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ABSTRACT *The most important question concerning the 60th anniversary commemoration(s) of the Asian-African Congress of 1955 is what voices will be heard, and which voices will prevail. This may also be the most significant difference between this year's commemorative gatherings and the event that provides the occasion for them. The delegates from 29 Asian and African nations that met in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 shared a sense of common experience in recent struggles against colonialism and racism. The hundred plus nations invited to this year's official commemoration come with quite different experiences in the intervening years since then. More significantly, whereas it was states that spoke in 1955, this year's commemoration has opened up political space to the voicing of public concerns by groups of activists, and representatives of diverse ecological, social, economic, political and cultural causes that are products of the present, many of them with only a tenuous discursive linkage to the original conference. It would be silly to expect common ground even of a ritual kind among these constituencies. Extra-state voices add a whole new dimension to the commemoration. Whether they are heard in a substantial sense or simply ignored with verbal platitudes will determine the historical significance and meaning of the conference. This essay was written before the actual conference in April 2015.*

KEYWORDS: Asian-African conference, non-aligned nations, third world, Indonesia, India, the People's Republic of China

The most important question concerning the 60th anniversary commemoration(s) of the Asian-African Congress of 1955 is what voices will be heard, and which voices will prevail. This may also be the most significant difference between this year's commemorative gatherings and the event that provides the occasion for them. The delegates from 29 Asian and African nations that met in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 shared a sense of common experience in recent struggles against colonialism and racism. The hundred plus nations invited to this year's official commemoration come with quite different experiences in the intervening years since then. More significantly, whereas it was states that spoke in 1955, this year's commemoration has opened up

political space to the voicing of public concerns by groups of activists, and representatives of diverse ecological, social, economic, political and cultural causes that are products of the present, many of them with only a tenuous discursive linkage to the original conference. It would be silly to expect common ground even of a ritual kind among these constituencies. Extra-state voices add a whole new dimension to the commemoration. Whether they are heard in a substantial sense or simply ignored with verbal platitudes will determine the historical significance and meaning of the conference.

The Bandung Conference was the culmination of revolutionary struggles against colonial rule and/or oppression, but the

goals of the participants and the program they signed on to was anything but revolutionary in their vision of the newly independent nations, or with respect to the world order in which they found themselves. Indeed, the gathering was remarkably status quo oriented. The conference sought most importantly to protect and strengthen the new world order embodied in the United Nations against divisions between the capitalist and communist blocs that threatened to undermine it and turn it into an instrument of great power politics. One after another, "the delegates stressed the importance of the United Nations as the best safeguard for the future of mankind and as the best guarantee of peace" (Abdulgani 1964a, 27).¹ But defending the UN seemed, under the circumstances, a radical act in the protection and promotion of freedom and human security. The deliberations were driven by a combination of plight and promise that in subsequent years would characterize Third Worldist activity in global politics. While the seemingly unrealistic optimism of the Conference reflected the lingering idealism inspired by recent victories over colonialism, underlying the optimism was a deep-seated fear of impending global conflict that threatened the very conditions for the sustenance of their achievement, and further prospects of nation-building and development, if not human existence itself. Both themes were in evidence in the official addresses, beginning with the welcoming speech by President Sukarno of Indonesia:

Yes, we are living in a world of fear. The life of man today is corroded and made bitter by fear. Fear of the future, fear of the hydrogen bomb, fear of ideologies. Perhaps this fear is a greater danger than the danger itself, because it is fear which drives men to act foolishly, to act thoughtlessly, to act dangerously... I beg of you, do not be guided by these fears, because fear is an acid that etches man's actions into curious patterns. Be guided by hopes and determination, be guided by ideals, and, yes, be guided by dreams! (Sukarno 1955, 22)

It is necessary to keep in mind in any assessment of the Conference that its primary goal was political, and the politics had much to do with the politics of the United Nations. In the force of its collective call for recognition of the new nations' voices in decisions that would determine their fates, as well as their prerogatives in speaking to global issues with which their fates were interlinked, the Conference pushed against the limitations of the newly established status quo as it had been envisioned by its great power founders who also presided over it. In the words of the Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo of Indonesia, a moving spirit behind and president of the Conference, "... this Conference was born out of the fulness of time which has entrusted to the independent states of Asia and Africa their new task in the destiny of mankind, but I venture to state that the foremost reason which gave birth to this Conference was the agonizing tensions from which the world is suffering today" (Sastroamidjojo 1955, 33). Among the stated goals of the Conference was to strive for more inclusive membership in the UN, with an eye especially on the People's Republic of China, which was a central concern of the participants. In his own address, Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia noted with a hint of criticism that the conference "shatters the frontiers which separated the two worlds: the communist and the non-communist. In this respect, our Conference appears to be an Afro-Asian offspring of the United Nations Assembly and offers an opportunity for regretting that the United Nations have not yet opened their doors to some nations having already obviously fulfilled the conditions of sovereignty and capacity required for membership" (MFARI 1955, 49).² The Communique of the Conference declared "full support of the fundamental principles of Human Rights as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and took note of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" (MFARI 1955, 165).³ It was not insignificant that the Communique placed human rights side by side

with explicit denunciations of colonialism and racialism, past and present.

Anti-colonialism and anti-racism were foundational to the political agenda to emerge from the Conference. As President Sukarno of Indonesia stated in his welcoming speech to delegates of the 29 nations gathered at the conference, "We are united . . . by a common detestation of colonialism in whatever form it appears. We are united by a common detestation of racialism" (Sukarno 1955, 22). Elimination of these twin evils was a precondition for peace in a world threatened by great power rivalry and nuclear destruction.

Putting these issues on the global agenda was no mean accomplishment. The success of the conference in uniting around them despite diversity of "color," culture, religion, historical legacies, as well as differences in political and economic interest, elicited wishful hopes of "determination to live together; to solve our problems peacefully in a brotherly fashion" and realize "the end of co-existence between differing political and social systems" (Abdulgani 1964b, 64).⁴ The optimism was no doubt partly a product of the euphoria the Conference generated, and the celebrated "Bandung spirit" it conjured, which arguably has been its most enduring legacy. Its longevity suggests that there was more to it than passing euphoria. The "spirit" was very much in evidence in the Third World resurgence of the following two decades of which the Conference was an inaugural moment, as well as the Non-Aligned Movement it inspired during the Cold War. To all appearances, it has outlasted the demise of the Third World with the neoliberal reconfiguration of global relations, and the irrelevance of non-alignment with the fall of socialism in the late 1980s.⁵ It enjoyed a revival with the 50th anniversary commemoration in 2005 (described by some as Bandung II), "deemed more relevant than ever by Left nationalists, pan-Asianists and 'Third Worldists' seeking to restore or reinvigorate a united front against US-led globalization and/or US imperialism" (Greenfield 2004, 166). Sixtieth anniversary

commemorations in 2015 continue to pursue this revival.

The Bandung promise was overcome within a matter of years by the very differences it had hoped to surmount. Gerard Greenfield has written that, "Far from representing a united front against racism, neo-colonialism and imperialism, the Bandung Conference was characterized by divisiveness and conflict within Asia and Africa that not only undermined the ability of Third World nationalists to contest the US empire, but reaffirmed the legitimacy of US imperial ambitions" (Greenfield 2004, 167). The criticism is well taken, and should serve as an important reminder for current commemorations of the "Bandung spirit," to which I will return below. It is also wrong-headed in its blanket condemnation, as if any event or movement must be dismissed offhand unless it musters sufficient unity and power to overthrow capitalism or US imperialism. By that logic, if we are to be consistent, we would have to dismiss as irrelevant not only the United Nations, but radical movements against capitalism (including those that eventuated in socialist states) which equally have failed to overthrow capitalism, capitulated to it, and turned into its active agents. It seems that even in its failure the Conference as a historical event may have a good deal to tell us about the dynamics of global politics, and the power relations that drive them, which are blurred in a single-minded preoccupation with US imperialism, and its suggestion that the overthrow of capitalism rules out concerns for issues that may be of the utmost significance to others in "Third World" (or "Global South," or whatever depiction is historically chosen). Capitalism is indeed a fundamental issue, but it is not necessarily the only one, and it is not viewed through the same lens everywhere.

The Bandung Conference was no doubt an important event in the political emergence of the Third World, but what it represented is best appreciated in the perspective of its antecedents and its consequences. President

Sukarno in his welcoming speech acknowledged the debt the Bandung Conference owed to the 1927 Brussels conference of the "League Against Imperialism and Colonialism" where "many distinguished Delegates who are present here today met each other and found new strength in their fight for independence" (Sukarno 1955, 19–20). That event, "covertly funded in part by the Communist International (and believed to be funded by the Kuomintang in China and the Mexican government)" (Prashad 2007, 19), pointed to the important part communism had played in the anti-colonial movement since the founding of the Communist International in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917, which first had found expression in the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East in 1920. It is this background that has prompted Samir Amin to write that "Bandung did not originate in the heads of the nationalist leaders (Nehru and Sukarno particularly, rather less, Nasser) as is implied by contemporary writers. It was the product of a radical leftwing critique which was at that time conducted within the communist parties" (Amin 2014).⁶

The other strand that was visible in the Bandung Conference was pan-Asianism, which since the turn of the 20th century had played an important part in fostering a sense of shared political and cultural plight among both radical and conservative intellectual activists across the breadth of Asia, more often than not finding expression in problematic contrasts between a "spiritual" Asia and a "materialist" West that in their very reductionism enabled some sense of kinship against apparent differences within Asia itself. This contrast found its way into many of the speeches at the Conference. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Conference organizers in including African states in the Conference, or the beliefs they expressed in a shared past and a common future with the peoples of Africa. But "Asia" was the central concern of the Conference. Already in 1947 Prime Minister Nehru of India had convened an "Asian Relations Conference" in New Delhi to promote

Asian solidarity. Rahul Mukherji writes that "Faith in Asian Civilization and values turned out to be a third (in addition to decolonization and non-alignment) – though much less effective – source of Asian solidarity" (Mukherji 2008, 166).

Nehru himself stated in his report to the Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha) in the aftermath of the Conference that,

While the Asian Renaissance has legitimately and naturally played an important part in the thinking of the delegates, it is important to note that they remembered and recorded, in accordance with their age-old traditions of tolerance and universality, that the Conference believed that Asian and African cultural cooperation should be developed in the larger context of world co-operation. (Nehru 1955, 16)

Finally, in a more immediate sense, the very existence of the UN provided a motivation for convening the Conference. According to Abdulgani, "It was felt – and is still felt – that the countries of Asia and Africa, because they have in many ways a similar international background and positive outlook, have the necessary foundation for such a regional grouping as the Charter of the United Nations envisages" (Abdulgani 1964a, 22). The insistence of the organizers on "shared background" with Africa served also as a disguise, if not an insincere one, for the importance to the "Asian" cause of Afro-Asian alignment in UN politics. The alignment was one that promised reciprocal benefits. "Asian" support for their de-colonization struggles was much appreciated by African states, most importantly in 1955 against apartheid in South Africa and French colonialism in the north. Support for the Palestinian cause, similarly, offered an inducement for Arab states to align with the emerging grouping. The UN "umbrella," if we may call it that, was important for the ability of the conference to bring together a variety of states who were otherwise suspicious of the communist legacies of internationalism or pan-Asianism, including Arab states who earlier had declined Nehru's

Asianist overtures, and even some like Burma (Myanmar) and Malaya who already had expressed concerns that "Asian domination might turn out to be worse than Western domination" (Mukherji 2008, 166).

If these earlier ideological and organizational legacies had prepared the ground for the Bandung Conference, what gave it urgency in the eyes of its organizers⁷ was fear of war and revolution. The global conflagration they feared had immediacy in eastern Asia in the conflicts surrounding the People's Republic of China (PRC), which at the time was the "focus of attention of the international world" (Abdulgani, quoted in Ang 2008, 31). The Korean War had just wound down to a standstill. Vietnam was poised between the end of one colonialism and the likely beginning of another. PRC claims on Taiwan threatened war with the United States. States from India and Pakistan to Burma and Laos had border problems with the PRC, some of them predating the colonial legacies that had produced them. These frictions threatened states that were still in the process of nation-building and consolidation of territories. Of equal concern were the *hua* populations of Southeast Asian states (in particular Thailand and Indonesia), whom the previous Guomintang government had claimed as *Chinese*, whose loyalties were divided between places of origin and places of arrival (Abraham 2008).

Much has been written about Premier Zhou Enlai's stellar performance in Bandung, the combination of reasonableness, dexterity and charm with which he was able to turn hostility to the PRC into something like hopeful acceptance of the possibility of peaceful coexistence. While Zhou's promises of peaceful resolution of problems with neighboring states were mollifying, it is doubtful that they alleviated fears of Communist imperialism and internal subversion. In his impromptu speech to the conference (in addition to a prepared text) in response to critics, Zhou assured the delegates that "The Chinese Delegation has come here to seek unity and not to quarrel ... The Chinese Delegation has come here to

seek common ground and not to create divergence" (MFARI 1955, 63). He further reiterated the PRC's commitment to uphold principles of mutual respect for territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference and peaceful coexistence, as well as withdrawing the Guomintang government's claims on overseas *hua* populations, recognizing their freedom to choose their citizenship. Despite Zhou's personal charm that won over the delegates, fear of Communism as represented by the Soviet Union and the PRC as a new form of imperialism and colonialism (as in eastern Europe) remained a contentious one at the Conference. It was in the end more or less swept under the rug by a verbal compromise over the scope and nature of "colonialism" that substituted "colonialism in all its manifestations" for unqualified colonialism or "forms of colonialism," as had been proposed by critics, some of them allied to the US in various pacts intended to "contain" communism (Kahin 1956, 30–31).

US scholar George Kahin who had close access to the conference proceedings wrote in his report that the organizers were motivated by a

common concern over what they regarded as an increasingly dangerous tension between China and the United States and their fear that this might break out into a disastrous world war from whose atomic consequences they could not escape. Related to this ... was the desire of the five sponsors to lay a firm foundation for China's peaceful relations with the rest of the world, not only with the West, but *equally with themselves and other areas of Southeast Asia peripheral to China*. Thus they envisaged the Conference as providing an opportunity for working toward three important objectives of their foreign policies: (1) avoidance of war, most immediately between China and the United States, (2) development of China's diplomatic independence of Russia, (3) containment of Chinese and Vietminh military power and political influence at the southern border of China and the eastern

boundaries of Cambodia and Laos, and the combating of illegal and subversive Communist activities in all non-Communist Asia, particularly in their own countries (Kahin 1956, 4–5, emphasis in original).

In Kahin's informed telling, finding a *modus vivendi* with the People's Republic of China overshadowed all other issues at the Bandung Conference. Prime Minister Nehru played the leading part to this end, securing the PRC's inclusion in the conference, and interceding on its behalf when necessary. Nehru had been pursuing some kind of cooperation with the PRC since the beginning of the decade (the PRC had been established in 1949), advocating also that China's seat in the UN Security Council be turned over from the Guomindang government in Taiwan to the PRC (he apparently also spurned an exploratory offer of that seat to India) (Harder 2015). He was convinced that the PRC's cooperation was indispensable to achieving Asian unity, and, indeed, world peace. The PRC's aggressiveness was exaggerated, he believed, attributing existing hostilities to mutual ignorance which, if overcome, would reduce tensions and the threat of war. He also seems to have had some conviction that the perceptible differences between PRC (and Vietnamese) and Soviet communism were evidence of the importance of the "Asian" factor in the former, which needed to be cultivated. "Asianness" aside, his distinction was well-taken in pointing to different paths socialism would take in Afro-Asian (and Latin American) societies, including China. In 1955, the PRC was still under the sway of the "New Democracy," which the Maoist leadership had adopted in 1949. New Democracy, Mao explained in the celebrated essay of that title, referred to a historical stage that must precede the transition to socialism in "semi-feudal semi-colonial" societies where collusion of colonialism and native "feudal forces" forestalled the development of capitalism. It was a stage that would provide for socialism the material foundation that in advanced societies had

been accomplished under capitalism. But it could not be capitalist, as it would be led by the Communist party, representing workers and peasants, rather than the bourgeoisie, which was too weak in such societies to undertake leadership (Dirlik 1997). More to the point here, the underlying reasoning suggested a double affinity if not identity for the PRC as both a socialist country and one that shared the experience of economic and social backwardness of colonial societies. In subsequent years, until the 1980s, the PRC in many ways bridged the second and the third worlds. In a fundamental sense, it also remained an outsider to both. It continues to remain an outsider at the present, this time belonging to both the world of capitalism and claiming affinity with the Global South.

If Bandung was a coming out party for the third world, the debut of the PRC was one of its most significant consequences. The unfolding of events after the conference confirmed Kahin's judgement that its main accomplishment had been educational (Kahin 1956, 35–36). The apparent *modus vivendi* established with the PRC was short-lived, unable to withstand the force of conflicting interests and claims the conference had sought to overcome, culminating most seriously in the India-China War in 1962, and the spread of Maoist revolutionary activity from India to the Philippines in the 1960s (and to the present day). But the conference did initiate relationships, informed by some sense of kinship, that continue to be called upon to the present day in claims of affinity. If others found that they could relate to the PRC in what it was trying to achieve, for the PRC it offered a clientele wary of Cold War great powers that could be cultivated in projecting power and influence beyond its national boundaries.

The issue of the PRC also has much to tell us about some of the fundamental limitations of the Bandung Conference. The Conference in the end was able to smooth over the hostility to Communism as represented by the PRC, but the hostility itself is revealing, and did not end with the conference. While Communist "imperialism" seems to

have been the primary focus of attention, no less important was the concern with Communist infiltration and subversion. As attested by the likes of Samir Amin and the movements that had gone into the making of the Conference, the issue of Communism was not merely a matter of imperialism or subversion from the outside, but an important strand that went into the making of the Third World, accounting for the revolutionary turn it would take in the 1960s. In contrast to the contemporary neoliberal equation of socialism with state intervention, hostility to socialism in the 1950s and 1960s was not directed at socialist privileging of the state. Most of the leaders at the Bandung Conference (Nehru prominently among them) believed in the centrality of the state in national development. Rather, as had been the case with the Guomindang in China, leaders of independence struggles who saw nation-building as the foremost task were suspicious of Communist advocacy of social revolution that brought issues of class inequality and oppression into the nation-building project. They were concerned with questions of economic backwardness and poverty, to be sure, but believed that those questions would be resolved with national sovereignty and development.⁸ While these leaders of the newly independent nations were unanimous in their condemnation of colonialism, they were also anxious to separate issues of colonialism from Leninist notions of imperialism as a necessary consequence of the capitalist economy. In foregrounding the links between colonialism, racism and capitalism – Frantz Fanon is the most obvious reference – the radical turn in Third World politics in the 1960s would not only challenge imperial capitalism as the ultimate culprit in global oppression, but also point to the complicity in oppression of the Third World national bourgeoisie with its own class interests. National liberation movements in the 1960s represented both the unfolding of the Bandung moment, and its negation (Amin 1994, 2015b).⁹

If the Bandung Conference had little to say about issues of class in nation-building,

its limited understanding of colonialism as a problem between nations led to obliviousness to questions of internal colonialism over minority ethnicities, nationalities and indigenous peoples. The celebration of “diversity” at the Conference (Sukarno 1955, 26–27) glossed over prolific problems of ethnic and minority oppression as well as religious conflict that accompanied nation-building efforts in most if not all of the societies involved. These problems have persisted over the years, in some cases acquiring even greater saliency. While systemic racism, too, may have been a product of Euro/American colonialism, it was by no means absent from relations between Afro-Asian societies. “Ethno-political faultlines” between and within Afro-Asian societies did not go unnoticed, leading the Burmese delegate at the Conference to observe that “it was terrible to be ruled by a Western power, but it was even more so to be ruled by an Asian power” (Abraham 2008, 54).¹⁰

References by sympathetic scholars to a “Bandung project” or to Bandung as the fountainhead for a “Third World project” are not to be taken at face value to suggest a common program of action. They refer rather to parallel political projects that came together during the following two decades in struggles against colonialism and neocolonialism in tenuous united front strategies led by the “national bourgeoisie,” collapsing in the end under the weight of imperialism and their own internal contradictions. The closest the Bandung Conference came to formulating a “project” was the final Communiqué, which, along with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, represented more a “code of conduct” than a political program (Acharya and Tan 2008, 3–7).¹¹ In the effort to accommodate differences in order to achieve consensus, the terms of the Communiqué were phrased in the most general terms, which left them open to interpretation in accordance with conflicting interests. As Kahin observed at the time, “with regard to... Controversial issues it should be noted that the breadth and lack of precision of the formulas found by the delegates covered different points of view, so that

each delegation, within limits, was free to interpret them to suit itself" (Kahin 1956, 31). In this sense, the Communique was similar to "Asian values" discourse in later years, which similarly is open to different societies projecting their own values upon it. Even the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who had been hostile to the Conference, felt that the document was one "which we ourselves could subscribe to" (Ang 2008, 42).

Containing the contradictions in a single narrative, implied by the term "project" may be consistent with the goals of the Bandung Conference. It also has theoretical justification going back to Lenin and the Communist International theses on the necessity of cooperation between classes in "national-democratic" revolutions against imperialism, which had come into play in the 1920s in China in the Communist Party's relationship with the Guomindang, and was implicit as well in Mao's idea of "new democracy." On the other hand, it also risks burying under a Bandung discourse the contradictions that have beset Third World societies in their relationship to capitalism, to one another, and their own social, political, and cultural constitution. If the Bandung Conference inaugurated a new age of the Third World, described by some as the "Bandung Era" (Berger 2004), it is equally important that the Bandung spirit that emerged from the Conference was quickly overtaken by more radical demands that called for the overhaul not just of existing colonial or neo-colonial relations but of the capitalist economy in which they were grounded. It is not surprising that participants in the original Bandung Conference proved to be reluctant to attempt a second gathering, which did not take place until 50 years later, under quite different circumstances. The radical turn in the 1960s represented a significant turn against the "national-democratic" aspirations of Bandung in its call for the reconstitution of Third World societies that suffered not just from ills left over from the past but from their entanglement in the global capitalist economy in which they already were enmeshed. While there

may be little question that Bandung has served well as a political or mobilizing myth, it is equally evident that the myth has been subject to different, and conflicting, significations and purposes.

The 50th and 60th commemorations of the Bandung Conference also take place in the context of "Asia rising." What is celebrated this time around is not the end of colonialism but success in global capitalism that surpasses by far the wildest dreams of the original Bandungers. Differences of the present from the post-World War II decades are by now widely familiar. The second world of socialism and the third world of national liberation alternatives are no more. Capital in its globalization has infiltrated the remotest corners of the earth. Eastern Asian societies have been the foremost beneficiaries as well as engines of globalization, culminating in the rise of the PRC. The bipolar configuration of global power that was the context for the Bandung Conference was replaced by the unipolar hegemony of the US with the fall of socialist states, which in turn is in the process of receding before a multipolar world in which the PRC is the foremost claimant for a new hegemony. In contrast to the Cold War decades when socialism offered a seemingly convincing alternative to capitalism, it is pursuit of supremacy within the victorious capitalist order that drives the competition for power. Claims to alternatives within this new context draw heavily on cultural legacies in search of efforts to construct "alternative modernities" to challenge the universalist assumptions of Euromodernity.

Perhaps not so surprisingly, given its limitations, the problems the "Bandung movement" sought to resolve have not disappeared, although they have been reconfigured by these changes, and the new problems they have added to the old ones. Foremost is fear. Fear of "weapons of mass destruction" is pervasive, the difference being that there is a wider range of them in more hands available at the present.¹² No longer restrained by a bipolar arrangement

of power, violent conflict between and within societies has become the new normal. Overshadowing it all is fear of impending ecological catastrophe brought about by the reckless developmentalism intrinsic to capitalism, emulated in turn by so-called socialist societies, and rendered into a “global faith” by the globalization of capital (Rist 2009).

Most interestingly, the People's Republic of China remains at the center of Bandung concerns, although in a vastly transformed role than 60 years earlier, in the promise it offers as well as the predicament it presents. With its newfound wealth and power, the PRC has emerged as a challenger to the world order established under US hegemony following the Second World War – not as a revolutionary challenger as in the 1950s to 1960s, but as competitor within the confines of global capitalism. Countries of the Global South (if not just the Global South) increasingly look to the PRC for help in overcoming their developmental problems. The Bandung revival, on the other hand, provides the PRC with an ideal platform to further consolidate its burgeoning initiatives to establish economic linkages across Afro-Eurasia, and extending to Latin America. The 2015 Bandung Conference seems tailor-made to flaunt such initiatives as the “One Belt One Road” projects to link the PRC with Europe across Central Asia through the “Silk Road,” and with Western Asia and Africa through the old “Maritime Silk Road” (described by President Sukarno in 1955 as “the life-line of imperialism”) (Sukarno 1955, 21), the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) Bank, and, most recently, the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) that has surpassed by far the regime's expectations in its attractiveness to prospective collaborators, across “North-South” or “East-West” divides. The timing is propitious, as the US forfeits claims to global leadership by squandering its wealth and prestige in wasteful wars without convincing reason, alienates Islamic and Arab states in its servile loyalty to the apartheid regime in Israel, and more and more resembles a failed state in the dysfunctions created by the sale of government to

corporate interests, backed by atavistic religious constituencies who find endless bliss in ignorance.

But, as in 1955, albeit for different reasons, the PRC is also hampered in its search for global leadership by suspicions of insidious imperial designs. Economic power has fertilized a chauvinistic nationalism that is indeed cause for concern not just for neighbors but globally, invoking suggestions of fascist political repressiveness at home and a *lebensraum* imperialism abroad. Its righteously if spuriously voiced claims on territories adjoining its boundaries and over seas in Eastern and Southeastern Asia has brought it into virtual (and, on occasion, real) conflict with all its neighbors, except perhaps North Korea. The colonialist tactics it uses in suppressing demands for autonomy (legally guaranteed on paper) among its own minority populations – most notably in Tibet and Xinjiang – have all the earmarks of state terrorism. Colonial presumptions also figure into threats of military conquest against Taiwan, justified by a racialized notion of national unity that ignores the historical, political and cultural gap that divides the two nations. A racialized notion of “Chineseness” is also audible in calls for unity of *hua* populations around the globe. Domestically, the suppression of intellectual freedom and dissent has been compared unfavorably by some of its victims to colonial rule, while the repression of popular demands for justice among the workers and peasants exposes the hypocrisy of the Communist Party that continues to claim them for its social foundation. Gender relations have taken a regressive turn with the retreat from revolutionary promises of equality and here, too, the leadership has been prepared to suppress all signs of dissent. Anti-imperialism, plausible in the revolutionary past, has turned in the post-revolutionary period into a chauvinistic nationalism, which seems to be a predicament of anti-imperialist nationalist ideologies. Despite its economic attractiveness to its neighbors and globally, PRC's behavior confirms for many among its neighbors the Burmese delegate's wistful observation in 1955 quoted above,

that while “it was terrible to be ruled by a Western power ... it was even more so to be ruled by an Asian power.”

The PRC’s problems loom large because of the leadership it aspires to, and is perhaps increasingly expected by some. But comparable if not similar problems plague most Afro-Asian societies involved in the Bandung Conference. Corruption, authoritarian intolerance for dissent, and ethnic and religious conflict are pervasive across the two continents. Some of these conflicts attest to the failure of postcolonial nation-building projects, others are products of the identity politics that have acquired saliency in tandem with globalization. Nativist cultural revivalisms (more often than not with religious overtones) against the universalist claims of Euromodernity, that meet with much applause in postcolonial criticisms of hegemonic Eurocentrism, also produce parochialisms that divide postcolonial societies from each other with uncompromising claims to cultural difference, unmediated by common notions of humanity and human rights. The contemporary scene in this sense is a regression from the Bandung Conference of 1955, where the participants saw no conflict between asserting at once loyalty to human *and* cultural rights but, on the contrary, saw the one as the confirmation of the other.

It is perhaps this spirit that the organizers of the 60th anniversary conference have in mind. The goal of the conference is, after all, to revive a sense of friendship and solidarity that may help overcome divisions and conflicts, which is also evident in the inclusiveness of the list of those invited. Whether or not they will be successful in cultivating a “spirit” that will outlast the rituals of the conference remains to be seen. Inclusiveness, admirable and necessary as it is, also increases the likelihood of immobilizing conflicting interests. On the other hand, unlike in 1955 when what brought the participants together were intangible sentiments of anti-colonialism and anti-racism, the present occasion nourishes off shared material interests that are already partially a reality, which enhances the possibility of a

common ground of material interests that the earlier Bandungers could only dream of. It is quite likely, indeed, that while the political events will be mostly of a ritual nature, the real action will take place at the Asia-Africa Business Summit scheduled in tandem with the political one (*Jakarta Post* 2015a, 2015b; Santikajaya and Abdurrohman 2015).¹³

This is where a crucial question arises. If Bandung contributes to political understanding among the participants and moderates their mutual distrust and conflicting interests, encourages greater solidarity, and offers even a glimpse of the possibility of a new world order based not on cut-throat competition but compassion and cooperation, it may indeed claim significance as a historical event, and not just ritual diplomacy. But this itself is possible only if the participants commit themselves to those qualities not just in terms of international diplomacy, but as principles in the reconstitution of social and economic relationships in their own societies and globally. In other words, if they are prepared to challenge the economic injustices of global capitalism, the social injustices that have proliferated under its regime, the injustices of “colonialism in all its forms,” and the political injustices of ethnic/cultural oppression and the denial to their populations of significant voice in the determination of their fates. Could Bandung in the spirit of solidarity take a step toward a “sharing economy” instead of serving as an instrument for new kinds of power within a destructive global capitalism? (STWR 2015)

In his draft proposal for a follow-up unofficial Bandung conference in October 2015, entitled “Building Sovereignty/ Preventing Hegemony,” Samir Amin writes: “What model of society do we want? Founded on what principles? The destructive competition between individuals or the affirmation of the advantages of solidarity? The liberty that gives legitimacy to inequality or the liberty associated with equality? The exploitation of the planet’s resources without regard for the future or by taking into consideration the precise measure of

what is needed for the reproduction of the conditions of life on the planet? The future must be seen as the realization of a higher stage of universal human civilization, not merely a more "fair" or more "efficient" model of civilization as we know it (the "modern" civilization of capitalism) (Amin 2015a; Khudori 2006).

These sound like improbable issues to be taken up in the official Bandung conference which, similar to its 1955 predecessor is likely to stay away from contentious issues of inequality, social justice and popular democracy, in any form. Speaking to these issues, cross-national boundaries, after all, would go against the commitment to "non-interference" if not cultural "autonomy." There is a suggestion in the conference organization that the business of Bandung is most likely to be, business, as APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) used to proclaim. Some Indonesian commentators already have pointed to the potential economic utility of the Bandung "brand" (Tarrosy 2014; Greenfield 2004, 169).

If we look past official Bandung with its social movement activists, then the grassroots problems that the original Bandungers had pointed to as projects that the new nations had to resolve still await solution. They have been exacerbated even further by voluntary or involuntary compliance with the demands of global capitalism. Poverty remains a pervasive problem. Despite advances in societies that have been able to take advantage of the globalization of capital to improve the condition of their people, more than half of the world's people live in abject poverty or lead a precarious existence at its margins. Poverty is most serious in societies of the Global South (neoliberal avatar of the Third World), but it is also increasingly a condition of life in so-called advanced capitalist societies, more so for the racially oppressed. Asian societies that have surged to the top tiers of the global economy over the last two decades nevertheless face seemingly insurmountable challenges in extending the benefits of development to their enormous populations. The PRC, the number two (and by some counts

number one) economy in the world in terms of overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ranks somewhere around 90th among more than 150 countries when it comes to per capita GDP. Number ten, India, ranks somewhere around number 140th, number seventeen, Indonesia, between 110th and 120th, and number eighteen, Turkey in Western Asia, somewhere in the region of the 65th. Most sub-Saharan African countries fall at the bottom of rankings of both GDP and GDP per capita. One of the most advanced with global claims, South Africa, ranks number 33 by GDP and in the 60s by GDP per capita (World Bank 2015; Wikipedia Contributors 2013).¹⁴ Economic power as reflected in the GDP has given these societies – especially the PRC – enormous clout in global relations, but the GDP per capita figures still qualify them, somewhat misleadingly, as developing societies.

Development has come at a high social and ecological cost. Societies of the Global South suffer from the same problems that afflict all contemporary societies. Privatization of resources in the name of market efficiency has led to the plunder of public resources, most egregiously in the PRC, *because* of its socialist pretensions, where officials supposed to serve the public have converted enormous amounts of wealth into private gain in systemic corruption. Land-grabbing and forcing dispossessed or surplus peasant (especially women's) labor into the market, typical of "primitive accumulation" under capitalism everywhere, has been exacerbated in the case of the PRC by far-flung and ruthlessly efficient Communist Party bureaucracy, disguising coercive rule and corruption under the sign of socialism. Similar corruption, using the resources of the state to dispossess the public is apparent everywhere under the regime of neoliberal global capitalism, with particularly devastating consequences for populations already suffering from endemic poverty.

Hackneyed clichés about rising tides lifting all boats don't explain why the tide rises to different levels for the billions living

in abject poverty and the richest 1% (still mostly in the US but with increasing numbers from the “Global South,” especially Asia) of the world’s population, which at last count owns 46% of its wealth or, looking at some samples from Asia and Africa, why the top 1% in “socialist” China owns one-third of the country’s wealth, the top 1% of India owns close to half of the wealth of the country, 10% of the population in Turkey owns close to 80% of the wealth, and, in the host country for of the Bandung Conference, Indonesia, which has experienced a severe increase in inequality over the last decade, 0.01% of the population accounts or 25% of the GDP and 40 individuals for 10%. In Africa, the ten richest individuals own as much as the poorest half (*Reuters* 2013; Rukmini 2014; Tadjoeeddin 2014; *Today’s Zaman* 2014; Zhou 2014; Lakner 2015). Obscene levels of consumption in the midst of dire poverty exacerbates the crisis of inequality while the promise of joining the so-called “middle class,” which in reality denotes not so much a “class” as those who have joined the consumer economy, recedes farther into the future for billions. As a recent article puts it,

In 1981, nearly 1.7 billion Asians were living on less than \$1.25 a day. Today, the figure is about 700 million. But vast numbers cannot aspire to rise much further. About 80 percent of the 3.6 billion people in developing Asian countries still live on less than \$5 a day, many relying on day labor, rag picking or other meager livelihoods. Even migrants who arrived in cities years ago feel trapped in a seemingly permanent underclass. At the same time, the numbers of millionaires and billionaires has burgeoned, creating elites that have more in common with the ultra-rich in cities such as Paris and New York than their own countrymen. Outside of eastern China and the advanced economies of South Korea and Japan, an Asian middle class has not taken widespread hold. (Kurtenbach and Mason 2014)¹⁵

The devastating ecological consequences of development raises further questions about its sustainability. Problems of environmental destruction and resource depletion that have accompanied development are well-known and widely acknowledged, even by those who are devoted to it in the pursuit of economic gain or political power. These problems have not diminished the hegemonic appeal of the technologies of development (or, better still, “maldevelopment”) pioneered by advanced capitalist societies. The economic success of eastern Asian societies offers proof enough that emulating these technologies and riding the networks of capital offer prodigious possibilities in the pursuit of wealth and power, more so for those states and elites capable of negotiating the vagaries of global capitalism. But disregard of long term consequences has come with a heavy price tag. The addition of hundreds of millions of consumers over the last two decades – much to the delight of capital – has already put at risk the ecological health of the globe and access to resources essential to life, among them air and water. Emulating the wasteful profligate consumption standards and habits of advanced capitalist societies such as the USA instead of seeking alternatives to them as they did earlier has brought countries such the PRC and India to the brink of ecological disaster, with far-reaching effects that reverberate across the globe. Asia is not just the fastest growing source of newly-minted billionaires, it is also home to the world’s most polluted cities, land and rivers. It does not take much imagination to foresee that further development along the same path will only deepen the current environmental crisis.

A new challenge facing governments with ecological and social consequences is meeting the sustenance needs of swelling numbers of urban populations as consumption standards are globalized for the new consuming classes, with much larger numbers of people straining to make ends meet, and even larger numbers reduced to scavengers in the market economy.

Incorporation in the global capitalist economy has accelerated globally the shift from agrarian to urban economy that everywhere has accompanied capitalist development, displacing the peasantry, commercializing agricultural production under pressure from capital and growing needs of urban populations, and adding the vagaries of the market to those of nature for both producers and consumers of agricultural products. This is by no means a new phenomenon in cities of the global south, but it has been speeded up by the globalization of markets and capital. Modern cities are both products of and responses to capitalism. The new megacities are no exception, except that they are more immediately self-conscious about their location in global networks of capital, which also distances them from their "backward" hinterlands. If urbanization is the source of new wealth and efficient use of some resources, the commercialization of agricultural resources to meet urban needs has led to further encroachment on other resources such as water, essential not just to agricultural production but human existence, and forests essential to global ecological health. The use of agricultural resources for fuel production, and global markets for flowers and bottled water are some ready examples. Commercialization also undermines food security and sovereignty by shifting control over production and distribution of agricultural commodities to global corporations, leaving entire populations at the mercy of markets they control, with the most severe effects. Food insecurity has become a topic of conversation in state projects. Food sovereignty, on the other hand, is among the foremost demands of popular organizations, such as the Movement for Landless Laborers in Brazil or the Via Campesina, which represent the people who find themselves at the wrong end of globalization (Tramel 2015).¹⁶

Bandung leaders in 1955 were preoccupied with the colonial roots of racism and poverty, and failed to make the connection to the context of all three in a globalizing

capitalist economy. Indeed, with some adjustments, what they sought was inclusion in the capitalist world economy (the PRC was the object of suspicion for that very reason). Greenfield is justified in pointing to their support for capitalism. The unmet needs of millions of their subjects erupted in rebellions in National Liberation Movements that sought to address these issues ignored in official Bandung. They, too, failed, with help from imperialist domination, and in their failure left behind half a century of turmoil that has refused to go away.

This past is available to the leaders who will meet in Bandung in April to commemorate and celebrate the conference of 60 years earlier. Whether or not they confront the political, social, cultural and ecological problems discussed above, that incorporation in global capitalism has brought with it in their various societies, or limit themselves to strategies of expanding their power within it, will serve as a measure of their success or failure. The issue is no longer merely capitalism, moreover, but corporate domination of the world that is at once economic, political and cultural. Euro/America still dominates the global economy, but the global economy is no longer just Euro/American. The burden is especially on the PRC in its aspirations to leadership in a new kind of world order. So far the outlook is not very promising.

The search for social justice, too, is no longer just eastern or western, or southern and northern, but global. Participants in the October conference for popular causes, such as Samir Amin, will go to Bandung from the recent meeting of the World Social Forum in Tunisia (Amin 2015c; World Social Forum 2015). If Bandung is to have credibility in its professed aspirations, and not just serve ruling class interests, it is imperative for the leaders attending to incorporate the demands for popular causes in their projects. Ignoring those demands will not invite revived revolutionary movements, but it will further fuel the vicious cycle of social and political alienation that finds expression in outbreaks of violence, inviting deepening state surveillance and repression,

more violence, and so on and so on, which has become the condition of social life.

Acknowledgement

I would like to recognize here the efforts of my friend Chen Kuan-Hsing to encourage, in the 2015 Bandung commemorations, the discussion of the issues I take up in this essay. This essay is a product of his urgings and encouragement.

Notes

1. Dr. Abdulgani was the Secretary General of the Indonesian foreign ministry and chair of the conference secretariat. The UN had been established in 1945 at the conclusion of the Second World War.
2. The immediate such nation for Prince Sihanouk was the People's Republic of China (PRC), which was of major concern to the conference as a whole.
3. The Communique consisted of seven sections: economic co-operation, cultural co-operation, human rights and self-determination, problems of dependent peoples, "other problems" (which included declaration of support for Palestinians), and promotion of world peace and co-operation.
4. See also the report on the Conference by the African-American writer, Richard Wright. Wright's sympathetic description of the carnivalesque air of camaraderie that prevailed at the Conference nevertheless remained skeptical of its translatability into lasting ideological coherence and unity of purpose (Wright 1956, 175–176).
5. Vijay Prashad has offered an engaged and engaging account of the prehistory and the afterlives of Bandung (Prashad 2007). See also Dirlik (2004).
6. Amin has been a foremost participant-theorist of Third World movements since the 1950s. See, also, Petersson (2014).
7. Specifically, the Five "Colombo powers" of Burma (Myanmar), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, Indonesia and Pakistan.
8. One author has suggested that in contrast to the attention it received in the 1960s under the influence of Latin American "developmentalism," political economy was a relatively "neglected area" at the Conference (Nesadurai 2008, 71–74).
9. Prashad writes that the contradictions of the Third World project and internal weaknesses "corroded the imagined community of the Third World, and eventually participated in the decimation of its agenda" (Prashad 2007, 114). Amin has also referred to "the Bandung movement,"

collapsing the Bandung Conference with the anti-colonial movements that preceded it as well as with the subsequent "non-aligned movement" (Amin 2014). For questions concerning the relationship between Bandung and later developments, see Young (2005).

10. Gender issues were not salient at the Conference. According to Prashad, they were the subject of subsequent Afro-Asian conferences in Cairo in 1957 and 1961 (Prashad 2007, 51–61).
11. The Five Principles (*Pancasila*), agreed to between India and the PRC in 1954, were: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. Changing PRC attitudes toward the Five Principles is analyzed in Chen (2008).
12. This term, popularized by the misadventures of the Bush administration in Western Asia, was used by Prime Minister Nehru in his report to the Indian Parliament (Nehru 1955, 18).
13. The invitees include Supreme Leader Kim Jung-un of North Korea. Among the stated goals is to voice support for the people of Palestine. Israel, of course, has become a close partner of the PRC in India, especially in the weapons trade. See *Jakarta Post* (2013).
14. I exclude here the oil-rich countries of Southwestern Asia which, with their ownership of this strategic resource, all along have commanded power out of proportion to their size and economic complexity.
15. Ashis Nandy captures the cultural consequences of severe inequality, with reference to India, in his juxtaposition of narcissism and despair (Nandy 2013).
16. For discussions of agrarian change under global capitalism, with an emphasis on Asia, see Dirlik, Prazniak, and Woodside (2012). For an interesting discussion of the significance of the collective economy in meeting the challenges of commercialization, see Donaldson and Zhang (2015)

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