

# From Ethiopia to Bandung via Fanon

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The final communique of the Bandung conference presented a new spirit for world affairs. Decrying racism, colonialism, and dependency upon the great powers of the East and West, the participants endorsed equality, self-determination, and co-operation especially between Asian and African peoples – the moral majority of humanity, as host President Sukarno put it in his opening remarks. Speaking at the time as a participant in what he called the “African revolution”, Frantz Fanon (1967c, 156) endorsed this Bandung spirit as an exemplar of the “necessary interdependence” of Third World liberation movements. Ethiopia was by far the most significant African polity in attendance due to its recent history of tenacious independence from colonial rule. And yet Ethiopia held a muted presence at the Conference (Legum 1958, 5). In terms of diplomatic weight, Ethiopia’s diffidence is indicative of the fact that the Black and African contingent played a secondary role to the diplomatic dramas debated by the South/South-East Asian Colombo powers who primarily organized the conference (see Appadorai 1955, 1–3). Rather than the new spirit of anti-colonial self-determination and Third World co-operation celebrated by Fanon, sober appraisals of Bandung have presented a Cold War conference that reproduced colonial fault-lines and divisions (see Burke 2010; Vitalis 2013).

In this article, I argue that the presence of Ethiopia at Bandung can be curated differently to reveal alternative repositories of anti-colonial struggles and diplomacies that evince a spirit of Third World liberation more in keeping with Fanon’s aspirations. The biography of Ethiopia’s own representative at Bandung, Yilma Deressa, orients us towards these legacies. In his youth, Deressa had been as much a revolutionary as Fanon. A graduate of LSE, Deressa, along with other prominent Ethiopian students, joined the Black Lion Organization (*Tikur Anbesa*) during Mussolini’s fascist occupation of sovereign Ethiopia (1935-1941) (Spencer 1984, 12, 120). After the defeat of Haile Selassie I’s army, and with the emperor in temporary exile, Deressa and others decided to undertake urban and rural guerilla warfare (Berhe 2003, 101). Before his capture by Italian forces, Deressa diplomatically represented a short-lived Western Oromo Confederation that modelled itself as a government-in-waiting. The federation sought a protective British mandate through the League of Nations with an eye, even, to future independence from Amharic hegemony (Gebissa 2002, 81–83).

At Bandung, Deressa must have shared pleasantries with Adam Clayton Powell Jr., the first African-American to represent New York City in Congress, and who attended the conference despite pressure from the US administration. Powell Jr’s political history also discloses an earlier Ethiopian connection. African Americans met fascist Italy’s colonial designs upon Ethiopia with outrage and activism. Once Mussolini’s intentions became clear after the WalWal incident in December 1934, a Provisional Committee for the Defense of Ethiopia formed in Harlem, New York City. Composed of a broad front of organizations (many associated with Garveyism) and representing over 15,000 persons, the Committee regularly met in the Abyssinian Baptist Church, then pastored by Powell Jr (Scott 1978,

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Sabrina Axster, Gurminder Bhambra, John Narayan, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful input.

124–26). In 1954, Selassie I visited Powell Jr's church, gifting a seven foot Coptic cross in recognition of the historic support for Ethiopia given by Harlemites (Powell 1971, 54). One year later, and Powell Jr was attending the Bandung Conference.

The Italy/Ethiopia war was the first significant and consequential act of fascist foreign aggression;<sup>2</sup> it was at the same time a project of colonial occupation, and an especially egregious one considering that both polities were, as members of the League of Nations, supposedly protected under the legal principle of non-aggression. From a Third World perspective such as Fanon's, World War Two began with the fascist invasion of an African polity, rather than the German invasion of a European polity in 1939. In any case, in the late 1930s many writers and politicians in Europe and its colonies identified the departure point of the path to World War in Ethiopia, subsequently moving to Spain, and then to Czechoslovakia. Mussolini's invasion was protested by a stunning global constellation of activists, writers, politicians, soldiers, religious bodies and lay-people (see for example Shilliam 2016). Intriguingly, and as the biographies of Deressa and Powell Jr suggest, some of the key figures at Bandung had, in the 1930s, been invested in the Italy/Ethiopia war. Some, such as Indian diplomat Krishna Menon (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1938) and India's first prime-minister Jawarhalal Nehru (see below) had been active defenders of Ethiopia. Others, such as U Nu, first prime-minister of Burma (Butwell 1969, 17), Filipino diplomat Carlos Romulo (1938), and Sukarno (1965, 145–46), had addressed the fascist invasion as part of their response to Japanese aggression.

As Tom Buchanan (2016, 654) puts it, anti-fascism and anti-colonialism could not be easily disentangled after the Italian invasion of 1935: "the former reconfigured, rather than simply displaced, the latter". Similarly, in this article I examine how anti-colonial anti-fascism prefigured and prepared the Bandung spirit not only in biographical terms but also in terms of casting an ethics of liberation on a global scale that interwove the fates of metropolises and colonies as well as diverse colonial subjects. My primary purpose in retrieving the intellectual and political strands of anti-colonial anti-fascism is to find routes through which to reconcile one of the most influential diplomatic episodes of Third World liberation – the Bandung Conference – with one of the most influential thinkers of said liberation – Frantz Fanon. The aim of this reconciliation is to draw in ever more expansive contours a spirit at Bandung that exceeded the conference's diplomatic impasses and postcolonial tragedies. In short, I join with others in intellectually reviving a Third World retrospect relevant for our times (see especially Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective 2018).

The methodological ambition of the article is exploratory and takes the form of a set of travelogues. In both ancient Greek and Islamic thought, to travel is to theorize – that is, to dislocate one's viewpoint and gain perspective from different contexts (see Euben 2004). Ideas travel too, and also gain new life in that movement (see Said 1984). Sam Opondo (2020) has demonstrated how even diplomacy – the quintessential act of international politics – might be apprehended, in cognate fashion, as a practice of pluricentric hermeneutics, that is, a negotiation of multiple meanings, positionalities, and expectations. Colonial rule has historically sought to curtail and outlaw travel of all these kinds between peoples and ideas, except for the journey from the periphery to the center and back again. To open up the prospect of "sideways" travel, then, should in principle be considered a methodology of liberation (see Shilliam 2015). Crucially, this kind of travel is not necessarily – or solely – guided by the straight lines of pre-established historiographies or theoretical frameworks. Accordingly, the sideways travels that I undertake below accord with what Édouard Glissant (1997) glosses as "errantry": a search

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<sup>2</sup> In the summer of 1923, Mussolini commanded the occupation of Corfu, which lasted for less than a month.

for paths in which the whorl and wheel of the journey provides the latent energy by which to charge understandings of the present differently.

I move through three such journeys. In the first, I draw out two key coordinates of Fanon's ethos of liberation: his sympathetic critique of *négritude* and his Third World diplomacy on behalf of the wretched of the earth. I suggest ways in which the Italy/Ethiopia war was implicated in the Black humanism that emerged from his critique and (in a more mediated fashion) the psychiatric practice that prompted his diplomatic mission. I will then use Black humanism as a compass for the next journey that threads the Italy/Ethiopia war into the tenets of *négritude* and back to the Antillean presence in 1930s Paris represented especially by fellow Martinicans Suzanne Césaire and Paulette Nardal. I especially consider the way in which Black humanism, when tasked to pursue anti-colonial anti-fascism in response to the Italy/Ethiopia war, produced alliances between the Black diaspora and North Africans - alliances that prefigured Fanon's own practical and ideological move to Algeria. The final journey orients towards the wretched of the earth as a diplomatic injunction. I examine the impact of 1930s anti-colonial anti-fascism on Jawaharlal Nehru. I specifically follow the ways in which the Italy/Ethiopia war contoured the anti-colonial foreign policy of the Indian National Congress and, ultimately, Nehru's own contribution to Bandung. It is not my intent to construct out of these three inter-linked journeys a clear linear narrative of cause and effect. I conclude, rather, by suggesting how the accretion of the ethics and practices encountered across the three journeys propel us to revive a Bandung spirit for our own constrictive age.

### **Ethiopia in Fanon's Ethos of Liberation**

Bandung, claimed Fanon (1967c, 156), demonstrated the "historic commitment of the oppressed to help one another and to impose a definitive setback upon the forces of exploitation". Fanon connected the Bandung lineage to the Algerian war for independence, which he was personally invested in at the time via his support for the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN). Due to granting the FLN observer status, the Asian-African conference had, in Fanon's (2018a, 563) opinion, internationalized the "Algerian problem": "French colonists were surprised to see so many countries [at Bandung] condemning them". This internationalization affirmed for Fanon the fact that particular national liberation struggles could function as "guide territories" and henceforth amplify the Third World movement in general. By this logic, Fanon affirmed, the 1957 African Democratic Rally (RDA) in Bamako, French Sudan (Mali), and the 1958 All African People's Conference in Accra, Ghana, all followed in Bandung's wake (Fanon 1967b, 163, 2018b, 567; see also Niang 2016).

These scattered comments were made relatively late in Fanon's short life, after he had oriented his critical exegesis of (mostly Antillean) *négritude* towards a more geopolitically and racially capacious solidarity with the wretched of the earth. Fanon's ethos did not manifest ready-made, but was itself a movement. Therefore, to expand in any meaningful way upon Fanon's appreciation of the meaning of Bandung requires some brief unpacking of the way in which his ethos of liberation ultimately directed Black humanism towards a Third World diplomacy.

Fanon's early work was in many ways a sympathetic critique of the *négritude* of Aimé Césaire - his old teacher at the Lycee Victor Schoelcher in Martinique; it was also one sharpened by the island's wartime experience of the Vichy regime. Faced with the arrival of approximately 2000 white soldiers, whose racism was bolstered by Philippe Pétain's accommodation to Nazism, Fanon recognized the necessity of the Antillean to "defend himself" (Fanon 1969b, 31-33; Macey 2001, 86). The problem, he argued, lay in the fact that this defense was existentially impossible on the terms given by the Antillean racial order: the Black was not a man, but a zone of non-being entrapped by whiteness (Fanon 1986, 10,

110). In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon undertook a set of philosophical procedures – in part a performance of the logic of *négritude* – in order to retrieve a Black humanity, only to end each movement with the return to a Black body whose humanity was mutated by whiteness. Arriving at the end of this exercise, Fanon proposed an uncompromising humanism that, having been cultivated through blackness, nonetheless shed the Manichean logic that had produced Black as non-being. “What I have to recapture”, he protested, “is the whole past of the world” (Fanon 1986, 226; see also Bernasconi 2002). In this sense, the humanism that Fanon sought to fashion was not one satisfied by being recognized as sufficiently human by white humans but rather one that sought liberation from a colonially-fashioned human (see Maldonado-Torres 2016, 13-14).

Fanon’s Black humanism was a self-conscious response to the travails of professional Antilleans vis-à-vis their relationship with metropolitan France. Nonetheless, in scoping out this somewhat self-obsessed relationship, Fanon was expressly aware of the cartography of colonial racism outside of the Antilles and beyond alienation of an “almost intellectual character” (Fanon 1986, 106, 112, 223). Of course, this awareness expanded significantly with his personal involvement in the Algerian war of independence. In Fanon’s subsequent musings, the Manichean logic of race suffered by the Antillean now served to explain the general relationship between the colonized native – the sub-human - and the European colonizer – the human (Fanon 1965, 38–39). In the colonial situation, argued Fanon (1965, 43, 93–94, 246), only one side of the equation could use violence in the pursuit of a new humanism: the native. Henceforth, Fanon (1965, 247) conceived of the creating of collective bonds - especially the building of a national culture through liberation struggle – as a politics categorically dissimilar to parochial and petty-bourgeois nationalism. Fanon demonstrated his understanding of the necessary internationalism of anti-colonial-national-consciousness when he identified himself as Algerian:

“The new relations are not the result of one barbarism replacing another barbarism, of one crushing of man replacing another crushing of man. What we Algerians want is to discover the man behind the colonizer; this man who is both the organizer and victim of a system that has choked him and reduced him to silence” (Fanon 1967a, 32).

The legacies of Nazism and colonialism, as they intersected in the Vichy regime, are apparent in the gestation of Fanon’s oeuvre. But in what ways might the preceding Italy/Ethiopia war be implicated in his evolving ethos of liberation? Let us start with Black humanism and especially Richard Wright’s influence on Fanon’s sympathetic critique of *négritude* as evidenced by a respectful letter sent in 1953 to the author of *Native Son* (Cherki 2006, 88). A couple of years earlier, Fanon had mobilized Wright’s infamous character, Bigger Thomas, to conclude perhaps the most quoted chapter of *Black Skins* - “The Lived Experience of Blackness”. In *Native Son*, Bigger represents the hopelessness of the American Black man’s search for recognition of his humanity – a man who cannot express his frustration except through existential violence. In the climax to the pivotal chapter of *Black Skins*, Fanon (1986, 139) narrated the explosions of Bigger as the desperate attempt to break the circle of whiteness that entrapped the Black man (see especially Bernasconi 2002, 79).

Wright’s construction of Bigger’s character owes much to the rise of fascism in the inter-war period and the parsing of this threat through the Black American political landscape via the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. The war made its presence felt in one of Wright’s earliest writings. Reporting on the (Black) Joe Lewis and (white) Max Baer boxing match in Chicago two weeks before Mussolini’s invasion, Wright described the type of police used to suppress Black celebrations of Lewis’s victory thus:

...not the carefully picked white cops who were used to batter the skulls of white workers and intellectuals who came to the South Side to march with the black workers to show their solidarity in the struggle against Mussolini's impending invasion of Ethiopia (Wright 1935, 19).

Half a year later, the Communist Party USA delegated Wright to attend the National Negro Congress held in Chicago. Wright (1936) reported on the proposed Negro Bill of Rights floated at the meeting, which included the principles: "opposition to war and fascism; the independence of Ethiopia; opposition of world colonial nations". One year later, under Communist sponsorship once again, Wright (2006, 392) launched a journal entitled *New Challenge*, which aimed to "present the literature and conditions of life of American Negroes in relationship to the struggle against war and fascism".

Mussolini's attempt to destroy the independence of an African peoples resonated intimately with Jim Crow policies to rob African-Americans of their putative equality. Considering the inter-twined nature of domestic racism and international fascism, it is no surprise that when Wright assembled the protagonists of *Native Son*, he conceived Bigger Thomas as "an American product, a native son of this land, [who] carried within him the potentialities of either Communism or Fascism" (Wright 1970). Wright further explained that the dispossession and disenfranchisement experienced by Bigger produced a pivotal moment in the character's life. "Looking and feeling for a way out", Bigger - the Black man - could turn either to fascism and a "gaudy, hysterical leader who'll promise rashly to fill the void in him", or to trade unionism and "millions of his kindred fellow workers" (Wright 1940; Foley 2010, 52).

Given all this contextual and textual evidence, I would argue that that the violence through which Bigger responded to alienation was a violence that Wright gleaned in the spread of fascism from Europe to Black American lives mediated by the fate of Ethiopia (see in general Thompson 2007, 144–47). Put another way, it was this specific violence – one of *fascist* potential and *colonial* enactment - that Fanon then existentialized as he sought to chart for Black humanism an exit strategy from the zone of non-being.

Fanon's Third World diplomacy owes much to his psychiatric work. And here too there is a connection to the Italy/Ethiopia war, albeit a more approximate one. The League of Nation's ineffective response to Mussolini's colonial war emboldened fascist forces in Europe, leading within months of the defeat of Ethiopia to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. It is important to note, though, that many in the African Diaspora conceived of their support for the republicans as an extension of their support for Ethiopians (Collum, Berch, and Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives 1992; Shilliam 2016). Fanon's connection to the Civil War was made during his psychiatry residency at St Albain via his mentor, François Tosquelles. Famous for developing the method of "institutional therapy", Tosquelles had previously been a founding member of the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) and during the Spanish Civil War was head of military psychiatric services. Sent to the southern front, Tosquelles implemented a therapy - *politique de sectuer* – which sought to treat patients without delay within their immediate environment (Robcis 2016).

During his residency at Bilda-Joinville Hospital in Algeria, Fanon applied Tosquelle's method by way of embedding the patient's case study within their social and political environment. This "situational diagnosis", as Fanon termed it, clinically operationalized his philosophical critique of the zones of being and non-being to account for – and practically confront - the structural effects of a colonial context upon the psyche (see in general Gibson and Beneduce 2017). Due to this clinical method of immediate contextualization, Fanon's Black humanism had to necessarily be transposed onto the polyglot landscapes of racism beyond the Antilles. Consider, in this respect, Fanon's resignation

letter to the resident minister in Algeria in the summer of 1956, in which he transcribed the Antillean logic of alienation onto the Maghreb:

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. What is the status of Algeria? A systematized dehumanization (Fanon 1970, 63).

Moreover, this practical transcription is aesthetically reflected in the very title of Fanon's famous last book, *les damnés de la terre*. Lewis Gordon (2015, 112–13) has reflected upon the way in which Fanon parsed the elements of Eugène Edine Pottier's socialist anthem, *L'Internationale*, through Haitian writer Jacques Roumain's adaption. In *Sales nègres* (dirty negroes), Roumain gathered the International by calling upon dirty Indians, dirty Arabs, dirty Malaysians, dirty Jews etc., all of whom represented the wretched of the earth. By choosing this title, Fanon extended the dehumanization that accompanied dirtying – i.e blackening – to a multitude of colonized peoples.

Emerging from a clinical innovation in the martial struggle against fascism in Spain, Fanon's "situational diagnosis" provided the therapeutic grounds upon which he would prescribe a Third World diplomacy guided by the principle that anti-colonial-national-consciousness had to be comprised of an internationalist ethics. It was not long before Fanon put this claim into effect. Very soon after his resignation from Bilda, he attended the First Congress of Negro Writers in Paris (*Congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs*). The Congress was convened by Alioune Diop and his wife Yandé Christiane. Featured in the roster were the male stalwarts of négritude – Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire – as well as Richard Wright. Occurring in 1956, less than one year after the Asian-African Conference, Diop presented the gathering at the Sorbonne as a "second Bandung"; while Césaire associated the Congress with Bandung by speaking of the latter as a "cultural event of the first magnitude" (Baldwin 1961, 25; Césaire 1956, 196). At this cultural Bandung, Fanon's presentation oriented Black humanism towards Third World diplomacy. Tellingly, his line of argument integrated the two broad historical fronts of anti-fascism and anti-colonialism:

the memory of Nazism, the common wretchedness of different men, the common enslavement of extensive social groups, the apparition of 'European colonies', in other words, the institution of a colonial system in the very heart of Europe, the growing awareness of workers in the colonizing and racist countries, the evolution of techniques, all this has deeply modified the problem and the manner of approaching [racism] (Fanon 1969a, 42).

From here, it was common sense for Fanon to define Algeria as a "guide territory" and Bandung as an amplifier of this guidance.

In this section, I have examined how Fanon wove his ethos of liberation with the intellectual and political legacies of the Italy/Ethiopia war and the broader fascist aggression that this war encouraged on the world stage ultimately resulting in World War Two. Leaving Fanon's biography and oeuvre to the side, the next journey tracks one coordinate of his ethos of liberation – Black humanism. This journey begins by riding the Ethiopianist current within negritude back to the anti-colonial anti-fascist movements of inter-war Paris; it finishes where Black humanists join with North Africans in a diplomatic mission to defend the wretched of the earth.

### **Black Humanism, Négritude and Algeria**

Fanon's old teacher, Aimé Césaire, eventually wrote about Ethiopia. In 1963, commemorating that year's inauguration of the Organisation of African Unity, Césaire published a poem in *Présence Africaine* dedicated to Diop, the journal's editor and co-initiator of the First Congress of Negro Writers – the “second Bandung”. In “Ethiopia” (1983), Césaire spoke of his “Senegal heart” and “island heart” witnessing the Queen of Sheba prophesizing the rebirth of African peoples after the closure of colonial and postcolonial violence. The poem suggests that by the 1960s Césaire négritude seems to have settled in the highlands of East Africa, and in the continent's new diplomatic capital, Addis Ababa, there to look uneasily over the fate of Pan-Africanism post-independence.

If we were to consult only the male authors of négritude, we might imagine that Ethiopia was a late sentimental addition to the Francophone world of Black consciousness. But let us follow, instead, those who have argued that any adequate retrieval of négritude's depth and complexities must attend to the erasure of Black women in its intellectual histories (for example Edwards 2003, 121, 147; Boittin 2010, 159). In fact, the wartime writings of Aimé's wife, Suzanne, pre-empted Fanon's search for a Black humanism that might provide a way out of the Antillean zone of non-being. Unlike her husband, who at the time viewed the Antilles as a world defined by lack and sterility, Suzanne Césaire saw in the islands a fertile terrain that, by cultivating African heritage in Antillean soil, had the potential to gestate a new humanity (see Rabbitt 2013, 39–41). And crucially, Suzanne Césaire came to terms with this potential by drawing upon the trope of Ethiopia.

In this endeavor, Suzanne Césaire was indebted to the famous late 19<sup>th</sup> century Haitian anthropologist, Anténor Firmin, whose ripostes to Europe's Manichean racism utilized the biblical figure of the Ethiopian as an exemplar of both the Black and the human (see especially Keith Louis Walker 2016). Suzanne Césaire was also indebted to a contemporary of Firmin, the German ethnologist Leo Frobenius, from whom she took the idea that the vital force that drove civilization was comprised of bipolar energies: the Hamitic and the Ethiopian. Unlike Firmin's biblical inspiration, Frobenius's preference for the Ethiopian was, in good part, determined by his political commitment to enhance Germany's African colonies and labor forces (Sylvain 1996, 487). He even undertook a (failed) secret mission during World War One to reach Addis Ababa, where he hoped to convince Lij Iyasu - at that point designated but not crowned Emperor - to enter the war on Germany's side (see in general Da Riva and Biocca 2016).

Suzanne Césaire drew upon both of these biblical-mythical and imperial-geopolitical tropes of Ethiopia in order to parody and undermine racist attributions of laziness and indolence to Black Antilleans. Suzanne Césaire argued that the Ethiopian was a vegetative energy, yet unlike the Hamitic, an energy that “lives and lets live”; in its obstinacy for surviving - even if trampled underfoot – the Ethiopian was a force for “independence” (Césaire 2012a, 5, 2012b, 30). Notably, her argument addressed the intellectual and class alienations that Fanon would later grapple with in *Black Skins*. The Martinican, claimed Suzanne Césaire, was the same kind of “plant-human” as the Ethiopian; and Antillean self-determination could only be achieved by embracing the “Ethiopian desire for abandon” rather than mimicking, as upwardly mobile Martinicans were wont to do, the Hamitic energy of domination.

Furthermore, Suzanne Césaire pre-empted Fanon's plea for Black humanism to break out of the Manichean order so that “it [might] be possible ... to discover and to love man, wherever he may be” (Fanon 1986, 231). For her part, Suzanne Césaire argued that cultivating the Ethiopian in the Martinican exposed an “incredible store of varied energies until now locked up within us” and one that might bring

“every living strength ... together up on this earth where race is the result of the most unremitting intermixing” (Césaire 2012b, 33; see in general Hurley 1998). Suzanne Césaire wrote these lines as, after years of apparent defeat, the “Gideon force”, comprised of Selassie I, Ethiopian irregulars, and British Commonwealth soldiers, launched its military campaign to drive out the fascists from Ethiopia. There was, then, a geopolitical reality that underwrote Suzanne Césaire’s presentation of the Ethiopian as a Pan-African force for independence - a force that represented the redemption of the Antillean and all humanity.

Indeed, whilst it is not explicitly documented, it is inconceivable that Suzanne Césaire’s négritude was not directly influenced by the anti-colonial anti-fascist movement that sought to defend Ethiopia’s sovereignty. Before returning to Martinique to write her poetry and prose, Suzanne Césaire spent some time in Paris, where, in 1937, she married Aimé (Rabbitt 2013, 38). Her husband, by that point in time, was himself invested in the struggle against Italian fascism: one white peer in his study group at École Normale Supérieure had conferred upon him the Amharic military title, *ras* (Arnold 1981, 11) - a word since popularized by the Rastafari faith.

But regardless of Aimé Césaire’s influence, Suzanne Césaire would have, during her Parisian sojourn, witnessed – if not partook in - the Antillean movement for the defense of Ethiopia directed by another Martinican woman and in many ways a progenitor of négritude – Paulette Nardal. Over the course of the 20s and 30s, Nardal was largely responsible for forcing the issue of Black consciousness onto the Parisian community of Antillean and Black intellectuals and artists (Sharpley-Whiting 2002, 68, 75). Nardal contributed to formative journals of the négritude tradition - for instance, *Le Cri des Nègres*, *La Dépêche africaine* and *L’Étudiant noir*. Additionally, she curated a “cercle d’amis” at her apartment on Sunday afternoons, wherein Black, white, Arab, Muslim and Christian would perform and discuss art and intellectual issues. Senghor and Aimé Césaire regularly attended. (Umoren 2018, 16).

Although the circle had a political dimension, Nardal was not herself a political creature; yet it seems that the prospective Italian invasion of Ethiopia activated her. In May 1935, she cofounded the Ethiopian Action Committee (*Comité d’action éthiopienne*) alongside fellow Martinican Daniel Cenac-Thaly, Martinican-born René Maran, and French Sudanese activist Tiemoko Garan Kouyaté (Umoren 2018, 41). The latter’s interest in Ethiopia predated Mussolini’s invasion. In 1933, Kouyaté envisaged a Black World Congress (*Congrès mondial nègre*) to be held in Liberia or Ethiopia and to be attended by the leaders of those most celebrated independent African polities including Haiti (Edwards 2003, 277; Goebel 2017, 167). The congress went unrealized. Nonetheless, in February 1935 Kouyaté wrote to Selassie I pledging to provide material support for the impending war with Italy, and claiming, at the end of the year, to have enlisted “one hundred Black voluntary reserve officers” (Genova 2001, 184; Goebel 2017, 168). Meanwhile, Nardal was appointed secretary of the World Committee against War and Fascism (*Comité mondial contre la guerre et le fascisme*) (Boittin 2010, 160). Before long, she had become a key node of cross-imperial coordination of Black peoples opposition to the fascist invasion, and communicated regularly with the International African Friends of Ethiopia in London (Edwards 2003, 298).

In October 1935, as Italy invaded Ethiopia, Nardal published “*Levée des races*” in the Senegalese paper, *Le PÉRISCOPE africain*. In political terms, the word *levée* connotes the raising of an army. Nardal made three points about this prospect. Firstly, the Black defense of Ethiopia was not in the service of a race war but in support of the principles of democracy. Secondly, nonetheless, the Italian invasion had produced a new “common soul” amongst Black populations worldwide. Thirdly, the response to the fascist invasion demonstrated for Nardal the existence, across races, of a desire for humanism to temper

the violences of colonialism (see Umoren 2018, 40–41). In this call to arms can be gleaned a tasking of Black humanism to gather a diverse constituency of colonial subjects for the defense of democracy against fascist aggression. While Nardal's capacious humanism was in part due to her strong Catholicism, her colleague Kouyaté's drew from a labor activist past. In 1932, Kouyaté formed the Union of Black Workers (*Union des travailleurs nègres*) for the purposes of providing mutual aid and cultural development. As a disaffected communist, Kouyaté apprehended his Black union as working with "all races and all nationalities" (Adi 2018, 100).

Paris soon became a node of activism that brought together diverse anti-colonial currents that ran across and beyond the French empire (see Genova 2001, 184–85; Edwards 2003, 297). Strikingly, Nardal and Kouyaté pursued a diplomatic mission strikingly resonant of Fanon's later ambitions: their Ethiopian Action Committee worked closely with North African Star (*Étoile Nord-Africaine*), the Algerian nationalist organization founded by Messali Hadj and a forerunner – although ultimate competitor – to Fanon's beloved FLN (Edwards 2003, 298).

The Islamic world split over support for Ethiopia. Some journalists and politicians strongly opposed fascist aggression, recalling Ethiopia as the first land to formally accept Islam when the original *hijrah* (migration) from Mecca was granted asylum by the king of Aksum. Others, though, pointed to the recent imperial history of Ethiopia as a Christian hegemon and oppressor of Muslims (see in general Kabha 2011; Erlich 1995). As it turns out, North Africans in Paris – especially Algerians – were far more supportive than antagonistic. Part of this support, as evident elsewhere in the Islamic world (Kabha 2011, 441), was probably provided by a souring of opinion for Mussolini after the execution in 1931 of 'Umar al-Mukhtar, the Libyan leader of anti-colonial struggle in Italian North Africa (Libya). In any case, the first meeting of the International Committee for the Defense of the Ethiopian People (*Comité international pour la défense du peuple éthiopien*), co-sponsored by Kouyaté and Hadj, brought together 800 white, Black and North African participants (Boittin 2010, 161). In the ensuing march, on August 21, Mussolini was not only declared the "enemy of our race" but also, in more expansive terms, as the enemy of "the 66 million colonized people" (Genova 2001, 185–86).

The following month, interior minister Joseph Paganon reported that North Africans in Paris "reckon that it is the duty of all Muslims unreservedly to lend their material and moral support to the Ethiopians" (Goebel 2017, 170). His estimation was not entirely rhetorical. In January 1936, North and West Africans formed a Coordinating Committee of the Blacks and Arabs of Paris (*Comité de coordination des Noires et Arabes de Paris*), which published its own journal – The Black and Arab Front in Defense of Ethiopia (*Front des noirs et des arabes en défense de l'éthiopie*) (Genova 2001, 186). An International Conference of Arabs and Negroes was soon after convened in Paris, which not only addressed Ethiopian independence but scoped out the possibility of a permanent political organization of Black and Arab unity (Edwards 2003, 297). As fascist forces viciously triumphed over Ethiopian military and civilians alike, the anti-colonial unities fostered by the anti-fascist conflict began to take precedence in organizing. In April 1937, a number of organizations including the Association of Martinican Students, Kouyaté's Union of Black Workers, and Hadj's Nationalist Party of Algeria (*Parti nationaliste d'Algérie*) – which had now replaced the banned North African Star – formed the *Rassemblement Colonial*. The *Rassemblement* brought together activists from North Africa, the Antilles, West Africa and French Indochina and functioned as an anti-colonial anti-fascist popular front (Genova 2001, 175; Edwards 2003, 297).

Thus, almost twenty years before Fanon's comments on Bandung, Parisian intellectuals and activists had drawn together two anti-colonial struggles within the French empire – the Antillean and

Algerian – through a defense of Ethiopia against fascist aggression. Prefiguring Fanon’s own movement in thought, the Parisian defense of Ethiopia demonstrated that Black humanism could be tasked to a diplomatic mission that incorporated the wretched of the earth. In short, the path that Black humanism travelled to Algeria was via Ethiopia. I would suggest that the trace of this united front can be identified in the subsequent prose and poetry of Suzanne Césaire’s *négritude*: there, the strictures of Manichean racism were to be destroyed by an undefeatable and uncontrollable Ethiopian-human. Aimé Césaire’s (2000) *Discourse on Colonialism*, which in 1950 argued that Hitler was a European norm and not an aberration, was less a new insight and more a rhetorical flourish of his wife’s - and other’s - commitments to anti-colonial anti-fascism. Aimé Césaire’s late poem on Ethiopia, which in the wake of Bandung sought a Pan-African path beyond colonial and postcolonial violence, was a quixotic marker of a diplomatic mission that ran deeper than those pursued by state elites of any color.

### **The Wretched of the Earth, Nehru, and Indian Independence**

Messali Hadj was one of many defenders of Ethiopia who had previously attended the historic Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism. Held in Brussels 1927, and instigated by the Comintern, the Congress inaugurated the League Against Imperialism. In his address at Brussels, Hadj condemned the “French imperialism [that wanted] to set brother murderously against brother” and argued that only through “uniting all oppressed peoples” and with the “support of the world proletariat” would it be possible to create a “truly human society” (Ansprenger 1964, 139). Key architects of the Bandung conference were in attendance at Brussels, including Mohammed Hatta, future vice-president of Indonesia, and Jawaharlal Nehru, future prime-minister of India (Mišković 2014, 2).

Nehru attended in his capacity as a delegate of the Indian National Congress (INC). At Brussels, he encountered for the first time the idea of an “Asiatic federation” and began to understand anti-imperialism in Marxist terms as a global struggle for which nationalism was a “narrow and insufficient creed” (Mišković 2014, 3; Chacko 2011, 184). However, the formation of Nehru’s foreign policy position did not travel a direct line between Brussels and Bandung; it owed greatly to the subsequent anti-colonial anti-fascist movement that grew around Ethiopia’s defense. In many ways, the Communist response to Mussolini’s invasion proved disappointing for Nehru and his colleagues. True to Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Comintern proclaimed opposition to Italy’s “colonial imperialist war of plunder”; in contradiction, Stalin’s *realpolitik* sought to preserve the French and Italian alliances that kept Nazi ambitions to the east in check (see Clarke III 2013).

Much of the Indian political classes supported Ethiopian sovereignty with no such qualifications. In October 1935, the month of the Italian invasion, a group of Bengalis founded an Association against the Italo-Abyssinian War (Framke 2014, 40). In the same month, the National Council of Women, the All India Women’s Conference, and the Women’s India Association all condemned Mussolini’s war of fascist aggression (Hiatt 1936, 12). One social welfare association in Calcutta collected medicines, and a small coterie of doctors and nurses travelled to Ethiopia to work with the Red Cross (Hiatt 1936, 12). Publications from Madras, Kolkata and Karachi invested themselves in the Ethiopian cause (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1937). The Amrita Bazar Patrika newspaper even opined that the Italian invasion revealed the necessity of forming a “league of oppressed nations” (Framke 2014, 41).

The suggestion of a Third World diplomatic mission to save Ethiopia resonated in the INC. From very early on in its existence, the Congress had opposed the entanglement of Indian peoples in imperial wars (Prasad 1983, 299). When Italy invaded Ethiopia, this principled anti-imperial stance conjoined with the anti-fascist struggle. In early 1936, the INC claimed the Ethiopian struggle as part of all exploited

peoples' struggles and declared the 9<sup>th</sup> of May to be Ethiopia Day (Bipan Chandra et al. 2016, 420). Nehru himself responded to the displeasure of the Italian Consul General in Calcutta in receiving this INC resolution: "imperialism goes to exploit and remains to exploit, and the people under its heel sink materially and spiritually. Its true messengers in Abyssinia have been poison gas and liquid fire and they reveal its nature more than any argument" (*New Times and Ethiopia News* 1936).

Nehru was first and foremost concerned with the British government's complicity in fascist aggression and what that meant for the prospects of Indian independence. If, in Marxist-Leninist terms, imperialism was to be understood as a mode of capitalist accumulation, and if fascism was a degenerative expression of imperial-capitalist power, then British complicity in fascism went hand in hand with the preservation of its empire and the wider imperial world. Furthermore, the fate of Ethiopia was especially entangled in the prospects of Indian independence given that Britain channeled diplomatic relations with Ethiopia through its India Office. Given these ideological and institutional backdrops, it is no surprise that Nehru was keen for the INC to develop an anti-colonial anti-fascist position, one that necessarily tied Indian independence to the Ethiopian struggle against fascist aggression.

At the Lucknow session of the INC in 1936, Nehru connected the Indian independence struggle to the Italy/Ethiopia war. First, he disavowed attempts by the British government to weaken the independence movement by offering an extension of the Indian franchise. Second, he claimed that the Ethiopian struggle was "something more than a local struggle" being "the first effective check by an African people on an advancing imperialism", and one that "already has had far-reaching consequences" (Nehru 1936). Bringing together these intra-imperial and international considerations, Nehru warned that to remain in Britain's imperialist fold was to remain "cribbed and confined, and allied to and dominated by the reactionary forces ... of the capitalist world". At the succeeding Faizpur session of the INC, Nehru (1937) once more alluded to the morally bankrupt dependency of India on British imperial policy, claiming that the Anglo-German Naval agreement of 1935 had "led to the rape of Abyssinia". Any meaningful independence, Nehru argued, necessarily required India to pursue a foreign policy un-entangled from imperial interests. To be principally anti-fascist – especially in terms of how fascism had become a vehicle for imperialism in the non-European world - was the litmus test for meaningful national independence. At this moment in time, Ethiopian sovereignty was, for Nehru, the geopolitical issue most salient to India's future.

Nehru continued to orient his Indian foreign policy towards the lodestar of anti-fascist anti-colonialism as the Second World War arrived. The war further exposed the dilemma at the heart of opposing fascism as a subordinate part of a European empire. In February 1939, Nehru claimed that the weakness Britain displayed during the Munich crisis was due to the fact that "imperialism cannot champion democracy, it cannot fight fascism effectively, as at heart it sympathises with it" (*New Times and Ethiopian News* 1939). This weakness implicated India. While Chamberlain kowtowed to Hitler's demands to annex Sudetenland, Nehru expressed sympathy with Czechoslovakia. Yet he also stated that India refused to be "exploited by imperialism" and would "not have war imposed ... by outside authority" (Krasa 1989, 348). The working committee of the INC argued that Indian participation in Britain's war against the Axis powers would come at the price of its own independence; alternatively, free and democratic India would "gladly associated [with] other free nations for mutual defense against aggression" (Kuracina 2007, 527–28).

Given these dilemmas, the INC, under Nehru's influence, put forward a foreign policy built upon two conjoined principles: a) opposition to the use of Indian resources for Britain's war effort, and b) a

desire to play an active ethical role in international relations, especially in terms of confronting fascist aggression (Prasad 1983, 299). In these principles can be gleaned an ethics of neutrality that Nehru would eventually take to Bandung.

Unsurprisingly, though, Winston Churchill refused any such principled opposition to the projection and defense of imperial power and made clear in September 1941 that the freedoms promised by the Atlantic Charter would not apply to India (Chacko 2011, 188). After the INC launched a Quit India movement in August 1942, Nehru was imprisoned and during this time wrote perhaps his most important historical work, *The Discovery of India*. In it, he argued that the Indian people had been subject to the principles and theories of fascism and Nazism via British imperial rule (Nehru 2002, 17). Then, reflecting upon his travels around the Raj, Nehru drew together the unavoidable entanglement of nationalism and internationalism in the independence movement. He remembered that he had been at pains to introduce an idea of “India as a whole” *and* existing within a wider world: “I brought in the struggle in China, in Spain, in Abyssinia, in Central Europe, in Egypt and the countries of Western Asia” (Nehru 2002, 59).

In Nehru’s prison-time reflections can be gleaned the fundamentals of an anti-colonial foreign policy endorsed by the INC and indelibly contoured by the anti-fascist struggle that pivoted around Ethiopia. In September 1946, Nehru, as the vice-president of the interim government of India, represented this independent platform in terms of three moral principles: firstly, a commitment to peace and freedom wherein “the denial of freedom anywhere must endanger freedom elsewhere and lead to conflict and war”; secondly, an especial focus, in this regard, upon the “emancipation of colonial and dependent countries” and in the “recognition in theory and practice of equal opportunities for all races”; and thirdly, as he put it to the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in 1947, a meaningful neutrality that would allow such moralities to be pursued: “we do not intend to be the playthings of others” (Prasad 1983, 300–301).

In these ways, Nehru molded the principles of the anti-colonial anti-fascist movement into a nationalist ideology that was necessarily internationalist. This “internationalist nationalism” (see Chacko 2011), born of Marxist-Leninism but contoured profoundly by the defense of Ethiopia, was, in application, strikingly similar to Fanon’s psychiatric praxis that demanded anti-colonial-national-consciousness to be comprised of an internationalist ethics. In effect, Nehru’s foreign policy rested upon a diplomatic mission towards the wretched of the earth. Like Fanon, Nehru (2002, 420) was convinced that the discourse on independence should never be one of isolation; speaking as prime minister of the largest democracy in the world, Nehru trusted that his foreign policy of ethical neutrality might help usher in a “new era of world co-operation”.

In 1954, Nehru brokered a treaty with China over Tibet with the help of five principles that gained fame, in the Sanskrit, as *panch shila*: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence (Fifield 1958, 505). These famous principles also resonated in the Bogor communique by the Colombo powers which, in the last days of 1954, announced the Bandung conference: the interrogation of “racialism” and colonialism; the scoping out of cooperation specifically between Asian and African nations; and the collective contribution of attending nations to “world peace and co-operation” (Appadorai 1955, 3). In the final sessions of the 1955 conference itself, certain attendees took issue with the communist genealogy of the term “peaceful co-existence” and so “world co-operation” was ultimately chosen as the more fitting expression of the Bandung spirit (see Keynes 1957, 366).

In the last journey, I began by addressing the Ethiopian legacy within *négritude*, and finished by examining how Black humanism was tasked to pursue Third World diplomacy. In this present journey, I have traced the ways in which the struggle over Ethiopia guided Nehru to fashion an “internationalist nationalism” cognate to Fanon’s diplomatic entreaty to defend the wretched of the earth. I have suggested that Nehru’s foreign policy designs came to contour – at least in part – the principles for a postcolonial age decided at Bandung. However, I want to finish this present journey by drawing out Nehru’s ethical commitment to the legacy of Black humanism that remained active – if partially submerged - in his platform at Bandung.

In his final address to the Bandung conference, Nehru once more promoted the utility of *panch shila* as diplomatic tools for the Asian world, and confirmed that Asian unity should and did not infer an anti-West racial sentiment. Yet Nehru concluded surprisingly. Arresting the logical direction of his prior argument, he turned towards the minority-African element of the Asian-dominated conference:

Everything else pales into insignificance when I think of the infinite tragedy of Africa ever since the days when millions of Africans were carried away as galley slaves to America and elsewhere, half of them dying in the galleys. We must accept responsibility for it, all of us, even though we ourselves were not directly involved. But unfortunately, in a different sense, even now the tragedy of Africa is greater than that of any other continent, whether it is racial or political. It is up to Asia to help Africa to the best of her ability because we are sister continents." (Nehru 1989, 392)

Nehru’s biography reveals a set of engagements with and commitments to Africa and its diasporic politics which wove around his primary concern for Indians and their independence. After completing his English education and returning to India in 1912, Nehru took up public engagement with the plight of Indians in South Africa. In 1928, he met African-American activist Max Yergen in India. Yergen had travelled to South Africa in 1920 as a missionary for the YMCA; and in 1937 he would organize the anti-colonial Council on African Affairs, headquartered in Harlem, with members including Adam Clayton Powell Jr and Paul Robeson (Slate 2012, 143; see also Kilson 1992). In 1938, Nehru visited Massawa and spoke with Indians resident in Ethiopia and Somalia who complained of their treatment under Italian colonial governance (Chhabra 1989, 17).

In the same year Nehru met Robeson in London. Robeson had just experienced a political awakening at a time when the imperial entrepôt was seized by a vociferous and voluminous support for Ethiopia equal – or second only - to Paris. In fact, the Italy/Ethiopia war to some extent catalyzed the political reception of Robeson’s iconic portrayal in 1936 of Toussaint L’Ouverture for CLR James’ play at the Westminster Theatre. One critic, for instance, reported that “[d]uring a meeting of Negroes which I attended as a protest against Italy’s invasion of Abyssinia, I heard speakers refer with pride to the inspiring life of Toussaint, a great man of colour” (James 2013, 178). Robeson reminisced on this very climate in the greetings he sent to the Bandung conference, being unable to attend due to the state department refusing him a passport. Thinking back to his London days, when he “first became part of the movement for colonial freedom”, Robeson (1978, 400) hailed the “many friends” attending Bandung that he had known then “from India and Africa and the West Indies”, and with whom he “shared hopes and dreams of a new day for the oppressed colored peoples of the world”.

Realpolitik, as it is wont to do, qualified Nehru’s commitment to Black humanism. After India’s independence, he advised that support for the African-American cause had to be pursued without

causing embarrassment to the US government (Slate 2012, 178). At the same time, Nehru's entreaties with the Colombo powers took the shape of a decidedly Asian affair. Nonetheless, his closing address at Bandung proffered some kind of atonement for following the anti-solidarity Cold War logics of many postcolonial elites. In his final words to the Asian-African conference, Nehru returned the diplomatic stage to the wretched of the earth and the Black humanism that refused to recognize racialized, juridical, class or national borders as immovable impediments to the pursuit of world cooperation. Here, at the end of the conference, lay a glimpse of the depths at which the Bandung spirit moved.

## Conclusion

What lessons might we draw from the accretion of these three journeys from Ethiopia to Bandung via Fanon?

Firstly, some considerations for the study of Fanon. Most attempts to connect Fanon to the Asian-African conference are undertaken in a generic postcolonial or anticolonial shorthand absent of any detailed genealogical or theoretical grappling with the relationship between his ethos of liberation and the Bandung spirit. There is, in this respect, a notable weakness in studies of Third World liberation movements as much as in Fanon studies: we have yet to seriously reconcile one of the most influential diplomatic episodes in Third World liberation with one of the most influential thinkers of said liberation. This weakness is compounded by recent curations of Fanon which have attenuated his ethos to a critique of anti-blackness. Iconoclastically speaking, *Black Skins* has been made into a standalone book; its inescapable relation to the *Wretched of the Earth* has been obscured or disavowed (for a critique see Thomas 2018). To be fair, though, this kind of circumscription of Fanon's oeuvre to the "subject" - absent the "movement" - is neither new nor original (see for instance Robinson 1993).

Secondly, some considerations for the study of Bandung. Critical appraisals of the Asian-African conference have done much to draw out the way in which the anti-colonial principles of "world cooperation" and neutrality crashed into the Cold War context. Other investigations have drawn out the longer genealogies that led to Bandung, usually returning to the anti-imperial politics of the 1900s-1920s. Fewer, though, have focused upon the intervening period - the 1930s and the rise of fascist aggression on a global scale.<sup>3</sup> And yet, it was the co-implication of fascism and colonialism in this period's struggles over global order that intimately tied the democratic presumptions of the West to the democratic aspirations of the "rest". This intimacy is ill-fitting with narratives of Bandung that overly, albeit understandably, geo-politicize the location of the Third World to a town in Indonesia, as did Sukarno in his opening address to the conference. In addition, the elision of anti-colonial anti-fascism from Bandung genealogies might have something to do with the fact that independent Ethiopia does not figure heavily in anti-colonial narratives and is rarely integrated into intra-imperial historiographies, whether Anglophone, Francophone or other. Here, a colonial episteme is evident - one that obfuscates "sideways" travel and errant orientations that exceed the imperial metropolises' straight lines.

I want to finish by bringing these two sets of considerations to bear upon each-other. In this article I have argued that a reconciliation between Fanon and Bandung requires some journeying through anti-colonial anti-fascism and the global reaction to the Italy/Ethiopia war. The accretion of the three exploratory journeys taken above render the following propositions: a) Fanon's ethos of liberation owes something to this formative "inter-war" moment; b) the practice of applying Black humanism to

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<sup>3</sup> For partial exceptions, and alongside the literature referenced in this article - especially Framke (2014) - see Patel and McMichael 2004; Armstrong 2016).

Third World diplomacy in this moment prefigures Fanon's intellectual, personal and political moves from *Black Skins* to *Wretched of the Earth*; c) the Third World diplomacy announced at Bandung owes, in part, to the Black humanist struggle for Ethiopia. I would like to excavate one political injunction from these propositions: an ethos of liberation on behalf of a blackened and dehumanized humanity need not be "identity" prone, exceptionalist, nationalistic, nor reproductive of colonial Manichean logic; it can just as much drive a diplomatic mission to liberate all those variously dehumanized - or at threat of dehumanization - across imperial and post-imperial landscapes. Such principled reciprocity only ever imperfectly acts upon the matter of neo-imperial and postcolonial global politics. Regardless, the breath of this Bandung spirit might help restore some humanity to our suffocating zeitgeist.

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