

# Reframing the Christian Left from the Legacy of **Tricontinentalism**

Anti-Imperialism and Transnational Solidarity

Daniel Saunders // July 2021

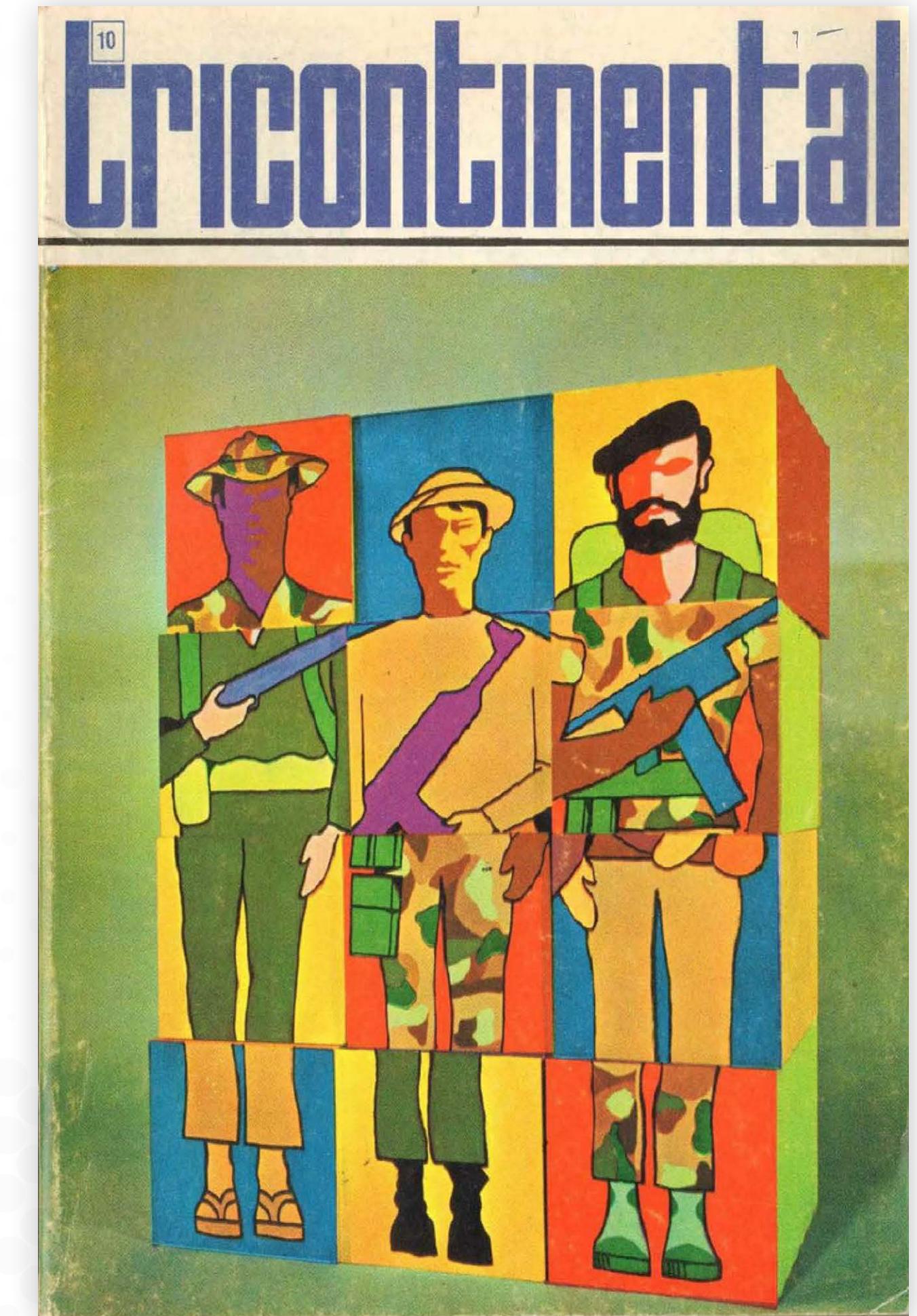




# The Tricontinental Conference of 1966

## Creating a Transnational Political Imaginary

- January 1966 in Havana, Cuba
- 500 delegates from 82 countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America
- Conference agenda:
  - Ongoing revolution against colonial and imperial powers
  - National self-determination, non-alignment, alternative to Cold War
  - Emancipation of “the darker races of mankind” (W.E.B. Du Bois), struggle against imperialism “from within and without”
- Creation of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL)



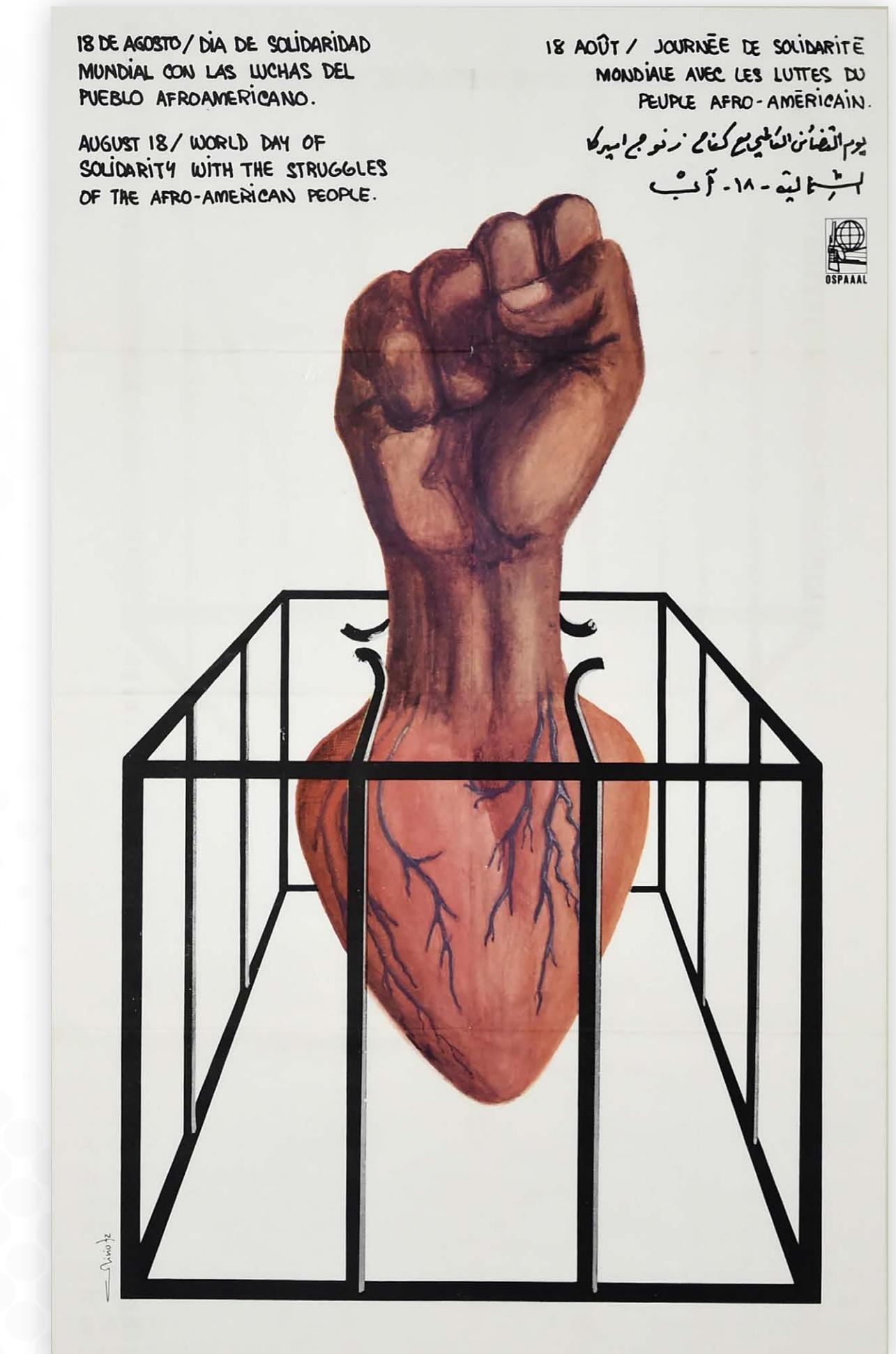
Tricontinental 10 (1969)



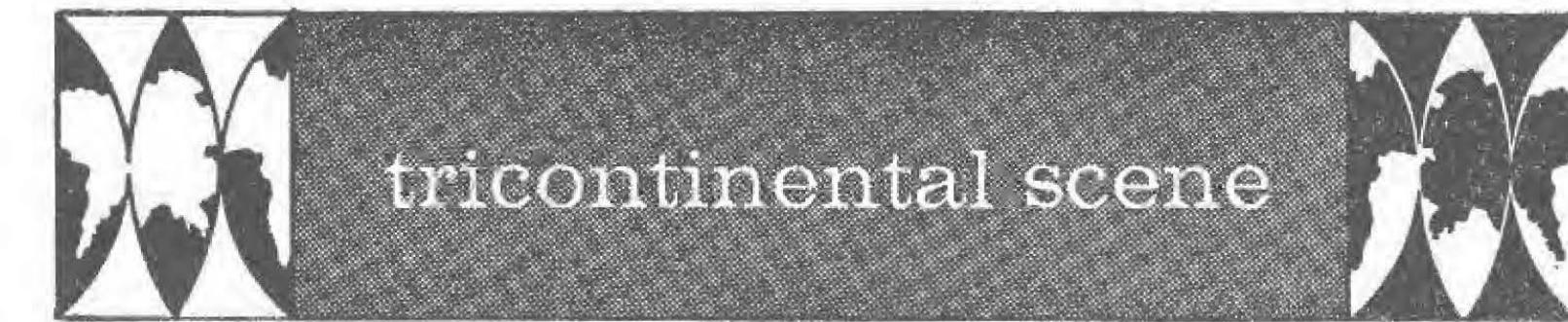
# Justice, Peace, and Transnational Solidarity

## A Lineage of Third World Christian Anti-Imperialism

- “**Third World**” – historical, anti-imperialist political project
- A framework for today’s most important social movements
  - Black Lives Matter, BDS, abolition, indigenous sovereignty, climate justice, wealth inequality
- Continuing the legacy of Christian anti-imperialism from Global South
- Building a world of Justice, Peace, and Transnational Solidarity



“World Day of Solidarity with the Struggles of the Afro-American People,” Olivia Martínez Viera (1972)



## The Call to Third World Christianity

« The **immoral US aggression** against the Indochinese peoples, which confronts the honest Christian with an event that violates his Christian sensibility...**the Cuban Revolution**, which implants a new strength to the revolutionary process on the continent with the greatest number of Catholics in the world...**the vigorous message** written with the blood of the guerrilla priest Camilo Torres. »

— Tricontinental 72

## THE CHRISTIAN COMMITMENT

Christian participation in the struggle for peace.  
The subversive Christ of Camilo Torres. The fourth Christian Assembly for Peace. Christians and US aggression in Indochina. Position of the churches.  
Political maturity of Christianity.  
Revolutionary Christians and Marxists seek unity.

In recent years an accentuated process of incorporating important sectors of religious faith — particularly Christians — into the social struggle, has occurred, and even the religious institutions themselves today approach the socio-political problem of our times with a frequency that has not been customary.

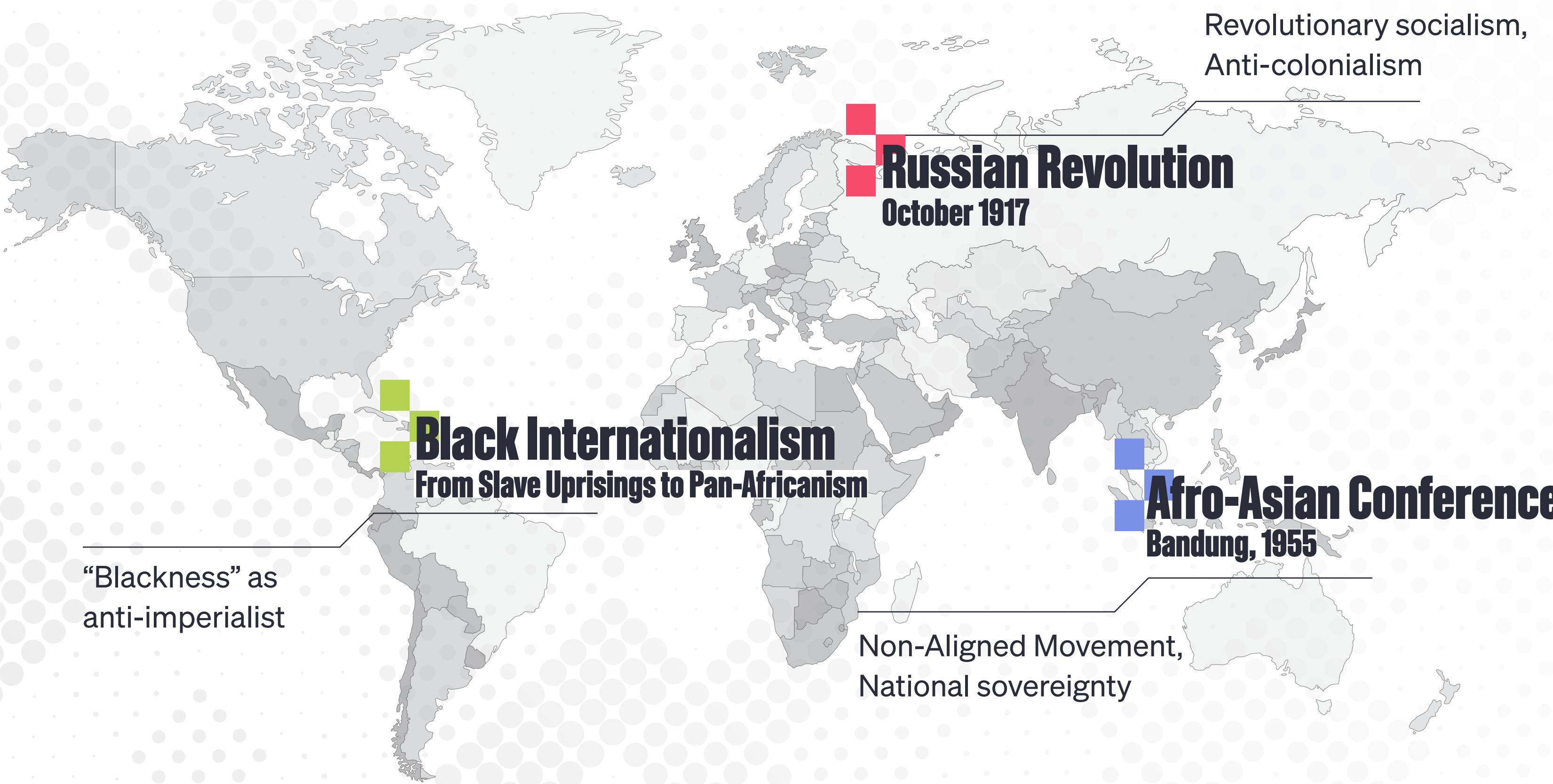
### The Struggle for Peace

The struggle for peace has been one of the forms in which Christian participation has been most evident. Christian movements for peace gained strength beginning with the Christian Conferences for Peace (CCP) stimulated by the prestigious



# The Origins of Tricontinentalism

## History and Themes



"70th Anniversary of the Socialist October Revolution"



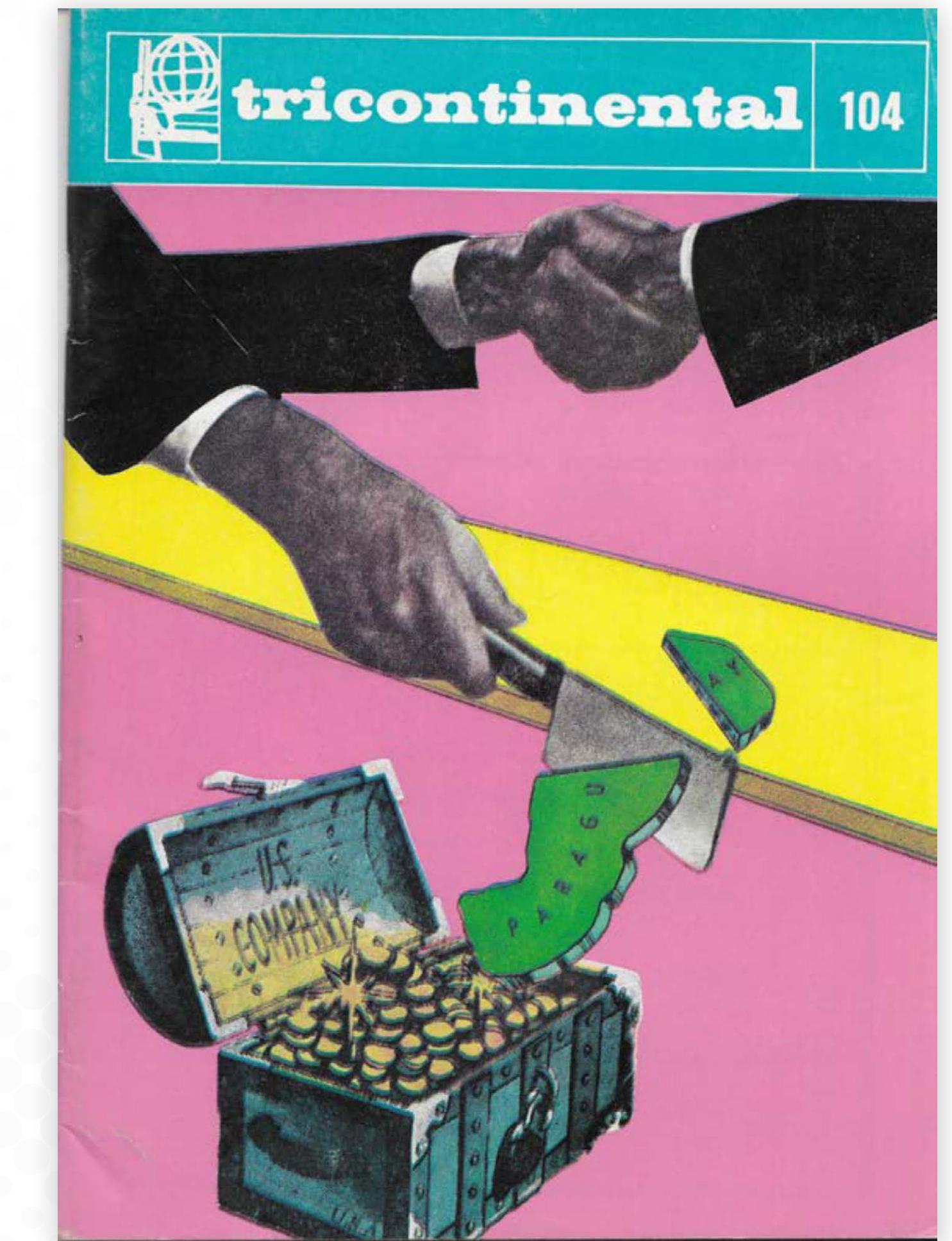
# OSPAAAAL's *Tricontinental* Journal

- OSPAAAL journal and artwork – carrying on the project of a “transnational political imaginary”
- *Tricontinental* engagement with Christian movements
- Primary focus on Latin America

## CHRISTIANISM AND MARXISM

This interview with Colombian priest René García, editor of *Frente Unido*, newspaper founded by Camilo Torres, gives us a panoramic view of the present situation in his country, where the revolutionary struggle has radicalized a group of priests who, together with their people, are waging the battle for national and social liberation, against native oligarchs who, in alliance with 20th century imperialism, expoliate and oppress those who will inevitably become the champions of a new social order.

By Josem Mayo



Tricontinental 104 (1977)



## OSPAAL's *Tricontinental Journal*

# Voices of Liberationist Christianity in the *Tricontinental Journal*

- Medellín Conference (1968): Third World response to Vatican II
  - Liberation theology as reflection on liberationist social movements
- 4 recurring themes of Tricontinentalist Christianity:
  1. Economic self-determination
  2. Church as site of social struggle
  3. Social love against institutional violence
  4. World liberation from the periphery



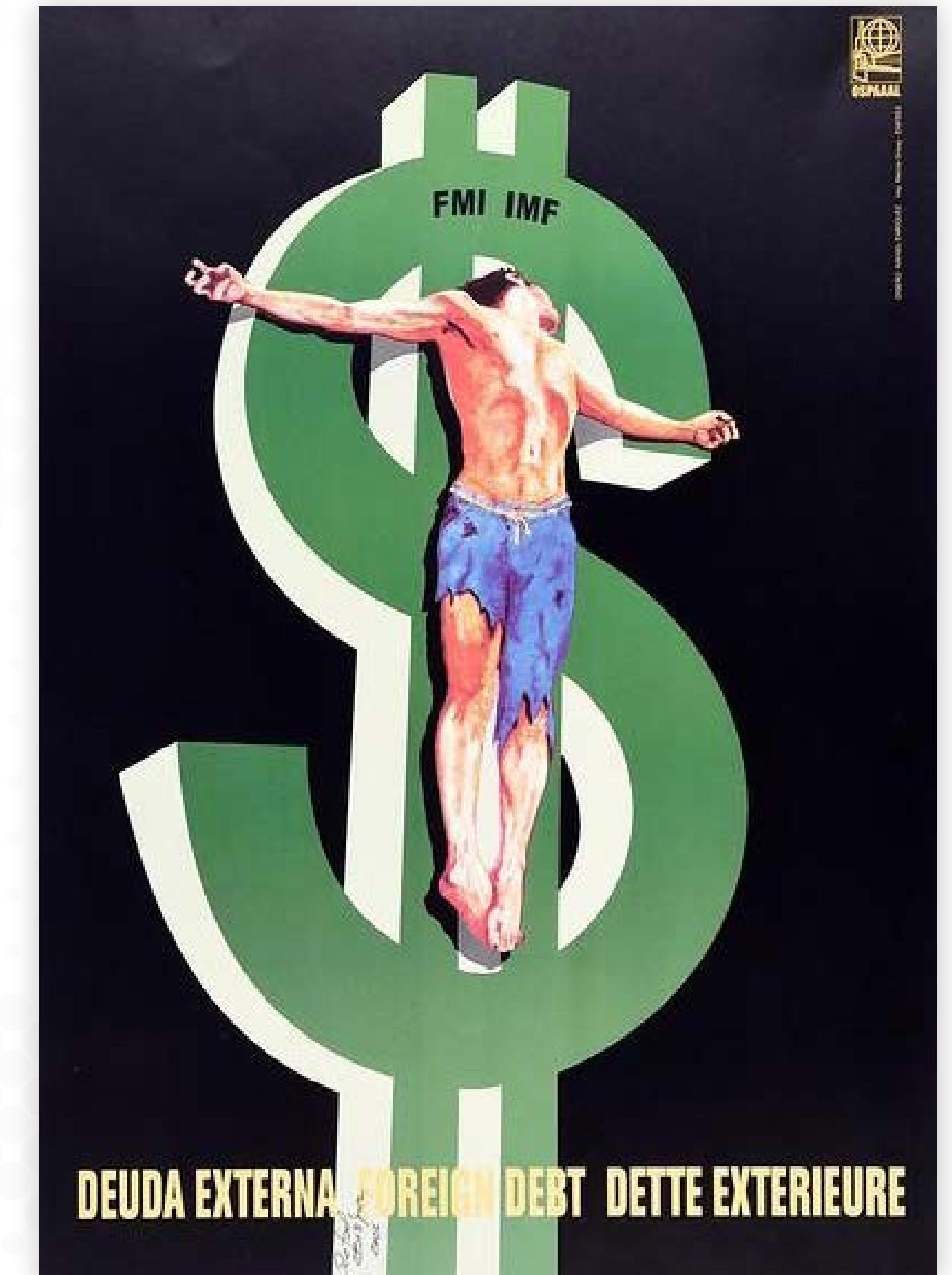


## OSPAAL's *Tricontinental Journal*

# 1. Economic Self-Determination

Latin America «was built up on feudalism and **slavery**, the system of **encomiendas**...and the **sale of blacks**, then **capitalism** was imposed over and above this system. »  
— Ecuadorian Bishop Leonidas Proaño

- Modernity/colonialism/capitalism – one interconnected history of domination
  - Underdevelopment, dependency, racism, violence
- Third World socialism means self-determination



“Foreign Debt,” Rafael Enríquez (1983)



### OSPAAL's *Tricontinental Journal*

## 2. Church and Social Struggle

« The church is in fact concerned with politics... It is also certain that the church and its members **cannot be politically neutral**. We priests are simply trying to exercise this **social right**. » — Estuardo Arellano, SJ

- Church entangled in society, site of social struggle
  - Bourgeois, institutional church – “theology of Christendom”
  - Revolutionary, missionary church – “theology of liberation”
- Christianity is inescapably political



“Apartheid, No,” Alberto Blanco González (1982)

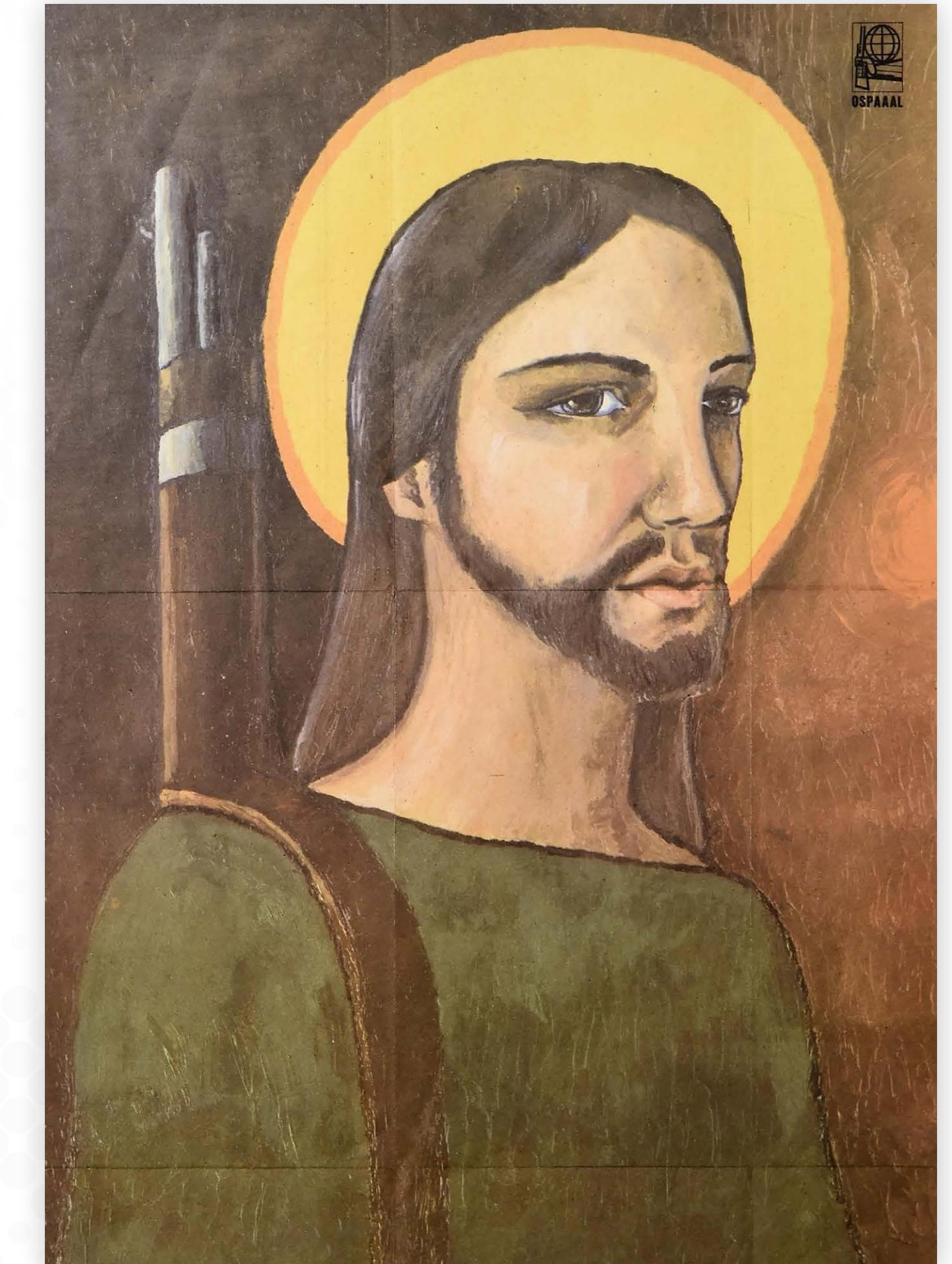


## OSPAAL's *Tricontinental Journal*

# 3. Social Love Against Violence

« Perhaps the mission of a Christian in the revolution is to prevent the necessary violence **from becoming hate**, revenge and brutality. The important thing in a struggle is to **establish justice**. » — Jalles Costa, theologian

- Violent structures already imposed from without
- Shifting framework of revolutionary violence – Gospel triumph of social love over hateful division



“Guerrilla Christ,” Alfredo Rostgaard (1969)

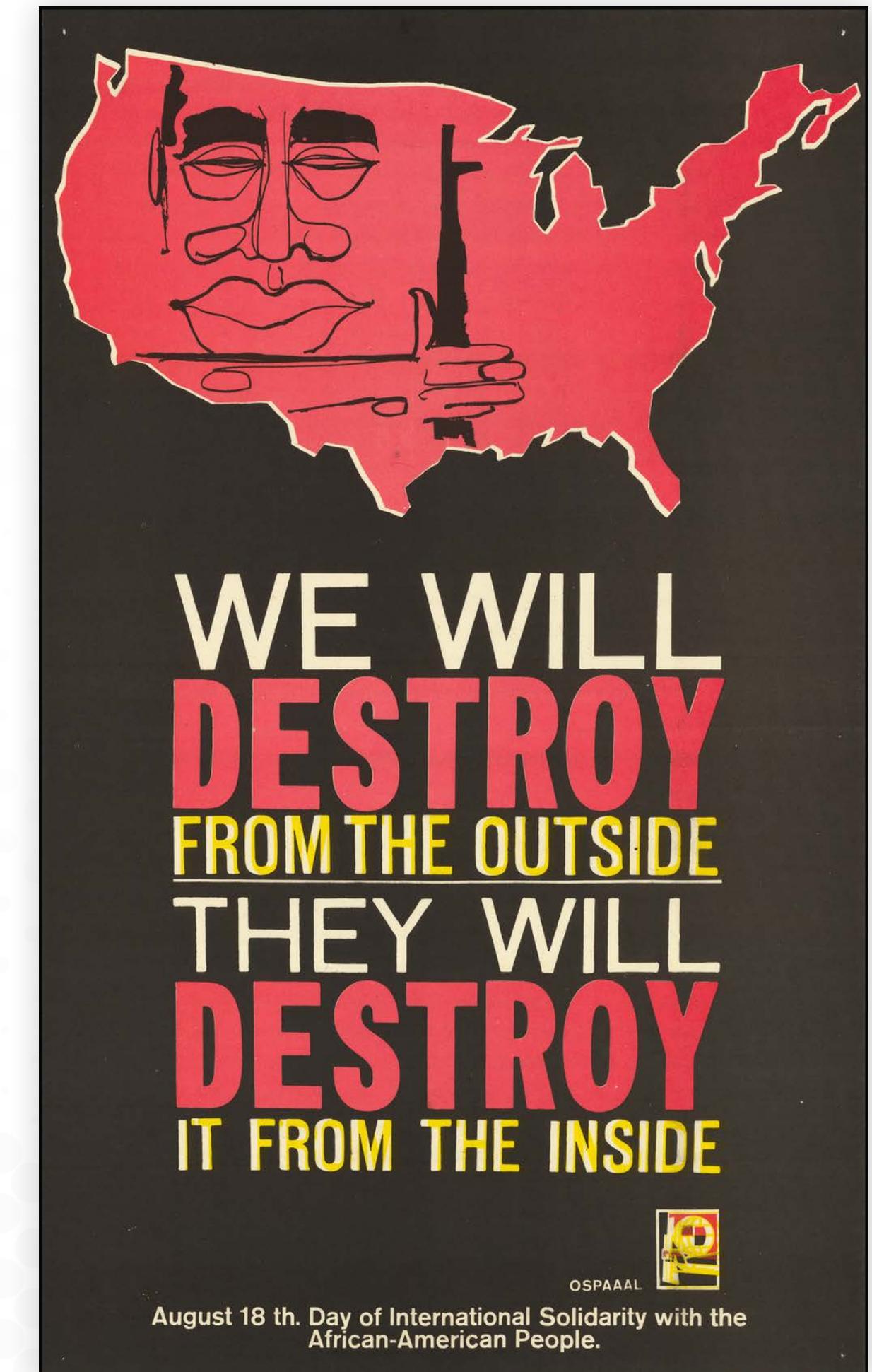


## OSPAAL's *Tricontinental Journal*

# 4. Liberation from the Periphery

« The Afro-American masses...are striking at US imperialism **from the inside** while we are dismembering it **from the outside**. » — Tricontinental 43

- First World in the Third World; Third World in the First World
- “Irruption” of the *global proletariat* as agents of their own liberation
  - Liberation theology’s “preferential option for the poor”
- Rejection of universalizing, Eurocentric categories for decolonial frameworks



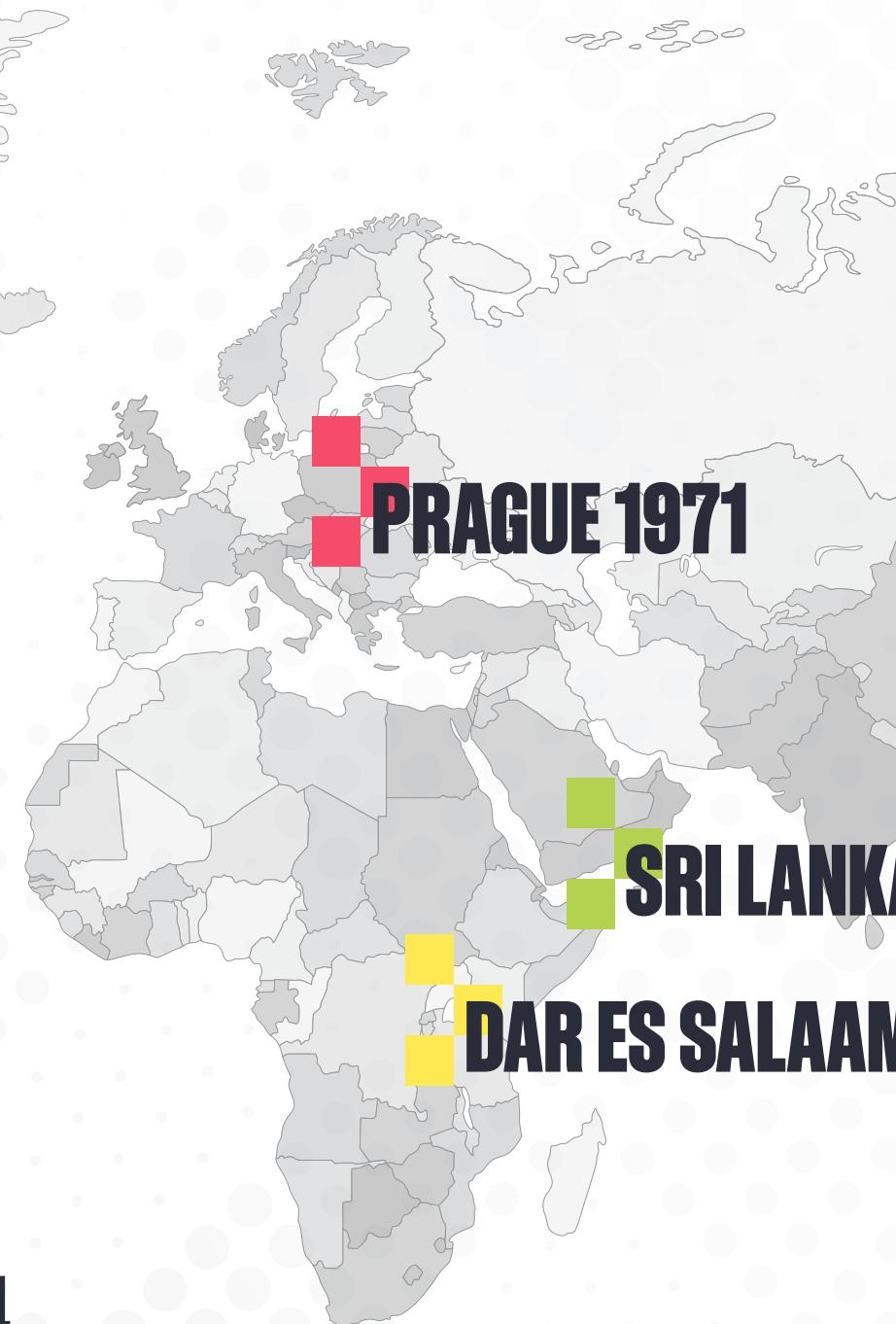
“Day of International Solidarity with the African-American People”



# A Tricontinental Genealogy

## Trajectories for the 21st Century

- Growth of transnational Christian solidarities
  - Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT)
- Anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist Christianities
  - From Black, indigenous, feminist, and decolonial theologies to Christian-Marxist dialogue

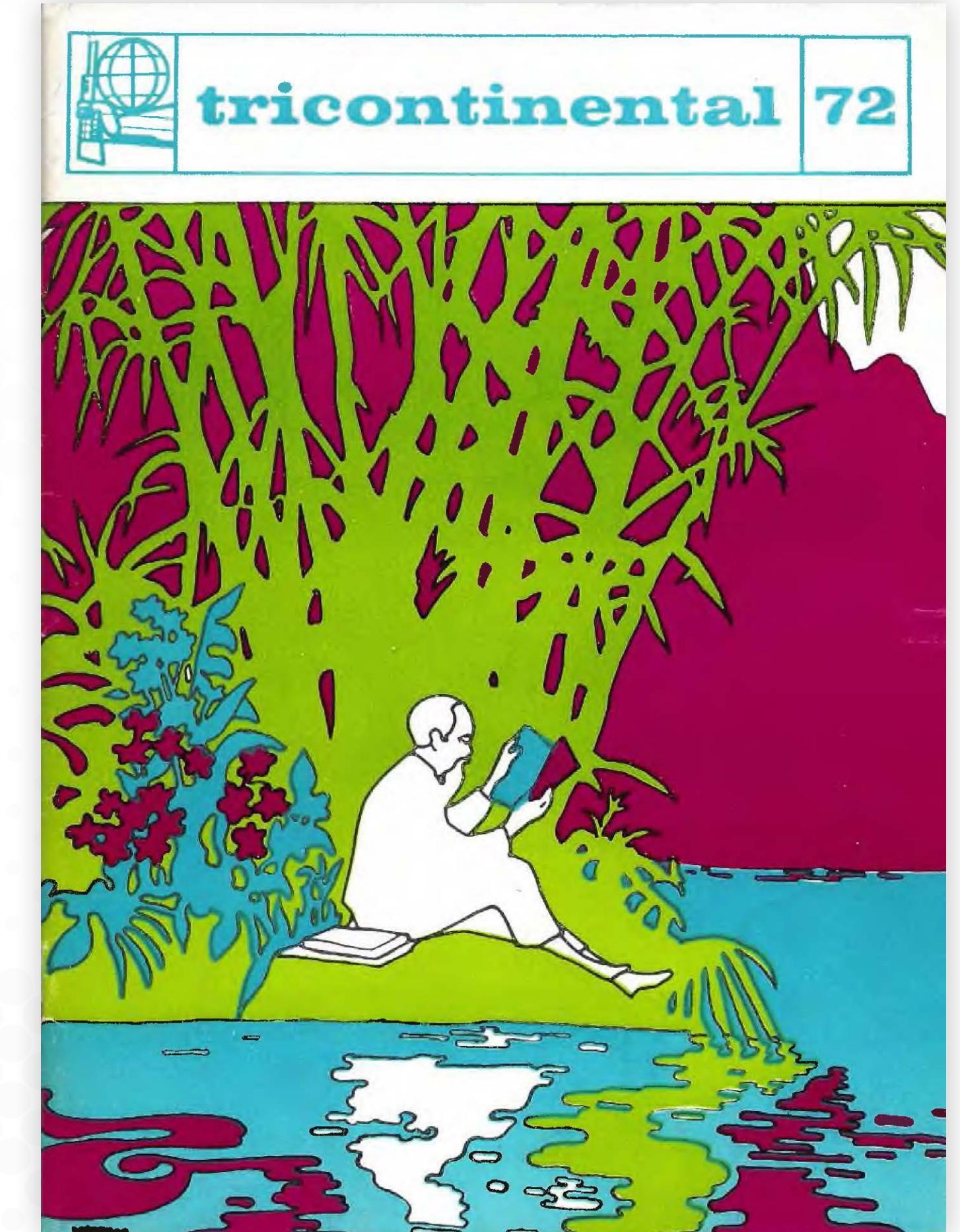




# The Tricontinentalist Framework

## Limitations and Advantages

- Limitations:
  - Narrow focus, insufficiently intersectional
  - Short-sightedness of guerrilla movements, historical challenges
- Socialism, Self-Determination, Anti-Racism/Decoloniality
- Beyond liberal histories and post-imperialist “Empire”



Tricontinental 72 (1972)



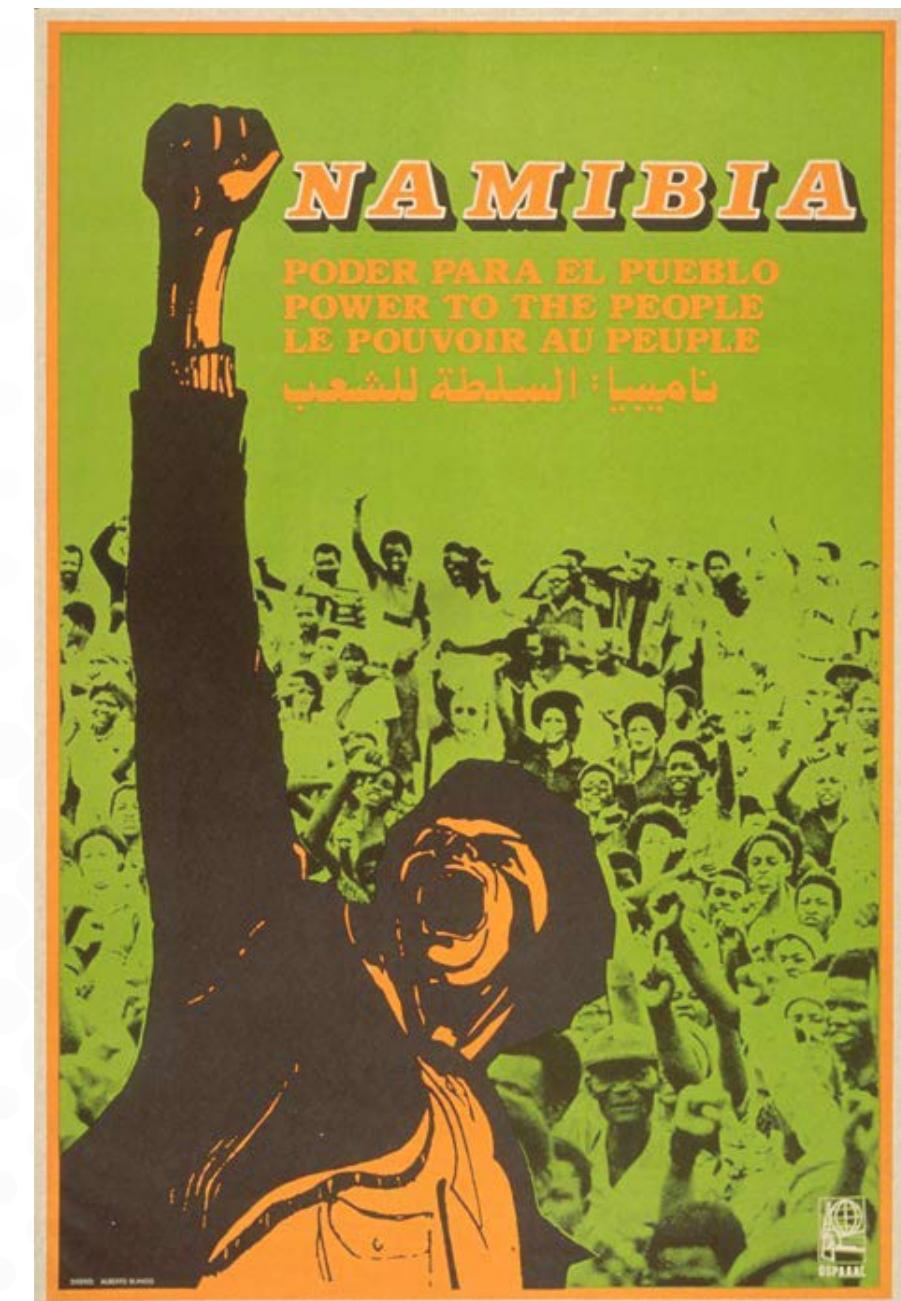
# Challenge and Opportunity

## Continuing a Transnational Political Imaginary

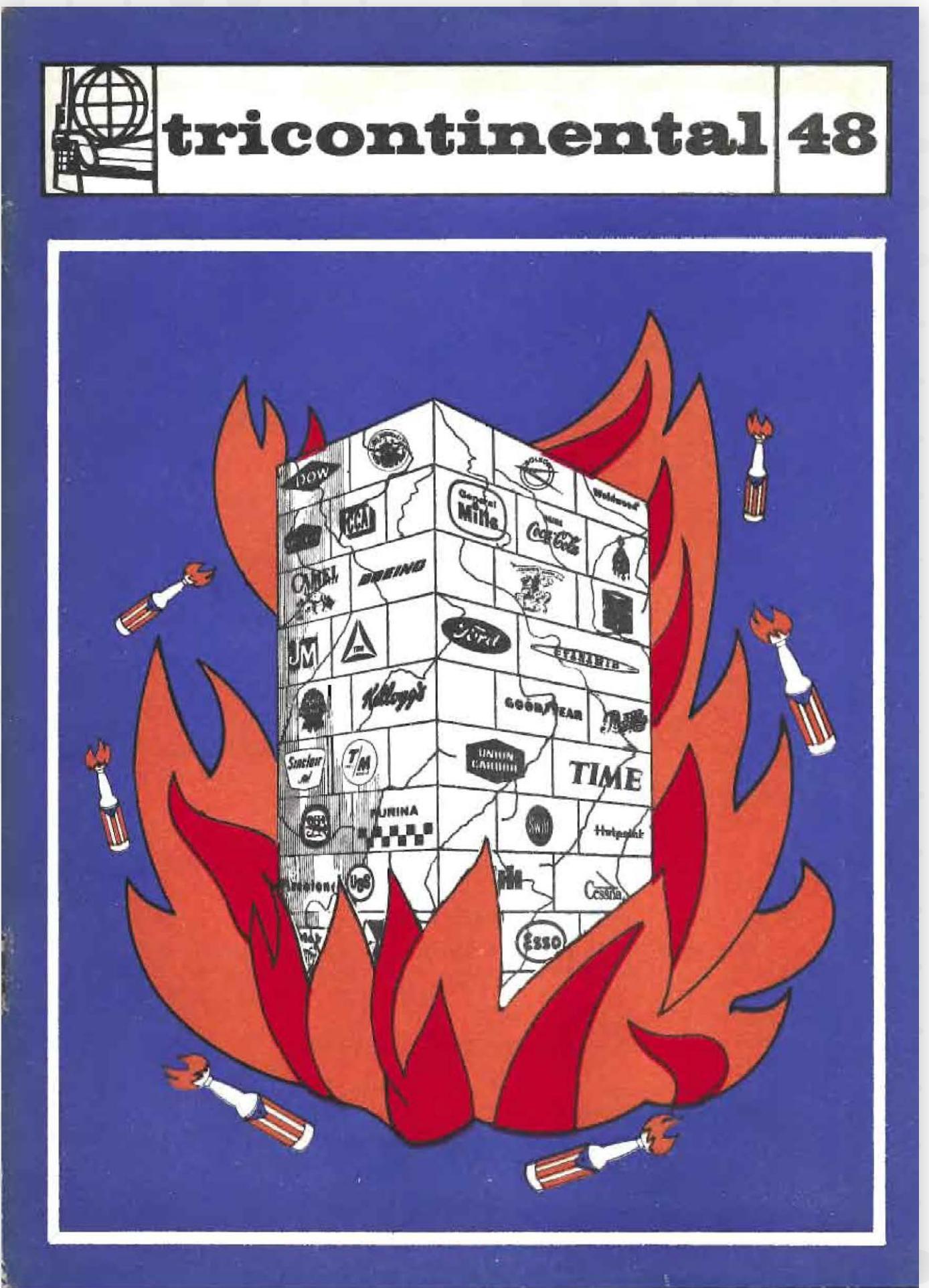
- Situating Global North Christian discourse and praxis in this alternative history
  - From theology/praxis of domination to theology/praxis of *liberation*
  - Importance of Global South movements
- Reckoning with the history and ongoing reality of imperialism
- Injustice anywhere a threat to justice everywhere – centering Justice, Peace, Transnational Solidarity as Christian Left goals



"No to the Economic Blockade of Cuba"



"Namibia: Power to the People"



Read the working paper at:  
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