

ANNE
GARLAND
MAHLER

FROM THE TRICONTINENTAL TO THE GLOBAL SOUTH

RACE, RADICALISM, AND TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY



From the
Tricontinental
to the Global South

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Anne
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TRICONTINENTAL
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Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity

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INTRODUCTION

When Barack Obama and Raúl Castro shook hands at the December 2013 memorial service for Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg, South Africa, the press called it “the handshake heard ’round the world.”¹ Yet few could have been aware of its furthest reaching implications. The White House claimed that this gesture was unplanned, but in retrospect, it appears to have indicated a thawing of animosity between the two nations, foretelling the leaders’ announcement one year later of a prisoner exchange and the restoration of full diplomatic relations. In his televised address on December 17, 2014, Obama would remind viewers that the United States had long ago restored relations with China and Vietnam and that the U.S. strategy of isolating Cuba had unequivocally failed to lead to the collapse of its communist government. It was, he put simply, “time for a new approach.”²

The decision to renew ties between the neighboring countries was widely characterized as a final curtain call for the end of the Cold War.³ But just as that pivotal handshake seemed to mark the end of an era, it also pointed to the continued impact of the Cold War on our contemporary moment. It was, in a sense, a recognition on Obama’s part of Cuba’s historic role in supporting the antiapartheid struggle in South Africa and also perhaps in supporting the very African American civil rights struggle to which Obama owed his presidency.

To not shake hands would have been a disavowal of the fact that what binds Obama and Mandela together is the legacy of a Cold War transnational struggle for racial justice in which Cuba played a central role.

From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity examines precisely that Cold War transnational struggle for racial justice to which the handshake alluded, arguing for its profound relevance for understanding social movements today. The promotion of a contemporary social movement was, Obama claimed, a major impetus for the decision to restore ties with Cuba. As he explained in his December 2014 statement on Cuba policy changes, “We are taking steps to increase travel, commerce, and the flow of information to and from Cuba. This is fundamentally about freedom and openness.” He added, “I believe in the free flow of information. Unfortunately, our sanctions on Cuba have denied Cubans access to technology that has empowered individuals around the globe.”⁴ In other words, he seemed to suggest that greater access to the telecommunications system would enable Cubans to organize and—perhaps like with protests in other places—achieve the destabilization and subsequent democratization of the Cuban government that the more-than-fifty-year U.S. strategy of isolation and blockade had been unable to accomplish.⁵

While the link drawn here between access to technology and democratic freedoms is a weak one, it is apparent that contemporary capitalist globalization has created the conditions for a radical expansion in antisystemic politics. The immediacy of global communication and the increased movement of materials and peoples across geopolitical borders have allowed grassroots movements to forge alliances with struggles all over the world. In recent years, this new era of solidarity politics has taken hold of the American continent with widespread protests against neoliberal policies and economic inequality and a growing movement against state brutality toward racially oppressed peoples.

Yet despite the enthusiasm and media frenzy often generated by these so-called Twitter revolutions, there is a paradox within social movements in the Americas today. On the one hand, protests against deregulation and corporate greed within global capitalism tend to reproduce the rhetoric of multiculturalism, generating silences around racial inequities. On the other, movements organized around racial justice tend to frame violence toward racialized populations within a context that is limited to a critique of the state, sidelining a broader consideration of the intersection between racial violence and global capital flows.

This book historicizes this disjuncture between alter-globalization and racial justice discourses by looking back at a profoundly influential but largely

forgotten Cold War movement called the Tricontinental.⁶ This movement articulated its critique of global capitalism precisely through a focus on racial violence and inequality. Contemporary progressive social movements, this book argues, are reviving key ideological and aesthetic elements of the Tricontinental while leaving aside its primary contribution to the formation of a global struggle specifically against antiblack racism.

The Tricontinental formed in January 1966 when delegates from the liberation movements of eighty-two nations in Africa, Asia, and the Americas came together in Havana, Cuba, to form an alliance against military and economic imperialism. It marks the extension into the Americas of the well-known Afro-Asian movement begun at the 1955 Bandung Conference, a moment that serves as the political cognate for what would eventually emerge as academic postcolonial theory.⁷ Through the artistically innovative and politically radical films, posters, and magazines that the Tricontinental published in English, Spanish, French, and sometimes Arabic, and distributed globally, the Tricontinental quickly became the driving force of international political radicalism and the primary engine of its cultural production around the world. While it was consistently hypocritically silent on racial inequities within Cuba, the Tricontinental played a pivotal role in generating international solidarity with the U.S. civil rights movement as well as with the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, and its vision of global resistance was shaped by its foundations in black internationalist thought and by the close involvement of African American and Afro-Latinx activists.

From the Tricontinental to the Global South analyzes the expansive cultural production of the Tricontinental and traces the circulation and influence of its discourse in related radical texts from the Americas, including Third Cinema, Cuban revolutionary film, the Nuyorican movement, writings by Black Power and Puerto Rican Young Lords activists, as well as works from contemporary social movements such as the World Social Forum and Black Lives Matter. Through this tracing, this book identifies a set of Tricontinentalist texts, referring to any cultural product that engages explicitly with the aesthetics and especially the discourse of Tricontinentalism, meaning it reflects a deterritorialized vision of imperial power and a recognition of imperialism and racial oppression as interlinked, often using a racial signifier of color to abstractly refer to a broadly conceived transracial political collectivity. Through identifying and analyzing Tricontinentalist texts from the mid-twentieth century to the present day, this book contributes to a transnational reorientation of sites of cultural production whose analysis is often contained within the national

and linguistic boundaries that traditionally determine the study of cultural production.

As a political discourse and ideology, Tricontinentalism framed its struggle through a spotlight on the Jim Crow South. In other words, Tricontinentalism portrayed the U.S. South as a microcosm of a deterritorialized empire and presented its global vision of power and resistance through the Jim Crow racial binary of white and color. Significantly, however, the racial binary through which these materials present the Tricontinental struggle is not intended to be racially deterministic such that they sometimes describe phenotypically white people who share the movement's views as "colored." This is what I call the Tricontinental's "metonymic color politics," meaning that in these materials the image of a white policeman metonymically stands in for global empire, and conversely, the image of an African American protestor signifies the Tricontinental's global and transracial resistant subjectivity. In this way, Tricontinentalist texts transform the category of color into an umbrella for a resistant politics that does not necessarily denote the race of the peoples who are included under that umbrella.

Through the destabilization of trait-based or racially essentialist requirements for inclusion within its revolutionary subjectivity, Tricontinentalism laid the groundwork for a theory of power and resistance that is resurfacing in the contemporary political imagination. Alter-globalization movements, as well as horizontalist models of cultural criticism like the Global South that have developed alongside them, are recovering the latent ideological legacy of the Tricontinental through a global concept of power and through devising revolutionary subjectivities that are unmoored from territorial, racial, or linguistic categories. However, our amnesia around the Tricontinental movement has meant that this revival is only partial. Within the alter-globalization movement in the Americas, the Tricontinental's nonracially deterministic political signifier of color has been converted into a rhetoric of color-blindness that is complicit with the neoliberal discourse of multiculturalism. Conversely, while the alter-globalization movement suffers from color-blindness, contemporary racial justice struggles on behalf of Afro-descendant populations in the Americas tend to focus on reforming the state apparatus and often do not fully address the mechanisms through which global capitalism perpetuates racial violence and racial inequity. As the Movement for Black Lives in the United States, for example, has begun to move toward a broader critique of racial capitalism and toward a transnational vision of solidarity, it too exhibits a partial revival of a largely forgotten Tricontinental past.

By pointing to these partial returns to Tricontinentalism in our contemporary moment, this book does not propose a celebratory embrace of the Tricontinental as an ideal model for political activism. As I will detail, the Tricontinental was burdened with profound inconsistencies such as its overwhelming silence on racial inequities within countries with leftist governments and its tendency to address itself to a heteronormative, masculinist subject. Rather than attempting to redeem the use value of Tricontinentalism as a political prototype, this book shines a light on the key insights to be gleaned from the study of this movement. That is, through recovering this buried history, I do not propose a return to the Tricontinental but rather intend to call contemporary solidarity politics into a deeper engagement with black internationalist thought that foregrounds the fight against racial inequities as a prerequisite to the future of transnational political resistance.

NETWORKED POLITICAL IMAGINARIES AND COLD WAR TRANSNATIONALISM

The networked character of politics today has challenged the models with which critics approach politically resistant cultural production, leading to the emergence of what I would characterize as horizontalist approaches to cultural criticism. Here I refer to two sets of overlapping critical categories. First, I refer to those that address how capitalist globalization facilitates the creation of networks among grassroots movements, yielding a new transnational political imaginary and global resistant subjectivity. This includes concepts like Arjun Appadurai's "grassroots globalization" and "globalization from below," Boaventura de Sousa Santos's "counter-hegemonic globalization," and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's "multitude."⁸ Second, I refer to a set of horizontalist reading praxes of both contemporary and past resistant cultural production in which texts are examined in dialogue with a global network of writers and artists. In the second category, concepts like Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet's "minor transnationalism"; Monica Popescu, Cedric Tolliver, and Julie Tolliver's "alternative solidarities"; and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's "reading globalec-tically" commonly deviate from a center-periphery model and move toward a decentered, networked model of reading antisystemic textual production. In this model, texts are examined within a transnational web of writers and artists who understand their conditions of oppression and resistance as interconnected.⁹ All of these concepts describe power as unmoored from territorial boundaries and emphasize lateral dialogue and mutual identification among

oppressed groups in terms transcendent of a shared experience of European colonization or of national, ethnic, and linguistic affinities. They aim to devise a “thick” globalization theory that provides an alternative to the discourse of neoliberalism by viewing the transnational experience of global capitalism from below.

Within this constellation of terms, the “Global South” has likely gained the most currency. While the Global South is often used to refer to economically disadvantaged nation-states and as a post–Cold War alternative to the term “Third World,” in recent years and within a variety of fields, including literary and cultural studies, the Global South is being employed in a postnational sense to address spaces and peoples negatively impacted by capitalist globalization.¹⁰ As a concept, the Global South captures a deterritorialized geography of capitalism’s externalities and means to account for subjugated peoples within the borders of wealthier countries, such that there are Souths in the geographic North and Norths in the geographic South.¹¹ Through this transnational conceptualization, the Global South is emerging as a critical category that encapsulates both horizontalist approaches mentioned previously: it is used to refer to the resistant imaginary of a transnational political subject that results from a shared experience of subjugation and also to a model for the comparative study of resistant cultural production.¹²

While the Global South and similar horizontalist concepts are valuable for engaging our contemporary political imagination, their newness risks eliding the historical context from which contemporary solidarity politics have emerged, creating utopic categories that reproduce the atemporal “end of history” narrative of globalization.¹³ In response, this book provides a systematic account of the cultural history of this horizontal turn in antisystemic struggles. It argues that the Global South and similar critical categories represent an attempt to recover a legacy that has been overlooked within the all-encompassing frame of postcolonial theory: the understudied yet powerfully influential Cold War ideology of Tricontinentalism.

In this sense, this book is rooted in a broader transnational turn in literary and cultural studies, joining an expansive body of interdisciplinary works in south-south comparison, world literature, global modernisms, transnational American studies, new Southern studies, and—most significantly for this book—studies of the Global South. In current scholarship on the Global South, however, our understanding of the relationship between Global South and postcolonial theory remains underdeveloped since both bodies of theory have arisen from a history of Cold War decolonization. Through tracing its

roots to the Tricontinental movement, this book intends to make a unique and vital contribution to the study of the Global South as a critical concept.

Within the broader transnational turn, recent scholarship on the Cold War is exploring a more nuanced understanding of this conflict by viewing it through the experiences of marginalized nations and peoples and through histories of decolonization.¹⁴ Although much has been written on African Americans' involvement in Cold War anticolonial activism, generally studies of decolonization have focused on post-World War II Africa and Asia, overlooking the Americas almost entirely. David Luis-Brown's *Waves of Decolonization: Discourses of Race and Hemispheric Citizenship in Cuba, Mexico, and the United States* (2008) responds to this gap by tracing anti-imperialist discourses in the Americas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that precede the decolonization of Africa and Asia. *From the Tricontinental to the Global South* builds on Luis-Brown's earlier work by examining the later transformation of these hemispheric American radicalisms from the early twentieth century into the present day.

Similarly, this study engages the extensive body of critical work on black internationalism and is influenced by scholarship on black-brown political solidarities, such as studies of exchanges between African Americans and Cubans.¹⁵ However, I aim to provide a new perspective by analyzing the roots and development of Tricontinentalist discourse as well as its contribution to internationalist and interethnic resistant subjectivities from the 1960s to the present. Within this field, this book shares with Cynthia A. Young's *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (2006) a focus on both Cold War radical cultural production and a transnational vision of revolution that was built largely through solidarity between African American and Cuban activists. Young argues that the formation of a U.S. Third World Left was inspired by two factors: first, decolonization, and especially the Cuban Revolution, and second, the print culture and media that helped to spread Third World leftist ideas around the globe.¹⁶ However, although the legacy of the Tricontinental permeates Young's book and although she consistently recognizes Cuba as central to the dynamics she analyzes, at no point does she mention the Tricontinental as the primary infrastructure for the production of the print culture and media disseminated among that Third World Left that is the subject of her book. Thus, this study's unique attention to the cultural production of the Tricontinental illuminates an overlooked genealogy, broadens *Soul Power's* focus on intellectuals from and within the United States, and uniquely brings this Cold War history to the present moment, providing

further-reaching implications for how this history informs our contemporary political context.

Within scholarship on Third World internationalisms, black radicalism, and decolonization discourses, attention to the Tricontinental prior to this book has been conspicuously sparse, but with a few important interventions.¹⁷ Vijay Prashad devotes a chapter of *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (2007) to the Tricontinental, but he treats it as a single event rather than a movement. In *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2003), Robert J. C. Young locates the beginning of an epistemology of postcolonial subjectivity in the Tricontinental and even suggests "Tricontinentalism" as a more appropriate term for postcolonialism. This book complements these studies but argues that the Tricontinental's vision of power and resistance is more akin to the horizontalist worldview encapsulated by the Global South. I suggest that the shift from Bandung's solidarity, which was based around postcolonial nation-states and a former experience of European colonialism, to the Tricontinental's more fluid notion of power and resistance is parallel to a shift currently taking place in academic scholarship from postcolonial theory to the Global South.

Moreover, I contend that Tricontinentalism constitutes a discourse that reverberates in a wide and transnational array of radical Cold War cultural production. In this sense, the understanding of Tricontinentalism put forth in this book aligns with Thea Pitman and Andy Stafford's position, expressed in the introduction to their 2009 special issue on "Transatlanticism and Tricontinentalism" in the *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, in which they define Tricontinentalism as a "discourse and practice" whose "ethos has been taken up . . . in cultural products from across the continents involved."¹⁸ Similarly, Besenia Rodriguez's "Beyond Nation: The Formation of a Tricontinental Discourse" (2006) describes Tricontinentalism as an "anticolonial and anti-imperial as well as anticapitalist" ideology that represents an alternative to integrationist views and to positions of black nationalism and pan-Africanism.¹⁹ It is, she writes, "staunchly anti-essentialist and critical of cultural or biological notions of race."²⁰ She identifies the presence of this ideology within the writings of specific U.S. antiracist activists from the 1930s through the 1970s, such as Shirley Graham Du Bois, Grace Lee Boggs, several African American journalists who participated in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in the early 1960s, and the Black Panther Party founder, Huey P. Newton.²¹ Rodriguez's understanding of Tricontinentalism, especially her analysis of its anti-essentialist leanings and its circulation among black internationalist intellectuals, has profoundly

influenced my own. However, while she mentions the 1966 Havana Tricontinental Conference as an important moment for Tricontinentalism, her study does not include any discussion of the Tricontinental organization itself or of its prolific cultural production. For this reason, her definition of its discourse remains at times undefined, collapsing, for example, the Bandung moment with that of the Tricontinental.

Whereas Pitman and Stafford, Rodriguez, and Young suggest Tricontinentalism as an ideology and discourse devised through a transnational dialogic exchange, which is the notion that I take up here as well, both Sarah Seidman and John A. Gronbeck-Tedesco take a different approach. Seidman's comprehensive study of the relations between African American activists and the Cuban Revolution in "Venceremos Means We Shall Overcome: The African American Freedom Struggle and the Cuban Revolution, 1959–79" (2013) discusses the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in detail. She argues that African American and Cuban exchanges during this period "occurred within the rubric of tricontinentalism," an ideology that she describes as emphasizing "the unity of Latin America, Asia and Africa specifically against Western imperialism, colonialism, racism, and capitalism," but which she characterizes as an ideology belonging to and devised by the Cuban state.²² Although Seidman recognizes the role of Tricontinental posters well into the 1970s in African American and Cuban political interchanges, as well as the influence of Tricontinentalist ideology on Cuba's involvement in the Angolan Civil War from 1975 to 1990, she suggests Tricontinentalism as a historical moment contained to the short period between 1966 and 1968, peaking in 1967.²³ Gronbeck-Tedesco's *Cuba, the United States, and Cultures of the Transnational Left, 1930–75* (2015) similarly positions the Tricontinental as a foreign policy strategy created by the Cuban state, but he emphasizes that it inspired a "Left humanism that crossed borders" and that it was "both a cultural language and a geopolitical strategy."²⁴ He also dedicates a significant portion of his book to an analysis of the disconnect between Cuba's Tricontinentalist antiracist politics and its domestic myth of racial equality. Building on the foundational work of these innovative studies, but also moving in new directions, I conceive of Tricontinentalism as 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. While all of these studies are influential, I seek to expand and define more precisely the notion of Tricontinentalism that is introduced within this prior scholarship and to address

its aesthetic and ideological influence on related radical intellectuals in the hemisphere.

OUTLINING THE TRICONTINENTALIST TEXT

Because the Tricontinental achieved its greatest impact through its immense propaganda apparatus, it represents, in large part, a body of cultural production. This vast array of cultural production includes *Tricontinental Bulletin* (1966–1988, 1995–), published in English, Spanish, French, and sometimes Arabic; posters that were folded up and included inside of the bulletins; *Tricontinental* magazine (1967–1990, 1995–); books and pamphlets; radio programs; and the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel produced by the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC). These materials, which continue to be published on a much smaller scale to this day, were all produced in postrevolutionary Cuba with the financial backing and bureaucratic support of the Cuban state. However, much of the content of the articles printed in the bulletin and magazine was sent in by the various delegations, and the films and posters were often produced in dialogue with members of the particular struggles that those materials represented. In this way, the Tricontinental provided both physical and textual spaces in which diverse political groups came into contact and functioned as an ideological nerve center that simultaneously shaped and was shaped by the perspectives of its various delegations.

Through the circulation of its publications and films, and through the iconic posters for which it is now recognized, the Tricontinental created something akin to Benedict Anderson's notion of an "imagined community."²⁵ However, whereas Anderson traces the role of textual production in the construction of a nation-state model of collective identity, the imagined community forged among political movements around the world through the circulation of the Tricontinental's materials was more similar to a *communitas*, a term that I take from Christopher Lee's description of the collective spirit inspired by the Bandung moment.²⁶ *Communitas* refers to a community of feeling, an affective community of solidarity that transcends national and regional geography and whose affinities are not based on location, language, or blood.

Building on Lee's analysis of Bandung, I refer to Tricontinentalism as an early model for what I call a "trans-affective solidarity" in which the ideology of Tricontinentalism is undergirded by and produces as surplus value a transnational, translinguistic, transethnic, and transracial affective encounter. That is, the Tricontinental's ideal vision of a collective social subject is not

forged through the social contract provided by the state or through a narrow definition of class or race but rather through a radical openness facilitated by affective relation. The Tricontinental envisions a political subject whose becoming rests in “making solidarity itself,” to use Lauren Berlant’s terms, or in forging a collectivity through the “attachment to the process of maintaining attachment” and to “the pleasure of coming together.”²⁷ The Tricontinentalist project of generating a new transnational political subject held together through affective attachment presents itself as a rehearsal for the eventual realization of a new global social relation. The means and the ends of Tricontinentalist politics are the same: the repetitive and persistent proclaiming of affective relation and community across national, linguistic, and ethnic borders is both the political act and the ultimate aspiration of Tricontinentalism.

In this sense, although they are mutually imbricated, this book does not present the discourse and praxis of Tricontinentalism and the Cuban state’s policies as necessarily one and the same. There is a tension within Tricontinental materials where, on the one hand, they represent a site of convergence for radical organizations with diverse views and, on the other, they are produced by the Cuban state and reflect the Cuban state’s ideological positions. Understanding this tension is key for comprehending the progressive politics on gender and sexuality espoused in some Tricontinental materials in the midst of Cuba’s so-called *quinquenio gris* (five gray years) (1971–1976), a period of repression of artistic and sexual freedoms on the island. Understanding this tension is also especially important for considering how the Castro government used Tricontinental materials to externalize its own racial divisions to the United States and South Africa while negating its presence at home.

Although Cuba’s revolutionary government had a vested interest in maintaining focus on black struggles abroad and silencing discussion around racial inequity within Cuba itself, and although Tricontinental materials became a primary tool for the exercise of these duplicitous racial politics, Tricontinentalist racial discourse—which was the result of a transnational exchange of activists and intellectuals—is not exactly identical to the racial discourse of the Cuban state. Conflating the two risks flattening the multiplicity of issues and interests to which Tricontinentalism responds and eliding the central contribution of black internationalist intellectuals—including black Cuban intellectuals—to the discourse and ideology of Tricontinentalism. Rather than simplistically reducing Tricontinentalism to a propaganda tool of the Cuban state, I propose Tricontinentalism as a transnational movement that was deeply rooted in a long tradition of black internationalist thought.

Specifically, it revised a black internationalist resistant subjectivity into a global vision of subaltern resistance that is resurfacing in social movements today.

Since the Tricontinental marks the official extension of the so-called spirit of Bandung into the Americas, it points to a moment in which a diverse range of radical writers and filmmakers in the Americas began to closely engage its discourse. Works situated within the Nuyorican and Black Arts political and artistic movements, Third Cinema, and Cuban revolutionary film represent a map of closely linked loci of radical New World cultural production whose connections remain largely unexplored because of the specificities of the identity politics, geographies, and artistic media asserted in their classification and study. Scholars have discussed the exchange between writers from the Black Arts and Nuyorican movements, the political alliances between the Cuban Revolution and Black Power activists, the influence of Cuban revolutionary film on the Third Cinema movement in the United States and elsewhere, as well as the cultural production of a U.S. “Third World Left.”²⁸ This book builds on this scholarship yet offers a new perspective by analyzing the Tricontinental’s contribution to the internationalist and multiracial resistant subjectivities often envisioned in these materials. I place these intellectual, artistic, and political exchanges within a broader context, tracing the Tricontinentalist argument for a deterritorialized imperial power and equally transnational and transracial resistant politics that is woven throughout texts from these diverse movements.

The remainder of this book is organized into five chapters. The first chapter, “Beyond the Color Curtain: From the Black Atlantic to the Tricontinental,” provides a long view of the Global South, a concept it discusses in further detail, by considering its roots in black internationalist political thought and specifically in the legacy of Tricontinentalism. The Tricontinental responded to prior framings of transnational anti-imperialism within the hemispheric American context: that is, the black internationalism of the 1920s to 1940s that is found in cultural movements like the Harlem Renaissance, *negrismo*, and *négritude*. With the U.S. expansion of the Spanish-American War and the military occupation of multiple Caribbean islands in the years during and immediately preceding the rise of these movements in the early twentieth century, Jim Crow racial politics would define foreign policy toward the millions of people of color newly brought under U.S. jurisdiction. This led to the emergence of a specific formulation of blackness in the *négritude*/negrismo/New Negro movements as both the emblem of a transnational experience of imperialist exploitation as well as the symbol of anti-imperialist resistance to that exploitation.

This political signifier of blackness traveled, so to speak, to the 1955 Bandung Conference with Richard Wright, who went to Bandung from Paris where he was living and collaborating with *négritude* writers. In Wright's *The Colour Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (1956), he uses the term "color" to expand this use of blackness as a political signifier in order to include people of non-African ancestry but continues to maintain the racial determinism and essentialism for which these movements were criticized. The Tricontinental, in its expansion of the Bandung alliance to the Americas, attempted to push *beyond the color curtain*, meaning that the Tricontinental meant to transform the category of color into a political signifier of color that did not denote a racially deterministic signified.

While the first chapter traces the evolution of a black Atlantic resistant subjectivity into Wright's articulation of a color curtain, chapter 2, "In the Belly of the Beast: African American Civil Rights through a Tricontinental Lens," delineates how Tricontinental materials discursively separate the politicized use of color found in Wright's text from its racially deterministic content. Wright claimed that "the negro problem" was not discussed at Bandung, but as the Afro-Asian solidarity of Bandung moved into the Americas, this alliance explicitly began to reach out to African Americans.²⁹ This chapter analyzes the plethora of official Tricontinental cultural production on African American civil rights, including articles from *Tricontinental Bulletin* and *Tricontinental*, posters focused on the Black Panthers and African American activism, the film shorts *Now* (1965) and *El movimiento Panteras Negras* (The Black Panther movement) (1968) by the Cuban filmmaker Santiago Álvarez, and writings and speeches quoted in Tricontinental materials by the African American activists Stokely Carmichael and Robert F. Williams. Through the analysis of these texts, this chapter illuminates the central tenets of a Tricontinentalist ideology in which the Jim Crow South and African American liberation became the primary focus.

Within what I term the Tricontinental's "metonymic color politics," the Jim Crow racial divide functions as a metonym not for a global color line but for a Tricontinental power struggle in which all radical, exploited peoples, regardless of their skin color, are implicated. The Tricontinental forges its transnational, transethnic, and translinguistic solidarity through a discursive coloring of resistant peoples. With this transformation of color from a racial to a political signifier, the Tricontinental articulates its critique of a global system of imperialism through a denunciation of racial inequality but simultaneously takes a radically inclusive stance that attempts to destabilize racial essentialisms.

This global concept of power, lateral solidarity among liberation struggles, and destabilization of trait-based claims to belonging make the Tricontinental a model that anticipates and is intrinsically relevant to contemporary theories and praxes of resistance.

The Tricontinental's deterritorialized notion of empire, its privileging of African Americans as representative of the global struggle, as well as its metonymic color politics, all represent a discourse that circulates in a range of cultural production beyond official Tricontinental materials. This ideology does not originate with the 1966 Tricontinental Conference, but rather, the Tricontinental becomes an official mouthpiece for ideas that were already being exchanged among American radicals. Through an analysis of works from the Nuyorican movement by Miguel Algarín, Piri Thomas, Pedro Pietri, and Felipe Luciano; writings by a group of radical Puerto Rican and African American youth in Harlem called the Young Lords Party; and an issue of *Tricontinental Bulletin* devoted to the Young Lords, chapter 3, "The 'Colored and Oppressed' in Amerikkka: Trans-Affective Solidarity in Writings by Young Lords and Nuyoricans," demonstrates how a global vision of revolution circulated in radical writings outside the Tricontinental's own cultural production.

Through a study of the treatment of Puerto Rican and African American solidarity found in Young Lords' and closely related Nuyorican texts, this chapter examines how the Jim Crow South became the lens through which Nuyorican writers took up structural inequalities in their particular contexts as part of a larger pattern of imperial power. This position is frequently summarized in materials written by the Young Lords through their consistent spelling of America as "Amerikkka." Like in Tricontinental materials, the racial oppression of the Jim Crow South emerges as a microcosm of an unequal power structure not only in America but also metonymically around the globe. The KKK stands in for global oppressive power and African Americans epitomize for the Young Lords what they call the "colored and oppressed people" of the world, which they explicitly state does not necessarily exclude white people. Ultimately, I argue, these materials contain within them a characteristically Tricontinentalist model of trans-affective solidarity, which produces a political imaginary that is always situated in the envisaged affective traversing of borders.

At the same time that a study of Tricontinentalism in New York Puerto Rican texts provides a case study for how this discourse circulated outside of Cuba, the Tricontinental also disseminated Young Lords' writings among its international constituency. Considering the inclusion of texts by the Young

Lords within the pages of *Tricontinental Bulletin* provides a helpful lens for understanding the Tricontinental's precarious political positioning between Cuba's communist government and the diverse constituents of the alliance. Through a discussion of the Young Lords' progressive politics on gender and sexuality, this chapter outlines the tension between the increasing Sovietization of the Cuban state in the early 1970s and the Tricontinental's role as a site of convergence for radical organizations with diverse views.

Finally, within a broader discussion of Nuyorican writings, this chapter offers a sustained close reading of *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), the well-known text by Piri Thomas (the most widely read Puerto Rican writer in the United States and the first to be embraced by mainstream U.S. publishers). The inclusion of *Down These Mean Streets* in this analysis may, at first glance, seem out of place because Thomas was not affiliated with the Young Lords, and, although he influenced Nuyorican writers greatly, he was considerably older than the other writers considered in the chapter. However, the discussion of Thomas's book—especially regarding its representation of the Jim Crow South as a microcosm of global inequities, its discussion of Puerto Rican solidarity with African Americans, and the protagonist's identification with a Southern, black subjectivity—not only reveals the presence of Tricontinentalist ideology in Nuyorican writings prior to the official formation of the Tricontinental alliance but also demonstrates how the lens of Tricontinentalism changes how we read such an exhaustively studied text. While not as hard-hitting as Santiago Álvarez's newsreels or the propagandistic writings in *Tricontinental Bulletin*, Thomas's Tricontinentalist worldview as expressed in *Down These Mean Streets* is quite explicit but has consistently been overlooked in the abundant scholarship on his text. In this sense, this chapter models a Tricontinentalist reading praxis, providing an opening for future scholarship that would engage in a reorientation of movement-era texts through the transnational lens of Tricontinentalism.

The fourth chapter, “‘Todos los negros y todos los blancos y todos tomamos café’: Racial Politics in the ‘Latin, African’ Nation,” examines the inherent contradiction in Cuba's primary role in producing the Tricontinental's materials through which the Cuban Revolution presented itself to the world as deeply committed to the struggle for racial equality. Cuba's Tricontinentalist support for black liberation in the sphere of international politics contradicted the Castro government's domestic racial discourse. As Mark Q. Sawyer has argued, in the domestic sphere, Cuba embraced a generic Latin American racial exceptionalism in which the seemingly inclusive concept of *mestizaje* is used to support a myth of racial democracy that veils inequalities. To this

Latin American exceptionalism, the Cuban government added a Marxist exceptionalism, in which socialist reforms are purported to have eradicated racial inequities.³⁰ Within a discussion of this dual racial discourse, I consider both the Cuban government's fraught relationship with African American and Afro-Cuban activists in the late 1960s and 1970s as well as how the dissonance between Cuba's domestic and internationalist racial discourses is clearly demonstrated in state rhetoric surrounding Cuba's involvement in the Angolan Civil War.

In the 1960s and 1970s, harsh condemnations of Cuba's racial politics came from African American militants who spent time in Cuba and wrote about their experiences upon leaving. At the same time, and while U.S. black radical groups like the Black Panthers faced ongoing political persecution and factionalism, Cuba was becoming further entrenched in the conflict in Angola. This contributed to a shift in Tricontinental materials in the late 1970s from a focus on the U.S. South, which was used as a microcosm for an expansive global empire characterized by racial capitalism, toward a focus on apartheid South Africa. In this process, the Tricontinentalist concept of the "South" becomes further deterritorialized and global in scope. The U.S. South, for example, is compared to South Africa, which is then compared to political relations in the Southern Cone of Latin America. In other words, a Tricontinentalist vision of the South as indexing spaces of inequity around the globe—which anticipates the contemporary usage of the term "Global South"—is even more fully articulated in Tricontinental materials in the late 1970s.

Despite the Tricontinental's focus on black struggles abroad, the immediate years following the 1966 Tricontinental Conference generally produced a textual silence on post-1959 racial inequalities on the island and was a period marked by repression toward intellectuals, including Afro-Cuban intellectuals. Despite this general climate of censorship, some Cuban writers and artists continued to produce texts that challenged the Castro government's triumphalist domestic racial discourse.

One significant example is the emergence in the mid-1960s of a loosely affiliated group of young black Cuban intellectuals and artists. Through a close reading of the work of one of these intellectuals, Nicolás Guillén Landrián—the long-censored Afro-Cuban filmmaker and the nephew of the famed poet Nicolás Guillén—this chapter considers how he used Tricontinentalism as a platform from which to launch a critique of the Cuban government's handling of domestic racial inequalities. Guillén Landrián appropriates a Tricontinentalist rhetoric as well as its newsreel aesthetic in order to expose racial discrimi-

nation and inequality within communist Cuba. In this sense, Guillén Landrián's work is a testament to an inherent contradiction and lack of self-criticism within the Tricontinental's focus on racism in the imperialist North. However, it also reveals the way in which Tricontinentalism as a discourse transcends the Cuban Revolution and could even be employed as a critique of it.

Although its materials continue to be produced today, the Tricontinental has been largely forgotten. This erasure is due to a combination of several factors, such as disillusionment with Cuba's repression of intellectual freedoms and the severe weakening of the Left in the Americas in the 1970s and 1980s. Equally significant is the way in which Cold War decolonization discourses would become preserved within the academic field of postcolonial studies, a field that has had a contentious relationship with Latin Americanism and that has tended to emphasize an experience of colonization rather than a horizontalist ideological project. In contrast, the Tricontinental was focused on global solidarity organized around ideological affinities. While it recognized similarities between experiences of oppression, the basis of its solidarity was not dependent either on those similarities or on trait-based characteristics, such as skin color or geographic location. In other words, even though Tricontinentalism has been recognized as a foundational moment for postcolonial subjectivity, the two are quite different in perspective.

Beginning in the 1990s, we witnessed a return of the Left in the Americas and, alongside it, I suggest, a return to the Tricontinental moment. With the slow recovery from the 2008 economic slump, leftist electoral politics are in crisis in the hemisphere, yet grassroots progressive social movements continue to gain ground. By suggesting that we have seen a return to the Tricontinental in these social movements, I do not mean that the Tricontinental has once again become the central voice of leftist radicalism. Rather, recent inter-American solidarity politics within the contemporary alter-globalization movement—of which the most obvious referent are the annual World Social Forums that have taken place since 2001—exhibit a revival of Tricontinentalism both in their aesthetics and ideology. Thus, the final chapter, "The (New) Global South in the Age of Global Capitalism: A Return to the Tricontinental," examines digital media from the World Social Forum, such as its "Bamako Appeal," which explicitly calls for a revival of the Tricontinental; the Occupy Wall Street movement; and the Black Lives Matter movement. It argues that, aesthetically, recent social movements draw from Tricontinentalist cultural production through the proliferation of "political remix videos," the creation of political posters that are at times direct copies of Tricontinental

screenprints, and the use of “culture jamming” to subvert media culture. Similarly, contemporary concepts like the Global South that have emerged to describe the transnational imaginary of alter-globalization movements are reviving Tricontinentalism’s ideological project and global concept of power and resistance.

While within the realm of Global South theory racial inequality has remained a central focus, there is currently a disconnect between theory surrounding transnational political solidarity and the reality of solidarity politics on the ground. For example, although the struggle against antiblack violence and racism is gaining visibility on the world stage, these struggles tend to be framed as critiques of the state that do not necessarily address racial violence through the lens of global capitalism. Conversely, alter-globalization movements directed against multinational financial institutions and corporations tend toward color-blind discourses of solidarity that overlook questions of race. In other words, in the contemporary revival of Tricontinentalism, the Tricontinental legacy is stripped of its most valuable contribution: its metonymic color politics, which conceived of a global, inclusionary, and nonracially deterministic resistant subjectivity but which still kept racism and the image of global capitalism as a racializing apparatus in the spotlight. In contrast to the Tricontinental, the transnational solidarity of much of alter-globalization organizing today tends to reproduce the color-blind multiculturalism of neoliberal discourse, producing silences around racial inequalities.

This sustained study of the Tricontinental provides a long view of contemporary theories and practices of horizontal resistance, offering a point of comparison from which to develop in a more critical manner. With this in mind, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South* aims to call contemporary transnational solidarity politics into a deeper engagement with black internationalist thought and suggests that the fight against racial inequities is fundamentally necessary for the formation of Global South political resistance. Many of the writers and filmmakers discussed in the pages that follow had to physically travel somewhere else—to Alabama, Havana, Harlem, and Beijing—in order to fully place the social inequities that they witnessed and experienced at home into a larger context of global systems of oppression. In this sense, Tricontinentalist writers beg Tricontinentalist readers who are as internationalist in their thinking and understanding of oppression and resistance as they are. This book represents a step toward developing a Tricontinentalist reading, one that outlines a worldview that continues to be imagined, theorized, written, and believed.

Beyond the Color Curtain

From the Black Atlantic to the Tricontinental

The cover image of the tenth issue of *Tricontinental*—with its flat, bold colors and geometric designs (fig. 1.1)—is typical of the posters, magazines, and films that the Tricontinental alliance began distributing in 1966. Through graphic art and film, Tricontinental materials often communicated complex concepts, such as inequality, racism, and economic exploitation, in simple visual terms, creating nuanced political arguments through immediate visual impact. On the cover of this January–February 1969 issue, a drawing of what could be a preschool puzzle—where the child lines up the heads, bodies, and feet for three separate figures—is used to depict three militants who stand in for the three continents of the alliance (Africa, Asia, and Latin America). An African militant in camouflage wears the body of his Latin American ally (a Che Guevara lookalike with a beard and beret) and stands with the feet of an Asian fighter wearing the signature *dép lốp* sandals of the Viet Minh. Three profoundly diverse continents, which are represented in the Tricontinental alliance through a multiplicity of militant liberation movements with varying interests and goals, are metonymically synthesized into typecast caricatures.

Despite the simplistic nature of this image, the interchangeability of the three militants' bodies communicates a shared purpose, unity, and collective political subjectivity that is much more nuanced than it would initially ap-

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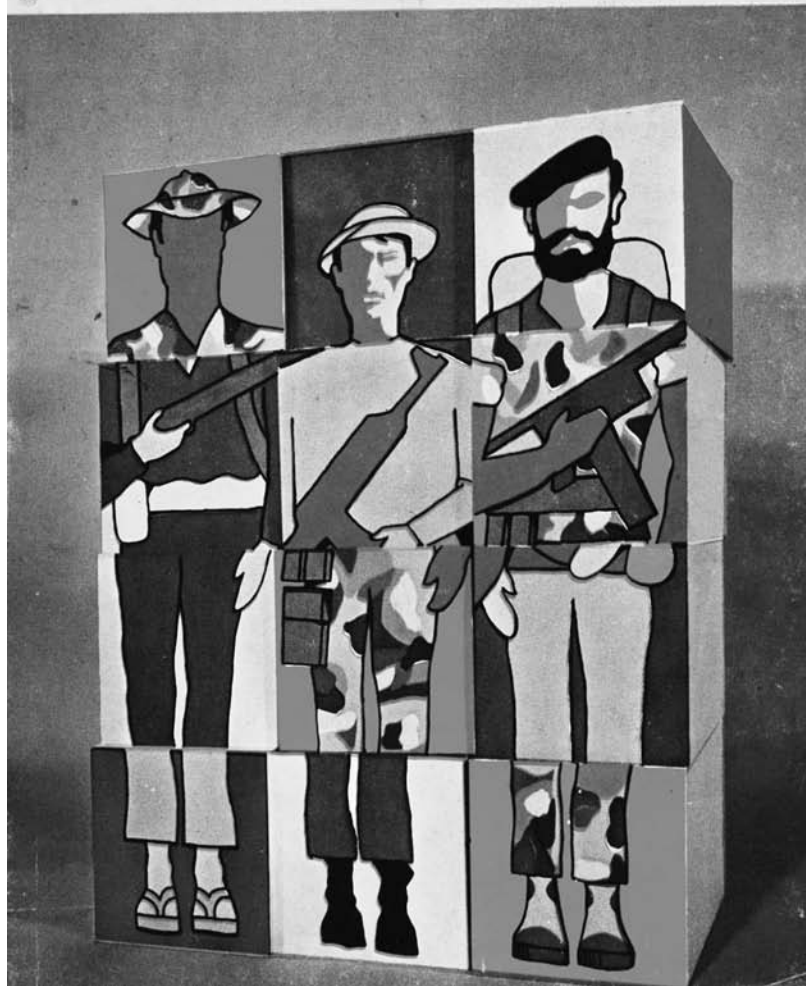


FIG. 1.1 *Tricontinental*, tenth issue (January–February 1969). COURTESY OSPAAAL.

pear. The vision portrayed here of an intercontinental exchange resulting in a globally unified and mutually supportive militant front against a common enemy—where any guerrilla fighter from any of the three continents could theoretically stand in for the eyes, hands, and feet of another, no matter how geographically, linguistically, or nationally distant—is a vision laden with idealism. Yet it was this far-fetched notion that drew delegates from leftist and militant movements of eighty-two nations, some with the support of their national governments and some in opposition to those governments, to the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Cuba, from January 3 to 15, 1966.¹ Five hundred and twelve delegates from Africa, Asia, and Latin America as well as 270 more observers, including journalists, invited guests, and representatives from socialist countries, met in the Hotel Habana Libre (formerly the Havana Hilton) in the busy cultural district of Vedado.² The conference was historically unprecedented and drew political leaders like Chile's Salvador Allende, Uruguay's Luis Augusto Turcios Lima, and Guinea-Bissau's Amílcar Cabral, as well as celebrities like the performer Josephine Baker and the writers Elizabeth Burgos and Mario Vargas Llosa. The Tricontinental alliance against imperialism that was forged by the delegates, formally named the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL), would quickly become the driving force of international political radicalism and the primary engine of its cultural production around the globe.

In the pages of the issue of *Tricontinental* mentioned earlier, we catch a glimpse of the broad range of struggles brought together through this movement. The articles contained in this issue cover politics in India, the Vietnam War, activities of the Tupamaro urban guerrilla groups in Uruguay, liberation movements in South Yemen, an interview with U.S. Black Panthers George Murray and Joudon Major Ford, a reflection by Fidel Castro on ten years of the Cuban Revolution, and an article by the U.S. socialist writer Irwin Silber on revolutionary art in the United States. On the back cover appears an iconic mother-child drawing by the Black Panther Party's Minister of Culture, Emory Douglas, in which a black woman sits on the edge of the bed in a room with peeling walls and smiles happily at her toddler, who is standing below her and holding a rifle over his shoulder.³

The overt presence and influence of African American intellectuals and artists are not unique to this issue of *Tricontinental*. In fact, an engagement with African American struggles formed an integral part of the Tricontinental's worldview and international appeal. The U.S. South and a Jim Crow racial binary of white and colored are consistently mobilized in Tricontinental materials

as the primary lens through which to theorize a transnational empire and transracial resistant subjectivity. In a way similar to the visual language analyzed in the cover image mentioned earlier, Tricontinentalism often employs apparently simplistic racial divisions to refer to a complex and nonracially deterministic understanding of global power and resistance. In this way, Tricontinentalism intentionally deviates from presenting its political collectivity through the lens of global class struggle. Rather, it foregrounds racial struggles, and specifically the struggles of black peoples, in order to open onto a broader, transracial political subjectivity.

This issue of *Tricontinental* is just one of many visually and historically rich materials that speak to a transnational political, artistic, and intellectual exchange between and beyond the three continents that the Tricontinental alliance claimed to represent. Activists and intellectuals from across the globe contributed to the Tricontinental's large body of cultural production, but, more important, they participated in the creation of a Tricontinentalist political ideology and cultural aesthetics that they would incorporate into their local artistic and intellectual networks. For this reason, Tricontinentalism can be found in a wide range of cultural production beyond what was produced by the Tricontinental organization (OSPAAAL) itself. Its influence is clearly evident in closely related radical texts in the Americas, such as those within Third Cinema, the Nuyorican movement, and writings by Black Power activists. While the chapters that follow will be devoted to tracing this influence more fully, in general, we might consider a Tricontinentalist text to be any text that engages explicitly with the aesthetics and especially the discourse of Tricontinentalism. That is, a Tricontinentalist text is one that incorporates Tricontinentalism by reflecting a deterritorialized vision of imperial power and a recognition of imperialism and racial oppression as interlinked, and often by using a racial signifier of color to abstractly refer to a broadly conceived transracial political collectivity. In this sense, through identifying and analyzing Tricontinentalist texts, this book resituates sites of cultural production whose analysis is often constrained by the national and linguistic boundaries that have traditionally determined how texts are studied and anthologized.

According to the Tricontinental's International Preparatory Committee, the Tricontinental originated in the 1955 Afro-Asian Bandung Conference. In reality, the Tricontinental (OSPAAAL) represented an extension of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) into the Americas, and although the preparatory committee described the AAPSO, an alliance of seventy-five organizations founded in Cairo in 1957, as originating "in 1955 at the meet-

ing of the heads of State in Bandung,” the AAPSO is generally considered significantly more communist-aligned than the 1955 Bandung Conference.⁴ Yet the Bandung and Tricontinental moments might be taken as two major cornerstones of Cold War anticolonialisms, separated by an ocean and a decade.⁵ Whereas Bandung has been the subject of a plethora of studies and is frequently referenced as a foundational moment for historically influential and impactful developments like the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) and academic postcolonial theory, the Tricontinental has not fared as well.⁶ The few studies on Tricontinentalism often simplistically limit it to the January 1966 conference, characterize it as a Soviet front organization, or dismiss it as a mere propaganda instrument of the Cuban state. Tricontinentalism, however, was conceived through a transnational dialogue whose discourse circulated widely outside of Cuba before and after the 1966 conference and whose origins and influences cannot solely be attributed to any one nation-state, not even Cuba or the Soviet Union. It is a key contention of this book that as Tricontinentalism represented a shift from a Bandung-era solidarity, based around postcolonial nation-states and a former experience of European colonialism, to a more fluid notion of power and resistance, Tricontinentalism largely anticipated a shift currently taking place in related theoretical approaches to transnational politics, such as the shift from postcolonial theory to the Global South.

Tricontinentalism has not only influenced theorizations of resistant political subjectivities under contemporary capitalist globalization, such as the Global South, but key aesthetic, discursive, and ideological elements of Tricontinentalism are also being manifested in present-day anticapitalist and antiracist social movements. In this regard, what has heretofore been completely overlooked in studies of Tricontinentalism is the way it represents, in large part, a response to previous efforts to combine anticapitalist and racial justice organizing in the American hemisphere. That is, Tricontinentalism sought to respond to long-standing debates within black internationalist political networks around the possibilities and limits of a transnational and transracial resistant collectivity. In contrast to a race-centered, pan-Africanist model or to the color-blind approach of communist internationalism, it aimed to articulate a critique of global capital and a vision of transracial resistance precisely through a focus on racial violence and racial inequality. Using the U.S. South and later apartheid South Africa as microcosms of global systems of inequity, Tricontinental materials posed the struggles of African Americans and of black South Africans as representative of the entirety of the Tricontinental’s transracial resistance.

Ironically, the Tricontinental's international and antiracist stance would frequently be mobilized by Cuba's postrevolutionary government in order to externalize its own racial divisions to the United States and South Africa. Tricontinental materials, all produced in Havana and radically committed to black movements abroad, were consistently silent on any racial discrimination or black political organizing within communist Cuba. This inherent contradiction will be discussed more fully in later chapters, but it should be noted that although the focus on black struggles abroad and silence on racial inequity within Cuba have significant overlap with the Cuban state's racial politics, Tricontinentalist racial discourse is not identical to the racial discourse of the Cuban state. Tricontinentalism should be understood, rather, as a transnationally dialogic discourse rooted in a long tradition of black internationalist thought that at times converges with and at times deviates from the Cuban state's racial rhetoric. Specifically, it revises a black international resistant subjectivity into a global vision of subaltern resistance that is resurfacing both in contemporary social movements and in contemporary horizontalist theories of power and resistance. In this sense, looking back at a Tricontinental model of political resistance provides significant insight for understanding social movements today, and specifically, it will help us to better understand a contemporary disconnect in the American hemisphere between alter-globalization and racial justice discourses.

What remains of this chapter outlines the Tricontinental's theoretical afterlives and roots. First, I begin with its afterlives by discussing modes of analysis, specifically world-systems and postcolonial theory, which emerged out of the transnational approaches of Cold War "Third Worldist" movements. I consider the recent trend away from these prior models toward more networked, horizontalist understandings of the operation of power and political resistance within neoliberal globalization. These networked theories of power and resistance, especially the critical concept of the Global South, are recovering, I argue, key components of a long-elided Tricontinentalism.

Second, I turn to the Tricontinental's roots, providing a long view of the Global South by considering how it is based in transnational anti-imperialist solidarities that arose in response to the early twentieth-century expansion of U.S. empire and to the accompanying exportation of regimes of control from the U.S. South to a larger Caribbean plantation zone. Tricontinentalism responded to prior framings of anti-imperialism in the American hemisphere, and specifically to a formulation of blackness in the *négritude/negrismo*/New Negro movements of the 1920s to 1940s, as the emblem of both a transna-