Scraped away the grief from my eyes
Broken away from the grip of pain
Torn away the web of helplessness
Come, Africa!

The earth's heart beats with mine, Africa
The river dances while the moon keeps time
I am Africa, for I have taken on your form
I am you, and my gait is your lion-walk
Come, Africa
Come with a lion-walk
Come, Africa!

If Faiz's poem is a vibrant example of the internationalist ethos of progressive Urdu poetry, it is no exception either. The internationalist commitment of the Progressive Movement was apparent since its very beginning. The anti-fascist struggles of European literary figures had enthused the Progressives, and one of the first official actions taken by the newly formed PWA, in 1935, was to send Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand as their representatives to London to participate in the conference of 'International Writers for the Defense of Culture'.

This culture of internationalism was not exactly new to Urdu literature; Mohammad Iqbal had been expanding the horizons of Urdu literature's engagement with the world for a while. The PWA poets, however, took this to new levels. The association had come into being at a time when the freedom movement was at its height, and the initial writings of its members were focused on the struggle against British occupation. Overtures to internationalism took on two forms: an interrogation and critique of colonialism and its related issues (the Second World War, for instance) and an expression of admiration for the Soviet revolution accompanied by a hope
that India’s freedom would result in a similar socialist society.

The disillusionment with the consequences of Independence—chiefly, the partition of the nation-state and its resultant bloodbath—and the disenchantment with the newly formed bourgeois state, which acted decisively and ruthlessly against the militant peasant movement of Telangana, took a toll on the erstwhile optimism of the progressive poets. In the years that were to follow, they increasingly turned their attention to the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles of their time. The shift of focus towards the international arena was also spurred substantially by Ali Sardar Jafri’s essay in *Naya Adab* titled “Taraqqi Pasand Sha’iri ke Banz Masaa’el’ (Some Issues Facing Progressive Poetry) in which he urged Urdu poets to give expression to and highlight people’s movements in other parts of the world. Several poets responded enthusiastically to this call and composed verses about China, Japan, Burma, Malay, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey, Iran, and Tunisia, among others.

The emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement at Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 (coincidentally, the year of the writing of ‘Aa Jao Africa’), concretized the idea of Third World solidarity, and provided another basis for its poetic expression in progressive poetry. The cultural exchange fostered by the Non-Aligned and Afro-Asian movements led to the translation of many of Faiz’s poems in Swahili, Chinese and Vietnamese, while the works of progressive poets from around the world were translated into Urdu.

As Carlo Coppola points out, the progressive poets studied and borrowed from English literature, but unlike their fellow writers of earlier generations the Progressives also looked to the literature of France and Germany and especially Russia for additional inspiration. No longer were writers confined to the particular problems and concerns of India; they were thrust into the mainstream of international literary and intellectual life. Literary movements and ideas in London, Paris and Moscow had immediate repercussions in Delhi, Lucknow and Lahore.

This period of Third World solidarity saw the Progressives composing poems on issues such as the struggles of Iranian students in 1959, the McCarthy era of repression of dissent in the United States, the European student uprisings in the 1960s, the Algerian freedom movement, the Palestinian struggle and the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa.

Internationalist sentiment within progressive poetry did not begin, of course, in this period. As socialists, the Progressives were always internationalists and the original focus of their internationalism was, obviously, the communist revolution and the international working-class movement— even Iqbal wrote paens to it and to its heroes. Decades later (1970 to be precise), Sahir would write the following hagiographic lines on the occasion of the worldwide centennial celebrations of Lenin’s birth:

*Insaari ke muqaddar ko aazaad kiya tu ne*
*Mazhab ke farebo se, shaahi ke aazabai se*

Through you, humanity was released from its fate
And was freed from the deceptions of religion, the depredations of monarchy

When Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in 1953 by the US government on the charge of being Soviet
The last major organizational act by the PWA was to hold an Afro-Asian Writers' conference in 1970, in which poets from Guinea, South Africa, Sudan, North and South Vietnam, Laos, and various parts of the subcontinent participated. This conference was a culmination of over two decades of solidarity between the progressive poets and their African counterparts. By this time, Africa had established a strong presence in the consciousness of the Urdu Progressives. Writing in the late 1960s, Ali Sardar Jafri had sought to articulate a bond with the ‘Negro’, claiming a special relationship between Indians and Africans:

_Habshī mera bhai_
_Jangal jangal phool chune_
_Bhai ke paaonī laal gulaab_

This African, my brother
Picks flowers in forest after forest
My brother, whose feet are red
Red as roses

In this poem, Jafri’s identification with the Africans and their struggles is obvious. What is lost in the English translation is the affection that accompanies this solidarity. Those who are familiar with the idiom will know that the couplet, _Jangal jangal phool chune, Bhai ke paaonī laal gulaab_, is from a folk song expressing deep fraternal fondness.
And a brother’s suffering compelled the poet to fashion poetry embodying a shared sense of grief and loss. When Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo and a staunch anti-imperialist, was deposed from office and subsequently murdered, Urdu poets celebrated his achievements and mourned his death. Makhdoom captured the feelings of the Progressives in his poem ‘Chup Na Raho’ (Be Not Silent):

Aur oonchi hai sehra mein umedaon ki saleeb
Aur ik qair-e khoon chashm-e sohar se tapka
Roz ho jashn-e shahedan-e wafa, chup na raho
Baar baar aati hai maqtaal se sada, chup na raho, chup na raho

On a high scaffold, hope was hanged again in the desert
And another drop of blood fell from the eye of the morn
Let the celebration of martyrs continue, be not silent
The execution grounds cry out: be not silent, do not be silent

One of the more powerful poems written on this occasion was Sahir’s ‘Khoon Phir Khoon Hai’ (Blood, However, is Blood). The poem begins with an epigraph, a fragment of a quote by Nehru (identified by Sahir as simply, Jawahar): A murdered Lumumba is several times more powerful than a living Lumumba ...

Zulm phir zulm hai, baajhta hai to mi jaata hai
Khoon phir khoon hai, tapkega to jam jaayega

Khoon e sehra pe jame ya kaf-e qaaiti pe jame
Farq-e insaaf pe ya paa-e salaasi pe jame
Tukh-e bedaad pe ya laasha-e bismil pe jame
Khoon phir khoon hai, tapkega to jam jaayega

Laakh baitha koi chhup chhup ke kameengaahon mein
Khoon khud deta hai jallaadon ke maskan ka suraagh

Saazishen laakh ufaati rahi hai sulmat ke naqaab
Le ke har boond nikalti hai hatheli pe charaagh

Zulm ki qismat-e naaakaara-o rusa se kaho
Jabr ki hikmat-e purkaar ke eema se kaho
Mahmil-e majlis-e aqvaam ki Laila se kaho
Khoon deewana hai, doaman pe tapak sakta hai
Shola-e tund hai, kharman pe tapak sakta hai

Tum ne jis khoon ko maqtaal mei chupaana chaaha
Aaj vo kocho-a baazaar mei va nikla hai
Kahiin shola, kahiin naara, kahiin patthar ban kar
Khoon chalta hai to rukta nahiin sangeeno na se
Sar utthata hai to jhukta nahiin aaseno na se

Zulm ke baat hi kya, zulm ki aqaat hi kya
Zulm ban zulm hai aqhaaz se anjaam taleh
Khoon phir khoon hai, sau shakht badal sakta hai
Aisi shakleri ke misaaz to misaaye na bane
Aise sholay ke bhajao to bhajaaye na bane
Aise naare ke daboao to dabaaye na bane

Tyranny is but tyranny; when it grows, it is vanquished
Blood however is blood; if it spills, it will congeal

It will congeal on the desert sands, on the murderer’s hand
On the brow of justice, and on chained feet
On the unjust sword, on the sacrificial body
Blood is blood; if it spills, it takes root

Let them hide all they want, skulk in their lairs
The tracks of spilled blood will point out the executioners’ abode
Let conspiracies shroud the truth with darkness
Each drop of blood will march out, holding aloft a lamp

Say this to tyranny’s worthless and dishonoured Destiny
Say this to Coercion’s manipulative intent
Say this to the Laila, the darling of the assembly
Blood is wild, it will splatter and stain your garment
It is a rapid flame that will scorched your harvests
That blood which you wished to bury in the killing fields
Has risen today in the streets and the courts
Somewhere as a flame, somewhere as a slogan, somewhere else as
a flung stone
When blood flows, bayonets cannot contain it
When it raises its defiant head, laws will not restrain it

Tyranny has no caste, no community, no status nor dignity
Tyranny is simply tyranny, from its beginning to its end
Blood however is blood; it becomes a hundred things:
Shapes that cannot be obliterated
Flames that can never be extinguished
Chants that will not be suppressed

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The Civil Rights Movement of the US was similarly a source of
great inspiration to the Progressives who saw their own
memories of colonial exclusion reflected in the plight of the
African-Americans. Gandhi’s influence on Martin Luther King
and its impact on the black liberation movement had already
helped establish a bond between people of the two countries.
Langston Hughes, the Harlem-based African-American poet,
had written:

Mighty Britain tremble!
Let your empire’s standard sway
Lest it break entirely –
Mr Ghandi fasts today

All of Asia’s watching
And I am watching too
For I am also jim crowed
As India is jim crowed by you

This powerful expression of solidarity, based on a common
racial identity, is echoed by Ali Sardar Jafri’s poem on Paul
Robeson:

Krishn ka goet hai, Gokhul ki hasaaeh shaam hai tu
Aa kaleje se lagaalek ke siyaah-faan hai tu

You are Krishna’s song, you are Gokul’s beautiful evening
Come let us embrace, for you too, like me, are dark-skinned

Jafri’s use of a racialized (non-white) identity to make a
connection with the colonized communities in other parts of
the world, and to implicitly place the opposition to oppression
along the fault lines of race is particularly interesting when
seen in the context of the fact that the Progressives had rarely
deployed racial tropes during the freedom movement. This new
sensibility – which coincided with the understanding of the
racist underpinnings of colonialism articulated by the likes of
Fanon (in Black Skin, White Masks), Aimee Cesaire and
Amilcar Cabral – emerged from an understanding of and an
identification with the anti-colonial struggles in Africa and the
Civil Rights Movement in the US.

It was no surprise then that Martin Luther King became a
celebrated hero for the Progressives and that his assassination,
in 1968, prompted Makhdoom to write this poem, celebrating
King’s life, mourning his death and placing his politics within
the broader context of other international struggles such as
Palestine and Vietnam:

Ye qatí qatí kiss ek aadmi ha nahi
Ye qatí haq ka, masoolayat ka, sharaaafat ka
Ye qatí ilm ka hikmat ka aadmiyat ka
Ye qatí him-o muravvat ka khoobsori ka
Ye qatí ek ko do ko nahi, hazoor ko hoi
Khuda ko qatí hai, qudrat ke shaaokar ka qatí
Hai sharm-e bash-vaadi, hai subha-suh-b-e Hunain
Ye qatí qatí-e maseeha, ye qatí qatí-e Husain

Voh haath aaj bhi maajood-o kaar farma hain
that urged his readers to cast off the chains of theocratic exploitation:

Phir bariq farozaan hai sar-e vaadi-e Seena
Ai deeda-e beena
Phir dil ko musaffa karo is lauh pe, shaayad
Maabain-e man-o tu naya painaam hoi utre
Ab rasme sitam hikmat-e khaasan-e zameen hai
Taa'eed-e sitam maslehat-e muft-e deen hai
Ab sadiya ke iqraa'at-ke itaa'at ko badalne
Laaazim hai ke inkaar ka farmaam hoi utre

Yet again, lightning shimmers atop the Sinai valley
O seeing eye
Ask the hearts to line up again
That between you and I, a new promise may descend
For now, the elite of the earth have decreed Tyranny to be normal
And the mufti has pronounced oppression worth obeying
To break this centuries-old cycle of acquiescence
A new proclamation must descend, the proclamation of dissent

Faiz, exiled to Lebanon under the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq, wrote several poems dealing with the Middle Eastern conflict: a piece on the city of Beirut (‘Ishq Apne Mujrimoñ Ko Pabajaulsañ Le Chala’/Love Leads its Prisoners Away in Chains), an anthem for Palestinian freedom fighters (‘Ek Taraana Filastini Mujahidoñ Ke Naam’), a dirge for those Palestinian martyrs who died in foreign lands (‘Filastini Shohada Jee Pardes Mein Kaam Aaye’), and perhaps the most famous, a lullaby to a Palestinian orphan (‘Mat Ro Bachche’/Weep Not, Child), and even dedicated his book ‘Mere Dil, Mere Musaafr’ (My Heart, My Wanderer) to the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.
In response to his call, a legion of Pakistani poets wrote with great feeling and empathy about Palestine, comparing the fate of the Palestinians to their own oppression under the dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq. The most vocal of these was, of course, Habib Jalib, who taunted Zia-ul-Haq in a ghazal that quickly became a popular anthem:

_Jahaan khatre mein hai Islaam, us main mein jaao_  
_Hamaari jaan ke dar pe ho kyooon, LEBNAAOn mein jaao_  
_Ijaazat maange hai hue bhi jab Beirut jaane hi_  
_To ahi-e hukum ye kahie hai tum zindaan mein jaao_

Go to the battleground where Islam actually is in danger  
Why are you after our lives? Go to Lebanon  
And when we ask for permission to go to Beirut  
Our rulers instead tell us to head for the dungeons

Jalib was, of course, exposing the hypocrisy of the Zia regime whose battle cry (both before it usurped power and afterwards when justifying the need to ‘Islamize’ Pakistani state and society) was ‘Islam in danger’, but which refused to even pay lip service to the actual struggles of the people of Lebanon and Palestine.

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Ultimately, the internationalist vision and solidarity of the Progressives came directly out of their politics and the general sensibility of the time. The realities of colonialism, and later neocolonialism/neo-imperialism, both required and provided a global frame of reference and a basis for shared political engagement with other colonized and/or oppressed peoples. Internationalism in this period, however, was not of a piece; the internationalism of the Progressives, for example, was a far cry from the pan-Islamism of Iqbal and his followers. It was instead informed by an understanding of the shared material conditions of oppression and struggle and was inspired by the international working-class movements and the struggles of colonized peoples across the world. There were other Urdu poets who wrote paean to the Algerian freedom fighters and the Palestinian cause, but from within a pan-Islamic sensibility. Not so the Progressives, for whom internationalism meant a common struggle against imperialism and for a new world order.
کہ بہادر کی طرف سے مسجد آمیزی کی انسنیت گی 
جاپنا آپ کی نیں اور آپ سے لگ جا切断 کے اور اس رنگ سے شفیعہ رنگ کی اور جا تا چھاکے سے گا دیکھ کی حصرت کا تذکارہ

آیت اللہ رضی اللہ عنہ کے عکس پر پیون کے جگادار 
کا خیال اور معاذ اور رفض بیا دد 
جوہر حقیقت سے دحقیقی کی مزاحیہ روزی 
اس وقت کے بروز میں گن میں کوہ حسینا ہو

دوکاری کیےہوئے کے خرچت اپنے ہوئے
اس کے کر کر میں بھی ہیں میں راحی 
گیرنی بھر دیہوں کی بندا ہو ہیں 
یاد تو دہم کی سیاسی الحیدر میں میں

اپنی گیسروں میں نازل شوہر چھا چھا گیا 
تلوار سے پچا یا تراک لمبے سے کرا گیا

اے، آپ رائے گیر کے احس سسن والے یکم 
وکھرے کے گماندوں کی نیں اور جس کی نیں 
بہادری برہمنی کا کون ہے بہادری کی خوبی 
وہتے دہدہ ایک اتھاراں دوڑتے ارٹ گزرو 
جبہرتے ہوڑ، پھر دوڑتے ارٹ گزرو 
ہے کہ آپ کی خدیا نتیجہ، دہ ثواب کی ہدی؟