

Beyond Containment: The Left-Wing Movement in Literature, 1945-1989

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There is increasing interest amongst historians in the global left-wing movement of the Cold War. Stephen A. Smith's observation that 'the impact of that movement on the twentieth century was massive' and Ronald Kowalski's acknowledgement that left-wing ideologies 'have been amongst the greatest influences on the history of [...] the world' indicate the importance of the topic for understanding the period.¹ Such importance needs to be kept in mind by cultural historians. It is still rare to come across a critical study that examines the literary treatment of radical politics or that recognises the ideological commitments of radical writers, who stated them explicitly in their novels, plays, poems, speeches and essays. As such texts describe it, these are writers who 'open the way to future art' (Roque Dalton), who 'genuinely express our way of life, our real problems, our struggles' (Nicolás Guillén) and who 'join the extensive forces of the organized masses of the people [...] with suffering and hope' (Pablo Neruda).² Writing during the long years of the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti, René Dépestre was typical in proclaiming that '[t]he revolution is the only power capable of destroying – with the creative energy of the people – all the hells that men have built'.³ In short, radical political discourse constituted a central branch of Cold War literature, becoming one of the cluster of features that appeared in all genres, all blocs and all countries.

Although the dream of social justice had persisted for millennia, the modern phase of left-wing thought only fully emerged during the Industrial Revolution. After a welter of proto-communist writing in the early nineteenth century, Marx and Engels's treatise on global insurrection in *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei* (The Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848) offered 'the first systematic depiction of the strategy, tactics,

¹ Smith, 'Towards a Global History of Communism', in Smith, ed., *The History of Communism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 2; Kowalski, *European Communism 1848-1991* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 7.

² Quoted in E. San Juan, Jr., *From the Masses, to the Masses: Third World Literature and Revolution* (Minneapolis: MEP Publications, 1994), pp. 105, 13, 16.

³ Dépestre, 'Black Nationalism and Imperialism', *Ikon*, 6 (1968), p. 30.

philosophy and world-view of communism'.⁴ As detailed throughout Marx's work, communism is both a moral doctrine of human conduct and a political programme for replacing capitalist institutions, market relations and private ownership with common custody of the means of production, arranged through local cooperatives whose members voluntarily contribute to, and share in, the common good. Inevitably, the nineteenth-century labour movement was neither consistent nor united. Most obviously, at the exact time that Marx's theories were gaining ground through the First and Second Internationals, another major current was developing in the form of democratic socialism. This made rapid progress from the 1860s to the turn of the twentieth century, a period in which the wealth generated by capitalism and the gradual improvement in living conditions created by electoral and labour reform questioned the need for class conflict. While sharing the Marxist belief in equality, social democrats held that change should come through legislation rather than revolution and that the state was not an innate evil but a potential source of general wellbeing. The German 'revisionists' and British Fabians, for example, argued that industrial capitalism was not so much the problem as its exploitative and undemocratic nature and that state intervention was required in order to redistribute wealth and alleviate hardship. Although Marx had used 'socialism' and 'communism' synonymously, the former could also refer to a state-led programme of ameliorative reform that negated the need for working-class activism.

The systematisation of various strands of left-wing thought foreshadowed their varying impact on state systems in the twentieth century. The sign of change came with the Russian Revolution in October 1917. Appearing to herald a new stage in world history, the event launched a multifarious and contradictory movement typified by divergence between theory and practice and disagreement over political and economic policy. Most obviously, the push for political change in Russia refuted the classical Marxist notions that revolution was only possible in industrial societies and was necessarily a global phenomenon. While Lenin's dream of a 'World Federative Republic of Soviets' was shared by the Third International, the need to defend political gains led to a focus on national advancement, as firmed up by the 'Socialism in One Country' propounded by Stalin and Bukharin.⁵ The 1917 Revolution also postponed the sovereignty of the working class, with the retention of power by a militant

⁴ Mark Sandle, *Communism* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006), p. 38.

⁵ Although the Third International, or Comintern, helped to create around 80 communist parties between 1919 and 1943, it had little impact on governmental systems and, apart from the Bolshevik takeover of Mongolia, produced only limited or failed uprisings in Germany, Slovakia, Italy, Austria and Hungary.

vanguard prolonging what Engels saw as the socialist or developmental stage of post-capitalist change.⁶ As a result, while the key tenets of Marxist-Leninism – nationalisation, industrialisation, collectivisation, welfarisation – brought full employment and social security, they also led to a rise in political terror. Crucially, when Soviet policy shifted from one-country communism to global revolution it was the bureaucratic one-party centralism of Stalin that prevailed over Marx’s libertarianism. After 1945, communist parties took power with Soviet support in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria and by local groups in Albania and Yugoslavia. In East Asia, insurgencies occurred in China, North Vietnam and North Korea, the first of these containing around half of the two billion people who came to live under state communism. With the creation of Cominform in 1947, the Warsaw Pact in 1955 and Comecon in 1949, the future of Soviet-led internationalism seemed assured. Yet the movement was never ideologically uniform. Demonstrating what Palmiro Togliatti termed ‘polycentrism’, various forms of national development emerged around the world, including the decentralised ‘self-management’ of Yugoslavia, the dynastic self-reliance of North Korea and the anti-American absolutism of Cuba.⁷ Especially influential was Maoism, an anti-imperialist peasant nationalism that inspired guerrilla insurgencies in places as far-flung as Cambodia, Nepal and Peru. When the revolution spread in the 1960s and 1970s – Congo-Brazzaville (1968), South Yemen (1969), Somalia (1969), Benin (1974), Ethiopia (1974), Cambodia (1975), Mozambique (1975), Laos (1975), Angola (1975), Afghanistan (1978), Nicaragua (1979) – it was often the national model that predominated. As a consequence, the swing to the left was never as united as many Western leaders feared. Indeed, the fault lines within and between countries, the rivalry between the Soviet Union and China and the global might of the US meant that, after the 1940s, revolution only occurred in a small number of the world’s poorest countries.

A fuller understanding of the left’s achievements is gained by turning from the Eastern Bloc to left-wing currents elsewhere in the world. Although unable to seize power, strong communist parties existed in many ‘Third World’ countries – Iran, Algeria, Mexico, Malaya, Burma, Thailand, the Philippines – and enjoyed broad grassroots support. The

⁶ The USSR never progressed beyond this stage. In the words of the 1986 Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the nation was still moving towards ‘a society in which public self-government will be established’ (quoted in Stephen White, *Communism and Its Collapse* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 3).

⁷ See Leslie Holmes, *Communism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 14.

Indonesian Communist Party had millions of followers before the mass purge of 1965-66, while the communist movement in Iraq was backed by some 20 per cent of the population. In Western Europe, communist parties had cause for optimism in the early Cold War, attracting nearly a million members in France, achieving half the vote in Italy, entering coalition governments in Norway, Finland, Belgium, Austria and Luxembourg and even attempting an armed takeover in Greece. At times, Moscow successfully courted left-wing regimes in Africa, East Asia and the Middle East through treaties and financial packages, even extending support to anti-imperial leaders – such as Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt and ‘Abd-al-Karim Qasim in Iraq – actively opposed to indigenous communist movements. The impression of Soviet control, however, was often misguided. For example, amongst the scores of African countries that proclaimed some form of socialism, the majority chose social democracy over the Marxism-Leninism proclaimed in Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia. And it was in its democratic formulation that left-wing ideology gained most traction outside the Eastern Bloc. The creation of mixed economies, with market-driven pricing modified by central planning and competition eased by the nationalisation of key industries and services, proved enormously popular with electorates, ensuring basic needs such as education, transportation and medical care. Socialist parties gained a sizable share of the vote in New Zealand, Australia and Japan and were in the ascendancy across much of Western Europe, either sharing power or dominating outright for long periods. Naturally, the motivation of such parties can be questioned. In Western Europe, welfarism was introduced in part to prevent a return to the radicalism of the 1930s and to ward off Soviet influence, giving the lie to the propagandist conflation of social democracy and Stalinism.⁸ Nevertheless, the achievements of state-led socialism were so extensive, and brought hope to so many millions, that one could debate which economic system won the Cold War. As Donald Sassoon remarks on the defeat of the communist bloc at the turn of the 1990s, ‘[t]he triumph of capitalism [...] was, in reality, the triumph of *regulated* capitalism’.⁹

The geopolitical divisions had an inevitable impact on Cold War writers who, grouped in ideological camps across the political spectrum, made left-wing politics one of the most debated topics in world literature. On the right, the approach ranged from mild disquiet

⁸ In the closed circle of Western propaganda, social democratic principles were equated with communism which in turn was equated with Stalinism ‘and so were to be rejected and attacked as oppressive ideologies which enslaved people’ (Sandle, *Communism*, p. 5).

⁹ Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), p. 446.

to committed, even hysterical opposition, denouncing Soviet communism, trade unionism, reformist socialism and left-leaning liberalism with equal fervour. Typifying the Western sub-genres of rightist literature were the McCarthyite drama of Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial* (1954), the conspiracy narrative of Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959), the dystopian fiction of Storm Jameson's *The Moment of Truth* (1949) and the satire on socialist realism in Anthony Powell's *Books Do Furnish a Room* (1971). There was also fiction by disaffected ex-communists such as Arthur Koestler, John Dos Passos, Ralph Ellison and Chester Himes, a generic category that David Caute labels 'the god-that-failed novel'.¹⁰ As Koestler illustrates, a number of Western writers played a conscious role in propaganda agencies like the US Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) and the UK's Information Research Department (IRD), which sought to mobilise right-wing literature in the battle for hearts and minds. Such agencies also gave their support to the dissident literature emerging from the Eastern Bloc, presented as an unflinchingly accurate glimpse into life behind the Iron Curtain. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Danilo Kiš, Czesław Miłosz, Milan Kundera, Anna Akhmatova, Irina Ratushinskaya, Uwe Johnson and Nien Cheng, amongst others, became the Eastern Bloc's most circulated writers, made available by publishers, praised by reviewers and, in some instances, rewarded by Nobel Prize committees. The rightist leanings of the Western literary establishment reappeared in educational institutions, which pursued a form of intellectual containment closely allied to political and military containment: 'It's hard to think of another trend in literary history subject to such a vituperative onslaught', Alan M. Wald remarks on leftist writing, which was either excluded from discussion or interpreted through 'paradigms largely derived from [...] theories about Stalinist politics'.¹¹ As Keith Booker points out, the same reductionism typified mainstream scholarship on postcolonial literature, by which texts were so often shorn of radical content and presented as 'examples of exotic aestheticism'.¹² If radicalism was unavoidable in the work of particular writers, academics could always focus instead on such anti-leftist texts as

¹⁰ Caute, *Politics and the Novel during the Cold War* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2010), p. 354.

¹¹ Wald, 'Revising the Barricades: Scholarship about the U.S. Cultural Left in the Post-Cold War Era', in Dubravka Juraga and M. Keith Booker, eds, *Socialist Cultures East and West: A Post-Cold War Reassessment* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2002), pp. 113, 115.

¹² Booker, 'Writing for the Wretched of the Earth: Frantz Fanon and the Radical African Novel', in Dubravka Juraga and Booker, eds, *Rereading Global Socialist Cultures after the Cold War: The Reassessment of a Tradition* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2002), p. 148.

José Revueltas's *Los errores* (The Errors, 1964), Mia Couto's *Raíz de orvalho* (Root of Dew, 1983) and Hama Tuma's *The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor* (1993), which reduced 'Third World' revolution to images of vaulting ambition and evil intent.

The outcome was a systematic concealment of a large percentage of the world's literature. Unbeknown to many readers, a wave of left-wing writing was published between 1945 and 1989, offering some of the most insightful analyses of contemporary history and exhibiting a stylistic range and intellectual depth still unrecognised by twenty-first-century scholarship. In the case of socialist realism, the commitment to 'revolutionary romanticism', or to didactic writing which aimed to 'liberate the toilers [...] from the yoke of capitalist slavery', could certainly damage the quality of a text, moulded by censorship, patronage and prescription into something resembling 'a *Pravda* editorial in novelistic garb'.¹³ Nevertheless, those who sought to stereotype the genre struggled to explain such socialist realist classics as Mikhail Sholokhov's *Tikhyy Don* (Quiet Flows the Don, 1928), Maxim Gorky's *Zhizn Klima Samgina* (The Life of Klim Samgin, 1927-36) and Christa Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel* (Divided Heaven, 1963). At the same time, left-wingism appeared in many other fictional genres worldwide, including historical fiction, crime fiction, science fiction, speculative fiction, children's fiction, the love story and the thriller, as well as in poetry, drama and memoir.¹⁴ Speaking mainly of Europe and North America, Andy Croft outlines the wide-ranging participation in left-wing cultural production in the twentieth century:

Communism may have become a prison for some artists and a barracks for many more, but it was [...] the distant shining city of the future for many others. Aragon, Anand, Becher, Biermann, Brecht, Breton, Calvino, Ehrenberg, Eisler, Eluard, Fast, Gorki, Guillen, Guthrie, Hughes, Hikmet, Kastner, Koestler, Leger, Lukacs, Mayakovsky, Neruda, Picasso, Prichard, Reed, Rivera, Robeson, Sartre, Seghers, Shostakovitch, Sholokov, Silone, Tikhonov, Tzara, Wolf, Wright, Yevtushenko – despite its own

¹³ Andrei Zhdanov quoted in Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. by Catherine Porter (1987; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 61, 56; David Priestland, *The Red Flag: A History of Communism* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), p. 141.

¹⁴ For an example of each of these in turn, see Katherine Susannah Prichard's *Golden Miles* (1948), Judah Waten's *Shares in Murder* (1957), Ivan Efremov's *Tumannost' Andromedy* (Andromeda, 1957), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), Ding Ling's *Yige xiaohongjun de gushi* (The Story of a Little Red Soldier, 1956), Anna Seghers's *Überfahrt* (Crossing, 1971), Ousmane Sembène's *Le dernier de L'Empire* (The Last of the Empire, 1981), Yánnis Rítsos's *Petrinos hronos* (Petriified Time, 1974), Bertolt Brecht's *Der kaukasische Kreidekreis* (The Caucasian Chalk Circle, 1948) and Mona Brand's *Enough Blue Sky* (1995).

instinctive suspicion of the world of the imagination, the international Communist movement enjoyed, however briefly, the energy and commitment of most major European and American twentieth-century writers and artists.¹⁵

Croft's point would have been better made by improving the focus on other parts of the world. A more representative list of left-wing writers would include Jean Devanny (Australia), Thein Pe Myint (Burma), Tokunaga Sunao (Japan), Faiz Ahmad Faiz (Pakistan), Ding Ling (China), Kim Chi Ha (South Korea), Yi Kiyong (North Korea), Sadeq Chubak (Iran), Ismat Chughtai (India), Patrícia Galvão (Brazil), Jorge Icaza (Ecuador), Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Miguel Ángel Asturias (Guatemala), Asadollah Habib (Afghanistan), Maria Lorena Barros (Philippines), 'Ali Ahmad Said Esber (Syria), Suhail Idris (Lebanon), Dennis Brutus (South Africa), Ghassan Kanafani (Palestine), Lil Milagro Ramírez (El Salvador), Sergio Ramírez (Nicaragua), Naguib Mahfouz (Egypt), Nguyễn Duy (Vietnam), Iwan Simatupang (Indonesia) and innumerable others, of all classes and nationalities, from all corners of the globe.¹⁶

The task of collating this immense body of work has barely begun. In a preliminary genealogy of literary left-wingism, Michael Denning has unearthed what he terms a 'novelists' international', a worldwide movement of 'engaged' or 'committed' writing that, from the early twentieth century, offered 'the first self-conscious attempt to create a world literature'.¹⁷ Although this was assisted by Soviet efforts through journals, writers' congresses and the Moscow Literary Institute to attract and mould writers from all over the world, the growth of the 'novelists' international' was far from centralised, involving a range of transnational associations, networks and publications that were never beholden to Moscow. Moreover, the personal contact between leftist writers from the First, Second and Third Worlds, not to mention the global circulation of radical literature in translation, created currents of mutual interest and exchange which were as remote from the diktats of

¹⁵ Croft, 'Authors Take Sides: Writers and the Communist Party 1920-56', in Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman and Kevin Morgan, eds, *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of British Communism* (London and Boulder: Pluto Press, 1995), p. 83.

¹⁶ Further indicating their importance in the period, a number of left-wing writers assumed roles in political life, as illustrated by Marcelino dos Santos (Mozambique), Sergio Ramírez (Nicaragua), António Agostinho Neto (Angola), Amílcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau), Mao Dun (China), Johannes Becher (East Germany), Han Sörya (North Korea), Ferdinand Oyono (Cameroon) and Alberto Moravia (Italy).

¹⁷ Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), p. 53.

Zhdanovism as they were from the culturalist prescriptions of the CCF. Rejecting the sweeping assertion that leftist literature is thin and propagandistic, the rest of this chapter examines its complex treatment of Cold War history, focusing on the lived experience of revolutionary movements, social democratic societies and ‘actually existing socialism’.

The most obvious topic that the work addressed was the need to free the working class from capitalist exploitation. In poetry, the multitude of social, political and economic injustices was summarised in Roque Dalton’s lament that ‘Under capitalism our heads ache / and they decapitate us’ and in Nâzım Hikmet’s cry that ‘we’re hungry, tired, covered with blood, / and still being crushed like grapes for our wine’.¹⁸ In fiction, much of the output exchanged the master plot of Soviet socialist realism – the activities of successful revolutionaries – for an account of the struggles of everyday communities. As Denning points out, this could involve a focus on the urban proletariat, the rural peasantry and even the struggling middle class, a range captured in Mulk Raj Anand’s *The Big Heart* (1945), Carlos Bulosan’s *America Is in the Heart* (1946), Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai’s *Thottiyude Makan* (Scavenger’s Son, 1947), Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Bozorg Alavi’s *Cheshmahayesh* (Her Eyes, 1952) and Yashpal’s *Jhutha Sach* (This Is Not That Dawn, 1958-60).¹⁹ As some of these writers indicate, left-wing sentiment was especially common in the anti-imperial literature of the Global South. With the majority of communist take-overs occurring in agrarian countries oppressed by local and imperial elites, E. San Juan is adamant that ‘the Third World writer is born already *engagé*, situated in the thick of class struggle’.²⁰ The point is illustrated by Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin (Ethiopia), Ferdinand Oyono (Cameroon), Peter Abrahams (South Africa), Pepetela (Angola) and Ayi Kwei Armah (Ghana), who were inserting radicalism at the centre of African writing at exactly the moment that the writing was achieving global recognition.²¹ In much of the work, the critique of capitalist exploitation

¹⁸ Dalton, ‘On Headaches’, quoted in San Juan, *From the Masses*, p. 11; Hikmet, ‘The Strangest Creature on Earth’, in Hikmet, *Poems of Nazim Hikmet*, trans. by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk Blasing (New York: Persea Books, 1994), p. 122.

¹⁹ See Denning, *Culture*, pp. 65-9.

²⁰ San Juan, *From the Masses*, p. 20.

²¹ For example, see Gabre-Medhin’s *Yekermo Sew* (The Seasoned, 1966), Oyono’s *Une vie de boy* (Houseboy, 1956), Abrahams’s *Mine Boy* (1946), Pepetela’s *Mayombe* (1980) and Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). Elsewhere, left-wing anti-imperialism appeared in Simin Daneshvar’s *Suwasun* (A Persian Requiem, 1969), Ghassan Kanafani’s *A’id Ila Hayfa* (Return to Haifa, 1970), Juan Cabreroy Laya’s *His Native Soil* (1941) and Mahidhara Ramamohanarao’s *Kollayi Gattitenemi* (Swarajyam, 1965).

existed alongside an advocacy of alternative state formations, typically expressed via accounts of industrial conflict and political insurgency.²² The participatory politics championed in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Perburuan* (The Fugitive, 1950), Ralph de Boissière's *Crown Jewel* (1952), Ousmane Sembène's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu* (God's Bits of Wood, 1960), Amado V. Hernandez's *Luha ng buwaya* (Crocodile's Tear, 1963), Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des battu* (The Beggars' Strike, 1979) and Alemseged Tesfai's *Eli Kal'a Quinat* (The Other War, 1984) dramatized Rosa Luxemburg's credo that 'socialism must be created by the masses' and Flora Tristan's insistence that '[u]nity is strength'.²³

An illustration of the urgency of much of the writing is the radical literature of Latin America. A major battleground during the Cold War, the region was beset by US military and economic interventionism, particularly after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, an event that inspired communists, syndicalists and democratic socialists from Mexico to Argentina. In response, the US-led Operation Condor worked to overthrow left-wing governments and to install military dictatorships, providing support to what Noam Chomsky termed 'some of the most barbarous regimes of the modern world'.²⁴ The beleaguered left was aware not only of the necessity of national struggle but also of the need to defend any gains against US imperialism. Amongst the writers involved were the Chilean Nicanor Parra, the Guatemalan Otto René Castillo, the Brazilian Jorge Amado, the Nicaraguan Gioconda Belli, the Argentinian Julio Cortázar, the Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar and the Mexican José Revueltas, all of whom wrote against Latin American regimes which 'lie, bribe, dance on the dead bodies' and against an imperialistic US which 'serves up the nourishment and the

²² As poets expressed it, 'Capitalism will pass away [...] / Just as sure as spring follows winter' and 'a new order, a new world, a new age' will be established in which 'the finite system of our oppressor / will be dust' (Ernesto Cardenal, *Cosmic Canticle*, trans. by John Lyons (1989; Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1993), p. 71; Bareq-Shafi'i quoted in Wali Ahmadi, 'Endangered Nation: The Literature of Soviet-Occupied Afghanistan', in Andrew Hammond, ed., *Global Cold War Literature: Western, Eastern and Postcolonial Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), p. 62; Fawaz Turki quoted in San Juan, *From the Masses*, p. 65).

²³ Luxemburg, 'Our Program and the Political Situation', in Luxemburg, *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. by Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), p. 368; quoted in Sandra Dijkstra, *Flora Tristan: Feminism in the Age of George Sand*, new edn (1984; London and New York: Verso, 2019), p. 163.

²⁴ Chomsky, *Towards a New Cold War: Essays on the Current Crisis and How We Got There* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1982), p. 24.

bullets'.²⁵ The power of the work is demonstrated by Claribel Alegría, a Nicaragua-born poet, novelist and essayist who grew up in El Salvador and returned to Sandinista-led Nicaragua in the 1980s. Her 'prose-verse narrative' *Luisa en el país de la realidad* (Luisa in Realityland, 1987) is an attempt to find a suitable form for the damaged history of El Salvador from the dictatorship of the 1930s to the civil war of the 1980s, when a US-supported junta unleashed a torrent of detention, torture and murder.²⁶ The outcome is a polyphonic and fractured narrative entirely free of the hackneyed predictability ascribed to political writing from the left. In charting the trials of her adopted country, Alegría bears witness to a 'people / who have been exploited / for five hundred years' and whose present is 'a harvest of skulls' created by death squads 'tossing babies / into the air / on bayonets'.²⁷ At times, the portrait of subaltern lives comes close to despair. In 'From the Bridge', Alegría's semi-autobiographical persona explains to a younger self that her adult learning has revealed, not an underlying method in political affairs, but 'a sinister / and well-planned disorder' in which those 'who clamor for / a more kindly world / [...] die tortured / in the prisons'.²⁸ Nevertheless, the narrative works towards a form of salvation. Revealing a modernist faith in the ordering properties of literature, the author comes to view the murdered as 'Seeds of Liberty', arguing that 'For each dead child / ten guerrillas are born' and that the nation's collective hope can be found

in the resurrection of the oppressed
in the Church of the people
in the power of the people
forever and ever
Amen.²⁹

²⁵ Pablo Neruda, 'They Receive Instructions against Chile', in Carolyn Forché, ed., *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1993), p. 578.

²⁶ Marcia Phillips McGowan, 'The Poetry of Claribel Alegría: A Testament of Hope', *Latin American Literary Review*, 32: 64 (2004), p. 6.

²⁷ Alegría, 'Personal Creed', in Alegría, *Luisa in Realityland*, trans. by Darwin J. Flakoll (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1987), p. 135; Alegría, 'Malinche', in *ibid.*, p. 76; Alegría, 'Operation Herod', in *ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁸ Alegría, 'From the Bridge', in *ibid.*, pp. 139-40.

²⁹ Alegría, 'Seeds of Liberty', in *ibid.*, p. 119; Alegría, 'Operation Herod', in *ibid.*, p. 35; Alegría, 'Personal Creed', in *ibid.*, p. 135.

Alegría was in no doubt about the necessity of cultural resistance in Central America and the wider Global South, once terming her writing ‘letras de emergencia’.³⁰ Other Latin American writers were equally convinced of literature’s role in the struggle: for example, Pablo Neruda extolled those committed writers who ‘walk out in the street with poems and guns’ and Otto René Castillo looked forward to the day when ‘apolitical / intellectuals’ are questioned on ‘what they did / when their country was slowly / dying out’.³¹

In many countries, the success of revolutionary action was greeted with a wave of celebratory writing. Xiaomei Chen’s recollections of watching Maoist theatre in the 1960s – ‘the heroic actions on stage cemented my identity as a member of the young republic, fortunate to have been born and raised in the brilliant sunshine of the socialist motherland’ – indicates the shared excitement of cultural producers and audiences.³² Yet there were many who realised that the new social order was not the thing for which they had fought. The continuation of hierarchy and privilege, the veneration of despots, the detentions, purges and murders all betrayed the principles of equality and justice informing theoretical communism in all its varieties. As Alex Callinicos points out, the one-party, bureaucratic command economy of Stalinism was clearly distinct from libertarian currents of left-wing thought, most obviously the permanent revolution and workers’ democracy advocated by Marx, Engels, Trotsky, Luxemburg and Gramsci.³³ After Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalinism at the Twentieth Party Congress, the search intensified for what Dubček called ‘socialism with a human face’, led by reform movements in the Eastern Bloc and by Western European radicals now turning from Soviet communism to Eurocommunism, neo-Marxism and the

³⁰ Quoted in Marjorie Agosín, ‘Foreword’ to Sandra M. Boschetto-Sandoval and Marcia Phillips McGowan, eds, *Claribel Alegría and Central American Literature: Critical Essays* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1994), p. xi.

³¹ Neruda, ‘Letter to Miguel Otero Silva, in Caracas’, in Forché, ed., *Against Forgetting*, p. 575; Castillo, ‘Apolitical Intellectuals’, in *ibid.*, p. 607. As a further statement on committed literature, Ding Ling proclaimed that ‘[h]appiness is to take up the struggle in the midst of the raging storm and not to pluck the lute in the moonlight’ (Ding, ‘Thoughts on March 8 (Women’s Day)’, reprinted in Gregor Benton and Alan Hunter, eds, *Wild Lily, Prairie Fire: Yan’an to Tian’anmen, 1942-1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 81).

³² Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), p. 10.

³³ Callinicos, *The Revenge of History: Marxism and the East European Revolutions* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 4.

New Left.³⁴ In the Eastern Bloc, the most famous attacks on ‘actually existing socialism’ were found in dissident writing, but complex responses also came from within the labour movement, which often yearned for alternatives to oppressive state and party apparatuses. Victor Serge’s *L’affaire Toulaév* (The Case of Comrade Tulayev, 1948), Ding Ling’s *Taiyang zhao zai Sanggan he shang* (The Sun Shines over the Sanggan River, 1948), Dai Houying’s *Jen a, jen!* (Stones of the Wall, 1980) and Christa Wolf’s *Was Bleibt* (What Remains, 1990) not only sought a more genuine socialism but also avoided the crude sentiments and clichéd characters of much rightist literature of the period. In the West, similarly, the news of Stalin’s ‘Great Terror’ emerging from the Soviet Union had a powerful impact on left-wing authors. George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Mandarins* (The Mandarins, 1954), John Berger’s *A Painter of Our Time* (1958) and Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* (1962) each suggested a left-wing movement ‘in *agonia*’, as Richard Sakwa puts it, plagued by the ‘mental anguish at the gulf between its ideals, the reality it found itself in and the reality it became’.³⁵

Some of the most impassioned warnings against revolutionary betrayal came from the Kenyan novelist, playwright and essayist, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. After the initial spread of communism across Eastern Europe and East Asia, the focus of activity shifted to Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, when a wave of anti-imperial insurgency led to the creation of over 30 left-wing governments, although not to the peace and prosperity that many had expected. On the one hand, a number of regimes – in Ghana, Tanzania, Benin, Guinea Bissau, Madagascar, Ethiopia, Angola – turned to an authoritarianism modelled on the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. On the other hand, national experiments in non-aligned socialism were undermined by superpower interference and by the pressures of a globalising capitalist economy, allowing only a measure of collectivisation and nationalisation. In Ngũgĩ’s Kenya, the Mau Mau insurgency of the 1950s had managed to rid the country of British rule but not protect it from Western commercial interests that replicated the acquisitiveness of former imperial elites. The issue is taken up in *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I Will Marry When I Want, 1977), a play first performed at the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Educational and Cultural Centre and composed in Gĩkũyũ verse. The drama centres on an aging peasant couple, Kĩgũũnda and Wangeci, whose one-and-a-half acre plot is coveted by Kĩgũũnda’s employer, Ahab Kĩoi, an

³⁴ Quoted in Ronald Kowalski, *European Communism 1848-1991* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 187.

³⁵ Quoted in Sandle, *Communism*, p. 120.

(Alex La Guma) and ‘that all the oppressed sections of our community [...] take up arms to overthrow the present oppressive system’ (Festus Iyayi).⁴²

The betrayal of revolution in both the non-aligned world and the Eastern Bloc existed alongside the numerous shortcomings of social democracy in the so-called ‘free world’. In the early years of the Cold War, the central tenets of welfarism, particularly the Keynesian principle of full employment, helped to lift millions out of poverty and went some way to create what Adam Michnik called ‘the market with a human face’.⁴³ Yet the numerous contradictions and hypocrisies of a mixed economy were difficult to ignore. For those committed to more progressive politics, the refusal of leftist parties to ensure even a fraction of the workers’ democracy theorised by Marx was aggravated by the sense that state-imposed egalitarianism was only pursued in order to ward off the more radical egalitarianism proclaimed, though not practised, by the communist bloc. At the same time, the socialistic welfare states developing across Oceania, Africa, Western Europe and the Middle East were compromised by their position within the US camp: that is, by their dependence on ‘the international protection of a country whose ethos, tradition and outlook were deeply hostile to socialism’.⁴⁴ For Donald Sassoon, whose words these are, the manner in which socialist and communist parties managed to regulate capitalist economies was an impressive achievement, many of them providing more satisfactory conditions of life than the wholesale surrender to market forces did in the US.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, regulated capitalism was still capitalism. For Jürgen Habermas, Marx’s censure of early social democracy for upholding private ownership and easing class enmities was still pertinent to ‘the welfare state compromise’ of the latter half of the twentieth century, when social democratic parties ‘intervene[d] in the economic system with the aim of protecting capitalist growth, smoothing out crises, and safe-guarding [...] the competitiveness of business’.⁴⁶

The division between the reformist and revolutionary wings of the labour movement was dramatized in a number of British texts. Despite the expansion of ‘cradle to grave’ security by Clement Attlee’s Labour Party in the late 1940s, disparities of power and wealth

⁴² La Guma, *Time of the Butcherbird*, new edn (1979; Oxford: Heinemann, 1987), p. 47; Iyayi, *Violence*, new edn (1979; Harlow: Longman, 1987), p. 185.

⁴³ Quoted in Callinicos, *Revenge of History*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Sassoon, *One Hundred Years*, p. 112.

⁴⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 767.

⁴⁶ Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians’ Debate*, ed. and trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 55.

continued during the Cold War, in large part due to Labour's limited commitment to nationalisation, which had drawn only 20 per cent of the economy into public ownership. Margot Heinemann's *The Adventurers* (1959), Herbert Smith's *A Field of Folk* (1957) and Len Doherty's *The Man Beneath* (1957) were critical of the leaders of public industries and complicit trade unionists, with Howard Barker's *A Passion in Six Days* (1983) and Adrian Mitchell's *The Bodyguard* (1970) coming to doubt whether there was anything socialist about the Labour Party at all. The doubts were expressed with particular force in the work of Jack Lindsay. An Australian-born member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Lindsay is now 'a forgotten voice' in British writing, although was central to the flourishing of left-wing intellectual culture in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴⁷ The earlier instalments of his series 'Novels of the British Way' (1953-64) are adamant that Attlee's government is an obstacle to "the offensive that brings us a Socialist Britain": as one of his characters remarks, "[w]e're still living under capitalism, we haven't got socialism just because we've got a Labour Government".⁴⁸ In his depiction of class struggle, Lindsay was mindful of Marx's definition of communism as both the historical stage that follows capitalism and the revolutionary action that brings that stage about. As another character thinks of the solidarity shown during a strike, '[t]his is already socialism, the living heart of it, from which the full extended form will break, this mass-force consciously facing the world of profit [with] the principle of justice'.⁴⁹ Lindsay also adhered to Marx's concept of proletarian internationalism. The purely national struggle portrayed in *Betrayed Spring* (1953), in which the deficiencies of nationalisation trigger a revolt from London to Tyneside, widens considerably in *Rising Tide* (1953), where a British dockworkers' strike inspires union activism across Europe, North America and the Middle East. In composing such fictional 'histories from below', Lindsay showed little interest in the experimentalism of Alegria and Ngũgĩ. Indeed, the author's strict adherence to the Zhdanovite precepts of *klassovost'* (class-consciousness), *ideynost'* (ideological convention) and *partiykost'* (loyalty to the party) was no doubt the reason for his popularity in the Eastern Bloc, where his books sold over a million copies. Nevertheless, the work shows the dynamism and commitment that often marked the genre, as well as a certain self-conscious literariness. It is not unusual to find Lindsay name-dropping key figures in

⁴⁷ John T. Connor, 'Jack Lindsay, Socialist Humanism and the Communist Historical Novel', *The Review of English Studies*, 66: 274 (2015), p. 343.

⁴⁸ Lindsay, *The Moment of Choice* (London: The Bodley Head, 1955), p. 336; Lindsay, *Betrayed Spring* (London: The Bodley Head, 1953), p. 309.

⁴⁹ Lindsay, *Rising Tide* (London: The Bodley Head, 1953), p. 178.

global left-wing fiction, berating the obscurantism of modernists such as Woolf, Lawrence and Kafka and denouncing ‘the dogma of non-political literature (which normally means literature that is violently anti-socialist and anti-Soviet)’.⁵⁰

The failure of many progressive parties to advance working-class rights was repeated in their failure to tackle other areas of inequality. By 1968, the so-called ‘year of revolutions’, the grassroots movement for radical change had not only divided into competing bands of anarcho-syndicalists, Trotskyists, Maoists and Guevarists, but also branched into areas of protest – black liberation, women’s liberation, gay rights, peace activism – which had previously been marginal in left-wing politics.⁵¹ Accordingly, the leftist literature of the period made a number of thematic advances, not least in its increasing coverage of indigenous and minority experience. The US literary left, for example, included Latino/a, Asian-American, Jewish-American and African American authors who placed anti-racist polemics at the heart of radical writing. As Alan Wald has detailed, the driving force behind such works as Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946), Shirley Graham’s *There Once Was a Slave* (1947), Alice Childress’s *Trouble in Mind* (1955) and Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) was ‘a desire for racial unity through political struggle towards utopian ends’.⁵² Elsewhere in the world, authors such as Claudia Jones, George Lamming, Dennis Brutus, Oda Makoto, Eva Johnson, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire and Oodgeroo Noonuccal were making ‘racial unity’ a central concern of the ‘novelists’ international’. In Australia, for example, the official suppression of Aboriginal literature was challenged by activist writers who were inspired both by the Aboriginal traditions of song-poetry and oral storytelling and by the civil rights activism of South Africa and North America. Although the social democratic movement had been gaining ground in Australia since the early twentieth century, driven ahead by an active union movement and strong Australian Labor Party, there had been little benefit for the Aboriginal people. For Oodgeroo, the response to dispossession and cultural destruction was an involvement in equal rights groups and political parties and a steady output of protest poetry. In ‘No More Boomerang’ (1966), she uses the European

⁵⁰ Lindsay, *After the 'Thirties: The Novel in Britain, and Its Future* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1956), p. 46.

⁵¹ For some literary responses to the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, see Norman Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* (1968), Nanni Balestrini’s *Vogliamo tutto* (We Want Everything, 1971), E.L. Doctorow’s *The Book of Daniel* (1971), John Berger’s *G.* (1972), Jean-Patrick Manchette’s *Nada* (1972) and Heinrich Böll’s *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum, 1974).

⁵² Wald, ‘Marxist Literary Resistance to the Cold War’, *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*, 20 (1995), p. 488.

ballad form to deliver a stark, unsentimental polemic about the decimation of Aboriginal culture, itemising at the start of stanzas the loss of those cultural markers ('No more corroboree', 'No more firesticks', 'No more gunya') which had once provided identity and belonging.⁵³ The loss is made more painful by the vacuity of the hegemonic capitalist culture which takes their place. When the poem describes the replacement of traditional wooden homes by mortgaged bungalows, or the boomerang by the 'Colour bar and beer', Oodgeroo mocks the supposed superiority of European imperial culture.⁵⁴ More pointedly, the lines 'No more sharing / What the hunter brings. / Now we work for money, / Then pay it back for things' are scathing of the enforced shift from collective self-reliance on the land to alienated labour in a capitalist economy.⁵⁵ Although 'No More Boomerang' fails to provide an answer to Australia's institutional prejudice, her 'Aboriginal Charter of Rights' (1964) is unequivocal in its demands: 'We want hope, not racialism, / Brotherhood, not ostracism, / Black advance, not white ascendance: Make us equals, not dependants'.⁵⁶

The marginalisation of demographic groups also occurred in the Eastern Bloc, where social and economic reform was failing to benefit all sections of society. Across the region, modernisation impacted on areas previously remote from central influence, where state planners swept away former markets, herded populations into industrial conurbations and transformed small holdings into mechanised state farms. The tribulations experienced by workers and peasants were justified by the promise of future affluence and the need for military preparedness in the face of Western enmity. 'We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries', Stalin complained in 1931: 'We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or they crush us'.⁵⁷ While modernisation certainly improved national incomes per head between the late 1940s and the early 1970s, there was some anxiety about its impact on traditional work patterns, living environments, family structures, generational relations and minority practices. Regarding the last of these, government policy was typically conducted by dominant ethnicities and used 'as midwife to ethnically homogenizing nation-states', despite the Marxist-Leninist idea that national identities would recede in the face of

⁵³ Noonuccal, 'No More Boomerang', in Noonuccal [Kath Walker], *The Dawn Is at Hand: Selected Poems*, new edn (1991; London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1992), pp. 54, 55, 54.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁶ Noonuccal, 'Aboriginal Charter of Rights', in Noonuccal [Kath Walker], *Dawn Is at Hand*, p. 60.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Mark Harrison, 'Communism and Economic Modernization', in Smith, ed., *History of Communism*, p. 388.

socialist internationalism.⁵⁸ For example, the Soviet authorities not only received nationalist opposition from supposed satellite states such as Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Romania and Albania but also internal resistance from some of its 104 recognised ethnic groups. This was seen in the constituent republics of Transcaucasia and Central Asia, which had been conquered by Imperial Russia in the nineteenth century and subjected to a wave of deportations and purges in the 1920s and 1930s, as Moscow determined to eradicate all traces of national sentiment. The consequences were captured in such works as Fazil Iskander's *Sandro iz Chegema* (Sandro of Chegem, 1977) and Andrey Platonov's posthumously published novella *Dzhan* (Soul, 1999), a coruscating attack on the devastation caused by state planning that ranks amongst the greatest works of twentieth-century fiction.

A similar status was achieved by another novella of Central Asian life, Chingiz Aitmatov's *Djamilia* (Jamilia, 1957). The author held an ambiguous position in Soviet letters, managing to remain a man of the Soviet establishment – illustrated by his membership of the Communist Party and receipt of the Lenin Prize – while also becoming the national writer of Kyrgyzstan, a status which may suggest that his loyalties lay elsewhere. The same political ambiguity informs the text. Set in a remote village on the Kazakh border, the novella is narrated by Seit, a budding artist, and recalls an event that took place in his childhood during the Second World War. At this time, the province is being increasingly controlled by Moscow, which uses the newly collectivised farms to produce food for the war effort. Nevertheless, the village manages to retain its age-old allegiance to Islamic custom, Kyrgyz folklore and patriarchal clan structures, all of which has endured 'since nomadic times when our forebears used to break camp and round up the sheep together'.⁵⁹ The real change occurs when a taciturn young soldier, invalided from the army, is sent to help with the harvest. Unknown to the local people, Daniyar was born in the village but had been orphaned at an early age and reared elsewhere by Kazakh relatives, later experiencing the modernisation drive of the 1930s through work in construction, mining and agriculture. Yet Daniyar's time in exile brought a strong yearning for his homeland. His patriotism emerges in the songs he sings to Seit and his sister-in-law Jamilia, songs which, though mixing Kyrgyz and Kazakh melodies, express 'an uncommon, expansive love for life and earth' that are specifically Kyrgyz.⁶⁰ Before long, the songs evoke in the two listeners a spiritual relationship to the

⁵⁸ Anna Belogurova, 'Communism in South East Asia', in Smith, ed., *History of Communism*, p. 236.

⁵⁹ Aitmatov, *Jamilia*, trans. by James Riordan (1957; London: Telegram, 2007), p. 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

country that ‘had lain deep in our souls and had only now come to life’.⁶¹ As the narrator continues,

For the first time in my life something new awoke within me, something irresistible: I still cannot explain it. It was a need to express myself, yes, to express myself, not only to see and sense the world, but to bring to others my vision, my thoughts and sensations, to describe the beauty of the earth as inspiringly as Daniyar could sing.⁶²

Interestingly, when Seit turns to painting to express his vision, his portrait of the ‘native soil’ eradicates all signs of Soviet modernisation, focusing instead on an unsullied Kyrgyz landscape of ‘mountains, steppe, people, grass, clouds and rivers’.⁶³ The hint of textual subversion is increased when Jamilia falls in love with Daniyar and, in contravention of village mores, elopes with the invalided soldier. Profoundly affected by the episode, Seit captures the moment of elopement in a painting that he later does for his diploma and, in doing so, summarises the novel’s treatment of nationhood in a single ambivalent image. On the one hand, the portrait of ‘Daniyar and Jamilia walking along the autumn steppe road with a broad, bright expanse before them’ acknowledges that Kyrgyz culture needs to move on from oppressive patriarchal codes and accept ‘the truth of life, the truth of those two people’; on the other hand, the focus on a ‘shining future’ that is restricted solely to a Kyrgyz couple privileges local identity over Soviet centralism.⁶⁴ The ambivalence is not resolved by the end of the novella. When Seit wonders where the couple may now be living and imagines them working in Siberia where ‘[m]any brave souls are toiling’, Aitmatov concurs with the official line while simultaneously hinting at the destructive nature of the communist regime.⁶⁵

In the Eastern Bloc, the struggles of minority ethnicities existed alongside the injustices of patriarchal power, which also continued in the face of ideological claims to the contrary. The nineteenth-century Marxist belief that women’s productivity could only be facilitated by salaried work had re-emerged more directly in Lenin’s claim that ‘to realize real equality between women and men, it is necessary for women to participate in joint production

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶² Ibid., p. 62.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 74, 72.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 95, 93.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 95.

and labour'.⁶⁶ To this end, the USSR mounted a campaign against workplace discrimination and sexual harassment as early as the 1920s, a decade in which women's rights to divorce, abortion and property advanced so rapidly that Alexandra Kollontai, head of the *Zhenotdel* (Women's Department), believed that the family would 'wither away' as surely as the state.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, female emancipation remained limited across the Eastern Bloc. Despite women's increased access to skilled labour and participation in governmental bodies from the 1950s, they were still excluded from higher wage professions and state politburos. At the same time, official policy was always modified in the face of the conservatism of much of the male population, whose insistence on women's reproductive and family roles was exacerbated by the unwillingness of states to intervene in domestic arrangements by extending childcare facilities and improving access to contraception. As Wang Zheng argues in the Chinese context, an additional defect of 'socialist state feminism' was that non-state actors were denied a role in policy making, with any dissatisfaction with the party line risking the charge that gender issues were being given primacy over class issues.⁶⁸ By the latter decades of the Cold War, the impact that second-wave feminism was having on social attitudes and governmental policies in the West was far in advance of any official practice in the Eastern Bloc. In texts such as Christa Wolf's *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (The Quest for Christa T., 1968), Gabriela Adameşteanu's *Dimineață pierdută* (Wasted Morning, 1983) and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), revolutionary societies which might once have appeared progressive were now shown to be retrograde.

One of the most extensive studies of the subject is Zhang Jie's *Chenzhong de chibang* (Leaden Wings, 1980). In the early years of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the official promotion of gender equality failed to increase women's divorce, property and employment rights against the resistance of patrilineal village structures. Even after Mao's death in 1976, the economic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, which shifted from centralism to entrepreneurship, brought only limited opportunities in retail, teaching and light industry. Moreover, the new regime withdrew from the previous line on equality and allowed a return to pre-Maoist notions of biological determinism: that is, to the production of 'spheres in

⁶⁶ Quoted in Donna Harsch, 'Communism and Women', in Smith, ed., *History of Communism*, p. 490.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

⁶⁸ Wang, "'State Feminism'?: Gender and Socialist State Formation in Maoist China', *Feminist Studies*, 31: 3 (2005), p. 520.

which women were deemed inferior to men'.⁶⁹ The outcome is taken up, albeit cautiously, in Zhang's *Leaden Wings*. Set towards the start of Deng's premiership, this is a socialist realist novel that champions industrial competition against the dead hand of bureaucratism, now supported only by die-hard Maoists nostalgic for the Cultural Revolution. Such loyalty to the party line was to be expected from the author, a member of the Chinese Communist Party at the time of publication.⁷⁰ Yet the novel received official censure, not least for its account of how the conflicting pressures of work and family and the restriction of career opportunities hampered the lives of women.⁷¹ The novel opens with the character of Ye Zhiqiu, a tough, outspoken journalist whose political articles reveal her intellectual parity with the high-ranking officials she interviews, but who is always obliged 'to hold herself in check' and 'behave like a middle-aged Chinese woman'.⁷² Despite remaining unmarried, she receives the opprobrium that is commonly directed at divorcees, as shown by the sexual allegations that litter commentaries on her reportage. While Ye Zhiqiu represents the professional class, a married couple in a nearby apartment, Wu Guodong and Liu Yuying, symbolise the economic struggles of the working class. For Liu Yuying, the drudgery of domestic labour and lowly-paid work is worsened by domestic abuse: divorce is impossible, however, as 'people would think she'd done something disgraceful'.⁷³ That marital strife also exists amongst the political elite is demonstrated by Xia Zhuyun, a minor official reduced to such lethargy by loveless marriage to a vice-minister that even her husband feels driven to exclaim that women should not "'depend on [...] husbands like feudal wives'".⁷⁴ Yet the novel is not without hope. In one of the closing scenes, the developing relationship between Xia Zhuyun's daughter and Ye Zhiqiu's adopted son risks the disgrace of an extra-marital romance but offers the prospect of more equal relations between the sexes, reflecting the author's belief that individual fulfilment through love is as important as social productivity. As part of this focus on the personal, *Leaden Wings* combines third-person narration with free indirect

⁶⁹ Wang, *Personal Matters: Women's Autobiographical Practice in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 151.

⁷⁰ See Rosemary A. Roberts, 'Images of Women in the Fiction of Zhang Jie and Zhang Xinxin', *The China Quarterly*, 120 (1989), p. 811.

⁷¹ 'In this respect Confucius was truly great', one character thinks: 'His feudal precepts still held sway in China' (Zhang, *Leaden Wings*, trans. by Gladys Yang (1980; London: Virago Press, 1987), p. 103).

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

discourse, dramatizing characters' interior lives and linking the novel to a wider current in women's writing in the post-Mao period. Authors like Zhang Jie, Zhang Xinxin and Yu Luojin constitute a literary generation that offered 'the first self-conscious feminist critique of [...] patriarchal values' and 'provided a public and narrative channel for Chinese women to express their gendered and subjective experiences'.⁷⁵

The PRC was one of only a handful of communist states to survive into the twenty-first century. By the late 1980s, the Soviet Union, which had led the global revolution for seventy years, was beset by economic decline, bureaucratic stagnation and political inertia, finally disintegrating in 1991 after a collapse of communist governments across the world. The kind of effusive obituaries of 'actually existing socialism' written by right-wing historians are illustrated by François Furet's celebratory axiom that 'Communism is completely contained within its past'.⁷⁶ Since the end of the Cold War, the world has seen a surge in aggressive neoliberalism which, unconstrained by the fear of Soviet opposition, has pursued its policies of environmental destruction, social inequality, human rights abuses and militarised border controls with impunity. Yet the failure of communism as a state practice does not discount the successes of social democracy in curtailing the worst impulses of capitalism nor suggest the end of political alternatives: the contemporary resurgence of left-wingism in Latin America and the former Eastern Bloc shows that many refuse to see fairness and equality as anachronistic ideals. That literature should still play a part in global resistance was taken up by Salman Rushdie in a lecture of 1990. Reflecting on the lack of effective resistance to liberal democracy, Rushdie was adamant that 'capitalism [...] will require novelists' most rigorous attention' and that 'if democracy no longer has communism to help it clarify, by opposition, its own ideas, then perhaps it will have to have literature as an adversary instead'.⁷⁷ The left-wing writing of the Cold War, with its progressive treatment of class, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality, still functions as a powerful adversary in the twenty-first century.

⁷⁵ Chen, 'Reading Mother's Tale: Reconstructing Women's Space in Amy Tan and Zhang Jie', *Chinese Literature*, 16 (1994), p. 119; Wang, *Personal Matters*, p. 165.

⁷⁶ Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. by Deborah Furet (1995; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. x.

⁷⁷ Rushdie, 'Is Nothing Sacred?', *Granta*, 31 (1990), p. 109.