This volume is among the outcomes of a multifaceted collaborative project that grew from the shared interest of the volume editors, Carolien Stolte and Su Lin Lewis, in Afro-Asian networks during the early Cold War. Over the duration of the project, ongoing since 2015, histories of decolonisation, Cold War Third Worldism, and South-South diplomacy have assumed a central role in global history publications and curricula, as confirmed by the release of the second edition of Christopher Lee’s foundational volume, *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, and the widespread acclaim for Adom Getachew’s *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*. In this scholarly landscape, *The Lives of Cold War Afro-Asianism* therefore serves as both an affirmation of the project’s many achievements, some of which are detailed in the introduction, and a reflection of current research priorities in a vibrant and fast moving field.

The format of an edited volume is well suited to the project’s interventions. The book is comprised of individual chapters by thirteen authors, not all of which can be mentioned in this review, as well as an introduction by the editors and an epilogue by Naoko Shimazu. Three poems, originally published in Indonesia in 1962, serve as interludes and evocative windows onto the Afro-Asian visions with which the volume grapples. Around half of the individual chapters originally appeared in a 2019 special issue of the *Journal of World History*, whose conceptual focus was on events, specifically ‘Other Bandungs’ in the era of the eponymous Asian African Conference of 1955. For this volume, abridged versions are printed alongside seven new contributions which focus primarily on life histories, although the two categories are deliberately fluid. The ‘lives’ in the volume’s title refer both to these individual trajectories, and to the diverse ways that Afro-Asianism manifests throughout. The conversation is thus a fresh one, allowing the previously published articles to be reframed within a different constellation. The events, institutions, and lives that readers encounter aid the editors’ ambitions to bring to light a ‘living network’ of Afro-Asianism. This network

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finds its place in emerging social histories of internationalism, notably by extending beyond state-led diplomacy and the podiums of high profile conferences.

Three of the volume’s most important interventions deserve to be mentioned. First, the relationship between the personal and the political in Afro-Asianism manifests powerfully here, lending weight to the growing interest in biography as method in global history. The emphasis placed on women’s history is important in this regard, as the opening vignette of the introduction hints (7–9). Two contributions, by Elizabeth Armstrong and Adeline Broussan, relate to the Women’s International Democratic Federation, which was founded in Paris in 1945 and later relocated to East Germany. One fascinating insight is the way in which Vietnamese women appealed to Algerian women to resist the deployment of their sons in the French army through the motif of motherhood. The personal-political nexus emerges most powerfully in the trajectory of Indonesian activist Francisca Fanggidaej, explored in the chapter by Taomo Zhou. Zhou uses memoir to great effect, to show not only how the promises of Third World liberation guided the lives of those who made Afro-Asianism concrete, but how these lives as method elucidate the passport and mobility regimes that constrained Afro-Asian connectivity, even for elite subjects.

Second, this volume moves the research agenda for the history Afro-Asianism definitively beyond a celebratory account of connections and solidarity projects between African and Asian countries, continuing a trend seen in other recent work in the field. As the editors note, the narrative of seamless solidarity is often a state-centric one, which cannot do justice to the complexities and contradictions through which historical actors worked. Among the most effective contributions in this regard are those that break new empirical ground to complicate assumptions about where the fault lines lay in a decolonising Cold War world. For example, in Wildan Sema Utana’s examination of the Afro-Asian Students’ Conference (Bandung, 1956), the author details the Philippines’ delegation’s walk-out following debate on what constituted ‘student’ matters and who qualified as official representatives. The archival trail for these moments of tension is often difficult to follow, with student politics being one useful entry point, but the volume lays important groundwork. Notably, Reem Abou-El-Fadl’s chapter qualifies the reach of the state in the ‘infrastructures of solidarity’ that defined 1950s Cairo, emphasising instead the social and cultural hub that can be read through memoirs.

Third, the volume confronts the role of developmental thinking in the visions of Afro-Asianists in the early Cold War. Although development is not a theme made prominent in the editors’ introduction, the nuanced approach to the theme throughout the volume offers an important corrective to the dismissal of Afro-Asianism as an abstract ideal confined to political theory or an end in itself. This intervention is made possible by the range of actors incorporated into the chapters, such as the Soviet Central Asian intellectuals working with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Hanna Jansen’s chapter. One contribution to single out is Yasser Nasser’s chapter on Indian economist J. C. Kumarappa,

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which is also a shining example of the use of personal papers to shed new light on Afro-Asianism. For Kumarappa, the notion of Asia, and physical trips to China and Japan, lent a comparative lens to his thinking about improving the lives of ordinary people, through a schema not dictated by the categories of the Cold War or European empire.

The book also opens up several avenues which give impetus to ongoing and future research. The first is the motif of peace, and its relationship to internationalisms that span Cold War camps. Appeals to peace appear numerous times among the actors and institutions explored here, and the editors hint at this common theme (8), but the volume stops short of conceptualising the role of peace (and violence) in Afro-Asianism. Several relevant ongoing research projects have the potential to propose a more systematic reading of ‘peace talk’ in decolonisation and the Cold War. We still understand little about how the significance and connotations of ‘peace’ changed across time, settings, or languages, and what contradictions peace allowed internationalists to work through. This volume will prove a useful reference point for addressing these questions.

More fundamentally, there is still work to be done to advance debate about which chronological and spatial dynamics characterised Cold War Afro-Asianism. While the visualisation produced through the collaborative project is an excellent resource for understanding the timing and geographies of Afro-Asian networks, Lewis and Stolte have—quite rightly—emphasised plurality in this volume, and have guarded against claims to representativeness. Yet Shimazu’s epilogue, and Gerard McCann’s chapter, raise critical questions about the place of African actors, and the idea of the African continent, in Afro-Asianism. For future research, the imperative is not simply to fund and publish more empirical studies of Afrocentric cases of Afro-Asianism, although this is important, but to write the dominance of particular Asian countries into a critical assessment of Afro-Asianism itself. Grappling with these dynamics prompts a broader set of questions; this volume’s reflections on the expansiveness of Afro-Asianism and on where we should apply it, in the introduction and epilogue, invite us to pay more attention to how contemporary proponents employed the term, with what interests, and why some engaging with what appears to historians as Afro-Asianism did not refer to it as such. These avenues are one way to further the discussion about when and where Afro-Asianism, in all its guises, shaped the making of the Cold War world. The diversity of cases presented here thus provides a useful starting point for asking bigger temporal-spatial questions, like when the centre of gravity shifted from one city to another, and whether such turning points mapped onto the collapse of a cultural institution, a personal conflict, or a military coup.

In sum, this volume stands as a testament to the field-defining work carried out by the Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, which has shown that histories of decolonisation and the Cold War can and must employ methods beyond the typical remit of international history, notably collaborative archival work. For students especially, this is a book that exhibits academic history-writing at its most hopeful and exciting, especially in a period of broader discussion about the making and meaning of present-day spatial signifiers like the Global South.


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12 Including the forthcoming work of Rob Skinner, Geert Castryck, and Carolien Stolte herself.
13 The visualisation can be accessed at https://afroasian.medialaygrounds.co.uk/.