

Making a world after empire: the Bandung moment and its political afterlives

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The geopolitical consequences of ‘South–South’ relations are animating the world as never before. Predictably, much of the analysis on today’s seismic transitions in and between developing nations is concerned more with clairvoyant visions of the future than with the sticky complexities of the past. Among the confident crystal-ball gazing into an ‘Asian century’, Western nail-biting about a so-called ‘Beijing consensus’, and even tentative hope of an ‘African renaissance’, it is clear that sober historical scholarship is vital to anchor the hyperbole surrounding the rise of developing world solidarity in the contested realities of the post-colonial world. This book is an important springboard in providing a critical genealogy of the transformative potential, but also aporia, inherent in the older ‘third world’ and contemporary ‘global South’.

It emerges from a 2005 gathering convened around the fiftieth anniversary of the landmark Bandung conference. Bandung is consistently invoked as an ideological lodestone of ‘third-worldist’ achievement, possibility, and continuity. Even as the authoritarianism of structural adjustment seemed to exorcise the ‘Bandung spirit’ by the 1980s, the language of Southern fraternity, honour in equitable economic partnership, and an institutional order better reflecting the distribution of the world’s peoples chimed with the thinking at the fifth BRICS summit in KwaZulu-Natal in 2013 much as in West Java in 1955. In rhetorical terms at least, the ghosts of Bandung continue to haunt the corridors of emerging power, even if neo-liberal divergences suggest challenging times ahead and substantive discontinuities from earlier volleys of ‘third-worldist’ collectivity.

It is indeed strange, then, that so little is known about Bandung and its legacies. This book fills the lacuna by exploring the intersection of new global histories of decolonization and of the Cold War with the spectrum of post-colonial studies. As the editor, Christopher J. Lee, argues, Bandung was ‘a historical juncture that served as a summary point for previous

anti-colonial activism and a new baseline by which the accomplishments of the post-colonial world were to be measured’ (p. 32). In finding ways to conceptualize this past and future, this volume is welcome.

The most useful intervention is Lee’s introduction (students will also find his copious references helpful). Having surveyed the Bandung conference itself, he orientates the collection around post-Andersonian theories of popular imagination as political practice. He utilizes critiques of Anderson’s *Imagined communities* to stress instead the importance of ‘politically constrained “represented communities”’ (p. 3). Scholars should look at the rhetoric and media of mobilization but also at parameters of expression. In this case, post-colonial imagined communities were bound by institutions (for example, structural legacies of colonial rule such as Cooper’s ‘gatekeeper states’) and thus one needs to focus on resultant ‘ritual practices of community legitimation’ (p. 24). For Lee, conversations at Bandung and beyond between African and Asian nationalists should be conceptualized in terms of ‘geopolitical *communitas*’ or ‘communities of feeling’ (pp. 3, 25): ‘one can argue that an existential *communitas* – based on shared experience of Western imperialism – informed an ideological *communitas* that intended to provide a distinct, even utopian, alternative to the preceding era through a discourse of Afro-Asian solidarity’ (p. 26).

Communitas functioned in less fixed ways than Anderson’s ‘imagined community’. It was intrinsically transitory, mobile, and unstable, based on rhetorical qualities of imagination but also with practical limitations (pp. 23–7). Bandung challenged global norms creatively – its enduring legacy – but the fluidity of *communitas* and an emphasis on political feelings over structured community enables scholars to incorporate those polarizing Cold War contexts that seemed to stymie Bandung’s potential and to trouble histories of ‘third-worldist’ ‘salvation and redemption’ (p. 8). This collection is alive to important ‘emancipationist’ histories but has an equally keen eye on dissonance within the Bandung collective, as well as the disconnect between the failures of the post-colonial present versus romantic visions of ‘third-worldist’ collaboration. The book’s spark comes from unpacking these ‘tensions of postcoloniality’ (p. 27), in addition to novel histories of connection.

Certain ideological divisions were acknowledged from the very outset at Bandung. However, the shared experience of imperial oppression and commitment to a more just world system bound together decolonizing countries in sometimes rocky, but emotively powerful, collectives of grievance and aspiration. Like few events

before it, Bandung created latitude for new nations to debate and assert themselves in a club of the like-minded towards broad reformist goals, a cross-racial solidarity rightly celebrated. But, as Burton states in her punchy epilogue, there were tensions under 'the romance of racialism that haunts many accounts of Bandung and its aftermath' (p. 352). She argues, for example, that the 'Nehruvian postcolonial imaginary carried racial hierarchies' and viewed Afro-Asia in 'civilizational terms' with India as senior tutor to emerging African nations (p. 354). 'Critical histories of Bandung can and should operate from this framework of skepticism about the employment of racial solidarity *tout court* on the post-1955 landscape ... to break, finally, from its presumptively fraternal narratives' (pp. 356–8). This is not to fetishize tension or reject deep-seated solidarity, but rather properly to historicize complexities in the post-colonial order.

The tensions and boons of Bandung's uneven legacy within the post-colonial *communitas* are examined throughout the volume. Part one, 'Framings', outlines the binding concepts of anti-colonialism and the vicissitudes of post-colonial state-building within a historical perspective. These contributions evoke Lee's 'communities of feeling' in quite broad senses and serve as a solid, if not spectacular, conceptual canvas for the original empirical case studies of part two. The latter's effervescent essays chart complex ways in which local and international contexts collided in the 'the search for a useable future' (p. 198) within Afro-Asia from the 1950s to the 1980s. Bier's chapter suggestively plots the intersection of women's movements and broader 'third-worldist' solidarity through the Egyptian press. In East Africa Brennan produces a fascinating analysis of the role of Radio Cairo in regional decolonization, while Burgess looks at Mao's ideological influence in Zanzibari modernization. This tessellates nicely with another, as Monson journeys into Sino-Tanzanian cooperation on the TAZARA railway. Finally, Lee's intriguing account of the itinerant South African intellectual Alex La Guma notes the importance of personalized cultural encounter for 'third-worldist' activism. All the essays provide satisfying additions, loosely tethered to the theoretical kernel of the book. The third section looks to the contemporary world in Tull's well-cited 2006 article on historical conviviality and today's China–Africa relations. Here Presholdt's offering on the creation of Islamic identity in coastal Kenya through the vehicle of Osama bin Laden's anti-Western iconography is a particularly imaginative take on the *communitas* theme.

Parts of the book, especially those chapters previously published, adhere to the collection's theoretical underpinnings at a fairly general level, inferring links to the Bandung movement rather than exploring them. Most chapters are, however, adept at providing a rich tapestry of international and transnational Afro-Asian interaction that drew inspiration, however fleetingly and amorphously, from those heady days in Indonesia in 1955. This creates a somewhat fragmented overall picture. But this book is not designed to be a panoptic survey, rather a provocative historiographical point of departure. In this sense it is successful. Although Lee acknowledges that Bandung created a 'diplomatic revolution' above all, he is also alive to the socio-cultural turn that connects these novel frontiers to older area studies. Equally, development and modernization emerge not as modish new themes but as subordinate parts of broader anti-hegemonic imaginary. This 'revolutionary' dimension in Sino-African exchange is well discussed by Burgess, Monson, and Tull. The collection provokes a series of fundamental questions but also implicitly calls for methodological innovation. Lee's literary approach helps open up new cultural vistas, much as Prashad's 'third-worldist' work elsewhere configures class struggle and capital at the analytical centre.

As this work suggests, Bandung lives on. The cooperation of emerging economies such as India, Brazil, and South Africa heralds a reinvigoration of the 'Bandung spirit' for many. Nevertheless, at the same time, the rise of BRICS augurs new forms of stratification within the global South. As a framework to make historical sense of these challenges and in pushing the boundaries of contemporary global history, this volume should be commended.

Transpacific revolutionaries: the Chinese Revolution in Latin America

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In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to relations between China and Latin America.