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The “Winds of Change” Blew in Many Directions: Decolonization, Dissent, and Opposition

Decolonization reflected the triumph of certain nationalist visions and political frameworks over others, frequently led by the individuals and groups with whom former colonial powers were most willing to negotiate. In turn, these groups have often dominated narratives in and of colonies-turned-states, positioned as they were to actively shape emerging national histories of local independence struggles. In consequence, far less attention has been paid to the afterlives of those individuals, communities, and groups that promoted other visions and frameworks and were therefore excluded from new state bureaucracies and positions of influence. Yet many of them continued their activities in a variety of forms – as political parties, civil society organizations, guerilla movements, and so forth.

This roundtable’s contributors each bring different perspectives to bear on the relationship between decolonization and opposition. Each contributor’s work has been rooted in area studies – South Asia, Southeast Asia, North Africa, East Africa, the Middle East – while also engaging in broader debates about the nature of post-colonial (nation-)state building. Drawing on their research and areas of expertise, they were asked to reflect on prominent scholarly narratives of decolonization and the local post-independence trajectories they have encountered in their research, as well as their exclusions. In turn, this led into a broader debate about the nature and meaning of dissent and opposition. Together, their responses reveal the utility of “decolonization” as a historical framework, moving beyond area studies, that helps draw out similarities and differences across varied regional and temporal landscapes.

Cemil Aydin: Decolonization as the emancipation of colonized African and Asian societies from racialized European imperial rule was the most important political transformation of the twentieth century.[1] It ended the Eurocentric imperial order and created the current map of nation-states. This emancipation process was accompanied by the emergence of a global public sphere with shared values and notions of rights, modernity, humanity, and progress of history, best exemplified by the references to Enlightenment ideas by non-European nationalists. Thus, the process of decolonization from the 1870s to the 1970s was clearly the fulfilment of the dreams of freedom for millions of people in the world, accompanied by diverse Afro-Asian visions to remake the world according to their own version of humanism.

There is now a rich scholarly literature addressing why, as David Scott and Stuart Hall discussed, "anticolonial utopias have gradually withered into postcolonial nightmares" in many places.[2] But the violence of decolonization wars and partitions, and the governance problems of post-colonial states in a turbulent international context, created "nightmares" for many in Asia and Africa, even when the process is celebrated as the dreams coming true. Part of the problem with this critical evaluation of decolonization as something that "went wrong" after gaining sovereignty is the utopian nature of Afro-Asian humanism, which aimed to redeem a world from the dark oppression of racial colonialism. David Scott calls this a narrative of "revolutionary romance," which appears in the history textbooks of many post-colonial nation-states as a story of salvation of the righteous oppressed nation by national heroes.[3] As the post-colonial states faced a new set of problems they had to solve, including violent responses to ethnic minorities asking for separation from some of the newly independent states, the emancipatory, celebratory emplotment of decolonization turned, for many, into a tragic narrative of shattered hopes. I see this special

issue, and the conference it was based on, as scholarly perspectives on the tragedy of the decolonization process, and various discontents and lost futures the process witnessed.

Lydia Walker: Most formal narratives focus on post-colonial state governments, their opportunities and challenges, and their role in revising and attempting to revise institutions of international order. Examples of this "statist" or even incipiently statist literature include Matthew Connelly and Jeffrey Byrne on Algeria or Manu Goswami and Benjamin Siegel on India, among many others.[4] These works focus on dominant nationalist movements that became national governments, through armed struggle or civil disobedience, and their post-independence international relations or domestic nation-building policies, or both. What can get left out of these narratives are the many actors and movements who remained outside of government, whether by choice or force. My book, *States-in-Waiting*, is explicitly subtitled "a counternarrative of global decolonization" because it focuses on the question of nationalist claimants who did not attain independent states during postwar decolonization — a period that stretched from the late 1940s to 1950s in much of South and Southeast Asia and from the late 1950s to the 1970s in much of the African continent — and how these claimants posed a challenge to the increasingly state-centric international system being created by that same process of decolonization.[5] This issue focused on decolonization's discontents analyzes some of these many histories embedded in the "emplotment of decolonization," to use Cemil's phrase, outside of modes of nationalist celebration or imperial nostalgia.

Claire Eldridge: As our workshop conversations highlighted, there is equally something interesting about what happens to independence-seeking movements when they get what they

have been fighting for. How they handle the shift from theoretical world-making to actual state-building and governance, and the choices and compromises that entails. What we often see manifesting is a sense of fragility and defensiveness among new states and those leading them. The drive to centralize and the obsession with unity is not necessarily about enacting a conservative political ideology, per se, but "conservatism" in the broader sense of trying to conserve power and protect what has been won, or it certainly is in the Algerian case, which is the one I know best.

The Algerian *Front de libération nationale* (FLN), for example, and the various nationalist incarnations that pre-dated it, was only ever able to operate clandestinely in an environment suffused with secrecy, factionalism, threat, and mistrust. In terms of the wider political environment, the formative experiences of these men, and occasional women, were those of colonialism – so political disenfranchisement, exclusion, and inequality. Given that context, it is not surprising that once in power, the FLN did not establish open, transparent, and democratic systems with the capacity to tolerate multiple opinions and dissent. That would have required a very substantial shift in mindset which could probably only come from a place of confidence and stability, which was not where the FLN and many other nationalist groups were in the immediate post-independence moment. Although there are exceptions to this pattern, the rigidity we often see in post-colonial states, and the inability to flex to accommodate alternative perspectives and ideas, arose because these were perceived as things that would dilute power and/or imperil the new state. Such attitudes make sense, given that particular context. However, at the same time, you have all those groups and individuals who actively participated in the struggles for independence, often at great personal risk and cost. Obviously, they wanted a say, and they

wanted to participate in the new nation, creating two incompatible, or certainly difficult to reconcile, sets of expectations and priorities.

Cemil: I would agree with Claire's point. David Scott's observation of a new "problem space" for the leaders of new sovereign nations in a world after empire carries a critique of the generation of post-colonial nation-states: they had not updated their earlier answers, which had been successful in responding to the problem space of racialized empires. Faced with opposition and dissent after independence, national leaders often linked any form of criticism to neo-colonial imperial meddling, and highlighted their own role as saviors in revolutionary romance to justify the top-down imposition of developmentalist plans and authoritarianism. In that sense, I think we can see a shift to conservative majoritarian rule in many post-colonial nation-states to speed up the goal of development and self-strengthening. Given the immoral great power politics of the Cold War, and the fact that many newly independent African and Asian states were too small and too weak to achieve noble goals of rapid development, the crisis of post-colonial African and Asian states had structural context beyond the qualities of their political leaders.

Scholarship and public historical memory on the problems of decolonization refer to things that went wrong in various aspects of this process. First was its incomplete nature. In fact, all the Afro-Asian conferences or Pan-African and Pan-Arab gatherings during the 1950s and the 1960s consistently emphasized the ongoing anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles in South Africa, Palestine, and other parts of the world. The implications of incompleteness in the process of worldmaking after empire is now widely discussed.[6] Second were the "lost futures" of the alternative political imaginations during the process of decolonization, which occurred as a

process of partitioning the world. Since decolonization occurred over a long period of time with bargains and compromises, contingent border formations, and the world-breaking impact of wars and military conflicts under the constraints of imperial meddling and great power manipulation, emerging nation-states were not what were dreamed of by many actors. Arab populations of the Ottoman Empire became colonized after the First World War by European empires, for example, and their freedom came at the expense of unprecedented division among them.[7] Partitions across Asia and Africa meant that the decolonization process occurred with population transfers and ethnic cleansing. Overall, while Afro-Asian humanist visions of equal rights and freedom were actualized, the political projects of federative unions and solidarity inherited from the era of pan-nationalisms were sacrificed to the reality of national sovereignty in a partitioned world.

Su Lin Lewis: I want to pick up on Claire's point, too, about what happened to independence movements when they got what they were fighting for. I've been thinking about this in relation to the transition that happens when anti-colonial activists, previously on the side of dissent and opposition, cross over to the other side of power. This often meant physically moving into colonial spaces: Nehru and Sukarno moved into residences of the British and Dutch governors-general who had once had them imprisoned (Sukarno renamed his luxurious Dutch mansion the "Merdeka" ("Free") Palace). I wonder about the affective dimensions of that transition, of inhabiting spaces that had previously been used by colonial officials as the control nodes of colonies, of riding around in new cars and airplanes, of suddenly being in control of large government budgets that could allow them to engage in large-scale dream-projects: dams, stadiums, even cities like Chandigarh. In one sense, this was a reclamation of power for the

leaders of new states, but in another, it was an ability to suddenly inhabit a position of immense power and control.

The charismatic leader became a centrifugal force for the nation; there is a long legacy of this in Southeast Asia that predates colonialism. This did not mean that Nehru and Sukarno abandoned their commitment to socialism and anti-colonialism – especially given their centrality to the Bandung project. But it did mean that the stakes for self-preservation became so much higher, as did, perhaps, the need to constrain sources of opposition – even those to whom leaders were once allied.

Lydia: In some ways, what unites many of the dissenters chronicled in this collection's essays and the contributors' wider work is not who these dissenters are, but who they are *not*. They are not representatives of post-colonial (or postimperial/metropolitan) state governments. Sometimes this is because of their personal choices, but many times it is not. Here, the difference between nationalist movement and national government is quite illuminating: nationalist movements were often incentivized to form (or at least to perform) broad coalitions across political, religious, class, and regional groups in order to increase their chances of success. Yet those who eventually became national governments often broke with these broader bases of support. The place of trade unions in independence movements versus post-colonial states is illustrative of this trend.[8]

Cemil: Earlier scholarship on the dialectics of decolonization, such as Fred Cooper's work on labor movements and nationalism in Africa,[9] shows how a metanarrative built by elite nationalist leaders asked all the different segments of society who had their own discontents and goals to

subsume or postpone their demands under the umbrella of the greater liberation struggle against colonial rule. A unifying grand cause of nationalism subsumed all other struggles, whether by the working class and peasants, women's organizations, or ethnic groups, by promising to respond to these justice claims after independence. Naturally, the achievement of sovereignty by a national elite who relied on a broad coalition increased pressure on them to deliver on these promises to their citizens.

In the moment of triumph for national struggles, reminders to new state elites of all the justice claims delayed (if not denied) often elicited a cynical response: that the particularistic interest of the opposition was harmful and divided the national unity necessary to defeat colonialism and achieve self-strengthening and modernization. In that sense, we can see the same items of opposition and dissent against the post-colonial nation-state that existed in the time of colonial rule and new states inheriting the paternalistic and authoritarian state institutions from the colonial regime. It is in that context that Frantz Fanon prioritized the actual justice claims and demands of the working class and peasants as the real force of decolonization, and considered nationalist leaders as a privileged group who continued the exploitative policies of the colonial state, a point well formulated by subaltern studies scholarship as well.[10]

Claire: Coming back to Lydia's earlier point about who gets left out, in the Algerian case, once in power there was a concerted effort by the FLN to create, embed, and then rigorously defend an official historical narrative of decolonization. This narrative centered the FLN as undisputed leaders of the anti-colonial movement, unanimously supported by all Algerians who fought together to achieve independence – hence the prominent slogan "one hero, the people."[11] This

narrative held for a surprisingly long time, only really being publicly challenged in the late 1980s.[12] It equally had significant global purchase – see Algeria's reputation as the "mecca of revolutions" in the 1960s.[13] This narrative omits alternative nationalist actors and movements (for example, Messali Hadj and the *Mouvement nationalist algérien*),[14] downplays certain groups within the FLN and/or arenas within the war (for example, the role of the *Fédération de France du FLN* in metropolitan France),[15] and erases the deep-seated internal factionalism within the FLN, including along ethnic lines.[16]

Although there was little to no public space for dissent in post-independence Algeria, criticism of the ruling regime from different quarters persisted in various forms – often via the diaspora. Two of the most prominent figures in this regard are Mohammed Harbi and Sadak Hadjerès, who left Algeria for France 1973 and 1992, respectively.[17] In the French context, which is where my own work has focused, the dominant narrative was deemed to be silence until the 1990s. Yet while it is true that the state was focused on not discussing decolonization, multiple groups who had been directly involved in the War of Independence and now resided in France (settlers, *harkis* or Algerians who served in the French military during the War of Independence, veterans, anti-colonial activists) were active in constructing their own histories and memories of these years.[18] In contrast to Benjamin Stora's famous description of these memories as "cloistered,"[19] there were in fact lots of connections and interactions between both the narratives and the groups professing them, despite the many divergences in their views about the colonial past and the post-colonial present in Algeria.

Emma Hunter: As was the case for Algeria, writing new national histories was a priority for the new nation of Tanzania. A powerful narrative was established which told a story of the rapid and unstoppable rise of Tanganyika's nationalist party, the Tanganyika African Nation Union (TANU), which came to incorporate all communities and interest groups. The result was a quicker transfer of power than the British had expected. Independence for Tanganyika in 1961 was followed by the awkward incorporation of Zanzibar, creating the new state of Tanzania in 1964, and TANU's transition from anti-colonial movement to a party focused on building a distinctive Tanzanian African socialism.

The scholarship of the last twenty years has begun to tell a different set of stories about decolonization, and to bring in a much wider cast of characters than was the case in earlier histories, crossing the dividing line of political independence. One strand of work has explored the tensions and conflicts within TANU, which were hinted at in earlier work but have been brought out much more explicitly now. Some have focused on national leaders, for example the tense relationship between Julius Nyerere and Oscar Kambona, which ended in Kambona's departure into exile, the focus of current work by the historian James Brennan. Others have explored local perspectives. If the 1950s saw the rise of TANU, in many parts of mainland Tanzania the 1950s was also a time of intense local politics and new associations defined in terms of ethnicity or locality. TANU's relations with these associations could be mutually supportive, but could also be tense, and after independence TANU increasingly saw them more as threats to be contained than allies in a shared cause.[20] Others have focused on Tanzania's intellectuals and the challenge they posed to Nyerere and his allies, for example in studies of the

radical currents of political thinking and practice around the University of Dar es Salaam by Andrew Ivaska and Eric Burton, among others.[21]

National histories also often left out the cross-border regional networks which underpinned decolonizing work. In East Africa, regional institutions played an important part in late colonial governance but also in anti-colonial political activism. My current collaborative research foregrounds a group of intellectuals and culture-brokers who sought to turn regional institutions to anti-colonial and decolonizing ends. The middle of the twentieth century was a time of region-making as well as nation-making, and the push and pull between region and nation continued after political independence, even as the nation increasingly came to dominate by the late 1960s.[22]

Su Lin: In terms of who gets featured or left out of narratives of decolonization, this depends on who is doing the telling. Both public and academic narratives of decolonization in post-colonial Asia (and Africa) have long tended to valorize the role of male political elites and their political parties. The standard narrative is that these elites were leaders of anti-colonial movements who were then able to unify the post-colonial state. While Subaltern Studies challenged the dominance of figures like Nehru and Gandhi in Indian histories of decolonization, readings of the Bandung era have continued to center the role of figures like Nehru as a leader of Third World internationalism, often marginalizing the role of non-state actors. As a collective, the Afro-Asian Networks project has tried to correct this, while being attuned to the ways in which non-state networks interacted with these figures.[23] Sukarno and Nasser, meanwhile, are still seen as figures who valiantly stood up to Western neocolonialism in the context of the Cold War,

even as they arrested or silenced political enemies. On the right, figures like Lee Kuan Yew or Ferdinand Marcos have long dominated the nationalist political narrative in Singapore and the Philippines, while at the same time suppressing dissent, particularly from the Left.

Lydia: There are clear, continuingly imperial remnants within post-colonial states. For example, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act in India, governs certain regions under a form of martial law and has its origins in British colonial rule. Perhaps focus on dissent and opposition post-independence can provide space to consider the continuingly *anti-colonial* remnants, which counter state, rather than imperial, governing authorities after independence. I would define "dissent" in the aftermaths of decolonization as disagreement or argument with the results of that process. Argument can take many forms, violent and non-violent. The moral valence of national independence can make it difficult to articulate critiques that may undermine the political legitimacy of new post-colonial states, or at least are perceived (by their governments, among others) to be doing so.

Claire: I think the point about the "moral valence" of national independence is really important because of the role it plays in shaping the conditions in which dissent is or is not possible. It is a key part of what makes dissent challenging (and potentially isolating) in the post-independence moment. In the workshop, Emma made the point that we need to be attentive to the ways in which the stakes of dissent change over time, especially between colonial and post-colonial contexts, and also vary between the different case studies explored here. In some instances, it gets easier to articulate dissent after independence, in other cases much harder. In an interesting

parallel to the colonial era, it often seems like dissent is more possible with distance; therefore, diasporas remain crucial sites for tracing these phenomena.

As well as being very context-dependent, dissent is frequently diffuse. The moral valence of national independence plus the dominance of nationalist governments, combined with the significance of decolonization as a fundamental change to the world order, often leaves little room for dissent. What does exist tends to be on the margins, or marginalized, and thus fragmented and atomized. It is perhaps worth reflecting on the lack of connection between dissenters, the absence of the kinds of collective forums created by anti-colonial activists. What does that say about the different structural conditions in which these forms of dissent have to operate? One of the commonalities is the absence in the post-independence period of a unifying enemy in the form of colonialism, which had previously done quite a bit of heavy lifting in terms of transcending place and context-specific enemies/opponents to facilitate the coming together of anti-colonial.

Continuing to think about definitions, does dissent require a corollary commitment to an alternative vision, ideology, or structure, or can it simply be "I do not agree with this"? Can it just be a negative response, or does it need a positive element in the form of an alternative proposal? This has echoes of debates around where the line is drawn between general opposition to colonialism and anti-colonial activism.

Emma: This brings us back to the question of what we gain by framing it in these terms, rather than – as an earlier generation might have done – as post-colonial state-building and opposition

forces within the state. A framing of "decolonization" allows us to see the dynamics within individual countries within a broader transnational process, the structural transformation that Cemil refers to as liberation from a particular age of empires and the redrawing of the world map, and to think of this as a process not an event. This is very much in the spirit of recent work – for example, Martin Thomas's new book, *The End of Empires and a World Remade*.[24] As Claire emphasizes, dissent is a constant. The question, then, for historians is to explore what forms dissent took in the era of decolonization, what moral and political visions were articulated, what political languages were employed, and how the horizons of what kind of dissent was possible shifted over time. This then perhaps opens up a path not only to describe dissent but to consider the role it played in decolonization as a process that did not stop at independence.

Cemil: There are many topics of opposition and dissent in the wide spectrum of post-colonial experience in Africa and Asia, but I want to highlight one crucial narrative plot advantage of the opposition to the newly independent modernizing nation-states. Decolonization relied on the future-oriented and utopian vision of Third World humanism and internationalism, and Cold War politicians and scholars often noted how nationalism, rising expectations of the African and Asian populations about a better future, and the "color curtain" were more important than the superpower politics of the iron curtain. Decolonization was, in many ways, a struggle to define the universality of equal rights for all, and history's teleology, and independence struggles were presented as a redemptive narrative, with the goal of restoring the dignity of an unfairly treated nation and returning it (or oppressed portions of humanity) to its rightful place in the world.

Once anti-colonial thought established this theological narrative of salvation, it becomes easier to criticize the nationalist leaders for failing to really redeem the nation or fulfil the promise of restoring the nation's rightful place in the world. Scholars of Arab nationalism and political Islam often note how Egypt's defeat in the 1967 War or the failure of the Pan-Arab nationalist movement to liberate Palestinians weakened the claim of ending the era of humiliation for Arab Muslims.[25] Any opposition group in Egypt or other Arab countries could present its political project as the true redeemer of the humiliated self. I recall the cover design of an Islamic opposition magazine in Istanbul published in 1968: "We Need to Save Our Nations from the Saviors" with a picture of Atatürk, Nasser, and other Arab and Muslim leaders of the post-colonial period.[26] Thus, perception of the incomplete decolonization of Arab Middle East and Muslim societies became one of the main moral arguments of Islamic oppositional political movements. We can see a similar argument by Hindu revivalist movement directed against the Indian National Congress.[27]

Claire: For me, "dissent" offers a more expansive and less binary concept than "opposition." But both terms offer ways to bring the focus back to decolonization as a (unfinished) process. They allow us to show the frictions within the process, to continue to problematize "winds of change"-style histories, or at least to show that the "winds" were blowing in multiple directions. In doing so, it creates space for a broader range of actors, many of whom struggled to be heard at the time. "Dissent" equally allows us to highlight both fluidity and continuities within decolonization. I was struck by Nana Osei-Opare's comment during the workshop when he invoked Nkrumah's statement that the world is divided into oppressors and oppressed, and anyone can be in either category at any moment. This is really true with respect to dissent in a lot of the cases we are

looking at. Dissent is a consistent theme across the colonial and post-colonial eras – many of these "dissenters" were anti-colonial activists, so their dissent or opposition was not necessarily a new stance. But the categories to which they get assigned change as the context evolves around them in this highly unstable period. Finally, because it is a softer term (to me, at least) than "opposition," "dissent" opens up space for thinking about compromises, which were part of post-colonial state-building, at least in some cases.[28] A dissenter is potentially someone with whom you can reach an accommodation, whereas an "opponent" suggests something more implacable.

Emma: I agree with Claire about the fragility of new states and the way they frequently reacted to that by closing down political space. And it's important to remember the strengths of the forces against them and the power that external actors wielded. But I also think it's important to remember the ideological diversity of politics in the age of anti-colonialism, and that conservatism was often a strand within anti-colonial thought. So it doesn't come from nowhere after independence, either in terms of governments or dissenters.

Su Lin: Whether one is or is not a dissenter depends on their proximity to power. To return to the case of Singapore, there was a short period of time where lines between power and dissent were blurred. Lim Chin Siong, the key leader of the Left in Singapore who emerged from the trade unions, founded the People's Action Party with Lee Kuan Yew, a Cambridge-educated lawyer, as a party of opposition. Yet with the ascendancy of Lee amidst decolonization negotiations, and his desire (and that of the British) to contain what they saw as a communist threat and sources of opposition, Lim and the Left were marginalized and constrained through numerous detentions.

They then mobilized a broad coalition of dissenter against the increasingly draconian policies of the state and restrictions on political freedoms.[29]

This picks up on Lydia's point about the moral valence of the state. Socialists who were kingmakers in one regime could be dissenters in another. Sukarno moved much closer to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) during the 1950s, partly due to his distrust of American neocolonialism. While Lekra writers affiliated with the PKI supported Sukarno's nationalist vision and drew on his patronage to cultivate Indonesia's internationalist networks in the 1950s,[30] their experiences of imprisonment and exile during the communist purges of 1965 turned them into powerful dissident voices during Suharto's authoritarian regime, inspiring new generations of activists. The writings of Pramoedya Ananta Toer and other prison memoirs served as what the anthropologist Doreen Lee called an "underground technology of dissent," one which reached an international audience of Western human rights campaigners.[31]

Anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian movements were able to create unity between various strands of the Left (and even the right) that dissipated depending on who was in power. The legitimation of that power depended on controlling these historical narratives and marginalizing the sources of opposition in the interests of national sovereignty, as Cemil has argued. Apart from in Vietnam, where the Communist Party won out, the Left has often been written out of the state-driven narratives of decolonization in Southeast Asia, from the political violence against and vilification of the KPI since 1965 to the marginalization of Philippines' Left under Marcos and in the Philippines' People Power movements of the late 1980s which brought him down. As Lisandro Claudio's recent work shows, those movements are now being memorialized in history

as a triumph of the middle class, subverting and marginalizing the role of the Left despite their prominent role in the anti-dictatorship struggle.[32] And as Fadiah Nadwa Fikri argues in our dialogue in this issue (and in her forthcoming PhD), this was also the case in Malaysia, where multi-racial leftist coalitions have been undermined by discourses of anticommunism and racialization. The legacies of the Cold War have long been present in narratives of Southeast Asian history.

Lydia: These post-colonial "dissenters" came from a wide cross-section of geographies and political orientations. Elsewhere, I've written about Jayaprakash (JP) Narayan, a leader of the Indian independence movement and trade unionist, who left formal Indian party politics in 1954, turning his attention to the post-Gandhian Sarvodaya movement (for domestic civil society and voluntary economic reform) and to a range of international causes, from anti-colonial nationalism on the African continent and in contested territories such as Tibet, to world peace and disarmament.[33] Then, during the Indian Emergency (1975-77) JP rejoined active Indian domestic politics to fight Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's suspension of civil liberties and decision to rule by decree.[34] JP is a unique figure who is difficult to categorize, but his contributions to religious and civil society (domestically and internationally) and labor movements show the wide range of non-state networks to which dissenters could belong.

Cemil: Afro-Asian humanity colonized by Europeans and Americans was very diverse in terms of their historical experience, and it is natural that they would have different political imaginations about the future. While ideas of the Enlightenment, namely liberty, equality, and fraternity, had already been embraced and had become part of future-making imaginations across

Asia and Africa, the particular political projects that these ideals could be attached to could differ. Highly different visions of what India should look like after gaining liberty from British rule illustrate competing agendas to achieve justice, rights, equality and fraternity in the face of caste, ethnic, religious, economic, and linguistic differences.[35]

The spectrum of opposition in post-colonial nation-states exhibit all sorts of available means and methods, and in fact, the Afro-Asian world of independent nation-states had difficulty responding to the demands based on high expectations generated by utopian humanism of the anti-colonial period.

Emma: To me opposition suggests something more formal or organized than dissent.

Su Lin: I see Emma's point. In the political sphere, dissent can range from more formal challenges from opposition parties to mobilizations and protests that signal popular discontent with both colonial and post-colonial regimes. Youths have been central to dissent – universities have always been vibrant hubs of radicalism and new ideas, creating independent thinkers capable of questioning state-driven narratives. The alliance of youths and workers has always been a potent combination, from the joint strikes of students and oil workers in late colonial Burma to the alliance of youth and trade unions which catapulted Lee Kuan Yew and the People's Action Party to power. In contrast, women (and particularly women of the Left) are almost always absent in nationalist and decolonizing narratives, apart from their symbolic role as "mothers of the nation" or as heroines of anti-colonial wars past. As Kumari Jayawardene has

long reminded us, they have always been expected to play a supporting role and subordinate their own causes to the nationalist struggle.[36]

The power of these movements depends on the breadth of their base. “Anti-colonial” or “anti-authoritarian” movements were able to mobilize large sectors of the population to oppose these regimes. These were the most visible and most symbolic forms of opposition but depended on many internal processes and forms of bargaining behind the scenes between competing interests – between both formal political parties (or aspiring political leaders) and non-state actors. I wonder if opposition is dissent at a more organized and larger scale.

Claire: As the preceding conversation and the special issue more generally make clear, dissenters come in multiple guises. As part of exploring this multiplicity, it is important to think about who is assigning labels like “dissenter”.

The *harkis* are instructive to think with in this regard. Many of these Algerian auxiliaries ended up in France after 1962 as they sought to escape waves of brutal retributive violence in Algeria at independence. I am not sure they are “dissenters” in the way this special issue is talking about, even though other people have cast them in this light. The FLN regime, for example, branded them as “traitors” who “betrayed” their countrymen and the Revolution by fighting “for” the French. The post-independence regime has consistently used *harkis* as convenient scapegoats, attaching this label to dissenters in order to deflect their criticisms and delegitimize their concerns.[37] On the opposite side of the Mediterranean in France, the former settlers or *pieds-noirs* used the *harkis’* service in the French army to position them as opponents of independence

and thus proof that the FLN was an unrepresentative "fanatical" minority manipulated by external pan-Arab forces, rather than the embodiment of the wishes of the Algerian people. In other words, they used the *harkis* to shore up their own dissent and articulate their bitterness over decolonization.

Both representations flatten and distort the more complex reality of the "choices" made by *harkis* during the War of Independence and their identification with Algeria and the nationalist movement. But both narratives gained purchase because of the greater degrees of power and capital (social, cultural, and political) enjoyed by the groups creating them, which connects to Su Lin's previous point about the relationship between dissent and proximity to power. The ability of the *harkis* to challenge or speak back was circumscribed by their precarious socio-economic situation: they were confined to isolated rural camps for many years run by the French state, on which they were entirely dependent for their survival. *Harkis* have been described as a group who were "never decolonized", having never had the opportunity to participate collectively in symbolic acts of decolonization such as the annual Independence Day celebrations in the homeland they left behind.[38] They are certainly "losers" within the independence process, and when they finally did find ways to articulate their experiences from the 1990s onwards, they expressed dissatisfaction with the outcomes of independence and with their treatment at the hands of the FLN. I am not sure this amounts to dissent, not least because I think their particular circumstances foreclosed active dissent as a possibility, but as a case study they are useful for reflecting on the possible boundaries of the (still very elastic) category of dissent and who gets to define those limits.

Lydia: The power relationships of dissent and its reordering by decolonization's regime changes, highlighted by Claire and Su Lin, are quite important. "Successful" decolonization—i.e. successful in terms of the creation of post-colonial nation-state—foreclosed certain political possibilities even as it codified others into independent states. It also transformed movements or individuals that resisted empire into those who either joined or resisted their ruling government. These peoples did not necessarily have a choice (or at least an unconstrained choice) on which path they took.

Decolonization spanned decades and continents and the horizon of national possibility shifted substantially across region and time. What was (or seemed) to be politically possible in much of Southern and Southeast Asia in the late 1940s and 1950s was quite different from the early 1960s on the African continent. The arrested decolonization of Portuguese Africa in the 1970s, settler colonial Rhodesia in the 1980s, and apartheid Southern Africa in the 1990s created new groups of "dissenters". Some new states also experienced the ultimate form of dissent—civil war—such as in Angola (1975-2002).

Su Lin: I don't think we can disentangle dissent and opposition from dynamics of power and resistance. Processes of decolonization create new forms of power (legitimized by narratives of decolonization) and new forms of dissent and opposition. Targets of opposition run the gamut from the big – colonialism, authoritarianism, neo-colonialism – to the small – governmental policies, arrests of individuals, tax increases. A small tax increase on oil affecting people's daily commute can be the spark for a massive wave of dissent that has been long in the works.

In the case of decolonization, the creation of "Malaysia" in 1963 was a major cause of Leftist opposition that united coalitions across Malaya, Singapore, as well as Indonesia. These coalitions opposed the detention of Leftist activists by both governments, the undemocratic ways in which the decision was made (without consultation of people in East Malaysia), and the belief that it served elite and neocolonial interests. What was painted as a proclamation of independence for Singapore by Tunku Abdul Rahman and Lee Kuan Yew was seen as a "neo-colonial plot," a divisive, racialized concept, and an excuse to crack down on the Left using antiquated emergency regulations devised to contain the Malayan Emergency.[39]

While dominant histories in Malaysia and Singapore paint this period as one in which a misguided Left was on the wrong side of history "outmaneuvered" by a triumphant Lee Kuan Yew, new counter-histories provide a more complex story of dissent, persecution, and alternative possibilities for the nation.[40] Separatist movements challenge the unity of the post-colonial state; Lydia's work shows how these movements have their own history and claims to nationhood. As we show in our dialogue in this issue, history-making, revisionism, and the creation of historical counter-narratives have been important sources of dissent, particularly in recent years and challenge hegemonic narratives of decolonization.

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[1] The story would be different for those who became independent from the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, where the potential for legal equality as citizens in the colonial period differed. See, for example, Judson, *Habsburg Empire*, and Quataert, *Ottoman Empire*.
[2] “David Scott by Stuart Hall.”
[3] See also Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*; ibid., *Refashioning Futures.*

[4] See Connelly, *Diplomatic Revolution*; Byrne*, Mecca of Revolution*; Goswami, *Producing India*; Siegel, *Hungry Nation*.
[5] Walker, *States-in-Waiting*.
[6] Said, *Question of Palestine*; Chamberlin, *Global Offensive*; Khalili, "Location of Palestine."
[7] Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*.
[8] Lewis and Stolte, "Trade Union Networks."
[9] Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*.
[10] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*; Chakrabarty, "Subaltern Studies."
[11] Rahal, *Algérie 1962;* Branche, "Martyr's Torch;" McDougall, "Savage Wars?" For broader histories of this period see McDougall, *History of Algeria;* Vince, *Algerian War.*
[12] Evans and Phillips, especially pp. 66-87.
[13] Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution*. The atmosphere in this moment is evocatively detailed in Mokhtefi, *Algiers, Third World Capital.*
[14] Aissaoui, "Fratricidal War;" Moussa, *Algérie ;* Moussa, "Occultation étatique."
[15] House and MacMaster, "'La Fédération de France du FLN." The role of women, while not omitted, was strategically evoked and within particular parameters, as discussed in Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters,* and Seferdjeli, 'Rethinking the History of the *Mujahidat*."
[16] Meynier, *Histoire intérieure du F.L.N.;* Guenoun, *La question kabyle;* Harbi, *L'Algérie et son destin*.
[17] Harbi's historical texts include *Aux origines du Front de libération nationale*; *Le F.L.N.*; *L'Algérie et son destin*; with Gilbert Meynier, *Le FLN*. The first volume of his memoirs appeared in 2001 (*Une vie debout*). In 2021, a series of twenty-three online interviews with Harbi were made available ("Memoirés filmés de Mohammed Harbi"). Prior to his death in 2022, Sadek Hadjerès collected his prolific outputs together on his personal website: https://www.socialgerie.net/.
[18] Eldridge, *From Empire to Exile*.
[19] Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli*.
[20] Maddox and Giblin, *In Search of a Nation.*
[21] Ivaska, "Leveraging Alternatives;" Burton, "Hubs of Decolonization."
[22] Milford et.al, "Another World?" See also Donovan, *Money, Value, and the State*; Vaughan et. al. "Thinking East African."
[23] Stolte and Lewis, *Lives of Cold War Afro-Asianism.* See especially the chapters by Reem Abou el-Fadl ("Building Egypt's Afro-Asian Hub: Infrastructures of Solidarity in 1950s Cairo") and Wildan Sena Utama ("A Forgotten Bandung: The Afro-Asian Students' Conference and the Call for Decolonisation").
[24] Thomas, *End of Empires*.
[25] Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought,* 48-115
[26] Turkey's Islamist journal, *Hilal*, had the cover headline called "Kurtarıcılardan Kurtulmak" ("To be Saved from the Saviors") in September 1967, just months after Nasser's defeat in the Arab Israeli War (*Hilal*, no. 74 (September 1967): 2).
[27] See Saleem, "Hinduism, Hindutva and Hindu populism."
[28] The "Generation Independence" project, led by Natalya Vince is an example of an attempt to move beyond binary narratives of post-colonial states as either utopias or failed/ betrayed dreams by focusing on the roles played by students in the construction of the Algerian state in the 1960s. For a selection of the oral history interviews from the project see: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqzMMJ68uComy_XCfwGUmIw (last accessed September 26, 2024).
[29] Harper, "Lim Chin Siong and the 'Singapore Story'."
[30] Utama, "Engineering Solidarity."
[31] Lee, "Dissident Writing." These include the works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Hersri Setiawan. See also Hearman, "Uses of Memoirs and Oral History."
[32] Claudio, "Memories of the Anti-Marcos Movement."
[33] Walker, "Jayaprakash Narayan."
[34] Prakash, *Emergency Chronicles.*
[35] For a discussion of the utilization of Enlightenment and counter-enlightenment ideas in formulating political theory for diverse political projects during the era of decolonization in South Asia, see Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*.
[36] Jayawardene, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*.

[37] As Erez helpfully pointed out, there are parallels here with the ways the term "razakar" has operated in Bangladesh.
[38] Charbit, "Un petit monde colonial en métropole."
[39] Letter from Lee Siew Choh to the Chairman of the United Nations, 6 May 1963, Item S-054-0084-0001-00001 – A/AC.109/PET.85 – Singapore – Barisan Socialis – Comm. 120, 152, 191.
[40] Kai, Tan, and Koh, *The Fajar Generation;* Kai, Quee, and K.S., *Comet in Our Sky*; Barr and Trocki, *Paths Not Taken*; Kai, *Living in a Time of Deception*. For attempts to navigate and reflect through these dominant narratives and counter-histories, see Seng et al., *University Socialist Club,* and Hong and Huang, *Scripting of a National History*.