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When Cheddi Jagan, the sitting Premier of British Guiana, narrowly lost the national elections of 1964 to his US-backed rivals, it appeared as if the powerful outside forces who had long sought to determine the colony's future had finally triumphed. As leader of the pro-independence People's Progressive Party (PPP), Jagan swept the colony's first elections under universal suffrage in 1953. As Premier, he attempted to end the Church's monopoly on education, put idle land owned by the big sugar estates to productive use, democratize village governance, repeal the existing ban on "subversive" literature (which included such seditious works as Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography), and implement a host of measures to improve the lives of workers and small farmers. But the British government of Winston Churchill, fearing it had allowed the first communist victory in the Commonwealth, suspended British Guiana's constitution and placed the colony under martial law. Undeterred, Guyanese voters returned Jagan to office again in 1957 and 1961. As the British gradually came to accept that Jagan would lead the colony into independence, Washington policymakers concluded it was left to them to prevent "another Castro" in the Americas. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), working with the A.F.L.-C.I.O. and Guyanese opposition forces, launched an extensive, covert destabilization campaign against this small South American colony with a population of 600,000. Tactics included economic sabotage and racial terror attacks designed to inflame communal tensions and render the colony ungovernable.¹ A relative of mine with first-hand knowledge

¹ Stephen G. Rabe, *U.S. Intervention in British Guiana: A Cold War Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 89–93.

of these operations once told me: “They’d firebomb a black church, then drive across town and firebomb a Hindu temple.”

As British Guiana approached independence under a US-backed coalition government, Jagan wrote a scathing indictment of Washington’s role in Latin America and the Caribbean in the twentieth century. He outlined the recent string of interventions to topple democratically elected governments in Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Argentina, and Guatemala. These administrations had earned the wrath of the US State Department by attempting to implement progressive policies – land reform, secular education, labour laws to protect workers – in short, basic steps towards pulling these societies out of the feudal and colonial past. Washington’s crusade against the spectre of communism in the Americas now intensified in its aggression against revolutionary Cuba.

The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana’s Freedom, was first published in 1966, shortly after Jagan returned from Havana, where he represented British Guiana at the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, better known as the Tricontinental Conference, an event central to the story told in this book. *The West on Trial* was in part addressed to the American people, a people Jagan knew well. He had spent seven years (1936–43) studying dentistry and working odd jobs – tailor, presser, door-to-door salesmen, dishwasher – in Washington D.C., New York City, and Chicago. Jagan was shocked by American racism, and the poverty, both black and white, he observed in places like Harlem and Chicago’s Near North Side. But he was also moved by the Gettysburg Address engraved into the walls of the Lincoln Memorial, and he admired Theodore Roosevelt, whom he saw as a “fighter for the underdog.”² It was also in America that Jagan met his wife and political collaborator, Janet Rosenberg, a nursing student from the South Side of Chicago.

Jagan accused Americans of forsaking their own revolutionary heritage, of forgetting that their own republic was born of a divisive and violent struggle against foreign domination. US leaders are incensed that Cuba seeks aid from the Soviet Union, but did not the early US republic turn to Jacobin France for help? Many Cubans had fled to Miami, but did not 60,000 Americans flee to Canada during the revolution? Fidel was nationalizing property, but did US patriots not seize the estates of Loyalists? American democracy was born of revolution and civil war, but now that the United States had come of age, its leaders denied the right

² Cheddi Jagan, *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana’s Freedom* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 63.

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of the poor nations of the global South to follow suit, to make their own histories, to embark on their own hazardous journey towards modernity.

With his idea of the US government as the enemy of historical progress, a kind of towering sentinel blocking the future waiting to be born, Jagan was not alone. It is a theme that appears in varied forms in the writings, poems, speeches, and political programmes of intellectuals, political leaders, and revolutionaries from across the global South in the 1960s. These visions have a common origin: the hopes embedded in the wave of decolonization that followed the Second World War, and their ultimate disappointment. The dream that once colonized peoples, now masters of their own destiny, could unlock their latent potential and forge ahead building modern, prosperous societies reflecting the needs and aspirations of the people, immediately came into conflict with US geo-political and economic imperatives in the context of the emerging Cold War with the Soviet Union. As Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman summarized in their 1979 book, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*: “The old colonial world was shattered during World War II, and the resultant nationalist-radical upsurge threatened traditional Western hegemony and the economic interests of Western business. To contain this threat the United States has aligned itself with elite and military elements in the Third World whose function has been to contain the tides of social change.”³

This vision of the US empire as the primary obstacle to the forward march of history lies at the heart of the Tricontinentalist project spearheaded by the ruling communist parties of North Korea and Cuba in the 1960s. Traditional elites resisting change is a timeless story, and revolutionaries always see themselves as agents of the future. However, Tricontinentalism was premised on a specific analysis of the post-war international order and the political tasks it demanded. The North Korean and Cuban leaderships argued that Washington’s global strategy was to concentrate massive military resources in particular zones where revolutionary change was on the horizon, thereby overwhelming and crushing transformative social processes which were otherwise likely to develop successfully. Karl Marx famously analyzed the capitalist mode of production as it emerged in Western Europe and diagnosed its inherent tendency towards crisis, and an ever-intensifying class struggle that would culminate in proletarian revolution. Vladimir Lenin built upon this to argue that capitalism

³ Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1979), 8.

had reached a final, imperialist phase, where competition between large monopolies and the need for new markets drove the colonization of the global South and wars between imperial states. However, neither Marx nor Lenin had foreseen that the balance of economic–military power would ever shift so unevenly to one single imperialist power, as it did to the United States as a result of the Second World War. This new international balance of power challenged the Marxist–Leninist schemata of world revolution. Crisis may be endemic to capitalism, and the intensification of class struggle inevitable, but how does a revolution survive the intervention of a force as powerful as the United States? In the Dominican Republic, a country of some four million, the military junta was able to muster about 2,000 troops willing to fire on the people demanding democracy in 1965. But Washington could back these up with nearly 24,000 US soldiers and marines in order to ensure the revolution’s defeat. The perennial example was Vietnam, where the United States unleashed the largest bombing campaign in human history on a country the size of New Mexico, and was ultimately willing to sacrifice nearly 60,000 of its own soldiers and personnel. This was precisely why Juan Bosch, the first democratically elected president of the Dominican Republic, overthrown in a US-backed military coup in 1963, concluded that “imperialism” was an outdated term. He preferred, instead, *pentagonismo*, referring to the Virginia headquarters of the US Department of Defense. Bosch argued that what the world faced by the 1960s was not Lenin’s paradigm of inter-imperialist rivalry, but rather, one superpower’s fanatic crusade to prevent the forward march of history.

This book examines how this understanding of the historical moment, and shared convictions about the fundamental tasks it presented to all those who believed in a post-colonial, post-imperialist, post-capitalist future for humanity, facilitated the first period of major engagement between North Korea and Latin America. In doing so, it offers a contribution to our understanding of the historical evolution of North Korean foreign policy, the intellectual history of the Latin American Left, and the sixties political phenomenon of Tricontinentalism. More broadly, it speaks to questions posed by the legacy of the twentieth-century communist movement. How do we best understand those socialist societies in which degrees of unfreedom internally, coexisted with a commitment to liberation struggles abroad? How has ideology and realpolitik intersected historically in the behaviour of socialist states like North Korea and Cuba, and how has this relationship been shaped by internal and external pressures? How does the rise and fall of Tricontinentalism lend

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itself to contemporary debates concerning imperialism, capitalist crisis, and class struggle? Aside from such questions, it is hoped this book contributes to a better understanding of a broader historical current, namely, the Third World project itself: the quest for a sovereign and emancipatory modernity in the post-colonial global South.

NORTH KOREA, CUBA, AND TRICONTINENTALISM

In the aftermath of the Korean War, the North Korean leadership began to attribute growing importance to the global South as a terrain of revolutionary struggle, and by extension, its own goal of reunifying the Korean peninsula. By 1966, it had fully embraced a militant Third Worldist political line given definition at two major events that year: the Tricontinental Conference in Havana and the Second Party Conference of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in Pyongyang. This political realignment was the basis of a new partnership between the ruling communist parties of North Korea and Cuba. Similar challenges facing the two nations as small, developing socialist economies under direct military threat from the United States, and their leaders' shared frustration with the "great power chauvinism" of Moscow and Beijing, created a strong degree of consensus on a range of political and ideological issues. These included the paramount importance of defending Vietnam against US aggression, the need for a more equal set of relations between socialist countries and communist parties, the legitimacy of heterodox, "national" roads to socialism, and a rejection of the trend towards economic liberalization taking place within the socialist camp. Cuban and North Korean leaders found unity in the belief that rural guerrilla warfare was the optimal revolutionary strategy in the global South, and together advocated a radical re-think of the role of the Marxist–Leninist vanguard party in these same societies.

Above all, the North Korean and Cuban leaderships agreed that in the current historical juncture, the central task of the international Left was the defeat of US imperialism. From their respective vantage points, the US government was the central obstacle to peace and progress in the world, its massive military machine routinely deployed to crush the nascent forces of socialism in the global South. Therefore, only by restraining Washington's ability to project hard power globally could the struggle for genuine self-determination in the Third World advance, and the aspirations at the heart of post-war decolonization be fulfilled. The strategy to reach this goal was a tidal wave of armed

resistance throughout the global South, “two, three, many Vietnams,” in the famous words of Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara. An insurgent Third World, North Korean, and Cuban leaders believed, had within it the potential to tip the global balance of power against the international military hegemony of the United States. This analysis was not simply an indictment of the role of US foreign policy in the world, but a rejection of what were seen as the dangerous errors of the two major socialist powers: the Soviet Union’s naïve faith in “peaceful coexistence,” and China’s dogmatic sectarianism, the latter which appeared to prioritize the struggle against Soviet “revisionism” over the struggle against US imperialism. The Cuban Revolution and the multitude of guerrilla movements it inspired in neighbouring countries in the 1960s convinced both Cuban and North Korean leaders that Latin America would play a key role in this new epoch of Third World revolution.

This was the context in which Latin America became an important focus of North Korean foreign policy in the 1960s, a period in which the Cuban and North Korean governments developed exceptionally intimate political, economic, and cultural ties. This cooperation included a joint programme to provide arms, financing, and military training to revolutionary movements throughout the region. In the process, North Korea acquired a new degree of prestige with the international Left, influencing Cuban economic policy, left-wing discourse in Latin America more broadly, and the strategies and tactics employed by revolutionary groups in several countries. Most significantly, Cuba and North Korea spearheaded a new, international political tendency – Tricontinentalism – which challenged the authority of Moscow and Beijing and injected an ultra-radical current into left-wing and anti-colonial movements throughout the global South. The creation of the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL) in 1966 laid the foundations of a new international committed to militant struggle against US imperialism. Tricontinentalism broke with Marxist–Leninist orthodoxy while attempting to recentre the communist principle of proletarian internationalism, placing national liberation struggle before class struggle, and action over ideology.

If these events are mostly invisible in the existing Cold War scholarship, they were not a secret at the time. That the status quo within the socialist camp was being challenged by an emerging Third Worldist tendency associated with the North Korean, Cuban, and Vietnamese communist parties was common knowledge within communist diplomatic circles, discussed in US intelligence reports, and commented upon

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by journalists who visited Pyongyang or followed Cuban politics in the 1960s.⁴ What then explains the near-absence of this history in the literature? As this book argues, both the North Korean and Cuban governments essentially abandoned the Tricontinentalist project in the early 1970s in favour of new political narratives and foreign policy strategies. Cuba and Vietnam opted for a closer partnership with the Soviet Union, and North Korea reconciled with China, while at the same time re-branding itself as a member of the non-aligned Third World. More consequentially, over the decades, Western scholarship has been slow in escaping a popular Cold War paradigm, which focused on superpower rivalry and assumed smaller socialist countries like Cuba and North Korea had little actual agency in their foreign policy. At the same time, it must be pointed out that if this history is largely forgotten in the metropolitan academy, that does not mean it is forgotten everywhere. While North Korea's role as an outspoken advocate of Third World solidarity during the Cold War strikes many people in the West as a surprising oddity, it is much more known and treated more seriously in many countries of the global South. The absence of this history in the existing scholarship, therefore, partly reflects the geographic and economic disparities and disconnects of global academic knowledge production.

Examining the story of North Korea and Latin America in the 1960s makes a crucial addition to past studies of North Korea's foreign relations, which have focused on the Soviet Union, China, and events internal to the Korean peninsula. In contrast to the familiar narrative of North Korea as a "hermit kingdom" whose allegiance vacillated between Moscow and Beijing during the Cold War, this study reveals how the Cuban Revolution and the tumultuous political situation in Latin America during the 1960s were major influences on how the North Korean leadership viewed the world, and by extension, how it affixed its foreign policy priorities and strategies. Likewise, this history reveals the important intervention

⁴ For example, see Branko Lazitch, "Peking and Havana Challenge Soviet Hegemony," *Est & Ouest* 19, no. 389 (September 1967): 1–3, reprinted in *Translations on International Communist Developments*, no. 1007 (November 30, 1967); "Report, Hungarian Embassy in Cuba to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry" (January 25, 1968), Wilson Center Digital Archive: digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116665; Wolfgang Berner, "Castro and Moscow's Latin America Strategy," *Aussenpolitik* (June 1968): 357–67, reprinted in *Translations on International Communist Developments*, no. 1042 (July 25, 1968): 5–17; "Kim Il-Sung's New Military Adventurism," CIA Intelligence Report, ESAU XLI, November 26, 1968, vi, Internet Archive: archive.org/details/ESAU-CIA/page/n11; Ben Page, "North Korea: Sitting on Its Own Chair," *Monthly Review* 20, no. 8 (January 1969): 30–1.

North Korea made in the events, ideas, and debates that shaped the first decade of the Cuban Revolution and the broader Latin American Left. This challenges the common conception of the latter as chiefly defined by a tension between the Cuban model and Soviet orthodoxy, as well as the assumption that the Soviet Union was Cuba's sole ally of importance within the socialist world. Doing so reveals an alternate model of the international alignments of the socialist camp in the 1960s, one that reminds us that the ideas, projects, and relationships that animated the Cold War did not merely develop in vertical patterns downward from the major powers but were constituted by a more diverse range of actors in the so-called Third World. Those at the forefront of anti-colonial and socialist projects in the global South did not see themselves as sitting on the side-lines of a more important global conflict between superpowers, but rather as shaping history themselves, through struggles in which the superpowers might be allies or adversaries.

Tricontinentalism was an important political intervention that has largely escaped academic and non-academic histories of the international Left of the 1960s and 1970s, which have focused more on the Sino-Soviet split, the New Left, and the debates that dominated the Western Marxist discourse. Tricontinentalism not only highlights the important contributions to Marxist theory and practise that came from the global South in the 1960s but also complicates the imagined binary between an institutionalized and fossilized Marxism within the socialist countries and an innovative “Western Marxism” taking place on North American and European university campuses. In the space opened by the Tricontinentalist project, the North Korean and Cuban communist parties, and New Left intellectuals in Latin America, North America, and Western Europe, were joined in a transnational circuit of ideas facilitated through conferences, literature, and travel.

Tricontinentalism was not only a declaration of war against the US empire, but also a bold challenge to the global leadership role held by the Soviet and Chinese communist parties. Therefore, revisiting the Tricontinentalist project allows us to consider the alternate pathways which were open to the international Left in the 1960s. The decades that followed saw the rise and fall of the Third World as a united force in world politics, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the birth of a new era of unbridled US military interventionism. These developments force us to seriously reflect on the lingering question Tricontinentalism has left us: what are the limits to radical change, especially in the global South, while the United States remains the global hegemon?

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The story told in this book connects the historical development of North Korean foreign policy to the history of Third Worldism, a subject that has received heightened interest from scholars in recent years.⁵ In a departure from much of the existing literature, this book argues that it is misleading to speak of a singular Third Worldist movement born at the Bandung Conference of 1955 and reaching its apex with the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1970s. Moreover, in an era where Marx, never mind Lenin, has largely fallen out of favour in the academy, there appears to be a temptation to de-communize the Tricontinental specifically, re-framing it as an ancestor to the identity politics popular on North American university campuses. These often-overlapping narratives reflect the turn away from class analysis and indeed, political economy altogether in the humanities and social sciences in favour of post-modernist alternatives. As Aijaz Ahmed, Robert Vitalis, and Adolph Reed Jr have argued quite persuasively,⁶ the mythologization of Bandung, and the broader temptation to read into the history of the Third World a grandiose, Manichean struggle between non-European peoples and “white supremacy,” may satisfy current political trends in leftist academia, but does not stand up to rigorous historical analysis.

Unfortunately, the anti-Marxist turn in the academy has served to jettison the very body of crucial Marxist-informed scholarship from the global South that can best help us understand Third Worldism. The groundbreaking work of intellectuals like Samir Amin, Issa G. Shivji, Walter Rodney, Hamza Alvi, Bereket Habte Selassie, and many others, the bulk of which was produced in the 1970s and early 1980s, interrogated the failures of decolonization, the challenges of underdevelopment and imperialism, the character of the post-colonial state, and the

⁵ Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007); Jeffery Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019).

⁶ Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, second edition (London and New York: Verso, 2008); Robert Vitalis, “The Midnight Ride of Kwame Nkrumah and Other Fables of Bandung (Ban-doong),” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism and Development* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 261–88; Adolph Reed Jr, “Revolution as ‘National Liberation’ and the Origins of Neoliberal Antiracism,” *Socialist Register* (2017): 299–322.

proliferation of self-styled socialist programmes in the global South. Ironically, the agenda of rejecting Eurocentrism and “universalisms” has resulted in the silencing of a whole canon of indispensable scholars from the global South in favour of currently more fashionable post-colonial theory generated in the metropolitan academy. Even CLR James and Frantz Fanon, two thinkers who retain some prestige within that space, are more fetishized than their ideas are seriously engaged with.⁷

This book makes the case that a great deal separated the Tricontinental from both Bandung and the Non-Aligned Movement in fundamental ways. Tricontinentalism was a distinct, communist-led political project that rejected non-alignment, neutralism, peaceful coexistence, reformism, and sectarianism. While it shared with other Third Worldist political projects a belief that the Third World – or what could be more objectively categorized as the periphery of the global capitalist system – had an important historical role to play, it did not envision this occurring through the United Nations or diplomacy between states, but rather through violent, revolutionary struggle from below. Just as it is misleading to conflate Tricontinentalism with various pro-capitalist, reformist, and elite-driven visions of Third World cooperation, it is equally problematic to project on to it the political concerns of contemporary social movements of the anglophone world.

While North Korea’s relations with the Third World during the Cold War has been studied in a small but important body of work,⁸ this book

⁷ As Adolph Reed Jr recently commented on Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, “...it really struck me, that what was then called or translated as ‘The Pitfalls of National Consciousness’ chapter, was one which nobody ever talked about, but it was the only one that had direct bearing on what was happening with racial transition in American politics at that point.” See “Why Don’t Black Politics Work for Black People: An Interview with Adolph Reed Jr,” episode 124 (April 24, 2021), *This Is Revolution* podcast. Concerning CLR James, see Christian Høgsbjerg, “The Red and the Black: CLR James and the Historical Idea of Revolution,” *CLR James Journal* 26, no. 1 & 2 (Fall 2020): 179–98.

⁸ John Chay, “North Korea: Relations with the Third World,” in *The Politics of North Korea*, ed. Jae Kyu Park and Jung Gun Kim (Seoul: Institute for Far Eastern Studies, 1979), 263–76; Barry K. Gills, *Korea versus Korea: A Case of Contested Legitimacy* (London: Routledge, 1996); Kim Ŭngsŏ, “1960 nyŏndae chungban Puk’an ũi chajuogyonosŏn ch’aet’aegye kwanhan yŏn’gu” [A study of North Korea’s Adoption of a Self-Reliant Foreign Policy in the Mid-1960s], *Segyejŏngch’i* [Journal of World Politics] 16 (2012): 237–87; Charles K. Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950–1990* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Ji Hyung Kim, “1980 nyŏndae ch’o NamBuk’an ũi Che3segye oegyogyŏngjaeng: konggae oegyomunsŏ (1979~1981) rŭl chungsimŭro” [Foreign Competition in the Third World between North