GLOBAL SOUTH STUDIES

Solidarity

By Poorvi Bellur | February 24, 2023

Within the extensive scholarship on decolonization across the Global South, a great deal of attention has been paid to the high tide of transnational solidarity in the 1950s-60s. Decolonizing nations were faced with the task of not just establishing their newfound sovereignty within an existing global system, but of forging that world system anew. This essay traces a concept history of anticolonial solidarity particularly as it evolved in leftist internationalist politics to define movements such as Afro-Asian solidarity and non-Alignment. Ultimately, a story of anticolonial solidarity focused solely on nation-states as actors would be remiss; this essay will examine how current scholarship explores non-state networks of solidarity, some of which have roots extending into the late nineteenth century.

Theorizing "Solidarity"

In order to draw out a conceptual history of anticolonial solidarity, it is helpful to begin with the history of the term "solidarity" itself. However, "solidarity" must be contextually grounded in the rhetorical constellation of terms and ideas committed to worldmaking and forging affective bonds around a common political cause, from the late nineteenth century onwards. Sven Liedman pinpoints the First Worker's International founding meeting in London (1864) as a crucial juncture in the history of solidarity on the global Left, given that the "provisional rules of the International spoke of 'solidarity among workers of various trades in every country'" (Liedman 2020, 13). Within the ambit of the Western European tradition of solidarity, the term itself is etymologically grounded in the Roman legal concept of "solidum," which Hauke Brunkhorst defines as "an obligation for the whole, cooperative liability, common debt and solidarity obligation: obligation in solidum" (Brunkhorst 2020, 43). In this framework, solidarity is rooted in the idea of social contract, or responsibility to a collective. Nathalie Karagiannis also emphasizes that solidarity "cannot be thought of without the original violence which produces it and without the violence it produces" (Karagiannis 2020, 63). By violence, Karagiannis means the violence of individual revolt in the creation of a social contract or collective interests. Her framing focuses on a more modern framework of solidarity, by Albert Camus, that highlights moments of revolt specifically as both formative of, and justified by, the emergence of human solidarity. This argument, Karagiannis qualifies, applies to a political or social solidarity, as opposed to the sense of community generated by faith.

However, a separation of the sacred from the political falls apart especially when examining religious modes of political solidarity across the decolonizing world, as demonstrated by Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and other scholars of the critical secularism studies collective.[1] The history of "pan-Islamic" thought and solidarity is one such example. The term "pan-Islam" has its origins in nineteenth-century British imperial paranoia about a global "Islamic conspiracy," but the term itself was adopted by a variety of state and non-state actors as a

means of organizing anticolonial resistance along the lines of religious community (Aydin 2007). Sultan Abdul Hamid II adopted the idea in the late 1870s to bolster Ottoman imperial leadership both as a symbolic and a political Caliphate standing against a "Christian West." It must be noted however that the Ottoman claim to the leadership of a "Muslim world" was certainly contested, from its inception at the end of the nineteenth century through the formal dissolution of the Ottoman empire in 1923. Ideas of a global Islamic *umma* united in the face of Western colonial incursions were by no means a product of state-sponsored internationalism alone; a prominent Islamic reformist and anticolonial thinker by the name of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani transmitted information about British colonial oppression in India to a growing following of Egyptians as early as the 1870s.[2] Conceptions of a global *umma* or community of Muslims as a mode of internationalist organizing were to play a prominent role in anticolonial and postcolonial solidarity projects of the early twentieth century, including the Khilafat movement in South Asia (1919-1924) and the establishment of the intergovernmental Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 1969.[3]

Liberation theology in Latin America is another significant example of a non-secularist solidarity model. A prominent thinker in this school, Gustavo Gutiérrez, theorized solidarity at the nexus of socialist and Christian thought. Gutiérrez put forward a theory of "solidarity with the oppressed" rooted in theological reflection and Biblical exegesis. However, he was also heavily influenced by Marxist ideas of class struggle and praxis: "The praxis on which liberation theology reflects is a praxis of solidarity in the interests of liberation and is inspired by the gospel" (Gutiérrez 1973, 24). For Gutiérrez, solidarity with the poor was an essential aspect of Christian purpose, and while his argument was grounded in Biblical justifications, it also drew heavily on a social scientific approach to class and poverty. This formulation of solidarity, hinged on the universality of Christian charity, also allowed for an acute criticism of colonialism and its legacies in Latin America. For liberation theologists, the sacred *was* the political and vice-versa.

It is clear, therefore, that in order to accommodate the diverse networks of solidarity that came to define the anticolonial worldmaking projects of the twentieth century, a theory of solidarity must look beyond secularist liberal thought as well as a state or elite-centric view of international solidarity. David Featherstone's definition of political solidarity as an actively constructed "transformative political relation" that "can entrench as well as challenge privilege and can close down as well as open up political possibilities and alliances" is a particularly comprehensive approach (Featherstone 2012, 1). His framework therefore pushes scholars of the Global South to look beyond left elites and leadership and instead towards the *labour* of building solidarity (Featherstone 2012, 46). Featherstone contends that solidarity must be understood within the context of the contested power relations through which it is forged, thereby rejecting a purely horizontal approach to geographies of solidarity.

Decolonization, Worldmaking and Solidarity

The effectiveness of Featherstone's approach to solidarity is especially clear when it comes to twentieth-century decolonization and the efforts made by state and non-state actors alike to imagine and create a new sense of the "global" in a post-WWI juncture. As the Powers at Versailles confronted the task of negotiating a lasting postwar peace in 1919, they were confronted by representatives of colonized populations across Asia and Africa, all of whom sought to assert their claims for a reorganization of global order along anticolonial lines. On

one hand, the Wilsonian internationalism of the newly minted League of Nations emerged as one framework for such a project. Concurrently, a scathing critique of colonialism and the League's liberal internationalism rang forth from the global Left, spearheaded by the newly established Soviet state and its internationalist organ for propagating world revolution, the Comintern. As a successor to the Second International, the Comintern intentionally fostered a broader conception of transnationalism in response to accusations of Eurocentrism in its early program and functioning. As indicated in the organization's Manifesto, there was a commitment to the principle of transnational connectivity within the design of the Comintern's complex bureaucracy, a commitment that was often tested by an acute sense of Moscow-centrism within the organization. Oleksa Drachewych's study of Comintern transnationalism makes a case for a "solidarity from below," fostered through Comintern-affiliated organizations that "took an ideal (e.g. anti-imperialism) and generalized it, developing networks of individuals and groups who mutually championed achieving that goal" (Drachewych 2019, 6). Categorized within Comintern records as "Non-Party Mass Organizations" and "Sympathizing Organizations for Special Purposes," this network included associations such as the "Internationale Arbeiter-Hilfe" (IAH or International Workers Relief).

Vladimir Lenin's "Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions," presented at the Second Congress of the Comintern (1920), was the first concrete evidence of Moscow's commitment (albeit limited) to integrating input from colonized peoples into Comintern programming. In the debates around this document, several voices from the colonized world emerged to critique, amend, and add to Lenin's theses. Prominent among these responses were the "Supplementary Theses" by Manabendra Nath Roy, a truly transnational figure who would go on to establish the Communist Party of India. Solidarity for the Comintern delegates was a dynamic idea riddled with tensions and contradiction, between a commitment to the "national" versus the "international," and between Moscow centrism versus a multi-centered global system. Moreover, delegates at the Second Congress grappled with the challenge of positioning a leftist solidarity or internationalism alongside other claims to solidarity, namely the various "Pan" movements. The Comintern debates around crafting anticolonial solidarity cannot be read in isolation from these other projects of global order and worldmaking, as evidenced by the fact that Comintern delegates themselves were engaging with, and even placing their own models of solidarity as competition to, these other networks.

Another concrete manifestation of Comintern commitment to anticolonial solidarity was its active support for the League Against Imperialism and Colonialism and Colonial Oppression (LAI), which brought together some of the most prominent leaders of anticolonial movements across Asia and Africa, including Jawaharlal Nehru, Messali Hadj, and Mohammad Hatta.[4] Though short-lived, the League would later become a touchstone for the leaders of decolonizing nations during the heyday of Afro-Asian solidarity at the Bandung Conference (1955).[5] Indonesian President Sukarno opened Bandung with a direct reference to the LAI conference in at Brussels in 1927, thus placing Bandung in a longer history of anticolonial solidarity efforts:

> I recall in this connection the Conference of the 'League Against Imperialism and Colonialism' which was held in Brussels almost thirty years ago. At that Conference many distinguished Delegates who are present here today met each other and found new strength in their fight for independence.[6]

Ostensibly, one of the first international conferences to address solidarity amongst decolonizing/decolonized nations was the Colombo conference of 1954, often positioned as the direct precursor to Bandung as the idea for an Afro-Asian solidarity conference was put forward by the Indonesian delegation at Colombo. The Bandung Conference was by no means the sole pinnacle of statist solidarity building efforts, as recent historiography has examined several other manifestations of this "Bandung Spirit," such as the conference in Delhi a week before Bandung, the Cairo conference for Afro-Asian solidarity in 1957, and the rise of the Non-Aligned movement. However, the fact remains that Bandung looms large as a standard against which these other gatherings are studied, as Carolien Stolte's analysis of "Other Bandungs" demonstrates, thereby making its scholarship a useful window into how historians have treated the concept of mid-twentieth century anticolonial solidarity at large (Stolte 2019).

Beyond the State

In addition to the notion of solidarity as a tool for building geopolitical alliances through states, the decolonizing moment saw the further proliferation of existing modes of anticolonial solidarity that did not necessarily centre nation-state sovereignty as their ultimate goal. One such axis of anticolonial solidarity was forged along racial lines. From WEB Dubois to CLR James to Eric Williams, various theorists of Black solidarity and Pan-Africanism were forging global networks that would enable a true emancipation from racial capitalism and emancipation that would hold the postcolonial state as accountable as the colonial state. While there was a great deal of ambiguity at Bandung about a definition for imperialism, for thinkers and activists grappling with the "global colour line," imperialism was inextricable from slavery as "a modern form of labour extraction and exploitation," which as Adom Getachew points out is a definition that "transcended the limited definitions of slavery that dominated the League of Nations' abolitionist efforts" (Getachew 2019, 23). The historiography on twentieth-century antiracist solidarity also highlights the Tricontinental movement, anchored around a conference in Havana, Cuba that took place a little over a decade after Bandung. Notably, this was a moment that concretely brought Latin America into the Afro-Asian solidarity compact and led to the establishment of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) in 1966.[7]

Another formation that both worked alongside but also transcended state-led visions of Third World solidarity is that of international feminisms. Chandra Mohanty defines an "imagined community'' of Third World oppositional struggles—"'imagined' not because it is not 'real' but because it suggests potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries, and 'community' because in spite of internal hierarchies within Third World contexts, it nevertheless suggests a significant, deep commitment to what Benedict Anderson, in referring to the idea of the nation, calls 'horizontal comradeship'" (Mohanty 2003, 46). Deeply invested in questions of race and decolonization, anticolonial women's organizations predate the Bandung moment in envisioning emancipatory postcolonial orders, evidenced by Shobna Nijhawan's work on the All-Asia Women's Conference in Lahore (AAWC, 1931). As Nijhawan demonstrates, the conference was "an instance of international relation-building between Indian feminists and feminists from around the world (colonies and nation states) that gained its strength by placing Asia as a centre for international organizing" (Nijhawan 2017, 25).

What did decolonization mean for the formation of feminist solidarity networks across the Global South? According to Elizabeth Armstrong and Vijay Prakash, the Bandung moment provided international feminist networks with a platform to discard the nationalist masculinist protectionism in global politics, which had resulted in two world wars in the first half of the century (Armstrong and Prashad 2006). Instead, they put forward a new internationalism that would be equally committed to building state welfare infrastructures and world peace. In Cairo, at the First Women's Afro-Asian Conference in 1961, delegates gathered to offer critiques of nationalist projects and prescriptions for how postcolonial states could improve the status of women in their respective countries.

Conclusion

Within the historical scholarship on decolonization and global thought of the twentieth century, there is a popular understanding that while the 1950s represented the height of optimism resulting in a plethora of worldmaking projects, this optimism was to soon dissipate. What with the failure of Gamal Abdel Nasser's the United Arab Republic (perhaps the pinnacle of his pan-Arab project) in 1961 and the collapse of Sino-Indian relations with the outbreak of war in 1962, it was clear that the state-mediated vision of Afro-Asian solidarity eulogized by Sukarno at Bandung was a distant dream. Though the tenuous covenant of Bandung seemed to be in decline, non-Alignment proved to be a longer lasting model for a state-led solidarity pact in the face of growing Cold War polarization and economic pressures.[8] Overall, scholarly consensus points towards a decline of international solidarity along the lines of colonial experience as the twentieth century progressed, in the face of sharpening Cold War geopolitics and the prioritization of national sovereignty above all considerations of broader solidarities. However, if we were to divert our gaze from superpower geopolitics and the nation-state as the sole analytic frame, the many strands of anticolonial solidarity that wove through the Global South endured. Networks that linked subaltern groups across the proverbial First, Second and Third Worlds outlasted the wave of state-mediated decolonization and continued to pursue more radical avenues of worldmaking that required them to hold the postcolonial nation-state regime accountable as well. The literature on correspondences between the anti-caste movement in postcolonial South Asia and Civil Rights activists in the United States is a testament to the transformative capacity of anticolonial solidarity as a language of worldmaking that did not end with the establishment of independent nation-states. The globalized vocabulary of contemporary activism and organizing across the Global South today, from climate activism to international campaigns against racialized police brutality, is a legacy of these conceptual and material networks of anticolonial solidarity.

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[1] Talal Asad's work pioneered a critical analytic for studying "secularism" or "secularity" in conjunction with Western liberal ideas of modernity and laid the foundation for an anthropology of the secular. See Asad 2003. Influenced by Asad's analysis, Saba Mahmood's work further dissects the liberal paradigm of secularity solution to the question of "difference" and religious minorities (Mahmood 2016).

[2] For more on al-Afghani's life and anti-colonial thought, see Mishra 2012.

[3] Beginning in 1919, the Khilafat movement or the Caliphate movement was a campaign of political resistance in South Asia that was varied in its goals and composition. While the movement broadly focused on protecting the Ottoman Caliphate as the anchor of a global Muslim community from Western incursions, it also acquired anticolonial resonances and attracted non-Muslim actors (the most prominent of which was MK Gandhi). For more on the Khilafat movement and its pan-Islamic significance, see Qureshi 1999.

[4] For more on the League Against Imperialism's history and significance, see (Louro et al. 2020). For more on the Brussels conference specifically, see Prashad 2007.

[5] The Bandung conference aimed to broker solidarity among the recently decolonized/decolonizing nations of Asia and Africa, and took place April 18-24, 1955, in Bandung, Indonesia. 29 countries sent delegates to the conference, which was organized by the states of Indonesia, Myanmar (Burma), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India and Pakistan. For more on the Bandung Conference, its lives and afterlives, see Eslava, Fakhri, and Nesiah 2017; Lee 2010.

[6] Sukarno. [Address given by Sukarno (Bandung, 18 April 1955)]. In: Asia-Africa speak from

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[7] For more on the history of OSPAAAL and the Tricontinental movement, see Mahler 2018.

[8] For more on the Non Aligned movement and the model of solidarity it proffered, see Mišković, Fischer-Tiné, and Boškovska Leimgruber 2014.

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Poorvi Bellur is a doctoral candidate in Global History at Princeton University. Her work focuses on global anticolonial solidarities and conceptions of imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with a focus on the British Empire in South Asia and the Arabic-speaking world. Her research broadly deals with the construct of political and cultural "solidarity" in the context of the Global South, and the modern historical genealogy of the concept. She is particularly interested in exploring archives of press, literature, and performance in order to broaden current scholarship on global anti-colonial networks beyond tracing political elites in favor of an understanding of global intellectual histories from below.

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