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978-1-107-10288-0 - Soviet Internationalism After Stalin: Interaction and Exchange Between the USSR and Latin America During the Cold War

Tobias Rupperecht

Excerpt

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Introduction: the end of Soviet isolationism after 1953

Late Stalinism, the period between the end of the Second World War and the death of the dictator in 1953, was the most isolated period of Soviet history. The political leaders saw the world as divided into two parts, and everything outside their own camp as ruled by unalterably hostile capitalist and imperialist war-mongers, eager to annihilate the Soviet Union. Internationalism, once a fundamental Bolshevik principle, had long been subordinated to the political goals of ‘socialism in one country’ after Lenin’s death and Trotsky’s ousting; foreign contacts had abated from the mid 1930s. While the Second World War had forced a specific form of violent interaction with the world abroad upon Soviet citizens, the USSR, with the onset of the Cold War in 1947, isolated itself more than ever from foreign countries beyond the control of the Soviet Army. Scholars were cut off from most international scientific discourse, and compliant writers claimed any notable invention to be of Russian origin. ‘Cosmopolitanism’ came to be a perilous reproach during a renewed terror against the populations of now both the Soviet Union and its new satellite states and annexed territories in eastern Europe.

A ‘myth of encirclement’¹ was to bond together Soviet citizens, devastated and traumatised by the war, behind their leaders. Only their wise policies, they claimed, could provide the peace and stability people so desperately wanted. By the late 1940s, the cultural and intellectual – if not the economic – isolation of the post-war Soviet Union was almost complete. Even international marriages were illegal. Western observers such as Isaiah Berlin noticed the complete ignorance of the Soviet intelligentsia about contemporary cultural life abroad.² For ordinary Soviet citizens, Vladislav Zubok wrote, ‘meeting a foreigner was less likely than

¹ Elena Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945–1957* (Armonk: Sharpe, 1998), pp. 84–7.

² Vladislav Zubok, *Zhivago’s Children: The Last Russian Intelligentsia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 14.

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seeing a total solar eclipse. Foreign travel was unimaginable. Comparison between the Soviet experience and life in other countries was almost impossible.³ While some not very extensive contacts with the people's democracies in eastern Europe were established and the offspring of the urban elites had access to scattered western cultural products, the bulk of the Soviet population remained isolated from the rest of the world and had a very hazy idea of what was 'out there'.⁴

This book, an entangled history of the Soviet Union and Latin America during the Cold War, explores how this extreme isolationism ended after the death of Stalin. The Soviet political and intellectual elite now harked back ideologically to what they saw as unspoiled Leninist socialism of the 1920s, and thus rekindled internationalism as an integral ideational component of the Soviet project. This cautious opening to the world brought Soviet intellectuals and citizens back into selected realms of contemporary world culture. At the same time, the northern hemisphere was politically divided into two hostile camps; both the United States and the Soviet Union tried to present their model of modern society in a good light to the emerging Third World, and culture was an pivotal battlefield of this struggle for hearts and minds. It was in the context of this tension between international cultural integration and political delimitation from the West that Soviet contacts with distant Latin America (re-)emerged at different levels. In five chapters, this book sheds spotlights on five zones of interaction between Soviet and Latin American societies, cultures and individual agents through the period of the Cold War; they all explore how what is called here 'Soviet internationalism after Stalin' was designed and how it was received by internal and external addressees.

In order to understand how the Soviet Union continued to function after the death of Stalin and the end of his terror regime, we need to consider more what could be called the 'appeal of the empire'. Time and again, western observers have underlined the shortcomings, faults and inner contradictions within the Soviet Union to an extent that makes it difficult to understand why this system actually prevailed for so long and, through the late 1980s, enjoyed at least the passive support of the overwhelming majority of its population and the respect of many political

³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁴ Jan C. Behrends, *Die erfundene Freundschaft: Propaganda für die Sowjetunion in Polen und in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006); Ellen Brun and Jacques Hersh, *Soviet–Third World Relations in a Capitalist World: The Political Economy of Broken Promises* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1990), p. 36; Wolfgang Kasack, 'Kulturelle Außenpolitik', in Oskar Anweiler and Karl-Heinz Ruffmann (eds.), *Kulturpolitik der Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1973), pp. 345–92.

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leaders and intellectuals in the Third World. This book argues that Soviet contacts with the Third World were an integrative moment within the Soviet Union after Stalin. Internationalism was not only an empty political catchphrase, but an ideal that many Soviet scholars, intellectuals, cultural figures, political decision makers and, through the consumption of internationalist cultural products, ordinary citizens actually subscribed to. The admiration for the USSR expressed by many visitors from the global South only confirmed to many Soviet politicians, intellectuals and the wider public the ostensible superiority of their own system. Soviet internationalism after Stalin was a source of legitimisation for the new Soviet political elite and an integrative idea within Soviet society during the turmoil of de-Stalinisation and through much of the period under the rule of Leonid Brezhnev that has been labelled the Era of Stagnation. Even early perestroika witnessed an upsurge of pro-Third World sentiments, before its failure initiated the dismantling of the USSR and thus of Soviet internationalism after Stalin.

The world's first socialist state has been critically analysed almost exclusively from European or North American points of view. Scholars have outlined its economic and moral inferiority to the western, liberal-capitalist model of modern society in all facets. Looking at the second half of its history from a southern perspective, this book tries to reconstruct and comprehend – though not justify or whitewash – the attractive and thus cohesive factors of this system. Unlike a recurring concept in historiography that sees the late Soviet Union as driven by pragmatist imperialism, *Realpolitik* or materialist rational choice, it takes ideas, convictions and emotions seriously. Looking at the impact of internationalist ideals, rekindled with explicit reference to the 1920s and early 1930s, reveals that ideology changed after the death of Stalin, but still framed the political horizon of the elites in politics and culture in the Soviet Union.

Soviet contacts with Latin America are particularly suitable for elucidating the role of convictions and ideology, as opposed to geo-strategic considerations, for, throughout the history of Soviet foreign policy, Latin America was usually of lowest priority. Geographic factors – the proximity to the overpowering United States on the one side, the huge distance to the USSR on the other – determined expectations of Moscow's foreign policy makers. But Latin America was interesting for many Soviet communists, as it was there where the first communist party outside Russia was founded (in Mexico); it was where, for the first time since the October Revolution, a socialist revolution took place without interference of the USSR (in Cuba); and it was a Latin American country that firstly voted democratically for a Marxist president (in Chile). Agitating the

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United States in its proclaimed back yard was a bonus, but not the main motivation to support political parties in every single state of the region. Latin America was interesting not so much for geo-politics, but for its homemade socialism.⁵ Mounting a Latin American lens to study Soviet internationalism after Stalin offers yet another advantage: recurring references to contacts in the 1920s and 1930s between the young Soviet state and leftist movements in the Hispanic world (contacts that had not existed with such other Third World regions as sub-Saharan Africa or the Middle East) make this book's case that Soviet internationalism after Stalin rekindled similar sentiments from the inter-war period.

This book tells the story of Soviet internationalism after Stalin as an intertwined history with selected groups from Latin America, mostly intellectuals, students and political and public figures. It looks at interactions below state level, it goes beyond the purely political dimension of international relations, and it underlines the role played by cultural exchange and cultural currents in the development of the late Soviet Union. This trans-national dimension makes clear how, also in the Soviet case, the domestic and the foreign were intertwined: internationalism was directed to audiences at home as much as abroad. There can be no talk of hermetical isolation or autarky of the Soviet Union from the rest of the world. In many respects, Soviet society was in tune with global developments from the mid 1950s, and in the realm of culture even more so than in economics or politics. Giving room to a foreign perspective on the Soviet Union thus allows for a reconsideration of the successes and shortcomings of Soviet advances to the Third World. Back home, the opening up of the Soviet state to the world had no undermining effect on its society. If anything, the selective perception and presentation of world developments created a coherent world-view that seemed to prove to many Soviet politicians, cultural figures and common citizens that the Soviet Union was still the global trail-blazer of modern society.

The opening up to the world under Khrushchev and Russia in global history

Much ink has been spilled by historians of the Cold War on Soviet foreign relations under Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev; they can be summed up here briefly. The Kremlin withdrew the Soviet Army from

⁵ Ilya Prizel, *Latin America through Soviet Eyes: The Evolution of Soviet Perceptions during the Brezhnev Era 1964–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. ix; Cole Blasier, *The Giant's Rival: The USSR and Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), p. 68.

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Austria and Finland, relinquished claims on Turkish territory and, conceding that there were different paths to socialism, reconciled with Yugoslavia. In the wake of the 1955 Bandung Conference, many Third World leaders sought contact with Moscow and raised high hopes there for anti-imperialist collaboration. Propagating a peaceful path to socialism, Khrushchev travelled to India, Burma and Afghanistan, later to Egypt and Indonesia, and altogether to thirty-five countries. The Soviet Party boss and the leading politicians who accompanied him (often including Ekaterina Furceva, Soviet minister of culture and the only woman in the Politburo), journalists and intellectuals offered Soviet assistance and friendship.⁶ Beyond these state-to-state contacts, the USSR became a member of more than 200 international organisations, from the Red Cross and the International Olympic Committee to many sub-organisations of the United Nations which it had previously boycotted, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNESCO (both in 1954) and the World Health Organization (WHO, in 1957).⁷

While these integrative tendencies at political level are fairly well studied, this book seeks to explore how the opening up of the Soviet Union also concerned cultural figures, intellectuals and ordinary people. Soviets citizens were still restricted in their freedom of movement, and peasants were not free to travel even within the Soviet Union until the early 1970s – in essence, a continuation of serfdom. But interacting with the ‘foreign’, in personal contacts as much as through representations, was much more of an everyday experience, at least for educated city dwellers, than during late Stalinism. The country that, in 1953, had still officially claimed to have invented the steam engine, the light bulb and television hosted, five years later, twenty international scientific conferences. Soviet academics and artists, most notably architects, could travel abroad again, for inspiration or to attend conferences in their field – or even for symbolic gatherings for the sake of international co-operation such as the 1957 Pugwash Conference in Canada. In the early 1960s, some 1,500 Soviet doctors were sent abroad every year. Soviet radio broadcast 2,000 hours weekly from 147 stations to all parts of the world by 1956 and expanded this programme for years to come. Soviet publishing houses had an average of 100 million books per year printed for

⁶ Aleksej Adshubej, *Gestürzte Hoffnung: Meine Erinnerungen an Chruschtschow* (Berlin: Henschel, 1990), p. 250.

⁷ Chris Osakwe, *The Participation of the Soviet Union in Universal International Organizations: A Political and Legal Analysis of Soviet Strategies and Aspirations inside ILO, UNESCO and WHO* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

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the outside world.⁸ There were already 2 million Soviet citizens travelling abroad from 1956 to 1958, and 1.5 million foreigners visited the USSR. By 1964, the yearly number of foreign tourists who flocked into the Soviet Union had surpassed 1 million. In 1955–8 alone, 20,000 Soviet artists were sent to 60 countries around the world, more than half of them to non-socialist parts of the world. The number rose to an impressive 80,000 Soviet artists abroad and about the same number of foreign artists in the Soviet Union from 1961 to 1965.⁹

The history of the Soviet Union was not determined only by authoritarian politicians and subservient apparatchiks. After the death of Stalin and the revelation of his crimes, a new generation of mostly young and urban Soviet citizens, later called the *šestidesjatkiki* ('the '60ers'), strove for socialism with a human face. Referring to a glorified notion of Lenin and of leftist culture of the 1920s, they longed for revolutionary activity and displayed an 'idealistic sense of social and moral justice'.¹⁰ With this reference, they, too, revived the socialist internationalism of the early Soviet Union. In its specific form after 1953, internationalism was not merely a political concept, but an officially promoted attitude that was adopted by large parts of the intelligentsia and the population. While contacts with foreigners and the world abroad were always subject to restrictive Soviet laws and official fears – particularly of western influence – they would increase steadily in number and importance in the years to come. By the end of the 1960s, no fewer than 40 million Soviet citizens were members of international friendship societies.¹¹

Historians of eastern Europe have long shunned an analysis of these 'trans-national' contacts and focused on the inner history of both Russia and the Soviet Union. 'Global' historians did not care much about Russia, either. In their stories of migrant networks, trans-continental

⁸ Richard Stites, 'Heaven and Hell: Soviet Propaganda Constructs the World', in Gary Rawnsley (ed.), *Cold War Propaganda in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 88; Sergej Romanovskij (ed.), *Meždunarodnye naučnye i kul'turnye svjazi SSSR* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1966), pp. 135–6, 101–7, 234–7; Spravka o kul'turnich svjazjach Sovetskogo Sojuza s zarubežnymi stranami, undated, GARF f.9518 op.1 d. 343 ll.169–173.

⁹ Romanovskij, *Meždunarodnye naučnye i kul'turnye svjazi SSSR*, pp. 47–8, 128.

¹⁰ Zubok, *Zhivago's Children*; Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 191; Juliane Fürst, 'The Arrival of Spring? Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev', in Polly Jones (ed.), *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 141; Petr Vajl' and Aleksandr Genis, *60-e: mir sovetskogo čeloveka* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2001).

¹¹ Anon., 'Im Namen von 40 Millionen', *Kultur und Leben* 11 (1971), 18–20; Nina Popowa, 'Über die Tätigkeit und die Aufgaben des Verbandes der Freundschaftsgesellschaften', *Kultur und Leben* 4 (1962), 6–9.

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connections, the global spread of commodities or ideas and the impact of ‘global moments’ on different societies, they have questioned not only the central role of the nation state as the given entity of analysis, but also the ostensibly all-encompassing and mono-directional influence of the West on the history of the rest of the world and its interpretation. However, they have predominantly implemented their theoretical approach through a historiography of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century South-East Asia, China, India and sometimes Africa. Latin America, once prominent in the Marxist world system and dependency theories, is conspicuously under-represented in recent debates. The region shares this marginal position with the Russian-dominated sphere.¹²

This absence is surprising for a Russian empire that, in the nineteenth century, spread from Swedish-speaking Finland until just short of San Francisco, and included territory from the Arctic Ocean to today’s Turkey and China. It boasted an unequalled variety of languages and ethnicities and huge numbers of believers from all world religions. In the twentieth century not only did Russia style itself as the global trail-blazer of an alternative modern society, but it also experienced unmatched immigration and emigration streams. After the Second World War, the Soviet Union contributed to the foundation of the most important international organisations, and it expanded its direct influence from the Elbe to some miles off the coast of Florida, and from large parts of Eurasia to the Horn of Africa. ‘The Soviet Union has become the centre of the civilised world’, bragged the 1958 issue of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* in its foreword. Moscow now supported influential political groups in essentially every single state on earth and was active in the Antarctic, the seven seas and outer space.

Russia’s inappropriate absence from the debates of global history has been acknowledged and deplored enough times – and relief has been

¹² For a sense of the field, see Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, ‘Global History 2008–2010: Empirische Erträge, konzeptionelle Debatten, neue Synthesen’, *Comparativ* 6 (2010), 93–133; Pamela Kyle Crossley, *What Is Global History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); Ulrike Freitag (ed.), *Globalgeschichte: Theorien, Ansätze, Themen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2007); Bruce Mazlish, *The New Global History* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Anthony Hopkins, *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). The classics include Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy: Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); James Theberge, *Latin America in the World System: The Limits of Internationalism* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1975); Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969); Raúl Prebisch, *Hacia una dinámica del desarrollo latinoamericano* (Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1967).

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produced.¹³ Yet in much of what has been written subsequently on Soviet participation in world integrative processes, there is a tendency to emphasise the shortcomings of the Soviet model compared to western global integration, an approach that contrasts with the core demand of global history not to take the West as a conceptual norm.¹⁴ With a degree of cynicism, one might actually say that communist eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are predestined for the analysis of a global historian. On the one hand, the ‘global’ was always an immensely important point of reference for Party leaders and theoreticians. They drew their legitimacy from processes in world history as they perceived them, and they constantly claimed that their type of state and their concept of modern society served as a role model for the rest of the world.¹⁵ Citizens, on the other hand, were, by and large, confined to where they lived, locked up in states that restricted foreign travel severely. Proponents of global history have emphasised that they are interested in the manifestation of global phenomena in a local context.¹⁶ Communist eastern Europe offers, in a pure form, such cases of the local meeting the global. There is another epistemological and theoretical reason to include the East and

¹³ Authors who have pointed out this lacuna in scholarship include Martin Aust (ed.), *Globalisierung imperial und sozialistisch: Russland und die Sowjetunion in der Globalgeschichte 1851–1991* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2013), p. 26; Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921–1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 313; Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 2011), p. 1286. A selection of studies on the Soviet Union and the Third World includes Andreas Hilger (ed.), *Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt: UdSSR, Staatssozialismus und Antikolonialismus im Kalten Krieg 1945–1991* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009); Vladimir Shubin, *The Hot Cold War: The USSR in Southern Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2008); Ragna Boden, *Die Grenzen der Weltmacht: Sowjetische Indonesienpolitik von Stalin bis Brežnev* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006); Maxim Matusevich, *No Easy Row for a Russian Hoe: Ideology and Pragmatism in Nigerian–Soviet Relations, 1960–1991* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003). For a broader overview, see David Engerman, ‘The Second World’s Third World’, *Kritika* 1 (2011), 183–211; Tobias Rupprecht, ‘Die sowjetische Gesellschaft in der Welt des Kalten Kriegs: Neue Forschungsperspektiven’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 58 (2010), 381–99.

¹⁴ Examples include accounts in which the Soviet model lacks economic competitiveness, money and/or lacking right of assembly. See Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Stephen Kotkin, ‘The Kiss of Debt: The East Bloc Goes Borrowing’, in Niall Ferguson (ed.), *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 80–93; Frederick Starr, ‘The Third Sector in the Second World’, in Bruce Mazlish and Akira Iriye (eds.), *The Global History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 191–200.

¹⁵ Jan C. Behrends, ‘Vom Panslavismus zum Friedenskampf: Außenpolitik, Herrschaftslegitimation und Massenmobilisierung im sowjetischen Nachkriegsimperium’, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 56/1 (2008), 27.

¹⁶ Kenneth Pomeranz, ‘Social History and World History: From Daily Life to Patterns of Change’, *Journal of World History* 1 (2007), 69–98.

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its relations with the Third World in the debates on global history: most historians who give a voice to non-western actors usually still do so with reference to Europe or the United States. Comparisons and shared histories of different non-western countries add a perspective that puts the pivotal role of the West in world history in perspective. Not all worldwide entanglements were predestined to finally merge into free markets and liberal democracies.

Terminology: internationalism, USSR, Latin America, Third World, (cultural) Cold War

‘Internationalism’ in this book follows Akira Iriye’s definition of ‘cultural internationalism’ as ‘attempts to build cultural understanding, international co-operation, and a sense of shared values across national borders through cultural, scientific or student exchanges’. Iriye has hinted at the impact that communist internationalism had on his concept of a ‘global community’ from early on, but he has himself, like most global historians, otherwise concentrated on Asian and western activities.¹⁷ This book fills the gap by putting the entangled history of the Soviet Union and Latin America in the context of a multi-polar history of the Cold War. International integrative developments in the history of the second half of the twentieth century were engendered not just by the West and under western terms.

Internationalism in the Soviet Union has so far been studied only in institutional histories of the Comintern and Cominform, and thus only for the first half of Soviet history.¹⁸ Stalin’s successors announced a return to *proletarian* (in relation to international communist parties in power) and *socialist* internationalism (towards the rest of the world), but in fact they did not simply warm up the old model of spreading world revolution and Soviet communism. The Soviet Union after 1953 combined ideas of socialist internationalism of the 1920s with the ‘cultural internationalism’ of the 1950s. The new Soviet leadership opened the country to the world in order to spread, if much more cautiously than the

¹⁷ Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 34; see also Martin H. Geyer and Johannes Paulmann, *The Mechanics of Internationalism: Culture, Society, and Politics from the 1840s to the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Carsten Holbraad, *Internationalism and Nationalism in European Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Kjell Goldmann, *The Logic of Internationalism: Coercion and Accommodation* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁸ E.g. Michael Buckmiller and Klaus Meschkat (eds.), *Biographisches Handbuch zur Geschichte der Kommunistischen Internationale: Ein deutsch-russisches Forschungsprojekt* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2007).

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early Bolsheviks, their model of society across the globe. At the same time, the end of isolation meant a re-integration of the Soviet Union, on political, scientific, intellectual and cultural levels, into a global community under the conditions of the Cold War. It is this specific conglomeration of revolutionary and integrative ideals that this book defines as 'Soviet internationalism after Stalin'.

The definition of 'USSR', is rather straightforward: interchangeably with 'Soviet Union', and occasionally 'the Soviets', it refers to the Soviet state and Soviet society, the latter with a focus on urban areas with a Slavic majority. 'Latin America' requires more explanation, possibly even justification: for the purpose of this book, it encompasses all countries of the American continents and the Caribbean except the United States and Canada. The more geographically rooted concepts of 'North' and 'South America', separated at the isthmus by the Panama Canal, represent today's political and mental maps. In the context of the Cold War, they are of less avail. To diminish tedious repetitions, the book occasionally – semantically and geographically not perfectly correctly – refers to Latin America as a 'subcontinent' and to Latin Americans as 'Latinos' (a term that, in the United States, refers to US citizens of Hispanic or Brazilian origin, whereas in Latin America and continental Europe it is simply a short form of 'Latin Americans'). The English language continues another pretension often criticised by Spanish and Portuguese speakers, as it claims the adjective 'American' for the United States only. In order to avoid offence or confusion, the abbreviation 'US' is used instead, and 'the Americas' replaces 'America' whenever the entire continent is concerned.

Cultural macro-histories, by conservative scholars such as Samuel Huntington and liberals such as Shmuel Eisenstadt alike, have been criticised for their large-scale construction of ostensibly homogeneous world cultures. Latin America is of course not homogeneous. Socio-economic, ethnic and cultural/language differences are tremendous between white settler colonies such as Argentina or southern Brazil and countries with an indigenous majority such as Bolivia or Guatemala. Dutch-, English- and French-speaking states in and around the Caribbean have little in common with Mexico or Uruguay. Exactly the same criticism, however, could be applied to the analysis of one specific nation: ethnic and class differences often vary to the same extent within a single Latin American country. For a global history that is not primarily interested in political relations of national governments, but in interactions of agency groups and individuals between different world regions, the nation state is just as questionable a category as the cultural unit 'Latin America'. A short history of the concept, and its application by Latin