

## Abstract

During the period of decolonisation in Africa, the CIA subsidised a number of African authors, editors and publishers as part of its anti-communist covert propaganda strategy. Managed by two front organisations, the Congress of Cultural Freedom and the Farfield Foundation, its Africa programme stretched across the continent, with hubs in Ibadan, Kampala, Nairobi, Cape Town and Johannesburg. This book unravels the hidden networks and associations underpinning African literary publishing in the 1960s; it investigates the success of the CIA in disrupting and infiltrating African literary magazines and publishing firms, and determines the extent to which new circuits of cultural and literary power emerged. Based on new archival evidence relating to the Transcription Centre, *The Classic* and *The New African*, it includes case studies of Wole Soyinka, Nat Nakasa and Bessie Head, which assess how their literary careers were influenced by these transnational literary institutions, and their response to these interventions.

## Keywords

CIA, African Literature, Cultural Cold War, Congress for Cultural Freedom, Literary Publishing, Authorship, Wole Soyinka, Nat Nakasa, Bessie Head.

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## Introduction

In 1961 the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Chief of Covert Action Staff issued a document setting out its covert strategy for international anti-communist propaganda. It announced that books and publishers were to play a fundamental role in the operation: 'Books differ from all other propaganda media primarily because one single book can significantly change the reader's attitude and action to an extent unmatched by the impact of any other single medium.'<sup>1</sup> The document listed the CIA's five-point plan:

- (a) Get books published or distributed abroad without revealing any U.S. influence, by covertly subsidizing foreign publications or booksellers.
- (b) Get books published which should not be 'contaminated' by any overt tie-in with the U.S. government, especially if the position of the author is 'delicate'.
- (c) Get books published for operational reasons, regardless of commercial viability.
- (d) Initiate and subsidize indigenous national or international organizations for book publishing or distributing purposes.
- (e) Stimulate the writing of politically significant books by unknown foreign authors – either by directly subsidizing the author, if covert contact is feasible, or indirectly, through literary agents or publishers.<sup>2</sup>

This book assesses the implications of the CIA's policy to 'get books published or distributed without revealing any U.S. influence', to directly or indirectly 'subsidiz[e] the author', and to subsidize 'national or international organizations for book publishing'. Focusing on the CIA's cultural programme in Africa, it aims to unravel some of the hidden networks and associations underpinning [African literary publishing](#) in this period of decolonisation during the 1960s.

The CIA used two main front organisations to carry out its undercover operation. The flagship of its cultural diplomacy programme was the Congress of Cultural Freedom (CCF), which was established in 1950, with its headquarters in Paris and offices in thirty-five countries. It funded art exhibitions, conferences, literary and music prizes, and over twenty prestigious magazines worldwide, including *Encounter* in London; *The Kenyon Review*, *Partisan Review*, and *The New Leader* in the United States; *Der Monat* in Germany; *Prewes* in France; *Quadrant* in Australia; *Tempo Presente* in Italy; *Forum* in Austria; *Jiyu* in Japan; *Cuadernos*; *Mundo Nuevo* in Latin America and *Hivâr* in Beirut. The second major front organisation was the Farfield Foundation – an ostensibly philanthropic organisation based in New York, which was incorporated in 1952 as a 'non-profit organization', allegedly to 'strengthen the cultural ties which bind the nations of the world and to reveal to all peoples who share the traditions of a free culture the inherent dangers which totalitarianism poses to intellectual and cultural development'.<sup>3</sup> Both the CCF and Farfield also received a limited amount of funding from private philanthropists.<sup>4</sup> The CIA's Africa programme stretched across the continent, with hubs in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Nairobi, Kampala, Ibadan, as well as in Paris and London. It was predominantly a publishing programme, funding a number of literary and political magazines, including *Black Orpheus*, *Transition*, *The New African*, *Africa South*, and *The Classic*, and book publishing by *Présence Africaine* in Paris, Mbari in

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<sup>1</sup> Church, *Final Report of the Select Committee*, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Saunders, *Cultural Cold War*, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> Benson, *Black Orpheus*, p. 36.

Nigeria, and Chemchemi in Kenya. It also funded arts centres, literary festivals and prizes, theatre productions, radio and television broadcasting operations, and conferences.

The technique of enlisting writers and publishers in the production and dissemination of government propaganda creation has a well-established historical precedent in British intelligence services. During the First World War Charles Masterman used publishers, including Hodder and Stoughton, John Murray, Thomas Nelson, Methuen and Oxford University Press, as well as a number of authors, including Arthur Conan Doyle, Arnold Bennett, Thomas Hardy, G. K. Chesterton and H. G. Wells, to produce covert propaganda for the British War Propaganda Bureau at Wellington House in London.<sup>5</sup> During the Second World War, authors including Graham Greene, George Orwell, and John Betjeman, and publishers like Hodder and Stoughton, Oxford University Press, Penguin, Heinemann, Faber, Collins, and Hogarth Press were likewise enlisted into the propaganda machine through the Ministry of Information.<sup>6</sup> In the post-war period, the British government co-opted British publishers to publish colonial propaganda via the auspices of the Colonial Literature Bureau across Africa.<sup>7</sup> The difference in the case of the CIA was the sheer scale of the operation – its global geographical reach – and its covert nature. Whereas the British government overtly enlisted authors and publishers into its propaganda campaigns, and only the readers were deceived about the source of the books, with the CIA, the deception extended to the whole literary establishment – authors, publishers, editors, and readers – none of whom were made aware of the propaganda operation.

The CIA's Cold War publishing strategy was more subtle than simple indoctrination. The CIA chose to influence the 'restricted field of production': the realm of 'high art' and serious literature, poetry, and plays produced by elite, highly educated writers, which Bourdieu describes as claiming to be autonomous and independent of commercial and political influence.<sup>8</sup> The main currency in operation in this field is cultural and symbolic capital; its association with economic and political capital is carefully disguised: it is 'an independent social universe with its own laws of functioning, its specific relations of force, its dominants and its dominated, and so forth'.<sup>9</sup> In order for the CIA to exert influence in the literary sphere, it had to build up credibility within the sphere by infiltrating existing literary and journalistic groups through financial patronage. Thus, the credibility and symbolic capital of writers and publications depended on the secrecy of the operation, on avoiding any 'overt tie-in with the U.S. government'.

There are two key lines of interpretations of this covert operation. Some regard it as a form of American cultural and political imperialism, while others see it as a benign, essentially apolitical form of cultural patronage and diplomacy. Frances Stoner Saunders's seminal study of the cultural cold war cast the Congress for Cultural Freedom as 'an extensive, highly influential network of intelligence personnel, political strategists, the corporate establishment and old school ties of the Ivy League universities', who successfully infiltrated left-leaning and liberal academic, literary, and cultural associations around the world.<sup>10</sup> Using the metaphor of the patron and the piper to describe the relationship between the CIA and its network of authors and editors across the globe,<sup>11</sup> she challenges claims that the CIA and its foundations provided aid with 'no strings attached' or that the recipients of this funding were unaware of its source.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Buitenhuis, *Great War of Words*, p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> Holman, *Carefully Concealed Connections*

<sup>7</sup> Davis, 'Creating a Book Empire', p. 136.

<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 163. I discuss how Bourdieu's theories of cultural production translate to African literary publishing contexts in 'Playing the Game?' and *Creating Postcolonial Literature*. For further analyses of this, see Brouillette, 'Postcolonial Authorship Revisited', Zimpler, 'For Neither Love nor Money', and Krishnan, *Contingent Canons*.

<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 163.

<sup>10</sup> Saunders, *Cultural Cold War*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>11</sup> Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?*

<sup>12</sup> Saunders, *Cultural Cold War*, pp. 4, 377.

While Saunders focuses on American and British art and literature in the cultural cold war, Andrew N. Rubin, Juliana Spahr, and Bhakti Shringarpure pursue a similar line of argument with respect to the CIA's impact on world literature and post-colonial literature. Rubin states that the CIA played a defining role in the establishment of 'new regimes of consecration', 'a new kind of international literary system', and a 'whole ideology and mode of world literature', and thereby helped to create world literature along conservative modernist lines by promoting art for art's sake.<sup>13</sup> He argues that the CCF 'upheld an illusion of the literary world outside of politics' and that it gave 'tremendous visibility' to some writers while excluding others.<sup>14</sup> This was part of the 'cultural process by which imperial authority was transferred from Britain and France to the United States in the aftermath of the Second World War'; its aim was to suppress dissent in the face of African nationalism.<sup>15</sup> Bhakti Shringarpure argues that CIA influence was exercised not so much through overt propaganda and editorial interventions as through promotion, cross-publication, and the creation of a depoliticized postcolonial canon of literature.<sup>16</sup> Juliana Spahr likewise claims that 'it is obvious that these manipulations curbed autonomy', but that the CCF had no need to 'censor or regulate' the publications that they funded, as the editors and writers who received support were 'handpicked by the Congress because their views were sympathetic to its concerns'.<sup>17</sup> These scholars make the astute observation that the CIA influenced postcolonial literature not simply through textual interventions but also by managing a select group of authors' visibility through patronage and promotion, international publication and translation possibilities, literary festivals and prizes. While these are intriguing arguments, all three studies relate to postcolonial literature in general, and further research on African literature is necessary to substantiate these bold claims.

Anecdotal evidence and scholarship related more specifically to the cultural cold war in Africa draws very different conclusions. Writers and editors who were involved in this programme have been at pains to assert their political and literary independence from the CIA after the funding scandal first came to light in 1966–7.<sup>18</sup> Esk'ia Mphahlele, Randolph Vigne, James Currey, Ronald Segal, Rajat Neogy, and Wole Soyinka have all stated that they were unaware of the source of the funding, that it had been provided on an unconditional basis, and that they had absolute freedom to exercise their own editorial judgements. Several subsequent studies of the CCF's little magazines in Africa, specifically *Black Orpheus*,<sup>19</sup> *Transition*,<sup>20</sup> and *Africa South*,<sup>21</sup> have corroborated these views and have found no evidence of editorial interference on the part of the CIA, or knowledge of the CIA funding by editors and authors. The CIA funding of Mbari Publishing offered writers and editors liberation from reliance on market forces or the restrictions of national governments, according to Nathan Suhr-Sytsma.<sup>22</sup> The Africa programme of the CCF is described by Asha Rogers as offering 'non-interventionist sponsorship', with an overriding aim to 'protect cultural autonomy and 'construct robust literary and cultural spheres'.<sup>23</sup> And the Transcription Centre and *Transition* magazine are termed by Peter Kalliney, 'relatively autonomous literary institutions'<sup>24</sup> which supported African writers who were 'drawn to

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<sup>13</sup> Rubin, *Archives of Authority*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>15</sup> Rubin, *Archives of Authority*, pp. 17, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Shringarpure, *Cold War Assemblages*, p. 157.

<sup>17</sup> Spahr, *Du Bois's Telegram*, pp. 105, 102.

<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, p. 40

<sup>19</sup> Benson, *Black Orpheus*, pp. 115, 36–7.

<sup>20</sup> Rogers, 'Culture in Transition', 190 and Kalliney, *Modernism in a Global Context*, pp. 102.

<sup>21</sup> Sandwith, 'Entering the Territory', p. 135, n. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Suhr-Sytsma, *Poetry, Print and the Making of Postcolonial Literature*, p. 72.

<sup>23</sup> Asha Rogers, 'Officially Autonomous', p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> Kalliney, *Modernism in a Global Context*, pp. 153.

modernist principles of intellectual freedom and writerly detachment'.<sup>25</sup> He claims that 'modernist aesthetic beliefs were key to US cultural diplomacy programs during the early Cold War', that the CCF used the doctrine of aesthetic autonomy 'to recruit intellectuals with no affinity for either Cold War superpower'.<sup>26</sup> These literary historians concur that the CIA's cultural interventions in Africa had limited political impact, and that their main legacy was the support of a transnational literary community with a shared literary aesthetic of modernist autonomy.

This book aims to contribute to these ongoing debates by following two new lines of enquiry. On a macro-level, it examines the transnational networks of African literary publishing in the period of decolonisation to investigate whether the CIA was successful in infiltrating African literary institutions, and to determine the extent to which new circuits of cultural and literary power emerged. By concentrating on publishers, the frequently forgotten agents in literary production, I review how publishing alliances were re-formed and realigned during the 1960s. On a micro-level, this book focuses on detailed author case studies, which examine whether or how individual African writers' careers and works were shaped by the literary networks supported by the CIA, and how they responded to these interventions. The three writers in question had widely divergent experiences of the CIA-funded institutions. Wole Soyinka was one of the principal beneficiaries of this funding, and the first case study analyses the role of the CIA in contributing to his canonical status. It focuses particularly on the role of the Transcription Centre in London in supporting Soyinka's writing career, and in facilitating the performance of his plays and the publishing and anthologising of his work. In contrast, the second case study examines the fraught and ultimately tragic involvement of Nat Nakasa with the CIA, charting his difficulties in creating a multiracial, transnational network of African writers as editor of *The Classic*, a literary magazine in Johannesburg that was funded by the Fairfield Foundation. The third case study of Bessie Head examines the routes to international publishing open to a writer who was an outsider, on the periphery of the CIA-funded literary network. After reviewing her early involvement with the CCF-funded magazine *The New African*, it then turns to her negotiations with commercial New York and London literary editors and publishers during the publication of her first two novels. This research is based largely on previously overlooked records in the Transcription Centre Records in Austin, Texas, the Nat Nakasa Papers at Wits University, Johannesburg and the Bessie Head's Papers collection at Serowe, Botswana. The correspondence reveals how these authors' careers were transformed by these transnational networks, as well as the ways in which these writers challenged, subverted and resisted external influence and control.

The writers within the networks of the CCF constituted a select group, who received unprecedented opportunities for international publication and promotion. Authors within these networks, who were direct recipients of CIA patronage, included Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Esk'ia Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Christopher Okigbo, Dennis Brutus, Alex La Guma, Grace Okot, Kofi Awoonor and Ama Ata Aidoo and to a lesser extent Ngugi and Head. According to Bernth Lindfors, these writers went on to receive 'the lion's share of attention in African university literature courses' and to become the most cited writers in African literary criticism,<sup>27</sup> gaining top positions in the 'canon of anglophone African writing'.<sup>28</sup> Social networks are described by Bourdieu as a means of transmission and exchange of social capital. He maintains that a 'network' of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term',<sup>29</sup> and that these networks operate

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<sup>25</sup> Kalliney, 'Modernism, African Literature, and the Cold War', p. 333.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>27</sup> See Lindfors, 'African Literary Criticism', pp. 6 and 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', p. 249.

by principles of exclusion: 'the conservation and accumulation of the capital which is the basis of the group' depends on members of the group regulating 'the conditions of access to the right to declare oneself a member of the group'.<sup>30</sup> A key element of this investigation is, then, understanding not only the 'investment strategies' employed by the CIA but also the 'conditions of access' and exclusion that regulated these networks.

Recent scholarship in African print culture has excavated hidden literature that has been excluded from the canon. Karin Barber designates this the 'obverse' or 'underside' of African literature: the 'profusion of innovative individual writing and enterprising efforts in local, small-scale print publication'.<sup>31</sup> Such vibrant but subsequently neglected literary publishing associations in the period of decolonisation include Hausa literary networks<sup>32</sup> Swahili post-independence poetry circles,<sup>33</sup> and popular literature magazines in socialist Tanzania<sup>34</sup>. Yet, other critics have drawn attention to the difficulty of literary survival for authors who were cut off from either state patronage or international publication. Joyce Ashuntantang's research on Anglophone Cameroonian literature shows that authors from the region were largely excluded from publication by multinational companies in the post-independence period, for a number of linguistic, political and geographic reasons, and she relates the problems facing dynamic but 'shoe string' literary publishers in Cameroon. Her verdict is that although 'multinational corporations exposed African writers to an international audience, they inadvertently stifled creativity and limited the creative arena'.<sup>35</sup> In a similar vein, Moradewun Adejunmobi argues that Indian Ocean literature is largely invisible to 'institutional readers' having been side-lined by multinational publishing houses, omitted from anthologies of African literature and subject to critical neglect. Her conclusion is that, 'It will no doubt take the combined efforts of committed writers, editors, and critics to transform Indian Ocean literature into a more visible and clearly defined entity' within which they 'would constitute dominant rather than marginal voices'.<sup>36</sup> Exclusion from these influential publishing networks has evidently rendered whole sectors of African literature invisible.

This book aims, then, to contribute to an understanding of the 'politics of visibility' of African literature<sup>37</sup> by addressing the CIA's role in the consecration and canonisation of African literature in the 1960s. Very little research has been carried out to date on the economics of the CIA's literary operation in Africa, or on the alliances that were cultivated between the Congress of Cultural Freedom and British and American publishers. Focusing on three individual authors' negotiations with their patrons and publishers, this study sheds new light on the intersecting networks of power and money that shaped African literature in the period of decolonisation, during a period that Soyinka termed a 'second scramble for Africa': a fight for cultural control in which authors, their publishers and the CIA were particularly entangled.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', p. 251.

<sup>31</sup> Barber, 'Introduction', p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Furniss, 'Literary Circles'.

<sup>33</sup> Askew, 'Everyday Poetry from Tanzania'.

<sup>34</sup> Reuster-Jahn, 'Private Entertainment Magazines'.

<sup>35</sup> Ashuntantang, 'Creative Writing in Cameroon', p. 245.

<sup>36</sup> Adejunmobi, 'Claiming the Field', p.1258.

<sup>37</sup> Shringarpure, *Cold War Assemblages*, p. 165.

<sup>38</sup> Soyinka's unpublished preface to *Poems of South Africa*, quoted in Ibrónke, *Remapping African Literature*, p.54.