Reviews

Holger Weiss, *A Global Radical Waterfront: The International Propaganda Committee of Transport Workers and the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers, 1921-1937*, Leiden, Brill, 2021, hbk 978-90-04-46291-5; e-book 978-90-04-46328-8. Also available Open Access at: A Global Radical Waterfront

In 1971 Pat Murphy, a veteran of the Seamen's Minority Movement who had also volunteered with the International Brigades in Spain, responded to a request from James Klugmann, the Communist Party of Great Britain's official historian, to furnish him with information 'about the early days of the seamen's struggles'. Writing from his home in Grangetown, Cardiff, Murphy recounted how in the 1930s he had 'lined up in the Seamen's Minority Movement (SMM) which was organizing seamen to fight against wage cuts and the lowering of the standard of existence'.[1] Recalling that 'we had groups in most sea ports in Britain with reliable comrades battling against strong odds to rally the seamen to resist attacks on their conditions', he described the threadbare infrastructure of the head office in London. Based in 'a small room' in Grundy Street in Poplar, which was well placed for both the West India and East India docks, it had 'a table, two chairs, a gas stove and type machine'; and he emphasises that the national organiser Fred Thompson, was 'capable and reliable'.

Alongside his discussion of the SMM Murphy also records his involvement as an 'Executive member of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers Unions'. The significance and reach of this organisation is made clear in Holger Weiss's epic study. Based on impressive, interconnected archive work in multiple languages and countries, the book reconstructs the core activities of the Communist International in relation to seafarers and maritime workers organising between 1921 and 1937. Weiss was also able to consult archival materials in Moscow

which are now largely out of reach of international researchers because of the invasion of Ukraine and subsequent war. Weiss's account centres on the activity of two key organisations tasked by the Comintern to act as Communist-led alternatives to the Amsterdam-based International Transport Workers Federation (ITF), which was positioned as a body of generally traitorous Social Democrats through most of the 1920s, and as fully 'social fascist' in the Third Period.

The organisations that Weiss focuses on are the International Propaganda Committee of Transport Workers (IPCTW), which sought to co-ordinate Communist maritime workers between 1921 and the late 1920s, and the aforementioned International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH). This was established in 1930 and dissolved in 1937, though it was largely defunct by the mid-1930s. Predominantly centred on Europe and North America, the ISH was headquartered in Hamburg until 1933, where it was well placed, among other things, to serve as a hub for Scandinavian/Nordic seafarers' organising, a focus on which is a key strength of Weiss's book. Both organisations also had a presence in Latin American ports and some connections in Africa, South Asia, China and Indonesia. While the extent and depth of these interconnections are not always entirely clear in this account, they were integral to the ways in which Communist maritime organising shaped a markedly different and more progressive racial politics than what prevailed in the ITF. As the discussion of the ISH's failure to develop an adequate response to Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia emphasises, however, the efficacy of such anti-colonial organising was limited.

Through focusing on these hitherto under-researched organisations, Weiss's account presents 'an alternative history of organising and radicalising the maritime transport workers during the interwar period' (p23). The central concern of his book is on organisational histories, though there are fascinating glimpses of more fine-grained political trajectories and solidarities along the way. As he notes, the core focus is 'on the macro and intermediated level, the international headquarters (secretariat) of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers and its forerunner' (p23). Thus Weiss traces the development of the IPCTW and ISH, the challenges they faced, their organisational strategies, and

how they related to the shifting priorities, analysis and concerns of the Comintern. In this regard there is a particular sense of the impact of the contortions from the Third Period to the Popular Front period. As Weiss indicates, the latter period notably involved both a significant *volte face* in the orientation of the ISH towards the ITF, and the former organisation's eventual dissolution.

The ISH moved from a position of making continual and vehement attacks on the ITF to presenting it as an ally, though, unsurprisingly after years of hostility from Communist maritime workers, the ITF did not then rush to reciprocate this new-found friendship. A key contribution here is the book's focus on the precarity and danger of ISH organising post-1933, and its struggles to find a secure place in which to base the organisation, recalling Bertolt Brecht's lines about 'changing countries' 'more often than shoes'. The book gives a vivid sense of the intense difficulties and precarity of seafarers' organising in Europe after 1933, and of the frequently horrific personal costs involved. Weiss documents the impact of both Nazi repression and the Stalinist purges on ISH activists, detailing, for example, the sentencing to death and murder of the Polish Communist and ISH functionary Alfred Bem, alias Adolf Shelley, in Moscow on 25 December 1927.

The book also focuses on the particular sites, and internationalist spaces, that were central to the organising of the IPCTW and the ISH, such as the transnational network of maritime workers' Inter-Clubs that they developed in key ports. There are also some really interesting accounts of particular interactions on board ships where the organisations had a presence – usually in the form of revolutionary cells. These accounts give fascinating insights into some of processes involved in building maritime solidarities and internationalisms, and the negotiations and tensions this involved, for example in the discussion of the racial politics of the Interclub in Hamburg, and the club's spatial dynamics. The distance between Communist idealisation of maritime workers and the realities on the ground also emerge fleetingly. Weiss's discussion of an internal memorandum, for example, notes the way the document focuses on the disruptive impacts of sex work and alcohol on the culture of the Inter-club in the port of Archangelsk. Organising in the port was also affected by

the severe economic hardship in the region, which meant that, in the 1930s, seasonal workers tried to climb on board foreign ships to beg for bread and clothes (p100).

Whilst the book is based on richly textured archival work, there are some limits and tensions. Weiss's account tends to follow along the grain of key Comintern sources, which form the predominant archival base of the project, and his judgements often align with these perspectives. He ends a discussion of attempts to form a 'Red Union' of seafarers in Britain through the SMM, for example, by quoting the sarcastic judgement of Solomon Abramovich Lozovsky, the General Secretary of the Red International of Labour Union: 'We will continue to babble about forming a union for ever but nothing will happen' (p388). Weiss accepts this damning verdict on the SMM, simply commenting 'case closed'. Sources more rooted in the experiences of particular ports give a quite different take on the efficacy and significance of these organisations, though still indicating that a red union was not on the cards. St Clair Drake, for example, argued on the basis of ethnographic research conducted in Butetown, Cardiff in the late 1940s that 'the Seamen's Minority Movement, the Colonial Defense Association, and "Larry" [his pseudonym for the Guyanese Communist seafarers' organiser and ISH activist Harry O'Connell] have had an influence over the years out of all proportion to the numbers of their members'.[2]

Given the depth of Weiss's knowledge of Comintern histories, it would have been instructive to read more about his reflections on the important lens the book casts on various aspects of international communism. The book offers considerable insights into the dynamics of racialisation in Communist internationalisms, and some of the different spaces and practices through which these were negotiated, but the implications of such insights tend to be left unexamined. There is also a considerable amount of material which bears on what Lisa Kirschenbaum has memorably termed Communism's 'man question'.[3] Such gendered perspectives are generally not developed as issues central to the text. For example, it is difficult to fully understand the political trajectories of George Hardy, an intriguing figure who had been involved with the Industrial Workers of the World in Canada before becoming involved in the ISH, without

engaging with the tensions around his extra-marital relationships. These constituted a significant offence to the mores of some British communists, and also occasioned protests by Hardy's wife at CPGB headquarters.[4]

Murphy's letter to Klugmann ends with the comment: 'You'll excuse me not sending stamps for replies as our meagre pittance of a Pension puts new pennies in short supply'. His answers to Klugmann's enquiries, and the precarity of his circumstances, draw attention to both the importance and the difficulties of telling these marginalised histories of Communist maritime organising. Organisations such as the ISH may have failed to live up to some of the grandiose ambition they were freighted with, but, as Weiss's astute study emphasises, their achievements and reach was nonetheless significant. In his considerable efforts to reconstruct their activities, Weiss offers key insights into these lost cultures of maritime internationalisms, as well as into the writing and reconstruction of internationalist left organisational histories.

Dave Featherstone, University of Glasgow

Notes

1. Pat Murphy to James Klugmann, 17 May 1971, CP/IND/KLUG/11/01, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, People's History Museum.
2. St Clair Drake, *Value Systems, Social Structures and Race Relations*, Unpublished PhD thesis University of Chicago, Anthropology, 1954, pp497-8.
3. Lisa Kirschenbaum, 'The Man Question: How Bolshevik Masculinity Shaped International Communism', *Socialist History*, 52, 2017, pp76-84, quote on p77.
4. See K. Morgan and A. Flinn, 'George Hardy (1884-1966), syndicalist and communist', in *Dictionary of Labour Biography XI*, edited by K. Gildart, D. Howell and N. Kirk, Springer, 2003.

Andre Schmid, *North Korea's Mundane Revolution: Socialist Living and the Rise of Kim Il Sung, 1953-1965*, University of California Press 2024, 336pp, ISBN 9780520392847 hb/pb

Andre Schmid's second monograph, *North Korea's Mundane Revolution*, joins recent publications that have sought to reframe histories of North Korea, given that the overwhelming majority of the existing literature tends to focus on Kim Il Sung and the cult of personality created around him. Schmid has chosen to tell a story of the perception, accommodation, co-creation, and, occasionally, critique of the New Living, 'a fantasy shared by both the North Korean Party-state and many Korean women and men … a quest for a better modern life imagined as being possible only through socialism' (p1). To do so, the author has turned to hitherto under-utilised sources that are often dismissed as products of state propaganda: advice literature, contemporary press and published memoirs. The analysis focuses on urban spaces, especially Pyongyang. Without questioning their proximity to approved state messages, Schmid argues that these sources can bring us closer to understanding how urban dwellers were exposed to a set of (often incoherent) moral expectations. In order to make his case, as well as his introduction the author has included an appendix, *An Essay on North Korean Print Media Sources*, in which he details his library research and explains why these otherwise available sources have been left untouched for so long. In addition to his choice of sources and research questions, Schmid has striven to keep Kim Il Sung as marginal to the narrative as possible, by concentrating on a period (1953–1965) when the cult of personality was either absent or still in its formative stages.

Schmid makes two further, overarching, arguments. First, he claims that his account of limited polyphony challenges the idea of a fully centralised North Korean public discourse. Second, he argues that the party's framing of the new, all-encompassing 'code of conduct' regarding the New Living was revolutionary, while demonstrating that its genealogies can often be traced back to colonial, or in certain cases, imperial times.

The complex set of social rules under study in the book ranges from the division of domestic labour between spouses to desirable

consumption patterns, and these areas of interest are reflected in its inner structure The first chapter, 'The Anxieties of Socialist Transition', evokes anxiety in its title, which points to one of the book's important features. Avoiding the projection of a coherent and always clearly known party message or party line, Schmid cites anxiety as a dominant feeling across different strata: planners, bureaucrats, engineers and workers.

The main body of the monograph is divided into four parts, with a total of nine chapters. Part One delves into the challenges of self-reform and self-cultivation, which placed the responsibility on individual citizens to transform their lives and leave behind 'outmoded thought', remnants of past mentalities that were deemed incompatible with socialism. Adherents of outmoded thinking were rarely called bourgeois, however (p50); Schmid makes the point several times that class struggle was seen as a thing of the past rather than a current phenomenon. Advice literature was available for reading about the proper socialist life (as the authors understood it), and extensive surveillance practices ensured that people were pressured to abide by them. The third chapter presents examples of self- and group criticism and explains their function for the givers and the receivers alike.

Part Two discusses efficiency in the workplace, mostly in construction. Chapter Four deals with the broader issue of how the planned economy functioned, and discusses the *kijunnyang* –the author translates the term as 'labour output norms' – which was the main type of information for central planning, and also a key determinant for wages and bonuses; this contextualises his analysis of discourses around the effect of material incentives. The second section of this chapter examines the intentions and obstacles to recruiting more women into the workforce; it highlights that *Chosŏn nyŏsŏng (Women of Korea)*, the magazine published by the Korean Democratic Women's Union (KDWU), the women's organisation that was in many ways linked to the party, struggled with articulating women's needs without sounding dangerously critical. Chapter Five links the suddenly emerging critical voices around the pace and quality of housing construction to the *Ch'ŏllima* movement. In looking at the extensive use of prefab housing, Schmid connects North Korean developments to global trends for combatting the housing crisis.

Part Three centres families and the women within them. Schmid shows how the celebration of the nuclear family was in fact rooted in the colonial era, and notes that a revolutionary moment was missed, as the demographic crisis could have prompted a thorough reassessment of the fixation on the nuclear family (p142). Chapter Six discusses the new marriage laws and the introduction of the *sŏngbun*, a hierarchical status system, demonstrating how it was closely intertwined with systematic support for war widows and orphans. This ties in nicely with the next chapter's focus on the devaluation of domestic work, and the gap between the idea of co-operative couples in which men participated in housework versus the realities of dependents, especially women, who were ridiculed in the national press.

The last part addresses consumption, and much of Schmid's attention here is dedicated to processes and materialities within the home: he traces how the apartment became an increasingly feminised space, and a space to be adorned; and he asserts that the way in which people consumed was supposed to show their high cultural level, although they could also be constrained by scarcity. A surplus of cash could even lead to depravity, as the leaders of one male dormitory framed it (p191). Schmid claims, however, that the class-related implications of the new consumption patterns remained unaddressed (p206).

The author pays particular attention to gender relations in discourses that surrounded the New Living. Most of the critical edge of Schmid's analysis plays out in relation to the internal tensions and incoherence in the implementation of measures that were supposed to fix the mould of the North Korean (urban) socialist woman. In doing so, he relies heavily on *Women of Korea*. He paints a picture of the restricted agency that women were able to exercise in challenging the masculinist norms that undergirded the rule of the party. The memoirs of Ri Myŏngwŏn provide an excellent source to support this gendered perspective: this is perhaps the most intriguing of the corpus that Schmid analyses. Ri was a wartime nurse-turned construction worker, who eventually became a model worker; in her writing she discusses her rise in the workplace hierarchy and her determination to improve production, in part with the inclusion of more women. Although the main thread of the memoir follows Ri's upward trajectory in the workplace, it is interlaced with

her efforts to make adjustments so as to keep up with changing party messaging (or the perceptions thereof).

One of the book's greatest appeals is its use of illustrations and cartoons, which the author reflects on at length. It is easy to imagine them being used in the classroom to facilitate group discussions. Furthermore, Schmid has included texts that he calls 'Flashes of criticism'. These are typographically separated from the main text, and are placed at the end of chapters (five, altogether), printed on a gray background, as additional material or objects of analysis that testify to the limited but existing opportunity to formulate criticism.

The concerns that animate Schmid's monograph – to seek, and indeed to expect to find, explanations and phenomena in North Korean social life beyond the purview of the party – resonates well with much of the scholarship on state-socialist Eastern Europe in recent decades. However, what has been possible in the case of the latter, thanks to the opening up of the archives and a pluralistic public discourse, seems a very distant prospect in the case of North Korea. Re-confirming the limitations of any examples of plurality he could uncover, Schmid explicitly states that his is *not* a bottom-up history. Indeed, at some points, the reader is left wondering whether what are presented as flashes of criticism can really be interpreted as such. Nevertheless, Schmid has turned over every stone to find voices that diverge from the ambiguous party line, and has succeeded more than once.

Schmid has written a history of the period from 1953 to 1965 that manages to almost entirely leave out Kim Il Sung. He explains his reasons for doing so in detail, and these will surely convince many scholars of state socialism. However, while he claims to offer an alternative to the schematic depictions of North Korea that the public knows all too well, the sparseness of references within the book to the broader political history and context (North Korean and beyond) may well make it difficult for the lay reader to follow his narrative.

Réka Krizmanics, Universität Bielefeld

Silvio Pons (translation by Derek Boothman & Chris Dennis), *The Rise and Fall of the Italian Communist Party: A Transnational History*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2024, 412 pp, $70 (hbk) ISBN: 9781503638839

The *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) was singular in its significance to twentieth century history. Arguably the only truly mass communist party in Western Europe, the PCI was also remarkable for its embrace of the 'national road' to socialism, pioneered by long-term Secretary Palmiro Togliatti. As such, much of the historiography on the PCI has adopted either a national perspective or a comparative analysis – with the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF) often being the comparator.

Silvio Pons, Professor at the *Scuola Normale Superiore* in Pisa, offers a different view in his new book, translated into English by Derek Boothman and Chris Dennis. Pons was also author of *The Global Revolution: A History of International Communism, 1917-1991* (2012, 2014), and brings to bear a transnational view on the PCI's voluminous archives, which are held at the *Fondazione Gramsci* in Rome, of which he is President.

Such a perspective is not uncommon amongst historians of the left, and Pons is right to highlight that 'historians of communism have practised transnational history without realising it' (px). Transnationalism is, however, a slippery term. To Pons, it means 'reconstructing a multiplicity of relational and temporal contexts … not only in Europe but in the colonial and post-colonial world' (px).

What makes the PCI a particularly interesting candidate for transnational history is its unique position as a mass party – almost always the second highest vote winner in Italian elections – that was excluded from a formal role in national government. As such it possessed characteristics of a governing party and a non-government organisation: able to both concretely inform Italian policy and to participate in a surprising array of global movements and conversations across Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The PCI, like other communist parties globally, was founded in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and its first few

decades were fundamentally shaped by the shifting political fortunes of the Soviet Union. Internationalism, a core left tenet that Pons uses interchangeably with transnationalism, came to mean the furthering of the interests of the Soviet state, particularly after Stalin's consolidation of power. This had disastrous consequences, as Pons explains, reflected in the failure of German communists to identify the truly dangerous character of Nazism as well as the opportunistic handling of the Spanish Civil War.

Pons focuses on the careers of the PCI's three most significant leaders, the first of whom, Antonio Gramsci, voiced sometimes unveiled criticisms of Stalin's policies and the risk they posed to the communist movement worldwide. 'Gramsci's stance was highly atypical in the context of Western communism', Pons explains. Togliatti, who succeeded Gramsci as party leader after the latter's arrest in 1926, reflected the 'unreserved compliance' that Moscow came to expect from members of the Communist International (p37). He accepted largely without question the various turns of the 1930s – becoming a central architect of Comintern policy alongside the Bulgarian Georgi Dimitrov – and publicly supported the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 while privately doubting its efficacy.

The German invasion of northern Italy in 1943 and the resistance which blossomed created fertile ground for the PCI, which 'despite their lack at the start of any popular rootedness' emerged at the end of the Second World War as a viable governing party (p94). This made them a force that neither Washington not Moscow could easily ignore, allowing the party to become an international power in its own right.

In the post-war period, Pons's account becomes properly transnational. Togliatti successfully ensured that the newly created Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) did not reprise the restrictive role of the Comintern, which had been abolished in 1943. Revelations in 1956 of Stalin's cult of personality, and the Soviet invasion of Hungary only months later, shook the faith of communists worldwide. Within the PCI, Togliatti steered a middle course – critiquing what he called the 'bureaucratic degeneration' (pp156-7) of the Soviet state while at the same time supporting Moscow's disciplining of the 'wayward' Hungarian People's Republic.

Significantly, it was at this point that Togliatti began to champion a new concept – 'polycentrism' – that challenged the blocs of the Cold War. This concept shared much with the model of non-aligned socialism advocated by the Yugoslav party led Josep Tito, with whom Togliatti had an often-testy relationship. The Italians began to forge their own international links, particularly to parties and liberation movements in northern Africa. Polycentrism also provided a useful answer to questions posed by the Sino-Soviet split: peaceful coexistence and violent revolution could cohabit the one planet, if respect were given to national sovereignty.

Polycentrism was also a statement of reality: few if any anti-colonial revolutionaries were willing to follow Moscow's line unwaveringly, and Togliatti hoped Italy's 'national road' might be more appealing. The PCI also traded on its history as a national liberation movement and Italy's lack of colonial possessions – having relinquished all such claims in 1947 – to appear as an honest mediator between Europe and its rebellious colonies. The PCI was able to condemn France's war in Algeria – Togliatti called it a 'war of extermination' – while the PCF supported the ongoing bloodshed (p178). The PCI developed a long-lasting relationship with Algeria's FLN after independence.

If this book has a hero, it is almost certainly Enrico Berlinguer, the third leader it focuses on, about whom Pons has already written one book (2006). After Togliatti's death in 1964, Berlinguer became increasingly prominent in party affairs, and he was made General Secretary in 1972. This was a generational change – Berlinguer was over two decades younger than his predecessor; however, Pons sees it as a continuation of Togliatti's legacy. Berlinguer was the most prominent of the PCI's leading group in condemning the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, judging Moscow's policy of 'limited sovereignty' in the People's Republics to be in contradiction with the worldwide campaign against American intervention in Vietnam (pp226-7). The Soviets responded by attempting to assassinate Berlinguer during a visit to Bulgaria in 1973.

In that same year, Berlinguer announced an 'historic compromise' with the centre-right Christian Democrats. This was partly grounded in the history of national unity government in the mid-1940s, but Pons demonstrates that it also reflected the Italians' shock at events

in Chile, where, in 1973, a democratically elected socialist government was removed in a CIA-backed coup. Berlinguer 'drew from these Chilean events the lesson that any … split in the political system and in society had to be avoided', particularly given Italy's already-fragile democracy (p242). The historic compromise laid the foundations for an unprecedented degree of electoral success and political influence, and the Communists joined a 'national solidarity' government from 1976-9. Ironically, this government oversaw a period of economic austerity after the oil shock, and battled a far-left terrorist campaign from the Red Brigades (*Brigate Rosse*).

During the 1980s, polycentrism became more reality than theory. China re-emerged as a global player whom Berlinguer found to be receptive to the PCI's world vision, while a revived peace and disarmament movement and a democratised European Community were welcomed as part of an emerging 'third way' between Soviet and American agendas. Furthermore, the elevation of Mikael Gorbachev as Soviet leader healed what had become an open split between Rome and Moscow. Berlinguer's funeral in 1984, attended by over one million people, had a pronounced impact on Gorbachev. This display of 'popular national emotion' was 'greatly different from ours', Gorbachev assessed, reflecting the tired nature of Moscow's project (p313).

However, the seeming unity of reform communism augured the beginning of the end. Gorbachev's attempts to revive the ailing Soviet system along democratic and participatory lines ended up breaking it, with the Berlin Wall falling in 1989 and the Union itself collapsing two years later. In 1990, knowing the end was nigh, the PCI began transforming into a 'democratic party of the left', which to this day maintains a strong presence in Italian politics, particularly in the party's former 'Red Belt'.

Pons's history is unapologetically top-down: the transnational connections discussed are at the level of national leadership, with regular party members entirely absent. This means that there remains a rich transnational history to be written of the PCI's global connections at the everyday level. Australia had the highest proportion of Italian emigration after the Second World War, and it is unsurprising that the PCI had a substantial impact on antipodean communist thinking. Following the

work of scholars like Simon Battiston, we can also see how PCI members in Australia created organisations to foster party identity abroad. Pons's intervention is an important contribution to such a project.

Jon Piccini, Australian Catholic University

Yulia Gradskova, *The Women's International Democratic Federation, the Global South and the Cold War: Defending the Rights of Women of the 'Whole World'?*, London, Routledge, 2022, 222 pages, ISBN 9780367504762

At the end of November 1945, more than 800 anti-fascist women from 37 countries met at the Palais de la Mutualité in Paris with the aim of creating a transnational women's organisation capable of defending the recently won peace, advocating the rights of women and children and preventing the resurgence of fascism. This meeting gave birth to the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), probably the most important transnational women's organisation of the Cold War, which was active until 1991. Despite the importance of this organisation, which was present in more than 100 countries and particularly influential among women of the Global South, it has been largely ignored by historiography. Historians of transnational feminist organisations have interpreted it as part of the network of so-called 'Soviet fronts', dependent on the interests of 'Moscow', and as a transmission belt of Soviet foreign policy towards 'women of the whole world' – as the title of its journal, published in several languages, puts it. Its policy of defending women's rights was thus seen as a mere screen for Soviet interests in the context of the 'cultural cold war', in which women's emancipation became an element in the competition between the two blocs. This view began to change in the 2010s, in particular thanks to the work of historian Francisca De Haan, who denounced the continuity of a 'Cold War paradigm' that had shaped the organisation's image. De Haan has highlighted the importance of the feminist policies developed by the WIDF: according to her, its defence of women's rights in decolonising

countries, and the place given to racialised women within its governing bodies, might even allow us to speak of it as supporting an intersectional feminism, in contrast to other major international feminist organisations that focus exclusively on the interests of Western women – and are direct competitors of the WIDF in attracting women worldwide.[1]

Yulia Gradskova's work is the first monograph entirely devoted to the WIDF and follows the path opened by de Haan, by writing the history of the organisation with a particular focus on its evolving relations with women in the Global South, mainly in the period between the Bandung Conference (1955) and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The author adopts a theoretical approach based both on the transnational history of organisations and the Cold War, and a postcolonial feminist lens. In particular, the originality of Gradskova's work lies in her analysis of the history of the WIDF from the perspective of its relations with women in the Global South, using both a macro and micro-historical approach. This analysis reveals the internal complexity of the organisation and the adaptation of its strategies and discourses to a geopolitical context in constant evolution from the 1950s to the fall of the USSR and marked by anti-colonial struggles. The research is mainly based on a large corpus of unpublished sources from Russian archives, in particular the archive of the Committee of Soviet Women (CSW). The correspondence between the women in the leading bodies of the Federation and the representatives of the national sections is particularly rich and offers a nuanced view of the internal disagreements and different positions of the women of the Federation, thus moving away from the traditional view of this organisation as a homogeneous bloc controlled by communist, particularly Soviet, women.

The first two chapters of the book describe the WIDF as an organisation based on transnational women's solidarity, with a threefold objective that has hardly changed in its almost 50 years of existence: the defence of peace, women's rights and children's rights. It also examines various aspects of the Soviet role in the Federation, especially through the influence of CSW women in the Federation's decision-making and the role of the WIDF in Soviet policy during the Cold War; and in the course of this the author problematises the notion of 'Soviet front organisation' through which the Federation has traditionally been analysed. Chapter

3 looks at the WIDF's strategy and discourses in the first decades of its existence, highlighting the maternalism that characterises its discourse of advocacy for the rights of mothers and children. The following chapters form the core of the analysis of the relationship between the WIDF and the Global South – Asia, Africa and Latin America. Chapter 4 looks at the integration of women's issues from the Global South into the Federation's policies – particularly on the questions of anti-colonialism and anti-racism – which at times clashed with the maternalist vision of the Federation's official discourse. Chapter 5 analyses the ways in which the WIDF exported the Soviet model of women's emancipation as a role model for women in the global South, particularly through the example of racialised women in the Soviet Central Asian Republics. The next two chapters deal with the ties between African, Asian and Latin American women members of the Federation and its leadership bodies, which developed from the disputes and contradictions that followed after the inclusion of the anti-colonial struggle of women from the Global South, and, especially, the support for an anti-imperialist discourse in some sections of the Federation. The internal diversity of the Federation is also addressed through a biographical approach to some of the Federation's leaders from Argentina, Nigeria, Jordan and Sudan. Finally, the author looks at the work of the WIDF during the International Women's Year and the UN Decade for Women, showing how in this last period, organisations from the Global South gained a dominant position in the Federation and shifted their interests and discourses towards the adoption of the new language of human rights and development.

Yulia Gradskova's research is a crucial contribution not only to the history of the WIDF, but also to the history of the Cold War and transnational women's organisations, particularly those linked to the Global South – even if some questions could have been developed further, such as the way in which the Federation dealt with racial issues. Her work shows that gender politics was indeed a central challenge in the Cold War, making the WIDF an important actor in the 'cultural Cold War'. Women in the Global South were attracted to an organisation that, unlike Western feminist organisations, combined women's rights advocacy with anti-racism and anti-colonialism. On the other hand, the policies of the WIDF reveal the contradictions of an organisation that,

while claiming to defend the interests of women in the Global South, placed itself in a position of superiority by exporting the Soviet model as an ideal of emancipation and modernisation. The growing importance of women from the Global South within the Federation put this discourse under strain; at the same time, internal contradictions show that there was a place for dissent within the Federation. In short, Gradskova's book opens up new paths of research on transnational women's mobilisations during the Cold War; the relations between women in the Soviet bloc and the so-called 'Third World'; and the significance of gender politics in the Cold War, a field that has not yet been sufficiently explored.

Mercedes Yusta, Université Paris 8

Notes

1. 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*, Vol 19 No 4, 2010, pp547-573; Francisca De Haan, 'The Global Left-Feminist 1960s: From Copenhagen to Moscow and New York', *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*, Routledge, 2018, pp230-242.