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Imagined Individuals: National Autobiography and Postcolonial Self-Fashioning

Philip Holden

Department of English Language and Literature
National University of Singapore
elhpj@nus.edu.sg

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Asia Research Institute

National University of Singapore

Shaw Foundation Building, Block AS7, Level 4

5 Arts Link, Singapore 117570

Tel: (65) 6874 3810

Fax: (65) 6779 1428

Website: www.ari.nus.edu.sg

Email: arisec@nus.edu.sg

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Imagined Individuals: National Autobiography and Postcolonial Self-Fashioning

Philip Holden

In his regular column in the *Manila Bulletin* in December 2002, Philippine Foreign Secretary Blas Ople added his voice to calls for a second Bandung Conference to be held in Indonesia in 2005, marking the 50th anniversary of the Asian-African Conference of April 1955. If the bipolar world to which Bandung addressed itself had now passed away, Ople noted, it had been replaced with a unipolar one, with a “monopoly on power now exercised by the G-8, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, . . . the Bretton Woods institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, and a vastly enlarged NATO and European Union.” Under such circumstances, the need for “a new rallying point” for nations disadvantaged by the new world economic order became even more pressing. Invoking the spirit of Bandung, Ople celebrated the actions of “luminous figures of the Third World, ranging from Sukarno of Indonesia, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Chou En-Lai of China, Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Fidel Castro of Cuba, Tito of Yugoslavia, Bandaranaike of Ceylon, Nkrumah of Ghana, and Carlos P. Romulo of the Philippines” who “gathered on the call of President Sukarno to chart an independent foreign policy of the developing countries, steering a middle course between the two nuclear-armed superpower titans, the United States and the Soviet Union.”

Ople’s speech exemplifies the gap between what G. H. Jansen caustically called the “two conferences” held at Bandung in April, 1955. The first, Jansen noted, was “the real conference, about which not very much is known, about which people care even less”: the second a “quite different conference, a crystallization of what people wanted to believe had happened which, as a myth, took on reality in the Bandung Principles and, later, in the Bandung Spirit” (182). The first conference did not gather on the call of Sukarno, but emerged from the deliberations of the Colombo group of prime ministers initiated at the suggestion of Indonesian Prime Minister Ali Sastroamijoyo (Sastroamijoyo 275, Kahin 2). Of Ople’s “luminous figures,” only five actually attended: Nkrumah, Bandaranaike, Castro and Tito were absent.¹ This conference was marked by a series of barely-defused confrontations. Mohammed Ali’s refusal to countenance Nehru’s changed order of proceedings was symptomatic of a tension over Kashmir which, “like a red thread” would “colour all kinds of discussion at the . . . Conference” (Abdulgani 78). Ceylon Prime Minister John Kotelawala’s demand that any definition of colonialism include Soviet domination in Eastern Europe provoked a sharp retort from Zhou Enlai, and was only negotiated through calculated ambiguity in the final communiqué. There were also surprising omissions. Only six African nations were formally represented, and Liberia protested in vain when no African representative was selected for the subcommittee assigned the task of drafting a statement on colonialism (Kahin 21). Of the over three hundred official delegates from twenty-nine states, none were women.²

Yet Jansen is right when he stresses that the “myth” of Bandung, as a story about the remaking of the world order, has become more important than the conference itself. Embodied in the conference’s final communiqué is a vision of a possible future that now, if anything, seems less possible than it did in the 1950s. Negotiating between the two blocs of Fordist/Keynsian Western Europe and North America, and the State Socialism of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the

Bandung Communiqué aimed not to constitute a further “regional bloc” but, in effect, to critique the failures of both blocs as heirs of the Enlightenment and to urge the creation of an international public sphere in which sovereign nations might interact on a basis of equality. It thus called for proper representation of Asian-African countries on international bodies such as the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency, and an end to colonialism in order to realise “the principle of self-determination of peoples and nations” embodied in the U.N. Charter (“Final Communiqué” 433). Equality would be achieved through the recognition of “national sovereignty,” with “all nations” being granted “the right freely to choose their own political and economic systems and their own way of life” (436). This vision of sovereign nation-states as actors would never be realized. Indeed, in the new regime of transnational “flexible accumulation” (Harvey 147) or “disorganized capitalism” (Offe 3) the nation-state’s autonomy would be eroded: if some members of the Third World might move from the periphery towards the centre of an economic world system, many others would seem doomed to constitute a “Fourth World” of marginal rural economies and urban townships or shanty-towns (Harvey 37). Yet the Bandung spirit remains a powerful touchstone for states, communities or individuals on or outside the periphery; it offers a vision of a different world order, and thus a hope that the present order is not perpetual.

What Bandung crystallized was not so much a reality as an international social imaginary in which emergent nation-states take on the attributes of individuals, and perform the function of autonomous actors. Social imaginaries, as we shall see, emerge from narratives, and story-telling played a key part in the production and dissemination of the spirit of Bandung, and indeed still plays a central role in contemporary invocations. Many of the names associated with Bandung wrote widely-disseminated autobiographies which map the unfolding of an individual life onto the narrative of a nation’s self-discovery and achievement of maturity through independence, in the process creating a social imaginary which represents the postcolonial state as an autonomous individual. Just as the conference was conducted in English, so these autobiographies were written in English and reached a wide international audience. And the social imaginary these texts create is gendered: if they seem to celebrate the realization of individual autonomy through the “heroic masculinity” of their protagonists, their genesis is complex: they are frequently written in collaboration with women, or with female characters in crucial relational roles.

This study concentrates attention on three autobiographies, those of Nehru, Sukarno, and Nkrumah. Nehru’s was written almost two decades before Bandung, and forms a template which Nkrumah and Sukarno would follow with significant variations. All three are documents of struggles to create new social imaginaries after colonialism through narratives that personify national sovereignty. And while these texts, as all texts, are hybrid, transcultural, in part diasporic, containing internal contradictions, we should not notice only these features from the vantage point of the present. Perhaps more significant are the texts’ disciplinary functions: their efforts to mould the nation, incite colonial subjects to recognize themselves as citizens of the new nation, and to spark recognition in an international audience by placing the nation’s narrative within a larger one of human self-realization. Sukarno’s speech at Bandung traced this narrative’s origins to Paul Revere’s ride 180 years earlier (4); Nehru was deluged with international correspondence regarding his autobiography. “‘Thank you,’ this creature cries from the wilderness,” wrote an American reader of

Nehru's text, "upon seeing a light shining in the distance, in the darkness, but steady, very steady, and impervious to wind or rain or the hypocrisy of mankind."³

Nehru

Of the three autobiographies Nehru's is the longest and most baroque. Written during its author's imprisonment from June 1934 to early February 1935, it thus precedes India's independence by more than a decade. *An Autobiography* initially follows a fairly even-paced chronology, describing its protagonist's Kashmiri ancestors' migration to the Mughal court in Northern India, his childhood, study at Harrow and Cambridge, and return to India in 1912. Nehru as protagonist is rescued from the "utter insipidity" of national life (28) by developments in national politics – the return of Gandhi, his organization of the Satyagraha Sabha to oppose the suppression of civil liberties in the Rowlatt Bills, and the massacre of peaceful protestors by British troops in the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar in 1919. These pivotal events in the national narrative are matched by other parallel incidents which implicate him personally: his fortuitous yet transformative involvement with the *kisan* (peasant) movement in the United Provinces, and his imprisonment at Nabha, one of the "princely states" which had nominal independence in British India.⁴ After this crucial turn in the narrative, *An Autobiography* then becomes the unfolding story of the quest for Indian independence, in which personal and national narratives merge. Events such as its protagonist's accession to the presidency of the Indian National Congress in 1929, his taking of the pledge of independence in 1930, and his participation in civil disobedience are described in detail, and interspersed with analysis of their political and social implications; there is also considerable reflection on the process of political reform and revolution, and upon internal conflicts within the independence movement and within the Congress itself. The reflective element of the autobiography is enhanced by incidents within the story it tells: Nehru's visit to Europe in 1926-1927 and his seven terms of imprisonment encourage a process of self-analysis that is largely carried out through the medium of writing, culminating in the writing of the text of the *Autobiography* itself.

The latter part of the *Autobiography* is clearly influenced by Nehru's long periods of imprisonment in the 1930s. There is no substantial personal narrative to tell, his "brief periods outside prison have . . . an air of unreality about them" (184), and indeed the working title for the book was *In and Out of Prison*.⁵ While the narrative of the quest for national independence continues, there is more reflection, and accompanying discussion is thematic rather than relating to a specific incident. Thus the momentum of the autobiography slows to a glacial crawl as events close in on the narrative present. Plot is replaced by a focus on character, and Nehru's engagement with the "paradox" of Gandhi's putative irrationality yet his unavoidable centrality to the independence struggle.

A close examination of Nehru's autobiography challenges contemporary critical common sense about the way the nation is thought. The idea of the nation as an imagined community constituted through narrative has become a truism of contemporary literary and cultural studies. Print capitalism, in Benedict Anderson's formulation, produces a sense of simultaneity through such cultural products as the novel and the newspaper, making the formation of a national community of members with common interests possible. Nationalism is also reliant upon a narrative of becoming which traces its origins back to a primordial past, and which projects the full realization of the nation into the distant future (Nairn 348-349, Gellner 49). Yet

these accounts are curiously silent on the manner in which the state relates to the nation, and makes the realization of the nation possible. If the nation is often imagined in terms of family or community, the nation-state which enables the recognition of the nation in the anti-colonial struggle is described in terms of post-Enlightenment notions of the individual. The state is a rational actor on an international stage: it demands recognition of its autonomy, not colonial enslavement by or neo-colonial dependence upon another. The state disciplines the nation, enables it to speak with a single voice: thus other states should not intervene in its “internal affairs.” This division between nation and state is not explicitly theorized, but rather exists at the level of a social imaginary, embedded within the stories national movements tell, feelings of solidarity they invoke, and the disciplinary self-fashioning they urge upon citizens-to-be (Gaonkar 4, Taylor 106). And the social imaginary is gendered: the nation acquires doxologically feminine properties—associations with emotion, tradition, culture, nature, the primordial—while the state is attached to the doxologically masculine qualities of rationality, modernity, discipline, continence.

Nehru’s *Autobiography*, as we might expect, concentrates upon the party and the future state as much as upon the nation. The Indian nation as *Bharat Mata*, Mother India, was already a central element in a nationalist social imaginary which stretches back through Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore to the nineteenth century. Nehru’s projected second volume of the *Autobiography* quickly burgeoned into a different narrative, an encounter with this figure, the “lady with the past,” “[s]hameful and repellent . . . occasionally, perverse and obstinate, sometimes even a little hysteric” (*Discovery of India* 563); in the first her presence is more muted, but it forms a common-sense foundation for the unfolding story. The nationalist mobilization of the 1920s, Nehru notes, “came and gave hope to her mind and strength to her much-battered body” (254) yet India remains, in an intriguing foreshadowing of theories of nationalism from the 1970s onward, “[t]wo-faced like Janus,” looking “both backwards into the past and forward into the future,” attempting to “combine the two” (254).

In *An Autobiography*, India’s narrative of self-realization as a nation-state is paralleled with Nehru’s own relationship with his wife, Kamala. The narrative first registers Kamala’s presence in a brief paragraph describing her and Nehru’s wedding, juxtaposed with a much longer account of the protagonist’s solitary adventure climbing in the Himalayas. From this dismissive beginning, Kamala’s presence grows, Nehru expressing pride in her taking part in picketing of shops in Allahabad (214-215) and in her determined support for him in prison (567). However, the presiding image of Kamala in *An Autobiography* is one of an invalid struggling with a long illness: the narrative proper concludes with Nehru paying visits to her on her sick-bed, and with the hope of improvement, but the dedication of the narrative, projecting beyond the narrative present, is “To Kamala, who is no more” ([iii]). Towards the end of the narrative, Nehru’s protagonist looks back on their marriage with regret, noting the profound “difference in our mental outlook” (561). In extra-textual comments, India’s future Prime Minister was also deeply disturbed by her return to “superstition” as her death approached. “Long talks with K,” he noted in his prison diary in 1935, “sometimes irritating and disturbing; at other times soothing. How very child-like she is!”⁶ Nehru saw her growing religious inclinations as “all rather vague” and “a type of hysteria”: he recounts that he talked with her “of science, psychology, religion, politics & economics in the larger sense” but felt his “efforts had wholly been in vain.”⁷

When attempting to write the second volume of his autobiography in 1940, Nehru returned to the figure of Kamala. “K. symbol of Indian women to me –in a sense of India. . . of women in general,” he wrote in his initial notes for an abandoned project, and then, more wistfully, “Did I know her? Did she know me[?] . . . Was it our fault or fault of this environment we lived in?”⁸ Kamala becomes representative for Nehru of a paradox which is central to *An Autobiography*: how can the primordial nature of the nation be disciplined to realize a modern nation-state? “India is so like a woman,” he had noted in a previous letter, “She attracts and repels.”⁹

The notion of nation as woman, then, is part of a social imaginary with Nehru’s narrative inherits. What is new, perhaps, in *An Autobiography*, is a parallel association which builds upon this, in which the state, and its precursor in the nationalist movement, is associated with doxologically masculine “technologies of the self.” On a personal level, this is exemplified by Nehru’s own adoption of the disciplinary elements of nineteenth-century bourgeois masculinity. In jail, he adopts an elaborate regimen of self-care: adhering “to a strict time-table” in order to appreciate “the value of work and exercise . . . for without them one is apt to go to pieces” (348). He shaves regularly every morning, in contrast to others: “as a rule, people gave it up and slacked in other ways” (348). At another point, he attributes his good health to his avoidance of “rich and excessive” food of the Indian middle classes, sun-baths in prison, and exercises (396). At the same time, Gandhi’s radical experiments with truth on his own body are dismissed. Gandhi’s bad health while fasting, letting “himself to go down hill,” is seen as eccentric personal indulgence (398). “I understand and appreciate simplicity, equality, self-control, but not the mortification of the flesh,” Nehru writes while discussing Gandhi towards the end of his narrative:

Just as an athlete trains his body, I believe that the mind and habits have also to be trained and brought under control. It would be absurd to expect that a person who is given to too much self-indulgence can endure much suffering or show unusual self-control or behave like a hero when the crisis comes. To be in good moral condition requires at least as much training as to be in good physical condition. But that certainly does not mean asceticism or self-mortification. (510-511)

“Self-mortification” here can lead to weakness, rather than strength, to a turning inwards rather than preparing the protagonist to venture out into the public sphere. Gandhi’s experiments, in this view, have no object and are self-consuming, just as Gandhi himself has no theory of the state.

An important feature of Nehru’s account of masculine self-fashioning illustrated above is how, as in Victorian texts such as those of Herbert Spencer or Samuel Smiles, accounts of bodily discipline quickly move beyond the body and take flight into figuration, in which the physical stands for the moral or spiritual. The quest for integrity and trimness thus quickly extends even to the choice of reading matter: “I occupied myself with books, going from one type of reading to another, but usually sticking to ‘heavy’ books. Novels made one feel mentally slack, and I did not read many of them” (352). And it becomes a powerful metaphor for the discipline necessary to resist colonialism:

[Gandhi] did succeed amazingly in giving backbone and character to the Indian people. There were many, however, who developed neither much backbone nor character, but who imagined that a limp body and a flabby look might be the outward semblance of piety.

It was this extraordinary stiffening-up of the masses that filled us with confidence. A demoralized, backward, and broken-up people suddenly straightened their backs and lifted their heads and took part in disciplined, joint action on a country-wide scale. (76)

The vocabulary of the British public school, *mens sana in corpore sano*, is here deployed to describe--and indeed give agency and coherence to -- an emerging, disciplined nationalist movement from a “demoralized” national populace. Gendered notions of character, images of bodily integrity, and the nascent nationalist movement are continually woven together by Nehru’s metaphors: writing of the humility needed for party leadership of the masses, he notes that “conceit, like fat on the human body, grows imperceptibly, layer upon layer, and the person whom it affects is unconscious of the daily accretion” (206).

The place in which this discipline is produced is prison. Nehru’s autobiography, we have noted, describes his many terms of imprisonment in the 1920s and 1930s, and the working title of the manuscript was *In and Out of Prison*. At one level, imprisonment provides Nehru a ready metaphor for colonialism. He explicitly compares Naini prison to British India, an outward show of efficiency masking a regime “with little or no care for human material” which aims to break inmates so that they “may not have the least bit of spirit left in them,” and which is maintained through the complicity of “stool pigeons” who keep the inmates divided (224-225). Like British India, the prison’s apparent governmental modernity – its regulations which hint at self-improvement and reform – masks a feudal order in which underpaid warders exhort money from the inmates, and make no effort to “consider the prisoner as an individual, a human being, and to improve or look after his mind” (221). Yet prison has a more complex role than this in the text. Prison is the place where, paradoxically, Nehru can perfect techniques of self care, devise elaborate regimens of bodily training, reading, and contemplation. In a letter to his father during his first imprisonment in Lucknow jail in 1922,¹⁰ the political activist, perhaps with some bravado, notes that he will “rejoice” in the solitude of imprisonment, and the opportunities for contemplation it affords. Prison, for Nehru, is a place of individuation and separation: his comrades are largely shadowy figures, and he describes a regime of spinning, exercise, and the microscopic examination of the various animals in his cell, all activities which owe little to the presence of companions. In his prison diary in 1932, he notes that “it is a sore trial to live with people in a barrack,” and is indeed tempted to prefer the loneliness of solitary confinement.¹¹ In Lucknow Jail, he writes of an “utter want of privacy” and notes that “I often yearned for solitude” (93). And the solitude of prison produces the text itself. Begun in depression in Dera jail in 1934, the text of the autobiography enables its narrator to “think straight”: the narration of the life it contains constitutes a twofold “personal journey” which concludes in the narrative present (560).

The context of imprisonment also generates an imaginative topography through which Nehru maps the gendered opposition between male and female bodies, state and nation, onto the landscape of India itself. For prison is a place for the apprehension of the sublime through a viewing of landscapes and objects glimpsed beyond the prison walls. In part this is a technological sublime: Nehru’s wonder at the strange beauty of airliners passing over on their way to Batavia, for example, moves beyond the immediate anti-colonial struggle to his investment in the austere modernity of Le Corbusier’s Chandigarh – diminishing forever the tawdry colonial modernity of Lutyens’ New Delhi – or the massed concrete of the Bhakra-Nangal

dam. Yet the sublime is usually associated with landscapes, and in particular the glimpse of the massifs of the Himalaya from gaoles such as Dehra Dun or Almora. Even when confined to his cell and unable to see the mountains, Nehru finds that his mind “is full of them” and he is “ever conscious of their nearness,” sensing a “secret intimacy” between himself and the landscape (354).

Throughout Nehru’s text, indeed, Kashmir and the Himalaya in general represent autonomy, and the cool rationality of modernity. The title of the *Autobiography*’s first chapter, “Descent from Kashmir,” is deliberately punning – it looks back to Nehru’s Kashmiri ancestors, but it also dramatizes a fall into “a sea of Indian and non-Indian humanity” (13). Nehru’s narrative is punctured by attempts – either actual or vicarious – to return to these heights: he describes in detail a visit to the snowy landscapes of Norway while at Cambridge, and the chapter “My Wedding and an Adventure in the Himalayas,” describing events in 1916, contains only one paragraph referring to the former event, and much discussion of the latter, describing the protagonist’s “strange satisfaction in these wild and desolate haunts of nature” (37). The “mountain-top” of the Swiss sanatorium in a 1926 visit, “surrounded by the winter snow” provides a space of “far freer human relationships” (148), while the Himalayas continue to be a source of inspiration throughout the narrative. When he is moved to Almora prison to be nearer his wife, Nehru rejoices and launches into a typical reverie “to be back in these mountains, and as our car sped along the winding road the cold morning air and the unfolding panorama brought a sense of exhilaration. Higher and higher we went: the gorges deepened; the peaks lost themselves in the clouds: the vegetation changed until the firs and pines covered the hill-sides” (568). The postscript to the *Autobiography*, “Five Years Later,” ends with a return to Kashmir which closes the narrative: Nehru returns to his homeland after “an absence of twenty-three years. “I wandered about the Valley and the higher mountains and climbed a glacier, and felt that life was worth while” (611).

As with bodily discipline, so the landscape of Kashmir takes on a metaphorical valence both inside and outside Nehru’s text. In his first epilogue to the *Autobiography*, the author compares both his own life and the project of the realization of the nation to mountain climbing. His own struggle, Nehru notes, has been marked by a “spiritual loneliness”; he is “a stranger and alien in the West,” but also has “an exile’s feeling” in his own country:

The distant mountains seem easy of access and climbing, the top beckons, but, as one approaches, difficulties appear, and the higher one goes the more laborious becomes the journey and the summit recedes into the clouds. Yet the climbing is worth the effort and has its own joy and satisfaction. (596-597)

This metaphorization of a solitary individual gaining autonomy in a mountain landscape also recalls Nehru’s use of mountain climbing to describe the process of reading and acquiring knowledge in a letter to his daughter, Indira, written at the time he was completing the *Autobiography*. “Books,” Nehru writes, “give us the experiences and thoughts of innumerable others, often the wisest of their generation, and lift us out of our narrow ruts. Gradually as we go up the mountainsides fresh vistas come into view, our vision extends further and further, and a sense of proportion comes to us.”¹² And this language recalls a letter written a decade previously to his father, in which nationalism and the growth of knowledge merge.¹³ Since his return from England, Nehru confesses, he has had little time for reading, caught up in “the atmosphere of the law courts . . . , the continuous contact with the sordid side of human nature,” and this situation destroys the “power of free thought”:

We dare not think or follow up the consequences of our thought. We remain in the ruts and the valleys incapable of looking up towards the mountain tops. And the finer side of life escapes us, we cannot even appreciate art or beauty, for everything that is outside the ruts and the valleys terrifies us. (4-5)

Save from this “doom,” by the “politics” of the nationalist movement, Nehru proposes to while away his imprisonment by reading books concerning exploration and adventure in the Himalaya such as Sven Hedin’s *Overland to India*.

The project of the realization of the nation-state in these accounts, then, is imagined as a mountaineering expedition, an endeavor associated with a certain style of “heroic” masculinity. Proper planning is necessary, but ultimately the struggle involves a solitary individual’s confrontation with and overcoming of the natural. Through his invocation of sublime landscapes, Nehru also maps his own participation in nationalism onto Enlightenment tropes of progress, discipline, and rationality in the face of the overwhelming forces of nature, and longing “for small, virtuous and ‘pure’ communities in remote and cold places” (Bernal 209) which animated Romantic apprehensions of the sublime.

Outside the prison door, however, the Indian nation is not cold, remote, or solitary. Nehru’s accounts of the Indian nation emphasize heat, dust, the crowd, and a threat to individual autonomy that is simultaneously seductive and disturbing. In his early, life-changing involvement with *kisan* agitation in the United Provinces upon which the *Autobiography* turns as a narrative, Nehru travels in the countryside around Allahabad, noting how it came “alive with enthusiasm and a strange excitement” (51). Ever after, he notes, “my mental picture of India always contains this naked, hungry mass.” This was, in Nehru’s retrospective construction, a time of unmediated contact: “I spoke to them, man to man, and told them what was in my mind and my heart” (57). Yet this time of unmediated contact becomes a textual imaginary in the later *Autobiography*, a realm to which Nehru desires access, but from which he is always separated, as we have seen, by the “barrier” of individual consciousness and self-reflexive rationality. The future prime minister of India wonders about the irrational affection of the crowd, suspecting “their affection was meant not for me as I was, but for some fanciful image of me that they had formed” (78), while aware of the “intoxicating” effect such adulation temporarily produces in him.

After the 1929 Lahore Congress, Nehru finds himself besieged in his house in Allahabad by crowds of “pilgrims” who wait for days to see him, a situation which he views with ambivalence. The people, he notes, fill “some inner need of mine,” and he gains a “sense of authority” through their actions, yet they also make him aware of a “latent ‘will to power’”:

On their part, they exercised a subtle tyranny over me, for their confidence and affection moved inner depths within me and evoked emotional responses. Individualist as I was, sometimes the barriers of individuality seemed to melt away, and I felt that it would be better to be accursed with these unhappy people than to be saved alone. But the barriers were too solid to disappear, and I peeped over them with wondering eyes at this phenomenon which I failed to understand. (206)

This paradox disturbs the oppositions which *An Autobiography* has so carefully crafted between state and nation, masculinity and femininity, tradition and modernity, autonomy and dependence. The masses which represent India call for Nehru’s identification with them, yet such identification would necessitate a surrender of the autonomy and individuality which he identifies with the nationalist movement and the

state-to-be.¹⁴ The social imaginary which Nehru's text attempts to narrate, in which the state as an autonomous individual trains the unruliness of the nation, is haunted by the power of the nation itself, the suspicion that it may not be amenable to such disciplinary action. At the end of the *Autobiography*, Nehru can only reiterate this unresolved tension, noting that "I have been one of a mass, moving with it, swaying it occasionally, being influenced by it; and yet, like the other units, an individual, apart from the others, living my separate life in the heart of the crowd" (595).

Nkrumah

In the 1957 Commonwealth Prime Minister's conference in London, the leader of Britain's first West African colony to gain full independence watched his Indian counterpart with awe:

At each meeting my admiration for Nehru increased. Some days he barely uttered a word, but with a mere gesture, a nod of his head or some other sign, he indicated his understanding of or agreement with the matter under discussion. When he spoke, it was always worth listening to, whether you agreed with what he said or not. What he had to say was said with the minimum of words and in the minimum of time, and expressed his views very firmly. It was, I felt, the mark of a wise man. ("The Impact that Lasts" 110)

The observer was Kwame Nkrumah, now Prime Minister of an independent Ghana. Nehru and Gandhi had been inspirational to him in Ghana's independence struggle; in particular he was impressed by Nehru's ability "to interpret Gandhi's philosophy in practical terms" (*Ghana* viii). The example of India is, indeed, central to Nkrumah's own self-fashioning and the social imaginary of the new nation-state which his autobiography seeks to bring into being. One of the most striking encounters in Nkrumah's own autobiography is between the nationalist leader and the Colonial Secretary, R.H. Saloway, in Accra on the eve of the launching of "positive action," or civil disobedience, by the Ghanaian nationalist movement. The struggle for Indian independence, Saloway notes, succeeded because the "Indian was used to suffering pains and deprivations"; civil disobedience will fail in the Gold Coast because "the African has not that spirit of endurance" (116). In the heat of the struggle, Nkrumah notes, "Mr Saloway's words hammered my brain in mockery.—'Now, had this been India . . .'" (117).

Nkrumah drew more than tactics from Gandhi and Nehru. His autobiography, *Ghana: the Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, written hastily in 1956 for publication on the occasion of Ghana's full independence in 1957, follows the Nehruvian model in many ways. As its title suggests, the book participates in a remaking of social imaginaries which draws on Nehru's prior narrative. The narrative of Ghana's emergence as a nation-state is tied to Nkrumah's own personal growth, and a series of parallels are again drawn between technologies of the self which are coded as masculine, and applied to the male body, and the action of the party and then the state upon the nation. Many of these tendencies, indeed, are drawn together in the final image of the narrative, in which Nkrumah envisions himself as captain of the ship of the nation, standing "proudly . . . on the bridge of that lone vessel as she confidently sets sail," raising "a hand to shade my eyes from the glaring African sun," and scanning the horizon of an international public sphere (290).¹⁵

The story of *Ghana* in narratological terms is very different from that of Nehru's autobiography. Nkrumah as protagonist moves from a village childhood in Western Ghana to teacher training at Achimota, outside Accra. His sojourn abroad

commences in poverty in the United States, rather than as a student at an English public school, and his political radicalization largely occurs during twelve years of study and activism in exile. Upon return to the Gold Coast in 1947, his rise is meteoric. He leaves behind the “reactionaries, middle class lawyers and merchants” (62) of the United Gold Coast Convention, founding the Convention People’s Party to lead “the politically awakened masses” (108). Despite detention by the colonial authorities he reaches power within a limited self-governing constitution in 1951, and leads the Gold Coast to independence as Ghana in 1957. If the events which Nkrumah narrates—his speedy realization of the nation—contrast with Nehru’s protracted and seemingly interminable struggle, however, the manner in which they are presented to the reader shows remarkable parallels to his predecessors’ story. Like Nehru’s autobiography, *Ghana* slows down to a crawl as it approaches the narrative present. Nkrumah’s election as Leader of Government Business for the Gold Coast occurs well before the half-way point in the narrative, and much of the ensuing pages map political struggles and diversionary excursions in which a central narrative is at times seemingly lost.

More strikingly *Ghana*, just like its predecessor, is marked by a gendered social imaginary. *Ghana*, like Nehru’s autobiography, is dedicated to a woman who embodies the nation—here not a wife, but the narrator/protagonist’s mother. Nkrumah’s mother, like Nehru’s Kamala, seems to represent the nation-to-be awaiting the moulding disciplinary action of the state. His leaving the Gold Coast is thus dramatized through a tearful leave-taking from his mother on the banks of the Ankobra river, a canoe taking him out into the current and away from a “peaceful picture of African rural life” (25). Describing his return to the Gold Coast more than a decade later, Nkrumah chooses to narrate his reunion with his mother before moving on to political action: at first she does not recognize him, but finally “her hitherto wonderfully controlled emotions broke through the barrier and, as she clutched me to her, I felt her body vibrate with deep sobs” (67). Nkrumah’s mother does enter into affairs of the state; the narrator is careful to emphasize at this point that he does not “discuss with her my political ideas for the future” (67). After discovering the date of Ghana’s forthcoming independence, Nkrumah’s first act is again to greet his mother; she notices his excitement, but again makes no direct comment, prompting approval from the protagonist. “‘What an excellent wife she must have been!’ I thought to myself, ‘No questions, no hints, no suspicion!’” (283).

Nkrumah’s mother figures in the social imaginary of the new nation as a national unconscious, representative of the formlessness of the unawakened nation upon which the state must act. Other women in the narrative, however, are represented very differently. Like Nehru’s *Autobiography*, *Ghana* celebrates masculine *askesis* and self-discipline. Late in his narrative, its protagonist admires the industry of ants, “not a single slacker among them” (223); he stresses, like Nehru, industry and control of the body. Yet there is always a suspicion of an overly-trained body—Nkrumah’s eyes rest on the men who bring cargo through the surf at Accra, “on the face of it as strong and healthy men” but penetrate to a truth of early death and exhaustion (236); manual labor in the United States proves debilitating, depleting the protagonist of vital energy (36). To a greater extent than Nehru, Nkrumah stresses privation and, in particular, fasting: the refusal of the seductions of the appetite: fasting as a triumph over the body figures both early (15) and late (127, 144) in the narrative: it is a technology of the self with a “spiritual value” useful both to the activist, political prisoner, and politician.¹⁶ In contrast to this, the female body is

figured by Nkrumah as soft and enveloping, offering the seductive possibility of a surrender to the appetite which would divert the protagonist from his revolutionary path.

From an early age, Nkrumah's narrator confesses, he has associated with women "a dread of being trapped, of having my freedom taken away or being in some way overpowered" (12). On a later visit to the Canary Islands, he experiences physical revulsion when approached by "two elegant Spanish girls in negligées" in what he presumes to be a hotel: "[T]o my utter horror and embarrassment one of them came over, planted herself on my knee, and began stroking my hair and generally enveloping me with her limbs" (26). Nkrumah's precipitate flight back to his ship parallels a later incident, in which, working as cabin crew on an American passenger ship, he is "taken aback" when he enters a cabin and sees "a most attractive woman reclining on her back almost completely naked": this time, he again takes refuge in temporary retreat (38). *Ghana*, furthermore, tends to elide relationships with women which were important to its author at the time of their occurrence, if not at the time of their narration. Portia Duhart, with whom he had a prolonged and intimate relationship in the United States, is dismissed in a page, while his close relationships with women working from the West African National Secretariat in London are hidden completely: he praises their industry as volunteers, but makes no reference to personal ties (56).¹⁷ This excision preserves the momentum of the narrative of hard work and privation in the service of national liberation which women might otherwise derail. "I was afraid," Nkrumah's narrator comments, "that if I allowed a woman to play too important a part in my life I would gradually lose sight of my goal. Few people have been able to understand this attitude of mine and I have been described by various people as a Don Juan, an impotent man and even a eunuch. Those who know me, however, regard me as a very normal man with probably more than average self-discipline" (42).

As in Nehru's narrative, however, *Ghana's* division between state and nation and its stress upon gendered disciplinary practices as a means of propelling forward the narrative of national liberation is never quite achieved. Nkrumah's narrator urges the realization upon his readers that "[w]ithout discipline true freedom cannot survive" (x), and that such discipline can only be realized through the actions of a vanguardist party upon the people (ix, 215). Yet, like Nehru, he finds such autonomy is eroded by the crowd. Returning to Takoradi in 1953, Nkrumah feels "giddy at the sight" of the crowd: "with the swaying of the bodies to the rhythm of the drums it was as if we were about to disembark on to a moving raft in a strong swell" (187-188). Here the captain of the ship becomes a helpless passenger on a raft and, as in Nehru's narrative, the image focuses crowd's corrosion of individuality, the nation's intractability to disciplinary efforts. Earlier, on his release from prison in Accra after electoral triumph, Nkrumah moves "like a ship being dragged by an overpowering current in a sea of upturned faces. To look at this locked mass of struggling figures and to listen to the deafening clamor of their jubilant voices made me feel quite giddy" (135). Returning from America, the nationalist leader is again confronted with an undifferentiated mass of people, "panting and groaning as their bodies were crushed together[;] . . . everywhere I looked I could see people fainting" (168). And when individuals do stand out from the crowd to represent the nation, they are female: the woman who emerges from the crowd to sing "Lead Kindly Light" at the formation of the CPP (107), or the woman who adopts the name of "Ama Nkrumah," and slashes her face in front of a CPP rally in Kumasi (109).

Nkrumah's narrative is less reflective than Nehru's: his protagonist hesitates in these scenes, but then moves forward to accept the mantle of leadership offered by the nation: the energy of the crowd is trained into the work of governance and the founding of the nation-state. One scene, however, is particularly reminiscent of Nehru's own dilemma of a "separate life in the heart of the crowd." Awaiting results in the 1954 general election, Nkrumah is consumed by restlessness. Contacting a friend, he laments that he cannot be a "normal person," cannot experience at first hand "the singing of the waiting crowds and the buzz of shouting and laughter" (210). The friend suggests that he disguise himself with a cap, and then drives him around Accra in a "baby Fiat car." Confined in the car, Nkrumah has the "pleasure of being one of the crowd and sharing with them the thrill of election night" (211), yet the pleasure in part comes from his continued separation from the masses.

There is a further complexity to this scene. What Nkrumah does not reveal is that the driver of the car was Erica Powell, soon to be his private secretary and collaborator on his autobiography. Nkrumah acknowledges Powell's contribution in a small paragraph of an acknowledgment immediately after the book's preface, noting that he "dictated" most of the text to her (xii). Yet Powell seems to have made a greater contribution than this: in her own account she writes of having "to piece together the bits of scattered mosaic" that emerged through a series of interviews, and she did independent historical research to establish facts such as her subject's likely birth date (83).¹⁸ If Nkrumah's autobiography appears to be the product of an individual, it is in fact a collaborative work: if women in the text often threaten to derail the swelling national narrative, one woman in fact constructs it and enables it.

Sukarno

The autobiography of Sukarno, first published just before the events of 1965 which would lead to the Indonesian president's demise, shares the feature of collaborative authorship with Nkrumah's text. The *Autobiography* was researched and written in English by American journalist Cindy Adams at Sukarno's request: Adams was provided with civil servants as aides, and given the opportunity to fly wherever she wished in the archipelago to interview Sukarno's family members and friends from his childhood, youthful activism in Surabaya, to political maturity and internal exile in Flores and Sumatra. Sukarno appears to have had doubts about the autobiography's status – Adams herself recalls that at a late stage in the text's production he asked that the book be called a "biography" (Adams 266), and only reluctantly acquiesced to her demand that he write a letter approving it as an autobiography. As it is written, however, *An Autobiography* clearly fulfils Philippe Lejeune's criteria of "a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (193). And the fact that Sukarno's text is written in English should not necessarily be *prima facie* evidence of its inauthenticity: the Indonesian president was fluent in the language, and his speech at Bandung, for many the highlight of the conference in its placing of the struggle against colonialism in a larger narrative of world history, was delivered in English. "He spoke English with a slight accent," wrote Richard Wright, recalling how Sukarno had held the conference spellbound, "he knew words and how to use them, and you realized at once that this man had done nothing all his life but utilize words to capture the attention and loyalty of others" (136).

Sukarno's *Autobiography* shares basic elements with those of Nehru and Nkrumah. The growth of an individual parallels that of a nation, and there is a

slowing down of narrative time and, indeed, a loss of narrative coherence, as we approach the narrative present. The climax of the text is Sukarno's triumphant return to Jakarta airport on December 28, 1949, to an Indonesian state now recognized by the Dutch (262): subsequent chapters, covering the following fifteen years, are more preoccupied with answering international criticism against the new national regime, and particularly Sukarno's place in Indonesia's transition to "guided democracy." However, the gendered division between state and nation which makes the two earlier works is absent, or at least configured differently. Sukarno in his narrative embodies the nation: "Sukarno *is* the *people*" (283), and there is thus little of the agonized self-reflection that marks Nkrumah's, and to an even greater extent Nehru's accounts of their lives.

In contrast to the dichotomy between masculine technology and feminine emotion which marks Nkrumah's and Nehru's texts, Sukarno's autobiography constructs an essentially Romantic protagonist, a "man of feeling," described through analogies to a lover, and artist, or—recalling his own training—an architect:

The simplest way to describe Sukarno is to say that he is a great lover. He loves his country, he loves his people, he loves women, he loves art, and, best of all, he loves himself.

. . . He takes a deep breath when he sees a beautiful scene. He waxes lyrical at an Indonesian sunset. He cries when he sings a Negro spiritual. (1)

The figure of the architect of the nation does at time run into uncertainties. Possibly drawing on Nkrumah, Sukarno at one point admits the isolation he feels in the Istana Merdeka, and recounts driving around Jakarta with an aide "in a tiny unmarked motorcar" in order feel art of the crowd, to "feed off the masses" (10). Sukarno also struggles to justify his role in enlisting hundreds of thousands of Indonesians to work as *romushas*, forced laborers on projects throughout the Japanese empire during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia. Adams mentions that this was one of the last sections of the autobiography written, after Sukarno repeatedly avoided the subject (184). In an introductory chapter, Sukarno as narrator notes that autobiography is like "tearing adhesive tape off one's memory" and opening barely-healed wounds (16), and later identifies his collaboration with the Japanese as among the most painful of these (191-2). Yet for the most part it is a virtuoso performance, Sukarno fulfilling his own vision forty years previously of a "pilot" of the ship of the Indonesian nation, embodying Ernest Renan's national soul, and drawing from a shared history the common "urge to live as one" ("Nationalism, Islam and Marxism" 3).

Sukarno's performative protagonist exhibits none of the careful *askesis* of Nkrumah's or Nehru's: he confesses to enjoying cross-dressing as a young man, and openly celebrates his various relationships with women. This difference, however, hides a similarity: Sukarno's autobiography also makes use of women to symbolize the growth of nationhood, and in fact makes a thoroughly schematic use of an opposition between masculinity and femininity to do so. As with Nkrumah, Sukarno's mother is representative of the nation. He is keen to stress her Balinese origin, and her marriage to his Javanese father as predictive of a process of becoming Indonesian, in which "ethnic" groups cease to be "islanders and strangers" and form a new national identity. Both Sukarno's mother and the servant girl who brings him up, Sarinah, are held up as representative of the "masses," of the "small people" whose individual aspirations make up the nation (25).

As the narrative progresses, women function for Sukarno as markers of intellectual growth. His first infatuations are with Dutch girls, who are somewhat

ambiguously represented in the narrative. For Sukarno the protagonist, they represent the vain hope of admission into colonial society in the Indies: Mien Hessels, the object of his affections in Surabaya, is thus “the icing on the cake I could never buy,” “creamy-skinned and curly-headed,” standing for “everything I’d always wanted” (45). This infatuation, however, is subject to retrospective interpretation by the narrator. “I was very much attracted to Dutch girls,” Sukarno glosses in retrospect. “I wanted desperately to make love to them. It was the only way I knew to exert some form of superiority over the white race and bend them to make them bend to my will” (45). And the youthful infatuation with Mien Hessels is placed within an interpretative framework by a sudden prolepsis: Sukarno jumps forward two decades, to an encounter with a “a fat old matron” in wartime Jakarta:

Ugggghhhh! Mien Hessels! My beautiful fairy princess had turned into a witch. You have never seen such a homely, sloppy hag. How she had let herself go. (46)

In the narrative present, Sukarno now thanks God for deliverance from his former girlfriend through her father’s stingingly racist refusal of his proposal of marriage.

The episode of Mien Hessels is the first of several relationships in which women mark transitions in Sukarno’s – and implicitly the nation’s – self-realization. In Surabaya, Sukarno stays with the activist Tjokroanimoto: his marriage to Tjokro’s daughter, Utari, is portrayed as arising from a sense of obligation, and his leaving the marriage displays both growing autonomy and yet respect for his mentor. Inggit Garnasih, whom Sukarno marries after her divorce from his landlord, Hadji Sanusi, in 1923, represents another location and transition: here Sukarno’s study at the Technical Institute in Bandung and his growing political awareness. Sukarno’s description of Inggit as uneducated but providing him with a means of knowing himself through reflection sets the tone for the description of his future marriages. “There was nothing in her life but me and what I thought and I hoped and what I dreamed, he writes, “I talked; she listened. I rhapsodized; she worshipped.” (57) Sukarno’s next wife, Fatmawati, is associated with his exile in Bengkulu, Sumatra; the final marriage that he mentions, to Hartini, takes place in Java a few years after the establishment of the Indonesian republic. None of the women appear as actors in their own right—indeed Sukarno expresses puzzlement when they do oppose him: Inggit’s insistence on a divorce, for example, and Fatmawati’s opposition to his marriage to Hartini (284).¹⁹

Women characters thus mark stages on the journey to independence and self-realization in Sukarno’s story. Male characters also work to produce the protagonist as artist or architect of the nation through relational contrast. Thus Sukarno’s erstwhile partner in struggle, Mohammad Hatta, is described by the narrator “a man totally opposite to me in nature,” “[c]areful, unemotional, pedantic” (117):

Hatta and I were never on the same wavelength. The best way to describe Hatta is to relate the afternoon he was enroute to somewhere and the only other passenger in the car was a beautiful girl. In a lonely, isolated area the tire went flat. . . . When the driver returned with help two hours later, he found the girl snuggled into the farthest edge of the motorcar and Hatta in the other corner snoring away. Ugggghh that man was a hopeless case. We never thought alike on any issues. (119).

Yet it is not only Hatta’s efficiency and commitment to organization which is seen as unmanly. In describing Sutan Sjahrir’s underground resistance to the Japanese during the occupation, Sukarno condemns Sjahrir for being too much a man of action. “Sjahrir never took it on the chin like I did,” he notes, but rather worked “behind my

back,” out of “the line of fire”: here paradoxically collaboration is made the most difficult choice, resistance the easiest. Underlying Sukarno’s differentiation of himself from Hatta and Sjahrir is perhaps expatriation. Hatta and Sjahrir had spent prolonged periods in Europe: like Nehru and Nkrumah, they were attached to the possibilities of wrenching modernity from the West, to the conscious enactment of a disciplinary rationality upon the body. Sukarno did not leave Indonesia until the Second World War, and then only on trips to parts of the Japanese Empire. Despite his awareness of the models of Nehru and Nkrumah, then, Sukarno is less reflective than his predecessors: his protagonist embodies the nation and the state follows the path the nation subscribes, without the tension of the earlier autobiographies.²⁰

In Conclusion

All three of these autobiographies produce a gendered social imaginary through the simultaneity of narratives of individual and national emergence. In terms of contemporary autobiography studies, they seem anomalous. We see none of the “*collective*, familial sense of self, foreign to many white traditions” (Coslett et. al. 4), the “radical decentering and even erasure of the autobiographical subject” (Lovesey 43) and concomitant deconstruction of “the individualism of autobiography’s Western legacy” (Kaplan 132) which is praised in accounts of much contemporary global, transcultural, feminist, or postcolonial autobiography. Flawed and contradictory as they are, these autobiographies attempt to construct an individual protagonist whose autonomy stands synecdochally for the wished-for autonomy of the new nation state in an international public sphere: they do not decenter, deconstruct, and they are, at the very least, ambivalent about the power of the collective, especially those elements of collectivity which they deem irrational or pre-modern. Even Sukarno, who lays less stress than Nkrumah and Nehru on Weberian rationality and identifies more thoroughly with prophecy and Javanese tradition, is still ambivalent regarding collective traditions and memories. In exile on Flores, he signifies his “freedom from superstition” by selling off to a local copra merchant a good-luck charm which has been precious to him (134).

The autobiographies may, however, ask us to question aspects of contemporary autobiography theory, particularly the symmetry assumed between geopolitical transformations such as globalization and the structure of autobiographical texts. While the postmodern text, with its complex self-referentiality, may respond to many features of life in the Western metropolis – diaspora, migrancy, an end to grand narratives of progress, rationality, and nation—these texts’ responses are surely situational. The complex life world of European and North American cities in our new millennium increasingly resembles that of colonial cities such as Allahabad, Accra, and Batavia, cities which generated the autobiographical texts discussed above. Yet in this life world, the efficacy of “a postmodern form of autobiography as an appropriate medium for emancipation and decolonization” (Hornung and Ruhe 2) seems compromised, at best. The three autobiographies discussed above were key documents which contributed to the refiguring of social imaginaries after colonialism: no postmodern autobiography seems to have produced a similar effect.

What is lacking in much contemporary analysis is surely a historicization of the notion of the individual, and particularly the relationship of the individual to various collectivities. Reference to a collective or communally constituted self is not always destabilizing and, indeed, a search by metropolitan critics for communally or

collectively constituted identities in culturally “other” texts may simply invert orientalist analyses of “the pervasive influence of family and clan (China), caste and fatalism (India), and groupism (Japan) to the exclusion of the salience of agency” (Dissanayake xi). One might see all autobiography as concerned with a negotiation between individual and community: indeed, as several critics have noted, the autonomous subject central to canonical nineteenth-century autobiography is more complex and relationally constituted than commonly thought (Danahay 1-34, Broughton 1-10). To understand these autobiographies and the social imaginaries they attempt to bring into being, we need to historicize the emergence of the notion of the individual within, and then to consider the differences to that history experienced by those who have a deferred relationship to the modernity of colonialism.

Such a discussion is clearly beyond the scope of this paper, but we can, perhaps, pull together a few threads. Notions of individual autonomy as expressed in life writing seem to be closely related to the rise of the nation state, and its concomitant production of citizen-subjects. Marcel Mauss’s seminal essay on changing notions of the self plots a gradual transformation from the premodern to the modern:

From a simple masquerade to the mask, from a ‘role’ (*personage*) to a ‘person’ (*personne*), to a name, to an individual; from the latter to a being possessing metaphysical and moral value; from a moral consciousness to a sacred being; from the latter to a fundamental form of thought and action – the course is accomplished. (22)

Mauss’s account is clearly ahistorical, and implicitly evolutionist but, as J.S. La Fontaine has noted, it can be embedded within specific historical and social settings. Fontaine suggests that we often overlook the fact that Enlightenment notions of self “exist in the context of a particular concept of society as a whole: the idea of the nation-state,” and notes that these societies have “a clear distinction between office and office-holder, and hence between an individual and his social role” (136-137). In contrast, in other societies personhood is likely to be “a complex of social relationships” into which one is born (137). Thus the Western concept is not “simply the result of greater sophistication or elaboration of conceptual thought” but “derives from a particular social context” (139). And autobiography, a key genre which emerges in the nineteenth century, helps to produce these individual selves separate from social roles. In a parallel argument, Betty Joseph notes that the self constructed by an autobiography is dispersed through “public consumption” and indeed produces a public or a “people” who “need an autobiographical figuration to produce itself as a mass subject” (52). Intriguingly, Joseph notes, “the autobiographical impulse” is “a practice that is crucial to representative politics in the modern nation-state” (53). Writing one’s life and participating in politics are both forms of “representation” and thus in the nation-state we have, then, a “‘national’ subject in whose person a ‘people’ can see themselves reflected” (54).

We can begin to see, through Joseph’s comments, the parallels between individual and national actors, the manner in which the production of the individual might dovetail with the production of national stories. Yet in thinking of autobiography in the shadow of Bandung, we need to pay attention to one more factor: colonial modernity. For the formerly colonized, modernity is belated: it must be wrested from the hands of the colonizer, realized in an autochthonous manner. Yet modernity comes through colonialism, and indeed colonialism justifies itself as a modernizing project. Thus Partha Chatterjee, speaking of the formerly colonized,

notes that because of “the way in which the history of our modernity has been intertwined with the history of colonialism, we have never quite been able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse, unfettered by differences of race or nationality (“Our Modernity” 14, see also Chakrabarty, “Modernity and Ethnicity . . .” 6). Chatterjee and others have thus noted that modernity becomes a nationally marked project, in which rediscovered remade “essences, origins, authenticities” are put to careful use (Chakrabarty, “The Difference-Deferral . . .” 373). Famously, also, for Chatterjee, modernity after colonialism is a gendered project: independence offers the promise of uniting the feminized private sphere of tradition with the masculinized public sphere of the state: once the opposition is established, however, it can never quite be eradicated (Chatterjee, *Nation* 116-134, Chakrabarty, “The Difference-Deferral . . .” 395-396).

The narratives thus, through their mappings of gender, nation, and individual lives, ask questions which go to the heart of the social imaginaries they seek to construct. Bandung for us now is a memory, perhaps a touchstone, a reminder of the possibility of another world order. If the autonomy of the nation state, the possibility of sovereignty earnestly elaborated in these narratives, proved illusory, the social imaginaries in which they are embedded are still very much with us. With the failure of the autonomy of the post-independence state after independence, the people turn back to the affective power of nation, and to Bandung’s daughters – Megawati Sukarnoputri, Indira Gandhi, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, Chandrika Kumaratunga – who again have striven to inhabit their father’s houses, to harness the social imaginaries which their father’s lives and autobiographies honed.

Notes

- ¹ Despite Richard West’s assertion to the contrary (283), Tito did not attend the Bandung Conference. The Yugoslav leader had been interested in issues relating to the Third World for some time: a Yugoslav mission was founded in New Delhi in 1949. He visited Burma, India and Egypt some months before the Bandung Conference took place, but his substantial organizational role within the Non-Aligned Movement perhaps dates from his meeting with Nehru and Nasser at Brioni in July 1956 (Beloff 163).
- ² Indira Gandhi did attend but, despite the fact that she had recently been elected to the Congress Working Committee, the central policy-making arena for the Congress Party, she was not an official delegate.
- ³ Jean Frost to Jawaharlal Nehru, 15 April 1941. Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library, Teen Murti House, New Delhi (NMML), Correspondence item 1354.
- ⁴ The retrospective shaping of a life performed in *An Autobiography* seems to have a lasting effect on Nehru’s own self-construction. When interviewed by Michael Brecher in 1956 and asked to name key formative elements in his life, all were before 1935: India’s then Prime Minister listed the Amritsar Massacre, his work with the kisans, and the first “close contact” with Gandhi, as well as the 1929 Lahore Congress, his various terms of imprisonment, and --after a little thought--his visit to Europe in 1926-27 (28-29).
- ⁵ See Jawaharlal Nehru to V.K. Krishna Menon, 9 December, 1935, reprinted in Gopal, ed. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 7, 15.
- ⁶ Prison Diary, 19 February 1935, reprinted in Gopal, ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 6, 320.
- ⁷ Prison Diary, 1 February 1935, reprinted in Gopal, ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 6, 312-313.

- ⁸ Subject File 415, Notes Prepared for “Toward Freedom,” 3, Jawaharlal Nehru Papers, NMML. Despite the title of this file, its contents seem to be not notes prepared for *Toward Freedom* (the American version of the first volume of *An Autobiography*, with an added chapter, published in 1941), but an outline written over several months from August 1941 onwards for the projected continuation of the autobiography in a second volume.
- ⁹ Letter to Padmaja Naidu, 26 January 1926, reprinted in Gopal, ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 2, 226.
- ¹⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru to Motilal Nehru, 1 September 1922, Motilal Nehru Papers, NMML.
- ¹¹ Prison Diary, 15 March 1932, reprinted in Gopal, ed., *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 5, 369.
- ¹² Jawaharlal Nehru to Indira Nehru, 22 February 1935. Reprinted in Sonia Gandhi, ed., *Freedom’s Daughter*, 146.
- ¹³ Jawaharlal Nehru to Motilal Nehru, 1 September 1922, Motilal Nehru Papers, NMML.
- ¹⁴ Nehru’s disquiet about India is personified in the figure of Gandhi. “He came to represent India to an amazing degree and to express the very spirit of that ancient and tortured land, Nehru writes, “Almost he was India, and his very failings were Indian failings” (508). The most comprehensive account of Nehru’s “total incomprehension” in the *Autobiography* in his depiction of Gandhi as an irrational but historically progressive force is found in Chatterjee’s *Nationalist Thought*, 150-157.
- ¹⁵ For a more extended account of the discursive context of Nkrumah’s autobiography, see Holden.
- ¹⁶ Erica Powell, Nkrumah’s secretary from 1952 onwards, notes Nkrumah’s “fanatical” obsession with physical health. In her account, the then Prime Minister of the Gold Coast follows a rigid regimen involving meditation, strenuous physical exercises, and long walks in the garden of his residence. When Powell questions him on this, he replies, “I have dedicated my life to the liberation and unity of the African continent. I cannot give my whole and undivided attention to this gigantic task if my body and mind are not functioning properly. It is my duty to ensure that . . . both are kept in peak condition” (80).
- ¹⁷ See Portia D. Duhart to Nkrumah, 23 June 1944, GNA SC 21/3/48. In this letter Portia hints at the possibility of marriage, noting that “God has given us to each other” (5). National Archives of Ghana, Accra (GNA) SC/BAA/516 also contains a letter written to Nkrumah in 1957 by “Zander,” a friend in Philadelphia who is a mutual acquaintance of both Nkrumah and Portia, referring to the couple as “two yearning longing hearts made by God to compliments [sic] each the other” (4) and noting that “the full potential of neither can be realized till that which God has joined in creation is not assundered” (5). For WANS, see Nkrumah’s testimony before the Watson Commission, in which he describes both Florence Manley and Margot Parrish as “girl friends” PRO CO 964/27, Examination of Francis Nii-Kofi Nkrumah (v108-110). A love letter from Florence, produced in an attempt to discredit Nkrumah’s character at the Commission hearings, suggests that their relationship was close, and that she was planning to come to the Gold Coast. See PRO CO 964/24: Watson Commission - Gold Coast Commission of Enquiry – Exhibits, vol. 1, exhibit 46. Sherwood offers the most extensively researched account of Nkrumah’s “social life” in London (164-166).
- ¹⁸ Powell also raises the possibility that some of Nkrumah’s recollections represented in the autobiography are entirely fictional. She recalls, for instance, a discussion with Charles Arden Clarke in which the then Governor of the Gold Coast disputes Nkrumah’s memory of the adulatory crowds he encountered on his release from prison on 12 February, 1951. Arden Clarke’s version is that Nkrumah left the prison alone, and then returned to the gaol with supporters to stage a mass rally and take photographs (92).
- ¹⁹ Labrousse notes that a similar pattern exists in popular biographies of Sukarno published after his official rehabilitation in 1978. In such texts women associated with the leader contribute “to the geographic and national dimension of the hero” —Haryati and Hartini from Java, Yurike Sanger and Kartini Manoppo from Manado, while Naoko Nemoto (Ratna Sari Dewi), Sukarno’s Japanese wife, represents the international dimension (182).
- ²⁰ Sukarno makes explicit reference to Nehru’s *Autobiography* in his narrative. Imprisoned, he thinks of “a badminton game and a shuttlecock which flies in and out at the whim of the players” and notes that “Nehru, who had gone back and forth to prison eleven times, once likened himself to a shuttlecock” (125). Adams recalls meeting a dejected Sukarno in March 1966, and seeing that he was visibly moved by Nkrumah’s recent ousting from power in a coup (Adams 306).

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