

Beyond US Hegemony: The Shaping of the Cold War in Latin America

The historiography of the Cold War has been widely affected by the transformation of international historiography in the past two decades. The use of new sources from different countries, including Communist ones, since the 1980s and what can be labeled as a “global” or “transnational turn”, begun in the decade of 1990s, has challenged the traditional tenets of diplomatic and international historiography, which usually considered the Cold War mainly as the history of Superpower’s confrontation. The vanishing of this approach to the study of the Cold War and the emergence at the forefront of public debate of issues that transcended the logic of mere bipolar confrontation had led historians to pose questions about the agency of once considered subaltern actors, such as the Third World countries, the role of transnational actors such as NGOs, migrants, women, scientists’ international networks or artists among many others. This revision of traditional historiographical standards has also brought into the debate transnational issues, such as emigration, environmental problems, cultural transfers, or human rights.¹

This transformation of the international historiography on the Cold War has also slowly impacted on the study of Latin America’s post WWII history. The new approaches to the region are more complex and subtler, they emphasize the agency of Latin Americans and Latin American states and dig out social or cultural aspects traditionally neglected by the historiography focused on diplomatic or geopolitical issues. They also emphasize that national frameworks might distort our perspective and that, as Tanya Harmer states, an accurate understanding of the Cold War requires a transnational approach.²

Yet, in spite of this renovation, the history of the Cold War in Latin America is still mostly dominated by a narrative that considers it as a chapter in the broader history of the US hegemony in the Western hemisphere.³ In this dominating narrative, the Cold War in Latin America—with its chronological and thematic specificities, local and global connections—loses importance vis-à-vis the protracted building of US supremacy in the continent.

Stephen Rabe’s latest book, *The Killing Zone*, highlights some of these problems. The book is a compelling study of Washington’s Cold War interventions in Latin America and their justifications, which the author dates back to the Monroe Doctrine. However, one is left wondering if the Cold War in Latin America was just a recollection of American interventions and if the proposed chronological continuity, which links the post Second World War period with the beginning of the nineteenth

century, really helps our understanding of the causes of the tragedies which marked the period. Moreover, in Rabe’s book Latin America’s agency through the Cold War dissolves in a narrative which, portraying the Western Hemisphere as a victim of the bipolar conflict, by means of US’ interventions, neglects Latin American countries capacity to adapt and even influence Cold War dynamics (Rabe, 2012).⁴

Greg Grandin and Gilbert Joseph (2010) and Joseph (2008: 6) provide good examples of these historiographical tendencies. The contributors to these volumes assume a transnational approach, emphasizing that national frameworks might be not adequate for a complete understanding of the Cold War in the Western Hemisphere. Yet, Grandin and Joseph embed their narration of the Cold War in Latin America in a broader narrative of revolution and US counterinsurgency, which evolved in both a domestic and a hemispheric framework. Hence, it is possible for the authors to speak of a “first Cold War” in the interwar years and even to suggest that the Cold War is not over since the United States is still aspiring to an hegemonic role in Latin America (and elsewhere).

A different perspective has been recently offered by Brands (2010) that, adopting the concept of “multilayered conflicts” in describing Latin America’s Cold War, presents a more nuanced approach to the role played by US hegemony in determining historical events in the region. Moreover, the book also tries to recover the active role played by Latin American actors during the Cold War, in a process that Tanya Harmer (2013) has defined as “‘Latin Americanization’ of the Cold War”. The author, however, seems to coincide in making equivalent Cold War and inter-American relationships. Furthermore, for Brands, Latin America seems to have truly entered the conflict only after the victory of the Cuban revolution in 1959.

In this dossier we aim to integrate into Latin America’s Cold War history some of the innovations which have already benefitted the broader Cold War historiographical debate during the last decades and which have also recently started to positively influence the Latin American historiographical debate (Kirkendall, 2014). Although the history of the hegemonic aspirations of the United States in the hemisphere remains a significant one, Latin America fully participated in the conflict, its international arrangements and the cultural dimensions of the global Cold War. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the multiple dimensions of the Cold War as they

were experimented in Latin America and by Latin Americans.

In this dossier we pay special attention to Latin America's perspective, and we focus on how Latin American countries were able during the Cold War to exert both political and cultural agency, adapting to and shaping the allegedly "bipolar" dynamics. Furthermore, although the continental impact of the events in Cuba cannot be denied, in this dossier we aim to show that during the previous decade the Cold War had already begun to produce political, economic and social effects on the Western Hemisphere. By adopting this perspective and by exploring both political and cultural topics we hope to contribute to a more complex and nuanced understanding of the Latin American experience through the Cold War, while also highlighting the specificity of the period vis-à-vis the prior (and posterior) decades.

Furthermore, we aim to dig out connections others than the traditional focus on US-Latin America relations. As Matthew Connelly (2000) points out in his work about the Algerian revolution, during the Cold War new events and connections silently emerged crossing and eroding the "bipolar" logic of the period and established the basis for the unfolding of a new period of globalization. In this process, Latin Americans played also their part.

In this sense, in this dossier, we will explore the connections of the region with other parts of the world during the period, with the goal of providing a more thorough picture of the shaping of the Cold War in Latin America but, also, by Latin America. Indeed, as all the essays point out the Cold War was not only shaped by the two superpowers but, as two of the contributors to this dossier assert, "the bipolar image of the second half of the twentieth century must be revised in order to achieve a better understanding of the complexity of the particular mechanisms, which were originated in different regions and nations."⁵

One of the challenges of this dossier is to demonstrate the relevance of relationships different from the traditional link with the United States. In his essay, for example, José Antonio Sánchez Román shows that the British Empire provided an important symbolic role for the editors of the Argentine daily *La Nación* in the creation of their international image in the early phase of the Cold War. We also emphasize the connections with Europe and the meanings of international organizations, as in Moreli Rocha and Le Chaffotec's essay, which offers a suggestive analysis of the interaction between Pan-Americanism and the less known Pan-Latin movement at the early moment of the Cold War.

The articles of this dossier focus on traditional themes: economy and politics (both international and domestic) and on new subjects such as cultural representations, and cultural influence. They offer fresh insight into these topics thanks to the comparative (even global) framework chosen by the authors.

Vanni Pettinà, for example, demonstrates both the capacity of reaction of Latin American actors to the new in-

ternational scenario and how the global reorganization caused by the Cold War, a process different from a mere return to the pre-WWII US hegemonic project planned by US policymakers, had a significant impact in the region, forcing the local elites to reassess their positions. In some case, as in Mexico's, local elites were able to successfully readjust to the new scenario, showing that Latin American countries could develop, as other Third World's states such as, for example, Egypt or India, considerable leverage with Washington.

Paula Barreiro López, who focuses on the cultural dimension of the Cold War in a broader context, offers another evidence of the Western Hemisphere capacity to adapt and even shape the Cold War. In her provocative essay, which dislocates the hegemonic, traditional Paris-New York axis, she shows the impact that Latin American political and artistic practices had on European avant-garde movements on the eve and during the 1968 student's movement.

In turn, Soledad Loaeza shows the deep impact of the Guatemalan coup of 1954 in Mexican attitudes and strategies toward the Cold War and, above all, in the domestic political alignments. As Loaeza shows focusing on Mexico, in many cases continental political elites reacted to Cold War events and dynamics according to domestic considerations and concerns, and not only as a consequence of US pressures. Again, this does not mean neglecting the asymmetry of power of Latin American countries relation with Washington. However, Loaeza's article also points to different factors which shaped Mexico's policy making with regards to the Guatemalan crisis.

These articles notice that the beginning of the Cold War represented the onset of a new world for Latin America as well. This is something that Latin Americans quickly understood and they struggle to come to terms with the new situation. This was not necessarily negative, as the article by Moreli Rocha and Le Chaffotec demonstrates, since the new scenario opened political opportunities to Latin American countries as international actors. The new system of global governance envisioned by the victors in the war is a good example of this, since the Latin American nations seemed to have a large representation in the UN. This was not the only venue opened to the Latin Americans after the end of the war, as Moreli Rocha and Le Chaffotec show, and although these opportunities vanished it is worthy to reconsider them, mainly in our present scenario of a "multipolar" world.

Sánchez Román's and Juan Pablo Artinian's articles explore the domestic dimension of the Cold War, focusing on the early phase of the period and highlighting the significant of the conflict for the shaping of the political discourse in Argentina. Yet, the role of United States in this process was scarce and the two articles demonstrate that some of the more daring tropes of the political language of the early Cold War (for instance "totalitarianism") might have been emerged in an autonomous fashion in different parts of the world. Thus, as Sánchez

Román shows, the conservative daily *La Nación* connected in its messages the critic of totalitarian regimes with its political struggle against Peronism in a very idiosyncratic way. This provides an analysis of the production of right wing ideas in Latin America during the Cold War, a usually neglected topic.⁶ Artinian, focuses on the anti-Peronist cultural production promoted by the Argentina's Socialist Party, showing how it resorted as well to the idioms of the Cold War, in particular the concept of "totalitarianism" in order to stigmatize Peronism. But as in the case of *La Nación*, Artinian also reveals how this was an autonomous development, drawing as much from images of the national history as from the global Cold War.

The articles of this dossier share the idea that Latin Americans were able to some extent to shape the discourses, representations and even policies which traditionally we associate with the Cold War. This is of course more apparent if referred to Latin American domestic developments, but it is even applicable to other contexts. Latin American's debates and political practices influenced the ideas and practices of other actors in different parts of the world as Paula Barreiro López's article demonstrates in this dossier.⁷ However, we still need to know more about the transnational influence of Latin American Cold War.

We hope these contributions provide the reader with new views about the Cold War in Latin America. Although we do not aim to shake the consensual knowledge about US hegemony in the region, we believe the Cold War's impact on Latin America went beyond the traditional influence of the United States. Also, we hope to demonstrate that to some extent Latin Americans were also involved in the creation and shaping of the practices, discourses and representations of Cold War, both in Latin America and abroad. By emphasizing this, we aim to remember that even a "bipolar" world had its roots in complex heterogeneous contexts.

NOTES

1. The classic work is Westad (2005). See also Lundestad (2000); McMahon (2013); Connelly (2002); Smith (2000). For a summary of the evolution of the global and transnational history in the recent years, see Iriye, (2013). Examples of new topics, which sometimes go beyond the time framework provided by the Cold War, can be found among others in Connelly (2010); Snyder, (2013); Cullather (2010); Belmonte (2008). See the interesting reflections on culture and international affairs in Iriye (1979; 1997).
2. See, for example, Friedman (2003); Harmer (2011, 2014: 144); Schmidli (2013).
3. Thus, Fein (2008) and Zolov (2008) provide a very suggestive analysis of the cultural aspects of the Cold War but their frame of reference is the discussion about US hegemony. For Calandra and Franco (2012), the Cold War in Latin America is tantamount to hemispheric relationships.
4. See also Kirkendall (2014).
5. See the article of Alexandre Moreli Rocha and Boris Le Chaffotec in this dossier. Antonio Varsori (2000: 281) states that the Cold War "was only to a limited extent bipolar", although he refers mostly to the role of Western European powers such as France or Britain in shaping the post-war period.
6. Harmer (2014: 144) underlines. See, nonetheless, the important works of Ernesto Bohoslavsky on the right wing in South America.
7. This has been also explored, with a particular focus on diplomatic and military issues, by Piero Gleijeses (2002), in his study of Cuban involvement in Africa.

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