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“Blood is the Symbol of Afro-Asia”: Afro-Asian Imaginings of Past, Present, and Future Violence during the Bandung Era

By

Edward Yuan

Abstract

Scholars often point to the Bandung Conference as a major event in the history of decolonization. However, this perspective relies on an interstate and developmentalist reading of anticolonialism that ultimately failed with the debt crises of the 1980s, the emergence of neoliberalism, and the death of the Bandung project. This paper offers a shift in focus by exploring the grassroot networks of Afro-Asian decolonization in the Bandung era and their preoccupation with redemptive violence in order to offer a more revolutionary imagining of the Bandung Spirit and to highlight its continued relevance rather than its eventual demise.

About the author

Edward Yuan holds a BA in History from the University of British Columbia. He is particularly interested in economic and cultural histories of colonialism, decolonization, and neocolonialism. Currently, he is working on a comparative study of global deindustrialization toward the end of the 20th century, with a specific focus on Northeast China following market reforms. With this project, he hopes to shed light on the global implications of the neoliberal turn and challenge nativist narratives of the offshoring of manufacturing and resource extraction in North America.

Bandung, 1955

As 29 of the world's poorer and more racially marginalized nations gathered for the Bandung Conference in 1955, writers, revolutionaries, and statesmen hailed the beginning of a new Southern world imbued with the spirit of the mountainous Indonesian city, Bandung.[1] Driven by the revolutionary, anticolonial, and Third-Worldist hope called the Bandung Spirit that swept through Africa and Asia, decolonizing states convened numerous conferences in the 1950s and 1960s.[2] Yet by the 1980s, a combination of infighting, debt crises, and repression ended the liberation networks that propagated the Bandung Spirit. This raises the questions: What was the Bandung Spirit? Whose imaginings of it are remembered? And is it still worth remembering in a post-Bandung world? In the Bandung Era, non-state Afro-Asian networks of writers, poets, and revolutionaries conceptualized the Bandung Spirit as an ethos animated by both the colonial violence of the past as well as the redemptive potential of future anticolonial violence. These networks first used chronopolitics—the politics of time—to narrativize common histories of colonial violence and futures of anticolonial violence.

The purpose of this narrativization was to unite Afro-Asia as an imagined community in the absence of convincing cultural, geographic, or political similarities. While some colonized writers condemned revolutionary violence, others saw it as a way to reclaim their future and humanity. This grassroots conception of the Bandung Spirit, focusing on the centrality of violence in colonial history and anti-colonial struggle, stands in contrast to the moderate and developmentalist elite narratives of Bandung, and demonstrates that the Afro-Asian movement took on a life outside of state monopolization. However, scholars have criticized the Bandung paradigm's binarization of colonizer and colonized as an oversimplification of the reality of decolonization, where decolonizing states could reproduce colonial violence.[3] Despite its historical shortcomings, the Bandung Spirit retains its relevance today as a radical hope for a future free from colonial oppression, made possible only by the redemptive and violent struggles of colonized people against their colonizers.

Until recently, scholarship about the Bandung Era has failed to account for the transnational, people-centered networks that created the Bandung Spirit. Early scholarship, including the work of George McTurnan Kahin, focused on the Bandung Conference's Cold War implications and the emerging Bandung world as a geopolitical bloc, with interchangeable names like the Third World, Global South, or Afro-Asia.[4] Later, as debt crises destroyed decolonizing states and ushered in the contemporary neoliberal and neocolonial system, new histories interpreted the ephemeral nature of the Bandung Spirit as indicative of its lack of grassroots support.[5] Jeffrey Byrne argued that Third-Worldism was a framework monopolized by hypocritical political elites, while Robert Vitalis stated that the Bandung Conference did not launch a popular movement of any kind.[6] Other authors like Samir Amin and Vijay Prashad affirm the Bandung Spirit by examining it through a grand economistic lens,contrary to how it was perceived by Afro-Asian thinkers at the

time.[7] In 2018, the Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective's manifesto called on scholars on the Bandung moment to focus on “the highly mobile activists, writers, scientists, and artists of the Afro-Asian moment,” opposing the state-centered political lenses offered by early scholarship. This project answers this call by centering transnational networks of decolonization and their theories on (anti-)colonial violence. [8] will discuss the centrality of violence in the Bandung Spirit, as conceived by Richard Wright in *The Color Curtain* and the Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau (AAWB). These perspectives embody how non-state actors created and participated in networks that agitated for a vision of a new world, one which acknowledged the violence in the colonial world order and its necessity in anti-colonial struggles. This paper will first analyze how global personalities as well as decolonizing and colonial states created the space of Afro-Asia which ignored political boundaries and created a solidarity between the myriad figures travelling between the conferences of that time. Then, I will seek to explain why Afro-Asia held such an appeal as an imagined community by focusing on its shared histories of, struggles against, and even desires for violence. Finally, I will argue that Afro-Asianism’s demise is attributable to the persistence of colonial patterns of violence that prioritized “development” and its implicit colonial assumptions despite a more comprehensive future vision from Afro-Asian writers.

Creating Afro-Asia

The transnational Afro-Asian context behind Bandung brought together writers such as Richard Wright and the AAWB to perform and create two manifestations of the Bandung Spirit. These were different in their context of creation but united by a preoccupation with colonial violence. Wright was born in Mississippi and lived in Arkansas and Tennessee before moving North to pursue his career in writing. These formative experiences under Jim Crow informed Wright’s perspective on racism in the African-American context.[9] The Black America he grew up in was violent and could be seen as a form of colonization. Some poets of the AAWB did precisely that by incorporating African diasporas into their ideas of the colonized world.[10] Nevertheless, Wright never thought of himself as a colonized subject and instead thought of his participation with Afro-Asia as the tying together of different African-American and colonized experiences of racial discrimination.[11] Thus, when Wright went to Bandung in 1955, he sought to better understand these people he perceived as radically different, yet shaped by the same racist structures.[12] His account of the Bandung Conference, *The Color Curtain*, was published in 1956 and was informed by interviews, state speeches, and meetings organized by the local Konfrontasi study group.[13] That being said, Wright was far from a hunted dissident and his trip was funded by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an anti-communist organization of writers, artists, and intellectuals that was covertly backed by the CIA.[14] Previously, he had even acted as an informer to the American consulate on the Gold Coast’s anticolonial movement under Kwame Nkrumah.[15] This demonstrated Wright’s willingness to work with the very American government institutions he criticized, providing that it was mutually beneficial. As the author of the definitive account of the Bandung Conference in America, Wright has been examined as an exceptional personality (such as in *Richard Wright in Context*) and the

subject of much scholarly discussion.[16] He is regarded as a key figure in the emerging networks of Third World writers and intellectuals.[17] Yet, few scholars have focused on what Wright observed at Bandung.[18] Some authors have deemed his work as fear-mongering Orientalism, or suggest it was obscured by accounts that perpetuate half-truths about Bandung. However, Wright's observations on violence at Bandung account for an integral part of the Afro-Asian movement's founding myth and should continue to be considered within the context of his own goals.[19]

Afro-Asian writers, including Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Ousmane Sembene, and Mao Dun, formed the AAWB in 1957 following the Bandung Conference. During the 1958 Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Tashkent, the AAWB announced its mission to create a new world literature that does not privilege the Euro-American tradition.[20] Through this statement, the AAWB communicated that the cultural work of decolonization was intertwined with the political and economic, and constructing Afro-Asian connections based on equality should be prioritized over hierarchical relationships with the former colonial metropole. With this ethos, the unified AAWB published their only poetry anthology, *Afro-Asian Poems*, from Colombo in 1962, adding to their political publication, *The Call*, and literary journal, *Lotus*.[21]

The transnational spaces of the AAWB, ranging from Bandung to Cairo, Tashkent, Colombo, and Beijing, illustrate how wide the Afro-Asian movement's scope was.[22] Like Wright's backing from the American government through the CCF, the AAWB's publications were also funded by states at Bandung as diverse as Nasserist Egypt, Ceylon (still a formal colony before 1972), Indonesia under Sukarno, Maoist China, and India along with the Soviet Union, which was motivated by both by geopolitical maneuvering to overthrow status-quo powers as well as a real ideological alliance with decolonial activists interested in the alternative modernity promised by Marxism.[23] Nevertheless, the AAWB was not beholden to its backer states whom they often criticized. Instead, they were primarily interested in using states to advance their work of revolutionary decolonization. Thus, Wright and the AAWB, brought together by new Afro-Asian connections enabled by state funding and the era's conferences, were not just pawns in the cultural Cold War but represented a popular Afro-Asian movement. As a wide-ranging cultural vehicle of the Third World project, the AAWB offers a representative example of the grassroots manifestation of the Bandung Spirit.

The creation of Afro-Asia during the Bandung Era first involved narrativizing shared histories to shape their arguments for the anticolonial future. Scholarship on Afrodiasporic worldmaking and chronopolitics stress how the dislocation of slavery forced Afrodiasporic thinkers to reimagine the past to create new identities. Sun Ra's identification with Ancient Egypt or the Black Hebrew Israelites with Judaism are a few examples.[24] The efforts of Afro-Asian states and poets to create an Afro-Asian world fulfill a similar purpose.[25] While the fantastical worldmaking that followed Bandung often pseudo-historically projected religious, national, and colonized communities back in time before such modern identities

were constructed, the creation of Afro-Asia was defined by the tangible historical reality of colonization.[26] Wright notes that the Bandung Conference brought together delegates that had “nothing [in common] but what their past relationship with the Western World had made them feel.” The feeling that colonialism engendered was solidarity.[27] In the Pakistani poet Kassim Ahmad’s poem, “To the Forgotten Heroes of This Land,” featured in *Afro-Asian Poems*, Ahmad invokes mythological figures from different Asian cultures to swear a pact against colonialism.[28] By narrativizing the heroes of different historical traditions into the idea of Asia, Ahmad argues for the restoration of past Pan-Asian unity in future anticolonial struggles. Other poems like, “I Am A Negro” and “The Black Eagle Awakes” use the history of the Black Atlantic to project Pan-African solidarity back in time.[29] While there is often a division between the “Afro-” and “Asian” in *Afro-Asian Poems*, this division is regarded as an opportunity for cooperation, as proven by poems that bridge that perceived gap through the project of decolonization. The Chinese poet Han Beiping exoticizes Africa in his poem “Drums at Night” by using drumbeats to emphasize Africa’s “foreignness”, while simultaneously expressing solidarity with the drum that “beat(s) for freedom and independence.”[30] Finally, the inclusion of poets from the Soviet Union’s Asian minorities like Mirza Tursun-Zade, and his poem “My Sister, Africa!” are also notable. Tursun-Zade’s poems further disintegrate political borders and compartmentalized histories to create an Afro-Asia future by recognizing Central and Northern Asia, often treated as an annex of European Russia, as independent subjectivities with histories of racialization and colonization akin to the rest of Afro-Asia.[31] Nevertheless, an Afro-Asian world united by a history of colonialism was not constructed for its own sake but simply set the stage for a more powerful theme: revolutionary Afro-Asia united by blood.

Significance of Racial Shame and Violence

In the anticolonial worldmaking undertaken by the Bandung Spirit, violence plays a central role in its chronopolitics. The violence of the past produced the oppression that forms the unjust violence of the present, which then created conditions for retributive anticolonial violence with the promise of a just peace. Wright mentions that some American journalists, speaking of the Bandung Conference’s alleged anti-white bias, “seemed to have forgotten that Asian and African countries had watched in helpless silence while white powers had gathered and disposed of the destinies of Asian and African peoples.”[32] While the era’s conferences were not concerned with the topic of racial exclusivity, there was a reciprocal logic in how the violence of the division of the world under colonialism produced the conditions for anticolonial organizing.[33] Besides the colonial violence obvious in invasions, arrests, and killings, Wright also identified the violence in Malay language booklets for Dutch colonists and their families that only teach interrogating questions and threatening commands.[34]

All of this colonial infrastructure, whether carceral or linguistic, is meant to dehumanize the colonized, and created what Wright called “racial shame”.[35] To illustrate what he meant by racial shame, Wright recalled a fellow African-American journalist who

straightened her hair and chemically lightened her skin in secret.[36] She not only felt like she had to negate and conceal her Blackness, a marker of being one of the colonized, she had to deny it ever existed in the first place. Wright mentions how he observed similar feelings of inferiority stemming from racialization among Indonesians: “Because I feel inferior. I can't help it. It is hard to be in contact with the white Western world and not feel like that. [. . .] And that is why I feel that I'm colored.”[37] In other words, racial shame was the structural psychological violence that simply being a colonized subject entailed; an experience that was shared by Afro-Asians.

The AAWB repeats this psychological conceptualization of colonial violence but also ties it to the exploitative violence of racial capitalism. Poems like Mazisi Kunene’s “Pass! Pass!” address how the dislocation of African people during the transatlantic slave trade uprooted communities and that as estranged, enslaved peoples in a foreign land, salvation could only come with “time’s anger, which alone accumulates the hurts of man.”[38] Colonialism’s violent dislocation through economic changes, conquest, and kidnapping destroyed pre-modern solidarities within cultural communities, extended family networks, and pre-colonial hierarchies. At the same time, it opened up the space for other colonized peoples to unite around their new shared temporal sense of loss. This theme is present in the poem “The Forced Worker”, by Antonio Jacinto, which uses the Angolan plantation economy to analogize the violent commodification of colonized peoples.[39] Coffee that is “roasted, ground, tortured, black, black like the forced worker” is only harvested with the super-exploitation of colonial labor, beatings of protestors, and subtler forms of violence like forced forgetting of trauma through alcoholism.[40] Jacinto illustrates the omnipresent nature of colonial violence in the context of racial capitalism and does not limit dehumanization to those who experienced chattel slavery. By reducing colonized people to a commodity like a coffee bean, colonialism’s racial capitalism is shown to be similarly dehumanizing and violent. Colonialism commodified and dislocated all colonized peoples. Accordingly, Afro-Asia was not united by geography, culture, or political systems, but rather by violence accumulated over centuries of colonial exploitation.

“Blood is our weapon, Blood is our might”: The Necessity of Violence

The focus on the ubiquity of violence by the people and poets of Afro-Asia marks the radical departure of the Afro-Asian movement away from the hesitant attitude of the Bandung states towards violent anticolonialism. The Final Communique from Bandung preached neutrality and ignored, or was non-combative towards, the potential for neocolonial aggression.[41] Yet, just two years before the Bandung Conference, the Iranian Prime Minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, was overthrown in a British and American-backed coup, and power was given to the Pro-West and Westernizing Shah.[42] The 1953 Iranian coup was a repudiation of all that decolonization stood for. Even then, Iran under the Shah was invited to Bandung and the coup received little to no criticism aside from a few veiled remarks.[43] Wright does not even mention Mossadegh or notice the Iranian delegation anywhere in his book.

Interstate conceptions of Bandung in the 50s and 60s used the language of peaceful neutrality but often meant self-interested passivity.

In contrast to the appeasement politics during the Bandung Conference, the AAWB's reaction to neocolonial violence in the 1961 coup against President Lumumba provides a contrasting example of how Afro-Asian writers conceived of Bandung as an active space of solidarity and anti-colonial violence. Patrice Lumumba was the first president of the Republic of the Congo who, crushing American, British, and Belgian hopes of becoming neocolonial powers in the Congo, took a nationalistic and non-aligned path after independence in 1960.[44] In response to this, Lumumba was overthrown and assassinated in 1961 in a Western-backed coup and replaced by his former chief-of-staff, Mobutu, handpicked by the CIA to lead the Congo on a path more friendly to the West.[45] Despite only being president of the Republic of the Congo for a few months, Lumumba embodied the idealism, non-alignment, and pacifism of the early Afro-Asian movement, and his death heralded a sea-change in Afro-Asianism.[46] Lumumba publicly committed to non-alignment (with the US or the Soviet Union), denounced communism, and was democratically elected under the colonial regime. In other words, he did not cross any of the professed red lines of the ostensibly decolonizing empires. His assassination proved to Afro-Asia that colonial violence could only be answered with violence and that peaceful decolonization with the consent of the metropole was a fantasy.[47]

Accordingly, in the weeks and months following the assassination, Afro-Asian activists made their feelings towards the assassins of Lumumba known, not only in conference halls or editors' rooms, but also in the streets. In New Delhi, thousands marched in the streets with signs saying "Love Live Martyr Lumumba!".[48] In Cairo, students attempted to storm the Belgian embassy.[49] In Beijing, Jakarta, as well as in the Afro-Asian diaspora in Harlem, similar demonstrations were held.[50] Furthermore, unlike the absence of discussions of the coup against Mossadegh by the decolonizing states at the Bandung Conference, Lumumba was a central figure of discussion by the AAWB in *Afro-Asian Poems*.[51] Besides republishing two poems that Lumumba wrote before his assassination, most countries contributed at least one poem eulogizing him.[52] The Urdu poet Sahir Ludhivani and the Punjabi poet Amrita Pritam both wrote poems dedicated to Lumumba. The Sudanese poet A.M. Kahir called on Afro-Asia to avenge Lumumba, and Lukman Njoto wrote that Afro-Asia would continue Lumumba's revolution in "Scarlet Red".[53] Njoto's murder in the American-backed 1965 Indonesian Mass Killings and coup further proves the ubiquity of (neo-)colonial violence. "The blood you tried to dam with a martyr's grave, Has flooded the whole wide world," Ludhivani writes. The significance of Lumumba's assassination was that the Bandung states were now faced with an Afro-Asian populace and culture that largely rejected compromise with their former colonial masters, instead, whether they wanted to or not, Afro-Asia was locked in a violent struggle to the death with colonialism and neocolonialism.[54]

The recognition that violence was inevitably intertwined with anti-colonial agitation was a prominent undercurrent back in 1955, even if the Bandung states were generally non-confrontational. Six years before Lumumba's assassination, Wright noticed ordinary

peoples' embrace of anticolonial violence during the Bandung conference. Throughout the conference, Wright mentions benefitting from discrimination in reverse because of his race, and claims that there was a "powerful substratum of racial emotion" directed against white people at Bandung.[55] In response, he simultaneously distanced himself from the latent anti-colonial violence but also weaponized white fears to blackmail racist institutions globally. While it may seem like Wright was echoing white racial preconceptions of a violent and savage Orient, his description of anticolonial rage was a threat against white America when considering his complicated relationship with the CCF.[56] Ultimately, Wright was a reformist who rejected the racist status quo as well as radical revolutions, hence he cooperated with the CCF and wrote *The Color Curtain* as a call for America to cooperate with the new Third World. The West were ignorant that they had created the conditions for anticolonial violence in the colonized world and, unless they could assuage it by acknowledging the harm of colonialism and aiding their former victims, Afro-Asia would unleash that violence through Communism and revolutionary anti-colonialism.[57] Thus, his diagnosis of colonized psychology's rage was a way to blackmail white American society to tear down Jim Crow in America and lend a helping hand to Afro-Asia.[58] This was a result that would benefit both sides of the color curtain since Wright saw colonial underdevelopment as producing a "cult of action". As he writes, "If the past is shameful, and the future uncertain, then the present, no matter what its content, must be made dramatically meaningful."[59] Thus, to Wright, anticolonial violence was ultimately avoidable by the West while also harmful to the South because it was a weapon without a purpose and a hope without a future.

Yet, through the AAWB's perception of violence as necessary for decolonization, Wright's violent "cult of action" was given direction, no longer a present spasm but rather the path towards a just future. This is first seen in the structure of *Afro-Asian Poems*. Vietnamese poets, including Ho Chi Minh, contribute the most poems of any country even though most of the work is republished material.[60] Naturally, these poems focused on the ongoing war in Vietnam and were written from the perspective of guerillas and soldiers fighting against American imperialism.[61] The rest of AAWB's poets were generally theorists rather than practitioners of violence, so they proved the necessity and viability of violence through the works of their Vietnamese comrades locked in the violent liberation struggle. "It is our blood that exploiters squeeze, it is our blood that brings us freedom [. . .] Blood is our weapon, Blood is our might, Blood is the symbol of Afro-Asia," writes Ariyawansa Pathiraja, summarizing the reciprocal relationship between past and future violence and its centrality to the Afro-Asian hope of decolonization.[62]

When considering how the AAWB saw violence as necessary for decolonization in contrast to Wright's view of it as an avoidable result of colonial violence, Frantz Fanon's conceptualization of violence is deeply intertwined with the Bandung Spirit. However, his famous works like *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* were not translated or popularized until the mid to late 60s.[63] Fanon's basic argument that colonialism "is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" echoes the AAWB's conceptualization of the necessity of anticolonial

violence.[64] Fanon's description of reclaiming one's lost humanity by violence against the ones who had taken it also explains the perceived necessity of redemptive violence that Wright and the AAWB described.[65] While Wright was likely unaware of Fanon's work in 1955, Fanon had direct contact with some of the poets in the anthology having given notable speeches at the All-Africa Peoples' Conferences.[66] Accordingly, Fanon's influence shows that he was vocalizing a common experience among colonized subjects and that his ideas were circulated the Afro-Asian world, proving the existence of Afro-Asia as influenced by and influencing prominent theorists on anti-colonialism.

Betrayls anf Failures of Decolonization

The capability for and right to redemptive violence by all victims of colonialism as conceived by the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau also challenges the hegemonic post-independence discourse of developmentalism. Developmentalism can be broadly defined as the idea that postcolonial countries needed to urgently catch up with the metropole through the modernization of institutions and the industrialization of the economy.[67] The Afro-Asian states generally subscribed to ideas and metrics of development inherited from their former colonizers and the Final Communique of Bandung called for increased investment, aid, and trade with the colonial metropole.[68] State delegates at Bandung were generally from the elite of colonial society – colonized intellectuals, in Fanon's words. Thus, their conception of future development was rooted in the same structures that produced them.[69] The presidents, economists, and new elites of decolonizing states mostly did not see underdevelopment as a reciprocal relationship with the development of the colonial core. Rather, it was conceived of as a lower stage in the linear path of modernization that any country could achieve with the proper aid and resources. Some poems reflect this belief, as in Nigerian poet Elizabeth Emma Brown's "Looking from the Plain", who writes from the perspective of on top of a great dam: "side by side, watching fresh waters, wash clear all the sufferings of the past."[70] For Brown, her history of colonial violence could be washed away with the development's promises, as symbolized by the dam. In contrast, Vyjayanthi Rao demonstrates in her work on dams, museums, and relocated villages in India, that this post-independence modernization narrative mirrors colonial ideas of linear progress based on conquering nature, uplifting "backwards communities", and single-minded economic developmentalism.[71] The peasantry, indigenous communities, women, and other groups are again victimized by this hegemonic model of post-coloniality that reproduces colonial violence.[72]

Aware of this injustice, Afro-Asian writers used the space and language legitimized by interstate conceptualizations of Bandung to advocate for the peasantry's right to violently resist marginalization. As the vast majority of the world's population until very recently, smallholding farmers or peasants formed the major support base for anticolonial revolutions as diverse as the Maoist Revolution in China and the Free Officers Movement in Egypt.[73] However, the peasantry was often ignored by the resulting post-colonial states as a relic of the past to be integrated into markets, cities, and nations by post-independence narratives;

a perspective that was common among developmentalist Global South thinkers and repeated by Wright.[74] Yet, in “The Death of a Peasant” by Wispi Agam, Agam illustrates the violence of the peasant’s hunger and dispossession before a violent call to action against all forms of oppression.[75]

While Agam could be writing about how the colonial economy treated the peasantry, *Afro-Asian Poems*’ publication after Indonesian independence, and Agam’s condemnation of “those in power”, show that he was attacking all forms of colonial violence, including those perpetuated by the ostensibly post-colonial state.[76] Agam’s call to continue turning the wheels of history with land and blood to finally reach peace further demonstrates the AAWB’s frequently combative attitude towards post-colonial political elites. Another poem by A. M. Khair, “To an Arab Peasant”, calls on the marginalized to take control of their fate and regain their humanity through violence because “the axe will not wait.”[77] Though abstract notions of violence can appeal to political elites, Khair’s vivid description of a peasant picking up an axe reflects the unharnessed, spontaneous, and grassroots need for anticolonial violence not conducive to monopolization. Yet, Agam and Khair use the space and language created by Bandung to attack the reproduction of colonial violence. The AAWB and the publication of Afro-Asian Poems were funded by the Bandung states whose rhetoric of opposing colonialism can be repurposed against the colonial violence produced by those same states.

While justifying victims’ rights to violent resistance may seem simple in colonizer/colonized or modernity/peasantry dichotomies, this binarization also reveals flaws in the Bandung Spirit. In theory, the AAWB’s embrace of violence, Fanon’s division of humanity into two species, and Wright’s belief that the colonized world needed to wholeheartedly unite behind national symbols were described as fascistic by contemporaries.[78] Some of the Bandung Spirit’s results reflect this. Indian and Arab communities were violently expelled by anticolonial revolutions in East Africa because they were seen as petite-bourgeoisie compradors.[79] Wright’s observation that the desire for anticolonial violence in Indonesia was often directed at Chinese-Indonesians, also perceived as compradors, grimly precedes the anti-Chinese violence of the 1965 mass killings which were started by a neocolonial coup.[80] Furthermore, the Bandung Conference’s Final Communique affirmed Indonesia’s claim over all of the Dutch East Indies including West Irian, populated by indigenous Papuans, as an act of decolonization.[81] West Irian Nationalism was supported by the Dutch in their neocolonial aim to contain Indonesia, but also by many indigenous Papuans who saw the Indonesian state as an intruder similar to the Dutch.[82] Simple colonizer/colonized dichotomies do not hold up under scrutiny and conceal the complexities of colonial history. Consequently, the Bandung Spirit’s binarization of colonization and its dehumanization of an amorphous colonizer sometimes was repurposed for discriminatory, expansionist, and anti-indigenous purposes.

The Bandung Spirit as it existed in history was a vision created by and for the victimized who rarely had the power to carry out its promise of redemptive violence. The AAWB likely would have claimed that the Bandung Spirit withered precisely because it failed

to unleash Afro-Asia's pent-up rage for anticolonial ends. Fanon said as much about proponents for peaceful resistance in Algeria in 1957 when he rejected the First Conference of Independent African States' call for non-violence and instead argued for anti-colonial struggle by any means necessary, including violence, as part of a worldwide struggle without compromise.[83]

The Bandung Spirit's decline also forces us to look at the violence after its fallout – structural adjustment policies, the unequal ecological crisis, and the continued underdevelopment of the Third World – rather than simply condemn the violent resistance to these oppressive structures.[84] When the powerless clamor for blood, is it genuinely a violent vision of an irrational millenarian future as apologists for colonialism claim, eager to point out decolonization's mistakes, or is it a hope and a threat that the powerless are capable of reacting violently when dehumanized and oppressed? In "Song of the Curse", the Korean poet Paik In Joon starts by graphically and even sadistically writing about torturing American imperialists, but the poem later reveals that he intends to torture the Yankees not "with swords or fists, but with the pen."[85] Paik's dream of conflict and torture is not his idealized future, but rather an analogization and refutation of the oppressive power structures limiting the colonizer's capacity to reciprocate violence. As a hope for the victimized, the Bandung Spirit retains its power if its emphasis on violence is seen as a threat that the colonized are human too, and thus capable of fighting back if victimized.

The Death of Bandung and the Future of (Anti-)Colonial Violence

While Wright passed away in 1960 at the peak of the Afro-Asian movement started at Bandung, the AAWB died a slow death from two interrelated crises that also spelled the end of the Bandung project. First, the Sino-Soviet split bitterly divided communist opinion within the Afro-Asian movement.[86] As relations between the two states soured, the Bureau divided into Soviet-aligned and Chinese-aligned splinter groups in 1966, each more interested in defending its chosen camp than advancing international revolution.[87] Second, neo-colonial coups and the Latin American and African debt crises of the 1980s enabled the neo-liberalization of society and states in the Global South.[88] These new governments, unlike their developmentalist predecessors, were borne out of anti-colonial revolution and no longer interested in the rhetoric of anti-colonialism. In cases such as Ghana, Indonesia, or Chile, revolutionary Afro-Asian groups were snuffed out by state repression and outright massacres.[89] In other cases, such as in China, South Africa, and India, the same groups were slowly suffocated by an emerging neoliberal world system that was hostile to any sense of international solidarity.[90]

Ultimately, the result of the Bandung Project illustrated the inadequacy of halfway measures and compromised developmentalism in a world where hegemonic neocolonial systems have the power to subsume dissenting states and popular movements. The Bandung Conference arguably set the stage for its own destruction when its final resolution invited capital from their former colonizing powers to invest in their countries.[91] The defeat of Bandung also coincided with a loss of sovereignty in a variety of fields. For example, many

African countries lost their food sovereignty in the 1980s and were forced to export cash crops while dependent on Western imports for basic food needs, creating precarity that endangers food-insecure populations and gives foreign powers more leverage.[92] Since the cultural process of recolonization is intertwined with the political and economic, only a comprehensive rejection of the totality can lead to another real chance at decolonization. Any future anti-colonial movement must be clear in its intention not to recreate the colonial world order in a more geographically equal economic or cultural arrangement, but rather the destruction of it altogether.

Despite the failure of Bandung in its moderate interstate form, the centrality of violence in Afro-Asian thinkers' radical and alternative imagination of the Bandung Spirit has escaped scholarly attention until recently. Through Richard Wright and the AAWB, this paper has demonstrated how writers who participated in Bandung's networks of decolonization created a shared Afro-Asian future through anticolonial worldmaking. The purpose of this Afro-Asian world was to unite the alienated victims of colonialism through the promise of a future redeemed with blood. This violence was rationalized by the idea that colonial violence could only be resolved through anticolonial violence and its redemptive potential. Moreover, the AAWB's critique of post-independence developmentalism as reproducing colonial violence also clashes with the hegemonic postcolonial narrative of modernization, a narrative that eventually led to the downfall of the Bandung project in the 20th century. Yet, despite claims to the contrary, the Bandung Spirit was not monopolized by political elites and was truly a transnational people's movement, where hopes for the redemptive potential of anticolonial violence were exchanged between figures like Frantz Fanon, Richard Wright, and the countless forgotten poets of Afro-Asia.

Notes

[1] The conference's official name was the Asian-African Conference, but Afro-Asian Conference was also commonly used. This paper will use the conference's most popular and evocative name: the Bandung Conference

[2] Su Lin Lewis and Carolien Stolte, "Other Bandungs: Afro-Asian Internationalisms in the Early Cold War," *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1 (2019): 5.

[3] Swan Quito, "Blinded by Bandung?: Illumining West Papua, Senegal, and the Black Pacific," *Radical History Review* 131, no. 1 (2018): 63-64.

[4] George McTurnan Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference: Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1956), 36-37.

[5] Matthieu Rey, "'Fighting Colonialism' versus 'Non-Alignment': Two Arab Points of View on the Bandung Conference," in T*he Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War*, eds. Natasa Miskovic and Harald Fischer-Tinéand Nada Boskovska (London: Routledge, 2014), 173-174; Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1956), 146.

[6] Jeffery J. Byrne, "Beyond Continents, Colours, and the Cold War: Yugoslavia, Algeria, and the Struggle for Non-Alignment," *The International History Review* 37, no. 5 (2015): 913; Robert Vitalis, "The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung (Ban-doong)," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 4, no. 2 (2013): 277.

[7] Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 44-45; Samir Amin, *Samir Amin: Pioneer of the Rise of the South*, ed. Hans Günter Brauch (New York: Springer Publishing, 2012), 72.

[8] Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, "Manifesto: Networks of Decolonization in Asia and Africa," *Radical History Review* 131, no. 1 (2018): 178.

[9] Thadious M. Davis, "Richard Wright's Triangulated South: Formation as Prelude and Preface," in *Richard Wright in Context*, ed. Michael Nowlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 12-13.

[10] George A. Williams, "The Black Eagle Awakens," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 41-42.

[11] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 114.

[12] Brian Russell Roberts, "Bandung and Third-World Liberation," in *Richard Wright in Context*, ed. Michael Nowlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 166-167.

[13] *Studieclub Konfrontasi* was an Indonesian study group founded in 1954 with ideological leanings that were nationalist but also pro-Western. See Brian Russell Roberts and Keith Foulcher, *Indonesian Notebook: A Sourcebook on Richard Wright and the Bandung Conference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 8, 13.

[14] William E. Dow, "Paris and Ailly," in *Richard Wright in Context*, ed. Michael Nowlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 53.

[15] Bill V. Mullen, *Afro Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 66.

[16] Davis, "Richard Wright's," 11.

[17] Roberts and Foulcher, I*ndonesian Notebook*, 19-20.

[18] Mullen, *Afro Orientalism*, 58-59.

[19] Roberts and Foulcher, *Indonesian Notebook*, 4.

[20] Pieter Vanhove, "'A World to Win': China, the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, and the Reinvention of World Literature," *Critical Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2019): 152.

[21] Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, eds., *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), viii.

[22] Vanhove, "A World to Win," 144-145, 151, 156.

[23] Hala Halim, "Lotus, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 32, no. 3 (2012): 570-571.

[24] Tobias C. Van Veen, "Afrofuturism and the Chronopolitics of Alien Nation," in *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* (Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2015), 77-80.

[25] Van Veen, "Afrofuturism," 80-82.

[26] Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference*, 48; Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 12-13.

[27] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 12.

[28] Kassim Ahmad, "A Pact: To The Forgotten Heroes of This Land," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology,* eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 111.

[29] Ahmad, "A Pact," 112-113; Williams, "The Black Eagle," 41-45.

[30] Han Beiping, "Drums at Night," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology,* eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 45-49.

[31] Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, "Manifesto," 178-179.

[32] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 83.

[33] Byrne, "Beyond Continents," 920-921.

[34] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 179-180.

[35] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 174-177.

[36] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 185-187.

[37] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 65, 190-192.

[38] Mazisi Kunene, "Pass! Pass!," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 126-127.

[39] Antonio Jacinto, "The Forced Workers," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 7-8.

[40] Jacinto, "The Forced Workers," 7-8.

[41] Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference*, 73-74.

[42] Siavash Saffari, "Jalal Al-e Ahmad's Gharbzadegi and the Spirit of Bandung: A Decolonial Reimagination of Development in Mid-Twentieth Century Iran," *Asia Review* 12, no. 1 (2022): 140-141, 146.

[43] Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference*, 71.

[44] Emmanuel Gerard and Bruce Kuklick, *Death in the Congo: Murdering Patrice Lumumba* (London: Harvard University Press, 2015), 21-27.

[45] Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*, 114; Vanhove, "A World to Win," 155-156.

[46] Duncan M. Yoon, "Our Forces Have Redoubled": World Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (2015): 246.

[47] Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*, 114; Vanhove, "A World to Win," 155-156.

[48] British Pathé, "India: New Delhi: Lumumba Death Protest," filmed February 17, 1961, video, https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/249007/.

[49] British Pathé, "Cairo Riots Over Congo," filmed February 27, 1961, video, https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/190725/.

[50] Pedro Monaville, "The political life of the dead Lumumba: Cold War histories and the Congolese student left," *Africa* 89, no. 1 (2018): 15.

[51] Vanhove, "A World to Win," 155-156

[52] Patrice Lumumba, "May Our People Triumph," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 57-59; Patrice Lumumba, "Congo," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 60.

[53] Sahir Ludhivani, "Homage to Lumumba," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 63-64; Amrita Pritam, "Homage to Lumumba," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 65; Wispi Agam, "Scarlet Red," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 77.

[54] Vanhove, "A World to Win," 155-156.

[55] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 173.

[56] Lewis and Stolte, "Other Bandungs," 15; Roberts and Foulcher, *Indonesian Notebook*, 16-17.

[57] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 207-210.

[58] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 219-220.

[59] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 193.

[60] Al-Kharrat and Salem, *Afro-Asian Poems*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 151-170; pt. 2, 143-157.

[61] "Vietnam," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 143-170.

[62] Ariyawansa Pathiraja, "Afro-Asian Blood," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 26-27.

[63] Leo Zeilig, *Frantz Fanon: A Political Biography* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 245.

[64] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 61.

[65] Fanon, *The Wretched*, 21; Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 79.

[66] Zeilig, *Frantz Fanon*, 115-117.

[67] Amin, *Samir Amin*, 38

[68] Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference*, 76-77.

[69] Zeilig, *Frantz Fanon*, 214-216; Fanon, *The Wretched*, 208-209.

[70] Elizabeth E. Brown, "Looking from the Plain," in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau, 1962), 105.

[71] Vyjayanthi Rao, “The Future in Ruins,” in *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 290-291.

[72] Rao, “The Future in Ruins,” 314-316.

[73] Zeilig, *Frantz Fanon*, 187-189.

[74] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 97, 209.

[75] Wispi Agam, “The Death of A Peasant,” in A*fro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau, 1962), 87-90.

[76] Agam, “The Death,” 87-90.

[77] A.M. Khair, “To An Arab Peasant,” in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology,* eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau, 1962), 139-140.

[78] Fanon, *The Wretched*, 35-36; Roberts, “Bandung and Third-World,” 164-165.

[79] Vitalis, “The Midnight Ride,” 278-279.

[80] Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 39, 58-59, 79.

[81] Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference*, 82.

[82] Quito, “Blinded by Bandung?,” 63-64.

[83] Zeilig, *Frantz Fanon*, 115-117.

[84] Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 108; Amin, *Samir Amin*, 73-74.

[85] In Joon Paik, “Song of the Curse,” in *Afro-Asian Poems: Anthology*, eds. Edward Al-Kharrat and Nihad Salem, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Colombo: Afro-Asian Writers’ Bureau, 1962), 79-81.

[86] Halim, “Lotus,” 582.

[87] Vanhove, “A World to Win,” 157-158.

[88] Jerome Roos, *Why Not Default: The Political Economy of Sovereign Debt* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 12-13, 164-166; Gregory Smith, *Where Credit is Due: How Africa's Debt Can Be a Benefit, Not a Burden* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2021), 79-80.

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[90] Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 215-217.

[91] Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference*, 76-78.

[92] Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 202-203.