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Introduction

ON FEBRUARY 24, 2022, troops and tanks of the Russian Federation crossed the border of Ukraine, launching an all-out effort to conquer a sovereign state. President Vladimir Putin declared that the invasion would free the people of Ukraine from their “nazi” oppressors and restore their historic unity with Russia. To accomplish this liberation, Putin ordered the terror bombing of apartment buildings, hospitals, power plants, and cultural institutions, killing thousands. In his furious speech on the eve of the assault, Putin described Ukraine as an artificial creation of Soviet politics, an area that had never had its own “real statehood.” Ukraine’s corrupt leaders had made Ukraine into a “colony,” from which NATO was preparing an attack on Russia.¹ Putin did not mention that Ukraine’s people had voted for independence in 1991 and had exercised sovereignty for more than three decades.

Putin’s tirade of February 2022 explicitly repudiated what had been vaunted as a major achievement of the Soviet Union—its multinational composition—as well as that structure’s origins in Leninism and communist rule. Putin cited Lenin as the “author and architect” of Ukraine as a political entity, its first borders

1. For Putin’s speech on the eve of the invasion, see “Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” February 21, 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>, accessed February 11, 2023. Months before the beginning of the war, Putin had proclaimed that Ukrainians and Russians were a single nation: “Stat’ia Vladimira Putina ‘Ob istoricheskom edinstve russkikh i ukraintsev,’” July 12, 2021, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>, accessed February 11, 2023.

established when Bolshevik leaders configured the USSR as a union of nationally based republics. In Putin's perspective, this federalism had been a terrible mistake, an unnecessary "lordly gift" to nationalists that left a "land-mine"—the constitutional right to secede—waiting for its moment to explode. And explode it did in 1990 and 1991, bringing down the Soviet Union with it. This argument—Putin presented it as "historical fact"—called into question the sovereignty of all the states that had emerged from the dissolution of the USSR. Further, Putin's condemnation of NATO and its putative threat to Russia's security implied that the states of eastern Europe that had been under Soviet domination until 1989 had no right, even as sovereign entities, to choose their own means of defense.² Putin's speech was an assertion of Russia's return, not as a bastion of communism, but as an empire that straddled the continents of Europe and Asia.

One of the most eloquent critiques of Putin's arguments was made at the time by Kenya's ambassador to the United Nations, Martin Kimani. On the eve of Russia's assault, Kimani explained to the Security Council that just as Ukraine had once been part of a large empire, African countries had been parts of colonial empires. European empires had often drawn territorial boundaries in Africa that divided people with a common language, culture, and sense of belonging or grouped people of unlike cultures and affiliations within a single political unit. But when African colonies became independent states, Kimani observed, they did not fight each other to remake the past but accepted existing boundaries in order to insure peace on the continent. African leaders had agreed that the decolonized states, however their frontiers had been defined, had become sovereign polities.³ He had a point. For all the challenges that Africa has faced since the era of independence in the 1950s and 1960s, wars between states and the redrawing of boundaries have been rare. Only two new states, Eritrea and South Sudan, have been carved out from the borders designed during colonial rule.

2. "Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii," February 21, 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>, accessed February 11, 2023.

3. https://www.un.int/kenya/statements_speeches/statement-amb-martin-kimani-during-security-council-urgent-meeting-situation, accessed February 24, 2023.

Kimani's thoughtful response made a case for accepting the statehood of former colonies. Yet the institutions designed to safeguard the sovereignty of states have not always had the strength and motivation to fulfill this goal—not in the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, not when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003.⁴ Nor has a world order based on nation-states provided sufficient means to counter the extreme inequalities that emerged between former colonies like Kenya and states in Europe and North America. Were other ways of governing relations among different peoples, replacing those of empires, imaginable?

In this book, we turn back to twentieth-century moments of imperial dissolution to explore questions of political imagination and reconfiguration. We focus on three efforts to create large-scale, trans-continental projects that could unite peoples of different origins in productive, attractive, and strong political units: Eurasia, Eurafica, and Afroasia. All three concepts were both influential and controversial in their times. Projecting political linkages across states and continents could inspire a quest for equality and justice but could also provide a rationale for imperialist aggression. We focus on both context and consequence—on situations in which these projects flourished, foundered, or were transformed, as well as on their impacts on the configuration of power in the world.

After the collapse of the Russian empire in 1917, the idea of uniting peoples across Eurasia was proposed as a counter both to western claims to civilizational superiority and to the Bolsheviks' version of nations united under communist rule. Eurasianism reappeared in the 1990s after a second imperial breakdown, this time of the Soviet Union, as a rejection of the purported triumph of liberal democracy and capitalism over communism. Eurafica and Afroasia also emerged first in the 1920s, the former as an effort to replace rivalry among European empires with cooperation in the exploitation of Africa, the latter as a challenge to the global reach of European empires. Both concepts took on new forms in the 1950s as anti-imperial activists and political leaders worried

4. The United States did not intend to incorporate Iraq into its polity, as Russia intends with regard to Ukraine, but the United States did clearly violate Iraqi sovereignty on grounds that were largely bogus.

that nation-states created after the deprivations of colonial empire would have difficulty making their way in a world of concentrated economic, military, and political power.

Eurasia, Eurafrika, and Afroasia shared an emphatic rejection of Eurocentric approaches to politics and culture but did not propose the development of national cultures and self-contained national politics as the only or best way forward. They were not the only initiatives created in the twentieth century to overcome the confines of both empire and nation-state. Some political leaders and intellectuals in the early decades of the century thought that the world would soon divide itself into a small number of geographical blocs. The Bolsheviks chose the word “Union” to describe their reconfiguration of Russian empire; France would choose the same word in 1945; Britain thought of Commonwealth as a complement or a successor to empire. After World War II, the world appeared to be divided into two blocs, led by the United States and the Soviet Union, but from the 1950s, scholars and activists invoked a “third world” that asserted its independence from both. After the implosion of the second world in 1989–91, pundits thought the three worlds had been reduced to one. In the early twenty-first century, some claim that the world is multipolar; others say it is fragmented.

This book focuses on three post-imperial possibilities raised by people looking beyond national and continental boundaries to reconfigure world space. For these activists and intellectuals, space was not shaped just by landmasses, oceans, mountains, and rivers but by political relationships that could be made and remade.⁵ Imagined futures in each of our cases were challenged by the constraints of institutional, economic, and cultural realities and were, fatefully, transformed by them.

Let us briefly introduce the three projects, beginning with Eurasia.

After the fall of Russia’s Romanov dynasty in 1917, politically minded intellectuals sought ways to reorganize sovereignty across the huge space of the former empire. Some were engaged in wars of independence for regions and peoples that had been incorporated into the tsarist empire. Two intertwined projects challenged both

5. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

the old imperial system and the nation-state alternative. The more visible one was the reconstruction of much of the former empire as a communist federation. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics served as a model or an anti-model for state remaking for much of the twentieth century. The other plan existed in the creative imaginations of intellectuals, most of them émigrés and opponents of Soviet power. This idea, emerging in the 1920s, was Eurasianism—the notion that people across the great space once criss-crossed by Mongol and Turkic conquerors and inhabited by groups with different ethnic origins and religions shared a historically conditioned capacity for alliance in a multinational polity.

A number of influential intellectuals and political leaders in African and Asian countries also sought alternatives to both colonial empire and nation-state. As the possibility that imperial rule was vulnerable to challenge became stronger in the years after World War II, some worried that territorial independence would separate African or Asian people from each other as well as from a colonizing power. Two of these alternatives for a post-imperial future will be examined here: Eurafrica and Afroasia. The polities emerging out of colonial empire were often small or fragmented, lacking resources and in some cases population, largely resulting from the ways that empires had divvied up their overseas territories. Many of the new states had been impoverished by their imperial pasts—their wealth expropriated, their people made to work in demeaning conditions, their leaders disparaged. The doubts expressed by African leaders from Kwame Nkrumah to Léopold Sédar Senghor in the heat of anticolonial struggles of the 1950s anticipated some of today's concerns that the end of colonial rule has not brought about economic and social equality on a global scale.

The goals of advocates of Eurafrica in French Africa overlapped with those of political leaders in France who sought integration with the other states of Europe without giving up France's overseas territories. Both African and French leaders realized that in the new situation the former colonizer and the former colonized would have to become more equal partners in an overarching political structure organized along federal or confederal lines. Advocates of Afroasia, in contrast, sought to break with just such connections, reminiscent as they were of European dominance. They sought instead

to devise mechanisms for cooperation among former colonies to contest the ways in which the former colonial states, as well as the United States and the USSR, were exercising economic and political power around the world.

Eurafrica and Afroasia were the focus of vigorous political contestation—from the late 1940s to the late 1950s in the case of Eurafrika, from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s in the case of Afroasia. Both projects confronted on the one hand the opposition of wealthy states to any political structure that would pressure them to redistribute their resources and on the other hand the vested interest that elites in decolonizing states acquired in the constituencies they were riding to power (chapters 2 and 3). Eurasia, however, took on a new life in the 1990s. What for a time seemed to be a post-imperial array of independent states formed by the breakup of the Soviet Union set a Eurasian stage for advocates of a restored Russian empire (chapter 4).

The leading figures behind these three projects gave them names that emphasized their cross-continental assertiveness, but their continental visions were political constructions, not strictly geographic ones according to the conventions of today's maps. Eurasia did not include India, China, Southeast Asia, or most of Europe; its spatial configuration was defined by the expansion of Russian empire and by the fusion of Turkic, Mongol, and Slavic heritages. The European component of 1950s Eurafrika embraced only the six aspiring members of the European Economic Community and its Africa was French and Belgian, although leaders on both sides of the Mediterranean thought Eurafrika could eventually become more inclusive. The Afro-Asian Conference of 1955, bringing together representatives of twenty-nine states, defined itself as a political project of formerly colonized states, attracting the interest of more countries as they liberated themselves. The Afroasian effort to redefine a world economic order eventually brought in countries of Latin America to create a coalition that called itself the Group of 77, keeping that name even as the number of member states grew to 120.

China, following upon the triumph of communist revolution in 1949, was present at the 1955 Conference and sought to expand its influence on the Afroasian movement. China's brand of

communism appealed to some militants in Africa and Asia, but ruling elites were more likely to see it as a threat. In the early 1960s, China became embroiled in conflict with India and the USSR. By the 1990s, when China was becoming a global economic power, the Afroasian movement had lost its steam; China—with its Belt and Road and other initiatives—became a source of investment capital and aid, eagerly sought by some, regarded by others as a neocolonial power like those of the west. Its ambiguous position as an imperial, post-imperial, and anti-imperial polity put China in awkward and shifting relations with Afroasia. China was looked at askance by Eurasianists and not envisioned as part of their projects.

All three movements were spearheaded by intellectuals and political elites, and none of them became a full-fledged mass movement able to bring people across the spaces they claimed into sustained and collective mobilization. Eurasianism began among Russian exiles in the 1920s and stood no chance of penetrating the closed and repressive Soviet polity; its reemergence in the 1990s and 2000s attracted discontented university, political, and military elites. The leading advocates of Eurafrika and Afroasia were cosmopolitan intellectuals and political activists engaged in transnational circuits that crossed the line between colony and metropole. They sought to mobilize people in widely varying localities and circumstances, to channel people's anger over colonial repression and exploitation into electoral campaigns, street demonstrations, general strikes, and in some cases armed struggle. Making the connection to popular masses required boundary-crossing elites to develop local networks and constituencies—a goal that was widely recognized but difficult to accomplish. As we shall see, the very success of movements in obtaining national independence—starting with India in 1947 and Indonesia in 1949—pushed new ruling elites to focus on national politics even as their status as heads of recognized states gave them a platform to criticize imperialism and global inequality.

Post-Imperial Opportunities

All three movements gained ascendancy from crises of empire. Disolutions of empire, peaceful or violent, reconfigured France, Great Britain, and Belgium in the 1950s and 1960s and Portugal in the

1970s. Russian empire collapsed twice, first in 1917 and a second time with the breakup of the Soviet system in 1989–91. A world of about fifty states at the end of World War II became a world of nearly two hundred states at the end of the century, each claiming to govern a territory and the exclusive power to represent that territory's population.

The Eurafrica that influential leaders in French Africa advocated from the late 1940s to the late 1950s offered one approach to confronting economic inequality between colonizer and colonies. After the war, advocates for Eurafrica built on France's insistence that the people of its African colonies were an integral part of the French population to turn prewar assumptions upside down: Europe's claim to exploit African resources would become Africa's claim for resources it needed to develop. For their part, the leaders of France were seeking economic and political integration within Europe but feared that incorporating France without its African colonies into a European entity would split France in two. By the 1950s, African political movements were strongly challenging colonial rule, and they were in a position to insist that if Eurafrican political institutions were to be created, Africans must have a voice in them. The overlapping goals of political elites in African and European France meant that the aftermath of colonialism became a much-debated issue in the politics of constructing Europe. The European side of the Eurafrican project blinked first, pushing aside the voices and demands of France's African citizens while remaining open to supranational structures integrating the relatively affluent states of Europe.

Afroasian possibilities seemed to open up as Eurafrican ones were shutting down. Whereas both Eurafrica and Eurasia posited a continued relation with what had been an imperial center—Paris or Moscow—Afroasian advocates insisted that as states became liberated from colonial rule they should focus on cooperation with each other. Afroasian politics had emerged first in early twentieth-century circuits of anticolonial militants through London, Paris, Hamburg, Moscow, Singapore, Beijing, and other cities. Many opponents of colonial rule were influenced by communism and other strands of socialism and attracted by the European left's explicit condemnation of imperialism; these activists acquired a powerful patron after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Anticolonialism took other

forms—liberal, pan-Arab, pan-Islamic, pan-African, Christian—in the first decades of the twentieth century. Over time, the USSR, following its own strategic and ideological course, became a force that divided as well as brought together the enemies of colonial rule. World War II produced both a crisis of empire in western Europe and the expansion of the Soviet sphere into eastern Europe. Which territories could aspire to sovereignty and what sort of future that sovereignty would entail was in question for the subsequent decades.

The Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 brought together the rulers of ex-colonial states that had by then become independent. Attendees broached the possibility of acting collectively as a bloc while retaining individual sovereignty. As more colonies became independent, other organizations with differing memberships took up the challenge laid down at Bandung, among them the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (1957), the Non-Aligned Movement (1961), and the Tricontinental Conference of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (1966). Meanwhile, intellectuals, artists, and activists made efforts—through such organizations as the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau—to work together to combat Eurocentrism, to enhance people's pride in their cultural heritages, and to make clear to the world the contribution of African and Asian civilizations to humanity.

There was a tension between an Afroasianism of people and political movements and an Afroasianism of states. The sovereignty of the national state proved to be both a strength and a weakness of the new states' drive for global reform. By the mid-1960s, it was becoming clear that the ruling elites of newly independent countries were following different trajectories in economic and social policy, in ideological development, and in their relationships with the rich and powerful states of the world. The ruling elites of each state were—indeed had to be—most concerned with maintaining their own power against internal and external challenges. An attempt to hold a successor conference to Bandung in Algiers in 1965 ended in a fiasco.

There followed other attempts to use the architecture of interstate relations, particularly the United Nations and its affiliated

organizations, to develop cooperation among the states of Asia, Africa, and—increasingly—Latin America. The wealthy states' reaction to proposals to reform global economic structures was to refuse not only specific proposals but also their underlying premises, denying that either a past of colonial exploitation or a present of poverty and hunger constituted a basis for reorganizing global economic relations and insisting instead that all states make what they could of their "freedom."

Unlike Eurafica and Afroasia, Eurasia has a present as well as a past. The Eurasianists of the 1920s underscored the shared cultural attributes that linked the myriad peoples in this vast region and advocated both political and economic integration across the reimagined continent. Their theories were not welcomed by communists in Russia, who were embarking on a new kind of multinational politics. In the USSR, nationality was recognized in the units and subunits of its formally federalized polity, while centralized control was maintained through a political innovation—the one-party state. But when communist authority collapsed many decades later, intellectuals revived the Eurasian idea as a successor ideology to what had been the defining purpose of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

As Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery have argued, there are parallels between the "post-socialism" of 1989–91 and the "post-colonialism" of the 1960s, when states faced the task of "becoming something other than socialist or other than colonized" in a global context in which most economic resources and international rules governing economic life were shaped by the great powers.⁶ During the implosion of the partly self-contained economic and political structure of the Soviet bloc and consequent ideological void, Eurasianism seemed to offer possibilities for a post-Soviet future for Russia. After Vladimir Putin consolidated his control over the Russian Federation in the 2000s, Eurasianism became a frankly imperial ideology. Prominent advocates of Eurasianism called for a new "geopolitics" to counter the new west—Europe and the United States. Russia

6. Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, "Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, 1 (2009): 6–34, 11 quoted.

should recover its historical Eurasian territory and develop affiliations with other areas to create a “multi-polar world.”⁷

Both the resurgence of an imperial Eurasia and the inability of advocates of Eurafrika and Afroasia to achieve their desired structural changes expose the limitations and constraints of the international order that was supposed to make the world less unequal and more stable. The radical shifts in formal sovereignty of the last half of the twentieth century did not produce equality or stability.

Sovereignty in Question

All three post-imperial projects both asserted and nuanced concepts of sovereignty, countering the legitimacy of forces seen as external to a given population but leaving open the means by which political power should be exercised and legitimated. The conventional notion of sovereignty as an all-or-nothing proposition corresponds poorly to the complexities of power relations in world history. As James Sheehan argues, “As a doctrine, sovereignty is usually regarded as unified and inseparable; as an activity, however, it is plural and divisible.” It is a bundle of claims “by those seeking or wielding power, claims about the superiority and autonomy of their authority.” Claiming sovereignty depends to varying degrees and particular circumstances on law, force, political culture, and external recognition. It is not fully located in “the people” of a particular state or in the person of a sovereign; it is not separable from normative and institutional structures among the states of the world. Sovereignty can be cross-cut by non-territorial networks and institutions that assert power in certain domains—the World Trade Organization’s regulation of international commerce for instance. Empires, generally, could recognize a degree of sovereignty in a subordinated polity, what political theorists call layered or shared sovereignty.⁸

7. The emphasis on geopolitics in this latter version of Eurasianism figures in the title of an influential book by Alexander Dugin, “The Foundations of Geopolitics”: Aleksandr Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki: geopoliticheskoe budeshchee Rossii* (Moscow: Arktogeia, 1997). See chapter 4. We use Dugin’s first name in its English variant in the text and his Russian first name for his Russian publications.

8. James Sheehan, “The Problem of Sovereignty in European History,” *American Historical Review* 111, 1 (2006): 1–15, 2, 3 quoted; Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner, eds.,

Advocates of Eurasia, Eurafrika, and Afroasia had experienced the layered dimensions of imperial formations and could both envision independence from imperial rule and look beyond the nation-state. They sought overarching institutions to express—and possibly enforce—common projects while recognizing national difference and varying degrees of political autonomy within a larger structure. In the last half of the twentieth century, advocates for Eurafrika, Afroasia, and Eurasia had to make their way in an international scene that both reified the division of the world into national states (expressed in membership in the United Nations) and intruded—through UN agencies, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund—on those states’ control over economic and social life. The debates over Eurafrika and Afroasia in the 1950s and 1960s were about shaping untried forms of post-imperial sovereignty. In the 1990s, the relationship between Moscow and the fourteen ex-Soviet states as well as with the component parts of the Russian Federation itself were in question. In each case, the would-be makers of new social possibilities were constrained by already constituted and self-interested political and economic actors.

Military violations of sovereignty, like Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, are not the only problematic aspect of the post-imperial world order. The boundedness of the sovereign state implies that the welfare of the people of each state is a matter for that state alone; by “freeing” their colonies, imperial leaders freed themselves from responsibility for the social conditions and civil rights of the people they used to rule. Paralleling the idea of autonomous state sovereignty, theories of economic behavior stress individual autonomy—of the person, the corporation, or state—each of which is free to sink or swim in the waters of global commerce. During struggles against colonialism, advocates of independence pushed for support from international institutions committed to global justice, but once independence was achieved, poor states could only *appeal* to

Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Concept (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); John Agnew, *Globalization and Sovereignty* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2009); Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

richer states to redistribute some of their resources. At the same time, people within a sovereign country had limited means to enlist support beyond their borders for injustices or deprivations, whether caused by external forces or the rulers of their own countries.

Connections and Disconnections

The three projects for political reconfiguration examined in this book expressed aspirations to make connections—political, economic, and cultural—across land and sea and to respond to the challenges of both empire and narrow nationalism. They did so in different ways and without strong or consistent connections to each other.

The example of communist modernization in Central Asia appealed to some Asian radicals, and the USSR provided aid and connections to activists in the countries involved in the Afroasian movement.⁹ China was also in position to play the Afroasian card. But both Soviet and Chinese initiatives did as much to divide as to unite Afroasian states, with their various ideological postures and relations with western powers (chapter 3).

Eurasianists situated themselves first against western Europe and later, targeting the United States as well, against “the Atlantic,” while Eurafrica was a project that brought Europe and Africa together. Both concepts emphasized culture, but to different ends. Léopold Sédar Senghor, a major theorist of Eurafrica, imagined a shared “African” culture that embraced variations within the continent; N. S. Trubetskoi’s “Eurasia” focused on cultural affinity across a linguistically varied landscape. Senghor continually emphasized the complementarity of unlike civilizations, African and European, while Trubetskoi and other Eurasianists stressed the divergence of large-scale world cultures—Eurasian versus European. Trubetskoi was radically hostile to European “civilization,” and, while an agile operator in international social science, he acknowledged no European sources for his arguments in the 1920s and 1930s. In

9. Masha Kirasirova, “Sons of Muslims in Moscow: Soviet Central Asian Mediators to the Foreign East, 1955–62,” *Ab Imperio* 2011, 4: 106–32; Marek Eby, “Global Tashkent: Transnational Visions of a Soviet City in the Postcolonial World, 1953–1966,” *Ab Imperio* 2021, 4: 238–64.

the 1990s, the neo-Eurasianist Alexander Dugin drew on European sources of political theory and engaged in the politics of the European far right, but his goal was the rejection of what he saw as European social norms. Dugin bound the North Atlantic powers—Europe and North America—into a single hostile camp. His Russia-centered Eurasia did not overlap Afroasia or Eurafrica, although he did envision a Russian-led alliance with the “Poor South” against the “Rich West.”

Before World War II, anticolonial activists in Asia and Africa paid attention to cultural affinity within each continent. This cultural complex created the possibility for political relationships that would allow for both autonomy and cooperation. But what galvanized Afroasian movements was not so much cultural likeness as the struggle against imperialism and its aftermaths, notable in the continent-crossing connections forged by, among other groups, the League against Imperialism (1927–37) and the Bandung Conference of 1955. Some theorists and activists developed what might be termed an “anticolonial culture,” whose contents, as in the writing of Frantz Fanon, were defined by common struggle.¹⁰ The emerging Afroasian movements of the 1950s stood in opposition to calls for Eurafrica; anticolonial culture presented a direct challenge to Senghorian ideals of civilizational complementarity.

The point of juxtaposing Eurasia, Eurafrica, and Afroasia in this book is that all three concepts addressed a critical political issue of their times—the power of the world’s great empires and the uncertainty of how to escape and supersede them.

Eurasia and Eurafrica, in their manifestations in the 1920s and 1930s, reflected geopolitical awareness generated in the context of inter-imperial rivalry in the early twentieth century. They grew out of a widespread interest among political theorists as well as activists in organizing political relations around large blocs, transcending both imperial and national states. Among these endeavors were Pan-Africanism, Pan-Asianism, Pan-Slavism, and Pan-Arabism—movements that brought together people who claimed to have

10. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961); Ismay Milford, *African Activists in a Decolonising World: The Making of an Anticolonial Culture, 1952–1966* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

common cultural roots across vast tracts of land and in some cases oceans. Activists believed these connections could lead to collective action, perhaps trans-territorial governance but at least some form of alliance and cooperation.

Another impulse for thinking in large geographical terms was exemplified by the British scholar Halford John Mackinder. In an influential article published in 1904, Mackinder argued that mobility across the steppes and marshes of what he called “Euro-Asia” made that region into a “pivot” of history. The volatile politics of nomadic populations had led to the crystallization of imperial power, until countered by the “oceanic” strategies of the western European empires. Euro-Asia, he predicted, would revive in the age of railways.¹¹ Visions of world politics organized around blocs, such as those of Mackinder, had considerable influence before and after World War I, both among imperial leaders eager to extend their web of power and intellectuals hoping that federal relations among states within a large geopolitical sphere would produce a more stable order than competition among empires.¹²

Eurasian and Eurafrikan projects took shape in Russian and French imperial settings, but they looked beyond empire to a political formation that would override rivalries within it. Afroasian politics posited a new kind of power bloc of independent states that had overcome western imperialism. As the challenge to European empires grew more compelling in the years after World War II, Afroasian movements shifted back and forth between a revolutionary current directed against the United States and the states of western Europe but open to cooperation with the communist

11. Halford John Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *Geographical Journal* 23 (1904): 421–44.

12. On the importance of variants on the theme of blocs in Germany, the United States, and Great Britain, see Charles Maier, *Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), Gerard Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Liane Hewitt, “The World in Blocs: Leo Amery, the British Empire and Regionalist Anti-internationalism, 1903–1947,” *Journal of Global History* 2022, doi:10.1017/S1740022822000262. Trubetskoi did not cite Mackinder but was well aware and appreciative of Oswald Spengler’s related arguments in his *Decline of the West* (first published in 1922). Sergey Glebov, *From Empire to Eurasia: Politics, Scholarship, and Ideology in Russian Eurasianism, 1920s–1930s* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2017), 82.

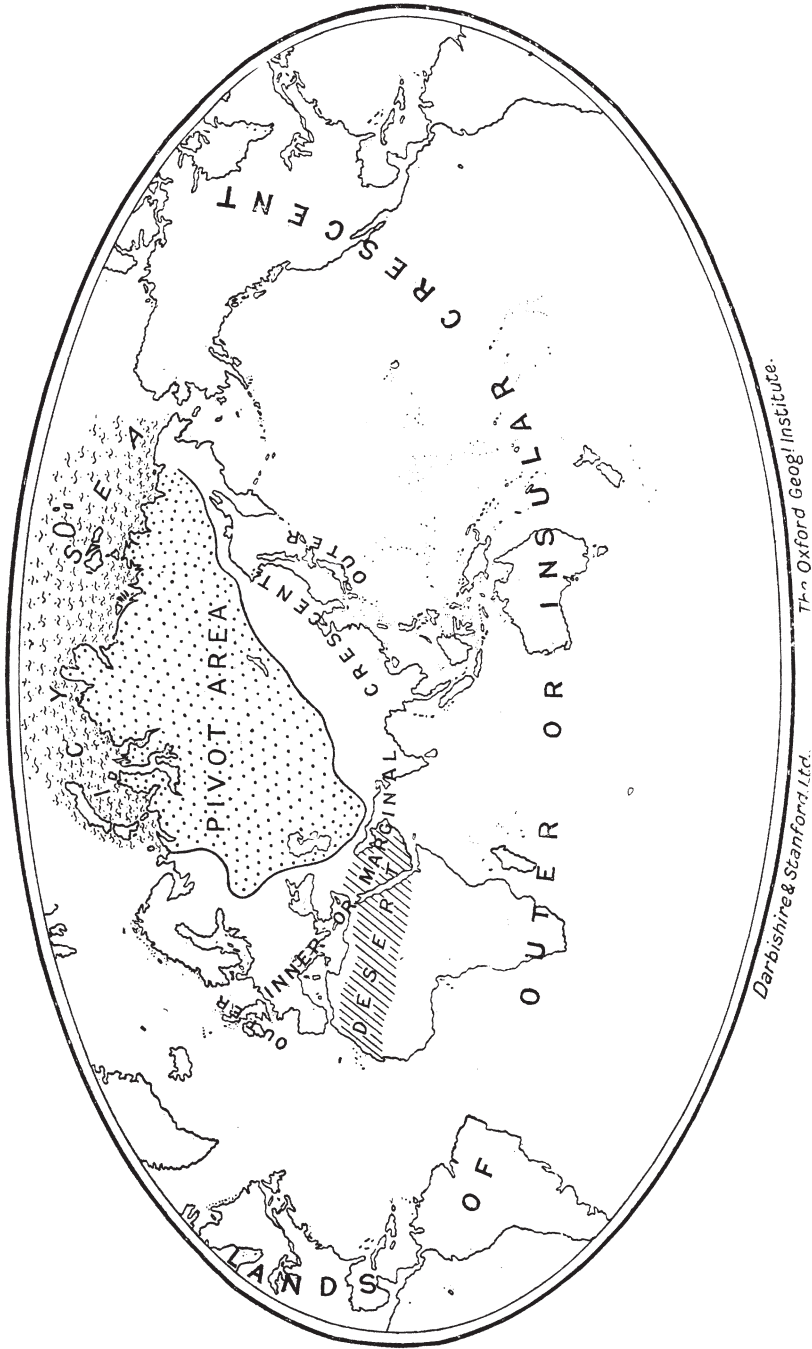


FIGURE 0.1. Halford Mackinder's map "The Natural Seats of Power," showing what he considered "the pivot of history," 1904.
Source: Halford John Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal* 23 (1904): 436.

Darbshire & Stanford Ltd.
The Oxford Geographical Institute.

world (complicated by the Sino-Soviet split) and a “third worldist” viewpoint that favored the creation of a bloc capable of collective political and economic cooperation that could stand up to both the first and the second worlds.

Although the term “third world” was coined by a French geographer in 1952,¹³ it appealed to political elites who saw the need to act collectively and did not want to get trapped in a world divided into two blocs. Afroasia could be imagined as a megabloc, but more compact regional groupings of like-minded ex-colonial states also emerged, for example the socialist-oriented “Casablanca Group” (Ghana, Guinea, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Mali, and Morocco) and the more conservative “Monrovia Group” (Liberia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and other English-speaking African countries). The initiatives of these new leaders signaled that the newly won status of nation-state was an insufficient foundation for their aspirations.

Imperial Origins

Eurasia, Eurafrica, and Afroasia each emerged out of empire and in opposition to western European claims to civilizational superiority. The three possibilities did not derive from preset concepts of an ideal polity, of a single people ruling themselves or otherwise, but from people’s experience of empire and their interest in transforming it.

Empires had devised ways to address the multiple and unlike peoples they ruled. Violence was fundamental to building and maintaining empires, but imperial polities, if they were to endure, had to intervene in a variety of ways in the lives of their subjects. Rulers of empire tried to ensure that components of the polity would form closer relationships with the imperial overlord than with each

13. Alfred Sauvy, “Trois mondes, une planète,” *L’Observateur*, 118 (1952), reprinted in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire* 12 (1986): 81–83. Sauvy argued that the Third World was “ignored, exploited, despised like the Third Estate” (of revolutionary France) and emphasized that “what matters to each of the two worlds is to conquer the third, or at least to have it on their side.” A less-known usage of the term came from the British High Commissioner to India describing speeches made at the Asian Relations Conference of 1947 calling on Asian territories to assert themselves and avoid dependence on either the United States or the USSR. Vineet Thakur, “An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947,” *International History Review* 41, 3 (2019): 673.

other. At the same time, empires needed intermediaries—sent out from the center, co-opted from incorporated societies, or recruited through exclusive ties to the rulers—who could connect their disparate lands to the faraway imperial authorities. Intermediaries were necessary but dangerous; they had to be kept loyal. Empires were held together not just through rewards and coercion, but through cultural and ideological representations that portrayed their power as in the nature of things, as systems of relations that gave people a place in a powerful entity, even if that place turned out to be on the lower level of a hierarchy.¹⁴

The imperial powers considered in this book followed different politics of difference at the turn of the twentieth century. France proclaimed the principle of equality for all its citizens but defined the vast majority of the inhabitants of its expanding overseas territories as “subjects,” excluded from citizens’ rights and vulnerable to forced labor, land seizures, or arbitrary punishments. Such invidious distinctions and deviations from principles of republican governance disturbed some members of the political establishment and were challenged by many colonial subjects, but French governments stuck to their practices of governing different people differently for decades.¹⁵ Russia, in contrast, was ruled by an autocracy. Rather than a dichotomy between a rights-bearing and a rights-less population, the differential allocation of rights and privileges among the diverse peoples of the empire was legally the prerogative of the Russian emperor. No one was a rights-bearing citizen.¹⁶

These were two strategies for imperial rule among many others. At the beginning of the twentieth century, much of the world’s population lived in or within the reach of some kind of imperial polity: in the long-standing but troubled Chinese empire, the durable Ottoman empire, the vast and still spreading Russian empire, or the

14. Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010). The literature on particular empires and the interactions among them is now vast.

15. For an overview of struggles over citizenship and colonialism, see Lorelle Semley, *To Be Free and French: Citizenship in France’s Atlantic Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

16. Jane Burbank, “An Imperial Rights Regime: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 7, 3 (Summer 2006): 397–431.

colonial empires of western Europe and Japan. In each of these settings, the forceful incorporation of people had led to the subordination and exploitation of ethnic, racial, and religious groups, their differences defined in multiple ways.

Empire, in colonial and other forms, had long been subject to challenges from multiple sources: intermediaries who sought autonomy or the takeover of the empire, rival empires that tried to weaken their rivals by supporting subordinated religious or ethnic groups in someone else's empire, and political movements that rejected the principle of imperial rule altogether. Starting with the revolutions in North and South America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, nations had been carved out of empires. But the societies that resulted from these revolutions were highly unequal and far from homogeneous. Making them more homogeneous—closer to the ideal-type of the nation-state—entailed violence and exclusion. And some of those nations had empire-building ambitions themselves.

Imperial ambitions intersected explosively in the early twentieth century. The most powerful empires of that time—Germany, France, Britain, Austria-Hungary, Russia, the Ottomans—drew each other into a war that mobilized and devastated subject peoples in many parts of the world and eventually brought in the United States and Japan. As the states that had dominated so much of the world threatened and undermined each other, what alternatives to the fractured and entangled assemblages of the unlike and the unequal were imaginable?

In the 1920s and 1930s, the three spatially and humanly ambitious projects of Eurasia, Eurafrika, and Afroasia coexisted with empires that had emerged victorious in 1918 as well as with new and expanding empires—Japan, the Soviet Union, fascist Italy, Nazi Germany. The idea that the nation-state should be the basic building block of global politics was not hegemonic in these decades. What sovereignty would mean in a post-imperial world had to be worked out; it was not a given to which all anticolonial activists aspired. None of the projects we examine leapt straight from the national to the global, and they did not necessarily claim that the principles on which they were based were universal. They each took a relational and regional view of connection and affinity,

while remaining tensely aware of the wider context of economic and political power.

We are not negating the importance of nationalism in the history of the twentieth century, especially the power of claims to national autonomy coming from people subordinated by colonial regimes. These histories have received dedicated attention from scholars of history, politics, and international relations.¹⁷ Eurasia, Eurafica, and Afroasia should be seen in relation to contemporaneous assertions of national identification. Eurasia, in both Trubetskoi's and Dugin's formulations, posited imperial rule, but recognized the diversity of the Eurasian polity; Senghor's Eurafica was confederal, with a layer of collective governance over French and African polities that were internally self-governing and reflecting their own notions of "nation"; the Afroasia of Bandung was an alliance of nation-states, building solidarity based on a long-term goal of transforming the world.

This book does not exhaust the possibilities of political relationships that cross large spaces without recreating the hierarchies of empire. The "pan" movements mentioned above—pan-African, pan-Slavic, pan-Arab—attempted trans- and post- imperial association. Devotees of Esperanto hoped that a new language could overcome national animosities.¹⁸ Religion cut across imperial lines: Britain, France, the Netherlands, and Russia claimed authority at various points over some of the largest populations of Muslims in the world, and they constantly feared that Islamic connections would threaten imperial ones—a fear recently revived in the face of networks advocating "jihad" across national and continental boundaries. World communism was also seen by many as an alternative to capitalist imperialism. The projects of the USSR intersected all three—Eurasian, Eurafican, and Afroasian—possibilities.¹⁹

17. For a recent forum presenting different scholarly views on the place of nationalism in world history, see *American Historical Review* 127, 1 (2022): 311–71. See also John Breuilly, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

18. Brigid O'Keeffe, *Esperanto and Languages of Internationalism in Revolutionary Russia* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

19. See the references to pan movements and communist internationalism in chapter 3.

The British Commonwealth, measured against other supranational and transcontinental possibilities, was in an ambiguous position. It was constructed more as an imperial than a post-imperial project.²⁰ The Commonwealth was initially a very white enterprise, in which settlers from the British Isles living in places where indigenous populations had been subordinated—Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa—gradually acquired the capacity to govern themselves in most respects while remaining subjects of the king or queen of England. In India beginning in the nineteenth century and later in parts of Africa, activists well-versed in British practices of governance at home and abroad laid claim to “imperial citizenship,” demanding rights and political voice in a transcontinental polity, something the British government had no intention of conceding. In the early twentieth century, Canada, Australia, and other dominions refused to allow Indians a right to immigrate into these parts of the British empire. This racially motivated rejection of a rights regime across spaces identified as “British” was instrumental in pushing the Indian National Congress to demand full independence rather than reform of the British empire.²¹

As most parts of the British Empire in Africa and Asia acquired independence from the 1940s through 1960s, the Commonwealth became a post-imperial umbrella for former British territories, but it was a weak structure unable to act on major issues. It did not stop

20. On the ideas behind the “white” vision of Empire and Commonwealth, see Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). In the aftermath of World War II, the British government looked to the Commonwealth to maintain British economic and political power, softening the transition from an imperial to a post-imperial project. But both the “white” and the “non-white” Commonwealth proved impossible to control—not least because of tension between the two. Daniel Haines, “A ‘Commonwealth Moment’ in South Asian Decolonization,” in Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake, eds., *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 185–202; John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of British World-System, 1830–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 569–73.

21. When India did become independent in 1947, its new status meant that the Indian state achieved formal equality with the other states of the former empire, but overseas Indians were left in limbo between their host countries and India. Raphaëlle Khan, “Sovereignty after Empire and the Search for a New Order: India’s Attempt to Negotiate a Common Citizenship in the Commonwealth (1947–1949),” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 49, 6 (2021): 1141–74.

the repression of African nationalism by a white minority government in Rhodesia in the 1960s, and it did not give rise to a citizenship that could be exercised anywhere in the Commonwealth.²²

What had united the United States in the 1780s was preserving its post-imperial existence from the threat of the powerful empires of that time. After independence the United States asserted that its defensive perimeter extended to the rest of the Americas even as territories in much of the region acquired sovereignty in their own right. Over time, the United States developed its own imperial reach. Some elites around the world found utility in an American connection, however unequal, while others hoped to find an antidote to American economic, political, and military power in connections among themselves—including, as we will see, the solidarity offered by Eurasia, Eurafrica, and Afroasia.

The range of post-imperial possibilities proposed over the twentieth century gave different meanings to “sovereignty,” not necessarily congruent with a singular people living in a defined space.²³ Afroasia posited a close cooperative relationship among sovereign states, Eurafrica a layering of sovereignty, Eurasia a singular authority but a multi-ethnic society, its distinctive social groups connected by cultural affinities and historical linkages.

Each of these projects had a relationship—an uneasy one—to questions of human rights and hence to the idea that certain principles were “universal.” Human rights discourse posited a set of values that was supposed to apply to all human beings irrespective of membership in a political unit. It presumed that sovereignty was not absolute. The difficulty was the absence or weakness of

22. Philip Murphy, *The Empire's New Clothes: The Myth of the Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). Even the Nationality Act of 1948, which conveyed a form of British citizenship to the subjects of dominions and colonies—including the right to enter and live in the United Kingdom—was undermined by the refusal of much of the “white” Commonwealth to allow nonwhites to exercise such rights in their countries, and once Great Britain gave up most of its colonies, it began to erode the rights that the Act had provided within the United Kingdom. The empire-wide citizenship provisions enacted by France in 1946 were more far-reaching and became part of the debate over Eurafrica in the 1950s (chapter 2).

23. On the uncertain nature of sovereignty in a decolonizing world, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), and the discussions of the topic based on her book in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 40, 3 (2020): 597–635.

enforcement mechanisms beyond the jurisdiction of any state. The International Court of Justice (established in 1946), the European Court of Justice (1952), and the International Criminal Court (2002) were attempts to regulate behavior at a global or regional level, but their jurisdiction and power were limited. The absence of enforcement mechanisms erased much of the practical significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that emerged from long discussions at the United Nations in 1948.

There was also considerable ambiguity about the relation of human rights to the colonial question as it played out in Africa and Asia. In the 1950s, African and Asian leaders used the language of rights to protest the violence, racial degradation, and exploitation that colonial regimes inflicted on inhabitants of their territories but left open the question of what rights formerly colonized people would have in their new states. That the ability of “a people” to govern itself should be considered a human right is a relatively new norm; it was only recognized by the United Nations in a resolution of December 1960. Scholars debate the importance of human rights arguments to anticolonial activism, but there is considerable agreement on what happened next. As political leaders of anticolonial movements established themselves in power, they became increasingly wary of the idea of universal rights; the kind of arguments that they had used against colonial regimes might be turned against them.²⁴ A small number of African leaders have been brought before international jurisdictions for human rights violations with varying degrees of success, while many Africans wonder why it is Africans who are most often brought before these bodies.

To argue, as do some African leaders, that criticism of human rights violations in African states in the name of human rights

24. Samuel Moyn sees arguments for independence and for human rights as quite distinct. *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). Roland Burke stresses the importance of human rights arguments to the decolonization process. *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). Both scholars agree that after acquiring independence, ex-colonial states tended to consider arguments based on universal human rights to be an intrusion on their sovereignty. See also Meredith Terretta, “From Below and to the Left? Human Rights and Liberation Politics in Africa’s Postcolonial Age,” *Journal of World History* 24, 2 (2013): 389–416.

constitutes a neocolonial intrusion is to make a claim about the inviolate nature of sovereignty. It is the flip side of the argument that once independent, ex-colonial states have no claim on the resources of the former colonizer.²⁵ The individual state, like the individual person, is in such conceptions a free and autonomous actor interacting with other actors in equivalent positions. These assertions are the object of dispute today.

Both appeals to the universality of rights and assertions of national sovereignty raised the difficult question of where the defense of rights could be located. Some advocates of Eurafrika thought that the ideals of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen might be best protected by institutions above the give-and-take of politics in the individual territory. The Afroasian movement argued that the rights of sovereignty gave each state control over natural resources that superseded multinational corporations' rights to property; some asserted that the people of poor states had a "right to development." Eurasianists were never concerned about rights, and in their more recent incarnations Eurasianist theorists explicitly rejected values declared to be universal and castigated them as western, decadent, and perverse.

What was at stake for the projects of Eurasia, Eurafrika, and Afroasia was the possibility of constructing institutions beyond the territorially bounded state that could offer protection and provide needed resources to people across large areas of the globe. In multiple sites, political thinkers and activists attempted to rethink political space in terms that were bigger than nationally bounded territories and smaller than global or universal scales. Their historical experiences had made clear to them both the dangers and the possibilities of connections across space.

25. Christian Olaf Christiansen and Steven L. B. Jensen conclude that ending colonial rule both freed colonizing states from historic responsibility for their effect on the economic, social, and political rights of colonized people and freed newly independent states from scrutiny for their violation of rights: "Decolonisation—owing to its sovereignty emphasis—would over time prove to be the perfect storm for rights denial." "The Road from 1966: Social and Economic Rights after the International Covenant," in Steven L. B. Jensen and Charles Walton, eds., *Social Rights and the Politics of Obligation in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 293.

Themes

Several themes run through our account of the histories of Eurasia, Eurafrika, and Afroasia.

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL SOLIDARITIES

A conceptual anchor of our analysis comes from the writings of the Senegalese politician, philosopher, and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Senghor argued that there were two forms of political association, “vertical solidarity”—the relationship of the poor and weak with the rich and powerful—and “horizontal solidarity,” by which he meant a relationship of equals among the formerly colonized.²⁶ For Senghor, horizontal solidarity without vertical connections was unity in poverty; it risked perpetuating the inequalities to which colonialism had given rise. Vertical solidarity without horizontal ties was another version of colonial domination. However, horizontal solidarity combined with vertical solidarity would give the poor the collective strength to make demands on the rich.

When Senghor introduced these concepts, the conjugation of horizontal and vertical solidarities seemed a promising possibility. France, weakened by World War II and striving to hold on to its overseas territories, had to respond to the demands of its overseas peoples, first for citizenship, then for equality among citizens.²⁷ Senghor’s strategy became the basis for making claims within what had been the French empire, renamed the French Union in 1946 and the Community in 1958. Efforts to obtain equal wages, benefits, and rights to representation for all of France’s citizens, in African territories as well as European France, achieved a measure of success, enough to push French leaders to ask whether France could afford to keep its overseas territories.

Senghor’s schema is relevant to other political settings and projects. For the proponents of Eurasia, Eurafrika, and Afroasia, the

26. One of his earliest expressions of the horizontal-vertical dialectic was in the newspaper he edited, *La Condition Humaine*, July 11, 1948. Senghor’s views will be discussed more fully in chapter 2.

27. Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

interplay of vertical and horizontal ties was critical. The idea of a Eurasian connection between Slavic regions and the huge landmass to their east was supposed to affirm civilizational affinities under the oversight of the Russian state. Most Eurasianists postulated that groups on this vast terrain influenced each other's cultural practices, but that political connections ran vertically from each group to the overall ruler. Advocates of Eurafrika argued that the horizontal affinity of Africans within a Eurafrikan polity would allow them access to the resources needed to close the gap between colonizer and colonized and thus to overcome a history of oppression and exploitation. Afroasianists wanted to replace the vertical structures of empire with horizontal connections among the formerly colonized, enabling them to challenge the power of former colonizers in western Europe, the United States, and, for some, the Soviet Union. All three movements promised to change the relationship of space and power and to overcome the economic and cultural superiority of "the west," either by operating within asymmetrical structures to reduce their inequities or by challenging them head-on.

But the very reasoning that made these concepts so attractive was also an obstacle to their success: extremes of inequality meant that the poor needed the help and patronage of the rich. Collective efforts to challenge inequality between Europe and North America and Africa and Asia did not necessarily address political and economic inequality within the states that had emerged from colonization. After 1991 many of the states that had been Soviet republics remained dependent upon economic connections and resources of the Russian Federation. The multiple pathways out of empire led the former components of French, British, and Russian empires to unanticipated futures.

POLITICAL IMAGINATION

The most durable contribution of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* has not been his analysis of nationalism but his emphasis on the political significance of imagination.²⁸ Imagination, even

28. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Max Bergholz, "AHR Reappraisal: Thinking the

in what is sometimes considered the age of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, went beyond a national focus. Intellectuals and activists focused their thoughts and efforts at popular mobilization on a variety of potential units, from the provincial to the transcontinental. Activists, as Anderson pointed out, traveled in different circuits; contacts made inside, across, and outside state borders helped to shape conceptions of what kinds of political entities were possible—Eurasia, Eurafrika, and Afroasia among them.

National projects were beset by tensions and conflicts that threatened their coherence and attractiveness. Anderson insists that nationalism is a “horizontal” construct, positing a common identification with a singular nation. Yet his foundational example—the nationalism of creole societies of the Americas in the early nineteenth century—emerged in the condition of vertically organized power. The societies of South America were highly stratified, with a small landlord class of European origin at the top, commanding the services and labor of peasants of indigenous origin and of slaves and their descendants. Tensions between the opposing pulls of vertical and horizontal solidarity produced both defenses of hierarchy and demands for equality and inclusion.²⁹

AFFINITY

A third theme is social affinity, imagined or experienced. Although there has been a strong tendency in history and the social sciences to emphasize like-to-like relationships and to see them as constituting collective actors—the proletariat, African Americans, the LGBTQ community—relationships between the unlike and the unequal have also shaped history and inhabit the present. Eurasia, Eurafrika, and Afroasia were projects based on affinity among

Nation: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, by Benedict Anderson,” *American Historical Review* 123, 2 (2018): 518–28, esp. 519.

29. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 16; Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Hilda Sabato, *Republics of the New World: The Revolutionary Political Experiment in Nineteenth-century Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018); Marcela Echeverri, *Indian and Slave Royalists in the Age of Revolution: Reform, Revolution, and Royalty in the Northern Andes, 1780–1825* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

people, not identity.³⁰ Different types of affinity presented different possibilities for collective action. A person in Senegal under French rule might self-describe as a member of the Serer ethnic group, a speaker of the Wolof language, an inhabitant of the colony of Senegal, an African, a subject or perhaps a citizen of the French empire, a member of a religious confraternity, and a person sharing racial and cultural connections to people of African descent in the Americas. Such a person might “be” male, female, a youth, an elder, a person of high or low status. Affinity could be territorial or cosmopolitan.

The advocates of Eurasia emphasized elements of a shared history, based on environmental pressures and social responses across a vast space. Eurasian conditions meant that widely dispersed peoples were expected to have developed distinctive social behaviors, yet still share assumptions about how political life should be conducted. Senghor and other advocates of Eurafica argued that what could connect people was not just cultural commonality but cultural complementarity. In their view, the rationalistic attitudes of Europeans and the more intuitive, familial notions of Africans enabled two-way interactions and contributed to the richness of humanity. In contrast, the politics of Afroasian activists was less about cultural foundations for affinity than the experience of colonial oppression and the ongoing need to combat European imperialism and end economic exploitation.

These projects for affinities across large spaces constituted challenges to the politics of identification that in various forms asserted likeness as the basis for allegiance and drew sharp lines between those included in a group and outsiders—defined by nationalism, ethnic politics, or racial identification. The promoters of Eurasia, Eurafica, and Afroasia did not exclude other forms of affinity or collective action, but they were trying to get people to situate themselves and their aspirations in wider frameworks, at a time when other political entrepreneurs were advocating affiliations that were defined more narrowly.

30. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29, 1 (2000): 1–47. Scholarship has tended to emphasize either the power of “identity politics” or else the politics of connectivity and inclusivity, but both positions are claims, assertions that exist in relation to each other, in a contradictory or perhaps complementary manner.

Advocates of Eurafrika had to build a bridge across the racial divide that decades of European colonialism had fostered and that persisted even when the French government claimed to repudiate invidious distinctions among its citizens. Eurasianism began in the 1920s by celebrating multiplicity of cultures and revived in the 1990s under the influence of the Soviet ideology of the “friendship of peoples.” That same regime, however, had claimed that some ethnic groups harbored “enemies of the people.” Moreover, despite official recognition of multiple ethnicities within the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, hierarchical distinctions between Russians and non-Russians as well as racist stereotyping remained salient elements in social life.³¹ Afroasianists were themselves divided over whether their project was anti-European or anti-imperialist, and attempts to forge unity among the “darker nations” faced different forms of division, prejudice, and conflict within the Afroasian universe.³² Despite the widespread repudiation since World War II of the kind of white supremacist ideology that underpinned colonialism, racialized distinction keeps resurfacing in many world areas, inflecting social possibilities for well-being and political participation.³³

RECONFIGURING SPACE

The advocates of Eurasia, Eurafrika, and Afroasia did not presume that political space was neatly bounded by linguistic or cultural frontiers or by a long common history.³⁴ The concepts of space they deployed were dynamic, shaped by both imagination and political action. Eurafrika started with a spatial configuration created by

31. David Rainbow, ed., *Ideologies of Race: Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union in Global Context* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019). For comparative perspectives, see Sarga Moussa and Serge Zenkine, eds., *L'imaginaire raciologique en France et en Russie, XIX^e-XX^e siècle* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2019).

32. Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007).

33. See Chari and Verdery, “Thinking between the Posts,” 26.

34. Alternative ways of conceiving of space, whether in terms of defining regions or connections across regions, has become a major preoccupation of scholars. For a recent compendium of different issues and approaches, see Matthias Middell, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies* (London: Routledge, 2019).

French empire-building. This geography was combined with the project of European integration to create a complex political unity, in which different European states (six were in play at the time) and former French and Belgian colonies in Africa would exercise certain functions within their established boundaries while ceding others to common institutions. Just who would have political voice and how and where it would be exercised was disputed for a decade, a time when the space of the French Union and of Europe were both in question.

Eurasianists emerged from a space that had been configured by the world's largest empire. Tsarist rulers changed the internal map of the territory multiple times, and Soviet leaders followed suit.³⁵ Eurasianist attempts to found the geography of power on acceptance of diversity, overlapping cultures, and civilizational attributes have contributed to recent ideological initiatives in the Russian Federation. In Putin's version of a Eurasian polity, adherence is not a matter of choice but an historical necessity: Russia must defend its "great space" against other geopolitical actors.³⁶

The politics of Afroasia involved a rethinking of space at a global level, severing the asymmetrical connection of south to north. It linked independent states more through a common project than in common institutions. The insistence on the part of ex-colonial leaders like Kwame Nkrumah that a world divided into sovereign nation-states did not have to be a world in which each state pursued only its own political destiny was a break with conventional theories of nationalism and of international relations.³⁷ But that project sat uneasily with the way decolonization was proceeding in the 1950s and 1960s, territory by territory, through negotiation or revolution. The nation-state may not have been what Nkrumah and others most wanted, but it was what they could get.

35. Jane Burbank, "All under the Tsar: Russia's Eurasian Trajectory," in Yuri Pines, Michal Biran, Jörg Rüpke, and Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum, eds., *The Limits of Universal Rule: Eurasian Empires Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 342-75.

36. The most influential theorist of Russian "great space" politics is Alexander Dugin. See among his many publications, Aleksandr Dugin, *Geopolitika postmoderna: Vremena novykh imperii. Ocherki geopolitika XXI veka* (St. Petersburg: Amfora, 2007) and chapter 4 in this volume.

37. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*.

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