

Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 347 pp.

Reviewed by **Daniel Cooper**, Randolph College

Sponsored by Fidel Castro's Cuban government, the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana brought together in anti-imperialist solidarity representatives of 82 nations from Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity*, Anne Garland Mahler recovers the history of this landmark Cold War event and chronicles the global reach of Tricontinentalism. Peaking in influence in the 1960s and 1970s thanks to Havana-based propaganda arm the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), Tricontinentalism viewed empire and the subjectivity that resists it as correspondingly deterritorialized, transnational, and networked. Tricontinentalism thus destabilizes postcolonialist understandings of anti-imperialist struggle conceived along national and racial lines and prefigures notions of the Global South, a post-Cold War critical model that "addresses spaces and peoples negatively affected by capitalist globalization," including those within imperialist nations like the U.S. (32). Considering Tricontinentalism's emphasis on capitalism and racism's correlativity, events since Mahler's 2018 book have dramatically validated its argument that a return to Tricontinentalism can help bridge alter-globalization and racial justice movements today.

Prior to the Tricontinental, theories of Cold War "Third Worldism" excluded Latin America while focusing on newly independent Asian and African states following their show of solidarity at the 1955 Bandung Conference. Drawing Latin America into the fold with Cuba at the center, the Tricontinental globalized the geopolitics of nonalignment vis-à-vis US capitalism and Soviet communism. Mahler tells this story in multidisciplinary fashion, combining careful historical reconstruction and piercing cultural criticism to offer an innovative model for scholarship at the intersections of global and Latin American Cold War cultural history. Doing so, she nuances and fortifies a trend in recent Cold War studies led by a promising cohort of younger Latin Americanists working to amplify the protagonism of Latin American state actors, intellectuals, artists, and activists in shaping the contours of the otherwise binary conflagration. Her chronicle is as thorough as those in recent seminal histories of Latin America's Cold War experiences, including Patrick Iber's *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (2015) and Thomas C. Field, Jr., Stella Krepp, and Vanni Pettinà, et al.'s (eds.) *Latin America and the Global Cold War* (2020). Meanwhile, her "Tricontinentalist readings" of poetry, fiction, poster art, and film represent aesthetic critique of the highest order.

As a historian, Mahler strongly renders one of the book's central threads—Cuba's emergence from the 1960s through the 1980s as a leader of antiracist internationalism despite systemic anti-Blackness on the island. As Cuba welcomed African American exiles and activists like Angela Davis and led anti-apartheid military efforts in Africa, Black Cubans remained largely excluded from their country's political process and suffered many of the same racialized socioeconomic inequities of the pre-Revolutionary period. Recalling Cuba's Independence-era race-blind nationalism for context, Mahler breaks ground as a critic deciphering the cultural implications of Castro's Tricontinentalist thrust. In her seamless analysis of *Coffea arábica* (1968), she examines how Afro-Cuban filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián's subversive "aesthetic choices" interact with his appropriation of a revolutionary Tricontinentalist messaging to denounce the exploitation of Black labor in a Castro agricultural initiative. Underscoring the tragedy that befell countless artists and intellectuals around the world who bucked official Cold War narratives, Mahler details Cuba's shunning of Guillén Landrián for an oeuvre deemed counterrevolutionary. Her other Tricontinentalist readings include an examination of Nuyorican novelist Piri Thomas' *Down these Mean Streets* (1967), which proves her critical agility across cultural mediums and geographies, and an especially sharp evaluation of Cuban documentarian Santiago Álvarez's *Now* (1965). A foundational piece of OSPAAAL propaganda highlighting US race hypocrisy, *Now* was, according to Mahler, an ironic but important influence on Guillén Landrián.

Castro's incongruous international and domestic race politics form the "inherent tension" of Cold War Tricontinentalism, one that remains vital in post-Castro and post-Cold War Cuba. During summer 2020, Cuban media reported critically on the police murder of unarmed African American George Floyd and sympathetically on ensuing Black Lives Matter protests. Covering the police murder of unarmed Afro-Cuban Hansel Hernández near Havana one month later, however, the same media echoed the Cuban Interior Ministry's account, which stressed Hernández's criminal record and claimed the officer shot him in self-defense. This recent inconsistency proves the essential currency of Mahler's history.

Her scholarship is urgent precisely because it points to the imprint of Tricontinentalism on global movement politics today. Mahler delivers a prophetic historical lens through which to understand—and vital lessons for seizing—the transformative moment afoot in the US and abroad following a string of highly publicized police lynchings in 2020. To approach Mahler's book at this historical crossroads, as a global pandemic lays bare the racial divisions at the heart of capitalist inequality, and protestors overcome state and right-wing militia violence to proclaim that Black Lives Matter, is to confront stark questions. Will the placating pretenses of neoliberal multiculturalism defang current

popular mobilization? Or will the Movement for Black Lives embrace its Tricontinentalist roots enough to tear down the most oppressive components of racial capitalism?

Central to Mahler's account of Tricontinentalism's global reach during the Cold War is how it elevated African Americans to the symbolic vanguard of international anti-imperialism. Civil Rights movement imagery depicting Black protestors standing up to white police was featured prominently in OSPAAAL materials distributed around the world. This black-white color line drew from interwar Pan-Africanism and Black Atlantic internationalism, from W.E.B. Du Bois and the Harlem Renaissance in the US to the *negrismo* and *négritude* movements in the Caribbean. Yet, unchained from modern nationalism's narrow determinisms, Tricontinentalism's color dialectic offered a more inclusive marker of ideological positioning that could galvanize anti-imperialist solidarity transcendent of identity. Mahler hammers this point throughout her study.

Rightly so. What she terms "metonymic color politics" (4)—where skin color stands for ideology rather than race—is Tricontinentalism's greatest contribution, offering a roadmap for bridging racial and economic justice struggles that, too often in the post-Cold War era, have remained disparate. Indeed, those seeking to better grasp the current Black-led uprising's more relevant global-historical precedents should include Mahler's book on suddenly-in-vogue reading lists instructive of dismantling structural oppression and creating better allyship. Highlighting Tricontinentalism's model of intersectional solidarity politics, she warns against neoliberal multiculturalism promoted by elites satisfied with diversity and representation as worthy ends on their own. For Mahler, only a radical approach to antiracist struggle centered on a critique of capitalism and imperialism and, concomitantly, an anticapitalist/anti-imperialist vision centered on race can effect systemic change.

In 2020 the Movement for Black Lives is rapidly evolving in such a direction. Beyond its original call for police reform, more radical targets are evident in recent digital media hashtags like *#abolishthepolice*, *#abolishICE*, and *#defundthepentagon*. The ubiquity of these demands suggests a sharpened understanding of the links between state-sanctioned racialized violence in the U.S., including violence perpetrated against immigrants, and the militarized defense of capital against darker-skinned people abroad. In another example of the present's Tricontinentalist underpinnings, tens of thousands of workers from diverse backgrounds across the U.S. walked off the job during the July 20th Strike for Black Lives. Organized explicitly around Blackness, this inclusive anti-capitalist action crystalizes Tricontinentalist metonymic color politics in a post-Cold War context.

There are other hopeful signs that tenets of Tricontinentalism are finding expression in the current Black-led uprising. Mahler profiles the Young Lords Party, a late-1960s and

early-1970s New York activist group of primarily stateside-born working-class Puerto Ricans who engaged with Tricontinentalist internationalism. Exploring the group's practice of "transaffective solidarity," whereby solidarity itself represents "a rehearsal for the eventual realization of a new social relation" (11), Mahler calls attention to how the Young Lords overcame Tricontinentalism's "tendency to address itself to a heteronormative, masculinist subject" (5). Expanding the intersectional potential of Tricontinentalist discourse and practice, the Party featured women in leadership and centered women's, gay, and transgender liberation in their antiracist and anticapitalist work.

Mahler implies a thread from this radical brand of Tricontinentalism to the Movement for Black Lives, noting that "three black queer social justice activists" organized the latter's "original hashtag and subsequent infrastructure" (232). The massive June 2020 March for Black Trans Lives reflects the Movement's continued foregrounding of "the voices of those who have been traditionally marginalized" in Black liberation organizing (232). At the intellectual and moral vanguard of the broader culture, a new generation of intersectional Black feminist activist-scholars like Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor emerges as this generation's critical conscience, poised to receive the proverbial torch from the likes of Angela Davis. Davis, whose recent activism includes prison abolition and Palestinian liberation, is for Mahler "an iconic figure in Tricontinental cultural production" (132). A recent photograph of a gray-haired Davis, wearing a kente-print coronavirus-preventing facemask while raising her fist at a Juneteenth 2020 dockworkers' Port of Oakland shutdown, could not represent more richly the essential Tricontinentalist inflections of this moment in history.

*From the Tricontinental to the Global South* offers an indispensable historical perspective for understanding our tumultuous present; until Mahler releases an updated edition with a Tricontinentalist reading of the immediate post-George Floyd era, readers can only wait in anticipation.