NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at https://www.neh.gov/grants/research/fellowships for instructions.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: The Aesthetic Cold War: Decolonization and Global Literature

Institution: University of Kentucky

Project Director: Peter Kalliney

Grant Program: Fellowships

The Aesthetic Cold War: Decolonization and Global Literature, Peter Kalliney

Research and overview

In "Africa and Her Writers" (1973), Chinua Achebe observes, "As African writers emerge onto the world stage, they come under pressure to take their stand." Reaching a global audience required African writers to take a clear stand--on what issue, and by whom? Out of context, we might expect Achebe, the most widely read of African novelists, to be thinking about European imperialism or about his decision to write in the English language. These two issues sparked robust debates in the literature from decolonizing situations. In this essay, however, Achebe insists that the Cold War, rather than the lingering effects of imperialism or the continued use of European languages in postcolonial environments, determines the political and aesthetic contexts in which postcolonial writers speak to global audiences. Writers from the decolonizing world, Achebe says, are less preoccupied with the legacy of imperialism than they are with "recrimination between capitalist and communist aesthetics."

Anticolonial intellectuals tended to be Cold War neutrals politically and aesthetically. Politically, it was a moment full of promise and fraught with danger: although World War II weakened the imperial powers, making decolonization a genuine possibility in most places, the ensuing Cold War threatened to turn the colonial world into a site of proxy wars, puppet governments, and client states. Replacing one form of imperialism with another was not an attractive prospect, and most anticolonial intellectuals hoped that a modicum of independence could be fashioned out of initiatives such as the Bandung Conference of 1955.

Aesthetically, anticolonial writers sought to carve out a precarious space of nonalignment. Assembled on one side, as Achebe reminds us in this essay, are those who believe in the complete autonomy of aesthetic production: "that art should be accountable to no one, and needed to justify itself to nobody except itself." Ranged on the other side are those who subscribe to a utilitarian theory of art regulated by state authority: "that a poet is not a poet until the Writers' Union tells him so." Western European high modernist aesthetics pitted against a Stalinist program of socialist realism: these are the twin global pressures out of which postcolonial literature was forged. Subscribers to these competing philosophies were so rigid in their convictions, Achebe declares, that they had become functionally indistinct from one another. Neither group presented an attractive option for anticolonial intellectuals, who believed that writers should not pledge allegiance to a predetermined aesthetic bloc. The African, Asian, and Caribbean writers I propose to study refused to relinquish their aesthetic independence and yet insisted on the relevance of literature to the decolonizing struggle. How they articulated and defended their intellectual freedom by cannily moving between these aesthetic camps is the story I plan to tell.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union, and their respective allies, made concerted efforts to recruit, and sometimes to monitor and control, writers from the decolonizing world. Cultural diplomacy programs and state-sponsored surveillance were the Janus faces of the leading Cold War antagonists: actively recruiting writers in the decolonizing world through cultural outreach while using intelligence services to keep tabs on intellectuals. International cultural diplomacy programs, such as the US-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Soviet-sponsored *Lotus* magazine and literary prize, were extensive collaborative ventures with intellectuals in decolonizing regions. Sometimes, however, as in the cases of C.L.R. James, Claudia Jones, Doris Lessing, and the All-India Progressive Writers' Association, another integral part of the Cold War standoff--surveillance--came into play. How nonaligned intellectuals responded to state intimidation, the flip side of cultural diplomacy, is an equally important component of my approach. Combining original archival research and book history with close readings of literary texts, the resulting monograph will contribute to the global literary history of the twentieth century.

Methods and work plan

Introduction and Chapter 1: researched and fully drafted.

The resulting book will open with a short introduction and then a much longer intellectual history,

contending that the key aesthetic declarations in the Cold War and in anticolonial literature are part of the same discussions about autonomy, authenticity, and indigeneity in art and culture. It will include substantial examinations of important documents from three intellectual strands usually kept separate: from modernism, including the 1929 "Revolution of the Word" in *transition* magazine; from socialist aesthetics, including the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress; and from anticolonial literary theory, including the 1928 "Cannibalist Manifesto" by Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade and the 1934-38 manifesto of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association. The chapter will establish the deep connections between anticolonial literary practices and what I call the aesthetic Cold War.

Chapter 2: archival research complete and chapter fully drafted.

The CIA's covertly-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) provides a fascinating instance of international cultural diplomacy. Although CCF programs in Europe have been documented in great detail, the African program--led by Es'kia Mphahlele--has yet to be fully considered. The CCF funded the most important literary conference in the decolonizing world, the African Writers of English Expression conference at Makerere University in Uganda (1962), as well as lending support to the journals *Black Orpheus* (founded 1957, Nigeria) and *Transition* (founded 1961, Uganda). As I argue in "Modernism, African Literature, and the Cold War," the covert nature of CCF funding made it difficult for the organization to enforce any kind of ideological conformity among its partners. Paradoxically, this resulted in literary institutions that celebrated the freedom of intellectuals from imperialism and even from the polarities of Cold War aesthetic ideology.

Chapter 3: archival research complete and chapter fully drafted.

In response, the Soviet Union established the international Lotus Prize and magazine, an outgrowth of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association (AAWA). Unlike its competitor, the Afro-Asian initiative was clear about sponsorship and objectives: to promote better understanding between the Soviet Union and decolonizing areas. It was established on the heels of the first Afro-Asian writers conference in Tashkent (1958), a meeting that attempted to translate the spirit of the Bandung summit into an international literary network. The journal, issued simultaneously in Arabic, English, and French, explicitly frames a world-literary space in non-capitalist terms. My research focuses on Alex La Guma, inaugural prize winner, AAWA Secretary General, and South African exile, as well as Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, also prize winners (all three participated in CCF projects, too, showing their ability to play both sides).

Chapter 4: archival research complete; chapter to be written during proposed fellowship.

The bilingual career of Eileen Chang allows scholars to consider how socialist revolution and European imperialism in China influenced the emergence of global literature in English. A clever and deceptively complex writer of romantic short stories who began publishing in the 1940s, Chang fled the mainland for Hong Kong and later for the US in the 1950s. With assistance from the US Information Agency (State Department), she wrote two anticommunist novels in English during her Hong Kong exile. Although it is common to regard Chang's for-hire writing as heavy-going propaganda, against her earlier and later work as both lighter in style and apolitical in message, I will suggest there is great deal of continuity between these different phases of Chang's career. How the anticolonial writer of the 1940s adjusted her narrative techniques to the climate of the 1950s, and how her cosmopolitan self-translation facilitated this transformation, will be the subject of this chapter.

Chapter 5: archival research and writing of chapter to be done during proposed fellowship.

This chapter and the next turn to state policing of late colonial and early postcolonial writers. The MI5 files on Doris Lessing, collected during her residence in London, provide a glimpse of how the British authorities understood the work of anticolonial intellectuals. The Rhodesian writer's protests against the Colour Bar were at least as great a concern as her wavering Communist sympathies. Following the lead of William Maxwell and James Smith, who consider the question of writers under surveillance (but do not

examine colonial figures), this chapter will study the British state's conflicted response toward non-metropolitan intellectuals. Combining archival research with a reading of *The Golden Notebook* (1962), I will demonstrate that Lessing understood surveillance less as an impingement on, and more as a stimulus to, her writing. The novel shows that the state's uncertainty--did Communism or anticolonialism represent a greater threat to British interests?--offered a glimmer of hope for intellectuals who rejected authoritarianism in all its global manifestations.

Chapter 6: archival research complete and chapter fully drafted.

The concluding chapter will track the US state's monitoring and deportation of Trinidadian intellectuals C.L.R. James and Claudia Jones. James and Jones did not collaborate during their time in the US in the 1930s and 40s: James was a Trotskyite and Jones a loyal Communist Party member, making them sworn enemies. After being deported in the mid-1950s and going to London, however, James and Jones moved subtly away from revolutionary socialism and toward anticolonial nationalism. By analyzing the FBI files and court documents related to both cases as well as James's and Jones's written work, this chapter suggests that the state's monitoring and discipline of Caribbean radicals had the unexpected effect of turning bitter enemies into Black Atlantic collaborators in the national independence struggle.

Interpretive significance

1. For most of the twentieth century, the dominant aesthetic debate, globally, was between those who believed in complete aesthetic autonomy and those who argued for a realist literature that serves political and social ends. I consider how the terms of this debate, and the quest for aesthetic nonalignment in the Cold War, facilitated the emergence of colonial and postcolonial literature in a global literary context.

2. Late colonial and early postcolonial writers had some of the most perceptive things to say about this aesthetic debate because they were not enamored of either side. Whereas nearly all the existing studies of the Cold War focus on Western European, North American, and Soviet writing, this project will turn our attention to what is sometimes called the Global South.

3. The Cold War is a pivotal but poorly understood episode in the globalization of literary production. The immersion of writers from what was then called the Third World into global literary space happened in the laboratory of an aesthetic and political Cold War, in which anticolonial intellectuals were courted and disciplined by powerful states.

Competencies, skills, and access

I have completed the archival work necessary for this project, except for scrutinizing the MI5 files on Doris Lessing, which are fully available to researchers. I have written three books on the literature of decolonization. My archival work on *Commonwealth of Letters* (which was supported by a Summer Stipend and a Fellowship from NEH) led directly to this current proposal. In that book, I document the metropolitan British literary institutions that were used and ultimately reshaped by anticolonial writers in English. Although I believe it offers a compelling account of how English literature became a global enterprise, the version of literary history I tell there does not consider the political, and more important, aesthetic effects of the Cold War on transnational English literature.

Final product and dissemination

I have made excellent progress so far. A Guggenheim fellowship allowed me to complete most of the archival work as well to write the introduction, Chapters 1-3, and 6. During an NEH Fellowship, I would finish the archival research on Chapter 5 (one month) and write Chapters 4 and 5 (three months each). The editors of the *Modernist Latitudes* series at Columbia University Press, Jessica Berman and Paul Saint-Amour, have expressed interest in seeing this manuscript when it is complete. I also plan to publish an essay on *Lotus* magazine in *Times Literary Supplement*, as I did on CCF activities in Africa.

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