Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas
Anuario de Historia de América Latina

61 | 2024 | 392-423

Natália Ayo Schmiedecke

University of Hamburg

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https://doi.org/10.18716/ojs/jbla.61.2304

Known Posters, Unknown Impact. OSPAAAL Graphic Art and Its Worldwide Reception

Natália Ayo Schmiedecke[1]

Abstract. – In recent years, the literature on the Cold War era has given increasing attention to the so-called Third World project and has proposed new concepts to analyze its different currents, such as Tricontinentalism. Scholars agree that the propaganda materials produced by the Cuba-based Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL, 1966-2019) played a crucial role in disseminating the Tricontinentalist agenda, vocabulary and imagery. But this general agreement is not anchored in empirical evidence, since the circulation and reception of these materials have been understudied so far. This paper argues that debates on Tricontinentalism have much to gain from expanding this front. By focusing on the OSPAAAL posters, I will explore four avenues – their distribution; reproductions and versions; iconographic and stylistic influence; and presence in books, exhibitions and archives – highlighting the methodological difficulties involved in this endeavor. The paper organizes data obtained from archival documents, works by other scholars and interviews published in different parts of the world. This approach challenges generalizations based on very specific primary sources, as well as theorizations not grounded in rigorous empirical analysis. This study reaffirms the importance of a Cold War history that considers the particular dynamics of the so-called Third World, their global connections, as well as the visual dimension of the antagonisms and solidarities built in that context. At the same time, it emphasizes the importance of a long-term perspective when looking into the global sixties.

Keywords: Tricontinentalism, Cuban Poster Art, Visual Culture.

[1] I would like to thank the colleagues of the BMBF project WONAGO, especially Professor Ulrich Mücke, Dr Thiago Prates and Dr Khalil Dahbi, for their valuable feedback on an earlier version of this text. I am also very grateful to the anonymous reviewers of the paper, who gave me generous advice to improve it, and to Professor Aldo Marchesi, who instigated me to develop this study.

Resumen. – En los últimos años, los estudios sobre la Guerra Fría han prestado cada vez más atención al llamado "proyecto Tercer Mundista" y propuesto nuevos conceptos para analizar sus diferentes corrientes, como el Tricontinentalismo. Los analistas coinciden en que los materiales de propaganda producidos por la Organización de Solidaridad de los Pueblos de África, Asia y América Latina (OSPAAAL, 1966-2019), radicada en Cuba, desempeñaron un papel crucial en la difusión de la agenda, el vocabulario y el imaginario tricontinentalistas. Pero el consenso acerca de la influencia ejercida por sus publicaciones no está anclado en evidencias empíricas, ya que la circulación y recepción de estos materiales apenas ha sido estudiada. Este artículo sostiene que los debates sobre el Tricontinentalismo tienen mucho que ganar con la expansión de este campo de estudios. Centrándome en los carteles publicados por la OSPAAAL, exploraré cuatro frentes – su distribución; reproducciones y versiones; influencia iconográfica y estilística; y presencia en libros, exposiciones y archivos – resaltando las dificultades metodológicas implicadas. El artículo organiza datos obtenidos de documentos de archivo, trabajos de otros analistas y entrevistas publicadas en distintas partes del mundo. Tal enfoque cuestiona las generalizaciones basadas en fuentes primarias muy específicas, así como las teorizaciones no fundamentadas en un análisis empírico riguroso. Este estudio reafirma la importancia de una historia de la Guerra Fría que considere las dinámicas particulares del llamado Tercer Mundo, sus conexiones globales, así como la dimensión visual de los antagonismos y solidaridades construidos en aquel contexto. Al mismo tiempo, subraya la importancia de una perspectiva de largo plazo al examinar los sesenta globales.

Palabras clave: Tricontinentalismo, gráfica cubana, cultura visual.

Since the closure of the Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL) in June 2019, interest in this topic has been growing, both inside and outside academia. Created during the Tricontinental Conference in 1966, OSPAAAL was based in Cuba and aimed at supporting and coordinating revolutionary struggles at a global level.[2] The organization was led by the Cuban government,

[2] The creation of OSPAAAL was an attempt to expand to Latin America the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), founded in 1957 in Cairo. Both organizations coexisted and AAPSO is still active.

which was its fundamental sponsor,[3] and had representatives of leftist governments and movements from the three continents encompassed in its acronym.[4] A quick search on the internet demonstrates that OSPAAAL became known above all for its graphic art, designed by Cuban artists. Indeed, it is possible to state that, although its initial agenda was much more ambitious, in practice OSPAAAL's work ended up being more focused on organizing events and, mainly, producing cultural materials such as the *ICAIC newsreel,*[5] the *Tricontinental* bulletin, the *Tricontinental* magazine and the posters distributed along with the latter.[6]

So far, little is known about the reach of these materials. This is due both to the incipient nature of studies on the subject and to the difficulty of covering a number of diverse contexts in individual research projects. OSPAAAL had an international Executive Secretariat, maintained relations with political organizations from many countries and its published materials thematized struggles carried out in different parts of the world. Furthermore, the *Tricontinental* magazine and the OSPAAAL posters were printed in multiple languages and distributed in the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe, mainly targeting left-wing activists. Given the complexities of working with an object that is transnational in so many senses, most studies on the organization have preferred to restrict their scope to the internal analysis of OSPAAAL graphic art, observing its main characteristics and contextualizing it within the Cuban political and cultural framework.[7] Other authors have

[3] Although it was expected that partner organizations, especially those represented in the executive secretariat, would also make financial contributions, this seldom happened.

[4] The first OSPAAAL Executive Secretariat was composed of representatives of Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Chile, the United Arab Republic, the Conference of Nationalist Organizations of the Portuguese Colonies (CONCP), Congo-Leopoldville, Guinea-Conakry, Syria, Pakistan, South Vietnam, and North Korea. Some changes took place over the years.

[5] ICAIC is the acronym for Cuban Institute on Cinematographic Arts and Industry.

[6] On Tricontinental and other OSPAAAL publications, see: Robert J. C. Young, "Disseminating the Tricontinental": Chen Jian et al. (ed.), The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties, New York: Routledge, 2018, pp. 517-547.

[7] David Kunzle, "Public Graphs in Cuba: A Very Cuban Form of Internationalist Art": Latin American Perspectives, 2: 4 (1975), pp. 89-110; Jorge Bermúdez, La imagen constante. El cartel cubano del siglo XX, La Habana: Citmatel-Cubaliteraria, 2015

recently opened a promising avenue of research by focusing on the relationship maintained by the organization with specific movements or regions.[8] Focusing on the intentions underlying OSPAAAL published materials, these works seek to demonstrate that they were aimed at contributing to advancing objectives of Cuba's foreign policy.

Taking a different stance, scholar Anne Garland Mahler argues that the OSPAAAL materials were a site of convergence for radical organizations with diverse views and not always reflected the Cuban state's ideological positions.[9] Mahler highlights the transnational nature of what she calls Tricontinentalism, a discourse globalized by OSPAAAL's "large propaganda apparatus",[10] which turned the organization into "an official mouthpiece for ideas that were already being exchanged".[11] Tricontinentalism would supersede the Cuban state, circulate outside of materials produced by OSPAAAL itself and reverberate in a wide array of radical Cold War cultural production.[12]

(E-book); Régis Léger, Cuba gráfica: Histoire de l'affiche cubaine, Paris: L'Échappé, 2013; Alberto García Molinero, La imagen tricontinental. La Feminidad, el Che Guevara y el Imperialismo a través del arte gráfico de la OSPAAAL, Santiago de Chile: Ariadna, 2022; Lídia Generoso, Solidariedades tricontinentais em movimento: política, imagens e temporalidade na produção cultural da Organização de Solidariedade dos Povos de África, Ásia e América Latina (1963–1990), Brasil: Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto, 2023 (PhD diss.); Natália Ayo Schmiedecke, "Oppressed, Resistant, and Revolutionary: The Third World as Designed in the OSPAAAL Graphic Art": Antíteses, 16: 31 (2023), pp. 251-291.

[8] Jessica Stites Mor, South-South Solidarity and the Latin American Left, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2022, pp. 51-98; Fernando Camacho Padilla / Jessica Stites Mor, "Presence and Visibility in Cuban Anticolonial Solidarity: Palestine in OSPAAAL's Photography and Poster Art": Sorcha Thomson / Pelle Olsen (ed.), Palestine in the World: International Solidarity with the Palestinian Liberation Movement, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023, pp. 167-196; Rahel Losier / Jessica Stites Mor /Fernando Camacho Padilla, Statelessness and Solidarity: Palestinians, Dhofaris, and Saharawis in Tricontinental Media: Bandung, 11 (2024), pp. 67-101.

[9] Anne Garland Mahler, From the Tricontinental to the Global South. Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, p. 11. This argument should be problematized, as there is evidence of the Cuban government's control over the organization in documents and interviews.

[10] Mahler, From the Tricontinental, p. 81.

[11] Mahler, From the Tricontinental, p. 14.

[12] Mahler, From the Tricontinental, p. 8-9.

Mahler's main objective is to trace the genealogy of Tricontinentalism and define its distinctive features in order to support the hypothesis that it would be an antecedent of the concept of the Global South and would be influential to contemporary transnational social movements.[13]

It is important to mention that Mahler did not invent the term Tricontinentalism, which had already been employed with different connotations in the early 2000s by other scholars.[14] Mahler questioned some of their postulates and embraced others, undertaking a more theoretical approach. As a result, her work has given unprecedented prominence to the subject and has become a benchmark. While some scholars have adopted the concept of Tricontinentalism proposed by Mahler, others have avoided it. Having as their main concern the different forms assumed by the so-called "Third World project"[15] and the place of Latin America in it, works on Tricontinentalism diverge on the nature, protagonists and chronology of this phenomenon.[16] These

[13] In this endeavor, the author tends to generalize conclusions drawn from the analysis of specific sources, but these conclusions not always hold up if one considers the body of OSPAAAL cultural production. For example, the concept of "metonymic politics of color" proposed by the author does not apply to all posters published by the organization.

[14] Robert J. C. Young, "Postcolonialism: from Bandung to the Tricontinental": Historein 5 (2005), pp. 11-21; Besenia Rodriguez, "Beyond Nation: The Formation of a Tricontinental Discourse", United States of America: Yale University, 2006 (PhD diss.); Thea Pitman / Andy Stafford, "Introduction. Transatlanticism and Tricontinentalism": Journal of Transatlantic Studies, 7: 3 (2009), pp. 197-207.

[15] This term was popularized by historian Vijay Prashad to refer to a shared political platform aimed at guaranteeing political and economic sovereignty for the former colonized world ("the darker nations"), having the United Nations as the major institution for planetary justice (Vijay Prashad, The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World, New York: The New Press, 2007). These postulates have generated controversy in the literature, as demonstrated by Joseph Parrott, "Introduction: Tricontinentalism and the Anti-Imperial Project": R. Joseph Parrott / Mark A Lawrence (ed.), The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. 1-14.

[16] See, for instance, Parrott / Atwood Lawrence, The Tricontinental Revolution, and Moe Taylor, North Korea, Tricontinentalism, and the Latin American Revolution, 1959–1970, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Regarding works that adopt alternative terminologies, see Samantha Christiansen / Zachary A. Scarlett (ed.), The Third World in the Global 1960s, New York: Berghahn Books, 2013, and

works focus on the period between the late 1960s and early 1970s in order to identify manifestations of the agenda, vocabulary, iconography and graphic styles associated with Tricontinentalism in different geographical and political contexts. However, a key aspect has not yet been directly addressed: what is OSPAAAL's specific role in circulating this content? Through what resources? How effectively?

By asking these questions, I am challenging the automatic association between the Tricontinental Conference, OSPAAAL and Tricontinentalism, which often appear in the literature as synonyms. Moreover, I am assuming that the importance and influence exerted by OSPAAAL cannot be taken for granted, and that debates on Tricontinentalism have more to gain from further inquiring about it. As I will show by focusing on the OSPAAAL posters, the impact of these materials is not yet clear, and although there are different avenues to explore this matter, none of them provide definitive conclusions. I will explore four of such avenues: distribution; reproductions and versions; iconographic and stylistic influence; and presence in books and exhibitions. Rather than providing a complete account, the main goal here is to give visibility to the methodological difficulties involved in the attempt to measure the dissemination and impact of OSPAAAL graphic art. This approach challenges theorizations not grounded in rigorous empirical analysis that end up fabricating a heroic past and projecting onto it contemporary concerns of the English-speaking world.[17] It also challenges generalizations based on very specific primary sources, suggesting that, at this stage, this method is not productive.

In order to help make broader interpretations possible in the future, this article organizes data obtained from various sources: works by other scholars who have studied political posters produced in different parts of the world, interviews with militants and artists who worked for movements associated with OSPAAAL, and documents consulted in digital and physical archives. The latter include materials published by the organization itself, such as the *Tricontinental* magazine, as well as periodicals and posters produced by leftist movements associated with OSPAAAL during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In working with these sources, I looked for direct or indirect references to the OSPAAAL

Zeina Maasri / Cathy Bergin / Francesca Burke (ed.). Transnational Solidarity: Anticolonialism in the Global Sixties, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022.

[17] This approach was critically addressed by Taylor, North Korea, pp. 9-10.

posters in order to identify some contexts in which they circulated, as well as ways in which they were appropriated by both partner and rival organizations.

By adopting the proposed approach this study reaffirms the importance of revisiting the Cold War history from a perspective that highlights the particular dynamics of actors of the so-called Third World and their links with actors from the First and Second Worlds, as well as the visual dimension of the antagonisms, rapprochements and solidarities built in that context. At the same time, by encompassing examples corresponding to the post-Cold War period, it emphasizes the relevance of a longer-term perspective, which allows for recognizing changes and continuities in the production, circulation and reception of cultural products.

1. Distribution

Following the "countercultural media ethos", aimed at ensuring the widest possible circulation with the minimum of resources, OSPAAAL encouraged the free copying and reproduction of all its published materials.[18] The latter were designed by Cuban artists and approved by the organization's international Executive Secretariat before being published. OSPAAAL started producing posters in 1967 and they were initially distributed along with the *Tricontinental* bulletin. After the creation of the *Tricontinental* magazine, they started to be folded up into it. The initial print run of the posters was 50,000 copies in offset printing and 500 in silkscreen.[19] The offset ones were printed in three versions: 25,000 copies with the text in Spanish, 15,000 in English and 10,000 in French. From 1968, a single version made up of these three languages plus Arabic was adopted. This practice, which dates back to some anti-fascist publications of the 1930s, became a hallmark of

[18] Tom Wilson, "Paper Walls: Political Posters in an Age of Mass Media": Elissa Auther / Adam Lerner, West of Center: Art and the Counterculture Experiment in America, 1965–1977, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011, pp. 175-178.

[19] Not all posters had silkscreen versions and, at some point, the posters in offset started to be printed not only in a size to fit in the magazine, but also in a larger size. Both the latter and the silkscreen ones were distributed independently from the magazine.

OSPAAAL graphic art.[20] Including the Arabic version of the texts was challenging, since there were no typographic models available in Cuba at the time, so it had to be drawn manually.[21] This demonstrates that the artists working for OSPAAAL had to find creative solutions to technical problems resulting from the distance between the regions encompassed in the acronym.

Circulating the materials internationally also required inventiveness given the absence of a previously established distribution system and also the fact that their content, which usually called for armed struggle, was considered terrorist in several countries. Different means were employed to distribute them either openly or clandestinely. The main one was postal correspondence with redistribution centers created abroad. Scholar Jorge Bermúdez mentions centers located in Prague, Rome, Stockholm, London, Tokyo and Cairo and points out that, while most of them had a relatively brief and limited activity, the center in Prague lasted the longest and was responsible for distributing the OSPAAAL materials to Europe, Latin America and the United States.[22] There are mentions of some other centers in the *Tricontinental* magazine, such as Distribuidora Solaris in Panama (1984–1990), IMELSA in Nicaragua (1984) and Graphic Corporation in Ghana (1984). During the 2000s, the magazine often informed in its back cover where to find OSPAAAL publications, listing locations in Cuba, Argentina, Mexico, Germany, Italy, the United States, Greece and Brazil. The distribution was also carried out through Cuban governmental bodies such as embassies, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), the Young Communist Union (UJC) and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC).[23] In addition,

[20] Natália Ayo Schmiedecke / Erika Zerwes / Lídia Generoso, "Reframing Revolution and Solidarity: Photography and Visual Culture in OSPAAAL Poster Art (1967–1990)": Bandung, 11 (2024), pp. 102-140.

[21] Héctor Villaverde, Testimonios del Diseño Gráfico Cubano, 1959–1974, La Habana: Ediciones La Memoria, 2013, pp. 226-227.

[22] Bermúdez, La imagen constante, not paginated. Prague was an international hub for left-wing organizations during the Cold War, serving as bridge between Third Worldists from different parts of the world. See Michal Zourek, Checoslovaquia y el Cono Sur 1945-1989. Relaciones políticas, económicas y culturales durante la Guerra Fría, Praga: Editorial Karolinum, 2014.

[23] Bermúdez, La imagen constante, not paginated.

individuals and organizations that visited the island acted as informal distributors.

For example, US activist Angela Davis recounts in her autobiography the day in the late 1970s when she was approached by a customs officer in Guadeloupe, where the ship she took to return from Cuba to the United States docked. After checking the content of their bags, the officer threatened to arrest her and her fellow travelers for "bringing communist propaganda to foment revolution on this tranquil island". Davis explained to the officer that, although most of them were indeed communists, "we do not come to Guadeloupe on any political mission". But when the officer discovered boxes of *Tricontinental* magazines and "posters depicting Jesus Christ, with haloed head, wielding a carbine on his shoulders [...] He completely lost control".[24] The mentioned poster (Figure 1) was designed by the head of OSPAAAL propaganda department, Alfredo Rostgaard, in honor of the Colombian guerrilla priest Camilo Torres, killed in combat in 1966. Davis also mentions problems with visas and other issues that came up during and after the trip, allowing one to glimpse the difficulties involved in solidarity work in the Cold War context.

Figure 1: Poster by Alfredo Rostgaard, OSPAAAL, 1969. Courtesy of Lincoln Cushing-Docs Populi.

[24] Angela Davis, Angela Davis: An Autobiography, New York: International Publishers, 1988, pp. 213-214.

Another example concerning the distribution of OSPAAAL materials is a 1968 ministerial decree that prohibited the "import, diffusion and circulation" of the *Tricontinental* magazine throughout French territory, claiming that it would be part of a "red plot" organized from abroad. Despite this, the editor responsible for the French edition of the magazine, François Maspero, continued to publish it in Paris until 1971. According to him, difficulties occurred even before the ban:

> "the length of postal transmission and the manufacturing times had shown us that it was not possible to publish here with sufficient speed an edition reproducing all the texts published by the OSPAAAL. Some quickly lose their relevance. Others, however, have already been published elsewhere in France".

That is why he took "the initiative and the responsibility of condensing the French edition into 4 issues, now quarterly, where we will find the most important texts in their entirety".[25] This testimony indicates that the OSPAAAL materials were reproduced by different local actors, not only those who had official relations with the organization.

Through the intermediation of Éditions Maspero, *Tricontinental* reached the French speaking world, being influential in some intellectual and political circles, as scholar Andy Stafford comments in his study on the Moroccan magazine *Souffles*.[26] In the United States, between 1971 and 1973, the Bay Area printing collective Peoples Press produced an English edition of *Tricontinental* that featured new content and artwork in addition to a digest of materials from the Cuban publication. Italian, German and Arabic editions of the magazine were also temporarily published, respectively, by the publishing houses Feltrinelli in Milan, Trikont in Munich, and by a group led by a Cuban resident in Beirut. The latter lasted only a couple of months in 1982, being interrupted by the Israeli invasion known as the Siege of Beirut.[27] As remarked by the curators of a recent exhibition on such materials,

> "in publishing local editions of Tricontinental, these groups and individuals served as 'multipliers' of OSPAAAL's discourse [...] The acts of translating, physically producing, and reading these magazines alike allowed for individuals

[25] Tricontinental 4, 1968 (french edition) (my translation from French), p. 3.

[26] Andy Stafford, "Tricontinentalism in recent Moroccan intellectual history: the case of Souffles": Journal of Transatlantic Studies, 7: 3 (2009), p. 221.

[27] Camacho / Stites Mor, Presence and Visibility, p. 175.

located thousands of miles from the three continents to which Tricontinentalism had originally referred to craft their identities as part of its radical community".[28]

Therefore, OSPAAAL's publications aimed to reach different parts of the world and relied on the help of multiple individuals and institutions to achieve this goal. Over the years, however, with the decline of revolutionary enthusiasm at a global level, solidarity networks became scarcer. Faced with the severe economic crisis caused by the end of the Soviet bloc, the organization had to suspend the publication of *Tricontinental* and was able to produce only a dozen posters during the so-called Special Period (1990-1995).[29] The magazine resumed publication in March 1995, thanks to the support of various Cuban institutions and the Coordinating Committee for the Support of the Cuban Revolution in Italy.[30] At this new stage, the circulation of OSPAAAL published materials depended mainly on subscriptions, direct sales, trips abroad by the organization's representatives and, to a lesser extent, visits to its headquarters by representatives of foreign organizations.

There are some mentions in the literature of places where certain people came into contact with the OSPAAAL posters in different parts of the world. Archivist Lincoln Cushing, who has led many Cuban poster cataloging projects and written reference works on the topic, reports having had his first encounter with them in the lobby of a US academic directory.[31] In turn, Carlos Vega, another important poster collector,[32] saw them for the first time in 1974, when he traveled to Cuba as a member of the Venceremos Brigade. Vega's group spent three months on the construction of an agricultural community outside of Havana.

[28] The James Gallery, Notes on Solidarity: Tricontinentalism in Print. Sep 10 - Nov 2, 2019. Exhibitions and Programs, 2019, p. 12.

[29] The years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and, by extension, of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) were known in Cuba as the "Special Period in a Time of Peace".

[30] Tricontinental 131, 1995, p. 2; Tricontinental n. 135, 1996, p. 1.

[31] Lincoln Cushing, ¡Revolución! Cuban Poster Art, San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003, p. 18.

[32] After his death in 2012, Vega's OSPAAAL posters collection was donated to the Interference Archive, based in New York and led by Lincoln Cushing. He also collected other materials, in different formats, corresponding to radical activism and black and latino cultural expressions, which were donated to other US archives.

Upon their arrival, the brigadistas received a number of presents which included three OSPAAAL posters. According to Vega's son, "he was hooked" and took advantage of Sunday outings to get more posters in bookstores. His experience in Cuba would have been a turning point in his life: "the thing that would direct his life and work forever after, was the value placed on culture at the center of the Revolution – a value embodied in these OSPAAAL posters".[33] He recognized in the latter

> "that beauty was not only a goal, but a method; that the art had the power to convey powerful messages and ideas, to educate, and to aspire, and could be therefore a practical force for liberation in the world".[34]

Vega would emerge as an important community organizer in the 1970s, working with the Puerto Rican community of Holyoke.

Fifteen hundred kilometers away, in Chicago, Puerto Rican activists had founded the Young Lords Organization a few years earlier to protest the capitalist system and its perverse effects on oppressed peoples. Mahler mentions an occasion, in late 1969, when members of the organization raised the aforementioned "Guerrilla Christ" poster (Figure 1) during a service at a church in East Harlem, New York.[35] This poster was also displayed on the façade of the Young Lords headquarters in the same neighborhood, as a 1969 photograph taken by Hiram Maristany and reproduced by Mahler shows.[36] Among the many political posters covering the front window of the headquarters, another 1969 poster by Alfredo Rostgaard can be distinguished.[37] It depicts a guerrilla fighter with a blank face, suggesting that it could be filled in by any one of the three faces on the right side of the poster, which intend to represent Africa, Asia and Latin America. Mahler argues that this way of representing the alliance between the three regions was in line with the internationalist ideology of the Young Lords.[38] The

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[33] Jesse Maceo Vega-Frei, "The Carlos Vega Collection of OSPAAAL Posters": Interference Archive, Armed by Design/El Diseño a las Armas, New York: Tricontinental Interference Archive, 2015 (Interference Documents 11), pp. 7-8.

[34] Vega-Frei, "The Carlos Vega Collection", p. 8.

[35] Mahler, From the Tricontinental, p. 106.

[36] Also available at: https://whitney.org/collection/works/65762. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[37] Available at: https://www.docspopuli.org/CubaWebCat/detail.np/detail-302.html. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[38] Mahler, From the Tricontinental, pp. 116-118.

presence of OSPAAAL posters among US anti-racist movements of the period was also attested by the Black Panther Party member Emory Douglas, who recalls having seen them for the first time in 1967/1968, when he was working at *The Black Panther* newspaper. According to Douglas, in the early days of the Party, they received publications from Havana through a P.O. box, a gesture that was reciprocated.[39]

Outside of the United States, "As would occur in student dorm rooms across the West, Cuban revolutionary posters and other paraphernalia" proliferated in some military bases of the National Liberation Front of Algeria (FLN) in Tunisia, according to historian Jeffrey Byrne.[40] Also, graphic designers who worked for the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) mention having seen Cuban posters in its headquarters. Kaleb Shaalukeni stated in a 2008 interview that during the 1980s the walls of SWAPO's print shop, located in Lusaka, were "covered with posters – not only with those that they had printed themselves, but especially with images of their heroes", including "posters from Cuba [which] portrayed Che Guevara and Fidel Castro".[41] Graphic designer Theo Namupala pointed out that the emblem adopted by SWAPO during the 1989 elections was inspired by an OSPAAAL poster that had been displayed in the organization's offices.[42]

The examples cited above suggest that OSPAAAL posters mainly reached political activists from international revolutionary movements. As we will see in the following sections, the posters were appropriated by these and other recipients in various ways.

2. Reproductions and Versions

During the 1960s and 1970s, US leftist groups often reworked Cuban posters for domestic use. For instance, the New York-based Glad Day

[39] Lincoln Cushing, "Influences between U.S. and Cuban Poster Art": Interference Archive, Armed by Design, p. 61.

[40] Jeffrey Byrne, "The Romance of Revolutionary Transatlanticism: Cuban-Algerian Relations and the Diverging Trends within Third World Internationalism": Parrott / Atwood Lawrence, The Tricontinental Revolution, p. 171.

[41] Giorgio Miescher / Lorena Rizzo / Jeremy Silvester, Posters in Action: Visuality in the Making of an African Nation, Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009, p. 29.

[42] Miescher / Rizzo / Silvester, Posters in Action, p. 169.

Press reprinted a 1973 OSPAAAL poster by Rafael Morante[43] in solidarity with Angola. In the new version,[44] both the Glad Day's logo and a solid green background were added, the latter being motivated by the wish to prove the capacities of a new printer. Another example is a poster designed by US artist Jane Norling for OSPAAAL in 1972, when she traveled to Cuba invited by the organization. Entitled "September 23/Day of World Solidarity with the Struggle of the People of Puerto Rico",[45] the poster was reworked five years later in Chicago for a conference on Puerto Rico's independence. In this case, the OSPAAAL logo was deleted, and the original text was replaced with information on the topic, location and date of the conference.[46]

Direct collaboration between the artists hired by the organization, which were all Cubans, and foreign designers was unusual. The OSPAAAL posters were designed by the former, with rare exceptions, such as the aforementioned poster created by Norling, another one designed by Swiss artist Richard Frick in 2007, and a few others whose image came ready-made from North Korea.[47] Also, although the organization produced some materials commissioned by partner governments and movements, they did not result from joint work. Rafael Enríquez, who was OSPAAAL's art director for several years, recalled in an interview that he had designed many graphics for sandinista publications even before their triumph in Nicaragua in 1979. When asked if OSPAAAL trained Nicaraguan designers, Enríquez clarified that

> "Those who collaborated in the preparation of projects in OSPAAAL were activists of the [Sandinista National Liberation] Front. Let's put it this way: They came to us in the framework of their real tasks and work objectives in Cuba,

[43] Available at: https://www.docspopuli.org/CubaWebCat/detail.np/detail-16.html. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[44] Available at: https://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/201054128. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[45] Available at: https://www.janenorling.com/new-page-3. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[46] Cushing, Influences between U.S. and Cuban Poster Art, p, 58-59.

[47] Interview with Santiago Rony Feliú, Havana, 30 November 2023 (recorded in .mp3).

whenever necessary. It was not training as such, but rather an occasional collaboration on our part. They were fighters, not artists".[48]

OSPAAAL posters were also printed abroad in other formats such as pages of periodicals and postcards. The best-known example is "Black Panther" (1968), by Alfredo Rostgaard, which displays the illustration of a black panther with its mouth open and a text which reads "Retaliation to crime: revolutionary violence" in four languages.[49] Shortly after its publication, OSPAAAL adapted the poster as a postcard, adding a photograph of Huey Newton in the panther's mouth and replacing the original text with "Free Huey Newton!".[50] According to Cushing, the image was first used in the United States in a September 1968 issue of *The Black Panther* newspaper and later reprinted both as a poster and a postcard.[51] These exchanges between OSPAAAL and the Black Panthers were two-way, as demonstrated by illustrations by Emory Douglas featured in the *Tricontinental* magazine and also in a 1968 poster by Lázaro Abreu.[52] The same can be observed in the case of the Young Lords. As Mahler indicates, between 1970 and 1971, some OSPAAAL posters were reproduced in the Young Lords Party's newspaper *Palante*, while the *Tricontinental* bulletin displayed illustrations of party leaders on the back covers of its 60th issue.[53]

In addition to being reprinted by sympathetic groups, OSPAAAL posters were also falsified by enemy organizations. The *Tricontinental* magazine mentions a poster attacking an African revolutionary leader that circulated in East Africa in 1969.[54] The leader concerned was

[48] Otker Bujard / Ulrich Wirper, La revolución es un libro y un hombre libre. Los afiches políticos de Nicaragua Libre 1979-1990 y del Movimiento de Solidaridad Internacional, Managua: IHNCA-UCA, 2009 (my translation from Spanish), p. 31.

[49] Available at: https://www.docspopuli.org/CubaWebCat/detail.np/detail-333.html. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[50] Available at: https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM73879. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[51] Cushing, Influences between U.S. and Cuban Poster Art, pp. 64-65.

[52] Available at: https://www.docspopuli.org/CubaWebCat/detail.np/detail-328.html. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[53] Mahler, From the Tricontinental, p. 118-122.

[54] Fernando Camacho Padilla / Jessica Stites Mor, Counterfeit OSPAAAL Posters as Counter-revolutionary Device: Public Humanities Hub, The University of British Columbia, August 18, 2020. Available at: https://public-

Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu, a Zanzibar-born Marxist and pan-Africanist nationalist who played an important role in the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution and assisted Ernesto "Che" Guevara in Tanzania. Against an orange background, the poster featured an illustration of his face in the center and, below, a long text entitled "Babu the rank opportunist". After examining the poster, OSPAAAL representatives concluded that its creators had photocopied the organization's logo, used technical printing means similar to those employed in Cuba, and introduced the false posters in intercepted correspondence. *Tricontinental* also mentions other "provocative materials, also supposedly edited by OSPAAAL" that were circulating at the same time in Algeria and Guinea. In the former case, as the magazine explained, the posters attacked the "revolutionary government of President Boumedienne [sic]" and, in the latter case, they demanded the release of "conspirators serving imperialism", who were imprisoned after an attempt to overthrow the government of Ahmed Sékou Touré. The aim of the falsified posters would be to create confusion and generate tensions among OSPAAAL and its affiliated organizations. In a statement, OSPAAAL's Executive Secretariat accused the CIA of being behind this plot and stated that the "provocative lies" would not stop the organization's successful solidarity work.[55]

Although most examples of OSPAAAL posters that were reproduced, versioned or falsified abroad correspond to the organization's early years, this practice has never ceased, as demonstrated by more recent examples. One of them is a 1998 poster designed in Canada by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty to call for a march organized to protest police actions against the so-called "squeegee kids".[56] It featured the same image used in a 1967 OSPAAAL poster by Jesús Forjans, which was taken from a 1964 photograph of a civil rights protest in the United

humanities.ok.ubc.ca/2020/08/18/counterfeit-ospaaal-posters-as-counter-revolutionary-device/. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[55] Tricontinental 13, 1969 (my translation from Spanish), p. 1-2. The "fake" posters can be consulted at Richard Frick, The Tricontinental Solidarity Poster, Bern: Comedia-Verlag, 2003, pp. 432-433.

[56] Available at: https://www.alternativetoronto.ca/archive/items/show/340. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

States.[57] The image depicts on the foreground a white policeman with his back toward the camera, who holds a baton in one hand and pushes the chest of an African American protestor with the other. The protestor faces the camera and appears to be shouting. Forjans added the word "now!" above the image in black block letters, overtly referencing the homonymous film by Cuban filmmaker Santiago Álvarez released in 1965. As Mahler argues, the meaning of the poster transcends the US context: "The white policeman signifies global empire and the black protestor embodies the global subaltern struggle".[58] This is precisely why it suited the Canadian context of the late 1990s to protest police intimidation and imprisonment of the poor youth.

More recently, a banner was published on the Facebook page of Perú Libre in the context of the 2021 presidential elections that culminated in the victory of the party's candidate, Pedro Castillo (Figure 2). The banner was an adapted version of a 2017 OSPAAAL poster which was a part of the portfolio "Unidad y Antimperialismo en José Martí" (Figure 3). It shows a photomontage in which two hands have the fingers intertwined and connected by colorful wires. In the Peruvian version, these colors also appear on the flag inserted above the image, which seeks to symbolize the Andean region. This flag was widely used by Castillo's campaign to mark his Andean origin and his commitment to indigenous peoples in order to distinguish himself from his rival, Keiko Fujimori, who was seen as a representative of the wealthy and urban sectors. While in the OSPAAAL poster the notion of different peoples coming together, transmitted both by the image and the textual quote by José Martí ("The peoples who do not know each other should hurry to know each other, as those who are going to fight together"[59]) referred to Cuba's Latin Americanist project, the Peruvian version alludes to union within the national framework.

[57] Available at: https://www.docspopuli.org/CubaWebCat/detail.np/detail-342.html. (Accessed June 30, 2024).

[58] Mahler, From the Tricontinental, p. 103.

[59] My translation from Spanish.

Figure 2: Banner posted on the Facebook page of Perú Libre on October 8, 2021. Accessed on: July 3, 2023.

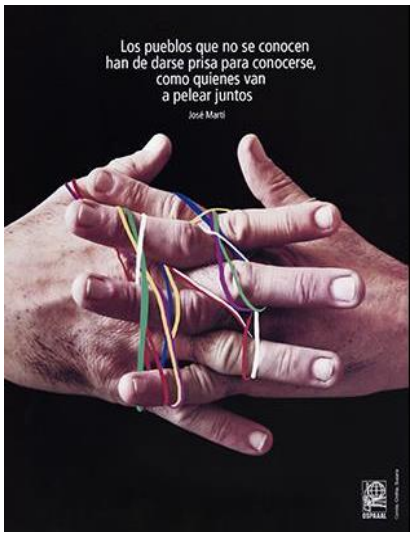

Figure 3: Poster by Camila / Cintia / Susana, OSPAAAL, 2007. Source: Center for the Study of Political Graphics.

Unlike the previous example, in which an OSPAAAL poster was used by a candidate supported by Cuba, the next one critically targeted one of its allies: Russian president Vladimir Putin. It was published on the website Ospaaal.com in 2022 shortly after the start of the war in Ukraine.[60] It is worth noting that, until then, the website had been limited to reproducing selected Cuban documents, especially posters, accompanied by information on authorship, year, and size. The "Putin Poster", as they named it, is an adapted version of a famous 1969 poster by Alfredo Rostgaard which portrayed former US president Richard Nixon as a monster. This poster innovated by using the origami technique, which builds its message in stages.[61] It was conceived to be gradually unfolded so that the "true nature" of Nixon would be

[60] Available at: https://www.ospaaal.com/putin.html. (Accessed April 20, 2024). I could not find information on the people behind the website.

[61] Generoso, Solidariedades tricontinentais, p. 214.

revealed.[62] When completely open, the poster uses psychedelic and hyper-real colors and patterns to present him as a being with elven ears and sharp fangs.[63] In 2013, Mexican artist Jorge Alderete produced another version of the poster for the magazine *El Fanzine*, in which Nixon was replaced with US former president Barack Obama,[64] and nine years later it was Putin's turn in the Ospaaal.com version. While the 1969 poster included no text and the 2013 one presented a short bio of Rostgaard and a note on the original design, the newest version presents a short biography of Putin followed by a comment on the United Nation's resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[65] Given the proximity between the Cuban and the Russian governments, this new version would hardly have been produced if OSPAAAL still existed.

The examples cited in this section show that OSPAAAL posters have been appropriated by both sister organizations and political opponents. In some cases, the interchanges were direct and mutual, indicating that there was a perception of a collective struggle. In turn, the case of the fake posters suggests that, at least in its early years, the OSPAAAL posters were considered as efficient threats by intelligence services of governments hostile to Cuba and to its allies. However, there have been relatively few direct recreations or falsifications of OSPAAAL posters in comparison to other ways in which their influence can be observed.

3. Iconographic and Stylistic Influence

The literature has stated the originality of Cuban poster art in the communist world, especially with regard to its distancing from the

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62 Available at: https://www.docspopuli.org/CubaWebCat/detail.np/detail-339.html. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

63 Available at: https://www.docspopuli.org/CubaWebCat/detail.np/detail-338.html. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

64 Available at: https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1441195/las-caras-de-obama-poster-rostgaard/. (Accessed April 20, 2024). I would like to thank the anonymous peer reviewer of the article for clarifying the origin of this poster. It is worth mentioning that Obama was target by OSPAAAL publications in many occasions, especially after being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009. By repudiating his nomination, the organization sought to give visibility to the continuity of imperialist policies in Obama's terms.

65 The text is presented both in Spanish and English.

socialist realist model in favor of a plurality of visual languages that were in line with international trends such as Pop Art, Op Art, Conceptual Art, Minimalism and the Polish poster school. As early as 1970, art critic Susan Sontag pointed out to "stylistic eclecticism", encompassing "a wide range of influences from abroad", as a hallmark of Cuban poster art.[66] Among these influences, Pop Art has been the most highlighted. According to art historian David Craven, Cuban artist René Mederos developed a Cuban variation of Pop Art which would consolidate its progressive potential.[67] In words of Jorge Bermúdez, "Cuba's graphic communication changed the sign of pop art" by reversing its technical and aesthetic assumptions from the material culture of consumerism and mass media towards political communication.[68] In the case of the OSPAAAL posters, as historian Lídia Generoso observes, the predominance of elements associated with pop art – such as the use of intense colors and high contrast, or the so-called "anti-advertisements" – was stronger in the late 1960s, but tended to diminish from the second half of the 1970s onwards.[69] As we will see in the following pages, the OSPAAAL posters were also influential from an iconographic point of view. They shared visual codes with other political organizations of the period, reiterating themes and symbols that alluded to the desired Third World revolution.

In her work on political posters of the Lebanese Civil War, art historian Zeina Maasri found that a number of them

> "corresponded with the aesthetic genres of other contemporary anti-imperialist struggle and revolutionary movements' posters, particularly the solidarity posters issued by the Cuban-based OSPAAAL"

as demonstrated by their "1960s Pop aesthetics, pictorial abstraction and vigorous colours".[70] The author explains that many Lebanese and Palestinian posters of the time were also homologous to the Cuban ones

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[66] Susan Sontag, "Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity": Dugald Stermer, The Art of Revolution: 96 Posters from Cuba, London: Pall Mall, 1970, p. xv.

[67] David Craven, Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990, New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2002, pp. 102-104.

[68] Bermúdez, La imagen constante.

[69] Generoso, Solidariedades tricontinentais, p. 196.

[70] Zeina Maasri, Off the Wall. Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009, p. 44.

"in the iconographic representations pertaining to armed struggle, popular resistance and revolutionary discourse".[71] One example is a 1977 poster published by the Lebanese Communist Party that brings together revolutionary leaders from different parts of the world: Walid Kamal Jumblatt (Lebanon), Gamal Abdael Nasser (Egypt), Patrice Lumumba (Congo), Ernesto "Che" Guevara (Cuba), Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam) and Tanios Chahine (19th century Lebanon), suggesting that they had fought a common cause, "Against imperialism and Zionism", as textually stated in Arabic.[72] The poster has flashy colors and is divided into six squares, each containing the portrait of one of the leaders, in pop art style.[73] A similar graphic design had been employed one year earlier in an OSPAAAL poster by Victor Manuel Navarrete in honor to Che Guevara.[74] Furthermore, except for Jumblatt and Chahine, the same "heroes" commemorated in the Lebanese poster were also portrayed in many OSPAAAL posters, which also opposed imperialism and Zionism.

Such similarities have been analyzed through the lens of a shared visual culture, as demonstrated by an article by historian Brandon Kinney. The author argues that, during the national liberation struggles of the 1960s–1980s,

> "As these revolutionaries increasingly identified their own struggles with that of the broader Third World, they came to embrace a shared set of symbols and imagery, such as the raised fist or the AK-47 [rifle]".[75]

Focusing on the latter, Kinney analyzes posters produced in Cuba, China and Palestine to demonstrate that they helped divorcing the significance of the rifle from its Soviet origins, turning it into a symbol of Third World struggle and solidarity. As I argued in another work, other symbols used in the OSPAAAL published materials to associate the Third World with the notions of oppression, resistance and revolution were the barbed wire, chains and defiant looks.[76] These

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[71] Maasri, Off the Wall, p. 45.

[72] Available at: http://signsofconflict.com/Archive/poster_details/1396. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[73] Maasri, Off the Wall, p. 59.

[74] Available at: https://www.docspopuli.org/CubaWebCat/detail.np/detail-156.html. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[75] Brandon Kinney, "'The Rifle is the Symbol': The AK-47 in Global South Iconography": Journal of World History, 34: 2 (2023), p. 286.

[76] Schmiedecke, "Oppressed, Resistant, and Revolutionary", pp. 264-265.

symbols can also be found in the graphics of other revolutionary movements of the period, as recently published works have shown,[77] and sometimes the same image was reproduced by several of them.

This is the case of a high contrast drawing of a man who wears an open jacket or suit and has his head held high, his fist raised and his mouth open as if he were shouting. His African origin can be inferred from the shape of his hair and the contexts in which the image was used. I traced the first appearance of this drawing in the August 1976 issue of the magazine *Solidarity*, published by the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization. The drawing, in black and white, was illustrating a poem by South African writer and anti-apartheid activist Breyten Breytenbach. The same image appeared in a 1981 OSPAAAL poster on Namibia by Alberto Blanco, occupying the foreground of a black, green and orange photomontage (Figure 4). In the background, there is a mass of people whom the man is presumably leading. This poster establishes an open dialogue with the Black Panthers, as it appears to be a direct reworking of a 1970 poster designed by Richard Moore (Dharuba Bin Wahad).[78] The latter featured a similar character on the foreground and the text "Power to the people", also present in the Cuban version.[79]

One year after Blanco's poster was published, the same image of the man appeared in at least three issues of *The Namibian Youth*, the official bulletin of the SWAPO Youth League (Figure 5).[80] In all cases, it was reproduced on the page that displayed the table of content, a short

[77] Paula Barreiro López analyses a pamphlet published in 1968 by the so-called Tricontinental Sorbonne – Comité des Trois Continents during May 68, while Jeremy Friedman and R. Joseph Parrott cover examples of posters published in China in 1967 and in the United States in 1972, respectively. Paula Barreiro López, "Cultural Guerrilla: Tricontinental Genealogies of '68": Maasri / Bergin / Burke (ed.). Transnational Solidarity; Jeremy Friedman, "Reddest Place North of Havana: The Tricontinental and the Struggle to Lead the 'Third World'": Parrott / Atwood Lawrence (ed.), The Tricontinental Revolution, p. 196. Joseph Parrott, "Brother and a Comrade: Amílcar Cabral as Global Revolutionary: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War": Parrott / Atwood Lawrence (ed.), The Tricontinental Revolution, p. 246.

[78] Available at: https://collections.museumca.org/?q=collection-item/201054474. (Accessed June 28, 2024).

[79] Schmiedecke / Zerwes / Generoso, "Reframing Revolution", pp. 115-116.

[80] Issues of January/February 1982, March/April 1982, and September/October 1982.

presentation of the league and information regarding subscription. Although this use was similar to the original one in the *Solidarity* magazine, it is plausible to assume that the OSPAAAL poster was its inspiration rather. Apart from the short time gap between them, this was the poster to which graphic designer Theo Namupala referred when he stated that the emblem adopted by SWAPO during the 1989 elections (Figure 6) was inspired by an OSPAAAL poster displayed in the organization's offices, as mentioned earlier in this article.[81] In April 1983, the image was also published in *Sechaba*, the official organ of the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa, illustrating a declaration of Caribbean Journalists "against the injustices and the inhumanity of the fascist apartheid regime" (Figure 7).

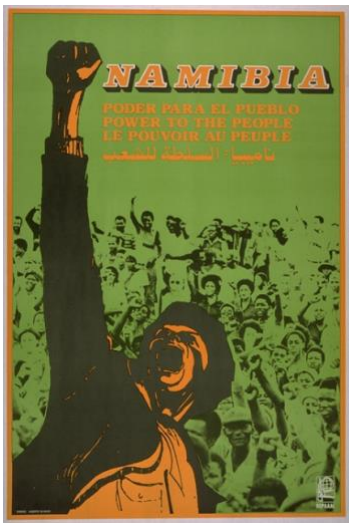
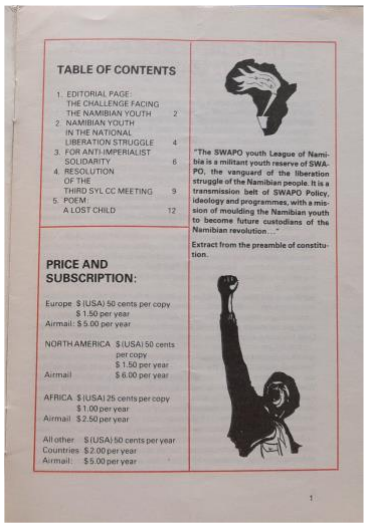


Figure 4: Poster by Alberto Blanco, OSPAAAL, 1981. Courtesy of Lincoln Cushing/Docs Populi.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"The SWAPO youth League of Namibia is a militant youth reserve of SWAPO, the vanguard of the liberation struggle of the Namibian people. It is a transmission belt of SWAPO Policy, ideology and programmes, with a mission of moulding the Namibian youth to become future custodians of the Namibian revolution..."

Extract from the preamble of constitution.

PRICE AND SUBSCRIPTION:

Europe $ (USA) 50 cents per copy
$ 1.50 per year
Airmail: $ 5.00 per year

NORTH AMERICA $ (USA) 50 cents per copy
$ 1.50 per year
Airmail $ 6.00 per year

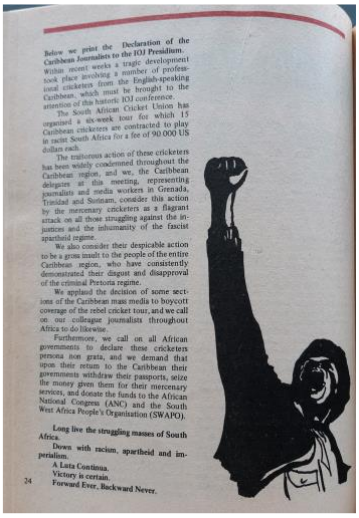
AFRICA $ (USA) 25 cents per copy
$ 1.00 per year
Airmail $ 2.50 per year

All other Countries $ (USA) 50 cents per year
$ 2.00 per year
Airmail: $ 5.00 per year

1

Figure 5: *The Namibian Youth*, Jan./Feb. 1982, p. 1. Photographed by the author at the archive of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam (IISH).

[81] Miescher / Rizzo / Silvester, Posters in Action, p. 169.



Below we print the Declaration of the Caribbean Journalists to the IOJ Presidium.

Within recent weeks a tragic development took place involving a number of professional cricketers from the English-speaking Caribbean, which must be brought to the attention of this historic IOJ conference.

The South African Cricket Union has organized a six-week tour for which 15 Caribbean cricketers are contracted to play in racist South Africa for a fee of 90.000 US dollars each.

The traitorous action of these cricketers has been widely condemned throughout the Caribbean region, and we, the Caribbean delegates at this meeting, representing journalists and media workers in Grenada, Trinidad and Surinam, consider this action by the mercenary cricketers as a flagrant attack on all those struggling against the injustices and the inhumanity of the fascist apartheid regime.

We also consider their despicable action to be a gross insult to the people of the entire Caribbean region, who have consistently demonstrated their disgust and disapproval of the criminal Pretoria regime.

We applaud the decision of some sections of the Caribbean mass media to boycott coverage of the rebel cricket tour, and we call on our colleague journalists throughout Africa to do likewise.

Furthermore, we call on all African governments to declare these cricketers persona non grata, and we demand that upon their return to the Caribbean their governments withdraw their passports, seize the money given them for their mercenary services, and donate the funds to the African National Congress (ANC) and the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO).

Long live the struggling masses of South Africa.

Down with racism, apartheid and imperialism.

A Luta Continua.

Victory is certain.

Forward Ever, Backward Never.

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Figure 6: *Sechaba*, Apr. 1983, p. 24. Photographed by the author at the IISH.

Figure 7: Logo of the SWAPO Party. Source: South African History Online.

In turn, demonstrating again that these exchanges were two-way, a 1969 *Sechaba* issue proudly mentioned that a drawing of Barry Feinberg, who worked for the magazine, had been reproduced in an OSPAAAL poster.[82] The latter was designed by Berta Abelenda to call for the "Day of Solidarity with the People of South Africa".[83] The image, which depicts a warrior who wields a spear with one arm and a shield with the other, had been adopted by Umkhonto we Sizwe, founded in 1961 by both ANC and the South African Communist Party. "Umkhonto we Sizwe" can be translated into "Spear of the Nation". As scholar Kim Miller points out, although the movement did not use this kind of weapon,

> "they invoked the symbolism of the spear in both text and image [...] against the racist apartheid regime. As an indigenous weapon, the spear is a clear reference to past African military traditions and resistance to colonial rule".[84]

[82] Sechaba 9, (Aug. 1969), p. 12.

[83] Available at: https://www.docspopuli.org/CubaWebCat/detail.np/detail-67.html. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[84] Kim Miller, "Moms with Guns: Women's Political Agency in Anti-Apartheid Visual Culture": African Arts, 42: 2 (2009), p. 71.

Portraying weapons used to resist colonial rule in order to establish a continuation between past and present struggles – or "genealogies of resistance"[85] – was also a hallmark of the OSPAAAL posters, as many analysts have observed.[86]

The examples commented above show that OSPAAAL shared visual codes with partner organizations during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, having directly influenced their graphics as well as been influenced by them. An influence can also be perceived in materials produced more recently, including to support causes distant from OSPAAAL's principles. This is the case of a poster created in 2008 by artist Shepard Fairey to support Barack Obama in the US presidential elections.[87] Known as the "Hope poster" and quickly officially adopted by Obama's campaign, it became famous, having been copied and parodied many times. As Mahler convincingly argues, although analysts have failed to identify OSPAAAL poster art among its main influences,

> "The Obama 'Hope' poster is closely reminiscent of several 1970s Tricontinental posters that were dedicated to heroes of African liberation movements like Patrice Lumumba and Amílcar Cabral in which the subject, who is stylized in the OSPAAAL's signature simple design and bright spot colors, similarly gazes upward and to the left of the frame".[88]

The author also calls attention to the fact that several of Fairey's screenprints "are almost direct copies of Tricontinental posters" such as a 1999 image made for his own graphic design company, which appropriates a 1968 OSPAAAL poster in solidarity with North Korea.[89]

Therefore, the iconographic and stylistic influence of the OSPAAAL posters can be recognized in graphic materials produced in different

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[85] Lani Hanna, "Tricontinental's International Solidarity: Emotion in OSPAAAL as Tactic to Catalyze Support of Revolution": Radical History Review, 136 (2020), p. 174.

[86] Clare Davies, "Decolonizing Culture: Third World, Moroccan, and Arab Art in Souffles/Anfas, 1966-1972": Forum Transregionale Studien, (2015), pp. 22-25; Bermúdez, La imagen constante; García Molinero, La imagen tricontinental; Generoso, Solidariedades tricontinentais; Schmiedecke, "Oppressed, Resistant, and Revolutionary".

[87] Available at: https://www.artic.edu/artworks/229396/barack-obama-hope-poster. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

[88] Mahler, From the Tricontinental, p. 202.

[89] Mahler, From the Tricontinental, p. 201.

contexts. In the next section, we will look at a factor that helps explaining this reach and influence: their presence in compilation books and exhibitions.

4. Books and Exhibitions

Some examples of where the OSPAAAL posters could be seen outside of Cuba were mentioned earlier in this article: folded into the *Tricontinental* magazine and on the walls of the headquarters of revolutionary political organizations. Other examples can be found in the section "Tricontinental in march" of the magazine, which often mentions political events abroad in which OSPAAAL publications (posters included) were displayed by its representatives, as well as in recent studies. For example, historian Catarina Laranjeiro identified numerous banners with printings of Amílcar Cabral's portrait produced by OSPAAAL in the Cuban-backed ceremony that proclaimed the independent state of Guinea-Bissau in 1973.[90]

In the cultural sphere, OSPAAAL posters have been featured in art books and exhibitions. As early as 1970, McGraw Hill published *The Art of Revolution: 96 posters from Cuba*, edited by art critic Dugald Stermer. It reproduced posters by different Cuban institutions, accompanied by two introductory texts, one by Stermer and one by Susan Sontag. As art historian David Kunzle argues, both texts are wholly sympathetic to Cuba, and the book ended up contributing to the "aestheticization" and "consumerization" of the Cuban poster.[91] This phenomenon was particularly visible in the realm of the ICAIC posters due to the pictorial finish of its silkscreen printing, its outstanding aestheticism and the limited number of its prints.[92] In the following years, exhibitions of Cuban posters – converted into a sort of genre – were organized both inside and outside the island in places such as San Francisco's Palace of the Legion of Honor (1974), Belgrade's Museum of Contemporary Art (1976) and Paris's Centre Pompidou (1977).

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[90] Catarina Laranjeiro, "The Cuban Revolution and the Liberation Struggle in Guinea-Bissau: Images, Imaginings, Expectations, and Experiences": The International History Review, 42: 6 (2020) p. 1332.

[91] Kunzle, "Public Graphs in Cuba", p. 92.

[92] Bermúdez, La imagen constante, not paginated.

The two first exhibitions entirely devoted to OSPAAAL graphic art took place in Havana, first at the Center of International Art (1978) and later at the Hotel Habana Libre (1981). More recently, between September and November 2015, the Interference Archive, founded four years earlier in New York, hosted the exhibition "Armed by Design//El Diseño a las Armas", which brought together posters from the collections of Carlos Vega and Dara Greenwald. The short book published to accompany the exhibition includes texts by poster collectors, archivists, scholars and artists who reflected on the characteristics and relevance of OSPAAAL graphic art. Also in New York, between September and November 2019, the James Gallery organized "Notes on Solidarity: Tricontinentalism in Print," an exhibition composed of documents and objects from different parts of the world aimed at highlighting "the extensive international network of print production that developed in connection with Tricontinentalism".[93] This is a rare case in which OSPAAAL publications were put into dialogue with other materials produced with the same ethos. On the other side of the North Atlantic, in London, the House of Illustration organized in 2019 the exhibition "Designed in Cuba: Cold War Graphics", bringing together 100 posters and 70 magazines, while the Victoria and Albert Museum hosted the exhibition "OSPAAAL: Solidarity and Design" between 2022 and 2023, inviting the audience to "Discover how the Organization […] platformed anti-imperialist and revolutionary movements in the Global South through this display of [about 200] posters."[94]

OSPAAAL posters have also been featured in exhibition catalogues and compilation books. In most cases, the selected posters correspond to the early years of the organization and are presented along with posters produced by other Cuban institutions. The exceptions are the books *Il manifesto dell'OSPAAAL. Arte della Solidarietá* (1997), collectively published in Varese by TRIcontinental and il Papiro publishing houses, and *The Tricontinental Solidarity Poster* (2003), edited by artist and poster collector Richard Frick and published in Bern by Comedia-Verlag. Frick remembers having seen and bought OSPAAAL

[93] The James Gallery, Notes on Solidarity, p. 7.

[94] "OSPAAAL: Solidarity and Design", available at: https://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/ospaaal-solidarity-and-design. (Accessed April 20, 2024).

posters for the first time during the 1970s at an exhibition in Zurich. In 1976, he travelled to Cuba for the first time. Back then,

> "it was possible to acquire OSPAAAL posters at the hotels in Cuba for about one dollar. It was the beginning of a passionate collecting career that has lasted more than 30 years".

Also according to Frick, the idea of publishing a book on the topic arose around 2001 with the aim of "showing the almost forgotten history of liberation struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America as a reflection of an era".[95] Produced in collaboration with OSPAAAL, the books by Frick and Il Papiro reproduce most of its already published posters, accompanied by information on the designer, year, size and printing technique, as well as by introductory texts. Alongside those edited by Stermer (1970) and Cushing (2003), these books have become the main references for studies on the subject.

In turn, the works of compilation, digitization and online publication carried out by different institutions have made it possible to greatly expand access to these and other Cuban posters. The Cuban National Library "José Martí", the Docs Populi Project and the Ospaaal.com website stand out in this regard. Digital versions OSPAAAL posters can also be found on websites of cultural institutions whose collections are either more generic, such as the Oakland Museum of California, the Online Archive of California and the Victoria and Albert Museum, or specialized in a specific theme, such as the Palestine Poster Project and the Chicago Anti-Apartheid Movement Collection.

Therefore, initiatives aimed to catalogue, reproduce and exhibit Cuban posters started in the late 1960s and have never ceased. On the contrary, recent developments made possible by technological advances have allowed these efforts to multiply. With regard to the OSPAAAL posters, specifically, some trends can be observed. First, in exhibitions and books on Cuban graphic art that encompass works by different institutions, the OSPAAAL posters covered almost always correspond to its early years. Second, the need to mark its specificity within the framework of Cuban graphics could be observed from the late 1970s onwards, as demonstrated by the exhibitions held in Havana in 1978 and 1981, but it was from the 1990s on that OSPAAAL itself

[95] Richard Frick. "Mi camino hacia los carteles políticos de la OSPAAAL": Tricontinental, 170 (2011) (my translation from Spanish), p. 34.

began to more systematically explore the cultural and commercial interest in its posters. This can be seen in many advertisements published in the *Tricontinental* magazine as well as in the books produced in collaboration with Il Papiro and Richard Frick. Third, it is mainly foreign institutions from the United States and, to a lesser extent, Europe that have been undertaking projects on the OSPAAAL graphic art. And forth, the growing interest in recent years in revisiting the Cold War history from a Global South perspective has contributed to a sort of boom in studies, books and exhibitions on the subject of Third World solidarity, and many scholars and art curators have (re)discovered the OSPAAAL publications.

The closure of OSPAAAL by the Communist Party of Cuba in 2019 took place in the midst of this process.[96] Since then, the documents which had formed the archive located in its headquarters have been unavailable, meaning that its published materials can only be consulted in other institutions.[97] In this context, the collections kept in archives and museums, as well as in compilation books and on websites, have played a fundamental role. However, there are important aspects that could be better clarified through the access to internal documents, such as the criteria underlying the graphic project of the organization at different stages and its relationship with representatives of foreign organizations in terms of disputes, collaboration and feedback on the published works.

5. Conclusion: Range and Limits of OSPAAAL Graphic Art

During its 53 years of existence, OSPAAAL's ambition to become a hub of internationalist solidarity was only partially fulfilled, and mostly in the symbolic domain. Many of the plans made in 1966 were never accomplished, for example, holding Tricontinental conferences periodically and moving the organization's headquarters to other Third World countries. Both were made unfeasible by various factors, above

[96] Regarding the closure of OSPAAAL, see Fernando Camacho Padilla / Eugenia Palieraki, "Hasta Siempre, OSPAAAL!": NACLA Report on the Americas, 51: 4 (2019), pp. 410-421.

[97] Recently, it was announced that a part of the OSPAAAL archive was donated to the Fidel Castro Center in Havana and its documents will be gradually made available for consultation.

all, the political upheavals experienced by revolutionary movements during the Cold War. In practice, OSPAAAL became a relatively small project maintained by the Cuban state, which was its fundamental sponsor. When the closure of the organization was announced, few voices from abroad regretted the decision, and the artists who had worked for it were left helpless. This allows us to relativize the idealistic vision that predominates in many studies on the subject, but not to deny the impact of the organization's cultural production, as we have seen through this article, focusing on the case of its published posters.

Different dimensions of the international circulation and reception of the OSPAAAL posters were covered: distribution system and places where they have been displayed; their appropriation by partner and rival organizations in the form of reprints and versions; their iconographic and stylistic influence on other graphic materials; and their presence in artistic, editorial and heritage projects. In all cases, I sought to encompass examples from different countries and times, but this did not prevent a certain imbalance. The predominance of examples corresponding to the United States can be noticed in all sections, which is due, on the one hand, to the fact that relations between Cuba and this country have aroused much more political and academic interest than relations between Cuba and other regions, and, on the other hand, to the greater ease of finding sources in the various US archives, libraries and museums, including in digital format. This raises the question of whether exchanges between OSPAAAL and US left-wing and anti-racist activists were more intense than with other partners and, therefore, to what extent the conclusions obtained from such case studies can be generalized.

Following the United States, most of the examples covered correspond to Africa, which occupied a special place in Cuban foreign policy between the 1960s and the 1980s.[98] In this case, the representativeness is partly due to my own study, which has mostly focused on exchanges with this region. OSPAAAL relations with the Arab world,[99] including in terms of graphic influence, have been studied by other authors, but this has hardly been the case with Asia and Latin America. Filling this gap is essential to be able to estimate more clearly

[98] Piero Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

[99] See footnote 8.

the geographical reach of the OSPAAAL materials and their greater or lesser influence in each context. But, in all cases, it is already possible to state that different means were employed to circulate them, and the help of leftist individuals and organizations was decisive for this endeavor. In turn, artistic exchanges and direct collaboration in the production of the posters were rather an exception.

In chronological terms, most of the examples covered through the article correspond to the early years of OSPAAAL. On the one hand, we observe a greater presence of OSPAAAL graphic art as a reference for materials produced by different foreign organizations between the late 1960s and the early 1970s, when national liberation struggles proliferated in the so-called Third World. On the other hand, the posters produced during this period have become the most iconic, that is, they are the most remembered, most commented on and most repeatedly included in books and exhibitions. Therefore, the late 1960s and early 1970s were the most productive in terms of the number of posters designed and, according to many authors, also from a qualitative point of view, especially thanks to the artistic direction of Alfredo Rostgaard.[100] One might wonder whether this diagnosis is mostly based on valuing certain styles over others. In any case, there is evidence that, over the years, the enthusiasm towards the OSPAAAL materials, and their impact, has waned.

At some point, they started to attract more attention due to their testimonial value than to the currency of their conveyed narrative. Furthermore, as art historian Lani Hanna argues,

> "OSPAAAL posters are regularly shown in galleries and museums. These posters are often celebrated for their design and aesthetic merit. This focus on design, while warranted, can decontextualize the posters from the political formations and solidarities they aimed to propagate".[101]

Conversely, other curatorial projects – weather in the form of books, exhibitions or collections – have highlighted the purpose of internationalist solidarity that guided OSPAAAL graphic production, often in an idealizing way. The tensions between the two approaches

[100] In quantitative terms, OSPAAAL published approximately 198 posters between 1967-1976, 115 posters between 1977-1989, 52 posters between 1990-2007 and a few more in the following years.

[101] Hanna, "Tricontinental's International Solidarity", p. 170.

became explicit recently, when Lincoln Cushing published an open letter addressed to the board members of the Poster House museum regarding their decision to cancel an exhibition on Cuban international solidarity posters for political reasons ("a perceived lack of 'neutrality'"[102]). Regardless of their orientation, many of the projects devoted to preserving and disseminating the legacy of OSPAAAL poster art have been carried out in the Global North, namely, in the United States and Western Europe. This raises the question whether it is mainly due to financial and infrastructural issues, or interest in the subject is greater in these regions.

When it comes to books and exhibitions not focused on Cuban poster art, the OSPAAAL posters are rarely present, indicating that, to date, there have been few efforts to establish dialogues between these posters and materials produced outside Cuba in different contexts. Furthermore, judging by exhibitions recently organized on art and resistance, as well as by conversations I had with colleagues who are experts in African art museums and Vietnamese posters, OSPAAAL's production is little known and does not seem to have been a strong reference for artists from the Global South.

Further investigating the contexts and conditions under which the OSPAAAL materials have circulated and been appropriated since the late 1960s will help evaluating to what extent the conjectures proposed in this article are valid. This will contribute to better understand the potential, as well as the limits, of concepts such as Tricontinentalism and also to verify whether the boom around the "global sixties" is overestimating some phenomena and conditioning the interpretation of the (much less studied) following decades.

[102] Lincoln Cushing, "Our Struggle is Your Struggle: International Solidarity Posters. Don't censor social justice art", available at: https://docspopuli.org/articles/OSIYS-letter.html. (Access on: July 2, 2024).