"The People's Bandung": Local Anti-imperialists on an Afro-Asian Stage

Stolte, C.M.

"The People's Bandung": Local Anti-imperialists on an Afro-Asian Stage

Carolien Stolte

Journal of World History, Volume 30, Numbers 1-2, June 2019, pp. 125-156 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2019.0015

"The People's Bandung": Local Anti-imperialists on an Afro-Asian Stage*

CAROLIEN STOLTE
Leiden University

Introduction

The 1955 intergovernmental Conference of Asian-African Countries at Bandung is widely regarded as an important prelude to the non-aligned movement. It is less well known that eleven days prior to the Bandung Conference, a conference was convened in New Delhi that should be considered its unofficial counterpart. In sharp contrast to Bandung, which was not open to the public, the nongovernmental nature of the Delhi conference enabled thousands of people to attend. Officially known as the Conference of Asian Countries on the Relaxation of International Tension (CRIT), it was heavily influenced by the growing peace movement of the early Cold War years.[1] Over the next five years, the Delhi gathering's success in terms of attendance,

*This article would not have been possible without the many discussions on 1950s internationalism within the "Afro-Asian Networks Collective." Thanks also to the participants and organizers of the ICS workshop "India, China, and the Emergence of Post-War Post-Colonial Asia, 1945–50" in New Delhi; the staff of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library; the LIAS History working group at Leiden; and the (Il)liberal Internationalisms workshop in Vienna, particularly Glenda Sluga and Natasha Wheatley. This article is part of a VENI project funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research.

[1] The conference's official name was too convoluted for the press and even for the conference conveners, most of whom simply spoke of the "Conference of Asian Countries" or the "Asian Solidarity Conference." The exceptions were intelligence services, the World Peace Council, and the Russian Press, all of whom had stakes in emphasizing the conference's links to the peace movement. In order to avoid confusion with the 1947 Asian Relations Conference, also held in New Delhi, this article uses the official name (acronym CRIT) throughout.

Journal of World History, Vol. 30, Nos. 1&2

media coverage, and interest from writers, poets, and artists, gave rise to a set of additional conferences across Africa and Asia. It was also instrumental in the formation of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), which was formally established in Cairo in December 1957 with support from the Egyptian government. Several founders of AAPSO had attended the Delhi conference in 1955, and would populate AAPSO committees for years to come.

This article attempts to broaden the "Bandung Moment" by focusing not on interstate diplomacy, but on more popular—and certainly more populous—expressions of the much-famed "Bandung Spirit." In contrast to the official Bandung conference, the "People's Bandung" sought bottom-up, mass-based support for decolonization and nuclear disarmament through popular manifestations of international solidarity. The Delhi conference and subsequent gatherings of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization and the international peace movement to which they were loosely connected, were not organized or supported by the Nehruvian government.[2] Quite the contrary: not a few of the networks, resolutions, and personal relationships that emerged as a result, pushed the boundaries of both the Bandung outcomes and Nehruvian foreign policy.[3] But this did not deter the organizers of the Delhi conference to fashion themselves as an expression of the popular spirit of Bandung. The final resolution stated: "this Conference of Asian Countries assembled here in New Delhi wishes the Bandung Conference of the Afro-Asian countries great success."[4] As shown below, both Indian and international press reports of the conference indicate that opinions expressed at the Delhi conference were widely assumed to foreshadow the outcomes of Bandung, using the Delhi conference as a barometer of public opinion for the less accessible diplomatic conference.[5]

There is good reason to soften the boundaries between the "official" and "non-official" Bandungs somewhat. The unofficial "Bandungs," particularly Delhi and Cairo, handled their publicity so well that media and other observers had difficulty distinguishing between them, suggesting that—to

[2] On Afro-Asian solidarity in Nehru's foreign policy, see Godfrey H. Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment* (London: Faber, 1966); David Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement: Ideology and Foreign Policy of the Third World* (New York: Halsted Press, 1973); and more recently Swapna Kona Nayudu, *The Nehru Years: Indian Non-Alignment as the Critique, Discourse and Practice of Security (1947–1964)* (PhD thesis, King's College London, 2015).

[3] Among several examples, Bandung had invited both Vietnams, whereas the Delhi conference only invited representatives of North Vietnam.

[4] NMML, RNPP, "Resolutions."

[5] On the public and non-public aspects of Bandung as a carefully curated event, see Naoko Shimazu, "Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 225–252.

a contemporary eye at least—they were not so dissimilar as events centered on promoting decolonization and combating old and new forms of imperialism. The question of how different Afro-Asianisms related to each other, however, touches on a historiographical discussion that has picked up steam from the "Bandung at 50" celebrations in 2005. In *Little Histories*, Jamie Mackie argues that Bandung generated Afro-Asian enthusiasm, but no concrete follow-up meetings.[6] While true in a strict sense—the Bandung powers never again reconvened in the same configuration as an official "Asian-African Conference"—and while Bandung was an important precursor to the Non-Aligned Movement, Afro-Asianism and non-alignment cannot be conflated.[7] Moreover, many subsequent Afro-Asian gatherings did not convene diplomats or heads of state, and therefore inhabited a different international space. Christopher Lee has taken a different view in *Making a World After Empire*, in which he argues that it was precisely organizations like AAPSO that broadened the reach of Bandung.[8] Sally Percival Wood has built on this by arguing that Bandung inspired a "conferencing phenomenon," based on the common experience of resistance to colonial oppression and a desire to reconnect cultural ties across the Afro-Asian region.[9]

This article argues that a narrow view of the Bandung Moment obscures crucial Afro-Asian interaction in the early Cold War period, and that a hard separation between the state and non-state levels cannot be applied to the Afro-Asian regionalism of the early Cold War. A conference not officially sanctioned by one delegation's government could be an official conference in the eyes of another. The Delhi conference was not convened by the Indian Government, but convened many political actors, including from India itself.[10] Conversely,

[6] Jamie Mackie, "The Bandung Conference and Afro-Asian Solidarity: Indonesian Aspects," in *Bandung 1955: Little Histories*, ed. Derek McDougall and Antonia Finnane (Caulfield: Monash University Press, 2010), 9–26: 21.

[7] Lorenz M. Luthi, "Non-Alignment, 1946–1965: Its Establishment and Struggle against Afro-Asianism," *Humanity* 7, no. 2 (2016): 201–223: 202. See also Itty Abraham, "From Bandung to NAM: Non-alignment and Indian Foreign Policy, 1947–1965," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 46, no. 2 (2008): 195–219. See also the chapters in Natasa Miskovic, Harald Fischer-Tiné, and Nada Boskovska, eds., *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi – Bandung – Belgrade* (London: Routledge, 2014), particularly the chapter by Matthieu Rey: "'Fighting Colonialism' Versus 'Non-alignment': Two Arab Points of View on the Bandung Conference," 163–183.

[8] Christopher Lee, ed., *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), "Introduction," 17.

[9] Sally Percival Wood, "Retrieving the Bandung Conference . . . Moment by Moment," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 43, no. 3 (2012): 523–530: 529.

[10] The Indian preparatory committee for the conference included no fewer than 43 Members of Parliament. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (hereafter NMML),

Bandung co-convener Gamal Abdel Nasser and his Minister of State Anwar Sadat sponsored the Cairo conference that followed it, but convened a wide range of state, non-state, and semi-state actors. Recent histories of internationalism, moreover, have pointed to the ways in which individuals could inhabit all three of these roles, depending on the moment and the venue.[11] This article therefore gives center stage to the Delhi CRIT, precisely because it blurred the lines between both official and non-official spaces as well as between the Cold War blocs. It is in these "blurry edges" of the Cold War that the Afro-Asian solidarity movement brings into view the crucial impact of these engagements on the connected processes of decolonization and the emerging Cold War. This broad-based popular Afro-Asianism both spoke to and argued with its more famous Bandung counterpart.

The Delhi Conference of Asian Countries on the Relaxation of International Tension is largely forgotten today. As Hanna Jansen notes in this issue, it lives on mostly in AAPSO histories that acknowledge it as a predecessor. This also means that the conference has remained trapped in the official hagiography from the AAPSO Secretariat. Not least, therefore, this article is an attempt to recover this conference for the historical record. It is pieced together from, among other sources, the large personal archive of CRIT co-convener Rameshwari Nehru and reports from journalists, organizations, individual observers, and intelligence services. This article is also an attempt to recover this conference in a way that does not subordinate it to Cold War bloc pressure. As Leslie James and Elizabeth Leake have argued, capitalized processes like Cold War and Decolonization tend to obscure the importance of human agency.[12] Inspired by Naoko Shimazu's work on the actual Bandung Conference's engagement with the public and vice versa, this article's point of departure is that the "People's Bandung" had key characteristics that set it apart from its more famous sibling.[13]

Rameshwari Nehru Personal Papers (hereafter RNPP), Conference of Asian Countries, Bulletin no. 2, 25/3/1955, 9.

[11] Patricia Clavin, "Defining Transnationalism," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (2005): 421–439: 425. See also the collection of essays in Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms: A Twentieth Century History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[12] Leslie James and Elizabeth Leake, "Introduction," in *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence*, ed. Leslie James and Elizabeth Leake (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 1–17: 7.

[13] Naoko Shimazu, "Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014). On the importance of public diplomacy in this period, 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.

First and most important of these is the local associational culture that gave it life, and the way in which these local actors privileged an internationalist platform over a national one. This leapfrogging of the national occurred across the full spectrum of participants. The conference ended up convening members of governments and of opposition parties; poets and novelists; academics and artists; some famous and others less so. But the conference would not have materialized without a deep engagement of local activists with international issues. These activists, predominantly organized through peace councils and peace committees operating on scales varying from regional bodies to single towns, were part of the international network of the World Peace Council (WPC) but animated by local agendas and ideas about peace with very different intellectual genealogies than their Soviet-sponsored umbrella organization. The Delhi conference gave these activists an international platform, which brought some of them to Cairo in person, and motivated others to become long-distance members of AAPSO.[14] The intent of this article is not to argue that the delegates who convened in Delhi in 1955 were not also involved in nation-building. But analyzing this leapfrogging of the national level in favor of an (inter)continental platform during the crucial years of decolonization and nation-building in the mid-1950s, can point to the reasons why Afro-Asia was seen as the most attractive focal point for anti-imperial solidarity.

The second feature that sets these activists apart from the "official" Afro-Asianism of Bandung is the centrality of the peace movement. The popularity in 1950s India of the Soviet-dominated World Peace Council and the host of fellow-traveler celebrities the Council attracted such as Diego Rivera, Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Dubois, and Jean-Paul Sartre, is an important part of this. However, it would be shortsighted to dismiss initiatives like the Delhi Conference as "puppet" events that prove no more than the long arm of Soviet foreign policy. The WPC encompassed a much broader range of interests than has been acknowledged in its sparse historiography.[15] Günter Werlicke has noted wrily how several instances in which even Eastern European WPC members departed from

[14] I am thankful to Chilamkuri Raja Mohan for alerting me to the fact that AAPSO membership was common across left-leaning India as a token of solidarity, even without direct conference participation.

[15] On the range of actors and interests involved in the WPC, see Günter Werlicke, "The Communist-led World Peace Council and the Western Peace Movements: The Fetters of Bipolarity and Some Attempts to Break them in the Fifties and Early Sixties," *Peace and Change* 23, no. 3 (1998): 265–311; Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

the Moscow line have been dismissed as "anomalies."[16] He acknowledges that the WPC suffered from a dilemma: on the one hand, its ambition was to become the umbrella world peace movement, for which it attracted prominent public figures and forged alliances with organizations across Cold War dividing lines. On the other hand, becoming a truly representative global movement would mean relinquishing control over the Council as an instrument for popularizing Soviet foreign policy initiatives. It was precisely this dilemma that created phases of openness and diversity in the Council's history.[17] The proliferation of peace meetings across Afro-Asia in the 1950s constitutes one such phase. It provides a vivid demonstration of how the cultural and historical referents of local peace movements could deviate from "standard" WPC discourse, and how the anti-imperialist agendas that informed such peace activism could conflict with WPC agendas.

The third and final feature is the core issue of anti-imperialist internationalism itself. It was precisely the versatility of polyphonic internationalism that enabled the activists in this movement to imagine visions for Afro-Asia and Afro-Asian decolonization that were different from the visions of their respective governments. It also gave them the "luxury" of considering the anti-imperialist agenda of the movement over the concerns of Cold War demarcation lines and ideological divisions that constrained official narratives. The diversity of the Indian activists who participated in this Afro-Asian moment from Delhi to Cairo, and from Cairo to later conferences in Conakry and beyond, proves that the People's Bandung was an inclusive one.

As elaborated below, contemporary observers tried and failed to categorize moments such as the Delhi conference and the Afro-Asian conferences that followed it, such as the Afro-Asian Jurists Conference (Damascus, 1957), the more famous Afro-Asian Writers' Conference (Tashkent, 1958), or the Afro-Asian Women's Conference (Cairo, 1961), by their political color or "bloc" membership. In reality, the international careers, friendships, and sponsors of this Afro-Asian moment showed an almost cheerful disregard of the political, ideological, and even geographical demarcations of their time. Bringing the Indian individuals and associations who participated in this moment into view, demonstrates how actors far removed from the national stage nevertheless considered themselves part of the Bandung moment, "lived" the Bandung moment, and made it their own. As such, this "People's Bandung," as a prelude to the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity

[16] Werlicke, "The Communist-led World Peace Council," 266–267.
[17] Ibid., 275; 298.

Organization and the start of India's involvement in that organization, offers a case study of a transnational network in which a variety of internationalisms co-exist and intersect.

The Local in the Making of the International

On 25 September 1954, a long procession shut down regular traffic in downtown Calcutta. At the head of the march, four young men and women held up huge placards that spelled a single word: "Peace." The organizers published a resolution in which they pledged to resist imperialist war conspiracies in Asia, with special reference to the recently concluded Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), and to demand an end to all remaining foreign pockets on the continent.[18] The spectacle was described as follows: "Behind fluttered hundreds of blue banners, posters, cartoons and paintings drawn by leading artists for the occasion. Calcutta's tramwaymen in their uniforms, representatives of other workers and employees' unions, marched side by side with members of the Legislature and Municipal Councils, writers and artists, leaders of the West Bengal Peace Council, members of cultural organizations, women, youth and children inspired on by the song squads of the Indian People's Theatre Association and Loka Sanskriti Sangh, and the marching bandsmen of Bhavanipur Friends Club. It was a demonstration by the people of Calcutta of their desire for Peace and collective security in Asia."[19]

This march was not an isolated outburst of "local internationalism." Rather, it signaled the mobilizational power of anti-imperialist internationalism in this period, even in places and among people unconnected to cosmopolitan intellectual networks. In the same week, five hundred laborers of the Harbour Workers Union of Madras organized a rally, attended by a further 1000 workers, to denounce SEATO, urge acceptance of the People's Republic of China into the UN, and to declare that "Asians shall not fight Asians."[20] After the rally, the People's Progressive League of North Madras circulated a petition to

[18] The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, also known as the Manila Pact, had been concluded two weeks previously. It was intended to be a Southeast Asian version of NATO, though did not include standing forces. Critics saw it as an unwarranted extension of American influence, and by extension of the Cold War, and as a threat to recently decolonized nations' autonomy and sovereignty.

[19] NMML, RNPP 26/WPC 1953–1960. AIPC Weekly Newsletter, 5/10/1954: West Bengal.

[20] NMML, RNPP 26/WPC 1953–1960. AIPC Weekly Newsletter, 5/10/1954: Tamilnad.

this effect that was signed by, among others, 650 local fishermen.[21] Further Asian Solidarity initiatives were organized by the All-India Kisan Conference at Moga, the Mazdoor Sabha in Gwalior, and the Provincial Peace Conference of Orissa. In Patiala, a multi-party conference representing a variety of political views declared that "no power on earth can turn Asia into an arena of War."[22]

It is easy to dismiss a march by "the people of Calcutta" as a communist-run event, coordinated from above, or the signing of a petition by fishermen as orchestrated by the Harbour Workers Union. And indeed, the tramway workers union in the city was linked to the Communist Party of India (CPI), and the Harbour Workers Union was part of the pro-communist All-India Trade Union Congress.[23] The leadership of the West Bengal Peace Council likewise included prominent Bengali communists with straightforward links to the Soviet Union.[24] However, it also included members like Vivekananda Mukherjee, editor of the large Bengali vernacular newspaper *Jugantar*, which was published by the more moderate Amrita Bazar Patrika Group, which favored the Congress Party.[25] Likewise, it is less easy to explain away that Shri Bhaskran, a hotel worker in Madras, took it upon himself to sell close to a thousand peace badges to support the Asian Solidarity Campaign, and collected nearly 1500 signatures for the appeal against imperialist interference in Asian affairs. This was enough to earn him special mention in the national bulletin of the All-India Peace Council (AIPC, 1951), the local branches of which were involved in many of these solidarity initiatives.[26] Taken together, these instances demonstrate a local culture of internationalism, in which individuals and groups embraced causes far beyond their direct life-worlds, as a closer look at the Indian People's Theatre Association involved in the Calcutta campaign can elucidate.

[21] Ibid.

[22] NMML, RNPP 26/WPC 1953–1960. AIPC Weekly Newsletter, 11/10/1954: Pepsu.

[23] On the Calcutta tram workers and the Communist Party of India, see Siddharta Guha Ray, "Politics and Protest: Story of Calcutta Tramworks 1940–1947," in *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*, ed. Tanika Sarkar and Sakhar Bandopadhyay (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2018), 151–176. On the Harbour Workers Union, see Kanchi Venugopal Reddy, *Class, Colonialism and Nationalism: Madras Presidency, 1928–1939* (New Delhi: Mittal, 2002), 181.

[24] On Soviet involvement in the formation of the CPI, see the documentary collections brought together by Gangadhar Adhikari, *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1971–1977).

[25] AraniBasu, "History of Media in Bengal: A Chronological Overview," *Transcience* 4, no. 1 (2013): 13–19: 15.

[26] NMML, RNPP 26/WPC 1953–1960. AIPC Weekly Newsletter, 5/10/1954: Tamilnad.

The history of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) sheds light on a brand of peace activism that had less to do with allegiance to Cold War blocs than with anti-imperialist internationalism, the local roots of which were more layered than the question whether it "fitted" into 1950s international peace discourse can uncover. The IPTA had its origins in the first conference of the Progressive Writers Association (PWA, 1936), an anti-imperialist and left-oriented union of authors and poets that cut through British India's linguistic divisions.[27] PWA co-founder and later Afro-Asianist Sajjad Zaheer also played an important role in founding the IPTA at the national level. Aside from the cultural activists that formed the Progressive Writers Association, the People's Theatre Association also attracted local theater and music troupes. The Calcutta Youth Cultural Institute, founded by students of Calcutta University in 1939, had played an important part in founding the organization's Bengal chapter.

The students of the Youth Cultural Institute had coined the concept of *ganasangeet*. Translating as "people's songs," the genre of *ganasangeet* combined folk music and political themes with the express intention to bring subaltern groups and middle and upper class intellectuals together in a shared political space, which they had used to strong effect during the 1940s, including during the Bengal famine.[28] These people's songs were rooted in the tradition of early twentieth century anti-imperialist *swadeshi* songs and were popularized in new forms by the IPTA.[29] Members of the IPTA taught songs to workers and peasants through classes and organized squads, such as the one referenced above. The movement was on the decline by the 1950s, but the genre that did proliferate during this period was that of peace songs.[30] Moreover, Tanika Sarkar shows that, musically, the IPTA took their song experiments further by creating political songs that drew upon a variety of musical traditions as a "musical-international."[31]

[27] On the history of the Progressive Writers Movement and its links to internationalist movements in the early Cold War, see Sajjad Zaheer [transl. by Amina Azfar], *The Light: A History of the Movement for Progressive Literature in the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Hafeez Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 26, no. 4 (1967): 649–664; Rakhshanda Jalil, *Liking Progress, Loving Change: A Literary History of the Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[28] Tanika Sarkar, "Time in Place: Urban Culture in Decades of Crisis," in *Calcutta: The Stormy Decades*ed. Tanika Sarkar and Sakhar Bandopadhyay (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2018), 461–474: 468.

[29] Anuradha Roy, "The Music of Politics and the Politics of Music," *India International Center Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2006): 71–84: 72.

[30] Ibid., 76.

[31] Sarkar, "Time in Place," 468.

The anti-imperialist and internationalist roots of the organizations which gathered in the streets of Calcutta in September of 1954, and the songs and dances that accompanied them, thus predated the Cold War and the international peace discourse of the WPC. So did their idiom: the use of "people's" to signal political positioning was used widely throughout India. But these antecedents did put them in an ideal place to engage this anti-imperialism in the cause of Asian and Afro-Asian solidarity, and to use the WPC and its networks to further their own ends. It is no coincidence that prominent members from both the PWA and the Indian People's Theatre Association were also members of the All-India Peace Council and the WPC in the 1950s. Famous novelist Mulk Raj Anand is a strong example. He was a prominent member of the WPC from its very start, having attended its precursor, the World Congress of Intellectuals in Defence of Peace in Wroclaw in 1948. His circle of international friends likewise included many WPC members, such as Pablo Picasso (see Figure 1). His peace activism, however, well

FIGURE 1. (Left to right) Pablo Picasso, Ceylonese architect Minette DaSilva, American sculptor Jo Davidson, and Mulk Raj Anand at the World Congress of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace, Wroclaw 1948. *Source*: Polska Agencja Prasowa (Polish Press Agency), 27/8/1948.

predated the WPC and the Second World War. The founding manifesto of the WPC, which Anand co-wrote in London, opened with the words that "it is the duty of Indian writers to give expression to the changes in Indian life and to assist the spirit of progress . . . to discourage the general reactionary and revivalist tendencies on questions like family, religion, sex, war, and society . . . "[32] PWA co-founder Sajjad Zaheer's career likewise took an international turn. After a conviction for engaging in communist conspiracy in Pakistan and being extradited to India in 1954, Zaheer revived his links to the progressive cultural movement and went on to become a vocal advocate for Afro-Asian solidarity and a leader in the Afro-Asian Writers' Association.[33] In this way, cultural actors both famous and obscure brought tried and tested anti-imperialist strategies to the new context of the early Cold War. In organizations like the WPC, they found institutional spaces in which they could connect with peace movements from across the decolonizing world, which were similarly rooted in the anti-imperialist struggle.[34] They may have strengthened the WPC's image as a global organization, but they also used the WPC to strengthen their networks of Afro-Asian solidarity.

What did this interaction with the WPC look like at the institutional level? A full critical history of the World Peace Council is yet to be written, especially a study that is sensitive to its global dimensions. The existing historiography is largely focused on tensions between the peace movements within the Cold War blocs or the WPC as an extension of Moscow's foreign policy. The history of the All-India Peace Council, which was allied with the WPC from its first foundation in 1951, has not been written either. The role of the AIPC and its Indian leaders in the foundation of the Afro-Asian movement is not an angle that can bring a full picture of the AIPC into view. What it does bring out, however, is that the internationalist activism of the Indian AIPC members ran on a parallel track, the direction of which was determined both by the anti-imperialist internationalism of the interwar years and by local anti-British struggle.[35]

[32] Malik, "The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan," 651.

[33] On Zaheer's arrest, see Kamran Asdar Ali, "Communists in a Muslim Land: Cultural Debates in Pakistan's Early Years," *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 3 (2011): 501–534.

[34] See Rachel Leow in this issue.

[35] For a thorough characterization of interwar internationalism in South Asia, see M. Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). See also Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); A. Raza, F. Roy, and B. Zachariah, eds., *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds and Worldviews, 1917–1939* (London: Sage, 2014).

FIGURE 2. Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew (l.) chairs the Special Session of the WPC in Stockholm, 5 April 1956. *Source*: *Bulletin of the World Peace Council*, May 1956.

Over the years, the WPC did try to incorporate peace discourses with Afro-Asian intellectual genealogies into their own work as part of an effort to become *the* global peace organization. Institutionally, AIPC leaders would come to occupy high offices in the organization, with Saifuddin Kitchlew, another internationalist with strong roots in inter-war anti-imperialism, eventually becoming vice-president (Figure 2). Kitchlew also led the Indian delegation to the WPC Congress in Vienna, at which meeting it was decided to broaden the peace movement by actively seeking out alliances with non-communist organizations.[36] This likely facilitated the WPC's enthusiasm for the Delhi Conference of Asian Countries for the Relaxation of International Tension in 1955, which was attended by many WPC members. Kitchlew himself had been re-elected president of the AIPC at its Madras Congress for Peace and Asian Solidarity, and became part of the CRIT Preparatory Committee.[37]

[36] Farooq Z. Kitchlew, *Freedom Fighter: The Story of Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew* (Sussex: New Horizon, 1979), 89.

[37] NMML, RNPP: Conference of Asian Countries, Bulletin no. 2, March 25, 1955. Asian Solidarity and Peace.

FIGURE 3. Harkrishan Lall, *Women workers on the hills*. *Source*: *WPC Bulletin* 9 (April 1954), 10.

The willingness of the WPC to embrace Afro-Asian themes likewise showed itself in its enthusiastic embrace of Afro-Asian art and poetry in the pages of its bulletin. When the AIPC organized a large exhibition of contemporary Indian art in Delhi, the WPC Bulletin pictured canvases of left-leaning artists such as Punjabi painter Harkishan Lall (Figure 3).[38] And when India held the Asian Solidarity Month, to which the local initiatives described above were connected, the WPC published the accompanying documentation of resolutions and petitions in full, acknowledging at least implicitly that this month of Asian Solidarity and its timing reflected the Indian peace activists' desire to popularize the Five Principles recently enunciated by the Nehru–Zhou Enlai agreement a few months previously, and had little to do with WPC affairs.[39] If the call to include the PRC in the United Nations and to oppose the remilitarization of Japan converged with WPC talking points, the motivation was different: "Such attempts by interested powers are aimed at maintaining colonial rule, thwarting the freedom desire of the peoples of this region and endangering the sovereignty of Asian countries."[40]

[38] A fellow traveler, Lall (1921–2000) had toured the Soviet Union and Poland in 1953 as part of an Indian artist's delegation. Memorial speech by Mago given in New Delhi on 19/9/2000, as part of recollections compiled by Amarjit Chandan. Uddari Art website, accessed 31 July 2018.

[39] Also known as the Panchsheel agreement, these are: mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence.

[40] "On Asian Solidarity," *World Peace Council Bulletin*, no. 17 (September 1954): 5.

This temporary convergence of anti-imperialist agendas with WPC principles was true in a larger sense for the Delhi Conference of Asian Countries on the Relaxation of International Tension as well. Their calls for disarmament and denuclearization were primarily informed by anti-imperialism, fears of new forms of imperialism in the guise of organizations like SEATO, and an Asian solidarity which was explicitly changed to Afro-Asian solidarity in the months after the conference.[41] Among the "Political Questions" on the agenda—sessions were grouped under the headings of political; cultural; and economic and social questions, respectively—the prohibition and control of weapons of mass destruction was listed, but well below the issue of colonialism and foreign interference in the internal affairs of Asian countries. Other political questions on the agenda included "discrimination against Asians in the matter of immigration" and equal rights for immigrant citizens.[42]

In the end, the aim of "lessening world tension," as it was known in WPC circles, was interpreted mostly indirectly. The conference aimed to "study the common cultural heritage of Asian countries with a view to reviving and strengthening old cultural ties" and "to afford an opportunity for an exchange of views on the common problems affecting Asia." "Securing greater common understanding and close contact," then, would "help lessening present world tension" as a by-effect.[43] The organizers thus used the international networks of the WPC to recruit international participants for the Delhi Conference, but the conference was not organized under the WPC flag, or even under that of the All-India Peace Council.[44] It was the local Asian Solidarity Campaigns of September 1954, inspired by the Nehru–Zhou Enlai meeting as well as the Colombo Conference that laid the foundations for Bandung, which had culminated in the decision to not only internationalize the local, but also to localize the international by hosting an international peace and solidarity conference on Indian soil.

[41] In late 1955, Asian Solidarity Committees across India were renamed Afro-Asian Solidarity Committees. NMML, RNPP, Rameshwari Nehru to Yusuf Sebai, 18/2/1958.

[42] "The Conference of Asian Countries," *World Peace Council Bulletin* no. 1 (January 1955): 7.

[43] Ibid.

[44] The conveners had clearly come together through their work for that organization. To all intents and purposes, the CRIT was an AIPC project, but not in name. Contemporary sources largely left the AIPC out of their reporting, but the fact that Romesh Chandra called the CRIT an AIPC conference in retrospect in a 2001 interview, is evidence of the close connection. NMML, Oral Transcripts. Romesh Chandra interviewed by Usha Prashad, 10/9/2001.

From Delhi to Bandung

Interestingly, the chosen format for the Delhi CRIT closely resembled an earlier conference held in New Delhi: the 1947 Asian Relations Conference, in which some 200 delegates representing 28 Asian nations convened in New Delhi to discuss the shape of the postwar world and the position of the decolonizing world in a new international order.[45] Important agenda points included remaining imperial occupations in Asia and how Asia might collectively work towards removing them, as well as emerging new forms of imperialism and how to best safeguard hard-fought freedoms. The prevailing attitude was that no one Asian country could face these challenges alone, and that Asian solidarity was key to gaining and maintaining the independence, development, and prosperity of individual nations. The CRIT went back to the blueprint of this Asian Relations Conference.

Like the CRIT, the Asian Relations Conference had been styled as a non-political gathering even though it convened many soon-to-be members of government. Delegations consisted of academic, cultural, and social organizations. Secondly, because it was non-political, it could adopt an inclusive attitude to what constituted a "national delegation"—in the case of the Asian Relations Conference, this ranged from the individual Soviet Central Asian Republics, to Tibet, Outer Mongolia, and U.S.-occupied Japan. In the case of the CRIT, this included North Vietnam and North Korea, with the interesting distinction of being the "first major Global South conference North Korea ever attended.[46] Though eight years apart, both conferences exhibited an almost cheerful disregard of the emerging ideological lines of the Cold War, something which became difficult to replicate as the internationalist optimism of the 1950s drew to a close. Thirdly, the Asian Relations Conference had been a public gathering, with tickets sold to thousands of interested participants who braved the threat of ongoing Hindu-Muslim rioting and police-enforced curfews to catch a glimpse of famous freedom fighters.

---

[45] Carolien Stolte "'The Asiatic Hour': New Perspectives on the Asian Relations Conference, Delhi, 1947," in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War*, ed. Miskovic, Fischer-Tiné, and Boskovska, 57–75. For important notes on this conference as inspiration (or lack thereof) to future movements, see Vineet Thakur, "An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947," *The International History Review* (February 2018): 1–23.

[46] Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1992* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2015). A delegation of primarily pro-communist Korean groups was present at the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference in Beijing (see Rachel Leow in this special issue), but during this conference the Korean War was ongoing.

The Conference on the Relaxation of International Tension was arguably even more of a public event than its 1947 predecessor. Though the Asian Relations Conference could count on important donors both in kind and cash, the Provisional Government had hosted it. The CRIT, by contrast, was organized by volunteers and funded largely by public subscription. The conference was the brainchild of Rameshwari Nehru, a prominent social worker and veteran of both the Indian anti-imperialist and women's movement.[47] In the 1950s, along advisory work for the Nehruvian Government, she had become involved in a variety of international and internationalist organizations, including the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society, the World Peace Council, the All-India Peace Council, and the India-China Friendship Association.[48] But despite her wide array of institutional connections, she lamented shortly before the conference: "We are very hard up for money, as a big undertaking like this requires a lot of money and we are depending solely on public support for financing the conference."[49] What the conference did not lack, however, was volunteer labor. The Preparatory Committee included academics from different disciplines at Delhi University, Jamia Milia Islamia University, Delhi Polytechnic, and the Jullundur (Jalandhar) Law College. Many of their international students found their way to the conference preparations—so much so that they ended up turning people down.[50] As a way to kill two birds with one stone, the Preparatory Committee used student volunteers to further popularize the conference. Students could sign up for a "Reception Committee," as part of which they were to recruit fellow students and friends to become "members" of the conference. For every ten members they enlisted, they received one observer ticket.[51] All incoming volunteer labor was directed to Romesh Chandra, the General Secretary of the AIPC and later co-founder (with Rameshwari Nehru) of the Indian Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. Chandra coordinated the Reception Committee from the Imperial Hotel, where the conference's secretariat was lodged in one of the hotel rooms (see Figure 4). As one of Delhi's first high rises and home to a permanent

[47] On Rameshwari Nehru, see Om Prakash Paliwal, *Rameshwari Nehru, Patriot and Internationalist* (New Delhi: National Book Trust India, 1986).

[48] NMML, RNPP, subject correspondence.

[49] NMML, RNPP, Rameshwari Nehru to Dr. G. Bhatra, 24/2/1955. The AIPC certainly contributed, and the author cannot exclude the possibility that this included funds provided by the WPC.

[50] NMML, RNPP, Rameshwari Nehru to Dr. G. Bhatra, 24/2/1955.

[51] NMML, RNPP, Rameshwari Nehru to Kazuyoshi Konno, student at Delhi University, 24/2/1955.

FIGURE 4. The Imperial (1936) in the 1950s. *Source*: Postcard, New Delhi.

suite kept by the Nehru family, the Imperial had played host to key political meetings in the run-up to Independence, and had hosted discussions on Partition with Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, and Mountbatten. As a location for the conference's secretariat, it should be read as a caveat for the conference's outward portrayal as an underfunded event far from the realms of power. The same held true for the location of the conference's inaugural session at the Constitution Club of India, which was literally set up as a forum for interaction between present and past parliamentarians.

The sessions open to the public, however, were more in line with the aims of the conference: held at the Gandhi grounds near the Delhi Railway Station, they were easily accessible to all. The *Bombay Chronicle* described the public closing session as follows: "The delegates were addressing a crowded public meeting in Gandhi Grounds. The large gathering gave them a warm ovation as they arrived. Flags of the various countries participating in the Asian Conference fluttered majestically on both sides of the dais. Streamers, on which were written the five principles of co-existence, were also prominently displayed at the meeting. All the delegates were introduced to the audience amidst loud applause. Shouts of Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai rent the air as the Chinese delegates appeared on the dais. Three Chinese girls were

lustily cheered when they sang a Hindi song entitled 'The sky is ringing with the shouts of India-China brotherhood'."[52] A similarly evocative event was a public reception for all the attending writers and artists, for which cultural organizations across India had joined forces: it was organised by no fewer than the Shaw Society, Romain Rolland Club, Tagore Society, Sanivar Samaj, Rajdhani Sanskriti Parishad, and the All-India Bengali Literary Conference. Here, too, music played an important part: visiting artists such as Vietnamese poet Tran Khanh Van sang songs in their own language, and Indian hosts followed suit with, among others, songs by Tagore.[53]

The similarities between the Asian Relation Conference and the CRIT were not coincidental. Although the All-India Peace Council did not yet exist in 1947, many of its members had attended the Asian Relations Conference in different capacities. Rameshwari Nehru, for instance, had played a prominent role in the Asian Relations Conference, and so had Hannah Sen. As co-founder of the Lady Irwin College in New Delhi, she had hosted a gathering for all the female delegates and observers to the conference at the college, and was likewise involved in the preparations for the CRIT.[54] Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, a long-standing ally of Rameshwari Nehru and Hannah Sen in the Indian women's movement and a session leader at the Asian Relations Conference must have conferred some of her enthusiasm on her cousin Romesh Chandra, who co-organized the 1955 gathering. All three women had been leaders of the All-India Women's Conference (AIWC), which had, aside from involvement in the Asian Relations Conference, had a history of Asian anti-imperialist solidarity themselves as conveners of the 1931 All-Asia Women's Conference in Lahore.[55] And as Elisabeth Armstrong reminds us, such anti-imperialist women's networks matured in the late 1940s and 1950s into a politically diverse landscape that included the 1949 Conference on the Women of Asia (Beijing), the 1958 Asian-African Conference of Women (Colombo), and the 1961 Afro-Asian Women's Conference (Cairo).[56] It is likely that the participation of Pak Chong-ae (Pak Den-Ai) as leader of

[52] Editorial, "Asians Resolve to End Colonial Rule," *Bombay Chronicle* 11/4/1955, 1.
[53] "Reception to Delegates," *Hindustan Times*, 6/4/1955, 3.
[54] *Asian Relations, being Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April 1947* (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 1948), 314; NMML, RNPP, Bulletin no. 2: Preparatory Committee.
[55] See, in particular, Sumita Mukherjee, "The All-Asian Women's Conference 1931: Indian Women and their Leadership of a Pan-Asian Feminist Organization," *Women's History Review* 26, no. 3 (2017): 363–381.
[56] Elisabeth Armstrong, "Before Bandung: The Anti-Imperialist Women's Movement in Asia and the Women's International Democratic Federation," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 2 (2015): 305–331.

the North Korean delegation was a result of such connections.[57] The Beijing conference had been convened by the Women's International Democratic Federation, of which Pak Chong-ae had been an Executive Committee member since 1948.[58]

It is worth highlighting that the links between the two Delhi conferences in 1947 and 1955 revolved around the women's movement. Despite the vibrancy of the feminist internationalism in the first half of the twentieth century, prewar radical anti-imperialism had been a largely homo-social space.[59] In 1947, by contrast, Jawaharlal Nehru specifically requested that delegations to the Asian Relations Conference include women.[60] From the 1950s, the peace movement further augmented female participation, although the notion of peace as a "women's issue" should not be overstated. In Europe and the United States, there were strong links to earlier pacifist discourses.[61] But the peace idiom in India had different roots, not least in the Gandhian movement of which Rameshwari Nehru had been part. It is more likely that the focus on the inclusion of mass organizations energized women's networks at this conference. Despite its elite leadership, the AIWC was both committed to and adept at reaching local organizations and non-elite spaces.[62] It was in this context, for instance, that Rameshwari Nehru had met Perin Chandra, Romesh Chandra's partner. Upon her release from jail for her involvement in the Quit India campaign in 1942, Rameshwari had invited Perin, then head of the Punjab Women's Self-Defense League, to take over AIWC business.[63] Perin became a leader in the All-India Peace Council soon after the CRIT, further strengthening these ties.

This use of preexisting contacts from the women's movement did not always have the desired effect in the new context of the CRIT.

---

[57] Although I cannot offer concrete evidence as the files of the 1949 Beijing women's conference are closed, Pak Chong-ae's speech at the Delhi conference opened with personal thanks to Rameshwari Nehru, suggesting connections predating the conference.

[58] Francisca de Haan, "Eugénie Cotton, Pak Chong-ae, and Claudia Jones: Rethinking Transnational Feminism and International Politics," *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 4 (2013): 174–189: 180.

[59] This is increasingly highlighted in the historiography of anti-imperialist movements. See, for example, the third chapter of Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third-World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 89–98.

[60] Thakur, "An Asian Drama."

[61] Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993).

[62] Elisabeth Armstrong, "Indian Peasant Women's Activism in a Hot Cold War," *in Communist Histories* (New Delhi: Leftword Books, 2016), 176–217.

[63] Paliwal, *Rameshwari Nehru*, 21.

Though a notable presence at the conference, Pak Chong-ae primarily used the conference to call for another conference to be convened on the Korea issue, but did not engage with the conference agenda, which closely and purposefully mirrored that of Bandung. The agenda for the Bandung conference had already been published and this close correspondence created a potentially embarrassing situation for Indian Prime Minister Nehru who, as co-convener of the Bandung Conference, was committed to the latter initiative. A rival conference in his capital city was not good for diplomatic relations with his Bandung colleagues. This was exacerbated by the fact that Rameshwari Nehru, as the main host for the Delhi conference, was a relation of his: she was married to his cousin Brij Lal Nehru. As Nehru wrote to his cousin-in-law: "outsiders who come here do not draw a clear line between Governments and non-official organizations. Apart from this, even from the political angle there is a possibility of embarrassment. As it is, the Indonesian Government has been rather put out by this conference and has asked us repeatedly for explanations as to what it is. The idea of this Asian Conference taking place just a few days before the Afro-Asian Conference in Indonesia naturally leads people to ask how these two are related or what they have to do with each other."[64]

Behind the scenes, however, the separation was not as strict. Nasser stopped by the conference on his way to Delhi and combined the visit with bilateral talks with Nehru.[65] Pham Van Dong, North Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister, privately had dinner with Nehru to discuss the situation in Indo-China—though this accidentally became public knowledge.[66] And two weeks before the conference, Rameshwari Nehru shared the complete delegate list with the Prime Minister, with the promise to keep him abreast of any changes.[67] And though Nehru could not attend the conference publicly, he was willing to meet a few delegates personally at his house. Urging caution, he wrote to Rameshwari: "it will be difficult for me to meet a large crowd, but you can select those whom you wish me to meet. I suggest 8th April at 6:30 PM at my house. Please let me or Indira know who is coming."[68]

Publicly, Nehru's long efforts to establish the Bandung conference, the delicate international situation in the mid-1950s, as well as his relationship with Sukarno and the other Colombo Powers were at

[64] NMML, RNPP, Jawaharlal Nehru to Rameshwari Nehru, 11/3/1955.
[65] Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement*, 63.
[66] "Viet-Minh minister meets Nehru - support assured to PanchShila," *Bombay Chronicle*, 9/4/1955, 1.
[67] NMML, RNPP, Rameshwari Nehru to Jawaharlal Nehru, 24/3/1955.
[68] NMML, RNPP, Jawaharlal Nehru to Rameshwari Nehru, 24/3/1955.

FIGURE 5. Jawaharlal Nehru (r.) receives a WPC delegation at the Indian Government's Secretariat Building in New Delhi. On the left noted Syrian peace activist Mustapha Amine. *Source*: *Bulletin of the World Peace Council*, no. 8, 15 April 1958.

stake.[69] Privately, there is little reason to assume Nehru had fundamental problems with a conference tied to the All-India Peace Council and, by extension, the WPC. Many prominent Indian politicians were members of the WPC in the 1950s, including his fellow architect of non-alignment V.K. Krishnamenon, who had been involved in political work with Mulk Raj Anand and Romesh Chandra from the late 1930s onwards.[70] The MPs who sympathized with the Delhi Conference's aims organized themselves into an organization called Parliamentarians for Peace—not as part of the AIPC but in close

[69] On the nature of this relationship, see Cindy Ewing, "The Colombo Powers: Crafting Diplomacy in the Third World and Launching Afro-Asia at Bandung," *Cold War History* 18, no. 2 (2018): 1–19.

[70] They had met in London in 1937. According to Romesh Chandra, this is where he learned that "to be in the Indian independence movement, one must also be an internationalist." NMML, Oral Transcripts. Romesh Chandra interviewed by Usha Prashad, 10/9/2001.

relationship to it.[71] And when the Bureau of the WPC organized a session in New Delhi in March 1958, the meeting took place in the Indian Government's Vigyan Bhavan (Figure 5). Nehru warmly greeted the delegates and participated in some of the proceedings along Rameshwari Nehru, who attended the meeting, a few short months after AAPSO was established at Cairo, as head of the Indian Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee.[72] But as the proceedings of the Delhi conference make clear, Nehru was not the only person who blurred the lines between the "Official Bandung" and the "People's Bandung."

Though the Conference of Asian Countries on the Relaxation of International Tensions may not have been quite as underground and subversive as its organizers and subsequent historiography have suggested, officially the government of India kept it at a distance. The conference's flirtation with Bandung was one-sided and the uncomfortable sense of competition with the two did not go unnoticed by both journalists and secret services. As one CIA official noted: "although the New Delhi meeting is not a preliminary to the Afro-Asian Conference, the Communists are expected to exploit this opportunity to set the tune of their propaganda at Bandung."[73] An editor for *Time* was even more explicit: "The press began touting the affair as an official precursor to the impending 29-nation Asian-African conference at Bandung, Indonesia. But when the delegates streamed into New Delhi last week, a Red-tinted film of disillusion settled about Mrs. Nehru's meeting . . . The next performance of the Communist roadshow will be at Bandung this week, where the audience will be delegates who, in theory at least, represent more than half the world."[74]

It is ironic that the most disparaging remarks about the CRIT as a Moscow-run affair largely missed the connection to the peace movement. This caused such reports to interpret Beijing's large delegation of peace activists to Delhi as a sign it considered the conference unimportant: "The leader of the group is a high non-party government official and the remainder of the group consists of 'cultural' and labour leaders who are perennial delegates to peace conferences."[75] "Perennial," here, was meant dismissively, suggesting that the movement was limited to a few

[71] Ibid.

[72] Special issue on the New Delhi session of the Bureau of the World Council of Peace, 22–25 March 1958. *World Peace Council Bulletin* 8 (April 1958): 5–6.

[73] Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Office of Current Intelligence. Memorandum on the Asian Conference for Relaxing International Tensions, 14/3/1955.

[74] "Prelude to Bandung," *Time* 65, no. 16 (1955): 42.

[75] CIA, Memorandum on the Asian Conference for Relaxing International Tensions, 14/3/1955.

regular participants but held no mass appeal. In terms of India-China connections, this misses the point. The CRIT was a reunion of Indian and Chinese activists who had met at the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference, where Delhi organizers like the aforementioned Romesh Chandra, Saifuddin Kitchlew, C.N. Malviya and others had met their Chinese counterparts.[76] The presence of Guo Moruo (Kuo Mo-Jo), moreover, was eagerly anticipated by the Indian public. He was considered one of the most important attendees along with Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg. His work was well known, and so was his affinity with Indian literature and the arts. He had been present at the founding of the India-China Friendship Association in May 1952, where Nehru's sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit led the Indian delegation, and was a longtime admirer of Tagore.[77] By Indian journalists, he was alternatively considered a sympathetic representative of Chinese government circles, or a luminary of Chinese literature and the arts, and his speeches were quoted in full. The press calmly took note of his statements on the history of Sino-Indian relations and its shared 2,000 year history, but his rousing call at the public session in the Gandhi grounds was conveyed in print as it had been shouted through the microphone: "WE WANT PEACE IN ASIA AND THE WORLD AND REFUSE TO BE COWED DOWN BY THREATS FROM ANY POWER. ASIA HAS LONG BEEN EXPLOITED AND CAN NO LONGER BROOK INTERFERENCE IN HER AFFAIRS!"[78]

Like the Chinese delegation, the other delegations all included prominent novelists, poets, and artists. Aside from Ilya Ehrenburg, the Soviet delegation consisted mainly of intellectuals from the Central Asian Republics, such as Tajik poet Mirzo Tursun-Zade and Turkmen composer Veli Mukhatov.[79] Notable is also the strong presence of female writers, such as Japanese poet Kyoko Nagase, Ceylonese writer Theja Gunawardana, and Vietnamese poet Tran Khanh Van.[80] Together, they ensured that the emotive Asianist rhetoric of postcolonial revival of intra-Asian ancient bonds and cultural affinities which the Indian public expected from Guo Moruo, became the language of the conference. The final resolutions ended with an emotional

[76] See the contribution by Rachel Leow in this special issue.

[77] On the India-China Friendship Association, see Arunabh Ghosh, "Before 1962: The Case for 1950s China-India History," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 76, no. 3 (2017): 695–727. On Guo Moruo and Tagore, see Sisir Kumar Das, "The Controversial Guest: Tagore in China," *China Report* 29, no. 3 (1993): 237–274: 240–241.

[78] "Asians Resolve to End Colonial Rule," *Bombay Chronicle*, 11/4/1955.

[79] NMML, RNPP, Conference of Asian Countries, Bulletin no. 1, New Delhi, March 5, 1955, 7. For Mirzo Tursun-Zade, see also Hanna Jansen's contribution to this issue.

[80] Ibid., 5.

collective statement entitled "Appeal to Asians": "we met in New Delhi here on the threshold of a new period of history. We have had long historic relations in the past. We have witnessed periods of glory, which remain our precious heritage, and the memories of those days are enshrined in our hearts. Together we have also witnessed periods of stagnation, exploitation and national humiliation, dark dismal periods. We are out of the valley now and there are new urges and stirrings in the hearts of our millions. We are on the march, dedicated to the preservation of freedom, that had earned freedom which we shall never lose again. We are dedicated to peace, for peace represents the inner spirit of Asia."[81] In this way, the conference infused peace discourse with new meaning, calibrated to the decolonizing world.

If the organizers hoped to steer this rhetoric towards the Bandung frame, the delegates happily complied. Maulana Bhashani, a Pakistani delegate to the Delhi conference, is a strong example. Bhashani's activism had deep roots in peasant organizing. An alumnus of the Deoband School, he was a popular Islamic scholar who used his status as a religious leader to oppose communal strife by arguing that divisive colonial policies shared blame, and to call for solidarity with oppressed populations.[82] As the founder of the Awami League (East Pakistan), he used his status as a political leader to oppose new forms of Great Power control, particularly Pakistan's relationship to the US. Combined, this earned him both the honorific *Mazlum Jananeta* (Leader of the Oppressed) and the much less generous "Red Maulana."[83] By the 1950s, his commitment to "international cooperation, friendship, and solidarity"[84] had brought him to international peace conferences, including Delhi. Moving deftly from a speech on the universality of Asian culture and religion, Bhashani declared in his speech: "We hope that all states present at the coming Bandung Conference will accept the Panch Shila . . . From the New Delhi Conference we can only express this clearly defined hope to the Bandung Conference. This united declaration of the countries of Asia and Africa can become a very valuable contribution to the advance of civilization in the whole world . . . I pray to the creator, the most gracious Allah for the success

[81] NMML, RNPP, Resolutions.

[82] Peter Custers, "Maulana Bhashani and the Transition to Secular Politics in East Bengal," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 47, no. 2 (2010): 231–259: 235.

[83] Layli Uddin, "Maulana Bhashani: The Lessons of Freedom," *The Daily Star*, 21/11/2015. See also her PhD dissertation, "In the Land of Eternal Eid: Maulana Bhashani and the Political Mobilisation of Peasants and Lower-Class Urban Workers in East Pakistan, c. 1930s–1971." Royal Holloway, University of London, 2016 (under embargo).

[84] Uddin, "Maulana Bhashani."

of the Conference and for the establishment of world peace through the sacred unity of oppressed Asians.[85]

Outside observers likewise analyzed the conference in the Bandung frame. Indian press reports of the conference indicate that opinions expressed at the Delhi conference were widely assumed to foreshadow the outcomes of Bandung. However naïve in hindsight, this impression was probably created by the fact that the long road to Bandung, as noted above, included stopovers in Delhi for some. As one slightly confused editor reported in the *Bombay Chronicle*: "a sort of eve-of-Bandung meeting in Delhi on Wednesday was addressed by leaders of India, Egypt, and Afghanistan. There is something common between these three, but it might easily be exaggerated. It is that they are not attached to any bloc. The Delhi meeting, however, emphasized not their non-alignment but the phenomenon of Asian resurgence, of the change from dependence to independence."[86]

While the national dailies largely hailed the conference as a great success and as an indication that the Bandung Conference would be equally productive, the gathering was not without its critics. It was precisely the cross-bloc list of invitations and the conference's inclusive internationalist agenda, which privileged general anti-imperialism over specific ideological content, that was perceived as both problematic and dangerous. These voices held that the conference could only spell trouble, especially for India: "The idea of Soviet Russia being an integral part of Asia, which is one of the basic factors influencing the constitution of this Asian Conference, is highly questionable. It sounds unnatural and ridiculous, speaking whether geographically or historically . . . This single fact is sufficient to vitiate and weaken the claim that the Conference is non-partisan. The talk of capitalist-communist coexistence is without substance. It is just an empty slogan to lull people into a sense of complacency."[87]

From Delhi to Cairo

In the years after 1955, ownership of (and participation in) the "Bandung Moment" was increasingly contested not just at the international, but also at the local level. On their part, the peace activists of the 1954 local Asian Solidarity campaigns who had organized the Delhi gathering, now

[85] NMML, RNPP, Speech M. Bhasani 7/4/1955.
[86] Editorial, "The Asian Way," *Bombay Chronicle* 15/4/1955.
[87] C. Parameswaran, *A Look into the Conference of Asian Countries* (New Delhi: The Republican Series, 1955), 16.

lent their support to the organization of a bigger event: the 1957 Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Conference, held in Cairo. According to G.H. Jansen, "if the first Asian Solidarity Conference in 1955 had been a competitor to Bandung, the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference of 1957 viewed itself as dedicated to completing Bandung's work."[88] From an Indian perspective, this was indeed the case: in 1956, the Asian Solidarity Committee changed its name to the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee at the Asian Writers Conference in New Delhi. CRIT organizer Anup Singh became the Indian delegate on a four-country mission of writers, along with Chinese novelist Yang Shou, Russian writer Anatoly Sofranov, and Japanese internationalist Masaharu Hatanaka. After plans for the Cairo conference emerged in consultation with Nasser, Singh declared: "Once again we meet on an unofficial level to take stock of the world situation and to appraise and analyse our common problems. Let the Cairo Conference be the People's Bandung."[89]

Like its predecessors, the Cairo Conference was driven by Afro-Asian solidarity in the form of support for the decolonization of remaining colonial territories as well as by fears of new forms of imperialism. All independent countries of Asia and Africa had been invited, as well as delegations from eighteen nationalist movements ranging from Algeria to Zanzibar. The organization of the conference followed the same logic as the Delhi conference: two years of grassroots work culminating in the establishment of local Afro-Asian Solidarity Committees, which formed the basis for delegations to Cairo. Where no Solidarity Committees existed, other local organizations were contacted. This resulted in the same precarious balance of an unofficial conference with hybrid delegations that included both local activists and national dignitaries.

Other echoes of the CRIT reverberated through the halls of the Cairo conference, not least in the physical presence of the many people who attended both conferences. For India, these included Rameshwari Nehru, Anup Singh, and Perin and Romesh Chandra, as the main hosts of the Delhi conference. Of the other Indian official delegates to Cairo, several had played supporting roles in the organization of the Delhi conference as well as attended the Asia-Pacific Peace Conference, such as V.K. Dhage, A.K. Gopalan, and C.N. Malviya. All three were MPs, further blurring the lines between the state and non-state realms.[90]

[88] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 258.
[89] Ibid., 255.
[90] AAPSO delegate list cross-checked against CRIT Preparatory Committee lists. The possibility of further overlaps is considerable—these only include the official delegates, while both conferences had broader attendance.

Interestingly, however, peace activists outside the public eye made it to Cairo as well. Attendees also included members from local governments, *kisansabhas* (farmer's councils), and trade unions, which put some of the original grassroots organizers of the solidarity movement on the Afro-Asian stage. This meant that like Delhi, the Cairo Conference played host to a diverse set of internationalisms ranging from liberal internationalists with considerable faith in the international order in general and the United Nations in particular; to feminists, trade unionists and farmer's representatives who believed the inequalities they fought were best addressed at the international level; to radical internationalists who, rather than fight for Afro-Asian inclusion, sought to overthrow the international order and remake it. But all were united by a common desire to help create a postcolonial world of greater justice and equality, and the Cairo meeting progressed with a minimal amount of ideological discord.[91]

Aside from the official record of the conference, a number of personal accounts of the conference remain, not least of Rameshwari Nehru herself. Her notes emphasize just how strongly she was wedded to the idea of a people's conference: "Men and women travelled long distances to come to Cairo to greet the delegates. Thousands of young students, both boys and girls, paraded the streets in batches carrying banners bearing good-will messages; shouting slogans for Afro-Asian solidarity. The whole route from our Hotel to the Conference Hall was decorated with multi-colored buntings and improvised gates wishing hearty welcome to the 'messengers of peace,' as they termed the delegates. . . . Embraces and kisses were showered on the delegates who were literally drowned under the overwhelming affection of the public."[92]

This description conjures up images of the delegate parades on the streets of Bandung a few years previously.[93] But the idea of cultural identification that characterized the broader Afro-Asian movement stands out in the Cairo description. Rameshwari Nehru emphasizes the link between local and international spaces, and the emotive appeal of long-distance solidarities: "we were taken out on excursions outside the city of Cairo. The enthusiasm of the people even in these far-off places in small towns and smaller villages was great. Thousands of school boys

[91] *Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Conference, Cairo 1957–1958* (Cairo: Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization, 1958).

[92] NMML, RNPP, Indian Delegation Report Cairo—personal note by Rameshwari Nehru.

[93] Shimazu, "Bandung as Theatre."

and girls, men and women came out of their houses and gave us heartening cheers. The welcome given was in the traditional fashion, musicians playing the indigenous musical instruments riding on gaily adorned camels covered with multi-coloured embroidered trappings. Wherever we went, the town and the village en route all took a gala appearance and the atmosphere became charged with friendship and love. We felt like being amongst our own people with whom fate had united us for good and for evil and forever. The idea of the Afro-Asian Solidarity seemed to have taken life and form in the broad smiles and love-laden eyes and expressions of exuberant joy."[94]

Elsewhere in this issue, Rachel Leow comments on the emotional registers of Afro-Asian diplomacy. It is worth noting here that the idea of Afro-Asian solidarity, which according to some accounts was one of the weaknesses of the official Bandung conference, is especially emotive here. Despite her long career as an internationalist, Rameshwari noted that "I have attended many national and international conferences but none inspired me in the way this Conference did. . . . The Conference stirred the hearts and the minds of men, it awakened the conscience of humanity, it reminded the free countries that it was not enough for them to be free themselves. They owed a duty outside the geographical boundaries of their own countries and their apathy also was to some extent responsible for the sufferings of the colonial people. The Conference also reminded them that their own freedom was in danger as long as their neighbors were slaves."[95]

The delegations of China, Lebanon, Iraq and the Soviet Union were of comparable size to India's; only Japan sent a much larger and more diverse delegation, ranging from a Member of Parliament from the Liberal Democratic Party to a widow of one of the fisherman from the "Lucky Dragon," the Japanese fishing boat contaminated by the nuclear tests on the Bikini Atoll in 1954.[96] The Peace Councils that had provided a significant portion of the Cairo delegates all had a strong anti-nuclear bent. And while in much of Asia this was largely a left-wing prerogative, this was different in Japan, where anti-proliferation activism was a bipartisan issue, allowing for a large delegation of a variety of political colors.

[94] NMML, RNPP, Indian Delegation Report Cairo—personal note by Rameshwari Nehru.

[95] Ibid.

[96] International Institute for Social History (IISH), International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU) archives 3885: Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Conference.

But the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference was different from its predecessors in one aspect: this conference was marketed as "the Peoples' Bandung" from the start, not just by Anup Singh but also by Gamal Abdel Nasser.[97] As further elaborated by Reem Abou-El-Fadl in this issue, Nasser had emerged as an international leader of note at Bandung, so this time the label carried real weight.[98] Nasser publicly supported the conference and gave the opening speech. Moreover, Anwar Sadat, later to become Egypt's third president, led the Egyptian delegation. National Assembly member Syed Gomma had been assigned to travel to dependent territories across Africa prior to the conference to recruit freedom fighters. The preparatory committee of the conference had published an appeal clarifying their intent: "to gather support for the Bandung Principles, and to propagate the spirit that animated them, a number of Solidarity Committees have already been established in different countries. These committees have striven to revive among the Asians and Africans the old contacts and to forge new ones in all fields. Thus a secure popular foundation for our solidarity is being laid."[99] Finally, the Egyptian state reportedly paid for much of the conference, as Sukarno had done at Bandung.[100]

This caused the Cairo conference to be analyzed in the Bandung frame by both its supporters and its critics. Peking Radio announced that "the decisive action to hold the Asian-African Conference is an important sign of the further development of the Bandung spirit."[101] American civil rights activist Homer A. Jack, though critical of the conference in other respects, published a report of the conference noting the students waiving banners with "Afro-Asian Solidarity!" and "Down with Imperialism!" and meticulously cited the countries represented at both Bandung and Cairo, the countries represented at Bandung but not at Cairo, and the countries represented at Cairo but not at Bandung.[102] Even the Cairo conference's staunchest critics who dismissed the conference as Moscow-run were forced to use the same

[97] Editorial, "Unofficial Asian-African Conference on Dec. 26 – 500 delegates from 38 nations expected," *Times of India* 2/12/1957.

[98] See, among others, Reem Abou-El-Fadl, "Neutralism Made Positive: Egyptian Anticolonialism on the Road to Bandung," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 42, no. 2 (2015): 219–240; Reem Abou-El-Fadl, ed., *Revolutionary Egypt: Connecting Domestic and International Struggles* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[99] IISH, ICFTU 3884, ICFTU circular 31/1/1958 quoting *The Daily Worker* (London), 26/10/1957.

[100] Homer A. Jack, *Cairo: The Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference – A Critical Analysis* (New York: Toward Freedom Series, 1958); Shimazu, "Diplomacy as Theatre," 234.

[101] IISH, ICFTU 3884, ICFTU circular 31/1/1958 quoting Peking Radio, 26/10/1957.

[102] Jack, *Cairo: The Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference*.

analytical frame, speaking of a "distortion of Bandung" (ICFTU director G.H. Millard) or "exploiting the Bandung spirit" (*The Interpreter*, November 1957).[103]

Conclusion: Polyphonic Internationalism and the "People's Bandung"

"The Bandung Moment" has been hailed as a major diplomatic feat, as the "coming of age" ceremony of Afro-Asia, dismissed for its lack of tangible outcomes, or all of those things at once.[104] But if one widens the lens by adding the Delhi Conference of Asian Countries on the Relaxation of International Tension to the picture as a "people's" counterpart to the intergovernmental conference, a different Bandung Moment emerges. This broader Bandung Moment was representative of Afro-Asian popular hopes and dreams for a post-imperial world, and of a spirit that caused local organizations as well as individual artists, students, musicians, and writers to jump the national and work in an Afro-Asian frame. The Delhi conference belongs in the larger narrative of the Bandung Moment as an event that coincided with Bandung, but brings into view a different Afro-Asianist trajectory: one that contained a variety of visions of Afro-Asian futures, united by a strong emphasis on the lived practice of Afro-Asian solidarity. In the midst of the interlinked processes of decolonization and the early Cold War, it was in this popular Afro-Asian context that a plurality of internationalisms could continue to thrive.

For diplomat and journalist-turned-historian Godfrey H. Jansen, this was enough to dismiss moments like the Delhi conference for lacking consistency, and for being hopelessly naïve. To him, the Afro-Asian solidarity movement was a "parody of, and parasite on, the Bandung Spirit," rather than an expression of it.[105] But this view fails to take into account one of the solidarity movement's most important features: the importance it placed on culture. This helped to connect

[103] IISH, ICFTU 3884, ICFTU circular 31/1/1958.

[104] Antonia Finnane, "Bandung as history," in *Bandung 1955*, ed. McDougall and Finnane, 1–8; Derek McDougall, "Bandung as politics," in ibid., 131–139. See also Seng Tang and Amitav Acharya, "The Normative Relevance of the Bandung Conference for Contemporary Asian and International Order," in *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for the International Order*, ed. Tang and Acharya (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008); Jamie Mackie, *Bandung 1955: Non-Alignment and Afro-Asian Solidarity* (Didier Millet, 2005), 124–128; Shimazu, "Diplomacy as Theatre."

[105] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 252.

local activists to their peers across Afro-Asia, and galvanised mobilization on Afro-Asian issues beyond cosmopolitan cities and literary works. As shown above, such local campaigns and song squads were more than "petitions propaganda." It was in this sphere of Afro-Asian activity that local academic, cultural, and social organizations continued to leapfrog the national to fight old and new forms of imperialism across the decolonizing world, under the banner of Afro-Asian solidarity. And it is in this agenda of Afro-Asian solidarity that different articulations and idioms of internationalism could once again converge.

In the case of the Indian peace movement, whose leaders organized the Delhi Conference, the anti-imperialist strategies and ideas that drove their international engagements had deep local roots that predated the Cold War. However, this did not mean that they could not be brought to the international stage and translated into Cold War Afro-Asianism. It did mean that their activities were largely rendered invisible in the analytical frames that have shaped Cold War scholarship. The tendency to reduce the complex of interactions during the cultural Cold War to narratives of top-down manipulation has been described elsewhere, as has the tendency to label activists as either pro- or anti-communist, leaving no room for the "blurry edges" of the Cold War in the decolonizing world.[106] Recent scholarship on organizations like the Council for Cultural Freedom and the World Peace Council has sought to move past these binaries, as they are particularly limiting in gauging the agency of Afro-Asia.[107] The activism of people like Maulana Bhashani demonstrates that the question of whether he was a "Marxist or a Maulana" was not one he would ask of himself. As Uddin argues, "Bhashani showed that both traditions belonged in the soil of Bengal."[108]

Finally, the fate of international bodies like the World Peace Council has further exacerbated the historical evaluation of polyphonic internationalisms such as that of Afro-Asian peace and solidarity: as the WPC failed to succeed in becoming a representative global movement, peace discourse became increasingly considered double speak for Soviet policy. As Jansen notes with his usual acerbic wit: "that particular Trojan horse was showing signs of wear and tear: it had nearly succeeded in making 'peace' a derogatory word."[109] But as

[106] Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*, 3.
[107] See the other contributions to this special issue.
[108] Uddin, "Maulana Bhashani."
[109] Jansen, *Afro-Asia and Non-Alignment*, 250.

the Delhi conference shows, discourses of peace and nuclear disarmament brought in WPC influence, people, and contacts, but the WPC did not control the layered meanings, histories, and referents of "peace" for the conference participants. The Delhi conference ended up articulating its own peace and solidarity discourse for the nascent Afro-Asian movement, giving substance to the idea of the "People's Bandung" and inspiration for the foundation of AAPSO. As Anup Singh declared in Cairo: "We stand by the ten principles of the Bandung Conference. We abhor the path of war and violence and we are dedicated to world peace, for peace represents the inner spirit of our peoples."[110]

[110] *Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference* (Cairo: Foreign Languages Publishing House: Moscow, 1958).