The place of Latin America in the history of the Global South, or global history in general, is often ignored and undervalued. While there is ample evidence of the existence of “powerful interactions” between Latin America and the rest of the world, scholars have been slow to integrate the region fully into twentieth-century histories of the Cold War, the Third World project, and global struggles against imperialism and (neo)colonialism.[1] Jessica Stites Mor’s ambitious new book, *South-South Solidarity and the Latin American Left*, is therefore a welcome and much-needed intervention in the fields of Latin American history, Cold War history, and histories of transnational solidarity activism and internationalism. Drawing on material from an impressive number of archives in Cuba, Israel, South Africa, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Germany, and the United States, Stites Mor compellingly shows how Latin Americans in the 1960s and 1970s built relationships—both real and imagined—with people, organizations, and states in Africa, Asia, and other Latin American countries.

The book examines four case studies to make the case that South-South solidarity movements were neither irrelevant nor inconsequential. To trace the overlooked impact of Latin American transnational solidarity, Stites Mor argues, we need to expand our understanding of solidarity and take account of actors that operated from within public institutions and bureaucracies, rather than focusing on social movements alone. The first two case studies, then, analyze the role of the revolutionary state in what Stites Mor calls “rendering” solidarity. Chapter 1 focuses on Mexico’s place as a “safe haven” for leftists escaping anticommunist violence and repression in the Southern Cone (p. 25). Zooming in on the Chileans who fled their country after the military coup of September 1973, the chapter shows how and with what consequences they were received by the Mexican revolutionary state. The warm welcome that Mexico offered Chileans was not just a symbolic stance against imperialism, Stites Mor demonstrates, but also “created and protected a space of resistance” as Latin American exiles based in Mexico City were able to organize and coordinate a transnational solidarity movement to denounce the Pinochet dictatorship (p. 42).

Chapter 2 moves on from Mexico’s rather pragmatic interpretation of solidarity to discuss the Cuban revolutionary state, focusing on the cultural production of the Organización de Solidaridad con los Pueblos de Asia, África y América Latina (OSPAAL). Through powerful and visually appealing posters and photographs, Stites Mor argues, OSPAAL managed to create a “transborder political community” dedicated to the overthrow
of colonialism, apartheid, imperialism, and racism (p. 97). While other scholars have discussed OSPAAAL’s creative outputs in relative depth, this chapter, which draws on an article that Stites Mor published in 2019, serves as an important example of the importance of cultural production for transnational solidarity movements.[2] Visual art and music are powerful tools with the ability to cross linguistic barriers, bringing people together for a common cause that otherwise might have been too complex or distant.

The last two case studies in the book are arguably the most intriguing, as they cover topics that have received little attention elsewhere. Moving away from the revolutionary state, chapter 3 examines the Argentine Left’s complex and multifaceted relationship to Palestinian nationalism and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Rather than focusing on direct connections and the “transfers of material resources,” Stites Mor shows how the PLO provided a fractured and embattled Argentine Left with a common cause to rally behind (p. 100). The Palestinian struggle for self-determination was thus an important “symbol” for the Argentine Left, but it did little to advance the PLO’s cause (p. 128). This has left me wondering about the Palestinian view of the Argentine solidarity movement. What did Palestinian nationalists think—if anything—about these mostly symbolic and representational acts of solidarity? Nonetheless, the chapter’s focus on the domestic contexts in which solidarity was practiced is also a welcome one, reminding that transnational movements have local roots and that these roots give shape to a movement.

Chapter 4 analyzes another understudied and exciting topic, namely the influence of Latin American liberation theology on antiapartheid movements in southern Africa. Liberation theology, Mor argues, functioned as a “vehicle for transnational solidarity,” allowing Catholic activists from Latin America to transmit radical ideas of national liberation and anti-imperialism to the rest of the Global South (p. 133). Catholic women played key roles in these networks of exchange and circulation. Stites Mor provides us with the example of the Hildegard Goss-Mayr, an Austrian Catholic activist who traveled extensively between Latin America and southern Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, speaking about “nonviolent political resistance strategies developed by Catholic leftists” from Latin America (p. 145). This chapter also engages with one of Stites Mor’s key arguments: that solidarity activism can have a significant and continuing impact if it operates through already existing institutions, such as the Catholic Church.

It is perhaps unsurprising that such a slim book on South-South solidarity, at less than 180 pages of main text, leaves several questions unanswered. The “lived experiences” of the people who participated in or were influenced by transnational solidarity activism are not covered in much depth.[3] What did solidarity activism look like for those who participated in it? How did it shape individual lives and local contexts? These are important questions that can help us trace the impact of South-South solidarity at different scales. I also would have liked to read more about how exactly solidarity movements evolved over time, particularly with regard to the late 1970s and 1980s but also during the understudied decades of the 1940s and 1950s.[4] Stites Mor argues that transnational solidarity movements “entered a new phase” in the mid-1970s, but it remains relatively unclear why and how this process happened (p. 171). Did this have to do with the rise of human rights activism? Is it connected to the end of the Cold War? And how do Central America and the Caribbean, important sites of transnational solidarity in this period, feature in this history?

Instead of dwelling on what the book does not do, however, I want to use the remainder of this review to reflect on some of its most intriguing and thought-provoking arguments. Throughout the book, Stites Mor grapples with the question of how we can assess the impact of solidarity activ-
ism, particularly if a transnational movement does not achieve its direct aims. South-South solidarity movements, Stites Mor argues, have often been dismissed as failures because they did not complete their ambitious objectives of “ending imperialism or overturning a regime.” Yet, she rightly points out, this failure does not mean that South-South solidarity activism did not have a significant influence, as well as a powerful afterlife beyond “the initial moment of protest.” Rather, it means that we should evaluate South-South solidarity differently, analyzing the “complex workings of solidarity actions over a movement’s stated aims” (p. 5). I agree with this point and would suggest we apply it to the study of North-South solidarity movements, too. After all, in the Cold War period, very few solidarity movements succeeded in achieving their radical goals, but they nevertheless made a difference, shaping everyday life and influencing governments’ foreign policies. Moreover, it is worth acknowledging that there are important exceptions to this narrative of failure, such as the transnational Nicaragua solidarity movement, which made a significant contribution to the fall of the dictator Somoza in 1979 and involved a range of actors from the Global North and South, as I and others have demonstrated elsewhere.[5]

This brings me to reflect further on the usefulness of the separate categories South-South and North-South to analyze solidarity activism. On the one hand, in Stites Mor’s book, the distinction between the two appears quite clear, as North-South solidarity movements generally consisted of “highly unequal parties” which were interested in the transfer of resources from Western Europe and the United States to national liberation movements in the Global South. In contrast, South-South solidarity activists worked toward an equal partnership and “more reciprocal relationships of exchange” (p. 5). Still, the South-South relationships analyzed in this book do not always appear to have been “aspiring for partnership” (p. 168). The Cuban and Mexican revolutionary states were clearly in a more powerful position than those they acted in solidarity with. It was, for example, up to the Mexican state to decide if and how the Chilean exiles would be granted asylum. Similarly, activists operating from within institutions, such as the Catholic Church, could often rely on resources and organizational backing. This was not always the case for grassroots activists, who operated in a very different context.

Furthermore, as the case studies in the book show, the boundaries between the Global South and North were porous. Solidarity movements that originated in Latin America often involved the Global North, both as a geographical space where Latin American exiles lived and organized but also because actors from the United States and Europe, such as the theologian James Cone (author of the 1969 book *Black Theology and Black Power*) and the abovementioned Goss-Mayr, were part of those networks. Of course, as other scholars have pointed out, the Global South can be defined as more than a geographical space, but also as a shared political consciousness resulting from “a shared experience of subjugation under contemporary global capitalism.”[6] This does not appear to be the definition that Stites Mor uses, however, since her focus in on “the countries that identify themselves as being part of the Global South,” which implies a territorial definition and includes actors such as the Mexican state (p. 17).

As a result, I am not sure that we should approach the study of South-South solidarity movements as fundamentally different from North-South transnational solidarity activism. Solidarity networks do not always fit neatly into one or the other category, as they often involve a range of actors and locations in both the Global North and South. Furthermore, like North-South transnational activism, South-South solidarity networks were shaped by power dynamics and hierarchies. Instead of merely celebrating the existence of South-South transnational solidarity movements, scholars will benefit from examining how inequalities,
tensions, and disagreements shaped the way they operated. Only then can we begin to fully grasp their influence on people’s lived experiences, as well as their “relationship to moments of historical change” (p. 3).

These reflections should not be read as direct criticism of Stites Mor’s excellent book, which deserves to be read widely. Indeed, it would have been impossible for any book to answer all these questions and engage with all these issues. Rather, they show how much work there is still to be done on South-South solidarity activism, and in that respect this book lays a crucial foundation for further research. For historians of the Caribbean and Central America, the book’s innovative methodology and conceptual framework serve as useful examples of how we can approach topics that we still know little about, such as the experiences of Nicaraguan and Salvadoran refugees in the late Cold War, the international dimensions of Maurice Bishop’s New Jewel Movement, and the transnational campaigns of anticolonial activists from the French and Dutch Caribbean.[7] I am certain that Stites Mor’s seminal work will be a source of inspiration for many students and scholars interested in uncovering these overlooked but deeply relevant interactions between Latin America and the world beyond the Western Hemisphere.

Notes


If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at https://networks.h-net.org/h-caribbean

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