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The caged bird sings of freedom: Maya Angelou's anti-colonial journalism in the United Arab Republic and Ghana, 1961–1965

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Abstract

At the height of the 'global 1960s', hundreds of African Americans moved to Africa in search of a refuge from racism and the opportunity to participate in anti-colonial politics. One of the most prominent figures in this movement was Maya Angelou. Nine years before the publication of her first book, Angelou lived in Egypt, then known as the United Arab Republic, where she worked as a writer, editor, and broadcaster at state-directed media institutions. She continued this work in Ghana, where her journalism and political writing situated the civil rights struggle in the United States within wider campaigns against racism and imperialism. Using previously unexamined documents from Angelou's personal archive and surviving records of her political writing, this article sheds light on the role of African American activists in global anti-colonial networks and the challenges faced by radical journalists across the decolonizing world.

Keywords: anti-colonial; African American; Egypt; Ghana; Africa

In the spring of 1964, Ghana's international radio service dedicated a series of programmes to the struggle for civil rights in the United States of America. This uncommon display of solidarity, intended for listeners across Africa, depicted campaigns in the US as part of a wider struggle against colonial rule. Depicting the United States as 'the greatest twentieth-century colonial power', the broadcasts likened segregation in the American South to apartheid in South Africa and condemned the Johnson administration's attempts to 'bomb villages and foment unrest' across the developing world. More hopefully, however, they also suggested that the support of activists across the world would inevitably play a role in the liberation of African Americans. As one broadcast in May 1964 noted, marches and direct action campaigns had already succeeded in 'putting the struggle of the Afro-American into world news' and 'extending the lines of communication' between activists in the United States and Ghana. 'For the first time in hundreds of years of oppression', it claimed, 'the Afro-American can look on his ethnic roots with pride and the knowledge that he received moral support from that source'. It also suggested that Ghana would continue to advocate for civil rights until the world united against American racism. The announcer summarized this approach by quoting a poem by Langston Hughes: 'Looks like what drives me crazy don't have no effect on you, but I'm going to keep on at it till it drives you crazy too'.¹

¹'Western Enmity for Socialist Countries', Accra in English for Africa, 6 April 1964, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, Second Series, Part IV: The Middle East and Africa* (hereafter SWB II ME) 1522/b/1; 'Malcolm X's call for African help for US Negroes', Accra Home Service in English, 15 May 1964, SWB ME/1556/b/5; 'Africa and Civil Rights in the USA', Accra in

These radical expressions of civil rights as an anti-colonial struggle are particularly remarkable because of their author, the renowned African American poet Maya Angelou. While the series was originally uncredited, Angelou's personal archive at the Schomburg Center in New York contains two scripts that are an exact match for transcripts of the Ghanaian broadcasts and credit Angelou as the original author.² These broadcasts, however, were not Angelou's only foray into anti-colonial writing. In 1960, eight years before *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* made her a household name in the United States, Angelou had been an active member of the left-wing Harlem Writers' Guild and published her first fiction writing in a communist literary magazine. In 1961 she left New York for Cairo, the capital of the United Arab Republic (UAR) and a hub of anti-colonial activity in Africa. There, Angelou worked as an editor at a state-funded magazine and broadcast over Radio Cairo's international services. She moved again in 1963, settling in Ghana – the first sub-Saharan country to achieve independence and another hub of radical activism on the continent.³ In Accra, Angelou became close to the Nkrumah regime, continuing her work as a journalist and broadcaster and working as an editor for a Pan-Africanist magazine. Drawing on her own experiences of racism and discrimination in the United States, her radical writing emphasized the connections between African and American activism, situating the struggle for civil rights within global campaigns against imperialism and discrimination.

This article contextualizes Angelou's writing within the wider world of international anti-colonial publicity. By the 1960s, broadcast and print media had both emerged as tools for radical information work. Shortwave radio services allowed African nationalists to send subversive messages into colonial territories, while smuggling and diplomatic missions allowed print propaganda to circulate widely.⁴ These initiatives were usually financed by socialist states. As Zoe LeBlanc demonstrates her work on information policy in the UAR, anti-colonial propaganda campaigns provided left-wing regimes with an opportunity to undermine their rivals and improve their own international standing.⁵ However, this does not mean that state exercised absolute control over media production. Research by James Brennan and Marissa Moorman suggests that anti-colonial broadcasters often adapted or rejected the official rhetoric of their host countries in order to secure publicity for their own causes.⁶ Ismay Milford and Jeffrey Ahlman, similarly, have helped to reconstruct the world of anti-colonial publicity by examining the

English for Africa, 30 May 1964, SWB II ME/1586/b/2; Langston Hughes, 'Evil', in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, eds. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (New York: Vintage, 1995), p. 227.

²Maya Make [Maya Angelou], 'News Talk', Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library (hereafter Sc MG 830) Box 180, Folder 2.

³Angelou claims to have moved to Ghana in July 1962, but this appears to be an error. The UAR residence card in Angelou's personal archive was renewed in August 1962, strongly suggesting that Angelou was in Cairo at the time. Her personal papers also contain letters of recommendation from Joseph Williamson which mention Angelou's upcoming journey to West Africa. These are all dated July 1963. See *Biṭāqat 'iqāmat mū'aqata – Mārjarit 'Anjalūz* (Temporary Residence Card: Marguerite Angelos), Sc MG 830, Box 1, Folder 7; Joseph Williamson to Ellen Mills-Scarborough, 10.7.1963, Sc MG 830 Box 1, Folder 7.

⁴Friederike Kind-Kovács, 'Broadcasting as Internationalism', in *The Wireless World: Global Histories of International Radio Broadcasting*, eds. Simon J. Potter, David Clayton, Friederike Kind-Kovács, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, Nelson Ribeiro, Rebecca Scales and Andrea Stanton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 134–53, at 146, 148; Adam LoBue, "'They Must Either Be Informed Or They Will Be Cominformed': Covert Propaganda, Political Literacy, and Cold War Knowledge Production in the Loyal African Brothers Series', *Journal of Global History* 18, no. 1 (2023): 68–87, at 72, 82.

⁵Zoe LeBlanc, 'Circulating Anti-Colonial Cairo: Decolonizing Information and Constructing the Third World in Egypt, 1962–1966' (PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2019), 3.

⁶James R. Brennan, 'Radio Cairo and the Decolonization of East Africa, 1953–1964', in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 173–95, at 174; Marissa J. Moorman, *Powerful Frequencies: Radio, State Power, and the Cold War in Angola, 1931–2002* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), 125. Robert Heinze has identified a similar relationship between African broadcasters and the colonial state in Zambia; see Robert Heinze, "'Men Between": The Role of Zambian Broadcasters in Decolonisation', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40, no. 3 (2014): 623–40.

precarious relationships between individual activists and their government sponsors.⁷ This article builds on their work by examining the production of anti-colonial media from an individual perspective, exploring how Angelou, as a Black American woman, navigated a complex system of contingent political labour.

This article also contributes to the rich existing literature on African American interactions with African decolonization. From the 1930s to the 1970s, many African American radicals chose to settle in Africa, with many taking up political or cultural work. Gerald Horne and Penny Von Eschen present these interactions as a form of radical place-making which allowed anti-racist activists to contextualize their own struggles within a global campaign against imperialism.⁸ Edward Curtis and Hisham Aidi have explored the role of African American activists within the politics of Afro-Asian solidarity, while Kevin Gaines and Dayo F. Gore have drawn attention to the opportunities and constraints faced by Black expatriates in postcolonial Ghana.⁹ In a valuable theoretical intervention, Maytha Alhassen depicts these networks of radical African American travellers as ‘engaged witnesses’ – activists who channelled their experiences of anti-colonial activism into new solidarities with the Afro-Asian world.¹⁰ Angelou’s experience as an anti-colonial journalist, however, demonstrates that Black radical writing could also function in the opposite direction, fostering an understanding of anti-racist activism amongst audiences of Africans. Tracing Angelou’s participation in wider anti-racist and anti-colonial circles also responds to David A. Bell’s criticism of transnational history, helping to uncover the ‘underlying logic’ behind global networks of activists.¹¹ Like the ‘engaged witnesses’ in Alhassen’s work, Angelou’s radical writing was only possible through cooperation and friendship-making within a wider political community.¹²

Previous work on Angelou’s life in the UAR has been based primarily on the fourth and fifth volumes of her autobiography, *The Heart of a Woman* and *All God’s Children Need Travelling Shoes*, which describe her life in New York, Cairo, and Accra between 1959 and 1965.¹³ Both books, however, focus on Angelou’s experiences of motherhood and belonging and only provide a slim account of her political work. To the linguist John McWhorter, this selectivity reflects Angelou’s intent to ‘sanitize’ her own image as a canonical American writer.¹⁴ Alease Brown, meanwhile, interprets the omissions more sympathetically as a concession to the ‘politics of

⁷Ismay Milford, *African Activists in a Decolonising World: The Making of an Anticolonial Culture, 1952–1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 2, 109–10, 213; Jeffrey S. Ahlman, ‘Managing the Pan-African Workplace: Discipline, Ideology, and the Cultural Politics of the Ghanaian Bureau of African Affairs, 1959–1966’, *Ghana Studies* 15/16 (2012/2013): 337–71, at 348.

⁸Gerald Horne, *Mau Mau in Harlem? The U.S. and the Liberation of Kenya* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁹Edward E. Curtis IV, ‘“My Heart is in Cairo”: Malcolm X, the Arab Cold War, and the Making of Islamic Liberation Ethics’, *The Journal of American History* 103, no. 3 (2015): 775–98; Hisham Aidi, ‘Du Bois, Ghana and Cairo Jazz: The Geo-Politics of Malcolm X’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Politics*, eds. Olivia Rutazibwa and Robbie Shillam (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 413–30; Kevin Kelly Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Kevin Gaines, ‘The Cold War and the African American Expatriate Community in Nkrumah’s Ghana’, in *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences during the Cold War*, ed. Christopher Simpson (New York: The New Press, 1998), 135–58; Dayo F. Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

¹⁰Maytha Alhassen, ‘To Tell What the Eye Beholds: A Post 1945 Transnational History of Afro-Arab “Solidarity Politics”’ (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2017), 8, 48.

¹¹David A. Bell, ‘This is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network’, *The New Republic*, 26 October 2013; LeBlanc, ‘Circulating Anti-Colonial Cairo’, 32.

¹²Alhassen, ‘To Tell What the Eye Beholds’, 48, 51; See also Elore Chowdhury and Liz Philipose, eds., *Dissident Friendships: Feminism, Imperialism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

¹³Maya Angelou, *The Heart of a Woman* (London: Virago, 1986; first published 1981); Maya Angelou, *All God’s Children Need Travelling Shoes* (London: Virago, 1987; first published 1986).

¹⁴John McWhorter, ‘Saint Maya’, *The New Republic*, 20 May 2002.

respectability' which constrained African American women's writing in the late twentieth century.¹⁵ Angelou, for her part, justified her selectivity in literary terms, explaining that she aimed to use the genre of autobiography to explore universal parts of the human experience and 'use what has happened to me . . . to see what human beings are like'.¹⁶ Consequently, Angelou's autobiographies do not provide sufficient evidence to reconstruct her radical political work. This article draws on previously under-utilized sources from her personal archive at the Schomburg Center, cross-referencing original manuscripts with archived newspapers and radio transcripts. In doing so, it identifies two radio scripts never previously attributed to Angelou and a further eight examples of her writing from Cuba, the UAR, and Ghana. It also examines surviving copies of the publications where Angelou worked as a writer and editor alongside original correspondence with Angelou's employers. Taken together, these previously unexamined sources shed light on a formative moment in Angelou's career and provide new insights into the inner workings of anti-colonial media production.

From Cairo to Harlem: early encounters with anti-colonial internationalism

Maya Angelou's work in the UAR and Ghana formed part of a wider engagement between African American radicals and anti-colonial activists in the mid-twentieth century. In the 1920s, intellectuals in North America and West Africa had engaged with Marcus Garvey's philosophy of Pan-Africanism, which advocated for decolonisation, political unification and the return of the Black diaspora to Africa.¹⁷ This symbolic entanglement inspired political action in the United States, particularly after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. In Harlem, a predominantly African American neighbourhood of New York, large crowds attempted to enlist in the Ethiopian army but were dispersed by the police.¹⁸ Transatlantic political work became more difficult in the post-war era due to the growing persecution of radical political groups by the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUA). However, the landmark Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in 1955 and the independence of Ghana in 1957 encouraged many African American activists to follow anti-colonial causes.¹⁹ In return, the growth of the civil rights movement in the US increasingly captured the attention of nationalist activists across Africa. In 1958, the All-African People's Conference in Accra featured written contributions from two African American celebrities: the singer Paul Robeson and the sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois.²⁰ By 1964, the British Foreign Office was so concerned about the money flowing from African Americans to anti-colonial groups that they considered sending clandestine propaganda to 'prominent negroes' in Harlem – a notable exception to their supposed policy of avoiding information work within the United States.²¹

¹⁵Alease Brown, 'Maya Angelou: Pan-Africanism within a Politics of Respectability', in *The Pan-African Pantheon: Prophets, Poets and Philosophers*, ed. Adekeye Adebajo (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 222–36, at 222.

¹⁶Walter Blum, 'Listening to Maya Angelou', in *Conversations with Maya Angelou*, ed. Jeffrey M. Elliot (London: Virago, 1989), 38–46, at 39; Maya Angelou in Cheryl A. Wall, 'Angelou at the Algonquin: An Interview by Cheryl A. Wall', *CLA Journal* 58, nos. 1–2 (2014): 10–19, at 11.

¹⁷Adam Ewing, *The Age of Garvey: How a Jamaican Activist Created a Mass Movement and Changed Global Black Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 5, 76, 85; Ruth Watson, 'Literacy as a Style of Life: Garveyism and Gentlemen in Colonial Ibadan', *African Studies* 73, no. 1 (2014): 1–21, at 12.

¹⁸Clare Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 206.

¹⁹Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 145–6, 152, 167–8.

²⁰The Security Aspect of the All-African People's Conference held in Accra in December 1958', Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and predecessors, The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA FCO) 141/13690/131.

²¹'Subversive links between Harlem and Africa', 1964, TNA FCO 168/1259; J. K. Drinkall to Bryatt, 14 August 1964, TNA FCO 168/1259.

Maya Angelou's first interactions with Africa, by contrast, were on behalf of the US Department of State. In 1954, while working as a nightclub singer in San Francisco, Angelou was hired by a production of *Porgy and Bess* – an opera set in an African American community in coastal South Carolina – which had accepted State Department funding to tour North America, Western Europe, and the Middle East. This tour was typical of State Department policy in the era. As Melanie Masterson Sherazi has pointed out, touring productions like *Porgy and Bess* formed an important part of American cultural diplomacy in the Cold War, and the opera's Black cast promised to undercut Soviet claims about the limited opportunities for people of colour in the United States.²² *The New York Times* certainly praised the tour for 'winning friends for the American way of life' across the world.²³ To Angelou, this opportunity for international travel was highly appealing. In the third volume of her autobiography, she recalls her excitement to work with 'a large, friendly group of Black people who sang so gloriously and lived with such passion'. However, her decision was also motivated by economic and political factors. By 1954, Angelou's 'night-club routine' was beginning to feel stale and unsustainable. She was also concerned that her association with a dance school proscribed by the HCUA might otherwise prevent her from acquiring a passport. Whilst on tour, Angelou's enthusiasm was also dampened by her growing discomfort as a cultural ambassador for the United States. In January 1955, Angelou travelled to Alexandria and Cairo with the *Porgy and Bess* cast. While in Egypt, however, Angelou claims to have struggled with a 'bitter thought . . . The very country that denied Negroes equality at home provided them with documents that made them attractive abroad'.²⁴ Like many cultural diplomats of the Cold War, Angelou was ambivalent about her work; attracted by the prospects of travel and steady pay but never fully comfortable with its underlying political ends.

Angelou's discomfort with US diplomacy eventually encouraged her to publish her first fiction writing. Angelou moved to Harlem in 1959 in search of singing work. Through her friends, the anti-racist activists John and Grace Killens, Angelou joined the Harlem Writers' Guild (HWG) – an organization of African American writers which had quickly come to function as a literary arm of the civil rights movement. These political connections inspired Angelou to begin working as a civil rights activist. In June 1960, after organizing a successful fundraiser for anti-racist causes with fellow HWG member Godfrey Cambridge, Angelou took up work as the Northern Coordinator for Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She also became involved with the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) – a pressure group which sought to improve the relationship between the United States and the revolutionary government of Cuba.²⁵ In July 1960, these interests converged with the publication of Angelou's first fiction writing, the Spanish-language '*Entre Memphis y Cleveland*', in the Cuban literary magazine *Lunes de Revolución*.²⁶

The significance of this first publication has typically been overlooked. McWhorter is one of a few scholars to acknowledge Angelou's association with 'an obscure Cuban journal of Marxism', but this is an unfair characterization.²⁷ *Lunes de Revolución* was the weekly literary supplement to *Revolución*, one of two official newspapers of the Cuban regime. By 1960, it was the most widely read literary magazine in the Latin American world and had a larger total circulation than *The New York Review of Books*.²⁸ The large number of contributions by HWG and FPCC members in

²²Melanie Masterson Sherazi, 'Maya Angelou on the Road with Porgy and Bess in Cold War Italy', *Modernism/modernity* 4, cycle 3 (2019), https://modernismmodernity.org/forums/posts/porgy-and-bess-cold-war-italy?fbclid=IwAR118I_RxfKUC8h3pz3dIrNV3e_RE-TRwKtggV-8ND2UXBhcVqJ9KD8VsNg.

²³'Porgy and Bess', *The New York Times*, 1 October 1955, 18.

²⁴Maya Angelou, *Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry like Christmas* (London: Virago, 1985; first published 1976), 132–3, 143–4, 228.

²⁵Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 30–31, 42, 66, 87, 98.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 85; Marguerite Angelos [Maya Angelou], '*Entre Memphis y Cleveland*', *Lunes de Revolución* 67 (4 July 1960): 26–7. A digitized copy of the magazine, including Angelou's story, is available at <https://dloc.com/AA00013450/00068>.

²⁷McWhorter, 'Saint Maya'.

²⁸William Luis, 'Exhuming *Lunes de Revolución*', *CR: The New Centennial Review* 2, no. 2 (2002): 253–83, at 254.

the special edition – including James Baldwin, John Henrik Clarke, and Harold Cruse – suggest that Angelou got involved with the publication as a direct result of her growing involvement in activist groups.²⁹

Like much of Angelou's writing through the 1960s, *Entre Memphis y Cleveland* fit into a wider anti-racist project. Where *Porgy and Bess* had sought to deflect Soviet claims of American racism, *Entre Memphis y Cleveland* depicts the persistence of racism in the northern United States. The story follows J. C. Henderson, an African American man travelling from Tennessee to Ohio to meet his sister in Cleveland. When the bus stops at a segregated rest stop, however, Henderson is attacked by racists who accuse him of travelling to Ohio to sleep with white women. Henderson fights back, barely escaping with his life and warning another black character to escape before he is targeted too.³⁰ While censorship prevented the short story from being distributed in United States, a letter to *Lunes de Revolución* suggests that copies of the special edition were smuggled into Harlem and read by small communities of radicals.³¹ In this sense, Angelou's first political writing allowed her to engage directly with a transnational political project aimed at undermining the liberal internationalism embodied by productions like *Porgy and Bess*.

These early experiences of activism help to demonstrate Maya Angelou's developing political thought. In 1954, the prospect of travel and stable pay had encouraged her to take up work as a cultural ambassador for the US Department of State, but she had quickly grown uncomfortable with the prospect of representing a country which denied civil rights to its own citizens. In Harlem, Angelou developed an interest in more radical political currents, culminating in the publication of her first short fiction in a communist literary journal. Ultimately, participation in cultural and social networks like the HWG and the FPCC provided Angelou with the means to develop her voice as an anti-racist writer.

From Harlem to Cairo: Vusumzi Make and the African Association

Over time, these social networks would also introduce Angelou to the wider world of anti-colonial politics. In September 1960, the Fifteenth Session of the United Nations General Assembly brought a variety of socialist and postcolonial leaders to New York. When Fidel Castro abandoned his midtown hotel to stay at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, Angelou and the FPCC were among the radicals who gathered to pay respects to the revolutionary leader.³² The independence of sixteen new African states in 1960 also raised hopes for a 'Year of Africa' at the United Nations, and this idea was given political weight in December with the declaration that 'an end must be put to colonialism and all practices of segregation and discrimination associated therewith'.³³ Most significantly for Angelou, the General Assembly also attracted a delegation from the South African United Front (SAUF), a short-lived alliance between various radical anti-apartheid groups

²⁹James Baldwin, 'El ghetto de Harlem', *Lunes de Revolución* 67 (4 July 1960): 9–11; John Henrik Clarke, 'Transición en el cuento negro norteamericano', *Lunes de Revolución* 67 (4 July 1960): 17–18; Harold Cruse, 'El arte negro y el arte occidental', *Lunes de Revolución* 67 (4 July 1960): 12–14.

³⁰Angelos [Angelou], 'Entre Memphis y Cleveland'.

³¹John Clark, 'Carta de un Negro Americano', *Lunes de Revolución* 73 (15 August 1960): 31, digitized at <https://dloc.com/AA00013450/00074/pdf>. It is possible that this writer was John Henrik Clarke himself, suggesting that the magazine circulated through the HWG and FPCC.

³²James Booker, 'Is Castro Convertible?', *New York Amsterdam News*, 24 September 1960, 1; Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 95, 96.

³³Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 73; 'Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples', www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-granting-independence-colonial-countries-and-peoples.

including the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC).³⁴ At a party hosted by John and Grace Killens, Angelou was introduced to Vusumzi Make, a charismatic member of the PAC delegation. Feeling an immediate romantic connection, Angelou and Make met several times over the course of the SAUF delegation's stay to New York. In the winter of 1960–61, Make invited Angelou to stay at his north London home while he made arrangements for a new permanent base for the SAUF. According to Angelou, the two never married but decided to refer to each other as husband and wife – an arrangement which would last for the subsequent two years.³⁵

Over the next few months, Angelou began to frame her own experiences within a global struggle against imperialism. In January 1961, as Make began a tour of Europe, South Asia, and Africa with the SAUF, Angelou returned to New York and continued her work as an activist.³⁶ From a new apartment in midtown Manhattan, Angelou played a leading role in the newly founded Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage (CAWAH), a group of around fifty members opposed to both European colonialism and supposed 'Uncle Toms' within the civil rights movement.³⁷ Maintaining that 'what happens in Africa affects every black American', CAWAH joined Malcolm X in a march on the UN General Assembly in February 1961 in protest against the murder of Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba.³⁸ Toward the end of 1961, however, Angelou discovered that Make had fallen behind on rent for their shared apartment. In response, Make suggested that Angelou and her son Guy leave the New York and join him in Cairo. By that point, Make had become a prominent PAC delegate at the African Association, an organization of anti-colonial activists sponsored by the UAR government. Faced with the prospect of eviction, Angelou had little choice but to accept. A residence card in Angelou's personal archive reveals that she, Make, and Guy moved to a state-subsidised apartment at 4 Ahmed Heshmat Street, directly opposite the African Association offices.³⁹

Make's position at the African Association reflected the UAR's wider policy of support for anti-colonial nationalism. At first, President Gamal Abdul Nasser had used the African Association to sponsor scholarships for African students as a form of cultural diplomacy. Over time, however, the UAR's increasingly anti-imperialist ethos transformed the Association into a hub for anti-colonial exiles from across the continent. By 1961, it was home to delegations from some fifteen anti-colonial parties and dominated radical nationalists whose views aligned with those of the Nasser regime.⁴⁰ For activists like Make, this arrangement offered a level of access and mobility which was impossible under the confines of apartheid rule.⁴¹ Perhaps the most significant advantage, however, was access to the UAR's expansive information system. Stipends from the UAR government allowed PAC delegates in Cairo to publish a newsletter, *Africanist News and Views*, and place articles into the official African Association journals *Nahdat Afriqiyah* (*African*

³⁴Matthew Graham, 'Campaigning Against Apartheid: The Rise, Fall and Legacies of the South Africa United Front 1960–1962', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46, no. 6 (2018), 1148–1170, at 1149; 'UN Warned of Uprising', *The New York Times*, 17 November 1960, 30.

³⁵Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 106–8, 113–19, 133.

³⁶Graham, 'Campaigning against Apartheid', 1157.

³⁷Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 143; Peter Kihss, 'Negro Extremist Groups Step Up Nationalist Drive', *The New York Times*, 1 March 1961, 25.

³⁸Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), 189; Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 147, 150.

³⁹*Biṭāqat 'iqāmat mū'aqata – Mārjarit 'Ānjalūz*; Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 140, 205, 209; Helmi Sharawy, *Sīrat miṣriyyat 'afriqiyya* (*An Egyptian-African Biography*) (Alexandria: El Ain, 2019), 89.

⁴⁰Reem Abou-El-Fadl, 'Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub: Infrastructures of Solidarity and the 1957 Cairo Conference', *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1 (2019): 157–92, at 162, 163; Muhammad Fayek *'Abd al-Nāṣir wa-l-thawrat al-'afriqiyya* (*Abdul Nasser and the African Revolution*) (Beirut: Dar Al Wahda, 1984), 58.

⁴¹Abou-El-Fadl, 'Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub', 162; Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 88.

Renaissance) and *al-Rābiṭat al-Āfriqiyah* (*The African Association*).⁴² African Association delegates were also permitted to delegate members to broadcast over Radio Cairo, the UAR's extensive international radio service.⁴³ By 1962, for example, the ANC was producing a weekly programme in English and Sotho under the title *Elezwi Labantu* (*Voice of the People*).⁴⁴

In his personal account of the work of the African Association, Nasser's African Affairs Advisor Mohamed Fayek recalls that this anti-colonial publicity was intended to inform Africans of new developments across the continent and thus cement the UAR's place within a 'comprehensive African revolution'.⁴⁵ Publications like *Nahḍat Āfriqiyah* certainly promised to foster solidarity and 'familiarity amongst Africans' while *Africanist News and Views* consistently framed the anti-apartheid struggle as part of a continental campaign against imperialism.⁴⁶ However, this media system also served as a form of publicity for the Nasser regime and tended to follow government lines.⁴⁷ While memoirs by African Association members claim that activists were given 'complete independence', intelligence files suggest that they nevertheless worked under the close supervision of Fayek and the Ministry of the Interior.⁴⁸ Radio Cairo, too, reserved the right to increase and decrease broadcasting hours according to the changing political interests of the Nasser regime.⁴⁹

This ambiguity was reflected in Angelou's own experiences with the media. After several months in Cairo, the feminist journalist Hanifa Fathy interviewed Angelou for a state-controlled newspaper.⁵⁰ The subsequent article, entitled 'I Came to Cairo to Escape Racist Segregation', describes Angelou's work with Martin Luther King and her experiences of racism in the US. These comments are remarkably frank, especially given the political context. The relationship between the US and UAR warmed between 1962 and 1963, and the Nasser government had promised to tone down criticism of the US in the media as a concession to the Kennedy administration.⁵¹ In the interview, however, Angelou framed her criticism of the US within praise for the UAR, contrasting her experiences of racism at home with her warm welcome in Cairo and making special reference to the 'crazy joy' when Nasser visited Harlem in 1960.⁵² Significantly, she also chose not to mention the discrimination she experienced in the UAR. Despite the UAR government's official commitment to anti-racism, many Egyptians continued to discriminate against dark-skinned people.⁵³ Maytha Alhassen's research reveals that Angelou was in fact the subject of racist catcalling.⁵⁴ In this sense, calculated appeals to the interests of the Nasser regime

⁴²LeBlanc, 'Circulating Anti-Colonial Cairo', 102. Some digitized copies of *Africanist News and Views* are available at www.sahistory.org.za/collections/101218.

⁴³Sharawy, *Sīrat miṣriyyat 'āfriqiyya*, 145.

⁴⁴'Cairo Radio's Programme in Sesuto', Cairo Home Service, 24 July 1962, SWB II ME/1004/b/3; 'Cairo Radio on the Struggle in South Africa', Cairo in English for East, Central and South Africa, 11 August 1962, SWB II ME/1020/b/2.

⁴⁵(*al-thawrat al-'āfriqiyyat al-shāmila*), in Fayek, *Abd al-Nāsir wa-l-thawrat al-'āfriqiyya*, 47.

⁴⁶Abou-El-Fadl, 'Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub', 167; 'Tenth Anniversary of Sharpeville', *Africanist News and Views*, March 1970, 1–2.

⁴⁷Fayek, *Abd al-Nāsir wa-l-thawrat al-'āfriqiyya*, 59.

⁴⁸Suleiman Malik, quoted in *Unser Leben vor der Revolution und Danach – Maisha Yetu Kabla ya Mapinduzi na Baadaye*, eds. Sauda A. Barwani, Regina Feindt, Ludwig Gerhardt, Leonhard Harding, and Ludger Wimmelbucker (Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe, 2003), 50; 'Kenya Office Connections with the Kenya Office, Cairo', TNA FCO 141/6291/75/1.

⁴⁹Sharawy, *Sīrat miṣriyyat 'āfriqiyya*, 107.

⁵⁰Hanifa Fathy, *Ājāt 'ilā al-Qāhirat hrbān min al-tafriqat al-'unṣuriyya* ('I Came to Cairo to Escape Racist Segregation'), Sc MG 830 Box 1, Folder 7. By 1962, all newspapers in the UAR were forced to follow editorial lines set by the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance; see Sonia Dabous, 'Nasser and the Egyptian Press', in *Contemporary Egypt through Egyptian Eyes: Essays in Honour of Professor P.J. Vatikiotis*, ed. Charles Tripp (London: Routledge, 1993), 100–21, at 106–7.

⁵¹Nathan J. Citino, *Envisioning the Arab Future: Modernization in US–Arab Relations, 1945–1967* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 212, 226–7.

⁵²(*al-farhat al-junūnih*), in Fathy, *Ājāt 'ilā al-Qāhirat hrbān min al-tafriqat al-'unṣuriyya*.

⁵³For a historical overview, see Eve Troutt-Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 187, 209.

⁵⁴Maytha Alhassen, 'To Tell What the Eye Beholds', 272.

allowed Angelou to share her experiences of American racism, but constrained her ability to speak about the same issues in the UAR.

In this sense, Angelou's move to the UAR was a turning point in her career as an activist. In New York, working with CAWAH had encouraged Angelou to situate her own anti-racist thought within a global campaign against imperialism. In Cairo, she drew on the same rhetoric to explain the civil rights struggle to a new audience in the nationalist press. As ever, this work was strongly influenced by political and economic factors. Angelou left the United States because of an unstable financial situation and catered her activism in Cairo to the interests of the Nasser regime. However, her interview with Fathy suggests that she also learned to work around the constraints of an authoritarian press. Like the activists in Brennan and Moorman's work, Angelou could draw on an existing nationalist vocabulary to bring attention to her own political ideals.

Nice women don't work: anti-colonial journalism in the United Arab Republic

Living in Cairo provided Angelou with new opportunities for anti-colonial writing. Ultimately, however, her transition from activist to journalist was a difficult one. Make initially resisted Angelou's attempts to find a job, claiming that 'nice women don't work' and suggesting that her career could undermine his own social position.⁵⁵ As a result, Angelou was forced to live the life of a high society wife, becoming close with the community of diplomats and exiles in Cairo and forming a particularly close bond with Liberian chargé d'affaires Joseph Williamson. After several months, however, Angelou discovered that Make had once again burned through the family finances. In the summer of 1962, she began looking for work which could supplement their stipend from the African Association.⁵⁶

To do so, she turned to a personal friend – David Du Bois, son of the communist activist Shirley Graham and stepson of the sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois.⁵⁷ By this point, David Du Bois had been working as an anti-colonial journalist for several years. As a student in China, he had briefly worked as a writer and broadcaster for Radio Peking. Over time, however, he realized that he was 'neither willing nor able to accept [his] primary role in life as a propagandist for the cause of New China'.⁵⁸ Having become interested in 'the general area of propaganda in the interest of African freedom', Du Bois emigrated to Cairo in August 1960 and began writing for a variety state-owned newspapers.⁵⁹ By June 1961, he was working with Radio Cairo to produce *Africa Marches Together*, a programme for African audiences dedicated to anti-colonial politics and news commentaries.⁶⁰ In July 1962, he also became the unofficial editor of the *Arab Observer*, an English-language magazine with international distribution which was intended to be the UAR equivalent to publications like *Newsweek* and *Time*.⁶¹ With David Du Bois' support, Angelou was hired as the Africa Editor at the *Arab Observer*, seemingly around the time of the magazine's relaunch in June 1962.⁶² Appreciating the rapid pace of the *Arab Observer* offices, she began researching, writing, and editing articles on African politics, drawing on Make's wide knowledge

⁵⁵Judith Rich, 'Westways Women: Life Is for Living', in *Conversations with Maya Angelou*, ed. Jeffrey M Elliot (London: Virago, 1989), 77–85, at 80.

⁵⁶Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 216, 221–2, 225, 235.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 221; Blum, 'Listening to Maya Angelou', 80.

⁵⁸David Graham Du Bois, quoted in LeBlanc, 'Circulating Anti-Colonial Cairo', 192; Laurence Moore to Maya Angelou, 10 April 1975, Sc MG 830 Box 20, Folder 24; 'Inside Labour: Malcolm X, Calling for Violence, Meets with Communists in Cairo', 8 April 1964, FBI Records: The Vault, [hereafter FBIV] Q 100 399321-A, Section 2: 'Malcolm X Little', 22 March 1964–9 February 1965.

⁵⁹Aidi, 'Du Bois, Ghana and Cairo Jazz', 413, 426; LeBlanc, 'Circulating Anti-Colonial Cairo', 192.

⁶⁰LeBlanc, 'Circulating Anti-Colonial Cairo', 202–3; 'Cairo Broadcasts to Africa', Cairo in English to East, Central and South Africa, 11 September 1962, SWB II ME/1053/b/6; 'Cairo Broadcasts to Africa', Cairo in English to East, Central and South Africa, 18.9.1962, SWB II ME/1060/b/1.

⁶¹LeBlanc, 'Circulating Anti-Colonial Cairo', 141, 203.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 201; Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 223, 230.

and contacts to gather news from across the continent. This process reflected the UAR's broader approach to African publicity, which drew on nationalist networks and the African Association to find reliable journalists and news items for their own articles and broadcasts.⁶³

The close ties between the *Arab Observer* and the Nasser government sometimes forced Angelou to cater her writing to the needs of the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance. In one chapter of *The Heart of a Woman*, she describes learning how to create effective propaganda, disguising her own political stances 'with such subtlety that the reader would think the opinion his own'.⁶⁴ Angelou was also acutely aware of her status as an African American woman in an office dominated by Egyptian men. At times, Angelou's critics claimed that her work at the Africa Desk was only as a proxy for Make and the PAC. 'It really was terrifying', Angelou claimed in a later interview, 'that each time I spoke, each time the magazine came out, there was a question of: was that my point of view, or was I speaking for my husband?'⁶⁵ After the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, too, she claims that anti-American hostility in the *Arab Observer* offices 'rendered [her] odious' to her co-workers.⁶⁶ In this sense, working as an editor forced Angelou to negotiate complex political dynamics from a position of economic and social insecurity. While editorial work allowed Angelou to position herself as an expert on African affairs, it also made her reliant on the continued support of the UAR government as a sponsor of anti-colonial writing.

Within a few weeks of starting work at the *Arab Observer*, Angelou also began writing and announcing for Radio Cairo's international services. As with her print journalism, this work was motivated in part by economic insecurity. Angelou recalls that she was paid four Egyptian pounds for each script she wrote and was paid a further pound if she narrated the scripts herself.⁶⁷ However, it also built on her growing experience as an anti-colonial journalist. By 1962, Radio Cairo had become one of the largest international broadcasters in the region. Producing programmes for sub-Saharan Africa in eleven languages, including Swahili, Hausa, Lingala, and Arabic, the service presented the UAR as a leader of the Afro-Asian world and campaigned for the continent's 'complete freedom without interference' by communists and colonizers alike.⁶⁸ This anti-colonial rhetoric proved popular among small audiences of African nationalists – but also it proved deeply concerning to many colonial officials, who interpreted the service as a 'major weapon of Egyptian subversion' and attempted to undermine its claims through clandestine propaganda networks.⁶⁹ While Angelou's biographies do not reveal many details about her work, it seems most likely that she contributed to the service's English-language broadcasts to Europe and Africa. One candidate is David Du Bois' programme, *Africa Marches Together*, which frequently drew on news reports from US publications to depict Africa 'rising against tyranny' and '[standing] together in the struggle for freedom'. In late 1962, the programme produced a detailed documentary series on South African history that may have drawn on information provided by

⁶³Sharawy, *Sirat mişriyyat 'afriqiyya*, 145.

⁶⁴Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 233, 234.

⁶⁵Rich, 'Westways Women', 81.

⁶⁶Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 254. Du Bois also faced hostility from coworkers because of his nationality; see LeBlanc, 'Circulating Anti-Colonial Cairo', 203.

⁶⁷Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 241, 252.

⁶⁸Douglas Boyd, *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of Radio and Television in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 28; 'Zanzibari African Leaders' Desire to Introduce Communism', Voice of Free Africa in Swahili, 3 March 1961, SWB II ME/582/b/2; 'Communism in Africa and Kenyatta's Release', Voice of Free Africa in Swahili, 10 March 1961, SWB II ME/588/b/1.

⁶⁹Brennan, 'Radio Cairo', 176, 180; Simon M. W. Collier, 'Countering Communist and Nasserite Propaganda: The Foreign Office Information Research Department in the Middle East and Africa, 1954–1963' (PhD diss., University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, 2013), 137, 140; R. G. Turnbull to I. Macleod, 8 September 1960, TNA FCO 141/17888. For more detail on the response of 'nervous states' to anti-colonial broadcasts, see Moorman, *Powerful Frequencies*, 53.

Make and the PAC.⁷⁰ It is also possible, although less likely, that Angelou's connections with anti-apartheid networks in Cairo put her in contact with the producers of *Elezwi Labantu*. The service's lead announcer Mzwandile Piliso had once been Make's counterpart at the SAUF, although sources suggest he had little respect for his former colleague.⁷¹ Like *Africa Marches Forward*, Piliso's broadcasts presented apartheid South Africa as a 'police and fascist state', with broadcasts frequently suggesting that Africans follow the example of Algeria and seize control of the government by force.⁷²

At the *Arab Observer* and Radio Cairo, therefore, Angelou continued to give vocal support to anti-racist and national liberation campaigns. In contrast to her previous writing, however, this work was predominantly based in a radical vision of anti-colonial nationalism and made little mention of her own experiences of the civil rights struggle. This reflected the influence of the UAR's Ministry of National Guidance, but it also reflected her growing integration into radical social networks like the African Association. Despite these social connections, however, Angelou also had to contend with consistent discrimination at the workplace on the grounds of her gender and nationality. In this sense, Angelou's political journalism in the UAR was a continual negotiation with power that balanced her identity as an African American woman with her access to radical nationalist networks.

Revolutionary return: civil rights and solidarity politics in postcolonial Ghana

By the summer of 1963, Angelou's life in Cairo was drawing to a close. With her marriage to Make breaking down, and her residence permit close to expiration, she began looking for work abroad. West Africa was her first choice – in part because her son Guy had moved to Accra to study at the University of Ghana, and in part because she believed that living in the sub-Saharan region would allow the pair to live and work 'without being influenced by racial discrimination'.⁷³ Armed with a letter of recommendation from her friend Joseph Williamson, which emphasized her skill as a journalist and her support for African nationalism, Angelou soon secured a position at the Liberian Department of Information.⁷⁴ Ultimately, however, she would not take up the job. After Guy was hospitalized in a car accident, Angelou decided to settle in Ghana, where she found work as a dance instructor and administrator at the University of Ghana's Institute of African Studies.⁷⁵

At her new home in Accra, Angelou became involved in a large and politically active community of African American expatriates. Ghana had long been a source of fascination for civil rights activists in the United States, and the emigration of W. E. B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham to Accra in 1961 transformed the city into a magnet for African American radicals.⁷⁶ By 1963, this community had grown to include the historian Sylvia Boone, the trade unionist Vicki Garvin and the writer Julian Mayfield, a friend of Angelou's who had appeared alongside her in *Lunes de*

⁷⁰'Cairo Broadcasts to Africa', Cairo in English to East, Central and South Africa, 4 December 1962, SWB II ME/1125/b/1; 'Cairo Broadcasts to Africa', Cairo in English to East, Central and South Africa, 11 December 1962, SWB II ME/1131/b/1.

⁷¹Vladimir Shubin, 'Comrade Mzwai', in *One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today*, eds. Arianna Lissoni, Jon Soske, Natasha Erlank, Noor Nieftagodien, and Omar Badsha (Johannesburg: Wits University Press 2012), 255–74, at 256–7. The SAUF was officially disbanded in March 1962.

⁷²'The Africans' Struggle Against Verwoerd', Cairo in English to East, Central and South Africa, 4 August 1962, SWB II ME/1014/b/1–3; 'Cairo Radio's South Africa Talk', Cairo in English to East, Central and South Africa, 15 September 1962, SWB II ME/1050/b/2; 'Conditions of Africans in South Africa', Cairo in English to East, Central and South Africa, 28 July 1962, SWB II ME/1009/b/2.

⁷³Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 255.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*; Joseph Williamson to E. Reginald Townsend, 10 July 1963, Sc MG 830 Box 1, Folder 7.

⁷⁵Angelou, *Heart of a Woman*, 268; Angelou, *All God's Children*, 16–17, 33; Leslie Alexander Lacy, *The Rise and Fall of a Proper Negro* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 176.

⁷⁶Gerald Horne, *Black & Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 344; Gaines, *African Americans in Ghana*, 78ff, 141.

Revolución in 1960.⁷⁷ Like Angelou in Cairo, many of these expatriates found work in Ghana's state-controlled media. Mayfield and Boone worked for newspapers and radio services while Graham directed Ghana's nascent television network.⁷⁸ President Kwame Nkrumah, like Nasser in Egypt, had urged the press to 'present and carry out our revolutionary purpose', acting as 'a weapon . . . to overthrow colonialism and imperialism and to assist total African independence'.⁷⁹ Unlike the UAR, however, this vision of anti-colonial nationalism involved sharp criticism of the United States and broad solidarities with the civil rights movement. This was a popular sentiment amongst Ghana's African American community. As Mayfield reminisced in a letter to Angelou in 1973, working in Ghana had offered him the opportunity 'to contribute in one's own field to the nation's objectives' alongside 'the satisfaction of not having to put up with the bullshit of white power twenty-four hours a day'.⁸⁰ Echoing Marcus Garvey, Angelou referred to the community as 'revolutionist returnees' – activists whose return to a symbolic motherland was the ultimate expression of a shared historical destiny.⁸¹

Before long, Angelou began working for Ghana's revolutionary media. Shortly after arriving in Accra, she arranged an interview with T. D. Baffoe, editor of the government-controlled *Ghanaian Times*.⁸² Already familiar with Angelou's anti-colonial work in the *Arab Observer*, Baffoe hired her to write a three hundred word article on 'America, capitalism and racial prejudice' which was published the subsequent week.⁸³ Newspaper archives give a strong impression of Angelou's work in the period. On the eve of the March on Washington in August 1963, for example, she helped to organize a solidarity protest outside the US Embassy in Accra. The next day, the *Ghanaian Times* published a large picture of Angelou and Mayfield outside the Embassy which was presented as evidence that civil rights had attracted sympathy 'throughout the world'.⁸⁴ The protest also attracted the attention of *Muhammad Speaks*, the official newspaper of the Nation of Islam, which published a quote from Angelou claiming that that 'the Afro-American struggle is inextricably linked with the battle of Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans against every form of imperialism and neo-colonialism'.⁸⁵ Manuscripts in Angelou's personal archive also suggest that she was a regular contributor to the women's section of the newspaper, 'Mainly For Women', writing articles that praised the 'phenomenal strides' made by women in the workplace and as educators.⁸⁶ In this sense, Angelou's journalism in Accra reversed the trend set in Cairo. Within Ghana's radical information regime, Angelou's gender and her experiences in the civil rights movement were not inconvenient constraints, but rather opportunities to situate the struggle for civil and social rights within global anti-imperialist campaigns.

At times, however, emerging anti-American sentiments in the Nkrumah government appear to have influenced Angelou's work. In February 1964, for example, she wrote an article for the *Ghanaian Times* on the connections between civil rights and anti-colonial activism in Africa.

⁷⁷Lacy, *Rise and Fall*, 175; Angelou, *All God's Children*, 8; Julian Mayfield, 'Los Ultimos Dias de la Calle Duncan', *Lunes de Revolución* 67 (4 July 1960): 24–5.

⁷⁸Gaines, *African Americans in Ghana*, 141, 143, 164; Sylvia Boone to Maya Angelou, 28 January 1966, Sc MG 830 Box 14, Folder 7.

⁷⁹George Roberts, *Revolutionary State-Making in Dar es Salaam: African Liberation and the Global Cold War, 1961–1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 203–4.

⁸⁰Julian Mayfield to Maya Angelou, 9 June 1973, Sc MG 830 Box 33, Folder 7.

⁸¹Angelou, *All God's Children*, 18, 23.

⁸²By 1963, the *Ghanaian Times* was one of only two newspapers in Ghana and its editorial line was strongly influenced by the Ghana News Agency, Press Secretariat and Ministry of Information – see Jennifer Hasty, *The Press and Political Culture in Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 34.

⁸³Angelou, *All God's Children*, 32, 33.

⁸⁴'Give Afro-Americans Civil Rights', *Ghanaian Times*, 29 August 1963.

⁸⁵Maya Angelou Make [Maya Angelou], quoted in 'What Africa Did on the "March" day', *Muhammad Speaks* 3, no. 1 (1963).

⁸⁶Maya Make [Maya Angelou], 'Women in the Public Eye', Sc MG 830 Box 180, Folder 3; Maya Make [Maya Angelou], 'Women as Educators', Sc MG 830 Box 180, Folder 3.

Arguing that the ‘atmosphere of freedom’ prevailing in the United States was ‘won out of the perseverance and solid planning of the African masses’, the article argued that ‘the African American . . . must stand firm with his brothers against their mutual enemy for their mutual benefit’. However, it also referred to the dangers of African Americans as ‘Judases, Quislings [and] Uncle Toms’ in Ghana, singling out African American employees of the State Department as a threat to Ghanaian security.⁸⁷ This harsh stance reflected a moment of particular insecurity in the expatriate community. In January 1964, Nkrumah had survived an assassination attempt on the steps of the State House in Accra. In the increasingly paranoid atmosphere that followed, Angelou recalled, political commentators began witch hunts against African Americans in Ghana, accusing the United States of using the expatriate community to ‘infiltrate Africa and sabotage [Ghana’s] struggle’.⁸⁸ A memoir by historian David Levering Lewis agrees, recalling that the Ghanaian media began obsessively denouncing ‘enemies within the country and imperialist plots from without’.⁸⁹ Just over a month later, an African American employee of the United States Embassy in Accra raised the American flag after it was torn down by protestors. The offending employee, Adger Emerson Player, was subsequently expelled from the country alongside six academics.⁹⁰

Angelou claims to have kept silent during this period, aiming to ‘become invisible and avoid the flaming tongues’. Her autobiographies are critical of the snobbery of African American employees of the State Department, but highly sympathetic to the victims of discrimination by the Nkrumah regime.⁹¹ Her article on ‘Judases’ at the State Department, by contrast, suggests that she may have participated a form of anti-American publicity in order to protect her own position. As an employee of the state-controlled media, Angelou certainly risked redundancy or even expulsion from the country if she refused to follow the government line.⁹² As the author Leslie Lacy notes in his own memoirs of life in Accra, African Americans with ties to the Nkrumah regime were often encouraged to act as ‘watchdogs in the community’ and held responsible for any dissent within it.⁹³ While Angelou was given relative freedom to criticize the United States government, her own political vulnerability in Ghana also forced her to act as the enforcer of the government’s ideological line.

In this sense, Angelou’s work in the Ghanaian press continued her delicate negotiation with state power. As in Cairo, her personal networks of friends allowed her to take up a position as an anti-colonial political commentator. In Accra, the politics of the Nkrumah regime proved a more fertile ground for Angelou’s perspectives about civil rights as an element of a wider anti-colonial struggle. However, her experiences in Ghana also help to demonstrate the political vulnerability of expatriate journalists as anti-colonial writers. While Angelou was given considerable freedom to criticize racism in the United States, she also faced pressure to denounce ‘subversive’ African Americans in a way which seems to have run contrary to her personal beliefs.

From script to transcript: broadcast journalism and the problem of censorship

Angelou continued her work as a radio journalist in Accra, producing scripts for the External Service of the Ghanaian Broadcasting System (GBS). Like Radio Cairo, GBS supported radical anti-colonial activity and praised its host nation as a leader of the anti-colonial world. As Nkrumah explained at the inauguration of the External Service in October 1961, Ghana’s broadcasts were intended as an ‘assault . . . against the ramparts of colonialism and imperialism in

⁸⁷Maya A. Make [Maya Angelou], ‘The Afro-American must know this’, *Ghanaian Times*, 15 February 1964.

⁸⁸Angelou, *All God’s Children*, 80.

⁸⁹David Levering Lewis, ‘Ghana, 1963: A Memoir’, *The American Scholar* 68, no. 1 (1999): 39–60, at 56.

⁹⁰Emmanuella Amoh, ‘The Dilemma of Diasporic Africans: Adger Emerson Player and Anti-Americanism in Kwame Nkrumah’s Ghana’, *African Studies Review* 63, no. 3 (2022), 544–67, at 545, 552, 553.

⁹¹Angelou, *All God’s Children*, 23, 80.

⁹²Amoh, ‘Dilemma of Diasporic Africans’, 548.

⁹³Lacy, *Rise and Fall*, 188. See also Lewis, ‘Ghana, 1963’, 47.

all their forms' which would 'continue to fight for our complete emancipation, assisting in the struggle for the total liberation of the African states'.⁹⁴ To this end, the GBS External Service produced broadcasts in Arabic, Bambara, English, French, Hausa, Swahili, and Portuguese, attracting audiences of radical nationalists which often overlapped with Radio Cairo's broadcasts.⁹⁵ In keeping with the transatlantic interests of the Ghanaian government, however, GBS also drew on the experience of African American writers to report on racism within the United States. As one announcer claimed in a broadcast to Africa, 'the people of this continent cannot but be preoccupied with the struggle of the Afro-Americans', whose activism formed part of a 'common fight for the attainment or recognition of their God-given and inalienable rights'.⁹⁶ By 1964, Mayfield, Boone, and Angelou were all employed as writers for GBS, and a letter from Make to Angelou which alludes to 'hear[ing] your voice from Lagos' implies that Angelou also continued her earlier work as an announcer.⁹⁷

Only two of Angelou's original radio scripts survive in her personal archive, both covering current events in the United States for the service's popular 'News Talk' feature.⁹⁸ BBC Monitoring reports reveal that both scripts were broadcast on the GBS African Service in 1964 – the first in April and the second in late May.⁹⁹ Together, the scripts and their monitored transcripts demonstrate Angelou's ability to promote international solidarities within a broader campaign of nationalist publicity. The April broadcast, for example, built on a *Ghanaian Times* article by the journalist and Charles Howard Wright on the poor relationship between Ghana and the Western world. Describing Wright as a 'freedom fighter', the programme criticized the US for praising 'reactionary forces' while denouncing progressive leaders and suggested that Ghana's developmental socialism would ultimately 'bring the most good to the most people'. Significantly, it also framed Nkrumah's anti-colonial policy within a global campaign of resistance to western interference ranging from Cyprus and Algeria to Cuba and Indonesia.¹⁰⁰ The May broadcast, similarly, reported on African American protests against discriminatory hiring practices at the 1964 World's Fair in New York. Emphasizing African sympathies for African American campaigns against racism, it also depicts the protests as a form of 'Positive Action' – a term which was first used for non-violent campaigns against empire in colonial Ghana.¹⁰¹ Like her work in the Ghanaian press, Angelou's broadcasts from Accra successfully balanced nationalist publicity with appeals to progressive campaigns across the world.

This work still faced significant state interference, and GBS broadcasts seem to have been strongly influenced by the shifting attitudes of the Nkrumah regime. In August 1963, for example, announcers claimed that Ghana had supported the March on Washington, suggesting that the

⁹⁴Kind-Kovács, 'Broadcasting as Internationalism', 146; Bernard Senedzi Gadzekpo, 'Ghana *Muntie*: From Station ZOY to the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation', 50, included as supplementary material to Audrey Gadzekpo, 'Tuning in to His-Story: An Account of Radio in Ghana through the Experience of B. S. Gadzekpo', *Africa* 91, no. 2 (2021): 177–94.

⁹⁵Gadzekpo, 'Ghana *Muntie*', 49; 'Reply to Questionnaire on Communist Bloc Radio Propaganda', 26 February 1964, Records created or inherited by the Foreign Office, The National Archives, London, 1110/1855.

⁹⁶Racial Discrimination in the USA', Accra in English for Africa, 30 August 1963, SWB II ME/1341/b/2.

⁹⁷Julian Mayfield, 'News Talk', Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library (hereafter Sc MG 339) Box 17, Folder 9; Vusumzi Make to Maya Angelou, 28 February 1964, Sc MG 830 Box 33, Folder 19.

⁹⁸Maya Make [Maya Angelou], 'News Talk', Sc MG 830 Box 180, Folder 2.

⁹⁹'Western Enmity for Socialist Countries', Accra in English for Africa, 6 April 1964, SWB II ME/1522/b/1; 'Africa and Civil Rights in the USA', Accra in English for Africa, 30 May 1964, SWB II ME/1586/b/2.

¹⁰⁰Maya Make [Maya Angelou], 'News Talk', Sc MG 830 Box 180, Folder 2; 'Western Enmity for Socialist Countries', Accra in English for Africa, 6 April 1964, SWB II ME/1522/b/1.

¹⁰¹Maya Make [Maya Angelou], 'News Talk', Sc MG 830 Box 180, Folder 2; 'Africa and Civil Rights in the USA', Accra in English for Africa, 30 May 1964, SWB II ME/1586/b/2; Eric Opoku Mensah, 'Collective Memory, Merging Enemies, Consistency of Word and Place: Nkrumah's Rhetorical Artefacts in the "Positive Action" Protest', *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 7 (2016–17): 21–32, at 21.

mass protest proved how far African Americans had been ‘inspired by the African revolution’.¹⁰² Less than two weeks later, however, the service attacked the leaders of the march for failing to ‘look beyond their own borders’ and participate in ‘the struggle against colonial and imperialism everywhere’.¹⁰³ A comparison of Angelou’s original scripts to transcripts of the programmes as broadcast strongly suggests that her work was edited by political agents before transmission. In Angelou’s draft of the April broadcast, for example, she refers to the West’s denigration of ‘self-imposed redeemers’. However, the phrase was cut from the final broadcast – seemingly because it the words ‘self-imposed’ could be interpreted as criticism of Nkrumah, who styled himself as the *Osagyefo* [‘Redeemer’] of Ghana. The final version of the April broadcast also added references to Nkrumah’s ‘all-consuming passion’ for Ghana, replaced a mention of Ghana’s ‘token military machine’ with a mention of its ‘military power’, and replaced one instance of ‘the West’ with a more direct reference to ‘Ghana’s enemies’. The transcript of the May broadcast, similarly, cuts the ‘certain’ when Angelou mentions that ‘certain Afro-American leaders’ are rejecting capitalism and adds several references to the importance of Positive Action. Taken individually, any of these changes would have been unremarkable. Together, however, they suggest the influence of Ghanaian censors in removing subtlety and reinforcing the nationalist outlook of GBS broadcasts.¹⁰⁴

Angelou’s work at the GBS External Service thus gave an international dimension to her work for the Ghanaian press. In broadcasts to Africa, Angelou continued her ongoing attempts to frame the civil rights movement within broader anti-colonial currents. Continual references to freedom fighters and ‘Positive Action’ played a central role in this rhetoric by redeploying the language of anti-colonial action in the context of the United States. However, reading Angelou’s scripts and transcripts side-by-side also provides important insight into the process of censorship in international broadcasting, suggesting the extent to which Angelou’s scriptwriting was edited to fit the standardized anti-colonial vocabulary of the Nkrumah regime.

Point and counterpoint: *The African Review* in late Nkrumahist Ghana

Whilst in Ghana, Angelou also began working as an editor at *The African Review*, a new state-funded magazine intended to provide a radical nationalist viewpoint on global affairs.¹⁰⁵ Much like the *Arab Observer*, the magazine’s creation reflected international political currents. By 1964, the Nkrumah government had come to suspect that Western countries were infiltrating the African nationalist movement. This concern was well-founded – intimidated by radical nationalist propaganda and concerned about the spread of communism, the US and UK were in fact providing clandestine sponsorship to moderate African nationalists through organizations like the Information Research Department and Congress for Cultural Freedom.¹⁰⁶ In response, the Ghanaian Publicity Secretariat turned once again to Ghana’s African American community. Julian Mayfield was appointed as editor-in-chief of *The African Review*, while Angelou became culture

¹⁰²‘The Washington March’, Accra in English to Africa, 28 August 1963, SWB II ME/1339/b/4.

¹⁰³‘Ghanaian Comment on US Negroes’ Campaign’, Accra in English for Africa, 8 September 1963, SWB II ME/1348/b/1.

¹⁰⁴Maya Make [Maya Angelou], ‘News Talk’, Sc MG 830 Box 180, Folder 2; ‘Western Enmity for Socialist Countries’, Accra in English for Africa, 6 April 1964, SWB II ME/1522/b/1; ‘Africa and Civil Rights in the USA’, Accra in English for Africa, 30 May 1964, SWB II ME/1586/b/2.

¹⁰⁵This magazine is not to be confused with academic journal of the same name, nor the magazine of the same name published as anti-communist propaganda by the British Foreign Office. See Alex White, ‘A Tale of Two Reviews’, *Africa is a Country*, 21 July 2023, <https://africasacountry.com/2023/07/a-tale-of-two-reviews>.

¹⁰⁶Elizabeth M. Holt, ‘Cairo and the Cultural Cold War for Afro-Asia’, in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building*, eds. Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, Mary Nolan, Marilyn Young, and Joanna Waley-Cohen (London: Routledge, 2018), 480–93, at 486; LoBue, “‘They Must Either Be Informed Or They Will Be Cominformed’”, 69.

editor and worked on seven articles for the inaugural issue.¹⁰⁷ Like her previous work, these edited articles suggest the vital importance of radical and anti-colonial ideas to Angelou's political thought. 'Point Counterpoint', for example, provides a side-by-side comparison of Martin Luther King and Frantz Fanon on the subject of violence.¹⁰⁸ Angelou had previously been sympathetic to King, but by 1964 had come to believe that Fanon and Malcolm X were 'the only two people, concerned with the trials of our lives, [who] have directed or tried to direct their speeches, essays, etc. to the oppressed people themselves'.¹⁰⁹ Angelou also edited an essay by the South African author Bessie Head on the psychological effects of apartheid which concluded that individual liberties were the only solution to the degradation of imperialism.¹¹⁰ A third article, entitled 'Woman of Africa', profiles the Liberian politician Ellen Mills Scarborough and advocates a greater role for women in African politics.¹¹¹ Scarborough was in fact an acquaintance of Angelou through Joseph Williamson, and it seems likely that this personal connection helped to facilitate the article.

As Angelou prepared for the first edition of *The African Review*, she also drew closer to Malcolm X. Like Angelou, the former spokesperson of the Nation of Islam was on a political trajectory that drew him toward African anti-colonialism. In March 1964, he and John Killens began preparations for a new Organization of Afro-American Unity [OAAU], a political body which promised to use African anti-colonial methods to address white supremacy in the United States. The following month, he left the United States to travel around Africa and the Middle East, meeting with Nasser and David Du Bois in Cairo, writing articles for *The Egyptian Gazette* and broadcasting on the Nigerian and Kenyan radio services.¹¹² Visiting Ghana in May and November 1964, Malcolm X also spent time with the African American community and became particularly close to Mayfield, Garvin and Angelou.¹¹³ These personal ties to radical expatriates evidently disturbed the FBI, who recorded rumours that Malcolm X was considering 'top propaganda job offers from Ghana and Egypt'.¹¹⁴ Ultimately, however, it was Malcolm X who persuaded Angelou to join him. Sharing Angelou's concern with radical activists becoming disconnected with real issues and talking 'over the head of the masses', Malcolm X promised to find her work in the OAAU.¹¹⁵ In 1965, therefore, Angelou left Accra for New York, aiming to continue her work for *The African Review* through correspondence with Mayfield and the other editors.

Ultimately, however, this work proved impossible. Angelou arrived in the United States on 19 February 1965, just two days before Malcolm X's assassination. The OAAU collapsed in the wake of the murder and Angelou settled in Los Angeles uncertain about her own future.¹¹⁶ Personal correspondence reveals that her work for *The African Review* continued. In August 1965, Mayfield wrote to Angelou asking for 7,000 to 10,000 words on the protests and riots against police brutality in Watts, Los Angeles.¹¹⁷ Angelou was in fact an eyewitness to the riots, and her continued friendship with Mayfield appears to have allowed the magazine to continue its work as a bridge

¹⁰⁷Gaines, *African Americans in Ghana*, 167; Angelou to Unknown, 1965, Sc MG 830 Box 1, Folder 8.

¹⁰⁸'Point Counterpoint', *The African Review* 1, no. 1 (1965), enclosed in Sc MG 830 Box 174, Folder 4. See also Gaines, *African Americans in Ghana*, 221.

¹⁰⁹Maya Angelou to Unknown, Sc MG 830 Box 1, Folder 8.

¹¹⁰Bessie Head, 'The Human Condition', *The African Review* 1, no. 1 (1965), enclosed in Sc MG 830 Box 174, Folder 4.

¹¹¹Naa Adaawa, 'Woman of Africa', *The African Review* 1, no. 1 (1965), enclosed in Sc MG 830 Box 174, Folder 4; Joseph Williamson to Ellen Mills-Scarborough, 10 July 1963, Sc MG 830 Box 1, Folder 7.

¹¹²Les Payne and Tamara Payne, *The Dead Are Arising: The Life of Malcolm X* (London: Viking, 2020), 436, 437, 439; Marable, *Malcolm X*, 364, 367; Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (London: Penguin, 1966; first published 1965), 466; 'Is Malcolm X Clueing in Africans on US?', *The Militant*, 11 January 1965, enclosed in FBIV Q 100 399321-A.

¹¹³Lacy, *Rise and Fall*, 208–9, Malcolm X, *Autobiography*, 468.

¹¹⁴Malcolm X, 14 December 1964, FBIV Q 100 399321-A.

¹¹⁵Maya Angelou, *A Song Flung Up to Heaven* (London: Virago, 2002), 6–7.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 26, 53.

¹¹⁷Julian Mayfield to Maya Angelou, 26 August 1965, Sc MG 830 Box 33, Folder 7.

between African American activism and Ghana's anti-American publicity.¹¹⁸ However, correspondence within the radical expatriate community also suggests that the relationship between African American publicists and the Ghanaian state was rapidly eroding. Financial instability was certainly a problem – Mayfield's letters allude to fighting with the Publicity Secretariat for a salary, and correspondence from David Du Bois suggests that he was never properly paid for work on behalf of the Nkrumah regime.¹¹⁹ Sylvia Boone also alludes to political hostility in a letter to Angelou, revealing that she had been singled out for criticism by Nkrumah in a cabinet meeting and subsequently 'advised' to cease work for Ghanaian newspapers and broadcasts.¹²⁰ Julian Mayfield ultimately left Ghana in January 1966, disillusioned by his experiences and hoping to return to radical activism in the United States. One month later, a successful coup against the Nkrumah regime ruptured the last of Angelou's personal ties to Ghana and *The African Review* was banned by the newly-formed National Liberation Council.¹²¹

Angelou's return to the United States, therefore, marked the end of her engagement with global anti-colonial activism. While she had initially hoped to continue her political work with the OAAU and *The African Review*, both projects ultimately proved unsustainable. With few remaining ties to activist networks, her political work was gradually eclipsed by her work as a poet and author. The first volume of Angelou's autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, became a bestseller in 1969 and propelled her toward mainstream success in the United States.

Conclusion

On 27 August 1983, Maya Angelou participated in another March on Washington – an anti-racist demonstration held on the twentieth anniversary of the original event. Earlier in the day, however, Angelou had participated in a separate celebration: a small reunion of Ghana's radical expatriate community, held on the twentieth anniversary their solidarity protest outside the US Embassy in Accra. Like the larger march, the reunion commemorated a long history of anti-racist activism. However, its participants also looked to the future, inviting speakers from the Ghanaian government and discussing plans for 'cooperative undertakings' which could promote growth and stability in their former home.¹²² The contrast between these two events demonstrates the complexity and breadth of Angelou's political life. Across her long career, Angelou acted as a popular author and a radical activist; a civil rights campaigner and an anti-colonial militant; a speaker at Bill Clinton's inauguration and a publicist for the Nasser and Nkrumah regimes.

Angelou's personal archive offers new insight into the radical dimension of her political work and helps to reconstruct her first experiences as an activist and author. In 1960, a growing interest in anti-racist activism introduced her to international issues from the Congo to Cuba. In Cairo, Angelou became closer to African nationalist networks, using her talent as a writer to produce material for anti-colonial magazines and broadcasts. She continued this work in Accra, combining her attacks on colonial power with reportage on racism in the United States. Like many anti-racist radicals of the period, from W. E. B. Du Bois and Shirley Graham to John Killens and Malcolm X, Angelou identified civil rights in the United States and anti-colonialism in Africa as a shared struggle against white supremacist rule. However, Angelou's work went beyond bearing witness to political change. Her career as a journalist, editor, and broadcaster allowed her to present these ideas to audiences of African radicals while intimidating colonial states.

¹¹⁸Angelou, *A Song Flung Up*, 66.

¹¹⁹Julian Mayfield to Maya Angelou, 26 August 1965, Sc MG 830 Box 33, Folder 7; Angelou to Unknown, Sc MG 830 Box 1, Folder 8; David Du Bois to Y. Eduful, 18 August 1865, Sc MG 339 Box 4, Folder 15; David Du Bois to Julian Mayfield, 17 March 1966, Sc MG 339 Box 4, Folder 15.

¹²⁰Sylvia Boone to Maya Angelou, 28 January 1966, Sc MG 830 Box 14, Folder 7.

¹²¹Gaines, *African Americans in Ghana*, 224, 233.

¹²²'Ghana Reunion', 10 April 1983, Sc MG 800 Box 1, Folder 14; 'Ghana Reunion', 14 September 1983, Sc MG 830 Box 1, Folder 14.

Angelou's work in the UAR and Ghana also helps to reconstruct the social networks which made her political writing possible. At various points, personal connections to writers and activists helped Angelou to find political work. In Harlem, the HWG and FPCC introduced Angelou to *Lunes de Revolución*, which in turn led to her first published writing. In Cairo, connections to Vusumzi Make and David Du Bois allowed her to take up work as an anti-colonial writer and broadcaster. In Accra, similarly, close relationships with Julian Mayfield and Sylvia Boone gave her access to state information networks but an emerging friendship with Malcolm X encouraged her to return to the US. In this sense, the transnational networks which defined Angelou's early career were not virtual constructs but social and affective communities sustained across national boundaries.

Most significantly, Angelou's early career also sheds light on the complex negotiations of power involved in anti-colonial media production. Through her career in Africa, Angelou's writing was consistently based on her ability to present material that was convenient to the political needs of state-controlled media machines. This professional instability was compounded by economic insecurity - not to mention her race, gender and nationality, which exposed her to discrimination and sometimes acted as barriers to paying work. Like many anti-colonial writers, however, Angelou was able to work within these constraints to promote a radical vision of anti-colonial solidarity. For a brief moment at the height of the 'global 1960s', her work promoted a form of anti-racist internationalism within the narrow confines of nationalist publicity and advocated for African Americans in the struggle against 'colonialism' at home.