



# The Global Sixties

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## Special issue: the global sixties in the Global South

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### ABSTRACT

This Introduction provides a conceptual framework and pre-view of the five articles contained in the Special Issue, “Global Sixties in the Global South.” The articles derive from a two-day, interdisciplinary conference held at Stony Brook University in Spring 2022 and reflect scholarship by both younger and more established scholars who explore diverse topics from African, Asian, and Latin American perspectives. After a brief historiographic overview and discussion of the semantic relationship between “Global Sixties” and “Global South,” the Introduction makes the case for the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue as the basis for Global Sixties scholarship. The Introduction further argues how the articles that make up the Special Issue reveal the contradictions inherent to solidarities across disparate lands, the cultural valence of place, the continued if refracted operation of imperialisms, the messiness of ideological schisms, and the corruption inherent to power dynamics that suffused revolutionary consciousness and Third World ambitions alike. Ultimately, we argue that “Global Sixties in the Global South” provides a framework that reveals a world deeply entangled across geopolitics, political economy, and culture in ways that account for both the meta-narratives of revolution and ideology and the micro-histories of personal intimacy and affective relations.

### KEYWORDS

Global Cold War; Global Sixties; Global South; Bandung; Tricontinentalism

Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the Global Sixties were a time of cultural experimentation, coupled with revolutionary aspirations to restructure society. These areas became progenitors as well as consumers of modernist political, ideological, and cultural forces that shaped the era. They contained sites of violent Cold War struggles as well as inspirational models for the radical politics of anti-colonial and “anti-imperialist” liberation and social revolution. Colonial empires were crumbling, and a new postcolonial world, accompanied by novel social formations, was emerging. At the same time, the ambivalence and contradictions of this “long decade” included not just the frustrated hopes for new political futures and a new

global order among nations, but a descent into an age of crises, counter-revolution, pessimism, and withdrawal.

In the United States, legacies of the Global Sixties abound in the legalization of psychedelic drugs and marijuana; in the transformation of gender norms and rights; in racial consciousness and activism; in heightened environmental awareness; in right-wing populist politics and left-wing ideological “wokism.” Yet what constitutes the Global Sixties across the Global South? What are that period’s legacies for comprehending social demands and transformations in today’s world? How can we work backwards through those legacies to grasp the complexities of South-South engagements and divergencies? And to what extent do we in the “Global North” share similar or opposing sets of historical experiences and vestiges of this period?

As readers of this journal are well aware, the burgeoning field of the Global Sixties is rooted in an ongoing, interdisciplinary, collaborative mapping project.<sup>1</sup> The intellectual richness of this evolving field in formation lies precisely in our shared historical vocabulary (e.g., Spirit of Bandung, Nonalignment, Tricontinentalism) marking turning points, as well as a shared set of references grounded in key historiographic texts.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the malleability of the Global Sixties framework – one that establishes as an epistemological premise the intertwining of geopolitics, regionalism, political mobilization, and cultural formations – has lent itself to a proliferation of subfields, what Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra and Anne Garland Mahler have described as the “centrifugal nature of Global South studies.”<sup>3</sup> One of the dangers of this proliferation lies in the increasing fragmentation of the field, as scholars exploring different aspects of the Global Sixties within their respective geographical regions and/or disciplinary areas – whether in diplomatic history, literary studies, or musicology – trend toward intellectual endogeneity.

This Special Issue harnesses the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of the Global Sixties to remind us of our shared origins and to celebrate the discovery of new points of intersectionality. Among the key aspects that emerge from this engagement across disciplines is to underscore the transcendent relevance of the Cuban Revolution and Vietnam, and the incorporation of new axes of political solidarity such as through film and song. More importantly, the volume celebrates the importance of dialogue among scholars who might otherwise fail to cross paths with one another or read each other’s works. Early collective projects that helped to establish the contours for a Global Sixties historiography recognized the centrality of interdisciplinary conversations, and it is very much in this spirit of a collective enterprise that the current collection of essays emerged and seeks to embrace.<sup>4</sup>

Building out from a conference held at Stony Brook University on April 7–8, 2022, the present collection brings to light five distinctive papers,

each of which addresses themes and subjects that crisscross the area once self-identified as the “Third World.”<sup>5</sup> As conference co-organizers, we sought to incorporate papers and scholars broadly representative of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Ultimately, however, our conversations covered more geographical terrain than what is found in the papers selected for inclusion here, and inevitably this leaves out or marginalizes large and important participants such as Egypt, India, China, and Mexico among many others.<sup>6</sup> Our choice of title for the conference and Special Issue – “Global Sixties in the Global South” – explicitly establishes a direct connection between these two overlapping conceptual and historiographical frameworks. While Global Sixties signifies a *decentering* of 1960s research away from capitalist metropolises to focus upon the historical agency of “peripheral” actors and social forces, Global South is used not simply as a synonym for the anachronistic Third World but to denote a broader set of intersecting epistemological categories.<sup>7</sup> It is at once a designate for a geographical “place” while simultaneously a term that invokes revolutionary consciousness, global networks of political solidarity, and unrealized projects of socialist transformation. As Sinah Theres Kloß articulates, Global South “should be understood as a process and practice, created and influenced by the ever-changing and never fixed status positions of persons and institutions.”<sup>8</sup> Yet while this collection certainly embraces the category of Global South in this way, the papers also purposefully reveal the contradictions inherent to solidarities across disparate lands, the cultural valence of place, the messiness of ideological schisms, and the corruption inherent to power dynamics that suffused revolutionary consciousness and Third World ambitions alike. In short, we seek to interrogate the *globality* of the Global Sixties by highlighting encounters that were complex, evolving, and interconnecting. What this framework reveals is a world deeply entangled across geopolitics, political economy, and culture in ways that account for both the meta-narratives of revolution and ideology and the micro-histories of personal intimacy and affective relations. This, we argue, is the foundation of the world of the 1960s and thus, by extension, the basis for writing a global history of the period.<sup>9</sup>

Several broad themes course through these papers and provide structure to the special issue.<sup>10</sup> The first concerns the Bandung Conference of 1955, which has assumed a point of genesis in the historiography of the Global Sixties. What is at stake in the rediscovery of this “founding moment” when drawing upon competing epistemological assumptions and methodological tools distinctive to our respective disciplinary training? In other words, how can we continue to think through the “afterlives of Bandung” from both a multidisciplinary and an interdisciplinary perspective?<sup>11</sup> As Elleni Centime Zeleke and Arash Davari ask, “What form can the ‘Bandung’ spirit take today?”<sup>12</sup> At the same time, we also discover the need for an expansion

of vocabulary, one that allows us to recognize broad conceptual points of reference – such as the significance of Vietnam – while remaining attuned to what Shimelis Gulema described as “the nuances of particular stories” during the conference’s roundtable discussion. In doing so, however, we must avoid being overly “charmed by hybridizations,” as Benjamin Tausig put it during that discussion, so as not to become blinded by the inherent “messiness . . . of nationalities that are not singular at all.” Our historiographical project, in short, must go beyond simply following the cartographer’s model of adding more regions and locations to its ever-expanding map, while continuing to decenter the United States and, for that matter, the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> We must remain open to new methodological approaches while seeking out new vocabularies for an evolving theoretical framework.

A second theme these papers consider is the lost trajectories of alternative internationalisms that failed to solidify. The period encompassed by the Global Sixties, to cite one definition, reflected competition between “varieties of internationalism” – capitalism, socialism, and nonalignment – that manifested themselves geopolitically.<sup>14</sup> This burst of alternative internationalisms is at once a manifestation of decolonial aspiration that refused colonialism’s exploitative expansionism and a refusal of the Cold War world picture. We have to recognize how different possible futures were thwarted, crushed, or overwhelmed by a global war that was hardly “cold.” Violence defined the era, as one finds in the sizzling hot and blood-drenched frontiers of conflict in Vietnam, South Africa, and elsewhere. As Christopher Lee put it during our roundtable discussion, one is “struck by how much Vietnam defined perspectives and loomed in the imaginations of so many people.” Sorting through these competing and overlapping imaginaries is central to the Global Sixties project. It involves an awareness of diplomatic history, while integrating this with social, political, and cultural history. We continue to grapple with how new sites of discovery and new social practices were produced in relation to new and transformational imaginaries. One of the most striking aspects is the emergence of “spatialized language” tied to what Tausig noted in our conversation was a “new ethical way” of organizing – or better, countering the organization of – global power. It is tempting to sketch in broad strokes a genealogy of successive geographical imaginaries, one reflective of the rise and demise of overlapping geopolitical power dynamics – for instance, the rise of nonalignment replacing Afro-Asia or Cuban advocacy for Tricontinentalism in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split.<sup>15</sup> Yet inquiries into situated, relational practices in the Global South reveal that geopolitical imaginaries operated not in succession but in convergence, negotiation, and even mutual reinforcement.

Finally, there is the theme of affective subjectivity, that is, of how individuals emotionally experienced the Global Sixties. These internationalist

projects simultaneously became imbricated in the form and content of social protest movements, consumptive practices, and artistic endeavors.<sup>16</sup> By returning to the micro-history level, various papers directly address questions of sexual love and violence, utopian yearnings and ideological disaffections, and the ways that music and the visual arts inspired people to live their lives distinctively from what came before. Nonstate actors such as students, filmmakers, and musicians with access to travel feature prominently in several of the essays, where archival sources go beyond the traditional role of newspapers and diplomatic correspondence to include personal letters, memoirs, and semiautobiographical fictionalized accounts, films, musical notations and lyrics, paintings, and theater performances. These cultural productions, often the result of cross-regional contacts, facilitated exchanges, albeit with varying degrees of discernible success or significance. The stakes of the archive become significant. As Matías Hermosilla noted in our roundtable conversation, archival-based research requires “thinking about the materiality [of the Global Sixties] itself.” The question of aesthetics and politics opens up the urgency to consider the material and the affective beyond the realm of human actors. The expanded archive thus calls for a methodological expansion that takes into consideration the long genealogies of genres, mediums, technical training, and material features, as much as the emerging of geopolitical imaginaries. As Andrew Ivaska reminded us during the roundtable, we should consider how words, sounds, images, and things possess the capacity to produce affect and intimacy. Or at the very least, that social relations are always already mediated by these extra-human agents.

The first article in this special issue is by the historian Andrew Ivaska, whose book on Tanzanian youth culture made a significant, early contribution to Global Sixties historiography.<sup>17</sup> Ivaska returns here to Tanzania, where he unearths the intertwined life stories of U.S. and African students who embraced socialist Tanzania as a counterpoint to racist South Africa, on one hand, and as a beacon of revolutionary fervor, on the other. In “Romancing the Frontline: A View from Dar es Salaam on Intimacy and Political Attachment,” Ivaska’s analytical lens zooms in and out, as he shifts his focus across questions ranging from interracial intimacy and gender politics to expressions of liberal idealism and African revolutionary power dynamics. In doing so, he leads us to the discovery of unexpected transnational connections between Africa and the United States, while taking us down pathways that reveal the fraught and ultimately irreconcilable contradictions that defined the place of love and solidarity in the Global Sixties.

The next two articles address the Vietnam War from two opposite ideological nodal points and with vastly different methodological concerns. Film and media scholar Man-Fung Yip’s “Cinematic Solidarity and International Revolutionary Commitment: Cuban Documentaries on

Vietnam” traces how well-known Cuban filmmakers like Santiago Álvarez and Julio García Espinosa from the Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC) traveled to Vietnam at the height of the war and produced archival footage, newsreels, and documentary films. Yip’s close readings of seminal works by these filmmakers suggests how cinema was the site of divergent ideological flows and aesthetics, ones that do not necessarily align with the presumed axis of political solidarity (i.e., socialist realism). As Yip also reveals, contemporary Vietnamese viewers on the ground were not the intended audience for these Spanish-language solidarity films. Rather, the works became widely known within the international film festival circuit.

Historian Sudina Paungpetch’s article, “Bases, Bars, and Blue Jeans: Thailand and Cultural Debates over the Vietnam War,” examines the Vietnam War’s broad socioeconomic and cultural impact on Thailand, a hub of U.S. air operation and the Southeast Asian destination for R&R. While PX goods, American popular culture, and the attendant economic “gold rush” were all generally welcome, cultural nationalism was expressed in media reporting, novels, and popular music. A central focus of Paungpetch’s analysis is the impact on Thai sex workers, whose mixed-race children were perceived by some in the media as threats to the country’s traditional social mores. The local government’s efforts to control women’s bodies – for instance, through the issuance of health cards and mandatory checkups – were not unique to Thailand. We should keep in mind that U.S. bases across Asia, whether in Okinawa or in Korea, were intercultural, interracial contact zones par excellence during the Global Sixties, and thus legitimized efforts at population control. What distinguishes Paungpetch’s case study is how the end of the Vietnam War brought economic and emotional devastation to over a hundred thousand Thais, whose livelihood and often interracial bonds of intimacy were rooted in the contact zone.

The next contribution is by Matías Herмосilla, a recent PhD in history from Stony Brook University. Herмосilla’s work explores the social, cultural, and geopolitical aspects of global social protest music, and in this article he focuses on the 1967 “Protest Song Conference” organized by Cuba. By that point, folk music had become a universally recognized form of “protest” music and the Cuban authorities sought to harness the genre in support of its broader revolutionary aims. Herмосilla provides unique insight into the conference, from the perspective of organizers, participants, and observers. At the same time, he reveals the broader political implications of “protest song” not only for the Cuban government but for the Third World revolutionary project.

The final essay in the collection is by historian Christopher Lee, whose numerous writings on postcolonial Africa and African intellectual thought have made an important impact on the field.<sup>18</sup> Lee returns to the

fundamental question of space, the “reimagining of geographies,” in the post-Bandung world. He reflects on how Bandung gave rise not simply to new global political projects but to novel ways of conceptualizing global geography itself, notably through the concept of “Afro-Asia.” Lee pinpoints examples in which the “spirit of Bandung” concretely manifested itself in novel ways of conceptualizing space, without losing site of the problematic and fraught contradictions that arose alongside those efforts and ultimately doomed them.

We are very pleased to bring these five articles together for a special issue bridging geographic and methodological specializations, thus encompassing multiple regions across today’s Global South. The historiography of the Global Sixties while relatively young, is nevertheless flourishing. Its strengths are reflected in the intellectual vibrancy and generosity of the scholars who now claim the field as their own. While some of us were born in the 1960s, most were not. We all have the advantage of returning to the era with the benefit of historical distance and the relative absence of political baggage. This allows us, as well, to ask the fundamental question: What kind of world – or better, *worlds* – did the Global Sixties produce or fail to produce? We hope this collection aids in unfolding answers to that question and inspires others to do the same.

## Notes

1. For the idea of the Global Sixties as a “mapping project,” see Eric Zolov, “Los 60 fueron globales,” *Lento* no 62 (2018): 9–19. For an overview of the “state of the field,” see Martin Klimke and Mary Nolan, “Introduction: The Globalization of the Sixties” in Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, and Mary Nolan, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1–10.
2. Among these texts one would include Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2008), and primary sources by Frantz Fanon, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and others.
3. Magalí Armillas-Tiseyra and Anne Garland Mahler, “Introduction: New Critical Directions in Global South Studies,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2022): 4.
4. Notable works include Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills and Scott Rutherford, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009), Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett, eds., *The Third World in the Global 1960s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), and Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, and Mary Nolan, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (New York: Routledge, 2018).



5. The papers came out of a two-day, in-person conference, “The Global Sixties in the Global South” co-organized by Shimelis Gulema, Sohl Lee, Benjamin Tausig, and Eric Zolov on April 7-8, 2022. Generous support was provided by the Humanities Institute (HISB), the Faculty in the Arts, Humanities and lettered Social Sciences (FAHSSS) Interdisciplinary Initiatives Fund, the Departments of Art, History, and Music, and the Institute for Globalization Studies (IGS) at Stony Brook University. The editors are deeply grateful for additional contributions by Marié Abe, Marisol Villela Balderrama, Michelle Chase, Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, and Siwei Wang, , , whose papers are not included in the present collection, as well as for commentary by José Baeza, Gui Hwan Lee, and Vanni Pettina.
6. The papers presented at the conference discussed the international exchange, for instance, with Cuba. For the worldwide spread of Maoism during the Global Sixties, see Arif Dirlik, “Mao Zedong Thought and the Third World/Global South,” *Interventions*, 16:2 (2014): 233–256.
7. For an early writing that conceptually interrogates the link between “1968” and the “Third World” as one of ambiguity, and thus articulates the significance of *global* sixties while criticizing the Eurocentric mapping engrained in the concept of the Third World, see Arif Dirlik, “The Third World,” in *1968: The World Transformed*, eds. Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 295–317.
8. Sinah Theres Kloß “The Global South as Subversive Practice: Challenges and Potentials of a Heuristic Concept,” *The Global South*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 8. For a very useful unpacking of the term with annotated bibliography see Anne Garland Mahler, “Global South,” *Oxford Bibliographies* (October 25 2017): 1–17. DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780190221911-0055. See also Armillas-Tiseyra and Anne Garland Mahler, “Introduction: New Critical Directions in Global South Studies.”
9. For a reflection on global history and the Global Sixties, see Stephan Scheuzger, “La historia contemporánea de México y la historia global: Reflexiones acerca de los ‘Sesenta Globales,’” *Historia Mexicana* 68:1 (2018): 313–58.
10. The conference concluded with a roundtable conversation among all of the participants, from which several comments and ideas are introduced here.
11. Christopher Lee, ed., *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010; 2019 rev. edition).
12. Elleni Centime Zeleke and Arash Davari, “Introduction: Third World Historical,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2022): 426.
13. See, for instance, Anne E. Gorsuch, “Cuba, My Love: The Romance of Revolutionary Cuba in the Soviet Sixties,” *American Historical Review* vol. 120, no. 2 (2015): 497–526; Anne Gorsuch and Diane Koenker, eds., *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).
14. Klimke and Nolan, “Introduction,” 1.
15. A good overview of this trajectory can be found in Prashad, *The Darker Nations*.
16. For a close interrogation of “affective subjectivity” in Mexico’s global sixties see Mary Kay Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter: Pepe Zuñiga and Mexico City’s Rebel Generation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).
17. Andrew Ivaska, *Cultured States: Youth, Gender, and Modern Style in 1960s Dar es Salaam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
18. Selected books include Christopher Lee, *Alex La Guma. Culture and Liberation: Exile Writings, 1966–1985* (Kolkata, India: Seagull Books, 2022); Christopher Lee, *Franz Fanon: Toward a Revolutionary Humanism* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press,

2015); Christopher Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010).

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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**Sohl Lee** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art at Stony Brook University (SUNY). Her first book project, *Reimagining Democracy: The Minjung Art Movement and the Birth of Contemporary Korean Art*, forthcoming from Duke University Press, traces the multifaceted process by which a particular decolonial aesthetics of politics emerged during South Korea's democratization. Her current research projects include the global circulation of North Korean art and visual culture, Buddhist modernism, and pedagogical curating.