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The Communist Transnational? Transnational studies and the history of the Comintern

Oleksa Drachewych 

Abstract

In the last decade, the historiography of international communism during the interwar period, organized by the Bolshevik-led Communist International, or Comintern, which existed from 1919 to 1943, has undergone significant shifts with one prominent new trend in the field being transnational studies. With the transnational turn, scholars have been able to reconsider how communist ideas were transmitted throughout the world, moving past traditional histories that focused either on national communist parties or the bureaucracy of the Communist International. Though transnational studies of the Comintern are still relatively new to the field, they have provided more information about communist front organizations, the lives of individual communists, and the networks in which these individuals traveled. Transnationality has also helped shift communism away from being a peripheral subject in the histories of imperialism, diaspora communities and radical networks of the interwar period to being a prominent feature of studies on these topics. In this historiographical review of transnational studies of the Comintern, it may be better to colloquially refer to the Communist International as the Communist Transnational as a historiographical frame of reference, reflecting how significant these political or cultural exchanges were across borders.

1 | INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 1990s, studies on the history of the Communist International (Comintern), the Soviet Union's organization to oversee international communism from 1919 to 1943, tended to take one of two forms. They were either broad surveys, looking to explore new methodologies or conclusions that could be made with the opening of the Russian archives following the collapse of the Soviet Union or they prominently focused on communist parties in one nation or region. Despite the opening of the Comintern Archives with the fall of the Soviet Union and the potential for new avenues of inquiry, Comintern historiography seemed stuck in reconsidering old controversies or confirming long-held suspicions. Debates revolved around the totalitarian nature of the Comintern, Moscow's control of communism, and the effects of Soviet policy on the development of the Communist International. Comparative studies were few and far between.

In recent years, however, as more scholars have delved into the archives, benefitting from greater access thanks to easier travel and an increase of digitized sources, many have started to move past looking at only the global dimensions or national peculiarities of international communism during the interwar period. A recent essay, on the rise of

biographical studies and the Comintern, printed in this periodical details one of many avenues that has become in vogue (Morgan, 2012).

Another important new avenue in the historiography is that of transnationalism and the Comintern. Scholars have begun to identify that the Comintern, while having an international scope, and influencing national parties, was also a transnational body. Influenced by major proponents of this approach, Comintern scholars started to apply the transnational turn to their exploration of the Comintern, its organization, its member parties, its tactics, and its individual members. Delineating itself from the obvious international dimension of the Comintern, the global scope of its oversight of communist parties, its transnational nature, exemplified by the transfer of people, ideas and structures of communist parties, beyond simply the transmission from Moscow to national party, or vice-versa, but between parties and across borders, should be highlighted. It may be more useful to colloquially retitling the organization as the Communist Transnational when discussing these developments as a historiographical frame of reference. The growing literature, especially in the past decade, on communist front organizations, bodies used by the Comintern either to represent a broadly-acceptable public face of its efforts or suborganizations which aimed to lead communist efforts on certain campaigns, across borders highlight how transnational studies have become a growing and exciting field in the historiography of international communism. While few controversies exist yet, transnationality as a concept is one that can no longer be ignored in the study of interwar international communism, and the Comintern especially, and several subfields of study have developed in the historiography: radical networks, solidarity studies and transnational organizations. These fields, when taken together, make up this new historiographical trend, and give historians a richer appreciation of how the Comintern operated and how influential communism was during the interwar period.

2 | TRANSNATIONALISM IMPLIED

Though the transnational turn in Comintern studies is a relatively new phenomenon, the transnational nature of Comintern activities was a concept of which scholars implicitly were aware. For example, historians had noted the role such Comintern luminaries as Mikhail Borodin had in developing the nascent Chinese Communist Party in the early 1920s or in ensuring Comintern tactics were employed in its relationship with Chinese Nationalists (The Kuomintang) (Holubnychy, 1979; Jacobs, 1981; Jacobson, 1993, pp. 120–127; Jefeits, 1997). The Comintern sent representatives to other parties to arbitrate disputes or to ensure the parties followed the correct line. Autobiographies and biographies of important Comintern functionaries showed the importance the exchange of ideas or their individual travel represented in communist circles (Hardy, 1956; Haywood, 1978; La Guma, 1997; Roux, 1944; Smith, 1993).¹ These were, in essence, transnational exchanges, through the movement of personnel to transmit Comintern edicts or tactics to the local level.

Transnationalism was also casually reflected by the focus on comparative approaches to the Comintern. There was a sense from scholars, through a variety of conferences and collections, to reflect on the similarities and differences across many regions. These studies often had a greater focus on European communism and fit into previous debates, often intervening on problems of Moscow's totalitarian control. The term transnational was not used, but in performing these comparatives, scholars did implicitly suggest how the Comintern was more than just an international body with national sections (Narinsky & Rojahn, 1996; Rees & Thorpe, 1998). Of these comparative studies, one of the strongest examples of this tendency is found in a collection edited by Matthew Worley (2004). With some of the top scholars of national communist parties, and specifically looking at the impact of the tactical shifts of the Third Period, 1928–1935, it sought to show that there was not a monolithic implementation, nor that these tactical shifts, which typically were seen as devastating to international communism, were uniform. In fact, the collection articulates how success or failure of parties wildly varied and often had to do with the level of influence of the Comintern and local conditions. But in doing so, many of these historians touched on one of the key aspects of future transnational studies of the Comintern – the spread of ideas and people across borders. In this case, the

dissemination of Comintern tactics from Moscow brought with it, at times, greater oversight and interaction between Moscow and other nodes of contact, such as the party leadership. Touching on this impetus, Worley co-edited another volume, this time with Kevin Morgan and Norman LaPorte (LaPorte, Morgan, & Worley, 2008) which approached the issue of Stalin's increased influence on the Comintern with a transnational comparative, becoming one of the first comparative studies to examine what had been accepted as a broad pattern in the Comintern and directly compare its development across borders. (2008, pp. 1–7).

By the second half of the first decade of the 2000s, Comintern scholars started to inherently take transnational approaches to their topics, beginning what has developed into a series of subfields within Comintern studies that when combined make up the Communist Transnational historiography. Focusing on the networks that developed among communist followers, the exchange of ideas between Moscow and individual parties, the experiences in the Comintern bureaucracy and the development and evolution of communist front organizations that required approaches that worked beyond national parties to succeed, these scholars of communist transnationalism have made significant contributions to our knowledge of the communist experience during the interwar period. These subgroups include: diaspora networks, transnational radical networks, transnational front or sub-organizations, and transnational solidarity.

3 | A: DIASPORA NETWORKS

The first studies that exposed the value of transnationalism were those that focused on the networks cultivated by international communists. In particular, the global networks of subgroups of communists tended to be the best indicators to show the value of a transnational approach. Josephine Fowler (2007) was one of the first, showing in her pioneering study of Chinese and Japanese communist networks how their specific values and issues resonated not just in China and Japan, but in diaspora communities across the Pacific. Anna Belogurova (2017) has expanded on Fowler's studies by looking specifically at Chinese diaspora communities in South East Asia and in the Americas. These communities were connected globally, having shared values and beliefs, including deference to the positions of Chinese nationalist Sun Yat-sen and support of national rights in the United States and in Cuba. For example, their support of Cuban independence from American imperialism was one prominent campaign and was merged with Chinese demands for better wages and labour and political equality. They had shared publications and through these networks, certain party models and organization were transplanted between communities, developing a distinct approach to the communist experience and showing directly how ideas were borrowed and reapplied in different contexts through these networks.

This attention to diaspora communities is not limited to Asian communities.² Margaret Stevens' recent work (2017) has shown how the Americas had their own networks where communists, nationalists and black activists traveled. Stevens shows the value of regional communist front organizations, such as *La Liga Antiimperialista de las Americas* (LADLA), predating Willi Münzenburg's much more well-known initiative of the League Against Imperialism (LAI), in popularizing certain campaigns unique to the Americas. For example, American and Latin American communists worked together on a "Hands Off Haiti" campaign. The American Negro Labour Congress, a Comintern-initiative originally based in Chicago in 1925 which later moved to New York in the late-1920s because of the growing Caribbean diaspora community, helped unify racial equality efforts with anti-imperial efforts in the Americas. These networks agitated on behalf of the nine accused African American teens in the Scottsboro Trial of 1931 and made up a significant part of communism's presence in the interwar period. Sandra Pujals (2014) has shown that New York was a major hub of Comintern transnational forces, where radicals and communists intermingled with Caribbean immigrants and in turn became aware of Caribbean issues, while also using these networks to foster anti-imperial sentiment, presaging the Soviet Union's support of the Cuban revolution and other leftist movements in the region. These networks also took more subtle forms where travelers among the reds became future cultural icons, borrowing communist ideas that influenced their later work in Latin America.³ Many other scholars specifically studying the

Americas have written widely on the LADLA and leftist anti-imperialism during the interwar period, as exemplified by the work of Daniel Kersffeld (2010, 2012). Kersffeld seems hesitant to use “transnationalism” to describe his approach or the work being done by LADLA, but in showing the scope and influence of LADLA and its aims, he describes the exchange of ideas that exemplify a transnational organization.

4 | B: TRANSNATIONAL RADICAL NETWORKS

Related to this study of networks was the growing attention to investigating at the history of red followers, who had come to the Soviet Union to see the workers' paradise that the Soviet Union was promoting in its rhetoric. Subgroups of communists were able to take advantage of the Bolsheviks' interest in specifically radicalizing and gaining inroads in their communities, such as African Americans, who had higher quotas in order to ensure communism could become a force in reaching black workers. A wealth of studies has focused specifically on this racial dimension, highlighting both the unique experiences of African American communists, including their reaction to Soviet society and how it influenced their views (Carew, 2010; Carew, 2015; Matusевич, 2017; McClellan, 1993). Several prominent figures in the debates on what the Comintern termed the “Negro Question,” from Claude McKay to Harry Haywood, spoke favorably at one point or another about their experiences, having an influence on how communism was presented in the United States and internationally (Haywood, 1978; McKay, 1923). They were not the only group that the Soviet Union hoped to draw into its orbit as intellectuals, many with leftist leanings, inspired in some way by the aims of the Soviet Union, whether be its perceived egalitarianism or its anti-imperialism, traveled to the communist state. Cultural propaganda was a prominent feature of the Comintern's, and the Soviet Union's, efforts and it resonated with these individuals, with many latching onto the USSR's attempts to cultivate a new form of modernity in the twentieth century. These figures were critical in promoting Soviet aims globally, developing a powerful transnational network that sought to inculcate everyday loyalties to communism and the Soviet Union, defending it from Western animus towards communism and often downplaying the excesses of the Soviet regime. These individuals were often drawn to the Soviet Union through cultural front organizations and were treated well, with the Soviet Union specifically targeting these cultural and intellectual leaders for propaganda purposes (Stern, 2007).

When these ideas moved outside of the Soviet Union and to different regions, they took different forms that reflected regional variations. Ricardo Melgar Bao (2008) has shown how the Bolshevik Revolution influenced Latin American radicals to define imperialism differently than Europeans, giving Latin American anti-imperialism a distinct flavor across the region. Bao (2009) has also looked at intellectual networks explicitly, explaining how they operated, and although transnationalism is not explicit, implicitly it is hard to ignore, as the transnational exchange of ideas and concepts from the Bolshevik Revolution and the Comintern had to be applied in local ways.

Biographical dictionaries have remained an important addition to the study of the Comintern and, following Lazitch and Drachkovitch's (1973; 1986) landmark volume, several have been published in different languages and focusing on different regions (Buckmiller & Meschkat, 2007; Gotovitch & Narinsky, 2001). These dictionaries, most recently exemplified by Lazar and Victor Jefeits' biographical dictionary (2015) of interwar communists in the Americas, inherently show the radical networks that formed through international interwar communism and the Comintern. Much as other historians of Latin American communism seem hesitant to explicitly highlight the transnational nature of their work, the elements of radical transnational networks are easy to find in their biographical dictionary which highlights the exchange of radicals and ideas across borders. A major emphasis of their entries is how much cross-border travel there was for communists but also the influence the Soviet Union had, exemplified, just as other intellectuals or communists had, by attendance and involvement in the Comintern training schools such as the Lenin School.⁴ These communists are members of national parties, but also develop an identity as a communist internationally outside the nation state, operating transnationally, bringing what they learned from their trips abroad back home to help spearhead communist platforms and campaigns.

5 | C: TRANSNATIONAL FRONT AND SUB ORGANIZATIONS

The history of the Comintern's front organizations has expanded considerably by scholars looking past a top down view of the Comintern bureaucracy or a party-centric view, looking solely at party structures, and by applying a transnational framework. The opening of the Comintern archives allowed scholars who wanted to learn more about some of the Comintern's front organizations and specific movements to finally fully provide those histories. This attention to front organizations has greatly deepened our understanding of the Comintern's efforts on anti-imperialism and race. Prior to these endeavors, the historiography on the topic tended to be defined entirely within national party circles, from the Comintern apparatus itself, or at most, the interaction between Moscow and the follower parties. One of the best examples of the transnational turn redefining how to approach a topic and internationalizing it was Hakim Adi's work (2013). He provided one of the first overviews of the interconnection of Black Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and the Comintern. No longer was the story focused only on the Comintern's implementation of self-determination for African Americans, the so-called Black-Belt thesis, or to a lesser extent, the development of the Native Republic Thesis, the application of self-determination for black Africans in South Africa. Adi was able to show how the Comintern's attention to black issues was because of new ideas from communists in the periphery and black communists coming to Comintern schools. These communists formed, or supported, front organizations such as the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) or the *Ligue pour la defense de la race negre* (LDRN) which operated beyond national borders, seeking to organize black workers in the black Atlantic, or in the French Empire respectively. It was the first of many studies that were able to show that these movements were not bound by national parties and extended across borders, showing that these organizations and interested communists were able to develop their own networks to enhance the impact of their message.

Comintern specialists were also blessed by growing attention to two front organizations that desperately demanded fresh eyes with archival documents, the ITUCNW and the League against Imperialism (LAI). Whereas Adi focused on one theme and its global and transnational reach, these studies detailed the genesis of specific front organizations, their formation, their aims, and their organization. While including much detail that previously had not been available, becoming important additions to the history of Comintern organization, they also connected these organizations with their wider transnational impact. For example, the ITUCNW was seen as a counterweight to non-communist Pan-African movements, such as Garveyism. Its leadership, especially George Padmore, tended to ascribe to a Pan-Africanist approach and was successful at establishing contacts across Europe and Africa for the purposes of expanding the reach of the organization and its organs (Weiss, 2014; Weiss, 2016). Following the aforementioned LADLA, the LAI became a body that connected colonial representatives with like-minded individuals, initially regardless of whether they agreed with communism or not, to combat imperialism. While those conclusions had been made previously (Jones, 1996), these newer studies highlighted these networks and their transnational nature, explaining how chapters were established around the world, transferring ideas, people and messages all for the purpose of developing a global movement across borders (Pettersson, 2014a; Pettersson, 2014b). This work builds on the work of other historians, such as Kersfeld (2007) who had already shown how the first congress of the LAI allowed the development of connections between communists in the Americas and the progressive movements of interwar Europe.

6 | D: TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Building on these studies, Holger Weiss (2017) edited a collection which included articles which extended transnational frameworks to other front organizations, terming them "non-party mass and sympathizing organizations," reflecting how they were outside of traditional party structures, but undoubtedly aligned with the Comintern, with the aim of discussing international solidarity and exploring other understudied organizations, including the International Red Aid and International of Seamen and Harbor Workers. These scholars emphasize the role of cities acting

as hubs for the cultural, political and intellectual exchange of communist ideas. This focus on solidarity has led to new projects that place generalized campaigns as a prominent theme in transnational studies of the Comintern (Albert, 2017; Brasken, 2015). These studies focus less on the Comintern or communism specifically, but more on the aims and campaigns instituted and supported by communists. For example, communists, among other groups, placed transnational pressure, developing a Latin American transnational identity, in support of Augusto Sandino in Nicaragua until the partnership splintered over ideological issues (Carr, 2014; Jefeets & Jefeets, 2017). These solidarity campaigns often took an ideal (e.g. anti-imperialism) and generalized it, developing networks of individuals and groups who mutually championed achieving that goal. For many of the scholars focusing on interwar communist solidarity, German communist Willi Münzenberg occupies a key role, as founder of the LAI and later the World Congress against War and Fascism and as one who sought to legitimately promote anti-imperialism or anti-fascism and took advantage of these radical networks. He is almost lionized in the field, rescuing him from being a peripheral character in the history of international communism or, as seen in Sean McMeekin's (2003) assessment, a conman. The focus on transnationalism is a prominent feature of those looking at his influence, exemplified in the findings of the Münzenberg forum (Bayerlein, Brasken & Sonnenburg, 2018).⁵

This attention to these organizations and movements of the Comintern has led other scholars to take transnational approaches to the study of other movements and organizations of the Comintern.⁶ Whether it is the Hands Off movements, that included attention to imperial activities in China or Abyssinia, and other international campaigns, (Stutje, 2015; Sullivan, 2013), or the networks in which communists traveled, exemplified in the story of Indian revolutionary M.N. Roy, who started in the United States, as a revolutionary nationalist, before moving to Mexico where his meeting with Borodin turned his attention to communism and he became an early representative of Mexican communism. His role in developing Indian communism, centred in Berlin, while also coordinating radicals in Moscow and India, inherently was transnational (Manjapra, 2010b).⁷

7 | E: BROADER APPROACHES

With the addition of greater detail and with a transnational approach in mind, other scholars have built on these studies and started to reconsider what they mean for long held debates in Comintern historiography, namely the totalitarian nature of Soviet control of international communism and the individual agency of actors and organizations within the whole apparatus (Drachewych & McKay, 2019).⁸ Furthermore, the history of the Comintern had begun to enter more prominently into other transnational studies. Although a recent introduction for a collection on transnational solidarity by Bayerlein, Baskin and Weiss (Weiss, 2017, pp. 1–2) argues that general histories of interwar transnationalism have underplayed the role of Comintern organizations, scholars have started to look at the transnational hubs that they describe in their collection and have placed greater emphasis on the communist movement than had otherwise been. The focus on cities as hubs for transnational exchange of ideas led to non-Comintern scholars recognizing the importance of communist networks in broader movements in interwar European cities. Anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, political equality, and racial equality were not exclusive aims of the left and as a result, communists influenced, and were influenced by, other like-minded individuals on these hot-button issues in the interwar period. Paris, London and Berlin, to name three, have seen increased scholarly attention, as all saw radicals and ideas come together from various other movements (Boittin, 2010; Goebel, 2015; Manjapra, 2010a; Pennybacker, 2009). Communists realized the value of being in a major European capital city and hosting major conferences outside of Moscow, following from their predecessor, the Second International, which held conferences all over Europe prior to the First World War, and stationed in Amsterdam following it. The LAI held its major conferences in Brussels and Frankfurt (Petersson, 2014a, pp. 49–71). The ITUCNW initially hoped to host its founding meeting in London but had to settle on Hamburg (Adi, 2013, pp. 97–110). In other cases, a biographical approach, combined with a transnational perspective, echoed the conclusions of some transnational Comintern scholars, highlighting how

individual people were vectors for these ideas, merging two prominent trends that have started to become more commonplace in the study of the Comintern (Pennybacker, 2009).

These intellectual exchanges were not limited to Europe and the histories of broader radicalism in Africa and South Asia have also started to include the history of communism and its influence on anti-imperialism and racial politics in each region (Bush, 1999; Chatterjee, 2017; Derrick, 2008). One notable approach, emphasized by Kris Manjappa (2010a), sees Indian communism's influence on Indian anti-colonialism as less the application of a Westernized platform, but instead, a set of ideas open to interpretation and with a variety of possible outcomes, spurred on by their transnational transmission from elsewhere, highlighting Berlin as the significant "nexus" of Indian anti-colonial thought.

Coupled with these conclusions regarding the exchange of ideas and the establishment of transnational front organizations, transnational approaches to the study of the Comintern have changed how historians explore how communists themselves lived, operated, believed and created a shared experience. Further moving past traditional models that looked at individual parties or the Comintern organization, scholars have unearthed documents of everyday communists, many of whom became cogs in the system, but firm believers in the brand of communism that the Bolsheviks and the Comintern promoted. Brigitte Studer's landmark study (2015) represented a paradigm shift in how best to track the lives of many of these functionaries. No longer was it appropriate to see communists as "Comintern agents" with no agency. Nor could many communists be seen as simply members of a national party. While these were concepts already growing in importance in major historiographical debates, her work was one of the first to effectively show the formative nature of the shared experience of many of these followers. Many communists, often Western Europeans, came to Moscow, becoming Comintern functionaries, engaging in both a political and social transformation. Seeing the Comintern as not solely national, nor international, the transnational allows Studer to show how the Comintern developed a shared cultural space within which communists traveled or communicated, reforming communists as the new Soviet man or woman, aimed at mobilizing internationalism and communism, globally. To do so, there was a national dimension (the national parties), the international (the Comintern as a whole in its scope) and the transnational (the movements of personnel and cultural and ideological exchanges across borders). Across these dimensions, it defined each individual communist, as they negotiated their roles in this international organization. Those who traveled to the Soviet Union, with Executive Committee approval, had to engage in self-criticism and "speak Bolshevik," referencing Stephen Kotkin's enduring phrase to explain everyday Soviet citizens negotiation with the regime to avoid problems. As a result, this focus on the self and the shared experiences of communists created a "cultural milieu" that was unlike any other that had been seen.

Lisa Kirschenbaum (2015) added to this subfield by looking at this shared collective experience through the interwar period and into the early Cold War, one of the first histories to explore directly how these experiences shaped communists' lives following the Comintern's dissolution. Focusing primarily on biographical approaches of certain people and bodies, many American, she shows how some in the Comintern moved frequently, working in the Soviet Union printing newspapers, especially those in English, before using events such as the Spanish Civil War to escape persecution in the Soviet Union. In the process, they recalled the general commitments that communism represented: anti-fascism, egalitarianism, and hope for a better world. Kirschenbaum expertly shows that these events were not only formative in developing the kernel of those shared collective experiences, but also had deep implications for their memory. Even when events such as the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, which showed that pragmatism could cause the ideological bankruptcy of the Comintern's anti-fascist goals, or later, when the revelations of Stalinism with Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech caused many communists to break with the Soviet Union, they always fondly remembered their efforts with the Comintern and in such campaigns as the Spanish Civil War. These experiences were entirely grounded in the transnational movement and exchanges these followers of the Comintern undertook and Kirschenbaum does well to mesh two of the prominent trends in Comintern history: biography and transnationality.

Broader narratives of international communism, especially with the recent celebration of the centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution have ensured a greater consideration of the role of the Comintern and transnationality is yet again front and center in historians' evaluations.⁹ For example, S.A. Smith, in his addendum to Alexander Vatin's

piece in an edited collection (2014), distinctly placed emphasis on the transnational nature of the Comintern's work and international communism's motivations, focusing on how Bolshevik ideas, concepts or works took on different or enhanced meanings in other regions, a result of certain linguistic peculiarities. Smith builds off his knowledge of the Chinese revolution to show how despite being part of the same movements and all part of the Comintern networks, translation caused a unique form of evolution of the movement, with terminology, particularly surrounding the nation and nation-state leading to continued differences and variations.

The centenary had some scholars look at the legacies of the Bolshevik Revolution with the Comintern playing a significant role. Vijay Prashad (2017) is one historian who has sought to reclaim the history of international communism, and the Comintern, and details some of the positive legacies the Bolshevik Revolution created, but also the aftereffects of the Comintern's movements. Though light on details and intentionally published to inspire future research, while also acting as a political piece to influence people today, he published a short volume aiming to detail the transnational influences of the Bolshevik Revolution, showing how the edicts of the Comintern influenced Indian communism, the Chinese revolution, leftist movements in the Caribbean and in Africa. The effects of communist thinking on colonial liberation and race resonated and even if many individuals were not leftists, many undoubtedly were influenced by these philosophical and radical exchanges of ideas.

This project came after two others by Prashad (2007, 2016) that also inherently demonstrated that the study of the Comintern was multifaceted. In one example (2016), he took a look at the developing world generally, tracing how communist ideas resonated throughout colonial liberation circles. Through his publishing house, he published what may be the start of a series of stories or moments in Comintern history, taking biographical or microhistorical approaches, in order to try to begin to expose some of the history of the movement that he says needs to be told with Comintern records, reflecting both on the fact that there remain ideological differences between authors and their subject matter, an overreliance on police records, and a general fear of admitting the role communism had on the modern world. In the first volume, many authors highlight how their topics influenced transnational movements, whether it was in the spread of ideas of anti-colonialism, support for liberation or civil rights movements or simply describing the nature of a given individual's career.

The history of the transnational Comintern is still a budding field. There is, as yet, limited controversy and in many cases, scholars in the field are still discovering new connections that could be made, while gauging the strengths and weaknesses of taking a transnational approach to the topic of international communism in the interwar period.¹⁰ What has to be encouraging to historians of the Third International is that it no longer is an isolated field of study, only of interest to scholars of communism or leftists seeking to recapture a lineage of ideas. The Comintern played a significant role in shaping prominent political movements in the interwar period, and in order to do so, ideas had to cross borders, enabling the exchange of communist outlooks, platforms and methods with other communists and non-communists alike. Though communism operated in a national context, as evident in the many parties, over seventy by the end of the 1920s, it was a global movement with over a million followers from all corners of the world. Many traveled across borders to attend Comintern congresses, to learn ideology at Comintern schools, or to help budding communist parties and campaigns throughout the world. As scholars continue to delve into the Comintern Archives and consider these transnational exchanges, our knowledge of the left's influence in the twentieth century will only grow.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This is just a small selection of examples that show the inherent transnational travel and exchange prevalent in communist networks.
- ² In addition, Hakim Adi (2010) has examined black worker in France and Britain and Comintern attempts to organize them.
- ³ These subtle connections are the subject of an article by Pujals in a forthcoming edited collection (Drachewych & McKay, 2019). Furthermore, there has been some work on the limits of communism's allure to Caribbean diaspora communities, as exemplified in Jacob Zumoff's (2011) study on Costa Rica and Caribbean migrants.
- ⁴ This is the focus of another article of theirs (Jeifets & Jeifets, 2016).

- ⁵ Notably, the published collection from the Münzenberg forum includes a number of the authors highlighted in this paper, publishing articles in English, German and Spanish.
- ⁶ Scholars have also shown how ideas about race and labour crossed borders, informing different regions with similar problems, leading to different approaches in how they tackled racial problems (Smith, 2017). In other cases, taking a transnational approach has led to important contributions in defining how the Bolsheviks themselves viewed certain ideas relevant to international communism and its worldview, showing how the exchange of ideas was by no means one-sided (Kirasirova, 2017).
- ⁷ Furthermore, as more research is done on these networks or organizations, the history of influential individuals can be ascertained and naturally take a transnational approach. (e.g. Aitken, 2008).
- ⁸ One additional benefit could be in “locating the global” in the local, finding areas where rank-and-file communists were part of a global community, further moving away from focusing on the Comintern bureaucracy or the leadership of communist parties. This position is one for which Joachim Haberlen has advocated (Haberlen, 2012).
- ⁹ In particular, the first volume of the recent Cambridge History of Communism (Pons & Smith, 2017) considers the transnational dimension of communism, highlighting Moscow as a hub, and its efforts in multiple articles. There are also some examples of studies that imply transnationality but do not explicitly use the term or transnationalism as a framework of analysis (Pons, 2014; Daly & Trofimov, 2017).
- ¹⁰ A recent introduction to an edited collection (Dullin & Studer, 2016) argues that transnationality is the missing piece allowing for fuller and deeper histories of the Comintern and global communism.

ORCID

Oleksa Drachewych  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3147-7920>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Oleksa Drachewych received his PhD in history from McMaster University in 2017. He specializes in the history of international communism, anti-imperialism and race during the interwar period. He is the author of *The Communist International, Anti-Imperialism, and Racial Equality in British Dominions* and is co-editing a collection with Ian McKay entitled *Left Transnationalism: The Comintern and the National, Colonial and Racial Questions*, forthcoming with McGill-Queen's University Press in 2019.

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