Introduction
(Re)Situating Latin America and the Caribbean within Antifascist Studies

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Leaders in a growing number of countries espouse authoritarian rule, male domination, racism, anti-Semitism, conspiracy theories, and suppression of leftism, gender dissidence, and immigration. Speaking in the name of the people, they claim they will make their nations great again. These dictators and would-be dictators consult and ally with each other.

This description chillingly corresponds to the current global political situation, yet it equally resembles that of the interwar and World War II era. The 1920s–40s witnessed the rise of fascism, whereas today we see throughout the world the rise of right-wing populism, whose characteristics have led scholars to debate whether it is an updated version of fascism or simply resembles it. This book explains how ordinary people in Latin America, including the Spanish Caribbean, have contested fascism and kindred groups at home and abroad in the past and present. It is critical to learn from their efforts, which can help inform similar struggles elsewhere at this moment.

There have been many faces of antifascism in Latin America. In 1924 and 1938, Latin Americans in several ports of call greeted Italian ships exhibiting Fascist achievements with violent protests. Afro-Uruguayans condemned the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, tying fascism to imperialism and racism. Artists were among the most prominent antifascists in Mexico, and their varying portrayals of fascism reflected Communist shifts and the policies of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40). A Jewish Argentine woman led a militia of the anti-Stalinist Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, POUM) in the Spanish Civil War. During the 1930s–40s, Argentine and Chilean writers of differing political affiliations fought against fascists outside and within their organizations. Central American and Caribbean male exiles deployed US president Franklin D. Roosevelt's (1933–45) "Four Freedoms" to contest dictators in their homelands, whom they considered fascist. Utilizing a similar

strategy, Guatemalan middle-class mestiza intellectuals cited statements of feminist antifascists throughout the hemisphere to indirectly counter President Jorge Ubico's (1931–44) authoritarianism and hide-bound gender notions. Much more forthrightly, some trans Brazilians in 2016 formed a soccer team that has flaunted rigid fascist-style gender divisions and restrictions. Only a selection of the Cubans who fought in the Spanish Civil War are remembered today – the ones whom officials regard as loyal to the Revolution.

These are among the antifascists depicted in this book. Their heterogeneous vocations, political persuasions, ideas, styles of engagement, and gender, racial, and ethnic identities remind us that there have been a "panoply of anti-fascisms," in Nigel Copsey's words.[1] This variety, as well as the fact that the antifascists described above were mostly locals, would surprise those who believe that European exiles – largely male – brought antifascism to the region. Or at least this is what the literature until recently has suggested.

Indeed, while antifascism has emerged as an important topic of research in the last few decades, the emphasis has been on Europe, although this is changing. Historians generally have considered antifascism as a European phenomenon, with other regions on its margins.[2] Only one of the seventeen chapters in the canonical volume, *Rethinking Antifascism* (2016), focused on a country outside Europe, namely Argentina.[3] According to Hugo García, who edited a journal issue on transnational antifascism published that same year, antifascism was largely a "culture of exile" housed in European cities and New York. He did not consider the European and Latin American exiles who congregated in Mexico City, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, and Santiago, Chile. While conceding that President Cárdenas promoted antifascism in Mexico, García interpreted it as part of the adaptation of European ideas and strategies to the antifascist periphery. Merely two of the seven contributors in this issue treated European antifascist exchanges with persons outside that continent, emphasizing the former's participation. Discussing German sojourners in Mexico, Bolivia, and Argentina, Andrea Acle-Kreysing wrote that "through both exile and contact with a non-European *audience* [our italics],

[1] Copsey, "Preface: Towards a New Anti-Fascist 'Minimum,'" xiv, xvi (quote), xviii. Also see García, Yusta, Tabet, and Clímaco, "Introduction," 4, 6.
[2] As noted by Braskén, Featherstone, and Copsey, "Introduction," 1–2. Also see Kirk and McElligott, "Introduction," 2.
[3] García, Yusta, Tabet, and Clímaco, eds., *Rethinking Antifascism*.

antifascism became a transatlantic political culture," suggesting that Latin Americans simply listened to the Europeans.[4]

To their credit, these authors modified some of their positions. The editors of *Rethinking Antifascism* added Buenos Aires to the list of cities that sheltered exiles and noted the need to explore "the impact of antifascism on the non-Western world" beyond "exiles and the involvement of various ethnic groups in the Abyssinian and Spanish conflicts."[5] For her part, in another article, Acle-Kreysing assigned agency to the antifascist labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the Cárdenas government, and other Mexican actors and analyzed exchanges among them – although their relationship with European refugees and exiles received much of her attention.[6] Still, this departed from the propensity of most specialists, who have either traced a unidirectional transmission of antifascism from Europe rather than a two-way exchange or have reduced those circular exchanges to the ones between Europe and the United States.[7]

In the past, relatively few Latin Americanists concerned themselves with antifascism. Those who studied it also tended to concentrate on European émigrés,[8] perhaps implicitly or unintentionally concurring that antifascism was a European import carried by exiles. More recent studies have discussed locals in various Latin American settings and periods rather than European visitors, but they are little known outside the countries in which they appeared and do not provide an overall view of the history of antifascism in the region.

These and other works focusing on European movements and voices, as well as on particular Latin American countries, are pioneering and valuable additions to the field. Marking a new departure in the field, Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey, and David Featherstone (2021) and Joseph Fronczak (2023) produced truly global and transnational volumes.[9] Building upon these publications and responding to calls for research on areas outside Europe and North America, this book expands

[4] García, "Transnational History," quotes on 566 and 569. Elsewhere in this journal issue, see Acle-Kreysing, "Shattered Dreams," quote on 668.
[5] García, Yusta, Tabet, and Clímaco, "Introduction," 6, 11 (quote).
[6] Acle-Kreysing, "Antifascismo."
[7] Seidman, *Transatlantic Antifascisms*.
[8] Among other works, see Bertonha, "Anarquistas italianos nas Américas"; Domínguez Prats, "La actividad de las mujeres republicanas en México"; Fernández Aceves, "Belén Sárraga Hernández"; Friedmann, *Alemanes antinazis*; Lida, "Debates del exilio francés"; Newton, "*Ducini, Prominenti, Antifascisti*," and "Indifferent Sanctuary"; Pasolini, "The Antifascist Climate"; Von Mentz and Radkau, "Notas en torno al exilio político alemán."
[9] Braskén, Copsey, and Featherstone, eds., *Antifascism in a Global Perspective*; Fronczak, *Everything Is Possible*.

antifascist studies by highlighting homegrown Latin American activists, their agency, and their transnational contributions. It is the first book in any language to offer an encompassing history of antifascism in Latin America. As the title indicates, *Antifascism(s) in Latin America and the Caribbean: From the Margins to the Center* brings to the forefront influential groups and individuals in an area that much of the literature has considered peripheral. We argue that Latin America and other areas outside Europe may be marginal to the *literature* on antifascism but not to antifascism itself. The contributors to this book demonstrate that Latin America did not lie on the outskirts of a European antifascist center, nor did militants in this region merely copy European models. As Fronczak observed, antifascism did not exactly fan out from its Italian origins: "Locals all over pulled antifascism out of its Italian particularity . . . People in different places made it meaningful to them, and in doing so they changed its meaning" and constructed an array of antifascisms.[10] In effect, the so-called periphery was the creative center of antifascism, and the book's title reflects this notion. The collective image offered by the chapters emphasizes that there was no single antifascist experience in Latin America. Rather, there were multiple Latin American antifascisms in different countries, groups, and periods, forged in the interplay between local, regional, and transnational processes. Furthermore, Latin American antifascists were full-fledged participants in cross-border exchanges from the Global South to the Global North and within the Global South.

Antifascism(s) in Latin America and the Caribbean and Antifascist Studies

A major purpose of this book is to put Latin American antifascisms – as a new field of study – in conversation with works on antifascism in other parts of the globe. How does adding Latin America – through this book and other writings – affect existing narratives on antifascism? Do our perspectives and conclusions fit, agree, or differ with these? How can our works enrich each other? The dialogue we are opening is transnational in that we are reaching back and forth across the geographical lines that mark the literature, imagining potential multidirectional insights and

[10] Fronczak, *Everything Is Possible*, 105–7, quote on 106.

stimulation.[11] We focus this dialogue on the themes of European exiles, Communism, gender, race, and imperialism.

As already stated, we contest several of the prevailing literature's most striking traits, namely, its Eurocentrism and perception of one-way exchanges from Europe to other regions. Europeanists will find that exiles from this continent did not necessarily inaugurate antifascism in Latin America, nor were Latin American movements mere derivations of European ones. We do not neglect the role that European exiles played in Latin American antifascisms. They were important actors, but not the only ones or necessarily the most important ones. Instead, we emphasize local actors, agendas, and contexts. Rather than focusing on these visitors' impact on Latin America, this book could motivate Europeanists to research how Latin Americans affected European antifascisms by participating in international antifascist gatherings and mobilizations, the Republican side of the Spanish Civil War, and transatlantic intellectual networks, as well as through Global South to Global North solidarity with the Spanish Republic and the Allies.

The historiography on Europe also has tended to focus on Communist links, often from a top-down perspective, for example, by highlighting the significance of the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement (1932–33) and the Comintern's promotion of Popular Front alliances with democratic non-Communists against fascism (1935–39, 1941–45).[12] García, Yusta, Tabet, and Clímaco noted that many scholars identified antifascism with Communism – often putting the former in a negative light – an identification that, they argue, is perhaps "the greatest obstacle to understanding antifascism as a historical phenomenon." Yet while "Communism may have been one of the main driving forces behind the great antifascist mobilization in the years 1933–1939," antifascists varied greatly in terms of their political persuasions.[13] Copsey, Fronczak, and others also asserted the political diversity of antifascists and Fronczak downplayed the Comintern's role in the creation of the Popular Front. Sandra Pujals revealed how militants in the Caribbean Basin before 1935 anticipated or contested Comintern policies, in effect agreeing with Fronczak that one cannot assume Soviet control over grassroots antifascists.[14] In her chapter

[11] Rac and Ureña Valerio, "Introduction," 21, inspired this notion of a transnational dialogue among scholars.
[12] Among other works, see Ceplair, *Under the Shadow of War,* 78–93; Fisher, *Romain Rolland*, 147–70; Calver, *Anti-Fascism*; Cooper, "Pacifism, Feminism, and Fascism."
[13] García, Yusta, Tabet, and Clímaco, "Introduction," 3–4 (quotes).
[14] Copsey, "Preface"; Fronczak, *Everything is Possible*, 185–88; Pujals, "Con saludos comunistas."

in this book, she also notes the transnational activism of lower-level Communists who had arrived in this region from various countries.

John Lear's chapter also reveals that while Communism was critical for Diego Rivera and Mexican artists, it was not the only factor in Mexican antifascism. Communists played an important role in the antifascist orientation of the Argentine and Chilean societies of writers explored in Jorge Nállim's chapter, but they were part of broader ideological and political fronts. This is in line with Andrés Bisso's findings that Acción Argentina (Argentine Action), the largest antifascist association of the 1930s–40s in that nation, contained members of the Socialist, democratic-centrist Radical, and conservative parties, although it excluded Communists.[15] Nevertheless, the fact that Communists participated freely alongside members of these parties and Acción Argentina in other antifascist journalistic, cultural, and associational spaces demonstrates the nuanced and complex relationships among them.[16] In this book, Vanessa Miseres shows that Chilean and Argentine feminist magazines included Communists along with writers of other ideological orientations who produced a strong antifascism combined with specific gender meanings. And, as Ariel Lambe explores in her text, the fate of Cuban veterans of the Spanish Civil War, regardless of their former Communist and antifascist affiliations, was mediated by their perceived loyalty to the Cuban revolutionary regime. Finally, it should be noted that anarchists also had played an important role in antifascism, but by the 1930s their numbers and influence had declined.[17] In these and other manners, this book engages with the call of antifascist studies to not merely reduce antifascism to Communism and, instead, to complicate that relationship.

Thus, the new literature, including this book, demonstrates that antifascism mobilized people not only of a large partisan – and nonpartisan – spectrum but of many national, racial/ethnic, and religious backgrounds.[18] It also attracted women, although the older literature tended to overlook them. Interestingly, however, several important studies on Latin American antifascist women's organizations antedated works on men's groups in this region.[19] Nevertheless, scholars prioritized the armed antifascist resistance

[15] Bisso, *Acción Argentina*.
[16] Nállim, *Transformations and Crisis of Liberalism*, and *Las raíces del antiperonismo*; Deutsch, *Gendering Antifascism*.
[17] Shaffer, "Contesting Internationalists"; De Laforcade and Shaffer, eds., *In Defiance of Boundaries*; Cappelletti, *Anarchism in Latin America*.
[18] Fronczak, "Local People's Global Politics," 256.
[19] Antezana-Pernet, *El MEMCH*; Tuñón Pablos, *Mujeres que se organizan*.

and, in countries not under fascist rule, political campaigns and the formulation of antifascist principles. These activities, as well as the sources used to study them, centered on male participation. Ignored was women's significant participation in vital antifascist realms such as supplying the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and the Allies in World War II, building antifascist homes and communities, and melding women's rights with antifascism. Unutilized were the sources that portrayed these women, such as memoirs, women's magazines, interviews, and newspaper social pages.[20]

This situation is changing. Five of the fourteen chapters in the edited volume *Antifascism in a Global Perspective* mentioned women protagonists. Caroline Waldron Merithew incorporated women into her study of transnational solidarity with Ethiopia, including Emperor Haile Selassie's wife, Empress Quizzero Menen, and daughter, Tsehai, who helped found the Ethiopian Women's Association.[21] According to Sana Tannoury-Karam, the female section of the League against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon inserted women's rights into Arab antifascism, insisting that women's participation was essential for a genuine democracy.[22] These women engaged in South–North exchanges not to save other countries from imperialist conquest or fascist takeovers, but their own. Latin American antifascist women and men often saw the external and internal threats as intertwined and directed their efforts against both, as Pedro Cameselle-Pesce, Aaron Coy Moulton, and Patricia Harms point out in their chapters.[23] Harms and Moulton extended this sense of intertwining by demonstrating how men and women in the circum-Caribbean used statements issued by prominent antifascists throughout the hemisphere to contest local dictatorships.

Antifascist women did not simply copy their male counterparts' goals, ideas, and activities. By making clothing for Spanish Republican and Allied soldiers, women in various nations constructed an antifascism rooted in their domestic roles. As an Argentine newspaper noted, "by peeling potatoes one combats fascism."[24] But this was not their sole inspiration. Their engagement with the international and local dimensions of antifascism was inextricably linked to their struggles to advance their rights, protect their homes, and promote democracy and social justice, as Miseres, Cameselle-Pesce, and Harms indicate. Similarly, branches of the World Committee

[20] Richet, "Women and Antifascism," especially 153–55, inspired these thoughts.
[21] Merithew, "O Mother Race," and "Naming Rape"; Pankhurst, *Sylvia Pankhurst*.
[22] Tannoury-Karam, "No Place for Neutrality."
[23] Also see Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It*; Deutsch, *Gendering Antifascism*.
[24] Quoted by Ardanaz, "Pelando papas," n.p.; Marino, *Feminism*; Deutsch, *Gendering Antifascism*.

of Women against War and Fascism (1934–41), and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (1915–), both founded in Europe, supported peace, Popular Front reforms, women's rights, the Spanish Republic, and the strengthening of local democratic rule. Mercedes Yusta observed that a Spanish affiliate of the Women's World Committee, the Agrupación de Mujeres Antifascistas (Antifascist Women's Group, AMA, founded in 1936) probably was the first modern mass political movement of Spanish women.[25] The same was true for the Movimiento de Emancipación de Mujeres de Chile (Movement for the Emancipation of Chilean Women, MEMCH, 1935), the Mexican Frente Único Pro-Derechos de la Mujer (Sole Front for Women's Rights, FUPDM, 1935), and Comité Argentino de Mujeres Pro Huérfanos Españoles (Argentine Committee of Women for Spanish Orphans, CAMHE, 1937) in their respective countries.[26]

The Spanish Civil War (1936–39) was a lightning rod for global female (and male) activism, including in Latin America, as many chapters in this book demonstrate. In solidarity with the Spanish Republic, British women raised funds, wrote officialdom, and sent clothing, supplies, and ambulances. Some served there as doctors, nurses, educators, and relief workers. Women elsewhere engaged similarly. A number took up arms, such as the Argentine Mika Feldman de Etchebéhère described in Miseres' chapter. According to Laurence Brown, French women's admiration for their Spanish counterparts, whom they thought were fighting alongside men (although few were) to defend the Republic that had given them the vote, reinforced their argument that suffrage would strengthen the French Republic. Responding to appeals based on both maternalism and citizenship, women's groups in many countries aided Spanish mothers and children. Feminists in France and elsewhere regarded such aid as a means of expressing themselves politically.[27]

[25] Yusta, "Género y antifascismo en España," especially 228–29. On Spain, also see Nash, *Defying Male Civilization*; Acklesberg, *Free Women of Spain*, and "Women and the Politics." On France, see Reynolds, *France between the Wars*, and "The Lost Generation"; Carle, "Women"; Coons, "Gabrielle Duchêne"; Sandra Blasco Lisa, "El Comité Mundial de Mujeres contra la Guerra y el Fascismo y sus relaciones con España," paper presented at the Seminario Permanente México–España, El Colegio de México, Mexico City, March 9, 2022.

[26] Edelman, *Banderas*, 46; Tuñón Pablos, *Mujeres que se organizan*; Olcott, *Revolutionary Women*, and "The Center Cannot Hold"; Antezana-Pernet, *El MEMCH*; Rojas Mira and Jiles Moreno, "La extraordinaria acción política," and "El Movimiento pro Emancipación de las Mujeres de Chile"; Montero Miranda and Rubio Soto, "El Movimiento pro-Emancipación de las Mujeres de Chile"; Rosemblatt, *Gendered Compromises*.

[27] Brown, "Pour Aider Nos Frères d'Espagne"; Yusta Rodrigo, *Madres coraje*; Damousi, "Humanitarianism"; Zubillaga, *Niños de la guerra*; Rein, "The Meites Sisters."

The affective ties among British activists, and those that linked them with their communities and the Spanish people, contributed to "an emerging gendered transnational solidarity," in Roseanne Webster's words.[28] Joy Damousi added that Australians who supported Spanish refugee children inspired people outside Europe "to identify as international citizens."[29] Pujals, Miseres, Moulton, Nállim, and other contributors to this book provide glimpses of these transnational feelings and identities, which persisted into World War II and beyond.

Recent works have inserted women in European Resistance studies, whom previous writings had largely disregarded.[30] During World War II, French and Italian women led Resistance groups; gathered intelligence; served as couriers; printed and disseminated news and antifascist writings and propaganda; engaged in strikes, sabotage, and armed opposition; and sheltered and transported Jews and other fugitives to safety. Several authors have noted that their participation enabled some to rebel against gender norms or at least contemplate more extensive political and social roles. Yet their actions as caregivers and helpmates of male comrades also reinforced maternalism, an ambiguity that Miseres discerned in Etchebèhére's experiences in Spain.[31] In this book, Moulton, Harms, and Cameselle-Pesce add to the study of women's resistance by discussing peaceful means, and Cara Snyder describes transgender people's nonviolent defiance.

Biographical works on antifascist women (and men) in Europe and other regions reveal the divides and overlaps between the personal and political, private and public, as well as the relationships and emotions that strongly influence people's lives and political activism.[32] Harms, Lambe, Lear, Miseres, and Pujals contributed chapters with biographical elements for this book, and hopefully more Latin Americanists will follow their example.[33] The lack of primary sources on women's lives can impede such

[28] Webster, "A Spanish Housewife," quote on 399. On Britain see Jackson, *British Women*; Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*; Fyrth and Alexander, *Women's Voices*; Bruley, "Women Against War and Fascism"; Alberti, "British Feminists"; Roberts, "In the Margins of Chaos."

[29] Damousi, "Humanitarianism," 114.

[30] Among other works that disregarded women, see Wieviorka, *The Resistance*; Deák, *Europe on Trial*. An exception to the earlier literature is Slaughter, *Women and the Italian Resistance*.

[31] Deacon, "Fitting in to the French Resistance"; Bonfiglioli, "Red Girls' Revolutionary Tales"; Pojmann, *Italian Women*; Andrieu, "Women in the French Resistance"; Moorehead, *A Train in Winter*, and *A House in the Mountains*; Richet, "Marion Cave Rosselli," and *Women, Antifascism and Mussolini's Italy*.

[32] Bordegaray, "Luchas antifascistas"; Carle, "Women"; Coons, "Gabrielle Duchêne"; Rein, "The Meites Sisters"; Iacovetta and Stradiotti, "Betrayal, Vengeance, and the Anarchist Ideal."

[33] For Latin America, see Marino, *Feminism*, and "Marta Vergara"; Sapriza, *Memorias de rebeldía*; Deutsch, "Questioning the Binary."

research, but women's history specialists have found ways around this obstacle.[34]

The gendered analyses of women (and, in this book, trans) antifascists are unmatched by gendered analyses of their male peers. While there are numerous works on fascist masculinities, few historians have dissected antifascist masculinities.[35] Perhaps the identification of fascism with male dominance has led scholars to assume the opposite for antifascism. Regardless, Latin Americanists should examine this intriguing topic. In any case, this book shows that women contributed to antifascism in many ways, in response to local, regional, and transnational dynamics, and in multiple spaces that defied clear boundaries. Their stories demonstrate that women were not marginal but central actors in their own right, far from Eurocentric or male-centric prejudices and analyses.

Students of US antifascism have devoted much attention to women and race/ethnicity. Two massive Popular Front groups arose in the 1930s: the International Workers Order (IWO) and American League against War and Fascism (AL, later called the American League for Peace and Democracy). Beyond their differences, both the IWO and the AL were multiracial/multi-ethnic organizations, with the active participation of women, Jews, Blacks, and laborers, and strong ties to Communists. They combined organization and advocacy for their working-class members of different gender, race, and ethnic backgrounds with opposition to fascism and solidarity with international antifascist causes such as Ethiopia, Republican Spain, China, and anti-Nazi Germans.[36] Communist Dorothy McConnell, the most prominent AL white female journalist, and her Black peers, including Claudia Jones, a leading feminist and intellectual, and the distinguished social worker and pro-Spanish Republican activist Thyra Edwards, regarded fascism as "less a concrete regime in Germany or Italy and more a vehicle to conceive the *connectedness* [italics in original] of seemingly divergent struggles."[37] Their intersectional analyses of women's issues elucidated the "connectedness" of

[34] Chaudhuri, Katz, and Perry, eds., *Contesting Archives*.
[35] Meyers, "Feminizing Fascist Men"; Henry Brown, "The Anarchist in Uniform"; Sewell, "Antifascism in the Neighborhood"; Lundberg, "The Antifascist Kick."
[36] On the IWO, see Zecker, *Road to Peace*; Keeran, "National Groups"; Antler, "Between Culture and Politics," esp. 267–73; Jennifer Young, "Emma Lazarus Clubs and the Fight for Black Women's Freedom," paper presented at "Di Linke: The Yiddish Immigrant Left from the Popular Front to the Cold War," online conference, Cornell University, December 6–10, 2020. On AL, see Vials, *Haunted by Hitler*, 49 (statistic), 53–57; Lynn, "Antinazism," 31; Braskén, "Aid the Victims of German Fascism!"; Garlid, "Minneapolis Unit"; Copsey, "Communists," 191–97.
[37] Vials, "Red Feminists," n.p.