammatical rules for these languages and to record their history and literatures” (AA Writers Documents 62). With this resolution, the Bureau recognized the importance of oral languages in abolishment of linguistic hierarchies. Furthermore, the focus on rendering these oral languages, written, demonstrated the extent to which the Bureau had identified that one of the major obstacles in the preservation of language—and the implicit colonial hierarchy in languages’ status as an indicator of “civilization”—was the absence of a written form. Moreover, in a later resolution they urge for the “setting up of a wide scale translation movement for the Afro-Asian intellectual productions into the non Afro-Asian languages,” in order to flood the “European and American markets with this production,” just as “the European and American production has kept flooding the Afro-Asian people for long centuries” (AA Writers Documents 64). In anticipating Edward Said’s seminal work on cultural imperialism almost thirty years later, this statement evinced the Bureau’s understanding of the importance of translation and dissemination for the colonial education system, as well as the relationship between print culture and the global market.⁵² This reverse “cultural flooding,” was also meant to embody the Bureau’s commitment to a

⁵² In his 1993 work, *Culture and Imperialism* Said writes, “What I want to examine is how the processes of imperialism occurred beyond the level of economic laws and political decisions, and—by predisposition, by the authority of recognizable cultural formations, by continuing consolidation within education, literature, and the visual and musical arts—were manifested at another very significant level, that of national culture, which we have tended to sanitize as a realm of unchanging intellectual monuments, free from worldly affiliations” (Said 12).

transnational humanism because it would allow “Afro-Asian culture” to “take its place beside other world cultures and occupy its desired position in the universities abroad” (AA Writers Documents 64). In this sense, the Bureau served as a precursor to many contemporary discussions concerning the politics of dissemination of both “world” and “postcolonial” literatures.

The Bureau also recommended the establishment of a Translation Center at the Bureau’s headquarters in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The emphasis on translation was not only meant to provide a forum for the exchange of culture, but was also dedicated to the politicization of this culture. The act of translation itself was viewed as means through which to combat cultural imperialism:

[...] the translation should be concentrated on the books concerned with contemporary issues. But at the same time attention should be paid to classical works because many of them are also reflecting national tradition and spiritual and intellectual lives of the peoples which are closely connected with the struggle of Afro-Asian peoples now surging ahead. (AA Writers Documents 68)

This cultural dialectic, which was concerned with bringing the rehabilitation of cultural heritage directly into the contemporary, revolutionary struggle, meant there was no room for what Mao Zedong in his *Talks* had similarly denigrated as “art for art’s sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics” (Denton 11). For the rest of the Bureau’s existence—and even after the split in 1966 between Soviet and Maoist contingents—this direct link between culture and a revolutionary politics would dominate the organization’s agenda not unlike the Union of Soviet Writers in 1932. The creation of a national tradition meant to combine the cultural heritage of the past with urgency of the contemporary political moment. Such a reformulation of the role of literature—from an inventory of humanisms from around the world,

to the revolutionary didacticism of a “combat literature”—would conceive of translation itself as an act of cultural struggle.

In addition to this notion of translation as anti-imperialism, the Bureau also linked it to processes of globalization: “We are now living in an era of technology and science which continuously make the values of distance shorter and shorter and places the life of a nation in such a position that any isolation from international relations is impossible” (AA Writers Documents 67). This compression of space within the context of Third World decolonization provides an alternative lens through which to view postcolonial identity.⁵³ That is, instead of focusing on the colonial spaces of globalization, the AAWB sought to emphasize the compression of alternative spaces of Third World engagement. The “translation of literary, scientific and cultural works in general” were conceived of as the primary components of postcolonial development and modernity (AA Writers Documents 67). By linking the translation of both scientific and humanistic advances, the Bureau demonstrated its commitment to the project of modernity in terms of industrial modernization and its correlative aesthetic. However, due to the history of colonialism, and the general consensus among the delegates that colonialism represented a form of capitalism, the AAWB’s postcolonial theories of modernity emphasized the need for a reformulation around alternative conceptions of the human and its relationship with society. As the Soviet Union the PRC represented the two most established examples of this alternative at the time, the Bureau took as one of its major platforms the reimagining of

⁵³ While the Bureau understood this within the context of a national modernity, such a phrase has interesting resonances with David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989). This again serves to support the notion previously brought up in relation to Mbembe’s assertion that this period of decolonization was itself an entanglement of *durées*.

modernity and the human through the process of mutual exchange and translation outside of a colonial dynamic.⁵⁴

Although the Bureau conceived of itself as a transnational organization, it also understand the necessity for the institutionalization of similar projects on a national level. They urged for a reevaluation of university curriculum in order to “enlarge the scope of teaching Afro-Asian languages in the Universities and some specialised institutes (such as the school of languages) and to create Seats in the universities for some languages known for their wealth and intellectual masterpieces” (AA Writers Documents 62-63). The AAWB delegates understood that such a “decolonization of the mind,” was just as important as the decolonization of economic modes of production.⁵⁵ Harking back to the first conference’s commitment to a reevaluation of world literature from the perspective the Third World, this second conference in Cairo took this idea one step further in calling for a revision of university curriculum to better represent non-Western literatures and cultures. In order to support these pedagogical reforms, they turned to the classic function of the literary academy, the assemblage of anthologies: “Issuing annual anthologies of poetry, novels, plays, popular literature and other kind of literary productions to be translated into the Afro-Asian languages in order to spread their use, and to make collections of unified selection to be translated into non Afro-Asian languages to spread Afro-Asian thought abroad” (AA Writers Documents 64). The construction of these anthologies, and their consequent translation and dissemination was understood as part of the decolonization process. Translation as decolonization meant to take language as the starting point for the formation of a postcolonial identity. These anthologies were meant to be “third world literature”; not only were they formed out of the contributions from an array of cultures and geographies,

⁵⁴ See Appendix A for the 6 motions for Afro-Asian Solidarity through culture.

⁵⁵ See Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo’s *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: J. Currey, 1986. Print.

they were also meant to circulate in the world as part of a larger struggle against cultural imperialism.⁵⁶

However, the AAWB was at pains to accommodate both this commitment to a cultural cosmopolitanism and the Maoist focus on the masses: “in order to mobilize the forces of Afro-Asian peoples in their struggle, priority in translation should be given to books accessible to the masses: books which do not fulfill this condition should be simplified, with being honest to the original” (AA Writers Documents 69). This assertion was reminiscent of the PRC’s own project Mandarin’s simplification as a writing system. Furthermore, the tension between an aesthetic that resonated with a cosmopolitan understanding of humanism and a literature that was made for and by the masses brought issues of audience into the Bureau’s larger focus. The delegates sought to define literature’s audience as walking the line between cosmopolitanism and the masses. The simplification of texts in order to reach the largest audience possible would effect the quality of the original however loyal the simplification seemed. Moreover, the literature of the masses were often oral narratives and proverbs rather than the codified classics of a particular culture like *Arabian Nights* or *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The paradox of this split commitment—to represent the richness of non-Western cultures while simultaneously promoting a national culture that reflected the lived struggle of the masses—would become an increasingly difficult task in the face of the realpolitik of the Sino-Soviet split. As a result, the idealism of 1962 would soon be tempered by the nationalist polemics carried out at the third AAPSO conference in Moshi, Tanzania in 1963.

⁵⁶ As David Damrosch writes in *What is World Literature?:* “My claim is that world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike” (Damrosch 5).

The delegates at the Cairo conference approved the executive committee of twenty-three member countries and a permanent bureau consisting of Ghana, Indonesia, Cameroon, China, United Arab Republic (later Egypt), U.S.S.R., Sudan, Japan and India, and Ceylon (later Sri Lanka) as the Secretary General. This permanent membership would oversee the daily operations of the Bureau in Ceylon, including the establishment of a translation center funded by donations from member countries. The same twenty-three countries and their delegates ended the conference by uniting around their “Appeal to the Writers of the World” in which they again championed a revolutionary humanism as one of the primary pillars of the organization. Afro-Asian writers, “enlightened by [their] noble human values” were destined to join the “sacred battle against misery fear and suffering,” because they were the “voices of [their] peoples’ conscience” (AA Writers Documents 77). Lofty designations of the writer as possessing a “sense of duty, responsibility and justice [...] to make use of [their] honest penmanship in the struggle against colonialism in all its forms,” meant that literature occupied a privileged position wherein one could attain a “realization of better life for man, and the provisions of bread, amity, culture, and peace” (AA Writers Documents 77).

Likewise, the strong moral conception of the role of writer and literature elevated the cultural struggle alongside other anti-colonial initiatives, whether these were economic or otherwise. To quote Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, this “decolonization of the mind” was, from the beginning, viewed as an integral part of the overall process of postcolonial identity formations. The urge for a catalogue of humanisms from around the Third World at Bandung had evolved by the end of the conference in Cairo into a call for the mobilization of this culture within the anti-colonial struggle. National culture, as the AAWB would attempt to articulate, meant to move through the violence of the colonial struggle (Fanon) in order to bring about a “bright” and

“prevalent peace on earth” (AA Writers Documents 79). This highly idealistic rhetoric would influence a whole generation of writers from across the Third World. Debates concerning the correct form of revolutionary writing would also characterize early conceptions of postcolonial and lead to the appropriation of combat literature for its capacity to both subvert the colonial structure through a depiction of the lived reality of masses. Through the AAWB and other international writers conferences, this Maoist-inflected “combat literature” would be appropriated and transformed by writers such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Dennis Brutus, Ahmed Sékou Touré, as well as in the diaspora by the Haitian, Jacques Stephan-Alexis. Furthermore, with the rapidly shifting ideological fronts of the Sino-Soviet split in the mid-sixties, many of these writers would come to manipulate the structures for their own national interests. If Tashkent and Cairo focused on a the idealistic transnationalism of the struggle, later conferences at Moshi and Bali would demarcate fissures within the organization along lines of national interest and Cold War realpolitik.

The AAWB and the Sino-Soviet Split

Rumblings of trouble, which had been muted at Cairo, began to surface at the next Permanent Bureau meeting in Colombo from October 4th-12th 1962. Although there were further resolutions to set up a literary magazine named *The Call*, which would consist of submissions and translations by member countries, the members of the committee seemed exasperated with the lack of participation: “The Bulletin however has not been published with much regularity mainly due to the fact that no regular contributions were received by us, and also the absence of a Board of Editors consisting of representatives of the Bureau members resident in Colombo” (AA Writers Documents 103). The rhetoric of unity and solidarity espoused at Cairo had begun to founder upon the lack of on-the-ground commitment to the Bureau’s cultural production. Such

inconsistency between the idealistic rhetoric of the Cairo conference, and the frustrations of the permanent Bureau later in the year revealed the growing tension between the Chinese and the Soviets during the period. Khrushchev's denial of nuclear weapons to the PRC, the Sino-Indian border war, and the perceived ideological vacillations of the Soviet Union served as fodder for the PRC's distancing of itself from Soviet influence. The AAPSO and the AAWB would serve as the public forum wherein these debates would come to a head, filtered through the rubrics of foreign policy, humanism, and aesthetics.

The emergence of Mao's "three-worlds theory," which as Odd Arne Westad writes was "a variation on a Stalinist theme that Mao first put forward in 1964," would serve to deepen the split within the socialist bloc (Westad 162). This policy "placed the United States and Soviet Union within the First world as hegemonic superpowers, while the other industrialized countries, over which the two superpowers exerted their hegemony, constituted a Second World. China and the poor countries of the South made up a Third World, which were making revolution against the superpowers and would become the future center of international developments" (Westad 162). Given the frequency of AAPSO meetings during the period, as well as its increasing status as unofficial forum for the airing of Sino-Soviet grievances, it is not surprising that Mao's "three-worlds theory," would polarize the AAWB. In fact, as Westad writes, "Mao also during the early 1960s began seeing the Soviets as returning to a pre-revolutionary state, in which their *cultural* affinity with the West was determining their international political positions. The Soviets were part of the self-centered and complacent Western culture, while revolutionary China fought on against imperialism, helped by other Third World countries" (Westad 162). The turn to cultural difference as the determining factor of foreign policy revealed the importance of the AAWB as a battleground for Cold War realpolitik. Between the Bureau's commitment to the

anti-imperialism symbolized by Lumumba's death and the importance of cultural difference as one of the main fissures of the Sino-Soviet split, the AAWB's Colombo period embodied an almost unprecedented linkage of foreign policy and literary theory.

The third AAPSO conference in Moshi, Tanzania from February 4th-11th, 1963 made explicit the contention at the root of the Sino Soviet split. In a foreign policy analysis published in 1966 by Harish Kapur through the China Study Centre think-tank in New Delhi, he wrote that "the numerous activities of China in Africa seem to suggest that she is at present more concerned with limiting Soviet influence than that of the United States. [...] in their zest to undermine Soviet influence Africa, the Chinese Communists have bluntly introduced the Sino-Soviet dispute into all Afro-Asian conferences attended by the Russians" (Kapur 36-7). According to Kapur, at the Moshi conference, "despite all appeals by the Soviets to avoid public debate on divisive issues, the Chinese showed from the start that they were bent on a ruthless struggle with the 'white' Soviet delegation" (Kapur 37). These polemics were met with ambivalence and "misgivings" by many African delegates, including the host of the conference, Julius Nyerere. This mobilization of race as one of the reasons for ideological distinction from the Soviet Union demonstrated Chinese awareness of history of racism at the core of colonial policy. The Soviets claimed inclusion in the organization due to their holdings in central Asia. However, the priority given to combatting racism as a tenet of imperialism meant the organization entangled the discourses of racial, cultural and linguistic difference. As such, the notion of an international class struggle was often read in racial terms. However, within the context of the AAPSO, the Chinese delegates used it for explicit leverage in terms of forging alliances and cultivating trust with political and literary actors from the across continent. This exploitation of racial discourse

would have a polarizing effect on the organization, as it posited race against class as the main cipher of anti-colonial struggle in the Third World.

Bali, Indonesia, 1963 and the Afro-Asian Poetry Anthology

This polarization would be furthered by an Executive AAWB meeting in Bali, Indonesia later in the year from July 16th-20th, which was attended by a large Chinese delegation that included the essayist Yang Shuo, as well as a Ghanaian delegation headed by the poet Kofi Awoonor. In his General Report, Secretary General R.D. Senanayake proclaimed that the AAWB represented the vanguard against imperialism. As this was the first conference in Indonesia since Bandung in 1955, he also sought to “further [the] development of the Bandung spirit for unity and struggle against imperialism is not only the common militant desire of the Afro-Asian peoples, but also the glorious mission of the Afro-Asian writers” (AA Writers Bali 10). With this return to Indonesia, the AAWB had infused the humanism of Bandung with the militancy of the contemporary moment of decolonization. The literary strategies and aesthetics promoted by the AAWB were meant to engage, embody and catalyze revolutionary movements from Algeria to Mozambique, to Kenya, South Africa, Malaysia and South Vietnam. After a brief *compte rendu* of a number of struggles for national independence, their correlative cultural productions, as well as concurrent South-to-South cultural exchanges and translation projects, Senanayake summed up the Afro-Asian situation with the Maoist notion that “the contradiction between the Afro-Asian peoples on the one hand and the imperialist bloc headed by the US on the other is irreconcilable” and because of this the “peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America [...] form the main source of world revolutionary storm of today” (AA Writers Bali 16). This implacable anti-imperialism through solidarity set the stage for a discussion of the first volume of a poetry anthology that had been published especially for the conference.

Senanayake announced that the this volume was “the first infant born with the co-operation of Afro-Asian writers,” and urged that “this selection of poems be translated into the national languages of each country participating in this meeting for better understanding among poets and writers” (AA Writers Bali 29). With contributions of seventy poems from ten different countries, this volume can be read as one of the first attempts to create a contemporary anthology of world literature that not only validated non-Western contributions, but also emanated from Third World circuits of Cold War print culture. In short, it was an anthology of world literature that took the postcolonial as its point of departure. While some poems, including, paradoxically, many of the Chinese contributions, were translations of poems from previous historical moments, most of the poems published in the anthologies were primarily concerned with representing cultural struggle, decolonization, and the martyrdom of Patrice Lumumba. Given the controversial Maoist-inflected platform of the organization, the volumes also marked an attempt to conceive of Afro-Asian solidarity through the aesthetic lens of what Fanon had called “combat literature,” discussed in the first chapter.

In the preface to the volume of poetry Senanayake writes that the “Anthology of Afro-Asian literature aims at introducing the works of those Afro-Asian men of letters, who abide by the principle that art should serve the people,” as well as that, “Afro-Asian cultural workers should be in the forefront in fulfilling the aspirations of Afro-Asian peoples and implementing the fundamental tasks of the Afro-Asian writers’ movement” (AA Poems Part 1, vii). As such, the first volume “deals exclusively with poetry as poetry is the most popular branch of literature” (AA Poems Part 1, vii). The significance of the anti-colonial struggle to the links of solidarity was indicative not only of the historical moment but also serves as an intervention into the formation of postcolonial national literatures. Rather than view these formations as existing

within hermetic national spaces, the publication of an anthology of poems in 1963 reveals the inherent transnational crucible within which postcolonial national culture emerged across the Afro-Asian world. That this Third World transnationalism was infused with Maoist and Fanonian notions of the role of literature in struggle demonstrated the extent to which the aesthetic concerns of two vastly different regions—Africa and East Asia—had dovetailed during the early sixties. This provocative vector provides an alternative mapping of the emergence of postcolonialism that does not perpetuate the very Area Studies paradigms created by the Cold War itself.

The inclusion of poems by Patrice Lumumba in the anthology's first volume represented the Bureau's recognition of the Congo Crisis as, according to the dictum of "combat literature," an important site for Afro-Asian cultural struggle. In the late fifties, the Chinese experience had fired the imaginations of leftist leaders across the Third World. Following this, Lumumba's death and the ensuing Congo Crisis stood as a early sixties cipher behind which to mobilize. In this sense, Lumumba's martyrdom extended far beyond the African continent, providing an historical urgency to the process of decolonization across the Third World. As such, this Africa-China vector of the sixties can be read as one of the most provocative instances of transnationalism during the era of decolonization and the emergence of the postcolonial as a politico-aesthetic category.

Lumumba's own poetry would serve as one of the centerpieces of this new anthology. In the poem, "May Our People Triumph," Lumumba furthers the transatlantic framework of pan-Africanism and diaspora: "Weep, O my black beloved brother deep / buried in enternal (sic) bestial night. / O you, whose dust simooms and hurricanes / have scattered all over the vast earth" (AA Poems Part 1, 57). His reliance on the imagery of natural disaster in his articulation

of the disparate geographies of diaspora pervades the entirety of the poem and allows him to bring them together under the rubric of pan-African solidarity. As discussed above, Lumumba's poetry, as well as many other contributions to the volume, should be read as examples of "print culture," and as such are "products of a complex network of social relations" and as such "they offer a valuable insight to a given sociological and historical reality" (Thomas 27). He continues by identifying the catalyst for this scattering in the enduring history of violence on the continent through an address to a generalized African slave: "You, rounded up in raids; you, countless / times defeated / In all the battles ever one by brutal force; You, who were taught but one perpetual lesson, / One motto, which was ... slavery or death" (AA Poems vol. 1, 57). After beginning with the effect, Lumumba introduces the dialectic of "master and slave" as the cause. This move fits neatly within both Maoist contexts of a "revolutionary literature" and the "combat literature" of Fanon. For Lumumba, if the history of the continent can be understood through the dynamic between master and slave, then both the revolutionary struggle and its accompanying literature must engage directly with this encounter in order to accurately reflect the contemporary moment.

Furthermore, Lumumba avoids the tendency of Senghorian negritude to idolize the pre-colonial past, writing that the African has "silently succumbed to countless deaths / Under the ugly guise of jungle fever" even before "there came a day that brought the white, / More sly, more full a [sic] of spite than any death [...] / And drove your children down into the holds of ships" (AA Poems Part 1, 57). Similar to Yambo Ouologuem's, *Bound to Violence* (1968), in his indictment of a longer history of violence, Lumumba still places Western colonialism higher in the hierarchy of atrocities committed on the continent. He continues by linking the enslavement of European colonialism to the cotton fields of America: "'Twas then the tomtom rolled from

village / unto village, / And told the people that another foreign slave ship / Had put off on its way to far-off shores/ where God is cotton, where the dollar reigns as King” (AA Poems Part 1, 58). This transition from the denigration of European colonialism to the identification of American slavery as the primary target, furthers the Bureau’s commitment to the struggle for Third World decolonization. For Lumumba, the American slave becomes the cipher through which pan-Africanism finds its voice, decrying the “unending, wracking labour,” and “relentless sun” of the American plantation (AA Poems Part 1, 58). According to the poem, if the violence of the dialectic begins on the continent, it reaches as far as the slavery in the American south. This switch from a strictly European context to one that includes America represents the Bureau’s interpretation of changing Cold War power dynamics.

While the first half of the poem articulates the descent into exploitation and slavery, the second half, in characteristic dialectic form, moves forward into a liberatory message through the emergence of what Lumumba appropriates as an anti-imperial art form: jazz. After their enslavement in America, where “They taught you in your psalm to glorify / Their Lord, while you yourself were crucified to hymns,” Lumumba writes that “your dim, fantastic dreams / Poured out aloud in melancholy strains, / As elemental and as wordless as your anguish. [...] And from that mighty music the beginning / Of jazz arose tempestuous, capricious,” (AA Poems Part 1, 58). This appropriation of jazz as an anti-imperial form allows Lumumba to emphasize the importance of cultural struggle. As such, the poem is itself an exercise in “combat literature.” By appropriating the transatlantic history of the slave trade and jazz, he makes the case for the primacy of cultural struggle to contemporary movements for decolonization. Moreover, this is an endorsement of a global humanism that declares “to the whites in accents loud / That not entirely was the planet theirs” (AA Poems Part 1, 58). Music, as a liberatory, prophetic, force links the

continent with its diaspora and provides part of the cultural solidarity through which pan-Africanism established transnational relevance.

However, in line with the Fanonian notion that through “combat literature,” “national literature” emerges, Lumumba ends the poem by pulling pan-African solidarity back within the Congolese context: “And may our people, free and gay forever, / Live, triumph, thrive in peace in this our Congo” (AA Poems Part 1, 59). The inclusionary pronoun “our,” with its racial resonances, allows Lumumba to straddle both the national and transnational contexts. Through racial and cultural solidarity, the diaspora is included within the Congolese struggle for decolonization “in the very heart of our great Africa” (AA Poems Part 1, 59). This double movement is emblematic of the poetry anthology on a whole; many of the poems sought to simultaneously emphasize the transnational solidarity of racial and cultural difference, as well as the immediate political context of decolonization. In an aggregate sense, the anthology promoted commitment to transnational humanism through the support of discrete national liberation movements. That is, what Fanon cautions when he writes, “if nationalism is not explained, enriched, and deepened, if it does not very quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into humanism, then it leads to a dead end” (Fanon, *Wretched* 144). With the collection included in this anthology, the Bureau’s cultural platform attempted to combine the militancy of Maoist “revolutionary literature,” with the commitment to a paradoxical humanism of Fanon’s “combat literature.”

The anthology includes poems from Indian and Vietnamese contexts written in homage of Lumumba as martyr, as well as contributions from Indonesia, the Sudan, and the Soviet Union. The Chinese contributions exhibit a mix of historical dramatization and “examples” of what they considered to be Maoist “revolutionary literature.” Of particular interest is a poem by

Han Peiping titled “Drums at Night,” which provides a Chinese imaginary of Ahmed Sékou Touré’s revolutionary Guinea. The poem begins with an observation, “Night advances step by step / into the heart of north Africa / [...] / human shadows disappear / from the mirror; darkness / becomes master of all” (AA Poems Part 1, 45). Although stereotypical in its trope of Africa as the “dark continent,” Han’s observation focuses on the passage of time in an unfamiliar geography. With descriptions like the “clamour of the day ebbs / like the tide” and “silently I crossed a clearing / seeing a sky filled with stars / fireflies ever chasing each other,” Han situates himself within the foreign landscape at a moment of temporal transition (AA Poems Part 1, 46). However, the darkness does not serve to further the unfamiliarity of his position; instead his descriptions allow him to situate himself within the Guinean space, an attempt at engagement rather than isolation.

With the nightfall, Han mobilizes another stereotypical trope, that of drumming: “Suddenly came drum throbs, out / of the depth of the forest; / first notes like a soliloquy, or / a man complaining, crying” (AA Poems Part 1, 46). While, this reliance on generalized motifs can be read as a reductive account of one salient feature of Guinean culture, it is also indicative of some initial encounter where the nuance of observation is lost in the most obvious of first interactions. As such, Han’s rudimentary approach to Guinean culture focuses on what his senses can collect as information. If the first few stanza’s of the poem focus primarily on the visual, or more precisely, the limitation of the visual as darkness falls, the second section focuses on the auditory. The drums stand in for the voices of an actual conversation, which demonstrates Han’s position outside verbal language as a means of communication. His attention to the drums serves in lieu of interactions with actual people: “Then beating quickened, with / a sound like the call of men / lifting their arms; like the/ shooting of thousands of arrows” (AA Poems Part 1, 46). The

drums are militantly anthropomorphized, creating a tension between Han's attempt to integrate himself into the environment and the spatial isolation his observational approach dictates.

The sound of drums also serve as catalysts for the passage of time, "that heralds the arrival / of dawn" as well as means to make "the sleeping forests awaken" as "the great earth trembles" (AA Poems Part 1, 46). This categorical valorization of culture leads directly into Han's attempt to provide a Chinese endorsement of transnational humanism in Guinea:

African drums, African drums
creation of the highest
human genius; their beating
expressing deep emotion
then the joy of the people
in so complete a way (AA Poems Part 1, 47).

For Han, the drums serve as an immediate cipher that straddles the Bureau's platform of a "revolutionary," or "combat literature," and the redefinition of humanism from non-Western perspectives. Furthermore, the assertion that the drums are a "creation of the highest human genius," is a direct refutation of colonial discourses of primitivism (AA Poems Part 1, 47).

Rather than represent some "absence" of civilization, the drums are rehabilitated within the Afro-Asian framework as an example of one of the highest expressions of human culture. While such an easy reversal seems obvious, and even essentialist given the prevalence of negritude within the pan-African movement of the time, the fact that the poem is written from Han's own on-the-ground experience in revolutionary Guinea reveals the importance of South-South exchanges to the construction of a postcolonial imaginary. Moreover, because this affirmation of Guinean culture comes from outside of the binary of colonizer and colonized, it presupposes a commitment to non-alignment, that is, an ostensible absence of prejudice. While the AAWB was very much biased along socialist lines, these horizontal affirmations of solidarity did provide a new vector along which to form South-to-South imaginaries.

As the poem continues, it reveals Han's interpretation of the drums as a language in and of itself. The isolation of the poem's speaker can be interpreted first as an attempt at critical distance, but perhaps more precisely as an indication of the linguistic and cultural barriers facing the poet as a foreigner. For Han, the drums are understood as means to translate cultural norms because they "can express / welcome to guests; entertaining / them with notes of happiness" as well as "praise a woman's / beauty" (AA Poems Part 1, 47). However, he quickly moves to its more militant uses: "aggressors attack like brutal beasts; immediately drum / beat sound the alarm. / [...] / Beats [...] / that go swiftly along roads / slaves took telling folk / to pick out arrows, draw swords" (AA Poems Part 1, 47). This folding of transnational humanism into a call to arms reveals the paradox of the Bureau's anthology: that the rehabilitation of a colonized culture, of the very category of human, must be filtered through the exigencies of Fanon's combat literature.

It is necessary to interrogate this controversial claim within the acute historical context of 1963. Given the global scope of numerous wars of decolonization, as well as protracted conflicts in Algeria, the Congo, and Vietnam, among others, the AAWB had attempted a cultural intervention into this volatile historical moment. It was no longer enough to affirm a pre-colonial culture as in the case of Senghorian definitions of negritude; rather for the AAWB culture was only relevant if it intervened into the reality of decolonization. In the final stanzas of the poem, Han provides this requisite link to history:

Underfoot is the old
battleground of Africa
broken arrow heads buried
in yellow sand along with
rusty knives; Old Toure
led good fighters; struggling
against aggressors tearing
them to pieces. (AA Poems Part 1, 48)

This reference to the Guinean struggle for independence under the leadership of Ahmed Sékou Touré demonstrates the Bureau's commitment to the contemporary historical circumstance, of memorializing the struggle as a celebratory moment of victory against colonial aggression. Han Pei-ping's recourse to the historical moment after a long sensorial description of Guinean landscape posits the geography of the new nation as a militant palimpsest. The landscape with its drums represents an opportunity for quiet reflection, but a reflection that necessarily leads from consideration of old colonial wars to new ones. The land embodies the history, but it is a bloody history, interpreted explicitly from lens of a materialist historiography. This Chinese imaginary of revolutionary Guinea is undoubtedly limited in its generalized and stereotypical depictions. However, this generalized account was precisely the point: the political ramifications of Afro-Asian imaginaries and cultural resonances was a united front against imperialism. If the goal was solidarity, then that solidarity could not itself be subject to debate.

This suturing of poetics to politics precipitates a predictable pattern of didacticism within the anthology, which this chapter has previously discussed. However, what the poem provides in its gaze of Afro-Asian solidarity is a turn from the pre-colonial past as one of the only reference points for the creation of national culture. The "African drums / that have beaten for the glory / of ancestors, for the rebellions / of slaves, against humiliated existence" are now looking forward to "freedom and independence; in their / throbbing is the deep note of / indignation, while sounds / of joy rise to the clouds" (AA Poems Part 1, 48-9). While indicative of the categorical optimism of much of the literature of independence, these moments of liberatory exuberance are an attempt to create culture out of the very moment of struggle. This is what Fanon defines as the necessity of "combat literature" to not look to an imagined past for the basis of postcolonial national culture. However, one of the results of the Bureau's cultural platform is the complete lack of

interrogation of the liberatory moment. The writer was not supposed to attempt a critical distance from the struggle; rather, it was to use literature, and specifically poetry, as means to “awaken” the masses to struggle. Critical of a politics of independence linked to neocolonialism, this “combat literature” brought a “third world literature” as “print culture” to bear as means to articulate the platform of the Bureau and the AAPSO as a whole.

Besides the inclusion of his own writing in the anthology, a good portion of the collected poems are either homages to or elegies for Lumumba. For the Bureau, Lumumba’s death provided the political cipher through which to articulate the militant poetics of “combat literature.” His positioning at the historical crossroads of Belgian colonialism and the rise of what the Bureau denigrated neo-colonialism, also provided an historical hinge between the previous forms of colonial aggression and the new era of Western dominance, which would last until the normalization of Sino-American relations with Nixon’s visit to China in 1972. Lumumba’s death, however tragic, provided the Bureau with a concrete historical injustice that could, through his martyrdom, hold the combative aesthetic line of a Third World imaginary.

These affirmations of solidarity range from basic statements, like the Indonesian poet, Njoto’s, “Lumumba’s blood is scarlet red / Congo! / your revolution is our own / your revolution we have in common / world revolution,” to the Sudanese, A.M. Khair’s, cry to arms, “The more they / take our blood, the greater / our army grows; one falls / a thousand arise; butchers / of Lumumba tremble! We / will avenge Lumumba” (AA Poems Part 1, 77, 110). In two poems from India, one translated from Urdu by Sahir Ludhianivi and the other from Punjabi by Amrita Pritam, the poets pay homage to Lumumba through a condemnation of the United Nations. The trope of blood permeates the poems. In Ludhianivi’s, he writes “The trial of blood will lead to the murderer’s dens. / Let the conspirators veil themselves in darkness / But every drop of a

martyr's blood / Will light an immortal flame" (AA Poems Part 1, 63). This focus on injustice reveals not only the importance of the legal framework of human rights to the organization, but also what the AAWB perceived of as the hypocrisy of international organizations such as the United Nations: "Warn the tricksters of diabolical diplomacy / Unveil the brushing (sic) bride of the U.N.O" (AA Poems Part 1, 63). In this sense, one of the essential components of the AAWB platform was their insistence upon their occupation of a moral high ground. The anthology was meant, through its commitment to "combat literature" to convey moral indignation with both the history of colonialism and the hypocrisy of the current geopolitical dynamic. Such a push from the perspective of historical injustice was only possibility because of the circumstances of Lumumba's death. As the Punjabi poet Amrita Pritam writes, "Can the white sheet hide this red spot in its folds? / [...] / The doors of the U.N.O. are shut / A question rises from the dark continent / Like the earth's red tongue licking the breasts of the sky" (AA Poems Part 1, 65). As such, themes of interrogation and justice dominate the anthology, including this articulation of a final loss of "African" innocence with Lumumba's death.

Another theme of the poetry anthology is what Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet call a "minor transnationalism."⁵⁷ Besides the general calls to Afro-Asian solidarity, pan-Africanism, and the Chinese imaginary of revolutionary Guinea discussed above, the anthology contains a number of poems that enact "peripheral" horizontal affiliations both in terms of colonial histories as well as contemporary vectors of migration and diaspora. In the poem "The Sun Rises over the Caribbean Sea," the Korean poet Lee Ma-ik writes, "Your light is as sharp as a knife against your enemy. / Your land is as hot as fire. / The cliffs surrounding you / Soars (sic) as high as the

⁵⁷ See Shih and Lionnet *Minor Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. Print. "The transnational [...] can be conceived as a space of exchange and participation wherever processes of hybridization occur and where it is still possible for cultures to be produced and performed without necessary mediation by the center" (Lionnet, Shih 5).

1,211 Height of Korea.. / Fight Cuba!” (AA Poems Part 1, 104). This mobilization of Caribbean geography and climate as an anti-imperial force itself is equated with the experience of the Korean War where “just like the valleys of Korea, / Cuba, your sea will be hell for your enemy” (AA Poems Part 1, 104). According to Lee, the very topography of each country is hostile to “Yankee aggression” as Korea’s mountainous peninsula is found to have innately similar anti-imperialist qualities as the island of Cuba. This ecological solidarity is constructed within the Cold War context of a “militant” minor transnationalism, which draws the Korean War into resonance with the Cuban struggle. As such, these “postcolonial ecologies” are mobilized in transnational solidarity.⁵⁸ Furthermore, while outside of the original conception of the Bureau as performing Afro-Asian solidarity, the many references to Castro’s Cuba in the anthology embodies the growing importance of the Caribbean and Latin American contexts to Third World solidarity movement of the 1960s.⁵⁹

Although the first volume of the anthology is full of these minor transnationalisms, the quality of the poetry as “literature” is decidedly hit or miss. In part due to the aesthetic strictures of a Maoist cultural platform and Fanonian notions of combat literature, the included poems have a tendency to slip into the realm of slogan and propaganda. In the attempt to describe the immediacy of the revolutionary moment, many of the selections are overwrought affirmations of militant solidarity. However, despite its propagandesque aesthetic, the anthology represents perhaps the first collection of world literature written from a postcolonial perspective. As such it is an example of “third world literature” as Thomas writes, as “print culture.” The many minor transnationalisms including as well as two poems by Indonesian poets, one titled “Yesterday and Today: For the Arab People,” and later, “A Cuban Maid in Peking.” The poems depict working

⁵⁸ See Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*.

⁵⁹ The Tri-continental conference in Havana, Cuba in 1966 would prove to be the apex of the this solidarity.

class or peasant figures who are eulogized through their involvement in different aspects of the struggle—from their death in combat to exuberant support for a far flung revolutionary movement across the continent or world such as Mazisi Kunene’s “The Revolution: South Africa,” wherein he provides an exilic affirmation of South African struggle.

One Soviet contribution by Mirzo Tursun-Zade, “My Sister, Africa!” provides another transnational imaginary. The growing tension within the AAPSO between the Soviets and the Chinese is exemplified through each poem’s depiction of Africa. While Han Pei-Ping’s poem is linked to an on-the-ground experience in revolutionary Guinea, Tursun-Zade’s poem takes the continent as a whole as its poetic subject. Furthermore, while the Chinese poem focuses on the stereotypical trope of African drumming, the Soviet poem focuses on the equally stereotypical trope of the black body as the site of trauma:

Of the fabulous land, of the body as
black as the night
Red with blood at the hands of the
villainous white.
Limb from limb she was rent by the
pale—featured mob. (AA Poems Part 1, 141).

This emphasis on race belies a larger tension within the organization as to the state of Chinese influence versus the Soviets. As would become exceedingly clear in later polemics during the Sino-Soviet split, there existed a pronounced anxiety over questions of race and geography. The Soviets had claimed relevance to the AAPSO through the citation of their central Asian territories. The first Writers Conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan had confirmed their inclusion and marked one of the high points of solidarity within the socialist bloc. However, with tensions arising due to Cold War realpolitik and the increasingly globalized reach of PRC national interest, the Soviets soon found themselves in competition with Mao for the ideological hearts and minds of the Third World, and in particular, the African continent. The denigration of the

white West in Tursun-Zade's poem can thus be read as an attempt to engage with the racial discourse of difference as it related to questions of ideology. The Maoist model, with its non-Western and non-white origin had increasingly become an alternative cultural and political model across Africa and Asia. As the Sino-Soviet split intensified during the mid 1960s, the Chinese would marshal race time and again as a means to drive a wedge between Soviet interests and the African continent.

An obvious issue for the anthology was its publication exclusively in English. Although the official languages of the organization were English, French and Arabic, the Bureau's decision to publish only an English version marks a significant decision in terms of the politics of language and global reach. The selection, which included seventy poems from ten different countries—the vast majority of which did not use English as an official language—meant the volume represented a vast project of uni-directional translation and anticipated later anthologies of world literature that struggle with the same issues of translation, audience, and the dominance of English as a lingua franca. However, the lack of an attempt at multilingual publication marks a significant failure on the Bureau's part to fulfill its self-proclaimed goal of promoting an "art" that "should serve the people" (AA Poems Part 1, vii).⁶⁰ Akin to Senghor's admission in the postface to his 1961 volume of poems, "Nocturnes," that he wrote in French to reach the largest audience possible, the Bureau was constrained by the financial cost of multiple linguistic publications, as well as the increasing fraught Cold War political landscape that threatened to pull the very concept of Third World solidarity apart during the sixties. Ironically, the common history of Western colonialism that had brought the organization much of its *raison d'être*,

⁶⁰ Although the anthology represents the Bureau's first collective publication, there were a series of translation projects initiated by the Bureau that did attempt to translate across indigenous languages of the global South. For example, the Afro-Asian Book Club out of Pakistan that tried to hold itself out of Sino-Soviet polemics, but which was very much indebted to the work of the AAWB.

meant that these colonial languages would also haunt attempts at cultural solidarity. Although in its conception the anthology was meant to share the common struggle of Afro-Asian peoples, it had become a project of a Third World cosmopolitanism, which relied upon Europhone lines of communication.

The second part of the poetry volume was published two years later in 1965. The Sino-Soviet split had begun to dominate the political landscape, as well as with the escalation of the Vietnam War, this volume represented the final unified cultural product of the Third World's socialist bloc. With publications from eleven more Afro-Asian countries, the total number of countries represented by the volume was twenty-one. Poetry remained the genre of choice, with the second volume receiving a marked increase in African poetry, with contributions from Angola, the Cameroon, Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria, the island of Mauritius and the Sudan. China and the Soviet Union were both represented, including more contributions from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) the Koreans and Indonesians. Furthermore, the poetry in the second volume is less propagandistic, with poems from a young Kofi Awoonor and the collection's first contribution from a woman, the Nigerian, Elizabeth Emma Brown. Homages to Lumumba still abounded, as well as the commitment to collective struggle and the minor transnationalisms of Third World imaginaries.

Of the more inspired selections is Angolan poet, Antonio Jacinto's "Poem," wherein he equates the process of writing poetry to various manual tasks of the oppressed classes. He writes from the perspective the Fanonian lumpenproletariat, "My poem goes in the taverns / 'gamble turning out tomorrow gamble / turning out tomorrow," to the washerwoman, "My poem comes from the native townships / on Saturdays it brings dirty clothes / on Mondays it takes clean clothes," to the peasant, "My poem is a forced worker / working on the coffee plantations," and

finally, to the migrant, “My poem is arrested / it met a native soldier / it had a passbook, the master/ forgot to sign” (AA Poems Part 2, 5). These equations of cultural labor with manual labor resonate with Maoist conceptions of the role of literature and art. However, Jacinto negotiates these constraints in an attempt to move beyond just a propagandistic account of the anti-colonial sentiment. The self-reflexivity of identifying his cultural labor as means to bring about the class alliance of a materialist historiography points to his conception of literature as an affective hinge of association.

For Jacinto, it is through the poem that he is able to personify this materialist historiography. In fact, it points to a problematic issue in Maoist conceptions of literature and art: how a literary elite “sublimates” their own consciousness in order to accurately reflect the will of the “people.” While such a task seems absurd in our contemporary context given the obvious aesthetic limitations of the Maoist model, it embodied one of the central problematics of many writer committed to a materialist historiography during the sixties. The essentialized “people” or “masses” become a utopian and un-interrogated counterpoint to the writers own political convictions. Jacinto continues with a litany of oppressed class positions his poem occupies, finally writing, “it lives in the night of ignorance / my poem knows nothing of itself / it does not even know how to ask” (AA Poems Part 2, 6). Here, Jacinto’s poem enters into a complexity rarely touched on in the anthology; his use of “the poem” has a double resonance. Firstly, and given the long catalogue of oppressed class positions, the lines can initially be read as the lack of revolutionary consciousness between various aspects of society. In characteristic Maoist fashion, the poem is meant to awaken the consciousness of the masses, inciting them to “know,” “ask,” and ultimately, to revolt. However, the second interpretation of these lines belies Jacinto’s own anxiety’s concerning his role as revolutionary poet. Taken literally, it points to the writer’s

ambivalence as to poetry's ability to incite the revolutionary consciousness it is tasked with bringing. In this sense, this stanza signals Jacinto's own doubts concerning the effectiveness of this attempt to "embody" the masses struggle, that is, the very sublimation that forms the basis of "combat literature."

The poem ends with move back towards the poet's own subjectivity: "my poem already wants / and already knows / my poem is I—white / mounted on me—black / riding along life" (AA Poems Part 2, 6). The poem, which until this point has served as a means to embody the oppressed subject, is now used to describe the poet himself—the poet's "I" is understood to be part and parcel to the oppressed "we." After a whole poem dedicated to the social relations between oppressed classes, this unification is brought about by a turn to race. It not only signals the importance of race to politics in Angola and on the continent as whole, but also allows Jacinto to end with an affirmation of similarity that cuts across the class divide. As part of the literary elite, Jacinto's anxiety's over class difference can thereby be, dialectically, subsumed under racial solidarity. The poem itself, as black ink spread across a white sheet, unifies writer and worker through the rubric of pan-Africanism, which resonated with the Bureau's cultural platform. Thus while Western materialism focused exclusively on class struggle, within the Third World context, race would appear time and again as a means to bridge class divides, both within the macro-scale of a global division of labor, but also within the inchoate postcolonial national context.⁶¹

The inclusion of Elizabeth Emma Brown from Nigeria and her two poems, "The Lament of Nigerian Workers," and "Lumumba," marked the first time a woman was published in the

⁶¹ This application of a materialist historiography to the postcolonial nation itself found its inspiration in Mao's own writings, "Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society" (1926), as well as Fanon's chapter on "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Kwame Nkrumah in *Neo-colonialism, the Last State of Imperialism* (1965) would also provide their own class analyses of postcolonial societies.

AAWB's anthologies. While there existed an extensive Woman Caucus in the AAPSO as a whole, which dealt with issues of human and gender rights, female contributions to the journal were scarce. The Ghanaian, Efua Sutherland, had participated in the first Writers conference in Tashkent, but, as primarily a playwright, had not contributed to this anthology of poetry. As with Jacinto's poem, these two contributions by Brown are attempts at a displacement of subjectivity, that is, an attempt at materialist sublimation. Of particular interest is her depiction of Patrice Lumumba wherein she breaks from previous homages included in the anthology that remain squarely in an third-person, adulatory mode.

Instead, Brown inhabits the body of Lumumba, writing from the perspective of the soon-to-be martyr: "A day before I was spat upon / And told my face was black, / No one sat on the table with me / Because my skin was black" (AA Poems Part 2, 106). Referencing the breakdown of diplomatic negotiations of Congolese independence in Brussels, Brown begins with a characteristic move of the African poets in the anthology to point out the racism inherent within the colonial framework. She continues with a depiction of Lumumba's imprisonment "behind the dreary prison bars," and then describes the insidious nature of the politics of naming leading up to Lumumba's death: "My name was numbered a thousand and one, / Troublemaker, agitator were just a few. / [...] / Alas! New names I acquired: Communist, Communist inspired, were just a few" (AA Poems Part 2, 106). Indicative of the Western gaze, as well as Cold War realpolitik, the litany of different derogatory monikers for Lumumba also reflects the ambiguity of his own stance vis à vis Marxism. The repetition of "just a few," after the initial discussion of Lumumba's blackness can, moreover, be read as an omission of certain racial epithets as part of this long line of labels.

Even with the wholesale appropriation of Lumumba as a martyr within the African, and in particular, socialist bloc, his own political orientation has been the subject of intense debate. In fact, despite his alleged radicalization at the first All-African People's Conference in Accra in 1958, Lumumba the politician was perhaps more adept at manipulating the discourse concerning his ideological convictions than many in the Cold War international community. However, like so many African politicians including Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, the rise of the PRC as an international player, as well as the increasing acuity of the Sino-Soviet split, meant that the Cold War political landscape had become even more entangled during the sixties. Furthermore, with the escalating war in Vietnam and the growing tide of national independence movements on the African continent, the rapidly shifting political alliances made the Congo Crisis into a bloody synecdoche for a "bloodless" Cold War.

Brown continues with a depiction of Lumumba as imprisoned first by the Belgians, and later "betrayed and denied by my countrymen, / As the Lord Jesus was of old" (AA Poems Part 2 106). This common characterization of Lumumba as a savior that decried the "acts of inhumanity / Of man to a fellow man," not only recuperates the discourse of human rights that was so important to the Bureau's cultural platform, but also returns the poem, and the anthology as a whole, back to an appropriation of Lumumba as martyr and sacrifice for the greater cause of "freedom," which "shall light for ever more" (AA Poems Part 2, 107). Brown's assumption of Lumumba's persona not only posits the poem itself as an act of naming, but also allows her, along with Jacinto, to use racial solidarity to overcome the dissonance created by difference. While for Jacinto it is an attempt to "go down among the masses," for Brown her identification with Lumumba allows her to sublimate gender difference. Although it is by no means a requirement for a woman poet to discuss gender in her writing, which is itself an act of relegating

minority voices to minority issues, it is striking that instead of speaking from a feminine space, Brown uses Lumumba, and his masculinity, to speak to global issues of human rights and racial solidarity.

Perhaps the most well-known African poet to be included in the anthology is George Awoonor Williams (later Kofi Awoonor), and his poem “The Black Eagle Awakes.” Easily the longest poem in the volume, it reads as a short history of the continent from pre European contact forward and into the most recent colonial encounter. Reminiscent of a poetic rendering of Hegel’s master and slave dialectic found in Lumumba’s contributions in the previous volume, Awoonor interprets the history of the continent as a history of labor in its various manifestations, be it slavery or otherwise. Beginning with the European encounter where “Splashing through the Atlantic waters / They came to collect black human cargoes” and later describing his ancestors: “They took the ship / Their song was / On which shores are we going to land / On which shores?” Awoonor furthers the common trope in literature on the transatlantic passage (AA Poems Part 2, 41). However, in the next stanza he explores earlier histories of labor connected with the continent:

We had worked in the foundries of Nero
And built the Pyramids of Egypt
We raised the walls of Zimbabwe
And fashioned the glory of Mani-Congo.
The warriors of Ashanti were among us
And we sang to the anvil sound
Of the bronze workers of Benin.
We raised Empires and Kingdoms
Fashioned the wisdom of Timbuctoo
The cow and the corn of our land
Multiplied a thousand fold
And we were at peace
In Kumbin Saleh we raised the temples
To our gods and worshipped therein. (AA Poems Part 2, 41)

Reminiscent of negritude's projects of cultural inventories—and thereby subject to the same critique of essentializing a utopian and peaceful past—what is interesting for Awoonor lies the connection between labor and culture, between the manual work of the Pyramids, the “walls of Zimbabwe” and the cultural work of fashioning the “glory of Mani-Congo” and the “wisdom of Timbuctoo.” (AA Poems Part 2, 41). The overall effect of this coupling is the articulation of a pre-colonial definition of African civilizations: the industrial developments of bronze working, the engineering feats of the pyramids, the agricultural breakthroughs of animal domestication and farming, and the proliferation of indigenous religions. As such, this first part of Awoonor's poem can be read as a recuperation of African culture within the context of 1960s discourses of transnational humanism. The concurrence of these African civilizations with the slave trade is glossed over, with Awoonor focusing instead on the protracted conflict between the European denial of African dignity: “To them we were the animals of the jungle / To them we were the dregs of humanity” (AA Poems Part 2, 42). Using references to the African empires of the Ashanti and Zulu, which were complicated by their own histories of expansion and violence, he describes an initial throwing back of the European slave trade: “Blood flowed from the great veld / And covered the fields of Chaka's Kingdom. / Osei-tutu's men rose, fought undauntedly / For four hundred years we fought and won” (AA Poems Part 2, 42). While this focus on a unified African front against the slave trade elides the historical complicity of African rulers with the transatlantic passage, the historical narrative Awoonor provides is one of resistance against foreign aggression. Such a selective narrative fits neatly within the contemporary context of the 1960s and a similarly protracted and bloody decolonization of the continent.

The rest of the poem focuses on the post 1885 Berlin conference and the partition stemming from the European “scramble for Africa.” If the previous imperial moment focused on

the extraction of African labor during the slave trade, this following moment begins with Awoonor's accusation of European duplicity: "Then they came back again offering peace and friendship. / We received them in our bounty. / But the second slavery had begun. / They walked our lands like overlords" (AA Poems Part 2, 42). This "second slavery" moves past a fixation with labor as resource, and to the ownership of territory and transformation of culture:

They taught our children strange ways
And steeped them in the oblivion of subjection.
But we did not sleep, we never surrendered.
They soldiers and lawmakers came
Accompanied by their men of god
Performed evil deeds in our sight
Stole the gold and diamond of our land
And gave us the Bible in exchange.
Our guns were weak and theirs were strong
But we did not sleep, we never surrendered. (AA Poems Part 2, 42)

Similar to the disruption of the indigenous cultural logic articulated in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, this second interruption works through the reversal of the moral hierarchy. However, if Achebe's work falls squarely within the tradition of critical realism, Awoonor's poem occupies the complicated space vis-à-vis definitions of "literature" and "print culture" discussed above. Christianity is seen as pagan, even as it is used to justify the extraction of natural resources. Moreover, Awoonor identifies the tripartite scheme of modern era colonialism: the army, law, and religion. Technological superiority is used as grounds for religious and cultural superiority, resulting in the apparent disintegration of indigenous culture so many of the pan-African intellectuals of the period decried. This unequivocal condemnation will serve as poetic fodder for the following sections, wherein Awoonor moves squarely into the realm of "combat literature."

The next stanza, which lasts the entirety of a page, pulls the poem into the combative realm of anti-colonial struggle. Similar to other contributions in the anthology, the stanza literally marshals the drums of war in response to the "blood of martyrs" that should not "be shed

in vain” (AA poems, vol. 2, 43). Awoonor writes that “the tears and moanings have ended / the revolt of slaves had begun” and that “the drums beat again / This time more powerfully / And marshaled forces marched forward / Shaking the sacred earth of Africa” (AA Poems Part 2, 43). As the complexity of the aesthetic retreats as the overtly political message of the poem takes over, Awoonor’s “call to arms” again fits precisely into the Maoist cultural platform of the Bureau during the early 1960s. The characteristic emphasis on a unified continent resonated both with the cultural concerns of pan-Africanism and the militancy of “combat literature.” Yet, in many ways the poem can represent a transitional space from the negritude of the fifties and the coming dominance of a targeted realism of many African writers during the sixties. If the Bureau’s poetry was meant to inspire anti-colonialism through its recourse to the dramatization—and often romanticization—of the struggle, then the use of realism by many African novelists of the period could also be seen as a revolutionary act.⁶² That is as an aesthetic, realism provided a revolutionary critique of the on-the-ground reality of colonialism and thereby did not smack of the conservatism a Western modernism denounced. Such a complex jumbling of genres within the context of decolonization meant that categories such as romanticism, realism, and modernism were understood via the moment of anti-colonial struggle, rather than European periodization.⁶³ In this sense, the Bureau endorsed a national *modernity* that *realistically* represented the atrocities of colonialism through a *romantic* push for revolution. This model outlines the transition, through poetry, between the categories of critical realism to socialist realism discussed by Onoge. The poem’s reduction to the political performed by Awoonor was thereby a clarifying aesthetic act, one that could be situated at the crossroads of multiple vectors of influence, appropriation and exchange. Such an act, which took its cues from

⁶² See Simon Gikandi, “Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History” *Modern Language Quarterly* 2012. Volume 73, Number 3: 309-328.

⁶³ This is one of the products of Mbembe’s aforementioned definition of “entanglement.”

Third World solidarity, pan-Africanism and Maoism, could be understood as a move out of European definitions of genre and aesthetics periodizations and into what has become known as the postcolonial.

The theme of combat continues in the final four stanzas of the poem. Awoonor depicts a kind of African “long march” that sweeps across all corners of the continent. He initially describes the colonizer’s scorn: “And they laughed at us / They said the children of darkness have gone mad,” and with a specific barb at the Afrikaaners, “at sunset they will return to their kraals” (AA Poems Part 2, 44). However, these insults give way to consternation in the face of a marching, pan-African host that

[...] crossed the Nile and reached the Niger
There the enemy had fled before us.
By the banks of the Congo we saw them gathered
Then Lumumba pointed his spear at them
The spear Nkrumah gave him
And they fled like geese before a storm. (AA Poems Part 2, 44)

This transnational “long march” mobilizes and brings together the legacies of both Lumumba and Nkrumah. As a possible reference to Lumumba’s “radicalization” at the All African Peoples Conference in Accra in 1958, Awoonor militarizes pan-Africanism within the context of an African socialism. The spear represents the transformation of materialist ideology within the African context, which allows for solidarity across national lines. This racial and ideological solidarity of the continent extends to east where the host “rested under the shadow of Kilimanjaro / And the Burning Spear looked into the waters” and later, “Our wing in the north had routed them / And the beloved hills of Algeria are free” (AA Poems Part 2, 44). With this description of the extensive wave of decolonization across the continent, Awoonor’s poem is remarkable for its categorical optimism. The complications of an incipient neo-colonialism are nowhere to be found, and the protracted war in Algeria is seen as having already given way to

national independence. Awoonor has placed himself at a moment where the ethical justification for a continued colonialism was no longer tenable. That is to say, he sensed that such unbridled optimism was justified as decolonization meant a victory for historical justice.

However, it is in the penultimate stanza that Awoonor demonstrates his awareness of transcontinental solidarities, even as he has remained within the pan-African context. He describes the African host as “gathering for the final assault,” because at their “head will be the shade of great Chaka” (AA Poems Part 2, 45). This diachronic invocation of the controversial leader of the historic Zulu nation is then coupled with a horizontal, synchronic movement: “Our forces have redoubled / And from distant Asia / Another people whose victory echoes reached us / Have joined our ranks” (AA Poems Part 2, 45). This reference to the original “long march” and victory of the CCP in 1949 brings the poem to its enactment of Afro-Asian solidarity. The moral conviction of a recuperation of human dignity and human rights across a rapidly decolonization Third World means that Awoonor’s gesture towards Asia can be understood as an endorsement of what he considered an inevitable movement towards historical justice. With his conclusion that “our blackness shall redeem us” and finally the repetition of the Swahili term for freedom, “Uruhu! Uruhu! Uruhu!,” Awoonor again enacts the categorical optimism of the historical moment (AA Poems Part 2, 45). As discussed above, the realities of an incipient neo-colonialism, as well as the specter of Cold War real-politik embodied by the Sino-Soviet split, were not interrogated by Awoonor in his militant exuberance. However critical “combat literature” was of colonialism, it was not able to address the antagonisms of the post-combat nation. That is, as important as it was to the birth of the postcolonial, it was not able to address the subtle and various entanglements of the postcolony.

Awoonor's long poem is followed by contributions from two South African poets, Dennis Brutus and Mazisi Kunene. Brutus' three contributions, "The Mob," "Kneeling Before You," and "For a Dead African," were some of the first poems published after his initial volume, *Sirens, Knuckles, Boots* in 1963, and appeared in the Afro-Asian anthology just after his release from Robben Island in July of 1965.⁶⁴ His first poem "The Mob" is a claustrophobic meditation on the mental state of the author as he flees "the faceless horrors / that people my nightmares" to the waking world only to "find confronting me / the fear-blanked facelessness / and saurian-lidded stares of my irrational terrors" (AA Poems Part 2, 129). This mob that populates both the poet's dreams and reality reads as an alternative class category to the uneducated "masses." The mob has doubled the poet's own consciousness back up upon itself, revealing the irony inherent in the Maoist notion that it should be the writer that awakens the consciousness of the "masses." The mob thereby exhibits a corrupted agency wherein it tortures the writer, rendering him incapable of inciting a consciousness conducive to struggle. The reversal of influence complicates the anthology's commitment to "combat literature," as it reveals the paradoxes of such a unilateral and didactic aesthetic.

With the final stanza, Brutus calls out, "O my people / what have you done [...]?" (AA Poems Part 2, 129). This naming of the "people" restores Brutus' faith in the utility of a materialist historiography as it is the awakened "people"—rather than the uneducated masses, or even the corrupted "mob"—that should respond to his call. Paradoxically, it is the poet that must first "find comforting" in order to ask how he can "smooth awake your mask of fear / restore your face, your faith, feeling, tears?" (AA Poems Part 2, 129). Here, Brutus moves away from a unilateral notion of the poet's role as a cultural vanguard, and to a more dialectic movement that

⁶⁴ Brutus would also publish a collection, *China Poems* in 1975. The poems included in this volume were republished from his first volume of poetry, *Sirens, Knuckles and Boots* (1963).

evinces the complicated process of an inspired “combat literature.” It is not enough to incite the “people” to action; for Brutus, it is also necessary for the “people” to serve as poetic muse. His use of vocabulary such as “fear-blanked,” “saurian-lidded,” and finally, “mask of fear,” reveals the importance of awakening some notion of class consciousness in order to access a more “authentic” vision of agency and struggle (AA Poems Part 2, 129). However, as with many of the poems in the anthology, the “people” as a concept remains abstracted, and it is instead the ruminations and eventual epiphanies of the poet that occupy the page. Brutus’ ending with a question does gesture towards some acknowledgement of how the “people” remains an ambiguous political cipher that serves more the personal ends of the poet’s mental state rather than an articulation of a collective consciousness.

His second poem, “Kneeling Before You,” furthers, in a quasi-romantic tone, the dialectic between poet and people. Reminiscent of many Chinese revolutionary plays where love for the party and struggle replaces romantic love, in this poem the object of the speaker’s affection is ambiguously genderless: “Kneeling before you in a gesture / unposed and quite unpractised” (AA Poems Part 2, 130). The speaker continues his impromptu supplication, “standing always stripped to the very bone / and central wick of our real selves / that burnt simple and vulnerable as flame” (AA Poems Part 2, 130). These lines depart from the rest of the volume’s Hegelian struggle to the death of master and slave; instead this encounter is based on vulnerability, openness and harmony more characteristic of a love poem. The preoccupation with being laid bare, of the presentation of the self’s authenticity in the encounter, leads the poet to wax, “for heart, head and spirit in a single movement / responded thus to some stray facet / of your prismatic luminous self” (AA Poems Part 2, 130). With this further meditation on vulnerability, the poet creates a space wherein the resonance, in Hegelian terms, with another

“self-consciousness” replaces the general militancy of the volume’s dedication to “combat.” A turn towards a more psychoanalytic inflected materialism, the poet’s subjectivity is refracted through the prism of the “other,” which “responds with total rhythm (sic) in the dance” (AA Poems Part 2, 130).

However, this space of vulnerability exists only as it is opposed to a violent exterior: “And answering, you pressed my face against your womb / and drew me to a safe and still oblivion, / shut out the knives and teeth; boots / bayonet and knuckles” (AA Poems Part 2, 130). A maternal embrace emerges out of the romantic overtones of the previous stanzas and stands in direct opposition to the raw images of violence and war. As such, the genderless and general “you” of the poem can now be more readily interpreted along the lines of an abstracted “people” or nation. As such, Brutus’ inclusion in the anthology was as a cultural representative of South Africa. The “people,” as mother means the poet has returned to his origin, has placed his hope in the protective (and now strangely class) relationship of mother and child. In materialist terms, the speaker’s identity and poetic inspiration is now tied to the maternal force of the “people.” As with the previous poem, Brutus romanticizes the capacity of such a relationship to protect against the violence of exterior forces. As such, the romanticization of the dialectical relationship between writer and “people” becomes one of the unanticipated results of the attempt to, through “combat literature,” depict the tragedy of the anti-colonial struggle. The final lines of the poem turn towards how this embrace is integral to survival, even as “[i]nvestigating searchlights rake / our naked unprotected contours / [...] / Boots club on the peeling door / [...] / Patrols uncoil along the asphalt dark” (AA Poems Part 2, 131). Surrounded by terror and the secret police, these two figures find a place where “somehow tenderness survives” (AA Poems Part 2, 131).

The relationship described in the poem is oddly not liberatory; rather it is based on survival, on the ability to endure rather than the ability to fight.

Brutus' final poem is the most structurally complex, as it uses iambic meter and approximates the Shakespearean sonnet form. The irony of using the English form for a poem titled "For a Dead African," brings Brutus into an entangled aesthetic characteristic of many African cultural products of the period. This tension between the poem's revolutionary content,, the strict, colonial, meter, and sing-song ABAB rhyme scheme creates a space intent on subverting the sonnet form for overtly political purposes. It begins with a reversal of sonnet structure; instead of ending the poem with the characteristic two-line Shakespearean couplet, Brutus uses an unrhymed parenthetical aside to start: "(John Nangoza Jebe was shot by the police in a / Good Friday Procession in Port Elizabeth, 1956)—" (AA Poems Part 2, 132). This deadpan recitation of the Port Elizabeth massacre, which served one of the most important political lightning rods of South African activism of the period, imposes the history of class struggle onto the sonnet. It is only after this acknowledgement of the historical circumstances in South Africa can the poem move forward into three four-line stanzas.

While the initial parenthetical aside marks the importance of recording a materialist history, the first two stanza articulates why an acknowledgement of the massacre is so important for Brutus: "We have no heroes and no wars / only victims of a sickly state," and later, "We have no battles and no fights / for histry (sic) to record with trite remark; / only captives killed on eyeless nights / and accidental dyings in the dark" (AA Poems Part 2, 132). The elision of the Port Elizabeth massacre from what Brutus deems as official history means the poem serves as the event's site of memory. However, while the poem is written specifically for John Nangoza Jebe, Brutus' use of the title "For a Dead African," generalizes the episode to the pan-African

context. While Jebe's death is indicative of the South African apartheid state and the "rains of hate" that divide the country, his death also serves as a synecdoche of the larger situation on the continent. In this sense, while many poems focus on the martyrdom of Patrice Lumumba, here Brutus provides an example particular to the South African context (AA Poems Part 2, 132).

Jebe's death lies outside of what Brutus considers the mainstream and "proper" colonial history of South Africa, and so he uses the cultural realm to provide an alternative history. It is paradoxical, then, that Brutus turns to the sonnet in order to record this alternative history of class struggle. The tension between his choice of an European form and the articulation of the ramifications of the Port Elizabeth massacre demonstrates both his subversion of that form and its own insufficiencies. The "perversion" of the fourteen line sonnet can thereby be read as the perversion of the apartheid regime in South Africa. For Brutus, the absencing of "the roll of those who died / to free our land" must be included with the birth new nation: "these nameless unarmed ones will stand beside / the warriors who secured the final prize" (AA Poems Part 2, 132). Here, the official colonial wars exist alongside the unofficial struggle of the "masses," of which Brutus includes not just those who died at Port Elizabeth, but also the larger history of social injustice on the continent and beyond. As such, this entanglement of form and content provides an arresting cultural cipher for the crossroads of South African politics and struggle.

Moreover, Brutus' own activism, shooting, and imprisonment hangs heavy over the poem, suggesting that even as he writes of Jebe, he is, through his own political history, placing himself alongside those that he memorializes. This embeddedness of subject with object, of writer with the people, typifies many of the poems included in the volume and, as I have discussed a various points, resonates with the Maoist dictum of "going down among the masses" in order to sublimate the individual consciousness through an engagement with the collective.

The paradox of using the sonnet form is thereby indicative of a reversal, however symbolic. In contrast with the exploitative history of colonialism, here, it is the English language and poetics that is subverted into what can be called a “combat sonnet.” Awoonor’s long poem defines postcolonialism through the clarifying, albeit aesthetically limiting, reliance on a romantic depiction of pan-African struggle. However, Brutus’ poem remains more entangled, crossing form and content in a way that is more indicative of the continuing context of apartheid in 1960s South Africa. His inclusion in the anthology—and later involvement of figures like Alex La Guma in the Bureau—meant that AAWB’s anti-apartheid stance had become a large part of its moral argument for social justice and human rights.

Mazisi Kunene, who would become Africa’s poet laureate in 1993 and the South African laureate in 2005, is one of the only poets to have work included in both volume one and two of the anthology.⁶⁵ In contrast to Brutus quasi-existential meditations, many of Kunene’s poems clear observation separation between individual as poet and “people” as subject. Relying on the clear identification of place and object in “To Our Jailer,” “The South African Road Squads” and “Slums of South Africa,” Kunene often takes recourse to a catalogue of body parts, which is reminiscent of Achille Mbembe’s “aesthetics of vulgarity.”⁶⁶ With lines like “Children, children, others decaying / Others falling on the ground / Tripping over hard corpses,” and later “The rain falls, the mud smells, / The farm of worms lies beneath / Death strolls in the streets,” Kunene approximates a vulgar realism most often found in socialist realist novels of the period (AA Poems Part 2, 135). By dramatizing what Fanon would call the lumpenproletariat in his poem, Kunene not only embodies the scope of “combat literature,” but also equates the slums to a kind of purgatorial space where “the nameless crowd, swollen bellies / In the dust, the dust, the

⁶⁵ In exile from South Africa, Kunene would teach at UCLA for 20 years. The poems included in these two anthologies represent some of the earliest publications of the celebrated, although at times problematic, poet.

⁶⁶ See Mbembe’s eponymous chapter in *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

diseased dust...” gaze into “the horizon / Waiting, waiting, and waiting” (AA Poems Part 2, 135). Kunene’s strict division between the death of an apartheid, or colonial state, and the life of a liberated South Africa furthers the categorical hinge between prison and liberation characteristic of the volume as a whole.⁶⁷

Perhaps his most intriguing description of apartheid, Kunene writes, “Time thickens the stone / The walls must break / Beating the dust” (AA Poems Part 2, 134). While apartheid’s divisions grow deeper and stronger over time, the militant context in which Kunene writes insists upon a Fanonian rupture in order to arrive at a new definitions of community and state. However, the corporeal realism of his poems gives way to a romanticization of “fresh love” that “breaks from the storm” and “life” that “will spring again” (AA Poems Part 2, 134-5). As the whole anthology works within the hinge between oppression and liberation, describing and inspiring a culture of struggle, what emerges is an anticipatory tone, one that manifests in many references to the past in order to move into an imagined future. The descriptive realism of the tragic past is replaced by the categorical optimism of what the Ivorian novelist, Ahmadou Kourouma, would later ironically describe as “the suns of independence.”

One of the most curious poems in the volume, “Asian-African Blood,” comes from Ceylon (later Sri Lanka), which housed the permanent office of the AAWB during the early years. Writing that “Asia is full of blood / Africa is full of blood” the poet, Ariyawansa Pathir, problematically uses the essentialist trope of blood as an identification of racial separation from the West through the political solidarity of anti-colonial leaders (AA Poems Part 2, 26). In the poem’s central stanza he brings the variegated political histories of Africa and Asia together:

Lumumba’s silence beneath the grave,
Nasser’s courage that built the Aswan Dam,

⁶⁷ For a discussion on the relationship between colonialism and the apartheid state, see Mahmood Mamdani’s *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.

Mandela's tears in the prison cell,
Kenyatta's voice which sees no barricade,
Mao's sweat that makes hundred flowers bloom,
Sirimavo's struggle to consolidate freedom,
Uncle Ho's determination to unite his land
Bung Karno's effort to crush Malaysia,
All that is significant
As the colour of blood is. (AA Poems Part 2, 26)

Pathir sees blood as both an exploited and liberatory aspect of Afro-Asian solidarity. Not only was it their "blood which the exploiters squeeze, " it is also their "blood that brings [them] freedom" (AA Poems Part 2, 26). Harkening back to previous discussions and the first solidarity and writers conferences that expressed an unwavering support for the "Afro-Asian personality," Pathir's focus on blood and an oppositional politics reads as catalogue of anti-colonial revolutionaries during the 1960s. The disparate political histories of two continents are fused with the mixing of Asian and African blood. The invocation of each leader is followed by a description of what Pathir deems one of their major contributions to Afro-Asian solidarity. From Lumumba's death, which has again dominated the anthology, to the paradoxical citation of Mao's "Hundred Flowers" campaign (which he would later renege upon), to Mandela's tears, Pathir's collating of what he saw as a united front against Western imperialism is fascinating when viewed from historical hindsight. In 1965, Mandela was viewed as important to the struggle for decolonization as Lumumba, or to follow the poem's controversial association, as Mao.

Conspicuous is the absence of the Soviet Union from this catalogue. Such an omission of any Soviet contributions both from the poem's catalogue of great Afro-Asian leaders and the second volume of the anthology as a whole demonstrates the increasing volatile nature of the Sino-Soviet relations during the period. As this volume represented the last cultural product of the Bureau before its own split along Chinese and Soviet lines in 1966, the ostensible solidarity

of the organization had begun to founder as the increasing virulence of Cold War realpolitik took over in the late sixties.⁶⁸ With China at the precipice before their Cultural Revolution and, after Lumumba, the war in Vietnam becoming the major revolutionary cipher, the Afro-Asian movement was caught at an historical crossroads. The political utility of such a sweeping solidarity across two continents was untenable in the face of rising Cold War national interests.

Even the choice of language for the volume demonstrated the fraught nature of the organization. While the official languages remained English, French, and Arabic, the anthology's publication exclusively in English not only indicated the financial constraints of publication for the Bureau, but also exemplifies the common trend of anthologies of world literature to translate in a unilateral direction from an indigenous language into English. While many of the poems in the anthology were composed in English, the majority of contributions had been translated from non-Western languages. While this was indicated for a couple of poems from India, the anthology as a whole did not include the names of the translators or the languages in which each poem was originally composed. Again, while it is possible to ascribe this to financial constraints, the anthology's linguistic shortcomings demonstrated the difficulties of reconciling the politics of language with targeted audience of any volume of world literature—be it for the indigenous “masses,” Third World cosmopolitans, or Western readers.

While the anthology succeeded in its commitment to a Maoist cultural platform through its many examples of Fanon's “combat literature,” such a compendium of world literature (understood as part of Third World print culture) embodied both the benefits and limitations of the transnational context. The inclusion of so many discrete examples of nationalism, while an attempt at a transnational humanism, did elide the many gendered and minority variations within

⁶⁸ Even with Zhou Enlai's tour of Africa in 1963 to drum up support and solidarity, the Sino-Soviet split would come to dominate the organization in produce jockeying camps within the socialist bloc itself.

the national context itself. However, the broad strokes of this period of Cold War internationalism did succeed in clarifying, however momentarily, what would constitute a postcolonial act. While the definition of this act would evolve with the proliferation of various kinds of postcolonialism after independence, the anthology represents the first attempt at a definition of world literature from the perspective of cultural struggle, that is, from the anticipation of the postcolonial. As such, the complicated synthesis of periodizations, genres, and aesthetics within this context were unified, if ultimately limited, in their proximity to the political event of anti-colonial struggle across Africa and Asia.

The AAWB Split 1966 and Sino-Soviet Realpolitik

After the publication of the second anthology, the Sino-Soviet split reached the AAWB with its full impact. In response to what they deemed as the ideological hijacking for the Maoists by the Secretary General, Ratne Senanayake, at the 1963 conference in Bali, as well as his “illegal” sanctioning of a Beijing conference later that year, a meeting was called in Cairo from the 19th-20th of June 1966. This Soviet sympathetic contingent renamed itself as the Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers and was headed by the Egyptian writer, Youssef El Sebai. In their 1966 publication, the *Afro-Asian Writer*—which was the first publication of what would become the much disseminated *Lotus*—they lambasted the Maoist contingent for using the AAWB as a means to “pursue egoistic aims using ultra-revolutionary slogans” and “propagate certain ideological theories which are to be always avoided by Afro-Asian writers” (*Afro-Asian Writer* 3). Senanyake received the brunt of the criticism as they wrote that he “in flagrant manner took sides with the Chinese and refused to receive one of the leading Soviet writers who was visiting Colombo, [which] finally led the President of the Ceylon Writers Union to resign, and henceforth the Union became virtually a club for the Chinese and Senanayake’s friends” (*Afro-Asian Writer*

13). They also moved the headquarters of the Bureau from Colombo to Cairo and scheduled another meeting for September 2nd, 1966 in Baku, Soviet Union, as well as the third official conference of the AAWB in Beirut for the following year.

With representatives from the Soviet Union, Sudan, India, as well as the disenfranchised head of the Ceylon Writers Union, the delegates decided to “seek all the ways and means to enable Afro-Asian Writers to re-organise their ranks” and thereby “remove Senanayake from office and to transfer the Bureau to another country” (Afro-Asian Writer 15). The Soviet delegation, led by Tursun Zade, diplomatically asserted that instead on focusing on the divisions created by Senanayake, the Bureau should focus on “the unification of fronts and national committees against the common enemy” (Afro-Asian Writer 17). They further indicted the inactivity of the Bureau, its inability to efficiently enact several of the Bureau’s resolutions from the Second Conference in Cairo such as the “co-ordination of activities,” the “collection of data with regard to literature,” “writers and conditions of writers and their movements,” “dissemination of information through publication,” and finally, “translation work” (Afro-Asian Writer 20). Moreover, they called the two existing publications a “haphazardly compiled anthology” of “such a poor standard that even a second rate literary organisation would hesitate to own them” (Afro-Asian Writer 21). Even though some of the delegates had themselves published in these volumes, including Tursun Zade, the imperative to distance themselves from the Maoist cultural platform of the first eight years of the Bureau meant these literary productions were to be stricken from the record of Afro-Asian publication. The dissatisfaction with these two publications would give rise to the founding of *Lotus*, which would be published into the 1980s and represents one of the most comprehensive attempts at a postcolonial literary strategy during the Cold War period.

One of the paradoxes of this split in the Bureau lay in the continued denigration of both Western imperialism and the war in Vietnam by each contingents. The emergency meeting in Cairo issued declarations condemning the war as “the most direct provocation to another global holocaust” and asserting need for “every writer today in Asia and Africa and elsewhere [...] to raise his or her voice in condemnation of this brutal U.S. aggression and in support of the heroic Vietnamese people” (Afro-Asian Writer 25). The emergency meeting later that year in Beijing from June 27th to July 9th similarly condemned the war in Vietnam as having “trampled underfoot the Vietnamese people’s sacred national rights: independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity, and seriously sabotaged the 1954 Geneva Agreements which [the Americans] had solemnly recognized” (China Reconstructs, 61). Although the Bureau itself had split along Sino-Soviet lines, with the escalation of the war in Vietnam each side attempted to appropriate the conflict as their own. This heightened rhetoric sought to position either country as the main bastion of anti-imperialism and thereby garner support among other Third World nations in the socialist bloc. As the decade wore on, the Vietnam War would replace the death of Patrice Lumumba as the cipher around which the Afro-Asian movement would align. However, the Sino-Soviet split meant that instead of a unified front, the socialist bloc had succumbed to the exigencies of national interest and Cold War realpolitik. As bombastic as the anti-imperial rhetoric remained, it was no longer directed entirely towards the West. As had become apparent during the Bureau’s emergency meeting in Cairo, and would be reinforced during the Beijing meeting later that year, many Third World writers and intellectuals—especially from Africa—would have to negotiate this new Cold War ideological terrain.

With allegedly 161 delegates from 53 different countries, the Afro-Asian Writers’ Emergency Meeting in Beijing sought to clearly demarcate the Chinese position from that of the

Soviets. Zhou Enlai's speech emphasized the importance of a "united front" that "must include all countries and people subjected to U.S. imperialist aggression, intervention, control or bullying; but it absolutely must not include the Soviet revisionist leading clique and the Indian reactionaries. On the contrary, they can only be the targets of struggle by the international anti-U.S. united front" (China Reconstructs, 39). With this indictment of both the Soviets and the Indians, Zhou severed much of the solidarity of the previous decade beginning with his own diplomatic overtures at Bandung. The high-period of Afro-Asian solidarity had foundered against both the failures of Sino-Soviet diplomacy, which included Khrushchev's denial of nuclear weapons capability to the PRC among other reasons, but also the domestic tensions produced by the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in China. Chen Yi's speech similarly denounced the Soviets, but couched his argument in cultural terms: "our unprecedented, great cultural revolution is indeed an extremely heavy blow at imperialism [...] Dare the U.S. imperialists and Soviet modern revisionists launch, like China, a great cultural revolution in their countries? I can say categorically that they dare not" (China Reconstructs, 44). Just as many Third World countries had looked to China for inspiration with its founding in 1949, the great proletarian cultural revolution was also meant to serve as inspiration for other Third World countries as it continued the revolutionary discourse into the period of post-independence. The notion of cultural struggle, consolidated by the AAWB with its adoption of a Maoist cultural platform in 1960, had now become the primary valence of the larger anti-imperial movement.

Although the embattled secretary general of the AAWB, Ratne Senanayake was not in attendance, his report was read by his representative D. Manuweera and decried the "Soviet splittists" who "have taken the illegal and despicable step of creating a fake Afro-Asian writers' bureau and what they call to [sic] 'removing' our respected Secretary-General from his post"

(China Reconstructs 52). While the Cairo meeting had described the efforts of the current Bureau as insufficient in its commitment to the resolutions adopted at previous AAWB meetings, Senanayake's speech emphasized the "editing and publishing" of "an Afro-Asian Literature Series in English and French. Six volumes of this were already in print, and they include *The Way He Lived* by Phan Thi Quyen, *The Village That Wouldn't Die* by Nguyen Ngoc, two books by Vietnamese authors, *The Silence of Ashes* by the Algerian writer Kaddour M'Hamsaji, *The Tornado of Africa* by the Malian poet Mamadou Gologo, *Poems from Nepal* and *Stories about Vietnam* written by several Chinese writers," as well as an anthology of "*Selected Afro-Asian Stories* [...] in preparation" (China Reconstructs, 52). These volumes further map the multi-sited geography of the Bureau's transnational "print culture." While previous publications by the Bureau had cited Maoist literary and cultural theory as its guiding principle, with the Bureau's split it had become apparent that the endorsement of even stricter policies concerning art and politics embodied by the Cultural Revolution had, for the Soviet contingent, contributed to their characterization as revisionist. For Senanayake and the Chinese delegates, this meant that the Soviets—as well anyone sympathetic to their contingent—would be excluded from future publications by the "legitimate" Bureau.

The irony of pushing for increased solidarity in the face of the Vietnam war, while at the same time deepening the diplomatic chasm with the socialist bloc, was furthered by the embattled Guo Moruo. Guo, who had served on multiple Chinese delegates to AAWB meetings, had been himself the object of criticism earlier in 1966 and it seemed as though his speech at the conference was meant to assuage doubts as to his political commitments on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. Although Guo began with the same vocabulary of Soviet revisionism he then pushed his critique further, into the solidarity rhetoric of "human nature:" "How can we

imagine that a common human nature exists between Johnson who is using napalm bombs and toxic chemicals to slaughter people in Vietnam and the Vietnamese people who are heroically resisting aggression?” And later: “How can we imagine that common human nature exists between the Western slave-traders of the old days who brandished bloodstained whips and the Negro brothers who were kidnapped to buccaneering ships? They are not ‘friends, comrades and brothers’ in any sense; they are irreconcilable enemies locked in a life-and-death struggle” (China Reconstructs, 55). By drawing a parallel between the colonial slave trade and the Vietnam war, Guo paradoxically furthered the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave by breaking with the commitment to a transnational humanism that had governed the creation of the Bureau. The paradox of this shift meant that while the dialectic of master and slave had been used in the early years of the Bureau as a means to forge links of a common “Afro-Asian” experience under colonialism, it was now used sever any humanistic association with the West. The AAWB’s commitment to a transnational humanism was critical of the history of colonialism. However it did not seek to abolish the entanglement brought about by that same history, which was now exploited within the context of the Sino-Soviet split. This exploitation would draw out, along racial and geographic lines, the Chinese attempt to paint the Soviets as revisionists and unable to address themselves to Third World issues.

The publication of the *Afro-Asian Writer* in 1966, which as discussed above became the first issue of *Lotus*, detailed the Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers’ (PBAAW) response to the “illegal Peking meeting.” Of particular interest were statements included by both Amilcar Cabral’s Permanent Commission of the Writers and Artists of So-called “Portuguese” Guinea and Mozambique’s FRELIMO. With an apparent disagreement over the inclusion of one member of the organization, Cabral’s delegation had broken with the general tone of the Beijing

conference because it “had regrettably exceeded its legal competence” in dealing with the exclusion of a member (Afro-Asian Writer 41). Furthermore, the Guinean delegation felt as though the Beijing meeting had consisted mainly of wrangling over ideological disputes, their statement elaborating that they “wish to thank all those—particularly if they are our people’s friends—who do not seek to draw us in ideological disputes, the consequences of which proves to be harmful to the national liberation movement” (Afro-Asian Writer 42).

In an even more critical statement, the FRELIMO delegation from Mozambique had flown to Beijing under the impression that they would give a speech examining “the problem of Vietnam” (Afro-Asian Writer 43). However, upon arrive the Chinese committee requested a copy of the speech and “after reviewing it, these responsible officials commented that our Front had overlooked some of the principal point namely: the attack that would be made on the Soviet Revisionists and collaborators and attack on the meeting held by the Afro-Asian Writers Permanent Bureau in Cairo that should be described as a criminal action against Solidarity” (Afro-Asian Writer 43). Apparently, after the FRELIMO delegation reiterated their stance concerning only dealing with support for the Vietnamese struggle, “the Chinese [...] placed the representatives of the Front in a car and took them away from Peking all the time the Conference held its sessions: finally out from the country” (Afro-Asian 44). Furthermore, according to the FRELIMO delegation “more than 90 percent of the ‘representatives’ of participating countries in that Conference are permanent residents of China” and that “the ‘delegation’ that sat in the seat of Mozambique had no import or support inside Mozambique” (Afro-Asian 44). With conflicting reports concerning the conference, the ideological mud-slinging that had come to characterize the Bureau’s meetings, as well as FRELIMO’s accusations of censorship, the high-period of Afro-Asian Solidarity beginning with Bandung in 1955 was at an end.

Conclusion

The Cairo-based Afro-Asian Writers Permanent Bureau would go on to publish a literature quarterly, *Lotus*, which oversaw one of the most comprehensive discussions of postcolonial aesthetics, the Vietnam war, and the occupation of Palestine, into the 1980s. Under the stewardship of Youssef El Sebai, the magazine included African Lotus Prize winners such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Alex La Guma. The Afro-Asian Writers Bureau, which was now based in Beijing, oversaw almost a decade’s worth of publications of the propaganda organ, *The Call*. With the domestic turmoil of the Cultural Revolution in full swing, the Beijing-based AAWB also included the translation and dissemination of all of their model revolutionary plays through the organization, as well as a 1968 publication, “The Struggle Between Two Lines,” that continued the anti-Soviet rhetoric, reading the roots of the revisionism back into the early sixties. In this sense, the Bureau—especially as a cultural organization—had occupied the primary space of ideological dispute for the Sino-Soviet split. With the Chinese accusing the Soviets of collusion with U.S. interests, the 1972 normalization of Sino-American relations symbolized by Richard Nixon’s visit to the PRC became one of the most destabilizing moments in the history of Afro-Asian solidarity, and would mark a decisive end-point to the rhetoric of solidarity that had characterized the movement in its early years.

Many socialist African writers and intellectuals would feel left in the ideological lurch. Maoism, which had provided so much ideological and literary inspiration in the early years of the Bureau with its focus on Patrice Lumumba’s death and the ensuing Congo Crisis, in the mid-seventies increasingly appeared to many of these thinkers as primarily a tool of Cold War realpolitik. However, as the following two chapters will discuss, the appropriation of “symbolic Maoism” by writers such as Léopold Sédar Senghor and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o meant that while

the realities of Cold War politics had taken over during the 1970s, there had already been an extensive period of interpretation and dissemination within the African and African diaspora context. Of utmost importance was Frantz Fanon's 1961 formulation of a "combat literature," which, as a product of the intense internationalism of the AAPSO and its overtly Maoist resonances, had taken hold as the primary point of reference for many postcolonial intellectuals.

While Soviet models were also an important cultural vector for many of these writers, this chapter has argued that symbolic Maoism played a crucial role in the prevalence of a materialist historiography and "combat literature" in African literature of the period. This appropriation within the historical moment of decolonization meant a revolutionary aesthetic, understood as a reflection of the lived reality of the people's struggle, was understood as one of the most relevant and potent mechanism in the creation of postcolonial national culture. The tension between categorizing the Bureau's cultural production as "literature" or "propaganda" would mean their anthologies of "third world literature" can be considered as instances of "print culture," which "should be viewed as products of complex network of social relations" (Thomas 27). As a result, definitions of the postcolonialism—as they related to both the African context and debates concerning the networks of exchange and appropriation of world literature—were no longer based primarily in a relationship between colonizer and colonized. Instead, the AAWB oversaw the emergence of postcolonialism as a politico-aesthetic category that was not only anchored in but also constructed through South-to-South transnational exchanges of the Cold War period.

Chapter 3

Senghor's Maoism: "Stylization for the People" at the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists

Introduction

In his 1961 *Nation et la voie africaine du socialisme* (The Nation and the African Path of Socialism), the Senegalese poet-politician, Léopold Sédar Senghor, proclaims:

Si le Congrès de la *Fédération des Communistes*, qui eut lieu, à Londres, en novembre 1847, fut, avec la publication du *Manifeste communiste*, l'événement le plus significatif du XIX^e siècle, la *Conférence de Bandoeng*, tenue en 1955, peut être considérée, sans contredit, comme son pendant au XX^e siècle. (Senghor, Nation 21)

(If the Congress of the Communist Federation, which took place in London in November of 1847, was, with the publication of the Communist Manifesto, the most important event of the 19th century, the Bandung Conference held in 1955 can be considered without objection as the same for the 20th century.)⁶⁹

Although Senghor did not himself attend Bandung—and was not a member of the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) or Afro-Asian Writers Bureau (AAWB)—his claim that the conference was the most important event in the 20th century meant he looked to the legacy of Bandung for two projects: the short-lived Federation of Mali and later, Senegalese independence. While the dream of a larger West African federation would soon founder, Senghor's commitment to a Bandung humanism would also infuse the politico-aesthetic project of *négritude*. Moreover, and in striking similarity with the AAWB, he would dabble in Maoist literary theory during the latter part of the fifties.

As such, this chapter will explore Senghor's engagement with Maoism. The argument is not that Senghor was a Maoist. His commitment to a socialist humanism, denigration of a scientific socialism, and a moderate political position vis-à-vis severing ties with the French

⁶⁹ All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

colonial metropole, meant he never explicitly endorsed the kind of state communism embodied by the People's Republic of China. Also, this chapter will not analyze the wide range of views within the Senegalese political landscape during the forties and fifties nor Senghor's relationship with the French government and Western intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre. Instead, this chapter will read Senghor "horizontally," that is, outside of a north/south and colonizer/colonized dichotomy. Specifically, it will ask, how did Senghor appropriate a "symbolic Maoism" into his own politico-aesthetic project? What kinds of frictions, textures and perspectives emerge from Senghor's oeuvre when viewed through the "horizontal" lens of an Africa-China imaginary? In short, what did Maoism represent for Senghor?

In a 1956 debate at the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Senghor mobilizes Mao's *Talks at the Yenan Forum of Literature and Art* to respond to the Haitian writer, Jacques-Stéphan Alexis' argument concerning the crisis of "black African culture" and consequently, Senghor's *négritude*. Although Senghor never wrote in the strict socialist realism of Maoist China, his interpretation of "Maoist stylization" at the First Congress contributed to the global image of Maoism as an alternative within the socialist bloc. For Senghor, it demonstrated his interest in looking beyond colonial frameworks for political and cultural models that were predicated on translation and difference, rather than on an implicit universality. It also produced a friction over questions of audience in his 1961 collection of poems, *Nocturnes*, and in particular, the elegies that conclude the work. As a result, Senghor's "Maoism" provides a new transnational dynamic to the formation of postcolonial Francophone African literature which, rather than exist exclusively within the relationship between France and its former colonies, also emerges out of the Africa-China imaginary of the global sixties.

Maoism and the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists

From September 19th to 22nd 1956, the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists was held in Paris, France and represented one of the largest gatherings of intellectuals and writers from the continent and diaspora. Organized by Alioune and Christiane Diop through the literary journal *Présence Africaine*, the conference invited over “sixty prominent black writers from the English- and French-speaking worlds” (Vaillant 285). The political and aesthetic stakes were high. Coming one year after the 1955 Africa-Asia conference in Bandung, Indonesia, the Congress convened at the cusp of a robust period of Cold War internationalism. If Bandung had announced a new historical era, the postcolonial, the delegates at the First Congress were committed to articulating its ramifications for pan-African cultural contexts. The immediacy of anti-colonial movements infused many of the sessions and debates with an urgency for culture and aesthetics to reflect their historical moment, that is, to be given a political edge.

One of the architects behind the conference was Léopold Sédar Senghor. While he had recently lost his seat in the French National Assembly to Félix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, Senghor was fresh off a victory for his political party, the *Bloc démocratique sénégalais* (BDS), earlier in the 1956 Senegalese elections. He had also just published his critically heralded collection of poems, *Ethiopiennes*, which included his most acclaimed work to date, the dramatic poem “Chaka.” In her biography of Senghor, Janet Vaillant writes, “By 1956, the year *Ethiopiennes* appeared, Senghor also saw clearly the connections between his thinking on personal and cultural issues and a particular political agenda” (Vaillant 284). The First Congress of Black Writers and Artists represented an opportunity for Senghor to articulate these connections. As a “man of substance [...] he was no longer an unimportant lycée teacher writing

poems or essays for the small world of Paris intellectuals, but a public figure, putting his ideas about culture and Negritude squarely in the public domain” (Vaillant 285).

His speech on the first day, “L’esprit de la civilisation où les lois de la culture négro-africaine” (The Spirit of Civilization, or, the Laws of Black African Culture), sought to directly address this relationship between culture and politics. Appropriately, Senghor opened with a reference to the Afro-Asian meeting at Bandung the previous year:

Qu’on le veuille ou non, 1955 marquera une date importante dans l’histoire du monde et d’abord dans l’histoire des peuples de couleur, Bandoeng sera désormais, pour ces peuples, un signe de ralliement. Non par les intrigues qu’essayèrent d’y susciter les deux Blocs, mais par l’esprit de libération qui s’y donna naissance. *L’esprit de Bandoeng*, c’est le souci que manifestèrent, alors, les peuples afro-asiatiques d’affermir, en l’affirmant, leur personnalité pour ne pas venir les mains vides ‘au rendez vous du donner et du recevoir.’ (Présence 51)

(Whether one wanted it or not, 1955 marked an important date in world history, first and foremost in the history of peoples of color. From now on, Bandung will be a rallying point for these people. Not because of the intrigues created there by the two Blocs, but because of the spirit of freedom which was given birth. The *spirit of Bandung* is the manifested concern through which the Afro-Asian people affirm their personality, and in so doing, come ‘to the rendezvous of giving and receiving’ without empty hands.)

While he was not in attendance at Bandung, this quote underscores the importance of the meeting for Senghor’s own project of *négritude* within a transnational context. His use of Bandung as both historical marker and cipher through which to read the emergence of national liberation movements is not far removed from the AAPSO’s own attempt to claim the legacy of Bandung for its own, similar, purposes. However, while the AAPSO grew ever more aligned with a radical socialist bloc, Senghor’s opening reads Bandung through the birth of a “spirit of freedom” rather than through “the intrigues created there by the two Blocs,” thereby demarcating a third path, one predicated on the third path of non-alignment (Présence 51).

While the political rhetoric of the AAPSO cannot be entirely reconciled with non-alignment, especially as it concerns its hard swing left during the sixties, some of their discourse

on the importance of civilization and culture, that is, of the “Afro-Asian personality,” resonates with Senghor’s opening. Senghor links the “spirit of Bandung,” to “la Civilisation mondiale—et, d’abord, la Paix” (world Civilization, and primarily, Peace) which “sera l’œuvre de tous ou ne sera pas” (will be the work of all or will not be at all; *Présence* 51). As discussed in previous chapters, the importance of recuperating definitions of “civilization” and “humanism” outside of a Western framework was one of the defining tenets of the AAPSO and led to the creation of the AAWB. Senghor’s push for “*notre Renaissance*,” (*our Renaissance*) which “sera moins le fait des politiques que des écrivains et artistes nègres” (will be less a consequence of politics than of black writers and artists) not only demonstrates his exposure and enthusiasm for the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, but also, along with the AAWB, emphasizes the importance of culture to national liberation movements (*Présence* 51). As with the AAPSO, Senghor’s project of negritude embodies the period’s tendency to suture culture and politics together into a larger project of liberation. Senghor even states that if “les écrivains et artistes nègres veulent parachever l’oeuvre dans l’esprit de Bandoeng, *ils doivent se mettre à l’école de l’Afrique Noire*” (black writers and artists want to perfect their work in the spirit of Bandung, *they must begin with the Black Africa school of thought*; *Présence* 51-2). This brings him to the topic of his speech, in which intends to elaborate upon the “*physiopsychologie du Nègre* (Black physio-psychology)” in order to open the Congress’ stated topic for the first day: the formulation of a “cultural inventory” of the “black world” (*Présence* 52).

Extensive scholarship exists critiquing Senghor for his essentialist definitions of what does or does not constitute “blackness.” While these arguments are crucial to understanding the vast scope of Senghor’s oeuvre, this chapter does not intend to replicate them. Instead, as stated in the introduction, the goal is to read Senghor through a “horizontal” lens, that is, to open his

work to a transnational filter that, while acknowledging the importance of the relationship between “colonizer and colonized,” defines the lines of exchange and comparison within a Cold War global South. Thus, while Senghor’s project of *négritude* does fundamentally pit “Greco-Roman reason” against the “emotive African,” it is revealing that at the Congress Senghor frames his speech on “the laws of black African culture” within the context of Afro-Asian solidarity movements, beginning with Bandung.

To anticipate his later exchange with Jacques-Stéphan Alexis and citation of Mao’s *Talks*, this section will discuss some of the main points of his speech, beginning with another parallel with the AAPSO: Senghor’s engagement with the Hegelian dialectic. He defines “black physio-psychology”: “Ebranlé, il répond à l’appel et s’abandonne, allant du sujet à l’objet, du moi au Toi, sur les ondes de l’Autre. Il meurt à soi pour renaître dans l’Autre. Il n’est pas assimilé ; il s’assimile, il s’identifie à l’Autre, ce qui est la meilleure façon de le connaître” (Shaken, he answers the call and abandons himself in it by moving from subject to object, from me to you, on the waves of the Other. He dies to himself in order to be reborn in the Other. He is not assimilated; rather he assimilates. He identifies with the Other, which is the best way to know the Other; *Présence* 52). This definition initially appears as a revision of Hegel’s dialectic of the master and slave, in which the encounter with the “Other” does not produce an inevitable “struggle to the death,” but instead, an affective attempt at association and identification. This produces an interesting fold into previous scholarship on Senghor, which justifiably critiques him for his definition of a “sensual African” against the “logical White.” However, by redefining the power relationship of the dialectic, Senghor redefines logic and reason through an African “sensuality”—what he later describes as “la force vitale” (vital force) and the importance of “rhythm” (*Présence* 53). Senghor does not conceive of this in opposition to rationality, but

rather, as a re-definition of what constitutes reason itself: “Mais sa raison n’est pas discursive; elle est synthétique. Elle n’est pas antagoniste; elle est sympathique. C’est un autre mode de connaissance” (But his reason is not discursive; it is synthetic. It is not antagonistic; it is pleasant. It is another mode of knowledge; *Présence* 52). While the obvious critique of such a position is that it denies the capacity to learn another kind of rationality or logic due to a fixed, however, faulty, notion of “race,” it is perhaps productive to read Senghor here as accounting for the simple notion of cultural difference. In fact, the dichotomy of assimilation and “giving-over to the other” he describes in his speech could be read productively against W.E.B. Du Bois’ notion of “double consciousness,” that is, of the difficult relationship of a minority vis-à-vis a majority within a given context.⁷⁰ One could perhaps, if controversially, even apply this notion of assimilation to the majority to the history of Senghor’s own Senegal and its cohesion around an Islamo-Wolof model.⁷¹

However, while Senghor’s engagement with the dialectic redefines the relationship between subject and object, between self and “Other,” its emphasis on assimilation and identification in fact embodies a model of solidarity—the most historically and immediately obvious being his opening reference to the Afro-Asian solidarity of Bandung. This “horizontal” reading of Senghor’s definition of the “black physio-psychology” opens a new comparative

⁷⁰ See W. E. B. Du Bois *Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Library of America, 2009.

⁷¹ Mamadou Diouf writes, “[...] le Sénégal qui se fabrique depuis la séquence coloniale et l’accélération urbaine se recentre sur la façade atlantique et les valeurs de civilisation et de culture portées par une ‘vernacularisation’ des mondialisations, orientale (musulmane notamment) et occidentale. La grammaire et la mise en ordre de ces procédures sont *wolof*. Ce choix justifie un sous-titre explicatif pour préciser ma démarche et l’ambition que je me suis fixée en rédigeant cet ouvrage. La fabrication dont il est question a en effet pour matrice ‘le modèle islamo-wolof’ qui définit un centre de référence et ordonne les sociétés autres que *wolof* selon un axe dont l’islam est le signe de culture et d’organisation sociale et politique” (Diouf 8-9). (The Senegal manufactured since the colonial sequence and urban acceleration is centered around the Atlantic façade and the values of civilization and culture brought by a ‘vernacularization’ of globalizations, ‘oriental’ (notably Islamic) and occidental. The grammar and ordering of these procedures are *wolof*. This choice merits an explanatory subtitle in order to clarify my approach and ambition with which I am concerned in the writing of this work. The fabrication in question has as its matrix “the Islamo-wolof model” that forms its referential center. It also orders non-*wolof* societies along an axis of which Islam is the cultural sign for social and political organization.)

paradigm within which to consider Senghor's commitment to "négritude." If, due to the violent history of colonialism and the slave trade, reconciliation with Europe at the historical juncture of national liberation was untenable, Asia, with its own variegated histories of colonialism, could provide a more receptive ground to apply such a "dialectics of solidarity."

Senghor then moves on to read "black" metaphysics as "une ontologie existentielle" (an existential ontology; *Présence* 53). While this initially appears to further his engagement with European intellectual history, it also allows him to elaborate a cultural theory that anchors an African mode of existence beyond the merely descriptive: "Car ce qui saisit le Nègre, c'est moins l'apparence de l'objet que sa réalité profonde, sa *surréalité*; moins son *signe* que son *sens*" (What takes hold of a black person is less the appearance of an object but its profound reality, its sur-reality; less the sign than its signification; *Présence* 52). Here is Senghor's reasoning for the importance of surrealism as an art form to the négritude movement. He elaborates an African existence based in corporeal experience and an integration with the daily objects and encounters of reality. Such a style allows for a supremely interpretative mode of existence—a kind of lived allegory wherein the quotidian is laden with meaning, rather than only physical reactions to objects. For Senghor, this ability to seamlessly create meaning inheres in the "African sensibility" and "rhythm." Rather than critique Senghor for his obvious and problematic essentialism, this chapter will consider how this logic works in his theory of the role of literature and art, and in particular his citation of Mao's *Talks* at the Congress.

For both Césaire and Senghor, surrealism represented a liberatory mode of expression, one that provided ample room for the critique of colonialism and the lived experience of many under its yolk. For them it was, contrary to some abstract styles, a means to foment struggle. This political engagement seems at odds with another style of the period considered to be the bread

and butte of national culture movements of the Third World: socialist, or critical realism. The tension between these two styles would emerge later with Alexis' challenge to Senghor during the debate. However, in his speech Senghor is loathe to pit these two styles in opposition to each other. In fact, he uses his notion of the African's inherent "existential ontology" to bridge what would appear to be an irreconcilable stylistic gap:

Parce que fonctionnels et collectifs, la littérature et l'art négro-africains sont *engagés*. [...] Ils engagent la *personne*—et non seulement l'individu—par et dans la collectivité, en ce sens qu'ils sont des techniques d'*essentialisation*. Ils l'engagent dans un avenir qui lui sera désormais présent, partie intégrante de son moi. C'est pourquoi l'œuvre d'art négro-africaine n'est pas, comme on l'a dit souvent, copie d'un archétype répétée mille fois. (Présence 56)

(Black African art and literature are *engaged* because they are functional and collective. [...] In the sense that they are techniques of *essentialization*, they engage the *person*—not only the individual—in and through the collectivity. They engage a person in a future that, from now on, will be the present, an integral part of itself. This is why black African art is not, as we have often said, a copy of an archetype repeated a thousand times.)

For Senghor, the functionality of art is an inherent quality of "black African culture." It is, as with Sartre, an engaged art—one that is derived from and embedded in the social. He cites the example from Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir*, wherein the father of Laye fashions gold jewelry accompanied by poetry, song and dance.⁷² Senghor is at pains to erase the division between the act of creation and its links to the artisanal act of culture. In this sense, "black African culture," is a culture in constant formation, in constant connection with the collectivity of society. To be "essentialized" here means to be woven into an evolving social fabric. Instead of a "stale" reproduction of an object, which according to Senghor serves no real societal purpose, "l'artisan-poète est situé et il engage, avec lui, *son* ethnique, *son* histoire, *sa* géographie. Il se sert des

⁷² This reconciliation of Laye's work as an "engaged literature" is at odds with many critics of the period, including Mongo Beti who in his 1955 article, "Afrique noire, littérature rose" (Black Africa, Rosy Literature) critiques Laye's work for its attempt to "nous faire croire à une Afrique idyllique, mais qui n'était qu'in vraisemblable." (make us believe in an idyllic Africa, but which was in fact improbable) (A.B. 144). See "Afrique noire, littérature rose" in *Présence Africaine*.

matériaux qu'il a sous la main et des faits quotidiens qui font la trame de sa vie" (the artisan-poet is situated, and as such he engages *his* ethnicity, *his* history, *his* geography. He makes use of the material at hand and the daily events that form the texture of his life; *Présence* 56). This last assertion sounds drawn from a socialist realist manifesto. And yet, for Senghor, his commitment to surrealism is not in contradiction with the exigency of the political moment because his conception fuses artist with societal function. "Black African art" is *already* social, *already* reflects the acuity of the historical moment through the artist's embodiment of an "existential ontology,"—through a necessary, almost *a priori* relationship to the collectivity.

This step brings Senghor to a conclusion that paradoxically resonates with the tenets of socialist realism: "Parce qu'engagé, l'artisan-poète ne se soucie pas de faire œuvre pour l'éternité. L'œuvre d'art est périssable. Si l'on en conserve l'esprit et le style, on se dépêche de remplacer l'œuvre ancienne—en l'actualisant—dès qu'elle se démode ou se détruit. C'est dire qu'en Afrique noire, 'l'art pour l'art' n'existe pas ; tout art est social" (Because of his engagement, the artisan-poet does not worry about making a work for eternity. The work of art is perishable. If one keeps the spirit and the style, one can hasten to replace the older work—in its actualization—as soon as it falls out of fashion or into ruin; *Présence* 57). This categorical denial of what socialist realists deem "bourgeois art," or an art without social function or purpose, also appears in Mao's *Talks*. At this crucial point, Senghor's speech has led to an integration of literary and cultural theory with African ontology. One embodies the other and vice versa. In fact, to follow this logic, the artistic act is the means through which such an ontology self-perpetuates. This self-perpetuation also embodies the evolutionary nature of society—an emphatic endorsement of a dynamic "becoming" rather than a static "being."

While Senghor hardly misses an opportunity to step into the trap of a racialized essentialism, the details of his “laws of black African culture” reveal a much more complicated relationship to essentialist accusations.⁷³ For Senghor, African art in all its functionality is also strategic. He cites the West African example of the griot, who as he “psalmodie la geste d’un héros légendaire, c’est l’histoire de son peuple qu’il écrit avec sa langue, en lui restituant la profondeur divine du mythe” (chants of a hero’s legendary act, it is the history of his people that he writes with his tongue, restoring in him the divine depth of the myth; *Présence* 57). The orality of the song allows the griot to consistently reconstruct history according to contemporary social exigencies. Since “all art is perishable,” the griot’s song serves to commemorate the past according to the pulse of the present. The creative act *is* the creation of society, of the collectivity itself. There are no archives or museum wherein art “exists for eternity” as repositories of the “beautiful.” Rather, what is beautiful—according to Senghor’s interpretation of the Wolof words, “dyêka,” “yèm,” and “mat”—is defined as “qui convient,” (that which suits) “qui est à la mesure de,” (that which is at the measure of) “qui est parfait” (that which is perfect; *Présence* 57). Such a translation lends an added dimension to both Césaire and Fanon’s endorsement of a humanism “à la mesure du monde” (made to the measure of the world) discussed in previous chapters. Moreover, for Senghor, it situates his own commitment to surrealism and the “beautiful” within the rising tide of anti-colonial movements that sought an art that reflected the urgency of the political moment through a commitment to some variant of socialist realism.

⁷³ In fact towards the end of his speech he asserts: “On me dira que ‘esprit de la Civilisation et les lois de la culture négro-africain, tels que je les ai exposés, ne sont pas du seul Négro-africain et qu’ils sont communs avec d’autres peuples. Je ne le nie pas. Chaque peuple réunit, en son visage, les divers traits de la condition humaine” (One will tell me that the spirit of Civilization and the laws of black African culture, such as have explained them, are not unique to the black African and are in common with other peoples. I do not deny it. Each people unifies, according to its features, the diverse traits of the human condition; *Présence* 65).

This tension between the “surreal” and the “socialist real” was no better exemplified than by a long exchange between the Haitian writer and revolutionary Jacques-Stéphan Alexis and Senghor later that afternoon. Following the last session of the first day dedicated to forming an “inventory” of “black African culture,” Alexis took the floor to elaborate on Richard Wright’s now famous intervention concerning the differences between the African-American experience and Senghor’s seemingly essentialist “black African culture:”

Nous avons entendu, cet après-midi, toute une série de communications qui, à mon avis, sont du plus haut intérêt quant à l’inventaire culturel, quant au contenu des différentes cultures qui forment ce que l’on est convenu d’appeler ‘le monde noire.’ Mais, d’autre part, il m’a semblé que les questions fondamentales de la culture elle-même n’étaient que fort peu envisagées. En effet, quand nous disons ‘la culture,’ de quelles données parlons-nous ? Parlons-nous d’une donnée ayant quelque rapport avec *un sol*, avec *un peuple*, avec *une histoire* ? Ou parlons-nous *d’un ensemble* de territoires, *d’un ensemble* de peuples, *d’un ensemble* d’histoires qui ont été plus ou moins contemporaines, mais qui ont des différences indiscutables? (Présence 69)

(This afternoon we have heard a whole series of speeches that, in my opinion, are of the utmost interest both in regards to a cultural inventory and the cultural content of what makes up what is conveniently called the “black world.” But on the other hand, it seems to me that fundamental questions concerning culture itself have not been strongly envisioned. Indeed, when we speak of “culture,” what givens are we talking about? Are we speaking about a given that has some relationship with the soil, with a people, with a history? Or are we speaking *of an ensemble* of territories, *an ensemble* of peoples, *an ensemble* of histories that while they are more or less contemporary, have indisputable differences?)

Alexis had pointed out the tendentious issue at the heart of Senghor’s conception of negritude, which as discussed above, lent itself to the charge of essentialism.⁷⁴ Alexis’ distinction between a given that is “vague” (vague) “floue,” (blurred) and “imprécise,” (imprecise) of Senghor’s negritude and the “ensemble” that makes up “the black world,” not only anticipated these critics, but also appealed to the immediacy of the Congress’ historical moment (Présence 69). Alexis refused to accept that culture existed in an African “*a priori*” racial space; instead he promoted a

⁷⁴ The long list of negritude critics include Wole Soyinka, Ezekial Mphahlele, Frantz Fanon, Jacques-Stéphan Alexis, and Keorapetse Kgotsitsile, among many others.

materialist notion of culture, one that was irrefutably linked to the multiplicity of historical contexts. He even appealed to fellow countryman Jean Price-Mars, who was serving as chair of the session, as the man who at the moment Haiti “était occupée une nouvelle fois par des forces étrangères,” (was occupied a new time by foreign forces) stood firm for “une culture nationale” (a national culture; *Présence* 69). This commitment to the “now” of the historical moment meant that in his conception culture was centered explicitly on a national context.

Although it is possible to read Senghor’s model as predicated upon delineating cultural difference within a national context, he does repeatedly step into the problematic ground of racial essentialism. Coming from the first liberated black colony, Haiti, Alexis—along with the American Richard Wright—felt that Senghor’s model of “la culture négro-africaine” (black African culture) elided the historical, linguistic, and geographic differences of the diaspora. Alexis’ endorsement of an “ensemble” of territories, peoples and histories meant that Senghor’s model, while predicated on establishing a cultural inventory of difference in the face of European colonialism, was read by many in the diaspora as insufficient with regards to the variations of what could constitute “black African culture.”

For Alexis, culture’s immediate political context was the formation of a nation around the will of the people. While he would later give his own speech at the conference, *Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiennes* (On Haitian Marvelous Realism), Alexis, after Richard Wright, was one of the most vocal critics of Senghor’s position.⁷⁵ Overtly Marxist in his orientation, he pushed for a conception of culture that met the people in their historical circumstances and that

⁷⁵ In Matthew Smith’s *Red and Black in Haiti*, he describes Alexis’ devotion to Jacques Roumain’s national cultural project and his quick rise within the young radical Marxist student movement that founded the journal *La Ruche* in 1945. This group, in addition to being enamored with the political engagement offered by surrealism promoted by André Bréton and Aimé Césaire, were also central in the January revolt in Haiti in 1946. He details Alexis’ (who was a burgeoning novelist in his own right) seminal role in leading the revolt, which succeeded in ousting Élie Lescot. These early political successes would no doubt lead to Alexis’ increased commitment to the Marxist project in the fifties. See Smith, *Red & Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*.

the people should properly express themselves and their circumstances through a politically engaged cultural production:

Il s'agit d'abord, de savoir si les peuplements, quels qu'ils soient, sont une expression de la réalité qui les entoure: si ces peuples ont, devant la vie, devant les conditions historiques qui les ont formés, devant la réalité des armes économiques avec lesquelles ils appréhendent la vie, une attitude propre. (Présence 70)

(First of all it is crucial to know if the population, whoever they are, are an expression of the reality that surrounds them: if these people have the correct attitude in the face of life, in face of the historical conditions that have formed them, and in face of the reality of the economic weapons with which they apprehend life.)

For Alexis, culture's on-the-ground reality was one of an imminent anti-colonial movement for national liberation and as such was opposed to Senghor's "inventaire culturelle," (cultural inventory) which was, as he asserted, "purement spirituelle," (purely spiritual) and not "liée à l'histoire" (linked to history)" or "la vie" (life; Présence 70). This specific critique of negritude as preoccupied with cataloguing an essentialist African past at the expense of the current "people's struggle," would find its way into a number of writers conceptions of national culture, not the least of which would be Frantz Fanon, who was himself in attendance in 1956.

Alexis continued to urge for not just a national culture, but a culture "en fonction de l'indépendance nationale—en fonction de la formation des nations" (in function of national independence—in function of nation formation; Présence 70). If, as Alexis implied, Senghor's cultural inventory represented a static and apolitical collection of proverbs, songs, rhythms and folktales from a bygone era, then Alexis' conception of culture sought to articulate the dynamism of a new nation, what he would later deem as part of a "humanisme nouveau" (new humanism; Présence 76). While nationalism would become, as Fanon would later famously point out, problematic in its own right if not tempered with a renewed internationalism, for Alexis it was necessary to begin with the lived reality of the "ensemble" of territories, peoples and histories in

their struggle against colonialism. Referencing the Africa-Asia conference held the previous year, Alexis concluded that the world was at “a crossroads,” that is, “[c]’est Bandoeng, c’est une cloche qui résonne, qui indique non seulement que nous voulons que nos cultures apparaissent comme de grandes et belles choses mais qui indique également que les peuples veulent naître à la vie en tant qu’organismes constitués. Et ce sont ces organismes constitués qui seront la base des cultures nationales en formation.” (It’s Bandung, a bell that resounds, which indicates both that we would like our cultures to appear as grand and beautiful things, as well as that the people want to be born into a life as constituted organisms. And it is these constituted organisms that will form the basis for national cultures; *Présence* 71). For Alexis, any discussion of a pre-colonial culture only served to confuse and stifle the current context. The nation represented the chance for a rebirth as “constituted organisms,” that is, as citizens of a modern nation. If an inventory was to be made, it should be one that embraced the crossroads symbolized by Bandung and its convening of the new postcolonial era. While Alexis took issue with what he deemed as Senghor’s neglect of the struggle for national self-determination, it is revealing that the Africa-Asia conference at Bandung served as a fundamental cipher for both writers. As he finished, Alexis’ fulmination was met with prolonged applause from the many delegates.

In many ways, the ostensible differences between Senghor and Alexis embodied the diversity of ways in which various organizations, including the AAWB, sought to lay claim to the legacy of Bandung. Bandung, for all of its rhetoric of unity and solidarity against colonialism, also set the stage for heated debates over the correct path to decolonization. Socialism, and increasingly, a hard-line Marxism would influence many national imaginations after 1955. These variations might then account for such a disparity among delegates at the Congress who, while committed to the project of decolonization, disagreed over its exact

implementation, especially as it concerned the role of literature and culture in national formation. Specifically, perhaps both the generational differences between Senghor and Alexis and the differences in historical contexts brought out the apparent incompatibility in their respective political commitments. With both intellectuals also laying claim to what constituted a “new humanism,” or to quote Césaire, “humanism made to the measure of the world,” it was clear that however unified the delegates were in their endorsement of Bandung solidarity, there still existed ample room for debate concerning its ramifications for political and cultural struggle.

Price-Mars then turned the microphone over to Senghor for his rebuttal. Senghor responded that Alexis had in fact “abordé le problème de la deuxième journée, qui traite, précisément, de la crise de la culture négro-africaine” (broached the problem of the second day, which specifically addressed the crisis of black African culture; *Présence* 71). For Senghor, Alexis had jumped to the following day’s thematic focus and his contribution threatened to derail the first day’s emphasis on establishing a cultural inventory. Senghor continued that while he agreed with Alexis that the crisis of “la culture négro-africaine” (black African culture) was that “la culture ne doit pas être de l’art pour l’art” (culture must not be ‘art for art’s sake) and that he, Senghor, had in fact “l’[a] dit assez,” (said this enough) it was still necessary to “commencer par faire l’inventaire culturel” (start by constructing a cultural inventory; *Présence* 71). Whether Senghor had explicitly envisioned the conference along these daily thematics, or whether Alexis’ impatience had forced his hand, what became immediately apparent was that it was not possible to discuss “black African culture” without a discussion of its crisis. This crisis embodied the tension between the notion of “art for art’s sake,” as decoupled from its historical and political context, and an art that reflected the people’s lived reality of “national cultures in formation” (*Présence* 71). Alexis’ impatience with the cataloguing of a cultural inventory lay in its

valorization of an African past—a past that Alexis as a Haitian and a member of the diaspora perhaps felt more removed from than Senghor—at the expense of the acuity of the current historical moment. Senghor’s original argument that “la culture négro-africaine” was necessarily “engaged” and was emphatically not “art for art’s sake” appeared too nuanced for Alexis, and considering the prolonged applause after his intervention, for many of the delegates in attendance. Whether Senghor’s model could accommodate this crisis of “black African culture” was not the issue. The political ferment of the late fifties, and the growing popularity of hard-line Marxist models such as Maoism, revealed that Senghor’s spirituality was the victim of the pervasive atheism of dialectic materialism and its accompanying critique of *homo economicus*.

This tension is evidenced in how the moderate Senghor proceeded to answer Alexis’ question of cultural crisis. It revealed the importance of a new comparative paradigm, one which had begun to resonate with many delegates from the continent and its diaspora:

Je vais vous donner un exemple qui est significatif à cet égard : l’exemple de Mao Tse-tung. Lisez son *Discours aux Ecrivains*. Mao Tse-tung nous dit qu’on doit écrire pour le peuple. Nous sommes d’accord. Je vous ai montré qu’en Afrique la littérature était faite *par tous et pour tous*. Mao Tse-tung nous dit donc qu’il faut écrire, il faut parler *au peuple* des préoccupations *du peuple*. (Présence 71)

(I’m going to give you a meaningful example in this respect: the example of Mao Zedong. Read his *Talks at the Yen-an Forum*. Mao Zedong tells us that one must write for the people. We agree. I have shown you that in Africa the literature is made *by* everyone and *for* everyone. Mao Zedong has told us it is necessary to write, that we must talk *to the people* of the concerns *of the people*.)

Senghor’s use of Mao to respond to the crisis of “black African culture” not only demonstrated the extent to which Maoist cultural policies had been disseminated across the Third World and, in particular, the African continent, but also, that communist China provocatively occupied a position of example and model for many national movements on the cusp of decolonization. By citing Mao Zedong’s *Talks at the Yen-an Forum of Literature and Art* in order to address Alexis’

critique of an outmoded cultural inventory in favor of a literature that reflected “national cultures in formation,” Senghor had signaled the existence of a new South-South vector of cultural and intellectual exchange that lay outside of a colonizer and colonized dichotomy. While this Cold War Africa-China imaginary would reach its apogee during the following decade of decolonization, Senghor’s appropriation of Mao in 1956 evinced the early utility of Maoism for debates ranging from what kind of economic mode of production was most conducive for development, to what kind of aesthetic best served this new era of postcolonial national culture. Moreover, it allowed Senghor to exploit Maoism to address the concerns of more radical Marxist contingents—of which Alexis was a part—both within the context of black internationalism and Senegalese domestic politics.⁷⁶

Another key point in Senghor’s appropriation of Mao lay in questions relating to author and audience. In both his speech given earlier in the day, and during his exchange with Alexis, Senghor repeatedly returned to the critique of the bourgeois notion of “art for art’s sake,” which echoed a famous line in Mao’s *Talks* wherein he states “there is in fact no such thing as art for art’s sake, art that stands above classes, art that is detached from or independent of politics” (Denton 11). To reiterate, Senghor defined “la culture négro-africaine” as inherently

⁷⁶ Mamadou Diouf writes: “Deux partis dominent la scène politique de la colonie du Sénégal : l’élite se partage entre la vieille SFIO (Section française de l’international ouvrière) de Lamine Guèye et le BDS (Bloc démocratique sénégalais) de Léopold Sédar Senghor et Mamadou Dia, qui s’investit dans les campagnes en utilisant les relais maraboutiques et les réseaux traditionnels. Le marxisme, lui, touche une partie de l’intelligentsia urbaine, généralement formée en France. [...] Les *originaires* votent pour la SFIO, qui a adopté la couleur rouge des socialistes européens ; les anciens sujets pour le BDS, qui opte pour le vert aux lectures plurielles [...] La bataille du rouge et du vert domine ainsi la vie politique sénégalaise pendant dix ans, de 1948-1958, à la veille de l’indépendance, date à la quelle les deux principaux partis fusionnent pour former L’union progressiste sénégalaise (UPS)” (Diouf 204-5). (Two parties dominate the political scene in the colony of Senegal: the elite is split between the old SFIO (French Section of the International Worker) of Lamine Gueye and the BDS (Democratic Senegalese Bloc) of Léopold Sédar Senghor and Mamadou Dia, which invested in campaigns that use Marabout go-betweens and traditional networks. Marxism touches a part of the urban intelligentsia, usually educated in France [...] The *originaires* vote for the SFIO, which had adopted the color red of the European socialists; the *anciens sujets* for the BDS, which opted for the green of a plurality of readings [...] Thus the battle of the red and green dominates Senegalese political life for ten years, 1948-58, until the eve of independence when the two principal parties joined to form the Progressive Senegalese Union (UPS).)

“engaged,”—as a cultural production that was both functional and collective. It intrinsically could not, for reasons discussed above, be “art for art’s sake.” In his citation of Mao, Senghor sought to demonstrate how African cultural production already embodied the critical shift in audience that much of Marxist literary theory promoted. As such, this *en vogue* endorsement of Maoist literary theory worked on two levels. Firstly, it provided Senghor’s project of *négritude* with the political relevance Alexis accused it of lacking. Secondly, it reinforced his commitment to a “dialectics of solidarity,” which he himself and Alexis relied upon in their referencing of the Bandung Conference. In fact Alexis’ critique of Senghor, and its resonance with many of the delegates, seemed more a general disagreement with Senghor’s moderate rhetoric than his actual argument. While Senghor readily admonished that it was necessary to write “to *the people* of the concerns of *the people*” he did avoid the use of Mao’s hard-line rhetoric that: “all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines” (Denton 11). Within this context, Alexis may have taken more issue with Senghor’s commitment to a moderate socialism over a radical Marxist political party.

Following this, what intrigued Senghor in his reading of Mao lay less in delineating party lines and more in the question of “*stylization*.”

[Mao] vous dit qu’il faut *styliser*—que, justement, si vous ne stylisez pas, vous ne pouvez pas plaire au peuple. Et Mao Tse-Tung vous dit qu’il faut styliser en s’appuyant sur la tradition nationale—en l’occurrence, en ce qui nous concerne, sur l’art nègre et sur la culture nègre. (Présence 71)

([H]e says it is necessary to *stylize*—that, in fact, if you do not stylize, you will not be able to please the people. He says it is necessary to stylize through relying upon the national tradition—in this particular case, and what is relevant to us—on black art and on black culture)

It was with this statement on Maoist “stylization” that Senghor sought to appropriate the commitment to a revolutionary literature in Mao’s *Talks* in order to support his own project of

negritude and its accompanying cultural inventory of, for lack of a better word, tradition. For Senghor, to “stylize” meant to write literature that resonated with the cultural traditions of the people—their oral narratives, music and ultimately, their “vital force” and “rhythm,” in order that the content of anti-colonial struggle would find the right aesthetic form.

Here, Senghor picks up a thread he had elaborated upon earlier that day in his speech on the laws of “black African culture:”

Qu’est-ce que le rythme ? C’est l’architecture de l’être, le dynamisme interne qui lui donne forme, le système d’ondes qu’il émet à l’adresse des Autres, l’expression pure de la force vitale. Le rythme, c’est le choc vibratoire, la force qui, à travers les sens, nous saisit à la racine de l’être. Il s’exprime par les moyens les plus matériels, les plus sensuels : lignes, surfaces, couleurs, volumes en architecture, sculpture et peinture : accents en poésie et musique ; mouvements dans la danse. Mais, ce faisant, il ordonne tout ce concret vers la lumière de l’esprit. (Présence 60-61)

(What is rhythm? It’s the architecture of being, the internal dynamism that gives it shape, the system of waves that emit its address to Others, the pure expression of the vital force. Rhythm, it’s the vibrating shock, the force that, through the senses, grabs us at the roots of our being. It expresses itself through the most material of means, the most sensual: lines, surfaces, colors, architectural volumes, sculpture and painting, accents in poetry and music—the movements in dance. But, in so doing, it orders all of these concrete things according to the mind’s eye.)

For Senghor, rhythm was one of the key methods through which the “black African culture” articulated its “existential ontology.” That is, anchored in the experience of the senses, Senghor’s rhythm provided the creative interface between body, space, and expression. This threading of a person’s “spirit” through an engagement with material surroundings furthers Senghor’s refusal to endorse the economic determinism of a orthodox Marxism. Rhythm, if derived from a person’s material surroundings, is also created through the body’s synthesis of a variety of factors, including the specificity of cultural and geographic context—and controversially for Senghor, race. “Stylization,” then, becomes the formal means through which an artist taps into these specificities in order to reach a particular audience, what is emitted in order to address him or

herself to the “Other.” Rather than only read rhythm as exclusively present in movements of the body, Senghor cites poetry as the genre that is most capable of expressing the verbal aspect of rhythm. A cultural inventory based on an engagement with “tradition,” however problematic, served as a point of departure for creating art that, while derived from the cultural and historical specificity of a region, was also committed to activating the political exigencies of the contemporary context.

Senghor’s citation was based on a statement in the *Talks* where Mao urges: “nor do we refuse to utilize the literary and artistic forms of the past, but in our hands these forms, remoulded and infused with new content also become something revolutionary in the service of the people” (Denton 546). While such an assertion is ironic in light of the rampant iconoclasm of the Cultural Revolution during the 1960s, in 1956 Senghor interpreted Mao to mean that the use of traditional form was part of a dialectic movement forward into the service of anti-colonial struggle. To further his point, Senghor continued with an example of how during an electoral campaign a politician’s speech fell flat due to its “style hautain” (haughty style); he contrasted it with a poet, whose poem “fit pleurer les gens” (made people cry) because he “avait été fidèle aux lois de la culture négro-africaine” (had been loyal to the laws of black African culture), and “le rythme auxquels les Africains étaient sensibles” (the rhythm to which Africans were sensitive; *Présence* 71). The crisis of “black African culture” was precisely that, rather than exist as a kind of pan-African anthropological inventory, culture had to be mobilized in order to address the immediate context of struggle. The commitment to cataloguing the past, which Alexis thought obfuscated the militancy of the contemporary cultural moment, was actually a preparatory move for Senghor, one that precipitated rather than prevented change. Without this “stylization,” works that addressed the political without corresponding to “l’esthétique négro-africaine [...] ne

pourraient pas être goûtées” (the black African aesthetic [...] could not be appreciated; *Présence* 72).

However, Senghor’s commitment to a “stylization” for the people did not translate into the adoption of the rigid socialist realism of Maoist China. In fact, in an address almost two decades later (1975) in Congo-Brazzaville, Senghor expresses his disappointment with socialist realism as a genre:

Le réalisme socialiste serait, non pas l’expression de la réalité sociale, telle qu’elle existe par-delà les apparences, mais l’expression des idées politiques de l’auteur. J’ai pu personnellement en juger d’après les œuvres que j’ai vues de cette école. Ce qui importe, ce n’est pas le *style*—la force suggestive de l’expression—, qui doit ‘cacher’ les idées, mais le sujet traité : le portrait de Staline, par exemple, la Révolution d’octobre, la maison natale de Mao Tsé-Toung, etc. A la réflexion, comme à l’expérience, le réalisme socialiste m’a paru être peu marxiste. (Senghor, *Relecture* 27)

(Socialist realism would not be the expression of social reality as it exists beyond appearances, but the expression of the author’s political ideas. I was able to personally judge this following the works I have seen from this school of thought. What matters is not the *style*—the suggestive force of expression—, which must “hide” the idea, but the subject treated: the portrait of Stalin, for example, the October Revolution, the childhood home of Mao Zedong, etc. In reflection, as in experience, socialist realism seemed hardly Marxist at all.)

Senghor’s analysis turns the purported intent of the genre on its head. Instead of depicting the “lived struggle” of the people, that is, pulling from specific material circumstances an adequate reflection of basic reality, Senghor identifies socialist realism in much of its Soviet and Chinese incarnations as overly subject to the political convictions of the author. In practice, “socialist realism” becomes a victim of its own ideology. It no longer attempts to reconstruct a lived, social reality, but rather, the correct party line. For Senghor, this constitutes a betrayal of an engaged “stylization,” one that taps into the rhythm of a society’s “vital force.” While this dismissal of the genre comes almost twenty years after his speech at the First Congress of Black Writers, his reading of Mao already presages such a position. Senghor is not interested in literature in the

service of a party or particular ideology. As he writes, socialist realism must reflect “the social reality,” which necessitates an engagement with the human as both material and spiritual being. It is revealing then, that his two examples of the genre’s failures further the creation of a personality cult at the expense of a “socialist humanism.”

However, Alexis was not satisfied with this reading of Mao. As with the multitude of critics before and after, he leveled his disagreement specifically at the hegemonic usage of Senghor’s “black African aesthetic,” asking, “Je voudrais savoir si, en Afrique, il existe—en général—une esthétique négro-africaine valable pour *tous* les peuples de l’Afrique” (I would like to know if, in Africa, there generally exists a black African aesthetic that is valid for all African people; *Présence* 72). As Senghor began to explain how “la civilisation européenne [...] est essentiellement fondée sur la raison analytique et discursive” (European civilization [...] is essentially founded upon analytical and discursive reasoning; *Présence* 72), Aimé Césaire, who seemed to not want the debate to devolve into a circular exchange between Senghor and Alexis, intervened:

Je ne vois pas très bien ce qui sépare la position de M. Alexis et celle de M. Senghor [...] M. Alexis nous parle d’une différence. Il se demande s’il y a une culture négro-africaine. Il s’insurge contre le terme. [...] il est clair qu’à l’intérieur de l’Afrique il y a aussi place pour des cultures africaines [...] ajoutées à la vaste civilisation négro-africaine qui, par le jeu des force historiques, a débordé du cadre africain ; il y a également place pour des cultures nationales. Ce n’est pas du tout contradictoire. (*Présence* 73-4)

(I do not see what really separates Mr. Alexis position from that of Mr. Senghor. [...] Mr. Alexis speaks of a difference. He asks if there is a black African culture. He declares his opposition to the term. [...] It is obvious that in the interior of Africa there is also a place for African cultures [...] added to the vast black African civilization, which through the game of historical forces have extended beyond the African framework; there is equally place for national cultures. It is not at all contradictory.)

Even with Césaire's attempt to reconcile the two positions, Alexis continued to demonstrate his discomfiture with Senghor's emphasis on a cultural inventory of shared racial past, as well as Césaire's dismissal as he responded:

Quand on parle du problème de “la crise”, ce sont des cultures nationales en formation qui sont *en crise*. Mais au moment de l'inventaire, il est indispensable de dire, par exemple, que ces cultures sont en formation—sans quoi nous arrivons à une mosaïque de données qui ne peuvent être intégrées. [...] il s'agit de faire l'inventaire culturel de son peuple et de sa nation, *en formation*. (Présence 75)

(When we speak about the problem of ‘the crisis,’ it is the national cultures in formation that are *in crisis*. But at the moment of an inventory it is indispensable to say, for example, that these cultures are in formation—without which we arrive at a mosaic of givens that cannot be integrated. [...] It is about constructing a cultural inventory of one's people and one's nation *in formation*.)

Alexis' essential point lay in where the emphasis should be put when conducting the cultural inventory. Following Senghor's response and Césaire's intervention, he had refined his argument. Instead of continuing to take issue with Senghor's notion that the crisis existed in the transformation of “black African culture” into the national context, he insisted that the crisis *was* the formation of national culture itself. The importance of a cultural inventory of the “nation in formation” revealed a different interpretation of stylization, one that was predicated on integration into the context of independence. Rather than stylize to “a black African aesthetic,” it was instead more strategic to stylize to the national context—e.g. Haitian, Senegalese, etc.—of an anti-colonial struggle. This urge for a cultural inventory of the nation in formation had its own Maoist resonances: “China's revolutionary writers and artists [...] must go among the masses [...] of workers, peasants and soldiers, go into the heat of the struggle, go to the only source, [...] in order to observe experience, study and analyse all the different kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art” (Mao 82). In this well-known section of Mao's *Talks*, he foregrounds the national context as

Alexis sought in his disagreement with Senghor. Rather than conduct a cultural inventory to approximate what he viewed as a generic and outmoded notion of “black African culture,” Alexis promoted a cultural inventory of the people as a proto-nation in “the heat of the struggle,” which entailed observation by going “among the masses” (Mao 82). If Senghor’s interpretation of Mao rested on a stylization according to an “image and rhythm to which Africans were sensitive,” Alexis’ stylization meant to address such a crisis through the depiction of the people in their struggle for national self-determination (Présence 71).⁷⁷

As would become clear from this exchange, Senghor endorsed an aesthetic that reflected the person as embedded in the collective, that is, in the “social” writ large. Because he did not endorse a literature of the party that much of Maoist literary theory encouraged in its application during the Cultural Revolution, to discuss of Senghor’s Maoism is to work within the framework of a “strong misreading.”⁷⁸ However incompatible the two thinkers appear given historical hindsight, Senghor’s engagement with Maoism revealed not only the wide scope of his thought, but also represented his willingness to look “East” across the global South for alternative models of culture relevant to an emerging postcolonialism.

Cold War Contexts

This exchange between Alexis and Senghor, while emblematic of a larger current that split the Congress along both ideological, geographic, and generational lines, also signaled the importance of China as an alternative model of both economic development and national culture. These new South-to-South Cold War exchanges brought about a new lens through which to view

⁷⁷ Alexis would also give a speech at the Congress, titled: *Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens* wherein he outlines his own aesthetic project that evolved from a commitment to a classic socialist realism of his novel, *General Sun*, to what he calls the “marvelous realism” that would dominate his next novel, *The Magical Trees*.

⁷⁸ See Harold Bloom’s *A Map of Misreading*.

the formation of postcolonial national culture on the continent and in its diaspora.⁷⁹ Rather than only view the cultural and intellectual production of decolonization through its vertical relationship with Western colonialism, an Africa-China imaginary moved along a horizontal axis of Afro-Asian solidarity and produced resonances and exchanges that lay outside of a colonial framework.

This symbolic Maoism would continue to fire the imagination of Senghor well into the 1970s. In his *Nation and the African Path of Socialism* (1961), he would write, “[l]’erreur des Russes avait été de négliger les paysans et l’agriculture. Mao Tsé Tung n’a pas renouvelé l’erreur. Il s’est appuyé sur les paysans : sa révolution a été, avant tout, une révolution paysanne.” (The Russians’ error had been to neglect the peasants and agriculture. Mao Zedong did not repeat the same error. He focused on the peasants: his revolution was above all a peasant revolution; Senghor, *Nation* 85). For Senghor and many others, Mao’s emphasis on the rural peasantry in a pre-industrialized state was more readily applicable to other agriculturally-based economies across the Third World, and to African development in particular. At the time, Maoist China represented the only Third World country to both win an anti-colonial war and establish a socialist state. As such, it was common for other leftist leaning politicians of African independence to seek inspiration from political paradigms elaborated outside of colonial contexts. However, the growing rift between Soviet and Chinese models would come to a head during the Sino-Soviet split in the mid 1960s, and many African countries, including South

⁷⁹ See my article, “The Global South and Cultural Struggles: On the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization.” *Journal for Contemporary Thought*. Global South Cultural Dialogue Project: Forum on Indian Literature to World Literature.

Africa, Tanzania, and the Congo-Brazzaville, would find themselves caught in the ideological crosshairs.⁸⁰

While different contingents within Senegal itself would exhibit a much deeper engagement with both Soviet and Maoist party models, Senghor would never fully endorse a radical break with the French metropole similar to Ahmed Sékou Touré in Guinea.⁸¹ Senghor would move quickly to consolidate political power by forging an alliance in 1958 on the eve of Senegalese independence between his and Mamadou Dia's *Bloc démocratique sénégalais* (BDS), and the more radical, *Section française de l'international ouvrière* (SFIO) to create *L'Union progressiste sénégalaise* (UPS). By bringing together the Verts (BDS) and the Rouges (SFIO), Senghor was able to exploit both the leftist tendencies of the SFIO as well as his own party's mobilization of Islam and the peasantry. As Mamadou Diouf writes in *L'histoire du Sénégal*:

La "négritude" senghorienne, en tant qu'ensemble des valeurs du monde noir, fut l'arme principale de la critique de [la domination des citadins assimilés]. L'affichage de l'appartenance politique par la couleur, la coupe des habits, le style des bijoux et les constructions savantes des tresses et poses des mouchoirs de tête ont donné aux joutes politiques un caractère bariolé, flottant aux rythmes des tam-tams, présence incontournable des campagnes politiques. (Diouf 205)

(As an ensemble of the values of the black world, Senghorian "négritude" was the principal weapon of a critique of [assimilated urbanite domination.] The display of political affiliation by color, the cut of clothes, the style of jewelry and the clever construction of braids and wrapping of head handkerchiefs, gave the political contests a rainbow-colored character, floating to the rhythm of tam-tams, an inescapable presence of the political campaigns.)

Senghor's alliance with SFIO and his explicit incorporation of négritude and "rhythm" into the political campaign itself allowed him to form a party that would dominate the post-independence

⁸⁰ See Bruce Larkin's Larkin, Bruce. *China and Africa, 1949-1970: The Foreign Policy of the People's Republic of China*.

⁸¹ There is an argument to be made for Touré's deeper engagement with Maoism as a party ideology and the creation of a personality cult. See his four-hundred page tome: *La révolution culturelle* (The Cultural Revolution).

scene for the next twenty years. Perhaps it is not entirely incorrect to suggest that Senghor's experience at the First Congress of Black Writers, during which Alexis continued to take issue with a cultural inventory that neglected to reflect the struggle of a "nation in formation," informed some of his own political maneuvering two years later. The UPS can thereby be read as an attempt to bridge the ostensible gap (Senghor would disagree with there being one in the first place) between *négritude* and a radical leftist agenda anchored in party politics. Moreover, it can also be understood as Senghor's concrete political response—through his own reading of Mao's *Talks*—to Alexis' fixation with the crisis of "black African culture."

The *Talks* was not the only Maoist text Senghor deemed useful for the Senegalese and larger African context. In a speech given in Tunis in July of 1975, Senghor this time turns to Mao's seminal text, *On Contradiction* (1937) in his engagement with the concept of the "dialectic:"

Je vous renvoie à l'étude de Mao Tsé-Toung intitulée *A propos de la Contradiction*. En effet, le penseur chinois nous y fait, à la chinoise, un exposé concret, à la fois clair et subtil, de la dialectique en s'appuyant sur les textes de Marx, d'Engels et de Lénine. Mais c'est, par-delà les exemples classiques trouvés en Europe, en puisant de nouveaux exemples dans la réalité chinoise. Par quoi il enrichit la dialectique en l'élargissant et approfondissant. (Senghor, Relecture 21)

(I refer you to Mao Zedong's study titled *On Contradiction*. Indeed, the Chinese thinker provides us with a concrete report, according to the Chinese experience, that is both subtle and clear, by leaning on the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. But it is beyond the classic examples found in Europe because it draws from new examples in the Chinese reality. As such he enriches the dialectic by both enlarging and deepening it.)

While many Western Marxists viewed Mao's writings as fundamental deviants from the orthodox canon, in contrast, Senghor cites Mao as having "enriched," "expanded," and "deepened," the way in which the concept of the dialectic can be applied in a given circumstance. Senghor even notes it is because of the geographic and cultural difference—that is, of reading Marx from the cultural specificity of a Chinese context—that Mao is able to

contribute so effectively to the concept of dialectics. Senghor continues to delineate Mao's argument that contradictions exist in all "choses et de tous les phénomènes," (things and in all phenomena) and that each specific contradiction must be resolved according to "une méthode différente après analyse de la situation concrète" (a different method according to the analysis of a concrete situation; Senghor, *Relecture* 22). In particular, he endorses the flexibility that comes with the notion that "principal" and "secondary" contradictions, as well as each of their aspects (both principle and secondary as well), can change according to historical period and context. What appears to be the main, or principle contradiction in one context, may not have the same resonance in another. It is this flexibility of circumstance that proves so attractive to Senghor; in its application in diverse historical contexts, it frees the dialectic from *one* particular historical context. With Senghor's long insistence upon creating a path to development through a commitment to the differences that come with an African socialism, the example of Mao—however controversial given historical hindsight—gave Senghor an example of an appropriation of Marxism that was not just an imitation of a universal, and implicitly, Western model.

Such a position allows Senghor to continue his speech, "Relisons, maintenant, l'histoire, depuis la formation du capitalisme, sous le double regard du marxisme et de l'africanisme. [...] L'essor du capitalisme coïncide avec les grandes découvertes : avec l'essor des sciences, mais aussi avec la *Traite des Nègres*" (Now let us reread history since the formation of capitalism through the double filter of Marxism and Africanism. [...] The rise of capitalism coincides with important discoveries: with the rise of the sciences, but also with the *Treaty of Negroes*; Senghor, *Relecture* 22). Senghor then launches into a comprehensive racial critique of the rise of capitalism due to the exploitation of the African continent in a three and half century long slave trade not unlike the argument in Aimé Césaire's seminal text, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955).

He reads the history of capitalism through the “double regard du marxisme et de l’africanisme” (double filter of Marxism and Africanism; Senghor, *Relecture* 22). In short, he filters dialectical materialism through racial and cultural difference. As stated in previous chapters, the point is not to endorse Maoism as a viable economic or cultural model. Instead, the intention is to put into relief why Maoism proved such a seductive model for African intellectuals, writers and politicians. Whatever its severe deficiencies, Maoism did provide an historical, non-Western alternative. Senghor’s appropriation of Mao was not so much an appropriation of the exact political or cultural policies of the Maoist state; rather it was an appropriation of the *possibility* of an alternative. That is, what Maoism symbolized—a “symbolic Maoism”—for articulations of an African postcolonialism.

Jacques-Stéphan Alexis would himself develop a similar view of China, and in particular, of Mao’s text *On Contradiction*. He writes in his political diatribe, “Marxism, the Only Possible Guide for the Haitian Revolution” in 1959:

De même que Mao Tsé Toung a fait avancer la théorie marxiste de la contradiction en étudiant les contradictions concrètes s’exerçant à l’intérieur du peuple chinois à l’époque contemporaine, de même qu’il a su tirer de la pratique de la révolution chinoise des enrichissements de la théorie de la contradiction, il semble que beaucoup peut être fait en Haïti sur la question qui reste ouverte. (Alexis 125)

(Just as Mao Zedong furthered the Marxist theory of contradiction through studying the concrete contradictions that were exerted on the interior of the Chinese people in the contemporary era, and just as he knew how to pull the practice of the Chinese revolution from the richness of the theory of contradiction, it seems that there is also a lot that can be done in Haiti on this open question.)

Similar to Senghor’s endorsement of Mao’s focus on the peasantry, Alexis found in Mao’s *On Contradiction* a theory that articulated the difficulties of rule after the founding of a socialist state. This meditation on the different types of contradictions and antagonisms, both principle and secondary, which persisted among the people even after the defeat of the colonial/imperial

power, was one of the only theoretical attempts from the Third World to think past the anti-colonial struggle and to a postcolonial and socialist context.⁸² The circulation of Maoist theories from guerrilla warfare to literature and culture demonstrated the extent to which China was thought to represent a new kind of society, one that was bent on eliminating the traces of imperialism even after independence. With the rise of neo-colonialism imminent to many African states, as well as Alexis' own vigorous denouncing of those interests in Haiti, a text like *On Contradiction* provided a template for combatting this new threat after independence. Alexis would even travel to Beijing via Moscow both in 1959 and 1960, where his reportedly warm relationship with Mao and the Union of Chinese Writers furthered speculation as to where he obtained the funds necessary for his ill-fated invasion of Haiti in 1961.⁸³

In short, the debate at the First Congress of Black Writers concerning Maoism and the crisis of "black African culture," was emblematic of a larger trend of the period among leftist intellectuals from Africa and the Caribbean. In addition to Alexis' visit, both Kwame Nkrumah and Ahmed Sékou Touré visited Beijing in the early sixties, ushering in, according to Chinese newspapers, a new era in Africa-China relations.⁸⁴ This diplomatic openness with China would create an image of Maoism as an important contribution to the project of decolonization begun at Bandung in 1955. Within the intellectual landscape, the misreading of Maoism as a Marxist humanism would become one of the most contentious ideological issues of the Cold War period.⁸⁵ For example, Fanon and Alexis' simultaneous push for "new humanism" with either an explicit endorsement of Maoist policies (Alexis) or controversial friendships with African leaders with strong Maoist ties (Fanon with Ahmed Sékou Touré), would lead to complications

⁸² See Mao, Zedong's "On Contradiction" in *Selected Works*.

⁸³ See Michel Seonnet's pseudo-biography of Alexis, *Jacques Stéphen Alexis, Ou, le Voyage Vers La Lune De La Belle Amour Humaine*.

⁸⁴ See issues of the *Peking Review*, September 14th, 1960 and August 18th, 1961.

⁸⁵ See Dunayevskaya, Raya. *Philosophy and Revolution: From Hegel to Sartre and from Marx to Mao*.

in identifying exactly how intellectuals, writers and politicians across the Third World appropriated Mao for their own political and cultural projects. However, what was clear was that during the fifties and sixties a strong, but tenuous Africa-China imaginary emerged as a primary vector of a Cold War global South.

The circulation of Mao's *Little Red Book*, his essay "On Contradiction," and *The Talks at the Yen'an Forum*, to name a few, meant that while the Soviet Union still occupied a large space within the ideological landscape, Maoism offered a comprehensive Marxist alternative to the Comintern. The existence of ideological plurality within the socialist bloc brought about an intense period of appropriation; if Mao could translate Marxism into a Chinese context, with its historical, cultural, and linguistic differences, then the same could be done in various national contexts in Africa and the Caribbean. Furthermore the PRC provided a new ally with which to enter the international fray of Cold War realpolitik. African manipulations of the Soviet Union, China, not to mention institutions such as the United Nations—embodied by Léopold Sédar Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania—meant that the Cold War was now fought along multiple geographic, ideological and cultural fronts.⁸⁶ The importance of these new Cold War fronts would find its way into Senghor's poetry, and in particular his collection *Nocturnes*.

Stylization for the People in the Elegies of *Nocturnes*

As discussed above, one of Senghor's main responses was to Alexis' assertion that his definition of "black African literature" was not "linked to history," or "life" (*Présence* 70). He returns to his original speech at the beginning of the session:

⁸⁶ See Odd A. Westad *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*.

Je vous ai montré que la littérature négro-africaine était une littérature ‘engagée’ et incarnée. Pendant l’occupation, j’ai recueilli des chants de Résistance, par les paysans sérères. Aujourd’hui encore, il y a des poèmes contre le colonialisme. Aujourd’hui encore, on montre comment la civilisation capitaliste se fonde sur l’Argent. Seulement, si les œuvres qui traitent de cela ne répondaient pas à l’esthétique négro-africaine, elle ne pourraient pas être goûtées. (Présence 72)

(I have shown you that black African literature was an “engaged” and embodied literature. During the occupation, I collected songs of Resistance by Serer peasants. Again today, there are poems against colonialism. Again today, we show how capitalist civilization is based upon Money. Yet, if the works that address all of that do not respond to a black African aesthetic, they could not be appreciated.)

Part of the contention surrounding “the crisis of black African culture,” was that it was part of the larger crisis of decolonization, which, according to Alexis, necessitated a politically engaged literature that was derived from and in turn inspired a national cultural struggle. Senghor’s project of negritude, with its admittedly essentialist claims concerning African culture, had been conceived along with Césaire’s own formulation during a politically acute, but for Alexis, altogether different historical moment. As a cultural inventory, Senghor’s negritude was in many ways formulated as a theory of knowledge—Senghor even uses the term “existential ontology”—opposed to the purported Greco-Roman heritage of Western society.⁸⁷ Alexis’ push for a new cultural inventory that reflected “national cultures in formation” revealed a new generation of writers’ commitment to the immediate context of anti-colonial struggle for national independence. As an attempt to catalogue the “lived reality” of people under colonialism, Senghor’s citation of his cultural inventory of “chants de Résistance, par les paysans sérères” (songs of Resistance by Serer peasants) embodied the poet-politician’s awareness of the tension this crisis produced (Présence 72). However, what Alexis ultimately took issue with was Senghor’s use of the term “black African aesthetic,” instead of locating such a definition in the Senegalese nation. While Césaire would point out that this was more an issue of semantics,

⁸⁷ See Senghor’s *The Foundations of Africanité" or négritude" and "arabité."* in *Présence africaine*, 1971.

which should not separate Senghor and Alexis' from their unified platform against colonialism, the debate crystallized the historical shift from the anthropological underpinnings of the previous incarnation of negritude, and its fraught transition into an engaged and even militant incarnation within the heightened political context of decolonization and national independence.

Senghor's citation of Mao's *Talks* provided a means through which to respond to the crisis caused by this historical shift. Senghor's appropriation of a Maoist-inspired stylization allowed him to retain his commitment to the cataloging of "black African culture," as well as provided the hinge through which he could address the immediate political context of anti-colonial struggle. This tension between negritude and the nation would permeate his next collection of poems, *Nocturnes* (1961), and in particular, the five elegies included at the end of the collection. The first collection of poetry published after the brief experiment of the Mali Federation, which ultimately led to Senegalese independence in 1960, *Nocturnes* is the first creative effort published by Senghor as the president of Senegal. The five elegies included in the publication were written between 1957-59 and were some of Senghor's only creations after the Black Writers Congress of 1956 and before independence. In fact, the "Elegy for Aynina Fall," which this section will discuss at length, was first published in *Présence Africaine* immediately after transcripts from the 1956 Congress.

In *Léopold Sédar Senghor* (1985) Janice Spleth discusses this use of a new poetic genre for Senghor. Instead of dealing exclusively with death, she asserts Senghor's elegies seem "to derive from the French interpretation that views the elegy more broadly as a lament [...] for the ephemeral nature of things" and that "despite their obvious Western antecedents, they also introduce the unmistakable stamp of African influences" (Spleth 123). She continues to situate Senghor's publication of *Nocturnes* within the context of Senegalese independence and as such

many of the poems “might even be categorized as national anthems of a sort” with “the archetypal hero” as the “founder of the nation” (Spleth 124). The failure of Senghor’s attempt to build a Francophone, Federation of Mali, is reflected in the collection as “the sheer weight of Senghor’s political burden” that “in spite of their characteristically Senghorian rhythm and imagery,” the poems tone “reveals the regrets both of middle age and of the tempestuous political period.” (Spleth 125). The *Elégies* are thereby distinguished from *Ethiopiennes* because “[o]ne no longer has the sense of a successfully completed task. The problem remains when the poem is finished” (Spleth 126). Such a characterization of Senghor’s elegies demonstrates the transition from the optimism of independence to the trials of the postcolony.

Within the context of Senghor’s debate with Alexis, it is also possible to read the *Elégies* as Senghor’s poetic attempt to address the crisis of “black African culture.” Even with Senghor’s commitment to *négritude* as an *a priori* reflection of an engaged and political context, the *Elegies* exhibit an increased awareness of Cold War machinations—as if in response to Alexis’ critique that it is necessary to articulate a “national culture in formation” rather than rely on a cultural inventory of the entire black world. Abiola Irele writes that Senghor chose a “reflective tone” over “self-dramatisation” and that “the poet’s self-awareness has now diffused itself in a more intimate identification with the elements of his imaginative universe” (Irele 21). If this self-awareness and consequent reflectivity arises in part out of Senghor’s own political difficulties, then his “imaginative universe,” would also be tempered by those same realities.

This section will read Senghor’s two poems: “Elegy for the Waters,” and “Elegy for Aynina Fall” against the backdrop of the crisis of “black African culture” and in particular, the function of a China imaginary in “Waters” and the implementation of a Maoist-inspired stylization in “Aynina Fall.” Although he never wrote in the strict socialist realism of Maoist

China, Senghor's appropriation of what can be considered Maoist stylization in "Elegy for Aynina Fall" produced an aesthetic friction between his commitment to the pan-Africanism of negritude, the politics of the Cold war, and the Senegalese anti-colonial struggle.

In his poem, "Elegy of the Waters," which forms part of a series of elegies towards the end of *Nocturnes*, the Catholic Senghor brings the international context of the Cold War into his call for God's will to be meted out on the just and unjust alike. Although the poem is written in the form of a prayer, it is significant for his contorting of the elegiac form into a political diatribe against the fraught landscape of Cold War realpolitik.⁸⁸ This departure from the classic meditative lament of an elegy produces a friction between form and content with Senghor's appeal for, "Feu ! Feu ! murs ardents de Chicago, feu ! feu ! murs / ardents de Gomorrhe / Feu sur Moscou. Dieu est égal pour les peuples sans / dieu, qui ne mâchent pas la parole" (Fire! Fire! burning walls of Chicago, fire! fire! / burning walls of Gomorrah / Fire on Moscow, God is just to the godless peoples, / who do not mince their words; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 73; Heinemann 49). The poem's use of Cold War geography interspersed with appeals to the "le regard du Dieu jaloux," (the eye of a jealous God) demonstrates the extent to which the ideological divisions between American and Soviet camps had become a serious question of faith in one secular doctrine or another by the early 1960s (Senghor, *Nocturnes* 73; Heinemann 49). Chicago, with both its history of the fire in 1871 and global imaginary as a den of tommy-gun toting gangsters, provided the Cold War surrogate of Gomorrah for Senghor. Moscow, implied to be the Sodom to Chicago's Gomorrah, was also to meet ruin in fire as its inhabitants, the Comintern, had participated in a prolonged and godless dissembling.

⁸⁸ Spleth writes concerning "Elegy of the Waters": "The rebirth of civilization anticipated by the writer recalls his concept of a Universal Civilization in that the elegy provides for the survival of the world's diverse people and cultures. This particular work also constitutes a strong indictment of the superpowers" (Spleth 130).

If the line breaks included in the first edition by Éditions du Seuil in 1961 are valid, then the break between “sans” and “dieu,” can be read multiple ways. If the break is valorized, and the line ignores its grammatical logic, then Moscow is a city “without,” in a general sense of lack. The next line can then be read without sarcasm, and God becomes a god of justice that “ne mâchent pas la parole.” If read orally, the only way to distinguish between the verb “mâcher” as being conjugated with “les peuples” or with “dieu” is then where the pause is placed—at the line break, or after “dieu.” If the break is ignored, as is the case in Heinneman’s volume translated much later in 1969, and the conjugation of the verb “mâcher” is kept with “les peuples,” then the line condemning Moscow to burn can be read sarcastically. “Les peuples [...] qui ne mâchent pas la parole,” are condemned not for their honesty, but for the implied lack thereof (Senghor, *Nocturnes* 73). This possibility of multiple interpretations could be understood as emblematic of Senghor’s ambivalence towards the Soviet Union and their national interests during the period. What is clear, however, is a condemnation of both blocs. The ideological divisions between Cold War blocs, each identified by Senghor as godless in their own way, will meet their end when confronted with the justice of a Catholic God.

Although Senghor’s American and Soviet imaginary is one of punishment, China occupies a much different poetic space: “Seigneur, pitié pour les dix justes, mais pitié pour la Chine pour qui enfant j’ai tant prié” (Lord, have pity on the ten just men, pity for China. / As a child I prayed so hard for her; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 74; Heinemann 49). Senghor’s use of justice in regard to China is fundamentally different from his use of the concept to mete out punishment for Moscow and Chicago. Pity for China is juxtaposed against pity for “les dix justes,” (the ten just men) implying that China deserves rehabilitative prayer, rather than punitive (Senghor, *Nocturnes* 74; Heinemann 49). According to Senghor, for every person deserving of

condemnation, there are a few that have maintained a commitment to justice and deserve to be spared. Besides the implication of China's historic underdevelopment and poverty, Senghor seems to consider China more a victim of circumstances, colonial or otherwise.⁸⁹ If as a child Senghor prayed for China as part of missionary propaganda designed to, through pity for the starving children of Asia, render him grateful for his own blessings, then as an adult Senghor's image of China is still beholden to the pity associated with such a history of exploitation, which inevitably lends itself to comparison with circumstances in Senegal and other African countries.⁹⁰ This pity, then, is one of solidarity in underdevelopment rather than of the "white man's burden."

If the first half of the poem delineates the contours of justice, the second half unleashes the cleansing power of diluvial forgiveness:

[...] PLEUVE ! il pleut
Et vous ouvert de votre bras de foudre les cataractes du pardon.
Il pleut sur New York sur Ndiongolor sur Ndialakhar
Il pleut sur Moscou et sur Pompidou, sur Paris et
banlieu, sur Melbourne sur Messine, sur Morzine. (Senghor, *Nocturnes* 75)

[...] LET IT RAIN. It rains
And you have opened from your arms of thunder the cataracts of forgiveness
Rain on New York, on Ndiongolar on Ndialakhar
Rain on Moscow on Pompidou, on Paris and suburbs,
on Melbourne on Messina on Morzine. (Heinemann 51).

As with the previous section, Senghor jumps from continent to continent, evoking a multipolarity to God's watery pardon. However, the sheer catalogue of cities and geographies towards the end of the poem opens up the possibility for a new juxtaposition of spaces within the Cold War. Rather than remain in the static dichotomy of America and the Soviet Union, Senghor

⁸⁹ See Shu-mei Shih's article "Race and Revolution: Blackness in China's Long Twentieth Century" for a discussion of China's shifting role from colonized victim to global power in the contemporary moment in *PMLA* (2013).

⁹⁰ See Amade Faye, Lilyan Kesteloot and Amadou Ly's *En Relisant Nocturnes De Léopold Sédar Senghor: Suivi De, Léopold Sédar Senghor Et La Sérénité*.

evinces the multi-faceted nature of the political moment. Not only does this rain quench the fires of Chicago (or at least New York) and of Moscow, but it also rains equally on the rest of the world.

This has unexpected consequences for China. The only space to receive a description of the flood's aftermath, it has a catastrophic effect on the population: "Il pleut sur L'Inde et sur la Chine—quatre cent mille / Chinois sont noyés, douze millions de Chinois / sont sauvés, les bons et les méchants" (Rain on India, China—four hundred thousand / Chinese are drowned, twelve million Chinese are / saved, the righteous and the wicked; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 75; Heinemann 51). Although many more Chinese survive than drown, the inclusion of "the righteous and the wicked" among both the survivors and the drowned produces a contradictory image, one that leaves the reader with an uncertainty as to the ultimate effect of God's pardon. Whether Senghor is reading into the split between the Guomintang on Taiwan with mainland China's communist party, or whether the image references only the sheer immensity of China's population as it had impressed itself upon Senghor, is subject to debate. What is clear is China also occupies an ambivalent place in Senghor's Cold War constellation. With the beginning of the Great Leap Forward in 1958, China had embarked on a grand social experiment that many newly formed African nations found intriguing in its implications for their own socialist projects. Although the Great Leap is now considered an economic catastrophe, in 1961 Senghor's Chinese imaginary pulls from both this historical context and its accompanying discourse of China as developmental model for Senegal. Perhaps a warning, or an admission of the sacrifice necessary for pardon, Senghor's flood of China could be best read as an unfinished meting out of both justice and forgiveness. In short, God, along with the rest of the Third World during the 1960s, is still deliberating on China's grand experiment.

Senghor ends the poem with a paradoxical return to a black and white racial dichotomy: “Pleut [...] / Sur les têtes de chaume sur les têtes de laine. / Et renaît la vie couleur de présence” (Rain [...] On straw heads and wool heads. / And life is born again colour of whatever is; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 75; Heinemann 51). With the focus on racial difference in the closing lines of the poem, Senghor returns to a comparison that best characterizes his dramatic poem “Chaka,” from his 1956 collection, *Éthiopiennes*. However, the many geographies and peoples enumerated throughout previous sections gives the last line’s focus on the rebirth of life, “colour of whatever is,” a distinctly multi-racial resonance. That is, an equanimity of politics, race, and development linked to the present moment of decolonization and nation building. This “couleur de présence,” is not only open in that each space is allowed to appear in its unadulterated state, but also fixed in that it exhibits Senghor’s controversial commitment to an underlying essence. Although with the end of the poem Senghor thereby returns to his project of negritude and its problematic essentialism, it is a negritude that has been re-contextualized outside of a strict framework of the colonizer and the colonized. While not an explicit appropriation of Maoism socialist realism, in Senghor’s hands the elegy is emphatically not “art for art’s sake.” Through his integration of the multi-polarity of Cold War geographies, and in particular his complicated imaginary of China, Senghor has “stylized” the elegiac form for the politically contentious moment of Senegal’s recent decolonization and independence.

Although Senghor’s “stylization” in “Elegy for Waters” is primarily an exercise in incorporating Cold War politics into his poetry, the final poem in the collection, “Elegy for Aynina Fall,” has a stylization that directly engages with the Maoist dictums concerning audience, form and content he cited at the First Congress of Black Writers. In fact, the poem is included in the *Présence Africaine* issue immediately following the transcripts from the Congress

and as such can be read as Senghor's poetic rebuttal of Alexis. Different in subject and scope from the rest of the collection, the finale to *Nocturnes* is a combination of elegy and dramatic poem, and departs from the surrealism of Senghor's most famous dramatic poem, "Chaka."⁹¹ While "Chaka" is primarily a philosophic dialogue between a disembodied "voix blanche" and the quasi-mythic leader of the pre-colonial Zulu nation, which Senghor appropriates for the pan-African context, this poem is an elegy for the murdered union leader, Aynina Fall, of the African railway workers of the Dakar-Niger line in 1951. In this sense, it can be read as a direct response to Alexis that literature should reflect the lived reality of struggle.

As Faye, Kesteloot and Ly write, "avec deux chœurs et un coryphée, Senghor emprunte à la tragédie grecque ancienne...et aux chants amébées pratiqués en Afrique de l'Ouest, chez les Sérères entre autres" (with two choirs and a coryphaeus, Senghor borrows from ancient Greek tragedy [...] and from Amoebaeon singing practiced in West Africa among the Serers and others; Faye 55). This amalgamation allows Senghor to pull from Western and Serer traditions, creating a formal hybridity that both enables and limits his goal of writing according to "rhythm" of the Senegalese people. Although Senghor's use of Serer instruments and rhythm reflects his fidelity to the laws of "black African culture," his simultaneous use of stylistic elements of Greek tragedy produces an aesthetic entanglement that further complicates the attempt to stylize for the people. However, as discussed above, Senghor's reading of Mao according to this combination of forms and influences does not necessarily inhibit his poetics: "We should take over the rich legacy and good traditions in literature and art that have been handed down from past ages in China and foreign countries, but the aim must still be to serve the masses of the people" (Denton 465). This triangulation of aesthetic influences in Senghor—between Greek tragedy, Serer songs,

⁹¹ In their introduction to the Heinemann translation of Senghor's volume, John Reed and Clive Wake write: "It is perhaps not entirely without design that the 'Elegy for Aynina Fall' is placed last, for it suddenly releases Senghor's poetry from its creator and expand the notion of leadership to include all men" (Reed xii).

and the contemporary moment of struggle—can be read as embodying the notion in Mao’s *Talks* of infusing old forms with new content, in order to “become something revolutionary in the service of the people” (Denton 465). For Senghor, his reading of Maoist stylization can thereby be understood *as* a process of amalgamation. It is neither a catalogue of a cultural inventory from the past, nor an abandonment of the Western forms and language in which Senghor was educated.⁹² In fact, what enables the union of these forms is the struggle itself.

Against this backdrop, “Elegy for Aynina Fall,” is an attempt to stylize for the people through the martyrdom of a union leader. The poem begins with the funeral rhythms of a *gorong* and the chorus leader’s call, “Quel calme redoutable dessous l’azur ! Et pas un / souffle quand passe l’ombre des Esprits / Si blanche,” which is soon disrupted by “le Tonnerre aux cris brefs a rugi, Fall ! / et la foudre frappé Koumba-Betty” (A dangerous calm beneath the blue! And not a breath / stirs when the white shadow of the Spirits / Passes. A sudden storm has broken on the season, / raining its dust of blood. / The Thunder with sharp cries has roared Fall! and / the lightning has struck Koumba-Betty; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 77; Heinemann 52). The breaking of this calm with the storm’s lament for Fall is taken up by the female chorus and their lament in Wolof for Fall’s loss: “Niiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiina! / Woï Nina! woï / Niiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiina!” (Senghor, *Nocturnes* 78). This early break with French in favor of the Wolof expression for loss of a loved one, “woï,” serves to enact Senghor’s problematic essentialism of the fundamental emotional nature of “black African culture,” as well as embody the tension of the politics of language. If French is used by the chorus leader to dramatize Fall’s death, the expression of loss is, for Senghor, best articulated in Wolof. The use of his first name, “Nina,” by the chorus of young

⁹² The success of this triangulation within the Chinese context is subject to debate. The semantic difficulty of distinguishing between what was considered “bourgeois” or “Western,” would become one of the main aesthetic debates during the Cultural Revolution in China.

women is then juxtaposed against the chorus of men's repetition of his family name, Fall, which names the martyr in full.⁹³

Rather than beginning like many Greek tragedies, *in medias res*, Senghor's poem is spoken through the narrative of the "coryphée," or chorus leader, which produces the effect of a "story within a story," as the dual male and female choruses complement the "coryphaeus" dramatization of the events from the Thiès railway strike. The chorus leader then depicts the scene of Fall's wounding and death, describing Fall's enemies as "Jackals," "Hyenas," and "les Baboons," that "se jettent sur lui, lui plantent leurs crocs dans le dos. Le sang ruisselle de ses blessures profondes, qui arrosent la terre d'Afrique. Comme Lion du Ferlo, d'un bond il est hors d'atteinte et, de ses yeux de foudre, tient l'Adversaire à distance. Mais son cœur sans haine avait été touché—pas son bras" (The Baboons flung themselves on him, they sank / their fangs into his back. The Jackals barked. / The blood ran from his deep wounds, watering / the soil of Africa. Like the Lion of the Ferlo, / with one leap he escaped and held the enemy at / bay with lightning eyes. / But his heart without hate had been touched—not his arm; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 79; Heinemann 53). This anthropomorphosis of Fall and the union opposition into rather obvious roles within the animal kingdom—Fall as the noble lion and the opposition as scavengers—serves as another attempt by Senghor to stylize according to an abstract notion of "black African culture." The "baboons'," attack, as a metaphor for gun shots, is characterized as a inter-species brawl. While this description of the events with what Senghor considers African referents serves to locate Fall's death within a Senegalese space, it is unclear whether this succeeds as an effective stylization for a Senegalese audience, or whether it only contributes to a problematic exoticism for a Western one. However, the dramatization of this moment of anti-colonial

⁹³ Again see Faye, Kesteloot, Ly, *En Relisant Nocturnes De Léopold Sédar Senghor: Suivi De, Léopold Sédar Senghor Et La Sérénité*.

struggle and martyrdom for Senegalese independence renders an unequivocal picture of Senghor's commitment in the poem to the Maoist dictum of valorizing the moment of struggle, if at the expense of aesthetic acuity.

After the male and female choruses lament the lack of concrete activist leadership after his death, "Qui guidera les camarades ? Qui conduira les ambassades ? [...] Qui mènera l'assaut contre les tatas des puissants ? Commandera l'assaut contre les remparts de l'Argent ?" (Who will lead the comrades? Who will conduct the embassies? [...] Who will lead the attack on the tatas of the mighty? Who will command the attack on the ramparts of Money?) the chorus leader chastises them for not seeing "le laurier rose qui grandit sur les cendres. [...] Il a versé son sang, qui féconde la terre d'Afrique ; il a racheté nos fautes ; il a donné sa vie sans rupture pour L'UNITÉ DES PEUPLES NOIRS. Aynina Fall est mort, Aynina Fall est vivant parmi nous" ([...] the pink laurel tree that grows out of ashes. [...] He has shed his blood enriching the soil of Africa: he has redeemed our faults, he has given his unblemished life for the UNITY OF ALL BLACK PEOPLES. Aynina Fall is dead. Aynina Fall is alive among us" (Senghor, *Nocturnes* 81; Heinemann 55). Similar to his previous appropriation of Chaka, Senghor sees Fall's martyrdom as symbolic for the larger cause of pan-Africanism. The specific national context of Senegal becomes metonymic for the struggle of the continent as a whole. Even as Alexis had pushed for a nationalization of culture, Senghor, ever the dialectician, is still committed to the great synthesis of the continent's liberation. Fall's blood has nourished not just Senegal, but the whole of Africa, so that he lives on wherever the anti-colonial struggle unfolds.

This blatant politicization at the expense of a more subtle aesthetic nuance has had many critics dismiss the poem as "weak" and if "one considers it to the text *Chaka*, which is also a

dramatic poem, it is not comparable” (Faye 55).⁹⁴ This question of the quality of overtly political texts, especially in their socialist realist incarnations, has been discussed at length in many contexts and will not be rehashed here.⁹⁵ However, Senghor’s revision of his surrealist aesthetic is significant as a response to the overtly political nature of the historical moment of decolonization. The appropriation of a literary Maoism in response to Alexis’ intervention concerning the crisis of “black African culture,” reflects the extent to which it was, in 1961, no longer entirely viable to create a cultural inventory of the nation without some gesture towards “going among the masses” in order to articulate the lived reality of a Senegalese anti-colonial struggle.

If the first half of the poem with its funerary rhythms opens with the death of Aynina Fall, the second half begins with the dignified and regal beat of a *dyoung-dyoung* from the Siné delta region, which accompanies Fall’s resurrection as the symbolic head of the completed railroad: “Admirez la locomotive, haute sur pattes, si souple et fine, comme un cheval du Fleuve. Elle unit Saint-Louis à Bamako, Abidjan à Ouagadougou / Niamey à Cotonou, Fort-Lamy à Douala, Dakar à Brazzaville” (Wonder at the engine, high on its paws, so supple / and fine, like a horse of the River. / It links Saint Louis with Bamako, Abidjan with / Ougadougou, / Niamey with Cotonou, Fort-Lamy with Douala, / Dakar with Brazzaville; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 82; Heinemann 56). The organic, even animalistic space of Fall’s death, wherein his blood “qui féconde la terre d’Afrique” (enriching the soil of Africa) has transformed into the industrial space of a modernizing Senegal (Senghor, *Nocturnes* 81; Heinemann 55). The national railway, with its “étoile d’or vert sur roue d’acier,” (golden green star on a wheel of steel) articulates the

⁹⁴ “on considère le texte de *Chaka*, également sous la forme d’un poème dramatique, ce n’est pas comparable.” (My translation) Also, see Jonathan Peters, *A Dance of Masks: Senghor, Achebe, Soyinka*.

⁹⁵ See Emmanuel Ngara’s *Art and Ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influence of Marxism on African Writing* and Omafume Onoge’s “The Crisis of Consciousness in Modern African Literature: A Survey (1974)” in *Marxism and African Literature*. (1985)

legacy of Fall's martyrdom, which helps complete a pan-African network of railway lines, furthering the notion that the successful development of Senegal is linked to the success of the continent as a whole (Senghor, *Nocturnes* 82; Heinemann 56). For Senghor, the vibrancy of transcontinental commerce is now meant to replace the mourning of the sacrifices made during the anti-colonial struggle.

The train is both the cause of Fall's death and the vehicle for its mourning. Moreover, it enables his resurrection at its head as it is transformed into the horse upon which Fall reassumes his role, not as leader of a union strike, but as leader of a nation on the path of development: "Maintenant qu'au galop de ta locomotive, tu arrives premier des combattants / Annonceur de la Bonne Nouvelle (Now to the gallop of your engine, you come first of / the fighters / Announcer of the Good News; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 83; Heinemann 57). The "Good News" of Fall's resurrection is that the railway network has been completed, ushering in a new era of economic exchange and communication between former colonies, rather than only with the colonial metropole.

Senghor's stylization in this final poem moves him out of a cultural inventory of a pre-colonial past. It even moves him past Alexis' emphasis on the struggles of a nation in formation, which he addressed in the first half of the elegy. In this second part the focus has become the development of postcolonial Senegal, one that in its desire for industrialization, will "prendrons aux Conquéranrs leurs armes comme nous l'avons toujours fait" (Yes we will take our weapons from the conquerors as / we have always done; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 82; Heinemann 56). However, even within the context of an independent Senegal, Senghor does not see Fall's martyrdom, like his early appropriation of Chaka, as only valid within a national context: "Bloc sans couture de la terre sénégalaise... / Roc sans fissure des peuples africains... / Nous voici tous

unis, comme les dix doigts de la main” (Seamless stone of the soil of Senegal... / Unfissured rock of the African peoples... / We are at one like the ten fingers of the hands; Senghor, *Nocturnes* 84; Heinemann 57). The return of an organic image of body parts after the industrial network of a finished railway line, allows Senghor to again argue for an commonality that links African peoples, who are now connected by Fall’s blood and industrial development.

The fact that this poem ends the collection is significant both for its focus on a post independence Senegal—one of the first poems from Senghor to do so—and Senghor’s appropriation of what he considers a Maoist “stylization for the people.” With this engagement, Senghor addresses the crisis of “la culture négro-africaine,” through an aesthetic that articulates the culture of national struggle with a renewed and updated politicization of negritude. With its formal amalgamations, use of both French and Wolof, as well as juxtaposition of animalistic and industrial imagery, the overall success of the poem as it navigates these aesthetic frictions is subject to debate. However, Senghor’s attempt to accommodate such disparate concerns within a single poem, as well as his decision to end his first creative publication after Senegal’s independence with such an experimental departure from previous work, signals the extent to which the more militant definitions of national culture, à la Alexis and Mao, had interrogated the viability of negritude’s application to the immediate historical moment.

Within this context, one of the issues that pervades Senghor’s volume of poetry is the politics of language. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, as well as in the speeches and debates at Tashkent, one of the effects of appropriating a literary Maoism meant a serious engagement with questions of audience. As Senghor wrote almost exclusively in French, the inclusion of many Wolof terms in this volume of poetry produced a hybrid linguistic text. While

not an out and out “creolization,”⁹⁶ the mixing of terms and syntax resonates with Chinua Achebe’s assertion within the Anglophone context: “The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language so much that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning an English that is at once universal and able to carry his particular experience” (Achebe 347). Senghor’s interpretation of a literary Maoism as “stylization for the people,” meant that besides appropriating “rhythms” and “symbols” that embodied the cultural inventory of negritude, there persisted the apparent contradiction between writing in French and writing for the workers and peasants in a poem like “Elegy for Aynina Fall.”

This tension is embodied by the curious preface to his glossary of terms included at the end of *Nocturnes*. Senghor begins: “Certains lecteurs se sont plaints de trouver dans mes poèmes des mot d’origine africaine, qu’ils ne ‘comprennent’ pas. Ils me le pardonneront, il s’agit de *comprendre* moins le réel que le surréel—le *sous-réel*” (Some readers have complained that my poems have words from African languages in them, which they do not understand. They must forgive me. What is important is not so much understanding the *real* but the *surreal*—what lies beneath the real; Senghor, *Nocturnes*, Appendice; Heinemann 59). Here, Senghor is most likely addressing the Western readership of his poems—the volume was published by Éditions du Seuil in 1961—and their resulting defamiliarization (Barthes) from reading poetry that included language and expressions that were not French. Senghor’s “apology” gives way to his equating the use of Wolof and other West African expressions as embodying a notion of the “sous-réel.” This endorsement of the “sous-réel” echoes his speech at the First Congress of Black Writers discussed at the beginning of this chapter: “ce qui saisit le Nègre, c’est moins l’apparence de

⁹⁶ See Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.

l'objet que sa réalité profonde, sa *surréalité* ; moins son *signe* que son *sens*" (What takes hold of a black person is less the appearance of an object but its profound reality, its sur-reality; less the sign as its signification; *Présence* 52). However, to posit a French linguistic space as "real" and opposed to the surreal or "sous-réel" space of Wolof limits interpretations of such a potentially hybrid text like "Nocturnes." The entanglement of languages opens up a new conceptual space, one that jumbles the implicit hierarchies of language rather than reinforces them. By using both French and Wolof, Senghor straddles commitments to both literal and figurative reality, that is, between the "sign" and its "signification."

Senghor seems to embrace this paradox with his next sentence: "J'ajouterai que j'écris d'abord pour mon peuple. Et celui-ci sait qu'une *kôra* n'est pas une harpe non plus qu'un *balafong* un piano. Au reste, c'est en touchant les Africains de langue française que nous toucherons le mieux les Français et, par delà mers et frontières, les autres hommes" (I may add that I write primarily for my own people. They know that a kora is not a harp, any more than a balafong is a piano. Besides, it is through reaching Africans who speak French that we have the best chance of reaching Frenchmen and, across seas and frontiers, the rest of men; Senghor, *Nocturnes*, Appendice; Heinemann 59). It is clear from this statement that while Senghor writes primarily for his "people"—almost a given as the first president of Senegal—he is still committed to the global reach that French as a *lingua franca* possesses. For Senghor, the choice of French with interspersed interjections in Wolof is one based on the greatest number of people by whom his poetry can be read. His inclusion of a glossary to explain the indigenous "rhythm" of his Wolof expressions, while not "de faire de l'exotisme pour l'exotisme" (pursuing exoticism for its own sake) is an obvious concession to the primarily Francophone and Western readership of his poetry (Senghor, *Nocturnes*, Appendice; Heinemann 59).

In fact, the glossary itself is included as an apology for the instances of indigenous language “defamiliarization.” It is obvious that despite Senghor’s assertion that he stylizes for his “people” (which given his open declaration of his Afro-Europeanness has multiple meanings), his primary audience remains either educated African Francophone populations or the French metropole. Through this attempt to address the politics of language, Senghor demonstrates a tension related to his interpretation of a Maoist “stylization for the people” he cited during his debate with Alexis. The often contradictory relationship between form, content, and language remains central to understandings of the formation of modern African literature, and reveals the fraught relationship between what constituted an anti-colonial politics and its corresponding aesthetic during the period. Senghor’s “stylization for the people,” while not embodying the creative turn to indigenous languages like *Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o*, does reveal the extent to which, through his debate with Alexis and reading of Mao, the exigencies of the political moment had impressed themselves onto the formation of a Senghorian aesthetic.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to fill in an important gap in the intellectual and cultural history of the Cold War through a discussion of the appropriation of a “symbolic Maoism” by Léopold Sédar Senghor, beginning with his debate with Jacques-Stéphan Alexis at the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists in 1956. Through an analysis of Senghor’s articulation of a “dialectics of solidarity,” the debate on the crisis of “black African culture,” his later application of Mao’s *On Contradiction* to the history of the African slave trade, and a close reading of his “stylization for the people” in two elegies, this chapter examined a new Third World cultural vector through which to read the emergence of Senghor’s postcolonialism that lies outside of an explicit

relationship with the French metropole. For Senghor, Maoism represented an alternative model for culture and development, and that whatever its ultimate deficiencies, was predicated on the importance of translation and cultural difference. In this sense, Senghor's "Maoism" was an endorsement of the *symbolic* value of a non-Western national model that was not a blatant copy of Western universalism. As such, Senghor would use the symbolic power of an alternative—one of the lasting legacies of Bandung—as he defined and implemented his own project of an African socialism.

Chapter 4

“Beyond the Cliché and Slogan”: Afro-Asian Solidarity and The Crisis of Representation in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o

Introduction

This chapter will explore an aspect of this alternative genealogy of postcolonialism based on South-to-South cultural exchanges through consideration of the Kenyan writer, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s, involvement in the Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers. It will also explore this notion through close readings of “symbolic Maoism” in his novels, *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*. As with previous chapters, these instances of Afro-Asian solidarity are considered as integral to our understanding of postcolonialism as its own “concept of history.” Also, in keeping with previous discussions of Fanon and Senghor, this section will not argue that Ngũgĩ was a Maoist. Furthermore, it will not consider Ngũgĩ’s writings primarily in relationship to the English metropole nor in their connections with a Soviet literary field. Instead, this chapter will read Ngũgĩ “horizontally” through the Afro-Asian solidarity movement, situating his novels within the internationalism of a Cold War Third World. In short, the object will be to determine what Maoism represented for Ngũgĩ? And by extension, how does his engagement with Maoist literary theory resonate with or differ from Senghor’s? Finally, it will argue that Ngũgĩ implemented an Afro-Asian imaginary, including a “symbolic Maoism,” in his reformulation of cultural struggle within the context of neocolonialism in Kenya.

The Bureau Post Sino-Soviet Split

In 1966 the Bureau had split into the Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers based in Cairo, and the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau (AAWB), which was moved from Ceylon to Beijing.

The Chinese-run Bureau would publish a propaganda organ *The Call* until 1973 when publication ceased in part due to the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. In addition to publishing *The Call*, they also reprinted many of the model revolutionary plays in English. They would condemn the Permanent Bureau meetings as “Soviet revisionism,” and issued reports on various national liberation movements in Africa and Asia. However, as with the Permanent Bureau, they were equally interested in the Palestinian struggle and South African apartheid. They also ran articles on Chinese medical teams in African countries, and highlighted the Chinese-built TAZARA railway in Tanzania and Zambia. In terms of literature, many contributions were reprints of Chinese poems by figures like Guo Moruo or of Mao Zedong’s writings on literature and art originally published in *On New Democracy* (1940). When an article or work of literature was included from outside of China, the article was often attributed to “A Fighter” or “A Correspondent.” This kind of ghost writing renders *The Call* a propaganda mouthpiece rather than a literary or scholarly journal. It had become, to use Dominic Thomas’ term, a journal of “official writers’ who adhere faithfully to the party line” (Thomas 18). In this sense, although the journal’s audience was ostensibly international, its content reflected the stagnation of cultural production in China during the period. Such a reduction in aesthetic range meant the previous leverage the PRC had exhibited during the early years of the Bureau began to wane. As African writers began to look for an aesthetic that represented the social conditions of the postcolony, an aesthetic that was overly focused on anti-colonial struggle was increasingly viewed as inadequate.

The Cairo-based Permanent Bureau would become the primary forum for these discussions concerning humanism, literature and the postcolony. In spite of their nominal inclusion on the Executive Committee, PRC contributions were altogether absent from the pages

of its publication *Lotus*, which ran into the 1980s. However, the intervention Maoist literary thought had made during the early years of the Bureau and its platforms on world and postcolonial literature were still palpable. In particular, the many articles on audience, the politics of language and cultural difference touched upon issues Mao Dun had raised in his presentation on Mao's *Talks at the Yanan Forum of Literature and Art*. Also, while the two anthologies of poetry were later derided by the editorial board of *Lotus* for their lack of aesthetic sophistication and poor publication quality, they did provide an initial template for later anthologies of world literature published by the Permanent Bureau. Furthermore, the visible presence of Chinese infrastructure projects like the TAZARA railway did provide a lasting image—however controversial—of the PRC as committed to the development of African nation-states. In short, while *Lotus* was squarely within the Soviet camp, the PRC continued to occupy an important, if even more contested space in African imaginaries of alternative modernities and cultural production.

Ngũgĩ and the Lotus Prize (1973)

Established in 1969 by the Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers in Cairo, Egypt, the Lotus Prize was awarded annually in three categories: poetry, theater and prose. The award's criteria were outlined during the fourth session of the Permanent Bureau in Cairo, 1968:

These prizes shall be awarded to works of high literary and artistic values, reflecting the objective realities of our times and expressing a militant attitude against any form of national and racial discrimination and social inequality, against any imperialist aggression or infiltration, as well as works expressing the people's aspirations to a better life. (*Lotus* Vol. 1 No. 2, 184)

As would become clear with Ngũgĩ's reception of the award in 1973, the Permanent Bureau still held to a strong notion of cultural struggle, human rights and Fanon's notion of "combat

literature.” However, ten years after the Tashkent conference of 1958, the political landscape had become increasingly variegated in terms of national liberation movements. For example, while some African members of the Bureau were from independent states, such as Senegal, others were still in the full throes of liberation struggle, such as Mario de Andrade the delegate from the Portuguese colonies, which would later become Angola. Even Alex La Guma, the delegate from an ostensibly independent state, South Africa, would be one of the main advocates for the elimination of apartheid in the pages of the journal. These varied chronologies on the continent itself, not to mention their contemporaries in the Middle East and Asia, signaled an important change in how the delegates went about addressing issues of decolonization and cultural struggle. It was no longer necessary to write only in opposition to colonial rule. With the rise of what many delegates decried as neocolonialism after independence, including Sembène Ousmane who himself received the Lotus Prize in 1972, it was no longer viable to conceive of decolonization as a singular linear moment consisting of the nation’s birth.

In September, 1973, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o attended the 5th Conference of Afro-Asian Writers in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan U.S.S.R. He, along with the Vietnamese Thu Bon, and Algerian, Kateb Yacine, received the Lotus Prize for literature. A brief article in the Lotus issue immediately before the conference details the reasoning for his award:

Man as portrayed in James Ngũgĩ’s works can only lead his life seeing at the end its glorious beauty in spite of all the hardships and difficulties. This is because from the very beginning he has been keen on writing for the Africans, and not to satisfy a publisher looking for things that may be interesting to the Western reader. This authentic writer has taken interest in the cause of his people, the conflicts in his community and in Africa in general. He has devoted all his time and efforts to these issues. Therefore he has been deservedly awarded the LOTUS Prize for Afro-Asian literature for 1973, in recognition of his person and in appreciation of his literary creativity” (Lotus, no. 19 176-77)

Ngũgĩ had recently dropped the Christian “James” from his name, preferring instead the traditional Gikuyu term “wa Thiong’o” which means “son of Thiong’o.”⁹⁷ It is compelling that at this moment of international success, especially within the socialist bloc that dominated the Permanent Bureau, Ngũgĩ chose to leave English in order to concentrate on creating a national literature in his native, East African tongue. The excerpt from *Lotus* affirms this change, for while it lauds Ngũgĩ for the strong, internal optimism of his writing, it also emphasizes his turn away from the West in terms of audience and publishing. While not producing the same level of schism with the London-based publishing house, Heinemann, as evidenced by its fraught relationship with the Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngũgĩ’s turn towards an East African audience is praised as a return to “authenticity,” to the quintessential role of writer as activist. For the Afro-Asian Permanent Bureau, it is in fact this combination of activism and authenticity that qualifies him for the Lotus Award. Moreover, the valorization of African funds of knowledge, that is, to situate African literature firmly within the social relations of local landscapes, is what constitutes him as a candidate for the prize.⁹⁸ Herein lies one of the paradoxes of the Permanent Bureau: the commitment to a recuperation of an African, or for Ngũgĩ, even a Gikuyu humanism as a means to enact the Bureau’s long-standing commitment to a “humanism made to the measure of the world” (Césaire 73).

In Ngũgĩ’s 1981 compilation, *Writers in Politics*, he includes his speech for the reception of the Lotus Prize in 1973. He begins by re-posing W.E.B. Dubois’ question in *Dusk of Dawn*,

⁹⁷ This has produced much confusion of how to even alphabetize Ngũgĩ’s works in Western libraries. Many file his writing’s under “wa Thiong’o,” rather than “Ngũgĩ.” This is not unlike Ousmane Sèmbène’s reversal within the French system where he is often cited as “Sembène Ousmane.” While these confusions are somewhat tangential, they do reveal the proclivity for mistranslation and consequent misrepresentation of the African author once they are catalogued for Western readership.

⁹⁸ Simon Gikandi, in his 2000 critical study of Ngũgĩ, complicates this relationship of Ngũgĩ to his immediate context: “While some of the best critical works on Ngũgĩ’s novels and plays have given us a profound sense of the context in which they were produced, very little attention has been paid either to how this context has shaped the form of his works or how our notion of this context—cultural nationalism, ‘Mau Mau,’ or neo-colonialism in Kenya—has been overdetermined by Ngũgĩ’s discourse” (Gikandi 2).

reformulated from the context of pan-Africanism to that of Afro-Asian solidarity: “What are the links that bind us? The ties of geography are easier to see. Africa and Asia, two great continents, shake hands across the Suez Canal. The Indian Ocean anyway has never been barrier, and for centuries East Africa peacefully traded with China, India and Arabia, before the arrival of the Portuguese” (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 116). Ngũgĩ begins with a re-positioning of African history, based in the horizontal axis of Indian ocean geography. Focusing specifically on East Africa, Ngũgĩ outlines how the divisions of the world into a colonial North and a colonized South is a phenomenon that was predated by a horizontal multi-polarity between Africa and Asia. While perhaps a reduction of the exact nature of these relations, Ngũgĩ’s emphasis on the peaceful nature of these exchanges is meant to evoke a pre-colonial history of solidarity. He continues: “This is an African story; it is also an Asian story; and any cursory glance at the history of China, Indo-China, India, Africa, the West Indies and Afro-America, will see the testimony in tears and blood” (*Writers*, Ngũgĩ 116). As with Senghor, Ngũgĩ affirms an African “dialectics of solidarity” with Asia both in terms of colonial history, and the rewriting of this history through literature. So much of Ngũgĩ’s creative work to date, *A Grain of Wheat*, *The River Between*, among others, were focused on colonial Kenya’s relationship with the British metropole. However, within the context of the Permanent Bureau, it is possible to reconsider Ngũgĩ’s oeuvre from the perspective of a Cold War Third World. As such his reception of the Lotus Award reveals the extent to which his work resonated across the horizontal axis of Africa and Asia.

Beginning with this endorsement of transnationalism, Ngũgĩ then gives a brief outline of his cultural theory within the context of anti-colonial struggle: “On the cultural level, [the people] refused to ask the Lord to wash them white: they created their own songs, their own poetry, their own dances, their own literature. Often these songs and dances created by the

people for the people in their economic and political struggle were banned by the colonial administration. But no amount of gunpowder can put down the creative spirit of a people” (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 118). Here, he describes the pervasive “colonization of the mind” within the dual contexts of education and religion. For Ngũgĩ, the cultural sphere is the realm wherein the colonized people begin to imagine alternative circumstances. His juxtaposition of colonial “gun powder” against the “creative spirit of the people” resonates with the AAWB’s commitment to a revolutionary, or “combat literature” (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 118). Culture is thereby understood as a catalyst that can subvert colonial power dynamics through the basic representation of an alternative set of cultural logics, of an aesthetic that is “created by the people for the people” (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 118). While post the Bureau’s Sino-Soviet split, this activist conception of the role of culture is reminiscent of the Bureau’s initial, Maoist-inspired cultural platform. He continues: “[The true literature of the African peoples] is the literature of struggle: the struggle of ordinary people, who against great odds have nevertheless changed and are continuing to change oppressive social systems and hence the power map of the twentieth century” (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 118). Ngũgĩ’s embracing of such an activist role of literature reveals the enduring influence of this train of thought within Afro-Asian circles and provides additional reason for his reception of the Lotus Award in 1973. While not an explicit reference to Maoist literary theory, it demonstrates the extent to which the provocative Chinese intervention during the early years of the Bureau had become a given within discussions concerning the role of literature and culture in anti-colonial struggle.

This is not to say Maoist literary theory was appropriated wholesale without any modification or reformulation within the African context. Mao’s *Talks* had become one of the primary theoretical documents for the Cultural Revolution, which as many scholars have pointed

out, produced an profound stagnation in cultural production in China for the better part of a decade. As with Senghor's assertion that many examples of "socialist realism" from China and Soviet Union were more examples of the creation of a personality cult rather than a reflection of actual social realities, Ngũgĩ is similarly concerned with such a distinction: "In this, progressive African writers have no choice other than to align themselves with the revolutionary forces of change at every historical phase of the struggle. This has not been an easy task. It calls upon them to go beyond the cliché and the slogan to capture not only the vibrations of an ever-changing intricate pattern of human interactions in space, but also their contradictions in the movement of society in time" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 119). Within the Chinese context, the slogan style would become one of the main cultural outputs (big character posters) besides the model revolutionary plays. However, while Ngũgĩ uses some of the Maoist rhetoric of "struggle" and "contradiction," his definition of the role of literature paradoxically has much more in common with Senghor's. Ngũgĩ is interested in a literature that pinpoints the history of struggle both in diachronic and synchronic contexts. Literature, as a representation of this struggle, must negotiate the complexities of human relationships and their interactions in order to imagine a new society. This attempt to move past a simple chronological notion of history also resonates with Jameson's "concept of history" elaborated upon earlier in chapter one. Literature's role within this "concept of history" is one that pulls together disparate threads across spaces and geographies—embodied here by the Afro-Asian solidarity movement—to address specific social issues linked to postcolonial development. For Ngũgĩ, literature helps work through the "contradictions" of a postcolonial nation state. Writers, then, occupy the crossroads of space and time in order to help usher in a "concept of history" linked to an more equitable social reality.

As such, Ngũgĩ's speech on the role of literature shares proximity with a notion later developed by Ato Quayson, namely that of "colonial space-making." Quayson writes, "While the hegemonic relations of power and the ideas and assumptions undergirding them may be challenged, the platforms upon which the relations take shape are as much cultural and symbolic as they are political and spatial" (Quayson 16). The lack of separation between economic colonization and cultural colonization would become, for Ngũgĩ, one of the most important issues at stake in the postcolony. The interrelations of the colonial education system, the politics of language, and decolonization would form the basis of much of his thought into the 1980s. For Ngũgĩ, the process of cultural decolonization would be necessary long after the event of independence itself. In this sense, a simple chronological notion of history that marked independence for Kenya in 1963 was insufficient to address the complications of a cultural and symbolic decolonization. For Ngũgĩ, then, this kind of a "concept of history" was anchored in a struggle against "colonial space-making." It would also provide an important reason for transnational solidarity: "A shared experience of the past, a shared hope for the future: these then are the most enduring links that bind African peoples and those of Asia, on the continent and in the diaspora" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 119). By bringing together the multiple histories of colonization and decolonization in Africa and Asia, Ngũgĩ demonstrates the necessity of working beyond national contexts and simple chronologies of history. Thinking through the solidarity of Africa and Asia puts into relief history's conception, that is, how a myriad of factors work across cultural, economic, political and spatial spheres to articulate "human interactions in space" and the "movement of society in time" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 119). In particular, it highlights the important role of the writer as catalyst within this variegated historical landscape.

At the 1976 International Emergency Conference on Korea in Tokyo Ngũgĩ elaborates on his conviction concerning the role of writers in cultural struggle: “Where do art and artists stand in all this? I do not believe in the neutrality of art or, for that matter, any neutrality at all in the battle against whatever social forces diminish the human spirit. And the human spirit is not simply located in the ruling circles. Its location is in the totality of a people, particularly looked at from the position and needs of the most downtrodden” (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 125). This statement echoes both Senghor and Mao’s endorsement of an art that is not for art’s sake previously discussed in chapter three. This notion of “commitment” or an “engaged” literature has its roots in the Africa-Asia Conference in Bandung and in the legacy of the AAWB. Ngũgĩ is also highlighting the necessity for the continuation of struggle from within the postcolony itself. As he often states, Ngũgĩ is interested in pinpointing the hidden “neo” in the “post,” that is, the persistent neocolonialism present in the postcolony. The persistence of colonial antagonisms within a postcolonial Kenya is indicative of the non-linearity of colonial power dynamics as they operate to varying degrees across space, politics and culture. The physical or political space of independence for Ngũgĩ is not the same as the space of cultural independence. As such, the cultural imagining of alternatives is both anticipatory and cathartic. Such a “committed” view of culture allows for a continued mediation of the residual effects of colonialism in Kenya post 1963. Given the heightened political climate of the conference surrounding the continued fighting between North and South Korea, Ngũgĩ is here reasserting the committed nature of writing within an Afro-Asian “concept of history.” For Ngũgĩ, the conflict of the Korean peninsula works as an important indicator for Kenya of this “neo” in the “post” due to its status as one of the enduring partitions of the Cold War.

Of particular interest is Ngũgĩ's use of the term "neutrality." He continues in this analytical vein by making a connection between neutrality and non-alignment: "For how can writers, if they are going to be meaningful, assume a non-aligned posture amid a million voices silenced or crying out in unison, even in their very silence, for the right to control the natural and human resources of their own land? How can one be non-aligned in the very sight of a million muscles flexing to break centuries of chains?" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 125). The AAWB's co-existence with the non-aligned movement has been briefly touched upon. Chapter one highlights the tension between Bandung's engagement with non-alignment and the AAPSO's claim to that legacy even through its in-practice alignment with the socialist bloc. The politics of non-alignment also holds renewed possibility for an oppositional politics after the fall of the Soviet Union and the failure of socialisms in both Africa and Asia. However, in 1976, such a position was viewed by many involved in the AAWB as a concession to capitalist interests. Here, Ngũgĩ enacts a movement similar to the AAPSO in 1957: he imagines an alternative modernity read through the discourse of human rights. In this context, to be non-aligned means to ignore the continued human rights abuses—again the "neo" in the "post"—after independence.

He concludes his speech with a reference to the Korean poets, Kim Chi Ha and Yun I Sang: "For us in Kenya, in Africa, Asia and South America, the struggle against the Five Bandits of Kim Chi Ha's poetry must continue and like Yun I Sang give voice to forced silence" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 125). This tri-continental framework again serves to enact the geographic plurality of a "concept of history." By finding linkages of solidarity in Asia, Ngũgĩ moves past the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized. By "looking East" he is also able to find inspiration for his own struggle in neocolonial Kenya embodied by his controversial call for the abolition of the Department of English at the University of Nairobi and his later activism with rural theater

groups. In this sense, Ngũgĩ furthers within a post-independence context many of the initiatives began at Tashkent before decolonization.

Although he won the Lotus Award in 1973, Ngũgĩ's involvement in the Bureau did not begin until the Beirut conference of 1967, two years after the Bureau's virulent split into Soviet and Chinese factions. During the late sixties, Ngũgĩ was teaching at the University of Nairobi, which resulted in the resignation of his post after the fall out from his call to abolish the English Department. The comments on this paper had recently appeared in his 1972 collection of essays *Homecoming*, which cemented his reputation as a polemic thorn in the side of colonial models of education, and in particular, the dominance of English as the primary language of instruction and literature. However, one of the common misconceptions of Ngũgĩ lies in the assumption that in his call for the abolition of the English department he was also calling for the abolition of English itself. From the beginning of his involvement in changing education models, Ngũgĩ is interested in both reversing linguistic hierarchies and in eradicating the colonial power dynamics inherent in the model.

He writes in the comments to the paper on the Abolishment of the English Department, originally written in 1968: "If there is need for a 'study of the historic continuity of a single culture', why can't this be African? Why can't African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?" (*Homecoming* Ngũgĩ, 146). The idea of recuperating historical continuity works within both Ngũgĩ's Kenyan context and the larger framework of Afro-Asian solidarity. As both the Bandung Conference and the AAPSO sought to recuperate a notion of humanism and civilization outside of the West, Ngũgĩ here is pushing for a reordering of knowledge that casts colonialism as an interruption rather than an historical "beginning." He continues: "Just because for reasons of political expediency we have kept English as our official

language, there is no need to substitute a study of English culture for our own. We reject the primacy of English literature and culture” (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 146). Anticipating his most famous treatise in *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ locates culture in the very use of a particular language. It is easy here to level the criticism that Ngũgĩ is “anti-English” in a categorical way. This kind of reaction is again a misreading of how Ngũgĩ conceives of how English functions within a Kenyan or East African context. While such rhetoric is purposefully provocative, it does not mean that English is not useful for “political expediency” nor that the English language, and its accompanying aesthetics and genres such as the novel, are not, after the colonial interruption, irrevocably part of the Kenyan context. Educated at the University of Leeds, and finding his first success writing novels in English, Ngũgĩ could in fact hold the opposite opinion without stirring up such a controversy over the politics of language.

Furthermore, Ngũgĩ is not arguing for a cataloguing of a pre-colonial cultural inventory (Senghor) nor is he denying the pragmatic uses of English, even within the education system. When he writes: “that the English Department be abolished,” and a “Department of African Literature and Languages be set up in its place” Ngũgĩ is in fact identifying the importance of reordering knowledge outside of a colonial taxonomy.⁹⁹ As such, Ngũgĩ is advocating for education as one of the primary fronts of decolonization: “The primary duty of any literature department is to illuminate the spirit animating a people, to show how it meets new challenges, and to investigate possible areas of development and involvement” (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 146). This activist vision of the role of literature and education fits squarely with the AAWB’s goals of articulating the Afro-Asian personality through the notion of a “concept of history.” If education is a key tool with which to order how knowledge is presented, then what is provocative is not the

⁹⁹ See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*.

fact that the name of the primary department of literature at the University of Nairobi is changed; rather, it is the retention of an education model shorn of its colonial prejudices. Or to be more specific, it is the translation of such a model into the Kenyan context, which necessitates a wholesale reordering of knowledge and content.

Ngũgĩ clarifies this with his next assertion: “In suggesting this name, we are not rejecting other cultural streams, especially the western stream. We are only clearly mapping out the directions and perspectives the study of culture and literature will inevitably take in an African university” (Ngũgĩ, *Homecoming* 146). By locating Kenya—and Africa as whole—at the center of education, Ngũgĩ is not advocating for anything out of the ordinary within a national context. The primacy of a particular nation’s cultural production is almost a given in any other framework. However, the fact that such a statement produced such a controversy within the Kenyan context reveals the extent to which the prejudices of the colonial model had utterly dominated the education system. It also puts into relief one of the reasons why the line between culture and politics seemed so thin during the period of decolonization. The AAPSO had realized this early on, and the AAWB’s 1957 meeting in Tashkent interpreted this as the necessity for cultural struggle. Here, Ngũgĩ takes this one step further by arguing for the systematic reordering of knowledge within models of education—one of the most important areas of post-independence development. For Ngũgĩ, the impulse to declaim a “humanism made to the measure of the world,” meant taking this argument into institution of education, that is, into the discipline of the humanities itself (Césaire 73).

As such, Ngũgĩ provides an arresting filter through which to read African involvement in the Bureau post the 1966 split. The South African, Alex La Guma, would also be heavily involved in the Permanent Bureau, serving as assistant editor to *Lotus* well into the 1970s.

However, it's Ngũgĩ's position as both writer and educator that makes his resonance with the Permanent Bureau's cultural goals so important. For the Permanent Bureau, Ngũgĩ represented the interface between cultural struggle as linked to a particular aesthetic and postcolonial education. Ngũgĩ's push for a re-localization of literature and knowledge to an African context furthered the Tashkent Conference's problematic of audience broached by Mario de Andrade and elaborated upon by Mao Dun. In addressing the seemingly simple question of audience ten years after Tashkent Conference and in the East African context of the University of Nairobi, Ngũgĩ became a lightning rod for contentious debates concerning the politics of language and the viability of Europhone African literature.

This tension lay at the heart of the Permanent Bureau's own existence. Although they advocated cultural exchanges and translation projects between Afro-Asian countries, their languages of publication were English, French, and Arabic. Similar to Ngũgĩ's concession that using English was "politically expedient," the Permanent Bureau was caught between its goals of exhibiting Afro-Asian culture and "personality" and reaching the greatest number of people in Africa, Asia, and beyond. As discussed in the previous chapter, this tension was also embodied by Senghor's defense of using the French language, if de-familiarized by Wolof, in the glossary for his poetry collection, *Nocturnes*. However, the fact *Lotus* was published in three languages is itself a linguistic feat. This meant that poetry originally written in "minor" languages like Vietnamese or Urdu would undergo three different sets of translations—English, French and Arabic. The upshot was *Lotus* represented one of the most prolific venues for the translation of world literature during the twentieth century. Furthermore, because of its focus on the literatures

of Africa and Asia, its definition of world literature was derived explicitly from postcolonial contexts.¹⁰⁰

In a 1974 *Lotus* article titled, “Problems of Translation of Afro-Asian Literature” by Attar Singh, he outlines the importance of a revival of indigenous languages: “The confrontation with the West brought with it an awareness at various levels of new cultural values including those of Western literature. But there was an element of cultural distortion inherent in the colonial situation of these countries because their confrontation with the West was not that between equals” (*Lotus* 30). This “cultural distortion” is a productive term to address the relationship between language and the postcolony. As with Ngũgĩ, Singh not only delineates the how this distortion is connected to linguistic hierarchies, but also how after the history of colonialism it is necessary to work within a multilingual framework. Translation then becomes one of the primary grounds of the postcolony’s negotiation of this “cultural distortion.” The notion of representing a particular culture through the filter of a colonial language means many writers would in turn “distort” English and French itself. Or to put it another way, they would use Europhone languages to “translate” indigenous culture to what was primarily a Western audience. The dissonance between using a colonial language to describe indigenous culture would then produce an aesthetic friction, or for the Permanent Bureau, a “cultural distortion.” As a long list of scholars have pointed out, many of the most successful African writers during the fifties and sixties—Achebe, Senghor, and Ngũgĩ—would appropriate the European language for their own narratives. Literary representation of the postcolony thus worked on two levels of distortion: both

¹⁰⁰ Ngũgĩ writes “The postcolonial is at the heart of the constitution of Goethe’s world literature, and even in theory, it indeed constitutes the nonimperial heart of the modern and postmodern” (Ngũgĩ, *Globalectics* 55).

of the indigenous culture and of the European language itself.¹⁰¹ This double movement would ultimately produce a crisis of postcolonial representation.

However, what both Ngũgĩ and Singh affirm is not only a privileging of indigenous languages as a creative vehicle, but also the translation between indigenous languages themselves. These kinds of translations would avoid—both figuratively and metaphorically—the direct mediation of the colonial metropole. Singh gives the example of the National Book Trust in India, which attempted to re-center the primary language of translation on the Indian subcontinent from English to Hindi. He writes, “from this master version in Hindi all other translations were made. The translations made in this manner have retained their inherent Indian identity in such greater measure than was expected” (Lotus 32-3). While still a concession to the existence of “major” versus “minor” languages on the sub-continent, Singh’s point is that this translation model is a step in the right direction for an “authentic” literary representation of Indian social reality. Even though the use of the term “authentic” is problematic in its essentialist connotations, Singh’s article does point to the widespread sentiment within Afro-Asian literary circles that there must be some recuperation of writing in and translation from an indigenous language.

Singh asserts the forum for this kind of work is the Permanent Bureau: “[...] if the efforts of the Afro-Asian writers movement are to be directed towards promotion of direct translations from one language into another a scheme of projecting some major Afro-Asian languages such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Swahili, Chinese and Japanese as the languages of literary exchange should be encouraged” (Lotus 34). Such an initiative is aimed at removing the Eurocentrism from the cultural exchanges between Afro-Asia. While there still existed national

¹⁰¹ While specific to a Caribbean context, Édouard Glissant’s theory of creolization is one of the most productive models of this process. In particular see his book, *Poetics of Relation*.

liberation struggles during the seventies, the Permanent Bureau now saw much of its task as creating linkages between contemporary literary representations of the postcolony in both Africa and Asia. Ngũgĩ's position vis-à-vis the politics of language was thereby not an uncommon sentiment during the period. One of the main goals of this analysis is to resituate Ngũgĩ's decision to compose in Gikuyu within the context of Afro-Asian cultural exchanges. Rather than remain within an orthodox analysis of colonial language versus indigenous language, this chapter argues for the rereading of Ngũgĩ's cultural production through the horizontal transnationalism of Afro-Asian solidarity. Ngũgĩ's reception of the Lotus Prize in 1973 was not only for his push for the revival of indigenous language cultural production, but also for its catalyzing of a larger linguistic trend within the transnationalism of the Permanent Bureau. This positioning of literature to address the concerns of a local audience and a crisis of representation would help rethink theories of translation and postcolonial aesthetics from outside of a colonial power dynamic.

The “Neo” in the “Post” And Afro-Asia

Within the history of the Bureau, Ngũgĩ's engagement with the politics of language furthers an intellectual genealogy that began with the first conference in Tashkent. Mario de Andrade's critique of colonial linguistic hierarchies and Mao Dun's response as it concerned writing for a local audience would inform much of the Bureau's cultural platform during the initial years of decolonization in Africa and Asia. However, as definitions of anti-colonial “combat literature” would come up short in address the various entanglements of the postcolony, Ngũgĩ's reformulation of this debate would bring these issues to bear within the neocolonial context. As discussed above, Ngũgĩ's refusal of the simple linearity of “post” independence would be aided by looking to the synchronic links of solidarity in Asia.

The split in 1966 into Soviet and Chinese branches resulted in the rapid withdrawal of the Chinese from Permanent Bureau official publications. However, they would continue to be present at Permanent Bureau conferences as official “observers” and would continue to provide an image of China as a possible alternative to the Soviets. Even though the Chinese had lost much of their influence in the Bureau, their anti-imperialist rhetoric was geared as much towards the specter of colonialism as it was to the neocolonialism of the current context. In this sense, a text like Mao Zedong’s *On Contradiction*, which provided a systematic critique of antagonisms in a post-independence framework, would resonate with thinkers like Senghor, Fanon and Ngũgĩ. As one of the early texts that addresses postcolonial development from a materialist historiography, it proved attractive to many African writers for its recognition of a continued struggle after independence.

In this sense, it is possible to claim *On Contradiction* occupies a prominent, if controversial, position in postcolonial theory, especially when read against Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*. As stated before, the goal is not endorse Maoism *tout court* as a solution to crises of African literary representation. Rather, it is more productive to read how African writers exploited and reformulated Maoist notions in their respective contexts. Within the context of the global sixties, Maoism was simply impossible to ignore. Additionally, the importance of Fanon’s text to theories of postcolonialism cannot be overstated. Ngũgĩ often cites Fanon’s chapter, “On National Consciousness,” as one of the most important influences on his own work. However, as demonstrated in the first chapter, it is important to read Fanon’s text as much through Third World transnationalism as through a relationship with the colonial metropole. The resonances of Fanon’s notion of “combat literature” with a Maoist “revolutionary literature,” can thereby be read into formation of the Bureau’s own cultural platform. If the

AAWB stood as possibly the first systematic formulation of postcolonialism from the perspective of transnational solidarity, then these two texts—emerging from both African and Asian contexts—can be read in relationship to each other. This is not to say Fanon’s discussion of neocolonialism is directly derived from Mao’s analysis in *On Contradiction*. Moreover, the argument is not intended to undercut the strong humanist impulse of Fanon’s work in its comparison with Mao’s interpretation of dialectical materialism and its profound anti-humanism. However, it is important to point out the variety of readings and misreadings that made up the Bureau’s articulation of an alternative “concept of history.” Such a polyvalent understanding of the period helps further contextualize Ngũgĩ’s work within the framework of Afro-Asian transnationalism.

The Crisis of Representation

One of the ways in which to describe the history of the Bureau’s cultural platform is as a prolonged negotiation of the crisis of representation. Beginning with Tashkent, Maoism appeared to many writers as a viable cultural model due to its answer, however overly categorical, to the relationship between ideology and aesthetics. As Mao Dun articulated, art and literature needed to reflect the lived reality of struggle under colonialism. The audience for such a literature was then those who occupied the most oppressed segments of society: the peasants and the workers. However, for Mao it was not enough for the content to reflect the outlook of the proletariat. The form itself had to also reflect the writers commitment to a proletarian consciousness. Such an aesthetics would resolve the contradiction between a radical politics and the use of “bourgeois” forms such as the novel, which originated outside of a non-Western cultural context. The Bureau addressed this issue in its first two anthologies by focusing on poetry, oral and written, as a genre

constant across all cultures. However, as many writers from Africa and Asia were educated in the West, they often turned to forms such as the novel, and its accompanying emphasis on the journey of an individual's consciousness. Later, *Lotus* would often print a variety of genres, ranging from short stories to excerpts from novels, as well as poetry and literary criticism. This precipitated a renewed debate concerning the relationship between form and content in the late sixties and early seventies. One of the main points of emphasis was how to adapt the novel to postcolonial circumstances. For a writer like Ngũgĩ, who was trained at the University of Leeds in the Western classics of realism and modernism, the disconnect between his turn to radical politics in the late 60s and choice of aesthetics became increasingly acute.

As such, this section takes as a point of departure Simon Gikandi's notion that "[...] given Ngũgĩ's struggle with the crisis of representation in his non-fictional writings, it is surprising that so many critics have written on his ideological dilemma as if it were independent of aesthetic problems" (Gikandi 11). The goal is to situate Ngũgĩ's own movement from novels to drama within the context of a crisis of representation, which was also embedded in the transnationalism of the Permanent Bureau and its publications. Furthermore, this section argues Ngũgĩ's transition to Gikuyu as his primary creative language positions language at the center of this crisis. As a result, one of the most important questions of 20th century African literature, the politics of language, can be read through the history of Afro-Asian solidarity, and, provocatively, through the pervasiveness of Maoist literary theory during the late sixties and early seventies.

In his 1973 essay, *Literature and Society*, Ngũgĩ grapples with the relationship of the writer as individual to literature as an embodiment of a collective consciousness: "The very act of writing, even at the level of the individual, implies social relationship: one is writing about somebody for somebody" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 4). Here, Ngũgĩ is already signaling a heightened

awareness of the intended audience of a committed literature. Even the creative act of writing is viewed as a collective enterprise intimately connected to how the author's imagination is embedded in the social fabric writ large. Ngũgĩ continues:

Literature, then, does not belong to ethereal planes and surreal spaces, electing to have nothing to do with the mundanity of economics, politics, race, class, history. As a process and an end, it is conditioned by these social forces and pressures because imagination takes place within economic, political, class and race context. Arising from its thoroughly social character, literature is partisan: it takes sides more so in a class society" (Ngũgĩ, Writers 4).

Ngũgĩ footnotes this statement in the text as a reference to Mao's well known quote in the *Talks* that "all culture, all literature and art belong to definite classes and are geared to definite political lines. There is in fact no such thing as art for art's sake, art that is detached from, or independent of politics" (Denton 11). Ngũgĩ thereby maintains that an engaged writer within the context of a neo-colonial Kenya must be partisan. They must write from an oppositional perspective with the intent of inciting a radical activism from the people. As with Senghor's interpretation of these same lines to mean a "stylization for the people," Ngũgĩ is similarly interested in writing a literature that resonates with the cares and concerns of society as a collectivity. However, while Senghor would locate this in the "the vital force" and "rhythm" of a cultural inventory, Ngũgĩ has taken a page from Alexis' intervention concerning the nature of "national cultures in formation" (Présence 73, 71). Ngũgĩ's stylization for the people is located in the necessity of cultural struggle within the Kenyan neocolonial context. Ngũgĩ decries the tendency of postcolonial leaders to "hide under cloaks of militant nationalism," "calls for dead authenticity," and performances of cultural symbolism" (Ngũgĩ, Writers 18). These components of an indigenous culture, much of which informed Senghor's notion of a cultural inventory and were central to recuperations of his African humanism, are now, according to Ngũgĩ, exploited by the postcolonial elite to maintain power after decolonization.

The continuation of a literary struggle within the neocolonial context is one of Ngũgĩ's major contributions to the field of postcolonial studies. It represents an engagement with a "concept of history" that situates literature as one of the many facets of an "anti-colonial space making." As with other postcolonial theories, and in particular Achille Mbembe's notion of the postcolony, much of Ngũgĩ's work during this period can be read as attempts to provide an alternative periodization of postcolonialism that is not predicated on the linear chronology of pre and post independence. Part of what makes Ngũgĩ so pertinent to such a historical moment is his attempt to write, rather than only analyze, such a space. Namely, the aesthetic that emerges from this moment is one that addresses the crisis of representation within the Kenyan context. Ngũgĩ's commitment to literature as a collective enterprise evinces the landscape of the "neo in the post." Or in other words, his work as both critic and writer allows him to work across the many nodes of struggle in postcolonial Kenya. This kind of periodization takes into account political doctrines, economic policies, cultural negotiations, and international solidarity movements in order to situate Kenya in a particular moment in space and time. Moreover, it is a periodization grounded in the local experiences of indigenous populations aimed at catalyzing change—that is, "literature is partisan: it takes sides" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 4).

Ngũgĩ addresses the importance of this attention to the collective experience later in his talk: "Literature then is produced by people in history, It reflects, and reflects on, those activities that are the stuff of history. It affects people's attitudes to the social context of the lives of men, women and children. If that context is one of domination, subjugation and resistance, then it is a matter of life and death as to how people view all the forces at work in that in that context." (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 22). It is important to highlight that Ngũgĩ's choice of content and form is derived from what he, as a writer, sees as the critical failures of a people who may be "free" from

colonialism in name, but have not seen their quality of life improve after independence. His awareness of the importance of literature to re-write history indicates why it is possible to read both Ngũgĩ's early work and his socialist realist phase as literary interventions into postcolonial periodization. Here, Ngũgĩ is writing from a deep commitment to basic human rights elaborated elsewhere by the AAWB's cultural platform and enacted by other authors such as Kofi Awoonor. However, the difficulty becomes how to produce an art that both reflects the critical issues affecting a society without overly stylizing, namely, without producing a literature that is an exercise in pure didacticism as it was implemented in Maoist China. Ngũgĩ appropriates Maoist literary theory for its clear stance concerning audience and endorsement of literature as collective. However, his position as outside of the government, as in fact in opposition to its excesses, means he is also committed to the civil act of dissidence.¹⁰²

Gikandi summarizes this tension on the level of aesthetics: "on the one hand [Ngũgĩ] defines literature as a collective enterprise that is affected by a community's wrestling with its environment, and he conceives the writer as a person defined by his or her engagement with the interests of this community; on the other hand, however, he wants art to maintain a certain autonomy and the artist to sustain a certain imaginative subjectivity" (Gikandi 11). Part of this crisis of representation is how to articulate the disconnect between political history and the lived reality of a nation's citizens. The autonomy of the artist as both embedded in society and a voice of dissidence creates the role of writer as activist. Although their politics were quite different, this position resonates with Senghor's critique of socialist realism in Soviet and Chinese contexts as overly concerned with cultivating a personality cult at the expense of engaging with on-the-ground social realities. As if realism, in its preoccupation with the institutions of socialism, loses

¹⁰² See Dominic Thomas' *Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa* for a discussion on official and non-official literature in the Congo. Specifically chapters on Sony Labou Tansi, Henri Lopes, and Emmanuel Dongala.

its critical edge. Gikandi's notion of autonomy that helps maintain a "certain imaginative subjectivity" is the autonomy of dissidence (Gikandi 11). Because Ngũgĩ is writing from a position outside the institution, his realism is not aimed at shoring up political power, but rather, at subverting the structures of neo-colonialism. In short, although for Ngũgĩ literature may be partisan, it is not of the party.

Ngũgĩ pinpoints this tension as he outlines his own cultural platform in the Kenyan context: "[Literature] is of course more than just a mechanical reflection of social reality. As one of man's artistic activities, literature is in itself part of human self-realization as a result of his wrestling with nature and with one another" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 4). This quote embodies Ngũgĩ's desire, as Gikandi stipulated above, to somehow maintain an autonomy, to foster the role of the imagination within an historical context fraught with social inequalities. What is interesting here, though, and what is a thread that weaves its way through Ngũgĩ's multiple negotiations of genres and language over the years, is his awareness of anthropocentric time. Namely, a strict socialist realist framework would, as Ngũgĩ points out, produce a "mechanical reflection of social reality" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 4). While Ngũgĩ endorses the role of the writer as one embedded in the social fabric, he does signal an awareness of another element of importance to the negotiation of the crisis of representation: nature. The notion of an individual self-consciousness that moves, almost dialectically, through various stages of self-realizations cannot be entirely located in the interactions with social, political, and cultural others. For Ngũgĩ, if the writer is both participant and catalyst within the social fabric, then that fabric is itself embedded in the specific topographies of space. While so much of the Bureau's cultural platform over the years had been preoccupied with the recuperation of Afro-Asian humanism, Ngũgĩ points out nature as a third vector through which to represent the postcolony. As a result, the crisis of representation is not

only a product of a disconnect between writer and audience or between aesthetic and ideology. Rather, it is also a crisis of resources (both natural and human) embodied by the history of colonial extraction. Furthermore, it is the ways in which these resources are mismanaged in the postcolony that provides one of the main lines of dissent in Ngũgĩ oeuvre.

Gikandi writes that Ngũgĩ's work can be characterized by a negotiation of "three gaps" in "colonial and postcolonial Kenya:"

[...] the gap between the everyday experience of rural peasants and urban workers and the art forms of the middle class (the novel or drama); the chasm between the experience of reification in class society and the writer's utopian desire for a 'non-alienated mode of cognition'; and the break between the functional authority of art (its need to serve an ideological interest) and its inherent autonomy (the fact that art derives its identity from its ability to transcend its conditions of possibility)" (Gikandi 12).

This section would add a fourth gap to Gikandi's list: the ecological gap between nature as a source of artistic inspiration (e.g. the sublime), and its severe exploitation during the era of colonial and now postcolonial extraction. This awareness of anthropocentric time in Ngũgĩ's work produces a heightened preoccupation with the segments of the population whose social fabric is most closely embedded in the natural world: the rural peasantry. By targeting this audience, Ngũgĩ works along what he deems as one of the closest interfaces between humans and nature. This idealization of the peasantry as close to the natural world can be found in other examples of critical realism, including Mao Dun's work during the May Fourth movement in China.¹⁰³ As such, the crisis of representation in Ngũgĩ's work is not limited to mechanical depictions of class struggle; instead it functions as a product of Ngũgĩ's working along the multiple valences of a "concept of history," one which includes an engagement with the natural world. This engagement serves to de-center the human, and specifically for Ngũgĩ, humans who ignore the crisis of natural resources in their attempts to hold onto political power.

¹⁰³ For example, see Mao Dun's short story, "Spring Silk Worms."

Petals of Blood, Devil on the Cross, and “Symbolic Maoism”

Ngũgĩ’s 1977 novel *Petals of Blood* provides a point of entry for mapping this “concept of history” according to Jameson’s four categories: “the history of philosophy, revolutionary political theory and practice, cultural production, and economic cycles” (Jameson 179). His last novel before his turn to writing in Gikuyu, *Petals of Blood* occupies a provocative space within the landscape of modern African literature. Ngũgĩ had finished the novel at a writers retreat in Yalta in the Soviet Union. As discussed above, he had also just won the Lotus Prize at the 1973 Writers’ conference in Alma Ata. The writing of the novel also took place during Ngũgĩ’s formulation of a strong stance vis-à-vis the relationship of the writer and politics. He was in particular, in the process of working through an engagement with Maoist literary theory among other influences. “Symbolic Maoism” thereby functioned as one of the many disparate valences within Ngũgĩ’s “concept of history.”

Furthermore, within the transnational context of the Permanent Bureau, it could be argued the text represented an apex in Ngũgĩ’s synthesis of philosophy, political practice and cultural production—all within a trenchant critique of neo-colonial economics. Provocatively, it was his use of English, and the accompanying global reach it entailed, that had established him so prominently in the world of the postcolonial literature. Yet this global reach for Ngũgĩ was also an indication, and perhaps one of the most important reasons, for him to address another the crisis of representation in his work. For Ngũgĩ, it was not enough to only write for a global Anglophone audience. While Gikandi identifies the “three gaps” in the crisis of representation along the lines of genre, aesthetics and ideology, Ngũgĩ would take aim at the linguistic links between these three, choosing to change both genres and language after *Petals of Blood*.

However, before turning to *Devil on the Cross*, and the political fallout it precipitated, this section will read *Petals of Blood* according to Jameson's "concept of history," and in particular, through its engagement with a "symbolic Maoism."

Many African literary critics have placed Ngũgĩ's *Petals of Blood* in the tradition of socialist realism. Omafume Onoge writes in 1974: "It is perhaps not fortuitous that Sembène Ousmane and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, who today are the leading advocates of socialist realism, had earlier based their major creative works on concrete anti-colonial movements led by the peasants and proletarians of Sénégal and Kenya" (Onoge 42). In this essay, titled, "Crisis of Consciousness in African Literature," Onoge gives an outline of African literature from Negritude forward through critical realism and socialist realism. He is admittedly partisan, citing both Sembène (*God's Bits of Wood*) and Ngũgĩ (*Petals of Blood*) as some of the foremost writers of conscience in the post-independence period. Moreover, he readily draws parallels with China in his critique of current (1970s) trends in African literature: "Years ago, Mao Tse-Tung in the midst of an analogous revolutionary situation, reminded Chinese writers and intellectuals that 'ideas do not fall from heaven, nor do we receive them as a gift of God while we sleep'. The sources of ideas could not be accounted for by a pagan invocation of a mysterious muse. On the contrary, ideas—artistic ideas included—are the products of social praxis" (Onoge 43). Here Onoge is enacting, on the level of criticism, his own exercise in "symbolic Maoism." By citing Mao, as well as the Chinese situation as "analogous" to an African context, he endorses an African perspective that "shows a critical familiarity with the revolutionary theories of their counterparts in Asia and Latin America" (Onoge 43). Onoge is in full support of a class-based notion of art as well as its accompanying literary criticism. He even ends his essay with two more quotes from Mao's *Talks* on the question of audience and the unity of content and form.

These famous sections of the *Talks*, wherein Mao writes that “there is only human nature in the concrete, no human nature in the abstract” and “[w]orks of art, however politically progressive are powerless if they lack artistic quality,” are some of the most consistently appropriated sections by African writers and critics (Onoge 44). Mao’s text is thereby misread by Onoge into the African literary landscape.¹⁰⁴ Of particular importance is Onoge’s citation of Mao’s distinction that they are opposed “to the tendency towards so called ‘poster and slogan style’ which is correct only in political approach but lacks artistic power” (Onoge 44). The fact that there was an asphyxiation in cultural production during the Cultural Revolution in China—the model plays being the only acceptable works of art during the period—is not interrogated by Onoge. Paradoxically, the notion that Mao is somehow aware of the danger of an art that reflects, almost verbatim, political slogans, (even as this became the central outcome of his literary theory in China) is one of the most important insights Onoge derives from the *Talks*. The disconnect between the on-the-ground reality in China and how a text like Mao’s *Talks* circulated within African literary debates reveals its symbolic power even after the Sino-Soviet split and the decline of PRC influence in the Afro-Asian solidarity movement.

Onoge is even specific as to how Maoist notions of the role of literature and art are transformed within the African context: “While we accept the relevance of Mao’s ideas to our artistic situation in Africa, this caveat is even more in order. [...] Given our peculiar cultural and linguistic problems, the artist who wishes truly to communicate with the 80 per cent who live below the bread line will have to create truly revolutionary artistic vehicles” (Onoge 44). He continues, “If [the African writer] is to complete the task by telling us where we are going, he must be prepared to commit *class suicide*” (Onoge 44). Here is the return to a “crisis of

¹⁰⁴ He is not the only African literary critic to engage with Maoist theory post-independence. See also Emmanuel Ngara, *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*.

consciousness” with which Onoge had begun his survey of African literature. He identifies the history of modern African literature, which he periodizes as beginning with Senghor’s and Césaire’s *négritude*, as a history of “crises of consciousness.” If the *négritude* moment was a negotiation of what he calls a “revolutionary affirmation” (Césaire) and a “mystical affirmation” (Senghor), then the crisis of this post-independence moment is located in the attempt on the part of the educated literary elite to embody, in their art, a commitment to the “80 per cent who live below the bread line” (Onoge 44). This crisis of consciousness is similar to Gikandi’s assertion that Ngũgĩ’s work can be read as a crisis of representation. In fact, Onoge’s politics would dictate the crisis of representation is a kind of crisis of consciousness. However, it is more productive to read his Maoist-inflected notion that the writer must commit “class suicide” in order to “raise the people’s consciousness” as forming one part of Gikandi’s three gaps based on class, reification, and autonomy that he reads in Ngũgĩ’s work (Onoge 44). In this sense, Mao’s *Talks* can be read as operating as “symbolic Maoism” within the landscape of an African literary criticism committed to a materialist historiography during the post-independence period. It also helps map how African literature engaged with Marxism in its formulation of postcolonialism. In this sense, Onoge’s class-based literary analysis rooted in a “crisis of consciousness” is itself a product of this encounter. In contrast, by locating this “crisis of consciousness” within a larger landscape of a “crisis of representation” Gikandi’s criticism helps locate this Marxist encounter as just one factor among many in the formulation of African postcolonialism.

From 1964 to 1972 the Kenyan government was headed by president Jomo Kenyatta as the head of the Kenya African National Union (KANU), who had been originally associated with Kenya’s movement for independence and the Mau Mau rebellion. The government had maintained a healthy skepticism of China, especially with its high visibility in Tanzania and

Zambia due to the construction of the TAZARA railway.¹⁰⁵ In fact, Kenyatta's anxieties over the spread of socialism in Kenya was not limited to the influence of the Soviet Union: "It is naïve to think that there is not danger of imperialism from the East. In world politics the East has as many designs upon us as the West and would like us to serve their own interests. That is why we reject communism." (Quoted in Hutchison, 117). As such, Kenyatta was openly hostile to the workings of the socialist bloc within the country. This discomfiture was embodied by the power struggle between Kenyatta and the former deputy president of the KANU, Oginga Odinga, who would be removed from his post in 1966. Odinga had also served as a representative to various AAPSO conferences in the preceding years. However, since the death of his lieutenant and confidante, Pio de Gama Pinto in 1965, who had both served as his main contact with Chinese and Soviet embassies and his primary political strategist, Odinga had become increasingly pro-socialist bloc and had sought political and financial assistance from Beijing.¹⁰⁶ Upon discovering these clandestine exchanges, Kenyatta had branded Odinga and his faction within the KANU as "agents of rapacious international communism" (Hutchison 119). Following his expulsion, Odinga would form his own party, the Kenya People's Union (KPU). This party would have explicit, although limited Chinese backing as "Kenyatta warned the communist embassies that financial support for the new party would be construed as subversion and would lead to severance of relations" (Hutchison 119).

It is within this domestic political landscape that Ngũgĩ wrote *Petals of Blood*. Although not published until 1977, the story's plot unfolds during the tumultuous years of famine during the 1960s in a rural Kenyan town called Ilmorog. A disenfranchised school teacher named Munira leaves his family to found a school in the town. There, he works his way through

¹⁰⁵ See Jamie Monson's *African Freedom Railway*.

¹⁰⁶ See Alan Hutchison *China's African Revolution*.

ambivalent reactions to the plight of the peasants, and in particular, forms friendships with three other “outsiders” to the town: Abdulla, the owner of the local town store and bar, the beautiful Wanja, the granddaughter of the town’s “wise-women” who has retreated there in order to escape from her past, as well as Karega, a former student of Munira who has come to seek his advice. As the lives of the four main characters become more and more intertwined and they discover coincidences in their past that link them irrevocably together, the town, Ilmorog, experiences two years of famine, effectively wiping out the agricultural production and bringing the region to the brink of starvation. A movement to travel to Nairobi to see their regional representative, Nderi wa Riera, brings the peasants and the four main characters together in a moment of collective consciousness. Nderi’s role as the corrupt government official that eventually exploits Ilmorog through an avalanche of exploitative measures shows how Ngũgĩ sought to address the conflict between what Frantz Fanon would call the “national bourgeoisie” and the peasants in post-independence Kenya.

Throughout the novel, Ngũgĩ situates his characters as heirs to the anti-colonial movement embodied by the Mau Mau rebellion.¹⁰⁷ This reading of the Mau Mau experience into post-independence Kenya is important to Ngũgĩ’s formulation of cultural struggle within the postcolony. It also demonstrates how Ngũgĩ again refuses the chronological notion of independence as the primary indicator of decolonization. During the peasant march to Nairobi the store-keeper Abdulla reflects on the connection with the Mau Mau movement: “[...] and despite the sun and the drought and his anxiety over the fate of the donkey he would feel that

¹⁰⁷ The origin of the term “Mau Mau” is unknown. Gikandi writes: “In its atavism, ‘Mau Mau’ posed a challenge to both the ‘imaginative structures’ of white supremacy and the moral conduct of the Gikuyu *athomi*. An because ‘Mau Mau’ was the unnamed and unnamable event (even to this day no one knows what the name meant or represented), it signified a certain gap in both European and Gikuyu consciousness” (Gikandi 27). Perhaps it is only coincidental, but it is provocative that in the absence of a specific meaning, “Mau Mau” is pronounced as a homonym to the “Mao” in Mao Zedong. If there is some connection beyond the homonymic it would further Jameson’s original definition of “symbolic Maoism” as a “shadowy but central presence” (Jameson 188).

Mau Mau was only a link in the chain in the long struggle of African people through different times and different places” (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 137). For Ngũgĩ, the spirit of the Mau Mau rebellion is also the spirit that provides the motivation for the peasants of Ilmorog to mobilize against underdevelopment and famine post-independence. By linking the Mau Mau not only with contemporary Kenya, but also across the African continent, Ngũgĩ locates the struggle for decolonization within the temporal and spatial plurality of a “concept of history.”

Gikandi describes how the Mau Mau rebellion functions in the text as “the defining moment in Kenya’s recent history [...]. In fact, the redefinition of ‘Mau Mau’ that is evident in Ngũgĩ’s later works, most notably *Petals of Blood*, cannot be understood outside his adoption of a materialist ideology and aesthetic” (Gikandi 29). Gikandi writes it was Ngũgĩ’s adoption of a “Marxist historiography,” while he “was involved in an ongoing debate among Kenyan intellectuals on the utility of usable pasts and the nature and function of culture in a period of ‘arrested decolonization’” that turned the Mau Mau imaginary into a contested cipher for national identity post-independence (Gikandi 29). *Petals of Blood* is thereby an explicit attempt to rewrite history according to revolutionary political theory. Ngũgĩ’s critique of a Kenyan “national bourgeoisie” thereby resonates with both Fanon’s chapter “On the Pitfalls of National Consciousness,” and its provocative precursor: Mao’s *On Contradiction*. In this sense, Ngũgĩ is attempting to read theories of contradiction into the Kenyan national discourse as he attempts to negotiate, through the novel *Petals of Blood*, a crisis of representation. Namely, the crisis inherent in representing the Mau Mau rebellion in the acute political climate of post-independence Kenya.

This “concept of history” is also embodied in the references to China throughout the text as an example of a nation which went through similar colonial turmoil. Locked in a prison cell towards the end of the novel, Karega reflects on the fate of Kenya in relationship to China:

Even in himself he could not recognize the dreamer who once could talk endlessly about Africa’s past glories, Africa’s great feudal cultures, as if it was enough to have this knowledge to cure one day’s pang of hunger, to quench an hour’s thirst or to clothe a naked child. After all, the British merchant magnates and their missionary soothsayers once colonised and humiliated China by making the Chinese buy and drink opium and clubbed them when they refused to import the poison, even while the British scholars sang of China’s great feudal cultures and stole the evidence in gold and art and parchments and took them to London. [...] And China was saved, not by singers and poets telling of great past cultures, but by the creative struggle of the workers for a better day today. (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 301)

Karega draws a parallel between the valorization of pre-colonial Africa as a “cradle of civilization” similar to that of China with its own “great feudal cultures.” Karega’s commitment to a materialist ideology means he identifies these pre-colonial cultural inventories as insufficient. This gesture also resonates with the Bureau’s identification of Afro-Asian cultures as repositories of “humanism made to the measure of the world” (Césaire 73). In this sense, Karega’s commitment to a materialist ideology can thereby be read as subject to the same idealism inherent in the Bureau’s conception of Afro-Asian solidarity. Karega’s imaginary of China as having overcome British colonization—the same European power that had occupied Kenya during the Mau Mau rebellion—through “the creative struggle of the workers” understands the Chinese experience primarily through its interpretation within an international framework, that is, in its “symbolism” (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 301). As such, what is compelling for Karega is the example of creative class struggle. Similar to Alexis’ position vis-à-vis Senghor discussed in the previous chapter, Karega endorses a conception of culture that is linked to “national cultures in formation.” By extension then, *Petals of Blood* can be read as a materialist

intervention into the formation of Kenyan national culture, one that draws links between seemingly disparate events such as Mau Mau struggle and cultural revolution in China.

Earlier in the novel, during a conversation on population control with Nderi, a corrupt official, Karega uses China as a model of a developing country that “is able to feed and clothe her millions” (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 178). Karega’s positive image of China is then juxtaposed against Nderi’s negative one: “But at what price has China been able to do that? No individual freedom...no freedom of the press...no freedom of worship or assembly and people wearing drab uniform clothes. Would you wish that for your country?” (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 178). This brief exchange encapsulates the range of opinions regarding China during the Cold War period, which is not entirely different from Senghor’s ambivalence in the elegies of *Nocturnes*. As a government official, Nderi’s position is intended to reflect Kenyatta’s notion discussed above that Kenya should be as wary of an imperialism from the East as from Europe. Yet, Nderi’s critique of China is meant to ring ironic due to his corruption. As such this exchange demonstrates the way in which *Petals of Blood* is partisan in its depiction of the Kenyan situation. However, the upshot is that these varying viewpoints bring out the disputed nature of “symbolic Maoism” itself. Rather than view China as a wholly positive alternative model, the debate between the two characters puts into relief the contested legacy of Maoism within an international framework.

Another instance of an imaginary of China in the novel occurs when Abdulla explains to a frustrated Karega why he had decided to come to Ilmorog. He recounts a conversation he had while looking for work: “I said: a cripple must he not eat? They looked at one another. They said: he who has ears should hear: he who has eyes should see. ‘This is New Kenya. ‘No Free Things. ‘Mkono mtupu haulambiwi! ‘If you want free things, go to Tanzania or China. ‘I

laughed bitterly. For even to go to Tanzania or to China one would need money for bus fare” (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 255). This quote is significant for its intertextuality. Abdulla’s indignation over the status of the cripple as outside basic social welfare is reminiscent of Ousmane Sembène’s 1973 novel, *Xala*, wherein the protagonist, El Hadji is cursed to impotency by a beggar he had wronged in the past. This reference to what many scholars consider to be Ngũgĩ’s Francophone counterpart is then followed with a quote by Jesus which is stated a number of times throughout the New Testament and specifically, in the context of the parable of the sower in the gospel of Mark: “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear” (New International Version Mark 4:9). This citation of Jesus as he describes the importance of his followers to be fertile spiritual ground is then juxtaposed against an ironic slogan for a newly independent, and emphatically anti-socialist Kenya. This suturing of Biblical references with the nationalist discourse of a new, free market-oriented Kenya is characteristic of much of Ngũgĩ’s work during the period. In particular, this passage critiques the use of Biblical parables as evidence for a free market model, a critique which dominates in his next novel, *Devil on the Cross*.

This association is followed by a switch from English to the Swahili phrase: “Mkono mtupu haulambiwi!” (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 255). This quip translates as “one cannot lick an empty hand,” or “one cannot get anything from an empty hand.”¹⁰⁸ While this code switching is also emblematic of much of Ngũgĩ’s work, here it allows Ngũgĩ to draw an associative line from Biblical proverb, through a newly independent Kenya, and to an indigenous language. By bringing together these references in a catalogue, this passage identifies the different aspects of neo-colonial discourse in Kenya. This discourse stretches across European referents and into the indigenous language itself. The logic of this catalogue of almost stream of consciousness references also leads to an invocation of Tanzania and the PRC. Indicative of the two nation’s

¹⁰⁸ Translation by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o.

collaboration on the TAZARA railway project, the imaginary of China is here read through Kenya's East African neighbor. Julius Nyerere's project of African socialism (*ujamaa*) is put into stark contrast with the Kenyan model. Abdulla's frustration with this model leads him to sardonically state that "one would need money for bus fare" to even get to Tanzania (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 255). Ngũgĩ uses this exchange to highlight the stark ideological contrasts even within East Africa itself. Abdulla's sarcasm reveals that he would prefer the idealism of a country of "free things" to a system that counts a person's disability against them (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 255). It also pinpoints how *Petals of Blood* is meant to represent the possibility of alternatives to the current political and social makeup of Kenya. With its partisan stance, *Petals of Blood* is intent on revealing the hypocrisies of the Kenyan system through a reliance on the imaginaries of alternative models found both in Africa and Asia.

At the very end of the novel Abdulla's surrogate son, Joseph, returns from school for a visit. He returns from Siriana, the same school that both Munira and Karega attended, which establishes him as a foil to previous generations. Joseph is holding Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood* as he talks with Abdulla about a student strike. In response to Abdulla's impulsive request for forgiveness over not providing him the best environment to grow up in as a child, Joseph surprises him by answering that there is nothing to be sorry for, and that in fact, he wants to grow up and be like him:

You fought for the political independence of this country: I would like to contribute to the liberation of the people of this country. I have been reading a lot about Mau Mau [...] I have been reading a lot about what the workers and peasants of other lands have done in history. I have read about the people's revolutions in China, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, Angola, Guinea, Mozambique... Oh yes, and the works of Lenin and Mao. (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 339-40)

This passage links the Mau Mau rebellion to other peasant movements across the Third World. As such, it embodies what Gikandi writes that it is precisely as "discourse that 'Mau Mau' has

come to occupy a central place in Ngũgĩ's thoughts," and that "[Ngũgĩ's] later works are deliberate attempts to create an intellectual history for the movement as a way of accounting for his prior ambivalence toward it" (Gikandi 26-7). As a high school student that had family members and friends who participated in Mau Mau but was not directly involved himself, Joseph represents Ngũgĩ's attempt to create a discursive line of opposition from previous generations and to the current one. In some ways, Joseph's taking up of a revolutionary history within the post-independence context is not all that different from Ngũgĩ's position as a writer committed to critiquing the excess of independent Kenya.

The reworking of the Mau Mau legacy exists on not only on a diachronic, generational level, but also on a synchronic one. The linking of Mau Mau to other peasant movements across the Third world demonstrates the importance of Third World solidarity to Ngũgĩ's politico-aesthetic project. Joseph represents the possibility of recasting Kenya's history through a materialist historiography in order to imagine an alternative society that does not perpetuate the exploitation of previous colonial moments. Gikandi writes that in *Petals of Blood*, "the ethic driving the bourgeois novel is reversed: the deepest crisis of the individual subject [...] acquires greater value when it illuminates the crisis of the whole society" (Ngũgĩ, *Petals* 33). While Gikandi refers to the immediate context of Kenya, namely, a crisis of the collectivity, which undercuts the novel's characteristic tracing of an individual consciousness, Ngũgĩ's synchronic invocation enlarges this tracing of a collective consciousness across national boundaries. Here, an aesthetics of the collectivity works within a transnational framework governed by a materialist historiography. An awareness of the people's movements in African, Caribbean, and Asian contexts are coupled with an intellectual genealogy that moves from Lenin to Mao. With this shift from the novel as a narrative of an individual consciousness, to the novel as emblematic

of a transnational, Third World consciousness, Ngũgĩ embodies how “art could be used as an instrument of knowledge and social change” (Gikandi 33).

However, this aesthetics of solidarity would hinge, linguistically, on the global reach of colonial languages such as English and French. If *Petals of Blood* can be read as an anglophone counterpart to Ousmane Sembène’s *God’s Bits of Wood*, then these works embody a Third World literary network of world literature—that is, a “third world literature” not unlike the poems compiled by the Bureau in their first two poetry anthologies in 1963 and 1965. However, *Petals of Blood* would be the last novel Ngũgĩ would write using English as his language of composition. The global reach and circulation of texts like *Petals of Blood* and *God’s Bits of Wood* were dependent upon the use of European languages. As with Senghor’s admission in the third chapter that his goal was to reach as large a Francophone audience as possible, Ngũgĩ’s departure from English can be read as an intervention into audience of such a third world literature. As useful as English was for the creation of solidarity links across the Third World, for Ngũgĩ it was also necessary for his works to reach indigenous populations. This crisis of representation would bring about his transition to Gikuyu in *I Will Marry When I Want* and *Devil on the Cross*. As Gikandi writes: “Writing in Gikuyu was a threat to the [middle class] not so much because it evoked new literary subjects or advocated new radical commitments [...], but because a discourse across class lines would call into question the political arrangements that secured the political authority of the postcolonial state” (Gikandi 37). The transition to Gikuyu was not only an attempt to insert an indigenous language into this transnational network of third world literature, but also an attempt to work in an inverse direction, that of a specific linguistic population and region within the nation state itself.¹⁰⁹ This double movement meant that while

¹⁰⁹ Ngũgĩ writes: “To choose a language is to choose a world, once said a West Indian thinker, and although I do not share the assumed primacy of language over the world, the choice of a language already pre-determines the answer

the creation of the work in Gikuyu helped resolve a crisis of representation within a national context, it also signaled the beginning of a life-long commitment to translation for Ngũgĩ in order to affirm the transnational solidarity of other people's movements across the Third World.

Ngũgĩ's linguistic transition thereby inserted Gikuyu into the global network of a "third world literature." Translation was thereby the means through which Ngũgĩ also resolved one aspect of the crisis of representation in his work. It allowed him to write for a local audience, but also allowed him to participate in global literary networks which brought the larger reach to which a writer like Senghor was committed. It would also be dominated by a continued application of a materialist historiography and, as discussed in chapter two, Fanon's notion of "combat literature." Yet the shift in the locus of oppositional politics from an anti-colonial platform to one that decried neo-colonial interests represented by what Fanon and later Ngũgĩ identified as the failures of the "national bourgeoisie," meant that the materialist notion of class analysis was now applied within the context of postcolonialism. An important textual precedent for reading a materialist historiography into a postcolonial context was Mao's *Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society* (1926). In a recent interview with Ngũgĩ, he says that "[Mao's] analysis of class society in China was helpful to me in understanding class composition" and that "it was a way of looking at class structure in a non-industrialized [context]." He also states that his writing of *Devil on the Cross* "also coincided with my acquaintance with the work of Mao," for example, "*Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society, On Liberalism, and On Contradiction*."¹¹⁰ Mao's reading of a materialist historiography into the context of a post-independent China produced a proliferation of terms that could be appropriated within other Third World contexts.

to the most important question for producers of imaginative literature: For whom do I write? Who is my audience? [...] The question of audience has a bearing on the next few problems for a writer: What is the subject and content of my works? From whose stand do I look at that content or not?" (Ngũgĩ, *Writers* 53-54).

¹¹⁰ In discussion with the author, September, 2014.

He distinguishes between a “comprador bourgeoisie,” “national bourgeoisie,” and even stratifies the peasantry into “rich, middle and poor.”¹¹¹ This “Sinification” of materialist historiography as an example of “symbolic Maoism” would prove useful for Ngũgĩ in his critique of Kenyan neo-colonialism.

In this sense, it is possible to read both *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* (1982) as narrative explorations of class in Kenyan society through the periodic invocations of a “symbolic Maoism.” Famously written on prison-issued toilet paper while Ngũgĩ was detained in a Kenyan prison, *Devil on the Cross* marks his first attempt at a novel in Gikuyu.¹¹² While his first work in Gikuyu, was the play, *I Will Marry When I Want*, *Devil on the Cross* is remarkable as a hybrid text full of transitions between the genres of prose, poetry and drama.¹¹³ As a novel that bends genres and breaks new linguistic ground, it is provocative that Ngũgĩ takes as his subject a class analysis of neocolonialism in post-independent Kenya. The first two-thirds of the novel is a series of stories within stories, with each character filling in his or her respective background as a member of a particular class—peasantry, working, intelligentsia, or the business elite. The repeated blending of Gikuyu proverbs and Biblical references means the novel can be read as a prolonged negotiation of cultural intertextuality, both of indigenous and European tropes.¹¹⁴ As with the novel *Petals of Blood*, the characters’ past hardships are soon found to be entangled with one another, with ultimately tragic results.

¹¹¹ See Mao Zedong, *An Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society* (1926).

¹¹² It is thereby possible to read *Devil on the Cross* as an example of prison literature.

¹¹³ “With the writing and performance of *I Will Marry When I want* in 1978, Ngũgĩ was finally able to achieve his aesthetic ambition—to overcome the gap that separated his art and his politics” (Gikandi 185).

¹¹⁴ “But if orality is what authorizes both story teller and listener in this novel, one must hasten to add that one of the reasons why *Devil on the Cross* is defined as a modern tale is the simple fact that its oral resources came from three distinct sources: Gikuyu oral discourses, biblical narratives, and contemporary urban stories. Indeed one of the most remarkable features of the Gikuyu version is the extent to which it takes the close connection between these discourses for granted, shifting from one to the other regardless of the different historical and ideological circumstances that produced them, and oblivious to the assumed opposition between tradition and modernity in African literature” (Gikandi 211-12).

The opening chapters take place in a *matutu*, which is driven by Robin Mwaura towards the town of Ilmorog—the same fictional space of *Petals of Blood*. Although he is the driver of the van, Mwaura’s ruthless interaction with one of the passengers, Wangari, foreshadows what the group will find in Ilmorog. Wangari, who does not have the money for the fare, tries to convince Mwaura to let her travel: “ ‘When we get to Ilmorog, I won’t fail to find someone to lend me the fare.’ ” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 37). Mwaura responds: “ ‘Nothing is free in Kenya. Kenya is not Tanzania or China.’ ‘Elderly one, I have never lived by the sweat of another....But if you only knew what I have seen and been through in this Nairobi of yours....’ Mwaura cut her short. ‘I don’t want any tales about one-eyed ogres. Cough up the money or get out.’ ” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 37). This exchange is similar to the invocation in *Petals of Blood*, which reads neighboring Tanzania’s experiment in socialism, *ujamaa*, through the larger imaginary of China and its involvement in building the TAZARA railway. Yet here the bus fare is not for a hypothetical migration across the border; instead it is for travel to a congregation of thieves and robbers in Ilmorog—a meeting that Wangari intends to report to the police.

Although the circumstances that have brought the characters together in Mwaura’s *matutu* vary, they are all planning to attend this meeting and have been given an invitation which reads “*The Devil’s Feast! Come and See for Yourself—A Devil Sponsored Competition To Choose Seven Experts in Theft and Robbery. Plenty of Prizes!*” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 68). This feast is soon discovered to be a congregation of Kenya’s new business elite and their international partners, what Fanon, and earlier, Mao, would call the “national bourgeoisie.” In his *Analysis*, Mao makes a distinction between a “comprador bourgeoisie,” which collaborated with colonialism prior to independence, and a “national bourgeoisie,” that continues this collaboration after independence. However, both Fanon (*Wretched*) and Ngũgĩ focus on an analysis of the

“national bourgeoisie” within postcolonial contexts. If Fanon can be read as analyzing the rise of the “national bourgeoisie” as a phenomenon across the Third World, Ngũgĩ’s text represents an application of the term within an African, and specifically, Kenyan context. For both, the “national bourgeoisie” represent an upper class that, with its roots as leaders in the anti-colonial movement, have now moved into prominent political and business positions after independence. According to Ngũgĩ, they have manipulated the signs and symbols of independence, indigenous culture and Christianity to shore up their political power, which is based on a continued collaboration with foreign actors.

The meeting in Ilmorog begins with the Master of Ceremonies reinterpreting the parable of the sower within a neocolonial context, concluding, “For unto the man of property more will be given, but from the poor man will be taken even the little that he as kept in reserve” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 85). While Senghor’s *Nocturnes* would mobilize a notion of Catholic justice in his indictment of Cold War interests of both capitalist and socialist blocs, the representation of Christianity in *Devil on the Cross* is a perversion of Christian charity. For Ngũgĩ, its invocation is used as justification for an exploitative economic model based on the manipulation of property, government office and investment. The repeated use of both Biblical and Gikuyu references, included as stories within the larger novel, produces a “parabolic aesthetic” that straddles written and oral narrative.¹¹⁵ In the mouths of Mwaura and national bourgeoisie like Gatheeci wa Kihuuha, Ngũgĩ shows how culture is mobilized according to class interest. The manipulation of signs and symbols from both indigenous and Christian culture leads to a pervasive allegorical tone, one that serves as a cultural intervention against the political designs

¹¹⁵ “The narrative opens by complicating the identity and authority of the narrative voice and then proceeds to establish a multiplicity of stories; above all, it insists on the interaction of narrators and interlocutors; the narrative exchange takes place between narrators and listeners within the fictional world of the novel, and real readers are often reduced to eavesdroppers” (Gikandi 214).

of what Ngũgĩ identifies as Kenya's national bourgeoisie. In this sense, the text's exercise in class analysis can be read as a kind of materialist proverb, one which pinpoints the contradictions inherent to the mobilization of Christian and Gikuyu tropes in service of economic exploitation.

As the Master of Ceremonies concludes his retelling of the proverb, the cave full of "thieves and robbers" erupts into applause and commentary:

"The master of ceremonies has told the truth about the unity that exists between us and foreigners. They eat the flesh and we clean up the bones...the dog that has a bone is better off than the empty-handed...but make no mistake, it is a bone with a bit of flesh on it...*That's true African socialism...Ujamaa wa Asili Kiafrika*...not like that of Nyerere and his Chinese friends, the socialism of pure envy, the *Ujamaa* that seeks to prevent a man from holding a bone...We don't want Chinese ways in our country. We want Christianity...." (Ngũgĩ, Devil 87).

This response to the Master of Ceremonies' interpretation of the parable of the sower also works within an allegorical mode. For Ngũgĩ, the national bourgeoisie's collaboration with foreign business interests is understood as a parasitic symbiosis. Content to collect economic scraps, the Kenyan elite consider that "the dog that has a bone is better off than the empty-handed" (Ngũgĩ, Devil 87). They interpret the right to possess a bone, if without meat, as a kind of "true African socialism," which is in opposition to the Chinese and Tanzanian "socialism of pure envy" (Ngũgĩ, Devil 87). This fixation with property, however altered, forms the basis for many of the ensuing stories told in the competition to award the most exploitative thief and robber.

Provocatively, the elite's imaginary of China is opposed to Christianity—a Christianity redefined according to the Master of Ceremonies interpretation. Paradoxically, it is the spread of the Chinese model, rather than the Soviet one, that is read as a threat to the economic status quo.

As the competition unfolds, the specter of Chinese communism returns as a straw man for a heated debate between two figures of the national bourgeoisie, Gatheeci wa Kihuuha and Gitutu wa Gataanguru. One aspect of the competition is to present a possible economic policy

that can exploit the population in a new way. For Gatheeci, it consists of building “houses the size of a bird’s nest” when “the famine exceeds the limits of endurance. [...] Anyone who is desperate for a place to lay his head will be forced to buy a nest from us” (Ngũgĩ, Devil 118). In his rebuttal of Gatheeci’s claim as the greatest thief and robber, Gitutu retorts:

Mr *Chairman*, that man who calls himself Gatheeci wa Kihuuha (or was it Kihihi wa Gatheeci?) wants to rouse the workers and peasants to take up arms against us. The man wants the workers to become so angry that the scales will fall from their eyes, and they will rise up against us with swords and clubs and guns. Doesn’t Gatheeci wa Kihaahu realize that our people are sick to death of taking up arms? I know what it is: the man wants to introduce Chinese-style communism into this country. (Ngũgĩ, Devil 120)

With Gitutu’s accusation, the imaginary of China is recast from the perspective of the national bourgeoisie as the undesirable result of economic policy gone wrong. Gitutu’s critique of Gatheeci is that his policy of forcing people to pay for small plots of land for shelter would exacerbate the social conditions of the country to the extent to which it would incite another revolt. Gitutu continues with the notion of “revolutionary fatigue,” namely, that after independence the people are “sick to death of taking up arms,” and what is at stake is to walk the line of exploitation without crossing it. The specter of “Chinese-style communism” is then used against Gatheeci as his policy would paradoxically bring about a turn to the Chinese model.

Gatheeci responds to Gitutu by denying that he “might be the cause of the emergence of Chinese-style communism in the country” and that why would he “accept being ruled by a party dedicated to eradicating the system of theft and robbery” only to “go back to working with [his] hands” and “eat only what has been produced by [his] sweat” (Ngũgĩ Devil 123). Gatheeci furthers his argument by asserting that it is in fact Gitutu’s “plan for grabbing all the soil and all the air in the universe that’s the *dangerous* one and the one that could spread the disease of Chinese-style communism more quickly” because “if you prevented people from breathing, what would prevent them from taking up clubs and swords and guns? Isn’t that tantamount to showing

how much you despise the masses? Better meanness that is covert: better a system of theft that is disguised by lies” (Ngũgĩ, *Devil* 120). The upshot of the entire exchange is to reveal a profound disenchantment with this incarnation of Kenyan independence. In particular, Ngũgĩ uses the irony of this exchange to articulate his notion of the “neo” in the “post.” Namely, that by manipulating the trappings of independence the national bourgeoisie maintains its stranglehold on the economy. This commitment to duplicity in political, economic and social spheres is one of the most weighted factors for the competition’s crowning of the king of “thieves and robbers.” Moreover, by identifying the Chinese model as a direct threat to the Kenyan system, Gatheci and Gitutu’s tirades serve to further the text’s implementation of a materialist historiography. Because the novel’s characters are intended to embody the world view of a particular class, this exchange demonstrates the range of possible interpretations—as either provocative alternative or demonized excess—of “symbolic Maoism.”

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s relationship to the Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers, as well as his appropriation of “symbolic Maoism.” As with the previous chapter on Senghor, it has read Ngũgĩ’s work “horizontally,” through the transnationalism of Afro-Asian solidarity and the implementation of an African imaginary of China. As such, the Bureau’s awarding of Ngũgĩ the Lotus Prize in 1973 was indicative of his attempt to situate literature as a fund of knowledge and to validate a humanism that emerged out of a specific, East African context. His deep engagement with the politics of language also helped contextualize the Bureau’s own debates concerning the use of European and indigenous languages. In this sense it is possible to read Ngũgĩ’s oeuvre as part of the Bureau’s “anti-colonial space making.”

Although the Bureau underwent its own Sino-Soviet split in 1966, this understanding of postcolonialism as a “concept of history” still informed its core cultural platform, which during the 1970s had found an African counterpoint in Ngũgĩ’s novels.

The chapter also provided a larger context for discussions of the crisis of representation in not only Kenya, but across the postcolonial world. Through the history of the Bureau, it draws a direct link between the conference at Tashkent, with its speeches by Mario de Andrade and Mao Dun, and negotiations of the crisis of representation after decolonization. While China was no longer an active member in the Bureau during Ngũgĩ’s involvement, close readings of his novels *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross* also reveal a continued engagement with Maoist literary and cultural theory. The “symbolic Maoism” in his novels are thereby evidence of how an imaginary of China was productively “misread” (Bloom) after decolonization and into what Ngũgĩ identifies as neo-colonialism. In sum, the chapter has mapped Ngũgĩ’s encounter with “symbolic Maoism” as one factor among many in his formulation of an African postcolonialism.

Conclusion

Afro-Asian Legacies: Postcolonialism as a Concept of History

This dissertation has mapped the vectors of cultural exchange between Africa and China during the Cold War. It has shown how African formulations of postcolonialism took into account a myriad of factors, which included looking beyond the colonial metropole for affirmations of a postcolonial identity. In thinking through African postcolonialism beyond the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized, this dissertation has attempted a “relational comparison,” one that explores an alternative periodization of postcolonialism.¹¹⁶ This alternative mapping shows how the Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau provided a forum through which writers from around the Third World came together to reject the colonial notion of center and periphery. In short, the Bureau defined postcolonialism *as* “concept of history.”

This definition of postcolonialism as a concept of history takes into account the relationship between historical events and the transfer of ideas through cultural exchange. This kind of comparison means political and economic histories can be productively read against and through the cultural sphere. The interrelation of these events and intellectual exchanges provides a way in which to map an interdisciplinary approach to world and postcolonial literature. It also allows for a cultural historicization of new trends in contemporary globalization and geopolitics. Specifically, China’s current and controversial presence in Africa should be properly historicized as not just a brand new economic phenomenon linked to the increasing multi-polarity of geopolitics, but rather as also a phenomenon that manipulates the political and cultural rhetoric of friendship and solidarity of the Cold War period. This multi-faceted approach would allow for a

¹¹⁶ Shu-me Shih writes: “Relational comparison is not a center-periphery model, as texts form a network of relations from wherever the texts are written, read, and circulated. In its singularity as text and interconnectedness in history, we may say, lie a literary work’s literariness and worldliness” (Shih, *Comparison* 96).

comprehensive mapping, one which takes into account these failures and successes—as well as their contestations—in order to create a “concept of history” for not only the previous, but also contemporary moment.

As such this dissertation contended the AAWB represented an alternative periodization of postcolonial literature according to South-to-South cultural exchanges, transnational humanism, pan-Africanism, and “symbolic Maoism.” Specifically, it traced the rise and fall of “symbolic Maoism” as a controversial cultural theory that African writers such as Senghor and Ngũgĩ provocatively “misread” as they articulated their own definitions of postcolonial national culture. Moreover, the dissertation argued the Bureau endorsed a “third world literature,” which brought histories of colonialism and national liberation struggles into their definition of “combat literature.” However inadequate “combat literature” was in addressing the cultural concerns of the postcolony, it provided an early crystallization of a postcolonial aesthetic. Chapters also showed how the idealism of Third World solidarity foundered upon the parochialism of Cold War *realpolitik* as well as the severe limitations of Maoist literary theory. In spite of these failures, the Bureau did identify the importance of solidarity against colonialism on not only an economic, but also a cultural front. In sum, this dissertation has read world literature through its entanglement with world history in order clarify the complex network of relations that informed African definitions of postcolonialism during the mid-twentieth century.

Appendix A

I. The strengthening of national Cultures in the Afro-Asian countries and the Development of the Afro-Asian Personality:

1. The study of the contemporary Afro-Asian literature in its confusion with the national struggle, promotion, development and preservation of national culture, adoption of progressive aspects of foreign civilisations which are beneficial to the Afro-Asian countries; struggle against the dependence on imperialist cultures.
2. The good care of the national languages and taking them on the basis of literary expression so that they may play their role in the struggle against imperialist cultural domination.
3. The revival of national art and literature, i.e., popular and traditional; the collection and study of popular literature including legends and songs.
4. The organisation of Afro-Asian exhibitions where models of popular arts are to be exhibited in order to achieve understanding and sympathy.
5. The study of the literary links among the Afro-Asian countries in the course of history to show the extent of sympathy and solidarity among them in the literary field.
6. The study of the role played by the Afro-Asian countries in the creation and development of human civilization.

Source: AA Writers: Documents on the Culture of the Struggling Afro-Asian Peoples. Indonesia National Committee for the Afro-Asian Writers' Conference. Bali, Indonesia: 1963.

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