

James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, Steffi Marung, eds. *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020. 352 pp. \$100.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-04650-5.



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The transnational history of Cold War Eastern Europe has been a developing field for at least two decades now, to the point where a researcher might feel deficient if they have not incorporated some larger perspective into their work. But it may be fair to say that the dominant approach so far has been episodic: East Europeans as tourists, East Europeans flirting with visitors from far away, or East Europeans consuming Western goods.[1] Such work, while enormously valuable, does rest upon an implied frame in which Eastern Europe is isolated and disconnected from the world; otherwise the travel and the consumption might not be so interesting. In hindsight, perhaps the transnational journey has set the stage for the global turn. At the same time, though, the book under review shows that something has been lost, too—thrown from the baggage compartment, as it were, during a sharp and rapid turn.

James Mark and his colleagues, Artemy M. Kalinovsky and Steffi Marung, have been engaged in a multi-year, multi-institutional research project on global socialism that has resulted in an

impressive series of conferences; earlier, with a different group of colleagues, another similarly scaled research endeavor led by Mark produced the 2019 volume *1989: A Global History of Eastern Europe* (with Bogdan C. Iacob, Tobias Rupprecht, and Ljubica Spaskovska). Collectively, this global enterprise succeeds in making the case for situating Cold War Eastern Europe in multiple global contexts. *Alternative Globalizations* offers fourteen essays on a multitude of globalized networks: of capital, labor, scholarship, activism, and diplomacy. Each contains dozens of examples of the embeddedness of Eastern Europe—the Soviet Union throughout is usually included in that regional category—in the Cold War world.

Mark and his colleagues for the most part eschew the close-angled lens of the earlier transnational work. The initial essay, by Mark and Yakov Feygin, surveys three decades of development thinking in Eastern Europe—or what they provocatively call an “alternative world order” (p. 36). Péter Vámos rewrites China’s rivalry with the Soviet Bloc in the Third World, making the story

much more multilateral than the old version centered on Moscow. Massimiliano Trentin shows that East Germany was a player in its own right in the Middle East, pursuing economic and political goals (aiming to box out West Germany and gain diplomatic recognition) that did not always fall in line behind Moscow's dictates. Iacob gives us the globalism of colloquia and seminars, as scholarly and cultural organizations, UNESCO in particular, structure the relationship of Balkan scholars to the Global South.

The pitfalls of this approach could be captured in a deft yet treacherous comment by Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, in his essay on the Soviet Union's relations with "the decolonized world" of the late 1960s. Recent efforts to recast the Cold War as a conflict of different modernities, he writes, fail "to interrogate the problematic nature of capitalism, and by extension communism" (p. 59). Thus all of contemporary history becomes the playground for the astute global analyst, and communism is just a conceptual appendage of capitalism. Sanchez-Sibony's work is always stimulating, and this essay is one I would hope any scholar of postwar economic or political history would read; the omnivorous tone, at the same time, could obscure his valuable effort—and that of this volume—to decenter capitalist models of development.

A number of essays take a more contingent approach, identifying individual experiences and placing them at the center of global narratives. Sometimes, as in Iacob's contribution or those by Marung, Kalinovsky, and Hanna Jansen, the actors are academics, and their actions are books and conferences. Alena Alamgir and Christina Schwenkel explore the experiences of Vietnamese guest workers in Eastern Europe, principally Czechoslovakia. Łukasz Stanek explores the impact of East European architects in developing cities worldwide. Maxim Matusevich gives voice to African travelers (especially students) to the Soviet Union as they encountered the darker sides of Soviet anti-racism. Quinn Slobodian teases apart the

varied assumptions and messages contained in East German citizens' reactions to the Tiananmen Square Massacre in June 1989. Each of these essays shows how alternative globalizations not only existed at the level of policymaking and investment but also shaped and were shaped by individual lives.

Transnational and global history alike, I would argue, must be wary of the lure of shiny objects: those moments of surprising connection that seem to encapsulate a world of relationships despite walls and blocs. The essays in *Alternative Globalizations* are often as much about limitations on the global as they are about its possibilities. Thus Kim Christiaens and Idesbald Goddeeris are right to argue, in their contribution to this volume, for situating Solidarity in the global struggle for human rights.[2] Yet the story they tell is as much an anatomy of a reticence (to quote Václav Havel) as it is of engagement. Much of the trade union's engagement with the Third World was the work of its representatives abroad, after all, and thus not indicative of real interest back in Gdańsk. Echoing Sanchez-Sibony, I would urge global historians to question the nature of national histories, and by extension global histories. *Alternative Globalizations* offers a variety of navigation systems for the would-be traveler of those histories.

Notes

[1]. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[2]. A theme explored as well by Robert Brier in his forthcoming *Poland's Solidarity Movement and the Global Politics of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2021).

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