

1 *Popular Sovereignty and the End of Empire*

1.1 “The Fate of the Common People”

On November 17, 1935, the Indian economist Joseph Cornelius Kumarappa was invited by a group of students at the University of Allahabad to reflect on the politics of the anti-colonial movement in British India. Writing in a special issue of the campus newspaper *The Students' Outlook*, Kumarappa focused his remarks on the meaning that “the sovereignty of the people” – the basis of any “attempt by a community to govern itself” in a democratic manner – should have for countries under European colonial rule.¹ He compared the two main political models in front of colonial peoples in the mid-1930s: the liberal representative democracy of Britain and the United States, or Soviet Communism. Both systems promised to base government on the consent, will, and power of “the people”: “when the people were groaning under autocracy and the burden of supporting their autocratic feudal lords they yearned for a ‘Government of the people, for the people, and by the people.’”² Yet both, in reality, failed to deliver on such lofty republican ideals, formalizing a set of institutions that kept the actual people away from the arena of political rule: “they aim at the masses having power in their hands but in effect the few at the top hold the reins.”³ Kumarappa argued that liberal democracy and Soviet-style Communism shared an attachment to a regime of representation whose organization was inimical to direct popular rule. Whether the task of the state was market regulation or large-scale property redistribution, its internal structure delegated sovereignty to members of political parties and to a limited number of legislative bodies, circumscribing the exercise of popular power. “The fate of

¹ J. C. Kumarappa, “Communism and the Common People,” in J. C. Kumarappa Private Papers – Articles by Him, vol. 1, no. 29, 174–77, at 174, Manuscripts Collection, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi.

² Ibid. ³ Ibid., 175.

the common people under a benevolent capitalism,” Kumarappa wrote, “has not been much improved under Soviet Communism. In both cases, public opinion is molded by a small group who also hold the press to strict censorship. Economic activity is planned and controlled from the center.”⁴ If anti-colonial nationalism was to really allow “a community to govern itself,” then non-European leaders needed to move beyond the capitalist-Communist binary and question the very political form – the modern state premised on political representation – on which the two models rested.

This book is an attempt to take seriously, on its own terms, the understanding of anti-colonial popular sovereignty articulated by Joseph Kumarappa in the middle weeks of November 1935. Though written for a regional campus publication with limited readership – and, as far as we know, never reprinted anywhere outside of Allahabad – Kumarappa’s short article encapsulated a growing frustration during the interwar period with many of the accepted maxims of anti-colonial nationalism: the demand for national independence, for a powerful state, and for representative institutions able to secure political rights for those reduced to the status of imperial subjects. The goal of the next seven chapters is to recapture the nature of this critical political imaginary, identifying its intellectual sources and the ideas of its main proponents. By the time Kumarappa’s essay was published in *The Students’ Outlook* in 1935, much political debate in South Asia revolved around the issue of “self-rule,” often transliterated into the Sanskritic term *swaraj*. The term *swaraj* was first deployed in a political sense by the nationalist leader Dadabhai Naoroji during a rally in Tollygunge, Calcutta on December 26, 1906. For Naoroji, *swaraj* meant the introduction into India of parliamentary government patterned on Britain or on the semi-independent settler states of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.⁵ It entailed, as Naoroji argued, the creation of “a constitutional representative system” like in “the self-governing colonies.”⁶ Three years later, the pamphlet *Hind Swaraj, or Indian Home Rule* (1909), authored by the young lawyer Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi during a journey between London and South

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dadabhai Naoroji, *The Late Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji on Swaraj: Presidential Address at the Calcutta Congress 1906* (Bombay, 1917), 13–14. See Dinyar Patel, *Naoroji: Pioneer of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), 242–50.

⁶ Naoroji, *The Late Dr. Dadabhai Naoroji on Swaraj*, 13–14.

Africa on the SS *Kildonan Castle*, both paid homage to Naoroji and criticized how easily *swaraj* had been collapsed into a matter of electoral reform.⁷ As *swaraj* became a concept bandied about back and forth in nationalist circles over the next five decades, it raised fundamental questions about imperial and postimperial political founding. What would self-determination within – and eventually beyond – the British Empire in fact look like? What did it mean for a colonial people to become self-ruling? Kumarappa’s essay in November 1935 was a response to precisely these questions. His answer – and that of a group of others, this book seeks to demonstrate – was that self-determination would remain incomplete under a state that allowed for the elected representation of colonial peoples. The more transformative, more urgent, and more *democratic* task was to find participatory mechanisms for popular rule, which might make a people into agents rather than objects of government.

Indian political thinkers who challenged the relationship between political representation and popular sovereignty in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s did so against the backdrop of enormous global transformations. Recent scholarship in intellectual history has shown how the interwar period was marked by a striking degree of political and legal experimentation, both within Europe and beyond it. The years from 1917/18 to 1945 were beset by what C. A. Bayly has described as a far-reaching, drawn-out “world crisis” stretching across continents.⁸ In Jan-Werner Müller’s memorable phrasing, “no liberal answers for the democratic age had emerged by the mid-1920s,” and, “in the absence of any kind of stable constitutional settlement,” those conscripted into European modernity had to “keep on experimenting with political forms and principles.”⁹ On the specific question of democracy,

⁷ M. K. Gandhi, *“Hind Swaraj” and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony J. Parel (Cambridge, 1997), 13–18.

⁸ C. A. Bayly, *Remaking the Modern World, 1900–2015: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Hoboken, 2018), 12–48.

⁹ Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven, 2011), 48. On political experimentation around the question of state sovereignty in the interwar period, also see Marc Stears, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State: Ideologies of Reform in the United States and Britain, 1909–1926* (Oxford, 2008), 128–98; Cécile Laborde, *Pluralist Thought and the State in Britain and France, 1900–1925* (New York, 2000); Jeanne Morefield, “Urgent History: The Sovereignty Debates and Political Theory’s Lost Voices,” *Political Theory*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2017), 164–91;

following the cataclysm of WWI, it was no longer clear to many why the demands of newly enfranchised populations should be channeled through constitutional parliamentary states. Writing from London in 1917, the British economist John Hobson observed that WWI had demonstrated the hollowness of modern electoral democracy, particularly the vulnerability of democratic institutions and political parties to capture by oligarchic economic interests. He insisted that it was misguided to consider the liberal states of the West as democracies in any real sense of the term:

The forms of political self-government, indeed, exist in Britain, France, America and elsewhere with varying measures of completeness. But nowhere does the will of the people play freely through these forms. In every country the will of certain powerful men or interests is pumped down from above into the party machinery that it may come up with the formal register of an electorate denied the knowledge and opportunity to create and exercise a will that is informed and free. Popular opinion and aspirations act at best as exceedingly imperfect checks on these abuses of political self-government. So evident has been the failure of all democratic forms hitherto devised that hostile critics have pronounced democracy incapable of realization.¹⁰

As representative democracy lost its luster after 1917, Hobson suggested there would be an intellectual backlash against many of its core principles, for “not only the spirit but the very forms of popular self-government have suffered violation.”¹¹

Hobson’s prediction was prescient. That same year, W. E. B. Du Bois argued in an essay for the *Journal of Race Development* that neither the United States under Woodrow Wilson nor the capitalist, constitutional states of Western Europe were full democracies, since they all disenfranchised and subjugated their colonial subjects.¹² With the outbreak of socialist revolution in Germany in 1918, Rosa Luxemburg authored a defense of “anti-parliamentarism,” advocating direct self-legislation through workers’ councils.¹³ Hobson’s fellow

and Mira L. Siegelberg, *Statelessness: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), 49–154.

¹⁰ J. A. Hobson, *Democracy after the War* (London, 1917), 5. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹² W. E. B. Du Bois, “Of the Culture of White Folk,” *Journal of Race Development*, vol. 7, no. 4 (1917), 434–47.

¹³ Rosa Luxemburg, “What Does the Spartacus League Want?” in *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*, ed. Dick Howard (New York, 1971), 366–76.

British socialist G. D. H. Cole held that electoral forms of working-class politics, such as that practiced by the British Labor Party and the trade union movement, had run their course by 1918, and the need of the hour was for more revolutionary alternatives.¹⁴ When Carl Schmitt thus declared in 1923 that the liberal ideal of reasoned deliberation within elected representative legislatures, inherited from John Stuart Mill and François Guizot, was no longer tenable in the twentieth century, he was conveying a sentiment as formative for the post-WWI left as for the reactionary Caesarist dictatorships that would arise in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁵

Discussions about political representation and *swaraj* in colonial India were produced by the particular conditions of South Asia in the first half of the twentieth century but were also, at the same time, deeply global phenomena. They were imbricated in a transnational backlash against liberalism and driven by larger ruptures in thinking about parliamentarism and representative democracy after 1917 and 1918. Revisiting the Indian sovereignty debates provides us with a concrete archive to evaluate modern anti-colonialism as a body of *democratic* thought. To put the point in a slightly different manner: What was the *democratic* dimension of the protest against European imperial rule? What did opposition to imperialism entail in terms of theories of popular sovereignty and government? How did anti-colonial movements respond to the denial of political rights by European empires, and what did they offer as potential correctives?¹⁶ The challenge to representative government in thinking about *swaraj*

¹⁴ G. D. H. Cole, *Self-Government in Industry* (London, 1918).

¹⁵ Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA, 1985).

¹⁶ Recent work on twentieth-century anti-colonial democratic thought includes: James Tully, “Civic Freedom contra Imperialism,” in *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 2008), 225–309; Margaret Kohn and Keally D. McBride, *Political Theories of Decolonization: Postcolonialism and the Problem of Foundations* (New York, 2011); Karuna Mantena, “Popular Sovereignty and Anti-Colonialism,” in *Popular Sovereignty in Historical Perspective*, eds. Richard Bourke and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge, 2016), 297–319; and Nazmul S. Sultan, “Self-Rule and the Problem of Peoplehood in Colonial India,” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 114, no. 1 (2020), 81–94. For an account of anti-imperial popular sovereignty focused on the eighteenth-century Haitian Revolution, see Kevin Olson, *Imagined Sovereignities: The Power of the People and Other Myths of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, 2016), 144–66.

underscores how one argument within twentieth-century anti-colonial thought – neither the only nor the most pervasive argument, by any account, but an important one for around six decades – was about the illegitimacy of electoral representation as the primary vehicle for self-determination. If the purpose of countering empire was to make a people self-governing, to turn them from subjects to citizens – to give them, as a collective body, the right of authorship over laws – then, it followed, the concentration of lawmaking authority within a limited number of institutions and persons undermined the scope of self-government. Grounding a political alternative to imperial rule within the strictures and constraints of a liberal constitutional order was considered incompatible with a democratic interpretation of the principle of self-determination. From the perspective of this interwar tradition, genuinely anti-colonial political thinking was an experiment in reevaluating the institutional forms of popular rule.

1.2 “The Awakening of the Orient”: Empire and Colonial Freedom

The possibility of collective political self-government exercised directly by colonial peoples themselves began to crystallize as an idea in European political thought during the opening decades of the twentieth century. A number of the British commentators whom Gregory Claeys has characterized as “imperial sceptics” greeted national independence movements in India, Iran, Egypt, and East Asia as evidence that European liberalism’s pedagogical mission of rendering non-European peoples fit for modern self-government had finally succeeded, and might now be safely stalled.¹⁷ L. T. Hobhouse argued in 1911 that “nothing has been more encouraging to the Liberalism of Western Europe in recent years than the signs of political awakening in the East,” offering as an example Iranian constitutional opposition to the extension of British influence in the country in 1908 and 1909.¹⁸ Until the turn of the twentieth century, the sociologist insisted that “it seemed as though it would in the end be impossible to resist the ultimate ‘destiny’ of the

¹⁷ Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850–1920* (Cambridge, 2010).

¹⁸ L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, ed. James Meadowcroft (Cambridge: 1994), 114. On Hobhouse and empire, see Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, 2016), 341–62.

white races to be masters of the rest of the world,” but the rising chorus of demands for parliamentary government and independent states in the colonies – “the awakening of the Orient, from Constantinople to Peking” – was “the greatest and most hopeful fact of our time” for those critical of imperial militarism.¹⁹ For the Fabian socialist Sidney Webb in January 1918, the acceleration of colonial home rule signaled that the assumptions of civilizational superiority that had propelled European expansion through the nineteenth century were on the verge of collapse: “just as in the past the civilizations of Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Carthage, and the great Roman Empire have been successively destroyed, so, in the judgement of this detached observer, the civilization of all Europe is even now receiving its death blow.”²⁰

The most systematic and certainly the most influential analysis published in the 1910s of what Leonard Hobhouse called “the awakening of the Orient” came not from the Western European capitals of London, Paris, or Brussels, but from a tottering, tumultuous Russian Empire on the eve of WWI. Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1914), published as a set of essays in the St. Petersburg Bolshevik journal *Prosveshcheniye* (*Enlightenment*) between April and June 1914 (while Lenin himself was in exile in Poland), was an attempt to give a comparative account of non-European nationalist struggle, within the framework of the Marxist tradition as Lenin understood it. Lenin took there to be an important functional difference between successive waves of national revolution in Europe through the nineteenth century and national revolution in the colonies of European powers. Europe between the French Revolution of 1789 and the unification of Germany in 1871 had undergone “an epoch of bourgeois-democratic revolutions,” as popular national movements sought to establish commercial, representative republics led by a national bourgeoisie – an observation Marx had made often in his late work, Engels had famously reiterated in “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific” (1880), and Lenin adopted from them both.²¹ European colonies in the early twentieth century confronted

¹⁹ Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, 114.

²⁰ Sidney Webb, *Labor and the New Social Order: A Report on Reconstruction* (London, 1918), 3. See Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 228.

²¹ V. I. Lenin, “The Right of Nations to Self-Determination,” in *Lenin: Collected Works* (CW), vol. 20 (December 1913–August 1914), trans. Bernard Isaacs and Joe Fineberg, ed. Julius Katzer (Moscow, 1964), 393–454, at 405–6. Also see

a different situation, subject to an extractive, monopolistic global market extending outward from Western Europe and its satellite states, woven into the material networks of empire, a system Lenin analyzed at greater length in the pamphlet *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917).²² The demand for popular government in national terms in a colonial setting was, consequently, a demand for control over the imperialist world-system. Unlike most European national movements of the previous century, anti-imperial nationalism in the colonies challenged the expansion of European commercial power. Lenin upheld support for colonial independence movements as a pillar of Bolshevik foreign policy, stating that “the nationalism of any oppressed nation has a general democratic content that is directed *against* oppression, and it is this content that we *unconditionally* support.”²³ His model was Marx’s enthusiasm for Polish independence in the mid-1860s.²⁴

What did Lenin’s theory of anti-imperial nationalism imply for political strategy in the colonial world? For one thing, as Sanjay Seth has argued, Lenin failed to adequately distinguish between anti-imperialism seeking to counter European domination out of opposition to capitalism, and anti-imperialism seeking to counter European domination in order to build up state-led domestic capitalism.²⁵ The Indian Marxist Manabendra Nath Roy (M. N. Roy) thus criticized Lenin’s blanket support for anti-imperialism.²⁶ But, going further, by 1917 Lenin was adamant, with what Rosa Luxemburg described as an

Friedrich Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1978), 683–717.

²² V. I. Lenin, “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism,” in *Lenin: CW*, vol. 22 (December 1915–July 1916), 185–304.

²³ Lenin, “The Right of Nations,” 412.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 432–33; and Karl Marx, “Poland’s European Mission (1867),” in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Russian Menace to Europe: A Collection of Articles, Speeches, Letters*, eds. Paul W. Blackstock and Bert F. Hoselitz (Glencoe, IL, 1952), 104–8. On Marx and Poland, see Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago, 2010), 42–78.

²⁵ Sanjay Seth, *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics: The Case of Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1995), 48–51.

²⁶ M. N. Roy, “Original Draft of the Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question,” in *Selected Works of M. N. Roy*, vol. I, ed. Sibnarayan Roy (New Delhi, 1987), 165–68.

“iron consistency,”²⁷ that the only truly revolutionary regime in the colonies, as in Russia, would need to be a militarily powerful, fiscally centralized, and coercive workers’ state. In the important pamphlet *State and Revolution* (1918), Lenin elaborated a theory of state power rooted in a historical and sociological account of the inevitability of violent class conflict. The modern state and its various organs – a standing military and police force, representation through parliament, and monopoly over territory, citizenship, and population – were products of a rising bourgeoisie’s efforts to consolidate its power over other classes. The origins of the European state lay in its capacity to act as a “‘special coercive force’ for the suppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, of millions of working people by handfuls of the rich.”²⁸ As an organized working class began to gain political power, it confronted the intransigence of a bourgeoisie resisting the dismantling of its political and economic domination. During the period of revolutionary struggle, the coercive apparatus of the modern state provided the proletariat with institutions to expropriate private capitalist production. What Lenin called “the dictatorship of the proletariat” carried out a revolution against the resurgence of capitalism using the tools of the bourgeoisie, relying on “state power, a centralized organization of force.”²⁹ Like the democratic republics it replaced, Lenin’s revolutionary state was premised on political representation. Lenin stated that he did not aim for “the abolition of representative institutions and the elective principle,” but for the “conversion of representative institutions from talking shops into ‘working’ bodies.”³⁰

²⁷ Rosa Luxemburg, “The Russian Revolution,” in *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?* ed. Bertram D. Wolfe (Ann Arbor, 1961), 25–80, at 34–35.

²⁸ V. I. Lenin, “The State and Revolution: The Marxist Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution,” in *Lenin: CW*, vol. 25 (June–September 1917), 385–497, at 402.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 409. On the longer intellectual genealogy of Lenin’s ideas about dictatorship and revolution, see Dan Edelstein, “Revolution in Permanence and the Fall of Popular Sovereignty,” in *The Scaffolding of Sovereignty: Global and Aesthetic Perspectives on the History of a Concept*, eds. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, Stefanos Geroulanos, and Nicole Jerr (New York, 2017), 371–92, at 384–86. On the Marxist conception of dictatorship more generally, see Lea Ypi, “Democratic Dictatorship: Political Legitimacy in Marxist Perspective,” *European Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 28, no. 2 (2020), 277–91.

³⁰ Lenin, “State and Revolution,” 428.

In practice, this meant the concentration of sovereign lawmaking power within a vanguard workers' party legislating on behalf of the proletariat from a single state assembly. Lenin rejected ideas about the federalist devolution of legislative power to local communes outlined in the middle of the nineteenth century by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin as unhelpful utopianism, echoing Marx's critique in 1874 of Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy* (1873).³¹ Lenin's commitment to a centralized representative state, as Tracy Strong has observed, derived from a realistic assessment of the constraints imposed by conflict on political founding.³²

Unsurprisingly, with Lenin's rise, support for the construction of Leninist states became part of the official Bolshevik approach to anti-imperial nationalism from the mid-1910s. Joseph Stalin's "Marxism and the National Question" (1913), an essay Lenin commissioned from Stalin in Vienna, accepted the normative value of the nation as a political community, advocated a strong centralized state in opposition to empire, and decried "unlimited federalism" as a pernicious form of "separatism."³³ Over eight days between August 31 and September 7, 1920, the Bolshevik-dominated Third Communist International (Comintern) convened the "Congress of the Peoples of the East" in Baku, Azerbaijan, an ambitious gathering of nationalists from Central Asia, the Caucasus, Iran, and India. The Red Army was still fighting a brutal civil war on three fronts, but Lenin's Bolsheviks were also making rapid gains into the border regions of the erstwhile Russian Empire, including into Azerbaijan itself. Part of the goal of the Congress of the Peoples of the East was to endear the Bolsheviks to non-European nationalities and to present the newly ascendant Russian regime as an ally of Asian opposition to British, French, and American imperialism. The meeting was led by Grigory Zinoviev and Karl Radek, both prominent Bolsheviks who would fall victim to Stalin's purges in the 1930s.³⁴

³¹ *Ibid.*, 434.

³² Tracy B. Strong, *Politics without Vision: Thinking without a Banister in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, 2012), 184–217.

³³ Joseph Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," in *Marxism and the National Question: Selected Writings and Speeches* (New York, 1942), 7–68, at 65. See Eric D. Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States* (Princeton, 2019), 288–89.

³⁴ The Baku Congress has been surprisingly neglected by historians, despite Congress proceedings having been available in Russian since the 1920s and in

Much of the Congress was consumed by criticism of the 1919 Paris Peace Settlement. The settlement was widely viewed by delegates as a strategic agreement intended to extend the victorious Entente powers’ control over Asia (an undeniably accurate observation, as we shall see later in the chapter). Radek declared to the Congress on its second day that “Entente capital,” spearheaded by Britain, France, and now the United States, “having struck down its German competitor, the German brigand, has obtained control of the hundreds of millions who make up the peoples of the East, in order to enslave them.”³⁵ Bolshevik delegates like Radek presented the Leninist form of the state to the assembled nationalist leaders as the only effective bulwark against imperial expansion by the Entente and the specter of colonial “enslavement.” On September 6, Béla Kun of the new Hungarian Soviet Republic argued for collectivist, centralized states in the colonies, capable of breaking the exploitative alliance between local business interests and European capitalists, an alliance Kun considered a way of rendering non-European societies subject to European states. Without state power at its disposal, Kun insisted that “the revolution of the peoples of the East” would invariably bend to the European bourgeoisie and to local “agents of foreign imperialists.”³⁶ Only after a political party representing agricultural and industrial workers took command of a powerful state did it possess an effective instrument to resist the incursions of foreign capital. Anatoly Skachko from the Ukraine repeated Béla Kun’s point in a speech later that evening, stressing the need for a political system in Anatolia, Persia, and India where all products of labor belonged to a single, central state.³⁷

English translation since the 1970s – and despite Zinoviev’s actions at the Congress having been popularized through Warren Beatty’s film *Reds* (1981). For the few existing studies, see Stephen White, “Communism and the East: The Baku Congress, 1920,” *Slavic Review*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1974), 492–514; Ronald Grigor Suny, “‘Don’t Paint Nationalism Red!’: National Revolution and Socialist Anti-Imperialism,” in *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then*, ed. Prasenjit Duara (London, 2004), 176–98, at 193–96; and Alp Yenen, “The Other Jihad: Enver Pasha, Bolsheviks, and Politics of Anticolonial Muslim Nationalism during the Baku Congress 1920,” in *The First World War and Its Aftermath: The Shaping of the Middle East*, ed. T. G. Fraser (Chicago, 2015), 273–94.

³⁵ *Congress of the Peoples of the East (Baku, September 1920): Stenographic Report*, trans. Brian Pearce (London, 1977), 44.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 127–28. ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

The stenographic report of the Congress of the Peoples of the East reveals that doctrinaire Leninism was not the only ideology circulating in Baku in September 1920. On September 5, Mikhail Pavlovich, a well-known commentator on Iranian and Chinese affairs from Odessa, advocated for the creation of peasant assemblies in the colonies modeled on Russian *soviets* from the early days of the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. By establishing “peasant soviets, soviets of the toilers” as mechanisms for direct self-government, Pavlovich argued in the spirited millenarian language typical of the Baku Congress, nationalists and the leadership of the Comintern would “significantly advance the cause of the revolutionary education and organization of the masses of the East in the struggle against the world of the predators.”³⁸ Pavlovich’s proposal contained faint traces of Bakunin’s program of decentralized federalist socialism from the 1870s. But Pavlovich’s was a minor voice, and the Leninist line clearly carried the day. As the Moscow Comintern became the key European supporter of anti-colonial nationalism between 1919 and the outbreak of WWII, its propaganda consistently extolled the virtues of a centralist party-state. Within the League Against Imperialism (LAI), a transnational network of anti-colonial activists backed by the Comintern from 1927 to 1937, a fairly narrow imagination of the sovereign political community dominated. The manifesto adopted at the LAI’s second meeting in Frankfurt on July 31, 1929 hailed the Soviet state of the 1920s as “a powerful stimulus to the colonial peoples to struggle for national freedom and independence.”³⁹ Insofar as there was a coherent Soviet view of anti-colonial self-determination in the interwar decades, it was oriented toward moulding independence movements into demands for unitary party-states.

At the same time, the discourses of anti-imperialism and self-determination were taken up not just by the Bolsheviks but by the other rising power of the post-1919 world: the United States. In 1916, Woodrow Wilson was reelected to his second term as U.S. President.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁹ “Manifesto of the Second World Congress of the League Against Imperialism,” 2a. 1929. Stencil. 5 pages. No. 78. League Against Imperialism Digital Archives (Collection ID ARCH00804), International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam. On the LAI, see the volume *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives*, eds. Michele Luoro, Carolien Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter, and Sana Tannoury-Karam (Leiden, 2020).

The former academic soon began to present himself as an arbiter in the diplomatic gridlock of Europe’s Great War.⁴⁰ Wilson’s address to the U.S. Senate in January 1917 laid out the general framework of an American-led postwar settlement. Amongst other things, Wilson’s settlement maintained that securing peace entailed giving attention to the internal organization of individual states. Along with the regulation of interstate relations, Wilson argued, international agreements after the war needed to integrate democracy as a core principle of political order: “no peace can last, or ought to last, which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed.”⁴¹ Accepting the value of “the consent of the governed” meant that national groups had to be given a voice in political rule and that “no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property.”⁴² Wilson went on to assert that “the consent of the governed” was embedded in a particularly Anglo-American political tradition and had been produced by the long experience of English constitutionalism since the Magna Carta and by “those who have sought to build up liberty” in North America since the eighteenth century.⁴³ Very broadly, “the consent of the governed” meant representative government on the American model. Wilson reiterated these arguments as he prepared to lead peace negotiations in France in 1918. In his famous “Fourteen Points” (“War Aims”) speech to Congress on January 8, 1918, Wilson presented “the consent of the governed” as a way to reform European imperial practice in the 1910s. The fifth of Wilson’s fourteen points held that an “adjustment” of “colonial claims” by European powers should accommodate the express consent of non-European subject

⁴⁰ Wilson’s internationalist turn after 1917 is the subject of a substantial historiography. See, for example, Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York, 1992); David Steigerwald, *Wilsonian Idealism in America* (Ithaca, 1994); Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (London, 2002), 11–33; Trygve Thrøntveit, “The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination,” *Diplomatic History*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2011), 445–81; and Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York, 2007), 16–53.

⁴¹ Woodrow Wilson, “Last Hopes of Peace with Germany – Address to the United States Senate, January 22, 1917,” in *President Wilson’s Great Speeches and Other History Making Documents* (Chicago, 1919), 144–52, at 148.

⁴² *Ibid.* ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 149.

populations.⁴⁴ In “determining all such questions of sovereignty,” European powers should incorporate “the interests of the populations concerned.”⁴⁵

Wilson’s Secretary of State Robert Lansing recognized that the president’s turn to national self-determination to rectify imperial misrule on the eve of the Paris Peace Conference was not particularly novel; it was an older Anglo-American ideal of “consent of the governed,” which had “for three centuries been repeatedly declared to be sound by political philosophers, and generally accepted as just by civilized peoples” dressed up with some new, ambitiously idealistic terminology directed at Britain and France, especially at Clemenceau and Lloyd George.⁴⁶ Wilson opened up the possibility that imperial subjects were at least morally entitled to political self-rule, then proceeded to define self-rule as a historically specific form of representative government.⁴⁷ If peoples outside the Anglo-American civilizational sphere wanted to rule themselves independently, they needed to first adopt the political institutions that were its distinctive achievements. The tangible result of Wilson’s thinking on democracy during the Paris Peace Conference was the establishment of the League of Nations Mandates system in 1919. Large swathes of territory belonging to Germany, Austria, and the Ottomans in Central and Southwestern Africa, the Middle East, and the Pacific Islands were made over to Britain and France. Under the periodic oversight of a multimember Permanent Mandates Commission linked to the League, Britain and France were supposed to gradually introduce their new subjects to Western European, or more narrowly transatlantic, norms of statehood and representative democracy. In colonies “inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world,” Paris delegates agreed during the ratification of Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant on February 14, 1919, it

⁴⁴ Woodrow Wilson, “President Wilson’s Address to Congress Proclaiming the War Aims of the United States January 8, 1918,” in *President Wilson’s Great Speeches*, 339–48, at 344.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Robert Lansing, *The Peace Negotiations: A Personal Narrative* (Boston, 1921), 96.

⁴⁷ On national character, political representation, and the modern state in Wilson, see Duncan Kelly, “Woodrow Wilson and the Challenge of Federalism in World War One,” in *The Federal Idea: Public Law between Governance and Political Life*, ed. Amnon Lev (Oxford, 2017), 167–88.

fell onto the “advanced nations” of Western Europe to undertake “tutelage,” as “mandatories on behalf of the League.”⁴⁸ The nature of “tutelage” depended on “the stage of the development of the people,” but in all cases it meant laying the rudimentary foundations of the bureaucratic, representative, centralized nation-state.⁴⁹ Taken beyond Western Europe, Wilson’s vision of a world remade through a cascade of republican democracy thus became part of an imperial system projecting the territorial state and representative government as universal standards. Indeed, as Susan Pedersen has noted, “Britain found Wilsonian ideas easy to accommodate because they dovetailed so nicely with British imperial practice.”⁵⁰

There were, of course, categorical differences in the options put forward by Wilson and Lenin. John Maynard Keynes, who attended the Paris talks as an advisor for the British Treasury, warned of the likelihood of a polarized international system with “no moral solidarity” between constituent countries, divided between a Wilsonian Anglo-American-French camp, an authoritarian Germany, and a Russian-led network of new revolutionary states.⁵¹ Wilson’s ideal regime, a multiparty representative democracy with legally protected property rights and free commercial exchange, was precisely the kind of Trojan horse for capital accumulation attacked in Lenin’s *State and Revolution*. There was also the important question of racial and civilizational difference. Lenin and others in the Bolshevik inner circle like Zinoviev and Radek were committed to direct political action on the part of Asian anti-colonial leaders. By all accounts, Wilson never imagined any kind of non-European political agency outside of European supervision, at least not in the foreseeable future. There was undeniably an ideological struggle between two paradigms of colonial self-determination in 1919 and 1920. In his classic study of

⁴⁸ “Comparison between the Draft Covenant and the Final Text,” in *Documents on the League of Nations*, ed. C. A. Kluyver (Leiden, 1920), 49–61, at 58–59.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁰ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York, 2015), 25. On the Mandates System and European empire, also see Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge, 2005), 115–95; and Rose Parfitt, *The Process of International Legal Reproduction: Inequality, Historiography, Resistance* (Cambridge, 2019), 154–222.

⁵¹ John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (New York, 1920), 295.

the Paris Peace Conference, the historian Arno Mayer thus described Wilson's Fourteen Points as a "counter-manifesto" aimed at Lenin.⁵² Wilson's underlying motivation, according to Mayer, was to prevent Soviet forces from monopolizing the languages of anti-imperialism and collective self-government and to render the ideas compatible with American interest.

But in locating a sort of proto-Cold War in 1919, Mayer's interpretation also had the effect of eliding deeper connections between the Leninist and Wilsonian views. Though they never admitted as much, the two leaders converged on the nature of the political community to be created through self-determination: a territorially sovereign polity with a strong centralized administration and a representative system of government. For Lenin, a single political party would use the representative institutions it inherited from previous regimes to govern on behalf of a nation's working people. For Wilson, popular representation of national groups would occur through an elected central legislature. In both cases – and in the movements at Baku, Frankfurt, and Paris, which were their respective interwar legacies – colonial self-determination was meant to buttress the power of states claiming to represent and speak *for* the people.⁵³ It was this structural homology between Western and Soviet anti-colonialism that Joseph Kumarappa perceptively identified, and tried to challenge, in November 1935.

1.3 Anti-Colonialism as Political Thought

As historians and political scientists in Western Europe and the United States turned their attention to "the awakening of the Orient" from the 1940s, the Lenin-Wilson perspective proved remarkably resilient. The

⁵² Arno J. Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (New Haven, 1959), 329–67.

⁵³ Eric Weitz is alone among historians in highlighting the broad similarities, rather than the differences, between Lenin and Wilson in 1918 and 1919. As he has noted, by the end of the Paris Peace Conference, a collectivist understanding of self-determination that applied to 'peoples' rather than to individuals came to be shared by liberal internationalists and Marxists. I build on Weitz's insight in this section, though my contention is that the idea of state-based political representation, and not just the community of the nation, became dominant in 1919. See Eric D. Weitz, "Self-Determination: How a German Enlightenment Idea Became the Slogan of National Liberation and a Human Right," *American Historical Review*, vol. 120, no. 2 (2015), 462–96; and Weitz, *A World Divided*.

first academic study of twentieth-century anti-colonial movements was authored in 1944 by Alfred Cobban, the great English scholar of Burke, Rousseau, and the French Revolution, for the London-based Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA, or what is now the Chatham House think tank in St. James's Square).⁵⁴ The main theme in Cobban's discussion was that modern anti-colonialism had a clear, traceable genealogy. It was the latest iteration of a world-historical process begun in the late eighteenth-century Age of Revolutions, when popular sovereignty first came to be linked to national independence. With the French Revolution in particular, "the people itself became the supreme authority, the single active principle in the state."⁵⁵ But the revolutionary and postrevolutionary people never acted as individuals; they came together collectively in units called nations, and each individual nation thereby gained a right to author its own laws. "The people ceased to be an atomic dust of individuals" and instead "became a *whole*, was called the *Nation*, endowed with sovereignty."⁵⁶ Cobban considered the post-1789 theory of popular rule as an essentially *national* phenomenon to be the source of the principle of self-determination in 1919. The Bolsheviks and Wilson gave new currency to national liberation as a democratic ideal, but did not fundamentally offer a new definition of the concept.⁵⁷ As a political movement oriented toward giving lawmaking power to colonial nationalities, to be exercised by them collectively *as* national peoples, anti-colonialism in the twentieth century was similarly adopting the legacy of the French Revolution.

The third aspect of the modern revolutionary tradition, making possible the relationship between people and nation, was the state. The nation as a whole carried out its sovereignty indirectly, by selecting

⁵⁴ On the interest in non-European politics at Chatham House in the 1940s, see Inderjeet Parmar, "Anglo-American Elites in the Interwar Years: Idealism and Power in the Intellectual Roots of Chatham House and the Council on Foreign Relations," *International Relations*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2002), 53–75.

⁵⁵ Alfred Cobban, *National Self-Determination* (London, 1944), 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* On the theme of popular sovereignty and national communities generally, see Istvan Hont, "The Permanent Crisis of a Divided Mankind: 'Nation-State' and 'Nationalism' in Historical Perspective," in *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 447–528; and Bernard Yack, "Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism," *Political Theory*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2001), 517–36.

⁵⁷ Cobban, *National Self-Determination*, 12–13.

deputies from amongst itself. The modern state enabled such delegation to take place, as the mechanism of representation required the existence of a central assembly whose members would be able to legislate for the entire nation, and would then have the power to enforce this legislation. Following the French Revolution, Cobban wrote, “to give effect to the new conception of the democratic nation-state a rigidly centralized system of government was set up, as a result of which the nature of the state was drastically altered.”⁵⁸ As anti-colonial leaders extended the French Revolution beyond Europe, they reproduced its fidelity to the centralized, representative state. The demand for the national sovereignty of non-European peoples after 1919 “saw the idea of the centralized nation-state pushed to its furthest point.”⁵⁹

Cobban viewed anti-colonial nationalism with deep apprehension. It threatened to reenact in new settings the violence of statism experienced in Europe in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially “the frustration of democratic institutions in the centralized nation-state” resulting from the replacement of local self-rule with the rule of representatives.⁶⁰ He was certainly much more straightforwardly critical of the nation-state as a political form than either Woodrow Wilson or Lenin had been in 1918 and 1919. In a review of Cobban’s book, Hans Morgenthau complained that the historian had taken his criticisms of the ideal of sovereign power too far.⁶¹ Despite his misgivings about statism, however, Cobban continued Wilson and Lenin’s shared verdict on the nature of anti-colonial self-determination: It was above all a project of constructing statist forms of political representation on the eighteenth and nineteenth-century European model.

A broadly similar assessment was given by John Petrov Plamenatz, Isaiah Berlin’s successor as Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at All Souls’ College, Oxford, in his *On Alien Rule and Self-Government* (1960). In Plamenatz’s eyes, anti-colonialism was a fraught process from the very beginning. Non-European leaders were adopting theories of national sovereignty from the Age of Revolutions, but were transposing them onto societies accustomed to personalistic,

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 140. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 141. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁶¹ Hans Morgenthau, “International Affairs,” *Review of Politics*, vol. 10, no. 4 (1948), 493–97, at 497.

autocratic monarchical government. Plamenatz found it easy to differentiate, for example, between the political culture of the American colonies in the late eighteenth century and that of Asian and African peoples in the twentieth:

the colonies now claiming independence are not societies of the same kind as the thirteen colonies which signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The freedom of the individual was about as well respected in those colonies as in the mother-country . . . It is by no means clear that the colonies now clamoring for independence are all fit for self-government in the same sense.⁶²

Non-European colonies took the revolutionary theory of the popular nation-state without the revolutionary commitment to individual freedom.

Such an account combined a diffusionist understanding of popular sovereignty as cascading outward from the French and American revolutions with well-worn tropes of intractable Oriental difference and despotism. Indeed, in a revealing passage Plamenatz contrasted “effective self-government” such as was practiced in Britain and the United States with “what Montesquieu called Oriental despotism.”⁶³ The suggestion was that anti-colonialism was both formed in the shadow of the European Age of Revolutions and that it reproduced only one strand of the era’s legacy, namely domineering state power. When a “backward people” who had not fully undergone “the process of westernization” ruled themselves collectively through a modern state, they “resorted to practices fatal to freedom and democracy.”⁶⁴ Plamenatz thus proposed that the transfer of political power to non-European peoples (a broad civilizational category that encompassed Balkan nationalities on the European periphery) should occur under international supervision. He called for an “International Authority” of liberal democracies, led by Britain, the United States, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, to be made responsible for drafting suitably liberal constitutions for newly independent countries.⁶⁵ The organization was to be kept separate from the United Nations, which after fifteen years was coming to be dominated by new powers and giving “the critics of ‘imperialism’ with an excuse for raising a clamor.”⁶⁶ It is

⁶² John Petrov Plamenatz, *On Alien Rule and Self-Government* (London, 1960), 28.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 51. ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 82. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 208. ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

worth noting that the immediate context for Plamenatz's complaint about the United Nations in 1960 was the rise of a Soviet-backed Afro-Asian bloc in the General Assembly.⁶⁷

Plamenatz's plan for the postimperial world order had some overlaps with the interwar Mandates System of the League of Nations. It was also similar to a number of other ambitious midcentury plans for a transnational federation of Western liberal democracies, proposed by British and American thinkers such as Lionel Curtis, Clarence Streit, and Ernest Bevin.⁶⁸ But while European tutelage in the Mandates System and in Anglo-American proposals from the 1940s was intended to prepare colonies for eventual statehood, Plamenatz's International Authority was presented as a response to the looming threat of a global proliferation of powerful, authoritarian nation-states. Here, the compositional history of *On Alien Rule and Self-Government* is relevant. Plamenatz began writing *On Alien Rule* at Oxford in 1958, the year that Isaiah Berlin delivered his famous lecture on two concepts of liberty at the university. Plamenatz was personally quite close to Berlin – Berlin later spoke movingly of their friendship at Plamenatz's memorial service in 1975 – and his 1960 book used many arguments from the philosopher's 1958 lecture.⁶⁹ Of particular importance was Berlin's spirited defense of “negative freedom” as a general principle for safeguarding the individual from being subordinated to externally imposed doctrines.⁷⁰ In Berlinian language, Plamenatz wrote that “in a free society” the “rule of freedom is essentially negative.”⁷¹ Berlin provided a framework for Plamenatz to classify anti-colonial movements

⁶⁷ See Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2009), 149–89; and Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia, 2010).

⁶⁸ On these plans, see Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939–1950* (Princeton, 2017), 100–67.

⁶⁹ Isaiah Berlin, “John Petrov Plamenatz,” in *Personal Impressions*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, 2014), 177–86. Plamenatz's relationship with Berlin in the 1950s and 1960s is further detailed in Joshua L. Cherniss, *A Mind and Its Time: The Development of Isaiah Berlin's Political Thought* (Oxford, 2013), 144–87.

⁷⁰ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, eds. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (London, 1997), 191–242. See James Tully, “‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ in Context,” in *Isaiah Berlin and the Politics of Freedom: ‘Two Concepts of Liberty’ Fifty Years Later*, eds. Bruce Baum and Robert Nichols (London, 2013), 26–51.

⁷¹ Plamenatz, *On Alien Rule*, 59.

within an existing rubric of modern political theory. The statism of anti-colonialism undermined negative freedom and posed a challenge to the creation of “free” societies outside of a Western European and North American core.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the political scientist Rupert Emerson gave his own analysis of Afro-Asian independence movements in the influential volume *From Empire to Nation* (1960). Emerson was an American who had studied under Harold Laski at the London School of Economics from 1922 to 1927. *From Empire to Nation* was the first of a number of studies of anti-colonialism he published in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷² According to Emerson, though commentators persisted in viewing anti-colonialism as a protest against Western domination, in substance it was a Europeanization of the world, able to challenge the West only “in its own terms.”⁷³ The seeds of anti-colonial thought lay in the modern idea of “the sovereignty of the people,” understood as the right of a preexisting national community to shape its own political life.⁷⁴ Emerson highlighted the eighteenth-century origins of “the argument linking democracy and nationalism,” singling out what he saw as the pivotal role of Rousseau, and, citing Alfred Cobban, located “the rise to self-assertion of Asian and African peoples” in the legacy of the Atlantic eighteenth century.⁷⁵ For anti-colonial nationalists as for revolutionaries two centuries earlier in North America and especially France, “the nation-state was regarded as the political expression of the democratic will of the people.”⁷⁶ The form of the nation-state adopted most commonly was a thoroughly centralized one. In the “democratic constitutions” imagined by independence leaders, Emerson remarked that political power would be “almost as much imposed on the people from above

⁷² Two other important subsequent publications were: Rupert Emerson, “Colonialism,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1969), 3–16; and Rupert Emerson, “Self-Determination,” *American Journal of International Law*, vol. 65, no. 3 (1971), 459–75.

⁷³ Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Cambridge, MA, 1960), 203.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 215–18. On Emerson’s treatment of nationalism, see Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), 103; and Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, 2019), 15–16.

⁷⁶ Emerson, *From Empire to Nation*, 217.

as in any of the previous regimes,” creating “a government which tells the people what to do than one in which they must exercise freedom of choice.”⁷⁷

Before he turned his attention to anti-colonialism in 1960, Rupert Emerson was primarily known as a historian of German political thought. His 1927 LSE dissertation under Harold Laski was titled *State and Sovereignty in Modern Germany*. It was a study of debates on the nature of state power over a half-century from Bismarck’s unification of Germany in 1871 to the adoption of the Weimar Constitution in 1919.⁷⁸ The focus of Emerson’s thesis was the division in modern German history between unitary and pluralist notions of sovereignty. He contrasted the state theories of Heinrich von Treitschke and Johann Kaspar Bluntschli with the organicist conception of diffuse, group-based political life in Otto von Gierke’s writings. Not altogether surprisingly, the publication of Emerson’s dissertation in 1928 was shepherded by his Harvard colleague Carl Friedrich, the preeminent scholar of Gierke and German pluralism in interwar America.⁷⁹ The difference between Emerson’s early scholarship on Germany and his later scholarship on non-European nationalism was striking. Little of the intellectual diversity Emerson detailed in his early writings was present in his works from the 1960s. He simply did not consider popular sovereignty to be as contentious a topic for anti-colonial figures as it had been for a generation of pre-Weimar German thinkers.

By the early 1960s, then, an interpretation of anti-colonial political thought as hopelessly, almost tragically statist was dominant in Anglo-American political theory. The interpretation was founded on the twin historiographical premises that a nationalist republican discourse from the era of the great Atlantic revolutions remained unchanged as it travelled over nearly two centuries and crossed borders, and, relatedly, that only those strands of this republican discourse in which sovereignty was to be represented through the state gained traction within independence movements. The narrative bound the logic of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 280.

⁷⁸ The dissertation was published as Rupert Emerson, *State and Sovereignty in Modern Germany* (New Haven, 1928).

⁷⁹ Ibid., xi. On Carl Friedrich, see Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Emigres and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton, 2014), 25–75.

anti-colonial nationalism to a prior historical precedent and highlighted the circumscribed nature of its political imagination. Midcentury political theorists shared with the dueling liberal and Soviet ideologies of the post-1919 years the assumption that non-European nationalists could only ever take state-based representative government to be the appropriate answer to the problem of institutionalizing popular sovereignty in an imperial and postimperial setting. As late as 1984, the Oxford international relations theorist Hedley Bull reduced “the revolt against the West” to the struggle of colonial peoples “to achieve equal rights as sovereign states.”⁸⁰

The conventional statist narrative of anti-colonialism has persisted into our contemporary moment. Erez Manela’s *The Wilsonian Moment* (2007) recapitulates key themes of the older account, especially of its liberal internationalist variant. Manela’s book documents how the Wilsonian idea of self-determination was taken up by nationalists in India, Egypt, China, and Korea over six months between autumn 1918 and spring 1919.⁸¹ Manela constructs a diffusionist narrative wherein the appropriation of Woodrow Wilson marks a critical point of origin for anti-colonial nationalism, leading to the acceptance of republican government and the institutional apparatus of the modern nation-state as aspirational goals for critics of European empire. This is a highly partial, selective understanding of anti-colonial thought of the interwar period. It obfuscates movements that not only did not align themselves with the president’s Anglo-American liberalism in 1919 but also frontally challenged the liberal tradition’s core assumptions about representation and sovereignty. As Adam Tooze notes, “appealing as it may be to construct a ‘Wilsonian moment’ in India, it existed, if it existed at all, in the minds of no more than a handful of nationalists.”⁸² The Wilsonian paradigm cannot explain

⁸⁰ Hedley Bull, “The Revolt against the West,” in *The Expansion of International Society*, eds. Adam Watson and Hedley Bull (Oxford, 1984), 217–28, at 220.

⁸¹ Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 55–157. A similarly celebratory depiction of Wilson’s influence, though one largely limited to Europe, is Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 11–43.

⁸² Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order, 1916–1931* (London, 2014), 190. Cf. also the limitations of Wilsonianism in Egypt in 1919: Hussein Omar, “Conscript and Sacrifice: The Political Theology of the Egyptian Revolution of 1919,” talk given at Department of History, SOAS University of London, March 19, 2018. I am grateful to Hussein Omar for sharing a draft of the talk.

why an economist writing from a North Indian town in 1935 might have viewed liberal, representative democracy as a problem to be overcome, rather than a promising route out of imperial domination.

The Wilsonian Moment joins an emerging body of scholarship in international history and the history of modern legal and political thought seeking to recover the role played by non-European actors in the disintegration of empire and the formation of international society during the first half of the twentieth century. Anti-colonialism in its various guises – in independence movements, in petitions to the League of Nations, and in activism through the LAI, the UN General Assembly, or the 1955 Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian Peoples – occupies a prominent place in the story. Yet the precise architecture of the political community propounded by nationalists of the period is all too frequently taken to be predicated upon the capacity of state institutions to represent the colonial people.⁸³ The nation-state forged in the violent crucible of Atlantic revolution and entrenched in European politics by the early twentieth century is treated as a sort of modular template for popular self-determination, to be adopted by all other societies one by one in an uninterrupted cascade of nation-building. Such a narrative is sanitized of all the messiness of disagreement that marked the actual history of nationalism in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. It turns into a unilinear story of state formation what was in reality a very lengthy, drawn-out process beset by competing, conflicting, and often irreconcilable political visions. If we take seriously the insight that anti-colonial political thought was concerned above all with political and economic sovereignty and only marginally with the ideology of pre-political individual rights, then, I would argue, we also

⁸³ See, for example, Weitz, *A World Divided*; Arnulf Becker Lorca, *Mestizo International Law: A Global Intellectual History 1842–1933* (Cambridge, 2014), 225–62; Jörg Fisch, *The Right of Self-Determination of Peoples: The Domestication of an Illusion*, trans. Anita Mage (Cambridge, 2015), 190–217; Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights*, 13–58; Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2015), 251–77; and Talbot C. Imlay, “International Socialism and Decolonization during the 1950s: Competing Rights and the Postcolonial Order,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 118, no. 4 (2013), 1105–32. On the limits of basing a ‘democratic’ justification for decolonization primarily on political representation, see the discussion in Anna Stiltz, “Decolonization and Self-Determination,” *Social Philosophy and Policy*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2015), 1–24.

need to recognize the multiplicity of meanings attached to the concept of anti-colonial sovereignty in the twentieth century.⁸⁴

1.4 Situating the Book

Radical Democracy in Modern Indian Political Thought is part of, and a contribution to, an ongoing revisionist turn in studies of political decolonization within British and French imperial history. Over the past fifteen years or so, historians have tried to move away from positing the nation-state as the only or even the preferred political unit embraced by leaders of colonial independence movements. The pivotal reason for the revisionist turn has been Frederick Cooper's important work since the mid-2000s on empire, labor, and political belonging.⁸⁵ Writing against teleological histories of an old world of empires giving way to a new world of territorially autonomous nation-states, Cooper has unearthed the myriad ways that political leaders in French West Africa negotiated for social citizenship rights within the constitutional framework of the wider French Empire between 1945 and 1960. The goal of many West African leaders was a transnational French imperial federation with equality of political status between its constituent national units, a "composite political entity" to be "transformed into a structure that would ensure the rights and cultural integrity of all citizens."⁸⁶ Cooper's interpretation has been transformative for the study of the French Empire in the mid-twentieth century.⁸⁷ It has also

⁸⁴ On the priority of political sovereignty in anti-colonial movements, see especially Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), 84–119.

⁸⁵ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005), 153–214; Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, 2014); Frederick Cooper and Jane Burbank, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, 2010); Frederick Cooper, *Africa in the World: Capitalism, Empire, Nation-State* (Cambridge, MA, 2014).

⁸⁶ Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*, 9.

⁸⁷ See Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago, 2005); Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC, 2015); Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, 2006); and Adria Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism: Anti-Colonial Protest in the French Empire* (Cambridge, 2013). For a critical discussion of imperial federalism in French Africa, see Richard Drayton, "Federal Utopias and the Realities of Imperial

more recently begun to inform scholarship on decolonization in other contexts, to the extent that, as Michael Collins puts it, it is now possible to speak comparatively of a global “decolonizing federal moment” stretching across the British, French, and Dutch empires from about the 1930s to the mid-1960s.⁸⁸ In the South Asian case, a new group of historians has excavated long-neglected federalist plans from the 1930s and 1940s advocating the territorial autonomy of Muslim-majority provinces and of native-ruled princely states.⁸⁹

Radical Democracy is shaped by the critical sensibility of the new federalist historiography. It is similarly attentive to the defeated alternatives of anti-colonial politics – the paths *not* taken, or taken only to be abandoned – and tries to resist seeing the entire period of interwar anti-colonial struggle as a teleological progression toward national independence. Yet there are crucial differences between the federalist projects analyzed in this book and those retrieved from the archives by other imperial historians over the past few years. This book is a study of federalist visions of direct democracy. The broad tradition of political thought examined here opposed centralized state authority on the grounds that it entailed an exclusively representative system of self-government, delegating the making and execution of public law to

Power,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2017), 401–6.

⁸⁸ Michael Collins, “Decolonization and the ‘Federal Moment,’” *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2013), 21–40, at 36. On federalism and anti-colonialism in the British imperial context, see, for example, Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, 107–41; and Ismay Milford, “Federation, Partnership, and the Chronologies of Space in 1950s East and Central Africa,” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 63, no. 5 (2020), 1325–48. For an overview of the historiography, see Merve Fejzula, “Historiographical Review: The Cosmopolitan Historiography of Twentieth-Century Federalism,” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 64, no. 2 (2021), 1–24.

⁸⁹ On provincial territorial autonomy along religious lines, see Iqbal Singh Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge, 2012), 185–98; and Sunil Purushotham, “Federating the Raj: Hyderabad, Sovereign Kingship, and Partition,” *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2020), 157–98, at 180–88. On the federalism of the princely states, see Purushotham, “Federating the Raj,” 168–79; Eric Lewis Beverley, *Hyderabad, British India, and the World: Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, c. 1850–1950* (Cambridge, 2015), 54–70; Sarath Pillai, “Fragmenting the Nation: Divisible Sovereignty and Travancore’s Quest for Federal Independence,” *Law and History Review*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2016), 743–82; and Rama S. Mantena, “Anticolonialism and Federation in Colonial India,” *Ab Imperio*, vol. 3 (2018), 36–62.

state officials. Statism in both its monarchical and parliamentary variants was seen as putting into place a hierarchical structure of command. The ‘people’ could act only through the organs of the state, such as an elected parliament, which stood in for (‘represented’) the entire body of citizens – the precise definition of self-determination endorsed unquestioningly, as we have seen, by Woodrow Wilson and Lenin after the Great War. For the constitutional reformers, historians, political scientists, economists, and pamphleteers who form the subject of the following chapters, the problem of statism was fundamentally about how it filtered and disciplined national sovereignty into only being performed in an indirect, representative way. The thinkers envisaged a federal network of independently governed citizen assemblies as the correlative response. Their federalism, then, went far beyond securing mutual relations between an aggregate of sub-imperial polities. It became a critique of regnant understandings of representative government and was oriented toward imagining the self-rule of imperial subjects in a historically novel fashion, through mechanisms for directly participatory decision-making.

As a project aimed at recovering a lost model of anti-colonial federalism, *Radical Democracy* also illustrates the existence of direct democracy as an ideal within twentieth-century Indian political thought – certainly a much more prevalent ideal than has been acknowledged by political theorists. Studies of Indian nationalism generally tend to identify the critique of representative, parliamentary democracy with M. K. Gandhi, both with the seminal pamphlet *Hind Swaraj* (1909) and with the escalation of Gandhian mass mobilization after 1919.⁹⁰ Significantly less attention has been paid to other movements – whether intellectual or more avowedly political – trying to break out of the tangled web of electoral politics, parliamentarism, and representation through the twentieth century, even within intellectual histories of popular sovereignty in Indian constitutional discourse.⁹¹

⁹⁰ See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis, 1993), 85–130; Uday Singh Mehta, “Gandhi on Democracy, Politics, and the Ethics of Everyday Life,” *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2010), 355–71; and Ajay Skaria, “Relinquishing Republican Democracy: Gandhi’s Ramarajya,” *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2011), 203–29.

⁹¹ See, for example, Sarbani Sen, *The Constitution of India: Popular Sovereignty and Democratic Transformations* (New Delhi, 2007).

There has been little cognizance of the decades-long tradition of thinking about direct democracy examined here, stretching from the early 1920s to the mid-1970s.

Taking as its guiding framework the conceptual link between federalism and popular sovereignty, Chapter 2 turns to an analysis of a draft constitution prepared for the state of Mysore in southern India by the philosopher Brajendra Nath Seal. Mysore was one of colonial India's approximately 600 'princely states' – territories of varying size and population governed through indirect imperial control, with local monarchical dynasties allowed to retain political power. Mysore began to experiment with democratic reforms in the early 1880s; the 1923 constitution was a particularly ambitious attempt to imagine popular government under the conditions of indirect British rule. Though Seal's constitution never fully came into effect, Chapter 2 details its program of federalist decentralization and popular lawmaking, and situates its provisions within the context of a debate in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Mysore about the efficacy of the British model of parliamentary government. The chapter also brings to light how the native-ruled princely states were seen by some idiosyncratic reformers of the time as sites of potential constitutional experimentation.

Chapter 3 traces the rearticulation of democratic elements of the 1923 Mysore draft in the writings of a group of nationalist historians. In particular, it focuses on Radhakumud Mookerji, Radhakamal Mukerjee, and Beni Prasad, all three of whom were based at the North Indian universities of Allahabad and Lucknow and were important figures in a genre of historical writing on the premodern Indian state, what has sometimes been termed the "historiography of the ancient Indian polity."⁹² The chapter examines the intellectual origins of the genre and shows how Radhakumud, Radhakamal, and Beni Prasad constructed a federalist, republican narrative of Indian political history, one whose constitutional systems could be revived in the twentieth century. I locate the three historians' ambitious project of historical restoration as a response to demands for elected representation, state sovereignty, and parliamentarism made by the Indian

⁹² R. S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India* (New Delhi, 1959), 1–13.

National Congress (INC), the main nationalist outfit in British India, between 1885 and WWI.

Chapter 4 moves into the 1930s and 1940s and turns its attention to an intellectual tradition I call “Gandhian democracy.” From the mid-1930s on, four key thinkers influenced by M. K. Gandhi – Joseph Kumarappa, Kishorlal Mashruwala, Vinoba Bhave, and Shriman Narayan Agarwal – expanded on *Hind Swaraj* to argue that capitalist economics were a threat to democratic equality and produced the kinds of unaccountability and elite capture of legislatures which they identified in Western European parliamentary states. In response, Gandhian thinkers developed proposals for federalist postcolonial constitutions, combining a system of participatory legislative councils with collectivist agrarian socialism. I trace the intellectual origins of Gandhian democratic thought in the 1930s and 1940s and outline how its main proponents articulated ideas of anti-parliamentarism and moral economics. Revisiting the Gandhian tradition, I suggest, highlights the importance of economic ethics in participatory theories of democracy and popular sovereignty.

Chapter 5 examines in detail the interaction between parliamentary and anti-parliamentary views of popular government during the drafting of India’s postimperial constitution, when delegates convened on Curzon Road in New Delhi from the second week of December 1946 to the final week of January 1950. Scholars have long seen the drafting debates as a consolidation of republican self-government and an ethos of political transformation. Such a focus has overlooked the role of ideas about participatory democracy in shaping the Constituent Assembly debates. Yet these ideas, with their roots in the interwar years, were part of a discernible line of political argument during the constitution-making process. Chapter 5 shows how the doctrine of statist, parliamentary supremacy emerged – and triumphed – as a rejection of proposals for popular lawmaking and control of representatives. The chapter is about both the lingering influence and the constitutional defeat of a political theory of direct democracy in the lead-up to colonial independence.

In the aftermath of political independence, Chapter 6 argues, direct democracy was turned into a discourse of protest against the parliamentary structure of the postcolonial Indian state. Chapter 6 charts the career of Jayaprakash Narayan, a veteran of the Indian socialist movement who came to be given the moniker *loknayak* (“the people’s

leader”). I focus on a sixteen-year period from 1959 to 1975 and trace how Jayaprakash Narayan formulated a democratic theory built around three concepts: *loksatta* (“popular sovereignty”), *janata sarkar* (“people’s government”), and *sampurna kranti* (“total revolution”). The resulting theory called for a radical departure from the electoral democracy of the 1950 constitution. It necessitated a new political order based on direct legislation by citizens’ assemblies. Chapter 6 reads the theory of “total revolution” as the final iteration of interwar federalist thought, redefined in opposition to a dominant notion of collective self-rule through the periodic election of party leaders.

What are the stakes of revisiting this story now? What do we gain conceptually by recognizing the depth and range of the critiques of representative democracy within twentieth-century Indian political thought? I take up these questions in the Conclusion. Since the end of the Cold War, the idea that governments derive their legitimacy from the will of their people – the old Wilsonian mantra of “the consent of the governed” – has become something of a sacred maxim of progressive political life. Political democracy has become a defining – perhaps *the* defining – element of the liberal world order. Yet it is an often uncritical enthusiasm for electoral representation, individual rights, global capitalism, and statist governance that has been the most salient feature of our liberal age, a political orientation Susan Marks describes as a way of strategically “legitimizing low-intensity democracy.”⁹³ As John Dunn has written, just as representative democracy has risen and risen triumphantly to become “an index of global normality,” the multilayered concept of *democracy* itself has been rendered compatible with elite governance and private accumulation.⁹⁴ It is of course not possible, within the political and especially the economic constraints of the twenty-first century, to fully recover all elements of a prior historical point when things were imagined in other ways. But it is the hope of this book that mapping out a defeated tradition of popular sovereignty gives us resources to at least begin to think past the iron cage of liberal representative democracy.

⁹³ Susan Marks, *The Riddle of All Constitutions: International Law, Democracy, and the Critique of Ideology* (Oxford, 2000), 62–67.

⁹⁴ John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 2019), 154–58.