

The Decolonising Camera: Street Photography and the Bandung Myth

CHRISTOPHER J. LEE

Lafayette College

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5612-5927>

Abstract

This article examines the visual archive of the 1955 Asian-African Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia. Better known as the Bandung Conference or simply Bandung, this diplomatic meeting hosted 29 delegations from countries in Africa and Asia to address questions of sovereignty and development facing the emergent postcolonial world. A number of well-known leaders attended, including Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Zhou Enlai of China, Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, and Sukarno of the host country, Indonesia. Given its importance, the meeting was documented extensively by photojournalists. The argument of this article is that the visual archive that resulted has contributed to the enduring symbolism and mythology of Bandung as a moment of Third World solidarity. More specifically, the street photography style of many images – with leaders walking down the streets of Bandung surrounded by adoring crowds – depicted an informality and intimacy that conveyed an accessible, anti-hierarchical view of the leaders who were present. These qualities of conviviality and optimism can also be seen in images of conference dinners, airport arrivals, delegate speeches, and working groups. Drawing upon the critical work of scholars of southern Africa and Southeast Asia, this article summarily positions the concept of the ‘decolonising camera’ to describe both the act of documenting political decolonisation as well as the ways in which visual archives produced during decolonisation can contribute to new iconographies of the political, which are both factual and mythic at once.

In April 1955, delegations from 29 countries in Africa and Asia convened in the city of Bandung, Indonesia, to address pressing issues their respective continents faced during the early Cold War period.* Formally named the Asian-African Conference, the Bandung Conference – or simply Bandung, as it is often referred to – was co-sponsored by Indonesia, Burma (present-day Myanmar), Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), India, and Pakistan. Though the countries present were not all independent – Sudan

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Figure 1: Major-General Sovag Jung Thapa of Nepal speaking before delegates. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

would achieve its independence in 1956 and the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1957 – the meeting initiated a new period of postcolonial diplomacy and Third World internationalism. It was the largest summit of its kind at that point, ostensibly representing 1.4 billion people, or almost two-thirds of the world’s population by some estimates.¹ Only the United Nations (UN), which had 76 members in 1955, was larger in numeric representation and in terms of geographic and political magnitude. Of the 29 delegations in attendance, 23 in total, including the five sponsors, represented countries on the Asian continent. These included the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Turkey, Japan, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Nepal, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, North and South Vietnam, and the Philippines. The remaining deputations from Africa represented Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast, Sudan, and Liberia.²

Against this intercontinental backdrop, the Bandung Conference reflected a diverse set of aims and ambitions. Though regional conflict in Southeast Asia between North and South Vietnam provided an initial catalyst for holding the conference, the programme for the meeting encompassed broader issues concerning American and Soviet influence in Asia and Africa, the importance of sovereignty for states that had achieved independence, economic development and trade, and remaining

1 J.L. Kotelawala, *Bandung 1955: Addresses to the Asian-African Conference and Statements to the Press* (Colombo, Ceylon: Government Press, 1955); L.M. Lüthi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 278.
 2 For scholarship on the Bandung meeting, see K. Ampiah, *The Political and Moral Imperatives of the Bandung Conference of 1955: The Reactions of the US, UK and Japan* (Leiden: Brill/Global Oriental, 2007); C.J. Lee (ed), *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, 2nd edn (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019); V. Prasad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007); Q.N. Pham and R. Shilliam (eds), *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); S. Tan and A. Acharya (eds), *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008).

uncertainties over the surge of decolonisation then occurring, particularly in Africa. This diversity of perspective and ambition could be witnessed at the personal level. The diplomatic and symbolic importance of the meeting was not lost on those leaders present, including such prominent statesmen as Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) of India, President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–70) of Egypt, Premier Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) of the PRC, and President Sukarno (1901–70) of Indonesia, all of whom promoted personal, national, and international interests (Figure 1). The Bandung Conference offered a global stage for their rise and that of their respective countries. The origins and purposes of the meeting were therefore multifaceted from geographic, political, and individual standpoints.

Yet this geopolitical complexity has frequently been glossed over in favour of the popular mythology of the Bandung Conference – what is commonly referred to as the ‘Bandung Spirit’. The Bandung Spirit has been subject to debate, referring at once to a continuing ethos of anticolonialism, a presentist attitude of alliance and solidarity, and an optimistic feeling of unlimited possibility about the future.³ Above all, it captured an argument that imperialism was over and that nation-state sovereignty and international cooperation were the new norms. This article examines how photography from the meeting played an important role in the creation of this mythology by producing an iconography of postcolonial leadership and social spectacle that would continue to reverberate in the decades ahead. The visual archive of Bandung through its depictions of collaboration and conviviality between Nehru, Nasser, Sukarno, and other figures contributed to an enduring image of Third World solidarity. By the same stroke, it also generated a ‘great man’ version of the meeting and Third Worldism more generally with its problematic elitism and gender exclusivity.⁴ Though a number of delegates like Nehru and Nasser participated in later conferences of even greater size and representation, given the continuing expansion of the postcolonial world, Bandung initiated this visual symbolism of postcolonial masculine camaraderie. If the importance of Bandung ultimately rested in its establishment of a permanent idea – one elusively conjured and represented by the Bandung Spirit – the photographs of the conference facilitated this ethos of continued anticolonialism after independence. That photographs with their empiricist attributes of capturing a ‘first draft of history’, to use an expression of Siegfried Kracauer, would contribute to political mythology may appear paradoxical at first glance.⁵ Yet, as demonstrated by a number of critics touched upon in this article, modern photography, especially in colonial contexts, has frequently retained this capacity for mythmaking.

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- 3 L. Eslava, M. Fakhri and V. Nesiah, ‘The Spirit of Bandung’, in L. Eslava, M. Fakhri and V. Nesiah (eds), *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Futures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3–32. This symbolism has been particularly demonstrated through different memoirs and commemorations of the meeting. See, inter alia, R. Abdulgani, *The Bandung Connection: The Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung in 1955* (Singapore: Gunung Agung, 1981); D.K. Emmerson, ‘A New Spirit of Bandung?’ *Pacific Forum/CSIS*, 29 April 2005; J. Mackie, *Bandung 1955: Non-Alignment and Afro-Asian Solidarity* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2005); V. Matthies, ‘The “Spirit of Bandung” 1955–1985: Thirty Years since the Bandung Conference’, *Intereconomics*, 20, 5, 1985, 207–10.
 - 4 A. Burton, ‘The Sodalities of Bandung: Toward a Critical 21st-Century History’, in C.J. Lee (ed), *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, 2nd edn (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019), 351–61.
 - 5 P. Hayes and G. Minkley, ‘Introduction: Africa and the Ambivalence of Seeing’, in P. Hayes and G. Minkley (eds), *Ambivalent: Photography and Visibility in African History* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019), 4.

To this effect, this article dwells on the images from Bandung to propose the idea of the ‘decolonising camera’ as an analogue to the better-known ‘colonising’ one.⁶ This concept is understood in two ways. First, the decolonising camera refers to the visual documentation of moments and processes related to the event of political decolonisation. Second, it also denotes a conjoined aesthetic and political ambition: by depicting and representing political decolonisation, new forms of knowledge and power can be revealed and constituted. These forms are not necessarily anticolonial or postcolonial as such, but can indicate new conditions of political possibility that have yet to be fully articulated. The remainder of this article interrogates the visual archive of the Bandung Conference to demonstrate these qualities and the interpretive potential of the decolonising camera as a concept.

Bandung Historicism and Postcolonial Aura

In December 1954, having returned to Paris after a sojourn to Spain where he was conducting research that would result in the book *Pagan Spain*, the African American novelist Richard Wright picked up a newspaper that announced a forthcoming conference of 29 Asian and African countries to be held in Indonesia the following year.⁷ As recalled in the opening paragraphs of *The Color Curtain*, his influential account of the Bandung Conference, this news struck Wright with a mix of feelings – astonishment balanced with confessed bafflement, an underlying Western-centric ignorance tempered by a strong sentiment of connection with the world of the conference and its participants. As he put it, a ‘stream of realizations claimed my mind’, with ‘colored’ peoples who had experienced European colonial rule now deciding their own destiny.⁸ Wright had already visited a part of this emergent world, specifically the Gold Coast, as recounted in *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos*, published earlier that year.⁹ Though unplanned, his eventual trip to Bandung expanded his sense of decolonisation and its meanings. The inventory of leaders he recollected that night in Paris – including Jawaharlal Nehru, Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72), Ali Sastroamidjojo (1903–75), Zhou Enlai, and Ho Chi Minh (1890–1969) – highlights both wonder and a limited familiarity with the world at hand.¹⁰ Indeed, his ultimate motivation for attending was not based on any expertise, but his own life experience. Like those figures in attendance, Wright had ‘a burden of race consciousness’ and ‘class consciousness.’¹¹ He had been ‘a member of the Communist Party for twelve years’ and knew ‘something of the politics and psychology of rebellion.’¹² As Wright

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- 6 W. Hartmann, J. Silvester and P. Hayes (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History, 1915–1950s* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1998). For a different take involving ‘decolonising’ the camera, see M. Sealy, *Decolonising the Camera: Photography in Racial Time* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2019).
- 7 R. Wright, *Pagan Spain* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008 [1957]).
- 8 R. Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1994 [1956]), 11.
- 9 R. Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Harper, 1954).
- 10 It should be noted that neither Kwame Nkrumah nor Ho Chi Minh attended the conference, though Wright’s mention of their names has undoubtedly contributed to this impression in the years since. See R. Vitalis, ‘The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung (Ban-doong)’, *Humanity*, 4, 2, 2013, 261–88.
- 11 Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 15.
- 12 *Ibid.*

summarised, '[t]hese emotions are my instruments. They are emotions, but I am conscious of them as emotions. I want to use these emotions to try to find out what these people think and why'.¹³

This affective approach conveyed by Wright sets a stage for addressing the opportunities and challenges of Bandung. The qualities of 'history' and 'emotion' that are foregrounded at the start of his text anticipated and reinforced the complex notion of the Bandung Spirit, with the entanglement of empiricism and affect defining the recurrent uses of Bandung and its attendant mythologies for decades after. Yet, in contrast to recent scholarship that has sought to dispel this political mythos to reinforce a factual record, this article embraces this discourse of spirit and its persistence in order to understand the power of modern myths and the limits of academic knowledge.¹⁴ The popular uses and misuses of history should not always be disregarded and corrected in favour of academic judgement. Rather, they should be approached and understood for the alternative rationales at work, which typically seek to strengthen unorthodox narratives, establish new epistemologies of knowledge, and achieve counterhegemonic political ends. This dialectic between the factual and the mythic comprises what I call 'Bandung historicism' – an approach that not only favours the perspectives and narratives of the Global South, but in doing so rethinks the uses and meaning of empiricism beyond purified Western concepts of race, nation, culture, and territory, which can misrepresent longstanding histories, presentist intentions, and imagined futures.¹⁵ Bandung can be framed through the lenses of event, metaphor, and memory, to use a historical sequencing from Shahid Amin, to accommodate the ability of historical episodes to evolve for different reasons and purposes, which in turn can result in competing lessons and legacies.¹⁶ With its unconventional nature and material, the visual archive of Bandung demonstrates the possibilities of this new historicism, which, like the Bandung Spirit, extends beyond the event of Bandung itself, through its interweaving of empiricism and myth for political ends.

In approaching photography and the Bandung Spirit, it is important to observe that the matter of 'spirit' and its associated terms have long defined photography and its interpretation. Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936) is among the most influential examples through its examination of 'aura' in relation to art and how the imparting of this feeling has been diminished through mechanistic replication.¹⁷ 'Aura' cannot be reproduced, a limitation to the machine nature of the modern camera, but one not exclusive to photography either. However, Miriam Bratu Hansen has presented the counterargument that the influence of Benjamin's 1936 essay has led to narrow understandings of 'aura'. The concept of 'aura' has had different meanings across Benjamin's work. Specific to

13 Ibid.

14 Vitalis, 'The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah'.

15 On 'Bandung historicism', see C.J. Lee, 'Return of the Event: Bandung and the Concept of the Conference', in C.J. Lee (ed), *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, 2nd edn (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019 [2010]), xv–xxxiv.

16 S. Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

17 W. Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, M.W. Jennings, B. Doherty and T.Y. Levin (eds) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

photography, Hansen suggests that 'aura' can be better grasped in relation to the 'trace' (*spur*).¹⁸ Photographs depict not only an immediate present that soon becomes the past, but they can contain contingent traces of the future. This identifiable futurity is not solely enabled through retrospective knowledge – what a viewer brings to an image – but it is facilitated through the medium of the photograph itself. The photograph structures the future, however contingently, thus conveying a temporally informed 'aura'. As Hansen writes, 'aura is not an inherent property of persons or objects [within a photograph] but pertains to the *medium* of perception, naming a particular structure of vision'.¹⁹ Benjamin touched upon this potential between aura and temporality in his earlier essay 'A Short History of Photography' (1931), in which he asked, 'What is aura? A peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be'.²⁰

This temporal understanding of aura – the idea that the effect of aura is due to a photograph's possession and condensation of past, present, and future – can be applied to images of Bandung to explain their continued power. A parallel approach is the related concept of 'magic', which has also been strongly associated with photography. Paul Landau has outlined a genealogy of this usage from the 'magic lantern' of the seventeenth century – a proto-camera that projected images by shining light through painted glass lenses – to inventor Fox Talbot's view of photography as 'natural magic', to Roland Barthes's insistence on the 'magical character of the photographic image'.²¹ Significant to this understanding of the mysterious properties of photographic images and the supernatural technology of cameras is the general association between art and spirit. 'Spirit photography' in Victorian Britain, for example, sought to capture ghostly apparitions and the presence of the dead.²² This relationship echoed pre-existing understandings unrelated to photography. Landau notes that the mimesis found in African sculpture and other media has typically been anchored through notions of 'spirits', 'ghosts', and 'ancestors'. These perspectives on African artwork reinforced colonial chauvinism, with arguments of 'primitiveness' and 'savagery' being rationalised through the perception of African proximity to a 'spirit' world, with ritual being favoured over reason.²³

Though religious 'spirit' and political 'spirit', like that at Bandung, represent two different registers of knowledge and belief, the potential dialogue between the two and the transformation of views on 'spirit', with it gaining a more positive value during the postcolonial period, are suggestive. Furthermore, the connections between art, 'spirit', and the ir/rational necessitate a return to existing scrutiny of photography and colonialism, given that colonial photography was frequently positioned as a modern counterpoint to the abstraction and unreason of indigenous artwork. The camera

18 M.B. Hansen, 'Benjamin's Aura', *Critical Inquiry*, 34, 2, 2008, 340.

19 *Ibid.*, 342, emphasis in original.

20 W. Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography', *Screen*, 13, 1, 1972, 20.

21 Barthes's emphasis. See P.S. Landau, 'Introduction: An Amazing Distance: Pictures and People in Africa', in P.S. Landau and D.D. Kaspin (eds), *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 22.

22 *Ibid.*, 5.

23 *Ibid.*, 22, 23.

as a tool of colonial conquest and control has been well established. In their influential book *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History, 1915–1950s*, Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester, and Wolfram Hartmann have written, ‘[w]hen photographs come out of storage, it is as if energy is released.’²⁴ Much of this ‘energy’ – or ‘spirit’, or ‘aura’ – has to do with audience reception: stories prompted by visual reminders, hidden histories that come to light once more. This dialectic between the image and the viewer is, of course, central to the power of photography. The importance of their argument, however, has less to do with the intrinsic aesthetic value of an image than with the social histories surrounding the image outside of the frame. Their concern is with popular perspectives rather than academic ones. Indeed, they underscore how historians up to that point had largely failed to see photography as possessing a unique ‘language...with its own structures of meaning.’²⁵ Rather than undertaking a ‘pictorial turn’, as promoted by W.J.T. Mitchell, historians had been content with photographs serving as mere ‘illustration’ rather than foregrounded content to be analysed in its own right.²⁶ As a result, historians had treated photographs in an uncomplicated, positivist manner – a form of evidence that is direct, accurate, and without need of analysis – despite the layered complexity of images. Specific to the context of Namibia, photography took on the double role of depicting and pathologising Namibians, portraying them as unready for self-rule while legitimating South African control over the country. Drawing from Allan Sekula, Hayes and her co-authors refer to this situation as a colonial variation of the camera’s ‘double system of representation’, by which the camera performs ‘both repressive and honorific functions.’²⁷ Colonial photography was a constitutive practice. The ‘colonising camera’ did not merely convey the world as it was, but produced new interpretations and subjective narratives about the world. It contributed to the ‘truth apparatus’ of the colonial state and its desire to collect and regulate ‘authoritative knowledge’, to cite Santu Mofokeng’s phrasing, over subject populations.²⁸ Ethnographic photographs and police photographs, to take two subgenres, resembled one another in purpose and power.

However, the colonising camera was not infallible. Hayes, Silvester, and Hartmann express concern that the correspondence between the camera and colonialism can fix a linear understanding of how power and the visual unfold. Though the camera was an imperial instrument and a symbol of modern capitalist technology by enabling the capture and circulation of knowledge with speed, the unevenness of colonialism must also be acknowledged, which could result in ‘plural and different colonialisms’ that departed from more monolithic understandings of imperial power.²⁹ Taken further, the colonising camera did not necessarily reinforce dichotomies of coloniser/

24 P. Hayes, J. Silvester and W. Hartmann, ‘Introduction’, in W. Hartmann, J. Silvester and P. Hayes (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History, 1915–1950s* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1998), 2.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.; W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chapter 1.

27 Hayes, Silvester and Hartmann, ‘Introduction’, 3.

28 Ibid., 5.

29 Ibid., 3.

colonised, white/black, and active/passive on every occasion.³⁰ Citing Sekula once more, there often existed instead the ‘messy contingency of the photograph.’³¹ Images could undertake unusual and unanticipated journeys dependent on the photographer and their identity, the subjects of the images, and the manner in which images were collected and archived, ranging from museums, to state repositories, to private collections.³² The information from captions – names, dates, locations – or the lack thereof could also impact their meaning.³³ Hayes and Gary Minkley have recently invoked the term ‘ambivalent’ to describe the range of unresolved tensions that can characterise photographs: their factual claims versus their unintended interpretive effects, their concrete detail versus their unstable meaning through public circulation. Hayes and Minkley stress the importance of retaining this irresolution, rather than working toward firm judgement and conclusiveness about the significance of photographs.³⁴

Shifting to the context of Southeast Asia, Rosalind Morris has also approached the subject of colonial photography and how the nineteenth-century British photographer John Thomson, as her case study, had ‘the reputation of being a dangerous geomancer’ with his camera viewed as ‘a dark mysterious instrument’ that could ‘see through rocks and mountains’ and ‘pierce the very souls of the natives.’³⁵ Morris underscores the familiar tropes of colonial power embedded in this self-description. What is of greater interest to her is the sociological nature of Thomson’s work in both London and Southeast Asia – the former depicting class distinctions and the latter capturing racial and cultural differences. An ambition can be observed to have ‘the photograph...exceed the mere reproduction of nature by becoming emblematic.’³⁶ As in case studies from Africa, this production of the emblematic reinforced a structure of ‘foreignness’ between Europe and Asia.³⁷ Drawing from these critical observations from the colonial archive and from the context of Europe, a set of questions can consequently be posed as to how they might apply to Bandung and the postcolonial period more generally. Following Benjamin, what type of ‘aura’ do postcolonial photographs possess? Are traces of futurity caught in the frame? Drawing from Hayes and her co-authors, to what extent do photographs from Bandung reinforce colonial dichotomies, or introduce new postcolonial variations? Alternatively, do they complicate such distinctions through contingencies and messiness? Furthermore, as Sekula might ask, what sort of double systems of representation can be detected? As examined in the next section, postcolonial photography does possess the potential to elude preceding visual structures of power, with the visual archive of Bandung demonstrating how the reinforcement of colonial emblems of difference can be displaced with a new iconography of Third World solidarity. Bringing the contexts and critical

30 Ibid., 4.

31 Ibid., 5.

32 Ibid., 5, 6.

33 Ibid., 7.

34 Hayes and Minkley, ‘Introduction’, 3.

35 R.C. Morris, ‘Introduction. Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia’, in R.C. Morris (ed), *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 1, 2.

36 Ibid., 3.

37 Ibid., 8.



Figure 2: Conference attendees at work. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

literatures of southern Africa and Southeast Asia together, the ‘decolonising camera’ does mark a contrast with the ‘colonising camera.’ However, like the postcolonial condition itself, it also reveals the entanglements of colonial and postcolonial image making and, as a result, the ways in which the colonial and the postcolonial both continue to haunt the present.

The Spectacle of Self-Determination

An initial consideration when approaching the concept of the ‘decolonising camera’ is how the photographs of Bandung convey the scale and sweep of the opportunities and challenges present through the diversity of delegations, but also the work performed through committees and speeches (Figure 2). International diplomacy requires a setting and audience, and political leaders, as agents of history, need a stage, literally and figuratively. Taking place for a full week between 18 and 24 April, this ample time period allowed for public speeches, but also for working groups and informal meetings to take place. Intentions to encourage intercontinental goodwill, to discuss shared socioeconomic problems, to consider the issue of postcolonial sovereignty vis-à-vis the West, and to determine the roles Africa and Asia could have in a world polarised by the Cold War presented unifying themes for the assembled delegations. Of the 29 countries in attendance, most had achieved independence, though, as mentioned earlier, there were others which remained under the last vestiges of colonial rule. Further constituting this spectrum were increasingly influential states of the postcolonial world – such as India, Egypt, and the PRC – as well as countries that had only recently faced the dissolution of their own imperial ambitions, like

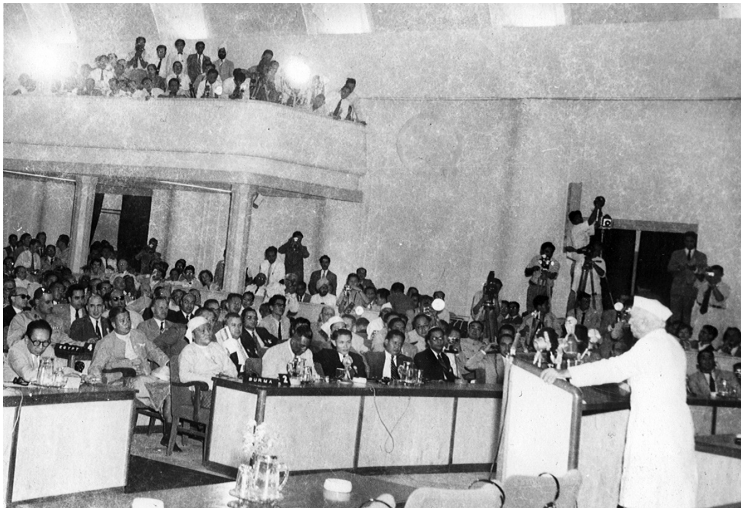


Figure 3: Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at the lectern delivering an address. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

Japan, which lost its empire after its defeat at the end of World War II. Some countries had experienced intensive European colonisation – the Gold Coast, Egypt, and India, for example – while other states had experienced Western imperial influence in more limited ways, such as Ethiopia, the PRC, and Thailand. What provided a sense of solidarity among participants was recognition that, first, the global political order was experiencing profound change during the 1950s and that, second, countries in Asia and Africa had the most to gain and potentially lose within this shifting context. This optimism and uncertainty can be grasped in the speeches given in the main conference hall (Figures 3 and 4), many of which have been anthologised, but also through the pragmatic work of diplomacy that occurred offstage.³⁸

What is important to the mythology of Bandung is how its visual archive framed leaders in ways that demonstrated elements of power, popular appeal, and international solidarity. Drew Thompson has written that the photography of decolonisation involves multiple genres – high and low, from studio photography to press photography – which in turn outline both statist and alternative histories of post-colonial independence.³⁹ The visual archive of Bandung can also be said to have multiple genres, though the photographs addressed in this essay, which are drawn from the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, are primarily press photos sponsored by the Indonesian government, with attention focused on the leaders present in order to capture the importance of the meeting. Carlos Romulo (1899–1985), who headed the delegation from the Philippines, remarked that ‘Bandung was, in a

38 Centre for the Study of Asian-African and Developing Countries, *Collected Documents of the Asian-African Conference, April 18–24, 1955* (Jakarta: Department of Foreign Affairs, 1983); G.M. Kahin, *The Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 1955* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1956).
39 D. Thompson, ‘Photographic Genres and Alternate Histories of Independence in Mozambique’, in P. Hayes and G. Minkley (eds), *Ambivalent: Photography and Visibility in African History* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2019), 129, 143.



Figure 4: PRC Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai (right foreground) and other members of the Chinese delegation. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

manner of speaking, a historical pageant, symbolizing the coming of the age of Asia and Africa.⁴⁰ Naoko Shimazu has reiterated this point more recently, describing the Bandung Conference as ‘a collective crowning ceremony or inauguration ceremony of post-colonial Asia and Africa.’⁴¹ As she further argues, a key reason for the early canonisation of Bandung can be attributed to its theatrical qualities of staging and enactment that immediately produced symbolic meanings during the event itself. ‘What is striking about Bandung is that it was an act of confident assertion *vis-à-vis* the [Western] ruling elite of international society,’ she writes, ‘and not a passive act of seeking acceptance.’⁴² The elements of stage (place), performers (political leaders), and audience (present and future) proved crucial to this radical assertion of an emergent Third Worldism. The photography from Bandung portrays the former two elements, while also building a present and future audience receptive to the ideals and spirit of Bandung through its spectacle.

The urbanism and specifically the street context of many images are a vital part of this staging, performance, and audience creation. Indeed, though many of the photographs of the meeting can be classified as press photos by photojournalists, a number of them also fall into the genre of street photography due to their setting. Abigail Solomon-Godeau has written that this genre is largely a twentieth-century invention, even though its practice goes back to the nineteenth century. A defining feature of this style, before its more recent auteurist claims, is simply its urban vernacular – streets, pedestrians, sidewalks, alleyways, cars, and so forth – which was carefully

40 C.P. Romulo, *The Meaning of Bandung* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1956), 35.

41 N. Shimazu, ‘Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 48, 1, 2014, 232.

42 *Ibid.*, 233.

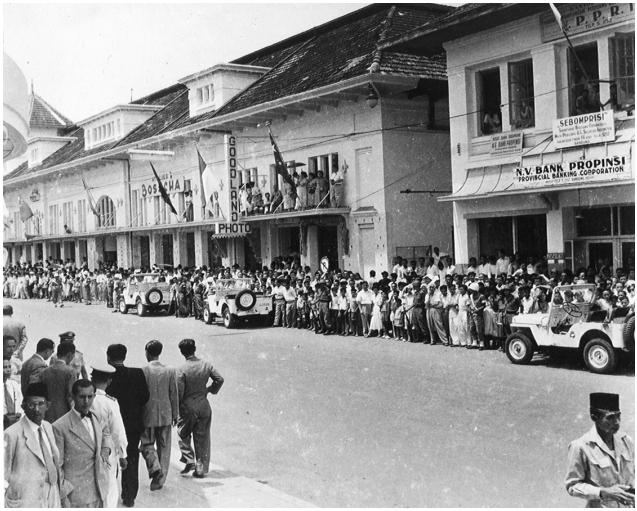


Figure 5: Crowds and state security on the streets of Bandung. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

managed by the conference organisers prior to the meeting.⁴³ The choice of Bandung as the conference venue rather than Jakarta, Indonesia's capital, was somewhat unusual. This decision can partly be attributed to political nostalgia, given that Sukarno had been a university student at the Bandung Institute of Technology and the city's consequent reputation as a seedbed for 'freedom-fighters'.⁴⁴ There were also security concerns due to the regional presence of the Darul Islam Movement (Islamic State Movement), a separatist organisation established in 1942, which declared its intention of founding the Islamic State of Indonesia in West Java. Nonetheless, Bandung may have been perceived as easier to secure than the much larger city of Jakarta, which had 1.9 million people in 1955.⁴⁵ Beyond the choice of city, the Joint Secretariat charged with organising the event created the 'AAC zone' ('Asia-Afrika Conference zone') that included the Freedom Building (formerly the Merdeka Building), Bandung's central mosque, and Jalan Braga, a popular avenue with restaurants and cafes. Built in 1895, the Freedom Building served as the primary venue for speeches and events. In 1980 it would become the Museum of the Asian-African Conference to mark the meeting's twenty-fifth anniversary.⁴⁶ The organisers took additional consideration of the surrounding neighbourhood with streets cleaned and street vendors removed from their usual commercial spaces.⁴⁷ Buildings and streets were also renamed under the direction of Sukarno. Beyond the Freedom Building, a second conference venue, originally known as the Dana Pension Fund Building, became 'Dwi-Warna' ('Two-

43 A. Solomon-Godeau, *Photography after Photography: Gender, Genre, History*, S. Parsons (ed) (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 79.
44 Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre', 235.
45 Shimazu further writes that Bandung and the conference were located in the 'heartland' of the Darul Islam, thus underscoring both the security risk while also legitimating a military presence. See *ibid.*, 235–6.
46 *Ibid.*, 242.
47 *Ibid.*, 238.

Colour'), which referred to the Indonesian flag's red and white colours. Jalan Raya Timur (Great Eastern Road) was redesignated 'Jalan Asia Afrika' ('Asia Africa Road'), and Jalan Alun Alun Barat (West Square Street) became 'Jalan Masjid Agung' ('Great Mosque Street').⁴⁸

Beyond street vernacular, another feature of the genre of street photography is its spontaneity and informality – what Solomon-Godeau characterises as 'the representation of individuals without their knowledge or consent'.⁴⁹ This aspect can be seen in photographs of crowds commingling with state security, underscoring the competing dynamics of popular energy and state control that contributed to the atmosphere (Figure 5). Richard Wright noted the state preparations and the security on hand in the streets of Bandung. 'We rolled into Bandung, a city of half a million people, and saw a forest of banners proclaiming Asian and African solidarity; bright posters welcomed delegations to the city,' he writes in *The Color Curtain*, describing his introduction to the city.⁵⁰ 'Stout, squat, white-helmeted troops lined the clean streets, holding Sten guns in their hands and from their white belts hand grenades dangled... The faces of those troops were like blank masks, and they looked at you with black, cold, unresponsive eyes.'⁵¹ Wright offers personal context on the threat posed by the soldiers. 'Not so horrible... You see, I've just come from Spain where you live under the muzzles of machine guns every hour of the day. You get used to it,' Wright explains. 'The machine gun at the street corner is the trade-mark of the twentieth century. Open force is better than swarms of plain-clothes men. You know where you are with a machine gun.'⁵²

These offhand remarks can be seen as blasé moments of sarcasm on Wright's part, though it is difficult to disassociate their deeper meaning from his preceding experiences of anticolonial nationalism in the Gold Coast and racial violence in the United States in addition to Spain, which was still ruled by the fascist government of Francisco Franco (1892–1975). Wright understood the contradictions of the political energy at hand – a prelude to the complexity of the Bandung Spirit – that involved tension and control as much as it did celebration and optimism. The decolonising camera conveyed this coexistence of anxiety and determination and, akin to the colonising camera, can be said to depict 'plural' postcolonialisms rather than simplistic notions of power (Figure 6). 'We drove past the conference building and saw the flags of the twenty-nine participating nations of Asia and Africa billowing lazily in a weak wind,' Wright continues, 'already the streets were packed with crowds and their black and yellow and brown faces looked eagerly at each passing car, their sleek black hair gleaming in the bright sun, their slanted eyes peering intently, hopefully, to catch sight of some prime minister, a U Nu, a Chou En-lai, or a Nehru.'⁵³ Indeed, despite security concerns, members of the public could encounter conference

48 Ibid., 241.

49 Solomon-Godeau, *Photography after Photography*, 81.

50 Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 132.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 133.



Figure 6: Zhou Enlai and Sukarno travel by motorcade. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

delegates through hotel access and special waiting areas that allowed for viewing.⁵⁴ ‘In this way, pedestrians could enter the conference zone unhindered as long as they did not obstruct the delegates and the working of the conference,’ Shimazu writes. ‘This gesture of public spiritedness on the part of officialdom afforded once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to the people of Bandung to approach conference delegates face to face, and even ask for autographs.’⁵⁵ This accommodation at the venues and on the streets, which can frequently be seen in images from the meeting (Figure 7), created ‘a special atmosphere to the whole occasion,’ allowing for ‘a continuous interaction between conference delegates and the people, almost as though a weeklong street theatre was being staged’.⁵⁶

These images of power also complicate the genre of street photography, given that its practice has traditionally involved the disadvantaged and the marginalised as subjects, as noted by Solomon-Godeau.⁵⁷ Pictures from Bandung unsurprisingly involved leaders as a focal point. This blending of street photography and diplomatic portraiture is most clearly evinced in the daily ritual made by delegates of walking between their hotels and the Freedom Building – a practice that became known as the ‘Bandung Walk’ and the ‘Freedom Walk’ (‘Merdeka Walk’).⁵⁸ The distance between the two conference hotels and the Freedom Building was relatively short – the Grand Hotel Preanger was 100 metres away and the Hotel Savoy Homann was only 50 metres away. Walking to the venue was consequently encouraged to reduce

54 Shimazu, ‘Diplomacy as Theatre’, 238.
 55 Ibid. Shimazu notes that these measures of public access were similar to, and even less extravagant than, those at other conferences like the 1947 Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi.
 56 Ibid.
 57 Solomon-Godeau, *Photography after Photography*, 85.
 58 Shimazu, ‘Diplomacy as Theatre’, 247.



Figure 7: A delegate arriving at a venue (person and venue are unconfirmed). Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

traffic. The practice became more theatrical, however, with delegates proceeding as carefully spaced and self-contained national units (Figures 8 and 9). ‘World statesmen as key diplomatic actors are often perceived by audiences to be personifications of the states they represent,’ Shimazu describes, ‘hence, the giving of a strong stage performance becomes even more critical to creating a positive national image in international politics.’⁵⁹ To this end, delegates wore clothing and uniforms that reflected cultural identities and political power. Indeed, despite the Third World solidarity being promoted, nationalism was on full display. Kojo Botsio (1916–2001), for example, who led the delegation from the Gold Coast, can be seen wearing Ghanaian kente cloth, while Zhou Enlai wore a Mao suit, popularised by the Chinese Communist Revolution. Nehru wore a Nehru jacket, naturally enough, and Nasser wore a military uniform symbolic of the Free Officers Movement, which he led to power in Egypt. As Shimazu comments, ‘[t]he spontaneity of the occasion produced powerful visual imagery of the great men of Asia and Africa striding purposefully towards the Freedom Building amidst cheering local crowds, and came to represent the iconography of the Bandung Conference in later years.’⁶⁰

Arguably more significant than the nationalism on display during this occasion of Afro-Asian solidarity is the voyeuristic nature of the images. The close proximity suggests not just access, but a sense of personal intimacy and even equivalence. The photojournalists do not convey ethical concern or hesitance over consent in taking these photographs. Many images impart the ‘predatory, possessive, and aggressive aspects of the photographic act’, to use the words of Solomon-Godeau, even among the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 242.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 244.



Figure 8: Kojo Botsio of the Gold Coast (foreground centre). Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.



Figure 9: Zhou Enlai (centre left) and members of the PRC delegation. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

most powerful leaders.⁶¹ Nehru, Zhou, and Nasser were the most popular delegates among the street crowds, largely because they ‘embodied the power and the spirit of a nationalist or revolutionary struggle.’⁶² A specific reason for the appeal of Zhou was the presence of a significant local Chinese population in Bandung, numbering

61 Solomon-Godeau, *Photography after Photography*, 88.
 62 Shimazu, ‘Diplomacy as Theatre’, 245.



Figure 10: Nehru and Nasser walking the Bandung Walk. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

around 40,000 (a 1945 estimate). Indonesia more generally had a substantial Chinese community, which encouraged the signing of the Sino-Indonesian Dual Nationality Treaty after the conference.⁶³ Reflecting his esteemed status as an elder statesman, Nehru was greeted by rallying cries of ‘Merdeka, pak!’ (‘Freedom, sir!’) when he waved to the crowds. In contrast, Nasser, given his younger age of only 37 years, was viewed as the embodiment of youthful vitality and ambitious revolutionary energy – he symbolised the new Egypt.⁶⁴ Indeed, the street photography genre of the images with their horizontal, anti-hierarchical nature emphasises once more a shared space with the crowds, as well as attempts at connection and solidarity among delegates (Figure 10). Seeking interpersonal and popular rapport are constant features. The conference offered a unique venue to build interpersonal and intergenerational networks among delegates. Unlike the UN with its American and Soviet supervision, the meeting actively excluded, at least formally, these superpower influences. The opportunity to meet, converse, and exchange ideas in person retained significant political value. In this way, the decolonising camera did illustrate a transfer of power – the postcolonial images from Bandung’s visual archive form a distinct contrast to the pathologising imagery of the colonising camera with its pejorative depictions of ‘native’ peoples unready to rule.

Yet the conference was actively shaped by leaders who had specific ambitions. Bandung introduced, legitimated, and entrenched recognised heads of state. Though a range of unofficial delegations and non-state participants attended, the conference

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid., 246.

was ultimately exclusive, being both elitist and masculine.⁶⁵ Of the leaders present, Nehru, Zhou, Nasser, and Sukarno proved to be crucial in defining the meeting's short-term and long-term success.⁶⁶ Each played different roles and achieved different outcomes. Each had different sources of capital – personal and political – to draw upon. Nehru and Zhou in particular pursued complementary agendas that reflected the Panchsheel Treaty (1954) between both countries, and they arguably shared the most political capital of any of the leaders in attendance based on their personal reputations and the countries they represented. India and China were the two largest countries in terms of territorial size with resources and economic potential that affirmed their influence in the regions of South and East Asia. Combined with this dimension were the remarkable political histories that both countries possessed. India held the distinction of being the first major colony of Great Britain to achieve independence along with Pakistan following partition in August 1947. Under the leadership of Nehru and Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948), the Indian National Congress and India more generally attained an anti-imperial symbolism and moral authority widely admired by other colonial countries. Nehru had participated in the 1927 League Against Imperialism meeting, and he understood the importance of intercolonial connections and the new possibilities of self-determination that could emerge at Bandung.⁶⁷

The PRC similarly attracted attention for the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong (1893–1976), after a 20-year period of conflict with Chinese nationalists led by Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975). This armed struggle – informed by Marxism and supported by peasants and workers who pursued tactics of guerrilla warfare – provided a contrast to the non-violent resistance of Gandhi. It arguably proved more influential to anticolonial movements in Asia and Africa. Maoism as revolutionary thought and strategy inspired and sustained political activism across both continents. As a consequence of these factors, both Nehru and Zhou perceived Bandung as an occasion to consolidate their standing among regional neighbours and globally. Although the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) would not formally take shape until the Belgrade Conference of Nonaligned States convened in 1961, Nehru promoted the idea of 'non-alignment' from the US and the Soviet Union as a signature feature of his country's diplomacy. Zhou sought wider diplomatic recognition for the legitimacy of the PRC (Figure 11), given that Taiwan (formally known as the Republic of China) retained UN status as China, a situation that would last until 1971. Tensions between the PRC and Taiwan were such that

65 Among the better-known unofficial delegates were African American participants Richard Wright, as mentioned, but also US Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. See N. Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 210–12. Unofficial delegates representing liberation struggles in Algeria and South Africa also attended. See B. Bunting, *Moses Kotane, South African Revolutionary: A Political Biography* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1975), chapter 12; M. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 81, 85, 93–6.

66 On the leaders present, see A. Acharya and S.S. Tan, 'Introduction: The Normative Relevance of the Bandung Conference for Contemporary Asian and International Order', in A. Acharya and S.S. Tan (eds), *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), 1–18.

67 M.L. Louro, *Comrades against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).



Figure 11: Zhou Enlai (left) and Sukarno (centre) at dinner. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

Zhou survived an assassination attempt in Hong Kong on his way to Jakarta when the original Air India flight he was scheduled to fly on exploded.⁶⁸

For Nasser, Bandung offered an opportunity for gaining international recognition, enabling him to ascend to a status equivalent to statesmen like Nehru, despite the ambiguities of the Free Officers coup that placed him on the path to power in 1952. The period between the 1952 Revolution and April 1955 was a complex one. Though Nasser played a key role in the revolt and served as vice-chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council under President Muhammad Naguib, it was not until late 1954 – after ongoing disputes with Naguib and surviving an assassination attempt in October of that year – that Nasser effectively ascended to the presidency. A new constitution approved in 1956 would formalise this status.⁶⁹ However, Nasser had grown concerned with the continued influence of Great Britain in the Middle East, especially after the signing of the Baghdad Pact in February 1955 that resulted in a series of military agreements between Britain, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan – the last four being present at Bandung. Egypt had been an observer at the 1947 Asian Relations Conference in Delhi, and Nasser and Nehru had been in dialogue in the weeks prior to the Asian-African Conference regarding the issue of non-alignment, with mutual diplomatic visits to Cairo and Delhi.⁷⁰ The Bandung meeting solidified this effort, with the elder Nehru assuming a mentorship role. Nehru was 65 years old at the conference, whereas Nasser was only 37, as mentioned earlier. Though Nasser had little political capital to offer Nehru initially, he had much to gain through his

68 S. Tsang, 'Target Zhou Enlai: The "Kashmir Princess" Incident of 1955', *The China Quarterly*, 139, 1994, 766–82. For a recent appraisal of Zhou and his career, see G. Wenqian, *Zhou Enlai: The Last Perfect Revolutionary* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007).

69 For a recent biography of Nasser, see S.K. Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004).

70 Lüthi, *Cold Wars*, 290–91.



Figure 12: Zhou Enlai (left) arriving at Bandung's airport with Ali Sastroamidjojo (centre) welcoming him. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

friendship with Nehru as indicated in the years ahead, particularly with the formation of the NAM in 1961.

Not least, Sukarno as the host played an indispensable part to ensure the conference's success along with Prime Minister Ali Sastroamidjojo (1903–76), who attended to more prosaic organisational matters of scheduling and diplomatic arrivals (Figure 12). Sukarno's opening address captured the immediate symbolism of the conference, in which he asked,

What can we do? We can do much! We can inject the voice of reason into world affairs. We can mobilise all the spiritual, all the moral, all the political strength of Asia and Africa on the side of peace. Yes, we! We, the peoples of Asia and Africa, 1,400,000,000 strong, far more than half the human population of the world, we can mobilise what I have called the Moral Violence of Nations in favour of peace. We can demonstrate to the minority of the world which lives on the other continents that we, the majority, are for peace, not for war, and that whatever strength we have will always be thrown on to the side of peace.⁷¹

Sukarno's unusual, yet vivid, phrase the 'Moral Violence of Nations', which implied a moral, rather than military, approach to achieve world peace, set the tone for how Asian and African countries could participate in the evolving global order. World peace emerged as a clear theme in the final communiqué of the conference.

71 'Speech by President Sukarno of Indonesia at the Opening of the Conference', *Collected Documents of the Asian-African Conference, April 18–24, 1955* (Jakarta: Department of Foreign Affairs, 1983), 8.



Figure 13: Ali Sastroamidjojo (left), Prime Minister U Nu (1907–95) of Burma (centre), and Nehru (right) during a break. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

This excerpted passage also articulates what ultimately became the Bandung Spirit: a feeling of global political possibility when Asian and African countries collected their interests together. Richard Wright observed this elusive possibility, writing ‘[o]ver and beyond the waiting throngs that crowded the streets of Bandung, the Conference had a most profound influence upon the color-conscious millions in all the countries of the earth.’⁷² It can also be seen in the visual archive of Bandung with its depictions of convivial leaders and vibrant streets, which, to draw on Benjamin, contained traces of the future in terms of Third World solidarity and its limits.

The visual archive of Bandung ultimately contributes to the concept of the decolonising camera and its potential meanings by documenting a key moment in the history of decolonisation and, in doing so, enabling the reconfiguration of relations of power and knowledge once shaped by colonialism. The airport arrivals, the dinners, the working groups, the cigarette breaks, and the Bandung Walk all point to an emergent postcolonial camaraderie and cosmopolitan brotherhood (Figures 13 and 14). Furthermore, the photojournalism genre of these images repositions these leaders as relatable – among, and of, the people – in contrast to many self-styled and controlled images of postcolonial power: the ubiquitous presidential portrait being the best example. It should be acknowledged that the photographer or photographers who took these images are currently unknown.⁷³ While this factual absence would traditionally be seen as a limitation for interpretation, this situation contributes to the social aspect of the images – the communal, authorless nature of the Bandung Spirit once more. In her book *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*,

72 Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 176.

73 For a study of journalism and Afro-Asianism after the Bandung meeting, see T. Zhou, ‘Global Reporting from the Third World: The Afro-Asian Journalists’ Association, 1963–1974’, *Critical Asian Studies*, 51, 2, 2019, 166–97.



Figure 14: A working session with delegates from Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, and the Philippines. Image courtesy of the Museum of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia.

Ariella Aisha Azoulay discusses how the institutionalisation of photography has depended on the identification of the photographer with an understanding that the image is their ‘property’.⁷⁴ This authorship is ‘the point of origin of the discussion of photography’.⁷⁵ However, against this prevalent practice, Azoulay argues for a suspension of the power of authorship – what she calls an ‘illegitimate sovereignty’ – in order to open the ‘event’ of a photograph to a wider political ontology beyond that of the photographer.⁷⁶ Jennifer Bajorek’s recent work in West Africa has extended Azoulay’s argument to examine multiple political ontologies and, following the lead of Patricia Hayes, the variety of forms of citizenship that can be documented and expressed through photographs.⁷⁷ As Bajorek and Hayes point out, Azoulay’s notion of ‘political ontology’ is circumscribed by normative understandings of citizenship and the nation-state – political framings that were suspended temporarily at Bandung in favour of Third World solidarity.

What all three do agree on is the potential for photographs to deterritorialise ideas, claims, and political imaginations. This tension between territorialisation and deterritorialisation can be seen in the images at Bandung – a tension that can be further witnessed in the non-contiguous, archipelagic geographies of the Third World and the Global South more generally. The informal intimacies of Bandung’s visual archive contributed to the ethos of the Bandung Spirit by capturing the human energy of the conference with its complex mix of power and novelty, national

74 A.A. Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2015), 26–7.

75 *Ibid.*, 23.

76 *Ibid.*, 24.

77 J. Bajorek, *Unfixed: Photography and Decolonial Imagination in West Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 27–8; P. Hayes, ‘The Uneven Citizenry of Photography: Reading the “Political Ontology” of Photography from Southern Africa’, *Cultural Critique*, 89, 2015, 173–93.

ambition and Third World camaraderie. As cited earlier, Siegfried Kracauer remarked that a photograph was a 'first draft of history' – an understanding that implied a need for critical engagement and contextualisation, while also recognising the value of such initial impressions.⁷⁸ This approach applies to the photographs of Bandung. Historical judgements of the meeting have sharply contrasted, at times tending toward a utopianism – Bandung being a shining instance of Third World solidarity – and on other occasions leaning toward dismissiveness – a conference that ultimately accomplished little. Its significance rests in between. If the geographic balance of the meeting tilted toward Asia, the future of Asia–Africa relations moved to the continent of Africa and evolved to include such later organisations and movements as the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (founded in 1957), the Afro-Asian Writers Association (founded in 1958), and the NAM. Bandung provided a visual iconography of what solidarity looked like for these future iterations of Third Worldism, even if individual ambitions and competing nationalisms remained beneath the surface.⁷⁹

Conclusion: The Arts of Diplomacy

With the colonial period receding and postcolonial autonomy better established, the initial fervour of Afro-Asian solidarity in 1955 shifted and declined during the 1960s, though it did not entirely disappear. The Vietnam War, apartheid South Africa, and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank of Palestine after 1967 continued to offer reasons for protesting against emergent and remaining forms of imperialism. New connections were also fostered, particularly in Latin America with the 1966 founding of the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL) in Havana, Cuba.⁸⁰ But these later developments do not fully account for the successes or failures of Bandung. The Asian-African Conference did not establish a diplomatic routine like the NAM. Yet, to interpret the event as a failure due to its singularity neglects a more prosaic aspect of the meeting and international conferences more generally: the opportunity to meet, converse, and develop relations with other leaders and diplomats. The visual archive of Bandung depicts this social life and cultural history. Though the expression 'Third World' preceded the conference, Bandung symbolised its meaning in palpable form. The photojournalism from the event promoted this idea as well.⁸¹ Bandung served to both territorialise and deterritorialise Third Worldism. To say that these images are examples of 'Asian' or 'African'

78 As quoted in Hayes and Minkley, 'Introduction', 4.

79 On later histories after Bandung, see J. Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927–1992)* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); R. Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema between the Second and the Third Worlds* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020); G.H. Jansen, *Nonalignment and the Afro-Asian States* (New York: Praeger, 1966); N. Miskovic, H. Fischer-Tiné and N. Boskovska (eds), *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi-Bandung-Belgrade* (New York: Routledge, 2014); M. Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); R.B. Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

80 OSPAAAL has also been referred to in primary sources as the Afro-Asian Latin American People's Solidarity Organization (also the Afro-Asian-Latin American People's Solidarity Organization). See P. Asselin, 'Global Revolutionary Currents, the Vietnamese Revolution, and the Origins of the American War', *African Identities*, 16, 2, 2018, 191–204; A.G. Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

81 Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 6–7.

photography misrepresents the diplomacy involved and its attempt at a new political geography.

Taken further, the visual archive of Bandung raises questions not only about political decolonisation, but also decolonising knowledge, especially knowledge made and received through visual imagery. Paul Landau has drawn upon the insights of V.Y. Mudimbe to argue that an 'image-Africa' has often obscured African societies, histories, and politics in a fashion similar to the 'Orient' as discussed by Edward Said.⁸² This 'image-Africa' has been constituted through written accounts, art collections, and museum exhibitions, but also photographs. Such practices, to cite Maurice Merleau-Ponty, have betrayed 'a false consciousness, a thief's consciousness' on the part of the coloniser.⁸³ The imagery from Bandung suggests the opposite potential – photography can be a source of restitution, creation, and empowerment, if not entirely restoration. Along this line, Rosalind Morris has written that photography does not illustrate the past as it once was, but instead provides a 'space of endurance, of fantasy, and of self-making'.⁸⁴ Like political independence, photographs can mark points between two orders of time and the emotive qualities that each time period might conjure. These emotions are not always celebratory. 'It [a photograph] opens between an orientation to the past as that which is cut off from its own future, and an orientation to the future as the ideal form of the past,' Morris writes. 'Accordingly, there is, on one side, mourning and, on the other, an anticipatory melancholia.'⁸⁵ Her remarks recall the temporal 'aura' of photographs as touched upon by Benjamin. These images, like the Bandung Spirit to which they have contributed and reflect, impart senses of nostalgia and postcolonial melancholia. They contain traces of a 'former future', in Reinhart Koselleck's phrasing, that continues to inform and haunt the Global South in the present.⁸⁶

The 'photographic totality' of Bandung therefore suggests a vision more complicated and layered than simple postcolonial optimism.⁸⁷ Returning to the idea of 'Bandung historicism' and its interplay between political imagination and the factual record, Richard Wright's account is an example of the evolution of an event through storytelling, with *The Color Curtain* having received critical scrutiny for its frameworks that have foregrounded some themes at the expense of others. The reading and misreading of Bandung by Wright has been attributed to his American and Black identities, in addition to his personal political history. In their recent critical study, *Indonesian Notebook*, Brian Russell Roberts and Keith Foulcher have pointed out the myths surrounding the writing of *The Color Curtain* and what has been left out, namely Wright's interactions with his Indonesian hosts and local writers in Java, as well as the role of the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom in funding his

82 Landau, 'Introduction', 2, 5.

83 As quoted in *ibid.*, 7.

84 Morris, 'Introduction', 10.

85 *Ibid.*, 9

86 R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, K. Tribe (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004 [1979]), 3, 11.

87 The expression is Siegfried Kracauer's. See R.C. Morris, 'Photography and the Power of Images in the History of Power: Notes from Thailand', in R.C. Morris (ed), *Photographies East: The Camera and Its Histories in East and Southeast Asia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 151.

trip.⁸⁸ These relationships between storytelling, folklore, and historicism have subsequently generated wide-ranging audiences and self-sustaining publics for Bandung – what Narendran Kumarakulasingam has referred to as ‘Bandung beyond Bandung.’⁸⁹ Photography has been a vital part of this post-event narration, contributing to its status as a concept-metaphor – an intersectional moment of history and symbolic meaning that has come to represent one origin of the Global South.

By extension, the decolonising camera must be approached as not simply a matter of documenting political decolonisation, but as equally involved in deconstructing remaining forms of colonial power – discursive, symbolic, and intellectual. This secondary process is more difficult and points to a similar set of limitations its conceptual precursor possessed: decolonisation, like colonisation, is often incomplete. Still, though dismantlement may remain unfinished, images can create new narratives, iconographies, and political communities. In her book *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java*, Karen Strassler has discussed how it is through ‘the reflexive production and circulation of images that “imagined” social entities like nations become visible and graspable, that they come to seem to exist prior to and independent of those images.’⁹⁰ Such iconographies can present ‘ideal models of citizenship’ with visual symbols seen as ‘condensations of national mythologies and rallying points for mass movements.’⁹¹ Images can constitute ‘vivid mnemonic and pedagogic tools for training would be national subjects’, thus moving beyond being ‘proof of the past’ or ‘shimmering visions of the future.’⁹² In her more recent book *Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia*, Strassler has ventured further to propose and examine the ‘image-event’, which she defines as ‘a political process in which an image (or a constellation of related images) crystallises otherwise inchoate and dispersed imaginings within a discrete and mobile visible form that becomes available for scrutiny, debate, and play as it circulates in public.’⁹³ To be sure, as Strassler writes, ‘it is hard to imagine any political event that is not also an image-event.’⁹⁴ Nonetheless, these ‘image-events’ can illuminate issues of ‘credibility, authenticity, and truth’ beyond the ‘staged and static’ politics of the state.⁹⁵ Through popular circulation, images can acquire ‘symbolic density’ and ‘iconic value’, becoming the ‘terrain of political struggles...in the messy arena of the public sphere.’⁹⁶ As she concludes, the ‘inherent volatility’ of such images can make them more significant and meaningful.⁹⁷

88 B.R. Roberts and K. Foulcher (eds), *Indonesian Notebook: A Sourcebook on Richard Wright and the Bandung Conference* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

89 N. Kumarakulasingam, ‘De-islanding’, in Q.N. Pham and R. Shilliam (eds), *Meanings of Bandung: Postcolonial Orders and Decolonial Visions* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 59.

90 K. Strassler, *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.

93 K. Strassler, *Demanding Images: Democracy, Mediation, and the Image-Event in Indonesia* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 13.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., 11.

96 Ibid., 12, 13.

97 Ibid., 11.

These observations of Strassler build upon the critical interventions discussed previously. They are suggestive of the ongoing evolution of photography in Indonesia since the Bandung meeting and the ways in which photography can work through decolonisation to raise new questions and concerns about the postcolonial nation-state. The visual archive of the Bandung Conference demonstrates the qualities and mutual tensions she cites, being an ‘image-event’ whose photographs indicate a desire for ‘credibility, authenticity, and truth’ that in turn have acquired ‘symbolic density’ and ‘iconic value.’ The emblematic figures and images of Bandung have provided ‘vivid mnemonic and pedagogic tools for training would be national subjects’, albeit subjects of the Third World and the Global South instead. Taken further, through these images we might counterpose colonial and postcolonial photography as genres of difference versus connection, genres of conquest and destruction versus creation, development, and progress. Bandung historicism – of which these images are an essential part – holds the potential for circumventing the conformities of nation-state narratives in order to foster transnational sensibilities that account for the interplay of myth and empiricism, the tensions of postcolonialism, and the unruliness of Cold War internationalisms. By the same stroke, this visual archive presents evidence of how the early postcolonial world remained entangled with the remaining vestiges of colonialism. The decolonising camera, like the colonising camera, ultimately marked an incomplete process with its images of power, patriarchy, and elitism perpetuating a preceding structure of territorial, class, and gender politics. Allan Sekula’s understanding of photography as possessing both honorific and repressive qualities applies to Bandung. The polysemic nature of the Bandung Conference and its visual archive not only conjure the ghosts of past futures, but they also suggest other legacies beyond the camera that continue to haunt the present.