

Art, Socialism, and Solidarity at the International Congress of Africanists, 1962–1973

Kate Cowcher

In 1963 Kenya's minister of labor, Tom Mboya, published "African Socialism" in the journal *Transition*. Writing in the wake of independence, Mboya argued that African societies were inherently predisposed to socialism through their traditional structures and philosophies, but that developing "African socialism" required a commitment to interpreting and implementing the concept in the context of a decolonizing Africa. The first "responsible" group comprised "intellectuals"—would they, he asked, having read his discussion of the "socialist outlook in our tradition ... pick up the threads and help us defeat intellectual imperialism?" (Mboya 1963: 19). In service of African socialism, the intellectual was, in Mboya's mind, to confront the frames that had historically bounded knowledge about the continent. The intellectual must dismantle deleterious colonialist epistemologies. The task, no matter the discipline, was a political one.

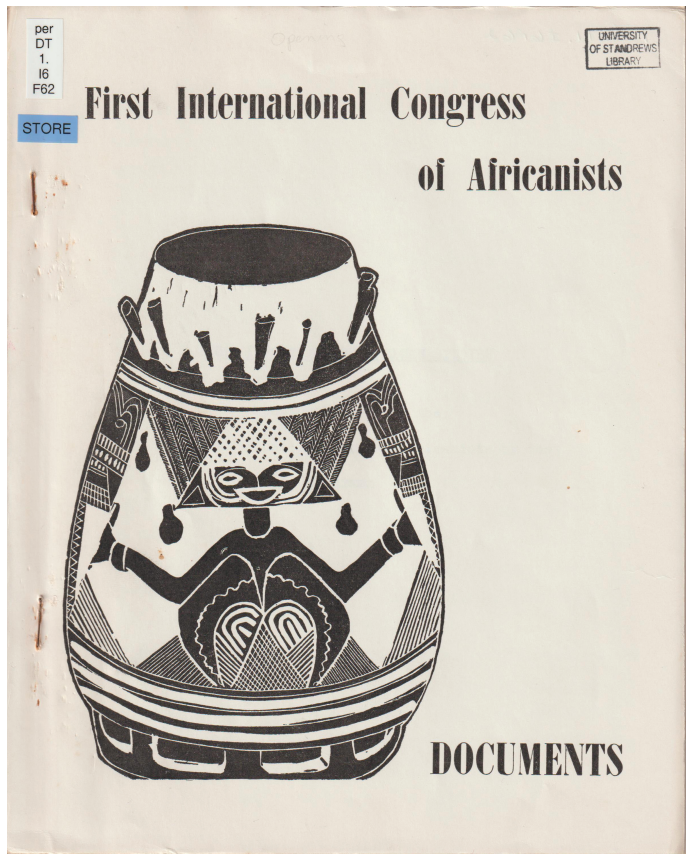
In the early 1960s, reclaiming the writing of Africa's cultural and political history was a major priority. History was, as Chinua Achebe and others had made clear, the site of colonial violence.¹ Rethinking approaches to artistic heritage was key to this endeavor. At the newly founded International Congress of Africanists, the challenges of such work were top of the agenda. As befit the Cold War context of its inauguration, socialist ideas were at the forefront of the congress, whose first iterations occurred in Accra (1962), Dakar (1967), and Addis Ababa (1973). While many African delegates subscribed to an African socialism premised on the notion, proffered by Mboya and others, that the continent's precolonial history predisposed it to communal ownership and collective responsibility, some, such as South African

writer Esk'ia Mphahlele, contested any such idealizing. Speaking in Accra, Mphahlele (Bown and Crowder 1964: 228) nonetheless pushed socialist-oriented concerns by foregrounding the complex lived experiences of the poorest in society as a priority for the African writer and artist. If the congress provided space for African delegates to debate socialism's relevance on the continent, it was also a place where delegates from the Soviet Union came to propose new socialist-oriented frames of analysis for the making of art and the writing of its history. These first meetings of the International Congress of Africanists provided contact points on the continent for many groups interested in exchanging ideas but also in proclaiming solidarity.

Within the wider Cold War, Soviet authorities expressed concerns about "African" socialism, stressing that socialism could come in only one variety: scientific socialism, a keystone of Marxist-Leninism. Many African socialists, including Mboya, were not committed to achieving communism. Rather, they saw African socialism, approached pragmatically and flexibly, as the most equitable means for developing new, independent nations—the preferable alternative to capitalism.² Yet, despite points of contention over socialism's ideological boundaries, the Soviet and African intellectuals achieved a notable rapport, with the former framing academic research as being in service to anticolonial struggle. In 1958, for example, the historian and ethnographer Ivan Potekhin, who soon became a leading proponent of the International Congress, hosted Senegalese writer Alioune Diop in Moscow.

Though he could not accept the notion of a specifically "African" socialism, Potekhin did accept that a distinct "African road to socialism" existed and must be supported (Skorov 1964: 447). Potekhin's phrase sounded similar but differed notably in concept to what Senegalese poet and the country's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, called "la voie africaine du socialisme" (the African way of socialism) (Senghor 1971: 283–90). Potekhin's idea was a compromise, one that acknowledged that attention must be paid to recovering African social mores and historic

KATE COWCHER is Lecturer in Art History at the University of St Andrews. She completed her PhD at Stanford in 2017, and is currently working on her first book, entitled "Beyond the Feudal Fog: Art and Revolution in Ethiopia." kc90@st-andrews.ac.uk



1 Bruce Onobrakpeya, cover design for *First International Congress of Africanists DOCUMENTS*, lino block printing, 1962.
Photo: permission of the artist, courtesy University of St Andrews Library

2 Cover design for Lalage Bown and Michael Crowder (ed.), *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists: Accra, 11th–18th December 1962*, London: Longmans, 1964.

traditions but that, nonetheless, held that the ultimate goal was scientific socialism. Senghor's "la voie Africaine," with which Diop had much sympathy, was first formulated in the late 1940s and elaborated in *Nationhood and the African Road to Socialism* (Senghor 1962) and *On African Socialism* (Senghor 1964b). The latter argued that Karl Marx's "methods and means" (Senghor 1964b: 103), particularly the emphasis on class conflict, were not, in themselves, automatically relevant to Africa; rather, the continent was predisposed to socialism because it was a place that "bases its general activity on the group" rather than the individual (Senghor 1964b: 93). If Potekhin's "African road" prioritized political and economic concerns, Senghor's "la voie Africaine" was steeped in humanist readings of Marx (Stibbe 1961: 242–43; LeMelle 1965: 334–35). Though the tenets of Senghor's Négritude philosophy were not fully synonymous with his interest in socialism, his concept of "la voie Africaine" was, in fact, prefaced on the idea that transforming African society required "integrating socialism with Négritude" (Senghor 1964b: 165); that is, integrating socialism with a philosophy prefaced on the ontological difference between Europe and Africa.

Despite the seeming disjoints between African intellectuals like Senghor and Diop and the more orthodox socialism of Potekhin, the two constituencies shared certain key priorities. Like Diop,



Potekhin vocally denounced European imperialism. With Diop, he advocated for the International Congress of Africanists, insisting that it not be a dry academic forum. In keeping with both the broader Soviet African studies agenda and the concerns of many African intellectuals, Potekhin believed it was essential to shift the geographic center of so-called Africanist scholarship away from the West. The new congress, he argued, must have "a militant, activist character" (1962: 35). Research shared there, he insisted, must be in "the service of the African people struggling for a final liquidation of colonialism and ... the most progressive paths of development" (1962: 35).

In this article, I examine the intersections of art and socialism in and around the first three congresses. Rather than provide a comprehensive survey of all that occurred at each, I focus on the recurrent, shifting concerns regarding socialism's relevance to the study and making of art in Africa. In doing so, I seek to document the unexpected sites of solidarity, as well as persistent tensions around socialism's applicability in African contexts. Following an outline of the congress's origins and the Cold War context, I examine Accra (1962) and Dakar (1967) in turn. In Accra, African socialism was both celebrated and contested, particularly as regards the symbolic and political utility of the continent's historic arts. Five years later in Dakar, Soviet delegates asserted themselves, proclaiming solidarity with African scholars and artists while proposing a materialist approach to historic and contemporary



3 Stamp design featuring Kofi Antubam's design for the *Aseseguwa* (Seat of State), 1967. Photo: courtesy of the author

arts. The third congress, in Addis Ababa (1973), took place amid the stirrings of socialist-oriented dissent, a forerunner to revolution in Ethiopia just months later. The significance of these international congresses has been overlooked, yet they were a critical part of the effort by African intellectuals to reclaim the “Africanist” endeavor just as international academic interest in the continent was burgeoning. Though, as events in Addis Ababa made clear, academic discussions were not always in sync with realities on the ground, the first three congresses were key sites for intellectual exchange on the continent for those presumed to be divided either by the Iron Curtain or the policy of nonalignment.³

FOUNDING THE CONGRESS AND THE CULTURAL COLD WAR

The International Congress of Africanists was founded during one particular session of the International Congress of Orientalists in Moscow in August 1960. Then, delegates gathered for the twenty-fifth iteration of the latter, an academic forum which included the study of (and delegates from) sub-Saharan Africa alongside more familiar studies in Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa.⁴ The 1960 Congress of Orientalists was the first to be held in the USSR since the Bolshevik revolution; Cold War tensions inevitably bubbled. British historian Roderick MacFarquhar (1960: 114–18) reported, for example, on the nonarrival of a Chinese delegation, despite expectations its members would attend. If deteriorating Sino-Soviet relations overshadowed

proceedings for some, elsewhere at the congress other splits were emerging. In the “Africa Section,” Nigerian historian Modilim Achufusi argued that Africa should no longer be a subsection of the orientalist’s congress (Potekhin 1960: 3).⁵ In the wake of independence, Achufusi argued for a new, separate forum dedicated to the dissemination of research on and about Africa. His resolution passed, and the first International Congress of Africanists took place on the continent within two years.

Achufusi’s proposal was greeted with broad enthusiasm. Potekhin wrote to Black American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois that it fit well with their shared interest in organizing a conference to discuss the writing of an “Encyclopedia Africana.” Potekhin subsequently encouraged Du Bois to contact Professor Kenneth Onwuke Dike, principal of University College, Ibadan, and one of the members of the congress’s organizing committee (Potekhin 1960: 3). If Potekhin was personally invested in the founding of the new congress, the encouragement of an “Africanist” field of study, discrete from the “Orientalist” one, also fit the USSR’s broader political priorities. Under Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviets firmly shifted their attention to decolonizing Africa. In 1960, the Africa Institute opened in Moscow, headed by Potekhin, and a “complex approach” (i.e., an interdisciplinary one) to the continent’s study became the priority (see Telepneva 2019: 3–4). This southward pivot was tracked by American academics throughout the 1960s, as they were equally concerned with the development of a new “area studies” approach to Africa. In 1969, Arthur Jay Klinghoffer (1969: 51) analyzed Soviet interest in African socialism. He noted that in 1960–1961 Soviet academics had made clear efforts to distinguish between Africa and what was understood as the “Orient.” Evidence of this, Klinghoffer argued, could be seen in new journal names; for example, *Problemy Vostokovedeniia* (Problems of Oriental studies) became *Narody Azii i Afriki* (Peoples of Asia and Africa).

Though the drive to separate the Orientalist and Africanist fields meshed with new Soviet priorities, the energy behind the new international congress came from African scholars. They sought to take control of the narrative, both in the wake of colonialism and amid geopolitical tensions. The configuration of the congress’s organizing committee openly acknowledged Cold War fault lines. The heads of universities in Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Senegal, and the Congo were asked to serve alongside representatives from the International African Institute, the Africa Institute of the Academy of the Sciences in the USSR, the African Studies Association of the United States, and the French Africanists (“International Congress” 1961: 47). The committee reflected the desire to redress the balance in African studies in favor of African voices, but also to welcome the other key players of the era. Attendance at the first committee meeting in Ibadan in 1961, encompassing just four representatives, reflected political fault lines: Dike and Nana Kobina Nketsia IV, vice chancellor of the University of Ghana, were joined by Soviet representative

4 Picture released on April 1, 1966, of Andre Malraux (l), French Minister of Cultural Affairs, and Léopold Sédar Senghor (r), president of Senegal, at the opening of the First World Festival of Black Arts (FESMAN), in Dakar.
Photo: AFP via Getty Images

Potekhin and American William Jones, president of the new African Studies Association. Dike, as chairman, opened the meeting by stating his hope that “foreign scholars” would understand that Africans must now “speak for ourselves.” Africans were obligated, he argued, to “study with thoroughness and depth our own past ... our own present and our own prospects” (“International Congress” 1961: 47).

The overt inclusion of American and Soviet interests on the congress’s organizing committee contrasts with familiar narratives about the cultural Cold War and covert efforts by the superpowers to infiltrate and influence African cultural production. The US Central Intelligence Agency’s clandestine sponsorship of the Congress of Cultural Freedom, Soviet funding for cultural education and film festivals, and Chinese support for organizations such as the Afro-Asian Writers’ Association were all ways in which the United States, the Soviet Union, and China hoped to insert themselves into Africa’s era of independence (see, e.g., Saunders 1999; Scott-Smith 2002; Friedman 2015; Nash 2016; Matusevich 2019). Other studies have countered narratives of superpower propaganda by emphasizing African agency (Popescu 2019). Matthew Eatough (2019), for example, highlights the ways in which Mphahlele, the head the Congress of Cultural Freedom’s Africa program, borrowed from both US *and* Soviet literary discourses to inform his vision for literary criticism that was equally occupied with creative freedom, the fragmentary nature of the African experience, and class consciousness.

The International Congress of Africanists did not escape entanglement in the covert Cold War networks. University College, Ibadan (the location of the first committee meeting), for example, received funds from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations in the early to mid-1960s (Parmar 2012: 158). Yet, as the committee’s make-up made clear, there was little interest in pretending an atmosphere of ideological rivalry did not exist. Rather, the congress created a space in which rival approaches—alongside questions about the definition of an “Africanist” and who had the right to produce “Africanist” knowledge—were presented and appraised at the invitation of the continent’s leading thinkers.

ACCRA, 1962

The University of Ghana hosted the first International Congress of Africanists in 1962. The brochure, published by Caxton Press in Ibadan, features a design by the Nigerian artist Bruce Onobrakpeya. The cover image, which was also reproduced in black and white on the congress “Documents” (Fig. 1) and in two colors on the *Proceedings* (Bown and Crowder 1964; Fig. 2), featured a Yoruba Ogboni drum. Historically, these drums, called *agba*, meaning “barrel or canon” (Ojo 1973: 50), were both musical and sacred objects in the Ogboni society of southwestern Nigeria. They were used to announce meetings, rites of passage, and to guide spiritual worship. The number of visible pegs in the



image suggests that Onobrakpeya represented the largest form of Ogboni drum, known as *iya ilu* or “mother” drum (Drewal 1989: 136). Up to thirty inches high, the skin of these drums is held by thirteen pegs (Ojo 1973: 50). Ogboni drums are elaborately decorated, typically featuring an anthropomorphic carving on one side that depicts the “face of worship” (Drewal 1989: 136). This face provides a focus for the divine forces associated with the drum’s role, and Onobrakpeya’s design centers attention on it. On the congress’s brochure it is an apposite icon, invoking the sacred gathering of a group of initiates. Reflecting on this commission, Onobrakpeya reports he primarily focused on the drum as “a symbol of dissemination of information.”⁷⁶

By 1962, Onobrakpeya had a reputation for innovative design and was involved in print-making workshops with Ulli Beier’s Mbari Artists’ and Writers’ Club in Ibadan (Stanley 2011: 22). He was associated with the Zaria Art Society and the debates about the significance of cultural traditions—in his case, the folktales of the Urhobo people—and how they might come to serve modernist expression in the newly independent Nigeria (see Okeke 2006: 26–37). Onobrakpeya’s stylized rendering of the Ogboni drum departed from his more experimental paintings of Urhobo mythologies, but its presence on the brochure resonated with the interests of his fellow artists in Zaria and elsewhere to assert the utility of cultural heritage within new nation-states. In Accra, the drum provided the principal visual reference, carried on the brochure from panel to panel by every delegate. Its strong, graphic outlines made an impression; in her report on the congress, delegate Dorothy Porter (1963: 202), librarian from the Moorland-Spangarn Center at Howard University in Washington DC, marked out Onobrakpeya’s “attractively designed” cover for praise.

The drum also resonated with wider debates at the congress regarding the need to recenter the continent’s historic arts and cultural practices as critical to the development of new states. By 1962, the principle tenets of Senghor’s Négritude and its centering



5 Afewerki Tekle
The Total Liberation of Africa (1963)
 Stained glass; 150 m x 150 m
 Located in Africa Hall at the headquarters of
 the United Nations Economic Commission
 for Africa (UNECA), Addis Ababa.
 Photo: Goodwin Ogbuehi

of historic artistic culture as evidence of an African civilization in stark contradistinction to a European one (Senghor 1956: 57–58) were well known. In configuring Africa’s arts as manifestations of the continent’s knowledge systems, Senghor framed objects like the Ogboni drum as emblematic of Africa’s contribution to the “Civilization of the Universal” (1994: 32; see also Gbadegesin 1991: 30–45). Humanity could not be understood in its totality without recognition of such arts—and their corresponding spiritual significance—on their own terms.

In an address in Oxford the year before the Accra gathering, Senghor had further insisted that Négritude was “traditionally *socialist* in character” [emphasis original] for reasons like those later invoked by Mboya; namely, that “Negro-African society” was “classless” and “community-based” (Senghor 1964a: 264–66). Senghor had been at pains to differentiate his “African Mode of Socialism” from that of Europe or the USSR. He cited Potekhin, signaling his awareness of the “socialist experiments of Eastern Europe” and their “positive achievements” (Senghor 1964a: 266), but he ultimately dismissed the economic idealism of the latter, arguing that though socialism was morally superior to capitalism, Africa needed capital. Senghor’s economic pragmatism was counterbalanced by his own humanist idealism when he argued that “spiritual needs, which weigh so heavy in Negro-African hearts” (Senghor 1964a: 266) ultimately underpinned African socialism in a way that neither Marx nor Potekhin could appreciate. Senghor’s critique of Marx’s “scientific” inclination dated to the late 1940s when he was reading Marx’s early works in the library of the French Parliament (Rippert 2017: 139–41). Against the

backdrop of France’s last attempts at colonial development in the postwar period, Senghor became broadly committed to socialism. He grew increasingly occupied with the idea that socialism was less about radically changing African society and more about uncovering and preserving its existing inclinations (LeMelle 1965: 331–32). In the early years of independence, he reemphasized this message and went further: the objective of ending the exploitation of African men and women, he argued, could be satisfied only by revivifying the “black soul” (Senghor 1964a: 265). Liberation from oppression meant striving not simply for “material well-being” but for spiritual redress; only art could express the “rapture of the heart, of the soul” (Senghor 1964a: 266) that this moment called for.

Ghana’s president, Kwame Nkrumah (1970), would later contest Senghor’s “idyllic” conception of African socialism prefaced on the notion of a “classless” continent, but at the first congress Nkrumah’s arrival at the University of Ghana, of which he was chancellor, was choreographed both to stir hearts and to contrast starkly with European precedents. American Charles J. Patterson provides a description: delegates mingled in the university’s Great Hall while *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* played from loudspeakers. “Abruptly,” however, “the music of Mozart [was] over-awed by the

belligerent booming” of drums (Patterson 1962: 2). These were not Ogboni *agba*, however, but Akan drums heralding Nkrumah’s arrival. This fit with the tabula rasa tone of Nkrumah’s opening address, which recounted scholarly interest in Africa from its origins in Persia, Greece, and Rome, through Arab and Chinese endeavors, to the European efforts of recent centuries. If the former were motivated by scientific curiosity, he argued, the latter were motivated by nefarious economic interests and had contributed to the continent’s subjugation. A rebirth of the “Africanist” endeavor was essential. “Africanists everywhere,” Nkrumah argued, “must ... help in building the spiritual and cultural foundations for the unity of our continent” (Bown and Crowder 1964: 10).

Dike followed with a similar tone but warned against romanticizing Africa’s history, particularly relative to its art. “We must accept the glories of Benin art with the human sacrifices,” he argued, “just as the Spaniards accept the horrors and bigotries of the Inquisition with the achievements of El Greco and Cervantes” (Bown and Crowder 1964: 22). Dike critiqued the idealizing overtones of Négritude and, by extension, African socialism’s tendency to deemphasize difficult indigenous histories. His note of caution, however, was followed by a call to action for those invested in the academic study of Africa’s arts; it was, he argued, of paramount importance to elevate artistic traditions to the status of world culture, as broad human “achievements” not “products of so-called ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’ societies” (Bown and Crowder 1964: 22). After all, Dike insisted, the arts of Africa had regenerated European culture only a few decades previously. Here he was aligned with Senghor, who had argued that after the failure of the “Greco-Roman aesthetic” (the approximation of art with an imitation of nature), European art had been revived only through its “encounter” with the arts of Africa (Senghor 1956: 65).

Diop subsequently cut to the chase with the congress’s diverse audience, which included delegates from across Africa, from Europe, North and South America, the USSR, the Middle East, and Asia. He disliked the term *Africanist*, which, he argued, framed Africa as a “passive object of scholarship” (Bown and Crowder 1964: 46). A decade earlier, the journal *Présence Africaine* had published “L’art nègre” (Diop 1951) in a special issue stressing that scholarship on Africa’s arts must serve decolonization efforts. The emphasis on the political urgency of the study of art resurfaced in Diop’s Accra address when he stated that “cultural consciousness” was inseparable from “political and economic consciousness” and that all were bound up in an age of revolution. The emphasis now fell on the “building up of African authoritativeness.” But, he stressed, “authoritativeness in cultural matters” could not be realized until “political authority [was] in the hands of the people” (Bown and Crowder 1964: 49). Intellectuals must be anticolonial activists; artistic culture needed to resonate at both the national and the continental level. “Men of culture have ... [a] clear responsibility,” he argued; “they must provide a structural pattern for ... national consciousness, as well as the consciousness of Africa as a whole” (Bown and Crowder 1964: 48–49).

Diop’s insistence on activism and colonial liberation as precondition to “authoritativeness” appeared to affront the myopia of the “colonized intellectual” in Frantz Fanon’s recently published *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The latter, Fanon argues, were misguided in their quest to recover some lost, unifying “African” culture. In focusing on correcting the oppressor, they simultaneously

confirmed the generalizing assumptions of the latter and neglected realities on the ground (Fanon 2001: 170–71). Yet if, like Fanon, Diop saw anticolonial struggle as precondition to “authoritativeness,” he nonetheless configured Africa’s “men of culture” in a manner that Fanon would have challenged. While Diop called upon the latter to forge a blueprint for national (as well as continental) consciousness, Fanon stressed that culture could not itself create but was rather derived from national consciousness; that is, from the people (Bown and Crowder 1964: 49; Fanon 2001: 188). Fanon insisted that only the struggle for the creation of a new nation could give birth to national cultural forms. He would, therefore, have contested Diop’s inverted configuration of the latter as “structural pattern” for the consciousness of the former.

Fanon, sadly, died months before the Accra congress. His own rebuke of Négritude’s more romantic presuppositions and generalizing tendencies of African socialism was, therefore, absent from the proceedings. Yet voices of dissent were raised, most notably by Mphahlele, who took Senghor to task (Bown and Crowder 1964: 220–32). In his presentation, Mphahlele cited Senghor’s poem “Prayer to Masks,” which begins with the lines:

Masks! Oh Masks!
Black mask, red mask, you black and white masks,
Rectangular mask through whom the spirit breathes,
I greet in silence! (Bown and Crowder 1964: 226–27).

Mphahlele acknowledged the “nobility of tone and feeling” of Senghor’s writing but insisted that the reverent imagery found in such prose obscured the fact that it referenced no “tangible experience” (Bown and Crowder 1964: 227). The emphasis on collective rapture displaced individual reality. Mphahlele was a known critic of Négritude. Not long before he appeared at the Accra congress, his collection *The African Image* (1962) had been published. In it he confronts the obsession with exhibiting only the “traditional or indigenous” arts (Eatough 2019: 144). The pursuit of that which was definitively “African” involved glossing over diversity with a pretense of unity.

Mphahlele cautioned against literature focused on “African-ness,” fearing that it produced only “fodder for the Africanist” (Bown and Crowder 1964: 228), another term he disliked. If Mphahlele was critical of Négritudist themes, he was also concerned that social realist writing in European languages was valued purely for its “African” “sociological” content. Here he rebuked not only Western scholars but Soviet Africanists who actively encouraged social realism as documentation of African societies in transition. Mphahlele charted a course between two socialist visions for African postcolonial culture, stating that neither truly made visible or, more important, impacted the lives of the poorest in society. There was no singular African literature, he argued, and creative culture should not be motivated by a “general ephemeral notion of African solidarity” (Bown and Crowder 1964: 231) but rather should be “nourished by local experience,” for which he proposed both community workshops and a greater appreciation for the sophistication of vernacular forms.

Mphahlele’s presentation preceded the “Art and Music” section of the congress, chaired by the Ghanaian artist Kofi Antubam. The two shared some concerns. Antubam was a renowned artist,



6 Traditional artworks for public viewing during the World Festival of Black Arts, Dakar, Senegal, April 1966
 Photo: Priya Ramrakhal/The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images

closely associated with the pageantry of independent Ghana (Hess 2006). He was also a writer and, at the time of the congress, was preparing his book *Ghana's Heritage of Culture* (1963), which documents the diversity of Ghana's artistic traditions while emphasizing the country's "contribution to the arts" (Hess 2006: 187), a sentiment that aligned with Négritude's recuperative aspirations. Yet Antubam was more interested in the concept of the "African personality," popularized by Nkrumah, which shared with Négritude what Archie Mafeje calls "an ontology of being black in a white-dominated world" (1990: 162). The difference between the two, Mafeje argues, was that Nkrumah's "African personality" was concerned with shared sociological traits rather than artistic embodiments of the Black soul. Antubam did not draw specific distinction between Négritude and the African personality; however, when he wrote about "tribal masks," he was, unlike Senghor, unmoved by them. They were a "great source of symbolic art," he states, but "there [was] no place for this particular form of art in Ghana today" (1963: 191). In Antubam's model, certain cultural traditions belonged to societies past; they were important and should be studied, but their principle utility was in supporting new, composite forms for the symbolic repertoire of the new nation. These ideas, and their commitment to making use of hybrid historic and contemporary imagery for a new political present, are conspicuous in his own civic art, such as the

Asesegua (Seat of State). This chair for Ghana's head of state combines the historic forms of the Akan Golden Stool with newer symbols, such as the black star of anticolonialism, which also appeared on the Ghanaian flag (Hess 2001: 65; Yorke et al. 2017: 1610). In 1967, it was one of several new national icons to be showcased on Ghana's stamps (Fig. 3).

Atta Kwami (2013: 227) speculates that Antubam was influenced by Marxist ideas about art's utility, encountered via Soviet contacts in Nkrumah's administration. Most likely Antubam was encouraged to develop his long-standing interest in historic art in Ghana into a book while in East Germany (GDR), where, in 1961, his *Art of Ghana* exhibition had opened.⁷ *Ghana's Heritage of Culture*, funded by the GDR's German-African Society, was a continuation of that exhibition, and, as Gerald Götting's "Preface" notes, served to affront the idea that African art was "primitive," an idea propagated by the "so-called civilized apologists of colonial or neo-colonial policy" (Antubam 1963: 11). This, along with lines that stressed the GDR's desire to "give real help to the cultural development of Africa" (Antubam 1963: 12), echoed the interests of Soviet African studies, as expressed by Potekhin, to be both distinct from the Africanist approaches of former colonial nations and in active service of decolonization. In Accra, therefore, Antubam likely agreed with Mphahlele on the need for contemporary art to be grounded and useful, while rejecting the suggestion of dispensing with pan-African aspirations. The combined concern for continental scale *and* local, material realities that seemed to underpin Antubam's 1963 publication was one that Soviet scholars would elaborate further at the next congress, in Dakar in 1967.

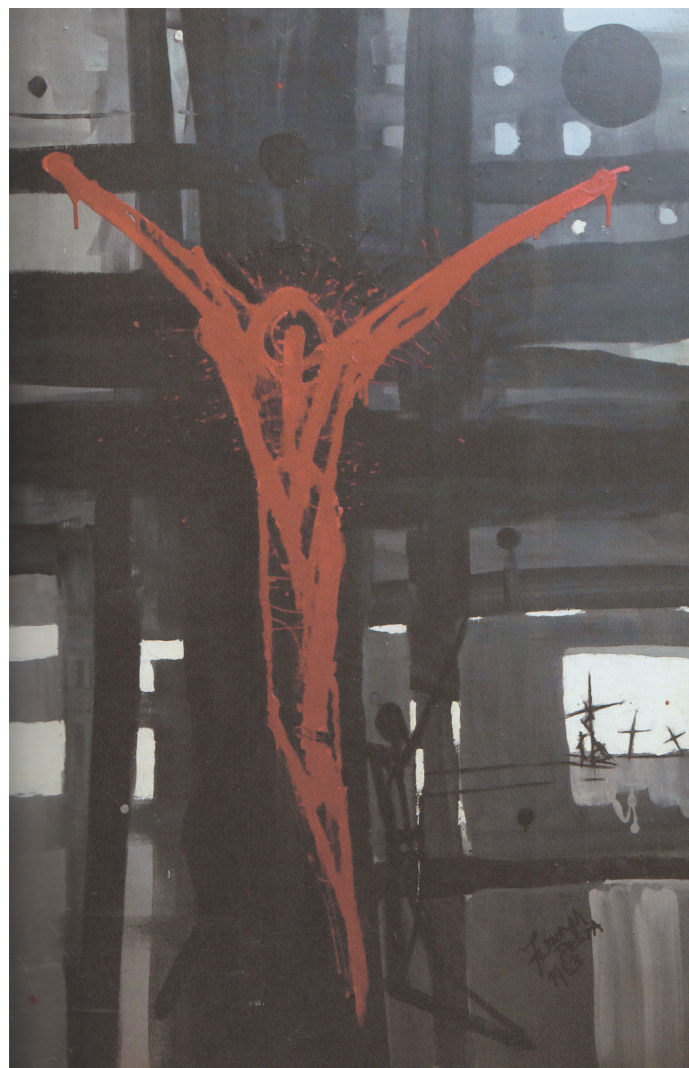
7 Gebre Kristos Desta
Golgotha (1963)
Oil on hardboard; 183 cm x 122 cm
Photo: reproduced with permission of the Gebre
Kristos Desta Center, Addis Ababa

DAKAR, 1967

Diop was the chair of the 1967 congress. In Accra, he had been “the most voracious, intellectual pouncer” (Patterson 1962: 3). In Senegal, he struck a more diplomatic tone, calling for a silence to mark the recent deaths of Melville Herskovits and Potekhin, “old friends” of “different ideologies” (“Second Session” 1968: 202). At the Accra meeting, these men, as the respective heads of the American and Soviet Africanist fields, had been prominent. Certainly their “different ideologies” had been evident: Potekhin was accused of preaching “a sermon in full accord with Soviet economic theology” (Patterson 1962: 9), while Herskovits lobbied against the Soviets in an effort to ensure the congress would be controlled by individual scholars rather than governments (Gershenhorn 2004: 228). Despite representing rival sides, however, they also worked together. Their coauthorship, for example, of the congress’s constitution was held up as evidence that this new Africanist forum represented a “moratorium on Cold War politics” (Crowder 1963: 251).

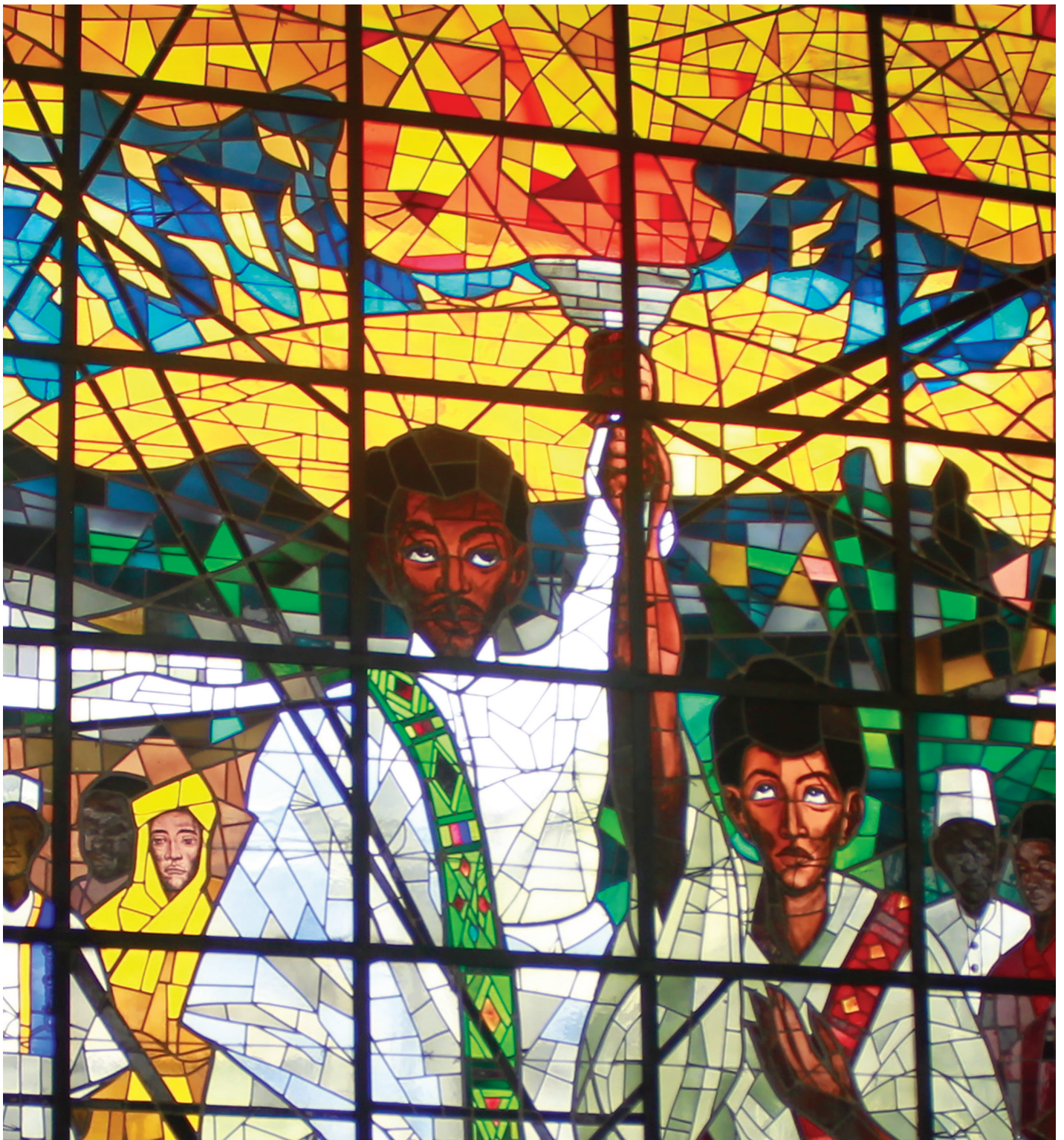
The Dakar congress opened a year after the landmark First World Festival of Negro Arts (Fig. 4). Referring to the latter as the “Imaginary Museum” of the Black world, Diop proposed that the congress was its intellectual corollary. If the festival was “the illustration of the values of Negritude,” Diop stated, the congress aspired to “study of the organization of these values for the development of Africa” (“Second Session” 1968: 203). Senghor surely approved of Diop’s conflation. He used his own speech as host nation president to suggest that *Négritude*—a term, he said, he knew was not appreciated by all—was essentially the same as “Africanism” and that, therefore, a congress of *Africanists* shared its principal concerns for uncovering and making visible the “Negro-African civilisation” (“Second Session” 1968: 213). Nkrumah had looked back at that which came before; Senghor looked resolutely forward, emphasizing the grand scale of the task ahead. He called for a move away from “fragmentary” or “atomis[ed]” research (“Second Session” 1968: 210–11). Scholars must, he stressed, consider the “totality of African history” [emphasis original], dating back not “six thousand” but over a “million” years (“Second Session” 1968: 211). Only by pursuing research on such a scale could the African contribution to the “Civilisation of the Universal” be seen.

Though he did not make explicit the connection, Senghor’s aspirations for a “total” African history echoed those of the recently deceased Potekhin, the man whose version of socialism Senghor had previously found too doctrinaire. Potekhin had been a leading advocate of rewriting the entire history of Africa, which, he stated, had previously been written by the “scientists of colonial countries ... [and] distorted and falsified beyond recognition” (1962: 35). For Soviet Africanists the question of rethinking the “totality of African history” was critical. If, for Senghor, this was about restoring Africa’s centrality in global history, for Potekhin and his colleagues it was bound to Marxist teleology, whereby Africa’s history could be shown as progressive development in which colonialism was a stage out of which the continent was emerging.



Their motivations were not entirely the same, but Senghor’s and Potekhin’s ambitions correlated in interesting ways.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the papers at Dakar that spoke most closely to the scale of Senghor’s aspirations were delivered by Soviet delegates Vil’ Borisovich Mirimanov and Galina Chernova. Mirimanov’s paper (1967) addressed “Some Problems of the History of Fine Arts in Tropical Africa,” while Chernova’s contribution (1967) chronicled the work of contemporary artists from across the continent. From the outset, Mirimanov stressed that Soviet interest in the arts of Africa was distinct from that of Western Europeans. While artists in France and Germany were, he argued, enthralled by “so-called ‘primitive art’” (a term he distained), a Latvian art critic who published under the Russian pseudonym V.I. Markov had written “the first publication to regard African statuettes and masks ... as works of art” (Mirimanov 1967: 3). Mirimanov was referring to Markov’s *Negro Art*, prepared in 1913 and published posthumously in Petrograd in 1919 (see Howard, Bužinska, and Strother 2015). Having established the Russian/Soviet pedigree for writing respectfully about art from Africa, Mirimanov went on to stress that the Soviet Union was deeply committed to developing such study and that it had held several important exhibitions in the 1960s, drawing on collections in Leningrad, Moscow, and Tartu, Estonia. The Africa Institute had sections dedicated to the study of ancient and



modern African culture, and the historical connectivity between these two occupied Mirimanov's own research. Only by bringing together "exceptionally vast and disconnected material embracing the oldest and longest period in the history of African art," Mirimanov argued, could a sense of "the evolution ... [of] specific forms in African art" be gauged (Mirimanov 1967: 5). Such study was needed, he emphasized, for "us to carry out the most important task now facing every student of African culture, to write the entire history of fine arts in Africa" (Mirimanov 1967: 5–6).

Mirimanov briefly outlined how his own formal observations

8 Detail of Figure 5, the central window of Afewerk Tekle's *The Total Liberation of Africa* (1963). Photo: Goodwin Ogbuehi

of petroglyphs demonstrated evolution from naturalism through a period of "sketchiness" to a transition to realism. Such an evolution was important to document, he argued, because it countered the presumption that African arts were "alien to realism" (Mirimanov 1967: 7). Antubam had addressed similar presumptions when he reported that European colonial art teachers had insisted that the use of perspective, three-dimensionality, and

naturalistic portraiture were “completely un-African” (1963: 130) and should (along with painting, in general) be discouraged on the continent. While Antubam would argue that, though painting was a “borrowed medium” (1963: 131), Ghanaian artists were capable of innovating with it, Mirimanov stressed that the presumption that the continent lacked a history of realism was fallacious. Mirimanov’s interest, opposing what Senghor had dismissed as “atomized” research, was in recovering such histories and reconstructing knowledge about “separate periods” into a story of “successive phases of a single process” (Mirimanov 1967: 8).

Mirimanov fully developed this idea in his magnum opus, *Iskusstvo Tropsičeskoj Afriki; Tipologija, Sistematika, Ėvoljucija* (*The Art of Tropical Africa: Typology, System, Evolution*), in which the history of art in Africa is described as a progressive “polycentric supersystem” (1986: 288; see also Cowcher 2019: 154–55). In Dakar, he laid the foundations for this later endeavor, arguing that among the “problems” to be addressed by scholars was the multitude of intentions and material conditions of art’s production. Benin court art, he argued, revealed the power structures under which an artist labored (Mirimanov 1967: 9–10), rather than the individual intention of the artist, while “cult and applied art” (masquerade, religious statuary, etc.) were complex embodied communications, their form ultimately determined by a “utilitarian function” (Mirimanov 1967: 10). Mirimanov’s paper built upon work conducted in Moscow and Leningrad in the preceding years, including *Isskustvo Afriki/African Art* (1964), coauthored with Chernova, and the edited volume *Essays on African Culture* (1966), written both for Soviet readers and for distribution in Africa’s decolonizing nations. His particular research interests were Africa’s ancient and medieval arts but, guided in part by the grand aspirations of the “complex approach,” as well as a desire to disavow the West’s “bourgeois” ahistorical ethnographies, he sought to make such periods keystones in an all-encompassing narrative of continental progress. This approach meshed with Senghor’s ambitions, but it also had no interest in Négritude’s romantic inclinations. Per the expectations of scientific socialism, this was a project uninterested in constructing discrete histories circumscribed by race and more concerned with documenting a singular, interconnected, progressive human history from which Africa’s specific contributions had long been excluded.

While Mirimanov emphasized progressive, historical reconstruction efforts, his colleague Chernova (1967) surveyed the continent’s contemporary art scene. This topic was divisive in the 1960s when Western scholars, notably William Fagg, agonized over the “death” of “traditional” African art and the corrupting influence of European modernist modes (Beier 1968: 3). Antubam had wryly inferred that such anxieties derived from the fact that Europeans “fear ... future competition” (1963: 131). Soviet Africanists had no such anxieties; Africa’s diverse contemporary arts were a manifestation of the continent’s social and political realities. Chernova had attended the 1966 First World Festival of Negro Arts, which, she noted, was the first continent-wide exhibition of contemporary art. Her enthusiasm for its diversity and innovation was palpable. She reported on consternation at the festival regarding the impact of cheap foreign imports on traditional craft industries. Unlike “foreign scholars,” however, who had opposed a resolution put forward by African artists and writers, including Bernard Dadié, in favor of encouraging “serial

production” in the applied arts (as a counter to foreign imports), Soviet scholars had given their “full support” (Chernova 1967: 9). Where their Western colleagues feared conflating art and manufacturing, Chernova and her colleagues stood in solidarity with what they saw as a pragmatic decision to develop the continent’s art industries in response to current realities.

Chernova listed artists and their contributions to what she considered a rich if uneven contemporary art scene.⁸ She praised the “beauty” and “dignity” of works by artists such as the South African Gerard Sekoto and the Nigerian Demas Nwoko. She was enthusiastic about artists such as Boubacar Keita from Mali who chronicled social themes such as “Peasants at Work in the Fields,” and she noted important civic art such as Afewerk Tekle’s great stained glass depicting Africa’s past, present, and future in Africa Hall, Addis Ababa (Fig. 5). While reserving particular praise for social realism in painting and public art, Chernova also celebrated artists working in abstract modes and new media. This included the work of Senegalese artist Ibou Diouf (Fig. 6), whose work she praised for “[embodying] the joy of liberation,” Iba N’Diaye’s powerful evocation of the Tabaski ritual, Ivorian sculptor Christian Lattier’s string and metal armature works, and Ethiopian Gebre Kristos Desta’s blood-splattered representation of the Crucifixion in *Golgotha* (1963, Fig. 7), which was notable for its universally relatable representation of “torment” (Chernova 1967: 14). What brought these diverse artists together, Chernova argued, was a shared “unity of purpose ... a common struggle for liberation” (1967: 4).

Chernova’s voracious appetite for such a diverse array of African modernist work challenges any notion that the Soviets were solely interested in socialist realism, which since the 1930s had been the dominant mode in Soviet art schools. Though African students who studied in Soviet schools in the 1960s and 1970s were given a thorough training in realist modes (Cowcher 2019: 155–56) and though some localized versions of socialist realism (with prescribed subjects and an emphasis on sunny realism) were instituted in art schools under African Marxist military regimes in the 1970s (e.g., in Ethiopia), Chernova’s appraisal of the Dakar exhibition made clear that, to her, the value of an artwork hinged less on form than on content and intent. Indeed, works in a range of formal languages, from Gebre Kristos’s expressive paint strokes to Sekoto’s stylized renderings of Black Parisian life, were all acceptable, provided they were motivated by a common cause. Ethiopia had not been colonized by Europeans, but the inclusion of Gebre Kristos and Afewerk under Chernova’s progressive umbrella spoke to her evaluation of their work as a contribution to the continent’s collective struggle.

Emphasis fell, again, upon the importance of art’s utility in expressing and shaping contemporary realities, in not obsessing over historic arts in order that they might live silently in a museum, but in finding the useful among the historic. Chernova’s celebration of abstract or religious-themed works such as N’Diaye’s *Tabaski, sacrifice du mouton* (1963)—strikingly enigmatic in form, with figure and ground dissolving into each other in a muddy, mottled figurative abstraction—derived from the fact that they were not seen as “bourgeois” or “art-for-arts-sake.” Rather, they deployed expressive or abstracted modes to materialize a “profound philosophical problem” (Chernova 1967: 13)—in the case of the Islamic Tabaski festival, the sacrifice of a sheep as tribute to the Prophet



9 Gebre Kristos Desta
People Disguised (1973)
 Oil on hardboard; 91 cm x 70 cm
 Collection of Carol Boram-Hays and Michael B. Hays
 Photo: reproduced with permission, courtesy Carol Boram Hays and Michael B. Hays

Ibrahim, who was willing to kill his son, Ismael, at God's command but, at the last minute, was given a ram to sacrifice instead. N'Diaye's murky rendering was, in Chernova's estimation, valuable for its earnest wrestling with the "stern laws of life and death on earth" (1967: 13). At the same time, the recurrence of Christian themes was tolerated and even praised by Chernova because they revealed a collective concern for "equality and mercy" and for "good and evil" (1967: 14). Chernova praised Gebre Kristos's rendition of Christ's bloody presence on the cross, for example, as a profoundly empathetic work, its visceral red daubs suggestive of "all the torments that some people have had to endure" (1967: 14). In Chernova's mind, these were works of abstraction with progressive, humanist intent.

Chernova ended her presentation by citing Potekhin, "a sincere friend of the African peoples," who in his last article wrote, "The manners and customs of peoples have been scrupulously observed and described, but never ... was any evaluation of those manners and customs attempted from the standpoint of the interests of progress" (Chernova 1967: 15). Both Mirimanov and Chernova envisaged their contributions to the International Congress of Africanists as hailing from this standpoint. Their positions were, at once, in solidarity with the leading African intellectuals with whom they shared the stage and in step with both a Marxist conception of history and the use of art as a means of making social

realities visible. By the time of the next international congress, these latter two issues were urgent discussion topics in the bars and cafes of the city in which it took place: Addis Ababa.

ADDIS ABABA, 1973

Haile Selassie I University hosted the third congress, though all presentations took place at Africa Hall, the seat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa ("Third International Congress" 1973: 38). Here delegates could not miss Afewerik Tekle's great window, praised by Chernova, in which Ethiopia was configured as the continent's torchbearer (Fig. 8). If, in Dakar, the Soviet delegates had showcased their support for progressive Africanist scholarship, a different constituency asserted solidarity with their African colleagues in Addis Ababa: Black American scholars. Ethiopia's emperor, Haile Selassie, like Nkrumah and Senghor before him, opened the proceedings with an address that underscored the congress's continental significance while also noting the increased participation of African scholars. This participation, he stated, "can no doubt help to redirect Africanist research into areas of greater relevance to Africa's needs and interests" (Clarke 2004: 231). The increased African presence was matched by that of Black American scholars, who were represented at both Accra and Dakar but not as a discrete delegation. Sixteen scholars traveled to Addis Ababa as part of the Black American delegation, many of them historians working in relatively new Africana studies programs. They included the Marxist Guyanese historian Walter Rodney, whose landmark book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) had just been published, and John Henrik Clarke, who had recently finished serving as president of the African Heritage Studies Association (AHTSA).

The formation of the AHTSA had fueled the determination of Black American scholars to seek greater representation at the congress. The AHTSA had formed as a breakaway group from the African Studies Association (ASA) during a stormy conference in Montreal in 1969 (Clarke 1976: 5–11). During that conference a "Black caucus" of students and academics had called for equal representation in the predominantly White American professional body. When such representation was not forthcoming, the AHTSA was founded, and the ASA, the organization once led by Herskovits, was accused of a "neocolonialist" approach to the study of Africa. Confrontation between the ASA and AHTSA was avoided in Addis Ababa because the American delegation was equally divided between the two groups.

The Soviets had long seen themselves in solidarity with Black Americans. The relationship dated to the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution, when luminaries such as Claude McKay and Langston Hughes had traveled to the young USSR, which presented itself as progressive and inclusive, in contrast to segregated America (Moore 1996; Matusevich 2008a; Wilson 2018). In the Khrushchev era, as Soviet African studies burgeoned, the emphasis on the notion of the "friendship of peoples" drove a policy that invited students from across the nonaligned world, including many African countries, to live and study in Soviet institutions. As Maxim Matusevich (2008b), Julie Hessler (2006), and others have shown, the Soviet veneer of racial utopia masked paternalism and resentment, which led to both racist violence against Black students and, particularly in the perestroika period,

a nativist rejection of Blacks in Soviet spaces. Nonetheless, in the Africanist field, Potekhin in particular enthusiastically supported Black American Africanist projects. He maintained a friendly correspondence with Du Bois in the latter stages of both of their lives, the two having met in Moscow during Du Bois's tour in the late 1950s.⁹ With Potekhin's support, Du Bois organized a conference on his "Africana Encyclopedia" project following the first Africanist congress in Accra. With the passing of both Du Bois and Potekhin, the rapport between Soviet and Black American intellectuals waned. In Addis Ababa the Black American delegation was keener to assert solidarity with artists and intellectuals on the continent.

Following the 1973 congress, Clarke (2004) wrote a report on the historic participation of Black American scholars. He was a proponent of an expansive pan-Africanism, which he understood as not only continental solidarity but as encompassing all people of African descent. Clarke agreed with Haile Selassie's comment that "the time [seems] to have come when Africans [can] abandon the role of subservience [in Africanist study] and embrace that of full and equal participation" (2004: 231). Clarke bristled at certain papers presented during the congress, particularly those on economic and political matters, for continuing to treat "African problems in the abstract" (2004: 231). Apartheid, racism, oppression, and the ongoing fight against Portuguese colonialism were, he and fellow Black American delegates highlighted, not just academic concerns but violent, lived realities.

Clarke felt that the panels on social and cultural development, in which African scholars were notably active, were the strongest. He was particularly impressed by artists such as Ethiopian playwright Tsegaye Gebre-Medhin, who presented on "Africa as the Origin of Early Greek Theatre Culture." Tsegaye had been a prominent figure in the 1960s effervescent art scene, known as the "Addis Spring," during which he had debuted works that dealt with both social inequality in Ethiopia and the predicament of the educated Ethiopian (Azeze 1985: 37–38). In 1970 Tsegaye traveled to Senegal to study Négritude (Plastow 1996: 101), and his contribution to the 1973 congress was clearly informed by pan-Africanist concerns. Clarke was receptive to his framing. As was clear from both his postcongress report and his later writings in journals such as *Présence Africaine*, Clarke shared Diop's idea, articulated a decade earlier in Accra, that the revolution in Africa must not only be one of political consciousness but of cultural consciousness too.

Revolution was, in fact, brewing in Addis Ababa in 1973. Alongside Tsegaye, another Ethiopian scholar, Girma Amare, presented an ominous-sounding paper, "Considerations of Some Ideological Problems in Ethiopia Today." The contents were not published, but the "problems" implied by the title are not hard to imagine. Girma, an Ethiopian historian who by the mid-1980s was at the University of Lagos, would later write (Amare 1984) about the tensions in his country regarding historic imperial governance and the failure to enact substantive social and political modernizing reforms. Since the mid-1960s, Haile Selassie had been accused of failing to deliver land reform and of presiding over a "feudal" system of rank social inequality. Ethiopia's students rallied under the slogan "Land to the Tiller" and called for a radical redistribution of land ownership. In the spring before the international congress in December 1973, Haile Selassie I University had been the

site of student protests following an exhibition of photographs, taken by faculty and students, of an unfolding famine in Wollo Province (Redda 1996: 20). Clarke's report makes no reference to domestic turmoil, instead speaking warmly of the congress's hosts. Yet, as delegates mingled, the famine continued to unfold outside Addis Ababa, a reality that made Haile Selassie's opening speech about the relevance of Africanist research to "the struggle that our continent is ... waging against poverty, ignorance and disease" (Clarke 2004: 231) retrospectively jarring.

Ethiopia's revolution unfolded less than a year later when the emperor was deposed by a military committee, which proclaimed a commitment to Marxist-Leninism but soon turned dictatorial. Art played a key role in the revolution, which hinged upon making visible unseen social classes and, specifically, the suffering of the rural population. In the same year as the congress and the inflammatory exhibition at the university, Gebre Kristos Desta, the artist whom Chernova had praised for the universal relevance of his *Golgotha* (1963), painted a work rooted in the specific visual politics of Ethiopia's prerevolutionary moment. *People Disguised* (1973; Fig. 9) combines Gebre Kristos's characteristic biomorphic abstractions—circles, bubbles, and blood-like smears—with the suggested presence of three bodies: a figure on the left, indicated by a red oval face and two eye-like circles; a figure on the right, implied by a silhouetted head in profile; and a figure in the middle, whose circular torso, top center of the canvas, reveals a clear skeletal core. Gebre Kristos had used skeletal forms in other works not to infer starvation but to invoke such concepts as internal strength. In 1973, however, any suggestion of a rib cage in a work entitled *People Disguised* had provocative connotations.¹⁰

Whether the painting was intended as an overt critique or not, the presence and absence of the figures in Gebre Kristos's work resonated with the growing accusations that Haile Selassie's government was actively concealing the physical suffering of starving people. One starkly realist element in the canvas is an eye, in the top right, its pupil clearly dilated. It looks not at the indistinct figures but at the viewer of the canvas; its presence unsettling, it seems to both accuse and call to action. A few months after Gebre Kristos painted *People Disguised*, his student Eshetu Tiruneh took a more direct approach when he painted a mural—depicting starving but defiant Ethiopians on a confrontational march from the barren countryside—on a wall of the Fine Arts School in Addis Ababa.¹¹ Eshetu painted in a more clearly realist mode than his teacher. Eshetu's mural, which became an icon of the early revolutionary years, anticipated an uncompromising schism that followed the emperor's downfall, one in which abstraction was quickly characterized as "bourgeois" and realism established as the only appropriate mode for a socialist revolution, a schism that contrasted with Chernova's inclusive appraisals in the previous decade.

The role of socialist ideas in postrevolutionary Ethiopian art is a subject for another study. Suffice it to say that, by the time of the third congress, debates around socialism's relationship to Africa's art and culture had moved far from the general concerns regarding the recuperation of historic arts for continental solidarity that had been at the forefront in Accra. In the 1970s in Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Angola, art and visual culture would be put directly in the service of Marxist revolutions and civil wars that called for depictions of and assistance for African

proletarian struggles. The representation of class-based struggle was a marked departure from the diverse, utopic imaginary of 1960s African socialism. In Ethiopia, in particular, the exposé of inequality within the imperial system troubled the country's status as a pan-African beacon, a status that delegates to the third congress were overtly reminded of via Afewerik Tekle's stained glass. If the third congress marked a moment of solidarity between Black American scholars and their African colleagues, the events of the Ethiopian revolution would have serious ramifications for the country's pan-Africanist reputation, particularly among Black Americans (see Wondwosen 2016).

The gathering in Addis Ababa marked a turning point, not only within Ethiopia but for the congress as a whole. Its next iteration was in Kinshasa in 1978 but under a changed name: the International Congress of African Studies. Despite efforts to wrest the term *Africanist* away from its associations with Western scholarship (notably Senghor's attempt to conflate Africanism with Négritude), the term was dropped in favor of the more neutral *African studies*. Anthropologist Barbara Harrell-Bond (1979) reported after the conference that Kinshasa was notable for the dominance of African scholars. She claimed that the waning of once "lavish" state support for African studies outside the continent—a hallmark of Cold War academic priorities—meant that many non-African scholars lacked the resources to attend (1979: 1). Whether that or a shift in priorities was the cause, non-African "Africanists" did not, after the tensions in Addis Ababa, see the congress as the critical "international" gathering it had been in the

1960s and early 1970s. The age of signaling solidarity was waning.

The first three International Congresses of Africanists took place against a Cold War backdrop in the first decade of African independence. Their histories and contexts allow us to locate the specific occasions at which certain ideas were presented and contested. Identifying these is important for documenting key shifts in the attitudes and approaches to the historic and contemporary arts of the continent as they evolved through the 1960s and 1970s. These were, of course, not the only places at which these ideas were discussed. Mirimanov (1969), for example, developed his ideas further when he spoke at the subsequent Algiers Symposium on African Culture. The International Congress of Africanists, however, represented a concerted effort on the part of African intellectuals to take control of the academic study of the African continent. Socialist concerns were prominent at all three congresses, though their specific manifestations shifted from the open-ended, collective aspirations of African socialism, abundant in Accra, to the grand narratives and materialist frameworks presented in Dakar, to the class-based tensions that bubbled overtly and covertly in Addis Ababa. From Ghana to Ethiopia, art, broadly defined, was repeatedly cited as a radical means of shifting perspectives about the continent, as a tool in ongoing decolonizing processes, and as a bulwark against neocolonialist incursions. Though the meeting in Addis Ababa revealed a lingering cleavage between academic debates and political realities, the importance of these congresses as spaces of exchange and solidarity should not be forgotten.

Notes

This essay began as a paper for the panel "Cultures of Solidarity, or Towards a Bright New Future: Transnational Exchange in African Liberation Networks" at the European Conference on African Studies, University of Edinburgh, June 12, 2019. I thank the panel convenors, Dr. Nadine Siegard and Dr. Polly Savage, for their feedback on an earlier draft. I am grateful to Janet Stanley at the Warren M. Robbins Library at the National Museum of African Art for her assistance to accessing texts by Chernova and Mirimanov. Finally, I thank Bruce Onobrakpeya for sharing his memories of the design he made for the first congress, and Dr. Carol Boram-Hays for introducing me to Gebre Kristos's *People Disguised* (1973) in Columbus, OH, in summer 2018.

1 The final chapter of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), for example, amplifies the tragedy of the narrative by revealing the callous and ignorant manner in which the British district commissioner intended to record events in his proposed book, "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger."

2 The varieties of African socialism (from Tom Mboya to Julius Nyerere) and the Soviet response to them were closely tracked by American scholars, most notably the historian Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, who authored an article (1968) and a book (1969) on the subject.

3 Nonalignment refers to the Non-Aligned Movement, established 1961, following principles laid out at the landmark 1955 conference in Bandung. The movement expressed commitment to peaceful coexistence, mutual nonaggression and noninterference. As the discussions around the founding of the International Congress make clear, countries such as Ghana who were adherents to it did not refuse to engage Cold War politics, but rather insisted that mutual respect and cooperation was critical.

4 The International Congress of Orientalists had existed since the 1870s, the era in which Orientalist study underwent a process of "professionalization." Though the colonialist underpinnings of European Orientalism, broadly defined, would be laid bare by Edward Said in 1978, in the 1960s Orientalist study remained an interdisciplinary, international field, one that, though historically dominated by European voices, increasingly encompassed the work of academics in Asia, the Middle East,

North Africa, and, somewhat later, sub-Saharan Africa.

5 The date of this letter, May 10, 1960, must be incorrect, as it refers to the International Congress of Orientalists, which took place in December 1960. This was likely a typographical error, and Potekhin meant 1961.

6 Bruce Onobrakpeya, personal communication, February 11, 2021.

7 Antubam's publication and its East German patronage are discussed by Monica Blackmun Visonà in her paper "Connecting Two Akan Scholars to French and British Patronage," presented at the European Conference on African Studies, University of Edinburgh, June 13, 2019.

8 Chernova argued that the ongoing fight for independence in the Portuguese colonies impacted the abilities of certain African countries to develop modernist modes, while also highlighting other countries (including Rwanda, Burundi, Gambia, and Sierra Leone) that, "for a number of reasons," had yet to develop modern painting and sculpture. Modern art, therefore, was "uneven" on the continent (Chernova 1967: 7).

9 Letters between Potekhin and Du Bois from 1960 to 1963 can be found in the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers at UMass Amherst. They have been digitized and are available online at <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/collection/mums312>.

10 The title is written on the back of the canvas.

11 A small, later version of this mural is viewable today in the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa.

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