

Sammelrez: Bandung Revisited

Lee, Christopher J. (Hrsg.): *Making a World After Empire. The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*. Ohio: Ohio University Press 2010. ISBN: 978-0-89680-277-3; 280 S.

Tan, See Seng; Acharya, Amitav (Hrsg.): *Bandung Revisited. The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order*. Singapore: NUS Publishing 2009. ISBN: 978-9971-69-393-0; 229 S.

Rezensioniert von: Vijay Prashad, Trinity College

In 2005, the Indonesian and South African governments co-hosted an Asian-African summit to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the famous Bandung Asian-African Conference. Called „Reinvigorating the Bandung Spirit“, the conference was both a glance backward at the historical Bandung, and a wishful look forward at the emergence of a newly confident South. By the early 1980s, the Third World Project (as I called it in *The Darker Nations*), with Bandung as talisman, had come to a halt. The debt crisis had been its undoing, but so too had its own failure to re-create the planet's political space. None of the participants at the 2005 meeting wanted to dwell too much on failure, largely because by 2005 a new opening had presented itself. The very large economies of the South (which Goldman Sachs had dubbed the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, later South Africa) had pushed against the constraints of the Atlantic consensus and begun to assert themselves on the world stage. It was this new confidence, in the context of grotesque inequalities, that the idea of reinvigoration of Bandung took place.

In the world of scholarship Bandung had been largely forgotten. There was, by 2005, not one monograph that used the protocols of modern archival research to detail the events that led up to the historical conference, to trace the events of the conference, and then to properly assess its aftermath. The fullest work remained George McTurnan Kahin's collection of speeches, with its sober introduction, and his work on Indonesia that included assessments on Bandung. A few memoirs (Roes-

lan Abdulgani's *The Bandung Connection*, 1981) helped fill in the blanks, and these were useful to Jamie Mackie's short book *Bandung 1955: non-alignment and Afro-Asian solidarity* (Editions Didier Millet, 2005), written to commemorate the 50th anniversary. Even as Jamie Mackie was a leading voice on Indonesian history, the book itself has not received any attention. The 50th anniversary was not „met with the brouhaha“ it deserved, as noted by Antoinette Burton in the Lee volume. It was largely ignored.

But not long after, these two books sit on my shelf. Of the two, Tan/Acharya is the closest to attempt a historical excavation. It collects essays delivered at the Singapore's Rajaratnam School of International Relations in April 2005. Anthony Reid, Ang Cheng Guan, Chen Jian, and Helen E. S. Nesadurai offer the context for the conference: the Cold War tensions that spread from the Korean peninsula (armistice, 1953) to the fringes of Asia (the formation of the U.S. initiated military pacts: SEATO, 1954 and CENTO, 1955), and ruptured in the Taiwan Straits (1954-55); the last wars of decolonization, from the Malaysian Emergency (1948-1960) to the Mau Mau Uprising (1952-60); the search for a way out of the bipolar conflict through the assertion of the Afro-Asian bloc, this to both give strength to the emergent nations and to ensure amity between those who had the tendency toward conflict. These essays draw on a variety of archives, and enrich the historical record. The details from the Chinese, Indonesian, Thai and other sides brings in the complexity that shows us both how bold Bandung was, and how its contradictions had to be negotiated by the major players. One can only hope for more such work, elaborated books on the minutiae that made Bandung possible.

Nesadurai quite correctly points a finger at the United Nations as the principle instrument to carry forward the Bandung agenda. Adekeye Adebajo takes the story forward, offering an analysis of the promise and limitations of the U.N., with a fierce critique of the way the U.N. has been hijacked by the Atlantic powers. These essays put the Bandung agenda into history, constructing the cauldron that brewed the agenda, and then showing us how it was dissipated by forces external to it,

as well as by forces internal to it. The dialectic between these two forces (external and internal) is important to track. Central to this process is the way in which the Bandung Spirit loses its shine.

Christopher Lee's volume reads in a very different register than that produced by Tan and Acharya. It comes in three parts. The second part is by far of the greatest interest. Here Laura Bier, James Brennan, Thomas Burgess, Jamie Monson and Christopher Lee offer detailed essays on the complexity of state construction in the national liberation context. Laura Bier's essay is very rich, exploring the work of women in the Afro-Asian movement, mainly through the Egyptian women's press. Brennan, Burgess and Monson build a vision of the complexities of state construction in East Africa: from Kenya to Tanzania the influence of Cairo and Beijing reigned supreme, and these authors show how local and international pressures jostle to find a dynamic, with different agendas at work, some more invested in everyday reforms and others with grandiloquent schemes for the planet. What the essays show us is the conflicts over finding what Burgess calls „the search for a usable future.“

Less impressive are the essays in the first section, led off by Dipesh Chakrabarty's keynote address to the conference at Stanford University where these essays were first delivered. Chakrabarty claims that the Bandung agenda „displayed an uncritical emphasis on modernization,“ and that the leaders acted as if the people they governed „needed to be educated in the habits and manners of citizens.“ The Bandung debates show us that the main issues were less around issues of modernization, but around the problems of procedural justice (as Nesadurai shows). Given the ongoing colonial wars from Korea to Kenya, and the dominance of the Atlantic powers over the United Nations and its raft of institutions, the main issue at Bandung was to create space for the new powers to exert their agenda. Furthermore, the leadership at Bandung earned their places through anti-colonial struggles that lasted decades; they obviously did not represent their peoples in an unproblematic sense (they had their own class agendas, for instance). But their claim to leadership was far

greater than that of the colonial viceroys, and their pedagogical impulses came from their attempt to produce a national populace that could be someday freed from their various forms of bondage. Patronizing it might have been, but such impulses need to be set in their context.

The year before Bandung's 50th anniversary, David Scott published *Conscripts of Modernity: the tragedy of colonial enlightenment*. Scott's account, which is highly influential (quoted approvingly in Lee's introduction) offers an a-historical view of the Bandung agenda. Scott writes that anti-colonialism „has been written in the narrative mode of Romance,“ which then makes anti-colonialism a positive force to overcome its negation, colonialism. But in Bandung, it was not only colonialism that was the problem, but also the emergent Atlantic bloc, and the old social classes in the emergent nations. The diagnosis was much more sophisticated. As well, if Scott asks us to see the anti-colonial nationalism of the post-WW2 years as rooted in Tragedy rather than Romance, he switches one cartoon image for another: what you don't have in either is the richness of the Bandung agenda, and its destruction by the 1980s through its own internal failures (which are emphasized by Chakrabarty) and by the external pressures (which are ignored entirely by Chakrabarty: such as the Atlantic bloc – the G7, the IMF – and the emergence of a new globalized multi-national capitalism, or in other words, imperialism).

A new research agenda has indeed opened up. Post-colonial historians have turned away from the purview of the nation-state to the interactions among states and peoples (as in the East Africa essays in the Lee book). Diplomatic historians have abandoned their obsession with the aide-mémoires that go from one well-heeled palm to another, and their framework that went from Washington to Moscow to Beijing, with the brief stop in Geneva, Paris, London and Berlin. We now have work, as in the Tan/Acharya volume, that pays attention to Bangkok and Manila, Cairo and Durban. The best tribute to the Bandung spirit is the emergence of this scholarship. Bandung's final communiqué noted, „The peoples of Asia and Africa are now animated by a keen and

sincere desire to renew their old cultural contacts and develop new ones in the context of the modern world." Tan/Acharya and Lee are doing just that.

HistLit 2011-4-124 / Vijay Prashad über Lee, Christopher J. (Hrsg.): *Making a World After Empire. The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*. Ohio 2010, in: H-Soz-Kult 18.11.2011.

HistLit 2011-4-124 / Vijay Prashad über Tan, See Seng; Acharya, Amitav (Hrsg.): *Bandung Revisited. The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order*. Singapore 2009, in: H-Soz-Kult 18.11.2011.