

working on French history have positioned themselves competently to discuss such questions in dialogue with other historiographies. In this respect, the volume under review is a milestone in French historiography as well as in international global history and deserves a correspondingly broad reception.

James Mark / Paul Betts (eds.): *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, 384 pp.

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When did decolonization start? Often the answer given is: Decolonization started in earnest in 1947 when India – the former crown jewel of the British Empire – became independent. The Second World War had exhausted colonial powers like Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France and limited their capacity to subdue colonial unrest. Furthermore, the direct control over a colonial empire had become increasingly costly. Sometimes scholars push the chronology even further and concentrate on the late 1950s and early 1960s when many sub-Saharan countries achieved independence and decolonization became unstoppable and irreversible. In a narrow sense these descriptions are correct. Up to the late 1950s, it remained unclear, if the European empires in Africa and Asia would be completely decolonized

or if there would be some kind of colonial retrenchment, where the colonial centers would focus on keeping the most profitable or otherwise useful colonies under (in)direct control while “dismissing” the rest into independence.

Independence was not granted by generous empires, but had to be fought for, although not always militarily. Therefore, decolonization was preceded by a struggle for independence that in nearly all cases started before the decolonization of India or the beginning of the Second World War. These different independence movements have gathered attention by researchers in the past, even if a lot remains to be researched. What hasn’t been done often is to think post-war decolonization and pre-war independence struggles and organization of independence movements together. What has been done even less is to put Eastern Europe in these two storylines and between two book covers. This is exactly what James Mark and Paul Betts are trying to do with their edited volume.

The book is not an edited volume in an orthodox sense. It is structured in nine chapters in addition to an introduction without any further substructure that puts the nine chapters in groups under a common theme that applies to several chapters simultaneously. The editors present their book as a collectively researched and written monograph and not as an edited volume. This is an interesting concept that seems to have not been followed through completely, as each chapter has specific authors listed in the table of contents with James Mark named as sole author or co-author for four of the chapters plus the introduction. The nine chapters focus on specific topics with no particular chronological or regional fo-

cus in comparison to the other contributions in the book.

All chapters refer to the pre-1945 period to differing degrees, although this necessarily encounters difficulties from time to time. One methodological obstacle is represented by the title. In the interwar period, the Soviet Union was the only state-socialist country. Under Stalin, Soviet authorities were not too keen to “go global”, and interwar Eastern Europe was not too keen to become socialist. The authors of a book titled “Socialism Goes Global” could have reflected a bit more on this potential conceptual problem but they solve the issue quite well by focusing on continuities between the interwar period in Eastern Europe with the postwar history of then state-socialist Eastern Europe. Readers will be surprised to find quite a few continuities in policy-design but also personal overlaps where actors stayed the same in spite of official claims by the state-socialist regimes to break completely with the allegedly bourgeois past of their countries.

In their introduction, James Mark and Paul Betts emphasize that Eastern Europe in fact had been the first world region in the twentieth century that was decolonized after the collapse of four large empires, the Hohenzollern, the Romanov, the Habsburg, and the Ottoman one. In a transnational perspective, Eastern Europe therefore formed the vanguard of decolonization and was seen by some contemporaries as such. State-socialist actors from Eastern Europe like Yugoslavia’s leader Tito used the demise of the German and Italian fascist empires in 1945 to claim that Eastern Europe had decolonized itself again. Tito – in particular after his break with Stalin – could claim that he also freed

himself from Soviet imperialism which gave him great prestige when dealing with leaders from the Global South.

James Mark and Paul Betts avoid one-sided narratives and repeatedly point at “ambiguities”. These ambiguities include among others Polish plans in the interwar period to acquire colonial possessions in Africa to become a fully “civilized” country accepted by the West or the critique by the post-independence Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere of a second “Scramble for Africa” involving the state-socialist countries of Cold War Eastern Europe. James Mark and Paul Betts rightfully criticize popular narratives that let modern globalization begin in the 1970s. Such narratives ignore the role that Eastern European actors had already played in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in actively spinning a globalizing world.

Scholars who start their narratives in the 1970s – according to the editors – tell a story of Eastern Europe that succumbed to Western-dominated finance capitalism and became marginalized, squeezed between the West and East Asia. By contrast, James Mark and Paul Betts situate Eastern Europe firmly in the history of decolonization and globalization. With the collapse of communism and the enlargement of the European Union, the view became very popular that Eastern Europe – allegedly – had returned home to the West. This narrative was pushed by actors from the region in the 1990s as well. James Mark and Paul Betts – by pointing out the ideology of Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orbán – show in their introduction that narratives of Eastern Europe in need of decolonization and situated in-between the West and the South are no thing of the past.

The general theses from the introduction resonate in the different chapters of the volume. The first chapter, titled “Origins”, is the longest chapter in the book. In it, James Mark and Steffi Marung focus mainly on the interwar period and how the newly independent countries in interwar Eastern Europe tried to navigate in a world still dominated by West European empires. The second chapter written by Eric Burton, James Mark, and Steffi Marung deals with the issue of “Development”. “War and Peace” is written by Péter Apor and is one of the chapters focusing more on the post-1945 period than e.g. the chapter “Origins”. The two following chapters “Culture” and “Rights” authored by Paul Betts and Radina Vučetić deal more with issues of “soft power” that nevertheless were at least as important as questions of arms trade or financial flows. The chapter “Race” by James Mark touches a very sensitive and central topic in twentieth-century history. The chapter “Health” by Bogdan C. Iacob is not only important because of recent experiences with pandemics. The topic of public health is well-suited to show continuities between the interwar and Cold War periods. The chapter on labor and educational mobility by Alena Alamgir puts away with myths about state-socialist Eastern Europe in particular. While forms of individual mobility were heavily restricted in state-socialism, she argues, forms of collective mobility played a large role not only for the state-socialist societies in Eastern Europe but for decolonized countries in the Global South which cooperated with Eastern Europe, as well. The last chapter by Péter Apor and James Mark focuses on the “Home Front”. The two authors ask, how notions of anti-

colonial solidarity were evoked and transformed in Eastern European societies.

There are only minor points of criticism or rather wishes for improvement. The authors put considerable effort in presenting eye-catching sources in their chapters. This is wonderful, but has one downside: sometimes the reader is left in the dark with what to make of these sources, as they are not sufficiently contextualized. For example, it is fascinating to get to know that Stalin or some parts of the higher echelon of the Soviet Union tinkered with the idea of acquiring the former Italian colonial empire in Africa after the victory over fascism in the Second World War. Without contextualization, however, the reader only knows that someone must have been playing around with this idea, but not how realistic or representative for the Soviet elite this line of thought was. One feels reminded of heated scholarly debates on the First World War, where everyone involved could point at some isolated radical memorandum to prove his or her point without coming any closer to some kind of scholarly consensus. Furthermore, some more theoretical reflections would be appreciated. The term imperial and empire are used very inflationary. That is to some extent unavoidable in a book on decolonization. However, the use of more rigorous definitions in the introduction could have tamed inflation.

All in all, the volume published by James Mark and Paul Betts is innovatively conceptualized and a worthwhile contribution to the research literature. Any scholar dealing with global or Eastern European twentieth-century history is well advised to take a look at the book.