

Introduction

In September 1953, Burmese socialist U Hla Aung departed his home country for New York in the United States to attend the eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) which sat until December. On April 26 1955, he would give a speech in the same city to the United Nations (UN) Committee on Non-Self-Governing Territories in which he urged listeners to strengthen their resolve against ‘race domination’ and continued colonial rule in Africa.¹ In between these summits, Hla Aung ventured around Africa on a diplomatic visa, building up a network of contacts and comrades who would feed him information and ideas about the state of anti-colonial struggles in the region. He drew connections on behalf of the Asian Socialist Conference (ASC) as much as the Burmese government, nurturing friendships with actors who shared his brief of constructing socialism at the same time as dismantling imperialism, across borders. After the UNGA sitting of 1953 concluded, he attempted to attend two pan-African conferences in Ashanti, Gold Coast and Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia, missing the first one and reaching the second, which was subsequently cancelled due to the British preventing representatives travelling from Uganda and Kenya.² Meanwhile, the *Times of India* reported on January 6 1954 that his hotel in Lusaka had to change a ‘whites only’ policy on his arrival, which disturbed fellow guests and prompted other hotel-keepers in Central Africa to consider whether to ‘relax their traditional colour bar’.³

This episode provides insights into global decolonisation as it unfolded in the 1950s. Scholars of the international history of anti-imperialism and decolonisation have traditionally rendered a post-Second World War period during which nation-states took precedence over empires as a new form of ‘imagined community’ for many of the world’s populations.⁴ For example, Mark Berger divides the 1950s–1970s into first and second generation ‘Bandung regimes’ which comprised new nation-states that tried to achieve ‘the prosperity and progress that national liberation

¹ “Text of Statement By U Hla Aung in the Committee of Information U.N. Six Session on “Race Relations & Social Conditions” in Non-Self-Governing Territories,” *Anti-Colonial Bureau News Letter* no. 9 (1955), 3–4.

² “Secretariat Report to the 3rd Meeting of the Bureau Kalaw May 25 to 28 1954,” Prem Bhasin Papers (Socialist Party), fol. 26, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML), 6; “Patterns on the Loom,” *Socialist Asia* 2, no. 10 (1954): 44.

³ “New Regime in C. Africa: Will Hotels Now Relax Colour Bar?,” *Times of India*, Jan 6, 1954: 11.

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

and independence were supposed to deliver' as Empire rapidly declined.⁵ Berger considers that the 'rise of Third Worldism in the 1950s and 1960s' spoke to the ascendancy of the postcolonial leaders who gathered at the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955, eager to discuss how to safeguard national sovereignty in an age of Cold War sabre-rattling.⁶ Such accounts give the impression that anti-imperial internationalism in the 1950s was synonymous with the machinations of nationalist political leaders. However, the Hla Aung episode chronicled above speaks to a non-state or non-official underbelly to 1950s decolonisation which is necessarily submerged in this teleological reckoning with the course of post-war anti-imperialism. Such frenzied decolonising underworlds, threaded together by peripatetic Asians and Africans taking copious risks for uncertain rewards, produced visions of regional and global futures that resist easy approximation to a singular Third Worldism – even if, as in the case of Hla Aung, their practitioners typically blended unofficial with state portfolios.

This monograph centres a clutch of specifically Burmese, Indian, and Indonesian politicians who authored fresh socialist internationalisms as their countries decolonised. These three countries achieved independence around the same time and radical politicians in each country envisioned an amorphous egalitarian and democratic future which they termed 'socialism'. Burmese, Indian, and Indonesian political actors drove the emergence and flourishing of far-reaching socialist networks out of this sense of hope and possibility that radiated around southern Asia. This episode deserves recounting in its own right; South and Southeast Asian socialists, besides just organising themselves into caucuses which could compete for political power following independence, also initiated conversations about sweeping transnational change on terms that provided a counterpoint to other, more statist and less anti-imperial socialisms through the 1950s. In addition, the recounting of this episode revises historiographical understandings of post-Second World War decolonisation and internationalism. Following key figures' movements and pronouncements across an extended period reveals how far the itinerant and ideologically experimentative dynamics of interwar internationalisms continued to ring true into the 1950s, whereby multifarious visions of potential futures interpenetrated across unpredictable geographies. Socialism is necessarily central to this story; it appealed, as to many radical South and Southeast Asians in the interwar era, in its mutable and imaginary propensities, implying an egalitarian and democratic global future that remained to be shaped.

The monograph therefore asks: why, how, and with what local and global repercussions, did the appeal of 'socialism' issue forth from South and Southeast

⁵ Berger, "After the Third World?" 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9–12.

Asia between broadly 1947 and 1960, such that given countries contributed nascent internationalisms to post-war global politics? These questions might previously have been answered with reference to the currency of the term 'socialism' among postcolonial state-making projects from the 1950s. Scholars are now beginning to disaggregate the various socialisms that persisted at the margins of such regimes. As Kevin Fogg writes of Indonesian socialism in the 1950s, the term had 'a diverse spectrum of understandings [that] allowed different political streams to claim the term for highly different purposes'.⁷ Su Lin Lewis and Nana Osei-Opare's new volume proposes that Global South actors filled the term with meanings rendering their own visions for development and modernity.⁸ This monograph joins Lewis and Osei-Opare in viewing Global South actors as architects of distinctive socialisms that spoke to the anti-imperial conditions in which they were brewed. However, it demonstrates that South and Southeast Asian socialists sought to evolve socialisms that not only developed or modernised societies at home, but levelled regional inequalities, and revamped the international order. Burmese, Indian, and Indonesian socialists sensed that the world was ripe for remaking at the turn of the 1950s, and acted as the carriers of a worldmaking spirit across the region and around the globe, before concerns of development and modernisation actually delimited this spirit later on.

As these points suggest, the monograph seeks to decentre the nation in our assessment of post-Second World War anti-imperial internationalisms. Burmese, Indian, and Indonesian socialists entered the fray as transnational political actors at a time – between 1947 and 1949 – when the impact of decolonisation and the Cold War on regional and global orders was not yet clear. By the mid-1950s, the Cold War had increasingly become synonymous with the international order, and anti-imperialist politicians were forced into a defensive posture, evaluating how to resist its incursions on their hard-won sovereignty. However, actors harbouring ambitions to not just socially engineer home or 'Third World' societies, but to evolve models for world social organisation generally, sensed a more malleable terrain earlier on, and it is in this propensity that the three countries named above are important. Each was a major force within South and Southeast Asia capable of setting the tone for socialist debate and policymaking around the region. However, beyond this, each also had a substantial cluster of leftists eager to set in train wider shifts by means of transnational networking and scheming. These figures were never *outside* the nation – but their visions, actions, and the internationalisms that followed in their trail, charted courses which can only be fully appreciated when such individuals are positioned in the foreground, and allowed to speak to the events and senses of possibility that stirred them.

⁷ Fogg, "Indonesian Socialism of the 1950s," 465.

⁸ Lewis and Osei-Opare, *Socialism, Internationalism, and Development*.

The monograph argues that the socialists it assesses were engaged in the doing of transnational anti-imperial solidarity in the 1950s, rather than just the thinking. Nascent scholarship on the crafting of different imaginaries about post-imperial futures to the nationalist or developmentalist in the early to mid-twentieth century is overly attendant to agendas around which there was much consensus within particular intellectual worlds. This makes it seem as if solidarity were a by-product of ideological concordance. Gary Wilder and Adom Getachew have produced studies of African, African American, and Caribbean anti-colonial ‘worldmakers’ who largely agreed about what imperialism, and its legacies, consisted in, and about the political solutions required to defeat it.⁹ The Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective has investigated the 1950s more specifically, but chiefly through the lens of a number of conferences where African and Asian activists gathered to sound similar notes about how post-imperial futures should take shape.¹⁰ Alongside intellectual effort expended in print or at conferences, the making of anti-imperial solidarities also required much practical effort in shaping and maintaining friendships with distant allies. In addition, it involved mediating conflicts and tensions that could destabilise given conversations at any moment. Through its case studies, this monograph adds much practical detail to the understandings rendered by scholars of Afro-Asianism of how non-state 1950s anti-imperial networks functioned.

Methodologically, as well as argumentatively, this monograph has much in common with accounts of pre-independence Asianisms which consider that itinerant anti-imperialists fashioned and exchanged radical agendas on the fly, as much as exported specific ideologies.¹¹ However, it treats the post-Second World War era, and addresses the unavoidable question of how and when notions of modernisation and development proscribed the utopianism that moved earlier-twentieth century anti-imperial intellectual exchange. Recent accounts of 1950s–1960s Afro-Asian internationalisms stop short of answering this question, while analyses of interwar internationalisms presume that such utopianism – where ‘utopianism’ refers to radical worldmaking ambitions, not confined to one nation-state – decayed in the 1940s. Notions of modernisation and development circulated through the twentieth century, but took on a new sheen in the 1950s, with the advent of modernisation theories alongside the growing fixation of extant postcolonial state-making projects on ‘development’. The monograph proposes that non-state socialists located within South and Southeast Asia entered into a stinting embrace with this order at best in the 1950s, crafting outlets for their continued radical internationalisms throughout.

⁹ Wilder, *Freedom Time*; Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*.

¹⁰ Lewis and Stolte, “Other Bandungs,” 1–19.

¹¹ Harper, *Underground Asia*; Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts*.

The individuals examined in this monograph include Jayaprakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia of India, U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein of Burma, and Sutan Sjahrir of Indonesia. These leaders were accompanied in internationalist endeavours by less well-known domestic comrades including Hla Aung of Burma and Soerjomo Koesoemo Wijono of Indonesia. All of these individuals are introduced in detail in Chapter I. They are selected because they typify the experimental and multi-directional 1950s decolonising dialogues that this monograph focusses on. They responded similarly to the formal fall of Empire in their countries, seeking to translate a moment of decolonising excitement into a passage of epochal change. The monograph references these individuals in each chapter – rather than, say, dedicating a chapter to socialists from each country – in order to emphasise how their dynamic of energetic networking brokered the formation of newfound transnational alignments and imaginaries. It brings out the contributions of junior comrades who did the legwork of South and Southeast Asian socialist internationalisms in flitting across Asia and Africa taking notes on extant anti-colonial struggles and building personal connections, while organising journals and conferences from their Rangoon base. This is especially important in highlighting how such non-state internationalisms functioned.

In terms of Indian figures, Jayaprakash Narayan – commonly known as JP – was an idiosyncratic politician and activist who spent much of the 1950s promoting movements of agrarian reform that sought to disperse land ownership among peasantries. His friendliness with Mahatma Gandhi during freedom struggle days imbued in him a fondness for notions of decentralisation and participatory democracy, which at once fed and were enriched by his internationalist engagements. Later on, in the 1970s, he took a stand against Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's invocation of a national 'Emergency', which Indira claimed was a vital measure to protect national security. JP, a complex figure, called for a 'total revolution' led by students to rid society of corruptions at the time – seemingly under the impress of Mao Zedong, who had made a similar call in China a decade earlier – only to help form a body two years later, the 'Janata Party', which was a forerunner of today's Bharatiya Janata Party, the governing right-wing party.¹² The monograph provides insights into such complexities by offering up a rich account of given actors' internationalisms. For example, JP, among other South and Southeast Asian socialists, launched and undertook extended trips to Yugoslavia in the 1950s, admiring the cooperative model of social organisation which he believed was in train there. This was part of a lusting for a popular or communitarian form of socialism which took on new dimensions in cross-border travels that JP then tried to apply to domestic politics in unorthodox ways.

¹² Guha, *India After Gandhi*, 332–333.

Ram Manohar Lohia was a more philosophical socialist than JP who helped the latter craft transnational networks in the late 1940s that eventuated in the ASC, but who spent considerable time theorising socialism alongside drawing the practical linkages required for its transnational triumph. He was perhaps the chief brain behind the ASC, articulating the notion of a 'Third Camp' or 'Third Force' in world affairs at the beginning of the 1950s, which was to consist in a bloc of anti-imperial states and peoples that was neutral in the Cold War, and eager to beat their own political paths outside it. Lohia and JP helped form the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) in 1952, a body which historians have struggled to characterise ideologically. The pair did not stay on good terms for long, with Lohia forming a separate party in 1956 out of frustration at JP and the PSP's supposed closeness to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, whose 'socialism' Lohia deplored.¹³ Lohia was a maverick whose many strands of thought influence progressives, feminists, and anti-caste campaigners today.¹⁴ However, Lohia also made many journeys around the globe in the immediate post-independence period which are less well-publicised than his domestic arguments and writings. These journeys – in terms of the poverty he encountered, the cooperative industrial experiments he observed, and the people he met and spoke with – were as vital in the making of 1950s anti-imperial socialist internationalisms as the theoretical tomes he produced on ideas of a 'Third Camp'.¹⁵

In Burma, U Ba Swe and U Kyaw Nyein founded what became known as the Burma Socialist Party (BSP) in 1945, which became a key force in the governing Burmese Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) coalition from 1948. Ba Swe was to be the second Prime Minister of Burma after U Nu, taking up the posting in June 1956 for eight months. He had been involved in anti-imperial struggle since his student days in the mid-1930s, when he met Kyaw Nyein, a close comrade in years to come. Kyaw Nyein fell out with Nu in 1958 resulting in a split of the governing coalition into the 'Clean AFPFL' and the 'Stable AFPFL' – the latter of which Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein formed – a disagreement which ultimately paved the way for military rule in Burma within a matter of years. While plenty is understood about the involvements of this pairing in Burmese politics in the 1950s, less is known about their outlooks on international politics, though Kyaw Zaw Win has written about their work with the ASC.¹⁶ Ba Swe and Kyaw Nyein, unlike many other figures

¹³ Doctor, "Lohia's Quest for an Autonomous Socialism," 318.

¹⁴ Yadav, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in Rammanohar Lohia?" 93–94; Dhara, "Do you know the feminist Lohia?," *Forward Press*, Mar 21, 2017, accessed Oct 21, 2021, <https://www.forwardpress.in/2017/03/a-great-politician-ram-manohar-lohiya-english/>; "Dr. Ambedkar and Ram Manohar Lohia on caste system and the social justice," *The Ambedkarite Today*, Mar, 2019, accessed Nov 15, 2021, <https://www.ambedkaritetoday.com/2019/03/ambedkar-and-lohia-on-caste.html>.

¹⁵ Lohia, *Third Camp in World Affairs*.

¹⁶ Win, "A History of the Burma Socialist Party (1930–1964)," 237–238.

featured in this study, were state actors, and this impacted their socialisms, which sometimes included propagandistic references to policy ideas and platforms.

Another Burmese socialist who this monograph references regularly is Hla Aung, one of the ASC's roving secretaries in the 1950s, who this monograph terms 'mobile intermediaries'. The ASC's secretaries did much of the groundwork of padding out Asian socialist networks, undertaking lengthy international tours to nurture solidarities with far-flung contacts who had broadly similar ambitions to South and Southeast Asian socialists. They created anti-colonial organisations in league with these contacts, such as the Anti-Colonial Bureau (ACB), oriented towards achieving tangible goals – including the end of imperialism in Africa – not just intellectual agreement on common problems. Hla Aung was a Member of Parliament and a diplomat, but not a public-facing figure within the BSP in the vein of Ba Swe or Kyaw Nyein, and thus had more time than they did for experimental transnational political strategising.¹⁷ Hla Aung, like JP, relished the socio-economic radicalism of industrial experiments underway in Yugoslavia, publishing a book by regional leftist Milovan Djilas in 1953 which focussed closely on Yugoslavian socialism.¹⁸ Primary sources explored later in this monograph demonstrate that he was an adventurous internationalist scavenging global opportunities and connections to plug anti-imperial and socialist causes late into the decade.

In Indonesia, independence leader and revolutionary theoretician Sutan Sjahrir founded the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI) in February 1948, which David Hill describes as 'Indonesia's most vocal promoter of democratic, liberal socialism' before 1960 when it was banned.¹⁹ Sjahrir is a household name in Indonesia for his anti-imperial campaigns in the 1930s and 1940s and for acting as the first Prime Minister of the country between 1945 and 1947. He had significant differences with fellow Indonesian nationalists Mohammad Hatta and, most tellingly, Sukarno. Sukarno – the first President of Indonesia – annulled the country's experiment with parliamentary democracy in 1959 and imprisoned Sjahrir in 1963; Sjahrir died three years later in 1966. Sjahrir helped to forge the South and Southeast Asian socialist networks at the turn of the 1950s that brought about the ASC, although he was too busy with domestic politics to involve himself deeply with its plans outside of major congresses. Similarly to the Burmese case, a PSI member who was not so public-facing, Wijono, took up a prominent role within the ASC in 1953, acting as its first General Secretary from that year. Alongside Hla Aung, he travelled far and wide expanding ASC networks, plugging its projects, and encouraging fellow international socialists to adopt anti-imperial positions on freedom fights in

¹⁷ Win, "Burma Socialist Party," 91.

¹⁸ Djilas, *Yugoslavia in Its Strive for Socialism*.

¹⁹ Hill, *A Critical Biography of Mochtar Lubis*, 8.

Africa. Wijono had participated in some of the Sjahrir cabinets of the 1940s, acting as vice-minister of the interior at one stage.²⁰ Like Sjahrir, he found himself in opposition on a domestic front in the 1950s but had more time than the PSI leader for internationalist strategising.

Each of the figures introduced above viewed the onset of decolonisation in South and Southeast Asia with relish, considering the liberatory energies it unleashed as potentially epoch-making. They were socialists of an anti-imperial bent who felt that decolonisation across the region could ripple out to reshape the international order, as well as social orders at home. They penned letters to one another and convened several early meetings to share ideas about how an 'Asian' or global socialism might advance. They formed the ASC in 1953 as a vessel for their internationalisms; through this body, which was funded by various member parties, they honed imaginaries about socialist and post-imperial regional and global futures, and crafted plans to effect these imaginaries, which included anti-colonial, economic, and political strategies. Asian socialists bonded at many smaller-scale, 'bureau' meetings than their well-publicised conferences of 1953 and 1956. Here, the aforementioned 'mobile intermediaries' – lesser members of Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialist parties who flitted around Asia, Africa, and Europe trying to identify new allies and make progress with ASC projects – took centre stage. They reported on their various struggles and successes between meetings and conducted open-ended discussions at the meetings about how to make progress in the months following.

The monograph considers these activists to epitomise what Dipesh Chakrabarty terms the 'dialogical side of decolonization'. Chakrabarty distinguishes this from the 'developmentalist side of decolonization whereby anti-colonial thinkers came to accept different versions of modernization theory that...made the West into a model for everyone to follow'.²¹ By and large, the postcolonial leaders of the 1950s and 1960s associated with the Bandung Conference and Non-Alignment – including Nehru, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Julius Nyerere – embraced notions of development that identified rapid, state-driven economic growth as a sure-fire route to achieving political parity with Euro-American nations. They also launched nation-building projects predicated on the notion that their peoples needed to be educated in how to be citizens.²² State- and nation-building were intimately linked, and the outcome of postcolonial leaders' drive towards 'development' was what Chakrabarty terms a 'pedagogical' political style, in which these leaders cast themselves as indispensable tutors of their peoples.²³ It followed that postcolonial elites

²⁰ Mrázek, *Sjahrir*, 322–323.

²¹ Chakrabarty, "The Legacies of Bandung," 46–47.

²² *Ibid.*, 53.

²³ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

who viewed their own governance as vital in the pursuit of goals of ‘development’ and ‘modernisation’ – which Chakrabarty refers to as ‘catching-up-with-the-West’ – were not predisposed to be patient with political opponents.²⁴ Many postcolonial regimes gravitated towards authoritarianism by the 1970s at the latest, often set in train by the actions and policies of state leaders who considered their rule inextricable from the development and modernisation of given nation-states.

By contrast, Chakrabarty identifies the ‘dialogical side’ of decolonisation as having consisted in ‘different thinkers’ adopting ‘different positions’ on the future of their societies.²⁵ Anti-imperialists envisioned myriad potential futures in the immediate post-Second World War period. The concept of a ‘dialogical’ decolonisation implies extended and somewhat ad hoc conversations between copious thinkers, and thus speaks to the dynamics of mobility and open-ended discussion that defined non-state, Afro-Asian internationalist networking in the 1950s. While claiming that tracking the actors introduced above illuminates much about the dialogical underbelly to 1950s decolonisation, this monograph also thoroughly documents the tensions and hierarchies that characterised such non-state networks. European socialists were prominent within international socialist networks at this time. Asian socialists typically required their patronage to make long journeys abroad, but pointedly decried European inaction on ongoing colonialism in Africa in particular. For their part, European socialists sought to gain insights into what was going on in the decolonising world, and their pictures of these worlds were tinged with ‘deepening Cold War anxieties’.²⁶ The divides in international socialist networks extended beyond this; Israeli involvement deterred Arab socialists and ultimately undermined the ASC. South and Southeast Asian actors helped thrust multiple socialist internationalisms onto the global scene in the 1950s by means of a dialogical decolonisation which was multilayered and messy.

In this connection, the monograph proposes that socialism for many Asian and African radicals consisted in a broad imaginary of an egalitarian and democratic, post-imperial future – not simply in an ideology or a philosophy – and that socialism’s power as a mobilisational category lay in this capaciousness. Maia Ramnath has shown that socialism was not an ‘ideological monolith’ but a ‘heteroglossic discourse’ between the 1900s and 1930s in which ‘an analogous range of positions’ on how to confront capitalism and imperialism could be taken.²⁷ Socialism served a similar discursive function in the 1950s; its invocation as a descriptor of an egalitarian and democratic future which could yet be shaped in any number of directions

²⁴ Chakrabarty, “The Legacies of Bandung,” 53.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁶ McCann, “Possibility and Peril,” 191.

²⁷ Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, 18.

by given interlocutors, got socialists such as Hla Aung a hearing in brief sojourns to different cities and countries. Socialism was not infinitely malleable. As the 1950s went on, it was conjured by South and Southeast Asian among other postcolonial regimes as a means of achieving equality and prosperity within a nation-state framework. Many such postcolonial state-building projects were moved by anti-communism, and leading South and Southeast Asian socialists shared their domestic political rivals' fears of communism.²⁸ Some Asian socialists grew more developmentalist or nationalist themselves, and concomitantly, the meanings of the socialisms they invoked became less flexible. Still, in the multi-directional decolonising dialogues of the 1950s, socialism was a potent mobilisational category because it hinted at the kind of equalitarian and participatory, post-imperial future that many interlocutors imagined, without being too prescriptive as to what these futures consisted in.

The monograph outlines a chronology of internationalist collaboration and possibility through its assessment of the activities of South and Southeast Asian socialists between 1947 and 1960, during which time key figures repeatedly adjusted their aims and strategies. This chronology – outlined in detail below – gives us a better understanding of the contingent, experimental, and ad hoc nature of non-state internationalist networking in the 1950s, whose prospects could be bolstered or diminished not just by geopolitical shifts, but also by personal squabbles and political disagreements. South and Southeast Asian socialists intended to create redistributive states at home that achieved economic plenty by pursuing some form of industrialisation; they also wanted these states to be deeply democratic, and found Yugoslavian and Israeli state-building experiments intriguing in their supposedly participatory, collectivistic ethos. However, more than this, they were the rugged participants in an evolution of socialist internationalisms that envisioned ending imperialism while nurturing models for the egalitarian and democratic revision of societies generally. As such, they were global actors as much as regional or Afro-Asian ones, and it is in this propensity that the monograph uses the term 'internationalist' – to convey worldmaking intent. Throughout, the monograph emphasises how these actors crossed and interweaved different scales of political activism – local, national, and international – and thus emphasises their agency, if also the plethora of intellectual paths that individuals could end up taking, in this turbulent decade.

²⁸ Zachariah, *Nehru*, 197–198; Bo Bo, "Raising Xenophobic Socialism against a Communist Threat," 189.

Decolonisation in South and Southeast Asian Studies

The thrust of much recent historical study into decolonisation has been in the direction of assessing its cultural and social aspects alongside its political and economic ones. For some decades, metropolitan study of decolonisation attended primarily to the reasons for colonial withdrawal.²⁹ Meanwhile, study of decolonisation in formerly colonised countries themselves tended to present a narrative whereby a narrow sub-set of heroic freedom fighters ousted colonial overlords, founded the nation, and shaped its early postcolonial history in their image.³⁰ Within each of these categories, there were several gradations – metropolitan historiography included studies focussed on one empire as well as comparative approaches, for example, while historiography in formerly colonised countries varies in tenor, argument, and approach depending on the country or region concerned.³¹ However, these historiographies were largely different sides of the same coin, treating the colonial encounter as a two-way street counterposing the colonial power against leading anti-imperial elites, and presenting decolonisation as if it were a simple handover of that power with consequences for both sides, and for the international order, which came to be structured by the Cold War and by nation-states more than by empires.

A microcosm of this can be seen in the debate in South Asian studies between the Cambridge and ‘subaltern studies’ historiographical schools. Historians of the 1960s ‘Cambridge School’, assessing the dynamics of Indian nationalist struggles, asserted that well-placed Indian elites, moved by narrow material self-interest, capitalised on limited opportunities for self-rule tendered by the British in areas such as the civil service and gradually eroded the legitimacy of British rule in this way.³² Young Indian scholars challenged this narrative, proposing that nationalism had been a coherent struggle for freedom from imperialism in which major anti-colonial leaders such as Nehru and Gandhi took centre stage. A more sophisticated take on the topic emerged in the 1980s with the ascendancy of the ‘subaltern studies’ school of historians, who viewed ‘subaltern’ – or non-elite, such as peasants and women and lower castes – groups as occupying their own domain of consciousness distinct from those of elites.³³ The school later came to be sceptical

²⁹ Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation*; McIntyre, *British Decolonization*.

³⁰ A.G. Hopkins, “Rethinking Decolonization,” 214.

³¹ Betts, *Decolonization*; Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization*; Shipway, *Decolonization and Its Impact*.

³² Gallagher and Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” 1–15; Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*; Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics*.

³³ Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*; Amin, “Gandhi as Mahatma,” 1–61; Chakrabarty, “Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography,” 9–17.

about the extent to which subalterns and their consciousness could be represented or spoken for through the archival record.³⁴ Despite their profound differences, both the Cambridge and subaltern studies schools assessed colonialism as an encounter unfolding primarily within one particular empire or emerging nation. Similar debates played out in Southeast Asian studies, where anthropologist James Scott proposed that anti-colonial revolutions sprang from an insurgent peasantry's moral economy, and others countered that 'nationalism' comprised a struggle between interest groups for power within given colonial systems.³⁵

Much of this scholarship could be termed teleological; it focussed on nationalist mobilisations which eventuated in the overthrow of colonialism, the achievement of independence, and the forging of a nation-state. This tendency towards teleology has found itself replicated in the work of 'area studies' scholars in the same decades. The emergence of 'area studies' scholarship, which is associated with the compartmentalisation of South and Southeast Asia as objects of study, related to American interest in how decolonisation might affect the world order in the context of Cold War concerns about communism. It spawned the advent of modernisation theories with which Western researchers attempted to delineate how recently independent countries might achieve levels of political and economic development similar to those of the United States and northern Europe.³⁶ Although there were shifts in approaches to, funding for, and models of area studies across the second half of the twentieth century, which broadly correlated with developments in the Cold War, area studies works tended to be bounded and teleological in nature, centring processes that unfolded in particular nations or regions. Southeast Asian studies was critiqued in the 1990s for its inability to account for the 'borderless worlds' of people, capital, and diasporic communities, although this changed again in the 2000s with growing suspicion of those who had pronounced the 'end of history' a few years earlier in the face of the collapse of the Soviet Union and ascendancy of capitalist globalisation.³⁷

In the last 15 to 20 years, historians as well as scholars of literature, political scientists, and anthropologists among others have moved towards a view of decolonisation as a process unfolding on several scales – imperial, national, and international – which involved many different actors beyond prominent colonial and nationalist elites.³⁸ New work on Asian and African societies between the 1930s

³⁴ Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 271–313.

³⁵ Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*; Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*; Ludden, *Reading Subaltern Studies*, 7.

³⁶ Szanton, *The Politics of Knowledge*, 10.

³⁷ Fukuyama, *End of History*; Chou and Houben, *Southeast Asian Studies*, 8.

³⁸ Milford, "Zoom In, Zoom Out, Change Lens," 10.1353/cch.2017.0026.

and 1960s emphasised how actors ranging from labourers to students to urbane businessmen had a stake in decolonisation, embarking on cultural and political trajectories on local scales, which interpenetrated but were not coterminous with nationalist trends and policy-making.³⁹ The cumulative effect of these developments on historians has been to impress upon them, as scholar of French West Africa Frederick Cooper put it, that decolonisation should not be reduced to ‘a singular phenomenon with certain determinant effects’, even if it was still ‘something that happened’ with particular consequences.⁴⁰ A recent compendium on the global history of decolonisation combines local, regional, imperial, and international levels of analysis, suggesting that decolonisation touched politics, economies, and cultures across these scales, whilst also shifting ‘the normative foundations of the international community’.⁴¹

There has been a proliferation of historical interest in postcolonial South Asia in recent years. In regard to India and Pakistan, key works attend to themes of partition, nation-building, border-making, identity, citizenship, and cultural diplomacy among others.⁴² There is growing interest in similar themes in Southeast Asian studies, though more so in relation to Indonesia than Burma – the latter of which is typically designated part of Southeast rather than South Asia.⁴³ It is perhaps the case that Burma’s seeming insignificance in the Cold War as compared with India and Indonesia comparatively diminished interest in the country’s postcolonial experience. Whilst the growing interest in parts of postcolonial South and Southeast Asia is welcome, relevant studies still centre around the actions and initiatives of a small number of governing elites. Major political parties and intellectuals in their day which figure frequently in this study only appear on the sidelines of landmark works about nation- and state-building in each country – particularly concerning India and Indonesia.⁴⁴ Copious biographies have been produced on the first Prime Minister of India, Nehru, and the first President of Indonesia, Sukarno, which contemplate their upbringings, intellectual and political awakenings, and actions

³⁹ Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*; James Le Sueur, *The Decolonization Reader*; Duara, *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then*; Bogaerts and Raben, *Beyond Empire and Nation*.

⁴⁰ Cooper, “Decolonization and Citizenship,” 64.

⁴¹ Jansen and Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A Short History*, ix.

⁴² Daiya, *Violent Belongings*; Zamindar, *The Long Partition*; Guha, *India After Gandhi*; Khan, *The Great Partition*; Leake and Haines, “Lines of (In)Convenience: Sovereignty and Border-Making,” 963–985; Ansari and Gould, *Boundaries of Belonging*.

⁴³ Day and Liem, *Cultures at War*; Knörr, *Creole Identity in Postcolonial Indonesia*; Berenschot, Schulte Nordholt and Bakker, *Citizenship and Democratization in Southeast Asia*; Min Ye Paing Hein, “Fighting in the Dark,” 189–216; van Klinken, *Postcolonial Citizenship in Provincial Indonesia*.

⁴⁴ In Burma, as Chapter I lays out in more detail, major socialists assessed in this monograph were part of the government(s). Nevertheless, they too have attracted little attention, perhaps less than the first Burmese Prime Minister U Nu. Kipgen, “Political Change in Burma,” 48–55.

as governors.⁴⁵ Some works have begun to problematise the myths associated with these leaders.⁴⁶

Historians of India and Indonesia have made attempts to assess contending postcolonial visions to those tendered by the aforementioned leaders. They have rightly emphasised how such visions took shape outside yet simultaneously within the nation – in the sense that actors independently forged political agendas that could never entirely escape, and indeed came to reciprocally influence and be influenced by, the course of mainstream postcolonial nationalism. For example, Kevin Fogg has produced important studies into Islamic and socialist trends within Indonesian nationalism.⁴⁷ He demonstrates how neglected actors contributed strongly to domestic revolutionary struggles whilst borrowing from transnational intellectual roots.⁴⁸ This is a point of concurrence with scholars of decolonisation in India, who are finding that rival political actors to mainstream nationalists drew on diverse global intellectual resources in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁹ For example, Lydia Walker has written an article about Indian socialist JP which argues that JP ‘presented a non-statist critique of postcolonial state sovereignty’ marshalling concepts from the ‘Anglophone international peace movement’ of which he was a member.⁵⁰ Her article is notable because it highlights how actors at the margins of the postcolonial state articulated their own notions of how decolonisation should unfold at a regional level which could contrast sharply with those of major state actors. It also captures how such actors scoured their international political networks to find intellectual support in this venture.

Besides these attempts to expand our understanding of the sophistication of decolonisation in particular countries, there have also been attempts to situate decolonisation across South and Southeast Asia in a unified framework. Gyan Prakash, Michael Laffan, and Nikhil Menon have edited a volume which highlights how colonialism shaped postcolonial projects in India, Indonesia, and Burma among other countries. It distinguishes a ‘postcolonial moment...punctuated by vulnerability, uncertainty, anxiety, and violence’, extending from the end of the Second World War into the mid-1960s. While it attends primarily to actors who

⁴⁵ Legge, *Sukarno*; Pandey, *Nehru*; Brown, *Nehru*; Zachariah, *Nehru*; L.J. Giebels, *Sukarno: A Biography*; Purdey and Mietzner, “The Sukarno Dynasty in Indonesia,” 355–368.

⁴⁶ Sherman, *Nehru’s India: A History in Seven Myths*.

⁴⁷ Fogg, *Indonesia’s Islamic Revolution*; Fogg, “Indonesian Socialism of the 1950s,” 465–482.

⁴⁸ Fogg, “Indonesian Islamic Socialism and its South Asian Roots,” 1736–1761.

⁴⁹ Sherman, “A Gandhian Answer to the Threat of Communism?” 249–270; Sherman, “‘A New Type of Revolution’: Socialist Thought in India,” 485–504; Walker, “Decolonization in the 1960s,” 227–264; Siegel, “The Global Imaginaries of Indian Development,” 1175–1204; Balasubramanian, *Toward a Free Economy: Swatantra*.

⁵⁰ Walker, “Narayan and the Politics of Reconciliation,” 149–150.

were involved in state-building projects in these countries, it importantly identifies how a 'conscious sense of novelty, of trying to bring newness into the political world' moved South and Southeast Asian radicals in this period.⁵¹ This sense of novelty also linked non-state actors across South and Southeast Asia who crafted their own postcolonial projects outlining what ideal social orders might look like at this time. A critique which might be levelled against the aforementioned volume as well as the articles referenced on the previous page is that the notion of internationalism receives little or no hearing. The works tend to portray anti-imperial actors as having been singularly concerned with realising a particular agenda for the development and flourishing of given nation-states.

This relative absence of considerations of the post-war internationalism of Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian anti-imperialists can be attributed to the fact that South and Southeast Asianists chiefly account for post-Second World War decolonisation as a state-building process, to be assessed and explained within familiar national contours. For example, Lydia Walker makes reference to JP's international connections when and where he utilised them to advance arguments about decolonisation in India. This approach perceptively captures transnational dimensions of Indian decolonisation, but does not place the internationalism of individuals such as JP in full relief. Walker describes JP as both 'an Indian patriot and an internationalist cosmopolitan', which is suggestive of an understanding of internationalism that pairs it with nationalism as a commitment, ultimately, to furthering the causes and reputation of a specific nation-state in a global order composed of such.⁵² This has been a common view within South Asian studies in particular of what 'internationalism' consists in, although Manu Bhagavan has contested it.⁵³ It impedes study of international networks and connections in the 1950s and 1960s that were more iconoclastic in political orientation. The next section assesses how scholars of the international history of the 'Third World', Afro-Asianism, and the Cold War have understood nationalism and internationalism, and tries to articulate how a more expansive understanding of the global dimensions of decolonisation in the 1950s is necessary to interpret some of the themes explored in this monograph.

⁵¹ Prakash, Menon and Laffan, *The Postcolonial Moment in South and Southeast Asia*, 13–17.

⁵² Walker, "Jayaprakash Narayan and the Politics of Reconciliation," 150.

⁵³ For a conversation between Partha Chatterjee, a leading advocate of this view of internationalism within South Asian studies, and Manu Bhagavan, an author who has shown how Nehru articulated a radical vision of 'One World' which conflicted with the notion of the nation-state as the endpoint of decolonisation, see Chatterjee, "Some Observations from Modern Indian History," 320–334; Bhagavan, "Reflections on Indian Internationalism," 220–225.

Third Worldism, Afro-Asianism, and the Cold War

Historians of decolonisation and anti-imperialism have long since highlighted the ‘Third World’ movement as a crucial juncture at which postcolonial nationalists began to articulate a new internationalism.⁵⁴ ‘Third World’ was a designation originally coined by French historian Alfred Sauvy in the early 1950s to refer to predominantly African and Asian countries outside of the power blocs of the Cold War that came together first at the Bandung Conference of April 1955, and later – according to the mythology – in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of the 1960s. There is some suggestion that the term should have been translated as ‘Third Force’ to emphasise more concretely a geopolitical entity distinct from the Western and Eastern blocs.⁵⁵ Today, the ‘Third World’ is still broadly seen by historians as having comprised an ideology or project, launched by governing statesmen in Africa and Asia in the mid-1950s, seeking liberation for the peoples of formerly colonised regions of the globe from the shackles of imperial control, as well as from Cold War meddling with their hard-earned right to self-determination.⁵⁶ Despite the myths that have continued to replicate themselves in the historiography of the ‘Third World’ movement since, a number of important state leaders did gather at Bandung and initiate solidarities which affected the course of decolonisation and the Cold War overall. These solidarities, as Naoko Shimazu has shown in relation to the choreography of Bandung, were somewhat performative, rather than being constructed across space and place at considerable personal risk, such as those non-state solidarities considered in this monograph.⁵⁷

Foundational works on Third World history are centrally focussed on a narrow cast of actors. These works view decolonisation as an exercise in safeguarding sovereignty, building resilient nation-states, and creating an international order suitable to these purposes, and revolve around a familiar set of nationalists who attempted this. They presume a sharp binary between the heady anti-imperial internationalisms of the interwar era and a more muscular, singular postcolonial internationalism. For example, Vijay Prashad, considering the emergence of the notion of a ‘Third World’ in the 1950s, references how Nehru gave a speech to the Indian parliament in 1958 iterating ‘main points of the Third World platform’ such as ‘political independence, nonviolent international relations, and the cultivation

⁵⁴ Jansen, *Non-Alignment and the Afro-Asian States*; Kimche, *The Afro-Asian Movement*.

⁵⁵ Smith, *Understanding Third World Politics*, 12.

⁵⁶ Prashad, *The Darker Nations*.

⁵⁷ Vitalis, “The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah,” 261–288; Shimazu, “Diplomacy As Theatre,” 225–252; Phạm and Shilliam, *Meanings of Bandung*.

of the UN as the principle institution for planetary justice'.⁵⁸ Prashad, like other writers about the Third World, identifies the Bandung Conference as a key moment when these leaders joined forces to articulate and promulgate their internationalism.⁵⁹ A voluminous literature has grown up around this conference, in terms of how it was staged, the proceedings themselves, what the shared political platform, if any, consisted in, and what the repercussions were for international order.⁶⁰ Bandung, though, was just one manifestation of an anti-imperial drive to rebalance global politics at this time. Many non-state actors formulated their own internationalisms, which did not necessarily bear a filial resemblance to those of prominent Third World nationalists.

There is a general consensus among students of twentieth-century international history that interwar internationalisms were characterised by a deal of political openness and experimentation where post-war ones were more ideological and restricted. After what Erez Manela terms the 'Wilsonian Moment', when African and Asian nationalists ventured with little success to appropriate United States President Woodrow Wilson's language of self-determination for their own ends at the close of the First World War, it is considered that these nationalists initiated a search for other liberatory visions including communism but also non-secular alternatives.⁶¹ In fact, these searches were already underway; aspirations towards self-determination were widespread in Asia and Africa from the 1910s onwards. There is much work, not least by South and Southeast Asianists, investigating the vigour and dynamism of interwar internationalisms. These internationalisms were threaded through the lives of itinerant anti-imperialists and the webs of friends and contacts they honed.⁶² Some studies of decolonisation and anti-imperialism in the *longue durée* begin with major conferences of this era such as the Brussels Conference of the League against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression in 1927, and link these meetings ultimately to the 'Third Worldism' of the post-Second World War era, seeing the former meetings as more exploratory and the latter as more focussed on defining a coherent political agenda for the Third World.⁶³

The general bifurcation which these studies suggest between a fluid, circumstantial, and contingent interwar anti-imperial internationalism and a declaratory,

⁵⁸ Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 31–50.

⁶⁰ Mackie, *Bandung 1955*; Tan and Acharya, *Bandung Revisited*; Lee, *Making a World after Empire*; Shimazu, "Diplomacy As Theatre," 225–252.

⁶¹ Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

⁶² Goswami, "Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms," 1461–1485; Ali Raza, Roy and Zachariah, *The Internationalist Moment*; Raza, *Revolutionary Pasts*; Harper, *Underground Asia*.

⁶³ Prashad, *The Darker Nations*; Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 250–278; Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement*.

statist post-war counterpart is questionable. The studies typically suppose that African and Asian investments in self-determination translated seamlessly into the state-building projects and platforms of various Third World leaders in these decades, and into an attempt to articulate clearly a project or ideology for safeguarding and advancing Afro-Asian self-determination at a time of Cold War violence and sabre-rattling that manifested in the Bandung Conference, when actually there were many contending ‘Third Worldisms’ which did not resemble this muscular, nationalist one. It is notable that, amid the aforementioned scales of decolonisation which scholars of international history investigate – local or imperial, national, and international, as enumerated by Jan Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel – there is no place for the transnational, trans-local, or trans-regional.⁶⁴ Studies of cross-border flows of ideas, practices, and materials have become increasingly important to sundry fields of historical enterprise in recent decades, and yet they have rarely featured in historiography on post-Second World War decolonisation, except in relation to diaspora.⁶⁵

This picture is changing with fresh work on transnational Afro-Asianisms in the 1950s and 1960s which proposes instead that there were multiple ‘Third Worldisms’. This work typically views Third Worldism or Afro-Asianism as having consisted in a plethora of progressive visions of regional and global restructuring that non-state actors drove forward through avid cross-border networking.⁶⁶ The work increasingly highlights the prominent contributions of women to this fervid Afro-Asian moment where traditional Third World scholarship was attendant to male state leaders.⁶⁷ It aligns with accounts of the global or cultural Cold War that ‘de-centre’ their analytical lenses to bring to the fore the encounters and experiences of African and Asian activists, writers, and journalists.⁶⁸ Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake have recently argued that decolonisation and the Cold War were not ‘isolated, parallel phenomena’, but ‘a broader moment of intertwined, if sometimes paradoxical, local and global change’ for cultural and political actors

⁶⁴ Jansen and Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A Short History*, ix.

⁶⁵ Matera, *Black London*; Manela and Streets-Salter, *The Anticolonial Transnational*.

⁶⁶ Stolte and Lewis, *The Lives of Cold War Afro-Asianism*; Prakash and Adelman, *Inventing the Third World*; Vivekanandan, “Indian Strategizing in the Age of Transnational Solidarities,” <https://doi.org/10.1177/23210230241235732>.

⁶⁷ Baldinetti and Biondi, “Unfolding Transnational Female Networks,” <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096231179657>; Lewis, “Women, Hospitality and The Intimate Politics of International Socialism,” 242–280.

⁶⁸ Vu and Wongsurawat, *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia*; Ostermann and Goscha, *Connecting Histories*; Hecht, *Entangled Geographies*; Mooney and Lanza, *De-Centering Cold War History*; Misković, Fischer-Tiné and Boškovska, *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War*; Zhou, *China, Indonesia, and the Cold War*.

across Africa and Asia and beyond.⁶⁹ There remains a tendency in some such acts of methodological ‘de-centring’ to designate ideas according to one of several familiar ideological labels such as nationalist, capitalist, or communist. There were substantial differences between and across the 1950s and 1960s in terms of the political possibilities that individual actors sensed, which can be lost when they are viewed as an era.

This monograph agrees that capitalist-communist ideological competition had a profound effect on post-war Asian political cultures. However, it considers that there is a lacuna in studies of such cultures for assessments of internationalisms which forged new imaginaries of regional and world futures. South and Southeast Asian non-state socialists evolved notions of imminent futures which were as much shaped by existing ideals, mediated through specific moments or senses of political possibility, as by Cold War ideological struggle. Certainly, Asian and African politicians and intellectuals who disliked communism, capitalism, and the statist course of mainstream postcolonial nationalisms, cleaved towards democratic socialisms as a corrective – but this tendency was exacerbated from the mid-1950s with the increasing centrality of the Cold War to the international system. Historians disagree about exactly when the Cold War – taken in its propensity as a bifurcating ideological contest – went global, but suggest that this happened ‘sometime after 1950’.⁷⁰ By bringing close attention to non-state actors who pursued agendas not easily reducible to inter-state rivalries or geopolitics, this monograph is able to shine light on this question. If, as the monograph intimates, Afro-Asian non-state socialisms were a form of escape – as imaginaries surely must be – from prevailing political options, then their progressive subsumption under a wave of slights and sloganeering is suggestive of when Cold War ideologies did become pervasive.

The field of new international history, which has nourished many works about decolonisation and the cultural and global Cold Wars, understands decolonisation narrowly as a struggle for national independence and sovereignty waged by elites who were fascinated by ideas of modernisation and development. Scholars of post-war Afro-Asian internationalisms move forward from this. They focus centrally on what Su Lin Lewis terms an ‘arc of conferences of the post-colonial era’ that have been neglected as against extensive studies of the Bandung Conference, where given actors tended to meet, fraternise, and express their shared political hopes and aspirations.⁷¹ Anti-imperialists had been gathering at conferences to exchange notes on regional and international politics since the 1920s, and this extended into the post-war period at sites – one being Rangoon in Burma – that are

⁶⁹ James and Leake, *Decolonization and the Cold War*, 2.

⁷⁰ Jansen and Osterhammel, *Decolonization: A Short History*, 21.

⁷¹ Lewis, “Asian Socialism,” 60.

not typically considered constitutive of Third Worldist sentiment or strategising.⁷² These conferences were largely non-state affairs, even if organisers may have leant on their connections in government circles to bring them about or to suss out the favourability of such figures to the associated agendas. They spoke to a common sense of political excitement and opportunity among freedom fighters and citizens of formerly colonised countries at the prospect of moulding their own futures. As Rachel Leow, a member of the aforementioned research collective, has perspicaciously demonstrated, emotion was crucial in fostering the Afro-Asian internationalisms of this period; popular investments in ideas of ‘peace’, for example, were deeply felt, rather than simply being arrived at philosophically or ideologically.⁷³

Work in this oeuvre is beginning to track the life histories of interlocutors between major conferences, including assessing the tensions that existed within their networks, not just the agreement.⁷⁴ This monograph takes scholarship on Afro-Asian internationalisms further through the detailed tracking of inter-conference lives: the meetings, trips, visits, acquaintanceships, and correspondence that sustained the affinities that made Lewis’ ‘arc of conferences’ possible. At this time, the space between state and non-state was populated by a host of private transnational organisations ranging from overtly political bodies such as the SI to ostensibly non-political trade union bodies such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) or the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), each of which had a leaning in the Cold War. These organisations are the stuff of what Erez Manela has usefully termed ‘international society’.⁷⁵ African and Asian activists drew on the expertise and resources of these bodies and the events and individuals associated with them to pad out their global contact books and make the conduct of long-distance journeys and tours easier.⁷⁶ Fashioning new international networks and connections was a necessarily messy and opportunistic affair. The Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, by focussing mostly on particular conferences, has arguably overstated the extent to which the non-state anti-imperial activisms of this period were specifically Afro-Asian in provenance; in many cases, they were as international or global as they were Afro-Asian, frequently requiring collaborations with European and Israeli contacts and institutions among others.

⁷² Louro, *The League Against Imperialism*.

⁷³ Leow, “The Emotional Making of Third World Internationalism,” 21–53.

⁷⁴ Utama, “A Forgotten Bandung,” 213–240.

⁷⁵ Manela, “International Society as a Historical Subject,” 184–209.

⁷⁶ James, “Dialogues of Decolonization between the Caribbean and West Africa,” 378–401.

Socialist Internationalism in Southern Asia

This monograph chronicles the emergence, flourishing, and evanescence of specifically South and Southeast Asian socialist internationalisms in a post-Second World War moment of worldmaking fervour. Nascent research into various domestic socialisms, socialist internationalism, and global social-democratic networks, has pointed towards Afro-Asia as an engine room of fresh leftist political visions in the 1950s and 1960s. However, few such works track the individuals who carved out practical and intellectual spaces for the exploration of such visions across a prolonged period. This is due to the erstwhile pervasive historiographical presumption that itinerant and exploratory internationalisms were a thing of the interwar period, crowding out interest in similar phenomena from the late 1940s. Innovative forays such as that of Elisabeth Armstrong into the travels and travails of Southeast and East Asian feminists whose socialist praxes have been neglected are often confined to a certain moment or conference.⁷⁷ In other cases, scholars have invaluable demonstrated the artistic and cultural forms through which leftist South Asians registered their iconoclastic politics over several decades.⁷⁸ The present volume emphasises how postcolonial South and Southeast Asian actors crafted socialisms which were at once distinct from, but bound up with, mainstream political trends. This emphasis breaks down the dichotomy which such studies of post-war Asian left-wing internationalisms imply between modernisers and technocrats on the one hand, and radical dissidents on the other.

Talbot Imlay has written an account of socialist internationalism generally whose presumptions and frameworks he exports to Asia with the onset of decolonisation in the mid-twentieth century. The final chapter of his book *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism* seeks to examine the significance of decolonisation for international socialist prospects. This necessitates introducing new, Asian socialist actors into his study, which Imlay does sparingly. Imlay outlines at the beginning of the work that he regards socialism as a 'European phenomenon, even if its influence extended beyond Europe', and identifies socialist internationalism as a practice of consultation between left-wing political parties on regional and global issues.⁷⁹ Operating with this understanding of socialism and socialist internationalism, Imlay is forced to view South and Southeast Asian socialists as, at best, partners in the enterprise of international socialism, or inheritors of its traditions, rather than as actors capable of forging their own notions of socialism and internationalism. This is arguably the mistake that the final chapter of his book, as well as separate

⁷⁷ Armstrong, *Bury the Corpse of Colonialism*.

⁷⁸ Sunderason and Hoek, *Forms of the Left*.

⁷⁹ Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism*, 1–20.

articles on the topic, make; they propose that given figures formed the ASC to make a mundane process of inter-party consultation on matters of policy easier, and that they became embroiled in debates with European socialists about whether supporting nationalism or ‘minority rights’ – the individual rights of those who did not want to be part of new nation-states – was more important in addressing anti-imperial struggles.⁸⁰

This monograph proposes by contrast that the socialism of the ASC was capacious and primarily anti-imperial in provenance. When Asian and African socialists used this term, it tended to convey a future social and political order, both regionally and globally, that was highly egalitarian and democratic, and which had dispensed with imperialism and the hierarchies, domination, and exploitation characteristic of it. The individuals assessed in this monograph had begun deploying the term some decades earlier during interwar anti-imperial agitations to designate this amorphous egalitarian and democratic future, and on achieving independence, they attempted to give it clearer definition. Its definition or postulates were not only to be explored in theoretical discussions, but to be discussed and discerned in practice. This practice was not simply the practice of inter-party consultation – although this mattered – but a process of negotiation and experimentation worked out by South and Southeast Asian socialist intermediaries on the ground. While leading figures such as JP and others created the links between parties that enabled the ASC to come into being, more junior colleagues in each party ventured to West Asia, Europe, and Africa to identify contacts conducive to their mutable socialist message, and observe and participate in constructive projects in countries such as Yugoslavia that helped them determine what the socialisms of the future might look like.

The fact that the monograph addresses Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialisms simultaneously distinguishes it from various articles and theses on different countries’ contributions to the ASC.⁸¹ These articles and theses provide fertile insights into Burmese, Indonesian, and Japanese socialisms in the 1950s. This monograph, through bringing South and Southeast Asian socialist actors together into one account, divines wider trends such as the significance of decolonisation in unleashing fresh waves of leftist ideas from southern Asia, the essential role of itinerant junior party members or ‘socialist intermediaries’ in bringing Asian socialist networks together, and common responses to rival ‘Third World’ and Cold War internationalisms. The monograph also draws on Su Lin Lewis, who has written an insightful account of the South and Southeast Asian socialist interlude

⁸⁰ Imlay, “International Socialism and Decolonization during the 1950s,” 1105–1132; Imlay, “Defining Asian Socialism,” 415–441.

⁸¹ Win, “Burma Socialist Party”; Niwandhono, “The Making of Modern Indonesian Intellectuals”; Kanda, “The Japan Socialist Party’s role in the Asian Socialist Conference in the 1950s.”

in post-war international history. Lewis situates her account against the backdrop of the ‘messy and divisive realm of post-colonial politics’ wherein Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian socialists sought to distinguish themselves from other trends.⁸² She contends that these groupings were ‘first and foremost concerned with outlining the ideal character of the post-colonial state’ through the ASC, and demonstrates how they promulgated ideas of the ‘welfare state as a basis of social security, along with a protection of democratic rights’ as a model for postcolonial futures.⁸³ She is perceptive in seeing that South and Southeast Asian socialists set out distinctive internationalist agendas at major conferences which differed from those of rival politicians in their own countries, as well as from those of European socialists.

This monograph borrows, but also departs, from Lewis’ account in several ways. Lewis views the ASC as an alternate, more non-state form of ‘Third World solidarity’ to Bandung.⁸⁴ She notes that prominent figures within the ASC largely led rival parties to those of the Bandung statesmen, and thus identifies Asian socialism as a dissonant note within a wider Afro-Asian internationalist register that also included Bandung. She considers Asian socialism to have typified the manifold ‘South-South’ internationalisms that took shape in this era.⁸⁵ This monograph argues that South and Southeast Asian socialists were international actors as well as Afro-Asian ones who wanted to radicalise political futures generally, even if from Global South regions in the first instance. They experienced the immediate post-Second World War years not simply as a phase in which they needed to agree on notions of how to arrange a postcolonial state, but as a moment rife with possibilities for remaking global as well as regional orders. Lewis tends to agree that their internationalism had such propensities, but this monograph definitively elicits their worldmaking enthusiasms. It closely follows how lesser-known Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian intermediaries honed anti-imperial socialist internationalisms between and beyond major conferences. This emphasises that the internationalisms that swirled around and suffused the ASC were as pragmatic as they were ideological, and as practiced – and negotiated – as they were thought.

The monograph brings Asia to the heart of our accounts of the international intellectual history of the 1950s. Gary Wilder and Adom Getachew have recently written important critical works about the intellectual history of decolonisation from African vantage points. Wilder focusses on a number of French and Antillean thinkers who extracted from their ‘immanent critiques of colonialism *and* republicanism’ intellectual resources for the construction of an alternate future ‘through

⁸² Lewis, “Asian Socialism,” 61.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸⁵ Lewis, “Decolonising the History of Internationalism,” <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440123000233>.

which they hoped to transcend the very idea of France, remake the world, and inaugurate a new epoch of human history'.⁸⁶ Wilder critiques historians for treating decolonisation 'as a series of dyadic encounters between imperial states and colonized peoples', attributing this view to a 'postwar logic that reduced colonial emancipation to national liberation', and arguing instead that 'decolonisation was an epochal process of global restructuring that unfolded on a vast political terrain inhabited by diverse actors and agencies'.⁸⁷ Most usefully, the book brings the opinions and arguments of its key interlocutors into the foreground, allowing the reader to appreciate the perspectives of the authors of this radical project. Wilder emphasises that utopianism was a signal feature of anti-imperial strategising for many such intellectuals in the post-war period, and did not necessarily sit easily with the notion of the nation-state as the endpoint of decolonisation. The book develops a sophisticated account of utopianism, proposing that it was in fact closely paired with pragmatism, and extensively profiles how given thinkers devoured different political and intellectual traditions to make arguments at what they regarded as opportune global moments for radical change.

Adom Getachew similarly tracks the attempts of, in her case, black anglophone critics of colonialism, to launch a 'worldmaking' project with the fall of imperialism which would create a 'domination-free and egalitarian international order'.⁸⁸ Her book is rooted in a comprehensive account of the history of empire, which considers alien rule to have manifested in international structures of unequal integration and racial hierarchy that anticolonial nationalists sought to dismantle.⁸⁹ From the 1930s, anticolonial thinkers such as George Padmore and CLR James identified that an oppressive international system required a coordinated international anti-imperial response, and they began working up a notion of self-determination which involved supplanting enslavement for democratic, developmental, and redistributive visions of the global future.⁹⁰ Getachew traces various shifts in anti-colonial thinking about how to achieve such futures which often alighted on one or another form of federalism or decentralisation to disperse power and disrupt structures of external domination. For our purposes, the key findings of Getachew's work, in common with Wilder's, are that decolonisation invited deep political soul-searching among anti-imperialists who often viewed radical global change as being concomitant with self-determination. To understand what internationalist politics individual activists envisioned during decolonisation, focussing centrally

⁸⁶ Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

⁸⁸ Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 67–84.

on their words and actions is key, whilst being mindful of the regional and world events and contexts that shaped these.

This monograph differs from Wilder and Getachew in de-emphasising ideas themselves and bringing to the fore themes of communicability, mobility, and contingency. Much work on federal and cosmopolitan alternatives to Empire and nationalism between the 1930s and 1960s homes in on ideas or intellectual traditions as repositories of dissent, and highlights consensus within particular activist worlds. The works of Wilder and Getachew would seem to suggest that advocacy of radical visions of regional and global political change requires unity among a close-knit set of thinkers about what the precise nature of the problem with existing constitutional arrangements is, and detailed agreement about an alternate arrangement that might promote their desired ends. This monograph agrees with both that a significant swathe of anti-imperialists during decolonisation pursued the construction of equalitarian and democratic futures that cannot necessarily be classed as nationalist. However, it finds that South and Southeast Asian socialists pursued their desired futures by means of practical engagements following basic agreement on generalised political ideals, rather than pursuing detailed intellectual consensus on the nature of imperialism first. As we will see, this was sometimes problematic; key intermediaries breezed over disagreements about the involvement of Israel in Asian socialist networks, among other tensions that need not have been so latent with a clearer theorisation of exactly how imperialism manifested. The making of 1950s anti-colonialism by non-state actors was a necessarily messy affair, especially where its brokers exchanged amorphous notions of an imminent socialist tomorrow.

There are a handful of works on cosmopolitanism and federalism in 1930s–1960s South and Southeast Asia.⁹¹ The monograph does not stray into debates about republicanism or federalism in the context of early Indian, Burmese, or Indonesian postcolonial politics since its key actors – at least in their mutual dealings – did not commonly debate questions of constitutional arrangements within South and Southeast Asian states, as compared with questions of power imbalances in the international arena.⁹² This may speak to their relative privilege as against residents

⁹¹ Cooper, *Citizenship Between Empire and Nation*; Bose and Manjapra, *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones*; Lewis, *Cities in Motion*; Mantena, “Anticolonialism and Federation in Colonial India,” 36–62; Mantena and Mantena, “Introduction: Political Imaginaries at the End of Empire,” 31–35.

⁹² Merve Fejzula has cogently critiqued works on anti-imperial ‘cosmopolitanisms’ that which presume the supposedly liberal-democratic visions springing from them to have comprised alternatives to the developmentalisms that eventually took hold, and that federalism and republicanism differed fundamentally to nationalism; she suggests that both could be about procuring a particular form of postcolonial state. Fejzula, “The Cosmopolitan Historiography of Twentieth-Century Federalism,” 477–500.

of these countries who were members of national, social, or ethnic minorities, and for whom the notion of an anti-imperialism that took no stance on how much autonomy to delegate to minorities within emerging postcolonial states might have been dubious or distasteful. However, it also reiterates that they were doers as much as thinkers, seeking to initiate the conversations and collaborations that coaxed the still indistinct socialisms of the near future into being. In studying these figures, the monograph centres a different – and more non-state – type of Asian intervention in post-Second World War intellectual history to authors from Glenda Sluga to Roland Burke who have charted Asian contributions to debates unfolding in institutions of liberal international order such as the UN.⁹³ The monograph elucidates how the internationalism it assesses emerged from a particular region – in this case southern Asia – prior to manifesting in or impacting on inter-state institutions.⁹⁴

Insights contained within this monograph also bear on nascent scholarship on development in twentieth-century Asia and Africa. As described above, histories of decolonisation typically took the 1950s onwards to be an age of heavy industrialisation in the Global South – India being a case in point. Latter-day studies of development introduce diverse actors into histories of policymaking in relevant countries, while also encompassing different forms of development beyond the economic.⁹⁵ Relevantly to this monograph, there has been a confluence between historiography on development and on socialism in regard to the Global South. For example, Su Lin Lewis and Nana Osei-Opare have edited a volume that adroitly identifies how socialism could both open up new vistas in the fashion considered in this monograph, and narrow them down to concise scientific and technocratic agendas at given moments.⁹⁶ These arguments parallel those laid down in other volumes such as by Michele Di Donato and Mathieu Fulla, who propose that non-state actors intervened in discussions of development in distinctive ways through the century.⁹⁷ These works strike a collective chord on the agency that leftist networks had in creatively moulding internationalisms to serve specific political strategies, where previously internationalism had been cast as derivative of anti-colonial nationalism. This monograph provides case studies into how South and Southeast Asian socialists counterbalanced utopian and developmental notes within their internationalisms during an era when the zeitgeist of economic planning threatened to trammel more subversive notes.

⁹³ Sluga and Clavin, *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*; Burke, *Decolonization*.

⁹⁴ Davies et al., “Rethinking Transnational Activism through Regional Perspectives,” doi:10.1017/S0080440123000294.

⁹⁵ Macekura and Manela, *The Development Century: A Global History*; Immerwahr, *Thinking Small*.

⁹⁶ Lewis and Osei-Opare, *Socialism, Internationalism, and Development*.

⁹⁷ Di Donato and Fulla, *Leftist Internationalisms*.

Meanwhile, there has been important work on the labour involved in crafting post-war internationalisms from scholars of Afro-Asian networks. Carolien Stolte has revealed how trade union networks in 1950s Afro-Asia connected local actors to regional and global ones – not just through the initiatives of major transnational trade union associations, but at least as much by horizontal ties between anti-imperialists themselves.⁹⁸ Leslie James has demonstrated how mobile Trinidadian union leader McDonald Moses attempted to radically improve the lives of workers in early 1960s Nigeria through a seemingly ‘mundane’ practice of ‘daily administrivia’ characteristic of the international and nongovernmental organisations he patronised. James proposes that ‘it was in the realm of the tedious, the prosaic, and the routine where transnational dialogue was often activated as a tool for historical and social transformation’.⁹⁹ James’ article is a welcome intervention because it identifies that the labour which Afro-Asian activists underwent in threading together new transnational solidarities was generative and radical, even if it sometimes appeared repetitive. These works help pave the way for the present study, which similarly points towards the degree of menial labour involved in the making of post-Second World War South and Southeast Asian socialist internationalisms.

Arguments, Methodology, and Structure

The monograph is separated into four largely chronological chapters. It is arranged in this way so as to highlight, in Stolte’s terms, a ‘chronology of possibility’ that manifested in South and Southeast Asian socialist internationalisms between the late 1940s and late 1950s.¹⁰⁰ For politicians and intellectuals in countries which had just gained independence, the 1950s often comprised a spell of political excitement and experimentation. The monograph suggests, in tune with Stolte and against scholars such as Michael Goebel who propose that the nation-state was set in train from much earlier as *telos* of anti-imperialism, that non-state South and Southeast Asian socialists viewed the political future as open-ended for much of this decade.¹⁰¹ As Christopher Lee outlines, decolonisation broadly comprised ‘a complex dialectical intersection of competing views and claims over colonial pasts, transitional presents, and inchoate futures’.¹⁰² We need to assess how particular actors conceived of the past, the present, and the future, and of their place and agency in

⁹⁸ Stolte, “Introduction: Trade Union Networks,” 331.

⁹⁹ James, “Dialogues of Decolonization between the Caribbean and West Africa,” 378–401.

¹⁰⁰ Stolte, “Trade Union Networks,” 332.

¹⁰¹ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 250–278.

¹⁰² Lee, *Making a World after Empire*, 8.

foreclosing some pasts and prompting other futures, before presuming a narrow anti-imperialism predicated on nationalist goals. This monograph innovatively surveys how a particular network of Asian socialist internationalists conceived of local and global pasts, presents, and futures in their mutual dealings, and of how they conceived of and attempted to inhibit or press forth possibilities at different times *within* the 1950s. This is what is meant by a ‘chronology of possibility’ on Stolte’s terms.

Chapter I, ‘Beginnings’, introduces a number of Indian, Burmese, and Indonesian actors who feature centrally throughout the monograph. These figures, who occupied senior positions within various domestic socialist parties, considered the achievement of independence in large parts of South and Southeast Asia in the late 1940s to carry potentially epochal implications. ‘Socialism’ seemed, to them, to beg the formation of more egalitarian and democratic social orders at home and a more just international order – and they sensed that closer solidarities between one another at a foundational moment in global history might constitute the beginnings of such a transition, regionally and internationally. The chapter familiarises us with the individuals who exchanged letters, travelled to meet likeminded thinkers, and organised early meetings to discuss and explore these amorphous, but invigorating possibilities. It ties together the knots linking these individuals with an account of the inaugural ASC congress in Rangoon in January 1953, where they and many contacts met for extended conversations and often grew politically and personally closer, notwithstanding significant disagreements.

Chapter II, ‘Solidarities’, reviews a period in which South and Southeast Asian socialists utilised the ASC, and the funding it received from major member parties, to formulate internationalist projects oriented towards achieving the aims they had set out at Rangoon. The chapter draws on the understanding of ‘solidarity’ articulated by political geographer David Featherstone, who questions the notion that solidarities require pre-existing ideological concordance, arguing instead that they are contingent – in other words, vulnerable, or capricious – relationships fashioned across uneven geographies by widely dispersed communities of actors who seek to destabilise ‘material relations between places’.¹⁰³ The chapter highlights how a mobile set of socialist intermediaries came to the fore within the ASC following the Rangoon Conference, venturing around Africa and Asia in search of freedom fighters who supported their aspirations towards dismantling imperialism and constructing fresh social orders. It is structured around several intimate ‘bureau meetings’ at which these intermediaries formed plans as to how to achieve collective aims. Their networking was hastened by an easing up of tensions in Korea

¹⁰³ Featherstone, *Solidarity*, 16–18.

and Indochina, which gave them hope that a period of global peace might be nigh, should they succeed in promulgating a fitting internationalism quickly.

Chapter III, 'Splits', assesses how South and Southeast Asian socialists adjusted in the face of political crises. The ASC declined from the mid-1950s as parties funnelled crucial funding elsewhere. Several of these parties lost important elections at home that weakened their credibility as potential governments of the future. These developments, along with the convening of the Bandung Conference which heralded the emergence of an anti-imperial internationalism backed by powerful global leaders, diminished the political prospects of the various socialist internationalisms suffusing the ASC. The Cold War spread definitively across Asia and 'Third World' statesmen tried to resist or play the two superpowers off against one another. Leaders of socialist parties became concerned with how to orient themselves on budding Cold War or communist threats. Intriguingly, South and Southeast Asian socialism's mobile intermediaries continued to zip between countries and continents fashioning anti-colonial and leftist linkages, less concerned with the Cold War. The chapter enunciates how Asian socialist networks began to fracture along these lines, culminating in the second ASC congress of November 1956 in Bombay, where furious disagreements about events in Hungary and Egypt, and how to rank the relative dangers of communism and imperialism, derailed formal proceedings. Delegates nevertheless deepened personal bonds on the sidelines, and thrashed out shared internationalisms at events taking place in the evenings.

Chapter IV, 'Afterlives', addresses a question which is often asked of scholarship on Afro-Asian internationalisms, namely, what is the historiographical significance of studying a slew of seemingly failed utopias? The chapter emphasises how the hopes, ambitions, and alliances that the 'Asian socialist' interlude of the 1950s nurtured, shaped the political lives of key interlocutors for years afterwards, influencing other historical actors who these interlocutors ran into in the process. Domestic politics and the internationalist imaginaries that these interlocutors fashioned were a double helix; they were inextricably bound, but interlinked more closely at certain points than others. The chapter traces how leading South and Southeast Asian socialists began to adopt a 'democratic socialist' ideological position in the late 1950s which was intended to counsel their governments in what they viewed as a more noble model of state-building to the developmentalist ones being pursued. Individuals such as JP did this by plumbing their international contact books in search of sources of intellectual nourishment. Meanwhile, the chapter traces how junior South and Southeast Asian socialists continued their attempts to mould an anti-imperial world socialism. They too blended the international with the national, helping bring about various schemes for the promotion of solidarities between African and Asian youth; such schemes took place on the initiatives of various national leaders and actors – including Europeans and Israelis – but

imbibed something of the non-state, anti-imperial socialist internationalism that ASC secretaries emblematised.

Methodologically, the monograph blends networks with biography. It tracks and analyses the transnational political engagements of a core set of South and Southeast Asian socialists from the late 1940s to the late 1950s. It does this in order to emphasise how these individuals collectively forged internationalisms which expand what historians understand about post-Second World War decolonisation, Asian international history, and the global 1950s as a moment of beguiling possibility if also of urgency and anxiety. As such, the monograph introduces its key actors before discussing their chief meetings and a series of more intimate collaborations, journeys, and projects that fed into shared imaginaries. South and Southeast Asian socialist internationalisms were dexterously networked, thus the monograph shifts between Burmese, Indian, and Indonesian characters and contexts across each chapter as appropriate to tease out given imaginaries. The approach is biographical in the sense that it follows common actors for an extended period. This enables the monograph to make good on claims to emphasise the significance of studying 1950s non-state internationalisms, which not only profoundly shaped their practitioners, but touched countless other regional and global actors. Biographical research on decolonisation in South and Southeast Asia is becoming increasingly common, especially where it outlines how neglected actors conceived of and sought to shape presents and futures between the 1940s and 1970s.¹⁰⁴

This methodology approximates closely that of Tim Harper for an earlier time period. Harper's *Underground Asia* integrates household names but also little-known figures into a narrative of global anti-imperial struggle wherein itinerant individuals lurched between different political bandwagons in pursuing generalised goals. His work introduces and follows these individuals around the globe, cross-comparing their practical as well as intellectual trajectories in order to illuminate common transnational utopian sensibilities. It provides copious detail on the inner workings of such underworlds, whereby violence or censorship or simple happenstance proscribed some encounters and enabled others. Harper makes reference to how 'a sense of Asia as a field for concerted action' moved his actors as much as any more concrete ideology or philosophy.¹⁰⁵ This monograph argues that such senses moved actors with broadly comparable politics in the 1950s, and considers tracking and shifting between them in a similar vein to Harper to emphasise the point strongly. Of course, global politics had shifted, and the risks involved in transnational travel

¹⁰⁴ Ting and Blackburn, *Women in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements*; Chaturvedi, "Introduction: Writing History of the Borderlands," 307–322; Pols, *Nurturing Indonesia*; Bose, "Inheritance and the Idea of 'the East' in Banglaphone Thought in the Era of Decolonisation," 863–875.

¹⁰⁵ Harper, *Underground Asia*, 40.

were tactical rather than treacherous. For the actors studied in this monograph, passport and visa restrictions were troublesome, but they did not face show trials or imprisonment. Meanwhile, jet travel alongside advancing communication technologies compressed space and time further still than the period Harper studies, allowing actors to pursue political change on a wider plane than Asia alone.¹⁰⁶

The large bulk of the primary sources which the monograph draws on are made up of private papers and letters, socialist journals, and newspaper snippets. The author was able to uncover copious materials relating to South and Southeast Asian socialism at the Nehru Memorial Museum & Library (NMML) in New Delhi. For example, the personal collections of various Indian socialists were found to contain materials ranging well beyond just the activities of these socialists. ASC secretarial reports by Wijono have been drawn on extensively to pad out a picture of Asian socialist activities between major gatherings. The author consulted other materials including letters to and from South and Southeast Asian socialist intermediaries at the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. Volumes of Indian newspapers *Janata* and the *Times of India* were consulted at the Centre of South Asian Studies in Cambridge and online respectively, while other materials were consulted at the British Library reading room in Boston Spa, West Yorkshire. Most recently, the author perused publications associated with Indonesian socialists and liberals such as *Socialist Bulletin* and the *Times of Indonesia*, and assorted materials available through the archives of the Surakarta Press Museum, to complement *Socialist Asia* which was based in Burma. Overall, there is a slight slant towards Indian sources, which is justifiable because the NMML proved a greater treasure trove on given socialist activities and interactions than other repositories. The sources there have not been studied by scholars of the ASC and provide insights into the chronologies of possibility that South and Southeast Asian socialists overall sensed.

The nature of these sources fit with the methodology that has been outlined above. ASC institutional files as well as other documents pertaining to significant meetings of international socialists reveal common casts of characters across space and place and across a significant span of years, allowing the author to discern who major and minor figures in relevant networks were. Having discerned these networks, the author then searched for additional information on given figures. This teased out similar chronologies in the lives of many of the figures concerned in terms of the possibilities they sensed and tried to realise in their interlinked internationalisms. It was hard to identify extensive collections in Indonesia or Myanmar that added significantly to the observations derived from the aforementioned materials. Still, if lettering is taken to include personalised reflections in contemporary journals such as the Rangoon-based *Socialist Asia*, then the voices of

¹⁰⁶ Black, "The Speed of Decolonization,"; Tiemeyer, *Women and the Jet Age*.

Indonesian and Burmese actors feature throughout this monograph. A noteworthy number of sources examined in the monograph relate to conferences or to smaller-scale meetings of the ASC. While the author is seeking to shine a light on what took place between conferences, it is not advisable to avoid these conferences or the evidence they offer about relevant networks and individuals. Where the author refers at length to ASC congresses, it is to support arguments about the chronology of South and Southeast Asian socialisms in the 1950s, and point towards tensions in the networks that are harder to divine from materials relating to individuals.

The politicians examined in this monograph were mostly anglophone. This also made it easier for the author to assess the necessary materials, which were almost exclusively in English. Some less prominent activists within South and Southeast Asian socialist caucuses spoke and wrote in languages other than English, as did leading figures, occasionally. There are obvious limits to how far a research methodology predicated around English-language sources might be scalable to 1950s Afro-Asian internationalisms that were more polyglot than this variant of Asian socialism. A debate has grown up in recent years about how far global history is an elite endeavour. Jeremy Adelman terms global history an ‘Anglospheric invention to integrate the Other into a cosmopolitan narrative on our terms, in our tongues’.¹⁰⁷ Adelman here is intimating that practitioners of transnational and global history have not escaped a methodological Eurocentrism prevalent within the universities from which they hail.¹⁰⁸ This methodological Eurocentrism manifests in a diffusionist brand of writing assessing how cultural, economic, intellectual, and political trends originating in Europe universalised across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the involvement of copious ‘non-Western’ agents.¹⁰⁹ Adelman points out that many such works ‘dwell on integration and concord, rather than disintegration and discord’, as if these processes of diffusion and universalisation took place without resistance, dissent, or the formation of counter-universalisms, which many scholars are now showing was a feature of these centuries.¹¹⁰ He rightly suggests that such an enterprise appears dubious in a global present characterised by resurgent nationalisms, and not by the ever-closer forms of integration supposedly beloved of scholars of transnational and global flows.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Adelman, “What Is Global History Now?” *Aeon*, Mar 2, 2017, accessed Oct 20, 2021, <https://aeon.co/essays/is-global-history-still-possible-or-has-it-had-its-moment>.

¹⁰⁸ Greco and Schuster, “Decolonizing Global History?” 428–429.

¹⁰⁹ Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914*; Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History*; Osterhammel, *A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*; Moyn and Sartori, *Global Intellectual History*, 16.

¹¹⁰ Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia*; Aydin, “Globalizing the Intellectual History of the Idea of the “Muslim World”,” 159–186; Gopal, *Insurgent Empire*.

¹¹¹ Adelman, “What is Global History Now.”

His argument is not one which invalidates transnational and global history or the themes of connectivity, reciprocity, and mobility that they have prioritised, but invites closer scrutiny of these categories, and the tensions and frictions that accompanied them.¹¹² This monograph emerges from a branch of scholarly work which views movements of persons and ideas between and beyond specific nation-states and imperial entities as constitutive of fresh internationalisms in mid-twentieth century history. As such, it draws on the methods and insights of transnational and global history, even if it addresses scholars of international history as much as of the former fields. International history is becoming less distinguishable than before from global history because many of its practitioners now integrate the above themes into their work. The monograph challenges scholars of the international history of decolonisation, socialism, and the Cold War to be more attendant to mobilities of persons and ideas in the 1950s – specifically, to how non-state actors waged their own anti-imperial, socialist, and non-aligned struggles through complex and dizzying processes of travel, interaction, and debate. These processes comprised the multi-directional flows and movements that are the stuff of global history – and yet this monograph resists any temptation to sow Asian socialists into a universalistic world history of socialism framed around certain ideological or philosophical precepts, but instead emphasises discord, disjuncture, and contingency, as much as connection and mutuality. Global history, as a cluster of themes and methods, is arguably vital to the endeavour of getting to grips with the complexities of the modern world in that it can demonstrate phenomena both of concord and discord.

One of the novelties of what follows is that the individuals assessed are viewed as having fashioned new solidarities and print cultures in their wake, rather than as having grown closer once print media nourished common sentiments and aspirations, as per Benedict Anderson's influential notion of 'imagined communities'.¹¹³ Another reason why some reckoning with the significance of multi-directional flows and mobilities is crucial to contemporary historical study is that such a reckoning emphasises how presumptions borne through scholarship on nationalism and nation-states condition much of our wider historical understanding. That a set of individuals such as those considered in this monograph can have fashioned new imaginaries largely through the channelling of their own hopes into avid political activity, rather than through some form of print media first bringing them into contact, might seem counterintuitive. Sequences that seem intuitive to historians often seem so because much historical writing up to the present day has been written in a teleological and modernist key, conditioned, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has powerfully captured, by accounts of the histories of a handful of West European nations whose

¹¹² Drayton and Motadel, "Discussion: The Futures of Global History," 1–21.

¹¹³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

features are taken to be universal.¹¹⁴ The monograph considers – perhaps provocatively – that some Afro-Asian leftists in the 1950s hastened to ‘socialism’ in its propensity to suggest a different regional and world order to that which modernity, among whose integral symbols was the nation-state, had wrought, even if they were simultaneously bound up in this very same present. It is unsurprising that those with a political yearning for radically different social systems reach out zealously to one another, rather than first being brought into contact by print media.

Ultimately, the monograph demonstrates how an energetic set of South and Southeast Asian socialists forged wide networks of progressives and anti-imperialists at the turn of the 1950s whose common goals were to build more democratic and egalitarian social orders, and transform an imperialistic international order into a more peaceable one. It suggests that socialism appealed to many Asian and African activists who moved in ASC circles chiefly in its capacity to invoke a broadly equalitarian and participatory post-imperial future. It proposes that a distinct chronology of possibility is discernible in the interactions and campaigns of major and intermediary ASC figures through the 1950s. These points collectively capture the signal contribution of the monograph; namely, that post-Second World War South and Southeast Asia turbocharged the emergence of new socialist internationalisms onto the global intellectual scene whose vim and vigour revise our understanding of 1950s decolonisation. Itinerant non-state actors from Burma, India, and Indonesia independently forged these developments and inaugurated a fresh episode within the world history of socialism. Their trajectories after the diminution of this passage of feverish networking and exchange emphasise the importance of studying the ‘dialogical’ side to decolonisation when seeking to understand domestic politics as well.

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¹¹⁴ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

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