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## **Review of Prakash, G.; Adelman, J. (2023) *Inventing the Third World: in search of freedom for the Postwar Global South***

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## BOOK REVIEW

*Inventing the Third World: In Search of Freedom for the Postwar Global South*, ed. Gyan Prakash and Jeremy Adelman (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023; pp. ix + 279. £85).

'I too am called upon—Angola / urges each niche of feeling to open up / I can't sit down with folded hands / when people are deprived of independence / what then is left, oh contemporaries / I dare not look at the faces / of those still young' (*Indonesia Sings of Afro-Asia*, tr. Bintang Suradi [1962]).

These are the opening lines to the Indonesian poet Benni Tjung's poem 'Partnership'. It was part of a book of Indonesian poetry produced for the Second Congress of Afro-Asian Writers, held in Cairo in 1962. Benni Tjung's poem was dedicated to Mário Coelho Pinto de Andrade, founder of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), which, by the time the conference was held, had become embroiled in the Portuguese Colonial War. The poem was meant to convey Benni Tjung's solidarity with the Angolan struggle for independence. Other poems in the collection cover the political situation in Congo, Armenia, Vietnam and elsewhere, 'mending the torn threads of history'. As a collection, this set of poems is emblematic of the themes covered in Gyan Prakash and Jeremy Adelman's new edited volume, in which all chapters shed light on important shifts and contested meanings of the Third World imaginary (p. 17).

The book looks at the years 1945–89 as a period of possibility. Rather than starting from the assumption that the idea of the Third World was 'a doomed one' (p. 7), they seek to take seriously the ideas of and around Third Worldism circulating in this period. In doing so, this book takes Vijay Prashad's famous phrase that the Third World was not a place but a project one step further. In this book, it is not one project but many projects, all of which imagine alternative futures—just not always the same ones. Each of the chapters in the volume brings a different interpretation of that 'Third World imaginary'. In keeping with the volume's breadth, the chapters do so from different thematic vantage points—political, artistic, literary and more. Cindy Ewing sets the scene by charting the international political contours of the Third World in the late 1940s. Patrick Iber turns the lens on another set of crucial years, by examining the regional history behind the famous 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Cuba, placing it in a broader Latin American context by centring Lázaro Cárdenas and the Latin American Conference of 1961 in Mexico. Agustín Cosovschi broadens this yet further by examining the cordial relations between Chilean socialists and the Yugoslav regime. These three chapters deserve special mention as a set, because together they shed light on places and relationships that are peripheral in many conceptions of the Third World.

Another set of three chapters deserves special mention, because they highlight the joyful mixing in this volume of different types of sources—not just

in terms of archives and languages, but because of the productive use of works of paintings, jazz music and seemingly innocuous letters and print images. Atreyee Gupta takes the paintings of Goan artist Francis Newton Souza to walk the reader through the 'politics and poetics of color' in post-war art (p. 157), showing how the colour black channeled '(a)chromatic contractions of resistance' (p. 174). Naresh Fernandes examines how swing and big band instrumentation worked its way to India and sheds light on the transformations that occurred in the process, showing how jazz entered into conversation with musical traditions from across the Third World, and in the process, became an important articulation of Third World solidarity. Jessica Bachman looks at Soviet visual culture, showing how images not originally produced for consumption in India nevertheless became important sources of progressive, cosmopolitan identity formation in the decades after Independence. These three chapters stand out for their creative and innovative use of sources, but also because they make the 'Third World imaginary' which the editors seek to convey appear especially alive—so much so, that the reader does wish the images included in these chapters could have appeared in colour.

Given the breadth of this volume and the attention to diversity of places, themes and media through which the Third World imaginary was constructed, it is quite striking that the volume skews rather male. That is not to say that women are completely absent, and Penny M. von Eschen's work on Katherine Dunham as a participant in the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar in 1966 deserves special mention in this regard. But given the strength of the editors' statement on how demands for a more just and equal world order intersected with Third Worldism over the course of the Cold War (pp. 22–3), the comparative lack of non-male voices in the subsequent chapters is noticeable.

How, in the end, should we look back on the ways in which the Third World was (re)invented in the post-war decades? Many chapters in the volume play with temporality in their evaluation of the Third World imaginary. In the preface, Homi Bhabha asks, 'Where was the Third World? Where is it *now*?' (p. i). In the Introduction, Gyan Prakash and Jeremy Adelman place the volume's focus on the period after the Second World War in a much longer struggle against empire, arguing that the Cold War was one episode in that longer history (p. 18). Srirupa Roy offers a post-mortem of Third Worldism in the late 1970s, though one 'without the finality of death' (p. 254), arguing for a transmutation of the Third World project, rather than a demise. Samuel Moyn's 'Coda', finally, cautions against too romantic an interpretation of postcolonial internationalism as it never offered a full-scale alternative to postcolonial nationalism (p. 262), but does end up stating that 'whatever else is true for the end of empire, it left dreams of global fairness that refuse to die' (p. 265).

We might tentatively conclude that the legacy of Third World imaginaries is as diverse as those imaginaries themselves, and the recent resurgence of historical interest in this moment would appear to reinforce that assertion. This book appeared within months of Erez Manela and Heather Streets-Salter's edited volume, *The Anticolonial Transnational* (2023) and Su Lin Lewis's and my own *The Lives of Cold War Afro-Asianism* (2022). If these three volumes have anything in common, it is that they embrace the diversity of thought within and across movements, and—rather than seek to impose order by assigning typologies, categories and genres—make that diversity the point.

That there is no overlap in content across these three volumes, further proves that there is much work left to be done, and that many forms of the Third World imaginary are to be uncovered still. Meanwhile, the fourteen authors involved in *Inventing the Third World* have given the reader a wealth of material from which to take inspiration.

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