



Radical Regionalism: Feminism, Sovereignty and the Pan-African Project¹

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Abstract

This article analyses how sovereignty in Africa's immediate post-independence period was necessarily conceptualised as a regional pan-African and internationalist project of decolonisation, outlining lessons for the contemporary period. The capacity of newly independent states to shape their domestic policy and mobilise resources was constrained by their subordinate place in the global political and economic order, which made them dependent on foreign capital and tied them to the interests of their former colonisers. As such, they fostered radical regional and international solidarity that would facilitate the continent's development. Looking at a series of feminist conferences in the immediate post-independence era, the article also traces the contributions of Southern feminists to the decolonisation project and African feminists to the conception of pan-Africanism, breaking with Western feminists to conceptualise national liberation as fundamental to gender justice.

Résumé

Cet article analyse la manière dont la souveraineté, dans la période qui a immédiatement suivi les indépendances en Afrique, a été nécessairement conceptualisée comme un projet régional panafricain et internationaliste de décolonisation, en insistant sur les enseignements pour la période contemporaine. La capacité des États nouvellement indépendants à façonner leur politique intérieure et à mobiliser des ressources était limitée par leur place secondaire dans l'ordre politique et économique mondial, qui les rendait dépendants du capital étranger et les liait aux intérêts de leurs anciens colonisateurs. Ainsi, ils ont encouragé une solidarité régionale et internationale radicale qui faciliterait le développement du continent. En examinant une série de conférences féministes organisées au lendemain des indépendances, l'article retrace également les contributions des féministes du Sud au projet de décolonisation, ainsi que celles des féministes africaines à la conception du

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panafricanisme, rompant avec les féministes occidentales pour conceptualiser la libération nationale comme fondamentale pour l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes.

Introduction

Decolonisation across Africa brought about historic changes; it was a moment of solidarity, optimism, and radical rethinking of political and economic systems. This article explores how decolonisation projects across the continent articulated new visions of economic development and political sovereignty. In particular, through an analysis of inter-state continental conferences and feminist regional initiatives, I explore an African vision of sovereignty and regionalism that demonstrated a clear awareness of the structural limits imposed by colonial rule.

Through both ideological and material changes, these nations tried to resist colonial structures of global capital and create a more equal postcolonial world. Through nationalisation and industrialisation, states attempted to create new forms of independent development that relied on regional cooperation, with social policies such as free education, healthcare and guaranteed employment being introduced to strengthen and modernise the nation. This is in contrast to how regionalism across the African continent is envisioned today, which is often within a neoliberal framework that operates at the state level and prioritises free trade, access to foreign capital and foreign direct investment, producing citizens as competitive workers in the global world market. It is also in contrast to the many radical movements, organisations and activists that were engaged in pan-Africanism and Third Worldism before, during and after decolonisation. While the first part of this article focuses mainly on state-led projects of decolonisation, I turn in the second half to feminist regionalisms to explore an example of non-state pan-Africanism at play. African feminists in their diversity, but also other continental movements such as those of workers, students and intellectuals, fought for radical iterations of pan-Africanism. In many ways, one effect of the postcolonial state has been to de-radicalise decolonisation and these movements.

I make use of the term 'regionalism' throughout this piece to refer to a state policy of continentalism across Africa. The reason I term it regionalism is to echo the Third Worldist belief in various decolonised regions coming together to confront colonial capitalism. Regionalism thus indicates both a form of continental solidarity across Africa as well as a belief in Africa as a region coming together in solidarity with other states in Asia and Latin America. Because of this, there is no easy division between regionalism and internationalism: during this particular moment, the two feed into

one another. Internationalism here refers to global connections of Third Worldist solidarity that produces an international anti-colonial movement.

Regional solidarity and cooperation were linked to the evolving project of pan-Africanism, which connected African countries on the basis of a shared ideological project of independence and anti-colonialism. Notions of sovereignty and internationalism in particular can shed light on this broader project. Radical regionalism touches on the very heart of the pan-African project as it encompasses questions of identity, nationalism and agency. While African independence projects were in many ways nationalistic, they also understood independence as needing to go beyond the nation. It is these understandings of state agency and state sovereignty at national, regional and international levels that is the focus of this article.² Alongside this, there was an emergence of a clear feminist consciousness within the politics of decolonisation and anti-colonialism. Ideologically, a strong discourse of solidarity across the African continent and diaspora provided a pathway for conceptualising postcolonial nationhood.

The overarching aim of this article is to trace some of the ways in which state-led projects of decolonisation in Africa understood regionalism during this historical moment; in other words, to situate these policies and debates within a broader ideological and material project, one very much centred around questions of agency, regional solidarity and sovereignty. In particular, the article focuses on two elements of this: state-led economic policies and feminist interventions. By zooming in on these particular aspects, I aim to show how they contributed to the development of this moment. To do this, my main research question is: How can we explore state-led economic policies and feminist debates as spaces through which postcolonial African states asserted their sovereignty as well as reimagined regionalism and the international? This is not an exhaustive exploration, given the multiplicity of ways in which states and blocs organised against colonialism; nor does it aim to cover pan-Africanism as a whole. Rather the focus is on some of the debates states and political leaders as well as feminists had around decolonisation, and how they might speak to ideas of connection between Africa and the world. Temporally, I limit my focus to the mid-twentieth century, although much work has been done around pan-Africanism, postcolonialism and political economy in more recent decades.³

Pan-Africanism emerged from both the African diaspora and the African continent itself. The initial call for pan-Africanism came from people such as Edward Blyden, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois and Anna Julia Cooper (the latter being one of the main organisers of the first Pan-African Congress in 1901), as well as statesmen (Kasanda 2016: 184). Included

within the pan-African lifeworld are also individuals such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first president of Senegal (1960–80) who founded *négritude* (1966), a movement that emphasised the cultural and racial unity of Africa (*ibid.*). The organised pan-African movement is said to have begun with the founding of the African Association in London in 1897 (Adi and Sherwood 2003: viii). By the early twentieth century, in the context of growing anti-colonial movements across Africa, political parties, leaders and activists leaned towards pan-Africanism as a political ideology for liberation from colonialism. Seminal events such as the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester, England, reflect this divergent locus of pan-Africanism, where ‘Africa for Africans’ became a major discourse. Kwame Nkrumah, one of the delegates, noted: ‘Pan-Africanism and African nationalism really took concrete expression when the Fifth Pan-African Congress met in Manchester. Instead of a rather nebulous movement concerned vaguely with black nationalism, the Pan-African movement had become an expression of African nationalism’ (Nkrumah, Arrigoni and Napolitano 1963: 134).

This article focuses on two particular aspects of pan-African decolonisation. The first is the underlying regionalism that runs through it, which I refer to as radical regionalism. The second is the contributions made to this project by African feminists and feminist organisations, who engaged with one another regularly throughout the twentieth century to conceptualise agency and sovereignty and incorporate gender into debates around African independence. These two areas of focus provide important and neglected entry points to shed light on the challenges of pan-African thinking and its potential for facilitating alternatives to contemporary neoliberal regionalism. While much work has looked at the pan-African project as a form of internationalism, there is space for the question of African regionalism to be further explored. Contributions to the pan-African project from feminists are similarly under-studied.

This article draws on multiple sources of data, including primary archival material and secondary sources. The archives include the Wilson Archives on the Bandung Conference; the Women’s International Alliance archives at the LSE library; and the Pan-African Congress in Manchester. The former archives were available online, and the latter I was able to access personally. These archives differed significantly from one another, in the sense that the Wilson archives were primarily about correspondence between heads of state, while the Manchester archives were about debates, letters and press releases by activists. Moreover, each archive focused on different groups, thereby providing a rich array of material. In terms of secondary sources, I relied on multiple historical studies of pan-Africanism, as well as books analysing the period of decolonisation across the continent.

One challenge during the research process was the lack of material on feminists who were active during this period, specifically a systematic collection of what they thought, said and did. This pushed me to look for clues between the lines, and to approach the archival material I found with that in mind. This meant paying attention to which women were mentioned and when, and following up on those leads. I also traced particular themes, ideas and events that come up multiple times. This allowed me to trace what was seen as central to the project of decolonisation. My aim was to put the material together into a story that focused on particular topics such as sovereignty, nationalism and feminist activism. Thus, story-telling through archives is an approach that very much inspired the way I thought about my material and method. I am conscious of the limits to this, and that in searching for evidence of regionalism I may have constructed a story about regionalism that overstates its importance. However, my aim is not to make an argument about how influential regionalism was, but rather to trace how it was part and parcel of anti-colonial and postcolonial politics.

Theoretically, I work from the assumption that the material and the ideational are always co-constituted and never neatly separable. The political economy of a given context is therefore always connected to discourse and ideology, and thus must always be studied from that lens. Pan-Africanism is no exception, and I have very much understood it to be a project that had strong material and ideational elements. For example, the discourse of solidarity is one we often associate with pan-Africanism; however, I try to show that this was more than simply a discourse as it also constituted a material approach to organising economies and societies.

The argument of this article is that postcolonial state projects across the African continent were conscious of the limits of the 'colonial international' and of the need to articulate decolonisation projects that would guarantee political and economic independence. In order to achieve this, they deployed forms of radical regionalism that highlighted the connections between them and that brought solidarity to the fore. Concepts like sovereignty and internationalism were debated extensively, and played a major role in forms of regionalism. I also focus on feminist organising during the same period to highlight the ways in which they mobilised the idea of solidarity, arguing that sovereignty and internationalism were central to feminist forms of radical regionalism as well.

The first section looks at the idea of the colonial international, and argues that nations across the global South saw sovereignty as central to independence and as a means of challenging colonial internationalism (Getachew 2019). Using Vivienne Jabri's concept of the 'colonial international', I trace the claims

made by postcolonial states that revolved around economic and political sovereignty. The second section discusses the concept of internationalism more extensively, focusing in particular on debates between postcolonial nations around solidarity. Drawing on archives of the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, I show the ways in which internationalism was connected to regionalism and nationalism. The third section looks at the concepts of sovereignty and internationalism through the lens of feminists and feminist organisations. Focusing specifically on conferences African feminists organised and attended during the 1930s–60s, I trace the ways in which they mobilised the idea of solidarity, and whether this was articulated differently from the ways in which postcolonial states and leaders mobilised it. The fourth section brings together the debates in the first three sections in order to make the overarching argument that we can read understandings of sovereignty and internationalism through the project of radical regionalism. I propose that many of these states and feminists conceptualised the relationship between the nation and the global as porous, unstable and fluid in a productive way. While the nation remained central to anti-imperialist politics, it was not seen as limiting to forms of regional and international solidarity, which were seen as equally important to decolonisation.

Sovereignty vis-à-vis the Colonial International: Bandung as a Moment of Resistance

Sovereignty during the anticolonial and postcolonial period was closely connected to Africa's relationship with the international sphere, one still structured by colonialism. This becomes clear when we look at initiatives such as the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, a conference bringing together leaders of newly-independent nations that aimed to plan for a political and economic future determined in and by postcolonial nations. In this section, I introduce Vivienne Jabri's concept of the 'colonial international'⁴ and draw on material from the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung to flesh out some of the debates around the concept of sovereignty, which fed into anti-colonial alternatives pan-African leaders envisioned. The archival material I draw on represents an attempt to create a narrative around how these leaders saw the international, and how they navigated the tensions between the national, regional and international. I pay special attention to economic development plans; sovereignty for these figures meant more than simply formal or legal decolonisation, as it also required economic and political independence. The following section focuses more explicitly on internationalism; here I aim to contextualise the debates around sovereignty as a whole.

Vivienne Jabri uses the term 'colonial international' to describe an international sphere still permeated by imperialism. The timeframe this refers to is the 1950s and 1960s, during which appearances suggest an end of colonial rule – and therefore an international sphere open to all independent nations – and yet during which we see the continuing presence of colonial power. This concept has parallels with Kwame Nkrumah's neo-colonialism. Jabri argued that the changes put forward by postcolonial leaders across Africa and Asia should be understood as attempts to access the colonial international (2012: 100). Sovereignty was defined as belonging to some nations and not others. From mandates and protectorates to settler colonies and colonised nations, the logic of colonialism was a linear one where many nation-states were stuck in a position of *potential* sovereignty. As Antony Anghie writes, 'Sovereignty existed in something like a linear continuum, based on its approximation to the ideal of the European nation-state' (2007: 148).

Regaining control over the institutions of international political economy – the same institutions that reproduced global inequality – was seen as the path to independence:

In its role in both accumulation and the establishment of legitimacy, the postcolonial state is an interventionist state: it seeks to construct a hegemonic structure that functions to legitimize a political economy of development; it builds a state apparatus geared for planning as well as the mobilization and management of national resources (*ibid.*: 102).

However, this is always done vis-à-vis the international; it is this tension that mediates anything and everything the postcolonial state does. 'This is where the postcolonial state comes face to face with the colonial structure of the international. The resistance of the postcolonial state as such must hence be measured in terms of how it fulfils its role in relation to the constraints of the international' (*ibid.*). This suggests that when we evaluate post-independence leaders and their political projects, we must take into account their relationship(s) with the international. In the case of Africa, this resistance meant not only transforming African production within the international sphere that was, in and of itself, colonial, but also the creation and articulation of new social and political projects that moved beyond the binaries of East and West (*ibid.*: 103).

The attempted dismantling of the colonial international, which was seen as part and parcel of decolonisation, can be read through seminal events such as the Afro-Asian conference at Bandung in 1955. Bandung has produced a wide array of literature and debate, ranging from those adopting a 'narrative of disappointment' to those adopting a 'narrative of nostalgia' (Eslava,

Fakhri and Nesiah 2017). Bandung brought together representatives of over two-thirds of the world's population, and the emotional and symbolic nature of this moment cannot be overstated. In many ways, it recalls Frantz Fanon's hopes for a postcolonial renaissance, and for the creation of a new international beyond European imperialism:

The Third World today faces Europe like a colossal mass whose aim should be to try and resolve the problems to which Europe has not been able to find answers. If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. ... No, we do not want to catch up with anyone. What we want to do is go forward (Fanon 1963: 254).

For Fanon, the creation of a new social and political project was very much tied to anti-imperialism and anti-racism. Fanon's work focused on a material analysis of neo-colonialism, and can be read alongside the work of Kwame Nkrumah, among others, who clearly pointed to neo-colonialism as a material and ideological consequence of colonial rule (Fanon 1963). Nkrumah understood neo-colonialism as a 'situation of infringed national sovereignty and intrusive influence by external elements' (quoted in Langan 2017: 1) thereby centring the question of sovereignty. Neo-colonialism was understood as any policy, event or influence that impeded the ability of a sovereign nation to self-govern. Indeed, Nkrumah explicitly mentioned aid when he discussed the ways in which neo-colonialism worked:

Control over government policy in the neo-colonial state may be secured by payments towards the costs of running the state, by the provision of civil servants in positions where they can dictate policy, and by monetary control over foreign exchange through the imposition of a banking system controlled by the imperialist power. 'Aid' therefore to a neo-colonial state is merely a revolving credit, paid by the neo-colonial master, passing through the neo-colonial state and returning to the neo-colonial master in the form of increased profits (Nkrumah, Arrigoni and Napolitano 1963: ix).

Other African leaders at the time similarly argued that colonialism would not end that easily, and that former colonial powers would continue to attempt to exercise control over Africa and the rest of the global South (Sankara and Anderson 1988).

These were the very themes that animated the conference; indeed, anti-racialism was a centrepiece of the debates around what 'universal human rights' should look like. As Partha Chatterjee notes, discussions around

human rights at Bandung – rather than reveal a concession to liberal colonial notions of human rights and the depoliticising effect this definition carried with it⁵ – revealed how differently postcolonial nations approached the concept of human rights: ‘In 1955, no one had any doubt about the principle problem of human rights in the world: the continued existence of colonialism and racial discrimination. The principle of self-determination of peoples and nations was the chief instrument by which human rights were to be established’ (Chatterjee in Eslava, Fakhri and Nesiah 2017: 672). Chatterjee continues:

Accordingly, the conference supported the rights of the Arab people of Palestine. It called for the end to racial segregation and discrimination in Africa. It supported the rights of the peoples of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia to self-determination. It called for Cambodia, Ceylon, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Libya, and Nepal to be admitted to the UN, and for a united Vietnam. These sentiments were invoked when the Non-Aligned Movement was formally launched in Belgrade in 1962 (*ibid.*).

It is around national sovereignty that the battle lines of the colonial international become clear. The international was a ‘colonial international’, as Jabri phrased it, precisely because not all nation-states were considered to be sovereign; in fact, the majority were not. Categories such as mandates and protectorates betrayed this linear logic of colonialism, whereby some nations were *potential* nation-states (*ibid.*: 668) embodying sovereignty, but to reach this stage meant achieving a certain civilizational status. As Anghie notes, ‘Sovereignty existed in something like a linear continuum, based on its approximation to the ideal of the European nation-state’ (2007: 148). Nevertheless, while it is clear that postcolonial nations posed a radical critique of the unequal distribution of sovereignty – and thus the creation of an international that was colonial rather than equal – a problem arose following their adoption of the nation-state as a means of challenging this inequality. In other words, it was accepted that the nation-state was a prerequisite of sovereignty, thereby displacing other notions or sources of sovereignty. This in turn led to the intensification of other forms of oppression, including against ethnic and religious minorities who did not fit within the bounds of the new nation. Indeed, as Bandung was taking place, the host, Indonesia, was in the midst of colonising West Papua.

The material and economic dimensions of sovereignty are equally important to note, and I elaborate on these in the next section. The call for sovereignty was matched by a call for industrialisation.⁶ Some of the themes that emerge from these principles include the need for cooperation within the global South; the creation and sharing of technical expertise, research

and development; the establishment of international bodies to coordinate economic development; and self-determination in terms of economic policy. As Chatterjee notes, the communiqué suggests that most countries at the conference saw themselves as ‘exporters of raw commodities and importers of industrial products’ (Chatterjee in Eslava, Fakhri and Nesiah 2017: 673). State-led economic development through industrialisation was envisioned as a means of interrupting the dependency they faced on global capital. State-led economic development through industrialisation was envisioned as a means of interrupting their dependency on foreign capital. A national programme for development based on industrialisation thus clearly emerges from the conference as well as debates before and after. This is not to discount the fact that in some ways, the adoption of the modern nation-state and nationalism on the part of postcolonial elites was an implicit acceptance of colonial modes of governance and societal organisation (Massad 2012: 277–8). Although there were attempts to radically critique the classical idea of sovereignty, for instance by Senghor and Césaire who posed the possibility of a federated community, the reality is that the majority of African postcolonial states adopted what was very much a Eurocentric framework for national organisation.

Evaluating Bandung, the Non-Aligned Movement that emerged from it, and postcolonial projects more broadly, requires understanding the context in which they emerged; or, as Chatterjee suggests, considering what they were fighting against (Chatterjee in Eslava, Fakhri and Nesiah 2017: 657). Bandung and the Non-Aligned Movement were part of a set of ideas that characterised decolonisation, ideas that located justice both nationally and internationally. In many ways, these created a new space of internationalism (*ibid.*: 671) that, for a brief moment, challenged colonial internationalism. ‘The demands made at Bandung still remain the unfulfilled promises of a global order founded on the freedom and equality of nations and peoples. That is why the memory of 1955 still refuses to go away, even though the world has changed so much over the past sixty years’ (*ibid.*: 674). It is difficult not to see this as a lost or missed opportunity (Taha in Eslava, Fakhri and Nesiah 2017), even when we understand the severe limits these nations faced. Such a moment has not come about again, and in many ways, we have since seen a deepening of the colonial international with the Washington Consensus in the 1970s. Unfulfilled promises of justice and the growing unlikelihood of a decolonised international continue to haunt us precisely because we are increasingly seeing the fulfilment of a vision that is antithetical to the one people across the postcolonial world imagined in the 1950s.

A Decolonised International

This section focuses explicitly on ideas of internationalism that animated many of the states and political leaders that were active during the period of decolonisation, showing how the lines between national and international were often blurred in a conscious attempt to transform global politics. In this sense, state-led projects of decolonisation were not just trying to decolonise individual nation-states, but also the broader international sphere, calling for the economic, political, social and intellectual cooperation of African countries and the African diaspora. The main demand was that African resources be used for the development of African peoples, and that independence meant more than legal or political emancipation but also encompassed economic independence. This was to be done through unifying markets and creating a new political landscape through which African unity could thrive. This movement between the national and international produced a radical form of regionalism: a form of transnational solidarity between states that called for a new international based on principles of sovereignty and equality.

This period of decolonisation, therefore, produced an interesting articulation of sovereignty that blurred the lines between the national and the international, producing radical regionalism. The latter term thus suggests that whereas today the bounded nature of sovereignty is represented through defensive territoriality, during the 1950s and 1960s there was a more fluid and porous understanding of sovereignty. In the current moment of resurgent right-wing nationalism, where the nation is to be protected from internal and external 'enemies', it appears as though sovereignty will only become more constricted. One lesson we can take from previous eras is the importance given to regional and international solidarity, alongside the maintenance of national sovereignty against imperial power.

This section is built largely around both the 1945 Pan-African Conference in Manchester and the 'Bandung Archives', which include correspondence between postcolonial leaders in the lead-up to the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung and the period thereafter. Interestingly, there was a second Afro-Asian Conference that had been planned but that never materialised because of growing tensions between various postcolonial nations. I first discuss some of the debates key figures had in this archival material, before turning to the second conference that never took place. The agenda of the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung was to promote Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and to oppose colonialism or neo-colonialism by any nation. The agenda of the 1945 Pan-African Conference in Manchester was to denounce and criminalise racial discrimination, and denounce imperialism

and capitalism, while also providing a space within which activists and politicians could organise around the shared goals of decolonisation.

1945 Pan-African Conference in Manchester

A press release by the Pan-African Congress in Manchester (1945) stated:

On Monday, the 15th of October a Pan-African Congress will begin in the Chorlton Town Hall, Manchester, and go on for a week. Roughly two hundred delegates hold mandates from political, social, industrial and co-operative organisations; cultural and youth movements. The Colonial Trade Union movement is well to the fore in representation. Dr. W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, the eminent Negro scholar and writer will represent the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples of America. The Congress promises to be the greatest and most representative ever called by Africans and peoples of Africa[n] descent to plan and work for their freedom. (Pan-African Congress 1945)



Figure 1: Plaque in Manchester commemorating the location of the 1945 Pan-African Conference (Source: Boardman n.d.)

This built on earlier pan-African congresses, including the first ever which was organised by Du Bois in 1919 in Paris. He wrote:

I was convinced by my experience in Paris in 1919 that here was a real vision and an actual need. My plans as they developed had in them nothing spectacular nor revolutionary. If in decades or a century they resulted in such world organisation of black men as would oppose a united front to European

aggression, that certainly would not have been beyond my dream. Out of this there might come, not race war and opposition, but broader co-operation with the white rulers of the world, and a chance for peaceful and accelerated development of black folk (*ibid.*).

In the build-up to this conference, pan-Africanism was influenced by socialist, anti-imperialist and internationalist movements that advocated for a decolonisation of the 'colonial international'. These included the influential *négritude* movement founded by Césaire and Senghor, as well as the Marxist-inflected activism of Claudia Jones, Walter Rodney and Frantz Fanon.

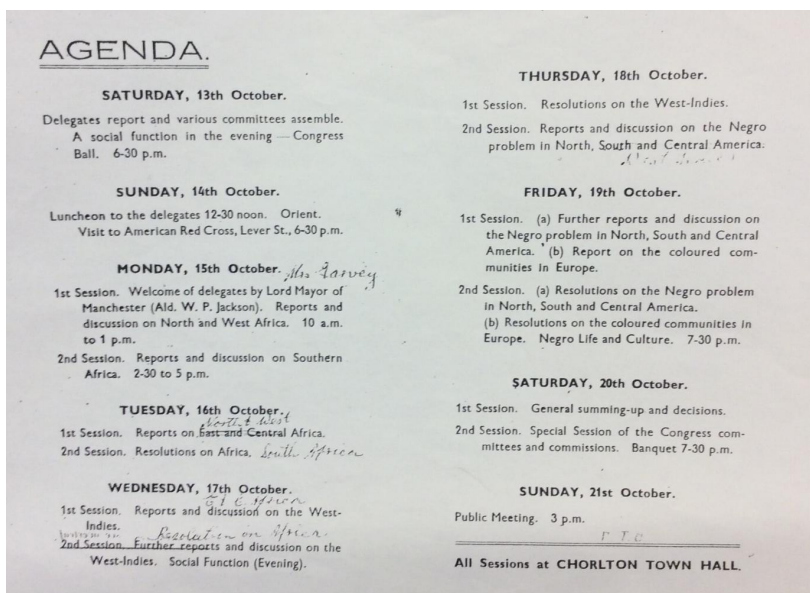


Figure 2: 1945 Pan-African Conference programme (Source: Unknown 1945)

The Pan-African Congress in Manchester was the fifth such conference. It was held from 15–21 October 1945, following the creation of the Pan-African Federation in Manchester in 1944. It was organised by George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah, and attended by over ninety delegates including Jomo Kenyatta, Hastings Banda, Obafemi Awolowo and W. E. B. Du Bois (who had organised the first Pan-African Congress in 1919). Resolutions criminalising racial discrimination and denouncing imperialism and capitalism were passed. Additionally, a journal was created at the Congress entitled *Pan-Africa*, remaining in print for two years.⁷ The resolutions criminalising racial discrimination in particular highlight the ways in which imperialism and racism were seen as co-constitutive. This, too, highlights an assumption that is missing today, where racism and imperialism are not always analysed as co-constituted but rather as separate structures or events.

The Pan-African Congress had ties to various movements, including that of Marcus Garvey and the international trade union movement, to which many workers across Africa were affiliated (Shepperson and Drake 2008). Many of the discussions revolved around independence and national liberation across Africa and the diaspora:

Looking back at the 1945 Pan-African Congress, it seems evident that some valuable groundwork for independence movements in British Africa was laid in Manchester, England, in the mid-1940s: especially through the work of Kwame Nkrumah for the Gold Coast which became independent in 1957 under the old African name of Ghana; and of Jomo Kenyatta for Kenya which achieved independence in 1963 (*ibid.*: 5).

Nkrumah in particular put forward his idea of a united Africa, or a pan-Africa. He began by targeting former French colonies in West Africa, urging them to leave the French Union and join a new Union of Africa. France organised a referendum, in which all countries except Guinea voted to stay in the French Union. Sékou Touré in Guinea came up with the slogan 'Better independence with poverty than servitude with plenty' (*ibid.*: 14). Ghana stepped in and lent Guinea 23 million US dollars, and put forward the proposal to found a union of African states. Nkrumah also rearticulated relations between 'sub-Saharan' Africa and North Africa, using the slogan 'The Sahara no longer divides us, it unites us' (*ibid.*). Not only did Nkrumah marry an Egyptian woman, Fathia Nkrumah, but he also had a close relationship with Egypt's first post-independence leader Gamal Abdel Nasser.



Figure 3: 1945 Pan-African Conference delegates A (Source: Unknown 1945)



Figure 4: 1945 Pan-African Conference delegates B (Source: Unknown 1945)

Ghana's decision to lend Guinea 23 million US dollars is another instance where regionalism took on both a material and an ideational form. Here, Ghana was central in providing financial and military support to other anti-colonial movements. The formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU); the setting up of the Institute of African Studies; the funding of *Encyclopaedia Africana* all point to a material basis of support for cultural forms of anti-colonialism. The decision to lend money to countries such as Guinea in order to free them from becoming indebted to imperial countries is another example of this support. Nasser, similarly, saw outlets such as *Voice of the Arabs* as central to spreading anti-colonialism across the continent.

In 1958, Nkrumah was to organise the Accra Conference, or the Conference of Independent African States. This included only eight countries at that time: Ghana, Liberia, Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia and Ethiopia:

They were now talking about a united political entity as large as the USA, the Soviet Union, or China. Their perspective at this conference and its aftermath was not fifty African states, it was continental government of the continent. At the back of the hall at the conference there was a big map of Africa and Padmore and others had taken a picture from this magazine, *Pan-Africa*, of a very strong black man breaking his chains, and they had superimposed this on a map of Africa. Underneath it they had paraphrased Marx and Engels: 'You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a continent to regain.' And that was sort of the spirit at this particular conference. ... On the last

day, Nkrumah got up and made a speech: 'Now you've seen an independent state, we've had this big conference, now go on and free your part of Africa.' And sitting here at the time was Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere, and a number of other people who would soon 'free their part.' Banda was there from Malawi, and when he got off the plane and said his place should be in prison like Kwame Nkrumah. This just fired up the whole continent which said, 'Let's get moving.' And they set a goal: 'The year 1960 is going to be Africa's year – this is '58 now – we're going to try to be free' (Shepperson and Drake 2008: 16).

This powerful account by St. Clair Drake, who was present at many of these conferences, highlights the strongly regional sentiment that brought together many of these leaders. For them, the idea of a united Africa was central to how they envisioned independence and a future beyond imperialism. Moreover, as this passage highlights, the connections between them served to propel liberation movements forward across the continent. Seeing Nkrumah, who had led Ghana to independence in 1954, inspired leaders like Kaunda, Nyerere and Banda, who were to lead their own countries to independence soon after. These connections, that were both political and emotive, cannot be understated. If Africa is to move forward along the lines of independent development today, this form of radical solidarity across the continent is surely a prerequisite.

The OAU was formed in 1963 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia with the aim to encourage political and economic integration among member states, and to eradicate colonialism and neo-colonialism. At its inaugural meeting, Gambian pan-Africanist Alieu Ebrima Cham Joof is quoted as saying:

It is barely 75 years when the European Powers sat round the table in Germany each holding a dagger to carve up Africa for its own benefit. ... Your success will inspire and speed up the freedom and total independence of the African continent and eradicate imperialism and colonialism from the continent and eventually neo-colonialism from the globe.... Your failure, which no true African in Africa is praying for, will prolong our struggle with bitterness and disappointment. I therefore adjure that you ignore any suggestion outside Africa and holding that the present civilization, which some of the big powered are boasting of, sprang up from Africa, and realising that the entire world has something earthly to learn from Africa, you would endeavour your utmost to come to agreement, save Africa from the clutches of neo-colonialism and resurrect African dignity, manhood and national stability (Cham-Joof 2006 [1963]).

The aims of this organisation included coordinating and intensifying cooperation in Africa; defending sovereignty and independence; and eradicating colonialism and white minority rule. The OAU was established following a division between

the 'Casablanca bloc' and the 'Monrovia bloc'; the former, led by Nkrumah, wanted a federation of African countries, while the latter, led by Senghor, saw unity as something that took time through economic – not political – cooperation.⁸ The OAU provided material support to anti-colonial movements through training and arms (the ANC and ZANU are two examples), and set up the African Development Bank to fund economic projects in Africa.

However, even within the OAU, divisions soon emerged between former French colonies and the rest, as well as between countries that supported the US versus those that supported the USSR. As I have shown with Bandung, support for the US was seen as problematic and thus countries which expressed such support were not always welcomed in these spaces. This brings us back to the colonial international, and the ways in which colonial-era divisions continued to impact the possibilities of radical regionalism.

1955 Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung

The theme of internationalism comes out quite clearly in materials from the first Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, particularly through constant references to put aside differences and focus on common challenges. In a secret Chinese intelligence report on the conference, it is stated:

The original intention of Indonesia to organise the Asian-African Conference was attributed to the agony it felt for lack of energetic support in its pursuance of 'a positive and independent policy' as the USA attempted to isolate it and pressed it to give up the existing policy. They felt it was necessary to organise the Asian-African Conference [sic] to encourage "independent" policy, and oppose military cliques and colonialism (Chinese Foreign Ministry Intelligence Department 1954).

In another document, economic cooperation was emphasised:

Economic development is an important issue faced by Afro-Asian countries. All these countries lack capital and human resources, hence they can cooperate with each other on economic development. ... It is very important to expand regional and cross-regional commerce, it is also beneficial (Cable from the Chinese Embassy in Indonesia 1954).

This brings us back to the themes discussed in the previous section, namely: the centrality of economic development to the broader project of decolonisation. The need to develop capital and human resources was seen as imperative, and this was modelled on the idea of regional solidarity and cross-regional commerce.

Related to the question of independent economic development was the issue of political non-interference. The question of non-alignment animated

many of the discussions that appear in this material. In one correspondence, Nasser says:

I stepped forward to propose holding the Second Non-Aligned Conference. The main purpose is to encourage and attract emerging countries and those still under the influence of foreign countries to adopt an independent policy to enable Non-Aligned Countries leaders to discuss not only their own national issues but also important international issues, and to emphasise that war and peace not only involve the great powers but influence us as well. Furthermore, the conference can also promote our trade with one another (Premier Zhou Enlai and President Nasser 1963).

Similarly, in a correspondence based on a visit of the Chinese Premier to Ghana, Mali and Guinea, Nkrumah was recorded identifying the root causes affecting peace as imperialism and both new and old colonialism (Cable from the Chinese Foreign Ministry 1964). Malian leader Modibo Keita expressed support for non-alignment and positive neutrality, as well as socialism (*ibid.*).

One topic that emerged quite clearly from this archival material is that of Palestine/Israel. Palestine was a central concern for many countries, particularly those in North Africa and the Middle East. In a record of a conversation between Nasser and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, Nasser says:

The United States, Britain, and France carry out activities toward Africa by way of Israel. We do not go into countries originally under the control of Britain or France, but Israel can. They take advantage of the condition of Israel not being a colonial country to act by way of Israel to provide aid to African countries and to exercise control over them. In Casablanca at the start of 1961, I asked President Keita of Mali why his country was purchasing small arms from Israel. He replied that France refused to provide them. Mali could not buy them from Israel. I urged him to buy them from France, or else we could also provide them, and at a price lower than that of Israel. As a result, Keita cancelled the agreement with Israel and bought the weapons from us (Premier Zhou Enlai and President Nasser 1963).

There is much to unpack here, but what is of particular interest is the notion of African solidarity against Israel in light of the occupation of Palestine. Nasser is quite explicitly claiming that other African countries such as Mali should be apprehensive about Israel's encroachment into the continent. In the words of Zhou Enlai, 'Israel is the wedge of imperialism driven into this region' (*ibid.*). In the previous excerpt, we see the material underpinnings of internationalism: the discourse of solidarity was more than discursive, it also meant materially enacting networks of buying and selling that bypassed imperial nations. Nasser was not suggesting that Mali refuse to buy from

Israel simply on the basis of solidarity, but also proposing that Egypt could provide those weapons instead. Here we see the coming together of a material and ideological expression of regionalism.

Alongside Palestine/Israel, three other major conflicts emerge as of central importance to various African leaders: French colonial rule in Algeria, the situation in Congo, and the situation in Vietnam. In a correspondence between Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and the Algerian Ambassador to China Mohamed Yala, the latter said:

We are very sympathetic to Vietnam. Vietnam is being split up, and in 1962 France also tried to partition Algeria. Even still, Algeria keeps running into imperialism, primarily the opposition and breaking of American imperialism. They have had huge profits in Sahara Petroleum and support a rebellion. America was also behind the Algerian-Moroccan conflict. You could say that we have the same enemies and the same mission. If the entire world followed the example set by Cuba, Vietnam, Taiwan, Congo and South Africa and rose up and fought back, what would America be able to do? America is still dealing with just one Cuba, a single Vietnam keeps America's leaders constantly busy. If there were ten Cubas in the world or ten Vietnams, what could they do? Congo currently is exactly a third Cuba (Premier Zhou Enlai and Mohamed Yala 1964).

Here we see a clear emphasis on internationalism, through the point that imperial powers would not be able to repress uprisings if they happened across the postcolonial world at the same time. Yala's point about having the same enemies is also pertinent: it is precisely anti-colonialism that brought together many African nations in a form of regional and international solidarity. What is also quite striking is that Congo was centred alongside the problem of Palestine and Vietnam, in distinction to today where – although the conflict in Congo continues – it is not often mentioned as a crisis the global community needs to respond to.

The principles described in this section were not adopted by all African countries. There appeared to be a split between African countries who were seen as allies of the US and those that were against it. Countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco were seen as allies of the US and therefore as problematic (*ibid.*). The growing tensions between African countries based on this split were partly what prevented the second Afro-Asian Conference from taking place. Although a second Afro-Asian Conference was planned to take place in Algiers, it never materialised. This was partly because of the coup that ousted Ben Bella and brought Boumedienne, and partly because of the politically divergent paths African nations were taking. It is here that we see the end of an era, seeing many of

the promises of Bandung fail to materialise. I now turn to a conference that was more specifically focused on pan-Africanism that set the ground for the growing pan-African movement.

Feminism Between Home and the World

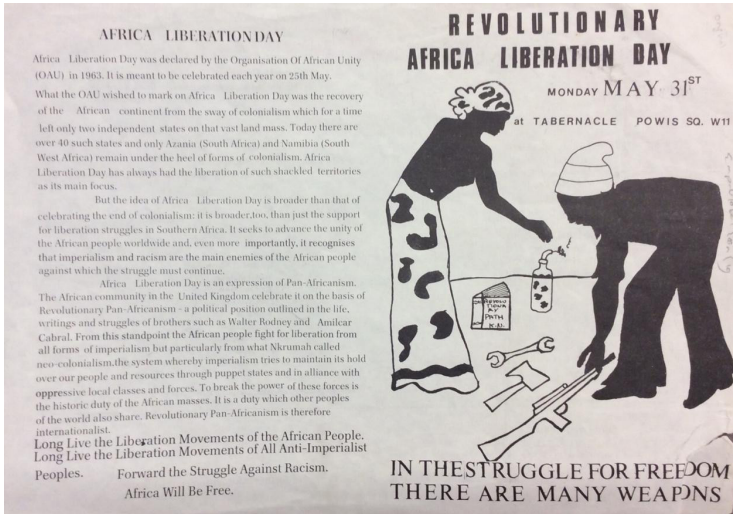


Figure 5: OAU poster (Source: Organisation for African Unity n.d.)

I begin by focusing on some of the debates feminists in the postcolonial world had around postcolonial projects more broadly, including that of pan-Africanism. To do this, I rely on the concept of transnational feminism, which denotes movements and connections between and among feminists that allowed them to come together in solidarity without assuming that the differences among them did not exist or that they were potentially divisive. Transnational feminism is directly connected to the theme of radical regionalism in that it understands feminist organising as intrinsically regional and international. Feminist conferences in particular were key spaces in which regional solidarities were cultivated, and in which problems afflicting nations were understood as connected to one another.

I focus specifically on some of the feminist conferences that were held, and the articulations around solidarity that emerged from them. I am especially interested in the 1939 International Association for Women (IAW) congress in Copenhagen, the 1959 Asian-African Conference of Women in Colombo, and the 1961 Afro-Asian Women's Conference in Cairo. While the first is interesting because it marked a moment during which feminists in Africa broke with Western feminists because of disagreements over imperialism,

the latter two conferences are interesting because they mark a new beginning in feminist solidarity across borders over the issue of imperialism.

I begin this section by engaging with the poster 'Revolutionary African Liberation Day' (Figure 5). In many ways the poster is symbolic of a political moment during which men and women were seen as necessary to the liberation struggle. As the poster notes, African Liberation Day – created by the OAU – was set up to connect African people globally against imperialism and racism, and was seen as 'an expression of pan-Africanism'. This pan-Africanism was seen as intrinsically internationalist, and although centred on Africa, it made claims about a broader type of unity. Despite the presence of a woman in the poster, the topic of sexism and gender inequality is not mentioned in the poster, nor is it necessarily a major theme across much of the archival material I found. This is despite the fact that feminists engaged with the pan-African project in multiple ways, as well as with the fight against colonialism and racism more broadly. This section explores these engagements in order to contextualise how feminists both supported and went beyond the pan-African project.

Solidarity among postcolonial nations during the era of decolonisation set the scene for many of the debates and policy transformations that took place. We often recall the pan-African movement through the work and writing of male visionaries, such as George Padmore, Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Amílcar Cabral, Stephen Bantu Biko and Frantz Fanon. Yet, as Mama and Abbas remind us, 'an accurate historic record must include women like Mable Dove Danquah, Adelaide Casely-Hayford, Bibi Titi Mohamed, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Gambo Sawaba, Muthoni Likimani, Thenjiwe Mtintso, Djamila Bouhired, Charlotte Maxeke, Albertina Sisulu, and the other uncounted numbers of women who mobilised for Africa's liberation' (2014: 4). Similarly, Carole Boyce Davies writes that despite being erased from the history of pan-Africanism, women have been active within it from the beginning (2014: 78). Davies calls for us to place this activism within the broader field of transnational Black feminism, given the similar types of debates such women engaged with. She gives the example of Annie Cooper, who not only published extensively on the subject but was one of the organisers of the first Pan-African Congress.

Women contributed to the pan-African lifeworld in many ways, including through organising, scientific innovation, novels, plays and a whole range of other initiatives. This section focuses on feminist organising – specifically through conferences – and the ways in which these spaces opened debates around pan-African solidarity and solidarity with women across the

postcolonial world. While we know more about women's participation in Black internationalism (Brown 2015), and pan-African organising outside of Africa (Reddock 2007; Davies 2007), there is so much more to know when it comes to feminist contributions to the pan-African project within the continent.⁹

We have seen a growing shift towards African regionalism in the last two decades, in particular through the establishment of educational centres such as the African Gender Institute in South Africa and CODESRIA in Senegal, as well as through increasing developmentalism and NGO alliances. This regionalism, however, has a historical predecessor. As Amina Mama notes, reflecting on work being done at the African Gender Institute: 'We worked with an idea of activist scholarship that was both globally informed and locally grounded, taking its cues from international feminist movements, as well as from the history of diverse women's struggles in the region, using shared reflection to generate locally grounded critical engagements with feminist theories, pedagogies and curriculums' (2011: 7). It is this history that this section explores, particularly in relation to the regional and international connections formed through it.

The 1939 IAW in Copenhagen marked a breaking point in relations between Western and Eastern feminists. Given the colonial context during which many of the early feminist debates began, it is understandable that women saw gender equality as tied to national liberation. This soon produced confrontations between African, Asian and Middle Eastern feminists on the one hand, and Western feminists on the other. These often took place at international feminist conferences following the refusal of Western feminists to take seriously the problem of colonial rule that their own governments were incriminated in (Badran 1996: 13). These contradictions led feminists to look elsewhere for solidarity. In countries like Egypt, this began as early as the 1940s, when Egyptian feminists were accused of not upholding the democratic and equal principles they constantly spoke of (*ibid.*: 223). It was the 1939 IAW congress in Copenhagen in particular that revealed to Egyptian feminists the myth of a global sisterhood.

Egyptian feminists began to note the double standard at play in the realm of international politics. They pointed out, for example, that countries such as Britain were never criticised for colonialisation rule or the giving away of Palestine, whereas countries deemed 'undemocratic' such as Egypt were constantly criticised. At the IAW feminist congress in Copenhagen, there was an explosive confrontation surrounding the myth of a 'global sisterhood'. Margot Badran writes:

This double standard made Huda Sha‘arawi feel that ‘it had become necessary to create an Eastern feminist union as a structure within which to consolidate our forces and help us to have an impact upon the women of the world.’ Indeed, as early as 1930 Nabarawi had asserted that the path toward liberation of Eastern women was different than that of Western women, suggesting that Eastern women should unite. Meanwhile a move toward Arab unity had been growing among women and men in Egypt and other Arab countries (*ibid.*: 238).

Eventually they were to turn towards other African and Asian feminists and create separate conferences that focused on issues affecting colonised nations. This mirrors what I argued earlier in relation to Bandung: the creation of spaces for regional and international cooperation amongst postcolonial nations were central to the formation of radical regionalism. The reluctance of Western feminists to speak out against the Balfour Declaration and the subsequent colonisation of Palestine was the final straw for Egyptian feminists, who did not see a separation between gender justice and national liberation. In an instance of colonisation, they saw feminism’s role as one of resistance; feminists were supposed to challenge all forms of oppression, rather than focus on gender as though it was neatly separable from other forms of oppression. Alongside this was the obvious problem of Western feminist support for these very colonial projects. The category of ‘woman’ has always been an already-racialised category that is far from universal, even as it was claimed to be so.

This shared analysis of imperialism connected women across different geographical and cultural spaces and provided a means through which radical regionalism could be created. For feminists, radical regionalism very much rested on a shared understanding of colonial history and the colonial present, and what it meant to think of a future that took national sovereignty seriously. As Elisabeth Armstrong has written: ‘Fostered by the shared analysis of imperialism, women from newly independent and still colonised nations in Asia and North Africa honed what I call a solidarity of commonality for women’s shared human rights, and a solidarity of complicity that took imbalances of power between women and the world into account’ (2016: 305). Similarly, Antoinette Burton (1994) has written that these conferences made visible the refusal by women in Asia and Africa to be dismissed or be seen as developmentally backward in their demands, or be mobilised without consultation into a Western-dominated feminist agenda.

The growing momentum around transnational and anti-colonial feminist solidarity was heightened by the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in

1955. The Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation is another prominent example of a forum in which African feminists engaged with one another and with other feminists from the global South. Laura Bier writes:

As new alliances were forged in the international arena, groups of women activists, writers, students, and politicians circulated within the milieu of international conferences, visiting delegations, summits, and committee meetings. The resulting exchanges and networks were part of what made possible the sorts of imaginings that overflowed the boundaries of the nation-state (2011: 159).

Throughout these meetings, the central articulation was around postcolonial agency and the importance of feminists in the global South to speak on their own terms. Even before this meeting, however, feminists such as Amy Ashwood Garvey and Claudia Jones were engaging in internationalist activism around imperialism and gender (Reddock 2007).

However, the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung was not the first time women from across Africa and the rest of the global South came together to discuss imperialism, capitalism and gender. In 1947, the Conference for the Women of Asia was held with the explicit aim of 'opening a new chapter for Asian and also African internationalist leadership' (Armstrong 2016: 307). The conference was held in Beijing, and was one of the first international events organised by the Chinese Communist Party. It included 367 women from thirty-seven countries. It became clear from the conference that what connected women from across Asia and Africa was anti-imperialism, mass-based organising, a membership dominated by rural women, and anti-capitalism (*ibid.*). Conference reports, such as one based on this one entitled *The Women of Asia and Africa*, emphasised the shared struggles women in both continents faced.

One fascinating point that was raised by women at this conference was the need to hold both their own states as well as imperial states to account. Indian feminist Jai Kishore Handoo, for example, led a campaign against the use of Indian troops to put down the independence movement in Indonesia, and a Vietnamese delegate appealed to African delegates at the conference to protest against Algerian, Tunisian, Senegalese and Moroccan soldiers being taken to Vietnam to 'fight against a brother people, against whom they have no reason whatsoever to fight' (*ibid.*: 312). What created solidarity, therefore, was a shared commitment to fighting against imperial oppression, both at home and abroad. Here again we see parallels with the communiqué that emerged from the conference at Bandung: the fight against empire was understood as creating connections between postcolonial nations and activists within them.

It is important to note that feminists often elaborated a double critique, of both Western feminism as well as of postcolonial states. For example, the focus of some feminists on social reproduction posed a question to such states as to whether they were taking the gendered consequences of state-led capitalism seriously. Similarly, the questions feminists raised around whether gender equality principles would be enshrined in new constitutions pushed states to think about what the project of decolonisation meant for everyone. As we now know, many states did not pay attention to these critiques, and reproduced gender inequality in some ways, while addressing it in others.

A second conference with a similar theme was held in 1958, three years after the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, this time in Colombo, Sri Lanka; and a third in Cairo in 1961. The latter conference, which was more leftist and radical in orientation, focused on solidarity between women based on both nationalism and their positions within global capitalism. Interestingly, because of an increasing focus on fascism among Western feminists at the time, there were debates around the centring of fascism at the global level.

While women delegates from Africa and Asia did not disagree about the importance of eradicating fascism, they defined 'fascism' through the lens of imperialism. War in the colonies was ongoing in 1945, these delegates reminded the assembly. Fascism was one powerful force behind military conflict, but colonialism was another as colonial powers attempted to quash freedom movements by brute force. Delegates from Asia and Africa did not nationalise their analysis of imperialism to indict one colonising country over another. Instead, they focused on the political economy of colonialism. Colonised people, they stressed, lost the opportunity to enjoy basic dignity and to provide for their own well-being (*ibid.*: 321).

These reflections highlight the tensions around 'global sisterhood' while showing some of the emerging connections between women across Africa and Asia. From Egypt to India to Kenya, women were highlighting the problems they faced from both local patriarchy and global imperial capitalism, participating, I would argue, in cultivating radical regionalism.

Women did not only do this at feminist conferences but also took up space at broader conferences around anti-imperialism. Amy Ashwood Garvey addressed the Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945, focusing on the position of the Black woman:

In Jamaica, women in the civil service ... take no active part whatever in the political development of the country ... it is among the women teachers that we find a progressive movement ... the labouring class of women who work in the fields, take goods to the market, and so on, receive much less pay for

the same work than the men do ... the Negro men of Jamaica are largely responsible for this, as they do little to help the women to get improved wages (Adi and Sherwood 2003: 73).

This double critique was central to the ways in which African, Asian and women of African descent imagined decolonisation. Decolonisation was never simply about men from these countries taking over political power; it was about liberation for both men and women. While the archives do not tell us in great detail who the women across the African continent were who took part in these conferences, we do know that there was momentum around feminist organising that took both patriarchy and imperial capitalism seriously.

I am fully aware of the risks involved in having focused on conferences as spaces in which feminists organised, given the tendency for such feminists to come from elite backgrounds and to be professionals. Many feminists active at these conferences were well-educated and came from the middle classes or elite families of various African nations. As has been noted by other scholars, this often produced a very particular understanding of feminism that tended to exclude other women (Ahmed 1992). For instance, the issues that were prioritised tended to be those that touched the lives of professional women, rather than working-class women. In the context of Egypt, for instance, feminists in the 1920s and 1930s tended to focus on veiling and seclusion, as well as legal and educational rights, because those were the restrictions that affected their lives the most. The class distinctions between feminist activists – who often appeared at these conferences – and the many women they claimed to represent continue to be an important site of fracture and contestation.

At the same time, we do see indications that these conferences were not as homogenous as we may at first assume. Take, for instance, the two later conferences I discussed earlier. The first, in 1958, three years after the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and the second in Cairo in 1961. These conferences are notable for their focus on leftist feminist activism, and on radical forms of politics that women embodied. The conference in Colombo, in particular, included important discussions on capitalism and class. Even more importantly, the 1947 Conference for the Women of Asia, held in China, was attended primarily by rural women and its focus was almost solely on the question of mass-based organising.

Even within specific feminist movements we see important tensions arise in relation to questions of class and nationalism. Leila Ahmed has argued that what became the dominant voice of feminism was one that favoured Westernisation and secularisation, a primarily upper-middle class version (1992: 174). The nationalism they propagated, therefore, was closely

tied to a particular understanding of how Egypt needed to modernise in order to become fully independent and has close connections to Egyptian modernists who, feeling the European gaze toward the Orient, felt the need to portray Egypt positively. The alternative to this were feminists who tried to articulate female subjectivity within a more 'Egyptian' discourse. Malak Hifni Nassef, for example, formulated her ideas about feminism in and through the lens of Egyptian culture.

In the 1950s, when socialist tools and concepts became more prominent throughout the postcolonial world, we see Egyptian feminists engage with a way of analysing what many of them saw as the main problem facing Egypt: social inequality. Some examples include Inji Efflatoun, who, as a delegate of the League of Women Students and Graduates of Egypt, the communist women's organisation, to the World Congress of Women held in Paris in 1945, gave the following speech:

I made a very powerful speech in which I linked the oppression of women in Egypt to the British occupation and imperialism. I not only denounced the British, but the King and the politicians as well. It was a very political speech in which I called for national liberation and the liberation of women (*ibid.*: 196).

Other feminists active as communists included Latifa al-Zayyat and Soraya Adham.

While a focus on feminist conferences, therefore, tends to dominate the literature – largely because these remain some of the few remaining records of feminist activism during that era – this does not easily correspond to a focus on elite feminist issues at the expense of everything else. There existed contestation within these conferences and within feminist circles more broadly around what feminism meant, and how a certain class bias needed to be addressed within national feminist movements. This played out within national feminist spaces, as well as at various international feminist conferences. As anti-capitalism became more central to feminist activism during the 1940s and 1950s, we see the participation of non-elite feminists increase, and the subjects of these conferences shift.

Moreover, we can also see from the discussions feminists had at these conferences that the futures they proposed did not neatly align with what states and the broader male-dominated pan-African project were proposing. This is where we see divergences within radical regionalism. It is not a simple case of feminist and pan-African visions being aligned, but rather that they aligned in some ways while clashing in others. In particular, they may both have prioritised anti-imperialism and the need for economic independence, as these animated many movements at that historical moment. However,

feminists often took more radical stances on what anti-imperialism meant, as we can see from their critiques of their own states' decision to participate in military activities in other countries. Similarly, feminists often posed a more thorough form of anti-capitalism that was significantly different from state-led capitalism adopted by many African postcolonial states.

Feminists are thus an important group that performed radical regionalism. Feminists posed a double critique against both patriarchy and capitalist imperialism, therefore fighting a battle on two fronts. Because of this, there were early confrontations between Western and Afro-Asian feminists who disagreed over the priorities feminists should organise around. For Western feminists, imperial capitalism was not seen as an issue, whereas for African and Asian feminists it was seen as a central issue. This led to African and Asian feminists creating regional forms of solidarity rather than international ones with Western feminists. Thus feminists practised a form of regional radicalism that in some instances was more radical than the form practised by postcolonial leaders such as Nasser, Nkrumah, Nehru and others. This was because they posed a challenge to both imperialism and capitalism – as these leaders did – as well as to patriarchy and its emergence within the form of the postcolonial state and postcolonial nationalism.

Central to this point is that within feminist critique of the nation-state we can locate a particularly important intervention in understandings of sovereignty. The nation-state in its patriarchal orientation prevented some feminists from seeing it as an ideal vessel for liberation politics. Given our contemporary context, where socialist internationalism has weakened and regionalism has at times become synonymous with developmentalism, the nation-state remains patriarchal and nationalist in an insular and regressive manner that connects deeply to global capitalism. Indeed, one cannot help but wonder what Africa's future would have looked like had it been in the hands of radical groups such as feminists, workers, students and beyond, who often had more radical futuristic visions that went beyond nationalism, the nation-state and patriarchy.

Conclusion

This contribution has centred decolonisation across Africa as a foundational event in relation to questions of economics, politics and society. Through an analysis of sovereignty and economic policies, I have traced the ways in which states navigated the structures of colonial rule and the new reality of postcolonial nation-building. In particular, I have analysed the forms of regionalism and internationalism that animated this period, through economic programmes such as nationalisation and industrialisation, as

well as through debates around sovereignty. The article worked from the assumption that the material and ideological are always connected, and that an analysis of decolonisation must take both into account.

The argument of this piece is that postcolonial state projects across the African continent were conscious of the limits of the 'colonial international' and of the need to articulate projects that would guarantee political and economic independence. Notions of agency, sovereignty and radical forms of connectivity were thus central to this broader project, as was feminist organising and other forms of solidarity across borders. This adds to what we already know about solidarity during this moment, and works to centre radical forms of politics that may hold promise for us today.

This focus on regionalism during decolonisation raises interesting questions about regionalism across the continent today. Then, regional solidarity and cooperation were linked to the evolving project of postcolonial nation building, which connected African countries on the basis of a shared ideological project of independence and anti-colonialism. For this reason, I refer to regionalism then as a *radical regionalism*, based on the goal of anti-colonial independence. The radicalism embedded within this form of regionalism (connected to internationalism) evoked norms of agency and sovereignty that challenged the 'colonial international' and paved the way for independent forms of economic development.

The current context is radically different from the moment of decolonisation, in several ways. First, economically we have seen the increased embeddedness of neoliberalism across all spheres of life in a way that has naturalised the logic of the market. Second, the political ramifications of this for regionalism in particular have been that regional cooperation is understood as neoliberal cooperation across borders and economies rather than the more radical forms of regionalism that were imagined previously. Finally, and specifically with regards to feminists, neoliberalism and increasing developmentalism have meant that gender equality has been framed within discourses of development propagated by NGOs. This has sometimes had the effect of de-politicising and individualising gender inequality.

So, what can we learn from the moment of decolonisation? One lesson is that the notions of regionalism and internationalism are crucial to creating alternative forms of solidarity. Non-alignment is an interesting political principle that could hold promise for Africa today. Non-alignment at its core was a commitment to stand against imperialism and exploitation. Given the large amount of colonial activity in Africa today, it is imperative that African countries recognise the importance of resisting colonial interests and cooperating to resolve conflicts that continue to rage unresolved. Another

example can be drawn from feminist activism. The radical connections between African and Asian feminists are a useful example to think of in light of the increasing fragmentation of women's solidarity today. Of particular importance is the centrality of anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism and anti-patriarchy to the struggles of feminists in the 1950s and 1960s.

Another lesson that can be taken from this moment is based on the principles underlying regional cooperation. Radical regionalism goes beyond trade deals or institutional commitments to cooperation and instead poses the question: *economic development for whom?* This was the question that drove many of the leaders and movements of the decolonisation period, to which the answer was that economic development must always serve both nation and continent. Any forms of regional cooperation should therefore be based on that principle. Moreover, the basis of the nation-state is also important to think about critically. The feminist proposal to re-imagine the nation-state as well as to think of sovereignty as something that could go beyond the nation-state both provide creative ways of thinking through some of the limitations of contemporary nation-state formations as well as the rise of right-wing forms of nationalism.

Economically, much can be learned as well. Industrialisation was seen as central to any such independent economic policy. Currently, African development is heavily reliant on finance capital, foreign direct investment, and foreign aid. Many of the debates in the 1950s and 1960s clearly saw the problems with this over-reliance on foreign capital, especially Western capital. Industrialisation was seen as the way out of this dilemma, as it would allow African nations to develop their own resources, of which they have plenty. Primary commodities were extremely important in this understanding of independent economic development. They were recognised to be crucial to the functioning of global capital and to the development of Western countries themselves. However, because they were exported raw and manufactured elsewhere, the value from these products never reached Africa itself. One aim of these movements was to move beyond Africa as a supplier of raw commodities. Nationalising key industries was similarly seen as important, particularly infrastructure and banking. We are seeing the privatisation and selling-off of key industries across the African continent today, in precisely a reversal of what leaders in the 1950s were advocating. Nationalising means greater control over these key industries, and also provides a means of creating local capital that can be used for development.

In sum, there is much to learn from the moment of decolonisation and the ways in which the future was imagined. Radical forms of politics, whether emanating from pan-Africanists or feminists, centred the idea that

Africa should control its own destiny. Sovereignty was seen as the answer to the continuing control exercised by colonial power, and independent forms of economic development were crafted to counter the uneven global economic system. Since the 1970s, Africa has become increasingly entangled within neoliberal and ultra-nationalist forms of economic and political development. It is increasingly urgent for us to think of alternatives to these exploitative systems. Perhaps this does not mean only thinking of the future, but also revisiting the past.

Notes

1. London School of Economics. This article was completed as part of the Post-Colonialisms Today project.
2. This builds on important emerging work on this topic, particularly Getachew (2019).
3. I want to highlight the work of Thandika Mkandawire, Samir Amin and Archie Mafeje and thank the anonymous reviewer for these suggestions.
4. This builds on previous theoretical approaches such as dependency theory, world systems theory and the work of Samir Amin in the context of Africa and the Middle East.
5. See Moyn (2014).
6. In some ways, this pre-empted approaches such as dependency and world systems theory, which centred the global capitalist system as a site of colonial inequality.
7. There are only two full sets of it in existence: at the Houghton Library at Harvard and the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh.
8. It is beyond the scope of the article to go into detail of the differences between these blocs; however, I want to note that these differences also speak to the particularity of global capitalism and decolonisation at that moment and how liberation was imagined.
9. This is not to deny that some individual women, such as Amy Ashwood Garvey, are renowned for their contribution to the pan-African project. As Adi and Sherwood note, 'If ever there was a life of lived pan-Africanism, it was that of Amy Ashwood Garvey. She not only lived in many parts of the Black world, but participated in the major events – from the founding of Garvey's UNIA to the Pan-African Conference of 1945 and the independence of Ghana in 1957' (2003: 69). However, because her manuscripts were lost, we have little access to her full body of work (*ibid.*).

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