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Women's Rights and Global Socialism: Gendering Socialist Internationalism during the Cold War

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Abstract: This Special Issue explores the complicated relationship between women's rights and global socialism during the Cold War. This Introduction describes how the articles deal with this relationship in three, partly overlapping, periods. The first set of articles looks at how the ethos of the Popular Front resonated among women's movements in Asia, Latin America, and Europe, and examines the connections between interwar anti-fascist and anti-imperialist feminisms and those that re-emerged after World War II. The second set of articles focuses on the role and development of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and its model of internationalism in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China in the early Cold War. The final articles centre on the challenges faced by the WIDF from the 1960s, exploring issues such as the anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa, the Portuguese wars of decolonization, and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976–1985). Together with this process of decolonization, this Special Issue also examines how the consequences of postsocialism, in particular for women's rights (the loss of social rights, material security, and substantial challenges to reproductive freedoms), have triggered renewed debates about the history and legacies of communist women's liberation movements in the former socialist world.

In 1978, US feminist journal *Quest* published a forum on international feminism featuring articles by the Indian economist Devaki Jain and American writer Charlotte Bunch. It seemed a propitious moment to discuss such a topic. The United Nations had recently held an International Women's Year (1975), launched a Decade of Women (1976–1985), and was just about

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to adopt its historic Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979).[1] Yet, the contributors were sceptical that feminism could really become a "global ideology".[2] Women in post-colonial countries, Jain warned, viewed Western feminism as an "anti-male philosophy or a male-mimicking quest for equality which is […] unnecessary for us and our political economies".[3] In the West, Bunch noted, women still needed to learn that a global feminism could not simply reflect a North American worldview. Postcolonial feminisms, she wrote, were shaped by a specific form of Marxism, ideas about self-determination and development, and women's status in national liberation movements or newly independent nations in the global South. At the same time, "the oppression of women in industrialized countries [has] taken a subtle and invidious turn which is sometimes exported as 'women's emancipation'".[4] This was a veiled reference to the Eastern Bloc, where women's rights were often touted as proof of the success of the state socialist project. In other words, the scepticism voiced by Jain and Bunch about the possibilities of a feminist internationalism were shaped in no small part by concerns about the incompatibility of feminism and socialism. Fast forward forty years, and similar concerns are still shaping contemporary debates about global feminist solidarity.[5] These questions are also central to the articles in this Special Issue, which explores the complicated relationship between women's rights and global socialism during the Cold War.[6]

The articles in this Special Issue draw on new sources – including personal papers, private correspondence, interviews, memoirs, and institutional archives – to explore struggles over women's rights in international communist and left-revolutionary movements from the perspective of often-forgotten mid-ranking officials, functionaries, and activists. Covering the period

1. Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-Raising Event in History* (Oxford, 2017).
2. Devaki Jain, "Can Feminism be a Global Ideology?", *Quest. A Feminist Quarterly*, 4:2 (1978), Special Issue on "International Feminism", pp. 9–15.
3. Devaki Jain would later write a canonical account of women's engagement with UN development policies. See Devaki Jain and Amartya Sen, *Women, Development and the UN: A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice* (United Nations Intellectual History Project) (Bloomington, IN, 2005).
4. Charlotte Bunch, "An Introduction…", *Quest. A Feminist Quarterly*, 4:2 (1978), Special Issue on "International Feminism", pp. 4–8.
5. Lucy Delap, *Feminisms: A Global History* (London, 2020); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *For the Many: American Feminists and the Global Fight for Democratic Equality* (Princeton, NJ, 2021); Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold War* (Durham, NC, 2019).
6. This Special Issue is the result of a research network hosted by the Universities of Liverpool, Cambridge, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, between 2018 and 2020. The workshops were generously funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council Leadership Fellowship ("How Women's Rights became Human Rights: Gender, Socialism and Postsocialism, 1917–2017", Grant ref. AH/P008852/2).

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between the global Popular Fronts against fascism of the 1930s and the end of the Cold War, the contributors look beyond the female figureheads of international communism to illuminate the experiences of lesser-known actors, such as British journalist Charlotte Haldane, Chilean women's leader Olga Poblete, Chinese labour heroine Shen Jilan, South African socialist Elizabeth van der Heyden, Soviet functionary Zhura Rahimbabaeva, or the West Bengali writer and activist Malobika Chattopadhyay. These female activists represented a wide range of ideological positions as communists or socialists, and their views on women's rights were influenced partly by Soviet models, alongside a variety of Marxist, anti-imperialist, or nationalist approaches to women's emancipation. We thus use the term "global socialism" to refer both to the state socialist regimes of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and China, and to the postcolonial socialisms that emerged in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.[7] Socialist internationalism during the Cold War enabled alternative forms of globalization in the Second and Third Worlds through transnational connections and flows of people, goods, and ideas.[8] Thus, as Paul Betts reminds us, "it is wrong to say that 1989 was the moment when globalization caught up with the Eastern Bloc. On the contrary, eastern Europe had been engaged with the Global South in countless ways since the mid-1950s, as evidenced in the spheres of trade, labour training, military assistance, education, cultural promotion and humanitarian assistance".[9] While much of the recent literature on socialist internationalism has focused on Europe and Europeans, the contributors to this Special Issue draw on archives around the world to reconstruct these alternative globalizations from the perspective of female activists from the Global South.

Women from Latin America, Asia, and Africa, as the essays in this collection demonstrate, redefined women's rights and socialist internationalism on their own terms, thus challenging the models offered by European Marxists or Soviet communism. Over the past decade, scholars such as Francisca de Haan and Kristen Ghodsee have reinserted communist women's organizations into the history of the global Cold War, arguing that the bipolar logic of that conflict, and a persistent anti-communist bias among Western feminist

7. James Mark, Artemy Kalinovsky, Steffi Marung (eds), *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington, IN, 2020); James Mark et al., *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonisation* (Oxford, 2022).

8. Patryk Babiracki and Jersild, Austin (eds), *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War: Exploring the Second World* (Palgrave, 2016); Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton, 2020); Theodora Dragostinova, *The Global Cold War from the Margins: A Small Socialist State on the Global Cultural Scene* (Ithaca, NY, 2021); Elidor Mehilli, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World* (Ithaca, NY, 2017); Artemy M. Kalinovsky, *Laboratory of Socialist Development: Cold War Politics and Decolonization in Soviet Tajikistan* (Ithaca, NY, 2018).

9. Paul Betts, "1989 at Thirty: A Recast Legacy", *Past and Present*, 244:1 (2019), pp. 271–305.

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activists and scholars, has erased their contribution.[10] Central to this effort has been the rehabilitation of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), an anti-fascist federation of women founded in Paris in 1945, which along with many other international non-governmental organizations (such as the World Federation of Trade Unions, the World Federation of Youth, or the World Peace Council) fell increasingly under Soviet influence after the onset of the Cold War. In an influential argument, Francisca de Haan has argued that the WIDF represented a "transnational left-feminism".[11] In parallel, there has been a much-needed re-evaluation of the history of the mass organizations for women established by national communist parties, which has resulted in a lively debate about the extent to which women in these organizations possessed "agency" vis-à-vis ruling parties or state authorities.[12] Much of this work has drawn on the concept of "state feminism" to explain how female communist activists worked through state institutions to implement policies aimed at women's emancipation in state socialist regimes.[13]

To explore the central theme of postcolonial challenges to European or Soviet socialist models of women's emancipation, the essays in this collection pursue three lines of argument. First, we explore the limits of the category of "state feminism" as a way of demonstrating women's agency within state socialist societies and global socialist movements, in particular through a focus on mass organizations. Second, the articles presented here suggest histories of struggles over women's rights in the context of twentieth-century socialist internationalism in Eastern Europe and the postcolonial world need to take greater account of the hierarchies of nation, race, and ethnicity. Rather than seeing communist women as intersectional feminists *avant la lettre*, the articles in this collection seek to problematize the way in which transnational encounters within international communist movements in the age of decolonization were shaped not only by nationalism but also racial discourses. Third, we argue that prior scholarship has not taken sufficient

10. 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; Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex*.

11. Francisca de Haan, "The Global Left-Feminist 1960s. From Copenhagen to Moscow and New York", in Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, Mary Nolan, Marilyn Young, Joanna Waley-Cohen (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (London, 2018), pp. 230-242.

12. Nanette Funk, "A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women's Organizations, Women's Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 21:4 (2014), pp. 344–360.

13. Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China, 1949–1964* (Berkeley, CA, 2016); Kristen Ghodsee, "Pressuring the Politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and State Socialist Feminism", *Slavic Review*, 73:3 (2014), pp. 538–562.

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account of the degree to which female activists were political agents, who engaged with international women's rights from positions shaped by their political and ideological commitments rather than notions of "female solidarity" or a generalized "left-wing" orientation. From this perspective, international collaboration around women's rights was not only possible when activists chose to put to one side their political affiliations – as existing literature on women in humanitarian movements often suggests – but emerged from women negotiating their political views on both national and international levels.

GLOBAL SOCIALISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

Throughout the twentieth century, communists and socialists were among the most vocal supporters of women's emancipation – and state socialist countries made significant progress in achieving legal equality and economic independence for women – yet the leadership of communist parties and mass organizations was dominated by men. This familiar paradox is reflected in the almost total absence of women from the major international histories of twentieth-century communism.[14] Women and questions of women's rights typically appear only fleetingly in scholarship exploring the transnational world of the Comintern and its associated organizations, such as Workers' International Relief or the League against Imperialism.[15] Ambivalence towards the question of women was already palpable in the early years of the Communist International. In November 1920, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) adopted "Guidelines for the Communist Women's Movement", drafted by former social democrat and high-ranking KPD functionary Clara Zetkin. The Comintern appealed to its member parties to promote women's full participation in public and private life, and to integrate women into all levels of the "proletarian class

14. Silvio Pons, *The Global Revolution: A History of International Communism 1917–1991* (Oxford, 2014); David Priestland, *The Red Flag: Communism and the Making of the Modern World* (London, 2009). For exceptions, see Celia Donert, "Feminism, Communism and Global Socialism: Encounters and Entanglements", in Juliane Fürst, Silvio Pons, Mark Selden (eds), *The Cambridge History of Communism*, vol. 3, (Cambridge: 2017), pp. 399–421, and Donna Harsch, "Communism and Women", in Stephen A. Smith (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism* (Oxford, 2014).

15. Michele L. Louro, Carolien Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter, Sana Tannoury-Karam (eds), *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (Leiden, 2020); Holger Weiss, *International Communism and Transnational Solidarity: Radical Networks, Mass Movements and Global Politics, 1919–1939* (Leiden, 2017); Frederik Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg, the League Against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925–1933* (Lewiston, ID, 2013); Kasper Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity: Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (Basingstoke, 2015).

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struggle".[16] But at the same time, working-class women were viewed with suspicion. The Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921, which was largely devoted to the "woman question", concluded that "the masses of passive working women who are outside the movement – the housewives, office workers and peasant women who are still under the influence of the bourgeois world-view, the church and tradition, and have no links with the great liberation movement for communism" represented a "great danger".[17] The Comintern established a Women's International Secretariat, but it did not last long. Communist women's organizations were tied ever more tightly to party cells, and forced to compete with the unions. The international secretariat, led by Zetkin, was forced to move from Berlin to Moscow, and the Comintern monthly for women, *Die Kommunistische Fraueninternationale*, was closed in 1925. The last International Congress of Communist Women took place a year later. The Women's Section of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet (Zhenotdel) was dissolved in 1930, as the Soviet Union distanced itself from a revolutionary programme of gender and sexual emancipation, embracing a much more conservative approach to women's role as worker and mother.

This Special Issue picks up the story in the mid-1930s, when the Comintern supported the creation of a World Committee of Women against War and Fascism, presaging a broader shift towards a global Popular Front policy that allowed communists to cooperate with a wider range of non-communist, anti-colonialist, socialist, pacifist, and feminist organizations in the struggle against fascism and imperialism. The first set of articles in this collection asks how the ethos of the Popular Front resonated among women's movements in Asia, Latin America, and Europe, as well as exploring the connections between interwar anti-fascist and anti-imperialist feminisms and those that re-emerged after World War II. In this section, articles by Jasmine Calver, María Fernanda Lanfranco González, and Manuel Ramírez Chicharro explore the transnational circulation of socialist feminisms between Western Europe, East Asia, and Latin America between the 1930s and 1950s. These articles contribute to scholarship that emphasizes the role of actors from colonial and dependent territories in shaping the transnational world of the Comintern through the interwar years, despite the hierarchical system of control imposed by the Soviet Union.

The second set of articles in this Special Issue asks how the language of women's rights and socialist internationalism changed in the period of building socialism in Eastern Europe and China from the late 1940s, as well as interrogating the extent to which the WIDF's internationalism was shaped by a

16. Eriz Weitz, "The Heroic Man and the Ever-Changing Woman: Gender and Politics in European Communism, 1917–1950", in Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose (eds), *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), pp. 311–352.
17. Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (Basingstoke, 2015), p. 47.

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Soviet agenda during the era of decolonization. The Women's International Democratic Federation, established in Paris in November 1945, embraced anti-fascism and anti-imperialism in its early years, acting as a magnet for anti-colonial women's movements in Asia and North Africa.[18] Three years later, the Cold War was making itself felt within the Federation, as the rift between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia resulted in the 1949 expulsion of the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia from the WIDF after the Second Cominform Resolution.[19] By 1951, along with other communist non-governmental organizations such as the World Federation of Trade Unions, the WIDF was forced to move eastwards. The Federation was stripped of its status as a non-governmental observer at the United Nations' Economic and Social Committee for its role in propaganda campaigns against UN military intervention in North Korea.[20] For the next forty years, the WIDF secretariat was located in the German Democratic Republic, coordinating peace campaigns, fact-finding missions, international congresses, and research workshops, from its offices in East Berlin.[21] The national affiliates of the WIDF tended to be mass organizations for women connected to national communist parties.

The third set of articles focuses on the challenges faced by the WIDF's model of internationalism between the 1960s and the 1980s, with a particular focus on anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa, the Portuguese wars of decolonization in Southern Africa, and the United Nations Decade for Women, which ran from 1976 to 1985. Throughout the 1960s, the WIDF was buffeted by the ideological conflicts within the Eastern Bloc, facing sharp criticism from Italian and Chinese members about its unwavering support for Soviet foreign policy. The Federation to some extent embraced development assistance as a way of supporting women's organisations in the postcolonial world, although this material assistance did not always meet

18. Katherine McGregor, "Opposing Colonialism: The Women's International Democratic Federation and Decolonisation Struggles in Vietnam and Algeria, 1945–1965", *Women's History Review*, 25:6 (2016), pp. 925–944; Elisabeth Armstrong, "Before Bandung: The Anti-Imperialist Women's Movement in Asia and the Women's International Democratic Federation", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 41:2 (2016), pp. 305–331.

19. Chiara Bonfiglioli, "Cold War Internationalisms, Nationalisms, and the Yugoslav-Soviet Split: The Union of Italian Women and the Antifascist Women's Front of Yugoslavia", in Francisca de Haan, Margaret Allen, June Purvis, Krassimira Daskalova (eds), *Women's Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present* (London, 2012), pp. 59–76.

20. Celia Donert, "From Communist Internationalism to Human Rights: Gender, Violence and international Law in the Women's International Democratic Federation Mission to North Korea, 1951", *Contemporary European History*, 25:2 (2016), pp. 313–333; Michelle Chase, "'Hands Off Korea!' Women's Internationalist Solidarity and Peace Activism in Early Cold War Cuba", *Journal of Women's History*, 32:3 (2020), pp. 64–88.

21. Elizabeth Armstrong, "Before Bandung: The Anti-Imperialist Women's Movement in Asia and the Women's International Democratic Federation", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 41:2 (2016), pp. 305–331.

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the needs or demands of its recipients.[22] In 1975, the WIDF organized its own World Congress of Women in the German Democratic Republic, as a socialist counterpoint to the bigger UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City.[23] The WIDF provided a space for communication for left-wing women's groups that were operating illegally during the wars of decolonization. It was one of the channels enabling women from socialist countries, and from left-leaning anti-colonial movements, to participate in international discussions about women's rights during the Cold War. And, as many of the articles in this Special Issue indicate, the history of the Federation also reveals the misunderstandings, disagreements, and conflicts that were an integral part of the localized histories of "leftist" women's movements across much of the twentieth century.

WHAT IS LEFT OF LEFT FEMINISM?

The collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, along with China's top-down transition to state capitalism, transformed the terms of the *Quest* debate about "international feminism". Devaki Jain and Charlotte Bunch had framed their discussion of global feminism in relation to debates about Marxism, welfare, development, and self-determination, concepts that were swept away by debt crises and austerity as the Cold War stuttered to an end. Symptomatic of this shift from socialist internationalism to a new age of liberal internationalism, perhaps, was the transformation of Charlotte Bunch from a Civil Rights-era social justice feminist to the figurehead of a post-Cold War global movement to recognize "women's rights as human rights". The gendered consequences of postsocialism – including the loss of social rights and material security, and substantial challenges to reproductive freedoms – have triggered renewed debates about the history and legacies of communist women's liberation movements in the former socialist world.[24] This has diverted attention from an older narrative, in which second-wave feminism and the New Left shook up the male-dominated, hierarchical structures and theoretical orthodoxies of communist parties after 1968, above all in Western Europe.[25] Journals such as *Quest* were part of this earlier movement.

22. Elizabeth Banks, "Sewing Machines for Socialism? Gifts of Development and Disagreement between the Soviet and Mozambican Women's Committees, 1963–87", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middles East*, 41:1 (2021), pp. 27–40.

23. Celia Donert, "Whose Utopia? Gender, Ideology and Human Rights at the World Conference of Women in East Berlin, 1975", in Samuel Moyn and Jan Eckel, *The Breakthrough: Human Rights in the 1970s* (Philadelphia, PA, 2014).

24. Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex.*

25. See for example Maria Michetti, Margherita Repetto, Luciana Viviani, *UDI: Laboratorio di politica delle donne* (Rome, 1984); Jane Jenson, "One Robin Doesn't Make Spring: French Communist Alliance Strategies and the Women's Movement", *Radical History Review*, 23

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By embracing a politics of recognition over redistribution, the philosopher Nancy Fraser has argued, women's liberation movements even helped to enable the neoliberal forms of capitalism that have flourished since the 1970s.[26] Recent scholarship has, however, sought to redefine women's political engagement in communist parties and mass organizations as a broad-based "transnational left-feminism", before the era of the New Left.[27] In this reading, the socialist past becomes a resource that could inform contemporary feminisms in an age of global capitalism.

Recent scholarship rehabilitating the role of state socialist mass organizations for women has drawn on the notion of "state feminism" to show how women worked within the structures of the socialist state to promote women's interests. Coined by students of the Scandinavian welfare state to analyse government policies aimed at removing the structural basis of gender equality by socializing reproduction and employing more women in the state sector, the concept of state feminism has also been criticized as a top-down strategy that failed to solve the problem of underrepresentation and subordination of women.[28] The term has been used to describe the policies of postcolonial welfare states in the Middle East, such as Egypt and Tunisia, which committed to public equality for women and men, and supported women's productive and reproductive roles, while leaving unchallenged women's subordinate position in the family and the political system. More recently, it has been applied to communist states, too. Wang Zheng has compellingly argued that the All-China Women's Federation operated as a socialist feminist cultural front in the People's Republic of China, and that Chinese communist party campaigns for women's emancipation should thus be seen as an example of "state feminism".[29] In the case of communist Bulgaria, Kristen Ghodsee argues that representatives of the Committee of Bulgarian Women lobbied for resources to support women's interests within the structures of the socialist state.[30] Mass

(1980), Special Issue on communist movements ("For a Social History of Politics") edited by Victoria de Grazia.

26. Nancy Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History", *New Left Review*, 56 (2009), p. 97.

27. Francisca de Haan, "Eugénie Cotton, Pak Chong-ae, and Claudia Jones: Rethinking Transnational Feminism and International Politics", *Journal of Women's History*, 25:4 (2013), pp. 174–189; Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms; Francisca de Haan, "The Global Left-Feminist 1960s: From Copenhagen to Moscow and New York", in Shen Jilan *et al.* (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (London, 2018), pp. 230–242.

28. Harriet Holter, "Women's Research and Social Theory", in Harriet Holter (ed.), *Patriarchy in a Welfare Society* (London, 1984), pp. 18–24; Helga Maria Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism* (Oslo, 1987).

29. Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China* (Berkeley, CA, 2017).

30. Kristen Ghodsee, "Pressuring the Politburo: The Committee of the Bulgarian Women's Movement and State Socialist Feminism"', *Slavic Review*, 73:3 (2014), pp. 538–562.

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organisations in some cases provided sites for activism and solidarity, but also imposed hierarchies and ideological frameworks on their members, which were challenged by female activists seeking new forms of political organisation, as explored in this collection through case studies of transnational connections between Lusophone women during Portugal's wars of decolonisation, or of small socialist groups that emerged as rivals to the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa after 1960. This also suggests that the category of "transnational left-feminism" might inadvertently obscure the political divisions and rivalries that were so crucial to the protagonists of these movements.

That the communist past of Central and Eastern Europe could be a resource used to inform future social justice feminism in the United States is an argument made strongly by Kristen Ghodsee in her recent essay, *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism*.[31] The experience of Bulgarian women under state socialism is presented as a counterpoint to the lives of young American millennial women, who might have forgotten the lesson that economic independence fosters self-realization. By contrast, Miglena Todorova, who grew up in socialist Bulgaria, suggests that for post-socialist subjects, "Marx's theories of human development leading to transformed consciousness and socially useful work in the socialist public economy may not be liberation but the site of state governmentality and violence". For women who grew up in the socialist bloc, Todorova argues, the ruptures and transformations of 1989 "have produced postsocialist subjectivities, modes of consciousness, and personal and group relations marked by *doubt*", characterized by a need to "interrogate and understand how state socialism in the twentieth century enfolded race, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and violence".[32] Seen from this perspective, women might have better sex under socialism, "unless one is a poor, racialized Indigenous, Roma, or Black woman whose concern is not having satisfying sex but surviving racist patriarchal heteronormative neocolonial societies stretching from the former Soviet Union in the East to the United States and Canada in the West".[33]

Anti-fascism, anti-imperialism, and anti-racism were central to the WIDF approach to forging connections with women's movements around the world in the late 1940s, but the essays in this Special Issue remind us that socialist internationalism did not treat all women equally. The anti-racism of Soviet-supported socialist internationalism regained its appeal after the defeat of Germany and Japan, and as anti-colonial resistance gathered strength against British, French, and Dutch colonial rule in Asia during the 1940s. Across the socialist world, class was deemed to have eradicated differences based on race as well as gender,

31. Kristen Ghodsee, *Why Women Have Better Sex under Socialism and Other Arguments for Economic Independence* (London, 2019).

32. Miglena Todorova, *Unequal Under Socialism: Race, Women and Transnationalism in Bulgaria* (Toronto, 2021).

33. *Ibid.*

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yet in Eastern Europe, as in the postcolonial world, race and racial difference had been central to the states that had preceded the creation of socialist regimes, whether in the Nazi New Order in Europe, or European colonial empires in Africa and Asia. As Quinn Slobodian has written, this raises the question of how "race and racialized thinking operate in a socialist society […] that had decreed racism out of existence?"[34]

Numerous studies have shown that state socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union was anything but blind to racial or ethnic hierarchy, notwithstanding the rhetoric about working-class equality through socialist internationalism.[35] Romani, Muslim, and Jewish minorities all faced pressure to assimilate to the language and culture of the majority population across Central and Southeastern Europe.[36] Similar pressures were experienced by ethnic and national minorities in the Soviet Union. Non-European students and migrant labourers faced discrimination on the street and official restrictions on their freedom to mingle with their host societies. These racialized hierarchies were most visible in the treatment of women, and affected citizens of socialist states too, as exemplified by widespread practices of sterilization of Romani women across state socialist Europe.[37] As Miglena Todorova has argued, central and southeastern Europe were part of a "racial globality, wherein Western racial sciences, colonial technologies, Marxist-Leninist imaginations, and socialist state policies intertwined to produce socialist women belonging to privileged ethnic majorities attached to racial Whiteness and European civilization, as well as Romani and Muslim women whose Otherness marked them for state-led socialist emancipation or eradication".[38]

FROM GLOBAL POPULAR FRONTS TO THE COLD WAR

In the first article of this Special Issue, Jasmine Calver explores the *Comité Mondial des Femmes contre la Guerre et le Fascisme* (World Committee of

34. Quinn Slobodian, *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York, 2015), "Introduction", p. 1.

35. Alena Alamgir, "Race is Elsewhere: State-Socialist Ideology and the Racialisation of Vietnamese Workers in Czechoslovakia", *Race and Class*, 54:4 (2013), pp. 67–85; Eric Weitz, "Racial Politics without the Concept of Race: Reevaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges", *Slavic Review*, 61:1 (2002), pp. 1–29; Francine Hirsch, "Race without the Practice of Racial Politics", *Slavic Review*, 61:1 (2002), pp. 30–43; Rossen Djagalov, "Racism, the Highest Stage of Anti-Communism", *Slavic Review*, 80:2 (2021), pp. 290–298.

36. Celia Donert, *The Rights of the Roma: The Struggle for Citizenship in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge, 2017); Mary Neuburger, *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgaria* (Ithaca, NY, 2004).

37. Donert, *The Rights of the Roma.*

38. Miglena Todorova, "Race and Women of Color in Socialist / Postsocialist Transnational Feminisms in Central and Southeastern Europe", *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*, 16:1 (2018), pp. 114–141. See also Miglena Todorova, *Unequal Under Socialism.*

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Women against War and Fascism, CMF) in relation to interwar humanitarianism as well as communist internationalism. Set up in Paris in 1934 as a sister organization of the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement, the CMF aimed to attract working-class, intellectual, socialist, and left-leaning women to the communist movement, where women were heavily underrepresented. (By the late 1920s, less than one per cent of the membership of the French Communist Party were women.) The CMF did not describe itself as a feminist organization, and its leader, Gabrielle Duchêne, did not identify explicitly as a Communist. Closely connected to the French branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Duchêne was a syndicalist and feminist pacifist who sympathized with the Soviet Union during the 1920s as the country of women's liberation.[39] The *Comité Mondial des Femmes* organized campaigns on behalf of women in Nazi Germany, the Spanish Civil War, in Abyssinia following the Italian invasion, and in response to the Second Sino-Japanese War. After the Japanese invasion of Nanjing in December 1937, during which tens of thousands of Chinese civilians were murdered and raped, the CMF launched a campaign to raise international awareness about the suffering of Chinese women and girls, and to support "Warphans" – children orphaned in the military conflict.

In her article, Calver draws on CMF publications and the personal papers of its members to show how both Chinese and European women drew on maternalist and humanitarian discourses alongside anti-fascist internationalism in the CMF's "Warphans" campaign. At the CMF Congress in Marseille in 1938, Loh Tsei, a Chinese sociology major and student leader also spoke in "emotive and violent language" about the rape and kidnapping of Chinese women by Japanese soldiers. Calver suggests that the CMF child sponsorship campaign for children orphaned in the Sino-Japanese War – or "Warphans" – infantilized Chinese society through its humanitarian rhetoric. Yet, her research also emphasizes that the "Warphan" was not dreamt up by the CMF, but was rather the idea of Song Meiling, wife of Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-Shek. Song Meiling had been a figurehead of the New Life movement of the 1930s, which drew inspiration from Confucianism, Christianity, and European fascism. This also involved an attempt to counter the "Modern Girl" associated with Republican China.[40] Although the CMF gave Song Meiling little credit for the Warphans campaign, Calver shows that the CMF's international socialist and anti-fascist campaigns against Japanese aggression were shaped as much by the agency of Chinese women – nationalist as well as communist – as by Europeans.

39. Emmanuelle Carle, "Gabrielle Duchêne et la recherche d'une autre route. Entre le pacifisme féministe et l'antifascisme", PhD dissertation (Montreal, 2005).

40. Madeleine Y. Dong, "Who is Afraid of the Chinese Modern Girl?", in Alys Eve Weinbaum *et al.* (eds), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity and Globalization*, pp. 194–219.

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That the anti-fascist internationalism, maternalism, and humanitarianism of the CMF could provide a platform for cooperation between women across ideological divides was also demonstrated by a central figure in Calver's article: Charlotte Haldane, a journalist who headed the British branch for the CMF and who was sent to China by the Comintern in 1938. Haldane had been a member of the Communist Party of Britain since 1927, but maintained connections to both socialist and liberal politicians. As Calver points out, Haldane did not simply play the role of a communist delegate in China, she also delivered messages from Clement Atlee and Archibald Sinclair, leaders of the Labour and Liberal Parties. Thus, the history of the CMF bolsters Laura Beer's observation that studies of international feminism between the world wars increasingly support the revisionist view that cooperation between women across ideological divides – liberal, socialist, and communist – was possible within anti-fascist and pacifist movements to a greater extent than the narrative of socialist opposition to "bourgeois feminism" would allow.[41] Similar patterns would also emerge in the successor organization to the CMF, after the Committee dissolved at the end of 1941, its anti-fascist mission already compromised by the Nazi–Soviet pact and the outbreak of World War II. The CMF was succeeded after the defeat of Germany and Japan by the Women's International Democratic Federation, founded in Paris in late 1945.[42]

The WIDF promised to revive the anti-fascist and anti-imperialist socialist internationalism that had characterized the era of the Popular Fronts, although we still know relatively little about the personal connections that linked these two phases of anti-fascism and anti-imperialism. The article by María Fernanda Lanfranco González hints at the continuities between the two movements, drawing on a case study of the Movimiento pro-Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena (MEMCH) in Chile. Founded in 1935, the MEMCH was inspired by the 1934 World Congress of Women against War and Fascism and became the "most significant local manifestation of Popular Front feminism in Chile". A driving force behind the MEMCH was Chilean feminist Marta Vergara, who had witnessed the restrictions on women's rights by Hitler and Mussolini while serving as the Chilean delegate to the League of Nations Commission on Women's Rights and the IACW. Lanfranco González points to the many structural barriers – membership

41. Laura Beers, "Bridging the Ideological Divide: Liberal and Socialist Collaboration in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1919–1945", *Journal of Women's History*, 33:2 (2021), pp. 111–135.

42. Mercedes Yusta, "The Strained Courtship between Antifascism and Feminism: From the Women's World Committee (1934) to the Women's International Democratic Federation (1945)", in Hugo García *et al.* (eds), *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York, 2016).

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practices, the location of international meetings, and language differences – that hampered Latin American women's involvement in women's international non-governmental organizations. While more than half the members of MEMCH's local committees in the provinces had links to the Communist Party, most of its leaders were middle-class women who were able to participate in international organizing, such as Pan-American networks protesting against "Spanish Fascism" under Franco or the persecution of Jews in Hitler's Germany. From 1946 to 1953, Olga Poblete (1908–1999) – a professor of history at the University of Chile from a modest background – was Secretary General of MEMCH and fostered links with both the WILPF and the WIDF. While studying at Columbia University in New York in 1946, Poblete became involved with the US branch of the WILPF and, on her return to Chile, remained one of its few Latin American members. The onset of the Cold War – when US foreign policy under the Truman administration made economic aid and credits to Latin America dependent on anti-communist policies – marginalized Poblete and her fellow *memchistas* in Chile, not only communist activists, but those without party affiliation in the provinces. Lanfranco González shows through her study of Poblete's correspondence that the WILPF leader leveraged her international networks to win protection for MEMCH members. As Cold War tensions increased, she writes, Poblete allied herself with the Chilean branch of the Soviet-supported World Council of Peace even though she "did not wish for either a Soviet or North American peace imposed by war".

As the stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union heated up in the late 1940s, women such as Olga Poblete faced increasingly difficult political choices when forging transnational alliances. Scholars have long recognized that Latin American feminists linked to the Inter American Commission on Women, established in 1928 as the first intergovernmental organization for women's rights in the world, played a crucial role in pushing for the inclusion of women's rights in the United Nations Charter.[43] The internationalist Pan-American feminism that emerged in Latin America during the 1930s was not simply a result of ideas being exported from the United States and Western Europe to the "South".[44] Evolving from the ethos of the global Popular Front against the crises of that era – the Great Depression, the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay (1932–1935), fascism's rise in Europe and Asia, right-wing authoritarianism in the Americas and the Spanish Civil War (1936–1938) – interwar Pan-American feminism

43. Katherine Marino, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2019; Ellen DuBois, Lauren Derby, "The Strange Case of Minerva Bernardino: Pan American and United Nations Women's Rights Activist", *Women's Studies International Forum*, 32 (2009), pp. 43–50.
44. Marino, ibid.

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incorporated "feminist labor concerns with equal rights demands and [knitted] crucial connections between feminism, socialism, antifascism and anti-imperialism".[45] Latin American feminists, as Katherine Marino shows, dramatically expanded the contemporary focus of US feminists on legal equality to demand economic and social rights for women (including equal pay, labour rights for rural and domestic workers, rights of children born out of wedlock, paid maternity leave and childcare), as well as promoting Latin American leadership and opposition to US imperialism.

Although the WIDF offered a space for international collaboration across ideological divides in the early years of the Cold War, Manuel Ramírez Chicharro emphasizes the tensions that emerged between the European leadership of the Federation and WIDF affiliates in Latin America. In Mexico and Cuba, Ramírez Chicharro argues, tensions between the European WIDF leadership and local affiliates were compounded by the effects of US foreign policy in Latin America during the early years of the Cold War. Anti-communism in post-revolutionary, corporatist Mexico, for example, marginalized communist-affiliated women who had been active in Mexican radical feminism during the 1930s. His article examines the activities of Mexican and Cuban associations for women that were ideologically close to national communist parties, at a time when these parties had been banned. Both the Cuban and Mexican branches of the WIDF firmly opposed US imperialist intervention, and supported measures to improve the literacy and culture of female peasants. Ramírez Chicharro suggests that the Cuban Federation was more effective than the Mexican organizations, which had been excluded from government once the revolutionary period of Lazaro Cárdenas in the 1930s had ended. The corporatist Mexican state integrated left wing, reformist, and conservative women into mixed organizations, and communist women lost influence; moreover, Mexican women were not enfranchised until 1958. As a result, communist-leaning Mexican women embraced conservative gender roles, despite their radical ideological backgrounds. By contrast, he writes, the Cuban Federation "seemed to promote discourses to decolonize, or at least to radicalize, traditional conceptions of femininity linked to the nation's progress and modernization". By studying the diverse voices of Latin American affiliates of the WIDF, Ramírez Chicharro argues that Latin American women sought to expand the Federation's vision of women's rights in relation to their own priorities, for example, regarding rural women or women of colour, partly in response to perceptions of paternalism among the European leadership of the organisation.

45. Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*, p. 5.

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"STATE FEMINISM" AND SOCIALIST INTERNATIONALISM IN THE GLOBAL COLD WAR

The second set of articles – by Zsófia Lóránd, Nicola Spakowski, and Yulia Gradskova – explore the connections between women's rights and socialist internationalism during the period of "building socialism" in Eastern Europe and China after World War II. In post-war East Central Europe, Zsófia Lóránd argues, the language of socialist internationalism meshed uneasily with older discourses of race in women's organizations that were also subject to rapid Stalinization in the late 1940s. Her article traces this argument through a detailed analysis of the women's magazine *Asszonyok*, the main publication of the Hungarian Women's Democratic Federation (MNDSz) – a Popular Front umbrella organization that swiftly became the women's section of the Hungarian Communist Party (MKP) after 1945. After the "national Christian" governments of the interwar years, German occupation and life under the fascist Arrow Cross, Hungarian feminists were seeking to redefine women's rights in the socialist state of the MKP. Lóránd argues that, in the early post-war years, the style and content of *Asszonyok* was influenced by interwar Hungarian women's movements and communist activism, especially the experience that editor-in-chief Magda Aranyossi gained while working in Paris for the magazine *Femmes* in the 1930s, where she became a founding member of the CMF and met Gabrielle Duchêne. Aranyossi was a writer and journalist from a Jewish landowning family who was forced to emigrate after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, returning to Hungary in 1941 to join the underground communist resistance against the Axis-allied regime of Miklos Horthy. By studying the internal workings of the MNDSz and the editorial processes of *Asszonyok*, Lóránd shows how "the celebration of friendship and a broad anti-fascist alliance of women which characterised the era contrasts starkly with the series of betrayals in the Stalinisation process amongst the charismatic women of the era". Party affiliation, not class solidarity, she suggests, ultimately dictated these alliances and betrayals. At the same time, orientalism tinged the magazine's representations of anti-colonial movements, while minority women within Hungary – particularly the Roma – were absent from its pages.

While the notion of "state feminism" has been used productively to show how women worked to advance their interests within the structures of socialist states, might this concept assume too sharp a distinction between the spheres of state and society? This is the argument put forward by Nicola Spakowski in an alternative interpretation of women's agency in the early years of the People's Republic of China, suggesting that "labour" is a more appropriate lens for conceptualizing relations between women and the communist state. A Chinese labour heroine, Shen Jilan (1929–2020), emerges in Spakowski's article as a lens for understanding feminism in socialist societies through the prism of work rather than the state. Shen

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Jilan was one of the most prominent Chinese woman labour models of the early 1950s, "rising to fame through her struggle for equal pay for women in Xigou village and even becoming a delegate to the Third World Congress of Women [organized by the WIDF] in Copenhagen in 1953". Spakowski argues that the "new sense of honor, dignity and acts of recognition" that Chinese women gained through their work at the local and national level were "important aspects of their 'liberation' – gains that are easily overlooked in a rights-centered discussion". Yet, this was not translated into recognition on the international level, since: "It was the educated and experienced heads of the Chinese delegation who represented New China on the congress stage and pointed to uneducated and young Shen Jilan as mere evidence of successful liberation." In contrast to the concept of a "top-down" process of state-led women's emancipation, Shen Jilan was a "central actor in the transformation of the gender order at the village level" and a "representative of the working class in China's new political order" at the national level, but on the international stage, became only a "symbol of the superiority of socialism as a society of gender equality".

The shifting scales of analysis in Spakowski's study of Shen Jilan encourage us to consider the quest for legitimacy on the international stage, as well as at home. Turning to the Soviet Union, Yulia Gradskova's article explores this issue by asking how the Soviet Women's Committee sought to influence the work of the WIDF, particularly in relation to women from newly independent countries in Africa and Asia. Drawing on the archives of the Soviet Women's Committee in Moscow, Gradskova builds on her earlier research, which used internal WIDF correspondence and reports of the Soviet Committee to reconstruct the numerous instances of women from Africa, Asia and Latin America calling on the WIDF to change its programme and structure in order better to represent the women in their countries. In many cases, it seems,

> [the] WIDF leadership, and particularly Soviet representatives, opposed their demands. This happened especially when proposed changes went against current Soviet foreign policy goals (for example, the conflict between the Soviet insistence on détente and women's participation in armed anti-colonial struggles) or when representatives of women's organizations from the Global South tried to insert their priorities on the WIDF's agenda, such as demanding women's right to be landowners.[46]

For her article in this Special Issue, Gradskova focuses particularly on the way in which the apparent success of Soviet development policies in Central Asia was used to sell the Soviet model of women's emancipation to postcolonial countries during the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the context of growing competition between the Soviet Union and China. Importantly, however, she also argues that women

46. Yulia Gradskova, "Women's International Democratic Federation, the 'Third World' and the Global Cold War from the Late-1950s to the Mid-1960s", *Women's History Review*, 29:2 (2020), pp. 270–288.

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from the Soviet republics in Central Asia – such as Zuhra Rahimbabaeva from Uzbekistan, who was appointed the Soviet delegate to the WIDF Secretariat in East Berlin in the late 1960s – played a significant role in reshaping and improving the Federation's relationships with women from the Global South.

THIRD WORLD SOLIDARITY, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, AND THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The final set of articles – by Allison Drew, Giulia Strippoli, and Mallarika Sinha Roy – turn their attention to southern Africa in the 1960s, and the transformation of socialist internationalism during the United Nations Decade for Women launched in 1975. Despite the crucial contributions of women to anti-colonial and nationalist movements in Africa, their role was frequently diminished after independence.[47] In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) refused for a long time to "acknowledge that gender discrimination needed to be addressed ahead of national liberation", believing that feminism was a bourgeois indulgence of white women in the "West" that did not apply to a radical liberation movement.[48] During the early years of the ANC's operations in exile, women activists relied on an informal "women's affairs" group led by Ruth Mompati (1925–2015) in Dar es Salaam. The 1963 WIDF conference in Moscow enabled Mompati to make contact with women from Angola's MPLA, which later resulted in further connections to women in West Africa. In 1969, an ANC conference in Morogoro created a Women's Section that would work out of ANC headquarters. The Women's Secretariat moved from Dar es Salaam to Lusaka, Zambia, in 1973. However, some ANC women were wary of getting trapped into working for the Women's Section, which they saw as focusing on welfare work shaped by conservative ideas about women's "traditional" roles rather than political issues, while the ANC leadership continued to rely on women to "fill traditional caring roles and perform the emotional labour needed to keep the movement together". Yet, South African women's opposition to long-standing racial segregation, which was institutionalized with the apartheid regime in 1948, was built on "decades of experience organising and mobilising opposition to government policies at grassroots and local levels". South African women who tried to organize both within the mixed-gender

47. Meredith Terretta, *Petitioning for our Rights, Fighting for Our Nation: The History of the Democratic Union of Cameroonian Women, 1949–1960* (Bamenda, 2013); Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyikan Nationalism, 1955–1965* (Portsmouth, NH, 1997).

48. Emma Lundin, "'Now is the Time!' The Importance of International Spaces for Women's Activism within the ANC, 1960–1976", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 45:2 (2019), pp. 323–340.

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ANC and in women-only organizations were accused of endangering the movement's campaigns for liberation.

The ANC-aligned Federation of South African Women did not formally affiliate to the WIDF, most likely due to South Africa's 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, but it was influenced by the WIDF's "left-feminist internationalism" as well as by local concerns. At its first meeting, held in Johannesburg in April 1954, FEDSAW adopted a Women's Charter, and a year later contributed the section on women's demands to the Freedom Charter adopted by the Congress Alliance. FEDSAW's demands included rights to maternity leave, antenatal and childcare, nursery schools and access to contraception for "all mothers of all races", as well as children's rights to health and education, rights to housing, infrastructure, and food.[49] FEDSAW delegates attended the WIDF World Congress of Mothers in Lausanne in July 1955. Maternalism was the key discourse that connected "South African women and the world beyond". During the 1950s, FEDSAW organized marches and demonstrations – culminating in a 20,000-strong women's march on the Union Buildings in Pretoria in August 1956 – that delayed the implementation of pass laws for all African women, and "forced the state to see them as political agents".[50]

In South Africa, as Allison Drew points out, the experience of male political prisoners in the struggle against apartheid has been universalized, while women's experiences have been marginalized. To counteract this narrative, Drew's article focuses on two tiny socialist mixed-sex groups established on South Africa's Cape Peninsula during the first years of armed struggle against apartheid in South Africa: the little-known Yu Chi Chan Club and National Liberation Front, which split from the Non-European Unity Movement, a rival of the African National Congress. The State of Emergency imposed in March 1960 after the Sharpeville massacre marked a new phase in the anti-apartheid struggle, in which women had to find different ways to assert themselves. The ANC and PAC were banned and driven into exile. The YCCC and NLF were active on the Cape Peninsula from April 1962 until their members were arrested in mid-1963. Drawing on interviews, court records, and NLF publications, Drew argues that the group's "relatively flat organizational structure and non-gendered activities facilitated women's participation", in contrast to the hierarchical organization of the South African Communist Party. She suggests that "the NLF's focus on learning and its small horizontally-organized cells allowed women to participate", meaning that "its history has a significance beyond its tiny numbers and ephemeral existence, one that stands as a critique of the sexism that has characterized the South African left". After their arrest, eleven members of the NLF received

49. Meghan Healy-Clancy, "The Family Politics of the Federation of South African Women: A History of Public Motherhood in Women's Antiracist Activism", *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 42:4 (2017), pp. 843–866.
50. *Ibid.*

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prison sentences of five to ten years. Four of these were women. And yet, as female political prisoners, their experiences have been erased from histories of anti-apartheid activism. Drew argues that reconstructing the history of groups such as the NLF can demonstrate the extent to which the experience of male political prisoners in the struggle against apartheid has been universalized, while women's experiences have been marginalized.

This was notably the case, Giulia Strippoli argues, for one of the last European colonial powers to relinquish its territories in Africa: Portugal. The importance of understanding transnational alliances between women as a political resource, rather than emphasizing women's dependent relations on male-dominated political parties, emerges from Strippoli's study of connections between the Portuguese Movement of Democratic Women (*Movimento Democrático de Mulheres;* MDM), and women's organizations in Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique during the Portuguese anti-colonial wars of the 1960s and 1970s. Existing studies have either analysed these associations within a national frame, or highlighted the relations between anti-colonial movements in Portuguese territories and the Soviet Union. By contrast, Strippoli argues women associated with anti-Salazar and anti-colonial movements in Portugal and Africa were forging connections already in the 1950s. The WIDF acted as a crucial space where Lusophone women could make connections, she suggests, even before the formation of oppositional women's movements such as the MDM within Portugal itself. Strippoli resists an explanation based on party or ideological affiliation, in which women's activism is interpreted in relation to male-dominated communist or socialist parties, instead emphasizing the importance of transnational female solidarity in connecting anti-colonial movements to oppositional movements in Portugal.

Finally, Mallarika Sinha Roy's article about Malobika Chattopadhyay's experiences as Secretary of the Asian Commission in the headquarters of the Women's International Democratic Federation in East Berlin between 1984 and 1987, explores the "dreams Indian socialists held concerning European socialism" in the final years of the global Cold War. Chattopadhyay had been part of the Indian communist movement since her university studies in Calcutta in the 1950s, and remained active in Leftist women's organizations in West Bengal from the 1960s. Sinha Roy's article draws on diaries and memoirs that Chattopadhyay published during and after her journey to the GDR, situating her experiences within a longer history "of travel from colony to the metropole, and later from the postcolonial locations to European metropolitan centres", but one that also involved "making sense of the vast gap between 'real' and 'imagined' socialist Europe". The importance of travel differentiates her texts from the genre of Bengali memoirs of socialist women. Sinha Roy suggests that the memoir has not received much attention as an example of Indian women's writing due to the "delayed attention to the creative and experiential worlds of women in the Leftist political parties, literary and cultural organisations in India".

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Sinha Roy's article could thus be located in a broader drive to challenge the absence of communists in studies of Indian writing and gender, "partly because of their declining political fortunes in recent years and partly because they are associated with sorry narratives of political compromise as well as an unimaginative, and at times outright hostile, approach to questions of feminist agency and sexuality".[51] Greater attention has been paid to Marxists outside the CPI. Yet, Loomba warns that we should not "oversimplify the political commitment or subjectivities of those who stayed within the Party fold. Party affiliations do not necessarily guarantee radical commitment, nor do they automatically denote radicalism compromised". "Communist self-fashioning did not take place in an ideological or social space of its own. Especially when it came to questions of gender and sexuality, communists were as deeply influenced by nationalist ideas and practices as they were by Marxist and revolutionary ones; indeed, the former provided the lens through which they viewed and appropriated the latter." Chattopadhyay's travels to East Berlin, Moscow, Athens, and the UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, as Sinha Roy so insightfully demonstrates, show this process of socialist feminist self-fashioning also unfolding through encounters with the real and imagined worlds of European socialism.

CONCLUSION

In 2009, Malobika Chattopadhyay returned to Berlin, now the capital of unified Germany. The WIDF, which had institutionalized the camaraderie of socialist feminism that had brought her to the GDR more than twenty years earlier, had vanished from the city. Her former colleagues and friends were reluctant to discuss unification. The international world of "global socialism", of which the WIDF had been one small part, had disappeared, bringing to an end the institutions and disrupting the biographies of several generations of internationally minded communist women. Across the postsocialist world, from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union to China, "gender" displaced the older focus on women's emancipation as the theoretical lodestar of feminism.[52] Gender was presented as a concept enabling a clean break with the socialist past.[53] The concept of gender, as developed by Western feminists, was disseminated by transnational networks of individuals, non-governmental organizations, and Western foundations. Postsocialist

51. Ania Loomba, *Revolutionary Desires: Women, Communism and Feminism in India* (London, 2018).
52. Nicola Spakowski, "Socialist Feminism in Postsocialist China", *positions: asia critique* 26:4 (2018), pp. 561–592.
53. Susan Zimmermann, "The Institutionalization of Women's and Gender Studies in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Asymmetric Politics and the Regional-Transnational Configuration", *East Central Europe*, 34–35:1–2 (2008), pp. 131–160.

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experiences of inequality, which were felt disproportionately by women as the privatization of economies was accompanied by the privatization of families, fostered a sense of nostalgia for the egalitarian structures of socialism.[54]

But, as the essays in this collection demonstrate, the socialist past is not simply a resource for contemporary feminisms. Many of the questions raised by the authors have been the subject of long-standing debates, which have re-emerged in recent scholarship about the history of "global feminisms" in the twentieth century.[55] This collaborative project has suggested that a history of struggles over women's rights in the global communist movements of the short twentieth century should look beyond the narrative of solidarity that those movements themselves constructed. Race, political affiliation, and geography were not erased by international communist movements, but constituted the relations between the women who sustained them throughout the twentieth century.

54. Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York, 2016); Alastair Bonnett, *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia* (London/New York, 2010).

55. Lucy Delap, *Global Feminisms*; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *For the Many*; Kristen Ghodsee, *Second World, Second Sex.*

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