

# THE GLOBAL SOUTH IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

## Viewing African American Civil Rights through a Tricontinental Lens

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*Abstract: In January 1966, delegates from the liberation movements of eighty-two nations came together at the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Cuba, to form an alliance against imperialism. This alliance, called the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Organización de Solidaridad de los Pueblos de África, Asia y América Latina, OSPAAAL), quickly became the driving force of international political radicalism and the primary engine of radical cultural production throughout the world. I argue that this influential political movement, which has been the subject of surprisingly few scholarly studies, forms the ideological backbone of current conceptualizations of global subalternity, such as the increasingly circulating notion of the Global South. Through close analysis of documents from OSPAAAL's propaganda apparatus, namely the Tricontinental Bulletin and a newsreel by Santiago Álvarez called Now (1965), I examine how OSPAAAL, through its engagement with the African American Civil Rights Movement, presents a theory of transnational subaltern political resistance that is resurfacing in the contemporary notion of the Global South.*

In January 1966, delegates from the liberation movements of eighty-two nations came together at the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Cuba, to form an alliance against imperialism. This alliance, called the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Organización de Solidaridad de los Pueblos de África, Asia y América Latina, OSPAAAL), quickly became the driving force of international political radicalism and the primary engine of radical cultural production throughout the world. Through an analysis of documents from OSPAAAL's propaganda apparatus, namely the *Tricontinental Bulletin* (1966–1988, 1995–) and a newsreel called *Now* (1965) by Santiago Álvarez, the following essay argues that this influential political movement, which has been the subject of surprisingly few scholarly studies, forms the ideological backbone of current conceptualizations of global subalternity such as the increasingly circulating notion of the Global South.

The way in which contemporary capitalist globalization yields greater international solidarity among grassroots political movements has been described in varying terms in recent scholarship, but the term *Global South* has gained the most currency. The Global South, which generally refers to a political consciousness resulting from the recognition by diverse peoples of their shared experience of the negative effects of globalization, might productively be considered a depar-

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ture from the limitations of postcolonial theory.<sup>1</sup> Since its formal emergence in the late 1970s, postcolonial theory, with its focus on the experience of European colonization, has become mired in debates concerning whether it is relevant to people living within Western Europe and North America and whether its use in reference to Latin America is merely part and parcel of an orientaling Western academy. As a category, postcoloniality has not had a reach commensurate with the transcendent geocultural boundaries of globalization, and the Global South has emerged to provide a more useful rubric for theorizing contemporary hegemony and resistance.

Yet because the Global South diverges from postcoloniality while still rooting itself in the vast intellectual tradition generally subsumed under postcolonial theory, its historical and ideological parameters remain vague. In this regard, I suggest that the emergence of the Global South represents an attempt to recover a latent ideological legacy that has been lost, or at least overlooked, within the all-encompassing frame of postcolonial theory. This specific ideology, I argue, was embodied at the January 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Cuba, and in the formation of OSPAAAL.

Robert J. C. Young, the scholar to have written most extensively on OSPAAAL, locates the beginning of an epistemology of postcolonial subjectivity in the 1966 Tricontinental and even suggests *tricontinentalism* as a more appropriate term for postcolonialism (2004, 30).<sup>2</sup> However, while Young recognizes the Tricontinental's anti-imperialist ideology as the source of what would later coalesce under the academic category of postcolonial theory, its vision of power and resistance is more akin to the worldview encapsulated by the Global South. Specifically, what I find relevant about tricontinentalism is the way in which, in contrast to postcoloniality's focus on formerly colonized nations, it explicitly includes those located in the geographic North within its subjectivity. As the Tricontinental represents the extension to the Americas of the Afro-Asian solidarity begun at the 1955 Bandung Conference,<sup>3</sup> it marks the moment when this global alliance began to reach out

1. I draw from López's (2007) definition of the Global South, which, in its reference to a subjectivity and consciousness rather than geographical region, differs from the term's geopolitical usage to refer to those nations that make up, for example, the UN Group of 77, which was established in 1964 to promote South-South economic cooperation.

2. I will use the names Tricontinental and OSPAAAL interchangeably.

3. Following the 1962 ousting of Cuba from the Organization of American States, Cuba requested to join the Afro-Asian alliance that originated at the 1955 Bandung Conference (International Preparatory Committee 1965, 4). At the time of Bandung, there were "two analogous but separate spheres of subaltern struggle": one in Asia and Africa and the other in Latin America (Young 2005, 17). With the mounting US military campaign in Vietnam and a common recognition of Cuba and Vietnam as participating in a joint struggle, these separate spheres would join to form the Tricontinental. Bandung is often referenced as the beginning of what would become the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which refers to those recently decolonized nations that sought to form a third bloc apart from the capitalist West or the communist East. The central concerns at Bandung (and for NAM) were political and economic independence, nonviolent international relations, and the democratization of the United Nations. As Fidel Castro pushed for more concrete action on behalf of anticolonial struggles, the Tricontinental would diverge significantly from NAM's platform of peaceful coexistence. Additionally, although the Tricontinental defined itself in terms of anti-imperialism, not communism, and the Soviet Union was not a member, many anticolonial movements responded to US containment policy by becoming more

explicitly to African Americans.<sup>4</sup> Tricontinentalists claimed that African Americans were subject to the very same oppression that they were, and thus not only considered them to belong to the Tricontinental but, because they were said to be fighting within the belly of the beast of the imperialist United States, deemed them particularly representative of the Tricontinental's global subaltern subjectivity.

By consistently presenting the Jim Crow South as a microcosm of global empire, the Tricontinental, much like the Global South, maintained a deterritorialized notion of imperial power. Moreover, tricontinentalist discourse often used a racial vocabulary to mark ideological position rather than physical appearance, attributing color as a signifier of subaltern resistance to phenotypically white people who shared its views, and in this way, sought to destabilize racially essentialist claims to belonging. It is this deterritorialization of power and destabilization of trait-based requirements for inclusion that, I argue, makes the Tricontinental a model for an international political subjectivity that anticipates and is intrinsically relevant to emerging theories of transnational subalternity.

While the ideology claimed by the Tricontinental was already circulating among the international Left well before the 1966 meeting,<sup>5</sup> OSPAAAL produced a wide range of propaganda materials that included the *Tricontinental Bulletin* (1966–1988, 1995–), published monthly in English, Spanish, French, and sometimes Arabic, which provided updates on liberation struggles and OSPAAAL actions; a bimonthly magazine published in English, Spanish, French, and Italian called *Tricontinental* (1967–1990, 1995–), which included speeches, essays, interviews and in-depth analyses of the political and economic contexts of each struggle; radio programs; the posters for which OSPAAAL is now recognized, which were folded up inside issues of *Tricontinental*; and the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel (Noticiero ICAIC Latinoamericano).<sup>6</sup> The ICAIC Latin American Newsreel, short films made by the Cuban Film Institute (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cine-

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closely allied with the Soviet Union. In this sense, “nonaligned” is not an accurate descriptor for the Tricontinental. See Prashad (2007), Young (2005).

4. Richard Wright (1956, 178) points out that the only mention of “the Negro problem” at Bandung came from African American congressman Adam Clayton Powell, who, Wright claims, was sent to defend the US “bill of racial health.” In contrast to the Tricontinental, it does not appear that African American civil rights were at the forefront of issues discussed at Bandung.

5. Rodriguez (2005, 63) uses the term *tricontinentalism* to refer to the “critique of global capitalism and its exploitation of the world’s racialized peoples” articulated in the early 1960s in several articles composed by African American activists such as John Henrik Clarke, Richard Gibson, LeRoi Jones, Julian Mayfield, Robert F. Williams, and William Worthy, who traveled to Cuba through their participation in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), an organization created in the United States to balance the negative media portrayal of the Cuban Revolution. These writers’ visit to Cuba should be understood within the context of an exchange between US black leftists and the Cuban Revolution in which Castro’s government actively reached out to African American activists, like those in the FPCC or later to those like William Lee Brent, Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, Angela Davis, Huey P. Newton, and As-sata Shakur, who visited or defected to Cuba. Several of these activists would become disillusioned with the Cuban Revolution as they became familiar with its domestic racial inequalities. However, despite this, I maintain that the ideology of tricontinentalism, which US black leftists had a pivotal role in shaping, continued to circulate, providing a model for current conceptualizations of global subalternity. For more on African Americans and the Cuban Revolution, see Gosse (1993), Guridy (2010), Joseph (2006), Rodriguez (2005), Sawyer (2006), Tietchen (2007), and Young (2006).

6. *Tricontinental Bulletin* 37 (1969): 44–45.

matográficos, ICAIC), played weekly in Cuban theaters from 1960 to 1990. It was often distributed internationally and engaged themes such as the achievements of the Cuban Revolution and independence struggles in Vietnam and elsewhere (Chanan 1980, 1).

The Cuban Film Institute, created less than three months after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, was the first cultural organization decreed by the Castro government (Chanan 2004, 35). Its films occupied a central space of social dialogue within revolutionary Cuba and would have a profound impact on the development of a new radicalist aesthetics of filmmaking throughout the world. Cinema of the Cuban Revolution would be made in the style defined by Julio García Espinosa in his famous 1967 manifesto as “imperfect cinema,” which celebrated the imperfections of low-budget film that—in contrast to the conventional smooth-surfaced Hollywood studio cinema—emphasized filmmaking as a process and sought to actively draw its audience into the film’s revolutionary struggle (Chanan 2004, 184). Because of limited materials due to the US blockade, the time constraints of a weekly chronicle, and the improvisational creativity of Santiago Álvarez as a filmmaker, the inventive short films that made up the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel, which was headed by Álvarez, are arguably the clearest embodiment of the aesthetics of imperfect cinema.

The Tricontinental played a central role in the circulation of this revolutionary film aesthetic among the international Left. Octavio Getino and Fernando E. Solanas’s renowned essay “Toward a Third Cinema” (1969), which named revolutionary filmmaking, and especially the documentary genre, as the defining artistic arena of the anti-imperialist struggle, was first published in *Tricontinental*, and the distribution of the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel was a key component of the Tricontinental’s propaganda campaign. Considering the central position afforded to the African American cause within the Tricontinental, it is not surprising that one of the most famous of ICAIC’s newsreels is *Now* (1965), a fast-paced six-minute film by Álvarez that pairs Lena Horne’s 1963 song of the same title with documentary footage of white-on-black police brutality and images of protest from the US Civil Rights Movement.

Scholarship and reviews of *Now* generally describe the film as a denunciation of violence against African Americans and a rallying cry in support of civil rights activists (Charity 2005; Hess 1984; Rist 2007). However, I argue that *Now*’s message is far more complex: through presenting a pointed critique of the reformist goals of the Civil Rights Movement and pushing for radicalization and militancy, the film attempts to frame the African American struggle within the Tricontinental’s global movement.<sup>7</sup> In the following pages, I use *Now* alongside the *Tricontinental Bulletin* to outline how tricontinentalist ideology attempts to deterritorialize em-

7. I use “Civil Rights Movement” to refer to the sector of the larger black liberation movement in the United States that practiced nonviolence and that sought further incorporation into civil society. Elsewhere, I reference Black Power, by which I mean the heterogeneous section of the black liberation movement that took a more radical approach through such ideologies as black nationalism and communism. While I recognize that the boundaries between them are often blurry and that many activists participated concurrently in organizations on both sides, my differentiation draws from Cha-Jua and

pire and destabilize colonial racial divisions by pointing to imperialism within the geographic borders of the United States and privileging African American protestors as representative of its political subjectivity. An analysis of the argument put forth in *Now* sheds light not only on the Tricontinental's use of a local and racialized discourse to formulate a global, nonracialized revolutionary subjectivity but also on the way in which a text such as *Now* acquires new meaning when viewed through a Tricontinental lens. This examination of *Now's* tricontinentalist argument will be followed with further reflection on how recognizing the Tricontinental as a theoretical and historical foundation helps to better solidify the Global South as a working concept.

#### NOW'S CRITIQUE OF MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.'S "DREAM"

The 1965 release of *Now* was met with immediate international acclaim, and the film was shown in festivals around the world. Its final frame, in which the word "Now!" is spelled out with machine-gun shots onto the screen, even inspired the logo for Newsreel, the New York collective of activist filmmakers founded in 1967 (Hess 1984, 388). With time, *Now* has been a testament to the enduring relevance of Álvarez's work. It currently boasts tens of thousands of views on YouTube, and in 2005 it was included in Travis Wilkerson's DVD compilation *He Who Hits First Hits Twice: The Urgent Cinema of Santiago Álvarez* (2005).

In keeping with Getino and Solanas's theory of "Third Cinema," in which the role of the revolutionary filmmaker is not merely to document but to intervene, Álvarez claimed that he intended to "join things up in such a way that they pass before the spectator as a complete entity, with a single line of argument" (Chanan 1980, 6). In this sense, his newsreels, which are not intended to report the news with objectivity but to make a clear political argument, reflect the critical stance and subjectivity that are characteristic of the essay film (Rascaroli 2009). The images in *Now*, taken from pirated news footage and photographs cut out of *Life* magazine, are brought to life through the rapid sequencing, quick cuts, and aggressive zooms that characterize Álvarez's "nervous montage" style (Hess 1984, 393). This style has been described as "diametrically opposed to the 'long take' form of the direct cinema approach that dominated US production" at the time (Mraz 1990, 133).

Yet the true driving force of the film is the audio track: the song "Now!" sung by Lena Horne, which was composed for a performance Horne delivered at a Carnegie Hall benefit for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Hess 1984, 387).<sup>8</sup> SNCC worked closely with Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to carry out the famous sit-ins and Freedom

Lang's "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire" (2007), which recognizes Black Power and civil rights as having differing ideologies and objectives.

8. The lyrics, by Broadway duo Betty Comden and Adolph Green, were set by composer Jule Styne to the tune of the Hebrew folk song "Hava Nagila," thus drawing an implicit comparison between the racism suffered by Jews and that suffered by African Americans (Buckley 1986, 248).

Rides that occurred across the US South and played a leading role in organizing the 1963 March on Washington, where King delivered his legendary "I Have a Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.<sup>9</sup> Horne's song largely reflects King's ideological perspective as expressed in this famous speech in which King defined the Civil Rights Movement as fundamentally concerned with the acquisition by African Americans of all of the rights promised to American citizens in the US Constitution.<sup>10</sup> King's political position is fully embraced in Horne's song. Consider, for example, the following citation from the song's chorus:

Now, now  
Come on, let's get some of that stuff  
It's there for you and me  
For every he and she  
Just wanna do what's right  
Constitutionally  
I went and took a look  
In my old history book  
It's there in black and white  
For all to see<sup>11</sup>

The lyrics express a clear sense of urgency regarding the granting of civil rights across the racial divide yet emphasize doing "what's right constitutionally" and the United States' history of a discursive commitment to equality. The song suggests that one can look in a history book and find "in black and white" the rights promised to African Americans. The belief in equality has always been a part of American history, the song argues; it just needs to be extended to the black community.

Álvarez noted that in *Now*, "the script is in the song itself. As you follow the song, you write the script" (Castillo and Hadad 2009). In other words, the images in the documentary are arranged in rhythmic timing with the sound track and often directly correlate with the lyrics. However, this does not mean that there is a perfect coincidence of argument between song and film. In fact, I suggest that whereas Horne's song echoes the philosophy of Martin Luther King Jr. in drawing its inspiration from the social promise of the Constitution, Álvarez appropriates the song to formulate his own counterargument, claiming that this constitutional promise of equality does not apply to the African American community.

According to Michael Chanan, "Álvarez is a staunch believer in the naked power of the image, illustrated by music. He hates using verbal commentary . . . 'that simply means you have not explained yourself'" (1980, 10). In *Now*, Álvarez conveys his argument through his use of images, arranging the photographs and film footage in a montage style in which the message is contained in the

9. Later, when SNCC came under the leadership of Stokely Carmichael, it would diverge from the reformist philosophy espoused by King (Joseph 2006).

10. For a study of King's speech, see Vail (2006).

11. Lena Horne, vocal performance 1963, on 20th Century Fox Records, of "Now!", words and music by Betty Comden, Adolph Green, and Jule Styne, song © Stratford Music Corporation. All rights administered by Chappell and Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Alfred Music.



metonymic relationship of one image to the next.<sup>12</sup> Considering that Álvarez's most immediate audience was a primarily Spanish-speaking Cuban public that, despite the cursory subtitles, may not have understood all the English lyrics of Horne's song on a first viewing, the message conveyed through image becomes that much more important for perceiving Álvarez's intended meaning. In other words, one could watch the film with the sound off and still come away with the film's core message.

However, there are several key moments in which Álvarez places his images in ironic juxtaposition with Horne's lyrics, thus situating the visual track in an intermittent relationship of counterpoint with the audio track. These instances of ironic interaction between the images of the film and the song's lyrics, which I will detail in the analysis below, appropriate the discourse of Horne's song in order to undermine it, giving a sharp edge to the film's critique. Some of these key lyrical moments are not translated in the subtitles, meaning that while a non-English-speaking person would comprehend the overall argument on a first viewing, she would miss many of the subtleties that would be more clearly conveyed to an English-speaking viewer. This suggests that the film's intended audience is also, and perhaps primarily, a US or international Left that sympathizes with the song's rhetoric, which the film seeks to challenge and radicalize.

In keeping with its focus on claiming the rights set forth in the Constitution, the song begins by evoking the origins of US democracy in the figure of its founding fathers:

If those historic gentleman came back today  
Jefferson, Washington, and Lincoln  
And Walter Cronkite put them on Channel 2  
To find out what they were thinkin'

Álvarez pairs these lyrics with a photograph of protestors sitting on steps (fig. 1). The camera focuses in on an African American boy holding a US flag. The next image shows a policeman who appears to be violently pulling the flag from the child's arms (fig. 2). The lyrics that follow are accompanied by a close-up of an African American person's eyes:

I'm sure they'd say  
Thanks for quoting us so much  
But we don't want to take a bow  
Enough with the quoting  
Put those words into action  
And we mean action now!

The whites of the eyes transform in a dissolve into the face of Abraham Lincoln, which fades into an image of the Lincoln Memorial, immediately recalling the location from which King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech two years before

12. Álvarez's films reflect the influence of Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, who theorized montage as a collision of shots that, like the explosions in an internal combustion engine, drive the film and its thesis along (Mraz 1990, 133).



Figures 1, 2, 3 Film stills from *Now*, dir. Santiago Álvarez (Havana, 1965). Original photographs of child: "No More Police Brutality," Jackson, Mississippi, June 17, 1965, by Take Stock/Matt Heron, reproduced by permission.

the production of the film. The camera descends from Lincoln's head down to the base of the memorial, where the face of a protestor who is being beaten winces in pain. As Horne sings "Now!", the word appears as though written across the protestor's pained face (fig. 3).

While the images in the documentary are topically consonant with the song's lyrics—for instance, Álvarez presents images of the founding fathers in the same moments that Horne sings about them—the reference to the US forefathers takes on a different meaning in the film than it does in the song. The song evokes the forefathers in order to point to their unfulfilled, but viable, dream of equality such that Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln are narratively positioned as the ones calling for action. According to John Hess (1984, 392), "the song, and through it Álvarez, argues that the US was once a revolutionary country which then lost its way. To solve our contemporary problems—for example racism—we must reclaim our revolutionary past." While I agree with Hess's assessment of the song's argument, I argue that the images themselves communicate a very different message. The man wincing in pain is positioned beneath the feet of the Lincoln monument as if he were being crushed by the massive statue. The US flag is ripped from the protesting child's hands. Whereas the song evokes the US identity as a call to action, the film posits an a priori separation of African Americans from citizenship, evoking a call to action based precisely on disidentification with the United States and suggesting that if one really "went and took a look / In my old history book," one would find a history of anything but equality.

Álvarez reinforces this history of oppression throughout the film, which consists of a montage of images of police brutality against African Americans edited in time with the song's rhythm. He emphasizes racial hierarchies by featuring images in which white police are standing above—often pointing a gun down at—a black victim, who is lying on the ground. While the film footage and several photographic stills are taken from the 1965 Los Angeles Watts riots, in which black residents protested police brutality, Álvarez does not show images of the rioters taking violent action. Instead, he emphasizes their victimization, using photographs like one in which two young boys, who have been arrested, stand beneath a Los Angeles Police sign.



Several images of police violence directed at black women follow these lines:

People all should love each other  
Just don't take it literal, mister  
No one wants to grab your sister.

In one image of excessive force (fig. 4), a woman is picked up by her arms and legs by a group of five policemen that surround her. As she is carried to the back of a truck in front of a crowd of people, her shoes fall off into the street and her dress comes up, revealing her thighs and slip. The phrase “no one wants to grab your sister” addresses the racist fear of miscegenation, specifically the fear of sexual relations between white women and black men, which underlay many of the Jim Crow laws as well as the practice of lynching. Martha Hodes argues that during slavery in the United States, white men maintained not only the sole right to vote but also the perceived right to sexual violence against women, both white and black. According to Hodes (1992, 241), the extent to which suffrage was associated with domination over women's bodies became evident in the postemancipation period, when “whites conflated the new political power of black men with sexual transgressions against white women.” Hodes points out that while this fear had been present since the colonial era, political power and sexual power were so fundamentally intertwined in the minds of southern whites that it was not until suffrage was extended to African American men that this fear reached the level of social panic.

Tellingly, this single line of Horne's song is purported to have caused it to be effectively banned in the United States by the refusal of some major radio stations to play it (Gavin 2009, 332). Álvarez juxtaposes this phrase with the conceptually



Figure 4 Film still from *Now*, dir. Santiago Álvarez (Havana, 1965).

inverted image of gang-like violence by white policemen toward black women, implying that it is not white women who are threatened by black men, but rather, it is white men who “grab” black women. As Álvarez pairs these disturbing images of police violence with the song’s reference to the fear of miscegenation, he alludes to a history in which the constitutional right to vote is associated with African Americans’ victimization rather than empowerment. This line of the song, as well as references to the Constitution, is not translated in the film’s subtitles, suggesting that many of the subtleties of Álvarez’s critique of US democracy are directed to an English-speaking public.

Considering the film’s critique of the hypocrisy of US democracy, it is significant that Álvarez originally received a copy of Horne’s song from Robert F. Williams, whom Álvarez described as a friend (Castillo and Hadad 2009). Williams, the former president of the Monroe, North Carolina, division of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and a staunch opponent of King’s pacifism, was living in exile in Cuba when Álvarez made *Now*.<sup>13</sup> The critique that Álvarez puts forth in *Now*, while ironically dissonant with the lyrics of the song that Williams gave him, directly parallel Williams’s own ideology. Álvarez’s representation of the separation of the black community from US citizenship echoes a statement by Williams in which, when asked by a reporter if he would give up his citizenship in his support for Cuba, he replied, “As an Afro-American, I never had American citizenship” (Young 2006, 27).

In addition to aligning with Williams’s views on citizenship, *Now* also channels Williams in its critique of the nonviolence for which the Civil Rights Movement is recognized. Álvarez’s juxtaposition of photographs in which African Americans are victimized with the song’s chorus, “Now is the moment / Come on, we’ve put it off long enough,” proposes action as the path to ending oppression. Whereas the song does not imply that this action need be violent, I propose that the film calls specifically for militancy. The film’s critique of nonviolence is suggested in the extended photographic still that serves as the backdrop for the opening credits (fig. 5). In the photograph, some of the Civil Right Movement’s most prominent leaders—Martin Luther King Jr., president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Roy Wilkins, president of the NAACP; James Farmer, president of the Committee on Racial Equality; and Whitney Young, executive director of the Urban League—sit in a meeting with President Lyndon B. Johnson. Hess (1984, 388–89) argues that the photograph sets up the oppositional relationship between protestors and police that characterizes the rest of the film. Indeed, during the time the still photograph remains on screen, the following credits appear in overlay: “Personajes—Negros y Policías Norteamericanos.” This description of the characters sets up a binary of victims and victimizers, associating Johnson with the policemen and emphasizing the very opposition to which Hess refers.

13. Williams became known for forming a self-defense militia within his NAACP chapter and for his journalistic coverage of the famous Monroe “kissing case.” After facing death threats and an FBI arrest warrant, Williams escaped to Cuba in 1961, where he continued to publish his newsletter, *The Crusader* (1959–1969), and host a radio broadcast called Radio Free Dixie (1962–1966). See Tyson (1999).



Figure 5 Film still from *Now*, dir. Santiago Álvarez (Havana, 1965). Original photograph: "Johnson and Civil Rights Leaders," January 18, 1964, AP Photo, reproduced by permission.

Although this photograph can be read as one more depiction of the division between "negros y policías norteamericanos," Chanan (2004, 219) notes that the photo "establishes the film's tone of skeptical irony," an assertion that is not followed with further analysis. The photograph, juxtaposed with video footage of riot police running and marching, stands out as particularly static in an otherwise fast-paced, "nervous" film. In a newsreel lasting merely six minutes, this photograph remains on-screen for forty-five seconds. Álvarez does little to dynamize the image (such as fast cuts or zooms) but rather presents the photograph in the Hollywood "long take" style that he is known to oppose. Additionally, while I agree that Johnson is associated with the brutality of the policemen, the photo is the only image in which black and white men lean in toward one another in a communicative gesture and appear on the same level, Whitney Young sitting slightly higher than Johnson.

Johnson is the subject of biting criticism in a number of Álvarez's films, such as *LBJ* (1968) and *Hanoi Martes 13* (1967). Other than in the photograph with Johnson, the civil rights leaders do not appear again in *Now*. Thus, instead of focusing on these leaders' activism by showing images of them protesting, Álvarez's only presentation of them is in a static image in which they appear with this reviled politician. In this way, Álvarez offers a subtle critique of the movement's reformism, suggesting that cooperating with politicians, like Johnson, within a flawed political system does not bring change, only stasis.

The skepticism that Álvarez demonstrates toward the movement's leaders is then explicitly extended to its nonviolent methods. For example, the lyrics "We want more than just a promise / Say goodbye to Uncle Thomas" are sung simulta-



Figures 6, 7, 8 Film stills from *Now*, dir. Santiago Álvarez (Havana, 1965). Original photograph of woman protestor: "Woman Kneeling," May 5, 1963, copyright Bettmann/Corbis/AP Images, reproduced by permission.

neously with the appearance of a famous photograph of a civil rights protestor in front of the Traffic Engineering Building in Birmingham, Alabama. The woman is kneeling and her eyes contain an expression of agony (fig. 6). In direct timing with the words "Uncle Thomas,"<sup>14</sup> Álvarez focuses in on the protestor's hands, which are folded together as if in prayer, a subtle allusion to the religious character of civil rights protests like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Birmingham campaign (fig. 7). After zooming in on these praying hands, Álvarez then immediately cuts to the tied hands of a black man in a photograph in which a mob of white men hold him captive by a rope (fig. 8), arguing thus that the non-violent philosophy of the Birmingham protestors is yet another manifestation of black subjugation, or modern-day Uncle Tomism. The praying hands are tied and held by the rope of white domination.

This point is further emphasized in the final frames of the film, which show nonviolent protestors who have chained their hands together in a symbolic act that communicates their continued enslavement even in the era of putative freedom. Once the song reaches its crescendo, Álvarez focuses in on the bound hands of these protestors. As Horne sings the final line, "The time is now," Álvarez cuts to an image of a man running and zooms in on his hands, free of chains and tightened into fists. Next, the film comes full circle, back to an image of a boy who, instead of holding a US flag, furrows his brow and holds up his fists in anger (fig. 9). The final photograph depicts a woman standing above a crowd with her fist in the air, and the film ends with the sound of a machine gun firing as the word "NOW" is symbolically shot onto the screen (figs. 10, 11). The message is clear: break free of your chains and fight! The film implicitly decries the pacifist approach of the Civil Rights Movement as yet another enslavement and affirms a militant approach as a more viable path toward liberation.

14. "Uncle Tom," which alludes to the protagonist of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), is a derogatory term for a black person who behaves in a subservient manner.



Figures 9, 10, 11 Film stills from *Now*, dir. Santiago Álvarez (Havana, 1965).

#### “NEGROS Y POLICÍAS NORTEAMERICANOS” IN THE TRICONTINENTAL SPOTLIGHT

In his critique of civil rights discourse, Álvarez seeks to disconnect the African American struggle from a particularly US identity, merging it rather with a global struggle against imperialism. *Now* was released the same year that the Tricontinental alliance, which brought together delegates from Latin America, Africa, and Asia to form OSPAAAL, was announced in the pamphlet *Towards the First Tricontinental Conference* (International Preparatory Committee 1965). According to Young (2001, 192), this union, “which represents the formal globalization of the anti-imperial struggle,” stemmed from the common recognition among decolonized nations that political independence did not necessarily imply economic independence. OSPAAAL supported militant liberation struggles in places like Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, South Africa, and Palestine, and also sought to create an economic alliance so that members could trade with “the advanced countries on such bases that will allow our own development” (International Preparatory Committee 1965, 9).

While OSPAAAL was against any form of military or economic imperialism, it consistently pointed to the United States as the quintessential representative of this aggression. As a central component of its condemnation of the US government, OSPAAAL identified the cause of African Americans as an integral part of its platform. In the pamphlet, the Tricontinental’s International Preparatory Committee defines “support to the negro people of the United States in their struggle for the right to equality and freedom and against all forms of discrimination and racism” as part of the agenda for the upcoming meeting (International Preparatory Committee 1965, 8).

This initial solidarity with the African American freedom struggle becomes only more pronounced in the years following the first Tricontinental conference, as is clearly evinced by the many articles devoted to it in the *Tricontinental Bulletin*. For example, the August–September 1966 issue states: “Although geographically Afro-Americans do not form part of Latin America, Africa, or Asia, the special circumstances of the oppression which they suffer, to which they are subjected, and the struggle they are waging, merits special consideration and demands that the Tri-Continental Organization create the necessary mechanisms so that these brothers in the struggle will, in the future, be able to participate in the great battle being fought by the peoples of the three



continents."<sup>15</sup> In this statement, OSPAAAL does not just express its support for African Americans but explicitly brings them within the fold of the Tricontinental alliance itself.

The *Tricontinental Bulletin*, especially in its first ten years, is flooded with images of police brutality against African Americans, images strikingly similar to those that appear in *Now*. Like *Now*, the Tricontinental consistently points to the oppression of African Americans as revelatory of the hypocrisy of US democratic ideals. An August 1967 article claims: "It would take too long to enumerate each and every case of lynching, rape, physical torture and other atrocities perpetrated against the Blacks in a country where the rulers brazenly proclaim themselves the defenders of democracy and freedom."<sup>16</sup> Just as Álvarez pairs images of violence against African Americans with the song's references to the US Constitution, the writers of the *Tricontinental Bulletin* point to lynching and rape as evidence of the hypocrisy of the "democracy and freedom" that US political leaders claim to uphold.<sup>17</sup>

The *Tricontinental Bulletin* uses this evidence of hypocrisy to argue for the colonial nature of the US government's relationship to African Americans.<sup>18</sup> A January 1967 article entitled "Black Power: US Version of Struggle against Colonialism" argues: "Those masses who are discriminated against already understand that their problems do not revolve around the right to eat in certain cafeterias, the right to vote or the right to send their children to certain schools. The question goes much deeper. The radical Negro vanguard is becoming aware that their fight is a part of the independence movement of the colonized peoples and that their enemy is Yankee imperialism."<sup>19</sup> In this statement, the writers of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, like Álvarez in *Now*, present the reformist goals of the Civil Rights Movement as shortsighted. The article celebrates what it claims is the increasingly popular belief that, as explained in a January 1970 article, African Americans' "objective of national liberation, the liquidation of racism, cannot be achieved within the present, imperialist, capitalist structure."<sup>20</sup> Their path to liberation, the Tricontinental argues, lies primarily in their recognition of US democracy as a farce and US imperialism as the enemy.

In presenting the United States as an imperial power so pervasive that it has become "the common enemy of the peoples of the world," even including those

15. *Tricontinental Bulletin*, nos. 5–6 (1966): 21.

16. *Tricontinental Bulletin*, no. 17 (1967): 10.

17. Unlike *Tricontinental* magazine, most articles in the early issues of the *Tricontinental Bulletin* are not attributed to an author, and much of the information included therein is provided by the delegations. The writers of this 1967 issue are loosely defined as the OSPAAAL Executive Secretariat, with Osmany Cienfuegos acting as general secretary (*Tricontinental Bulletin*, no. 2 [1966]: 45; no. 3 [1966]: 3), and Miguel Bruguera, head of OSPAAAL's Department of Information, as editor (Estrada 2006, 1).

18. This argument has deep roots in the rhetoric of the Comintern, such as the logic behind the Communist Party of the United States's call in the 1930s for the formation of a separate nation among African Americans in the southern "Black Belt" states, as well as in pan-Africanist and US civil rights traditions.

19. *Tricontinental Bulletin*, no. 10 (1967): 4.

20. *Tricontinental Bulletin*, no. 46 (1970): 15.



who live within its borders, OSPAAAL anticipates by more than three decades the theories put forth by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri on the nature of modern empire.<sup>21</sup> In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri claim that in contrast to the transcendent nature of European colonialism, modern-day empire “establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *detritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers” (2000, xii, emphasis in original). They identify the logic of the US Constitution as exemplary of this immanent nature of empire in that, in producing its own internal limit by simultaneously granting and restricting constituent power, it turns outward toward the frontier in order to avoid reflection on its internal contradictions.

This vision of empire as unfettered by territorial boundaries and incorporating the entire world is parallel to the representation of imperialism in the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, which quotes Stokely Carmichael as saying, “Imperialism is an exploiting octopus whose tentacles extend from Mississippi and Harlem to Latin America, the Middle East, South Africa and Vietnam.”<sup>22</sup> The logic behind the Tricontinental is that the resistance to this monster must be equally global, a concept perhaps best articulated by Che Guevara in his “Message to the Tricontinental,” which he wrote in 1966 prior to leaving for Bolivia and which was published by OSPAAAL on April 16, 1967, in a special supplement (Estrada 2006, 2). According to Young (2001, 212), Guevara’s message is especially significant because of the way in which it defines a new revolutionary subject—not the proletariat of Marxism but “we, the exploited people of the world. ‘We, the dispossessed.’” Guevara’s vision of a global subaltern subjectivity is akin to Hardt and Negri’s (2000, 393) claim that with an immanent empire, there exists more revolutionary potential since it creates “the set of all the exploited and the subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire.” The two make essentially the same argument: that the expansiveness of empire, lacking geopolitical boundaries, allows for the creation of a new revolutionary subject, one that also lacks boundaries and that identifies with exploited people anywhere from Vietnam to Cuba to Alabama.

Among these exploited people of the world, OSPAAAL privileges African Americans. If imperialism is an octopus covering the earth with its deadly tentacles, then African Americans, the *Tricontinental Bulletin* maintains, are fighting “within the guts of the monster itself.”<sup>23</sup> This concept stems not just from African Americans’ location within the United States but also from a view of the transat-

21. *Tricontinental Bulletin*, no. 2 (1966): 31.

22. *Tricontinental Bulletin*, no. 10 (1967): 7. In August 1967, Carmichael visited Cuba and spoke at the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) conference, formed by the Tricontinental’s twenty-seven Latin American delegations (*Tricontinental Bulletin*, no. 1 [1966]: 8). Sarah Seidman (2012, 2) has written an in-depth article on Carmichael’s celebrity in Cuba in which she notes that what bound Carmichael to Cuba was a “shared Tricontinental ideology,” which she describes as a particularly Cuban “political construct akin to Third Worldism.” According to Seidman (2012, 3), Carmichael called OSPAAAL “one of the most important organizations for the development of the struggle of the Negroes in the United States,” and years later dubbed the *Tricontinental* magazine ‘a bible in revolutionary circles.’”

23. *Tricontinental Bulletin*, no. 25 (1968): 30.

lantic slave trade as a foundational moment of colonial hegemony. Consider the statement by Mao Zedong (1964, 4) that Robert F. Williams published in the October 1964 issue of his newsletter, the *Crusader*: “The evil system of colonialism and imperialism grew up along with the enslavement of Negroes and the trade in Negroes, it will surely come to its end with the thorough emancipation of the black people.” Mao, a central figure of OSPAAAL, identifies the enslavement of black people as foundational for imperialism and equates their liberation with the end of imperialism itself.<sup>24</sup>

Aníbal Quijano argues that because slavery was the economic driving force behind European colonialism, racial categories were devised to legitimize colonial hierarchies. As a result, “colonizers codified the phenotypic trait of the colonized as color” (Quijano 2008, 182). Guevara’s revolutionary subject arises out of a discourse that appropriates this colonial language, which separates the colonizer and the colonized into categories of white and colored, in order to create a phenotypic articulation of an international anti-imperialist resistance. However, the phenotypic language used to describe this global revolutionary should not be confused with racial determinism. On the contrary, it is a racial abstraction, meaning the designation of “color” is dissociated from physical characteristics, signifying rather an ideological position of anti-imperialism.

Besenia Rodriguez makes this very assertion when she explains that when Williams refers in his newsletter to Fidel Castro, a white descendant of a Spanish landowner, as “colored,” the word is disconnected from a black nationalist insistence on ethnicity or the suggestion of a pan-Africanist cultural heritage. Rather, in the spirit of tricontinentalism, it is used to “forge a solidarity based on a common exploitation” (Rodriguez 2005, 75). In other words, color, for Williams, is coded to signify the same global revolutionary subjectivity to which Guevara refers. So while the new revolutionary subject, as defined by Guevara and OSPAAAL, finds its clearest expression in the politicization of the “colored” identity of the former slave, lending a central representative position to African American activists within the global anti-imperialist struggle, this discourse of color transcends a direct relationship to physical appearance.

An understanding of tricontinentalism’s use of color as a political signifier provides further insight into Álvarez’s *Now*. Hess criticizes the way in which Álvarez conflates multiple groups within *Now*:

When Álvarez sets up the analogy in *Now* among Nazis, the KKK, the US government, the police and guardsmen (this was before Kent State), white racists, and LBJ, what is he trying to indicate? Is he arguing that they are all Nazis, that politically the US is a fascist state . . . or is he saying that all these men . . . repress disenfranchised people? I can’t answer this question, and think that this ambiguity, which works well on an emotional level, is also Álvarez’s greatest weakness as a filmmaker. (Hess 1984, 398)

24. Maoism initiated a shift within the Third World radical Left from a Eurocentric, orthodox Marxist focus on the industrial proletariat to the peasant struggle, helping to ideologically unify guerrilla struggles from Cuba to Vietnam (Young 2004, 15–23).

However, in view of the preceding discussion, we might consider Álvarez's fusion of images of repression into the oversimplified category of "North American policemen" in a different light. By depicting the white policemen's oppression of African Americans, Álvarez exploits the colonial categories of "white" and "colored." While the film exhibits an attempt to incorporate African Americans into the anti-imperialist project of the Tricontinental, it also appropriates an African American identity to stand in for all "the exploited people of the world." Just as the "policías" embody colonial oppression, the "negros" epitomize what Hardt and Negri would call the potential revolutionary multitude. Hess's apparent confusion, while perhaps a fair criticism of the totalizing perspective of the film as well as the Tricontinental itself, is symptomatic of both a lack of historical context in discussions of *Now* and a dearth of scholarship on the ideology of tricontinentalism.

The way in which tricontinentalism destabilizes colonial racial categories by employing its very vocabulary as markers of ideological position rather than phenotypic appearance is parallel to the way in which it deterritorializes empire through locating its presence in the global North. This vision of global oppression and resistance, described ironically through a defined geographic location and a racialized body, is, I would argue, a trope that is repeated in a range of anti-imperialist cultural production in the Americas, meaning that I would like to suggest *Now* as more of an exemplar than simply an isolated filmic event. In looking beyond similar texts' apparently simplistic oppositions by seeing how their representations of local hegemony are actually metaphors for an immanent empire and how their racialized discourses are divorced from a one-to-one relationship to physical appearance, we may begin to outline a tricontinentalist poetics. In doing so, we better situate our engagement with emerging concepts of transnational subalternity within the wider trajectory provided by tricontinentalism.

#### GLOBAL SOLIDARITY FROM THE TRICONTINENTAL TO THE GLOBAL SOUTH

As a text like *Now* suggests, tricontinentalism and its cultural production once circulated widely among the international Left, yet the central tenets of its ideology have been largely forgotten. According to Young (2004, 15), the student protests that erupted in May 1968 began an exchange between poststructuralist theory and the intellectual work of the "Third-World radical left," such as the Tricontinental, that would eventually become postcolonial studies. Postcolonialism would not be formally articulated as a critical category of literary analysis, however, until the 1980s, such as in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, in which postcolonial literatures are broadly defined as "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present-day" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989, 2).

Despite this panoramic approach, in practice the study of postcolonial literature has tended to focus on the former African and Asian colonies represented at Bandung, dismissing Latin American writers almost entirely. Some Latin

Americanist scholars, in turn, have resisted identifying with postcolonial studies, seeing it as a sweeping categorization articulated from the North American and Western European academies and as a misappropriation of concepts long rooted in Latin Americanist traditions.<sup>25</sup> John Beverley (2004) characterizes this resistance to postcolonial studies among some Latin Americanist scholars as a *neo-arielista* attitude, meaning that its anti-imperialist rejection of the Western academy is founded in an elitist self-distancing from Latin America's marginalized populations. In contrast, scholars of literature of the southern United States, in their innovative uses of postcolonial theory, often have to defend its use by arguing for parallels between the histories of the US South and other postcolonial contexts (Cohn 2007; Zamora 1997, 119).

Perhaps more important than this tendency to elide the Americas, however, is the way in which postcoloniality emphasizes the circumstantial, in which a conceptual premium is placed on nonwhiteness and homologized with a narrowly defined experience of former colonization, rather than the ideological.<sup>26</sup> This is precisely what Bill Ashcroft (1999, 14–15) argued when he claimed that postcolonial discourse is the discourse of the colonized and thus is not necessarily anticolonial in sentiment. In contrast, the Tricontinental was focused on an ideological stance of anti-imperialism. While it recognized similarities between experiences of colonization, the basis of its solidarity was not dependent on those similarities nor was it dependent on traits such as skin color, geographic location, or the social class of a person's family background. In other words, even though tricontinentalism is recognized as a foundational moment for postcolonial studies, the two are quite different in perspective.

Over time, subaltern studies has shifted its focus from the experience of colonization to a shared experience of the negative effects of globalization. New categories like the Global South are emerging as attempts to describe the common goals and worldviews of resistance movements across national boundaries.<sup>27</sup> While many of these concepts focus on an experience of exploitation and thus can imply a very broadly defined circumstantial definition, Alfred López's (2007, 1) definition of the Global South as the "mutual recognition among the world's subalterns of their shared conditions at the margins of the brave new neoliberal world of globalization" is particularly compelling. This mutual recognition implies a mutual worldview and ideology, and in this sense, captures precisely the tricontinentalist image of Che Guevara's "exploited people of the world." These

25. For in-depth discussions of the Latin Americanist debates on postcolonial studies, see Coronil (2008) and Lund (2006).

26. Edward Said (2002, 2) states that postcolonialism does not adequately account for the experience of neo-colonialism caused by structures of economic dependency. I would add that the Latin Americanist concept of "decoloniality," which is decidedly ideological and which theorizes coloniality as a structure of power and knowledge rather than a historical condition, does not necessarily challenge postcolonial theory's traditional investment in a nonwhite and non-Western locus of enunciation. See Mignolo (2007, 2012).

27. Other terms for this trend include Arjun Appadurai's (2001) "grassroots globalization," Boaventura de Sousa Santos's (2002) "subaltern cosmopolitanism" and "counter-hegemonic globalization," and Fernando Rosenberg's (2006) "cosmopolitismo, alternativo sureño."

new concepts aim to transcend regional and ethnic identities and a narrowly defined historical condition of postcoloniality and they recognize the negative effects of globalization on groups located within the global North. In this sense, they could be viewed as attempts to revive an elided tricontinentalism.

This acknowledgment of the Tricontinental's contribution to the Global South does not mean to imply a one-to-one correlation between the two.<sup>28</sup> Within a 1960s Cold War environment, many of the liberation movements that formed the Tricontinental tended to consider the creation of a space free from imperialism as an attainable goal. With the collapse of Soviet communism and ascendance of the neoliberal model, the possibility of excusing oneself from collusion with global capital has become much further out of reach. Participation in the global economy, through avenues like the Internet and social networking, has developed into an important tool for the growth of transnational political movements. This shift, theorists of the Global South maintain, does not mean the end of mankind's ideological evolution, as Francis Fukuyama (1992) argued, but rather the advent of ideologies of subaltern resistance that challenge and undermine neoliberalism from within.

Moreover, by proposing the intellectual recognition of the Tricontinental's legacy, I would like to make clear that I am in no way arguing for its triumphalist embrace. The Tricontinental is an imperfect model with inconsistencies and weaknesses that arise, for example, from the tendency of its cultural production to address itself to a masculine and heteronormative subject. My attention to the Tricontinental is not meant to redeem it as a model for political activism but rather to shine a light from a scholarly perspective on the insights to be gleaned from its study, which are several.

First, the Tricontinental offers a long view of the Global South, a starting point from which to develop and depart that, as I have attempted to demonstrate here, necessitates a close examination of foundational Cold War texts. Second, rooting the Global South in tricontinentalism clarifies the concept not as a mere offshoot of postcolonial theory but rather as an explicit divergence from postcoloniality as an organizing category with the aim of recovering the basic tenets of tricontinentalism. This implies that theorists of the Global South, in recognizing the legacy of tricontinentalism, would commit to articulating the ideological grounds for inclusion through which individuals imagine themselves as part of a resistant, global subjectivity over trait-based and circumstantial conditions.

Third, recognizing tricontinentalism as a model means explicitly acknowledging the centrality of both Latin American and African American intellectual traditions, which are often marginalized in postcolonial studies. This acknowledgment, which does not imply the dismissal of other intellectual traditions represented at the Tricontinental, has implications for the US and Latin American academies alike. The Tricontinental provides a theoretical backbone for scholars

28. Additionally, I do not suggest OSPAAAL as the only relevant antecedent to the Global South. The influence of Antonio Gramsci's "Southern Question" (1926) resonates within the term itself, and roots can be found in texts commonly associated with postcolonial theory, pan-Africanism, and Latin American Marxist writings, to name just a few.

doing comparative work in hemispheric American subaltern studies. Additionally, since postcolonial theory significantly diverged from tricontinentalism, it implies that those Latin Americanist scholars who view postcolonialism as an over-generalizing or foreign construction may be justified but that Global South theory cannot be labeled in quite the same way. In other words, recognizing the tricontinentalist roots of the Global South has enormous potential for opening communication between intellectual traditions that has often been stymied under the rubric of postcolonialism. Finally, as the Global South attempts to name and theorize the present reality of transnational subaltern politics, further study of its relationship to the Tricontinental constitutes a key step toward a more informed engagement with our contemporary political landscape.

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