

A City Against Empire

Transnational Anti-Imperialism
in Mexico City, 1920–30

Thomas K. Lindner



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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AFL	American Federation of Labor
AGELA	Association Générale d'Étudiants Latino-Américains [General Association of Latin American Students]
<i>AIZ</i>	<i>Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung</i>
ANERC	Asociación de Nuevos Emigrados Revolucionarios Cubanos [Association of Cuban Revolutionary New Emigrants]
APRA	Alianza Popular Revolucionario Americana [American Popular Revolutionary Alliance]
CGT	Confederación General de Trabajadores [General Confederation of Workers]
CROM	Confederación Regional de Obreros Mexicanos [Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers]
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Comintern
ENP	Escuela Nacional Preparatoria [National Preparatory School]
LACO	League Against Colonial Oppression
LADLA	Liga Anti-Imperialista de las Américas [Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas]
LAI	League Against Imperialism
MAFUENIC	Manos Fuera de Nicaragua [Hands Off Nicaragua]
PCC	Partido Comunista de Cuba [Cuban Communist Party]
PCM	Partido Comunista Mexicano [Mexican Communist Party]
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario [National Revolutionary Party]
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional [Institutional Revolutionary Party]
PRV	Partido Revolucionario Venezolano [Revolutionary Party of Venezuela]
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública [Secretariat of Public Education]
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Social Democratic Party of Germany]

UCSAYA	Unión Centro Sud Americana y de las Antillas [Union of Central-South America and of the Antilles]
ULA	Unión Latinoamericana [Latin American Union]
WPA	Workers Party of America

Introduction

*I walked through the city. [...]
I saw the main avenues and palaces.
It is a great city and can become an unparalleled city.*

Julio Antonio Mella (1920)¹

In 1926, the 22-year-old law student Julio Antonio Mella was forced to leave his hometown Havana. As a communist student organizer, he had worked in the Cuban opposition movement and initiated a hunger strike in prison to protest the regime's accusation of being involved in terrorist activities. When Mella was released in January 1926, he knew where to take refuge: in Mexico City, the Mexican metropolis he had already admired during a visit in 1920. Among activists in Latin America, the city was known as a space where left-wing radicals of all sorts and ideological shades could count on support of the Mexican government and the city's civil society. In Mexico City, Mella indeed used his charms and talent as a speaker to become a central figure within the city's political circles, embodying qualities representative of the larger scene of activism in Mexico City. Transnationally organized and politically radical, many groups wielded anti-imperialism as their central ideological tool to tie together diverse individuals and ideals. These political activists, communists as well as nationalists and many others, shared the notion that the growing influence of the United States was a threat to the sovereignty of Latin American nations and needed to be fought. In the 1920s, anti-imperialism was a political watchword, a label under which many political activists, intellectuals, and artists established transnational connections, thereby creating a "new geography of resistance" in Mexico City.² This

1 Julio Antonio Mella, "Diario del primer viaje a México (1 de abril–21 de junio de 1920)," in *Mella. 100 Años*, vol. 1, ed. Ana Cairo (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2003), April 8 and 9. If not indicated otherwise, all translations are by the author.

2 Barry Carr, "Pioneering Transnational Solidarity in the Americas: The Movement in Support of Augusto C. Sandino 1927–1934," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20, no. 2 (2014): 147.

book seeks to shed light on the developments that led to the postrevolutionary city becoming an important space of transnational political activism, analyzes how anti-imperialism was transnationally and locally created, envisioned, and performed, and examines how the city eventually lost much of its appeal for transnational activists at the end of the 1920s.³

Mexico City after the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) was the space of an extraordinary modernization process.⁴ After almost a decade of violent conflict that had slowed down economic growth, rapid modernization characterized the city during the 1920s including dramatic changes in culture, politics, social life, urban experience, technology, and education. The population of the city had almost doubled, from 344,721 inhabitants in 1900 to 615,327 in 1921. In 1930, Mexico City reached the number of 1,029,068 inhabitants, most of that growth caused by internal migration from the countryside.⁵ On the streets of Mexico City, modernization could be witnessed first-hand in a buzzing and noisy atmosphere. More inhabitants required new ways of transportation, and the numbers of automobiles, motor buses, and electric trams on the streets exemplified the ongoing urban transformation. The city's boundaries expanded rapidly, and in the process the growing social divisions between poor and rich, old and new became increasingly visible to the city's inhabitants.⁶ Compared to cities in western Europe or the United States, this urban transformation happened later, was more strongly shaped by foreign influences (investment, technology, design), and caused greater social inequalities.⁷ In the 1920s, Mexico City had become the modern

3 This study's use of the term *postrevolutionary* distinguishes between the armed phase of the revolution (1910–20) and the period that followed it. The intent is to emphasize the historical moment in which many Mexican and non-Mexican activists, artists, and intellectuals seized on the recent popular upheaval as an opportunity to re-formulate existing ideas and forge new alliances. Anti-imperialism was one of the ideas that gained new meanings and urgency after the revolution. For this argument, see Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 6–7.

4 For the urban transformation of Mexico City since the 1880s, characterized by the ideals of national modernization and cosmopolitanism, see Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 3–42.

5 Numbers from Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900–1931* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 226. This estimate relies on census data in which Mexico City is comprised of the four *delegaciones*, M. Hidalgo, Cuauhtémoc, B. Juárez, and V. Carranza. The Federal District additionally includes 12 more *delegaciones*; its population in 1930 was 1,221,000. Numbers for the even larger Metropolitan Area were only gathered from 1940.

6 See Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 20–28.

7 See John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 17–18.

metropolis that experts and politicians had envisioned since the 1880s and the city firmly established itself as the political, financial, and commercial capital of the nation. As historian John Lear has concisely put it, Mexico City was imagined in the 1920s as “the modern capital of a modernizing nation.”⁸

The main thesis of this book is that Mexico City became a hub for transnational activism, particularly for anti-imperialist networks after the Mexican Revolution. In the 1920s, the Mexican capital not only became a multinational metropolis and a cosmopolitan city of avant-garde artists, but also a laboratory for radical internationalism. The city attracted larger than average numbers of political activists who found opportunities to work and make a living in the city and turned it into a center for organization and agitation.⁹ After the First World War, political activists intermingling in urban centers around the world were able to take advantage of new technologies that facilitated the flow of persons and ideas across national borders and oceans in a time that saw an unprecedented proliferation of internationalism in institutions, ideas, and global movements.¹⁰ Similar to other metropolises, such as New York, Havana, Buenos Aires, Paris, and Shanghai, anti-imperialism in Mexico City became a universal concept, a lingua franca connecting local, national, and continental struggles to a global problem: the existence of empire.

What did anti-imperialism mean in Mexico City in the 1920s and who can be defined as anti-imperialist? For me, anti-imperialists were those who expressed their opposition to imperialism and elevated this concern into a central part of their political identity. Communists who criticized capitalism, progressives who defended the Mexican Constitution of 1917, and Mexican presidents who talked about the nationalization of oil companies did so in a language of anti-imperialism. Very diverse actors with different ideologies identified their respective political problems with the existence of imperialism, usually in relation to the imperialism of the United States. For anti-imperialists, empire was about the domination of one place or territory over another with varying degrees of local cooperation, and varying techniques and objectives. Almost always, empire was seen as having a geographical or spatial center (e.g., London, Paris, Wall Street, etc.).¹¹ Anti-imperialism, in such a relatively emic

8 Lear, *Workers*, 359.

9 See Barry Carr, “‘Across Seas and Borders’: Charting the Webs of Radical Internationalism in the Circum-Caribbean,” in *Exile and the Politics of Exclusion in the Americas*, eds. Luis Roniger, James N. Green, and Pablo Yankelevich (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 223. For Carr, the cities that became hubs of radical internationalism were Havana, New York, Tampa, Key West, and Mexico City.

10 See Akira Iriye, *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 20–30.

11 This is a difference to later ideas that tend to stress the fluid character of capital and empire; see, for example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

usage, had more to do with the self-image of nationalists, communists, and liberals—and less with the objective existence and various shapes of imperialism. This study follows the historical actors in their multifaceted critiques of empire and thus highlights the diverse, sometimes even contradictory trajectory of the term and the practices derived from it. Anti-imperialism was thus not a clear-cut ideological program. If anything, it was an inclusive political framework, which could easily be combined with other ideologies and traditions like Marxism and nationalism, and, in rarer occasions, even with Catholicism, spiritualism, and racism. These attributes of anti-imperialism—openness, inclusiveness, a deliberate vagueness—were part of its attraction, but undoubtedly also part of its problems. Compared to more comprehensive doctrines like fascism or communism, ideologies with specific ideas about culture and society, anti-imperialism was decidedly smaller in scope and narrower in what it opposed.¹² It also had a distinctly strategic outlook connected to specific political aims and thus a strong cross-ideological component. The umbrella term of anti-imperialism allowed conservative nationalists and communists to work together in opposing the foreign policy of the United States in Mexico, although their respective images of how, for example, a future Mexican society should ideally look like, differed substantially.

Due to the rich tradition of anti-imperialist thought and the wide range of anti-imperialist political practices, this work embraces the idea that anti-imperialism was not just a negative, reactive movement against empire.¹³ Anti-imperialist movements created their own agendas and linked their fights to several other discourses, using concepts like self-determination, nation building, international solidarity, and a just international order. Opposing empire was a way of searching for an alternative modernity, re-inventing modernity beyond the mere imitation of Western models of development, as historian Nicola Miller put it.¹⁴ By the 1920s, those who criticized imperialist policies could draw on a tradition of both Marxist (Lenin, Bukharin) and non-Marxist (Hobson, Rodó) theories that had managed to give the term imperialism a negative connotation by the 1920s.¹⁵

12 There was, for example, no anti-imperialist vision of how to lead a good family life or how to eat well—aspects that were included in other ideologies of the time.

13 I second Ian Tyrell's and Jay Sexton's thought on American anti-imperialism here. They use an even wider definition of (U.S.) anti-imperialism that views it as a strand of political thought, a form of social and political action, a foreign policy, a versatile language and a political cause, a cultural formation, a form of subaltern resistance, and a type of historiography. See Ian Tyrell and Jay Saxton, Introduction to *Empire's Twin: U.S. Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism*, eds. Ian Tyrell and Jay Sexton (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 5, 9.

14 See Nicola Miller, *Reinventing Modernity in Latin America: Intellectuals Imagine the Future, 1900–1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 16–18.

15 See Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961 [1916]); Nikolai Bukharin, *Imperialism*

When viewed through the lens of transnational activism, Mexico City was part of a global moment of anti-imperialism in the mid-1920s. Historians Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier coined the term “global moment” to describe the often simultaneous, yet ideologically divergent, even contradictory, interpretations of landmark events around the world that “coalesced around the notion of an interconnected future.”¹⁶ The city of Mexico City experienced its anti-imperialist moment between the summer of 1925 and the summer of 1927.¹⁷ Before 1925, local, national, and global factors laid the basis for this moment in Mexico City: radical groups combined Marxism with Mexican nationalism and created transnationally active organizations; the Communist International (Comintern) supported these movements as part of its global strategy, and the Mexican state encouraged anti-imperialist nationalism as part of its own nation-building project. In 1925, the synchronicity of several local, national, and global factors triggered the anti-imperialist moment that transformed Mexico City into hub of transnational activism. The moment started to fade out in 1927, though the process of fragmentation lasted longer and was not as clear-cut as the moment’s beginning in 1925. While some developments, such as the anti-imperialist solidarity with César Augusto Sandino in Nicaragua, only reached their peak in 1928, the general dynamism and integrative force of anti-imperialism slowly tapered off. The transnational networks of anti-imperialism disintegrated: some activists turned their focus towards their respective national struggles, while others committed themselves to the increasingly static Comintern line that left them with little agency. Consequently, Mexico City lost its significance as a hub of anti-imperialism at the end of the 1920s.

This book focuses on several political actors who called themselves anti-imperialists and attempts to situate these actors within the social structures of Mexico City, within a history of Latin American thought, and as part of a changing political culture of the 1920s. The protagonists of this study were of different nationalities, ethnicities, religions, and social classes. In a time when men usually dominated traditional public politics, radical

and World Economy (New York City: International Publishers, 1929 [1917]); John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (New York: J. Pott, 1902); José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel* (Montevideo: Dornaleche y Reyes, 1900).

16 See Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, Introduction to *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s*, eds. Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For the importance of the global moment of 1917–19, see Fabian Krautwald, Thomas Lindner, and Sakiko Nakao, “Fighting Marginality: The Global Moment of 1917–1919 and the Re-Imagination of Belonging,” *L’Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques* 18 (2018).

17 On the anti-imperialist moment of 1925 in Paris, see Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 158–75.

women successfully managed to become key actors in the transnational networks of radicals. Still, women faced serious limitations in their possibilities to express themselves and were sometimes actively excluded from the anti-imperialist movement.¹⁸ Socioeconomic factors were crucial markers of difference as well. Some anti-imperialists were well off and powerful, like the group of Venezuelan exiles in Mexico City, who missed the tennis courts of their hometown Caracas.¹⁹ Other actors—and these cases by far outnumber the affluent ones—struggled to make a living in Mexico City and worked as teachers, translators, journalists, typists, nude models, or artists. This study is thus not the re-telling of a story of elite cosmopolites who traveled across national boundaries without problems, but rather the story of the transnational creation of cosmopolitan thought zones characterized by severe incongruities of power and wealth.²⁰ Apart from gender and class, passports mattered, too. Latin American exiles were immediately affected by changing relations between their country of origin and the Mexican government. Mexican communists were often threatened by government repression, while foreign radicals (or those thought of as such) were in constant danger of being deported from the country. Certain Americans and Europeans were privileged because their passports allowed them to easily travel between their countries of origin and Mexico, and some returned home and used their knowledge about Mexico to advance their careers in universities or government positions.²¹

Global and continental developments shaped the transnational networks of anti-imperialism in Mexico City. In the aftermath of the First World War, increasing disappointment with the unfulfilled promises of the “Wilsonian moment” and the Western powers more generally, spurred many anti-imperialists and anticolonialists to turn to socialist and national alternatives to the international order.²² In Mexico, the Mexican Revolution overshadowed Woodrow Wilson’s promises, but after the end of the armed conflict, Mexicans, and Latin Americans more generally, demanded that the

18 For a good overview of the “Gendering of the Cultural Revolution,” see Stephanie J. Smith, *The Power and Politics of Art in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 77–120.

19 See Guillermo García Ponce, *Memorias de un general de la utopía* (Caracas: Cotragraf, 1992), 67.

20 See Kris Manjapra, Introduction to *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, eds. Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

21 A remarkable number of members of the U.S. Communist Party who were active in the 1920s in Mexico later became ardent anti-communists, putting their expertise to the service of American intelligence services. The best documented case is that of Bertram and Ella Wolfe, who after years of communist activity in Mexico worked for the U.S. State Department during the Cold War.

22 See Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

promises of self-determination be applied to the Western hemisphere, too. After all, considerable numbers of American troops were stationed in three countries—Nicaragua, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic—in 1919.²³ The American interventions during the Mexican Revolution had proven that the sovereignty of a large and important Latin American country was not necessarily sufficient to ward off the United States. Those who condemned these occupations and viewed the United States as an empire could build on a rich tradition of Latin American thought, but they were also spoken to by a new voice on the international stage: The Soviet Union offered anti-imperialists and anticolonialists an attractive alternative to the Western powers, which preached liberalism and democracy, yet implemented imperialism and the League of Nations Mandate System. Apart from socialism, radical nationalism offered an alternative to the existing order, as it became clear that nation states, not empires, would become the organizing principle of international politics. Anti-imperialism could integrate the two dominating poles of global thought: in its various forms, it was compatible with the global discourse on self-determination and nationalism, but also with the internationalist visions of socialism. Anti-imperialism thus enabled transnational debates, creating conversations and shared dwelling spaces between disparate groups.

But there is also a national and local context to be considered when talking about anti-imperialists in Mexico City in the 1920s. A crucial difference to anti-imperialist groups elsewhere was their relationship to the Mexican host society, and specifically to the Mexican government. Indian anticolonialists in London, Vietnamese nationalists in Paris, and Puerto Rican activists in New York acted from within the centers of the imperial power that they wanted to see overthrown. This does not hold true for the left-wing anti-imperialist groups in Mexico City, for whom the Mexican government, at least until its right-wing turn at the end of the 1920s, functioned as a potential ally against imperialism. This favorable view of the Mexican government—and, more generally, of Mexico as a country—was a reverberation of the Mexican Revolution and the hopes it had inspired. The revolution had attracted many activists, who interpreted it as a people's uprising against an old regime and heavy-handed foreign influence—aims with which anti-imperialists sympathized.²⁴ The Mexican Revolution thus helped catalyze a Latin American backlash against U.S. militarism and Washington's

23 These three occupations (Nicaragua 1912–33, Haiti 1915–34, and the Dominican Republic 1916–24) were the largest and longest ones in the 1920s, while others took place in Puerto Rico, Panama, and Cuba. See Alan L. McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

24 See Pablo Yankelevich, *La revolución mexicana en América Latina: Intereses políticos e itinerarios intelectuales* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2003); Adalberto Santana, ed., *América Latina y la revolución mexicana* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2010).

dollar diplomacy.²⁵ Apart from its symbolic value, the Mexican Revolution also brought actors into positions of power where they could actively shape the conditions in which transnational anti-imperialism flourished. When the philosopher José Vasconcelos became minister of education, he used the position to bring anti-imperialists from different parts of the world to the city.²⁶ In general, the Mexican nation state was in a phase of experimental reconstruction during the 1920s and all political developments were framed as struggles over the course of the postrevolutionary state. In these struggles, anti-imperialists could present their goals as contributions to the national revolutionary project—an opportunity that was unique to the Mexican context and sustainably shaped the anti-imperialist movement.

The intricate relation between global, continental, national, and local factors for the development of anti-imperialist networks in Mexico City in the 1920s cannot be adequately represented by focusing on one context only. Thus, this study attempts to underline the inherently global nature of anti-imperialism, while situating anti-imperialists in Mexico City in their local context and acknowledging the enormous impact of the Mexican Revolution on anti-imperialist thinking. The role of Jacobo Hurwitz, one of the protagonists of this story, exemplifies the interconnectedness of different levels of historical analysis: as a Peruvian exile in Mexico, Hurwitz profited from the Mexican political elites' continental ambitions to portray Mexico as national haven for Latin American radicals. In the local context of the anti-imperialist scene in Mexico City, Hurwitz switched allegiances from the populist–nationalist version of anti-imperialism, represented by his compatriot Haya de la Torre, to a Marxist approach to imperialism. Additionally, Hurwitz became known as an expert on China who wrote articles that used the situation of semi-colonial China to explain Latin America's position vis-à-vis global imperialism.²⁷ An artificial distinction between these different levels of analysis seems to be counterproductive, and the strict distinction between the local and the global remains, as historian Kris Manjapra aptly called it, a “false dichotomy.”²⁸ Anti-imperialists permanently chiseled it to fit into the national and local contexts, while retaining its global impulse.

In recent years, historians have increasingly stressed the transnational and trans-imperial dimensions of anti-imperialist and anticolonial movements. Scholars no longer study anti-imperialism solely through the lens of internal developments within nation states, but rather as a result of transnational

25 See Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Holt, 2007), 33.

26 For Vasconcelos and his role in the movement of cultural nationalism, see Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880–1928* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982).

27 Jacobo Hurwitz, “La esperanza amarilla,” *El Libertador* 12 (June 1927): 27, 29.

28 Kris Manjapra, “Communist Internationalism and Transcolonial Recognition,” in Bose and Manjapra, eds., *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones*, 159.

exchanges. Many historians have emphasized the role of cities as hubs of anti-imperialism and transnational political interaction in the years after the First World War. As prime locations of social, intellectual, and political exchange between many different types of people, urban environments were spaces where transnational interaction was a feature of everyday experience and where resistance against global developments (like imperialism) could most effectively be organized. Most of this strain of historiography has focused on the European capitals as spaces of transnational exchange.²⁹ While it has developed fascinating insights into the logic of networks and the inherently transnational nature of anti-imperialism in the 1920s, it is time to stress the importance of transnational networks of anti-imperialism in non-European cities as well.

In Latin American historiography, there is a growing body of literature on the transnational networks of anti-imperialism of the interwar years. In recent years, historians Alexandra Pita González, Carlos Marichal Salinas, Nicola Miller, and Greg Grandin have all examined the role of transnational (particularly continental) networks in the intellectual history of anti-imperialism.³⁰ Scholars have also examined the role of transnational organizations and networks that were created in the 1920s to promote anti-imperialism specifically. Daniel Kersfeld's studies on the Liga Anti-Imperialista de las Américas (LADLA), Ricardo Melgar Bao's studies on the LADLA and the Unión Centro Sud Americana y de las Antillas (UCSAYA), and Barry Carr's works on radical internationalism have all stressed the importance of the transnational genealogy of anti-imperialist networks.³¹ By focusing on Mexico City,

29 For the examples of Paris and Berlin, see Jennifer Anne Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis: The Urban Grounds of Anti-Imperialism and Feminism in Interwar Paris* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010); Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*; Michael Goebel, "The Capital of the Men without a Country: Migrants and Anticolonialism in Interwar Paris," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 5 (2016); Nathanael Kuck, "Anti-Colonialism in a Post-Imperial Environment: The Case of Berlin, 1914–33," *Journal of Contemporary History* 49 (2014).

30 Alexandra Pita González, *La unión latinoamericana y el boletín renovación: Redes intelectuales y revistas culturales en la década de 1920* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2009); Alexandra Pita González and Carlos Marichal Salinas, eds., *Pensar el antiimperialismo: Ensayos de historia intelectual latinoamericana, 1900–1930* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2012); Alexandra Pita González, ed., *Redes intelectuales transnacionales en América Latina durante la entreguerra* (Colima: Universidad de Colima and Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2016); Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999); Greg Grandin, "Your Americanism and Mine: Americanism and Anti-Americanism in the Americas," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (2006).

31 See Daniel Kersfeld, "La Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas: Una construcción política entre el marxismo y el latinoamericanismo," in *El comunismo: Otras miradas desde América Latina*, eds. Elvira Concheiro, Massimo Modonesi, and Horacio Crespo (Mexico City: UNAM, 2007), 151–68; Daniel Kersfeld, *Contra el imperio: Historia*

this study can add a social, urban, and actor-focused context to the existing literature on continental networks and Latin American thought. At the same time, a transnational perspective on Mexico City underlines the role of the city for the genealogy of global anti-imperialism, a role too often overlooked.

Regarding the intellectual history of anti-imperialism in Mexico, I argue that anti-imperialists were more aware of their position within a global movement of anti-imperialism than is often acknowledged. Admittedly, in postcolonial Latin America, a long tradition of *continental*, not global, thought influenced anti-imperialists during the 1920s.³² Julio Antonio Mella's role model was José Martí, discussions on the role of the indigenous population of Latin America were deeply intertwined with debates about persisting colonial structures, and Latin America's own postcolonial status was frequently referenced in anti-imperialist writing. Historian Michel Gobat argues that the term "Latin America" itself is inseparably linked to anti-imperialist ideas of the nineteenth century.³³ But there is more to the anti-imperialism of the 1920s than its continental traditions and diachronic history. As historian Patricia Funes has shown, the 1920s were for Latin American intellectuals "a time of transit, of nomadic and hermaphrodite ideas."³⁴ The ever-transitory character of ideas also applies to the re-configuration of anti-imperialism. The rise of the Soviet Union, the new position of the United States as a global power after the First World War, and the damaged credibility of Europe as a model for development were extremely important factors in re-defining anti-imperialism as a social movement. This movement was less elitist and less Eurocentric than its nineteenth-century predecessor and was more interested in global developments like the anticolonial movements in Africa and Asia.

The focus on synchronic, transcontinental influences on the genesis of anti-imperialist thinking is connected to historiographical discussions about the history of the eventual emergence of the Third World and the roots of decolonization. Over the last twenty years, it has become clear that the origins of post-Second World War decolonization cannot be explained

de la Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2012); Ricardo Melgar Bao, "Un neobolivarianismo antiimperialista: La Unión Sud Centro Americana y de las Antillas (UCSAYA)," *Políticas de la Memoria* 6/7 (2006/7); Ricardo Melgar Bao, "The Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas between the East and the West," *Latin American Perspectives* 35, no. 2 (2008); Carr, "Pioneering"; Carr, "Across."

32 See Alexandra Pita González and Carlos Marichal Salinas, Introduction to *Pensar el antiimperialismo*.

33 See Michel Gobat, "The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race," *American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (2013).

34 Patricia Funes, *Salvar la Nación: Intelectuales, cultura y política en los años veinte latinoamericanos* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2006), 13.

without acknowledging its early roots in the global interconnection of the 1920s.³⁵ This work relates to these studies by arguing that Latin American solidarity with Africa and Asia, too, was essentially envisioned in the 1920s through transnational exchange. The idea of tricontinental solidarity specifically was not the product of events like the Bandung Conference of 1955 (where Latin American countries did not participate anyway) or the Cuban Tricontinental Conference of 1966, nor were they first envisioned within a Cold War context. Rather, I argue that the seeds of tricontinental solidarity were already visible in Latin American societies of the 1920s—specifically in anti-imperialist thinking.³⁶ Many anti-imperialists in Latin America claimed that their continent occupied a similar position to Africa and Asia in a global system of imperialist oppression. The view that sovereignty necessarily included economic independence, not just the mere existence of a nation state, was common in the 1920s and could bridge what historian Christy Thornton has called the “decolonization divide.”³⁷ This tricontinental thinking found its most prominent and visible expression in concrete acts of solidarity like the anti-imperialist “Brussels Congress” in 1927—an event historian Michael Goebel has identified as the founding event of a “Proto-Third World.”³⁸ Still, this does not mean that tricontinental solidarity was necessarily welcomed or reciprocated by Africans and Asians, nor does it deny the structural dissimilarities between Latin American anti-imperialists and African and Asian anticolonialists. But the foundation of tricontinental solidarity was built in the 1920s, its genesis facilitated by anti-imperialist imaginations.³⁹

35 See Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007); Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (New York: Allen Lane, 2012); Sönke Kunkel and Christoph Meyer, eds., *Aufbruch ins postkoloniale Zeitalter: Globalisierung und die außereuropäische Welt in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2012).

36 For a similar argument in relation to intellectuals in Argentina, see Martín Bergel, *El Oriente desplazado: Los intelectuales y los orígenes del tercermundismo en la Argentina* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2015).

37 Christy Thornton, “A Mexican International Economic Order? Tracing the Hidden Roots of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 9, no. 3 (2018): 393.

38 Michael Goebel, “Forging a Proto-Third World? Latin America and the League Against Imperialism,” in *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives*, eds. Michele L. Louro, Caroline Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter, and Sana Tannoury-Karam (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020), 53–78.

39 On tricontinentalism, see Thea Pitman and Andy Stafford, “Introduction: Transatlanticism and Tricontinentalism,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 197–207.

Implicitly, this work also addresses the relationship between global history, postcolonial studies, and Latin American historiography. Postcolonial studies have been regarded with some suspicion by historians of Latin America—the idea that concepts and methods created for the analysis of other historical cases and regions would simply be applied to postcolonial Latin America has left them doubtful rather than inspired.⁴⁰ Experts on the history of Latin America have criticized postcolonial thinkers and theorists for ignoring Latin America altogether or for discounting certain parts of Latin American history like the complicated histories of *mestizaje* and hybridity.⁴¹ Since the 2000s, the discussions about postcolonial studies in Latin America have shifted to the question of whether Latin America lends itself as location for “global history” perspectives. Analyzing this discussion, Matthew Brown criticizes that the dialogue between global history and Latin American history regularly fails in part because both traditions tend to portray Latin America as marginalized and passive. Yet, as Brown also underlines, Latin American historians have long been attentive to how global processes have been incorporated into local histories at various moments without necessarily calling these events global.⁴² Rafael Marquese and João Paulo Pimenta second Brown when they argue that Latin American historiography has long been global, without its practitioners and English-speaking academia fully acknowledging it.⁴³ This study supports the claim that global history and Latin American history are more strongly interwoven than is usually acknowledged. It attempts to strengthen the dialogue between studies on the transnational making of modern Mexico, on the one hand, and studies about anti-imperialist interconnections and transnational networks in the field of global history, on the other hand. The history of anti-imperialist interconnections in the 1920s lends itself to that task, because anti-imperialists of the time themselves addressed issues that

40 Some of this suspicion can be seen in Jeremy Adelman’s critical reflection on the state of global history: Jeremy Adelman, “What is Global History Now?” *Aeon*, March 2, 2017.

41 See J. Jorge Klor de Alva, “The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of ‘Colonialism,’ ‘Postcolonialism,’ and ‘Mestizaje,’” in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995). For a discussion on the relationship between Latin American history and postcolonial studies, see Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 17 and Nicola Miller, “The Historiography of Nationalism and National Identity in Latin America,” *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 2 (2006).

42 See Matthew Brown, “The Global History of Latin America,” *Journal of Global History* 10, no. 3 (2015): 368.

43 The authors identify Caribbean Marxism, the Latin American branch of the French Annales school, and dependency theory as global history *avant la lettre*. See Rafael Marquese and João Paulo Pimenta, “Latin America and the Caribbean: Traditions of Global History,” in *Global History, Globally: Research and Practice Around the World*, eds. Sven Beckert and Dominic Sachsenmaier (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

continue to be discussed in the current academic discourse. The question as to whether Mexico belonged to “the West” or “the rest,” for example, was already posed by anti-imperialists in the 1920s, and their complex and contradictory answers reveal both the relevance of the question, but also the inflexibility of the artificial dichotomy.

Studying anti-imperialist networks in Mexico City necessarily involves a perspective that takes transnational entanglements seriously. Anti-imperialism was not just a frame of reference grounded in global thinking—it was also a movement comprised of actors who frequently crossed national borders, both within and beyond the Americas. A shift in perspective towards transnationalism, defined as an attempt to capture experiences that traversed and transcended the borders of nation states, has come to define much of the historical profession, with many historians leaving behind “the prison-house of national norms.”⁴⁴ De-centring the nation, of course, does not mean ignoring the nation and the huge historical impact of nationalism. Quite the contrary is true: transnationalism opens up perspectives on the specific ways in which—in this case Mexican postrevolutionary—nationalism was constructed. The complex construction of national identity through transnational contact is exemplified by the ways in which anti-imperialism appropriated nationalist ideas.

This examination of anti-imperialist networks relies on primary unpublished sources, published accounts of activists, and on publications of the time. I could consult ten archives in Mexico, the United States, and Europe. Police surveillance documentation from the Mexican, U.S., and European security services are one intriguing—though problematic—source of information on anti-imperialist actors.⁴⁵ “Egodocuments” of the actors, often written with hindsight, have their own issues and are, if possible, contrasted with the actors’ accounts from the time, such as published or unpublished diaries and correspondence. Materials on the internal communications of the communist movement or of sympathizing labor organizations are used, with caution, for the same purpose.⁴⁶ The third source corpus consists of journals, magazines, and newspapers, as well as of other published writings of the time such as

44 Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, “Rethinking the History of Internationalism,” in *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*, eds. Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 7.

45 This material comes from the “Political and Social Investigations Department” of the Archivo General de la Nación in Mexico City, from the digitalized *Archives Unbound* collections of the U.S. National Archives, and from the German Bundesarchiv. Police surveillance reports are often the best source for historians of transnational anti-imperialism in Europe. For the Mexican case, however, I did not find as many reports on anti-imperialists and could only use few examples.

46 For the communist and socialist perspective, the Centro de Estudios del Movimiento Obrero y Socialista (CEMOS) in Mexico City and the archive of the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam were helpful.

pamphlets, posters, and political treaties. Visual sources such as photographs, murals, drawings, and other forms of art have been used to round off the source corpus.⁴⁷

Taken together, the different chapters of this book seek to tell the story of transnational activism in Mexico City. The first chapter analyzes the relationship between radical politics and art in Mexico City through a relatively local lens. By discussing the Mexican avant-garde movement and Marxist muralism, it examines how anti-imperialist motives and images influenced the anti-imperialist scene and political art in Mexico City more broadly. Rather than just a discursive act, criticizing empire was extremely centered around visual expressions and a language of symbols. Anti-imperialist artists were an integral part of the “Mexican Cosmopolitan Summer” and thus shaped the fate of Mexico and Mexican nationalism in the 1920s.⁴⁸

In the second chapter, the focus lies on the activities of Latin American political exiles in Mexico City, their involuntary entanglement in transnational politics, and their involvement in the city’s anti-imperialist scene. The Mexican postrevolutionary governments, often driven by strategic considerations rather than a spirit of Latin American solidarity, gave refuge to many political exiles and tried to use them for their own political aims, especially to expand Mexican influence in the Caribbean, Central, and South America. But the exiles had their own plans and performed their visions of national revolution, transnational anti-imperialism, and continental unity in their own ways, which were not always to the liking of the Mexican governments. Between 1920 and 1929, and especially between 1925 and 1927, Mexico City was the most active hub of Latin American exile activism and a small-scale laboratory of what Latin American utopian projects of unity could look like. The examples of the Venezuelan, the Cuban, and the Peruvian exile communities reflect the diversity within exile activism, while at the same time underlining the unifying role of anti-imperialist thinking for these different political projects of exile activism.

The third chapter turns to the question of how anti-imperialist politics were performed and organized in the city streets. It examines two transnational solidarity campaigns in which anti-imperialists in Mexico City showed their support for their comrades elsewhere. The campaign against the conviction of the Italian-American anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States was used by communists to, among other things, gain popularity among the global left. In Mexico City, anti-imperialism was a radicalizing

47 In the case of visual sources, the Hemeroteca Nacional de México in Mexico City, several collections at the University of Texas Libraries in Austin, and the collection of magazines, posters, and prints at the Ibero-American Institute in Berlin have helped me a lot.

48 On the concept of the “Mexican Cosmopolitan Summer,” see Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, “The Cosmopolitan Mexican Summer, 1920–1949,” *Latin American Research Review* 32, no. 3 (1997).

force, especially when it coincided with the local protest against the U.S. military campaign in Nicaragua. Starting in the summer of 1925, the solidarity campaign for the rebel general Augusto César Sandino mobilized large crowds in Mexico City and brought anti-imperialist protests onto the streets. With large demonstrations, economic boycotts, and fundraising campaigns, the anti-imperialist scene sought to show solidarity and profit from the popular global topics, thus establishing a connection between the global anti-imperialist movement and local activism.

In the fourth chapter, the origins of tricontinental thought in postrevolutionary Mexico are examined. The Mexican and the Russian Revolutions had demonstrated that radical societal change was imaginable, at the very least. Together with the First World War, which for many in the Americas signaled the demise of European global hegemony, these revolutions represented a new time of political possibilities as well as a tectonic shift in global politics. War-torn Europe, holding onto and even expanding its reach on its non-European colonies, and war-profiteer America, reaching out for new markets in Latin America, were increasingly seen as the capitals of empire. Consequently, many anti-imperialists in Mexico City looked to “the East,” drawing inspiration from the anticolonial revolutions in Africa and Asia. How anti-imperialist imaginaries about China, Morocco, and India inspired political activists, intellectuals, and artists to embrace an early version of tricontinental solidarity is the central question of this chapter.

The fifth chapter addresses the role that the anti-imperialist scene in Mexico City played in global networks of anti-imperialism and communism. It examines the Congress Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression that took place in Brussels in the beginning of 1927. The Brussels Congress brought together anticolonial and anti-imperialist activists—among them many residents of Mexico City such as Julio Antonio Mella, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, and José Vasconcelos—and marked an important peak of anti-imperialist transnationalization in the interwar years. The preparations for the Congress and the primarily urban networks behind it underline the central role of Mexico City for the global anti-imperialist movement. The political activists from Mexico City were at least as crucial as their counterparts in Berlin or Moscow, though their contributions have rarely been acknowledged in the existing literature.

The narrative concludes at the end of the 1920s, because the political circumstances in Mexico changed and an internationalist vision of anti-imperialism made way for a narrower vision of anti-imperialism as part of the national revolution. But neither the history of anti-imperialism in Mexico nor the history of Mexico City as location of transnational activism and exile activism ended there. In the 1930s, President Lázaro Cárdenas revived anti-imperialism, and, by nationalizing the foreign-owned petroleum companies, arguably initiated the largest anti-imperialist state program in Mexican history. By the 1930s, however, global circumstances had changed: the Comintern had given up its internationalist vision of cooperation with the

national liberation movements in the colonial territories, and anti-imperialist alliances lost their attractiveness as facilitators of transcontinental interaction and transnational militancy. In the early 1930s, U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt promised that his country would be a “good neighbor” and recognize the sovereignty of Latin American nations. At the same time, the rise of global fascism became the primary concern for internationalist left-wing milieus and activists. The importance of anti-fascist language temporarily overshadowed anti-imperialist argumentation. Globally, though, anti-imperialism would celebrate a triumphant comeback after the Second World War in the decolonization processes and with the rise of concepts such as “the Global South.”⁴⁹

For the young Cuban Julio Antonio Mella, who began to admire Mexico City in 1920 and became one of its most famous anti-imperialists after his return to the city in 1926, the 1920s ended tragically. Shot by an assassin hired by Cuban President Gerardo Machado in 1929, Julio Antonio Mella died an early death—a death that symbolizes the end of Mexico City as a hub of global anti-imperialism.

49 See Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

CHAPTER ONE

Anti-Imperialist Cosmopolitanism

Art and Radical Politics

There is an epic quality about the Mexican artists that pulls at the imagination. They arise out of a long series of conflicts, testifying that nowhere as in Mexico has art so intimately been linked to the fate of its people.

Anita Brenner (1929)¹

In September of 1923, a young woman arrived in Mexico City equipped with not much more in her possession than a letter of recommendation from her father's rabbi.² The young American had just turned 18 the previous month and had recently quit her studies at the University of Texas, Austin. Little hinted at the fact that she would one day become the chronicler of the city's political art scene of the 1920s. The woman's name was Anita Brenner; her parents were Jewish-Latvian immigrants who had built a life in Aguascalientes where Anita was born in 1905. In 1916, the family had to flee the Mexican Revolution and resettled in San Antonio. Returning to Mexico in the 1920s, Brenner quickly began taking part in the cultural movement she herself called the "Mexican Renaissance." Being bilingual and well connected, Brenner became a cultural broker between the United States and Mexico as a journalist and anthropologist. From 1923 to 1927, Brenner participated in the cultural scene of a city that was the "cosmopolitan capital of an era of political utopias and social and artistic experimentation."³ After her return to the United States, Brenner published her studies of the Mexican art scene in her monograph *Idols Behind Altars* in 1929. The book soon became a popular success and remains one of the classic works about Mexican art of the twentieth century.

1 Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Payson & Clarke, 1929), 244.

2 See Susannah Joel Glusker, *Anita Brenner: A Mind of Her Own* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 33.

3 See Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, "Presentación. *Le retour de Anita Brenner*," Preface to Yolanda Padilla Rangel, *México y la Revolución mexicana bajo la mirada de Anita Brenner* (Aguascalientes: Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, 2013), 13.

Idols Behind Altars makes evident Brenner's admiration for the protagonists of Mexico City's art scene of the 1920s, and more broadly for Mexican culture in general. Brenner was especially fascinated by the crucial role that radical politics played in cultural production in the city. About the famous Diego Rivera, one of the central and certainly most colorful characters of the politicized art scene, Brenner wrote in a mixture of admiration and confusion: "One wonders that, knowing he cannot be except crudely classified, Rivera should attach himself so determinedly to this or that doctrine or party. He is nationalist, anti-imperialist, and communist, not less convinced because he is cosmopolite."⁴ Anita Brenner's bafflement about the classification of Rivera's political views was intrinsically connected to the context of Mexico City's art scene of the 1920s. Highly politicized, it was a space in which visual expression and radical politics intersected with each other. This fusing of politics and art took place in the transnational sphere and was fueled by transnational networks. The ideological standards of the artists were those already identified by Brenner: nationalism, anti-imperialism, and communism. Anti-imperialism was one of the central issues of the city's avant-garde and muralist artists during the postrevolutionary decade of the 1920s.

This chapter examines the role of artists within the diverse scene of anti-imperialist activism in Mexico City, with special attention to the interplay between nationalism, populism, and communism in works of art. Between 1921 and 1924, the muralist movement, consisting of artists commissioned by the Ministry of Education, became a leading voice in the city's arts and culture scene. Education minister José Vasconcelos played a central role in the creation of a transnational network of artists, many of whom used anti-imperialism to partake in the process of re-thinking Mexican culture. As in the case of political exiles who were invited to Mexico, Vasconcelos led numerous promising artists to the Mexican capital, many of whom were Mexicans who came back from their voluntary exile in Europe to shape a new Mexican art. After 1924, the heterogeneous muralist movement partly disintegrated and radicalized itself as it became more closely connected to the Communist Party. New artists, like the avant-garde photographer and communist Tina Modotti, entered the scene and became important mediators between the world of art and that of radical politics. In the second half of the 1920s, the communist newspaper *El Machete*, an initiative of the muralists, and the Comintern-financed magazine *El Libertador*, an explicitly anti-imperialist publication, provided spaces for visual expression in the in-between space of art and politics, printing photographs, caricatures, and prints. The focus on the muralist movement, Tina Modotti, *El Machete*, and *El Libertador* does not claim to be representative of Mexico City's diverse art scene.⁵ And yet,

4 Brenner, *Idols*, 279.

5 For a good overview, see John Lear, *Picturing the Proletariat: Artists and Labor in Revolutionary Mexico, 1908–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

its analysis details an exemplary case of how art and anti-imperialist politics intersected in the cosmopolitan context of a modern city.

The concept of cosmopolitanism, a term used by Anita Brenner in her description of Rivera, offers a valuable perspective on the intersection of art and politics. The concept of cosmopolitanism, just like the concept of the “citizen,” has a long Eurocentric genealogy, as it is mostly associated with the nineteenth century and a global culture of elites who had the time, resources, and networks necessary to cross borders easily. In historiography, the discourse on cosmopolitanism has undoubtedly emancipated itself from its focus on Western conceptions of citizenship and claims to universalism.⁶ A multitude of different approaches to cosmopolitanism has been brought forth in the last 30 years. Historians Kris Manjapra and Sugata Bose have championed the concept of “cosmopolitan thought zones,” “heterotopias” where conversations between dissimilar groups create shared public worlds.⁷ Manjapra uses the concepts of “aspirational” or “anticolonial” cosmopolitanism and thereby challenges the understanding of cosmopolitanism as a project of nineteenth-century Western elites.⁸ To combine the concept of cosmopolitanism with concrete transnational networks can help us rethink the distinction between the global and the local as well as the role of “subaltern” realities.⁹ Cosmopolites were not just those artists spending their days in the cafés of Montparnasse, but also those who developed internationalist visions of the world in the newspaper offices of Mexico City.

The transnational networks of artists and political activists in Mexico City can be described as a form of anti-imperialist cosmopolitanism. Like the similar concepts of anticolonial, aspirational, or vernacular cosmopolitanism, the term anti-imperialist cosmopolitanism emphasizes the simultaneity of local activism and global networks and the cosmopolitan spirit of those who employed global knowledge or transnational networks in a specific local context. The term draws on historian Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo’s term “Mexican Cosmopolitan Summer,” defined by him as a “season of

6 See Sebastian Conrad, *What is Global History?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 207.

7 Kris Manjapra, Introduction to *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, eds. Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1.

8 See Kris Manjapra, “Communist Internationalism and Transcolonial Recognition,” in Bose and Manjapra, eds., *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones* and Introduction. For an example of the application of the concept of cosmopolitanism to visual culture, see María Fernández, *Cosmopolitanism in Mexican Visual Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

9 See Barry Carr, “‘Across Seas and Borders’: Charting the Webs of Radical Internationalism in the Circum-Caribbean,” in *Exile and the Politics of Exclusion in the Americas*, eds. Luis Roniger, James N. Green, and Pablo Yankelevich (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 234.

revolutionary fascination, primitivism, and social hope to modernist and radical activists, artists, and writers” between 1920 and 1940.¹⁰ The term anti-imperialist (instead of anticolonialist) accounts for the historical situation of Mexico and Latin America in the 1920s as nation states struggling to keep, not achieve, sovereignty. In postrevolutionary Mexico, anti-imperialist cosmopolitanism allowed nationalists to frame their project of defending Mexican interests as part of a global movement, and it allowed communists to gain support from the Mexican government, as long as their radical anti-imperialism fell in line with Mexican interests. Being a cosmopolitan anti-imperialist in this context meant expressing concern for the concrete experiences of oppression across a variety of imperialist contexts with a clear perspective—that of Mexico City.

The transnational networks of artists in Mexico City were inherently cosmopolitan, while at the same time, they created an art form that would be viewed (retrospectively and by their contemporaries) as truly, “authentically” Mexican. Many artists supported the Mexican nation state’s project that anthropologist Manuel Gamio had described in his 1916 classic *Forjando patria*, “forging nationhood.”¹¹ In this project, cosmopolitanism and nationalism reinforced one another and became two connected means to recovering a “lost” non-European tradition. This movement was based on earlier attempts of the nineteenth century to incorporate the indigenous past into *historia patria*, a patriotic postrevolutionary history.¹² In literary and scholarly texts, the pre-colonial period and its peoples were presented as civilized and thus as a suitable element of the national past. Often, pre-colonial history was transformed into poetic folklore and a romanticized version of indigenous cultures helped incorporate the era into a broader category of national heritage.¹³ Mexicans like Diego Rivera who returned from the cosmopolitan circles of Paris used their knowledge of the world as a resource to create “authentically Mexican” art. And vice versa: non-Mexican artists participated in Mexican cultural nationalism to promote anti-imperialism abroad, for example by strengthening Mexico’s position in the fight against U.S. imperialism. For these actors, forging nationhood in the 1920s meant, among other things, fighting imperialism.

10 See Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, “The Cosmopolitan Mexican Summer, 1920–1949,” *Latin American Research Review* 32, no. 3 (1997): 224.

11 See Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1960 [1916]).

12 For an analysis on how Mexican scientific explorations of race were connected to U.S. and European racial sciences and connected to policies towards indigenous peoples, see Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 17–88.

13 See Rebecca Earle, *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish America, 1810–1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 19, 132 and, more generally, 100–32.

The fervent search for a nationally defined identity was part of the process of legitimizing the postrevolutionary order, particularly in opposition to the older elites of the Porfiriato on the one hand, and the cultural imperialism of Europe and the United States on the other. This search for national identity, for *lo Mexicano* and for authenticity, was a modern phenomenon that participated in processes of nation building and state consolidation; it rarely lapsed into anti-modern provincialism. Mexican nationalism was less the return to something forgotten or the rebirth of a culture lost, and more a modern phenomenon of the 1920s embedded in the transnational flows of activists, global flows of ideas, and technological innovations. Mexican nationalism was thus as modern as the city of Mexico itself. Rather than the exotic town that some foreign travelers liked to describe it as, the city has been, as Tenorio-Trillo formulated it, “such a part of the making of the modern that examining it is but another way to inhabit what is known as the modern world.”¹⁴ Like many other metropolises of the 1920s, Mexico City promised modernity, and the project of cultural nationalism and its relationship with anti-imperialism was part of its global appeal.

Mexican Muralism: Avant-Garde, Anti-Imperialism, Nationalism

For modern Mexican culture, the year 1921 was of crucial importance. It marked the beginning of the mural movement as Rivera returned from Europe, the French painter Jean Charlot arrived in Mexico City, and David Alfaro Siqueiros published his pamphlet promoting constructive art for a new generation of American artists.¹⁵ In December 1921, a young law student named Manuel Maples Arce plastered the walls of Mexico City with his manifesto *Actual No. 1*, starting “Mexico’s first self-acknowledged avant-garde movement,” Estridentismo.¹⁶ The Estridentismo movement was closely linked to the beginnings of the muralist movement and brought an explicitly global vision to it. Influenced by Italian Futurism and Dada, the *estridentistas* sought to challenge artistic conventions and create a new visual language based on the experience of everyday life in the modern metropolis. They envisioned modernity as a global phenomenon with technology like the radio, telegraph, and airplanes as mediators that transcended national boundaries. The early

14 Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), xv.

15 “Tres Llamamientos de Orientación actual a los Pintores y Escultores de la nueva Generación Americana,” in *Textos de David Alfaro Siqueiros*, ed. Raquel Tibol (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974), 19–23; Francisco Reyes Palma, “Vanguardia Año Cero,” in *Modernidad y modernización en el arte mexicano, 1920–1960*, ed. Museo Nacional de Arte (Mexico City: Museo Nacional de Arte, 1991), 43–51.

16 Tatiana Flores, *Mexico’s Revolutionary Avant-Gardes: From Estridentismo to ¡30–30!* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 1.

avant-garde movement did not perceive of Mexico as a peripheral country and specifically addressed an audience beyond the Mexican borders. What Maples Arce and many other *estridentistas* tended to ignore, however, were Mexico's ethnic diversity, social inequality, and legacy of colonialism and violence—topics later integrated into Mexican modernism by the mural painters. The adherents of Estridentismo met in the Café de Nadie in the barrio Roma, where, as art historian Tatiana Flores emphasizes, “as in Europe, café culture became associated with the avant-garde.”¹⁷ The Estridentismo movement included the first generation of mural painters as well as non-Mexican artists such as Jean Charlot and, a little later, Tina Modotti.¹⁸ At least until 1925, the muralist movement, and arguably even larger sections of the city's art scene, were influenced by the visions of Estridentismo, its global consciousness and its spirit of avant-garde cosmopolitanism.

The year 1921 was crucial for anti-imperialism in Mexico City, too. Mexican president Álvaro Obregón appointed the philosopher José Vasconcelos as minister of education, giving him the chance to remodel education and culture in Mexico. Vasconcelos had already made a name for himself as an intellectual, a participant of the Mexican Revolution, and a director of the National University of Mexico. His version of a racially defined anti-imperialism was influenced by José Enrique Rodó's Arielismo movement, particularly its opposition to “Anglo-Saxon” materialism. Vasconcelos developed his own concept of a “cosmic race” that he believed would emerge through mestizaje to form the basis of a new Mexican identity.¹⁹ In contrast to the nation's despised northern neighbor (Vasconcelos rarely hid his anti-Americanism), he proclaimed, this identity would be determined by its inherent spirit, not by superficial materialism.²⁰ Up through 1924, Vasconcelos pursued an unprecedented educational platform that overhauled Mexico's cultural institutions and constructed new rural schools to improve literacy. An important component of the new cultural policies was the promotion of the visual arts, and, more specifically, the commissioning of monumental murals on public buildings.

17 Flores, *Mexico's Revolutionary Avant-Gardes*, 197; Carmen De Mora, “Notas sobre El Café de Nadie de Arquelas Vela,” *Anales de Literatura Hispanoamericana* 26, no. 2 (1997): 249.

18 Flores, *Mexico's Revolutionary Avant-Gardes*, 1.

19 For Arielismo, and Rodó's legacy, see Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999), 96–114.

20 See José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica: Misión de la raza iberoamericana* (Paris: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925) and Marilyn Grace Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004). Generally, Vasconcelos's ideology is hard to categorize, as it included anti-imperialism, anti-communism, Hispanism, Mexican nationalism, anti-Americanism, and racial spirituality. After he unsuccessfully ran for president in 1929, Vasconcelos took a turn to the political right and expressed sympathies for fascism.

The painters received commissions for wall paintings that were supposed to depict the Mexican nation and its history. Building on the achievements of the revolution, the mural project was designed to contribute to the cultural education of the Mexican people and to symbolically integrate marginalized groups, especially the indigenous population, into an independent Mexican national narrative.

During his time as minister, Vasconcelos acted as a mediator between the network of muralists and the Mexican government. The first project Vasconcelos initiated was the decoration of the theater of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (ENP), located in the old building of the Colegio de San Ildefonso in the colonial center of Mexico City. For the job, the minister tapped Diego Rivera—recently returned from Europe—and granted him artistic autonomy, only demanding that the mural “have Mexican content and that it be a good painting.”²¹ In March 1922, Rivera began working on his mural *La Creación*, “an allegory of race” influenced by Italian fresco technique and Christian motifs.²² The mural abstractly idealized racial mixing and clearly contrasts with Rivera’s later, more concrete works. In line with Vasconcelos’s cultural nationalism, the indigenous population in *La Creación* stands for universal values, not for its contemporary social fights. Ironically, Vasconcelos was not entirely satisfied with Rivera’s work, considering it insufficiently Mexican. Nevertheless, Rivera had estheticized Vasconcelos’s theories of mestizaje and signaled that he was willing to participate in the government’s project of nation building. The shared anti-imperialism of the two men would be the basis for an intensified cooperation over the following years.

The muralist movement was a dynamic, modernist enterprise of a generation of Mexican and non-Mexican cosmopolites. While Rivera worked on *La Creación*, Vasconcelos engaged several young painters who were supposed to assist Rivera while also developing their own murals. The selection of the group was mainly influenced by “economic factors,” meaning that the ministry needed artists to “paint by the square yard for a house painter’s wage.”²³ The low pay for physically challenging work proved unattractive to many established artists and a group of young, untried artists constituted the core of the muralist movement. The 25-year-old Frenchman Charlot had served in the French artillery during the First World War and had migrated to Mexico in 1921. The 30-year-old Ramón Alva de la Canal created his own work depicting the tragic arrival of Catholicism in Mexico and was joined by the 19-year-old Fermín Revueltas, who had studied in Chicago, as well as

21 Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920–1940: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 38.

22 For Rivera’s own interpretation of his work, see Diego Rivera, “Las pinturas decorativas del Anfiteatro de la Preparatoria,” *Boletín de la Secretaría de Educación Pública* 1, no. 1 (1923): 363–65.

23 Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance: 1920–1925* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 151.

Emilio García Cabero, the Guatemalan Carlos Mérida, and Fernando Leal, a 21-year-old art student. Additionally, the 26-year-old Coahuiliense Xavier Guerrero and two painters returning from Europe can be categorized as core members of the muralist movement: the 26-year-old David Alfaro Siqueiros, who had met Rivera in Paris, and the 31-year-old Amado de la Cueva. Most of these artists were regular guests at the *Café de Nadie*, a space that connected *estridentistas* and *muralistas*.

Today, the muralists are praised as geniuses who reinvented Mexican national culture after the revolution. In the 1920s, however, the muralists' relationship to Mexico City's middle class was characterized by conflict. Arguably, the political project of the muralists and their self-understanding as a collective political actor were only formed in response to attacks by conservative students in the *Preparatoria*. In Charlot's memory, the painters "received the brunt of an indignation carried to the point of mayhem" during the year 1922.²⁴ Students spit on the murals, stuck chewing gum to them, and painted circles over them. The students' vandalism and the bourgeois press's insults expressed the resistance of the Mexican middle and upper classes towards muralism and the project of "Indianizing" Mexican culture.²⁵ Charlot recounts a European version of this condescension in an anecdote: In the spring of 1923, the famous English writer D.H. Lawrence visited the murals in the ENP and, after having seen all of them, only sighed "Gauguin!"²⁶ Still, the opposition they encountered did not automatically unite the muralists: they remained jealous of each other and constantly argued about paintings, payments, and politics.²⁷

While parts of the Mexican middle and upper classes felt threatened by the muralists, the Mexican government—and particularly José Vasconcelos—saw muralism's enormous potential as a vehicle for Mexican cultural nationalism, particularly when it came to developing alternatives to Eurocentric perspectives on art, politics, and Mexican history. A focus on anti-imperialism allowed for the integration of a vaguely defined Marxism into Mexican nationalism. While the muralists' anti-imperialism sometimes aligned nicely with the nationalist project of the Mexican government, it also collided loudly with official expectations. But, overall, the strategy of emphasizing anti-imperialist visions in their murals was successful in enabling them to incorporate political radicalism into the national project, as it secured contracts as well as small recurring public scandals that

24 Charlot, *Mexican Mural*, 154.

25 See Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 95.

26 Charlot, *Mexican Mural*, 161.

27 Siqueiros, in his autobiography of 1977, spends quite some effort complaining about the other muralists: "shameful reactionaries" (Leal and Cabero), Catholic apologist (Charlot), "mystic *zapatista*" (Rivera), and petit bourgeois (Orozco). David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Me llamaban el Coronelazo* (Mexico City: Grigalbo 1977), 211–12.

enhanced the muralists' fame. At least until 1928, anti-imperialism allowed the muralists to frame their Marxist visions as part of the national project in the wake of the Mexican Revolution.

Jean Charlot's mural *La Massacre en el Templo Mayor*, located in the ENP, is one example of a work that used anti-imperialist tropes to reject Eurocentric images of Mexican history and subtly address U.S. imperialism. Finished in 1923, the mural depicts a violent scene of Mexican history, namely the slaying of the Aztec people in their capital city Tenochtitlán in 1519 by Hernán Cortés's general Pedro de Alvarado. On the left of the mural, the Aztecs are shown celebrating a religious festival; they are unarmed and perplexed by the approaching danger that emerges from the right side of the wall: the Spanish army attacks mercilessly, armed with futuristically glowing lances and spears. The dignity and humanity of the Aztecs, who peacefully celebrate their religion and wear festive dresses, contrasts starkly with the depiction of the Spanish as military machines. The heavy armour makes the Spanish invaders look like indistinguishable robots, an interpretation that Charlot himself supported by stating that he painted "robot knights trampling upon Indian victims."²⁸ The European conquistadors use their technological advantage in a way that transforms them into warriors without spiritual or moral compass. Greed is the motor for their relentless territorial expansion and plunder that ultimately leads to genocide.

It takes little imagination to interpret Charlot's mural not just as a comment on Mexican history, but on imperialism more generally. The French artist reinterpreted the dichotomy of spiritualism versus materialism, a prominent feature of Latin American anti-imperialist thought in the 1920s: The deeply spiritual Aztecs fall victim to the materialist invaders who rely on superior technology and are only motivated by the prospect of material gain. The idea that Latin America possessed its own spirituality that stood in contrast to the "Anglo-Saxon" materialism of the United States was a common idea of Latin American anti-imperialism, popularized by José Rodó's essay *Ariel* in 1900. By the 1920s, a whole generation of Latin American intellectuals had been brought up as *Arielistas*. One of the most famous supporters of *Arielismo* was indeed José Vasconcelos, the man who had commissioned the painting and hired Jean Charlot, who, just like Vasconcelos, was a devout Catholic. One of the central tenets of Vasconcelos's anti-imperialism was the cultivation of Hispano-American unity based on the values of spiritualism and Catholicism that could resist the expansive materialism rooted in North American Protestantism. For Vasconcelos, as for Rodó a generation earlier, the weakness of Latin American economies only strengthened the continent's dignity and spirituality, just as the technological disadvantage of the Aztecs dignified their resistance in Charlot's painting. At first sight, this interpretation clashed with the harsh critique of Catholicism that was an integral

28 Charlot, *Mexican Mural*, 154.

part of the muralist movement and which would later become an almost official Mexican state doctrine during the Cristero War (1926–29). But Charlot, the only outspoken Catholic of the muralists, depicted the clash between spirituality and imperialist materialism rather than the institution of the Church.

The muralists were not satisfied with their role as anti-imperialist voices within the larger project of developing an autonomous Mexican esthetics after the revolution and soon began to radicalize politically. Vasconcelos, on the other hand, became frustrated with the muralists. He sent Rivera to Tehuantepec to experience “real” indigenous culture, but then awarded him with the most prestigious project of Mexico’s new cultural nationalism: the painting of the Ministry of Education building itself. The Ministry of Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, SEP in its Spanish acronym), located just across the street from the ENP in the colonial city center, possessed two large courtyards with a total of 674 square meters of wall space. Rivera was to paint the hallways and oversee the decorations of de la Cueva, Guerrero, and Charlot. The painters worked simultaneously in the SEP and in the ENP, where they discussed techniques, colors, and the murals’ motifs. The director of the ENP and future labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano played a crucial role in shaping the muralists into a political collective by bringing them into contact with political students and intellectuals from his extensive network. Partly as a result of these exchanges, the muralists formed the Grupo Solidario del Movimiento Obrero, which for many of them was their “first experience of collective organization” for the interests of the working class.²⁹

By 1923, the group of muralists had radicalized and fallen foul of Vasconcelos whose allegorical, folkloristic idealization of the Mexican past clashed with the artists’ desire to deal with issues of class and race in Mexican society.³⁰ In addition to the Mexican Revolution, the muralists debated the Russian Revolution and the effects of Soviet-style communism on the Americas. As an outcome of the discussions that took place during their work, the muralists considered founding their own union to express their self-understanding as craftsmen in overalls rather than as intellectuals. This self-image was henceforth upheld and enforced by the muralists, who mostly came from Mexican middle-class families.³¹

29 John Lear, “La revolución en blanco, negro y rojo: Arte, política, y obreros en los inicios del periódico *El Machete*,” *Signos Históricos* 9, no. 18 (2007): 114.

30 Robin Adèle Greeley, “Muralism and the State in Post-Revolution Mexico, 1920–1970,” in *Mexican Muralism: A Critical History*, eds. Alejandro Anreus, Robin Adèle Greeley, and Leonard Folgarait (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 19.

31 See, for example, Juan Del Sena, “Diego Rivera en el Anfiteatro de la Preparatoria,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, April 6, 1922, 26. For the denim overall as a marker of the international proletariat, see Lear, *Picturing*, 2.

As a consequence of their discussions and as visible proof of their commitment to labor struggles, the muralists founded the “Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors” in Rivera’s house. The founding members were the state-commissioned muralists along with José Clemente Orozco, who had just returned from the United States and, with his 39 years, was the oldest of the group. Orozco, today considered one of the “tres grandes” of Mexican muralism, was, in contrast to Rivera and Siqueiros, only half-heartedly engaged in the union.³² The group discussed a declaration of principles for days, but they ultimately never published it; only statements of Siqueiros, Rivera, Charlot, and Orozco make it possible to reconstruct its content. The union’s first principle committed its members to an “anti-imperialist and revolutionary” orientation.³³ In the rest of the declaration, the muralists established various principles on art and its role in bringing about societal change and professed their loyalty to the Third International. It was no coincidence that anti-imperialism was the union’s first tenet: as a basic principle, it served as an ideological unifier; as a self-identity, it created the basis for an ideologically diverse organization. While Rivera emphasized his proximity to the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM), Siqueiros was still influenced by anarchist and socialist currents of Spain and France; while Charlot lived a leftist Catholicism, Orozco was an adherent of anarcho-syndicalist ideas throughout his life. All these currents, including the sympathy for a renewed revolutionary Mexican nationalism, were integrated under the umbrella term of anti-imperialism.

Rivera’s designs for the 124 murals in the SEP aptly expressed the muralists’ aim to politicize Mexican art as Rivera “Mexicanized” the designs he had previously submitted to Vasconcelos. While the concentration on Mexican topics still fit into Vasconcelos’s policy of cultural nationalism, the minister strongly opposed the muralists’ commitment to social revolution, now evident in their explicit praise for the Comintern. The slightest friction sufficed to lay bare the ideological divide between the muralist movement and their patron, although the break of the alliance between the Marxist muralists and Vasconcelos was far from being an ideologically determined inevitability. The occasion of the conflict was more tangible: Rivera had included some lines of a poem written by Carlos Gutiérrez Cruz in his mural *Salida de la Mina*, which the government interpreted as a call to violence and expropriation. After deliberation within the syndicate, the artists collectively decided to erase the poem so as not to jeopardize the whole mural. Quoting a radical poem in that specific mural was also far from coincidental: Mexico’s mineral resources were a central anti-imperialist topic of the 1920s and the question of who should be allowed to profit from subterranean resources united Mexican nationalists and communists throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

32 See Siqueiros, *El Coronelazo*, 214.

33 Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Arcángeles: Doce historias de revolucionarios herejes del siglo XX* (Mexico City: Edición de Traficantes de Sueños, 2011), 80.

An integral part of efforts to “Mexicanize” muralist painting was an orientation towards the indigenous population of Mexico and a conscious focus on depicting it in art. Many political movements in Mexico City had ignored indigenous people in Mexican society, although the presence of indigenous peoples and images in the city could hardly be overlooked. Pictures of “el indio” were used in cigarette advertisements and indigenous protagonists were used to bestow upon movies or theater productions a touch of the “authentically Mexican.”³⁴ In 1921, the beauty pageant “india bonita” was celebrated with a great deal of public attention, and even the president congratulated the winner.³⁵ Communists usually justified their ignorance towards indigenous communities with the ideological argument that, according to Marxism, imperialism had transformed all ethnicities into workers. Any marginalization of the indigenous communities, they claimed, was hence caused by economic rather than racial oppression.³⁶ In contrast, the muralist painters were not blind to the situation of indigenous communities in Mexico, whose public perception they enduringly shaped with their art. The painters’ imagination of indigenous communities in the form of *indigenismo* combined Marxism with cultural nationalism.³⁷ In stark contrast to more orthodox communists, the muralists were explicitly not color-blind. For them, like for Vasconcelos, revolutionary Mexican nationalism was an opportunity to integrate indigenous groups into the nation.

The political divisions within the muralist group surfaced with increasing frequency until an external event at the end of 1923 united the movement again. Conservative and reactionary Mexican generals attempted to overthrow President Álvaro Obregón’s government and replace his designated successor Plutarco Elías Calles with the more conservative finance minister Adolfo de la Huerta. The coup d’état was crushed by government troops, but the rebellion clearly showed that the postrevolutionary order was far from being stable and remained vulnerable to riots from the powerful military. For the muralist movement, however, the rebellion created the possibility to unite internally and expand their influence on the Mexican political left. The syndicate of painters had quickly backed the existing order, immediately denouncing the generals’ rebellion as “counterrevolutionary.”³⁸ The more radical members,

34 Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, “A Tropical Cauthemoc: Celebrating the Cosmic Race at the Guanabara Bay,” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 16, no. 65 (1994): 116.

35 See *El Universal Ilustrado*, August 4, 1921, 1; and, more generally, López, *Crafting Mexico*, 29–64.

36 The argument was often repeated, for example, by Bertram Wolfe (writing as Audifaz); see Audifaz, “Basta de ‘razas,’” *El Libertador* 1 (March 1925): 9.

37 See Stephan Scheutzger, *Der Andere in der ideologischen Vorstellungskraft: Die Linke und die indigene Frage in Mexiko* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2009), 227, 249.

38 “Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos Pintores y Escultores,” *El Machete* 7 (second fortnight of June 1924): 4.

Revueltas, Siqueiros, Rivera, and Guerrero, even traveled to the front to fight the insurgents, but they did not arrive in time to experience any real combat.³⁹ Unified in the rejection of the reactionary rebellion, the painters' union became nationally recognized and used its voice in Mexican national politics basically to revive the Mexican communist movement.

Starting in 1923, the muralists significantly influenced the Communist Party's ideological orientation in Mexico. The membership numbers of the PCM were small and the party barely had any access to the rural population.⁴⁰ The members of the painters' union decided to join the ranks and immediately rose to leading positions within the party, with Siqueiros, Rivera, and Guerrero being elected into the Executive Committee of the party in April 1923.⁴¹ In the coming years, the influence of the muralists shaped the ideological orientation of the PCM by strengthening its emphasis on the anti-imperialist elements of revolutionary struggle. The muralists were part of a wider trend to open the communist movement to diverse social groups beyond the traditional urban proletariat. Scientists, intellectuals (Alfons Goldschmidt), and peasant leaders (Úrsulo Galván) joined the leading committees of the party in addition to artists. After the muralists revived the Communist Party, the arrival of an Italian ship forced the movement to debate the role of European cultural imperialism and thereby once again reaffirm anti-imperialism as its central ideological framework.

In Mexico City, the rise of fascism in Italy was viewed with great interest and growing concern in 1923 and 1924. The muralists, and leftist anti-imperialists more broadly, viewed fascism as indicative of the decline of Europe after the First World War. From this perspective, support for the rising fascist movement in Italy appeared as a consequence of European fear of Soviet-style communism. In March 1924, the muralists created their own newspaper, *El Machete*, to influence public opinion and develop a space for art and radical politics beyond city limits. In April, a man identified as Spineli Aldo (or Aldo Spineli, perhaps an Italian immigrant?) connected fascism to imperialism in an article published in the paper. According to Spineli, Italy remained a slave to English and French capitalists' interests.⁴² He interpreted fascism as the incorrect answer to a legitimate threat: the global system of imperialism.

In the same year, an incident in Veracruz exemplified the clash between European cultural imperialism and Latin American anti-imperialism. The muralists were directly involved in the conflict, merging their critique of

39 See Taibo II, *Arcángeles*, 90.

40 See Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 28.

41 Rivera had member number 992, but the PCM most likely had fewer than 1,000 active members in 1923 as the numbers had been given out since 1919.

42 See Spineli Aldo, "El fascismo italiano," *El Machete* 3 (first fortnight of April 1924): 6.

imperialism with a communist anti-fascism. The Italian government, headed by Benito Mussolini, aimed at establishing commercial partnerships with the emerging markets in Latin America and sought to expand Italy's cultural influence on Latin American politics. To this end, the Italian fascists discovered the idea of *Latinità*, the Italian equivalent to the French *Latinité*, an ideology that promoted a cultural connection and common heritage between the "Latin peoples" of Italy and Latin America. To establish friendly relationships with Latin American governments and strengthen the ties to Italian emigrant communities, the Italian government sent the ship *Nave Italia* to many major cities in Latin America. The *Nave Italia* was packed with industrial products and artworks by Italian artists to showcase what was considered as the best that Italy had to offer. The artworks presented on the boat's exhibition were esthetically conservative and explicitly anti-modernist, with no connections to the Italian Futurist or avant-garde movements of the time. In its mission to spread Italian culture in Latin America, the Italian government presented a nationalist, harmonious version of Italian culture that, as art historian Laura Moure Cecchini noted, revealed a "colonial reading of the continent": it excluded the indigenous populations and represented American cultures as subaltern, dependent on European culture.⁴³ The presentation of sentimental scenes, lovely landscapes, and antique nudes appealed to large parts of the conservative Latin American elite and bourgeoisie who, despite the ruptures of the war, still viewed Europe as their cultural lodestar.

While many in Latin America praised the *Nave Italia*—Peruvian president Leguía was photographed visiting the exhibition—the ship encountered stark opposition from anti-imperialists in Mexico. The resistance to the Italian mission of cultural imperialism was led by the muralist movement of Mexico City. The muralists had not only founded their own labor union, but also their own newspaper, which they now wielded to call out the Italian ship's mission as a form of cultural imperialism and as diffusing the worst European ideas to Latin America. For the anti-imperialist muralists, the art exhibited on the *Nave Italia* was not only artistically outdated, but politically treacherous; representative of the old, elitist European high culture and isolated from the social realities of the people, it was indicative of a continent in decline.⁴⁴ The muralists, who wanted to call out social injustices in Mexico and recuperate Mexico's indigenous roots and cultures, treated the *Nave Italia* and its open glorification of white European culture as nothing less than a provocation.

Even before the Italian ship arrived at the port town Veracruz, the muralists and the Communist Party started their counter-propaganda campaign from Mexico City. In the pages of *El Machete*, the PCM lambasted the ship's

43 Laura Moure Cecchini, "The *Nave Italia* and the Politics of Latinità: Art, Commerce, and Cultural Colonization in the Early Days of Fascism," *Italian Studies* 71, no. 4 (2016): 463.

44 Moure Cecchini, "*Nave Italia*," 472.

cultural mission as “a fascist propaganda tour” and demanded that Veracruz should “Boycott the fascist ship!”⁴⁵ During the ship’s stay in the port of Veracruz in August 1924, *El Machete* turned up the volume of its campaign against Italian fascism. A huge caricature depicting the fascist Blackshirts with skulls, daggers, and the Roman salute dominated one of *El Machete*’s title pages.⁴⁶ The muralists dismissed the Italian cultural mission as part of the “Mafia activities” of the Italian fascists, who had killed workers, peasants, and even a socialist senator back in Italy. Enraged, *El Machete* and the PCM demanded the workers and peasants of Mexico form a united front against all activities of the *Italia*. The intervention of the communists did, however, not prevent the success of the boat in Veracruz: 10,000 people boarded the ship on its first day in the harbour alone.⁴⁷

The *Nave Italia* incident reveals how the muralists engaged with the idea of cultural imperialism and deconstructed European claims to cultural hegemony. The fact that the anti-imperialist painters agitated against a cultural mission of the fascist Italian government is hardly surprising. The way in which the muralists attacked parts of Mexican society—and particularly the bourgeoisie of Mexico City—for sympathizing with the *Nave Italia* is revealing, however, because it illustrates well the anti-imperialist perspective on European cultural hegemony. The artists published a whole play with satirical poetry as a parody mocking Mexico City’s bourgeoisie of the Colonia Roma alongside a satirical cartoon by Orozco. The piece, probably written by *El Machete*’s editor Graciela Amador, satirized the fascination of the city’s elites for the *Nave Italy*, contrasting the naïve upper-class admiration for European whiteness (“those nudes throbbing and white”) with their loathing of the “dirty” proletariat of Mexico.⁴⁸ For the muralists, the *Nave Italia* not only represented fascism—it also reproduced European cultural and racial supremacy. They saw in the artworks on display exactly the kind of art that had flourished under Porfirio Díaz in the capital and thus viewed it as representative of elitist disdain for everything indigenous and Mexican.

Besides Italian fascism, the muralists also discussed Europe’s current political situation in reports on Weimar Germany. While Italy had been governed by a fascist party since 1922, Germany was still a democratic state in the 1920s. Mexico City’s anti-imperialists thus had a more ambivalent take on the role of Germany. On the one hand, Germany was perceived as a typical example of the decline of European civilization. The imperialist ambitions of the German Reich had brought the country into conflict with the British and French empires and some anti-imperialists in Mexico

45 El Comité Nacional Ejecutivo del Partido Comunista de México, “La Nave ‘Italia’ Mensajera de Mussolini, Arribará en Breve a Veracruz,” *El Machete* 8 (second fortnight of July 1924): 1.

46 *El Machete* 11 (August 28–September 4, 1924): 1.

47 See Moure Cecchini, “*Nave Italia*,” 468.

48 “Los Rorros Fachistas,” *El Machete* 11 (August 28–September 4, 1924): 2.

indeed viewed Germany as another victim of British, French, and American imperialism. In a retrospective on the year 1925 in *El Libertador*, José López categorized Germany as a “semi-colonial country,” alongside “the majority of countries of Latin America, China, Persia.”⁴⁹ This classification is extraordinary because it puts Germany, a country that had clearly been an empire just ten years previously, alongside post-colonial or semi-colonial countries. Other voices were more critical of German imperialist revisionism. From Mexico City, Teodoro Loaf criticized the “colonial week” held in Hamburg in 1926 as parading exactly the kind of chauvinistic revisionism that Germany was accused of.⁵⁰ For the anti-imperialists in Mexico City, Germany thus held an ambivalent position: it was, like other “semi-colonial” countries, a victim of the imperialist system, but at the same time extremely willing to become an imperialist country again if given the chance to do so.⁵¹ For the muralists, Germany was a frustrated rather than a convinced ex-imperialist power—an assessment that in retrospect turned out to be correct.

Europe, in the eyes of the muralists, stood for a declining civilization as well as a continent where capitalism had literally reached its highest stage. Particularly Italian and German fascism was interpreted as the last breaths of a dying capitalist system that, as Lenin had already explained, needed to radicalize itself to survive. The muralists’ growing loyalty to the Communist Party went along with the embrace of a stricter Leninist definition of anti-imperialism. In this process, the muralists’ vaguely defined Marxism, enriched with anti-imperialism and Mexican nationalism, gave way to more ideologically orthodox visions of communism and historical materialism. After Plutarco Elias Calles was elected as Mexican president in June 1924, the muralists’ desire for social revolution increasingly clashed with the postrevolutionary bourgeois regime and its focus on state consolidation. Between 1925 and 1927, Calles used anti-imperialism as a tool to popularize his version of Mexican nationalism, but it was clear that his anti-imperialism was one that was supposed to consolidate, not accelerate, the achievements of the Mexican Revolution.

The rupture between the muralists and Calles happened after his election and can be explained by their diverging views on European cultural imperialism. In June of 1924, the Syndicate of Painters and Sculptors had still supported Calles, not least because they viewed him as “definitely possessing a revolutionary character.”⁵² By September 1924, though, *El Machete* declared

49 José López, “El Balance Anti-Imperialista de 1925,” *El Libertador* 7 (February 1925): 1–3.

50 Teodoro Loaf, “El Antimperialismo Equivoco,” *El Libertador* 9/10 (September/October 1926): 4. Teodoro Loaf was likely the nom de guerre of Theodor Abramovich Breslauer-Bochen, a Polish communist active in the United States and Mexico in the mid-1920s.

51 See “El Militarismo,” *El Machete* 17 (October 16–23, 1924): 2.

52 “Manifiesto del Sindicato de Obreros Técnicos Pintores y Escultores,” *El Machete* 7 (second fortnight of June 1924): 4.

that the coming presidency “will be an instrument of North American imperialism.”⁵³ In the same month, the painters decided to officially declare *El Machete* as the newspaper of the PCM. *El Machete*’s tone towards Calles sharpened over the next months, although he interfered little in Mexican politics. After being elected president, Calles took a lengthy journey to the United States and Europe to inform himself about the social situation in other countries. The trips were treated with suspicion by the painters, who used a large caricature on the front page of *El Machete* to break with the coming president. The caricature, titled “Calles in Germany,” depicted Calles as a bourgeois social democrat who propagated “class collaboration.” The references to Germany were twofold: first, there was the German imperial eagle on Calles’s hat, and second, a swastika featured prominently under Calles’s chin.⁵⁴ The accompanying text clarified that the painters had decided to stop supporting Calles because the “false socialists completely sell out the country to Yankee imperialism.”⁵⁵ The close cooperation with German social democrats—Calles had met with Friedrich Ebert in Berlin—made him not just a bourgeois social democrat. The history of the German working-class movement, and particularly the SPD, which had supported the First World War, made him complicit with imperialism in the eyes of the muralists.

Depicting the Empire on Walls and on Paper

The ideological radicalization of the muralist movement after the election of Calles as Mexican President did not put an end to the painters’ focus on anti-imperialism. Starting in 1925, though, an openly communist imaginary tended to replace the Mexican nationalism that had been a strong element in the early 1920s muralism. Examples of how imperialism and empire were imagined and visualized can thus be found not only on the city’s walls but also on the pages of the muralists’ newspaper *El Machete* and the anti-imperialist magazine *El Libertador*. Empire was now depicted on the walls as well as on paper to create an anti-imperialist iconography that aimed to be universally understandable, but was clearly context-specific regarding its topics, messages, and symbols.

During the Calles presidency, the muralists stopped acting as a coherent movement and developed individual artistic projects, often critiquing the Mexican status quo. In April of 1925, the Syndicate was dissolved and *El Machete* remained its legacy.⁵⁶ Diego Rivera continued his work in the Secretaría de Educación Pública, the SEP, and in 1927 traveled to the

53 “La XXXI Legislatura Será Instrumento del Imperialismo Norte-Americano,” *El Machete* 12 (September 4–11, 1924): 1.

54 See “Calles en Alemania,” *El Machete* 14 (September 25–October 2, 1924): 1.

55 See “¡Traidores y Vividores Profesionales!” *El Machete* 14 (September 25–October 2, 1924): 1.

56 See Taibo II, *Arcángeles*, 97.

Soviet Union as an official guest of the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. The murals in the SEP, a central location for the Mexican state and for Mexican culture, were finished by Rivera one year after his return. His murals in the SEP are examples of how anti-imperialism could be used to visually connect the Mexican Revolution to the Russian Revolution. Directed against a Eurocentric perspective on Mexican history, the murals are examples of how anti-imperialism could tackle issues of race and class and connect the local and the global. But—and it is important to stress this—my focus on anti-imperialist elements in these murals does not explain them in their (ideological) totality. A focus on anti-imperialist elements can, however, explain the merging of nationalist, populist, and communist elements that are all present in the artworks in the SEP. An anti-imperialist focus can thus add to the existing interpretations of the murals.

Three murals, located on the third floor of the SEP, are particularly telling of Rivera's aim to combine global and local versions of anti-imperialism. The painting *El pan nuestro* is a variation of Christian iconography, with a group of people waiting for the breaking of the bread at a table.⁵⁷ People of different ages, genders, and ethnicities wait for the bread to be broken while they are surrounded by peasants and soldiers. An indigenous Tehuana, by the 1920s a national icon based on the traditional dress of women from Oaxaca, seems to protect the whole scene.⁵⁸ Rivera's mural propagates a future political order of harmony and social equality, independent of origin, gender, or race. The social antagonisms caused by colonialism, imperialism, and the years of armed conflict can be dissolved in this utopian future. The role of the indigenous population was central to Rivera, who believed that justice in Mexico could only exist by integrating indigenous groups into the nation. Rivera proposed a variation of the *mestizaje*-idea that was, unlike Vasconcelos's racial and spiritual mixing, to be created through social and transcultural interaction.⁵⁹ By positively theorizing culture and identity as legitimate spaces for the revolutionary project to do its work, Rivera's vision diverged significantly from more orthodox communist voices. In contrast to the color blindness of Marxists, Rivera wanted his comrades to take steps to bring about a multiracial and multicultural society, which he saw

57 The person breaking the bread is most likely the Indian anticolonialist and agrarian scientist Pandurang Khankhoje, a friend of Rivera's and professor at the National School of Agriculture in Chapingo. For his role within anti-imperialist networks in Mexico City, see Chapter 4.

58 For the history of the supposedly traditional/pre-colonial *traje* of the *tehuana* and its connection to modernization and capitalism, see Francie Chassen-López, "The *Traje* de *Tehuana* as National Icon: Gender, Ethnicity, and Fashion in Mexico," *Americas* 71, no. 2 (2014): 281–314.

59 Mary K. Coffey, "All Mexico on a Wall: Diego Rivera's Murals at the Ministry of Public Education," in Anreus, Adèle Greeley, and Folgarait, eds., *Mexican Muralism*, 68.

as means to create national identity and overcome foreign influence. *El pan nuestro* combines Marxism and cultural nationalism by using the vocabulary and strategies of anti-imperialism as well as anti-capitalism. The notion of indigenous communities as revolutionary actors merged socialist universalism with the specificity of Mexican history.

Directly opposite of *El pan nuestro*, Rivera mirrors the utopian scene, moving its location from Mexico to the United States. In *El Banquete de Wall Street*, another group of people sits around a table. This time, a golden cash box dominates the mural's center. Once again, Rivera used contemporary figures as templates for his characters, in this case J.P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford. The U.S. capitalists dine in the vault of a bank, surrounded by absurd machines. The men's physiognomy is grotesquely distorted, underlining their physical weakness and caricaturing their greed. A miniature version of the Statue of Liberty serves as a lampshade, satirizing the liberating promises of the American Dream. Like the communist press, Rivera uses "Wall Street" as a code for a monopolist-led economy exploiting the oppressed, thereby merging anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist critique. Reversing Charlot's depiction of the conquistadors as robots, Rivera portrays the bank vault with human attributes. The grotesque humans in front of the absurd machine thus appear as androids who have sold their humanity to merge with the machines. Like Charlot, Rivera seemed to imply that capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism not only rob their victims of humanity, but also dehumanize the supporters of empire. The old capitalists represent the global order of imperialism and capitalism that had been at its peak before the First World War and that, by the end of the 1920s, clashed with the youthful promise of revolution.

Rivera viewed a Soviet-style social revolution in Mexico as path to overcoming capitalism and imperialism. A third mural in the Court of Fiestas—clearly influenced by Rivera's impressions of Soviet Russia—illustrates this idea. The mural *En El Arsenal* is ideologically orthodox, depicting proletarian revolution in the style of social realism. In *En El Arsenal*, an idealized Frida Kahlo distributes guns to workers and peasants for the impending revolution. David Alfaro Siqueiros, Julio Antonio Mella, Tina Modotti, and Vittorio Vidali (an Italian Comintern agent) are portrayed as core figures of the revolution. Rivera's mural expresses both the local revolution in Mexico with the redesign of Mexican national culture and the global revolution in which the proletariat would remodel the social order from scratch.⁶⁰ The local revolution, though, is not just a national one: the Cuban Mella, the Italian American Modotti, and the Italian Vidali symbolize a transnational movement. In *En El Arsenal*, Rivera certainly embraced

60 See Mauricio Castillo, "Local and Global Dreamworlds in Diego Rivera's Murals at the Secretaría de Educación Pública," in *Seeing in Spanish: From Don Quixote to Daddy Yankee: 22 Essays on Hispanic Visual Cultures*, eds. Ryan Prout and Tilmann Altenberg (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 143–62.

Soviet-style revolution and industrial communism rather than cosmopolitan anti-imperialism. And yet, even in this example of social realism, there is an (admittedly small) element of anti-imperialism: anti-imperialism could bridge the gap between the local and the global revolution as it viewed the Mexican Revolution as a possible starting point for the global revolution.

In his work in the SEP, Rivera engaged with two central debates of the time: the role of the Mexican Revolution and Mexico's place in a globalizing world. For both debates, anti-imperialism offered a set of arguments, symbols, and traditions that facilitated the combination of local, national, continental, and global visions that was different to the explanations and arguments offered by nationalism, populism, or communism. The production of an "authentically" Mexican art, the usage of Mexican symbols, and Mexican history was thus not just part of the national project of *forjando patria*. By highlighting the efforts of the United States to dominate the independent nation states to its south, anti-imperialists sought to partake in the global debates about self-determination in the 1920s and turn Woodrow Wilson's promises against the United States. Clearly, Mexicans had never shared the enthusiasm of the Wilsonian Moment in the first place, because they were well aware that the demands that they were putting forth were not in the interest of the United States. By indicating the discrepancy between formal autonomy and continuing foreign domination, artists like Rivera embraced the main idea of anti-imperialism in Latin America, namely that colonialism continued to exist by other means.

Just as Rivera was envisioning Mexico's future in the SEP in 1928, the crude reality of Mexican politics caught up with him. It became increasingly clear that the postrevolutionary Mexican regime had stabilized after having successfully crushed the Catholic rebellion of the Cristeros. Even after Calles left office in 1928, his influence over the next three presidents was substantial. He institutionalized his power by founding the Partido Nacional Revolucionario in 1928 (PNR) and become known as the "Jefe Máximo" who orchestrated Mexican politics from behind closed doors. The Mexican government carried out repressive measures against the Communist Party and banned *El Machete* in 1929. Simultaneously, the official discourse of a revolutionary nationalism aggressively co-opted the muralist movement and used its anti-imperialist credibility for nationalist aims.

Anti-Imperialist Iconographies in El Machete and El Libertador

Apart from murals, anti-imperialist thought was visualized in Mexico City's radical newspapers, which were themselves part of a continental network of press outlets with direct or indirect relations to the Comintern, a "red hemerography" in Latin America.⁶¹ While *La Correspondencia*

61 Ricardo Melgar Bao, "La Hemerografía cominternista y América Latina, 1919–1935: Señales, giros y presencias," *Revista Izquierdas* (2011).

Internacional and *La Correspondencia Sudamericana* (the publication of the South American Secretariat of the Comintern published in Buenos Aires since 1926) repeated the Comintern's positions verbatim, the Mexican papers *El Machete* and *El Libertador* were more complicated cases. *El Machete* was originally founded by the muralists but, over time, became the paper of the PCM. *El Libertador* was the official organ of the transnationally active anti-imperialist organization LADLA and, though financed by the Comintern, managed to maintain a degree of independence from the communist structures, giving non-communists a voice to express their anti-imperialism. Both *El Machete* and *El Libertador* gradually lost their independence and gravitated more and more towards the Comintern, although this process did not happen linearly and remained unfinished until at least the beginning of 1928.

The genealogy of *El Machete* evidences that the publication was initially not conceived as a Communist Party paper, but rather as a space of artistic freedom for the muralists. When it was launched in March 1924, it was edited collectively by Rivera, Siqueiros, and Guerrero and paid for by the painters' syndicate. Graciela Amador, the treasurer of the syndicate, wrote a four-line poem that vividly condensed the paper's mission: "El Machete serves to cut the cane, to open paths into the shady forests, to decapitate snakes, to crush all obstacles and humiliate the pride of the relentless rich."⁶² The paper proclaimed to actively contribute to social revolution through the creation of a visual revolutionary language. For this purpose, the image of the machete, which was prominently placed on every front page, symbolized a Mexican version of global revolution and clearly symbolized anti-imperialism and anticolonialism.

El Machete's first year was dominated by strong societal backlash against the increased role of the muralists in Mexico's political discourse. The mural painters were physically attacked in the streets of the city and murals were, once again, disfigured or destroyed. In July 1924, Vasconcelos had to resign as minister and the Obregón administration cut off funding for the muralists.⁶³ Without government protection, the artists saw themselves exposed to the increasing violence, spurring them to collectively decide to cease all work in the SEP. However, Rivera, who was responsible for the designs of the SEP, refused to accept this decision and continued working in the SEP without pay, a refusal that culminated in him being expelled from the union. Meanwhile, the muralists lost their government contracts and Siqueiros was even denied pending payments because of a painting denouncing imperialism. In August 1924, the painters' union announced a strategic reorientation: "We will exchange the walls of public buildings with

62 *El Machete* 1 (first fortnight of March 1924): 1; José Clemente Orozco, *Autobiografía* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1970), 73.

63 See Greeley, "Muralism," 19.

the columns of this revolutionary newspaper.”⁶⁴ In the future, the pages of *El Machete* were to function as the “mobile walls” of the movement, thus opening up a new medium for the continued publication of revolutionary art.⁶⁵

The creators of *El Machete* strategically occupied city space to influence, appropriate, and transform public discourse. The American communist Bertram Wolfe later ridiculed the monumental dimensions of the newspaper, “oversized,” as he noted, but the paper’s dimensions served a specific purpose.⁶⁶ *El Machete*’s size was essential for the visual effects of the published art and crucial for its propagandistic value. Visibility in the public sphere energized political art’s ability to shape a day’s discourse on the city streets. The front page was unique and instantly recognizable, its red and black ink giving the paper a “colorful liveliness.”⁶⁷ The editors encouraged the public display of *El Machete* in small workshops and factories: “For five cents, [*El Machete*] is a must for every workshop, factory or agrarian community.”⁶⁸ The importance of the paper’s public visibility was closely linked to reading practices of the time. In the city, and even more so in worker’s milieu, the practice of collective reading was commonplace: Workers gathered on the streets to share a newspaper and read aloud the headlines or even whole articles. This practice of collective reading also illuminates the societal impact of the newspaper. Though *El Machete* most likely did not reach 10,000 sold copies per week, one might assume that each copy reached several people.⁶⁹ Eventually, the medium of the newspaper, originally born out of necessity, became an advantage for the muralists: it enabled them to distribute political art to broader swathes of the population, art in print form could be created much more quickly, and it afforded them greater independence from government intervention. The mobile walls of *El Machete* became part of the collective project of the muralists, who cannily adapted their anti-imperialist messages to different types of media.

The creation of *El Libertador*, whose first issue was published one year after *El Machete*’s, in March 1925, was inspired by the former’s prominent publication of muralist art on paper. As a “grey magazine,” *El Libertador* connected the communist movement with other progressive and nationalist

64 David Alfaro Siqueiros, “Llamamiento al Proletariado,” *El Machete* (special issue, August 10, 1924).

65 Siqueiros, *El Coronelazo*, 223.

66 Bertram Wolfe, *The Fabulous Life of Diego Rivera* (New York: Stein and Day, 1963), 153.

67 Siqueiros, *El Coronelazo*, 218.

68 See, for example, *El Machete* 62 (first fortnight of April 1927): 1.

69 Historian Letizia Argenterì gives the number of 11,000 weekly copies of *El Machete* at the end of 1928—a number that seems very high and might have been a self-declared aim. See Letizia Argenterì, *Tina Modotti: Between Art and Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 94.

currents in Latin America.⁷⁰ Its main topic was, unsurprising for the paper of the LADLA, anti-imperialism, which enabled it to build bridges between communists and sympathizing non-communist anti-imperialists. Compared to the weekly or bi-weekly *El Machete*, *El Libertador* was a monthly magazine with a significantly smaller print run, but its circulation in the intellectual circles of Latin American anti-imperialists was greater than *El Machete*'s.⁷¹ While *El Machete* targeted Mexican workers and was meant to be read publicly, *El Libertador* was intended for intellectuals in Lima, San José, and New York.⁷² Its different distribution pattern explains why *El Libertador* cost ten American cents, not Mexican pesos, even in Mexico. The paper directly addressed the somewhat ironic circumstance that a paper denouncing imperialism could not be purchased with the local currency: "There is no currency that is accepted everywhere in Latin America except for the famous American dollar [...] We have the same language, the same tradition, the same metric system, the same history, and an anti-imperialist magazine needs to announce its price in American dollars."⁷³ On the whole, *El Libertador* was a forum of discussion for the transnational network of anti-imperialists in the Americas, which the magazine helped to sustain. It featured remarkably heterodox opinions and maintained "relative autonomy" towards the Comintern, although it was ultimately part of the communist effort to create a united front of anti-imperialist forces in the Americas.⁷⁴

For *El Libertador*, art was an important means of communicating the anti-imperialist message, too. Anti-imperialist topics and visualizations were used as a way of combining Marxism with Latin American symbols and traditions within a transnational Latin American public. Diego Rivera, expelled from the painters' syndicate, joined the LADLA to design the magazine's emblem and many of its front covers. The emblem of *El Libertador* depicted a muscular man with indigenous physical features breaking the chains of imperialism in front of a map of the Americas. The chains emerge from the top of the emblem, from what appear to be the skyscrapers of New York. As symbols, the chains connected the anti-imperialist fight to older social movements such as the anti-slavery movement, but also to the contemporary project of the Soviet Union and its ambition to free all peoples from oppression.

70 See Ricardo Melgar Bao, "El universo simbólico de una Revista Cominternista: Diego Rivera y *El Libertador* (1925-1929)," *Convergencia* 6, no. 21 (2000): 122.

71 Serious estimations about *El Libertador* range between 3,000 and 5,000 copies; see Kersfeld, *Contra el imperio*, 53, 194; Melgar Bao, "El universo simbólico," 122.

72 Carlos Mariátegui, for example, had *El Libertador* sent to him in Lima. Further proof for the continental circulation of the paper were the advertisements for many non-Mexican magazines such as the Argentine magazines *Revista de Oriente*, *Renovación*, and *Cordoba*. See *El Libertador* 8 (April 1926): 2, 10-13.

73 "Diez Centavos Oro Americano," *El Libertador* 2 (May 1925): 1.

74 See Melgar Bao, "El universo simbólico," 128.

In *El Machete* and *El Libertador*, caricatures were the most convenient and provocative way to visualize opposition to imperialism.⁷⁵ A caricature by José Clemente Orozco called “Imperialism–Reformism–Clergy” serves as an example of how caricatures pithily captured anti-imperialist ideology in a nutshell.⁷⁶ The cartoon depicts three men who, in a friendly way, stand arm in arm. One of them is “Uncle Sam,” who embodies U.S. imperialism, always ready to strike the other two figures with his “big stick” of foreign policy. On the opposite side of the caricature, a grim priest praises Christ. He represents not only the Mexican Catholic Church, a traditional antagonist of the secular Mexican state, but also the “Creole and European Bourgeoisie,” as the caricature’s caption clarifies. In the middle of the picture, penned in between the cleric and the foreigner, a pig-faced man with moustache and suit declares: “Viva la Revolución.” The fat man represents Mexican reformism (possibly even the powerful labor leader Luis N. Morones), willingly bowing to the pressure of external forces. Imperialism, in Orozco’s depiction, is basically congruent with the United States of America and is exercised through foreign policy. The mere existence of the U.S. big stick—the possibility of military intervention alone—is a threat serious enough to cause the Mexican government to make concessions. But there is more to the caricature than simple anti-Americanism: imperialism, in Orozco’s depiction, cannot be explained solely as economic or military power from abroad—it requires the collaboration of local agents who profit from it. Mexican groups such as the Church, the bourgeoisie, and the Mexican elite enable the system of imperialism, profiting from their alliance with the foreign power.

The depiction of empire in the caricatures in *El Machete* and *El Libertador* exemplifies that anti-imperialists viewed imperialism as a global system, though with clearly identifiable roots in New York and Wall Street. The skyscrapers of Manhattan were a universal symbol for financial imperialism, just like the dollar sign—more rarely, the British pound—and the fat man with money bags. Taken together, these symbols represented the global financial elite that, in Lenin’s thinking, were the forces behind imperialism. Washington and the White House were less often chosen as representative images of imperialism, emphasizing the position that U.S. imperialism was driven by economic rather than political aims. American bankers, not bureaucrats, were the antagonists of the Latin American anti-imperialists. A

75 The (assumed) importance of caricatures for Mexican culture led Carleton Beals to write a whole chapter about the topic in his 1931 book *Mexican Maize*: “So woven is caricature into the texture by the Mexican loom of life, of sex, of death, that one is always in doubt whether the artistic formulation (which is a popular as well as a refined pastime) is but a spontaneous outgrowth of the inner reaction or is consciously built into divine blasphemy and lampoon.” Carleton Beals, *Mexican Maize* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1931), 234.

76 José Clemente Orozco, “Imperialismo–Reformismo–Clero,” caricature, *El Machete* 17 (October 16–23, 1924): 1.

caricature in *El Machete* from December 1927 exemplifies the anti-imperialists' view of themselves as disruptors of the continental flow of capital. In the caricature, two hands that represent the United States and Great Britain, identified by dollar and pound signs respectively, pull on strings to manipulate dancing puppets. A third hand is about to cut the strings with a sickle inscribed with "anti-imperialism."⁷⁷ The caricature was a comment on the Pan-American Congress of 1927, an event despised by Latin American anti-imperialists because it represented the Panamericanism that was seen as a rehashed Monroe Doctrine for the 1920s. The image applied the general position that financial interests were behind the congress, and, more generally, behind the ideology of Pan-Americanism.

Other depictions of empires in caricatures were even less subtle, often with the intention of combining imperialism with well-known, often negatively connoted, Mexican or Latin American symbols. In *El Machete* and *El Libertador*, snakes, pigs, vampires, and the devil identified imperialism in its most grotesque forms.⁷⁸ Bertram Wolfe, writing under his pseudonym Audifaz, explained this imagery in 1925: "Imperialism is a two-headed monster. The head that devastates the countries of Latin America with flames from its jaw is called 'imperialism' and the head that devours lives and sucks the blood of the proletarian classes and of the small peasants of the United States is called 'capitalism'; but the monster is a single one."⁷⁹ Like the position taken by the caricaturists in *El Machete* and *El Libertador*, the communist Wolfe—who in the cited article argued strongly for a color-blind Marxism—defined imperialism in economic terms and tied it to capitalism in the Americas. The emphasis on economic arguments was common among anti-imperialists, while his views on race clashed with those of the muralists. Still, Wolfe charged his universal anti-imperialist argument with a locally resonant image—the picture of the double-headed serpent, possibly a reference to Inca mythology.

Many caricatures attempted to specify the relatively abstract topic of imperialism by connecting it to the Mexican context of the 1920s. Anti-imperialists regularly targeted the Catholic Church, a fact that underscores the localized nature of the caricatures and their participation in a broader discussion about the laicism of the Mexican state and, in extension, about Mexican nationalism. They regularly tackled the global influence of the Vatican, especially in the years 1926 and 1927, at the beginning of the Cristero War in Mexico. Frequently, the illustrations cast Mexican workers, peasants, and soldiers as victims of the global forces of Catholicism and capitalism. While the caricatures depict workers, peasants, and soldiers as real people, united in solidarity, the global forces of religion and capitalism often lack human

77 *El Machete* 91 (December 3, 1927): 1.

78 See, for examples, *El Machete* 11 (August 28–September 4, 1924): 4; *El Libertador* 2 (May 1925): 1; *El Machete* 39 (March 13, 1924): 1; *El Libertador* 4 (July 1925): 1.

79 Audifaz, "Basta de 'razas,'" 9.

faces. In a caricature in *El Libertador*, two giant octopuses hold the American continent in their tentacles and, according to the caption, “suck the blood of all Latin American workers.”⁸⁰ The two horrifying animals represent “Rome/Vatican” and “Wall Street,” as the caption clarifies. The creatures’ tentacles are intertwined in a way that makes their bodies basically indistinguishable, symbolizing the overlapping interests of the forces of capitalism and Catholicism, which cooperate to exploit Latin American workers. Through artistic depiction, the drawings establish a binary opposition between the abstract forces behind imperialism and its real victims. The (male) Mexican worker represents a real historical subject, while the global forces of imperialism only benefit abstract forces in Rome or New York rather than real humans in Latin America.

The visualization of fighting, and particularly the usage of weapons, reveals much about the self-understanding and intellectual tradition of anti-imperialist artists. They usually identified imperialism with one or several daggers, a weapon of deceit and treason. In contrast, they depicted those who defend themselves against imperialism as using guns, and, less commonly, the sickle or the machete. As a weapon of the peasants and proletarian workers, the gun symbolized the Mexican Revolution and represented demands that the people take up arms, just as Diego Rivera had proposed in *En El Arsenal*. The self-image of anti-imperialists as represented in the caricatures relied heavily on the semantics of transparency. While the forces of imperialism hide their intentions, or use their power indirectly through Latin American puppets, the fighters against imperialism pride themselves on the straightforwardness of their motives. Oftentimes, their self-ascribed honesty is symbolized by a strong male human body in opposition to grotesque animals, treacherous backstabbers, and physically inferior enemies. By identification through what it is not, the figure of the anti-imperialist is thus linked to supposedly masculine values such as heroism, strength, and courage.⁸¹ The idealization of manual labor as it was performed by the muralists, who always insisted on being artisans, not “intellectual artists,” conforms with this broader valorization of masculinity.

Apart from these findings, the caricatures do not clearly identify what anti-imperialism meant or what it meant to be an anti-imperialist. Historian Melgar Bao noted the conspicuous absence of salvationist imagery in the anti-imperialist press.⁸² While the empire was depicted in a myriad of visual forms, anti-imperialism had no clearly identifiable symbols for its readership.

80 “El Matrimonio divino,” *El Libertador* 9/10 (October 1926): 16. In Latin America, the pulpo became a popular symbol for imperialism, dollar diplomacy, and Pan-Americanism. See, for example, *Repertorio Americano* 15, no. 9, September 3, 1927, 1.

81 For a similar argument, see Ricardo Melgar Bao, *Vivir el exilio en la ciudad, 1928. V.R. Haya de la Torre y J.A. Mella* (Mexico City: Taller Abierto, 2013), 45.

82 See Melgar Bao, “El universo simbólico,” 132–33.

And while the ideology of anti-imperialism was much more than just a negation of imperialism, its visualization struggled to establish explicitly anti-imperialist symbols and images apart from machetes, guns, and chains. The closest *El Libertador* came to salvationist images were the portrayals of anticolonial heroes, namely Sun Yat-Sen, Abd-el Krim, and, most notably, César Augusto Sandino. Quite often, however Latin America was simply portrayed as a victimized continent that could be mocked, manipulated, threatened, stabbed, robbed, shot, and bombed because of imperialism.⁸³

Apart from caricatures, drawings, and prints, photographs featured prominently in the two papers' visual language of anti-imperialism. Italian American photographer Tina Modotti, who combined the esthetics of modernist photography with the topic of romanticized revolution, became the most prominent artist who published in both papers. Purposefully oscillating between agitation and aestheticization, Modotti followed the global trend of idealizing workers and their everyday life. In Soviet Russia and Germany, working-class photography had become part of a revolutionary art canon by the mid-1920s. The *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (*AIZ*), a weekly newspaper published in Berlin by the communist member of the Reichstag Willi Münzenberg's press outlets, integrated large photographs depicting the social conditions of the working class into its rather short articles. Modotti and the editors of *El Machete* and *El Libertador* were convinced of the persuasiveness of photographs for the revolutionary cause and took inspiration from the layout and usage of photographs in the *AIZ*.⁸⁴ Probably facilitated by the editors' contact with Alfons Goldschmidt, who wrote articles about Latin America for the *AIZ*, Modotti's photographs were also published in the *AIZ* in Germany.⁸⁵

During the 1920s in Mexico, the medium of photography influenced ever-expanding parts of the population, as journalists of weekly and daily newspapers increasingly illustrated their articles with photographs. Tina Modotti was one of the first photographers to recognize the full propagandistic potential of "revolutionary photography" that fused art and politics. Far from the stereotypical representation of Mexican poverty, Modotti gave agency to historical subjects, often simply by making the marginalized visible.

83 All of these activities appear on the front cover of *El Libertador* alone.

84 Raffael Carrillo, the General Secretary of the PCM from 1924 to 1929, opened up to the Peruvian Mexican historian Ricardo Melgar Bao in 1982: "I had a special interest in talking to Münzenberg. He had published a magazine that reached great impact in Europe due to its usage of layout and photography. I remember one of the covers, depicting bare feet, only bare feet. Impressive." Melgar Bao, *Haya*, 145.

85 The *AIZ* printed Modotti's photograph of a boy wearing a sombrero in March 1928 as the front cover without mentioning her name (an example of the active exclusion of female voices within (European) communism). Later, the *AIZ* printed more of Modotti's work and finally acknowledged her authorship. See *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, March 14, 1928, 1, 8–9; *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, October 8, 1930.

El Machete, and to a lesser degree *El Libertador*, offered a powerful forum for that task. Modotti's photographs of Rivera's murals of the SEP were published in *El Machete* to popularize muralism, and her photos of Mella covered several front pages of the paper.⁸⁶ Conversely, the central role of the paper for urban everyday life was captured by Modotti's photography, most vividly in her work *Campeños Reading El Machete*. The photo shows a group of sombrero-wearing men collectively reading the paper. Taken from above, Modotti's photograph leads the viewer's gaze towards the hammer and sickle symbols of the title page, as the symmetry of the round hats conceals the men's faces: rather than bourgeois individuals, they are the proletariat, and, as such, reading *El Machete* was part of their identity.

After the Calles government turned away from openly promoting anti-imperialism as quasi-official state doctrine and its disputes with the United States, the muralists and editors of *El Machete* and *El Libertador* encountered heavier repression in Mexico. Calles's move to the political right was interpreted as a betrayal of anti-imperialism by artists like Siqueiros, who in his memoirs lamented that Calles had given in to the "pressure of North American imperialism."⁸⁷ In 1929, the offices of *El Machete* were closed; it continued publication illegally until 1934. During this precarious period, the paper lost its initial focus on artistic design, becoming heavily text-based and ideologically Stalinist. Its content now did little more than glorify the Soviet Union. *El Libertador* experienced a similar demise, with massive financial problems in 1927/28 and the closing of the Comintern-friendly press by the Calles government in 1929.

An Anti-Imperialist Cosmopolitan Summer?

By the second half of the 1920s, the optimism of Mexico City's art scene in the first postrevolutionary years had vanished as social tensions began to play a larger role for artists. In 1925, Manuel Maples Arce and other *estridentistas* moved to the city of Xalapa after a police raid on the Café de Nadie. Meanwhile, new artists and intellectuals arrived in the city: in 1923, Anita Brenner came to Mexico with a stipend from the SEP to preserve indigenous culture in Mexico. In the same year, Tina Modotti arrived in Mexico City with American photographer Edward Weston. Both women would decisively influence Mexico City's intellectual scene and be at the center of a network of artistically and politically active people.

Tina Modotti's role as mediator between different scenes exemplifies how anti-imperialist cosmopolitanism played out in the milieu of artists and activists of the city. As an example, not a representation, of the cosmopolitan scene of artists in the years 1924–26, Modotti and her social circle symbolize

86 *El Machete* (special issue, January 11, 1929); *El Machete* 148 (January 19, 1929); *El Machete* 152 (February 16, 1929).

87 Siqueiros, *El Coronelazo*, 225.

a time marked by the merging of culture and radical politics.⁸⁸ The cosmopolitan scene of artists was politically active and well-connected both to Mexican political circles and the transnational networks of radical politics. While many members of the cosmopolitan circles of the 1920s were U.S. Americans or Mexicans, there were also significant numbers of South Americans and Caribbeans, Europeans, and Asians in Mexico City. A spirit of anti-imperialist cosmopolitanism held these multicultural networks together, even if the exact meaning of the term anti-imperialism remained vague.

The Mexican Revolution had created hopes all over the Americas and attracted many artists and intellectuals who dreamed of redesigning a revolutionary art, and with it, helping build a new social order. At the center of these transnational networks of radical artists and intellectuals were expatriates like Tina Modotti, Anita Brenner, Carleton Beals, and Alfons Goldschmidt. Many foreigners came to the city, attracted by its promises of the exotic and eccentric, and many turned to Diego Rivera to be introduced into the art scene. After 1926, Tina Modotti assumed the role of gatekeeper of Mexico City's art scene, especially for communist exiles. Modotti, born in Udine in 1896, had emigrated to San Francisco in 1913 to work as a model and actress. Accompanying the photographer Edward Weston, she moved to Mexico City in July 1923 and quickly became an active intermediary between cosmopolitan avant-garde artists and radical political activists.⁸⁹

In her first years in Mexico, Modotti gained a reputation for throwing legendary parties in the apartment she rented together with Weston. In her next apartment at Abraham Gonzalez Street no. 31, Modotti regularly hosted political gatherings, such as the meetings of Red Help.⁹⁰ Radical activists found in Modotti's apartment a place where they could freely assemble and discuss their ideas—in a sense, it was a cosmopolitan communist version of the political salon.⁹¹ Modotti's parties were part of a cosmopolitan lifestyle in which art and politics merged in a multicultural context. In March 1924, Weston expressed his amazement about the number of languages spoken at a party: "French, Spanish, German, Italian, Mexican, Hindu, American,

88 See Tenorio-Trillo, "Cosmopolitan Mexican Summer," 224.

89 Modotti had a romantic relationship with Edward Weston (until he returned to California), with muralist Xavier Guerrero (until he left for Moscow to take part in a political party training), and with the exiled Cuban communist Julio Antonio Mella, who was assassinated in the presence of Modotti in 1929; see Christine Hatzky, *Julio Antonio Mella (1903–1929): Eine Biografie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2004), 296–97.

90 See Tina Modotti, *Una mujer sin país: Las cartas a Edward Weston y otros papeles personales*, ed. Antonio Saborit (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 2001), 71; Melgar Bao, *Haya*, 41.

91 Christiane Barckhausen quotes a memoir from Vittorio Vidali in which Modotti's apartment is called "our salon." See Christiane Barckhausen, *Auf den Spuren von Tina Modotti* (Kiel: agimos, 1997), 171.

these nationalities were represented at last night's party."⁹² The parties at Modotti and Weston's home were more than merely multilingual—they were occasions of cultural transnational network building and, increasingly, a site of political radicalization.

The parties at Modotti's fostered an atmosphere of celebration and permissiveness, not unlike parties in the New York of the Roaring Twenties or in Paris during the *Années folles*. Mexican and foreign artists and intellectuals celebrated the possibilities offered by the Mexican capital of the mid-1920s. At a Mardi Gras party in March 1924, Weston and Modotti exchanged clothes and Weston noted in his diary: "She smoked my pipe and bound down her breasts, while I wore a pair of cotton ones with pink pointed buttons for nipples." Other party guests mocked traditional gender roles as well ("Lupe Marín came dressed as Diego, padded, ponderous, lumbering"), and when Nahui Olín, Leo Mathias, and Weston danced as a trio, it "shocked the good Frau Goldschmidt," Alfons Goldschmidt's wife Lina.⁹³ Alcohol, dancing, music, and masquerade were regular features at the parties of these artists and intellectuals.

As the borders between radical politics, art, journalism, and social life became blurred in cosmopolitan circles, love affairs between its members became quotidian. Gossip about the newest intricacies between potential or real lovers flowed constantly. American journalist Bertram Wolfe had to justify his interest in Katherine Anne Porter in a letter to his wife: "I have been behaving most properly. And this about Katherine P(orter?)? Really I am very fond of her and have always liked her and wonder just what can be the reason for your question."⁹⁴ Beals had been left by his American wife Lillian in 1924 and healed his "divorce-damaged ego" with "the excitement of a series of romances," in the run of which he started a relationship with Tina's sister Mercedes.⁹⁵ More significant than the real and alleged love affairs was the way love and relationships were addressed by the protagonists themselves. Once again, the relationship between Weston and Modotti was remarkable. Both had spouses in the United States (Modotti's husband died in 1925) but made no secret of their relationship in Mexico: they lived together and even celebrated a "mock marriage" for a photo session in which they made fun of bourgeois photography, and, while at it, the institution of marriage more generally.⁹⁶

92 Edward Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, 2 vols. (Rochester, NY: George Eastman House, 1961–66), 1.59 (March 30, 1924).

93 All quotes from Weston, *Daybooks*, 1.55 (March 9, 1924).

94 Letter from Bertram Wolfe to Ella Wolfe, ca. 1925, Bertram D. Wolfe Papers, Box 159/16, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

95 John A. Britton, *Carleton Beals: A Radical Journalist in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 33.

96 Photograph of Tina Modotti and Edward Weston, 1924, Wolfe Papers, Box 174, HIA. Ella Wolfe wrote on the back of the photo that Modotti and Weston were "poking fun at traditional photography."

On another occasion, Weston casually noted that at a gathering at the Goldschmidt house, “a new Communist group was formed,” an event afterwards celebrated in the *Salón Azteca*.⁹⁷ Weston’s small note is evidence of the fact that the Cosmopolitan Mexican Summer was also about radical politics, not just art and cultural exchange. The newly founded communist group that Weston referred to was probably either a group of communist students who had been expelled from the ENP or a communist group preparing the protests against the Italian ship *Nave Italia*.⁹⁸ In both cases, Weston’s condescension towards political activism cannot hide the fact that arts and politics were merging in the cosmopolitan circles.

The host of the new communist group, Alfons Goldschmidt, like Modotti, acted as an intermediary between artists and the world of radical politics, specifically between the muralists and the global networks of anti-imperialism and communism. As a member of the LADLA and prolific writer of articles for *El Libertador* and *El Machete*, the name Goldschmidt was well known among anti-imperialists and communists in Mexico City.⁹⁹ Born in 1879 in Gelsenkirchen, Goldschmidt had been invited to Mexico to join the university as a professor of economics by José Vasconcelos. Already in Berlin, Goldschmidt was part of global communist networks and had had contact with prominent communists like Willi Münzenberg, Clara Zetkin, and Sen Katayama. In April 1923, the Goldschmidt family (Alfons, his wife Lina, and their daughter Irene) traveled to Mexico, where they stayed, with short breaks, until the end of 1925. Goldschmidt conversed with the radical intellectuals Jesús Silva Herzog, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, and Ramón P. de Negri, with Mexican president Calles, and with artists like Modotti, Rivera, and the eccentric Dr. Atl about Marx, Engels, and the evils of imperialism.¹⁰⁰ As a teacher at the Escuela Nacional de Altos Estudios, the Marxist economist soon attracted students interested in learning about Marxism and historical materialism.

Other members of the cosmopolitan scene were less well prepared for an academic career but could still make a living with their language skills. The U.S. communist Bertram Wolfe became a certified English teacher and, together with his wife Ella, taught at a girls’ high school.¹⁰¹ The most popular

97 Weston, *Daybooks*, 1.82 (undated; probably June 27, 1924).

98 These two interpretations are given by Christiane Barckhausen; see Barckhausen, *Auf den Spuren von Tina Modotti*, 137–39; “Grupo Comunista Estudiantil,” *El Machete* 10 (August 21–28, 1924): 3.

99 Goldschmidt’s role for the Mexican communists is illustrated by the fact that one of his articles was published on the cover of the first number of *El Machete*. See Alfons Goldschmidt, “¿Qué es la Revolución?” *El Machete* 1 (first fortnight of March 1924): 1.

100 Wolfgang Kießling, *Brücken nach Mexiko: Traditionen einer Freundschaft* (Berlin: Dietz, 1989), 121–23, 139–42.

101 “Certificate of Employment issued by Antonio del A. Castillo, Secretaría de

occupation in Mexico City for the members of the cosmopolitan scene, though, was journalism. The best-known example of a leftist, anti-imperialist journalist was certainly Carleton Beals, who was a member of the cosmopolitan circle around Modotti and Goldschmidt and would in 1928 be the only American journalist to be allowed to interview Sandino in Nicaragua. These interviews, published in *The Nation*, made him, according to his biographer John A. Britton, “a leading spokesman of anti-imperialism” in the United States and in Latin America.¹⁰² Before his scoop in 1928, Beals made a living as a journalist and language teacher in Mexico City. Goldschmidt, too, wrote numerous articles for Mexican and German newspapers and acted as “South America correspondent” for the German working-class magazine *AIZ*. The Swiss journalist Fritz Bach (his real name was Sulzbachner) had a similar job and regularly wrote articles about Mexico for the German press. The German journalist Leo Matthias used his time in Mexico with Rivera, Weston, and Modotti to write a travel book about Mexico for the avant-garde publishing house *Die Schmiede* in 1926.¹⁰³ Anita Brenner regularly wrote articles about Mexican art for outlets like *The Nation* and the U.S. art magazine *Charm* and about Jewish life in Mexico for the *Menorah Journal* and the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*.¹⁰⁴ Frances Toor, the ethnographer of Mexican indigenous cultures, started her own cultural journal in Mexico City in 1925, tellingly named *Mexican Folkways*.

The circles of intellectuals, artists, and political activists in Mexico City were more than just a playground for North American artists and scholars, and, in consequence, are more than just a part of the history of Mexican–U.S. relations. Surely, U.S. Americans, and especially radical leftists, crossed the border to Mexico to enjoy greater cultural or political freedom, and many Americans developed an interest in “all things Mexican” after the Revolution.¹⁰⁵ But the impression that Mexico City was primarily a laboratory for American radicals is too simple. Mexican, American, South American, Asian, and European radicals were all involved in the communist and cosmopolitan scenes of the city, as evidenced by the presence of Indian anticolonialists. Pandurang Khankhoje and Hermbal Gupta belonged to the inner circle of artists and intellectuals at Modotti’s home and were well-connected to government officials like Vasconcelos and Ramón P. de Negri.¹⁰⁶

Educación Pública,” Wolfe Papers, Box 155/16, HIA, and Bertram Wolfe, *A Life in Two Centuries: An Autobiography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981), 279.

102 Britton, *Carleton Beals*, 2.

103 See Leo Matthias, *Ausflug nach Mexiko* (Berlin: Die Schmiede, 1926).

104 “Jewish Telegraphic Agency,” Anita Brenner Papers, Box 25.1 and “Menorah Journal,” Box 25.2, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Austin, TX.

105 See Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920–1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 7–8.

106 Weston, *Daybooks*, 1.95 (October 2, 1924).

In 1926, Weston left Mexico and passed his studio on to Modotti. Subsequently, Modotti embraced a more ascetic lifestyle and joined the PCM in 1927. She worked as a freelance photographer and translator for *El Machete*, joined the International Red Aid, and became an organizer of the Hands Off Nicaragua campaign in Mexico City. After the assassination of Julio Antonio Mella in January 1929, Modotti was targeted by a smear campaign conducted by the city's anti-communist press.¹⁰⁷ Modotti opened her first exhibition in December 1929 but was arrested by the Mexican authorities and deported to Europe in February of 1930 as part of the larger crackdown on communists in the country. During a stopover in New Orleans after her expulsion, Modotti wrote a harsh piece against the Mexican government in an open letter to Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui, published in *Amauta*. In it, she reflected on her relationship to Mexico, clearly disappointed by her treatment as a prisoner and “pernicious foreigner.” After working in service of the revolution for the last years by merging art and politics, Modotti now lambasted the Mexican “counterrevolutionary government” for having “totally submitted to Wall Street.” For Modotti, the attraction of the Mexican Revolution had been its anti-imperialist promise, a promise betrayed, as she concluded: “The revolutionary spirit that attracted so many to Mexico is now nothing more than a legend.”¹⁰⁸

The group of artists around Modotti is only a glimpse into the city's much wider panorama of artists, activists, and intellectuals. Neither Tina Modotti nor the guests of her parties were entirely representative of the art scene of the city, and yet their attitudes and interactions illustrate the overlapping of arts and politics in a cosmopolitan context. The Mexican Cosmopolitan Summer was strongly connected to the muralist movement: The muralists created a cosmopolitan, revolutionary culture that attracted radical artists and intellectuals, arguably as much as the Mexican Revolution itself. Those artists and intellectuals (Modotti in her photography, Brenner in her ethnographic studies) supported the muralists' project of infusing Mexican culture with a confident anti-imperialist nationalism. American anti-imperialists were fascinated by Mexico's recent revolution—an event that, in their view, elevated Mexico to much more than simply the non-United States. The same holds true for European Marxists and Indian anticolonialists: they were attracted by Mexico for the global appeal of its revolution and its promises. As a modern metropolis, Mexico City played an important role for the cosmopolitan scene, too, as an equally international as well as politically radical mixture of activists and artists would hardly have been imaginable in smaller Mexican towns of the 1920s, if only for the lack of avant-garde cafés and dancing salons. American cities, similarly, did not enjoy the kind of government support, and their denizens were not as open to explicitly revolutionary rhetoric, either. Mexico City was a special place in the mid-1920s,

107 See Argentero, *Tina Modotti*, 114.

108 Tina Modotti, “La Contrarrevolucion Mexicana,” *Amauta* 29 (1930): 94–95.

one that provided an anti-imperialist cosmopolitanism that was unique to the city and at the same time deeply embedded in global networks.

Cosmopolitan anti-imperialism was never independent of the global and local surroundings in which it was created. Without Mexican nationalism, the Mexican Revolution, and its continental aspirations—and the global attractiveness of a social Soviet-style revolution—cosmopolitan anti-imperialism cannot be satisfyingly explained. And yet, cosmopolitan anti-imperialism helped create a framework in which cultural nationalism, dreams of global communism, and the explicit integration of indigenous cultures could coexist. Ironically, it was exactly this mixture that proved attractive to foreigners, who tended to overlook the modern aspects of Mexico's postrevolutionary culture. Already starting in the late 1920s, the Mexican government and the artists themselves took advantage of the global appeal of an exotic, non-modern version of Mexico that the world apparently wanted to see. Mexico was painted and sold as an exotic country of romantic revolutionary hopes. Although having acquired an enormous knowledge of the histories, contradictions, and intricacies of Mexico, Anita Brenner contributed to this global perception and made a career of skillfully explaining exotic Mexico to the American public.¹⁰⁹ The picture of pre-modern Mexico was *en vogue* and—another irony—boosted the modern tourist industry.

109 See, for example, her guidebook for American tourists, with illustrations by Carlos Merida: Anita Brenner, *Your Mexican Holiday* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1931).

CHAPTER TWO

Our Anti-Imperialist America Transnational Exile Networks¹

That exile was for me a form of freedom, perhaps the only form of freedom, since in Peru none exists.

Haya de la Torre (1923)¹

Displaying a colorful mix of multiple architectural styles, the Calle de Bolívar is one of the urban arteries of the historic center of Mexico City. The lively street owes its name to Simón Bolívar, who is said to have stayed in a colonial house there as a teenager on his way to Spain in 1799. In 1907, during the lead-up to the 1910 centennial celebrations of Mexico's War of Independence, the city re-baptized the Calle del Coliseo Nuevo as Calle de Bolívar to honour the "liberator of Latin America," in an act that showed the growing admiration for Bolívar and the idea of continental unity he represented. In the 1920s, when automobiles were beginning to clog the narrow street, the Calle de Bolívar became the epicenter of Latin American exile activism and anti-imperialist agitation in the city. Exiles from many parts of Latin America were fascinated by the street and the connection to history its name promised; they wandered through the street, looking for a free table in one of the numerous cafés and cantinas. The Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas (LADLA in its Spanish acronym²), an organization that explicitly connected exile activism to anti-imperialism, had established its headquarters

1 Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, "Declaración después del destierro," in *Obras completas*, vol. 1 (Lima: J. Mejica Baca, 1977), 17–19.

2 I use this translation from the Spanish "Liga Anti-Imperialista de las Américas" and the acronym LADLA because that is the way the organization is known in the Spanish-language scholarship. This avoids confusion with the League Against Imperialism, the organization created at the Brussels Congress. In the 1920s, the U.S. section of the LADLA was called All-America League Against Imperialism. As late as the 1970s, Manuel Gómez (aka Charles Philipps aka Charles Shipman) lectured a graduate student that the name was "All-America," Not "All-American" (emphasis in the original). Letter from Manuel Gómez to Stephen J. Whitfield, November 11,

in a colonial building in the street and had proudly named its own magazine *El Libertador*. Some communist exiles from Venezuela, Cuba, and Peru had even moved into the building that was said to have hosted Bolívar in 1799 and started a communal living project there, thus practicing everyday *latinoamericanismo*. With its symbolic name and multi-layered history, the Calle de Bolívar stands as a powerful example of the spaces of exile activism that developed in the city of Mexico in the 1920s.

The twentieth century in Mexico has been profoundly shaped by exiles and refugees. Historian Pablo Yankelevich has called Mexico a country of refuge, a “país refugio.”³ Often, particularly in European memory, Mexico is predominantly associated with its generous acceptance of Spanish Republicans and the victims of fascism during the 1930s and 1940s.⁴ Scholarship on exile in Mexico tends to concentrate on a diachronic perspective, often with the desire to contribute to the history of exile in Latin American history more generally. Political scientists and sociologists Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, for example, have proposed models for thinking about political exile as a constant, yet flexible, tool of Latin American governments over the last two hundred years.⁵ I want to contribute to the scholarship by focusing on a specific place and time and thereby help to show, as others have before, that the concept of the nation was often imagined not from within, but from the outside.

This chapter seeks to contribute to studies on exile in Mexican history by focusing on the role of Mexico City as a hub of exile radicalism. How and why did exile activists come to Mexico City? How did they use the city’s conditions as well as anti-imperialist arguments to transnationally organize? Finally, why did the transnational contacts not lead to long-term continental cooperation but fragment into national projects? The spatial focus on Mexico City highlights the communication between different national exile groups and the important role of anti-imperialism as factor enabling the cooperation, but also the conflicts, between exile communities. Other scholars have focused on entanglements and synchronicity within the exile communities

1971, “All-American Anti-Imperialist League 1920–1930, 1971,” Charles Shipman Papers, Box 2005C6231.06, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

3 Pablo Yankelevich, ed., *México, país refugio: La experiencia de los exilios en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: INAH, 2002). See also Pablo Yankelevich, ed., *En México, entre exilios* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores/ITAM, 1997).

4 For a helpful overview, as well as a deconstruction of the traditional image of Mexico as a country of asylum—prevalent in non-Mexican historiography—see Daniela Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles: Mexico and the Jewish Refugees from Nazism, 1933–1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), especially xiii–xiv.

5 Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, *The Politics of Exile in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Mario Sznajder and Luis Roniger, *La política del destierro y el exilio en América Latina* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2013); Luis Roniger, *Destierro y exilio en América Latina: Nuevos estudios y avances teóricos* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2014).

of Mexico City as well. Historian Barry Carr, for whom the Mexican capital was an “emporium of Latin American exiles,” has stressed the diversity and the embeddedness in transnational networks of “exiles, émigrés, refugees, revolutionaries and dreamers” and situates the city within a larger network of transnational cultural interaction in the Circum-Caribbean.⁶ Historian and anthropologist Ricardo Melgar Bao has analyzed the multiple ways in which exile was negotiated in the debates between Mella and Haya de la Torre, dedicating considerable energy to the spatial and everyday aspects of “living exile.”⁷ Exploring the vicissitudes of the exile activism of the Peruvian APRA, historian Martín Bergel perceives exile activism as having been part of “a militant traveling culture,” stressing the transnational networks that the activists maintained through a shared intellectual culture.⁸ In his study on Latin American “radical militants,” historian Sebastián Rivera Mir details the diversity of Latin American exile communities and the ways in which they experimented with political practices in exile as well as with communication techniques within larger conspiratorial networks.⁹ This chapter builds on these contributions and, by treating exiles as anti-imperialist actors, undertakes a shift in perspective that brings into sharper contrast inter-exile entanglements, both of cooperation and conflict.

To elucidate what brought exile communities together in the first place, the first part of the chapter examines continental intellectual traditions of envisioning Latin American unity as well as the specific context that actively encouraged transnational exile activism after the Mexican Revolution. In the second part, the transnational networks of political exiles are analyzed in relation to the urban surroundings in which anti-imperialist exile politics were practiced. The third part of the chapter examines the fragmentation of exile communities into national groups, and the failed attempts to export revolution back to their home countries of origin. Thus, the chapter makes a chronological argument about Mexico City becoming a hub of transnational anti-imperialist activism with different phases. A first phase of building transnational networks until 1925 was followed by a second phase

6 Barry Carr, “Mexico City: Emporium of Latin American Exiles and Revolutionaries in the 1920s,” in *1810–1910–2010: Mexico’s Unfinished Revolutions*, ed. Charles B. Faulhaber (Berkeley, CA: Bancroft Library, 2011), 25–40; Carr, “Across.”

7 Ricardo Melgar Bao, *Vivir el exilio en la ciudad, 1928. V.R. Haya de la Torre y J.A. Mella* (Mexico City: Taller Abierto, 2013).

8 See Martín Bergel, “La desmesura revolucionaria: Prácticas intelectuales y cultura del heroísmo en los orígenes del aprismo peruano (1923–1931),” *Nuevo Mundo Mundo Nuevos* (2007) and Martín Bergel, “Nomadismo proselitista y revolución: Una caracterización del primer exilio Aprista (1923–1931),” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 20, no. 1 (2009).

9 Sebastián Rivera Mir, “Militantes radicales de la izquierda latinoamericana en México, 1920–1934: Prácticas políticas, redes y conspiraciones,” Ph.D. dissertation, Colegio de México, 2014.

of anti-imperialist euphoria in Mexico City until 1927, and a third phase of fragmentation and re-nationalization starting in 1927.

The transnational organizations of the Venezuelan, Cuban, and Peruvian diasporas stand as examples of exile groups in Mexico City. These were the largest groups and remain the best documented cases; the three communities shared an anti-imperialist conviction, the desire to enable Latin American countries to resist the hegemonic power of the United States and retain the continent's economic, political, and cultural independence. Mexico City was a good place for this project. The country had just experienced a major revolution that had inspired many political activists in Latin America. The postrevolutionary leaders of Mexico liked to paint their country as the first Latin American country to have successfully stood up against U.S. encroachment. In its attempts to forge a new national identity after the revolution, the Mexican state welcomed all foreigners—not just from Latin America—who they thought would help stabilize Mexico's revolutionary achievements and strengthen Mexico's position in the region. Embracing anti-imperialism was an attempt by the Mexican government to attract leading thinkers of the continent and advance Mexican interests in the Americas.

Ideologically, the project shared by the Latin American exiles in Mexico City was their desire to see Latin America unified in one form or another. While they were closely connected to the anti-imperialist radical intellectuals in the Mexican government, the state-sponsored artists, and the European and Asian radicals, Latin American exiles thus had their own special mission that sometimes collided with and sometimes chimed nicely with other positions from the anti-imperialist spectrum. Working towards revolutionary coups in their respective countries, exiles in Mexico City agreed that authoritarian leaders such as Gerardo Machado in Cuba or Juan Vicente Gómez in Venezuela were merely the symptoms of a rigged system, profiteers of the imperialist system in the Americas. For the exiles, the authoritarian leaders were caused and sustained by the economic and cultural system of imperialism and were thus not isolated national phenomena. With this analysis came a similarly transnational solution: anti-imperialists in exile asserted the need for cooperation between themselves on a local level.

Making Mexico City a Hub for Exile Radicalism

Ideology and Identity: Anti-Imperialism as Uniting Latin America

What were the intellectual roots that led to the cooperation of Latin American political exiles in Mexico City in the 1920s? Concerning ideology, the tradition of (Spanish-speaking) Latin American anti-imperialism was a decisive continental cause.¹⁰ Besides, a specific Latin American identity became

¹⁰ In the nineteenth century, anti-imperialists actively replaced the idea of “Hispanic America” with the concept of “Latin America” to include the region's hegemon

deeply intertwined with anti-imperialist discourse over the course of the nineteenth century, transforming solidarity among those fighting imperialism into a strong bond for any exile who had to leave his or her country of origin. The idea of uniting Latin American countries had always been motivated by the desire to defend existing sovereignty against external expansionism. Since the wars of independence and throughout much of the nineteenth century, the notion that the new nation states in the Americas were threatened by European expansion was commonplace. The fear of foreign intervention was by no means a symptom of paranoia: European colonial powers were willing to use force to collect on the debts of Latin American states and intervene militarily if they saw their interests in the Americas endangered. In the 1860s, the French army invaded Mexico to install a French protectorate.¹¹ While the danger of European military expansionism receded in the second half of the century, Latin America's relationship to the United States became more ambivalent. Admiration for the northern neighbor and its democratic achievements had inspired the independence movements, but the role of the United States in the hemisphere was increasingly viewed with suspicion. The United States was growing rapidly: after annexing territories from Mexico and the Caribbean, the United States engaged in an ever-more aggressive economic expansion into the markets to its South to supplant European competitors. In Latin America, the United States came to be regarded as a power that was aggressively asserting its economic interests and undertaking an unwanted civilizing mission in the Western hemisphere.

The idea that the young America was inherently different from old, archaic Europe had united North and Latin American elites since the early nineteenth century.¹² For some, "America" stood for the historical possibility of a continental democracy based on the values of liberty and sovereignty. The growing disappointment of Latin American elites with U.S. neglect of its own values found expression in the concept of the "Two Americas," where "Latin America" carried on the American tradition of anticolonialism. The adjective "Latin" itself connoted a whole array of beliefs about race, culture, and history, and its meaning varied depending on the concrete context. But the embrace of the "Latin" had, from the very beginning, entailed the rejection of U.S. expansionism, materialism, and individualism.¹³ By the end

Brazil. In practice, though, Brazil and its particularities were often ignored. See Michel Gobat, "The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race," *American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (2013): 1354.

11 See Kristine Ibsen, *Maximilian, Mexico, and the Invention of Empire* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2010).

12 Greg Grandin, "Your Americanism and Mine: Americanism and Anti-Americanism in the Americas," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (2006): 1043.

13 See Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 2.

of the nineteenth century, debates on imperialism and approaches to the other (as Yankee, gringo, or simply as foreigner) dominated reflections about what it meant to be “Latin American.”¹⁴ The term *Nuestra América*, created and disseminated by the Cuban writer and independence hero José Martí in his 1891 essay of the same name, became widely popular among Latin American intellectuals. Martí’s text proposed a Latin American unity as a defensive measure against “the giant with the seven-league boots,” the increasingly powerful United States.¹⁵ Martí’s intervention, for Argentine historian Oscar Terán the “first Latin American anti-imperialism,”¹⁶ signalled that the influence of the United States was progressively being regarded as negative in Latin America. Martí emphasized the role of the continent’s indigenous cultures in its quest for modernity, and thereby opened up debates about the value of the autochthonous in Latin America.

Anti-imperialist thought among Latin American intellectuals was fueled by their interpretation of U.S. foreign policy as a secular messianism.¹⁷ The Guerra de 98, or Spanish–Cuban–American War, seemed to confirm the fears of a new American frontier. The Cuban War of Independence against the Spanish Empire escalated into a war between Spanish and U.S. forces in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. After having quickly defeated the Spanish army, North American troops took control over Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Cuba received its formal independence, although occupation troops stayed on the island until Cuba amended its constitution to include the terms set out in the so-called Platt Amendment, which guaranteed the right of the United States to intervene in the island nation’s affairs. Many Latin American thinkers read this foreign policy move of the United States as marking a shift in the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine away from the position of self-defense against European powers and towards proactive imperialist action in Latin America. With the addition of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine in 1904, the United States could justify intervention throughout the hemisphere, thus confirming Latin American fears. Carried out under Roosevelt’s slogan “speak softly and carry a big stick,” subsequent U.S. incursions in Central America and the Caribbean demonstrated for Latin Americans that the United States was, indeed, becoming an empire.

As a direct reaction to the Spanish–Cuban–American War, the Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó published his celebrated essay *Ariel* in 1900. Rodó

14 See Alexandra Pita González and Carlos Marichal Salinas, eds., *Pensar el Antiimperialismo: Ensayos de historia intelectual latinoamericana, 1900–1930* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2012), 10.

15 See José Martí, *Nuestra América: Edición crítica*, ed. Cintio Vitier (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 2002).

16 Oscar Terán, “El primer antiimperialismo latinoamericano,” *Revista de Cultura* 12 (1982).

17 See Stefan Rinke, *América Latina y Estados Unidos: Una historia entre espacios desde la época colonial hasta hoy* (Mexico City: Colegio de México/Marcial Pons, 2015), 95.

contrasted what he saw as the “Anglo-Saxon materialism” and “mediocre individualism” of North America with the “Latin spirit” of spirituality, idealism, and an admiration for beauty. *Arielismo*, the principle of guarding Latin American identity in the face of U.S. cultural menacing, became the leading ideology for a whole generation of Latin American intellectuals, literally “the bible and conscience of Latin America.”¹⁸ Rodó’s thinking was not just based on the (stereotypical) rejection of supposedly corrupt North America, but expressed a hopeful confidence in Latin America’s own capacity to generate powerful alternative values. Rodó thus promoted the idea of a shared culture of Latin America and the possibility of an alternative Latin American modernity.¹⁹

The First World War accelerated the development of Latin American anti-imperialism. After the United States gave up its neutrality in 1917, most Latin American countries followed its example. Others, most notably Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, remained neutral. This was less due to the countries’ *germanofilia*, as many contemporaries suspected, and more caused by the desire to demonstrate independence vis-à-vis the United States.²⁰ Support for continental anti-imperialist unity was strengthened by two repercussions of the war. First, the war and the entry of the United States into it served to highlight the role of the United States as the hegemon of the Western hemisphere, especially in economic terms: the United States became the most important trading partner for Latin America as U.S. companies and U.S. capital came to replace their European, often German, competition. A second factor in the development of Latin American anti-imperialism was a profound disappointment with Europe as a model of development. The “Old World” no longer represented civilization and progress (as it had for Latin American elites and oligarchs for a long time), but instead stood for greed and global bloodshed. Europe had lost its appeal as being worthy of imitation for Latin American societies. In short, the First World War induced support for a united “Latin America” and resistance against the growing economic power of the United States and the cultural decline of Europe.

In Mexico, where armed revolution, civil war, and the First World War overlapped, fears of U.S. intervention became particularly palpable. Anti-imperialist sentiment and Mexican nationalism were fueled by the U.S. military invasion and subsequent occupation of the Mexican port town Veracruz in 1914 as well as by John J. Pershing’s punitive expedition on Mexican soil to capture Pancho Villa in 1916. After these two events, Latin American public opinion feared that the United States would embark on a more comprehensive military attack on Mexico. The more radical propositions of the Mexican Revolution, particularly land and property redistribution, were seen as being especially threatened by the United States.

18 See Miller, *Reinventing Modernity*, 24.

19 See Miller, *Reinventing Modernity*, 26, 68.

20 Rinke, *América Latina*, 126.

The revolutionaries thus enshrined them in the new Mexican Constitution of 1917, a constitution that would cause much conflict with the United States over the following two decades. In general, the Mexican Revolution had an enormous impact on Latin America and augmented the feeling that the various nations had a shared purpose, often vis-à-vis the United States. The historical example of a proto-anti-imperialist revolution would inspire Latin American intellectuals, political activists, and social movements over the course of the following decade.

Education and Nationalism: José Vasconcelos's Continental Network

In postrevolutionary Mexico City, anti-imperialism held together different exile communities in what came close to a miniature version of utopian anti-imperialist Latin America. For many of those forced to leave their home countries, Mexico City became a laboratory of political radicalism. Since the beginning of the 1920s, the Mexican Revolution and its repercussions had attracted many exiles, especially on the political left. The promises of agrarian reforms, property redistribution, and a more inclusive educational system attracted many who saw themselves as liberals, leftists, or socialists. Additionally, influential people in the Mexican postrevolutionary government actively brought political exiles to the Mexican capital. The most important network builder and central figure of Mexican anti-imperialism was José Vasconcelos. Having been in exile himself, Vasconcelos used his continental networks to assemble many of the leading voices of the idea of a united Latin America in his city in the 1920s.

Born in Oaxaca in 1882, Vasconcelos lived in his youth for a short period of time in Texas, where he developed a hostility towards the United States and became a committed anti-Protestant. An early supporter of the Mexican Revolution, Vasconcelos was ironically forced to go into American exile in 1915. In New York, he encountered many exile groups and developed sympathy towards the Venezuelan anti-Gómez cause. In his autobiography, Vasconcelos later remembered that “a bond of strategic solidarity had been established between those martyrs of liberty and my person.”²¹ Ideologically, Vasconcelos initially fit quite nicely into the Venezuelan opposition circles, in which revolutionary vigour, anti-positivism, and anti-oligarchism amplified each other and melded with Vasconcelos's own ideal of latinoamericanismo.²² After his return to Mexico, Vasconcelos was named dean of the National University (today's UNAM), where he was responsible for the creation of the university's emblem, a condor surrounding a map of Latin America, and the institution's new motto: “Por mi raza hablará el espíritu” (“The spirit will

21 José Vasconcelos, *Memorias II: El desastre, El proconsulado* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982 [1938]), 28.

22 Ricardo Melgar Bao, “Utopía y revolución en el exilio venezolano en México,” Paper presented at the XX International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), April 1997, 4.

speak for my race”). In 1921, the prolific writer Vasconcelos joined Álvaro Obregón’s administration, where he was tasked with the job of minister of education. Vasconcelos held this office until 1924 and used it to implement his extensive program of education reform and cultural nationalism.

Vasconcelos is best known for his 1925 work *Raza cósmica*, but his dedication to the idea of a united Latin America had already manifested itself during his tenure as minister and university dean. The philosopher-politician Vasconcelos held an emotional speech about the destiny of “our Spanish America” as part of the celebrations of the “Día de la Raza” on October 12, 1920. On this symbolically charged day, Vasconcelos whipped up sentiments against Venezuelan president Juan Vicente Gómez among the students. In truly Bolivarian fashion, Vasconcelos handed over a Venezuelan flag to, as he later explained, “the pure hands of the Mexican students so that they take it through the free streets of Mexico City while their Venezuelan brothers can go and take it to Caracas.”²³ According to Vasconcelos’s own memory, his speech had quite an impact on the crowd and, more broadly, the whole city, with students shouting slogans like “Death to Juan Vicente” and “Viva Venezuela libre.”²⁴ The whole incident caused a diplomatic crisis and an intra-governmental conflict between Vasconcelos and foreign minister Adolfo De la Huerta. Even if Vasconcelos overemphasized the selflessness of his acts of Latin American solidarity, it remains undisputed that a strong commitment to Latin American unity was a core element of Vasconcelos’s ideology.

Bringing Latin American exiles to Mexico was part of Vasconcelos’s program of major education reform and the promotion of cultural nationalism. As minister of education, he expanded rural schools, created a system of public libraries, initiated literacy programs, and attempted to incorporate indigenous communities into the national education system.²⁵ For Vasconcelos, education was the key to what he saw as the great promise of mestizaje: improving the “race” and civilizing the nation.²⁶ In Vasconcelos’s pseudoscientific ontology, the biological and esthetic mixture of peoples went hand in hand, ultimately leading to the creation of the cosmic race. It has been noted that this vision was primarily a spiritual, not a material or biological project and that the nature of “the race” could thus be changed

23 José Vasconcelos, “Discurso en la Universidad, 1920,” in *José Vasconcelos y la Universidad*, ed. Alfonso de María y Campos (Mexico City: UNAM, 1983), 66–67.

24 See Vasconcelos, *Memorias II: El desastre*, 29.

25 José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica: Misión de la raza iberoamericana* (Paris: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925); Mary Kay Vaughan, “Nationalizing the Countryside: Schools and Rural Communities in the 1930s,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920–1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 157–75, 145.

26 Linnete Manrique, “Dreaming of a Cosmic Race: José Vasconcelos and the Politics of Race in Mexico, 1920s–1930s,” *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 3 (2016). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2016.1218316>.

through education. Vasconcelos insisted on the creation of an identity that was both continental and national and he thus participated in the debates about a shared Latin American past and future in the tradition of Rodó.²⁷

Vasconcelos entrusted foreigners with the task of promoting his anti-imperialist version of cultural nationalism. This was coherent with the philosopher's vision of reconciling nationalism with Latin Americans' shared heritage. For his mission of setting off a revival of Mexican and Latin American art, Vasconcelos activated his transnational networks to bring in people he considered valuable experts or allies. Oftentimes, Latin American writers, artists, or teachers were given positions in or related to the Ministry of Education. The most famous person Vasconcelos convinced to come work in Mexico was future Nobel laureate Gabriela Mistral, although she was not in political exile. The poet, already famous in Chile by that time, accepted Vasconcelos's invitation to participate in the reform of the education system in 1922 and stayed in Mexico for two years. Mistral worked as a teacher in rural areas and co-developed the system of open outdoor schools, thus partaking in the efforts to "bring education to the people," and particularly to indigenous communities. Mistral traveled extensively throughout Mexico while she finished her book *Lecturas para Mujeres* and developed a life-long love for the country. Later, both Mistral and Vasconcelos were called the "teachers of America," underlining their enormous impact on education and culture.²⁸

Oil and Empire: State-Sponsored Anti-Imperialism

Anti-imperialism had been a constant feature of the theoretical attempts to unite Latin America since the nineteenth century and provided the driving force of the cultural and educational reforms implemented under Vasconcelos. With the presidency of Plutarco Elías Calles, anti-imperialist ideology moved from the intellectual and cultural sphere to the level of hard realpolitik. Calles's anti-imperialist phase, roughly two and a half years from the beginning of 1925 until September 1927, was of utmost importance for the exile circles of radicals in Mexico City. The new president used the networks that Vasconcelos and the radical intellectuals had developed and tapped the exile communities to sharpen his foreign policy in Central and South America. In the conflict with the United States, the Mexican government wanted to expand its influence on the Caribbean, Central America, and the northern part of South America as a counterweight to American

27 See Marilyn Grace Miller, *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 27, 29.

28 For the friendship between Vasconcelos and Mistral as well as their crucial role for educational reforms in Mexico and internationally, see Fabio Moraga Valle, "Educación, exilio y diplomacia: Vasconcelos, Mistral, Torres Bodet y la proyección internacional de sus ideas educativas, 1921-1964," *Revista de Historia de América* 156 (2019): 61-94.

influence. Calles actively brought exiles from Latin American countries to Mexico City to encourage them in their revolutionary efforts against the American-backed leaders of their home countries, even supplying Venezuelan and Cuban exiles with weapons from the Mexican army. Between 1925 and 1927, anti-imperialism was used as quasi-official Mexican state policy, encouraged by pointed rhetoric from Calles and welcomed by many radical militants throughout the Americas.

An important factor for radicalization of the exile communities in Mexico City was the worsening of U.S.–Mexican relations. The Calles administration started in a relatively comfortable position: the office had passed peacefully to the incoming president for the first time since 1884 and Calles possessed the support of his popular predecessor Obregón and the powerful labor leader Luis N. Morones as well as the diplomatic recognition of the United States.²⁹ Calles presided over a country that had enjoyed economic recovery after the revolution. The Mexican economic boom lasted until 1926, during which period Calles sought to extend state authority into the realm of health, education, and welfare services, fields long dominated by the Catholic Church.³⁰ The ensuing conflict with the Church erupted in 1926 into a guerrilla conflict known as the Cristero War. The anticlerical Calles viewed the Catholic Church as a foreign-controlled power that was actively undermining the sovereignty of the Mexican state in rural areas. The conflict, which lasted until 1929, harmed Calles's reputation in the United States, particularly among Catholics, who protested against army atrocities committed against the local Catholic population.³¹ The diplomatic disgruntlements over the Cristero War contributed to the deterioration of U.S.–Mexican relations between 1925 and 1927. The main conflict, however, was about oil and empire.

From mid-1925 to the fall of 1927, the conflict with the United States dominated Mexican foreign policy and made the country a symbol for anti-imperialism. It was precisely in this phase that the exile communities of leftist Latin Americans in Mexico became radicalized and began to be used by the Mexican government for Mexican foreign policy aims in Latin America, particularly to counter the influence of the United States. The diplomatic crises of 1925–27 revolved around oil, empire, and the legacy of the Mexican Revolution. After his inauguration, Calles sought a way to present himself as the legitimate heir of the revolution and thus yearned to translate into reality the more radical articles of the Mexican Constitution of 1917. Pressured by the powerful (and increasingly corrupt) labor union Confederación Regional

29 See Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 113.

30 See John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 362.

31 See T.R. Ybarra, "Grim, Silent Church War Waged in Mexico," *New York Times*, April 3, 1927, 3.

Obrera Mexicana (CROM) and its leader Morones, Calles pushed for the application of Article 27 of the constitution. A key symbol of the Mexican Revolution, the article stated that all land, water, and mineral rights were the property of the people of Mexico and that, consequently, the Mexican state had the authority to expropriate and redistribute land from large landowners. The populist Calles threw his support behind Morones's project of nationalizing the foreign-owned oil companies in the hopes of increasing his credibility among campesinos and workers, even if that meant alienating the powerful northern neighbor.

After the revolution, the economic future of Mexico relied heavily on oil. In 1921, Mexico was the largest oil producing country in the world.³² Oil revenues, many hoped, would finance the rebuilding and industrialization of the country. Already by 1924, however, the deposits showed signs of exhaustion, leading to labor disputes. One month after Calles's inauguration, Mexico's Congress debated how to increase tax income and establish stricter oversight over the powerful oil businesses, with Article 27 looming large over the whole issue. It was clear that any move against petroleum companies operating in Mexico would be unacceptable for the United States, as most of the companies drilling on Mexican soil were U.S.-owned, Wall Street-backed firms. Especially in the Gulf of Mexico, U.S. companies had replaced British oil interests, buying land along the coastline with the aid of American banks.³³ For both North American leaders and Mexican nationalists, the question of who owned the oil in the Mexican ground was ideologically and emotionally charged.

Driven on by the Mexican and U.S. nationalist press, the arguments over Mexican petroleum escalated in mid-1925, when U.S. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg released a statement to the press insinuating that Calles might soon face another rebellion and that U.S. support for his government could only be guaranteed if Mexico did a better job of protecting U.S. lives and property: "The Government of Mexico is now on trial before the world."³⁴ If Kellogg thought his declaration would discourage the Calles government from letting the petroleum conflict escalate, he was spectacularly wrong: the declaration whipped up nationalistic feelings in the Mexican public like never before. Calles capitalized on Kellogg's statement, seizing the opportunity to cast himself as a defender of Mexican sovereignty against the interests of Wall Street and the White House. Calles replied to Kellogg with an equally threatening tone, making it clear that no country had the right to interfere in Mexico's domestic affairs. In December 1925, the Mexican

32 Buchenau, *Plutarco*, 116.

33 For the case study of the Laguna Corporation in Campeche, see Hart, *Empire*, 334-41.

34 Letter from Kellogg to Sheffield, quoted in Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia, and the United States in the 1920s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 79.

Congress passed a “Petroleum and Land Law” that implemented Article 27 and restricted foreign ownership of wells, land, and subsoil.

During 1926 and much of 1927, the conflict escalated even more, causing serious tensions in U.S.–Mexican relations. In October 1926, Calles published an article in *Foreign Affairs*, explaining his nationalistic policies and the economic rationales behind them. Calles was clear in his defense of the disputed articles of the constitution and his mission to work for the many in Mexico, not the few. Calles also addressed the Mexican Revolution, making the case that it was a purely Mexican project and that U.S. meddling would endanger Mexican sovereignty: “Internationally the Mexican Revolution ‘has no axe to grind,’ but wants to avoid entanglements by adopting a clean-cut legislation and by making foreign investors conform to Mexican law.”³⁵ Calles’s messaging in the U.S. press was unsuccessful, in part because American newspapers loved to speculate about the transformation of the “Oil War” into a new Mexican–American war.³⁶ Mexican public opinion backed Calles against what was perceived as the arrogant, imperialist behavior of the United States, and at the same time Mexicans feared a new war.³⁷ Even the Mexican communists rallied behind Calles in defense of Mexican sovereignty, warning of “Yankee troops at the border” and calling for a united front against American imperialism.³⁸

While this sounded like the usual anti-imperialist rhetoric, the communists had seldom come closer to representing public opinion in Mexico than they did in the spring and summer of 1927. At the height of the conflict with the United States, several developments reinforced each other in what could be called Mexico’s anti-imperialist moment. In February, Mexico presented itself as an anti-imperialist country at the Brussels Congress—with greetings and financial support from Calles. The solidarity campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti was radicalizing at the same time, influenced by the war in Nicaragua that enraged large sections of the Mexican public. The Calles regime was regarded as ally against the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and lent moral support to the rebel general Sandino.³⁹ Nicaragua exemplified the opposing interests of the Mexican and U.S. governments in Central America. At the beginning of 1927, the Mexican government fully embraced anti-imperialism.

The tense relations between Mexico and its northern neighbor were, at least in Mexico, blamed on the influence of U.S. ambassador James R. Sheffield, who

35 Plutarco Elías Calles, “The Policies of Mexico Today,” *Foreign Affairs* 5, no. 1 (October 1926): 3.

36 See T.R. Ybarra, “The Oil War in Mexico Grows More Intense,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1927.

37 See Jesús Silva Herzog, *Una vida en la vida de México* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1986), 93

38 “Tropas Yanquis en la Frontera,” *El Machete* (first fortnight of February 1927).

39 See Alan L. McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 219.

maintained close personal ties to American oil interests.⁴⁰ The anti-communist Republican was perhaps the most hated American in Mexico in the 1920s. Historiography has not been milder on Sheffield, portraying him as a Mexican-hating racist (which he undoubtedly was, even by the standards of the 1920s) and his actions as an “early manifestation of US political discourse during the Cold War.”⁴¹ Sheffield railed against “Bolshevik Mexico” by playing up the activities of small Marxist groups and exaggerating their influence on Calles. In his reports to Kellogg, Sheffield delivered conspiracy stories, many of which were colorfully illustrated with “intrigues” of Russian and German spies.⁴² The U.S. intelligence services struggled to substantiate Sheffield’s paranoia and depicted every radical statement of the PCM as potentially provoking revolution and every populist speech of Calles as a threat to U.S. property in Mexico.⁴³ Ironically, Sheffield’s hard line against “Marxist Mexico” provoked Calles to embrace radical anti-imperialism.

In July 1927, U.S. president Coolidge resolved many outstanding tensions by having Sheffield resign from office.⁴⁴ The new ambassador, former senator Dwight W. Morrow, immediately impressed the Mexican public by simply acknowledging Mexico’s rights as a sovereign nation. During a breakfast Calles had with Morrow, the good relations between the two countries were restored through soft power: “a triumph of the diplomacy of ham and eggs,” as Silva Herzog later remembered.⁴⁵ Still, swapping out ambassadors was, although symbolically important, only a small step towards improved relations, not necessarily its cause. U.S.–Mexican relations improved significantly over the course of the next two years. From the summer of 1927 onwards, Calles moved to the political right and Mexican foreign policy against the United

40 See Buchenau, *Plutarco*, 117. Frank Tannenbaum described Sheffield as “not particularly sensitive to the Mexican political atmosphere” and “influenced in his views by the local American colony.” See Frank Tannenbaum, *Mexico: The Struggle for Peace and Bread* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), 269.

41 Buchenau, *Plutarco*, 117.

42 Confidential Report from Sheffield to Kellogg, April 21, 1926, in “Internal Affairs of States, Political Affairs, Mexico, Bolshevism, Communism, Communistic Activities, January 14, 1927—Oct. 5, 1928,” Records of the U.S. State Department Relating to Internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910–1929, U.S. National Archives, *Archives Unbound*, 812.0013/115.

43 In the United States, obscure propaganda against Calles fed the narrative of “Bolshevik Mexico.” One pamphlet, possibly from exiled Cristeros, called Calles “the blood-thirsty Black Czar” of Mexico. Francisco Gómez del Rey and Hernán Díaz, *The Black Czar: Plutarco Elias Calles, Bolshevik Dictator of Mexico* (El Paso: El Diario de El Paso Press, 1928).

44 The *New York Times* dryly concluded that “our unsettled relations with the Calles Regime led to irritating incidents” and that for Sheffield the “pressure proved too much.” See “Sheffield Resigns; Coolidge Praises his Work in Mexico,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1927, 1.

45 Silva Herzog, *Una vida*, 95.

States softened remarkably. Calles even wrote a very conciliatory article in the *New York Times* in which he praised individualism and capitalist development, but still managed to sprinkle in some anti-imperialist threats: “If the United States intervenes in the affairs of Latin America, for any reason whatsoever, the consequence will be that the whole of Spanish-speaking America will be alienated.”⁴⁶ After giving up his populist anti-imperialism and economic nationalism, Calles became a reliable ally of the United States, starting in 1928. For the communists, he exemplified the bourgeois or even reactionary course the Revolution had taken.

Continental Networks of Exile Activism in Urban Spaces

The year 1925 was a caesura for Mexico City as city of Latin American exiles. The city became the primary location of exile radicalism in the Americas, surpassing other important (and interconnected) exile locations such as Buenos Aires, San José, New York, and Havana. Mexico City’s rise as most important center of exile activism was caused by a shift within the changing networks of transnational activism. These shifts had several reasons: First, growing repression in Cuba crossed off Havana from the exiles’ small list of safe havens and forced radical activists (including Cubans) to relocate to Mexico. Second, the year 1925 was also the year in which the LADLA was founded in Mexico City—a transnational organization promoting anti-imperialism and the ideal of a unity of Latin America that functioned as important forum of interconnection between different exile groups. The organization and its newspaper *El Libertador* became centers of the anti-imperialist networks. Third, the city of Mexico itself played a role as it provided exile communities with spaces for cooperation and interconnection.

Havana to Mexico City: Shifting Networks of Exiles

The case of the Venezuelan exile community exemplifies the forced relocation of exile communities from Havana to Mexico City in the mid-1920s and underlines the argument that Mexico City became a hub of anti-imperialist exile activism not by endogenous causes only (e.g., the attraction of the Mexican Revolution), but rather because the existing transnational networks of anti-imperialists and exiles shifted. The dynamic networks adapted to changing circumstances and were built on existing personal contacts that had often grown through shared political activism. In Mexico City, many networks were re-built on the basis of what had been established in Havana. The example of the Venezuelan exile community and their route from Caracas to Havana to Mexico City thus stresses the embeddedness of Mexico City into the larger continental networks of radicals.

46 P. Elias Calles, “Calles Sets Down his Aims for Mexico,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1927.

By the twenties, many political activists from Venezuela—by no means only radicals—were forced to flee the authoritarian rule of Juan Vicente Gómez, who governed Venezuela between 1908 and 1935. Gómez stabilized his regime using the country's oil riches, led it on a path of modernization, and consolidated his rule using a strong military and feared secret police. Political opponents were met with repression, imprisonment, or forced *destierro*—political exile. Numerous Venezuelans left the country and created tight networks of solidarity that included the Venezuelan communities of New York, Panama City, Havana, San José, San Juan, Madrid, and Paris. Until 1925, the small group of Venezuelans in Mexico City, which consisted of students and individuals who had been invited by Vasconcelos, remained marginal in the transnational networks of the Venezuelan diaspora, particularly in comparison with the larger groups in New York and Havana.

The exile of the young Eduardo Machado, from Caracas via Havana to Mexico City, illustrates the range of the continental anti-imperialist networks of the 1920s. Machado was born into a rich and influential family from Caracas in 1902. A gifted athlete, he won the national tennis championship in 1923 and, under different circumstances, would probably have considered becoming a professional tennis player. But Machado and his friends, many of whom were also members of the prestigious tennis club "Paraíso," were part of the opposition movement against Juan Vicente Gómez. In 1923, the president's brother was assassinated and the regime intensified its crackdown on opposition movements. Eduardo and his friends had already encountered socialism through the Russian émigré painter Nicolás Ferdinandov. Excellently connected in Caracas, not least through their affluent family backgrounds, the rebels were informed of upcoming arrests and fled to Havana, where Eduardo's brother Gustavo Machado and Salvador de la Plaza had already been living in exile since 1919. In Havana, the nucleus of the Venezuelan exile community that later moved to Mexico City was beginning to grow and develop its own contacts to radical Cubans and the Peruvian exile circles.

For the Venezuelans in Havana, the city and its vibrant political atmosphere were fertile ground for their own orientation towards radical anti-imperialism and Latin American solidarity. By 1924, Havana had become a center of the Venezuelan exile community and anti-Gómez activities. With its approximately 500,000 inhabitants, the city had a large working-class movement and a strong syndicalist tradition of labor struggles. For the exiled Venezuelans, Havana was a buzzing metropolis that made their hometown Caracas appear like a "large village"⁴⁷ in comparison. The Cuban capital made the critique of imperialism literally visible in the city streets: Eduardo Machado witnessed that "the island experienced an atmosphere of resistance against

47 Guillermo García Ponce, *Memorias de un general de la utopía* (Caracas: Cotragraf, 1992), 46.

the humiliating Platt Amendment,"⁴⁸ the treaty that added permission for the United States to intervene in Cuba to the constitution itself. In Cuba, imperialism and the role of the United States in the Caribbean were openly discussed and became central political questions in a society in which the majority of Cubans lamented the country's persistent dependence on the United States.

In Havana, the Venezuelan exile community radicalized and integrated a critique of capitalism into their political agenda. Through a shared embrace of the idea of Latin American cooperation in the tradition of Martí, the leftist militants discovered ideological bridges to the Cuban nationalist movement. One of the main propellers of the re-appropriation of Martí was the student leader Julio Antonio Mella, whose aim was to merge social-revolutionary workers, intellectuals, and students with the Cuban nationalist forces into an anti-imperialist united front.⁴⁹ This idea appealed to the group of Venezuelan exiles around the Machado brothers and Salvador de la Plaza, who collaborated with leading Cuban intellectuals like Mella, Rubén Martínez Villena, and Jorge Mañach to edit the newspaper *Venezuela Libre*. The paper was not just anti-Gómez; it was also a paper of Hispano-American solidarity and anti-imperialism. Its front page prominently featured the triad slogan: "For the liberty of peoples. Against the tyrannies of America. Against Yankee Imperialism." Due to its broad perspective on imperialism in the Americas, *Venezuela Libre's* circulation went far beyond the borders of Cuba and Venezuela and became, at least for its rather brief existence until July 1926, part of the continental public sphere of the 1920s.⁵⁰

Alongside the editorial offices of *Venezuela Libre*, the university campus in Havana became a contact zone for Latin American anti-imperialists. Eduardo and Gustavo Machado as well as Salvador de la Plaza joined the "Universidad Popular José Martí," a people's university founded by revolutionary students under the leadership of Mella in November 1923. As part of the Córdoba University reform movement, the new university's aim was to provide free education to the workers of Havana. A new, socialist style of education was developed at the university and the Venezuelans soon became an integral part of the utopian project: they took courses, soon taught classes, and wrote their own texts.⁵¹ Through their work at the university, the Venezuelan exiles got to know the multiracial working class of Havana and experienced the political climate of anti-imperialism that characterized Cuba in the 1920s.

48 García Ponce, *Memorias*, 47.

49 See Christine Hatzky, "'Nosotros vamos por otro camino: somos revolucionarios...?' Julio Antonio Mella, el movimiento estudiantil y los antiimperialistas de los años veinte," *Iberoamericana* 3, no. 12 (2003).

50 For a list of all collaborators of *Venezuela Libre*, see Daniel Kersfeld, *Contra el imperio: Historia de la Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2012), 46.

51 See García Ponce, *Memorias* 48.

But the campus was also a melting pot of Latin American exile and diaspora communities: exiles from Haiti, Peru, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, and Central America preached anti-imperialism in the name of Martí and practiced transnational solidarity in the classroom.

A third type of practiced Latin American solidarity between different exile groups in Havana was constituted by the spaces where new forms of art and living were tried out. Eduardo and Gustavo Machado initially lived in a hotel and regularly visited the nearby atelier of Venezuelan painter Luis López Méndez. Over time, Méndez's house became the meeting point for the multinational militants of Havana and various exiles moved in with the painter. The house, located in the heart of colonial Havana, thus became a center of radical anti-imperialism. A silkscreen machine was used to print propaganda against Gómez, but also for the Cuban radicals and for texts for the Universidad Popular. Many exiles and radical Cubans lived there cheaply or took temporary refuge from Cuba's secret police. The lively house of exiles was soon called *La Covacha Roja*, the red booth.⁵² The meeting place gained a reputation as a cosmopolitan space, a "little agitated Babel."⁵³ The *Covacha Roja* was the place where many of the members of the continental anti-imperialist movement of the second half of the 1920s met: the Venezuelan exiles met the more radical Peruvian exile circle, namely Jacobo Hurwitz, Esteban Pavletich, and Luis F. Bustamente, who all lived in the *Covacha*.

In May 1925, the political situation in Cuba changed dramatically as Gerardo Machado assumed office as president of Cuba after a successful campaign of "moderate nationalism." Machado had managed to awaken the hope for full Cuban independence while also being backed by the U.S. government and the U.S. companies in Cuba.⁵⁴ Mella had ridiculed Machado as "Tropical Mussolini" for his undisguised power ambitions—an insult Machado would not forget.⁵⁵ In August 1925, the Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC) was founded and Machado was prepared to immediately outlaw the party. For the anti-imperialist activists, the second half of 1925 was a time of amplified repression: in November, almost fifty political activists were arrested, among them Mella, who started an 18-day hunger strike in prison.⁵⁶ The arrests

52 Hatzky mentions the same location under the name "Cueva Roja"; see Christine Hatzky, *Julio Antonio Mella (1903–1929): Eine Biografie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2004), 157.

53 García Ponce, *Memorias*, 51.

54 See Hatzky, *Mella*, 130–32.

55 Julio Antonio Mella, "Machado: Mussolini Tropical," *Juventud*, March 1925, published in *Mella: Documentos y artículos*, ed. Mariá Antonieta Juliá (Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y la Revolución Socialista de Cuba) (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), 169.

56 On Mella's hunger strike and the continental expressions of solidarity, see Hatzky, *Mella*, 166–73.

caused a continental outcry of solidarity, and in Havana the Venezuelan exiles co-organized the Committee for the Liberty of Mella. Pressured by public opinion, Machado had to release Mella, who was given asylum by the Mexican Calles government. The Venezuelan and Peruvian exiles, compromised by their involvement in organizing the solidarity for Mella campaign, were wanted by the Cuban secret police, and they, too, fled to Mexico. Via Honduras and Guatemala, the nucleus of the anti-imperialist circle of Havana thus collectively moved to Mexico City.

Transnational Anti-Imperialism: The LADLA and the radical print culture

Much of the role of Mexico City as a hub of anti-imperialism in the second half of the 1920s can be attributed to one specific transnational organization that functioned as a coordinator and a platform for exile activism. The Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas, LADLA, managed to connect the Comintern-inspired fight against imperialism in Latin America with the aims of the exiles, particularly of Venezuelans, Peruvians, and Cubans. At least before internal divisions split the anti-imperialist movement in 1927 and 1928, the LADLA managed to incorporate many ideologically diverse groups under its leadership. The fact that Mexico City—and not Chicago or Buenos Aires with their strong working-class movements—was chosen as location for a continental organization by the Comintern showed that the communist leaders in Moscow saw the potential of combining anti-imperialist agitation with the aims of the Mexican Revolution. The founding of the LADLA contributed significantly to transforming Mexico City into a hub of anti-imperialism and exile activism. The LADLA's uniqueness was that it could use the umbrella term of anti-imperialism to bring ideologically diverse groups together and thus provide the space for cooperation between communists and non-communists, some of whom were members of the Mexican government.

After its foundation in the end of 1924 and the beginning of 1925, the LADLA soon became the most important united front organization of the communists in Latin America. Its creation was initiated (and financed) by the Comintern and carried out with the help of the increasingly confident Mexican and American communists, who were concerned about the growing international cooperation of non-communist labor unions, specifically the intention of the Mexican reformist labor union CROM and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to form a continental union.⁵⁷ The creation of the LADLA, envisioned as counterweight to labor reformism, led to several

⁵⁷ See Kerssfield, *Contra el imperio*, 48. The CROM was “the most important labor organization in the country between 1918 and 1928.” It usually supported nationalist and protectionist economic policies in an alliance between workers and the state. See Javier Aguilar García, “Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana (CROM),” in *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society & Culture*, ed. Michael S. Werner (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 294–97.

conflicts between the American communists of the Workers Party of America (WPA) and the Mexican communists. The American communists wanted to establish the new continental organization in Chicago, “at the cradle of US imperialism.”⁵⁸ The Americans were met with heavy resistance from the Mexican communists, who feared that a continental organization based in Chicago would be dominated by the WPA; instead, they advocated for Mexico City as the location for the continental headquarters. Ultimately, the conflict was resolved by Moscow in favor of Mexico City. For the global communist movement and especially the young Soviet Union, Mexico was an important geopolitical location and promised more revolutionary potential than the United States.

The promise of the LADLA was to bring together nationalist sentiment with continental anti-imperialist traditions and use both in favor of global communism. In his comprehensive study of the League, historian Daniel Kersffeld emphasizes that the creation of the LADLA was “unprecedented” in the history of Latin America for three reasons: First, the LADLA was the original Marxist organization to fuse nationalism and Latin Americanism in its fight against imperialism. Second, the League expanded its social basis beyond workers to include peasants and the radicalized and ascending middle class in its project. Lastly, the LADLA successfully linked its national and continental sections to the League Against Imperialism (LAI) and thus to the global fight against imperialism.⁵⁹

In line with its anti-imperialist ideology, the magazine soon developed into a platform for transnational exile activism. An article in *El Libertador* by “a leader of the freedom movement of Venezuela,” with the pseudonym Espartaco, represented the LADLA’s stance towards nationalism and anti-imperialism. Praised as “destined to make history in Latin America” by the magazine’s editors, the article outlined the basic principles that intertwined the anti-imperialist project and the fight against Latin American autocracies. True Latin American unity, the article stated, could only be achieved after the dissolution of the remains of the autocratic tyrannies—Venezuela, Peru, and Guatemala were named—that were supported by the American government, the American oil interests, and Wall Street.⁶⁰ Espartaco also referred to the old *Arielista* call to unite Latin America “in a racial conglomerate” in order to take on the “colossus of the North” as an equal. In other words, the LADLA brought forward a version of anti-imperialism that integrated nationalism and Marxism into the older concept of latinoamericanismo. Soon after the launching of the paper, Cuban, Venezuelan, and Peruvian exiles reported in *El Libertador* about the situations in their respective countries.

58 Manuel Gómez, quoted in Kersffeld, *Contra el imperio*, 56.

59 See Kersffeld, *Contra el imperio*, 12.

60 See Espartaco, “Las autocracias como obstáculos para la lucha Anti-Imperialista,” *El Libertador* 2 (May 1925).

With its focus on continental anti-imperialism, the LADLA and its radical print culture were centers of practiced exile activism in Mexico City. Radical print shops and newspaper offices became not just intellectual, but physical spaces of transnational entanglement. In the newspaper offices, the exile activists received news from their countries, disseminated their own texts, and coordinated their activities. By the end of the 1920s, the Latin American exile communities in Mexico City had created their own cultural landscape with numerous publications. The LADLA was at the center of these networks, publishing *El Libertador* and the anti-clerical paper *El Bonete*. The editors of *El Libertador* shared an office with the paper *Libertad*, published by the Venezuelan exiles in the Calle República de El Salvador no. 94.⁶¹ There was significant exchange between the two publications, and the Venezuelan exiles played an important role in shaping the direction of *El Libertador*, with the Venezuelans Salvador de la Plaza and Gustavo Machado acting as administrators of the magazine. The Cuban exiles around Mella published their paper *Cuba Libre*, the Peruvians around Haya de la Torre had *Indoamérica*. Through shared networks, these newspapers were closely connected to the PCM's *El Machete*, the UCSAYA's *La Batalla*, and the student magazine *Tren Blindado*. Especially the offices of the LADLA in the Calle de Bolívar constituted a space where exiled activism was realized and connected to Mexican radicals and émigré circles.

Performing Exile Radicalism and Anti-Imperialism

When the exiled Venezuelans and the newly exiled Mella and his Cuban friends arrived in Mexico City in February 1926, the city became the most important center of Latin American exiles. In Mexico City, the cooperation between the left-wing activists from Venezuela, Cuba, and Peru deepened through their common political and social networks. These networks shaped the lived realities and everyday practices of resistance in Mexico City. Specific spaces of the city—newspaper offices, university campuses, housing—enabled transnational anti-imperialism and inter-exile activism alike. Different groups had to react to each other constantly, a development that enabled cooperation but also amplified conflict. In that sense, the spaces of Mexico City were the local stage to present different visions of anti-imperialism to a Latin American public. This local stage of anti-imperialist agitation in Mexico City around the year 1927 was easily assessable. The corridor of radical exile activism was concentrated in a relatively small area in the colonial city center. The exile radicals thus performed their political activism in Mexico City's narrow streets of the old colonial city, not in the newer districts south and west of the Paseo de la Reforma that were considered modern, clean, and elegant. By the 1920s, the old colonial city center had already been abandoned by the city's elite, who had been moving to the western suburbs since the

61 See *El Libertador* 17 (April 1928) and Rivera Mir, "Militantes," 195.

1890s.⁶² Like for much political activism, the location of radical exile activism in the “old city” may have been indicative of the relatively precarious social conditions of many of the exiles.

Spaces where sociability and exile activism overlapped, apart from the newspaper offices, were institutions of higher education. During his tenure as dean of the university in Mexico City and as minister of education, Vasconcelos had brought several exiles to Mexico. Haya de la Torre worked for the ministry during his first exile while Carlos León taught American sociology at the National University. The ENP, located in the Colegio San Ildefonso, and administratively a part of the National University, became a particularly thriving space of exile activism. The building, today known as one of the birthplaces of Mexican muralism, housed the institution that saw itself as the educator of the future leaders of Mexico. It was traditionally a site of Mexican nationalism, student activism, and Bolivarian ideals of continental unity. The amphitheater of the ENP could be rented for all kinds of purposes and was used for anti-imperialist conferences, fundraisers, and poetry performances. Historian Rivera Mir has described one occasion in which the Cuban poet Graciella Garbalosa organized an evening of poetry performances that combined the recital of Ibero-American poets with the collection of money for the Cuban exile community of the city.⁶³ Other exiles, like the Bolivian poet Tristán Marof, debated imperialism and the role of the Mexican Revolution in the same place.⁶⁴ Haya de la Torre held a whole lecture series at the ENP in 1928. During Haya’s lecture on the economic challenges facing Peru and Latin America, he was interrupted by Mella and other communists, who had attended his lectures in order to try to publicly question his revolutionary fervour.⁶⁵ In short, the ENP was a space of heated debates among exiles and a local stage of anti-imperialism.

The city’s halls and salons were local stages of exile activism, too. The prestigious theater Virginia Fábregas, for example, hosted the largest gathering of the Sandino solidarity campaign on April 1, 1928, which attracted an audience of more than 5,000, according to *El Machete*.⁶⁶ The event became the most iconic anti-imperialist event of the 1920s and was deeply influenced by the participation of Latin American anti-imperialists in exile. The Venezuelan Carlos León, the Peruvian Jacobo Hurwitz, and the Haitian Jolibois Fils held speeches that all lambasted, as *El Libertador* wrote, the “imperialist offensive in our country, in Nicaragua, and in all

62 See Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, “1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no. 1 (1996): 81–84.

63 See Rivera Mir, “Militantes,” 154.

64 See Melgar Bao, *Haya*, 29–30.

65 Adys Cupull and Froilán González, *Julio Antonio Mella y México* (Havana: Casa Editora Abril, 2008), 153.

66 “Grandioso Mitin del Frente Unico ‘Manos fuera de Nicaragua,’” *El Machete* (April 4, 1928).

parts of America.”⁶⁷ The anti-imperialists of the Hands Off Nicaragua campaign were noticeably proud that they could fill such a large space and reported that the theater was already packed an hour before the speeches began.

Exile activism and anti-imperialism inspired a unique flat share in Mexico City, a new version of the *Covacha Roja*. Some Venezuelans had first moved in with Mella and his wife Olivín Zaldívar Freyre into a house in the Colonia Roma, and some weeks later, the whole group moved to a large colonial house on the Calle Bolívar in downtown Mexico City. Eduardo Machado later reported about the exiles in the house: “Salvador de la Plaza, Gustavo Machado, and I occupied the first floor with the Peruvians Jacobo Hurwitz and Esteban Pavletich. The second floor was occupied by Julio Antonio Mella, Olivar Zaldívar [Zaldívar], Carlos Aponte Hernández and Bartolomé Ferrer.”⁶⁸ Machado also implied that Tina Modotti moved in with Mella after his divorce from Olivín Zaldívar, but Modotti was more likely just a regular visitor in the house. The Latin American spirit of the revolutionary domicile was fueled by the legend that Bolívar himself had once lived in the exact same house during his exile in the city. The house symbolically paired the Venezuelan, Peruvian, and Cuban exiles, in a tri-national neo-Bolivarian project.⁶⁹ The house, one could call it the *Casa Bolívar*, became another hotspot of exile sociability and political activism in the city.

Private apartments provided a confidential space that spared activists the fear of police surveillance. Apart from the *Casa Bolívar*, where secret political gatherings were regularly held, Tina Modotti’s apartment in the Abraham González no. 33 served as a private space of exile activism and conspiratorial meetings. Baltasar Dromundo, a Mexican friend of Mella and Modotti, later recalled that Modotti’s apartment was always open for Cubans who had escaped “Machado’s hell” and had not yet found a place to stay in Mexico City.⁷⁰ According to Barckhausen (who relies on testimony from Vittorio Vidali), Modotti’s home was the secret meeting place for newly arrived communists in Mexico City and was the only address known to foreign activists who came to the city. She also describes the apartment where Modotti and Mella lived together as home to many Cuban political emigrants for whom Modotti was “a loving host.”⁷¹ Exile radicalism in Mexico City was performed in public, semi-public, and private spaces that were seldom structured around national exile communities. Newspaper offices, university buildings, and even the communal living projects were inherently transnational projects, bringing together different exile groups.

67 “Gran Mitin en el Teatro Fabregas,” *El Libertador* 17 (April 1928).

68 García Ponce, *Memorias*, 67.

69 See Melgar Bao, *Haya*, 41.

70 Quoted in Christiane Barckhausen, *Auf den Spuren von Tina Modotti* (Kiel: agimos, 1997), 188.

71 See Barckhausen, *Auf den Spuren von Tina Modotti*, 171, 191.

Exporting Diaspora Radicalism to Venezuela, Cuba, and Peru

The transnational moment of inter-exile communication and cooperation in Mexico City did not last very long. In the years 1927 and 1928, a dynamic of nationalization increasingly substituted the visions of continental unity and anti-imperialist solidarity. Venezuelans, Cubans, and Peruvians all founded their own national projects to bring revolution to their home country. While these organizations were transnationally organized, their logic was a national rather than a transnational one. The ideological divisions within the organized exile communities, most visibly between populists and communists, fortified the organizations' fragmentation. Increasingly, conflict shaped the relations between the different exile communities, not least because the generosity of the Mexican government in terms of resources and support proved to be limited.

National Projects, Transnationally Organized: PRV, ANERC, APRA

In the years 1926, 1927, and 1928, the Venezuelan, Cuban, and Peruvian exiled radicals all founded their own revolutionary organizations, thereby setting in motion a dynamic of re-nationalization. The Venezuelans formed the Partido Revolucionario Venezolano (PRV), the Cubans the Asociación de Nuevos Emigrados Revolucionarios Cubanos (ANERC), and the Peruvians in exile the Alianza Popular Revolucionario Americana (APRA). These organizations were not necessarily parties in a strict sense, but they were more tightly organized than just social movements. Both the Peruvian and the Cuban organizations were strongly centered around their respective leaders Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre and Julio Antonio Mella. All of the exile organizations shared several characteristics: they were connected to the home country and to other diaspora communities, worked for a revolution in their countries, and used the Mexican government for their cause. They were all, perhaps to different degrees, influenced by the place in which they were founded because they endorsed the Mexican Revolution and its political aims (mainly sovereignty, agrarian reform, and social justice) and worked to bring revolutionary achievements back to Venezuela, Cuba, and Peru.

The Venezuelans in Mexico City had been able to build on an existing tradition of Mexican solidarity with the anti-Gómez cause. José Vasconcelos had granted asylum to Venezuelan oppositionists since 1920 and president Obregón supported a group of Mexican women in solidarity with Venezuela, an organization chaired by Obregón's wife María Tapia Monteverde. The Mexican public and the Mexican political elite joined the Venezuelan exiles in an "anti-imperialist alliance"⁷² against Gómez—an open support for the

72 Víctor L. Jeifets and Lazar S. Jeifets, "La inserción internacional de la izquierda comunista anti-gomecista en el exilio venezolano, primeros años," *Revista Izquierdas* 25 (2015): 8.

Venezuelan opposition that led to the mutual withdrawal of diplomats in 1922 and the termination of diplomatic relationships between Mexico and Venezuela in 1927. The Venezuelan exiles embraced Mexican support and emphasized the shared Mexican–Venezuelan tradition of anti-imperialism. For the Venezuelans, “Mexico” became the synonym of progress, solidarity, and anti-imperialist resistance. As Melgar Bao notes, the exiles saw Mexico as “tierra sin mal,” a “land without evil.”⁷³ The Venezuelan exiles, especially the more radical ones, saw themselves as exporting Mexico’s revolutionary achievements back to their home country, making their fight against Gómez a fight against imperialism and for the achievements of the Mexican Revolution. While the Venezuelan exiles were not the only foreigners in the 1920s who associated Mexico with positive attributes, their perspectives were particular. The Venezuelans in exile experienced Mexico in an almost entirely urban context and out of a position of privileged access to the political and intellectual elites of the city. The discrimination of indigenous peoples in the countryside and the unsolved contradictions of the Mexican Revolution were not part of their experience. Neither was the legal framework of Mexican immigration laws, which in the 1920s acquired a restrictive and even xenophobic character.⁷⁴ For the Venezuelan exiles, Mexico’s own contradictions were secondary as “Mexico” referred to the Mexican Revolution and the need to radicalize the Venezuelan movement.

The arrival in 1926 of the group around the Machado brothers from Havana energized the Venezuelan exiles in Mexico City. The new vigour was cemented by the founding of the PRV, an organization with the primary aim of overthrowing Gómez—if necessary with force—and the subsequent installation of a new, leftist government. Founded in March 1927, the PRV was not a communist party, although its aims aligned with those of the Comintern at the time. Rather, the PRV’s first platform was much more influenced by the spirit of the Mexican Revolution. The new party’s laicism, its strong support for the emancipation of campesinos and indigenous people, and its demands for land distribution were all positions rooted in the Mexican Revolution.⁷⁵ The founding of the PRV was also inspired by the Brussels Congress. The Congress protocol named the PRV as a participating organization represented by the three delegates C. Gustavo M. Morales, Carlos Quijano, and Salvador de la Plaza.⁷⁶ In an article that outlined the general principles of the PRV, Eduardo Machado explicitly emphasized that the new party had been represented at Brussels and thus could count on

73 See Melgar Bao, “Utopía y revolución,” 9.

74 See Sznajder and Roniger, *Politics of Exile*, 123.

75 See Melgar Bao, “Utopía y revolución,” 12.

76 Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont* (Offizielles Protokoll des Kongresses gegen koloniale Unterdrückung und Imperialismus, Brüssel, 10.–15. Februar 1927) (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1927), 231, 238.

“the moral and material support of eight million workers from around the world.”⁷⁷ For the Venezuelan exiles in Mexico City, their party’s participation at the most important Congress of global anti-imperialism signified a huge gain in visibility and legitimized the anti-Gómez fight as part of the global struggle against imperialism.

Together with the Venezuelans, the Cuban opposition circle around Mella moved from Havana to Mexico City at the beginning of 1926. In Mexico City, Mella was probably the most active anti-imperialist agitator and organizer of all exiles: he not only worked in the Cuban exile community, but also engaged in national politics in Mexico and participated in continental organizations and in global network of anti-imperialists. Since his arrival in Mexico, Mella had developed the idea of a Cuban anti-imperialist organization to unite the exiled opposition against Machado. In 1927, during his time in Paris, where he stayed after having attended the Brussels Congress and visiting Moscow, Mella wrote two letters to high-ranking communists that reveal that he wanted to strengthen the links between the LADLA headquarters in Mexico and the Cubans in Paris and that he envisioned making Cuba “a second Nicaragua.”⁷⁸ This slogan referred to Mella’s vision of military resistance against Machado, but it also implied a focus on anti-imperialist propaganda and Latin American solidarity.

In the first months of 1928, almost a year after his Venezuelan comrades, Mella founded the ANERC.⁷⁹ Like the PRV, the new organization was anti-dictatorial and anti-imperialist, but it was too much of a united front organization to be truly communist. The ANERC, despite counting communists among its ranks, existed independently from the communist structures and was more influenced by Sandino’s strategies of armed resistance and José Martí’s ideas of continental anti-imperialism. The ANERC was a remarkably heterogeneous group that united students, workers, intellectuals, and black and white Cubans. It sought close relations to other exile groups like the bourgeois-nationalist circle of the Unión Nacionalista in New York, where Mella traveled in the fall of 1927 to establish contacts. The ANERC published its own magazine, *¡Cuba Libre!*, in Mexico City and then sent it to Cuba, where its distribution was in permanent danger of confiscation by Machado’s secret police. In the first edition of *¡Cuba Libre!*, Mella outlined the ANERC’s aims and strategies, which make clear that anti-imperialism stood at the heart of the organization’s ideological identification. Like the PRV, the ANERC was a well-connected, inherently anti-imperialist, transnational

77 Venezuelan Section of the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas, “A los Venezolanos,” March 1927, reprinted in *Pensamiento político venezolano del siglo XX. Documentos para su estudio: El comienzo del debate socialista 12*, ed. Congreso de la República (Caracas: Avila Arte, 1983), 109–11.

78 See Mella’s Parisian letters to Willi Münzenberg from May 6, 1927 and to Codovilla from April 27, 1927. Both letters are quoted or reprinted in Hatzky, *Mella*, 221, 367.

79 For a list of founders, see Hatzky, *Mella*, 264–65.

group. Its organizational core was Mexico City, although it had other sections in Paris, New York, Madrid, and Bogotá.⁸⁰

Mella and his comrades, too, were inspired by Mexico's political culture and explicitly referred to the Mexican Revolution as a model for a successful, progressive anti-imperialist uprising, while the Nicaraguan Moncada and the Chinese Chiang Kai-shek served as negative examples of nationalist anti-imperialists. This warning has to be read in the context of the then growing rivalry between the LADLA and Haya de la Torre's APRA. While Mella championed a nationalist opposition in Cuba, he was aware of the dangers of broad united front organizations and their tendency to develop into what he called "populist anti-imperialism." For Mella, the fight against imperialism could only be won with an internationalist outlook: "The fight that in isolation seems quixotic (*quijotesca*), can easily be internationalized when we focus the problem on its practical revolutionary aspects."⁸¹ The fight against Machado, according to Mella, should be linked to the struggles against imperialism and despotism in Haiti, Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. The ANERC was anti-imperialist, nationalist, and internationalist all at once. It championed a national unity against Machado and the United States while simultaneously taking a Latin American and even global perspective on the Cuban anti-imperialist fight.

The case of the Cuban ANERC organizer Sandalio Junco is revealing in assessing how anti-imperialists connected imperialism to racism. Junco arrived in Mexico City in 1928 after having been a leading trade unionist and the most prominent black leader in the Cuban Communist Party. In Mexico, where he stayed until 1930, Junco served in several positions for the LADLA. He spoke for the ANERC at the one-month anniversary of Mella's death and, in May 1929, participated in two conferences in Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Junco's participation at these events is of significance because he emphasized the value of black internationalism for Latin American anti-imperialism. Junco disagreed with the Peruvian philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui, who couldn't attend the conferences due to illness but had his essay on "The Indigenous Problem" read by another delegate. While Mariátegui only focused on the exploitation of indigenous labor, Junco drew connections between the experiences of different racialized communities. Junco stressed that the situation of black migrant workers from the Caribbean in U.S.-owned companies like United Fruit was comparable to modern-day slavery.⁸² Anti-black violence and racism, Junco continued, were exported from "yanquilandia" to other parts of the Americas by U.S.

80 See Hatzky, *Mella*, 265–66.

81 Juliá, *Mella: Documentos y artículos*, 403–11.

82 See Anne Garland Mahler, "The Red and the Black in Latin America: Sandalio Junco and the 'Negro Question' from an Afro-Latin American Perspective," *American Communist History* 17, no. 1 (2018): 24.

imperialism.⁸³ In combining both race-based and class-based perspectives, Junco thus articulated a black internationalist version of anti-imperialism that distinguished itself from the glorification of Spanish culture of some *Hispanoamericanistas*.

The third large group of exiles in Mexico City was comprised of Peruvians. Like the Cuban community around Mella, the Peruvian exile community was strongly influenced by one individual: Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre. The APRA, founded by Haya in 1926, soon came to be equated with the uniquely Latin American label “populist,” as it combined nationalist and socialist anti-imperialism and relied on Haya’s charismatic leadership. The APRA was a party of students and intellectuals with roots in the opposition movement against Peruvian dictator Augusto B. Leguía as well as in Peru’s university reform movement. Many Peruvian intellectuals, poets, and students viewed Leguía, who pursued a program of credit-based modernization, as a servant of foreign capital. Leguía repressed and regularly deported members of the country’s opposition whenever their actions became too seditious for the autocrat.

Expelled from Peru, Haya de la Torre went into his first Mexican exile between November 1923 and May 1924. In Mexico City, Vasconcelos became Haya’s mentor and provided him with a job as his secretary. The devout Catholic Vasconcelos supported the anticlerical Haya in a move that showed that anti-imperialism could transcend other ideological differences. For Haya, as for so many other exiles, Mexico served as a catalyser for his vision of imperialism. He reviewed Manuel Ugarte’s book *El destino de un continente* enthusiastically, lauded it for its critical stance towards Wilson, and praised the idea of latinoamericanismo as a strong anti-imperialist force. Influenced by Vasconcelos—who during Haya’s stay in Mexico was putting the final touches on his book *La raza cósmica*—Haya stressed the need to construct an “authentic” national identity without “foreign interventions or influences.”⁸⁴ The Comintern saw a potential ally in Haya and invited him to Moscow in 1924, but even the legendary commissar of arts and political education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, could not convince Haya to become a communist himself. Later, Haya claimed that he had always realized that communism was not the right solution for Peru, but there is no evidence that the Comintern dismissed him as potential ally before 1927.

APRA was created as a transnational organization with its first cells in Paris, Mexico City, and Buenos Aires. Haya had founded the APRA while in exile in Paris in 1926 and presented the new, mostly still fictional *alianza* as the leading united front organization of Latin American anti-imperialism. When he hoisted the APRA onto the global stage right before the Brussels Congress in 1927, he challenged the communist-influenced LADLA, which

83 See Mahler, “The Red,” 25.

84 Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, “What is the A.P.R.A.?” *Labour Monthly* 8, no. 12 (December 1926): 756–59.

also claimed to represent Latin American anti-imperialism in a united front. Haya later claimed that the APRA was founded during his first Mexican exile in 1924.⁸⁵ Haya's doctored version of the truth only makes sense in a ploy to distinguish the APRA from other transnational anti-imperialist organizations: the LADLA (founded in 1924) and the Unión Latinoamericana (founded in 1925). Haya wanted to position the APRA as the first transnational organization of anti-imperialism and as an organization with direct links to the Mexican Revolution. Additionally, for a Latin American anti-imperialist organization, Mexico City was simply a better place of foundation than Paris.

While the communists were highly skeptical of the APRA, the conflict was not about ideological intricacies. Already in Brussels, the personal animosity between Haya and Mella had become apparent. In 1927, both men were considered potential leaders of a united Latin American movement against imperialism—high hopes for two young men who had not long ago been student activists. In 1927 and 1928, the quarrel between Mella and Haya divided the anti-imperialist scene of Latin America. Only four years earlier, Mella had been an admirer of the older Haya, whom he had met at a student congress in Havana. Mella had even praised Haya as an “archetype of the Latin American youth,” as an embodiment of Rodó's figure Ariel.⁸⁶ After the Brussels Congress, the disappointed Mella struck a different tone. In his response to the launch of APRA, “What is ARPA?,” Mella did not hide his contempt towards Haya's movement: it was formed of a “small group of students” who had thought of a “‘genius’ program” (Mella's sarcastic scare quotes), but their “society of revolutionary infants” had just come up with platitudes full of “shamelessness and intellectual immodesty.”⁸⁷ The bitterness of these words indicates that the fight was not about the correct interpretation of Marxist doctrine alone: this conflict was personal, it was about ambition, treason, and masculine egos.

By the time of his second arrival in Mexico City in November 1927, Haya was no longer considered an ally by the communists. Much of the activities of the APRA in 1928 and 1929 were thus aimed at creating a continental network independent of communist structures. Haya courted promising Peruvian intellectuals and recruited the young poets Magda Portal and Serafín Delmar, who, in Lima, had been part of the intellectual salon around José Carlos Mariátegui and his magazine *Amauta*.⁸⁸ After their deportation

85 Pedro Planas Silva and Hugo Vallenos Málaga, *Haya de la Torre en su espacio y en su tiempo* (s.n.: HV ediciones, 2010), 14.

86 Julio Antonio Mella, “Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre,” *Juventud* 1, no. 2 (1923), reproduced in *Haya de la Torre: Peregrino de la unidad continental*, 2 vols, ed. Luis Alva Castro (Lima: Fondo Editorial “V.R. Haya de la Torre,” 1988), 1.88.

87 See Julio Antonio Mella, *¿Qué es el ARPA?* (Lima: Editorial Educación, 1975 [1928]), 12–13.

88 Portal Papers, “Trazos Cortados, Segunda Parte,” 22–24, University of Texas Libraries, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, Austin, TX.

to Havana, the two poets went into exile in Mexico City where they changed their allegiances from Mariátegui to Haya. While women in Peru were still not allowed to vote in national elections, Portal was using her transnational reputation and contacts to become a leading voice of APRA and was elected unanimously as APRA's first general secretary in January 1928.

Like the Venezuelan exiles, the exiled Peruvians developed a deep connection to Mexico. Magda Portal remembers that the large parades of Mexican campesinos at the May First demonstrations had "an extraordinary emotional impact" on her. For Portal, Mexico was the place where "a new concept of the peoples of Latin America" was developed in a revolutionary atmosphere, although she admitted that not all aims of the revolution had been realized.⁸⁹ Haya regularly referred to the Mexican Revolution in his public speeches, for example at a meeting of prominent anti-imperialist intellectuals in Paris in 1925, where he praised the revolution and portrayed Mexico as a guard of the continent's freedom: "The struggle of the Mexican people is our struggle, it must be our struggle."⁹⁰ In private, Haya's analysis was more critical, but it still contained an element of admiration when he described the Mexican Revolution as a spontaneous event led by instinct, without plan, program, or leader.⁹¹ For the leadership of APRA, Mexico as a country symbolized the revolution, and the Mexican governments of Obregón and Calles were, if not socialist, at least acceptably anti-imperialist.⁹²

Exporting Revolution: Increasing Conflicts and Fragmentation

The PRV, the ANERC, and the APRA were all transnational exile organizations that were formed with the plan of overthrowing the authoritarian regimes in the respective home countries, all inspired by the example of the Mexican Revolution. All three organizations were deeply influenced by the Mexican political culture in which they were founded and where the revolution and its violence were respected, sometimes even glorified. All three groups received support from the Mexican government, which was still eager to expand its influence in the Americas. All plans of military invasion either failed or were never brought to realization, often because the exiles in Mexico City knew too little about the concrete conditions in their home countries or because they overestimated the willingness of the people to start a revolution in the first place. In that sense, all the failed attempts to export revolution "back home" reveal more about the visions of the exile communities in Mexico City than they do about the social developments in Venezuela, Cuba, or Peru. Over time, the various attempts to instigate uprisings in their countries of origins caused conflict between the exile communities themselves. Most

89 Portal Papers, "Trazos Cortados, Segunda Parte," 31–33.

90 See Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, *Por la emancipación de América Latina* (Buenos Aires: M. Gleizer, 1927), 115.

91 See Haya de la Torre, *Emancipación*, 123.

92 See Melgar Bao, *Haya*, 63.

explicitly, the rupture between the communist-leaning anti-imperialist visions of the Venezuelan PRV and the Cuban ANERC clashed with the populist anti-imperialism of the Peruvian APRA.

The founding of the PRV gave new impulses to older designs to topple Gómez's regime in Venezuela by means of military invasion. The Mexican government and the continental network of anti-imperialists were crucial actors in these multiple failed invasions. The Mexican government had been giving the Venezuelan exiles financial and material support since 1920 to make their mark on Central America and to counterbalance the influence of the United States in the region. In 1927, former president Obregón supplied the group of Venezuelan exiles in Mexico City with weapons to liberate Venezuela. Carlos Aponte Hernández—who had just returned from Sandino's camp in Nicaragua—Bartolomé Ferrer, Salvador de la Plaza, Carlos León, Eduardo Machado, and Julio Antonio Mella were the core personnel of the planned invasion, and the former Venezuelan general Emilio Arévalo Cedeño, who had been a co-founder of the PRV, was supposed to lead it. The mission failed spectacularly because, according to Machado, Arévalo Cedeño used the occasion to smuggle rum, causing Obregón to withdraw his support and his weapons.⁹³

The failed invasion of Venezuela was directly linked to ANERC plans to invade Cuba because Mella convinced Obregón that these exact weapons would be put to better use in Cuba. Having secured Obregón's support, Mella's friend Fernández Sánchez traveled to Cuba to prepare the military operation, but Machado's well-informed police detained, and ultimately deported, Fernández Sánchez, thereby destroying all prospects of a successful military operation.⁹⁴ The role of the communists during the whole operation remains somewhat mysterious, but both the Mexican and the Cuban communist parties seem to have rejected the plans of the exiled Cubans.⁹⁵ Their anxiety about potentially creating "another Nicaragua"—which is to say another bloody guerrilla war—was likely caused by the Comintern's rejection of alliances with bourgeois liberals and nationalists, a rejection that was starting to be felt in Latin America in 1928. After all, Sandino was increasingly seen as a "petty bourgeois" military man who cared about Nicaragua, not about world revolution. While the united front approach of the ANERC surely hampered closer relations with the Comintern in 1928, it also showed that Mella favored an alliance with Cuba's national bourgeoisie over the support of the Comintern.

Following the trend of fantasizing about armed insurgency, the Peruvian exiles put forward their own revolutionary plans. In January 1928, the small Mexican apриста cell presented their so-called "Plan de México." The plan was to begin an armed insurgency in Peru to topple Leguía, organize

93 See García Ponce, *Memorias*, 76.

94 See Hatzky, *Mella*, 273–75.

95 See Hatzky, *Mella*, 275–77.

elections, and put a new party, the Partido Nacionalista Libertador, into power with Haya as their presidential candidate.⁹⁶ The plan revealed a remarkable paradox in the strategy of APRA: it sought to gain power through both armed insurgency and election. Haya explicitly expressed his hopes of recruiting former members of Pancho Villa's and Emiliano Zapata's armies as soldiers for an invasion in Peru.⁹⁷ Haya was undoubtedly entertaining the idea of a military operation in Peru at the same time that the Venezuelan and Cuban exiles in Mexico City were hashing out the details of their operations. The "Plan de México," however, split the APRA network and cut it off from many of its transnational allies. The unilateral move of the Mexican APRA plunged other apistas in Lima, Paris, La Paz, and Buenos Aires into turmoil and ended in irreconcilable schisms.⁹⁸ In Lima, Mariátegui feared Haya's lust for power; this led him to break with the APRA in 1928. With recent Italian history in mind, and much like Mella, Mariátegui now painted Haya as a populist caudillo whose anti-imperialist socialism could easily turn into fascism.⁹⁹ Mariátegui insisted that APRA's anti-imperialist nationalism was not in itself a progressive political program. But while Mella lambasted Haya for using nation and race—and not exclusively class—as categories of analysis, Mariátegui explicitly criticized Haya for not sufficiently trusting the revolutionary potential of Peru's indigenous population.¹⁰⁰ Over the course of the next few years, Haya's character and his eclectic interpretation of anti-imperialism caused distrust in the leftist circles of the Americas.¹⁰¹

Many repercussions of the "Plan de México" in Mexico City were consequences of the global split between communist and nationalist anti-imperialists that was reaching Latin America in 1928. Deeply affected by having been betrayed by the Guomindang in Shanghai in April 1927, the Comintern changed its policy on forging temporary alliances with non-communist liberation movements in colonial and semi-colonial contexts. The return to the tactics and rhetoric of militant class struggle, promoted

96 See Iñigo García-Bryce, "Haya de la Torre and the Pursuit of Power in Peru, 1926–1948: The Seven Paradoxes of APRA," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 51 (2014): 96.

97 See Haya's letter to Luis Heysen of March 27, 1928, quoted in García-Bryce, "Haya," 96.

98 See Kathleen Weaver, *Peruvian Rebel: The World of Magda Portal, with a Selection of her Poems* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2009), 58, 69.

99 José Carlos Mariátegui, "Carta a la célula apриста de México," printed in *Lutas Sociais* 17, no. 30 (2013): 136–38.

100 See José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), most explicitly 33.

101 This sentiment was most pointedly expressed by Carleton Beals, who in the 1930s called Haya a "glib" character whose anti-imperialism was "democratic, semi-Marxian, semi-Fascist." Carleton Beals, *The Coming Struggle for Latin America* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1938), 144–45.

during Stalin's rise in Moscow, was officially adopted at the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1928. The aggressive line of the "Third Period" was implemented with some delay in the Latin American communist parties during 1928 and 1929. But, as the discussion between Haya and Mella have shown, the split between communists and nationalist anti-imperialists was already under way before the new strategy of the Comintern finally reached Latin America.

The global re-configurations had direct consequences for the exile circles in Mexico City. The Peruvians Jacobo Hurwitz and Nicolás Terreros broke with the APRA and converted to communism—a rather unsurprising move given their closeness to both the Cuban and Venezuelan exiles. In Mexico City, Hurwitz and Terreros joined the campaign in solidarity with Sandino in Nicaragua and published anti-APRA propaganda.¹⁰² Hurwitz had written an article in *El Libertador* aptly titled "Why I Am Not with APRA" in which he claimed that the Mexican APRA had threatened him and Terreros because of their engagement for Sandino.¹⁰³ The APRA responded in an article in *Atuei*, an avant-garde modernist magazine published in Havana, and furiously denounced Hurwitz with clear anti-Semitic overtones: "Apart from being a Jew, he is also a bad poet."¹⁰⁴ Besides slandering Hurwitz as traitor, the Mexican APRA cell blamed the exile community of Venezuelans in Mexico for Hurwitz's defection. As proof, they pointed out that Hurwitz used *El Libertador* to publish his critical account of his former comrades. The Mexican APRA cell only referred to the magazine of the LADLA as "El Libertador de la Plaza," implying that the whole magazine was dominated by the Venezuelan radicals around Salvador de la Plaza. In 1928 and 1929, the Peruvian exiles Pavletich (who had acted as intermediary between Haya and Sandino) and Eudocio Ravines (Haya's companion in Brussels) also broke with the APRA and instead joined Mariátegui's newly established Partido Socialista de Perú.

And yet, even in 1928, when the anti-imperialist movement was deeply split, a large project of Latin American academic anti-imperialism was successfully launched in Mexico City: the Instituto Mexicano de Investigaciones Económicas. The institute was founded by Alfons Goldschmidt and Jesús Silva Herzog in response to a conference on the importance of petroleum in the world, organized by Goldschmidt in October 1928. It was set up to discuss the economic problems of Mexico and Latin America, bringing together Marxist and non-Marxist economists. The institute included many of the best-known intellectuals and economists of the continent and many leading exile voices of Mexico City: the Venezuelan Humberto Tejera, the

102 See Melgar Bao, *Haya*, 86.

103 Jacobo Hurwitz, "Por qué no estoy con el APRA," *El Libertador* 18 (June 1928): 7, 18.

104 Haya de la Torre, "El Parto de los Montes: Jacobito," *Atuei* (issue unknown), reproduced in Alva Castro, *Haya de la Torre*, 1.170.

Bolivian Tristán Marof, and the new archenemies Haya and Mella.¹⁰⁵ The institute only existed for 15 months, but it managed to publish four issues of its own magazine *Revista Mexicana de Economía*. The creation of the institute by Silva Herzog and Goldschmidt serves as a reminder that even when communists and populists fiercely attacked each other in public, they still shared anti-imperialism as a common continental project.

Burying Anti-Imperialist Dreams

The death of Julio Antonio Mella symbolically ended the role of Mexico City as a hub of exile anti-imperialist activism. The funerals and memorial events after his assassination were a last brief spell of transnational solidarity and exile cooperation before the exile communities fell apart conclusively and most exile activists left Mexico City in 1929 and 1930, either voluntarily or by force.

At the age of 25, the Cuban Julio Antonio Mella, organizer, speaker, and all-around coordinator of everything anti-imperialist, was assassinated. The crime occurred on January 10, 1929 after Mella and Tina Modotti had attended a meeting in the rooms of the International Red Aid in the historic center of Mexico City. On the way home, Mella was shot twice in the back in front of Modotti's home on Abraham González Street. The murder was carried out by two hired killers working for José Magriñat, an agent of Machado.¹⁰⁶ The wounded Mella (holding the latest issue of *El Machete* in his hands) was taken to the San Jerónimo Hospital, where he died during the night.¹⁰⁷ The next day, Modotti took a last (now famous) picture of her companion that was published on *El Machete's* front page in its next regular issue.¹⁰⁸ In Mexico City, the death of the famous Cuban exile occupied the city's newspapers. The communist *El Machete* published a special issue the next day, already naming culprits for Mella's death in its headline: "JULIO ANTONIO MELLA killed by the bullets of Machado's minions and by criminal Yankee Imperialism."¹⁰⁹

The treatment of Mella's death in Mexico City was a local event with international significance, especially for exiled activists. Mella's body was placed on a bier in the headquarters of the Communist Party of Mexico, at Mesones no. 54, and all mourners were encouraged publicly to pay their respects. Magda Portal, the leading APRA activist, later remembered having participated in Mella's honour guard at the communist headquarters.¹¹⁰

105 See Silva Herzog, *Una vida*, 87 and Cupull and González, *Julio Antonio Mella y México*, 169.

106 The question of who was culpable of Mella's assassination continues to be the subject of passionate discussion; for the current state of debate, see Hatzky, *Mella*, 300–22.

107 See Letizia Argenterì, *Tina Modotti: Between Art and Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 110–11.

108 *El Machete* (January 19, 1929): 1.

109 *El Machete Extra*, January 11, 1929.

110 Portal Papers, "Trazos Cortados, Segunda Parte," 35

El Machete devoted several issues to Mella's life and his legacy as a fighter against imperialism, and even published popular Mella *corridos* that were meant to be sung in the city streets.¹¹¹ Mella's comrades from the PCM took his coffin on a funeral procession through the center of the city on January 12, 1929. The whole incident was meticulously observed by four secret agents of the Ministry of the Interior who reported that Mella's death was used for anti-imperialist propaganda. Short speeches were held on the street, blaming imperialism rather than just Gerardo Machado. Some of the exiles spoke, too, for example the Venezuelan León, who demanded that the Mexican government break off diplomatic relations with Cuba, just as it had done with Venezuela.¹¹²

One month after Mella's death, the volume of anti-imperialist rhetoric increased even more. The International Red Aid, the LADLA, and the Committee Pro-Mella organized a wake in the Hidalgo theater to commemorate their comrade's death. In the speeches held, Mella was depicted as a Latin American fighter against imperialism, rather than as a Cuban communist. At the wake, Modotti stated that Mella was "now a symbol for the revolutionary fight against imperialism and its agents," comparable to the Nicaraguan Sandino. Diego Rivera reminded the audience of the second anniversary of the establishment of the LADLA, an organization co-founded by Mella in Brussels. The Peruvian Hurwitz lamented Mella's death "in a foreign land," and even the apриста Carlos Manuel Cox spoke "on behalf of the Peruvian political exiles."¹¹³ The presence of APRA members and the reliance on anti-imperialism as a binding tie underscored the momentous nature of the occasion: it was the last moment of shared anti-imperialist sentiment experienced by the exile scene of Mexico City before it fell apart irretrievably.

With Mella's death, the phase of anti-imperialist euphoria that had started in 1925 and experienced heavy conflict in 1927 and 1928 came to its definite end. Mexico ceased to be a safe haven for exiled leftists, mainly because the Mexican government assumed a reconciliatory attitude towards the United States. The conflicts over petroleum and about Mexico's support for Sandino were, if not resolved, at least defused. After the assassination of president-elect Obregón in the summer of 1928, ex-president Calles ruled informally as "Jefe Máximo" and adopted a conservative political line that helped him obtain the support of the United States. The PCM conclusively turned from the government at the end of 1928 and some communists even supported

111 "CORRIDO de la Muerte de Julio Antonio MELLA," *El Machete* (January 19, 1929): 3.

112 All quotes from "Report by the agents no. 14, 18, 25, 19 to the Chief of the Departamento Confidencial," Federal Government of Mexico, Archivo General de la Nación, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Box 0059, vol. 135911/45.

113 All quotes from "La Velada por el camarada Mella," *El Machete* (February 16, 1929): 1-3.

the failed rebellion of General Escobar against the federal government in March 1929.¹¹⁴ Harsh repressive measures followed, against communists, but also against the supporters of Vasconcelos (who had lost the 1929 election), against Catholics, and against labor leaders. The offices of *El Machete* were shut down in June 1929 but the paper continued publishing illegally. In January 1930, the Mexican government broke off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and the new president Pascual Ortiz Rubio set forth the conservative program. The PCM, by now increasingly Stalinist and hunting down suspected supporters of Trotsky, was declared illegal and most of its leaders were arrested. After a failed assassination attempt on Ortiz Rubio in February 1930, the imprisonment and torture of Mexican radicals escalated and radical political foreigners were expelled from the country.

A series of deportations in 1929 and 1930 contributed to the decay of the exile communities in Mexico City. Esteban Pavletich and Tina Modotti were deported, while others fled the country secretly, such as the ex-aprista Hurwitz, or left the country voluntarily. In May 1929, Magda Portal went on a speaking tour through the Caribbean, holding lectures on U.S. imperialism and in defense of the Mexican Revolution.¹¹⁵ Like Haya, Portal continued to admire the Mexican Revolution as a model for all Latin American countries. Haya left Mexico in June 1928 to travel through Central America teaching his version of anti-imperialism but was deported from Panama to Germany where he revived his contacts to Alfons Goldschmidt and prepared the publication of *El Antiimperialismo y el APRA*.¹¹⁶ Most of the Venezuelan exiles had already left Mexico in 1928 and 1929. Eduardo Machado went to Paris; Carlos Aponte Hernández and Gustavo Machado organized an uprising in Curaçao.¹¹⁷ In early 1930, the Cuban Sandalio Junco was arrested and later deported to Germany, after several communist organizations had protested the Mexican government's plans to extradite him to Cuba.¹¹⁸

With much of the core of the exile community of anti-imperialists deported and the communist leadership imprisoned, there was not much left of the exile anti-imperialist activism in Mexico City. The LADLA stopped the publication of *El Libertador* and ceased to exist as an independent organization after its "Bolshevization" was implemented, starting in July 1929.¹¹⁹

114 See Buchenau, *Plutarco*, 143.

115 See Weaver, *Peruvian Rebel*, 73. In 1931, the speeches were published in Lima as *América Latina frente al imperialismo y defensa de la Revolución Mexicana*.

116 Haya and Goldschmidt remained friends. In 1932, Goldschmidt published a defense of Haya against the attacks of Peruvian dictator Sánchez Cerro. It was apparently important for him to clarify that the APRA "has as much to do with the communist movement as I have with Adolf Hitler." Alfons Goldschmidt, "Der Terror in Peru," *Die Weltbühne* 28 (second half of 1932): 213-14.

117 See García Ponce, *Memorias*, 108, 110.

118 See Mahler, "The Red," 19.

119 See Kersffeld, *Contra el imperio*, 195.

Most of the prominent anti-imperialists were expelled from the party shortly afterwards.¹²⁰ The Comintern relocated most of its activities away from Mexico City: the headquarters of the Central Committee moved to New York and the South American Secretariat in Buenos Aires became more important.¹²¹ For the communists, the proletarians of Buenos Aires and New York now seemed to promise more revolutionary potential than the rather vague anti-imperialism that had dominated the left in Mexico. As far as the exile organizations were concerned, both the ANERC and the PRV were dissolved or soon merged with other parties, while the APRA, under Haya's leadership, arguably became one of the most important Peruvian parties of the twentieth century.

Mexico City's role as a hub of anti-imperialist activism is exemplified by the rise and fall of revolutionary exile organizations in the city during the 1920s. The long moment of inter-exile cooperation between 1925 and 1927 overlapped with the geopolitical aims of the Calles government but was also a time of a global euphoria within the anti-imperialist movement. Simultaneous with the ceasing of that global moment in 1927, the exile communities in Mexico City ended their cooperation and a dynamic of re-nationalization of the exile projects replaced an anti-imperialism that emphasized Latin American solidarity. As Mexico City ceased to be a haven of exile radicals, some of the anti-imperialist rhetoric was replaced by a stronger focus on anti-fascism in the 1930s. As European refugees began to arrive in Mexico City in the 1930s, Mexico City once again became a hub of exile activism.¹²²

120 In September 1929, Diego Rivera, Luis G. Monzón, Enrique Flores Magón, and Federico Bach were thrown out of the party. Úrsulo Galván had already been expelled in May.

121 See Kerssfield, *Contra el imperio*, 242.

122 See Anna Koch, "Exile: Dreams: Antifascist Jews, Antisemitism and the 'Other Germany,'" *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 9, nos. 1–2 (2020): 221–43.

CHAPTER THREE

Standing with Sacco and Sandino

Transnational Solidarity Campaigns

Everthing should be done to preserve the memory of the tragic Sacco–Vanzetti incident. It is a reminder that even the most perfectly planned democratic institutions are not better than the people whose instruments they are.

Albert Einstein (1947)¹

The 10th of August 1927 was a special summer Wednesday in Mexico City.² It was exceptional because it was quiet. The notoriously loud and easily excitable city remained silent for the quarter of an hour in what retrospectively appears as an atmosphere of melancholia and a shared feeling of powerlessness. At 10 o'clock in the morning, the assembly lines in the city's factories stood still as thousands of workers interrupted their daily routine. Cars and trams were left standing on the street, causing the vibrant traffic of the city to come to a halt. A "respectful silence"³ lay over the city of almost one million inhabitants. The city's silence was the pre-mature memorial ceremony of two anarchists who were to be executed in the far-away city of Boston in the following days.⁴ It was also a last, truly desperate, attempt to make the voices of millions of workers and sympathizers heard in the United

1 Albert Einstein, "Für Sacco–Vanzetti Memorial," draft of document from 1947, Einstein Archives Online.

2 Anita Brenner noted in her dairy on August 9, 1927: "It is surely summer. Plums, pears, and grapes, and explosive mixtures." See "Diary June 1, 1927–Dec 31, 1927," Anita Brenner Papers, Box 121.1, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Austin, TX.

3 "A pesar de las protestas de los laboristas de todo el mundo, Sacco y Vanzetti van a morir," *Excelsior*, August 10, 1927, 1.

4 Originally, the silence was supposed to take place at the hour of the execution, which was then postponed several times. Sacco and Vanzetti were eventually electrocuted in the early hours of August 23, 1927. See "Mexicans Decide on Boycott. Workers Plan Half-Hour of Silence at Hour of Execution," *New York Times*, August 7, 1927, 3.

States, or, more precisely, in the ears of U.S. President Calvin Coolidge and Massachusetts Governor Alvan T. Fuller, who continued to ignore the thousands of petitions asking for a pardon for Sacco and Vanzetti. The two Italian-American anarchists had been sentenced to death by a court in Boston in what many observers viewed as a prejudiced and dubious trial. In Mexico City, the opinion that the trial was a miscarriage of justice and, more generally, a violation of human decency and morality, seemed to unify the polyphonic politics of the city. Even the conservative newspaper *Excelsior* wrote that “our workers demand the pardon of Sacco and Vanzetti” and almost fatalistically declared that “despite the protests of workers worldwide, Sacco and Vanzetti are going to die.”⁵

Why did a whole city, or at least a considerable part of its working class, stand still for minutes of mourning for two unknown individuals? The answer to that question is closely connected to the forms of labor movement organization in the 1920s, but also to how solidarity with distant others was imagined and performed in the city. These traits were not specific to the case of solidarity with Sacco and Vanzetti, but part of a larger history of solidarity campaigns in Mexico City and embedded into transnational networks of radical activism. In the 1920s, the two most important transnational solidarity campaigns in Mexico City were the ones advocating for Sacco and Vanzetti between 1921 and 1927 and the one in support of César Augusto Sandino, who fought against U.S. troops in Nicaragua, between, roughly, 1926 and 1930. While the campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti had its origins in the United States, the campaign for Sandino was mainly developed in Mexico City. Both campaigns used anti-imperialism’s potential as “powerful generative theme,” as historian Barry Carr has called it.⁶ It was within the context of solidarity campaigns in which anti-imperialist arguments became visible on the city streets and were performed at solidarity rallies or money collections. Thus, both campaigns were highly influential, even constitutive, for the transnational networks of anti-imperialists in Mexico City.

The aim of this chapter is to analyze these two solidarity campaigns, which are rarely addressed in relation to each other and have developed two different historiographies. First, there is a historiography on the case of Sacco and Vanzetti and its global repercussions. This historiography has a long tradition as it was already negotiated in former socialist countries, and especially the question of guilt or innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti was discussed passionately over decades. The global solidarity campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti and its local specificities have only recently become a more visible part of these debates, often explicitly addressing the need to

5 “A pesar de las protestas,” *Excelsior*, August 10, 1927, 1 (emphasis added).

6 Barry Carr, “Pioneering Transnational Solidarity in the Americas: The Movement in Support of Augusto C. Sandino 1927–1934,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20, no. 2 (2014): 143.

re-examine the solidarity campaign with a transnational or global perspective.⁷ Second, there is a large amount of literature about the fight of Sandino in Nicaragua and the networks behind the solidarity campaign for Sandino.⁸ Within this historiography, the need to trans-nationalize the perspective on the solidarity campaign is addressed as well. Examining the two cases of solidarity campaign in a common study, via their spatial and temporal proximity in Mexico City, combines the need to trans-nationalize the history of the cases, as expressed in both historiographies. Moreover, it opens up new perspectives that see the two campaigns as interconnected parts of global networks, held together by concrete persons, ideologies, and spaces.

A third historiography this chapter engages with is about the nature of transnational solidarity campaigns and their place in history writing. Many historical studies have addressed transnational solidarity campaigns without explicitly naming its object of study as such: international histories of the anti-slavery movement, the women's suffrage movement, or the working-class movement have transcended national frameworks, almost by definition.⁹

7 See Lisa McGirr, "The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A Global History," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (2007). For a transatlantic perspective that compares Sacco-Vanzetti to the Dreyfus affair, see Moshik Temkin, *The Sacco-Vanzetti Affair: America on Trial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). For the solidarity campaign from a Parisian perspective, see Brooke L. Blower, *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture between the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93-130.

8 In the last 30 years, international scholarly interest in Sandino's role in Latin American history has markedly declined. For relatively recent voices, see Richard V. Salisbury, *Anti-Imperialism and International Competition in Central America, 1920-1929* (Wilmington, DE: Roman & Littlefield, 1989); Michelle Dospital, *Siempre más allá...: El Movimiento Sandinista en Nicaragua, 1927-1934* (Managua: Instituto de Historia de Nicaragua, 1996); Michael J. Schroeder, "The Sandino Rebellion Revisited: Civil War, Imperialism, Popular Nationalism, and State Formation Muddled Up Together in the Segovias of Nicaragua, 1926-1934," in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, eds. Joseph Gilbert, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo Salvatore (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Michael J. Schroeder, "Social Memory and Tactical Doctrine: The Air War in Nicaragua during the Sandino Rebellion, 1927-1932," *International History Review* 29, no. 3 (2007): 518-20; Alan L. McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended U.S. Occupations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 213-37. For examples of studies of the solidarity campaigns for Sandino, see Richard Grossman, "Solidarity with Sandino: The Anti-Intervention and Solidarity Movements in the United States, 1927-1933," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009); Carr, "Pioneering." Michael J. Schroeder has additionally collected an impressive number of primary sources and bibliographies online: Michael J. Schroeder, "Sandino Rebellion: A Documentary History." www.sandinorebellion.com/Top100pgs/Top100-p20b.html.

9 See Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, "Historical Precursors to Modern Transnational Social Movements and Networks," in *Globalizations and Social*

In recent years, the study of transnational solidarity campaigns has been addressed more explicitly, often building on older works of history or on the usage of the concept within social sciences. Historians Christine Hatzky and Jessica Stites Mor have theorized about the current state of historiography, ascertaining that many perspectives still hold on to a Eurocentric bias that manifests itself in the prominence of studies of North-to-South solidarity campaigns in comparison to South-to-North or South-to-South campaigns.¹⁰ Hatzky and Stites Mor observe a shifting research paradigm that moves away from meta-explanations of solidarity such as human idealism or altruism and rather focuses on the agency of previously marginalized groups in local contexts.¹¹ Studies of transnational solidarity campaigns have become fairly widespread in recent years and have often been framed as a way to grasp a fuller picture of transnational connections overlooked by national history writing.¹² This chapter attempts to follow the demands of the current historiography to de-nationalize history, with both a stronger focus on local actors and an awareness of transnational networks.

Transnational solidarity campaigns in Mexico City in the 1920s could build on a tradition of well-organized Latin American solidarity campaigns that had often relied on anti-imperialism as its ideological foundation. These campaigns had mainly emerged in the context of the struggle for Cuban independence in the late nineteenth century. Latin American elites, teachers, artisans, workers, and Cuban émigré communities across the continent supported Cuban independence and thus created one of the earliest broad-based solidarity movements in Latin America.¹³ The Spanish–Cuban–American War of 1898 fueled anti-imperial sentiment in Latin America as it “marked the beginning of the American Century.”¹⁴ Another peak of continental solidarity was inspired by the Mexican Revolution. American “slackers” from north of the border, mainly socialists and anarcho-syndicalists who opposed the draft and war in general, actively participated in the

Movements: Culture, Power, and the Transnational Public Sphere, eds. John A. Guidry, Michael D. Kennedy, and Mayer N. Zald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

10 Christine Hatzky and Jessica Stites Mor, “Latin American Transnational Solidarities: Contexts and Critical Research Paradigms,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20, no. 2 (2014): 128.

11 See Hatzky and Stites Mor, “Latin American Transnational Solidarities,” 135.

12 See, for examples, Jessica Stites Mor, ed., *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013); Daniel Laqua, “Freethinkers, Anarchists and Francisco Ferrer: The Making of a Transnational Solidarity Campaign,” *European Review of History* 21, no. 4 (2014).

13 See Dalia Antonia Muller, “Latin America and the Question of Cuban Independence,” *Americas* 68, no. 2 (2011): 214.

14 Ada Ferrer, “Cuba, 1898: Rethinking Race, Nation, and Empire,” *Radical History Review* 73 (1999).

Revolution.¹⁵ Many of those slackers remained in Mexico after 1920 and influenced the anti-imperialist and communist circles in the capital, acting as intermediaries between the radicals in Mexico and the global socialist movement. In many countries throughout the American continent, the public followed the Mexican Revolution with great interest and empathy.¹⁶ With the help of skillful propaganda, the revolutionaries in Mexico inspired, for example, the thinking of the Buenos Aires intellectuals José Ingenieros and Alfredo Palacios.¹⁷ In the 1920s, activists refined these field-tested projects of transnational solidarity and used an increasingly anti-imperialist message to combine local, continental, and global agitation.

The main argument of the chapter relates to the chronology of the book as a whole and stresses the period from 1925 to 1927 as a long anti-imperialist moment in Mexico City. By analyzing solidarity campaigns, it shows how earlier discourses on working-class solidarity, class consciousness, or anti-Americanism were transformed into a language of anti-imperialism just before the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in the summer of 1927. At the peak of anti-imperialist activism in Mexico City, the summer of 1927 was a crucial transitional moment for the anti-imperialist scene. The role of the communist networks is particularly revealing, as they contributed to the success of the solidarity campaigns but were also responsible for the split of the anti-imperialist movement shortly afterwards. More than other parts of the book, this chapter therefore focuses mainly on communist activism and communist sources. The second argument refers more generally to the relationship between local actors and global networks. Political actors in Mexico City managed to tie local goals to the global campaign supporting Sacco and Vanzetti but struggled to convert the continental campaign for Sandino into a global event. Both the success of the localization process and the partial failure of the globalizing efforts have to do with the role of anti-imperialist arguments that sometimes facilitated the translation of certain topics but could also limit its universalizing potential. Working-class solidarity in Boston could be translated into anti-imperialist solidarity in Mexico City, but anti-imperialist arguments hardly traveled the other way around due to global power asymmetries. Anti-imperialist arguments thus worked better in some contexts (for example in Latin America when the United States was involved) than in others. More generally, transnational

15 See Dan La Botz, "American 'Slackers' in the Mexican Revolution: International Proletarian Politics in the Midst of a National Revolution," *Americas* 62, no. 4 (2006).

16 For a perspective on the Mexican Revolution from the labor movement in the United States, see Gregg Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder? The American Federation of Labor, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution 1910–1924* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

17 Pablo Yankelevitch, "Las redes intelectuales de la solidaridad latinoamericana: José Ingenieros y Alfredo Palacios frente a la Revolución mexicana," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 58, no. 4 (1996).

solidarity campaigns did not automatically offer an effective “vehicle to mobilize international resources for local political change,” as Hatzky and Stites have argued.¹⁸ My argument is not that localization was easier than globalization, but rather that changing local circumstances and global power structures were mutually constitutive. In other words, anti-imperialists in Mexico City could use the Sacco–Vanzetti incident for their local goals, but there was little they could do to convince, for example, the German SPD to care for Sandino.

Pro Sacco and Vanzetti in Mexico City

On June 20, 1926, the Mexican branch of International Red Aid organized a demonstration in the city of Mexico with the purpose of protesting against the conviction of two Italian-born anarchists in the United States, Ferdinando “Nicola” Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Workers and students as well as prominent activists such as Julio Antonio Mella, who represented the LADLA, held speeches demanding solidarity for the two comrades in the United States. The demonstration went on in an “orderly” fashion until the protesters decided to take their indignation where they thought it rightly belonged: to the American consulate. In front of the building, an agent of the secret police “wrestled a sign out of the hands of a protester,” as the communist newspaper *El Machete* described it. The sign that had so bothered the policeman read “Let us liberate the victims of imperialism.” The police intervention caused outrage among the protesters, and it was only due to the calming influence of the demonstration’s organizers that further “serious friction could be prevented.” Nonetheless, five protesters were arrested, among them Mella and his wife Oliva Zaldívar. In the following days, the arrest of the five activists was the topic of heated discussions in the city.¹⁹ The conservative press reports on the incident implied that the events were staged by foreign activists. Defending the imprisoned activists, *El Machete* stylized the arrested Mella and Becerra in the same manner Sacco and Vanzetti were portrayed: their heads with their last names next to them made the activists look like soon-to-be working-class martyrs. After five days in prison, the protesters were set free and the solidarity campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti continued, reaching its peak more than a year later.²⁰

Scenes like the one in summer 1926 were common in the 1920s in the Americas and in Europe, especially as the fight for Sacco and Vanzetti gained momentum between 1925 and 1927. From 1921 to 1927, in the time between the verdict and the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, a local robbery just

18 See Hatzky and Stites Mor, “Latin American Transnational Solidarities,” 130.

19 The other detained activists were Carlos Becerra, Rosalio “Blackwell” Negrete, and Susana González.

20 “Mitín Pro Sacco Vanzetti. Encarcelamiento de cinco compañeros,” *El Machete* (July 8, 1926): 3.

outside of Boston was transformed into, to use the words of historian Lisa McGirr, a “global event” that fascinated millions of people.²¹ In April 1920, the robbery of a shoe factory in South Braintree escalated and a guard and a paymaster were killed. Although there was no physical evidence linking the suspects to the crime, an American jury found the two Italian-born anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti guilty on July 14, 1921. Both men had immigrated to the United States from Italy in 1908 and were working as shoemaker and fish peddler in the immigrant districts of Boston, where they became involved in anarchist activism. As both foreigners and radical activists, the two men stood as paradigmatic examples of government repression in the U.S. interwar period. Sympathizers of the two accused workers regarded the trial as a farce and as evidence of the fact that the justice system in the United States was heavily politicized; rigged against immigrants and radicals. Until today, the guilt of the two anarchists remains unproven and the whole trial highly dubious.

Early support for Sacco and Vanzetti in the form of solidarity campaigns first arose in the big cities in the Americas that already had strong working-class movements, namely Boston, New York, Chicago, Mexico City, Caracas, and Montevideo. Throughout the 1920s, the solidarity with Sacco and Vanzetti remained an urban phenomenon, as big cities were the traditional centers of labor internationalism. In October 1921, large demonstrations were held in London, Rome, Paris, and Le Havre. In Santiago de Chile, 3,000 protesters marched through the city’s streets.²² Soon, the protests turned violent and the workers’ outrage materialized in attacks on American officials and government buildings. The American consulate in Switzerland received death threats, while the American ambassador in Paris was sent a mail bomb. Bombs exploded in the U.S. embassies in Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro as well as in the U.S. consulates in Zurich and Marseille in October and November 1921. These attacks demonstrate that the solidarity campaign was, right from its beginning, not just about influencing the public’s opinion and pressuring the court in Massachusetts to release the imprisoned anarchists. On the contrary, as McGirr has argued, the bombings hurt the cause of Sacco and Vanzetti in the short run because they “hardened a segment of public opinion against the two men”²³ and complicated the relationship of supporters to otherwise sympathetic groups like the social democratic parties. Besides anarchist solidarity, an anti-imperialist potential was already visible in the early movement, as the case allowed workers from Buenos Aires to Rome to voice their growing concern about the rise of American power after the world war.

In Mexico, the solidarity campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti was initially a project of anarchist groups. The transnational networks of organized anarchists were the first to make the Sacco–Vanzetti case known to a broader

21 McGirr, “Passion,” 1085.

22 See McGirr, “Passion,” 1091.

23 See McGirr, “Passion,” 1086.

public in Mexico. Sacco and Vanzetti themselves had a biographical connection to Mexico, as the two had spent a year in Monterrey with anarchist militants in 1917, dodging the draft in the United States. The contacts established during that time went beyond the borders of the United States and Mexico, reaching to Europe and many countries in South America. During their years in prison in the United States, Sacco and Vanzetti deepened those contacts and wrote to several anarchists, receiving news, requesting help, and demanding further mobilization for their cause. The dense networks of anarchists, particularly Galleanistas, constituted the early base for the global solidarity campaign. In Mexico, the organized labor movement protested against the treatment of Sacco and Vanzetti as early as 1921. In many local surroundings, the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT), the syndicalist labor federation that had broken with the nationalist CROM in 1921, played an important role in organizing protests. In other cases, committed individuals of the anarchist network took action on their own initiative. One example of such an anarchist was Librado Rivera, a comrade of the famous Mexican brothers Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón during their exile in the United States. Librado was in contact with Vanzetti and started a solidarity campaign in his magazine *Sagitario*.²⁴ The campaign was ultimately taken up and joined by other anarchist papers; in so doing, they pressured the communist labor unions of the country into caring for the case.

As in other places with a strong anarchist tradition, the influence of anarcho-syndicalist groups in Mexico facilitated mass mobilization. Historian John M. Hart has even argued that anarchism was “the principal ideological expression of Mexican working-class radicalism” between 1865 and 1910.²⁵ Anarchists could undoubtedly draw on a proven repertoire of publicity to mobilize their supporters. This happened in a crucial moment of radical politics in which, globally speaking, anarchism and communism were struggling about the leadership within the working-class movement.²⁶ In 1921, when the campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti started, this fight was

24 In 1925, Vanzetti wrote to Librado, asking him to deposit a red flower in his name at the grave of “our unforgettable Ricardo” Magón. It is unknown if Librado ever went to Mexico City to fulfill his friend’s wish, but he undoubtedly embraced the cause of Sacco and Vanzetti. See Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Arcángeles: Doce historias de revolucionarios herejes del siglo XX* (Mexico City: Edición de Traficantes de Sueños, 2011), 179.

25 John Mason Hart, “The Urban Working Class and the Mexican Revolution: The Case of the Casa del Obrero Mundial,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 58, no. 1 (1978): 2.

26 McGirr sees this moment as a “transitional moment in radical politics” in which anarchism was declining and communism was rising globally. This is undoubtedly a correct assessment, although the lasting power and attraction of anarchism, at least well into the 1930s, tends to be underestimated in some historiographies. See McGirr, “Passion,” 1091–92.

far from over, although the Russian Revolution and its obvious potential to inspire political imaginations on a global level placed the communists in an increasingly better position. The communists quickly recognized the huge potential of the case, but they had to actively appropriate Sacco and Vanzetti's case and obscure the fact that the two convicted men were radical anarchists, not communists. In the Soviet Union, all anarchist movements or organizations were outlawed, and anarchists were persecuted, and yet the Comintern actively supported the solidarity campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti.²⁷ This paradox can be explained by *realpolitik* rather than ideology: the Comintern cared little about ideological differences in the global left (outside of the Soviet Union), but a lot about becoming the leader of the international left. As historian Moshik Temkin has argued, Moscow's hidden agenda was not to trick liberal intellectuals into embracing a communist cause, but to trick the world into thinking Sacco and Vanzetti *was* a communist cause to begin with.²⁸

Within the logic of the global communist structures, the case of Sacco and Vanzetti was the first attempt to establish united front organizations to gain control over the global political left. As early as 1921, the WPA and the Executive Committee of the Comintern endorsed the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, and the communists channelled their support through a united front organization that was created for the purpose, the United Front Pro Sacco and Vanzetti. It was the organizational core of the communist solidarity campaign, serving to coordinate different communist unions and organizations, and was part of the Comintern's strategy to gain the support of broader swaths of the public. One of the key tactics was to build intermediary organizations, which in turn would enable the Comintern to get to know local problems—translate the global communist agenda to fit the needs of the local population. In Mexico, the local branches of the Red International of Labor Unions, the Red Peasant International, the LADLA, the South American Secretariat, and the Caribbean Bureau were intermediary organizations created to “bring Mexico and Latin America closer to Moscow and Moscow closer to Mexico and Latin America,” as historian Daniela Spenser has formulated it.²⁹ The International Red Aid, another intermediary organization with a global network of national branches, was supposed to coordinate the global protests. Its Mexican branch gained popular support during the Sacco and Vanzetti campaign. When Julio Antonio Mella was arrested in 1926, he spoke in the name of the Red Aid,

27 This enraged exiled Russian anarchists like Alexander Berkman who published angry pamphlets against what he called a “disgusting hypocrisy, in view of the fact that numerous Russian Saccos and Vanzettis are filling the Bolshevik prisons.” Quoted in Temkin, *Sacco–Vanzetti Affair*, 49.

28 See Temkin, *Sacco–Vanzetti Affair*, 47.

29 See Daniela Spenser, *Stumbling its Way through Mexico: The Early Years of the Communist International* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 149.

and the agitation in response to his arrest certainly helped to increase the organization's profile in Mexico City.³⁰

The global conflict between anarchists and communists is visible in the local context of Mexico City; it can be witnessed in the ways the communists actively appropriated the solidarity campaign. In Mexico, like in other places with a strong anarchist tradition, the communists actively obscured the Italian-American's anarchist convictions by emphasizing class, not ideology, as explanations for the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti. The Communist Party organ *El Machete* increasingly framed solidarity with the two imprisoned men in terms of proletarian solidarity, often simply ignoring or concealing the fact that they were convinced anarchists. During the 1920s, and especially in 1926 and 1927, the anarchist networks were actively marginalized within the campaign and attacked by the communists. In July of 1926, *El Machete* made fun of "the silence of the anarchists who call themselves comrades of Sacco and Vanzetti,"³¹ mocking the (not at all silent) Mexican anarchist movement. The communists of *El Machete* frequently described Sacco and Vanzetti simply as "workers" or "revolutionaries," making the point that the case was essentially about punishing revolutionary workers in general, not anarchists particularly.³² Ironically, the anti-communist press supported the communists' version wholeheartedly. The conservative Mexican newspaper *El Excelsior*, as well as the Parisian *Le Figaro* before it and probably countless other newspapers worldwide, simply called the two men "communists,"³³ and thereby helped the communists to appropriate the popular fight of Sacco and Vanzetti.

Ultimately, the communists succeeded in appropriating the case of Sacco and Vanzetti. By the spring of 1927, the two Italian-Americans had become working-class heroes on a global scale, but their fate also caused mobilization on the part of middle-class citizens and liberal intellectuals, many of whom were increasingly embracing cosmopolitan identities.³⁴ Even the relatively

30 The Red Aid aimed at defending those who were arrested for their fight against capitalism and imperialism. Consequently, the case of Sacco and Vanzetti was a promising opportunity for the local branch of the Red Aid in Mexico City to make itself heard in the diverse political landscape of the city. See "First Article of the Statutes of the Liga Internacional Pro-Luchadores Perseguidos Afiliada a la Ayuda Internacional Roja, México, D.F.," in *Mella: Documentos y Artículos*, ed. Mariá Antonieta Juliá (Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y la Revolución Socialista de Cuba) (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975) 255.

31 "El silencio de los anarquistas, los que se llaman compañeros de Sacco y Vanzetti," *El Machete* (July 8, 1926): 3.

32 "En las personas de Sacco y Vanzetti se quiere castigar a los trabajadores revolucionarios de todo el mundo," *El Machete* (August 6, 1927): 1.

33 See McGirr, "Passion," 1102. *Excelsior* describes Sacco and Vanzetti as "communists" and "anarchists" in a single article; see "Paro en el Distrito por el Asunto de Sacco y Vanzetti," *Excelsior*, August 9, 1927, 1.

34 See McGirr, "Passion," 1096, 1103, 1105.

conservative social democratic parties of Europe joined the fight for the liberty of Sacco and Vanzetti as the biggest solidarity demonstrations took place in the summer of 1927.³⁵

Radicalizing Solidarity during a Summer of Desperation

For the sympathizers of Sacco and Vanzetti in Mexico City, the summer of 1927 was a crucial time of desperation and radicalization. It was also a transitional moment in which the two Italian-Americans became displayed as anti-imperialists. The imminent execution of the two anarchists in the United States caused violent protest on a global scale. In Mexico City, large protest marches and demonstrations took place at short intervals on July 31, August 10, August 22, and August 28. *El Machete* wrote about the march on the evening of August 10—the day that had begun with 15 minutes of silence—stating that “by the time the front of the demonstration had already reached the Post Office building, the rear-guard had hardly left the street of Héroes.”³⁶ Based on this assessment, which translates to about a kilometer, one can estimate that there were up to 40,000 protesting workers and sympathizers.³⁷ The solidarity campaign had obviously reached the workers of the city. In the following weeks, *El Machete* furiously declared “War on the murderers,” its front page featuring a picture of Mexican workers symbolically carrying two decorated coffins through the crowded city streets.³⁸ The crowd of mourning protesters (carrying hammer, sickle, and ammunition belts) represents the united front of the working class in Mexico, unified in its condemnation of the execution and U.S. imperialism. This narrative is underlined by the fact that the government-friendly labor union CROM and the anarcho-syndicalist union CGT are both represented by flags in the huge crowd, their supporters marching peacefully alongside each. The images demonstrate how the communists sought to harmonize internal working-class struggles to be able to credibly appropriate the solidarity campaign as a struggle of the proletariat per se.

The last large demonstrations in the summer of 1927 are key events in the interpretation of the Sacco and Vanzetti case. From the local perspective of Mexico City, the summer of 1927 was the moment in which conflicting

35 The German SPD’s official paper *Vorwärts* indignantly wrote about a “legal killing” on its front page. “Der Justizmord vollzogen! Sacco und Vanzetti gesetzlich ermordet,” *Vorwärts*, August 23, 1927, 1. In the Berliner Lustgarten, 150,000 people allegedly marched to commemorate the two anarchists.

36 M. [Mella], “La manifestación del día 10 en la Ciudad de México,” *El Machete* (August 12, 1927): 1.

37 The number of 40,000 “red workers” is published by the newspaper *El Informador* of Guadalajara; see “No contesto los mensajes Mr. C. Coolidge,” *El Informador*, August 11, 1927, 1.

38 See *El Machete* (August 27, 1927): 1.

leftist perspectives on the case were unified and anti-imperialism became the dominant perspective on the Sacco and Vanzetti case. This does not mean that anti-imperialism had not been in use before the summer of 1927—it had always been an important element of the protests and had certainly motivated the bombings of U.S. consulates in the early 1920s. But before 1927, different concepts, slogans, and phrases were used simultaneously and never clearly distinguished one from another. Articles about Sacco and Vanzetti stressed the injustice of the case and the bourgeois nature of the jury, sometimes U.S. racism against Italian immigrants or discrimination against politically active workers. Imperialism, however, was not necessarily featured in conjunction with the Sacco and Vanzetti case. In an article of *El Machete* published in June of 1926, it is the “bourgeois justice”³⁹ that had sentenced the two innocent men. The term “imperialist” is used once, almost dutifully, to describe the “imperialist bourgeoisie of the United States” in general. Apart from that instance, it is made clear that the indignation about the case arose from the nature of the class struggle within the United States: Mexican workers were called upon to stand in solidarity with their working-class comrades in the United States. In the summer of 1927, during the large desperate demonstrations, the discourses about class struggle, racism, injustice, and the role of immigrants in the United States were harmonized under the headline of anti-imperialism.

This merging of discourses is visible in the depiction of the case and the solidarity campaign in the communist press. In August 1927, a drawing on *El Machete*'s front cover shows the two men's heads in front of Wall-Street skyscrapers, with the dagger of U.S. imperialism about to stab them to death.⁴⁰ The theme of American imperialism killing Sacco and Vanzetti became more prominent in the following weeks. Apart from caricatures, the texts published in *El Machete* also took an anti-imperialist turn, describing Sacco and Vanzetti as victims of the “immense octopus which is Yankee imperialism.”⁴¹ In the summer of 1927, it was not American anti-Italian racism or the American legal system, it was the *pulpo* of imperialism that had caused Sacco and Vanzetti's damnation.

The increasingly anti-imperialist ductus of the communists was reflected on the city streets in July and August 1927. In June of 1926, protesters in Mexico City had already blamed the United States for killing Sacco and Vanzetti. A protest group in front of the American consulate had shouted “Down with Americans,” but heavy rain had “prevented the demonstration from degenerating into an open attack on the consulate,” as the *New York Times* reported.⁴² The general anti-American sentiment of 1926 was

39 “La Justicia Burguesa,” *El Machete* June 3, 1926, 1,4.

40 *El Machete* August 6, 1927, 1.

41 “Frente Unico para salvar a Sacco y Vanzetti! ¡Abajo la Burguesía Americana!” *El Machete* (August 13, 1927): 1.

42 “Mexican Reds Protest on Sacco and Vanzetti,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1926, 25.

transformed into anti-imperialist outrage in 1927. This shift is even reflected in the reports of the *New York Times* correspondent in Mexico City. On July 5, 1927, the correspondent reported that 2,000 “red” protesters marched to the American consulate in Mexico City once again. This time, no anti-American shouts were reported, but the crowd did carry banners with slogans against “Yankee imperialism.” The “red protesters” were dispersed by motorcycle policemen, without any help of rain necessary.⁴³

With their foreseeable death, Sacco and Vanzetti became anti-imperialist martyrs in Mexico. When the two anarchists, despite several desperate last-minute attempts to save their lives, were finally executed in the early hours of August 23, 1927, they were not primarily remembered as anarchists or workers, but increasingly displayed as anti-imperialists. This shift in the local discourse about Sacco and Vanzetti can be traced to local developments in Mexico City in 1927, namely to another large solidarity campaign that became visible in the city: the campaign in support of liberal rebel general César Augusto Sandino in Nicaragua.

In Mexico City, activists were already familiar with the situation in Nicaragua, especially after the U.S. intervention in January 1927. The Cuban communist Julio Antonio Mella was engaged in promoting the cause of defending Nicaraguan sovereignty. At the end of 1926, he had already urged the “free press” of Latin America to publish more news from Nicaragua, adding that the advance of imperialism required the defense of the “border of Latin America which is in danger.”⁴⁴ To support Sandino, at least symbolically, Mella promoted the idea of boycotting U.S. products in January 1927. The *New York Times* reported that “[a]n association of Central Americans, headed by Juan [sic] Mella, a Cuban student, is planning a boycott against American goods and business houses in Mexico until American marines are withdrawn from Nicaragua.”⁴⁵ A few weeks later, a boycott order was placed in every post box in Mexico City. The leaflet, directly referring to Nicaragua, concluded that “every citizen, and especially every woman, of Latin America should conscientiously practice the boycott against everything North American.”⁴⁶ In the spring of 1927, the idea to boycott U.S. products to send a sign against the American intervention in Nicaragua was well known to the people of Mexico City.

The idea of the boycott was expanded to the cause of Sacco and Vanzetti in the following summer, in the context of the last desperate attempts to save

43 “2,000 Mexican Reds March on Consulate,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1927, 14.

44 Julio Antonio Mella, “Declaración de la Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas,” supplement to *El Libertador*, December 1926, quoted in Juliá, *Mella: Documentos y artículos*, 262–63.

45 “Plan Boycott against US,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1927, 10.

46 The boycott order was sent to the *New York Times* by a concerned American businessman in Mexico City and was, almost in its totality, published in the paper. “Boycott Call Sent to All Mexico City,” *New York Times*, March 24, 1927, 10.

the two anarchists' lives, or as a form of retaliation. When Sacco and Vanzetti were finally executed in August 1927, *El Machete* took up the anti-imperialist boycott idea and immediately declared "Boycott Yankee goods! Boycott the imperialist assassins!"⁴⁷ Apart from propagating the new strategy to portray the two anarchists as victims of U.S. imperialism, *El Machete* also championed the boycott as an explicitly anti-imperialist weapon. The boycott, started in March 1927 as a protest against the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, was now expanded and modified to also include the protests against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. In this way, the communists combined the global protests against the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti with the globally less-known issue of Nicaragua. The communists had experienced the success and emotionality of the large demonstrations in Mexico City in the summer of 1927 and immediately attempted to transform the popular appeal and dynamism of the campaign to another, closely connected topic.

The numerous demonstrations in Mexico City in the summer of 1927 showed an emotional desperation that had to do with the imminent execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, but also with the feeling of helplessness. Oftentimes, these emotions would erupt in outbreaks of violence, not just in Mexico, but globally. Protesters did not support Sacco and Vanzetti simply because they were workers, too, but because the men's unfair treatment reflected illegitimate practices that had not been agreed upon. The moral outrage ("war on the murderers!") about the execution of two probably innocent men was not specific to Mexico City, but the connection of moral outrage and anti-imperialism was specific to Mexico, or at least to Latin America and could be called a moral economy of anti-imperialism.

A poster, published by the LADLA on the occasion of American Independence Day 1927, shows two developments: the shift in argumentation towards depicting the Sacco and Vanzetti campaign as an anti-imperialist cause and, second, a reference to an older moral code that had been violated. The poster, distributed in Mexico City, read, in the American national colors red, white, and blue: "1776—Washington, Franklin, liberty, independence. 1927—Coolidge, Sinclair, Morgan, petroleum, Wall Street. Texas in 1847. Panama in 1903. Nicaragua, Santo Domingo. Sacco and Vanzetti. Imperialism. Kellogg, robbery."⁴⁸ By contrasting the United States in 1927 with its independence heroes of 1776, the LADLA used the classic anti-imperialist argument that the United States had betrayed its own history of anticolonialism. Sacco and Vanzetti were explicitly portrayed as part of the imperialist policy of the United States: as victims of imperialism, comparable to the fate of the people of Santo Domingo. The moral outrage about the killing of two men, a concrete case with real human tragedy, was thus combined with the topic of imperialism more

47 *El Machete* (August 27, 1927): 1.

48 I could not find the original poster, but it is described in a *New York Times* article. "Sees Liberty of '76 Gone," *New York Times*, July 4, 1927, 4.

broadly. Anti-imperialism was thus denounced not just as politically unjust, but as morally loathsome.

In the second half of 1927, and in 1928, the post-mortem re-interpretation of Sacco and Vanzetti as victims of imperialism continued, symbolically integrating the men into the Latin American anti-imperialist movement. In January 1928, an article published in *El Libertador*, demanded vengeance for the two executed men and connected their fate to the destiny of whole nations: “Yankee imperialism responded to the worldwide protest [in solidarity with Sacco and Vanzetti] with an insolent show of force, not only electrocuting those comrades, but killing the patriots of Nicaragua, cannoning densely populated cities in China, threatening Mexico and pressuring the nations of Europe.”⁴⁹ According to this line of reasoning, the death of Sacco and Vanzetti was directly connected to the struggles of global anti-imperialism in general, and the intervention in Nicaragua in particular. The Sacco and Vanzetti solidarity campaign was thus viewed as the dawn of a large Latin American anti-imperialist uprising. The article in *El Libertador* closed with a sermon-like description of the Sacco and Vanzetti legacy for the anti-imperialist movement:

In the name of Sacco and Vanzetti, the colonial and semi-colonial peoples have to unify in a real united front of all anti-imperialist forces to combat imperialism and its national allies. In the name of Sacco and Vanzetti, we must study the specific conditions of our different countries, train ourselves technically, prepare and strengthen our organizations to bring down Yankee imperialism. This is the only way to save the nations of Latin America.

In the summer of 1927, Sacco and Vanzetti became unexpected heroes of the anti-imperialist cause in Mexico and Latin America. In Mexico City, the preparations for the next large solidarity campaign were already under way. This time, the topic of anti-imperialism would take center stage right from the start.

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign in Mexico City

In the second half of the 1920s, Nicaragua was the foremost scene of U.S. meddling in Latin America and a showcase for anti-imperialist solidarity. The Central American country had experienced a long-standing civil war, known as the *guerra constitucionalista*, between Liberals and Conservatives. In May 1926, the United States intervened in the conflict, supporting the conservative side militarily, thereby, as many interpreted it, violating the country’s national sovereignty. From a foreign policy viewpoint, the U.S. intervention

49 “23 de Agosto de 1927. Vengamos y Honoremos a Sacco y Vanzetti Intensificando la Lucha Contra el Imperialismo Yanqui,” *El Libertador* 14 (January 1928): 10–11.

was aimed at limiting the influence of Mexico in Central America. The Calles government had supported the liberals with weapons and used an increasingly aggressive tone towards the United States since 1925. In 1927, the United States imposed a peace deal between the fighting parties that included the holding of elections supervised by the United States. The Liberal General Sandino, who had returned to Nicaragua from Mexico in 1926, opposed the peace deal and reproached the Liberals for striking a deal with their conservative rivals. Sandino organized an army of volunteers to fight the U.S. forces in the country. Sandino's fight against the marines fascinated and enraged Latin American anti-imperialists, who saw Nicaragua as the perfect example for the imperial ambitions of the United States.

The violation of Nicaraguan sovereignty became the most discussed topic among Latin American anti-imperialists, who quickly activated their continental and transcontinental networks of solidarity. In Mexico City, demonstrations and boycotts in solidarity with Nicaragua were organized by short-lived ad hoc committees like the Association of Central Americans or the Spanish American Committee since late 1926.⁵⁰ Inspiration for these early actions came from Latin American students in Paris. In the French capital, the AGELA, originally a student association of Latin Americans, had initiated a remarkable anti-imperialist movement.⁵¹ Together with the Parisian APRA cell, the AGELA students organized a Nicaragua solidarity rally on January 13, 1927, and a conference in which the Uruguayan law student and AGELA founder Carlos Quijano debated with the American journalist Paul Scott Mowrer about the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua.⁵² In February 1927, the student association joined the popular protests of French trade unionists in solidarity with Sacco and Vanzetti, while simultaneously continuing to speak up against U.S. imperialism. For the Latin American activists, Paris became a place to experience transnational activism and thus one important connection point linking Mexico City to the global anti-imperialist movement.

One key figure connecting the Latin Americans in Paris to the anti-imperialist scene in Mexico City was Julio Antonio Mella. After he had diffused the idea to boycott American products in Mexico in January 1927, Mella traveled to Europe and came into contact with Latin American

50 In January 1927, the *New York Times* reported that a "boycott on all merchandise and other products of the United States throughout Latin America is proposed by the Spanish-American Committee of Mexico City, as an expression of resentment against the policy of the Washington Government toward Nicaragua." "Says Arms Came from America," *New York Times*, January 13, 1927, 3.

51 Jens Streckert, *Die Hauptstadt Lateinamerikas: Eine Geschichte der Lateinamerikaner in Paris der Dritten Republik (1870–1949)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013), 211.

52 One year later, Quijano published the outcome of the conference: Carlos Quijano, *Nicaragua: Ensayo sobre el imperialismo de los Estados Unidos* (Paris: Agencia Mundial de Librerías, 1928).

students and their actions of solidarity. In February, the communist Mella, who at that time was officially expelled from the Communist party of Cuba, but re-admitted in May, participated in the Brussels Congress. After the congress ended, Mella traveled to Moscow with the Mexican labor leader Ismael Martínez, and then, in April, to Paris where he stayed at Carlos Quijano's place.⁵³ Mella, who was primarily interested in the situation in Cuba and the Havana student protests against Machado, witnessed the Nicaragua solidarity campaign in Paris. Apparently impressed by the methods and fervour of the campaign, Mella desired to make Cuba "another Nicaragua," as he wrote to the Argentinian Comintern functionary Victorio Codovilla in Moscow.⁵⁴ Back in Mexico, Mella became a leading voice of the campaign in solidarity with Sandino, bringing his Parisian experiences back over the Atlantic.

At the beginning of 1928, the communist parties of the United States and Mexico recognized the immense potential of a Sandino solidarity campaign. In Mexico City, several small circles of solidarity already existed at that time, for example the Comité Pro Sandino, a group of Nicaraguan exiles under the leadership of the Liberal politician Pedro L. Cepeda.⁵⁵ The PCM, encouraged by their U.S. sister party, founded their own committee, aptly named Comité Manos Fuera de Nicaragua (Hands Off Nicaragua; MAFUENIC in its Spanish acronym), in January 1928. It quickly became known all over the Americas. MAFUENIC was an alliance of several organizations and part of the united front strategy of the communists. The member organizations of MAFUENIC reflected a broad societal spectrum, with anti-clerical feminist Belén de Sárraga providing personal contact to Mexican President Calles.⁵⁶ Despite the nominally large number of member organizations, the LADLA took the lead in organizing the committee. Both through personal overlaps and through the role of its magazine *El Libertador*, from February 1928 onwards the "official organ" of the united front committee, the LADLA controlled much of the internal dynamics of MAFUENIC.

In Mexico City, MAFUENIC was intentionally designed to become the primary international voice of solidarity with Sandino. To acquire this resonance, anti-imperialist argumentation played a crucial role in the communists' campaign. In February 1928, MAFUENIC was publically

53 See Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 134.

54 Letter from Mella to Codovilla, April 27, 1927, in Christine Hatzky, *Julio Antonio Mella (1903–1929): Eine Biografie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2004), 221.

55 Daniel Kersfeld, "El Comité Manos Fuera de Nicaragua: primera experiencia del sandinismo," *Pacarina del Sur. Revista de Pensamiento Crítico Latinoamericano* 13 (October–December 2012). www.pacarinadelsur.com/nuestra-america/oleajes/537-el-comite-manos-fuera-de-nicaragua-primera-experiencia-del-sandinismo.

56 See Hatzky, *Mella*, 260.

presented for the first time at a “Great Rally against Yankee imperialism, for the liberation of Nicaragua and all of America, for the triumph of the miners of Colorado, for the liberty of Isidoro Azzario and against the Pan-American farce in Havana.”⁵⁷ As the name of the rally already makes clear, the Nicaragua solidarity campaign focused heavily on condemning “Yankee imperialism” while championing Latin American unity. The official aims of MAFUENIC were of humanitarian nature: to support Sandino by sending medical aids and to agitate against North American imperialism in Nicaragua and Latin America. Unofficially, MAFUENIC was also seen as a useful platform to transform the success of the anti-imperialist solidarity campaign into sustainable support for the Communist Party. By becoming the internationally most visible solidarity campaign for Sandino, MAFUENIC could be used to infuse a communist undertone into all utterances of solidarity, regardless of their origin or intent.

Donating money for Sandino became an act of Latin American solidarity and a way to perform anti-imperialism in Mexico City. Under the guidance of the Peruvian exile Jacobo Hurwitz, MAFUENIC raised funds for Sandino while simultaneously mobilizing public opinion all over Mexico in trade unions and student circles.⁵⁸ In Mexico City, the donations for the Nicaraguan Sandinistas were framed as proud sacrifices of Latin American solidarity: “It is necessary to show the capitalists of Wall Street that our donation is not some compassionate alms but a brotherly help and, if possible, a sacrifice for the sake of our freedom: Ten thousand pesos for the injured of Nicaragua! Hands off Nicaragua! Yankees out of Latin America!”⁵⁹ The money, officially used for humanitarian purposes only,⁶⁰ remained modest

57 Kerssfield, “Comité.” The mention of the miners of Colorado refers to the miners’ fight for justice after the Columbine Mine massacre of November 1927 in which six miners were killed by police who allegedly used machine guns. Isidoro Azzario was an exiled Italian anti-fascist who was arrested in Panama in 1927 and sentenced to 15 years in prison by an Italian court in 1928.

58 See Carr, “Pioneering,” 148.

59 “Diez Mil Pesos para Sandino,” *El Libertador*, June 18, 1928, 3.

60 Officially, all donations were used to acquire medical supplies for the wounded fighters and civilians in Nicaragua. The humanitarian aspect of the donations was important to MAFUENIC to avoid state repression, especially in Mexico and the United States. In reality, a distinction between “war purposes” and “medical supplies” was impossible to draw. Consequently, MAFUENIC handled all financial transactions with utmost secrecy. The FBI viewed the activities with suspicion and quotes Manuel Gómez, head of the U.S. campaign: “We have worked out a plan by which we can help him [Sandino] openly, from now on we will send him money under the term (guise) of medical supplies, bandages and clothing, no one can stop us from sending money and other things under such terms (methods) and no one will suspect that the money is really going for all kinds of war purposes” (emphasis in the original). “Communist Activities New York File #61-3105 of 23.02.1928,”

at best.⁶¹ But its value consisted primarily in establishing a narrative myth in which the rural mountains of Nicaragua and the urban anti-imperialist scene of Mexico City could be perceived as different battlegrounds of a shared fight. In *El Libertador*, the sending of a medical team to Nicaragua was idealized as “irrefutable proof of the Latin American sentiment and the general repudiation of Yankee imperialism.”⁶² The “Latin American sentiment,” as well as the feeling of what historian Michael J. Schroeder has called an “imagined intimacy” between city and countryside, were crucial for the solidarity campaign but necessitated permanent performative maintenance.⁶³

During the first months of 1928, the tone of MAFUENIC’s anti-imperialist campaign sharpened. *El Libertador* published an article attacking anti-imperialist “traitors” to the Nicaraguan cause. The article, after unsurprisingly denouncing the Nicaraguan liberals, also named other “traitors.” These included the Nicaraguan poet Salomón de la Selva, Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos, Argentinian anti-imperialist Alfredo Palacios, and Peruvian APRA-founder Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre—all four outspoken supporters of Sandino and his fight. Their treason, according to the sneering article, consisted in supporting the United States-supervised elections in Nicaragua.⁶⁴ Nicolás Terreros, the former aprista who had joined the Communist Party together with Hurwitz, wrote another sharp article denouncing the “utopy of Latino-Americanismo” and mocked its belief that the “spirit of the Latin race” could oppose the “economic penetration of imperialism”—an attack both against Vasconcelos and the Argentinians Palacios and Ugarte.⁶⁵ In the same article, Terreros also criticized the “Indo-American doctrine” that wanted “to combat imperialism by returning to primitive forms of social organization,” a critical remark directed at Haya de la Torre and his APRA. The communists of MAFUENIC obviously tried to harm their rivals inside of the anti-imperialist movement by discrediting their support for Sandino. This could be interpreted as a direct repercussion from Moscow—as an act of Bolshevization in Latin America, where the communist parties terminated their relations to non-communist sympathizers. Another interpretation,

Federal Bureau of Investigation: Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts. Subject: All American Anti Imperialist League.

61 Barry Carr quotes the U.S. Military Attaché in Mexico City, Major Fred T. Cruise, who estimated in July 1928 that the financial support Sandino received in total was “less than \$20,000.” See Carr, “Pioneering,” 148.

62 “Manos Fuera de Nicaragua!” *El Libertador* 15 (February 1928): 3.

63 The phrase “imagined intimacy,” as well as the photographs of the AIZ, are taken from Schroeder, “Sandino Rebellion: A Documentary History.”

64 “Una traición a Nicaragua,” *El Libertador* 14 (January 1928): 6.

65 Nicolás Terreros, “Utopías y Realismo en la Lucha Antimperialista,” *El Libertador* 15 (February 1928): 15.

more concerned with symbols and appearances, sees the attacks as part of a struggle for representation. Nicaragua had become the most important symbol of Latin America's anti-imperial fight and representing it was a precious resource that could be used on the global stage.

The strategy of the communists behind MAFUENIC was more complex and certainly less ideological than a narrow focus on the "Bolshevization" argument suggests. Simultaneous to denouncing the "nationalist" APRA and the Mexican "spiritualists," MAFUENIC integrated some of the cast-offs' key arguments into its own program. In 1928 and 1929, these changes caused a shift in argumentation: although the communists never ceased to mention imperialism's economic dimension, they increasingly focused on the cultural dimension of imperialism. Especially identity questions become a tool to link broader anti-imperialist arguments to their cause and to raise "Latin American sentiment." One keyword used by *El Libertador*, the official magazine of the campaign, to evoke such a sentiment was dignity. Sandino was portrayed as personification of a Latin American dignity under attack: "Sandino is the strong arm, the healthy and dignified conscience of Latin America challenging the threatening power."⁶⁶ Sandino, in this version, single-handedly gave Latin America hope because he defended the dignity of a nation, of a continent—"Sandino's fight is the defense of all of Latin America"⁶⁷—or of the Latin "race" in general: "Nicaragua defends the dignity of a race."⁶⁸ This portrayal of Sandino by MAFUENIC relates to, but is not equal to, Sandino's self-portrayal as masculine defender of a violated honour.⁶⁹ By focusing on the identity politics of imperialism rather than on its economic consequences, MAFUENIC appropriated much of the arguments of de la Torre, Mariátegui, or even Vasconcelos while at the same time attacking those same persons. For the solidarity campaign, the focus on a shared Latin American identity under attack by "Yankee" imperialism seemed way more auspicious than, for example, a discussion on the links between imperialism and capitalism—under different circumstances the key topic for communist anti-imperialists.

The focus on a shared Latin American identity in solidarity with Sandino was crucial in establishing the ties between Nicaragua and Mexico City. In the local sphere of Mexico City, the performance of solidarity became increasingly important as a symbol of Latin American anti-imperialism. At the peak of the solidarity campaign, a large gathering in Mexico City took place in the sold-out theater Virginia Fabregás on April 1, 1928. The

66 "¡Manos fuera de Nicaragua!" *El Libertador* 15 (February 1928): 4.

67 "4 de Mayo," *El Libertador* 17 (April 1928).

68 Rafael Contreras, "La Tragedia de Nicaragua," *El Libertador* 15 (February 1928): 10.

69 Schroeder has explored how cultural ideas of honor, masculinity, and *personalismo* of Segovianos clashed with the methods of modern warfare, especially the "impersonal" usage of airplanes by the U.S. marines, see Schroeder, "Social Memory," 518–20.

meeting in solidarity with Sandino in the prestigious cultural center was a milestone of the solidarity campaign in Mexico.⁷⁰ As a result of the meeting's dynamism, regional branches were founded in at least nine other Mexican cities and towns.⁷¹ MAFUENIC attempted to shape an image of continental unity, regularly publishing reports about the campaign's growing success and reputation across the Americas: "MAFUENIC is a combat name in America. MAFUENIC is a flag of honor and virility in this struggle of wicked interests that lead to treachery or passivity."⁷²

The organizational epicenter of the campaign in Mexico City was the headquarters of the LADLA at no. 55 Calle Bolívar in downtown Mexico City. Photographs taken by Tina Modotti show that the campaign poster featured a stylized Sandino looking down from the headquarters onto the busy street in downtown Mexico City.⁷³ Another photograph, taken inside the LADLA office, was published by the campaign to document its efforts and its professional treatment of the money it collected. The photograph shows the "official opening of the Sandino collection boxes" in the presence of a notary and illuminates several key features of the campaign. This picture illustrates the close organizational connection between MAFUENIC and the campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti: the official posters of both campaigns are hanging right next to each other on the back wall. More significantly, the people depicted show the diversity and continental ambitions of the campaign and its sympathizers. The Peruvian Jacobo Hurwitz sits at the far right side of the table, together with Swiss national Federico Bach (Fritz Sulzbachner), who wrote the articles for the German leftist paper *AIZ*. Joseph "Jolibois" Fils, delegate from the Haitian Union Patriotique, visited MAFUENIC's headquarters while touring through Latin America to raise support for Haiti's anti-occupation fight and is eternalized in the photo sitting next to the campaign's notary.⁷⁴ Its organizational structure, continental focus, and self-image made MAFUENIC a transnational campaign. The seriousness of the faces stresses the almost holy act of opening the collection boxes and corresponds with the rhetoric employed by MAFUENIC: pathos and seriousness were essential tools for agitating the campaign's sympathizers. This seriousness

70 "Grandioso Mitin del Frente Unico 'Manos fuera de Nicaragua,'" *El Machete* (April 4, 1928).

71 See Kerssfeld, "Comité."

72 Kerssfeld, "Comité," 8–9.

73 Fritz Bach, "Bei dem Rebellengeneral Sandino," *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, July 16, 1928.

74 For Jolibois Fils's anti-imperialist tour through Latin America and his transnational activism in general, see Alan McPherson, "Joseph Jolibois Fils and the Flaws of the Haitian Resistance to U.S. Occupation," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 16, no. 2 (2010): 120–47.

had to be performed on the streets, expressed in speeches and articles, and visualized in the photographs published by MAFUENIC.

In the autumn of 1928, Sandino staged a powerful public relations coup that sheds light on the symbolisms involved in the transnational solidarity campaign in his name. Sandino sent his comrades in Mexico City an American flag, which had allegedly been captured by his troops during the battle of El Zapote in May 1928.⁷⁵ Most likely, the flag was not captured during combat, but stolen from an American mine—but that was neither known nor did it diminish the flag's symbolic value.⁷⁶ The flag was brought to Mexico City by Gustavo Machado, a Venezuelan exile who had visited Sandino's camp in Las Segovias and written reports for *El Libertador*. On October 10, 1928, Machado presented the precious trophy to the committee in Mexico City and read aloud the accompanying note from Sandino, which stated that "the American people have permitted, by indifference, the bankers of Wall Street to stain the symbol of national honour, dirtying the stars and stripes with mud and blood in a savage war of aggression against a small nation."⁷⁷ By blaming Wall Street and by emphasizing the flag's role as a "symbol of national honour," Sandino tried not to antagonize the American general public. Sandino—and, even more so, his communist advisors—knew that the anti-imperialist and pacifist discourse within the United States could be used as a strong weapon against the intervention in Nicaragua. But despite these words, the "captured" flag carried anti-American implications that were deliberately exploited by MAFUENIC. Members of the committee posed proudly next to the flag, and a whole photo series was published to show off the war trophy. Consistent with MAFUENIC's self-image, these photos do not mock the flag, but instead rather reflect the anti-imperialist's seriousness and the historical weight of their mission. As an instrument of propaganda, the flag was useful in Mexico and even entered the international stage a year later at the Second International Congress against Colonialism and Imperialism, held in Frankfurt, Germany, in July 1929. Germán List Arzubide, an avant-garde artist and speaker for the Mexican delegation, displayed the U.S. flag, drawing an "emotional response" from the international audience.⁷⁸ The "captured" flag certainly was not subtle, but it worked perfectly as a symbol

75 "Entrega de la Bandera Norteamericana enviada por el General Sandino al C.C. 'Manos Fuera de Nicaragua,'" *El Libertador* 20 (November 1928): 1.

76 McPherson cites sources from an investigation by the U.S. Marines that state that no flag was stolen and that the stars on the "captured" flag were too small for the flag to be from the Marines anyway. McPherson suspects that the flag was stolen from a U.S.-owned mine. See McPherson, *The Invaded*, 221.

77 The whole letter was published in *El Libertador*: "Entrega de la Bandera Norteamericana enviada por el General Sandino al C.C. 'Manos Fuera de Nicaragua,'" *El Libertador* 20 (November 1928): 1.

78 Salisbury, *Anti-Imperialism*, 123.

for anti-imperialism, at least in front of an audience of anti-imperialists already skeptical of the imperial ambitions of the United States.

The relationship between MAFUENIC and Sandino was far from being one-sided. Sandino himself was aware of the impact and reputation that MAFUENIC had acquired in the Americas and used it to his favor, just as the LADLA or Haya de la Torre's APRA used Sandino's reputation for their own cause. On the occasion of the first anniversary of his fight, Sandino wrote a letter to Jacobo Hurwitz thanking him for the campaign's efforts. Sandino's signed note was then proudly published in *El Libertador* in June 1928.⁷⁹ The exchanges between Mexico City and Las Segovias were carried out by a small but highly active group of people who served as intermediaries between the two spaces; they also drew on a network that stretched from central Mexico through Guatemala and Honduras to Nicaragua. In Mexico City, the Peruvian Jacobo Hurwitz functioned as Sandino's "ambassador" to the campaign headquarters. Together with Esteban Pavletich and Nicolás Terreros, Hurwitz built a Mexican aprista cell of exiled Peruvians who planned to liberate their native country from the rule of Augusto B. Leguía. During his stay in the exile circles of Mexico City, Hurwitz's political convictions became closer to communism, and he broke with the APRA in 1927. Shortly after the rupture, Hurwitz was named Secretary General of the MAFUENIC campaign and was thus responsible for assuring that the campaign's medical and military supplies reached Sandino. In Tegucigalpa, the intellectual Froylán Turcios acted as the EDSN's international spokesperson and became "the linchpin of Sandino's information network"⁸⁰ through his magazine *Ariel*.

Besides the financial support and pro-Sandino propaganda, MAFUENIC's network of supporters along the route from Mexico to Nicaragua provided a gateway for sympathizers to travel to Nicaragua.⁸¹ Many of those travelers ended up fighting in Sandino's army, including people like Esteban Pavletich from Peru, Gustavo Machado, Carlos Aponte and Salvador de la Plaza from Venezuela, Agustín Farabundo Martí from El Salvador, and José Paredes from Mexico. The impact of the so-called "Latin American Legion" (which included men from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic) was rather limited, but it served its purpose of, once again, demonstrating Latin American solidarity.⁸² The American journalist Carleton Beals traveled to Nicaragua via the established route and was the only journalist from the United States to interview Sandino. Beals's series of articles on Sandino, published in *The Nation*, made him the leading

79 "Informe de MAFUENIC," *El Libertador* 18 (June 1928): 8–9.

80 McPherson, *The Invaded*, 218.

81 Carr, "Pioneering," 148.

82 See Carr, "Pioneering," 148; José Román, *Maldito país* (Managua: Editorial Amerrisque, 1983), 110.

voice of Sandino sympathizers within the United States.⁸³ Beals followed the anti-imperialist mainstream of the time and portrayed Sandino as heroic individual fighting the aggressive U.S. imperialist policies—a depiction that was highly controversial in the United States, but made Beals a hero for the cosmopolitan left in Mexico City.⁸⁴

The most impressive successes of the transnational campaign were without exception achieved in Latin America, where solidarity with Nicaragua was transformed into what historian Richard Salisbury has called “an anti-imperialist crusade.”⁸⁵ In many places, MAFUENIC could link its activities to local grassroots movements and founded national branches in Argentina, Cuba, Columbia, and El Salvador. In Latin America, the solidarity campaign was generally seen as a brave attempt to fight off the imperialist ambitions of the United States in Nicaragua. On a more abstract level, the campaign was interpreted as an alternative to the U.S. concept of Pan-Americanism as it had been presented at the Havana Conference in January 1928. The Latin American press mirrored the public outrage over the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua. The Buenos Aires newspaper *Crítica* even claimed that the “United States intervention in Nicaragua is far worse and more unjust than was Belgium’s invasion by Germany in 1914.” Directly relating the events in Nicaragua to the Havana Conference, Montevideo’s *Diario del Plata* wrote: “The failure of Havana to solve the Nicaraguan muddle is really the death-knell of the Pan-American ideal.”⁸⁶ Many Latin American intellectuals outspokenly supported Sandino and used their own transnational networks to create public support for Sandino.

In the United States, the national committee of MAFUENIC was able to create significant publicity for Sandino’s cause and gain the support of trade unions, leftist intellectuals, and representatives of the Chinese and Filipino communities. The most prominent members of the American branch were either Latin American exiles like Eduardo Machado and Sandino’s half-brother Sócrates, or well-known figures in the tradition of North American anti-imperialism like Scott Nearing, Roger Baldwin, and W.E.B. DuBois. As in Mexico, the committee published pamphlets, held anti-war rallies, raised money, and even leafleted Marine bases before the

83 *The Nation* printed Beals’s story about his journey to Nicaragua in nine editions in 1928. See, for example, Carleton Beals, “With Sandino in Nicaragua: Sandino—Bandit or Patriot?” *The Nation* 126, no. 3273, March 28, 1928.

84 See John A. Britton, *Carleton Beals: A Radical Journalist in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 60, 68, 146.

85 Salisbury, *Anti-Imperialism*, 99.

86 Both newspapers cited in John Edwin Fagg, *Pan-Americanism* (Malabar: Krieger Publishing, 1982), 162. For a good overview of *Crítica* and its position towards the U.S. intervention in Nicaragua, see Martín Bergel, *El Oriente desplazado: Los intelectuales y los orígenes del tercermundismo en la Argentina* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2015), 174–76.

Marines were shipped to Nicaragua.⁸⁷ The close ties between the North American MAFUENIC branch and its headquarters in Mexico City are exemplified by the person of Manuel Gómez, co-founder of the Mexican Communist Party and General Secretary of the U.S. campaign. Gómez, whose real name was Charles Francis Phillips, led the U.S. section of the LADLA and had encouraged the PCM to create MAFUENIC in January of 1928. Some of the dynamism of the campaign spilled over to Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, but its center remained New York City. Like Mexico City, the metropolis contained a large multinational audience with a radical political tradition, and in 1927 its Latin American population numbered about 40,000.⁸⁸

Outside of the Americas, the Nicaragua solidarity movement encountered greater obstacles. In Europe, solidarity with Sandino was mostly of a rhetorical nature.⁸⁹ The campaign was strongest in Paris, the traditional study abroad destination for Latin American students. Haya de la Torre's APRA, as well as the Latin American students of AGELA, organized demonstrations. Outside the realm of Latin American exile communities, the Nicaragua solidarity campaign struggled, ultimately failing to develop strong contacts with the local working-class movements in the big European cities. In Asia, solidarity with Sandino's struggle was mostly symbolic, too. Self-identified anti-imperialists like the Japanese communist veteran Sen Katayama and Indian nationalist Jawaharlal Nehru sent congratulations to Sandino.⁹⁰ In China, the Guomindang boasted a "Sandino brigade" among its ranks.⁹¹ In the end, MAFUENIC did neither gain mass support nor inspire large demonstrations in Europe or Asia. In the summer of 1927, the Sacco and Vanzetti solidarity campaign succeeded in mobilizing the European working class. When the communists took over the Nicaragua solidarity campaign in January 1928 in Mexico, they tried to build on these established networks of activists, but what had worked in Mexico, and to a certain degree in the Americas, could not be easily transformed into a global movement.

As the international solidarity campaign and Sandino's global popularity reached their peak in 1928, Sandino suffered setbacks. He parted ways with Froylán Turcios, whose magazine *Ariel* was shut down by the Honduran government and whom Sandino suspected of having pocketed funds.⁹² As

87 See Richard Grossman, "Solidarity with Sandino: The Anti-Intervention and Solidarity Movements in the United States, 1927-1933," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 72.

88 See McPherson, *The Invaded*, 221.

89 In the Latin American press, the speeches and writings of Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse were nevertheless cited as proof for European solidarity with Sandino.

90 See McPherson, *The Invaded*, 224.

91 Julie A. Charlip, "Central America in Upheaval," in *A Companion to Latin American History*, ed. Thomas H. Holloway (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing 2008), 409.

92 McPherson, *The Invaded*, 225.

Sandino's transnational network of sympathizers began to slowly crumble, his army suffered serious defeats. His problems forced Sandino to take a major risk and seek asylum in Mexico to obtain funds from the Mexican government. The trip, started off in the summer of 1929, ended disastrously. The Mexican government under President Portes Gil conferred with U.S. officials and offered Sandino asylum in the remote state of Yucatán, keeping him away from the radical political scene of Mexico City, and refused to fund Sandino's fight. Perhaps even worse than the refusal was the deterioration of Sandino's relations to the communist organizations that had supported him from Mexico—the PCM, the LADLA, and MAFUENIC. The communists viewed Sandino's petition for support from the increasingly anti-communist Gil-government as an act of betrayal. Gerardo Machado apparently led a smear campaign denouncing Sandino of having accepted money from Washington.⁹³ Sandino, who had become increasingly skeptical of the Mexican communists, forced his liaison to the Comintern, Farabundo Martí, to choose between him and the communists. Martí chose the latter and stayed in Mexico rather than traveling to Las Segovias with Sandino.⁹⁴ Disappointed by his failed mission to acquire help in Mexico, Sandino headed back to Las Segovias in April 1930.⁹⁵

What followed was an intricate back and forth between the Comintern and Sandino. In April 1930, Willi Münzenberg and Virendranath "Chatto" Chattopadhyaya, members of the International Secretariat of the League Against Imperialism, published a declaration defending Sandino against the accusations of having sold his cause to the imperialists. The statement made it clear that "the slanders" against Sandino were unsubstantiated and that Sandino would continue his fight against U.S. imperialism as well as against "all the Latin American governments that are just so many more instruments of imperialism, including among them the Mexican government, which has turned into a government that is frankly counter-revolutionary."⁹⁶ But the reconciliation was only temporary. In February 1931, Sandino's former ally Farabundo Martí declared that Sandino had "betrayed the world

93 Accepting money from Washington was obviously the worst sin an anti-imperialist could commit. The communists claimed to have a copy of the \$60,000 check but never produced it. See McPherson, *The Invaded*, 227.

94 Farabundo Martí went on to start his own guerrilla struggle in his native El Salvador, where he was killed in 1932.

95 On Sandino's exile in Mexico, see Román, *Maldito país*, 110–13 and Carlos Villanueva Castillo, ed., *Sandino en Yucatán 1929–1930* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1988).

96 Willy Münzenberg and Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, "Les Calomies contre le général Sandino," *La Correspondance Internationale* 35, April 23, 1930, 426. Translation from Rodolfo Cerdas-Cruz, *The Communist International in Central America, 1920–36* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), 74.

anti-imperialist movement to become a petit-bourgeois liberal caudillo.”⁹⁷ With this label, Martí set the tone for more communist voices denouncing Sandino as traitor. J. Gómez from the PCM, for example, published an article in *La Correspondance Internationale* titled “Sandino’s Betrayal” in which he argued that Sandino “has not called for a struggle against feudalists, for an agrarian and anti-imperialist revolution, but only for a struggle for the withdrawal of the American Marines from Nicaragua.”⁹⁸ The communists portrayed Sandino as a nationalist fighting for independence rather than social revolution and withdrew all of their support.

This change of loyalties took place against the larger background of the Comintern’s re-adjustment of its global policy towards anticolonial forces. In late 1928 and 1929, the Comintern lurched to the far left and insisted that the world economy had entered the so-called “Third Period” of economic collapse and working-class radicalization. In the colonial and semi-colonial contexts, the new strategy impeded cross-class alliances with any bourgeois or nationalist anticolonial forces. Regardless of national or local specificities, the Comintern’s focus lay on whether the leader of a national liberation movement declared himself as communist and saw his movement as a proletarian one. Sandino, unwilling to do so, was thus denounced and all solidarity from the communist movement ceased. The Second Congress of the League Against Imperialism in June 1929 made no mention of Sandino or Nicaragua at all.⁹⁹ The communists had misinterpreted Sandino’s fight for independence and national reconciliation as a fight for social revolution, and Sandino had taken advantage of this misjudgment as long as the communists were useful for his goals. On the other hand, the communists literally disregarded any local specificities with their one-size-fits-all approach. What had begun as a local solidarity campaign had become a continental success story, and ultimately was abruptly ended by an intervention caused by global shifts of loyalty.

For the communists, the highly personalized character of MAFUENIC’s solidarity campaign became a liability. MAFUENIC and many of Sandino’s Latin American supporters had used the solidarity campaign to portray Sandino as an anti-imperialist who opposed U.S. imperialism for the sake of a greater good. After his break with the Comintern, Sandino’s position towards the status of global imperialism became clearer: he cared a lot about Nicaragua and rather little about the world. His anti-imperialism was “ruggedly expressed”¹⁰⁰ and included the crudest references to

97 For Martí’s statement, which he gave in a report to the International Red Aid on February 22, 1931, see Cerdas-Cruz, *The Communist International*, 75.

98 J. Gómez, “La Trahison de Sandino,” *La Correspondance Internationale* 23–24, March 25, 1933, 347–48. Translation from Cerdas-Cruz, *The Communist International*, 74.

99 “Résolution sur l’Amérique Latine,” ARCH00804/85, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

100 Carr, “Pioneering,” 148.

phenotypes (“the blonde beasts”) as well as an increasing hatred towards even the most sympathetic U.S. Americans.¹⁰¹ Sandino understood imperialism as a fundamentally external phenomenon in which Nicaraguans were exclusively victims of the “Yankee pirates” and completely disregarded the organic relationship of Nicaraguan elites to imperialism.¹⁰² Thus, Sandino’s personal anti-imperialism was, as stated by Rodolfo Cerdas-Cruz, “limited to opposing the undisguised military manifestations of intervention.”¹⁰³ After his Mexican exile, Sandino, perhaps not the perfect poster boy for a global anti-imperialist campaign to begin with, focused on his fight in Nicaragua and stopped believing that symbolic solidarity from outside could contribute substantially to his fight, which he continued against U.S. marines until their withdrawal in January 1933. Sandino remained in opposition to the Nicaraguan National Guard because of its relation to the U.S. military. The head of the National Guard and future dictator Anastasio Somoza García ordered Sandino’s assassination, and Guardsmen killed Sandino, his father, and his brother on February 21, 1934.

Transnational solidarity campaigns were of great importance to the anti-imperialist scene of Mexico City. The global campaign for the release of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti culminated in a radicalization in the summer of 1927. Sacco and Vanzetti became anti-imperialists during this summer, a change not explicable without the simultaneously ongoing Sandino solidarity campaign. The dynamism and moral outrage of the communist campaign could, to some extent, be transferred to the following MAFUENIC campaign, “the first, modern, networked, antiimperialist campaign in Latin

101 At a dinner party in Mexico City in 1929, organized by Isidro Fabela, leader of the pro-Nicaragua protests in Paris, Sandino caused a scene when he yelled “Yo no creo en la admiración de usted porque es gringo y todos los gringos son enemigos de la libertad” to a U.S. citizen who had expressed his admiration for Sandino’s cause. Sandino explained to the *New York World* why he disregarded any anti-imperialist activities in the U.S., revealing a limited understanding of the criticized society: “The North American people is as imperialist as its leaders. If in the United States there exists anti-imperialist organizations, it is not because their members are North Americans but because they are in majority Russians, Lithuanians, Germans, Spaniards, Italians, Latin Americans, from all over the world. Few are the exceptions to this general rule.” Augusto César Sandino, “Declaraciones del general Augusto César Sandino para el *New York World*,” January 29, 1930, in Villanueva Castillo, *Sandino en Yucatán*, 206–8. Translation from McPherson, *The Invaded*, 87.

102 Sandino regularly spoke and wrote of the “piratas norteamericanas,” for example in his letters to the presidents of the United States and Mexico. See Augusto César Sandino, “Carta abierta al Presidente Edgard [sic] Hoover de Estados Unidos,” March 6, 1929; Augusto César Sandino, “Al Presidente de Mexico, Emilio Portes Gil, December 4, 1929,” both letters in Sergio Ramírez, ed., *El pensamiento vivo de Sandino* (San José: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1979), 164–68, 187–90.

103 Cerdas-Cruz, *The Communist International*, 39, 45.

America.”¹⁰⁴ MAFUENIC clearly showed that a transnational solidarity campaign could be successful without the central involvement of actors of the “Global North.” To the contrary, the focus on intra-Latin American solidarity was crucial to the campaign’s success. Analytically, the case of MAFUENIC thus shows that transnational solidarity cannot be described as a unidirectional process (e.g., from the Global North to the Global South), but rather as a complex process of mutual construction.¹⁰⁵ South–South solidarity became imaginable and realizable with the Nicaragua solidarity campaign.

Transnational solidarity campaigns in the interwar period were a crucial tool through which the concept of internationalism became tangible and could be learned, articulated, and performed locally. The 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of networked campaigns on a global level that possessed the potential to mobilize huge amounts of people in the name of solidarity. In the Americas, the campaign for the “Scottsboro Boys” in the 1930s built on the experiences of earlier campaigns, especially the campaign in condemnation of Sacco and Vanzetti’s conviction. The solidarity campaign for the Scottsboro Boys, nine young African Americans from Alabama sentenced to death because of “trumped-up rape charges,” mobilized thousands of protesters to condemn American racial injustice.¹⁰⁶ The case gained broad attention among anti-imperialists worldwide, some of whom connected the Scottsboro case to the fight of Sandino, like U.S. American writer Langston Hughes did in his poem *Scottsboro*.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in 1935, the Hands Off Ethiopia campaign became a global movement, with urban hubs in Harlem, Paris, Chicago, and London.¹⁰⁸ The campaign also built on earlier transnational movements such as the Sacco and Vanzetti campaign. To some degree, the solidarity with Ethiopia campaign marked a watershed, as it was mainly framed in terms of

104 Carr, “Pioneering,” 141.

105 Hatzky and Stites Mor, “Latin American Transnational Solidarities,” 131.

106 Frances Peace Sullivan, “For the Liberty of the Nine Boys in Scottsboro and against Yankee Imperialist Domination in Latin America: Cuba’s Scottsboro Defense Campaign,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 38, no. 2 (2013): 282.

107

Gandhi
Sandino
Evangelista, too
To walk with you—
8 BLACK BOYS IN A Southern JAIL.
WORLD, TURN PALE!

Langston Hughes, “Scottsboro,” in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 1, *The Poems: 1921–1940*, ed. Arnold Rampersad (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 207–8.

108 Joseph Fronczak, “Local People’s Global Politics: A Transnational History of the Hands Off Ethiopia Movement of 1935,” *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 2 (2015): 245–74.

anti-fascism. Still, an anti-imperialist argumentation persisted; indeed, Italy's colonial ambitions in Africa were those of an empire, and fascism and imperialism merged in the cases of Italy and Germany.¹⁰⁹ Transnational solidarity campaigns showed that global anti-fascism and anti-imperialism increasingly overlapped (but not without new tensions) in the 1930s.¹¹⁰

109 Fronczak illustrates the simultaneity of arguments (anti-war, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist) when describing a joyful parade in Harlem in August 1935: "People held signs inscribed, 'Hands Off Ethiopia,' 'Schools—Not Battleships,' and 'DOWN WITH FASCIST OPPRESSION IN ITALY AND GERMANY.' Two children, one black and one white, had their picture taken with the sign, 'ABBASSO LA GUERRA IMPERIALISTA.'" Fronczak, "Local People's Global Politics," 258.

110 See Tom Buchanan, "'The Dark Millions in the Colonies are Unavenged': Anti-Fascism and Anti-Imperialism in the 1930s," *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 4 (2016): 645–65; Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey, and David Featherstone, eds., *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism* (London: Routledge, 2020).

CHAPTER FOUR

Anti-Imperialist Imaginaries

Mexican Origins of Tricontinentalism

China, India, Morocco, Syria, Russia!
And America?

Julio Antonio Mella (1926)¹

By 1920, after the First World War had shuttered European supremacy over global politics, the global system of colonialism seemed badly shaken. The Russian Revolution had created a new regime that presented itself as an anticolonialist force in the world, while U.S. president Wilson promised national self-determination and emphasized his country's history of anticolonialism. The abolition of colonialism, it might have seemed at the beginning of the 1920s, would be the defining development of the still young century. Latin American anti-imperialists, who since the mid-nineteenth century had insisted that their continent suffered from imperialist oppression, thus faced an intricate situation after the First World War: They saw the power of global anticolonialism, but they also had to acknowledge that Latin American countries, mostly independent nation states by the 1920s, had unique aims and unique histories that did not automatically include them into the anticolonialist project. This tension could not only be addressed, but to a certain extent bridged by anti-imperialism. In Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Argentina was included as an example of a "semicolony."² With the category of semi-colonialism, anti-imperialists in Mexico City gained a powerful tool to integrate their fight into the global anticolonialist struggles of the 1920s.

This chapter examines how anti-imperialists in Mexico City reported about, imagined, and experienced the ongoing fights against colonialism in Africa and Asia and thereby traces the origins of tricontinental imaginations in the anti-imperialist networks of the 1920s. The idea of cooperation and

1 Julio Antonio Mella, "El Kuo Min Tang y la Revolución China," *El Libertador* 8 (April 1926): 11.

2 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961 [1916]), 144-45.

solidarity among Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans became popular in the 1920s, particularly among those activists and intellectuals who imagined anti-imperialism and decolonization as a common global project. Anti-imperialists in Mexico City admired anticolonial fighters like Mahatma Gandhi or Abd-el Krim because their struggles in India or Morocco were interpreted as a part of the fight for the abolition of colonialism *and* imperialism. In the 1920s, anti-imperialist imaginations thus functioned as powerful resource of tricontinental thinking.

The concept of tricontinentalism, although it is not a term of the 1920s, can better explain anti-imperialist thinking than similar concepts such as “Third World” or “Global South,” as it more clearly addresses its radical and communist genealogy.³ The idea of tricontinental solidarity was popularized by the “Tricontinental Conference” in 1966 and is thus normally associated with the Cuban Revolution and the Cold War.⁴ Tricontinentalism is usually defined as a broad movement that united anticolonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist thought across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.⁵ Tricontinentalism’s history, its discourses and practices thus predated the Cold War and the Cuban Revolution. The involvement of Latin Americans, too, dates back at least to the interwar years.⁶ And while the term “tricontinentalist” did not exist prior to the Cold War, its core idea of criticizing imperialism through a focus on racial inequality and a shared colonial past already existed in the 1920s.

The historiography on the origins of cooperation between Africa, Asia, and Latin America has increasingly emancipated itself from the history of the Cold War. While the term “Third World” only emerged in the 1950s, an older tradition of cooperation between Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans that went back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries existed.⁷

3 Historian Robert J.C. Young has argued for the usage of “tricontinental”: “It avoids the problems of the ‘Third World’, the bland homogenization of ‘the South’, and the negative definition of the ‘non-west’ which also implies a complete dichotomy between the west and the rest which two or more centuries of imperialism have hardly allowed.” See Robert C.J. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 5.

4 See John A. Gronbeck-Tedesco, “The Left in Transition: The Cuban Revolution in US Third World Politics,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40 (2008): 651–73; Sarah Seidman, “Tricontinental Routes of Solidarity: Stokely Carmichael in Cuba,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2012): 1–25.

5 Besenia Rodriguez, “Beyond Nation: The Formation of a Tricontinental Discourse,” Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2006; Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 2, 3.

6 See Thea Pitman and Andy Stafford, “Introduction: Transatlanticism and Tricontinentalism,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 7, no. 3 (2009): 197–98.

7 For the concept of the Third World, see Christoph Kalter, *The Discovery of the Third World: Decolonization and the Rise of the New Left in France, c.1950–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

till, overviews of the history of decolonization rarely address these important predecessors.⁸ Studies on Pan-Asian, Pan-Islamic, and Pan-African movements, on the other hand, are good examples of the ways in which historians are increasingly studying interconnections beyond continental boundaries.⁹ Scholars have emphasized how the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/5 and the First World War contributed to the delegitimization of European colonial rule and have described them as important milestones in the development of an emerging postcolonial identity.¹⁰ Most of these perspectives emphasize the role of transcontinental entanglements, many explicitly identifying the interwar period as a phase of increasing interaction between Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans. Increasingly, the Brussels Congress and the history of the League Against Imperialism are addressed as precursors to tricontinental exchange in the 1920s, while other phenomena, such as migration into the colonial metropolises, are increasingly examined as part of the “seeds of third world nationalism,” as historian Michael Goebel formulates it.¹¹ This chapter seeks to add to the existing scholarship by highlighting the contribution of anti-imperialists in Mexico to the development of tricontinentalism.

Perspectives from Latin America on tricontinental thinking have mainly focused on events after the First Tricontinental Conference of 1966.¹²

- 8 While many overview histories of decolonization tend to leave out the 1920s entirely, Jansen and Osterhammel argue that any history of decolonization must begin with the First World War; see Jan C. Jansen and Jürgen Osterhammel, *Dekolonisation: Das Ende der Imperien* (Munich: Beck, 2013), 29–32.
- 9 See P. Olanwuwe Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism: The Idea and Movement, 1776–1991* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1994); Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
- 10 Cemil Aydin, “A Global Anti-Western Moment? The Russo-Japanese War, Decolonization, and Asian Modernity,” in *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s*, eds. Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For the relevance of the First World War for anticolonial movements, see Michael Adas, “Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology,” *Journal of World History* 15, no. 1 (2004); Fabian Krautwald, Thomas Lindner, and Sakiko Nakao, “Fighting Marginality: The Global Moment of 1917–1919 and the Re-Imagination of Belonging,” *L'Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques* 18 (2018).
- 11 Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5; Michele L. Louro, Caroline Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter, and Sana Tannoury-Karam, eds., *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020).
- 12 See Ulises Estrada and Luis Suárez, eds., *Rebelión tricontinental: Las voces de los condenados de la tierra de África, Asia y América Latina* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007); Eduardo Devés-Valdés, *Pensamiento Periférico: Asia, África, América Latina, Eurasia y más* (Santiago de Chile: Ariadna Ediciones, 2017). For a perspective

However, a growing body of scholarship traces the emergence of tricontinental thinking back to the First World War and the interwar period. Historian Martín Bergel uses the concept—as *tercermundismo* or *prototertercermundismo*—to examine how ideas about the “orient” became positively connoted after the First World War.¹³ Bergel draws on Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism to analyze how the image of the Orient in Argentina was transformed from a negative to a positive “other” at the beginning of the twentieth century. Bergel calls the creation of this (often imaginary) community between Latin Americans, Africans, and Asians an “inverted orientalism.” This positive orientalism, born out of anti-imperialist and spiritualist ideas, was not, as Bergel emphasizes, confined to Argentina, but constituted a movement with expansive global networks.¹⁴ Besenia Rodríguez traces tricontinentalist thinking back to the first half of the twentieth century and identifies Afro-American thought as “staunchly anti-essentialist” notions of race within anti-imperialist ideology.¹⁵ Generally, the Said-inspired perspective on Latin America has become quite popular in recent years, although many studies focus on cultural developments only and rarely include the 1920s specifically.¹⁶

This chapter traces the origins of tricontinental imaginations in Mexico City. It examines how thinking about the Mexican Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and anticolonial revolution shaped the origins of tricontinental imaginations. During the 1920s, revolutions were a central concept of imagining social change for many kinds of political movements around the world. This was evident in Mexico, where the Mexican Revolution shaped anti-imperialism, but also Mexican nationalism and the country’s foreign relations to both the United States and the Soviet Union. The Mexican Revolution served as a lens through which the anticolonial struggles in Africa and Asia were viewed and evaluated. The lasting impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917 on tricontinental thinking can hardly be disputed, either. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union actively promoted the idea of a global alliance against imperialism and colonialism. In Latin America, the Comintern

from cultural and literary studies on the relation between Latin America and India, see Susanne Klengel and Alexandra Ortiz Wallner, eds., *Sur/South: Poetics and Politics of Thinking Latin America–India* (Madrid: Vervuert, 2016).

13 Martín Bergel, *El Oriente desplazado: Los intelectuales y los orígenes del tercermundismo en la Argentina* (Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes Editorial, 2015). Oscar Terán calls Ingenieros’s enthusiasm for Abd el-Krim “protoertercermundista”; see Oscar Terán, *José Ingenieros: Pensar la Nación* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 1986), 102.

14 See Bergel, *El Oriente desplazado*, 15.

15 See Rodríguez, “Beyond Nation,” vii.

16 For a good overview of studies of orientalism in Latin America, see Silvia Nagy-Zekmi, ed., *Moros en la costa: Orientalismo en Latinoamérica* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2008), esp. 11–21, and Erik Camayd-Freixas, ed., *Orientalism and Identity in Latin America: Fashioning Self and Other from the (Post)Colonial Margin* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013).

searched for ways to connect its aims to continental traditions as well and used anti-imperialism to encourage tricontinental imaginations. Taken together, the Mexican and the Russian Revolutions provided an ideological basis and a global perspective on imperialism that allowed many political activists in Latin America to connect their struggles to maintain national sovereignty to the fights to achieve national sovereignty in the colonial world. Furthermore, tricontinentalism was imagined through referencing the anticolonial revolution. The idea that anti-imperialism in the Western hemisphere could draw inspiration from anticolonialism in the East, from Africa and Asia, gained momentum in the 1920s, especially after a global moment of anti-imperialist uprisings in 1925. Anti-imperialist actors in Mexico City were notably more interested in China, Morocco, and India—the three examples taken up in this chapter—than is usually acknowledged in historiography. After the end of the First World War, the search for alternatives to the recently disgraced Western modernity flourished and tricontinental imaginations were one way to engage with alternatives to the Western model of development.¹⁷

Anti-Imperialist Encounters: Revolutions in Mexico and Russia

Tricontinental thinking in Latin America in the 1920s cannot be explained without the revolutions in Mexico and Russia. The notion that the Mexican Revolution was basically a local affair and that the Russian Revolution had little impact in Latin America obscures the crucial role that an internationalist communism played in promoting the idea of cooperation and solidarity among Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans. The anti-colonialist trajectory of the Russian and the practical example of the Mexican Revolution deeply influenced internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. The same is true for the histories of decolonization and the “Third World.” Explaining decolonization without reference to either of those two revolutions remains bound to a national narrative, ignores the structures of connectivity and knowledge transfers of the early twentieth century, or disregards Latin American agency. The 1920s and the interwar period were thus not just the “pre”-history of decolonization, but rather an essential part of its genesis as a global movement.

The revolution ended the long-standing dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, a time characterized by a relentless modernization without democratization.¹⁸ The regime that emerged from the Mexican Revolution proved more durable than its nineteenth-century predecessors, arguably in parts due to its nationalist and anti-imperialist elements. Those who profited from the revolution, mainly the middle classes, retrospectively interpreted it as an

17 See Nicola Miller, *Reinventing Modernity in Latin America: Intellectuals Imagine the Future, 1900–1930* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 16–18.

18 See Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Sarah Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake: The Making of a Political System, 1920–1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

anti-imperialist uprising. When Mexican President Calles came into conflict with the United States during the 1920s, he invoked the legacy of the revolution and its commitment to Mexican self-determination.¹⁹ Different Mexican governments, under Carranza, Obregón, and Calles, actively disseminated an anti-imperialist version of the revolution in Latin America in order to shape public opinion in favor of their governments. This propagation of a positive image of the Mexican Revolution was a strategy to secure revolutionary achievements against the reach of the United States by creating a transnational public sphere of pro-revolutionary voices in Latin America.²⁰

The role of anti-imperialism during the Mexican Revolution, however, is disputed. One of the most influential interpreters of the revolution, social historian Alan Knight, is skeptical of the idea that the revolution had a basis in anti-imperialist thinking: "The revolution was not, least of all in terms of its basic origins and popular manifestations, a nationalist, or anti-American, or anti-imperialist revolution."²¹ For Knight, the Mexican peasantry mainly fought the capitalist concentration of land in a few hands by appealing to older models of production.²² Concerning the role of Pancho Villa, Knight admits that "a somewhat contrived anti-imperialism" played a role if one sees anti-imperialism less as an ideological constant than a political expedient.²³ Other scholars see anti-imperialism as an integral part of the Mexican Revolution, together with nationalism and anti-Americanism.²⁴ For historian John Mason Hart, American control over the Mexican economy, and especially American investments, touched off "the first great Third World uprising against American economic, cultural, and political expansion."²⁵ Hart has emphasized the importance of external factors on the outcome of the revolution, especially the role of the United States, but also of global events: the Iranian Revolution of 1905, the 1911 Chinese Revolution, and the Russian Revolution of 1905.²⁶

19 Plutarco Elias Calles, "The Policies of Mexico Today," *Foreign Affairs* 5, no. 1 (October 1926): 3.

20 See Pablo Yankelevich, *La revolución mexicana en América Latina: Intereses políticos e itinerarios intelectuales* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora, 2003), 123.

21 Alan Knight, "The United States and the Mexican Peasantry, circa 1880–1940," in *Rural Revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics*, ed. Daniel Nugent (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 27.

22 See Knight, *The Mexican Revolution*, 1.148.

23 Alan Knight, "The Ideology of the Mexican Revolution," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 8, no. 1 (1997).

24 See John Mason Hart, "Social Unrest, Nationalism, and American Capital in the Mexican Countryside, 1876–1920," 72–88 and Rubén Osorio, "Villismo: Nationalism and Popular Mobilization in Northern Mexico," 89–106, both in Nugent, *Rural Revolt in Mexico*.

25 See John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 362.

26 See Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*, 187–234.

The Mexican Revolution could easily be linked to other utopian projects and critiques of Eurocentrism. The Argentine University Reform Movement combined the idea of continental unity with the belief in the revolutionary force of the Latin American youth—topics that the Mexican revolutionaries used for their own purposes to create a “laboratory of ideas” in the 1910s and 1920s.²⁷ The First World War further enhanced the voices of the younger generation that was critical of Europe’s role in the world. The perception of Europe as a hypocritical continent preaching civilization while practicing barbarism confirmed the suspicions of many anti-imperialists, who, in the tradition of Martí and Rodó, had long preached that Latin America needed to emancipate itself from its European tutors and embrace Latin American values. During the war, Europe became a symbol of regression and destruction.²⁸ As early as 1916, the Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio had attacked the cultural supremacy of Europe in his seminal work *Forjando patria* in which he laid out an all-encompassing critique of the idea of European cultural supremacy, writing that Europe imposed its culture “by force of canons, bottles of whiskey and suspicious smugglers in Africa and Asia.”²⁹ With this critique of European colonialism, Gamio connected his idea of a reevaluation of indigenous civilizations to anticolonial movements, just as anti-imperialist intellectuals like José Carlos Mariátegui and Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre did in the 1920s.

In the 1920s, the Bolshevik Revolution influenced Latin American perspectives on internationalism. The Revolution of 1917 was a global event that both fascinated and frightened millions, as people projected their own hopes, fears, and misunderstandings onto it. Whether in condemnation or praise, Bolshevism had been established by 1920 as a watchword in Mexican culture and politics.³⁰ Mexican views remained ambivalent throughout the 1920s: while some thought that their shared anti-imperialism had the potential to make allies out of Russia and Mexico, the Mexican governments always feared social revolution. Presidents Carranza and Obregón both constantly flirted with the Soviet Union, mainly to counteract the ambitions of the United States.³¹ Especially Obregón talked about radicalizing the revolution, kept sympathizers of communism as allies, and established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1924. On the other hand, he attacked his socialist critics and his administration expelled radicals as “foreign agitators.”³² While

27 See Yankelevich, *Revolución mexicana*, 123.

28 See Stefan Rinke, *Im Sog der Katastrophe: Lateinamerika und der Erste Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2015), 238, 258.

29 See Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1960 [1916]), 190.

30 See Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia, and the United States in the 1920s* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 54.

31 See Hermila Galindo, *La doctrina Carranza y el acercamiento indo-latino* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 1919), 53, 69.

32 For a more detailed account of Carranza’s and Obregón’s policies towards the Soviet Union and communists in Mexico, see Spenser, *Impossible Triangle*, 58–64.

anti-imperialism could bring Mexico and the Soviet Union together, the latter state's communism posed serious hurdles for close relations.

While the heads of the Mexican government remained ambivalent towards the Russian Revolution, many mid-level government officials developed contacts with the Soviet Union in the 1920s. These radical intellectuals had become powerful during the Mexican Revolution as trade unionists, peasant organizers, journalists, and academics. The middle-class reformers had roughly been between 20 and 30 years of age when the revolution started and they reached government posts during the 1920s. One radical intellectual who sought to improve ties between Mexico and the Soviet Union, but also between Mexico and Africa and Asia, was Ramón P. de Negri, a ubiquitous figure in Mexican politics of the postrevolutionary decade. De Negri worked for the Mexican foreign service and held numerous posts in different administrations in the 1920s.³³ De Negri did not conceal his admiration for the Russian Revolution as he took advantage of his government posts to recruit radical anti-imperialists. As founder of the Escuela Nacional de Agricultura de Chapingo, for example, de Negri recruited another radical intellectual, Silva Herzog, as well as the Indian anticolonialist Pandurang Khankhoje. In 1927, de Negri became too radical for President Calles who sought to reconcile relations with the United States and thus sent de Negri to Europe where de Negri, as Mexican plenipotentiary minister in Europe, used his networks to secretly co-organize the Brussels Congress of 1927. With their sympathies for the Soviet Union, radical intellectuals like de Negri created early tricontinental networks in Mexico.

Other radical intellectuals like the economist Jesús Silva Herzog or the director of the ENP, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, attempted to integrate ideas of the Bolshevik Revolution into Mexican politics, thereby seeking to radicalize the revolution, too. Both Toledano and Silva Herzog were well-connected intermediaries between radical socialist groups and the Mexican government.³⁴ In some ways, José Vasconcelos can also be subsumed under the category of the radical intellectuals, although his view of the Soviet Union was more inconclusive. Known as an anti-communist intellectual, Vasconcelos still appreciated the mass education programs of Anatoly Lunacharsky and the historical role of Lenin, whom he admired as an intellectual but criticized for having created a "dictatorship of espionage and brutality."³⁵ As historian Daniela Spenser has emphasized, the radical

33 See Spenser, *Impossible Triangle*, 56.

34 In 1929, Silva Herzog became the Mexican ambassador in Moscow. Lombardo Toledano's role was even more crucial as he developed the vision that the Mexican Revolution (as a progressive nationalist and anti-imperialist project) could serve as a model for the rest of the Americas. See Barry Carr, "Lombardo Toledano, Vicente," in Werner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mexico*, 754–56.

35 See Claude Fell, *José Vasconcelos: Los años del Águila (1920–1925)* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1989), 23. On the similarities between Vasconcelos and Lunacharsky, see

intellectuals' attempts to import certain socialist ideas happened without a thorough understanding of Soviet developments—the Russian Revolution served as an inspiration rather than as a political blueprint for Mexico. Rather than opposing Western-style development and capitalism altogether, the anti-imperialist elite of Mexico tried to implement certain aspects of the Russian Revolution into their own revolutionary project. They creatively combined ideas of the Russian and the Mexican Revolutions and underlined the shared anti-imperialist orientation of both revolutions.

A small but vibrant multinational communist community also spread the seeds of tricontinental thinking in Mexico City, buoyed by their general excitement about the Russian Revolution. In the late 1910s, Mexico City hosted radicals, disillusioned liberals, and socialists from the United States, Europe, and Asia who sought contact with the local radical activists. Once again, anti-imperialism proved to be a resource that could put American slackers, Mexican radicals, and Comintern agents into contact. A key figure for the early anti-imperialist networks in Mexico City was the Indian anticolonialist Manabendra Nath Roy. Born in West Bengal in 1887, Roy had partaken in the so-called “Hindu–German conspiracy.” With the declaration of war against Germany in April 1917, Roy and other Indians of the conspiracy were put on trial in the United States, but Roy fled to neighboring Mexico. As the likelihood that a German–Indian alliance would ever come to fruition seemed less and less, Roy, together with the North American radicals, Mexican unionists, and anarchists, co-founded the PCM in Mexico City in November 1919. With the support of Mikhail Borodin, a Comintern agent born as Gruzenberg in Belarus in 1887, Roy was elected as the party's first secretary general.³⁶ Roy's ideological shift (much later, he wrote in his memoirs that “Mexico was the land of my rebirth”³⁷) was influenced by the Russian Revolution, the end of the war, and the creation of the Comintern. As Michael Goebel has put it, “it was now Moscow's instead of Berlin's geopolitical considerations”³⁸ that mattered to Roy, not least because that was where the money came from. Together with Manuel

Mary Kay Vaughan, *The State, Education, and Social Class in Mexico, 1880–1928* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982), 249–53.

36 During his short stay in Mexico City, Borodin founded the Buró Latinoamericano in Mexico City in 1919. The bureau was the first transnational organization in solidarity with the Soviet Union in the Americas and, arguably, a prototype of later organizations like the LADLA. See Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo, *Historia del comunismo en México* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1985), 31. On Borodin, see Daniel Kersfeld, *Rusos y rojos: Judios comunistas en los tiempos de la Comintern* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual 2012), 73–74.

37 Manabendra Nath Roy, *Memoirs* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1964), 217.

38 Michael Goebel, “Geopolitics, Transnational Solidarity or Diaspora Nationalism? The Global Career of M.N. Roy, 1915–1930,” *European Review of History* 21, no. 4 (2014): 488.

Gómez and Mikhail Borodin, the PCM dispatched Roy to the Comintern's Second World Congress in Moscow and Petrograd in 1920 to be part of the Mexican delegation composed of three non-Mexicans. In Moscow, Roy presented his "supplementary theses on the national and colonial question," which gained him a worldwide recognition as a brilliant theorist of colonialism.³⁹ Roy, who after the Congress never returned to Mexico, later worked for the Comintern in China and India, was expelled from the party in 1929, and became a self-declared "radical humanist."⁴⁰

The Second World Congress of the Comintern in 1920 was an early opportunity to frame and test tricontinental thinking as American and Latin American anti-imperialists had to develop arguments that resonated with Africans and Asians. At the congress, Mexico was portrayed as a semi-colonial victim of U.S. imperialism, although the PCM delegates later primarily remembered their short meetings with Lenin.⁴¹ In September 1920, the Congress of the Peoples of the East took place in Baku, an event considered to be a de facto continuation of the Comintern Congress. The speech of American communist John Reed revealed some of the key problems facing tricontinental solidarity, paramount of which was the formal independence of the republics in the Americas. Reed addressed the issue by discussing the examples of the Philippines, Cuba, Haiti, and Santo Domingo, because these peoples "know what it means to live under the rule of 'free America.'" He interpreted the Mexican Revolution as an anti-imperialist uprising after which the people in Mexico "wanted to keep the wealth of Mexico for the Mexicans and tax the foreign capitalists."⁴² The two congresses of 1920 decisively influenced the approach that the Comintern would take towards Mexico over the coming decade. The Comintern line dictated that Mexico be portrayed as a semi-colonial country to facilitate anti-imperialist alliances with Asian and African communists. With that directive, anti-imperialism moved to the center of communist activities in Mexico.

To establish the new strategy of cooperation with trade unions and non-communists, the Comintern sent the Italian-American Louis C. Fraina

39 See Goebel "Geopolitics"; Daniel Kersffeld, *Contra el imperio: Historia de la Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2012), 23.

40 Roy later remembered about his time in Mexico City: "I never made many friends. Mexican exuberance, heavily tinged with conventionality, though not always hypocritical, was incompatible with my temperament." Roy, *Memoirs*, 217.

41 Roy wrote that Lenin ordered him to concentrate on the revolutionary struggle in "the Old World" because "it would be long before revolution could succeed in the New World." Phillips remembered, also decades later, that Lenin's knowledge of Mexico was "frankly fragmentary." See Roy, *Memoirs*, 346 and Charles Shipman, *It Had to be Revolution: Memoirs of an American Radical* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 118.

42 John Reed's speech in Congress of the Peoples of the East. Baku, September 1920. Stenographic Report, ed. Brian Pearce (London: New Park, 1920), 86.

and the Japanese communist veteran Sen Katayama to Mexico City. Phillips, who was the only one of the trio who spoke Spanish, was supposed to help as an assistant. Fraina had apparently impressed the Comintern officials at the World Congress, but rumors that he was a spy of the U.S. Justice Department made his more active involvement in the United States impossible, so the Comintern sent him to Mexico. Sen Katayama, born as Yabuki Sugatorō in 1859, had lived in the United States as a Christian socialist for many years before co-founding the Communist Party of the United States in 1919. Until 1921, the Fraina–Katayama–Phillips trio helped to build communist structures in Mexico and integrate the country into the global networks of communism, thus in many ways laying a solid basis for tricontinental cooperation. Both Katayama and Phillips would attend the Brussels Congress of 1927 to cement the tricontinental connections.

After the early communist circles of Borodin-Roy, Fraina-Katayama-Phillips, and the American slackers, the Soviet Embassy became the hub for communists in Mexico City. After president Obregón officially recognized the Soviet Union in 1924, the Soviets opened an embassy, which enabled them proactively to shape the image of the Soviet Union in Mexico. The first Soviet ambassador in Mexico was a veteran of the Revolution, the Polish-born Stanislav Pestkovsky. The sociable Pestkovsky organized parties at the embassy that became the talk of the town; at one party, the radical intellectuals de Negri and Silva Herzog became friends with Pestkovsky.⁴³ For the communist networks in Mexico City, the embassy was established as the organizational center, where contacts were made and money was distributed.⁴⁴ U.S. communist Bertram Wolfe acted as Pestkovsky's translator while Ella Wolfe officially worked in the Soviet embassy—in her own words, “a nest for their agents.”⁴⁵ Bertram and Ella Wolfe acted as intermediaries between the communists in the embassy and the cultural scene in Mexico City and thus became an integral part of the Cosmopolitan Mexican Summer.⁴⁶

After a conflict over Pestkovsky's support for communist railway workers in their fight against the state-supported union CROM, the Soviet ambassador was recalled to Moscow in October 1926, leaving Mexico with a “most affectionate farewell” from *El Machete*.⁴⁷ His successor was an even more renowned character of the Bolshevik Revolution, the feminist Alexandra

43 See Spenser, *Impossible Triangle*, 100.

44 The Soviet embassy channeled financial aid to the PCM, its newspaper *El Machete*, as well as to the LADLA and its organ *El Libertador*.

45 Ella Wolfe, “Transcript of Oral History Interview,” Bertram D. Wolfe Papers, Box 159/10, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

46 U.S. journalist Carleton Beals wrote to Ella Wolfe that people drank at the embassy until eight o'clock in the morning at one party. See Letter from Carleton Beals to Ella Wolfe, ca. 1925, Wolfe Papers, Box 159/16, HIA.

47 “El compañero Pestkovsky regrasa a la U.R.S.S.,” *El Machete* (September 30, 1926): 1.

Kollontai, whose stay in Mexico lasted until June 1927. The communists of *El Machete* could hardly believe that one of the leading female revolutionaries was sent to Mexico and praised Kollontai as the moral conscience of the revolution, as “la Kant del proletariado.”⁴⁸ On the other hand, U.S. media and the conservative press in Mexico started a hostile campaign against Kollontai, often including slander and undisguised sexism in their reports.⁴⁹ The state of international relations between the United States and Mexico was extremely fragile in 1926/27, and as Soviet ambassador Kollontai had to walk on eggshells. American Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg, supported by the nervous reports of U.S. ambassador Sheffield, depicted Mexico as supporting Bolshevism and spreading communism to American soil. Kollontai, annoyed by the rumors, noted in her diary: “There is no single fact, not one serious evidence. But slander works. The circles of the Mexican bourgeoisie already second it. All of this is very sad.”⁵⁰ Kollontai continued organizing social events in the embassy by showing Soviet movies and putting on Russian folk music concerts, enlarging the communist networks to integrate feminists like the singer Concha Michel.⁵¹ After Kollontai was forced to leave her position because of altitude sickness, the Soviet ambassador post in Mexico City remained vacant. Soviet–Mexican relations were severely damaged in 1930 and were only re-established during the war in 1942.⁵²

The role of communist networks in Mexico exemplifies the complex relationship between communism and tricontinental thinking. Communism was often the ideological driving force of solidarity with anticolonial movements in Africa and Asia. Like in Europe, the challenge for the Comintern in Mexico was getting the local and national communist sections to grasp the issue of including anticolonialism and placing a focus on African and Asian liberation movements. The Communist Party and the Soviet embassy, however, had their hands full with dealing with the Mexican as well as the U.S. governments and with establishing their own networks. In 1924 and 1925, the Comintern thus began directly supporting tricontinental thinking, through the creation of anti-imperialist organizations like the LADLA. The Cominternist LADLA and its magazine *El Libertador* openly connected

48 “Breves datos biográficos sobre la compañera Kolontay,” *El Machete* (September 30, 1926): 4.

49 Even the serious *New York Times* mentioned Kollontai’s “extremely radical views regarding matrimony” and the fact that she was married several times. See “Soviet Names Woman Minister to Mexico,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1926, 3.

50 Alexandra Mijáilovna Kollontai, *Diplomaticheskíe dnevniki, 1922–1940*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Academia, 2001), quoted in Rina Ortiz Peralta, “La embajadora roja: Alexandra Kollontai y México,” *Relaciones. Estudios de Historia y Sociedad* 149 (2017): 24.

51 See Spenser, *Impossible Triangle*, 111.

52 “Mexico Breaks off with Soviet Russia,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1930, 1, 20.

Latin American anti-imperialism with anticolonialism and reported about the Chinese Civil War or the status of Abd-el Krim's liberation movement in Morocco. The Russian Revolution and global communism thus had a significant role in cultivating tricontinental ideas in Mexico.

“Yellow Hope”: Perspectives on Semi-Colonial China

In the 1920s, China became a symbol of and a test for tricontinental internationalism. For many anti-imperialists, China took on a significance that approached the ways communists stylized the Soviet Russia as a worldly paradise. Anti-imperialists in Latin America attempted to give an already existing fascination for China a political meaning by focusing on its semi-colonial status that it shared with most Latin American countries. In this sense, the political interest in China was not just an Orientalist enthrallment with a foreign culture. Very concretely, solidarity with China meant taking an anti-imperialist stand against the political involvement of European powers in Asia.

Tricontinental thinking and the praise of Chinese anti-imperialism existed side by side with xenophobia against Chinese immigrants, for example in Mexico where Chinese migrants had been arriving since the 1880s. Anti-Chinese riots, like the massacre of Torreón in 1911 when 303 Chinese migrants were murdered by revolutionary soldiers, were often triggered by local *ligas antichinas* and by the nationalist press.⁵³ Anti-Chinese racism and an admiration for the Chinese nationalist liberation coexisted. Anti-imperialists had a positive opinion of China, identifying it with the struggle for national liberation and the Guomindang. As a new type of anti-imperialist mass party, the Guomindang was regarded as an intriguing project for “semi-colonial” Latin America. The Guomindang became a symbol for bringing together nationalist and communist anti-imperialism in a united front.

News and opinions about the situation in China arrived in the cities of Latin America through the international news agencies or through the transnational press network of the anti-imperialists and communists. *El Machete*, the communist newspaper, for example, regularly published the latest news about the Chinese Civil War based on news bulletins from Moscow. The reports about the Civil War in China, mainly in the period of the Comintern-supported united front strategy between the May Thirtieth Movement of 1925 and the beginning of 1928, show how China became an important metaphor for anti-imperialists. The paper of the LADLA, *El Libertador*, kept its readership well informed during the ongoing civil war. After police forces in Shanghai's international quarter fired on protesting students on May 30, 1925, *El Libertador* dedicated its title page

53 See Robert Chao Romero, *The Chinese in Mexico, 1882–1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010), 145–90.

to the events to showcase solidarity with the Chinese anti-imperialists. The article contextualized the situation in Shanghai as part of a global wave of national liberation movements and blamed the foreign powers for exploiting China for its natural wealth: the Japanese, Americans, British, French, and Germans had staged “a diabolic plundering of the defenseless country, internally rotten by the cancer of imperialism.”⁵⁴ In the reporting about the incidents in Shanghai, the Mexican anti-imperialist paper interpreted the incidents and the ensuing media campaign to portray the Chinese protesters as uncivilized barbarians as part of the decline of the “civilizing mission” of European and American powers: “The ‘civilizing’ work was completed; first slavery in the workshop, then, death as wild beasts.” For the authors of *El Libertador*, anticolonialism and anti-racism were essential prerequisites for tricontinental thinking.

The reports about the May Thirtieth Movement showed that the events in China carried a global significance and epitomized a new dimension of anti-imperialism. The commentators in Mexico specifically compared the situation in 1925 to the events in China in 1900, when an international alliance of imperialist countries had crushed the Boxer Rebellion. Specific reasons why an international alliance of imperialist forces could not, like in 1900, crush the local anti-imperialist uprising were published: “From 1900 to 1925, twenty years have gone by. The world war [...] has awakened millions of people, has given them back the consciousness of their power and their needs, and they have found a guide and a flag in the Russian example.”⁵⁵ In other words, the First World War and the Russian Revolution stood in the way of history repeating itself: semi-colonial China was no longer alone in opposing the imperialist ambitions of foreign powers and Europe had lost all moral or material supremacy over the affairs of Asian countries. While 1900 was imagined as a year of global cooperation between empires, 1925 was depicted as a year of cooperation between those fighting against empire—a year of anti-imperialist solidarity.

Over the next years, China remained a topic of heated debate among anti-imperialists in Mexico City, who began to describe imperialism in terms of culture and civilization. When reporting about atrocities committed by Western forces in China, cultural essentialism snuck into the writings of anti-imperialists: detailed descriptions of brutal killings, mass executions, and torture were contrasted with the Western idea of the civilizing mission.⁵⁶ For anti-imperialists, the example of China perfectly exemplified the West’s hypocrisy, decadence, and racism. In April 1926, the communist Julio Antonio Mella wrote about what he called the “civilizing diplomacy of Western canons” and extensively used the (very un-materialistic) notion of

54 “El Imperialismo en China,” *El Libertador* 4 (July 1925): 1.

55 “El Imperialismo en China,” *El Libertador* 4 (July 1925): 1.

56 See, for example, a translated article from the *Daily Worker*: Larry, “La Masacre Imperialista en China,” *El Libertador* 7 (February 1926): 14.

civilization when writing about the Chinese: “This great people of ancient, superior intellectual and moral civilization was a slave, a colony of the brutal capitalist civilization of the West.” For Mella, it was clear that, after the “Oriental Revolutionary Movement” had succeeded, “the new civilization will come from the Orient.”⁵⁷ Like other anti-imperialists, Mella regarded the united front approach of the Guomindang as future for anti-imperialism: unity between nationalists and socialists, nationalization of the economy, land distribution, and a geopolitical alliance with the Soviet Union. Haya de la Torre, Peruvian exile in Mexico City, famously called his movement APRA “the Guomindang of Latin America,”⁵⁸ as he saw the Guomindang as a model of development “without European tutelage.”⁵⁹ Between the May Thirtieth Movement of 1925 and the outbreak of the Chinese Civil War in 1927, many Latin American anti-imperialists depicted imperialism in China as a cultural phenomenon, as a clash of civilizations rather than as a purely economic phenomenon.⁶⁰

In Mexico City, the anti-imperialist revolts in China were framed in positive, but mostly Orientalist terms. Often, the incidents were described metaphorically as the awakening of a sleeping giant.⁶¹ Describing China as a sleeping giant referred both to the country’s civilization, viewed as having been suppressed since the arrival of the Western empires, and to the sheer population numbers of China. Almost no article in Mexico failed to mention the quantitative massiveness of the Chinese uprising: “200,000 labor union members,” “half a million Guomindang members” and “400 millions of Chinese workers”—impressive numbers for the Latin American anti-imperialists.⁶² For the Latin American commentators, these numbers symbolized the lasting impact that any political change in China would have on the system of global imperialism. This line of argumentation followed the strategy of the Comintern in the mid-1920s to portray the Chinese anti-imperialist struggle as a global priority.

57 Mella, “El Kuo Min Tang y la Revolución China,” 11.

58 In February 1927, Haya wrote that he aspired to build “a revolutionary organization rooted in the conscience of the masses as the Chinese Kuo-Min Tang.” See letter from Haya de la Torre to “comrades in Havana,” in Haya de la Torre, *Obras completas*, vol. 1 (Lima: J. Mejía Baca, 1977), 136–41, and Haya de la Torre, “De Haya Delatorre a José María Zeledón,” *Repertorio Americano* 4, January 28, 1928, 63–64.

59 Haya de la Torre, *Obras completas*, 1.63. On Haya and the Guomindang, see Pedro Planas Silva, *Mito y realidad: Haya de la Torre (origenes del APRA)* (Lima: Centro de Documentación e Información Andina, 1985), 57.

60 In one instance, *El Libertador* wrote about the imperialist forces in China acting in “the interests of civilization and Christianity,” thus adding a religious element to the civilization discourse. This line of argument, however, remained the exception to the rule. “El Balance Anti-Imperialista de 1925,” *El Libertador* 7 (February 1926): 2.

61 For this exact image, see *El Machete* 62 (first fortnight of April 1927): 1.

62 “Los obreros de China contra el Imperialismo,” *El Libertador* 3 (June 1925): 2 and Mella, “El Kuo Min Tang y la Revolución China,” 11.

But the voices from Latin America were not just reproductions of thoughts originating in Moscow. Quickly, anti-imperialists drew analogies between China and “semi-colonial” Latin America. In April 1926, Mella, criticized the Western hypocrisy and racism to draw analogies between China and Latin America. According to Mella, it was only the successful independence that put an end to the disparaging talk of “bandits,” “thieves,” and “savages.” While unsuccessful anticolonialists remained outlaws, successful ones became respected leaders of post-colonial nation states, Mella implied. For Mella, the current problem in China was one that still plagued Latin America: the complicity of national elites with imperialism. In Mella’s words, “the best instruments of foreign domination were the rulers. There the celestial Emperors, here the worldly tyrants.”⁶³ But Mella did not settle for analogies between China and Latin America. In the spring of 1926, the Cuban communist named the Chinese, the Moroccan, the Syrian, and the Mexican anti-imperialist movements as parts of the global anti-imperialist movement: “For all colonial and semi-colonial peoples, the Chinese Revolution is an example and a hope.” Echoing the Comintern’s global strategy, Mella used his own impatient staccato style: “China, India, Morocco, Syria, Russia! And America?”⁶⁴ The last question mark was a message to Mella’s anti-imperialist comrades in Latin America: Lamenting about U.S. interventionism in Latin America was not enough—anti-imperialist action needed to be part of a global movement or it would be doomed to failure. Mella showed a remarkable degree of global consciousness, making it clear that China represented a model case for Latin American anti-imperialism.

In 1927, the alliance between nationalists and communists in China broke apart—an event with massive consequences for anti-imperialists around the world. After nationalist and communist troops had jointly conquered Shanghai in April 1927, the nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek betrayed the communists, killing tens of thousands in what came to be known as the Shanghai Massacre. The betrayal meant the end of the united front in China and constituted a devastating blow to the idea of united front movements in general. For communists worldwide, China after the spring of 1927 acquired a whole new significance. Now, referring to the Guomindang meant warning of the dangers of nationalism. Once again, the LADLA paper *El Libertador* was most interested in applying lessons from China. The Peruvian exile Jacobo Hurwitz, at that time still a member of Haya’s APRA, analyzed the changed geo-political situation in June 1927 by portraying Chiang Kai-shek as a sellout and beneficiary of the imperialist “politics of the dollar.” Hurwitz insisted that the events in China should be viewed as a helpful lesson for anti-imperialists and opined that China remained “the Yellow Hope” for the global anti-imperialist movement. And yet, the real lesson was simple, a warning against those revolutionaries too comfortably viewing nationalists as

63 Mella, “El Kuo Min Tang y la Revolución China,” 11.

64 Mella, “El Kuo Min Tang y la Revolución China,” 11.

anti-imperialist allies: “Beware of the right!”⁶⁵ After the Shanghai Massacre, many communists rethought their alliances with nationalist anti-imperialists, even before the Comintern officially revised its united front policy and entered its so-called “Third Period” in 1928.

In the Third Period, the example of China became less interesting for anti-imperialists in Mexico and Latin America, although the Comintern and the communist press continued to report about China. What had made the example of China so captivating for Mexican anti-imperialists was not just the shared status of semi-coloniality, but also the united national movement against imperialism that had developed in the country. Many anti-imperialists in Mexico City were interested in the Guomindang and what its example meant for their own context. While the events of 1927 were a setback and a reason for disappointment, China did not disappear from the papers altogether. Viewed together with the reception of the anticolonial movements in Morocco and India, it becomes clear that the interest in China was part of a larger development, the emergence of a political tricontinental thinking in the 1920s.

“Applause for Abd el-Krim”: The Rif War in Mexico and Latin America

Starting in 1925, the anticolonial Rif War became a topic of interest for anti-imperialists in Latin America and an instance in which international solidarity was imagined and performed. Spanish and French troops fought against the local Riffian forces under rebel leader Abd el-Krim al-Khattabi in the mountains of northeastern Morocco. Abd el-Krim had proclaimed an independent Rif Republic, in part as reaction to the Paris Peace Conference, which cemented Spanish and French protectorates in Morocco. The Rif War, lasting from 1921 to 1926, had a unique significance for Latin American anti-imperialists that distinguished it from other anticolonial fights. First of all, the Riffian rebels were fighting the Spanish, the former colonial power of most of the Latin American countries. The Rif War thus occasioned anti-imperialist actors in Latin America to rethink the role of Spain for post-colonial Latin America in the 1920s. Second, the rebel leader Abd el-Krim himself became a symbol of the global fight against imperialism, not unlike the Nicaraguan Sandino at the same time. Abd el-Krim was aware of his symbolic role and actively promoted the Moroccan anticolonial fight in Latin America. Third, the Rif War sparked a discussion among Latin American anti-imperialists to engage in a discourse about race and the role of indigeneity in anticolonial fights. The Rif War, like the civil war in China, was an event that inspired tricontinental thinking and solidarity in Latin America.

The newly founded LADLA in Mexico City and the Latin American Union in Buenos Aires, two anti-imperialist organizations with continental

65 Jacobo Hurwitz, “La esperanza amarilla,” *El Libertador* 12 (June 1927): 27, 29.

networks, experienced the peak of a global anti-imperialist euphoria in 1925. The magazines *El Libertador* in Mexico City (published by the LADLA), *Renovación* in Buenos Aires (ULA), *Repertorio Americano* in San Juan, and *Revista de Oriente* in Buenos Aires (by the Association of Friends of Russia) began a publication campaign against the colonial powers in the Rif. Numerous renowned intellectuals embraced the anticolonial fight of the liberation of the Rif and used the newly established transnational press networks to voice their positions.

In the summer of 1925, Abd el-Krim became the face of global anticolonialism.⁶⁶ Abd el-Krim himself saw the globalization of his fight—making it part of a larger narrative of anti-imperialist dynamism—as a huge opportunity to direct global attention towards the Rif. Latin America was a particularly fertile ground for his anti-imperialist campaign, as Abd el-Krim spoke fluent Spanish and knew enough of Latin American history to appeal to the anti-imperialist traditions of the continent. In December 1924, Abd-el Krim responded to an invitation of the *Unión Latinoamericana* to attend the centenary celebrations of the Peruvian independence that he had received together with Indian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.⁶⁷ In his letter, Abd el-Krim presented himself as the perfect anti-imperialist ally for the Latin Americans, extensively referencing heroes of Latin American independence: “the heroic Moroccan people fight for the same ideals that impelled Miranda and Moreno, Bolívar and San Martín. ... Like you a century ago ... we are now willing to sacrifice life and property to become free peoples.” Abd el-Krim framed his fight as a national liberation struggle directed against European imperialism rather than as a guerrilla war against the Spanish. The “provisional regent of the Rif Republic” asserted that Europe had been corrupted by the war and had lost the right to impose its will on other continents. But, Abd el-Krim continued, his fight was not motivated by hatred against Spain, “the cradle of our grandfathers.” The rebel leader envisioned a future in which “we too, after our own Ayacucho [...] will be recognized by Spain in our right to independence and we will reconcile with her as a well-loved older sister.”⁶⁸ Cautious not to appear anti-Spanish, Abd el-Krim thus created a shared history of Spanish-speaking America and Morocco based on the experience of Spanish colonialism and European—not Spanish—arrogance.

Enthusiastic responses to Abd el-Krim’s call for solidarity came from all over the Americas. In Lima, Marxist intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui praised Abd el-Krim as an heir to Bolívar and San Martín and as a role model for the young Hispanic American generation: “Western civilization feels

66 In August 1925, Abd el-Krim’s face covered the title page of *Time* magazine.

67 Abd el-Krim’s letter was first published in the ULA’s paper *Renovación* in December 1924. In the summer of 1925, as the campaign against the Spanish accelerated, it was reprinted, for example in the Costa Rican journal *Repertorio Americano*.

68 All quotes are from “Mensaje de Abd-El-Krim a los pueblos de la América Latina,” *Repertorio Americano* 10, no. 16, June 29, 1925, 3,4.

threatened by Abd el-Krim.”⁶⁹ But the center of the publication campaign remained Mexico City. In May of 1925, *La Antorcha*, a magazine published by José Vasconcelos in Mexico City, portrayed Abd el-Krim as a brave anticolonial hero who deserved every bit of solidarity: “Republican America would betray its very reason of existence, if it were to hypocritically turn a blind eye towards the fight that the admirable Riffians maintain against the decadent imperialisms of the Mediterranean, unfortunately represented by Latin people.”⁷⁰ In this reasoning, history obliged Latin Americans to support anticolonialism, at least morally, even when that meant opposing the Spanish and their culture.

Apart from spiritual support and historical analogies, Latin American anti-imperialists soon wrote about more material interconnections between their continent and the fight at the Rif. Rafael Carrillo, Secretary General of the Mexican Communist Party, wrote a furious article about the recruiting methods of the Spanish Foreign Legion in Latin America, claiming that Spanish consuls had already convinced thousands of young men to join the Spanish Army by “encouraging the romantic eagerness of the American youth.” But while the young men were indoctrinated to believe they were fighting for “the civilization,” for “the liberty and honor of the white race,” and “other nonsense from the imperialist handbook,” they were actually partaking in a war of domination and plundering.⁷¹ For the anti-imperialists, the recruitments not only put young men in danger; perhaps even worse, they made them complicit in the process of maintaining European dominance in Africa.

Peruvian anti-imperialist Haya de la Torre was as vocal in denouncing Spanish actions in Africa as he had been in praising the Guomindang. Still regarded as an anti-imperialist ally by the communists in 1925, Haya insisted that Spanish intellectuals had lost all moral integrity for not calling out the “crimes of Morocco.”⁷² Haya, like Mariátegui, saw the rebels in Morocco (“los moros”) as an indigenous race who shared with Latin Americans a history of Spanish conquest.⁷³ For Haya, Spanish militarism was “trying to criminally conquer another race, as indigenous and as heroic as our races.” By engaging with Morocco, Haya sharpened and propagated his own vision

69 See José Carlos Mariátegui, *Figuras y aspectos de la vida mundial: 1923–1925* (Lima: Amauta, 1970), 234–38.

70 “Un aplauso a Abd el-Krim,” *La Antorcha* 33, May 16, 1925.

71 Rafael Carrillo, “La próxima ofensiva en Marruecos,” *El Libertador* 8 (April 1926): 3.

72 Haya de la Torre, “Hispano-Americanismos Literarios,” *El Libertador* 4 (July 1925): 16.

73 Haya’s perspective on Morocco ironically mirrored the perspectives of the Spanish conquistadors vis-à-vis the indigenous population in the Americas. In their ignorance, the Spanish conquerors described the unknown peoples in categories they knew from the wars against the “infidel moors.” See Serge Gruzinski, *What Time Is It There? America and Islam at the Dawn of Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 132–44.

of Indoamerica—a future for the continent with a basis in pre-colonial thought. But Haya also connected U.S. imperialism and European colonialism. Concerning the alleged presence of American air force pilots among volunteers of the Spanish forces in Morocco, Haya presented his own theory: “The Yankee pilots want to learn how to eradicate indigenous peoples in a mountainous, passionately defended region. Killing indigenous populations in the plains is of no interest to the Yankees; Mexico as well as all desirable countries in the Americas are mountainous.” For Haya, Morocco was a symbol, it was “nothing less than the repetition of our past and the announcement of our future.”⁷⁴ Haya de la Torre echoed Abd el-Krim’s vague idea of a shared racial origin of Arabs and Latin Americans and thus used Morocco as a symbol for his own anti-imperialist vision.

In Latin America, Abd el-Krim was often portrayed as the stereotype of a wise Arab scholar bringing civilization to his people. Many press reports stressed the personal integrity and “civilized” manner of the Rif rebel. The Buenos Aires-based *Revista de Oriente* described Abd el-Krim as an “intelligent and cultured Moroccan [...] who understood that to overcome the oppressors of his people, something more than bravery and heroism was necessary, that a constant and conscious work of study was indispensable.” *Revista de Oriente* called Abd el-Krim a “man of iron will” and a wise scholar who had learned to understand imperialism; the Argentine journal also cheered that he would bring the achievements of “civilization” to his people.⁷⁵ By actively countering the pejorative reports of the large press agencies, anti-imperialists who admired the fight of Abd el-Krim cautiously portrayed him as a custodian, and not a destroyer, of civilization, and they took care to qualify that his idea of civilization differed from that of Europe that had led to a world war.

The anti-imperialist campaign in favor of Moroccan independence was part of a much broader moment of anti-imperialist agitation in Latin America, mainly carried out by transnational anti-imperialist press networks. The campaign churned out the by then conventional wisdom that Europe was a continent in decline, a conclusion epitomized by the crumbling Spanish Empire. The pro-Morocco campaign invoked a remarkable level of solidarity among Latin American anti-imperialists, whose embrace of Abd el-Krim’s cause helped them unambiguously clarify where they stood, namely on the side of the victims and enemies of colonialism and imperialism. The anticolonial fight in Morocco enabled anti-imperialists in Latin America to reflect upon their own role in the global movement against imperialism and their continent’s role as forerunner of post-colonial agitation. After the Spanish–Cuban–American War in 1895, the role of Spain as an imperialist power had been often neglected by the

74 Haya de la Torre, “El asesinato de un pueblo,” *El Libertador* 7 (February 1926): 6–7.

75 “Marruecos,” *Revista de Oriente* 3, August 1925, 6–7.

anti-imperialists in Latin America who often, if implicitly, had appreciated Spanish culture as a counterweight to “Anglo-Saxon” materialism. This changed in 1925 and anti-imperialists openly pronounced their rejection of Spanish cultural imperialism openly. The LADLA, Haya de la Torre, and the Argentine socialists of the ULA all realized that any glorification of the Spanish Empire would detract from their anti-imperialist credibility. In that sense, reporting about the Rif War, like reporting about China, did lead to changes within Latin American anti-imperialism: arguments, alliances, and histories were globalized and made to fit with other movements fighting imperialism in Africa and Asia

“In the same boat”: Indians and India in Mexico City

During the 1920s, anti-imperialists in Mexico City engaged with the anticolonial movement in India, although less so than with the situation in China, because India lacked the latter’s status of semi-coloniality and was not an objective of a large-scale Comintern propaganda campaign. Still, political interest in India was considerable and a transcontinental transfer of ideas between India and Mexico took place in the 1920s, often via individual Indian anticolonialists who became part of the anti-imperialist scene of Mexico City. In the 1920s, Indian anticolonialists in Mexico, like Manabendra Nath Roy and Pandurang Khankhoje, propagated nationalism and Marxism and managed to inspire tricontinental thinking by promoting the project of Indian independence in Mexico.

In the 1920s, José Vasconcelos was the most famous Mexican intellectual whose anti-imperialism was clearly shaped by a deep fascination for Indian thought. In his search for a racial ethos for the “cosmic race,” Vasconcelos was inspired by India’s supposedly supreme spirituality. Vasconcelos’s thinking about India was filtered by European traditions, especially Spanish Catholic mysticism and the writings of European orientalist about India.⁷⁶ To be fair, Vasconcelos’s studies went beyond simply syncretizing European orientalist perspectives—his works *Estudios indostánicos* (1919), *La raza cósmica* (1925), and *Indología* (1926) were directed against what he identified as the cultural decay of Europe.⁷⁷ For Vasconcelos and his followers, disappointed by Europe’s materialism, Indian philosophy represented an alternative to the West and a spiritual inspiration for Mexico—an interpretation that was not uncontroversial in the anti-imperialist scene.

⁷⁶ See Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico City at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 255.

⁷⁷ Despite its title, *Indología* was about Hispano-America rather than India. But at least Gabriela Mistral, reviewing the book of the man who had invited her to Mexico, interpreted the book as taking a cosmopolitan, Hispano-American perspective, somehow between the East and the West. See Gabriela Mistral, “Hispano-americanos en París. José Vasconcelos *Indología*,” *Repertorio Americano* 22, 11 June 1927, 9–10.

The figure of the Bengali poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore was remarkably popular in postrevolutionary Mexico. In Mexico City, the so-called “Tagore Moment” became visible through several Spanish translations of Tagore’s poems and by Vasconcelos’s embrace of Indian thought and culture.⁷⁸ In 1921, Vasconcelos invited Tagore to Mexico City for the centennial celebrations of Mexican independence—just like the anti-imperialists of the Buenos Aires group around *Renovación* would do three years later. Tagore visited Buenos Aires in 1924, but health issues prevented him from continuing to Mexico. Nevertheless, Vasconcelos became Tagore’s quasi-ambassador in Latin America, publishing an article in 1925 that praised him as the “most important figure in today’s world.”⁷⁹ In Mexico, Tagore was interpreted as an Eastern version of José Enrique Rodó. While Rodó had identified “Anglo-Saxon” culture with superficial materialism, Tagore identified the same superficiality more generally with “the West.” In that sense, the non-Western spirituality of Tagore was perfectly suited to be adapted by Latin American anti-imperialists who followed Rodó. Tagore’s ideas served for them as a bulwark of inner spirituality and morality against amoral Western imperialism. The Tagore Moment ultimately led anti-imperialist thinkers to reflect upon the role of Latin America in relation to Asia, Europe, and the world.

While some left-leaning intellectuals and artists of Mexico City went head over heels for Tagore, others viewed the Indian philosopher with skepticism. The muralists around Rivera and Siqueiros mocked Vasconcelos and his “Eastern spirituality”; for the Marxists, the whole Tagore talk was suspiciously bourgeois, un-revolutionary, and overly academic. By 1924, the muralists were openly attacking Vasconcelos for his esoteric spiritualism and his admiration for India. One caricature in *El Machete* lampooned Vasconcelos as a Buddha-like statue, surrounded by numerous symbols of different world religions. He enunciates that “the complete truth can only be published in a book of memoirs,” a joke about Vasconcelos’s tendency to write lengthy autobiographies.⁸⁰ In his mural *Corrido de la Revolución proletaria*, Rivera ridiculed Mexico’s Eastern-loving intellectuals, depicting Tagore as a crazy intellectual and Vasconcelos sitting on a white elephant. The Mexican wise men are caricatured as, in Tenorio-Trillo’s words, “sissy, urban, cowardly, ignorant and unrealistic imitators of Western orientalism who aim to criticize the West without seeing the real conditions of their country.”⁸¹ For the Marxist muralists, the orientalism of the anti-communist Vasconcelos was highly suspicious, a reminder that tricontinental thinking was not automatically praised by anti-imperialists. Both *El Machete* and *El Libertador* only

78 See Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City*, 262–69.

79 José Vasconcelos, “El apóstol,” *Repertorio Americano* 9, no. 24, February 23, 1925, 370–71.

80 “Vasconcelos,” *El Machete* 17 (October 16–23, 1924): 2.

81 See Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City*, 268.

reported little about the independence movement in India. While the Chinese Civil War was a topic pushed into the spotlight by the Comintern, and the Rif War was interesting because of Spain's involvement, India remained a terra incognita. Perhaps most importantly, the anti-imperialists were not able to establish a connection between the Indian anticolonial fight and the imperialist ambitions of the United States. While this connection could be drawn—if only with some shoehorning—in the cases of China and Morocco, it hardly existed in the case of India. Anti-imperialists in Mexico cared little about the British Empire anyways—for them, it stood for the past, not the future of imperialism.

In Mexico City, individual Indian anticolonialists promoted tricontinental thinking by addressing Indian independence and its relation to Mexican anti-imperialism. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, the most prominent of these Indians was the Brahman Manabendra Nath Roy. As a representative of Mexico at Comintern congresses, Roy was an agent of revolutionary Marxist politics in the communist networks between Mexico City and Moscow. But Roy also connected the anticolonial fight in India to the anti-imperialist scene in Mexico—sometimes deliberately, sometimes inadvertently—by being superficially exoticized as a wise Indian who could give Mexican anti-imperialism spiritual depth.⁸² His opposition to imperialism shaped Roy's political activism and connected his activities for Indian independence to communism in Mexico. Roy's cooperation with the Germans in the Hindu-German conspiracy during the First World War had not been based on the geopolitical goal of weakening the British war efforts alone. The alliance between German diplomats and Indian nationalists was ideologically based on a shared anti-imperialist conviction, an amalgam of anti-Western and anti-modern ideas mixed with a romanticized nationalism and a hatred towards the great powers.⁸³ Roy's conversion to Marxism between 1917 and 1919 was caused in part by his Mexican environment, and opposition to imperialism remained the constant connecting his earlier nationalist anticolonialism with his internationalist, revolutionary anti-imperialism. Experiencing American influence in Mexico City, Roy learned that political sovereignty alone would not necessarily keep foreign influence at bay. Though written much later, Roy concluded in his memoirs that "In Mexico I realised what I could not do in China, that national independence was not the cure for all the evils of my country."⁸⁴

82 Roy recalls an event in which he was invited to the house of Linn Gale and his wife Magdalena, both followers of Indian spiritualism in Mexico City. The couple presented him with a picture of Indian "Lord Krishnamurti." Roy asked who that Indian man was, and later remembered that "[m]y naïve question dumbfounded the host, and Magdalena nearly fainted." See Roy, *Memoirs*, 185–87.

83 See Goebel, "Geopolitics," 487 and Michael Goebel, "Una biografía entre espacios: M.N. Roy, del nacionalismo indio al comunismo mexicano," *Historia Mexicana* 62, no. 4 (2013).

84 Roy, *Memoirs*, 76.

Roy's experiences in Mexico led him to substitute anti-imperialist nationalism with anti-imperialist communism—a rather short leap as Roy later recalled.⁸⁵

In his memoirs, Roy constructed Mexico as simultaneously more civilized (modernist, cosmopolite, Francophile) and less modern (archaic, superstitious, ignorant, illiterate) than his native India.⁸⁶ By referencing the supposed racial commonalities between Mexican and Asian “Indians” (while at the same time ridiculing these categories for lacking all scientific credibility), Roy invoked a trope regularly employed by Mexicans and Indians alike.⁸⁷ For Roy, the common experience of racism connected Indians and Mexicans: “We are in the same boat; my country is similarly stigmatised by the arrogant imperialism of the White race.”⁸⁸ Roy echoed Latin American anti-imperialists like Mella, Haya, and Mariátegui, who all, despite their diverse materialist approaches to politics, were very aware of the West's civilizing mission and the intricate connections between imperialism and racism.

Apart from Roy, there were other, less famous Indians involved in the anti-imperialist scene of Mexico City. One of them was a radical anticolonialist named Herambalal Gupta. He belonged to the Berlin group of radical Indian nationalists, together with Roy, Chatto, and Bhupendranath Dutta.⁸⁹ As a member of the Ghadar movement, Gupta left Berlin in 1925 and went to the United States but ended up in Mexico. Trained as a philologist, Gupta worked as a translator of Indian literature into Spanish (he translated Tagore's *Chitra*) and published texts in Vasconcelos's magazine *La Antorcha*.⁹⁰ In the mid-1920s, Gupta was part of the circle of left-wing intellectuals and artists in Mexico City and appeared in Edward Weston's diary in October 1924.⁹¹ The sources of anti-imperialists in Mexico City reveal little about Gupta, but his presence suggests that the Indian anticolonialist movement was perhaps more a topic of private conversations rather than part of the official anti-imperialist propaganda.

The third Indian in Mexico City's anti-imperialist scene was Pandurang Sadashiv Khankhoje, born in 1886. He was mentioned alongside Gupta in the same entry of Weston's diary. Fortunately, however, his life is better

85 Roy, *Memoirs*, 60.

86 See Goebel, “Geopolitics,” 489–92.

87 See, for example, a later quote from Octavio Paz, Mexican ambassador to India in the 1960s: “I want to say that I can understand, to a certain extent, what it means to be Indian because I am Mexican.” Quoted in Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City*, 248.

88 Roy, *Memoirs*, 62.

89 Gupta (in contrast to Roy, Chatto, and Dutta) was apparently not on the radar of the German agencies. See Bundesarchiv, Berlin R1507/11, Reichskommissar für Überwachung der öffentlichen Ordnung/Ausländer im Reich.

90 See Tenorio-Trillo, *I Speak of the City*, 263.

91 Edward Weston, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston*, 2 vols. (Rochester, NY: George Eastman House, 1961–66), 1.95 (October 2, 1924).

documented than Gupta's.⁹² Like Roy and Gupta, Khankhoje had a direct relation to the United States, where he had graduated with degrees in agriculture and genetics. During the war, Khankhoje became involved in the Hindu–German conspiracy and, like many other anticolonial Indians in Berlin, switched allegiances to Lenin and communism in 1917 or shortly afterwards, although he never joined a communist party. Khankhoje knew Roy, Chatto, and Gupta from his Berlin days and from a trip to Moscow in 1921.⁹³ Through contact with the radical intellectual Ramón de Negri, he obtained a lectureship at the National School of Agriculture in Chapingo where he met Rivera and Modotti. Khankhoje stayed in Mexico for many years and became a leading biologist, developing new strains of high-yielding corn.⁹⁴ Khankhoje was eternalized by Modotti in a brilliant modernist photograph series and depicted by Rivera in his mural “Our Bread,” in which a person breaks the bread to feed the Mexicans.⁹⁵ The title of the mural, *El pan nuestro*, was a pun on the Spanish word for bread—and Khankhoje's first name.

Khankhoje's agricultural projects in Chapingo and his involvement in radical agrarian organizations are exemplary of an agrarian version of anti-imperialism and of Indian–Mexican cooperation. Khankhoje first taught biology students in Chapingo and began research on maize cultivation. He thought that scientific progress and agricultural knowledge were essential for Mexican and Indian peasants. In Mexico, Khankhoje came to know the rich tradition of agrarian struggle and soon taught at the Free Schools of Agriculture, an education project inspired by Zapata's peasant movement during the revolution. The schools were inaugurated to teach agricultural techniques and science to campesinos, thus reflecting the belief in scientific progress within Marxist circles.⁹⁶ Convinced of the necessity of this work to diffuse agricultural knowledge, Khankhoje taught peasants free of charge. Khankhoje kept thinking of India and its independence fight. In the words of his daughter, “at the back of his mind, too, was the hope that his experiences in Mexico would one day be put to use in India.”⁹⁷ Khankhoje perceived his

92 This is primarily thanks to the work of Khankhoje's daughter Savitri Sawhney, who collected and published his memoirs alongside her own research. See Savitri Sawhney, *I Shall Never Ask for Pardon: A Memoir of Pandurang Khankhoje* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008).

93 Sawhney, *I Shall Never Ask*, 214–15.

94 Sawhney, *I Shall Never Ask*, 245–46. In 1955, Khankhoje, then as Mexican citizen, returned to India with his family.

95 See Isabel Arline Duque, “Pandurang Khankhoje, el ‘sabio hindú,’ en México,” *Alquimia* 17, no. 50 (2014): 15–16.

96 For an illustration of this belief, see Rivera's mural *Man, Controller of the Universe*, a eulogy to scientific progress and socialism. At the bottom of the mural in the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Rivera painted different types of maize, referencing Khankhoje's experiments.

97 Sawhney, *I Shall Never Ask*, 241.

engagement for local farmers, very often of indigenous origin, as having a racial element to it that connected India and Mexico. He later remembered that “I have placed all my earnings in the hands of the Mexican Indians, who are after all ‘Indians,’ like me.”⁹⁸

The anticolonialist Khankhoje gave his agricultural work a decidedly political purpose, combining it with the social struggle of Mexican campesinos. Mexican papers like *Excelsior* were interested in the work of what they called “the wise Hindu.”⁹⁹ Far from being a scientist only, Khankhoje was a political activist. His involvement is exemplified by an event in the summer of 1928, the inaugural ceremony for the re-opening of the Agricultural School, “Emiliano Zapata,” in Chapingo. *El Machete* reported about the event and the content of the speeches delivered. The guest of honour of the ceremony was the former president of Hungary, Mihály Károlyi, who drew parallels between Hungary and Mexico, two countries whose economies heavily relied on agriculture. The second speech was given “in the name of the Anti-Imperialist Congress of Brussels” by the Swiss journalist Federico Bach, who emphasized the need for the peasants of the world to unite against the “imperialist enemy.” After Bach, the photographer Tina Modotti (“whose revolutionary photography is well known by the peasants of the region,” as *El Machete* stated) gave a short speech expressing her love for revolutionary Mexico. Khankhoje ended the event with a short introductory class about the cultivation of wheat.¹⁰⁰ The event and the speakers it brought together (who were shown in a photograph included with the article) reveal how involved Khankhoje was in the anti-imperialist scene and how political were his agricultural projects in Mexico.

Khankhoje’s engagement also mirrored a focus on agrarian issues within anti-imperialism in the second half of the 1920s. The LADLA had a strong agrarian faction, with a power base among unionized peasants in Veracruz and Michoacán. The most prominent leader of this peasant-based version of anti-imperialism was Úrsulo Galván, administrator of *El Libertador* and initiator of the Free Agricultural Schools. In 1926, several Mexican peasant organizations formed the Liga Nacional Campesina, with “Peasants of America Unite!” as their motto, and the machete as their symbol. According to historian Melgar Bao, the Latin American communists tended to follow Bukharin rather than Stalin, Trotsky, or Zinoviev, which led to an emphasis on “Eastern and agrarian issues.”¹⁰¹ Even after the Comintern entered its Third Period, the agrarian, union-oriented, intellectual, and anti-imperialist elements continued to be strong within Latin American communism. Most pointedly, this Latin American version of agrarian Marxism was expressed

98 Khankhoje, in an interview to *Excelsior*, quoted in Sawhney, *I Shall Never Ask*, 246.

99 See Duque, “Pandurang,” 12.

100 All quotes from “Reapertura de la Escuela Agrícola ‘Emiliano Zapata,’ de Chiconcuac, Méx.,” *El Machete* 128 (August 25, 1928): 4.

101 See Melgar Bao, “The Anti-Imperialist League,” 10.

by Mariátegui, who stressed the importance of peasants and indigenous communities in overcoming capitalism. In Mexico City, Pandurang Khankhoje represented a peasant-oriented version of anti-imperialism that relied on Mexican–Indian solidarity and tricontinental imaginations.

Through imagining global revolution, anti-imperialists in Mexico City developed early versions of tricontinental thinking. In the 1920s, many political activists, intellectuals, scholars, and artists increasingly looked towards Africa and Asia for inspiration as Europe had lost its status as a model of development. For anti-imperialists, looking East towards the Soviet Union, India, and China promised new inspiration for Latin America as an alternative modernity that relied on national self-determination rather than on imperialism. Admittedly, many anti-imperialist concepts remained vague and sometimes contradictory. And yet, the search for new inspiration beyond a Western model of development reveals a multitude of perspectives that were shaped by a desire to know more about the events, social conditions, and cultural horizons of other continents. This curiosity was amplified by an unprecedented degree of transcontinental interaction through travel and migration. Anti-imperialists pointed out similarities between Latin America and the East, be it the shared status as semi-colonial countries, as in the case of China, ethnic similarities, as in the case of the Riffians and Indians, or the shared history of Spanish colonialism, as in the case of Morocco.

Anti-imperialist imaginaries were a way to reflect upon one's own position in an increasingly globalized way. Thinking, writing, and talking about China, Morocco, and India thus caused a constant comparing, adjusting, and aligning of Latin American anti-imperialism. Ultimately, this modification of Latin American anti-imperialism via imagining anticolonial revolution made it more coherent with movements in Africa and Asia and led to new visions of the globe. Traditionally, Latin American anti-imperialism emphasized the dichotomy North–South, in which the Catholic, Spanish-speaking, and spiritual Latin Americans of the South stood against the Protestant, English-speaking, materialistic Anglo-Saxons of the North. While these depictions remained powerful, a new distinction between the West and the East supplemented the North–South divide. The stereotyped West stood for an imperialist modernity, while the equally stereotyped East represented self-determination and a path to modernity through national or social revolution. Many perceived connections to the East relied on a supposedly shared culture, a history of colonialism, and a similar position in the global system of imperialism. Some of these traits could potentially be used for the exact opposite argument—after all, the United States had a history of anticolonialism, too—but one has to keep in mind that, in the 1920s, these geographical imaginations were still young and vaguely expressed.

South–South connections were imagined long before they were put into practice. Tricontinental thinking in Mexico City thus predated tricontinental action and was quite clearly more than just an imitation of European-style

Orientalism.¹⁰² Tricontinental imaginations were also more than just a localized version of Moscow's intention to cast the Soviet Union as the global champion of anticolonialism. Many non-communists were inspired by the Russian Revolution, borrowed communist ideas, and creatively combined lessons from Russia with the aims of the Mexican Revolution. Especially when it came to criticizing the growing power of the United States, Mexican nationalists viewed the Soviet Union as a counterweight to the United States. Anti-imperialism, not communism, was the ideological bridge between the Russian and the Mexican Revolutions and anti-imperialists found numerous ways to connect these two revolutions to the ongoing anticolonial revolts in Africa and Asia. Rather than a consequence of the developments and repercussions of the Second World War, tricontinental thinking in Mexico was already developed and imagined in the aftermath of the First World War.

102 For the same argument, see Klengel and Ortiz Wallner, Introduction to *Sur/South*, 15.

CHAPTER FIVE

Globalizing Urban Networks

The Brussels Congress of 1927

Mexico, with a radical President and policy, was eager to take the lead in a Latin American bloc against the United States; and Mexico, therefore, took great interest in the Brussels Congress.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1935)¹

When Alfons Goldschmidt, the German-Jewish journalist, economics professor, and well-read Marxist wrote his memoirs in 1931, he vividly remembered one week in the February of 1927. Goldschmidt was by no means short of memorable moments in his life. He had fought in the First World War, had experienced the tumultuous 1920s in Berlin and Mexico City, had been friends with eccentric figures like Tina Modotti and Kurt Tucholsky and had directed a German movie about Aztec culture.² And yet, the days of mid-February 1927 occupied a special role in the description of his own life. What had left such a lasting impression on Goldschmidt was a rather bureaucratic sounding event: the “Congress Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression.” Referred to by Goldschmidt as “Brussels Congress,” the gathering inspired the gifted journalist to only write about it in the most grandiose tone. A convinced communist, Goldschmidt had chosen the name “Adolf Silber” as his alter ego in his autobiography—a joke about the Nazi leader who would soon be handed power in Germany and drive Goldschmidt out of his homeland. Goldschmidt remembered in 1931 that “in Brussels, a Congress against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression was supposed to take place. It was the most tremendous rally Adolf had ever witnessed.” In his emotional description of the Congress, Goldschmidt did not spare with superlatives: “Probably never before had a rally heard the indignation of the

1 Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New York: John Day, 1941 [1935]), 124–25.

2 The documentary “Auf den Spuren der Azteken” was released in Germany in 1927. Unfortunately, the movie has been lost.

chased billion with descriptions of such force, filled with numbers of dread, with the death screams of the shot, the hanged, the whipped, the lynched.” To hear of the crimes committed in the name of colonialism by the colonized themselves left a deep, almost religious, impression on Goldschmidt. For him, the Congress was not only of “worldwide significance,” it also marked the beginning of a new, anti-imperialist age: “From the halls of the Palais Egmont, the flame of the maltreated had shot so high that all peoples had to see it!”³

Alfons Goldschmidt was not the only one impressed by the Comintern-sponsored Congress that took place in the Egmont Palace in Brussels from the tenth to the fifteenth of February 1927. Indian anticolonial leader Jawaharlal Nehru called the Congress “an event of first class importance,” Albert Einstein saw it as the “embodiment of the solidary striving of the oppressed for independence,” and Song Qingling, the widow of anti-imperialist hero Sun-Yat Sen, called it a “historical event of worldwide significance.”⁴ For the contemporaries of February 1927, the Brussels Congress undoubtedly was a history-making event. The participants quite rightly recognized the novelty of the Congress: It was the first event at which delegates from all the colonized parts of the world could speak out against colonialism and imperialism. The ideological heterogeneity and diversity of the delegates impressed the Congress participants and observers alike, some of whom explicitly rejected the idea that the event was a communist farce as its opponents continuously claimed. Nehru, for example, concluded in his report on the Congress that the “Brussels Congress was thus, so far as its delegates were concerned, by no means purely communist.”⁵ In 1927, it was all but normal that communists, social democrats, liberals, and anticolonial nationalists came together and declared themselves anti-imperialists. Neither was it a minor event when the leaders of the Indonesian, Indian, and Persian independence movements came together with their anti-imperialist comrades from Africa, from Europe, and from the Americas. The Brussels Congress was thus a meeting point for many different, yet intersecting, anticolonial movements as it provided a transnational forum of interaction between activists from different colonial empires.

3 All quotes from Alfons Goldschmidt, “Die halbe Welt,” autobiography, ca. 1931/32, Nachlass Alfons Goldschmidt, Archiv der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 182–84.

4 Jawaharlal Nehru, “Report on the Brussels Congress,” February 19, 1927, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, ed. S. Gopal, 15 vols. (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1972–82), 2.278. Both Einstein and Song Qingling sent telegrams, see Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit, *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont* (Offizielles Protokoll des Kongresses gegen koloniale Unterdrückung und Imperialismus, Brüssel, 10.–15. Februar 1927) (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1927), 264, 278.

5 Jawaharlal Nehru, “Report on the Brussels Congress of 19 February 1927,” in Nehru, *Selected Works*, 2.283.

And yet, despite its impact on the contemporaries of 1927, the historical significance of the Congress has long been neglected. In the last years, though, it has become the subject of historical studies that either work on anti-imperialism globally or on the League Against Imperialism, the organization founded in the wake of the Congress to formalize Comintern networks. The main controversy in the historiography seems to be whether the history of the Brussels Congress should be categorized as part of the global history of communism, or, rather, as the starting point for the “project of the Third World,” that is, as an early example of de-colonization processes.⁶ The relevance of communism is underlined by historians who rely on sources that stress the communists’ involvement. In the GDR, for example, the Congress was the object of a body of scholarship that is largely ignored by historians, probably due to its glorifying Marxist–Leninist language.⁷ In this communist narrative, the communists cleverly persuaded non-communists into joining the Congress and the LAI. Recent scholarship, relying on the Comintern archives, and much more nuanced than before, stresses the role of communists and supports the perspective that the Congress was first and foremost a communist affair.⁸

A different perspective on the Brussels Congress stresses its role as inspiration for the “Bandung spirit” of anticolonial cooperation or as a starting point for the “departure into the post-colonial age.”⁹ These perspectives, to varying degrees, emphasize the agency of non-communist actors, denying that the communists managed to manipulate anticolonial activists into cooperating with the Comintern.¹⁰ Much of the recent literature is the

6 Prashad writes that “Amid snow and far from home, the project of the Third World began to take shape.” Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007), 16.

7 As an example, see Hans Piazza, ed., *Die Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit* (Leipzig: Karl-Marx-Universität, 1987).

8 Fredrik Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg, the League Against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933*, 2 vols. (numbered continuously) (Lewiston, NY: Queenston Press, 2013); Fredrik Petersson, “Hub of the Anti-Imperialist Movement: The League Against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014).

9 Jürgen Dinkel, *Die Bewegung Bündnisfreier Staaten: Genese, Organisation und Politik (1927–1992)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015) and Jürgen Dinkel, “Globalisierung des Widerstands: Antikoloniale Konferenzen und die ‘Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit’ 1927–1937,” in Kunkel and Meyer, eds., *Aufbruch ins postkoloniale Zeitalter*. Historian Fredrik Petersson is able to situate his work in this historiography as well by locating the Brussels Congress in the context of interwar anticolonialism; see Fredrik Petersson, “From Versailles to Bandung: The Interwar Origins of Anticolonialism,” in *Bandung, Global History, and International Law: Critical Pasts and Pending Presents*, eds. Luisa Eslava, Michael Fakhri, and Vasuki Nesiah (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

10 See Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, 16–30.

product of transnational perspectives and emphasizes the need for a nuanced look that marginalizes neither communists nor the beginning project of Third World cooperation. The Congress is, as has been pointedly written, “best understood on its own terms and in the context of the interwar world.”¹¹ The Congress is now treated as the birth of “the anticolonial transnational,”¹² and as the beginning of the influential League Against Imperialism.¹³ It is also analyzed in relation to Nehru’s internationalism,¹⁴ the construction of transnational surveillance structures,¹⁵ and as a global lens through which very different actors could read their own local conflicts as part of a “Third World Nationalism.”¹⁶ In other words, the scholarship has broadened and new emerging perspectives on the Congress underline its relevance for the history of the twentieth century.

While the non-Latin American scholarship on the Congress debates the role of communism, Latin American historiography tends to focus on the rift between communists and “populists” within the Latin American anti-imperialist movement—a conflict exemplified by the confrontation between the former friends Julio Mella and Haya de la Torre in Brussels.¹⁷ Studies on Latin American communism, *en vogue* in the 1980s, disagreed on whether (or to what degree) the Brussels Congress was important for the Comintern in Latin America.¹⁸ The importance of the Brussels Congress for the Americas

11 Michele L. Louro, Caroline Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter, and Sana Tannoury-Karam, eds., *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020).

12 Erez Manela, “Foreword: Plotting the Anticolonial International,” in Louro et al., *The League Against Imperialism*, 11–15.

13 The best edited volume on the League includes an inspiring number of different perspectives; see Louro et al., *The League Against Imperialism*.

14 See Michele L. Louro, *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 19–102.

15 Daniel Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 139–68.

16 See Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 206.

17 See, for example, Jussi Pakkasvirta, *¿Un continente, una nación? Intelectuales latinoamericanos, comunidad política y las revistas culturales en Costa Rica y Perú (1919–1930)* (San José: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 2005), 99–101; Eugenio Chang-Rodríguez, *Pensamiento y acción en González Prada, Mariátegui y Haya de la Torre* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2012), 324–25.

18 Cerdas-Cruz treats the Congress rather briefly, while Caballero’s standard history of the Comintern in Latin America focuses on the World Congresses of the Comintern rather than the Brussels Congress. See Rodolfo Cerdas-Cruz, *La hoz y el machete: La internacional comunista, América Latina a la revolución en Centro América* (San José: Editorial Universidad Estatal a distancia, 1986), 221–24; Manuel Caballero, *Latin*

is increasingly being recognized. Goebel has proposed to see the LAI as a precursor of a proto-Third World idea in Latin America.¹⁹ Christine Hatzky uses the Brussels Congress to explain Mella's personal ambitions and his dispute with Haya de la Torre, while Ricardo Melgar Bao uses the Congress quite similarly as a stage to dive more deeply into the Mella–Haya rivalry.²⁰ Daniel Kersffeld has written the most detailed work on the Congress and the LAI in the Americas, analyzing the Latin American participation at the Congress in great depth and placing it in the context of the history of the Latin American anti-imperialist movement.²¹

This chapter aims at contributing to the existing scholarship by adding a perspective from Mexico City and thus linking the conflicts within the global anti-imperialist movement to the local quarrels in Mexico City. The structure of the chapter, with perspectives from Berlin, Moscow, and Mexico City, highlights three underestimated phenomena: the role of transnational *urban* networks for the Congress, the role of Mexico as topic at the Congress, and the role of Mexico City as organizational center for anti-imperialist networks. The networks of global anti-imperialism were not scattered around the globe, but concentrated in specific cities where local actors had the resources and abilities to globalize the movement. Mexico City was one hub of this global urban network, just like Berlin or Moscow. The role of Mexico City as organizational center preparing and evaluating the Brussels Congress is hardly addressed by the literature on the Brussels Congress. Similarly, the role of Mexico as an anti-imperialist symbol at the Brussels Congress is marginal in a scholarship that focuses on the roles of India, China, or Puerto Rico. Especially for the global fight against the United States, Mexico became a crucial discursive marker for Latin Americans, but also for Asian and African Congress delegates.

The absence of Mexico in the literature on the Congress surprises, as the cluster “Mexico/Latin America” was literally one of the three foci of the Congress, besides China and India. This focus was far from being a secret,

America and the Comintern 1919–1943 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

19 See Goebel, “Forging a Proto-Third World?”

20 See Christine Hatzky, *Julio Antonio Mella (1903–1929): Eine Biografie* (Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2004), 204–10; Melgar Bao, *Haya*, 67–85.

21 Daniel Kersffeld, “Latinoamericanos en el Congreso Antiimperialista de 1927: Afinidades, diseños y rupturas,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 16, no. 2 (2010). See also Daniel Kersffeld, “La Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas: una construcción política entre el marxismo y el latinoamericanismo,” in *El comunismo: Otras miradas desde América Latina*, eds. Elvira Concheiro Bórquez, Massimo Modonesi, and Horacio Crespo (Mexico City: UNAM Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Ciencias y Humanidades, 2007), 160–61, and Daniel Kersffeld, *Contra el imperio: Historia de la Liga Antiimperialista de las Américas* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2012), 94–136.

and Congress organizer Münzenberg even proudly declared it in his Congress speech: “Representatives of the three decisive country groups in this moment of history have come together: China, India, and Mexico–Latin America.”²² Clearly, the organizers’ focus on “Mexico–Latin America” was unfortunate and confusing, as it grouped together very different countries, while simultaneously highlighting one specific national case. The focus on “Mexico–Latin America” is additionally clouded by the fact that in the Congress protocol, some delegates (from Haiti, the Antilles, and one from the United States) were grouped under the headline “freedom fight of the Negroes.” But they, like their comrades from Mexico and Venezuela, mainly spoke about “North American imperialism,” adding to the importance of the topic. The delegates from the Americas, far from being a homogeneous group and with widely diverging expectations, influenced the Brussels Congress significantly by focusing on the new global role of the United States as imperial power and by establishing “Mexico” as a symbol of anti-imperialist resistance. And despite all differences and apart from all the conflicts these delegates shared the common vision that they, too, were part of the global anti-imperialist movement.

The Brussels Congress ranks first in the series of congresses that took place after the First World War and respectively championed Pan-Asianism, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Americanism, and Pan-Africanism.²³ The Brussels Congress’s historical significance arises from the fact that it connected Pan-Asianists, European socialists, Pan-Africanists, and Latin American anti-imperialists. It thereby added a global perspective to otherwise often local, regional, or continental anticolonial projects. Furthermore, the three most important tendencies of anticolonialism of the interwar years were represented in Brussels: socialism/communism, liberal humanitarianism, and the colonial independence movements.²⁴ Especially the fact that opposition against imperialism and colonialism was voiced by both colonial resistance and by residents of the imperialist powers themselves simultaneously is a historical specificity during the interwar period. The Brussels Congress achieved a diversity of participants and topics that was historically unmatched in 1927. Delegates from all parts of the world discussed such diverse topics as colonial brutality in the French territories in Africa, the intricacies of the Chinese Revolution in Canton, the hopes of Indian peasants for national independence, and the racist Jim Crow laws in the United States. While the transnational forum of the Congress provided a global lens to the issues of imperialism and colonialism, the Congress was not a dialogue between equals, and existing power relations led to controversies and misunderstandings.

22 *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 271.

23 See Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 127–60.

24 See Dinkel, *Die Bewegung Bündnisfreier Staaten*, 35.

Organizing Anti-Imperialist Euphoria, 1925–1927

Networks in Berlin and Moscow

The preparations for the Brussels Congress mainly took place in Berlin, partly in Moscow. In a way, the history of global anti-imperialism in the 1920s is best described as a history of urban transnational networks. The case study of the Brussels Congress exemplifies how these networks were transnationally planned, organized, and promoted.

The sheer number of actors of different backgrounds gathered at the Brussels Congress of February 1927 is astonishing: at least 174 delegates and activists representing 137 different parties and organizations from all over the world made the Congress, at least in the time between the wars, the most representative gathering of anticolonialists from Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Despite efforts to depict the materialization of the Congress as a quasi-natural phenomenon, “so to say happening explosively,”²⁵ as co-organizer Louis Gibarti (born László Dobos) put it in the preface to the gathering’s protocol, it took months of extensive network-building to achieve the degree of heterogeneity reflected in the attendees. The center of this global network preparing the Brussels Congress was located in Wilhelmstrasse no. 48 in downtown Berlin. In Berlin, more so than in Moscow or Brussels, the global congress was prepared and launched.

The idea of a congress of global proportions originated in the global moment of anti-imperialist euphoria during the summer of 1925.²⁶ The simultaneity of the Rif War, the Great Syrian Revolt, and the May Thirtieth Movement in China led to a shared sense of new possibilities for anti-imperial movements. In Berlin, the events stimulated Willi Münzenberg to engage more seriously with the anticolonial liberation movements worldwide and to connect their struggles more explicitly to the struggles of the European proletariat.²⁷ Münzenberg, a communist member of the Reichstag and self-made media mogul, was known as “communism’s entrepreneurial genius”²⁸; he organized propaganda campaigns for the Comintern whilst continuously improving his own standing within the global communist movement. Münzenberg could pull the strings behind the scenes (often playing the Comintern and

25 Luis Gibarti, “Vorwort,” in *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 5.

26 Goebel uses the notion of a global moment of euphoria for the summer of 1925.

I argue that the time frame for the atmosphere of optimism among anti-imperialists can even be extended up until the Brussels Congress. Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 158–66.

27 See Petersson, “Hub,” 51.

28 Charles Shipman, *It Had to be Revolution: Memoirs of an American Radical* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 162. Manuel Gómez was born as Charles Phillips in 1895 in New York City and died as Charles Shipman in 1989. He also used the pseudonyms Frank Seaman and Jesús Ramírez during his active time in the U.S. and the Mexican communist parties.

local communists against each other) and, if needed, enter the spotlight and grab his audience's attention. From Berlin, Münzenberg began to organize solidarity campaigns that went well beyond the local or national context to gain the support of communist sympathizers and tie them organizationally to Moscow's reach. Berlin was a good place to do so, as it functioned as a "sanctuary for anti-imperialist activists in the 1920s."²⁹ The capital of Weimar Germany and its vivid political scene provided a favorable environment for up to 5,000 political refugees, activists, and students from the colonial world.³⁰ In Berlin, anticolonialists came together to develop a broad anti-imperial attitude that was not restricted to criticizing any one particular empire.³¹

In the summer of 1925, Münzenberg recognized the enormous potential of anticolonial campaigns for the communist cause after learning about events taking place in China. In May 1925, 13 Chinese protesters were killed by the British authorities in Shanghai, an event that caused worldwide outrage. The shooting sparked strikes and protests in China, London, and Berlin under the slogan "Hands Off China."³² In Berlin, Münzenberg and the Workers' International Relief organized large solidarity demonstrations in June and July 1925, culminating in a large "Hands Off China" congress on August 16, 1925. The congress was attended by hundreds of representatives from communist, socialist, intellectual, and national liberation organizations, thus foreshadowing the Brussels Congress.³³ The positive result of the congress encouraged Münzenberg to set up a committee to protest cruelties committed in Syria in December 1925. In Syria and Lebanon, local anticolonial fighters had begun to engage the French colonial authorities in a war that is today known as the Great Syrian Revolt. With his committee, Münzenberg gained the sympathies of leading left-wing intellectuals such as Ernst Toller and John Heartfield, who spoke out against the reported atrocities of the French colonial forces.³⁴

Spurred on by the successful anti-imperialist campaigns, Münzenberg and his deputy Louis Gibarti took on the role of organizers of a potential congress of global proportions that was to unite communists, left-wing

29 Petersson, "Hub," 55.

30 See Nathanael Kuck, "Anti-Colonialism in a Post-Imperial Environment: The Case of Berlin, 1914–33," *Journal of Contemporary History* 49 (2014): 143–44.

31 Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest*, 140 and Kuck, "Anti-Colonialism," 153.

32 For the China solidarity campaigns in Great Britain, see Tom Buchanan, *East Wind: China and the British Left, 1925–1976* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–47.

33 See Hans Piazza, "The Anti-Imperialists League and the Chinese Revolution," in *The Chinese Revolution in the 1920s: Between Triumph and Disaster*, eds. Mechthild Leutner, Roland Felber, M.L. Titarenko, and A.M. Grigoriev (London: Routledge, 2002), 167.

34 See Petersson, *Münzenberg*, 156.

social democrats and socialists, intellectuals, and bourgeois representatives from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. At first, the Comintern was notably hesitant about Münzenberg's project. Münzenberg's fiancée Babette Gross, who was the managing director of his publishing house Neuer Deutscher Verlag, reported that the Indian Manbendra Nath Roy and the Argentinian Victorio Codovilla in particular were opposed to the plan because they feared that "ideological confusion" would be the result of the united front policy.³⁵ Münzenberg and his team used Moscow's indecision to push their plans forward: First, they set in motion a preparatory conference taking place in Berlin in February 1926 where the existing contacts to the exiled circles of Chinese, Indian, Syrian, Egyptian, and Persian anticolonialists in Berlin were formalized and the League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO) was founded, electing as its leaders Louis Gibarti and Lucie Peters (born Lucie Hecht). Present at the inaugural meeting in the Berlin Rathauskeller, the Indian national revolutionary Virendranath "Chatto" Chattopadhyaya was made part of the Congress's organizing committee. Despite being an antagonist of the influential Roy and far from being a thoroughly convinced Marxist himself, Chatto was a key figure in the creation of the League Against Imperialism.³⁶ In the first LACO executive committee, Mexico was represented by Alfons Goldschmid.³⁷

Beginning in March 1926, Gibarti sent out the first of hundreds of leaflets, letters, and invitations to potential congress participants, many of which were intercepted by European security services.³⁸ The Comintern created a special commission to oversee the project in March 1926, but did little to contribute to the actual convening of the congress and even recommended postponing it altogether.³⁹ Meanwhile, initial positive responses were already arriving at the LACO secretariat in Berlin. The Guomindang of Canton welcomed the forthcoming reunion of all oppressed peoples. The fact that the immediate responses to the preliminary invitations were overwhelmingly positive surprised Münzenberg and Gibarti and ultimately convinced the Comintern leadership to finally give the green light and release funds for the upcoming anti-imperialist congress.⁴⁰

The reluctant support from the Comintern did little to help Münzenberg, who had problems finding an adequate location for the large gathering. Initially, he had planned on holding a large conference in Berlin, but the

35 Babette Gross, *Willi Münzenberg: Eine politische Biografie* (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 1991 [1967]), 291. Like many other German communists, Gross survived National Socialism and the Second World War in Mexican exile.

36 See Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

37 See Petersson, *Münzenberg*, 183, and, for the LACO in general, 175–98.

38 Piazza, "The Anti-Imperialist League," 168.

39 See Louro, *Comrades*, 32.

40 See Piazza, "The Anti-Imperialist League," 169.

Weimar government—always afraid of Comintern involvement—refused to grant permission. The French government denied the permit for Paris, fearing that an anti-imperialist congress might stir up hope in the French colonies. The Belgian government under premier minister Henri Jaspar (and foreign minister Émile Vandervelde, the secretary of the Second International) finally allowed a congress in Brussels—either out of a deep commitment to the constitutional right to free speech or out of the fear of facing a large-scale political scandal.⁴¹ The Belgian government struck a secret deal with the anticolonialists that the topic of the Belgian colonies was “not to be touched.”⁴² Thus, any talk about the Congo was off the table for the gathered anti-imperialists, but the topic’s shadow still loomed large over the congress. A location outside of Europe was never seriously considered, probably because many organizers were deeply embedded in the anti-imperialist circles of Europe and the largest exile communities of Chinese and Indian nationalists were concentrated in Paris, Berlin, and London. While the congress organizers had their reasons to stay in Europe, a congress location outside of Europe would have surely had a large symbolic significance, like the city of Bandung had in 1955.⁴³

As early as October 1926, the organizers of the Congress connected China and Mexico. Münzenberg and the LACO wanted to use the positive experiences of the Hands Off China campaign of the summer 1925 and globalize them by including Mexico, as the quasi-natural leader of the Latin American countries in their fight against U.S. imperialism. Moreover, China and Mexico were both, in Lenin’s term, semi-colonial countries that struggled to defend, not gain, national sovereignty. At a public event organized by the LACO in Berlin, the speakers began focusing on the situation in China and Mexico when promoting the anticipated “world congress.” Alfons Goldschmidt and Ramón P. de Negri, the plenipotentiary minister of Mexico in Europe, spoke about the “culture war in Mexico,” referring to the Cristero Rebellion against the Mexican government.⁴⁴ Shortly before the meeting, the LACO published an article in its newspaper on the connections between China and

41 See Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest*, 147. Babette Gross suggests that Vandervelde and his position in the international socialist scene prompted the Belgian government to agree to the Congress; see Gross, *Münzenberg: Eine politische Biografie*, 291.

42 Gross, *Münzenberg: Eine politische Biografie*, 291.

43 In the opening speech of the Bandung Conference in 1955, Indonesian President Sukarno remarked that “[Brussels] was a meeting place thousands of miles away, amidst foreign people, in a foreign country, in a foreign continent. It was not assembled by choice, but by necessity. Today the contrast is great. Our nations and countries are colonies no more. Now we are free, sovereign and independent. We are again masters in our own house. We do not need to go to other continents to confer.” See Sukarno, “Opening Address Given by Sukarno (Bandung, April 18, 1955),” in *Asia-Africa Speaks from Bandung* (Jakarta: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 1955).

44 “Einladung zur Öffentlichen Mitgliederversammlung,” October 22, 1926,

Mexico. The article goes to great lengths to connect the anti-imperialist fights in Mexico and China, reasoning that the liberation movements of the two countries were in “different phases of their development.” Regarding the positive responses to the planned congress, the article states that “it is no coincidence that exactly those two countries most energetically take up the idea of an international congress” and ends with the vigorous call, “Hands off China—Hands off Mexico!”⁴⁵ In the same issue of the paper, the LACO published an article by Gibarti about the Cristero Rebellion and the role of the Catholic Church in Mexico in which he stated that the Church was being financed by foreign imperialists. Apart from that, he explains why Mexico had become so crucial for the anti-imperialist movement and the congress organizers: “Mexico is the flag bearer of the fight for liberation in Spanish America.”⁴⁶ With Mexico and China as foci, it was clear that the Congress was not solely a meeting for anticolonialists, but rather attacked different forms of colonial and imperial oppression on a global scale.

In December 1926, Gibarti sent out the official invitation letters (in French, English, and German) from the headquarters of the LACO. Brussels was finally confirmed as the Congress location. Attached to the invitation was a preliminary agenda for the gathering outlining its aims and schedule.⁴⁷ It is clear that the creation of the LAI as a result of the Congress was already planned in December. If one compares the invitations to the actual agenda in Brussels, the main difference is that the phrase “countries menaced in their independence” was changed to the more Leninist-sounding “semi-colonial countries.”⁴⁸ Apparently, the term was not considered an orthodox communist expression, as those were carefully avoided at the Congress.

The Berlin–Moscow axis set the pattern for the genesis of the Brussels Congress. In Moscow, though, the planned congress was still supported hesitantly. The Comintern’s stance towards anticolonial movements was still based on the resolutions of the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924, where the anti-imperialist alliance of the “colonial peoples” with the “revolutionary proletariat of the capitalist countries” was stressed, urging all communist parties of the imperialist countries to engage more with anti-imperialism. This

Bundesarchiv, Berlin R1001/6751, Liga gegen Imperialismus und ihre internationalen Beziehungen, 14.

45 “Hände weg von China—Hände weg von Mexiko!” *Der koloniale Freiheitskampf: Mitteilungsblatt der Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung* 4 (October 10, 1926), 1, 2.

46 Louis Gibarti, “Der Kirchenkonflikt in Mexiko,” *Der koloniale Freiheitskampf: Mitteilungsblatt der Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung* 4 (October 10, 1926), 2.

47 “Invitation to the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism,” December 15, 1926, ARCH00804/1, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

48 “Agenda of the Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism,” February 10, 1927, ARCH00804/5, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

deeper engagement happened via newly found bureaucratic structures. The Indian Roy, recognized expert on the colonial question since 1920, established the International Colonial Bureau in Paris in July 1924 and managed to carry out some anticolonial propaganda with the *Union Intercontinentale*. But Moscow's support (more precisely, the focus of the members of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, ECCI) continuously shifted towards the anticolonial movement in Berlin. Münzenberg's activities during the campaigns for Chinese and Syrian independence in 1925 had impressed the Comintern leaders and strengthened the links between Berlin and Moscow.⁴⁹ As a result, a new organization, the League Against Colonial Oppression, was founded and expected to "act as neutral intermediary between the Communist International and nationalist movements in the colonies."⁵⁰ However, the Comintern's colonial expert Roy—who was a strong opponent of the Berlin anticolonialists and especially of Chatto—and the Argentinian Codovilla opposed the Congress and urged the Comintern to postpone it. Other actors in Moscow supported Münzenberg, who urged the Comintern leadership to understand that the anticolonial movement was in itself strong enough to bring about a global congress.

For the Comintern, the Brussels Congress and Münzenberg's enthusiasm were both attractive and dangerous. On the one hand, the general aim of establishing a global anti-imperialist movement was in line with the communists' goals and the anticolonial movements were an attractive ally for the communists. On the other hand, the independence of the LACO—a requirement to be able to attract prominent anticolonialists—was a permanent danger to the Comintern, fearing open dissent from non-communist speakers at the Congress. The Comintern resolved this issue by applying a covert strategy at the Congress: the organizers around Münzenberg had to meticulously avoid Marxist-Leninist overtones or any obvious connection to communist parties. From the Soviet Union, only the Kresintern, the International of Peasants, was invited—a surprising fact considering the global aspirations of the event. Moscow's man in Brussels was Sen Katayama, who officially represented the Japanese labor movement, but acted as Comintern agent, later reporting on the Congress. The Comintern's actions "behind the scenes" and its downplaying of its communist ties, however, left a significant space for independent action at the Congress. The LACO (later LAI) activists could use the Comintern's self-imposed restrictions to fight for its independence from Moscow and did so successfully, at least in its early years of existence. In that sense, the history of the LACO/LAI resembles the history of the LADLA in Latin America, an organization also co-financed by the Comintern but equally able to retain a remarkable amount of independence over quite some time. This was not least attributable to the fact that

49 For a detailed account of this network, and Münzenberg's role, see Petersson, *Münzenberg*, 126–73.

50 See Petersson, *Münzenberg*, 206.

the Berlin faction received funds from affiliated non-communist organizations in the colonies and semi-colonies like the Indian National Congress and the Mexican government.⁵¹ The history of the Brussels Congress cannot be explained without the power struggles between different strands of the communist movement, in this case between the Berliners (Münzenberg, Gibarti, Chatto⁵²) and the Comintern (among others, Roy and Codovilla). But the networks went beyond this dichotomy—the third important faction was located across the Atlantic, where the Congress was eagerly anticipated as well.

Networks in Mexico City

The city of Mexico was already included in the run-up to the Congress. Anti-imperialists in Mexico City promoted the Congress and were able to influence the Congress agenda. During the whole year 1926, the LADLA attempted to gain Latin American speakers for the Congress. The issue for the LADLA as a front organization was that it wanted to use the global stage of Brussels to promote a Comintern-friendly version of Latin American anti-imperialism. At the same time, the LADLA needed to please both the Berlin organizers (who tried to disguise any communist involvement) and the non-communist Latin American public by appointing prominent intellectuals who were anti-imperialists, but not communists, like José Vasconcelos and Manuel Ugarte.

In Mexico City, where the activities of the LADLA were coordinated, the news of an upcoming anti-imperialist congress of global proportions led to excitement. The communists supported the congress and *El Machete* emphasized the great importance of the event.⁵³ In October 1926, four months prior to the gathering, *El Libertador* reported on the Brussels Congress as a long-awaited opportunity at which “Latin America must raise its voice and scream out all the abuses, all the threats and all the rapacity of the imperialists in this continent.”⁵⁴ Latin American anti-imperialists were eager to let the world know that their struggle mattered, too, and that it had to be recognized by the worldwide anti-imperialist movement. The second important aim, as formulated in the LADLA-dominated magazine, was to use the global stage to unify the anti-imperialist movement of Latin America. The dream of a united Latin America that could stand up to its imperialist

51 Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest*, 146; Michele L. Louro, “‘Where National Revolutionary Ends and Communist Begins’: The League Against Imperialism and the Meerut Conspiracy Case,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 33, no. 3 (2013): 338.

52 According to Babette Gross’s sister Margarete Buber-Neumann, Chatto was “the soul” of the Berlin office. See Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Von Potsdam nach Moskau: Stationen eines Irrweges* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1957), 107.

53 See “La Conferencia de Bruselas,” *El Machete* (September 30, 1926): 4.

54 “El Congreso de Bruselas,” *El Libertador* 9/10 (October 1926): 10.

oppressors was present in the report anticipating the Congress: "In Brussels, the base of a powerful Latin American anti-imperialist organization must be established."⁵⁵ In short, the article from October 1926 already named the two main goals for most of the Latin Americans at the Congress, namely those associated with the LADLA: to make their struggle heard to the world and to unify the Latin American anti-imperialist movement.

Prior to the Congress, these aims dominated the actions taken by the LADLA, the organization responsible for finding suitable speakers to send to Europe. LADLA's leitmotif was the growing danger of U.S. imperialism for "semi-colonial" Latin American countries. Other topics, such as the situation of Puerto Rico or the Philippines, were substituted under the headline of resistance against U.S. imperialism. The organizers supported this Latin American spirit by appointing speakers from one country to speak as representatives of another country. The Mexican Vasconcelos spoke for Puerto Rico, while the Uruguayan Quijano spoke on behalf of Venezuela. Surely, much of this was due to practical constraints (no Puerto Ricans or Venezuelans fit for the task were to be found in Europe), but the organizers did rightly assume that the creation of Latin American unity was a main goal of many of the delegates and by their appointments gave them a valuable platform for their Latin Americanism.⁵⁶ The sense of a Latin American unity against the United States was thus reinforced in Brussels.⁵⁷

Active support from Mexico City came also directly from President Plutarco Elías Calles and his government. Calles had, according to Babette Gross, contacted Münzenberg through Alfons Goldschmidt, professor of economics in Mexico City at the time. Gross remembers that "the Mexican government showed keen interest in the planned congress and supported its materialization with substantial financial means."⁵⁸ Calles's decision to support the anti-imperialist gathering in Brussels has to be seen in relation to his administration's disputes with the U.S. government over the ownership structure of Mexican petroleum and Mexican involvement in the war in Nicaragua in 1926 and 1927. In January 1927, the relations between Mexico and the United States were so toxic that there was widespread speculation about an American invasion of Mexico.⁵⁹ In this context, Calles hoped to send a sign of strength to Washington via Brussels.⁶⁰ The Mexican president was

55 "El Congreso de Bruselas," 10.

56 For a similar argument, see Kersffeld, "Latinoamericanos," 154 and Kersffeld, *Contra el imperio*, 95–96.

57 See Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 241.

58 Gross, *Münzenberg: Eine politische Biografie*, 295.

59 See Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elías Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 131–34.

60 See Kersffeld, *Contra el imperio*, 97.

aware of the ample symbolic value of the congress and wanted to sharpen his anti-imperialist profile, both back home and on the global stage.⁶¹

A key protagonist of the Brussels Congress was a Mexican diplomat, although he is rarely mentioned in the historiography on the Congress. This diplomat was Ramón P. de Negri, born in 1887 and Calles's man in Europe. Like Calles, de Negri was born in Sonora and was a veteran of the Mexican Revolution. In Mexico City, de Negri had been one of the radical intellectuals who admired the Russian Revolution at the beginning of the 1920s. He had excellent contacts with the anti-imperialist scene of the city and to anti-imperialists overseas. As Mexican plenipotentiary minister in Western Europe from 1926 to 1929, de Negri acted as an important behind the scenes organizer, using his extensive transnational contacts to ensure his president's influence on European politics, and especially on the preparations leading up to the Brussels Congress. In Mexico, de Negri had already been a leading voice in and an integral part of the secretariat of the LADLA in its initial phase, which made him an expert on anti-imperialism and united front tactics.⁶² Gross later reported that de Negri hosted a dinner party in Berlin for the new Soviet ambassador in Mexico, Alexandra Kollontai (who made a stop in Berlin on her way to Mexico), at which Müntzenberg and the staff members of the LAI were present and Kollontai promised to make the Congress a success in Latin America.⁶³ Apparently, de Negri and the Calles government had no reservations against working with the Comintern or financing a Congress that was also supported by money from Moscow. With Calles's backing, de Negri was even appointed to the Provisional Committee of the Congress and could influence its procedures and agenda through his position on the important committee.⁶⁴

The actual amount of financial support from the Mexican government remains difficult to determine, but there is no doubt that rumours of official support from the Mexican government circulated and were used to convince delegates to come to Brussels. In November 1926, Nehru wrote a letter to his father trying to convince him of the importance of the congress, stressing that the organizers had a "great deal of support from nearly 400 organisations all over the world, including two governments—those of Mexico and Canton in China."⁶⁵ Clearly, the support of the Mexican government boosted the legitimacy of the congress, helped the organizers conceal their relations

61 *El Machete* quotes Calles, who justifies his support of the Brussels Congress with the words that the fight his government started would benefit all countries. See "La Conferencia de Bruselas," *El Machete* (September 30, 1926): 4.

62 Kerssfield, *Contra el imperio*, 49.

63 See Gross, *Müntzenberg: Eine politische Biografie*, 296.

64 "Invitation to the International Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism," December 15, 1926, ARCH00804/1, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

65 Letter from Nehru to his father, November 16, 1926, in Nehru, *Selected Works* 2.251.

to Moscow, and even worked as a bulwark against too much Comintern intrusion. In short, networks centered in Mexico City as well as Mexican money deeply influenced the Brussels Congress.

A Global Stage for Anti-Imperialist Networks, February 1927

Anti-Imperialism, a Contested Watchword

The Brussels Congress of 1927 brought anti-imperialism onto a global stage. The concept of anti-imperialism, however, meant different things to different actors. There was no unity of aims and little commonly agreed upon definitions among the diverse actors. Contemporary accounts as well as the historiography tend to highlight the delegates' heterogeneity and are undoubtedly right in doing so. Most studies, however, seem to work on the assumption that Africans, Asians, Europeans, and people from the Americas were united in sharing the desire to overcome imperialism. But rather than a shared understanding of what imperialism and anti-imperialism meant, conflicts and controversies, even misunderstandings, shaped the congress, although these conflicts are sometimes hard to reconstruct given the nature of the curated sources.

At 8 o'clock in the evening on February 10, 1927, the "vice-president of the mine workers of South Wales," Stephen Owen Davies, inaugurated the Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in the prestigious Palais d'Egmont in Brussels. The palace "with the rebel name," as Alfons Goldschmidt called it, was located in the center of Brussels, a city in which colonialism was ubiquitous.⁶⁶ Münzenberg's deal with the Belgian authorities had led to the absurd situation that Belgian colonialism in Africa, infamous for its brutality, had to be actively ignored by the delegates. In 1927, the Congo was still one of the world's most brutal colonial systems, with the practice of portage or forced labor just outlawed in 1926.⁶⁷ The anti-imperialists at the Congress adhered to Münzenberg's deal and avoided the sensitive issue of the Congo. They did, however, formulate a "Belgian Resolution" that sounded like an admission of guilt as it pledged that "at the next International Congress [...] the Belgian methods of colonialism will be denounced as vigorously as those of British and French imperialism."⁶⁸ While this resolution was not debated or passed, it was later published in the German protocol of the event in the summer of 1927.⁶⁹

For many observers, journalists, and delegates alike, the ethnic diversity of the congress was noteworthy and interpreted as a sign of human progress. Alfons Goldschmidt remembered the first session of the presidential

66 Alfons Goldschmidt, "Die halbe Welt," 182.

67 See Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (London: Zed Books, 2002), 13–60.

68 "Belgische Resolution," 1927, ARCH00804/14, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

69 *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 262.

committee that he presided over: “at the table sat black, yellow, brown, white heads full of vigour.”⁷⁰ The journalist Manfred Georg, like Goldschmidt a politically left-leaning German Jew, saw in Brussels primarily “a swarm of heads and colors, as if the tribes of the world were having a fantastic rendez-vous” and, referring to the strong presence of Chinese delegates, concluded: “Yellow prevails.”⁷¹ But not just the Europeans were impressed by the multi-ethnic character of the Brussels Congress. Nehru, the well-traveled cosmopolite, could hardly hide his curiosity about the gathering of so many different peoples and used a comparison to Indians to describe the Latin Americans in Brussel: “The people from Latin America, dark as the northern Indian, were again a different and interesting type.”⁷² While these statements show some degree of exoticizing, the overall message of the congress was clear: it opposed racism as vigorously as imperialism.⁷³

But the ethnic diversity of the congress did not erase the power struggles and conflicts about issues of race among the delegates, some of which can be reconstructed through the content of the congress speeches. The sessions that structured individual speeches were arranged inconsistently by the organizers, sometimes by a geo-political imperative, sometimes under other headlines such as race. The session on the “Negro struggle for freedom” awkwardly mixed together what the organizers saw as manifestations of racial oppression in very different contexts. Lamine Senghor spoke on behalf of the Committee for the Defense of the Black Race, Max Bloncourt for the Intercolonial Union of the Antilles, Carlos Deambrosis Martins for the Patriotic Union of Haiti, Josiah Tshangana Gumede for the South African National Congress, and the African-American Richard B. Moore spoke about different forms of racial oppression and discrimination in the Caribbean, in Africa, and in the United States. The Congress resolution on the issue of race unambiguously condemned racism and blamed capitalism and imperialism for the crimes of slavery and segregation. The resolution situated the phase of “High Imperialism” between 1880 and 1890 and called out European powers’ “greed for African territories” as the cause for Africa’s misery, sarcastically stating that death and epidemics were the “great blessing of Christianity and civilization.”⁷⁴ When talking about Africa, the delegates of the Brussels Congress thus registered a causal relationship between colonialism and racism.

Looking at the resolution’s stance towards racial discrimination in Latin America, this causal relationship becomes less clear. The resolution states

70 Goldschmidt, “Die halbe Welt,” 182.

71 Manfred Georg, “Die Unterdrückten,” *Berliner Volkszeitung*, February 16, 1927, 1–2.

72 Jawaharlal Nehru, “Report on the Brussels Congress of 19 February 1927,” in Nehru, *Selected Works*, 2.281.

73 “Texte du discours d’ouverture par Henri Barbusse,” ARCH00804/9, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

74 “Résolutions communes sur la question nègre,” LAI Archive, ARCH00804/54, International Institute of Social History.

that “in Latin America, negroes cannot complain about racial prejudice. Political and social equality and the cordial relationships between the races of these countries prove that no natural antagonism exists between them.”⁷⁵ This assessment of supposed racial equality in Latin America was perhaps well-intentioned, but ultimately ignorant—apart from anti-black racism, anti-indigenous racism existed in all parts of Latin America in 1927.⁷⁶ Moreover, it openly denied victims of racism the opportunity to speak about racial issues at all. For the delegates and the Comintern, the resolution served the purpose of contrasting the idea of U.S. segregation against the more inclusive idea of Latin American *mestizaje*. In that sense, “race” as a category could be included into the Congress theme of denouncing U.S. policies on a global or domestic level. According to the Congress speeches, imperialism thus caused racism in Africa and the United States, but in Latin America—supposedly a victim of imperialism as well—this was not the case.

Practical problems were probably unavoidable at a global conference, but the issue of language shows that a multitude of interpretations of imperialism existed simultaneously among the congress delegates. The official languages were English, French, and German. Arabic and Chinese were used in the speeches, too, but no translations into Arabic or Chinese were provided. For the Spanish-speaking delegates of Latin America, language was a particularly sensitive issue as it (and very concretely the usage of English) was always linked to the concept of cultural imperialism. José Vasconcelos directly addressed what he saw as the irony of having to condemn U.S. imperialism using the English language:

Many of you will ask yourselves why it is that this man comes to talk to you in the name of Latin America, in the name of Spanish speaking people, and he addresses you in English. It was decided in the Committee that only two languages should be used in the Congress. I did not raise a protest although I am one of those ardent defenders of the Spanish language as the main link of our race because I thought through the English language we should reach a larger number of delegates.

Regarding the activities of English miners and in response to a greeting from the North American delegation, Vasconcelos added that “If there are still people using the English language to speak of Liberty, then Latin American [*sic*], too, can use it to express their soul.”⁷⁷ Overall, European languages

75 “Résolutions communes sur la question nègre.”

76 See Peter Wade, “Racism and Race Mixture in Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 52, no. 3 (2017).

77 For both quotes, see speech of Vasconcelias [*sic*], Congress-Meeting of February 10, 1927, ARCH00804/39, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

dominated at the Brussels Congress, a fact emphasizing that the very real power relations were not easily erased through egalitarian speeches.

While there was no consensus on what imperialism meant, even finding a common enemy was not as unambiguous as it appeared. Historian Jürgen Dinkel has convincingly argued that a shared critique of the League of Nations created cohesion among congress delegates.⁷⁸ The German writer Ernst Toller, for example, ended his speech with the thought that Brussels was the “true” League of Nations: “Here we create the real League of Nations, without masters and servants, without exploiters and exploited, without geopolitical subjects and objects. Long live the League of Nations of Brussels.”⁷⁹ And, indeed, many delegates followed Toller in critiquing Wilson’s false promises of self-determination. The mandate system that the League of Nations had implemented on the conviction that “the tutelage of such [colonized] peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations”⁸⁰ had not brought independence, but a revised form of paternalistic imperialism to Africa and Asia—a fact that African and Asian delegates pointed out explicitly in Brussels. But if we include the Latin American delegates, the picture gets more complicated as none of them even mentioned the League of Nations, as they had little reason to do so. The League’s concept of self-determination, as historian Alan McPherson has formulated it, “kept Latin American hopes for an effective anti-occupation LN [League of Nations] alive during the 1920s.”⁸¹ Although many of these hopes were disappointed as the League ultimately failed at defending national sovereignty and retained its Eurocentric orientation, the League of Nations was not the prime enemy of Latin American anti-imperialists.

There was no such thing as a clear definition of what imperialism meant among all congress delegates apart from the most basic understanding of the multi-layered term. Did imperialism cause racism? What was its relation to capitalism and were there cultural elements to imperialism, such as language? The congress delegates disagreed regarding these questions, although it should be mentioned that there were also many shared convictions and structural similarities. But the choir of cross-continental anti-imperialism didn’t sing in unison in the manner in which it was presented at the time, however impressive and influential the whole endeavor of the congress ultimately was.

78 See Dinkel, *Die Bewegung Bündnisfreier Staaten*, 37.

79 Rede von Ernst Toller, Mitglied der deutschen Delegation. Mit Resolution der deutschen Delegation. 1927, ARCH00804/49, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

80 The Covenant of the League of Nations, 28 April 1919, Article 22.

81 Alan L. McPherson, “Anti-Imperialism and the Failure of the League of Nations,” in *Beyond Geopolitics: New Histories of Latin America at the League of Nations*, eds. Alan L. McPherson and Yannick Wehrli (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015), 26. For a similar argument, see Thomas Fischer, *Die Souveränität der Schwachen: Lateinamerika und der Völkerbund, 1920–1936* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2012).

Transnational Urban Networks in Brussels

The organizers of the Brussels Congress embraced the rhetoric of national self-determination. Speakers and delegations were organized by prioritizing the logic of national parties and national independence movements over transnational organizations. While this may have made sense in some cases to harmonize the aims of anticolonial activists, this national logic also restricted the agency of the speakers. To be fair, the speeches and resolutions were not consistently organized anyway, oftentimes emphasizing national liberation movements, but also mixing it with questions on class and race. The example of the Latin American delegation and their official designations in Brussels foregrounds the limits of the national logic. The Latin American delegates were not delegates sent from all the nations of the continent, as the congress organizers implied. They were in their majority the actors active in the anti-imperialist scene of Mexico City and just happened to have different nationalities. The main conflict among Latin Americans in Brussels, often described as an ideological quarrel between communists and populists, was a struggle for dominance over the transnational networks of anti-imperialism in Latin America, particularly the most important one in Mexico City.

The Latin American delegation in Brussels surely was ideologically heterogeneous. With Julio Antonio Mella, Haya de la Torre, and José Vasconcelos, the delegation included figures of continental prominence. The Cuban Mella (from the beginning of 1926), the Peruvian Haya (between 1923 and 1924 and again from 1927 to 1928), and the Mexican Vasconcelos had all lived in Mexico City and developed their political networks in the Mexican capital. The most prominent Latin American voices were thus part of the anti-imperialist scene of Mexico City. Most of the Latin American delegation was composed either of Latin American students in Europe (like the Uruguayan Carlos Quijano or the Peruvian Eudocio Ravines) or of anti-imperialists who had some connection to Mexico City.⁸² There were European and Asian delegates with a connection to the anti-imperialist scene of Mexico City, too. Alfons Goldschmidt, for example, had been a prominent voice of anti-imperialism during his stay in Mexico between 1923 and 1925 and spoke extensively about Mexico in his Congress speech.⁸³ The U.S. communist Manuel Gómez and the Japanese veteran Sen Katayama had been active in Mexico City at the beginning of the 1920s as well, and both helped found the PCM. Rather than on their national delegations—which in the case of Japan did not exist anyway—they relied on their network of urban activism.

In Brussels, the ideal of Latin American unity was much more important

82 The Congress protocol counts 15 delegates from America, but then names many more in its list of participants. Some delegates were not counted as “from America,” like the Dutch labor union activist Edo Fimmen, who spoke on behalf of the Mexican CROM in Brussels. See *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 229.

83 Text der Rede von Alfons Goldschmidt, 1927, ARCH00804/56, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

than the national logic. For Latin American delegates, anti-imperialism was a global phenomenon that required a continental resistance. In Brussels, Spanish-speaking Latin Americans could literally represent any other Spanish-speaking country in Latin America. The Cuban Julio Antonio Mella thus represented the LADLA headquarters in Mexico City, the Mexican National Peasants League, the Colombian Workers Federation, and the LADLA section of Panama. The Peruvian Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, apart from the Peruvian section of the LADLA, also represented the LADLA's Nicaraguan and Panamanian sections.⁸⁴ The Latin American delegates shared a cultural tradition of anti-imperialism that other world regions lacked and that made the need to frame anti-imperialism in national terms unnecessary. For Latin American anti-imperialists, the fact that U.S. troops were stationed in Nicaragua was not a national problem, it was a continental one that required the resistance of transnational organizations. The Brussels Congress thus reinforced a Latin American regionalism on the basis of a shared version of anti-imperialism.⁸⁵

The case of Puerto Rico highlights the sense of Latinamericanism among delegates, but also the failure of inserting a national logic into the Latin American anti-imperialist voices in Brussels. As historian Sandra Pujals has shown, the fact that the Mexican former minister José Vasconcelos ended up representing the National Party of Puerto Rico was caused by the nationalists' eagerness to prevent a communist speaker. The fact was a by-product of a local conflict, an attempt by American communists to gain influence within the Puerto Rican nationalist movement via the local branch of the LADLA.⁸⁶ The case of Puerto Rico could have been useful for the congress, as it offered a good opportunity to showcase that formal colonies existed in the Americas, too. For the Latin American delegates, however, the case of Puerto Rico was rather exceptional. For most of the Latin American countries, gaining political sovereignty was not the issue—preventing the violation of existing sovereignty was. As the Latin American delegates cared little about Puerto Rico, the country's colonial situation was basically ignored during the congress. Vasconcelos, amazingly, didn't even mention Puerto Rico and instead choose to talk about Mexico.⁸⁷ Ugarte, the other appointed speaker for Puerto Rico, did not even show up to the

84 *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 236–37.

85 See Goebel, "Forging a Proto-Third World?" 11. For examples, see *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 63–69, and the overall tone of the resolution, 76–79.

86 See Sandra Pujals, "¡Embarcados! James Sager, la Sección Puertorriqueña de la Liga Anti-Imperialista de las Américas y el Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico, 1925–1927," *Revista del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* 22 (2013): 105–39.

87 Speech of Vasconcelias [sic], Congress-Meeting of February 10, 1927. The other delegates for Puerto Rico were the Peruvian journalist César Falcón and the Cuban-French Louis Casabona.

congress. Representing the U.S. section of the LADLA, Manuel Gómez at least mentioned the island, linking it to the fight for independence of the Philippines, but he didn't elaborate much on the connection.⁸⁸ Of the published speeches in the official congress protocol, not one single European, Asian, or African delegate referred to Puerto Rico. The idea of a nation struggling to *keep* its national sovereignty, as in the case of Nicaragua, was not outlandishly absurd anyway, as the Congress was dominated by the issue of "semi-colonial" China.

The most important conflict of the Brussels Congress for Latin American historiography can be explained by a focus on transnational networks, too. The clash between the LADLA and the APRA has often been described as ideological confrontation between a Marxist and a populist-nationalist interpretation of Latin American anti-imperialism. The two transnational organizations and their respective voices in Brussels, Mella and Haya de la Torre, did indeed represent different interpretations and strategies of the anti-imperialist struggle. But rather than about ideology alone, the conflict was mainly about who would dominate the anti-imperialist networks in Latin America and who could speak for all Latin American anti-imperialists. The conflict was amplified by the congress, particularly by the global stage it promised. This stage was consciously used by Haya de la Torre to launch his APRA as a continental, transnational organization that claimed (as the LADLA did, too) to speak for Latin American anti-imperialism. The conflicts in Brussels were less about the correct interpretation of anti-imperialism and more about control over the transnational networks in Latin America, particularly in its most important hub: Mexico City.

Before preparations for the Congress had begun, the APRA had been little more than a personal dream of its founder, Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, who wanted to create (and lead) an anti-imperialist movement of all classes in Peru and, possibly, in all of Latin America. As an exile in Europe at the time, Haya used the opportunity to speak at the Congress to promote his project and build sections of it in Buenos Aires and Paris. In an article published in the British *Labour Monthly*, Haya advertised his organization as a unique front anti-imperialist party and emphasized "the class struggle against imperialism," a nice ideological bridge to the Comintern and Münzenberg.⁸⁹ Prior to the Congress, Haya gave interviews to Chinese journalists in Europe in late 1926, stylizing his new party as the "Guomindang of Latin America."⁹⁰ Haya's aim was to gain power within the transnational networks of anti-imperialism by promoting his own transnational alliance: rather than as "Guomindang of Peru," APRA was promoted as "Guomindang of Latin America." The identification of the APRA with the Guomindang was no

88 *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 72.

89 Haya de la Torre, "What is the A.P.R.A.?" 756–59; for the same argument, see Goebel, *Metropolis*, 243.

90 Cerdas-Cruz, *La hoz*, 63.

coincidence: both were nationalist, anti-imperialist, and against any kind of foreign influence on their movements, and yet, at that moment at least, they both allied with the communists. As planned, Haya was able to use the congress to make his new organization known to the gathered anti-imperialists.⁹¹ Haya's strategy in Brussels was to present his organization as a reliable anti-imperialist partner for the communists in Latin America while simultaneously reiterating its independence from the Comintern. For him, this seemed the most promising way to gain influence on the transnational networks of both communists and non-communists in Latin America. In short, Haya cared more about his influence in Mexico City than about his image in Brussels or Moscow.

The clash between Haya and the communists took place during the discussions about the "Resolution on Latin America" at the end of the congress. The clash can hardly be explained by ideological differences only and makes more sense as part of a Public Relations campaign to position the APRA as a leading voice within Latin American transnational networks of anti-imperialism. The APRA delegates Haya and Ravines only signed the congress resolution "with reservations," a snub towards the other Latin American delegates and the Comintern. The reasons why Haya provoked the confrontation with the communists remain dubious, but were probably strategic: Haya wanted to promote APRA's existence and position it as an anti-imperialist force outside of the Comintern's global reach.⁹² Quite paradoxically, Haya's reason for not fully supporting the resolution was its affirmative stance towards alliances with the national bourgeoisie, which was exactly what Haya and his Guomintang analogy stood for.⁹³ On an ideological level, Haya's arguments did not make much sense, as their feigned class-based Marxism contradicted the whole point of the APRA as a multiclass alliance between manual and intellectual workers. The rupture between the APRA and the communists started in Brussels, where it was originally only recognized by a few. However, it would soon split the anti-imperialist movement of Latin America in two, a conflict that would be most visible in Mexico City.

91 According to fellow APRA delegate Eudocio Ravines, Haya was quite successful in charming the Comintern, and even the Italian-Argentinian Comintern agent Victorio Codovilla courted the non-communist Haya. See Eudocio Ravines, *La Gran Estafa: La penetración del Kremlin en Iberoamérica* (Mexico City: Libros y Revistas S.A., 1952), 103–5.

92 See Kersfeld, *Contra el imperio*, 159 and Max Zeuske, "Haya de la Torre, die APRA und der Brüsseler Weltkongreß der Antiimperialistischen Liga," in *Die Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit*, ed. Hans Piazza (Leipzig: Karl-Marx-Universität, 1987), 153. The same argument was made by fellow delegate Ravines, who reported that Haya only thought strategically and was eager to gain public attention with his move to vote "with reserves." Ravines, *Gran Estafa*, 105.

93 See Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 244.

Mexico, Symbol for Anti-Imperialism

In the congress debates, Mexico featured prominently. The country received much more attention than other Latin American countries traditionally identified with imperialism such as Puerto Rico or Argentina. The exceptional interest in Mexico was caused by the Mexican involvement in the congress preparations, its role as neighbor of the United States, and structural reasons, such as its supposed “semi-colonial” status. Mexico’s exceptional role in Brussels was partly caused by the importance of China at the congress. As Mexico, China was a formally independent nation state in 1927 and was referred to at the congress as semi-colonial. In the first months of 1927, as Nehru wrote to a friend in India, the situation of China was “dominating politics in Europe.”⁹⁴ At the congress, the Chinese delegation (compromised of Chinese exiles, Guomindang delegates, and some generals) was the largest of all delegations and no fewer than four resolutions on China were drafted. These resolutions demanded the withdrawal of foreign troops and the recognition of the already existing Chinese National government.⁹⁵ The semi-colonial situation of China dominated the Brussels Congress, and this focus helped the Mexicans, and Latin Americans in general, to explain their own agenda that was, as in China, about recognizing and respecting national sovereignty.

In Brussels, Mexico was what the United States of America was not; it was perceived as fundamentally anti-Yankee. When delegates spoke about Mexico, they immediately spoke about the nation’s fight against the “colossus of the North.”⁹⁶ Even for non-Latin Americans, it was perfectly clear that “Mexico comes in because of its fears of the U.S.A.,”⁹⁷ as Nehru had already formulated it months before the congress started. Latin American and European delegates alike described Mexico as the borderland where imperialist expansion could be witnessed firsthand: Mexico’s sovereignty was threatened by military force, its governments were pressured into unfair treaties, and its natural resources lay in the hands of a few big foreign companies. The congress manifesto struck a similar tone in identifying Mexico as the prime target of U.S. imperialism: “North American imperialism [...] threatens the independency of Mexico, where for the first time democratic power has established itself and makes efforts to protect the sovereignty of their country against the shameless and continual aggression of foreign powers.”⁹⁸ Speakers like French writer Henri Barbusse echoed these thoughts and portrayed Mexico

94 Letter from Jahwarhalal Nehru to Rangaswami Iyengar, January 25, 1927, in Nehru, *Selected Works*, 2.258.

95 *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 52.

96 *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 69.

97 Letter from Nehru to his father, November 16, 1926, in Nehru, *Selected Works*, 2.251.

98 Congress manifesto, 1927, ARCH00804/10, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

as perfect example of intricate forms of imperialism and semi-colonialism. After having denounced colonialism in India, China, Indochina, Syria, and Africa, Barbusse spoke about Mexico: "There is also a more sophisticated form in which imperialism imposes its yoke. It binds countries to treaties and tariffs, and through control and monopolies makes them dependent on its grace, as it tries to do with Mexico, where the lust for power [la convoitise] of the enormous neighbor can rely on the reactionary national forces."⁹⁹ For Barbusse, Mexico signified the semi-colonial condition. Mexico was thus more than Mexico, it represented semi-colonialism, perhaps even more so than semi-colonial China.

Mexico's special role in the global fight against imperialism was intensified by a second interpretation brought forward in Brussels: Mexico as an extraordinary example of anti-imperialist resistance and safe harbor of global solidarity. This perspective was present in the congress manifesto and was emphasized by several speakers, who referred to Mexico's historical role in resisting U.S. expansionism. Uruguayan student leader Carlos Quijano got to the heart of the issue in his speech: "Mexico is the border of Latin America. In this country, the United States have found an enemy not easy to defeat. An energetic resistance has always been the answer to attacks."¹⁰⁰ Quijano saw Mexico as the future zone of dispute between the world's strongest imperialism and global anti-imperialist forces. In the background of these arguments the Mexican Revolution loomed large. The Congress manifesto clearly referred to the Revolution as a cause for hope and a cornerstone of global solidarity. Martínez, the communist from Tamaulipas, talked about the Mexican Revolution and its potential to provide a hopeful example for other anticolonial fights: "The Mexican people have struggled over decades for the fulfilment of their ideal of freedom without ever forgetting that other countries faced the same situation and had the same desires. They were always ready to stand alongside them with all their means."¹⁰¹ The Mexican communist Martínez supported this anti-imperialist interpretation of the Mexican Revolution, at least on the global stage. In the assessment of the Mexican Revolution as fundamentally anti-imperialist and emancipatory, the actions of North American imperialism were interpreted as a reactionary backlash against Mexico's revolutionary achievements, especially against the Mexican Constitution of 1917.¹⁰²

Third, Mexico was praised in Brussels as an example of a non-discriminatory,

99 Texte du discours d'ouverture par Henri Barbusse, 1927, ARCH00804/09, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

100 *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 67.

101 *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 69.

102 The Constitution was mentioned in the final statement (the document not signed by Haya de la Torre); see "Erklärung zur Lage und über die gegen den amerikanischen Imperialismus notwendigen Kampfmassnahmen," 1927, ARCH00804/42, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

inclusive racial democracy. This idea followed the same logic as the “Resolutions communes sur la question nègre” because it contrasted the segregationist U.S. policies—especially in the U.S. South—with the more inclusive idea of *mestizaje*. Vasconcelos presented a version of his idea of the “cosmic race” in Brussels: “At any rate, remember, friends from all over the world, that Latin America is not only our country, but also your country, the country of every man, no matter what race or color, the country of the future and the home of all men.”¹⁰³ In Vasconcelos’s vision, Mexico functioned as an almost natural leader in efforts to achieve future Latin American unity. In his speech, Alfons Goldschmidt, self-declared Mexico-aficionado, championed anti-racist anti-imperialism as a powerful tool against the idea of the supremacy of the “Anglo-Saxon race”: “For us, there is no such thing as a ‘race question.’ [audience:] (Bravo!) We must see race from the perspective of imperialism: as a social category.”¹⁰⁴ Praising the achievements of the “wonderful liberation movements” in Latin American history, Goldschmidt positively referenced the way national and social interests aligned in Mexico. Years later, Goldschmidt wrote in his autobiography that he met brave Latin Americans in Brussels who “were the hope for the groaning army of indios.”¹⁰⁵ Like other anti-imperialists in Brussels, Goldschmidt interpreted the Mexican Revolution as an anti-imperialist, partly indigenous, uprising against the large landowners and thus underlined the importance of racial equality for the whole anti-imperialist movement.

Mexico was very present at the Brussels Congress and became a symbol of the anti-imperialist fights in the Western Hemisphere. The Mexican government as guardian of the revolutionary achievements was openly praised in Brussels, and President Calles delivered “greetings” via telegram.¹⁰⁶ As a code for both anti-imperialism and anti-Yankeeism, Mexico served the function of reducing the complexities of imperialism in the Americas for Europeans, Africans, and Asians. Additionally, the Latin American delegates collectively knew a lot more about Mexico (where many of them lived) than, for example, the ways in which British imperialism operated in Argentina. Surely, the practical support for the congress by the Calles government substantiated Mexico’s role and helped give Mexico the role of leader of Latin American resistance against the United States. At the end of the congress, most of the Latin American delegation signed the resolution on the fight against American imperialism that urged anti-imperialists to build transnational united front organizations.¹⁰⁷ But the struggle for supremacy within the

103 Speech of Vasconcelos [sic], Congress-Meeting of February 10, 1927.

104 Text der Rede von Alfons Goldschmidt, 1927, ARCH00804/56, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

105 Goldschmidt, “Die halbe Welt,” 182.

106 *Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont*, 273.

107 “Erklärung zur Lage und über die gegen den amerikanischen Imperialismus

continental networks of anti-imperialists had only begun in Brussels and would continue in Mexico City.

Disintegration and Disillusionment, 1927–29

Networks in Berlin and Moscow

The immediate reaction to the congress in the European press was divided. Left leaning and communist papers praised the congress, while the conservative press viewed it more critically. Not surprisingly, Münzenberg's *AIZ* eulogized the Brussels Congress in February and March 1927 as "Congress of Billions," as "massive demonstration against the violent imperialist oppression."¹⁰⁸ The *AIZ* front cover showed a photograph of Lansbury and Liao shaking hands: "English–Chinese Fraternization in Brussels."¹⁰⁹ Congress delegate Ernst Toller wrote an article in the Berliner left-liberal *Weltbühne* describing the gathering as "organizational concentration of all rebelling forces of orient, occident, and Europe against the supremacy of the European-American ruling class."¹¹⁰ In a revised version of his early article, Toller later strongly condemned nationalist tendencies among the delegates: "If the liberation of peoples would only serve to replace the war of the imperialists with the war among nations, the world would have not advanced one bit."¹¹¹ Parts of the non-communist and conservative German press were openly hostile towards the Congress, such as the *Pforzheimer Anzeiger*, accusing Toller of "unpatriotic conduct."¹¹²

Outside of Germany, the Brussels Congress was viewed extremely skeptically, and interpreted as the propaganda event of a small group of Berlin-based communists. Some of the European articles can be traced through the secret work of the German officials entrusted with "colonial matters." The German Imperial Colonial Ministry (the Weimar successor of the Imperial Colonial Office) had secretly watched over the activities of the LACO/LAI since April 1926. The German embassy in Brussels reported that the Belgian press had "only reported little."¹¹³ It was only a month later that the Belgian press reported about the Brussels Congress—causing no small degree of

notwendigen Kampfmassnahmen," ARCH00804/42, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

108 "Die Unterdrückten Völker stehen auf," *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, March 6, 1927, 8–9.

109 "Englisch-Chinesische Verbrüderung in Brüssel," *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, March 6, 1927, 1.

110 Ernst Toller, "Der Brüssler Kolonial-Kongreß," *Die Weltbühne* (March 1, 1927): 5–8.

111 "Gegen Kolonialimperialismus," in Ernst Toller, *Quer durch: Reisebilder und Reden* (Heidelberg: Das Wunderhorn, 1978), 237–41.

112 "Vaterlandloses Gebaren," in Ernst Toller, "Imperator Noske," *Die Weltbühne* (March 29, 1927): 37.

113 "Deutsche Gesandtschaft in Brüssel an Auswärtiges Amt," February 15, 1927,

anxiety among the German diplomats and civil servants. The Germans were alarmed because two articles in Belgian newspapers (one Catholic, one liberal) discredited the Congress as serving German interests, implying that it had been supported by German officials.¹¹⁴ An even more radical tone was struck by a Portuguese newspaper that wrote about a German–Soviet pact to destroy global imperialism: “German government in cahoots with communists.”¹¹⁵ The German officials were genuinely worried about this, as they called it, “tendentious coverage” of the congress due to the danger it posed to German interests.¹¹⁶

Organizationally, the founding of the LAI was a lasting impact of the Brussels Congress. Already in Brussels the delegates had decided to found an organization that could formalize the networks and positions established at the congress. Münzenberg and Chatto had already prepared the launch of the “League Against Imperialism,” a name that was carefully constructed to form opposition to the “League of Nations.” The LAI (now replacing the LACO) was an essential part of the anti-imperialist networks of the late 1920s and early 1930s and frequently cooperated with other anticolonial organizations like the Indian National Congress and the Parisian Ligue de Défense de la Race Nègre.¹¹⁷ As its global network grew, the idea of the LAI was questioned by Moscow. While the attacks on the united front strategy had already begun after Chiang Kai-shek’s massacre of Chinese communists, these voices multiplied after the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in July and August of 1928. The Comintern leadership gave up on all united front activities and employed a much more aggressive tone, accusing moderate socialists and social democrats of being “social fascists.” This ideological re-orientation had severe consequences for the LAI, with communists no longer concealing their involvement in the League and openly taking control of the organization. In 1928 and 1929, many non-communist members left the LAI, while others, like the formerly non-communist Chatto, stayed

Bundesarchiv, Berlin R1001/6751, Liga gegen Imperialismus und ihre internationalen Beziehungen, 36.

114 “Au service de l’Allemagne,” *La Nation Belge*, March 13, 1927; “Comment, sous prétexte d’anti-impérialisme colonial, les communistes bolchevisantes et germanisants sont venus tenir leurs assises à Bruxelles,” *L’Étoile Belge*, March 13, 1927, both in Bundesarchiv, Berlin R1001/6751, Liga gegen Imperialismus und ihre internationalen Beziehungen, 62–65.

115 “Congresso Anti-Colonial de Bruxelas,” *Diário de Notícias*, March 22, 1927, Bundesarchiv, Berlin R1001/6751, Liga gegen Imperialismus und ihre internationalen Beziehungen, 74.

116 “Deutsche Gesandtschaft Lissabon an Auswärtiges Amt,” March 24, 1927, Bundesarchiv, Berlin R1001/6751, Liga gegen Imperialismus und ihre internationalen Beziehungen, 72.

117 See Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest*, 150–53.

in the League, supported its ideological transformation, and joined the Communist Party.¹¹⁸

The Second World Congress of the League in 1929 was a clear marker of the ideological shift within the LAI and its abandonment of broad anti-imperialist coalitions. The congress was supposed to take place in Paris, but, as two years before, problems with the authorities forced the LAI to reschedule the congress to take place in Frankfurt am Main. The 1929 Frankfurt Congress still hosted impressive numbers of delegates from all parts of the globe and, at least on the surface, it appears as if Frankfurt continued the way paved in Brussels: China and India continued to be important, while Africa and Latin America were discussed more extensively and special panels on the position of women and the young inside the anti-imperialist struggle provided much-needed new perspectives.¹¹⁹ While those changes certainly looked inclusive, they deflected the public's attention from what the congress had become: more exclusive towards non-communists. Nationalists from the colonies—or those whom the communists labelled as such—were excluded or silenced during the meetings. Unlike in Brussels, the resolutions approved in Frankfurt were drafted by Comintern members beforehand. Nearly all the resolutions took an aggressive tone towards national liberation movements, stating numerous times that “the national bourgeoisie of the colonial countries has ceased as a whole to be a revolutionary factor in the anti-imperialists' movement.”¹²⁰ The harsh language towards nationalist liberation movements from the colonies was based on a new interpretation of anti-imperialism: Instead of seeing it as an inclusive, fluid and open slogan to promote global solidarity, anti-imperialism was now interpreted as a rigid and exclusionary category.¹²¹

The Comintern faction from Moscow dictated the proceedings and had won the upper hand over the Berlin network. Ironically—if only in hindsight—the Frankfurt Congress proved right the critics of the Brussels Congress and the LAI, who had always suspected the whole endeavor of being “Bolshevik propaganda.”¹²² The communist agenda dominated the Congress and steered its focus towards the Soviet Union. Speculation about a coming war against Soviet Russia influenced the Congress Manifesto as well as the public opening of the congress in the Hippodrom Frankfurt, which was succinctly titled “War China–Soviet Russia?,” with Sen Katayama and

118 Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest*, 154.

119 “Agenda,” 1929, ARCH00804/69, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

120 “Resolution: ‘The Political Situation and the War Danger,’” July 1929, ARCH00804/90, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

121 See Louro, “Where National Revolution Ends,” 339.

122 See, for example, a letter to the German Foreign Ministry, March 26, 1927, Bundesarchiv, Berlin R1001/6751, Liga gegen Imperialismus und ihre internationalen Beziehungen, 67.

Georg Ledebour as speakers.¹²³ The Anti-Imperialist Youth Conference, which was taking place at the same time in Frankfurt, echoed the growing influence of the Soviet Union even more strongly. Its first speaker, a man named Rust, from the Communist Youth International, praised the Soviet Union for “voluntarily waiving their inherent imperialist privileges in China,” a formulation that must have sounded like a parody to some anti-imperialists who had experienced the Brussels Congress.¹²⁴ The Frankfurt Congresses of 1929 marked a decisive shift from the idea of a united front based on the principle of internationalism to the more rigid interpretation of internationalism as support for the Soviet Union. South-South solidarity, encouraged in Brussels, became impossible as soon as it meant that any form of cooperation had to go through Moscow. Consequently, the attractiveness of the LAI in non-communist circles and in the colonies approached null after the Frankfurt Congress.

The role of Latin America, and specifically Mexico, in Frankfurt was representative of how the Comintern’s perspective on anti-imperialism had shifted. While Mexico had been very important in Brussels in 1927, it was marginal at best in Frankfurt 1929. The resolution on Latin America merely echoed the general direction of the Congress, calling for the defense of the Soviet Union and sideswiping the APRA as the “ex-revolutionary students” of the “Guomindang of Latin America.”¹²⁵ Though Diego Rivera was elected to the Executive Committee of the LAI, he did not show up in Frankfurt and had no traceable influence on the congress agenda. The delegates from Latin America included familiar figures from the anti-imperialist circles like Germán List Arzubide and Alfons Goldschmidt, who spoke on behalf of Venezuela this time.¹²⁶ In total, 16 delegates from Latin America attended the congress.¹²⁷ Jacobo Hurwitz, by 1929 a well-known figure in the anti-imperialist network of Mexico City, held a speech at the Youth Conference in which he explained the importance of the student movement for anti-imperialism in Latin America. Hurwitz also lamented that the Mexican petit-bourgeoisie had stopped its fight against imperialism and that the Portes Gil government had instead become an “agent of North American imperialism.”¹²⁸ The Mexican government, in 1927 still the proud supporter of the Brussels Congress, was

123 “Manifesto of the Second World Congress of the League Against Imperialism,” July 1929, ARCH00804/78; “Pamphlet der Liga mit Einladung zu der Eröffnungskundgebung des 2. Weltkongresses,” July 1929, ARCH00804/76, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

124 “Protokoll des Kongresses. Mit Liste der Delegierten,” 1929, ARCH00804/107, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

125 “Protokoll des Kongresses. Mit Liste der Delegierten.”

126 “Agenda,” 1929, ARCH00804/69, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

127 For a complete list of all delegates, see Petersson, *Münzenberg*, 624

128 “Protokoll des Kongresses. Mit Liste der Delegierten.”

now seen as an enemy of the global communist movement. Against this backdrop, Mexico—and with it, implicitly, the Mexican Revolution—lost its symbolic weight as a place of anti-imperialist resistance.

For the Comintern, anti-imperialist allies such as the Mexican government were no longer welcome by 1929. The Berlin network of anti-imperialists was damaged by the Comintern, and, shortly afterwards, destroyed by the Nazis. In February 1933, the LAI's Berlin headquarters was shut down as part of the broader Nazi crackdown on all anticolonial institutions in Germany.¹²⁹ The League's members were expelled or fled Germany. Münzenberg, and with him the German section, relocated to Paris. On paper, the LAI continued to exist until 1936, but without any significant influence on communist networks in Europe. In Mexico City, the communists similarly destroyed what they had built since 1925 by abandoning the united front idea and its most prominent organization in the Americas, the LADLA.

Networks in Mexico City

In Mexico City, where anti-imperialists had been anticipating the Brussels Congress since 1926, the reports about the Congress really took off after the event had taken place. In February 1927, the communist newspaper *El Machete* reported about the “grandiose” event.¹³⁰ It took some months until the analysis of the event could be delivered, but in June 1927 the LADLA paper *El Libertador* published an extensive special issue on the congress, printing the manifesto, several resolutions, Barbusse's speech (all in Spanish translation), and two photographs. Additionally, the editors commented on the significance of the congress, praising its outcome as a “solemn pact of solidarity against the modern scourge of humankind,” imperialism.¹³¹ Not surprising in an organ that always advocated the united front idea, the analysts of *El Libertador* praised Brussels as a convention of all anti-imperialists in “one single gigantic front” and explicitly demanded that the same kind of union be formed in Mexico and Latin America. Brussels, in this interpretation, gave new inspiration to the projects that sought to unite the countries of Latin America.

Diego Rivera designed the front cover for the special issue of *El Libertador* on the Brussels Congress. His contribution is crucial because it represented an understanding that many anti-imperialists in Mexico shared. The front cover illustration depicted the oppressed peoples of the world in the background, raising their hands and their weapons: hammer, sickle, and pen—symbols of revolutionary workers, peasants, and intellectuals. Separated from the ethnically diverse “peoples of the world” by a brick wall, three figures openly showed their disgust of the rebelling masses.

129 See Brückenhaus, *Policing Transnational Protest*, 171–72.

130 “Grandioso Congreso Antiimperialista en Bruselas,” *El Machete* (second fortnight of February 1927): 1.

131 “El Congreso Antiimperialista de Bruselas,” *El Libertador*, June 10, 1927, 4.

They represented the global system of imperialism and were clearly identifiable: a fat British man with a Union flag on his cylinder, a hawked-nosed Uncle Sam, and a small, seemingly submissive figure wearing the pope's tiara. The three possessed tools to defend the existing order: a dagger, a pistol, and a bag of money. Their contempt is engraved in their facial expressions. Rivera's interpretation of the Brussels Congress from Mexico City was remarkable and showed how Mexican anti-imperialists combined global and local events and integrated the results into existing frameworks of anti-imperialism. The "peoples of the world" part of the caricature is rather conventional and reflects the rhetoric of the Congress and its interpretation in *El Libertador*: the oppressed peoples of the world finally come together in a historically unique fashion.

The front part of the picture, with the figures representing the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Vatican, is, however, intriguing. For Rivera, these three powers upheld the global system of imperialism with their money and capability to use brute force. Rivera's depiction of the forces behind imperialism diverged from the coverage they received at the actual congress in Brussels. While the role of Great Britain and its involvement in the League of Nation's mandate system was discussed in Brussels, the role of the United States as a new leading global power was acknowledged by most delegates, but actively promoted only by the Latin American delegates. The third figure's depiction is most striking: the role of the Catholic Church in the global system of imperialism was non-existent in Brussels.¹³² Instead, the idea of broad alliances included Christian anti-imperialists like the Italian delegate Guido Miglioli, who spoke for the Association of Catholic Peasants and warned against the expansion of fascism in Italy.¹³³ Rivera presented a Mexican perspective on the Congress in which the Catholic Church, which traditionally took the side of large landowners and promoted ultra-conservative social values in Mexico, was integrated into the global system of imperialist oppression. Apart from the traditional anti-revolutionary role of the Catholic Church in Mexico, the Cristero Rebellion gave new urgency to this anti-clericalism.

While the role of the Church was seen much more critically in Mexico than in Brussels, some lessons from Brussels were directly transferred to the urban network of anti-imperialists in Mexico City. A case in point is the growing role of China for the anti-imperialist movement in Mexico. Latin American anti-imperialists had been interested in the events in China prior to the Brussels Congress, and *El Libertador* regularly reported on the anti-imperialist struggles in China and on related events, like the death of Sun Yat-Sen or the atrocities committed by the armies of imperialist forces

132 The words "pope," "Vatican," and "Catholic Church" do not appear in the Congress protocol at all.

133 "Discours du délégué italien Guido Miglioli," 1927, ARCH00804/51, League Against Imperialism Archive, International Institute of Social History.

in China.¹³⁴ Brussels strengthened the thinking about China in Mexico. The Chinese nationalist party had been praised in Brussels and many communists were not immune to the attraction of the Guomindang: Julio Mella praised the Chinese nationalists as a “mighty organization” that had inspired the revolution in China.¹³⁵ The praise ended abruptly after Chiang Kai-shek killed thousands during the April 1927 Shanghai massacre. This betrayal was used to fight the renegade anti-imperialists of the APRA. Former APRA member Jacobo Hurwitz questioned all alliances with nationalist or bourgeois anti-imperialist forces in a special issue about the Brussels Congress.¹³⁶

After the Brussels Congress, Latin American communists lashed out against anti-imperialist nationalists. This conflict mainly took place inside the anti-imperialist network of Mexico City. Julio Antonio Mella, who had become the Comintern’s most reliable partner in Latin America after the Congress, published a small book in April 1928 in Mexico City called *¿Qué es el ARPA?*, a reckoning with Haya’s organization and his behavior in Brussels.¹³⁷ Mella now used the Guomindang analogy against Haya, likening him to Chiang Kai-shek. Interestingly, Mella also showed in his text that Haya’s claimed love for China stood in sharp contrast to Haya’s actions against Chinese merchants in both Peru and Mexico, where Haya had praised the propaganda of the Anti-Chinese Committee of Mexico.¹³⁸ While throughout 1927 Stalin and the Comintern still adhered to the united front policy and only in 1928 declared that nationalist forces could not be trusted, Latin Americans had already drawn their own conclusions. Latin American communists began using “China” as a reference to discredit nationalist anti-imperialists.

The goal of the Berlin LAI network was to establish national divisions around the globe, a project that proved difficult in Mexico City because the anti-imperialists of the city had established their own transnational organization in 1925: the LADLA. Like the LAI, the LADLA had received money from Moscow and had therefore already acquired experience in the struggle to keep its autonomy vis-à-vis the Comintern. The LADLA successfully retained a remarkable level of independence from the communists, which was perhaps the reason why the Comintern wanted to establish another, potentially rivalling united front organization in Mexico City. Münzenberg’s reasoning behind expanding the LAI to the Americas was probably twofold:

134 “La muerte de Sun Yat-sen,” *El Libertador* 3 (June 1925): 2 and “La Masacre Imperialista en China,” *El Libertador* 7 (February 1926): 14.

135 Julio Antonio Mella, “El Kuo Min Tang y la Revolución China,” *El Libertador* 8 (April 1926): 11–12.

136 Jacobo Hurwitz, “La esperanza amarilla,” *El Libertador* 12 (June 1927).

137 Mella distorted the acronym APRA to ARPA (“harp”) to mock Haya and to stress that for the APRA “the popular stands before the revolutionary.” Julio Antonio Mella, *¿Qué es el ARPA?* (Lima: Editorial Educación, 1975 [1928]), 11.

138 Mella, *¿Qué es el ARPA?*, 64–65.

he wanted to strengthen his own Berlin network in the Americas while at the same time enlarging his organization as a whole. Münzenberg's plan to organize the LAI in the Americas involved people he trusted and delegates he had already met in Brussels: Gómez, Mella, Goldschmidt, and Federico Bach. While the U.S. section of the LAI was established in July 1927 and organized several public rallies in the United States, the Latin American bureau—supposed to be located in Mexico City alongside the LADLA headquarters—remained fictional.¹³⁹ The whole operation was a dubious idea of Europeans who had little concept of the realities in Latin America. The LADLA had already gained a reputation as a continental anti-imperialist organization and there was no need for another anti-imperialist united front organization. Besides, the LADLA was a member of the LAI anyway and had sent delegates to its congresses. In short, the LAI failed in Mexico City because the anti-imperialist movement had already established its own transnationally active network and needed no tutelage from the Europeans.

After the Brussels Congress, the connections between Berlin and Mexico City were in some cases even strengthened, despite the attempts of Moscow to gain control over both networks. Goldschmidt regularly wrote articles for *El Libertador* about Europe and for the German newspaper *AIZ* about Mexico and Central America; Bach wrote for *El Libertador* and acted as a correspondent for the *AIZ*, writing articles and sending photographs from Mexico City to Germany. These connections between Münzenberg's press conglomerate in Berlin and the offices of *El Libertador* in Mexico City were probably part of the attempts to establish the LAI bureau in Mexico City. In February 1928, the official organ of the German section of the LAI, *Der koloniale Freiheitskampf*, published *El Libertador's* front cover of the previous month on its own front page, propagating solidarity with the fight of Sandino in Nicaragua.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps because they recognized the futility of their mission, Bach's and Goldschmidt's efforts to establish the LAI bureau in Mexico slowly ebbed. With the right turn of the Calles government in 1929, communist organizations in Mexico had other worries anyway and the project was dead before it had ever really started. In Mexico, anti-imperialists concentrated their efforts on Sandino's fight in Nicaragua and adopted a language of continental rather than global solidarity.

At the Brussels Congress, Latin American delegates stressed their membership to the global networks of anti-imperialism and insisted on the relevance of Latin America for the global fight against imperialism. Especially Mexico became a symbol for semi-colonialism and for the fight against U.S. imperialism. In 1927, the role of the United States was viewed skeptically in Africa, and Asia as well, as the Wilsonian moment had long faded, making this focus a promising strategy for Latin American anti-imperialists. They were

139 Petersson, *Münzenberg*, 341–48.

140 *Der koloniale Freiheitskampf: Mitteilungsblatt der Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung und Imperialismus* (February 1, 1928), 1.

not unsuccessful in their pledge to focus on the role of the United States, as a remark in Nehru's report makes clear: "Most of us, specially from Asia, were wholly ignorant of the problems of South America, and of how the rising imperialism of the United States, with its tremendous resources and its immunity from outside attack, is gradually taking a stranglehold of Central and South America." But, Nehru continued, other anticolonial activists "are not likely to remain ignorant much longer for the great problem of the near future will be American imperialism."¹⁴¹ For the Indian anticolonial activist Nehru, the idea that the United States was an empire comparable to the British Empire was far from absurd. Latin American voices were heard and understood in Brussels.

141 Jawaharlal Nehru, "Report on the Brussels Congress of 19 February 1927," in Nehru, *Selected Works*, 2.281.

Conclusion

The North American businessman, the Brahmin, the Syrian, the Turk, many Chinese and Japanese; Europe, Asia, and Africa meet there. [...] Again, it is Babylon, though the Spanish language prevails.

Alfons Goldschmidt (1927)¹

Many of this book's chapters featured stories of historical actors entering Mexico City at some point during the 1920s. The Cuban revolutionary Julio Antonio Mella first came to the city in 1920 and returned in early 1926, the American journalist Anita Brenner arrived in 1923, and the Venezuelan radical Eduardo Machado started his Mexican exile in 1926. The German professor Alfons Goldschmidt, the Italian-American photographer Tina Modotti, and the Indian anticolonialist Pandurang Khankhoje also arrived during the 1920s, likewise attracted by the Mexican capital and its reputation as center for leftist anti-imperialism. It is no coincidence that so many non-Mexicans came to live their dreams of revolution and radical politics in the city. Neither is it a coincidence that, by the beginning of the 1930s, all of these activists, except for Khankhoje, had left Mexico City. By then, the city had lost what had made it special in the eyes of Latin American communists, American socialists, European radicals, and Asian anticolonialists: the appeal of an intellectual center of radical activism, where diverse visions of a non-imperialist world could be imagined, created, tested, and performed.

In the 1920s, Mexico City became the Western hemisphere's anti-imperialist melting pot, a laboratory for transnational political activism in a society that had recently experienced social revolution. Driven by the desire to present themselves as heirs of the Mexican Revolution, the Mexican presidents

1 Alfons Goldschmidt, *Auf den Spuren der Azteken* (Berlin: Universum Bücherei, 1927), 31.

Obregón and Calles elevated anti-imperialism to what can effectively be called a state doctrine. Some political actors, like education minister José Vasconcelos, actively worked towards making anti-imperialism a central ideological doctrine by integrating it into new education programs, promoting new forms of art, or attracting radical political activists who had been exiled from their home countries. The legacy of the Mexican Revolution enabled the combination, sometimes even symbiosis, of Mexican nationalism and internationalist anti-imperialism. Besides the attraction of the Mexican Revolution, the success of the revolution in Russia inspired leftist political activists, even if they did not embrace communism, because it showed the malleability of political circumstances and the possibility of enacting radically new forms of political organization. Local factors of Mexico City and its position within continental networks of exile and political radicalism additionally helped to transform the modernizing capital into a laboratory for transnational anti-imperialist activism.

The first three chapters of this book focused on how networks of anti-imperialists played out on the local level of the Mexican capital. They highlighted the strong local embeddedness of anti-imperialist networks as well as their fundamentally transnational character. Anti-imperialism was an integral part of the city's avant-garde scene, of Mexican muralism, and of what Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has called the Mexican Cosmopolitan Summer. In the "world-class city with cosmopolitan flair,"² diverse artists embraced an anti-imperialist imagery that soon became a crucial inspiration for a radical iconography. Anti-imperialist and anticolonial symbols and images were at the center of the city's murals and newspapers in the 1920s, be it the use of the machete as symbol for anti-imperial resistance or the omnipresence of the Wall Street image to symbolize American financial imperialism. The Mexican Cosmopolitan Summer was much more than just a phase of foreigners' fascination for revolutionary tourism. Many non-Mexicans contributed to the vibrant art scene of the city and helped to create an atmosphere of radical activism in which the worlds of art and politics mutually reinforced each other. Anti-imperialism brought art and politics together and functioned as a way to address the inherent tensions between Mexican nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Muralists enthusiastically participated in the project of cultural nationalism by including indigenous topics into their work, winning them both the praise of foreign critics as well as an air of condescension from many conservatives in Mexico City. On walls and, later, on the pages of the radical papers *El Machete* and *El Libertador*, muralists fused their radical visions of revolutionary Mexico with a Marxism that was influenced by Russian social realism while frequently integrating, and thereby re-formulating, anti-imperialist symbols into their works. Anti-imperialism

2 See Jürgen Buchenau, *Plutarco Elias Calles and the Mexican Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 81.

was integral to the art world of Mexico City in the 1920s, and art was an integral part of forming anti-imperialism.

The rise and fall of Latin American exile activism in Mexico City can only be understood with a focus on anti-imperialist alliances, too. The repercussion of the Mexican Revolution across Latin America was the main factor attracting radicals and thus a cause of the city becoming a crucial hub of exile activism. Particularly the message of anti-imperialist solidarity was promoted by Mexican intellectuals and government officials who worked for the aim of increasing Mexican influence in Central and South America. In 1925, the attractive conditions for Latin American exiles in Mexico City led to a long moment of extraordinary exchange and cooperation between Venezuelans, Cubans, and Peruvians in the city. Until 1927, Mexico City remained the central hub of Latin American exile communities in the Western hemisphere. Within the networks of exiles in Mexico City, anti-imperialism functioned as enabler of Latin American solidarity and as catalyst of a radical revolutionary spirit. After 1927, mainly due to ideological and strategic differences between different national exile groups, these networks of exile cooperation disintegrated and gave way to a national logic in which the respective national revolutionary projects became more important than transnational cooperation in a spirit of Latin American solidarity. Symbolically, the golden age of Mexico City as a hub of Latin American radical exiles came to an end with the assassination of Julio Antonio Mella in the city.

Two transnational solidarity campaigns, the campaign for the release of the Italian-American anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti and the campaign supporting Augusto César Sandino in Nicaragua, were important symbols for anti-imperialist activism in the city. The global campaign for Sacco and Vanzetti was used for local aims in Mexico City as communist groups attempted to transform the case into an anti-imperialist issue during the solidarity movement's radicalization in the summer of 1927. The anti-imperialist outrage over the execution of the two anarchists was then, locally, readjusted to fit the simultaneously succeeding Hands Off Nicaragua campaign which supported the liberal general Sandino and relied heavily on continental networks of anti-imperialists centered in Mexico City. Local struggles, alliances, and tactics of the earlier Sacco-and-Vanzetti campaign were reimagined in a transnational campaign that emphasized Latin American unity and solidarity against what was perceived as a U.S. intervention in a sovereign nation state. The success of the campaign showed that transnational solidarity could well succeed without the involvement of the Global North. As in other cases, anti-imperialism functioned as an integrative force, holding together ideologically disparate groups. The two campaigns showed the limits but also the potential of the communists' united front strategy. Anti-imperialism was effectively used by communists to gain access to larger swaths of the population, while a narrow interpretation of the Comintern guidelines during the early Third Period carried the danger of cutting off the communists from local alliances.

The role of Mexico City for the broader networks of global anti-imperialism is still underestimated. Both the relatively abstract concept of tricontinental thinking, a concept closely related to the Mexican and the Russian Revolutions, and the Brussels Congress of 1927, are examples that show that global anti-imperialism can hardly be understood without a contextualization of global and local circumstances, trends, and networks. Novel ways of imagining anti-imperialism initiated an early form of tricontinental thinking in Mexico as a Mexican version of the idea of solidarity between Africa, Asia, and Latin America, was already born in the 1920s. After the world war, many political activists and intellectuals in Latin America looked towards Africa and Asia because they were disappointed with the European powers' slaughter in the war as well as worried about the growing economic power of the United States. In the political and intellectual scene of Mexico City, "looking East" became a means to think about alternatives to Western modernity. The stereotyped East included the societies in Africa and Asia, but also Russia and its new societal model of Soviet-style communism. Tricontinental thinking was closely linked to the Russian and Mexican Revolutions, two revolutions with a clear anti-imperialist direction. For nationalists as well as communists and liberals, self-determination and revolution became watchwords that promised what the Western democracies were unwilling to provide: a just global system without foreign interference into weaker nations' internal affairs. During these thought experiments, diverse perspectives revealed that "the East" was an abstract construction that could be filled with different meanings according to context and intention. Anti-imperialists in Mexico City found many ways to express solidarity or commonality between Mexico and China (a shared semi-coloniality), between Mexico and Morocco (a common history of Spanish colonialism), and between Mexico and India (a supposed racial similarity and a reliance on agriculture). While anti-imperialism in Mexico City had traditionally been focused on its rejection of U.S. influence, this North-South logic was accompanied by an East-West dichotomy in which the West stood for capitalism and imperialism while the East represented self-determination and revolution. Like Africans and Asians, Latin Americans possessed a history of colonialism and increasingly harnessed that history for tricontinental solidarity in the 1920s.

The Brussels Congress of 1927 was influenced by the global networks of the anti-imperialist scene of Mexico City. The Congress revealed the difficulties and potentials of framing anti-imperialism as a global movement against colonialism and imperialism. While the term's vagueness could integrate many diverse movements and even conceal internal contradictions, its ideological flexibility became precisely then a liability when actors from different contexts expressed their disagreements on the concept's precise meaning. At the congress, anti-imperialism was a contested catchphrase that meant different things to different actors. The congress was the result of cooperation between different urban networks with centers in Moscow, Berlin, and Mexico City.

Despite the efforts to present the congress as the coming together of different *national* movements, a close look at the organizational structure and internal conflicts reveals that the congress was realized by a small number of actors, grouped together in their respective urban networks. Regarding the role of communism in the global anti-imperialist networks, the history of the Brussels Congress serves as a reminder that neither the narrative of a simple diffusion from Moscow's directives nor the story of local resistance against those same orders does justice to the complex struggles within communism that can much better be explained by the logic of competing, but interrelated, urban networks in the interwar years.

In telling the story of Mexico City becoming an anti-imperialist center in the 1920s, I have developed several related arguments. The first argument concerns the chronology of this history. I have argued that from the summer of 1925 until the summer of 1927, Mexico City was the site of an anti-imperialist apogee. The city became the location of a perfect storm of anti-imperialism in which several short-term and long-term developments culminated. Encouraged by the favorable conditions in postrevolutionary Mexico, different communities of political actors—muralists, exile communities, radical intellectuals, foreign scholars—had been able to grow their political and discursive power since the early 1920s. Between 1925 and 1927, many of these groups openly embraced anti-imperialism as their central ideology. In 1925 and early 1926, several events and developments coincided to initiate the peak of anti-imperialist radicalism: the exile community of Havana was forced to move to Mexico City, U.S.–Mexican relations seriously deteriorated under the new president Calles, the muralists voiced their radical Marxism, the anti-imperialist LADLA was founded with money from the Comintern, the global campaign to save Sacco and Vanzetti gained visibility in the city, and the anti-imperialist fights in China, Syria, and Morocco amplified the anti-imperialist atmosphere. In short, Mexico City experienced a long moment of political activism in which numerous struggles and issues were merged under the concept of anti-imperialism.

Anti-imperialism's ideological flexibility was an advantage during this apogee as it allowed for alliances between Mexican officials, American socialists, Comintern agents, and Cuban revolutionaries. But anti-imperialism's relative vagueness also led to the end of the Mexican anti-imperialist moment. After the Brussels Congress, the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti and the improvement of U.S.–Mexican relations under the increasingly conservative Calles, it became clear that the concrete aims of different actors who had used anti-imperialist rhetoric were vastly different. The Comintern had used the label to gain a foothold in Mexico while simultaneously denouncing the Mexican government; Latin American radicals in exile had picked it up to gain support from the Mexican government for their planned national revolutions, and Mexican nationalists and socialists alike had embraced it to fend off the imperial ambitions of the United States. With the baggage of all these conflicts, the perfect storm of anti-imperialism ended in 1927. This does not

mean that anti-imperialism disappeared from politics, though, as it continued to appeal to a number of influential and diverse actors during the late 1920s and 1930s, most notably during the Hands Off Nicaragua campaign and Cárdenas's nationalization projects. But the ideological flexibility, the hopeful radicalism, and the centrality of a global consciousness increasingly gave way to more rigidly separated ideologies and to a revolutionary rhetoric that quickly became a stale ritual in Mexican politics in the 1940s.

The second argument of this book is that a transnational lens on radical political networks can best capture the importance of intellectual and physical exchange across national borders in the 1920s. Much of historiography has already underlined this argument, especially when it comes to Latin American networks of intellectual entanglement.³ Minor revisions to the existing scholarship can be made, though. More surprising than the general degree of transnational interaction was the degree to which North American political radicals were involved in the anti-imperialist scene of the 1920s. Americans like the slackers, the communist couple Bertram and Ella Wolfe, and the photographer Tina Modotti were key figures in the anti-imperialist scene of Mexico City. Furthermore, intellectual and academic exchange was at the basis of anti-imperialist theory building in the 1920s, with Nearing's and Freeman's *Dollar Diplomacy* becoming a Latin American classic, but also with American anti-imperialists like Ernest Gruening arguing for a stronger recognition of Mexican independence. All in all, anti-imperialism was developed in a transnational thought zone that encompassed at least the Spanish-speaking parts of Latin America and the United States of America. The radical rejection of any kind of imperialism of the United States did not mean the rejection of U.S. politics or culture per se. Quite the contrary was often true: shared anti-imperialist convictions could be a bridge between the United States and Mexico and anti-imperialists in Mexico City regularly praised their "allies in the United States."⁴ In stating this, I second the findings of historian Martín Bergel, who has called the transnational networks of anti-imperialism part of an anti-anti-American culture.⁵ Of course, there was also a good amount of plain anti-Americanism within anti-imperialism, but anti-Americanism alone cannot satisfyingly explain anti-imperialism's success in Mexico.

3 See, for example, Alexandra Pita González, *La unión latinoamericana y el boletín renovación: Redes intelectuales y revistas culturales en la década de 1920* (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2009).

4 See "Aliados en los Estados Unidos," *El Libertador* 1 (March 1925): 3.

5 See Martín Bergel, "El anti-antinorteamericanismo en América Latina (1898–1939): Apuntes para una historia intelectual," *Nueva sociedad* 236 (2011). For a similar argument about the cultural relations between the United States and Mexico, specifically about the important role of the 1920s, see Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920–1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 203–8.

Third, by studying anti-imperialist networks, this work has advocated that the decade of the 1920s deserves its own space in Mexican historiography to understand the decade's logic more appropriately. The 1920s was a time of hopeful departure and radical imaginations, a decade of state-building in which political possibilities and heterogeneous hopes were openly expressed and experimented with. Although heavily influenced by the repercussions of the armed struggles of the Mexican Revolution, the 1920s was much more than solely the epilogue of the revolution.⁶ A transnational lens on the 1920s can reveal some of the decade's particularities and situate Mexico City as both a place of postrevolutionary dynamics but also as part of larger continental and global networks. Tricontinental thinking, for example, was encouraged by the postrevolutionary environment, but it was also simultaneously embedded in a larger discourse in which European colonialism and U.S. imperialism were heavily criticized in many places, not just in Mexico. On the other hand, the 1920s was not just a pre-history of Cardenismo, the later rule of President Lázaro Cárdenas from 1934 to 1940. While there is reason to regard Cárdenas as the political actor who ultimately stabilized the political system after the revolution and secured many revolutionary achievements, including the constitution's anti-imperialist elements, it would be a teleological misconception to see the 1920s as a phase that had to culminate in a strong leader securing the revolutionary aims. If one adheres to such a logic at all, it could as well be argued that this strong leader was the ambivalent character Calles—not the still very popular Cárdenas—who laid the foundation for PRI rule when he founded its predecessor PNR in 1929. Examining anti-imperialist networks has shown that in the 1920s the Mexican government was neither helpless nor completely in control over political radicalism and civil society more broadly. In other words, a focus on the 1920s highlights the contingencies of Mexico's postrevolutionary history.

Having asserted the uniqueness of the 1920s in Mexican history, one also has to acknowledge the long-term continuities initiated in the 1920s. The state consolidation and "institutionalization" of the revolution continued under Cárdenas and his successors. Cárdenas, a loyal supporter of Calles in the 1920s, soon emancipated himself from his predecessors after his election in 1934 and terminated Calles's informal rule as Jefe Máximo. The Cárdenas presidency, lasting until 1940, became a phase of renewed left-wing politics with the distribution of land, implementation of social security, and nationalization of oil companies carried out to fulfill the promises of the revolution both nationally and internationally. But rather than a break

6 For an overview over the decade's function in historiography, see Heather Fowler-Salamini, "De-Centering the 1920s: Socialismo a la Tamaulipeca," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 14, no. 2 (1998): 288–89. Sarah Osten recently made a similar argument in her work on postrevolutionary socialism in Southeastern Mexico; see Sarah Osten, *The Mexican Revolution's Wake: The Making of a Political System, 1920–1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 12.

with the developments of the 1920s, the social reforms further consolidated the revolution and established the power of the state in all of Mexico. In this process, Cárdenas regularly used anti-imperialism to defend Mexican interests, for example against U.S. petroleum companies. Instead of the 1920s as a prehistory to Cardenismo, one could see the 1930s and the more conservative 1940s as phases of continued state consolidation prioritizing economic growth and modernization—including occasional elements of anti-imperialist rhetoric and what historian Christy Thornton has called a “historical duty deriving from the revolution” in international relations.⁷ In the 1940s, the project of economic modernization continued under Cárdenas’s conservative successor Manuel Ávila Camacho, but anti-imperialist rhetoric was temporarily sidelined by a focus on anti-fascism. Camacho positioned Mexico as ally of the United States against the Axis powers and entered the war in 1942, supporting the United States in its war efforts, and welcoming (certain) refugees fleeing from Nazi persecution in Europe.⁸

Globally, anti-imperialism celebrated a triumphant comeback after the Second World War. During the decades of decolonization in Africa and Asia, anti-imperialism gained new momentum in Latin America as well. The Cuban Revolution in 1959 made Latin American anti-imperialism known to the whole world. This Cuban version of anti-imperialism, not its Mexican predecessor, would come to dominate the popular understanding of what anti-imperialism meant and symbolized for the following decades.⁹ As in the 1920s, anti-imperialism inspired tricontinental solidarity, most notably with the 1966 Tricontinental Conference and with the numerous journeys that made Che Guevara the quasi-official diplomat of the Cuban Revolution. The Argentine physician, like Mella in the 1920s, experienced Mexico City as exile location in the 1950s. In Mexico City, Guevara met the Castro brothers and attended the economics lectures of Jesús Silva Herzog, one of the Mexican

7 For Thornton, the revolution helped the Mexican governments assume a leadership role in the struggle for a different global economic order and was a basis for coalitions with Latin American and Third World countries. See Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 1, 9.

8 For a discussion on the achievements and limitations of Mexico’s immigration and refugee policies in the 1940s, see Daniela Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles: Mexico and the Jewish Refugees from Nazism, 1933–1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Frédéric Bonnesoeur, Christine Kausch, Thomas Lindner, Winfried Meyer, and Julia Pietsch, eds., *Geschlossene Grenzen: Die internationale Flüchtlingskonferenz von Évian 1938* (Berlin: Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung/Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 2018), 292–97 and <https://evian1938.de/en/mexico>.

9 For transnational studies of Mexico’s role in the context of decolonization, the Cold War, and post-Bandung movements, see Renata Keller, *Mexico’s Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Eric Zolov, *The Last Good Neighbor: Mexico in the Global Sixties* (Durham, NC: Duke, 2020).

radical intellectuals already active in the 1920s. Arguably, Mexico City and its history of resistance was, once again, the place that inspired dreams of social revolution elsewhere. While the history of Mexico City continues to be a source of—often romanticized, often distorted—stories of revolution until today, there is no denying that the decade of the 1920s was central to the city's perception as a space of radical activism. And there is truth to that image: fueled by local traditions of resistance, global imaginaries of revolution, and the seemingly countless possibilities of a postrevolutionary capital, the Mexican metropolis became a hub of transnational activism and radical anti-imperialism in this turbulent decade.

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