Introduction

Strangers hurried through the Saigon night. Some were pilgrims, streaming into the capital to usher in the lunar New Year. Others were entrepreneurs, magnetically drawn to the big city, bloated beyond recognition by a frenzy of construction and consumerism. Many more were refugees who had fled their napalmed homes and poisoned rice paddies and now huddled in the outskirts of the sprawling capital. They arrived hungry and angry, courtesy of Uncle Sam.[1]

Quite a few of the faces belonged to revolutionaries. They had crept into the beating heart of South Vietnam under the cover of darkness, making contact with a network of clandestine operatives burrowed into the city's nooks and crannies. Having fought the militaries of both the Republic of Vietnam and the United States in the jungles for several years, striking here, retreating there, they vowed to bring the battle to the impenetrable capital itself. Tonight, some of these fighters mused, they might put an end to decades of imperial rule, finally winning a united, independent, and socialist Vietnam, a triumph not only for the Vietnamese people but also for anti-imperialists everywhere.[2]

In the early morning hours of January 31, 1968, the sound of crackling fireworks gave way to the rattle of machine guns as thousands of revolutionaries sprang into action. Death squads hunted government officials. Sappers blew a hole through the outer wall protecting the US Embassy. Running battles left corpses, debris, and the occasional burned-out American vehicle littering the streets. Similar scenes played out across the country. Although the "Tet Offensive" failed to defeat the United States and overthrow the Republic of Vietnam, the revolutionaries nevertheless scored an enormous political victory.[3] Told for years that the communists were unpopular terrorists on the verge of annihilation, the world witnessed the spectacle of a massive coordinated offensive organized right under the nose of a combined force of more than a million American and South Vietnamese troops. In the heavily mediated world of the 1960s, many believed they had witnessed something momentous. "There is nothing as powerful as example and the Vietnamese resistance

sent a sense of possibility flashing out over the airwaves all around the globe," recalls antiwar activist Sheila Rowbotham. "If the Vietnamese could take on the mightiest power in the world, what about us?"[4]

As Vietnamese fighters pressed their offensive, tens of thousands of radicals across North America and Western Europe raced to West Berlin to do their part in bringing the Vietnamese revolution to victory. On February 17, 1968, they overwhelmed the giant auditorium of the Technical University of Berlin, assembling beneath a gigantic flag of the National Liberation Front inscribed with the famous injunction: "The Duty of Every Revolutionary is to Make the Revolution." As one participant explained, it was the "first real gathering of the clans," uniting such groups as the Socialist German Student League, the British Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, the French National Vietnam Committee, and the American Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.[5] What brought them together was a shared commitment to not only ending US aggression in Vietnam but also joining with their Vietnamese comrades to overthrow the "imperialist system." This is what inspired them to collaborate across borders in one of the largest radical antiwar convergences of the decade: the determination to make a contribution to the anti-imperialist struggles exploding across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and hopefully soon in North America and Western Europe as well.[6]

Huddled in that auditorium, where acrid cigarette smoke mixed with the stench of sweat, the anti-imperialists set to work. Faced with American escalation of the war, radicals called for a parallel escalation of their own efforts. They argued that the best way to support the Vietnamese people was to open a "second front" in the North Atlantic. Internationalism meant building a united global movement against imperialism, led by the heroic guerrillas of Vietnam. In France, their efforts to translate the Vietnamese example into a domestic idiom would help to bring about the largest general strike in history. And the unprecedented events of May '68, which seemed to prove that revolution was possible in the capitalist North Atlantic, in turn inspired radicals elsewhere. For a moment, world revolution appeared to be on the agenda.[7]

A decade later, in 1978, veteran antiwar radicals returned their attention to Southeast Asia. Although the war had ended in US defeat, with Vietnam reunified as an independent country embarking on the promised path to socialism, things had not turned out as expected. Reeducation camps were packed with suspects. Poorly planned economic policies exacerbated the challenges created by wartime destruction. State repression forced many to emigrate. Most astonishingly of all, Vietnam was again at war. But instead of locking arms with their neighbors against

imperialism, Vietnamese revolutionaries fought against them. Vietnam, Cambodia, and China, all nominally socialist states, all former allies against imperialism, all onetime beacons of international solidarity, were slaughtering each other in an unprecedented internecine war.[8]

The Third Indochina War aggravated existing hardships, prompting even more refugees to flee Southeast Asia, often in dilapidated vessels that drifted across the South China Sea. Creaky fishing boats capsized. Refugees fell prey to pirates. Food ran out. Those who survived the harrowing passage found themselves herded into camps in neighboring Southeast Asian countries and tried their best to find meaning, care for each other, and create a new life. But eventually the host countries began to refuse entry to refugees, even forcing them back to sea. By early 1979, the region was engulfed in a humanitarian crisis.[9]

Many former North American and Western European antiwar radicals watched these images of suffering in dismay. Working with anticommunist Vietnamese living abroad, some erstwhile radicals organized a vast campaign to save the "boat people." Initially hoping to cross into Vietnamese waters to rescue refugees from the sea, they settled instead on chartering a ship, appropriately named the *Isle of Light*, and navigating it to the coast of Malaysia to serve as a floating hospital. As they worked under a scorching sun to save the refugees, their comrades internationalized the campaign, even winning the support of the US government, which was only too happy to use the crisis to rewrite the history of the war, rebrand itself as a virtuous nation, and shine a harsh spotlight on the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.[10] Activists who once joined Vietnamese communists in an international anti-imperialist struggle against the United States now found themselves allied with the United States in a massive international campaign against "human rights violations" in Vietnam.[11]

They had come to champion a very different kind of internationalism. Instead of politics, they preached morality. Instead of advocating the right of nations to self-determination, they promoted the rights of the individual. Instead of struggling to build a new world, they aimed to alleviate suffering in the imperfect one that existed. Instead of looking to the leadership of heroic guerrillas abroad, they claimed to save helpless victims. Instead of anti-imperialism, they spoke of human rights. By the end of the decade, anti-imperialism was in crisis, and human rights were on their way to securing the hegemony that they enjoy today. This book explains how that happened. Tracing the history of international antiwar activism from the early 1960s through the late 1970s, it shows how and why human rights displaced anti-imperialism as the dominant way that leftist activists in the North Atlantic imagined making the world a better place.

Scope

Although activists across the globe came to exchange anti-imperialism for human rights, nowhere was the shift more dramatic than in France. The French, and Parisians in particular, began the 1960s as some of the most engaged militants, sophisticated theorists, and uncompromising advocates of anti-imperialism, yet ended the 1970s as some of the most ferocious anticommunists, unabashed cheerleaders of interventionism, and vociferous proponents of human rights. In the colorful words of one contemporary observer, although once enjoying a "cosmopolitan paramountcy in the general Marxist universe," Paris is "today the capital of European intellectual reaction."[12] More recently, historian Robert Brier has declared the whole episode to be "one of the more spectacular reversals of intellectual history."[13]

What made this reversal so stunning was not just its intensity but also its international repercussions. France had long exercised a cultural, political, and intellectual hegemony over the global left. A beacon for radicals everywhere, the country's revolutionary history held enormous attraction. From Karl Marx to V. I. Lenin, Hồ Chí Minh to Zhou Enlai, Messali Hadj to Frantz Fanon, countless anti-imperialists had walked the cobblestone streets of its capital.[14] After the Second World War, France became a hub for cutting-edge political theory. Because of this unique international status, developments in France could not help but have a significant impact elsewhere, particularly on the rest of the North Atlantic. No other group of figures played so decisive a role in propelling this shift in how activists in North America and Western Europe more broadly approached internationalism.[15]

Although French radicals acted as a driving force, the story of how human rights displaced anti-imperialism cannot be told from a strictly national perspective because the activism of the 1960s and 1970s was thoroughly interconnected. As consummate internationalists, French radicals were in continuous dialogue with comrades not only in neighboring European countries but also across the Atlantic. Indeed, their most important contacts were often Americans, whose unique location inside the imperialist superpower of the era, or what they called the "belly of the beast," lent their struggles great international credibility, turning them into a vanguard of sorts. The French closely followed events in the United States, learned from them, and were profoundly transformed by them. For that reason, while I focus on French radicals, this book also tracks developments in the United States, drawing the two into a single story.

But as important as these connections between French radicals and their peers in the other capitalist countries of the North Atlantic were,

relationships with what was then called the "Third World" were at times even more consequential. Struggles abroad not only furnished activists with a wealth of new ideas, tactics, and models but also served as powerful examples of change. This was especially true in France. Once the second largest maritime empire in the world, the hexagon's link to its colonies was so tight that decolonization boomeranged back into France with terrible velocity, effectively sparking a civil war at home that led to the collapse of the Fourth Republic. In this context, French activists were exceptionally attuned to developments abroad. They cut their teeth in solidarity movements, traveled abroad to see revolutions firsthand, and enthusiastically followed events in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.[16]

Much the same can be said about the United States. Although the United States never possessed as large an overseas empire as the French and experienced decolonization differently, the country's legacies of settler colonialism and chattel slavery, its pernicious role in Latin America, and its postwar status as leader of the "free world" provoked substantial domestic concern. The government's string of military bases, incessant interventions, and obsession with annihilating communism in the "Third World" compelled many Americans to look abroad. As citizens of the most powerful imperialist state on the planet, American activists felt especially responsible for the fate of the "Third World." Many took a keen interest in foreign policy, participated in solidarity movements, and made connections between struggles abroad and those of oppressed people inside the United States. Both in France and the United States, then, links with Asia, Africa, and Latin America were fundamental to the radical left.[17]

Radicals in France, the United States, and elsewhere in the North Atlantic turned to many struggles, yet it was the war in Vietnam, a former French colony and now the focus of US intervention, that became their most important international point of reference in the 1960s and 1970s. Many activists concurred with Che Guevara's assessment that Vietnam was the "focal point of all contradictions."[18] Vietnam, they believed, was the key to the entire world situation. The stakes were incredibly high, the struggle was live, and its future undecided. What is more, Vietnamese revolutionaries were fighting back, and it appeared as if solidarity could have a real impact on the outcome. More than any other struggle, the Vietnamese revolution shaped the meaning of internationalism for radicals, if not their very identity. Countless radicals of all ages would have agreed with the final editorial of the famous anti-imperialist journal *Partisans* when it declared: "Our generation is the generation of the Vietnam War."[19] For these reasons, I have focused on the internationalist struggles around Vietnam as a window into exploring the dramatic shifts in global politics that took place in those years.[20]

But if Vietnam played an important role for activists abroad, those movements also played an important role for Vietnamese revolutionaries. Hungry for allies, Vietnamese communists devoted considerable effort to connecting with movements across the globe, including those in the North Atlantic, which they felt could play a strategic role behind enemy lines. Since the United States was the main aggressor in Southeast Asia, Vietnamese revolutionaries unsurprisingly prioritized strong relations with American activists. Even more important than the United States, however, was France. Vietnamese communists had a longer history of organizing there, enjoyed the support of the largest community of overseas Vietnamese, relied on the solidarity of some of the most dynamic leftist movements in the capitalist world, and skillfully took advantage of the French government's outspoken criticism of the American War to turn Paris into their internationalist base of operations for the entire North Atlantic. But Vietnamese communists viewed connections with activists in countries like France and the United States as more than just means to fighting the US government. Like radicals in the North Atlantic, they also viewed their struggles as fundamentally linked to others in a grand project to change the world. As Lê Duẩn – arguably the single most important revolutionary leader during the American War – publicly explained in 1967, "The Vietnamese revolution is a component of world revolution and its successes have never been separated from the latter's."[21] In this way, radicals in France, the United States, and Vietnam were not simply connected to one another politically, intellectually, and affectively. In the 1960s, they came to see themselves as different fronts in the same international revolutionary process, which is why this book focuses on their interrelationships.[22]

History is neither a continuous stream nor a series of neatly bounded periods; it is instead the consequence of contingent encounters, some of which take hold in unforeseen combinations whose accretions may produce what can only later be seen as important shifts. By zeroing in on these "contingent encounters" between developments in France, the United States, and Vietnam, this book explains how human rights displaced anti-imperialism among activists in the North Atlantic. In the mid-1960s, American intervention in Vietnam, activist efforts to internationalize the war, and the Vietnamese strategy to sway public opinion against the United States led radicals to create a new international whose primary objective was to win the ideological war. In the late 1960s, unrest in France, the militancy of Black struggles in the United States, and the audacity of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam led radicals to argue that the best way to help the Vietnamese people was to "bring the war home." In the early 1970s, domestic experiences with incarceration, President

Richard Nixon's new focus on prisoners of war, and South Vietnam's repression of political dissenters led them to reframe antiwar solidarity around civil liberties in South Vietnam. And in the late 1970s, the decline of radicalism, a new foreign policy in the United States, and a humanitarian catastrophe in Southeast Asia helped create the conditions that led internationalists to shift their allegiance from anti-imperialism to human rights.[23]

Of course, events outside France, the United States, and Vietnam also influenced how activists in North America and Western Europe reimagined internationalism. Within the North Atlantic itself, Italy, Great Britain, and West Germany, but also smaller countries such as Belgium, played a role. In addition, while Vietnam was certainly decisive, radicals in the North Atlantic were also influenced by many crosscurrents elsewhere: social movements in Latin America, the aftermath of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, the complexities of the Cultural Revolution in China, the writings of Soviet dissidents, the long struggle of the Palestinian people, the persistent campaign against apartheid in South Africa, the opportunities of the Nicaraguan revolution, the seeming paradoxes of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the unique rise of Solidarity in Poland, and especially the turn to authoritarianism in Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina. Moreover, in some cases other ways of conceptualizing internationalism proved quite important, particularly those organized principally around race, gender, religion, or geography, as well as many smaller radical internationalisms, which dissented from both the hegemonic models of anti-imperialism and human rights.[24]

While I certainly touch on a number of these experiences in this book, trying to include in a single comprehensive narrative everything that may have contributed to the shift from anti-imperialism to human rights would have resulted in an account that was superficial, disorienting, and incapable of conveying change over time in a consistent manner. Instead of jumping from one region, struggle, activist milieu, or solidarity campaign to another, I have chosen to concentrate here on the triangle of France, the United States, and Vietnam. To follow the trajectory of one current of internationalist activists, two ways of practicing internationalism, and linkages between three countries makes for a more coherent narrative about who changed, in which direction, and exactly why.

Overview

US aggression in Vietnam soon drew widespread condemnation in North America and Western Europe. So diverse was this opposition that one cannot speak of a single coherent antiwar movement but rather a

cacophonous collection of initiatives spanning the political spectrum. This book focuses on one set of antiwar actors: the "radicals." Although consciously distinguishing themselves from others in the larger antiwar scene, radicals were by no means homogenous. They came from many backgrounds, subscribed to competing traditions, advocated diverse tactics, and displayed wildly different levels of engagement. While a small core memorized Marx and Lenin, developed a comprehensive theory of the world situation, and dedicated their lives to making change, many others were driven by personal concerns, motivated by local problems, and had only a vague desire to do good in the world.

Despite their differences, the radicals all shared the same general approach to opposing the war. While some arrived at it intuitively, and others processed it into an explicit principle, they all believed that the war was not caused by this or that politician, but by a broader "system" that made such wars possible in the first place. Ending the war, then, necessarily meant changing the system. This is why I have called them radicals; true to the word's etymology, they sought to grasp the problem at what they perceived to be its "root."[25] While the term may seem generic, it captures how tens of thousands of antiwar activists from all walks of life came to adopt the same politics of systemic change, together contributing to its rise and fall, even if they personally experienced this history in different ways. In calling them radicals, then, I aim to name a kind of collective character that emerged through a shared process of political subjectivation.[26]

Radicals soon recognized that the system they sought to change exceeded the territorial frontiers of a single state, which led them to coordinate their efforts. In deference to historical tradition, they adopted the term "internationalism" to name their belief that the only way to realize their political project was to unite across borders. At the same time, they took another page from the past by defining the global system they wished to transform as "imperialism." In this way, radicals came to see their project as "anti-imperialist internationalism." Anti-imperialist internationalism allowed radicals to designate a common enemy, link the domestic and the foreign, and think politics at a global level. But it did not in itself offer a concrete path to changing the world. There were potentially many different ways to overthrow the global system of imperialism.[27]

But in the 1960s, most anti-imperialist radicals more or less adopted a single approach. This was the Leninist problematic. If "anti-imperialist internationalism" was a way to frame the problem of uniting across borders in a struggle to change the world, then a "problematic" was the theoretical, practical, and strategic system that promised to actually solve

that problem. To be sure, what came to be codified in the early twentieth century as "Leninism," and later as "Marxism-Leninism," was more than just a way to practice international solidarity. As both a development of Marxist thinking and a mode of communist politics, it claimed to unite theory and practice into a comprehensive whole that could provide answers to just about everything, from ideology to strategy, the party to the state, the seizure of power to revolutionary culture, economic planning to socialist construction. The problematic's architects deliberately assembled it into a unitary system, even if they recognized that it would be interpreted, applied, or adapted differently. This book, however, is not about Leninism as such, but rather the competition between the various ways that activists imagined coming together across borders to change the world. For that reason, while I certainly engage with other elements of Leninism when necessary, this study focuses primarily on those dimensions of the Leninist problematic that relate directly to the question of internationalism.[28]

At the heart of the Leninist problematic's solution to the problem posed by anti-imperialist internationalism was the right of nations to self-determination. According to this idea, nations exist, they oppress one another, and oppressed nations have the right to define their political future, which came to mean the struggle to win independence as nation-states. As for anti-imperialist radicals living in the oppressor nations, it was their duty to do whatever possible to lend a hand. Backed by solidarity movements in the imperialist core, oppressed nations would overthrow imperial rule, build strong states at home, and collaborate internationally to construct a socialist system that could facilitate the transition to communism, which they defined as a truly egalitarian world free from inequality, oppression, or domination.

Of course, anti-imperialism was not the only kind of internationalist politics available in the progressive milieus of the North Atlantic. Despite similar aspirations, occasional alliances, and notable cross-fertilizations on the ground, radicals fought to make the world a better place under competing internationalist banners. Some suggested that the best way forward was through religious faith. Others proposed unity on the basis of racial identity. Still others looked to the idea of international sisterhood in the struggle against global patriarchy. Although the explosive political context of the 1960s boosted many of these competing internationalisms, none benefited more than anti-imperialism. The many revolutions, decolonization movements, and national liberation struggles rocking the planet in those years allowed ideas associated with anti-imperialist internationalism to extend far beyond the relatively small circle of committed Leninist radicals in North America and Western Europe.

Anti-imperialism did not just win over many hardened activists sympathetic to these other internationalisms; it even achieved authority across the wider ecosystem of progressives who were concerned with issues like the Vietnam War but did not consider themselves militants, infrequently participated in actions, and only occasionally joined organizations. Although anxious about Leninism, opposed to revolution, and distrustful of Vietnamese communists, countless progressives hoping to transform the world in an egalitarian direction nevertheless came to see the problem as imperialism, the solution as national self-determination, and their task as organizing solidarity with national liberation movements while pushing for change at home. If one measure of a political project's strength is the degree to which it can win the support of the broader population, then anti-imperialism's ability to inform how millions understood, thought about, and acted in the world in the late 1960s was a clear sign of success.

But all that changed in the 1970s. People across North America and Western Europe deserted leftist campaigns, lost faith in national liberation struggles abroad, and abandoned the prospect of comprehensive change. Searching for a viable alternative, they turned to what was once a marginal notion in the leftist milieus of the North Atlantic: human rights. Of course, "human rights" meant different things to different people. But in the same way that radicals equated anti-imperialism with the right of nations to self-determination, so too did many rights activists in the North Atlantic reduce human rights to a single definition: the rights of individuals. According to this idea, individuals exist, they are endowed with certain inalienable rights, and they have the right to demand those rights. As for rights advocates in the North Atlantic, it was their duty to do whatever possible to lend a hand to secure human rights, which came to mean guaranteeing civil liberties against the encroachments of states. By making moral claims, advocating for suffering victims wherever they may be, and pressuring states to grant individuals their rights, humans everywhere would gradually come to enjoy the same universal rights, ultimately alleviating suffering in this world.

Like those radicals who embraced Leninist anti-imperialism, the activists who turned to individualist human rights imagined change at a global level, preached a commitment to universalism, and promoted human rights as an internationalist project that could make the world a better place. But their vision of change was drastically different. If anti-imperialism aimed to help people transform themselves into subjects, human rights viewed them as victims whose only ambition was to survive. If anti-imperialism saw people in the "Third World" as leaders in a struggle for change, human rights looked to professionals in the "First

World" as the active force in minimizing suffering throughout the world. If anti-imperialism declared that the only way to make the world better was through politics, human rights claimed that politics were external impositions to be avoided at all costs. If anti-imperialism insisted that lasting change depended on transforming a global system, human rights suggested that any such attempt would cause more harm. Indeed, human rights activists argued that one of the main reasons why the victims they hoped to save were suffering so badly was because anti-imperialists had foolishly tried to revolutionize the world. For quite a few of these rights activists, the only real way to change the world was to prevent it from getting worse.[29]

Although there was never a singular breakthrough, a definitive moment in which this specific vision of human rights emerged triumphant for everyone across the globe once and for all, by the late 1970s many people in the North Atlantic were not only abandoning anti-imperialism for some kind of individualist human rights, but also coming to see the latter as the only possible way to improve the world. Some historians have interpreted this dramatic transformation as one of evolution. According to this telling, radicals became humanitarians, revolution became ethics, and anti-imperialism became human rights. In its most teleological version, the end is said to be already present in the beginning, only waiting to be realized.[30] While there was certainly a degree of metamorphosis, especially when one turns to the biographies of individuals who traded the Little Red Book for government portfolios, the shift was more complex. As historian Samuel Moyn has argued, human rights succeeded not because they were implicit in all that came before, but because they survived while their rivals failed.[31] Following this approach, I reject the model of "evolution" in favor of "displacement." Anti-imperialism did not mutate into human rights: it entered into crisis in the 1970s, creating a space for human rights to overtake it as the dominant way of doing internationalism.

How did this happen? Much of it had to do with the collapse of the North American and Western European radical left. This decline had many causes, from state repression to an inability to build unity in difference, but I argue that since the trajectory of the radical left was so powerfully defined by events abroad, political developments in the rest of the world were a crucial factor in the collapse of anti-imperialism in the North Atlantic. By the late 1970s, national liberation struggles had fallen short of expectations. Instead of creating a new egalitarian world, they spawned nation-states that repressed their own people, accommodated themselves to capitalism, or fought shooting wars with each other. There was perhaps no greater symbol of this reversal than the Third Indochina War. Once a source of inspiration, the proof of anti-imperialist internationalism's success, Southeast Asia

soon became a source of disillusionment, the proof of its failure. In China, anti-imperialists looked to capitalism, realigned with the United States, and turned on their allies. In Cambodia, anti-imperialists harassed their neighbors, constructed an autocracy, and massacred countless innocent people. In Vietnam, they curtailed democratic self-activity, targeted the ethnic Chinese minority, and occupied Cambodia.

Of course, anti-imperialism did not vanish overnight. Some activists in the North Atlantic continued to fight under its flag. Others tried to reinvent radical internationalism in light of new struggles in places like Nicaragua. Nevertheless, radicals were undeniably far fewer in number, anti-imperialism was much less popular, and inherited ideas such as the party, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and even the right of nations to self-determination had become suspect. This spelled disaster for the entire anti-imperialist left: Because anti-imperialism had aligned itself so closely with the Leninist problematic, the terrifying failures of movements tied to that problematic threw anti-imperialist internationalism itself into crisis, which in turn cleared the space for alternative ways of thinking global change. By advocating individual rights instead of national liberation, morality instead of politics, and reform instead of revolution, human rights not only survived this decade unscathed but also capitalized on a growing dissatisfaction with anti-imperialism to propose a different path. The very conditions that triggered the decline of anti-imperialism made possible the rise of human rights.

But a central argument of this book is that this explanation is not enough. Human rights succeeded not simply because anti-imperialism failed, as if in a hydraulic fashion, but rather because its partisans were able to convincingly market human rights as a legitimate successor to anti-imperialism. This involved striking a delicate balance. Human rights had to be presented as distinct from anti-imperialism. But if human rights were framed as too different, they could not have resonated with the desires of activists searching for a new home during the crisis of anti-imperialism. Proponents therefore had to make human rights appear as if they operated on the same continuum as their great rival. Human rights, to put it differently, had to be framed as sharing the same progressive goals of anti-imperialism without suffering from any of its weaknesses.

Taking the example of international solidarity with Vietnam, I show how this was made possible in at least three ways. First, even though anti-imperialism and human rights, differed from one another, the particular form of anti-imperialism that radicals adopted in the 1960s shared many "elective affinities" with the rival human rights internationalism. Activists supporting the idea of national self-determination often treated nations as essentialist subjects, much as rights activists viewed individuals. They

saw the nation as endowed with inherent rights, mirroring the flat universalism of human rights. And while they did develop a different tactical repertoire, some radicals nevertheless made moral appeals, pointed to international law, or highlighted the suffering of Vietnamese as victims – all of which were hallmarks of human rights activism.

Second, anti-imperialist radicals and human rights activists converged on a series of projects in the early 1970s, such as the exemplary campaign to save political prisoners in South Vietnam. Although still working within the framework of anti-imperialism, antiwar radicals increasingly demanded the release of individuals imprisoned by the dictatorship in South Vietnam, making possible a tactical alliance with rights activists. Collaborations of this kind introduced the more marginal human rights internationalism to larger activist milieus, boosted its progressive credentials, and helped create a cultural, political, and intellectual terrain that was more favorable to rights talk. The unexpected convergence allowed human rights to appear as emancipatory as anti-imperialism. Consequently, when anti-imperialism slid into crisis in the late 1970s, activists could interpret human rights as simply a better way to realize their shared goal of making positive change in the world.

Lastly, human rights internationalism superseded anti-imperialism because it benefited from the defection of some radicals in the 1970s. To truly compete with anti-imperialism, human rights activists had to do more than just present themselves as an alternative; they needed to match the kind of dynamic activist energy that had helped make anti-imperialism so popular. One solution came in the form of radicals who jumped ship, and in the process brought with them skills, experience, and a repertoire of exciting forms of solidarity. This transfer was largely made possible through the encounter between human rights and a new kind of humanitarianism. In places like France, many of these defectors did not leap directly to human rights. The internal contradictions of anti-imperialism led them to develop a kind of radical humanitarianism that carried forward Leninism's activist aura while rejecting its overall framework. Their search for a new way to frame their militant internationalist practice led them into the arms of human rights. In fusing humanitarianism and human rights, these renegade radicals helped elevate human rights internationalism into a force that could not merely compete with anti-imperialism, but perhaps even beat it at its own game.

Contributions

In order to tell this history of the rivalry between different ways of thinking internationalism, I spent nearly a decade working with a wide range

of materials. I pored over the newspapers, manifestos, internal bulletins, and political programs of countless organizations housed in over a dozen archives and libraries in five countries. I relied on hundreds of published primary sources in several languages. And I learned much from the work of fellow scholars working in a number of intersecting disciplines.

This book draws on, and aims to contribute to, three fields of inquiry in particular. One is the vast literature on the antiwar movements of the Vietnam War years. The book begins by arguing that antiwar activism was far more than some liberal, single-issue, American campaign to bring the boys home.[32] It leans on Bethany Keenan's research to demonstrate how antiwar activism was a crucial part of political life in countries like France.[33] It continues the work of Niek Pas by drawing attention to those radicals who saw antiwar activism as part of a much larger project of change.[34] It takes a cue from Sabine Rousseau by stretching the timeline of the war in order to make new discoveries about comparatively less studied topics such as refugees, political prisoners, and the Third Indochina War.[35] It develops the findings of historians like Harish C. Mehta to restore the agency of Vietnamese figures in shaping international antiwar activism.[36] And it takes inspiration from scholars like Judy Tzu-Chun Wu to illuminate the ways that political actors made sense of their internationalism.[37] Indeed, this book hopes not only to provide a richer history of how radicals in the North Atlantic related to struggles in Vietnam, but also to use that history to explore how radical activists imagined anti-imperialist internationalism in the 1960s and 1970s.

To study the meaning of anti-imperialism among radicals in the North Atlantic, this book engages with the burgeoning field of the "Global Sixties." Leaning on scholars like Robin D. G. Kelley, it uncovers the forgotten dreams of activists in the North Atlantic.[38] Like Gerd-Rainer Horn it documents how activists turned those dreams into egalitarian innovations.[39] Like Martin Klimke, it emphasizes the interconnected nature of this transformational activism, doing for the United States and France what he did for the USA and West Germany.[40] Like Christoph Kalter, it sheds light on the centrality of the "Third World" to the trajectory of this interconnected anti-imperialist left in the North Atlantic.[41] Like Cynthia A. Young, it dissects the complex processes of adaptation, projection, and translation that characterized the internationalism of those years.[42] And like Kristin Ross, this book not only reconstructs the radical anti-imperialist experiments of the 1960s and 1970s, but also seeks to explain how they were mutilated, distorted, and replaced by competing internationalist projects like human rights.[43]

This book takes special inspiration from figures like Alessandro Russo who insist that we approach the radical emancipatory projects of the "Sixties" on their own terms.[44] Consequently, it argues that the only way

to grasp the political significance of anti-imperialist internationalism is to look at its founding assumptions, internal contradictions, and the historical processes that led to its exhaustion. This means explaining not only why anti-imperialism succeeded but also, more importantly, why it failed, and searching for the reasons for that failure within that mode of politics itself. After all, as important as external factors were to anti-imperialism's demise, millions abandoned it because they believed it fell short of its own promises. This book therefore aims to deepen our understanding of anti-imperialism in the "Global Sixties" not only by tracking its rise, consolidation, and transformation but also by offering a sober investigation of its inherent limits, the reasons why people willingly switched their allegiance to other internationalisms, and how internationalist alternatives like human rights capitalized on its failures in the 1970s.

This leads directly to the third major scholarly field: human rights. This book expands on Samuel Moyn's revisionist arguments that human rights were only one way to improve the world, that until recently they were not very popular among activists, and that their surprising successes had a great deal to do with the fate of other internationalisms.[45] It takes to heart Mark Philip Bradley's insights about the diversity of human rights vernaculars to show how a specifically individualist variant of rights discourse began to cohere in the 1960s and 1970s.[46] It confirms Jan Eckel's claim that developments within the left in those years played an important role in the general rise of this individualist conception of human rights.[47] It develops Barbara Keys's work to show how these rights activists found themselves allied with a US government that appropriated this vision of human rights during a crucial moment of imperialist crisis.[48] And it draws on Eleanor Davey's study of radical humanitarianism to show how France served as a crucible for these dramatic shifts in the way people thought about changing the world.[49]

But if Davey's project adopts the vantage point of human rights to explain how "sans-frontiérisme" replaced "Third Worldism" as the major way of "approaching suffering" in the rest of the world, this book offers an interpretation from the other side. After all, radicals did not conceptualize internationalism as addressing "suffering" but instead as collectively organizing international revolution against capitalist imperialism. Anti-imperialists did not even call themselves "Third Worldists," which is what human rights crusaders hostile to anti-imperialism labeled them. Nor did they see their internationalism as so unidirectional. For them, internationalism was not about how they in North America and Western Europe should approach suffering in the rest of the globe, but rather about how radicals everywhere could collaborate to build a new world altogether, with revolutionaries abroad, like

Vietnamese communists, playing leading roles. My book, then, complements Davey's important study by firmly centering the perspective of the anti-imperialists themselves.

The key innovation of this book, then, is to weave together original findings from archival research, new interpretations of published sources, and insights from a number of scholarly fields into a single, granular, coherent, synthetic, and accessible narrative about international antiwar activism in the 1960s and 1970s that explores the transformative competition between the two dominant ways that activists imagined the international goal of making the world a better place. The Overture sets the scene by returning to the early twentieth century to uncover the construction of the Leninist problematic, explain its international appeal, and show how Vietnam came to be perceived as its prime test case. Chapter 1 begins the story proper by tracking the emergence of a radical antiwar international in the 1960s. Chapter 2 explains why so many radicals followed the lead of Vietnamese revolutionaries by embracing Leninist anti-imperialism over other internationalist projects such as human rights. Chapter 3 discusses why radicals turned to revolution in the late 1960s. Chapter 4 demonstrates how in the early 1970s widespread repression prompted radicals to focus on incarceration, reassess civil liberties, and forge alliances with human rights activists. Chapter 5 surveys the collapse of radicalism, the apostasy of former radicals, and the meltdown of anti-imperialist internationalism in the context of the Third Indochina War. Chapter 6 turns to the international campaigns to save refugees in Southeast Asia to explain how the crisis of anti-imperialism created an important opportunity for human rights internationalism to take the lead in the late 1970s. Lastly, the Coda brings the story to the present by reflecting on the meaning of emancipatory internationalist politics in the wake of human rights internationalism's own crisis.

Stakes

Every history is a history of the present. Even when scholars refuse to acknowledge the presence of the present, all historical studies are shaped by the questions, assumptions, personal convictions, and especially the political stakes of their time. This book began with a conviction that this imperialist world order of systemic inequality, exploitation, and domination is intolerable. Its founding assumption is that this world is not necessary, that a better one is possible, and that ordinary people have the capacity to unite across borders, divisions, and differences to build an emancipatory future.

At the same time, it recognizes that we live in an era haunted by the undeniable failures, and in some cases horrific disasters, of previous

attempts to radically change the world. For that reason, it argues that any attempt to think emancipatory internationalist politics today depends on our ability to take stock of prior cycles of struggle. For those of us living in the North Atlantic, that means confronting the internationalist campaigns that emerged across North America and Western Europe in concert with anti-imperialist struggles across the globe in the 1960s and 1970s. Those years witnessed the highest concentration of interconnected anti-imperialist struggles in world history, generated an extraordinarily rich laboratory of political invention that raised new questions that continue to preoccupy us, and brought about sweeping changes that have shaped the world we live in today.

Most of all, they marked a turning point when the very political matrix that had made possible this remarkable political experimentation collapsed. In the 1970s, a set of concepts came apart, a general problematic unraveled, a theoretical system disintegrated, a conceptual language decomposed, a revolutionary culture crumbled, and a mode of politics reached its point of saturation. All this allowed human rights to emerge as an alternative that channeled anti-imperialism's universalist aspirations but rejected its commitment to radical political change. If anti-imperialism enabled millions to organize unprecedented struggles for universal emancipation, then human rights refocused attention to the millions who suffered from the botched emancipatory projects of those very anti-imperialists. In this way, human rights succeeded precisely because they made visible, responded to, and took advantage of anti-imperialism's indisputable failures. The collapse of anti-imperialism, particularly its Leninist variant, and the rise of human rights were completely linked.

If thinking emancipatory internationalist politics today depends on explaining why anti-imperialism failed, and if human rights were historically tied to the sequence that led to anti-imperialism's exhaustion, then it is imperative that we understand their complex relationship. The wager of this book, then, is that taking anti-imperialism seriously sheds new light on human rights, and taking human rights seriously tells us a great deal about the appeal, trajectory, contradictions, and failure of anti-imperialism. As it should be clear, this approach does not presuppose neutrality, and still less any desire to somehow get the best of both worlds, but instead is rooted in the belief that taking each side seriously on its own terms is necessary to understanding the internationalist politics that defined the twentieth century. It is only by contending with this history that we can grasp the consequential transformations of the past, make sense of our own moment of crisis, and find ways to act in the turbulent years that lie ahead.