Heather Streets-Salter / Erez Manela (eds.): The Anticolonial Transnational: Imaginaries, Mobilities, and Networks in the Struggle Against Empire (Global and International History). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 318 pp.

Reviewed by
Poorvi Bellur, Princeton

The volume opens, "As it turns out, anticolonialism in the twentieth century, and even beyond, was almost invariably transnational in both thought and action" (p. 3). With this opening claim, the volume positions itself squarely within the burgeoning wave of scholarship dedicated to the global intellectual history of decolonization and anti-imperialist world-making in the twentieth century. This wave includes recent volumes addressing the role of internationalist organizations and conferencing in decolonial organizing, including the League Against Imperialism, the League of Nations, the United Nations, the Afro-Asian solidarity conferences, and the Non-Aligned Movement, to name a few.[1] *The Anticolonial Transnational* takes from this scholarship the push to look within and beyond the category of the nation-state in constructing histories of anticolonialism and claims to analyse the latter "as a general phenomenon that operated in all regions of the world and across the chronological divide of World War II" (p. 3). The volume brings together a diverse set of historical narratives from across various spheres of coloniality and commits itself to providing a window into three different approaches to the transnationalism of its actors: transnational imaginaries, mobilities, and networks in operation. In addition to this three-pronged approach, the volume claims to be invested in the category transnational as an alternative sphere to mainstream twentieth-century state-centric internationalism; anticolonial actors and entities "were compelled to operate in the transnational space precisely because they were denied recognition in the international arena and their demands were therefore generally excluded from formal international institutions" (p. 15). The extent to which inclusion within internationalist organizations spearheaded by colonial powers was a primary goal for anticolonial actors can and should be questioned. For many of the radical actors described in this volume, inclusion within organizations such as the League of Nations (famously referred to by Vladimir Lenin as a "thieves' kitchen") was a submission to the same forces of global capital and colonialism rather than a path to achieving self-determination.

While the volume itself is helpfully organized thematically into three parts ("The Many Anticolonial Transnationals", "Solidarities and Their Discontents", and "Anticolonialism in the Postcolonial Age"), common historiographical concerns emerge across the contributions, despite their regional and temporal variations. One of the central questions raised by this volume is in expanding the definition of colonialism and empire what do historians of transnational thought and organizing gain. It certainly serves to shift the focus from a resistance-collaboration binary approach to colonial and anticolonial think-

ing, as demonstrated by the complexity of Japan's position as an imperial power and simultaneously a symbol of pan-Asian civilizational power in Nicole CuUnjieng Aboitiz's chapter on the *Ilustrado national* movement in the Philippines. Zaib un Nisa Aziz's chapter about radical Indian anticolonialists engaging with socialist internationalism in the early decades of the twentieth century also advocates for an expansion of imperialism to include the coercive force of global capital – an expansion that Tony Wood also draws upon to bring Latin America and the Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas into a story of an interwar anticolonial upsurge that is otherwise dominated by Asian and African narratives.

In a crucial intervention, Kristin Oberiano's study of the fight for Chamorro self-determination in Guam within a wider Pacific theatre in the 1970s and 1980s underlines how an expansion of historical frameworks of coloniality must include internal colonialism, deftly pointing out that the nationalist, state-driven "Third World" anticolonialism of the post-World War II era rarely included the "global zeitgeist to define the Fourth World and Indigenous anticolonialism" (p. 252). This expansion of our analysis of coloniality helps to expand what is meant by decolonization as well. Looking beyond the sociopolitical impacts of the colonial experience, Vivien Chang's chapter on self-reliance as an idiom of development in sub-Saharan Africa centres on the efforts to decolonize natural environments. As for epistemic decolonization, Sarah C. Dunstan's chapter on Cheikh Anta Diop's project of the remaking of an African past through the lens of an anticolonial practice of historical writing and thinking demonstrates the ways in which the anticolonial transnational was not limited to futurist projections but was a profoundly useful framework for those reflecting on the past as a foundation of culture. Lydia Walker also examines the relationship between knowledge production, area "expertise", and American imperialism in her study of Winifred Armstrong's travels in Africa and her work for the US State Department. Quito J. Swan's chapter on the soundscapes of Rastafari in Bermuda points to the ways in which cultural production and archives of performance are as important to a study of anticolonial transnational solidarity as are political archives.

Of course, an expansion of the categories of colonialism and anticolonialism cannot result in a lack of historical specificity, as this would render these categories as methodologically unstable. Mark Reeves's chapter on Carlos Romulo's rotary internationalism and "conservative" anticolonialism raises the question of how "anticolonial" a thinker like Romulo truly was, even if he was invested in a project of transnational solidarity. In the chapter on petitions from the Arab-Asian bloc presented at the United Nations, Cindy Ewing examines the basis for these petitions, even though they claimed self-determination for colonized peoples, as a form that "formalized the encounter between the colonizer and colonized" (p. 165). Another danger of the expansion of the bracket of *colonial* and, by extension, *anticolonial* is the tendency to flatten the power landscapes that served in giving certain colonized populations power over other groups. This comes out especially in Ruodi Duan's piece on Chinese-Tanzanian relations in the 1960s,

wherein the tensions between the South Asian and Arab settler populations in Tanganyika and Zanzibar and the indigenous population complicated the Chinese state narratives of anticolonial solidarity. The many anticolonialisms studied in this volume all point to the need within the scholarship for an interrogation of the category *anticolonial*, to the same extent that the categories *transnational* and *global* are subject to a critical lens.

Beyond the attention, this volume draws to categories of analysis, it also highlights the importance of specific *sites* of transnational connectivity, spaces that range far beyond colonial metropoles. The ways in which internationalist frameworks of thought were fundamentally shaped by local contexts is emphasized across this volume. These sites of anticolonial practice and organizing were far from being hermetically sealed from the actions of their inhabitants, as Ewing states in her chapter on the United Nations "as both site and target of political struggle" (p. 164). In addition to geographic sites, other spaces emerge as sites of anticolonial worldmaking, such as the home. This is highlighted in Michele Louro's examination of Agnes Smedley's revolutionary life, a part of which was spent hosting the milieu of Indian revolutionaries in Europe through her relationship with the Indian socialist revolutionary Virendranath Chattopadhyaya. Louro's examination of the ways in which gendered forms of labour constituted an anticolonial praxis for someone like Smedley is a testament to the ways in which the personal was political and vice versa.

Finally, this volume is in many ways a meditation on the irrelevance of a success-vs-failure paradigm to the study of decolonization as a project or of anticolonialism more broadly. This is brought to the fore especially by the later chapters in the volume, which examine the stilted and ongoing nature of decolonization as a global process. What is more, when decolonization was understood for its radical liberatory potential, the continuities between the colonial and postcolonial state stand as a glaring reminder of the persistent need for a decolonizing ethic even after the formal establishment of nation-states, as shown by Oberiano's study of the indigenous critiques of internal colonization in Guam, as well as Swan's examination of the persistent affective appeal of a decolonizing ethic among Black radical and youth groups in Bermuda as an existing British overseas territory. Rather than pointing to a narrative of the zenith of decolonization and transnational solidarity from the 1950s to the 1980s, this volume presents a case for a new chronology of anticolonial transnationalism, one that is open-ended and ongoing. In the epilogue, Michael Goebel emphasizes the need to treat spaces of "exceptionalism" or "contradiction" in histories of decolonization and anticolonial solidarity not as peripheral to these histories but instead as *central* to how they are defined. In the spirit of this call to action, perhaps it is time to discard the lens of *success* and *failure* through which decolonial projects of the twentieth century have often been analysed and to instead focus on the ways in which the phenomena of decolonial practice can be contextualized within the shifting relationalities of people, power, and material resources that were constitutive of twentieth-century transnationalism.

Note

1 Though this literature is vast, notable recent volumes on this subject include Michele L. Louro et al. (eds.), The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives, Leiden 2020; Christopher J. Lee, Making a World after Empire : The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives, Athens 2010; Nataša Mišković, Harald Fischer-Tiné, and Nada Boškovska Leimgruber (eds.), The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi – Bandung – Belgrade, New York 2014.

Immanuel Ness: Organizing Insurgency: Workers Movements in the Global South, London: Pluto Press, 2021, 240 pp.

Reviewed by
Andreas Bieler, Nottingham

How can working class gains obtained in struggle from employers be secured more permanently? How can capitalism be challenged successfully on a road towards a socialist future? In his book *Organizing Insurgency*, Immanuel Ness is clear in his answer. Workers require a more permanent organization, including a strong trade union and political party: "If workers form a strong revolutionary organizational force, that resistance will be sustained and far more successful" (p. 62). In other words, working class power is reflected in strong organization. According to Ness, "[c]lass struggle is inevitable, but working-class power requires the strength of organization of a union and political party to advance and consolidate its interests" (p. 100). In this review, I will highlight several key contributions of the volume, but also make some critical observations.

Ness's first significant contribution asserts the continuing importance of agrarian workers for capitalist accumulation on a global scale (pp. 18–19). Employed in highly precarious conditions by labour brokers, it is the super-exploitation of these workers, being paid less than what they would need to reconstitute themselves, that sustains corporate profits in global value chains (GVCs). Second, considering it is these workers' exploitation underpinning the global economy, it is, therefore, also these workers who are in the best position to challenge capitalism. As he explains, "[e]ven if commodities produced in the South are consumed in the South, profits are realized by multinational corporations and concentrated in financial centres of the North. Therefore, labour struggles in the imperialist North […] are of far less consequence" (p. 25). Hence, Ness provides a welcome corrective to Western-centric scholarship, which tends to prioritize the analysis of workers' struggles in the Global North to develop lessons for workers in the Global South. Following Ness, it is the workers in the Global North who should study and learn from class struggles in the Global South.

Third, Ness provides fascinating empirical insights into class struggles in primitive steel manufacturing in India, the production of agricultural commodities for export in the Philippines, as well as resistance to labour brokering in South Africa. As a result of capitalist competition, employers tend to invest in new technology in order to gain an advantage vis-à-vis their competitors through increases in productivity.