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Other Bandungs: Afro-Asian Internationalisms in the Early Cold War*

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ON the cover of the Jakarta Reporters Club handbook to the 1955 Asia-Africa Conference is an iconic photograph of a rickshaw driver looking up at a large billboard, featuring a map of the 29 participating nations stretching from China to Ghana. Bandung was once a colonial resort town, nestled in the mountainous tea plantations of West Java, and gained notoriety during the Indonesian Revolution, when Indonesians burned down part of their own town in response to the Dutch reoccupation of the city. Over six days in April, however, the modernist hillside bungalows housed not wealthy Dutchmen but the leaders of Asia's largest powers. The city itself was overrun with diplomats, statesmen, journalists, and photographers enacting a spectacular moment of resurgence for nations emerging from colonial rule. In his opening address, President Sukarno roused conference delegates with a fiery oratory to mobilize the spiritual, moral, and political strength of Asia and Africa for peace in a world "made bitter by fear."¹ Amidst the tumultuous years of the early Cold War, this was a

*We would like to extend our utmost thanks to our collaborators in the Afro-Asian Networks Collective—the contributors of this special issue as well as Leslie James—for the many conversations that led to this special issue and the project as a whole. Our collaborative research week and ensuing workshops would not have been possible without a research network grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

¹ *Asia-Africa speaks from Bandung* (Djakarta: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Indonesia, 1955), 19.

theatrical performance staged before the world.² *Life* magazine photographs show Sukarno laughing with Nehru, the Cheshire cat grin of Zhou Enlai, Nasser in stoic profile, and processions of gleaming motorcars and flags. The Bandung conference captured the zeitgeist of the postcolonial moment and the converging forces of decolonization and the Cold War. It captured it so well that the surrounding years became known as the eponymous “Bandung Era.” But this did not preclude that Bandung was built on much older traditions of anti-imperialist struggle, which involved not only political leaders but a multitude of largely forgotten actors emerging on other stages.³ Important discourses of Afro-Asian solidarity, internationalism, and peace predated the conference, and remained in circulation among activists and intellectuals who would go on to carry on the Bandung spirit well beyond the flashing lights of the conference.

Bandung continues to leave its imprint in the world’s memory. We have a trove of audio and visual material about the conference, preserved as part of UNESCO’s “Memory of the World” in Indonesia.⁴ We have a number of rich and varying accounts, including those of African-American intellectual Richard Wright, Filipino diplomat Carlos Romulo, Indian journalist Godfrey Jansen, and one of the pioneers of Southeast Asian studies, George Kahin.⁵ The turn of the millennium marked the fiftieth and sixtieth anniversaries of the conference, which today’s statesmen have taken as an opportunity to stress economic and diplomatic cooperation of nations across the

² Naoko Shimazu, “Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955,” *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 225–252.

³ Much has been written in recent years about the anti-imperialist internationalism, especially during the interwar years. Recent studies include Michele Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Fredrik Petersson, *Willy Münzenberg, the League Against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933* (Lewiston: Queenston Press, 2013); Manu Goswami, “Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms,” *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012): 1461–1485; Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

⁴ Much of this has been collected online by David Webster on <https://bandung60.wordpress.com/about/>. The Asian-African Conference Archives, which include documents, pictures, and films of the conference are available at the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia and were submitted by Indonesia to UNESCO’s “Memory of the World” Register in 2015.

⁵ Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing Company, 1956); Carlos P. Romulo, *The Meaning of Bandung* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956); Godfrey H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966); George Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1955).

Global South.⁶ This has coincided with a resurgence of scholarship on Bandung. Monographs and edited collections have tended to structure the creation of the Third World and the Non-Alignment specifically around the sites of major diplomatic initiatives from Delhi and Bandung to Cairo, Belgrade, and Havana.⁷ For global and international historians, Bandung has provided a meeting place to examine political mobilizations in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East in a shared frame, and an occasion to examine the engagement of postcolonial leaders with new international norms, well beyond New York and Geneva.⁸ Christopher Lee has captured the symbolic and intellectual pull of Bandung as “both a moment and an era” which contained “the residual romance of revolution, as well as the realpolitik of a new world order in the making.”⁹ However, this focus on diplomatic initiatives has narrowed the historiographical treatment of the Bandung era. For one, in placing Bandung within a broader international history, the Indonesian context for the conference has been largely left out.¹⁰ So, too, have many Afro-Asian forums that took inspiration from Bandung. As “realpolitik” took precedence over “romance,” a narrative

⁶ Antonia Finnane, “Bandung as History,” in *Bandung 1955: Little Histories*, ed. Antonia Finnane and Derek McDougall (Caulfield: Monash University Press, 2010); Hee-Yeon Cho Chen and Kuan-Hsing, “Editorial Introduction: Bandung/Third Worldism,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 4 (2005); Arif Dirlik, “The Bandung Legacy and the People’s Republic of China in the Perspective of Global Modernity,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 16, no. 4 (2015): 615–630.

⁷ Kweku Ampiah, *The Political and Moral Imperatives of the Bandung Conference of 1955: The Reactions of the US, UK and Japan* (2007); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press People’s History, 2007); Itty Abraham, “From Bandung to Nam: Non-Alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947–65,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 46, no. 2 (2008): 195–219; See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya, eds., *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008); Natasa Miskovic, Harald Fischer-Tiné, and Nada Boskowska, eds., *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi-Bandung-Belgrade* (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁸ Roland Burke, “‘The Compelling Dialogue of Freedom’: Human Rights At the Bandung Conference,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2004); Luis Eslava, Michael Fakhri, and Vasuki Nesiiah, eds., *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Futures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁹ Christopher J. Lee, “Between a Moment and an Era: The Origins and Afterlives of Bandung,” in *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010): 1–42.

¹⁰ Exceptions include: Jamie Mackie, “The Bandung Conference and Afro-Asian Solidarity,” in *Bandung*, ed. McDougall and Finnane (1955); Shimazu, who refers to the impact of Darul Islam and Sukarno’s desire to see himself as a “unifier” on a national and international stage; Dewi Fortuna Anwar, “Indonesia and the Bandung Conference: Then and Now,” *Bandung Revisited*; Wildan Sena Utama, “From Brussels to Bogor: Contacts, Networks and the History of the Bandung Conference 1955,” *Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2016).

of “Third Worldism” emerged in which Bandung became NAM in embryonic form, a conflation of Afro-Asianism and non-alignment that still lingers today.¹¹

What do we lose when we focus on a single conference as an epoch-making event for the Third World? What do we miss about this era and all of its possibilities when we narrow our view to diplomatic arenas? With some notable exceptions, little has been written on the way in which other actors throughout the Afro-Asian region interacted and conversed with each other—not in the key sites of international diplomacy, but through journeys, private initiatives, personal communication, and underground or lesser-known conferences and gatherings. As Gary Wilder has noted, the period after 1945 constituted a moment of “world-historical opening,” when “a range of solutions to the problem of colonial emancipation” were imagined and pursued amidst converging pressures of anti-colonial nationalism, European neo-colonialism, American globalism, and UN internationalism.¹² This was a period in which not only new political elites but also activists, intellectuals, and artists converged to end colonialism, to envision more equitable social orders, and to find ways of securing a lasting peace. The Bandung conference marked a recalibration of diplomatic tradition to fit the postwar world. But if the Bandung era is viewed *only* as a recalibration of diplomatic tradition, we lose sight of the history of “unrealized emancipatory potential” of this period.¹³ The Bandung era was also a period of intensive social and cultural interaction across the postcolonial world, of conversations across national, linguistic, and ideological borders. Artists, poets, and performers experimented with new ideas and techniques for intellectual and cultural expression to create new visions of the nation and of the world order. This new set of actors wrestled with communist, socialist, and

¹¹ On these problematic conflations, see Lorenz M. Luthi, “Non-Alignment, 1946–1965: Its Establishment and Struggle against Afro-Asianism,” *Humanity* 7, no. 2 (2016): 201–223; 202; Itty Abraham, “From Bandung to NAM: Non-alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947–1965,” *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 46, no. 2 (2008): 195–219. Recent scholarship, moreover, is highlighting contestations around the Third World as a “program” versus an “identity.” See, among others, Jeffrey Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹² Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16. For a particularly poignant example, see Quito Swan, “Blinded by Bandung? Illumining West Papua, Senegal, and the Black Pacific,” *Radical History Review* 131 (2018): 59–81.

democratic ideas in circulation, constantly reformulated their political loyalties, and built up networks of intellectual and radical sociability.

This special issue, therefore examines “other Bandungs”: conferences in the 1950s and 1960s that convened the decolonising world in different constellations. All the gatherings examined in this issue have in common that they were not styled as intergovernmental affairs. They did not convene heads of state, even though several of them were covertly or overtly state-sponsored. And none of them were completely disconnected from the state: delegations included civil servants, members of parliament, representatives of local and provincial governments, opposition leaders, government advisors, and state-appointed representatives. Together, they show the presence of a much broader Afro-Asian enthusiasm. While some of the early conferences foreshadow Bandung and solidify the connections that made the official conference possible, later conferences self-consciously claimed to be expressions of the Bandung Spirit, or at the very least located themselves vis-à-vis the Bandung conference. Collectively, the papers in this issue show that a hard separation between the state and non-state realms cannot be made, and that a more inclusive view of Bandung Era conferences brings into focus an Afro-Asian movement that reached beyond political elites and across Cold War blocs. And notwithstanding the symbolic value of the actual Bandung conference, the inclusion of meetings that reached beyond the intergovernmental level by including activists, dissidents, and intellectuals, uncovers a “lived” Afro-Asianism with deep local roots. The “other Bandungs” reached from international conference halls into local solidarity initiatives far away from cosmopolitan centers—and vice versa. Sometimes, these connections to the local were spontaneous. At other times, as Reem Abou-El-Fadl shows in her paper, they were part of a deliberate policy of outreach. Without wanting to diminish the plurality of voices in the Afro-Asian movement or the presence of more radical visions of world order, we have nevertheless chosen to speak of “other Bandungs” to acknowledge the importance of Bandung as a reference point while showing both the breadth and the reach of Afro-Asianism in this era.

In examining these gatherings, we take inspiration from the work of scholars of transnational feminism in Afro-Asia, which, as Laura Bier has noted, emerged in the postcolonial context of conferences and committees.¹⁴ Recent work on women’s movements in this period has clearly articulated both the limitations of the Cold War analytical

¹⁴ Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser’s Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 161.

frame, as well as the diversity of politics of both the activists and the organizations involved.¹⁵ As Elisabeth Armstrong shows in her examination of the 1949 Conference of Asian Women in Beijing, this new generation of women from across Asia and North Africa engaged in a “solidarity of commonality” that explicitly recognized the imbalances between women of the world.¹⁶ The contributions to this issue show that this was not confined to the international gatherings of the Afro-Asian women’s movement, but impacted the language and practice of Afro-Asian solidarity in mass conferences as well. At the “People’s Bandung” in New Delhi examined in Carolien Stolte’s paper, the Social Commission called “upon all women of Asia to strive for the elimination of colonialism for it is only under conditions conducive to peace that women and children can enjoy their full rights.”¹⁷ Conversely, Rachel Leow’s paper demonstrates that more inclusive participation as well as the changing language of international conferencing also made Afro-Asian gatherings more vulnerable to dismissal by the observers of Cold War powers as “emotional” or “irrational” diplomacy. Su Lin Lewis argues that one of the key differences between the 1953 Asian Socialist Conference (ASC) and the 1955 Bandung Conference was not only the participation of female delegates, but the ASC’s vocal support for “full equal rights and dignity of position” to women in one of its core resolutions.

It is with these caveats in mind—the blurred boundaries of the state, the Cold War, and bloc politics, as well as the changing social dynamics of internationalism—that the authors in this issue have approached the Bandung Era. In focusing on Asian and Afro-Asian conferences, this volume also follows on the work of Vijay Prashad in tracing the trajectory of the Third World as a “Project” that emerged through various cities and sites where new postcolonial elites congregated to imagine its possibilities. But rather than write a teleological narrative of rise and fall, we focus on a number of near-simultaneous sites and less-remembered events that, taken together, reveal the contours of a broader Afro-Asian movement: connections that supplemented, amplified,

¹⁵ Francisca de Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women’s Organisations: The Case of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF),” *Women’s History Review* (2010): 547–573; Elisabeth Armstrong, “Before Bandung: The Anti-Imperialist Women’s Movement in Asia and the Women’s International Democratic Federation,” *Signs* 41, no. 2 (2016): 305–331.

¹⁶ Armstrong, “Before Bandung,” 305. The canonical text on the imbalances between Western and Third World feminists is Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

¹⁷ Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Rameshwari Nehru Personal Papers, Findings and Resolutions 10/4/1955.

traversed, or even countered, the diplomatic maneuvers of Bandung. As conferences, these events served as sources of transnational solidarity and strength among new Afro-Asian coalitions, all motivated by discourses of anti-colonialism and the need to find a more peaceful trajectory out of the violent manifestations of the Cold War.

The interconnected web of conferences that we track emerged, in part, from the 1947 Asian Relations Conference in Delhi, which was itself born out of the various pan-Asian projects of the interwar era, and out of which sprang different trajectories of activism.¹⁸ Hanna Jansen shows how connections made at this conference carried over into later intellectual collaborations. In Lewis' paper, Indonesian, Burmese, and Indian socialist intellectuals and politicians who met in Delhi reconvened at the 1953 Asian Socialist Conference in Rangoon, seeking a "third way" in the political model of democratic socialism while campaigning for self-determination across Asia and Africa. The hopes of the Asian Socialist Conference to reach out to African audiences found their ideal broker in the figure of James Markham, a central figure in Gerard McCann's analysis of African engagements with the Afro-Asian project in this issue. While Markham reappears in Bandung in 1955 as part of Ghana's three-man delegation, Asian socialists, as members of opposition parties in most of the participating countries, were not invited there. Godfrey Jansen wrote disparagingly of the latter days of the Asian Socialist Conference as an organization "smitten with bankruptcy that was as much ideological as financial, faded into inaction and insignificance—a thin, forlorn echo [of Bandung]."¹⁹ But as Kyaw Zaw Win has argued, the Asian Socialist Conference was also, in many ways, a "precursor" to Bandung in its drafting resolutions on human rights, anti-colonial solidarity, and cultural co-operation.²⁰ The demise of the Asian Socialist Conference does signal the way in which connections can be broken, made vulnerable by the fractious politics of the postcolonial state and competing demands of nationalism and regionalism on Afro-Asian solidarity.

But the Asian Relations Conference of 1947 was not the only point of departure for the gatherings examined in this issue. As Stolte shows

¹⁸ Carolien Stolte, "The Asiatic Hour: New Perspectives on the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947," in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2014), 75–93; Vineet Thakur, "An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947," *The International History Review* (2018): 1–23; Tansen Sen, *India, China, and the World: A Connected History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), chapter 4.

¹⁹ Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 267.

²⁰ Kyaw Zaw Win, "The 1953 Asian Socialist Conference in Rangoon: Precursor to the Bandung Conference," in *Bandung*, ed. McDougall and Finnane (1955), 43–56.

in her paper, the organizers of the 1955 New Delhi Conference of Asian Countries for the Relaxation of International Tensions drew on the spirit of the Asian Relations Conference, but took at least as much inspiration from World Peace movements. Marketed as the “Asian Solidarity Conference,” this conference opened eleven days before the Bandung Conference and professed to manifest Asia’s popular support for the latter. In doing so, this “People’s Bandung” continued a trajectory set in motion 1952 at the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference in Beijing, examined by Rachel Leow. The larger institutional orbit of the World Peace Council, especially the Council’s connections to peace movements in Afro-Asia, has received little scholarly attention.²¹ However, many of the peace activists from Leow and Stolte’s articles reappear at the conferences of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization, which had its first meeting in Cairo in December 1957. Abou-El-Fadl, meanwhile, explores the intersection of governmental and non-governmental elements in this organization—including media and intellectual associations—that set the context for Afro-Asian solidarity in Egypt.

Some of the papers in this issue also disrupt the conventional geographies of Afro-Asianism. Hanna Jansen examines the role of scholars and writers in Soviet engagements with the Afro-Asian solidarity movement. These were built on strong personal ties, especially on the part of the Central Asian members of the Soviet Committee for Solidarity with the Countries of Asia and Africa. Institutionally, however, the potential of these engagements was limited. Jansen shows how UNESCO was favored over AAPSIO as a platform for Soviet thinkers to engage with Afro-Asia as an intellectual project. Jansen’s inclusion of Central Asian writers such as Mirza Tursun-Zade in the intellectual projects of the era crucially disrupts received notions of regionalism during the Cold War. The “erasure” of Central Asia from global geography during the Soviet era has been termed a form of “cartographical dismemberment”; the region disappeared almost entirely from the geographical imagination—eventually dissolving into the disciplinary cracks of Area Studies in the 1950s as an unlikely part of “Eastern Europe” due to the geopolitical fractions of the times.²² Jansen’s article makes clear that, even as Central

²¹ With the recent exception of Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

²² Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 177–178. On the disciplinary history of Area Studies and its relationship to the Cold War, see also Matthias Middell and Katja Neumann, “Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization,” *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 1 (2010): 149–170.

Asia was receding from view in western cartographies of Asia, it emerged in alternative forums as part of new regionalist formations. Similarly disruptive of Cold War cartographies is the casting of Havana as a destination for Afro-Asian intellectuals in 1968 by Ali Raza. Through the writings of Pakistani authors, he shows how the Cultural Congress of Havana convened writers devoted to the cause of national liberation movements, drawn by the promise of a new and equitable society offered by Castro's Cuba. The Cultural Congress took place two years after the famous "Tricontinental," which established the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Raza shows how intellectuals in Pakistan subverted their country's diplomatic alignment to the US in important ways.

The fact that novelists, artists, and poets rubbed shoulders with government representatives, further emphasizes the porousness between state and non-state actors, and the way in which diplomatic overtures were supported and legitimized by civil society actors. This happened both on and off the conference podium. In Leow's paper on the 1952 Beijing conference, Chinese intellectuals stage a much-applauded "People's Diplomacy" through the physical embrace of Indian and Pakistani writers at the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference, but PRC officials also used the conference to negotiate new trade terms with the conference's delegates. In Stolte's paper on the 1955 Delhi conference, bilateral talks took place in the margins of the conference between India and Egypt as well as India and Vietnam. In her paper on Egyptian initiatives around the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization, Abou-El-Fadl shows how scholars, journalists, and artists lent their support to the pan-African initiatives of the Egyptian state. McCann shows how Nkrumah employed James Markham as his "man in Asia" to harness the organizational power of Asian anti-imperialist movements toward African decolonization.

In other cases, however, such connections did not always enhance the position of those in power. In Lewis' paper, powerful Burmese ministers interact with leaders of socialist opposition parties in India, Indonesia, and Japan to seek the support of "world public opinion" and legitimize the Asian Socialist project. In Raza's paper, Havana functioned as a site where Pakistani left-wing intellectuals engaged with their peers across the decolonizing world, but in ways that ran directly counter to the interests of the Pakistani state. In India, as Stolte shows, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru struggled to explain to his Bandung colleagues, especially to Sukarno, how it was possible that another international conference gathered in New Delhi at the same time the Bandung conference was taking place. Here, it was precisely

the porousness between the state and non-state realms that confused the picture, as the Delhi conference professed to be non-governmental but counted a large group of Indian members of parliament among its organizers.

If the delegates to these conferences defied easy categorization as state or non-state actors, they also failed to conform to the bloc divisions of the early Cold War. Collectively, the attendees of the “other Bandungs” represented a broad political spectrum that could not be subordinated to Cold War camps. The Asian and African socialists examined by Lewis and McCann explicitly sought to transcend such divisions in their promotion of a “Third Force”—in this case a democratic socialist one, independent of both “communist” and “capitalist” bloc formations (as well as of the European-based Socialist International).²³ In the case of events such as the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference, the Delhi Conference of Asian Countries, or the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization, the gatherings themselves were left-leaning, but the allegiances of their participants varied widely. As monks and priests streamed into Beijing, Islamic socialists converged on Delhi, and African independence fighters arrived in Cairo, it was clear that for many, the challenges common to the decolonizing world trumped Cold War concerns. Likewise, African-American activists from the United States arrived at World Peace Council conferences, Russian delegates attended decolonization conferences, and Soviet Central Asian intellectuals professed themselves to be Afro-Asianists.²⁴ As is further elaborated below, the Cold War could also constrain possibilities for organizing or attending conferences. Key Cold War fractures such as the Korean War (1950–1953), the Sino-Soviet split (1956–1966), and the wars in Indochina heavily influenced the demise of initiatives like the Asian Socialist Conference and AAPSO.²⁵ But as Abou-el-Fadl shows in her paper on AAPSO, these

²³ See also Talbot C. Imlay, “International Socialism and Decolonization during the 1950s: Competing Rights and the Postcolonial Order,” *American Historical Review* 118, no. 4 (2013): 1105–1132.

²⁴ On Central Asian intellectuals as intermediaries in Soviet international relations, see Jansen in this issue, as well as Maria Kirasirova, “‘Sons of Muslims’ in Moscow: Soviet Central Asian Mediators to the Foreign East, 1955–1962,” *Ab Imperio* 4 (2011): 106–132.

²⁵ On Sino-Soviet competition over control of AAPSO, see Charles Neuhauser, *China and the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization, 1957–1967* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian Research Center, 1968); Darryl Thomas, “The Impact of the Sino-Soviet Conflict on the Afro-Asian Peoples’ Solidarity Organization: Afro-Asianism versus Non-Alignment, 1955–1966,” *Journal of Asian and African Affairs* 11, no. 2 (1992): 167–191. On the consequences of the split see Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

fractures also kept open multiple trajectories for both individuals and groups to connect within and across such divides.

There were important material dimensions to this flurry of transnational activity in the 1950s. The increasing availability of air travel shortened distances across the Afro-Asian region, while the short hops on 1950s air routes allowed participants to work their way to a conference through multiple stops, not only getting to know the territory in between but also using those intervals to build personal relationships. It is no coincidence that many of the 1950s conferences took place along the transcontinental air routes of the era.²⁶ Likewise, the willingness of the first generation of postcolonial governments and political parties to invest in Afro-Asian relations, provided an impetus to transnational gatherings across Asia and Africa. In some cases, so did sponsorship from Cold War era organizations with stakes in the region.²⁷

Language, meanwhile, provided both opportunities and limitations. The linguistic divisions left across Afro-Asia by European empires severely constrained communication across old imperial lines. Proceedings and reports of Afro-Asian conferences invariably include a commentary on language. While at the 1947 Asian Relations Conference the issue of a language of communication for Asia was part of the conference proceedings itself as a quest to find a decolonial lingua franca, different conferences found different solutions for this problem.²⁸ Some conferences opted for English-only, such as the Asian Socialist Conference. Other conferences opted to fully embrace the region's linguistic diversity by allowing speeches in every language, such as the 1955 Delhi conference. AAPSO, meanwhile, decided to opt for English, French, and Arabic as its primary languages. This was a problem, however, without a satisfactory solution. At the Asian Socialist Conference, the complaint was raised that English put the already very large Indian delegation at a further advantage. Conversely, at the Delhi conference, delegates complained of sessions made both interminable and confusing by the necessity of so many translations.

²⁶ Su Lin Lewis, "Skies that Bind: Air Travel in the Bandung Era," *Afro-Asian Visions Blog* (September 2016) at www.medium.com/afro-asian-visions/skies-that-bind-air-travel-in-the-bandung-era-feac8e844993.

²⁷ Gerard McCann, "Trade Unionism, African Cold War and Kenya's Global Moment, 1937–65," *Journal of Social History* (forthcoming, 2019).

²⁸ For the discussion on this issue, see *Asian Relations, being a Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference New Delhi, March–April 1947* (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 1948), esp. 204–207.

But aside from the financial, practical, and cultural dimensions to international conferencing, there were crucial political constraints. In the case of Afro-Asian conferences, these were created by the hardening lines of the Cold War, by former colonizers' attempts to retain control over decolonized areas, as well as by postcolonial regimes. In Leow's paper, Chen Hansheng, a high level delegate of the PRC, plays a connecting role in appearing at a number of World Peace conferences across Moscow, Beijing, and Delhi, referring to himself as a "messenger of peace." But a delegation to Mecca led by a Chinese Islamic scholar was denied visas for onward travel to Saudi Arabia from Karachi. This too could have unexpected results: he stayed in Karachi to cultivate close connections with Pakistan's interlocutor to the World Peace Council, who consequently appeared in Beijing. In Lewis's paper, well-established Asian socialist parties paid their own airfare to Rangoon, a key hub on trans-Asian air routes, while other parties were unable to attend due to financial or political restrictions.

Both colonial and postcolonial governments restricted the movements of activists and intellectual across these borders. These ranged from the confiscation of passports, to refusal of visa and travel permission, to power play. The most famous case of the latter is probably British, French, and American strategizing over their response to the Bandung plans, resulting in the British advising Kwame Nkrumah not to attend Bandung.²⁹ But examples from the conferences in this special issue abound. Asian socialists were unable to convene a meeting in Bandung due to the visa restrictions imposed on Israeli socialists. This was one year before the Bandung conference would take place. While the Israel-Palestine issue became a major point of discussion there, Israel was unrepresented despite the protests of U Nu and Nehru; this was due in part to Egyptian campaigns to counter Israel's forays into the Afro-Asian world—campaigns which, as Abou-El-Fadl shows, would continue with the formation of AAPSO. In Raza's paper, the Pakistani poet and recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, is invited to the 1968 Havana Congress but unable to leave the country under Ayub Khan's military dictatorship. Pakistani writer Abdullah Malik is able to attend only because he is based in London.

²⁹ Frank Gerits, "Bandung as the Call for a Better Development Project: US, British, French and Gold Coast Perceptions of the Afro-Asian Conference (1955)," *Cold War History* 16, no. 3 (2016): 255–272: 262. This did not deter many historians from placing Nkrumah at Bandung anyway: see Robert Vitalis, "The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung (Ban-Doong)," *Humanity* 4, no. 2 (2003): 261–288.

Restrictions imposed on travel were themselves drivers of Afro-Asian Solidarity. Notable absences elicited strong and emotional responses at conferences themselves. At times, they even became sources for new Afro-Asian initiatives. One example is the international outcry over the confiscation of African-American artist and activist Paul Robeson's passport by the United States government. A campaign to reunite him with his travel documents reached as far as India, where a national appeal from the All-India Peace Council resulted in the American Embassy in Delhi being inundated with emotionally charged petitions and letters of protest. Days later, peace committees in Venezuela followed suit.³⁰ In a no less emotional response, Paul Robeson's recording company *Othello* offered to specially record albums with Robeson's famous songs for export to countries which had supported him, including newly recorded songs "sung as far as possible in the national language."³¹ Robeson also sent a passionate letter of greeting to the 1952 Beijing Peace Conference, "over the flimsy fence which the war-minded men in Washington have erected between you and me," containing "proud assurances of unbreakable solidarity" that bore "the voice of the people crying out in unity with yours for peace."³² In her paper on the 1952 Peace Conference, Rachel Leow conceptualizes the emotionally charged language and gestures that marked many of the conferences analysed in this issue. Drawing on Roland Burke, whose work on "emotional diplomacy" has pointed out that US official assessments of such gatherings were often disparaging and dismissive of the "unreasonable enthusiasm" of Afro-Asian delegations,³³ her paper gives center stage to the emotional registers of the Beijing conference specifically, and of the Bandung era generally. Understanding the emotional and internationalist registers of Bandung-era conferences, Leow argues, is a crucial part of any effort to more fully recover the subaltern dimensions of the Cold War.

In "subalternizing" the Cold War, the importance of direct Afro-Asian connections is crucial. Ranging from the journeys of African students to Asia examined by McCann, to the Afro-Asian stage that

³⁰ "Support for Paul Robeson," *Bulletin of the World Council of Peace* 15 (1954): 10.

³¹ "Interesting Move for the Recording and Sale of Songs by Paul Robeson," *Bulletin of the World Council of Peace* 17 (1954): 10.

³² "Greetings from Paul Robeson," *The Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Regions Bulletin* 1 (1952).

³³ Burke, "Emotional Diplomacy and Human Rights at the United Nations," *Human Rights Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (2017): 273–295. On the emotional registers of Third World diplomacy in this era, see also Frank Gerits, "'When the Bull Elephants Fight': Kwame Nkrumah, Non-Alignment, and Pan-Africanism as an Interventionist Ideology in the Global Cold War (1957–66)," *The International History Review* 37, no. 5 (2015): 951–969.

was Havana in Raza's article, or conversations between Soviet Central Asian intellectuals and their Asian and African peers in the halls of UNESCO examined by Jansen, these interactions often ran counter to established notions of the directions of Cold War international traffic. But aside from bringing into focus the blurry edges of the Cold War, this also requires interrogation of the intellectual and cultural referents underpinning these interactions. We are indebted to scholarship that challenges the teleological, high political view of the 1950s and early 1960s as decades of dashed hopes, and views this era as one of dynamic, globalist, and forward-looking cultural and intellectual expression.³⁴ Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H. T. Liem's collection on Bandung-era Indonesia shows how China, Egypt, and "the new West" of the USA served as models of modernity for Indonesian filmmakers, performers, and writers. As they argue, while the Cold War has largely been seen as a bipolar, negative force, it also "facilitated and opened up access to new networks, new ideas, and new worlds."³⁵ In 1950, a group of Indonesian artists crowned themselves the "legitimate heirs of world culture" who would "[further] culture in their own way."³⁶ The architects of this manifesto would go on to take different paths, due to disagreements on the role of culture in society. Cultural workers of LEKRA, affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party, turned to revolution and social realism in their poetry, theatre, and literature, while the Indonesian Socialist Party's cultural arm, the *Konfrontasi* study group, committed themselves to a doctrine of universal humanism that challenged the significance of national revolution.³⁷ It was the *Konfrontasi* group that hosted Richard Wright on his journey to Bandung, an encounter that is untangled in Foulcher and Roberts' nuanced exploration of the cultural

³⁴ Tony Day and Maya Liem, eds., *Cultures at War: Cultural Expression in Cold War Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: SEAP, 2010); Jennifer Lindsay and Maya Liem, eds., *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950–1965* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011); Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

³⁵ Lindsay, "Heirs to World Culture 1950–1965: An Introduction," *Heirs to World Culture*, 22.

³⁶ "The Gelanggang Declaration," as quoted and translated by Lindsay, "Heirs to World Culture," 10.

³⁷ On Lekra, see Michael Bodden, "The Dynamic Tensions of Lekra's Modern National Theatre," in *Heirs to World Culture*, ed. Lindsay and Liem, 453–484; "Modern Drama, Politics, and the Postcolonial Aesthetics of Left-Nationalism in North Sumatra: The Forgotten Theater of Indonesia's Lekra, 1955–65," in *Cultures at War*, ed. Day and Liem, 45–80; Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri, "LEKRA and Ensembles: Tracing the Indonesian Musical Stage," in *Heirs to World Culture*, ed. Lindsay and Liem, 421–451; Keith Foulcher, "Bringing the World Back Home: Cultural Traffic in *Konfrontasi*, 1954–1960," in *Heirs to World Culture*, ed. Lindsay and Liem, 31–56.

traffic and the misunderstandings embedded in African-American engagements with the Afro-Asian world.³⁸

Similarly, in our papers, these different “pulls” of cultural and intellectual traffic from Moscow, Beijing, Cairo, Hollywood, and post-imperial London nourished the dynamism of the age, but also constituted new and grievous splits, particularly in the Left. In Lewis’ and McCann’s papers, Asian and African socialists distinguished themselves from the communist parties with whom they had once been aligned by denouncing the Soviet Union and its “totalitarian” and “imperialist” impulses. While they drew on models of the welfare state, they also voraciously criticized the colonial politics of European socialists. The networks between Richard Wright and his Indonesian socialist hosts were facilitated by their joint connections to the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an important and highly contested source of patronage for Asian and African intellectuals disenchanted with Moscow.³⁹ In Raza’s paper, the CCF appears as a deeply polarising force in Pakistan, supported by the Pakistan government, which called on intellectuals to take sides and continuously vilified the Soviet Union as a “fanatical creed,” and explicitly evoked Islam in its battle against communism. These cultural battles made writers like Malik and other leftist intellectuals in Havana even more sensitive to the politics of the conference in staging Cuba’s attempt to supplant China and the Soviet Union as leader of the Third World. Similarly, Abou-El-Fadl shows how the 1957 Cairo conference, far from being a front for Soviet communism, was an occasion for Nasser to carefully navigate the relations between the Soviet Union and China, while Egyptian intellectuals continued to cultivate relationships with African and Arab liberation movements. These actors, then, were not puppets and passive recipients of the propaganda battles of the Global Cold War, but actively seized, challenged, and created new currents of thought.

In recovering these narratives of lost conferences and gatherings, we must also acknowledge the ephemeral quality of the Afro-Asian era and

³⁸ Brian Russell Roberts and Keith Foulcher, eds., *Indonesian Notebook: A Sourcebook on Richard Wright and the Bandung Conference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

³⁹ See Peter Benson, *Black Orpheus, Transition, and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999); Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and Postwar American Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2002); Iber, *Neither Peace Nor Freedom*; Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg, eds., *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

the fragility of its internationalism in the 1950s, both at the diplomatic and non-state level. By the end of the 1950s, a number of Asian socialists were marginalized, jailed, exiled, with their parties banned or dissolved. As Cairo became the new leader of AAPSO and the Afro-Asian world after 1957, Indians began to gradually pull away from the organization. Meanwhile, diplomatic attempts to hold a second Bandung in Algiers in 1965 stalled. The first generation of postcolonial leaders passed away or was removed from power, the Vietnam War and Arab-Israeli conflict continued to escalate, and new regionalisms took precedence. In rivalry with Nasser, Nkrumah emerged as leader of pan-African movements, particularly after Ghana's independence in 1957. Although a neat separation is impossible to make, Mark T. Berger has conceptualized this as a "first" and a "second" generation of Third World regimes, with the latter reflecting a "more radical, more unambiguously socialist" orientation, bookended by the Cuban and Nicaraguan Revolutions.⁴⁰

While the dissolution of networks forged in the 1950s indicates the failures of Afro-Asianism at the inter-state level, it also shows that it was in the cultural sphere that Afro-Asianism left its most important legacies. One of the most enduring organizations of the Afro-Asian era began in Tashkent in 1958, which resolved to establish a permanent body of Afro-Asian Writers in Colombo.⁴¹ Extracts from the bureau's first anthology of Afro-Asian poems capture the emotive pull of transnational solidarity, from Han Pei-Ping's elegy to "African Drums" to Sitor Situmorang's poem about a "Cuban maid in Peking," who hands him a "banner of her country, celebrating the victory of her land over American aggression."⁴² The bureau was later moved to Cairo, with subsequent meetings held in Beirut, Delhi, Almaty, and Angola throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁴³ In March 1968, the Afro-Asian

⁴⁰ Mark T. Berger, "After the Third World? History, Destiny and the Fate of Third Worldism," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2004): 19. On the first generation, see, more recently, Kate McGregor and Vanessa Hearman, "Challenging the Lifeline of Imperialism: Reassessing Afro-Asian Solidarity and Related Activism in the Decade 1955–1965," in *Bandung, Global History, and International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁴¹ On Tashkent see Constantin Katsakioris, "L'Union Soviétique et les intellectuels Africains: Internationalism, panafricanisme et négritude pendant les années de la décolonisation, 1954–1964," *Cahiers du monde russe* 47, no. 1–2 (2006): 15–32; Rossen Djagalov, *Premature Postcolonialists: Soviet-Third World Literary and Cinematic Engagements in the Age of Three Worlds* (forthcoming, McGill-Queens University Press).

⁴² *Afro-Asian Poems: An Anthology* (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1963).

⁴³ See Hala Halim, "Lotus, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 3 (2012): 563–583; Duncan Yoon, "'Our Forces Have Redoubled': World Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (2015): 233–252.

Writers' Association began publishing *Lotus*, a triquarterly journal based in Cairo, counting among its contributors leading writers and poets from across Asian and African continents, including Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Leopold Senghor. *Lotus* harked back to the original charter of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, asserting that the "literary creations of this world are an integral part of the struggle waged by the peoples of Africa and Asia against colonial oppression and foreign domination."⁴⁴ Throughout its lifetime, the journal not only explicitly condemned American aggression in Vietnam and the Israel-Palestine conflict, but also featured the work of North Vietnamese poets like Thanh Hai and Palestinian writers like Ghassan Kanafani. The forthcoming work of other scholars currently working in research collectives on Afro-Asian literature will no doubt tease out more of these literary connections.⁴⁵ But if *Lotus* was the culmination of Afro-Asianism, it is worth recalling the many roadmaps that pointed in its direction.

As a working group, we have argued elsewhere that a global moment like the proliferation of Afro-Asian enthusiasm in this period cannot be brought fully into view by a single scholar.⁴⁶ By bringing together scholars working on a number of different regions, our collaboration has broken out of traditional national and regional frameworks to look jointly at exchanges across Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.⁴⁷ The penetration of Afro-Asianism to the local level, or the meaning of Afro-Asianism in different geographical and political settings, requires specialized local and linguistic knowledge. The articles in this special issue, therefore, are the product of research in the Cold War era archives of the United States and the Soviet Union, but also in archives in New Delhi, Nairobi, Calcutta, Cairo, Yangon, Lahore, and Jakarta. And as the conferences in this issue convened a wide array of local and international actors, including people unrelated or even opposed to those in power, it has required substantial archival research in a wide array of other repositories. Almost all of the articles in this issue are indebted to sources we have reviewed and discussed as a collective at the International Institute of Social History in

⁴⁴ "Charter of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association", *Lotus* 1, no. 1 (1967).

⁴⁵ This includes the Bandung Humanisms group, led by Lydia Liu, and the recent "inventory workshop" on the Afro-Asian Writers Association at NYU in 2017. We are grateful to Rossen Djalalov for alerting us to this.

⁴⁶ Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, "Manifesto: Networks of Decolonization in Asia and Africa," *Radical History Review* 131 (2018): 176–182.

⁴⁷ This special issue, too, is indebted to the discussions of the "Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective."

Amsterdam, which focuses on social and emancipatory movements and has an explicit mandate to protect archives under threat from states. But given the unofficial nature of many of the gatherings examined here, the papers are no less informed by the use of different kinds of sources, from “grey literature” unearthed in local repositories, to unpublished memoirs in personal libraries, to oral history interviews with activists from the era and their children, to the use of songs, novels, and works of poetry.

Throughout, the guiding principle of this working group has been that insights on one Afro-Asian gathering lead to insights on another. We have been fortunate that we could spend time reviewing sources in key repositories together and share findings in real time. In this way, Lewis and McCann were able to tackle the Asian Socialist Conference in Rangoon from different area studies vantage points, while sharing sources and findings along the way. Leow’s research on the APC in Beijing unearthed a number of parallels and connections to the Delhi conference three years later. Jansen’s work on the intellectual projects of Central Asian thinkers from the Soviet solidarity committees gave new depth to the project when some of those thinkers reappeared at Asian peace conference in the projects of others. As a collective, we have also sought to expand our network via our blog, which has connected our work with that of others working on similar themes, widened our perspectives, and contributed to an increasingly connected web of historical scholarship on this era.⁴⁸ We have created a dynamic visualization of the conferences of the 1950s and 1960s Afro-Asianism, based on our collective’s database, and hope to develop it for future collaborations and public input.⁴⁹ We acknowledge here that most of us are based at European universities, which has greatly facilitated our access to sources, resources, and each other. Even then, we were forced to acknowledge parallels to the gatherings we study when the success of our own attempts at bringing the collective together was undermined by contemporary visa regimes.

At its heart, our research collective has sought to trace the convergence of networks of decolonization through the web of Afro-Asian conferences in the Bandung era. This has meant looking below and beyond the conventional framings of the Cold War and entrenched, state-centric narratives about winners and losers in the postcolonial world. The intellectuals, artists, writers, activists, and political operatives who traversed these routes met, in many cases for

⁴⁸ www.medium.com/afro-asian-visions.

⁴⁹ See www.afroasiannetworks.com/visualisation/.

the first time, in the various hubs of the Afro-Asian world to envision and make a world after empire.⁵⁰ Their relationships were fraught with tension, hierarchies, and conflict, but they were also characterized by solidarity, affect, and emotion. While they left a much lighter, and often grainier, archival footprint than the political elites of Bandung, these gatherings provide us with a far more nuanced understanding of the postcolonial world and its multi-directional pulls. We have seen how activists used new international fora—from the Socialist International to UNESCO—to vigorously campaign for Afro-Asian inclusion. Tracking their movements uncovers the vitality of world peace movements, the everyday work of anti-colonial solidarity, and journeys to the new meccas of the Third World. Their networks were brittle, and easily disrupted by postcolonial governments and Cold War propaganda battles. But they left important imprints on both cultural production and international engagements in the postcolonial world. Finally, we acknowledge that this is an unfolding story, one which we hope will yield new insights with the further opening of archives, the unearthing of neglected sources, and the production of new scholarly work, particularly from Afro-Asia itself.

⁵⁰ Here of course we borrow from Lee, *Making a World After Empire*.