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Michele L. Louro. *Comrades Against Imperialism: Nehru, India, and Interwar Internationalism*. Cambridge: CUP, 2018. Pp. vii, 309. £75.00.

Anyone visiting the archives at Delhi's Nehru Memorial Museum Library, or 'Teen Murti' as it is affectionately known, cannot fail to be impressed by the towering presence of all things Nehruvian within this most precious of historical collections. Despite this, a changed political climate in India, and a shifting historiography alongside it, has called into question the legacy and centrality of India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, amongst the commentariat. These have been hard times for *Panditji*. It is to Michele Louro's credit then that *Comrades Against Imperialism* finds an avenue to continue the story of the international dimensions of India's independence struggle, whilst largely avoiding the hagiographical Nehru-centric narrative that has often characterised

the writing of India's early twentieth century history. *Comrades Against Imperialism* is about much more than this.

This is a book that is straightforwardly the story of the international sources of India's independence struggle, as seen through by the ideas and world ordering visions of Nehru. But as the author makes clear from the outset (2-3), too often this is a struggle that privileges local and national politics. We lack a broader understanding of the ways in which Nehru's nationalism was constituted by his experiences with anti-imperialist movements and mobilizations. In particular the book covers connections he developed with the League Against Imperialism (LAI) and wider anti-colonial movements. Part I covers the formative years surrounding the 1927 Brussels meeting of the LAI. Part II follows Nehru's formal break from the increasingly communist-dominated organisation following the Frankfurt conference of 1929, a period in which his international networks expanded to encompass Pan-Africanists, freedom fighters in China and Egypt, and the European peace movements of the 1930s. The point here is not to write out India's national histories. Rather the book explores the ways in which the independence struggle was enmeshed within wider movements and events that helped to inform Nehru's own attempts to reconcile the pursuit of independence from European powers with a wider anti-colonial and anti-imperial internationalist solidarity. As Louro points out, this paints Nehru's story as an example of a wider interwar moment of anti-colonial internationalism, one in which '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' (5).

The opening chapters are rich in their coverage of the LAI's activities allowing a deeper enquiry into Nehru's internationalism, whilst forging a more expansive framework for assessing the League itself. As Louro rightly points out, whilst the LAI has broadly been overlooked in international history, existing accounts have tended to view it simply through the lens of communist or socialist internationalism. (21). A broader perspective pursued here then, views the Brussels convention in particular as a key moment in the forging of an anti-imperialist comradeship, internationalising the colonial question, and galvanising networks of anti-imperial solidarity (42-3). The Brussels Congress manifesto represented, in Louro's words, nothing short of a 'reimagining of the world' through an anti-imperialist lens, necessitating a 'discursive shift in the narrative of world history', rejecting European tropes of civilizing missions, imperial histories, and epistemologies (43). This moment of anti-imperial solidarity also gave rise to new geographical imaginaries that divided the world along imperial and anti-imperial lines. This resonated in the texts of the Congress, as well as in the reports Nehru made to his Indian National Congress (INC) colleagues back in India which were interlaced a more Asiatic dimension and even notions of 'Greater India' (49-55) – prefiguring the later Bandung Conference of 1955.

The impact of these internationalist encounters on Nehru's thinking are extracted in convincing detail in these chapters. A greater commitment to anti-

imperialism, a growing socialist vision for India, and even a more refined outlook on the future of India's foreign policy after empire are all explored in chapters two and three. Here, one of the core arguments of the book is teased out, that of the particular 'blending' of Nehru's nationalism with his internationalism; the mixing of his anti-colonialism as a national project, with his anti-imperialism as an international (or even transnational) project. Chapter three in particular highlights the interplay between LAI debates, trade union groups, and the status of India's own independence struggle. This gives us a less doctrinaire understanding of the development of Indian independence, contextualising it within wider political movements, and showing how Nehru's nationalism and internationalism were not independent ideologies, but rather co-constituted entities, dependent on one another.

But this was not a simple story of complementary agendas. INC-LAI relations became particularly strained over the agenda for Indian independence, leading to a split over the Delhi manifesto of November 1929 which called for immediate dominion status for India in return for the calling off of the civil disobedience campaign (169). This was not a position that the LAI viewed as sufficiently anti-imperialist and ties between the two organisations were cut. Part II of the book traces the story beyond this split, a period which saw the INC fall under the increasingly oppressive measures of the late colonial state. Partly as a consequence of this, new links were cultivated with a growing field of anti-colonial movements including, albeit fleetingly, the black internationalisms of W. E. B. Du Bois, George Padmore, C. L. R. James, and Jomo Kenyatta. As Louro shows, world events decisively shaped Nehruvian internationalism here too,

most emblematically in the fascist/imperialist conflicts in Abyssinia, Spain, and China.

The archival range of this work is impressive. An expanded argument on the international sources of Nehru's world vision is bolstered by archival sources gathered from across Europe, North America, and New Delhi. This allows consideration beyond institutional histories of the INC, encompassing the LAI, the British Labour Party, Communist Party, and European Peace movements. At an individual level, Nehru's papers are complemented by surveys of Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Roger Baldwin, and Reginald Bridgeman to name a few. Indeed the sophistication of the book places it firmly in a growing catalogue of new international histories of South Asia exemplified in ongoing work by Carolien Stolte, Harald Fischer Tiné, Benjamin Zacaaharia, Maria Framke, Maia Ramnath and others. *Comrades Against Imperialism* also bridges a recent renaissance on wider internationalisms covered for example by Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, Susan Pedersen, and Erez Manela, and those who have sought to decentre European-focused studies covering anti-colonial and anti-imperialism movements. Here recent works by Gary Wilder and Michael Goebel, as well as Christopher Lee's edited volume on Bandung are key.

To its credit, *Comrades Against Imperialism* is limited not so much by the content of its coverage, but by the range of questions it prompts and yet leaves unexplored. The idea of Nehru's 'blending' of nationalism and internationalism is appealing, but at some point, familiar categories and dichotomies necessarily work their way back in. We are left with a methodological question on how such

a history should be conceived. Is this is this a case of add nationalism to internationalism and stir? A more intriguing stance is that these were two concepts that were finding particular rearticulations within the Indian independence struggle, in a state of becoming rather than simply being, and therefore in a state of radical contingency.

What this might also mean for our reading of interwar internationalisms offers a potentially more emancipatory vision than the sometimes teleological understandings we have so far. As an example of this, Bandung, we are told, signalled the 'end' of the anti-colonial world order - the moment at which the inherent tension between a 'post-national' internationalism inevitably foundered upon the rocks of the interstate system. But can't we also speak of the evolution of this very order and its emergence in geographies elsewhere, attached to differing projects certainly, but still benefitting from the intellectual and practical benefits of similar transnational networks traced here?

Finally, and one of the most exciting aspects of this book, is in its gesturing towards a wider intellectual and organizational history of international thought in South Asia beyond Nehru's immediate political world. Whilst Nehru's internationalism can be seen in terms of its constitution with wider movements and ideas, on the back of works such as this we can also move towards a literature in which Nehru himself is decentered from the narrative. A vision of a literature that escapes the realm of the political towards the realm of the intellectual, the institutional, the aesthetic, and the more broadly activist.

Michele Louro moves us further along this path, and regardless of your stance on Nehru, the historiography is the richer for it.

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