

“Our Forces Have Redoubled”: World Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau

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Although most all contemporary studies of China and Africa focus on current economic or foreign policy concerns, this article provides a preliminary mapping of Africa-China cultural exchanges during the Cold War. Growing out of the Africa-Asia Conference of Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955, the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau forged third world solidarities via an alternative conception of postcolonialism based on the transnationalism of global South cultural struggle. By analyzing the cultural exchanges of the bureau, and in particular their definition of world literature, this article seeks to move beyond postcolonial scholarship that focuses exclusively on a vertical relationship between the colonizer and colonized. In so doing, it both reinterprets the Cold War from outside of an American and Soviet dichotomy and provides a critical cultural historicization to China’s current, and often controversial, presence in Africa.

Keywords: Africa, China, Bandung, Afro-Asian, third world, solidarity, global South, world literature, postcolonialism, Mao Dun, Kofi Awoonor

In his 1965 poem “The Black Eagle Awakens,” the poet and diplomat, Kofi Awoonor, articulates a multifaceted and paradoxical vision of revolutionary Ghana.¹ Militant in tone, Awoonor begins with a seemingly common evocation of African imagery, the baobab tree: “Today we lie under the baobab tree/The drums that beat the war-dances have not slept/Our strength is gathering/Gathering for the final assault.”² As the stanza unfolds, it becomes clear that the baobab provides more than just shade for rest. It is, in fact, the rallying point for a transnational call to arms. The origin of the army Awoonor conjures extends far beyond the borders of Ghana. “The shade of great Chaka,” the controversial figure of Zulu unification in

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1 The poem is published under his previous name, George Awoonor-Williams. At the time of writing, word came of his death during the September 21, 2013, attacks at the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya.

2 George Awoonor-Williams, “The Black Eagle Awakens,” *Afro-Asian Poems; Anthology*. (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau, 1965), 2.

South Africa, leads soldiers whose ranks are filled with Ghanaian freedom fighters, Zulu warriors, and “from distant Asia/Another people whose victory echoes reached us.”³ For Awoonor, this is not just a pan-African army; it is also a transcontinental and transracial one. In 1965, with the Vietnam War still raging and many African countries mired in bloody wars of decolonization, only one Asian country could cite a guerilla war as the main instrument of an achieved independence: the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

The founding of the PRC in 1949 marked a watershed event for leftist-leaning anticolonial actors across the third world, and in particular on the African continent. Within this context of Cold War decolonization, the Afro-Asian solidarity movement began with the Bandung Conference of 1955. It continued through the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) and produced a diffuse and potent third-worldism that would help put the “global” in the term “global 60s.” This article will trace the emergence of the Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau (AAWB) as the cultural wing of the AAPSO. After a brief discussion of Bandung, it will explore the first AAPSO conference in Cairo, in 1957, as well as the first AAWB conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1957–1958. In 1966, the AAWB would split into the Cairo-based Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers and the Beijing-based AAWB. Although the Beijing branch would fade during China’s Cultural Revolution, the Permanent Bureau in Cairo would oversee the publication of *Lotus* into the 1980s. It remained the official cultural mouthpiece for the AAPSO, which still has offices in Cairo in 2014.

This article’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 essay.⁴ Instead, this article explores the horizontal vector between Africa and China, which provides yet another way to engage with histories of decolonization and their cultural productions. Through an analysis of the bureau’s initial cultural platform, its engagement with “symbolic Maoism,” (Jameson) and a close reading of Awoonor’s contribution to the volume of *Afro-Asian Poems* in 1965, this article contends the bureau represented an alternative conceptualization of postcolonialism based on transnational solidarities of a Cold War global South.⁵

3 Ibid., 45. Also, see Léopold Sédar Senghor’s 1956 poem “Chaka,” in his collection *Éthiopiennes*. The poem appropriates the Zulu leader as a symbol for anticolonial pan-Africanism and serves as a textual precedent for Awoonor’s usage.

4 Please see Rossen Djalalov, “The People’s Republic of Letters: Towards a Media History of Twentieth-Century Socialist Internationalism.” PhD thesis, Yale University, 2011.

5 I use 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.” Ato Quayson, *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

Bandung Anxieties

The Bandung Conference was held in the eponymous city in Indonesia April 18–24, 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 nonalignment, decolonization, and humanism.⁶ Although they did not use the term, the conference provided a preliminary concept of postcolonialism through its commitment to “Bandung spirit.” Delegates described this spirit with 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.”⁷ With the absence of the Soviet Union, excluded on geographic grounds, many looked to China as the would-be harbinger of ideological dissension. 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 understand and respect, mutual sympathy and support, instead of mutual suspicion and fear, mutual exclusion, and antagonism.”⁸ 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 anticolonialism.⁹

However, a skeptical Richard Wright maintained that as socialism had once turned from Europe to Asia, it had now begun 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.”¹⁰ For Wright, nonalignment was a pretext for the spread of the socialist bloc to Africa by both the Soviet Union and “Red China.” Their goal would be to convince proponents of nonalignment that a third path to development could not ignore socialist critiques of colonialism 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.¹¹

6 See, in particular, Christopher Lee, *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

7 Asian-African Conference. *Selected Documents of the Bandung Conference; Texts of Selected Speeches and Final Communique of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 18–24, 1955* (New York: Distributed by the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1955), 31.

8 *Ibid.*, 21.

9 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 *After Victory* (London: A. Melrose, 2001).

10 Wright, Richard. *The Colour Curtain, a Report on the Bandung Conference*. (London: D. Dobson, 1956), 138.

11 China’s role in the AAPSO and its relationship to the United Nations has always been a contentious issue. Although speaking more as it concerns the contemporary context, the Comaroffs put it well as they

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 to 1961—although later revealed as a famine-producing disaster—would initially be interpreted during the period as an attempt to skip Marx's stages of history.¹² 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 "implemented" non-Western socialism.

An arresting case-in-point is Aimé Césaire's resignation from the French Communist Party in his *Letter to Maurice Thorez* in 1956.¹³ 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."¹⁴ 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 anticolonial 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 exist only due to the pervasive system of resource extraction from the colony.

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." See Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 46.

12 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 [...]." See Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," *Social Text* 9/10 (1984): 178.

13 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.

14 Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez," *Social Text* 103 (2010): 147.

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 toward 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.”¹⁵ This turn away from the colonial metropole and toward China—however ironic given historical hindsight—pinpointed the failure of European socialism to address colonialism. In his dissatisfaction, Césaire pointed to a non-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 semicolonial 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.¹⁶

The “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.” 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.”¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸ Jameson’s periodization of the sixties thereby relies on myriad factors that stretch synchronically across historical, economic, and cultural spheres. It 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

15 Ibid., 150.

16 For the ramifications of Maoism in the American context please see Robin D. G. Kelley’s “Black Like Mao” *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*, eds. Fred W. Ho and Bill Mullen (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

17 Jameson, “Periodizing,” 179.

18 Jameson, “Periodizing,” 205.

encounter.”¹⁹ These frameworks help rethink periodization outside a set of linear or chronological circumstances that posit independence as the decidedly banal hinge in the designation of the postcolonial. As will be discussed following, the Afro-Asian solidarity movement in many ways embodied, to modify Quayson’s phrasing, an “anticolonial space making.”

Also reminiscent of Raymond Williams’s “structures of feeling,” this methodology takes into account variables from across the synchronic board.²⁰ If periodization is a concept rather than a linear slog forward, then it is possible to trace cultural currents of a period across various geopolitical 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 post-colonialism, and by extension, history, from a global South perspective. Through their writer summits and publications, the bureau brought together disparate vectors—Maoism, pan-Africanism, humanism, transnational solidarity—to produce an “emergent” (Williams) postcolonial aesthetic. This aesthetic was linked to cultural struggle in the historical moment of decolonization and its incipient neocolonialism.

Jameson never explicitly defines his term “symbolic Maoism,” preferring to describe it as a “shadowy but central presence” in his 1984 essay.²¹ 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.”²² 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 sixties. For this essay, however, 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 nothing to further

19 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, *Postcolonial*, 16.

20 See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). Print.

21 Jameson, “Periodizing,” 188.

22 M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2012), 396.

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 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.”²³ 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, although 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 anticolonial 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.²⁴ 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.²⁵

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 (Bloom) of image (Mao as icon) and text (Maoism as a set of tenets). 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.²⁶ To engage with

23 Rob Wilson and Christopher Leigh Connery, *The Worlding Project: Doing Cultural Studies in the Era of Globalization* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2007), 96.

24 For a discussion on the emergence of Maoism out of a range of socialism, including a sustained engagement with anarchism in twentieth-century China, see Arif Dirlik’s seminal work, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

25 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), and “Talks at the Yen’an Forum of Literature and Art” (1942) to name a few of the most influential texts of a large and controversial corpus.

26 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* (Paris: s.n., 1956), 66–83. Frantz Fanon’s 1958 article in *El Moujahid* included in *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967). Also, within the literary realm, the repeated references to Mao in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s socialist realist novel, *Petals of Blood* (1977).

Maoism while thinking through specific projects of national culture does not make these thinkers Maoist, however. 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.²⁷

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

The Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization held its first meeting from December 26, 1957, to January 1, 1958, in Cairo, Egypt. More than five hundred delegates from forty-eight different nations were in attendance. In his opening address, the president of the conference, Anwar El Sadat, positioned the AAPSO within the legacy of Bandung. He also engaged with the history of enlightenment thought: “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.”²⁸ El Sadat interpreted the historical necessity (Jameson) of the AAPSO as rooted in the psychology of colonized subjects and the present possibility of solidarity. He called the colonized a “human being whom imperialism had reduced to a typified specimen of a subjugated species” and “bondsmen recognizable in every colonized country.”²⁹ In this way, El Sadat responded to the history of enlightenment philosophy and its manifestation in colonial taxonomies. By locating the seeds of resistance in the psyche of the colonized, he endorsed an oppositional politics that was both affective and cultural. He urged for a turn from the struggle exclusively against the colonizer to a relational solidarity between former colonies in order “to meet, to consolidate, [and] to react with one another.”³⁰

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.”³¹ 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 coordinate the translation movement.”³² These global South translation and cultural exchanges would attempt, however briefly, to move the organization past

27 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 article'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.

28 Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference. *Afro-Asian Peoples Conference 26 December 1957–1 January 1958: Principal Reports Submitted to the Conference* (Cairo: Permanent Secretariat, 1958), 9.

29 *Ibid.*, 9.

30 *Ibid.*, 9.

31 *Ibid.*, 60.

32 *Ibid.*, 60.

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

Tashkent, 1958, and Third World Literature

The first Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, October 7–13, 1958, took the turn to third-worldism and its relationship to anticolonial 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.³³

(my emphasis)

At Tashkent, world literature was understood as a cultural embodiment of a third world postcolonialism.³⁴ Furthermore, its usage serves as an intervention into the typical genealogy of world literature that begins with Goethe's 1827 coinage of the term *Weltliteratur* and then moves to discussions of the effects of contemporary globalization on literature.³⁵ 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 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 had taken up this notion in his closing speech at the previous AAPSO conference in Cairo in 1957 and later would explore it in depth in *The Wretched of the*

33 Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers. 1970. *12 Years, Afro-Asian Writers*. (Cairo: Afro-Asian Writers' Permanent Bureau, 1970), 23.

34 This reference to the world literature at Tashkent can be traced back to discussions at the Union of Soviet Writers Conference in 1934.

35 The long list of scholarship over the past twenty-five years includes but is not limited to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Charles Bernheimer's edited volume *Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Franco Moretti's “Conjectures on World Literature” *New Left Review* (January/February 2000): 54–68; David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Gayatri Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Christopher Prendergast and Benedict R. O. G. Anderson's *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004); Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell's *Shades of the Planet: American Literature As World Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas's *A Companion to Comparative Literature* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

Earth.³⁶ Although Aimé Césaire did not participate in the conference, Fanon's speech, as well as the "Appeal to the Writers to the World," resonated with his earlier call in *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) for "a humanism made to the measure of the world."³⁷

The organization's 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. The delegation included Zhou Yang, then vice minister of culture and vice director of the CCP's Department of Propaganda, and famous writers such as Mao Dun, Ba Jin, and the wife of Lu Xun, Zhu An. For the Chinese delegation, Tashkent was an opportunity for Maoist notions of the role of art and literature to be presented on a global stage. The PRC's political jockeying that had begun 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, Efua 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."³⁸ Although referencing the

36 One of the key definitions of this "new humanism" is found in Fanon's chapter "On National Culture," *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 178: "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." 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," *Journal of Contemporary Thought*, 35, Summer (2012): 40–46.

37 Aimé Césaire and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 73. Another key text for this definition of humanism is Léopold Sédar Senghor's defense of negritude in 1970 wherein although 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." Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century," *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, eds. Olaniyan, Tejumola, and Ato Quayson (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 196. It is with this sense of a certain flexible set of cultural values and their "relational opening to the world"—tempered with the Fanonian notion of struggle—that this article understands the term *humanism* in regards to the AAWB.

38 Afro-Asian Writers' Conference. *La Conférence des écrivains d'Asie et d'Afrique à Tachkent...* (my translation) [7–13 Octobre 1958.]. (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1960), 11.

country's rich tradition of oral literature, de Andrade attacked the colonial hierarchy of language that 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.

Although 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. Even though 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 a “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.³⁹

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 New Culture Movement of May 4th 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.”⁴⁰ Although 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.⁴¹

39 “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.” Institute for the Study of the USSR. Institute Publications. *Bulletin*. 5.12. *Current Soviet Affairs* “The Spirit of Tashkent: A Review of the Conference of Afro-Asian Writers,” (1958): 19.

40 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.” See Mao Zedong's “Talks at the Yanan Forum on Art and Literature” *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 474.

41 “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

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 of their environment.⁴² 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.⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ Yet, such a radical shift in audience was a response to de Andrade’s grappling with the politics of language.⁴⁵ This focus on the peasantry as source and audience for cultural struggle provided a preliminary answer to Tashkent’s central question concerning the relationship among 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.”⁴⁶ 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. Although initially Tashkent’s humanism had been associated with an affirmation of cultural difference in the “Appeal,” Mao Dun’s speech lent this humanism a distinctly materialist inflection.⁴⁷ Such a materialist turn created a template for a new culture

精神面貌，也就无法反映出这个惊天动地的时代。” (My translation) Shi jie wen xue she, Peking, *Tashigan jing shen wan sui Zhongguo zuo jia lun Ya Fei zuo jia hui yi*. (Beijing: Zuo jia chu ban she, 1959), 56.

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.” Mao in Denton *Talks*, 470.

42 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.” Mao in Denton *Talks*, 470.

43 Shi jie wen xue, “Tashigan,” 56.

44 Ibid., 56.

45 Mao provocatively asks toward 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” Mao in Denton *Talks*, 464, 467.

46 “哪里有劳动，哪里就有诗。” (my translation) Shi jie wen xue, “Tashigan,” 56.

47 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.

based on factors similar to Jameson’s categories.⁴⁸ 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 anticolonialism. 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 anticolonial 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 that 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.

This concept of history was also based in thinking through the multiple valences of Afro-Asian solidarity. For the AAWB, however, 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 global 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, how “symbolic Maoism” functioned within this framework has not been mapped. The goal, however, is not to analyze the controversial Maoist legacy in China. These debates have been had at length in other forums.⁴⁹ Rather, this article focuses on how “symbolic Maoism” functioned with a variety of other factors, including pan-Africanism, in the formation of the bureau’s cultural platform.

Although 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 the 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”; nonalignment; 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.”⁵⁰

48 That is, the “history of philosophy, revolutionary political theory and practice, cultural production, and economic cycles.” Jameson, “Periodizing,” 179.

49 See Rebecca Karl’s *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Mobo Gao’s controversial *The Battle for China’s Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Pluto Press, 2008); Slavoj Žižek’s provocative introduction to Mao Zedong in *On Practice and Contradiction* (London: Verso, 2007); Maurice Meisner’s *Mao Zedong: A Political and Intellectual Portrait* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007). 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.

50 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

Awoonor's African Long March

“Symbolic Maoism” provided an edge to cultural struggle that many writers and intellectuals across Africa found useful in their own articulations of national consciousness. This appropriation was mirrored by Sino-African diplomatic relations itself, which were ratcheted up during the period.⁵¹ Moreover, within the historical context of early sixties decolonization—Lumumba’s fall, the ensuing Congo crisis, and the Vietnam War—the bureau provided a forum wherein discussions of the relationship between decolonization and neocolonialism became increasingly acute. In the first part of the anthology published in 1963, there are seventy poems from ten different countries; it is one of the first anthologies of world literature compiled exclusively with non-Western contributions. Although this anthology of third world literature took the bureau’s concept of postcolonialism as its point of departure, it was still published exclusively in English for reasons of expediency and global reach.⁵² The first publication included poems from figures such as Patrice Lumumba, as well as the Soviet writer Mirzo Tursun-Zade’s, and the Chinese writer Han Pei-ping’s, imaginaries of Africa. This section will focus on the second volume of the anthology, published in 1965. In particular, it will analyze George Awoonor Williams’s (later Kofi Awoonor) “The Black Eagle Awakens.”⁵³

against means to think with a difference—a difference that would destabilize the universalist idioms, historicize the contexts, and pluralize the experiences of modernity” *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 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* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Satya P. Mohanty, *Colonialism, Modernity, and Literature: A View from India*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Laura Doyle and Laura A. Winkiel, *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Jean and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South, or How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).

51 There were a flurry of official state visits to the PRC by leaders such as Sékou Touré September 10–15, 1960, Kwame Nkrumah August 14–19, 1961, as well as Julius Nyerere’s five different trips to the PRC as president of Tanzania from 1964 to 1985, which were primarily in regard to China’s investment projects and in particular the TANZAM railway. See Jamie Monson, *Africa’s Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). Furthermore, China was the first nation to extend official diplomatic recognition to the Algerian Front de Liberation National (FLN) in 1958. Also, Zhou Enlai’s tour of ten African countries at the end of 1963 provided a response to the African visits to Beijing, as well as indicates an official Chinese diplomatic presence in Africa during the period. For these and other diplomatic activities, see Bruce Larkin, *China and Africa, 1949-1970: The Foreign Policy of the People’s Republic of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

52 The issue of the politics of language—Europhone versus indigenous—has been one of the fundamental questions in scholarship on twentieth-century postcolonial literature. Although the bureau did acknowledge the importance of indigenous languages and translation projects between non-Western languages, the bureau’s publications would be primarily in English, French, and Arabic. In this sense, while at the Tashkent writers conference de Andrade pushed for the use of indigenous languages, with the publication of the bureau’s first poetry anthologies in English there was a pronounced emphasis on style, tone, and content over the use of an indigenous language.

53 Ratne Deshapriya Senanayake describes the reason why the bureau began with poetry as a genre: “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 and 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. The present volume deals exclusively with poetry as poetry is the most popular branch of literature. Love for poetry is one of the characteristics of the Afro-Asian peoples as it

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 period. Reminiscent of a poetic rendering of Hegel’s master and slave dialectic found in Lumumba’s contributions in the first volume, Awoonor interprets the history of the continent as a history of labor in its various manifestations. He begins with the European encounter where he furthers the common trope of the transatlantic passage: “Splashing through the Atlantic waters/They came to collect black human cargoes./ [...]/They took the ship/Their song was/On which shores are we going to land/On which shores?”⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

Reminiscent of negritude’s project of cultural inventory, and thereby subject to similar critiques of essentializing a utopian past, Awoonor’s catalogue forges connections between labor and culture. He links the manual work of the pyramids and the construction of the “walls of Zimbabwe” with the cultural work of fashioning the “glory of Mani-Congo” and the “wisdom of Timbuctoo.”⁵⁶ The upshot of this coupling is the articulation of a precolonial 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 local religions. As such, this first part of Awoonor’s poem can be read as a recuperation of African culture that enacts the bureau’s recuperation of non-Western humanisms. The involvement of African civilizations with the slave trade is glossed over, with Awoonor focusing instead on the protracted conflict of the denial of African dignity: “To them we were the animals of the jungle/To them we were the dregs of humanity.”⁵⁷ Awoonor continues with references to the African

may be all over the world.” See *Afro-Asian Poems; Anthology* (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau, 1963), Preface.

54 Awoonor, “Eagle,” 41.

55 *Ibid.*, 41.

56 *Ibid.*, 41.

57 *Ibid.*, 42.

empires of the Ashanti and Zulu, which were complicated by their own histories of expansion and violence. He then 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.”⁵⁸ This focus on a unified African front against the slave trade elides the historical complicity of African rulers with the transatlantic passage. Yet, the historical narrative Awoonor writes is one of resistance against foreign aggression, which fits within the bureau’s endorsement of a similarly protracted decolonization of the continent during the 1960s.⁵⁹

The rest of the poem focuses on the period after the 1885 Berlin conference and the partition stemming from Europe’s “scramble for Africa.” If the previous imperial moment focused on the extraction of African labor during the slave trade, this moment begins with an accusation of 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.”⁶⁰ 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.
The 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.⁶¹

Similar to the disruption of the indigenous cultural logic articulated in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, this second interruption works through a reversal of the moral hierarchy. Christianity is seen as pagan, and 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

58 Ibid., 42.

59 The militancy of this poem is a departure from his first poetry collection, “Rediscovery and Other Poems,” published in 1964 and which contained numerous reinterpretations of Ewe dirge poetry. Robert Fraser writes: “Thus, in all of Kofi Awoonor’s work personal self-expression and social criticism proceed hand-in-hand. There are two principle reasons for this. The first is that the Anlo tradition itself embraces both norms: the ‘I’ of an Akpalu dirge is both the suffering individual artist, despised and often a little ridiculous, and the whole society which has suddenly and inexplicably been plunged into mourning. The English-language poet who draws on this convention soon learns to operate in both capacities. The second is Awoonor’s deep sense of responsibility toward the nation as a whole, a responsibility which extends way beyond the boundaries of Eweland to embrace the whole of suffering Ghana.” Robert Fraser, *West African Poetry: A Critical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 161–62.

60 Awoonor, “Eagle,” 42.

61 Ibid., 42.

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 bureau’s appropriation of “symbolic Maoism,” which focuses on the contemporary moment of decolonization.

The next stanza, which lasts the entirety of a page, pulls the poem into the combative realm of anticolonial 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.”⁶² 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.”⁶³ As the complexity of the aesthetic becomes sutured to the political message of the poem, Awoonor’s “call to arms” fits precisely into the “symbolic Maoism” of the bureau’s cultural platform during the early 1960s. The emphasis on a unified continent also resonates with the cultural concerns of pan-Africanism. The poem’s militancy not only fits the Maoist definition of *revolutionary literature*, but also what Fanon would later call a “combat literature” in *The Wretched of the Earth*.⁶⁴

In many ways the poem represents a transition from the negritude of the fifties and to the dominance of a targeted realism during the sixties. If the bureau’s poetry was meant to inspire anticolonialism through its recourse to the dramatization—and often romanticization—of struggle, then the use of realism by many African novelists of the period could also be seen as a revolutionary act.⁶⁵ That is, as an aesthetic, realism could provide a critique of the on-the-ground reality of colonialism and thereby did not smack of the conservatism European modernism denounced. Such a complex jumbling of genres within the context of decolonization meant that categories such as realism and modernism were primarily understood via the moment of anticolonial struggle rather than European

62 Ibid., 43.

63 Ibid., 43.

64 Although this article cannot go into an in-depth analysis of the two, the resonances of Mao’s definition of *revolutionary literature* with Fanon’s definition of *combat literature* in *The Wretched of the Earth* are striking. First Fanon: “Finally, a third stage, a 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. [...] This is combat literature in the true sense of the word, in the sense that it calls upon a whole people to join in the struggle for the existence of the nation. Combat literature, because it informs the national consciousness, gives it shape and contours, and opens up new, unlimited horizons. Combat literature, because it takes charge, because it is resolve situated in historical time” Fanon, *Wretched*, 159, 174; my emphasis. And Mao: “Revolutionary literature and art should create a variety of characters out of real life and help the masses to propel history forward. For example, there is suffering from hunger, cold and oppression on the one hand, and exploitation and oppression of man by man on the other. These facts exist everywhere and people look upon them as commonplace. Writers and artists concentrate such everyday phenomena, typify the contradictions and struggles within them and produce works which awaken the masses, fire them with enthusiasm and impel them to unite and struggle to transform their environment.” See Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*. Vol. I, III. (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 82.

65 See Simon Gikandi, “Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 73.3 (2012): 309–28.

periodization.⁶⁶ In this sense, the bureau endorsed a national *modernity* that *realistically* represented the atrocities of colonialism through a *romantic* push for third world independence. With the bureau's first anthology, poetry was endorsed as uniquely equipped for the romanticization of this "call-to-arms."⁶⁷ Awoonor's commitment to the histories of slavery and the "long march" of combat can be read as an attempt to re-periodize the sixties according to the context of global South struggle. This re-periodization is situated at the crossroads of multiple vectors of influence, appropriation, and exchange. Such an act, which took its cues from third world solidarity, pan-Africanism, and "symbolic Maoism," can be understood as a romanticized, yet entangled move through genre and aesthetics. This movement would form the basis of the bureau's definition of *postcolonialism* as a "concept of history."

The theme of combat continues in the final four stanzas of the poem. Awoonor depicts an 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."⁶⁸ These insults, however, 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.⁶⁹

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 Marxism in the African context, which encourages solidarity across national lines. This racial and ideological solidarity of the continent extends eastward where the host

66 Jean and John Comaroff's notion of "Afromodernity" seems appropriate here: "At other times Afromodernity has lain implicit in signs and practices, dispositions and discourses, aesthetic values and indigenous ways of knowing. Nor is it best labeled an 'alternative modernity.' It is a *vernacular*—just as Euromodernity is a vernacular—wrought in an ongoing, geopolitically situated engagement with the unfolding history of the present. And, like Euromodernity, it takes many forms." Comaroff and Comaroff, *Theory*, 9.

67 Neil Lazarus identifies "postcolonial" poetry as equally demonstrative of a structure of feeling (Williams) as fiction: "In much 'postcolonial' poetry we witness the attempt to find words, tones, registers, grammars, syntaxes, sensitive to and capable of registering landscapes as well as patterns of social relationship shaped by particular histories of dispossession and resistance, conquest and reclamation, subjection and struggle." Although Lazarus uses the example of the Caribbean poet Édouard Glissant's "leading the word astray" in order to reformulate colonial language in order to "enable them to shoulder the burden of *postcolonial* representation," Awoonor's poem, in its militant depiction of the history of slavery and exploitation does not so much as "lead the word astray" as it leads it headlong into the reimagined history of a romanticized and pan-African class struggle. Lazarus, *Postcolonial*, 82–83.

68 Awoonor, "Eagle," 44.

69 *Ibid.*, 44.

"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."⁷⁰ 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 neocolonialism are muted, and the protracted war in Algeria is seen as having already given way to national independence. Moreover, Awoonor does not address the failures of socialism, which would surface on a systemic scale. Instead he situates himself at a moment where the ethical justification for a continued colonialism is no longer tenable. He senses, along with the bureau's commitment to human rights, that such unbridled optimism is justified because decolonization means a victory for the "right" side of history.

To return to the close reading of the poem that began this article, it is in the penultimate stanza that Awoonor demonstrates his awareness of transcontinental solidarities, even as he remains in a 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."⁷¹ This diachronic invocation of the controversial leader of the 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."⁷² This reference to the original "long march" of Mao and the CCP brings the poem to its enactment of Afro-Asian solidarity. For Awoonor, the "long march" of decolonization results in lines of affiliation across the third world. It also means his gesture toward Asia can be understood as an endorsement of Jameson's "concept of history," which draws parallels across seemingly disparate contexts. With his conclusion that "our blackness shall redeem us" and finally the repetition of the Swahili term for freedom, "Uruhu! Uruhu! Uruhu!," Awoonor enacts the categorical optimism of pan-Africanism in that historical moment.⁷³ As discussed previously, the realities of an incipient neocolonialism, the specter of Cold War realpolitik embodied by the Sino-Soviet split, as well as the severe limitations of the Maoist model, are not interrogated by Awoonor in his militant exuberance. However critical "revolutionary literature" was of colonialism, it would take another aesthetic to address the antagonisms of the independent nation. That is, as important as "combat literature" was to the birth of the postcolonial, it was not able to address the various entanglements of the postcolony.

Conclusion: Afro-Asian Legacies

Awoonor's optimism now sounds premature given the rise of neocolonialism and the seemingly short-lived nature of these global South exchanges. Furthermore, the AAWB would soon founder upon the realpolitik of the Sino-Soviet split. The bureau would divide in 1966 into a Cairo-based, Soviet-dominated Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers and a Beijing-based AAWB. Although this first Tashkent incarnation of the bureau would result in a schism, however, it did succeed in bringing many important cultural issues to the table during the high period of 1960s national

70 Ibid., 44.

71 Ibid., 45.

72 Ibid., 45.

73 Ibid., 45.

self-determination. These included: the writer's relationship to anticolonial politics, decolonization, national modernity, humanism, audience, language, and translation. Also of critical importance was the bureau's conception of postcolonialism as based in transnational solidarities rather than in an exclusive relationship with the colonial metropole. To return to Jameson, the bureau's "failure" should thereby be understood through the "unified field theory" of his "concept of history." Namely, instead of reading the bureau as a failure sequestered off in the far-flung spaces of "Afro-Asia," it is important to analyze the connections between the cultural work of the bureau and the actual politics of decolonization in many territories across the third world.

Although the Beijing-based bureau would primarily publish the propaganda organ *The Call*, which would cease publication during the domestic turmoil of China's Cultural Revolution, the Cairo-based bureau would oversee the founding of *Lotus*, one of the seminal journals for discussions of what is now considered postcolonialism in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷⁴ In fact, the Permanent Bureau in Cairo would succeed in sustaining the global South conversation and exchange that continued up until the very creation of postcolonial studies in the Western academy during the 1980s. Many of the issues that initially concerned the bureau still persist in contemporary discussions of postcolonial literature, world literature, and the relationship between "first" and "third" world cultural production. For example, consider the ongoing debates on the question of audience for many best-selling writers from Africa and Asia. In addition, the concern over the influence of globalization on local aesthetics has informed key concepts such as Orientalism, strategic essentialism, creolization, entanglement, cosmopolitanism, and even the practice of comparison itself. As such, there is the possibility that the history of the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau and its later incarnations could provide an as-of-yet unexplored genealogy to the rise of postcolonial studies as an academic discipline.

Finally, there are contemporary parallels within the geopolitical sphere that require a reappraisal of organizations like the AAWB. The rise of China as a world power, the history of which is partly rooted in forums such as the AAPSO, means that rereading these Cold War global South exchanges could help contextualize current trends in globalization and geopolitics. "Symbolic Maoism," which provided much of the ideological spark for the bureau's cultural platform during the sixties, has given way to the "capitalism with Chinese characteristics" that now dominates the current global economic landscape. Specifically, China's controversial presence in Africa should be properly historicized as not just a brand new economic phenomenon linked to the increasing multipolarity of geopolitics, but rather as also a phenomenon that mobilizes the political and cultural rhetoric of friendship and solidarity of the Cold War period. This multifaceted approach would allow for a 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.

74 See Hala Halim's "Lotus, the Afro-Asian Nexus and Global South Comparatism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32.3 (2012): 563–83; Vijay Prashad's cursory survey in *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*. (New York: New Press, 2007).