

CONCEPTUAL READINGS INTO THE COLD  
WAR: TOWARDS TRANSNATIONAL APPROACHES  
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LATIN AMERICAN  
STUDIES IN EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE

Leituras conceituais na Guerra Fria: rumo a abordagens  
transnacionais a partir da perspectiva dos estudos  
latino-americanos na Europa Oriental e Ocidental

Lecturas conceptuales en la Guerra Fría: hacia enfoques  
transnacionales desde la perspectiva de los estudios  
latinoamericanos en Europa Oriental y Occidental

ALBERT MANKE, KATEŘINA BŘEZINOVÁ  
AND LAURIN BLECHA

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Albert Manke é PhD em História Ibérica e Latino-americana pela Universidade de Colônia (Alemanha), pesquisador sênior do Centro de Estudos Interamericanos da Universidade de Bielefeld e professor do Departamento de História Ibérica e Latino-Americana da Universidade de Colônia (albert.manke@uni-bielefeld.de).

Kateřina Březinová é PhD em História pela Universidade Carolina de Praga (República Tcheca), professora associada do Departamento de Relações Internacionais e Estudos Europeus e chefe do Centro Ibero-Americano da Universidade Metropolitana de Praga (brezinova@mup.cz).

Laurin Blecha é doutoranda do Departamento de História Contemporânea da Universidade de Viena (Áustria) (laurin.blecha@gmail.com).

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## ABSTRACT

This bibliographical and conceptual essay summarizes recent research in Cold War Studies in Europe and the Americas, especially on smaller states in historiographical studies. Against the background of an increasing connectedness and globalization of research about the Cold War, the authors highlight the importance of the full-scale integration of countries and regions of the 'Global South' into Cold War Studies. Critical readings of the newly available resources reveal the existence of important decentralizing perspectives resulting from Cold War entanglements of the 'Global South' with the 'Global North.' As a result, the idea that these state actors from the former 'periphery' of the Cold War should be considered as passive recipients of superpower politics seems rather troubled. The evidence shows (at least partially) autonomous and active multiple actors.

**KEYWORDS:** new Cold War History; Global South; small States; Latin America; Europe.

## RESUMO

Este ensaio bibliográfico e conceitual resume pesquisas recentes em Estudos da Guerra Fria na Europa e nas Américas, especialmente em pequenas potências, em estudos historiográficos. Num contexto de crescente ligação e globalização da investigação sobre a Guerra Fria, os autores apontam a importância da integração em larga escala dos países e regiões do "Sul Global" nos Estudos da Guerra Fria. Leituras críticas dos recursos recém-disponíveis revelam a existência de importantes perspectivas de descentralização resultantes dos enredos da Guerra Fria do "Sul Global" com o "Norte Global". Como resultado, a noção de que esses atores estatais na antiga "periferia" da Guerra Fria serão considerados como receptores passivos da política das superpotências parece bastante problemática. A evidência mostra (pelo menos parcialmente) atores múltiplos e autônomos ativos.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** nova História da Guerra Fria; Sul Global; pequena potência; América Latina; Europa.

## RESUMEN

Este ensayo bibliográfico y conceptual resume investigaciones recientes sobre Estudios de la Guerra Fría en Europa y las Américas, especialmente sobre las pequeñas potencias, en estudios historiográficos. En el contexto de una conexión creciente y de la globalización de la investigación sobre la Guerra Fría, los autores señalan la importancia de la integración a gran escala de países y regiones del "Sur Global" en Estudios de Guerra Fría. Las lecturas críticas de los nuevos recursos disponibles revelan la existencia de importantes perspectivas de descentralización resultantes de los enredos de la Guerra Fría del "Sur Global" con el "Norte Global". Como resultado, la idea de que estos actores estatales en la antigua "periferia" de la Guerra Fría se consideren receptores pasivos de la política de las superpotencias parece bastante problemática. La evidencia muestra (al menos parcialmente) actores múltiples autónomos y activos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** nueva Historia de la Guerra Fría; Sur Global; pequeña potencia; América Latina; Europa.

Research on the Cold War has long concentrated on key confrontations between the superpowers (Autio-Sarasma & Humphreys, 2010a: 16). Since the end of the millennium, however, there has been increasing interest in actors and issues previously overlooked in the bipolar perspective. Last decade was especially prolific in introducing debates coined by postcolonial and subaltern approaches to the development of countries and societies in the 'Global South' – a term usually used by Cold War scholars to designate the states formerly referred to as belonging to the 'Third World.'<sup>1</sup> Robert McMahon describes this as follows: "The upsurge of interest in such 'hot' topics as decolonization, development, sovereignty, state-formation, and human rights has helped move the Third World from periphery to center stage in several disciplines and subfields, fueling a burgeoning scholarship on the global South during the postwar era" (McMahon, 2013: 4).

According to Rupprecht, this growing interest is the result of a changed perspective: "Meant as a conscious delimitation of Eurocentrism, the focus is being redirected to the places where the Cold War was hot and where its consequences can be observed in the clearest fashion until today: to the Third World"<sup>2</sup> (Rupprecht, 2007:2). McMahon (2005) and Jacob (2015a: 5) also have contributed to Rupprecht's argument. Moreover, since most Cold War conflicts were staged in the 'Global South,' it is only partially appropriate to term these places as the 'periphery' (Jacob, 2015).<sup>3</sup> Interactions between local endeavors of decolonization and the influence of the superpowers (Bradley, 2010; Engerman, 2011), as well as postcolonial (Kwon, 2010), transnational, and transsystemic (Péteri, 2008) perspectives are highlighted in other works that are part of this paradigm. Interpretations originating in other world regions have also become more prominent (Hong, Szonyi & Zheng, 2010). Studies of this kind can be grouped under the label *New Cold War History*. Building upon the first, innovative but still mostly bi-polar and elite-centered approaches by John L. Gaddis (1997; 2005), this new Global History research of the Cold War was fundamentally articulated by Odd Arne Westad's seminal monograph *The Global Cold War* (2005).

This new line of research was enriched by approaches from cultural studies laying the foundation for real inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue. As McMahon notes: "[...] the cultural turn in the humanities and social sciences, with its insistence on the critical importance of race, gender, identity, religion, emotion, and language has also proved to be a powerful spur

for Third World-oriented scholarship [...]” (McMahon, 2013: 4). By opening the way for an analysis of intersecting areas, the Cold War is increasingly being understood as a globally interwoven space and period of conflict (Maguire, 2016; Iber, 2015; Aparicio [et al.], 2013; Calandra & Franco, 2012; Isaac/Bell, 2012; Niño Rodríguez & Montero, 2012; Gienow-Hecht, 2010; Jervis, 2010; Greiner [et al.], 2009; Stöver, 2007: 247-296; Caute, 2003; Richmond, 2003). But it allows also for readings of social, economic, and cultural change (Immerman & Goedde, 2013), and new approaches towards the conceptions of ideologies (Leffler, 2007). In order to include concepts other than just power struggles, Heymann and Martin-Nielsen speak of the Cold War as a “global condition affecting the whole world, not only the power blocs” (2013: 221).<sup>4</sup>

The fall of the Berlin Wall gave a new impulse to research on the Cold War with the opening of archives, especially in the former Soviet Union and its neighbors. Findings in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the declassification of documents in the United States, Western Europe, China and Latin America provided further important insights into Cold War history that challenged some formerly accepted interpretations. (Bayerlein, 2016; Joseph, 2008: 8-9; Blanton, 2008; Spenser, 2008: 392-394; Hanhimäki & Westad, 2004). This opening was at times accompanied by translations of documents into English, for instance by the *Cold War International History Project* (CWIHP) at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington.<sup>5</sup> Some of such findings have been obtained through cooperation between Eastern and Western scholars (e.g. Fursenko & Naftali, 2006). Since 2011 a committee of historians in Germany, that also has a section on Latin America, have been declassifying and analyzing *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (Federal Intelligence Service) documents from between 1945 and 1968.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, the Cold War is no longer primarily an area of American and Soviet/Russian historical memory and the related historiographies. Looking behind the ‘Iron Curtain’ (e.g. in Kramer & Smetana, 2013; Vázquez Cienfuegos, 2015 and 2016), as well as multipolar and decentralized approaches allows us now to make the complexity of this conflictual period more tangible (Pieper Mooney & Lanza, 2013).

Latin America’s role in the global Cold War has usually been told as an intrinsic part of the history of the Americas. Here the *longue durée* story of the relationship between the different Latin American states and the United States since the rise of the U.S. to a hemispheric hegemonic power in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century has occupied a prominent place (Pardo Rueda, 2014; Brands, 2010; Grandin & Joseph, 2010; Joseph & Spenser, 2008; O’Brien, 2007; Reid, 2007; McPherson, 2006; Nieto, 2003; Robinson, 2003; Ayerbe, 2001; Dietrich, 2007; Meding, 2007; Spenser, 2004; Grandin, 2002 and the collection of documents in Holden & Zolov, 2000). In

this context, the role of the United States as an imperialist aggressor and supporter of state terrorism has been highlighted (Grandin, 2004; Streeter, 2000; Rodríguez Cruz, 2005; Manke, 2014; Kornbluh, 2003; Harmer, 2011; Haslam, 2005; Menjívar & Rodríguez, 2005; Lynch, 2011; Gill, 2004; Calloni, 2010; McSherry, 2005; Wright, 2007; Walker & Wade, [2017]).<sup>7</sup> The concern with the violations of human rights that accompanied U.S. involvement in Latin America during the Cold War has created a specific research area about the memories of the victims of Latin American dictatorships (see, amongst others, Luther [et al.], 2011; Mayer & Molden, 2009; Molden, 2007). New research on Latin America in the Cold War, as shown in Joseph and Spencer (2008), goes a step further by focusing on the interactions between Latin American States and non-state actors.

Significantly fewer studies have examined the influence of the Soviet Union and other socialist states on Latin America during the Cold War (Rupprecht, 2015 and 2010; Andrew/Mitrokhin, 2005: 27-137; Kanet, 2005; Paszyn, 2000).<sup>8</sup> The exception is, of course, Cuba (Cabrera Arús, 2015; Loss, 2013; Loss/Prieto, 2012; Greiner, 2010; Díez Acosta, 2002). China's influence in Latin America during the Cold War was only marginally treated for many years. Its presence in the region has mostly been analyzed on a broader level and from a longer perspective (Manke, 2015; López, 2013: 221-236; Rothwell, 2013; García Triana, 2003; Mann, 2002). Because of the superpowers' central role both in the Cold War and in the production of knowledge, many 'Western' and 'Eastern' scholars remain bound to superpower paradigms and perspectives. Only a few of them envision other perspectives, such as South-South cooperation. For instance, Ribeiro (2015), Hatzky (2012) and Gleijeses (2002) have provided important insights into Cuba's engagement in Africa.

### THE 'COLD WAR': A VALID CONCEPT FOR A TRANSNATIONAL HISTORY OF EAST AND WEST?

There already exist some studies which analyze societies in the two opposed ideological blocs during the Cold War from a comparative perspective, e.g. in Eastern and Western Europe (Vowinckel, Payk & Lindenberger, 2012). Vowinckel, Payk, and Lindenberger's analysis offers not only some new insights, but also a dialogue between different scientific cultures and traditions from diverse perspectives. The authors reckon that the very term 'Cold War' is in itself a Western imprint that was practically not in use in the 'Eastern Bloc' before 1989. They use it as an analytical term to stress complexity instead of unidimensional and undifferentiated explanations: "[...] instead of applying a schematic model to the changing realities of the Cold

War, we want to explore its diverse horizons and multiple forms of expression – particularly in their European characteristics” (Vowinckel, Payk & Lindenberger, 2012a: 1).

As a conceptual point of departure for a bibliographical analysis, the term ‘Cold War’ can be understood in the above-mentioned critically reflected sense, even without going as far as deconstructing the term in the sense of Wallerstein or Jacobs, as it seems as an operable basis for analyzing interactions between smaller states in this context. Wallerstein questions the universal validity of this term when he points to alternative models and movements, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). He argues that with the NAM a counter-narrative was constituted that cannot be subsumed under the concept ‘Cold War’ (2010: 17-18). Wallerstein misconceives here that the states which joined the NAM were not exempt from the effects of Cold War conflict. In the present context, one can follow Wallerstein’s argument insofar as the concept ‘Cold War’ can be expanded through alternative readings that stem (albeit not exclusively) from the ‘Global South.’ Jacob uses Wallerstein’s argument which relates in particular to Asia, and gives it validity for Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East to it (2015a: 5).

#### SMALL STATES AND SECONDARY ACTORS IN LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE DURING THE COLD WAR

More recent contributions have broached the issue of the relations and interactions between (Eastern and Western) Europe and Latin America, to go beyond the former obsession with the superpowers and broaden the scope of research (Manke & Březinová, 2016; Opatrný, 2010). The volume edited by Manke and Březinová stands for the new trend that allows for decentralized and entangled readings of the Cold War. Although it does not offer a path-breaking study (as it represents mostly a translation of already published articles into German), by focusing on the interactions between small states and secondary actors on both sides of the Atlantic, the editors go beyond a merely bipolar perspective and enlarge it at the same time.

Similar kind of interactions, in this case between state and non-state actors and the media across ideological borders, were dealt with by the first edited volume of the *Aleksanteri Cold War Series* published by the *Cold War Research Group* at Helsinki University. According to the editors of this volume, interactions seem to be illustrated more easily if they take place between less powerful actors or states. Because we consider this a key element for framing the study of interactions between smaller states and actors in the Cold War, it is worth citing a long extract from these authors:

As yet, these studies are almost exclusively 'top down,' focusing on high-level political decision-making and influential actors in the arena of the world politics. The new shift in research, which has shone light beneath the highest level decision-making at small and non-state actors, first emerged in the field of cultural studies but this development is now being strongly felt in the wider field of Cold War history. [...] These new Cold War studies focus on interaction and cooperation; individual states, non-state and small actors, including individuals on both sides of the Iron Curtain – with the special focus on the understudied Eastern point of view. Research has turned to ordinary people's encounters and interaction instead of confrontation a conflict (Autio-Sarasma & Humphreys, 2010a: 17).

We would like to go one step further and not only comparatively study the interactions between Eastern and Western states in Europe, but also analyze the states and actors in the 'Global North' and the 'Global South.' Some have carried out this kind of comparison through the (almost classical) lens of asymmetries, such as Tom Long who reflected on the relations between the United States and Latin America (2015: 1-3). By looking beyond, one can spotlight small states and secondary actors and highlight some of their interactions that rarely reflected a deep asymmetry. For a discussion of the concept of 'small states' from a political science perspective, see Maass (2009) and Belfer (2014). Small states can be defined in different ways, also in a relative sense, i.e., if their neighboring states are more powerful and limit their possible actions. The definition of small is challenging and often unclear (Hey, 2003: 2-3). Nevertheless, it is not just about observing small states' behavior inside their respective bloc, but also about the interactions between them that sometimes transcend ideological borders.

As some states do not meet the criteria of 'small states,' it seems useful to introduce the category 'secondary actors' which can mean regional powers (cf. Frazier & Stewart-Ingersoll, 2012). The definition of 'secondary actors' can also include terms like 'middle states' or 'middle powers' (Von Bredow, 2003). Nevertheless, it seems to us as too static, since – depending on the regional or hemispheric context – a small state can develop into a regional or (temporarily) into a great power, as was the case of Cuba during its engagement in Angola (1975-1991). Not only states like Brazil and Argentina, but also a state like Cuba can be termed a 'secondary actor' in Latin America, if the circumstances allow such a categorization. In Europe, even Great Britain, a nuclear power, could be treated as a secondary actor in the Cold War if US interests were at stake (Cushion, 2016). But not only the relationship between Europe and the U.S. was marked by asymmetry, within Europe there also existed (and continue to exist) sharp contrasts: "The political complexity of Europe derives from the co-existence of a multitude of large and small states" (Heymann & Martin-Nielsen, 2013: 230).

By focusing on the relations between smaller states, they do not appear solely as extras in the superpowers' larger theaters during the Cold War (such as Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis). Researchers will be able to analyze more closely different forms of cooperation between these states and actors (such as international companies and scientific communities) and to sound out the potentials and constraints of such relationships. Furthermore, such an approach can provide fresh knowledge and new perspectives about the range in which smaller states were operating during that period. Research has shown that cooperation between smaller states frequently involved impulses from both directions, not just from Europe (Manke & Březinová, 2016: 18). Transnational, multilayered, and sometimes contradictory processes of entanglement can be observed which involved a whole range of actors and dynamics. Should we focus exclusively on conflicts, however, we would miss large part of the story: what we see are not only (more or less functioning) bilateral relations, but the circulation of people, ideas, technologies (Patti, 2015; Manke, 2015a; Bortlová, 2013), and cultural elements (Maguire, 2016; Cabrera Arús, 2015; Březinová, 2013).

Another rewarding approach can be found in the dialogue between 'Western' and 'Eastern' academic traditions. Researchers in Eastern, Central, and Western Europe have developed different interpretations of the Cold War as an academic subject, as well as scholars of different generations in their own field of expertise. By proceeding with this international, inter-systemic and intergenerational dialogue, we add yet another layer to interpretations that already have provoked quite contrary positions 'inside' Western traditions. This breaks up Western-centric ideas of a "clash of civilizations" (Huntington, 1996) and offers entangled visions of the 'other.'

These visions reveal two basic current tendencies. While among 'Western' scholars a critical analysis of the 'Western' hegemon (the United States) is becoming increasingly relevant (Joseph & Spenser, 2008), 'Eastern' European scholars tend to embed their research in a general reappraisal of their countries' Cold War pasts. This can be seen as part of a revisionist process of coming to terms with their own past that helped to declassify thousands of documents of the period before 1989. While this transparency and self-criticism can be regarded in rather positive terms, it often comes with unilateral interpretations. The Soviet Union's politics concerning smaller states in its sphere of influence and even in relation to smaller states in Latin America is generally being condemned as negative. At the same time, the hegemonic influence of the United States on smaller states is interpreted in benevolent terms, even if some aberrations of its presumably benevolent dominance are acknowledged (Zourek, 2013). Although the negative impact of the Soviet Union is no longer being neglected among left-leaning 'Western' scholars, they usually limit it to the Soviet Union's European 'satellites'



and continue to reject more conservative views of an overall negative interpretation of Soviet engagement. In the 'East,' revisionists have taken over most of the academic discourse, though new nationalist interpretations of their nation's communist past sometimes lead to a recovery of some elements that can show certain independence in decision-making from the Soviet Union. Some of the more reflective publications result from cooperation between scholars in the 'East' and 'West' (Maguire, 2016; Kramer & Smetana, 2013).

Small states and secondary actors were usually bound to the influence of their respective hegemony and had only limited space for decision-making, both in Europe and in Latin America. But by looking at the interactions between these states, other layers and perspectives surface which seem to share more cooperative than conflictive characteristics. Still, the local or national narratives of each country, region or group have shaped their insertion in Cold War history in a decisive way, as have the different and entangled temporalities that have to be taken into account in order not to lose the local rootedness of transnational cooperation and conflict.

## CONCLUSIONS

States in the former 'periphery' of the Cold War cannot be considered merely as passive recipients of superpower politics in presumed 'centers,' but as (at least partially) autonomous and active actors. Their relationship with the superpowers often followed more pragmatic considerations than purely ideological ones. With this changed perspective, the competition of social orders invoked by David Skidmore takes a back seat in the discussion.

Furthermore, the great master narratives often shaped by bipolar bloc thinking can be expanded and partially questioned through these decentralizing interpretations of complex Cold War settings. This allows for the fact that Cold War Studies do not present themselves just as a field of international relations. Overlapping transdisciplinary approaches gain even more importance by enabling us to interpret and examine the global Cold War in new ways. This variety of research options opens up new approaches to the history of 'multiple modernities' invoked by Eisenstadt (2000) and Ortiz (2000) during the Cold War.

## NOTES

**1** A critical discussion of these terms is offered by Dirlik (2007: 12-14).

**2** This and all other citations were translated into English by the authors of the present bibliographical essay.

**3** We are also aware of the contested nature of terms like the 'Third World', 'developing countries' or 'industrialized countries.' See also Englert, Grau, and Komlosy (2006:13).

4 For a deeper discussion of different definitions of the term 'Cold War' see Nehring (2012), Duara (2011), and Wallerstein (2010), amongst others.

5 Since 1991, the CWIHP has harbored an excellent open source digital archive on the global Cold War (<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org> [2016-09-07]).

6 See <http://www.uhk-bnd.de> [2016-12-10].

7 Regarding the US imperialist role, the literature limits itself to allowing a short interruption during the Carter administration. See for instance Sikkink (2007: 121-147).

8 For an internal perspective of the Soviet Union during the Cold War see Zubok (2007).

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