

Book Note

Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America. Ed. Jessica Stites Mor. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013. Pp. 305. \$29.95.

Much academic literature on Cold War politics has explored, either by adopting or unpacking, a simple dichotomy between the Eastern and Western Blocs. This literature often implants assumptions of nonreciprocity and reactionaryism within the treatment of the so-called “Third World” countries during this time period. In *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America*, editor Jessica Stites Mor challenges the predominant discourse that Latin American human rights activism and leftist movements arose from polities of the Global South looking outward to institutions of the Global North as models. Instead, Mor argues, the historical paradigms used to analyze solidarity organizing must adjust to accommodate a wide range of modes and meanings of solidarity, including ways in which Latin American agendas emerged from strategic engagement grounded in local community contexts and South-South interactions. Curating eight diverse chapters and an epilogue, Mor, a cultural historian and Assistant Professor of History at the University of British Columbia, highlights a transformative period of political, social, and economic change in Latin America during the Cold War to sharpen the contours of the volume’s central question: “How do solidarity movements contribute to the emergence of more democratic, rather than hierarchical, forms of political community?”¹

Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America is organized into three parts tracking different temporal phases of human rights movements in Latin America. Part I, Critical Precursors to Transnational Solidarity, is a three-chapter examination of the ways in which resistance and anticolonialism mobilization helped define the left’s conception of solidarity. Part II, Solidarity in Action, is comprised of another three chapters that illustrate how tensions between the local and the transnational informed Third World countries’ perspectives about, and relations with, the Cold War struggle. In this second part, Russell Cobb’s essay explores the cosmopolitan transnationalism established by writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa during the 1960s “boom” in Spanish-American literature. Next, the two chapters comprising Part III, The Influence of Transnational Solidarity on Postnational Responsibilities, probe the use of solidarity activism as a political resource, both by oppressors and oppressed. For example, author Brenda Elsey surveys various ways in which popular culture and the solidarity movement intersected under the Pinochet

1. Jessica Stites Mor, *Introduction: Situation Transnational Solidarity Within Critical Human Rights Studies of Cold War Latin America*, in *HUMAN RIGHTS AND TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN COLD WAR LATIN AMERICA* 3, 4 (Jessica Stites Mor, ed., 2013).

regime, including by protestor activism surrounding Chile's participation in the 1974 World Cup and media coverage of Miss Chile's victory in the 1987 Miss Universe pageant. Finally, James N. Green brings the volume together with his epilogue, an unabashedly nonobjective self-interview about Green's efforts navigating a frictional dynamic between leftist and gay rights movements in Brazil, movements that he found to be mutually exclusive.

Molly Todd's chapter, "The Politics of Refuge," offers a particularly crisp distillation of several themes queried throughout the collection and provides a direct challenge to the mainstream narrative of international North-to-South humanitarian aid. Through a case study of Salvadoran *campesinos*, or rural laborers, who sought refuge in Honduras during the dirty wars and civil wars of the 1970s through early 1990s, Todd deconstructs the notion that such *campesinos* did not control the terms of their displacement. Instead, the flight of Salvadorans *en masse* is revealed to have been an orchestrated, collective process. The Salvadorans defied attempts by international entities such as the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees to characterize them as victims defined by a lack of statehood. Todd argues that the refugee-victim image idealized by such international entities effectively depoliticized and dehistoricized the *campesinos*. But through deliberative community organizing, the *campesinos* asserted their relevance by crafting political rhetoric to relate their struggles to the larger Cold War context. They strengthened their Salvadoran identity by establishing elaborate systems of representative self-government that were responsive to community needs regarding housing, health, education, and childcare within the camps. Still, international aid organizations, in particular those from the Global North, were crucial to lending credibility to Salvadoran testimonies and demanding accountability from the Duarte government when it came time to negotiate resettlement terms for thousands of *campesinos* returning to their homeland. Thus Todd's chapter illuminates the paradox of solidarity mobilization in Cold War Latin America—the success of the grassroots nationalist movements hinged upon the validation of the same international actors who often grossly misunderstood and misrepresented them.

Mor's volume deftly identifies a shortcoming common in historic accounts of international integration—that, as Elsey's chapter notes, despite the professed intent of scholars to focus on transnational methodologies and theories of globalization, "the national context has remained the center of their analyses" because of the limits of traditional modes of documentation, which are often bound to one country for one particular purpose.² Mor's collection is not immune to this critique. Even a chapter such as Christine Hatzky's that examines South-South cooperation and educational transfer,

2. Brenda Elsey, "As the World is My Witness": *Transnational Solidarity and Popular Culture*, in *HUMAN RIGHTS AND TRANSNATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN COLD WAR LATIN AMERICA* 177, 180 (Jessica Stites Mor, ed., 2013).

which provides a vivid and novel account of internationalist solidarities between Cuba and Angola during the late 1970s through early 1990s, inevitably admits a country-specific asymmetry in the availability of information. Hatzsky acknowledges that, because of a scarcity of appropriate interviewees, she could only provide an “impression” of the frequency of the permanent emigration of Cubans to Angola; the focus of her work remained on the Cubans who returned. But because the sophisticated analyses pervading the entire volume inculcate the reader with a healthy skepticism of historiography, the reader would likely credit Hatzsky for explicitly acknowledging her research limitations.

Despite the strength and comprehensiveness of the volume’s collected examinations, the role of feminist activism in these solidarity movements is noticeably absent. Because feminist and anticolonialist movements have historically been linked, there remains an obvious gap in the volume regarding discussion of efforts to secure the rights and equality for women in Latin America. A solitary reference to feminism appears in a short section within Elsey’s chapter, entitled “Women and Solidarity in ‘Folk’ Art,” which describes Chilean female activists who mobilized and united to promote political agendas that heightened awareness in gender inequality and domestic abuse; even then, Elsey notes that these women did not self-identify as feminists. The voices of authors such as Elsey and Green in this volume would have resonated even more strongly if offered alongside a fuller feminist study. Yet despite this gap, *Human Rights and Transnational Solidarity in Cold War Latin America* succeeds in presenting a new theoretical framework through which to view the study of Latin American transnational solidarity during the Cold War. Although the volume is primarily directed toward scholars of twentieth-century Latin America, all readers will appreciate the insight into grassroots historical perspectives that have been deemphasized for far too long.

—Connie P. Sung

