

Title—Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris & the Seeds of Third World Nationalism

Author—Michael Goebel

Year—2016

Categories: World History, Movement, Nationalism, Decolonization

Place: Paris

Time: 1919-1939

Argument Synopsis:

Focused on the politics of non-Europeans in interwar Paris in order to better understand the origins of an anti-imperialist notion of a united Third World. Goebel highlights interwar Paris as particularly suited to this study, because it had one of the highest percentages of non-Europeans living in the city during this period; there were 100,000 non-Europeans living in Paris by 1930. France suffered from a low birth rate that was exacerbated by the carnage of World War I, which led to them accepting immigrants before their European peers. Paris is described as an **incredibly cosmopolitan city** during this period, which led to mixing of different peoples from across the world.

Third World anti-imperial nationalism was not a European transplant or a homespun reaction against foreign meddling, but rather a result of the contact, networks, and connectivity of these non-European actors. Exchange is placed at the heart of his history of Third World nationalism. His choice of terminology, ‘anti-imperial nationalism’ as opposed to ‘anti-colonial nationalism,’ is important because he does not limit his study to peoples from colonized places, choosing to include Latin Americans and the Chinese for example.

For the purpose of his study, Goebel treats these non-European actors as **migrants, and not intellectuals**; he is not attempting to produce an intellectual history. While other historians have explored this topic, it has always been through a global intellectual historical lens. By treating the protagonists as migrants, Goebel hopes to restore the social aspect into this global intellectual history. The process of spending time in a metropolitan center had a politicizing effect. Their migration experience helped to foster the growth of an anti-imperialist and nationalist consciousness, which came to be known as the Third World.

Radical anti-colonialists used the **French Revolution language of popular sovereignty**, even as they turned cynical towards the French civilizing mission and revolutionary slogans. Goebel notes the use of French Revolutionary language in both the metropole and the periphery. He stresses the notion of citizenship as crucial in anticolonial discourse. He claims that the strong civic element found in anticolonial nationalism had its root in the language and influence of the French Revolution.

The idea of anti-imperial solidarity across the globe was a product of the interwar period, and Goebel argues that migration, especially in Paris and other metropolitan centers, formed the social bedrock of ideas. He urges for the history of transition from a world of empires to a world of nation-states to be reread in light of the social history of migration.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Anti-imperial spokespeople from outside the French Empire legitimized rights advocates from the French colonies
- Voluntary immigrant associations tended to be ethnic, but did not operate in isolation from each other & constantly influenced each other