Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub: Infrastructures of Solidarity and the 1957 Cairo Conference

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Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub: Infrastructures of Solidarity and the 1957 Cairo Conference*

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In December 1957, Cairo University played host to a conference with a difference – an international gathering of unprecedented scale in the colonised world. Representatives from forty-six countries across Asia and Africa spent a week in discussions, sharing their experiences of colonisation and their aspirations to overcome it. Their closing resolution invoked the Asian-African Conference held two years earlier in Bandung, Indonesia, which they said had 'set the standard' with its principles of self-determination, global equality, and peace.[1] Bandung remains preeminent in the lore of Afro-Asianism worldwide, and in historiographies of decolonisation today. Yet the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference and its Cairo Declaration were self-consciously a broadening and deepening of the 'Bandung Spirit' and example: Cairo's delegates represented many more countries, most of them yet to achieve independence, and they were not political elites, but activists, unionists, writers, and artists.

This presents two paradoxes for exploration, reflecting the richness of the extraordinary historical process of decolonisation. Firstly, the Cairo Conference delegates celebrated their struggles for national liberation – many were nationalist activists and organisers – but they also greeted each other as Afro-Asians. How did the national and transnational coexist in this context? Secondly, not only were the

*For their generous feedback on this article, I am grateful to the Afro-Asian Networks collective, particularly Rachel Leow, Su Lin Lewis and Carolien Stolte, and to Felix Berenskoetter, Omnia El Shakry, Salwa Ismail and Yara Salahiddeen. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

[1] 'Address by Yusuf Al-Siba'i', *The First Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference* (Cairo: AAPSO, 1958), 21.

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Cairo Conference delegates unaffiliated with their states, many had taken great risk in travelling to Cairo, evading colonial border controls or the surveillance of hostile regimes. Yet it was the Egyptian state that was sponsoring these proceedings, with a senior cabinet minister appointed conference chair. How can we understand popular agency and its limits in a state-sponsored peoples' conference? This article responds by analysing the building of an 'infrastructure of solidarity' on multiple spatial scales in the Egyptian capital in the 1950s, and the ways in which state and popular actors interacted at such sites. It situates the Cairo Conference in this process, starting with the founding of the African Association in 1955, followed by the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) in 1958. The former was established as a home from home for African students and political activists, while the latter was to continue the work of the Cairo Conference. Both owed some of their resources to the state but were officially independent of it.

The question of Afro-Asian identity has hardly had a hearing in Middle East Studies, where there has been a lack of engagement with Egypt's Afro-Asian policy under Gamal Abdel Nasser.[2] Instead scholars have focused on the Arab scale – given Nasser's captivation of Arab audiences, and the devastating Arab defeat of 1967[3] – variously engaging the conventional wisdom that Arab nationalism 'failed'. This notion assumes that pan-Arab and national loyalties were mutually exclusive,[4] and that there was an imperialist purpose behind Egypt's pan-Arabism.[5] By contrast, Egypt features prominently in global history scholarship on decolonisation, particularly that focused on the Bandung Conference,[6] in which overlapping national and transna-

[2] One important work is Tareq Ismael, *The UAR in Africa: Egypt's Policy Under Nasser* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971).

[3] See James Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002); Joseph Lorenz, *Egypt and the Arabs: Foreign Policy and the Search for National Identity* (Oxford: Westview, 1990); John Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

[4] Elie Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World: The Struggle over the Baghdad Pact* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 13; Avraham Sela, 'Nasser's Regional Politics: A Reassessment', in *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Egypt*, ed. Podeh and Onn Winckler (Gainsville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 183.

[5] Podeh, 13.

[6] Christopher Lee, ed., *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010); Jamie Mackie, *Bandung 1955: Nonalignment and Afro-Asian Solidarity* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2005); Derek McDougall and Antonia Finnane, eds., *Bandung 1955: Little Histories* (Caulfield: Monash Asia Institute, 2010). This discrepancy is likely a legacy of the early twentieth century foundations of different fields, and the separation of Middle East from African Studies. See

tional engagements are uncontroversial. Yet even here, the Bandung and Cairo Conferences are at times deemed part of a fleeting moment of 'high-minded symbolism',[7] which masked participants' rivalries and nationally differentiated priorities.[8] There is room for a different perspective, which acknowledges the transnational circulations of ideas and solidarity practices in the spaces created by both conferences.

The role of non-state actors has not been a significant focus in studies of Nasser's Egypt, and even the state's agency has often been downplayed. Many accounts have employed a 'Cold War lens',[9] privileging the feuding superpowers' perspective. Scholars have been preoccupied with evidencing that the Nasserist project overreached, and that its counterbalancing of great powers was a fruitless strategy.[10] Here they have presented Cairo as very much beholden to Moscow, and AAPSO as a Soviet front through the activities of the World Peace Council, with competition from the Chinese.[11] This approach overlooks the active hostility that confronted such Third World projects,[12] as well as the multifaceted agency of a state like Egypt, given the role of the popular networks analysed here. By contrast, scholarship on Algeria has celebrated it as a haven for Third World liberation movements.[13] This only makes the silence on Egypt's role more problematic, given that Egypt hosted the Algerian National Liberation Front's provisional government nine years before Algerian independence, amongst several other internationalist commitments.

Zachary Lockman, *Field Notes: The Making of Middle East Studies in the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[7] Frank Gerits, 'Bandung as the Call for a Better Development Project: US, British, French and Gold Coast Perceptions of the Afro-Asian Conference', *Cold War History* 16, no. 3 (2016).

[8] See James Brennan, 'Radio Cairo and the Decolonization of East Africa, 1953–1964', in Lee, 173; Robert Vitalis, 'The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung (Ban-doong)', *Humanity* 4, no. 2 (2013): 261–288.

[9] Matthew Connelly, 'Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence', *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 739–769.

[10] See Adeed Dawisha, 'Egypt', in *The Cold War and the Middle East*, ed. Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 47.

[11] Charles Neuhauser, *China and the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization, 1957–1967* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Research Center, 1968). On the WPC see Stolte in this issue.

[12] Katharine McGregor and Vanessa Hearman, 'Challenging the Lifeline of Imperialism', in *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Futures*, ed. Luis Eslava, Michael Fakhri and Vasuki Nesiah (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 164.

[13] Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Jeffrey Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and Third World Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

This article builds on the small but growing literature that addresses actors beneath the high politics level of Afro-Asianism, involved in national and transnational communities simultaneously.[14] It focuses on the subaltern agency of Egyptian activists, writers, and artists, who made of Cairo a hub for Arab, African, and Afro-Asian connections of different kinds in the 1950s. To do so, I engage with scholarship from historical geography on the relational production of place, and the generative nature of solidarity. In her work on London as a world city, Doreen Massey proposes 'an alternative geographical imagination in which the character of a region . . . is a product not only of internal interactions but also of relations with elsewhere'.[15] Cairo as a place for Afro-Asian solidarity can be similarly understood as a product of interactions at home and elsewhere. Egyptian solidarity activists confronted an unequal, colonially constituted external geography, and sought to remake it into one of global justice and peace. A spatial analysis helps clarify the driver of their solidarity practice, namely the recognition of their entanglement with other colonised peoples, and the way imperial power operates 'along long chains of command',[16] which they aim to disrupt.[17] As Massey argues, '[l]ocality and interconnectedness are often part of the very politics, even the focus, of the struggle . . . their rethinking may be a crucial part of political organising'.[18] To examine this process, I draw on the concept of translocality, which connotes 'situatedness during mobility': 'agents' "simultaneous situatedness across different locales"'.[19] Its twin valences appear in the forging of physical places for connections to be made, and the flow of people and ideas between them. Such solidarity practice is generative of new political imaginaries and communities in turn, as David Featherstone elaborates: 'translocal political organizing'[20] can lead to 'the active creation of new ways of relating'.[21]

[14] Duncan Yoon, '"Our Forces Have Redoubled": World Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau', *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (2015); Laura Bier, 'Feminism, Solidarity, and Identity in the Age of Bandung', in Lee; Vijay Prashad, 'Cairo', in *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (London: New Press, 2007); McGregor and Hearman.

[15] Doreen Massey, *World City* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2007), 17.

[16] Massey (2008), 323.

[17] Massey, 'Geographies of Solidarity', in *Material Geographies: A World in the Making*, ed. Nigel Clarke, Massey and Philip Sarre (London: Open University, 2008), 323.

[18] Ibid., 313.

[19] See discussion in Clemens Greiner and Patrick Sakdapolrak, 'Translocality: Concepts, Applications and Emerging Research Perspectives', *Geography Compass* 7 (2013): 375–376.

[20] David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), 18.

[21] Featherstone, 5.

Accordingly, I argue firstly that Egyptians negotiating the challenges of decolonisation in the 1950s built an infrastructure for translocal solidarity on Arab, African, and Afro-Asian scales simultaneously, and engaged in the relational construction of identity in the process. Moving between localities at each scale, they tried to renegotiate and break down some of the borders between them, most notably by seeking to move Algeria and Palestine from Arab onto Afro-Asian agendas. Secondly, I argue that Cairo as an Afro-Asian hub was produced through tensions and collaborations between state and non-state actors, in the context of a state that monopolised the political sphere, but promoted a political project of anti-imperialism that enjoyed widespread legitimacy.

The first section of this article examines the local places in which international solidarity was practised in 1950s Cairo, focusing on the African Association in the period before the Cairo Conference. The second section examines the interactions between delegates at the Cairo Conference itself, as a site for the creation of new identities through solidarity. I highlight the Egyptian delegation's promotion of the causes of Algeria and Palestine, revealing the ways in which the three scales – Egyptian, Arab, Afro-Asian – of identification merged in these Egyptians' constructions of identity. In the final section I chart the addition of AAPSO to Cairo's infrastructure of solidarity, and analyse the ways in which it enhanced the possibilities for mobility and rootedness on a more expansive, Afro-Asian, scale.

In this sense, this article responds to Christopher Lee's invitation to identify 'the varied locations and complex, situated meanings of 'Afro-Asianism,' and to similar calls from historians of black internationalism to subject its networks and geographies of encounter to greater scrutiny, rather than generalising about its meaning.[22] In so doing I connect the literature on nation making in Egypt with that on decolonisation and Cold War politics, and re-establish the overlooked connections forged across the African continent and into Asia by one of Africa's first independent states. I conclude with reflections on the contours and limits of solidarity in decolonising states.

[22] Lee, 'Between a Moment and an Era and an Era: The Origins and Afterlives of Bandung', in *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 3–4; Diarmaid Kelliher, 'Historicising Geographies of Solidarity', *Geography Compass* 12, no. 9 (2018): 5.

Infrastructures of Solidarity: Building an African Home in Cairo

In June 1954, Egypt's daily *Al-Ahram* reported that the annual Liberation Festival would see Cairo host a 'general congress of peoples from colonised African territories', in solidarity with them against imperialism.[23] In late 1955, this trend was enhanced with the formation of the African Association: a crucial precursor and later complement to AAPSO, it has been overlooked in the literature on Egypt's foreign policy and Afro-Asian networks. Its address at 5 Ahmad Heshmat Street in Zamalek became the site of tens of African liberation movement offices, and a cultural centre for Egyptian scholars, writers, students and activists who supported their cause. As official policy was being developed, Association members were hosting, introducing, broadcasting, and even mobilising African activists in Cairo. These were translocal interactions: producing interconnectedness between different local places, across different spatial scales, simultaneously. They created a permanent politicised space for the African community to organise in Cairo: a rootedness which was in itself a resource for activists suffering political persecution and often forced underground. At the same time this fixity promoted mobility: it allowed individuals to meet one another and share their experiences and skills, and encouraged ideas to flow between Cairo and other locales, even if their authors were immobile. This was in turn a politically productive solidarity practice, extending relations and resources across borders, overcoming colonial 'enclosure' and isolation. Indeed, the Association was also a place for African liberation movements' political expression, through channels furnished and contributed to by their Egyptian hosts.

The Association was established just three years after the Free Officers toppled the Egyptian monarch in July 1952. Led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, this clandestine military movement seized power with the stated aim of purging Egypt of all imperial influence. At that time, the state tradition was firmly Egyptian nationalist, with little Arab or Afro-Asian engagement.[24] The Free Officers had promptly begun outreach in both Arab and African spheres, with the strategy of forging

[23] 'Forthcoming Cairo Conference of African People', 478, 24, 22.6.54.

[24] Egypt headed the Arab League, but its member states were mostly still colonised, its decisions limited. In Africa, Egypt had strong ties only with Sudan, an Arab state that it had previously governed until it came under British rule in the 1880s. See Eve Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Otherwise, Egypt had an embassy in Addis Ababa and diplomatic missions in South Africa and Somalia: Fayiq, *'Abd Al-Nasir wa-l-Thawra*

a base to provide leverage in their withdrawal negotiations with Britain.[25] In 1955 Nasser travelled to Bandung – via Delhi and Rangoon[26] – where he affirmed Egypt's solidarity with all colonised nations, based on their common past experiences and future challenges of development.[27] This logic of connection and mutuality prompted a strategy to disrupt the colonial chain, and informed the Egyptian leadership's invitation to liberation movement leaders to convene in Cairo.[28] Indeed historian Muhammad Anis described Bandung at the time using metaphors of space and movement, as 'the moment of Arab nationalism's exit from isolation', prompting its fusion with Afro-Asianism and 'progressive humanism'.[29] Many scholars have understood such discourse as masking a contradiction,[30] but for Egypt's leaders, the national and international were mutually reinforcing routes to liberation, and assuring a decolonised neighbourhood was a matter of survival. If Burma, India and China had already begun their outreach along similar lines in previous years,[31] Egypt was in this sense a pioneer among African states.

The Association's role as a base for African liberation movements evolved gradually. It was first founded to take responsibility for the thousands of students now coming to Egypt on university scholarships, particularly from the Nile Basin countries and from Muslim communities in West Africa.[32] Behind this was a motivation to locate students who were involved in national liberation movements in their home countries, with whom Cairo could foster productive relations. Some of these would become representatives with permanent offices at the

Al-Ifriqiyya [Abdel Nasser and the African Revolution] (Cairo: Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi, 1982), 8–9.

[25] Nasser's engagements in the Arab arena are well documented, although their very early nature is less widely recognised. See Abou-El-Fadl, *Foreign Policy as Nation Making: Turkey and Egypt in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 147–177.

[26] See Su Lin Lewis, 'Skies That Bind: Air Travel in the Bandung Era', *Afro-Asian Visions* blog, 2016: https://medium.com/afro-asian-visions/skies-that-bind-air-travel-in-the-bandung-era-feac8e844993.

[27] Nasser, Speech at Opening Ceremony of Bandung Conference, *Nasser.org* website, 19.4.55: http://www.nasser.org/Speeches/browser.aspx?SID=339&lang=ar.

[28] *Al-Ahram*, 13.1.54, 6, see Ismael, 24. Egypt had already begun hosting the Algerian National Liberation Front in 1953: Fathi Al-Deeb, *'Abd Al-Nasir wa Thawrat Al-Jaza'ir* [Abdel Nasser and the Algerian Revolution] (Cairo: Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabi, 1984).

[29] Muhammad Anis, *Al-Mu'tamar Al-Asyawi Al-Ifriqi* [The Asian-African Conference], *Ikhtarna Lak* 44 (Cairo, 1958), 160.

[30] See fn 9.

[31] See Leow, Lewis and Stolte in this issue.

[32] See Fayiq, 44–45; 'Nigerian Students for Egypt', *Summaries of World Broadcasts*, BBC Written Archives (hereafter SWB) IV 420, 39, 27.11.53.

Association. This process was supervised by senior Free Officer Muhammad Fayiq, who headed the presidency's new African Affairs Bureau from 1955 to 1966.[33] The Association itself was not a state organisation, however, and its director Abd Al-Aziz Ishak was a scholar, formerly at Khartoum University and later consultant to the Foreign Ministry.[34] The Association's community hovered close to, but outside, the bureaucratic apparatus.

One such figure was Helmi Sharawy, who went on to become coordinator of the African liberation movements in the Egyptian presidency, but had begun by pursing research at the Association. He had visited it in its first year, and was captivated by the anticolonial fervour and ideological commitment of its community. Sharawy stresses that its Egyptian staff were not state employees, and kept their distance from the 'personal projects' and political climbing surrounding the mass party of the time, the National Union.[35] Sharawy describes himself as having been caught between the lofty ambitions of contributing to the cause of national liberation in Africa, and the mundane concern of finding a stable income. Ultimately he disregarded opportunities for secure employment in academia, and began freelancing as translator and researcher at the Association.[36]

Sharawy's description of the six African youths he met there illustrates the diversity of profiles it hosted in 1956. They were mostly university students, one from South Sudan, two from Nigeria, both supportive of the south eastern leader Namdi Izikwi, a fourth from West Africa, and two from western and northern Eritrea. They all gravitated around 'the Professor', Abd Al-Aziz Ishak, who led them in long discussions about empire and resistance in Africa.[37] Sharawy describes Ishak as a liberal scholar with a satirical wit that often rattled the technocrats who liaised with him from the African Affairs Bureau.[38] For Sharawy, and for his African colleagues, the Association was a haven of education and mentorship, amongst intellectuals with genuine affection for their African students.

The Association's community grew suddenly after Nasser's successful nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company in July 1956.

[33] Fayiq; Ismael, 157–225; Joshua Nkomo, *The Story of My Life* (London: Methuen, 1984), 101–102.
[34] Interview, Helmi Sharawy, Cairo, 30.8.17.
[35] Helmi Sharawy, *Sira Misriyya Ifriqiyya* [An Egyptian African Story] (Cairo: Al-Ain, 2019), 102.
[36] Sharawy, *Sira*, 99–100; Interview, Sharawy.
[37] Sharawy, *Sira*, 14.
[38] Sharawy, *Sira*, 154.

Britain, France and Israel's joint attack on Egypt in October had generated an unprecedented cascade of Afro-Asian solidarity with the Egyptian people: 'the sheer volume, universality, and scale of adverse reaction to the British and French attack on Egypt shocked, sobered or scandalised the supporters of the policy'.[39] After Suez, the transnational networks flowing through Cairo multiplied. Indeed Fayiq remembers 1956 as a turning point for Egypt's African relations: it both emboldened Nasser and mitigated the difficulties Fayiq had faced in locating African liberation movements.[40] Several African movements were attracted by Cairo's victory, and began taking the initiative to make contact. A case in point is Felix Moumié, leader of the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC), whose widow and fellow activist Marthe wrote: 'When we saw that Nasser could nationalize the Suez Canal, resist the French and the British, and win, we said to ourselves, this is someone who can really help [the UPC]'.[41] As Kenyan independence activist and later vice president Oginga Odinga put it, 'It was the abortive Suez adventure of 1956 . . . that united all Africa, and Africa with Asia and the Arab world, to give a great spurt forward to national independence . . . Africa was never the same after Suez . . . '[42]

The second function that the Association now came to fulfil was to enable communications amongst its African guests, and between them and their bases at home. Meeting one another in Cairo, they could escape their colonial administrations' restrictions on their movement, exchange skills and moral support, and broaden their networks. One of the first delegations came from the Cameroons, headed by Felix Moumié, with high hopes for a hearing in Egypt after Suez.[43] Arriving in July 1957, they found the Egyptian government had organised their residence and office in Zamalek, as well as financial assistance. Moumié's widow Marthe recalls Nasser taking a particular interest in the Cameroonian situation during his reception for the African delegations a week later.[44] She adds: 'All the parties represented in Cairo, with the support of the Egyptian government, had a spirit of manifest solidarity. The Algerians, Ugandans, South Africans, and Cameroonians consulted one another about strategies to adopt in their

[39] Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1992), 392.

[40] Fayiq, 24.

[41] Marthe Moumié, *Victime du Colonialisme: Mon Mari Félix Moumié* [Victim of Colonialism: My Husband Félix Moumié] (Paris: Duboiris, 2006), 100.

[42] Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 175.

[43] Moumié, 100.

[44] Moumié, 99.

struggle against colonialism. The UPC office in . . . Zamalek, Cairo, occupied an important place'.[45]

Similarly, Joshua Nkomo, president of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and later Vice President of Zimbabwe, recounts his route to Cairo via Accra's All-African People's Congress in December 1958. His trajectory highlights the significance of the tide of Third World political organising in facilitating introductions and collaborations between liberation movements. Of Accra, he says, 'the most important thing that happened to me there was my new friendship with a young man from Uganda, John Kale, a brilliant organiser who helped me a great deal . . . He was organising Joseph Kiwanuka's Uganda National Congress from an office in Cairo, and he introduced me to the leader of the Egyptian delegation, Dr [Fuad] Galal, and his deputy Mohammed Mohammed Faiek'. Nkomo describes Nasser as 'genuinely committed to national liberation in Africa' and recalls Galal inviting him to a meeting with the president following the conference.[46]

Arriving in January 1959, Nkomo had just learned of the banning of his organisation, and had begun making plans to return. Nasser advised him to organise from Cairo instead, rather than return to jail: 'I moved into a more comfortable hotel, at Egyptian government expense, and opened up a small office in the building of the African Association in Zamalek . . . the channel through which President Nasser gave support to liberation movements'. There he met Felix Moumié, and John Kale, who 'showed [him] all the techniques needed for running a political office'.[47] Alongside such opportunities, Nkomo's account also illustrates the limits curtailing the ambitious solidarity practices of a recently colonised state like Egypt. He recalls that Egypt was not especially well connected by phone and mail to southern Africa, prompting his decision to move to London to be more effective. Here again, however, he found support from Cairo when he left in July: 'The Egyptians raised no objection – indeed they even gave me some money to live on for a time, and paid my airfare'.[48]

Whilst African activists' meetings with state officials secured their position in Egypt, it was members of the African Association who were their main contacts and support in Cairo. For example in 1958, still in his twenties and a new researcher at the Association, Helmi Sharawy

[45] Moumié, 102–103.
[46] Nkomo, 77.
[47] Nkomo, 79.
[48] Nkomo, 81.

was to meet and become increasingly responsible for guests such as Felix Moumié (UPC), Joshua Nkomo (ZAPU), and Ignatius Musaazi of the Uganda National Congress Party (UNC). The continual movement and shifting fortunes of such figures was intimately tied to the support they received in Cairo, and to the exchanges they had with enthusiasts for their cause in Egyptian political, intellectual and cultural circles. In his memoir Sharawy explains how his volunteering for live interpreting tasks with such figures had accelerated his rise in the ranks, and the relaxed atmosphere in which his political experience was nurtured.[49] He also describes the Association's commemorations of national events and festivals pertaining to different liberation movements.[50]

Beyond its physical centre, the Association provided a valuable space in the media for African activists to disseminate their ideas and experiences to audiences in Egypt and back home. In 1957, its members began publishing the magazine *Nahdat Afriqya* ['Africa Rising'], under the editorship of Ishak and Egyptian poet Abdu Badawi. The Association expressly sought to forge an African consciousness among Egyptians, and *Nahdat Afriqya* announced itself the first Arabic language magazine with this objective, fostering 'familiarity amongst Africans', and 'publishing research that is important to every African'.[51] It was a rich publication featuring first-hand accounts from African politicians, a news roundup called 'Africa in a Month', scholarly research on African history, book reviews, and letters from its Arab-African readership.[52] Published in Arabic, English, and French, its editor called on writers from across the continent to contribute, under the slogan 'Africa for the Africans'.[53]

Meanwhile, the Association was able to generate new spaces for its guests' political expression and organising, by connecting them with Cairo Radio's nascent African broadcasts, providing both personnel and content. In July 1954, programming had begun in Amharic, Sudanese dialects, and Swahili.[54] Cairo's Swahili coverage was part of Egyptian support for the Mau Mau uprising: on the one hand, with news bulletins and press reviews highlighting Egyptian affairs, it fostered familiarity between the two peoples, and promoted Egypt as a regional ally. The first Swahili broadcast began by announcing: 'Today the people of the Nile Valley meet, on the ether, the sister people of

[49] Sharawy, *Sira*, 97–98.
[50] 'Al-Rabita Al-Ifriqiyya' [The African Association], *Nahdat Afriqya* I, October 1957, 52.
[51] *Nahdat Afriqya* II, December 1957, 2.
[52] See *Nahdat Afriqya* II, December 1957, 42–46, 47–49, 54–57.
[53] Ishak, 'Introduction', *Nahdat Afriqya*, Vol. I, October 1957.
[54] Fayiq, 35–36.

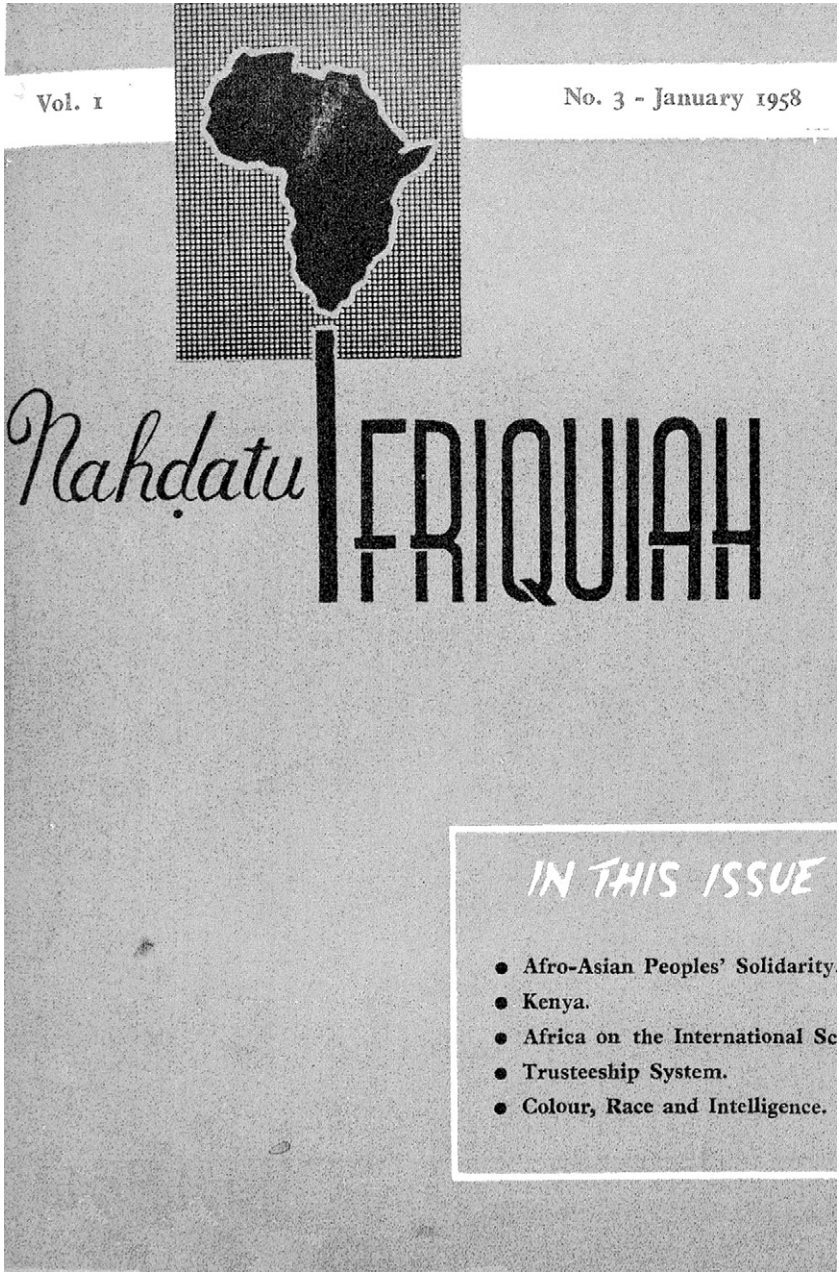

FIGURE 1. Front cover of *Nahdat Afriqya*, January 1958.

East Africa . . . who have always had a special place in our hearts'.[55] On the other hand, it exerted pressure on Britain, by reporting on British violence against the Kenyans, on dissenting voices in British parliament and society, and on other African liberation movements, from Zanzibar, Somaliland, Tanganyika, Uganda, Northern Rhodesia, and South Africa.[56]

Through their use of language and translation, mass media such as *Nahdat Afriqya* and Cairo Radio became important places for the politics of African solidarity, articulated together by and with the Association. However, this effort had important limits. The *Nahdat Afriqya* team took care to translate summaries of its content into English and French, aiming to foster an 'imagined community' contemplating the same content across linguistic barriers simultaneously. This effect was subject to the constraints of the Association's resources, both technically and financially, and circulation remained highest in Egypt, as reflected in the Letters pages. Conversely, Cairo Radio employed presenters directly from each movement, broadcast in their own language. It sought to constitute its listeners as members of national fighting fronts, but also of a wider African public, in which Egyptians featured by their side. In both media, however, hailing Arab-African publics into being in this way was limited by differences of class, gender, and cultures across audiences, as well as differential attitudes to Arab historical legacies in the continent, some of which were associated with slavery, or colonialism in the case of Egypt and Sudan.

Changing Political Imaginaries: From Suez to the Cairo Conference

> It was the first time that the colonised peoples could send their representatives . . . despite colonisers' borders and obstacles . . . despite the iron curtain that the coloniser used to isolate the peoples (. . .) [The Cairo Conference] created a new field for meeting and coordinating efforts, not only in Africa but extending to the peoples of Asia and others . . . [57]

During the Free Officers' first years in power, the production of Cairo as a hub for liberation movements proceeded through the fostering of a

[55] 'Broadcasts in Swahili', SWB IV 481, 33, 3.7.54.
[56] See 'Appendix: Cairo in Swahili', i–iv, SWB IV 558.
[57] 'Intishar Harakat Al-Tahrir fi-Afriqya' [The Spread of Liberation Movements in Africa], *Nahdat Afriqya*, December 1957, 59–63.

networked physical presence for their members and supporters, with an emphasis on the Arab world and Africa. With the Cairo Conference in December 1957, a new phase was inaugurated in which the Afro-Asian scale took prominence in Egyptians' political imaginaries. As Laura Bier observes, at this juncture after independence, 'the primacy of the nation-state as the locus of identity was largely taken for granted . . . '[58] Contrary to the conventional wisdom on Egyptians' mutually exclusive nationalist and pan-Arab commitments, those engaged with the state's radical project in the 1950s were undertaking a far more complex reimagining of their identities and role on the world stage. This was a dynamic process, unfolding first in the confrontation over Suez, and then in the gathering of Afro-Asian representatives in Cairo.

In both instances, Egyptians engaged in translocal organising with Arab, African, and Asian counterparts, and this was generative of new political imaginaries in turn. As Ruth Gilmore writes, solidarity practice remakes identifications through a creative process of engagement: in 'the context of shared opposition, the activists "discovered" . . . which is to say created – shared values; in turn, that collective work produced community solidarity, or political integration, enabling further action'.[59] Specifically, I show that the experience of Suez, and then their agenda-setting interactions at the conference, moved Egyptian activists and writers from a solidarity which foregrounded their common enemy, and proposed a shared project in the future, towards a solidarity which substantiated a shared project in the present. Having been observers of the broad trajectory launched at Bandung, the delegates became authors of resolutions that they would announce themselves for immediate implementation. As this section will show, this was by no means a seamless transition, as differences of class, language, and historical experience underpinned power differentials that could interrupt the flow of solidarity.

Suez: A Common Enemy and the Gift of Solidarity

There was a lively public debate about national identity already underway in the 1950s. Increasing numbers of publications were affirming the

[58] Bier, 155–156, 157.

[59] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalising California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 238. See Featherstone, 23.

salience of Egypt's regional neighbourhoods, even if they differed on the relative weight to be given to each. In 1954, Nasser himself had published *The Philosophy of the Revolution*, which presents Egypt as moving in three circles, Arab, African, and Islamic.[60] He also wrote a preface to Hussein Mu'nis' *Egypt and its Message*, which affirmed Egypt's African calling, but maintained the traditional nationalist trope of Egypt's contributions to European civilisation: 'We are neither from the Orient nor from the West, although we have a share in each of them . . . '[61] In 1956, a policy statement entitled 'Africa for the Africans' played up Egypt's moral leadership and Islamic heritage in Africa.[62] Such texts arguably marshalled a conservative emphasis on religious unity or nationalist tradition in order to balance their early, radical words on Africa. By contrast, subsequent media and official publications affirmed Egypt's new alliances confidently. As leftist historian Muhammad Anis wrote in a state-sponsored series, Nasser went to Bandung to explore Egypt's new role, 'while earlier Egyptian leaders would always go to London and Paris'.[63]

The struggle over Suez must be underlined as the crucial event connecting Bandung with the Cairo Conference, and shaping the Egyptian delegates' identity narratives, for several reasons. First, the extraordinary engagement of Arab, African, and Asian publics with Egypt's cause led many Egyptians to see themselves within wider and overlapping spatial networks of anticolonial resistance. The central trope here was that of the common enemy. This was a contingent process that predated Suez, but one which came to a dramatic crescendo in the second half of 1956. After securing British withdrawal in 1954, Egypt had faced renewed isolation through Britain's promotion of a Middle East security pact, and Israel's attack on Egyptian troops in Gaza in February 1955. The United States worsened this by making military assistance conditional on a settlement with Israel. It was at Bandung, after his embrace of neutralism, that Nasser was able to secure arms from the Soviet bloc instead.[64] Thus for Egyptians pursuing meaningful sovereignty, the need to resist Western regional alliances

[60] Nasser, *Falsafat Al-Thawra* [The Philosophy of the Revolution] (Cairo: Madbuli, 2003, 1953), 57–61.

[61] See Ismael, 106.

[62] Likely authored by the so-called Supreme Council for African Affairs, this appeared to reflect official thinking. As Sharawy recalls, however, this council was formed by Nasser to send a message regarding the civilian nature of Egyptian policy making, while the real decisions remained in Fayiq's hands: Sharawy, *Sira*, 121–127, cf. Ismael, 237.

[63] Anis, 160.

[64] Abou-El-Fadl, 'Neutralism'.

had thrown the Arab scale into relief, while the isolation then imposed by the Suez attack revealed Africa and the wider Afro-Asian space as generous spaces of translocal solidarity. In successive struggles with the Western bloc, Egyptians had discovered their need for support in Asia and Africa, and in a fluid process of introductions, sharing, and organising in spaces such as the Cairo Conference, they had begun to identify with one another. As Brown and Yaffe emphasise, 'relations of solidarity can travel in more than one direction simultaneously, building complex webs of reciprocity'.[65]

It was the gift of popular solidarity with Egypt across Africa and Asia that raised Egypt's profile internationally, and elicited the invitation to host the first Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference. In December 1956, after the Asian Writers Conference in New Delhi, the ASC permanent committee had decided to send a delegation to Cairo. Four ASC secretaries, Indian Anup Singh, Russian Anatoly Sefernov, Chinese Yang Shou, and Japanese Masharu Hatanaka arrived in February 1957 and met with Nasser, who confirmed his agreement to host the conference.[66] Egypt's leadership knew how to capitalise on this: Nasser had relied on a popular base to buoy Egypt through the Suez trial, and now used it to strengthen Egypt's Third World profile. Thus Suez brought together a trajectory of grassroots solidarity with state policy, which saw the articulation of Cairo with other Afro-Asian locales, and enabled the convening of the 1957 Conference.

Finally, the Suez experience deepened the so-called 'Bandung moment' in Egypt – specifically the rapprochement between Nasser and the Egyptian left – which shaped the composition of Egypt's delegation to the Cairo Conference. On the one hand, after Bandung and Suez, Nasser had realised the political leverage afforded by adopting more radical positions, which prompted an engagement with the communist bloc and Egypt's own leftists.[67] Until 1954, crackdowns on opposition had seen many such figures jailed, and even leftist Free Officers such as Khalid Muhyi Al-Din exiled.[68] Now, the government was keen to work with the left, aiming to enhance its own technocratic ranks with leftist intellectuals' superior capacities in theorisation, planning, and public discourse. On the other hand, Nasser's feats in

[65] Gavin Brown and Helen Yaffe, 'Practices of Solidarity: Opposing Apartheid in the Centre of London', *Antipode* 46, no. 1 (2014): 35.

[66] Anis, 198.

[67] Anouar Abdel Malek, *Egypt, Military Society: The Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser* (New York: Random House, 1968), 116.

[68] Khalid Muhyi Al-Din, *Wa Al'aan Atakallam* [And Now I Speak] (Cairo: Al-Ahram, 1992), 323–351.

securing arms and the Suez nationalisation had delighted audiences in the Arab world, and triggered a 'fascination with Nasserism'[69] amongst the Egyptian left, whose members had a strong tradition of theorising Arab nationalism within their socialism.[70] Its different factions now adopted a strategy of unification amongst themselves and cooperation with the state: 'Nasser's change in foreign policy was an important element in shifting the orientation of the Egyptian communists'.[71]

The conference delegation therefore included both Free Officers such as Muhyi Al-Din, and recently released Marxist intellectuals, who endeavoured to pull the government left. There was also an array of liberal and nationalist public intellectuals, who were content to support and generate publicity for the government project. These included Egypt's foremost man of letters Taha Hussein, celebrated novelists Nagib Mahfouz and Ihsan Abd Al-Qudus, and influential journalists Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, Ahmad Bahaa' Al-Din, and Zakariyya Lutfi Gum'a. The calibre of this team reflects the importance that the Egyptian government attributed to the conference, and also meant that rigorous and critical deliberations would ensue. This said, the Free Officers' rule was characterised by its close surveillance of the political field in Egypt and its wariness of independent organising. The Afro-Asian conference was accordingly subject to state supervision, with two military men placed in charge of its preparatory committee: senior Free Officer Anwar Sadat as preparatory committee and conference chair, and Yusuf Al-Siba'i as secretary. Sadat was a right-leaning figure, formerly secretary of the short-lived Islamic Congress, and described in Nkomo's memoir as 'not remotely interested in Africa'.[72] Al-Siba'i moved from his military background into a career as novelist and editor with an uncritical pro-government line. Ultimately this meant that the implementation of decisions remained to a large degree in state hands. However, this choice did not mean that the critical voices in Egypt's delegations were silenced. As the subsequent sections show, the conference appeared on a scene already vibrant with personalities and institutions engaged critically but sympathetically with the state policy of Afro-Asian solidarity.

[69] Sa'eed Rahmi cited in Ismael and Rifat El-Said, *The Communist Movement in Egypt, 1920–1988* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 107.
[70] Abdel Malek, 264–273.
[71] Ismael and El-Said, 82.
[72] Nkomo, 78.

Setting the Agenda: Fashioning an Arab Afro-Asianism

The Cairo Conference had come to its Egyptian hosts from an Asian solidarity movement trajectory in which they had not been much involved, but they now adopted several liberation causes from Asia and Africa. Meanwhile they endeavoured to secure recognition and support for the concerns they had carried alone thusfar, seeking to channel participating delegations' energies towards an Egyptian rendering of the meaning of Afro-Asian solidarity. Significantly, they were constructing this Afro-Asianism in tandem with Egypt's pan-Arabism, at a particularly tumultuous time for the Arab world. Egypt's merger with Syria into the United Arab Republic was announced within days of the Cairo Conference, sharpening the polarisation between the anti-imperialist republics and the pro-Western monarchies in the so-called Arab Cold War of the 1950s. Examining the delegates' interactions at the Cairo Conference, I chart their adoption of African and Asian liberation movements' causes as their own, and their effort to set the Afro-Asian agenda to include causes hitherto considered exclusively 'Arab'. Through such connections, they endeavoured to constitute themselves as subjects at home in Arab, African, and later Afro-Asian worlds, in a specifically Egyptian internationalism. Conferences were important venues for diplomatic sociability, and for securing consensus on agendas and priority issues which could then be transposed to other fora, both international and popular.[73] From 1958 onwards, Egypt's influence meant that 'Arab' issues were tabled in any Afro-Asian forum. Egyptian efforts were critical to the assimilation of Algeria and Palestine, but also Tunisia, Morocco, and Yemen, into the core causes and critiques of anti-imperialists in Afro-Asian and later Euro-American movements.

This process had begun in earnest with the preparations for Bandung. In the preceding Arab League meetings, Egypt tabled the issues of Palestine and North Africa alongside African liberation, racial discrimination in Africa, and disarmament, and secured an agreement from fellow Arab states to send delegates who would vote with Egypt on Palestine.[74] There was an agreement to send the Arab League's General Secretary Abd Al-Khaliq Hassouna within Egypt's delegation, and to

[73] Ruth Craggs, 'Postcolonial Geographies, Decolonization, and the Performance of Geopolitics at Commonwealth Conferences', *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 35, no. 1 (2014): 39–55; Naoko Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre: Staging the Bandung Conference of 1955', *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2014): 225–252.

[74] See 'The Presentation of Arab Issues at Bandung', SWB IV 560, 23, 9.4.55 and Ismael, 31.

get observer status for Arab countries which were not yet independent.[75] Egypt also led the Arab insistence on getting Israel uninvited, and was supported by Pakistan and Indonesia.[76] Nasser persuaded Indian premier and Bandung co-convenor Jawaharlal Nehru to agree to the discussion of the question of Palestine, as well as to support Egypt's resolution.[77]

At Bandung, Nasser's powerful emphases on the North African and Palestinian problems were echoed and endorsed by Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan delegates who were being hosted as political exiles in Cairo,[78] as well as other Arab delegates. Cairo Radio's 'Voice of the Arabs' reported approvingly: 'Egypt made these issues her own from the very first moment of discussion, and Abd Al-Nasir . . . expressed his appreciation for the continued attention paid by the members of the Asian bloc to the North African dispute . . . '[79] The Egyptian delegation's efforts resulted in the Final Communiqué recording its support for several Arab liberation causes. Under 'The Problems of Dependent Peoples' and 'Cultural Cooperation', it supported the rights to independence of Tunisians, Moroccans and Algerians, and under 'Other', it called for the implementation of United Nations resolutions on the rights of Arab Palestinians, and supported the position of South Yemen.[80] Bandung also generated a ten-point Declaration of which one clearly endorsed Egypt's struggle against the Baghdad Pact: 'Abstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers'.[81] These were not small victories, given the presence of delegates such as Atlantic Pact member Turkey, and delegates from Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, who were less than enthused by Nasser's proposals for Arab collective security away from the British.

One of the leftist delegates to the 1957 Conference, Mahmud Amin Al-Alim, observed that 'the Arabs now realise the importance of going out to the world with their causes and issues'.[82] This made 'Arab' issues

[75] Ismael, 31.

[76] For official Israeli reaction, see 'Dr Eytan on the Bandung Conference', Voice of Zion, SWB IV 560, 21, 10.4.55.

[77] Ismael, 30.

[78] 'An Interview with Salah Ben Yousif', SWB IV 561, 21–22; 'Mohammed Khaidar's [Khider] Broadcasts', 22–23; 'A Statement by 'Allal Al-Fasi', 23–24, 17-8.5.55.

[79] 'Abd Al-Nasir's Speech on the North Africa Issue', SWB IV 563, 24, 21.5.55.

[80] See Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference, *Interventions* 11, no. 1 (2009): 97, 100; see also Anis, 162.

[81] Final Communiqué, 102.

[82] Al-Alim, 'Tawsiyyat Al-Mu'tamar' [Recommendations of the Conference], *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, January 1958.

far more prominent in the preparatory committee's agenda and the eventual agenda setting for the conference, than they had been at Bandung.[83] Indeed at the October 1957 Preparatory Meeting, the second agreed agenda item was the Algerian situation, after Algerian delegate Ahmad Tawfiq Madani successfully requested separate consideration.[84] Under 'Other Issues', delegates agreed to send a letter of support to the Syrian people and government for their steadfastness during their recent standoff with Turkey, a message to the United Nations Secretary-General regarding the Syrian events, a memorandum to the General Assembly President on Algerian liberation, and even a message to the Egyptian people on the first anniversary of Suez.[85] On both the Syrian and the Algerian issues, the Turkish delegate Ali Belge refused to endorse the committee's statements – in a repeat of Turkish diplomat Fatin Rüştü Zorlu's behaviour at Bandung[86] – but came up against a balance of attendees that opposed his view.[87] With the two sub-committees formed for agenda and administrative matters headed by Egyptian Al-Siba'i and Indian Singh respectively, and given their support for Syria's position, Turkey's influence was weakened.

At the Cairo Conference itself, delegates from India, Cameroon, Indonesia, Japan, and Sudan all gave reports, on their own national liberation struggles, on challenges they confronted such as racial discrimination and the threat of nuclear weapons, and on the promotion of economic development and cultural exchange.[88] Meanwhile, Egyptian contributions such as Free Officer Khalid Muhyi Al-Din's address on neoimperialism made comparisons between Western security pacts in the Middle East, the Far East, and South-East Asia, and enumerated the anticolonial causes of West Irian in Indonesia and Goa in

[83] The Cairo Conference preparatory committee included twenty-one states: Afghanistan, Algeria, Burma, Cambodia, Cameroon, Ceylon, China, Jordan, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Japan, Lebanon, Libya, Mongolia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, USSR and Republic of Vietnam. It sent invitations to 55 countries, and the publicity was rigorous, including a decision to hold an 'Afro-Asian Week' from 1–8 December 1957 in Egypt as a prelude: Anis, 202, 220.

[84] See Anis, 200, 217. The agreed agenda was 1. The international situation and its effect on Afro-Asian nations, 2. The Algerian situation, 3. Colonialism and national independence, 4. Combating nuclear weapons, 5. Racism, 6. Coordination of economic and technical skills, 7. Coordination of efforts towards cultural cooperation, 8. Other issues.

[85] 'Ma'rad Al-Shahr' [The Month's Exhibition], *Nahdat Afriqya* II, December 1957, 37–39.

[86] Zeki Küneralp, trans. Geoffrey Lewis, *Just a Diplomat* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1992), 56–57.

[87] Anis, 210–216.

[88] See *Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), 4. The final agenda saw the addition of 'The conditions of woman and child'. See 7.

India in particular.[89] At the same time, his speech focused on Western designs on the Middle East, and the colonisation of Arab states. The Egyptian delegation then secured a resolution on Algeria which described the French as engaged in a war of extermination, and called on the people of Africa and Asia to mobilise public opinion through press campaigns and demonstrations insisting on France respecting the Geneva Conventions on the Laws of War.[90] On Palestine, the conference had begun with the Palestinian delegation's submission of a report and a proposal for a resolution on support for the Palestinians' right of return.[91] The final conference declaration then fully endorsed the Palestinian delegation's report. Whereas Bandung's final communiqué contained just a few lines on Palestine, here was a longer historical account, which pointed to Israel's 'aggressive expansionist nature', and its military and financial support by the United States. It described the Zionist project as 'growing along racial expansion lines . . . specifically aiming at the expulsion of Arabs from their country'.[92] Indeed persuading African interlocutors of comparisons with apartheid South Africa was fast becoming an important element of Egyptian policy.[93] As the 'Voice of the Arabs' had argued before Bandung: 'The conference is a call for freedom and equality. No wonder Israel was not invited . . . ! No wonder South Africa . . . did not respond to the invitation!'[94]

Meanwhile the Cultural Resolutions of the conference recommended the provision of scholarships and facilities to enable Algerians and Palestinians to study at schools and universities across Africa and Asia, in the context of the repression of teachers and students under colonial rule.[95] This overall trend continued beyond the founding conference and was stronger yet at the 1959 Youth Conference, where Palestinian refugees made up part of the UAR delegation, and where AAPSO Youth delegates were taken on a trip to Gaza as part of their stay.[96]

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[89] Khalid Muhyi Al-Din, '"Imperialism and Upholding the Peoples' Rights for Independence and Sovereignty": Report by Khaled Mohieddin, Egypt', *Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Conference*, 81–86.

[90] Resolutions, *First Conference*, 39.

[91] *Al-Ahram*, 26.12.57, 5.

[92] Resolutions, 42.

[93] Sharawy, 'The Presence of African Liberation Movements in Egypt after the Bandung Conference in 1955', in *The Future We Chose: Emerging Perspectives on the Centenary of the ANC*, ed. Busani Ngcaweni (Pretoria: African Institute of South Africa, 2013).

[94] 'Israel and South Africa', SWB IV 563, 19, 19.5.55.

[95] Resolutions, 62.

[96] *Al-Idha'a* [The Radio], Cairo, February 1959.

FIGURE 2. Crowds outside the conference opening ceremony at Cairo University. *Source*: *Al-Ahram*, 27 December 1957.

A critical limitation to this gain was that the problem of Zionism was not one that could easily be appreciated across Afro-Asian spaces. Connections had been forged between Israeli and Afro-Asian socialists in the precursors to Bandung such as the Asian Socialist Conference, and Israel was offering diplomatic and economic assistance to its African interlocutors, presenting itself as a fellow newly independent state.[97] This was compounded by another limitation in turn: the rivalries and competing interpretations of solidarity in the Afro-Asian space of other influential powers, such as the staunchly pan-Africanist

[97] See McCann and Lewis in this issue.

Kwame Nkrumah. Israel's activism had proven notably effective in Ghana, where Nkrumah convened the All-African Independent Peoples' Conference in April 1958, on the heels of the Cairo Conference, followed by the All-African Peoples' Congress in December, while resisting Egypt's counsel on the question of Palestine throughout. In later years, Israel's expansionism in Africa in particular would become a grave challenge for Egypt, and it would find support in its conflicts with Israel lacking, particularly among the more conservative states who went on to form the Monrovia Group.[98] Sharawy recalls trying to explain to his friend and ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo in 1958 the similarities between Rhodesia and Palestine, Algeria, Kenya and South Africa, as all subject to settler colonial regimes, but finding the Zionist movement's strong presence in South Africa in particular an obstacle to Nkomo's grasp of the comparison.[99]

Becoming Afro-Asian: A Shared Project

If these were the kinds of interactions Egyptians had at the conference, what was the effect on their political imaginaries? In the run-up to the Cairo Conference in late 1957, the Egyptian preparatory committee began to articulate their Arab and Afro-Asian identities in the Egyptian cultural press. This is illustrated well by a comparison of *Nahdat Afriqya*'s coverage of the conference, and that of *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, a cultural magazine edited by conference secretary Al-Siba'i which featured commentary from members of the Egyptian delegation's Cultural Committee. Even though the African Association did not have a formal presence at the conference, it was represented, whether by the correspondents who sent reports,[100] or the African conference delegates whom it hosted in Cairo. Both magazines covered the event extensively, asking similar questions regarding Egyptian delegates' impressions of their guests, and their 'duties . . . in implementing the conference's recommendations'.[101]

[98] See Sharawy, *Sira*, 102–105; Sharawy and Awatif Abd Al-Rahman, *Isra'il wa Afriqiya: 1948–1985* [Israel and Africa: 1948–1985] (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, 1985).

[99] Sharawy, *Sira*, 44.

[100] Areen Abd Al-Hamid, 'Ala Hamish Al-Mu'tamar: Ahrar Asya [On the Margins of the Conference: The Free of Asia], *Nahdat Afriqya* III, January 1958, 9.

[101] Enayat Al-Khurazati, 'Udaba' wa-Fananu Misr fi-Mu'tamar Al-Shu'ub Al-Ifriqiyya Al-Asyawiyya' [The Writers and Artists of Egypt in the Afro-Asian People's Conference], *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, February 1958.

Suez was a common point of departure for the Egyptian delegates, and the two publications used the motif of Egypt's national victory at Suez as an Afro-Asian one. This offered Egyptian audiences new coordinates for the resonance of this event, not only in the Arab but the Afro-Asian space too. At the conference, Anwar Sadat had addressed the delegations: 'In expressing her gratitude . . . Egypt . . . recognizes that the only way of repaying her debt to you is by taking an active part in the task of liberating the rest of those peoples whose fates are still being dominated by imperialistic regimes'.[102] In *Nahdat Afriqya*, Ishak echoed this by asserting that 'Colonialism was broken, and its prestige evaporated in Port Said'.[103] In *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, Marxist Lutfi Al-Khuli similarly affirmed that the choice of Cairo for AAPSO headquarters was 'a clear sign of these peoples' appreciation for the struggle of the Egyptian people in particular and the Arabs in general against colonialism'.[104] In the same issue, Al-Siba'i clarified: 'People always talked about pharaonic Egypt, but now Egypt has a different significance amongst nations: leader of the colonised . . . '[105]

While Suez was juxtaposed with the common enemy in the West, contributors also harnessed the trope of civilisation to assert their new orientation eastwards and enthusiastic adoption of African and Asian causes. Thus, in *Nahdat Afriqya*, Ishak called the conference a 'civilisational step' for eastern civilisations, which he deemed closer to Egypt's own than that of the West. Ishak criticised the way in which European civilisation had become the model for colonised peoples, and emphasised that African peoples' histories were steeped in 'elements of modernity', citing 'rational thought, humane feelings, ancient religions and generous values'.[106] His descriptions of the conference aimed to celebrate this heritage, and Egypt's central place:

> In one of the great halls of Cairo – which has seen 1000 years of civilisation of East, West and South – wise men from India, poets from China, heroes from Indonesia, cultured youth from Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, and Somalia, and the rest of the rising continent's nations, expressed the hopes of ancient Afro-Asian human civilisation, which

[102] 'Address by Anwar Sadat', *First Conference*, 8.
[103] Ishak, 'Thamrat', 6.
[104] Al-Khurazati.
[105] Al-Siba'i, 'Kharig Al-Nitaq Al-'Arabi' [Beyond the Arab Sphere], *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, February 1958.
[106] Ishak, 'Thamrat Al-Tadamun Al-Ifriqi Al-Asyawi' [The Fruits of Afro-Asian Solidarity], *Nahdat Afriqya* III, January 1958.

> aims at construction . . . fraternity and elevation, respect of humans for one another.[107]

Ishak's language illustrates both the endurance of colonial binaries of backwardness and civilisation, and the new ways in which Egyptians negotiated these. The latter ranged from asserting their own singular civilisational trajectory, to now locating themselves within a greater ontological unit and asserting its parity with, but difference from, the colonial West. Meanwhile, in *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, Cultural Committee delegates echoed this trope in expressing their new Afro-Asian affinities, stating that they had 'absorbed more than enough from Western cultures'.[108]

The conference debates on cultural exchange had provided a space for the elaboration of a shared project[109] – as compared to focusing on a shared enemy – in the production of an Egyptian, Afro-Asian identity. The theme of Egypt's own distinct trajectory was strongly present, but there was also a pledge to fuse this with new cultural sources. Significantly, this had come from a preeminent liberal nationalist, and longtime advocate of Egypt's Mediterranean identity and European ties, Taha Hussein. As Egypt's Cultural Committee chair, Hussein had spoken at length about 'Egypt's gift to world culture', but also announced 'that the Egyptian mind . . . the mind of the intellectuals, and of those seeking to learn, welcome most deeply the fruits of what the Asian and African countries' minds produce . . . '[110]

Indeed Hussein's speech revolved around translation in Egyptian and Arab history, which was a theme that animated conference proceedings on cultural exchange. It appeared in conference secretary Al-Siba'i's call for a nationally coordinated literary translation programme, and leading actress Fatin Hamama and director Salah Abu Sayf's call 'to realise the exchange of films on the widest possible scale'.[111] Novelist Nagib Mahfuz and editor Ahmad Bahaa' Al-Din insisted that the Egyptian state facilitate travel and collaboration between Egyptian and Afro-Asian writers, to enable 'the establishment of Afro-Asian literature, which will emerge out of spiritual and moral cooperation . . . These [writers] will be better placed for this than

[107] Ibid.
[108] Abd Al-Salam Sharif, quoted in Al-Khurazati.
[109] See Berenskoetter and Yuri van Hoef, 'Friendship and Foreign Policy', *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Foreign Policy Analysis* (2017), 6.
[110] Taha Hussein, 'Tanmiyat Al-Tabadul Al-Thaqafi' [The Development of Cultural Exchange], Speech for the Egyptian Delegation, *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, February 1958.
[111] Al-Khurazati.

European and American writers who are well-meaning but have not lost the perspective of the tourist, coming from very different cultures . . . '[112]

The delegates' comments further specify the features of the shared project, illustrating the relational ways in which they constructed and employed their Arab and Afro-Asian national identity narratives. Thus Marxist Lutfi Al-Khuli revealed the diverse causes which Egyptians now adopted as their own from the Afro-Asian sphere: 'the Egyptian writer is required today . . . to draw his pen in the face of nuclear weapons, human exploitation, and racial discrimination . . . ' while the Egyptian and Arab spheres were encouraged to open up to 'new trends of thought and culture'.[113] In describing the Egyptian writer's commitments, Al-Khuli articulated multiple internationalist scales: they came, he said, 'from his position as Arab and then as Afro-Asian and lastly as a human'.[114] As Liu puts it, 'Afro-Asian writers were striving toward a new humanism—a universalism about life and liberty—that was pitted against colonial violence'.[115]

Nahdat Afriqya further combined the Arab with Afro-Asian frames through stories such as 'Madagascar: The Asian-African Island' or by celebrating the Egyptian-Syrian merger as forming the first truly Afro-Asian state.[116] In providing a hall of fame of modernist leaders from the East, for example, Ishak grouped together Islamic modernist Jamal Al-Afghani with China's founder Sun Yat Sen, alongside Egyptian anticolonial nationalist Ahmad Urabi, Libyan fighter Al-Sunusi, and Riffian revolutionary Abd Al-Krim Khatabi.[117] Meanwhile in the post-conference issue of *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, the tale of Arab folk hero Abu Zayd Al-Hilali was retold, emphasising his Arab, Asian and African connections each time.[118] In the same issue, an analysis of Cairo Radio's 'special programmes' stressed their role in 'reshaping our culture into local, Arab and internationalist'. The author described Egyptians' Arab and Afro-Asian identities as a series of widening perspectives: 'We were until recently closed in on ourselves, colonised . . . Now

[112] Mahfuz in Al-Khurazati.
[113] Al-Khuli in Al-Khurazati.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Lydia Liu, 'The Eventfulness of Translation: Temporality, Difference and Competing Universals', *Translation*, Spring (2014).
[116] See *Nahdat Afriqya* III, January 1958, 34–36.
[117] Ishak, 'Thamrat', 4.
[118] Zakariyya Al-Higawi, 'Abu Zayd Al-Hilali: 'Arabi, Asyawi, Ifriqi' [Abu Zayd Al-Hilali: Arab, Asian, African], *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, January 1958, 42–45.

many events . . . have drawn new horizons in front of us. We now have to see ourselves as part of humanity . . . '[119]

While writers and artists engaged in this co-construction of Arab and Afro-Asian identities, it is important to note the challenges that confronted their dissemination, as was the case with the pan-Arabist nation making project.[120] Afro-Asian solidarity activists had to contend with the difference between their own experiences and visions, and those of Egyptians whose political culture was shaped by local references and an attachment to Egypt's distinct national identity. Particularly when combined with lingering tropes of civilisational superiority, this could undermine the solidarity framework. There was a concerted effort from state institutions to increase the popularly available literature on Africa and Asia, and to make relevant changes to the school and university curricula.[121] However such measures could not bring about shifts in societal attitudes swiftly enough for Association members like Sharawy, who bemoaned insufficient investment in cultural education around Arab-African relations in particular.[122]

A Growing Hub: AAPSO Joins the African Association

For its Egyptian hosts, a significant outcome of the 1957 Conference was that Cairo was now a firmly fixed presence on the Afro-Asian political map. They had demonstrated their ability to host and coordinate a vast array of delegates and ideas, and this had been politically productive – facilitating and strengthening connections between delegates across borders, and helping to clarify and argue for an Egyptian Afro-Asian political imaginary. The conference resolutions then added an important new node to the infrastructure of translocal solidarity practised by its hosts: they announced the formation of AAPSO, with a permanent secretariat to be based in Cairo, Egypt. This section examines the founding of AAPSO and the ways in which it enhanced both the rootedness and mobility of activist networks in Cairo. It should be clear that AAPSO was not the beginning of Third

[119] Bahig Nassar, 'Al-Idha'a wa-Thaqafatuna Al-Gadida' [The Radio and Our New Culture], *Al-Risala Al-Gadida*, September 1958.

[120] See Abdel Malek, 256–262.

[121] See Ismael, 104–107, Jacques Baulin, *The Arab Role in Africa* (London: Penguin, 1962), 51.

[122] Sharawy, *Sira*, 152.

World internationalism in Egypt, but was rather an addition to a dynamic existing framework. AAPSO was an international organisation, however, unlike the African Association – its relationship to high politics differed as a result. Below I discuss the influence of the different states involved with Afro-Asianism on AAPSO, and the opportunities and important limits this generated for its solidarity practices.

As AAPSO was being set up, the African Association was going from strength to strength. An immediate consequence of the Cairo Conference was the Association's swelling into the liberation movement base whose reputation came to be known across decolonising Africa. The opportunities it afforded these movements for situated mobility now multiplied. After the conference, *Al-Ahram* featured interviews with several African delegates who had managed to evade colonial border controls to make it to Cairo, and who were now effectively claiming asylum.[123] They included a resistance fighter with the Kenyan Mau Mau, a delegate from French Sudan who had claimed he was travelling to France, and Chad delegation president, Zakariya Nimr Yusuf, whose delegation had obtained pilgrimage visas for Hijaz, the only destination the authorities allowed. Also covered was the story of John Kale, the Ugandan student leader just 22 years of age, whom Nkomo would meet a year later. Kale was then Foreign Relations Secretary of the Ugandan National Congress, and would now become its first representative in Cairo, given a base at the African Association, and an influential voice on Cairo Radio.[124]

Meanwhile an elegant Nile-side villa was found to host the new Afro-Asian organisation in Cairo's Manial district. Its main tasks were to be the implementation of the conference resolutions, the promotion of Afro-Asian solidarity movements, and the provision of a link between them. A modus vivendi developed gradually with the African Association, whereby any liberation movement based in Cairo would propose a principal resident in the African Association, and a representative in the AAPSO Secretariat – this could be the same person, or and assistant. As Sharawy recalls, this new arrangement placed him and the AAPSO in competition for these liberation movements' attention.[125]

[123] 'The Story of Those Who Came to Participate in the Conference and Will Not Return!', *Al-Ahram*, 2.1.58, 3.

[124] See Ismay Milford, '"Shining Vistas" and False Passports: Recipes for an Anti-colonial Hub', *Afro-Asian Visions* online blog, 2017; Sharawy, *Sira*, 172.

[125] Sharawy, *Sira*, 102.

A division of labour also evolved to distinguish AAPSO's activities from those of others in Cairo. The African Association and later the presidency's African and Arab Affairs Bureaux provided politicised spaces from which liberation movements could communicate with their constituencies at home, associate with one another, and promote their political thought in written and broadcast forms. Meanwhile AAPSO also provided a fixed venue and resources, but promoted a different kind of mobility: delegates were able to represent themselves directly at foreign embassies and international organisations in Cairo, by accompanying their Egyptian hosts. This also allowed them to convey their message to non-African audiences at international conferences, whether in Cairo or abroad, again by accompanying Egyptian invitees.[126] An example comes from Marthe Moumié, who recalls that her husband began to receive messages of support from China during their stay in Cairo, and describes how contacts with China multiplied thereafter, followed in 1958 by a visit on the invitation of the Chinese Afro-Asian Solidarity committee.[127]

For the Egyptian leadership, and those writers and activists affiliated with it, AAPSO was also an important theatre in which to present their priorities and to engage dynamically with much stronger powers. At both the 1957 Conference and 1959 Youth Conference, Cairo played host and facilitator to both the Soviets and Chinese, navigating their complex relations, as well as their reactions to Egypt's own treatment of its communist movement. Contemporary accounts make much of the Soviet presence in particular,[128] and left-leaning intellectuals such as Anis were greatly enthused by this 'new gathering of liberation powers in the world, both socialist and nationalist'.[129] By contrast, the scholarship on AAPSO has often indulged in the language of fronts, presenting its members as puppets of the Soviet World Peace Council or as mouthpieces of Chinese propaganda.[130]

It is more precise to look at the organisation as having provided, through Cairo, a place for both powers to communicate with, and mobilise among, the world's liberation wave. There were three parties in this dynamic, and their relative power balances were not static. In this respect, a further political role for AAPSO from Egypt's perspective was as pressure balancer between the Soviet and Chinese poles of the

126 Sharawy, Interview; Moumié, 103.
127 Moumié, 102–103.
128 'Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference Delegates Start to Arrive', *Al-Ahram*, 23.12.57.
129 Anis, 225–226.
130 See Neuhauser.

communist bloc. Certainly AAPSO reflected the state of Sino-Soviet relations at different points, and the political weight of each power could be asserted through their expenditure on representatives' travel, and sponsorship of AAPSO activities. However from AAPSO's 1958–1959 beginnings onwards, the two powers were balanced by the efforts of Egypt as the host to assert its own neutralist interpretations, not least as Nasser's rapprochement with the left grew cold, and was followed by renewed repression – for reasons relating to intra-Arab relations rather than Cold War dynamics – in 1959.[131] Even in 1957, before the Cairo Conference, Egyptian preparatory committee member Zakariyya Lutfi Guma had completed an Africa tour aimed to assure fellow participants of Egypt's neutral stance.

AAPSO had a complex relationship with the Egyptian state, which at times enhanced, and at others limited the possibilities of translocal solidarity in Cairo. First, it had significant funding, starting with a government pledge of 10,000 Egyptian pounds annually to launch it, and enjoyed the support of major powers in its permanent secretariat. This comprised representatives from Egypt, India, Algeria, Russia, and China. This group had met on 3 January for the first time, and begun by setting 1 March as a day for coordinated action against nuclear weapons tests, and 30 March as a Day of Solidarity with Algeria.[132] However, even as the government openly promoted AAPSO, and had sought collaboration with the left at the Cairo Conference, this was still to be carefully regulated. AAPSO was to operate within the parameters of the existing system of Arab socialism, which stressed a national, non-communist trajectory towards social justice and redistribution.[133] AAPSO's permanent staff were Yusuf Al-Siba'i and two aides, the linguist Mursi Saad Eddin and author Edward Al-Kharat. Historian Anouar Abdel Malek stresses that this was a conservative choice of team, aimed at 'neutralising' any communist influence after the energy displayed by Marxist delegates at the Cairo Conference.[134]

Around the African Association and AAPSO were several other groups, affiliated to differing degrees with the state, and tasked with implementing policies in Africa and Asia. The Supreme Council,

[131] See Abdel Malek, 232–233.

[132] See 'Barnamag Al-Mu'tamar fi-Yum Wahid Maris', [The Conference's Programme on 1 March], *Al-Nashra Al-Ifriqiyya Al-Asyawiyya* [Afro-Asian Bulletin], May 1958, 4; McGregor and Hearman, 168.

[133] See Ahmad Al-Mulla, *Al-Yasar Al-Misri bayn 'Abd Al-Nasir wa-l-Sadat: Majallat Al-Tali'a, 1965–1977* [The Egyptian Left between Abdel Nasser and Sadat: Al-Tali'a, 1965–1977] (Cairo: Dar Al-Kutub, 2014).

[134] Abdel Malek, 232.

formed in January 1956, comprised high-ranking figures such as the Interior and Finance Ministers, and some diplomats, but did not compare in its influence with African Affairs Bureau chief Muhammad Fayiq.[135] In 1958, after the Cairo Conference, there was a recognition at the executive level that a more complex infrastructure was needed to support Egypt's new role.[136] This began with Fayiq expanding the African Affairs Bureau in the presidency and National Defence Council. From there he worked with other actors, among which AAPSO sat alongside the African Association as well as Egypt's Federation of Trade Unions (EFTU) as non-state organisations. Ahmad Fahim, vice president at the EFTU's founding in 1957, and president from 1962, had strong ties with several of his counterparts in Africa, despite the controls on labour activity in Egypt. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expanded its diplomatic representation in the newly independent African states, but according to Sharawy, was focused on Arab affairs. To the African Affairs Bureau, it remained primarily a source of information through its Research Directorate.[137] Another venue for information was the Institute of African Studies, formed at Cairo University in 1958, from narrower origins in Sudanese Studies. This year saw the emergence of a more extensive and permanent institutional set-up for Egypt's Afro-Asian solidarity policy, with elements operating at varying distances from the state.

In later years, both the African Association and AAPSO would try to host liberation movements regardless of their pro-Soviet or Maoist sympathies, and to avoid becoming embroiled in that rivalry. According to Sharawy, there were at times tensions 'between Zamalek and Maniyal' over which liberation movements were worthy of support.[138] After all, Egyptian engagements with both Russia and China extended to other critical areas such as trade and the Arab-Israeli conflict, and it was these that would often dictate Egypt's fluctuating positions in this dynamic.[139] These are the complexities revealed by breaking down Cold War frameworks, and asking how priorities of postcolonial independence and development overlay bipolar or intra-communist politics.

[135] Sharawy, *Sira*, 121–122. Cf. Ismael, 35 and Baulin, 47, who attribute more weight to the Foreign Ministry.
[136] See Sharawy, *Sira*, 136.
[137] Sharawy, *Sira*, 146–148.
[138] Sharawy, Interview.
[139] Murad Ghalib, *Ma' Abd Al-Nasir wa-l-Sadat: Mudhakirat Murad Ghalib* [With Abdel Nasser and Sadat: Murad Ghalib's Memoirs] (Cairo: Al-Ahram, 2001).

Conclusion

> The cordial reception given to us was not to any individual, but to our movement of solidarity, not only in Cairo but outside also, in towns as well as in villages . . . People from long distances, from the north and the south, have come to wish us success. In Egypt, at least, it has become a people's movement. Who can resist the force of its momentum now?[140]

If Bandung was the moment of emergence for Egypt's Afro-Asian solidarity framework, then the Cairo Conference provided the opportunity for its enunciation. The Egyptian activists and intellectuals engaged in this project aimed at nothing less than a remaking of the world order, in an endeavor that sought to connect between local places across the colonised space, overturning imperial hierarchies. They were driven by the example of Suez, and by the presence amongst the Arab delegations of strong leftist voices, together with liberation leaders who enjoyed bases in Cairo and coordinated policy with the Egyptian delegation.[141] The AAPSO then took its place alongside the already vibrant African Association, and there followed several AAPSO subcommittee conferences in Cairo: the Economics, Youth, and Women's committees convened in December 1958, February 1959, and January 1961 respectively.[142] By the late 1950s then, Cairo had been refashioned as an Afro-Asian hub, by facilitating interactions amongst diverse national liberation activists at home, and enhancing their mobility on multiple scales beyond.

In his review of recent historical geography scholarship on solidarity, Diarmaid Kelliher argues for greater attention to the structural contexts which condition solidarity practice over time: 'a generative conception of solidarity should not preclude attempting to understand the basis on which such relationships have been developed, and the wider contexts and structures that can both encourage and restrict the possibilities of solidarity'.[143] He presents decolonisation as a broad historical framework which might be fruitfully investigated along these lines. This article offers a contribution in this direction, having presented a case study of solidarity practised in the historical context of

[140] Rameshwari Nehru, First Conference, 74.
[141] Abdel Malek, 231.
[142] Prashad, 57.
[143] Kelliher, 8.

decolonisation, and negotiated with a centralised state engaged in an anticolonial nation making project.

First, this article has explored the different kinds of Afro-Asian identity being negotiated in Cairo in the 1950s, and the changing contours of the Egyptian activists and intellectuals' specific imaginaries. In pursuing a situated meaning of Afro-Asianism, the conditions of possibility of solidarity pertinent to this case become clear, which in turn sheds light on the processes that enable a particular Egyptian Afro-Asianism to emerge. In this case, the mere notion of a common enemy and a common experience of colonisation are departure points – solidarity starts with entanglement[144] – but cannot indicate the contours that solidarity will follow: 'Shared experiences matter in the construction of solidarity, then, yet such relationships must be actively produced, and can be developed in a multiplicity of ways'.[145]

Analysing the role of space in the building up of Cairo's infrastructure of solidarity is key here, since Egypt's geography was partly a source of vulnerability, but also one of great potential. Egypt was an influential and independent Arab state, strategically located in Africa and with powerful cultural influence in Asia through its ties to the Levant and Gulf. Egypt's counterparts in India or Ghana could not mobilise the same range of identities and material resources, nor appeal to the same range of communities. A spatial analysis shows the ways in which Egyptians fostered translocal connections through the African Association, the Cairo Conference, and later AAPSO, giving form and substance to the notion of a shared Afro-Asian experience and hence to a shared project. An important element that is often overlooked today is the promotion by Egyptian activists and leaders alike of the causes of Algeria and Palestine, making a lasting impact on anti-imperialist agendas through an Arab Afro-Asian imaginary. As Kelliher writes, 'nuanced historical geographies, attentive to the context of political activism and the diverse forms solidarities can take, help open up what can often be quite flattening abstract theorising around solidarity'.[146]

This article has further analysed the interactions between the state and popular networks of solidarity during decolonisation. In theorising race and the origins of solidarity, Juliet Hooker underscores the importance of structural conditions to mutual obligation: 'solidarity

[144] Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
[145] Kelliher, 5.
[146] Kelliher, 5.

can be derived from the spaces individuals inhabit together and the kinds of structural relations in which such shared membership enmeshes them'.[147] Broadly speaking, the spaces that Afro-Asian activists inhabited together were translocal, and the structures in which they were enmeshed were colonially constituted, which significantly complicated the task of communication and forging common meeting spaces. Yet the provision of substantial state resources, together with the labour of translocal organising undertaken by activists and intellectuals, helped build up an infrastructure of solidarity in Cairo that tempered this challenge significantly. 1950s Cairo proved to be a productive place for solidarity practice, in which the Afro-Asian project's features could take shape. The line separating the state apparatus from the intellectuals under study here was blurred: there was a broad consensus around the state's ideological framework of anti-imperialism, national development, and Afro-Asian solidarity. Accordingly, the great writers and artists of the day often supported state projects – through the Association's magazine for example, or the Cairo Conference committees – even as they kept their distance institutionally.

At the same time, the Egyptian case illustrates the limits placed upon popular solidarity by a centralised state in the context of decolonisation. In 1950s Egypt, channels for political expression and influence in the public sphere were closely monitored by the state. The input of intellectuals to state projects was subject to the intersecting tensions of domestic power struggles, and to embroilment in the interstate rivalries of high politics. The Egyptian left was vulnerable to domestic repression, for example, which was itself contingent on regional balances of power and ideological competition with Arab communism. During AAPSO's early years, solidarity activists confronted the influence of Sino-Soviet tensions, and instances of Egypt's Arab and African loyalties competing, as the presence of Israel drove a wedge between many of its new connections. There was also a contradiction between the aim to disseminate a new mass political culture, and the obligation to do this by central means. State sponsorship could spell overmanagement, and the imposition of a conservative political line, which reined in such expansive, indeed revolutionary, visions as those of the Cairo Conference's leftist delegates. A case in point is the state's tradition of converting the liberation movement offices in Zamalek into embassies as

[147] Juliet Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.

soon as independence was achieved, underlining its principles of national sovereignty and mutual non-interference.[148]

If the state attempted to direct popular activists, and assign them particular positions, those activists also utilised those positions in political contestation to make their own demands, for example placing pressure on the state to deliver on its pledges, and introducing new areas to state agendas on Afro-Asian cultural exchange. A detailed grasp of the organisational landscape under Nasser shows that intellectuals and activists of the left – in their withdrawal of support just as in their collaborations – were critical to the production of the Egyptian political order. The dynamics at play here are further illuminated by a consideration of subsequent eras, and by paying attention to 'both the opening up and the closing down of such spaces of solidarity'.[149] In the 1970s, the reversal by Anwar Sadat of much of Nasser's foreign policy led to the defunding of Cairo's infrastructures of solidarity, and the shrivelling of opportunities for Afro-Asian connections. The African Association was neglected, for example, and no longer used politically. It also led to upheaval on a personal level for those who had sustained them: Fayiq, for example, was jailed in 1971, and Sharawy was moved out of his position in 1973.[150] While the state's about-turn may seem to be the key here, it becomes clear that it was not simply the state's resources that had powered the Afro-Asian hub. Sadat's repression could not entirely overwhelm the popular networks that had been built in Cairo: from 1973 to 1980, Sharawy was able to transform the Association into a cultural and intellectual centre renamed the African Society, engaged particularly with the African Association of Political Science in Dar Es-Salam. Sharawy and his colleagues took up oppositional activism, and maintained personal and political links across Africa that fostered the mobility of ideas and initiatives beyond and in contestation of the newly hostile state.[151]

These insights underline the need to couch any study of Cold War dynamics within a larger decolonial frame, and to situate Cold War studies within the field of imperial history, given the salience of colonial legacies and neo-colonial power relations in determining the positions of members of the Afro-Asian bloc. The Egyptian case further highlights the importance of collaborative work across regional and

[148] Sharawy, Interview.
[149] Kelliher, 4.
[150] See Sharawy, *Sira*, 247–249.
[151] Sharawy, *Sira*, 249–406.

linguistic specialisms, through 'multiple archives, languages, and perspectives'.[152] This helps bring area studies conventions into question, and allows a more precise – if painstaking – construction of a larger scale view. Thus the Egyptian story offers global history and non-Middle East area studies scholarship a local context to the Cairo Conference and AAPSO, and some texture to an otherwise monochromatic image of its leadership. Conversely the non-Middle East scholarship offers the study of Egypt an awareness of comparable and connected cases in the Afro-Asian space, and of local contexts that shaped the decisions of Egypt's interlocutors. This reveals the multiple ways in which Egypt thereby contributed to trajectories of decolonisation beyond its borders, and to what is now recognised as the multipolarity of the Cold War.[153]

Finally, directing attention to the process of construction and projection of Egyptian Afro-Asianism, and to its contingency and fragility, counterbalances much of the conventional framing of Egypt within a dichotomy of success and failure. This binary has too often engulfed the Afro-Asian project also, deeming it to have been more 'spirit' than substance. Instead, examining the opportunities that solidarity gave to smaller powers, and smaller movements, helps compel a historical engagement with a world of very different imagined possibilities, and as sound a grasp of those that were realised as those that faded. Ultimately, collective efforts to forge a new Afro-Asian centre of gravity in an unequal world system took place at every level, and deserve to form a greater part of the scholarly stories of decolonisation.

[152] Afro-Asian Networks Collective, 'Manifesto: Networks of Decolonization in Asia and Africa', *Radical History Review* 131 (2018): 179.

[153] Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).