Concluding Conference of 2011-12 Sawyer Seminar: “Around 1948: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Global Transformation”

"After 1948: Realignments in Politics and Culture"

The Sawyer spring conference, “After 1948: Realignments in Politics and Culture,” brings together regional and topical panels devoted to taking a measure of the political, social, and cultural transformations underway throughout the world around 1948. Building on our fall conference, “Year Zero: The World Undone,” our focus on “realignments” seeks to reassess postwar trajectories through multiple aspects of alignment, nonalignment, disalignment, and realignment – of nations or colonies, of cultures or artistic movements, of thinkers or disciplines.

Taking as our proximate endpoint the Bandung conference of non-aligned nations in 1955, how might its aspirations and failures re-open Cold War narratives to transformations underway in the postwar period across the global north and south? Positioning our inquiry at the interface of the worlds of geopolitics and letters, arts, and culture, we frame this conference’s discussion in terms of multiple scenes of realignment underway in the contexts of the consolidation of the nation-state, the emergence of decolonization, the amelioration of genocide, and the rise of international human rights regimes. Much was in flux between violent pasts and undecided futures. If the Bandung Conference ultimately marked the organization of non-aligned nations within a logic of nation-states and regime decolonization, we take the trajectories that converged in Bandung as indicating a transforming world whose negotiation, shifting terms of alignment, and interfaces across a range of postwar geographies too often remain obscured by Cold War teleologies.