

# Reviews

David Johnson, *Dreaming of Freedom in South Africa. Literature between Critique and Utopia*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press 2020, 232pp, ISBN 978-1474430210

The quest for freedom has shaped world societies in dramatic ways, not least in the global south, where the struggle for national liberation and self-determination has mobilised millions against structures of oppression. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) eventually fulfilled the people's dream of freedom when it gained power in 1994. But what kind of freedom was achieved and what alternative visions of freedom were thereby sidelined or forgotten? David Johnson's eloquently written book *Dreaming of Freedom in South Africa* puts forward compelling reasons for continuing contestation over the concept of freedom, as well as for more scholarly attention to be directed at its study. What alternative visions were developed beyond the ANC's liberal-nationalist script, and how does the inclusion of visions developed by the political left challenge one-sided views on freedom?

Johnson's book is of greatest relevance for all interested in the histories of the South African left. It deals with the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), the anti-Stalinist Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), the ANC Youth League and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). The analysis is based on literary texts by such leading characters as Clements Kadalie, Albert Nzula, Dora Taylor, Muziwakhe Anton Lembede and Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe. Moreover, the empirical base is considerably broadened by ephemeral and quotidian written sources like speeches, pamphlets and newspaper articles.

After locating the intellectual origins of the liberal-nationalist conception of freedom, Johnson divides the book into four analytical chapters – one each on the ICU, the CPSA, the NEUM, and Pan-Africanism.

Johnson's analysis of the ICU is especially riveting. It shows that the ICU leadership's vision of freedom was a unique mix of Christian discourse, Garveyism, Communism, a wide range of literary resources, and its own vernacular language of freedom (p42). Christian language penetrated the ICU's visions of freedom – as, for example, when black South Africans were compared to the Israelites in Egypt, the ICU leader Kadalie was compared to Moses, and the rulers of white South Africa were analogised to the Egyptian pharaohs. Johnson shows that, for ICU leaders, Christianity provided an indispensable resource for denouncing settler power. Moreover, the ICU's vision of freedom included the realisation of full political, economic, civic and social rights to all citizens in South Africa, irrespective of colour, race or creed.

The ICU's firm emphasis on Christian conceptions of freedom played well with Marcus Garvey's international message of black pride, psychological liberation, self-reliance and racial separatism. 'Christian insurrectionism' and Garveyism shared an internationalist outlook, expressed for example through solidarity with anti-colonial struggles in India and Ireland. However, the relation to capitalism became a major bone of contention. Garvey called capitalism 'the best system ever devised', while the ICU articulated a strong critique of capitalism and dreamt of international working-class solidarity.

Johnson shows that, in contrast to the ICU, the International Socialist League (ISL) and the CPSA never endorsed Garvey's binary understanding of the 'white oligarchy' and 'the aboriginal in Africa'. Instead, they perceived society through the lens of the class struggle. Still, according to Johnson, most of the first-generation members of the ISL and CPSA had also had a Christian upbringing. Thus, in the 1920s, South African communists naturally, and rather effectively, fused biblical and Marxist vocabulary. Importantly, CPSA publications were keen on describing the false freedoms under capitalism. The CPSA argued that, without economic security for all, the political freedoms promised under capitalism were of little value. By the 1930s, however, the language of the CPSA had embraced the unattractive style of the Communist International (Comintern), as disseminated by the Comintern's official newspaper *Inprecorr*. Despite the disastrous course of the CPSA towards political oblivion during the late 1920s,

the Comintern's analysis of the Global South's path towards freedom continued to have a profound influence. Accordingly, the left in South Africa was advised to first support national-bourgeois liberation and only thereafter strive for socialist freedom.

In the fourth chapter, Johnson turns his attention to the ways in which Trotsky's political programme was recast in South Africa between the 1930s and 1950s. In an internationalist spirit, the anti-stalinist left drew comparisons between the struggle for freedom in South Africa and that of India, Malaya and Latin America. Within the NEUM, there was also a major question over whether or not the South African left should forge strategic alliances with the ANC. Trotsky advised in favour of such an alliance in 1934, but Johnson brings to the limelight vital examples of South African critics of anti-colonial nationalism who rejected strategic alliances with nationalists.

Finally, Johnson turns his attention to Pan-Africanist dreams of freedom. First, he examines the political, literary and philosophical reflections of Africanists in the 1940s, followed by an analysis of the writings of PAC members in the 1950s and 1960s. These movements represented a new generation of South African activists, who defined their own philosophy of Africanism. According to Johnson, this new 'African Nationalism' was more radical, because it was based on the notion of collective agency, and because of its support of socialism. However, Johnson makes important observations about leaders such as Lembede being temporarily inspired by European fascism during WWII. For example, Lembede studied Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and this had an impact on his views on political leadership (p137). However, others in the ANC Youth League resisted such explorations, and advanced instead a notion of a 'pure nationalism of an oppressed people' that had nothing to do with fascism.

One of Johnson's most notable conclusions is that there was no discernible link between the dream of freedom and the race of the dreamer. His book offers a nuanced comparison between different understandings of freedom within one nation, and opens up the possibility of comparing South African articulations of freedom with those of other African countries or white settler societies. Comparisons within one nation are crucial, but, as most of the book's alternative visionaries

of freedom were inherently internationalist, it would be useful to push forward the analysis to an international level. How were these internationalist ideas of freedom embedded in different national contexts, and how did other conditions and contexts affect the articulation of these alternative visions? Such enquiries could also deepen the understanding of what was unique about the South African visions, and in which ways they were shared across borders.

In conclusion, Johnson's book constitutes a benchmark for the history of freedom in South Africa and offers a refreshing conceptual and intellectual analysis of the South African left. Although most of the political movements that originally articulated these alternative visions of freedom are long gone, it is easy to agree with Johnson's assessment that their critique of the limits of freedom under capitalism, and of pernicious forms of nationalism, remain of highest relevance.

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**Julian Mischi, *Le parti des communistes. Histoire du PCF de 1920 à nos jours*, Marseille, Hors d'atteinte 2020, 720pp, ISBN 978-2490579594**

The centenary of the French Communist Party (*Parti communiste français*, PCF), founded in December 1920 at the Congress of Tours, did not lead to any major turning points within its historiography. Despite a handful of newly published books, no central debates or major breakthroughs have arisen from the low-intensity commemoration of the event.

The voluminous and interesting synthesis published by Julian Mischi, a prominent sociologist (and historian) of the late PCF, is probably one of the most noteworthy monographs published for the occasion. Mischi's book aims at describing the PCF at an individual scale, as close as possible to the rank and file. It is a social and political history of the men and women, and of the generations, that made (and unmade) communism in France. Mischi scrutinises the multiple adjustments French communists had to make with their party over time. As

against a so-called 'conventional' historiography, focusing on totalitarianism, party control and soviet influence, Mischi prefers to show how class struggle was an experience of 'individual emancipation' for the socially dominated groups of the working class. According to Mischi, these achievements deserve respect and should not be dismissed by moral condemnation due to the alleged totalitarian aspects of the PCF.

Although a century has passed since the founding of the PCF, its early years still draw much attention. Almost one-third of Mischi's book is dedicated to this period, when multiple individuals and militant groups 'federated' themselves with what later was to become the Stalinist party of the late 1920s and 1930s. The interpretation of these early years is still the subject of many debates. It is perceived as a period when 'another' party was still possible – and this is the reason these years still echo in the present.

Mischi describes in great detail the PCF's mechanisms of selection and promotion of a proletarian elite – an already well-known aspect of its history. According to Mischi, the PCF unwillingly became complicit with the republican/bourgeois/capitalist system, and a '*parti d'ordre*' (party of order), as early as the 1930s, when it dropped its radical anticolonial and antipatriotic attitude in support of the defence of the nation and 'democratic liberties' during the Popular Front period. He is at his best when he scrutinises the decomposition of the PCF during the 1970s and 1980s – a familiar topic from his previous works. He convincingly shows that the party's decline was not a continuous process, but a complex succession of local crises, political defeats, and social after-shocks from the failures of the 1960s.

The precision of Mischi's diagnosis is, however, paradoxical. His book seeks to go beyond the dead ends and 'aporias' of French communist history: it is intended as an invitation to those who reject the status quo imposed by contemporary capitalism and wish to build an alternative force. This preoccupation draws Mischi to considerations that are far less convincing: the welfare state, for example, is described as merely the trickery of the bourgeoisie 'to avoid revolution', and national states are mere auxiliaries of capitalist globalisation. The rights and liberties conquered by the working class in western countries are seen first and foremost as a consequence of the threat of communism; and in his final,

but not least contentious, argument, Mischi claims that the collapse of the Soviet Union has been to the detriment of popular classes – even though, as an historian, he has shown clearly the catastrophic effects of the famous ‘positive balance’ assessment of sovietism by PCF leader Georges Marchais in 1979.

Mischi’s argumentation relies strongly on the idea that democracy has been ‘confiscated’ by the French social and political elite. Accordingly, the ‘elitist tendencies’ in democracies were countered by the PCF as it sent deputies of popular origins to parliament, even though the reality was that the PCF promoted a specific kind of masculine, skilled-labour elite that was in stark contradiction to the party’s base of peasants, women and immigrants. If, as Mischi argues, a party like the Stalinist PCF is neither desirable nor possible anymore, it is difficult to understand how ‘internal democracy’ in an alternative party, with all its faults and limitations, could avoid similar problems of representation. Mischi’s conclusions also seem weak in face of the massive shift to the right of the popular and labour vote in France today.

After all, the failure of the PCF, which was founded in reaction to the First World War and the Russian revolution, was also a consequence of the party leadership’s lies and silences about the USSR and Soviet reality. They compromised the very cause they had dedicated their lives to. Mischi does not write much about the implications of Comintern repression or the Stalinist ruling system in the 1930s, but he does show how the shady deals they inevitably involved subverted efforts to build a party of the best of France after the Second World War. If Stalinism was a specific and paradoxical way of promoting the working class in France, it was also a system of moral corruption of those who rallied its cause, and this double-edged reality remains the major impediment to the writing of its history.

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Gavin Bowd, *Les communismes britannique et français, 1920-1991. Un conte de deux partis*, Paris, L'Harmattan 2020, ISBN 978-2343196138, 238pp

Marco Di Maggio, *The Rise and Fall of Communist Parties in France and Italy. Entangled Historical Approaches*, Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan 2021, ISBN 978-3030632564, xxvi+288pp

These books are both very similar and also quite different. They each set themselves the task of a focused comparison involving two West European communist parties/movements, encompassing the broad historical evolution of these parties and the national and international contexts within which they operated. They both anchor their analyses in the overarching narrative of the rise and decline of the international communist movement during the twentieth century; in two of the three national cases, the parties studied ceased to be 'communist' after 1991, whilst in the French case, the *Parti communiste français* (PCF) has limped on into the present day, though with no apparent prospect of recovering its past mass membership or electoral support. Although the PCF is the common denominator in these studies, the approaches taken, in both methodological and historiographical terms, are distinct.

Bowd's book is the more original, given the 'incongruity' of treating these two parties, the PCF and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), as comparable. He argues persuasively that, despite their highly significant differences, it is instructive to compare their trajectories. If the PCF has been characterised as the 'eldest daughter' of the European Communist movement, then the CPGB may be seen as the 'poor revolutionary neighbour' (p5). For Bowd, the contrasting fortunes of these parties, given the similarities in their national economic and international relations contexts, can shed light on the important cultural differences between their respective workers' movements. The study is focused upon the *interactions* between the PCF and the CPGB; he utilises party archives, the communist press and other journalistic reports as well as official diplomatic sources to paint the first detailed picture of the relations between the two movements.

A significant part of the complex explanation for this diversity can be traced to each party's moment of origin: the PCF was formed from

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the majority of delegates at the *Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière* (SFIO) Congress at Tours in 1920. This decision, by the largest socialist grouping in France at the time, to adhere to the Communist International (Comintern) can itself be explained by the proximate cause of socio-economic unrest in the aftermath of the First World War, but also by a long-standing affiliation to revolutionary politics, which placed the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia within the same (French) tradition of 1789. By contrast, the CPGB was formed outside of the mainstream workers' movement (as exemplified in the Labour Party), by a disparate coalition of Marxist *groupuscules*. Despite repeated efforts to affiliate the embryonic CPGB to Labour during the 1920s and beyond, these attempts at rapprochement were routinely rebuffed; mainstream British social democracy remained resolutely anti-communist. Bowd recognises that, for many British comrades, the French communist experience could be seen as an example to admire, and if possible emulate, but that it also had a tendency to aggravate feelings of inferiority. In one of many telling anecdotes uncovered, Bowd summarises a pamphlet published in Glasgow in 1922, *An Episode of the Paris Commune*, written by Tom Anderson, in which he bemoaned the submissive politics of the British working class, in comparison with their Parisian comrades, massacred in their thousands in 1871. The British, said Anderson pessimistically, were 'slaves' who were 'too docile' to revolt; they preferred the 'opium' of the promise that better times lay ahead (pp16-17). For its part, by the time of the General Strike of 1926, the PCF was already perplexed and disheartened by the 'timidity' of the British workers' movement, or at least its leading organisations, in the shape of Labour and the Trades Union Congress (TUC). Gabriel Péri, PCF journalist and correspondent for *L'Humanité* in London, was disdainful of the Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald and the TUC President J.H. Thomas: the prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, led a combative government which was willing to wield a "Browning" [shotgun] against the strikers', while the Labour leaders were 'attempting to teach him the principles of English boxing!' (p29).

Bowd includes important detail on the close links between the PCF and CPGB during the Second World War; he is not afraid to underline the 'lack of sincerity' in the former's effort to whitewash its record of



support for the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939-1941 (p111). In regular communiqués to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay, successive French ambassadors in London judged the British labour movement to be 'prudent and moderate'; the CPGB was only significant in terms of its industrial influence, rather than its political presence. In the wake of the 1945 general election, the ambassador noted, approvingly, that the future Foreign Minister, Labour's Ernest Bevin, was 'clearly anti-communist'. Although, in retrospect, the CPGB's 100,000 votes and two MPs elected (Willie Gallacher in west Fife and Phil Piratin in Mile End, London) represented the high watermark of Communist influence in Parliament, the French diplomatic service was confident in its dismissal of the CPGB as a dangerous force. (pp116, 155).

Di Maggio uses the term 'entangled history' (or *l'histoire croisée* in French historiography) to describe his approach to the PCF and the *Partito comunista italiano* (PCI). He contrasts this with a standard comparative study, because it presupposes a 'more solid common ground, determined by a relationship of interdependence between national and international which allows the reconstruction of relationships, reciprocal influences, exchanges and the circulation of ideas and analysis' (pxv). Although there are clear similarities with Bowd's research stance, di Maggio is particularly interested in the intersection between the intellectual histories of these behemoths of the West European communist movement, and the relationship between the development of Marxist ideas, on one hand, and the strategic or institutional evolution of these parties on the other. The nature of the PCF/PCI relationship was partly conditioned by the competition between them for post-1945 leadership of West European communism, but it was also marked by distinctive positions with regard to the Moscow 'centre' of the global movement. Di Maggio does not explicitly utilise Marc Lazar's suggestive metaphor, of the PCI and PCF being launched into orbit together, but with their trajectories increasingly diverging.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, whilst the book makes very convincing use of the literature in French and Italian, there is not so much engagement with the English-language literature (for example, the work of Tony Judt on the PCF or Don Sassoon on the PCI).<sup>2</sup>

There is a persuasive analysis of the 'dual level of managing relations' (p9) between the parties; firstly, the public, open and friendly relations

between two 'brotherly' parties, but, below the surface, a private wariness of the other's intentions, and even on occasion a real *froideur*, based upon the perception (and sometimes the reality) that the two movements represented opposite poles of a dilemma that affected both of them (and all Western parties, in truth). Namely, an oscillation between reformist evolution, adapting the avowedly 'revolutionary' and anti-system vocation of Western communism to capitalist societies that stubbornly refused to develop towards existential crisis, and what di Maggio terms a 'fallback to identity' (p209). Even during a period of ostensible common purpose, as during the 'Eurocommunist' interlude of the mid-1970s, di Maggio makes the important point that very similar rhetoric belied the fact that Eurocommunism became a tool for attempting to legitimise each party's national strategy, rather than an authentically transnational effort to forge a new united purpose (p167).

With the considerable benefit of hindsight, by the late 1970s both the PCF and the PCI were, despite their mass memberships and electoral presence, entering an era of strategic impasse. The PCF leadership group, despite regular waves of dissent, largely involving intellectuals, was adept at marginalising these challenges, often subsequently appropriating some of those dissident ideas in the name of party unity. However, once it became clear that the *union de la gauche* strategy was benefitting the Socialist Party of Mitterrand more than the communists, Marchais presided over a PCF *volte-face*, refusing to present a united front in the legislative elections of 1978. This provoked the broadest wave of dissent thus far, led by Paris federation secretary, Henri Fiszbín. (Incidentally, this federation was, at approximately 30,000 members, the same size as the entire CPGB at this stage.) After Mitterrand's Presidential election victory in 1981, the PCF accentuated its anti-system politics of identity, even though it also provided four Ministers in Mitterrand's cabinet, until 1984.

For the PCI, the failure of the party to convince either the Christian Democrats or the Socialists to work with it in a national government of 'historic compromise' meant that, by the start of the 1980s, the communists had reached a strategic dead end. The death of its reformist leader, Enrico Berlinguer, in 1984 was symbolic confirmation of the party's rudderless course. Di Maggio laments the movement's 'cultural

disintegration' (p231), as it stumbled towards collapse after 1989. The non-communist philosopher of the Italian left, Norberto Bobbio, was prescient when he observed that the loss of an emancipatory ambition as represented by the PCI was a defeat for the entire left, not just in Italy but across Europe (p271).

Both of these books will be read with great interest by subscribers to *Twentieth Century Communism*, the vast majority of whom will be familiar with the particular communist vernacular (*langue de bois* in the French) that characterises all of these parties. However, in 2023 younger readers may find this language esoteric and off-putting (if we can make the, perhaps heroic, assumption that they will find their way to this subject matter at all!). Yet, both books do amply demonstrate the critical contemporary significance of seeking to interpret what Bernard Pudal termed the 'defeated world' of West European communism.<sup>3</sup> Many of the strategic dilemmas that the PCF, PCI and CPGB grappled with remain just as relevant or even more acute today (e.g. how to envisage a governmental project for a radical left in an increasingly global capitalist order; how to construct successful alliances with variegated social movements; how to reconcile demands for autonomy and internal democracy with party unity and discipline). Neither book explicitly poses the question of whether there can be a renewed role for a radical left beyond either acting as a more or less loyal junior coalition partner in a centre-left administration, or, alternatively, acting as the (largely impotent and ignored) 'conscience of the left', shouting forlornly from the sidelines. But, they do provide important resources for beginning to think about these dilemmas once more.

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## Notes

- 1 Marc Lazar, *Maisons rouges: Les partis communistes français et italiens de la Libération à nos jours*, Paris: Perrin 2002.
- 2 See Tony Judt, *Marxism and the French Left: Studies on Labour and Politics in France, 1830-1981*, Oxford: Clarendon 1986; T. Judt, "The Spreading Notion of the Town": Some Recent Writings on French

and Italian Communism', *The Historical Journal*, Vol 28 No 4, 1985, pp1011-1021; Donald Sassoon, *The Strategy of the Italian Communist Party from the Resistance to the Historic Compromise*, London: Pinter 1981. See also for a comparative study, Cyrille Guiat, *The French and Italian Communist Parties: Comrades and Culture*, London: Routledge 2002.

- 3 Bernard Pudal, *Un monde défait: les communistes français de 1956 à nos jours*, Paris: Le Croquant 2009.
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**Michael Goodrum and Philip Smith, *Printing Terror. American Horror Comics as Cold War Commentary and Critique*, Manchester, Manchester University Press 2021, 311pp, ISBN 978-1526135926**

In 1944 America, 41 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women read comics, plus 91 per cent of American children. By 1950, 'the comics industry generated an annual profit of almost \$41 million dollars and published 50 million comics a month: everyone read comics' (pp 17-18). Resistance to the industry came from groups such as church and parental organisations that assumed children read the texts seriously. 1954 witnessed the adoption of the Comics Code Authority (CCA), a self-regulatory body that prohibited certain content. It dealt a huge blow to the horror genre, although it did not destroy it: it was to see a significant revival in the 1970s when the CCA reviewed their standards. *Printing Terror. American Horror Comics as Cold War Commentary and Critique* provides a broad history of the comics it addresses, but its key focus is on addressing the horror genre as a cultural force and examining its commentary on the world.

Goodrum and Smith argue that horror serves a social purpose that promotes an emotional catharsis in audiences, offering escapism, and an expression of socio-cultural fears. At heart, horror stories are morality tales that reaffirm societal values. The authors' aim is to explore the extent to which horror comics mirror America's dominant historical narratives, narratives through which the nation evolves and is constructed.

The authors robustly show the extent to which horror comics appear to indict racism and misogyny while consistently presenting women

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and people of colour as endangering white men and societal structures. Indeed, much of the work in the book builds on gendered readings of horror, including in relation to 'castration anxiety'. The beautiful female bodies presented for the male gaze are punished for the perceived lack they project back on to the assumed male reader, with acts of punishment against the female body positioned as acts of 'rephallusization'. Women are 'put in their place' to reinforce the 'place' of the male reader; the symbolic order is saved from that which threatens its stability. The abjection of women is required for maintaining the patriarchal order and the power structures inhabited by white American men. Notably, within these narratives the only fear taken seriously is that of the latter. The central thesis of the book is that fear is tied to privilege, and, more, that fear is a type of emotional property to which only the privileged have access. The authors argue that while on the surface horror comics appear to offer liberally progressive narratives, their creators reveal both a desire for change and resistance to it. In essence, they wanted change that leaves intact the full range of historical male privilege. Possessors of privilege fear its removal or even the widening of access to it.

The book divides the horror comics of the mid-twentieth century into two periods, separated by the CCA and its subsequent revision, applying to both the same over-lapping foci of trauma, gender and race. The authors posit that horror comics rejected the forward-looking narratives of economic and scientific progress that followed the First World War. They argue that instead they offered a counter narrative in which the cultural trauma of the war leaves a world in which male hegemony is threatened by social change as well as the horrors of war. In this same period, female characters emerge as empowered sources of horror. Within the genre they are denuded of their power, presented as objects to be acted on or subjected to violence. Overt racism is repudiated by horror comics at the same time as racist assumptions are reinforced, most notably by show-casing individual people of colour as barbaric under pressure or as a group threatening 'white' spaces.

Discernible shifts in the genre took place in the 1970s, linked to televised violence, fictional and real, especially as reflected in news coverage of the Vietnam War. 1950s horror revolved around white male victims and Othered monsters. In the 1970s horror was increasingly

inflicted by white male perpetrators. As the authors show, however, there was also a shift to storylines introducing evolving, emotionally complex characters that elicited and engaged reader sympathy. Hence, in effect, victimhood was still positioned within the white man's domain. Horror comics may have paid lip-service to feminist rhetoric, but, for the majority, women were sources of horror and/or titillation. Empowered black characters such as Blade emerged, but either as allies or protectors of white men, with power that derived from white society, and with the ever-threatening prospect of their potential reversion to barbarity. The preponderant tendency in horror comics was the depiction of scenarios in which white men served as victims to the racialised or gendered other.

Horror comics offered critiques that both challenged and reinforced American society's oppressive components. A genre that dealt in binaries of villains and victims was hardly a vehicle for nuanced analysis, as demonstrated in its approach to race in the 1950s, a period of systemic domestic racism, along with overseas neo-colonialism. Certainly, some narratives addressed issues pertinent to the emergent civil rights movement, the systemic racism endemic in American society's institutions and values, and American imperialism and the quest for global power. Nonetheless, the authors show how the material relating to these issues was so configured as to assuage any guilt on the part of the readers.

By the 1970s, horror comics largely avoided direct political comment. However, in the megamonster sub-genre, the authors detect a more hawkish rhetoric that belied the apparent sympathy for protest culture that was appearing in other horror genre variations. In the megamonster genre there was a discernible recurring fantasy of white American supremacy in which the nation is victim to nuclear and foreign threats that are resolved by American ingenuity. The megamonster genre facilitated stories of nuclear destruction that did not require political reflection from the reader, and promised that humanity, America specifically, would meet and overcome all threats, be they earthbound foes or aliens from the outer reaches of the universe.

Throughout the book there are illustrations from horror comics that support the arguments and themes it addresses. These are particularly potent in relation to gender and how horror comics use the language of female empowerment at the same time as reinscribing well-known

tropes of objectification. For example, female characters resemble contemporary pin-ups familiar in the pages of *Penthouse*. Empowered within existing structures, ‘powerful’ women are narratively capable of very little, and serve ultimately to assure male readers of their own power. Even more disturbing, ‘comics of this era contain storylines and images that both demonize the feminist movement and depict women as manipulative, evil and deserving of sexualized violence’ (p277). With women still in the role of monster, still subjected to seemingly well-deserved misogynistic violence, or so personality-devoid as to be mere backdrops to male victimhood, horror comics had barely changed since the 1940s and 1950s. They continued to reflect white male fears of invasion and of being replaced. As the authors argue, these comics were not, at heart, about horror, but about alienation and the way in which fear turns people, and indeed nations, into monsters.

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**Balázs Apor and John Paul Newman (eds), *Balkan Legacies. The Long Shadow of Conflict and Ideological Experiment in Southeastern Europe*, West Lafayette, Purdue University Press 2021, 412pp, ISBN 978-1612496405**

Driven by the ‘looming presence of the conflictual past’ (p2), Apor and Newman, historians of Eastern Europe, have put together a fascinating collection on the long-lasting legacies shaping contemporary South Eastern Europe. Perhaps counterintuitively, these legacies are dominated by several short-term turbulent historical experiences from the region’s twentieth century-history – the legacies of war and dictatorship but also of socialism and the difficult post-socialist transition – that are all perceived to have had a long-term impact on the region. In their conceptualisation of legacies, the editors and the volume’s fifteen contributors are taking their cue from historians of the USSR Mark Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin, who insist on the importance of historical turning points and ruptures, as well as from Maria Todorova’s theorisation of

legacy as ‘the totality of past experiences – reflected or unreflected – that has an impact on the present’ (p2). The result is a quality academic work adding new layers to the ever-growing field of memory studies.

The collection begins with a concise introduction which outlines the core themes and provides a theoretical background to the volume. The clear focus on the legacies of war and state socialism is visible in the selection of the fifteen chapters. These are divided into five sections, three of which deal with these themes. The other two sections cover non-communist legacies, and the entangled case studies of minority groups, but, to a degree, the legacies of war and socialism feature here too. The editors seem to have been relatively lax with the topic selection, allowing the authors to pursue diverse cases as long as they subscribe to the theoretical framework. In terms of geographical dispersion, the post-Yugoslav space is covered the most but there are also chapters on Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Albania.

The first section tackles the legacies of war in the post-Yugoslav space and in Greece after the 1940s civil war. Pavlaković argues that while the 1990s Homeland War has been unequivocally accepted as a key historical turning point in Croatia’s modern institutionalised and collective memory and nation-building narratives, the memories of World War II continue to divide public opinion. Likewise, Bozanic demonstrates the persistence of the war legacies which became an integral part of Serbia’s nationalist imagination in the 1990s. The so-called *hajduk* tradition of irregular warfare was reinvented and popularised in Serbian society during the Yugoslav wars, as a mobilisational tool, and as a way to claim symbolic continuity with Serbia’s historic struggle for independence. In a case rarely discussed alongside South Eastern Europe, but reminiscent of the histories of Spain and Portugal, Gkotzaridis analyses the aftermath of the Greek civil war, and shows how nearly twenty years of state suppression and demonisation of the left still could not completely erase the left-wing legacy of anti-fascism and resistance to right-wing dictatorships.

The next two sections focus on the political and everyday legacies of communism, the volume’s most prominent theme, and, in the paraphrased words of the much quoted Todorova, Eastern Europe’s ‘essential and irreducible point of the departure’ (p6). The period of



state socialism and its all-pervasive legacies are not viewed through a normative lens as either positive or negative, but are explored in their permutations and variations. In Romania, debates about communism and its collapse dominated political discourses during elections for more than twenty years after the transition. Thiermann notes the paradox that all candidates had ties to the former regime, yet all claimed the status of victims of communism and anticommunists. The difficulties in assessing the legacy of communism in the region can also be gauged by looking at ongoing contemporary debates on some of the former leaders, as Stankova does with respect to Georgi Dimitrov in Bulgaria, and Janinović with respect to Tito in Serbia and Montenegro. The legacy of the former Yugoslav dictator has recently been given new life, and the notable change in public sentiments towards the socialist past has facilitated the reappropriation and commodification of some of the most recognisable symbols of the former regime, allowing them to be successfully exploited commercially.

In contrast, critical discussion of other socialist legacies, such as the old regimes' material culture – an omnipresent and important part of Albanian identity according to Bickert and Vorpsi – often seems to have been deliberately ignored. In the absence of meaningful political and institutional engagement with the past, or a common culture of remembrance, nostalgia and the rehabilitation of various socialist legacies seem to be a common feature in the region's ongoing process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This can be seen not only in Albania and parts of the post-Yugoslav space, but also in Romania (cf Petrinca's chapter on the peculiar charm of the socialist sea resorts of Vama Veche and 2 Mai). In another study of the politicisation of socialist legacies, Sentevska sees the Eurovision Song Contest in the post-Yugoslav space as a 'launching pad for idealised images and narratives of (national) self-identification' (p217) which reproduce cold-war strategies of local political and media elites.

The fourth section of the book is labelled somewhat unimaginatively – and misleadingly – as 'non-communist legacies'. It discusses the infamous 'antiquisation' process in contemporary Macedonia (Dokmanovic); the enduring legacy of the monarchy in post-1989 Bulgaria (Wien); and the remembrance patterns revealed through the books that were taken

out of circulation in Croatia in the 1990s (Komnenović). To categorise these three chapters as dealing with non-communist legacies is to overlook that it is precisely the rejection of the communist ideological paradigm that has produced these counter-reactions in the cases of both Bulgaria and Croatia, leading to a positive re-evaluation of the monarchy in the former, and the neglect of literary works associated with socialism and its values in the latter. Komnenović's chapter on Croatia stands out within this section (and also within the entire volume), as it is the only one which engages exclusively with non-state initiatives for assessing the past.

The last section, covering minority-related topics, contains one of the volume's strongest chapters. The cross-border (self-)identification of the Burgenland Croats, who were divided between Hungary, Austria and (Czecho-)Slovakia after 1921, explored by Tyran, is not an immediate fit with the volume's focus, yet it represents a great example of the entangled and multifaceted historical experiences of many of the region's minority groups. Less clear-cut is the study by Alama, Ives and Bleak of the consistent 'other-ing' of the Roma, and of people with disabilities, who have been discriminated against regardless of the regime. Despite many similarities, these two communities, present throughout the region, yet deliberately forced into invisibility and marginalisation, require a more nuanced and in-depth analysis than the one offered here. Last but not least, Kovacevic Bielecki's chapter on post-Yugoslav refugees in Norway shows how the legacies of war and its concomitant ethnification spread beyond the region and continue to be reproduced, often in spite of individuals' reluctance to subscribe to exclusionary patterns of identification.

Not all chapters in the volume carry the same analytical value, yet they all clearly illustrate the persistence of specific historical legacies. Thus, the collection represents a useful prolegomenon to a better understanding of the modern Balkans, with its kaleidoscope of overlapping legacies.

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Terence Renaud, *New Lefts. The Making of a Radical Tradition*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 2021, 362pp, ISBN 978-0691220796

At an Australian anti-Vietnam war rally in 1969, new left group Society for Democratic Action distributed a list of protest chants to participants. One suggestion stands out in particular: Ho Ho Ho Chi Minh / We will fight / We will win / Paris, London, and Brisbane. While that sleepy metropolis – capital of the State of Queensland, with a population of half a million – sat incongruously alongside the more well-known centres of rebellion, student radicals imagined themselves part of a global uprising united by a rejection of old forms of protest and organisation, left and right.

Another connection between Brisbane new leftists and their imagined allies abroad was their reading lists. New procurements at the Red and Black Bookshop appeared on the flipside of this leaflet, including books by such luminaries as Wilhelm Reich, Herbert Marcuse, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Régis Debray. This breadth of interest – not merely topically, but temporally – captures something of the argument in Terry Renaud's fabulous new book, *New Lefts*. At the core of Renaud's problematic is: how could activists in Europe seek to constantly revolutionise the means of organisation, while simultaneously retaining fidelity to a dissident left-wing tradition decades in the making?

That a New Left had emerged to challenge the old was widely discussed during the 1960s. Scholars have since adopted numerous definitions of this term, some extending its coverage to encompass civil rights and feminist movements (see, for example, Van Gosse, *Rethinking the New Left*, Palgrave 2005), while others have enlarged its temporal dimension. In so doing, they stretch a movement originally seen as confined to the decade of the 1960s by identifying precedents in the mid-1950s – where a 'first' New Left broke with Stalinism – and after-effects extending well into the 1970s and 1980s.

Renaud's argument is perhaps the most radical to date, positing that the New Left is actually decades older than prior scholarship maintains, extending back as far as the 1930s, when a group of young leftists first identified the need for a (dare I say) third way between the increasing

rigidities of Soviet communism and an obstinate capitalism. Focusing particularly on the German 'neoleftist' group New Beginning, Renaud demonstrates a continuity of personnel and ideals linking clandestine anti-fascists in Weimar Berlin to the rioters on the streets of Paris in May 1968.

At the core of *New Lefts* is a particular reading of generations theory, as articulated by Karl Mannheim, whose *Ideology and Utopia* (written in 1929) was a foundational text for New Beginning. For Mannheim, generations were not crude demarcations based on age, but a social relationship born of shared experience and struggle – making it somewhat like class consciousness. By employing Mannheim's distinctions, Renaud is able to avoid a tired 'age-determinist' reading of New Lefts; as he puts it, 'this book never excludes neoleftists at heart' (p7). It also allows for a fascinating journey across multiple decades of new left commitment, as the anti-fascist generation is challenged, first by the decomposition of class consciousness that accompanied the rise of post-war European welfare states, and then a youthful rebellion against this tired consensus.

Renaud's eight chapters cover roughly forty years. From the dying days of inter-war German democracy, and the New Beginning group's doomed crusade to unite communist and social democratic forces against Nazism, readers are taken to the battlefields of Spain, where the horrors of civil war – and violent inter-left conflict – saw New Leftists increasingly reject the Soviet model. Renaud proposes that the Spanish conflict was the Vietnam of this earlier new left generation. While that parallel is among the weaker of the book's claims, it certainly captures the disillusionment many felt with the status quo.

World War Two saw anti-fascists, many of whom had emigrated to the United States by the time it started, take on substantial roles in the allied effort, which posed a challenge to their focus on spontaneity and direct representation. But the experience of Spain, and then the 'people's war' against fascism, made many New Beginning radicals less distrustful of authority, while also sharpening a particularly critical disposition towards Soviet-line communists. It was the remnant of the New Beginning underground which fought the formation in Soviet-occupied Berlin of the Socialist Unity Party, into which the Social

Democratic Party (SPD) and Communists would fold. While the idea of left unity had motivated New Beginning in the 1930s, a decade later it was anathema.

The 1930s new left's uncomfortable accommodation with capital and power occupies chapter six. Richard Lowenthal, who forms the biographical skeleton of Renaud's narrative, began his political life as an ardent Bolshevik, but went on to play a vital role in drafting and developing consent for the SPD's abandonment of Marxism in the 1959 Godesberg Programme. His pamphlet *Beyond Capitalism*, which laid the groundwork for that transformation, 'combined New Beginning's insights from the 1930s with the immediate post-war consensus that capitalism in its old form had died', making class struggle irrelevant. Lowenthal's journey from revolutionary to reformer is one that Renaud sees as symptomatic of the 'cycle' of new lefts: as each generation becomes ossified, another emerges to challenge it.

In the second half of the 1960s, another New Left (capitalised, for the first time) emerged, led by the SPD's own former youth wing. Charismatic radical Rudi Dutschke, 'with his long hair, tattered sweater and angry demeanour', became a leading figure in this organisation, which itself was a driving force behind the so-called Extra Parliamentary Opposition. In July 1967, this inter-generational conflict manifested when Dutschke sat on a panel alongside Lowenthal, who criticised the upstarts for their romantic utopianism. With characteristic youthful aplomb, Dutschke retorted by directly quoting a pamphlet Lowenthal had authored in the 1930s – 'summoning [a] ghost from the past' (p211) to justify his own youthful idealism.

Renaud's book is a vital one for those of us who study the intellectual history of the far left. By focusing on what he terms 'low theory' (p20), *New Lefts* pieces together a story of how a dissident tradition of now mostly forgotten thinkers shaped key events in German – and broader European – history. Renaud concludes with an exploration of the afterlives of the 1960s New Left, which, like its anti-fascist predecessor, found accommodation with the state and capital, in this case via Green parties and new social movements. The saga of new lefts remains ongoing – Renaud points to the political explosion of

2011 as demonstrating the perhaps perpetual dialectic of structure and spontaneity. This is a book that should be read widely, by activists and academics, old and new.

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