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Decentering internationalism: Spanish anarchist solidarity with Mexico during the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War

In June 1911, Anselmo Lorenzo took to the front page of Barcelona's prominent anarchist weekly, *Tierra y Libertad*. Forty years had passed since Lorenzo, a pioneering figure in Spain's powerful anarchist movement, had participated in the London congress of the International Workingmen's Association; now, he announced, "the program of the International…is today being brought about in Baja California."[1] In Mexico, amid the unfolding revolutionary process, "warrior workers wield the rifle and the plow, to the cry of Land and Freedom!" It was testament, Lorenzo argued, to the power of "emancipatory propaganda" that this occurred "not in Europe, where the working-class intelligentsia is so notable, nor in the most important countries of North and South America," but in Mexico, where radical ideas had been "brutally and inquisitorially persecuted" for so many years.[2] An enthused Lorenzo allowed himself to wonder, with palpable excitement, "how far the impulse given by the Mexican workers will go."

This article explores how Spanish anarchists responded to Mexico, both during the first years of the Mexican Revolution and during Spain's own revolutionary experiment in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). As Lorenzo's words attest, the spectacle of the Mexican Revolution conflicted with the peripheralizing assumptions of many Spanish anarchists, leading them to what Kevan Aguilar has described as "new social and political affinities toward a people that were former colonial subjects to their own nation's empire."[3] This, and the anti-fascist solidarity of the Civil War, constituted significant early examples of a major revolutionary movement in a European metropole looking to a former colony for inspiration, prefiguring the global outlook of "Third Worldism" by some decades.[4] However, this decentered internationalism did not always unfold straightforwardly. By acknowledging and exploring the nuanced and contested terms on which it emerged, this article—part of a broader project on the internationalism of Spain's powerful anarchist movement from 1910 to 1939—aims to contribute to the necessary work of de-essentializing radical ideologies and understanding the agency, contingency and creativity involved in building global solidarities, including working-class anti-imperialism.[5]

Magonismo in Spain

The outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in late 1910 occurred within weeks of the founding of the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour, CNT) in Barcelona. This new trade union movement, representing thousands of

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[1] Anselmo Lorenzo, "La revolución en Méjico," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 28 June 1911.
[2] The ascent to power of the dictator Porfirio Díaz in 1884 had brought "the weight of the State" upon the Mexican labour movement: Valadés, *El socialism libertario*, 202; Hart, *Anarchism*, 27-28.
[3] Aguilar, "Revolutionary Encounters," 22.
[4] See Brazzoduro, "Algeria, Antifascism, and Third Worldism."
[5] Featherstone, *Solidarity*. See for example Braskén, *International Workers' Relief*; Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*.

workers, endorsed the First International slogan that "the emancipation of the workers must be the labor of the workers themselves," rejecting political representation in favor of direct confrontation with capital and the state.[6] Across the Atlantic, this position belonged to the Partido Liberal Mexicano (Mexican Liberal Party, PLM), which disavowed any narrow, "bourgeois" vision of toppling the dictator Porfirio Díaz just to restore constitutional regularity. Instead, the PLM embraced a "proletarian" interpretation of the Mexican Revolution as a social uprising by workers and marginalized groups.[7] In April 1911, the PLM's Organizing Junta, which published the newspaper *Regeneración* from exile in Los Angeles, circulated a manifesto "to the workers of the whole world" declaring that the revolutionaries sought not to "topple the Dictator…to put another tyrant in his place," but rather "the effective emancipation of the Mexican people."[8] For those associated with the fledgling CNT, the *Liberales* represented the same call for wholesale "social revolution" from the bottom up and the same rejection of political change from above which they had championed in Spain. Moreover, they articulated themselves in "language akin to that used by anarchist publications of the whole world."[9] The PLM's radicalism, proletarian idiom and disavowal of parliamentary politics thus appeared to reflect the oppositional ethos of their own "anarchist-inspired workers' public sphere" in Spain.[10] As such, in the spring and summer of 1911 Spanish anarchists responded with "enthusiasm" to the "suggestive, contagious" developments in Mexico, distributing the PLM's manifesto, organizing solidarity funds, and propagandizing the revolution in their press.[11] In fact, solidarity with the Mexican revolutionaries was "the most important campaign" launched by *Tierra y Libertad* in this period.[12]

Yet the CNT and the PLM were not entirely alike. Whereas the former was well-anchored in the European libertarian socialist and revolutionary syndicalist tradition, the latter was influenced by Mexico's specific postcolonial dynamics. Throughout Mexico and across its northern borderlands, *Liberales* cultivated a "syncretic" anarchism which drew heavily on local, Indigenous patterns of resistance and emphasized land restitution and communal autonomy.[13] In fact, Geoffroy de Laforcade and Steven Hirsch regard the PLM as an archetypical example of the "cross-fertilization" of anarchism and Indigeneity in Latin America.[14] Indigenous activists articulated this in their own ways: for example, Fernando Palomares signed off his political writings as "el Mayo proletariat" to express a dual "ethnic and class" identity, while Primo Tapia de la Cruz was remembered for his ability to communicate anarcho-syndicalist ideas "in the Purépecha language and within the context of a Purépecha worldview."[15] In a 1914 message thanking the Organizing Junta for their solidarity, Juan Montero and other Yaqui Indians used the terminology of anti-capitalism and "the red flag of *Tierra y Libertad*" to define their land struggle.[16] This "cross-fertilization" shaped and was

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[6] "Congreso Obrero Nacional," *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), 4 November 1910.
[7] Carbó Darnaculleta, "¡Viva la Tierra y Libertad!"; Cowen Verter, "Biographical Sketch."
[8] "MANIFIESTO A los Trabajadores de Todo el Mundo," *Regeneración* (Los Angeles), 8 April 1911.
[9] "Una revolución libertarian," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 15 March 1911. On the different portrayals of the revolution: Beltrán Dengra, "La opinión de la prensa…"
[10] On the concept, see Ealham, *Anarchism and the City*, 34.
[11] "De la revolución mejicana," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 24 May 1911; Beltrán Dengra, "La opinion sobre…"
[12] Madrid, *Solidaridad Obrera*, 80.
[13] Struthers, *World in a City*, 152-3; Weber, "Different plans"; Maldonado Alvarado, *Magonismo*, 19-32; England, "*Magonismo*."
[14] de Laforcade and Hirsch, "Introduction," 7.
[15] Weber, "Different plans," 18-19; Weber, "Keeping Community, Challenging Boundaries," 226-227.
[16] Reproduced in Gámez Chávez, "Yaquis y Magonistas."

shaped by the Organizing Junta's idealized view of Indigenous communalism: its leader, Ricardo Flores Magón, held that Mexico's Indigenous and *mestizo* masses formed the ideal social base for an anarcho-communist society, because they "instinctively" hated government and the bourgeoisie, and maintained traditions of communal "mutual aid."[17] *Magonismo*, as this radical synthesis became known, also drew on the work of the Russian anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin, whose writings on evolution had laid the ground for a radically different perspective on supposedly "primitive" peoples.[18]

Barcelona's anarchist press acknowledged and celebrated the Indigenous aspect of the Revolution in its coverage of the Revolution. The CNT's newspaper, *Solidaridad Obrera*, recognized that the main beneficiaries of the PLM's call for land redistribution would be Mexico's Indigenous population, and depicted the revolution as a continuation of the struggle ignited by the Mexican War of Independence a century earlier.[19] For its part, *Tierra y Libertad* described with acerbic sarcasm how "our Mexican brothers" had by now "paid a just tribute to the *civilizers*" who had "for four centuries…watered their plants…with the blood of a human race *inferior* to their own."[20] It should be recalled that anarcho-syndicalism in Barcelona had built on a preexisting culture of everyday subaltern resistance, which it overlaid with a "language of class."[21] This blending of formal and informal was not too distant from *magonismo*'s own "syncretic" anarchism, as was apparent in *Tierra y Libertad*'s casting of the Mexican *campesinos* as the vanguard of the same struggle against capital and the state as Spanish workers: the "*indios*" ("Indians") had the same "enemy" ("the bourgeoise and the government"), and their "triumph" would represent "the apocalypse of the bourgeoisie" and be a "call to the global proletariat to 'rise up, modern slave, be free!'"[22] The newspaper also reproduced *Regeneración*'s Kropotkinian descriptions of "mutual aid" among the Mexican *campesinos* and upheld its defense of Emiliano Zapata's agrarian uprising in the south, arguing that the latter upheld the essence of *magonismo* and that the "*indios*" were acting "in accordance with" anarchist ideas, expropriating the land while "throwing the electoral ballot into the wastepaper basket."[23] These assessments of the Revolution identified an *implicit* anarchism in the Mexican agrarian rebellion and Indigenous struggle.

In some instances, this reimagining drew on essentialist and even "othering" ideas. In another influential Spanish anarchist paper, *El Porvenir del Obrero* of Mahón, a writer argued that Mexico's Indigenous communities had "anarcho-communist instincts" and a "spirit of hereditary mutual aid incomparably stronger than that which any European intellectual could offer," which was passed down "with the mother's milk."[24] This kind of essentialism might appear to have little to do with solidarity. However, this discourse, which was clearly influenced by *Regeneración*'s own arguments, was redolent of what Judy Tzu-Chun Wu terms the "radical orientalist" lens through which Western activists, with the collaboration of their Asian counterparts, would later idealize Vietnam and other Asian countries during the Cold War era.[25]

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[17] Ricardo Flores Magón, "El Pueblo Mexicano es Apto Para el Comunismo," *Regeneración* (Los Angeles), 2 September 1911. See England, "*Magonismo*," 252-256; Aguilar, "The 'indios' of Spain," 440.
[18] England, "*Magonismo*"; Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, 76-152
[19] "LA BANDERA ROJA," *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), 14 July 1911; see Aguilar, "Revolutionary Encounters," 36-37.
[20] "Los comunistas de Méjico," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 23 October 1912. Emphasis in original.
[21] Ealham, *Anarchism*, 34-39.
[22] "Los comunistas de Méjico," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 23 October 1912.
[23] Enrique Flores Magón, "La cuestión social en Méjico," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 13 March 1912; "La revolución en Méjico," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 11 December 1912.
[24] Aristedes Pratelle, "EL INSTINTO DE LA RAZA," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 13 July 1912.
[25] Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road*; see also Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism*, 139-40.

For Tzu-Chun Wu, although it was a distorted, romanticized view, "radical orientalism" was nonetheless "radical" because of the ways it "inverted and subverted previous hierarchies," centering Asian peoples as subjects in the envisaging of "new political possibilities."[26] The article in *El Porvenir del Obrero* evinced exactly this subversive, decentering thrust, declaring that Mexico was a "beautiful example" with which to educate what it sarcastically termed "the 'civilized' universe."[27]

Although this kind of discourse was essentialist and romanticizing, it marked a distinct contrast with Spanish conservatives' racialized portrayals of the agrarian rebels as "hordes of bloodthirsty murders."[28] In an imperfect but palpable way, it brought Indigenous people and their struggles for land and autonomy into the political imaginary of Spanish workers. This was demonstrated by acts such as the use of the pseudonym "Zapatista Indian" when donating to a solidarity fund for the Mexican Revolution.[29] Ricardo Flores Magón also wrote that the Spanish anarchist Fermin Sagristá had donated artwork to the PLM depicting a "beautiful *indio*," capturing "the virile attitude characteristic of the race."[30] *Regeneración* reprinted a poster in which the same artist gave striking visual expression to the decentering dynamic of solidarity with Mexico: mixing luminaries of the European anarchist tradition with those of the PLM, the poster's centerpiece portrayed three women on horseback—the one in the center wearing an Indigenous headdress and carrying a flaming torch—all bearing revolutionary slogans and riding westward across the globe from "EUROPE" to "AMERICA."[31]

However, not all anarchists shared in this decentered reading of the Mexican Revolution. According to David Struthers, many European and European-descended anarchists' responses to Mexico were constrained by "the racist and conceptual limits of their revolutionary imagination."[32] Ironically, it was *El Porvenir del Obrero* which was to demonstrate that such "limits" persisted in Spain, too, with a front page editorial ridiculing the idea "that the Mexican people, morally backward and lacking knowledge, should be placed by surprise ahead of the nations of greater culture."[33] The pseudonymized editorial insisted that, despite the author's "sympathy with the Mexican communist revolution," the latter "could only have a local influence," in contrast with the "benefit for all the countries of the world" heralded by David Lloyd George's reform program then taking place in Britain—the result of working-class struggle "in the civilized countries." Soon, the newspaper reproduced an article from the Parisian *Les Temps Nouveaux* which made its Eurocentricity even more explicit: "before arriving at the anarchist communism of which *Regeneración* speaks, the Mexican *indios* should follow the evolution of the European peoples, having their political and then social education."[34] This order of things was simply, *El Porvenir del Obrero* suggested, a rational truth: "if only we were wrong and that the sunrise of the social revolution might emerge where rationally we might least expect it!"[35] These examples demonstrated that exclusionary notions of racial and cultural "backwardness" which had existed in nineteenth century anarchism,

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[26] Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 5-6.
[27] Aristedes Pratelle, "EL INSTINTO DE LA RAZA," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 13 July 1912.
[28] Sevilla Soler, "España y los revolucionarios mexicanos," 311-312.
[29] See Aguilar, "The 'indios' of Spain," 441-442.
[30] Ricardo Flores Magón, "Una carta de Fermín Sagristá," *Regeneración* (Los Angeles), 8 June 1912; Masjuan, "*Reivindicación…*," 193; Aguilar, "The 'indios of Spain," 442-443.
[31] Centrefold in *Regeneración* (Los Angeles), 1 January 1913.
[32] Struthers, *World in a City*, 151. See also Samaniego López, "El poblado fronterizo…"
[33] "Dos revoluciones," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 6 March 1913.
[34] Jean Humblot, "EL ZAPATISMO," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 3 April 1913.
[35] "¿Anarquistas o qué?" *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 24 April 1913.

linked to an uncritical scientism, endured within parts of the Spanish anarchist milieu.[36]

El Porvenir del Obrero claimed that its differences with *magonismo* were based on principle. The newspaper's editor, Joan Mir i Mir, believed strongly in a "peaceful" revolutionary transformation, to unfold via the moral and intellectual preparation of the workers.[37] Accordingly, the newspaper described a feeling of alienation from the sanguinary coverage of violent insurrection in Mexico in other newspapers, which appeared to relish in violence.[38] For example, *El Trabajo* in Sabadell urged "those who have betrayed the people" in Mexico to "tremble, wretches, because it is too late to escape…upon your remains Justice and Truth must be built."[39] On the surface, the defense of non-violence was a perfectly legitimate, even admirable ethical stance. However, *El Porvenir del Obrero* articulated this critique of violence in terms of a contrast between a Mexico "debased by despotism, by ignorance and superstition," and more enlightened European countries.[40]

This question of violence is therefore illustrative of the potential for an easy slippage between a strict, singular vision of "the Ideal" and Eurocentric exclusionism. In this vein, in her biography of Jean Grave, the French anarchist and editor of *Les Temps Nouveaux*, Constance Bantman identifies an overlap between "revolutionary purism" and "bounded" internationalism, evidenced by Grave's skepticism towards *magonismo*.[41] *El Porvenir del Obrero* was closely aligned with *Les Temps Nouveaux*, reproducing articles which further exemplified this entanglement between doctrinarism and Eurocentricity, declaring for example that "no movement has been produced which is clearly and consciously anarchist, as could be conceived in our European environment."[42] Another *Les Temps Nouveaux* article reiterated this notion of "conscious" anarchism, arguing that Zapata's agrarian rebels would be shocked to hear that they were "anarchists, a term that most of them do not know."[43] The influential Spanish anarchist Vicente García used similar framing, writing that "if you told the *indios*, who do not know how to read or write, that they are anarchists, they would be bewildered."[44] García later built on this argument in *Solidaridad Obrera*, writing that "the Mexican *campesino*, although communist by intuition, does not know the principles, and his illiteracy is a wall that impedes him from the necessary study."[45] Written anarchist scripture was central to these activists' praxis and conceived as the only way to arrive at the movement's emancipatory ideals. However, as the political theorist George Ciccariello-Maher has emphasized, a focus on orthodox doctrine and "nominally 'anarchist' voices" can obscure broader practices of resistance and struggle, especially those outside the European anarchist mold.[46]

Ciccariello-Maher and other scholars concerned with "decolonizing" anarchism have thus argued that a truly decentered praxis should focus on "the spirit not the word" of anarchism, attentive to the broader patterns of resistance and subversion that lie outside the orthodox canon

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[36] Girón Serra, "Discursos."
[37] Alzina, "Repensant," 127-130. There was an interesting parallel here with the Greek-born Proudhonist Platino Rhodakanaty's opposition to violent agrarian rebellion as a means of liberating the Mexican *campesinos* some decades earlier: Hart, *Anarchism*, 17-42.
[38] "¿Anarquistas o qué?" *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 24 April 1913.
[39] "La Revolución en Méjico," *El Trabajo* (Sabadell), 4 January 1913.
[40] "Dos revoluciones," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 6 March 1913.
[41] Bantman, *Jean Grave*, 163-4.
[42] Jean Humblot, "EL MAGONISMO," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 27 March 1913.
[43] Jean Humblot, "EL ZAPATISMO," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 3 April 1913.
[44] Vicente García, "Sobre una crónica," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 3 April 1913.
[45] Vicente García, "Sobre Méjico," *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), 28 May 1914.
[46] Ciccariello-Maher, "An anarchism that is not anarchism," 40.

but that challenge structures of exploitation and oppression.[47] In a response to García, *Tierra y Libertad* approximated this championing of the anarchist "spirit" over the letter: "it does not worry us much whether the *indios* know or not how to define anarchism, if they understand it and they fight with weapons in their hands against authority and against capital, conquering the land for those who work it."[48] Anarchism was simply implicit in the Mexicans' practices of resistance and struggle: "if the Mexican revolutionaries do not fight for any determined political party; if they fight against authority, capital and politics, what do they fight for?"[49]

The newspaper further reinforced this voluntarist stance through the writings of Jaime Vidal, a US-based Spanish émigré and friend of Flores Magón, who identified the "*campesino indio*" as the "soul of the Mexican Revolution" and argued that in their passive theoreticism, the anarchist critics of Mexico were little different from the "parliamentary socialists and other *farsantes* [frauds] who constantly preach that 'the revolution's time has not come.'" Actions spoke louder than words, and Vidal did "not care that these fighters may not know how to read nor write" or whether "they have heard of the books of […] Grave, Kropotkin and other profound philosophers of the ideal." Rather, it was "enough for us to know that these Mexican slaves feel yearnings for freedom" and that they were going about it "by destroying all that hinders them, be that laws, religion, government, private property, etc."[50]As in the case of other foreign defenders of the Revolution, Vidal projected some of his own values onto the agrarian rebels: could the Zapatistas "marching into battle with images of the Virgin of Guadalupe sewn on their hats" accurately be described as fighting against "religion"?[51] Nonetheless, as Christopher Castañeda has argued, Vidal's importance was in recognizing that the "ultimate goal" of the revolution, "uplifting the campesinos," had greater relevance than "whether it qualified as a specific kind of anarchist movement with a canonical definition."[52] In a similar vein, the Andalusian anarchist Juan Gallego Crespo urged readers to "not stop to argue whether Mexico's revolution is or is not anarchist… let us just look to the fact that there are proletarians there fighting for their emancipation, for whose cause we must do everything possible."[53] Whereas some anarchists evinced a "bounded," Eurocentric cosmopolitanism, these activists demonstrated a decentering attentiveness to "local expressions of resistance against exclusionary practices."[54]

The First World War soon brought a generalized atmosphere of fervent, frequently vitriolic debate to the Spanish anarchist movement—as it did to anarchists across Europe, torn between neutrality and support for the Entente.[55] *El Porvenir del Obrero* embraced the latter (minority) view, and saw naïveté as the common denominator in its opponents "assuming a disposition for…anarchist communism among the Mexican *indios*" and in their having "become the unconscious instruments of German militarism in Europe."[56] The minoritarians had diverse reasons for their pro-Entente stance, both moral and pragmatic, but one was the belief that "people and governments of different nationalities" could be "regressive," as in the case of the "savage hordes" of the "bellicose German nation," or "progressive," like liberal

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[47] Ciccariello-Maher, "An anarchism that is not anarchism," 29, 40; Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism*, 7-8. See also Galián, *Colonialism, Transnationalism, and Anarchism*; Evren, "Black Flag White Masks."
[48] "Sobre Méjico," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 9 April 1913.
[49] "Sobre Méjico," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 9 April 1913.
[50] Jaime Vidal, "El alma de la revolución Mejicana," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 21 May 1913.
[51] Gonzales, *Mexican Revolution*, 141.
[52] Castañeda, "Moving West," 115.
[53] Juan Gallego Crespo, "Miremos hacia Méjico," *Tierra y Libertad* (Barcelona), 17 December 1913.
[54] Jabri, "Solidarity and spheres of culture," 716.
[55] Yeoman, *Print Culture*, 239-246; Kinna and Adams, *Anarchism, 1914-18*.
[56] "Las opinions ajenas," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 2 September 1915.

France.[57] In this polarized and essentializing worldview, the critique of Mexico hardened: another anti-*magonista* and pro-Entente paper, *Acción Libertaria* of Gijón, decried the "*indios*" of Mexico as "among the most ignorant and most brutish peoples of the earth," whose supporters were "confusing barbarism with anarchy."[58]

Amid this conflictive atmosphere, the anarchist defenders of the Mexican Revolution also doubled down, founding *Reivindicación*, the first explicitly *magonista* newspaper in Europe.[59] Its contributors included figures such as Eusebio Carbó and Manuel Buenacasa who would go on to play key roles in the CNT over subsequent decades. The newspaper's masthead, as well as declaring that it "will defend the expropriating Mexican Revolution," featured one quotation from the PLM martyr, Praxedis Guerrero ("There are many who are impatient for the hour of freedom, but how many work to bring it closer?") and another from Anselmo Lorenzo ("You say that Humanity is defectively organized? There you are to put it right."), both of which captured the voluntarist spirit of action over passivity.[60] Indeed, *Reivindicación*'s inaugural editorial declared that "we are fed up with theories...to implement anarchy it is not necessary that we all be professors and academics," and that rather than awaiting the right conditions "we must try everything and take advantage of all circumstances to bring about our ideal."[61] A decentered internationalism flowed from this empiricist rejection of abstract doctrine: if anarchists wanted to "set the society of the future upon solid foundations," they ought to do so by looking to a genuine example: "Mexico."

In the wartime context, *Reivindicación* construed support for the Mexican Revolution and a robust anti-militarism as mutually reinforcing positions.[62] Some years before the Bolsheviks, Mexico fired the imaginations of those who dreamt of working-class insurrection, beyond the victory of one alliance or the other: "Ah! If the European proletariat, instead of wielding the rifle to kill their brothers and defend the interests of the bourgeoisie...if instead of destroying each other in this fratricidal struggle, had imitated the Mexican revolutionaries."[63] The cataclysm made a mockery of Eurocentric hierarchies: one contributor reveled sarcastically in the fact that it was "the *indios*, the *semi-civilized*, the *savages*, [who were] giving lessons in anarchism to the *educated*, the *wise*, the *supermen* of old Europe, whose sons are seized by exterminatory madness."[64] The sun was setting on "old Europe," the "cradle of *civilization*," leaving it in the "gloomy night of the past" and those "old and routine hatreds of race and nation," whereas in Mexico one could perceive "the dawn of the new day" which would herald "Peace, Love, Freedom and Equality."[65] As in the earlier examples, this idealization had a subversive and decentering function, which had now taken on greater urgency than ever.

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[57] See "La carta de Kropotkine," *El Porvenir del Obrero* (Mahón), 11 March 1915.
[58] Enrique Nido. "Causas de la revolución mejicana," *Acción Libertaria* (Gijón), 1 July 1915; "A propósito de la revuelta mejicana," *Acción Libertaria* (Gijón), 30 July 1915.
[59] Masjuan, "*Reivindicación*," 189.
[60] With gratitude to Diego Flores Magón and the Acervo Histórico de la Casa del Ahuizote (Mexico City) for facilitating digital copies of *Reivindicación*.
[61] "Presentación," *Reivindicación* (Sabadell), 8 June 1915.
[62] In fact, these positions did not always align: the pro-*magonismo* Kropotkin was fervently pro-Entente, while Vicente García, who dismissed the "illiterate" revolutionaries, was a neutralist.
[63] José Beya, "No hay fuerza capaz de detener la marcha de los rebeldes mejicanos," *Reivindicación* (Sabadell), 27 August 1915.
[64] "¿ ?… [sic]," *Reivindicación* (Sabadell), 24 June 1915. Emphasis in original.
[65] M. Balaguera, "SOL PONIENTE Y SOL NACIENTE," *Reivindicación* (Sabadell), 16 July 1915. Emphasis in original.

Comrade Cárdenas? The anarchists and Mexico during the Spanish Civil War

Mexican assistance to anti-fascist Spain during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) would provide the context for further decentered internationalism.[66] Much had changed since the early 1910s: the CNT, which had then been a fledgling organization in its first years of existence, was now a mass movement and one of the key collaborators in an anti-fascist coalition fighting against right-wing generals and their foreign allies.[67] On the other side of the Atlantic, *Regeneración* had ceased publishing in 1918, Flores Magón died in a US prison in 1922, and anarchism was no longer a significant factor in Mexican politics.[68] The Mexican Republic's backing of its imperiled Spanish counterpart—which was prompt and consistent throughout the war and afterwards, in arms, humanitarian aid and diplomatic support—was pursued by President Lázaro Cárdenas's administration in line with its own foreign and domestic policy interests: collective anti-fascist security, self-determination, and the defense of a progressive, interventionist state from right-wing insurgency.[69] This was entirely distinct from the informal networks of revolutionary proletarian solidarity established between the PLM and CNT decades earlier.

Nonetheless, anti-fascism was, like "other varieties of international solidarity [...] a laborious construction [...] which involved a considerable degree of wishful thinking" and made for new alliances.[70] Spain's anti-fascists had been left deeply isolated by a sham "neutrality" pact orchestrated by Spain's fellow European democracies and promptly ignored by the German and Italian fascist regimes.[71] The CNT urged the workers of the world to understand their Spanish brethren as "the shock force of the universal proletariat," but this desire had been frustrated, compounded by anarchism's weakness in other countries: Emma Goldman, designated CNT representative in Britain, reported on the triple difficulty of overcoming the "conservatism" of labor leaders, Communist sectarianism, and "the conspiracy of silence on the part of the British press."[72] Meanwhile, although Goldman and others stood by the CNT, the Confederation's collaboration with the Republican state and the Communists drew the ire of many foreign anarchists, compounding the sense of international abandonment.[73] In such a context, gestures of support for the anti-fascist struggle had a powerful and long-lasting affective impact: decades after the Civil War, the CNT organizer turned Popular Army commander, Ricardo Sanz, would write of the enduring gratitude towards Mexico for going against the grain of "global hostility" and having "in the difficult moments of our life...stretched out its arms and supported us."[74]

Although the circumstances differed in many respects, identifying commonalities between the 1910s and 1930s permits an understanding of the conditions in which this decentered internationalism developed. For example, the Spanish Civil War marked the beginning of a new European cataclysm which, much like the previous one, offered itself as a context for geographical reimaginings. Thus would the CNT secretary Mariano Vázquez, in a letter to the Mexican trade union leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano in 1938, lament "that Mexico's geographic location is not that of France, because if it were so, we are sure that many

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[66] Scholarship on this wartime relationship has been very scarce, but a significant recent contribution in Aguilar, "The 'indios' of Spain," 447-457.
[67] Vadillo Muñoz, *Historia de la CNT*; Calero Delso, *El gobierno…*
[68] Cowen Verter, "Biographical Sketch," 99; Hart, *Anarchism*, 176-177.
[69] Ojeda Revah, *Mexico*; Powell, *Mexico*; Ímaz Gispert, "España en el corazón."
[70] García, "World Capital," 235.
[71] Casanova, *Spanish Republic*, 172-174, 213-222.
[72] "¡TRABAJADORES DE TODOS LOS PAÍSES, SOLIDARIDAD!" *CNT* (Madrid), 15 November 1936; Emma Goldman to Mariano Vázquez, 24 February 1937, Emma Goldman Papers 49, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam.
[73] Guillamón, *CNT vs AIT*.
[74] Sanz, *Los que fuimos a Madrid*, 98.

months ago our conflict would have ended with the victory of the people."[75] Others were more explicit about the ways that this inverted Eurocentric assumptions: in a radio broadcast, the Mujeres Libres ("Free Women") anarcho-syndicalist women's organization argued that Mexico's solidarity "increased in value amid the isolation in a which a so-called civilized world leaves us."[76]

As in the 1910s, when *magonismo* offered an example of popular social insurrection which anarchists contrasted with the top-down political visions of their rivals, in the 1930s a decentered gaze permitted anarchists to differentiate themselves through a distinct, revolutionary understanding of anti-fascism. It was within the context of Mexican support for the Republic that anarchist writer Emilio Mistral penned a biography of Flores Magón in which he recalled the days, decades prior, when he had "anxiously sought out" copies of *Regeneración*.[77] Although continuities between *magonismo* and the Cárdenas regime were largely imagined, for Mistral, the Mexican Revolution was a positive historical precedent for Spain's own struggle, demonstrating the need for social transformation to accompany the defeat of political tyranny. Moreover, Mexican diplomats' willingness to engage with the anarchists and other revolutionary elements contrasted with the counterrevolutionary, Popular Frontist framing demanded by the Republic's other main nation-state supporter: the Soviet Union.[78] As anti-authoritarians, the anarchists were skeptical of Soviet aid, and although they publicly avoided criticizing the regime, neither did they tend to praise it, instead exercising their own agency by casting aid as a manifestation of revolutionary solidarity between workers.[79]

Embracing Mexico was thus a further way to mitigate the political capital which the USSR could derive from its own intervention: in early 1937 Mistral was, along with other anarchists, a cofounder of the Asociación de Amigos de México (Friends of Mexico Association) which intended "to obstruct and impede as far as possible the proselytizing work" carried out by the Communists' own Friends of the USSR association.[80] This mirrored the imitative tactic which anarchists undertook in the humanitarian sphere, creating Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista (International Anti-fascist Solidarity, SIA) at least partly to vie with the Comintern's International Red Aid.[81] Underlying the creation of the "Amigos," however, was also a genuine, positive affinity with Mexico's revolutionary heritage and the desire to exercise their particular anarchist agency through alignment with it. Although officially nonpartisan, the "Amigos" were predominantly anarchist: the Madrid branch, for example, was funded by the local anarchist atheneums and the Libertarian Youth, and 98 percent of its six hundred affiliates in August 1937 were claimed as anarchists.[82] It had a visible presence in the Republican rearguard: for example, the Semana de México (Mexico Week) in October 1938, celebrating Mexican culture and politics and the solidaristic link between the two Republics with the participation of many local CNT unions and collectives, was one of the last major events held in Barcelona before it fell.[83]

Bringing the solidarity of the 1910s into dialogue with that of the 1930s also permits a reinterpretation of the doctrinal heterodoxy of the latter period as part of a longstanding

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[75] Mariano Vázquez to Lombardo Toledano, 13 July 1938, CNT (España) Archives 62C.3, IISH.
[76] "ENVIO A MÉJICO," *Mujeres Libres* (Barcelona), September 1938.
[77] Mistral, *Vida revolucionaria*, 7-8.
[78] Aguilar, "Revolutionary Encounters," 119; Smyth, "We are with you"; Casanova, *The Spanish Republic*, 220-225.
[79] See for example "UNA CONMEMORACION HISTORICA," *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), 8 November 1936. On the debates among Spanish anarchists over how to engage with Soviet support: Gudell, *Lo que oí.*
[80] PS-Madrid 663/20, CDMH.
[81] CNT (España) Archives 52B.1, IISH.
[82] PS-Madrid 663/20, Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica (CDMH), Salamanca.
[83] CNT (España) Archives 62C.1, IISH.

voluntarist streak in Spanish anarchism.[84] In 1915, the Andalusian anarchist writer Higinio Noja Ruiz had argued in *Reivindicación* that regardless of whether anarchist principles were being applied to the letter in Mexico, instead of "ridiculing the movement" anarchists had a duty to offer "a brilliant demonstration of international solidarity," showing "the comrades that struggle there that they are not alone."[85] In 1937, the same activist played a key role in founding the "Amigos de México," requesting funds from Vázquez to create a Valencian branch which would celebrate Mexico's "generous aid" and educate Spaniards about "that restless and dynamic *pueblo*."[86] The situation had changed, but although agrarian rebellion from below in the 1910s was very distinct from state-organized anti-fascist solidarity in the 1930s, both were examples of positive and practical action in contrast with the perceived passivity of more traditional ideological allies. Furthermore, as they had done in the 1910s with Mexico's agrarian rebels, Spanish anarchists now did with Cárdenas, focusing on aspects which appeared closest to their own values, such as his government's initiatives for land reform, popular participation, and secular education.[87] In this vein, the Amigos de México referred to *cardenismo* as a "case, uncommon in recent times, of a government expressing the aspirations of the people, and of a people tied to the government and disposed to support and defend it."[88] As in the 1910s, this was not without a significant amount of "wishful thinking" and romantic projection, but it was through this that Spanish anarchists decentered and broadened their revolutionary imagination and created new affinities.

These wartime solidarities also recalled the earlier period by facilitating, once more, a centering of Indigenous people as revolutionary subjects, albeit through similarly imperfect generalizations. For the Galician anarcho-sydicalist Claro Sendón, the "other nations, about which so much hot air has been produced," needed to bear in mind the great example of "virtue" given by the "spirited and indomitable race that bathed in the mayan, aztec and tlaxcaltec civilizations."[89] Aguilar has highlighted how *Nuevo Aragón*, the newspaper of the anarchist-led Council of Aragón, declared that "we *aragoneses* are the 'indians' of Spain," identifying with their idealized notions of Indigenous culture and character, people and foregrounding images of Mexican *campesinos* in its issue for May 1, 1937.[90] That date was a particularly suggestive one to choose, given its defining importance in working-class internationalism: in doing so, the newspaper again centered Mexico's Indigenous people as revolutionary subjects. The subversive identification with tropes of the "Indio" was also apparent within the Popular Army, where Henry Brown has identified how anarchist soldiers embraced the identity of a "*tribu* [tribe]" when other Republican factions used the epithet to criticize their "informal and distinctly proletarian aesthetic."[91]

This decentering solidarity also led some Spanish anarchists to reflect explicitly on the legacy of Spanish colonialism. Danny Evans has highlighted the anarchists' failure to secure a Republican commitment to Moroccan independence, and the presence of racist tropes about the rebel army's Moroccan troops in anarchist propaganda, as evidence of the movement's problematic relationship with colonialism coming to the fore during the wartime era.[92] However, Federico Ferretti and Jacobo García-Álvarez have highlighted how other examples

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[84] This broadens the thesis of Calero Delso, *El gobierno*…
[85] Higinio Noja Ruiz, "SOBRE LA REVOLUCIÓN MEJICANA," *Reivindicación* (Sabadell), 22 October 1915.
[86] Amigos de México to CNT National Committee, 19 March 1937, CNT (España) Archives 62C.1, IISH.
[87] On Cárdenas's government: Gonzales, *Mexican Revolution*, 221-259.
[88] Asociación Amigos de México, *México y los niños españoles*, 14.
[89] Claro J. Sendón, "México, pueblo hermano," *Fragua Social* (Valencia), 31 January 193
[90] *Nuevo Aragón* (Caspe), 1 May 1937; Aguilar, "Revolutionary Encounters," 112-113.
[91] Brown, "¡Vivan las tribus!" 364-365.
[92] Evans, "Carrying the war into Africa?"; Evans, *Revolution and the State*, 49-50.

from the CNT's propaganda prefigured "contemporary de-colonial arguments countering European universalism," albeit in a "sometimes contradictory" and often "not unproblematic" manner.[93] Similarly, the question of Mexico prompted varied responses, some of which reckoned with aspects of the colonial past. For Noja Ruiz, the postcolonial dynamics of the relationship between "Spain and Mexico, victimizer and victim yesterday, brothers today" were part of what made it a compelling one: "those who have felt embarrassed upon reading...the miseries of the [colonial] conquest...experienced a most profound emotion" when they observed Mexico's "solidaristic gesture." [94] Moreover, he identified the fact that "Spain should have been for Mexico a source of eternal disgust" as an argument for why Mexican solidarity was of greater political significance than the aid from the USSR.[95] As an explanation for the Mexicans' apparent overcoming of historical enmity, he mused that perhaps they "have understood that the Spanish rebels are the direct successors of those *conquistadores.*"[96] While acknowledging a sense of postcolonial guilt as a Spaniard, Noja Ruiz thus simultaneously identified the victimization of Indigenous peoples at the hands of Spanish colonialism as a source of commonality with the Spanish workers of the present, oppressed by the current crop of the very same traditional elite; a nuanced approach, somewhat more creative than simply invoking a crude class universalism in the abstract.[97] Kevan Aguilar notes that both Spanish radicals and Mexican diplomats referred to the idea of a shared historical enemy—Spain's traditional elites—throughout the war.[98] For example, Mexican trade union leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano described the Spanish people as the "last victims of Imperial Spain" and depicted Mexican support for the Republic as anti-colonial solidarity.[99]

The anarchist physician and writer Félix Martí Ibáñez's "Message to Mexico" for Mexican Independence Day 1937 was another example of such critical engagement, challenging neo-colonial narratives. For Márti Ibáñez, Mexico's revolutionary heritage made the country the "*patria* of the workers of the world" which "belongs to Humanity."[100] However, he also looked to historicize the specific historical ties between Spain and Mexico without regurgitating the racial and Catholic solidarity espoused by Spanish and Latin American neo-colonial elites. He argued that although many Spaniards and Mexicans were linked "by blood," they were united "with greater firmness by the Ideal."[101] This was evident in the specific histories of both countries: thus the affinity towards "our brown sister of the West" went beyond simply "gratitude for the generous aid" or "a friendly and emotive impulse," and instead reflected "a subconscious perception of the close historical affinities and the similarity of destiny that links the revolutionary Spain of today with the rebellious Mexico of always."[102] Martí Ibáñez described this as the true and genuine "*Hispanidad*," thereby looking to resignify this concept, which referred to a shared transnational community of Hispanic language and culture and was usually associated with reactionary, neo-colonial politics, as a non-racial, "spiritual" bond derived from a shared past and present of workers' resistance and struggle.[103]

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[93] Ferretti and García-Álvarez, "Anarchist Geopolitics."
[94] Noja Ruiz, "Prólogo," 2.
[95] Noja Ruiz, "Prólogo," 1-2.
[96] Noja Ruiz, "Prólogo," 2.
[97] On the Eurocentricity of class-centralism see Ciccariello-Maher, "An anarchism that is not anarchism," 22-23.
[98] Aguilar, "Revolutionary Encounters," 119-125.
[99] Cited in Ojeda Revah, *Mexico*, 216.
[100] Martí Ibáñez, *Mensaje*, 15.
[101] Martí Ibáñez, *Mensaje*, 5.
[102] Martí Ibáñez, *Mensaje*, 6.
[103] Martí Ibáñez, *Mensaje*, 5. On neo-colonial uses of *Hispanidad*, see Weld, "Reactionary Historical Consciousness."

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, a raft of studies have "provincialized" European anarchism by recounting the movement's global presence.[104] However, part of the aspiration to a decentered anarchism must also involve understanding the nuanced, frequently imperfect, but genuine anti-colonial and postcolonial praxis of European anarchist movements.[105] This article has added to that literature by exploring how Spain's formidable anarchist movement engaged with revolutionary Mexico in ways which challenged Eurocentric assumptions. In so doing, it has identified four key arguments which may prove fruitful points of comparison for the study of working-class anti-imperialisms across time and space. Firstly, it has shown that global solidarity did not unfold axiomatically from anarchist doctrine, which was also capable of fomenting exclusionist, Eurocentric hierarchies. Indeed, Aguilar has pointed out how not all Spaniards adhered to the decentered anti-fascism of the 1930s, as the CNT's official representative in Mexico City, Manuel Berrondo—an expatriate who had moved from Barcelona in 1931—was virulently prejudiced against Mexico's Indigenous population.[106] By de-essentializing radical ideologies, however, we are better able to identify the specific factors underpinning solidarities. In this vein, secondly, openings towards Mexico and Indigenous Mexicans were typically linked to moments of heterodoxy, when ideas of mutual aid, revolutionary struggle and anti-fascism were uncoupled from orthodox templates. While this further highlights the limitations and "boundedness" of dogma, future research might explore the limits of this heterodoxy and how to differentiate it from a more dangerous moral relativism.[107] Thirdly, contextual factors such as the First World War and the "neutrality" farce of the Spanish Civil War were important in urging many anarchists to look beyond "civilized" Europe and the boundaries of traditional templates. This implies a link between crisis in or near the European metropole and a decentering gaze, which merits further discussion in relation to other examples of anti-imperialist praxis. Fourthly, this process also often involved idealized representations of Mexico and its Indigenous population. On the one hand, these were often inaccurate, representing a projection of the European activists' own values onto the "other." On the other, they were subversive in intent, decentering in practice, and reflected the "cross-fertilization" which was happening in Latin America at the time. While this study has offered a more positive appraisal of this phenomenon, its potential ambiguities and pitfalls should be probed in future research.

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[104] Anderson, *Under Three Flags*; Hirsch and van der Walt, *Anarchism and Syndicalism*; Adams, "Non-Western Anarchisms"; Galián Hernández and Paonessa, "Caught between..."; Laursen, *Anarchy or Chaos.*

[105] Cleminson, "Anarchism and anticolonialism in Portugal"; Cleminson and Duarte, "Anarchism, Colonialism..."

[106] Aguilar, "The 'indios' of Spain," 452-453.

[107] See for example Laursen, "Anarchist Anti-Imperialism."

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