Acknowledgements

In 1981, during the summer, I wrote a short essay as a school project on the history of oil. My father introduced me to Anthony Sampson’s *The Seven Sisters*, and to the complex history of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), including the role of the Venezuelan and Saudi Arabian oil ministers who feature in this book. When my father died in 1999, I had already begun to think of this book, and we had briefly discussed its contours. As with all my other books, this one too is written in conversation with his spirit.

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Ten years ago, Naeem Inayatullah gave me a copy of *Global Rift* by L.S. Stavrianos. The book allowed me to visualize the history of the Third World, although Stavrianos had a much longer story to tell (from the start of colonialism to the 1980s). My ambit is much briefer, but it could not have been without Naeem’s gift.

Helpful librarians at Trinity College, the University of Massachusetts, the Hoover Institute, Singapore’s National Archives, and the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam) as well as the necessary labour of Professor Vatroslav Vekaric, editor of the *Review of International Affairs*, enabled me to assemble the materials necessary for this book. Friends here and there, including my sister Leela, provided me with the essential linguistic assistance (particularly to make my elementary European language skills come to life). Each snapshot, each section, is rooted in a city or a town. The book opens in Paris and ends in Mecca. I take advantage of this structure to tell the history of each city, of its country and its various movements. This kind of book relies greatly on secondary sources, and therefore on the hard and generous labours of generations of scholars. The length of the endnotes is an indication of how much I have borrowed from and owe them. For the lay reader, there might be too much detail; for the specialist, there will be too little. This is the risk of such a book.

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Introduction

The Third World today faces Europe like a colossal mass whose project should be to try to resolve the problems to which Europe has not been able to find the answers.

—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961

The Third World was not a place. It was a project. During the seemingly interminable battles against colonialism, the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America dreamed of a new world. They longed for dignity above all else, but also the basic necessities of life (land, peace, and freedom). They assembled their grievances and aspirations into various kinds of organizations, where their leadership then formulated a platform of demands. These leaders, whether India’s Jawaharlal Nehru, Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, or Cuba’s Fidel Castro, met at a series of gatherings during the middle decades of the twentieth century. In Bandung (1955), Havana (1966), and elsewhere, these leaders crafted an ideology and a set of institutions to bear the hopes of their populations. The “Third World” comprised these hopes and the institutions produced to carry them forward.

From the rubble of World War II rose a bipolar Cold War that threatened the existence of humanity. Hair-triggers on nuclear weapons alongside heated debates about poverty, inequality, and freedom threatened even those who did not live under the U.S. or Soviet umbrellas. Both sides, as Nehru noted, pelted each other with arguments about peace. Almost unmolested by the devastation of the war, the United States used its advantages to rebuild the two sides of Eurasia and cage in a battered Soviet Union. Phrases like “massive retaliation” and “brinkmanship” provided no comfort to the two-thirds of the world’s people who had only recently won or were on the threshold of winning their independence from colonial rulers.

Thrown between these two major formations, the darker nations amassed as the Third World. Determined people struck out against colonialism to win their freedom. They demanded political equality on the world level. The main institution for this expression was the United Nations. From its inception in 1948, the United Nations played an enormous role for the bulk of the planet. Even if they did not earn permanent seats on
Paris
A CONCEPT CONJURED

Among the darker nations, Paris is famous for two betrayals. The first came in 1801, when Napoléon Bonaparte sent General Victor Leclerc to crush the Haitian Revolution, itself inspired by the French Revolution. The French regime could not allow its lucrative Santo Domingo to go free, and would not allow the Haitian people to live within the realm of the Enlightenment’s “Rights of Man.” The Haitians nonetheless triumphed, and Haiti became the first modern colony to win its independence.1

The second betrayal came shortly after 1945, when a battered France, newly liberated by the Allies, sent its forces to suppress the Vietnamese, West Indians, and Africans who had once been its colonial subjects. Many of these regions had sent troops to fight for the liberation of France and indeed Europe, but they returned home emptyhanded.2 As a sleight of hand, the French government tried to maintain sovereignty over its colonies by repackaging them as “overseas territories.” A people hungry for liberation did not want such measly hors d’oeuvres.

In 1955, Aimé Césaire, the Martinique-born philosopher and then-Communist activist, published his Discourse on Colonialism. Alioune Diop’s celebrated publishing house, Presence Africaine, released the short manifesto as one more of its bold books intended both to create a dossier of the cultural wealth of Africa and its diaspora and to put European colonialism on notice for its brutality.3

In the opening pages of Discourse, Césaire writes, “Europe is indefensible.” “From the depths of slavery,” millions of people “set themselves up as judges.” The colonizer continues to brutalize the people in Vietnam, Madagascar, West Africa, the West Indies, and elsewhere, but the colonized now have the advantage. “They know their temporary ‘masters’ are lying. Therefore that their masters are weak.”4

In 1945–46, thousands of French troops returned to the Red River delta in Indochina, and Ho Chi Minh and his comrades retreated to the highlands of the Viet Bac to regroup for an extended war of liberation. This war lasted for almost a decade. But the French had an ally in another ambivalent revolutionary. By 1952, the U.S. government had already begun to pay for almost two-thirds of the battered French military treasury’s expenses. The
Brussels is an unlikely place for the formation of the Third World. In February 1927, representatives of anti-imperialist organizations from across the planet gathered in the city for the first conference of the League Against Imperialism. They came from warm climates to this cold city to discuss their mutual antipathy to colonialism and imperialism, and find a way out of their bondage. The young and the old, the African, the American, and the Asian, these representatives brought their decades of experience to one of Europe’s most celebrated capitals to find an agenda in common. Amid snow and far from home, the project of the Third World began to take shape.

A visitor to the city at that time would normally take in the remarkable museums and the Palais Royal, a set of buildings gathered around the gorgeous Parc de Bruxelles that housed the royal families of Belgium. Leopold II, the second king of modern Belgium, had transformed the medieval city during his long reign (1865–1909) into a modern wonder—with wide roads, proper sewers, and a magnificent urban display that had been crafted for the Universal Exhibition of 1897. While the city celebrated the genuine architectural and artistic treasures of northwestern Europe, it did little to reveal the basis of its own immense wealth. In 1927, a visitor to Brussels would saunter through the Petit Sablon, a charming garden with forty-eight marble statues that represent the artisans of the city. For centuries the city had been known for its textiles, lace, and glassware, and it is this craft production that the city celebrated. But by 1927, the main source of wealth for Belgium and the city was not from the artisans but from Africa. It was Africa, particularly the Congo, that made Leopold II one of the richest people on the planet, and it enabled the Belgian economy to become the sixth largest in the world (after Great Britain, the United States, Germany, France, and Holland).

In 1878, Leopold II initiated the foundation of the Comité des Études du Haut Congo, a private firm financed by himself that went into central Africa in search of resources and profits. The U.S. explorer Henry Stanley took up an appointment from Leopold II, for whom Stanley helped subjugate the various chiefs of the Bantu. Leopold II, through the typical
Bandung
THE 1955 AFRO-ASIAN CONFERENCE

In 1955, the island of Java bore the marks not only of its three hundred year colonial heritage but also its recent and victorious anti-colonial struggle. The diverse island that is the heart of the Indonesia archipelago is home to a large number of coffee, tea, and quinine plantations—the main producers of wealth for the Dutch coffers. At one end, toward the west, sits the town of Bandung, the City of Flowers. Its tropical deco administrative buildings contrasted strongly with the shacks that housed its workforce, forming a cityscape of uneven hopes and aspirations. In the 1940s, the workers and peasants of the city and its hinterland rose in struggle alongside the pemuda, the youth activists. The cry of Siaaaap (Attention!) rang out in the streets of the city in opposition not only to the Japanese occupiers but also the British who had replaced them, and the Dutch who waited in the wings to reclaim the island. In March 1946, when it appeared as if the British would not allow the Indonesians their independence, half a million residents of Bandung abandoned the city en masse, as they set fire to warehouses, homes, and government offices.¹ This event produced an epic song:

Hello-Hello Bandung
The capital of Parahyangan [Province]
Hello-Hello Bandung
The city of remembrance.
For a long time,
I have not met you.
Now, you are a Sea of Fire.
Let’s take over again, Bung [comrade].²

By 1955 the city had been repopulated, now largely by poor migrants who had been displaced by a rebellion led by the Darul Islam, an anti-colonial force that had pledged to create an Islamic republic in Indonesia (it died out by the mid-1960s for lack of success).³ And even repopulated, south Bandung remained scarred by the fire. The Indonesian government chose this city as the site for a meeting of twenty-nine representatives of
Unlike Bandung, Cairo in the 1950s had the feeling of a defiant city on a war footing, ready to take on the First World with rhetoric or guns, if necessary. In 1952, a group of young officers in the Egyptian army seized power. Organized by Lieutenant Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Free Officers forced out a monarchy long tainted by corruption and subservience to European interests. The Free Officers represented all the major strains of Egyptian political life. There were old-school nationalists of the Wafd Party, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, Communists, and also aristocrats who had lost faith in King Farouk. The diversity was a testament to the organizational capacity of Nasser, who understood the necessity for broad unity in the fight against the monarchy. Most of the officers who joined and supported the coup came because it represented the aspirations of the “new middle class” of bureaucratic and technical workers. The ideology of Pan-Arabism and the secular Turkish lineage of Kemal Ataturk appealed to their ideas about Egyptian modernity. Initially, the officers had hoped to assassinate a slew of monarchists and paralyze the government. As Nasser drove away from a failed bid to kill General Hussein Sirri Amer, he heard “the sounds of screaming and wailing. I heard a woman crying, a child terrified, and a continuous, frightened call for help.” Rather than kill Amer, the officers had hit some innocents. “We dream of the glory of our nation,” Nasser later wrote, “but which is the better way to bring it about—to eliminate those who should be eliminated, or to bring forward those who should be brought forward?” The holstered gun alongside the mass rallies would become the preferred instrument of revolution.

Nasser took charge of the revolution and made from the many lineages that produced it the ideology of Arab Socialism. The United States and Europe did not reciprocate Egypt’s request for assistance, so Nasser’s government turned to the USSR and its allies. Nasser goaded the French further with his support for the Algerian FLN; indeed, Egypt became one of the FLN’s principle supporters in its fight against French colonialism. The United States revoked its agreement to finance the Aswan Dam, and Nasser retaliated by seizing the Suez Canal, then owned by a French company. In late 1956, an Anglo-French-Israeli expeditionary force landed in Suez to counter this, and the Egyptians fought back valiantly, only to be saved in
In 1949, Raúl Prebisch wrote and circulated a paper titled “The Economic Development of Latin America and Its Principal Problems.” Prebisch, formerly undersecretary of finance in Argentina and then the first director general of Argentina’s Central Bank, had been appointed to head the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) in 1948. ECLA circulated the paper to continue a conversation among economists in the darker nations on the problem of “development.” The paper travelled from Buenos Aires into many languages, and mimeographed copies of it found their way into the planning commissions of many of the new nations. The basic problem raised by the paper is elementary: how should the overwhelmingly impoverished Third World create economic policies geared toward the development of the totality of its population? After centuries of imperialism, the new nations had been left with economies that relied on the sale of raw material and the import of finished goods. This fundamental imbalance meant that countries like Argentina had to export vast amounts of raw materials at relatively low prices, whereas their import bills would be inflated with the high prices commanded by industrially manufactured goods. What would be the instrument to break out of this vise? That was the “principle problem” of Prebisch’s paper.

ECLA and Prebisch had an answer, born out of the discrete experience of Latin America, notably its powerhouse of the time, Argentina. Until the early decades of the twentieth century, the dominant classes in Argentina held no brief for nation building. The oligarchs, the *haute portenos*, ran the country with an iron fist and held their own wealth in European banks (which meant that they preferred fiscal policies that favoured Europe’s currencies against Argentina’s economic strength). This detachment of the elite fueled the growth of a socialist movement, led by Juan B. Justo and the trade unions, and it angered patriotic sections of the elite (such as Carlos Pellegrini, who carped, “We must strive resolutely for our financial independence”). Argentina’s industrialization grew in the breach, when European and U.S. capital neglected the region for the period between the Depression of the 1930s and the wars of the 1940s. As the Argentine minister of agriculture said in 1933, “The isolation in which we have been placed by a
Brijuni was the Third World’s Yalta.

At the Yalta Conference, in February 1945, the original big three (Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill) colluded in the partition of Europe in anticipation of the fall of the Nazi war machine. Each of the major powers, the Allies agreed, would consolidate their “spheres of influence,” whether over Poland (the USSR) or Greece (United States and the United Kingdom). The Yalta plot spilled over to the rest of the world, as it presaged an attitude among the big three that each nation-state on the planet had to line up behind one or the other of the blocs. Neutrality or non-alignment was unspeakable.

On Brijuni, a beautiful island in the north Adriatic Sea, the other big three (Nasser, Nehru, and Tito) gathered in mid-July 1956 to discuss the fallout from the spheres of influence concept and their own vision for a non-aligned force in opposition to the Yalta logic. At one time the glitterati of the Austro-Hungarian Empire retreated to Brijuni, but now it functioned as the conference site for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Tito played host to his two friends, Nasser and Nehru. The trio spent three days in discussion, and also rested and got to know one another. They reviewed international developments, gauged the effects of the 1955 Bandung Conference, and began to formulate the agenda for the founding conference of what would become the NAM to be held in Belgrade in 1961. During this brief summit, the term “peaceful co-existence” was bandied about, as it had been for the past few years at summits across the Third World. Understood as a term for those countries that were unwilling to join one or the other of the superpowers in their blocs, peaceful co-existence had a broad appeal among the new rulers of the new nations. It had a negative meaning—as it referred to those states that did not want to ally with the USSR or the United States. It also had a positive meaning—as it indicated a principle for interstate relations that refused brute force in favour of mutual development. The rhetoric exceeded the policies. NAM produced all kinds of concepts (peaceful co-existence and active co-existence being examples). It wanted to base international relations on morals rather than in terms of power politics or national interest. This was the movement’s challenge, and undoing.