

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Beyond the “Historiographical Monroe Doctrine”: The Latin American Left and the World

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This essay reviews the following works:

Latin America and the Global Cold War. Edited by Thomas C. Field Jr., Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. Pp. 440. \$42.50 hardcover, \$29.99 e-book. ISBN: 9781469655697.

La imagen tricontinental: La feminidad, el Che Guevara, y el imperialismo a través del arte gráfico de la OSPAAAL. By Alberto García Molinero. Santiago de Chile: Ariadna Ediciones, 2022. Open access: <http://ariadnaediciones.cl/images/pdf/LaImagenTricontinental.pdf>.

From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity. By Anne Garland Mahler. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018. Pp. xi + 347. \$28.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822371250.

Toward a Global History of Latin America’s Revolutionary Left. Edited by Tanya Harmer and Alberto Martín Álvarez. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2021. Pp. xi + 301. \$90.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781683401698.

No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War. By Ariel Mae Lambe. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019. Pp. xvi + 310. \$37.50 paperback. ISBN: 9781469652856.

The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War. Edited by R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xvii + 365. \$120.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781316519110.

South-South Solidarity and the Latin American Left. By Jessica Stites Mor. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022. Pp. xix + 266. \$79.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780299336103.

Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy. By Christy Thornton. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. Pp. 301. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520297166.

The books reviewed here break new historiographical ground by offering truly global histories of twentieth-century Latin America. While we already have excellent transnational histories of Latin America, they are mostly inter-American histories that have focused on rethinking the power dynamics of early twentieth-century US imperialism, uncovering

intraregional dynamics during the Cold War, or showing how social movements throughout the Americas inspired one another during the global sixties.¹ In contrast, extrahemispheric studies have been comparatively rare.² The exception that seems to prove the rule is Cuba, a geopolitical anomaly as the only nation in the Western Hemisphere to join the socialist bloc. The historiography on Cuba has long mirrored this exceptionalism by studying Cuban-Soviet relations and Cuban endeavors in Africa. But what can we learn from seeing how the rest of Latin America engaged with the world?

Quite a bit, these books suggest. The arguments and insights of the works reviewed here vary, but they broaden our understanding of the many ways in which Latin America—especially Latin America’s revolutionary Left—interacted with the world beyond its borders in the twentieth century. Some clarify how Latin American countries contributed to and utilized multilateral forums like the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL), and the United Nations (UN) to counter US power and bypass the East-West dynamics of the postwar period. Others focus more on grassroots forms of solidarity across the Global South, showing how formative these campaigns were for the Latin American Left and, conversely, how Latin American ideas inspired actors elsewhere in the Global South, such as in postcolonial Africa. And studies that focus on relations with Europe provide new assessments of leftist diplomacy by revealing how Central American revolutionary movements used Western Europe to offset the US focus on counterinsurgency.

By abandoning what Tanya Harmer has called the “historiographical Monroe Doctrine”—that is, a tendency to ignore transnational flows or influences aside from US foreign policy—these books thankfully refuse to reduce Latin American transnational engagements to either complicity with or resistance to US imperialism.³ Instead, they capture a complex web of other interactions, perhaps akin to the insights first generated by Atlantic history a generation ago. Collectively, these publications show that Latin American states and movements were never merely the powerless victims of imperialism; that Latin America actively engaged with and shaped the Third Worldist projects that peaked in the 1960s and early 1970s; and that by reaching across the North and South Atlantic, the Latin American Left found some successes despite the extreme power imbalances it confronted.

¹ On rethinking power dynamics, representative books are Gilbert Joseph, Catherine LeGrand and Ricardo Donato Salvatore, eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of US-Latin American Relations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) and other books in that same series, and Alan McPherson, *The Invaded: How Latin Americans and Their Allies Fought and Ended US Occupations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Exceptional recent work on intraregional Cold War dynamics includes Tanya Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Renata Keller, *Mexico’s Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). On social movements in the 1960s, see Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left* (London: Verso Books, 1993); Aldo Marchesi, *Latin America’s Radical Left: Rebellion and Cold War in the Global 1960s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); and Teishan Latner, *Cuban Revolution in America: Havana and the Making of a United States Left, 1968–1992* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018). There is also significant work on migration and diasporas, too extensive to cite here.

² Some studies anticipated the approach of the books reviewed here, such as Jerry Davila, *Hotel Tropic: Brazil and the Challenge of African Decolonization, 1950–1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Federico Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War: Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Matthew Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries: The Chinese Revolution in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

³ Harmer was referring to histories of the Cold War specifically, but her argument can be extended to the twentieth century. See Harmer, “The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War: Fascism, Populism, and Dictatorship in Twentieth Century Argentina,” *Cold War History* 15, no. 3 (2015), 417–420 (a review of the book by the same name by Federico Finchelstein).

Nationalist revolutions and their global reach

One major contribution of the new transnational histories reviewed here is their attempt to go beyond merely recovering Latin American agency vis-à-vis the Global North to show how Latin American states and movements have influenced global ideas, practices, and institutions. Christy Thornton's excellent book *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* is exemplary in this regard. Her sweeping sixty-year study of Mexico's interventions in the formation of multilateral institutions offers a brilliant rethinking of how global economic governance developed. She upends long-standing assumptions that powerful, wealthy nations like the United States merely dictated the terms of economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which were then forced onto powerless, poorer countries. She shows instead that Mexico actively shaped these institutions by demanding equal representation for all nations, rich and poor, and a fairer redistribution of wealth between the industrialized creditor nations of the Global North and the developing, debtor countries of the Global South. With its robust and multisited archival work, sophisticated and nuanced arguments, and crystal-clear exposition, Thornton's work provides a model of transnational scholarship.

Thornton traces the ideas that propelled this project back to Mexico's 1910 revolution, which redefined property rights by empowering the state to impose limits on some forms of property, such as large agricultural estates, and by identifying subsoil resources like oil and minerals as property of the nation. While scholars have long recognized the importance of Mexico's progressive 1917 constitution and its impact in the region, Thornton takes these insights much further by tracing the way these revolutionary ideas then wound their way through successive international economic forums, prodded forward by Mexican representatives, culminating in the United Nations' 1974 approval of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States and the New International Economic Order. By focusing on Mexico's defense of economic, rather than purely political, sovereignty, Thornton also productively breaches what she has called the "decolonization divide"—that is, a tendency to separate Latin America from other postcolonial countries of the Global South (11). In this and other ways, Thornton's book offers fruitful lessons for seeing Latin America as a constituent part of the Third World project.

Still, this is not a simple feel-good story of an underdog nation standing up to imperialism. Thornton shows that Mexico often acted in self-interest, backing away from demands for reform that it did not benefit from. As the country became increasingly dependent on foreign investment in the 1950s and 1960s, it began to defend the international financial status quo. And when the debt crisis of the 1980s hit Latin America, the very global financial institutions that Mexico helped shape "emerged as key instruments in dismantling Mexico's state-led developmental project" (16). This is a complex story, simultaneously inspirational and cautionary.

Ariel Lambe's *No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War* covers different ground thematically and methodologically, but she too asks how a nationalist revolution—in this case, Cuba's 1933 revolution—might have global consequences. Lambe upends conventional wisdom about the defeat or "unfinished" nature of the 1933 revolution by showing how revolutionary activists persevered and regrouped after the January 1934 coup, channeling their energy toward international solidarity with Spain and, to a lesser extent, Ethiopia. Using archival documents and bulletins published by Cuban antifascist groups, she carefully reconstructs the many ways Cubans expressed their solidarity with the Spanish struggle, including military participation in international brigades or even direct enrollment in the Spanish Republican army, and solidarity efforts within Cuba, such as organizing support for the children of Spanish Republicans. While specialists have long been vaguely familiar with Cuba's outsized efforts to support the

Spanish Republic (e.g., proportionally, Cuba sent more volunteers than any other country), we have lacked a clear and comprehensive account of this history.

Lambe's book also provides a model for how transnational history can shift our understanding of national processes. By embedding the island in broader historical trends, Lambe recasts the Cuban 1930s as more than a mere fight to unseat a local dictator. The struggle for a "New Cuba," she argues, was part of a transnational antifascist movement, broadly defined, which stretched from the center to the Left, mobilized Cubans of diverse social and racial backgrounds, and extended across the Atlantic. By showing how Fulgencio Batista eventually used antifascist rhetoric, especially during World War II, she suggests that the authoritarian leader usually blamed for defeating the 1933 revolution nevertheless embraced some of its ideals.

Lambe also sheds more light on the conflicts and collaborations found in the Cuban Left in this period. For example, Cuba scholars routinely blame the Cuban Communist Party's adherence to Comintern directives for alienating other sectors of the Left and thus destroying any possibility of constructing a broad-based popular front during the country's revolutionary upheavals of the 1930s. But Lambe contextualizes these failures by recovering the party's widely respected efforts on behalf of Spain while also noting that other noncommunist leftist groups, such as anarchists or Trotskyists, also supported these campaigns. As she argues, "There may not have been a general Popular Front in Cuban politics, but there was an anti-fascist Popular Front" (173).

Thinking of the other works reviewed here, I find myself wishing Lambe had offered more analysis of whether Cuban antifascism influenced Spanish antifascism. For, as she shows compellingly, Cuba's historical development gave rise to a specific postcolonial form of antifascism, which stressed anti-imperialism and racial justice. There were times when Lambe seemed to strain against the limitations of her sources. For example, her argument that most Afro-Cuban antifascists eventually transferred their enthusiastic support of Ethiopia to the defense of Spain is mostly inferred from secondary sources on other countries (75). Still, anyone familiar with Cuban archives will recognize that these are inevitable blind spots and do not detract from Lambe's important contribution to transnational history and to an emerging subfield on the long shadow of the Spanish Civil War in Latin America.⁴

It is notable that Lambe's and Thornton's books cover periods somewhat unusual in studies of Cuba and Mexico—roughly from the 1920s through the 1960s and 1970s—reminding us that ideas about radical internationalism, underdevelopment, anti-imperialism, and racial justice emerged long before 1945 and waned long before 1990. Taken together, their works question the strengths and limits of conventional periodization of the Cold War for histories of the Global South—a question other books reviewed below return to.⁵

Latin America and the global Cold War

Two excellent and highly complementary anthologies showcase the new insights that emerge from looking at Latin America's global interactions during the Cold War. *Latin America and the Global Cold War*, edited by Thomas C. Field Jr., Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà, focuses primarily on South-South interactions from the 1950s through the 1970s, especially on interstate relations and multilateral institutions. *Toward a Global History of*

⁴ Kirsten Weld, "The Spanish Civil War and the Construction of a Reactionary Historical Consciousness in Augusto Pinochet's Chile," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (2018): 77–115.

⁵ For conceptualizations of Latin America's "long Cold War," see Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph, *A Century of Revolution Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

Latin America's Revolutionary Left, edited by Tanya Harmer and Alberto Martín Álvarez, focuses on the transnational relations of Latin America's insurgent Left, often with the European Left, in the 1960s and 1970s. Recent landmark studies of the Cold War in Latin America have tended to emphasize the conflicts between the region's progressive forces of change and reactionary elites backed by the United States. They have also moved beyond bilateral studies to recover the role of multiple states in the region, such as Chile, Brazil, and Cuba.⁶ Without abandoning those insights, the anthologies cast the Cold War as a truly multipolar conflict, building on Odd Arne Westad's pioneering call for histories of the Cold War that center the Global South.⁷

Editors of both collections make strong cases for the need for more transnational work. As the introduction to *Latin America and the Global Cold War* notes, while historians of Latin America have often been reluctant to abandon their national frames, scholars of Third Worldism have also tended to ignore Latin America while focusing on Afro-Asian connections. This dual myopia has led to "an underappreciation for the multivalent and tricontinental nature of [the] Third World's postwar struggle" (3). In their introduction to *Toward a Global History*, Tanya Harmer and Alberto Martín Álvarez argue that scholarship has eclipsed the global dimensions of Latin America's revolutionary Left partly because history teleologically tends to prioritize victorious forces, thus "marginaliz[ing] groups and processes that were overcome and defeated, the Revolutionary Left included" (3).

These anthologies have such rich and original contributions that it is impossible to do them justice fully here. Still, there are several underlying themes that constitute clear historiographical interventions. For example, several articles in *Latin America and the Global Cold War* epitomize newer approaches to US power during the Cold War. These authors show how the United States inevitably exerted pressure on Latin American foreign relations but could not fully extinguish interest in Third Worldism, neutrality, or nonalignment. Nor was the US solely responsible for all conflicts or missed connections. For example, Pettinà shows that, despite the Soviet Union's attraction as a model of modernity and potential alternative trading partner in the early 1960s, Mexico was ultimately constrained in developing fuller ties with the Soviets not just by its close political and economic relationship with the United States but also by misgivings within its own political establishment and missteps on the Soviet side. Eric Gettig's fascinating postmortem of Cuba's failed attempts to convene a conference of underdeveloped nations in the early 1960s shows that, despite Cuba's significant effort to court the support of countries across the Global South, the conference eventually fell victim not just to US opposition but also to the skepticism of more moderate African and Asian states and Brazil's competing ambitions for a development initiative of its own. These and other articles show that US pressure was only one among several factors that determined Latin American foreign policy in the period.

Latin America and the Global Cold War helps clarify Latin American engagement with the Non-Aligned Movement. Many early accounts of the NAM and Latin America understandably focused on Cuba, since the island was the region's only formal member throughout the 1960s. Indeed, articles here by Michelle Gethell and Gettig, as well as Jessica Stites Mor's book (discussed later), reinforce how active Cuba was within the NAM. More recent scholarship by Eric Zolov and others has begun to probe the ambiguous relationship with NAM forged by countries like Mexico and Brazil, which balanced the

⁶ Gil Joseph and Daniela Spenser, eds., *In from the Cold: Latin America's New Encounters with the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: The United States Wages Cold War in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Harmer, *Allende's Chile*; Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*.

⁷ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

temptation to participate in NAM against fear of alienating Washington.⁸ Several articles here further analyze this dynamic, asking how much room for maneuver Latin American states had. Thomas C. Field's article on Bolivian overtures to the NAM and socialist bloc in the early 1960s argues that Bolivia's eventual embrace of the US Cold War agenda was inevitable, but for a brief period, Victor Paz Estenssoro was able to cash in on the Alliance for Progress without breaking diplomatic relations with Cuba or abandoning economic negotiations with the Eastern bloc. Similarly, Stella Krepp argues that Brazil could not feasibly consider nonalignment without jeopardizing its relationship with the United States. Still, she notes that even post-1964 authoritarian Brazil remained interested in NAM debates, especially those concerning economic development.

But there are more forceful examples here too. Miriam Elizabeth Villanueva argues persuasively that Omar Torrijos used the NAM successfully in the 1970s as a forum to generate international support for ceding sovereignty over the Canal to Panama by speaking at NAM conferences, joining NAM in 1975, and building consensus through the NAM that could be turned into votes at the United Nations. Echoing some of the insights of Thornton's book, Villanueva provides an interesting case study of how a small, underdeveloped country like Panama could use multilateral institutions to exert pressure on the United States. Future scholarship will no doubt continue to debate how productive Latin American engagement with NAM was, but at the very least, these works show clearly that Cold War Latin American governments did not slavishly cater to Washington but sought inspiration in and engagement with Nasser's Egypt, Nehru's India, Tito's Yugoslavia, and Ben Bella's Algeria.

One notable trend in both anthologies is their tendency to emphasize tensions within transnational connections, reversing an earlier tendency to perhaps uncritically celebrate transnational solidarity. We see this especially in several contributions in *Toward a Global History of Latin America's Revolutionary Left* that draw on extensive and multisited archival research to fully explore the tensions and rivalries that characterized the Latin American Left in this period. These include familiar rifts, such as between Old Left and New Left, and others less familiar, stretching across the socialist world. For example, Michal Zourek's article, using the archives of the Czech Security Services, tells the fascinating story of Cuba's inadvertent reliance on Prague, one of the only cities that featured direct flights to Havana in the 1960s. As a result, more than a thousand Latin Americans (plus some Iranians and Eritreans) spent a short time in Prague en route to Cuba for military training. Zourek uses the Prague layover to examine the diverse profile of the revolutionaries who made the journey, finding members of pro-Soviet, pro-Chinese, and Trotskyist groups, as well as other New Left groups and radical Peronists. He also finds pervasive mistrust, disapproval, and lack of communication between Czechoslovakian and Cuban intelligence, thus reinforcing the conclusion other authors have reached that "the Soviet bloc was . . . involved but not in control of operations" (34). The Cubans and Latin Americans needed Eastern bloc logistic assistance but tried to keep details of their activities to themselves.

Other chapters in *Toward a Global History of Latin America's Revolutionary Left* provide fine-grained analyses of how rivalries and competitions played out on a global scale. For example, both James Hershberg and Gerardo Leiber show how competing groups within the Brazilian Left sought support and approval abroad. Hershberg combs through Brazilian, US, Russian, Czech, British, and French archival documents to provide a multifaceted analysis of the way Brazil's legally oriented Communist Party (PCB) and armed revolutionary Ligas Camponesas jockeyed for position against the backdrop of the Sino-Soviet split and a looming coup in Brazil. The centerpiece of the article is his careful reconstruction of the "competing missions to Havana to seek Castro's support" carried out by the PCB leader Luís Carlos Prestes and the Ligas leader Francisco Julião in the spring of

⁸ Eric Zolov, *The Last Good Neighbor: Mexico in the Global Sixties* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

1963 (105). Hershberg's detailed narrative shows that Cuba's early support for, and subsequent moderation toward, Latin America's revolutionary groups didn't automatically derive from Cuban leaders' own dogma about armed revolution or from Soviet pressure; it was also informed by concerted lobbying and counterlobbying conducted by Latin American groups themselves.

Leiber's chapter studies how the Italian Communist Party (PCI) negotiated the emerging rivalries between New Left and Old Left groups in Brazil in the early 1970s, as both the PCB and several guerrilla groups all lobbied for the Italian party's support. Leiber uses this detailed account to question the presumed boundaries between New and Old Lefts. Despite the PCI's own local commitment to electoral participation and labor organization, its reception of the Brazilian armed Left was shaped by collective memories of Europe's armed antifascist struggles of the 1930s and 1940s. Personal ties from that period survived too: when the young Brazilian guerrilla Rene Carvalho traveled to Italy in 1971, he brought a letter of introduction from his father, who had fought alongside PCI members in the Spanish Civil War.

Finally, both anthologies look beyond questions of insurgent and counterinsurgent violence to often-overlooked examples of revolutionary diplomacy. Taken together, the works offer convincing evidence of the diplomatic strength of Latin America's revolutionary Left, not only in exile and defeat but also in the throes of revolution and war. Arturo Taracena Arriola's fascinating first-person reconstruction of the diplomatic efforts of Guatemala's Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP) in *Toward a Global History* shows how the rise of social democratic leaders in Western Europe opened doors for the EGP to procure medical supplies, disseminate information, and win allies. He concludes that the Guatemalan revolutionaries not only fought the army on the battlefield but also successfully isolated the regime diplomatically. José Manuel Ágreda Portero's chapter in the same volume focuses on Spanish solidarity with the Sandinista revolution, as channeled through leftist parties and the Catholic Church, and how that reflected the Spanish Left's simultaneous grappling with its own country's democratic transition. While the Spanish Left was united in its desire to support the Sandinistas, Ágreda Portero also illuminates rivalries and schisms, finding that Spanish internationalists in Nicaragua "reproduced the partisan battles being fought back home" (274).

Eline von Ommen's chapter in *Latin America and the Global Cold War* offers a fascinating appraisal of Sandinista (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional, FSLN) diplomacy in Western Europe in the late 1970s, showing how FSLN representatives skillfully tailored their message to Western European audiences by emphasizing their movement's commitment to democracy, nonalignment, and respect for human rights while downplaying their connections to Cuba and the socialist bloc. Like Taracena Arriola, she notes that Central American leaders learned from and built on earlier diplomatic initiatives, including the solidarity work of Southern Cone exiles. For example, using oral histories, she finds that the FSLN successfully mobilized the "radical flank of the Chilean solidarity movement" (378) and that in some cases local European representatives for the Chilean Revolutionary Left Movement (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario, MIR) subsequently spearheaded solidarity for the FSLN. In this way, von Ommen offers a positive assessment of the FSLN's use of soft power and new insight into the successive waves of exile politics in Western Europe. Chilean exiles may have succumbed to internal divisions, but they nevertheless helped lay the groundwork for the FSLN's successful initiatives a few years later.

The Tricontinental: Not just a conference

A number of the authors reviewed here revisit the high-water mark of radical internationalist sentiment and South-South solidarity in the late 1960s and early 1970s. One of the period's most fascinating events was the heady January 1966 conference in

Havana, which brought together revolutionary states and movements from around the globe and firmly inserted Latin America into the emerging Third Worldist alliance that in previous forums (e.g., the 1955 Bandung Conference) had chiefly united Africa and Asia. Historians have long recognized the Tricontinental Conference as a watershed in articulating a militant form of global anti-imperialism. But the books and articles reviewed here take this analysis much farther, looking beyond the conference itself to the ideas and partnerships it generated.

Authors here define the Tricontinental, implicitly or explicitly, in different ways—as a movement, a worldview, a cultural style, or a distinctly militant chapter within a longer history of anti-imperialism. Some focus more on institutional histories of the conference’s preparation, proceedings, and political reverberations using diplomatic sources; some unpack the discursive and aesthetic imaginings of the Tricontinental through close analysis of its publications and associated artists; some focus on the strategic relationships that developed between revolutionary movements across the Global South in the conference’s wake. Authors here may disagree on the scope of the movement and how to assess its accomplishments and failures. Despite the differences in emphasis, however, we are seeing a new consensus emerge around the importance of the “age of the Tricontinental,” as Harmer and Martínez Álvarez call it. While other scholars may refer to this period as the long global 1960s, the works here depart from the emphasis on student politics and counterculture that often characterizes that historiography.

Anne Garland Mahler’s book *From the Tricontinental to the Global South* is a pioneering work for identifying and defining Tricontinentalism. For Mahler, Tricontinentalism was “a transnational discourse that begins to take shape prior to the Tricontinental Conference, that circulates outside of materials produced by the Tricontinental itself, that supersedes the Cuban state, and whose influence can be seen in contemporary transnational social movements” (9). As a movement, Mahler argues, Tricontinentalism critiqued capitalism and imperialism from the perspective of a united Global South, with particular emphasis on the intertwined nature of imperialism and racism (especially anti-Black racism).

Starting with a chapter that charts the origins of this discourse in Black internationalist thought of the interwar period, subsequent chapters analyze various films, bulletins, manifestos, poetry, and other writings from the 1960s to mid-1970s, drawing out the way Tricontinentalist discourse was created and wielded by various actors, ranging from radical US-based groups like the Young Lords and Black Panthers to prorevolutionary Cuban artists like Santiago Álvarez, and even Afro-Cuban intellectuals critical of the revolution, like Carlos Moore and Nicolás Guillén Landrián.

Mahler’s work is especially sensitive to the complex way race figured in Tricontinentalist discourse. Tricontinental discourse recognized imperial power and racial oppression as linked. While reserving particular critique for the anti-black oppression of the Jim Crow South and apartheid South Africa, Tricontinentalism did not reify racial difference and was not essentialist, she argues; it enabled inclusive forms of solidarity. But Mahler also notes internal tensions, particularly in Cuba, which she sees as engaging in a two-pronged racial discourse: inclusionary discrimination domestically alongside radical anti-racism internationally. Tricontinentalism thus allowed the Cuban government to “externalize its racial problems, pointing to racism as an expression of US imperialism to which both Cubans and African Americans were subject and denying the presence of racial inequalities within Cuba itself” (176).

In *La imagen tricontinental: La feminidad, el Che Guevara, y el imperialismo a través del arte gráfico de la OSPAAAL*, Alberto García Molinero offers a narrowly focused discussion of Tricontinental cultural production by providing an overview of the famous and widely influential poster series produced by OSPAAAL, the organization founded at the 1966 Tricontinental conference. *La imagen tricontinental* offers a useful, if somewhat general, overview of Cuba’s cultural policy in the 1960s, arguing that graphic design—especially in

poster art—was key to Cuba’s attempts to create new, more accessible forms of revolutionary art. García Molinero argues that OSPAAAL provided a crucial opportunity for global horizontal interactions as its widely disseminated publications became “a true space of solidarity, dialogue, and cultural exchange between Asia, Africa, and Latin America.” OSPAAAL’s consistent and vociferous denunciations of imperialism, he argues, made it “the greatest counterpropaganda organization” of the second half of the twentieth century (64).⁹

García Molinero identifies three principal and enduring themes in OSPAAAL posters: the role of women in revolutionary movements, the legacy of Che Guevara, and denunciations of US imperialism. The main contribution of the book is its detailed discussion of each of these themes by reproducing and analyzing numerous posters in each category. His sections on Che Guevara and US empire cover more familiar territory, but his discussion of gender is particularly welcome, as this has not been a major feature of other scholarship on Tricontinental culture. As García Molinero notes, despite the small number of women poster artists, OSPAAAL often included images of women, which oscillated between depicting them as mothers, as soldiers in national liberation movements, as related to nature or the landscape, and as symbolizing the nation. These themes often overlapped in posters, which he argues showed a “compositional duality” by simultaneously presenting women “as guerrillas, but also as mothers As revolutionary combatants at the vanguard of the armed struggle, but also linked to . . . natural elements related to the ideal of beauty, fertility, and rebirth” (169). García Molinero might have extended his attention to gender by unpacking how masculinity was constructed in images of Che and perhaps by analyzing the imagery of children that often featured in posters denouncing imperialism.

La imagen tricontinental is somewhat limited by its sources, which are primarily published catalogs, other secondary sources, and the posters themselves as archived on OSPAAAL’s website. Other primary sources, such as contemporary Cuban periodicals, might have allowed García Molinero to cross-reference how the visual themes of OSPAAAL’s graphic arts compared to discourse in contemporary publications or speeches. It might also have given readers a better sense of how Cuban discourse on women’s roles in national liberation evolved between the 1960s and 1980s, including how these ideas might have been shaped by the events the posters celebrated, such as the significant participation of women as soldiers in revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Nicaragua. Interviews with designers or with cultural functionaries in OSPAAAL or related institutions like ICAIC or Casa de las Américas might also have shed more light on the development of key themes or on the production and dissemination of the posters. Furthermore, the book has a tendency to uncritically reproduce certain Cuban government assertions. For example, he writes, “The Cuban Revolution was committed from its inception to combat all forms of oppression and discrimination in the world, especially racial discrimination” (139). Yet recent scholarship—including Mahler’s, discussed earlier—argues persuasively that while the revolutionary government was especially vehement in denouncing international expression of racial inequality, it approached domestic racial disparities more cautiously and moderately.¹⁰

Jessica Stites Mor’s *South-South Solidarity and the Latin American Left* takes up related questions in a wide-ranging and ambitious study of solidarity across the Global South during the long global 1960s. The book adds significantly to historiography on solidarity movements, which often focuses on campaigns originating in the Global North. Stites Mor provides a new perspective by looking at South-South connections, arguing that the

⁹ All translations are my own.

¹⁰ See especially Devyn Spence Benson, *Antiracism in Cuba: The Unfinished Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

expression of transnational solidarity was a formative and unifying experience for the Latin American Left. Rather than attempting a comprehensive history of these connections, she selects four case studies that capture the more grassroots solidarity of social movements or leftist parties and the more institutional expressions of solidarity undertaken by states and the Catholic Church.

The first two chapters focus on the role of revolutionary states, namely Mexico and Cuba, which served respectively as sites for the articulation and spread of progressive asylum policy and revolutionary discourse. Stites Mor's findings in these two chapters complement other publications reviewed here. Like Thornton, Stites Mor uncovers the transnational impact of revolutionary Mexico's 1917 constitution, especially as it pertained to international treaties on political asylum. Mexico's vanguard position on asylum made it an important site for various waves of exiles, including Spanish Republicans in the 1930s and Chilean refugees in the 1970s. That safe harbor, in turn, provided an early platform for eventually building a large transnational solidarity movement on behalf of Chilean exiles that spread from the Global South to the Global North. It also helped invigorate the Mexican Left. Although Stites Mor does not shy away from the limitations of Mexican asylum—noting, for example, that it was more receptive to middle-class Southern Cone exiles than to impoverished indigenous Central American refugees—she notes here and elsewhere that Latin America's revolutionary states were often successful in building counterhegemonic projects.

Stites Mor's chapter on Cuba's Tricontinental Culture also notes that OSPAAAL's publications, including posters and photojournalism, can be seen as a successful attempt to visually render global solidarity, significantly influencing the worldview of a generation of leftist activists in the Global South. Unlike most other studies of Cuba's attempts to "export" revolution, which focus on Cuba's propagation of *foco* theory or its material aid to insurgent groups, Stites Mor offers a welcome complement by examining the cultural apparatus of Cuba's global engagement. She also combines textual analysis of cultural production with a detailed account of Cuban efforts to establish support for its positions at the United Nations. As she argues: "The cultural work of OSPAAAL rendered a vision of anticolonial conflict that facilitated Cuba's internationalism. Its publication reached a broad audience of activists and advocates who, in turn, helped shape the agenda of the United Nations" (52).

The last two chapters look at more grassroots forms of transnational solidarity in the 1970s and 1980s: Argentine solidarity with the cause of Palestine and the influence of Latin American liberation theology in antiapartheid activism in South Africa. While the first two chapters perhaps covered more familiar ground, the second half of the book forges truly exciting new directions in historiography. While it can be harder to show concrete outcomes of the solidarity campaigns she uncovers here, Stites Mor also questions the high bar we often impose on determining the success of such initiatives. For her, the long-term construction of the Left's global identity and its commitment to South-South solidarity is important in its own right. As she argues, "These movements may not have defeated their enemies in countenancing neo-imperialism, in ending racial discrimination and violence, or in promoting equality among nations, but they produced a useful common language of solidarity that could be easily picked up and put to use by later generations" (171).

Stites Mor is skeptical about the ability of Cold War frameworks to adequately capture the South-South interactions she studies. The anthology *The Tricontinental Revolution*, edited by Joseph Parrot and Mark Atwood Lawrence, develops those ideas by explicitly suggesting alternative anti-imperialist histories and chronologies. Parrot's exceptionally lucid introduction teases apart the differences between various successive forms of Third World solidarity, especially by contrasting the more moderate visions expressed at the 1955 Bandung Conference with the more radical demands expressed at the 1966 Tricontinental Conference. Parrot argues for seeing Tricontinentalism as part of a longer

Third World project, a “radical vision of self-determination” that championed “armed revolt, socialism, [and] the creation of cultural and economic institutions to resist foreign domination” (1). While Tricontinentalism was often inspired by Marxism, it moved beyond Soviet policies and ideas, seeing anti-imperialism and national liberation—not class struggle—as the driving force of socialism. Tricontinentalism thus “sought to wed the program of Southern sovereignty with Marxism” (16).

The excellent articles in the collection then explore how these ideals played out in various interactions, ranging from James Jeffrey Byrne’s study of Cuban-Algerian relations in the 1960s to Paul Thomas Chamberlin’s study of the eclipse of secular or “cosmopolitan” visions of revolution in the Middle East from the mid-1970s to early 1980s. I can’t fully discuss all the articles here, but several have important implications for Latin American (especially Cuban) history. Articles by Rafael Hernández, Jennifer Hosek, and Eric Gettig shed further light on the Tricontinental Conference using new sources. Hernández and Hosek’s coauthored article uses the OSPAAAL archive to tease out the Cuban government’s goals in hosting the conference, especially in the context of the perceived abandonment by the Soviets after the 1962 Missile Crisis. Gettig uses US-based archives to uncover the US government’s reaction to the Tricontinental. He shows that the US government took advantage of the conference to exacerbate existing tensions in the Tricontinental alliance, especially between the Soviets and Chinese, New Left and orthodox Left, and moderate and radical states of the Global South. For the State Department, Gettig argues, the Tricontinental represented “as much a counterrevolutionary opportunity as a revolutionary threat” (227).

One major intervention of this volume is to explore Cuban influence across Africa. Piero Gleijeses’s landmark 2002 book *Conflicting Missions* established Cuban-African interactions as a scholarly field, showing how crucial Cuban support was for African national liberation movements, especially in Angola. But Gleijeses largely focused on Cuba’s military commitment. Articles here by Ryan Irwin, Joseph Parrot, and Jeffrey James Byrne focus more on the way Algerian, South African, and Guinean movements relied conceptually on Cuba’s example. Irwin and Parrot both discuss how Cuba provided an inspirational revolutionary model for the African national liberation movements that were taking shape in the Tricontinental period. On a more somber note, Byrne uses Cuban-Algerian relations in the 1960s to chart the rise and fall of South-South solidarity. He traces the tensions and inequalities that manifested across the Global South, especially the toxic effect of the Sino-Soviet split; tensions between those advocating armed revolution and those seeking more incremental change via international treaties; and the divergence between the small, underdeveloped states (like Cuba) that desperately needed global solidarity and the large, resource-rich states (like India and China) that did not. Cuban-Algerian relations thus shed light on “how the era of anti-colonial romance ended, and how various divergences within the Third World project contributed to future disappointments” (169).

Other recent publications have offered powerful assessments of how Cuban ideas of liberation, guerrilla warfare, and revolutionary consciousness were embraced, contested, and adapted by Latin America’s New Left. The work in *Tricontinental Revolution* suggests that we may see a parallel body of historiography emerging on Cuba’s influence in African revolutionary movements. With nuanced approaches that capture the potential messiness of South-South relations and how divergent Cuba’s impact was around the continent, the chapters add to earlier work that stressed the heroic and victorious nature of Cuban involvement in Africa, especially Angola.

Conclusions and directions for future research

Although the works reviewed here respond to certain shared underlying questions, the authors do not necessarily come to the same conclusions. For example, how should we

assess expressions of transnational solidarity and Latin American engagements with Third Worldism? How successful were these initiatives, and indeed, how should we define success? And does focusing on these connections run the risk of downplaying or ignoring the role of the United States in the region? Some authors here are enthusiastic about the liberating ideas and partnerships that stretched across the Atlantic or point to concrete campaigns aimed at the NAM, the United Nations, or the European Community. Others are more circumspect about these encounters because they believe they had few tangible results, they see them as empty discursive appeals designed to mollify the domestic Left, or they emphasize how troubled the alliances were by the divergent agendas found in the Global South. In addition, some authors suggest that the US government was able to co-opt, strain, or sabotage these South-South movements.

These books also directly or indirectly raise questions about periodization. Several works reviewed here emphasize the interwar origins of the expressions of solidarity, anti-imperialism, and anti-racism that we often associate with the 1960s. Others focus on the South-South connections and anti-imperialist militancy that flourished from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, moving toward defining this tendency or period as Tricontinentalism. But there is less consensus on how to define Tricontinentalism's characteristics, impact, and ending point. More broadly, does defining the "age of the Tricontinental" as a distinct historical period enrich our understanding of the global Cold War? Or is a Cold War framework insufficient, perhaps even counterproductive, for analyzing the forms of South-South engagement profiled here? In addition, while greatly clarifying the period from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, these books raise many questions about the subsequent period. How did Latin American engagement with the Global South look as the Third World project waned in the 1970s? And what can those relations tell us about the end of the global Cold War?

Perhaps inevitably, given their ambitious scales and provocative new material, these books also left me with some questions about scope and method. While these and other recent publications offer fascinating accounts of Latin American encounters with Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, historiography has so far largely left out Latin American engagements with Asia.¹¹ How might transpacific encounters compare with the better-known transatlantic encounters of the period? These books also offer excellent new global perspectives on the Latin American Left but largely leave us wondering about moderates, conservatives, and the Far Right. Might future scholarship on right-wing actors' transnational interactions show that global solidarity was not a monopoly of the Left?¹² Or will it confirm what is implied in these works: that transnational solidarity and leftist politics were somehow uniquely linked?

Finally, with some exceptions, the works reviewed here generally fall into two broad groups methodologically. On the one hand, we have cultural and intellectual histories that focus on aesthetics and political discourse, centering artists, publications, and other cultural expressions. On the other hand, we have diplomatic or political histories that mostly focus on states, institutions, political parties, and the leaders of leftist or revolutionary movements. Thus, these recent publications move away from the approach of a book like *In from the Cold*, which explored how power "manifests itself in identities and

¹¹ The new book by Moe Taylor, *North Korea, Tricontinentalism, and the Latin American Revolution, 1959–1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023), is a welcome step in this direction. I have discussed Cuban solidarity with Korea in the 1950s and with Vietnam in the 1960s in Chase, "Hands Off Korea: Women's Internationalist Solidarity and Peace Activism in Early Cold War Cuba," *Journal of Women's History* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 64–88, and Chase, "Picturing Solidarity: Photography and Cuban Internationalism during the Vietnam War," *Trans Asia Photography* 13, no 1, (2023). Also see Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries*, and Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History* (New York: Knopf, 2019).

¹² On this question, see Aaron Coy Moulton, "Recently on the Latin American Right," *Latin American Research Review*, advanced online publication, October 2, 2023.

everyday practices,” not just in state power or international relations.¹³ We will need social histories to help us understand how ideals of solidarity were shaped by less elite actors; how the transnational encounters described here were experienced at a more grassroots level; and how race, class, and gender informed the interactions illuminated in these works.

I indicate these gaps less as criticism than to note the exciting directions for future research that these publications suggest. The books all make major strides in reassessing twentieth-century Latin America by excavating extrahemispheric historical processes. They show unequivocally that Latin America was never merely Washington’s passive backyard but instead engaged with and shaped Third World and other transnational projects. By unearthing previously unstudied transnational encounters, and by taking an expansive view of the long-term results of these encounters, the works reviewed here ultimately offer a more optimistic assessment of the Latin American Left’s ability to contest US power than previous scholarship. These observations help us rethink reigning assumptions about the Latin American Left’s defeat throughout the twentieth century. As a textbook I sometimes assign states bleakly, there were no winners in Cold War Latin America, only losers.¹⁴ The works reviewed here invite us to look more closely at that assumption.

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¹³ Joseph and Spenser, *In from the Cold*, 17. Also see Kevin A. Young, ed., *Making the Revolution: Histories of the Latin American Left* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), which explores how the region’s Left engaged with issues of race and gender.

¹⁴ John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire* (New York: Norton, 2016), 322.

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