

LATIN AMERICA AND THE GLOBAL COLD WAR

Hannah McNICOL

October 12, 2022

Latin America and the Global Cold War, edited by Field, Krepp, & Perrina begins with a clear thesis: until recently, Latin America was largely omitted from global histories of the Cold War. In particular, the region has been excluded from the history of Third Worldism or the ‘Third World Project’ (Prashad, 2007) – the anti-imperialist politico-economic ideology manifesting in the 1955 Bandung Conference, Group of 77 (G-77) and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). This exclusion, the editors contend, has transpired through historical accounts of Third Worldism that have focused on events such as the Bandung Conference, which was principally an Afro-Asian movement. Latin American diplomatic history, on the other hand, tends toward US-centrism. Additionally, Latin American histories of the Cold War tend to bound their scope to the nation-state, with domestic economic, political, and social histories taking precedence. However, a growing literature is exploring transnational Latin American linkages and considering how they relate to the global Cold War. Field, Krepp, and Pettina’s volume substantially contribute to this cohort.

Crucially, *Latin America and the Global Cold War* responds to Westad (2005)’s historiographical challenge to contemporary Cold War historians: to explore global Cold War histories through the ‘prism’ of the Third World movement and the “three southern continents’ shared struggle for postcolonial forms of political and economic sovereignty” (Field et al., 2020 p.2). In the volume, eleven scholars take up this challenge, ultimately arguing that the diverse regional, national, and transnational Latin American histories deserve a central spot in the growing global histories of the Cold War. *Latin America and the Global Cold War* also demonstrates several key themes and concepts of concern to the Second Cold War Observatory (hereafter Observatory). These include the re-evaluation of Cold War periodisation, a focus on local agency, and embracing a multi-sited and multi-scalar research agenda (Schindler & DiCarlo, 2022).

SECOND COLD WAR OBSERVATORY

To begin, the volume quickly demonstrates the value of employing the historiographical ‘prism’ of Third Worldism. Miriam Villaneuva’s chapter goes beyond typical histories of US-Panama relations that focus on the major actors involved in the Panama Canal and the Torrijos-Carter Treaties. Villaneuva illuminates how the Panamanian government employed Third Worldist discourse to overcome the ‘in perpetuity’ clause that permitted US control of the Canal Zone. Framing US control as a key example to contribute to the swirling global discourse on anti-imperialism, they defended Panama’s sovereignty before the United Nations Security Council, the NAM, and the Organization of American States. At a local level, artists and university students performed and created documentaries employing Third Worldist themes of anti-colonialism and anti-racism in support of Torrijos.

Critically, this volume “[embraces] a plurality of multidirectional Third World experiences” (Field et al., 2020 p.7), resulting in discrete and sometimes contradictory narratives between chapters. For example, whilst Villaneuva demonstrated successful implementation of Third World rhetoric, Eric Gettig’s chapter demonstrates Cuba’s failed efforts to convene a “Conference of Underdeveloped Nations” in Havana in 1960. Through engaging with Third Worldism, Cuban Government attempted to demonstrate that it was not isolated in its politics, militarism, and anti-imperialism – as the US actively tried to demonstrate (Gettig, 2020). Similarly, Stella Krepp’s chapter shows how different Latin American nations identified with varying facets of the Third World movement. Although Brazil was initially welcoming of the NAM before 1964, its engagement with the movement was primarily reserved for exploring an ‘economic Third World.’ Brazilian elites often perceived themselves as Western and identified with cultural and political heritage from (white) European culture (Krepp, 2020). Indeed, these fluctuating relationships to the Third World movement are reflected in the structure of the volume itself which is divided into two conceptual halves. Part I focuses on Third World Nationalism or how the Third World movement was perceived or leveraged at a national level. Part II focuses on Third World Internationalism, examining “conceptual patterns of solidarity, heterogeneity and inclusion” (Field et al., 2020, pp. 7-8).

The volume’s embrace of multifaceted historical narratives is an important launchpad for the objectives of The Observatory. Schindler and DiCarlo (2022) recently argued that borrowing from Global Cold War historiography may provide analytical tools on the contemporary China-US rivalry today. In line with this approach, Sarah Foss’s chapter offers a fascinating example of development history in Cold War Guatemala. We

learn how the Eisenhower administration poured financial assistance through USAID into large-scale infrastructure and community projects throughout Guatemala. Representing a common Cold War strategy – whereby modernisation projects were used to build alliances but also to ‘win hearts and minds’ – Foss argues that Guatemalan elites leveraged US fear that Guatemala may fall to communism to garner more financing (Foss, 2020). Foss also demonstrates how local Mayan communities, aware of the opportunities that international politics provided, demonstrated resistance by refusing to give up long-held cultural agricultural practices. By detailing how these communities responded to and shaped global Third World development politics, Foss demonstrates the meeting of global and local histories.

McPherson and Thornton’s chapters stand out in their reconsidering of Cold War timelines: both highlight how Cold War histories were often built on past discourse and movements. Focusing on the pre-Cold War era, McPherson details the longer history of cross-border racial solidarity that allowed Haiti to identify with pan-African solidarity in the face of US occupations in the Cold War (McPherson, 2020). Thornton’s chapter demonstrates that Mexico’s role in Third World internationalism, exemplified in NIEO (New International Economic Order), did not suddenly appear with the 1960s and 70s groundswell of solidarity movements. Instead, Thornton points to deeper roots, such as the Mexican revolutionary constitution (1917), highlighting the “decades-long history of Mexican advocacy” (Thornton, 2020, p. 302).

Westad’s original thesis laid the foundations for this volume, and he concludes the volume. As countries in the global South seek a lens and language to articulate solidarity and anti-imperialism, he suggests that the Global South can offer a promising paradigm for future research on Latin American global history (Field et al., 2020 p.11-12). If Latin America and the Global Cold War is but an initial foray into this historiographical project for Latin America, then this must certainly be true. I look forward to seeing how this project, guided by the Third World ‘prism,’ continues to uncover overlooked histories. As such, it will be important to also show how these histories speak back, inform, and mould the prism and wider global history itself.

References

- Casals, M. (2020). Which borders have not yet been crossed? A supplement to Gilbert Joseph's historiographical balance of the Latin American Cold War. *Cold War History*, 20, 367-372.
- Field, T. C., Krepp, S., & Pettinà, V. (2020). *Latin America and the Global Cold War*. The University of North Carolina Press.
- Foss, S. (2020). Community Development in Cold War Guatemala. Not a Revolution but an Evolution. In T. C. Field, S. Krepp, & V. Pettinà (Eds.), *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (pp. 123-147).
- Gettig, E. (2020). Cuba, the United States, and the Uses of the Third World Project 1959-1967. In T. C. Field, S. Krepp, & V. Pettinà (Eds.), *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (pp. 241-273).
- Joseph, M. G. (2019). Border Crossings and the Remaking of Latin American Cold War Studies. *Cold War History*, 19(1), 141-170.
- Krepp, S. (2020). Brazil and Non-Alignment. Latin America's Role in the Global Order, 1961-1964. In T. C. Field, S. Krepp, & V. Pettinà (Eds.), *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (pp. 100-122).
- Prashad, V. (2007). *The darker nations : a people's history of the third world*. New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2007.
- Schindler, S., & DiCarlo, J. (2022). Towards A Critical Geopolitics Of China-US Rivalry: Pericentricity, Regional Conflicts And Transnational Connections. *Area*.
- Westad, O. (2005). *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*. Cambridge University Press.

Hannah McNicol is a PhD Researcher at the University of Melbourne and University of Manchester and an affiliate of the Global Development Institute. She studies Special Economic Zones in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the 'Second' Global Cold War.

The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors; they do not necessarily reflect the views of the SCWO.