

REVIEW ARTICLE

Challenging Imperialism Across Borders: Recent Studies of Twentieth-Century Internationalist Networks against Empire

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Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Shyamji Krishnavarma: Sanskrit, Sociology and Anti-Imperialism* (London et al.: Routledge, 2014), 264 pp., \$175.00, ISBN 9780415445542.

Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 344 pp., \$137.00, ISBN 9781107073050.

Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 274 pp., \$39.99, ISBN 9781349469062.

Michele L. Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 309 pp., \$99.99, ISBN 9781108419307.

Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 442 pp., \$55.50, ISBN 9780674725140.

Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 414 pp., \$29.95, ISBN 9780520284302.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the global dimensions of twentieth-century imperialism and anti-imperialism. Historians, themselves part of an increasingly interconnected world, have been drawn to investigate the links between anti-colonial activists working in different parts of the globe. After a period in which most studies had focused either on the perspective of imperial decision makers in Europe or on that of nationalist activists within the framework of one single colony, more recently scholars have argued that the first of these approaches underrates the agency of anti-imperialists in interactions with the imperial rulers, while the second makes it difficult to explain broader, global trends, including the surprising near-simultaneity of decolonisation in large parts of the world between 1945 and 1970. Instead, historians now argue that we need to take into account the inherently internationalist visions of many activists in this period, which led them to travel the world, interact with their counterparts from other colonies, develop shared views of anti-imperialism and provide each other with practical and ideological support. This review article examines some of the most successful monographs to be published in this field between 2014 and 2018.

Tracing Anti-Imperial Activism Across Borders

At their most basic level, all of the books under review agree about the importance of the extensive transnational voyages that anti-imperial activists undertook in the first half of the twentieth century, and of the efforts of anti-colonialists from various countries to cooperate with each other, sometimes as part of movements of a scale much larger than their original home colony. In that context, three of

the authors focus on one specific prominent anti-imperialist. This approach allows for an engaging narrative and a close look at that activist's shifting ideological views, as well as making it easy to convey the personal experience of moving from country to country.

In her account of the leading Indian nationalist, and independent India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), Michele Louro demonstrates the extent to which Nehru saw anti-imperialism as a global, internationalist project. She pays special attention to Nehru's participation in the League Against Imperialism (LAI), a transnational organisation inaugurated at a famous congress in Brussels in 1927 that brought together activists from all over the world, including anti-colonialists of communist, socialist and liberal persuasions.¹

Leslie James, in her study of George Padmore (1903–59), traces the career of this Trinidadian activist from his engagement with black radicalism in the United States, to his time as a prominent communist in Moscow and Hamburg beginning in the late 1920s, to his pan-African activism in Britain after 1933 and, finally, to his period as an advisor to Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana between 1957 and 1959. Her analysis emphasises the importance of Padmore's use of journalism to connect activists world-wide, as well as his complex political stances towards communism and nationalism during the Cold War period.²

Lastly, Harald Fischer-Tiné follows the voyages of Shyamji Krishnavarma (1857–1930), a liberal anti-colonialist of Indian origin who worked as a philologist in Oxford between 1879 and 1885, then as a lawyer in British courts in India and as the prime minister of a small Indian princely state, before moving back to Britain in 1897. There he founded India House, the most important centre of anti-colonial Indian activists in pre-First World War London, as well as his influential journal *The Indian Sociologist* which, beginning in 1908, embraced violent political action in the cause of radical anti-imperialism.³

As compared to the biographical approaches of these three authors, Kris Manjapra examines the meetings of a larger cast of historical characters from two countries. He shows how, after an earlier period of widespread German scholarly participation in the official projects of Orientalism and colonial science in India, between 1880 and 1945 Indian intellectuals of mostly Bengali origin and German intellectuals formed alliances against British hegemony, at a time when both groups saw themselves as victims of global British imperialism.⁴

The final two authors take yet another approach, concentrating on one important European city that became a focal point of global anti-imperialism. This allows them to provide a micro-analysis of an urban environment, demonstrating in depth how activists from different countries and colonial territories used the city as a meeting place.

Marc Matera, in his book *Black London*, shows how, at the heart of the largest empire on earth, the British capital became a central site of black anti-imperialism in the early and mid-twentieth century. There, African and Caribbean activists – including some who would later become heads of states of newly independent countries – founded political organisations that, while rooted locally, were internationalist in outlook; and black Londoners hailing from different parts of the world participated in the creation of a new global black culture in settings such as the music clubs of Britain's capital, or the anthropology department of the London School of Economics.⁵

Michael Goebel, in turn, focuses on interwar Paris, the capital of the second largest empire at that point in time. While Matera demonstrates the importance of London for black activism, Goebel

¹ Michele L. Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

² Leslie James, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

³ Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Shyamji Krishnavarma: Sanskrit, Sociology and Anti-Imperialism* (London et al.: Routledge, 2014).

⁴ Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

⁵ Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

includes in his book anti-imperialists of any national or ethnic background. He shows how Paris became an ‘anti-imperial metropolis’ where migrants from all over the world, including the French territories in North Africa, Vietnam and Senegal, and regions beyond the French Empire, such as India, the British Caribbean, China and South America, became politicised and began to form new political and ideological alliances and shared visions. As Goebel argues, the ‘common anti-imperialist language’ they created while in Paris was crucially important in preparing the ground for the wave of decolonisation after 1945 and the emergence of the post-Second World War vision of a united, post-imperial ‘Third World’.⁶

European Metropolises as Centres of Anti-Imperial Resistance

All of the authors agree that the European metropolitan countries played important roles as breeding grounds of internationalist anti-imperialism in the first half of the twentieth century. Attractive to activists as relatively safer spaces for political work as compared to their original home countries,⁷ Britain, France and Germany became the hubs of anti-imperialist networks, from which the spokes of extensive communication channels radiated out to many other parts of the world. James, for instance, points out how between the mid-1930s and 1957 Padmore’s location in the British capital was important for his creation of a global style of anti-imperialism. His London apartment became a meeting ground and site of advice for activists from all over the globe;⁸ and, as a frequent visitor to the House of Commons gallery, he was able to collect the latest news from different parts of the empire, which he then sent out to various colonies.⁹

As Fischer-Tiné describes, Krishnavarma also made effective use of his position at the centre of the British Empire. Following his experiences in India of the British counterterrorist paranoia of the 1890s and the racism of the local British military,¹⁰ he decided to move back to Britain, with its more liberal atmosphere. There, beginning in 1905, he provided a safe haven for Indian students who were opposed to colonialism, and sent off copies of his *Indian Sociologist* to India and any place on earth with an Indian minority.¹¹ Fischer-Tiné, moreover, provides a compelling case study of the extent to which many anti-imperialists undertook further transnational travels within Europe, after first arriving in the metropole of ‘their’ colonial empire – a topic that still remains under-studied.¹² As he demonstrates, Krishnavarma moved from London to Paris in 1907 to escape increasing government surveillance and police persecution in Britain directed against anti-imperialists, and further radicalised the message of his journal once he arrived there. His subsequent move to Switzerland in the summer of 1914 was inspired both by increasing conflicts with the local Indians in Paris, and by the looming danger of British–French government cooperation against him.¹³

Focusing on one city each allows Matera and Goebel to be especially detailed in pointing out not only the importance of London and Paris, respectively, as incubation spaces for global anti-imperialism, but also to capture the lived experience of activists from all over the world meeting each other in specific pockets of urban settings. In that context, Goebel argues that we should root

⁶ Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third-World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1–6.

⁷ For this argument regarding Paris, see Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 52–5; for London, see Matera, *Black London*, 64.

⁸ James, *Padmore*, 98.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 82–9.

¹⁰ Fischer-Tiné, *Krishnavarma*, 30–4, 54.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 58–65.

¹² See Daniel Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), for an attempt to show how the extensive police surveillance of anti-colonialists from different parts of the world living in Europe motivated these activists to move across inner-European borders, and how such travels, in turn, contributed to the creation of a shared pro-imperial mindset among the authorities of different empires.

¹³ Fischer-Tiné, *Krishnavarma*, 112, 120.

the history of global anti-imperialism and decolonisation in the 'social history of migration'.¹⁴ His book includes a fine-grained study of where the living quarters of anti-colonial migrants of various backgrounds and occupations clustered within Paris,¹⁵ how the Latin Quarter, home to students from all over the world, became the geographical centre of an emerging anti-imperial political project¹⁶ and how restaurants, musical performances and mutual aid associations became important settings for the politicisation of immigrants.¹⁷ In creating a micro-analysis of the day-to-day lives of these activists and the local networks that they formed, he traces 'the global "contagion" of the claim for national sovereignty through the urban space of interwar Paris'.¹⁸

Matera, similarly, pays close attention to where black activists lived and met within the urban environment of Britain's capital, focusing above all on Camden Town and Soho.¹⁹ Like Goebel, he shows the importance of local political organisations that soon created global networks, such as the West African Students' Union (WASU), founded in 1925,²⁰ and he demonstrates how black activists from different countries living in the city found common ground in causes such as protesting Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930s.²¹ Moreover, demonstrating how leisure time entertainment and political work blended into each other effortlessly, he follows his main characters through London's restaurants and jazz clubs, where black musicians 'articulated a black international in sound'.²² His inclusion of the broader cultural environment in which political activists were situated also allows him to pay more attention to gender issues than most other authors on anti-imperialism do. In that context, he analyses the heated debates among anti-colonial activists about relationships between black men and white British women over whether these relationships were symbols of black emancipation or led to an overly strong dependency on these often more well-off white 'sponsors'.²³ Matera is especially convincing in demonstrating the importance of black women in the 1930s who brought together a feminist and an anti-imperialist agenda, such as Jamaican writer and radio personality Una Marson and Amy Ashwood Garvey, a political activist and owner of black restaurants and nightclubs in London.²⁴

Encounters with Western Political Movements and Ideologies

As more and more anti-imperialists moved to Europe, they came in contact with European systems of thought, and with white European political activists. Encounters with communist Europeans were especially central, but interactions with European liberalism and anarchism also played a significant role (as did encounters with fascism, which, however, are less central to the books discussed here). Such interactions bring up a number of questions: did they lead to the creation of new, hybrid political ideas and ideologies? Or were they characterised by the attempts of one group to manipulate the other? In that context, while all of the books under review make clear the very real power hierarchies between white Westerners and non-Europeans, they also question an older assumption, according to which anti-colonialists were either subject to the whims of colonial masters, or were steered and manipulated by white, left-wing Westerners.

In some cases, encounters of anti-imperialists with European ideas and political movements went back as far as the pre-First World War period. Fischer-Tiné, chronicling the profound impact of a

¹⁴ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 279. See also *ibid.*, 3–6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 36–44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 116–48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 75–82, 108–15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁹ Matera, *Black London*, 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7, 22–61.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 62–99.

²² *Ibid.*, 9–13, 145–99, quote on 199.

²³ *Ibid.*, 200–37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43–5, 100–99.

major European thinker on a non-European anti-colonialist, demonstrates how Krishnavarma saw the European liberal social theorist Herbert Spencer, whose work he first discovered in England in 1882, as his most important political influence. Meanwhile, Fischer-Tiné also makes clear how after 1897, when Krishnavarma was forming strategic alliances with radical left-wing Europeans in the socialist and anarchist camps, these left-wing political movements had a surprisingly small ideological impact on him. Instead of turning to the radical left himself, Krishnavarma remained an economically liberal, socially conservative nationalist. His cosmopolitanism thus was not an expression of a politics of friendship, but was 'rather strategic', providing an important cautionary tale against naively assuming that meetings and political cooperations between global activists had a 'quasi-magical transformative power' in leading to ideological change within them.²⁵ Moreover, Krishnavarma's example shows how anti-imperialists could combine elements of political ideologies and strategies that were at the time, and still often are, seen as incompatible. Liberalism was frequently associated with a non-violent, gradualist approach to social and political improvement, while anarchism was associated with the embrace of violent methods; yet Krishnavarma stayed true to his liberal beliefs, while simultaneously accepting the use of violence as a tool against imperialism.

In interactions between global anti-imperialists and the European communist movement, the power play between European and non-European activists becomes especially visible. In that context, Louro convincingly challenges a traditional interpretation of the League Against Imperialism as a mere communist front organisation. While she acknowledges that the Comintern did indeed attempt to assert its control over this organisation, she demonstrates that, especially in its early period, non-communist activists with a colonial background, including Nehru, did have a significant influence on its agenda.²⁶

Goebel further revises traditional views in showing that not only were the French Communist Party and its affiliated organisations, such as the *Union Intercoloniale* (UIC), important in providing 'a platform of claims-making' and an arena for exchange between anti-imperialists from different parts of the world,²⁷ but that non-European anti-colonialists in fact co-founded the communist movement in Europe, rather than merely being co-opted by it.²⁸ As he argues, communists of non-European origin frequently held more radical views than their white counterparts, supporting, as in the case of Indian anti-colonialist M.N. Roy, an immediate left-wing revolution as early as 1920, at a time when most white communists preferred to first work together with 'bourgeois' nationalist movements in the colonies.²⁹

Various shades of grey become visible in anti-imperialists' interactions with communism. As Louro shows, Nehru never saw himself as a communist, and resigned from the increasingly Moscow-dominated LAI in 1930, at a time when the Comintern's Third Period made compromise between socialist activists like himself and the communists more difficult (though he continued to work informally with many former LAI comrades on various anti-imperialist, anti-fascist and peace projects, especially after another stay in Europe in 1935–6).³⁰ Padmore, as James describes, did identify as a communist in the late 1920s, while living in the United States,³¹ and continued to do so in 1929–33 in Russia and Germany;³² however, he broke with communism in 1933–4 and turned to Pan-Africanism instead.³³

Both Nehru and Padmore, however, remained inspired by Marxist ideas, and continued to form temporary alliances with communists and to praise certain aspects of the Soviet model. According to Louro, even during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s and beyond, Nehru never gave up his image of the Soviet

²⁵ Fischer-Tiné, *Krishnavarma*, xxiii; 83–93, 185, quotes on xxiii and 185.

²⁶ Louro, *Comrades*, 9, 21, 67–79.

²⁷ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 177, 194.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 179.

³⁰ Louro, *Comrades*, 188–98, 214–41.

³¹ James, *Padmore*, 24.

³² *Ibid.*, 24.

³³ *Ibid.*, 27.

Union as an ally in the fight against imperialism and as a model for modernising an agrarian, impoverished country, a view that he had developed at the Brussels Congress in 1927 and during a trip to Moscow in the same year.³⁴ Padmore, in turn, in the immediate post-Second World War period, continued to praise the Soviet Union's anti-racism, its minority and nationality policies and its attacks on imperialism in Africa, and tried to make a distinction between Stalinism, which he opposed, and the Soviet Union as a country.³⁵ Even as in his *Pan-Africanism or Communism* (1956) he became more openly critical of the Soviet Union's political system and ideology,³⁶ he still maintained his view that the Soviet Union was without racial prejudice, and saw value in Soviet-style economic planning.³⁷ In describing these complex ideological maneuverings, James stresses Padmore's strategic flexibility.³⁸ She emphasises how the Soviet Union, in the years following the Second World War, 'was one tool in . . . [Padmore's] arsenal to attack European colonial rule and Western racism rather than an object of steadfast fidelity'.³⁹ Both Padmore and Nehru frequently resisted the Cold War pressure to put themselves unambiguously into either the pro- or anti-Soviet camp.

Kris Manjapra equally stresses the strategic aspect of interactions between non-European anti-imperialists and European activists. He argues that in the first half of the twentieth century, Indian and German intellectuals came together in rejecting a nineteenth-century global order in which British political and economic dominance united with a belief in laissez-faire liberalism, and rationalism and positivism in the intellectual realm. Throughout his book, Manjapra does chronicle moments when the interactions between Europeans and non-Europeans were inspired primarily by intellectual curiosity, but the strategic dimension is always in the background.

As Manjapra argues, Indians and Germans, engaging in 'realpolitik',⁴⁰ 'began to use each other to pry apart and reorganise the world order'.⁴¹ Indian nationalists in exile and German government agents worked together during the First World War in schemes to undermine their common enemy, the British.⁴² During the interwar period, meanwhile, right-wing nationalist German intellectuals were interested in connecting to India by inventing new origin stories that rooted Germans in an 'Aryan' homeland in the East, rather than in Western European and Judeo-Christian traditions,⁴³ and 'Red Orientalists' in Germany, such as Theodor Lessing, worked with Indian anti-colonialists to attack British imperialism from the left.⁴⁴

In addition to studying these explicitly political alliances, Manjapra's book shows in innovative ways how Indians and Germans worked together strategically to demonstrate to the powerful British regime their intellectual prowess in a large number of seemingly non-political academic and artistic fields. These included psychoanalysis,⁴⁵ and expressionist painting and film.⁴⁶ In one chapter, he describes how in the interwar period, prominent Indian physicists built connections to German scientists including Albert Einstein, and in some cases spent part of their careers in Germany, while simultaneously pursuing nationalist politics.⁴⁷ In the area of economic theory, German scholars such as Werner Sombart worked with Indian thinkers including Zakir Husain, a later president of India, in questioning Adam Smith-inspired laissez-faire universalism, which anti-colonialists argued

³⁴ Louro, *Comrades*, 58, 96–109, 184–8, 257, 273, 278.

³⁵ James, *Padmore*, 96, 106–11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 63, 159.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁰ Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 88–108.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 75–87.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 171–90.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 211–37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 238–74.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 111–42.

sustained a British-dominated world-order under the guise of free trade.⁴⁸ Through such processes of exchange, the Indians' own academic standing increased, and German academics could demonstrate their continuing global scholarly prestige at a time when Germany's political and military power was severely compromised.

In Manjapra's analysis, these Indian–German cooperations were part of a revolt against a British-dominated European world order ruled by Enlightenment values. Goebel, meanwhile, demonstrates that it would be incorrect to assume that all twentieth-century anti-colonialists were by definition 'anti-Enlightenment', and that the universalist discourse of the Enlightenment tradition was inherently unsuitable for anti-imperialists to dock onto. As he shows, African and Vietnamese activists in interwar Paris of both reformist and radical persuasions frequently drew upon the vocabulary and imagery of the French Revolution and the republican ideals that it inspired, both of which were heavily influenced by Enlightenment values. Activists frequently referred to the notion of popular sovereignty expressed in the works of eighteenth-century French writers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau. Pointing out the mismatch between the republican promise of citizenship and equal rights for all on the one hand, and the autocratic reality of the colonies on the other, they created a powerful argumentative strategy when pursuing their political aims.⁴⁹

Taken together, the books thus show the eminently flexible and pragmatic ways in which anti-imperialists interacted with Westerners of various political persuasions. Non-European activists engaged with European ideas and ideologies, and entered into and dropped out of alliances according to what appeared helpful for the fight for independence at a given moment in time. In that process, they frequently adopted those parts of Western ideologies that seemed useful to them, while resisting a full-scale absorption into any one Western system of political thought.

Nationalism and Internationalism in the Interwar Period

One of the most striking aspects of global anti-imperialism in the interwar years is the breadth and diversity of goals and visions for the future among anti-colonial activists. While they agreed that the racist and autocratic imperialism of their present day had to be opposed, there was considerably less agreement among them on what should replace it. In that context, the role of nationalism among internationalist activists – and the question of how to define 'nationalism' – becomes important. Historians such as Frederick Cooper and Manu Goswami have recently warned against exaggerating the dominance of nationalist ideology among anti-imperialists, arguing that up until the actual time of independence, the scope and political structure that the colonies would take afterwards was in no ways pre-ordained.⁵⁰ Cooper has shown, for instance, that most activists from French West Africa saw a West African federation and full citizenship within the French Union of 1946 as a viable path and alternative to the model of the independent nation state in the immediate post-Second World War period.⁵¹

In the British Empire, similarly, some activists thought that it was possible to achieve emancipation within the empire by gaining full and equal imperial citizenship, and through winning self-governing dominion status for non-white colonies similar to, for instance, that of Australia and Canada, which were given internal self-governance through the Statute of Westminster of 1931. Matera, in that context, speaks out against reducing the visions of black activists in interwar London to a 'nationalist teleology' that ends with the attainment of the independent black nation state. Instead, he stresses that, up until the late 1940s, most black activists in London were not fighting for full independence from the British Empire, but rather for full imperial citizenship, and for the creation of regional federations with internal self-government and dominion status within the empire, one example being the West African

⁴⁸ Ibid., 143–70.

⁴⁹ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 10, 20, 216–49.

⁵⁰ Manu Goswami, 'AHR Forum: Colonial Internationalisms and Imaginary Futures', *American Historical Review*, 117 (2012), 1461, 1484; Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁵¹ Cooper, *Citizenship*.

federation that the members of WASU worked towards. Following Gary Wilder, Matera writes that these activists endeavored 'to institute forms of *non-national* colonial emancipation'.⁵²

Meanwhile, Louro, as well as Goebel, who distances himself to some extent from Cooper and Goswami, argue that nationalism should continue to be seen as a central driving force behind anti-imperial activism in the interwar period. This, however, does not lead these authors to claim that nationalism was in tension with internationalism. Louro stresses Nehru's 'special "blend" between internationalism and nationalism' and argues that, for him, 'nationalism and internationalism were never oppositional'.⁵³ His participation in the Brussels Congress convinced Nehru not only to combine his nationalism with an embrace of socialism, but also to expand his vision for anti-colonialism from a focus on India only to one that saw India's future as closely linked with anti-imperialist struggles in, among other places, China, Ethiopia and the Gold Coast/Ghana. Goebel equally stresses that among interwar anti-imperialists, nationalism and internationalism were complementary and strengthened each other, even though he acknowledges that the boundaries of the nations that interwar activists imagined were not always identical with the ones that eventually emerged. According to him, most of the activists saw fighting for the interests of their territorial nation as entirely compatible with their identification with larger regional cultural units, including ones based on Islam, or a whole continent, such as in Pan-Africanism.⁵⁴

The question of whether to demand full and immediate independence split the camp of self-described nationalists. The divisions among Indian anti-colonialists in the 1920s are one example: Jawaharlal Nehru's father, Motilal Nehru, and M. K. Gandhi, both prominent members of the Indian National Congress, at that point in time still limited their demands to reforms and dominion status for India within the British Empire. In general, however, one can detect a gradual trend, according to which proponents of full independence gained influence over time among various anti-imperial movements. This was true for activists with a wide range of ideological convictions. As Fischer-Tiné shows, the liberal Krishnavarma, having given up an earlier hope of being allowed to enter the 'empire club', argued from 1897 onwards, as part of the 'extremist' wing of the Indian nationalist movement, that a clear break from Britain was necessary;⁵⁵ and Goebel describes how, beginning in the 1930s, some anti-imperial activists, especially but not only among Arab nationalists, chose to ally themselves with European right-wing nationalist movements, including fascist ones, which contributed to these activists focusing on taking over territorial states and sovereignty.⁵⁶

At the same time, many anti-imperialists of left-wing persuasions – both of the communist and the pan-African kind – also moved towards demanding full independence over time, especially beginning in the late 1920s. Among such left-wing activists, self-rule within the boundaries of the nation state frequently was not seen as the end-point and final goal of anti-imperialist activism, but rather as a temporary step on the path towards a more far-reaching aim, such as a left-wing world revolution, or, in the case of pan-Africanism, the continental unity of Africa. As James argues in that context, 'for [left-wing] men like Fanon and Padmore, nationalism was a "means, rather than an ultimate end". It was a phase, rather than a goal'.⁵⁷

Interestingly, as Louro's and Goebel's books show, the belief of many left-wing activists that national independence was not the ultimate aim seems to have made them *more*, rather than less, committed to its speedy achievement in the present or near future, as compared to non-Marxist nationalists. As Louro demonstrates, it was to a large extent Nehru's participation in the League Against Imperialism, which compelled anti-colonialists world-wide to fight for full independence, that convinced him to take a more radical stance on that question from 1927 on, bringing him into conflict with his father and Gandhi. Thus, in that period, not only were nationalism and socialist

⁵² Matera, *Black London*, 2–5, 7–8, 29–36, 59, 322, quote on 4.

⁵³ Louro, *Comrades*, 1, 4. See also *ibid.*, 103. Quotes on 1 and 4.

⁵⁴ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 251.

⁵⁵ Fischer-Tiné, *Krishnavarma*, 32, 54, 58–65, 130–5.

⁵⁶ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 269.

⁵⁷ James, *Padmore*, 160.

internationalism compatible, but Nehru's activities worldwide and his contacts with the radical left made him into a more radical nationalist.⁵⁸

Goebel also stresses that in the interwar period, communists recommended national independence for everyone (pushing, for instance, Messali Hadj to seek independence for Algeria in 1927⁵⁹), and that, in fact, 'as far as independence was concerned, communists . . . tended to be more nationalist than those whom they denigrated as 'bourgeois nationalists' from 1917 onwards'.⁶⁰ Matera, similarly, shows how radical left-wing influence moved anti-colonialists towards demanding full independence and statehood. In his account, we see how after 1945 communist-leaning West Africans in London agitated for the immediate, full independence of West Africa, in contrast to more politically moderate members of the West African Students' Union who remained content with demanding self-governing dominion status.⁶¹ James in turn demonstrates how, after the Second World War, one of Padmore's reasons for supporting a strategy of taking over control of a state first, before carrying out social transformations, was precisely his continued admiration of the Bolshevik Revolution.⁶² These insights substantiate Goebel's argument, according to which the correlation between the demand for immediate national independence and an adherence to left-wing ideology shows that 'traditional interpretations opposing Marxism to nationalism have to be qualified for the colonial world'.⁶³

Did Internationalist Visions Fail After the Second World War, and If So, Why?

To what extent did the internationalist visions of the pre-1945 years survive into the actual period of independence between 1945 and 1970? This question is of considerable importance for historians of anti-colonialism. After all, if the survival of such visions can be shown, it proves that the utopias of interwar anti-imperialists were not mere mirages in the minds of global nomads, but in fact helped shape the post-colonial world in profound ways.

The years between 1947 and 1970 were characterised by an accelerating process as, one after the other, nearly all of the colonial territories became independent. Two countries attained special symbolic importance in that period: India, which gained its independence in 1947, and Ghana, the first colonial territory in Africa to become independent, in 1957. Louro and James show the significant role that Nehru and Padmore, respectively, played in the process of freeing these countries from foreign rule. Moreover, they demonstrate how, at least until 1947, both of these activists subscribed to what might be called a 'vanguard' model of the nation. According to that model, a small number of colonial countries were to go ahead in first achieving full national independence, in order to then serve as inspiration for activists in colonies still under foreign rule.

From 1927 onwards, Nehru worked for full independence for India (as well as socialism), in part so that it could then serve as a model for other colonies, in Asia and beyond. As Louro shows, beginning in the mid-1930s, Nehru became increasingly interested in African nationalism and built ties to leading pan-Africanists, including Padmore.⁶⁴ Padmore in turn, in the late 1940s, paid close attention to India, Malaya and Burma, perceiving 'victory in one colony as a step forward for all colonies',⁶⁵ and emphasised the taking over of political power and vanguard leadership in the late 1940s and 1950s.⁶⁶ For him, as he declared in 1953, the Gold Coast was 'like a lighthouse in a dark continent showing the blacks the way safely into port'.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ Louro, *Comrades*, 90, 104–26, 132–9, 140–2, 168–76.

⁵⁹ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 252.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 286; see also 179, 214. Quote on 286.

⁶¹ Matera, *Black London*, 313.

⁶² James, *Padmore*, 167.

⁶³ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 285.

⁶⁴ Louro, *Comrades*, 183, 198–206.

⁶⁵ James, *Padmore*, 84.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

Nehru still subscribed to such a mindset in 1947. Louro describes how at the moment of independence, he reaffirmed his commitment to 'comradeship with those who continued to struggle against imperialism world-wide'.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, for Louro, this moment was also the beginning of the end of the spirit of internationalism. She argues that at the time when anti-imperialists gained control of independent nation states, their earlier visions, which had made it possible to combine nationalism and internationalism, broke down. While she sees internationalism as compatible with nationalism as an ideology, she does not see it as compatible with interstate relations.⁶⁹ As she contends, after 1947 anti-imperialism came to be 'usurped by the interstate dynamics of the third world project'.⁷⁰ In the last chapter of her book, she argues that at the Bandung Conference of 1955, during which the representatives of recently independent countries in Africa and Asia came together, the leaders of new post-colonial nation states found themselves drawn into supporting primarily the national interest of their respective new countries, which led to much conflict among the participants and undermined the more flexible and fluid internationalist styles of cooperation that had characterised the interwar years.

Other authors, in contrast, maintain that the internationalist visions of the interwar years survived for longer. Rather than focusing on the challenges that the attainment of the nation state created for international cooperation, they argue instead that this spirit of cooperation was of great importance in bringing about the independence of many countries in quick succession, lending momentum to what UK Prime Minister Harold Macmillan famously called the 'wind of change'. Goebel, agreeing with arguments made in recent years by historians such as Odd Arne Westad, sees the Bandung conference in a direct line of continuity with the Brussels Congress of 1927. In his view, therefore, when it comes to objections to imperialism, 'World War II looks less like a watershed than the culmination of developments that were already well under way. These interwar transformations presaged decolonisation and the rise of a shared experience of the Third World, bound by a common history of imperialist exploitation'.⁷¹

James, in turn, shows that even after 1955 the model of India still held considerable attraction for leaders of anti-colonial political movements worldwide, and that among them, Nehru was still seen as a strong advocate of internationalist cooperation. As she points out, one of the last two messages that Padmore sent out before his death in 1959, congratulating Nehru on his seventieth birthday, praised Nehru's determination not to limit 'the colonial struggle to the narrow confines of national exclusivity'.⁷²

To be sure, Padmore also experienced the challenges of reconciling nation statehood with an internationalist outlook. As James argues, in 1957–9, during the last two years of his life, when he became Nkrumah's advisor on African Affairs and led an office that aimed to support freedom fighters throughout Africa and build Pan-Africanism, Padmore supported Ghana's development as an independent country, but primarily as a vanguard model that would be the first step towards the independence of other African colonies,⁷³ and towards socialism. According to James, for Padmore, 'bourgeois nationalism' was 'dangerous but necessary'; a 'means' in the direction of a future socialist society, rather than an 'ultimate end'.⁷⁴ Instead of being the final goal it was a useful tool in stirring anti-colonial resistance; a tool, however, that also forced him to support an increasingly authoritarian political regime under Nkrumah, and that opened up the danger that the wave of political liberation might get stuck in the small tidepool of national independence, rather than moving through and beyond it towards his ultimate goal of a 'United States of Africa'.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Louro, *Comrades*, 266.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 266.

⁷¹ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 289.

⁷² James, *Padmore*, 183.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13, 137–9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 160, 167, quotes on 160.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 160, 167, 172, 180.

On the other hand, as James argues, at the time of Padmore's death in 1959, the future of Pan-Africanism actually looked rather positive. Padmore had been strongly involved in negotiations leading towards the Ghana–Guinea union in 1958, which he hoped would set a precedent for further unification projects,⁷⁶ as well as in organising the All-African People's Conference in the same year, described by many as a continuation of the Manchester Congress of 1945, just like Bandung was often commented on as reviving the spirit of 1927.⁷⁷ As James argues, between 1958 and the Third Summit of the Organisation of African Unity in 1965, 'Pan-Africanism was gripped by the realisation of an organised, continental union'.⁷⁸

James is in agreement with Louro's point that this climate of cooperation was not of unlimited duration. Meanwhile, she argues that in Africa, it took until the mid-1960s for 'the failure to achieve substantive continental or even regional unity' to become evident.⁷⁹ Manjapra also locates the end of the spirit of internationalist cooperation among anti-imperialists worldwide around that point in time. He argues that there was an initial post-Second World War period of experimentation and mutual assistance among anti-colonialist movements, with Indians forging connections with China and African countries. In his account, the 'spirit of Bandung' continued to connect new nations across the global South for a number of years after the conference, and only ended in 1965; though it had begun to gradually weaken in the first half of the 1960s, when India went to war with China in 1962 and Pakistan in 1965, and when Nehru died in 1964.⁸⁰

Following that interpretation, one might wonder if one main reason for the breakdown of the internationalist project of mutual help among anti-imperialists was precisely the fact that most colonial countries had already become independent by 1965. The dissolution of the old alliances at the point when the shared goal of independence had mostly been achieved might be an indication that the common 'negative' project of ending colonial rule had considerably more connecting power than any specific and more concrete, positive political and ideological agenda of cooperation between independent nation states. Visions of larger political units, or of world-wide cooperation among formerly colonised nations, did certainly turn out to be overly optimistic, as most new nation states did indeed become ingrained within their former colonial borders. Meanwhile, it is well possible that even this world of small post-colonial nation states would not have come into being if global anti-imperialists had not developed, in the interwar period, a much more ambitious vision of a post-colonial order; a dream of the future that fuelled the many efforts among anti-imperialists from different countries to support each other during the years of decolonisation.

Of course, in addition to the emergence of these internationalist anti-colonial networks, there were other global events and developments that created a shared experience of dispossession among the colonised from different parts of the world and inspired them to challenge colonial rule, thus helping explain the rapid pace of decolonisation after the Second World War. These include the colonial authorities' unwillingness, after both world wars, to reward the colonised for their wartime sacrifices with political reforms; the global impact of the Great Depression; the relative loss of power of both Britain and France during the Cold War period and the emergence of the League of Nations and the United Nations that created public fora for questioning the legitimacy of colonial rule. Nevertheless, the books under review transform the field by adding a crucial element to our explanatory models for the 'contagion of sovereignty'⁸¹ among formerly colonised nations after 1945.

For the future, there are a number of themes that already appear in the books but could be developed further. It remains an ongoing project to reconnect more systematically the study of global networks and movements to that of the smaller-scale regional and national social and political

⁷⁶ Ibid., 182, 192.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 182.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 194.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 195.

⁸⁰ Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*, 279.

⁸¹ See David Armitage, 'The Contagion of Sovereignty: Declarations of Independence since 1776', *South African History Journal*, 52 (2005), 1–18.

contexts in which activists were situated. More research into how class and gender identities intersected with the political activities of anti-colonialists would be valuable; it would be worthwhile to examine in more detail the perspective of the colonial authorities in conjunction with that of global activists, showing how both of these groups interpreted each other's activities and interacted and negotiated with each other on a global scale; and more books are needed that study, systematically and to an equal extent, the activities of global anti-imperialists in multiple colonial empires. Thereby, we will move even further towards a truly comparative and trans-imperial perspective on the end of imperialism.