

short span of time between 1945 and 1965. Might the when and the how have had something to do with inter-empire power dynamics, not least World War II?

Although McNamee has not provided the theoretical or empirical justification for his subtitle (“Why States Colonize and Why They Stop”), he has nonetheless made important contributions to the study of colonization. He has demonstrated the conceptual flaws of the construct “settler colonialism”, and he has shown how much is to be gained by examining the tension between “settler” and “state”. He builds on this distinction to bring needed precision to interpreting multiple instances of imposed displacement and settlement. Much of his text could be a model for an examination of the important and complex relationship between decolonization and capitalism that goes beyond the unconvincing generalization that diminishes this otherwise insightful book.

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The Palgrave Handbook of Communist Women Activists around the World. Ed. by Francisca de Haan. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2023. xxiv, 701 pp. Ill. € 217.99. (E-book: € 160.49.)

My initial feelings when I opened this book were ones of impatience and curiosity – the book promised the long-awaited possibility of bringing together separate and controversial facts, notes, and tacit knowledge concerning the lives and deeds of women activists, the names of many of whom were familiar to me through my research on the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF).<sup>1</sup> Despite communist and leftist women being prominent participants in many international events during the twentieth century, the information on them on Wikipedia or the internet is scarce and almost no scholarly works have been published on these activists. The atmosphere of criticism of communist and Soviet politics cannot alone explain the lack of information regarding these prominent female historical actors: the availability of information and publications on male communists, including Stalin, Mao, and Trotsky, indicate an important gender disbalance concerning the representation of communists in history. So, I had long been waiting for such a book. My expectations were well rewarded by this volume, edited by Francisca de Haan.

The book appears at a time when the whole field of “post-communist” studies once again finds itself at the centre of the deepest crisis (after the end of the communist/state socialist system) due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the context of this devastating war, learning from the past, understanding the reasons why women

<sup>1</sup>Yulia Gradszkova, *The Women’s International Democratic Federation, the Global South and the Cold War: Defending the Rights of Women of the “Whole World”?* (London and New York, 2021).

were attracted to communist ideas, and the expectations and realities of the application of communist ideas, including their negative effects, have become more important for historians than ever before.

The anthology under review, edited by Francisca de Haan, Professor Emerita of Gender Studies at the Central European University and the first researcher to draw the attention of historians to the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF),<sup>2</sup> a hitherto "forgotten" Eastern bloc-leaning women's organization of the Cold War period, is the first entirely dedicated to the women, most of whom identified as communists. The gender approach to the choice of its main protagonists, but also to the methods of investigation, enables the reader not only to "get to know" and to evaluate the different political tasks of historical importance that communist women were engaged in (from representing Vietnam while signing a peace treaty – the chapter on Nguyễn Thi Bình – to leading one of the biggest communist parties of Western Europe – the chapter on Dolores Ibárruri), but also to explore how these women negotiated gender barriers and expectations of their respective societies and how they fought gender discrimination, including within the communist parties to which they belonged. One of the most striking examples of the latter is the biography of Italian communist and Resistance participant Teresa Noce, who learned of her communist husband's decision to annul their marriage from a newspaper article after he forged her signature on the annulment papers. Noce was expelled from the Executive Committee of the Italian Communist Party for making this forgery public (p. 205). Another example is Iijima Aiko, who joined the Japanese Communist Party at the age of seventeen and experienced her family life with the communist activist Ōta Ryū as discriminatory (pp. 328–330).

In the introduction to the book, De Haan stresses that communist activities are often studied without women, but, in reality, there were women who "co-constructed" "communism" (p. 2). Further, De Haan notes that communist women did this in at least three ways – bringing women into the party, questioning class priority for the communist struggle by introducing intersectionality (a specific example here is the Caribbean activist Claudia Jones), and, finally, questioning patriarchy inside the party. Due to their intersectional perspective, female communist activists did not limit their goals to "gender equality"; they were also interested in women's political and economic rights. The introduction includes an impressive list (p. 12) describing what these women did and how they contributed to the struggle for women's rights and equality.

This Handbook is therefore an important contribution to the history of the struggle for gender equality in the twentieth century: while the theory of "waves" has already been criticized by several feminist thinkers,<sup>3</sup> the exploration of the history of this struggle through individual biographies undertaken in the Handbook shows a complexity of actors, motivations, and co-operation along the way. By focusing on the overlooked communist actors, the book not only reinforces the critique of the

<sup>2</sup>Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)", *Women's History Review*, 19:4 (2010), pp. 547–573.

<sup>3</sup>Linda Nicholson, "Feminism in 'Waves': Useful Metaphor or Not?", *New Politics*, XII:4 (48) (2010).

waves theory, but also draws attention to the internal conflicts and contradictions of the process of changing ideas, legislation, and the everyday realities of women's status around the globe.

The book aims to include female activists from all continents: in the Foreword to the book (p. v), De Haan underlines the lack of a global perspective on communist women. This aim was accomplished to a high degree by inviting an international team of contributors from all continents – thirty-two contributors at different stages of their careers have written twenty-five political biographies of female activists from twenty-four different countries. However, one of the most difficult and important questions with this kind of global biographical handbook is what biographies to include, and what not to include. And, of course, the choice will depend on the available source material and expertise. Justifiably, the book starts with three “global foremothers” of communist women's activism – Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai, and Claudia Jones. However, the reason for choosing the other twenty-two women does not seem to be transparent in all cases. While the section on Europe appears rather balanced – it manages to represent both parts of a divided Europe – the choice of biographies representing Africa (paired with the Middle East) seems less clear. Indeed, the prominent Iraqi female activist Naziha al-Dulaimi and Aoua Kéita – one of the important protagonists of Mali's war for independence and post-independence leaders – are found here, together with the Algerian-Jewish communist Arlette Bourgel, to represent this enormous region. It is unclear whether such a choice is connected to the availability of contributors with specialist knowledge, the availability of archive material, or the definition of communist activist that the book's authors used. Still, underrepresentation of activists from Africa, including such countries as South Africa and Sudan, is problematic. As for Asia, the very interesting contributions on Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Indonesian, and Turkish women activists could have been complemented by one on Indian communist women, many of whom played a prominent role in the WIDF.<sup>4</sup> Finally, for the Americas, the Handbook successfully presents biographies of Vilma Espín, Cuban leader, head of the Federation of Cuban Women, and of the Argentinian Fanny Edelman, General Secretary of the WIDF in the 1970s. However, Black North American activists, represented now by a foremother, Claudia Jones, should probably also be represented by others – Angela Davis, for example. Furthermore, the book apparently aimed to discuss different generations of women. In reality, women from an older generation seem slightly overrepresented compared with women active in the 1960s to 1980s.

Another important question that usually arises when activism by communist women is discussed is to what extent these women shared male communist views and, not least, different kinds of anti-feminist sentiment? The contributors to the book express different opinions, including giving examples of active women quitting the party and founding new organizations defending women's rights (such as the Committee of Asian Women, founded by Iijima Aiko) or engaging in partisan activities within their parties – like Umi Sardjono. Sardjono founded the Movement

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<sup>4</sup>See Ania Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires: Women, Communism, and Feminism in India* (London and New York, 2018).

of Politically Active Women – an organization of Indonesian women, later Gerwani – at a time when the leadership of the Indonesian Communist Party opposed creating a separate women’s organization for fear it might weaken the revolution (pp. 380–381). Later, Sardjono is shown as skilfully promoting a new marriage law that would reflect the interests of Indonesian women but that lacked support from men (pp. 387–388).

The book triggers several important questions not specifically discussed in the introduction. How formal should membership of the Communist Party be? How should “communism” be understood in order for a female activist to be included in the book? Further, knowing the history of multiple internal splits within the communist movement, it would be interesting to understand what tendencies among different visions of “communism” are represented in the Handbook. And, finally, how the constantly moving division between communism and socialism was perceived.<sup>5</sup> Despite many chapters giving some answers to these questions, the book as a whole would have benefited from a more extensive discussion of these issues. The introduction, for example, briefly mentions (p. 18) that one logical question is why some communist women continued to support communist ideas, and remained party members despite what they knew about the terror unleashed by Stalin. In particular, as De Haan stresses, two of them, Polish activist Edwarda Orłowska and Romanian Ana Pauker, were themselves purged from the party as a result of the Stalinist anti-Semitic campaign. These contradictions are not discussed much further in general terms in the introduction, while individual chapters mainly discuss specific biographies and choices. As a result, it is unclear to what extent communist women, those featured in the book and those not, co-created communist campaigns of internal purges, cultural revolution, and how much power they had in issues such as the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968. In other words, did communist women deal mainly with women’s issues inside their parties, or can we speak about their responsibility for communism’s internal conflicts, splits, repressions against party members and citizens, and, finally, in some sense, for the growing unpopularity of the state socialist system during the late Cold War period? How does one deal with the possible complicity of communist women in internal repression, as well as other negative politics, including hidden racism, communist imperialism, restrictive reproductive politics, and the negligence of individual women’s aspirations? Here, I want to give just two examples: the head of the Committee of Soviet Women, Nina Popova, and the Spanish communist Dolores Ibárruri. Regarding Popova, it seems difficult to evaluate her participation in the politics of late Stalinism without access to KGB and special CPSU archives. Nevertheless, my own reading of the classified correspondence of the Committee of Soviet Women with its representatives in Berlin suggests that Popova was mainly following the party line.<sup>6</sup> As for Ibárruri,

<sup>5</sup>For example, the editors of this book explicitly insist on different socialisms and the importance of African socialism for inter-socialist communication. See also Eric Burton *et al.*, *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War* (Oldenburg, 2021).

<sup>6</sup>Gradszkova, *The Women’s International Democratic Federation, the Global South and the Cold War*.

the recently published book by Diego Díaz Alonso shows “Pasionaria” as a Stalinist and a silent observer of internal repression within the Spanish Communist Party.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, this book constitutes a pioneering and valuable contribution to researching women’s activism outside liberal feminist organizations on the Western side of the Iron Curtain. I would like to stress specifically the book’s success with respect to the organization of the chapters and its incorporating references – “Recommended Documents” section – to the most important works by each communist activist woman: those readers who are interested can navigate to this material for more information about particular female activists.

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MARTINO, ENRIQUE. Touts. Recruiting Indentured Labor in the Gulf of Guinea. [Work in Global and Historical Perspective, vol. 14.] De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Berlin [etc.] 2022. x, 271 pp. Ill. Maps. € 84.95. (E-book: € 84.95.)

Fernand Po, or Bioko, is a relatively large volcanic island a hundred kilometres off the coast of Nigeria. In the 1820s, the British “rented” it from the Spanish, who had occupied it in the eighteenth century. The British remained on the island, making it the centre of their fight against the enslavers, and allowing the introduction of other kinds of labour relations or labour exploitation. The freed slaves became not only the nucleus of the local Creole population, the Fernandinos, but they were also employed by the British in all sorts of economic activities as “free” labourers: as clerks; servants; manual workers; plantation workers; for policing and security, for instance. The island became a plantation site for palm oil. This activity brought in waves of different kinds of people who also mixed with the indigenous population, the Bube. Workers were recruited in Western Africa, especially today’s Nigeria. After being incorporated into Spanish West Africa in 1904, the island began to attract Hispanophone immigrants. Some established themselves as a class of plantation owners. This book highlights the labour and social history that emerged from the plantation economy, characterized by economic profit and labour exploitation.

The plantation economy required a massive amount of labour that was not present on the island. The twentieth century saw an expansion of the basin of labour supply, which consequently stretched from Liberia to Central Africa. The sources are vast and geographically disparate: the author has used annual reports on migration, police reports, missionary documents, and companies or trade collections from Spain to Britain to Germany. His book assesses the social and labour history of Fernando Po in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries using universalistic and Marxian

<sup>7</sup>Diego Díaz Alonso, *Pasionaria. La vida inesperada de Dolores Ibárruri* (Xixón, 2021).