

The East African Literature Bureau and the making of modern East African Literature

Introduction

* In the 1960s when the majority of African nations were gaining independence, Taban Lo Liyong referred to East Africa as a “LITERARY DESERT”. One implication of that claim is that there is a necessary, even inevitable link between literary and cultural expression, and the nation.

* The assumption of the claim voiced by Taban Lo Liyong is that the said literary desolation, even absence, in East Africa, though, does not entirely tally with the facts on the ground

* Whatever the case though the creation of the EALB in 1947/48 also highlights a link Not just between literature and history, but especially in this case between the EALB after World War II, and decolonization, independence and postcolonialism in East Africa.

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What Taban's statement also suggests or might encourage, is that the East African literary scene was adrift from the broad range of historical dynamics that were shaping the transnational and global flows of literary, cultural and expressive economies of the time.

To that end this research seeks to situate and relate the analysis of the EALB in the currents of the following currents:

---The Harlem Renaissance (1920s-30s)

---the Bandung Conference of 1955

---the 1956 Congress of Black Writers in Paris, France

---The Congress of Black Writers in Rome, Italy in 1958

--- The Makerere "Conference of African Writers of English Expression" in 1962

ISSUES FOR SPECIFIC INVESTIGATION

- Transnational notions and projects of the 'Literature Bureau': literacy, literature, civilizing mission, decolonization and postcolonialism...
- The EALB as a literary system of publishing and distribution of colonial and postcolonial modernity in East Africa
- The EALB as an aspect of the History of the Book in colonial and postcolonial East Africa: literary circularity, marketing, institutional support
- The tensions and complementarities between the Christian missions and the East African colonial governments in the affairs of the EALB
- EALB as a site and mechanism of literary and cultural transfer from the imperial centre to the colonial and even postcolonial peripheries
- Issues stemming from the project of colonial and imperial literary and transfers
- Implications for indigenous literary and literacy forms and projects and institutions