

Introduction

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At a time when talk of a third world war, quite superficially given the seriousness of the matter, is gaining traction to describe new global geopolitical tensions, it could sound naïve to direct attention toward the Bandung Conference, a 1955 geopolitical event. On that occasion, it was a very important, especially for the so-called Third World Countries – a category coined at that conference. That importance still motivates a number of scholars to reflect upon what happened to the ideals of this momentous conference. In fact, in 2020, the University of Dar es Salaam and the Radboud University Nijmegen had planned a conference commemorating its 65th anniversary. The conference did not take place due to constraints related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The assumption made by the call for contributions was that, after the 1955 Bandung Conference, most “non-aligned” Asian and African countries opted for philosophies of national unity to guarantee peace and stability. In the African case of Tanzania, the Ujamaa philosophy, which was secular although Tanzania had a ‘civic religion’, informed the shaping of the country’s political identity. In the Asian case, Indonesia adopted the philosophy of Pancasila, understood as a pluralistic and religious worldview; it recognizes six “official” religions. The assumption would pose two inevitable questions regarding what philosophy, secular or religious, succeeds or succeeded in promoting peace and stability, on one hand; and on the other, on whether there could be comparable philosophies of national unity from other countries.

Since the rapid changes of the 21st Century might have rendered the 1955 Bandung Conference not too familiar in the complex debates of the day, the present introduction seeks to make a brief presentation of the conference. It also attempts to elaborate on the idea of philosophies of national unity at play at the conference to establish whether they were of a religious or a secular approach to nation building.

The 1955 Bandung Conference was an Asia-Africa forum, organized by Indonesia, Burma, India, the then Ceylon and Pakistan under the coordination of the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time. Representatives of 29 Asian and African countries met in Bandung to discuss matters ranging from decolonization, peace, economic development, to the role the “Third World” was to play in

international policy and action, especially given the context of the Cold War. The forum sought to promote a new style of economic and cultural cooperation between emerging nations in Asia and Africa, with a clear aim of building those nations' autonomy to resist the then raging colonial systems. One can safely acknowledge that the effort was cognizant of colonial powers' unwillingness to involve these countries in discussions and negotiations regarding independence and development, while others in the opposing camps drew up the cold war plans. The conference insistently condemned all forms of colonial systems, whether it was the Western imperialism or the Soviet imperialism. It downplayed the potential expansionism of the model of communism from China. The Chinese representation at the conference embraced the right of nations to seek their own autonomy, particularly in the choice of their own political and economic systems.

The ten points' declaration of the conference included what could cautiously be called the principles of nationhood for the future of newly independent or soon-to-be-independent nations. These principles constituted what is known as the "spirit of Bandung" in reference to their inspiration in the cultural and religious beliefs as well as practices in the Indonesian culture. To this extent, it could be said that there was a secular, human-rights-based approach to the objectives of the conference, aligned to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on one hand. On the other hand, there was an indirectly religious approach, through the inspiration in the culture- and faith-informing principles of life in Asian countries. In this sense the spirit of the conference, combining a secular and a religious view, was a novelty in relation to imperialist colonial powers' approach, which was utterly secular.

Philosophies of national unity: secular and religious

Years after the conference, countries that participated followed different paths to political and economic development. For instance, it is patent to see that the Asian nations have developed greatly both politically and economically, while a great number of African nations still lag behind. Obviously, there are many reasons that could explain why the two continents moved in divergent directions. Scholars of the conference are bound to keep studying those factors as the world evolves. The 2020-projected conference in Dar es Salaam, which was meant to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the conference, sought to pose the question on these divergent directions taken by the countries on both continents, hinging on whether those countries could have forged their destiny based on secular philosophies of nationhood, or upon religious philosophies of nationhood.

Philosophies of national unity, in countries previously colonized, are unavoidable. Their situation is informed by the shared suffering, cultural humiliations and theft imposed by colonial powers, as well as all manners of exploitation resulting thereof. In the wake of the Bandung Conference, both Africa and Asia experienced a surge of nationalisms for the sake of sovereignty. It is not easy to figure out which ones were secularly inspired, and which ones were religiously inspired. However, one can state that the countries that minimized upheavals seem to have been those that managed to include, in their nation-building philosophies, the unity and diversity not only of their people, but also of their beliefs and cultures. It is possible to see this, even though imperfectly, in India, Malaysia and Indonesia, to name a few. Where a combination has featured in their approach to nation building, prodigious development has ensued. In nations, such as many African countries, where political and economic development have espoused strictly secular Western paradigms, no results similar to the ones in Asia can be demonstrated.

In Africa, right after the independence processes, since most dictatorships that took power were still under the control of foreign powers from outside the continent, no proper philosophy, secular or religious seems to have emerged. Pan-Africanism lost steam under the power struggle shaped by Cold War competition. It is possible to claim that only Tanzania's Ujamaa was a secular nationhood philosophy with some form of a civic religion, both converging into making a truly African nation.

The reality of the contrast between what happened in Asia and in Africa will always inspire more studies. It is in that context that the initially devised thematic areas for the 2020 conference sought to encourage the exploration of the matter, with the perspectives from the 21st century so far. The effort not to miss out the occasion sought to transform the call for conference papers into a call for a book project that would keep the thematic areas as proposed for the conference that could not happen. The suggested themes covered the revival philosophies of unity; the fundamental differences between philosophies of unity in Africa and Asia; a question regarding the possibility of philosophies of unity used to promote tolerance in a global, multi-cultural and multi-religious society; philosophies of unity as tools to promote regional integration and continental unity; the challenge of whether philosophies of unity could contribute to solving contemporary challenges such as ethnicity, tribalism, bigotry, social exclusion and religious cleansing; the possibility of African philosophies, such as Ubuntu, to shape, construct or obstruct the creation of unity in nation-building; and finally the last the question of whether unity was a product of an ideology; and how do philosophy and/or religion inform an ideology.

The book project

The response to the book project was almost as great as the one the conference had attracted. The logistics of getting the project underway delayed the project a little, however the great collaboration amongst those who showed interest in it made it possible. They were all aware that it could not be a delayed celebration of the 65th anniversary. On the other hand, given the lack of familiarity of some sectors of knowledge with the Bandung Conference, a book project about it seems not only fitting but also timely. What could not happen due to Covid-19 restrictions could happen by way of publishing the authors still studying this area of the progress in nation building.

Contributors to the book are all cognizant of the challenges posed by today's world to the Bandung Spirit's ideals. The different perspectives discussed demonstrate that, while the principles and Spirit of Bandung are perennial, today's difficulties facing such ideals are both an opportunity and a potential threat. The diversity of topics covered by the authors are also an illustration of the dynamism of Bandung, even when what is emphasized are its shortcomings. The reader will find enriching insights into an examination of Pancasila's principles captured as the inspiration of the Bandung Spirit and Ujamaa, indicating how they remain a valid and legitimate call for living the values of in digital era. A particular focus is placed on how social media can contribute to social unity from an Ubuntu perspective. A new analysis of Bandung's Pancasila and Dasasila describes how the spirit of the conference can find new interpretation from the point of view of the responsibility for a peaceful world. An inquiry into South Africa's philosophy of "Rainbow nationalism" as a philosophy of national unity, from the global south, offers a substantive critique to the Bandung Spirit. A study of the transposition of Indian Philosophical Perspectives that created a model of unity in Mauritius' religiously-inspired ideals informed an effective resistance to colonial influence. A different angle, in a study from modern Indonesia, explores Pancasila's principles as an antidote to religious intolerance and separatism, especially the principle expressed in the commitment to open dialogue, based upon mutual respect.

A review of the revival of Ujamaa in Tanzania, under the late president John Pombe Magufuli, suggests that it was regarded as a secular philosophy espoused to rekindle a united socialist and secular State. Another inquiry, using principles of Ujamaa, attempts to answer the question of whether philosophies of unity can promote tolerance in a polarized global world, taking advantage of new technologies. An examination of Ubuntu as a possible philosophy of nation building acknowledges the aspirations of people at the Bandung Conference. However, it

finds that, like many international conferences such as the Bandung one, viewed from Ubuntu perspective it failed to capture African values, which would explain why it remained fruitless in Africa. Another investigation endeavors to question whether philosophies of national unity can actually build unity, suggesting that intercultural philosophies could be more up to the task. An original view, from outside of Africa and Asia, makes the case for the consideration of people's religious belief when shaping philosophies of national unity, in the failure of which conflicts ensue, as the study from Estonia confirms. The case study chosen demonstrates that assuming folk's beliefs into philosophies of unity works better than pure secularism. The final contribution to the book reveals, with the example of Indonesia's public diplomacy, that democracy, religion and modern progress are compatible, particularly because of the Bandung Spirit, including Pancasila.

An overview of all insightful contributions to this book suggests that the quest for unity is still an imperative for nation building. The nature of the task seems to require conditions under which religious beliefs and secular approaches should find a convergent aim for the benefit of the people. The problem is that neo-liberal global trends of the contemporary world are showing signs of a new model of colonialism holding back, at least, the less developed countries. The forces driving such trends are mainly the urban elites, powerful global corporations and their networks. These forces are driving an aggressive globalization, which is overriding the sovereignty required to build nations. The urban elites and corporations behind global networks are leaving nations without the wealth they need to build growth. Instead, they are building wealth beyond nations, which seems to indicate that a new ideology is forging a supra-nation polity with an amorphous identity. The worrying aspect of it is that it appears as a society with neither shared universal values, nor faith, though it seems to have a materialistic and technological messianism of its own.

Beyond the Spirit of Bandung

Interestingly, even the global society cannot live without a certain faith and values. That is why the materialistic "messiahs" tend to present themselves as virtuous through a new type of faith called philanthropy, also called effective altruism. However, when the beneficiaries of such a philanthropy are regulators, lawmakers and politicians, what happens is not the building of unity. What happens, instead, is the institutionalization of corrupt systems that undermine nations and their

people. Such systems weaponize government structures against the people. Reflecting “beyond the spirit of Bandung” inevitably calls for a reinstatement of a dialogue that goes beyond a purely materialistic view of society. It means that the terms of the question for further research could change. Research must go beyond the dichotomy of whether philosophies of nation building that have succeeded were secular or religious. The question must open up to the possibility of a convergence between religiously inspired principles, ethical understanding of society, and secular approaches to technicalities of societal development.

The merit of the 1955 Bandung Conference seems to lie in the fact that the convergence of the three dimensions was assumed as necessary for the unity and stability of each individual country among those that were striving to be independent and sovereign. One of the strategies used by colonial powers to destabilize deeply the people in the colonies was precisely to dismiss their religious beliefs, their cultures and their worldviews. This is an important dimension of a united and peaceful society. Once interfered with there is no way of cementing any possible sovereignty. The process sucks out the soul of a people, making it vulnerable to all manners of exploitation. Acknowledging this fact, at this stage of the 21st Century, would explain why the study of the Bandung’s principles will remain relevant to both scholarly circles and popular discourses on the nature of the concept of nation. And more so, on the nature of the ideas such as people, citizenship, human development, polity, rule of law and social justice, as well as human rights. All these concepts are meaningful within a given society, a given territory and a given people, not in an amorphous global society. Today, the latter appears to prioritize pervasive neo-liberal policies, controlled by some elites who, in turn, control both markets and governments, whose interests are in such contrast with the interests of people. They are keen to create prosperity. However, such prosperity invariably forsakes the majority who are not equipped to compete with such forces. Competition is good, though when it happens with competitors who can never win it is unjust. This logic of unfair markets appears also in political processes: who wins in politics? Only those who have control over the reins of power, which turns processes such as elections into futile role-play exercises. The citizens’ vote ends up never contributing to the improvement of their lives. Such processes create power that is accountable only to itself, not to the people, or to interests that control it, including global networks. The Bandung Conference sought to resist such power and open new ways of cooperating, which is why its flame should keep burning.