

INTRODUCTION

Nehru and the Interwar World

In 1927, more than 170 delegates from across the world joined together in Brussels for the inaugural meeting of the League against Imperialism (LAI). This little-studied organization sought to coordinate the efforts of anti-imperialists across the interwar world and especially in the colonies. The chairman of the congress, George Lansbury of the British Labour Party, best captured the meeting's message by calling upon his comrades from Asia who were entrenched in anticolonial struggles: "Do not be fooled by the cry of mere nationalism . . . Get your national ownership, get your national control, that is right and proper, but do not stop there because if you do you will have only gone half way." Instead, Lansbury emphasized that "nationalism is *to be blended* with internationalism, because until it is, until the world is built on the foundation of *international comradeship* . . . all our labour is in vain."¹ Among the audience of notable Asian leaders was a budding anticolonial nationalist from India, Jawaharlal Nehru, who came to be profoundly influenced by Lansbury's message. After 1927, Nehru frequently argued that India's "nationalism is based on the most intense internationalism."²

This book reconstructs the history of Nehru's engagement with anti-imperialist "comradeship" and the special "blend" between internationalism and nationalism. The story begins in 1927, when Nehru arrived in Brussels and joined the LAI. As a result, he established lasting connections with many interwar activists abroad, both communists and noncommunists, who also sought a collective mobilization against imperialist powers and capitalist classes. The LAI

¹ George Lansbury, "Speech at the Brussels Congress," February 13, 1927, File G29-1927, All-Indian Congress Committee Papers, Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, India (hereafter AICC) (emphasis added).

² Nehru, Press Statement made in Brussels, February 9, 1927, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1972), 270 (hereafter cited as *SWJN*). Citations are from the first series published in 1972 unless otherwise noted.

joined Nehru with other anticolonial nationalists, socialists, communists, civil liberties reformers, pacifists, and antifascists. Although Nehru left the LAI in 1930, this book traces how anti-imperialist internationalism continued to inform his conceptualization of India and the wider world throughout the later years of the interwar period and beyond. Later in the 1930s, anti-imperialism became a struggle not only against capitalism and imperialism, but also against fascism and war. This led Nehru to the International Peace Campaign (IPC) in 1936. He also made the case that India's anticolonialism was linked to antifascist and anti-imperialist struggles in places such as China, Nicaragua, Abyssinia, Egypt, Republican Spain, and the Gold Coast (or present-day Ghana).

Nehru's politics were never confined to the nation after 1927; rather, for him, the nation was only the partial fulfillment of a broader vision of internationalism rooted in his experiences with anti-imperialist mobilizations in the interwar years. For Nehru, anti-imperialism came to mean the "blend" of Indian anticolonial nationalism and the diverse political projects represented in the anti-imperialist movement. I return to Lansbury's notion of "blending" frequently in this book to demonstrate the flexibility and heterogeneity of ideas that came to be part of the anti-imperialist movement and Nehru's appropriation of it. Nehru accepted Lansbury's argument that national sovereignty was "only half way" to achieving the goals of anti-imperialist "comradeship," and worked to "blend" Indian nationalist and internationalist objectives. His internationalist engagements enabled Nehru to develop lifelong partnerships and political projects in the name of anti-imperialism.

Nehru remains a mercurial figure in Indian historiography, and this book contends that this perception is primarily because we have yet to understand the pre-eminence of anti-imperialist internationalism in his life and work before 1947. This reinterpretation of Nehru encourages a history of political activism in India beyond the dominant narratives of Indian nationalism.³ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton rightly argue that histories of empire remain "insular," while historiography of

³ Scholars such as Maia Ramnath and Kama Maclean argue persuasively that Indian anticolonial resistance in the interwar years was more diverse and complicated than historians have recognized. See Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and Kama Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

anticolonial nationalism is “equally inward-looking.”⁴ Studies of colonial India and leaders such as Nehru are no exception. Scholarship on Nehru continues to privilege his local and national politics, largely due to the overwhelming concentration of micro-histories rooted in area studies and subaltern studies scholarship. Many scholars have situated Nehru’s British education and elite upbringing as the foundation of his Indian nationalist politics. Consequently, Nehru emerges as a central figure to blame for what subaltern scholars such as Ranajit Guha have called the “failure of the nation to come into its own.”⁵ The few existing biographical works that consider Nehru beyond the frames of the nation have done so as an anecdotal footnote to the larger narrative of his anticolonial nationalist activities in India.⁶

This book attempts to restore Nehru to his proper place in the world of the 1920s and 1930s.⁷ As biographer Benjamin Zachariah has aptly

⁴ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, *Empires and the Reach of the Global*, published in *A World Connecting, 1870–1945*, edited by Emily S. Rosenberg (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 423.

⁵ Ranajit Guha, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 43.

⁶ There are many biographies on Nehru and collected volumes of his writings before and after independence, although the volume of scholarship still pales in comparison to books on Gandhi. Scholars rely on the classic text, Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Other works include Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); B. R. Nanda, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Rebel and a Statesman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Judith Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); and Benjamin Zachariah, *Nehru* (London: Routledge Press, 2004). Of these, only Zachariah’s work considers Nehru’s internationalism in any depth.

⁷ Three important works in 2006 launched a burgeoning subfield of South Asia and the world: Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empires* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Durba Ghosh and Dane Keith Kennedy, eds., *Decentering Empire: Britain, India, and the Transcolonial World* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006). In their wake, a number of texts study various aspects of South Asia and the world in the colonial period: Sugata Bose and Kris Manjappa, eds., *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*; Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Manu Goswami, “Colonial Internationalisms and Imaginary Futures,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012): 1461–1485; Ali Raza, Franziska Roy, and Benjamin Zachariah, eds., *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1917–1939* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2014); Stephen Legg, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentalities, and Interwar India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Kris Manjappa, *Age of Entanglement: German*

suggested, Nehru believed that “the idea of the nation was problematic” because “the nationalist is only important until you are free.” Instead, Zachariah stressed that Nehru was more interested in the “larger questions” beyond political independence.⁸ Zachariah’s biography on Nehru is one of the only works that considers in any depth the Indian leader’s internationalism. This book seeks to study Nehru’s preoccupation with the world and the “larger questions” he sought to answer. However, it is not a biography in the sense that it seeks to recount the entirety of his life. Rather, it emphasizes the most significant aspects of the interplay between Nehru’s internationalist and nationalist projects. For Nehru, Indian nationalism and internationalism were never oppositional, and this book argues that the meaning of Indian anticolonial resistance developed not only in relation to people within Indian borders, but also in relation to the world beyond India.

Much of this rich history of interplay between national and international has been lost or silenced by scholarship that seeks to either displace or transcend the nation entirely. In doing so, international and national histories have become dichotomous and frequently situated at odds with one another. Instead, this book supports Glenda Sluga’s argument that there was a “long, intimate, conceptual past shared by the national and the international as entangled ways of thinking about modernity, progress and politics.”⁹ I argue that the interwar period was a critical moment

and Indian Intellectuals across Empire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

⁸ Benjamin Zachariah, quoted in Sandip Roy, “Freeing Nehru from the Gandhis: A 50th Anniversary Tribute,” *Firstpost*, May 27, 2014. URL: www.firstpost.com/politics/freeing-nehru-from-the-gandhis-a-50th-anniversary-tribute-1544599.html (accessed April 19, 2017).

⁹ Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 3. The argument that anticolonial nationalism for the colonized emerged in relation to internationalism was made even earlier, by Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Shadow of Shadows,” *positions* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 11–49. See also Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); 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); Michael Goebel, *Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Noor Khan *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration and the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); and Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

when international solidarities against imperialism were not only possible but also desirable for those seeking to capture the nation-state from European colonial powers. Nehru's story is a perfect example, as his participation in anti-imperialist networks and meetings were a catalyst for extending his political and intellectual horizons beyond the local and national arenas to places as distant as Jakarta, Canton, Cairo, New York, and Moscow. At the same time, his nationalist politics and ideas were connected to this wider world and informed his understanding of India.

Another point worth noting is that interwar anti-imperialism was global rather than solely European. Until recently, anti-imperialism and anticolonialism have been used interchangeably and rarely interrogated as a historically constructed set of ideas and practices rooted in a particular moment and place.¹⁰ I argue here that anti-imperialism during the interwar years became an idiom in which multiple advocates came together to debate, construct, and circulate across the world. Nehru was a mediator and contributor in this process, and he negotiated the meaning and terms of anti-imperialism with comrades worldwide. Over time, he appropriated the ideas embedded in anti-imperialist discourse and reconfigured them to fit conditions in India. In making these claims, this book furthers the endeavors by recent scholars of global intellectual history, who have enabled us to rethink the circulation of ideas and overturn assumptions that they moved from the West to "the rest."¹¹

Interwar anti-imperialism came to shape Nehru's worldview in profound ways. Nehru began to construct a global geography of anti-imperialism, defined as an imagined mapping of an anti-imperialist world with pivotal nodes to the East (China), to the West (Egypt), and to the North (Soviet Russia), and, on the other hand, an imperialist world comprised of European imperialists and American capitalists. Nehru located the key to world progress in the encounters and cooperation between anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist forces worldwide. A reading

¹⁰ Noor Khan recently argued that anti-imperialism was a global framework of resistance, while anticolonialism denotes a more localized resistance to a colonial power within a given territorial unit of empire. See her *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration*, 2–3.

¹¹ Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); and Cemil Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World: A Global Intellectual History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017). For debates about Indian nationalism as a derivative of the western epistemology, see Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and his *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

of this history illuminates the interwar years as formative to his later assumptions about India's neighbors, such as China and Egypt, as well as the future super powers: the Soviet Union and the United States. Finally, the anti-imperialist worldview provided for an anti-war agenda, as it demanded that anti-imperialists defend their counterparts worldwide – in the colonies and the Soviet Union – against imperialist aggression and war.

THE INTERWAR WORLD

While this book focuses on Nehru, it is equally a story about the interwar world that he engaged. The flexibility and heterogeneity of interwar politics, particularly in uniting communists and noncommunists or anti-capitalists with anti-imperialists, is best articulated by one of Nehru's closest comrades within the LAI, Roger Baldwin, who was a civil liberties advocate within the USA and internationally. Baldwin once wrote of the LAI and other interwar projects that:

Peace, democracy, anti-imperialism and civil liberties claimed my interest sufficiently to induce going along with any movement that seemed to me genuinely to promote them . . . It seems remarkable, looking back on the period, that no criticism from liberal quarters was directed at us non-Communists who took part [in united-front movements].¹²

Baldwin's reflection tells us two things. First, he demonstrates that many internationalists in the interwar years were less attentive to differences in orthodoxies or party politics; instead, they constructed inclusive and accommodative solidarities for "freedom" that transcended political, social and geographic boundaries. Second, as Baldwin eloquently adds, the differences between disparate members of such movements were easily overlooked in the interwar years, yet were difficult to reconcile in retrospect. Such retrospective or teleological views most often characterize interwar movements through the lens of communist and noncommunist tensions rather than as sites of solidarity and collaboration. That most institutions for anti-imperialism, peace, and civil liberties eventually fragmented along the fault lines of communism and noncommunism in the context of World War II and the Cold War forced Baldwin, in hindsight, to regret his "misplaced faith" in the "incongruity" inherent in

¹² Roger N. Baldwin, *Reminiscences of Roger Nash Baldwin*. Oral History taken by Harlan B. Phillips, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, December 1953–January 1954 (microfilm), 354.

such interwar mobilizations. His only solace was that he shared this “misplaced faith” with “distinguished company all over the world,” and specifically comrades such as Nehru.¹³

Nehru and Baldwin were drawn to organizations that transcended the boundaries of political activism and connected their local concerns to a wider world. Their story necessitates a rethinking of the basic categories of historical analysis for the interwar period. As historians, we have been trained to identify our historical figures through the lens of geography or political groups rather than recognizing the intersections between socialism, communism, nationalism, pacifism, and civil liberties worldwide. Such categories were highly unstable during the interwar period. What was so unique about the 1920s and 1930s was the ability to move across and within such categories and to rethink solidarities beyond the rigid frameworks afforded by strict orthodoxies or institutionalization. Nehru joined international movements of the period that were remarkably fluid and attracted a broad spectrum of activists.

The internationalist milieu of the interwar period was unique. Early histories of the interwar years have emphasized the great powers as the primary subjects of analysis, although this is changing as international historians have recently revisited the period.¹⁴ There certainly were earlier antecedents in the prewar years, but the interwar moment witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of internationalist institutions and ideas.¹⁵ The Great War and the Bolshevik Revolution had done much to destabilize and challenge the old world order of the late nineteenth century, and politicians and activists participated in an emerging discourse on the imagined futures of a new world of greater equality, justice, and

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The classic text on the interwar years remains E. H. Carr, *International Relations between the Two World Wars, 1919–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1947). More recent scholarship on the interwar years has focused on the impact of the League of Nations on the colonial world. See Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Erez Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*; and Daniel Laqua, ed., *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements between the World War* (New York: IB Tauris, 2011).

¹⁵ Akira Iriye argues that the quantity and membership of international organizations surged in the interwar period. See his, *Cultural Internationalism and the World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). The argument for a unique interwar moment is laid out in Ali Raza, et al., *The Internationalist Moment*. For prewar internationalism, see Harald Fisher-Tine, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces’: Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian freedom movement on the Eve of the First World War,” *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007): 325–44.

peace.¹⁶ Mobilization for national sovereignty, working class rights, suffrage, civil liberties, pacifism, disarmament, and anti-racism grew dramatically in the 1920s and 1930s as a consequence of the war's failure to change global and local inequalities. These new platforms hosted debates about the past and the future of the world; about the staying power of imperialism, racism, and capitalism; and about the tensions between nations, empires, and colonies.

Activists and revolutionaries from the colonial world were among the many who found these interwar spaces an opportunity to make claims for sovereignty and statehood to a global audience. The immediate postwar generation was inspired by the "Wilsonian moment" and the avenues afforded by the League of Nations.¹⁷ However, when the League proved more of a tool for imperialist expansion, anticolonial activists sought other platforms, notably ones inspired by communism and trade unionism.¹⁸ In the later 1920s, the Bolshevik Revolution and international communism became a great beacon of hope for many discontented nationalists and leftists from the colonies. The revolution introduced an internationalist model that sought to destroy the capitalist system through world revolution. Famous Indian exiles such as M. N. Roy found their way to communism and Moscow in the 1920s, while a burgeoning community of leftists in India sought inspiration and sometimes direction from Moscow, especially after the founding of the Communist Party of India in 1925.¹⁹

Nehru's entry into the international politics of anti-imperialism began in this distinctively "Leninist moment." In 1920, Lenin persuaded the Comintern to pursue a united-front alliance with bourgeois nationalist movements in the colonies as a means to encourage anti-imperialist revolution first, and class revolution later. The flexibility afforded by the Comintern's united-front years informed the making of anti-imperialism

¹⁶ Goswami, "Colonial Internationalisms and Imaginary Futures."

¹⁷ Manela, *Wilsonian Moment*.

¹⁸ On Indian trade unionism and internationalism, see C. M. Stolte, "Bringing Asia to the World: Indian Trade Unionism and the Long Road towards the Asiatic Labour Congress, 1919–1937," *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 2 (2012): 257–278. On India and international communism, see Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, *Comintern and the Destiny of Communism in India: 1919–1943: Dialectics of Real and a Possible History* (Bakhrahat: Seribaan, 2006). The classic text on this subject is Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

¹⁹ See, for example, Kris Manjappa, *M. N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (Delhi: Routledge India, 2010).

as a “blend” between communist and noncommunist projects. By the time Nehru joined the LAI in 1927, the Comintern was actively recruiting noncommunists from the colonies and looking upon the anti-imperialist movement as progressively moving toward the overthrow of the capitalist and imperialist world.²⁰

While it was closely linked to international communism, I argue that interwar anti-imperialism warrants its own history. Some scholars have identified the LAI in particular as a communist-dominated institution.²¹ However, this characterization neglects the robust participation and leadership by a wide range of anti-imperialists, especially noncommunists, who worked through and beyond the boundaries of party politics.²² Instead,

²⁰ There has been new and interesting work on the global networks created by international communism as well. See Holger Weiss, ed., *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Radical Networks, Mass Movements, and Global Politics, 1919–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

²¹ This argument is made by Fredrik Petersson in his published dissertation, *Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933* (Lewiston: Queenston Press, 2013); and his “Anti-Imperialism and Nostalgia,” in Weiss, ed., *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity*.

²² Aside from Petersson’s work on the Comintern, scholarship on the LAI has been slow to develop and remains rather thin. For brief but informative overviews of the LAI, see *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. VII, ed. by Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 40–49; Jean Jones, *The League against Imperialism*, Socialist History Occasional Pamphlet Series (Lancashire: The Socialist History Society and the Lancashire Community Press, 1996); and Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 176–177. Nehru’s relationship to the LAI is treated briefly in Gopal, *Nehru*, 52–58; Milton Israel, *Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 256–263; and Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 246–282. For an overview of the inaugural Brussels Congress, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press; distributed by W. W. Norton, 2007), 16–30. Other scholars have picked up various aspects of the organization. For the Comintern perspective, see Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg*. For the intersectionality of race and anti-imperialism in Britain, see Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). For a short history of the LAI in Paris, see Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For the African diaspora and the LAI, see Holger Weiss, *Framing a Racial African Atlantic: African American Agency, West African Intellectuals, and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). For a study of European colonial intelligence and the LAI, see Daniel Brückenhuis, *Policing Transnational Protest: Liberal Imperialism and the Surveillance of Anticolonialists in Europe, 1905–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 139–168.

this book supports Michael Goebel's argument that the Comintern and LAI provided a "platform for claims-making for anti-imperialists," and that these connections "unleashed [their] own dynamic" beyond the history of communism.²³ In a similar vein, this book tells a new story, not from the perspective of Moscow, but rather from those such as Nehru, who sought broadly conceived alliances across the communist divide in an attempt to challenge the global hegemonic power of capitalism and imperialism. Their story cannot be explained fully by the history of the Comintern, nor can one adequately understand Nehru's allegiances to it without considering the overlapping and flexible nature of these solidarities – in particular, the ways anti-imperialism brought together communists and noncommunists throughout the 1920s and 1930s, even when Moscow sent directives to split the ranks along party lines.

Much of these collaborative interconnections, so central to the anti-imperialist movement, have been neglected and lost as historiographical fields have developed around nationalism, international communism, socialism, and pacifism as separate categories with distinctive trajectories after World War II. We cannot fully understand the significance of the anti-imperialist institutions and solidarities of the interwar world without taking into account these intersecting histories. This book moves beyond teleological readings of the interwar year from the present, which neglect the overlap of anticolonial nationalism and communism, and instead encourages us to rethink conventional narratives of interwar history.

This book also dovetails and complements important research unearthed by those writing about new and unconventional narratives of black internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. Susan Pennybacker's study of the antiracist solidarities that intersected in Britain in the 1930s emblemizes this kind of rigorous scholarship. She writes against the historiographical silos that separate the histories of those activists deeply invested in articulating a "vision for an interracial world culture." She offers a richly researched discussion of the ways in which American protests against the Jim Crow South brought together an unlikely alliance of liberals, communists, socialists, and anticolonial nationalists in Britain.²⁴ Unsurprisingly, three of the five activists in her book also came to be part of the anti-imperialist movement and were some of

²³ Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 177. His treatment of the LAI is informative although brief and limited to the Brussels Congress and a few points about the French LAI after 1927.

²⁴ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 5.

Nehru's closest associates in the interwar years. Similar narratives are explored by Brent Hayes Edwards in his study of black internationalism across the Francophone and Anglophone world.²⁵ He finds incongruities, or "paradoxes," within black internationalism that were "translated" across the movement. In many ways, these translations are what Nehru and others in this book would have recognized as "blending" the many ideologies within the anti-imperialist movement.

At the same time, Nehru's story is not about race and internationalism. Certainly, the circles of anti-imperialism and Pan-Africanism overlapped extensively, and as much as those of anticolonial nationalism and communism. However, Nehru's appropriation of anti-imperialism as an idea and a set of practices was never informed by the discourse of race. His commitment to internationalism was based upon the struggle for Indian independence, the anticolonial struggle in Asia and Africa, and the struggle of workers for social equality and justice once all colonies achieved political sovereignty. In his many speeches on the meaning of anti-imperialism and the relationship between India and the world, the language of race was not part of his rhetoric, nor was racial oppression a critical aspect of his vision of global struggle. Rather, nation and class were the primary dimensions of his anti-imperialism.

While much of this book considers the possibilities for solidarity afforded by the interwar moment, it also grapples with the limits and contradictions embedded within anti-imperialism. Nehru failed to reconcile the critical differences between the political projects for an Indian nation-state and the mobilization of the working classes. These tensions were readily overlooked in the interwar years but difficult to reconcile after World War II and the arrival of political independence for India and many other nation-states soon after. Inevitably, the capture of the nation-state for Nehru meant that his role as an elite, bourgeois nationalist would place him at odds with his communist, trade unionist, and even socialist counterparts within the anti-imperialist movement.

For Nehru, anti-imperialism in India meant the "blend" of political independence with socialism. This amalgamation of nationalism with socialism symbiotically linked the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist

²⁵ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); and for history focused on the late 1930s to the post-World War II period, see Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

struggles within India. He resolved the tensions between class and nation by arguing that national independence in India was the fundamental, although only partial, fulfillment of anti-imperialism, while socialism within the subcontinent would usher in a new era of freedom and equality by challenging capitalism. His counterparts within the anti-imperialist movement, particularly many hard-line communists, found Nehru's commitments to national independence and socialism problematic. At the same time, he worked within an Indian National Congress that was diverse and often hostile to the ideas about socialism and anti-imperialism that Nehru advocated. Often, Nehru's anti-imperialist internationalism placed him at odds with his comrades abroad and at home.

Equally formidable for Nehru were the ways in which internationalism – as a vehicle for making-meaning, forging solidarities and creating global spaces of protest – came into conflict with the anticolonial nationalist objective to capture the nation-state. Internationalism transcended not only party politics, but also the very states that anticolonial nationalists sought to claim sovereignty over. Defining more precisely the internationalism of the anti-imperialist project in relation to the imperatives of the state and interstate system is necessary here. Nehru and his comrades identified themselves as internationalists, and they spoke of internationalism as their project. But what did internationalism in the interwar period mean? I argue that internationalisms are projects much like nationalisms. There is no scarcity of literature on nationalism as a project seeking to assimilate citizens into a shared spatial and cultural imaginary within a set of territorial borders.²⁶ Internationalism, too, aims to construct and deploy a discursive imagined community with a common historical experience, language, and goal, although it is based on an extra-territorial framework that is inclusive of but not limited to the nations and nationalism. In the case of Nehru, nationalism was often framed as a “stage” to an internationalism that would bring freedom, peace, and social justice to the colonies and worldwide. It encouraged the active repression of difference among constituent members and the breaking down of boundaries between states, colonies, and empires. This internationalism was an imagined community

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). Of course, anticolonial nationalist expressions were diverse and not solely a derivative of the Western model, a critique rightly made by Partha Chatterjee in his *The Nation and Its Fragments*. I argue here for recognizing both nationalism and internationalism as constructed communities contingent to time, place and perspective.

that sought solidarity for the excluded, the stateless, and the “oppressed peoples of the world.”²⁷

Internationalism must also be understood in contradistinction to interstate relations. The latter, often misleadingly referred to as internationalism, reflects the interaction of *states* across the world. Modern states constituted in the mid-nineteenth century, as Charles Maier contends, operated under a world order defined by the Treaties of Westphalia (1648), in which the idea of sovereignty “emerged with a dual thrust.” It was an “inward” sovereignty over a territorial unit and an “outward” recognition by other states of its legitimate statehood.²⁸ Maier argues that this “outward” sovereignty has been conditioned by interstate “competition, if not open warfare,” and was “premised on insecurity.”²⁹ The negotiations and relations between states, then, necessitate a different set of approaches, practices, and ideas. Rather than a homogenizing project of internationalism in which difference is overlooked and accommodated for a broad and heterogeneous community of anti-imperialists, the interstate platforms recognize difference, negotiate state interests, and establish normative relations between nation-states as distinct, geopolitical units with the idea that “competition” and “warfare” were central aspects of such relations.³⁰ In making this distinction, the League of Nations offers a clear model for interstate relations during the interwar period, one Nehru and most anti-imperialists opposed in the late 1920s and early 1930s because it reinforced the primacy of states over the more flexible solidarities of their movement.³¹

²⁷ Brussels Congress Manifesto, reprinted in “The Brussels Congress against Imperialism and for National Independence” and distributed to League members. Box 8, Folder 2, Roger Nash Baldwin Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey (hereafter Baldwin Papers).

²⁸ Charles S. Maier, *Leviathan 2.0*, published in *A World Connecting, 1870–1945*, edited by Emily S. Rosenberg (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 35. See also the earlier work by Prasenjit Duara on the constitution of nation-states in relation to a world of nation-states in the East Asian context: *The Global and Regional in China’s Nation-Formation* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33. There is some debate over the timing of the rise to prominence of the nation-state. While Maier situates it much earlier, Fredrick Cooper argues that a world of nation-states became normative only in the 1960s after the political decolonization of Africa. See his *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³⁰ I am indebted to conversations with several colleagues about the distinction between the interstate and the international: Maia Ramnath, Ali Raza, Franziska Roy, Carolien Stolte, and Benjamin Zachariah. Our discussions became the basis of Raza, et al., *Internationalist Moment*.

³¹ This is where I differ with scholars of the League of Nations, such as Akira Iriye, Glenda Sluga, and Susan Pedersen, in that they consider the Geneva-based institution as the

This distinction is critical in rethinking the ways in which anti-imperialist internationalism was incompatible with the interstate system. This tension can be located in the transition from anti-imperialism to antifascism and peace in the 1930s. When Nehru sought to forge internationalist solidarities with antifascists and advocates of peace, primarily through the IPC, he was forced to join hands with those who advocated for the League of Nations as the sole guardian of peace and stability worldwide. In this moment, on the eve of World War II, Nehru's internationalism found expression in a movement dependent on the interstate system and the primacy of nation-states that often openly supported the status quo and imperialism. This incompatibility between anti-imperialist internationalism and the IPC provides interesting clues for thinking about late interwar history and the inconsistencies created by internationalist modes of thinking when situated within interstate structures worldwide.

The difference between the interstate and the international became more pronounced after Indian independence in 1947 and in Nehru's attempts to build Afro-Asian solidarity in the 1950s. There has been a scholarly tendency to celebrate interwar anti-imperialism, and especially the LAI, as the precursor to the Asian-African Conference in Bandung (1955).³² In his opening remarks at the Bandung Conference, Indonesian President Sukarno evoked the historical legacy of the LAI as the forerunner to the much later Bandung Conference.³³ In studies from this perspective, communist involvement is downplayed and anticolonial solidarities are foregrounded, while the LAI is taken out of the interwar context entirely and given a new teleological reading from the vantage point of 1955 and after.³⁴ While continuities exist in both the interwar and postcolonial

premier forum of interwar internationalism. But the League of Nations focused on interstate diplomacy and "collective security" between nation-states.

³² The connection between the LAI and Bandung is made in several works: Prashad, *The Darker Nations*; Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Ohio University Press, 2010); Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, *Empires and the Reach of the Global*; Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*.

³³ President Sukarno, "Opening Address" (presented at African and Asian Conference, Bandung, Indonesia, April 18, 1955), *Selected Documents of the Bandung Conference* (New York: Distributed by the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1955).

³⁴ Fredrik Petersson makes a similar case by arguing that the LAI belongs as much to the global history of interwar international communism as to the nostalgic collective memory of postcolonial decolonization. This book differs in that the history of the LAI must be situated within broader internationalist histories of the interwar years, which were not the exclusive domain of international communism. See Petersson, "Anti-Imperialism and Nostalgia."

movements, I argue here that one cannot adequately understand interwar anti-imperialism, or its importance to Nehru and India, without situating it within the internationalist milieu of the late 1920s.

This book moves away from celebrating Bandung as a triumph of a global anti-imperialist struggle that began in the interwar period. Rather, it asks critically how this earlier history of anti-imperialist solidarity shaped and impacted Nehru's views of India and the third world. His formative experiences in the interwar period certainly informed Nehru's preconceptions about places such as the United States, Soviet Union, Egypt, China, and Indonesia. Yet, anti-imperialism as a way of thinking about commonalities, metaphors, and solidarities beyond political and state borders was highly incompatible with the interstate dynamics of the world after World War II. New heads of states across the global south came to places like Bandung to negotiate difference and establish normative interstate relations rather than forge internationalist solidarities.

Finally, a reframing of Nehru's past has some immediate ramifications for Indian history and contemporary political discourse. The current ruling political party in India – the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ancillary organizations – have long considered Nehru “anti-national” for his sympathies with Muslims and his hostility to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Sangh Parivar after the assassination of Gandhi. Nehru's history in the interwar period no doubt challenges this criticism, for it takes India as a starting point but borrows eclectically from an internationalist idiom that shaped political ideas and moved people around the world. Nehru both informed it and was shaped by it. This book does not, however, consider internationalism to be “anti-national,” but rather points to the rare and unique qualities of Nehru's political imagination – in particular, the idea that the nation was always shaped by the world and the world was always shaped the nation. The recognition that the nation and the world are not mutually exclusive could go a long way in thinking beyond the narrow and antagonistic nationalisms being advocated not only in India today, but also across the world.

This book is organized into two parts. Part I consists of four chapters that recount the story of Nehru's engagement with the LAI. The first chapter focuses on the inaugural meeting of the LAI in Brussels (1927), while the second explores his ongoing service in building the LAI as an institution capable of “blending” the diverse projects within the movement. Chapter 3 considers Nehru's return to India and his efforts to

internationalize the nationalist movement. Collectively, these chapters demonstrate the significance of anti-imperialist internationalism to Nehru's conceptualization of India and the interwar world.

The fourth chapter considers the crisis point in Nehru's relationship with the League by examining the Second World Congress of the LAI in Frankfurt (1929), where many communist members attempted to purge noncommunists from the movement. Communists operated under directives from Moscow to abandon united-front alliances. This chapter argues that Nehru and his comrades resisted the pressure from Moscow for months beyond the Frankfurt Congress, and only in 1930, when the INC wavered on the question of independence, did Nehru and the LAI split ranks.

Nehru's formal relationship with the League ended in 1930, although he continued to collaborate with former LAI comrades on anti-imperialist projects inspired by the organization's mission outlined in Brussels. Opening Part II, Chapter 5 traces Nehru's re-engagement with the LAI in London and his introduction to Pan-Africanists who were involved in the movement. Chapter 6 offers a study of Nehru's travels to Egypt and China and his work with peace organizations in the late 1930s. These chapters argue that Nehru's worldview and international networks expanded rather than receded in the 1930s as he came to see anti-imperialism as interconnected with antifascism. At the same time, his commitment to the latter led him to interstate platforms that were highly incompatible with interwar internationalism.

The final chapter reveals the fate of anti-imperialist internationalism in the run-up to and aftermath of World War II. Many of Nehru's comrades were forced into hiding or died in the war, while those who survived were never able to remake the "blend" of anti-imperialism emblematic of the interwar period. The chapter concludes with some reflections on the continuities and discontinuities between interwar and postcolonial internationalisms with a focus on Nehru and the Bandung Conference. Instead of inaugurating the third world project rooted in the ideas of the interwar period, the Bandung Conference must be seen as a closure. Nehru recognized in Bandung that the internationalist solidarities he sought to forge in the interwar years were no longer tenable in the postcolonial and Cold War world.