



**Tobias Rupprecht.** *Soviet Internationalism after Stalin: Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. X, 334 S. \$103.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-107-10288-0.

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“Soviet Internationalism after Stalin. Interaction and Exchange between the USSR and Latin America during the Cold War” is a multi-archival study based on a variety of sources. The author, Tobias Rupprecht, currently Lecturer in Latin American and Caribbean History at the University of Exeter, has excellent knowledge of the existing Anglo-American, Russian, German, and Latin American historiographies. There are not many historians who feel so equally at home in two non-European fields and command the linguistic skills to conduct this kind of research and Rupprecht makes good use of both archival sources and interviews. Overall this book is a well-researched account of Soviet and Latin American transnational exchanges and provides a non-western perspective on an otherwise familiar story of Soviet propaganda and cultural efforts during the early Cold War.

The book follows a chronological and thematic structure. In the first two chapters we are provided with a traditional account of the two-way cultural transfer between the Soviet Union and Latin America with a focus on friendship societies, travelogues and journalistic accounts. Here, Rupprecht argues somewhat boldly that Latin American culture was “perhaps the most illuminating example” (p. 74) of the re-internationalization of Soviet cultural life in the 1950s. He provides many examples that show the prominence

and attraction of Latin America in Soviet cultural life. In reality, however, a universal opening to the outside world took place, as for example many accounts written on the Moscow Youth Festival in 1957 have shown.

Chapter three focuses on Latin American intellectuals and it is here that the universal nature of the Latin American relationship with the Soviet Union becomes most obvious, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when left wing intellectuals all over the world lost faith in the Soviet Union. In chapters four and five, Rupprecht moves with ease between narratives detailing the history of Soviet institutions such as the Patrice Lumumba University and MGIMO, the Moscow Institute for International Relations, and the life stories and experiences of the students and area studies experts who trained at and staffed these institutions. He argues that the non-western origins and attitudes of the Latin American visitors bring out a unique perspective on Soviet education and efforts in internationalization. The “southern perspective” is indeed interesting as it overwhelmingly casts the Soviet project in a positive light, but it was also dependent on class, political views, and access to western political and cultural influences. In general, however, the narrative style of zooming in and out works well and the individual stories provide a wealth of detail that fills in the

context of a larger story about ideological and generational changes in the Soviet Union.

Rupprecht focuses on the cultural aspects of Soviet internationalism, a perspective that satisfied this reviewer, as the ideological and cultural components of internationalism underpinned the ultimate goals of economic and political dominance during the Cold War. Without “convictions, ideas, and emotions” (p. 3), the Cold War conflict would have looked dramatically different and there is no shortage of studies that detail the political history of the 20th century. In his focus on the renewed internationalism of the late 1950s, Rupprecht makes much out of the isolation of late Stalinism, but as he himself also points out, this much discussed isolation spanned less than ten years in the history of the Soviet Union and while it definitely had an impact, a part of the success of the “revival of internationalism” (p. 21) is of course that it built on earlier ideas and sentiments rooted in the revolutionary ideology of the Soviet Union. The study often looks back to the 1920s and 1930s, but even if it is mostly focused on the 1950s-1960s, when internationalism was most vibrant, one of the lasting conclusions of this book is that it shows convincingly how the overall development of Soviet cultural relations, exchanges, and area studies in general built – at least in part – on experiences and encounters with Latin Americans. This is not an unfamiliar narrative in recent studies of the Soviet Union and its relationship with the outside world but this story of Soviet-Latin American cultural transfer contributes with a geographic focus that has sorely been missing. We have studies of cultural interactions within the Eastern Bloc as well as Soviet cultural exchanges with the West, but other continents have not been covered in any depth.

In the introduction, Rupprecht includes a thorough overview of the terminology and safeguards himself well from potential criticisms about his generalizing use of terms such as Latin America, Cold War, and Third World, to take some

examples. His claims for what kind of history this account of Soviet-Latin-American relations supposedly stands are not as focused. It is “intertwined history” (p. 4), “entangled history” (passim), and “trans-national” (passim), and the introduction proposes that the study contributes to a “multi-polar history of the Cold War” (p. 9) with some intention to make up for some of the apparent absence of Russia in global history narratives. The rest of the book does not quite live up to the introductory remarks about global history, which end up being somewhat superfluous and the focus on interactions and exchange (emphasized in the subtitle) is much more appropriate. Therefore, by providing geographic cases that will hopefully be included in future global histories, together with African, Asian, and European perspectives, this work makes an important contribution to our understanding of the general cultural encounters (or cultural transfer) that took place during the Cold War.

Finally, with such a great variety of sources, the book would have benefitted from some visual material and something must have gone wrong in press, because this otherwise fine book looks as if it is photocopied, with skewed pages and a discrepancy in the margins, which reduces the quality of the reading experience. But that is on the press, not the author, who has produced a valuable contribution to the growing field of research on Soviet cultural relations with the outside world.

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