In the second half of the 1930s, a cluster of Mexican leftist ethnographers and public intellectuals began to call for territorial self-determination for the country’s indigenous peoples. This was a distinctive and novel current of thought within Mexican policymaking and knowledge-production around the indigenous question, yet neither its transnational origins nor its impact have been fully explored. Drawing on his research in Mexican and Russian archives, Tony Wood shows how Mexican advocates of Soviet-style self-determination came to adopt these ideas, and argues that their view of Mexico’s indigenous peoples as “nationalities” within a composite nation foreshadowed later demands for indigenous autonomy.

Tony Wood (Ph.D., New York University) is a political and social historian of modern Latin America. His current work focuses on transnational radical debates on race, class, and nation in the 1920s and 1930s, tracing connections between Mexico, Cuba, and the Soviet Union.

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