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Towards a global history of the Unidad Popular

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Abstract

Our understanding of the international and transnational history of Chile during the Unidad Popular (UP) government has expanded considerably since the early 2010s. But what has new research contributed to our understanding of events in Chile and Chile's significance in a global context? Examining the historiographical advances and questions that have driven scholarship in recent years, this article argues that international and transnational studies that focus attention on Chile and Chileans can offer new perspectives on the rise and fall of the UP. Rather than reducing international histories to an account of a select group of foreigners acting on an empty Chilean stage, these approaches foreground local actors and processes, exploring the extent to which Chileans were shaped by a multiplicity of interactions, invitations and inspirations across borders. Localising the global in this way can help us understand the reasons many within Chile conceptualised their goals, projects and actions as they did. It challenges the idea of Chilean exceptionalism. It also undermines right-wing actors' claims to be acting solely within national frameworks by revealing their own entanglements in translational networks and intellectual imports. Suggesting that we have much still to learn, the article also highlights possible avenues for further research and reflects on the contemporary relevance of the global in Chilean political discourse today.

Keywords: Chile; Unidad Popular; revolution; counter-revolution; Cold War; transnational networks; exile; Third-Worldism

As violent protests erupted across Chile in October 2019 in response to rising transport costs, President Sebastian Piñera called on Chileans to unite against what he called a powerful and relentless enemy. The implication was clear: protestors were depicted as un-Chilean and controlled by a bigger force than was immediately apparent. A day later, US President Donald Trump weighed in with his own denunciation of ‘foreign efforts’ in Chile while State Department officials pointed to Russian interference to ‘undermine all Chilean institutions and society’. The Organization of American States’ secretary general, Luis Almagro, more explicitly pointed to ‘Madurismo and the Cuban regime’ as being responsible for ‘violence, looting, destruction’ both in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America, where they aimed to ‘directly attack the democratic system . . . and force interruptions to constitutional mandates’.¹ With the scale and scope of protests against Piñera’s government having swelled dramatically in response to the government’s imposition of a state of siege and repressive tactics used by Chile’s armed forces, the narrative of foreign intervention persisted.² However, it was increasingly linked to a broader regional plot to undermine all democracies in the region (beyond Maduro, the culprits were named as Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega and Bolivia’s Evo Morales, whose alleged and so-called ‘double legal and constitutional violation’ of democratic norms in 2019 supposedly set an ominous example). Referring to a Havana meeting of the Foro de São Paulo in July 2019 (it actually took place in Caracas), which called for opposition against right-wing governments in the region and solidarity with Chileans protesting Piñera, Chilean historian Alejandro San Francisco argued, ‘The underlying issue is not the legitimate right to disagree, but the continental dimension of such politics, which transcend national states and make the all of Latin American territory a battlefield, in very similar circumstances to the revolutionary logic of the 1960s.’³

San Francisco was not the only one making historical parallels. For anyone familiar with Chile’s past, the allegation that local actors were subservient to foreign powers and that Chile was a victim of intervention from abroad was nothing new. As with so many other features of the government response to civic unrest, Piñera’s allegations, and right-wing commentary in general, echoed older strategies. Just as the military’s recourse to repression and the president’s talk of a ‘war’ against civilian opponents showed how little had changed since the years of dictatorship – how enduring violent methods and mindsets were despite three decades of democracy – the rhetoric of foreign intervention was yet another throwback to the 1960s and early 1970s. ‘Cold War political arguments exploited the dichotomy (national–foreign) to the maximum’, Aldo Marchesi has noted, with ‘negative connotations . . . with regards to the connections between domestic and non-national actors’.⁴

Now, as then, in fact, emphasising foreign connections was a means of delegitimising the Left, suggesting protestors were inauthentic, naively being manipulated by sinister outside forces. As a strategy this was used to justify disproportionate force and violence and the concept of a ‘war’. And it was a way of detracting attention from the local causes and problems from which such protests – and left-wing politics – stemmed. Then, opponents of Salvador Allende’s presidency and the Unidad Popular (Popular Unity or UP) government had fancifully claimed there were 15,000 foreign armed extremists in Chile ready to seize power and demolish democracy as a means both of undermining the government’s democratic mandate for change and calling for military intervention. Five decades later, even more outlandishly and irresponsibly, with no evidence to support their claims, Piñera and his supporters repeatedly pointed to Venezuela and Cuba as a means of justifying their repressive tactics, diverting attention from the root causes of social discontent and their own failings.⁵ As well as being fanciful, these approaches simplistically divided Latin America between internationalist leftist political and workers’ movements that participated in the Foro São Paulo and national governments in power. In doing so, they not only eclipsed local roots of left-wing activism but also the international and transnational support such governments received.

Indeed, opponents of Piñera pointed to public support he received from Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro when it came to the Chilean government’s response. Earlier in 2019, Chileans staged a boycott of the latter’s state visit to Santiago in response to his politics and comments he made lauding the country’s military dictatorship.⁶ In the 1970s, the Chilean Left had also pointed to the support foreign actors – primarily the United States – gave its opponents. By 1972, it was obvious that the Nixon administration was hostile to Allende, that it had intervened to prevent his inauguration and was bankrolling opposition

parties. US Congressional investigations that followed produced yet further proof of the US destabilisation campaign against the UP and its covert efforts to bring about the end of Allende's government. For decades, in fact, insofar as there was an international history of the Unidad Popular government, it was largely centred around the extent to which the United States should be held responsible for the military coup that toppled Allende's government in 1973 and brought General Pinochet's military dictatorship to power.⁷

These two narratives – of foreign left-wing extremists and US imperialists intervening in Chile – were essentially where our understanding of the international dimensions of the UP government stopped until relatively recently. There were various problems with such accounts, not least the binary Cold War equivalence some drew as a way of justifying subsequent authoritarianism and violence in the name of upholding 'democracy'. Beyond this, both of them suggested Chileans were passive recipients and victims of others' machinations. In different ways and for different reasons, they left little space for understanding the transnational and international roles that Chileans themselves played, the multiple relationships they maintained with non-Chileans, how they conceptualised the world, responded to it and with what consequences for developments within Chile itself. Consequently, they occluded, exonerated or abridged Chileans' participation in their own history, a particularly insidious problem when it came to explaining who and what lay behind the repression and human rights violations that followed the coup. For if US imperialists were essentially to blame, then what of the civilians and military figures closer to home who justified such repression and carried it out? Forced on the defensive by allegations of foreign intervention and guilt by association with foreign revolutionary groups, the Left also denied and downplayed links to the Soviet bloc, Latin American movements and Cuba. This, in turn, arguably led history to remember the Unidad Popular years – and Allende especially – as being more conservative and cautious than they were. In an effort to emphasise the *Chilean* nature of the UP – its uniqueness and exceptionalism, particularly in a Latin American context – this also resulted in a curious historiographical isolation of the Chilean experience, divorcing it from the world it was part of. Yes, the Chilean experiment in socialist democracy was *sui generis* – and many of its protagonists aimed explicitly to make it so, thereby avoiding the pitfalls and problems of other revolutionary processes. However, in order to do so, they also very often looked beyond their own local context for what to emulate as much as what to avoid.

This article argues that we can learn much from a globalised history of the UP. In surveying recent historiography, it contends that new global histories of Chile that place Chileans front and centre can provide new insight into the Unidad Popular and *la vía chilena al socialismo*: not as a distraction from local Chilean phenomena and actors or a way of delegitimising them based on conspiracy theories and vague evidence, but as a way of comprehending the intersection of local, regional and global ideas that drove this project – and its opposition – forward. These approaches do not treat Chile as an empty stage for a select group of foreign actors to pursue their own agendas and interests as traditional Cold War histories once did. Instead, they start with a complex Chilean context and look outward, examining overlapping interactions, influences and ideational flows. In this respect, historiography has moved toward a decentred understanding of Chile's UP years and the diverse interests and actors that were involved. It has also benefited from the emphasis on connectivity and entanglements, as well as different coexisting spatial dimensions, that global history offers. This article suggests that building on these insights and methodological frameworks in the future will teach us not only about Chile, but also the UP's significance beyond the country's borders.⁸ It can also offer a means of interpreting and contextualising contemporary efforts to pit the local against the global.

Decentring international histories and foregrounding the local in the global

Fifty years after Chile's election of Salvador Allende as president, we now know far more than we did about the international and transnational dimensions of the Unidad Popular. Since the beginning of the 21st century, historians have been able to draw on a wealth of newly declassified archival sources, published memoirs and oral histories to write new accounts of Chile's international and transnational past. This has been true both of those seeking to understand the UP itself and those who have examined its political opponents or competitors on the left. The fact that many historians working on such histories are

from a generation that did not live through the early 1970s has also freed them from refighting battles of the past. This combination of archival opening and generational distance has resulted in a decentring of our understanding of the different foreign powers involved in Chile and how they viewed the UP process. On the right, for example, it is now clear that besides Washington, Brasília also had a vested interest and active involvement in Chilean affairs during the UP years.⁹ This was not only at a government level, but it also involved right-wing women's networks in Brazil and Chile who drew inspiration and logistical support from each other. Business linkages between both countries, and further afield, were also significant in sponsoring the UP's opponents, although we still have far more to learn about them.¹⁰ On the left, Cuba's relationship with Chile is now clearer than it once was, which will be explained later in this article. Thanks primarily to the pioneering work of Olga Ulianova, Eugenia Fediakova, Michal Zourek and Radoslav Yordanov, we also now know far more about the Soviet bloc's relationship with Chile during the UP. What they have found is that there was often far more Soviet concern about what was happening in Chile than enthusiasm and effective support.¹¹ There have also been some excellent diplomatic histories of relations between Chile and countries like Mexico, whose government forged closer ties with the UP for regional and Third-Worldist reasons.¹²

However, the main advances in historiography and the significance of global history's insights for those trying to understand the UP years, have not been in relation to other powers' actions *towards* Chile. To the contrary, first and foremost, one of two major contributions has been the way new studies have dismantled the idea of Chile being a theatre for foreign actors to intervene in and recovered Chilean agency in forging international and transnational ties. While being mindful that agency does not, at least not always, equate to power, they have examined the way in which many Chileans interacted with others and the multidirectional way influence and ideas travelled. This is a dynamic process to understand. As Claudio Pérez Silva suggests in a recent study of the Chilean Left's transnational Latin American ties, left-wing parties' 'reception' of different ideas should be understood as 'a diverse and epochal process of critical appropriation of events and lived experiences', occurring a result of 'mediations, circulation, solidarities and preconceived conceptions'. This process was not unidirectional or automatic, he argues, but rather generated a diverse set of 'sympathies, distancing ... adscriptions and consequences'.¹³ And, of course, the same could be said of right-wing and centrist parties in Chile as well. Understanding foreign influence is not simply a question of intervention and acceptance but of negotiated dialogue, mediated resonance and contestation.

In this respect, it is increasingly clear we have a lot to learn about the UP years and the ideological, political and cultural environment in which they took place by looking simultaneously within and beyond Chile's borders. For Chile's Communist and Socialist Parties, in particular, internationalism and universalist assumptions about the inevitability of class conflict and imperialism on a global scale were embedded in their DNA. The Communist Party had local roots in Chile but was formally born as a member of the Soviet-led Comintern. Rejecting the Soviet Union as a model, the Chilean Socialist Party looked elsewhere for references and was inspired by a range of different countries and political parties, including Tito's Yugoslavia, the Algerian National Liberation Front (Front de Libération Nationale or FLN), the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana or APRA) in Peru and, of course, Cuba. A glance at invited participants to the national congresses of Chile's Socialist Youth (Juventud Socialista) illustrates both Latin Americanist and – by the 1960s – Third-Worldist alignments.¹⁴ Similarly, the World Federation of Democratic Youth – a Soviet-sponsored forum for young people from around the globe – that met in Santiago in 1961, brought delegates from 41 countries and 110 Latin American youth organisations together to exchange ideas with their Chilean counterparts and debate global problems. When the Bay of Pigs invasion happened in the middle of this conference, delegates urgently discussed the ways in which young people should respond, contributing to an outpouring of local Chilean anger and protest across the country.¹⁵ As anti-imperialist parties, the Communist and Socialist Parties stood in opposition to US involvement in Chile and further afield. However, both also had much to say about the Soviet Union's own actions, for example, in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). Meanwhile, as Pérez Silva underlines, in programmatic – if not strategic terms – Chile's left-wing parties had a lot in common with their counterparts in other parts of Latin America when it came to the defence

of national sovereignty, self-determination, agrarian reform and nationalisation of raw materials. As he argues, the Chilean Left's experience of modernisation, democratisation, anti-latifundist, anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist processes were shared simultaneously by others across the region.¹⁶

In a more direct sense, new histories of exiles in Chile and the many visitors who called the country home have also been immensely valuable in revealing the way in which transnational connections shaped political identities, projects and strategies. Chile – and Santiago in particular – had always been a place that welcomed visitors and exiles from abroad. But in the 1960s and 1970s, as Aldo Marchesi has underlined, it became the site of remarkable encounter and fluid exchange, that fostered local debate and innovation across the political spectrum.¹⁷ Among many others, Chileans interacted with economists at the UN Economic Commission on Latin America (ECLA or CEPAL by its Spanish acronym), the Belgian Jesuit Roger Vekemens, whose ideas were central to the Christian Democratic Party's political platform, exiled Brazilian academics, US Peace Corps activists living among communities around the country and members of the Uruguayan Tupamaro National Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaro or MLN-T), the latter of which the UP asked to help with defensive strategies.¹⁸ When it came to Latin America's revolutionary Left, dictatorship and repression in neighbouring countries led many to seek refuge in Chile, even if Allende asked them to limit their involvement in domestic politics.¹⁹ And their presence, in turn, allowed the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria or MIR) to convene a meeting in 1972 at which the regional revolutionary organisation, the Revolutionary Coordinating Junta (Junta Coordinadora Revolucionaria or JCR), was founded.²⁰

When it comes to revolutionary Cuba, and its relationship to Allende, the UP government and its historic effort to bring about radical change via the ballot box, Chilean agency and initiative is fundamentally important once again. Certainly, to understand the ties between Chilean left-wing actors and the island it is important to begin not in Havana but in Santiago, where news of the Cuban Revolution arrived in piecemeal form. As Allende's daughter, Beatriz, would later describe, Chileans were 'hungry for information' about the revolution and its significance, with few initially understanding who its leaders were or what they stood for.²¹ Very often this led those who could to journey to the island directly to learn about it firsthand, as was the case with Salvador Allende. The personal connections he made in Havana, sustained over the course of a decade in turn explain the intimate, and respectful, relationship between Fidel Castro and Allende during the UP years. As is now clear, when it came to Cuba's involvement in Chile during the early 1970s, Allende was in charge, requesting assistance from Castro for security and intelligence but defining the parameters within which the Cubans could operate. The frustrations the Cubans expressed when he refused to accept their advice and viewpoints, let alone their disdain for Chilean left-wing divisions, serve to counter the claims of *la vía chilena* being masterminded from Havana. Yes, Cuba was influential: an inspiration, point of reference, source of solidarity and advice for many in Chile at the time. But this did not mean it was in control.²²

Indeed, there is clearly a danger of ascribing Cuba too much power to determine left-wing politics in Chile. Even on the revolutionary left, as Eugenia Palieraki has shown, it would be simplistic to explain the birth of the MIR in Chile in the mid-1960s as a Castroite phenomenon. As she demonstrates, the new party brought together a range of different extra-parliamentary groups, among them many who looked primarily to the Soviet Union and the experience of the Bolshevik Revolution rather than Havana as a model for mobilisation and insurrectionary action.²³ Marian Schlotterbeck has similarly shown the local roots of unionisation, mobilisation and activism the MIR had in southern Chile that make a mockery of any suggestion that it was merely a party made in Havana.²⁴

On the other side of the political spectrum, new histories have shown that the Chilean Right, too, was informed by the wider world. The National Security Doctrine, derived from French counter-insurgent methods and disseminated by the United States, was immensely important throughout the Americas.²⁵ But, as Marcelo Casals argues in this special issue and elsewhere, we now also know more about Chilean right-wing groups' involvement in global anti-communist projects and influences.²⁶ Certainly, in crafting a particular idea of who should be included (and excluded) in the nation, what defined it and where it fitted vis-à-vis others, it is clear that the Chilean Right borrowed from and imported ideas from elsewhere,

not least from Francoist Spain, which combined with a particular reading of Chile's colonial past, linked it to a broader Hispanist community.

Consider, for example, Kirsten Weld's invaluable new research on the Spanish Civil War and its long-lasting influence in Chile. As she argues, an important group of Chilean conservatives '[read] the politics of the 1960s and 1970s through the lens of the Spanish Civil War'. *Gremialismo*, which played such a pivotal role in opposition strategies against the UP, she adds, was 'explicitly rooted in the military nationalism, conservative Catholic social thought and mythology of a glorious Hispanic cultural inheritance that had undergirded the Nationalist uprising and that Franco had used to legitimate his rule'. In particular, Weld writes that the idea that Francoist nationalists had fought and triumphed over 'international Marxism', winning 'a kind of Christian reconquest' of Spain, inspired coup leaders and helps explain the path they pursued in opposing and overthrowing the UP in the way they did. She also contends that the Chilean Left's 'romantic identification' with the Spanish Civil War exacerbated and contributed to the Right's reading of Chile through the lens of Spain's past.

The attention Weld has drawn to the Spanish Civil War's 'afterlives' in Chile, and to the way it was remembered and used decades later in Unidad Popular Chile, is an important corrective to exclusively US-centric international histories of the period. The architects of the coup and the dictatorship that followed, after all, were not seeking to emulate US-style liberal democracy. As Weld notes,

Their concerns, in addition to being economic and ideological, were religious and racialized, adapting for the Cold War era the idea of a transatlantic Catholic *raza* whose supposedly foreign elements had to be purged by a purifying violence. Put differently, the temporal and ideational horizon against which they situated themselves began not just with the Russian Revolution of 1917, but with the Crusades.

Just as with Chilean leftists who found inspiration through travels to Cuba, Weld also shows how the dictatorship's prominent intellectual and author of Chile's 1980 constitution Jaime Guzmán's direct physical contact with Francoist Spain as a 16-year-old student proved to be a formative experience that conditioned the way he made sense of the world henceforth.²⁷

On one level, these insights are important for what they tell us about opposition to the UP and its cataclysmic end. In addition to explaining how the global informed the local when it came to the coup leaders' conceptualisation of what they were doing and how they should do it, it also suggests the UP's leaders, and Allende himself, fundamentally misunderstood the threats ranged against them. Much of this has to do with the enduring resonance of the idea at the time – and since – that Chile was different; that it was exceptional and intentionally unlike other revolutionary processes. It would not be like Cuba's revolutionary state constructed on the back of armed struggle and the execution of old regime members; its democratic character and constitutionalism would eliminate excuses for intervention. And it would try to learn from other countries – Mexico, Iran and Guatemala included – when it came to expropriating raw materials so as to avoid potential retaliation.²⁸

However, this faith in Chile's particular circumstances and in charting a new, unique course, led its leaders to believe that the United States – as the principal foreign threat they believed they faced – would be far more constrained than it was. It also contributed to the view that the country's armed forces were constitutional, that they would not intervene in politics and that opposition politicians were ultimately wedded to democracy. Despite clear evidence to the contrary and some within the UP, as well as to outside it, arguing fiercely that this evidence needed attention, this assumption blinded the president, and the Communist Party in particular, to the reality they faced. Would the UP's trajectory have been different if its leaders had a better grasp of their opponents' mindset? It is difficult to know. It faced a well-funded opposition at home and hostility abroad. Given the differences that existed on the left it is also hard to conceive of a unified decision *either* to opt for conciliation and appeasement as a way of staving off brutal counter-revolution *or* to accelerate revolutionary goals and confrontation with opponents, both domestic and foreign, as a means of hastening class struggle and radical change. Knowing one's enemy, appreciating the lengths to which it will go and what it aspires to, as well as the pointlessness of pursuing strategies unlikely to succeed are nevertheless fundamental when embarking

upon transformational projects. In this respect, the UP fell short and paid the price for not having a coherent answer, one way or the other.

On another level, insights regarding the afterlives of the Spanish Civil War remind us that lived experience is pivotal in determining the choices that historical actors make later on. Understanding the formative events and ideas that shaped key actors in earlier years can and have helped historians to understand why and how their subjects interpreted the world around them in the way they did. It is only by grasping the significance of memories or prior experiences, that political imaginaries, constructed communities and reference points which determined choices in subsequent years become clearer. And this requires us to extend our chronological timeframe backwards. Indeed, new studies of the UP's repercussions at the same time as probing the interaction between local and global processes.

For example, we cannot understand the revolutionary Left that came of age in the 1960s without grasping how it was affected by coming of age at the time of national protests against the US-sponsored Klein-Saks austerity reforms and rising transport costs under Ibañez in April 1957. This chronological juncture, and the tensions that characterised it, galvanised young Chileans to be political, leading many of those who would be significant leaders in the long 1960s to campaign for the left-wing coalition, the Popular Action Front (Frente de Acción Popular or FRAP), in the country's democratic elections of 1958. It was the intersection of this upheaval and disappointment when Allende lost that, at least in part, gave the Cuban Revolution, months later, the potency and resonance that it acquired. 'On the one hand, life, risk, and hope, and on the other, hypocrisy, conformity and despondency', one Socialist commentator argued as he compared Cuba's example and Chile's reality in late 1960.²⁹ Or as a member of Chile's revolutionary Left who would volunteer to fight alongside Venezuela's guerrilla insurgency a decade later explained, 'the last time I believed in elections was in 1958 and I think that defeat, as well as the Cuban Revolution, closed one era in this continent and opened another'.³⁰ To reiterate, it is not that the global should explain the local but to suggest that the entanglement of the two can help clarify why some people chose their subsequent paths; why, in short, history unfolded as it did.

When conceptualising Chileans' transnational links, the reception of ideas from abroad and how these evolved over time, there is much more that could be said about recent histories and historiography of the UP years. Our understanding of Chile's foreign policy during the UP years, for example, has expanded considerably thanks to the opening of Chilean Foreign Ministry archives. The result is a picture of an ambitious and multifaceted international strategy that aimed to 'neutralize' opponents abroad and balance revolutionary objectives with a pragmatic understanding with Washington.³¹ For now, it is worth pausing to briefly mention two new histories that will add significantly to global histories of the Unidad Popular. The first is an article co-authored by Olga Ulianova and Alessandro Santoni, forthcoming in the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, which charts the inspiration the Christian Democratic Party (Partido Demócrata Cristiano or PDC) found in Europe and its relationships with analogous parties in Italy and Germany. International perspectives on the PDC provide insight not only into Christian Democratic transnational networks, such as the World Union of Christian Democrats founded in Santiago in 1961, but also into the disputes that existed within these networks and how the PDC evolved in relationship to the transnational alignments different factions within the party maintained.³²

The second is Eugenia Palieraki's work on the Chilean Left's relationship with Algeria from the 1950s to the 1970s. In a chapter for the volume *Latin America and the Global Cold War*, edited by Thomas Field, Stella Krepp and Vanni Pettinà, she argues that by understanding the links between the FLN and Chile's left-wing parties from the 1950s onwards, we gain a new understanding *both* of the UP's Third-Worldist position in international politics *and* the composition, purpose and significance of the Third World project itself. As Palieraki suggests, the latter became a space of exchange and experience which nurtured new ideas in mutually constitutive ways. By the long 1960s, 'geographic distances seemed to matter less and less', she writes, 'Within the Third World, an increasing number of activists travelled from one country to another and from one continent to another to assist revolutionary movements, attend military or intelligence training, or seek refuge from dictatorial right-wing regimes.' The idea of a common emancipatory struggle for the defence of their nations against colonial and neo-colonial powers grew stronger among these activists. Rather than merely fighting *against* the rigidity of a bipolar Cold

War order, the Algerian–Chilean relationship during the UP years also shows a commonality when it came to demanding ‘national control over raw materials . . . land reform, and for workers’ and peasants’ self-management’ that in turn helps us understand what Third-Worldists fought *for*.³³

This brings us to what seems to have been another major contribution to international and transnational histories in recent years: the story of Chile’s contribution to global processes and ideas. Indeed, new studies of the UP’s repercussions outside Chile’s national borders have taken us far beyond the old idea of international history as shorthand for foreigners trampling over a passive Chilean stage. Inverting hierarchies of power and influence, with solid evidence, they have refuted the idea that Europe and the United States drove history outward, looking instead at influences travelling in opposite directions. Thanks to Aldo Marchesi’s work, for example, we have been reminded of the place the Southern Cone assumed in left-wing and global politics as a site of intellectual creation, collaboration and contestation during the long 1960s – ‘a laboratory where activists assessed each local event and drew conclusions that would influence the coming struggles in their countries and the region, but also their global alliances’. Challenging critiques of global histories that treat Latin America as ‘an empty space that only received influence from other historical processes happening elsewhere in the world’, he contends that ‘the region’s own local, national and transnational political dynamics were crucial to the gradual formation of a shared experience among different new left organizations and militants’ who ‘not only became key actors’ in Latin America itself but ‘part of the global process of the new left’.³⁴ More specifically in relation to Chile, as alluded to above, he argues Chileans, together with exiles and visitors to the country, drew on what they witnessed around them to produce ideas with profound impact, influence and repercussion worldwide, such as the articulation of Dependency Theory and the evolution of a new Liberation Theology.³⁵ Alessandro Santoni’s study of the influence that *la vía chilena al socialismo* had on the Italian Communist Party’s strategies, and particularly Enrico Berlinguer’s adoption of ‘Historic Compromise’, is another case in point.³⁶ And, of course, the direct global ramifications of the Chilean coup have also received considerable attention when it comes to histories of solidarity practices and the rise of a global human rights discourse.³⁷

Future directions

Despite these new contributions, there remains a lot to learn. We still know relatively little about the Chilean Right and its contacts beyond the United States and Brazil, how its adherents perceived their position in relation to global events and what assistance they secured from abroad. For example, there are hints of Chileans’ integration in the broad transnational network of the World Anti-Communist League (WACL) before the coup that need further examination. A list of participants attending the second secret congress of the regional chapter of the WACL – the Latin American Anti-Communist Confederation (Confederación Anti-Comunista Latinoamericana or CAL) created in 1972 – in Alto Paraná, Paraguay, in May 1973, for example, includes the Chilean National Party’s leader, Senator Sergio Onofre Jarpa, and the Party’s Vice Presidents (also serving as Congressional Deputies), Gustavo Alessandri and Fernando Maturana.³⁸ But, to my knowledge, we do not have records of what precisely these Chileans contributed or gained from this encounter. Instead, we have a general understanding of the anti-communist resolutions to recruit politicians and armed forces across the region to coordinate activities and establish an educational programme.³⁹ Aside from this, we know that the WACL and CAL comprised people who saw themselves as acting in concert for a global cause that transcended nation states, governmental authority and international frontiers. As Kyle Burke writes, ‘many of those who populated the Cold War’s right-wing underground . . . saw themselves as internationalists *and* as revolutionaries’ who believed they formed a ‘vanguard of global revolution in which communism would vanish from the face of the earth’.⁴⁰ And yet, what is so striking is how *above ground*, Chilean delegates to the CAL in Paraguay were, standing out as congressional representatives of a democratic country mingling with military and police officials of dictatorial states. Later, at the third meeting of the CAL in Rio de Janeiro, the Chilean coup would be celebrated as a victory, with more than 200 delegates discussing how the country’s new dictatorship and repression might serve as a model to ‘combat and exterminate Red subversion in schools and universities’, root out ‘communists’ from unions, fight against Liberation Theology, and counter ‘communist propaganda’.⁴¹

For our purposes, the question remains how such networks translated into concrete opposition to the Unidad Popular within Chile before the coup and whether or not the UP's leaders, let alone the individual intelligence apparatuses of each of its constitutive parties, were aware of the extent of their influence. There were certainly reports of arms transfers across Chile's borders with Bolivia and Argentina for right-wing paramilitary forces in the build-up to the coup. And we know that the right-wing paramilitary group, Patria y Libertad's leader, Roberto Thieme, travelled to Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina in mid-1973 in search of support, vowing to launch an urban guerrilla war against the UP when he returned.⁴² Even before Allende's election, Chilean newspapers also contained reports of arms smuggling, contraband Belgian machine guns arriving from Argentina for extreme right-wing groups being just one example.⁴³ But with the majority of historians having focused on trying to find a smoking gun in Washington, we still know remarkably little about these other covert operations.

On the military side of the story, a lot also remains to be understood about cross-border ties, relationships and intelligence sharing. Thanks to ground-breaking studies about Operation Condor by John Dinges and J. Patrice McSherry, we know about collaboration and contacts between different military dictatorships *after* 1973, though much less about what preceded them.⁴⁴ Admiral Roberto Kelly's memoirs, published in 2005, revealed the intelligence that naval coup plotters relied on from Brazil about Peru's intentions in the event of a coup, offering a glimpse of regional collaboration, communication – and competition – between Latin American armed forces.⁴⁵ But there is undoubtedly much more to learn. The simple fact that army representatives from the United States and all Latin American countries met annually from 1960 onward at what was known as the Conference of American Armies (Conferencia de Ejércitos Americanos) suggests there is a much larger story to tell when it comes to military internationalism and coordination.

There are other glaring gaps in global histories of the Unidad Popular. Chile's relationship with the wider Third World, the forging of links to Africa and Asia or the UP's role within the Non-Aligned Movement and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) are all topics deserving more attention. Within this broader field, the Vietnam War stands out as conspicuous by its absence in new Third-Worldist histories of Chile during the long 1960s, despite the very real impact it had throughout society and across the political spectrum. Again, glimpses from biographies published by those who lived through the era suggest that Vietnam's direct influence was not so much as an example but as an issue that was refracted through domestic politics and used in local conflicts. At a march organised in solidarity with Vietnam from Valparaíso to Santiago at the end of 1967, for example, there were fierce intra-left disagreements among the students who took part. While Communists marched for peace with doves as symbols, socialists, dressed in combat green, carried pictures of Che, and echoed his call for 'two, three, many Vietnams'. Because of this, Communists denounced their Socialist comrades as 'extremists, irresponsible, anarchists', offering us insight into how even a seemingly innocuous event of solidarity with relatively low stakes exacerbated left-wing tensions on the eve of the UP's election campaign and victory.⁴⁶ An international war on the other side of the world thus served as a lens through which to interpret local realities and fight domestic battles regarding revolutionary strategy and prowess but there is much that remains to be understood regarding the different ways the Vietnam War was interpreted from within Chile.

It is certain that the political, theoretical and cultural resonance the Vietnam War had in Chile, as well as why and with what ends, deserves further exploration. When it comes to culture alone, Quilapayún's album, 'X Vietnam', Pablo Neruda's evocation of Chile as a 'silent Vietnam' in his poem, 'Incitación al Nixonicidio', and Victor Jara's 'El Derecho de Vivir en Paz' dedicated to 'el poeta Ho Chi Minh', illustrate the parallels between and solidarity for Vietnam that existed in Chile. They also raise more questions than answers about the symbolic significance Vietnam had for Chileans in the period, how they read such parallels between both processes and what lessons those who listened or read these works drew about their own circumstances.

To ask such questions is not to return to older historiography that distorts the significance of local experiences and circumstances by privileging the international system. The rush to global history should also not lead historians to fetishise and celebrate South–South ties for the sake of simply proving that

they existed without questioning the extent to which they were important for determining the course of history, why and how. We need more nuanced and critical appraisals of such linkages and good global history requires local knowledge. But to focus on the local as if it existed in isolation, at least in the case of the UP, is to miss the way in which many actors of the time conceptualised what it was they were doing and why. The global links Chileans forged during the UP years and before also help explain the overwhelming response to the coup as well as the speed and breadth the global solidarity movement subsequently assumed.

Echoes of the past in the present

In yet another echo of the past, ‘El Derecho de Vivir en Paz’ would become an anthem of the 2019 protests and resistance to government repression. Notably, however, in its new iteration there was no longer any reference to Ho Chi Minh or Indochina and the war it fought against the United States. This was unsurprising: Vietnam no longer constituted the reference point that it once did. And the world had changed significantly over the course of 50 years. Instead, the newest version of a song was fundamentally about local circumstances and concerns: a new social pact, an end to inequality, Chileans’ right to live with respect, liberty and dignity, without fear of state repression.

Meanwhile, although President Piñera’s allegations of Cuban and Venezuelan meddling in internal Chilean events were as implausible as they were sinister strategies to justify excessive force and ignore the larger causes of disquiet, my instinct is that it would be a mistake to discard international and transnational dimensions on local developments altogether. To understand the apparently simultaneous outbreak of protests around the world in 2019–20 – from Hong Kong to Iran, France, Bolivia, Colombia, Cataluña, the United States and Belarus – it is obviously vital that we look at the local circumstances in each case. But it would also be worth questioning the extent to which the international system, and transnational entanglements, comparisons or connections have affected the way events unfolded in such different parts of the world.

In Chile’s case, to reiterate, it would be foolish to see international influences as the instigator in control of events since October 2019. To do so plays into a dangerous tactic used by the government to justify its rhetoric of ‘war’. But a global perspective can tell us something about reference points and ideas that have been, and will continue to be, discussed, disputed and disseminated by political, cultural and economic means. Most obviously, Chilean events need to be read in the shadow of the 2008 financial crash and its slow but steady repercussions across the globe. The indigenous and feminist rights movements in Chile have also drawn much from analogous groups outside of Chile, just as they now inspire others worldwide. The question of what influence Hong Kong protests had on Chileans – either by way of inspiration or in terms of lessons learnt – is still unclear. However, tactics for avoiding tear gas appear to have been shared via social media between those facing Chinese and Chilean security forces.

Perhaps even more obvious is that simplistic ideas about a foreign-masterminded plot tell us a lot about the Chilean government’s own worldviews, historical references, foreign concerns and priorities. The seemingly orchestrated response to protests in Chile in October 2019 from Piñera, Trump and Almagro – not to mention Bolsonaro’s threats against any Brazilians who might be inspired to take to the streets – was a sign that a renewed, concerted, regional offensive against the Left was underway, using Chilean events to further regional and geopolitical goals. Significantly, it also revealed the growth of a right-wing collaborative network that had emerged as a result of the Right’s successive political victories between 2016 and 2019. What they sought to gain from evoking talk of ‘war’ and emulating dictatorial practices and to what extent their momentum will be checked by the astonishing result of the Chilean 2020 plebiscite or Joe Biden’s presidency is still to be fully determined at the time of writing. Either way, whether we are looking to the past or to the present, it is increasingly hard to make the case that Chile was – or is – exceptional. If the belief in its particularity blinded many during the UP years to what was to come, Piñera’s ill-fated and infamous notion of Chile as a shining ‘oasis’ of stability and progress in Latin America shows us once again just how problematic the idea of exclusionary national forms of reference can be. In this respect, at the very least, new global histories of the UP demonstrate how important it

is to look up from the confines of our national frameworks and consider comparisons, connections and communications as a means of questioning the local as well as the global.

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Declarations and conflict of interests

The author is Guest Editor of the journal's special issue *Chile's Popular Unity at 50* this article is included in; all efforts to sufficiently blind the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

Notes

¹Faiola, Krygier and Garip, 'Mastermind or scapegoat?'

²On Piñera's claim he had received intelligence about foreign (implicitly Venezuelan) interference, see 'Piñera a la prensa internacional'.

³San Francisco, 'Guerra civil en América Latina'.

⁴Marchesi, 'Escribiendo la guerra fría latinoamericana', 192.

⁵The justification that most commentators use for arguing Venezuela is masterminding protests is the convoking of the Foro de São Paulo in Caracas in July 2019, but cause and effect, let alone means, have yet to be proven. On the link between protests in Ecuador and the Caracas summit being rejected as 'ridiculous' and a 'grotesque analytical error', see Faiola, Krygier and Garip, 'Mastermind or scapegoat?'

⁶Kaiser and McGowan, "'Fascist, violent, dangerous"'

⁷See, for example, Haslam, *The Nixon Administration*; Gustafson, *Hostile Intent*; Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*. For an excellent new study of US–Chilean relations prior to 1970, see also Hurtado-Torres, *The Gathering Storm*.

⁸On the different meanings and approaches to global history, see Conrad, *What Is Global History?*.

⁹For more on Brazil's role in Chile, see Harmer, 'Brazil's Cold War in the Southern Cone'; Burns, 'El modelo brasileño'.

¹⁰Margaret Power, 'Who but a woman?'; Burns, 'El modelo brasileño'.

¹¹See, for example, Ulianova, 'Algunas reflexiones'; Ulianova and Fediakova, eds., 'Chile en los archivos de la URS'; Zourek, *Checoslovaquia y el Cono Sur 1945–1989*; Yordanov, 'Warsaw Pact countries' involvement in Chile from Frei to Pinochet'.

¹²Sánchez Barría, "'En la lucha contra el imperialismo, México y Chile de pie"'

¹³Pérez Silva, 'Hacia una historia de la izquierda chilena', 37.

¹⁴Valle and Díaz, *Federación de la Juventud Socialista*, 40, 43, 52.

¹⁵'La juventud de todo el mundo está con Cuba'.

¹⁶Pérez Silva, 'Hacia una historia de la izquierda chilena', 26–7, 34.

¹⁷Marchesi, *Latin America's Radical Left*; Marchesi, 'Southern Cone cities as political laboratories of the global sixties'.

¹⁸See Palieraki, *¡La revolución ya viene!*, 145–7; Purcell, *The Peace Corps in South America*; Harmer, *Beatriz Allende*, 197, 203.

¹⁹Harmer, *Beatriz Allende*, 171, 172.

²⁰Dinges, *The Condor Years*, 51; Marchesi, *Latin America's Radical Left*, 130–2.

²¹Beatriz Allende as quoted in Baez, *Preguntas Indiscretas*, 245.

²²For more on Cuba's involvement in Chile during the UP years, see Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War*.

²³See Palieraki, '¿Bajo el signo de Fidel?'; Palieraki, *¡La revolución ya viene!*.

²⁴Schlotterbeck, *Beyond the Vanguard*.

- ²⁵See Brands, *Latin America's Cold War*, 72–8; Robin, *Escuadrones de la muerte*.
- ²⁶Casals, 'The Chilean counter-revolution'; Casals, *La creación de la amenaza roja*; Casals, 'Against a continental threat'.
- ²⁷Weld, 'The Spanish Civil War', 78–80, 87–8, 93–4. Weld notes that this group was not as influential when it came to economic policy which was primarily inspired by the 'Chicago Boys' and the United States. See Weld, 'The Spanish Civil War', 108.
- ²⁸Harmer, *Allende's Chile*, 47, 86.
- ²⁹Waiss, '¿Hacia dónde va Chile?', 10.
- ³⁰Victor Irrizzari as quoted in *Punto Final*, 30 September 1969.
- ³¹For more on Chilean foreign policy during the UP years, see Harmer, *Allende's Chile*.
- ³²Ulianova and Santoni, 'The Chilean Christian Democratic Party'.
- ³³Palieraki, 'Revolutions entangled'. See also Sánchez Barriá, "'En la lucha contra el imperialismo, México y Chile de pie'".
- ³⁴Marchesi, 'Southern Cone cities', 54. Regarding the influence that Latin America had on the FLN in the early 1960s when it came to concepts of the quest for a socioeconomic 'second independence' – or 'double revolution' (both political and socioeconomic) see Palieraki, 'Revolutions entangled'.
- ³⁵Marchesi, 'Southern Cone cities', 67. See also Marchesi, 'Imaginación política del antiimperialismo'.
- ³⁶Santoni, *El comunismo italiano y la vía chilena*.
- ³⁷See, for example, Kelly, *Sovereign Emergencies*; Kelly, 'The 1973 Chilean coup and the origins of transnational human rights activism'; Christiaens, Goddeeris and Rodríguez García, *European Solidarity with Chile*; Perry, "'With a little help from my friends'".
- ³⁸'Delegados que participaron en el segundo congreso secreto de la confederación anti-comunista latinoamericana (CAL), a realizarse en Puerto Presidente Stroessner, Paraguay. Del 24-25-26-27 de Mayo de 1973'. My thanks to Molly Avery for sharing this document with me.
- ³⁹Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right*, 65. The CAL would have more than 1,000 members by 1974.
- ⁴⁰Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right*, 8.
- ⁴¹Burke, *Revolutionaries for the Right*, 66–7.
- ⁴²Harmer, *Allende's Chile*, 227–8.
- ⁴³See, for example, 'Fuerzas Armadas detectaron contraband de ametralladoras'.
- ⁴⁴Dinges, *The Condor Years*; McSherry, *Predatory States*.
- ⁴⁵Arancibia Clavel, *Conversando con Roberto Kelly V.*, 144–7. See also Harmer, *Allende's Chile*, 220–1.
- ⁴⁶Rigo Quezada, as quoted in Azócar Valdés, *Lorca*, 25.

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