

**Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War:
Transnational Activism, Networks, and Solidarity in the 1930s**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2014

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ABSTRACT

Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War: Transnational Activism, Networks, and Solidarity in the 1930s

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This dissertation shows that during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) diverse Cubans organized to support the Spanish Second Republic, overcoming differences to coalesce around a movement they defined as antifascism. Hundreds of Cuban volunteers—more than from any other Latin American country—traveled to Spain to fight for the Republic in both the International Brigades and the regular Republican forces, to provide medical care, and to serve in other support roles; children, women, and men back home worked together to raise substantial monetary and material aid for Spanish children during the war; and longstanding groups on the island including black associations, Freemasons, anarchists, and the Communist Party leveraged organizational and publishing resources to raise awareness, garner support, fund, and otherwise assist the cause. The dissertation studies Cuban antifascist individuals, campaigns, organizations, and networks operating transnationally to help the Spanish Republic, contextualizing these efforts in Cuba’s internal struggles of the 1930s. It argues that both transnational solidarity and domestic concerns defined Cuban antifascism. First, Cubans confronting crises of democracy at home and in Spain believed fascism threatened them directly. Citing examples in Ethiopia, China, Europe, and Latin America, Cuban antifascists—like many others—feared a worldwide menace posed by fascism’s spread. Second, despite their recent anticolonial struggle against Spain, Cubans cared deeply about its fate for reasons of personal, familial, and cultural affinity. They interpreted the Republic as a “new” Spain representative of liberation and the Nationalists as seeking return to the “old” Spain of colonial oppression. Third, pro-Republican Cubans

defined antifascism in Cuban terms. People of many different backgrounds and views united around a definition of antifascism closely related to their shared domestic political goals: freedom from strongman governance, independence from neocolonial control, and attainment of economic and social justice. Radical, moderate, and even largely nonpolitical individuals and groups in Cuba found in antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic a rallying cry with broad appeal that allowed them to strengthen solidarity at home and abroad. Cubans defined antifascism in both negative and positive terms, as a movement against fascism but also toward unity, democracy, sovereignty, and justice.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I begin by expressing my gratitude for the financial support that made this project possible. Columbia University's Richard Hofstadter Faculty Fellowship and Teaching Scholars Fellowship, as well as a Summer Research Field Grant from the University's Institute of Latin American Studies, funded my doctoral work. Additionally, the United States Department of Education supported me with a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship and, most significantly, a Javits Fellowship for four years. It is my hope that the U.S. federal government will continue to support graduate work at the level which I enjoyed.

Researching in Spain and Cuba, I received helpful assistance from many librarians, archivists, and fellow scholars. I am particularly grateful to Fernando Rovetta Klyver of the Centro de Estudios y Documentación de las Brigadas Internacionales at Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha in Albacete, Spain, and to Ana Suárez Díaz of the Centro Juan Marinello in Havana, Cuba for their extraordinary hospitality and generosity.

I am tremendously thankful for the instruction, mentorship, and friendship of my teachers and advisors at Columbia, including Chris Brown, Eric Foner, Natasha Lightfoot, Nara Milanich, and particularly those with whom I worked most closely: John Coatsworth, Jose Moya, Pablo Piccato, and Caterina Pizzigoni. Those from other fields of history were generous enough nonetheless to take an interest in my work and my scholarly development; those in Latin American history made up the most accomplished, supportive, engaging, and fun advising team a graduate student in the field could hope for. To all of them I extend my sincerest thanks. Also at Columbia I was fortunate to be supported in my academic endeavors, professional development, and day-to-day necessities by the dedicated administrative staff of the History Department, excellent librarians, the interdisciplinary Institute of Latin American Studies, an innovative

teaching center, an effective career services office, and all the other hardworking staff of the university. I appreciate the efforts of all these people. And I am thankful to have been part of a collegial community of graduate students in history and related fields at Columbia. For friendship and mutual aid I am particularly grateful to fellow history graduate students Carolyn Arena, Hannah Barker, Senia Barragán, Eric Frith, Toby Harper, Julia del Palacio, Elizabeth Schwall, and Andy Whitford.

I would not have entered a doctoral program in history were it not for the encouragement of three historians during my final undergraduate year and the three years following my graduation from college. During this time I figured out what I wanted to be when I grew up and came, comfortably, back to my love of history that had been there all along. Jennifer Klein helped me to connect my academic interests to professional work in activism, and then to bring the valuable experiences of that work back to the academy. Gil Joseph demonstrated to me that academic eminence and sincere kindness need not be mutually exclusive—a realization my mentors at Columbia would later reinforce—and helped coax me back from the brink of law school. It was Seth Fein whose extraordinary commitment to teaching and advising most changed the course of my trajectory. Though I was already a history major when I met Seth at the beginning of my senior year, I did not become an historian until I began to work with him. So compelling was the enthusiasm of his intellectual engagement with history and with his students that I was inspired by his example to pursue a Ph.D. in history. I cannot thank him enough.

I wish also to thank all the many superb teachers I learned with during my primary education. From the earliest age onward, I was fortunate to have teachers who recognized and nurtured my loves of history and of writing, as well as many other endeavors. In particular, I

thank Robin L. Crawford, K. Kelly Wise, and the late William Thomas of Phillips Academy Andover for leading me past the limits I imagined for myself.

I thank all of my family and friends—too numerous to name individually here—for their love, support, and encouragement. In particular, I am grateful to my dear friends Alayna Michelle Stone Hanson and Emily Cardy and especially to my mother for providing help with childcare during my final intense eight months of dissertation writing as a new mom. I am tremendously appreciative of my husband Kevin Mercik for more than I can possibly summarize—our love, our partnership, and our home form the sturdy foundation upon which I am able to build scholarly and professional success. Our delightful daughter Bridget Aurore Mercik was born in the same year as this dissertation and obligingly shared her mother’s attention with her textual sibling. Finally, I dedicate this capstone of my many years in school to my parents, Richard and Karen Lambe, who—in addition to being truly wonderful parents—have been exceptionally generous in every possible way in their support of my education.

Thank you, all.

INTRODUCTION

Transnational Activism, Networks, and Solidarity

During the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) diverse Cubans organized to support the Spanish Second Republic, overcoming differences to coalesce around a movement they defined as antifascism. Hundreds of Cuban volunteers traveled to Spain to fight for the Republic in both the International Brigades and the regular Republican forces, to provide medical care, and to serve in other support roles; children, women, and men back home worked together to raise substantial monetary and material aid for Spanish children during the war; and longstanding groups on the island including black associations, Freemasons, anarchists, and the Communist Party leveraged organizational and publishing resources to raise awareness, garner support, fund, and otherwise assist the cause. Though committed to political goals at home, Cuban antifascist activists made the choice to extend their activism beyond the island’s shores, to participate in another nation’s war—they believed that the Republican cause and their domestic goals were interconnected parts of a worldwide fight against fascism. In this study, we examine Cuban antifascist individuals, campaigns, organizations, and networks operating transnationally to help the Spanish Republic, contextualizing these efforts in Cuba’s domestic struggles of the 1930s. We pose broad questions relevant to understanding transnational activism, networks, and solidarity generally: How and why do non-state actors organized politically in their own country connect with and support like-minded activists of other nationalities? How and why do they interpret domestic political challenges as part of larger international problems?

During the first half of the 1930s, just a few decades after Cuba won its independence from Spanish colonialism, both Spain and Cuba entered into hard-won democratic experiments. Spain transitioned from monarchy to the Second Republic in 1931, 58 years after the

establishment of the First Republic. Spain had suffered a crisis of monarchy in the late 1860s and the short-lived First Republic was declared in 1873. A lack of national unity doomed the experiment, and the monarchy was restored in 1875. At the turn of the century, after several decades of Cuban independence struggles, Spain lost its remaining colonies—the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba—in war with the United States, a conflict known to U.S. students of history as the Spanish-American War. Following World War I, during which it remained neutral, Spain suffered from increasing unrest. The country had enjoyed some prosperity during the war years due to increased trade, but these gains quickly disappeared at war's end. Adding military insult to economic injury, the country suffered defeat in war in Morocco in 1921. From 1923 to 1930 strongman rule under General Miguel Primo de Rivera, who enjoyed the support of the king and the military, saw attempts at social and economic changes produce some successes but also further discontent. The Great Depression hit Spain hard. Primo de Rivera resigned as prime minister in January 1930 and, after municipal elections in which Republicans won a number of majorities, King Alfonso XIII, in power since 1902, abdicated and left the country in April 1931. Upon the king's departure, a coalition of moderates and leftists declared the Second Republic. The Republic's constitution of 1931 guaranteed a number of new rights, severely restricted the special privileges of the Catholic Church and traditional nobility, and paved the way for significant reforms. These progressive reforms of the Republican government under moderate liberal Manuel Azaña, combined with popular unrest, pushed many political, economic, and religious elites to the right. Meanwhile, many on the left felt that the Azaña government failed to go far enough in addressing Spain's ills. The embattled leader lost power in September 1933 (though he would serve as Prime Minister again in 1936). Over the next few years, violence increased as right and left struggled to control the Spanish government. Neither right nor left

constituted a unified, uniform block—fighting among factions on both sides increased disturbance to the country. Nevertheless, left and right coalesced into two diverse alliances and faced off against one another. Early in 1936 the Popular Front, formed the year prior by leftist and moderate Republicans, defeated the right's National Front in elections. Their victory was short lived, however, as political disunity, widespread violence, and economic troubles seriously destabilized the new government.

Then right-wing Nationalists rose up in military insurrection, beginning in Morocco, against those loyal to the Republican government on 17 July 1936, sparking civil war. Germany and Italy quickly offered aid to the Nationalists, and right-wing forces, unifying behind General Francisco Franco, soon overwhelmed those loyal to the government in a number of key regions of Spain. Republicans hoped for aid from Western democracies, but were disappointed when Britain, France, the United States, and others chose to follow the Non-Intervention Agreement (1936) barring partisan foreign participation in the Spanish conflict in the belief that by so doing they might avoid larger war in Europe. The Republican side did receive aid from Mexico¹ and, more significantly, the Soviet Union, which sent war materiel and approximately 2,000 men. However, this assistance was no match for that of the Germans and Italians to the Nationalists, in violation of non-intervention, which is widely credited with winning the war for Franco's forces (along with the fact that the Nationalist side included most of the formal military, and was thus better trained and better equipped even before receiving foreign aid). Italy sent military planes and 100,000 soldiers to Spain; Germany contributed training, weaponry, and bombers.

¹ The Mexican government sent weapons and ammunition to the Spanish Republic, and permitted Mexicans who wished to volunteer in Spain to do so with official consent. During the conflict it gave asylum to 500 Spanish war orphans. After Republican defeat Mexico took in many Republican refugees and never recognized the Franco government, maintaining official diplomatic ties with the Republican government in exile until 1977. Gerold Gino Baumann, *Los voluntarios latinoamericanos en la Guerra Civil Española* (Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2009), 22, 120.

Furthermore, unlike the Soviet Union, Germany and Italy updated, repaired, and continued to supply war materiel throughout the conflict, leaving the Nationalists far better equipped than their opponents. German and Italian intervention caused civilian casualties to reach unprecedented levels during the conflict due in large part to the bombing of population centers. Fascist air attacks on civilians were famously commemorated by Pablo Picasso in his painting *Guernica* (1937). It is estimated that more than 580,000 people died in the Spanish Civil War from bombings, executions, malnourishment, disease, and battle.

The immediate causes of the conflict were largely domestic Spanish concerns: frustration and anger directed at traditional power holders—the monarchy, the military, the Catholic Church, and an oligarchic nobility—as well as an ascendant capitalist class; the need for land reform in a country that was still largely agricultural; militant organizing by both peasants and industrial workers in response to extreme economic inequity; and a general sense of discontent with a country weighed down by tradition and perceived by many as anti-modern and backward, “barely touched by the industrial and liberal revolution that succeeded in transforming the old Europe.”² Many participants and observers, however, interpreted the struggle in international terms as one of antifascists (the Republicans or “loyalists”—those loyal to the elected government) against fascists (the Nationalists or “rebels”). As one scholar puts it, the conflict “was in many ways a homegrown struggle,” but “it was also a reflection of the struggle between the defenders and critics of modernity, which, having originated in the late nineteenth century, threatened during the 1920s and 1930s to destabilize all of Europe.”³ The struggle was in fact

² Pierre Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, Tony White, trans. (1961; Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 31–42.

³ Fredrick B. Pike, “The Background to the Civil War in Spain and the U.S. Response to the War,” in *The Spanish Civil War, 1936–39: American Hemispheric Perspectives*, 5.

much more complex than a dichotomy of political left vs. right seems to suggest, with disunity plaguing the factions on both sides of the war, for example, and Spanish political actors unable to be classified into neat categories of left and right. Throughout the course of this study, we will come to understand that in fact fascism and antifascism were categories broadly defined, encompassing diverse ideas concerning not only Spanish realities but also Cuban ones.

During the years preceding the Spanish Civil War Cubans struggled to defeat strongman president Gerardo Machado, whom some called the “Tropical Mussolini.” The era from 1925 to 1933 of Machado’s leadership, known as the *Machadato*, in which he transformed from an elected president into a repressive strongman changed the island’s political arena. Activists—some professionals and elite intellectuals, others from poor and working-class backgrounds—led the *clases populares* (popular classes) in sustained rebellion that achieved Machado’s downfall but did not stop there. Although Machado was ousted from the Cuban presidency in August 1933, the movement made up of diverse individuals and groups organized against him continued working for a “new Cuba,” one they hoped would be characterized by freedom from both strongman and U.S. control, as well as economic and social progress. They protested against the leadership of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes—plucked out of political obscurity and made president by U.S. ambassador Sumner Welles following Machado’s departure—whose extremely brief period in office brought little improvement of any kind. Then, during the government of Ramón Grau San Martín—a university professor and liberal moderate who led Cuba from September 1933 to January 1934—factions within both elite and popular Cuban political sectors jockeyed for control. Grau oversaw the partial implementation of an agenda that brought some substantive progressive change to the island including important social and economic reforms and the unilateral abrogation of the Platt Amendment that had codified U.S. neocolonialism in the Cuban

constitution since the beginning of the twentieth century. His government of one hundred days achieved important goals in the struggle for Cuban democracy and sovereignty, achievements that addressed longstanding grievances and raised expectations of further political, economic, and social progress. Nevertheless, many remained unhappy. Cuba staggered under the weight of global economic crisis, making some of Grau's reforms meaningless in their immediate practical application. Additionally, articulated defiance of U.S. influence over the island in the form of abrogation of the Platt Amendment did not cause that influence suddenly to vanish. Furthermore, the president attempted to coordinate progress in a political arena characterized by factionalism that was often bitter, vicious, and even violent. Members of the island's old political elite saw Grau as excessively radical; radicals believed he was too moderate; and powerful U.S. interests, both political and economic, felt threatened by his government's reform agenda. Disunity, which U.S. Ambassador Welles fostered, weakened the movement for change on the island.

Meanwhile, Fulgencio Batista—an army sergeant who had led the September 1933 “Sergeants’ Revolt” that allied with anti-Céspedes activists—began to take advantage of the political chaos to build his power. Welles encouraged Batista and helped form a coalition to support him. In January 1934 Batista withdrew the allegiance of the armed forces from Grau. Carlos Mendieta took over the government, and the United States gave him official recognition within days. From this point until 1940 when he was elected as president, Batista ruled Cuba behind a series of presidents whom he controlled—he ousted them when they disobeyed him. Many of those who had fought against Machado turned their ire toward the new strongman. The years 1934 and 1935 witnessed political, labor, and popular activism surge on the island. New political organizations formed. Grau and his reformers established the Partido Revolucionario Cubano – Auténtico (“Authentic” Cuban Revolutionary Party), while revolutionaries under the

leadership of Antonio Guiteras, formerly Grau's minister of government, formed Joven Cuba (Young Cuba), a clandestine radical group—both opposed Batista. Labor unions struck over one hundred times, student dissidents organized, and political demonstrations, direct action, and violence became common. Batista met continued activism with force. He—and the elite interests, domestic and foreign, that supported him—saw his role first and foremost as the enforcer of order. When the forces of unrest that had been fighting since the *Machadato* seemed to culminate in a general strike in March 1935, Batista reacted swiftly and ruthlessly.

The *Pax Batistiana* began in March 1935 with the collapse of the general strike. In the eyes of observers at the time and scholars looking back, the general strike of March 1935 represented the culmination of the revolutionary fight of the *Machadato*. Broken by the unleashing of brutal dictatorial repression it ended in defeat, disorganization, disillusionment, and, for some activists, death. Joven Cuba leader Antonio Guiteras was among those killed in the strike's aftermath by the military forces Batista controlled. Others were arrested or fled into exile. Scholars of Cuban history have interpreted the general strike as an endpoint. Louis A. Pérez, Jr. calls it “the last revolutionary surge of the first republican generation.” Batista's power increased, Pérez asserts, as he “restored order and tranquility.” And his “opponents never recovered. The tempest of the decade has spent itself. A respite from revolutionary activity settled over the island, due principally to the exhaustion of the passions and depletion in the ranks.”⁴ Similarly, Samuel Farber credits the “intense repression and political reaction that followed the defeat of the March 1935 general strike” with causing “defeat and demoralization of

⁴ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Between Reform and Revolution*, Third Edition (1988; New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 210–211.

the students, the working class, and other revolutionary forces.”⁵ Efrén Córdova, focusing on organized labor, notes that a “certain languor” came over the island’s workers, “some exhausted and others discouraged, after several years of almost continuous agitation.”⁶ Robert Whitney states: “After the general strike of 1935, the radical opposition entered a period of defeat and ideological crisis.” Summarizing the endpoint argument, he writes: “In many ways the events of early 1935 marked the end of an era in Cuban politics.”⁷ In these narratives, the failure in March 1935 marks a nearly complete rupture. A widely-held belief in the effective end of political activism on the island for an extended time after March 1935 approaches consensus, notwithstanding those scholars who see the Cuban revolution of 1933 as a “prologue” or “precursor” to the Cuban Revolution of 1959, a thesis that implies some continuity.⁸ Political activists’ losses were immense, and Batista skillfully employed a mixture of severe repression and reformist concessions to further weaken them. One scholar calls the subsequent period “the silent, unheroic years” of Cuba’s history.⁹

Yet out of this context grew Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic. The motivation driving the movement in support of these causes had three central components. First, fascism threatened Cuba directly. Cubans characterized fascism broadly as consisting of

⁵ Samuel Farber, *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, 1933–1960: A Political Sociology from Machado to Castro* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1976), 79–80.

⁶ Efrén Córdova, *Clase trabajadora y movimiento sindical en Cuba* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1995), 219.

⁷ Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920–1940* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 140.

⁸ Luis E. Aguilar, *Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972); Lionel Soto, *La revolución precursora de 1933* (Havana: Editorial Si-Mar, 1995).

⁹ Alistair Hennessy, “Cuba,” in *The Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939: American Hemispheric Perspectives*, Mark Falcoff and Fredrick B. Pike, eds. (Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 102.

many different tendencies: tyrannical power derived from violence, reactionary conservatism, social and cultural regression, economic exploitation, imperialist and enslaving impulses, xenophobic and racist nationalisms, and, in Catholic countries such as Spain, clerical overreach reminiscent of the Inquisition. Citing examples beyond Spain in Ethiopia, China, Europe, and Latin America, Cuban antifascists feared a worldwide menace posed by fascism's spread. In fact, German and Italian agents traveled throughout Latin America during the 1930s seeking economic and political opportunities for their regimes, and some leaders and activists in the region welcomed their presence. The Spanish Falange—a fascist movement begun in 1933—and other groups favoring the Spanish Nationalists operated on the island and enjoyed influence in the region, as well, which Cuban antifascists decried. Also, many characterized Latin American strongman governments themselves as fascistic, comparing, for example, Machado to Mussolini and Batista to Franco. Second, despite their recent anticolonial struggle against Spain, Cubans cared deeply about its fate for reasons of personal, familial, and cultural affinity. A sense of transnational Spanish-Cuban identity made Cubans feel as though they were naturally part of the Spanish struggle. Many Cubans still referred to Spain as “the motherland,” but hoped the Republic would bring fraternal relations based on newfound equality. Cuban antifascists interpreted the Republic as a “new Spain” representative of liberation and the Nationalists as seeking return to the “old Spain” of colonial rule marked by exploitation and oppression. Domestic concerns constituted the third motivation: Pro-Republican Cuban activists defined antifascism in Cuban terms. Beyond comparing their own leaders to specific European fascists, they came together around a broad definition of antifascism closely related to their shared political goals on the island: freedom from strongman governance, independence from neocolonial control, and attainment of economic and social justice. Radical, moderate, and even

largely nonpolitical individuals and groups in Cuba found in antifascism and support for the Republic a rallying cry with broad appeal that allowed them to strengthen solidarity at home and abroad. Cubans defined antifascism in both negative and positive terms, as a movement against fascism but also toward unity, sovereignty, justice, and a better future for Cuba and the world.

Connected in this way to domestic concerns, Cuban antifascism constituted a continuity of popular struggle through the latter half of the 1930s, a period in the island's history which scholars have argued was devoid of activism. In the paradigm of the *Pax Batistiana*, antifascism in an anomaly that demands explanation. The undeniable appearance of antifascism as a popular cause on the island during the period suggests that the rupture in activism was not so complete. To fit Cuban antifascism into the narrative of rupture, scholars acknowledge it, but characterize the movement as located outside of Cuban political activism. They base their argument for this characterization on three elements. First, they claim that support for the Spanish Republic took place on foreign soil, in the case of volunteers who traveled to Spain, and was therefore separate from domestic concerns. Discussing the period following March 1935, Pérez states that the island's activists were either dead, went into exile, or "departed Cuba to carry the banner of revolution to other lands, most notably, Spain."¹⁰ Farber summarizes this thesis with a quotation by a friend of Cuban political activist and Spanish Civil War casualty Pablo de la Torriente Brau—the subject, along with his wife and fellow activist Teresa "Teté" Casuso, of our first chapter. Looking back in 1949, Torriente's friend said of him, "if in Cuba there had been a glimmer of any possibility of renewing the struggle initiated years before, without a doubt he would have flown to Cuba. But in 1936, Cuba was a cemetery of illusions and revolutionary

¹⁰ Pérez, Cuba: *Between Reform and Revolution*, 211.

plans.”¹¹ This thesis posits that activists made the choice to support the Spanish Republic *instead of* continuing the Cuban struggle. Second, scholars assert that antifascism constituted an external agenda unconnected to domestic issues. Whitney, for example, introduces antifascism on the island as a project of the Communist International (Comintern). Following the Comintern’s Seventh Congress in 1935, its Popular Front policy directed the Cuban Communist Party to form antifascist partnerships. Within this well-known context of the international Popular Front, it is easy to assume that the Party was the only driver of the antifascist movement on the island. Accounts produced in post-Revolutionary socialist Cuba tend to reinforce the idea that the Communist Party was solely—or at least largely—responsible for Cuban antifascism.¹² Third, scholars assess Cuban antifascism as liberal and mainstream and therefore separate from the radical movements that preceded it.¹³ Related to the assertion that a Communist-dominated movement of antifascist activists engaged in broad-based coalition-building inclusive of moderates during the Popular Front era, this thesis glosses over the political complexities of Cuba’s late 1930s, projecting backward from the officially sanctioned antifascism of World War II during which Batista—as an elected president partnered with the Communist Party and eager for the continued support of the Roosevelt administration—brought Cuba into the war on the side of the Allies. Scholars assert all three elements of this argument briefly, superficially, and in passing. The rupture narrative of the *Pax Batistiana* does not include space for genuine domestic Cuban activism in the years immediately following the March 1935 general strike.

¹¹ Guillermo Martínez Marquez quoted in Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 82–83.

¹² Alberto Alfonso Bello and Juan Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España: Una gloriosa página de internacionalismo* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990); Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba, *Cuba y la defensa de la República Española (1936–1939)* (Havana: Editora Política, 1981).

¹³ Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 88.

The research presented in this study challenges all three elements of the rupture argument's interpretation of Cuban antifascism. It shows that support for the Republic took place on the island and in Cuban exile communities as well as in Spain, and that Cuban antifascism included people and groups of diverse political viewpoints and ideologies from moderate to radical, including but not exclusively Communists. In our first chapter—which follows Pablo de la Torriente Brau and Teté Casuso as examples of activist continuity across Cuba's 1930s, through the anti-Machado and anti-Batista struggles, into political exile after the March 1935 strike, and then into the early months of the Spanish Civil War, setting the stage for the subsequent chapters dealing with the war years—we see that the idea of leaving Cuba for the Spanish Republican fight expressed by Torriente's friend (and, in fact, by Torriente himself) was not considered by contemporaries so much an either-or decision as an opportunity for continuity. Throughout our study, we see Cubans interpreting antifascism as not only closely connected to the island's domestic struggle but also in fact part of or the same as that struggle. This assertion was consistent across diverse individuals and groups with disparate ideas concerning what exactly antifascism and the Cuban domestic struggle were. That diverse individuals and groups wrestled to define and promote antifascism challenges the second and third elements of the rupture narrative's argument concerning the movement. Not seeking to minimize the important part played by the Communist Party in Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic, we include the Communists' role not only in coordinating volunteers, both Communists and non-Communists, to cross the Atlantic (Chapter 2) but also in promoting antifascism on the island (Chapter 7). However, we uncover a much broader and more diverse Cuban antifascist movement beyond the Party, one that—years before the mainstream antifascist consensus of World War II—included anticommunists as well as those of other political beliefs and many who

saw themselves as largely nonpolitical. Men, women, and children of different socioeconomic levels and ethnicities from all over the island and the Cuban exile communities participated. Union members and university students, professionals and laborers, tradesmen and intellectuals, even boxers, baseball players, and musicians got involved in antifascist activism. Some were willing to go to Spain and take up arms, while others who traveled there provided support in nonviolent roles. Some who stayed on the island focused on work with a broad humanistic appeal, while others devoted themselves to partisan activism. Throughout our study, we consider the diversity of Cubans who identified themselves as antifascists. Examining the widely popular Cuban efforts to aid Spanish children during the war (Chapter 3), we analyze how diverse pro-Republican activists organized a charitable campaign intended to attract nonpartisan Cubans to support the antifascist cause. Exploring antifascism among the island's black activists (Chapter 4), Freemasons (Chapter 5), and anarchists (Chapter 6), we see how groups with disparate goals and values joined the movement, connected it to the missions of their organizations, and interpreted it as vital to both domestic and international struggles. Following our discussion of the Spanish Civil War years, our conclusion begins by considering the liberal and mainstream antifascism of the World War II years, exploring how it grew out of the radical activism that preceded it and the extent to which Cuban activist continuity existed even after Spanish Republican defeat in 1939. Following the continuity further, our conclusion examines the significance of 1930s Cuban antifascism for the 1959 Cuban Revolution.

Historical actors of the Cuban 1930s saw the general strike of March 1935 as an important turning point, rather than an endpoint. As we will see throughout our study, activists recognized the failure of the strike as a significant loss, one that left many feeling hopeless and helpless, and about which they thought, debated, and wrote for years afterward. It certainly did

constitute a harsh defeat, and evidence of the setbacks suffered by Cuban activists is solid. We do not seek to overturn, therefore, but rather to temper the traditional argument concerning the rupture in activism during the *Pax Batistiana*. A significant rupture did take place, but there remained more continuity than the above-referenced works have acknowledged. Two questions about this continuity frame many of the considerations of this study: How can we see the continuity? And how did the continuity function? The first is a methodological question; the second inspires the bulk of our analysis.

To see the continuity of Cuban activism after March 1935, we must shift the scale of analysis. Scholars build their interpretation of the *Pax Batistiana* as a rupture in Cuban activism on analysis of the island's domestic political arena. They consider the interaction of top activist leaders, such as Guiteras, and their organizations with key players in formal government (whether electoral or strongman), such as Grau and Batista, and their parties and bases of support. The scale at which they study politics is, therefore, at the national level; though acknowledging both, they do not consider in depth the everyday individual and grassroots level or the international level. At the national scale of analysis, we find activists and dissatisfied Cubans generally lumped into the faceless *clases populares* and global events considered in passing as external influences either unavoidably forced upon Cubans lacking effective agency to engage them or largely unconnected to the island's domestic situation. This scale of political analysis is appropriate for nation-specific studies of Cuban history, but it has the effect of placing the activism of Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic in an analytical blind spot. We study the antifascist activism of the late 1930s at two other scales: at the intimate, personal and interpersonal level and at the global level. Both help us to see the continuity in activism that is not as apparent at the national level.

Many of the same individuals who were activists in the struggle against Machado, Batista, and U.S. neocolonialism up through March 1935 became antifascist activists. We follow the trajectory of Torriente and Casuso across the 1930s as two important examples of this personal and interpersonal continuity; we will encounter many other individual examples along the way. We will see, therefore, how personal resilience is a vital component of activist continuity. The ability of many individuals to transcend the disillusionment of defeat is necessary for the continuation of a movement after the type of dramatic setback Cuban activists experienced in 1935. Understanding the day-to-day work of activism is important, too—oftentimes, persevering as an activist meant simply overcoming exhaustion, fear, and despair and continuing each day to do the work of organizing. An intimate scale of analysis allows us to examine the personal resilience and commitment as well as the daily work of numerous activists that sustain a movement after a defeat.

We can see continuity of activism across the 1930s by studying how individuals persisted, relying upon the same personal commitment, interpersonal relationships, organizational affiliations, and activist networks that they had in 1935 and before. Cuban activists seized upon antifascism and the Spanish Civil War as opportunities to regroup, reorganize, and continue working. For individual Cuban activists, moving from the anti-Machado and anti-Batista struggles into antifascism led to reflection on and articulation of continuity between causes. Many activists wrestled with expressing how and why they interpreted antifascism as aligned with Cuba's domestic struggle. Organizations, too, sought to connect their goals and values with those of antifascism; each group we study construed antifascism's aims differently based on that group's philosophy or ideology, yet all connected around the Spanish Republican cause. We will consider the arguments Cuban individuals and groups made expressing their support for the

Spanish Republic and the ways in which they saw antifascism as part of their mission. Often related to their membership in groups were activist individuals' interpersonal relationships and organizational connections, links through which they could achieve organizing work for the antifascist cause. In addition to studying individuals and groups, therefore, we examine Cuban antifascist networks. Antifascist individuals and groups used and strengthened during the Spanish Civil War the interpersonal and institutional networks they had formed during the *Machadato* or earlier.

Employing different scales to study the personal and transnational levels of Cuban activist continuity, we see that the two are closely connected. Cuban individuals, groups, and networks were transnational. Many Cubans had transnational identities. Individuals of various socioeconomic backgrounds traveled to other countries in search of work, for education, to reunite with family, or when fleeing political persecution. Migratory lives were common, and even those who never left the island were likely to come in contact regularly with people from Spain, Haiti, Jamaica, China, the United States, Mexico, and elsewhere.¹⁴ In this context, individuals had transnational experiences and built transnational connections. As we consider the trajectories of Torriente and Casuso in our first chapter, we will see transnational identities, migration, and connections at work in two individual lives and an interpersonal relationship. Studying Cuban volunteers in Spain and the Cuban campaign to aid Spanish children, we will examine further how transnational lives and links shaped Cuban support for the Republic—how, for example, Cubans who had lived in New York played a special role as linguistic and cultural translators in Spain, or how fundraising appeals played upon a Cuban sense of shared blood with Spanish war victims. Organizations, also, existed transnationally. All four of the groups we

¹⁴ Gladys Alonso and Ernesto Chávez Alvarez, eds., *Memorias inéditas del censo de 1931* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978), 74.

consider as part of the island's antifascist movement had close ties with brethren in other countries, especially Spain, the United States, and Mexico. Freemasons, anarchists, and the Communist Party all engaged in regular exchange with their counterparts in these countries—Communists interacted, in addition, with the Soviet Union and, in the Spanish Civil War years, France. The black Cuban intellectuals and activists whose associations participated in antifascism identified as part of the African diaspora, connecting with African Americans and other people of African descent, as well as wrestling with their cultural connections—as Cubans—to Spain. As each of these groups committed to antifascism and supporting the Spanish Republic, it did so within its particular transnational context. Cuban support for the Republicans involved transnational exchange of people, material, ideas, and organizations.

We argue, therefore, that Cuban antifascism and pro-Republican activism constituted a transnational movement. Though deeply rooted in the island's own political struggles it grew also around longstanding connections with other countries, especially Spain and the United States, and with particular locales, such as Catalonia and New York City. What is a transnational movement and how do we study it? At the most basic level, it is a coordinated organizing effort by activists and groups with a unifying purpose that is located in multiple countries and characterized by people, material, and ideas, and organizations traveling and communicating between nations. To study the Cuban antifascist and pro-Republican movement, we consider its components: the activists and groups, the unifying purpose they articulated, the multiple locations in which they operated, and the transnational networks that facilitated exchange. Interplay between the intimate scale of individuals and groups and the larger scale of movement across borders and oceans highlights an element essential to understanding the concept of the transnational: the impact of each locale on the others. Exchange between places leaves each

changed, and by moving between nations, a person or an idea both impacts the new locale and is altered by it. Studying Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic as a transnational movement, for instance, we note that Cuban exiles living in the United States who then traveled to Spain had a particular cultural identity forged by their experience that gave them unique opportunities and advantages during the conflict. We see that Spanish antifascist arguments took on a distinctly Cuban character on the island, one often shaped by longstanding connections the island had with Spain and the United States. To antifascist Cubans, as we have noted for example, Spanish Nationalists who rebelled against the Republic represented the “old Spain” that had colonized Cuba and dominated it for centuries, while the Republic represented a “new Spain” that was Cuba’s equal—in other words, antifascism melded with Cuban anticolonialism. We observe the ways in which organizational and ideological solidarities overlapped and interacted with solidarities based on nationality and culture as Cuban antifascist groups connected with their counterparts in other countries in their efforts to support the Spanish Republicans. In order to analyze a transnational movement, these examples demonstrate, our method of analysis must account for the interaction between people, places, ideas, organizations, and networks.

One methodological tool we employ is prosopography. Prosopography—group or collective biography—investigates “a group of actors in history by means of a collective study of their lives,” posing “questions about who rather than what.” It comprises both statistical analysis of the group’s characteristics and a collection of biographical case studies or “personal vignettes” about the individuals in the group.¹⁵ Each of these two parts presents relevant information about the group of individuals at a different scale, from the statistical overview to the intimate portrait.

¹⁵ Lawrence Stone, “Prosopography,” *Daedalus* 100, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 46, 51–53.

Both parts of prosopographic analysis require the availability of biographical data on a group of individuals; as a result, many studies utilizing this methodology focus on elites about whom records of such data exist. In this study, however, systematic records kept by Communists on both Communist and non-Communist members of the International Brigades make possible a statistical analysis in Chapter 2 of a sample of the Cuban volunteers in Spain even though many were non-elite. The limitations of the available biographical data make the sample an imperfect one, but with careful acknowledgement of these limitations the analysis is nonetheless extremely valuable. Material from many other sources makes possible biographical case studies of Cuban antifascists found throughout this study, personal vignettes that enrich the narrative and exemplify many of our assertions. The ability to conduct this type of analysis of diverse political activists including non-elites within a movement presents an exciting opportunity to wrestle with how movements function at the level of individual participants.

One of the principal functions of prosopography as a methodology is “to make sense of political action.” Political prosopography considers the substantial influence individual identity and personal motivation have over political action. In the case of prosopography of elite political actors, a behind-the-scenes look at politics has tended to reveal self-interested motivation based on economic concerns and kinship ties. Thus elite prosopography has often “reflected a deeply pessimistic attitude toward human affairs,” resulting in a simplistic and cynical assessment of individual motivation by focusing too much on self-interest as a driver of political action.¹⁶ In the case of antifascism and pro-Republican efforts during the Spanish Civil War, assessments of individual motivation behind political action have often swung too far in the opposite direction. Some degree of skepticism—if not cynicism—is necessary as a corrective to the overly

¹⁶ Stone, “Prosopography,” 46–79; John Marshall Carter, “Prosopography as a Teaching Tool: Understanding the Essence of Power,” *The Clearing House* 58, no. 1 (September 1984): 14–17.

simplistic narrative of “the Good Fight” found in the many celebratory accounts that exist of international antifascist involvement. By exploring the myriad motivations for Cuban participation based in diverse identities, this study tempers such idealistic assessments. A belief that the causes of the Spanish Republic and antifascism represented the good and that the fight for these causes was the fight for a better world was sincere and a strong motivation for many participants that should not be underestimated. We will see ample evidence of this idealism and sincerity throughout our study. However, the diverse motivations of individuals and groups in the struggle were much more complex—including personal, financial, professional, even criminal reasons for participation, in addition to political ones—as our biographical portraits illustrate. To understand the Cuban antifascist and pro-Republican movement fully, acknowledging the breadth of its diversity, we must account for this complexity of motivation. Studying activists at the intimate, personal, individual level and employing the technique of prosopography facilitates this accounting.

Examining diversity within the movement and its transnational nature, how do we define it as a single, coherent, and Cuban movement? How did diverse Cuban individuals and groups in various locations across multiple countries define themselves as antifascist and pro-Republican, devoting their work and resources to a common cause and coalescing around a shared movement? The key to answering these questions is the concept of solidarity. Diverse participants in the movement defined shared interests in the fights against Spanish Nationalists and international fascism, commonalities that brought them together with others, even with those who had different end goals in mind or who were traditionally their rivals. The cause of the Spanish Republic and the fight against the fascist threat, both international and domestic, combined in an antifascist rallying cry that brought disparate Cubans together: the child in a small town on the

island who sent in her meager savings to help her Spanish brothers and sisters, the doctor in exile in New York inspired by U.S. volunteers to travel to Spain and provide medical services, the Havana anarchist proud of the struggle being waged by his comrades in Catalonia, the woman widowed by a Spanish Nationalist bullet who struggled to continue working for the cause of the Republic in the face of personal tragedy, the Freemason reacting in fear and anger to his brotherhood and its values being attacked by Spanish Nationalists, the black Communist intellectual who saw in Spain an opportunity to fight for the end of both racial and class oppression, and so many others identified as part of the movement. A shared sense of solidarity did not result in perfect unity, as we will see clearly, nor in homogeneity of ideology, methods, goals, or values; it did, however, bring together diverse Cubans in a single, coherent movement composed of many parts.

Since we study disparate parts of this movement, it is useful to define how it constituted a single, coherent whole. The field of social movement studies lends us a useful delineation of the elements of a movement, which we can apply to our case. Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic was characterized by 1) a “sustained campaign of claim making” on behalf of the Republic and against international fascism by Cubans who related these claims to domestic concerns; 2) an “array of public performances” asserting these claims, including pro-Republican and antifascist editorials, manifestos, creative expressions such as poetry and illustrations, assemblies, demonstrations, radio broadcasts, charitable efforts, and voyages to Spain in support of the cause; 3) “repeated public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment” by participating individuals and organizations on the island and abroad, including presentations of the cause as respectable and legitimate, and assertions of solidarity and widespread popular support; and 4) the “organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these

activities.”¹⁷ Organizations and networks, as we have noted, carried on with a tradition of activism established in Cuba by the domestic struggles against Machado, Batista, and U.S. neocolonialism. Developing antifascist and pro-Republican solidarity was the key to sustaining activism into the period after March 1935.

Antifascism and the cause of the Spanish Republic provided Cuban activists with a common cause around which diverse individuals and groups built a movement held together by solidarity. The Cuban movement made up one part of the larger global antifascist movement. Transnational solidarity, therefore, is a concept central to this study of diverse, interconnected activists and organizations engaged in the work of antifascism. It signifies both the belief by people in different nations that their domestic struggles are related, and their border- and ocean-crossing work together for mutual benefit. The process of building transnational solidarity faced inevitable challenges of distance and difference between nations, but exchange between activists of various nationalities during the war had a profound impact on antifascism in each country. This study contributes to our understanding of why activists pursue transnational solidarity, how it functions, and to what extent it impacts the course of history. To do so, its analysis must account for the development and sustainability of—as well as the many challenges to—solidarity at various scales up to the transnational.

It was precisely antifascist Cubans’ sense of transnational solidarity that made their pro-Republican movement fundamentally Cuban. Based on both personal and political considerations, their sense of solidarity with Spanish Republicans (and, we will see, with the people of Ethiopia invaded by Italian fascism in 1935 as well) caused them to interpret disparate struggles as one and the same. In other words, the antifascist struggle *was* the domestic

¹⁷ Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), Chapters 1 and 6.

struggle—the Cuban struggle. Though some, following internationalist ideologies, defined their commitment to the Republican cause at least partially in terms of internationalism, virtually all Cuban antifascist activists viewed their efforts through the lens of Cuban realities: antifascism applied to Cuban problems, they believed, as well as global ones. Thus the concept of transnational solidarity constitutes another way in which we see into the activism blind spot of the *Pax Batistiana*. Cuban activists believed that the island’s domestic struggle of the 1930s formed part of the larger international challenge of fascism. Therefore, supporting the Spanish Republic—the fight for a “new Spain”—was, from the perspective of solidarity, the same fight as the fight for a “new Cuba.” Individuals, groups, and networks from the earlier activist period not only continued their work on into antifascism but also constructed a Cuban definition of antifascism such that it encompassed their previous struggle.

What exactly, in the end, did Cubans contribute to the defense of the Spanish Republic during the war? They contributed monetary and material aid, supportive arguments and propaganda, and volunteers. Cuba sent more volunteers to Spain than any other Latin American country. Most volunteers fought, with a good number of Cubans attaining leadership ranks in the military, while others served in support roles in medicine, transportation, childcare, and administrative work. Cubans sent food and supplies, emphasizing in particular contributions of the island’s agricultural crown jewels: sugar and tobacco. They raised money by selling stamps, bonds, tickets to pro-Republican events, and magazine subscriptions; taking weekly collections in places of employment and outside factories; and petitioning exile communities to send in contributions. Women and girls sewed clothes for Spanish children and Republican soldiers. Cubans set up an orphanage in Catalonia that, they noted proudly, flew the Cuban and Spanish Republican flags side-by-side. They held rallies, made speeches, gave radio broadcasts,

published manifestos, printed posters, and wrote editorials in support of the Republic. The groups we study committed their resources to assisting the pro-Republican cause, arguing for antifascism and the Spanish Republic in their publications, organizing informational meetings and tours by visiting Republican dignitaries, fundraising, and networking with counterparts in Spain, the United States and elsewhere to build solidarity for the cause. Solidarity itself was of vital importance to embattled Republicans, who, we will see, expressed again and again their appreciation for Cubans' commitment to them. The Spanish Civil War was a brutal and protracted fight, and in order to continue fighting Republican individuals and groups had to maintain commitment and foster resilience in the face of devastating disappointments and defeats. Their Cuban brethren understood this challenge better than many, and offered both their concrete aid and their heartfelt solidarity.

Contents and Structure

We have already touched upon the specific contents of the chapters, but a more detailed summary as well as a brief discussion of excluded topics warranting further study here provides the reader with a better understanding of the overall structure and with a sense of the direction of future research on the subject of Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic.

As previously noted, Chapter 1 introduces the personal commitment and involvement of two individual activists, writer Pablo de la Torriente Brau and his wife Teresa "Teté" Casuso, a recently married Cuban couple who fled to exile in New York following the March 1935 strike. Based on Pablo's articles and correspondence and Teté's memoir, as well as writing by some of their closest associates, the first chapter covers the chronological period prior to the Spanish Civil War, offering a view of Cuban activism during the *Machadato* and Batista's rise to power

from the couple's perspective. Pablo volunteered in Spain early on in the conflict, becoming Cuba's iconic volunteer, celebrated repeatedly during the war years—inspiring many compatriots to follow his lead—and long afterward. Teté became a leading antifascist organizer on the island as one of the founders of the Cuban campaign to aid Spanish children. These two individuals are central to Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic, and we will return to them periodically throughout the study.

In Chapter 2 we examine the identities and experiences of Cuban volunteers in Spain. We consider their diversity and compare their demographic characteristics with those of the Cuban population at large, determining the ways in which they were representative of or diverged from their contemporaries as a group. We touch upon some of the challenges of analyzing the volunteers' identities, many of which were transnational. Exploring their experience in Spain, we find that their transnational identities gave Cuban volunteers a special understanding of the Spanish conflict and unique opportunities and advantages. They served as important linguistic and cultural translators within a context of confusion born of multinational participation. Many of the volunteers worked to portray their efforts as respectable and legitimate, and some achieved advanced military rank. These contributions by Cubans to the Republican cause were widely noted, and celebrations of their efforts were used as propaganda to recruit new volunteers and antifascist activists on the island and elsewhere. For these same purposes, Cuban casualties were honored as martyred heroes. Nevertheless, we find that complex personal as well as political motivations drew Cuban volunteers to Spain, and cases of negative behavior complicate narratives of international participation in Spain as “the Good Fight.”

Chapter 3 studies the campaign for children organized by Havana's Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español (Association of Aid to the Child of the Spanish People, or A.A.N.P.E.), notable for side-by-side participation by men, women, and children. Research at Spain's National Library and the Institute of History of Cuba provides detailed information about the inner workings and public role of this organization, including its leadership, participants, goals, finances, and accomplishments. This information allows us to examine some of the practical elements of everyday activism work in the movement. The Association's periodical introduces a number of the principal Cuban arguments in favor of the Spanish Republic, particularly those most favored by moderates, which the chapter outlines and analyzes. The memoir by Teté Casuso, the Association's founding president, highlights the role of this remarkable woman in organizing aid for Spanish children after her husband was killed fighting in Spain alongside Republicans. Her commitment to the Spanish cause following this personal tragedy represents a powerful example of the activist resilience essential for continuity. In addition to considering the function and arguments of the campaign and the personal story of its founding leader, analysis of the A.A.N.P.E. touches upon organizing in and participation of the Cuban community abroad and upon collaboration among diverse pro-Republican individuals and groups on the island, even those who might have been antagonistic to one another under different circumstances. The popularity of the campaign to aid Spanish children—which was firmly pro-Republican—illustrates the effectiveness of the cause at bringing together diverse Cubans, while the tactics employed by Association leaders to draw in broad support raises interesting questions about the general public's perception of partisan activism.

The remaining chapters present the pro-Republican stance of four Cuban groups that predated the Spanish Civil War: black associations, Freemasons, anarchists, and the Communist

Party. All four groups were part of transnational networks that existed before the Spanish conflict, and all had prior experience with organizing for political causes, though they were quite different one from another. These four chapters focus primarily on the ways in which each group related antifascism and the Spanish Republican cause to its own values and goals and to Cuba's struggle. To do so, the chapters examine the various arguments the groups advanced against fascism and in favor of the Republicans. Studying these four groups side-by-side, we note significant commonalities and assess divergences. Discussing predictable differences between these disparate groups, we see also interesting overlaps, such as the longstanding anarchist who was also a prominent Freemason, or the shared interest in the Italian invasion of Ethiopia by black Cubans and Cuban Communists. We note tensions and dissent within each group, as well, such as the somewhat contentious shift from pro-Ethiopian to pro-Republican organizing within black associations or the presence of pro-Nationalist Freemasons and those in favor of a neutral stance with regard to political matters. In addition to considering the antifascist views and arguments of these four groups, the chapters examine—to the extent made possible by the available sources—the logistical elements of their antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic: We account for monetary and material aid sent to the Republicans; we follow transnational network connections utilized for antifascist purposes; and we note recruitment to the cause.

Analyzing publications by Cuban activists of African descent, Chapter 4 demonstrates that the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935) inspired black Cuban antifascism and examines how pro-Ethiopia organizing both supported and experienced tension with the pro-Spanish Republican movement. It contextualizes black Cuban antifascism within the experience of the African diaspora during the 1930s, focusing in particular on the cultural and political importance

of transnational relationships between black Cubans and African Americans. Based on research at four Masonic lodges, Chapter 5 shows how Cuban Freemasons equated Masonic values with antifascism, combated pro-Nationalist opposition within their ranks, and framed antifascism as self-defense against the virulent anti-Masonic stance of Spanish Nationalists. It notes the challenge faced by antifascists within Freemasonry posed by the fraternal order's commitment to political diversity, a commitment that made the self-defense argument particularly vital to Masonic antifascism. Chapter 6 uses evidence from fragmentary Cuban and Spanish anarchist materials in Amsterdam and Havana to show pro-Republican transnational organizing by Cuban anarchists. It demonstrates that while other groups idealized democracy as the desirable endpoint of antifascist activism, anarchists saw democracy merely as a means toward a revolutionary goal. Drawing on Communist archives and periodicals from Cuba and Russia, as well as the U.S. Library of Congress Latin American and Iberian Pamphlets collection, Chapter 7 presents the internationally coordinated Communist campaign of support as it existed locally in Cuba, noting the tensions that existed between Communist internationalism and Cuba's domestic antifascism. The Cuban Communist Party's role in organizing Cuban volunteers to travel to Spain is discussed in Chapter 2; Chapter 7 focuses on the way in which the Party presented and advocated antifascism on the island, considering its goals, arguments, and tactics. The chapter also considers the Party's relationship to Batista during the years of the Spanish Civil War, hypothesizing about how Cuban antifascism impacted this changing relationship, and *vice versa*.

These chapters explore understandings of democracy, sovereignty, and justice in these organizations; consider the impact of their connections to transnational networks; and present dissent within and disagreement between them. Taken together, they illustrate the diversity of

Cuban antifascism, its transnational character, and the power of the movement to unify disparate individuals and groups around common goals as well as the challenges to this unity.

The study concludes by considering the ways in which antifascism and historical memory of the Spanish conflict functioned in Cuba in the years and decades following Spanish Republican defeat in 1939. The war moved toward inevitable victory for Franco during January and February 1939 as Catalonia fell to Nationalist forces. France and Great Britain granted Franco's regime official recognition shortly thereafter. Republican refugees made arduous treks across the Pyrenees to France and unsuccessful attempts to escape to Portugal, from which the dictatorial regime of Antonio Salazar returned them to Franco. Republican Prime Minister Juan Negrin fled the country early in March. By the end of that month, Nationalist forces controlled the entire country, and Franco declared victory on the first of April. The Republican government continued to try to function in exile, and activists around the world maintained hope of its resurrection in Spain for many years afterward. Franco, however, succeeded in remaining dictator of Spain until his death at age 82 in 1975.

Our conclusion begins with Cuban activists' domestic political position during the early 1940s, showing that antifascism gained mainstream momentum in Cuba during World War II as the island sided with the Allies in 1941. Organizational records from the National Archive of Cuba illustrate a shift in Cuban antifascism at this time. Then it examines the relationship of the Cuban Revolution to 1930s antifascism and the Spanish conflict: the connections participants and observers drew between the two events, and the view and use of the earlier movement by the Revolutionary government. Fascinating documentation from the Institute of History of Cuba of a Revolutionary effort to find and assess Cuban Spanish Civil War combat veterans in the early 1960s addresses the significance of 1930s Cuban antifascism for the 1959 Revolution, and the

diplomatic relationship Cuba under Fidel Castro had with Francoist Spain challenges ideological narratives of left and right. Next, the conclusion follows up with the 1930s antifascists in their twilight years, and touches upon their relationship with both Spain and their own government during this later period. Finally, a broader look at transnational activism, networks, and solidarity generates a few thoughts on the relevance of 1930s Cuban antifascism to the present.

There are a number of topics related to this study that warrant further examination, and on which I hope to conduct future research. The first and perhaps most obvious is pro-Nationalist activism on the island. Though I do believe that the majority of Cubans who engaged with the Spanish conflict supported the Republicans, there existed a pro-Nationalist movement on the island as well. Records of the Falange on the island in the Cuban National Archive as well as opinions expressed in pro-Nationalist periodicals would give us insight into this other side of the struggle. Second, a look at the Cuban government's official stance on the war—which was neutral, in keeping with the Non-Intervention Agreement (1936)—and the island's diplomatic relations with Spain during the war years would further complicate our view of Batista. Government documents, including the neutrality decree of 1937 (Decreto Presidencial No. 3411), and a fascinating file found in the Spanish military archive at Ávila containing Nationalist assessments of Cuban diplomats would provide a good starting point for such research. Third, pro-Republican organizing on the island by self-identified Spaniards and the Spanish centers is excluded here as being somewhat separate from Cuba's domestic antifascism, but these people and institutions collaborated closely with those we do examine. I have encountered voluminous source material concerning the Spanish centers during the course of my research for the present study. Fourth, a number of materials already collected and some further research could illustrate in greater detail the connections members of specifically Cuban political

groups such as Joven Cuba, Ala Izquierda Estudiantil (Student Left Wing), and the Organización Revolucionaria Cubana Anti-imperialista (Cuban Revolutionary Anti-imperialist Organization, or O.R.C.A.) had with antifascism and the cause of the Spanish Republic. An examination of the participation of these groups in the movement would develop further our discussions of Cuban activist networks and continuity. Finally, a broader look at popular participation in the movement—beyond the participation of everyday Cubans in the campaign for Spanish children—could include surveys and letters to the editor in the mainstream press. A number of relevant pieces in *Bohemia* expressing diverse views on the conflict—and support for both sides—make up one good body of material on this topic.

A History of Hope

Cuban activists of the 1930s believed that their fight for a “new Cuba” and the Spanish Republicans fight for a “new Spain” were two parts of the same antifascist struggle. They based this interpretation on an understanding of the larger international threat of fascism, of the special historical relationship between Spain and Cuba, and of their own domestic problems as tied inextricably to both of these factors. In order to advance their goals on the island, to aid their “brothers” in Spain, and to do their part to combat global fascism, they connected with like-minded activists of other nationalities. They utilized the mobility of people, material, and ideas, and the connections of interpersonal relationships, cultural affinities, institutional ties, and shared ideology that constituted transnational activist networks. The result of their efforts was powerful transnational solidarity that, while it did not win the war for the Republicans or defeat Batista in Cuba, provided something even more important for activists in the long term: resilience in the face of defeat. The transnational solidarity of Cuban antifascism kept activism going on the

island through years during which discouragement and disillusionment could have led activists to despair—to give up hope.

This study of Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic offers new perspectives on both Cuba during the 1930s and the Spanish Civil War, examining the complex intersection of two histories not often considered together. Additionally, it is a case study of a transnational movement and the continuity of activism that provides insight from historical analysis relevant to activist efforts in any era. John E. Toews has stated that the historian's task is to connect memory with hope.¹⁸ This history studies hope and its resilience.

¹⁸ John E. Toews, "Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn," *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (October 1987): 907.

CHAPTER 1

Personal Resilience, Transnational Movement, Activist Continuity: Pablo de la Torriente Brau and Teresa “Teté” Casuso from Cuban Revolution to the Spanish Civil War

In July 1936, as Spanish Nationalists rose up against the Republic in Spain, there were, living humbly in Harlem, a man and woman whose choices and actions would be central to Cuban efforts in relation to the war: husband and wife Pablo de la Torriente Brau and Teresa “Teté” Casuso, both writers and political activists. Their individual stories, their relationship, and their involvement in Cuba’s domestic struggles, the Spanish Civil War, and international antifascism were highly influential among their contemporaries. Here we begin to examine the trajectory of these two political lives, to which we will return at various points throughout this study. Exploring the activists’ identities, their participation in the fights against Machado and Batista, their flight into exile in the United States in 1935, and the initiation of their connection to the Spanish conflict, we present two examples of individual participation in Cuban antifascism. We consider their motivations, the nature of their participation, and the resilience they showed in the face of disappointments and defeats. Following the journeys of these two activists provides insight into the formation of Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic, the transnational quality of the movement, and its connections to the activism that preceded it. These personal stories inform a large political question: How and why do activist movements cross time and space, through distinct eras and over national boundaries? Our study of Pablo and Teté’s personal commitment and transnational engagement explores activist continuity.

Transnational Identity

Pablo de la Torriente Brau embodied transnationality, his identity a function of a particular historical moment. There was a considerable population of Spaniards living in Cuba during the decades between the Cuban War of Independence and the Spanish Civil War. *Peninsulares* (people from the Iberian Peninsula) not only remained in Cuba after independence but also increased their numbers on the island significantly. In 1899, of the total Cuban population of 1.6 million people, 130,000 or approximately 8% were Spaniards. Between 1902 and 1916 over 400,000 more Spanish immigrants “arrived in waves, seemingly inexhaustible and irreversible,” in the words of historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr.¹ The presence of Spaniards in Cuba in the first few decades of the twentieth century was not uncomplicated, especially because they dominated economically desirable positions there, much to the frustration of Cubans. Yet it did strengthen the enduring cultural and familial ties between the countries. Such ties were strong in Pablo’s family. Though he identified himself as Cuban, Torriente was the son of a man born in Spain, Félix de la Torriente Garrido, and a Puerto Rican woman, Graciela Brau. Félix de la Torriente’s nationality was divided between countries like his son’s. He was the “son of a Cuban and Cuban himself in his sentiments,” according to Pablo’s sister Zoe, but born in Spain and raised there until the age of five.²

Like so many others during the early decades of the twentieth century, Torriente’s family was both multinational and migratory. Members of the Torriente Brau family moved and traveled between Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. In 1898, Félix moved from Cuba to Puerto Rico

Parts of this chapter are adapted from my M.A. thesis (May 2008), from a paper presented at the Columbia University Latin American History Graduate Student Conference (March 2010), and from my job talk presented at the University of Connecticut (March 2013).

¹ Pérez, Cuba: *Between Reform and Revolution*, 200–202.

² Zoe de la Torriente Brau, “Pablo de la Torriente Brau,” in *Papeles de familia: Compilación, presentación y notas*, Elizabet Rodríguez and Idania Trujillo, eds. (Havana: Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, Ediciones La Memoria, 2006), 13.

to take the position of secretary to the last Spanish governor of Puerto Rico. On 12 December 1901, Pablo was born in San Juan.³ In 1903 Torriente and his father traveled to Spain to visit the infant boy's recently widowed grandmother. Then they went on to Havana, where the Torriente Brau family lived for several years. Then the mother and children returned to Puerto Rico. The father remained in Cuba for some time, then joined the others in Puerto Rico, then returned to Cuba once more. In 1909, the family reunited in Santiago de Cuba, where they would remain. Later in life, Pablo would go into political exile repeatedly in the United States and would end up eventually in Spain in 1936. Cuban Torriente biographer José López Sánchez writes: "He spent his childhood in the islands of Puerto Rico and Cuba but he could not have foreseen that, as a volunteer of liberty, he would get his share of Spanish nationality as well."⁴

Torriente's national identity was both complex and politicized. His mother, Graciela Brau, was the daughter of Salvador Brau, Puerto Rican writer, politician, and historian.⁵ Pablo's grandfather Brau was a contemporary of Cuban independence fighter José Martí and, like his Cuban counterpart, an important proponent of his country's autonomy from Spain and an eminent intellectual figure. One of his works was the first history of Puerto Rico.⁶ When Pablo

³ Ibid.

⁴ José López Sánchez, *Pablo: imagen y leyenda* (Havana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 2003), 2.

⁵ Ibid., 1. It is interesting to note that an essay on Puerto Rican intellectuals attributes to Salvador Brau a "conception of Puerto Rico as a *patria*, a motherland (separate from Spain)" that was "already developed and certain" before the war of 1898. The essay notes, however, that this conception "was occurring only within a narrow elite." We will examine a conception of Spain as a motherland among Cuban antifascist activists. Juan García Passalacqua, "The dilemmas of Puerto Rican intellectuals," in *Intellectuals in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean, Volume II, Unity in Variety: The Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean*, Alistair Hennessy, ed. (London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press, 1992), 122–123.

⁶ Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones, "1898," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 78, no. 4 (November 1998): 578; Gervasio Luis García, "I am the Other: Puerto Rico in the Eyes of North Americans, 1898," *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 1 (June 2000): 40; García Passalacqua, "The dilemmas of Puerto

was a young boy living in Cuba, his grandfather sent him a copy of José Martí's *La Edad de Oro* (*The Golden Age*).⁷ The influence of their maternal grandfather, according to Pablo's sister Zoe, had a strong effect on Pablo, shaping the development of his intellect, talent, morality, and patriotism. He was politically aware from an early age. For example, in his very first journalistic endeavor, Torriente envisioned a political life for himself. When he was nine years old, remembered Zoe, Torriente published an article in his school's student magazine *El Ateneísta*⁸ in which he expressed his "great ambition: to become a sailor, attain the rank of admiral, direct a large squadron, go to Puerto Rico, and throw out the North Americans who were subjugating the nation."⁹ Just about a decade into life and into the twentieth century, young Pablo understood a central political problem faced by both Puerto Rican and Cuban political activists: U.S. neocolonialism.

As the grandson of an influential *autonomista*, Pablo certainly did not identify himself as Spanish. Neither was he, however, entirely Cuban, though he called Cuba home. Proud of his Puerto Rican heritage on his mother's side, he became indignant when introduced at a rally by the name Pablo de la Torrente y Bravo: "Pablo is fine, and Torrente doesn't upset me, but it's not Bravo, but Brau, which is the family name of my mother and my grandfather, of which I am very proud and which reminds me of my unrepentant nationality."¹⁰

Rican intellectuals," 122; Sidney Mintz, "Review," *American Anthropologist* (New Series) 59, no. 6 (December 1957): 1138–1139.

⁷ López Sánchez, *Pablo*, 3.

⁸ The title of this journal does not have a clear English translation—*Atheneum Member* approximates.

⁹ (Zoe) Torriente, "Pablo," in *Papeles de familia*, 15–16.

¹⁰ López Sánchez, *Pablo*, 2.

Though he expressed pride in his mixed Puerto Rican and Cuban nationality, however, Pablo felt also a strong sense of connection to Spain. As it did for many other Cubans, the connection existed within his own family heritage, and he expressed it in familial terms. Despite his longstanding anticolonial beliefs, Torriente, like other Cubans, referred to Spain as “the motherland.”¹¹ More than just a common saying, the term “motherland” for Spain used by Cubans was based in real and important historic and familial ties between the two countries, a special relationship which Cuban activists analyzed and utilized during their involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Torriente distinguished between an “old Spain,” no longer “motherland” but rather “stepmother”—in the tradition of Latin American independence fighter Simón Bolívar’s famous “Jamaica letter” of 1815, in which he called Spain Latin America’s “unnatural stepmother”—represented by the Nationalists on the one hand, and a “new Spain” represented by the Republic, a Spain that would be Latin America’s “older sister,” on the other.¹² Following Pablo, many Cuban antifascists would make a similar distinction between Nationalist and Republican Spain in relation to Cuba and Latin America, maintaining a familial metaphor while insisting on an anticolonial status of equality.

A Revolutionary Couple in the “Generation of the Thirties”

Whereas Pablo had a transnational and politicized identity from an early age, shaped by his family, Teté was shaped from an early age by Pablo. Ten years her husband’s junior, she knew him from the time she was seven years old and moved with her family to Cuba’s Oriente Province, where he lived. He was seventeen at the time, “an extraordinary boy both physically

¹¹ Torriente Brau to Carlos Martínez, New York, 28 July 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas de España*, Víctor Casaus, ed. (Havana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 1999), 46.

¹² Torriente, “En el parapeto: Polémica con el enemigo,” in *Cartas y crónicas*, 227.

and mentally,” who used to tell epic stories, such as those of Homer, to Casuso and other children, and to read to them works by Martí. Torriente courted the young girl from the time she was eleven or twelve, at which point her family was living in Havana and Torriente was a student at the Universidad de La Habana (University of Havana). In her memoir, she remembers his “offensive of books, poems, and flowers. No girl could have long resisted such a charming courtship, and for me he was a magician who rendered everything beautiful and noble.” The courtship was not only charming but also lengthy—they eventually married many years later. Pablo was responsible for giving Casuso her nickname; the first book of stories he published he dedicated “To Teté Casuso, *muchacha*,” and, writing in 1961, Casuso remarked: “Many people in Cuba still call me ‘Teté Casuso, *muchacha*,’ remembering those days when Pablo and I were together.”¹³

Casuso would fight alongside Torriente in the struggles of the self-identified Cuban “Generation of the Thirties,” political activists who made up the movements against Machado, Batista, and U.S. neocolonialism on the island during the 1930s. Together, they began their work as activists by taking part in the student organizing against Machado at the Universidad de La Habana. While young revolutionaries such as Pablo and Teté organized around the university, widespread popular activism against the dictatorship of Machado spread far beyond students and included massive labor strikes in numerous regions of the country. The students’ political organizing developed as one, albeit important, part of this larger movement.

Pablo and Teté understood their activism as a struggle against strongman governance and neocolonialism, and for social and economic progress on the island. Casuso wrote about her

¹³ Teresa Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, Elmer Grossberg, trans. (New York: Random House, 1961), 53–58. Deceptively titled, Casuso’s memoir covers her life prior to her involvement in the Cuban Revolution of the 1950s on pages 9–95.

husband: “Both as a student and as a reporter Pablo was in the thick of the political agitation to clean up the government and free Cuba from its colonial status.” As a result, he was often in jail or exile, sometimes along with his friend and fellow revolutionary Raúl Roa.¹⁴ In a July 1931 “call to arms” directed at students and the general public, Roa made explicit the connection between anticolonialism and the movement against the dictator Machado. The revolutionary student movement Ala Izquierda Estudiantil (Student Left Wing), of which he and Torriente were a part, attacked not only Machado but also “the social classes and foreign interests that maintain and profit from him.”¹⁵ Ala Izquierda’s manifesto of February 1931, “signed” by imprisoned *compañeros* Roa and Torriente as well as five more in prison and 34 others *en libertad*, called for the overthrow of the “dictatorial government of Machado, faithful servant of Wall Street.”¹⁶ Ala Izquierda, Roa explained in a November 1931 letter, was part of the “merciless and violent fight against Machado and imperialism.”¹⁷

The members of Ala Izquierda were continuing a project of student involvement in revolutionary politics begun in the early 1920s by a popular leader of their generation who would not live to see either the 1930s or his thirtieth birthday. The memory and writings of Julio Antonio Mella were strong influences on the student revolutionary movement of the 1930s.

¹⁴ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 58–59. Diary entries from Roa’s stint of incarceration from August 1931 to January 1933 are included in a published volume of his works. His prison narrative makes many mentions of Torriente, who was imprisoned with Roa during this time. Raúl Roa, “Presidio Modelo,” in *Órbita de Raúl Roa*, Vivian Lechuga, ed. (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 2004), 72–105.

¹⁵ Roa, “Tiene la palabra el camarada Máuser,” *Línea*, La Habana, 10 July 1931, in *Órbita de Raúl Roa*, 39.

¹⁶ Ala Izquierda Estudiantil, “Manifiesto programa del Ala Izquierda Estudiantil a los estudiantes y clase trabajadora de Cuba,” in *Documentos de Cuba Republicana*, Felicia Villafranca, ed. (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1972), 207.

¹⁷ Roa, “Reacción versus Revolución: Carta a Jorge Mañach, Hospital Militar de Columbia, November 1931 in *Órbita de Raúl Roa*, 71.

Torriente's sister Zoe noted in her narrative of Torriente's life that her brother contributed to the fund that paid for Mella to escape Cuba for exile in Mexico.¹⁸ The Ala Izquierda manifesto echoed statements of Mella's such as "Los universitarios contra el imperialismo yanqui y el servilismo del gobierno cubano" ("The university students against Yankee imperialism and the Cuban government's subservience").¹⁹ Casuso attributed the students' involvement in Cuban politics since 1923 to Mella, writing that he had agitated his fellow students by proclaiming in manifestoes and public meetings the truth of Cuban politics and of its colonial position, and demanding autonomy for the university.²⁰ It is interesting to note that one of the projects Torriente was working to complete in New York before his departure for Spain was "a copy of Mella's work on his interpretation of the Cuban reality."²¹ In 1932, several members of the revolutionary movement in New York, including Torriente, would found a political organization of exiles in the city called the Club Cubano Julio Antonio Mella²² that would go on to become an important organization in exile for pro-Republican Cubans, and to which we will return in the next chapter. Mella, whose ideology and activism incorporated many efforts of earlier Cuban revolutionary thinkers and leaders, was killed under mysterious circumstances while in exile in Mexico in 1929; Cuban activists accused Machado of having him assassinated, though the facts of the case are still debated. His death ended one decade of possibilities and left his young

¹⁸ (Zoe) Torriente, "Pablo," in *Papeles de familia*, 20.

¹⁹ Julio Antonio Mella, "Los universitarios contra el imperialismo yanqui y el servilismo del gobierno cubano," in *Documentos de Cuba Republicana*, 174–175.

²⁰ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 52–53.

²¹ Torriente to Roa, New York, 4 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 49.

²² (Zoe) Torriente, "Pablo," in *Papeles de familia*, 24.

compañeros in the position of having to begin a new chapter in the Cuban revolution. Out of his violent end grew the Generation of the Thirties.

By September 1930, Pablo's sister Zoe noted, the Cuban people's discontent with Machado was evident, but they lacked the unifying force necessary to turn anger into action. An opportunity for unification came in the form of a tribute to a "wise and prestigious elder," writer and philosopher Enrique José Varona, who had attacked Machado in *El País (The Country)*. In 1923 Pablo had gone to work in the law offices of Ortiz, Giménez, Lanier, and Barceló as secretary to Fernando Ortiz.²³ A group of young men with common political and ideological affinity gathered around Ortiz; the group included Ortiz's former secretary who had recently been promoted to lawyer, Rubén Martínez Villena, as well as Juan Marinello, Roa, and Torriente. In the autumn of 1930, this group organized the tribute to Varona that was to take place on 3 October. On 30 September, Zoe recalled, Roa told Torriente to arrive at the Universidad for a rally that was to march to Varona's house. By the time Torriente arrived, however, police had surrounded the Universidad and the plan had changed. The tone of the gathering had shifted from tribute to outrage. Casuso remembered: "The students ran through the streets shouting protests until the police wagons arrived and began carting them off. None of the students was armed, for at that time we did not dream of such things."²⁴ In contrast to Teté's innocent tone, Zoe described students throwing rocks at police officers and shouting "Death to Machado!" and "Down with tyranny!" They did not have firearms, she concurred, but put their faith in the fists of their stronger comrades, including Pablo. Roa, she recalled, commanded: "Policía que tocan,

²³ It is interesting to note that Varona and Ortiz were contemporaries of Pablo's grandfather Brau (though Ortiz was younger than the other two men), and engaged in similar political and intellectual projects. Díaz-Quñones, "1898," 578.

²⁴ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 53.

policía que cae” (“Police who touch, police who fall”). Predictably, violence broke out. Narrating in the present tense, Zoe described the events, bringing her reader close to Pablo in the midst of the action:

There is a great cry and fighting body to body between students and police. They hear shots from firearms. Pablo falls, collapsed on the ground. He believes they have injured him with a bullet wound. Only when he sees Rafael Trejo at his side, growing weak, does he realize that the shot had been for someone else. Trejo dies in the Emergency Hospital at dawn the next morning. Isidro Figueroa, worker, is wounded by a bullet in one shoulder.

A mounted policeman’s club left Pablo bleeding on the ground with an eight-centimeter head wound. He suffered a tremendous loss of blood and spent a month in the hospital.²⁵

Rafael Trejo became an important martyr and rallying cry for the Generation of the Thirties. Not long after leaving the hospital, Torriente published a rousing piece entitled “¡Arriba muchachos!” (“Up, boys!”) in the student publication *Alma Mater*, calling on the youth of his generation to rise up in revolution. Using outrage over Trejo’s death, he intended the article to agitate his comrades to action:

Trejo fell in the streets of Havana... Fell, no. He rose up taller than an immense statue, and from the height of a granite pedestal, wrought by his valor and the cowardice of his assassins, he delivers a powerful cry to wake all sleeping consciences: DOWN WITH TYRANNY AND OPRESSION!... DOWN WITH THE REGIME OF ASSASSINATION IN THE BACK!... DOWN WITH THE MONOPOLY OF THEFT!... DOWN WITH THE DISGRACE THAT CORRUPTS US!... This is how the dead speak, those who fall, with their chests facing forward, toward the rough path of dignity and of honor...²⁶

²⁵ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 53; (Zoe) Torriente, “Pablo,” in *Papeles de familia*, 19–22. Pablo gives a vivid and dramatic description of time with Trejo in the hospital prior to the young man’s death in a section entitled “Junto a Rafael Trejo” in the essay “Las mujeres contra Machado,” in *Testimonios y reportajes*, Emilio Hernández Valdés, ed. (Havana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 2001), 89–90.

²⁶ Torriente, “¡Arriba muchachos!” *Alma Mater* 3, no. 16 (November 1930), in *¡Arriba muchachos!*, Emilio Hernández Valdés, ed. (Havana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 2001), 5–6. Elipses in original.

Forward, Pablo commanded his comrades, “to put all our unmarred spirit into the furnace in which must be forged, by the fire of revolution, the new era of liberty and justice!” Rise up, he ordered, to clean away, “with the pure and rushing torrent of our youth, this, our Republic which they have rotted and sold to the foreigner.”²⁷ Using metaphors of fire and water, Pablo imagined that the flame of revolution would forge a new epoch and the river of revolutionary youth would clean away the corruption of the old. He and fellow activists looked forward to a “new Cuba.”

Cuban activists formed Ala Izquierda in the swell of revolutionary outrage and momentum following Trejo’s death; a year later, revolutionaries were still riding the wave of discontent. On the one-year anniversary of the ill-fated demonstration, in September 1931, Roa wrote a commemorative piece entitled “Rafael Trejo and the 30th of September” inside the Castillo del Príncipe prison. The first anniversary, “which we dreamed of commemorating over the crushed head of the Machado tyranny,” found them instead imprisoned. Cuba’s jails were full of political prisoners, among them Roa and his “comrade and beloved friend,” Torriente. Whereas Torriente envisioned fire and water, Roa used an image of new growth amid barrenness to illustrate the revolutionary movement. He imagined the “revolutionary event of the 30th of September” as a “magnificent spring shoot among the desolation and the shadows of an endless winter of horrors.” That event was just a beginning, in other words, a tender green sprout of revolution that would grow large. Trejo’s “martyrdom” would be used for the purposes of revolution. “His name is and will be,” stated Roa, a “flag of combat we will hoist to all winds.”²⁸ The young revolutionaries would evoke Trejo’s name as they did Mella’s, “with

²⁷ Torriente, “¡Arriba muchachos!” 6.

²⁸ Roa, “Rafael Trejo y el 30 de septiembre,” Castillo del Príncipe, 30 September 1931, in *Órbita de Raúl Roa*, 40–44.

shouts, with speeches, with a final silence from which our spirits will leave more pure and determined.” Trejo would not be forgotten; even after death he would continue to serve the revolutionary cause.²⁹ Both Roa and Torriente used the concept of martyrdom expressed by the phrase “Hasta después de muertos somos útiles,” that even after the revolutionary dies, he can still be of use to the movement. Mella, Trejo, and other casualties of the fight could be used by their survivors to rally support for the cause—to energize activists and inspire new participants—making defeat serve continuity.

As the economic and social crisis of the Great Depression created chaos and desperation in Cuba during the first few years of the 1930s—and as the revolutionary movement gained momentum—Machado, “a bloodthirsty dictator and pillager of the public treasury,” according to Teté, began to lose control of the country. Meanwhile, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt replaced Theodore Roosevelt’s “Big Stick” policy with his own “Good Neighbor Policy,” and sent Special Ambassador Sumner Welles to “try to mediate the convulsed country toward a ‘peaceful solution’ that would avoid the outburst of revolution.” Welles negotiated a *coup d’état* with Machado officials and the dictator left the country on 12 August 1933. First the leader of Machado’s army took over the presidency and then, after just a few hours, passed it on without incident to Manuel de Céspedes. A telegram from Welles to the U.S. Secretary of State sent at one o’clock in the afternoon that day stated: “The next few days will probably be difficult but I now have confidence that the situation has been saved and that no further action on the part of

²⁹ Torriente attributes this phrase to Mella. Torriente, “Hasta después de muerto...” *Línea* (Órgano de Ala Izquierda Estudiantil de Cuba) 3, no. 1 (18 September 1933), in *¡Arriba muchachos!*, 16.

the United States Government will be necessary.”³⁰ Welles appeared to have obtained the “peaceful solution” he had sought, Casuso remembered: “Then something went wrong.”³¹

“As always happens when there is total ignorance of a people’s deepest problems,” Casuso stated, “those responsible for this neat ‘arrangement,’ including the Special Ambassador, suddenly found themselves confronted by a broken dike.” From her perspective within the student movement, the United States had sought to avoid violence and revolution, but had “only succeeded in filling the dam till it burst.” Violence overflowed, and U.S. interests in Cuba “were endangered to a greater degree than if the United States had supported a democratic regime and recognized the right of the people to protect its interests and guarantee fair treatment and just reward for its labor,” Casuso asserted. Anti-Machado activists meted out vengeance against former Machado officials. Over the course of several days, Welles’s confident and calm tone became increasingly strained. In a 15 August telegram sent at noon to the Secretary of State, he complained that “utterly lawless student groups” were making the situation difficult to control.

The exiles who are now returning from the United States are unfortunately doing a great deal to increase agitation. They are taking the attitude that a triumphant revolution has placed the Government in power and that they are consequently entitled to dictate the policies of the Government. Furthermore the student group which is the most pernicious element in Cuban public life is constantly issuing inflammatory proclamations and making speeches of the same character over the radio.³²

“Those were colorful days,” recalled Casuso. Torriente, who was one of the exiles who had rushed back to Cuba from New York “at the first hint of Machado’s fall,” brought her to see the

³⁰ The Ambassador in Cuba (Welles) to the Secretary of State, Havana, 12 August 1933, *Foreign Relations of the United States. The American Republics (FRUS) V* (1933), 358–359.

³¹ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 59–61.

³² The Ambassador in Cuba (Welles) to the Secretary of State, Havana, 15 August 1933, *FRUS V* (1933), 365–367.

presidential palace, which hundreds of students had occupied. There she saw an army sergeant “curled up and sound asleep” on a Louis XV sofa. He was “disheveled and very thin, with sunken cheeks and a look of utter exhaustion.” The man, she noted with a literary sense of foreboding, was Fulgencio Batista.³³

Pablo’s sister Zoe remembered that her brother took part “in all the important actions” after returning from exile. In addition to taking over the presidential palace, student revolutionaries turned the Universidad into a central location of the national government and used the revolutionary moment as an opportunity to further the agenda of the student movement. They held large assemblies to discuss, debate, and vote on not only issues of Cuban government but also the conduct of university professors with regard to their allegiance to or denunciation of Machado. Zoe described Pablo as the revolutionary scribe; he participated as a student with a voice and a vote, and as a journalist with a notebook and a pen.³⁴

An event of deep significance to the activists of the Generation of the Thirties, the remains of Julio Antonio Mella returned home from Mexico in September 1933. In predictably exultant prose, Torriente anticipated the event in an article for *Ala Izquierda*’s publication *Línea* (*Line*). Mella, he wrote, was their “precursor, hero, and martyr.” He was the first “to insult with word and with action the slobbering senile monster Machado.” Three years after his death, Mella’s remains would be “received by frenetic throngs that applaud him as a living hero.” From the point of view of many of the young revolutionaries, victory over the dictator was achieved in Mella’s name. Now the workers and the students could build him a great national monument that, no matter how beautiful it was, would never “shine as much as his simple name,

³³ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 61–63.

³⁴ (Zoe) Torriente, “Pablo,” in *Papeles de familia*, 24–25.

united in a pool of blood with a universal idea: sacrifice for ‘the poor of the world.’”³⁵ Anticipation of Mella’s return marked a hopeful moment; with Machado gone, possibility ruled the day. In fact, on 29 September when the rally in his honor took place, the police and the army forced its participants to disperse.³⁶ The revolution was not turning out exactly as the activists had planned.

The students tried to set up a new government for Cuba—a “pentarchy” made up of two university professors, a newspaper editor, an independent and unsullied politician, and an old banker—but it only lasted six days. They were inexperienced and the country was in chaos. U.S. marines arrived in the waters of Havana but did not land, succeeding only in rousing anticolonial sentiment. “The population of Havana poured out on the quay,” Casuso recalled, “shouting ‘Get out! Go back to your country! You have no business here!’” The confusion of those days is evident in Casuso’s recollection: “I was present,” she remembered of the confrontation with the battleships, “though I hardly know how I got there or with whom. (Already I was rushing around everywhere, gathering items for Pablo’s news reports.)”³⁷

There was a brief attempt at a Cuban nationalist government from September 1933 to January 1934, that of Ramón Grau San Martín. This period, though short-lived, was hardly insignificant. It marked, notes historian Robert Whitney, the first time in its history during which the Cuban government answered neither to Spain nor to the United States.³⁸ The moment of hope and reform, however, did not last. The exhausted army sergeant Teté had seen on the

³⁵ Torriente, “Hasta después de muerto,” in *¡Arriba muchachos!*, 16–18.

³⁶ Luis E. Aguilar, *Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 185.

³⁷ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 64–65.

³⁸ Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 101.

sofa in the palace did not stay asleep forever in the halls of power; soon awoken, Batista began to position himself as a new strongman leader. Grau fell³⁹ (though he would go on to become president of Cuba again from 1944 to 1948) and Batista began to control the government through a series of civilian presidents until formally taking office in 1940. Outraged, the students returned once again to fighting. Not long after the end of Grau's first presidency, Casuso was part of a group of students occupying the Universidad, surrounded by Batista's military and police forces. She narrated the scene dramatically:

One day, late in the afternoon, we—the university leaders—were informed that the university was going to be taken over by the police. We decided not to leave. We had no arms, but they would have to kill us all if they tried to occupy our alma mater. We were about twenty. Armed soldiers and policemen surrounded the university, which stands on a hill, and fired tear-gas shells at us from the nearest roofs. We held out by tying handkerchiefs soaked in vinegar over our noses like masks.⁴⁰

Casuso's story demonstrates the way in which the political and the personal melded for Teté and Pablo; her narrative of the university occupation is half revolution, half romance.

Pablo heard of what was happening and came rushing over to share whatever fate was in store for us, to protect me, as he always did in his lifetime. He sprinted between two soldiers and came racing up the great stairway, over a hundred meters high, and reached us safely, gasping, "Where is Teté?" It is a marvel that he was not shot. I think it was surprise, plus the fact that the soldiers and police thought the university was stacked with arms and ammunition—which was not true—that held them back.⁴¹

³⁹ Whitney quotes the British embassy's Grant Watson describing Grau's departure for Mexico: "A crowd of his adherents gathered at the wharf and, as the vessel steamed down the harbor, they ran along the sides. They belonged to the poorer classes and were very enthusiastic. They regarded the impractical, consumptive doctor as their champion. He had been in office for only four and a half months, and yet he made reforms, some of which will last. Students of Cuban history will remember his term because a great change came over Cuba." Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 121.

⁴⁰ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 70

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

The young revolutionaries won that particular battle. Sensing perhaps that giving the student organizers a victory they coveted—university autonomy—might weaken their motivation to interfere in the larger political arena, the government capitulated to their demand.⁴² Casuso recounted her participation in the students' victory with great emotion, describing how she carried the government decree of university autonomy from the presidential palace to the university where thousands of students awaited their leaders:

I think that that has been for me the most solemn and important occasion of my life. During the automobile ride from the palace to the university I held that scroll in my hand as if I were carrying the sacred fire of a beautiful temple. What I was carrying represented a twelve-year struggle that had begun with Julio Antonio Mella; a struggle during the course of which many dear friends had died, like Mella, without seeing victory.⁴³

The car arrived at the Universidad amphitheater, packed with thousands of students, and compatriots pulled Casuso from the car, joyfully shouting, "Teté is bringing the Decree of Autonomy!" Carrying her on their shoulders, the students entered the arena full of excitement. Casuso did not mention where Pablo was, but we can imagine him there, perhaps carrying her aloft, perhaps striding alongside, beaming proudly, helping her up onto the podium in front of all their cheering comrades. Casuso remembered:

After prolonged applause and happy laughter, and shouts, and cheers, someone made the announcement that I was going to read the document. Instantly the silence was so profound that the reading resembled a religious ceremony. With what pride did I read

⁴² A secondary source challenges Casuso's chronology on this point. Aguilar suggests that autonomy was granted by the Grau administration in October 1933, whereas Casuso remembers meeting with Carlos Mendieta, who was not President until January 1934. Aguilar, *Cuba 1933*, 174. Perhaps providing a clue to the discrepancy, Whitney notes: "All of the important reforms of the Grau regime were, in fact, implemented by future governments, including the repressive Mendieta-Batista regime of 1934–1935." Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 121. It follows, then, that the reform could have been decreed under Grau, ignored by Mendieta-Batista, and then ceremoniously reinstated in 1934 for the political purpose I suggest here.

⁴³ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 72

that document that meant so much to us! It was the most truly radiant morning of my life.⁴⁴

The triumphant wave of Casuso's prose in this section of her memoir crests with her marriage to Torriente, "a lovely church wedding in a hermitage on a hill." It is as if the young Teté on the page is floating, almost literally, with joy: "My immense veil of white tulle," she seems to sigh contentedly, "was like a cloud." Amidst cheers and congratulations, the newlyweds headed off to their life together under a shower of rice. But the moment of happiness did not last long. Literally mid-sentence, politics and struggle reentered Casuso's story and put an end to the honeymoon: "We had a beautiful little apartment . . . in which we spent just one month of our hazardous marital life. After that we were in constant flight from the police and had to sleep in the houses of friends like escaped prisoners."⁴⁵ The ellipsis in the first sentence, present in the original, is pregnant with meaning. The reader can imagine Teté pausing as she composed her memoir in 1961, lifting her hands from her typewriter or suspending her pen midair, and drifting into a daydream, beginning: "What if . . . ?" The pause represents the road not taken: the normal life, free from activist struggle and revolution, from countless disappointments and defeats; the long, happy, married life she and Pablo could have spent and the home they could have made together if not for the role they chose to play.

The gesture by the government to the students of granting university autonomy, regardless of its intent, did not change much. Autonomy for the university was important for the young activists, but it did not improve the situation of Cuban people generally, and the fight against Batista went on. The students continued to run through the street shouting protests against the government and organizing public meetings. These meetings came to be called "hit

⁴⁴ Ibid., 72–73.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 73.

and run,” Casuso remembered, in honor of the hails of bullets with which they were often met.⁴⁶ Batista was intent on returning order to Cuba and used military force against not only the young revolutionaries but also the thousands and thousands of workers who struck across the country during 1934 and 1935.⁴⁷

Pablo and Teté lived in fear for their lives during these years, moving from place to place and continuing to organize and fight. Meanwhile, Casuso tried to finish school and start her new married life with Torriente. “[I]t was not easy to concentrate on one’s studies in 1934, 1935,” she stated in a matter-of-fact tone. “I would go home, to wherever we were staying at the time, without knowing where my husband was, and sit down with a textbook to study for examinations.” Overcome by a specific memory, she became emotional:

I remember that one day I got home to study for an examination in biology after a very dear friend, like Pablo and myself, recently married and happy, had been killed not half an hour after we had stood talking on the university steps. I opened the book and read a sentence of Claude Bernard’s: “Death is a phenomenon of perfection.” My eyes still filled with the image of my friend’s corpse as it had been carried still warm to the university hospital, I threw the book from me violently. Our comrade’s death was a phenomenon of absurdity! He had been gentle, intelligent, useful, loved, full of life and illusions. What perfection could his death hold? What did the science of all that stuff know?⁴⁸

Indeed, it was difficult to concentrate on reading books.

There would be one last forceful attempt at Cuban revolution by the generation of which Pablo and Teté were a part. On 19 February 1935, Universidad de La Habana students went on strike. Teachers and university employees soon joined them, and over the next few days the education strike spread rapidly. By March, a diverse range of unions had joined across the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 73–74.

⁴⁷ Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 124–131.

⁴⁸ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 74.

country and the action had become a general strike. Much of the country came to a halt for nine days. Batista, however, was determined to break the strike. He ordered the military to take over public transportation, the Universidad, and the postal service, and instructed them to protect replacement workers. He suspended constitutional rights, declared unions illegal, and had workers locked out of workplaces.⁴⁹

Batista's forces used violence in their strikebreaking. Casuso recalled a report to the student leaders by a young man returning from what was to have been a secret workers meeting during the strike. He had arrived at the apartment where the workers were to be, only to find the door open and the apartment empty of people—it was “as if buckets of blood had been poured over those floors,” Casuso remembered the man saying. “We never knew,” she wrote, “how many people had died there.” Those with any ties to revolutionary movements were hunted. Torriente, Casuso, and many of their fellow activists moved constantly during the strike to avoid being caught. By the eleventh day, the strike had collapsed. Using language suggesting Biblical proportions, Casuso registered the defeat: “And so it came about that Cuba was bathed in blood, and that a newly consolidated dictatorship was able to last another ten years.” Zoe shared her sister-in-law's sadness, remembering “the failed strike of March 1935, that fill[ed] the entire citizenry with discouragement.” The activists were defeated, at least for the moment. Batista knew that “the energy to resist was exhausted,” Teté conceded. “The ruthless suppression, the collapse of the strike, the closing of the university made it pointless for the more active and known among us to stay,” she wrote with resignation, “and the survivors of that Generation of the Thirties fled to Mexico and the United States.” Zoe concurred, writing in the present tense: “The prisons are full. The political persecution continues.” Pablo had to abandon Cuba. “He

⁴⁹ Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 131–132.

did not leave until he himself saw that, for the time being, there was nothing to be done in Cuba,” Teté concluded. “He was one of the last to go.”⁵⁰

We have arrived at an understanding of some of the history Torriente and Casuso carried with them to New York in 1935. They had felt the jubilation of victory in Machado’s downfall and the intense energy of hopeful momentum during Grau’s brief presidency. They believed for a short time that they were finally achieving democratic governance, an end to U.S. neocolonialism, and significant economic and social progress—a “new Cuba.” Then their victory fell apart. Batista’s rise to power was a significant defeat for the Generation of the Thirties, one that led many to discouragement, disillusionment, even despair. Looking back on the failed general strike of March 1935 it is easy to interpret it as an endpoint. By 1936 Batista’s forces had achieved the peace and quiet U.S. Ambassador Sumner Welles had desired in 1933. Bitterly, Casuso called it “the peace of the absent and the quiet of the dead.”⁵¹ To return to her metaphor, it was as if the dam holding back Cuba’s revolution, which had broken in 1933, had been rebuilt and the revolutionary waters once again contained.

The revolutionary waters had not, however, dried up. Leaving Cuba, Pablo, Teté, and their *compañeros* stepped out of the reservoir that remained behind that dam. Doing so left them with an intense revolutionary thirst. Stuck in the scorching New York summer of 1936, Torriente began to dream of rivers and whirlpools. Parched for action and feverish with revolutionary hope, he sought “the great river of revolution”⁵² in Spain, noting wistfully that this

⁵⁰ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 75–78; (Zoe) Torriente, “Pablo,” in *Papeles de familia*, 27.

⁵¹ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 78.

⁵² Torriente, “Me voy a España,” in *Peleando con los milicianos* (México, 1938; Havana: Ediciones Nuevo Mundo, 1962), 10. This essay or unaddressed letter is also reprinted in *Cartas y crónicas*, 55–57. Editor of that volume Víctor Casaus suggests that it may have been a letter to Juan Marinello.

river could teach Cuba “that when a people wishes to fight to the death for its ideals and necessities, *there is no barrier that can contain it.*”⁵³

The Summer of '36

In New York, Teté tried, and failed, to grow accustomed to life as a factory laborer. Pablo found work clearing tables at the Harvard Club, and after coming home each night exhausted and sore from an 11-hour shift, he would write articles for publications across Latin America. Together they helped found a club where they gathered with fellow Cubans and worked on a newspaper they sent back to the island covertly. “Although never poorer,” wrote Casuso, “I think I have never been more content or in better company.”⁵⁴

Torriente, however, grew frustrated. In his second year of political exile in the summer of 1936, and in the heat of July in the city, Pablo felt bored and discouraged. “I haven’t told you about activity here,” he wrote to a friend, “because really there isn’t any. Anywhere. Everything is dead. And, consequently, we are, too.”⁵⁵ Everyone was away for the summer. Their political club was vacant. Maybe he could resurrect it in the winter when its members returned, Pablo commented, but he was beginning to doubt that he would still be in New York come winter. He was irritated by his condition there, feeling as though he was wasting his time on menial work and glittering trivialities of the big city. “Here, in a year and a half of political exile,” he wrote, “I have done nothing but carry trays and wash dishes. It has made me stupid.”⁵⁶ Perhaps he

⁵³ Torriente, “La revolución española se refleja en Nueva York,” in *Cartas y crónicas*, 275. Emphasis added.

⁵⁴ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 78.

⁵⁵ Pablo de la Torriente Brau to Carlos Martínez, New York, 28 July 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 45–46.

⁵⁶ Torriente, “Me voy a España,” in *Peleando con los milicianos*, 10.

would return to Cuba, he mused, but his mind wandered. The conflict in Spain had captured his interest: The Spanish revolution, he wrote to a friend on 28 July, “has had my imagination going full steam these last few days.”⁵⁷ That same day Torriente heard that Miguel Angel Quevedo, director of the Havana publication *Bohemia*, was going to be in New York. He had written for *Bohemia* before, and bored as he was, jumped at the chance to meet with an old acquaintance and get himself some journalism work. He went to see if Quevedo would publish an article about the repercussions of the Spanish Civil War in New York. Quevedo asked him to send one as soon as possible, so that afternoon, Torriente wrote, “I went to a big rally in Union Square to gather information.”⁵⁸

Here was some excitement, some activity! Everyone knew Union Square, Torriente wrote in his article for Quevedo entitled “La revolución española se refleja en Nueva York” (“The Spanish revolution reflected in New York”), as the Red Plaza of New York. Men and women gathered there to talk revolution every day. Workers and radicals held rallies frequently. The gathering Torriente attended in support of the Spanish Republic was truly inspirational for the young writer and revolutionary. The crowded plaza, cries of “Long live the Spanish Popular Front!” and shouts against Mussolini and Hitler, red flags and banners in the air, revolutionary newspaper sellers, workers pouring out of factories at the end of their workday and joining in the rally made Pablo remember why he was a journalist: He “loved to go among the people, seeking their emotion to express their longings.”⁵⁹ The international character of the movement in

⁵⁷ Pablo de la Torriente Brau to Carlos Martínez, New York, 28 July 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 45–46.

⁵⁸ Torriente, “Me voy a España,” in *Peleando con los milicianos*, 9. Torriente remembers the day of the Union Square rally as 30 July, but according to the newspaper he is mistaken; it took place on 31 July. “Spain Fascists Assailed: Union Square Meeting Backs Fight to Put Down Rebels,” *New York Times*, 1 August 1936.

⁵⁹ Torriente, “Me voy a España,” in *Peleando con los milicianos*, 9.

support of the Spanish Republic inspired him. Recounting the participation of various political clubs, he remembered their diverse banners:

Not only of the Spaniards. Not only those of the Hispanic Americans. Also those of the German, Italian, Chinese, U.S., and French clubs. And the orators spoke like this also. Nobody understood them but everyone comprehended. There was one who spoke in German. Another in Hebrew. Another in Russian. When one began to speak in Italian, many people, in a friendly nature, exclaimed: ‘That’s Spanish!’ And when the Spanish orators Garriga, García, and Alonso spoke there were giant ovations.

One speaker, Torriente recalled, emphasized the significance of the fight for Europe and for the world. The outcome, this orator argued, would have an immediate and momentous impact on Spain, France, Italy, Germany, and the Soviet Union. Another speaker “signaled the importance for Latin America, tied in all respects to Spain, that the revolution there would have and the courage it would give our peoples.”⁶⁰ Standing there in the midst of the jubilant revolutionary crowd, Torriente struck upon an idea: “And so, remembering the fever with which I had been following the course of the fight in Spain, it was then that the luminous idea exploded in me of going to Spain, to the Spanish revolution, to march with the columns, to capture cities, to speak with the heroes, to see armed children and women.”⁶¹ Remembering the speeches he heard, Pablo suggested several motivations that drove his decision to go to Spain: the international threat of fascism, the special relationship between Spain and Latin America, the influence the Spanish conflict could have over Latin American struggles, and, as his last statement above implies, perhaps a personal sense of duty, excitement, adventure, and curiosity.

“The idea exploded in my brain,” Pablo wrote with dramatic flair, “and since then it has been setting fire to the great forest of my imagination. But it didn’t explode by means of a spark.

⁶⁰ Torriente, “La revolución española se refleja en Nueva York,” in *Cartas y crónicas*, 274–275.

⁶¹ Torriente, “Me voy a España,” in *Peleando con los milicianos*, 9–10.

It was even better, the way they used to set off bombs: by means of a long slow-burning fuse.”⁶² Adrift in exile, the activist felt himself drawn gradually back into the struggle, albeit in a different arena. From the outset, he connected his interest in going to join in the Spanish conflict to his hopes for Cuba. “There, apart from the great experience,” he wrote on 2 August, “I believe firmly that I could do much for the Cuban revolution, since it seems clear that the Spanish revolution has profound repercussions for Cuba and there will be countless lessons that will benefit our people given its vibrant imagination.”⁶³ He chastised himself for not thinking of going to Spain earlier: “Why didn’t this idea occur to me before? I would have been in Spain already. It is New York’s fault.” He contrasted New York with Spain. In New York he got swept away by the “nocturnal river of Broadway,” that “at the door of each burlesque, of each movie theatre . . . makes whirlpools.” In Spain he would be swept away by the “great river of revolution. To see a people in combat. To meet heroes. To hear the thundering of the cannon and feel the breeze of shrapnel. To contemplate fires and executions. To be close to the great silent whirlpool of death.”⁶⁴ It was decided: He would go to Spain.

Awoken from his summer stupor, Torriente found suddenly that he was pressed for time. There was a boat leaving for Spain in less than two weeks, he wrote in a 2 August letter, but that was a long time to wait. Other faster boats would leave for France sooner. If he could scrape together the money in time, he would be on one of those. He was trying to finish writing his novel *Aventuras del Soldado Desconocido* (*Adventures of the Unknown Soldier*),⁶⁵ he wrote to

⁶² Ibid., 9.

⁶³ Torriente to Pepe Velazco, New York, 2 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 47.

⁶⁴ Torriente, “Me voy a España,” in *Peleando con los milicianos*, 10.

⁶⁵ A recently published edition of the novel is available: Torriente, *Aventuras del soldado desconocido cubano* (Havana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 2000).

his friend Roa on 4 August, and was working on several other projects; but above all, he admitted: “I have a feverishness bordering on madness about my idea to travel to Spain.” The young revolutionary was determined. “If I don’t go,” he told Roa, “it will make me sick.”⁶⁶ On 6 August Torriente continued to worry about finding a boat to take him to Europe and money to pay for the trip: “I am restless, nervous, irritable. Because there is no boat. Nor have they answered me yet from Cuba, where I asked a periodical for money for the voyage.” He tossed and turned at night, preoccupied: “In bed the hours pass . . . one, two, three, four . . . And I never sleep.” Teté slept in the bed next to his, breathing deeply, he wrote. She understood, he believed, “that it is a glorious duty to go there to learn and tell other nations how liberty was victorious and fascism crushed.”⁶⁷ Just a few days later on 10 August, with his plans still unconfirmed, Torriente complained: “I have lost four pounds this week. And if this uncertainty continues, I’ll lose until I’m just bones.”⁶⁸ Adopting Torriente’s metaphor of burning and illness, Roa said of his friend: “The fever of the Spanish revolution had taken possession of him, absorbing all his capacity for service, his inexhaustible energy, and his heroic sense of life.” Looking back on the days described in Torriente’s letters from New York, Roa remembered his determination:

Pablo had decided to go to Spain and he was going to go. To impede him, to convince him otherwise, was impossible. In long hours of insomnia, in the momentary gaps (*huecos relampagueantes*) in the brutal work, he saw himself already on the front with the armed people, among militiamen (*milicianos*) without fear and without reproach, one more among them, soldier of Spanish liberty, which is to be a soldier of the liberty of the

⁶⁶ Torriente to Raúl Roa, New York, 4 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 49–50.

⁶⁷ Torriente, “Me voy a España,” in *Peleando con los milicianos*, 10–11.

⁶⁸ Torriente to “Adolfo García,” pseudonym for Raúl Roa, New York, 10 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 61–62. Torriente’s sense of humor and antifascism combine in the salutation of this pseudonymous letter to Roa, which reads: “Querido Adolfo Benito Franco.”

whole world. He guarded his meager savings with generous miserly zeal. He had no other aspiration or thought than collecting funds to pay for the trip.⁶⁹

Torriente did not want to be dissuaded. “Write to me,” he commanded a friend, “but don’t give me any cowardly advice.”⁷⁰

His motivations for making the trip were complex, personal as well as political. He wanted to escape boredom and “carrying trays.” He sought excitement, and to leave New York. He thought the journey would advance his journalism career. He wanted to take part in an event of world significance. He wanted an “opportunity to live” and “to be seen as a man.”⁷¹ This latter personal motivation reveals that Pablo interpreted the Spanish conflict as an essentially masculine endeavor, despite the leadership of women such as “La Pasionaria,” Dolores Ibárruri, and Margarita Nelken and the oft-noted participation of Spanish women in the fighting. Indeed, though his wife had participated side-by-side with him in the marches, rallies, and day-to-day work of political activism in Cuba, Torriente did not view the Spanish Civil War as an appropriate setting for her involvement. When he left New York, Teté remembered, “I returned to Cuba to stay with my parents until he sent for me. In his first letter home from Spain, however, he wrote that it was no place for me, and I must not think of going there for the time being.”⁷²

Pablo’s most urgently expressed motivations for going to Spain were political. One of his central, most important reasons for wanting to participate in the struggle of the Spanish

⁶⁹ Raúl Roa, “Los últimos días de Pablo de la Torriente Brau,” speech given 4 December 1949, in *Órbita de Raúl Roa*, Salvador Bueno and Vivian Lechuga, eds. (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 2004), 333–334.

⁷⁰ Torriente to Gonzalo Mazas Garbayo, New York, 2 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 48.

⁷¹ Torriente to “Adolfo García,” pseudonym for Raúl Roa, New York, 10 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 62.

⁷² Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 79.

Republicans against the rebellious Nationalists and their foreign fascist allies was to learn from its example for the struggle in Cuba. One of his roles, as he saw it, was to use his eyes and his *maquinita*, his little typewriter, to observe, learn from, and convey the lessons Spain had to teach the Americas. He wrote:

I go concretely and specifically to Spain for us; for the importance I consider this fight to have for us and the necessity of knowing its progress, its developments, the popular attitude, the dramatic and inspirational force of a people willing to die in a moment of justice. Effectively, I wish to feel all this and transfer it to those of us who will be anxious to know. And for this reason I will not be satisfied with writing only for Cuba, but will write also for the United States, Mexico, Costa Rica, and other places.⁷³

The struggle in Spain was—Torriente returned to this point again and again—the fight of a people against their army. And there existed, he exclaimed, “the possibility of the triumph of the people!” The young revolutionary saw this fact as particularly significant for the countries of Latin America. If the people defeated the army in Spain, then the Spanish Popular Front would serve as a vital inspiration and model for the revolutionaries and the peoples of Latin America, where some day, Torriente wrote, “people fighting against their army” would have to occur.⁷⁴ Emphasizing the antagonism between the people and their armed forces, Pablo implied a comparison between Franco in Spain and Batista in Cuba.

Torriente sought lessons in Spain not only for Latin America broadly but also for himself specifically. He went there not only as a journalist but also as a student of revolution. These two roles melded together and became inseparable in his mind. He saw war reporting in Spain as an

⁷³ Torriente to Ramiro Valdés Daussá, New York, 12 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 67.

⁷⁴ Torriente to Dr. Alfredo Sánchez Arango, New York, 6 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 53; Torriente to “Adolfo García,” pseudonym for Raúl Roa, New York, 10 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 62.

“extraordinary opportunity” to perform “work of a revolutionary nature.”⁷⁵ He wrote that the experience would be for him a “course of ‘specialization,’” an “apprenticeship” in “extraordinary reality.” From the struggle in Spain, he believed, he would learn to be a better revolutionary and thus be better equipped to further the cause of the Cuban revolution.⁷⁶

In addition to lessons, Torriente saw a direct relation between the Spanish and domestic efforts. The chances of the Cuban revolution toward which he, his wife, and so many of their dear friends had worked were dependent, as he understood it, on the outcome in Spain. If fascism won in Spain, a country with historic and economic ties to Latin America, “reactionary forces” in Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and Uruguay, as well as Cuba, would come together in solidarity, Torriente believed, implying that fascism would spread throughout the nations of the region. In this interpretation, Cuba and other Latin American countries struggling with strongman governments, neocolonialism, and “reactionary forces” depended directly on the outcome of the Spanish conflict. A tug-of-war between progression and regression characterized the historical moment, according to this view. Victory in Spain would be the “prologue” to Cuban revolution; the effort in Cuba would be delayed indefinitely if Spain were lost to fascists.⁷⁷

Despite his belief in the importance of the Spanish conflict for Cuba and Latin America, Pablo felt a need still to justify his choice to switch activist arenas from Cuba to Spain, responding to criticism by those who did not see the same connection between the struggles as he

⁷⁵ Torriente to Ramiro Valdés Daussá, New York, 4 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 52.

⁷⁶ Torriente to Ramiro Valdés Daussá, New York, 4 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 52; Torriente to Alfredo Sánchez Arango, New York, 6 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 54; Torriente to “Adolfo García,” pseudonym for Raúl Roa, New York, 10 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 62.

⁷⁷ Torriente to Ramiro Valdés Daussá, New York, 4 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 51–52; Torriente to “Adolfo García,” pseudonym for Raúl Roa, New York, 10 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 62; Torriente to Ramiro Valdés Daussá, New York, 12 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 66–67.

did. “I do not dispute,” he wrote to a friend, “that I could . . . be of more use in Cuba, for Cuba, today, than in Spain.” However, he argued, the choice faced in Spain—the choice to accept or reject fascism—was, he believed, a matter of life-and-death for the whole world, particularly “the colonial or semi-colonial countries.”⁷⁸ It was a highly significant and important event in which he felt deeply he should take part. He summarized to Roa his desire to go to Spain, suggesting a dramatic sense of his own destiny as well as modesty about his qualifications as an activist:

You all have confused me a little bit with an organizer or something of this sort. I am far from it, in my most profound and sincere judgment. Perhaps I go to Spain in search of all the teachings I lack to fill this role, to see if someday I can give of myself something more than an agitator journalist. And I don’t carry any aspiration of being a musketeer. I go simply to learn for our struggle one day. If something else happens it is because this is the way of revolution. Like if a grenade makes me lame. Do not believe either that I am mad. Sincerely, I am trying to let you in on the secret of my impulse to go there. And there is, as there always is in me, the emotion of impulse that tells me that my place is there now. Because my eyes were made to see extraordinary things. And my *maquinita* to recount them. And this is all.⁷⁹

Pablo in Spain

Torriente left New York by ship on 1 September 1936. He arrived in Madrid on 24 September after the Atlantic crossing and short periods of time spent in Brussels, Paris, and Barcelona. His arrival in Spain energized him tremendously. He worked without respite, sponsored by two Communist-affiliated periodicals: *New Masses* of the United States and *El Machete* of Mexico. His friend and fellow Cuban exile in New York, Jaime Bofill, served as interlocutor for Pablo with the editors of *New Masses*. (Bofill worked as Torriente’s

⁷⁸ Torriente to Ramiro Valdés Daussá, New York, 12 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 66.

⁷⁹ Torriente to “Adolfo García,” pseudonym for Raúl Roa, New York, 18 August 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 69–70.

administrative assistant in New York during Pablo's time in Spain, translating his articles and bringing them to the appropriate offices. He would go on to follow his friend's lead, later traveling to the Spanish conflict and serving in the same post, political commissar of the brigade led by "El Campesino," Valentín González.)⁸⁰ Torriente requested that Bofill send along orders from the periodical. "I await any kind of instructions," he wrote to his friend the day after his arrival in Madrid. "But I wait working, naturally."⁸¹ He walked the streets, took notes, met and interviewed people. He sought out and obtained interviews with important figures, using his connections with other writers and journalists, some of which he formed through his involvement with the Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas (Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals) in Madrid.⁸² Also, he wrote, "I speak with the people, which is what I like best."⁸³ In addition to the foreign periodicals that sponsored him, the Cuban magazines *Bohemia*, *Mediodía*, and *Noticias de Hoy* would publish his pieces on the Spanish conflict, also, for readers on the island.

Torriente sought to explain to his readers the significant differences between the Republican and Nationalist sides. His essay "En el parapeto: Polémica con el enemigo" ("In the parapet: Polemic with the enemy"), first published in English entitled "Polemic in the Trenches" in *New Masses* (8 December 1936) and later printed in Spanish in *Bohemia* (10 February 1937),⁸⁴ framed the struggle and revealed how the author understood the positions of the two sides. The essay was based on a curious occurrence. Torriente had traveled to the Sierra de

⁸⁰ Ana Suárez Díaz, *Escapé de Cuba: El exilio neoyorquino de Pablo de la Torriente Brau (marzo, 1935–agosto, 1936)* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2008), 549.

⁸¹ Torriente to Jaime Bofill, 25 September 1936, in Suárez Díaz, *Escapé de Cuba*, 549–551.

⁸² "Madrid's House of Culture," *The Volunteer for Liberty* 1, no. 19 (18 October 1937): 3.

⁸³ (Zoe) Torriente, "Pablo," in *Papeles de familia*, 29–30; Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 79; Torriente to Jaime Bofill, 25 September 1936, in Suárez Díaz, *Escapé de Cuba*, 549–551.

⁸⁴ Suárez Díaz, *Escapé de Cuba*, 555–556.

Guadarrama with a column of soldiers led by Francisco “Paco” Galán. “And there he receive[d] his baptism by fire,” remembered his sister Zoe in an essay written about her brother years later.⁸⁵ He attended meetings of the *milicianos* [Spanish Republican fighters], suffered from the daily shelling by Nationalists, and climbed the parapets. The parapet from which the Republicans fired, called La Peña del Alemán in honor of a fallen German comrade, was close enough to those of the Nationalists that, “as soon as it gets dark,” Pablo wrote, “little by little speeches start that end with harsh insults.” Both sides taunted: “Reds!” began the Nationalists, “have you eaten today? Have you smoked?” “Yes, fascist, we’ve got chicken left over,” responded the Republicans. “Reds, *hijos de puta!*” cried the Nationalists.⁸⁶

One distinction between the two sides, Torriente noted, was that whereas many spoke from his group, they heard only two or three voices from the opposing parapet. This difference, he asserted, demonstrated “that there was less enthusiasm on the side of the enemy.” The majority of the interchange was a discussion of the fight itself and the relative positions and merits of each side. Particularly interested in the subject of foreign aid, the enemy directed attention at him, Pablo claimed, calling on him to speak—“*Que hable el cubano*”—and saying: “Comrade, you who come from abroad should speak to tell us what you think of Spain.” He took the opportunity to describe the difference, as he saw it, between the foreigners who helped the Republicans and those who aided the Nationalists. With his side, he told them, were the workers of the United States, France, Belgium, Canada, England, and Mexico, the workers of the world, and those Nationalists who “have calluses on their hands” would be welcomed “with open

⁸⁵ (Zoe) Torriente, “Pablo,” in *Papeles de familia*, 30.

⁸⁶ Torriente to an unnamed correspondent, Madrid, 10 October 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 80–81; Torriente, “En el parapeto: Polémica con el enemigo,” Madrid, 29 October 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 222–237.

arms” by the Republicans if they defected, while the “exploiters” should prepare for death because there was “no hope for them.” On the Nationalist side, he believed, the foreigners were mercenaries, “Italians and Germans, paid by their governments, sent by Hitler and Mussolini, the two cocky provocateurs of the European political stage.” The Italians and Germans who fought for the Republic, on the other hand, were those “who fight for the liberty of their countries,” he claimed, the antifascists. “The whole world is against you,” he asserted to his opponents. “With you are the swine of the world.”⁸⁷

International support for both sides was a subject of intense debate, each side claiming legitimacy indicated by foreign endorsement. The Nationalists claimed that their foreign participants demonstrated international support: “Italians, Germans, and Moors come because we have the support of the whole world,” Torriente quoted a priest named Calvo, who usually spoke for the Nationalists, saying. Pablo spoke from his own perspective about Latin American participation:

We too, the Hispanic Americans, have come here, and there collected money for the cause of the Spanish people, because we are against the Spain which you want to prolong, the old Spain of the exploitation of our people, against that which was our stepmother and now will be our older sister . . .

The Nationalists, Pablo reported, were silent for a spell after this statement. Then one cried that Calvo would answer his claims. “Eh, you, reporter. You have spoken a string of lies,” Calvo said. If all America was with the Republicans, he argued, why were Uruguay and other Latin American countries about to withdraw their diplomats from Madrid? “The America that is with you is nothing but the bad America, which is equal to the bad Spain here.” To Torriente, the answer was obvious:

⁸⁷ Torriente, “En el parapeto.”

Listen, fascist, do you hear me? Well, I'm going to answer you, man. What easy things you ask! . . . Look, in the first place, you have to know governments are one thing, and people another. . . . This is what you need to understand, fascist, and this is what I want your men to know. When a people has the government it wants, as with Russia, or with Mexico, both send us first provisions and clothes, and second bullets to finish you off. Are you content yet, fascist?

Calvo was not satisfied, and the debate continued. He argued:

Listen, Cuban reporter, how is it that you feel so humanitarian as you say, when you accuse us of using Italian planes and yet you brag that you shoot us with Mexican bullets? Answer this, now, if you can, go on, that all of you are frauds and you would be better off not to meddle in Spanish affairs.

Again, the Cuban revolutionary had a revolutionary answer at the ready. He spoke “with a great voice resonating in the valley and the distance,” stating that the difference between an Italian plane and a Mexican bullet was the difference between fascism and antifascism:

These Italian planes you are using are the same that bomb the defenseless population of Abyssinia [Ethiopia], they are the same that Mussolini uses in the name of civilization to crush and assassinate a people, the most heroic in the world. And you who say you want a new Spain have attracted these heartless ones, these who represent barbarity, arson, assassination, and robbery today in the world; those who wish to provoke new killing in Europe. And you haven't hesitated to turn Spain into a new Abyssinia, and I know that you know what an Italian plane represents. But you don't know what a Mexican bullet represents, and I'm going to tell you. A Mexican bullet has never represented the conquest and the destruction of a people. A Mexican bullet has always represented a fight for the liberty of the people. A Mexican bullet represents for us, the Hispanic Americans, a constant, tireless fight against imperialism. For this reason, fascist, we feel proud to fire at you Mexican bullets, paid for by the Mexican workers, because they are bullets to liberate and not to oppress the people. And this is the difference between the Italian planes you use and the Mexican bullets we use.

With this conclusion, Torriente wrote, the Nationalists parapet exploded with gunfire and angry cries: “Traitor, go back to your country. *Hijo de puta!* How much are they paying you?”⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Torriente, “En el parapeto: Polémica con el enemigo,” in *Cartas y crónicas*, 222–229.

Torriente's arguments in "En el parapeto" claimed that transnational solidarity legitimized the Republican cause—certifying it with the approval and support of the working people of all nations. In other pieces, he explored the exchange between the Spanish Republicans and their foreign supporters. Emphasizing transnational solidarity, Pablo expressed an understanding of its complexity: Solidarity extended along multiple connections and the benefits of aid by foreigners to Spanish Republicans was not one-directional. Sometimes it took concrete form. Torriente reported widespread monetary support from his part of the world in the article "América frente al fascismo" ("America against fascism"):

I want to say to all of the *milicianos* . . . from all parts of this front, that in the United States, the workers, Americans, Spaniards, and Latin Americans, gathered in numerous committees, raise without stopping . . . dollars and more dollars for the cause of the Spanish Revolution. The Hispanic-American Antifascist Committee made up of Spaniards and Latin Americans, raises money at a rate of 500 to 1,000 dollars daily.

People in most of the countries of Latin America were managing to collect money for the Spanish cause, the article asserted, despite their living under dictatorships. In Cuba, Torriente claimed with pride, the people raised \$27,000 in just two days.⁸⁹ Monetary support from foreign actors to Spanish Republicans was not the only avenue of solidarity, however. As he expressed in his shouting match with the Nationalists, Pablo viewed the Spanish conflict in the context of Cuba's and Latin America's historic connection with Spain and anticolonial struggles. The conditions under which many Latin Americans struggled to support the Republicans highlighted the potential for aid to travel back across the Atlantic, from Spain to the Western Hemisphere. By building solidarity with the Republicans, Cubans and other Latin Americans would not only help their Spanish brethren but also further their own causes, both by dealing a blow to international fascism that threatened them and by learning revolutionary lessons from the

⁸⁹ Torriente, "América frente al fascismo," Buitrago, 7 October 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 278–279.

Spaniards. Pablo's sister Zoe Torriente summarized this point, which we have seen already expressed by Pablo during preparations for his departure: "He [went] to live the Spanish war to learn from it and then to be useful to Cuba, because he [knew] that the only way to free Cuba from the dictatorships and Yankee imperialism, the only cause of our ills, would be an armed fight."⁹⁰ The idea that Republican Spain provided important lessons for Cuban activists is one we will see repeated by others.

The clarity with which Torriente preached Republican support to Nationalists in an opposing parapet faltered faced with the grim realities of war. Though there is no indication that his support for the Republic waned, Pablo's zeal and focus wavered after a couple of months in the warzone. Late in November, he remarked in a letter on hearing a piece by Chopin on a car radio, "in the middle of a silent camp, close to the enemy." He thought wistfully of a time when music had for him "more diverse horizons than that of revolutionary hymns sung discordantly by marching companies." He lost himself in the music, remembering. The man who had turned on the radio, an assistant to the commander of the company, asked if he liked the piece. "I remember," he wrote, "because the next night, on the same road, he disappeared, probably forever." This jovial man, of brilliant wit, loved by all, was now gone and forgotten in the chaotic struggle of the fight.⁹¹ Torriente was ardently committed to the cause; but the sharp and strident idealistic absolutes of his rhetoric softened somewhat in response to the harsh day-to-day experience he was living. A constant assault on Madrid of cannon fire and enemy planes, Torriente wrote, was creating "a type of enraged resignation" in the general population. La Gran Vía, Madrid's equivalent of New York's Broadway, and Puerta del Sol, its Times Square, had

⁹⁰ (Zoe) Torriente, "Pablo," in *Papeles de familia*, 29.

⁹¹ Torriente to an unnamed correspondent, Madrid, 21 November 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 135–136.

borne the brunt of the bombardment. “I have been very close several times to places where inexpressible tragedies have occurred,” the revolutionary journalist reported. He was standing, as had been his wish, “close to the great silent whirlpool of death.” Yet suddenly he found reporting difficult. He would try to write another piece about the International Brigades, he promised a friend, but “understand that in these moments it is extraordinarily difficult to write in a journalistic tone.”⁹²

By the end of November Torriente was struggling personally, both to continue working and to keep his spirits up. He wrote about a party his regiment threw to lift the spirits of the people of Madrid, and then he did not write again for 15 days. His letter of 13 December betrayed some annoyance with his friends on the other side of the Atlantic. He had not written because he did not have a spare moment, he stated, but also because he had gotten nothing in return for some time. Dismissing the craft for which he had been known his whole life, he wrote: “And I do not like to write for the pleasure of doing it, because this is time I could spend doing other things.” Continuing in a terse tone, he stated that he had had “formidable war experiences” during the days he had not written, and that there was general pessimism about the fight. Nevertheless, he went on to describe positive elements of the situation, such as military advances, education efforts in the regiments, and improved discipline among the *milicianos*. He mentioned the weddings that were taking place among revolutionaries, marriages affirmed for the time being with the statement: “[B]y the powers invested in me by the laws of war and revolution.” And then he concluded:

It is absolutely freezing. If I am not careful, I freeze to death. I have a sheepskin vest and also I got a very beautiful *chilaba de moro*. But it’s not enough. My feet hurt. I don’t know how I am going to be able to endure this winter without heat. . . .

⁹² Torriente to an unnamed correspondent, Madrid, 21 November 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 139–141.

Regards to everyone even though no one remembers to send me anything. I haven't learned anything of the Conference of Buenos Aires⁹³ or of the latest American successes. And of Cuba, political news, not one bit.⁹⁴

Though he had managed to catalogue a number of hopeful developments, Torriente sounded discouraged.

Pablo, stated his sister Zoe, was not the kind of man who would contemplate war without taking part. So, after a few months, he abandoned his pen and joined with the *milicianos*. Roa echoed this interpretation. It was not honorable, he wrote, “to fight with the pen when what was urgently needed was to have a confrontation with bullets.” With bombs falling on Madrid, Pablo wrote to his wife:

I cannot stay seated before a typewriter while the city is being bombed. I go out into the street and see the mangled bodies of women, children, beasts of burden. . . . On the radio two women, “La Pasionaria” and Margarita Nelken, are calling pathetically for all able-bodied men to take up rifles and help defend Madrid. I am going to offer myself as a volunteer. I will fight beside the Spaniards. When the danger is past, I will return to my typewriter.

On 19 December Torriente was stuck by a bullet and killed. He was 35 years old. “I learned of his death on the Madrid front in a newspaper,” Teté remembered, detached. His body, Zoe wrote, spent three days behind enemy lines before being recovered—but her narrative lost track of her brother's remains after this point. They were, she implied, in a mass grave for dead Republicans, “awaiting an opportune moment for their final return to Cuba.” Pablo was, she asserted, “the first Hispanic American to cross the Atlantic to go to the Spanish Revolution, and he will remain

⁹³ The Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace, Buenos Aires, Argentina, December 1936, at which representatives of the nations of the Western Hemisphere discussed the Spanish Civil War, fascist attacks on Ethiopia and China, and the potential for world war, and adopted the “Declaration of Principles of Inter-American Solidarity and Cooperation.”

⁹⁴ Torriente to an unnamed correspondent, Madrid, 13 December 1936, in *Cartas y crónicas*, 148–155.

there as a symbol of the human solidarity between America and Spain.” Teté’s conclusion was less hopeful than that of her sister-in-law. “On the fall of the Republic,” she wrote, “his remains were carried out by a retreating Cuban, but they have never since been located, and Pablo, like Ignacio Agramonte, of whom he used to tell me when he was a youth of seventeen and I a fascinated girl of seven, has no known grave.”⁹⁵

In your surname, wrote a friend to Zoe de la Torriente Brau in 1941, “is rooted Cuba’s revolutionary spirit and the hopes of free Spain.”⁹⁶ Indeed, her brother Pablo was transformed, in death, into a powerful symbol of the struggles of both countries. He became an iconic figure, an inspiration to other Cubans to travel to Spain. Even the publication of the English-language volunteers in Spain, *The Volunteer for Liberty*, noted his passing. In an article describing the Madrid mansion that housed the Alianza de Intelectuales Antifascistas, *The Volunteer* stated that some members of the Alliance “leave the house to continue their work as fighters or artists at the front, and they do not come back again.” “Pablo de la Torriente,” the article continued, “the Cuban, went away a few months ago, never to return.”⁹⁷ Like Mella, Trejo, and other activists before him, Pablo became a martyr, his memory celebrated and used by those who survived him. His death, then, does not mark the end of our engagement with his story. As we will see, his legacy is a recurrent theme in Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic.

⁹⁵ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 79–80; (Zoe) Torriente, “Pablo,” in *Papeles de familia*, 29–31; Roa, “Los últimos días de Pablo de la Torriente Brau,” in *Órbita de Raúl Roa*, 336. Two relevant articles appear in issues of *Mediodía* which I have not been able to access: “El cadáver de Pablo de la Torriente tendido en el Comité Ibero Americano de Barcelona,” no. 20 (5 June 1937): 14 and Lino Novas Calvo, “El entierro de Pablo de la Torriente Brau,” no. 10 (25 February 1937): 9. I am hopeful yet that I may be able to access these issues of the periodical on a subsequent trip to Cuba, perhaps in the National Library, which was closed during my research there. The references come from Ministerio de Cultura, Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, *Índice de Mediodía, 1936–1939* (Havana: Editorial Orbe, 1979), 142–143.

⁹⁶ Mercedes Pinto de Rojo to Zoe de la Torriente Brau, 1941, in “El álbum de Zoe,” in *Papeles de familia*, 94.

⁹⁷ “Madrid’s House of Culture,” *The Volunteer for Liberty* 1, no. 19 (18 October 1937): 3.

Widowed, Teté also felt inspired to stay in the struggle by Pablo's sacrifice. Despite her suffering at this personal tragedy, she found the resilience to continue. We will return to her story when we examine the campaign to aid Spanish children which she helped to establish and led for a time. We will see, too, how her involvement in revolutionary activism reemerged in the 1950s after a period of disengagement caused by defeat and despair. The stories of these two activists illustrate the ways in which individual lives connect disparate eras and locations of activism, and following the trajectories of these lives allows us to perceive continuity of activism across cross time and space.

CHAPTER 2

Cuban Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War

Hundreds of Cubans, those on the island and those in exile, followed Pablo de la Torriente Brau's example and volunteered in Spain. Cuba sent more volunteers during the Spanish Civil War than any other Latin American country, volunteers who served in both the International Brigades and the regular Republican forces. Though conflicting claims, scattered and incomplete records, the use of pseudonyms and fake passports, and the diverse origin points of the volunteers' voyages make identifying a precise number impossible, estimates suggest that approximately 1,000 Cubans participated in the Spanish conflict.¹ Here, after a brief history of international participation in the war that serves to contextualize our study, we examine the identities and experiences of these Cubans who chose to cross the ocean and take part in a war in a foreign country—though, as we have already seen, Spain was less foreign to many Cubans than it was to most other international volunteers. To understand the identities of the Cuban volunteers, we utilize the method of prosopography, combining statistical analysis of information about their demographics with biographical sketches illustrating their characteristics more difficult to quantify. Using the 1931 Cuban census, we compare the volunteers to the general Cuban population in order to determine if their demographic characteristics diverged from those of their contemporaries. We get to know a handful of individual volunteers' stories more intimately; personal vignettes help to illustrate the volunteers' demographic and political diversity and the complexity of their motivations to participate in the war. The diversity of the

¹ Denise Urcelay-Maragnès, author of one of the only scholarly works on Cuban volunteers in the war, found 1,056. Denise Urcelay-Maragnès, "Los voluntarios cubanos en la Guerra Civil Española (1936–1939): La leyenda roja," *Historia Social*, no. 63 (2009): 41. Gerold Gino Baumann, an independent researcher who published a book on Latin American participation in the conflict, found 840 Cubans. Gerold Gino Baumann, *Los voluntarios latinoamericanos en la Guerra Civil Española* (Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2009), 34.

volunteers and the complexity of their motivations complicate the overly simplistic narrative of foreign participation in the Republican cause as “the Good Fight.” Interwoven with this study of the Cuban volunteers’ identities is an examination of their experience during the war. We consider the transnational networks that facilitated their recruitment in and travel from both Cuba and the United States. We see how Cuban lives, relationships, and spaces were transnational, and that this transnational character gave Cubans in the Spanish conflict special opportunities and advantages, setting them apart from other foreign volunteers. The international and local involvement of the Communist Party plays a central role, but we are careful also to note that the story is not simply or only a Communist one as some authors have suggested.² We conclude our discussion of the Cuban volunteer experience in the Spanish Civil War by assessing its outcome: What impact did their participation have?

A Brief History of International Participation in the Spanish Civil War

Though the Republicans did not receive formal foreign aid to nearly the same extent as the Nationalists did from Germany and Italy, their cause did attract foreign participation by numerous and diverse individual volunteers, the majority of whom served in the International Brigades.³ The International Brigades were a project of the Communist International (Comintern). The Comintern decided in September 1936 to organize foreign volunteers to aid

² An example of this assumption can be found in the famous volume of Cuban history by Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or The Pursuit of Freedom* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), 703. He states mistakenly that Cuban volunteers who served in Spain were “mostly combatant communists.” Partially accurate, he notes: “The Cubans in general were regarded as North Americans and served with them, and as a link in interpreting for them with Spaniards.”

³ The classic work of scholarship on the International Brigades is Andreu Castells, *Las Brigadas Internacionales de la Guerra de España* (Barcelona: Editorial Ariel, 1974). As with histories of the war, however, there has been an enormous abundance of scholarship and memoirs written about the Brigades, some general and some specific to the volunteers from certain countries or regions. A number of these works are cited below.

the Spanish Republic and ordered the Communist Party of France to coordinate recruitment and mobilization. It is estimated from Comintern records that over 30,000 foreign volunteers arrived at the I.B. base in Albacete over the course of the war. Initially, these recruits made up five International Brigades, traditionally identified by their numbers in Roman numerals: the XI, XII, XIII, XIV, and XV Brigades. Later a sixth I.B. formed numbered the 129th. The foreigners' energy and enthusiasm for the cause provided a valuable boost to embattled Republicans in many cases; their combat effectiveness, however, was lacking. Original orders called for men with military training and experience, but many of the volunteers did not meet these criteria, and some were even physically unfit. There was also a shortage of officers among the volunteers, and thus many units came to be commanded by unqualified leaders. As a result, the international units suffered extreme losses in battle, and had to be fortified with Spaniards. Morale suffered. Poor training, political infighting, lack of discipline, and desertion crippled the forces further. Nevertheless, the International Brigades took part in nearly every major battle of the conflict, and Spanish loyalists and their supporters celebrated the transnational solidarity they represented.

That the Spanish Civil War was a conflict both Spanish and international placed Latin American volunteers in a unique position relative to their comrades from other countries. On the one hand, notes one scholar of the war, the fight in Spain was between democracy and fascism; on the other, it resulted from "peculiarly *Spanish* controversies...land reform, the role of the military in public life, church-state relations, educational and cultural innovation."⁴ While most foreign volunteers in Spain understood well the international significance of the struggle, those from Latin America empathized deeply with the country's domestic problems as well, many of which their nations shared. "Unlike [North] Americans or Western Europeans, Spanish

⁴ Falcoff, "Preface," x.

Americans did not ‘discover’ the criticality of Spanish issues in the summer of 1936.”⁵ Latin American volunteers in Spain were better able than their international counterparts to comprehend all the complex causes of the conflict, not just overarching issues such as democracy and fascism. In their involvement in the Republican fight, they engaged with all the causal factors, interpreting the struggle in Spain as one of significance for Spain, for their countries in Spanish America, and for nations and people everywhere. For example, we have seen already that Torriente believed the fact that Spanish Republicans struggled against their military to be highly significant to Cuban reality, in which Colonel Batista, backed by the armed forces, controlled the island as a military strongman. To defend “the motherland,” to fight for their homelands, and to progress toward a better world, Cuban and other Latin American men and a few women crossed the Atlantic of their own volition and entered into a war in which no one required them to fight.⁶ Yet it was a fight they saw as their own, and many Spaniards interpreted the connections between themselves and the Spanish American volunteers similarly. It was this special sense of connection that caused Republican officials to welcome Cuban volunteers into the regular Republican forces as well as the International Brigades. We will examine below how the Cuban’s special position in the conflict, born of their transnational identities, impacted their experience in the war.

Cuban Volunteers’ Identities

The Cubans who volunteered for the Republic—like other Cuban antifascists—were diverse in terms of their places of origin, backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, occupations, and

⁵ Ibid., xi.

⁶ Baumann, *Los voluntarios latinoamericanos*, 21–27.

political beliefs, though some groups were represented disproportionately and virtually all of the volunteers who went to Spain were young and male. We discuss the issue of diversity in Cuban antifascism throughout this study. In this chapter, we use the historical method of prosopography to explore the volunteers' identities. Prosopography has often been used to study elites, particularly political elites. This circumstance is due in large part to the availability of records. In order to perform demographic analysis and to construct biographical sketches based on historical source material, the practitioner of prosopography must have access to detailed records that include both basic demographic data and more in-depth, qualitative assessments. Often such records exist only for elites. However, though most of them were not elites and therefore not the kinds of people who tend to leave behind extensive historical records, the international volunteers in Spain left an archival mark. An extraordinary body of source material exists in Moscow's Records of the International Brigades within the Communist International (Comintern) Archives⁷ containing documentation of over 450 Cuban volunteers in Spain.⁸ Due to the fact that they were doing something out of the ordinary and therefore notable, as well as the fact that the Communists were good record-keepers, we have an archive of detailed documents cataloguing thousands of men and women who volunteered from around the world. This collection—in addition to other fragmentary and scattered source material—allows us to learn a great deal about the Cuban volunteers individually and as a group. For many of the individuals documented in this archive, the records include extensive biographical surveys that

⁷ Records of the International Brigades, Comintern Archives, Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Recent History (RGASPI), Moscow, Russia.

⁸ Due to misspellings and several probable pseudonyms—for instance, neither Cuban patriot José Martí nor St. Francis of Assisi fought in the Spanish Civil War, but Martí's name and a "Francisco de Asis" appear in the records—it is not possible to know precisely how many separate individuals the records document. We address more on the confusion about volunteer names and pseudonyms in the discussion of the volunteer known as "Cuba Hermosa" below.

contain information about their age and place of origin, family and educational background, marital and parental status, and occupation. Also, the archive contains political assessments by Communist officials of the volunteers and by the volunteers of themselves, as well as information about their membership in organizations, their connections to one another, and their service in Spain. These sources are extremely valuable not only to the present study but also to the study of transnational activism, networks, and solidarity more broadly. They constitute a record of transnational political engagement by a diverse group of Cubans, and give us the ability to craft a prosopography that includes many non-elites.

The first component of our prosopography compares a random, stratified sample of the Cuban volunteers in Spain present in the Moscow archive⁹ to the Cuban population at large using data from the 1931 Cuban census—the census taken closest to the years of the Spanish conflict. We examine characteristics for which the census accounts and which appear in the archive’s biographical records, in order to compare the sample to the larger group. The purpose of such a

⁹ Our method for choosing the sample was as follows: Records in the Moscow archive are, for the most part, in alphabetical order by last name. There are typos and pseudonyms and, in many places, evidence of confusion regarding Hispanic surnames by record creators. These factors make a clear accounting difficult, but we have done our best to sort through duplicate and false records, resulting in a total number of 463. Working through the alphabet in order, we grouped the records by first letter of surname into groups of approximately the same size. Some letters common to Hispanic surnames—such as ‘A,’ ‘G,’ ‘M,’ ‘R,’ and ‘S’—made up their own groups. Other less common first letters were grouped together to equal the more popular letters approximately in number of names. Rounding up, we then chose a sample from each group that was equal to or slightly greater than 10%, resulting in a total sample size of 52. Moving from one letter group to the next, we alternated selecting the sample from the front of the group and going in alphabetical order and from the back and going in reverse; for example, for ‘R’ we started with Ramos Infante and worked forward and then for ‘S’ with Surribas González and worked back. Moving through the records in this fashion, we chose each individual for whom we could identify at least five of the six data points tested: sex, age, place of origin, marital status, education level, and occupation.

It is my intent to perform in the future analysis of all Cuban volunteers in the Moscow archive for whom at least five of the data points are available; however, technological problems with my database earlier this year requiring a lengthier intervention than I had the ability to pursue under my present time constraints kept me from doing so in this version of this study, hence the random, stratified sample of 10% included at this time.

comparison is to determine how representative the sample is of the general population: Was the demographic makeup of Cuban volunteers in Spain similar to that of the Cuban population as a whole? How did they compare? Based on generalizations of a typical political activist, we would suspect that the volunteers might have been more likely to be young, male, unmarried, and urban, and perhaps disproportionately well-educated professionals compared to the general population. Using data from the Moscow archive, the statistical analysis component of our prosopography allows us to test this proposition in the case of Spanish Civil War volunteers from Cuba. To do so, we use the Pearson's chi-square test for goodness-of-fit as our statistical methodology.¹⁰ This test uses the distribution of the data from the census for a given variable—age, marital status, etc.—to predict the distribution for the sample. We use the table of chi-square results to determine the probability that any observed discrepancy is due to chance as opposed to an actual difference between the census and our sample. This method gives us a statistically meaningful way to assess similarity and divergence between the Cuban volunteers and the island's population as a whole.

In 1931 the island of Cuba was home to 3,962,344 people, according to the census. The two most straightforward categories in which to compare our sample to the general population are sex and age. The Cuban population was 53.1% male and 46.9% female. Sex is the category in which Cuban volunteers in the Spanish conflict were least representative of the population at large: Though not exclusively male, the group of Cuban volunteers in Spain included only a handful of women; the Moscow archive contains records for five people definitively identifiable

¹⁰ For an explanation of this methodology, see: Sidney Siegel, *Non-parametric Statistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956).

as women and a later accounting by Cuban veterans lists nine.¹¹ Our sample taken from the Moscow archive was 98.08% male. The divergence was so extreme for this variable, that a chi-square test is unnecessary.

Age is another characteristic for which one might expect our sample to differ substantially from the total population. It seems likely that our sample of Spanish Civil War volunteers would be disproportionately young, and in fact it was. The chi-square test confirms our hypothesis in this case. In 1931, the year of the census,¹² none of the individuals in our sample of Cuban volunteers was under the age of 10 or over the age of 49. Within this range, we group our sample of volunteers into the same age ranges as used by the census: 10–19, 20–29, 30–39, and 40–49. We then compare the volunteers in these ranges to the general population in the same ranges. Predicting the number of volunteers in each category based on the distribution in the census, the chi-square test indicates that the largest discrepancies are in the 10–19 and the 40–49 age groups. Teenagers (as of 1931) were significantly overrepresented in the sample, and the 40–49 group was significantly underrepresented. The 30–39 group was somewhat underrepresented, and the number of twentysomethings is about what we would predict in the sample from the data in the census. Therefore, the chi-squared test, which adjusts for the number of categories available, indicates that the volunteers were disproportionately younger than other Cubans within their age range, 10–49.

¹¹ Agrupación de Veteranos Internacionalistas Cubanos, “Grados militares alcanzados por los cubanos en los tres años de guerra,” undated, Expediente 1/135, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63184, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete, Spain.

¹² In order to make the comparison with the 1931 census valid, we must adjust the volunteers ages to what they would have been in that year: A man who wrote that he was 21 on a survey in 1938, for example, would fall into the 10–19 category.

So our sample was disproportionately male and young. Was it disproportionately unmarried? The Cuban census of 1931 provides data on marital status broken down by both age and sex. Unfortunately, the age ranges used in the presentation of these data are slightly different than the age ranges used elsewhere in the census, due, it seems, to the fact that 14 was the age of consent for males: 14–20, 21–30, etc. Also, it is not possible to know whether biographical survey responses of “married” by volunteers all represented legally sanctioned marriages or if some were unofficial, “common-law” marriages (a separate group, noted as “unidos sin sanción legal,” in the census). That there are a number of examples observed in which a survey respondent reported having children but being single suggests that at least some volunteers did not consider themselves to be married if they were—or had been—involved in a more casual relationship; however it is impossible to know for certain how to interpret these responses in relation to the census categories. The census also includes categories for widows/widowers and divorced people, which do not appear on the surveys found in the Moscow archive. In order to create a comparison between the census and our sample, therefore, we have had to work with these limitations. First, since our sample is overwhelmingly male, and since marital status in the census differs significantly for men and women, we have tested marital status only for men, omitting the one woman who appears in our sample so as not to skew the results. Second, we have omitted data from the census on common-law marriages, divorced men, and widowers, since these categories do not appear in the data for our sample. Third, we have created a broader age range, 14–50, which lines up with the age categories for the census while not excluding any of the individuals in our sample, thus creating equivalent groups for the purposes of comparison. Having set up our data in this way, we perform the chi-square test and find that, surprisingly, there is little divergence between our sample and the Cuban population of

men under 50 in terms of marital status. The men of the sample are in fact representative of the marriage rate among Cuban men in their age range, which was approximately 28% of men age 14–50.

The next characteristic for which we want to make a comparison between our sample of volunteers and the Cuban population at large is province of origin. Cuba had six provinces during the 1930s: Pinar del Río, La Habana, Matanzas, Las Villas/Santa Clara, Camagüey, and Oriente. The island's two major cities—La Habana (Havana) and Santiago de Cuba—were located in La Habana and Oriente provinces, respectively. We might hypothesize that Cuban volunteers in Spain were likely to have come from urban centers, since cities are hubs of political action and since trans-Atlantic voyages originated there. In the case of Cuba, the major cities Havana and Santiago de Cuba have both been historically politically active, though it seems that volunteers departed for Spain only from Havana. If our hypothesis is correct, we would expect that a disproportionate number of volunteers would come from the provinces of La Habana and Oriente. The biographical records in the International Brigades archive often include individuals' places of birth, making a determination of province of origin possible. The census provides data on the current population of each province in 1931, not place of birth. In other words, the census reports residents in the year 1931, whereas the biographical information for our sample includes place of birth for births that took place from the 1890s to the 1910s. The comparison, therefore, is imperfect, since people move around. However, substantial discrepancies would still be informative.

From the census we learn that Oriente was the most populous province, followed by La Habana, and then Las Villas/Santa Clara. The other three provinces were significantly less populated, with Matanzas coming in last. A chi-square test predicting the number of volunteers

born in each province based on the total population of each province according to the 1931 census confirms our hypothesis only partially. La Habana province was indeed substantially overrepresented in our sample. There are two and a half times as many volunteers in the sample from La Habana province as predicted based on the census data. Oriente province, on the other hand, was significantly underrepresented. We observe approximately one-fifth the number of volunteers we would have expected to come from Oriente in our sample. Las Villas/Santa Clara is also underrepresented, with fewer than half the number of volunteers predicted. The provinces of Pinar del Rio, Matanzas, and Camagüey are represented in the sample at approximately the numbers we would expect. While it is predictable that a comparatively large number of politically active volunteers would come from the island's political center and main hub of volunteer recruitment for the Spanish conflict—Havana—it is important to note that the group did encompass significant diversity of origin, and that Santiago de Cuba, the other politically active urban center on the island was in fact significantly underrepresented. That our chi-squared analysis suggests that more Cuban volunteers were born in La Habana province than we would (imperfectly) predict based on population of the province in 1931 might reinforce a stereotype of the typical Cuban political activist as being urban. However, the underrepresentation of Santiago de Cuba contradicts this image, as does qualitative evidence, such as statements by director of volunteer recruitment Ramón Nicolau González, indicating that there were volunteers coming to Havana from other parts of the island specifically for the purpose of traveling to Spain. People coming from small towns and remote parts of the island to Havana to volunteer to go to Spain is significant, and might be somewhat surprising given the stereotype of the urban-based political activist. The mobility of Cuban activists of the 1930s (one function of the migratory lives of Cubans generally), however, is a phenomenon we have

previously observed in the case of Torriente and Casuso and will continue to consider throughout this study. The volunteers' biographical surveys make clear that many of them were already mobile for personal, familial, economic, and/or political reasons by the mid-1930s. Questionnaires asked volunteers to state how many cities and towns in their countries they knew in addition to their own, and many of the Cubans answered all or nearly all. Surveys also asked about time spent in other countries, and some of the Cubans reported having lived in the United States, Spain, Mexico, or France prior to volunteering in the war.

The 1931 Cuban census collected data on level of formal education; but, upon consulting the archives of the department of statistics for the purpose of producing a published version of the census in 1978, editors found that records for the categories "Public Instruction" and "School Attendance" had been lost.¹³ The published version of the census includes literacy rates and limited information about academic and professional degrees. The Cuban census reported that of the 2,924,537 people on the island over the age of ten, 2,095,836 (71.66%) knew how to read, 824,556 (28.19%) were illiterate, and the level of instruction obtained by the other 4,145 (0.14%) was unknown.¹⁴ For men over the age of 21, of which there were 1,084,517, the census reported that 756,375 (69.74%) were literate, 326,517 (30.11%) were illiterate, and for 1,625 (0.15%) the level of instruction was unknown. Additionally, the census reported that among men over 21 years of age, 7,309 (0.67%) had earned academic titles and 3,819 (0.35%) had earned professional titles.¹⁵

¹³ Gladys Alonso and Ernesto Chávez Alvarez, eds., *Memorias inéditas del censo de 1931* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978), 321.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 246.

Data for our sample in this category are also imperfect. We have fewer data on education level than we do for the other categories: for only 76.92% of the volunteers in our sample do we have this data point, as opposed to 92.31–100.00% for other points. The question concerning education did not appear on all the surveys, whereas questions about the other characteristics were more common; it is also possible that those with little or no formal education either did not respond to the question or did not take a survey, though it is evident that some of the surveys were conducted orally with answers filled in by a third party, so lack of literacy would not necessarily keep a volunteer out of the record. No one in the sample answered that they had no formal education. The question about education level was formatted as a fill-in-the-blank rather than a multiple-choice; as a result, the answers are not standardized, and include classifications that duplicate or overlap one another: primary, elementary, secondary, baccalaureate (“bachillerato”) and baccalaureate year one, military school, university, and business school. Some respondents also listed technical courses without indicating the type of institution at which these courses had been completed.

For the purposes of a comparison with the census, however, deciphering these classifications and the distinctions between them gets us nowhere in any case, since we lack the corresponding data for the population as a whole. We cannot make any kind of meaningful comparison between level of formal education data in our sample—since there is no way for us to know if those who skipped the question did so because they had no schooling or for some other reason—and literacy rate data in the census—since there is no consistent way for us to know if volunteers were literate. Based only on our biographical data from the Moscow archive, we can determine that, of those who indicated their level of education, a large majority (72.50%) indicated that their level of education was primary or elementary. Though we cannot determine

how their level of education compared to the population at large, therefore, we can assert that the majority of the volunteers in the sample were neither highly educated nor entirely lacking formal education.

The census of 1931 defined as occupations “all that which has a lucrative nature and which man works at to live or to sustain those who depend on him.” People other than the head of a household could have an occupation, it pointed out, though it did exclude “children at home or in school, the mothers of families, etc.” Accounting in this way, the census found that 1,297,764 Cubans had occupations in 1931, approximately 32.8% of the total population. Of all males on the island, 58.5% had occupations.¹⁶ Since we have chosen individuals from archival records who filled in an occupation question on a questionnaire, we have biased our sample in favor of the employed. It is possible that some who left the question blank did so because they were unemployed. There are some questionnaires in the archive in which the respondent indicates that he is unemployed, but none of these happened to have been captured in our sample, though we do have two individuals who reported being only students with no work listed. Therefore, we cannot test our sample against the population for a comparison of the employed vs. the unemployed.

What about comparing types of employment? The census breaks down occupations into five broad categories: 1) agriculture, fishing, and mining; 2) professionals; 3) services, domestic and personal; 4) commerce and transport; and 5) manufacturing and mechanical industries. Anticipating our trouble with these categories, the published version of the census notes that they are not as clearly defined as would be ideal: “The line that divides these groups or classes is often difficult to distinguish, and in many isolated cases severe difficulties arise in choosing the

¹⁶ Ibid., 109, 116.

most appropriate group in which to classify a person or profession.”¹⁷ The occupations individual volunteers listed in their biographical questionnaires add to our difficulty, since many stated their involvement in more than one field. Thus we have a laborer who was also a student and one who was also a baseball player; we have a kitchen helper who was also a tailor and a cook who was also a dockworker; we have three people who reported being both chauffeurs and mechanics. Even for those volunteers who listed only one occupation, it is difficult to determine the occupational category in many cases, since the census provides little specific definition of the groupings. Additionally, a substantial number of respondents to the biographical questionnaires in the Moscow archive listed the generic terms *jornalero* (laborer) and *empleado* (employee). Despite these difficulties, we will use the data we have to make a comparison between the sample and the general population.

Doing our best to determine the most accurate placement of each occupation given in our sample into one of the categories used in the census, we find the following. The only agricultural worker in our sample definitively identified as such is a “sugar chemist” (which would likely have been considered a professional-level agricultural job), though it is possible that some of those listed simply as laborers were agricultural laborers. The non-agricultural professionals include an accountant, an elementary school teacher, a court official, a member of the military, and two people in the arts. In the services, we have included food service employees, those in couture (tailor, cobbler, washer, etc.), those in communications (telegrapher, printer, etc.), and a barber. In commerce and transport are those who listed simply *comercio* (commerce) or *comerciante* (merchant or shopkeeper) and the notably large number (for the sample relative to other specific occupations) of men who worked in transportation: four

¹⁷ Ibid., 120.

chauffeurs, three mechanic/chauffeurs, two mechanics, and a stoker, whom, by including him in this category, we have assumed worked on the railroad as opposed to with a stationary machine, though we cannot be sure of this. Finally, in manufacturing and mechanical industries, our sample includes no one who listed factory work or other manufacturing; rather, the building trades dominate with two carpenters, and one each of a construction worker, an electrician, a painter, and varnisher.

A chi-square test of these data finds extreme underrepresentation of the agriculture, fishing, and mining occupations in our sample; even if we assumed that all those who listed the generic title “laborer” were in fact agricultural laborers, the sample would still include far fewer people in this category than we would predict based on the census. Professionals are only slightly overrepresented in the sample; service workers and those in commerce and transport are more substantially overrepresented, though the gap between the predicted and observed numbers is not nearly as large as in the case of the agriculture, fishing, and mining occupations. There is parity between the census and the sample in the manufacturing and mechanical industries occupations. It is not surprising that agricultural workers are underrepresented among the volunteers, though this fact might be useful in challenging some of the more romanticized propaganda to appear in the radical press that extolled the strong ties of solidarity that allegedly existed between the Cuban *guajiro* and the Spanish *campesino*.¹⁸ Neither are the other results particularly unanticipated, though we might have expected professionals to be somewhat more dramatically overrepresented in the sample. In fact, we find a diverse mixture of the professional and working classes.

¹⁸ Both the Word *guajiro* and the word *campesino* may be translated as ‘peasant,’ though *guajiro* is specific to Cuba.

Two other categories of potential interest concerning the volunteers are political conviction/involvement and race/ethnicity. Many of the Moscow archive records include information about volunteers' political identities. The Communists had a keen interest in assessing the volunteers who came to Spain for level of loyalty or danger to the Party. The Cuban census did not include data on political conviction—and in any case, many of the political groups of the day were clandestine if not illegal. Therefore, it is not possible to create a detailed comparison between the politics of the volunteers and those of the general population, though we may safely assert that many of the volunteers were politically committed leftists (though not all—we observe also the presence of volunteers without any specific political affiliation). The reasons this seemingly obvious assertion warrants a brief closer look is to dispel any sense that all the volunteers were Communists. A number of historical factors could contribute to this sense: the central role of the Communist International in creating and supporting the International Brigades, the work by the Cuban Communist Party to recruit volunteers, the better and more extensive records kept by Communists than by some other antifascist groups, and the historiography produced on the Spanish Civil War in Cuba after the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The historical records make clear, though, that, like the milieu of Republicans in the Spanish Civil War and that of the island's domestic political activists, the Cuban antifascist movement was politically and ideologically diverse—though most participants did fall somewhere along the left side of the spectrum. Official commentary and self-assessments concerning political ideology and group affiliation list anarchists, unionists, Trotskyists, and socialists; various Cuban groups including Joven Cuba (Young Cuba), the Agrarian Party (Partido Agrario Nacional, or P.A.N.), the Partido Revolucionario Cubano – Auténtico (“Authentic” Cuban Revolutionary Party), the Organización Revolucionaria Cubana Anti-imperialista (Cuban Revolutionary Anti-

imperialist Organization, or O.R.C.A.), and the Club Cubano Julio Antonio Mella; and, among those who had lived in Spain prior to the conflict, Spanish unions and political organizations. Others were “without party” and unaffiliated with any political organization or ideology, aside from being antifascist. This political and ideological diversity is a concept vital to the present study and will recur as a point of discussion in other chapters.

The biographical surveys preserved in the Moscow archive did not ask volunteers about their race or ethnicity, and photographic records—in addition to being incomplete—are not a sufficiently reliable source of information on categories that are often disputed in general and that were quite complex in the case of Cuba. Our accounting of Cuban volunteers of color must, therefore, rely on qualitative assessments. However, for the purpose of considering the relative diversity of the Cuban volunteers in Spain it may be useful to note the racial makeup of the island at that time. The 1931 Cuban census reported that the island’s population was 27.2% people of color, when the category “white” included Chinese.¹⁹ Elsewhere in the census, the category “of color” included people of Asian as well as African and mixed racial backgrounds (“población de color, incluso negros, mestizos y amarillos”), and the proportion rose slightly to 27.9%.²⁰ This discrepancy indicates both the arbitrary construction of racial categories and an apparent inconsistency or confusion regarding the racial character of the island’s Chinese population. The proportion of the population that was black or of mixed race (*elemento de color*) had declined substantially since its peak of 58.5% in the 1841 census, as the population of white Cubans (*elemento blanco*, including Chinese) had increased steadily over the same time period—the total number of people of color went up and down from census to census, while the white

¹⁹ Alonso and Chávez Alvarez, eds., *Memorias inéditas del censo*, 64.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

population grew consistently in each census except one (1899, during the bloody Cuban War of Independence) between 1775 and 1931.²¹ By 1931, therefore, a significant majority of Cubans were considered white.

Perhaps the most famous black Cuban volunteer was baseball player Basilio Cueria, whom we discuss in Chapter 4, but there were many others. Another gained a small amount of fame recently as the result of a high-profile photograph and a transnational search for his identity. The case of this volunteer, known by the pseudonym “Cuba Hermosa” (“Beautiful Cuba”), warrants some exploration here because it is exemplary of the challenges inherent in the creation of a prosopography of non-elites. The identities of many Spanish Civil War volunteers are obscured by unintentional errors and intentional concealment; to gain some sense of their identities requires that we piece together bits of information from fragmentary records scattered across the globe.

Cuba Hermosa²² emerged from anonymity in 2009 because he happened to be photographed in January 1937 in Barcelona by the Catalán photojournalist Agustí Centelles. The photograph (Figure 2.1) of the young black man in the estate of the late photographer was identified as showing a member of the famous Abraham Lincoln Battalion, a unit made up mostly of volunteers who arrived from the United States. The military uniform in which he was shown indicated that he had traveled to Spain as a volunteer for the Republic from the United States. Upon the purchase in 2009 by the Spanish government of their father’s collection, the photojournalist’s two sons asked that the government of Spain make a gift of the photograph in

²¹ Ibid., 64.

²² In an interesting aside, “Cuba hermosa” is a lyric from the song “Lamento Cubano” (“Ay Cuba hermosa, primorosa, ¿por qué sufres hoy tantos quebrantos?”), a popular political song from the 1930s written by Cuban musician Eliseo Grenet, whose brother Ernesto volunteered in the Spanish Civil War.

question to President Barack Obama as an homage to the more than one hundred African-American volunteers who went to Spain to fight for the Republic, and the government agreed. So the brothers notified the news media in hopes of discovering the man's identity for the purpose of informing his family of the honor. A transnational investigation followed, and resulted in an unexpected discovery: The man was not African-American; he was Cuban. The vital clue was a second photograph (Figure 2.2) in which the same man holds up a banner reading, in part, "Centuria Antonio Guiteras." Named for the fallen Cuban activist and leader of the group Joven Cuba, the Centuria was a subunit of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion known as "the Cuban Section," which we discuss at greater length below.



Figures 2.1 and 2.2 Photographs by Catalán photojournalist Agustí Centelles, taken in Barcelona in January 1937, depicting a black volunteer in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion

In consultation with scholars of the Cuban participation in the war, including Ana Suárez Díaz of Cuba, U.S.-based researchers Sebastiaan Faber and James D. Fernández scoured the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive (ALBA) in New York and other sources looking for clues about the man's identity. The memoir of Italian-American volunteer John Tisa provided key evidence. It includes a photograph (Figure 2.3) of a number of passengers on the S.S. *Champlain* voyage that departed for Europe in January 1937 carrying Tisa and the original members of the Centuria

Guiteras.²³ In the photograph appears an individual whom Faber and Fernández determined was both the man in the Centelles photograph and the man whom Tisa identified as “Cuba Hermosa.”²⁴ Another photograph (Figure 2.4) from the same voyage, which I discovered at the Centro de Documentación de Las Brigadas Internacionales (The International Brigades Documentation Center) in Albacete, Spain, shows only the Cuban passengers, and includes the same individual.²⁵ Based on the passenger list for the *Champlain*’s voyage, Faber and Fernández came up with five possible names for the mysterious man in the photographs: Bienvenido Domínguez, Faustino García, Juan Godoy, Ricardo Pérez, and Ronaldo Rodríguez.²⁶ A third photograph (Figure 2.5) printed in Tisa’s memoir shows Cuba Hermosa standing next to the author sitting on a donkey; this image gives us a slightly closer look at the man’s face.²⁷ In an April 1937 diary entry, Tisa described him: “Hermosa’s name, translated, means, ‘Beautiful Cuba,’ but his first name is really José. About 5 feet 8, boyish looking, magnificently proportioned, erect, and strong, he is beautifully jet black, with a mouthful of pearls for teeth and black, glistening eyes that are always smiling.”²⁸

²³ John Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight: An Autobiography of the Spanish Civil War* (S. Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1985), 82.

²⁴ Natalia Junquera, “El brigadista era cubano: El voluntario que aparece en la foto que Zapatero quería regalar a Obama zarpó de Nueva York, pero no nació en EE UU—Aún se ignora su nombre,” *El País*, Madrid, 1 March 2010. Accessed online 2 July 2010.

²⁵ “Brigadistas cubanos en el barco francés Le Havre [*sic*],” No. 240, Centro de Documentación de las Brigadas Internacionales (CEDOBI), Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Albacete, Spain.

²⁶ Junquera, “El brigadista era cubano.”

²⁷ Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight*, 88.

²⁸ Tisa, diary entry, 17 April 1937, published in *Recalling the Good Fight*, 70.



Figure 2.3 Passengers on the S.S. *Champlain* voyage of January 1937



Figure 2.4 “Brigadistas cubanos” on the S.S. *Champlain* voyage of January 1937



Figure 2.5 Cuba Hermosa standing to the left of John Tisa on a donkey

After several years of research on Cuban participation in the Spanish conflict, I have encountered several further pieces of evidence about this now iconic black Cuban volunteer. I remained on the lookout for his face in photographs of Cuban volunteers, keeping in mind his jaunty grin, prominent ears, and high cheekbones, and the shape of the hairline across his forehead. Sure enough, in the Harry Randall Fifteenth International Brigade Photograph Collection at the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive, I found a photograph (Figure 2.6) from April 1938 I believe is a match.²⁹ Figure 2.7 shows all five images of the man's face close-up for comparison.

²⁹ "Antonio Garcia, Auto Park, 59th Battalion Miguel Lausurica [*sic*], Darnos Apr 1938," 11-0346 Photo Unit #: E0427, Harry Randall: Fifteenth International Brigade Photograph Collection ALBA PHOTO 011, Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive, New York University, New York. Miguel Ángel Lauzurica was another Cuban volunteer in Spain.

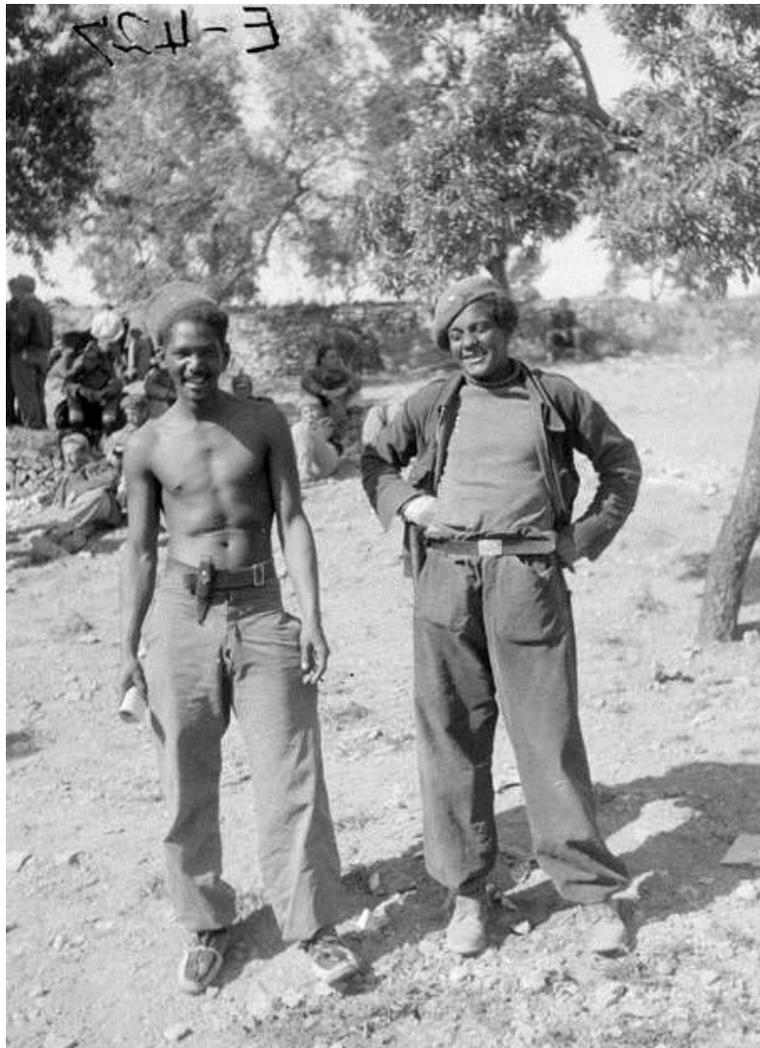


Figure 2.6 “Antonio Garcia, Auto Park, 59th Battalion Miguel Lausurica [sic], Darnos Apr 1938”



Figure 2.7 Comparison of photograph details showing, from left to right, the original Centelles image, the S.S. *Champlain* voyage group shot reproduced in Tisa’s memoir, the group shot of Cubans on the S.S. *Champlain* which I found in Albacete, the image depicting “Cuba Hermosa” from Tisa’s memoir, and the man identified as “Antonio Garcia” whose picture I found in New York

Perhaps Antonio García was the same person as the Faustino García listed by the team of researchers who investigated Cuba Hermosa's identity? The name as it appears on one version of the *Champlain* passenger list reads "Faustineo A. G. y Fernandez."³⁰ In the ALBA list "Roll Call – American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War" appears the clearly mangled name "Faustineo Garcia y Frandez A,"³¹ which we might decipher as Faustino A. García y Fernández. Antonio could be the 'A' initial found in these lists. So far so good, except that we have not accounted for the fact that Tisa stated the man's real first name was José. On that point we turn to the Cuban archives. The nickname "Cuba Hermosa" appears in Cuban records of veterans of the Spanish conflict, and, in one instance there, is associated with the name José. A list of veterans' names in the Registro General (General Registry) of the Instituto de Historia de Cuba (Institute of History of Cuba) lists the following two entries: "DIAZ, Antonio (Cuba Hermosa)" and "GARCIA CUBA, Jose (~~Cuba Hermosa~~)."³² The name Díaz does not fit with other clues, but we see here the names Antonio, José, and García associated with the pseudonym Cuba Hermosa. It seems, then, that the mysterious Cuban volunteer in the photographs had the surname García and some combination of given names and perhaps other pseudonyms including Antonio, Faustino, and José.

A report on Antonio García found in the Moscow archive stated that he was 28 years old and a blacksmith, and that he arrived in Spain in mid-January 1937 (which fits with arrival on the S.S. *Champlain* that month) and worked in the American Battalion of the XV Brigade (which

³⁰ "Champlain," 5 January 1937

³¹ Available online at: http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/tam/alba_names.html. Accessed 31 August 2010.

³² Untitled list of names, RG 4.11/2005(102–150), Registro General, Instituto de Historia de Cuba, Havana, Cuba.

was the Abraham Lincoln Battalion) as a cook. His record also noted a disciplinary incident in which he overstayed a leave in Madrid and then became “afraid to go back to the Brigade for fear of being punished.” The report stated that he wanted “to rest and then go back to the front,” and that he received a warning that if such an incident recurred he would be “handed over to the Spanish court.”³³ From these various fragments, located in Barcelona, New York, Havana, and Moscow, we are able to piece together a small part of the mysterious Cuba Hermosa’s identity. Cuban records conclude on a tragic note this brief portrait of the man with the slightly crooked, ever-present grin. The list of Cuban volunteers in the book *Cuba en España: Una gloriosa página de internacionalismo* lists Antonio García as having died after the war’s end; but a list of Cubans killed in the conflict found in the archives of the Instituto de Historia de Cuba includes, without reference to his actual name, “(Cuba Hermosa) (suicidio)”—Cuba Hermosa, suicide.³⁴

Our journey through the detective work of non-elite prosopography comes, therefore, to a sad ending. It has illuminated, though, the process by which personal vignettes in this study come to be; whereas our statistical analysis is based on data from a relatively uniform set of surveys from a single archive, our biographical sketches depend on the extensive collection of fragmentary evidence, often across various types of source material from multiple countries. And in commenting on the role of volunteers’ racial identity, using the case of Cuba Hermosa as an example, it is as important to note what does not appear in the records as what does. For modern observers—the photographer’s sons and those involved in trying to identify the man in the photograph in 2009 and 2010—Cuba Hermosa’s race was significant. His story came to light

³³ “Rapport No. 1741 – en cause: Garcia Antonio,” 21 September 1937, File 593, RGASPI.

³⁴ “Fallecidos después de la guerra,” in Bello and Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España*, 260; “Relación de los Cubanos muertos en la guerra de liberación e Independencia de España,” undated, Doc. 1/2:1/1.10/45–202, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista, IHC.

specifically because of the idea that the first black president of the United States would appreciate having a photograph of an African-American volunteer. Though Tisa gave a physical description of the man (as he did of other volunteers), however, none of the other records encountered in our search made mention of his race. It seems that record-keepers did not find it noteworthy that a particular volunteer was black as today's observers seem to do. The fact that the questionnaires volunteers filled out in Spain—surveys that collected all sorts of other demographic data and that asked detailed questions about their political allegiance and socioeconomic status—did not ask about race further corroborates this hypothesis.

That Cuba Hermosa was mistaken for a U.S. volunteer illustrates an important point about the identities of Cuban volunteers in the transnational movement of support for the Spanish Republic: Determining the national identity of an individual is tricky because many individual identities were transnational. For example, one discovery of the research for this study is that a significant number of Cuban volunteers who left for Spain from the United States were counted both as U.S. volunteers (of which there were, according to various estimates, 2,800–3,300) in U.S. sources and as Cuban volunteers in Cuban sources. This double-counting means that the totals of number of volunteers for the two countries overlap. Similarly, while international volunteers from, for instance, Ireland, Germany, or Poland are conspicuous in archival records of the war due to their foreign names, in many cases Cuban—and other Latin American—volunteers blend into records of the Spanish conflict. Cubans were not always identified as foreigners, as we will see, and in a case in which a Cuban's name was common, it would then be impossible to know if, for example, José Alonso or Alberto López or Pedro Rivero were the Cuban volunteers by those names or Spaniards who happened to have the same monikers.

Cubans with common names, therefore, disappear among their Spanish comrades in the archives unless identified specifically as Cuban.

When many Cubans had lived for years in the United States or Spain, or had been born in one of those countries or somewhere else besides the island, what does it mean to say that they were Cuban? Is it even useful to determine their national identities? Since this study examines as a group *Cuban* antifascist and pro-Republican activists, these questions raise critical considerations for our analysis. Evaluating which individuals were Cubans for the purposes of this study, we include first those who—regardless of place of birth or length of residency—identified themselves as Cuban. Torriente is one example of an individual born elsewhere (Puerto Rico) who identified himself as Cuban while simultaneously defining his own identity as transnational. Another is Aurelio Paula Bolaños, a Cuban volunteer who was born in Tampa, Florida, whose parents lived in Tampa, and who lived in Philadelphia prior to departing for Spain; a cigar worker immersed in Tampa’s politically charged, Cuban-dominated community, Paula expressed no sense of contradiction regarding identifying himself as Cuban despite having been born and living in the United States.³⁵ We will encounter other examples like these throughout our study. Conversely, we will meet some people who were born in Cuba or who lived there for many years who did not consider themselves Cuban. Though we would not, therefore, define such individuals as Cuban activists, their experience in Cuba and connections to Cubans often contributed to the transnational networks on which Cuban antifascist and pro-Republican activism relied—the case of Republican military leader Enrique Lister, discussed

³⁵ Raul Lavin, interview by Ana M. Varela-Lago, 8 December 1997, Digital Object Identifier S64-00011, Spanish Civil War Oral History Project, Florida Studies Center, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida; Aurelio Paula Bolaños, “Biografía de Militantes,” 9 June 1938, File 599, Subseries III, Opis 6, Fond 545: Records of the International Brigades, Comintern Archives, Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Recent History (RGASPI), Moscow, Russia..

below, is one example. Second, we take into consideration those whom our source material identifies as Cuban, evaluating on a case-by-case basis the reliability of the sources, and potential contradictions between external assessments of an individual and his or her self-identification. Combining self-identification and external assessments, then, we make educated decisions regarding inclusion of such individuals in the category ‘Cuban.’ Why create this category? Studying the Cuban movement is important, we argue, because examining continuity between the domestic struggle and the transnational one reveals new findings not apparent in studies of one or the other.

Our analysis of the Cuban volunteers’ characteristics informs the subsequent discussion, and additional biographical sketches of individuals will illustrate and exemplify various points about Cuban participation throughout the chapter. With this overview of the identities of the Cuban volunteers in Spain in mind, we move now to examining their experience participating in the Spanish conflict and the significance of this experience, beginning with their recruitment on the island and in exile.

Recruitment in Havana and New York

According to his writings, Pablo de la Torriente Brau came upon the idea of traveling to participate in the Spanish Civil War on his own, guided by his feeling of solidarity with “the motherland,” his engagement in the leftist milieu of New York City, and his sense of revolutionary continuity. No one recruited him actively. His involvement and death in the conflict, in turn, inspired other Cubans, both in the United States and on the island, to volunteer. Not everyone came upon the idea spontaneously or on their own, however; and those who did faced the same problem Pablo had of how, logistically and financially, to make the journey.

Active recruitment and organized support, therefore, were vital factors in getting Cuban volunteers to Spain.

Some Cubans were already in Spain when the conflict began, and the issue of Cuban-born volunteers who were in Spain for many years or decades prior to the start of the war is important to note in terms of demonstrating the difficulties in determining exactly whom to count as a Cuban volunteer. The case of José Luis Raldiri Menéndez is illustrative. A native of Havana, he had lived in Barcelona since he was four years old, a biographical note commemorating his death stated. The obituary in the periodical of the 35th Division did not call him Cuban, as other mentions of Cuban volunteers did.³⁶ Also, he is not listed among Cuban volunteers in Cuban sources, nor does he appear among the Cuban volunteers recorded in Moscow's Archive of the International Brigades. Despite having been born on the island, therefore, he was not considered Cuban, records indicate. Another case is that of Pablo Arocha Toledo, a volunteer who does appear in both the Moscow archive and Cuban records. Arocha was born in Santiago de Cuba, but moved to Cadiz, Andalusia in 1907. Though his records in the Moscow archive list his nationality as Cuban, they also note that he requested to remain in Spain at the end of the war.³⁷ These two examples of similar cases demonstrate that Cuban-born individuals who had lived in Spain for a long time prior to the war might be counted officially as either Spanish or Cuban, and that official assessments might not match the nationality with which an individual wished to self-identify.

³⁶ *Reconquista* (35 División). Volume, number, and date are illegible; page is unmarked, though it is probably page 20.

³⁷ "Ficha Individual," 19 December 1938, and an untitled assessment by the Communist Party of Spain, 20 November 1938, File 586, Subseries III, Opus 6, Fond 545: Records of the International Brigades, Comintern Archives, RGASPI.

In addition to those who were already in Spain, there were Cuban volunteers who traveled there from various places, including Mexico; the vast majority, however, came from the island directly or from the United States. Recruitment of Cubans to volunteer in Spain took place primarily in two places: Havana and New York City. These two cities were, as Torriente's story demonstrates, closely linked. It is therefore unsurprising that recruitment efforts in both were linked as well, a connection fostered in large part—though not exclusively—by Communists.

As we will see elsewhere in this study, many Cuban volunteers went to Spain to support the Republican cause who had no affiliation with the Communist Party. However, Cuban Communists recruited and supported the largest number of volunteers—both Communists and non-Communists—of any organization on the island. They coordinated with the Communist International's efforts, and the strength of the Party on the island relative to those of other countries in the region likely contributed to the fact that more Cuban volunteers joined the International Brigades and the regular Republican forces than came from other Latin American countries. Also, the Communists kept better records than many other organizations on the island, giving us a much clearer view of their recruitment efforts than we have, for example, for the anarchists.³⁸

The Cuban Communist Party began its official engagement with the cause of the Spanish Republic in November 1936, following the lead of the Comintern. Longstanding Party activist Ramón Nicolau González—a Party member since 1926 and Central Committee member since

³⁸ It is possible that the records of anarchists are simply less accessible or were lost or destroyed on the island while Communist ones were preserved and are made available. Records available in other countries, however, corroborate the assertion that Cuban Communists were more thorough and organized record-keepers during the Spanish conflict than were Cuban anarchists.

1929³⁹—took on the role of coordinating recruitment on the island. Nicolau González would remain active in Cuba following the 1959 Revolution and directed the team that produced the historical collection *Cuba y la defensa de la República Española (Cuba and the Defense of the Spanish Republic)* for the Party’s Central Committee in 1981; therefore, a substantial record exists of his efforts during the Spanish conflict.

Nicolau González described a dual intent behind the Cuban Party’s recruitment of volunteers to go to Spain. The Cuban Communists’ internationally-focused reason for recruitment efforts was, as they saw it, to liberate the Spanish people from fascism and other reactionary forces. They had a domestic—and more practical—consideration as well: Participation in the Spanish conflict would provide military training to Cuban volunteers who would return to the island equipped to participate in “an eventual armed anti-imperialist fight in our country,” Nicolau González stated.⁴⁰ The latter motivation echoes the argument, expressed by Torriente and others, that the Spanish conflict would teach Cubans lessons they could use in their own struggles; the Communists were simply more precise about the kind of lessons they thought would be most useful.

As we will see was the case for many Cuban antifascists, the Communist director of recruitment felt it important to emphasize not only the continuity between the Cuban and Spanish struggles but also the diversity of participants in Cuban antifascism. To manage recruitment, the Party set up a commission. Nicolau González was careful to note in a remembrance that the commission included members of various political backgrounds, “bonded by their common

³⁹ Instituto de Historia, *Cuba y la defensa*, 14. This length of engagement is considered “longstanding” since the Cuban Party was founded in 1925.

⁴⁰ Ramón Nicolau González quoted in Bello and Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España*, 145.

rejection of fascist designs.”⁴¹ Many different individuals and organizations devoted to insurrection in Cuba, he stated, decided—due to the political situation on the island and the events in Spain—to turn their attention and efforts from domestic concerns to the cause of the Spanish Republic. Nicolau González noted not only political but also geographic diversity. The commission was based in Havana, but, he stated, extended its efforts rapidly across the island, channeling the “enthusiastic and determined popular willingness to offer concrete aid to the antifascist fighters.”⁴² In addition to representing political and geographic diversity, Nicolau González emphasized, the volunteers came from different walks of life. Side by side with workers enrolled intellectuals, he stated enthusiastically.⁴³

The work of recruiting, supporting, and transporting volunteers took place clandestinely on the island and faced further difficulties internationally due to adherence—official or otherwise—of the major western democracies and many governments of smaller nations such as Cuba to the Non-Intervention Agreement (1936). Many in Cuba, however, aided the effort, recalled Nicolau González, describing an operational antifascist network of supportive participants. Hotel employees—“who were linked to the Party by militancy or sympathy, or, simply, by being supporters of the Spanish Republican government”—attended to volunteers from elsewhere on the island staying in Havana prior to their departure across the Atlantic. Two pawnshops in the city with Spanish Republican owners clothed them, offering the recruitment commission a discount on prices. Communists and sympathizers employed by the Secretary of State took great risks providing passports and other necessary documentation to the Cuban

⁴¹ Nicolau González, “La organización y traslado de los combatientes cubanos a la República Española,” in Instituto de Historia, *Cuba y la defensa*, 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴³ Nicolau González quoted in Bello and Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España*, 145.

volunteers without official consent and in violation of the Cuban government's neutrality in the conflict. Prior to departure, a small committee of doctors examined the recruits, and, Nicolau González boasted, not one man examined and approved for combat by the Cuban doctors received any objection from medical officials of the International Brigades upon arrival in Spain. The Party opened a travel agency to handle the voyages of the volunteers and cut down on the cost of their trips; the agency "saved us fifteen percent on the price of the tickets," the director of recruitment stated, "and, upon completion of this mission, remained active operated by the Party for several years."⁴⁴

Nicolau González's testimony reveals also the transnational Communist network at work in the recruitment of Cubans to go to Spain from various locations. Sent to Spain in December 1937, the Cuban director of recruitment left the work of the commission in Cuba to another and set off on a multinational journey that would take him to the United States and France to meet with Communists of those countries prior to his arrival in Spain. In New York City, he remembered, he visited the Club Cubano Julio Antonio Mella, a central location of Cuban antifascism and Republican recruitment we discussed elsewhere, at the request of the U.S. Communist Party (C.P.U.S.A.) and gave a talk to U.S. comrades detailing the pro-Republican work going on in Cuba. After visiting with French Communists in Paris, the Cuban traveled to Barcelona, where he visited another Club Mella. While in Spain, Nicolau González visited the front and maintained contact with Cuban volunteers, to whom he brought an "encouraging message from the distant homeland" and whom he "encouraged in the pursuit of the honorable internationalist mission they fulfilled so gallantly."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Nicolau González, "La organización y traslado," 9–10.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10–12.

The Mella Club of New York City which Nicolau González visited during his journey was an important hub of organizing efforts for antifascist Cubans living in the United States. Located in Washington Heights, founded in 1931 by Cuban activists exiled for their participation in the anti-Machado struggle, and named for martyred hero of that struggle Julio Antonio Mella, the club—like many other Spanish and Latin American organizations in the city that “lived [the Spanish Civil War] with palpable immediacy”⁴⁶ and together made up the *Sociedades Hispanas Confederadas de Ayuda a España* (Confederated Hispanic Societies of Aid to Spain)—became a center of antifascist activism and recruitment during the Spanish Civil War. The painting *Club Julio A. Mella (Cuban Workers’ Club)* (1937) depicts a multiracial crowd of men and women eating, drinking, smoking, reading, and discussing. A famous pro-Republican poster can be seen directly above the head of the central figure in the foregrounded trio.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ James D. Fernández, “Nueva York: The Spanish-Speaking Community Responds,” in *Facing Fascism: New York and the Spanish Civil War*, Peter N. Carroll and James D. Fernández, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 89.

⁴⁷ Henry Glintenkamp, *Club Julio A. Mella (Cuban Workers’ Club)* (1937), an oil on canvass, is owned by the Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA.



Figure 2.8 Henry Glintenkamp, *Club Julio A. Mella (Cuban Workers' Club)* (1937)

Italian-American volunteer John Tisa recalled that prior to his departure he had been “directed uptown to the headquarters of the Julio Mella Club, a left-wing organization comprising mainly Cubans, many of whom were refugees from the Batista dictatorship. At this club I met others like myself, with passports, listening to briefings and impatiently eager to leave for Spain.”⁴⁸ Work by Communists played a vital role in the recruitment and support of Cuban volunteers who left from New York, and the C.P.U.S.A. maintained close ties with the Club Mella. James W. Ford, a prominent African-American C.P.U.S.A. leader, played a particularly important role as a liaison between the U.S. Party, the Club Mella, and Cuban activists. Many interpersonal and organizational connections existed between the Club Mella and the Communists, and recruitment at the club for the International Brigades responded to the call from the Comintern; however, the recruitment did not depend solely upon Party members. It

⁴⁸ Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight*, 16.

succeeded in large part due to a strong sense of solidarity with the Spanish Republican cause among New York's Latin Americans without specific political affiliation other than antifascism.⁴⁹ Just as was the case on the island, Cubans in New York who volunteered to go to Spain tended to have some level of connection to the Communist Party, but many were not Party members.

The large initial group of Cubans volunteers who left from New York joined the U.S. Abraham Lincoln Battalion, the 17th Battalion of the XV International Brigade (which would come to be known as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade). The 17th Battalion was a unit “composed of men from every State of the Union, Cuba and South America,”⁵⁰ and the XV Brigade was “the genuine representation of the Popular Front of the world,” inclusive of “Britishers, Americans, Canadians, Cubans, Argentines, Catalans, Spaniards: men of all races and colors, men of 26 nations” in one account,⁵¹ “plucky U.S., British, Cuban and Canuck lads” in another.⁵² A celebratory description of the XV I.B. published in Madrid in 1938, *The Book of the XV Brigade*, emphasized the diversity of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion's members and acknowledged specifically the presence in its ranks of Latin Americans: “Some were young, some middle-aged; some workers, some professionals, writers and artists; some college boys and some teachers; some native born Americans for a dozen generations whose ancestors fought in the American Revolution of 1776, others born in various parts of Europe or Latin America—just an average

⁴⁹ Fernández, “Nueva York,” 88, 90; Ana Suárez Díaz, “La Centuria Guiteras: De Nueva York al Frente de Jarama (1937),” *Caliban: Revista Cubana de Pensamiento e Historia* VII (April–June 2010): 8–10; Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight*, 16.

⁵⁰ “Salud to all, from the XVth Brigade,” *The Volunteer for Liberty* I, no. 27 (20 December 1937): 2.

⁵¹ John Gates, Commissar of War of the 15th Brigade, to the comrades of the Local Federation of the U.G.T., Barcelona, published as “Brigade Accepts Patronage of Local Federation of U.G.T.” in *The Volunteer for Liberty* II, no. 18 (23 April 1938): 2.

⁵² “Bidding the International Good-Bye,” *The Volunteer for Liberty* II, no. 35 (7 November 1938): 3.

group of Americans.” A more detailed description of the various origins of the members of the Lincoln Battalion in this propaganda publication listed Cubans—along with Greek, Cypriot, Dutch, and Egyptian volunteers—under the category of “other nationalities,”⁵³ and the book’s authors printed a photograph (Figure 2.9) depicting “some of the Cuban comrades.”⁵⁴



Figure 2.9 Photograph of “some of the Cuban comrades” in the XV Brigade

The Cubans, *The Book of the XV Brigade* noted, were “exiled from their native island, escaping the terror groups of Batista.” The authors of this English-language publication repeated the common Cuban antifascist narrative of continuity between the struggle against strongman governance on the island and the pro-Republican fight in Spain. “Inspired by a hatred of tyranny,” it stated of the Cuban volunteers, “realising how Batista had turned Cuba into a hell of Fascist terror, they were determined to come to grips with International Fascism whose disciple Batista

⁵³ Commissariat of War, *The Book of the XV Brigade: Records of British, American, Canadian, and Irish Volunteers in the XV International Brigade in Spain, 1936–1938* (Madrid: Commissariat of War, XV Brigade, 1938).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

is.”⁵⁵ The periodical of the English-speaking members of the International Brigades, *The Volunteer for Liberty*, drew the same connection between Spain and its former colony. “Many Cubans have given their lives and many more will continue to sacrifice themselves fighting with the Loyal Spanish people against the forces of fascism that would want to enslave a free people,” the publication stated in February 1938. “With fascism driven out of Spain once and for all, the Cubans know that it will mean the gathering of forces to destroy fascism in the rest of the world. A victory for the Republic would be a death blow to Batista’s fascist aspirations. The Cuban people, too, are waiting to strike for freedom.”⁵⁶

The Cuban members of the Lincoln Battalion commemorated this perceived continuity between the Cuban struggle and the Spanish conflict when they named the “Cuban Section” of the 17th Battalion the “Centuria Antonio Guiteras” after the martyred leader of Joven Cuba, a central radical organization in the island’s domestic fight. Cuban exiles of diverse political backgrounds gathered at the Club Mella on 8 May 1936 to commemorate the one-year anniversary of Guiteras’s death. Once the Spanish conflict began, they gathered there again and began to organize a military unit to further commemorate Guiteras by fighting for the Spanish Republic in his name. The Centuria “consisted of young men who belonged to the ‘Julio Mella’ Cuban Club of New York City,” stated a 1938 article in *The Volunteer for Liberty*.⁵⁷ Many of them were inspired to go to Spain by Pablo de la Torriente Brau’s example, according to Cuban historian Ana Suárez Díaz, who has researched and written about both Torriente and the Centuria

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Cuban Volunteers in Spain,” *The Volunteer for Liberty* II, no. 7 (28 February 1938): 5. Though the periodical was intended for the English-speaking battalions of the International Brigades, it was bilingual English/Spanish.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 4–5.

Guiteras. Torriente left for Spain even before the call of the Comintern for foreign participation in the Spanish conflict and the inauguration of the International Brigades; thus he represents the particularly Cuban motivations for involvement in the struggle and the movement of Cuban activists from political stagnation and exile into the pro-Republican cause. Joven Cuba, the domestic activist group Guiteras led, had a complicated and not always friendly relationship with the Cuban Communist Party. Suárez Díaz sees the Centuria as a “complex culmination of the heterogeneous political ideology displayed by that Cuban exile of 1935–1936,” a continuity for a group of Cubans “who instead of returning to Cuba, chose to transfer to a new stage of political struggle: the Spanish people's war against fascism.” The choice of Guiteras as a symbol, “articulated as an ideal in the political imagination of a group of Cubans precisely in 1937,” Suárez Díaz points out, complicates in particular our understanding of the role of Communist influence. The men responded to a call by the Comintern and the C.P.U.S.A. sponsored them, yet they chose as their martyr and symbol the leader of a Cuban radical group engaged in specific domestic problems, rather than any Communist figure—rather than, say, Mella, who was a founding member of the Cuban Party. And they were by no means uniformly Communists. Some, Suárez Díaz notes, like Torriente, were “by temperament in the revolution, and by the same temperament could not belong to the Communist Party.”⁵⁸ Instead of conformity to Party membership, many of the exiled Cuban activists adhered to an ideal of revolutionary manhood symbolized by Guiteras; they were “Cubans who wanted to match that courage and bravery in the fight, now against the universal enemy: fascism.”⁵⁹ U.S. volunteer John Tisa observed the Cubans’ political diversity, as well as the connection they saw between their domestic struggle

⁵⁸ Suárez Díaz, “La Centuria Guiteras,” 2–3, 5–7.

⁵⁹ “Antonio Guiteras,” *Mediodía* (16 May 1938): 3; Suárez Díaz, “La Centuria Guiteras,” 5–6.

and Spain's. Some were Communists, some "had Marxist sympathies," and others "were just against Batista for his cruelties and let it go at that." They "loved to sing anti-Batista and revolutionary songs and did so at the club in Harlem, on the ocean in time with the gentle sway of the ship, and in Spain at the training bases," Tisa remembered. "Each Cuban had his own blood-curdling story of life in Cuba under the fierce dictatorship, and each was going to Spain on a personal mission to fight fascism, for to them the defeat of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco would be their vengeance on their own dictator, Batista." Referring to their U.S. exile, Tisa assessed that the Cubans "were resigned to the realization that their path back home had to be by way of Spain."⁶⁰

The first group of Cuban volunteers to leave from the island for Spain departed on 15 April 1937, Nicolau González remembered, several months after the first group from the United States. In keeping with the initial specifications of the call for volunteers, the Cubans in this first group were military specialists. Although they had been officials of the Cuban armed forces, they had, the director of recruitment was careful to note, "clean records."⁶¹ Documents from the International Brigades archive of Moscow corroborate his memory of the group, showing that these volunteers, processed on 17 May 1937, were former military men involved in radical politics on the island. Thus this group, too, demonstrates continuity between Cuban domestic struggles of the early 1930s and the effort to support the Spanish Republic. One member of the group, Andrés González Lanuza, a 44-year-old captain, wrote on a biographical questionnaire in Spain that he was involved in Joven Cuba and had "taken an active part in the Cuban revolution against fascism," presumably a reference to the anti-Machado fight, and perhaps also the early

⁶⁰ Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight*, 16.

⁶¹ Nicolau González, "La organización y traslado," 9.

struggle against Batista. Another called “Don” Julio Valdés Cofiño had served in the Cuban military for 13 years and had taken part in all the anti-reactionary fights on the island, according to an unattributed typed note. He and Pedro Dalmau Naranjo, a 35-year-old lieutenant, had at one point been condemned to death back home. The whole group, stated correspondence between an official of the 11th Division of the Republican forces and the Central Committee of the the Partido Comunista de España (Spanish Communist Party, or P.C.E.), “are persecuted for their fight against Yankee imperialism.” These facts seem to have been offered as proof of their worthiness upon their entrance into the Republican fight, “although they did not belong to the C[ommunist] P[arty] of Cuba.”⁶² Thus credentials for solidarity overlapped and intertwined: Communists in Spain might deem worthy of the Republican fight non-Communist Cubans with loyalty to and experience in anti-imperialist and anti-dictatorial struggles. Glossing over significant political complexity regarding Batista’s role in the anti-Machado struggle, *The Volunteer for Liberty* assessed the participation of Cuban military personnel in the pro-Republican fight, commenting: “It appears that in the Cuban Services reactionary political opinion is by no means as stable as in the forces of the imperialist countries. After all, it is not long since the Army and Navy were fighting on the side of revolution. For this reason many men have come over from both branches and brought useful experience and training into Spain.”⁶³

To summarize, recruitment of Cubans for the Spanish conflict had a number of notable characteristics. It encompassed a good deal of political and ideological diversity, though mostly

⁶² Andrés González Lanuza, “Biografía Militar,” 17 May 1937, File 594; “Don Julio Valdés Cofiño,” undated, File 603; Pedro Dalmau Naranjo, “Biografía Militar,” 17 May 1937, File 590; Jefe de Estado Mayor to Delegación del Comité Central del P.C., 20 May 1937, File 590, RGASPI.

⁶³ “Cuban Volunteers in Spain,” *The Volunteer for Liberty*, 4.

on the left side of the spectrum. The Communist Parties of several countries played an important role in bringing both Communist and non-Communist volunteers to Spain. Many who volunteered saw their action in so doing as a continuity of the Cuban domestic fight more than as an example of internationalism. Their sense of political continuity between the Cuban and Spanish struggles was bolstered by longstanding ties between the two countries. And networks—those organized around political activism as well as those constructed by transnational migratory lives—proved vital in the recruitment efforts. The case of famous Republican military leader Enrique Lister illustrates many of these points. Bringing the Cuban-Spanish connection full circle, Lister had “spent many years and learned much on the Cuban Island.”⁶⁴ An article in *The Volunteer for Liberty* entitled “Enrique Lister—An Emigrant Comes Home” discussed the connection as embodied by Lister. “No, Lister is not a Cuban,” it stated, “but he is one of the thousands of Spaniards who emigrated to the Americas looking for a pot of gold at the foot of a foreign rainbow. Like thousands of these thousands, Lister did not find gold. In Cuba he found only hard work, low pay, and dreams that didn't come true.” He arrived on the island at the age of 12, and his days as a “grocery boy and a stone-cutter” taught him, the article claimed, that “the main use which America has for foreigners is to make of them a reserve of cheap labor to do the hardest and dirtiest work for the lowest pay.” He learned about those who have plenty and those who have nothing, and in 1925 when he was 18 years old he took part in organizing the stone-cutters union, the article noted, before returning to his native Galicia the next year, where authorities targeted him as a dangerous radical. Now “one of the great commanders of the People’s Army,” the article concluded, Lister brought back from the Caribbean not a pot of gold, but rather “a mind and a heart full of the strength which people pour

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.

into the channels of unionization and into organized action for the creation of a democracy where Fascism cannot exist.”⁶⁵ These mentions of Lister’s experience in Cuba highlight the migratory connections between Spain and the island, and suggest that—in an interpretation mirroring that which Cuban activists made—Spaniards had revolutionary lessons to learn from Cubans, too.

The Cuban Experience in Spain

As they had in New York City, Cubans volunteering in Spain established a Club Cubano Julio Antonio Mella in Barcelona, which, we have seen, Nicolau González visited it during his time in Spain. On its walls, they hung portraits of their martyred heroes, Mella and Torriente, as shown in this photograph (Figure 2.10) published in the Cuban magazine *Mediodía*.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ “Enrique Lister—An Emigrant Comes Home,” *The Volunteer for Liberty* I, no. 18 (11 October 1937): 4–5.

⁶⁶ “Actividades cubanas en España,” *Mediodía* no. 32 (7 September 1937): 11.



Figure 2.10 Photograph taken at the Club Cubano Julio Antonio Mella in Barcelona

Like its counterpart in New York, the Catalán Club Mella was a place of transnational exchange. John Tisa called the club “a busy center for visiting North and South Americans, for those on temporary leave and looking for something to do, and for those passing through on their way to the States.”⁶⁷ He remembered meeting at “the Cuban club” with volunteers from various countries.⁶⁸ The club was also a location for political discussion where, Tisa recalled, “we sat around and talked with some of the members about the course of the war, world developments, and the bold and tireless activities of many Cubans in various units of the army.”⁶⁹ And finally, the club was a place for socializing where, according to Tisa, the Cubans threw dance parties all

⁶⁷ Tisa, diary entry, 30 October 1938, published in *Recalling the Good Fight*, 188.

⁶⁸ Tisa, diary entry, 2 October 1938, *ibid.*, 175.

⁶⁹ Tisa, diary entry, 4 September 1938, *ibid.*, 163.

the time. Though elsewhere the Cubans were celebrated by fellow volunteers for their good music and good cheer, Tisa came to feel somewhat negative about the frequent merrymaking in 1938 as the Republicans continued to lose ground in the conflict. In one diary entry from June he wrote of the club: “The city is set on fire from the sky, yet people still dance.” In another from September that year: “Of course, there was the usual music for anyone who cared to dance. With the uncertain way the war is going, I don’t know how anyone can enjoy dancing and because of this I left [the Cuban club] for headquarters in a bad humor.”⁷⁰ The Barcelona club was built upon an earlier experience with exile, the club of the same name built by Cuban exiles in New York City. It had a transnational character, serving as a place in which people of diverse backgrounds came together for exchange. It was inspired by and commemorated a past martyr, one who was both an important figure in the island’s domestic struggle and a Communist. It was a site of political engagement but also of socializing and gaiety. It had a positive impact and was praised; but it also garnered criticism occasionally. These characteristics of the Cuban club exemplify the Cuban experience volunteering in Spain.

Here we will explore the Cuban experience fighting for the Republic during the war, illustrating broad trends with individual examples. We will see the ways in which some Cuban volunteers drew upon prior experience in exile. We will consider how transnational identities gave some Cuban volunteers unique opportunities and advantages during the conflict, and examine the transnational exchange they experienced. We will continue to study the diversity of the group, including political and ideological diversity and the tension between Cuban domestic activism and internationalism, such as Communism. We will note the ways in which Cuban volunteers came to be celebrated by their comrades in Spain and by observers on the island and

⁷⁰ Tisa, diary entries, 19 June, 26 June, 4 September, *ibid.*, 143, 148, 163.

in the United States—and how these celebratory accounts served as an important organizing tool for activists—but also the ways in which they went astray from expressed ideals and drew rebuke. By examining the multiple motivations causing Cubans to volunteer and the various gains they enjoyed by so doing, we observe both the sincerity of idealistic commitment and the complexity of human participation.

The case of Dr. Eduardo Odio Pérez exemplifies the ways in which prior experience in domestic activism and in exile led some Cubans to volunteer for the Spanish Republic. Odio Pérez was older and more highly educated than most Cuban volunteers, but in that he had a longstanding commitment to Cuban political activism and spent a period of time in exile prior to the Spanish conflict, his experience is similar to that of many of his compatriots. The nature of the historical source material on Odio Pérez, too, is exemplary, in that it highlights the importance of transnational connections and complex political realities in shaping what we know about Cuban volunteers in Spain. We know a good deal about Odio Pérez due in large part to the correspondence he kept during the 1960s and 1970s with U.S. volunteer and nurse Fredericka Martin, who traveled to Spain with the Cuban and served alongside him in the American Medical Bureau (A.M.B.) there.

The doctor was born in Santiago de Cuba in 1893⁷¹ to a family one source called “petit-bourgeois.”⁷² Like many Cubans of his era, Eduardo lived a transnational life, moving across

⁷¹ Multiple primary sources produced by Odio Pérez himself confirm this information. Odio Pérez, “Solicitud de Paso o Ingreso en el Partido Comunista Español (Sección de la Internacional Comunista),” 9 November 1937, File 598, RGASPI; Dr. Oscar Telge to Comarade Commandant de la Base, 8 December 1937, File 598, RGASPI; Odio Pérez, “Biografía de Militantes,” 5 March 1938, File 598, RGASPI; Odio Pérez, “Biographical Statistics of the Personnel of the American *Medical* Bureau and Co-Workers,” survey sent by Fredericka Martin, 1968, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001. The last of these sources is undated, but correspondence indicates that Martin sent the blank survey to Odio Pérez in October 1968 and the doctor returned it completed to her in December of the same year. In contradiction with these primary sources, the book *Cuba y la defensa* gives his birth year as 1901. Biographical note added by editors at the end of Eduardo Odio Pérez, “La batalla duró diez días,” *Cuba y*

national borders frequently starting at an early age. He attended primary school in Santiago de Cuba and secondary school in Far Rockaway, New York, then pursued medical training at the University of Havana, Loyola University (1917), and Chicago Memorial Hospital, earning an M.D. He married a Cuban woman in 1919.⁷³ An A.M.B. press release that is undated but likely from 1938 described his professional medical background. Dr. Odio Pérez, it stated, “was chief of the Disinfection and Sanitation Health Department in Havana from 1933 to 1935.”⁷⁴ A biographical survey he completed in Spain in 1938 confirms his employment history as “head of disinfection” in Havana, and notes that his salary for this work was \$200–1000.⁷⁵

The A.M.B. press release described the doctor’s politics, stating that he “was a member of the Central Committee of the Agrarian Party (P.A.N.) in Cuba and was forced to flee his native land because of his political activity.”⁷⁶ His interest in activism began in 1927 during “political revolutions in Cuba,” the anti-Machado struggle. He went into political exile twice before Machado’s downfall, in 1930 and 1932, the latter time in Central America.⁷⁷ In February 1930 a group of doctors protested a planned homage to Machado. The event divided the

la defensa, 115. This discrepancy is indicative of the unreliability of the Cuban secondary sources, even regarding basic facts.

⁷² Biographical note included by the editors in Odio Pérez, “La batalla duró diez días,” *Cuba y la defensa*, 115.

⁷³ Odio Pérez, “Biografía de Militantes,” 5 March 1938, File 598, RGASPI; Odio Pérez, “Biographical Statistics,” 1968, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

⁷⁴ American Medical Bureau, press release, undated, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

⁷⁵ Odio Pérez, “Biografía de Militantes,” 5 March 1938, File 598, RGASPI.

⁷⁶ American Medical Bureau, press release, undated, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

⁷⁷ Odio Pérez, “Biografía de Militantes,” 5 March 1938, File 598, RGASPI.

Federación Médica Cubana (Cuban Medical Federation), with some members supporting it and others vehemently opposed. Odio Pérez was one of the leaders of the latter group, helping to organize a protest letter to the Federation's executive. An editorial in the New York City Spanish-language periodical *Gráfico* on 15 February 1930 concluded that, though the tribute event would take place despite the protest, the Cuban people would know that "honorable doctors" did not support it.⁷⁸ Odio Pérez noted with pride in his 1938 Spanish biographical survey that he "renounced Cuban Medical Federation with other companions for giving this homage to tyrant Machado." On the survey he remembered the date of this event as 1929.⁷⁹ The doctor stood before trial courts in Havana in 1929 and 1930, accused of conspiracy and illegal publication. Declared to be a rebel, he spent three days in jail before being freed on bail. He received amnesty in 1932.⁸⁰ In June of that year secret police agents foiled a plot by "Dr. Eduardo Odio, revolutionary by profession," and others to stage an armed expedition from Honduras to Cuba. The group planned to land in Pinar del Río and join forces with troops led by General Mario García Menocal against Machado, an article in *La prensa* of San Antonio, Texas reported on June 9, 1932. Members of the failed mission including Colonel Carlos Mendieta, the report stated, were imprisoned on the Isle of Pines.⁸¹ A few years later Mendieta would be among those the doctor protested.

With a wife and three children, Dr. Odio Pérez found himself in exile again in 1935 in New York City because of his participation in the "struggle against the Machado Government,"

⁷⁸ "Se oponen al homenaje a Machado," *Gráfico* (New York, New York), 15 February 1930.

⁷⁹ Odio Pérez, "Biografía de Militantes," 5 March 1938, File 598, RGASPI.

⁸⁰ Odio Pérez, "Biografía de Militantes," 5 March 1938, File 598, RGASPI.

⁸¹ United Press, "Se preparaba una expedición armada a Cuba," *La Prensa* (San Antonio, Texas), 9 June 1932.

as he wrote.⁸² The post-Revolutionary Cuban book on the involvement in Spain, *Cuba y la defensa de la República Española*, stated that he was exiled due to his involvement in the March 1935 strike.⁸³ He remembered attending May Day celebrations in New York City that spring.⁸⁴ In October Odio Pérez, identified in his capacity as a representative of the Partido Agrario Nacional (National Agrarian Party, or P.A.N.), spoke at a city meeting of Cuban exiles and their supporters against the “government of Caffery-Batista-Mendieta,” a triumvirate of U.S. Ambassador Jefferson Caffery, military strongman, and puppet president identified as “traitorous to Cuban nationalism and an instrument of Yankee imperialism.” The doctor argued that the “lands of the *guajiro*” had been “robbed by the North American companies.” Members of Joven Cuba, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano – Auténtico (“Authentic” Cuban Revolutionary Party), the Organización Revolucionaria Cubana Anti-imperialista (Cuban Revolutionary Anti-imperialist Organization, or O.R.C.A.), and Nacionalista Puertorriqueño (the Puerto Rican nationalist movement) attended the meeting, held at a dancehall at 146th Street and Broadway. U.S. writer Carleton Beals sent a supportive telegram to the meeting calling for triumph of revolution in Cuba before Christmas. Odio Pérez spoke alongside at least two other future Spanish Civil War volunteers from Cuba: Pablo de la Torriente Brau and Joaquín Ordoqui.⁸⁵ During his time in New York, the doctor also became a member of the Club Julio Antonio Mella.⁸⁶ All of these examples of involvement demonstrate that the doctor was a committed

⁸² Odio Pérez, “Biographical Statistics,” 1968, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

⁸³ Biographical note, Odio Pérez, “La batalla duró diez días,” *Cuba y la defensa*, 115.

⁸⁴ Odio Pérez, “Biografía de Militantes,” 5 March 1938, File 598, RGASPI.

⁸⁵ R. Zubaran Capmany, “Oratoria Tropical en Nueva York,” *La Prensa* (San Antonio, Texas), 10 October 1935.

⁸⁶ Odio Pérez, “Biografía de Militantes,” 5 March 1938, File 598, RGASPI.

participant in Cuba's domestic struggle and in the continuation of that struggle in exile in New York. He was not a Communist, but rather, as a member of one revolutionary Cuban political party, the P.A.N., a participant in a broad coalition of activists against Machado, Batista, and U.S. neocolonialism that included Communists and diverse leftists, and that had connections with U.S. activists as well.

Odio Pérez remembered attending an exposition of ambulances and information about the Spanish Civil War at Madison Square Garden.⁸⁷ The gathering he recalled was probably the reception for Spanish Republican Ambassador Fernando de los Ríos, which took place on 4 January 1937. The *New York Times* reported that approximately 16,000 people attended the meeting organized by the "United Spanish Societies, an organization of fraternal and benevolent groups in the Spanish colonies of the metropolitan area." At the meeting, the A.M.B. presented four ambulances "to the Spanish Leftist government," A.M.B. members pushing two of the vehicles into the hall amid applause.⁸⁸ "I could appreciate it was a serious and strong organization," the Cuban doctor noted, and so he applied to volunteer with the first A.M.B. group to leave for Spain.⁸⁹ His remembrance states that "several days after" the event at Madison Square Garden, his group left for Spain.⁹⁰ In fact, as noted above, the A.M.B. group that included Martin and Odio Pérez left New York for Europe on 16 January, twelve days after the rally at the Garden.

⁸⁷ Odio Pérez, "Biographical Statistics," 1968, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001; Odio Pérez, "La batalla duró diez días," *Cuba y la defensa*, 111.

⁸⁸ "Recruiting Denied by Spanish Envoy," *New York Times*, 5 January 1937.

⁸⁹ Odio Pérez, "Biographical Statistics," 1968, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

⁹⁰ Odio Pérez, "La batalla duró diez días," *Cuba y la defensa*, 111.

When the “Biographical Statistics” survey asked him years later to give his “motives” for going to Spain, Odio Pérez listed “humanitarian” reasons and “political awareness.” Elaborating, he wrote that his political motive was that “we could not do much in Cuba or in U.S.A., helping to win the war in Spain, it was much easi[e]r [than] to knock down Machado.” Given the chronology of events, Odio Pérez likely meant to write Batista here rather than Machado, whom he had helped to pressure out of office in 1933. In this statement, Odio Pérez articulated explicitly the continuity, as he saw it, between Cuba’s domestic struggle in which he had been deeply involved and the new fight across the ocean to which he went voluntarily. The idea of a flow of revolutionary activity diverted from the island to the Republican cause in Spain is reminiscent of the view we have seen expressed by Torriente and others. Additionally, and on a more personal note, the doctor remembered that he was in a terrible economic situation at the time, trying to support his wife and three children. This final stated motive suggests that the doctor received payment, compensation, and/or support for his family in exchange for his A.M.B. service. Indeed, when he returned to the United States and ran into trouble with immigration officials, it seems that the Communist Party helped get him home to Cuba. A faint recollection about his deportation recorded by Odio Pérez in the questionnaire he prepared for Martin sheds light on his connection to larger networks and with one U.S. figure of particular importance to New York City’s Cuban exiles: “My expenses from New York to Cuba I really do not know because I spoke about it to the negroe [*sic*] leader of the communist party of New York, I think his name was Ford.”⁹¹

African-American C.P.U.S.A. leader James W. Ford, served as an important point of contact between U.S. and Cuban activists during the Spanish Civil War. An “old friend of Cuba

⁹¹ Odio Pérez, “Biographical Statistics,” 1968, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

and the Cubans,” as the Cuban periodical *Mediodía* put it, Ford helped to recruit Cuban volunteers in New York and to promote the cause of the Spanish Republic and the activism of the Cuban Communist Party on the island. He praised Cuban involvement in the fighting in an interview published in *Mediodía* in July 1937 under the title “Cuba puede estar orgullosa de sus hijos” (“Cuba can be proud of her sons”). Ford called the Centuria Guiteras “one of the most important [units] of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion and at the rate it’s going, soon to become an independent body, one of those bastions of global democracy that are deciding the fight against fascism in the bloody Iberian Peninsula.” He described how Cuban volunteer Alejandro “Cheo” Anceaume, who had been left for dead for several days due to an error by some stretcher-bearers and had lost an eye, joked with him about his glass eye, demonstrating “the extent to which the Cuban can maintain his sense of humor.” Cubans who had never been soldiers advanced against the armies of Germany and Italy and made the enemy retreat, Ford reported Anceaume as saying. Other individual Cuban volunteers Ford singled out to honor included Dr. Odio Pérez and baseball player Basilio Cueria. Describing the former, Ford praised the doctor’s intelligence and dedication to the independence of Cuba. It made a good impression on him, he stated, “finding such a loyal representative of the Cuban intelligentsia caring for wounded Americans and Cubans on the front.” Lauding the latter, Ford noted that, in an achievement probably related to his sports career, Cueria had “been promoted for his heroic actions as a grenade launcher.” Remembering seeing him play baseball in New York, Ford commented that back then he “put the ball...where he wanted” and thus, “[l]ong before leaving for Spain...Basilio Cueria was a potential grenade launcher.” Now, Ford concluded, Cueria had “put his craft, with all his heart, in the service of the Spanish people and of world democracy.” In addition to the bravery of the fighters, their good humor, the intelligence and dedication of the doctor, and the physical

proWess of the athlete, Ford celebrated the Cuban volunteers for their good cheer and good music. The Cubans, he noted, “always bring the note of happiness to the trenches. The Creole music brings a note of color in the middle of horrible war. The Cubans have a magnificent pianist Arsenio Brunet, a violinist Gustavo Rodríguez, and lack neither a maracas player nor a master of the bongo.” Ford’s effusive celebration of the Cuban volunteers portrays a diverse range of individuals and a number of specific traits for which the Cubans were often celebrated by their peers: bravery, good humor and good cheer, intelligence, political dedication, fighting ability, athleticism, and musical talent. That the U.S. Communist reported to Cuban readers about Cuban volunteers he had visited and observed in Spain highlights the transnational nature of the interpersonal connections and networks on which Cuban antifascism was built. As Ford’s Cuban interviewer noted, Ford’s praise was for “the boys who, from New York and Havana, embarked for Spain demonstrating that on our island there are many men—very many—who do not recognize borders when it comes to defending a noble and just cause.”⁹²

Previous experience crossing borders and the ties between Spain and Cuba played important parts in the experience of the Cuban volunteers, putting all of them—and especially those who had lived in the United States—in a unique position relative to many other international volunteers. Cuba’s history as a recent former Spanish colony—and the linguistic, cultural, and familial ties between the two nations that resulted from this history—as well as the close connections and frequent migration between the island and the United States presented volunteers from the island with potential advantages over and opportunities relative to other foreigners in Spain.

⁹² Alberto Moré Tabío, “Cuba puede estar orgullosa de sus hijos,” *Mediodía* no. 23 (6 July 1937): 10–11, 19.

First of all, Cubans understood the language of the conflict. In all the celebration of the International Brigades and the unity and solidarity they represented, it was at times easy to overlook the practical problem their participation created. Part of what made the International Brigades so notable to Spaniards was their foreignness. As one 1938 article in a military unit periodical put it, people from the little villages close to the International Brigades base “stared in amazement at the strange men who spoke unintelligible languages.” And not only did they speak a different language than that of their host nation but also they spoke all different languages from one another. The work of the pro-Republican fighters in Spain thus suffered from the same affliction as that of the biblical builders of the Tower of Babel. Language, the article noted, was “a very difficult barrier to cross,” particularly on the field of battle.⁹³ The difficulties of communication between people of different tongues were amplified under the stressful, chaotic, and often terrifying conditions of war. Cubans did not have this problem of simple incomprehension, and their advantage in this regard could be the difference between life and death.

Sharing a common language with their hosts gave Cubans not only an advantage but also an enhanced opportunity to contribute to the cause. Spanish instruction was part of the education program within the International Brigades. “Culture Militias” offered daily Spanish classes meant to teach international volunteers military vocabulary, phrases common in daily life, and a solid grammatical base. Bridging the language gap was important not only for practical reasons but also for ideological and political ones. As foreign volunteers developed their Spanish language skills, one article celebrating the Culture Militias noted, the “comrades of different nationalities found in our manner of speaking the formidable bond of unity that was lacking for

⁹³ “Nuestro idioma lazo de unión,” *Reconquista* (35 División) 1, no. 3 (20 October 1938): 35.

their work.”⁹⁴ In other words, being able to speak to one another was a foundation of solidarity. And facilitating this ability was a helpful role certain Cubans could play in Spain. Many of the Cubans had bilingual language abilities from time spent living in the United States, and this fact placed the volunteers in a vitally important position. They could teach Spanish to volunteers who spoke English, the many individuals who came from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, and elsewhere. For example, Cuban Oscar Soler, a combat volunteer who ended up working in medicine after spending time in the hospital at Villa Paz/Saelices, tutored the U.S. nurse he met there, Fredericka Martin. In a letter he wrote to her after the conflict in June 1939, Soler called himself Martin’s “Spanish professor.” Writing in Spanish, he prodded her as a concerned teacher to practice her language ability in her reply; “since I suppose you will not have forgotten it,” he instructed her affectionately, “I want, when you reply to me, that you do so in Spanish.”⁹⁵

In addition to serving as a Spanish instructor, Soler worked as a translator in the military hospitals during the conflict, exemplifying another important function served by bilingual Cubans. For all the language instruction going on, many English-speaking volunteers still struggled to understand and to be understood. Bilingual Cubans could save the day at moments when important communication was lost in translation. U.S. volunteer John Tisa recalled one such episode in his memoir. One day, he remembered, a volunteer from New York serving as quartermaster for his battalion called in an order for food items. “His diction as yet was far from perfect and he was misunderstood.” Instead of the request for *jamón*, or ham, which he thought

⁹⁴ “2 años de Milicias de Cultura en las Brigadas Internacionales” and “Nuestro idioma lazo de unión,” *Reconquista* (35 División) 1, no. 3 (20 October 1938): 30, 35.

⁹⁵ Oscar Soler to Fredericka Martin, 21 June 1939, Folder 6, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive (ALBA 001), Tamiment Library, New York University, New York, New York.

he was making, an “order was placed for a hundred pounds of *jabón*—soap.” Fortunately, Tisa recalled, someone in Madrid thought the order sounded odd and called back to check. “A Cuban got on the line,” Tisa concluded with relief, “and thanks to him we ate ham.”⁹⁶ We can imagine Spaniards, Cubans, and volunteers from the United States having a good chuckle over this misunderstanding, especially since it was resolved before anyone on the front lines went hungry—but it is representative of a persistent problem that plagued the international forces. And it demonstrates the way in which the transnational identities of Cuban volunteers who traveled to Spain from the United States equipped them to play a critical translation role during the conflict.

Cubans served not only as linguistic but also as cultural translators. Though they were foreigners in Spain, their country’s close historical connection with Spain made them somewhat less foreign than other international volunteers. They could integrate into the host community with an effortless ease unavailable to their compatriots. English-language observations and remembrances of the Cubans often made note of this ability. In the village of Villanueva de la Jara, location of the training headquarters for the Americans, the men of the Centuria Guiteras impressed their U.S. counterparts when they “quickly established rapport with the villagers through a shared language.”⁹⁷ U.S. volunteers had a more difficult time fitting in in the small town. “Language, at first, was a barrier, but it was surmounted with the aid of the Cuban volunteers, who never tired of helping,” remembered John Tisa.⁹⁸ Cubans, stated another U.S. volunteer, deserved credit for “the winning of the villagers’ goodwill.” They “acted as

⁹⁶ Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight*, 25.

⁹⁷ Cecil D. Eby, *Comrades and Commissars: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 38.

⁹⁸ Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight*, 25.

interpreters for the other volunteers. They were a very amiable group—personable and *simpatico* in the truest Spanish sense. With the Americans they were warmly welcomed and invited to dine in village homes.”⁹⁹ These accounts of the Cubans’ ability to meld into the Spanish communities that hosted international volunteers celebrate them for this attribute, and illustrate the importance of their role as translators for other foreign volunteers. Their ability to serve as interpreters and cultural liaisons between English-speaking volunteers and Spaniards was helpful both on the combat front and in the daily life of international volunteers in Spain.

The so-called Spanish Battalion of the XV I.B. (the 24th, later the 59th) was another site in which Cuban volunteers were able to integrate relatively seamlessly with their Spanish hosts. The Batallón Español consisted primarily of Spaniards; but, noted the 35th Division periodical *Reconquista*, alongside them were “other sons of Spain, those who feel palpitating in their soul the desire for complete freedom. CUBA.” The article stated approvingly: “The sensibility of the moral values of the beautiful Antillean country is among us.” There were a few Greek, Polish, and U.S. volunteers in the “group of courageous fighters,” the article noted, but Spaniards and Cubans made up its bulk. These men of different nationalities spoke the same language, the article stated idealistically: the language of liberty, their common cause. In reality, of course, they did not actually all speak the same language. The Spanish Battalion may have been “[a]uthentically Spanish[,] [o]f soul and of sentiments,” as the article claimed, but in fact it was a cultural and linguistic jumble just like the rest of the International Brigades. Surely the Cubans’ ability to integrate with the Spaniards in the unit contributed to the positive feelings the hosts so readily expressed in their assessments of their Caribbean brethren.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Arthur H. Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1967), 31.

¹⁰⁰ “El Batallón Español,” *Reconquista* (35 División) 1, no. 3 (20 October 1938): 15.

Recognizing this special position of the Cubans and other Latin Americans, the Republicans welcomed them into the regular armed forces as well as the International Brigades. Cuban recruitment coordinator Nicolau González recalled that the leaders of the Spanish Communist Party “conceived of the idea of placing in the regular Spanish army all Latin American fighters that wished” to serve there. “This determination was met with overwhelming joy by our fighters,” Nicolau González remembered. And it was based upon “positive factors such as the identity of language and other characteristics common to Spaniards and natives of their former colonies.”¹⁰¹ The Latin Americans may have been international, but they were not quite foreign, as were other international volunteers; and among the Latin Americans, the Cubans were some of the most familiar, due to their late independence and the extensive migration between their country and Spain.

A third advantage many Cubans enjoyed in Spain was their ability to pass as Spaniards if doing so would benefit them in a given situation. Posing as Spaniards—or taking advantage, in some cases, of identities that were in fact ambiguous due to the close ties between the two countries—gave Cubans a way around the non-intervention policies that made getting to Spain difficult for many foreign volunteers. For example, the Cuban medical volunteer Pía Mastellari Maecha, female companion of Dr. Luis Díaz Soto who also volunteered in Spain, pretended to be Spanish in order to enter the country. “For my trip to Spain a Spanish woman’s passport was facilitated for me,” she reported in a letter from Barcelona in March 1938 requesting assistance from the Communist Party of Spain in orchestrating a similar arrangement for the trip home. Like many other Cubans of her era, Pía had a complex transnational identity. Her father was Italian, and she was born in Mexico. She moved to Cuba with her family when she was a child

¹⁰¹ Nicolau González, “La organización y traslado,” 12.

and became a citizen upon reaching adulthood. For her trip to Spain, though, she became “María García,” a Spanish woman, and entered the country without incident. Leaving, however, turned out to be more difficult even though she and her partner had strong ties with the Communist Party. She was forced to remain in Spain for a time after his departure due to the fact that she did not have “documents with which to obtain a legal passport,” and therefore the consulate refused to issue her one. She was delayed “until the situation with the passport was clarified.”¹⁰² Nevertheless, her relatively easy entrance into the country would not have been nearly as simple had she not been a native Spanish speaker, an advantage which Cuban volunteers enjoyed over their compatriots who did not share a language and culture with the country they sought to enter.

On the other hand, Cubans could fall back on their foreignness in situations in which being Spanish would put them at a disadvantage. One important time at which this ability served them well was at the end of the conflict. Foreign volunteers began to head home en masse late in 1938, as Nationalist victory loomed. Many of those who did not make it out in time ended up in French concentration camps along with Spanish refugees, while other international combatants were imprisoned in Spain. Back home on the island, activists petitioned the Cuban government to assist in freeing and bringing home these Cuban volunteers. One such petition appeared in November 1938, produced at an enormous assembly held by Cuban Communists in Havana’s Polar Stadium, and “signed” by the “80,000 attendees of the rally.” The Communists and fellow travelers gathered in the stadium petitioned the Cuban secretary of state, requesting official action to help liberate “the Cuban combatants made prisoners by the fascists in the land of

¹⁰² Pía Mastellari Maecha to Camarada Minor, 24 March 1938, File 597, RGASPI; Mastellari Maecha, “El pueblo español se mantuvo cada vez más firme,” in Instituto de Historia, *Cuba y la defensa*, 105–108.

Spain.”¹⁰³ A photograph (Figure 2.11) published in the commemorative book *Cuba en España* published on the island shows a group of activists standing on the front steps of the Cuban capitol building with a banner admonishing congressmen that the life or death of 250 Cubans depended upon their consciences. The book notes that they organized the action on behalf of Cuban combatants held in French concentration camps.¹⁰⁴



Figure 2.11 Cuban activists petition congressmen on the island to assist imprisoned Cuban volunteers

¹⁰³ “Al Doctor Juan J. Remos, Honorable Señor Secretario de Estado; y al Gobierno de Cuba en pleno,” 12 November 1938, 52–53, Number 641, Latin American and Iberian Pamphlets, Library of Congress (LAIPLC), Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁴ Bello and Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España*, unnumbered page.

Due in part to the intervention of foreign activists and governments, as well as to their citizenship status, international volunteers had a relatively easier time than Spaniards arranging to get transport to other countries. Spanish Republicans fleeing were refugees seeking new homes for an unknown length of time, whereas Cubans wanted simply to return home to the island or resume their lives in exile. One example of a Cuban volunteer who had married a Spanish woman illustrates the advantage the foreign volunteer had over the Spanish Republican at the end of the war. Oscar Soler, introduced above as a linguistic and cultural translator, found himself in June 1939 in the Camp de Gurs in the region of Aquitaine in southwestern France. He wrote to his friend U.S. nurse Fredericka Martin with sarcasm: “You know already that I am a *guest* of the French government and that they take very good care of me.” At this time, it seems, he still had hope that he would travel after leaving the camp to the United States, where he had lived before the war.¹⁰⁵ By August, though, he was in Havana. He did not get his first choice of locations, and his life in Cuba was very hard. “I never know where I’m going to eat or where I’m going to sleep,” he wrote. No one—no group—could assist him, he stated, because the “organizations are all broke + the Party can not [*sic*] render any help as the Party is without funds.”¹⁰⁶ In October he stated: “I’m trying very hard to get out of here + get back to the United States but somehow I can never get enough money together for the fare.”¹⁰⁷ At least, however, he was out of harm’s way; his Spanish wife was still stuck in a concentration camp in France.¹⁰⁸ He had hoped his friends in the United States would help him raise money to bring her to Cuba,

¹⁰⁵ Soler to Martin, 21 June 1939, Folder 6, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

¹⁰⁶ Soler to Martin, 11 August 1939, Folder 6, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

¹⁰⁷ Soler to Martin, 11 October 1939, Folder 6, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

¹⁰⁸ Martin to Odio Pérez, 31 October 1968, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

and then the Cuban Department of State had informed him that the government would have her on a ship to the island by the end of August.¹⁰⁹ Two months later, however, she was still in the camp. “I’ve been worrying a lot about my wife who is still in France as there is not a way to get her here on account of the war,” Soler confided to his friend. The Cuban government, he now believed, was working to arrange for some U.S. ships to take Cubans stuck in France to the United States and then on to Cuba, and his wife might be included in this group, but it would probably take a long time and “nothing effective” had yet been done. Winter approached, he lamented, and his wife was “in a very cold region of France” and probably lacked “the necessary things to protec[t] her from the cold.”¹¹⁰ The record of Soler’s concerns ends here, and we are left to wonder if his Spanish wife was ever able to make it to the Americas.

Beginning with the martyrdom of iconic volunteer Torriente, positive reports of the experience of Cuban volunteers in Spain inspired new recruits to join the fight. Celebratory accounts served as propaganda, an organizing tool used to recruit both new volunteers to travel to Spain and new antifascist and pro-Republican activists at home and in exile. On the island *Mediodía*, begun in June 1936 and edited by Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, and *Facetas de Actualidad Española*, begun in April 1937 specifically to bring news of the war to the island, celebrated Cuban volunteers—those who served in the regular Republican forces as well as those who were members of the International Brigades, and those who went to Spain from the United States as well as those who left from the island or were already there when the conflict began—as part of their support for the Republican cause. Both *Mediodía* and *Facetas* published poetic

¹⁰⁹ Soler to Martin, 11 August 1939, Folder 6, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

¹¹⁰ Soler to Martin, 11 October 1939, Folder 6, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

homages to Torriente,¹¹¹ and notable Cuban intellectual Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring called the Cuban volunteers, singling out Torriente, “Creole heroes of liberty” in a piece for *Facetas*.¹¹² Articles in *Mediodía* such as “Cubanos en España” (“Cubans in Spain”), “Más cubanos en España” (“More Cubans in Spain”), and “Los que vuelven del frente” (“Those who return from the front”) introduced Cuban readers to volunteers, their triumphs and their deaths, and made them into heroes.¹¹³ *Facetas* published photographs of individual Cubans volunteering in Spain with captions celebrating their accomplishments there. These portraits, often showing men in uniform, conveyed a sense of the Republican fight as respectable, dignified, and just. Captions told Cuban readers that their fellow countrymen fought for Spain’s “legitimate government” and for “Spanish democracy.” The three examples pictured here (Figures 2.12–14) show Cuban medical student Pedro Antonio Rodríguez Iñigo, who was already in Spain working when the conflict began and became a medical volunteer; Cuban baseball player Basilio Cueria, who left for Spain from the United States; and Andrés González Lanuza, a 44-year-old captain who was part of the first group of Cuban volunteers to leave the island.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Emilio Ballagas, “A Pablo de la Torriente,” *Mediodía* no. 14 (5 April 1937): 7; Gerardo de Valle, “Pablo de la Torriente Brau,” *Facetas de Actualidad Española* I, no. 3 (June 1937): 5.

¹¹² Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, “Por el Triunfo de la España, República de Trabajadores; contra la Barbarie Fascista,” *Facetas de Actualidad Española* I, no. 5 (August 1937): 4.

¹¹³ “Cubanos en España: ‘Mediodía’ en España,” *Mediodía* no. 24 (13 July 1937): 11; “Más cubanos en España,” *Mediodía* no. 29 (17 August 1937): 9; Joaquín Cardoso, “Los que vuelven del frente,” *Mediodía* no. 41 (8 November 1937): 9, 16.

¹¹⁴ “Capitán Pedro Antonio Rodríguez Iñigo,” *Facetas de Actualidad Española* I, no. 7 (October–November 1937): 83; “El Capitán de Ametralladoras,” *Facetas de Actualidad Española* I, no. 9 (January 1938): 75; “El Capitán González Lanuza,” *Facetas de Actualidad Española* I, no. 9 (January 1938): 113.



Figures 2.12–14 Portraits of Cuban volunteers in Spain published by *Facetas de Actualidad Española*

An article in *Facetas* introduced Cuban readers to the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, of which the Cuban column “Antonio Guiteras,” it noted, comprised a significant part. The tribute called the battalion a unit of “valiant defenders of the ideal.” Making a comparison between the foreign volunteers in Spain and foreign heroes of the U.S. Revolutionary War—Tadeusz Kościuszko, Casimir Pulaski, and Lafayette—and of the Cuban War of Independence—Máximo Gómez and Carlos Roloff Mialofsky—this article celebrating Cubans in the Spanish conflict sought to portray them as heroic and legitimate to readers on the island.¹¹⁵

Publishing positive assessments of foreign volunteers as pro-Republican propaganda was not limited to Cuban periodicals: Spanish periodicals and English-language publications celebrated Cuban contributions to the Republican cause in Spain, also. In addition to providing more examples of heroic accounts of volunteers to be used as aids in recruitment and organizing,

¹¹⁵ Hals Aurelious, “Cartas de España: El Batallón de Abraham Lincoln,” *Facetas de Actualidad Española* I, no. 4 (July 1937): 84–86.

these celebrations of Cubans in the press of other countries illustrate the transnational nature of pro-Republican activism. The 35th Division periodical *Reconquista* remembered Cuban Ramiro Azcuay in a brief note entitled “Por Cuba” (“For Cuba”): “An example of heroism we have in the activist,” it noted. Despite the fact that there had been a desire to leave him in a position working in the rearguard, the article stated with evident approval, he would not accept it. Instead he went to the front, and died there “defending Cuba, his distant country.”¹¹⁶ This article drew a connection between the struggles in Spain and Cuba. Another article in the same periodical commemorated Cuban volunteer Manuel Digat, a lieutenant of the 60th Battalion of the 35th Division, and commented on his transnational identity. A laudatory tribute, the article called Digat “brave and determined” and “an encouragement to his comrades,” stating that he never encountered insurmountable obstacles. It recalled one of his notable achievements during action in Gandesa when he “entered the village and, pistol in hand, intimidated some fascist forces, managing to save a truckload of ammunition, which he led to our base with the smile and the satisfaction of accomplishment.” Reporting that he had died directing the transport of munitions under heavy fire just days before he was scheduled to return home, it called the volunteer “Cuban by birth but genuinely Spanish in body and soul.”¹¹⁷ *The Volunteer for Liberty*, periodical of the English-speaking volunteers, ran a two-page article in February 1938 called “Cuban Volunteers in Spain,” which is referenced throughout this chapter.¹¹⁸ A Spanish-language commemoration of the 59th Battalion—the “Spanish Battalion,” formerly the 24th of the XV I.B.—in the same periodical noted that “the international comrades and in largest number the

¹¹⁶ “El camino de los héroes termina,” *Reconquista* (35 División) 1, no. 2 (20 September 1938): 7. This periodical is available in the Archivo General Militar de Ávila, Ávila, Spain.

¹¹⁷ “¡Héroes!” *Reconquista* (35 División).

¹¹⁸ “Cuban Volunteers in Spain,” *The Volunteer for Liberty*, 4–5.

Cuban comrades have done a great job.”¹¹⁹ An article in *The Volunteer* reporting on “American Volunteers in Spain” remarked that “[f]ighting with the Americans from their first action on was an important group of Central and South Americans, volunteers from Cuba, Mexico, Argentina—the bravest of the brave.”¹²⁰ *The Story of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion* published in 1937 called upon readers: “Let us not forget...the heroism of the Centurio Gutterrez [*sic*], the Cuban section, fighting for freedom for Spain and hoping for a similar fight for freedom in Cuba. Heroes, every one.”¹²¹

Commemorative accounts often celebrated those volunteers injured or killed in action, and such articles illustrate for us one important element of the Cuban volunteers’ experience in Spain: loss. As we have seen, Torriente was not only the iconic first Cuban volunteer to cross the Atlantic but also among the first and most noted deaths of the international participants. Cubans marked his battlefield death in commemorative events and in laudatory published remembrances, honored him posthumously in poetry and memorialized his name in titles of organizations. The following advertisement (Figure 2.16) published in *Mediodía* in April 1937 announced one gathering to remember Pablo at which several notable Cuban intellectuals and activists would speak.¹²²

¹¹⁹ “El Batallón 59 al otro lado del Ebro,” *The Volunteer for Liberty* II, no. 31 (5 September 1938): 11.

¹²⁰ “American Volunteers in Spain,” *The Volunteer for Liberty* II, no. 35 (7 November 1938): 9.

¹²¹ John Tisa (unattributed), *The Story of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion: Written in the Trenches of Spain* (New York: Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, 1937), 24.

¹²² “Homenaje a Pablo de la Torriente,” *Mediodía* no. 14 (5 April 1937): 7.

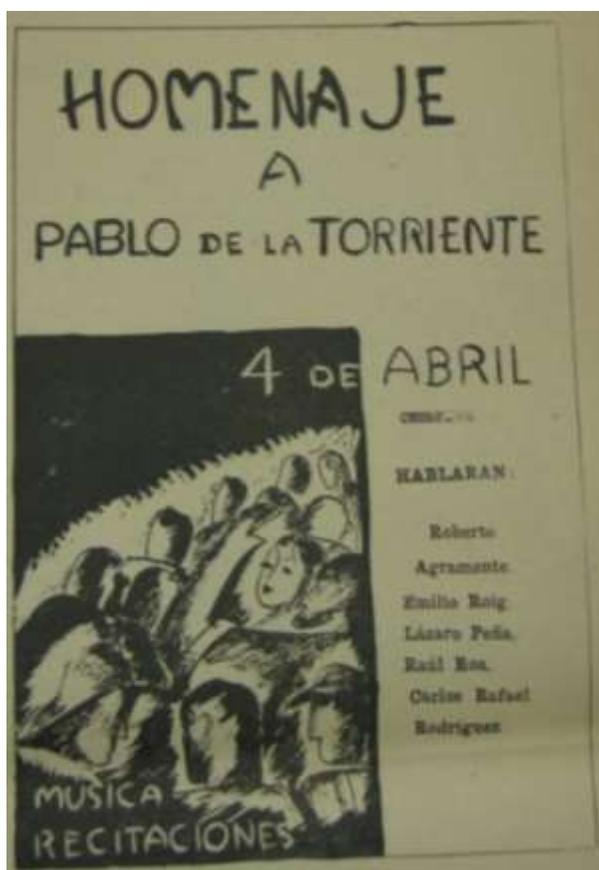


Figure 2.15 Announcement of event posthumously celebrating Pablo de la Torriente Brau

Another famous Cuban volunteer death was that of Rodolfo de Armas, organizer and leader of the Centuria Guiteras, who received similar attention from Cubans after his death. Pablo was posthumously the honorary head of the first Cuban contingent from New York; Rodolfo was its actual commander. These two were often singled out of all the Cubans injured and killed for special remembrance in the press outside of the island; for example, *The Volunteer for Liberty*, in a list of those killed from many nations (France, England, Germany, Italy, Japan, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Ireland, and the United States), picked Pablo and Rodolfo as the representative dead of their country.¹²³ De Armas represents several important characteristics of the Cuban volunteers and their experience in Spain: the continuity between the domestic struggle

¹²³ "A Year of the International Brigades," *The Volunteer for Liberty* I, no. 18 (11 October 1937): 2.

on the island and the Spanish conflict, the transnational connections made especially by those Cubans who had been in New York, the leadership role attained by many Cubans during the war, and the intense veneration of those killed in action.

De Armas was only in his mid-twenties and yet clearly admired by many as an effective leader. *The Volunteer for Liberty* noted that “the energetic Cuban student leader” stood at the head of a large number of “youthful antifascist Cubans,” acting as “the leading spirit in the organization of the ‘Centurie Guiteras’ Column” that had “played such an honorable role on the Spanish antifascist front.”¹²⁴ Another account noted that he “became the cynosure of admiring eyes” in the small village where the Americans had their training headquarters, “as he strolled during the paseo with a young Villanueva girl who had consented to become his wife.”¹²⁵ Italian-American volunteer John Tisa, friendly with many of the Cubans who served in the Abraham Lincoln Battalion, remembered with evident fondness:

Our group leader was Rodolfo de Armas, about five feet eight inches tall, broad-shouldered, and muscular. His wide, chestnut-brown face had a high, shiny, prominent forehead with deep-set, sparkling brown eyes, the left one crossed. When he spoke, one felt that one was in the presence of a powerful tractor in motion. He wasted no words, and one moved fast under his command. Always serious and in a hurry, he seemed intolerant and angry, until one got to know him; then one understood his vigor, his short temper, and his anxiety that everything be done quickly and perfectly. To his friends he was no mystery; he was considered to be one of the gentlest of human beings, as well as the most advanced Marxist of all the Cubans.

Despite his strong ideological convictions, though, the young leader was able to unite his politically diverse brethren; “by the magnetism of his personality and the soundness of his

¹²⁴ “Cuban Volunteers in Spain,” *The Volunteer for Liberty*, 4.

¹²⁵ Eby, *Comrades and Commissars*, 38.

reasoning,” Tisa recalled, he “was able to pull together in common bond the various political shades among these antifascist Cubans.”¹²⁶

The beloved Cuban youth fell during the Battle of Jarama in February 1937. It is clear from the historical record that his dramatic death in battle made a strong and lasting impression on those who witnessed it or who heard about it afterward, both Cubans and others supportive of the Republic. The story was repeated again and again in both Spanish- and English-language written accounts, including James W. Ford’s celebratory comments about Cuban volunteers. Prior to the written versions, it seems that the story was passed around orally; Ford stated that a North American had recounted to him the details of the event.¹²⁷ Accounts of the death varied in their details, but not in their drama. Describing the course of the battle at dusk, one account began: “All at once everything seemed to go wrong.”¹²⁸ A tank exploded into flames as approximately 450 Cuban, Irish, U.S., and Canadian volunteers “were advancing against a well-entrenched enemy.”¹²⁹ Cuban and Irish units had gone out ahead of other members of the Lincoln Battalion to engage the Nationalists. “Deployed next to the San Martín road, the Cuban section advanced, led by their charismatic leader, Rudolfo [*sic*] de Armas, who raised a clenched fist high in the air and signaled his men forward. Hit in the leg, he stooped to check the wound when he was hit again in the head and jaw. He was probably dead before he hit the ground.”¹³⁰ In another telling of the story, penned in 1937 in *The Story of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion*, the Cuban leader had just helped an injured soldier when he was shot: “Rodolfo de Armas, leader of

¹²⁶ Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight*, 16.

¹²⁷ Moré Tabío, “Cuba puede estar orgullosa,” 10.

¹²⁸ Eby, *Comrades and Commissars*, 61.

¹²⁹ Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade*, 66.

¹³⁰ Eby, *Comrades and Commissars*, 61.

the Cuban section, was the first one killed. After rescuing a wounded comrade he continued the advance, and beckoned the others to follow” just before being hit. He was one among many of his fellow countrymen, this account noted: “The losses of the Cuban section were heavy.”¹³¹ John Tisa (who was the author behind *The Story*, though it is often attributed to ‘Anonymous’) recalled decades later his own witnessing of the event in similar language, but with more personal details added. If his recollection is accurate, Tisa was one of the closest eyewitnesses to the death. “I was alongside him, about twenty feet to his right,” he remembered, “and felt secure under his leadership.” This sense of security was not to last. “At that moment, as I looked at Rodolfo, at the same time searching out where I would dash for cover in my next spring, a bullet struck him in the right leg, and when he stooped to grip his leg with his hands, shouting obscenities toward the fascists, two more bullets hit him, one in the head and the other in the jaw.” Tisa’s account is poignant, that of a friend: “Instinctively, I ran to him, oblivious of whistling bullets, but I was too late. I stood over him in sadness and uncertainty, and in sudden loneliness, for the one person I had looked upon as indestructible, the one I had admired, lay dead.”¹³² Ford, too, became emotional as he recounted the death for *Mediodía*, his interviewer, the author of “Cuba puede estar orgullosa de sus hijos,” stated. Pulling out a handsome photograph of the young leader, Ford commented: “Look, all heroism, youth, and fortitude. It seems incredible that he has died.” Caught up in the image and the moment, perhaps, Ford exaggerated a bit the details of the death: “The heroic boy, even though the blood flowed copiously, continued his march over the hill. But eventually he could not anymore. He tried to tie a handkerchief to control bleeding. In that moment he was the target of another bullet, but this time it was

¹³¹ Tisa, *The Story of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion*, 14.

¹³² Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight*, 42.

necessarily deadly as it had pierced his jugular.” Concluding this particularly dramatic account, Ford honored the Cuban leader and all the Cubans dead in Spain by comparing them to Julio Antonio Mella.¹³³ It is clear from Ford’s telling, Tisa’s remembrance, and other accounts of Rodolfo de Armas that his fellow volunteers greatly admired him and his capacity for leadership. Of the multiple Cubans who died during the Battle of Jarama, his death was the one told and retold, suggesting that he possessed a charisma that made him especially notable not only to his fellow Cubans but also to many others who knew him. The emotional tributes cited here distinguish a more recent assessment of the death as quite understated: “Rudolfo Armas [*sic*],” writes historian of the Lincoln Battalion Cecil B. Eby, “leader of the centuria of Cubans who had fled Machado’s regime, was a major loss.”¹³⁴

Not surprisingly, the Cuban press reported many of the Cuban losses in Spain. For example, the article earlier cited, “Cuba puede estar orgullosa de sus hijos,” listed a number of Cubans already injured or dead by July 1937 for readers back home on the island. Ricardo Triana, it stated, of La Víbora in Havana, had been injured in his right arm; Daniel Rivas, from the interior of the island, had one bullet wound in his arm and another in his chest; Luis Rivero Villanueva, of Niquero in Oriente, had lost a hand to an explosive; Armando González, of Marianao in Havana, was wounded in the leg; and Oscar Hernández, of Havana, was hospitalized. Angel Rufo, Carlos Guijarros, Pedro Hernández, Antonio Rodríguez, Aquilino Navarro Conejo, and Jorge de Cárdenas, as well as Rodolfo de Armas, were all dead.¹³⁵ Periodicals from elsewhere, such as *The Volunteer for Liberty* previously cited, and unit-specific

¹³³ Moré Tabío, “Cuba puede estar orgullosa,” 10–11.

¹³⁴ Eby, *Comrades and Commissars*, 64.

¹³⁵ Moré Tabío, “Cuba puede estar orgullosa,” 11.

publications of the Republican military also noted Cuban losses. For example, the *Boletín Información Comisariado* (Commissioner's Information Bulletin) of the 35th Division, in an article entitled "Héroes!" ("Heroes!") reported that Manuel Alonso Barroso, a 32-year-old Cuban of the 58th Battalion, XV Brigade had been wounded in combat.¹³⁶

Another Cuban volunteer to receive substantial attention upon his death in battle was Alberto Sánchez Menéndez. Born in 1915, Alberto began his political engagement as a student activist in the anti-Machado struggle when he was 15 years old. He became a close collaborator of Antonio Guiterras, and helped lead the March 1935 general strike on the island, after which he went into exile in Central America, Mexico, and finally Spain in March 1936. He was already there, then, when the Spanish Civil War began, and joined the fight in defense of the Republic immediately, becoming a commander of the Fifth Regiment, a unit of the regular Republican forces formed by the Spanish Communist Party. A member of the Spanish Party, Sánchez was trusted by its Central Committee, a representative of which sought his assessment of the first Cuban volunteers to arrive from the island. He married a fellow commander in the regiment, a Spanish woman named Encarnación Hernández.¹³⁷ *Facetas de Actualidad Española* published a photograph (Figure 2.16) of Alberto with his Spanish *compañera* and notified readers that "the young Cuban whose career in the Popular Army of the Spanish Republic had been so brilliant" had died in July 1937 in the battle of Brunete. "Alongside the blood of Pablo de la Torriente, Rodolfo de Armas, and so many other Cubans the blood of the Cuban youth remains in the Spanish countryside," the photograph caption read, "fertilizing the NEW SPAIN that is being

¹³⁶ "Héroes!" *Boletín Información Comisariado* (35 División en campaña) no. 54 (1 September 1938): 6. This periodical is available in the Archivo General Militar de Ávila, Ávila, Spain.

¹³⁷ Comité Central to Enrique Lister, 17 May 1937, File 601, Subseries III, Opis 6, Fond 545, RGASPI; María Luisa Lafita, *Dos héroes cubanos en el 5to. regimiento* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1980).

forged.”¹³⁸ Another photograph (Figure 2.17) of Sánchez shows a handsome and brooding young man.¹³⁹



Figures 2.16 and 2.17 Cuban volunteer Alberto Sánchez Menéndez

Some laudatory accounts of the Cubans killed in action were of higher literary quality than others, as one memorial of Alberto demonstrates. Among the dozens of poems celebrating Cuban volunteers, we find a few written by masters of the craft, such as the one commemorating Sánchez by Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. Neruda called the handsome young Cuban “taciturn, strong, and small of stature,” and memorialized his valor in battle, describing how he, blinded by smoke and blood, leapt up from a stretcher and ran again to the head of his unit. Out of his body flowed “our blood,” Neruda wrote, “and in the soil of Brunete his body remains as a flag.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ “Los Héroes Caídos,” *Facetas de Actualidad Española* I, no. 5 (August 1937): 23. Emphasis in the original.

¹³⁹ “Brigadista cubano Alberto Sánchez Méndez [sic],” No. 217, CEDOBI.

¹⁴⁰ This poem is misquoted in Fernando Vera Jiménez, “Cubanos en la Guerra Civil española. La presencia de voluntarios en las Brigadas Internacionales y el Ejército Popular de la República,” *Revista*

As the cases of several individuals already mentioned—including Rodolfo de Armas and Alberto Sánchez Menéndez—demonstrate, a number of Cuban volunteers achieved leadership positions and attained promoted ranks in the Spanish military, both in the International Brigades and the regular Republican forces. De Armas was one of the two highest ranking Cubans, along with Policarpo Candón, to achieve the rank of lieutenant colonel. Candón was a leader of a Brigade of over 3,500 men in the Division lead by “El Campesino,” Valentín González during 1937.¹⁴¹ *Mediodía* reported him killed in action in March 1938, calling him “one of the most valiant defenders of democracy on Spanish soil,” and boasting that he, “Cuban to the core,” occupied at the time of his death “a position of high responsibility in the Spanish Popular Army.”¹⁴² In addition to the two lieutenant colonels, 13 Cubans attained the rank of commander (including Sánchez), 27 of captain, and 33 of lieutenant. Also, 22 served as political commissars (including Torriente).¹⁴³

As the cases of Alberto Sánchez Menéndez, Rodolfo de Armas, and Oscar Soler have demonstrated, another common element of the Cuban volunteer experience in Spain was Cuban men becoming romantically involved with Spanish women. Alberto married a fellow commander; Rodolfo, we are told, wooed a girl from the small village where U.S. volunteers trained; and medical volunteer Oscar married a Spanish woman who was, by one account, a

Complutense de Historia de América 25 (1999): 301. A lengthy excerpt from the poem appears in Edmundo Olivares B., *Pablo Neruda: Los caminos de América* (Santiago: Editorial LOM, 2004), 219.

¹⁴¹ “Primera Brigada Móvil de Choque,” Documento 1, Carpeta 6, Caja 973, Archivo General Militar de Ávila, Ávila, Spain.

¹⁴² “Candón ha Muerto,” *Mediodía* no. 58 (7 March 1938): 9.

¹⁴³ Agrupación de Veteranos Internacionalistas Cubanos, “Grados militares alcanzados por los cubanos en los tres años de guerra,” undated, Expediente 1/135, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63184, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete, Spain.

nurse.¹⁴⁴ It is not surprising that young single men engaged in a military conflict far from home would take up with local women. The prospect of doing so was likely among the various personal motivations that drove Cuban activists to volunteer. In some cases, though, pursuing personal gain in this way drew negative attention from officials. The case of Cuban volunteer Manuel Cala Reyes, which we examine in greater detail in the conclusion, is an example. A veteran of the anti-Machado struggle, Cala was already in his late forties when he served in Spain. His age—advanced relative to many other volunteers—played a role in his investigation for possible sexual impropriety when he expressed interest in a 14-year-old Spanish girl. He claimed to want to marry the girl, and explained that older men marrying young girls was normal in his country—an interesting example of a Cuban volunteer attempting to leverage his foreign identity to get himself out of trouble. However, an official report stated that he had become physically forceful with the girl, and that she denied having expressed reciprocal feelings for the older man. Detention until repatriation was proposed.¹⁴⁵

The example of Arturo Corona shows that some Cuban volunteers were motivated in large part by self-interest rather than ideals or ideology. Corona (sometimes written as “Coruña” and also known as “Coronita”) left for Spain from the United States as part of the second major group of U.S. volunteers in January of 1937. He served in Spain with his female companion, a Cuban woman named Dulcea Hernaiz who worked as a nurse. A good deal of what we know of Corona survives in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive in New York due to the work of U.S. nurse and volunteer Fredericka Martin’s research on medical volunteers, among them Dulcea,

¹⁴⁴ Eby, *Comrades and Commissars*, 38; Martin to Odio Pérez, 31 October 1968, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

¹⁴⁵ Commission Judiciaire, “Rapport No. 1731,” 7 September 1937, File 588, Subseries III, Opis 6, Fond 545: Records of the International Brigades, Comintern Archives, RGASPI.

whom she met in Spain. Martin sought further information about the couple in her correspondence with Cuban doctor Eduardo Odio Pérez. Dr. Odio Perez believed that the man, whom he called Coruña, was a Cuban-American from Key West who was later in the U.S. Army and died fighting in the Pacific during World War II. He was, in the doctor's opinion, "not very straight."¹⁴⁶ Information compiled by the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive indicates that Corona was a student, that he was a member of the Communist Party, and that he had returned to the United States from Spain by April 1938.¹⁴⁷ The Cuban periodical *Mediodía* mentioned Corona briefly in July 1937. The article stated that he had taken over command of, "according to his own childishly proud words, 'the best contingent of fighters in the Spanish Army.'" He was, it claimed, a former anti-Machado fighter and only 23 years old.¹⁴⁸ Corona's personnel file in the Moscow Archive raises questions. A document in English dated 7 April 1937 begins by stating that Corona is Cuban, age 36, a member of the Communist Party of Cuba, First Lieutenant of the 17th Battalion of the XV Brigade (which was the U.S. Lincoln Battalion), and "Commander of Second Company up to Feb. 27." It notes that he was, as of early April, at Villanueva, and that Comrades Walsh and Suarez investigated him there the week of 1 April. Their findings were as follows. Corona "passed himself as battalion commander when he arrived in Villanueva ten days ago. Corona assigned one comrade Delgado, Albert, to be an adjutant and courier to one Doctor Fogarty, now residing in Villanueva." The report stated that this Dr. Fogarty carried a letter signed by Corona which he showed to Walsh, and that the letter

¹⁴⁶ Rosa Hilda Zell to Fredericka Martin, 26 September 1968, Folder 4, and Eduardo Odio Pérez to Fredericka Martin, 4 December 1968, Folder 5, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

¹⁴⁷ Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive, "Arturo Corona," <http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/arturo-corona> (Accessed 2 September 2010). The source for the information in the profile is listed as: "Complete list of Americans on File dated April 13, 1937."

¹⁴⁸ "Cubanos en España: 'Mediodía' en España," *Mediodía* no. 24 (13 July 1937): 11.

was marked, under Corona's signature, "A.C.O.L.B.," for American Commandant of Lincoln Battalion. The report mentioned that Corona claimed he possessed a special pass from the International Brigades allowing him free movement, as well as "a Packard and a late model Ford motor car to drive around in, one of which was burnt up." The report noted also that Corona wore three wide stripes on his hat and one on his sleeve. A document in French, which is undated, states that its information is based on a report from Cuban volunteer Florentino Alejo. The document accuses Corona of stealing 3,000 pesos from the Cuban Communist Party, and also notes that he was a deserter in Spain.¹⁴⁹ Clearly, officials had their eyes on Arturo Corona, and did not think particularly favorably of him. Arturo made himself infamous back in the United States as well, or as Martin put it in one letter, he "turned out badly."¹⁵⁰ Upon her return to New York, Martin learned that Corona had run a scam in which he solicited money from U.S. families of volunteers reported missing, ostensibly to support search and recovery efforts, and then vanished with the money and fled back to Cuba.¹⁵¹ Believing that Dulcea might have been one more victim of Corona's cons made her angry. "Dr. Odio thinks he was in U.S. Army and killed in the Pacific," Martin wrote. Then she conjectured bitterly: "I'd bet [he] is sitting easy somewhere."¹⁵²

Corona's case shows that individual actors could be both politically motivated and personally opportunistic. The volunteer may have been a genuine believer in Communism led

¹⁴⁹ Servicio de Cuadros, Base de la Brigadas Internacionales to the Control Commission, 7 April 1937, File 588, RGASPI.

¹⁵⁰ Fredericka Martin to John Martinez, 28 July 1977, Folder 11, Box 19, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001

¹⁵¹ Fredericka Martin to Sociedad de Amistad Cubana – Española, 6 June 1970, Folder 4, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

¹⁵² Fredericka Martin to Louis [probably Louis Miller], 29 April and 5 May 1970, Folder 4, Box 2, Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA 001.

astray by personal greed, or he may have joined the Party simply to benefit from the opportunities for theft and cons with which Party membership presented him. These opportunities, in his case, extended to the battlefields of Spain where he behaved in an unscrupulous and devious manner, dishonestly gaining in the process not only money but also power. In Spain Corona showed that he had an inflated sense of his own grandeur by bragging about his status and showing off the trappings of his alleged rank. These behaviors suggest that the volunteer may have sought adventure and status as well as money and power in Spain. It is probable that most international volunteers had some combination of political and personal motivations for going to serve the Spanish Republic; in Corona's case, we see a number of potential personal gains that could motivate volunteers—power, money, status, and adventure—overshadowing political reasons and idealism. Whereas we see many Cuban volunteers celebrated for having crossed borders and oceans driven by a sense of solidarity, Corona did so like a fugitive to dodge the consequences of his greedy and corrupt behavior.

Tensions within activists between idealism and personal motivations, between solidarity and individual desires, are important to consider in the case of Cuban volunteers and in the context of celebratory narratives that have interpreted the fight against fascism and for the Spanish Republic as “the Good Fight.” The diversity of the Cuban volunteers included a diversity of motivations, and a wide range of behavior. Though our overarching thesis concerns continuity of activism and the development of transnational solidarity, therefore, we must also account for examples that do not fit. The memoir of U.S. volunteer John Tisa is one excellent source of such examples. Tisa, though very fond of many Cubans and often complimentary in his comments about them, noted a lack of discretion by his Cuban counterparts during the voyage to Spain. The volunteers had received instructions regarding their behavior in New York,

commanding them to keep their mission secret. Other volunteers, Tisa recalled, followed these orders, trying to “appear as inconspicuous as possible,” but the Cubans did not. “They were a happy bunch, not caring who knew where they were going. They roamed the ship and invaded the upper, first-class decks and often were ordered back to our third-class hole.” Though Tisa admits that he “gate-crashed with them because I too wanted to see how the rich lived,” his account of the Cubans’ lack of discretion on board the ship nevertheless shows that they disobeyed orders, indicating a lack of discipline.¹⁵³ Tisa included in his memoir a couple of other quite unflattering instances of questionable behavior by Cuban volunteers, in which he tactfully left the identities of the men in question anonymous. In one instance a Cuban recounted his trip to a whorehouse in Spain. Having just admitted to seeking out a brothel himself, the U.S. volunteer claimed in his memoir that he and several others left, finding it distasteful, and “all of us wondering aloud why the government had not yet wiped out prostitution.” One of the men, he remembered, said that it was “unbecoming for volunteers to come into town and right off the bat look for a woman joint.” Later, he remembered, “a Cuban told me of his experience after he found a house where he was well taken care of.” The Cuban volunteer claimed that the woman refused his money, thanking him for coming all the way from America to help the Republican cause. In a somewhat humorous twist on political conviction, Tisa concluded the recounting of the Cuban’s tale: “Pepe added that the house is a respectable place with high health standards because ‘it is unionized and collectivized.’ He promised to take me with him next time.”¹⁵⁴ In a second instance recounted by Tisa, a Cuban volunteer made a mess of a latrine, missing the hole. When reprimanded, Tisa remembered, the culprit was embarrassed, but also gave the doctor who

¹⁵³ Tisa, *Recalling the Good Fight*, 17.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

scolded him an irreverent riposte. “The next time you have to go,” the doctor rebuked, “let me know and I’ll show you where.” The Cuban replied, “OK, Doc, what you can do now is show me how to put the stuff back into my ass,” Tisa wrote, and “walked away chuckling, proud of his retort.”¹⁵⁵

In some cases, political conviction and assessment of a volunteer’s behavior interacted in complex ways. In certain records it is difficult to discern whether a negative assessment of a Cuban volunteer is based on truly bad behavior or rather on political disagreement—or even a personal slight against an authority figure. For example, a report by the commander of the XIV I.B. requested severe punishment for two Cuban volunteers—Luis Silvestre and Daniel Avila—in October 1937, implying that they were at least badly behaved and self-interested if not something worse. They had, it stated, “participated very actively in the disorders caused on Sunday night the 26th of September of 1937 by certain suspicious elements during the party of the XIV Brigade.” They had acted, it continued, as “true provocateurs, exciting the men gathered there to create disorder; trying violently to break into the Swiss Hotel; [and] disseminating seriously defamatory statements about the heads of the XIV Brigade, to which they belong.” They had a history of such behavior, the report stated, and were suspicious. They lacked political consciousness and were, in fact, “old mercenaries of the fascist Cuban Army of Batista come to Spain simply for the spirit of adventure and to escape unemployment, if not for *something more serious*.”¹⁵⁶ Were these volunteers violent, disruptive thrill-seekers, as the report suggests? Might they even have been agents of Batista? Perhaps the heads of the brigade were insulted by the men’s “defamatory statements” and punishing them for this personal slight?

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 65.

¹⁵⁶ Comandante de la XIV Brigada to Comandante de la 105 Brigada, 2 October 1937, File 601, RGASPI. Emphasis in the original.

Or maybe the volunteers simply disagreed with the party line in the brigade, their political challenges provoking disciplinary action in an attempt to silence critique? It is likely that a combination of factors contributed to the negative assessment of these men, though the wording of the critical report strongly suggests that personal insult and political incorrectness played a role.

The opposite might also be true: Poor behavior might be covered over in the record if an individual was considered politically correct and useful. The case of Efrain Gausch León illustrates the types of discrepancies evident in the archive which seem to have resulted from attempts to perpetuate a celebratory image of the international volunteers by covering up less desirable attributes and actions. Gausch León was a native of La Habana province born in 1909, an electrician by trade who had worked for the Cuban telephone company, and an active member of the Cuban Communist Party since 1931. Sent by the Party, he arrived in Spain in February 1938 and became a member of the 24th Battalion of the XV Brigade; but in April he still had not taken part in any fighting due to a lung ailment. Nevertheless, assessments of the Cuban volunteer by International Brigade officials were positive. He was an activist in the Party and loyal Communist, they noted, which had caused him to be injured and imprisoned repeatedly in Cuba. He had been eager to fight fascism in Spain and convinced that doing so was a way to fight for his own country, stated one assessment. But by August 1938 Efrain was dead. A letter sent by the Central Committee of the Party in Spain to that of the Party in Cuba called him “the brave Cuban fighter” and reported that he had been killed by “a bullet of criminal fascism” while “fighting heroically in the Ebro offensive.” The remembrance concluded with a laudatory commemoration of the fallen comrade: “His death on the front of Liberty constitutes a further binding between our two peoples in their common struggle against their oppressors and the

enemies of Humanity. We promise comrade Efrain Guasch that his wish for freedom and progress that led him to come to our land will be fulfilled.”¹⁵⁷ This type of celebratory language was typical, as we have seen. Yet another contemporary source suggests that the Cuban volunteer’s death may have been in reality significantly less heroic. Without identifying him as Cuban, the 35th Division publication *Reconquista* used the story of Gausch León’s death as a warning to other volunteers. A September 1938 issue of the periodical reported that the soldier got ahold of a bottle of champagne to celebrate a victory in battle. The bottle was opened, the note stated, and beyond the river “remained the empty bottle with the life of the soldier.”¹⁵⁸ The military publication left the specific cause of death ambiguous, but the moral of the cautionary tale was not: Irresponsible use of alcohol on the front lines could lead to death. This interpretation of the Cuban’s death contrasts sharply with the laudatory statements in his personnel file. If not for his unusual name, this discrepancy in the record might never have attracted attention; but because we can identify the individual in the military periodical as being the same person as the volunteer in the Moscow archive records due to his unique name, we can see clearly how unflattering traits or behaviors of volunteers might be glossed over or deliberately hidden in official documentation.

Outcomes

What impact did the participation of Cuban volunteers in the Spanish Civil War have? Having challenged the oversimplified narrative of “the Good Fight” by examining complex

¹⁵⁷ Efrain Guasch León, “Biografía de Militantes,” 16 April 1938; Guasch León, “Questionnaire,” undated; El Secretariado del Comité Central, Barcelona, to Comité Central Partido Comunista Cubain [*sic*], 29 August 1938; and two untitled documents, File 594, RGASPI.

¹⁵⁸ “¡Soldados resistir!” *Reconquista* (35 División) 1, no. 2 (20 September 1938): 6.

motivations for participation and negative assessments of Cuban volunteers in Spain, it is important to note that they did contribute, nonetheless, to the pro-Republican cause. This point is vital to understanding activism. A history of activism necessarily utilizes, in part, source material produced by activists, and the writing of activists often takes the form of ideological conviction, idealism, and propaganda. It would be easy to fall into the trap of glorifying individuals, groups, or ideas based on the relentless enthusiasm of the source material. Bringing in complexities—personal foibles, documentary inconsistencies, ideological disputes, etc.—therefore, is essential to overcoming oversimplification. As we have noted throughout this chapter, the case of “the Good Fight” in Spain is one that exemplifies these tendencies. However, it is important, too, that our corrective not swing too far in the opposite direction. Cuban volunteers in the Spanish Civil War did, in fact, make substantial personal sacrifices to participate in the Spanish conflict, supporting a cause they believed was vital to the future of the world. Some of them did act heroically. Many died. All did something truly extraordinary: They chose to fight in another country’s war.

In addition to Cuban volunteers’ personal and political commitment and sacrifice, we have seen in this chapter that they brought with them a superior understanding of the Spanish conflict relative to foreign volunteers from non-Latin American countries. Their transnational identities put them in a position to make unique contributions as linguistic and cultural translators in a context in which translation was vitally important. Many of them worked to portray an image of respectability, legitimacy, and heroism which could be used as propaganda and to recruit other volunteers and antifascist activists—some contributed to this role in death, as their *compañeros* portrayed them as martyrs for the cause. A number of Cubans attained advanced ranks in the International Brigades and the regular Republican forces, and were noted

for their leadership and bravery. All of these experiences, actions, and characteristics constitute qualitative contributions of Cuban volunteers to the Republican cause in the Spanish conflict.

There is no way to quantify the contribution Cuban volunteers made to the Republican cause. In the next chapter, in which we examine the Cuban campaign to aid Spanish children, it is possible to discuss the amounts of money and clothing and food sent, but the contributions of combat and support volunteers are more difficult to catalogue. The contribution of foreign volunteers in general is further obscured by Republican defeat. If they had been victorious, perhaps we could say at least that they had assisted in attaining the stated goals of overcoming the Nationalist challenge to the Republican government and of putting an end to Italian and German meddling in Spanish affairs. That the Republic lost leaves us with historically counterfactual questions: If international volunteers had not been present, would the Republicans have won or would they have lost more quickly than they in fact did? Or did the pro-Republican foreigners have no impact at all on the final outcome? On the other side of the conflict, it is widely accepted that the Italian and German involvement helped the Nationalists win the war. While fascist support of Franco's forces is usually discussed in terms of numbers of troops, officers, trainers, planes, weapons, etc., the contribution of the international volunteers on the Republican side tends to evoke statements about solidarity, begging the question: What is solidarity worth?

In addition to boosting morale, which should not be underestimated as a contribution, solidarity built networks between the Spanish Republicans and their international supporters. In the case of the Cubans, many networks already existed, and these were utilized and further developed during the conflict. Along these network connections moved people such as the

combat and support volunteers. As we will see in the coming chapters, money, goods, publications, and ideas also moved via networks.

These networks constituted an important impact of the Cuban volunteers' participation. As Pablo de la Torriente, the Cuban Communist Party, and others had predicted, Spain would teach Cuban activists valuable lessons for their domestic struggle; it would also create and strengthen dynamic connections between them and their counterparts in Spain, the United States, and elsewhere. The Communist network was a particularly strong one, but as we will see throughout this study, it was not the only one in operation. Multiple organizational networks overlapped with one another and with personal connections. The diaspora of Republican refugees fleeing Spain after Franco's victory—many of whom ended up in Latin America—reinforced transnational connections and presented countless new opportunities for local connections in far-flung locations. Reverberations of the Spanish Civil War would be felt throughout Latin America for decades to come. Its impact in Cuba we discuss at length in the conclusion.

CHAPTER 3

Because Their Blood Runs Through Our Veins: The Cuban Campaign to Aid Spanish Children

Whereas campaigns organizing Cuban volunteers to aid the Spanish Republic involved almost exclusively young men and a tiny percentage of young women who were committed antifascists, the Cuban campaign to aid Spanish children successfully recruited men, women, and children of a wide range of ages including not only radicals but also moderates and charitable contributors without ideological affiliation. The principal organization of the campaign was the Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español (Association of Aid to the Child of the Spanish People, or A.A.N.P.E.), established in March 1937. The Association's founding president was Teresa "Teté" Casuso, widow of early combat volunteer Pablo de la Torriente Brau who was killed in action in December 1936 fighting with the Spanish brigade led by "El Campesino," Valentín González. The primary function of the A.A.N.P.E. was the raising of monetary and material aid for Spanish children impacted by the war, ostensibly without partisan bias. It was a charitable organization, the leaders of which claimed repeatedly that they did not take sides in the conflict. However, as the Association's bulletin *¡Ayuda!* (published July 1937 to April 1939) and its archived organizational records demonstrate, the A.A.N.P.E. was in fact firmly antifascist and its actions constituted pro-Republican activism.¹

The Association's structure included two leadership groups, a Comité de Honor (Honorary Committee) and a Comité Directivo (Leadership Committee), both made up of men and women. The Honorary Committee included notables such as Fernando Ortiz, Emilio Roig

¹ A full run of the A.A.N.P.E. bulletin *¡Ayuda! Órgano oficial de la asociación de auxilio al niño del pueblo español* published in Havana July 1937 to April 1939 is available at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (National Library of Spain) in Madrid. Organizational records for the Association can be found at the Instituto de Historia de Cuba (Cuban Institute of History) in Havana.

de Leuchsenring, and Roberto Agramonte who lent their names and prestige to the cause. The Leadership Committee, initially led by founding president Teté Casuso, included secretaries of acts and of correspondence and a treasurer, as well as a “vice” position to each and a membership committee (*vocales*).² In this latter group served people who directed the bulletin and contributed many of its articles; records indicate that these individuals did much more of the actual work than their figurehead counterparts on the Honorary Committee, to which Casuso was added after her resignation as president. Centralized leadership oversaw the organization as a whole, but delegations and children’s committees across the island managed local efforts and sent the fruits of their labors—in the form of articles and letters as well as monetary and material aid—to the A.A.N.P.E. offices in Havana. For example, the Delegation of San Francisco de Paula sent in \$7.90 in October 1937, writing to the central leadership to apologize for the “insignificant” amount and promising that they had “redoubled our efforts” to increase donations. The problem, they confided to the Havana office, was that many residents of their area who cooperated enthusiastically with their efforts were agricultural workers who had little to give.³ Despite centralization of aid efforts, local delegations had substantial autonomy. Delegation records indicate that each had its own Honorary and Leadership Committees and its own letterhead.⁴

² Members of both committees appear at the beginning of each issue of *¡Ayuda!* and on letterhead found in the Association’s organizational records. Membership changed somewhat over time, especially in the Leadership Committee.

³ Srta. Joaquina de la Torre, Presidenta, et al., San Francisco de Paula, to Comité Directivo de la Asociación Nacional de Auxilio al Niño Español [*sic*], Havana, 9 October 1937, 34.8/2005(37), Subserie Delegaciones, Serie Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español, Sección Otros Instituciones Nacionales, Fondo Registro General, Instituto de Historia de Cuba (IHC).

⁴ Subserie Delegaciones, Serie Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español, Sección Otros Instituciones Nacionales, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

The Cuban campaign to aid Spanish children was part of a larger effort focused on children during the war, coordinated in Paris and with adherents in many countries.⁵ It was also part of the Cuban antifascist movement that interpreted the struggle in Spain as one that in addition to being against international fascism and was also for a people historically closely linked to Cuba. The inaugural issue of *¡Ayuda!* (July 1937) stated the Association's aim to stand with the "noble Spanish people," asserting that their painful tragedy affected Cubans deeply, inspiring widespread desire to help. The Association wished to "translate this national sentiment into an act of positive support for the thousands of innocent victims," meaning primarily the children, "in the cities and countryside of Spain." If sympathetic people in Mexico, the United States, England, France, Belgium, and Czechoslovakia could raise so much money to aid the Spanish children, the A.A.N.P.E. declared, surely Cubans—"so closely tied for multiple reasons to the Spanish people"—should also play an important role in this effort.⁶

And so they did. Throughout the remainder of the war the A.A.N.P.E. successfully raised funds, organized volunteers, and accomplished impressive acts of assistance to Spanish children. In this discussion of the Association, we begin with a brief personal account of the organization's founder, examining her resolve to aid Spanish children as an intersection of her personal and political lives. A textual analysis of *¡Ayuda!* identifies the central themes of the organization's

⁵ Hywel M. Davies, *Fleeing Franco: How Wales Gave Shelter to Refugee Children from the Basque Country during the Spanish Civil War* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011); José F. Jiménez Trujillo, "Protection of Childhood during the Spanish Civil War: Art and Propaganda on the Republican Side," in *Children and Youth at Risk: Historical and International Perspectives*, Christine Mayer, et al., eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 2009); Dorothy Legarreta, *The Guernica Generation: Basque Refugee Children of the Spanish Civil War* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1984); Ricard Vinyes, et al., *Los niños perdidos del franquismo* (Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2003).

⁶ Comité Directivo, "Editorial: Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español," *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 4; "De Organización: Como Crece Nuestra Asociación," *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 16; "Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español: Llamamiento a Todos los Cubanos," n.d., 1/12:196/2.1/14, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

message and we assess how and why messaging changed over time. Financial analysis of the A.A.N.P.E. follows, made possible by extensive fundraising and expenditure data from the Association's bulletin and archived organizational records, and providing a quantitative perspective on the Association's claim that it enjoyed widespread popular support. We examine the Association's principal achievements: a welcoming reception in Havana harbor for Spanish children bound for refuge in Mexico, two Winter Clothing Drives, the establishment of a Cuban residential school for Spanish children in Catalonia, and finally the massive gathering of Cubans in Havana to welcome and hear an address by Fernando de los Ríos, Ambassador of Republican Spain. Our discussion concludes with the Association's reaction to Republican defeat.

At the Intersection of the Personal and the Political

When last we took leave of Teté Casuso, she had just learned from a newspaper of her husband's death in Spain. Cuban writer and political activist Pablo de la Torriente Brau had gone into the conflict as a war correspondent, but compelled by the desperate Republican effort to defend Madrid against Francisco Franco's advance, he took up arms to fight with the Spanish brigade led by "El Campesino," Valentín González. "When the danger is past," he wrote to his wife, "I will return to my typewriter." On 19 December 1936 he fell on the battlefield, killed by a bullet. Devastated, Teté sought some activity to keep herself occupied through her mourning. The first task that came to her mind was to publish the writing Pablo had done in Spain—but he had sent his work to a friend in New York,⁷ and she could not immediately acquire it. "While waiting for his chronicles to be sent to me from New York," she wrote in her autobiography, "I

⁷ Cuban historian Ana Suárez Díaz—author of *Escapé de Cuba: El exilio neoyorquino de Pablo de la Torriente Brau (marzo 1935–agosto 1936)*—notes that the friend referred to here was Jaime Bofill. Personal communication, 7 February 2012.

determined to do something to help the unhappy people for whose liberty Pablo had given his life.” And so she founded the Association of Aid to the Child of the Spanish People in mid-March of 1937 with help from the “generous initiative of a group of enthusiastic people.” Her memoir’s tone, dull with grief following her discovery of Pablo’s death, brightens momentarily with her pride for this organization. Its membership grew to 300,000, she boasted, “with a delegation in every town on the island, and the amount of assistance we gave to the Spanish people was enormous.” She felt particularly proud of the “frequent boatloads of food” sent and of the Casa-Escuela Pueblo de Cuba (People of Cuba Residential School) established and run by the Association, which housed Spanish children orphaned or otherwise displaced by the war in the Catalán town of Sitges.⁸ As founding president, Casuso authored pieces in the organization’s bulletin *¡Ayuda!*, most of which were articles we will consider during the course of our broader analysis of the bulletin. Two poems she published in the bulletin, however, give us a glimpse into her personal motivation, exposing the inner turmoil she experienced following her husband’s death. Her horror at her individual tragedy and Spain’s national tragedy intertwine in these works, and the devotion of the author and her organization to the cause of children becomes particularly poignant to their reader. Though not great works of literature, the poems express powerfully the intersection of personal and political in Teté Casuso’s early widowhood and are worth considering as part of the study of her activism and her organization.

⁸ Teresa “Teté” Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, Elmer Grossberg, trans. (New York: Random House, 1961), 79–80; “De Organización: Como Crece Nuestra Asociación,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 16; “Editorial: Saludo a la Colonia Escolar ‘Pueblo de Cuba,’” *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 3. The article by Ismael Cuevas, “Breve Memoria de la A.A.N.P.E.,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 4, would claim that the A.A.N.P.E. was founded in February rather than mid-March, but financial records corroborate the latter: The Association received its first donation from the Spanish Republican Circle (Círculo Republicano Español) on March 11, 1937. Authors used ‘Casa-Escuela’ and ‘Colonia Escolar’ interchangeably.

As we noted in Chapter 1, Pablo and Teté had been married for two years at the time of his death, but their friendship had been much longer. They first met in Oriente Province in 1918 or 1919 when Teté was seven years old and Pablo seventeen. Casuso's parents "loved and admired" Pablo, and he was "like a son" to them, she remembered. Reluctantly they agreed to their daughter's engagement to Torriente when she was just twelve years old, but stipulated that he must wait until she turned fifteen to wed. Pablo later released her from this engagement after it became clear that she did not feel ready to marry at so young an age, but he continued what she called his "charming courtship," regularly visiting her in her parents' home. The two eventually married in 1934 after a decade and a half of friendship.⁹ Thus when Pablo died on a Spanish battlefield Teté lost the love of her life and became a widowed newlywed. She was twenty-four or twenty-five years old. She and Pablo had no children, and as she confronted his sudden absence in her life, their never-born child added painful volume to the hollow.

Her first poem in *¡Ayuda!*, which she wrote in Mexico in October 1937 and published one year after Pablo's death in December, was "Lullaby without Child." One clearly identifiable theme in the poem, expressed in the title, is that of unrequited maternal love. The narrator sits singing lullabies and sewing children's clothes. The first two stanzas establish her loss. "Who robbed my scissors?" she begins, "Who robbed my thimble? Who holds my child in arms such that I cannot reach him?" The wind and the lament robber her, she continues; "life took my dream, and the child has not arrived." The third stanza suggests transference of maternal feeling from the never-born child to all children in general. "I sing my lullabies," states the narrator, "I sew, stitch and thimble, for the children of the world who are in my heart." These first three stanzas establish a haunting scene: The childless mother sits sewing children's clothes and sings

⁹ Casuso does not give a date for the wedding in her memoir, but the surrounding text makes clear that it occurred in 1934. Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 53–58, 70–74.

a lullaby to a little one who is not there. In the narrator's interpretation, the child exists, but is out in the world somewhere, held hostage, out of reach. If we take the voice of the narrator in Teté's poem to be her own, we may guess that these opening lines express the realization—sudden and terrible—that that which might have been very close in her future was now impossible forever: She and Pablo would not have a child. So she decided to turn her love outward to all the motherless children across the globe, to sing and sew and care for “the children without cradle”—the ones whose little smiles have turned to tears and tears to outcries because of death and war, as the poem describes—to give them “the song they do not have, and the maternal lap.” Turning personal loss into altruism was not easy for her. She struggled:

Mi delantalcito blanco,
ternura clara en la voz,
unas lágrimas cantando
al niño que no llegó,
¡y una canción de futuro
rompiéndome el corazón!

My little white apron,
pure tenderness in my voice,
some tears singing
to the child who did not arrive,
and a song of the future
breaking my heart!

“My lullaby has no child,” she stated in a single-line stanza alone toward the end of the poem. She was determined, however, and made her purpose clear: “For the earth and for the children,” she proclaimed, “my love has come to sing.”¹⁰

Casuso narrated the second poem she published in *¡Ayuda!* from the opposite perspective, that of the motherless child. Written in Mexico and published in December 1938, two years after Torriente's death, it is entitled “Christmas of the Motherless Child.” The voice of an excited child begins, “To my mama, so pretty!” He wants to make a great Christmas tree with his mother, with his hands as its branches and the lights of his eyes providing its illumination. “And

¹⁰ Casuso, “Nana sin Niño,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 7.

the little silver stars,” he tells his mother, “will be each memento of the Christmas tree of my memories.”

Toma mis alegrías
de aquel bosque de cuentos
y salpiquemos todo el árbol
de globos de colores, rojos,
 azules[,] verdes,
¡de color de contento!

Take my joys
from that forest of stories
and let us sprinkle the whole tree
with colorful globes, reds,
 blues, greens,
the color of happiness!

Something is not right, as the title has forewarned us: The child’s memory is a forest of stories, and there is a story which needs to be told in order for him to be able to remember; he must remember because his mother is in his memories, and so he can only reach her through a story. “Bring all my childhood,” he begs her, “And later bring the dream.” Only, his mother is not there. He seems to be searching for the right memory, the right story or dream in which to find her. At this point in the poem, a new voice exclaims: “But you are sad, child of the stories!” This second narrator addresses the motherless child as the poem concludes, telling him, “Come to my heart.” Only there will the child recover his memories and therefore his mother—in my heart, states the narrator, your mother will return from a dream. It is possible, especially given the poem’s emphasis on Christmas, that Casuso intended the voice of the second narrator to be that of Jesus Christ. “I am this night,” this narrator states, this Christmas night in which your mother may be resurrected in my heart. A few lines earlier, the poem had reminded us of another story, that of “that star that went one night to parade across the skies.” Alternately, Teté may have imagined herself as this second narrator, in keeping with the motherless child/childless mother relationship she established in “Lullaby without Child.” In her heart, she believed, the

motherless child could find maternal love, a metaphoric rather than metaphysical resurrection of his lost mother.¹¹

As we explore texts from the A.A.N.P.E. bulletin *¡Ayuda!*, we will encounter other instances of the connection Casuso drew between herself as the childless mother and the orphans and other displaced children of the Spanish Civil War. Her article in the bulletin's first issue, "With the Children who Voyaged on the *Mexique*," gave readers affecting descriptions of individual Spanish children on their way to refuge in Mexico and highlighted the role Cubans and Mexicans should play providing them with sorely needed tenderness and care.¹² The title of her radio address published in the second issue, "The Lullabies Will Be Heard Again," previewed the subject of her first poem.¹³ She felt also a more direct identification with the Spanish children who had lost their parents; in reference to her own young age in relation to her husband and at the time of her death, she commented in her memoir that when Torriente died he "made me more than a widow: I was an orphan."¹⁴

Teté expressed in hard work with tangible results a remarkable burst of energy in the wake of her personal tragedy. Resilience, though, proved to be more of a challenge. "For seven months I worked hard building up this organization, speaking over the air and at meetings, visiting villages all over the island, helping to get out our monthly publication, soliciting co-operation through magazine and newspaper articles," she wrote. Then she stepped down from her role as Association president early in 1938, and escaped once again into exile, leaving for

¹¹ Casuso, "Navidad del niño sin madre," *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 7.

¹² Casuso, "Con los niños que iban en el 'Mexique,'" *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 12–13.

¹³ Both the word *nana* and the term *canción de cuna*, literally 'cradle song,' are translated as 'lullaby.' Casuso, "Volverán las Canciones de Cuna a Escucharse," *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 6–7.

¹⁴ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 86.

Mexico to work on having Pablo's Spanish chronicles published. "I went for three months," she wrote of her trip, "and stayed for almost two years."¹⁵ An appropriate coda to her efforts, however, could be found in the establishment of several A.A.N.P.E. children's committees named for Pablo. The ninth issue of *¡Ayuda!* (January/February 1939) published a photograph of one in Santiago de Cuba, noting that it was the third such group to take Torriente's name "with just pride." It was a name, the caption stated, that "due to his noble life, and his heroic death, is a worthy medallion, and a faithful shelter to the effort of these children." His blood was not spilled in vain, the comment concluded, for it "lights by fires of daybreak this dawn of humanity."¹⁶

Message

Analysis of the full run of the A.A.N.P.E. bulletin *¡Ayuda!* distills six principal arguments mobilized by Association leaders to recruit supporters and raise aid. Over the course of the publication diverse writers deployed these central themes of the organization's message. Some of the themes remained remarkably consistent throughout. Authors adapted others, presumably in search of greater message effectiveness. Tracing the six arguments over time, we consider how they changed and melded, and we gauge probable value of each based on which faded out of use and which grew more strident. We evaluate how well Association claims hold up in its messaging, before moving on to quantitative analysis of A.A.N.P.E. financial data providing a view of the organization different from that glimpsed through a consideration of its six principal arguments.

¹⁵ Ibid., 79–80.

¹⁶ Photograph caption in *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 20.

First and foremost, the A.A.N.P.E. dedicated itself to the welfare of children, arguing that this mission's worth was self-evident. They used words on the subject attributed to José Martí—"Children are the hope of the world!"—in their bulletin and printed them on their letterhead. Association members emphasized the plight of the Spanish children with intense emotion suggesting both genuine empathy and a fundraiser's knack for tear-jerking. In a typical example, the first issue's editorial note described life for children in war-torn Spain as one in which they "learned to flee before they learned to walk, to scream before they learned to smile, to cover their eyes and faces with their tiny, trembling hands before they looked at the sky of their country torn by foreign shrapnel, not yet able to distinguish between the stars and the death that falls, also illuminating the night."¹⁷ Descriptions characterized by dramatic language and strong sentiment—often accompanied by arresting images of tragedy in Spain—rallied readers to donate money and time to a cause presented as universally appealing.

Children are the future, *¡Ayuda!* reminded its readers repeatedly. A poem verse in the second issue equated the death of Spanish children in the war with the death of happiness and the future:

Los niños son la alegría
son la aurora del mañana
y mueren asesinados
por los traidores de España

Children are happiness
they are the dawn of the future
and they die assassinated
by Spain's traitors¹⁸

To protect the Spanish children was "to save the conscience of future humanity,"¹⁹ "the flower of life,"²⁰ even "hope incarnate."²¹ One typically dramatic statement read: "In the enormous pupils

¹⁷ Comité Directivo, "Editorial: Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español," *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 4; "Nuestro Boletín," *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 3; A.A.N.P.E. Letterhead, n.d., 28.3/82, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

¹⁸ "Palabras a mi Compañera," *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 9.

of the Spanish orphan is now glimpsed the radiant dawn of the world.”²² The primary goal of this type of language was to motivate volunteers and donors with an assertion that all good people would help. The phrase “save the conscience of future humanity,” for example, formed part of the text on the cover of the second issue—accompanying an image of a crying toddler flanked by falling bombs—that concluded: “to abstain is to be guilty of indifference.”²³ All good men, stated another article more explicitly, are obliged to construct a defense of the Spanish children’s destiny.²⁴ By fostering a sense of duty among Cuban readers and defining their mission of saving children as inherently good and universally supported, A.A.N.P.E. activists hoped to grow their organization and its accomplishments.

Second, the A.A.N.P.E. did not wish to be seen as partisan and argued that Spanish children should be saved regardless of which side their parents supported in the war. Association writers claimed that children did not belong to political parties, but their bulletin provided a glimpse into the ambiguity of this claim. Articles in the first two issues of *¡Ayuda!* hinted at the challenge faced from critics and a contrary message emphasizing partisanship in the Spanish conflict. “They are not Russians, those we saw fighting in the outskirts of Madrid and in defense of Irún,” insisted a film review of a war documentary. “They are Spaniards, *very much*

¹⁹ “Sin hogar y hambrientos ¿Por qué he de morir?,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): front cover.

²⁰ “Nosotros y el Derecho de la Imparcialidad,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 3.

²¹ Basilio Álvarez, “Palabras [*sic*] de Basilio Álvarez para ‘Ayuda,’” *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 9.

²² José Antonio Portuondo, “La Infancia Española en la Guerra Civil,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 10.

²³ “Sin hogar y hambrientos ¿Por qué he de morir?,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): front cover.

²⁴ Armando Martín, “Apuntes sobre el Destino y Ayuda al Niño Español,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 5.

Spaniards,” and certainly Cubans, the review concluded, ought to know Spaniards when they saw them.²⁵ Clearly responding to accusations in anti-Republican propaganda of Communism or other leftwing bias, Teté Casuso—who had never been a Communist Party member and was already on her way to becoming stridently anticommunist—followed an emotional portrait of Spanish war orphans with bitter sarcasm: “These are the ‘red children,’ the terrible children, ‘the children who have learned to rob and murder and rape.’” Just a few paragraphs later in the same article, however, she admitted that some of the older children did indeed affiliate with one side over the other. They developed political sympathy, she argued, as “the natural result of the moment in which they have lived,” just as Cuban youth—such as she and her late husband—had done during revolutionary times. Confirming “red phobia” and contradicting the A.A.N.P.E. claim that children did not belong to political parties, she concluded by admitting that “there are a great number of youths with the Republican party.”²⁶

Nonpartisan claims showed their flaws even as they were stated. A.A.N.P.E. members wanted the Cuban people to view their cause of aid to the Spanish children as strictly apolitical, yet their organization had a clear Republican bias. Sometimes their language gave them away. One article innocently entitled “In Defense of Infant Happiness” assured readers that support they contributed would go to all Spanish children, regardless of whether their parents were *leales* or *rebeldes*.²⁷ Calling the Republicans ‘loyalists’ and the Nationalists ‘rebels,’ though historically accurate, was not politically neutral. One author stated her sympathies plainly: The sane part of Spain, she believed, fought to expel from its territory the traitors—or, in a literary

²⁵ Asela Jiménez, “No Pasarán,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 12. Emphasis in the original.

²⁶ Casuso, “Con los niños que iban en el ‘Mexico’,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 13.

²⁷ Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, “En Defensa de la Alegria Infantil,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 15, 20.

flourish, “vampires”—who exploited, murdered, and plundered.²⁸ An illustration published in May 1938 showed improvements in children’s health from 1931 to 1938 under the Republic, and the subsequent negative consequences of the “fascist movement.”²⁹ Association leaders acknowledged the contradiction in an advertising poster they produced. They called “those who caused this situation” persons “who revile the sacred principles of democracy” and who “have attacked and violated the will of a people.” Yet immediately following this censure of the Nationalists condemning their rebellion against the elected Republican government, authors emphasized that the A.A.N.P.E. “undertakes a highly humanitarian work free of any partisanship.”³⁰ Tension between the desire to appear nonpartisan and clear support for the Republican side in the Association’s public message resulted from members’ attempts to engage and organize diverse Cubans beyond their own circle of committed antifascist activists. Striving to acknowledge and to be inclusive of the political diversity of the Cuban left during this period, of which they themselves were representative, A.A.N.P.E. leaders tried also to appeal to those who viewed themselves as nonpolitical.

The nonpartisan argument demonstrated a weakness in the save-the-children argument: Clearly, some Cubans required convincing that the A.A.N.P.E. mission to aid Spanish children was inherently desirable and universally accepted. Even the most dramatic language and images of the plight of innocent children, it seems, were not deemed sufficiently effective by contributing writers. To foster a sense of duty in Cubans to participate and contribute also required an insistent nonpartisan appeal, as evidenced by the prevalence of this claim throughout

²⁸ Berta Arocena, “Una Casita Sugeridora,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 13.

²⁹ “Servicios de Higiene Infantil,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 18.

³⁰ “Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español: Llamamiento a Todos los Cubanos,” n.d., 1/12:196/2.1/14, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

much of the publication's run. The nonpartisan argument acted as a kind of addendum to the save-the-children argument. Leaders argued that the Association existed "without ascribing to any political sector, without solidarity with any social creed, for humanity pure and simple." It wanted only to save children, regardless of race, religion, or political party. All people of good and true hearts regardless of party or creed, the Association claimed, should unite around the cause.³¹ Men divided themselves up with political and ideological 'isms,' stated one article, but that reality should not be allowed to impact children—children should be able to live in peace.³² Another article agreed: Children are not ideological and should not be divided as adults are into fascists and Communists, Catholics and Protestants, it argued.³³ One particularly forthright request exemplified this part of the A.A.N.P.E. message. "Reader friend," began a December 1937 note addressed directly to a hypothetical member of the target audience.

Perhaps you are not a political man, perhaps you have not wanted to raise, in regard to the Spanish conflict, the question of responsibility or guilt, perhaps you, as a man, have felt shaken to your core with pity at the horror of this war, without passing judgment. Well then, friend, you can help to make the Spanish war less hard, you can serve peace in the midst of the contest's horror, helping the Association of Aid to the Child of the Spanish People, which only wishes to save the defenseless children of Spain from orphanage and misery. Send us your donation in clothing or cash . . .³⁴

The save-the-children argument relied upon the nonpartisan argument to reach Cubans otherwise confused or turned away by the civil war, interpreted as a conflict of brother against brother. The tension between these arguments and the Association's pro-Republican bias reveals the

³¹ José Antonio Portuondo, "Deber de Amor y Gratiud," *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 4; Tomas Blanco, "Un Llamado a la Conciencia Libre," *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 7.

³² S. B. G., "A favor del Niño Español," *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 20.

³³ José Antonio Encinas, "Los Niños y la Guerra," *¡Ayuda!* no. 7 (October 1938): 7.

³⁴ Untitled, *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 20.

difficult and even contentious divide between charity and activism, a line A.A.N.P.E. leaders walked carefully.

By December 1938 *¡Ayuda!* moved away from a carefully politic stance and abandoned the theme of nonpartisanship. Ten-year-old Rafael González—a resident of the Casa-Escuela in Sitges—wrote a thank-you note to the Cuban people stating that it was not all Cuba who aided the Spanish children but rather “the antifascist people.”³⁵ More than a year after the first two issues had hinted at challenges to the Association, the eighth issue addressed the attack directly, stating outright that it had “many enemies.” These foes lived in “lamentable error,” and Association members’ work had not succeeded in changing their attitude that was “mistaken” or in many cases due to “bad intentions.” The “decent people” working to save the “destitute and orphaned infancy cruelly assassinated by the Nazi-Onalists of the Iberian Peninsula” were persecuted in Cuba: Opponents targeted cinemas showing films supporting aid to the Spanish children, the Association received telephone and mail threats, and its radio hour suffered hostile interruptions. Nevertheless, *¡Ayuda!* maintained an optimistic tone. The noble and generous people of Cuba, the humble and middle classes, the bulletin stated, were doing real and tangible good in the lives of the Spanish children. This assistance must remain “our work, constant and exemplary.” The cause continued to gain supporters, and time would judge them favorably, it concluded.³⁶ The safe and attractive message of nonpartisan cooperation to save Spanish children had transformed into one in which enemies of the cause did receive recognition, but the final words encouraged motivation and hope. Too much emphasis on enemies might discourage supporters, and gaining and retaining them was the only way for the A.A.N.P.E. to achieve its

³⁵ Rafael González, “Agradecimiento al Pueblo de Cuba,” in “Lo que piensan y lo que nos escriben los niños de la Colonia Pueblo de Cuba,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 15.

³⁶ Raúl Mesones Riancho, “El Mejor Juez es el Tiempo,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 20.

ultimate goal of aiding Spanish children. In contrast to the neutral ‘Reader friend’ note asking for donations in the third issue, text soliciting support on the back cover of the eighth issue began, “Republican who reads us and who helps us: Triple your efforts . . .”³⁷ Between the former note in December 1937 and the latter in December 1938, the Republican position in Spain had deteriorated drastically. *¡Ayuda!* abandoned nonpartisan niceties, addressing both enemies and pro-Republican supporters directly.

Third, in a less frequent but still significant theme, contributors to the bulletin mobilized Christian faith in support of their cause. A female author identified as a member of the A.A.N.P.E. Delegation of Camagüey introduced a Christian perspective on the plight of the Spanish children to the first issue of *¡Ayuda!* (July 1937). “The children of Spain are the pain of the world,” she stated emphatically, and the “remorse of Humanity traitorous to Christ.” Christ was not, she argued, present in the bombs dropped on cities, far from any legitimate military target. He could not be found there among “the worst human instincts and ambitions.” It was “sacrilegious,” “profane,” and “inexcusable” to murder people—especially children—she wrote, while “invoking God’s protection and benediction.”³⁸

Several months later Teté Casuso took up the theme of Christianity introduced in the first issue, elaborating her vision for “the victorious peace” desired by “Friends of the Spanish People.” Victory in Spain would mean “justice and the right to work and live and love.” Peace could not be a barbarous triumph, a violent dominance; rather it must be a constructive peace of brotherly love, a “Christian peace,” she insisted. Christ, she argued, was not in the sinister bombers flying over Spain but rather “with the children” or even “fighting in the trenches against

³⁷ Back cover of *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938).

³⁸ Georgina Martínez, “Niños de España: dolor del mundo,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 7.

the barbarous invaders.” Christian peace, she believed, optimistic in the autumn of 1937, would come one day.³⁹ Arguing that Christ sided with the children she sought to serve and with the Republican side of the struggle probably helped Casuso find hope about the war’s course in her Christian faith. It may also have helped her to connect with some readers who would have been turned off otherwise by overtly political appeals.

To bring a touch of humor—and perhaps to evoke in the reader’s mind solidarity with everyday people rather than political zealots—one author in the same issue of the bulletin recounted the reception of revolutionary poet Rafael Alberti by a group in Andalucía. The peasants, he wrote, after the poet’s “irreligious and libertarian propaganda saw him off affectionately: ‘Well, Don Rafaé,’” they said to him, “‘may God accompany you in this Communism.’” *¡Ayuda!* sought to reclaim an active or even aggressive Christianity for the Republic, envisioning religion in which the poor would not submit to the rich and powerful, remaining resigned to their “miserable state.” Religion should not “sanctify despotism and fascist barbarity.” It should “save every man” from the current “hell” in Spain, and move toward “the universal peace of tomorrow and the future brotherhood of men.” Peace would establish a “new world of Love and of Justice.” The bulletin defended rage as “sacred” when justified, reminding readers that the “ire of Jesus of Nazareth was divine when, clutching the lash, he threw the merchants out of the temple.” Similarly, the rage of a people in self-defense against attacks “by foreign assassins” was sacred. In one bold statement the Spanish people would “turn into a new Jesus and throw the merchants out of Spain.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Casuso, “Volverán las Canciones de Cuna a Escucharse,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 7.

⁴⁰ José Antonio Portuondo, “La infancia Española en la Guerra Civil,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 10; Asela Jiménez, “No Pasarán,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 12.

The third issue of *¡Ayuda!* (December 1937) also included a number of references to Christianity or religion generally, though none of the kind of depth present in the first two. One simply pointed out that beyond any “racial, party, or religious limitation,” the A.A.N.P.E., wanted “only to save the children, for Love, from Hatred.”⁴¹ Another drew the same link as previous articles between religion and a future of peace.⁴² A third claimed that the “natural impulse of the human heart and social obligation” to defend innocent children “finds stimulus and support as much in that which is most mystical in Christianity as in that which is most materialistic in Marxism.” That Christianity and Marxism had this particular value in common, the article suggested, showed that the value was among “the biological necessities of the species.”⁴³

An interview with women volunteers at the A.A.N.P.E. Winter Clothing Drive in the third issue revealed that at least one “fanatic” refused to contribute to the effort because, he said, his religion would not permit him to do so.⁴⁴ One explanation for this encounter, which we discuss in the section devoted to Association accomplishments, could be the influence of propaganda portraying Republicans as anti-Catholic. Pro-Republican authors declaring their Christianity challenged such propaganda. Born of their challenge to the established Catholic Church of Spain, the idea of Republican anti-Christianity grew as Nationalist forces skillfully deployed it in their propaganda. The Christian theme emphasized by some authors in *¡Ayuda!* sought to reclaim the faith for supporters of the Republic, and to give the cause of the Spanish

⁴¹ José Antonio Portuondo, “Deber de Amor y Gracitud,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 4.

⁴² Rafael Suárez Solís, “La Educación del Hombre en el Terror,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 5.

⁴³ Tomas Blanco, “Un Llamado a la Conciencia Libre,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 7.

⁴⁴ G.F., “5.000 Piezas de abrigo enviadas a los Niños por nuestro Ropero,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 19.

children more widespread appeal. It could serve a similar function to that of nonpartisanship: to draw diverse Cubans to the cause. Individuals and families who did not share A.A.N.P.E. leaders' politics might be more receptive to connecting through shared faith. It seems, however, that the true Christianity argument may not have withstood the test of effectiveness, as A.A.N.P.E. writers abandoned it early on. Following the third issue, overt use of an appeal to Christianity disappeared from *¡Ayuda!* for ten months; and, when it reappeared in the seventh and eighth issues of the bulletin, it remained significantly reduced from its earlier prominence. An article in the seventh issue (October 1938) protesting that children should not be defined by the factions of their parents mentioned religion in passing, arguing that adults should not divide children into Catholics and Protestants.⁴⁵ The eighth issue (December 1938) included Teté Casuso's Christmas poem, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, as well as one article calling the war in Spain "monstrous and anti-Christian."⁴⁶ It is difficult to know definitively why Association authors downplayed the theme of Christianity after the initial three bulletin issues, though it is interesting to note that the theme reemerged—albeit much reduced—just as they decisively abandoned the theme of nonpartisanship in the autumn and early winter of 1938.

Fourth, A.A.N.P.E. members claimed in their publication that Cubans had a special relationship with Spain, and therefore a special responsibility to the Spanish people during their time of need. While appealing to the idea that *all* humanity in good conscience had an obligation to help the Spanish children, authors in *¡Ayuda!* nevertheless emphasized Spain's shared history with Cuba and Latin America as a whole, arguing that longstanding ties placed an imperative upon Latin Americans. The special relationship was, of course, an historical one. Many articles

⁴⁵ José Antonio Encinas, "Los Niños y la Guerra," *¡Ayuda!* no. 7 (October 1938): 7.

⁴⁶ Casuso, "Navidad del niño sin madre," *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 7; Consuelo Carmona de Gordón Ordas, "Defensa sin título del Niño Español," *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 17.

recounted historical examples of ties between Spain and Latin America, or between Spain and Cuba specifically. From shared history, authors in *¡Ayuda!* selected examples of fraternity and cooperation. One article entitled “Debt of Love and Gratitude” claimed to Cuban readers that Spain had supported them in the aftermaths of Cuban natural disasters such as the hurricane of 1926 and provided assistance to victims of Machado’s dictatorship. Reaching farther back, it reminded them of the colonial-era divide between “defenders, Creoles and Spaniards, of Spanish absolutism” on the one hand, and Martí and the people on the other.⁴⁷ Authors invoked Bolívar⁴⁸ and Cervantes,⁴⁹ identifying their cause with great men from a shared history.

Sometimes *¡Ayuda!* authors portrayed the relationship between Spain and Latin America as one of mother and children; other times, they depicted the relationship as one of siblings. Spain was “the mother of this world of ours.”⁵⁰ The countries of Latin America were Cuba’s “sister lands,” and together these lands were “daughters” of Spain.⁵¹ Cuba was to Spain a “brother in race and in history.”⁵² Mexico was the “sister Aztec republic,”⁵³ a “fraternal republic.”⁵⁴ Venezuela was a “sister republic.”⁵⁵ Often authors asserted that the peoples of Cuba,

⁴⁷ José Antonio Portuondo, “Deber de Amor y Gritud,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 4.

⁴⁸ Ernesto Silva Tellería, “La tragedia de España está en sus niños,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 4; Mercedes Pinto, “Repique de Resurrecciones,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 7 (October 1938): 17.

⁴⁹ Eddy Chibás, “Dellendá est Cartago!! Dellendá est Berlín!!,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 6.

⁵⁰ Casuso, “Volverán las Canciones de Cuna a Escucharse,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 16.

⁵¹ José Antonio Portuondo, Untitled, *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 18.

⁵² Guillermina Medrano, “Niños de España,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 14 or 15.

⁵³ “Notas Editoriales: Vida de la A. A. N. P. E.,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March de 1938): 21.

⁵⁴ Comité Directivo, “Editorial: Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 4.

⁵⁵ Mercedes Pinto, “Repique de Resurrecciones,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 7 (October 1938): 17.

Latin America, and Spain were all one in the same. We should not forget, they urged, that they are a part of us.⁵⁶ “That which is Spanish is very much ours,” stated one author, “we live so close, with such parallels, that it is impossible to resist.”⁵⁷ Not only were the countries of Latin America metaphorically family members of Spain but also Latin Americans were literally family members of Spaniards. Young Armando Martínez, a schoolboy chosen to greet the children refugees on their way to Mexico, melded these familial themes in his remarks. Addressing his “Spanish brothers,” Armando assured them that Cuban children—united with them by “multiple ties of confraternity that are not chains which could be broken”—sympathized with their pain. He tried to comfort them on their voyage to Mexico by reminding them that they were going to live in a “brother country,” a country of their race, their blood, their language.⁵⁸ This theme, which Armando used to try to calm the fears of Spanish children on their way to exile, Association members would use repeatedly to engage Cubans in assisting their Spanish kin. The special relationship argument was one of the most frequently emphasized themes in the A.A.N.P.E.’s message to its Cuban readers—as well as within Cuban antifascism generally. We are obligated to help our brother nation, went their argument; to speak of the Spanish people is to speak of our own people.⁵⁹

Authors arguing for Cuban support of Spain had to distinguish between a Spain Cubans fought against and one they would fight for. They asserted that the same “bad” Spain victimized both Spanish Republicans and Cubans: “When Cuba remembers its past, it evokes a militarism in

⁵⁶ Ernesto Silva Tellería, “La tragedia de España está en sus niños,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 4.

⁵⁷ Gustavo Fabal, “Ejemplo de Solidaridad,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 24.

⁵⁸ Armando Martínez, “Hermanos Españoles: Palabras del niño Armando Martínez, alumno de la Escuela ‘José Miguel Gómez’, que formó parte de la Comisión Oficial que subió a bordo del ‘Mexique’, en representación de la niñez cubana,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 6.

⁵⁹ Casuso, “Volverán las Canciones de Cuna a Escucharse,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 7.

the pay of a colonizing tyranny, and knows that the *miliciano* [Spanish Republican fighter] has been a victim as has been the *guajiro* [Cuban peasant] in turn.”⁶⁰ Spanish authors in the Cuban publication supported the concept of kinship between Cuba and the “good” Spain associated with the Republic as distinguished from an imperialist and oppressive Spain associated with the Nationalists. “Your great José Martí,” stated a Spanish woman to Cubans in a radio address printed in *¡Ayuda!* in December 1938, “is ours also, of the good Spaniards, who have always been his brothers.” Just as Cuban Association members emphasized their country’s special relationship with Spain specifically to inspire support, so too did Spanish authors. The radio address continued with a plea of this sort: We need help from all nations, the speaker stated, especially from those who “come from the same trunk as we do and speak the same language.” Think of your children, she pleaded, and then help ours.⁶¹

Fifth, the Association asserted that its efforts depended on contributions from children and women in addition to those of men, an argument that would come to interact significantly with the special relationship argument. An advertising poster produced by the A.A.N.P.E. stated: “We are sure to find in every child, every mother, every generous person a member of the Association who guarantees his moral solidarity to the cause of those thousands of innocent creatures.”⁶² The first issue of *¡Ayuda!* emphasized the role of youth in the Havana reception of Spanish children on their way to refuge in Mexico. A.A.N.P.E. leaders chose schoolboy Armando Martínez to greet the children refugees on their way to Mexico. A “poor boy” from the

⁶⁰ Berta Arocena, “Una Casita Sugeridora,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 13.

⁶¹ Consuelo Carmona de Gordón Ordas, “Defensa sin título del Niño Español,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 17, 27.

⁶² “Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español: Llamamiento a Todos los Cubanos,” n.d., 1/12:196/2.1/14, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

José Miguel Gómez School, Armando addressed his Spanish counterparts; but, Teté Casuso noted, his greatest contribution to the occasion was not the “magnificent spontaneous words” he delivered. It was, she wrote, the shirt off his own back which he gave to a Spanish boy who had none. Another of Casuso’s anecdotes makes an interesting comparison between the Spanish war orphans and the “little black children of the bay,” who improvised a show for the children on the boat. It was, she wrote, a “greeting from our own ragged and hungry children . . . full of creole sympathy and the generous heart of Cuba” to the children from Spain, “these hungry children without shoes, almost as naked as they, whom the horror of war . . . pushed to our generous land.”⁶³ With these two anecdotes, Teté illustrates the participation of children, but also implies the popularity of her organization’s cause by suggesting that poor children of different races represent Cuba’s generous welcome of Spanish orphans.

The first issue also established a children’s section of the publication with an announcement entitled “To Cuban Children” stating that *¡Ayuda!* would devote space for Cuban children to express their sentiments regarding the events in Spain and the condition of the Spanish children. Following this announcement were two letters written by children. Berta Rodríguez Barco, age eight, wrote that she wanted to help her little brothers and sisters in Spain, and so she was sending the entirety of her savings, 40 cents. The students of “School Number 2” in Güera de Melena sent five pesos raised by their community, along with one peso donated by Señora Pura Quintana, the teacher at nearby “School Number 1.”⁶⁴ The A.A.N.P.E. celebrated this type of cooperation between children and adults. In March 1938 the bulletin featured a letter written by a Mexican boy in which he pledged solidarity with the war victims of Republican

⁶³ Casuso, “Con los niños que iban en el ‘Mexique,’” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 15.

⁶⁴ “2 Cartas de Niños,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 6

Spain and told Cuban children that Mexican children did not eat sweets because the poor Spaniards were suffering. “I ask of you, the Cuban children,” he wrote, “to help the children of Spain.”⁶⁵ In May of 1938 *¡Ayuda!* published a poem written by a Spanish orphan living in Mexico praising President Lázaro Cardenas for welcoming the children from “sister Spain” to his country and treating them like Mexico’s own children.⁶⁶

Though they did not always have letters and poems from children to publish, the editors of *¡Ayuda!* made certain to emphasize their role in the organization whenever possible. In September 1938 they dedicated a page to work by Cuban children in solidarity with Spanish children. Pictured were children’s committees organized to help Spanish children, made up of both boys and girls and demonstrating at least a small degree of racial diversity. Of the ten children pictured, four are female and one appears to be black.⁶⁷ The following month, the “Children’s Page” again featured the children’s committees by publishing appeals for aid written and radio addresses delivered by officers of the organizations, noting in two cases the authors’ ages as nine and ten years old. One little boy told radio listeners that when the A.A.N.P.E. was established, he “felt a great desire to join the work of these comrades who were to help my comrades the little Spanish children.” Since the Association was an organization of grownups, he noted, he and his friends started their own group in support of the effort which became a children’s committee of the larger group. Featured during the A.A.N.P.E. radio hour and published in its bulletin, little José Alvarez had clearly earned inclusion by the grownups.⁶⁸ The

⁶⁵ Jorge Kind, “Yo soy un niño mexicano,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 18.

⁶⁶ Francisco González Aramburu, “A Lázaro Cardenas,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 11.

⁶⁷ “Página Infantil,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 22.

⁶⁸ “Página Infantil,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 7 (October 1938): 20.

“Children’s Page” feature continued in subsequent issues of the bulletin.⁶⁹ Cuban children also gave money to the cause. As we will see in our analysis of Association finances, they made group and individual donations to aid their Spanish counterparts and the A.A.N.P.E. highlighted their contributions.

The Association also placed great emphasis on the role of women—and particularly mothers—in efforts to aid Spanish children. In a typical statement and call for assistance, the first issue made a dual appeal to a special relationship of women to children and a special relationship of Latin America to Spain: “Two hundred thousand children stretch from Madrid their imploring little hands! What Cuban woman, what mother, what pious heart will deny their gathering (*concurso*)? Cuba, like Mexico, will be able to demonstrate, very soon, the generosity of its people!”⁷⁰ In this way, the theme of the special relationship between Spain and Cuba intersected with the special role the Association proposed for women and especially mothers to play in the efforts to aid Spanish children. Cuban women had a special role to play, authors argued in *¡Ayuda!*, because of a combination of their connection to Spain and their universal maternal instinct. A message directed at women in the second issue noted that it was the time of year when mothers changed their children’s wardrobes from summer to winter clothing, even in Cuba’s warm and pleasant climate. But in Spain, it warned, children would be ravaged not only by war but also by the bitter cold of winter. “It is now, Cuban mothers,” the article asserted, “when our feminine sensibility feels most overwhelmed by the abandonment and the poverty of the unhappy creatures.” Every woman could make coats for the poor Spanish children; none

⁶⁹ “Página Infantil,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 22; “Comité Infantil ‘Pablo de la Torriente,’” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 20.

⁷⁰ “2 Cartas de Niños,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 6; Félix Pita Rodríguez, “Cartas de París,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 22.

need shoulder the guilt of a Spanish child frozen to death, the message offered. The sad smile of the Spanish mother from afar would be the Cuban mother's reward.⁷¹ On the next page, the call for clothing took a harsher tone. The poem aimed at mobilizing women entitled "Words to My *Compañera* [Female Companion]" admonished the reader about her contribution to the cause in an emphatic typeface: "YOU, WHO ARE ALSO A MOTHER, TELL ME, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, COMRADE?" Your place is in the rearguard, the poem instructed women. Sew something for the *leales*; knit a coat.⁷² An echo of the poem's direct address to the Cuban woman as mother followed in the fourth issue. "And you, Creole mother, representative of the universal woman, who gives birth with love and pain," it reminded the reader, your child is a brother of the child who dies in Spain.⁷³ "Woman reader," pleaded a female author in the seventh issue, "I who have never forgotten the Cuban child, in the name of the Cuban child, I ask you to help the Spanish child."⁷⁴

Sixth and finally, members wanted to emphasize that their organization was born of popular efforts. The Comité Directivo asserted in the first issue that their Association filled "a need in the bosom of Cuban society." The people of Cuba, they claimed in an assertion closely related to the save-the-children argument, had a "collective desire" to aid the Spanish children. A poster produced by the Association expressed the popularity of its efforts, stating that no one in Cuban society could "remain indifferent to the tragedy" or "avoid a generous impulse toward the victims," and that its leaders had "the conviction to interpret the general sentiment." The

⁷¹ "Mensaje de la Asociación a las Mujeres," *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 8.

⁷² "Palabras a mi Compañera," *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 9.

⁷³ Luis Felipe Rodríguez, "Ante el Niño Español," *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 10.

⁷⁴ Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, "En nombre del niño cubano, ayudad al niño español," *¡Ayuda!* no. 7 (October 1938): 5.

A.A.N.P.E. had the privilege of interpreting this wish, of leading “a coordination of forces to materialize effective and measureable aid,” of giving life and form to the organization that would “channel this enthusiasm and convert it into a magnificent reality.” Their task was “that of arriving at the deepest part of the people’s heart,” not to tug at heartstrings, which they claimed had already happened spontaneously, but rather to achieve and retain the cooperation of each and every person. This organizing and persistence of effort, they stated, was the Association’s reason for existence. New regional and local subcommittees were establishing themselves all over the island, writers from the *Comite Directivo* noted, making the Association’s efforts truly national. A section of the issue entitled “On Organization: How Our Association Grows” detailed efforts in different locales, divided into sections by region.⁷⁵ On the one hand A.A.N.P.E. writers wanted to give the impression of spontaneous support by all of Cuba, but on the other they understood that effective organization always requires more than supportive sentiments. The purpose of the message they crafted was to assist in their organizing efforts. The back cover text of the first issue—accompanied by a dramatic image of a weeping toddler superimposed over photographs of bombed-out buildings—concluded that the Association “called on all who desire and feel that this voice of Cuba should reach a Spain that is hurting and suffering, in need of all our support and cooperation. HELP US!”⁷⁶

Work to craft the A.A.N.P.E. message for a Cuban audience served one central goal: wartime material aid to Spanish children. Association members claimed from the beginning that they enjoyed widespread grassroots support from Cubans. To substantiate this assertion, authors

⁷⁵ *Comite Directivo*, “Editorial: Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 4; “De Organización: Como crece nuestra Asociación,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 16–19; “Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español: Llamamiento a Todos los Cubanos,” n.d., 1/12:196/2.1/14, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

⁷⁶ Back cover of *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937).

included qualitative descriptions of diverse people and groups offering donations, volunteer time, and solidarity.⁷⁷ The clearest validation of their claim, however, came from financial data detailing contributions large and small from people and groups all over Cuba and abroad. We turn now to analysis of these records.

Finances

A founding donation of \$50 from the *Círculo Republicano Español* (Spanish Republican Circle) in March 1937 started off the A.A.N.P.E.'s fundraising. For most of the months of its existence, the Association recorded and published detailed accounting of every single source of its income, going so far, for example, as to record the five cents which someone found in the Association's office on 3 October 1938 in an empty jug.⁷⁸ Organizational records indicate also that, at least at first, Association leaders penned handwritten thank-you notes to individual donors and those who organized group collections; such notes dated May–November 1937 express gratitude for donation amounts ranging from \$0.80 to \$178.00.⁷⁹ Though the financial records are not perfectly complete or consistent, they provide ample information to give us a sense of the A.A.N.P.E.'s fundraising over time. Quantitative analysis of fundraising and

⁷⁷ “De Organización: Como Crece Nuestra Asociación,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 16–19; “Colectas y Actos realizados por la Asociación,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 23; “Continúa Nuestra Organización Extendiéndose por toda la Isla y hasta por el Extranjero,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 18–22; “Prosigue el Desarrollo de Nuestra Asociación,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 21–23; “Avances de nuestra Asociación,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 22; Ismael Cuevas, “Breve Memoria de la A.A.N.P.E.,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 4–6, 23, 27. The publication of messages received for Fernando de los Ríos's speech also demonstrated support from around Cuba and abroad. “Lista de telegramas de adhesión...,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 21.

⁷⁸ “Finanzas: Ingresos del mes de octubre,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 25; Carpeta 34.6/2005(1–103), Serie Asociación al Niño del Pueblo Español [*sic*], Sección Otros Instituciones Nacionales, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

⁷⁹ Carpeta 34.1/2005(1–24), Serie Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español, Sección Otros Instituciones Nacionales, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

expenditure data provides us with another view of the Association, and particularly its claim of popular involvement and support.

The Association raised more than \$18,800.00 during the 19 months for which we have financial data—unfortunately, the bulletin did not include comprehensive financial accounting for the months of January–March 1938 and no information on this period was found in archived organizational records—with an overall monthly average of approximately \$992.00. Fundraising success grew quickly over the first few months. At a time when rural workers in Cuba earned a minimum wage of \$0.80 per day and those in urban areas typically made \$2.00–3.00 per day,⁸⁰ an average income of approximately \$13.51 per day from its founding in mid-March 1937 through the end of July was an impressive accomplishment for the new Association. The daily average for the following five months, August to December of 1937, more than doubled to approximately \$29.17.⁸¹ During 1938, the daily average ranged from a low of \$22.77 for the month of June up to an extraordinary \$147.71 for December, by far the A.A.N.P.E.’s best month. A graphic representation (Figure 3.1) of monthly income and expenses illustrates several points. Income maintained stability from month to month relative to expenditures, which varied much more widely—the notable exception is December 1938, when income spiked dramatically. Overall, income enjoyed a modest increase from March to November 1937, and exhibited a general decline from April to November 1938. Expense data display two different types of spending. Day-to-day Association expenditures account for the gradual slope of the expenses plot visible in the graph, in which a general increase over time is observed, while spikes in the

⁸⁰ Robert Whitney, “The Architect of the Cuban State: Fulgencio Batista and Populism in Cuba, 1937–1940,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32, no. 2 (May 2000): 442.

⁸¹ First calculation based on four and a half months from mid-March through July 1937 (137 days) and a fundraising total of \$1,850.91. Second calculation based on five months from the beginning of August through December 1937 (153 days) and a fundraising total of \$4,463.50.

same plot show large shipments of monetary and material aid to Europe. The largest spending spike corresponds with the largest income month, December 1938.

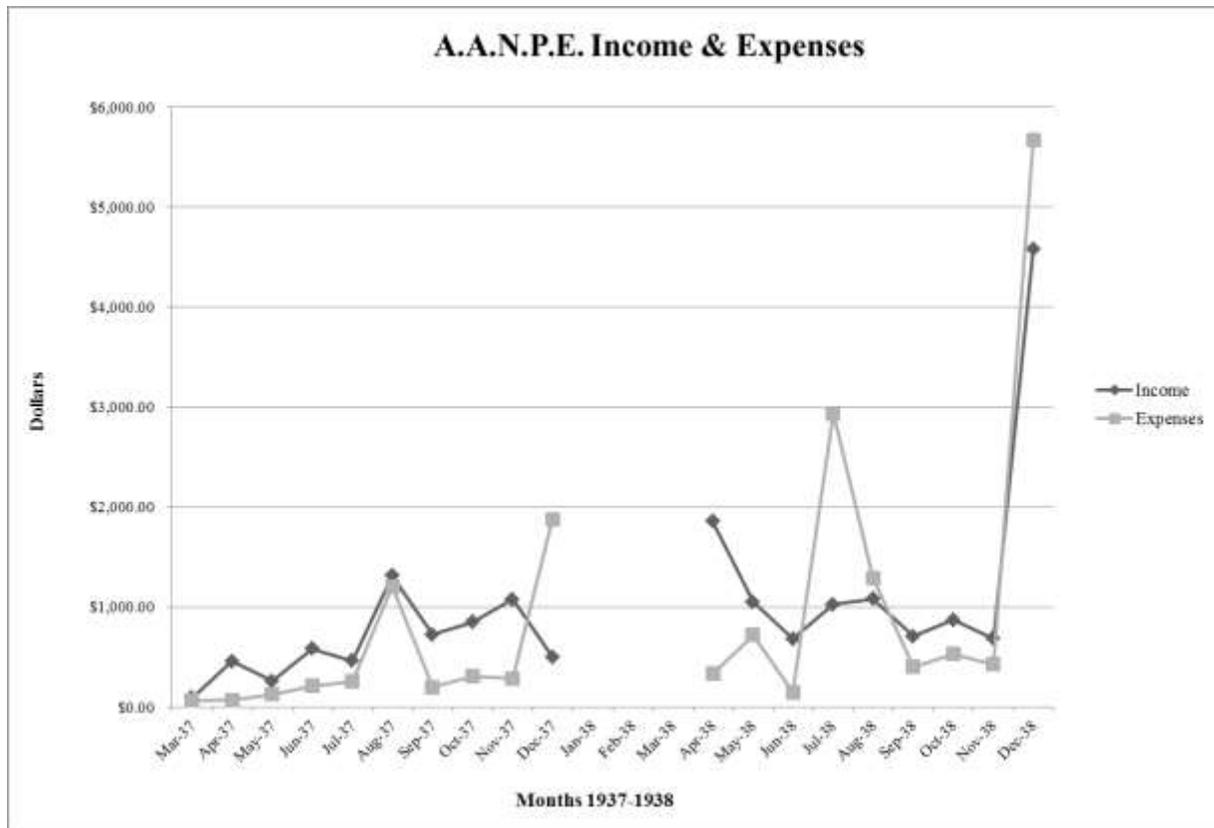


Figure 3.1 A.A.N.P.E. Income & Expenses

The organization gained income from a number of sources: it collected membership dues and subscription fees; sold bonds, stamps, postcards, fans, buttons, and copies of *¡Ayuda!*; held ticketed events; received funds raised by its delegations and children’s committees across the island and during radio drives; and enjoyed numerous donations sent in by organizations, groups, businesses, families, and individuals. We argue that membership dues and subscription collection and bond, stamp, postcard, fan, button, bulletin, and ticket sales represent centralized fundraising, whereas delegation, radio, organization, group, business, family, and individual donations represent popular grassroots support. Getting people to pay dues and buy items in one-on-one interactions required the systematic work by core A.A.N.P.E. participants in Havana

of convincing people to part with their hard-earned money. We do not mean to suggest that these donations were somehow inauthentic, only that they represented the hard work of a relatively small central group of the Association's most dedicated leaders and activists. Conversely, donations made by radio listeners, organizations, groups, businesses, families, individuals, and by A.A.N.P.E. adherents self-organized in diverse parts of the country—the delegations and children's committees—indicate, we assert, diverse popular grassroots support. This system of division is imperfect, but even if it cannot provide certain conclusions we believe it suggests intriguing fundraising trends.

How did centralized and grassroots fundraising trend over time? Choosing April 1937 as a starting point because it was the Association's first full month, we have compared periods at three-month intervals: April, July, and October 1937 and April, July, and October 1938 (complete data are unavailable for January 1938). Since ticketed fundraising events happened at specific points in time and took place sporadically throughout the Association's existence, it does not make sense to include their contributions when seeking long-term trends; therefore, we have omitted from centralized income totals the periodic influx of ticket-sale cash. A graphic representation (Figure 3.2) illustrates trends.

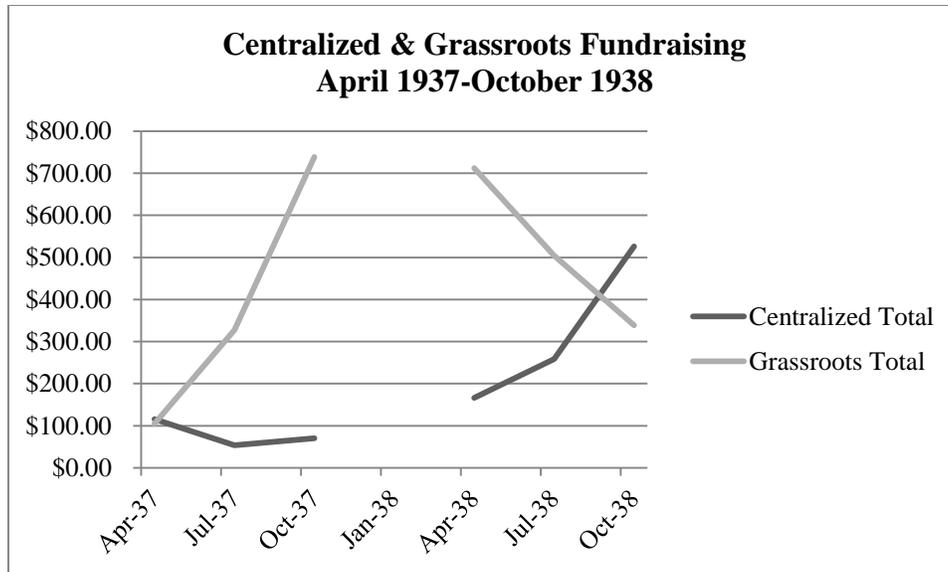


Figure 3.2 Centralized & Grassroots Fundraising, April 1937–October 1938

Starting off slightly greater than the grassroots income, the centralized income dipped between April and July 1937, but appears to have grown strongly and steadily from then on if the missing period followed the clear trend. This progression is unsurprising if we consider that leaders built up their fundraising structures over time, maintaining consistent contacts and sources while cultivating new ones. The grassroots income grew sharply during the first year and plummeted during the second in a curve similar to that of overall income (Figure 3.1) when we exclude the extraordinary month of December 1938. That the grassroots and overall income curves are so similar indicates that grassroots income drove fundraising. Indeed, for much of the A.A.N.P.E.’s existence income we are considering grassroots was higher than that we have categorized as centralized, even during most months with fundraising events.

What does the steep decrease in grassroots income during 1938 indicate? One hypothesis is that donors became disheartened by bad news from the Spanish front early that year as Nationalist forces gained momentum and Republicans lost ground. To test the theory, it is necessary to account for the surge in income in December 1938. If grassroots donations caused the extraordinary increase, this fact would challenge the hypothesis. In fact, when we omit the

month's unusually large event income—\$3,741.00—as we have done for previous calculations, we find that from October to December 1938, centralized income dropped sharply while grassroots income enjoyed a dramatic resurgence.

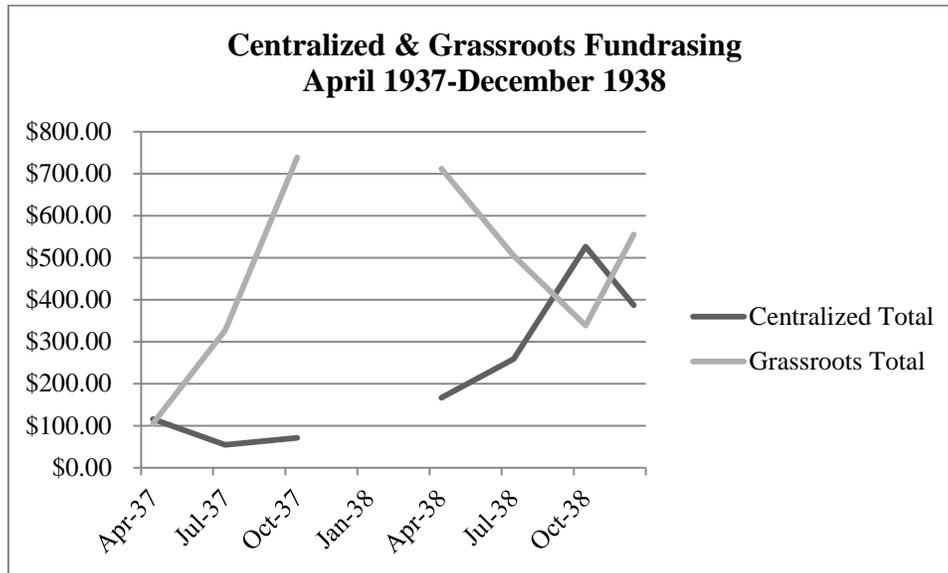


Figure 3.3 Centralized & Grassroots Fundraising, April 1937–December 1938

That Association leaders were instrumental in the organization of the massive reception for Fernando de los Ríos at the Polar Stadium that month probably explains the notable decrease in other forms of centralized fundraising—with all the work they did for the stadium event, they likely had little time for other efforts. The event, discussed in greater detail in the upcoming section on Association accomplishments, likely impacted grassroots donations as well. It is probable that excitement surrounding the event boosted both spirits and donations, even as Republican defeat neared. Though the reversal in trends for centralized and grassroots income in December of 1938 challenges our theory, therefore, it does not invalidate it. The stadium event of that month was unique in the Association's—and pro-Republican Cuba's—history, and it might account for the change.

Total monetary donation amount is only one—and perhaps not the best—way to measure popular grassroots support. The number, size, and origin of donations also indicate the level of

support the A.A.N.P.E. enjoyed. Examining October 1937 and 1938 as sample months allows us to form a picture of typical Association fundraising. In the category of individual and family donations in October 1937, the Association received 38 *donativos* (donations from single individuals or families) with an average amount of \$1.13 and 24 *colectas* (collections initiated by individuals) with an average amount of \$6.81. In October 1938, there were 17 *donativos* with an average amount of \$0.70, three *colectas* with an average amount of \$12.88, and four unspecified donations with an average amount of \$2.50. Some typical donation origins from these sample months give a sense of participating supporters. On 7 October 1937, for example, the Association received \$8.20 from a *colecta* initiated by a child named Martica Suárez, a \$0.40 *donativo* from Señorita Josefina Sánchez, and a \$1.20 *colecta* from “José Brell, de Lawton, Habana.” On the 17th of the same month, it received a \$20.00 *colecta* from “Francisco López, de Estrada, Oriente.” On the 27th, it received, among other types of donations, a \$1.00 *donativo* from Señora Jacinta Peña y Ruíz, a \$1.00 *donativo* from “Benigno López, Tabor, Camagüey,” and a \$0.60 *donativo* from Señora Concepción Ruíz. A year later in October 1938, the Association received, among other donations, a *donativo* of \$0.20 from a child named Lydia Santana on the 1st, a *donativo* of \$0.50 from Enrique Oliva and his wife on the 3rd, a *donativo* of \$1.20 from Señorita Salomé Hernández of Jobabo, Oriente on the 13th, a *donativo* of \$0.20 from a child named Lisardito Lister and \$10.00 from Bernardo Menéndez collected in ‘La Guardia’ bakery on the 15th, and a *donativo* of \$1.00 from “Valcárcel and wife” of Guantánamo in honor of Edita González on the 27th.⁸²

These sample donations show diversity typical of A.A.N.P.E. supporters in terms of age, gender, relationship status, and geographic origin. Unfortunately, only some of the donation

⁸² “Finanzas: Ingresos 1937 Octubre,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 25–26; “Finanzas: Ingresos del mes de octubre,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 25–26.

records in the bulletin and in archived organizational records included geographic origin; however, the information we do have indicates substantial geographic diversity. A handwritten list in the archival records of 38 donations notes the province of each donor, showing contributions from all six: Oriente had the highest number with 12, Camagüey followed with 10, Santa Clara had eight, Havana three, and Matanzas and Pinar del Río both had two, with one entry illegible.⁸³ Collaboration came from every corner of the island and, over the course of the Association's existence, locations abroad such as Tampa, Kingston, San Juan, Port Au Prince, and New York City. The sample donations also demonstrate the combination of individual, family, and *colecta* donations, and highlight participation by women and children. A few donation records of interest from the archive offer further clues about the diversity of participants. In May 1937 the A.A.N.P.E. received \$20.00 donated by the fishermen of the Sociedad de Marineros Pescadores de Batabano (Society of Fishermen Mariners of Batabano) on the Caribbean coast south of Havana; in September 1937 "la señora Ana Rodríguez y Serrano" and "la señorita Chana García y Hernández" collected \$7.00 in the neighborhood of Luyanó in the capital; in October of that year the sister of Cuban combat volunteer Angel Rufo, "who fell in Jarama assassinated by fascism" while fighting with the Centuria Guiteras, gave \$4.60 collected by their friends; and in November the Association welcomed an institutional donation of \$5.00 from the Club Atenas (Athens Club), a prominent black Cuban society.⁸⁴

Donations from diverse groups (Table 3.1) also provide insight into the popular grassroots character of the Association's fundraising. Again comparing October 1937 and 1938,

⁸³ Documento 34.1/2005(9), Serie Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español, Sección Otros Instituciones Nacionales, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

⁸⁴ Carpeta 34.6/2005(1-103), Serie Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español, Sección Otros Instituciones Nacionales, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

we gain a sense of typical group donations. In October 1937, the Association received 32 donations from groups with an average amount of \$15.77. In October 1938, there were 24 donations from groups with an average amount of \$11.57.

Table 3.1 Contributing Groups by Type for October 1937 and October 1938

Organization or Group Type	October 1937	October 1938
A.A.N.P.E. Delegations	Delegación Almendares Delegación Ciego de Avila Delegación Marianao Delegación Santiago de Cuba Delegación Vereda Nueva	Delegación Cárdenas Delegación Marianao
A.A.N.P.E. Children's Committees		Comité Infantil El Campesino Comité Infantil Enrique Lister Comité Infantil José Miaja Comité Infantil La Pasionaria
Other Organizations & Groups	Ateneo Socialista Español Block Pro-Mejoras de Cueto Colonia Asiento Colonia Dos Hermanos <i>Diario Español del Aire</i> Empleados de Cine Verdún Enfermos de Sanatorio La Esperanza <i>Facetas de Actualidad Española</i> Fca. de Sombreros J. Barquín y Cía Fca. Dos Hermanos Fileteadores de La Corona Fileteadores de Partagás Logia América Obreros de Fca. Escobas Casa Porto Plantel Rubén Martínez Villena Respetable Logia José González Valdés Sindicato de Chauffeurs Particulares	<i>Facetas de Actualidad Española</i> Fileteadores de Partagás Logia Eureka Logia Obreros de Morón Logia Sueños de Martí Obreros de la imprenta La Milagrosa Obreros de la imprenta Molina y Cía Obreros del vivero Indalecio Sociedad Espírita El Guía del Pastor

These sample months demonstrate that, in addition to that of its adherent delegations and children's committees across the island, the A.A.N.P.E. enjoyed support from unions, publications, Mason Lodges, and other groups. We discuss campaigns in support of the Spanish Republic by other groups in subsequent chapters. Here, their donations to the Association's work on behalf of children—along with those of diverse men, women, and children—give strong credibility to the claim that widespread popular support for this work existed among Cubans.

Accomplishments

The A.A.N.P.E.'s first major act was coordination of the reception in Havana harbor of the ship *Mexique* carrying Spanish refugee children to Mexico to live. The Cuban government did not allow the ship to land, but Cubans boarded it and lined the shore to welcome the young Spaniards and send them on their way to their new home. Much of the first issue of *¡Ayuda!* focused on this event, using support for the reception as evidence of the Association's grassroots character: A single call from the A.A.N.P.E., the Comité Directivo declared, was all it took to mobilize "all of society represented in its parties, associations, unions, and individually" for the reception. In turn, the Committee stated, the experience of coming face-to-face with the war's young victims had reinforced public desire to assist them.⁸⁵ The theme of a special relationship between Spain and Cuba dominated discussion of the event, along with emotional appeals to the reader. One article provided a portrait of a Spanish boy on the *Mexique*, while another printed the text of remarks made by a Cuban boy who boarded the ship to address his "Spanish brothers."⁸⁶ A photograph of the side of the ship packed with children leaning over its rails appeared twice in the issue, and three two-page pieces in a row detailed the event and its organization. Teté Casuso wrote the third of these three articles, entitled "With the children who voyaged on the *Mexique*." In it, she expressed with deep feeling her own reaction to meeting the Spanish children and those of other Cuban participants, depicting a poignant scene of tenderness,

⁸⁵ Comité Directivo, "Editorial: Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español," *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 4.

⁸⁶ Juan Ramón Jiménez, "Francisco González Aramburo: (Niño español del 'Mexique')," *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 5; Armando Martínez, "Hermanos Españoles: Palabras del niño Armando Martínez, alumno de la Escuela 'José Miguel Gómez', que formó parte de la Comisión Oficial que subió a bordo del 'Mexique', en representación de la niñez cubana," *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 6.

sorrow, and hope. The eyes of her friend Ramiro Valdés Daussá—who, Teté noted, had been “hardened in tough fights”—filled with tears as he held the tiny hands of Pepa Henares. Young María Luisa Corzo gave Avelino Rodríguez the only property she had, a portrait photograph of her family. Casuso described a peaceful photographic scene of the family seated by a lake with some swans, and then quoted the photograph’s heartbreaking inscription: Please always think of your father and your mother, the girl’s mother had written. “My little girl, do not forget me.” Now the family in the photograph did not exist, Teté told readers. The girl’s father died fighting alongside “La Pasionaria,” Dolores Ibárruri, and her mother was in the hospital. That the little girl would give away this photograph to one of the Cubans there to greet her required no commentary, Casuso stated. “A child who gives away the last thing left to her in the world as a token of gratitude gives us a piece of her heart. And she gives us this: her hunger for affection.” Including a number of similarly dramatic vignettes and portraits of individual children, the A.A.N.P.E. president humanized the victims for whom her organization labored. After touching upon all of the various themes of the Association’s message, Casuso concluded her narration of the *Mexique* reception by emphasizing the momentous nature of the occasion in the Association’s organizing. Here were the people, she claimed, of all races and nationalities, neither ‘loyal’ nor ‘rebel.’ “It was the unanimous gesture of the multitude that congregated to see them pass through, and to say to them that here, in Cuba, we love them, we empathize with them, with them we know suffering.” As the ship sailed out past el Morro, the fortress at the entrance of Havana’s harbor, Teté envisioned Spaniards and Cubans together “in a salute that is now neither communist nor socialist because it has become the salute against fascism, the salute of world democracy.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Casuso, “Con los niños que iban en el ‘Mexique’,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 1 (July 1937): 12–13, 22.

In the autumn of 1937 the Association had two primary goals: to send winter clothing to the Spanish children and to establish two refuge houses for them. Praising the enthusiasm of the Cuban people, the article made donation requests of the readers: clothing for the Ropero Invernal del Niño Español (Spanish Children's Winter Clothing Drive) and monetary support to found the Casas-Escuelas Pueblo de Cuba (People of Cuba Residential Schools).⁸⁸ The A.A.N.P.E. would succeed in sending multiple shipments of clothing to Spanish children and in establishing one Casa-Escuela in Spain's Catalán region for children orphaned or otherwise uprooted by the war. Here we chronicle how the Association achieved these two goals.

Readers of *¡Ayuda!* in October 1937 found a special message to women asking them to participate in the drive to send winter clothes to the children in Spain.⁸⁹ By the next issue's publication a couple of months later in December 1937, the Association reported having sent five enormous crates full of 5,000 coats (*piezas de abrigos*) for children to the Consul of the Spanish Republic in France. This impressive donation was the result of hard work by the A.A.N.P.E.'s Women's Committee which took on leadership of the drive and organized volunteers to sew and collect clothing.⁹⁰ A longer article took an in-depth look at this intense labor. A reporter identified as "G.F." (probably Gustavo Fabal, one of the bulletin's editors) visited the A.A.N.P.E. offices one evening late in November, and wrote passionately about observing volunteers at work. At ten-thirty at night the atmosphere in the room was feverish and agitated, G.F. noted, but the emotion was happy and proud. Briefly interviewing the women present, the author

⁸⁸ "Consignas Editoriales: Ropero Invernal del Niño Español y Casa Pueblo de Cuba en el Hogar Internacional," *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 2.

⁸⁹ "Mensaje de la Asociación a las Mujeres," *¡Ayuda!* no. 2 (September/October 1937): 8.

⁹⁰ "24.000 Latas de Leche y 5.000 Piezas de Abrigo Enviadas a los Niños Españoles," *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 3.

learned about the functioning of the clothing drive. In addition to the work of volunteers at the central office, distinct Association delegations throughout the island sewed and collected clothing to send in. The Delegation of Santiago de Cuba, for example, had sent 858 *piezas de abrigo* to date. Other organizations supportive of the Spanish Republic—such as the Izquierda Republicana Española (Spanish Republican Left), the Círculo Español Socialista (Spanish Socialist Circle), and the publication *Diario Español del Aire*—conducted clothing drives of their own and then brought in the items collected. Many individual women volunteered to sew in their homes, while others coordinated the purchasing of supplies and directed the work. María Prieto’s Dressmaking Academy had devoted entire days to the Ropero. Clothing stores owned by Spaniards contributed, as did “several establishments of Hebrews,” but reception amongst the majority of clothing stores had been negative. One storeowner, the women reported to G.F. indignantly, had been so bold as to claim that “his religion did not permit him to donate clothing to children in loyalist territory.” What, the Ropero volunteers asked with agitation, could possibly be the religion of this fanatic? It is likely that the unnamed individual expressed this sentiment because he believed the view that the Republic was anti-Catholic, although it is certainly also possible that he simply hit upon the first excuse which came to mind not to give away his merchandise. Impressed by the industrious commitment of the clothing drive volunteers, the reporter sought to convey the good feeling in the room that night to readers, hoping to inspire new participation and contributions. He imagined a Spanish boy dressed in a little suit sewn with care by the “noble women of Cuba,” and the child’s father finding solace amidst the devastation of war in this act of solidarity by his Cuban sisters. In this way, the clothing drive would elevate the “moral prestige” of Cuban people, G.F. argued, not before its government—“always a transient reality”—but before “another indomitably heroic people.”⁹¹

⁹¹ G.F., “5.000 Piezas de abrigo enviadas a los Niños por nuestro Ropero,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December

The A.A.N.P.E. kept Clothing Drive finances separate from other donations, and in March 1938 published a detailed account of the first Ropero's accounting. The Association treasurer established the clothing drive coffers with a \$50.00 donation from the general fund in October, and five other donors contributed a total of \$2.90 that month. In November, there were 23 individual, family, and *colecta* donations, plus a benefit held at the Prado Cinema raised \$227.00, the Socialist Delegation of Victoria de las Tunas raised \$27.27, the Delegation of Vertientes raised \$18.60, and the Hebrew Committee raised \$4.60, bringing the income total for the month to \$325.69. Most of these funds went immediately to purchase clothing and sewing supplies, leaving just \$33.82 at the end of the month. December slowed somewhat, with income totaling \$178.84. Money came from 12 individual, family, and *colecta* donations, as well as \$80.00 from the Delegation of Morón, \$70.19 from the Delegation of Manzanillo, \$9.00 from the Delegation of Vertientes, \$5.00 from the Alianza Femenina Oriental (Eastern Feminine Alliance), and miscellaneous leftover funds raised by the Prado Cinema benefit totaling \$10.40, sent in by the Asociación Protectora del Preso (Prisoner's Protective Association), the Spanish Socialist Circle, *Diario Español del Aire*, the Sindicato de Dependientes de Víveres (Grocery Store Clerks Union), the Sindicato Industria del Metal (Metalworkers Union), and a Dr. Tavío. Ropero leaders, again converting December's funds immediately to expenditures, were left with \$13.69 at 1937's end.⁹²

From January through the summer of 1938, the principal goal toward which the Association labored was the Casa-Escuela. In December 1937 *¡Ayuda!* had assured readers that

1937): 18–19.

⁹² “La Caja del Ropero del Invierno del Comité de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 2, 27.

establishment of a residential school was underway.⁹³ The Association enjoyed widespread support for the project, and took time in its fourth issue editorial to acknowledge (Table 3.2) the first organizations and groups to offer their assistance.

Table 3.2 Initial Organizations and Groups that Contributed to the A.A.N.P.E. Casa-Escuela

Asociación de Obreros Manuales	Resp. Logia ‘Antonio de la Piedra’
Asociación Unión Revolucionaria	Resp. Logia ‘Fe Masónica’
Centre Catalá	Resp. Logia ‘Hijos de la Fe Masónica’ (Sagua)
Comité Estudiantil 28 de Enero	Resp. Logia ‘Los Apóstoles’
Comité Femenino Hebreo	Resp. Logia ‘Pí y Margall’
Gran Logia Isla de Cuba de Ciego de Avila	Resp. Logia ‘Progreso’ (Santa Clara)
Gran Logia Obreros de Morón	Sindicato de Obreros de Cervecerías
Hermandad de los Jóvenes Cubanos	Sindicato de Panaderos de la Habana
Nueva Agrupación de Jóvenes del Pueblo	Sociedad Naturista ‘Vida’
Organización Auténtica	Sociedad Unión de Vendedores de la Habana
Partido Agrario Nacional	Unión de Empleados de Cafés
Partido Revolucionario Cubano	Unión Nacional de Mujeres

The editorial expressed the A.A.N.P.E.’s gratitude to the political, social, cultural, patriotic, worker, women’s, and Masonic organizations which “offer their generous and cordial hand to help save the life and the soul of 100 Spanish children.” In addition to this strong institutional support, the piece acknowledged the many Cuban and Spanish individuals who hoped to achieve and worked toward the creation of the residential school.⁹⁴ Another article celebrated grassroots participation by the Cuban population in the effort. While a group of Cubans fought alongside Republican forces, it stated, the “little Cuban house” symbolized the “honorable rearguard” of the Cuban people.⁹⁵ The Association highlighted in particular the Masonic contribution in May 1938, gratefully acknowledging a pledge by the Consejo Supremo de la Soberana Gran Logia de la Isla de Cuba (Supreme Council of the Sovereign Grand Lodge of the Island of Cuba) to

⁹³ “La ‘Casa Pueblo de Cuba’ en Puigcerdá,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 3 (December 1937): 3, 27.

⁹⁴ “La Comision Pro Casa Escuela en Puigcerdá,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 3.

⁹⁵ Berta Acosta, “Una Casita Sugeridora,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 13.

support the Casa-Escuela's creation. "With this gesture that enhances it and honors us," *¡Ayuda!* stated, "Cuban Masonry says loudly that it does not forget the duty of human solidarity which the Masonic tradition obliges."⁹⁶

In May 1938 the Association announced that black Cuban educator Rosa Pastora Leclerc would travel to Spain to become director at the Casa-Escuela.⁹⁷ Following a summer without publication—perhaps indicating hard work focused on other efforts—*¡Ayuda!*'s sixth issue in September heralded the residential school's successful establishment during May in the town of Sitges. The opening editorial exclaimed, "GREETINGS TO THE EDUCATIONAL COLONY 'PEOPLE OF CUBA.'" It began by describing the "happy and luminous morning" when a cable arrived from Spain announcing the "anxiously awaited news" of the school's opening. The editorial emphasized the need to fund the school now that it was established, stating that the achievement of this great accomplishment only imposed a more urgent obligation: the work of educating the children for a better future.⁹⁸ Photographs throughout the issue showed the school, the finances section noted that the A.A.N.P.E. had sent \$202.85 in May for "expenses of our Colony in Sitges,"⁹⁹ one article described Rosa Pastora Leclerc's visit to the children's colony 'Chatenay-Malabry' in France,¹⁰⁰ and another took the form of a conversation between the director and a Casa-Escuela student. "Rosa Pastora, where are you from?" the child asked, and

⁹⁶ "Notas y Comentarios," *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 21.

⁹⁷ Fernando G. Campoamor, "Rosa Pastora Leclerc," *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 8.

⁹⁸ "Editorial: Saludo a la Colonia Escolar 'Pueblo de Cuba,'" *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 3. The A.A.N.P.E. acknowledged that the Ministry of Public Instruction (Ministerio de Instrucción Pública) and other top-level functionaries of the Republican government assisted in the Casa-Escuela's establishment.

⁹⁹ "Finanzas: Egresos (Mayo de 1938): Enviado a Rosa Pastora Leclerc," *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 30.

¹⁰⁰ Teresa Proenza, "La Colonia Escolar Chatenay-Malabry," *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 8–9.

then, “Cuba, where is that?” The teacher replied, “Cuba is an island in the center of America. From here it would take us ten days in a boat to get there. If you went there you would see sun like this shining all year, green countryside, beaches and palm trees similar to the ones you see here.” The child asked if she would return to Cuba at the war’s end, and, at her affirmative reply, responded, “I don’t want you to go, Rosa Pastora.” She promised the child she would bring the children to Cuba to visit. “I’ll take all of you in a boat painted white,” she said, “to see the land where I was born, and later we will return to Spain.” The tender exchange, the article noted, took place as Rosa sat with the child in her lap, other children a ways off, romping about. A palm tree stood out against the smooth backdrop of the sea, and high above, fluttering together in the breeze, were “the flag of Martí” and that of the Spanish Republic, “the tricolor flag with which Spain gloriously opens its new history.” The Cuban teacher, it concluded, contemplated the child for a moment and then kissed him affectionately.¹⁰¹

A Spanish contributor to *¡Ayuda!* saw Rosa as the “personification of Cuban teaching,” and praised her “exquisite sensibility of true pedagogy.” Her “woman’s soul,” the author wrote, “knew as her own the sacrifice and the pain of the Spanish people.”¹⁰² Another article described Rosa’s participation in the International Conference to Aid the Spanish Children in Paris in July. She represented Cuba brilliantly, it stated, delivering during the panel devoted to delegates of foreign committees an address entitled “School Age Children and the Colonies,” the text of which followed. In her address, Rosa described the good fortune of children lucky enough to have spots in the school colonies and urged efforts to establish more such places so that more children displaced by the war could be safe, clean, fed, and educated. The Association was

¹⁰¹ Angel Lázaro, “Rosa Pastora en Sitges,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 9.

¹⁰² Guillermina Medrano, “Niños de España,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 14–15.

“jubilant with healthy satisfaction” at the participation of their distinguished delegate in a world event of such importance.¹⁰³

As cold weather again loomed on Spain’s horizon in September of 1938, the Association called for a renewed effort to collect winter clothes, expressing the hope that the Ropero of 1938 would outdo that of 1937. Accompanying a request printed in *¡Ayuda!* was a letter written by two Spanish children in gratitude to a Cuban woman who had donated clothing in the past.¹⁰⁴ In October, the bulletin advertised an exhibit of more than 6,000 *piezas de abrigo* collected thus far on display at the Casa de la Cultura (House of Culture) for a few days before the items would be shipped November 5th.¹⁰⁵ It also reported clothing drive finances for the period from the beginning of August through October 23rd. During August, the Ropero received \$80.00 from the A.A.N.P.E. general fund (which clothing drive organizers later repaid to the Association), along with 15 individual, family, and *colecta* donations totaling \$25.62, bringing the income for the month to \$105.62. September was a much busier month, with dozens of donations totaling \$265.77 and a large benefit event at Hatuey Park at the beginning of the month bringing in \$1,571.81. At the beginning of October, another benefit event, this time at the Belascoaín Cinema, raised \$336.28. During this time, expenditures totaled \$2,121.21, divided as follows: \$208.38 spent on the Hatuey Park event, \$116.45 spent on the Belascoaín Cinema event, and \$1,796.38 on sewing supplies and other expenses related to the work of the clothing drive.¹⁰⁶ For the remaining days of October, the Ropero received two *colecta* donations of \$26.45 and

¹⁰³ Introduction to Rosa Pastora Leclerc, “Los Niños de edad Escolar y las Colonias,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 16–17.

¹⁰⁴ “El Ropero Invernal del Niño, realidad en marcha,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 6 (September 1938): 25.

¹⁰⁵ Advertisement, *¡Ayuda!* no. 7 (October 1938): 21.

¹⁰⁶ “Balance del Ropero del Niño,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 7 (October 1938): 22–23.

\$1.90, as reported in February 1939. During the months of November and December combined, total clothing drive income reached \$800.32 and expenditures totaled \$418.40.¹⁰⁷ In December, *¡Ayuda!* included a summary of the 1938 Roperero's successes and a statement of its highly ambitious goal. The bulletin reported that in November the Women's Committee had sent 7,326 *piezas de abrigo*, the "fecund result of two months of work." This triumph invigorated volunteers, inspiring them to reach for a goal of 50,000 pieces for the winter.¹⁰⁸

Women, the article stated, should contribute by donating their time. They could sew in their homes, it suggested, or join other volunteers at the offices where sewing machines and materials were available. Men should contribute by donating their money. Addressing the reader directly, the article concluded: "If you have already made a donation, repeat it, because wartime necessities also reproduce themselves continuously."¹⁰⁹ A printed radio address in the same issue praised the clothing drive volunteers, expressing gratitude to the women who worked day and night—with tenderness, selflessness, and "the soul of mothers of children they have never even met"—for the cause of the Roperero.¹¹⁰

The Association branched out into donating food and other supplies. The drive's first shipment of the year included, in addition to clothing: 150 tins of sweets, 300 cans of condensed milk, 200 bars of guava paste, five ten-and-a-half-pound containers of cookies, 40 pairs of shoes, 720 stockings (60 dozen), 432 handkerchiefs (36 dozen), 600 tubes of toothpaste, 900 bars of soap, 100 toys, and 50 care packages especially for the Casa-Escuela containing school

¹⁰⁷ "Balance del Roperero de Invierno," *¡Ayuda!* No. 9 (January/February 1939): 22–24.

¹⁰⁸ Report, *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 12.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Consuelo Carmona de Gordón Ordas, "Defensa sin título del Niño Español," *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 17.

supplies.¹¹¹ The Ropero made a second shipment on January 8th. On that date, volunteers sent 4,700 pieces of clothing (*piezas de ropa*), 75 boxes containing 48 cans of milk each, 10 one-hundred-and-twenty-pound boxes of soap, six crates containing guava, and one box filled with sweets and various other provisions.¹¹² The Ropero managed to raise \$187.15 that month, mostly from many small individual donations. It spent the majority of its funds on the second shipment, and then, toward the end of January, sent almost all of what remained—\$130.00—to the Committee for Spanish Children in Paris for “urgent aid to evacuated children.” Meanwhile, its delegations from Guantánamo and Santiago de Cuba both sent smaller shipments of clothing and other supplies independently.¹¹³ The second Ropero did not reach its ambitious goal of 50,000 pieces of clothing, but it sent well over 12,000, along with food and other helpful supplies, expanding significantly upon the successes of the first. Leonor Pérez, a Cuban student leader stationed in Barcelona working for the Consejo Nacional de la Infancia Evacuada (National Council of Evacuated Children), recounted an emotional scene she witnessed in the Ministerio de Instrucción Pública (Ministry of Public Instruction) to emphasize for readers the importance of the Ropero efforts: “Upon opening the boxes of clothing sewn by Cuban mothers,” she wrote, a man hardened by the war was unable to hold back tears when “taking in his callused hands the tiny, delicate clothes made with so much love and conscientiousness by the hands of Cuban women.”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ “Nota del primer embarque del Ropero,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 19.

¹¹² “El Segundo Embarque del Ropero del Niño,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 4 or 5.

¹¹³ “Balance del Ropero,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (March/April 1939): 29–31.

¹¹⁴ Leonor Pérez Almeida, “Nuestro Deber Ante el Niño Español,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 7 (October 1938): 13.

Founded in May 1938, the Casa-Escuela was in serious danger by the end of October that year. *¡Ayuda!* published that month a happy photograph showing a visit by members of the “Cuban Club Julio Antonio Mella in Barcelona, who overwhelmed the surprised and joyful children of the residence with Cuban songs and rhythms.” But in December the bulletin published a letter written by Rosa Pastora Leclerc on October 21st discussing her imminent departure from Sitges. The school director managed to keep a hopeful tone in the letter, despite the undeniable context of looming Republican defeat. She mentioned ways in which the Association could turn its attention to aiding child war refugees in Barcelona, the number of which she estimated as 460,000. She offered assurances that the children of the Casa-Escuela would be left in caring and competent hands after she departed Spain. And she told of an occurrence that would likely inspire both pride and sadness in Cuban readers: The children of the Casa-Escuela said that they did not want to be evacuated to France; they wanted to go to Cuba. There was no way for sympathetic Cubans to fulfill this wish. In the “deep pain of farewell,” Rosa wrote, their desire was “a pinprick.” She concluded, “I have not spoken to them about my trip; but it seems that [the news] has gotten out among them.”¹¹⁵ With grim optimism, a two-page spread depicted in short articles and happy photographs “that which the children of the Colony People of Cuba think and write.” Ten-year-old Rafael González wrote that the people of Cuba “bring us food, clothing” and that “they sacrifice for us.” The children of the school were grateful, he stated, and they sent to the Cubans work they had done “because they had no other way to show their gratitude.” Twelve-year-old Enrique Orejón wrote that he and his fellow students were “very content and grateful for the help of Cuba and other nations,” especially the Cuban *campesinos* (peasants), “who work cheerfully to send us everything we need so that we

¹¹⁵ Rosa Pastora Leclerc, “Rosa Pastora escribe,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 10.

will be healthy and strong.” He looked forward to being a man and free in the future, he wrote, when peace will reign and Spain and all the other nations will be free.¹¹⁶

By the time *¡Ayuda!* went to print in February 1939, Pastora Leclerc had returned to Cuba. A photograph of her arrival accompanied an article welcoming her home. In Spain, the article noted, she had lived the horror of the Spanish people as Nationalist forces attacked Barcelona. She narrated the tragedy of the war, it commented, “with a dramatic quality that calls to mind the prison stories of Pablo de la Torriente.” With this comparison, the article’s author remembered and honored Cuba’s first loss in the war as the conflict neared its end, honored Rosa by comparing her writing to that of such a highly respected author, and gave a nod to the Association’s founding president Teté Casuso, Pablo’s widow. It noted also Pastora Leclerc’s multinational journey back to Cuba, during which she made stops in Paris, Brussels, and New York “to strengthen relations of solidarity.” In coming issues of the bulletin, the article concluded, Rosa would give readers a sense of the emotions and hopes of her Spanish days.¹¹⁷ But the next issue of *¡Ayuda!* would be the last, and Rosa contributed only a short article describing the Central Sanitaria Internacional (International Health Center) and requesting assistance for the organization.¹¹⁸ A letter written to her by Francisco Pelayo, one of the Casa-Escuela children, did a better job of expressing the poignant reality of the present situation. It described the evacuation of the school, the children’s journey to France, and the living conditions in the small French town of Cordes where they were staying. Do everything possible to have us

¹¹⁶ “Lo que piensan y lo que escriben los niños de la Colonia Pueblo de Cuba,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 8 (December 1938): 14–15.

¹¹⁷ “Retorno de Rosa Pastora Leclerc,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 5.

¹¹⁸ Rosa Pastora Leclerc, “Actividades de la Central Sanitaria Internacional,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (March/April 1939): 15.

brought to Cuba, young Francisco begged. “We ask it with all our hearts.” They missed their teacher, he wrote affectionately, and sent her “many kisses and hugs from your little comrades who love you very much and do not forget you.”¹¹⁹ The bond Rosa had built with her wards was strong, but no amount of close personal connection or broad solidarity of the Cuban people with the Spanish Republic would be enough to stave off their suffering by the early spring of 1939. As another article put it bluntly, in Sitges the residential school named for the Cuban people was no longer. The little ones who had found refuge there, it stated with resignation, now found refuge only in the Cuban people’s hearts.¹²⁰

The Association’s final large accomplishment was the massive gathering in the Polar Stadium on 18 December 1938 to see and hear Fernando de los Ríos, Ambassador of Republican Spain. This event occurred as Republican defeat in Spain approached, and yet it was by all accounts an extraordinary success. The A.A.N.P.E. stated that 80,000 people attended, and photographs showed the stadium packed with an enormous crowd. The event was vital at a moment when grassroots energy—and financial support—had been waning. It raised spirits and, as we have seen, significant funds; the Association’s emphasis in its bulletin probably aimed to maximize this impact. The ninth issue of *¡Ayuda!* devoted a two-page spread to Juan Marinello’s introduction of Don Fernando, and five and a half uninterrupted pages to the guest’s speech. A rousing photograph of the young intellectual and activist with his fist raised accompanied Marinello’s introduction. Addressing “representatives of the Spanish, Mexican, and Chinese republics” in attendance, Marinello noted that entering the stadium he had witnessed

¹¹⁹ Francisco Pelayo, “Francisco Pelayo, niño de la Colonia Pueblo de Cuba, refugiado en Francia, escribe a Rosa Pastora Leclerc,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (March/April 1939): 14.

¹²⁰ Armando Martín Corsanego, “Sentido de España: La Colonia ‘Pueblo de Cuba,’” *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (March/April 1939): 22.

“the worker arm in arm with the intellectual, the peasant in the company of the student, the man with the woman and the white with the black.” This vision, he interpreted, was a vision of Cuba, the people of Cuba who sought “the beautiful and wise, deep, high and human, that is to say Spanish, word of Don Fernando de los Ríos.” A multitude was present in the stadium, and many more clustered around radios to hear the ambassador’s voice. With this description, Marinello evoked broad solidarity and popular support, seeking to reenergize listeners both present at the Havana event and listening to the broadcast across the island. To inspire Cubans, Marinello drew a link between Don Fernando and José Martí, reiterating the common theme of a “bad” Spain represented by colonialism and Franco, and a “good” Spain found in the Republican ambassador and Cuba’s anticolonial struggle. He reinforced this connection with the example of his late friend, Pablo de la Torriente. Pablo died for Spain, which was the same as dying for Cuba, Marinello said. He had been proud to have learned to read using the texts of Martí, and it was Martí who taught him that “the obligation of a man was to be where he was needed most.” Thus it was Martí who sent Pablo to Spain, Marinello suggested, and Spain inspired in him a vision of a marvelous new dawn. The Spanish children, for whom the Association organized Don Fernando’s visit, would live this glorious future, he concluded to a prolonged ovation.¹²¹

Fernando de los Ríos similarly emphasized the special relationship between Spain and Cuba, calling his Cuban listeners “a substantial element of an eternal Spain that lives in you,” and pointing out their shared language and history. He also started out by making salutations to Mexican and Chinese representatives present, calling the Republic of China Spain’s “sister in struggle, ideals, and pain at this moment.” To highlight further the strength of international solidarity with the Spanish Republic, he stated that its situation was an issue of “universal”

¹²¹ Juan Marinello, “Palabras de presentación de Don Fernando de los Ríos pronunciadas por Juan Marinello en el Stadium Polar,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 12–13.

relevance and concern, noting majority popular support in various countries. He claimed that the Spanish stand against Napoleon had inspired the Germans in 1808, that in 1823 a famous British philosopher had named Spain “the only hope of the world,” and that in the current conflicts Spain’s antifascists served as an example for those of China. He addressed himself to Cubans (“sons of liberty!”) and Spaniards (“honored in ideals, in pain and in hope!”), but argued that their shared struggle for the Spanish Republic “in this hour of moral semi-darkness” actually defended of the future of all of humanity and the entire world.¹²²

Another full page of the bulletin published samples of the telegrams the A.A.N.P.E. received in support of the event, many more of which, it noted, had been read aloud in the stadium. The Association received four messages of support from “Ciudad Trujillo” (Santo Domingo), Dominican Republic; one from a union in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and two from Tampa, Florida from the *Círculo Cubano de Tampa* (Tampa Cuban Circle) and the *Centro Español de Tampa* (Tampa Spanish Center). Fifteen published solidarity telegrams from across Cuba—demonstrating considerable political diversity among supporters—came from groups such as the Santa Clara Provincial Assembly and the Palma Soriano Committee of the Communist Party, the Cayo Hueso neighborhood branch of Cuba’s ABC Party, the Eastern Regional Anarchist Federation in Palma Soriano, Youth of the People in Isabela de Sagua, and the Santa Clara Provincial Assembly of the “Organización Auténtico,” as well as from individuals, Cultural Houses, and provincial organizations supportive of the Spanish Republic.¹²³ This outpouring, as our financial analysis shows, was a final boost of popular support and

¹²² Fernando de los Ríos, “Discurso pronunciado por Don Fernando de los Ríos en el acto organizado por la A.A.N.P.E.,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 14–15, 17, 19.

¹²³ “Lista de telegramas de adhesión...,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 21.

income for aid to the Spanish children before Republican defeat brought the Association to an end.

Defeat in Spain

In an open letter dated 11 January 1939, A.A.N.P.E. president Ramiro Valdés Daussá began by claiming that the visit by Fernando de los Ríos to the Polar Stadium the previous month had “consolidated [the Association’s] prestige and the seriousness of the work it accomplished.” Now, he wrote, in appreciation of this work, the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy and the American Medical Bureau had put at the A.A.N.P.E.’s disposal a ship to bring food and other products to Barcelona. One more time, he directed readers, the people of Cuba must mobilize all the individuals and groups supportive of Spain to send coffee, sugar, and other supplies to their “Spanish brothers.”¹²⁴ Based on the organizations offering the ship and the destination of Barcelona for the aid, it is certain that this Cuban assistance was destined specifically for Republican Spain. Unfortunately for the A.A.N.P.E. and other pro-Republican Cubans, Barcelona fell to Nationalist forces just fifteen days after the letter was written.

The final two issues of *¡Ayuda!*—February and April 1939—registered Republican defeat. Authors wished to turn their thoughts to the coming peace, but found that they could not escape anger. They expressed rage and illustrated the increased drama of the children’s condition. The reality of the day in Spain was “cannibalistic, lacking all military and political decency, lacking all virility.” It destroyed and negated fraternal feeling, a sense of community, every good quality of human nature. And trapped in it the poor innocent children were in most dire need of assistance. Heartbreaking descriptions of the plight of children in Spanish war zones, which had

¹²⁴ Ramiro Valdés Daussá to the Government and People of Cuba in General, 11 January 1939, 1/12:196/2.1/9–10, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

never required exaggeration, now acquired a tone of desperation as in a cable from the Office Internationale pour l'Enfance (International Office for the Children) received by the A.A.N.P.E. and published in the bulletin: "Our Delegation receives report names all assistance organizations Barcelona quotation marks hundreds refugee children little ones mothers arms arrive Barcelona after evacuation Reus, Valls, Tarragona, stop Urgent all Committees begin campaigns support organizations to supply provisions clothing refuge innocent offensive victims."¹²⁵ Starvation threatened 300,000 infants and 3 million children, stated a notice published by the Association reprinting another telegram requesting aid; infants needed \$1.00 per month to survive, and children over five years old required \$2.00. Telegrams from Paris sounded Spain's S.O.S. to "the civilized world."¹²⁶ The call for help did not so much change in the face of Republican defeat as it increased in urgency.

¡Ayuda! authors continued to employ familiar themes as they asked for universal assistance during "this sad hour" in February 1939. For all humanity and for their own children, they asserted, "all mothers, all women, all honorable men, without distinction of race or belief," should help the homeless and orphaned Spanish children. They appealed not only to Cubans' humanity but also to their anticolonial sentiment. The defeat of the Republic, authors argued, was a defeat of the Spanish government by foreign powers. The exclusive goal of the Italian and German "invasion" was "to turn our country into a colony." A visitor to Rome, they reported, had seen hanging in various grocery stores signs with "the following infamous words: 'We sell oil from our colonies in Spain.'" This framing of the defeat as colonialism extended from the special relationship argument, in which the "bad" Spain represented by Nationalists continued

¹²⁵ "Editoriales," *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 3.

¹²⁶ "La 'Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español' ha recibido desde París el siguiente despacho," n.d., 1/12:196/2.1/12, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

the tradition of Spanish colonialism which Cubans had overthrown. As we have seen, Juan Marinello addressed this theme in his introduction to Fernando de los Ríos in the Stadium Polar in Havana. He stated that “Our America” shared a strong fraternity with great Spaniards who struggled against the dominant caste in Spain. “Cuba, which lived and suffered for centuries under Franco’s predecessors’ harsh work of oppression,” he argued, knew “better than any other Hispanic country” the difference between that Spain and the one represented by an “exceptional type” of Spaniard such as de los Ríos. Cuba had fought against the “bad” Spain in its anticolonial struggles and today gave money and “the blood of its best sons” for the “good” Spain. Republican leaders such as “La Pasionaria,” Dolores Ibárruri, continued the work of Martí, Marinello stated. A female author combined the special relationship argument with that of the feminine role, calling on Cuban women to save the children of the Spanish mothers, “because the blood of these children is blood that runs through our veins.”¹²⁷

The final issue of *¡Ayuda!* in April 1939 illustrated defeat with a cover photograph of refugees from Catalonia. It showed a haggard woman with two children sitting on the ground in an image striking in its similarity to Dorothea Lange’s iconic “Migrant Mother” (1936).¹²⁸ Articles described and images showed the evacuation process. “El Martirio Español: Exodo Trágico” (“The Spanish Martyrdom: Tragic Exodus”) provided one powerful description.¹²⁹ Many focused on the evacuation of children. As noted above, a letter from one of the child residents of the Casa-Escuela begged Rosa Pastora Leclerc to do everything in her power to have

¹²⁷ Luis Soto Fernandez, “De la España Heroica: Los niños indefensos ‘Objetivo Militar’ del Fascismo,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 11; Juan Marinello, “Palabras de presentación de Don Fernando de los Ríos pronunciadas por Juan Marinello en el Stadium Polar,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 12–13; María Josefa Bolaños, “Un llamado a la conciencia de la mujer cubana,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 9 (January/February 1939): 20.

¹²⁸ Cover of *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939).

¹²⁹ Jacques Honore, “El Martirio Español: Exodo Trágico,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939): 8.

them brought to Cuba.¹³⁰ Another article chronicled efforts to save children from starvation in Madrid.¹³¹ A description of the work of the Office Internationale pour l'Enfance stressed the international quality of the effort to aid the Spanish children, acknowledging efforts by the peoples of Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Egypt, England, France, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and Uruguay.¹³² An article directed at women, entitled "Un llamado a la conciencia de la mujer cubana" ("A Call to the Conscience of the Cuban Woman"), pleaded: "Listen and attend, women of America, mothers of the world, to the clamor of the Spanish mothers."¹³³ In an article considering fascism and democracy, one author attempted to extract a lesson from the defeat. In the future, he wrote, people would try to understand how this could possibly have happened; but in the present, we must study our values, the values that have failed in Spain. We must ask ourselves, he admonished, whether it is possible to go on living in a world without completely revising these values.¹³⁴

The Comité Pro-Repatriación de Cubanos en Francia (Committee for Repatriation of Cubans in France) attended to more practical and immediate concerns. In the Association bulletin's final issue, free of any claims of nonpartisanship, it urged the Cuban people—always "by the side of Republican Spain"—to take new action in response to the catastrophe wrought by "the invasion of Catalonia." In addition to the tremendous work of the A.A.N.P.E., the Committee asserted, Cubans could be proud also that they had contributed combat volunteers to

¹³⁰ Francisco Pelayo, "Francisco Pelayo, niño de la Colonia Pueblo de Cuba, refugiado en Francia, escribe a Rosa Pastora Leclerc," *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939): 14.

¹³¹ Nini Haslund, "Madrid," *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939): 12.

¹³² M. L. M., "La obra del 'Office Internacional Pour L'Enfance,'" *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939): 24.

¹³³ Rafael Marquina, "Un llamado a la conciencia de la mujer cubana," *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939): 13.

¹³⁴ Antonio J. Colorado, "La Lección de España: Fascismo y Democracia," *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939): 6–7.

the Republican cause. These fighters were heroes, the Committee stated to *¡Ayuda!* readers, and many had fallen in combat. They had earned the respect and admiration of the Spanish people, but now they languished in concentration camps in France. Help bring these Cubans home, the Committee pleaded—it would be, “in addition to fulfilling a patriotic and human duty, a way to help the Spanish Republic” by alleviating one small part of its responsibilities during this time of great need.¹³⁵

The final issue included also a timeline listing all Association aid to date, a gesture of taking-stock as the wartime effort came to a close.¹³⁶ A brief message on the last page pledged continued work on behalf of the Spanish children. It stated that the organization must sustain its work as long as there were Spanish children in need, urging “we cannot abandon them.” No pen, it stated, could describe the misery and the fear felt by Spanish children refugees in the French concentration camps. Now more than ever, it concluded, they need our help. Peppered with emphasized phrases in all capital letters, the article sought to leave readers of the last issue with a renewed sense of urgency.¹³⁷ For good measure, the magazine’s back cover featured no images, only a restatement of the most salient points of the final article, alone on the page, succinct this time and nearly all in uppercase letters:

400,000 Spanish children, women, and men are refugees in the concentration camps of France. Hunger and cold are decimating those guiltless victims. The concentration camps are inhospitable. (They do not have shelters.) The Association of Aid to the Children of the Spanish People asks for help for these refugees. Now more than ever, people of Cuba, help them!¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Comité Pro-Repatriación de Cubanos en Francia, “Al Pueblo de Cuba,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939): 9.

¹³⁶ “Relación de la ayuda prestada por esta Asociación hasta la fecha,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939): 3.

¹³⁷ “La A.A.N.P.E. continuará su ayuda á la infancia,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939): 31.

¹³⁸ Back cover of *¡Ayuda!* no. 10 (April 1939).

With these impassioned lines *¡Ayuda!* ended after ten issues spanning twenty-two months of publication.

The last evidence of the existence of the Association in the archive consists of two letters to Paris written by president Ramiro Valdés Daussá on 17 and 18 April 1940. The first noted that, as of November 1939, the A.A.N.P.E. had abandoned its organizational headquarters and had been operating out of the home of Rosa Pastora Leclerc. It notified the Office Internationale pour l'Enfance that it was liquidating its assets and it included a final donation of \$979.27, all the Association's remaining funds. The president specified a few particular destinations for small amounts of the money, including \$25.00 to a French concentration camp for the mother of Casa-Escuela former resident Francisco Pelayo. The remainder, he indicated, was to serve as "our final donation to the Spanish refugee children in France."¹³⁹ The second letter the A.A.N.P.E. president addressed to Francisco Pelayo's mother, informing her of the money sent in her name. "With true sorrow," he wrote to the woman in the Cahartre-Evre-Loir camp, "we wish to express that we have terminated all the work of this Association." He told her she could stay in touch by writing to Rosa Pastora Leclerc and sent a tender greeting to the boy.¹⁴⁰

Defeat of the Spanish Republic, then, brought an end to Cuba's Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español. A lack of bulletin issues and archival materials between the spring of 1939 and these final letters from April 1940 makes difficult the task of determining with certainty why A.A.N.P.E. efforts deteriorated so rapidly after the war's end. One possible

¹³⁹ Ramiro Valdés Daussá, Havana, to Henri Wallon, Paris, 17 April 1940, 34.1/2005(16–17), Serie Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español, Sección Otros Instituciones Nacionales, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

¹⁴⁰ Ramiro Valdés Daussá, Havana, to María Uria, Cahartre-Evre-Loir, France, 18 April 1940, 34.1/2005(22), Serie Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español, Sección Otros Instituciones Nacionales, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

explanation is that the pro-Republican Cubans who supported the Association's efforts were so disappointed and disheartened by defeat that they lost motivation to continue organizing and fundraising. Another obvious possibility is that the organization had lost its most general and potent motivating force—both for its leadership and its supporters—the drama of warfare and wartime suffering. Not only a desire for Republican victory but also, and perhaps more powerfully, the deeply felt need to save the children of a closely related fellow nation in desperate and violent crisis had energized thousands of ordinary Cubans to contribute what they could. Though the concentration camps of France were grim, children languishing in a friendly democracy did not match the anguish of children actively bombed by fascist planes. The Nazi invasion of France would change the situation dramatically, but by then the A.A.N.P.E. had dissolved. As we will examine in the conclusion, a new wave of antifascism began to gain momentum in Cuba as World War II got underway.

CHAPTER 4

Sons of America, Sons of Spain and of Africa: Black Cuban Antifascism

At the start of the Spanish Civil War, many people of African descent from around the world (as well as some Africans) stood ready to join the Republican cause, seeing it, as did other foreign supporters, as their own. Prominent black Cuban intellectuals and activists articulated an argument that the fight against fascism was closely linked to the struggle of black Cubans. Their antifascism overlapped with and to a great extent came to encompass during the 1930s their critiques of racism, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and other forces interpreted as oppressive globally. Black Cubans served in Spain as volunteers and organized for the Republic at home. Here we study antifascist and pro-Republican activism by black Cubans.

Black Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic existed within the context of political engagement in the African diaspora. Considering three other antifascist groups in subsequent chapters, we will see that Cuban Masonic and Communist activists operated in connection with hierarchical, multinational organizations, while anarchists and anarchist groups connected with their comrades in other countries through shared ideology and political collaboration. The transnational connections and networks accessed and utilized by black Cuban antifascist activists, on the other hand, were based in large part on a sense of shared cultural identity that was not at first explicitly politicized. Viewing black Cuban antifascism in its diasporic context, we encounter the ways in which ethnic and political solidarities interacted.

Black Cuban antifascism was closely connected with African-American antifascism. Examining the context of the black diaspora in the 1920s and 1930s, we see how cultural and political movements overlapped and intermingled, with a specific focus on the strong connections between black Cubans and African Americans. Key events that inspired and

motivated a steady political radicalization and shift to the left within the black diaspora—the anti-Machado struggle in Cuba, the Great Depression, the trial of the “Scottsboro Boys” in Alabama, and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia—set the stage for the black diasporic antifascism in which Cubans played an important role. We touch upon some key figures—particularly African American Langston Hughes and black Cuban Nicolás Guillén, both intellectuals and activists—who played formative roles in shaping and reshaping transnational black movements during these two vibrant decades, considering how they became involved in antifascism and the Spanish conflict, and how they interpreted this activism as connected to their cultural and political identities.

We find that some black Cuban antifascists focused less intently on the conflict in Spain than other Cuban antifascists, showing more concern for the defense of Ethiopia—a powerful African diasporic symbol—against Italian fascism than they did for the Spanish Republic. Others argued that Cubans of African descent were also sons of Spain, and that the Spanish conflict was their struggle as well. Black Cuban antifascism was characterized by differing viewpoints regarding the role of cultural identity in relation to political identity. In both types of identities tension existed between the national and the transnational.

Antifascism and a Transnational Black Left

The years preceding the conflict in Spain constituted a highly dynamic time for transnationally connected communities of people of African descent. Creative efflorescence in black cultures coupled with political militancy in response to racism, colonialism, imperialism, social injustice, and economic hardship during the 1920s and 1930s. Black political and cultural movements including Garveyism, the Harlem Renaissance, the francophone movement

Négritude, and *Afrocubanismo* (Afro-Cubanism) created and strengthened links between individuals and groups across national borders, and formed important, interconnected parts of a racially organized black internationalism: the pan-African movement. Pan-Africanism arose around the turn of the twentieth century as an effort to foster “cultural and political *coordination* of the interests of peoples of African descent around the world,”¹ which W. E. B. DuBois defined in a 1933 article published in the African-American periodical *Crisis*: “Pan-Africa means intellectual understanding and co-operation among all groups of Negro descent in order to bring about at the earliest possible time the industrial and spiritual emancipation of the Negro peoples.”² The political and cultural movements of the 1920s within the pan-African world established connections on which transnational black activism of the 1930s would depend. Local incidents in various parts of the world such as the Scottsboro trials in Alabama (1931) and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935) inspired transnational organizing campaigns by black activists and their allies, serving in many cases to bring together black activists and nonblack leftists. Prior to discussing black Cuban antifascism, it will be useful to engage in a brief exploration of this context of transnational black cultural identity and political engagement.

In this discussion, we will reference the “black diaspora” or “African diaspora.” It is useful, therefore, to begin with a clear definition of what we mean by this term, especially since it was not used by the historical actors we study.³ Most simply, it refers collectively to African-

¹ Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” *Social Text* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 46. Emphasis in the original.

² Quoted in Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” 46.

³ An extensive and comparative literature on the concept of diaspora in general provides a detailed historical analysis and conceptualization of the term. See, for just a few examples: Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996); Kim D. Butler, “Defining Diaspora,” *Diaspora* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 189–219; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001); Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” *Social Text* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 45–73; William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,”

descended communities around the globe, or, more poetically, “Africa’s scattered children.”⁴ Historically, the concept of diaspora usually connotes forced exile or removal of an ethnic group from a homeland and its dispersal to multiple other lands, sometimes referred to as a “victim diaspora.”⁵ Originating in the enslavement of Africans, their abduction from Africa and distribution as property across the Americas and elsewhere, the black diaspora fits into this category. Other characteristics of a victim diaspora relevant to our study include: a collective, idealized origin myth or myths about the ancestral homeland and some discussion of eventual return there; a belief that members of the diaspora should share a commitment to maintain, protect, and/or restore the homeland; the perception of a permanent lack of full acceptance by and integration into host societies; an enriching creative energy generated by the challenge of life in sites of captivity and/or oppression outside of the homeland; and an ethnic, cultural, and/or community solidarity—a shared consciousness, identity, and “sense of a common fate”—sustained over time, shaped by the imagined relationship to the mythologized homeland, and extant across the national borders of host countries.⁶ We will see that all of these elements characteristic of the black diaspora are relevant to the development and functioning of black

Diaspora 1, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 83–99; Khachig Tölölyan, “Rethinking *Diaspora(s)*: Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment,” *Diaspora* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 3–36. For an attempt at defining “African diaspora” specifically, see: Colin Palmer, “Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora,” *Perspectives* 39, no. 6 (September 1998).

⁴ Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Verso, 1999), 200–201. An important related concept is that of the “Black Atlantic.” Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁵ Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 1–2. Cohen notes that some scholars discuss “diaspora X in country Y,” but critiques this usage, arguing: “It is perhaps unnecessary that all diasporas are, such as the prophets in the Bible claimed of the Jews, ‘scattered to all lands,’ but I imagine most would agree that in order to qualify perhaps they should be dispersed to more than one.” Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 22.

⁶ Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies,” 83–84; Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 5–6, 21, 23–29.

Cuban antifascism: Ethiopia served in the role of the mythologized ancestral homeland; the fascist invasion of Ethiopia inspired an impetus to protect the homeland; racism and economic hardship in Cuba, the United States, and other American countries generated cross-border solidarity between African-descended people; creative energy employed by black artists and intellectuals fostered this solidarity; and a “sense of a common fate” developed around a perception of a global fascist threat in which the concept of fascism encompassed all the ills suffered by black people around the world.

Predictably, the final element of diaspora listed—a form of transnational solidarity based on a perception of cultural sameness—sometimes experienced tension with other conceptions of identity, including nationalism and internationalist ideologies. Diasporic solidarity competed with a loyalty to the host country and came into conflict with a sense of superiority by diaspora members in one country over those in another.⁷ As members of the African diaspora, black Cubans fostered transnational solidarity with other people of African descent yet struggled to reconcile their place in the pan-African world with their Cuban nationalism and with hostilities that existed on the island between black Cubans and African-descended people of different nationalities, principally Jamaicans and Haitians. The field of diaspora studies suggests the existence of an persistent tension for black people of the Americas relevant to the Cuban case: On the one hand, black Cubans desired their rightful place as equals within Cuban nationalism; on the other, they felt a permanent separation from a secure sense of homeland due both to the kidnapping of their ancestors from Africa and to the racial prejudice that kept them always somewhat apart from their fellow countrymen.⁸ In some instances, this tension led to negative

⁷ Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 25.

⁸ Literary scholar Monica Kaup describes the diasporic tension black Cubans experienced as follows: “Afro-Cubans, like African-Americans, vacillate between a utopian desire for ‘homecoming’ in the

outcomes, such as the conception of the above-mentioned hierarchy in which black Cubans imagined themselves to be superior to Jamaicans and Haitians on the island. In other cases, the tension inspired more productive developments, such as transnational solidarity. One diaspora scholar interprets the challenge of a multilayered diasporic identity as a potentially positive force, writing: “The tension between an ethnic, a national, and a transnational identity is often a creative, enriching one.”⁹ We find this to have been true in the case of black Cuban antifascism, in which solidarities based on black identity, Cuban national identity, and internationalist political identities such as Communism overlapped. Black Cuban activists worked to reconcile their ethnic and political solidarities—both nationalist and internationalist—during the period of our study, and we will see such tensions operate within the development of their antifascist solidarities.

Within the larger diaspora, connections with African Americans were particularly significant to black Cubans during the 1920s and 1930s. They believed that the situation of their racial brethren to the north was more similar to their own than those of other black populations of the Americas.¹⁰ One of the most celebrated transnational interpersonal links of this period is that between Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén and U.S. poet Langston Hughes, both of whom would become antifascists and travel to Spain on behalf of the Spanish Republic.¹¹ Hughes had close

discourse and social practice of New World nationalism and an alternative remembering of their displacement in the Middle Passage, an exile that the exclusions of contemporary racism perpetuate.” Monica Kaup, “‘Our America that is Not One’: Transnational Black Atlantic Discourses in Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes,” *Discourse* 22 (Fall 2000): 90–91.

⁹ Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 24.

¹⁰ Frank Andre Guridy, “Blues and *Son* from Harlem to Havana,” in *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 123.

¹¹ For a sample of literature on the relationship between the two poets, see: Martha Cobb, *Harlem, Haiti, and Havana: A Comparative Critical Study of Langston Hughes, Jacques Roumain, Nicolás Guillén*

ties to Spain and Latin America—particularly Mexico, Haiti, and Cuba—throughout his career, taking on an international role as a “cultural mediator.”¹² He met Guillén during trips to Havana in 1930 and 1931, during which the latter served as a tour guide for the already-famous North American poet,¹³ and the two initiated “a long and fruitful friendship which was later renewed in Spain during the Civil War.”¹⁴

It was in the Caribbean, argues one Hughes scholar, that the U.S. poet became “conscious that the black experience, with its attendant feelings of alienation and subjugation, is an international phenomenon.” For example, his short story “Little Old Spy” (1934) depicted racist policies in Cuba under Machado, which he experienced upon encountering legal trouble for attempting to visit a U.S.-controlled, segregated beach on the island. He attacked U.S. neocolonialism in Cuba as well, as in the poem “To the Little Fort, San Lázaro, On the Ocean Front Havana” (1931), in which he compared the attack of U.S. imperialism on Cuba to pillage by pirates earlier in the island’s history.¹⁵ Back in the United States, Hughes promoted the work of black Cuban intellectuals and artists in the context of the Harlem Renaissance. Analyzing the transnational networks that linked the Harlem Renaissance and *Afrocubanismo* (Afro-Cubanism) in the 1920s and 1930s, Frank Andre Guridy places Guillén, Hughes, and their relationship into a

(Washington: Three Continents Press, 1979); Keith Ellis, “Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes: Convergences and Divergences,” in *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans Before the Cuban Revolution*, Lisa Brock and Digna Castaneda Fuertes, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 129–167; Guridy, “Blues and Son,” 107–150; Kaup, ““Our America,”” 87–113; William Scott, “Motivos of Translation: Nicolas Guillén and Langston Hughes,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 5, no. 2 (2005): 35–71.

¹² Edward J. Mullen, *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1977), 15–46.

¹³ Kaup, ““Our America,”” 92.

¹⁴ Mullen, *Langston Hughes*, 27.

¹⁵ Mullen, *Langston Hughes*, 32; Ellis, “Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes,” 141.

transnational New Negro movement located in Havana as well as Harlem. Participants in both countries, he argues, saw the Harlem Renaissance and *Afrocubanismo* as two parts of a broader cultural phenomenon. The New Negro movement was inherently diasporic; intellectuals and artists in the movement drew upon a perception of a common cultural identity to craft a new self, the “New Negro.”¹⁶ Transnational cultural exchange along the “Harlem-Havana nexus”¹⁷ created important diasporic links; black people from Cuba, the United States, and other countries built a sense of solidarity around shared creative production in the arts and letters, they came “to ‘feel’ part of the same ‘*gente*’ [people] regardless of the language they spoke or their cultural proximity to Africa.”¹⁸ Political engagement facilitated by this solidarity, in turn, inspired new creative output. As Hughes insisted in a conversation in Valencia in 1937 with Guillén and Spanish poet Miguel Hernández about the “new literature” that would come out of war and revolution: “we know already how the great human movements present always a concurrent artistic, principally literary” component.¹⁹

Some Cuban intellectuals criticized the transnational solidarity of the black diaspora, and took issue with comparisons between Hughes and Guillén, asserting Cuban nationalism against any idea of similarity to U.S. culture. Comparing Hughes’s blues poems with Guillén’s “*Motivos de son*” (“*Son Motifs*”), Cuban journalist Ramón Vasconcelos stated in 1930: “Cuba is not the Yankee South nor is the *son* the ‘Blues,’ just as the guitar is not the banjo.” Similarly, Cuban critic Regino E. Boti wrote in 1932: “Just as a Yankee and a Cuban have nothing in

¹⁶ Guridy, “Blues and *Son*,” 107–111.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁹ Guillén, “Un poeta en espardeñas: Hablando con Miguel Hernández,” *Mediodía* no. 39 (25 October 1937): 11. Hughes would continue to wrestle with finding a balance between art and politics throughout his career.

common . . . [t]he two poets are different, and so are their poems.”²⁰ In these assertions, the nationalistic desire to assert Cuban independence from U.S. cultural influence attempts to disrupt transnational solidarity. Indeed, Guillén “saw it as his patriotic duty to promote Cuban values, to make Cuban popular culture a pillar in the quest for full sovereignty, and to use his literary talent to foster the equality and unity of the Cuban population,” states one scholar of both Guillén and Hughes.²¹ Guillén connected his own mission to those of Cuba’s national heroes, both black and white, who interpreted as fundamentally intertwined the struggles for Cuban independence and against slavery. Guillén possessed a strong nationalist motivation alongside his diasporic racial and internationalist political motivations. There existed significant historical differences and hostilities between the nations of Hughes and Guillén, but the “distinction nevertheless left the two writers considerable common ground and parallel perceptions.”²² The movement within which they worked was transnational, operating along interconnected networks across oceans and borders as well as fostering collaboration and exchange. Cultural connections between Harlem and Havana—of which the relationship between Hughes and Guillén is an iconic example—transformed during the early 1930s into organizing networks used for political action.

By that time members of the New Negro movement were becoming increasingly concerned with politics. Political involvement grew out of the cultural project in part: Intellectuals and artists of the New Negro movement had come to challenge elite cultural notions of respectability. In both Cuba and the United States, they “foregrounded precisely the cultural practices and the material conditions of the working classes shunned by aspiring-class and elite

²⁰ Quoted in Mullen, *Langston Hughes*, 30–31, 44n53, 44n55. Translations based on original Spanish texts printed in notes.

²¹ Ellis, “Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes,” 135.

²² *Ibid.*

blacks,” and looked “for alternative sources of ‘intelligence’ in the less ‘respectable’ urban cultures of the black working classes.”²³ Then came the Great Depression. The economic crisis that began in 1929, devastating many working people of different races and classes, came even earlier for blacks and for Cubans. Beginning in the mid-1920s, the onset of economic downturn in the United States impacted black communities disproportionately. As Hughes wrote: “The depression brought everybody down a peg or two. And the Negro had but few pegs to fall.”²⁴ The situation politicized many African Americans who joined with activists of other ethnicities in militant organizing.²⁵ The crisis came early also for Cubans generally, and the increasingly repressive and dictatorial Machado government exacerbated the ills of severe economic hardship. By the first two years of the new decade, conditions were deteriorating rapidly. The island to which Hughes returned in 1931 was far more desperate economically and turbulent politically than the one he had visited in 1930. The onslaught of the Depression in both countries and the political turmoil in Cuba shifted the emphasis of the Harlem-Havana interaction “from one that celebrated the art and literature of the New Negro to a politicized transnational struggle against imperialism and racism.”²⁶ Transnational cooperation between black Cubans and African Americans that had coalesced around vibrant cultural exchange during the 1920s became fertile ground for activist solidarity during the 1930s. Various activist causes served to strengthen further the bonds between these groups, and to connect them with the international political left.

²³ Guridy, “Blues and *Son*,” 118–119.

²⁴ Hughes, *The Big Sea* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), 247 quoted in Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker 1619–1973* (New York: International Publishers, 1974), 188.

²⁵ See Foner, “Black Workers During the Great Depression,” in *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 188–203.

²⁶ Guridy, “Blues and *Son*,” 145.

One such cause early in the decade was that of the “Scottsboro Boys,” nine young African-American men put on trial in Scottsboro, Alabama and threatened with execution in 1931 after being wrongfully accused of the rape of two white women and of attacking a group of young white men on a train. People of African descent and their allies—including Communist Parties, especially the C.P.U.S.A., which led the campaign—organized in multiple countries to support the young men, whose plight “stirred deep international indignation.”²⁷ Hughes visited some of the accused men in jail wrote about Scottsboro in a number of works.²⁸ Black activists and leftists in Cuba watched the case closely, and took part in the international campaign to save the lives of the accused. Still immersed in the black diaspora’s vibrant cultural moment, some expressed solidarity in verse. The 1934 poem “Hermano Negro” (“Negro Brother”) by Chinese-black-Cuban poet Regino Pedroso, for instance, exemplified the transition from primarily cultural concerns within the Harlem-Havana exchange and the wider pan-African world to an increasing politicization, and the role Scottsboro played in this change. Addressing his “negro brother” in Haiti, Jamaica, New York, and Havana, the Cuban poet urged:

Escucha allá en Scottsboro,
 en Scottsboro, en Scottsboro
 Da al mundo con tu angustia rebelde
 tu humana voz
 y apaga un poco tus maracas!

Listen there in Scottsboro,
 in Scottsboro, in Scottsboro
 Give your rebellious cry to the world
 Your human voice
 And tone down your maracas a
 little!²⁹

²⁷ Carmen Gómez García, “Cuban Social Poetry and the Struggle against Two Racisms,” in *Between Race and Empire*, 228.

²⁸ Ellis, “Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes,” 147–148; Arnold Rampersad, “Chronology,” in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 6, Leslie Catherine Sanders, ed. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), xiv.

²⁹ Regino Pedroso, “Hermano Negro,” reprinted and translated in Guridy, “Blues and *Son*,” 146–147. Many scholars quote various stanzas of this poem. It appears in full in Spanish in Debbie Lee, “Regino Pedroso and the Creation of a Triple Consciousness,” *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 2, no. 3 (July 2003): 231–233.

To inform interested Cuban readers about the case and to place the events of Scottsboro within the broader context of unjust conditions suffered by African Americans to the north, journalist Manuel Marsal published a book in Havana in 1932 entitled *El negro en los Estados Unidos de América: El caso Scottsboro* (*The Black in the United States of America: The Scottsboro Case*).³⁰ Another example of Cuban engagement with the events in Alabama is Cuban author and Communist Mirta Aguirre's 1935 poem "Scottsboro," a critique of race relations and capitalism in the United States. Calling the case "an iron put to the fire and lifted into the belly of a race," Aguirre blamed racism in the forms of lynch laws and the Ku Klux Klan as well as capitalism and imperialism for attacking "nine blacks almost children." Scottsboro in "Yankeeland," she wrote, "is a cloak of martyrdom and a cloak of shame which covers the two races."³¹ The Scottsboro case and resultant transnational organizing campaign helped to radicalize members of the black diaspora, including Cubans, who read works such as those cited above.³² In the context of economic hardship brought on by the global Great Depression, of horrifying racial violence in the United States, and of persistent injustice—racial and otherwise—in Cuba under the increasingly oppressive Machado government, the Scottsboro case marked a significant turning point at which the cultural-political balance of the black diaspora's transnational engagement tipped from an emphasis on creative output during the cultural moment of the 1920s to an emphasis on political activism during the 1930s.

³⁰ Cited in Gómez García, "Cuban Social Poetry," 228, 247n30.

³¹ Mirta Aguirre, "Scottsboro," reprinted and translated in Gómez García, "Cuban Social Poetry," 230–231. Also cited in: Manning Marable, "Race and Revolution in Cuba: African American Perspectives," in *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience*, Marable, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 96, 106n14; Peter McLaren, *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 80.

³² Guridy, "Blues and *Son*," 145.

Another key event in the emergence of a transnational black activism tied to the political left within the African diaspora during the 1930s was the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (also known at that time as Abyssinia) in 1935. The Scottsboro case in 1931 had inspired the ire of activists around the world who railed against racism, and in some cases capitalism and imperialism. The invasion of a free African nation by Mussolini's forces in 1935 drew the same angry criticisms, but by this later date, activists had begun to interpret and understand all these ills—and others—as parts of a consuming evil force: fascism. It is in 1935, therefore, that we can locate the emergence of strongly articulated antifascism within the black diaspora. Here we consider briefly the reception of fascist Italy's invasion within the African diaspora broadly, using many examples of reactions by African Americans, before examining in depth below the black Cuban response. By considering the interpretations and beliefs of African Americans, we do not intend to imply that African Americans and black Cubans were identical—in fact, there existed significant cultural differences and inequality between them. However, we focus here on the common ground on which diverse members of the African diaspora built black antifascism during the 1930s.

We have seen the importance of the idea of a “homeland” within a victim diaspora, a mythologized place which members feel a duty to protect and renew and from which they derive some sense of their identities. Though the continent of Africa served this function generally within the African diaspora, the nation of Ethiopia held a special place in the minds of many. As one diaspora scholar puts it, “by far the most significant notions of the African homeland were imbricated in ‘Ethiopia’—the place, the symbol, the idea, and the promise.” For many members of the diaspora in the Americas, the African nation represented not just a mythical homeland but indeed an identity: “‘Ethiopia’ was more of a concept of ‘blackness’ or ‘Africanity,’ only loosely

connected with the country of Ethiopia itself.”³³ In this way, antifascist organizing to defend Ethiopia by diasporic people of African descent constituted self-defense. Ethiopia was the only nation in Africa that, under the leadership of Emperor Menelik II (ruled 1889–1913), had maintained its sovereignty during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries while European powers divided between them the rest of the continent into exploitative colonies. Menelik’s forces defeated Italy’s colonizing efforts in 1896. Interpreters of this anticolonial history within the diaspora celebrated Ethiopia’s liberty. In his “Ballad of Ethiopia,” for example, Hughes identified Ethiopia as the place

Where the mighty Nile’s
Great headwaters rise
And the black man’s flag
In bright freedom flies.³⁴

Ethiopia was also one of the first countries on earth to have adopted Christianity, and signified therefore an “African Jerusalem” to many in the diaspora, a “cradle of civilization.”³⁵ Ancient histories claiming Ethiopia as the progenitor of Egyptian civilization and favorable references to it in the Bible³⁶ contributed to a sense of Ethiopia as the cradle of all civilization.³⁷ Throughout the diaspora, argues one historian, many believed “Ethiopia had been predestined by biblical

³³ Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 37–38.

³⁴ Hughes, “Mussolini, Don’t You ‘Mess’ with Me: Ballad of Ethiopia,” *Afro-American* (28 September 1935): 3.

³⁵ Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘This Ain’t Ethiopia, But It’ll Do’: African Americans and the Spanish Civil War,” in *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 129.

³⁶ William R. Scott, “Black Nationalism and the Italo-Ethiopian Conflict 1934–1936,” *The Journal of Negro History* 63, no. 2 (April 1978): 118.

³⁷ Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 37.

prophecy to redeem the black race from white rule.”³⁸ Built upon this powerful narrative, the idea of Ethiopia came to represent the freedom and dignity of black people worldwide.

The Italian invasion, therefore, constituted a deep affront that sparked an “international confrontation with fascism that rocked the Pan-African world,” in the words of Robin D. G. Kelley.³⁹ Members of the black diaspora took the Italian attempt to colonize Ethiopia personally, identifying Ethiopians as their endangered kinfolk, and it inspired an organized campaign in 1935 and 1936 “to save the last outpost of Negro rule in the world from white domination.”⁴⁰ For example, James Yates, an African American who would go on to volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, remembered encountering an angry rally in Harlem one day in October 1935, and, upon asking a passerby about its motivation, was told: “Why, man, don’t you know? That Mussolini has invaded the homeland of Ethiopia!”⁴¹ Hughes called people of the African diaspora to antifascism in defense of Ethiopia’s freedom:

All you colored peoples,
No matter where you be,
Take for your slogan:
AFRICA BE FREE!

All you colored peoples,
Be a man at last,
Say to Mussolini,
No! You shall not pass!⁴²

³⁸ Scott, “Black Nationalism,” 121.

³⁹ Kelley, ““This Ain’t Ethiopia,” 123.

⁴⁰ Scott, “Black Nationalism,” 119–120; Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 39.

⁴¹ James Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid: Memoir of a Black American in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing Inc., 1989), 91.

⁴² Hughes, “Mussolini, Don’t You ‘Mess’ with Me,” 3.

In this way, activists couched pleas for antifascist solidarity with Ethiopia in racial terms, counting upon a diasporic sense of identity to move people of African descent to act.

As members of the black diaspora fostered solidarity with Ethiopians, they interpreted the actions of Italian fascists as representative of the same kinds of racial, colonial or imperialist, and capitalist oppression they experienced in their own countries. For example, African-American labor leader A. Phillip Randolph “linked the cruel, uncalled-for rape of Ethiopia to the terrible repression of Black people in the United States.”⁴³ These forms of oppression constituted “the program of the white world” in the words of African-American intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois. Expressing a related sentiment, a leader of the N.A.A.C.P. stated angrily: “Italy, brazenly, has set fire under the powder keg of white arrogance and greed which seems destined to become an act of suicide for the so-called white world.”⁴⁴ Du Bois expressed the opinion that the whole world, including the great powers, would have come to Ethiopia’s defense if Ethiopians were white (a belief that would be belied shortly by the example of the Spanish Republic).⁴⁵ As these statements indicate, some in the African diaspora viewed race hatred as the primary characteristic of fascism, encompassing or causing its other ills. Kelley argues: “Black nationalists generally believed that indifference on the part of Western nations (most of which had their own African colonies to contend with) was nothing short of an act of racism. The invasion of Ethiopia was merely the first skirmish in what they viewed as a worldwide race war.”⁴⁶ This view experienced tension with the promotion of a transnational, interracial,

⁴³ Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid*, 92.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Scott, “Black Nationalism,” 122.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Kelley, ““This Ain’t Ethiopia,”” 130.

antifascist solidarity. African-American Spanish Civil War volunteer Yates recalled the looting of Italian stores in New York “by a minority of misguided Blacks” played upon by the “Garvey people and other nationalist groups.” He recalled trying to educate people, in an attempt to build solidarity, about the fact that many Italians condemned the invasion of Ethiopia and rallied against it across Italy. Yet “[m]ost Blacks saw the war in Ethiopia as merely another malicious attempt by whites to destroy Blacks,” he remembered, and “[s]ometimes it was difficult to quiet a Black audience long enough to speak.”⁴⁷

Regardless of their views on interracial solidarity, however, members of the African diaspora promoted antifascism as antiracism. Belief in racial or ethnic superiority and inferiority was indeed a central component of fascist ideology in some cases (though certainly not the exclusive purview of fascists). Closely related was the sense among people of African descent that fascism encompassed colonialism and imperialism, a view held also by antifascists of all ethnicities. Leftists both black and nonblack often shared the racial and colonial or imperial interpretations, and added to them the assertion of fascism as a force of oppressive and exploitative capitalism as well. These interpretations of fascism, typical among all antifascists, included other negative characteristics: violence, injustice, loss of liberty and sovereignty, exploitation, hatred, social and cultural regression, barbarity. Members of the black diaspora shared with other antifascists this same broad definition of fascism as a global threat that encompassed many of the ills they experienced in their own countries and feared worldwide.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid*, 93–94.

⁴⁸ Kelley argues that African-American volunteers arrived in Spain “armed with an unusually broad interpretation of fascism that included all forms of racist and class oppression.” Kelley, “‘This Ain’t Ethiopia,’” 145. I disagree respectfully with the assertion that this broad interpretation was unusual. As we see throughout this study, an encompassing definition of fascism was common among many antifascists of diverse backgrounds.

We have identified, however, a significant distinction between black and nonblack antifascism. Nonblack antifascists condemned fascism for fomenting hatred among people of different races and ethnicities, whereas they saw themselves as promoting fraternity and solidarity. However, as the quotations above show, powerful voices within the African diaspora equated fascism more directly with a “white world” agenda. The antifascism inspired within the African diaspora by Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia was in some instances, therefore, specifically a black antifascism against a white fascism rather than a multiracial antifascism against a racist fascism.

How, then, did transnational black support for Ethiopia transition and translate into pro-Republican activism during the Spanish Civil War? How did black antifascists view the struggle of Republican Spaniards as their own fight? One argument posits that the Iberian Peninsula served as a proxy for the African nation. According to a study of African-American involvement in Spain by Kelley, black antifascist volunteers in Spain imagined a confluence of the two fights. Since it was known widely that Italian fascists—as well as German Nazis—were aiding the Spanish Nationalists, black antifascists interpreted their actions as vengeance: fighting the invaders of Ethiopia on Spanish soil. In fact, approximately a dozen Ethiopians traveled to Spain to fight the Spanish Nationalists and their Italian and German allies. Ras Imru, a member of the Ethiopian royal family was among them, and expressed the opportunity for revenge posed by the Spanish conflict: “Madrid is not Addis Ababa. There we had nothing but our justified hatred. Here we have guns, tanks, and aeroplanes.”⁴⁹ Kelley captures the existence of this idea among less elite people of African descent by quoting from a work of fiction by African-American volunteer Oscar Hunter a phrase that encapsulates the thesis. In the story, a wounded black

⁴⁹ Quoted in Kelley, “‘This Ain’t Ethiopia,’” 139–140.

soldier explains his reason for coming to Spain: “I wanted to go to Ethiopia and fight Mussolini,” he says. “This ain’t Ethiopia, but it’ll do.”⁵⁰

The concept of confluence between the Ethiopian and Spanish conflicts was not easy to accept for all members of the black diaspora. Despite his commitment to solidarity, Spanish Civil War volunteer James Yates remembered his hesitant reaction upon being confronted for the first time with the question of volunteering in Spain. “Am I prepared to go to Spain?” he wondered. “I had been more than ready to go to Ethiopia, but that was different. Ethiopia, a Black nation, was part of me.” He was less familiar with “the reality of Spain and Europe.” And yet, he remembered—demonstrating again his belief in transnational, interracial, antifascist solidarity—“I knew what was at stake.” The struggle in Spain, he understood, was one between the poor, peasants, workers and unions, socialists and communists on one side against big landowners, the monarchy, and “right-wingers in the military” on the other. The former group had beaten the latter in an election, he knew, and if such an election had taken place in the United States, he believed, it “would have brought Black people to the top levels of government.” Republican Spain was “the perfect example for the world I dreamed of,” he wrote, a world in which wealth was redistributed, social services were introduced, and workers organized unions “in each factory.”⁵¹

As Yates’ remembrance suggests, the refocus of black antifascism on Spain relied in part upon connections within the African diaspora to the international political left. Like Yates, many

⁵⁰ Kelley, “‘This Ain’t Ethiopia,’” 123–124. Kelley notes that the Communist Party “adopted the slogan ‘Ethiopia’s fate is at stake on the battlefields of Spain’ and asked that material aid that had been collected for Ethiopia be passed on to Spain after the Ethiopian government could no longer receive shipments of supplies.” Some attacked the slogan and rejected the idea, he states, while many “black intellectuals and artists adopted the Spanish cause as their own.” Kelley, “‘This Ain’t Ethiopia,’” 132.

⁵¹ Yates, *Mississippi to Madrid*, 95–96.

members of the black diaspora embraced internationalist ideologies and interracial solidarity as important tools in their struggle against social and economic injustice. These black leftists understood the potential of the political and social events taking place in Republican Spain: It was, in Kelley's words "one of the few places on earth where black and white, Jew and gentile, could use guns to battle forces that threatened their individual and collective security," and "a nation experimenting in a radical democracy, where peasants, workers, and women had the right to vote, where Socialists and Communists held positions of power in government."⁵² For leftists within the black diaspora, therefore, a lack of any racial or ethnic identification—real or imagined—with the nation under fascist siege did not preclude a belief that the fight of that nation was their own. They saw the struggle against fascism as the struggle against oppression generally, regarding "Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler as representative of their oppressors back home."⁵³ In this way, they were exactly like other antifascist volunteers and supporters of the Spanish Republic around the world, regardless of race or ethnicity.

The Spanish Civil War served as a new meeting place for Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes, who had first encountered one another in Cuba in 1930. The two men were pictured alongside Soviet writer Mikhail Koltsov and U.S. writer Ernest Hemmingway in a photograph (Figure 4.1) published in the periodical Guillén edited in Cuba, *Mediodía*, in December 1937.⁵⁴

⁵² Kelley, "This Ain't Ethiopia," 133, 157.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁵⁴ *Mediodía* no. 48 (27 December 1937): 10.



Figure 4.1 Photograph published in *Mediodía* of Langston Hughes, Mikhail Koltsov, Ernest Hemingway, and Nicolás Guillén in Madrid in November 1937

The writing of both men on the subject of the Spanish conflict is well known. Guillén's work we will consider shortly during our discussion of black Cuban antifascism; before concluding this exploration of the development of antifascism in the black diaspora, however, it will be useful to consider for a moment Hughes's iconic response to the fight for Republican Spain.

Hughes served for six months as a correspondent in Europe for African-American newspapers covering the war, and his prolific written work of the period illustrates the perspective of an intellectual and activist within the context of the transnational black diaspora and political left. His journey began in July 1937 with the Second International Writers' Congress, where he reconnected with Guillén. In a speech he made to the Congress, he identified himself as "both a Negro and poor." This dual identity, he stated, gave him the authority "to speak for the most oppressed group in America, that group that has known so little of American democracy, the fifteen million Negroes who dwell within our borders." Connecting

the social, economic, and political oppression of African Americans to the situation in Spain and the threat of fascism broadly, he stated: “We are the people who have long known in actual practice the meaning of the word Fascism.” Referencing the plight of sharecroppers, the injustices of Jim Crow segregation, the violence of race riots and lynching, and the “sorrows of the nine Scottsboro boys, innocent young Negroes imprisoned some six years now for a crime that even the trial judge declared them not guilty of having committed,” Hughes made the connection for his audience in Paris: “Yes, we Negroes in America do not have to be told what Fascism is in action. We know. Its theories of Nordic supremacy and economic suppression have long been realities to us. And now we view it on a world scale.” He catalogued the global fascist threat, referencing Hitler’s attacks on labor unions and Jewish and black people in Germany; Mussolini’s “expedition of slaughter in Ethiopia” and segregationist policies in Italy; the “savage” mistreatment of neighboring peoples by and imperial ambitions of the Military Party of Japan; Batista and Vincent, “the little American-made tyrants,” in Cuba and Haiti; and the Spanish Nationalists led by Franco. This global threat, he told the Congress, was linked intimately to the practice of race prejudice:

Those who have already practiced bombing the little villages of Ethiopia now bomb Guernica and Madrid. The same Fascists who forced Italian peasants to fight in Africa now force African Moors to fight in Europe. They do not care about color when they can use you for profits or for war. Japan attempts to force the Chinese of Manchuria to work and fight under Japanese supervision for the glory and wealth of the Tokio bourgeoisie—one colored people dominating another at the point of guns. Race means nothing when it can be turned to Fascist use. And yet race means everything when the Fascists of the world use it as a bugaboo and a terror to keep the working masses from getting together. Just as in America they tell the whites that Negroes are dangerous brutes and rapists, so in Germany they lie about the Jews, and in Italy they cast their verbal spit upon the Ethiopians. And the old myths of race are kept alive to hurt and impede the rising power of the working class.

Hughes imagined that people of color, by “reach[ing] out their hands in friendship and brotherhood to all the white races of the earth,” would lead the way to a new society free of race prejudice, imperialism, and poverty in which “the workers of the world will have triumphed.” This powerful vision placed the “darker peoples of the world,” in Hughes’s words, at the helm of the fight. “We represent the end of race,” he stated. “And the Fascists know that when there is no more race, there will be no more capitalism, and no more war.”⁵⁵ To the African-American poet, people of color were the ultimate antifascists, poised to lead antifascism’s global triumph.

Hughes rejoiced in the black diaspora’s antifascist role, which was also antiracist in his interpretation. Celebrating the presence of black volunteers from the United States, Africa, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the English- and French-speaking West Indies in Spain, the African-American poet interpreted their fight as “a step in the battle for universal freedom” against fascism that “preache[d] the creed of Nordic supremacy and a world for whites alone.”⁵⁶ The use of colonized North Africans by the Spanish Nationalist forces saddened Hughes deeply,⁵⁷ as he articulated in one of his most famous pieces on the war, the poem “Letter from Spain Addressed to Alabama” (1937). In the work, he envisioned an African-American Republican volunteer from Alabama’s encounter with a captured wounded “Moor.” The poem’s subject expresses racial and anticolonial solidarity with the enemy combatant, interpreting the

⁵⁵ Hughes’s speech was published under the title “Too Much of Race,” *The Crisis* 44, no. 9 (September 1937): 272.

⁵⁶ Mullen, *Langston Hughes*, 37; Hughes, “Negroes in Spain,” *The Volunteer for Liberty* (13 September 1937) reprinted in Mullen, *Langston Hughes*, 96–98.

⁵⁷ Kelley notes that “Franco’s use of Moroccan troops was disheartening to black volunteers whose Pan-Africanist and pro-Ethiopian sentiments brought them to Spain in the first place. Why would their darker brethren, laboring under the yoke of colonial oppression, fight on behalf of the fascists?” Kelley, “‘This Ain’t Ethiopia,’” 146.

significance of the fight in Spain broadly in terms that could be described both as diasporic and leftist:

And as he lay there dying
In a village we had taken,
I looked across to Africa
And seed foundations shakin'.

Cause if a free Spain wins this war,
The colonies, too, are free—
Then something wonderful'll happen
To them Moors as dark as me.

I said, I guess that's why old England
And I reckon Italy, too,
Is afraid to let a workers' Spain
Be too good to me and you—

Cause they got slaves in Africa—
And they don't want 'em to be free.
Listen, Moorish prisoner, hell!
Here, shake hands with me!⁵⁸

As Kelley points out in his study of African-American volunteers in Spain, the anticolonial idealism Hughes expressed in this poem was complicated by the fact that the government of Republican Spain refused calls by radicals to grant independence to Spanish colonies in north and western Africa.⁵⁹ However, Hughes's hopeful sentiments about the Republic—also expressed in admiration for the lack of racial discrimination black volunteers encountered in

⁵⁸ Hughes, "Letter from Spain Addressed to Alabama," *The Volunteer for Liberty* (15 November 1937) reprinted in Mullen, *Langston Hughes*, 156–157.

⁵⁹ Kelley, "This Ain't Ethiopia," 147.

Spain⁶⁰—are representative of those felt by many politicized members of the African diaspora during the Spanish Civil War.

Though often the grim struggle necessitated uncomfortable pragmatism (and in many cases offered opportunities to the unscrupulous), people who were accustomed to suffering oppression placed their ardent hopes in the cause of the Republic's triumph—in the case of black antifascism, experience with racial prejudice and economic hardship contributed to a sense of solidarity with Spanish Republicans. Numerous black activists during the 1930s shared a consistent progression from engagement with the Scottsboro case to organizing around Ethiopia to support for the Spanish Republic. Black Puerto Rican bibliophile Arturo Schomburg, who lived in Harlem and played an instrumental role in connecting African Americans with people of African descent from the Caribbean, exemplifies this experience. He involved himself in the campaign to support the young black men accused in Scottsboro, protested against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and supported Republican Spain against Franco and foreign fascists.⁶¹ Driving forces behind this typical progression came from both the black diaspora and the international political left of the 1930s. They culminated in an African diasporic antifascism that encompassed diverse struggles and motivated transnational activists to make Spain's cause their own.

Exploring the African diaspora and the radicalization of transnational black activists during the 1920s and 1930s, we have touched upon the Cuban experience and the role of Cubans in this process. With a better understanding of this larger context, we turn our attention now to the specifics of black Cuban antifascism.

⁶⁰ Hughes, "Negroes in Spain," in Mullen, *Langston Hughes*, 96.

⁶¹ James, *Holding Aloft*, 214.

Black Cuban Antifascism

As it had for many other groups considered in this study, the struggle against Machado proved transformative for Cuba's black associations. During the republican period up through Machado's downfall, the island's black elites established and led associations that acted as both social clubs and political organizations. The black societies "espous[ed] uplift, respectability, cultural refinement, and intellectual pursuits," and were "entangled in mainstream parties in order to tap the opportunities offered by electoral politics," in the words of historian Melina Pappademos. In both capacities, the black societies fostered prestige for their leaders, helping "privileged blacks generate a robust public presence." To access republican Cuba's political system, elite Cubans of African descent carefully crafted civic identities and reliably delivered the electoral support of black constituencies to politicians in exchange for significant rewards including access to employment, schools, land, contracts, and other valuable resources.⁶² By so doing, they participated alongside other Cubans in the island's pervasive system of political patronage. Historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr. summarizes the function of this system: "Control of resources and revenues was the central if unstated issue of politics at all levels of the republic. The forms of conventional electoral competition disguised the urgent nonpolitical issues of Cuban politics. At stake was the livelihood of hundreds of political contenders and the many more thousands of dependents and supporters who, in varying degrees, relied on political patronage and public office for their well-being."⁶³

⁶² Melina Pappademos, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 11–12.

⁶³ Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 168.

Through organization of the associations, black elites sought not only material gains through the patronage political system but also the establishment of their inclusion in Cuban nationalism. They developed civic institutions as a means to assert their legitimacy in the island's political and social arenas, and to fight racial discrimination and break barriers. To be effective, elites and their institutions depended upon the ability to mobilize the broader black Cuban population politically, to exert political pressure and, most importantly, to deliver the black vote.⁶⁴ Their actions had some positive outcomes for Cuban blacks. Pappademos notes that “black societies’ exchange of political support for the resources controlled by political incumbents (that is, the clubs’ integration of clientelistic electoral networks) helped more resources reach black hands than would have been the case had they not participated in this sort of patronage negotiation.”⁶⁵ As long as the patronage political system was all Cubans’ primary access-point for resources, black Cubans—like all Cubans—had little choice but to participate for their survival. Less clear is to what extent this participation had any impact specifically on discrimination and barriers faced by Cuban communities of color.

By the mid-1930s many black Cuban activists rejected elite black leaders’ acquiescence as participants in a political system interpreted as corrupt and as a central source of the island’s ills. In so doing, they made up one important part of the powerful current of discontent that included diverse Cubans and that led to Machado’s overthrow and a changed political landscape on the island. Leaders of the established black societies, like other Cuban elites, found themselves under attack by new radical forces. “Although traditional black leaders claimed a sense of responsibility to the ‘race of color,’” Pappademos states, “black political outsiders

⁶⁴ Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 170–171.

⁶⁵ Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*, 12.

increasingly questioned their motivations and ties to corrupt administrations.”⁶⁶ These activists accused eminent black organizations, such as the Club Atenas (Athens Club), of having intimate ties to the corrupt and oppressive government as well as elitist pretensions. They organized a renovation of black Cuban activism, creating new societies such as the Directorio Social Revolucionario “Renacimiento” (Social Revolutionary Directorate “Renaissance”) and the Club Adelante (Forward Club). These groups shunned connection to the machinery of the political patronage system and claimed to be, in contrast with the established black societies, representative of the Cuban population of color.⁶⁷ They connected with the broader radical moment in Cuban politics. The “revolutionary mission of the black youth,” as stated in the black Cuban activist publication *Adelante* in 1936, consisted of education and indoctrination of the masses and “the recruitment of ethnic factors” to the cause of “common liberation.”⁶⁸

This new black Cuban activism following the downfall of Machado is one site in which we locate black Cuban antifascism. Specifically, the aforementioned publication *Adelante*, bulletin of the club of the same name, provides us with many examples of the integration of antifascism into the black Cuban organizing agenda of this period. As the quotation above suggests, the publication took on as its mission not only the progress of black Cubans but also work towards solidarity in the fight of the *clases populares* (popular classes) for a new Cuba. Concerned with “class consciousness” and “collective betterment,” authors in *Adelante* addressed a broad activist agenda.⁶⁹ These black Cuban activists of the 1930s asserted both

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁷ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 201–202.

⁶⁸ Serapio Páez Zamora, “La Misión Revolucionaria de la Juventud Negra,” *Adelante* 2, no. 16 (September 1936): 8.

⁶⁹ Anon., “Primer Aniversario,” *Adelante* 1, no. 12 (May 1936).

ethnic or cultural identities and political ones, and addressed both national and transnational agendas. Antifascism became part of their activism, and they related it to their readers' experiences. Another place in which we locate black Cuban antifascism is in the work of Nicolás Guillén, in his own writings and in the periodical he edited during the years of the Spanish Civil War, *Mediodía*. Guillén's work and his connections to the black diaspora which we discussed above help us to understand black Cuban antifascism as part of that important larger context. Examining these sources, we are able to identify and analyze the principal arguments of black Cuban antifascism, and to add to our understanding of the black Cuban experience in the Spanish conflict, expanding it beyond our previous mentions of Cuban volunteers of African descent who traveled to Spain. As we would expect having just explored some of the political currents and actions of the African diaspora in the 1930s, our discussion of black Cuban antifascism begins with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia.

As it did in so many contexts throughout the diaspora, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia inspired a strong assertion of antifascism in the pages of *Adelante*. Commentary in the publication argued that the Italian project in Ethiopia was colonial, capitalist, and fascist, and that these three driving forces were inextricably intertwined. The Italians' imperialist appetite was whet, wrote one author for the magazine, by the prospect of colonial investment in mines and plantations and of labor at starvation wages. These "economic necessities of capitalism" caused Italy to wage war on Ethiopia in an effort "to expand its colonial sphere" and "to oppress and exploit the Abyssinian people for the benefit of the Italian bourgeoisie." Unlike the colonial conquests of the nineteenth century, which had been typical of liberal capitalism, Italy's present colonial action constituted "the first war of corporatist fascism," according to an Italian author quoted in the black Cuban publication, "the initial act of power of the Fascist revolution, this

revolution of Mussolini which extends from the Mediterranean Basin to the Indian Ocean.” From the fascist perspective, the colonial project would therefore benefit Italians generally because of the fascist and corporatist organization of their society. Even war itself would benefit the people, Italian fascists argued in justification, because it would “rejuvenate the human body and purify the spirit.” In this way, the *Adelante* author commented, fascists prepared popular opinion in Italy for “the great tragedy that lies ahead.”⁷⁰ Black Cubans worried that the Italian people would be doped in this way into supporting fascist colonization efforts abroad.

The potential for colonization of Ethiopia by Italian fascists was particularly significant to black Cubans—as it was throughout the African diaspora—because of Ethiopia’s importance as a symbol. That Ethiopia was “the only free nation of Africa”⁷¹ was a central historical point made by authors in *Adelante*. The “ferocious war” waged by Italy was destroying the “relative liberty of Ethiopia.”⁷² Its status as the one African nation to resist European colonization successfully during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was of vital importance to the antifascism inspired in black Cubans by the Italian invasion of 1935. To emphasize this significant status *Adelante* recounted for readers the history of Ethiopia’s anticolonial struggle, the conflict between Italy and Emperor Menelik II known as the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1895–1896), and connected Ethiopia’s ongoing defense of its sovereignty to Cuba’s. It was important to authors in *Adelante* to foster solidarity between their readers and the people of Ethiopia by emphasizing connections between the two nations. “Our country,” wrote one Cuban author, “fought mightily for the same principles for which today the country of Menelik does.”

⁷⁰ José L. Franco, “El Conflicto Italo-Abisinio,” *Adelante* 1, no. 5 (October 1935): 8.

⁷¹ Anon., “Cuba y Abisinia,” *Adelante* 1, no. 6 (November 1935): 3.

⁷² Franco, “El Conflicto Italo-Abisinio,” *Adelante* 1, no. 5 (October 1935): 8.

In addition to drawing a general historic comparison between Ethiopia and Cuba, the author of the article “Menelik and Cuba” claimed a more substantial specific link: the mysterious figure Guillermo Enrique Eliseo, a.k.a. William H. Ellis, a man of African descent. According to the Cuban author in 1936, Ellis was a “Cuban born in the city of Santiago de Cuba” who lived in the United States from the age of four, where he adopted an Americanized “psychology” and name, and became a successful businessman on Wall Street and also in Mexico. His business interests extended to Ethiopia, the author stated, leading him to develop a friendly relationship with Emperor Menelik and to serve as a special envoy to Ethiopia for U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. Having never lost his “sincere love” for the land of his birth—the author claimed that Ellis “rendered great services to the work of our independence” during the Cuban War of Independence that began in 1895—Ellis allegedly spoke so beautifully about the island to the Ethiopian emperor that Menelik is quoted to have said: “The description you give me of Cuba is so lovely that it must surely be the second country created by God, after Abyssinia.”⁷³ The information presented by this Cuban author in 1936 contradicts assertions made in a couple of scholarly works on Ellis, who, evidence suggests, was not actually Cuban.⁷⁴ However, the significance of these stories for the 1930s Cuban reader is not diminished by uncertainty surrounding Ellis’s true identity. *Adelante* sought with evident pride to present a strong connection between Ethiopia and Cuba, and with this obscure historical figure provided just one specific example of the link.

⁷³ José M. Saenz, “Menelik y Cuba,” *Adelante* 1, no. 8 (January 1936): 17.

⁷⁴ Karl Jacoby, “Between North and South: The Alternative Borderlands of William H. Ellis and the African American Colony of 1895,” in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History*, Samuel Truett and Elliot Young, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 210–239; Richard Pankhurst, “William H. Ellis—Guillaume Enriques Ellesio: The First Black American Ethiopianist?,” *Ethiopia Observer* 15 (1972): 89–121.

Cuba's anticolonial past and anti-imperialist present served as a source of solidarity with the people of Ethiopia and informed the black antifascist response on the island to the Italian invasion. One editorial that drew an explicit comparison used a different version of the common David and Goliath metaphor often employed by Cubans in reference to the island's struggles with the United States to emphasize the valiant actions of a people against an immensely powerful adversary. Italian fascist attitudes and actions, the *Adelante* editorialist stated, had "engendered lively popular revulsion in all countries because the spirit of justice revolts against a tragic, desperate struggle between a giant and a child, in which, moreover, the giant is wrong." This revulsion was particularly tangible in Cuba because the island's historic, economic, and social conditions allowed its people "to comprehend the intensity of the drama which Ethiopia lives today." Cuba had fought heroically for liberty against a country—Spain—vastly more powerful than itself, just as Ethiopia did, lacking modern war capacity in the face of the Italian fascists' "technical perfection." Cuba was, like Ethiopia, a nation "kept prisoner by the influence of great foreign capitals"—both metropolises and financial interests, especially those of the United States—and might at any moment lose its sovereignty. The island was "a small country, surrounded by ambitions, harassed by those who see in it, like Mussolini in Abyssinia, a necessary and easy prey."⁷⁵

Furthermore, Mussolini sought to enslave Ethiopia.⁷⁶ As did other Cuban antifascists, Cubans of African descent extended the assertion of colonization to one of enslavement. The contention was even more resonant, perhaps, in the case of the African nation of Ethiopia than it would be later in the case of Spain. Slavery would result from colonization, *Adelante* reminded

⁷⁵ Anon., "Cuba y Abisinia," *Adelante* 1, no. 6 (November 1935): 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

black Cubans, drawing upon the example of Latin American history. Spaniards in the Americas claimed to “instill a new civilization in peoples of nonexistent, rudimentary, or radically different cultures than that which they brought with them”—as did the Italians in Ethiopia at present—when in fact they kept American indigenous peoples in “the most degrading servitude.” Cuba was no exception to this pattern. When the mortality of the island’s indigenous people threatened to cut into the Spanish colonizers’ greed, wrote one author in a piece entitled “The Black in the Colony,” the conquistadors brought slaves from Africa. And, the article emphasized for readers, other European nations traded in enslaved Africans as well,⁷⁷ just as European countries other than Italy colonized other African peoples in the present. In this historical context, Ethiopia’s role as the only African nation to fight off European incursion successfully and to remain free and sovereign was particularly meaningful to black Cubans. Asserting *Adelante* as the voice of “a very important portion of the Cuban population, the black,” an editorialist stated a message directed at the Cuban government: “the Cuban people is alongside that of Abyssinia and against the methods put into practice by the Italian government.” Black Cubans demanded freedom from European colonization for the nation of Ethiopia and freedom from enslavement for the Ethiopian people. Defining these dual freedoms as inherent Cuban values, they called upon their government to defend them in the international arena. “Cuba is for liberty,” the editorial stated, “and the government should assist in this.” The author made a specific policy request of the Cuban government: that it comply with “the sanctions imposed upon Mussolini by the League [of Nations] and accepted by our delegate before this institution for the maintenance of the peace violated by the fascist.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Alberto Arredondo, “El Negro en la Colonia,” *Adelante* 1, no. 12 (May 1936): 15.

⁷⁸ Anon., “Cuba y Abisinia,” *Adelante* 1, no. 6 (November 1935): 3.

In an argument closely related to those concerning colonization and enslavement, black Cuban authors emphasized in the pages of *Adelante* that racism was inherent to the Italian project in Ethiopia. To justify their colonial aspirations, one author stated, Italian fascists used “the absurd pretext of bringing civilization to Africa’s *tierras incultas*”—a phrase with a possible double interpretation meaning both uncultivated or virgin agricultural lands and uncultured or uncivilized countries.⁷⁹ Raised also in the comparison with Latin American colonization by Spain cited above, the question of civilization was central to the struggle between fascists and antifascists, as we see in other cases, and did not always pertain specifically to the issue of race. Antifascists defined civilization as progress, often in the forms of modernizing culture and social advancement, change which they claimed was specifically abhorrent to their fascist opponents. Antifascists countered fascist claims of bringing or maintaining civilization by attacking their use of violence against innocent human victims, and also specifically their bombing of civilian targets, urban centers, and buildings of societal and cultural import. Within their own countries, fascists promoted their conception of a civilizing project as protecting tradition and order against both political opponents and internal ethnic others. In the context of ethnic difference within a conflict, as in the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, mobilization of the concept of civilization took the predictable racist form stated above: The fascist invader claimed to bring civilization (defined as European culture and society) to “savage,” “barbaric,” or “backwards” others in foreign lands. Antifascists pushed back against this view by emphasizing the humanity of the victims. However, antifascist propaganda could stray into racist language, also, as we will see in cases of references to the North African mercenaries, or “Moors,” employed by Franco’s forces in Spain.

⁷⁹ Franco, “El Conflicto Italo-Abisinio,” *Adelante* 1, no. 5 (October 1935): 8.

Black Cubans understood that racism could be found beyond the confines of the fascist viewpoint in both their fellow antifascists and others. Many people who were neither fascist nor antifascist shared the fascist's concept of civilization and, defending it, espoused their own racism. One author in *Adelante* quoted a British publication, for example, that stated: "Italy fights for the cause of civilization against a barbaric people, and its victory will be a great advantage for Abyssinia and also for the whole world."⁸⁰ Black Cubans recognized racism in Cuban discussions of the Ethiopian conflict as well. "Every day," complained another author, "some periodical from the capital conveys gruesome news about alleged acts of barbarism committed by the soldiers of the Negus [Kingdom of Ethiopia] or just by some 'fierce' tribesman of Abyssinia." These types of reports, he noted, relied upon Italian sources and were "intended to present the Abyssinian people as the most ferocious and barbarous in the world" and, furthermore, were "intended to justify the bloody fascist campaign."⁸¹

Black Cubans, like other antifascists, defended the humanity and "respectability" of Ethiopian victims and attacked fascist violence in order to challenge the racist conceptualization of the civilizing project. "We admit unreservedly that a good Abyssinian gentleman," wrote an author in *Adelante*, "driven by a fierce hatred toward the invaders of his homeland, slaughters mercilessly the unfortunate who falls into his hands; we admit also that an Ethiopian 'tribe' beheads a holy soldier of the Pope determined to make them believe that the fascist bombs are blessed by the Heavenly Father and that they should submit meekly to the civilizing intentions of Mussolini." Black Cubans—and Cubans more generally—could empathize, perhaps, with this "good Abyssinian gentleman" and his "tribe," invaded, attacked, oppressed, and colonized by a

⁸⁰ Franco, "El Conflicto Italo-Abisinio," *Adelante* 1, no. 5 (October 1935): 9.

⁸¹ Vicente Martínez, "La 'Barbarie' Abisinia," *Adelante* 1, no. 11 (April 1936): 15.

foreign power. Violence in self-defense was understandable and justified. “What is more barbarous, to slaughter a Dominican priest or to massacre an entire defenseless people? What is more ferocious, to decapitate an Italian pilot or to bomb cowardly the hospitals and the trucks of the Red Cross, the defenseless villages?” Countless Ethiopian children, elderly people, and women had been “decapitated by fascist bombs.” What barbarism, black Cubans exclaimed with indignation, in the name of civilization! Fighting “heroically” for their liberty, their independence, and to preserve their homeland, the Ethiopian people were “respectable in every respect.” They warranted admiration for their ability “to preserve their independence through the centuries, fighting against the imperialist pirates of Europe.” They were not against civilization; in fact, they sought to progress, black Cubans emphasized using a characteristic antifascist definition of civilization. The “civilization” they rejected was that to which their African neighbors had been subjected, that of colonization and enslavement: the “alleged civilization of the Europeans” that brought fierce exploitation characterized not only by wage slavery but also by “the most primitive” slavery “of whips and fetters” to other nations on the continent such as Somalia, Eritrea, and the Congo. It was, wrote one author in a comparison to Latin America, the same “civilization” Europeans gave “to our brothers the American Indians,” and the Ethiopians did not want it.⁸²

In emphasizing the humanity and innocence of the Ethiopian people, writers in *Adelante* used language to describe the Italian invasion that would become familiar to pro-Republican readers during the Spanish Civil War. Ethiopia witnessed thousands of civilians, including women, children, and the elderly, “swept away by shrapnel,”⁸³ decimated in “horrendous

⁸² Martínez, “La ‘Barbarie’ Abisinia,” *Adelante* 1, no. 11 (April 1936): 15.

⁸³ Anon., “Cuba y Abisinia,” *Adelante* 1, no. 6 (November 1935): 3.

massacres conducted by plane,”⁸⁴ and, as noted above, “decapitated by fascist bombs.”⁸⁵ Antifascist authors emphasized the fascist bombing of civilian centers in Ethiopia as they would in Spain. Italian bombs were “destroying defenseless cities.”⁸⁶ Looking back on the conflict, one author in *Mediodía*, the magazine Guillén edited, made the comparison between Ethiopia and Spain explicit. Describing the horrors wrought by fascist “crime” in Ethiopia—“throwing incendiary bombs on defenseless civilians, killing children, the elderly and women, destroying civilization and peoples”—he told readers that now the peoples of Spain and China and “the proletariat of all countries” lived with the tragedy of these same terrible threats of fascism.⁸⁷ Propagandistic antifascist images depicting Italian aggression in Ethiopia also predated strikingly similar images from Spanish Civil War. For example, an illustration (Figure 4.2) published in February 1936 of bombs falling near an Ethiopian mother and her infant identified the horrific scene as one representative of “Roman Culture.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Mariano Salas Aranda, “La Liga de las Naciones Frente a Etiopía,” *Adelante* 1, no. 12 (May 1936): 4.

⁸⁵ Martínez, “La ‘Barbarie’ Abisinia,” *Adelante* 1, no. 11 (April 1936): 15.

⁸⁶ Salas Aranda, “La Liga de las Naciones Frente a Etiopía,” *Adelante* 1, no. 12 (May 1936): 4.

⁸⁷ Lucas Pino, “Perillazos,” *Mediodía* no. 55 (14 February 1938): 15.

⁸⁸ “Abisinia,” *Adelante* 1, no. 9 (February 1936).



Figure 4.2 Antifascist illustration of “Roman Culture” in Ethiopia

The conflict in Ethiopia inspired literary contributions in addition to illustrations, as would the Spanish conflict. Cuban journalist Tomás Borroto Mora published a poetic ode to Ethiopia in *Adelante* in November 1935. The poem emphasized the Italians’ colonial motivation and the ruse of a civilizing mission:

¡Más tierra! ¡más!
 ... la nuestra es ya pequeña,
 ¡Es preciso buscar gran extensión!
 ¡Hallad un punto débil! ... la Etiopía,

More land! More!
 ... ours is now small,
 It is necessary to seek a great extension!
 Find a weak spot! ... Ethiopia,

¿Un pretexto? ... la Civilización.

A pretext? ... Civilization.

It portrayed the violence of the Italians in Ethiopia, the soldiers, cannons, planes, and “rain” of shrapnel. “In Rome,” Borroto Mora stated provocatively, “the Wolf howls and the Vatican is silent.” Meanwhile, the poem concluded, making reference to the colonial division of the African continent, the other powers of Europe stood by without intervening because “thieves who retain their plunder cannot handcuff another thief.”⁸⁹ Also similar to an important trend seen later in the case of Spain was the multinational character of the outpouring of literary support for the Ethiopian cause. In October 1935 *Adelante* printed a Spanish translation of Langston Hughes’s “Ballad of Ethiopia.”⁹⁰ Themes established in these types of creative expressions would recur in responses to the Spanish Civil War.

By May 1936 black Cubans expressed deep pessimism about events in Ethiopia. Each day the free African nation was losing its territory, wrote one author, and no one offered to help. Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union all disappointed black Cubans with their responses to the situation. Fascist aggression and the inaction of the world’s other powers were equally to blame for Ethiopia’s fate, wrote *Adelante*’s administrator, a fate that foreshadowed world war: “In the end Italy will achieve its desires and Ethiopia will be one more colony in Africa, with the consent of the League of Nations, the Institution which was created for the establishment of peace, so that humanity would not again be plunged into the macabre spectacle of a new war.”⁹¹ Antifascists would repeat this multipart claim—about fascist colonization, the complacency of

⁸⁹ Tomás Borroto Mora, “Sintesis,” *Adelante* 1, no. 6 (November 1935). Elipses in original.

⁹⁰ “Poesias,” *Adelante* 1, no. 5 (October 1935): 19.

⁹¹ Mariano Salas Aranda, “La Liga de las Naciones Frente a Etiopía,” *Adelante* 1, no. 12 (May 1936): 4.

other world powers, and the consequent inevitability of a new world war—in the case of Spain and beyond.

It was with the avoidance of future war in mind that *Adelante* printed, over the course of four issues between August and November 1936, a series of declarations made by the exiled Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie to French scholar Marcel Griaule, translated into Spanish and entitled “El Drama Espantosa que ha Vivido un Pueblo” (“The Frightening Drama a People has Lived Through”). José L. Franco of the Cuban Comité Pro-Abisinia (Pro-Abyssinia Committee) oversaw this extensive publication effort, noting his own devotion to the Ethiopian cause, “which is that of the right and the just.” The number of pages and months devoted to Emperor Selassie’s words indicates a substantial commitment on the part of the black Cuban periodical to publicizing the issue of Ethiopia’s defeat at the hands of Italian fascism. Franco noted that Emperor Selassie’s declarations would serve to inform the Cuban reader about the events of the conflict. To relate the conflict to his readers, Franco drew a comparison between Ethiopia and the island: Mussolini called the Ethiopians bandits as the Spaniards had called the soldiers of Cuban independence leaders Antonio Maceo and José Martí thieves, he told them. The “tragic and poignant” pages devoted to Selassie’s words, he asserted, would bring to every home “the certainty that fascism, ... shown in the butchery of our black brothers of Ethiopia, is the most terrible danger that threatens civilization.” Expressing this threat was José L. Franco’s intent; he wished to advertise the terrible truth about “what will be the future war, if the peoples do not stop in time the unleashed desires of all imperialisms.” The Ethiopians, he assured readers in another statement which would be echoed a few years later in reference to the Spanish

Republicans, would keep fighting for their liberty and “for the right to command their own destinies.”⁹²

How did black Cuban antifascism organized around the cause of Ethiopia translate into black Cuban support for the Republic in the Spanish Civil War? The transition proceeded with a degree of bitterness for some. One author addressing black Cubans accused Cubans generally of ignoring the case of Ethiopia, of failing to realize the threat of fascism until it impacted other countries, especially Spain. The article by prominent Cuban antifascist and member of the Comité Pro-Abisinia Antonio Penichet—whose involvement in both Masonic and anarchist antifascism on the island we examine elsewhere—discussed fascism in Ethiopia, China, and Spain. Penichet argued that it took atrocities committed by fascist forces against the civilian populations—and especially the children—of Spain and China for the world to comprehend “the barbarity of the procedure used against Abyssinia.” Fascism had “razed” and “assassinated” Ethiopian children, youth, women, and elderly people without significant protest, Penichet stated, accusing observers across the globe of “accepting Italy’s ‘civilizing’ claim” and of wanting “to mitigate or conceal the crime and the theft committed against the Abyssinian people.” The crime was committed with impunity, he wrote, before an unsympathetic world. Cuba specifically was not spared from his condemnation. The Comité Pro-Abisinia had acted “in an atmosphere of hostile indifference,” he chastised fellow Cubans, even though “we had and have in Cuba so many motives to sympathize with Abyssinia.” The Spanish case had proven necessary in order to make people on the island take notice of “the bloody biology of fascism.” The plight of China fighting Japanese fascism, too, Penichet noted, though distant, drew more attention on the island

⁹² José L. Franco, “Al Comité ‘Pro-Abisinia’: El Drama Espantosa que ha Vivido un Pueblo,” *Adelante* 2, no. 15 (August 1936): 14–15; no. 16 (September 1936): 10–11, 15; no. 17 (October 1936): 11, 16; and no. 18 (November 1936): 15–16.

than had the pain of the Ethiopian people. Writing in October 1937, Penichet made an argument that would later be applied to the hindsight of World War II looking back on the Spanish Civil War: Had fascism been contained in Ethiopia, he asserted, the “somber spectacles” of Spain and China would not now exist to horrify those who contemplated them.⁹³ By including Penichet’s article, the editors of *Adelante* promoted his condemnation of the Cuban public’s indifference about the fascist attack on Ethiopia compared to general outrage at the situation in Spain. Indeed, in the research for this study, we have observed repeatedly a much greater volume of propaganda and other material produced by Cuban individuals and groups on the conflict in Spain relative to that produced concerning the conflict in Ethiopia, a discrepancy apparent in both periodicals and archival sources—*Adelante* is the one exception we encountered, in which concern for Ethiopia is expressed more prominently and voluminously than that for the Spanish Republic. Nevertheless, black Cuban antifascists did eventually embrace the Spanish Republican cause; Penichet’s article, for example, is accompanied in the black Cuban publication by a poem celebrating Spain’s role in advancing the workers of the world.⁹⁴

Black Cuban activists’ transition from adherence to the Ethiopian cause to that of the Spanish Republic proceeded gradually. During the first few months of the Spanish Civil War—August to November 1936—the declarations of Ethiopian Emperor Selassie discussed above featured prominently in *Adelante* whereas the periodical’s authors ignored events in Spain. With Selassie in exile and antifascist efforts in Ethiopia frustrated, however, the black Cuban publication began to pay attention to the Spanish conflict.

⁹³ Antonio Penichet, “Con los ojos sobre el mundo,” *Adelante* 3, no. 29 (October 1937): 9.

⁹⁴ Rubén Sinay, “Envío,” *Adelante* 3, no. 29 (October 1937): 9.

Black Cuban antifascism retained many of its central characteristics and emphases in the transition from the Ethiopian cause to the Spanish Republican one. For example, black Cuban antifascists interpreted the Republican struggle as one against colonialism. Even though Spain was itself a European power—and the former colonizer and enslaver on the island of Cuba, as noted repeatedly in the discussion of Ethiopia—it was still in danger of falling to others. As corrupt Chinese generals had done during Japanese expansion, Spanish collaborators of foreign fascists would “bring about the dismemberment of their country, imposing on the lands of Spain servitude to foreign powers,” stated José L. Franco in February 1937, having turned his attention from the declarations of Emperor Selassie to his “Universal Panorama,” a column on world events that appeared in Guillén’s periodical *Mediodía* as well. If fascism triumphed, Franco argued, Spain would become “a mere Italo-German colony.”⁹⁵

Black Cuban antifascists used the familiar themes of civilization and barbarity in their discussion of the Spanish conflict. They praised the Republicans for their forces made up of “popular militias that have made safe the best of the intelligentsia of the country, in order to take the immortal and civilizing soul of Spain today away from the dangers of the fierce and exterminating fighting.” By protecting the intelligentsia, Republicans promoted the antifascist version of civilization: cultural and social progress. In contrast, *Adelante* emphasized the brutality of fascist violence in Spain. Utilizing language that indicated a lack of civilization—and which was often used in expressions of racial prejudice by whites against ethnically different enemies—the column “Universal Panorama” called Spanish Nationalists “hoards” that committed “horrors” and “barbarous deeds.” Their ferocious acts reminded Cubans, the article noted, of the “tragic repressions” of the Spanish colonial era on the island, such as those

⁹⁵ José L. Franco, “Panorama Universal,” *Adelante* 2, no. 21 (February 1937): 8.

committed by the infamous Valeriano Weyler during the Cuban War of Independence.⁹⁶ In this comparison we can perceive a hint of a common Cuban antifascist argument about Spain, one discussed elsewhere: that the Spanish Nationalists represented the old Spain that had colonized Cuba—Weyler’s Spain—whereas Republican triumph would herald the permanence of a new Spain characterized by progress.

Adelante’s administrator, Mariano Salas Aranda, made a direct comparison between new Republican Spain’s struggle in the 1930s and that of Cuba for independence beginning in 1868. The achievement by a people of its liberty and its rights, he wrote, results from revolution. Beginning a brief history lesson for readers with the French Revolution,⁹⁷ he stated that the accomplishments of the French people cost them “the blood of their sons.” However, their triumph, he argued, inspired other people around the world to fight for their own freedom and rights—likely a reference to the countries of Latin America during the first couple of decades of the nineteenth century, perhaps including Haiti—struggles also characterized by violence. The social progress implemented in the U.S.S.R., he continued, would not have been possible without the revolutionary movement that preceded it, just as Cuban independence would not have been achieved if not for the armed movement of 1868. Like Cuba, *Adelante*’s administrator wrote, Spain “could not be an exception in world history. The Spanish people, fulfilling the historic mission of all peoples to realize the conquest of their liberties and rights . . . must necessarily

⁹⁶ José L. Franco, “Panorama Universal,” *Adelante* 2, no. 20 (January 1937): 20. In a similar *Adelante* assessment of all fascists, Mariano Salas Aranda wrote: “Culture, liberty, the law, justice, there is something there that instills fear in the fascist, for this reason when we see a Fascist state emerge the first thing put into practice is the destruction of culture, the restriction or abolition of liberties, the suppression of the law, the absence of justice; the great literary works are incinerated on enormous pyres, their authors are assassinated, imprisoned or exiled.” Mariano Salas Aranda, “Fascismo y Democracia,” *Adelante* 3, no. 35 (April 1938): 8.

⁹⁷ Mention of the American Revolution is notably absent from his chronology.

give their contribution of blood.” Only in this way, history taught, would the results last: “The conquests of the revolution obtained will be sealed with blood and imperishable.”⁹⁸ This optimistic assessment of triumph and permanence glossed over many complexities and disappointments in the history of all three examples—France, the Soviet Union, and Cuba—but nevertheless demonstrated an attempt by Salas Aranda to place the Spanish conflict in a global context of justified armed struggle—in Cuba and elsewhere—down through time.

Salas Aranda conflated the powerful forces of old, colonizing Spain with fascism, as did many other Cuban antifascists, and contrasted them with democracy, which he identified as his desired goal. The Spanish Nationalists—the forces of the monarchy, military, landowners, and clergy in Spain—represented domestic fascism and allied themselves with foreign fascists. Hitler and Mussolini sought to seize Spain “in their eagerness to ‘fascistize’ the world,” wrote Salas Aranda, as they had, by April 1938, already become the “owners of the defenseless peoples of Austria and Ethiopia.” Franco and his “henchmen,” the author argued, committed treason when they “took up the dangerous adventure of overthrowing the legitimate government of Spain, counting on the help of such powerful friends.” The price exacted by foreign fascists for this help would be paid in Spanish territory, he stated, and the lack of intervention by world democracies such as France and England made them in large part culpable for the transaction. Despite his frustration with these democracies, Salas Aranda expressed optimism nevertheless for democracy in general, writing that despite the danger of fascism, “we have hope that democracy will come out victorious in this titanic struggle,” in Spain and worldwide. Even if the powerful democratic countries did not come to Spain’s aid, democracy was still at work. In the

⁹⁸ Mariano Salas Aranda, “Misión Histórica de las Revoluciones,” *Adelante* 3, no. 31 (December 1937): 9. Salas Aranda acknowledges later in the article that Cuba’s present situation requires further revolutionary action.

Republican army fought “men of all parts and of all races, without whose courageous and effective help the Republic would have had to succumb to the savage attack of Fascism” already, he wrote in April 1938. This help would have to grow a hundredfold to defeat fascism in Spain, and then be sustained in all parts of the world, including the Americas, where people “suffered constantly the despotism and oppression of bloody and cruel tyrants” whose methods “bear close resemblance to those used by Hitler and Mussolini.” The peoples of the Americas “must establish genuinely democratic governments, not fictitious ones as we have been experiencing thus far,” and in so doing follow the example of Mexico that defeated oppression and marched toward true democracy, he argued. If not, their countries would become fascist.⁹⁹ In his conflation of Spanish Nationalism with both old, colonizing Spain and with 1930s fascism, his condemnation of powerful world democracies, his embrace of “true” democracy as the antidote to fascism, and his admonishment of the Americas to beware the fascist threat posed by their own authoritarian rulers, Salas Aranda outlined a typical moderate Cuban antifascist argument. Aside from his explicit mention of men “of all races” in the ranks of antifascists in Spain—which was uncommon, though not unheard-of, among Cuban antifascists generally—there is nothing in the *Adelante* administrator’s statement of this argument that hints at a race-based antifascism. Whereas the cause of Ethiopia had elicited frequent direct references to race and African diasporic ideas among black Cubans, the Spanish conflict led some to more general arguments shared with other antifascists.

In his writings on the Spanish conflict, Nicolás Guillén foregrounded the importance of his identity as a person of African descent in his antifascism. Addressing the Second International Writers’ Congress in July 1937, he said: “I come as a black man.” Similar to

⁹⁹ Mariano Salas Aranda, “Misión Histórica de las Revoluciones,” *Adelante* 3, no. 31 (December 1937): 9; Mariano Salas Aranda, “Fascismo y Democracia,” *Adelante* 3, no. 35 (April 1938): 8.

Langston Hughes, who envisioned a special leadership role within antifascism for members of the African diaspora, Guillén foresaw the importance of black antifascists in achieving a brighter future in which men would be “without colors, without wars, without prejudices and without races.” He told his audience at the conference: “I am here to remind you that the pariah status of the black is his strongest human engine, the force that projects him towards a broader, more universal and more just horizon, towards the horizon for which all honorable men of the world are fighting.” Fascism attacked the people who suffered greatest exploitation, Guillén argued, because their “utility as slaves” necessitated the impediment of their elevation. For this reason fascism had invented “a superior race, who should exploit, and other inferior ones who must live chained,” in Guillén’s interpretation. In the latter category, the Cuban intellectual included himself and other people of African descent on the island.¹⁰⁰

No one made a better antifascist than the black man, and especially the black Cuban, Guillén argued, because he knows that fascism “is fueled by race hatred and the division of men into inferior and superior beings, and that he, the black, is assigned to the lower place.”¹⁰¹ Black Cuban antifascism should resist such division. A month before the Writers’ Congress, Guillén had debated in the pages of *Mediodía* a Cuban sociologist who had argued for racial segregation in education on the island, and had compared such arguments to fascism.¹⁰² This type of division imposed by fascism would destroy Cuba, Guillén asserted in an argument to the Congress that echoed Cuban nationalist conceptions of a biracial *cubanidad* (Cuban identity). Both black and

¹⁰⁰ Nicolás Guillén, “Discurso del Delegado por Cuba,” *Mediodía* no. 29 (17 August 1937): 11, 18.

¹⁰¹ Guillén, speech to the Second International Writers’ Congress, reprinted in *Prosa de Prisa 1929–1972*, vol. 1 (Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1975), 85.

¹⁰² 15 June 1937 *Mediodía* article discussed in Ellis, “Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes,” 143.

white Cubans, he stated, were “irrepressible component[s] in the Cuban historical process.” To divide black and white would “submerge the country in a criminal chaos.”¹⁰³

Guillén linked black Cuban antifascism and the cause of the Spanish Republic specifically. “I can tell you that there [in Cuba] the black lives the tragedy of Republican Spain because he knows that this moment we go through is only one episode in the struggle ... between the democratic forces ... and the conservative classes that already enslaved him once and that have to enslave always,” Guillén stated in his first speech to the Writers’ Congress.¹⁰⁴ In his second, he asked about the black Cuban: “How is he not going to feel in the depths of his tragedy the tragedy of the Spanish people? He feels it, and shares with the white of the people the same ardors of liberation and struggle that move all oppressed people of the world, with no race other than the human.”¹⁰⁵ In this interpretation, people of African descent were antifascists and supporters of the Republican cause in Spain because they translated their experience with exploitation into an empathy with a similarly exploited Spanish people. Guillén illustrated the exploitation of the Spanish people in his second speech to the Congress with a quotation from a ten-year-old boy he met in Madrid: “Here we are all poor; here there is no one who has a thousand *pesetas*; here we all work, and to win the fascists would have to kill us all.” The Cuban author described the boy as half-naked and having lost his father and two siblings in the war.¹⁰⁶ The fact that black Cuban antifascists were black was significant to their support for the

¹⁰³ Guillén, speech, reprinted in *Prosa de Prisa*, 85. Ellis notes that for Guillén, Africanism and Hispanicism “were the elements that *together* constituted the national identity.” Ellis, “Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes,” 143.

¹⁰⁴ Guillén, “Discurso del Delegado,” 18.

¹⁰⁵ Guillén, speech, reprinted in *Prosa de Prisa*, 85.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

Spanish Republican cause, in this interpretation by Guillén, because this identity led to their exploitation which in turn facilitated cross-racial solidarity.

What about the significance of the fact that black Cuban antifascists supporting the Spanish Republic were Cuban—of their national identity as opposed to their ethnic, diasporic identity? Interestingly, though not unexpectedly given the writer’s intellectual interests, Guillén connected the motivation driving black Cuban antifascism in the Spanish conflict specifically to Hispanic identity, as well as to African diasporic identity. In his famous poem about the Spanish conflict, “España: Poema en cuatro angustias y una esperanza” (“Spain: Poem in Four Anguishes and One Hope”), Guillén expressed the way in which the black Cuban of multifaceted identity—American, Spanish, and African—found himself drawn to the Spanish conflict. Addressing Spain directly, the poem’s narrator—who has a “curly head” and a “brown body”—identifies himself: “I, son of America, son of you and of Africa, slave yesterday of white overseers, owners of angry whips; today slave of red Yankees, sugary and voracious.” Amid a vivid imagining of the war, he says to Spain: “I, son of America, I run to you, I die for you.”¹⁰⁷ Guillén told the audience of the Second International Writers’ Congress that “the Cuban black is also Spanish.” To support this provocative claim, he argued that the black Cuban “along with the infamous marks of the servant received and assimilated the elements of that culture.” He had a “Spanish soul.”¹⁰⁸ The type of tension exhibited in this argument between diasporic and nationalist identities is typical, as we have seen, of members of diasporas. Guillén himself was of mixed African and Spanish ancestry, so for him the assertion of a multicultural identity was literally accurate. That he extended the claim to all Cubans of African descent, however, defined his

¹⁰⁷ Guillén, “España: Poema en cuatro angustias y una esperanza.”

¹⁰⁸ Guillén, “Discurso del Delegado,” 18.

conception as broader than mere genealogy. We see elsewhere that the argument of Spanish “blood” was a powerful motivating force for white Cubans to get involved in the cause of the Spanish Republic; that Guillén extended this argument to black Cubans, therefore, is highly significant.

Also important was Guillén’s assertion that all Cubans, not just black Cubans, experienced oppression and therefore felt solidarity with the people of Spain. He based his claim on both an understanding of struggle as cross-racial and transnational and a conception of the special historical relationship between Spain and Cuba specifically. He argued that black Cubans faced exploitation on the island not only because of racial prejudice but also because all Cubans suffered for political reasons. He believed that fascism existed on the island in the forms of oligarchic economic control, military dictatorship, circumscribed liberty, and a lack of democracy. Guillén’s own loyalty to the Spanish Republican cause came from his identity not only as a black man but also as a Cuban, “because my country is also struggling against fascism, represented by a minority that enslaves and exploits, a minority that has the same quality as that which took up arms against the legitimate government of Spain.” Cuba faced a situation in which “the will of one man dominates over the others,” he wrote, and it was “true that there is there a dictatorship of the military and fascist type, that stifles free expression of thought and that kills the weakest attempt at democratic restoration.” Linking fascism in Cuba and Spain, Guillén expressed conviction about antifascist solidarity as not only universal among oppressed peoples but also based upon the specific historical relationship between the island and its former colonial master. Calling Cuba a “child of Spain,” he asserted that “the whole Cuban people are at the side

of Republican, democratic Spain because they know that both have identical enemies, identical destinies and identical heroic solutions.”¹⁰⁹

Articles about black Cuban volunteers in Spain illustrate some of the concrete ways in which black authors discussed race in relation to Cuban antifascism. Both Guillén and Hughes wrote articles about the black Cuban baseball player, former Harlem resident, and Spanish Civil War volunteer Basilio Cueria, captain of a machine gun company for the Republican army, whom we met during our discussion of combat volunteers. Guillén’s piece appeared in *Mediodía* in December 1937 and Hughes’s piece was published in *The Afro-American* in February 1938. Both authors addressed Cueria’s identity as a black Cuban, and their assessments of his black Cuban antifascism and participation in Spain are useful to our discussion here.

After a highly favorable description of the military accomplishments of “the fine looking young captain who was immensely popular with the officers and the men under his command,” Hughes turned to the question of Cueria’s identity as a black Cuban, addressing his race, his nationality, and his interpretation of fascism. “Since there are a large number of Cubans fighting in Spain on the government side, many of them colored Cubans,” Hughes wrote, “I asked Cueria how they were received, and whether any of them had ever been taken for Moors, or had encountered any color prejudice.” Cueria’s response was laughter, the African-American writer reported. He told Hughes that the Spaniards sometimes asked black Cubans if they were Moorish, “but never in an unfriendly way, since the Spaniards have no color feeling about the Moors. (And there are Moors on the loyal side, as well as with Franco.)” This optimistic assessment by Cueria represented his own experience; hostility based on ethnic difference—if

¹⁰⁹ Guillén, speech, reprinted in *Prosa de Prisa*, 84–85.

not specifically “color”—and contentious history did certainly exist in some cases between Spaniards and North Africans. Hughes referenced the cultural connections between Spain and Cuba, noting that Spain was particularly hospitable to Cubans due to a shared language, and that Cubans of color seeking homes outside of the island had often chosen to live in Spain rather than the United States “where they might run into difficulties on the basis of complexion.” Though, Hughes noted with perhaps a hint of pride, “Cueria himself assured me that he liked Harlem and would be coming back to America when the war is over.” Finally, Hughes portrayed Cueria’s assessment of the fascism he was fighting in Spain in racial terms, quoting the black Cuban as saying: “We can’t let the Fascists put it over on us. They’d put all the worst old prejudices back in to force and probably even introduce new ones, like Hitler and his Aryanism in Germany.”¹¹⁰

Guillén’s article on Cueria included greater specificity about his identity, points likely meaningful to Cubans that would have been of little interest to African-American readers. For example, Cueria was born in Marianao near Havana. He was biracial; his father was from Asturias in Spain and his mother was black. Seizing upon this identity, Guillén asserted that Cueria’s desire to fight fascism derived from his lineage on both sides: from Asturias “the fierce impetus, the hard resilience, the unbroken tenacity” and from Africa “the tempest of the spirit that crushed slavery and that finally explodes in search of a revolutionary way for its ascent.” Black and white skin mixed to form Cueria’s *piel mestiza* (mixed skin), which for Guillén was “a symbol of union before an enemy common to the workers of all races.” In this way, Guillén’s vision of Cueria made him representative of both a nationalist Cuban identity—a biracial *cubanidad*—and an internationalist political identity as a worker. Both “our people” and people

¹¹⁰ Langston Hughes, “Harlem Ball Player Now Captain in Spain: Basilio Cueria, Head of Machine Gun Company Called One of Best Officers,” *The Afro-American* (12 February 1938), reprinted in Mullen, *Langston Hughes*, 143–145.

all over the world, Guillén told Cuban readers, suffered persecution, “economic anguish,” and “terrible inequality.” Cueria, he asserted, “is a representative of this conflict” and “fortunately, the world is full of men like him.” Asked by Guillén his reason for traveling to Spain to fight, Cueria cited his “condition as a man of the people” and the fact that the Spaniards were, too. He did not express any sense that his racial identity played a specific role in the decision. His Cuban identity, though, he did discuss with reference to his role as a volunteer in Spain. He recounted a meeting with the famous Spanish General José Miaja in which the latter asked him about his origin, and then expressed satisfaction that Cubans “come voluntarily to Spain to fight for liberty.” It was a moment of great emotion, Cueria noted. Interestingly, whereas Hughes reported that Cueria told him he would be returning to the United States once the war concluded, Guillén claimed that he said he would be coming back to Cuba.¹¹¹ This contradiction serves to further emphasize Cueria’s multiple identities.

Between January and April 1938 *Adelante*, too, celebrated Cuban volunteers in Spain, some of them black. A series of three articles focused on the 24th Mixed Brigade of the Republican Army’s 96th Battalion. The January and February articles were by authors identified as members of the brigade—M. Sánchez and Rafael González—and were written “especially for *Adelante*.” The authors are not well-known Cuban volunteers; the names could be pseudonyms. It is not known, therefore, whether or not the authors were of African descent. Nor do the articles directly address race in a substantive way, although they do mention several black Cuban volunteers: Cueria, José G. Bridón (“our Commissar Bridón” in the González article), Tomás Díaz Collado, and the mysterious “Cuba Hermosa” alongside well-known white volunteers such as Pablo de la Torriente Brau and Rodolfo de Armas Soto in the Sánchez article. More

¹¹¹ Guillén, “Cubanos en España: Un Pelotero, Capitán de Ametralladoras,” *Mediodía* no. 45 (6 December 1937): 10.

significant is the inclusion in *Adelante* of volunteer reports from the Spanish war zone. The two authors promoted the Spanish Republican effort against fascism, celebrated the Spanish people “who will not resign to being slaves,” predicted victory, lauded democracy, and called upon their “brothers of America and very especially those of Cuba” to stand strong alongside loyalist Spain.¹¹² Powerfully articulated arguments written especially for *Adelante* by Cuban volunteers in Spain indicated the black Cuban publication’s full acceptance of and support for the pro-Republican cause by early 1938.

An *Adelante* author confirmed this acceptance and support in the third article, published in April 1938, stating that the publication, “lover of liberty and democracy,” had “since the first moment placed its sympathies on the side of the Spanish people’s Government.” The piece celebrated José G. Bridón, Comandante (Commander or Major) in the Spanish Republican Army and “delegate” of the 24th Mixed Brigade of the 96th Battalion. A black Cuban, Bridón was living in New York when the Spanish conflict began and was, according to the article, one of the first international combat volunteers integrated into the Spanish Republican Army “in which, for his intelligence, courage, and love demonstrated for the cause of Democracy, he has come to obtain the honorable insignia of Comandante.” Staff at *Adelante* had an opportunity to meet Bridón, the article stated, because he was traveling to Cuba, the United States, and elsewhere on a special mission for the Republican Army. Calling upon democratic and humanitarian sentiments, the periodical encouraged readers to follow this Cuban’s example. In whatever way possible, the article concluded, Cubans should, like Bridón, give aid to the legitimate Spanish government, defeat fascism, and liberate themselves from “the barbarity of Franco, Hitler, and

¹¹² M. Sánchez, Miembro de la 24 Brigada Mixta, Batallón No. 96, “El Año de la Defensa de Madrid,” *Adelante* 3, no. 32 (January 1938): 15; Rafael González, Miembro de la 24 Brigada Mixta, Batallón No. 96, “Entrega de la Bandera al 96 Batallón,” *Adelante* 3, no. 33 (February 1938): 11.

Mussolini.” A photograph (Figure 4.3) accompanying the laudatory article pictured Bridón in uniform, presenting the image of a dignified officer.¹¹³ This photograph is similar to those we saw in Chapter 2 of other Cuban volunteers in uniform, images that conveyed the legitimacy and respectability of the Republican armed forces to Cuban readers.



Com. JOSE G. BRIDON

Figure 4.3 Comandante José G. Bridón, black Cuban volunteer in the Spanish Civil War

Bridón does not appear to have been a well-known Cuban volunteer. His name appears in a list of volunteers published in Cuba¹¹⁴ and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive includes a very brief profile that indicates he had no known political party affiliation and spent time in a French concentration camp at the end of the conflict. This latter source suggests that his

¹¹³ Anon., “El Comandante Bridón,” *Adelante* 3, no. 35 (April 1938): 11.

¹¹⁴ The Cuban book *Cuba en España* lists his name as a Cuban combat volunteer. “Otros combatientes,” in Bello and Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España*, 262.

occupation may have been as a sanitation worker.¹¹⁵ The man presented by *Adelante*, regardless of anonymity or class background, was accomplished, admirable, and worthy of praise and emulation. His photograph, in the tradition of formal portraits of Cuban black society members,¹¹⁶ seems to have been intended to portray respectability, refinement, and civility indicative of a high level of “civilization.”¹¹⁷ The character of the staged image, along with the lack of any explicit discussion of race in *Adelante*’s three 1938 combat volunteer articles, suggests an intriguing possibility: In contrast with writers associated with the African diaspora, such as Hughes and Guillén, who saw race as central to a particular black antifascism, perhaps some writers for *Adelante* felt a degree of tension with regard to race. Perhaps they saw the Spanish conflict as an opportunity to present black antifascists as equal to other antifascists by *deemphasizing* their race.

Ultimately, then, black Cuban antifascism was characterized by differing viewpoints on the role of ethnic or cultural identity and of political identity. It sprang from the African diasporic, the Cuban nationalist, and the political left internationalist contexts in which it operated. Each of these contexts had its own narrative of race, and differences created tension between and within black Cubans as they examined, responded to, and participated in the Ethiopian and Spanish Republican causes. The antifascism they developed was rooted deeply in outrage born of Mussolini’s colonizing invasion of “the homeland” and symbol Ethiopia, with which they felt solidarity as people of African descent and as Cubans with historical memory of

¹¹⁵ Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive, Profile for “Jose Bridon y Curbie de la Mercedes Gerardo,” <http://www.alba-valb.org/volunteers/jose-bridon-y-curbie-de-la-mercedes-gerardo> (Accessed 2 September 2010). This profile cites as the source of its information the “Complete List of Americans on File April 13, 1937.” It notes “José G. Bridón” as an alias for the longer name referenced.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*, 76, 128, 135, 167, and 191.

¹¹⁷ Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*, 125.

colonialism and slavery, and living under neocolonialist pressures. With Ethiopia defeated, they—like others in the black diaspora and in transnational antifascism—turned their efforts to Spain, some seeing it as a proxy for the fight in Ethiopia. While most identified the Spanish Republicans as a fellow oppressed people fighting for common human goals such as liberty and rights, the source of solidarity with Spaniards was different for different black Cubans. Some black Cubans identified with Spanish Republicans as exploited people based on their racial identity and racialized experience; others as fellow workers; and still others as people of Hispanic cultural descent, as “sons of Spain *and* of Africa.”

CHAPTER 5

Intemperate Campaigns against Very Respectable Entities: Cuban Freemasons as Antifascists

By 1936 when the Spanish Civil War began Cuban Freemasonry was an influential organization. At the start of that year there were between 183 and 195 Masonic lodges and as many as 16,500 Masons in Cuba.¹ Though the institution suffered a brief crisis during the years of political turmoil earlier in the decade, especially 1932–1933, it was rebounding by 1936.² Freemasonry had over 130 years of history on the island, and Cuban Masons had a long tradition of networking across national borders with their brothers in Europe and the Americas. In the 1930s Cuban Masons maintained transnational ties with their Spanish brethren as Cuban anarchists did with Spanish anarchists or Cuban Communist Party members did with the Party in Spain. As conflict in “the motherland” began, Cuban Masons watched closely and debated their position relative to the fighting. This chapter explores why, how, and to what extent Cuban Masons defined themselves as antifascists and supported the Spanish Republic.

¹ A directory published in the Cuban Masonic press in January 1936 lists 183 lodges. “Directorio General de Logias para 1936,” *Mundo Masónico: Revista Mensual Ilustrada para el Templo y para el Hogar* 5, no. 45 (January 1936): 28–33. An article published in March in the Cuban Masonic annual report states that there were 195. José F. Castellanos, “Informe del Gran Secretario, Sesión Annual, Habana, 22 de marzo de 1936,” *Anuario de la Gran Logia de la Isla de Cuba* (Havana: Molina y Compañía, 1938), 593. For comparison, see Eduardo Torres Cuevas who states that there were 67 Cuban lodges in 1909, 100 in 1919, 154 in 1924, and 334 in 1955. He does not include any figures for the 1930s or 1940s. According to his calculations, 154 lodges were home to 14,000 Masons in 1924 and 334 lodges housed 30,000 members in 1955. Eduardo Torres Cuevas, “La masonería en Cuba durante la Primera República (1902–1933),” in José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli, ed., *La masonería en la España del siglo XX*, Vol. 1 (Toledo: Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Española, 1996), 518. Using these figures to calculate an estimate, we arrive at a plausible range for the number of Cuban Masons in 1936: 16,437–16,636. However, to arrive at the precise number of Masons is difficult. In a later publication, Torres Cuevas states that documentation in his possession shows 189 lodges and 13,000 Masons in Cuba in 1936. Torres Cuevas, *Historia de la masonería cubana: Seis ensayos* (Havana: Imagen Contemporánea, 2004), 240. The Masonic annual report states that the island’s Grand Lodge counted only 7,967 brothers for 1936, but noted positive growth trends following a downturn in 1932–1933. Castellanos, “Informe del Gran Secretario,” 589–590.

² Castellanos, “Informe del Gran Secretario,” 589–594.

Of the pre-existing Cuban groups examined in this study that took an antifascist stance during the Spanish conflict, Freemasonry is the least familiar to most readers. Cuban Masons' engagement with the Spanish Civil War has not been studied. Evidence of Masonic efforts in primary-source documentation of the Cuban campaign to aid Spanish children has introduced us to their substantial involvement in the pro-Republican cause, but in the Cuban historiography dominated by Communist influence their participation has not received attention. Additionally, much Masonic literature and source material sets the group apart; for example, Freemasonry-specific works address the role of Spanish Masons in the Spanish Civil War,³ and many of the fraternity's primary sources are held in libraries within Masonic lodges.⁴ Not organized around a particular political ideology or shared cultural identity, Freemasons nonetheless had powerful collective motivation to support the Spanish Republic. As one eminent historian of modern Europe puts it, Francisco Franco claimed that Masons caused Spain's problems "as Hitler blamed Jews for those of Germany."⁵ Masonic antifascism had historical precedent, was grounded in diverse beliefs, and lacked consensus among Masons. It was a complex stance that

³ Ferrer Benimeli, ed., *La masonería en la España del siglo XX*, 2 Vol. (Toledo: Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Española, 1996); Ferrer Benimeli, *La masonería española: La historia en sus textos* (Madrid: Ediciones Istmo, 1996); Juan José Morales Ruiz, *El discurso antimasonónico en la Guerra Civil Española (1936–1939)* (Zaragoza: Diputación General de Aragón, 2001).

⁴ In the United States, research for this chapter took place at four Masonic libraries: Chancellor Robert F. Livingston Masonic Library, Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York, New York, New York; House of the Temple Library, Scottish Rite of Freemasonry Southern Jurisdiction, Washington, District of Columbia; Masonic Library and Museum, Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Van Gorden-Williams Library and Archives, National Heritage Museum, Lexington, Massachusetts. Due to Masonic transnational networking, U.S. lodges are home to many Masonic publications from Cuba, which Cubans routinely sent to their brethren in other countries. According to its head librarian, however, the library at the Gran Logia de la Isla de Cuba no longer holds any historic primary sources from the 1930s.

⁵ John Merriman, "The Spanish Civil War," in *A History of Modern Europe from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 1225.

was in some ways powerful and in others fragile, as we will see. Fundamentally, however, Masonic antifascism was self-defense.

An examination of Masonic pro-Republican arguments allows us to compare and contrast their position relative to those of the antifascist groups we study in other chapters—particularly anarchists and the Communist Party.⁶ We see that within the context of international antifascism, Freemasons, whose values as a group are generally considered moderate and liberal, shared many opinions with their radical counterparts. The ominous specter of fascism paired with ardent calls for unity and a Popular Front brought together moderate liberals and leftist radicals in Cuba as they did in other countries, though certainly not without serious conflict. Moderate Masons and radicals differed in significant ways—Cuban Freemasonry was, for example, officially anticommunist—and these differences posed challenges to unity. Interestingly, the years of the Spanish Civil War also saw a great effort to unite all factions within Cuban Freemasonry, as well as a campaign to unite Cuban political parties on the left. Cries of ‘Unity!’ resonated throughout much of Cuban society during the late 1930s, but the goal was not easily achieved. Though Freemasons did successfully unite many of the island’s lodges in March 1938,⁷ debate over Spain within Cuban Freemasonry illustrates considerable political disagreement among Cuban Masons. Not all Masons were politically moderate; there were radical leftist Masons and Masons who supported the Spanish Nationalists as well as those who preferred neutrality or focused on domestic issues.

⁶ Overlap with black Cuban organizations is less apparent. Masons did not routinely discuss the interests or actions of black Cubans as they did the ideas of radical leftist political philosophies, and the little commentary that does exist does not relate directly to the Spanish Civil War. A tangential exception is the problematic Cuban Masonic view of race, which we do discuss in this chapter.

⁷ Cesáreo González Naredo, “La Unificación de la Masonería Cubana: Es la Obra Cumbre del Gran Maestro, Gonzalo García Pedroso,” *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 70 y 71 (February/March 1938): 3–4.

This chapter introduces histories of Cuban Freemasonry, Masonic transnationalism, and opposition to Freemasonry in Europe as a basis for Masonic antifascism. It presents three broad Masonic arguments made in Cuba in favor of the Spanish Republic based in respect for democracy and sovereignty, in Masonic philosophical and religious values and principles, and in self-defense. It explores political and ideological disagreement among Cuban Masons, particularly their anticommunism and other engagement with radical leftist philosophies. It concludes by examining the charitable impulse of Cuban Masons for the pro-Republican cause, showing their achievements in terms of aid sent.

A Brief History of Cuban Freemasonry

There exists no evidence of significant Masonic activity in Cuba prior to the early nineteenth century, though the second half of the eighteenth century saw some overtures in the direction of its establishment. During his years as English Masonic Grand Master beginning in 1754 the Marquis of Carnarvon appointed nine provincial Grand Masters, one of whom he designated for Cuba.⁸ The introduction of Masonic principles to the island took place when the British conquered Havana in 1762 during the Seven Year's War (1756–1763). A regiment of soldiers stationed there included some Masons, and the Grand Lodge of Ireland sponsored the establishment of Lodge Number 218.⁹ A certificate produced there in May 1763 provides evidence of its activity. A member of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge of London exhibited the

⁸ Joseph Gabriel Findel, *History of Freemasonry: From its Rise Down to the Present* (London: Asher & Co., 1866), 187–188. The others were for South Carolina, North America, Germany, South Wales, Chester, Sicily, Barbados, and Antigua.

⁹ José M. Castellano Gil, *La Masonería española en Cuba* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Centro de la Cultura Popular Canaria, 1996), 43–46; Ray V. Denslow, *Freemasonry in the Western Hemisphere* (1953), 319–320.

original document at a meeting in 1901, and fellow member Robert Freke Gould, an historian of Freemasonry, reproduced it with annotation in the lodge's periodical *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*. "We the Master wardens and Secretary of the Worship full Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons Dedicated to St. John No. 218 on the Registry of Ireland held in the Forty Eight Regiment of Foot" bestowed the Degree of Master upon a man named Alexander Cockburn "at our Lodge Room at the Havanna this 3rd Day of May in the Year of our Lord 1763." Gould notes that none of the names that appear on the certificate—Cockburn and four others—are those of commissioned officers in the regiment, suggesting that they were either non-commissioned officers or ordinary soldiers.¹⁰ Many historians use this document as proof of Cuba's first Masonic Lodge at the time of the British occupation.¹¹ Scholars have debated the extent to which Masonic ideas and practices may have extended beyond the primarily military British communities on the island during the short period before evacuation of the British in July 1763, but it is clear that Freemasonry had yet to gain much influence at that time.¹²

The next wave of Masonic influence came to Cuba with French-speakers fleeing neighboring Haiti in the wake of the Haitian Revolution, among them Masons who brought with them the charters for their lodges. During the first few years of the nineteenth century these men settled in Oriente Province and their Masonic work laid a foundation for Cuban Freemasonry before tensions arising from the Peninsular War (1807–1814) caused many to flee Cuba for New

¹⁰ Robert Freke Gould, "Certificate of a Military Lodge," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum: Being the Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London* Vol. 14 (Margate, England: H. Keble, 1901): 215–216.

¹¹ Castellano Gil, *La Masonería española en Cuba*, 44–45; Denslow, *Freemasonry in the Western Hemisphere*, 320. Castellano Gil reproduces the entire text translated in Spanish, and cites three other historians' use of the source.

¹² Castellano Gil, *La Masonería española en Cuba*, 45–46; Dominique Soucy, *Masonería y nación: Redes masónicas y políticas en la construcción identitaria cubana (1811–1902)* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Ediciones Idea, 2006), 37.

Orleans, bringing the lodge charters with them.¹³ Also during these first years of the new century U.S. Masons began to take an interest in Cuba, and U.S. lodges increased their influence and involvement as the French exited the island. French and U.S. influence within Freemasonry interacted, too, during these years following the Louisiana Purchase (1803) and surrounding Louisiana statehood (1812). In December 1804 the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania sponsored the establishment of the first lodge chartered specifically and exclusively for Cuba. Backed by U.S. Masons, the Havana lodge Le Temple des Vertus Theologales had Frenchman Joseph Cerneau as the first Master, and many of its early members were also of French origin.¹⁴ At this time the Grand Lodge in Philadelphia was an important center of Masonic activity in the Western Hemisphere, responsible for over one hundred lodges throughout Pennsylvania, and in Louisiana and Cuba.¹⁵ It chartered six more lodges on the island between 1815 and 1822. Grand Lodges of South Carolina and Louisiana also established lodges in Cuba during the same period, the former two and the latter three. These eleven U.S. chartered lodges were located in Havana (8), Santiago de Cuba (2), and Matanzas (1).¹⁶ Also during this time, French Freemasonry ceded authority over the fraternity in Cuba to Spanish Freemasonry. One Masonic commentator hypothesized that Cuban Masons resisted obedience to this new authority due to “the desire of

¹³ Castellano Gil, *La Masonería española en Cuba*, 46–47; Denslow, *Freemasonry in the Western Hemisphere*, 327–328; Albert Gallatin Mackey, *The History of Freemasonry* (New York & London: The Masonic History Company, 1898; 1906), 1512.

¹⁴ Castellano Gil, *La Masonería española en Cuba*, 46–47; Denslow, *Freemasonry in the Western Hemisphere*, 328; Mackey, *The History of Freemasonry*, 1961; Soucy, *Masonería y nación*, 38.

¹⁵ Nancy Vogeley, “Spanish-Language Masonic Books Printed in the Early United States,” *Early American Literature* 43, no. 2 (2008): 338.

¹⁶ Castellano Gil, *La Masonería española en Cuba*, 47–48; Denslow, *Freemasonry in the Western Hemisphere*, 329; Mackey, *The History of Freemasonry*, 1961.

our Cuban brethren to be free Masonically as well as politically” from Spanish colonialism.¹⁷ Debate about Masonic sovereignty would indeed parallel and interact with contests for national sovereignty.

From the beginning of U.S. Masonic involvement in Cuba, tension developed between its support for Cuban independence from Spain and undue U.S. meddling in Cuban affairs both Masonic and political. As most Spanish colonies struggled for and gained independence early in the 1800s, activists organized in Masonic Lodges in the United States, where they traveled seeking recruits, money, and arms.¹⁸ Though Cuba remained a Spanish colony long after most of the rest of the empire, its neighbors’ independence movements impacted Cuban society profoundly. Early nineteenth-century revolutionary ideology—influenced heavily by the French Revolution—was characterized by values of rationalism, liberalism, and anticlericalism, values shared broadly by Freemasonry. Some Cuban lodges became centers for the practice of these principles, revolutionary ideology, and anticolonial nationalism.¹⁹

Tension existed, however, with more conservative pro-Spanish forces. When five Cuban lodges combined in November 1820 to form the Gran Logia Española de Antiguos y Aceptados Masones de York,²⁰ for example, the lodge’s general regulations referred to “the Spanish nation in both hemispheres” and assured “absolute independence from other foreign Masonic

¹⁷ H. B. Jeffre, quoted in Denslow, *Freemasonry in the Western Hemisphere*, 330.

¹⁸ Vogeley, “Spanish-Language Masonic Books,” 339.

¹⁹ Wyatt MacGaffey, “Social Structure and Mobility in Cuba,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (April 1961): 107; Francisco J. Porte Domínguez, *La masonería en la independencia de Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Modas Magazine, 1954), 117–118.

²⁰ Castellano Gil, *La Masonería española en Cuba*, 48–49. The date of this merger is contested.

jurisdictions.”²¹ Disagreement between pro-independence Masons and those loyal to Spain would persist throughout the century, as Cuban Freemasonry grew and subdivided. The Spanish crown questioned the loyalty of Masons and feared their organization; the period of Masonic florescence in Cuba during the first three decades of the nineteenth century came to an abrupt end in 1828, when all Masonic meetings were prohibited by Spanish royal decree. Members of some lodges held clandestine gatherings, but persecution was effective and Cuban Freemasonry entered a weak period during which the presence of lodges on the island disappeared almost entirely. A royal amnesty decree in April 1834 had little impact in Cuba, where authorities continued to target Masons. Widespread expansion of Cuban Freemasonry would take place only later, beginning in the late 1850s. Separate Masonic bodies in Havana and Santiago struggled for control, and the 1860s and 1870s saw damaging infighting as factions formed separate lodges of the same names, each claiming authority as *the* Grand Lodge for Cuba.²² Work to unite disparate Masonic bodies culminated in 1880 with the creation of the United Grand Lodge of Colon and the Island of Cuba, a new institution that gained jurisdiction over 71 lodges across the island by September of 1881, and which received official recognition from 34 foreign Masonic groups.²³ Yet internal Masonic conflict continued.

²¹ Gran Logia Española, *Reglamentos generales formados para la uniformidad de sus trabajos con los subalternos* (Havana, 1821), available at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, Havana, Cuba, and excerpted in *ibid.*, 49.

²² Castellano Gil, *La Masonería española en Cuba*, 56–58, 74; Robert Freke Gould, *History of Freemasonry* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1936); Jeffre, *Beginnings of Masonry in Cuba*, quoted in Denslow, *Freemasonry in the Western Hemisphere*, 332.

²³ Torres Cuevas, “La masonería en Cuba durante la Primera República (1902–1933),” in Ferrer Benimeli, ed., *La masonería en la España*, 512. The older history by Gould states that the United Grand Lodge began with 57 lodges, and that it attained 82 by 1885, but that its official list of 1886 listed only 58. Gould, *History of Freemasonry*.

Though Freemasonry did not constitute a coherent political party or have a unified political philosophy in Cuba, Masonic intellectuals played a vital role in the development of Cuban secular liberalism, civil society, and struggle for autonomy during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Shortly after the final war for Cuban Independence began, the captain general of the island suspended the activities of all Cuba's Masonic lodges, though enforcement was spotty. A typically celebratory account of the Masonic role in the conflict claims: "In the new period of war for independence begun February 24, 1895, distinguished Masons were the ones chosen to raise the banner of freedom, and also those who sustained the insurrectionary movement in its critical days." U.S. intervention in the struggle brought U.S. Masons to the island on the side of independence. Many of the arriving U.S. military men who proclaimed support for Cuba's freedom and sovereignty were Masons, including those at the highest levels. Cuban Masons extended fraternal gestures of cooperation, including welcoming U.S. Masons into their lodges and supporting the establishment of English-speaking lodges on the island. U.S. Masons likewise worked to gain Cuban trust; following the U.S. naval blockade during the war, for example, the first ship to arrive in Cuba carried several thousands of dollars offered by the Grand Lodge of New York to the Gran Logia de Cuba for assistance to Masons during recovery.²⁴ Yet U.S. Masons espoused racist views of their "Latin brethren" as having a particular "temperament and training . . . in the school of a strong, centralized State and Church, with authority over all their acts and thoughts," not conducive to democracy. Due to these defects, one U.S. Mason asserted in 1934, they "naturally endeavored to impress upon

²⁴ Porte Domínguez, *La masonería en la independencia*, 120; Torres Cuevas, "La masonería en Cuba," 512–515.

Freemasonry the same autocratic practices.”²⁵ U.S. Masonic historian Ray V. Denslow captures in his 1953 assessment of Cuban independence and its effects on Freemasonry the contradictions endured and challenged by Cuban Masons with regard to their U.S. brothers:

The Spanish-American War did much to bring about new life in the affairs of the fraternity in Cuba. In the first place, it freed our Cuban brethren so that they might carry on publicly and without interference the work of their Grand Lodge; again, it brought Cuban affairs directly under the surveillance of the Grand Lodges of the United States. An influx of American citizens and members of the military establishment was an additional encouragement to the Cuban brethren; many of those high in authority in the American military government were members of the fraternity.²⁶

Revitalization for Cuban Freemasonry and strengthened bonds with brethren across national borders were positive outcomes for the fraternal order, but Denslow’s unwitting claim that Cuban Masons gained freedom from interference by coming “directly under the surveillance” of U.S. Grand Lodges illustrates their difficult position at the turn of the century. Cuba’s new constitution (1901) did codify many political values strongly defended by Masons—including division of government powers, freedom of the press, separation of church and state, and free and secular public education—but also included the Platt Amendment, authorizing extraordinary U.S. control over Cuba’s government and internal affairs.²⁷

Cuban historian of Freemasonry Eduardo Torres Cuevas argues that Masons enjoyed their greatest social and cultural influence in Cuba during the Republican era from 1902 to 1933. The period illustrates the complexity of Masonic political involvement in Cuba. Internal contradictions and ideological and political tensions in the institution of Cuban Freemasonry

²⁵ Charles A. Brockaway, “Freemasonry in Cuba,” in *Transactions*, Richardson Wright, ed. (New York: The Lodge, 1934), 202.

²⁶ Denslow, *Freemasonry in the Western Hemisphere*, 334.

²⁷ Torres Cuevas, “La masonería en Cuba,” 517.

continued during this era. For example, Torres Cuevas hints at a commonly expressed pride when he notes that the independence movement's "three principal figures"—José Martí, Máximo Gómez, and Antonio Maceo—were all Masons, but he is quick to add that they took political positions distant from those held by the leaders of Cuba's Grand Lodge at the time. At the other end of the period, he notes that the "greatest error by Masonic leadership during Republican history" was the highly publicized act of conferring the 33rd Degree, Freemasonry's highest honor, to "the despot" Gerardo Machado.²⁸ How were Masons to defend their values of liberty, equality, and fraternity while at the same time valuing ideological and political diversity amongst their ranks? The Spanish Civil War would present Cuban Masons with this challenge.

Spanish Anti-Freemasonry and Masonic Antifascism

The Spaniards who sought to topple the Republic despised Masons. Nationalists engaged in an active anti-Masonic campaign during the war, building upon centuries of persecution and repression of Freemasonry by clerical and political forces throughout Europe. Masonic values often challenged the legitimacy of secular rulers Masons deemed tyrannical, scaring first monarchs and later authoritarian governments, while virulent anticlericalism within Freemasonry drew the wrath of the Catholic Church. Both Catholic and Protestant states prohibited Masonic activity during the eighteenth century, based on fear of revolutionary plots against rulers, and Pope Clement XII issued the first papal encyclical against Freemasonry, *In Eminenti*, in April 1738.²⁹ Gaining traction from popular beliefs about the French Revolution beginning in the 1790s, anti-Masonic discourse and action persisted in Spain throughout the nineteenth century,

²⁸ Torres Cuevas, "La masonería en Cuba," 510–523.

²⁹ Morales Ruiz, *El discurso antimasonico*, 33–43; Pope Clement XII, *In Eminenti*, On Freemasonry, 28 April 1738.

intertwining with anti-Semitism and anti-British sentiment. Arguing against Spain's nascent liberal movement and its values of freedom, equality, and the rights of man, conservatives in favor of monarchal and church rule effectively used fabulous stories depicting Freemasonry as a legion of evil and sacrilegious men, enemies of God, plotting to destroy the world. Freedom of association in Spain during the brief period of the 'Sexenio' (1868–1874) allowed Masonic institutions to form and function openly, but anti-Masonic opinion persisted. Pope Leo XIII asserted in *Humanum Genus* (April 1884) that Freemasonry “revived the contumacious spirit of the demon.”³⁰ In the early twentieth century, authoritarian governments both left and right used anti-Masonic arguments. Soviet officials banned Freemasonry—invoking anti-Semitic fear and anti-bourgeois sentiment as justification—beginning in 1917. In Italy and Germany officials conflated Masons, Communists, and Jewish people to produce for the purposes of argument and propaganda a single enemy.³¹

Like their anti-Masonic forbearers and authoritarian contemporaries, Spanish Nationalists had both political and religious reasons to fear Freemasonry. Liberalism and anticlericalism were abhorrent to them, and threatened to destroy the ideal of a traditionalist, Catholic Church–guided Spain in which they ardently believed. From the conservative Catholic perspective, the dangerous faults of Freemasonry included secrecy, paganism, blasphemy, and revolutionary tendencies. One Spanish author of this viewpoint in 1937 speculated about the identity of Freemasonry's leadership with evident bias: “A man? A people? A devil? The Jews? The

³⁰ Morales Ruiz, *El discurso antimasonico*, 43–71; Pope Leo XIII, *Humanum Genus*, On Freemasonry, 20 April 1884.

³¹ Morales Ruiz, *El discurso antimasonico*, 72–73.

Protestants? The anarchists?”³² Whatever secrets Freemasonry hid, Spanish conservatives were certain it was comprised of their religious and political enemies.

The voices of Spanish Freemasonry, too, asserted enmity strongly against their opponents. The Spain in which Masons believed was the Second Republic, and upon its triumph the Madrid periodical *Vida Masónica (Masonic Life)* published a jubilant editorial proclaiming that Freemasonry “warmly welcomes and congratulates the interim government of the Spanish Republic, and hopes fervently that the Great Architect of the Universe will shine for the good of Freedom and the Homeland.”³³ Fascism and Nazism, they stated, brought about a “formidable reversal in the beautiful path of universal solidarity,” destroying liberty, halting human progress, and representing oppression, barbarism, and race hatred. To combat these forces, they endeavored to “continue our work of creating a society in which reign tolerance, moral dignity, contempt for the prejudices born of ignorance, devotion, and selflessness for the good of all.”³⁴ Long-established oppositional polemics increased in fervor during the 1930s. The period saw pro- and anti-Masonic arguments crescendo as conservatives faced off against the Republican government, and imagined themselves battling for Christian civilization against Judeo-Masonic Communism.³⁵

Pro-Nationalists brought this conservative view to Cuba. A series of three anonymous pro-Nationalist essays published on the island in 1937, for example, denounced the “gold of the

³² Anon., “El Mensajero del Corazón de Jesús,” *Rayos de Sol* 94 (1937), reproduced in Ferrer Benimeli, *La masonería española*, 147–149.

³³ Editorial, *Vida Masónica* 6, no. 2 (April 1931): 17, reproduced in Ferrer Benimeli, *La masonería española*, 172. Ferrer Benimeli’s citation contains an error; it states the volume number as 4 instead of 6.

³⁴ *Boletín Oficial del Grande Oriente Español* 7, no. 73 (June 1933): 1, reproduced in Ferrer Benimeli, *La masonería española*, 173–174.

³⁵ Morales Ruiz, *El discurso antimasonico*, 73–77.

French Jews and the Russian Bolsheviks” that had bought the loyalty of some Spaniards who were trying to sell Spain to “perverse and bloody communists.”³⁶ Spain was theirs, the essays reminded Spain’s “children in America,” for it had poured its blood and culture into the New World.³⁷ They want us to give this country, our country, to Russia, the author warned. They want “to turn us into Jews and Masons.”³⁸

Cuban Masonic Antifascism

Cuban Masons would not act as passive bystanders to the conflict in Spain. Just weeks after the start of fighting, the director of one of Havana’s leading Masonic periodicals, *Mundo Masónico* (*Masonic World*),³⁹ Cesáreo González Naredo urged readers to inform themselves about “the unequal struggle that is developing in the motherland” between those in favor of freedom and those against it. He called upon Cuba’s lodges to “awaken from their slumber and channel public and Masonic opinion to follow the paths of justice, freedom, and democracy that are in imminent danger of being lost for many years” to “despots, dictators, and exploiters.” The elected Republican government of Spain was just and legal, he argued; the “rebels” could have waited for an electorally sanctioned opportunity to gain influence and change policies, but instead chose treason, illegality, oppression, fanaticism, and dictatorship. Not only did Masonic

³⁶ Anon., “Españoles de América,” 1937, Doc. 7s168, Fondo Salvador Vilaseca, Instituto de Historia de Cuba (IHC), Havana, Cuba.

³⁷ Anon., “España a sus hijos en América,” 1937, Doc 8s168, Fondo Salvador Vilaseca, IHC.

³⁸ Anon., “A todos los españoles de las Américas de habla hispana,” 1937, Doc. 9s168, Fondo Salvador Vilaseca, IHC.

³⁹ This publication was considered by Cuban Masonic leadership to be preeminent. They wrote that they received much correspondence referencing and praising it, and called González Naredo “our beloved brother.” *Anuario de la Gran Logia de la Isla de Cuba: 1937–1938* (Guanabacoa: Imp. Alejandro López, 1941), 272. The issues of *Mundo Masónico* considered here are available in hardcopy at the House of the Temple Library in Washington, DC.

values dictate a need to defend freedom and democracy in Spain but also a triumph of fascism would threaten the institution of Freemasonry itself. Look, the author directed, to other examples for an idea of what “this criminal fascist movement” in Spain would do to Masons. Upon the triumph of fascism in Italy, lodges were burned and Masons persecuted, exiled, and murdered. Germany and Portugal provided further examples of what would happen to Spanish Masons at the victory of enemies bent upon destroying them. And Russia, suffering under a “fascist-proletarian dictatorship,” he wrote, demonstrated that Freemasonry “drowns” without freedom. It was not his intention, he insisted, showing some degree of dissent among the ranks, to disturb or offend any brother; but Cuban Freemasonry had to remain true to its principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity, to protect its liberal credo, its democratic doctrines, its reputation, and its very existence. In keeping with Masonic ideals, he encouraged readers to open lodges to rational debate, free from politicking and personal attacks. By considering both sides of the conflict and any “profits or losses that may result from the triumph of one or the other,” he asserted with confidence, Cuban Masons would come “to understand the danger to our institution if fascism triumphs in Spain,” and take action to defend Spain’s liberty with all their moral and material force. “Masons,” *Mundo Masónico*’s director concluded, “you know your duty.”⁴⁰

Antifascist Cuban Masons would return repeatedly to the themes outlined in González Naredo’s editorial as they mounted their defense of the Spanish Republic. The *Mundo Masónico* director had invoked a Masonic tradition of political involvement and proclaimed its necessity in the present, while balancing his assertions with a stated commitment to rational and respectful debate and plurality of opinions; he had affirmed Masonic politics as pro-democratic and anti-dictatorship, anticommunist as well as antifascist; and he had presented three components of

⁴⁰ González Naredo, “Puntos de Vista Por el Director: La masonería debe reaccionar ante la revolución española,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 52 (August 1936): 6–7.

Masons' pro-Republican stance: the political, philosophical, and self-defense arguments. Here we examine these three arguments, consider Masonic anticommunism, and explore dissent among Cuban Masons regarding support for the Spanish Republic. Our goal is to gain an understanding of the character and extent of Cuban Masonic antifascism from 1936 to 1939.

The Masonic political argument for the Spanish Republic—asserted by Spanish Masons and picked up on the island—resonated with two domestic political goals of vital importance to many Cubans: democracy and sovereignty. The people of Spain had elected their government democratically, Masons emphasized, and therefore the Spanish Republic was not only desirable but also legitimate and legal. A message from the Supremo Consejo Grado 33 de España (Supreme Council Grade 33 of Spain) to its Cuban counterpart in October 1936 stated succinctly: “The Spanish government is a legally constituted government, formed by the Popular Front parties that triumphed in the general elections of last 16 February. It is therefore a government of maximum legitimacy.” Attempting to present the Republic as respectable to all Masons, and to counter claims of leftwing radicalism, the Supreme Council of Spain continued: “The truth is that the regime is a democratic republic with great aims of social progress.”⁴¹ It was a Masonic principle, wrote leaders of Cuba’s Grand Lodge in a “Declaration of Principles about International Politics” in September 1937, that governmental transfer of power should occur without violence and follow democratic norms.⁴² “Our truth is this,” wrote *Mundo Masónico*’s director: Freemasonry respects legally constituted governments of countries in which it exists. The majority of Masons, he argued, “understand perfectly the reason Freemasonry should be on

⁴¹ Supremo Consejo Grado 33 de España, “Al Supremo Consejo Grado 33 para Cuba, Madrid, 12 de Octubre de 1936,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 54 y 55 (October/November 1936): 22.

⁴² Luis Martínez Reyes and Gonzalo García Pedroso, “Declaración de principios sobre política internacional, Habana, 15 de Septiembre de 1937,” in *Anuario: 1937–1938*, 52.

the side of the legitimately constituted government of the Spanish Republic.”⁴³ That the Spanish Republic was legitimate, declared an anonymous editorial, was sufficient reason for no Mason to oppose it.⁴⁴

The government’s legitimacy made the revolt against it “a bloody treason”⁴⁵ and the leader of that rebellion, Franco, a traitor.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the rebellion invited foreigners into Spain who threatened the country’s sovereignty. Like other supporters of the Republic, Cuban Masons decried the involvement in Spain of foreign military forces—“Moors and foreigners”⁴⁷ or “the Moorish, Italian, and German hordes”⁴⁸—who fought with the Nationalists against the Republican forces. The term ‘Nationalist’ to describe Franco and his supporters was absurd, they asserted along with other critics, because so-called Nationalist forces were in fact made up of regiments and divisions of the regular German and Italian armies.⁴⁹ Indeed, the ideology of fascism itself was a foreign import, argued a prominent Mason in Spain in a speech published in

⁴³ González Naredo, “Continúa la Guerra Civil Española: Nuestro humilde aporte por la libertad y por la democracia del mundo,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 21.

⁴⁴ “La Masonería y la Guerra Civil,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 31.

⁴⁵ González Naredo, “La Guerra Civil Española, la Masonería y Nosotros,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 62 y 63 (June/July 1937): 4.

⁴⁶ Bolívar (pseud.), “La España de Franco, Feudo de Extranjeros,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 66 y 67 (October/November 1937): 14.

⁴⁷ González Naredo, “Continúa la Guerra Civil Española, Cruel y Sangrienta Sembrando la Muerte,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 57 y 58 (January/February 1937): 19.

⁴⁸ Eduardo R. Chibas, et al., “La Intelectualidad Cubana y la Guerra Civil Española: A través de una interesante encuesta de la popular Revista ‘Bohemia,’” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 18.

⁴⁹ Bolívar (pseud.), “El Español ante la Francia actual: De nuestro corresponsal en España,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 7.

Cuba in March 1937.⁵⁰ Cuban Antonio Penichet combined arguments regarding fascism as a foreign ideology and the Nationalists as foreign forces in January 1938 with an article in *Mundo Masónico* claiming “fascism has nothing in common with Spain, much less with the Spanish people.” It had invited North Africans, Italians, Germans, and Portuguese into Spain, and paid them “to manage the apparatus of death.” This “human debris,” Penichet wrote, shared nothing spiritually with Spaniards.⁵¹ Going one step further, Masons asserted that the foreign fascist forces supporting the Nationalists were in fact colonial or imperialist agents; and in a fashion typical of Cuban sovereignty arguments, Masonic authors equated colonial intervention with slavery. The “odious foreign invaders” sought to extract minerals and other resources from Spain for their imperialist wars, and to enslave the Spanish people.⁵² The Spanish people rose up against those who would enslave them.⁵³ The foreigners considered their mission “a business of the colonial type,” and the Spanish people, fighting for their independence, would “die before they would become slaves of foreigners.”⁵⁴ Fascism represented “narrow nationalisms,” “stupid

⁵⁰ Luis Gertsch, “Democracia y Fascismo,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 24. Author’s surname misspelled as “Gertch.” Gertsch was not Spanish by birth, but had resided there for 28 years as of 1937.

⁵¹ Antonio Penichet, “Barbarie y Civilización: Dos clases de trincheras en España,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 68 y 69 (December/January 1937/1938): 25.

⁵² Bolívar (pseud.), “La España de Franco, Feudo de Extranjeros,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 66 y 67 (October/November 1937): 14.

⁵³ Ceferino González Castroverde and Hermenegildo Casas, “A todos los masones del universo,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 27.

⁵⁴ Bolívar (pseud.), “El Español ante la Francia actual: De nuestro corresponsal en España,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 8.

racisms,” and “imperialist greed.”⁵⁵ In one particularly colorful iteration imperialism hovered “like a ghost over the white head of the noble Spanish matron.”⁵⁶

It is important to note here that although the pages of *Mundo Masónico* declared elsewhere that “the idea of superior and inferior races is a myth,”⁵⁷ arguments against foreign interference in Spain’s internal affairs in the magazine crossed over into the realm of blatant and virulent racism. Tension around North African mercenaries fighting for Franco in the Spanish Civil War—referencing centuries-old history of conflict between Islam and Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula—was often perceptible beneath pro-Republican rhetoric’s surface. Most Cuban commentators on the left, however, carefully avoided ethnicity-based insults and seemed intentionally to use equal terms of disregard for all fascists, regardless of national or ethnic origin. At most, they would point out the hypocrisy of Franco using Muslim soldiers while claiming to fight for traditional Christianity in Spain; a typical expression of this argument appeared in *Mundo Masónico* attributed to an anonymous contributor from Santa Clara: “Why do they say that the rebellion in the Iberian Peninsula is among other things to return Catholicism to Spain if the action is realized primarily by non-Catholics, Moorish soldiers?”⁵⁸ Prejudice boiled over publicly, though, elsewhere in *Mundo Masónico*. An article by the magazine’s director González Naredo in September 1936 used the term “savages of Africa.”⁵⁹ In a February 1937 editorial González Naredo took his vitriol a step further: “While the Spanish people suffer

⁵⁵ Alfredo Padrón Batista, “Civilización Enferma,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 61 (May 1937): 10.

⁵⁶ González Naredo, “Continúa la Guerra Civil Española, Cruel y Sangrienta Sembrando la Muerte,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 57 y 58 (January/February 1937): 19.

⁵⁷ A. Pereira Alves, “¿Hay razas inferiores?,” *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 70 y 71 (February/March 1938): 23.

⁵⁸ Un Ajef de Santa Clara, “Notas de Actualidad: Dios, Religión y Guerra,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 57 y 58 (January/February 1937): 22.

⁵⁹ González Naredo, “Acotaciones,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 53 (September 1936): 29.

and bleed the savage hordes of Africa—these are indeed wild hordes!—sate their carnivorous appetites and vengeance contained for centuries.”⁶⁰ It is possible that González Naredo harbored an unusually strong personal racial animus, but other Masons used such problematic language also. An article by a prominent Spanish Mason published in *Mundo Masónico* in April 1937 used derogatory words for all fascists, but saved the same particularly racially problematic term for North African participants in the Spanish conflict: “Spain is today the theater of the most cruel and bloody civil war, begun by a band of military despots and reactionaries in collaboration with all the obstinate plutocracy and with the most savage hordes of the Rif and of the Tercio de Extranjeros.”⁶¹ Although expressions of racism are not surprising in the context of the era in which Cuban Masons published *Mundo Masónico*, it is important to make note of ignorant and hateful language used against ethnic others when considering Masonic proclamations of their values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, to which we will turn shortly.

One other significant consideration in the Cuban Masonic defense of the Spanish Republic as a legitimate and legal democracy was a critique of the position of other world democracies relative to Spain. Making a case for the Republic as a democracy caused antifascists to confront non-intervention by the European democracies and the United States. Although they praised these nations for hospitality toward Freemasonry, Masons came to the same conclusion as others, that the Non-Intervention Agreement was a cowardly betrayal of democratic values that aided fascism. “The absurd policy of panic followed by the European

⁶⁰ González Naredo, “Continúa la Guerra Civil Española, Cruel y Sangrienta Sembrando la Muerte,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 57 y 58 (January/February 1937): 20.

⁶¹ Ceferino González Castroverde, Gran Oriente Español, “Hermanos de todo el mundo, acudid en nuestro socorro,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 27–28. At the time the Tercio (Regiment of Foreigners, also known as the Spanish Legion) included many non-Europeans as well as Spanish conscripts who began their military careers in the Rif War in Morocco.

‘democracies’ frightened by the madness of those two lunatic drivers of Italy and Germany” marched the world toward the abyss, wrote *Mundo Masónico*’s correspondent in Spain who went by the pseudonym “Bolívar.”⁶² France, England, the United States, and all other democracies had become pale, silent, and trembling, in the descriptive language of another Masonic author.⁶³ They treated the legal government and the traitors equally, which many observers condemned, including Masons.⁶⁴ And in fact, the democracies were being duped by the fascist states, they argued, because fascists were indeed breaking their commitment and intervening in Spain. Without foreign fascist aid, “Bolívar” asserted in August 1936, it was “absolutely unquestionable” that Franco’s forces would already have lost.⁶⁵ Parts of the country were occupied by Italians and Germans, he wrote in February 1937. Spain was being colonized by foreigners, and would serve as testing ground for Hitler and Mussolini to plan future attacks.⁶⁶ As one European Mason asserted presciently in a speech printed in Cuba in March 1937, the Spanish conflict was transforming into world war.⁶⁷ Tacit accommodation of fascist leaders’

⁶² Bolívar (pseud.), “El Español ante la Francia actual: De nuestro corresponsal en España,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 8.

⁶³ Fabian Vidal, “Páginas Profanas: Por que el gobierno ingles es fascista y mantiene el absurdo comité de no intervención,” *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 72 y 73 (April/May 1938): 26.

⁶⁴ Supremo Consejo Grado 33 de España, “Al Supremo Consejo Grado 33 para Cuba, Madrid, 12 de Octubre de 1936,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 54 y 55 (October/November 1936): 22.

⁶⁵ Bolívar (pseud.), “Colaboración Española: Sobre la Guerra Civil en España,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 53 (September 1936): 28.

⁶⁶ Bolívar (pseud.), “Desde Barcelona: La Guerra Civil en Esp.: La traición de las democracias,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 57 y 58 (January/February 1937): 35.

⁶⁷ Luis Gertsch, “Democracia y Fascismo,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 27.

involvement in Spain by the democracies, Masons warned, jeopardized democracy and sovereignty in Spain and across the globe.⁶⁸

Like other antifascists, Cuban Masons saw the hand of fascism reaching across Europe, from Portugal to Turkey, and beyond, to Ethiopia, China, and even the Western Hemisphere. In January 1938 Cuban Masons reacted in horror to news from South America that, following the 1937 *coup d'état* of Getúlio Vargas in which he abrogated constitutional government, all Masonic lodges in the country had been closed, and their archives ransacked, by Vargas's "strong" government. The Masonic press reported that "that which was the great Republic of Brazil today converted into a totalitarian fascist state." They took liberty with their definition of fascism in this instance, but remained consistent in opposition to anti-Masonic strongman rule. They saw Vargas's actions as dictatorial, and therefore placed him among "our secular enemies."⁶⁹ His coup in 1937 convinced Cuban Masons that fascism had arrived in the Americas. By supporting the Spanish Republic as politically legitimate and desirable, they hoped to help protect democracy and sovereignty worldwide.

The Masonic philosophical argument for the Spanish Republic had two parts, religious and secular. The religious argument followed the Masonic tradition of anticlericalism, asserting that the Spanish Catholic Church aided Franco in committing the sins of fascism against the country and its people, and that true Christians, including Masons, must support the Republic. The secular argument stated that the Spanish Republic represented and practiced Masonic values

⁶⁸ As we have seen elsewhere, one of Republican supporters' most common warnings was directed at Spain's neighbor, France. See for example: Bolívar (pseud.), "El Español ante la Francia actual: De nuestro corresponsal en España," *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 7.

⁶⁹ Anon., "La Clausura de las Logias del Brasil," *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 68 y 69 (December/January 1937/1938): 21; M. Pitchon, "Informe del Presidente de la Comisión de Relaciones Exteriores," in *Anuario: 1937-1938*, 288.

and principles; that fascism contradicted all such values and principles; and therefore that Masons must support the Republic.

As a group, Masons were anticlerical but not atheistic, setting them apart from some of their fellow antifascists on the left. Cuban Masons professed their faith in God and Jesus Christ, but condemned the Vatican, the Catholic Church of Spain, the clergy, and “religious fanaticism.”⁷⁰ One Mason from Ciego de Avila expressed this opinion stridently, stating: “the Pope of Rome himself is no more Catholic than I.” To be Catholic was to believe in a supreme being, he wrote, not in priests.⁷¹ The forces of clericalism, Masons from both Spain and Cuba argued, were behind fascism; authoritarian states were their “traitorous and unfortunate work in the world.”⁷² The Church had been omnipotent in Spain, controlling not only Catholicism but also government and society, they claimed, and the Spanish people lived subservient to the clergy before the Republic. “The proclamation of the Republic was a happy awakening” and the Republican government “stroved to instruct the people and free them of the clerical yoke.”⁷³ Fascists sought to reverse these positive changes, Masons argued, favoring traditional Church rule over true Christianity for their own gain. An increasingly wide divergence could be found, they lamented, within Roman Catholicism “between the best known and most tender preaching

⁷⁰ See for example: González Naredo, “Continúa la Guerra Civil Española, Cruel y Sangrienta Sembrando la Muerte,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 57 y 58 (January/February 1937): 19; Anon., “El Dr. Fernando Ortiz en la Gran Logia” and “Consideraciones Masónicas, Luz y Tinieblas,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 68 y 69 (December/January 1937/1938): 10, 13.

⁷¹ Francisco Ledesma, “Y Nosotros, ¿Qué Hacemos?,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 66 y 67 (October/November 1937): 17.

⁷² Anon., “La Clausura de las Logias del Brasil,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 68 y 69 (December/January 1937/1938): 21.

⁷³ Luis Gertsch, “Democracia y Fascismo,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 24.

of Christianity and determinations made in external life and having nothing to do with the aforementioned religion.”⁷⁴

Fascists sought government power, and Masons asserted that the Church of Spain, in conflict with principles of true Christianity, favored fascist power over legitimate government. Quoting a prominent Spanish Catholic and echoing the government-legitimacy argument previously discussed, an author from Santa Clara asserted that Christians should not tolerate God’s name being used to attack a legitimately constituted State.⁷⁵ Under the heading “Not Only Masons,” editors of *Mundo Masónico* published a piece by leading Spanish religious figures they called the “Good Catholics” condemning fascism similarly. As Catholic priests, the men began, we decided in these grave times to speak out to our brothers in the faith. Quoting statements by church officials including papal bulls, they argued that rebellion against legitimate government authority violated Catholic principle. “No political party,” they wrote, “identifies itself with Catholicism, and fascism in its most fundamental aspects is in conflict with it.”⁷⁶

Furthermore, Masons found fascists to be spiritually suspect. They were “men without souls,” argued one Mason from Morón. They uprooted the seed of brotherly love planted by Jesus, he wrote, and replaced it with a seed of hatred and rancor against those who held different opinions or beliefs. If the hell these priests tell us so much about exists, he concluded, it will be too small for all these men without souls.⁷⁷ In contrast to these portrayals of evil fascists,

⁷⁴ Un Ajef de Santa Clara, “Notas de Actualidad: Dios, Religión y Guerra,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 57 y 58 (January/February 1937): 22.

⁷⁵ Un Ajef de Santa Clara, “Notas de Actualidad: Dios, Religión y Guerra,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 57 y 58 (January/February 1937): 22.

⁷⁶ José Manuel Gallegos, Leopoldo Lobo, Enrique Monter, etc., “Palabras de los buenos Católicos: La rebelión contra el gobierno legítimo es ilícita,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 23.

⁷⁷ M. F. Gómez, “Hombres sin Alma,” *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 72 y 73 (April/May 1938): 29.

Masons pictured themselves as martyrs in a role parallel to that of ancient Christian martyrs. In an “Anecdote from the Spanish Civil War,” an anonymous author described the martyrdom of a Masonic brother named Victor Abeal, who had been an engineer in Ferrol, Galicia. Brother Abeal, the author wrote, like many other Masons in his region, was arrested to be executed. His captors offered liberty in exchange for a renunciation of Masonic values and a “conversion” to Christianity. These events have nothing to do with Jesus Christ or his doctrines, the author stated. The Mason in question refused the proposed “conversion,” and was assassinated by the bullets of “the eternal inquisitors of Spain.” This is how our brothers are dying, the author wrote to fellow Masons, “for the cause of liberty, of honor, and of justice.”⁷⁸ We will return to the murder of Masons in Spain shortly, when we discuss the Masonic pro-Republican argument of self-defense.

One particularly literary parable published by the Cuban Masonic press shortly after the period of intense fighting in Teruel deserves note for its provocative mixture of religious and political values, and for its apparent leftist stance. In May 1938 *Mundo Masónico* published a short story entitled “God is Justice” by Father Hugo Moreno, a Spanish Republican priest from Andalusia who used the pseudonym “Juan Garcia Morales, Presbyterian.”⁷⁹ The story imagines that falling bombs have awakened the thirteenth-century Lovers of Teruel, Don Diego Martínez de Marcilla and Doña Isabel de Segura. Confused and terrified, Don Diego asks, “Will the final judgment take place in Teruel or in the valley of Jehoshaphat?” Judgment will take place here, states the unidentified narrator, because that which the psalm predicts is fulfilled: “The poor have occupied today the chairs the rich; the poor have driven from Spain those who, proud, had them

⁷⁸ Anon., “Lo que está pasando por allá: Anécdotas de la Guerra Civil Española,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 54 y 55 (October/November 1936): 26.

⁷⁹ José Antonio Morillas Brandy, “Juan García Morales: Un cura republicano: Obrero de la pluma,” *Cuadernos Republicanos* 23 (1995): 99–112.

under their yoke. Today the poor lead in Loyalist [Republican] Spain.” The kings, emperors, nobles, rich men, and rentiers once had power in Spain, you among them, he tells Don Diego. “You remedied all with charity and abandoned the enormous problem of justice, and the finger of Providence has condemned you. You have filled your mouths, as the prophet says, speaking God’s name and not carrying God in your heart.” Don Diego asks, “Are you the angel who comes to judge, are you, by chance, Jesus Christ? Who are you?”—and here the parable takes an unexpected turn. “I am a red,” the narrator states. “I have not founded hospitals or asylums like you to pick up the homeless and under this pretext gain the kingdom of heaven; I believed that the poor should have for their work all the amenities enjoyed by the rich.” The bombs that awoke you, he tells the centuries-dead nobleman, are the bombs of our brothers the poor, who are directed by Jesus of Nazareth, God of the laborer and the destitute. “Don Diego, haughty, proud, undaunted, is adamant” in response. “He does not understand Democracies or poverty. He does not understand how the poor can dominate the rich.” He feels love, but fails to understand justice. And so he and his lover return to the eternal sleep of death, not having comprehended the truth—that Labor will triumph over Capital because Labor is on the side of reason and justice. The nobles awoken from death loved God only with their lips, the parable concludes, and did not understand that God is justice.⁸⁰ In this remarkable story, a religious leader author equates Christian and leftist values in a defense of the Republic. In the Cuban Masonic press, the parable also suggests a reading specific to Freemasonry emphasizing the fraternity’s secular principles.

The secular part of Masons’ philosophical argument in defense of the Republic equated Masonic values with those of Republicans. In addition to the principles of democracy and

⁸⁰ Juan García Morales (pseud.), “Dios, es la justicia,” *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 72 and 73 (April/May 1938): 13.

sovereignty already discussed, Masons valued above all liberty, equality, and fraternity. Among the central motives for Masons to support the Spanish Republic was the elected government's commitment to these principles which it "so far has proved to keep faithfully" and, they believed, would implement at the end of the conflict if it triumphed. Freemasonry aligned itself with "those who defend the rights of man and the liberties of the people in the motherland," wrote González Naredo.⁸¹ Accordingly, Masons argued, they supported the "persons of liberal character" who made up the Republican government, individuals of esteemed and respectable "republican-liberal-socialist lineage."⁸² Masons also valued reason, and argued that the Republic had come to power by force of reason. Republicans displaced Nationalists from power by force of reason, they stated, and now Nationalists sought to regain their position through the reason of force. "Fascism does not believe in anything," asserted Penichet, "but its own force."⁸³

One way in which Masons—and others—portrayed the fight with fascism was as a struggle of civilization against savagery. Spanish Masons, for example, portrayed Franco's rebellion as "the most abominable crime against civilization" and the Republicans' fight as one of "civilization against barbarity."⁸⁴ In using this argument, Masons suggested that civilization itself was literally, physically in danger because fascism would lead to another world war, and its military tactics—bombing cities and killing people with poison gasses—would cause civilization to "disappear."⁸⁵ Furthermore, Masons equated their values with civilization: "On our side are

⁸¹ González Naredo, "Puntos de Vista: De la guerra civil Española, con la Libertad y la Democracia por Escudo," *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 68 y 69 (December/January 1937/1938): 6.

⁸² Anon., "La Masonería y la Guerra Civil," *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (March 1937): 31.

⁸³ Antonio Penichet, "Trayectorias," *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 54 y 55 (October/November 1936): 14.

⁸⁴ Ceferino González Castroverde and Hermenegildo Casas, "A todos los masones del universo," *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 25–26.

⁸⁵ Antonio Penichet, *Nuestra Responsabilidad ante la Próxima Guerra* (Havana: Logia Minerva, 1936), 5.

reason, justice, and rights, while the insurrection represents despotism, injustice, and barbarity.”⁸⁶ Civilization “ought to consist of the functioning of social institutions that serve the greatest good for the largest number of individuals,” they argued, such as freedom, housing and clothing, insurance for illness and old age, improved and more accessible public schools, prolongation of life and maximization of happiness, “not only for the privileged but also for those who have lived until now at the margins.”⁸⁷

It is evident that Freemasons shared some ground with leftists. They presented ideas about the equality of men, a positive role for socialism or social democracy, and a conception of justice for the poor and the masses. Some imagined the triumph of the poor over the rich, brotherly love as an end to prejudice, and even Christian values shared by “a red.” Within Masonic antifascism, there were individuals who held beliefs corresponding with wide range of ideologies. In a discussion of core Masonic principles as expressed within Cuban antifascism, however, it is important to note the official articulation of anticommunism. Even where their values overlapped with leftist ideologies—or where anticommunism was moderate—many Masons made a distinction between Spanish Republicanism and leftist radicalism. Leaders of the Supreme Council Grade 33 of Spain asserted: “It is a fallacy to call the legal government and the loyal army of the people the RED government and the RED army.” The rebels, they argued, used these misleading names “to justify their treason and their evildoing.”⁸⁸ “They are wrong, those who say that the present war in Spain is the work of Communism or of Anarchism,” wrote

⁸⁶ Ceferino González Castroverde, Gran Oriente Español, “Hermanos de todo el mundo, acudid en nuestro socorro,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 28.

⁸⁷ Alfredo Padrón, “La Civilización,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 52 (August 1936): 20.

⁸⁸ Supremo Consejo Grado 33 de España, “Al Supremo Consejo Grado 33 para Cuba, Madrid, 12 de Octubre de 1936,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 54 y 55 (October/November 1936): 22.

one Masonic author.⁸⁹ Communist involvement, reported *Mundo Masónico*'s correspondent in Spain, consisted of only two ministers who demonstrated "with their collaboration that their party is absolutely loyal to the democratic Republic which they support sincerely with all their enthusiasm."⁹⁰ Masonic anticommunism was not consistently expressed, and optimistic statements such as these were outweighed by less favorable assessments. Many Masons, even some who felt favorably toward socialism,⁹¹ condemned the Communist Party and Moscow nearly as fervently (though not, it seems, as frequently) as they condemned the ideologies of Rome and Berlin. In a work read on the radio, González Naredo described how all dictatorships were anti-Masonic, including Russia: "Freemasonry does not exist in Russia because in Russia there is no liberty."⁹² Another Cuban Masonic author wrote that leftists would substitute the "despotism of a Lenin" for the "democracy of a Simón Bolívar," while those on the right would exchange the "ideology of José Martí" with that of Hitler. "We are Americans," he stated. "These exotic ideas are daughters of Old World despotism, and must be rejected outright."⁹³ The Mason could be neither state communist nor fascist, wrote another, because both tendencies were dictatorship. "One brings dictatorship from above, and the other, dictatorship from below; Freemasonry repudiates all dictatorships." Freemasonry is not rightwing or leftwing, he stated,

⁸⁹ Alfredo Padrón, "La Civilización," *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 52 (August 1936): 20.

⁹⁰ Bolívar (pseud.), "Colaboración Española: Sobre la Guerra Civil en España," *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 53 (September 1936): 27.

⁹¹ González Naredo, "Acotaciones," *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 53 (September 1936): 29.

⁹² González Naredo, "Franco y la Masonería: Trabajo leído en la 'Hora Masónica de Cuba,'" *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 61 (May 1937): 16.

⁹³ A. Pereira Alves, "Ni izquierda ni derecha," *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 72 y 73 (April/May 1938): 13.

but persecuted by all autocracies.⁹⁴ In “Germany, Italy, Portugal, Rumania, Brazil, Russia, and other countries that suffer the boot of tyranny,” González Naredo wrote, “Freemasonry has been destroyed and annihilated.”⁹⁵

Most Masons were anticommunist because Communist states persecuted Masons, just as most were antifascist, citing anti-Masonic repression in fascist states. Though Masons used ardent pro-Republican arguments based on ideological and philosophical principles forcefully and often, their most salient antifascist claim was self-defense. The argument was simple and frequently repeated. Fascists defamed and banned Freemasonry, desecrated and closed Masonic Lodges, confiscated Masonic property, and assassinated Masons; Cuban Masons received accounts of these indignities and atrocities sent by their brethren in Spain.⁹⁶ Fascists and their dictatorial sympathizers committed these terrible acts, they claimed, in every nation in which they came to power. Franco said and did all the same anti-Masonic things as his contemporaries in these other places. If Franco and his allies triumphed against the Republic in Spain, the argument went, Spanish Freemasonry would perish and anti-Masonic forces would count another local victory in their global quest to destroy the fraternal order worldwide. “Where fascism prevails,” summarized one Cuban Mason, “Freemasonry cannot survive.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Francisco Ledesma, “¡Masón y Fascista?,” *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 70 y 71 (February/March 1938): 14.

⁹⁵ González Naredo, “Puntos de Vista: De la guerra civil Española, con la Libertad y la Democracia por Escudo,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 68 y 69 (December/January 1937/1938): 6.

⁹⁶ Anon., “Lo que está pasando por allá: Anécdotas de la Guerra Civil Española,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 54 y 55 (October/November 1936): 26; Anon., “Los Masones Españoles piden socorro,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 25–26; González Naredo, “Continúa la Guerra Civil Española: Nuestro humilde aporte por la libertad y por la democracia del mundo,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 21.

⁹⁷ Antonio Penichet, “Trayectorias,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 52 (August 1936): 11.

With the self-defense argument, antifascist Masons sought the last word within the order. Antifascist consensus did not exist within Cuban Freemasonry, and when erudite pleas couched in political and philosophical values failed to convince their brethren, Masons supportive of the Spanish Republic resorted to emphasizing existential threat. Some had trouble distilling the message, elaborating on the self-defense argument by connecting it to loftier arguments already considered. “Great exploiters of humanity,” wrote one, have always fought against Freemasonry because it is synonymous with “liberty, democracy, justice and reason.”⁹⁸ The Supreme Council of Cuba unanimously approved a motion in November 1936 condemning—“in the name of reason, liberty, and justice”—persecution of Spanish Freemasonry by Nationalists. Forces in favor of “exclusive and despotic systems,” Supreme Council members asserted, tried to destroy Freemasonry because it was “a formidable bulwark.”⁹⁹ A particularly concise summary of the Cuban Masonic antifascist position, however, reveals the greater effectiveness of the unadulterated self-defense argument relative to those concerning values. It included four points. The first point corresponded to our first argument: government legitimacy. The second and third points concerned Masonic principles and values—liberty, equality, and fraternity—and the men of “liberal character” who ran the Republican government, both components of our second argument, though leaving out religion. The last point began, “Fourth *and foremost* is that on the part of the government, Freemasonry has suffered no persecution.” On the contrary, Republicans loved and respected Freemasonry, “because, among other things, almost all of these great men identified are Masons.” Having asserted the correspondence between Masonic and Republican

⁹⁸ González Naredo, “Franco y la Masonería: Trabajo leído en la ‘Hora Masónica de Cuba,’” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 61 (mayo de 1937): 16.

⁹⁹ Antonio Gonzalo Pérez, “Del Supremo Consejo Gr. 33 para la Isla de Cuba a los Supremos Consejos Gr. 33, a todas las potencias de nuestra amistad, a los masones libres y aceptados de ambos hemisferios,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 54 y 55 (octubre y noviembre de 1936): 23.

values, antifascist Masons went further in the self-defense argument: Not only were Republican principles Masonic principles, Republican principals were Masons. Not only Republican and Masonic values but also the institutions themselves would be lost for many years, the summary concluded, if “secular enemies of the Order” triumphed.”¹⁰⁰

In this way, antifascists sought to convince their fellow Masons in Cuba of the relevance of the contest across the ocean in Spain as well as of the international struggle against fascism. Indeed the fight was taking place on the island itself. “Is fascism acting in Cuba?” asked Antonio Penichet. Yes, he argued, Mussolini had his sights set on the Americas, and, like he had done in Ethiopia and in Spain, was sending agents to Latin America with “the mission of advising governments that are influenced by his theories.”¹⁰¹ The dispatch of Italian and German agents to Latin America by their regimes did in fact take place.¹⁰² In Cuba, an incident of anti-Masonic propaganda by Franco supporters that took place late in the autumn of 1937 illustrates the power such attacks had to activate Masonic networks. For many months, the radio station CMCD of Havana had contracted with the Comité Nacionalista Español (Spanish Nationalist Committee) for broadcast time. In November the Committee cast aspersions on Freemasonry over the airwaves. The corresponding defensive maneuver was swift and effective. A letter from Cuba’s Grand Master to station directors on 24 November 1937 thanked radio staff for their

¹⁰⁰ Anon., “La Masonería y la Guerra Civil,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 59 (marzo de 1937): 31. Emphasis added.

¹⁰¹ Antonio Penichet, “¿Está actuando el Fascismo en Cuba?,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 66 y 67 (octubre y noviembre de 1937): 15.

¹⁰² Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Political Economy of Central America since 1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 85–86; Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), esp. 15–41.

“rapid intervention” in response to the broadcast of “concepts unfavorable to this Institution.”¹⁰³ The station administrator’s reply enclosed a copy of the letter sent to the Spanish Nationalist Committee. Careful to take a non-partisan tone, he praised the “excellent relations that unite us” with the group’s directors, “persons of our highest regard.” However, he wrote, the prestige of the station had been jeopardized by “intemperate campaigns, in language outside the rules to which we are accustomed, against very respectable entities.” The attack had offended national pride, he went on to assert, because Masonic Lodges represented the “best and most valiant nucleus” of the movement for Cuban independence. Aggression toward Freemasonry, therefore, was an affront to Cuba’s honor. He regretted the necessity of the determination, the director stated, but his letter terminated the Committee’s contract with the radio station.¹⁰⁴ “We believe that for your satisfaction and that of all the Masons of the Republic—among whom I am honored to count myself,” he wrote to the Grand Master, “the matter for us is resolved, bringing closure to a situation that we were the first to wish finalized.”¹⁰⁵ This episode illustrates a couple interesting points about Cuban Masonic antifascism: it is a clear example of the Spanish Nationalist anti-Masonic message being broadcast in Cuba, and it demonstrates the power of the island’s Masonic network to respond to such attacks in a swift and effective manner.

Masons argued self-defense when their other arguments failed. A short letter to the editor of *Mundo Masónico* in which a Mason from Cienfuegos condemned the magazine’s “leftist campaign” and requested termination of his subscription sparked the reiteration of the

¹⁰³ Gonzalo García Pedroso to Jesús López and José Benítez, 24 November 1937, in *Anuario: 1937–1938*, 61.

¹⁰⁴ José Benítez to Sr. Presidente del “Comité Nacionalista Español,” 27 November 1937, in *Anuario: 1937–1938*, 62–63.

¹⁰⁵ José Benítez to Gonzalo García Pedroso, 27 November 1937, in *Anuario: 1937–1938*, 61–62.

Masonic antifascist position *vis-à-vis* dissenters in March 1938. The letter's author thought the magazine preached Communism, despite its many iterations of anticommunism cited above. He acknowledged political diversity among Masons, but argued, "if Freemasonry adopts Communism as its creed, it would cease to be Masonic." Communism, he wrote, destroyed society and civilization and "all the conquests Christianity has made for the good of humanity."¹⁰⁶ The response of the publication forcibly stated the overarching message of Cuban Masonic antifascism, projecting the self-defense argument upon the individual disgruntled reader. "Distinguished sir," editor Mary Nieves wrote: "This publication does not maintain partisan tendencies; it only shows the enemies of the Masons in order to warn the honorable brothers. If a situation analogous to that of Spain were to develop here," she continued with sarcasm, "surely you would not dare tell those good Christian gentlemen that you are Mason."¹⁰⁷

Individualizing antifascism was a vital recruiting tactic precisely because there existed dissent among the Masonic ranks. While leftist groups suffered infighting within the antifascist movement, radical leftists were not also fascists. Some Masons, on the other hand, were, much to the public consternation of others in the fraternity. Though antifascists saw rightwing Masons as oxymoronic and disgraceful, they tried to reach them. The degree to which Freemasonry valued diversity of political opinion, however, handicapped antifascist organizing within the order. The self-defense argument was vital for this reason, and reports of assassinations carried the self-defense argument beyond an institutional existential threat to each individual Mason.

¹⁰⁶ Manuel Díaz Pérez, Cienfuegos, to Sr. Director de la Revista, Havana, 27 January 1938, in "Nuestra Actitud Antifascista: Dos cartas, dos contestaciones y un comentario," *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 70 y 71 (February/March 1938): 18.

¹⁰⁷ Mary Nieves, Havana, to Manuel Díaz Pérez, Cienfuegos, 1 February 1938, in "Nuestra Actitud Antifascista: Dos cartas, dos contestaciones y un comentario," *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 70 y 71 (February/March 1938): 18.

“This is not a question of politics of the right or left, or of races or much less religion,” pleaded an anonymous Cuban. “It is a proven fact and unfortunately true that many of our brothers in those valleys have been killed for the mere crime of being Masons.”¹⁰⁸ Set aside all political and philosophical opinion, antifascists begged their Masonic brethren, and consider the issue of our brothers’ life and death.

In this context, the self-defense argument transitioned into a plea for charity, reminiscent of a similar claim of non-partisanship in the Cuban campaign to aid Spanish children. Cuban Masons intended the self-defense argument to inspire action across political and ideological spectrums on behalf of Spanish brethren. “Masons in Spain are undergoing active, bloody, merciless persecution; our bounden duty is to run to their aid, support them morally and materially, no matter the political ideology,” urged the director of *Mundo Masónico*.¹⁰⁹ “What has Cuban Freemasonry done,” asked an anonymous author, “for its brothers persecuted, killed, injured and exiled[?]”¹¹⁰

Masonic Aid from Cuba to Spain

Cuban Masons not only made strong arguments in favor of the Republican cause but also sent material aid to help victims of the Nationalists in Spain, both Masons and others. Freemasonry on the island was already deeply committed to charitable fundraising and giving. In addition to providing for their fellow members, members’ widows, and families during difficult times, Masons sponsored efforts that benefitted Cuban society more broadly. They

¹⁰⁸ Anon., “Los Masones Españoles piden socorro,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 25.

¹⁰⁹ González Naredo, “Puntos de Vista: Por el Director: La revolución de España y la Masonería,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 53 (September 1936): 6.

¹¹⁰ Anon., “Los Masones Españoles piden socorro,” *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 60 (April 1937): 25.

funded and worked on initiatives in healthcare and public education, building medical facilities and providing poor schoolchildren with shoes, for example. Masonic aid was as fundamental to Freemasonry as were Masonic values. In fact, as we have seen, helping one another and providing for the needy in society were among Masons' most important principles, one of their cited reasons for supporting the Spanish Republic, which they saw as sharing their belief in the "prolongation of life and maximization of happiness."¹¹¹

In order to raise funds for victims in Spain, Cuban Masons used graphic depictions of their suffering to inspire generosity. Like other antifascist publications in Cuba during the Spanish Civil War, the Masonic print media used dramatic war photography—of destroyed buildings, wounded civilians, and corpses, including those of children—to encourage participation in pro-Republican efforts on the island. A full-page notice (Figure 5.1) appeared in *Mundo Masónico* in September 1937.

¹¹¹ Alfredo Padrón, "La Civilización," *Mundo Masónico* 5, no. 52 (August 1936): 20.



Figure 5.1 Solicitation for aid to war victims in Spain addressed to Cuban Freemasons

The text reads: “Spanish Freemasonry awaits our help. Every Mason must consider Spain’s tragedy a personal issue.” The Spanish Republican Circle, it continues, “requests assistance for the victims of the war.”¹¹² To establish a sense of obligation, the notice claimed the existence of a Spanish expectation of Cuban aid. In order to elicit such aid, it urged Cuban Masons to put

¹¹² “La Masonería Española espera nuestra ayuda,” *Mundo Masónico* 6, no. 64 y 65 (August/September 1937): inside cover, unnumbered.

themselves in the place of their Spanish brethren, to consider their tragic situation “a personal issue.” Having framed the need in these terms, the notice then requested aid, blurring Masonic and general need in Spain and leaving uncertain whether aid donated would go specifically to Masons or be applied more generally.

Cuban Masons used the example of aid given by their brethren from other countries to motivate brothers on the island to give. In March 1938 Cuba’s Masonic President of the Commission on Foreign Relations reported to Cuban Freemasonry on the aid efforts of European Masons to mitigate “the sufferings of the victims in this tragic struggle, especially of our brothers, who have suffered doubly for being Masons.” Citing the “persecutions and tortures” Spanish Masons had suffered in territory dominated by the Nationalists, the author no doubt intended that his Cuban readers feel inspired by the commitments made by European lodges and follow suit.¹¹³ Cuban Masons did indeed send money to Spanish Masons. Although we have not found detailed financial records, fragmentary evidence shows instances of successful Masonic fundraising. In September 1938, for example, Masons in Pinar del Río resolved to distribute a flier inviting all lodges, in their first sessions following receipt of the request, to take special collections “destined to aid Spanish Masons.”¹¹⁴ In March 1939 Cuban Masons reported having raised \$620.35 in a collection for the Grand Lodge of Spain.¹¹⁵

Additionally, we have seen evidence of Masons’ strong support of the Cuban campaign to aid Spanish children, indicating their commitment to helping war victims beyond Freemasonry.

¹¹³ M. Pitchon, “Informe del Presidente de la Comision de Relaciones Exteriores,” in *Anuario: 1937–1938*, 296.

¹¹⁴ Luis Martínez Reyes, “Ayuda a la Gran Logia Española, La Habana, octubre 9 de 1938,” in *Anuario de la Gran Logia de la Isla de Cuba: 1938–1939* (Guanabacoa: Imp. Alejandro López, 1941), 60–61.

¹¹⁵ Luis Martínez Reyes, “Informe del Gran Secretario, Habana, 26 de marzo de 1939,” in *Anuario: 1938–1939*, 229–230.

In response to particularly generous Masonic support of the Cuban residential school for war orphans established in the Catalán town of Sitges, leaders of the campaign praised Cuban Freemasonry in May of 1938 for its commitment to “the obligation of human solidarity which the Masonic tradition requires.”¹¹⁶ In the Masons’ annual meeting of that year, they resolved to take a special collection during the session that would be a donation from the Grand Lodge to aid Spanish children, and they pledged to contribute five pesos per month during the coming year to the same cause.¹¹⁷ Not only did Cuban Freemasonry as a whole give to the cause of the Spanish children but also individual lodges in locations around the island donated separately, demonstrating support for the cause among various groups of Masons beyond a centralized institutional agenda.¹¹⁸

Republican Defeat

As Republican defeat loomed, two Cuban Masonic commentators embodied the ongoing political and ideological tension within Cuban Freemasonry. In November 1938, after an uncharacteristic three-month break in publishing, *Mundo Masónico* director González Naredo gloated in a triumphant headline, “ANOTHER TRIUMPH FOR *MUNDO MASONICO*: One cannot be an acting Fascist and a Mason at the same time, SO CONFIRMS THE GRAND LODGE” (“OTRO TRIUNFO DE ‘MUNDO MASONICO’: No puede ser Fascista actuante y Masón a la vez, ASI LO CONFIRMA LA GRAN LOGIA”). A Mason, the article explained, had been successfully expelled from his lodge for professing to be an enthusiastic member of the

¹¹⁶ “Notas y Comentarios,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 5 (May 1938): 21.

¹¹⁷ Luis Martínez Reyes, “Acuerdos de la Sesión Anual de 1938, Habana, 27 de marzo de 1938,” in *Anuario: 1938–1939*, 17.

¹¹⁸ “La Comisión Pro Casa Escuela en Puigcerdá,” *¡Ayuda!* no. 4 (February/March 1938): 3.

Falange. By so doing, González Naredo asserted, the brother had “accepted and practiced the doctrines of an institution” fundamentally opposed to the Masonic principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and with a program calling for “the destruction and persecution of Freemasonry and of Masons in the whole universe.” Many other Cuban lodges, he noted approvingly, were readying to cleanse themselves of traitors such as these. Even more encouraging to the author behind *Mundo Masónico*’s longstanding commitment to antifascism were the voices of official Freemasonry he cited as publicly supporting this stance. He listed and quoted esteemed Cuban Masons espousing antifascist views, noting that such opinions were glorious “for this humble magazine that just a short time ago seemed to be alone and abandoned to its own fate.”¹¹⁹ In this way, the director’s celebratory article betrays a serious crisis in Cuban Masonic antifascism. Was the abandonment he mentioned responsible for the magazine’s unusual three months of silence in the summer and autumn of 1938? Had the Masonic mainstream turned away on the issue of fascism from *Mundo Masónico*, which it had once so fervently praised? And if so, did González Naredo’s jubilant article indicate a reversal, or just wishful thinking?

A few months later, in March 1939 as Nationalist victory in Spain came to fruition, Cuban Freemasonry’s President of the Commission of Foreign Relations concluded a report on international news with a comment on Spain. He addressed his commentary to the Grand Master and Masonic leadership body and it was published in the Masons’ official annual report. Though the current situation in Europe was ever more “bleak and saddening,” he wrote, there had arrived from Spain “a ray of light.” In that country, “the land to which we are so closely linked by blood and language; the land whose pains we feel like our own,” he stated, a discussion of peace had

¹¹⁹ González Naredo, “OTRO TRIUNFO DE ‘MUNDO MASONICO’: No puede ser Fascista actuante y Masón a la vez, ASI LO CONFIRMA LA GRAN LOGIA,” *Mundo Masónico* 7, no. 76 (November 1938): 29–30.

begun. After so much bloodshed and horror, he hoped a “real and stable peace” would be “reborn” not only to “appease the spirits there” but also to “calm those here in our temples.” In an interpretation quite different from González Naredo’s, the president of foreign relations believed Masonic principles dictated “that we admit no more difference than merit and demerit; that we reject no one for his beliefs and opinions; that we do not accommodate debates of religion or politics.” Such disagreements, he asserted, acted as “small infernos in which—painful as it is to confess—the Brotherhood and Tolerance have suffered grave losses.”¹²⁰

Though certainly not an endorsement of European fascism, these claims turned away from Cuban Masonic antifascism and favored a resolution of fighting by Nationalist triumph over a commitment to pro-Republicanism. Whereas González Naredo’s antifascism equated Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco, the conclusion of the president of foreign relations showed willingness to accept Franco in exchange for peace. Here we see the values of openness to debate and political and ideological plurality ascending over liberal Masonic values incompatible with fascism. It may be that we see also the leaders of Cuban Freemasonry resigned to inevitable defeat. The short time following the end of the war provided a respite, but as a Spanish historian of anti-Masonic efforts during the Spanish Civil War writes about Franco’s position in the spring of 1939, the “Victory signified only a brief ‘pause’ in the permanent combat against the enemies of Spain . . . the Judeo-Masonic-Communist-separatist conspiracy” against which Nationalists believed they fought for traditional Spain.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Octavio S. Martínez, “Informe de la Comisión de Relaciones Exteriores,” in *Anuario: 1938–1939*, 264.

¹²¹ Morales Ruiz, *El discurso antimasonico*, 305–306.

CHAPTER 6

Democracy is a Means, Not an End: Cuban Anarchists as Antifascists

Though Cuban anarchism had passed its point of peak influence by the start of the Spanish Civil War, the ideology and its adherents still played important roles in the island's working class during the 1930s. Following a lull caused by the disastrous strike results and severe repression of March 1935, the conflict in Spain reenergized anarchist mobilization in Cuba, as initiations of new organizing and publishing efforts during the years of the war illustrate. The surge of enthusiasm which the anarchist triumphs of the Spanish Revolution at the start of the war caused throughout international anarchism and the broader left, as well as the threat Cuban anarchists felt from international fascism and supporters of the Spanish Nationalists in their own country, inspired them to participate in antifascist activism. Antifascism and the Spanish struggle, as they did for other groups and campaigns on the island, provided Cuban anarchists with a new rallying cry and a specific set of goals to pursue that fit within the principles of their established ideology and movement.

After a brief survey of the history of anarchism in Cuba and a summary of important points about Spanish anarchism and the war, this chapter will study Cuban anarchist antifascism during the conflict. Bulletins, manifestos, and correspondence of the central Cuban anarchist groups of the 1930s—the Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba (Federation of Cuban Anarchist Groups, or F.G.A.C.), the Federación de Juventudes Libertarias de Cuba (Libertarian Youth Federation of Cuba, or F.J.L.C.), and the Centro Federalista Español (Spanish Federalist Center, or C.F.E.) of Cuba, as well as the Ateneo Socialista Español (Spanish Socialist Athenaeum, or simply “the Ateneo”) of Cuba, in which anarchists participated—and some of the island's regional anarchist groups preserved by the International Institute of Social History in

Amsterdam and the Cuban National Archive in Havana provide a fascinating if fragmentary glimpse into Cuban anarchist antifascism, and the networks and solidarity built between anarchists in Cuba and Spain during the war.¹

Using these few rich sources, the chapter analyzes antifascist commentary and arguments, shows the ways in which Cuban anarchists saw fascism as threatening and already at work on the island, and discusses the overlap and disagreement between anarchist views and those of other antifascists, considering efforts toward and hurdles obstructing anarchist unity with other groups. In it we study solidarity: anarchist solidarity with some Cuban antifascists and lack thereof with others, as well as the transatlantic solidarity Spanish and Cuban anarchists developed during the Spanish conflict. The chapter argues that anarchist antifascism did not view Republican victory in Spain as a desirable endpoint; rather, anarchists in Spain, Cuba, and elsewhere looked beyond democracy to revolution, and sought not only to defeat fascism in Spain and internationally but also to build a freer and more just Spanish society and a better world. Though they were discouraged by Republican defeat, therefore, we conclude that Cuban anarchists took the opportunity to look ahead and propose further action.

A Brief History of Cuban Anarchism and Its Connections to Spain

Labor began to organize in Cuba in the middle of the nineteenth century, and anarchist organizing followed a few decades later. Substantial economic expansion during the first half of

¹ Source material used in this chapter from the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute of Social History, or IISG) in Amsterdam is available in three collections. Documents from the C.N.T. (España) Archives and the Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archives were read in digital copies obtained directly from the IISG. Some of the periodicals cited can be found in these archival collections, while others are part of the IISG Latin American Anarchist and Labour Periodicals (1880–1940) collection, accessed on microfilm at Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Additional source material comes from the Registro de Asociaciones (Registry of Associations) at the Archivo Nacional de Cuba (Cuban National Archive, or ANC) in Havana.

the century caused population and labor forces to grow in rural, small-town, and urban Cuba. Under systems of Spanish colonial rule and slavery, workers in Cuba were divided by birthplace and race, divisions that hindered labor organization. More lenient regulations and sharp economic recession in the 1850s, however, prompted the formation of mutual aid and artisan societies in which workers began to organize.² The emergence of creole reformism in the 1860s occasioned the start of a push for increases in Cuban autonomy within Spanish colonial rule. In order to strengthen their movement, elite creole reformists made populist appeals to white artisans—both creole and of peninsular origin—for support, achieving significant success agitating these segments of the population. Within the working class, participation in reformist efforts had an empowering and motivating effect, and resulted in labor mobilization. The first significant strike in nineteenth-century Cuba took place in August 1865 when cigar workers from two factories walked off the job. This class confrontation over collective bargaining rights inspired strike fundraising at other factories, mobilized nonwhite as well as white workers, and won the strikers wage increases. The years 1865 and 1866 saw the establishment of Cuba’s first labor periodical, *La Aurora (The Dawn)*, in Havana, and an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to organize a cigar makers’ union.³ Workers mobilized, forming “strong pockets for industrial bargaining” beginning in the 1860s and continuing up to the last decade of the century. Forceful periodic protests by workers extended beyond established labor organizations, addressing issues

² Joan Casanovas, *Bread, or Bullets! Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850–1898* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 62–70; Jean Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery: A Case Study in Cuban Labour History, 1860–1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 97.

³ Casanovas, *Bread, or Bullets!*, 71–82.

such as wages, discrimination, and technological advances. Labor mobilization did not, therefore, necessarily depend upon recognized unions with formal bargaining power.⁴

During the latter half of the nineteenth century tension existed within Cuba's labor movement between reformism and radicalism. Prominent historians of Cuban labor during this period such as Joan Casanovas and Jean Stubbs have commented upon the two trends, the second of which included, over the course of many decades, revolutionary anticolonial nationalism, socialism, communism, and anarchism. Historians date the initial establishment of anarchism on the island at different points. The history of Cuban anarchism by Cuban-American journalist and anarchist Frank Fernández cites the founding in 1857 of a worker's organization based upon the ideology of French mutualist and anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Fernández calls the establishment of this group "the first step toward the creation of a civil society within the Cuban proletariat," but notes also that the artisan associations founded at this time were segregated both racially and by neighborhood.⁵ Stubbs gives 1872 as the earliest date to which anarchist ideas can be traced in Cuba, citing the formation of the Centro de Instrucción y Recreo (Education and Recreation Center) in Santiago de las Vegas, a city located 12 miles south of Havana, by tobacco worker Enrique Roig San Martín, who would become Cuba's most influential anarchist, Enrique Messonier, an important anarchist orator and organizer, and others.⁶ Casanovas cites the early 1880s as the period during which anarchism began to gain momentum, noting that "the labor

⁴ Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery*, 85–87.

⁵ Frank Fernández, *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement*, Charles Bufe, trans. (Tucson: See Sharp Press, 2001), 17. Fernández is a longstanding member of the Movimiento Libertario Cubano en el Exilio (Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile). Though his history of Cuban anarchism can be considered only semi-scholarly (in that it contains few citations to support its claims) and is based in large part on testimony and remembrances of his personal acquaintances, Fernández's work is nonetheless well respected and cited by scholars. Both the original version and the English translation are referenced here.

⁶ Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery*, 99; Fernández, *Cuban Anarchism*, 20, 23.

movement in Cuba was still reformist, but most workers increasingly saw reformism as unable to improve conditions in the workplace and in colonial society and out of touch with their own political aspirations.” Unauthorized strikes in 1882 and 1883 demonstrated that rank-in-file workers did not trust reformist unions to reach agreements on their behalf with employers or wait to become unionized before taking direct action. Furthermore, these job actions included Cubans of different races as well as *peninsulares*, whereas reformist labor organizations failed to integrate racially and were dominated mostly by men born in Spain. Stubbs depicts a monumental struggle between reformists and anarchists during the 1880s. Strikes of as many as 15,000 workers in the last few years of the decade indicated active organizing by a formidable group of agitators informed by the “classic anarcho-syndicalist concept of a strong revolutionary union and the general strike as its weapon against the manufacturing bourgeoisie.” Yet only when labor organizations joined the growing movement for Cuban independence did greater masses of workers become involved.⁷

Anarchists supported Cuban independence from Spanish colonial rule during the war 1895–1898. Not in agreement with elite conceptions of nationalism in the struggle, however, they interpreted the fight on the island—as they would the war in Spain four decades later—in an internationalist context, as anti-imperialist, and for economic and social justice. Historian of Cuban anarchism Kirwin Shaffer has argued that anarchists supported independence because they interpreted the fight as “an anticolonial, democratic revolution against tyranny and for the benefit of all residents of the island.” They adopted symbols of the struggle in order to localize

⁷ Casanovas, *Bread, or Bullets!*, 146–156; Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery*, 99–107. Casanovas notes that many labor reformists were Masons, and that Masonic lodges established mutual aid societies for workers in the 1880s. Anarchist leader Roig, on the other hand, was never a Mason, but rather belonged to the “Sons of Labor Number 7” lodge of the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows, a different fraternal order.

anarchist internationalism in a specifically Cuban context. On the practices of localizing internationalist struggle and distinguishing between national identity and nationalism, Shaffer notes the distinction made by anarchist intellectual Mikhail Bakunin between patriotism or nationalism on the one hand and “nationality” or “locality” on the other. Bakunin, a major influence on Spanish anarchism, argued for “social union” and true solidarity based on shared cultural experience at the local level but against “political union, the state.” Anarchists followed a similar strategy in Spain, using popular cultural symbols “to harmonize an international movement,” anarchism, “with local, regional, or national realities.” This practice helped anarchists to appeal to a greater number of people in both Spain and Cuba, whom they hoped to recruit for their international social revolution against all governments.⁸

Though they had an internationalist goal in mind, Cuban anarchists’ organizing impacted domestic politics profoundly. By mobilizing the spirit and symbols of Cuban independence in the decades following 1898 anarchists helped “to forge a democratic, internationalist ‘national’ identity in Cuba’s evolving political culture.” Anarchists promoted their own form of radical democracy—inclusive of all people as equal regardless of gender, race, and national origin—that localized internationalist struggle on the island, and which they claimed preserved the true intentions of Cuban independence and its hero, José Martí. By linking Cuban independence to internationalist struggle, Cuban anarchists challenged elites who claimed the mantle of Cuban independence but continued to mistreat workers and other non-elite groups in Cuban society. Anarchists reminded their fellow Cubans that “independence did not guarantee freedom, equality, or justice,” and that the maintenance of pre-independence power relations within Cuban society would continue to thwart these objectives. The new constitution of the Cuban republic offered

⁸ Kirwin Shaffer, “*Cuba para todos: Anarchist Internationalism and the Cultural Politics of Cuban Independence, 1898–1925*,” *Cuban Studies* 31 (2000): 45–75.

anarchists little in the way of workers' rights and protections, and elite control, they argued, negated the promises of freedom and democracy. Furthermore, U.S. neocolonialism put Cuban elites in a position necessarily at odds with Cuban labor: Elite concessions to labor would threaten U.S. interests on the island and demonstrate to the United States that the Cuban government was weak, and could therefore prompt U.S. intervention under the Platt Amendment—"if the state could not control labor, then the United States would." Cuban anarchists believed that this reality betrayed the falsehood of hypocritical patriotism and nationalism by elite-run government and proved that capital and the state worked together against labor.⁹

How Spanish was Cuban anarchism? Due to the prominence and strength of anarchism in Spain and the significant flow of people, publications, and ideas between Cuba and Spain, the argument that Cuban anarchism was Spanish seems intuitive. Historian of Cuban anarchism Amparo Sánchez Cobos notes that the arrival of anarchists and copies of their periodicals on the island from the peninsula planted the "first seeds" of the European political philosophy in Cuba precisely in the moment—the latter half of the nineteenth century, as described above—in which worker and mutual aid organizations were forming there. Undoubtedly, Spanish immigrants brought anarchism with them to the island. The Cuban and Spanish, particularly Catalán, movements were indeed closely linked; trade between Catalonia and Cuba established a route traveled by anarchists and their published materials. Casanovas notes that both unknown and popular Catalán anarchists traveled to Cuba in the 1880s and 1890s, bringing with them ideas and periodicals. These men and publications played an important role in spreading anarchist ideas on the island. Valencia and Andalusia, too, were regions of Spain that had both active

⁹ Shaffer, "*Cuba para todos*," 45–75.

anarchist movements and close commercial ties with Cuba prior to Cuban independence. However, though Spanish influence was certainly present, it was only one factor in the development of anarchism on the island. Interestingly, some of the most popular and influential anarchist leaders of late nineteenth-century Cuba, such as Roig San Martín, were not immigrants but native-born Cubans; and those prominent anarchist leaders who were Spanish were not from the anarchist strongholds of Spain such as Catalonia, Valencia, and Andalusia according to worker biographies. Historians of Cuban anarchism reference these demographic facts about the movement's leaders on the island as evidence supporting the claim that, although it is indisputable that Spaniards planted the seeds of the philosophy on the island, the movement that grew was genuinely Cuban. Furthermore, they argue that the "localism of political parties and Cuba's colonial condition gave Cuban anarchism its particular characteristics and trajectory."¹⁰ As anarchist participation in the independence movement demonstrates, anarchists localized their internationalist philosophy in Cuban realities, "specifically tackling core issues surrounding Cuban history, national identity, immigration, health, education, women, and the family." Thus, Shaffer writes, "anarchism became Cubanized."¹¹

Anarchists played a vital role in Cuban labor organizing during the republican period following independence from Spain. Movement among the Cuban working class during the period to a position of internationalist solidarity between Cuban and Spanish workers on the island progressed due in large part to the work of anarchists, though advancement in this regard was stymied to a great extent by effective divide-and-conquer tactics. Anarchists pointed out the

¹⁰ Amparo Sánchez Cobos, *Sembrando Ideales: Anarquistas españoles en Cuba (1902–1925)* (Seville: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2008), 99–104; Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery*, 99; Casanovas, *Bread, or Bullets!*, 146–147.

¹¹ Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 224.

hypocrisy of elites who welcomed Spanish capitalists but simultaneously tried to split workers by pitting Spaniards against Cubans, telling Cubans that *peninsulares* were stealing their jobs and using Spanish strikebreakers to weaken Cuban labor organizing.¹² Worker organization on the island during the first decade and a half of the new century was hindered by divisions within the working class which anarchists did not successfully overcome. Not until 1914 did organization of unions begin to gain momentum and to incorporate workers of different skill levels and from different industries. A National Worker Congress of August that year gestured toward worker unification across industries and the unemployed, but divisions persisted.¹³

During World War I, anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism played important roles in a notable period of Cuban labor agitation. Industrial laborers such as railway and dock workers, machinists, and sugar mill employees formed new groups during the war years that espoused anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist ideas. Worker agitation increased, calls for violent direct action escalated, and strikes on an unprecedented scale took place. Workers organized both small localized strikes and large-scale ones between 1917 and 1920 around demands for wage increases and an eight-hour work day. To demonstrate its control over labor to U.S. neocolonial observers, the Cuban government reacted with repression and deportation of Spanish anarchists, whom it labeled “pernicious foreigners.” These actions paralleled similar deportations of foreign-born anarchists from the United States during the same years. The concurrent arrival of many Spanish radicals was strengthening the influence of anarchism as a force in the labor unrest, and it was anarchists who led the strikes and organized many of the worker federations. The Russian Revolution of 1917, however, began to divert working-class radicalism in Cuba away

¹² Shaffer, “*Cuba para todos*,” 65–66.

¹³ Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery*, 116–119.

from anarchism and toward Communism. By 1925, when the Cuban Communist Party was founded, Communist influence had grown significantly within the labor movement and its organizations, while anarchism declined—due at least in part to a continuation of targeted repression including arrests and deportations of anarchist leaders.¹⁴

The election of Gerardo Machado as president that year was a death sentence for anarchist control of Cuba's labor movement. He led a "reign of terror" against anarchists on the island soon after he came to power, which included forceful strikebreaking, the dissolution of labor organizations, and the closure of radical publications. Leaders were not only arrested or forced into exile but also assassinated. Through these measures, Machado reestablished the strength of the Cuban government, demonstrated to the United States that he was in control of labor and capable of protecting capital, and asserted himself as a strongman.¹⁵ Repression of anarchism and labor organizing continued after the overthrow of Machado in 1933, culminating in the period directly preceding the Spanish Civil War with the defeat of the March 1935 strike by forces loyal to Cuba's emerging new strongman, Fulgencio Batista.

As their positions on Cuban independence, democracy, freedom, equality, and rights make clear, anarchists' role in Cuban society during the republican period comprised more than labor agitation and organization. Beyond a powerful force in the labor movement, Cuban anarchism was a "countercultural social movement that sustained a thirty-year challenge to Cuba's power holders in the name of the island's popular classes" during the island's republican years. The movement was diverse in terms of gender, race, national origin, age, and occupation, and it "challenged not only those political, economic, and cultural leaders who held power but

¹⁴ Shaffer, "*Cuba para todos*," 59–60; Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery*, 120–123.

¹⁵ Shaffer, "*Cuba para todos*," 61.

also the political, economic, and cultural foundations upon which Cuba's postindependence leaders based their rule and their notions of what it meant to be Cuban." Elite leaders saw Cuba as a republic that should be capitalist and Christian, whereas anarchists rejected these parameters in favor of their own radical vision of justice, freedom, and equality. They envisioned *cubanidad* (Cuban identity) as internationalist but localized to Cuban reality, and as based upon gender, race, and national origin equality. They represented the far left of *cubanía rebelde*, a Cuban tradition of revolutionary and leftist movements, and fit into a broader international and internationalist leftist surge during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Anarchists were among the key figures promoting this internationalism on the island.¹⁶

Though it is indisputable that the simultaneous government repression of anarchists and rise of Communism during the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s struck a blow to Cuban anarchism, the movement continued throughout the 1930s and beyond, truly ending on the island only with the exile of remaining anarchists during the early 1960s.¹⁷ Anarchists participated in strikes that contributed significantly to the overthrow of Machado in 1933, and workers adopted anarchist direct action tactics during the conflict that demonstrated the movement's lasting influence. Shaffer concludes that "anarcho-syndicalism, though not the only radical doctrine involved in the [1933] revolution, still lingered in the hearts, minds, and actions of various sectors of the workforce." Though weakened by the late 1930s, therefore, Cuban anarchists continued to be a force in activism and culture on the island.¹⁸ Antifascism inspired in them a

¹⁶ Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics*, 223–225.

¹⁷ See Frank Fernández, *El Anarquismo en Cuba* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2000), 87–122: "Castroismo y confrontación, 1959–1961" and "Exilio y sombras, 1962–1980." Also Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics*, 229–230.

¹⁸ Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics*, 229–230.

boost of energy and activity. Cuban anarchists joined in the antifascist movement in support of the Spanish Republic, coordinating as they had always with their Spanish comrades, sending volunteers to Spain to fight, and returning to the island with Spanish anarchists fleeing in the wake of Franco's victory.

Spanish Anarchism and the Spanish Civil War

Cuba and, above all others, Spain are two of a few countries worldwide in which anarchist activists succeeded during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in turning theoretical anarchism into significant action, building strong and effective labor movements organized around the ideal of voluntary cooperation in worker-controlled unions as a political and economic alternative to state and capitalist control.¹⁹ In the period immediately preceding the war in Spain, two principal organizations made up the Spanish anarchist movement: the Confederation Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Work, or C.N.T.) and the Federación Anarquista Iberica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, or F.A.I.). The former, founded in 1910 by anarchist groups in Catalonia, was syndicalist. It organized a militant working-class movement based on principles of class struggle and direct action, and coordinated difficult and important strikes. The latter was a “mysterious and powerful” organization made up of anarchists dedicated to maintaining the purity in practice of their philosophy. Semi-clandestine, it began in 1927, “made up of kindred groups similar to Masonic lodges” overseen and coordinated by a central committee. Tension arose and debates took place among various

¹⁹ Charles Bufe, in his introduction to Fernández, makes a comparison between Spanish and Cuban anarchism that implies equal achievement in both cases. Fernández, *Cuban Anarchism*, 8. I add the caveat that Spain is in fact the preeminent example and Cuba a lesser one. Spain is often compared with other European countries as the only one in which the ideas of Bakunin triumphed over those of Marx. See, for example: Pierr Broué and Emile Témime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*, Tony White, trans. (1970; Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 54–59.

factions within and between the C.N.T. and F.A.I. during the Republican era of the 1930s, but the two organizations worked closely together during the war, and the red and black flag printed with “C.N.T.-F.A.I.” became synonymous with Spanish anarchism.²⁰

When Spanish anarchists triumphed in Catalonia and elsewhere in Spain in the summer of 1936, they interpreted the action with enthusiasm and hope through the lens of their preexisting philosophical framework. It was “the spontaneous unleashing of the forces of the oppressed” against “the forces of repression” which anarchism taught would—with some coordination by a militant minority—overthrow capitalism and the state and mark the beginning of their new free and just society.²¹ Others reveled in the moment as well. The Spanish Revolution inspired leftists across the globe, both anarchist and non-anarchist. George Orwell famously described the scene in Barcelona in December of that year, recounting the red and black anarchist flags draped over worker-seized buildings, collectivized shops and cafés, clerks and waiters who “looked you in the face and treated you as an equal.” He noted that use of formal and servile salutations had been discontinued, private cars commandeered, walls plastered with revolutionary posters, and the air filled with revolutionary songs blasted through loudspeakers. The wealthy classes, it seemed to him, had practically ceased to exist. “All this was queer and moving,” wrote Orwell. “There was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for.” This changed society was in fact precisely what anarchists in Spain, Cuba, and worldwide fought for. Yet as Orwell himself noted, the change was not as complete or as permanent as it seemed

²⁰ Julián Casanova, *Anarchism, the Republic and Civil War in Spain: 1931–1939*, Andrew Dowling and Graham Pollok, trans., Paul Preston, ed. (1997; London: Routledge, 2005), 4; Broué and Témime, *The Revolution*, 54–57.

²¹ Broué and Témime, *The Revolution*, 54–55.

during those exciting days in 1936. “I did not realize,” he stated in hindsight, “that great numbers of well-to-do bourgeois were simply lying low and disguising themselves as proletarians for the time being.”²² Such “adverse circumstances were barely perceptible during the ‘glorious days’ of July in Barcelona” and in the months following when anarchists remained armed after their participation in defeat of Nationalist military insurgents.²³

Far removed from the romanticism of Orwell’s passage in *Homage to Catalonia*, Spanish historian Julián Casanova provides insight into the realities of the Spanish Revolution that began in the summer of 1936. The Nationalist military coup attempt against the Republic in July 1936 created division in the military and government security forces. Though the Republican state remained for the time being, it lost its monopoly on weapons. Armed individuals and groups, especially in major cities, played a vital role in helping to put down the initial Nationalist uprising in various areas around the country. Following these victories, many such individuals and groups in places where they had defeated the rebels proceeded to instigate revolutionary movements. “New armed protagonists,” states Casanova, many of them previously strong critics of the Republican government, “invaded the public sphere.” He summarizes the sudden, and for anarchists exciting, fundamental change: For unions, “it was no longer a question of declaring a new general strike, or of embarking on a new insurrectionary adventure, but rather of opposing an armed movement.” The war presented anarchists with new opportunities to gain considerable influence in light of a power vacuum and to promulgate armed revolutionary struggle within a nationwide context of using violence as a means to resolve social conflict. Calling for “purifying violence,” they participated in a practice of popular justice that would result in the execution of

²² George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1952; 1980), 4–5.

²³ Casanova, *Anarchism*, 102.

6,400 people in Catalonia by the end of 1936, assassinating “proven fascists” and others seen as enemies including conservative politicians, capitalists, and clergy. The violence was justified and “purifying” in their view because it was necessary to purge enemies in order to consolidate the revolution and build a new society. “What could not be achieved through the constant struggle of a revolutionary minority, with the uneven support of several hundred thousand followers,” Casanova notes, “now came about as a result of the failed *coup d’état*.” However, these anarchist achievements in the Spanish Revolution did not bring about a popular majority adherence to the philosophy and its proponents, a “militant minority.”²⁴

This context of opportunity and challenge is fundamental to an understanding of anarchist participation in the Spanish Civil War. The Spanish Revolution at the start of the war is widely considered to be one of international anarchism’s greatest victories in history; yet anarchists suffered defeat by Nationalists in the end along with the rest of the left and center-left. From the beginning of the Republican period, Spanish anarchists had struggled to make the most of the turbulent era, excited by circumstances changing in their favor, yet wary of not only counterrevolution by right-wing forces but also inadequacy and untrustworthiness of Republicans and other leftists, especially Communists. Leading up to their defeat, anarchists faced off against not only fascists but also would-be antifascist allies. As we will see in our discussion of Cuban anarchists and their relationships with their Spanish compatriots in the context of the war, anarchists saw revolution and complete transformation of society—into neither fascism nor Soviet Communism, but rather based on the principles of their philosophy—as the only acceptable end goal, whereas other antifascists prioritized other aims. Yet despite the thrill of initial victories and accomplishments during the Spanish Revolution, anarchists

²⁴ Casanova, *Anarchism*, 101–105.

recognized that they were not strong enough to defeat the Nationalists on their own. Many of their antifascist allies pursued different goals than they did, disagreed with them, or even attacked and jailed them, but they needed these allies nonetheless for the most important immediate priority: defeating fascism in Spain.

Pragmatism, therefore, played a vital role in Spanish anarchist decisions and actions. As it often does, pragmatism posed a challenge to ideals. Contrary to their own philosophy and to some accounts of their actions, anarchists in Spain “were more concerned, in the initial stages, with combating counter-revolution” than with pursuing central goals of anarchism such as collectivization of the means of production and establishing new alternative economic and political systems. For the sake of pragmatism, they even joined the remaining government institutions and emergent power structures.²⁵

To strengthen their antifascist movement, Spanish anarchists sought allegiance not only with often dubious allies of Spain’s left and center-left but also with their fellow anarchist compatriots internationally. Transnational solidarity itself was an important commodity during difficult times, encouraging sustained motivation and resilience for the fight. It led also to more tangible forms of support, such as international volunteers, monetary donations, and other aid sent. One of the anarchist movements with which the C.N.T.-F.A.I. sought to build solidarity was that of the island of Cuba. A small number of Cuban anarchists are known to have traveled to Spain to fight, and it is likely that others did so without revealing their specific political beliefs. We will examine the experience of one Cuban anarchist volunteer, Universo Lípiz Rodríguez, in the conclusion. Here, we turn our attention to the efforts made during the war by those anarchists who remained on the island.

²⁵ Casanova, *Anarchism*, 106.

Cuban Anarchist Antifascism

Following the violent defeat of the March 1935 strike in Cuba that caused so many leftist activists to go into hiding or exile, Cuban anarchism was in disarray. Individuals hid, groups dissolved, and the movement moved underground. Citing severe state repression in the wake of the disastrous strike, Cuban anarchists commented in October 1937 that they had been forced to work clandestinely.²⁶ The Nationalist revolt that began the war in Spain, however, jolted Cuban anarchism into action anew. On 1 September 1936, a few weeks after the coup, the *Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba* (F.G.A.C.) initiated publication of a bulletin providing information and opinion about the Spanish conflict. The mainstream press in Cuba, the bulletin asserted, was “blatantly fascist” and printed “slanderous fabrications” in its “eagerness to favor the fascist scoundrel.” They took it upon themselves, therefore, to disseminate fact as they perceived it. It was anarchists’ “inescapable duty,” in their opinion, to provide the Cuban public with the truth about events taking place in Spain. As this assessment of the mainstream press makes clear, anarchists positioned themselves far to the left of center politically during the immediate post-Machado era. They interpreted as “fascist” politics which moderate observers did not label as so extreme. Furthermore, they criticized the sitting government in Cuba much more brashly than many of their fellow antifascists, though they took precautions when doing so. The “conduct of an eminently reactionary government” on the island forced them to comment on

²⁶ *Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba* (F.G.A.C.), Secretario del Exterior, Havana, to unnamed, 20 October 1937, *Correspondencia con la Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba*, Habana, 20-10-1937 al 13-1-1938 (#2), *Correspondencia del Comité Nacional CNT y el Comité Peninsular FAI con organizaciones anarquistas [sic] en el exterior, 1937–1938* (Carpeta 62B), Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG. Evidencing the need anarchists expressed to work clandestinely, there are no authors or editors identified in many of the anarchist periodicals. Therefore, the organization responsible for publication is identified in many citations rather than any individual.

Spanish events clandestinely—individual authors rarely identified themselves in publications. Do so they must, however, to support “progressive Spain” and its workers, “courageous and determined to establish a new social system” based in true justice, economic equality, and freedom for all. For anarchists, as we have stated already, the end goal of the Spanish conflict was not Republican victory but rather the construction of a better society in Spain as one important step in their global goal of creating a better world. As previously noted, some anarchists in Cuba were Spanish-born and others native to the island; however, since all anarchists scorned adherence to a belief in national borders and distinctions, none of them saw the war in Spain as someone else’s fight. Cuban anarchists must be involved in the Spanish conflict, they believed, because it was a vital part of the international anarchist struggle. This obligation constituted the mission of the F.G.A.C. bulletin.²⁷

Though the majority of space in the five-page bulletin presented news items taken directly from the Barcelona publications of the C.N.T. and F.A.I., *Solidaridad Obrera* (*Worker Solidarity*) and *Tierra y Libertad* (*Land and Liberty*), expressing Spanish anarchist perspectives on the conflict, accompanying commentary by the Cuban anarchists provides us with a view of the perspective of anarchists on the island at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. Fascism in Spain, Cuban anarchists argued in September 1936, represented the culmination of various forces on the Iberian peninsula: monarchy, capitalism, militarism, and, above all, clericalism. The “military-capitalist reaction,” they wrote colorfully, “is the grim shadow of the steeple, ferocity, authority, evil, ignorance.” Spanish fascists sought to return the country to the days of Philip II (1527–1598), the F.G.A.C. claimed, in which the clergy celebrated executions by burning. The heroic Spanish people faced “enslavers and executioners.” Defending them would require a

²⁷ F.G.A.C., “A Nuestros Lectores y Simpatizantes,” *Boletín Información y Propaganda* 1, no. 1 (1 September 1936): 1.

coalition of support of “all liberal men,” F.G.A.C. “sympathizers and friends,” and “our libertarian comrades.” A lack of antifascist unity might allow Spain to become like Italy and Germany, where fascists prepared for war and for the “ruin of current civilization.”²⁸

Anarchists, like other antifascists, identified various components of fascism. In some ways, the Cuban anarchist definition of fascism and conception of antifascism were the same as those of other groups on the island. In agreement with others, they saw fascism as endangering culture and civilization because it elevated brute force over reason and justice. Legitimate Spain, they wrote, was characterized by honor, liberty, science, and art, while the Nationalists “destroy[ed] Iberia with the shameless help of the most abominable monsters on earth: Mussolini and Hitler.”²⁹ Militaristic, fascism imposed its will by “bestial force,”³⁰ and anarchists cited the “bestiality of fascism.”³¹ Fascism was an “assassin of women and children.”³² However, anarchists were careful to draw a distinction which their more moderate antifascist counterparts generally did not. Violence itself was not what made fascism brutish and dangerous; rather, it was violence without proper ideology that was the problem. “When violence is a materialist force,” anarchists wrote, “it is counterrevolutionary, regressive.” Violence motivated by correct

²⁸ F.G.A.C., “A Nuestros Lectores y Simpatizantes,” *Boletín Información y Propaganda* 1, no. 1 (1 September 1936): 1; untitled, 5.

²⁹ F.G.A.C., “Manifiesto a los Defensores de la Dignidad Nacional y de las Libertades Ciudadanas al Pueblo de Cuba,” n.d., #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

³⁰ Federación de Juventudes Libertarias de Cuba (F.J.L.C.), “Bajo la Bota Asesina,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 1.

³¹ F.G.A.C., “Militarismo,” *Boletín de Información* 1, no. 1 (February 1938): n.p.

³² F.J.L.C., “Notas Internacionales,” *Ideario* (15 January 1938): 7.

ideology, however, had a pureness that allowed humanism to negate cruelty, they believed.³³ As noted above, Spanish anarchists had practiced this principle during the Spanish Revolution following the Nationalist coup in July 1936. The fundamental problem with fascism, therefore, was not its violence *per se* but rather its reactionary and regressive violence. Fascism was the “cohesion of all retarding forces.”³⁴ It sought to start a new world war “to assassinate more millions of workers,” Cuban anarchists quoted Italian antifascists as proclaiming. The Italians urged their fellow antifascists to sabotage the war-making.³⁵ War could not destroy fascism; war would serve only to consolidate fascism’s power.³⁶ Antifascism, on the other hand, was not only a force against fascism but also for social progress and the progress of humanity.³⁷

Anarchist anti-statist and anti-capitalist ideology shaped their particular form of antifascism. Whereas many Cuban antifascists saw fascism as principally an invading, even imperialist force foreign to Spain, anarchists interpreted it as not only external but also a natural outgrowth of nationalism and capitalism. “Jingoistic nationalism” triumphed with “bloody bayonets,” destroying all that was good in human beings,³⁸ and capitalist nationalism was “the

³³ F.J.L.C., “Ser violentos,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 4. One way in which some moderates did find common ground with this view was in interpretations of the Republican fight as a kind of sacred rage. Some moderate antifascists, as we have seen elsewhere, cited examples from Christianity of God’s wrath as justified violence. However, even if moderates could agree with anarchists that certain circumstances called for violence, it is unlikely that they would have agreed upon the terms of the justification.

³⁴ F.G.A.C., “La Democracia es Medio, No Fin,” *Boletín de Información* 1, no. 1 (February 1938): 1.

³⁵ F.J.L.C., “Internacionales,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 7.

³⁶ F.J.L.C., “Bajo la Bota Asesina,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 1.

³⁷ Jesús Dieguez, Havana, to Nemesio Gálve[z], 16 January 1938, Correspondencia, documentos y manifiestos de la República de Cuba, 1937–1938 (#6), Correspondencia con organizaciones sindicales de America del Sur, 1937–1938 (Carpeta 60A), Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute of Social History, or IISG), Amsterdam, Netherlands.

³⁸ F.J.L.C., “Bajo la Bota Asesina,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 1.

wet nurse of the Fascist,” they wrote.³⁹ Fascism was the totalitarian state,⁴⁰ the predictable end of a statist progression pushed by capitalists or bourgeois socialists. Since anarchists saw the state as part of a corrupt system to be overthrown, they believed that all states—totalitarian, nationalist, socialist, communist, and democratic—were their enemies.⁴¹ Unlike many of their antifascist counterparts, therefore, anarchists did not idealize the Republican government of Spain, and in fact criticized it bitterly over its disputes with and repression of Spanish anarchists.

As we have seen, in place of fascism many Cuban antifascists envisioned democracy or social democracy. Conversely, anarchists saw democracy as a means to either fascism or revolution. In some cases, democracy served fascism.⁴² Spanish democracy did not overthrow capitalism, the state, or the church. The corrupt system controlled by these forces was, therefore, decaying, anarchists claimed. Fascism indicated “a rotting system.” It was “not a toxin which you can expel independently of the overthrow of the capitalist system,” stated a February 1938 article in the F.G.A.C. bulletin entitled “Democracy is a Means, Not an End.” As long as the capitalist order remained in place, so too would fascism, either “in the shadows or boldfaced.” For this reason, “leftist” governments or the democracy expressed in popular fronts, anarchists argued dismissively, were not the ultimate solution. These institutions and systems could not deal the final death blow to fascism. Only “frankly revolutionary regimes” would be capable of

³⁹ F.J.L.C., “¡Nacionalismo! ¡Socialismo!,” *Ideario* (15 January 1938): 6.

⁴⁰ F.J.L.C., “En defensa del federalismo,” *Ideario* (15 January 1938): 8.

⁴¹ F.G.A.C., “Sindicalismo,” *Boletín de Información* 1, no. 1 (February 1938): 8? [n.p.].

⁴² F.J.L.C., “Zafra! Miseria!,” *Ideario* (15 January 1938): 1

combating the danger of fascism. The article's illustration (Figure 6.1) depicted democracy as a road that forked in two directions: fascism or revolution.⁴³



Figure 6.1 Illustration accompanying the article
“Democracy is a Means, Not an End”

Despite these strong ideological convictions, anarchists were not incapable of thinking strategically and working toward building antifascist unity in the present moment. They placed themselves in the somewhat paradoxical stance of favoring antifascist unity while drawing a clear distinction between their own revolutionary antifascism and a lesser form of democratic antifascism.⁴⁴ However, the distance between circumstances and ideals called for pragmatism.

⁴³ F.G.A.C., “La Democracia es Medio, No Fin,” *Boletín de Información* 1, no. 1 (February 1938): 1–2.

⁴⁴ F.G.A.C., “La Democracia es Medio, No Fin,” *Boletín de Información* 1, no. 1 (February 1938): 2.

Though they made bold and optimistic claims to the contrary in their propaganda—stating, for example, that fascism represented the “last bastion of the exploiter class” and that the war in Spain would be the “last stage in the triumph of the universal proletariat”⁴⁵—anarchists recognized that in the present moment a decisive contest between fascism and anarchism would lead to their defeat. “When deciding the final battle our forces are vastly inferior to those of the enemy,” they wrote. Fascism pushed confrontation with revolutionary forces at this time, anarchists claimed, precisely because its leaders knew their adversaries were not strong enough to win, and that a right-wing victory was highly likely. In this regard, democracy and popular fronts had a role to play, anarchists admitted. “Only for this [reason] does Democracy serve as an anti-reactionary force,” they believed. Resisting fascism by democratic means was inferior to destroying fascism by revolutionary ones, but in the face of an overwhelmingly strong enemy, mere resistance would have to do for the time being. To delay the final battle until such time as they could win, anarchists would have to resist through democracy and hope that crises of the popular fronts would create opportunities for more substantive change. Furthermore, anarchists resolved, while the threat of fascism loomed, they should not attack democracy. However, neither would they “defend Democracy against Fascism,” because this course was a false path. Anarchists must, they understood, rely on collaboration with other leftists to resist fascism until they could start the revolution, but they called for demanding that each leftist group take its place in the struggle. In the future, they hoped, they would then “clear the field” before the final attack.⁴⁶ We glimpse here anarchist pragmatism at work within the context of work toward

⁴⁵ Juventud Antifascista Libertaria de Oriente, “Manifiesto al Pueblo Trabajador,” 1 May 1937, Cuba: Correspondencia, boletines y manifiestos, 1937–1938 (#8), Correspondencia y otros documentos de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores del Comité Peninsular FAI, 1936–1938 (Carpeta 58), Archivo de la Guerra Civil, Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archives, IISG.

⁴⁶ F.G.A.C., “La Democracia es Medio, No Fin,” *Boletín de Información* 1, no. 1 (February 1938): 1–2.

antifascist unity. Pragmatic schemes, however, cover only thinly an unwavering belief in the superiority of the anarchist ideology over all others and a plan for eventual ruthlessness against not only stark enemies but also traitorous or insincere “friends.”

More intensely than other antifascists, anarchists were persistent in their assertion that fascism operated in Cuba, threatening the island directly. The threat comprised two parts: External influence from foreign sources and homegrown fascism, although as we have noted the distinction between foreign and native was less certain for anarchists than for others, given their dismissal of the significance of nationality. It might be more accurate to think of the difference as one of geography—simply distant vs. near—or in terms of Bakunin’s conception of “locality,” as discussed above, rather than of nationality as it is commonly understood. Nevertheless, the F.G.A.C. proclaimed itself against “the fascist conspiracy of foreign elements in our country” in a manifesto.⁴⁷ It noted the director of the *Círculo Nacionalista Español* (Spanish Nationalist Circle, or C.N.E.) in Cuba as “one of the most prominent representatives of fascism” on the island.⁴⁸

In addition to these “foreign” influences, Cuban anarchists interpreted as fascist the “criminal repression carried out by the military dictatorship which we suffer.”⁴⁹ We are forced into a clandestine life, they wrote, “by the fascist repression to which this country is

⁴⁷ F.G.A.C., “Manifiesto a los Defensores de la Dignidad Nacional y de las Libertades Ciudadanas al Pueblo de Cuba,” n.d., #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁴⁸ F.G.A.C., “Mesa Redonda,” *Boletín de Información* 1, no. 1 (February 1938): 4.

⁴⁹ F.G.A.C. Secretario del Exterior, Havana, to unnamed, 20 October 1937, Correspondencia con la Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba, Habana, 20-10-1937 al 13-1-1938 (#2), Correspondencia del Comité Nacional CNT y el Comité Peninsular FAI con organizaciones anarquistas [*sic*] en el exterior, 1937–1938 (Carpeta 62B), Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

subjugated.”⁵⁰ Individuals and groups who fought for liberty and justice in a moment of such historic significance for the island, they stated, were subjected to “barbarous attacks” against their attempts to provide moral and material aid “to countries that defend their honor and national liberties.” The principal such attack against which the Cuban anarchists railed—like many of their antifascist counterparts—was the Cuban government neutrality decree of 1937 (Decreto Presidencial No. 3411) banning all “partisan” organizations that took sides in the Spanish conflict. “El Decreto,” they seethed, was “unprecedented,” the “supreme manifestation” of persecution.⁵¹

Twenty-five workers who met to organize for the antifascist and democratic cause of Spain, the Federación de Juventudes Libertarias (F.J.L.C.) reported, were arrested. Cubans supportive of the Spanish cause—“which is the cause of all”—were detained. Centers of Spanish antifascist activity were shuttered. These acts represented an “avalanche of fascist savagery,” the article stated. “Are we in Germany? What is happening in Cuba?” asked anarchists. “Is it possible to continue this shamelessness? What are the Cuban revolutionaries doing?” The Cuban revolutionary parties were, anarchists believed, in essence “nothing more than fascist.”⁵² The “great tragedy,” they argued, was that these revolutionaries were “men of good will.” Once in charge of the country, however, they went astray.⁵³ “The ‘revolutionary’

⁵⁰ Jesús Dieguez, Havana, to Nemesio Gálve[z], 16 January 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁵¹ F.G.A.C., “Manifiesto a los Defensores de la Dignidad Nacional y de las Libertades Ciudadanas al Pueblo de Cuba,” n.d., #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁵² F.J.L.C., “Editorial,” *Ideario* (15 January 1938): 3.

⁵³ F.J.L.C., “Editorial,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 3.

politicians,” anarchists asserted, only pretended to liberate Cuban workers.⁵⁴ “To overcome the indifference of the people,” they chastised the former revolutionaries, would require the “force of tenacious work” and “fecund sacrifices.” It would not happen, they told the politicians scornfully, “in the comfortable armchairs of your little Party offices.”⁵⁵ In this way, anarchists saw the institution of the state as corrupting otherwise principled individuals. At best it made them lazy, and at worst, despotic and counterrevolutionary. Bad enough already on its own, the state took on the worst characteristics of all other reactionary forces represented on the island by “the magnates of industry, of the bank, of commerce, and crafty Jesuitism, creole and foreign.” The combination of these sectors created an “oligarchy” in Cuba that kept the people subjugated with “insolent arrogance.” This “repressive and obscurantist” current was a “horrible threat to humanity,” Cuban anarchists warned, and they urged their readers to bring to bear all available resources and to set aside all personal and party differences to unite forces to block its advance.⁵⁶

One particularly colorful article in the F.J.L.C. bulletin described fascism as the “apocalyptic monster of our era” that was “slowly but surely infiltrating the entrails of the Cuban People.” If the monster was not stopped, it would devour the population’s collective insides and would submerge the island “in the darkest shadows of horror and misery, never before known.” Italy, Germany, Portugal, and “so many pseudo-democracies (that are no more than masked fascisms),” Cuban anarchist youth asserted, provided terrible examples of the realities of the monster: “tortures, prisons, murders by starvation, harassment, and a whole range of evils.” All

⁵⁴ F.J.L.C., “¡Nacionalismo! ¡Socialismo!,” *Ideario* (15 January 1938): 6.

⁵⁵ F.J.L.C., “Editorial,” *Ideario* (15 January 1938): 3.

⁵⁶ F.G.A.C., “Manifiesto a los Defensores de la Dignidad Nacional y de las Libertades Ciudadanas al Pueblo de Cuba,” n.d., #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

this wickedness illustrated the “excellence of this system which our rulers are imposing on us gradually.” In order to impose a fascist regime in Cuba, anarchists argued, leaders established militarism in the name of order. Then the clergy joined in, they stated, mobilizing its “regressive forces” as it had in Italy in its “pact with the cannibal Mussolini.” The result would be all manner of ills against humanity, and ultimately, chaos.⁵⁷ The arrest of a worker that resulted in illegal detention and severe mistreatment—the man, named José Castillo, was tied by his neck to the tail of a horse and paraded through his town—and a crackdown by armed men on a union radio transmission that included brutal beatings were both perpetrated, anarchists of the F.G.A.C. noted, by members of the Constitutional Army. These events, they argued, demonstrated the brutality of fascism, and their repetition indicated the current weakness of the Cuban people’s resistance to the threat.⁵⁸ Against this negative progression Cuban anarchists called for constant vigilance, and advocated persistent resistance whenever possible, passive or active, but always energetic. The Cuban people—especially the youth—must remain alert to the danger of fascism, they declared, or their hopes of liberty would be strangled, and the island would “drown in the black abyss in which lie the enslaved peoples under the death grip of Fascism.”⁵⁹

Anarchists also compared the governments of neighboring Santo Domingo and Haiti to fascist regimes elsewhere. Dominican strongman Rafael Trujillo ordered his “army of beasts” to assassinate Haitian workers, while the “tyrant of Haiti” was complicit in the massacre, they claimed, stating that these men were an affront to the Americas and an embarrassment to the world. Like other antifascists, anarchists looked also to examples around the world, such as

⁵⁷ F.J.L.C., “Lentamente,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 2.

⁵⁸ F.G.A.C., “Militarismo,” *Boletín de Información* 1, no. 1 (February 1938): n.p.

⁵⁹ F.J.L.C., “Lentamente,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 2.

China, “invaded by the bestial typhoon of Japanese fascism,” and Romania, “one more country that has fallen into the clutches of fascism.” They cited in particular Romanian government acts against racial minorities,⁶⁰ while elsewhere they praised themselves for the long tradition in Cuba of anarcho-syndicalist organizing across traditional racial boundaries.⁶¹

In addition to endorsing the crossing of racial boundaries, Cuban anarchists promoted crossing national borders, which, as we have seen, they interpreted as equally “artificial.” They celebrated the ease of international travel and communication in their age as an antidote to nationalism. Powerful, rapid, and numerous boats, trains, busses, and planes crossed nations, borders, and seas, they observed approvingly. Telegrams and cables transmitted daily word of each country’s events. The radio broadcast news instantly, and the published press commented on everything that occurred from “the most trivial to that of the greatest transcendence.” Continually edited books distributed the most important information in multiple languages. Frequent international conferences and congresses brought together the people and ideas of diverse countries. And multinational organizations and agreements addressed political, economic, social, scientific, literary, and other topics. All these means of interaction, Cuban anarchists summarized, defined their epoch as one of “a vast internationalization in many aspects of human life” that advanced the progress of people’s aspirations and of the universalization of knowledge. Internationalization represented progress, they believed, as did internationalism. The “triumphal march toward fraternity and human solidarity,” they predicted, “would end the nationalisms and racisms that divide humanity into aggressive hordes.”⁶²

⁶⁰ F.J.L.C., “Notas Internacionales,” *Ideario* (15 January 1938): 7; F.J.L.C., “Internacionales,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 7.

⁶¹ F.G.A.C., “Blancos y Negros,” *Boletín de Información* 1, no. 1 (February 1938): n.p.

⁶² Adrian del Valle, “Panorama Internacional: Nacionalismo,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 3 (1 June 1939): 1.

However, a negative reaction also characterized their age. Though all the aforementioned developments ought to foster “good relations between nations and fraternity among men,” anarchists lamented, “by a strange contrast we see manifest narrow nationalism with its natural characteristics of phobia against anything foreign.” Fascist, Nazi, and Falangist leaders used this xenophobic nationalism, they observed, “to impede the manifestation of the noble sentiment of human fraternity” and to breed in its place feelings that were “anti-human, aggressive, brutal, [and] full of hatreds.”⁶³ In the anarchist interpretation, nationalism led directly to fascism in an age when internationalism seemed triumphant. Thus, the cause of the fascist reaction, at least in part, was the same phenomenon that provided antifascists the tools of their most powerful countermeasure: transnational solidarity.

“Any increase in the spirit of SOLIDARITY and initiative,” Cuban anarchist youth reminded their bulletin readership with a quotation by the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta, was a step in the right direction, toward the ultimate goal of anarchism.⁶⁴ To this end and for more immediate practical reasons as well, Cuban and Spanish anarchists worked on fostering transatlantic networks and building solidarity with one another. Records of correspondence between Cuban anarchists and their Spanish counterparts during the Spanish Civil War are even more fragmentary than the collections of Cuban anarchist periodicals. The correspondence faced contemporary challenges: Many of the letters indicate that materials had to travel between Cuba and Spain along disjointed routes that included stopovers in Paris and transmission via an individual named David Alonso in Langeloth, Pennsylvania. They include warnings about the proper safe mailing addresses and the appropriate manner in which to send things, precautions

⁶³ Adrian del Valle, “Panorama Internacional: Nacionalismo,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 3 (1 June 1939): 1.

⁶⁴ F.J.L.C., “Pensamiento,” *Ideario* 2, no. 3 (31 January 1938): 4.

necessary, according to the Cubans, “given the circumstances we go through.”⁶⁵ However, the letters that are preserved in the archives demonstrate a mutual interest in developing relationships with one another, and show that the war provided an opportunity and an impetus to connect.

The Secretary of the Exterior for the National Committee of the F.G.A.C. wrote to Spanish comrades in October 1937 responding to their stated wish for a general description of anarchist and antifascist groups and activities on the island.⁶⁶ Apparently eager to comply with the request, the F.G.A.C. representative gave a great deal of information and analysis. He told the Spaniards that his group was reorganizing following dissolution in the wake of the disastrous March 1935 strike. The conflict in Spain, the timing indicates, provided the motivation for this regrouping. He mentioned successfully constituted organizations—as well as those in the process of forming—assembled in regions across the island. Seven groups made up the Havana local, while member groups and locals also functioned in Marianao, Pinar del Rio, Camagüey, Santiago de Cuba, and 8–10 other towns. According to this assessment, Cuban anarchism enjoyed significant geographic diversity in 1937. The letter’s author expressed pride also in the age diversity of the island’s anarchists. In addition to its regular chapters, the F.G.A.C. counted five youth chapters in the capital city and six in various locations across the island. These anarchist militants and sympathetic youth had formed an antifascist committee, the F.G.A.C. representative wrote, that had made modest achievements. Despite having to operate clandestinely, it had published truthful information about proletarian and revolutionary Spain and had collected through the sale of stamps and bonds “some quantities which have been sent to the

⁶⁵ C. Llovet, Havana, to Secretariados Relaciones Exteriores, Barcelona, 20 February 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁶⁶ A copy of the letter from Spain referenced, dated 15 August 1937, does not appear in the archive.

C.N.T. Committee in France.” Considering, however, that antifascist efforts had to be increased and that the clandestine nature of the F.G.A.C. hindered this work, Cuban anarchists, wrote the Secretary, established the Centro Federalista Español (C.F.E.) as a front group “legally constituted in both the Provincial Government and the Spanish Embassy.” This new organization, he told his Spanish comrades enthusiastically, “begins its activities with high potential for success and will soon open its clubhouse.”⁶⁷

Documentation from the archives of the Registry of Associations in Havana indicates that the C.F.E. was officially registered with the state as a cultural organization in July 1937. Its founding bylaws promised to unite members for the purpose of “human betterment” and the achievement of “a high level of human society.” The Center would maintain a library for the benefit of its members, and would give legal and medical aid when funds allowed. The bylaws stated that the C.F.E. would “support and cooperate with any entity that is akin to our ideology,” without stating the particulars of the ideology or naming anarchism. The group did, however, have to name members of its board in order to register with the state, and the list included the prominent anarchist (and Mason) Antonio Penichet.⁶⁸ On official letterhead far more professional in appearance than most Cuban anarchist publications, one of the C.F.E. secretaries of correspondence, Jesús Dieguez, wrote to a Spanish colleague in January 1938 explaining that

⁶⁷ F.G.A.C. Secretario del Exterior, Havana, to unnamed, 20 October 1937, Correspondencia con la Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba, Habana, 20-10-1937 al 13-1-1938 (#2), Correspondencia del Comité Nacional CNT y el Comité Peninsular FAI con organizaciones anarquistas [*sic*] en el exterior, 1937–1938 (Carpeta 62B), Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁶⁸ “Negociado de Asociaciones, Orden Público y Elecciones Registro Especial de Asociaciones,” “Centro Federalista Español – Reglamento,” and other official documentation of incorporation in Expediente 10402, Legajo 349, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Havana.

the Center was “an antifascist organization made up of revolutionary workers” united by the ideal of a federalist Spain.⁶⁹

In addition to explaining about the establishment of the C.F.E. as a legal entity capable of carrying out the work of Cuban anarchist antifascism more publicly, the F.G.A.C. representative took time in his letter to Spain to analyze other antifascists on the island. His analysis is illustrative of some of the challenges to unity, particularly with other leftists. In his estimation, the antifascist left in Cuba consisted of two groups of organizations. On the one hand, the Frente Democrático Español (Spanish Democratic Front) consisted of Communists (Círculo Español Socialista) and “elements of the Spanish high and low bourgeoisie” (Círculo Republicano, Izquierda Republicana Española, and Centre Catalá). These organizations called themselves leftists, wrote the anarchist, and defended bourgeois, democratic, Republican Spain. On the other hand, he stated, anarchists collaborated with “a group of workers sympathetic to Largo Caballero” of the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Worker Party), elements of the Partido Bolchevique Leninista (Bolshevik Leninist Party), meaning Trotskyists, and “some other sincere antifascists” in the Ateneo Socialista Español. They asked for our cooperation, wrote the F.G.A.C. representative to his Spanish counterpart, and we gave it to them. But the Frente Democrático Español “saw that the Athenaeum gained adherents [*personalidad*] and prestige by the day, and decided to eliminate it.” He went on to list the disruptions to meetings, real estate battles, and interference in radio air time perpetrated by the Communist-led

⁶⁹ Jesús Dieguez, Havana, to Nemesio Gálve[z], 16 January 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

organization against the Ateneo, concluding that these “so-called antifascists” used any number of means, including betrayal, to attack it.⁷⁰

These statements show that the lack of leftist unity well known in the context of the Spanish Civil War—characterized in particular by tensions between Republicans, Communists, Trotskyists, socialists, and anarchists—paralleled the political situation in Cuba during the conflict. We see when we consider elsewhere the views of Communists that Party officials viewed anarchists with as much suspicion, anger, and derision as the anarchists had for them in return. A lack of unity among the left and center-left in Cuba had been key to the downfall of the democratic experiment on the island following the overthrow of Machado in 1933, and to the subsequent rise of Batista as a new strongman. Indeed, the problem of infighting among leftist groups plagued movements and efforts around the world during the 1930s. The era of the conflict in Spain as well as the war itself are characterized by both a lack of leftist unity and attempts to address the problem that proved ultimately to be unsuccessful.

With regard to establishing transnational interpersonal links with Spanish comrades, the F.G.A.C. representative wrote that a propaganda tour of Cuba by representatives of the C.N.T. would be immensely useful. To that end, he mentioned having written to C.N.T. representatives in New York City to invite them, in the name of the Ateneo and the C.F.E., to the island for such a visit. He hoped that they would have an opportunity to explain the Spanish Revolution, he wrote, and impressed upon his colleague the importance of sufficient advanced notice of arrival to the appropriate groups in Cuba in order to facilitate proper preparations and accommodations. Since the political and economic situation was not optimal, he stressed, this measure would be

⁷⁰ F.G.A.C. Secretario del Exterior, Havana, to unnamed, 20 October 1937, Correspondencia con la Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba, Habana, 20-10-1937 al 13-1-1938 (#2), Correspondencia del Comité Nacional CNT y el Comité Peninsular FAI con organizaciones anarquistas [*sic*] en el exterior, 1937–1938 (Carpeta 62B), Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

necessary to ensure the most effective and efficient visit possible for the Spanish comrades from New York. Looking forward to this future multinational connection, the F.G.A.C. representative signed off.⁷¹

During the autumn of 1937 and the winter and spring of 1938 letters back and forth between anarchist representatives in Spain and the F.G.A.C., C.F.E., and Ateneo in Cuba shared expressions of solidarity-building. Cuban and Spanish anarchists based the solidarity they worked to establish across the Atlantic upon both a common belief that fascism threatened both nations and shared ideology. Your cause is our cause, Cuban anarchists told Spaniards.⁷² Fascism wishes to dominate your country also, Spaniards warned their counterparts in Cuba.⁷³ A representative of the C.F.E. in Havana asked a Spanish comrade to “receive our enthusiastic encouragement and our sincere adherence to all antifascist workers enrolled in revolutionary organizations whose purpose is not only to crush criminal fascism, scourge of humanity, but to overcome the state of things prior to July 19, 1936.” In other words, Cubans understood and supported the dual goal of anarchist antifascism: not only defeating fascism but also building a better society in Spain and a better world. His group believed, the C.F.E. representative told the Spaniard, that working people were the only ones capable of winning the war and conquering capitalism. For this reason, he stated, they chose to align themselves with “the legitimate representatives of the Spanish proletariat”—the radical unions—that would drive social

⁷¹ F.G.A.C. Secretario del Exterior, Havana, to unnamed, 20 October 1937, Correspondencia con la Federación de Grupos Anarquistas de Cuba, Habana, 20-10-1937 al 13-1-1938 (#2), Correspondencia del Comité Nacional CNT y el Comité Peninsular FAI con organizaciones anarquistas [*sic*] en el exterior, 1937–1938 (Carpeta 62B), Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁷² Jesús Dieguez, Havana, to Nemesio Gálve[z], 16 January 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁷³ Mariano R. Vázquez, Barcelona, to Centro Federalista Español, Havana, 19 March 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

transformation “despite the war against criminal fascism” and the systematic opposition of historic enemies.⁷⁴

Cuban anarchists wished to demonstrate to their Spanish counterparts both that they were antifascist and stood with those fighting fascism in Spain and also that they would take action in solidarity with anarchists against other antifascists hostile to them. As the C.N.T. expressed in a universal manifesto in November 1937, anarchists believed strongly in making their best effort to move away from inter-antifascist hostilities. The organization’s National Committee stated: “The unity of antifascist action cannot be a slogan of political speculation. The tragedy of the people at war deserves more respect.” In commentary accompanying the Cuban publication of this manifesto, Cuban anarchists showed their eagerness to prove their commitment to unity and solidarity, expressing the opinion that people in the countries of Latin America were particularly odious of dictatorships and fervent in their antifascist sentiment, and that they had a special interest in the “greatest disclosure of Spanish truth.”⁷⁵ In November 1937 leaders of the Ateneo sent word to Spain of their unanimous support for the “Revolutionary Alliance” of the C.N.T. and the Unión General de Trabajadores (General Union of Workers, or U.G.T.)⁷⁶ And in January 1938 the C.F.E. reported to Spain that they had sent a telegram to the Republican government petitioning for the release of anarchist antifascists: “Centro Federalista Español requests freedom antifascist prisoners members of revolutionary organizations U.G.T. C.N.T.

⁷⁴ Jesús Dieguez, Havana, to Nemesio Gálve[z], 16 January 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁷⁵ C.N.T., “La C.N.T. se Dirige al Mundo,” 12 November 1937, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁷⁶ Juan Salgado and Manuel Franco, Havana, to Mariano Vázquez, Valencia, 19 November 1937, and Juan Salgado and Manuel Franco, Havana, to Nemesio Gálvez, Paris, 19 November 1937, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

and F.A.I. Havana 11 January 1938.”⁷⁷ A Spanish anarchist representative replied two months later, expressing profound satisfaction at the Cubans’ “devotion to our cause.” He was pleased to be able to communicate, he wrote, the successful formation of the alliance between the anarchists and the U.G.T. and to inform the Cubans that the antifascist prisoners in question had been released. He appreciated Cuban efforts and devotion. The “greatest desire of the Spanish people,” he wrote, was the support of the international proletariat.⁷⁸

Both Cuban and Spanish anarchists expressed appreciation for information shared across the Atlantic. In a December 1937 letter, a representative of the F.A.I. wrote to the F.G.A.C.: “we address you as comrades of maximum reliability to inform us and advise on the structuring of the most effective relationships with the Cuban movement.” Every day, he told the Cubans, they realized more and more that “these relations with our true compatriots must be much more extensive” and they hoped that “the effectiveness of revolutionary action abroad” would also increase to the same extent.”⁷⁹ A representative of the C.N.T. wrote to the Ateneo in December 1937 that his organization, taking note of a suggestion from the Cubans, sent “the greatest possible quantity of propaganda” materials for Cuban use.⁸⁰ The F.G.A.C. wrote to the secretariats of foreign relations for the F.A.I. and the C.N.T. in February 1938 seeking “how to establish relationships that allow us to see firsthand the true characteristics of the events taking place there” and “the basis for strong relations.” In the letter, Cuban anarchists shared their

⁷⁷ Jesús Dieguez, Havana, to Nemesio Gálve[z], 16 January 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁷⁸ Mariano R. Vázquez, Barcelona, to Centro Federalista Español, Havana, 19 March 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁷⁹ Pedro Herrera to F.G.A.C., 30 December 1937, #8, Carpeta 58, Archivo de la Guerra Civil, Federación Anarquista Ibérica Archives, IISG.

⁸⁰ Mariano R. Vázquez, Barcelona, to Ateneo Socialista Español, Havana, 30 December 1937, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

desire to inform Spanish anarchists about the work of the movement in Cuba and expressed the opinion that all movements around the world should study the Spanish example. They accepted gladly the offer by the Spanish anarchists to send published propaganda to the island, and promised to establish a committee devoted to receiving such materials.⁸¹ In April 1938 representatives of the F.A.I. and C.N.T. expressed gratitude for the correspondence of the F.G.A.C., stating that they had taken “very good note of all its contents,” and informed the Cubans that in response to their desire for a relationship with and information from the Spanish anarchists, they would begin to send reports “now that we have initiated contact.”⁸² The timing of these letters between different individuals and groups, and some repetition of efforts to connect evident therein, indicate that establishing reliable channels of communication and steadily building solidarity were difficult endeavors. In addition to logistical and security challenges already mentioned, disorganization caused both by multiple different groups representing anarchism in various countries and by dislocation due to war hindered the effort at times. Yet both Cuban and Spanish anarchists persisted in the attempt to connect.

Solidarity across borders meant a lot to anarchists under siege in Spain. They expressed with gratitude “the satisfaction it produces in us to know that in distant lands there are comrades who are deeply concerned with our struggle.”⁸³ They responded to Cuban correspondence with emotion, telling their counterparts across the Atlantic that they were moved by the support. They wrote to the Cubans: “We are excited about the level of understanding that motivates you and

⁸¹ C. Llovet, Havana, to Secretariados Relaciones Exteriores, Barcelona, 20 February 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁸² Pedro Herrera and Mariano R. Vázquez, Barcelona, to Federación de Grupos Anarquistas, Havana, 9 April 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁸³ Mariano R. Vázquez, Barcelona, to Ateneo Socialista Español, Havana, 30 December 1937, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

that you have a clear vision of our fight.” As the Cubans were eager to give proof of their support through action—such as petitioning the Republican government for the release from prison of antifascist anarchists—Spanish anarchists felt equal urgency about explaining themselves to their foreign allies. “Be assured,” representatives of the F.A.I. and C.N.T. wrote to the Cubans referencing the difficult pragmatic choices they felt forced to make in the context of war and antifascist struggle, “that the Spanish anarchists have not forgotten our ideology and only the cruel imperative of circumstances obliges us to set aside its immediate application.”⁸⁴

Anarchist efforts in this context all centered around solidarity, and whereas fostering solidarity across the ocean with Cuban anarchists faced significant political and logistical challenges, meaningful and sustained unity with other antifascists would prove impossible. A lack of commitment to antifascist solidarity by other groups, anarchists believed, cost them the war.

Republican Defeat

In the wake of Nationalist victory in Spain, Cuban anarchists initiated publication of a new monthly periodical entitled *Rumbos Nuevos: Órgano Libertario (New Directions: Libertarian Medium)*. Their purpose, they wrote, was “to maintain upright the banner of the ideals of social liberty and social justice, object and purpose of the libertarian philosophy.”⁸⁵ In the publication, they assessed the reasons for defeat in Spain, took stock of the grim realities around the world in the present historical moment, and proposed further action.

⁸⁴ Pedro Herrera and Mariano R. Vázquez, Barcelona, to Federación de Grupos Anarquistas, Havana, 9 April 1938, #6, Carpeta 60A, Archivo del Comité Nacional C.N.T., C.N.T. (España) Archives, IISG.

⁸⁵ Anon., “Nuestros Objetivos,” *Rumbos Nuevos: Órgano Libertario* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 2.

Cuban anarchists proclaimed that the present was “truly discouraging for those of us who hold libertarian ideals” and wrote of “the terrible current circumstances of our history.” Reactionary forces continued unimpeded and stronger than ever, threatening all nations, “even those considered more democratic.” Spain, anarchists wrote in April 1939, “has fallen at last.” Spain followed Italy, Germany, Portugal, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and other nations, but not without a fight. It fell to the fascists not because of the will of the Spanish people, Cuban anarchists argued, but because of “the conjunction of declared enemies and delinquent friends,” “the imposition of the fascist governments and the complacency of the so-called democrats.”⁸⁶ Here anarchists expressed an opinion common among Cuban antifascists and antifascists more broadly, which we have observed already in other instances: anger at the democratic governments’ adherence to the Non-Intervention Agreement in Spain while fascist governments perpetrated flagrant violations of the agreement. Whereas some other antifascists expressed surprise and shock as well as anger over this transgression, or attempted to portray the democratic countries as hypocritical for their stance, anarchists interpreted the position of the “limping democracies”⁸⁷ as entirely consistent and predictable. The fence that divided the democratic and fascist sides, they reminded readers, was not as large as many believed.⁸⁸ The “intransigent nationalism” that became fascism, Nazism, and Falangism in Italy, Germany, and Spain also infected the democracies, although perhaps “not in such a brutal and aggressive

⁸⁶ Adrian del Valle, “La Reacción en Marcha,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 1; Anon., “El sindicalismo y sus tácticas,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 4; Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista de Cuba, “Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista de Cuba S.I.A., se Dirige al Pueblo: Manifiesto a los antifascistas todos,” 15 February 1939, in *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 6.

⁸⁷ Anon., “La Asociación Internacional de Trabajadores se dirige al proletariado,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 5.

⁸⁸ Anon., “La Verdad Sobre la Tragedia Española,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 2 (1 May 1939): n.p.

manner.”⁸⁹ England was a capitalist empire run by conservative nobles. Surely these men could not bear to see forces in favor of “the social emancipation of the working classes” triumph in Spain. France was a “republic of the petit bourgeoisie,” anarchists stated, “with hesitant socialist parties, lacking revolutionary audacity,” and therefore “was bound to go along with England, fearful of facing off with totalitarian states alone.” Any dispute between these nations and the fascists did not result from ideological difference, anarchists asserted, but rather merely from rivalries concerning economic interests, territorial occupation, and influence in international relations. Capitalist, conservative, and reactionary forces within England and France, who used their influence to maintain their class and caste privileges, “decided ultimately to throw democracy overboard.” With the exception of a few countries such as Norway and Sweden, Cuban anarchists stated, Europe was entirely covered by dark clouds. And despite the fact that its present government made efforts favoring stronger democracy, the United States, Cuban anarchists assessed within the context of their own neocolonial experience on the island, demonstrated characteristics of an exploitative economic imperialism. Additionally, in the countries of Latin America dictatorships persisted that were similar to the totalitarian countries of Europe in methods of repression, intransigence, violence, and horror. “In most of the republics of this continent,” Cuban anarchists lamented, “openly fascist groups work under the benevolent tolerance of governments, while those advocating the ideals of true freedom and progress are pursued covertly or openly.”⁹⁰ Even when they were able to report in May 1939 that the Cuban government had declared the Spanish Falange illegal in Cuba, anarchists warned that though it had been officially dissolved, the Falange “lives in the heart of every reactionary.”

⁸⁹ Adrian del Valle, “Panorama Internacional: Nacionalismo,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 3 (1 June 1939): 1.

⁹⁰ Adrian del Valle, “La Reacción en Marcha,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 1.

We must remain alert, they commanded their readers, and “strangle it whenever it raises its head, with or without official support.”⁹¹

Cuban anarchists criticized not only fascist and democratic nations for the tragedy in Spain but also the Soviet Union. As their analysis of defeat in Spain progressed from April to June 1939 in *Rumbos Nuevos*, Cuban anarchists focused more and more on that which they interpreted as the traitorous role of Communists, both Soviet and Spanish. Furthermore, they chronicled the ways in which, in their view, Communist influence had infiltrated, corrupted, and come to dominate the Republican leadership. They expressed these opinions as their own, and also reprinted statements by Spanish anarchists to the same effect, in a series of articles claiming to tell “the truth” about events in Spain. Anarchists were anticommunist as well as antifascist, though they critiqued Soviet Communism from the left rather than from the center as did their moderate antifascist counterparts. The anticommunism of anarchist antifascism was far more virulent, however, than that of moderates, and unlike the latter’s, extended deep into their vision of the Spanish Republican government.

Russia, despite its “great revolution that liberated it from the yoke of the Czar and aristocracy,” was beholden to “the tyranny of the State and the salary, falling under the dictatorship of a party that seemed each day to work more under the sign of reaction than of true revolution.”⁹² Cuban anarchists accused the Communist state even of collaborating with Italy: Despite virulent rhetoric against one another, they asserted, Russia and Italy were close, friendly nations, and the government of Stalin had gone so far as to provide that of Mussolini with the raw materials necessary for military campaigns during the war in Ethiopia and the invasion of

⁹¹ Anon., “Falange Española ha sido disuelta,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 2 (1 May 1939): 2.

⁹² Adrian del Valle, “La Reacción en Marcha,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 1.

Spain.⁹³ Echoing anti-Republican propaganda, anarchists claimed that some Spanish Republican elements actually worked for the Soviets. In a piece published in Cuba, the national committee of the Spanish anarchist organizations stated that the Italian and German invasion of Spain had required a request for aid from abroad. Russia sold them this aid “not only for a price in gold but also at the cost of our political independence.” In order to get the arms they needed, Spanish anarchists told their international brethren, Republicans gave up their country’s riches but also found themselves forced to tolerate domestic and foreign agents of the Soviet Union taking control of their politics and military activities. Thus the U.S.S.R. imposed “indignities” upon Spain and Spaniards.⁹⁴ Cuban anarchists asserted that “certain organizations and parties that claim to act on behalf of loyalist Spain” in fact pursued their own objectives, obeying “the *ukases* [official proclamations in Imperial Russia] of the modern Czar incarnate” at the expense of the “misery of the Spanish people.”⁹⁵ Republican leaders whose attitudes and decisions aligned perfectly with Russian policy, Cuban anarchists stated, constituted a “suspicious indication.” Actions by the Communist Party of Spain against socialists and anarchists were “criminal” and “advised by the Russian Embassy.” Soviet agents within the International Brigades, anarchists claimed, “assassinated thousands of non-Stalinist comrades, who had gone to Spain to fight for the proletarian revolution.” These Communist-perpetrated “monstrosities,” Cuban anarchists believed, “contribute[d] to the triumph of fascism.”⁹⁶

⁹³ Anon., “Notas Breves: Moscu y Roma,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 2.

⁹⁴ Comité Nacional, Movimiento Libertario, C.N.T., F.A.I., F.I.J.L., “La Verdad Sobre la Guerra y la Revolución en España: ¡A los trabajadores del mundo!,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 3 (1 June 1939): n.p.

⁹⁵ Anon., “Sin comentarios,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 7.

⁹⁶ Anon., “La tragedia española,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 8; Anon., “La Verdad Sobre la Tragedia Española,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 2 (1 May 1939): n.p.; Comité Nacional, Movimiento Libertario, C.N.T., F.A.I., F.I.J.L., “La Verdad Sobre la Guerra y la Revolución en España: ¡A los trabajadores del mundo!,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 3 (1 June 1939): n.p.

Unlike most of their fellow antifascists in Cuba, anarchists advanced an intense critique of Spanish Republican leaders themselves for their own defeat by Franco. One reason the war was lost to the Nationalists, they asserted, was betrayal of the anarchists—“the best antifascists”—by the Republican government. Republican leaders “inflicted all sorts of infamy” on them and did “everything possible to remove them from the direction of the war.” They gave up defense of major cities such as Valencia and Barcelona, anarchists stated, claiming even that after defeat “half of the military leaders defected to the Franco camp.” The betrayal of anarchists by Republican leadership, they believed, resulted in large part from the latter’s above-mentioned entanglement with the Soviet Union and Communist interests. Together with their pro-Stalin allies, anarchists claimed, Republican leaders promulgated partisan politics that hindered progress in the struggle.⁹⁷ In alliance with Communists, leaders in Spain protected bourgeois interests over those of workers, leading to counterrevolutionary actions that contributed to Republican defeat. “All the slogans of the Communist Party during the first two years of the war,” Spanish anarchists stated bitterly, could be summarized as: “Better to Lose the War than Tolerate Revolution.” If, by contrast, “all antifascists within and outside of our country had fulfilled their obligation like we did,” anarchists boasted, “the Spanish people would have triumphed.”⁹⁸ Instead, in alliance with Communists, the Republican leaders had behaved dictatorially, rebelliously, and had not truly represented the Spanish Republic, according to Cuban anarchists. They “operated without consultation and did not allow discussions with the Ministers that formed the Government and that represented the parties and organizations.” From these disappointments, Cuban anarchists gleaned a lesson applicable to their own situation on the

⁹⁷ Anon., “Traición a Espaldas de los Liberarios,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 3. This article is a summary of an editorial from the 23 February 1939 issue of *Le Libertaire*.

⁹⁸ Comité Nacional, Movimiento Libertario, C.N.T., F.A.I., F.I.J.L., “La Verdad Sobre la Guerra y la Revolución en España: ¡A los trabajadores del mundo!” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 3 (1 June 1939): n.p.

island, which they shared with fellow anarchists and others sympathetic to their message: “Not all who sell themselves as friends of the people are in reality; not all who shout revolution are sincere revolutionaries.”⁹⁹

In summary, Cuban anarchists concluded, the present hour was that of reaction, against which they must put up their best fight. Country after country reactionary forces conquered in their quest to dominate the entire globe.¹⁰⁰ “It would suggest a new Middle Age, with all its obscurantism, intransigence, persecutions, and atrocious fights.”¹⁰¹ All lovers of liberty should continue to combat this tide to avoid a second coming of the Dark Ages. Against Reaction, anarchists urged, we must wage Revolution.¹⁰² Faced with growing reaction, anarchists must amplify revolutionary struggle.¹⁰³ In place of monopolizing economic forces and arrogant fascism that threatened the last vestiges of freedom and would plunge humanity into an awful inferno, they stated, there remained only one option: Working people must come together and organize, and through their unions resist and commit to constant transformative work, “the daily fight.” Humanity’s final liberation required as a prerequisite the development of a “broad sense of solidarity and mutual trust” that would build a “harmonious spiritual environment consolidated by the intimate recognition derived from learning bound by the community of interests.” To achieve “the conquest of a future more worthy of man's existence” diverse people would need to work together against reactionary forces. One man by himself is weak, they reminded readers in a short primer on solidarity. Individuals must be respected, but in fact

⁹⁹ Anon., “La Verdad Sobre la Tragedia Española,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 2 (1 May 1939): n.p.

¹⁰⁰ Adrian del Valle, “La Reacción en Marcha,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 1.

¹⁰¹ Adrian del Valle, “Panorama Internacional: Nacionalismo,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 3 (1 June 1939): 1.

¹⁰² Adrian del Valle, “La Reacción en Marcha,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 1.

¹⁰³ Anon., “Dos palabras a las juventudes,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 6.

individuality is affirmed through the practice of solidarity and mutual aid, they asserted. Building upon belief in their central principle of solidarity, therefore, Cuban anarchists called upon their fellow libertarians to join together with all workers and “men of progress” in the ongoing struggle against fascism.¹⁰⁴

Even in defeat, Spain provided an important example of necessary antifascist attributes for the world to follow. The Spanish people waged their heroic defensive battle against international fascism, Cuban anarchists asserted, not because of some cultural characteristic. Rather, they were able and willing to fight while other peoples acquiesced because they had vital qualities those other nations lacked: revolutionary education, the practice of direct struggle, and the habit of sacrifice for an ideal. These qualities resulted from many years of fighting—against feudalism, clericalism, monarchism, “miserable and retardant capitalism,” and reactionary political and social forces in Spain—and experience passed down from generation to generation. This longstanding knowledge of struggle forged an “extraordinary hardening of combatants” in the Spanish proletariat, “making it the only invincible barrier against the progress of fascism.” Where did the Spanish people learn their revolutionary education? In their unions, anarchists asserted. Revolutionary syndicalism represented “the exultation of the dignity of man.” The Spanish proletariat, therefore, had the greatest antifascist energy. However, fascism threatened all sectors of Spanish society and had to be defeated by any means necessary. So without forgetting the revolutionary importance of the working class, the fight against fascism must

¹⁰⁴ Anon., “Nuestros Objetivos,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 2; XX (pseud.), “El Hombre,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 2 (1 May 1939): 6.

include a more extensive group of people.¹⁰⁵ Syndicalist principles and practices combined with broad solidarity, these arguments demonstrate, were the keys to anarchist antifascism.

As all antifascists took stock of defeat by Nationalists in Spain, anarchists projected their particular variety of antifascism forward into the looming larger conflict. True social revolution, Cuban anarchists argued, was the only means by which to prevent impending world war between totalitarian nations such as Germany, Italy, and Japan and the “so-called democratic nations, led by England and France.” Through revolution, anarchist antifascists envisioned themselves leading humanity away from all-consuming war toward a new world. They would give society “a truly human organization, in which the liberties of peoples and of men would be fully guaranteed.” Though they advanced this optimistic vision for a brighter future, however, their assessment of the present and of hope for the realization of their ideals remained grim. “Unfortunately, neither the people nor men seem ready yet for so momentous a revolution,” one anarchist author wrote in *Rumbos Nuevos* in May 1939. Perhaps before the better world could become a reality, he concluded, “we must first pass through the horrors of a world war.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Anon., “Una lección que debe aprender el proletariado del mundo entero,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 4–5; Anon., “Dos palabras a las juventudes,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 1 (1 April 1939): 6.

¹⁰⁶ Adrian del Valle, “La Fuerza es el Unico Derecho Internacional,” *Rumbos Nuevos* 1, no. 2 (1 May 1939): 2.

CHAPTER 7

Unity against Reactionaries: Cuban Communist Antifascism

At the start of the Spanish Civil War the Partido Comunista de Cuba (Cuban Communist Party, or P.C.C.) was a relatively young organization—having been founded in 1925—working to grow and to strengthen its influence on the island. During the entire revolutionary struggle against Machado and the intense period of activism afterward leading up to the general strike of March 1935, Cuban Communists had been constrained in their organizing efforts by the policy of the Communist International (Comintern). For nearly a decade the P.C.C. had struggled to reconcile directives from Moscow with Cuban realities. A few months after the general strike, in the summer of 1935, Comintern policy changed from one in which Communists were to reject collaboration with other leftists and with moderates (Third Period policy) to one that promoted antifascist unity between Communists and these other groups (Popular Front policy). By that time, members of the Party on the island lamented the missed opportunities of the previous years, blaming Comintern policy of the late 1920s and early 1930s for holding back the P.C.C.'s growth in membership and influence. Over the coming year, as the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and especially the outbreak of the Spanish conflict inspired a widespread grassroots antifascist movement on the island, Cuban Communists finally found themselves in a position in which international Communist policy and domestic Cuban activism aligned. They were determined not to miss another chance to connect Communism with the goals and aspirations of Cuban activists and the Cuban general public. They recognized powerful organizing potential in the movement of Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic.

Cuban Communists' engagement with antifascism and the Spanish Republican cause made significant contributions to those efforts. As previously noted, several histories of Cuban

involvement in the Spanish conflict, especially those produced in Cuba after 1959, have emphasized these contributions by Communists, particularly their role in organizing volunteers.¹ The movement against fascism and in support of the Spanish Republic on the island, however, had much to offer the P.C.C. in return as well. In this movement that was both Cuban and transnational the island's Communists found a cause that connected the dictates of international Communism—the policy of Popular Front unity against fascism worldwide—with a genuinely popular domestic effort around which diverse Cubans rallied. As antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic gained momentum on the island, Communists could finally relate the orders they received from their institutional hierarchy to the grassroots activism going on around them. Assertion of a leadership role in Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic proved to be an important organizing strategy for the P.C.C. that helped it to grow its membership and influence on the island.

We saw in Chapter 2 that the island's Communists utilized their domestic and transnational networks, as well as disciplined organizing and Party resources, to recruit and support Cuban volunteers in Spain, work that depended upon collaboration with the Parties of the United States, France, and Spain, as well as the Communist International (Comintern). In this chapter we examine other elements of Cuban Communist antifascism: the arguments the island's Communists used to articulate their antifascism and support for the Republic, how they connected the movement's efforts to the Party's values and goals, and how they used the movement to strengthen their relations with Cubans and their position in Cuban politics. We begin with a summary of the history of the P.C.C. prior to the rise of antifascism and the Spanish

¹ Alberto Alfonso Bello and Juan Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España: Una gloriosa página de internacionalismo* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990); Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba, *Cuba y la defensa de la República Española (1936–1939)* (Havana: Editora Política, 1981).

conflict, examining the interplay of Cuban politics and Comintern policy during and immediately after the *Machadato*. We discuss the critical year of 1935, during which a confluence of events—the general strike on the island in March, the start of the Popular Front Comintern policy that summer, and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October—changed the Cuban Communists’ position significantly. We follow the development of Cuban Communist antifascism, from the establishment of the Popular Front policy through the response to the Ethiopian conflict to the Spanish Civil War. We consider various elements of Communist antifascism on the island, including arguments and organizing activities. We analyze, too, Cuban Communist assertions about the fascist threat to Cuba and “fascist-like” operatives on the island. Discussing Communist interpretations of fascism in Cuba brings us to an examination of the complex and changing relationship between the P.C.C. and Batista during the latter half of the decade, which culminated in a seemingly unlikely alliance between the two in 1938. We argue that antifascism constituted one key element of this alliance. We conclude by considering the question of activist continuity through the *Pax Batistiana*, arguing that antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic played a key role in keeping activism going on the island through the late 1930s and hypothesizing about the ways in which the movement—especially Communist work within and in relation to it—contributed to dramatic changes in Batista and in Cuban politics at the end of the decade. This discussion will lead into the conclusion of this study, which begins with Cuban antifascism becoming officially sanctioned under Batista during World War II.

Considering Communists’ antifascist and pro-Republican arguments and actions, we observe also the ways in which these differed from those of the other groups we have studied. The central difference was the relationship between the P.C.C. and international Communism. This relationship impacted Cuban Communist antifascism in several ways. One characteristic of

Cuban Communist antifascism that was, predictably, unique to the Party was its emphasis on the role of the U.S.S.R. Although other antifascists minimized the Soviet role and countered claims of Communist dominance in the pro-Republican movement in response to anticommunist assertions by their opponents, Communists promoted the Soviet Union's contributions to the cause of the Spanish Republic and portrayed international Communism as leading antifascism worldwide. An emphasis on unity, while not unique to the Party, was particularly prominent among Communists within the Popular Front context, since this Comintern policy centered on a goal of antifascist unity. Unity faced challenges on the island, including overcoming the divisions in Cuban labor and politics exacerbated by the militant sectarianism to which the Communists had adhered prior to 1935 (due to the Comintern's previous Third Period policy) and continuing Communist antipathy towards leftists of different ideologies such as anarchists and especially Trotskyists (also policies dictated from above). These characteristics of Cuban Communist antifascism highlight difference between the Communists and many of the other activists considered in this study: Whereas others we have observed relied upon loose, organic networks based on common experience in domestic struggles or exile, or on shared culture or ideology, Communist networks were built around a hierarchical Party structure based in Moscow. The one other example in our study of a group with a hierarchical institutional structure is the Freemasons, and we have seen that their organizational values experienced some tension with antifascist activism; but Freemasonry did not have a centralized source of changing policy directives equivalent to the Comintern. Sometimes, policy dictated by the Comintern was at odds with Cuban realities; other times, the island's Communists made important gains while guided by centralized edicts. The decade of the 1930s was a period of rapid reversals in

international Communist policy, with many important changes concerning fascism, which Cuban Communists sought to follow while simultaneously navigating complex domestic politics.

A Brief History of Cuban Communism

Many Cubans had lived with economic deprivation for years already when a severe recession descended upon the island following the end of World War I. Unemployment surged, wages stagnated, and the cost of living increased. These dire conditions struck a workforce that was larger and more dominated by Cubans—as opposed to foreigners—than ever before, factors that combined to increase labor militancy. From 1917 on strikes became numerous, frequent, and often effective. Anarcho-syndicalism still predominated within organized labor on the island, as it had since the latter half of the nineteenth century, but it was in decline by the 1930s due in large part to severe targeted repression of anarchists. In the wake of the Russian Revolution, Communism began to gain ground. Enthusiasm for the turn of events in Russia spread among activists, giving Cubans revolutionary hope. Longstanding socialists on the island, led by Carlos Baliño, began to work toward establishing a Communist Party. Even some of Cuba's prominent anarchists, such as Antonio Penichet, expressed initial optimism. As it did elsewhere, the Russian Revolution would divide the island's anarchists, as some were attracted by its early achievements, while others became bitterly disillusioned and turned away from the Soviet state.

The 1920s proved to be a critical decade for activism by the island's leftists, who organized to protest against government corruption, U.S. neocolonialism, economic exploitation, and the injustices of Cuban society, such as racism. Cuban Communism grew out of this historical moment of economic hardship, social unrest, and radicalism. The founding of a series of radical organizations and parties on the island—the Partido Socialista Radical (Radical

Socialist Party) at the beginning of the decade, the Agrupación Comunista de La Habana (Havana Communist Group) in 1923, various Communist *agrupaciones* across the island and one in Havana of Polish Jewish immigrants in the following two years, and the initially anarchist-dominated Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba (National Workers Confederation of Cuba, or C.N.O.C.) in 1925—preceded the establishment of the Partido Comunista de Cuba in August 1925. The P.C.C. was formed out of the consolidation of the Communist *agrupaciones*, and, once established, applied for membership in the Communist International. One of its founders was the septuagenarian socialist Baliño; another was the charismatic student leader Julio Antonio Mella. During the latter half of the 1920s, through disciplined and aggressive organizing work, the P.C.C. began to gain influence in the C.N.O.C. and leadership roles in many of its constituent unions. Just a few months after the founding of the P.C.C., however, Gerardo Machado became president of Cuba and began to crack down on leftists with fervor.²

The Cuban Communist Party, then, was established precisely at the start of the *Machadato*, and, as we have seen, Machado wanted little to do with radical leftists. As a candidate for president in 1924, he presented himself as a reformer with a “Platform of Regeneration,” causing many who wished to see positive change on the island to support his candidacy. Upon winning, he continued at first to promote reform. Radicalism, however, was another matter. Though Machado maintained a positive image for the public through the first

² Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, “Manifiesto-protesta a los obreros y campesinos,” 1 December 1925, in Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba, *El movimiento obrero cubano: documentos y artículos*, Tomo II: 1925–1935 (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1977), 31–33; David Antes and José Pilar Herrera for the Comité Ejecutivo Confederado de la Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba (C.N.O.C.), “Acta de Constitución,” 8 November 1925, in *El movimiento obrero cubano*, 27–30; Efrén Córdova, *Clase trabajadora y movimiento sindical en Cuba* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1995), 126–133, 150–155; Sheldon B. Liss, *Roots of Revolution: Radical Thought in Cuba* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 63–67; Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 181–183; Hugh Thomas, *Cuba, or The Pursuit of Freedom* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), 574–578.

couple of years of his presidency, political activists on the island got a preview of his dictatorial tendencies. The president professed ignorance of leftists even as he assessed them negatively: “I don’t know what anarchism is, what socialism is, what communism is. For me they are all the same. All bad patriots.”³ He had labor leaders, anarchists, and student activists, such as Mella, rounded up. Some, like Mella, were jailed. Some who were Spanish nationals were deported. Some were shot. Leftists had no illusions about Machado, then, from the beginning. It took a bit longer for him to show his true colors to the general public. Though Machado continued to promote popular public works projects and to cultivate an image of personal charm and charitableness, rumors and reports began to hint at his leanings toward dictatorship by early 1927. U.S. Ambassador Enoch Crowder informed his superiors in March of that year that the president’s actions “cannot be interpreted otherwise than as savoring of dictatorship.”⁴ The following month, the Cuban Congress proposed a change to the constitution to extend the presidential term from four to six years. In 1928, as the island’s economy continued its rapid decline, the Cuban public began to experience the president’s increasingly tyrannical behavior. Machado secured a second, six-year term as president by forcing the traditional political parties by corrupt means into a joint nomination, making him the only candidate. Also that year, his crackdown on activists began to horrify a wider spectrum of the general populace after several students accused of being Communists were executed in a grisly manner. Their death early in 1928 was followed by a number of other assassinations of individuals deemed dangerous to Machado’s power over the spring and summer. Early in 1929, Julio Antonio Mella was

³ Gerardo Machado quoted in Thomas, *Cuba*, 580.

⁴ Enoch Crowder quoted in Thomas, *Cuba*, 584.

murdered in Mexico City. Though the true motive for his killing and the party responsible are still debated, many at the time believed a Machado henchman was to blame.⁵

Machado's dubious acquisition of a second term and outrage over assassinations combined with a new U.S. tariff on sugar that was a huge blow to the Cuban economy and the onset of worldwide depression to usher in the island's turbulent 1930s. An atmosphere of crisis wrought of both political and economic desperation fueled already potent anger over strongman rule and U.S. influence in the Cuban economy, while failures of reform and repression of activism radicalized many. Activism and solidarity increased. The C.N.O.C. had been declared illegal, but in March 1930 it succeeded nonetheless in organizing an effective general strike of 200,000 workers that was broken by violent repression. Soldiers broke up political demonstrations forcibly as confrontation between Machado and his growing number of opponents escalated. The president cemented his strongman governance with police and military brutality, a suspension of constitutional guarantees, the closing of schools and the university, widespread arrests, and censorship of the press. As Louis A. Pérez, Jr. puts it, "Cuba assumed the appearance of an armed camp, and terror became the principal means of government. The government physically eliminated opposition, real and suspected."⁶

Machado did not, however, manage to eliminate the Communists, or Communism, from the island's political arena. There were many factions competing with Communists in the struggle against Machado, but, these competitors aside, the polarized struggle between the president and his opponents provided the Party with opportunities for organizing and leadership. The Party gained activists from the anti-Machado struggle, some who discovered Communism

⁵ Pérez, Cuba: *Between Reform and Revolution*, 187–190; Thomas, *Cuba*, 579–588.

⁶ Pérez, Cuba: *Between Reform and Revolution*, 190–194.

while in prison. Two new recruits during this time who would go on to become prominent Cuban Communists were the shoemaker Francisco Calderío (better known as Blas Roca) and the ex-anarchist Joaquín Ordoqui. Between 1929 and 1933, the Party grew from a few hundred members to 3,000, a figure that would double after Machado's downfall, according to historian of Cuban labor Efrén Córdova. "Although Party affiliates were still few compared to the 200,000 members the Confederation [C.N.O.C.] alleged to have," writes Córdova, "the Marxists had become an influential force in the management of the labor movement." The P.C.C. and C.N.O.C. worked not only to grow their memberships but also to expand their organizations across the island, making inroads into both the industrial and agricultural sectors in numerous locales around the country. As Machado's persecution of them intensified, Communists relied upon effective organizing work to survive. Beyond growing Party membership, Communists increased their influence over the larger fight on the island as, in the words of Robert Whitney, "a significant number of Cuban radicals, whether party members or not, came to take Marxism seriously as *one* source of ideological inspiration in their struggle for a new Cuba."⁷

Yet while Cuba's economic and political problems created opportunities for the island's Communists to organize and gain influence, the Communist International's policy of the early 1930s hindered the potential for them to build solidarity with the island's other activists. Between the Comintern's Sixth Congress in 1928 and the Seventh in 1935, the Party line forbade collaboration with other leftists and moderates whom Communists considered "social fascists"—

⁷ Barry Carr, "Mill Occupations and Soviets: The Mobilisation of Sugar Workers in Cuba 1917–1933," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, no. 1 (February 1996): 135–137; Córdova, *Clase trabajadora*, 154–155; Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 64–67; Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 194–196; Thomas, *Cuba*, 597; Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 37. Due to biases in some Cuban historiography, it is important to emphasize, as Carr notes and as we have noted elsewhere, that other strong influences in Cuban organized labor, such as anarchism, remained significant into the 1930s, often in competition with the Communists.

anyone advocating reform or nationalism was thought to threaten worldwide solidarity among workers and the imminent overthrow of capitalism. Known as the Third Period, this time in the Comintern's history was in fact characterized by sectarianism and division rather than solidarity. Though the Communist view of Latin America did little to take into consideration the specific reality of each country, the Communist Parties of the region followed this official line. In the case of Cuba, Communists disparaged rivals in both politics and labor. The Party attacked political moderates and leftists—followers of Ramón Grau San Martín and Antonio Guiteras, respectively—with equal fury. Likewise, Communist union activists fought against both reformists and anarchists to take over the labor movement. For example, at a 1931 labor conference held to bring together eighteen of the island's unions, a delegate of a non-C.N.O.C. union complained of aggressive raiding by C.N.O.C. of fellow unions, while C.N.O.C. delegates called other labor activists “social fascists.” During the onset of economic depression worldwide, the Comintern policy produced many such failures and missed opportunities. Backlash from the right against the establishment of the Spanish Second Republic (1931), the Nazi ascent in Germany (1933), and the riot of right-wing forces in France seen by many on the left as a failed fascist *coup d'état* attempt (6 February 1934), however, began to raise serious doubts about Third Period Comintern policy. A growing recognition of the threat of various right-wing groups and movements led many Communists to a belief in the need for collaboration. The Seventh Congress of the Comintern in the summer of 1935 cemented this growing belief into policy change: Antifascist collaboration was now the Communists' primary goal, as expressed in the Popular Front. As historian of the Comintern William J. Chase notes, the new policy revitalized the Communists: “Its call for a broad-based antifascist struggle won many supporters and catapulted the Comintern to the forefront of the international antifascist movement.” In

Cuba, too, the Party obediently changed course along with the Comintern in 1935. At the Seventh Congress, a delegate from Cuba explained the way in which the Third Period policy had negatively impacted Communist efforts on the island, lamenting that they had taken a “hostile attitude” towards moderate and leftist parties and groups such as those of Grau and Guiteras and characterized them as “fascist.” Following the Third Period line, he stated, “hindered the expansion of the Party and the consolidation of its influence over the masses.” Communists’ sectarianism of the early 1930s crippled their ability to collaborate with other groups on the island. Following the disastrous general strike of March 1935 Raúl Roa, a dear friend and fellow activist of Pablo de la Torriente Brau’s and at the time a non-Stalinist Marxist, wrote in September of that year that all the groups on Cuba’s political left were “groping about like a blind man with his cane,” unable to oppose Batista as he consolidated power. Following the sectarianism of the Third Period, Communists had contributed to this disunity of the island’s activists. Cuban Communists, then, faced a seemingly insurmountable challenge of their own making when it came to the implementation of Popular Front policy on the island.⁸

Shortly after Popular Front policy was introduced at the Comintern’s Seventh Congress in the summer of 1935 the Italian invasion of Ethiopia sparked the beginning of antifascism in Cuba. Participation in the Cuban antifascist movement gave Communists, if not success in mending relations formally with certain political groups such as the Auténticos of Grau and Guiteras’s Joven Cuba, at least an opportunity to connect with Cubans (including the many

⁸ Manuel Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern, 1919–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); William J. Chase, *Enemies Within the Gates?: The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934–1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 13–15; Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 66–70; Whitney, *State and Revolution*, 73, 76, 94, 147–148, 166–167. For P.C.C. discussion of the Seventh Congress and the Popular Front policy in, see *Cuidemos la unidad: El caso del Dr. Martín Castellanos* (Havana: 1938), Number 644, Latin American and Iberian Pamphlets, Library of Congress (LAIPLC), Washington, D.C.

members of Joven Cuba who volunteered in Spain) and to gain new leadership roles in Cuban activism. The onset of the Spanish Civil War provided a more widely popular cause than that of Ethiopia on the island, and Communists were eager to inform Cubans of international Communism's role in supporting the Republic.

Cuban Communist Antifascism

Cuban Communists shared with other antifascists on the island a broad conception of fascism that included not only those traditionally considered in that category—such as Italian fascists and German Nazis—but also conservative or right-wing forces in Spain and Latin America such as monarchs and strongmen or dictators, feudal nobility and large landholders, the Catholic Church and its clerics, the military, and capitalist and imperialist interests. During the Comintern's Third Period, as we have seen, Communists had considered moderates and left-wing reformers “social fascists.” And even during the Popular Front period, Communists sometimes used the term “fascist” to describe any person or group they disagreed with—calling Trotskyists, for example, “allies of fascism.”⁹ Given this lack of precision in their definition of fascism, we might argue that Cuban Communists simply called anyone they did not like a fascist indiscriminately. Their use of the term was not so much careless, however, as it was deliberately inclusive for the purposes of building solidarity and organizing. Hyperbolic diatribes against Trotskyists aside, Cuban Communists used the term “fascist” to relate to other Cubans on the island by constructing a concept of a shared enemy against whom Communists positioned themselves as uniquely suited to fight. Antifascism was relevant to Cubans precisely because

⁹ C.C. del P.C.C., “Llamamiento al Pueblo” (Manifiesto impreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba firmado por el Comité Central pidiendo apoyo a la lucha del pueblo español), 4 November, 1936, Número 90, Legajo 1, Fondo Especial, ANC.

Cuban antifascists defined fascism so broadly. Communists' use of fascism and antifascism for their own organizing purposes is more perceptible than that of other groups because their need to negotiate the space between Comintern policy and Cuban reality exposed revealing inconsistencies. Here we explore the development of Cuban Communist antifascism as an organizing tool for the Party on the island.

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia represented an important stage in the development of Cuban Communist antifascism as it did for that of some of the island's black activists. Unlike the island's activists of color, though, Communists did not, as a group, have a cultural bond with the African nation imagined as a mythologized homeland. To Communists generally Ethiopia in 1935 was the current example of a global phenomenon, one geographic location on a list of places around the world threatened by their enemies. International Communism had just committed to battling fascism worldwide at the Comintern's Seventh Congress, and it was clear that Ethiopia represented an important site within the context of Popular Front policy—there was not, however, any particular preexisting connection between Communists and Ethiopians. Some Cuban Communist arguments against the fascist invasion expressed a lack of specificity concerning Ethiopian realities in keeping with this general Communist viewpoint toward the conflict. Public statements condemning Italian action on the African continent produced by the P.C.C. District Committee of Havana and Central Committee in September and October of 1935, respectively, evoked many of the standard antifascist themes with which we are by now familiar: Italian fascists were barbaric, killed women and children, assassinated workers and intellectuals, destroyed the people's rights and freedoms, brought crime and terror, reversed progress, and robbed Ethiopia to benefit powerful Italian capitalists whom Mussolini served, in the Communist interpretation. Italian fascism was expansionist, its action in Ethiopia was imperialist war—the

Havana Communists declared: “Italian Imperialism Hands Off Abyssinia!”—and it sought to install “the yoke of slavery” in the African nation, despite claiming to have a civilizing mission. Fascist “civilization” was in fact “death and destruction.”¹⁰ These statements Cuban Communists made about Ethiopia could have been made, at different times, about China, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Austria, or any other country invaded by or in conflict with Italy, Germany, or Japan.

In their calls for solidarity with Ethiopia, Cuban Communists promoted solidarity with the Soviet Union as well, and lauded the U.S.S.R. for standing with the African nation and against war. “The Soviet Union is the bulwark of world peace!” they proclaimed. The “U.S.S.R. is the only great country that does not possess colonies or enslave people,” they asserted, contrasting their portrait of the Communist country with their depiction of fascism. “She” formulated non-aggression pacts, defended oppressed peoples, and “points the way to peace and happiness!” Cuban Communists sought to tie the cause of Ethiopia to that of the Soviet Union in the mind of the reader. Cubans should support both Abyssinia and the U.S.S.R., they stated. In “this supreme hour,” they wrote, “every man or woman, everyone who loves freedom and hates the barbarism brought to Abyssinia by Mussolini, must be beside the people of Ethiopia, beside the Soviet Union, against the new world war, against fascism and imperialism.” In addition to portraying the Soviet Union as a worldwide guardian of oppressed people, Cuban Communists described the P.C.C. similarly: “The Communist Party launches its cry of alarm, and calls all the

¹⁰ Comité Distrital de la Habana del Partido Comunista de Cuba (S. de la I. C.), “¡FUERA LAS MANOS DEL IMPERIALISMO ITALIANO DE ABISINIA!” (Proclama impresa firmada por el Comité Distrital de la Habana contra el ataque del imperialismo italiano al pueblo de Abisinia), September 1935, Signatura 42; Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba (S. de la I. C.), “Defendamos al Pueblo Abisinio” (Manifiesto impreso del P.C.C. firmados por el Comité Central referente al ataque del imperialismo italiano al pueblo abisinio y exhortando a todo el pueblo para constituir el Frente Popular antimperialista), 11 October 1935, Signatura 53, Caja 1, Fondo Especial, Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Havana, Cuba.

people to fight against the war and support the brother people of Ethiopia, a victim like us, of imperialist rapacity.”¹¹

Communists on the island tried also to assert ways in which the conflict in Ethiopia was relevant specifically to Cubans and the Cuban domestic political situation, seeing an opportunity to organize Cubans—and not just black Cubans, who had their own sense of diasporic ties—around the Ethiopian cause. The heroic Ethiopian people—who, though “weak and poorly armed” were defending the “only independent black State of Africa”—“rose *en masse* against the fascist invader with the same valor and the same contempt of death with which rose our people in 1895 against the Spanish yoke,” wrote the Cuban Communists, promoting anticolonial solidarity. To defend Ethiopia against fascism was to defend its independence and sovereignty against foreign control, a struggle with which Cubans were all too familiar. Communists urged Cubans to organize “mass protests in factories, neighborhoods, with attacks on the embassy and large commercial houses, representatives of Italian fascism.” The people of Havana, “hating imperialist interference in their territory,” would come to the aid of the Abyssinian people, the Communists believed, drawing a parallel between the expansionism of Italian fascism and the meddling in Cuba of not only old Spanish colonialism but also newer “Yankee imperialism.” Communist authors conflated the defense of Ethiopia against fascism with Cuba’s domestic political struggles, tying the two together in their antifascist arguments. They called for unity around both the defense of Abyssinia and Cuba’s domestic fight. In keeping with the new Comintern policy of leftist and moderate unity, they attempted to use the Ethiopian cause to build a Cuban Popular Front, aiming their mobilization efforts regarding Ethiopia at Cubans of various political stances, including “Auténticos” (followers of Grau), “Guiteristas” (followers of

¹¹ C.C. del P.C.C., “Defendamos al Pueblo Abisinio,” ANC.

Guiteras), and “Agrarios” (members of the Agrarian Party or P.A.N.). In documents ostensibly devoted to the cause of Abyssinia, Cuban Communists argued for democratic rights; against war, intervention, and fascism generally; against fraudulent elections and for a constituent assembly in Cuba; and for a “popular, revolutionary, anti-imperialist government,” presumably in both Ethiopia and Cuba. Alternating between the cause of Ethiopia and their own domestic concerns, the authors of these Communist statements wove them together into a fight for people everywhere. Their goals, they believed, represented “the cause of our people and all oppressed peoples.” The antifascist fight was one for national independence in both countries, against war and imperialism in general, and against Cuba’s “Dictatorship of Batista and Caffery,” a reference to U.S. Ambassador Jefferson Caffery citing the dual ills of domestic strongman rule and U.S. neocolonialism.¹²

In the text of these Cuban Communist statements on Abyssinia, it becomes impossible to discern the point at which the cause of Ethiopia ends and that of Cuba begins. On one hand, Communists expressed in these antifascist arguments a type of perfect solidarity: The struggles of Ethiopia and Cuba became one as noble peoples fought against the oppression of dictators, imperialism, and fascism. On the other, however, in contrast with black Cuban activists, Communists did not succeed in analyzing or presenting any specificity about the Ethiopian cause aside from an acknowledgment of the country’s status as the only independent nation of Africa. Most Cubans knew few specifics of the Ethiopian conflict or Ethiopian realities. Communists did little to offer such information in their antifascist proclamations concerning the African nation, in contrast with black antifascists who explained at length the history and the present situation of the country.

¹² Ibid.

When civil war broke out between the Spanish Republic and right-wing Nationalists, however, the conflict seemed closer to home to many on the island. Based on the volume of material produced on the subject, we hypothesize that Cuban Communists did not consider Spain to be just another place of the list of fascist threats around the world. Though struggles in Ethiopia and other places, such as Europe and China, did appear repeatedly in Communist publications on the island, the pro-Republican cause dominated much more extensively during the years of the Spanish conflict. At times, Cuban Communists even expressed their belief in a Spanish antifascist exceptionalism in relation to other threatened countries. For example, Communist leader Joaquín Ordoqui stated in a speech in 1938 that Spain was different than the nations succumbing to fascism at the time; Hitler, Mussolini, and Chamberlain wished to resolve quickly the issue of Spain as they had those of Austria and Czechoslovakia, Ordoqui claimed, “but the unity and bravery of the Spanish people has shown them that this is not so easy to achieve.”¹³ The reader of Ordoqui’s speech is left to wonder whether or not the Cuban would have expressed his opinions about the superiority of the Spaniards’ unity and bravery if he found himself face-to-face with his Austrian or Czech comrades. It may be that some feeling of pride in Cuba’s Spanish heritage—or a sense that his audience would have such a feeling—prompted this seeming slight to other nations and lapse in universal solidarity.

One common Cuban Communist argument in favor of the Spanish Republic concerned the multilayered solidarity antifascist Cubans should feel with Spanish Republicans. The belief that “their triumph will also be our triumph,” as one manifesto exclaimed, referred to the historical relationship between the two countries and to the threat of fascism and “reactionary forces” in both, but also to a broader human solidarity. Communists compared the suffering of

¹³ Joaquín Ordoqui, “Discurso de Joaquín Ordoqui, Miembro del Buró Político del Partido Comunista de Cuba,” in *En Marcha con Todo del Pueblo* (Havana: Ediciones Sociales, 1938), 8, Number 641, LAIPLC.

Cubans during colonial times—“oppression, regression, and extermination” under the despotic rule of Miguel Tacón during the mid-nineteenth century and the vicious treatment of Valeriano Weyler during the War of Independence—to that of Spaniards at the hands of Nationalists, whom they viewed as the “successors” of Tacón and Weyler.¹⁴ The comparison with Weyler had a particularly chilling resonance for Cubans observing European fascism, since, in his brutal policy of *reconcentración*, he directed the Spanish military forces fighting against the island’s independence late in the nineteenth century to intern Cubans in what were essentially concentration camps where thousands suffered and died. Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler sought to do in Europe what Weyler had done in Cuba, Ordoqui told Cubans, voicing a comparison made repeatedly by Communists on the island.¹⁵ By making this type of comparison, Communists asserted their belief that Spain and Cuba had a special solidarity based on shared history. All countries, however, were at risk of falling to fascism. Spaniards were Cubans’ “brothers,” both because of shared ancestry and because all antifascists were brothers. “The cause our Spanish brothers defend is our own cause, it is the cause of all advanced and progressive humanity,” Communists argued. Regressive forces gathered against Spain and Cuba as they did against Abyssinia, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and other nations.¹⁶ The conflict in Spain was of critical importance for Cubans, Ordoqui stated. “Spain debates not only the fate of Europe, but the fate of the world.”¹⁷

¹⁴ C.C. del P.C.C., “Llamamiento al Pueblo,” ANC.

¹⁵ Ordoqui, “Discurso,” 8, Number 641, LAIPLC.

¹⁶ Manuel Luzardo, *El Camino de la Victoria Popular* (Havana: Ediciones Sociales, n.d.), 25–27, Number 615, LAIPLC; Ordoqui, “Discurso,” 6, Number 641, LAIPLC.

¹⁷ Ordoqui, “Discurso,” 6, Number 641, LAIPLC.

Communists in general defined fascist and right-wing forces around the world as “regressive” or “reactionary.” Cuban Communists lent some Hispanic specificity to their discussions of such reactionaries in the cases of Spain and Latin America. Reactionary forces, they argued, had for centuries “sucked the blood” of the Spanish people as they had “subjected under their heel the peoples of Latin America.” The forces of “old Spain” represented by Tacón and Weyler in colonial Cuba were in Spain the monarchists, clerics, feudal lords, and, more recently, capitalists who now joined with fascists, Communists stated, in a traitorous, “anti-Spanish” bloc—anti-Spanish because these forces were, according to the Cuban Communist interpretation, against the elected Republican government and against the Spanish people. All these reactionaries, perpetrators of longstanding oppression and inequity in Spain, formed the Nationalist side of the conflict. The Nationalists—representing both all the ills ever to plague the Spanish people and modern fascism—had “undertaken the task of violent overthrow of the democratic regime won in long years of arduous struggle by the Spanish people.” These forces, in the Cuban Communist conception, sought to set up a system in Spain similar to those of Germany, Italy, and Portugal under fascism, and with such a system to dominate and enslave workers, peasants, the petit bourgeoisie, and intellectuals.¹⁸

Traditional reactionary forces allied with fascism threatened Cuba as they did Spain, Communists believed. Secretary General of the National Committee of the P.C.C. Francisco Calderio (better known as Blas Roca) warned against these “fascistoid” reactionaries on the island.¹⁹ As did anarchists, Communists conflated fascists and capitalists, as well as the elite

¹⁸ C.C. del P.C.C., “Llamamiento al Pueblo,” ANC.

¹⁹ Francisco Calderio (Blas Roca), “Discurso de Francisco Calderio (Blas Roca), Secretario General del Comité Nacional del Partido Comunista de Cuba,” *En Marcha con Todo del Pueblo* (Havana: Ediciones Sociales, 1938), 38, Number 641, LAIPLC.

more generally. Included were “those who are servants of the enemies of the people, that is to say, of imperialist capital, of the large landowners, of the land thieves, of the large Spanish merchants, and of the large proprietors.²⁰ Also sugar industrialists,²¹ banking and business attorneys, and Cubans who acted as administrators of foreign holdings²² were among the forces Communists opposed and considered reactionary. Fascist-like individuals on the island included “figures holding high offices of state or high positions in society.”²³ Though no Cuban political parties had the name “fascist,” Roca claimed that political rivals of the Communist Party such as the right-wing ABC organization and the conservative party of Mario García Menocal had “reactionary directors, enemies of the people.”²⁴ Communists targeted specific individuals also. One repeated subject of their ire was Pepín Rivero, director of the newspaper *El Diario de la Marina*. Unpopular among leftists for his views and those of his periodical, Rivero garnered especially vitriolic attention from Cuban Communists, who portrayed him as the archetypal representative of all the forces on the island which they opposed. “The forces ‘Pepín’ leads” (“las fuerzas que acaudilla ‘Pepín’”) became Communist shorthand for fascist-like individuals and groups.²⁵ He was, they claimed, “decorated by the governments of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco.”²⁶ Even those who claimed to be revolutionaries, Communists warned, could be

²⁰ Roca, “¿Cómo puede Ud. mejorar su situación? Respuestas a sus Preguntas,” (Havana, June 1939), 12, Number 653, LAIPLC.

²¹ Roca, “Discurso,” 36, Number 641, LAIPLC.

²² Roca, “¿Cómo puede Ud. mejorar su situación?,” 16, Number 653, LAIPLC.

²³ “Declaraciones de Unión Revolucionaria Comunista.”

²⁴ Roca, “¿Cómo puede Ud. mejorar su situación?,” 13–16, Number 653, LAIPLC.

²⁵ Roca, “Discurso,” 35–36, 40–42, Number 641, LAIPLC.

²⁶ “Declaraciones de Unión Revolucionaria Comunista.”

reactionaries. Once again targeting political rivals of the Communist Party, Roca singled out anticommunist politician and activist Eduardo Chibás, writing that “the truth is that the only thing he does is to defend the millions of *pesos* of his father,” which, Roca claimed, he gained from workers through abusive rentals of numerous houses in Havana and Santiago de Cuba. All politicians who only sought personal gain at the expense of Cuba and the Cuban people—especially those who were stated anticommunists—were considered by the Communists to be “reactionaries and fascists.”²⁷

During the first few years of Cuban antifascism, Communists considered Batista to be among these reactionaries and fascists on the island. They called his power a military dictatorship that would turn the Cuban public into a puppet as it had the Cuban president.²⁸ Batista had “robbed the people of the human right to freedom of thought,” Communists asserted in 1936.²⁹ He committed “acts of terror” against Cuba. He commanded “fascist hoards of the military dictatorship” to attack supporters of the Spanish Republic, they claimed.³⁰ Only unity of all of the progressive and popular groups and parties on the island, they asserted, would overcome the dictatorship and reestablish the promise of democracy born of Machado’s overthrow. Communists compared Cuba’s situation with Spain’s in 1936: There, the people had

²⁷ Roca, “¿Cómo puede Ud. mejorar su situación?,” 15, 18, Number 653, LAIPLC. Chibás, an ally of Grau who would go on to found the Ortodoxo party, was strongly opposed to collaboration with the Communist Party. Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern*, 128.

²⁸ Comité Seccional de Luyanó del P.C.C., “12 DE AGOSTO ‘DIA DE LIBERTAD’ ¡MENTIRA!: Manifiesto impreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba firmado por el Comité Seccional de Luyanó, relativo a la suspensión por orden del gobierno de todos los actos conmemorativos del 12 de agosto,” 1936, Expediente 176, Legajo 8, Fondo Especial, ANC.

²⁹ C.C. del P.C.C., “Llamamiento al Pueblo,” ANC.

³⁰ Comité Seccional de Arsenal del P.C.C., “¡SALVAJISMO!: Proclama mimeografiado del Partido Comunista de Cuba firmada por el Comité Seccional de Arsenal dirigido contra el atropello realizado por la dictadura militar en el local de Izquierda Republicana Española,” n.d., Expediente 202, Legajo 5, Fondo Especial, ANC.

“achieved a legitimate electoral victory that ensured their improvement.” However, Communists told Cubans, reactionaries in Spain rejected this triumph of democracy. The clergy, monarchists, and capitalists, they stated, “found, the same as in Cuba, a military officer willing to impose by blood and fire all the injustices that for centuries have been maintained in Spain.” In this interpretation, Batista was equivalent to Franco, and the remedy to the situation, Communists argued, was for “the worker, peasant, professional, and woman” to fight together in a Popular Front.³¹ In other words, Batista and Franco were both fascists and to defeat them and restore democracy in Cuba and Spain would require Communist-led unity.

If Batista were Cuba’s Franco, then it followed in Communist arguments that he might receive support from Hitler and Mussolini as Franco did in the Spanish Civil War, as well as from Franco himself. Communist antifascist propaganda on the island emphasized dramatically the threat of foreign fascism in Cuba, which, they argued, would come in two forms. First, Cuban Communists believed that dictatorial regimes in Latin America were “fertile ground for the Nazi-fascist penetration,” and warned Cubans of “Nazi-fascist-Japanese penetration,” the direct intervention of agents of Germany, Italy, and Japan in their country.³² An illustration (Figure 7.1) on the cover of *Mediodía* (a periodical that was not exclusively or expressly Communist but inclusive of Communist authors and views) in March 1937 by political cartoonist José Cecilio Hernández Cárdenas, a black Cuban leftist known as “Her-Car,” depicted the leaders of these three countries pulling on the island in a game of tug-of-war with the country most frequently associated with imperialism in Cuba at the time: the United States.³³ Though the

³¹ Comité Seccional de Luyanó del P.C.C., “12 DE AGOSTO,” ANC.

³² Roca, “Discurso,” 34–35, 38, Number 641, LAIPLC; Ford, “Discurso,” 18, Number 641, LAIPLC.

³³ José Cecilio Hernández Cárdenas (“Her-Car”), illustration, *Mediodía* no. 13 (25 March 1937): cover.

cartoon probably overstates the level of interest “Nazi-fascist-Japanese” leaders had in possessing Cuba in 1937, it does clearly demonstrate the Cuban fear of the geopolitical threat of foreign fascism on the island expressed by Communists and other antifascists.



Figure 7.1 *Mediodía* cover illustration, March 1937

The cartoon leaves ambiguous the role of the United States: Is it an imperialist fighting to maintain its dominance of Cuba in the face of fascist threat, or is it a benevolent protector trying to keep the island away from evil forces? We will return to ambiguous views of the U.S. role in antifascism below when we discuss the Cuban Communists’ changing attitude toward the island’s northern neighbor.

Second, pro-Nationalist Spanish agents operating in Cuba would work to establish fascism there. Ordoqui described the insolence of “a commercial representative of the Government of Burgos” (the Nationalists) who demanded that the Spanish regional centers on

the island all fly the monarchic flag, threatening to “excommunicate from Spain” the members of any center that did not. And, Ordoqui claimed, the Falange in Cuba was “completely dominated by foreign fascism.”³⁴ It was the organization, the Communists stated, “in which are grouped the most rotten representatives of fascism, domestic and foreign, and especially the henchmen of Franco, fierce executioner of the heroic Spanish people.” It was “the center of the reactionary conspiracy against Cuba and against the people.”³⁵

In describing the threat of foreign fascism in Cuba, Communists tied the island’s fate to that, alternately, of Latin America, the entire Western Hemisphere, and Spain. One of the best opportunities Communists had to address the Cuban public was at an enormous rally they organized in the Polar Stadium in Havana in November 1938, at which they warned of these interconnected threats of foreign fascism. Attended by 80,000 Cubans who listened to speeches by Cuban Communist leaders Roca and Ordoqui as well as African-American Communist leader and transnational political activist James W. Ford, the gathering gave Communists a chance to pitch their antifascism (and domestic agenda) to a large, sympathetic Cuban audience. Ford—whose important role in the transnational coordination of Cuban volunteers in Spain we discussed in Chapter 2—portrayed the fascist threat to Cubans at the rally, developing the idea of a fascist threat to the Americas as a whole and to Spain, and drawing a number of connections for the audience. “The sinister plots of the fascists,” he told them, “have as one of their coveted purposes the establishment of fascism in our hemisphere.” They sought the fertile soil, mineral resources, and strategic military positions of Latin America and the Caribbean. “Every republic of Latin America runs the risk of having the same fate as Czechoslovakia,” he warned. Hitler’s

³⁴ Ordoqui, “Discurso,” 9–10, Number 641, LAIPLC.

³⁵ “Declaraciones de Unión Revolucionaria Comunista,” undated, Asignatura 1/2:3/1.1/71–72, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

plan was to surround both the Soviet Union and the Americas, Ford told his audience, claiming without presenting evidence that British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain gave Hitler access to Canada and the West Indies, to use as bases for fascist expansion in the Western Hemisphere. “This new threat to democracy and peace of the people of our hemisphere,” he urged, “makes imperative the closer collaboration of our continent.” To these admonitions concerning the threat of European fascism in the Americas Ford connected the cause of the Spanish Republic. “One of the most important moves in this fascist plan to dominate the world,” he told the Havana audience, “is the war in Spain.” A Nationalist victory there would hand over control of the country to Italy and Germany, he said, and then the fascists could “close the doors of Europe to America.” The cultural connections of the Spanish-speaking world which antifascists cited so often to encourage solidarity would be turned against them for nefarious purposes: The fascists would “use the cultural and economic ties between Spain and Latin America to seize power in the West and to try to take away from the United States the countries that lie south of its borders.” Like Her-Car’s cartoon on the cover of *Mediodía*, Ford acknowledged in his phrasing of this warning that the United States would fight to keep Latin America away from European or Asian fascists—whether as benevolent protector or as imperialist competitor was not clear. The U.S. Communist leader gave his audience examples of the ways in which their two countries were connected in struggle, drawing a distinction between a “good” and a “bad” United States in the same way that many antifascists distinguished between a “good” and a “bad” Spain. The monopolists and antidemocratic forces at work on the island, he told Cubans, were the “same interests that are fighting to establish fascism in our country.” The African-American Communist leader told Cubans about the C.P.U.S.A. roll in mobilizing progressive forces “in aid to Cuban democratic forces, for the wellbeing of the Cuban people, and for the defense of the

national economy of Cuba.” The Communist connections between Ford’s country and the island were part of a larger Pan-American antifascist force, he asserted. And the most urgent work before this force, Ford reiterated, was the victory of the Spanish Republic. “The last door in Europe must not be closed,” he insisted. “Fascism must not possess this vantage point of penetration into Latin America.” European fascism threatened the entire hemisphere in Ford’s interpretation, but stopping it in Spain would help keep it out of the Americas.³⁶

In case there was anyone on the island who did not have a suitably high level of fear of the fascist threat, Communists asserted bleak and dire predictions of what fascist victory would entail. Communists imagined dire consequences of fascist victory in Cuba, and Party leaders shared the details of their dark vision of this possible future with Cuban audiences and readers. The fascist agenda for the island, they warned, was a “conspiracy against progress.” In addition to facilitating “the penetration into our country of the Spanish Falangists, the Italian fascists, and the German Nazis who wish to take Cuba’s sources of wealth and strategic military positions,” the triumph of fascist forces would have a terrible direct domestic impact on Cuba’s economy, politics, society, and culture. Fascist rule would go against “the rights and demands of workers” and bring about oppression and enslavement. Fascists would set up company unions, and independent unions would become illegal, as would the Communist Party and other “revolutionary and progressive parties” on the island, and all “popular organizations” of women, professionals, blacks, youth, *campesinos*, etc. Fascists would create a new constitution that would allow them “to snatch the little bit of land that is left for the *guajiros*” and to raise rents, lower wages and pay in vouchers, increase work hours, abolish paid time off, dictate

³⁶ James W. Ford, “Discurso de James W. Ford, Miembro del Buró Político del Partido Comunista de EE. UU. y ex-candidato a la vice-presidencia de aquel país,” in *En Marcha con Todo del Pueblo* (Havana: Ediciones Sociales, 1938), 14–19, 22, Number 641, LAIPLC.

employment termination, and import cheap labor. Monopolists would run rampant. Progressive social laws would be revised. The free press would be censored. The “reactionary clergy” would resist the “Cubanization” of private education on the island, keeping it under Church control. Reactionaries would destroy also Cuba’s “citizen equality proclaimed in the Constitution,” persecuting “citizens on account of their being of a particular race or religion.” Racial prejudice would ascend to horrific heights, as it had in Europe. Cuba would witness “the revival of the anti-black campaign.” For example, reactionary forces would not defend the right of black Cubans to access all schools, jobs, and public places. The impact of their prejudice would go much farther than segregation, though, Communists asserted, referencing the horrors taking place in Germany: The ascent of racism on the island under fascist rule would lead to “a campaign of assassinating blacks, *en masse*, in the same way as in Germany are conducted assassinations *en masse* of Jews,” Blas Roca claimed. The K.K.K. would be resuscitated on the island. Religious discrimination would also intensify against different groups, even Catholics. Glossing over the complex role of Catholicism in relation to various “fascists,” especially the Spanish Nationalists, Roca asserted that victory of right-wing forces in Cuba would invite “agents of the murderers of Catholics in Austria” to the island, who would there perpetrate “the murders of spiritualists, Masons and Catholics and all the religious who oppose their evil, anti-human ends.” In summary, fascism in Cuba “threatens the foundations of our nation,” Communists argued—it would go “against the very existence of the [Cuban] Republic and national independence.”³⁷

³⁷ Roca, “Discurso,” 35–37, Number 641, LAIPLC; Roca, “¿Cómo puede Ud. mejorar su situación?,” 13, 17; “Declaraciones de Unión Revolucionaria Comunista”; Roca, *La unidad vencerá al fascismo: Informe ante la Tercera Asamblea Nacional del Partido Comunista de Cuba, efectuada en la ciudad de Santa Clara los días 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 y 15 de Enero de 1939* (Havana: Ediciones Sociales, 1939), 24–28, Number 654, LAIPLC.

To avoid this terrible fate, Cubans must look to their Spanish brethren, Communists believed. Based on the idea of shared history and ties between Spain and Latin America, Communists argued that Spain provided an ideal antifascist model for Cubans, and that, as we have seen argued elsewhere, the Spanish struggle had lessons to offer activists on the island. Communist intellectual Juan Marinello outlined this argument optimistically after a visit to Spain during the war, discussing the link between the Republican cause and Cuba with pride. Leaving Spain, he felt joy both as a revolutionary and as a Cuban. With evident optimism, he stated that before the Spanish conflict began, revolutionaries knew that the progress of revolution would produce “prodigious works.” Now, he continued, “we know how they will be produced.” The Spanish were exemplary in their fight against fascism, and, as a Cuban, this made Marinello proud. The people responsible for the prodigious works of revolution, he noted, were “people of our blood, of our psychological modes, of our historic rhythm.” Echoing the common metaphor, he called Spain “Mother, because now we do wish to be loyal children of her universal force.”³⁸

These examples demonstrate the argument we have made elsewhere that Latin American observers of and participants in the Spanish Civil War had a deeper understanding of the factions in the conflict and its longstanding historical causes than did other international observers and participants due to linguistic, familial, and cultural ties that existed historically between their nations and the “motherland.” Cuban Communists, as individuals, were no different than their countrymen in this regard. As members of a hierarchical international organization, though, and as adherents to a centralized agenda, they tended in their writing on antifascism to return again and again to the Party line. As they had done with the cause of Ethiopia, Cuban Communists

³⁸ Juan Marinello, “Palabras para Cuba: Dichas la noche del diez de septiembre de 1937 por la Emisora E. A. R. del Ministerio de Estado español,” in *Discursos de Juan Marinello al servicio de la causa popular* (Havana: Ediciones Páginas, n.d.), 15, Number 629, LAIPLC.

appropriated the Spanish Republic's struggle as their own, not just as Cubans but also as Communists. Within the Popular Front policy, Communists worked to position themselves as the leaders of antifascism and the Spanish Republican cause. To quote comrade Stalin, one manifesto declared, "the fight in Spain is not a private matter of the Spaniards."³⁹

This quotation from Stalin exemplifies an emphasis that set Communists apart from their fellow antifascists: One of the most striking—if predictable—distinctions between the antifascist arguments of the Communists and others concerned the Soviet Union. We have seen that the Soviet Union played an important role in the conflict in Spain and in the formation and coordination of the International Brigades; also, we have observed various viewpoints offered by diverse Cuban antifascists assessing the Communist country, debating its merits, criticizing its faults, and questioning Stalinism or Comintern policy, as well as attempts to deny or downplay the Soviet and Communist roles in the conflict to counter Nationalist propaganda. Cuban Communists, in contrast, did not hesitate to assert, proudly and publicly, that the Soviet and Comintern roles in worldwide antifascism and the cause of the Spanish Republic were unquestionably positive, as we have seen already in the case of Ethiopia.

In the case of Spain, also, the Communists differed from other Cuban antifascists in their insistence on the central role of the U.S.S.R. in the conflict. One typical enumeration of the ills of the Spanish Nationalists and their alliance with foreign fascists, for example, ended with the Communist assertion that their purpose was to start war in Europe against the democratic countries and "principally against the Soviet Union, the bastion of freedom, progress and civilization of the peoples of the world." The Popular Front, they argued early on in the conflict, deserved credit for keeping fascism from triumphing and the monarchy from being restored in

³⁹ C.C. del P.C.C., "Llamamiento al Pueblo," ANC.

Spain; the masses of the world “under the direction of the Communist Parties” would save the government in Madrid and avert a new world war.⁴⁰ A poster depicting a cartoon of “Don Fascism” in Spain and abroad as a creation of capitalists stated: “But in Russia it is another matter and there will never be fascism because Bolshevism prevented it with its victorious fight.” In the places fascism threatened such as Spain, the poster claimed, Communists “fight with skill and tenacity to impede its progress.”⁴¹

Though this type of language is familiar and unsurprising to students of Communist history, it deserves careful attention in the present analysis. The close ties between Spain and Cuba were central to pro-Republican organizing. Cubans of color—though lacking the same kind of direct familial and historical bonds—felt deeply connected to Ethiopia culturally in the context of the African diaspora. And the Ethiopians’ fight against Mussolini’s forces resonated with Cubans’ anticolonial sentiments. Even the struggle of China against Japan had some relevance on the island due to its Chinese population. In each of these cases, some form of organic ties existed between Cuba and the foreign country in question. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, had no link to Cuba other than through its Communist Party, and even that tie was a loose one during the 1930s. It was a great power that shared little with Cuba in terms of culture and from which very few immigrants arrived on the island.⁴² Adulation of the U.S.S.R. in pro-Ethiopian or pro-Republican documents, therefore, raises a provocative question about motivation: In a text that celebrated the Soviet Union and the antifascist cause, were Cuban

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “Historial breve y sincere del Don Fascismo de España y también del extranjero,” 1936, Document 16s186, Fondo Salvador Vilaseca, Instituto de Historia de Cuba (IHC), Havana, Cuba.

⁴² The Cuban census of 1931 did not indicate the existence of a statistically significant percentage of immigrants from the Soviet Union on the island. Gladys Alonso and Ernesto Chávez Alvarez, eds., *Memorias inéditas del censo de 1931* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978), 74.

Communists more intent upon promoting to their readers the former or the latter? In other words, did Cuban Communists believe that celebrating the Soviet Union would draw Cuban readers in, making them more likely to support the Communists' domestic and international agenda? Or did they think that Cuban readers already sympathetic to antifascist causes and drawn in by discussions of Ethiopia or Spain would then read their tributes to the U.S.S.R. and be converted to a position supportive of Communism?

Given the level of diverse popular support for antifascism among Cubans, we hypothesize that Cuban Communists saw an opportunity to organize for the Party while organizing against fascism and for Abyssinia and especially the Spanish Republic. Communist work on the island surely contributed to growing the antifascist movement, but the relationship between the Party and the movement was symbiotic rather than unidirectional. The antifascist cause, as we have seen, elicited broad-based adherence. Many Cubans wanted to help the Ethiopians and, to a much greater extent, the Republican government of Spain; the Soviet Union was supporting those causes. This confluence of events presented the P.C.C. with a chance to portray the U.S.S.R. and Communism as aligned with Cuban interests. Communists on the island wished Cubans to view the Party as the “guarantee of triumph in the antifascist and anti-imperialist fight.”⁴³ They wanted to foster unity and to build a broad Popular Front coalition, with the assumption that they would lead it. Seeking ways in which to implement the new Comintern policy of unity initiated in the summer of 1935, Cuban Communists encountered the Abyssinian cause that autumn and the Spanish Republican cause the following summer, and interpreted them as opportunities not only to increase their influence and gain a leadership position in the island's political landscape but also to grow Party membership. “Help conquer

⁴³ Roca, “Intervención del compañero Blas Roca en la discusión del caso Martín Castellanos,” in P.C.C., *Cuidemos la unidad: El caso del Dr. Martín Castellanos* (Havana: 1938), 5, Number 644, LAIPLC.

fascism!” exclaimed one advertisement (Figure 7.2) at the end of a Communist publication: “If you agree with Blas Roca’s report and the policy of the Communist Party of Cuba, apply to join.”⁴⁴

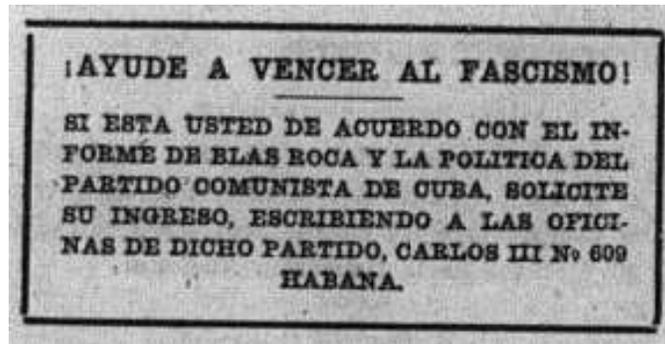


Figure 7.2 Antifascist recruitment advertisement for the Cuban Communist Party

Having argued in favor of the Soviet Union and Communism as stalwarts of antifascism and supporters of Ethiopia and the Spanish Republic, Communists went further, working to convince the Cuban people of the positive characteristics of the U.S.S.R. more broadly. Ford, for example, described the Soviet Union in contrast with the dark vision of fascism expressed by Communists. Point by point, he claimed that the U.S.S.R. was the opposite of fascist states: People there, he stated, had a right to work, to education, and to security; there was no unemployment, and the profits of work were distributed among the workers; there was no prejudice or division based on nationality, ethnicity, race, or religion, he believed; farmers lived well in the countryside; and a great culture, with many innovations, had developed in this country where “man cannot exploit man.” It was, he asserted to his audience of Cubans—who had no personal experience with the distant Communist country—utopia.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Roca, *La unidad vencerá*, 80, Number 654, LAIPLC.

⁴⁵ Ford, “Discurso,” 19–21, Number 641, LAIPLC.

Furthermore, Communist antifascists expressed explicitly their Party's desire to establish "the Soviet Cuba." Ford encouraged Cubans to imagine the possibilities that would exist if "the millions of dollars robbed from Cuban labor were spent on developing the cultural and economic resources of this rich Island." Roca was careful to tie this vision for a Communist future in Cuba not only to defeating global fascism but also to the island's domestic struggle. Surely with a realistic assessment of the Party's modest stature in Cuba at the time, Roca used caution in explaining the Communist vision for the island: "Our Party works so that in time Socialist Cuba can be established, but the popular triumph of tomorrow is not yet socialism. The popular success we anticipate tonight is only that of the liberated and democratic Cuba." To achieve this "popular triumph," Roca told Cubans, they must build a strong Communist Party of the masses, "the Party of the unity of all the Cuban people."⁴⁶

To achieve victory in Cuba's domestic struggle, also, Communists argued, "national unity" would be necessary. In the Popular Front context, the Cuban Communists saw themselves leading the island's factious political groups toward partnership. "For this sacred union," Manuel Luzardo stated, "our Party is working ardently."⁴⁷ In 1935 Communists called upon their fellow activists: "Now more than ever the P.R.C., Joven Cuba, and all anti-imperialist parties must respond to the Communist Party's calls for the coordination of the Popular Front. Let us join forces and give unity to the people, in a powerful Revolutionary Front for the struggle against war, against Dictatorship, for our national independence!"⁴⁸ In 1938 Roca called on Party members to embrace Communists within and communists outside of the Party, to welcome

⁴⁶ Ford, "Discurso," 20–23; Roca, "Discurso," 48, Number 641, LAIPLC.

⁴⁷ Luzardo, *El Camino*, 23, Number 615, LAIPLC.

⁴⁸ C.C. del P.C.C., "Defendamos al Pueblo Abisinio," ANC.

those who were communists without realizing it.⁴⁹ Throughout these years, the P.C.C. tried to negotiate with other parties and groups of the center and left, such as the P.R.C. and Joven Cuba, to form a coalition.⁵⁰

Uniting in a powerful Popular Front on the island would be the means by which Cubans would triumph over fascism and reactionaries, abroad and at home.⁵¹ “Unity will conquer fascism,” proclaimed one Communist publication.⁵² The Popular Front, led by the Party, would achieve victory in Spain: “Cuban people, friend of freedom and democracy, come with us in support of the heroic Spanish people,” Cuban Communists urged, “come with us to support the Popular Front government.”⁵³ One documentary example of Cuban antifascist unity in action is a list, found in the P.C.C. archive, of contact people for the various organizations that made up the national executive board of the Association of Aid to the Spanish People (Ejecutivo Nacional de la Asociación de Ayuda al Pueblo Español). Communists listed unions, student and youth organizations, political parties including the Auténticos and the P.A.N., the Casa de la Cultura (House of Culture), the Federación de Sociedades de Color (Federation of Societies of Color), and several other groups. Next to each group they listed the name of a contact person, and some of the people’s names they marked with the letter ‘P’ to indicate that they were members of the Party. Of the 22 groups listed, half were represented by contact people who were Communists.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Roca, “Discurso,” 49, Number 641, LAIPLC.

⁵⁰ Whitney, *State and Revolution*, 147–148.

⁵¹ Ford, “Discurso,” 15, Number 641, LAIPLC; Roca, *La unidad vencerá*, 4, Number 654, LAIPLC.

⁵² Roca, *La unidad vencerá*, Number 654, LAIPLC.

⁵³ C.C. del P.C.C., “Llamamiento al Pueblo,” ANC.

⁵⁴ “Ejecutivo Nacional de la Asociación de Ayuda al Pueblo Español,” undated, Asignatura 1/12:196/2.1/11, Fondo Primer P.C.C., IHC.

This document demonstrates that within a broad-based movement in which Communists publicly supported unity, they were nonetheless carefully accounting for which individuals were Party insiders and which were not.

This document shows that Cuban Communists were in fact part of a unified effort of moderates and leftists on the island to aid the Spanish Republic. The antifascist movement was as close as they were to come to the establishment of a Popular Front in Cuba. Communists worked together with Auténticos, members of Joven Cuba, black Cuban antifascists, and others against fascism and for the Spanish Republic. They were willing even, as we will see below, to work with anarchists if the latter were not overly anticommunist. Yet the unity Cuban Communists found in antifascism and pro-Republican organizing did not translate to an official Popular Front political coalition on the island. By early 1939 they were embittered by refusals from those on the island who remembered their sectarianism of the Third Period. Grau, Roca complained in January of that year, rejected any form of alliance with the Communists, destroyed collaboration between his party and Joven Cuba, and refused to enter into a Popular Front. Overlooking their antifascist collaboration, Roca stated that those like Grau who obstructed progressive unity went against the wishes of the masses and risked the triumph of fascism and reactionaries. Anything that weakened the Party or unity helped the fascists and reactionaries win, Cuban Communists claimed. They used attacks against their Party as propaganda pieces. Those who recognized the true threat of fascism, Roca argued, knew that “a truly popular and progressive unity” was necessary. They must, then, recognize that any attack on the Party came from “fascistoid and reactionary forces.” If “all Cubans who wish to defend Cuba from the fascist snares,” to improve the Cuban government and economy and the lives of its people, recognized that unity was the key to achieving these goals, then aspersions cast upon

Communists would become intolerable. In such propaganda, anticommunism equaled fascism, as did any refusal to work with the P.C.C., such as that of Grau. And the unwillingness of such leaders to cooperate in progressive unity indicated their betrayal of the Cuban people. They lied to Cubans, Roca claimed.⁵⁵ Thus even as they worked together with groups such as Grau's Auténticos in the antifascist movement, Communists separated themselves from such groups in their rhetoric: They might work together to defeat fascism, but Communists were the true representatives of the people—others fell short of the ideal of unity in both antifascism and domestic Cuban struggle.

Despite the fact that the promotion of unity was a common theme for the Cuban Communists, they, too, sometimes undermined this aim. Communist efforts to foster unity did not extend, for example, to Trotskyists, whom they considered “overt enemies of our p[arty],” “enemies of the proletariat,” individuals “of the lowest morality,”⁵⁶ “counterrevolutionaries,” and, as noted above, even “allies of fascism.” In the first few months of the Spanish Civil War Communists wrote that Trotskyists “take advantage of the defeats in recent weeks by the Spanish government to do the only thing they can do: throw mud on the Soviet Union, the Communist International, and the leader of the worldwide struggle against fascism, *compañero* Stalin.”⁵⁷ And after the Spanish conflict was over Cuban Communists were still complaining that Trotskyists attacked the Republican government of Spain. They grouped Trotskyists and anarchists, even conflating the two into a single category: anarcho-Trotskyists (“elementos

⁵⁵ Roca, *La unidad vencerá*, 28–32, Number 654, LAIPLC.

⁵⁶ El Buró del P.C. del Grupo de Repatriación, “Informe del Buro del Partido Comunista del Grupo de Repatriados Cubanos,” 26 May 1939, Asignatura 1/2:1/1.10/1–11A, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

⁵⁷ C.C. del P.C.C., “Llamamiento al Pueblo,” ANC.

anarco-trotskistas”). Both were targets of critical Communist assessment in May 1939 as the P.C.C. contemplated Cuban volunteers returning and Spanish refugees arriving from Spain. Cuban Communists tried to keep individuals they believed to be Spanish Trotskyists from disembarking on the island because they were considered dangerous to the revolution,⁵⁸ and created a list of individuals of interest, commenting on their ideological and political positions. One man in the group they considered, Augusto Campos, for example, was an “[e]lder anarchist element,” an “[o]ld convinced fighter imprisoned many times in different countries,” while another, Pedro Fajardo, lacked “true anarchist formation, although he says he sympathizes with it.”⁵⁹ Some in the group were allied with the C.N.T. and F.A.I., at least one, a “Del Toro” whose given name and first surname the Communists did not know, with the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, or P.O.U.M.). Negative assessments of these individuals illustrate an internal drive toward political disunity within the Communist Party; clearly, Cuban Communists felt it necessary to evaluate detractors and competitors and work actively to minimize their deleterious impact on the Party, separating them out from those they considered potential allies in a united front. One man, Alvaro Cabal, for instance, they deemed “to be somewhat intellectual, and dangerous as an enemy of the P[arty].” Of another, José Pendás (a Cuban anarchist volunteer in Spain according to a different source),⁶⁰ they stated: “Be careful with this element.” Disagreement with the Party could be based not only

⁵⁸ The archive does not reveal whether or not they were successful in keeping these “declared Trotskyist elements” from disembarking in Cuba. Since the Communists’ documentation of their attempt to do so admits that the Communists were not able to learn the names of the alleged Spanish Trotskyists, it is not possible for us to verify using other sources whether or not they made it to Cuba.

⁵⁹ Pedro Fajardo Boheras, whom we discuss in our conclusion, is identified as a Cuban anarchist volunteer in Spain in another source. Frank Fernández, *El Anarquismo en Cuba* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2000), 72.

⁶⁰ Frank Fernández, *El Anarquismo en Cuba* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2000), 72.

on ideological allegiance but also on domestic Cuban concerns: The abovementioned Pedro Fajardo, who lacked “true anarchist formation” according to the Communists, exhibited dissatisfaction with the Party in 1939 on account of its political shift to a policy of collaboration with Batista. Communists combined condemnations of personal faults and political ones. One individual, Armando González (a Cuban volunteer in the Centuria Guiteras according to a different source),⁶¹ they claimed, was “[w]ithout true ideology, without a formed political consciousness, of very low moral character with sexual aberrations,” in short, a “bad element.” An “adventurer,” Jesús Hevia, they deemed not very dangerous politically. A group of young men they assessed, perhaps somewhat condescendingly, as “good boys” lacking “true political ideology.” And of one anarchist leader, Julio Constantino Cavarrocas (elsewhere written “Cabarrocas”),⁶² they felt it important to note—without comment, but perhaps with commentary implied—that he was a “mulatto” with a female companion who was Spanish. Predictably, those among the “anarcho-Trotskyist elements” whom the Communists assessed favorably tended to be those who were least anticommunist. For example, one, José García,⁶³ whom they considered a “good element” had been positively influenced by the Party, Communists believed, and had spoken “in defense of unity with us, and against sectarianism.” Of a young C.N.T. militant—a son of Cubans born in Galicia named Oscar Jaime Portela—the Communists stated: “Is serious, good morals, and we do not consider him dangerous, since he is fairly quiet and has not made

⁶¹ Ana Suárez Díaz, “La Centuria Guiteras: De Nueva York al Frente de Jarama (1937),” *Caliban: Revista Cubana de Pensamiento e Historia* VII (April–June 2010): 12, 16, 17.

⁶² Julio Constantino Cavarrocas or Cabarrocas, whom we discuss in our conclusion, is identified as a Cuban anarchist volunteer in Spain in another source. Frank Fernández, *El Anarquismo en Cuba* (Madrid: Fundación de Estudios Libertarios Anselmo Lorenzo, 2000), 72.

⁶³ There is not another known Cuban volunteer named “José García,” so it is possible that this individual is “Cuba Hermosa.” However, there is no way to be sure, and we have no indication that Cuba Hermosa was politically partisan.

demonstrations against our P[arty].” Individuals who had fought well for the Spanish Republic also earned respect from the Communists despite their being of questionable political allegiance. And finally, always on the lookout for organizing opportunities, Communists assessed those members of the group they felt might be potential recruits. Of these “*compañeros* who have no real ideology” they stated: “For these good, politically sound comrades, our concern must be to divert them from the influence of the bad elements, to attract them to us through outreach work.”⁶⁴

Thus we see that even in the case of a group of individuals deemed to consist of enemies and competitors, Cuban Communists kept recruitment always in mind. In order to achieve unity for the domestic struggle and to defeat fascism, Communists took action to build the unity they sought, both for the benefit of Cuba and of their Party. They organized: “Our Party,” stated Luzardo, will work at “constructing pro-Unification committees.” To this work, he continued, the P.C.C. would lend “our cells, sectional committees, etc.”⁶⁵ The cause of the Spanish Republic was a powerful issue around which the P.C.C. organized for unity on the island. Cuban Communists included a plan to aid Spain in their “Program of Action” outlined in a volume entitled “The Road to Popular Victory” (“El Camino de la Victoria Popular”) produced at the Tercera Asamblea Provincial de La Habana del Partido Comunista (Third Provincial Assembly of Havana of the Communist Party, the precise date of which is unknown, but which occurred in the autumn of 1938 or the early months of 1939, between the Munich Agreement and the end of the Spanish Civil War)—other causes considered alongside that of the Spanish Republicans were

⁶⁴ El Buró del P.C. del Grupo de Repatriación, “Informe,” IHC; El Buró del P.C. del Grupo de Repatriación, “Elementos que componen el grupo anarco-trotskyista,” undated [probably the same date as the “Informe” of the same number: 26 May 1939], Asignatura 1/2:1/1.10/1–11A, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

⁶⁵ Luzardo, *El Camino*, 24, Number 615, LAIPLC.

those of the workers, the peasants, the unemployed, women, the population of color, youth, professionals, and artists, as well as mastering the electoral process and growing and strengthening the Party. The Spanish Popular Army relied on the strength of the people and, the Communists insisted with what must have been forced optimism following the Munich Agreement, both had never been stronger and were ready to defeat fascism and win the war. Despite this strength, they noted a bit more realistically, a show of international solidarity in the form of products sent was “necessary and essential” to sustain the millions of people in loyalist territory. Material aid to Spain from Cuba should consist of sugar and tobacco, Communists asserted. They believed, in true Cuban spirit, that “each and every heroic *miliciano*” should have cigars to smoke and enough sugar, important items among “everything necessary to defeat fascism.” They urged that 36,000 tons of sugar be sent from Cuba to the Spanish Republic. Additionally, they singled out aid to Spanish children, the Cuban campaign for which many Communists supported. Finally, they pledged to work “to reinforce the committees and organizations” devoted to aiding the Spanish Republic.⁶⁶ We have seen already in Chapter 2 the central role Communists played in recruiting and supporting both Communist and non-Communist volunteers from Cuba for the Republican cause. These concrete efforts to send aid to Spanish Republicans represented a significant contribution that served also as an organizing method for the Party.

The P.C.C. grew dramatically during the years of the Spanish Civil War and the Cuban antifascist movement. By one account, the Party had 2,800 in January 1938 (a reduction from the membership of 3,000–6,000 reported elsewhere for the early years of the decade⁶⁷), 5,000 by

⁶⁶ Luzardo, *El Camino*, 25–27, Number 615; Roca, “Discurso,” 37, Number 641, LAIPLC.

⁶⁷ Córdova, *Clase trabajadora*, 154.

September, and 23,300 in February 1939. Communists reported that 71% of these members were workers and just over 8% were peasants, meaning that a large majority of the membership came from the *clases populares* (popular classes).⁶⁸ Another account put membership at 24,000 in 1939 and noted also that the Party oversaw the reorganization of the national labor federation into the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (Workers Confederation of Cuba, or C.T.C.), an organization of 350,000 which “emerged as a source of enormous political influence” by the end of the decade.⁶⁹ During these same few years, Cuban Communists entered into an alliance with Batista, and their growth has been attributed to the strongman’s legalization of the P.C.C. and allowance of its organizing work, particularly in labor.⁷⁰ What role did antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic play in the Party’s growth in membership and influence, and in its alliance with Batista? We turn now to this question and a consideration of the Communist role in the continuity of activism during the *Pax Batistiana*.

The Communists and Batista

In the midst of Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic, Colonel Batista did an about-face. As a member of the British embassy observed, the Colonel “has attained a dominant position by his work to establish order throughout the island and this brusque transition from the role of Military Governor to that of advanced social reformer has taken people by

⁶⁸ Roca, “Las experiencias de Cuba: Versión taquigráfica del discurso pronunciado por el C. Blas Roca, Secretario General del Partido Comunista Cubano, en la sesión del 2 de febrero de 1939 del VII Congreso Nacional del Partido Comunista Mexicano,” cited in Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 85.

⁶⁹ Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 211.

⁷⁰ Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 85.

surprise.”⁷¹ Having firmly established strongman governance between 1934 and 1936, by using the military to impose order on the island with violent repression, Batista now turned his attention from repression to reform.⁷² Many were surprised by his sudden “apparent transformation from reactionary to reformist,” but Batista interpreted his goal as consistent throughout. At first he had to restore order, but even throughout the period in which he did, he retained his own beliefs and aspirations from the revolutionary moment of 1933 in which he had participated. The Colonel stated: “Many want to forget that I am the chief of a constructive social revolution, and see me as a mere watch-dog of public order. My idea of order is that of an architect rather than that of a police man.”⁷³ Moving forward from the 1934–1936 period of severe repression, Batista courted various political groups and parties on the island, including two organizations long opposed to him: the Auténticos and the P.C.C. He made no progress with Grau’s party, but found success in building an alliance with the Communists. It was, in the words of one scholar, “a rather amazing turn of events.”⁷⁴

A series of concrete advances for the Cuban Communist Party signaled the establishment of the alliance. In 1937 the P.C.C. front Partido Unión Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Union Party, or U.R.) gained legal status; in May 1938 the Communists secured permission to begin publishing a legal periodical; and in September 1938 the P.C.C., illegal since 1935, finally gained status as a legal political party on the island.⁷⁵ Communist Party leaders campaigned for office. The Party “adopted a reformist and openly collaborationist posture. It acquired legality

⁷¹ Grant Watson quoted in Whitney, *State and Revolution*, 149.

⁷² Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 211.

⁷³ Fulgencio Batista quoted in Whitney, *State and Revolution*, 149.

⁷⁴ Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 84.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

in September 1938 and permission to organize labor and in return pledged to support Batista.”⁷⁶ The transaction seems simple: The P.C.C. gained legal status and a respite from persecution in exchange for delivering a working-class constituency to Batista. How, though, does this assessment fit into the narrative of the *Pax Batistiana*, in which Cuban activists after March 1935 were totally devastated? Why, under such circumstances, would Batista need support from the Communists or a working-class constituency?

Just as Cuban Communists had experienced a confluence of events at home and abroad that set them on an antifascist course in 1935, Batista’s transformation over the last few years of the 1930s resulted from a number of coincident factors both domestic and international. Not wishing to go the way of Machado, the Colonel embraced a program of reform; having restored order by force, he then courted the support of the *clases populares* he had repressed; and feeling pressure from the United States, he sought political legitimacy. Unlike the Cuban elite and U.S. observers, Batista understood that dealing carefully with labor and leftist activism would be critical for any leader on the island in the era after Machado’s overthrow. The early years of the decade had raised popular expectations, but real change had not come. Despite the calm Batista’s crackdown achieved, there remained many reasons for discontent. Labor and living conditions were still as bad as they had been before 1933. Unemployment and underemployment were high, and the standards of living for both the working and middle classes were low. A bad sugar crop, and other economic problems including rising unemployment and reductions in public employees’ salaries increased unrest in late 1937 and early 1938. Though activist forces had been repressed, in other words, they had not been extinguished—in this atmosphere, the Colonel understood that he might share Machado’s fate. Batista did not have

⁷⁶ Pérez, Cuba: *Between Reform and Revolution*, 211.

confidence that the *Pax Batistiana* on the island would endure. Additionally, he worked within an international context. He needed to retain the support of the United States, and he was influenced by momentum in favor of reform across the Americas. Thus, if he was going to retain power for the long term, he needed to present himself as a reformer, legitimize his political role, and win over the masses.

Batista's negotiation of this complex political terrain reveals the tension apparent in the *Pax Batistiana* narrative. On the one hand, organized labor and leftist political groups were disillusioned, disorganized, and defeated after the March 1935 strike. On the other, the popular activism of the early 1930s had forever changed Cuba, and Batista found himself having to court the very people he had repressed in order to gain political legitimacy in the late years of the decade. The disillusion, disorganization, and defeat of activism post-March 1935 are well documented and undeniable. Yet it seems that the activists retained important power which Batista felt compelled to take seriously. How do we account for the evident continuity?

One possibility is that the defeat of the island's activists was not quite so thorough. The Communist Party was in fact gaining momentum, strength, and influence even before its alliance with Batista, due at least in part to its leadership role in Cuban antifascism. Communist publications of the period hint at the terms of the agreement between Batista and the Party, and suggest that the Communists negotiated if not on equal footing than at least with confidence in their political weight. Following the establishment of the alliance, Communists commented in a predictably positive manner on the Colonel's "democratic steps" and his "democratic and popular orientation."⁷⁷ Roca stated publicly in 1938 that the P.C.C.'s support of Batista was

⁷⁷ Roca, "Discurso," 39, Number 641, LAIPLC; Roca, "Discurso de Francisco Calderio (Blas Roca) en el acto del recibimiento," in P.C.C., *El recibimiento del Coronel Batista* (Havana: Ediciones Sociales, 1938), 5, Number 648, LAIPLC.

meant to highlight the Cuban people's desire "to unite against fascism, for democracy, for better living conditions, for the development of our economy, [and] for the consolidation of our independence." His public statements did not simply list pleasant-sounding talking points, however; the P.C.C. Secretary General sought to hold the Colonel accountable. With its "thousands of militants," he stated, the Party sought from Batista "the culmination of that which is started" and "the realization of all his promises."⁷⁸ Colonel Batista, stated an editorial in *Mediodía*, "proclaims the legality of the Communist Party not as a concession but as a right."⁷⁹ According to the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires at the time, during the period of Batista-Communist alliance, the Party, though "relatively small," had "growing strength and prestige." Its leaders were "capable, energetic men and include[d] some of the best political brains of the country," the U.S. official reported to the Secretary of State. They were "able and inspiring leaders, excellent orators." And these leaders could produce measurable results for Batista: "Strict discipline among its members," wrote the Chargé d'Affaires, had enabled the Party "to steal the show in any public rally, in contrast to the poor attendance by members of the other loosely-organized political groups."⁸⁰ Cuban Communists could rally the masses for the Colonel, literally and figuratively. They saw their efforts as responsible for "the extension, in the popular masses, of the positive position regarding Batista." In return, they expected "the growth of the authority of our Party, which is already a national political factor of prime importance."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Roca, "Discurso," 5, Number 648, LAIPLC.

⁷⁹ "Una Amenaza a la Paz," *Mediodía* no. 87 (26 September 1938): 3.

⁸⁰ U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Albert Nufer to Secretary of State, quoted in Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern*, 144.

⁸¹ Roca, *La unidad vencerá*, 11, Number 654, LAIPLC.

Also, disunity was not complete in the period after 1935, thanks in large part to Communist organizing. Though it is true that no Popular Front *government* coalesced in Cuba, antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic on the island constituted a Popular Front *movement*. Occurring just after the change in Comintern policy, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the autumn of 1935 provided a perfect opportunity for the P.C.C. to engage the Cuban public and other activists in anticolonial and antifascist outrage and organizing. The onset of conflict in Spain proved to be an even more popular cause on the island. Antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic—in which the Communist Party played an important role—provided continuity of Cuban activism through the difficult period after March 1935.

The impact of the movement could be observed in Batista himself. Having remained neutral in the Spanish conflict, due in large part to pressure from the United States to adhere to the Non-Intervention Agreement (we have seen that his enforcement of neutrality on the island caused many on the left to accuse him of aiding right-wing forces at home and in Spain), Batista began, over the same period, to move toward antifascism. That he did so over the last few years of the 1930s, of course, kept him in step with the United States and other large democracies. The change, however, also had domestic motivations. As Batista courted Communists and the *clases populares*, engaged as they were in antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic, he necessarily moved closer to the movement as well. A December 1938 article in the official periodical of the Comintern stated that Cuba's sugar oligarchs and Francoist/Falangist forces on the island were becoming increasingly hostile to the strongman.⁸² Reactionary forces on the island decried Batista's legalization of the P.C.C. The acolytes of Hitler and Mussolini in Cuba, stated an editorial in *Mediodía*, declared that they would combat the Communist Party's

⁸² Abed Brooks, "Perspectives," *World News and Views* 18, no. 60 (24 December 1938): 60, cited in Whitney, *State and Revolution*, 169.

legalization. Their doing so, stated the opinion piece, made clear that “the laws of the [Cuban] Republic do not signify anything to these advocates of organized violence.” Under the pretext of combating Communism, the article argued, reactionaries disobeyed the law—and by so doing, they threatened peace. “Those who provoke war,” the piece quoted Batista as saying, “will find us ready to defend peace.”⁸³ This editorial positioned the Cuban Communists as legitimate, law-abiding keepers of the peace, allied with Batista against domestic reactionaries and foreign fascists. From late in 1938 on through the early 1940s the alliance between Cuban Communists and Batista would be an antifascist one, as antifascism on the island moved from its era of popular mobilization to that of officially sanctioned national policy.

The beginning of the alliance of Batista and the P.C.C. coincided with the end of the fight for the Republic in the Spanish Civil War. In September 1938, as the Cuban Communists gained full legality, the Communist-led International Brigades were pulling out of Spain and Republican defeat approached. Over the first few months of 1939, Franco’s Nationalists swept through the remaining Republican-held parts of Spain and achieved final victory. Meanwhile, the newly legalized Cuban Communists looked ahead to the looming threat of world war and related changing antifascist circumstances to their ongoing domestic struggle. They left far behind their prior condemnations of Yankee imperialism and Batista’s fascism, and moved toward the moderate, mainstream, officially sanctioned antifascist collaboration that would become the Allied Forces in World War II.⁸⁴

⁸³ “Una Amenaza a la Paz,” *Mediodía* no. 87 (26 September 1938): 3.

⁸⁴ As Farber notes, the Batista-Communist alliance weathered the Nazi-Soviet Pact (August 1939) with no perceivable impact, which, he asserts, “was rather unusual, considering the many other Popular Front alliances ruined after the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement.” Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 86.

In July 1939 Blas Roca attended a conference of American Communist Parties in New York City that produced a manifesto outlining Communist antifascism in the hemisphere. Representatives from the Parties of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Chile, and Venezuela determined as their goal “finding improved methods for cooperation among all democratic forces in our hemisphere for struggle against aggression by the fascist powers and for the defense of peace and the freedom of our peoples.” Latin American Communists pledged antifascist cooperation with not only the Anglo-American people but also the Roosevelt government.⁸⁵ Batista, too, continued to seek cooperation with the U.S. administration during this time, and Communists chose to interpret his doing so in a positive light within the Popular Front context. After a trip to the United States in October and November 1938 the Colonel’s return to Havana was met by a mass rally organized by the Cuban government, attended by 3,000 Communists “who, waving red flags and holding clenched fists in the air, chanted, ‘Democracy! democracy!’”⁸⁶ Commenting on the Colonel’s trip, U.S. Communist leader Ford told Cubans it was “an example of how democratic cooperation can be supported.”⁸⁷ Roca called F.D.R. a “great democrat” and expressed his hope that out of the U.S. President’s meeting with the Cuban leader would come “a strengthening of democracy in Cuba, a strengthening of the democratic steps of Colonel Batista,” and “a greater cooperation between the people of Cuba and the United States against this worldwide threat which is Nazism.” We, the Cuban Communist leader stated

⁸⁵ Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern*, 61–62. Though willing to ally with other former enemies such as Batista and Roosevelt, the Communists declared in the manifesto, nevertheless, their continuing virulent opposition to Trotskyists, who, they implied, would bring fascism and war to the Americas.

⁸⁶ Whitney, *State and Revolution*, 172.

⁸⁷ Ford, “Discurso,” 18, Number 641, LAIPLC.

in November 1938, wish to tell the democratic government of Mr. Roosevelt that we are ready to fight the Nazis.⁸⁸

Over the period from the legalization of the P.C.C. and the Cuban leader's trip to the United States in the autumn 1938 through the official entrance of Cuba under the Coronel's leadership into the Allied Forces in 1941, Batista was able to work with both the Cuban Communist Party and the Roosevelt administration. Ties between these improbable allies were strengthened by antifascism. Used as an organizing tool by the Cuban Communist Party during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the Spanish Civil War, antifascism went on to become an important framework for collaboration between the Communists and Batista in both the domestic and international arenas. We turn now to a discussion of the legacy of antifascism in Cuba following Republican defeat in Spain, beginning with the World War II period.

⁸⁸ Roca, "Discurso," 38–39, Number 641, LAIPLC.

CONCLUSION

Cuban Antifascism After 1939

In this study we have come again and again to the same point: Republican defeat early in 1939. In so doing, we follow in the footsteps of countless pro-Republicans during the many decades since the conflict's end who have rehashed what happened, what should have happened, what could have been, and what can be learned. Notably, the Spanish conflict does not follow the old adage: "History is written by the victors." Due in large part to the ardent international support the Spanish Republic garnered, its memory did not fade despite decades of Franco's rule in Spain. Scholarship, public commemoration, and vibrant political debate within certain circles continue to focus on the war to this day. The phrase ¡No Pasarán! stands alongside other icons of the twentieth-century international political left, such as the image of Ché Guevara, that elicit enough popular recognition to appear on t-shirts the world over. Throughout this history, we have encountered numerous contemporary Cuban antifascist commentators who predicted that the struggle would continue, that the Spanish people and their international supporters could never truly be defeated—if popular historical memory can be considered a sufficient indicator, they were correct.

To conclude, we consider here the ways in which antifascism and historical memory of the Spanish conflict functioned in Cuba in the years and decades following Republican defeat in 1939. We begin with the World War II years, during which several newly-established organizations tackled the threat of fascism, and antifascism on the island received official recognition and support. Next, we examine the Cuban Revolution, considering the connections participants and observers drew between the Spanish conflict and the Revolution, the Cuban government's project to find and assess Spanish Civil War combat volunteers during the early

1960s, the interpretation and use on the island of historical memory of 1930s antifascism, and the diplomatic relationship between Cuba under Fidel Castro and Spain under Franco. We consider the relationship members of Cuba's 1930s antifascist generation had both with Spain and with their own government during their later years. Lastly, we offer a few final thoughts, based on our findings in this study, on the relevance of antifascism and of transnational activism, networks, and solidarity to the present.

World War II: Antifascism "Matures"

In the United States prior to 1940, supporters of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War were among the first to publicly recognize the threat of fascism. Activists from this era would come to be known as "premature antifascists," suspected of being dangerous leftist radicals and in some cases harassed by various branches of the U.S. federal government during the war and beyond, most notably during McCarthyism. In contrast, being an antifascist became politically sanctioned and socially acceptable in the United States just a few years later during World War II, as fascists became official enemies of the nation. In Cuba, also, antifascism gained official acceptance beginning in 1940 when Batista became the democratically elected president of the island. The circumstances, however, were quite different. Pressure from the superpower to the north played a significant role in causing the Batista government to side with the Allies, but two other political realities figured into the new Cuban president's calculations: his recent alliance with Cuba's Communists and the widespread grassroots antifascism already established on the island during the Spanish conflict. Historian Jorge Domingo Cuadriello summarizes: As a result of the agenda of its militant Communist allies, the demands of "broad democratic sectors of Cuban society," and pressure to conform to the liberal policy of the United States under

Roosevelt, Batista's government "began to assume antifascist positions that, before the dynamics of the complex international situation, became more radical and manifested themselves not only in speeches and press statements but also in concrete acts."¹

The series of antifascist acts by Batista's government following his inauguration in October 1940 was swift and forceful. Some precedent preceded Batista's official ascension. In conjunction with the government censure of groups on the left, Cuban officials had targeted overtly Francoist groups as early as December 1937; the Decreto Presidencial (Presidential Decree) No. 3411, which we have discussed elsewhere in relation to its impact on antifascist groups, made illegal any group with the fundamental function of providing moral or material aid for military conflicts in foreign countries. The Cuban government ordered the Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las J.O.N.S. to close indefinitely in December 1937 in compliance with the new law; in April 1939 it cited the organization, once again ordering it to dissolve "for having violated with its conduct the oft cited Presidential Decree No. 3411."² Though this early governmental antifascist action is notable, the necessity of its renewal in 1939 indicates that it was ineffective. Also in 1939, though the Cuban government recognized the Franco regime shortly after the end of the conflict, it maintained relations at the level of a *chargé d'affaires* rather than an ambassador despite pressure from Franco supporters. Early in 1940 the government shuttered the suspect right-wing organization Auxilio Social as a threat "against the stability of the Republic." After Batista's inauguration, the Cuban government's antifascist stance hardened and action intensified. In January 1941, the Cuban Senate, with the approval of

¹ Jorge Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio republicano español en Cuba* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2009), 52.

² Joaquín Ochotorena, "Secretaría de Gobernación: Resolución," 21 April 1939, Falange Español Tradicionalista de las J.O.N.S., Expediente 10768, Legajo 357, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Havana.

the Minister of State, expelled for his allegiance to the Falange Genaro Riestra, Spanish consul general in Cuba. Expulsions from the island followed over the next few years of a Spanish consul, of the inspector general of the Falange Exterior, and of the head of the Falange in Cuba. In 1941 a Tribunal de Urgencia (Provisional Court) charged the directors of various groups—including the Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las J.O.N.S., which had apparently once again not ceased to exist as ordered in December 1937 and April 1939—with endangering the stability of the country. Though the tribunal absolved nearly all of the accused individuals, their organizations were legally dissolved. Other men found to have collaborated with Axis powers were jailed or deported, and pro-fascist publications were discontinued under pressure or forcibly closed.³

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 Cuba declared war against the Axis powers. As a result, the Cuban government established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and cut ties with the Vichy government—in September 1944 the island would be the first Latin American nation to recognize the provisional republican government of France. Also upon entering World War II on the side of the Allies, Cuba instituted obligatory military service and, copying its powerful northern neighbor, interned foreign nationals from Axis countries without proven antifascist credentials. At the time, the island was home to 777 Japanese, 1,330 Italians, and 3,484 Germans.⁴

Some foreign nationals from Axis countries and their descendants participated in the officially sanctioned Cuban antifascism that burgeoned in the years following the end of the

³ Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 52–53; Consuelo Naranjo Orovio, *Cuba, otro escenario de lucha: La guerra civil y el exilio republicano español* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Centro de Estudios Históricos, Departamento de Historia de América, 1988), 111–115.

⁴ Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 53.

Spanish Civil War. A group of men and women all with Germanic names, for example, founded the Comité Alemán Antifascista (German Antifascist Committee) in 1943. Like many antifascist organizations before it, the Comité claimed to be an organization without “any sense of partisan politics,” inclusive of diverse individuals, and “based in democratic ideals.” Among its aims were: to assist the Allies against the Axis powers “alongside Batista, Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, and Chiang Kai-shek,” as well as the United Nations; to give “moral and material aid to the global German anti-Nazi movement;” to fight for a free Germany and a free Europe; to combat “Fifth Column-ism,” the work of fascists in Cuba; to promote antifascist propaganda in German and Spanish; to foster national and international solidarity in order to defend liberty; and “to combat unconditionally anti-Semitism wherever this vile and stupid weapon of fascism manifests itself.”⁵ Like their Afro-Cuban and Hispanic-Cuban counterparts during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the Spanish Civil War, these antifascist German-Cubans saw fascism during World War II as a threat globally, to their “homeland,” and to the island of Cuba.

Preceding the Comité Alemán, Jewish Cubans had identified anti-Semitism as a danger in Cuba several years earlier, shortly after Republican defeat in Spain. The Comité Central de las Organizaciones Hebreas de Cuba (Central Committee of Cuban Hebraic Organizations) issued an address to the people of Cuba in May 1939 warning of the threat posed by a “few isolated outbreaks of anti-Semitic ideas in our country.” A radio program and a morning newspaper, they warned, had begun campaigns against Jewish immigration to the island. Quick to uphold the principle of freedom of thought and to acknowledge Cuba’s need for a “policy of national protection,” they couched their plea in terms meant to appeal to Cuban nationalism. Applying to

⁵ Gert Caden and E. Julio Wolff, “Estatutos del Comité Alemán Antifascista,” 27 April 1943, and “Acta de Constitución,” 17 June 1943, Comité Alemán Antifascista, Expediente 10668, Legajo 355, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, ANC.

one race or religion the “most derogatory adjectives that the dictionary can contain,” they argued, “violates the Cuban principles of brotherhood.” Cuba had one race and one nationality: Cuban. Equal within it were “white and black, Chinese and Spanish, Hebrew and Catholic.” All were sons of Cuba.⁶ In this way, like other antifascists before them, Jewish Cubans concerned about fascism’s anti-Semitism infecting the island tried to connect with other Cubans by invoking nationalist sentiments and values. And like the Comité Alemán and others, they warned their fellow Cubans that fascism posed a direct threat to them on the island, not just far away across the Atlantic.

The Comité Alemán Antifascista operated under the umbrella of Cuba’s Frente Nacional Antifascista (National Antifascist Front).⁷ Founded in the summer of 1941, the Frente was representative of the “broad democratic sectors of Cuban society”⁸ against fascism. The Comité Gestor (Managing Committee) counted among its members a formidable and diverse who’s-who of influential Cubans—politicians, intellectuals, labor and student activists, feminists, doctors, lawyers, and veterans of the War of Independence, both black and white, male and female, and representative of diverse political persuasions, parties, and connections—many of them committed antifascists prior to 1939.

Table 8.1 Frente Nacional Antifascista Comité Gestor

Dr. Gustavo Aldereguía	Dr. Ramón Miyar
José Luis Amigo	Dr. Benjamin Muñoz Ginarte
Dr. Alfredo Antonetti	Dr. Alfredo Nogueira
Dr. Manuel Bisbé	Alfredo Padrón
María Josefa Bolaños	Lázaro Peña
Eduardo Cañas	Antonio Penichet

⁶ Comité Central de las Organizaciones Hebreas de Cuba, “Al Pueblo de Cuba,” 27 May 1939, Doc. 1s133 1939 Mayo, Fondo Salvador Vilaseca, Instituto de Historia de Cuba (IHC), Havana.

⁷ Gert Caden and E. Julio Wolff, “Estatutos del Comité Alemán Antifascista.”

⁸ Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 52.

Dr. Pablo Carrera Jústiz
Dr. José Guadalupe Castellanos
Carlos Fernández Cabrera
Edith García Buchaca
Dr. Ramón García Pujol
Dr. José Angel González Rubiera
Dr. Angel Alberto Giraudy
Eloy González
Dr. Luis Grau Agüero
Nicolás Guillén
Dr. Alejandro Ibarra
Francisco Malpica
Dr. Juan Marinello Vidaurreta

Hermenegildo Portuondo
José Antonio Portuondo
Dr. José M. Pérez Lamy
Ramón León Rentería
Dr. Carlos Rafael Rodríguez
Dr. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring
Comandante Bernardo Sandó
Dra. Clara Luz Sifontes
Ing. Gustavo Urrutia
Dr. Manuel Antonio Varona
Dr. Alejandro Vergara
Luis Gómez Wangüemert
Dr. Ricardo Zamanillo⁹

The Frente's mission was "to fight in an organized manner against the political tendencies called Nazism, Fascism, and Falangism, to defend democracy and manage support for all peoples fighting against Nazi-Fascism." The organization sought to provide economic, military, and moral aid to antifascist causes. Like the German committee, the Frente Nacional Antifascista organized to fight the threat at various levels: against fascist tendencies and agents in Cuba, alongside the Allies against the Axis powers, with the U.N. coalition, and in any place on earth where people fought fascism.¹⁰

The scope of the agendas of both the Comité Alemán and the Frente Nacional signified the culmination within a new historical context of the longstanding Cuban antifascist movement. With western great powers and the Cuban government finally engaged in the struggle, Cuban antifascists moved beyond the passionate but modest goals of grassroots organizing to grander aspirations of participation on the international stage at the highest levels. Cuban antifascism before 1939 had enjoyed widespread popular support and significant successes despite domestic

⁹ Frente Nacional Anti-Fascista letterhead, Frente Nacional Anti-Nazi Fascista, Expediente 10624, Legajo 354, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, ANC. The organization changed its name to Frente Nacional Antifascista by February 1943.

¹⁰ Frente Nacional Anti-Nazi Fascista, "Estatutos y Reglamento de la Asociación 'Frente Nacional Anti-Nazifascista,'" 8 July 1941, Frente Nacional Anti-Nazi Fascista, Expediente 10624, Legajo 354, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, ANC.

repression and international indifference. The movement's tenacious struggle of the 1930s laid the groundwork for its official debut in 1940.

Meanwhile, many longtime Cuban antifascists continued to work for the cause in local, practical ways. Groups we have studied, such as Cuba's Masonic lodges and anarchist organizations, welcomed and assisted Spanish Republicans fleeing Franco, work facilitated by relationships and networks previously established with their Spanish brethren.¹¹ Records of the Cuban Registry of Associations indicate that in 1940, 1942, and 1944 Cuban veterans of the Spanish Civil War founded their own antifascist organizations.¹² The Asociación Cultural de Ex-Combatientes Antifascistas (Cultural Association of Antifascist Ex-Combatants), founded in June 1940 and headed by veterans Julio Constantino Cabarrocas (elsewhere written "Cavarrocas") and Alberto Monteagudo Seoane, sought to organize not only veterans but also "all youth of both sexes, without racial distinction, who are antifascists and who feel social concerns with desires to overcome." The organization's bylaws prohibited political and religious propaganda and threatened with expulsion any member trying to impose his ideology on others. Several of the identifiable members listed in the Association's file were anarchists, and it seems as though the majority of the group may have had this political orientation.¹³ The group included

¹¹ Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 63–64.

¹² See also: Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 62.

¹³ Julio C. Cabarrocas and Alberto Monteagudo, "Reglamento," 5 June 1940, and Cabarrocas, "Acta de Constitución," 20 June 1940, Asociación Cultural de Ex-Combatientes Antifascistas, Expediente 6951, Legajo 257, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, ANC. Members listed are: Alberto Monteagudo [Seoane], Manuel Romero, Julio C[onstantino] Cabarrocas, Gustavo Rodríguez [Malagamba], Abelardo Iglesia[s Saavedra], Oscar Gonzalez, Pedro Fajardo [Boheras], Francisco Villanueva, Orlando [León] Lemus, Martínez Cubielle, Antonio Torres, and Tito Peña [López]. According to Domingo Cuadriello, the majority of members were anarchists. Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 62, 64. Frank Fernández, historian of Cuban anarchism, lists the following of these group members as anarchists who fought for the Republic: Iglesias, Malagamba, Monteagudo, Fajardo Boheras, and Cabarrocas.

Spanish Republican refugees as well.¹⁴ The Formación de Excombatientes Antifascistas (Group or Squad of Antifascist Ex-combatants) was founded in October 1942 and headed by veterans Norberto Hernández Nodal and Mario Alvarez Izquierdo. The large majority of members were Cuban veterans of the Republican forces during the Spanish conflict, and they stated the group's mission as "exclusively antifascist."¹⁵ They welcomed other veterans—both Cuban and those from the rest of America's nations—to join their organization, along with any antifascist properly recommended by two veterans or two active members of a recognized antifascist organization in Cuba. They took as their mission the "development of a collective war morale," the "establishment of a national economy adequate for the development of the war plan," struggle against "the fifth column" of fascists in Cuba, and raising funds "by all licit means" to support "the Democratic Cause."¹⁶ Twenty-six members of the group gathered in November 1942 to vote on officers.¹⁷ The organization was politically diverse. Some of those listed as having attended the election were among the anarchist members who were previously or concurrently part of the Asociación Cultural de Ex-Combatientes Antifascistas; some were Communist Party members. The inclusion of members of the Asociación founded in 1940 in the

¹⁴ Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 63; Cabarrocas, "Acta de Constitución."

¹⁵ Mario Alvarez Izquierdo to Sr. Gobernador de la Provincia, Havana, 9 October 1942, Formación de Excombatientes Antifascistas, Expediente 10055, Legajo 335, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, ANC.

¹⁶ Alvarez and Norberto Hernández Nodal, "Estatutos de la 'Formación de Excombatientes Antifascistas' F.E.A.," 8 October 1942, Formación de Excombatientes Antifascistas, Expediente 10055, Legajo 335, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, ANC.

¹⁷ "Acta de Constitución: Elecciones de Ejecutivo," 7 November 1942, Formación de Excombatientes Antifascistas, Expediente 10055, Legajo 335, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, ANC. Those listed are: "Norberto H. Nodal, Mario A. Izquierdo, Carlos V. Bravo, Gilberto Galán, Andrés G. Lanuza, Rogelio Rodríguez, Dr. Fernando R. V., Segundo Collar M., Juan A. Izquierdo, Oscar G. Ancheta, Mario Morales M., Alberto Monteagudo, Ramón Rey Ravelo, Carlos Cañizares, Juan Palacios H., Mario Sánchez, José H. Rizo, Héctor Morales, Arístides Saavedra, Manuel Alonso, Gustavo Malagamba, Dr. C. F. Arratte, Justo B. Quintana, Dagoberto F. Vera, Ramón L. Alvarez, Agustín B. Abad."

Formación founded in 1942 indicates that the former may have split or dissolved; likewise, members of the first two organizations showed up again in the rosters of the Asociación de Ex-Combatientes Anti-Fascistas Revolucionarios (Association of Revolutionary Antifascist Ex-Combatants) founded in September 1944. Intended to bring together as members both Cuban veterans and Spanish refugees of the war, the new organization borrowed language directly from the bylaws of the earlier two groups.¹⁸ When the Asociación elected officers in June 1946 members elected as president Gustavo Rodríguez Malagamba, anarchist member of both of the previous groups, and as vice president Norberto Hernández Nodal, who reported being a member of the Communist Party in 1937, served as president of the Formación founded in 1942, and would go on to die in the anti-Batista attack on the Cuban Presidential Palace in March 1957.¹⁹

Prominent scholars of Cuban history have dismissed Cuban antifascism based upon assessments of the Spanish Civil War and World War II periods as having been “liberal,” indicative of a move away from the vibrant grassroots political radicalism of the struggle against Machado and the years leading up to the disastrous strike of March 1935, and part of a general atmosphere of “defeatism” and “demoralization” among activists. Those activists who remained revolutionary, they argue, took their efforts off the island, departing from the domestic struggle by traveling to Spain.²⁰ In these interpretations, Cuban antifascism of the late 1930s and early 1940s is either homogenously moderate or located outside of Cuban political activism. Though

¹⁸ Manuel Rivero Setien and Roberto Casals Otero, “Reglamento,” 12 September 1944, Asociación de Ex-Combatientes Anti-Fascistas Revolucionarios, Expediente 5721, Legajo 225, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, ANC.

¹⁹ Norberto Hernández Nodal, “Fiche Individuelle,” 26 June 1937, File 595, Subseries III, Opus 6, Fond 545: Records of the International Brigades, Comintern Archives, RGASPI; Gustavo Rodríguez Malagamba and Enrique Gregori Barbó, “Acta de Constitución,” 3 July 1946, Expediente 5721, Legajo 225, Fondo Registro de Asociaciones, ANC; Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 314n163.

²⁰ Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 88; Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 211.

the extent of Cuban antifascism's impact on the island's broader political scene is certainly debatable, the assessment of it as simply moderate or foreign is incorrect. Throughout the present study, we have seen that Cuban antifascism prior to 1939 was both politically diverse and in many ways a continuation of domestic political struggles. Here, we see that although antifascism came to be officially recognized and supported on the island in the international context of World War II beginning in 1940 due to Batista's newfound commitment and Cuba's formal alliance with the Allies the following year—and therefore could be said to have become more mainstream—it continued to encompass political diversity and activists continued to relate it to domestic concerns. Many of the individual antifascist activists of the officially sanctioned movement during the 1940s were the same people who had made up the movement of the 1930s. Though it is true that Cuban political radicalism and revolutionary activism entered a period of relative dormancy during the 1940s, strong strands of continuity remained, 1930s antifascism important among them. And these tendencies did not stay dormant in Cuba for long.

The Cuban Revolution: Remembering, Assessing, and Utilizing 1930s Antifascism

U.S. foreign relations officer Wayne Smith recounted in his memoir an anecdote from the eve of the Cuban Revolution concerning historical memory of the Spanish conflict. Sitting in a Havana nightclub in 1958 in the midst of revolutionary tumult but before the fall of Batista's dictatorship, Smith felt the emotional energy and excited tension of the pro-rebel Cubans around him. They were hopeful, but unsure of the extent to which they could safely test the limits of Batista's control. One man, Smith recalled, tipsy and unable to control himself in the charged and expectant atmosphere, leapt to his feet and began loudly singing a revolutionary song of the Spanish Republic, the lyrics of which the U.S. official remembered as: "Down with the tyrant,

down with the dictator!” A moment of fear gripped the people in the nightclub: Would Batista’s agents apprehend the man? The waiters, Smith remembered, silenced the singer quickly and went around the bar insisting to other patrons that the dictator in question was Franco, not Batista. Evidently this explanation was sufficient, because the subversively celebratory reveling continued with no interference from authorities. Batista’s forces either were not present, Smith concluded, or they believed the waiters’ explanation.²¹ In this instance, a man overcome with the future potential of the revolutionary moment in Cuba called upon the past in Spain. He inserted the Republican cause of the Spanish Civil War as a substitute for the rebels’ cause in the Cuban Revolution. In keeping with the longstanding tradition of interpreting the antifascist struggle as part of the Cuban domestic struggle, later supporters of the Revolution such as this man in the nightclub equated the two. Assessment of Batista as a fascist dictator, while perhaps more fitting in 1958 than it had been in 1938, was also a longstanding tradition.

Whereas the Republican cause in Spain had lost, the Cuban rebels won. Many of those in the international left who had suffered bitter disappointment upon the Spanish Republic’s defeat rejoiced at the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. For example, U.S. nurse and Spanish Civil War veteran Fredericka Martin, whom we met during our discussion of volunteers in Spain, expressed this common sentiment to her Cuban doctor friend Eduardo Odio Pérez in 1970. Though well aware of the kinds of complications and contradictions existent within Cuban revolutionary reality, as commentary elsewhere in her correspondence indicates, Martin saw the Cuban Revolution as a desirable outcome. She wrote to her old friend and fellow veteran of the Spanish conflict: “And the picture of you in the parade moves me to say you are even more handsome than in your younger days. And so much happier, having seen so many of your dreams come

²¹ Wayne S. Smith, *The Closest of Enemies: A Personal and Diplomatic Account of U.S.–Cuban Relations Since 1957* (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), 38.

true for your homeland and to have been able to help with the process.” She contrasted the Cuban and U.S. experiences: “Of the sad condition of my homeland I shall not talk...it breaks my heart as you can well imagine.”²² A 1974 summary of the Cuban contribution to the Spanish Republican cause produced by the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. made explicit a comparison between the Spanish conflict and the Cuban Revolution: “Inspired by the heroic example of Spain, the Cuban people carried on the cause of the Spanish revolution. Cuba was the first of the Spanish-speaking countries to have a victorious socialist revolution.” Soviet authors commented in particular on the military training *Granma* expeditionary participants received from Spanish Civil War veteran Alberto Bayo, the influence of the Spanish conflict on “the political consciousness of the young Ernesto Che Guevara,” and the significant symbolism of slogans from “the heroic battle of Madrid” for “revolutionary Cuba’s confidence in victory during the days of the Bay of Pigs.” Expressing revolutionary optimism, they concluded: “The Cubans, who are so greatly indebted to the heroic struggle of the Spanish people, firmly believe that they too will win their struggle for freedom.”²³ Scholar Alistair Hennessy drew a similarly direct connection between the Spanish conflict and the Cuban Revolution in his 1982 essay on Cuba for the book *The Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939: American Hemispheric Perspectives*. The war in Spain was the great revolutionary failure of the first half of the twentieth century, he asserted, and the Cuban Revolution was the revolutionary triumph of the second half. It is significant, he argued, that two such intertwined countries “provided the touchstone for revolutionary enthusiasm on a world-wide scale.” He explored, as we have done, a number of

²² Fredericka Martin to Eduardo Odio Pérez, 6 June 1970, Folder 4, Box 2, The Fredericka Martin Papers, Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archive (ALBA), New York. Ellipsis in original.

²³ Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., *International Solidarity with the Spanish Republic: 1936–1939* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 106.

the ways in which the two countries were interconnected at the time on interpersonal, cultural, and intellectual levels.²⁴ More recently, at a February 2011 march commemorating the Battle of Jarama, two observations I made personally struck me regarding a continued relevance of the connection between the Spanish Civil War and the Cuban Revolution for many contemporary leftists. The first, which was subtle, was the sight of a marcher holding aloft the flag of the Spanish Republic and wearing an olive green cap with a patch depicting the Cuban flag sewn on one side. The second, much more overt, was the impassioned speech of a very elderly Spanish man who had fought for the Republic. One of a handful of surviving and relatively mobile native veterans of the conflict able to attend the rally at the end of the march, the man was asked by event organizers to say a few words. He took the opportunity to speak at length and with great intensity in support of the Cuban Revolution.²⁵

As some Spanish Civil War veterans have celebrated the Cuban Revolution, the Cuban Revolution has celebrated some Spanish Civil War veterans. Before, during, and after the Cuban rebels' successful fight, living Spanish Civil War veterans could turn out to be villains or heroes from the point of view of Revolutionary leaders, or their role could be ambiguous. Manuel Cala Reyes, Rolando Masferrer, and Rafael Chao Santana exemplify, respectively, the ambiguous, villainous, and heroic position a veteran of the Spanish conflict could assume relative to the Cuban Revolution. Teté Casuso, whom we have followed throughout this study, exemplifies a committed antifascist from the 1930s who became intimately involved in the Revolution and Revolutionary government and then broke with it bitterly. Examining the post-1939 trajectories

²⁴ Alistair Hennessy, "Cuba," in *The Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939: American Hemispheric Perspectives*, Mark Falcoff and Fredrick B. Pike, eds. (Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 101–158.

²⁵ Personal observations at La Marcha Memorial de la Batalla del Jarama, 26 February 2011, Jarama Valley, Spain.

of these four individuals as examples and considering the official assessment of Spanish Civil War veterans during the early years of the Cuban Revolutionary government, we explore the complexities and contradictions of the oversimplified view discussed above; an equation or straightforward progression between the Spanish Civil War and the Cuban Revolution may seem intuitively correct, but the historical reality is much more complex. Examining history at the intimate level of individuals allows us to explore this complexity.

Veteran Manuel Cala Reyes, also known as “Niño” Cala, was an ambiguous participant in the Cuban revolutionary struggle of the 1950s. A native of Santiago de Cuba, an agricultural worker, and an activist in the anti-Machado struggle, Cala was remembered alternately as “a professional revolutionary who did not agree with any government” and “an expert marksman with a notorious reputation as a gun-slinging gangster.”²⁶ This combination of characteristics was common in politically involved individuals of Cuba during the 1940s and 1950s. Batista officials killed Cala in Santiago de Cuba the morning after Fidel Castro led his attack on the Moncada in July 1953.²⁷ In a list of “Martyrs of the Moncada” published by the island’s Revolutionary press, Cala is listed among the civilians killed.²⁸ Despite this historical distinction, and his activism in the anti-Machado fight and service in the Spanish Civil War, “Niño” Cala does not seem to have received much attention or promotion from the Revolutionary government as a hero. A contemporary observer of the Moncada attack commented later that he was “was

²⁶ Antonio Rafael De la Cova, *The Moncada Attack: Birth of the Cuban Revolution* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 158.

²⁷ Doc. RG 4.12/2005(1–279), Serie Fichas de Datos de Combatientes Cubanos de la Guerra Civil Española, Sección Personalidades Cubanas, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

²⁸ Anon., “Mártires del Moncada,” *Granma*, <http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/marti-moncada/gm10.html> (Accessed 28 June 2010).

old and exhausted. There was no need to kill him. He was not involved in anything.”²⁹ This dismissive assessment suggests that perhaps Cala was not in fact an active rebel supporter, and was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Alternately, the 1930s historical record hints, he may have been downplayed for being a somewhat unsavory character. While in Spain, Cala caught the attention of officials for possible sexual impropriety, as noted in Chapter 2. Already in his late forties, he had become enamored of a 14-year-old Spanish girl, and claimed to want to marry her. The official report noted that he denied having had sexual relations with her, and stated in his defense that it was common for older men to marry girls of 14 or 15 in his country. After a confrontation, the report recorded, “little Maria” denied having told Cala that she was miserable at home and wanted to run away with him. “When he tried to kiss her, she struggled and was embraced by force,” it stated. Due to the fact that he was, in the report’s highly euphemistic terms, “a fanatical and incurable romantic,” officials proposed detention until repatriation. The record does not indicate whether or not detention was in fact enforced.³⁰ Such ambiguity of character reminds us of an important conclusion from our discussion of Cuban volunteers in the conflict: Individuals—even committed activists—had diverse backgrounds, personalities, values, and reasons for deciding to travel to Spain, some nobler than others, and their conduct there and beyond was as varied as they were.

In 1968 a Cuban observer wrote to a friend who had served in Spain: “There were quite a few who fought for the Republic, came back to Cuba, and proceeded to fight for Batista. The process of such a transformation took some time, of course, and was not quite so simple; but that was its final outcome.” Among these, she noted, was “the notorious Rolando Masferrer, a war

²⁹ De la Cova, *The Moncada Attack*, 158.

³⁰ Commission Judiciaire, “Rapport No. 1731,” 7 September 1937, File 588, Subseries III, Opis 6, Fond 545: Records of the International Brigades, Comintern Archives, RGASPI.

criminal, head of the ‘Tigres de Masferrer.’”³¹ Rolando Masferrer Rojas is arguably Cuba’s most infamous Spanish Civil War veteran. The subject of a good deal of intrigue and speculation in non-academic sources, Masferrer has not garnered much scholarly attention—brief mentions in the literature serve generally to illustrate either the political gangsterism of the 1940s or the brutality of Batista’s government during the 1950s. However, historian of the Spanish Republican exile in Cuba Domingo Cuadriello provides a useful biographical summary in a footnote.³² A leftist political activist beginning in his teenage years, Masferrer traveled to Spain as a volunteer at the age of 18, where he was shot in the leg and left with a limp. A Communist during the 1930s and early 1940s, he worked for the party newspaper *Noticias de Hoy (Today’s News)* while studying for a law degree at the Universidad de La Habana, where he won a prestigious award for outstanding students. He was a co-founder in 1945 of the newspaper *Tiempo en Cuba (Cuban Times)*, which, under his direction and after his expulsion from the Communist Party that same year, served as both an anti-Franco and anticommunist vehicle that criticized Batista prior to the 1952 *coup d’état* and later went on to become a journalistic voice supportive of his regime. Masferrer was a well-known leader of a *grupo de acción* during the 1940s, a participant in the unsuccessful Cayo Confites expedition to oust Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1947, and a representative of the Province of Oriente elected in 1948. When Batista’s *coup* succeeded, Masferrer took a group of his men—“including, curiously, the ex-colonel of the Spanish Republican Army Valentín González (Campesino),” according to Domingo Cuadriello—to the Universidad “to take part in the armed defense of the constitutional system of the country.” They departed when it became clear that

³¹ Rosa Hilda Zell to Fredericka Martin, 28 July 1968, Folder 4, Box 2, The Fredericka Martin Papers, ALBA.

³² Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 614–615n4.

the ousted Auténticos were not going to fight. Once President Carlos Prío Socarrás fled the country and Batista took over Masferrer became a supporter of the new leader. In 1954 he was elected as a senator for Oriente Province.³³ Described as a “political gangster”³⁴ and a “Batista henchmen,”³⁵ Masferrer was most notorious for his leadership of the brutal ‘Tigers’ mentioned above, a “paramilitary gang known for its crimes”³⁶ and essentially Masferrer’s private army of approximately 2,000 men.³⁷ There existed a longstanding animosity between Masferrer and Fidel Castro, his “personal enemy” dating back to Castro’s days as a university student in Havana.³⁸ The offices of *Tiempo en Cuba* were ransacked during the triumph of the Revolution,³⁹ and some claim that Castro was responsible for Masferrer’s death by car bomb in Miami in 1975.⁴⁰ In one scholarly assessment, historian of Cuba Hugh Thomas opines generously that Masferrer’s trajectory made him “a man of great wasted talent.”⁴¹ Domingo Cuadriello concludes that his life “constitutes a strange and contradictory case of intelligence,

³³ Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 591–592, 614–615; De la Cova, *The Moncada Attack*, 3–4.

³⁴ Farber, *Revolution and Reaction*, 121; Hugh Thomas, “Cuba: la revolución y sus raíces históricas,” *Estudios Internacionales* 4, no. 16 (January–March 1971): 148.

³⁵ Charles D. Ameringer, “The Auténtico Party and the Political Opposition in Cuba, 1952–57,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 65, no. 2 (May, 1985): 343.

³⁶ Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 289, 615n4.

³⁷ Lucinda Garza C., “Causas y desarrollo del conflicto cubano-norteamericano de enero de 1959 a julio de 1960,” *Foro Internacional* 9, no. 4 (April–June 1969): 358.

³⁸ Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 615n4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 591–592.

⁴⁰ De la Cova, *The Moncada Attack*, 26–27, 288. This view is expressed by numerous non-scholarly sources as well.

⁴¹ Thomas, “Cuba: la revolución y sus raíces históricas,” 148.

personal courage, and thuggery.”⁴² In any case, he certainly did not earn the rank of celebrated Spanish Civil War veteran in Revolutionary Cuba. Interesting in relation to the use of historical memory of the Spanish conflict is the fact that Masferrer got left out when compilation for publication of the official Cuban lists of veterans of the Spanish conflict took place.⁴³

The Cuban Revolutionary government did not hesitate to make Spanish Civil War veteran Rafael Chao Santana into a hero, awarding him numerous medals of honor.⁴⁴ A native of Havana who was born in 1916 who worked as a *tintorero* (dyer or drycleaner), Chao Santana joined the Communist Party in Cuba in the 1920s.⁴⁵ In Spain, the Central Committee of the P.C.E. assessed his conduct as good, disciplined, serious, and valiant. It noted that he was well respected among his comrades and called him a “good communist.”⁴⁶ After spending time in a concentration camp at the conclusion of the Spanish conflict, he sailed to Cuba on the ship *Orduna* in May 1939, along with almost two hundred other returnees.⁴⁷ Chao Santana joined the 26th of July Movement during the anti-Batista struggle of the 1950s. Having met Fidel Castro in Miami, he traveled to Mexico, voyaged on the *Granma*, and fought in the Sierra Maestra.⁴⁸

⁴² Domingo Cuadriello, *El exilio*, 615n4.

⁴³ Instituto de Historia, *Cuba y la defensa*, 293–301; Bello and Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España*, 259–267.

⁴⁴ Rafael Chao Santana, “Reseña y Testimonios Complementarios,” 15 February 1996, Expediente 1/122, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63184, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete, Spain.

⁴⁵ Chao Santana, “Biografía de Militantes, 28 December 1938, File 589, Subseries III, Opis 6, Fond 545: Records of the International Brigades, Comintern Archives, RGASPI.

⁴⁶ Comité Central, Partido Comunista de España, untitled assessment form, 7 November 1938, File 589, Subseries III, Opis 6, Fond 545: Records of the International Brigades, Comintern Archives, RGASPI.

⁴⁷ “Campo de Concentración Internacional (Grupo Cubano),” undated but probably 26 May 1939, Doc. 1/2:1/1.10/58–64, and “Lista de Embarque: Repatriados en el vapor ‘Orduna’ el 13 de mayo de 1939,” undated but probably 26 May 1939, Doc. 1/2:1/1.10/51–57, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC. Date assessment based on related documents in archive.

Though he would not become a member of the central heroic group of Spanish Civil War veterans most actively and publicly celebrated by the Cuban Revolutionary government (discussed below), Chao Santana enjoyed the benefits of a positive assessment of his credentials by the state. For example, as a member of the *Agrupación de Veteranos Internacionalistas Cubanos* (Association of Cuban Internationalist Veterans), he was among those elderly Spanish Civil War volunteers to travel to Spain in 1996 for a commemoration of Cuban participants.⁴⁹

Antifascist and Spanish Civil War widow Teté Casuso worked within and then broke publicly with the Cuban government following the triumph of the Revolution. Vehemently against Batista since the years leading up to the March 1935 strike, Casuso compared him to Franco in reference to his 1952 *coup*. Like the Spanish dictator, she wrote, Batista in 1952 “set himself up as Chief of State—despite the fact that the deposed government of Prío had been an absolutely democratic one.”⁵⁰ Teté lived in Mexico during the 1950s Batista regime, having lost any will for political activism. In the summer of 1956 she saw in a newspaper that a group of Cubans had been imprisoned in Mexico as a result of having been caught training for an expedition to overthrow Batista, training they received, as noted above, from former Spanish Republican Army captain Alberto Bayo, “a pleasant, harmless man in his sixties” in Teté’s memory. “I smiled bitterly,” she recalled, upon reading about the would-be revolutionaries. She had little hope for these young prisoners, but, she stated, their “illusions, so remote from reality, touched me,” and she decided she wanted to meet them. Aware of the historical memory of her

⁴⁸ Chao Santana, “Reseña y Testimonios Complementarios,” 15 February 1996, Expediente 1/122, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63184, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete, Spain.

⁴⁹ “Agrupación de Veteranos Internacionalistas Cubanos: España 1936–1939,” undated but probably 1987, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63189, and Chao Santana, “Reseña y Testimonios Complementarios,” 15 February 1996, Expediente 1/122, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63184, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete, Spain.

⁵⁰ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 87.

own political involvement among such activists of the era, and somewhat boastfully, she recalled the reaction of Fidel Castro and his compatriots to her arrival: “Fidel began calling over his comrades and introducing them to me. Most of them knew of me and my past, largely through Pablo’s writings or from what they had heard about us. Fidel was moved by my visit. ... He said he felt deeply honored that I, with all I symbolized in Cuba, had come to see them.”⁵¹ What did she symbolize in Cuba? A revolutionary past, but one she distinguished with some degree of disappointment from the revolutionary future brewing in 1956. With the exception of Fidel and his closest associates, the men in that Mexican prison were “much humbler and cruder” than the activists of Teté’s youth, she assessed. “Their language was coarse, and from the things they said I thought some of them irresponsible.” Nevertheless, Casuso’s encounter with Castro and his men set her life on a new course.⁵² She would go on to become a close friend and personal caretaker of the revolutionary leader.

Describing her state of mind at the beginning of her friendship with Fidel Castro, Casuso expressed an experienced activist’s bit of wisdom: “For revolutions, enthusiasm is essential, and this I did not have.” She was cautious, weathered by many old disappointments. Of Castro, she commented: “I had known so many like him whose dreams had been shattered by life’s realities.” Of his revolutionary exuberance, she wrote:

I could not easily surrender to his ardor and confidence—I had seen too much of that. I would not lightly accept a ‘messiah,’ a ‘savior of Cuba.’ I had known many people of high quality to compare him with, and enough of low quality to be on my guard. And I was in a discouraged frame of mind. Knowing my people’s mood, and the spirit of irresponsibility to which it had abandoned itself, I was unable to believe in it once more and to hope for a resurgence of heroism at the signal of another would-be liberator.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 93, 99.

⁵² Ibid., 94–95.

⁵³ Ibid., 101, 103.

In this statement, Casuso illustrated that a continuity of effort was not easy or straightforward for all 1930s antifascist activists. The devastation of defeat and personal loss both in Spain and in the domestic struggle turned many away from politics altogether; only the very closest contact with the new revolutionary leader brought Teté back from her apolitical existence. Castro organized her, asking her to describe the compatriots and experiences of her political youth, working to rekindle her enthusiasm, and asking no commitment from her during their first private conversation. She admitted that she “was eager to be convinced by him,” though she expressed a great deal of skepticism about the chances he and his “naïve” companions had for success, and “felt a kind of pity” for Castro in reaction to his “confidence and firm conviction.” She compared him to an “irresponsible, irrepressible child.” Nevertheless, Castro was a skilled organizer who recognized in Teté someone he could reach. She recalled that “during that long conversation I began to have a feeling of esteem for him and sympathy for his cause. My past appeared to join with his present and with Cuba’s future.” He reached her: “Even before he left, I had already more or less decided to help him all I could.” Castro returned the next day, and this time, he asked if he might store “a few things in her home”—a few things turned out to be seven carloads of weaponry. He proceeded, she recalled, to “take possession of my house.” She had cast her lot with the revolutionaries.⁵⁴

Jailed for a time in Mexico for storing weapons, Teté was undeterred. She continued to help the revolutionaries in Mexico, losing her lease and many of her possessions in the process. When, on New Year’s morning 1959, she got the news of Batista’s flight from Cuba, her reaction was shaped once again by her revolutionary past: “I felt only a kind of sad emptiness. Nothing seemed to affect me any more. I was accustomed to winning and losing, to rising and

⁵⁴ Ibid., 102–105.

falling unexpectedly.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, she sprang into action, seemingly by rote, securing the Cuban embassy in Mexico to rid it of symbols of Batista and protect it from vandalism at the hands of enthusiastic revolutionary exiles. Back in Cuba, Castro appointed her ambassador-at-large. She worked for the Revolutionary government until October 1960, when she asked Castro to fire her rather than resigning.⁵⁶ At that time, she denounced his government in the U.S. press while still expressing some fondness for him personally.⁵⁷ In her memoir, she described her feelings for him during the period leading up to her break with his government as remaining intensely affectionate, yet she found him changed after his time in the mountains and suffered many frustrations with his management of both Cuba and those around him. Her writings hint at the role her activist history may have played in the distance that grew between them. Symbolism of the revolutionary past was still important, but perhaps the reality of individuals from that past was uncomfortable or dangerous to the Revolution. At times, Casuso felt Castro “staring fixedly at me with actual hostility. Of what did I remind him,” she asked, “I, a silent witness of the time when he was not yet the great Fidel Castro?” Or perhaps, we may imagine, of an even earlier time when great revolutionaries fought heroically before Castro was even a grown man? Consistently, Casuso described her view of Castro as that of an adult looking at a child, “an outstanding child—outstanding, but, still, a child. This was not the sort of reaction he was used to.”⁵⁸ Here we glimpse the difficult complexity a living, breathing veteran of 1930s Cuban antifascism could present to the new revolutionary leaders. Clearly, these men and women had

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵⁷ Nan Robertson, “Castro U.N. Aide Defects to U.S.: Friend of Premier Charges His Regime Has Built a Police State in Cuba,” *New York Times* (15 October 1960): 1, 7.

⁵⁸ Casuso, *Cuba and Castro*, 172

significance; but what would be their role in the new Revolution? Could they prove useful, or were they dangerous?

A formal assessment of Cuban veterans of the Spanish Civil War took place during the very early period following the triumph of the Revolution.⁵⁹ It is clear that the Cuban Communist Party played a substantial role in the effort, though most of the individuals or offices involved remain anonymous in the archive. Incomplete and disorganized, the records of this effort available at the Instituto de Historia de Cuba (Institute of History of Cuba) comprise nevertheless a fascinating and sometimes chilling body of source material on 1930s antifascism in Cuban Revolutionary historical memory.

Information was recorded on a card for each Spanish Civil War veteran accounted for by the Revolutionary government. Some cards had only the person's name; some included a small headshot; and some gave further information about the person: his service in Spain, his trajectory since 1939, and/or his current status regarding place of residence, employment, and/or political engagement. Many stated simply: "His whereabouts are unknown." Others, however, provided Revolutionary commentary on the individual. Mario Alvarez Izquierdo, for example, one of the leaders of the *Formación de Excombatientes Antifascistas* founded in 1942, was listed as a secretary general of the port workers union, a "Mujalista" (a follower of anti-communist labor leader Eusebio Mujal), and, as of 1963, an exile. About Manuel Rivero Setien, member of the later group *Asociación de Ex-Combatientes Anti-Fascistas Revolutionarios*, the card stated that he had been a bad combatant in Spain, that in Cuba he had been a Representative to the House for the *Auténticos*, that he "participated in all the shamelessness of that epoch," and that he was

⁵⁹ Though much documentation of the work is undated, some is marked with the year 1963. The records indicate that much work had already been completed seeking out veterans' information prior to the dating of these documents.

at present in Miami. In other cases, the cards revealed a more dramatic end than exile. Hector Morales Muñoz was listed as “currently imprisoned,” and Armentino Feria Pérez and Eufemio Fernández Ortega as having been executed. Fernández Ortega’s record stated: “Executed [or shot] as a traitor, an agent of the C.I.A. in Cuba.”⁶⁰ Another assessment document called each of these three men a “traitor” and noted that the latter two were executed. (This document listed thirteen “traitors” among 167 veterans accounted for.)⁶¹ A third stated, regarding both Feria Pérez and Fernández Ortega: “Executed [or shot] by the Rev. TRAITOR.”⁶²

Other veterans received more favorable evaluations by the Revolutionary government. About Casimiro Jimenez, for instance, the assessment read: “His performance in Spain was good. Currently he holds up well politically.” Similarly, that of Manasés Romero Salicrup stated: “His performance in Spain was good. He remains with the Revolution.” Eduardo Sosa’s read: “Currently works in the port of Havana. His performance in Spain was good.”⁶³

The government was unable to locate information about the majority of the veterans, but not for lack of trying. An undated report by veteran Federico Chao Rodríguez chronicles his travels through the provinces of Villa Clara and La Habana seeking out “ex-combatants of the antifascist war of Spain.” A member of the Communist Party of Cuba beginning in 1932, Chao Rodríguez was, apparently, assigned the job of tracking down his fellow veterans of the Spanish conflict for assessment by the Revolutionary government. For example, he found Rafael Chao

⁶⁰ Doc. RG 4.12/2005(1–279), Serie Fichas de Datos de Combatientes Cubanos de la Guerra Civil Española, Sección Personalidades Cubanas, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

⁶¹ “Relación de excombatientes cubanos de la Guerra civil española,” undated, Doc. 1/2:1.10/31–33, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC.

⁶² Doc. RG 4.11/2005(102–150), Serie Doc. Relacionada con la Guerra Civil Española, Sección Personalidades Cubanas, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

⁶³ Doc. RG 4.12/2005(1–279), Serie Fichas de Datos de Combatientes Cubanos de la Guerra Civil Española, Sección Personalidades Cubanas, Fondo Registro General, IHC.

Santana, discussed above: “[W]e managed to locate the *compañero* Rafael Chao Santana, expeditionary of the *Granma* and Sierra Maestra fighter,” he recounted. His report demonstrates the seriousness of the effort, but also its limitations. In the province of Villa Clara, for example, Chao Rodríguez found only one volunteer who had died in combat, three who had died following the war—“excluding Rivero Setien, who died in Miami”—and three survivors. The note regarding the omission of Rivero Setien, whose negative assessment we discussed above, indicates an intentional exclusion from the historical record of those Spanish Civil War veterans deemed unworthy by the Cuban Revolutionary government. His name, like Masferrer’s, is omitted from official lists of veterans prepared for publication in the two major Cuban books on the subject (discussed below).⁶⁴ Chao Rodríguez’s report describes the way in which the search for veterans got channeled by the Cuban Communist Party. He sought out local Communist contacts, such as fellow longstanding Communist and veteran Manuel Corcho Díaz in Villa Clara, who then coordinated the effort to find veterans in their area. Upon leaving the province, Chao Rodríguez noted, he had established “a close bond” with the local Central Committee. In the province of Havana, Chao Rodríguez reported, he coordinated with the man responsible for the history of the province to initiate “a thorough job” of seeking information “at all levels” of the Cuban Communist Party.⁶⁵

The fact that revolutionary officials felt that such an assessment project was worth their time and resources during the first few years after the Revolution is indicative of the value they

⁶⁴ Instituto de Historia, *Cuba y la defensa*, 293–301; Bello and Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España*, 259–267.

⁶⁵ Federico Chao Rodríguez, “INFORME: Sobre el trabajo realizado por el *compañero* Federico Chao Rodríguez en las provincias de Villaclara y La Habana,” undated, Doc. 4.2/2005(14–15), Serie PCC, Sección PCC(1965), Fondo Registro General, IHC; Chao Rodríguez, “Biografía de Militantes,” 30 December 1938, File 589, Subseries III, Opus 6, Fond 545: Records of the International Brigades, Comintern Archives, RGASPI.

placed on 1930s Cuban antifascism, and especially combat in the Spanish conflict. The two most notable books on the subject published in Cuba—*Cuba y la defensa de la República Española (1936–1939)* (*Cuba and the Defense of the Spanish Republic*) produced by the Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba in 1981 and *Cuba en España: Una Gloriosa Página de Internacionalismo* (*Cuba in Spain: A Glorious Page in Internationalism*) by Alberto Alfonso Bello and Juan Pérez Díaz in 1990—illustrated the way in which the Revolutionary government framed and used these elements of the island’s 1930s history.

In 1981 *Cuba y la defensa de la República Española* compiled testimonies of selected surviving Cuban Spanish Civil War volunteers, biographical sketches of some both living and deceased, photographs and other images, reprints of a body of 1930s sources such as letters and published articles, and a lengthy though incomplete list of names of Cuban veterans. It was, therefore, principally a collection of primary sources and remembrances of participants, not an analytical work. The opening few pages, however, gave a sense of the viewpoint of the team of authors who produced the book for the Institute of History of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party under the supervision of Ramón Nicolau González, the man put in charge by the Party of recruiting volunteers on the island for the International Brigades during the Spanish conflict.

A quotation by Fidel Castro opened the work and set the tone. Though his statement celebrated antifascism and internationalism generally in reference to Cuban support for the Spanish Republic during the conflict, it focused on the International Brigades and concluded by ascribing the entirety of the Cuban effort to the Communist Party. Referring specifically to the participation of Cuban combat volunteers, Castro stated: “This is, in our opinion, one of the most

noble and heroic contributions to the world revolutionary movement of our first Communist Party, who inspired this act of solidarity.”⁶⁶

A brief prologue providing the reader with historical context and some commentary followed Castro’s lead by highlighting the role of Communists and the Soviet Union, though it did include some more detail about the diversity of 1930s antifascism both internationally and in Cuba. Like the present study, the prologue of *Cuba y la defensa* viewed the anti-Machado struggle as the foundation for Cuban antifascism and referenced the March 1935 strike as a critical point in the activism of the decade. As we have seen, the strike and subsequent repression were formative not only for Communists but also for people across the political spectrum, many of whom interpreted the events within an international framework of fascist threat. Considering this context for antifascism, the authors interpreted the continuity between the early anti-Batista and the anti-Franco struggles in terms they identified as Marxist-Leninist: “[I]t is well to remember the great Marxist-Leninist truth that, when applying firmly the principle of proletarian internationalism in helping other peoples fighting for their freedom, one defends simultaneously the freedom and interests of his own nation.” Though Communists did certainly express this principle at the time, a belief in the global threat of fascism and in the importance of transnational solidarity in combatting that threat abroad and at home was hardly exclusive to Party members and Marxist-Leninists. An explicitly pro-Communist interpretation is not, of course, surprising in a 1981 Cuban book produced by the Communist Party. The commentary at the beginning of the volume skipped over, for instance, the alliance between Batista and the Cuban Communists in 1938, mentioning only “the legality of the Communist Party and other opposition parties to Batista in the summer of 1938” as a political victory that came as a

⁶⁶ Fidel Castro quotation, front matter, Instituto de Historia, *Cuba y la defensa*.

consequence of the popular political pressure exerted on the island by antifascist organizing. In the case of Spain, the prologue credited the Spanish Communist Party and the Popular Front policy with the Republican electoral victory of 1936, the Soviet Union with being the Republic's strongest ally, and international Communism with the mobilization of foreign volunteers. These assertions are not false, but an emphasis on the Communist role downplays the contributions of others; however, the commentary in *Cuba y la defensa* did at least acknowledge explicitly the vital contributions of other "progressive sectors" and more broadly "all those who manifested themselves for democracy, social progress and peace, against fierce violence and war." Similarly, the prologue ascribed the majority of antifascist work on the island to the Party, but recognized that the movement brought together "all the people against Batista and imperialism who now came to join the great public mobilizations of solidarity with the Spanish people." Fascism, the authors emphasized, was a common enemy, a threat to the working class, to bourgeois democracy, and to colonized peoples. These sectors came together in Cuba and worldwide to combat it, the authors acknowledged—though, like the activists of the 1930s, they were quick also to draw comparisons between the fascist and bourgeois democratic countries, mentioning the imperialism of England, France, and the United States. Denouncing the meddling of Hitler and Mussolini in Spain to aid its traitors, they stated, was equivalent to denouncing the meddling of the United States in Cuba to aid Batista.⁶⁷ Though the prologue does a solid job of discussing the antifascist contributions of non-Communists and the overall diversity of the anti-Batista struggle and of Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic, we know that the book's producers omitted particular individuals deemed unworthy in

⁶⁷ Instituto de Historia, *Cuba y la defensa*, 1–6.

Revolutionary Cuba, and that they based omissions on explicitly Communist criteria within the Cuban Revolutionary context.

In terms of the usefulness of 1930s antifascism to the Cuban present, the authors of *Cuba y la defensa* made the point strongly that contemporary and future generations in Cuba should learn from the antifascists of the 1930s. This belief, they stated, motivated the publication of the book. One central point they wanted readers to take away from the participation of Cubans in the Spanish conflict was its place in the island's "internationalist tradition." This tradition, they noted, "in the conditions of the socialist Cuba of today" was "becoming extraordinarily gigantic bringing the encouragement and committed support of our people to Vietnam, Angola, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America."⁶⁸

Cuba's tradition of internationalism was the central focal point of the second of the two major works produced in revolutionary Cuba on the history of Cuban antifascism and participation in the Spanish Civil War, as its title suggests. Published in 1990, *Cuba en España: Una gloriosa página de internacionalismo*, which opened with a longer version of the same quotation by Fidel Castro, is primarily an analytical work. Like its predecessor, it includes some biographical sketches and the official (but incomplete) list of Cuban volunteers in Spain, but the majority of the book consists of historical discussion and analysis. Authors utilized interviews and published primary sources as well as works of scholarship, and the book does contain footnotes, though their use is sparse. It is more scholarly a work than *Cuba y la defensa*, if one with an explicitly Marxist-Leninist analytical framework.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1–6.

⁶⁹ Bello and Pérez Díaz, *Cuba en España*.

Cuba en España is essentially an expansion of the same commentary and ideas found in the prologue of *Cuba y la defensa*, concerned with the relevance of 1930s Cuban antifascism for the education of contemporary and future political generations. Authors surveyed the history of the international class struggle, of Cuban politics in the years leading up to the Spanish Civil War (highlighting the founding of the Cuban Communist Party or “first Marxist-Leninist Party”⁷⁰), and of Spanish politics in the years leading up to the conflict. They discussed the political composition of the international solidarity movement (breaking down, for instance, the party affiliation of the members of the Fifth Regiment: 50% Communist, 25% socialist, 15% Republican, 10% “without party” according to citations of publications by Spanish Civil War participants Enrique Lister and Vittorio Vidali⁷¹), and outlined the progression of the war. They celebrated the support provided by the Soviet Union and “other progressive forces of the world.”⁷² Finally, they presented the Cuban movement in support of the Spanish Republic and the “Cuban heroes” who volunteered in Spain, concluding with a section on “revolutionary continuity” discussing those who “support strongly the first Socialist Revolution in America, our Communist Party, and its maximum inspiration and guide, our Commander in Chief, Fidel Castro Ruz.”⁷³ The discussion of “heroes” introduced the reader to the central group of Spanish Civil War veterans—both martyrs and survivors of the conflict—most actively and publicly celebrated by the Cuban Revolutionary government. Presentation of those who survived served

⁷⁰ Ibid., 27–28.

⁷¹ Ibid., 104.

⁷² Ibid., 128–141.

⁷³ Ibid., 142–255.

to illustrate “revolutionary continuity,” with summaries of each individual describing their service in Spain followed by their service to the Cuban Revolution.

As was the case in *Cuba y la defensa*, *Cuba en España* omits some individuals, probably those deemed unworthy of remembrance and celebration in Cuba. For example, sections on the heroism of Pablo de la Torriente Brau⁷⁴ and on the Cuban campaign to aid Spanish children⁷⁵ both fail to mention Teté Casuso entirely. The former begins with the March 1935 strike and follows Torriente from his time in New York City through his death in Spain. It does cite letters of his from published volumes and remembrances of people who knew him, though not those of his wife. Given their political collaboration, not to mention their close companionship, the omission of Teté from Pablo’s biography in the work is striking. The latter misstates the name of the Asociación de Auxilio al Niño del Pueblo Español, contains other errors, and presents information and direct quotations almost entirely without citation. And again, the description’s exclusion of the founding president of the organization may only be explained by reasons of political calculation and animosity. Though it discusses diversity within 1930s antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic, therefore, the extent to which *Cuba en España* may be considered a scholarly work of history rather than a politicized work of historical memory intended to be used as propaganda is debatable.

Also regarding the calculated use—or in this case, lack thereof—of historical memory, it is perhaps significant that these two major works of commemoration of the Cuban defense of the Spanish Republic were published only after Franco’s death in Spain in 1975. One of the many pragmatic considerations—and to some perhaps surprising ideological complexities—of the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 211–223.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 180–182.

Cuban Revolutionary government was its positive relations with the Franco dictatorship. Expert on Cuban revolutionary foreign policy Jorge I. Domínguez explains this seeming contradiction. Following diplomatic isolation in the early 1960s caused in large part by its support of revolutionary movements in Latin America, the Cuban government adopted a new strategy for its relations with other states that placed less emphasis on the internal structure of a regime. “Regimes,” Domínguez writes, summarizing the policy, “even if they are right-wing and authoritarian, need not be opposed if their policies toward Cuba advance important Cuban goals.” The best example of the implementation of this policy, he argues, was the Cuban government’s relationship with the Franco government in Spain. “Cuba was on a collision course with Francisco Franco’s regime in Spain in the early years of revolutionary rule in Cuba; beginning in 1963, Spain and Cuba reached an understanding that allowed a mutually profitable trade to develop, and twelve years later Cuba officially mourned Franco’s death.”⁷⁶

The early conflict resulted from words and actions by the new Revolutionary government deemed inflammatory by Spanish officials. In January 1960 Castro publicly accused U.S. and Spanish officials and elites of a conspiracy to overthrow him. The Spanish ambassador went to the television station at which Castro was speaking to confront him, and an on-air brawl resulted, causing the Cuban government to demand the withdrawal of the ambassador. The following year the Cuban government, as part of an ongoing confrontation with the Catholic Church, arrested dozens of priests and deported them to Spain, while the Spanish government cut tobacco imports. Cuban imports from and exports to Spain fell substantially, and by 1963 Spain’s official airline had suspended all flights to the island. However, Domínguez notes, the relationship between the two countries had a long and complex history not conducive to overly

⁷⁶ Jorge I. Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution: Cuba’s Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 5, 118–119, 189.

simplistic policy. “Although Spain’s trade with Cuba declined in part because Spain retaliated against Cuba,” for example, “Spain never formally supported the U.S. trade embargo.” The two countries each had an interest in some maintenance of good relations. Franco wanted to avoid Cuban support of his overthrow; Cuba needed trade with Spain and sought to avoid problems with its tens of thousands of Spanish permanent residents.⁷⁷

The same year that the Cuban Revolutionary government recorded many of its ideological assessments of Cuban Spanish Civil War volunteers, 1963 saw in November the establishment of a bilateral trading agreement with Franco’s regime that “was an important and profitable turning point for Cuba, given the country’s isolation from most market economies at that time” and “the first formal breach of the U.S.-initiated embargo by a Western European government.” Spain’s official airline resumed flights, and throughout the decade the Franco government would be the island’s principal non-Communist trade partner. To accommodate their position as ideologically strange bedfellows, Franco resisted internal pressures to break ties with Cuba while Castro declined to support Franco’s overthrow. In a statement that illuminates the complex historical irony at play in this arrangement—particularly in the context of the present study—Domínguez notes that Castro’s commitment not to support Franco’s overthrow was “a policy made easier by the fact that there was no active revolutionary struggle against it.”⁷⁸

Twilight of the 1930s Cuban Antifascists

As noted above in our discussion of Rafael Chao Santana, a group of Cuban Spanish Civil War veterans—members of the Association of Cuban Internationalist Veterans on the

⁷⁷ Ibid., 187–188.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 119, 188.

island—were able to travel to Spain for a commemoration in 1996 celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the creation of the International Brigades. The Asociación de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales (Association of Friends of the International Brigades, or A.A.B.I.) hosted the visitors. Photographs (Figures 8.1 and 8.2) of the event taken by the A.A.B.I. show emotional leftist elders carrying the flags of Cuba and the Spanish Republic, fists held up in salute, as they march in a parade.⁷⁹



⁷⁹ These photographs were sent to me via electronic mail by a representative of the Asociación de Amigos de las Brigadas Internacionales without any identifying information regarding the photographer, date, location, specific individuals shown, or filing system under which the images are stored.



Figures 8.1 and 8.2 Cuban veterans of the Spanish Civil War return for a commemoration in 1996

Who were the Cuban veterans chosen to be part of the visit to Spain in 1996? Fortunately, the Spanish organization that hosted them collected biographical information and, in some cases, copies of historical ephemera to learn about the Cuban volunteers. A.A.B.I. records stored in the Archivo Histórico Provincial de Albacete (Albacete Provincial Historical Archive) hold completed questionnaires for 32 Cubans that give us a sense of their backgrounds and include brief narrative statements (some narrated in the first person and others apparently compiled as testimonies by other members of the Association of Cuban Internationalist Veterans) concerning their political affiliation, their service in the war, and their recognition in Cuba by the Revolutionary government.

The survey respondents were born between 1907 and 1921, with the majority born in the 1910s. They reported geographic origins in all six of the island's provinces, though the overwhelming majority came from the city or province of Havana: 21 from Havana; two each from Santa Clara and Oriente; one each from Matanzas, Camagüey, and Pinar del Río; one from Madrid; one from Tampa, Florida; and two not responding to the question. Their professions or

occupations at the time of their departure for Spain were diverse. The group included four who had been students, two male and one female nurse (the woman had been a teacher also), three who listed *dependiente de comercio* (salesclerk), three who listed simply *empleado* (employee) in addition to two gastronomic employees and two commercial employees, two who listed *obrero* (worker), and one *campesino* (farmer or peasant). There was a carpenter, a plumber, a builder, a construction worker, a mechanic, a bus driver, a telegraph operator, a dyer or drycleaner, and a graphic artist. There was also a Cuban Navy crewman and an employee of the Communist Party, as well as one individual who listed that he had no profession.⁸⁰

The anti-Machado struggle was a common starting point for many of the Cuban questionnaire respondents. All but one of the 32 listed the political organization or movement with which they were affiliated at the time they volunteered to help the Spanish Republic. Of the 31 who did, 18 listed a Communist Party or associated youth group and another three called themselves Communist “sympathizers.” Three listed Antonio Guiteras’s group Joven Cuba, two called themselves unionists, and the remaining five listed the Club Julio Antonio Mella, the Partido Socialista Catalán, the Juventud Socialista de España, the C.N.T.-F.A.I., and the Asturias uprising of 1934 as their primary political affiliations. Several of these Cubans were already in Spain prior to the start of the war, some having traveled there from the island when they were children, and thus listed Spanish groups rather than Cuban ones.⁸¹ Like many of the individuals we have encountered in the present study, it was common for survey respondents to live transnational lives moving between Cuba, Spain, and the United States.

⁸⁰ Expedientes 1/116–1/147, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63184, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete, Spain.

⁸¹ Ibid.

The questionnaire respondents served in both the International Brigades and the regular Republican forces. It seems as though the so-called “Spanish Battalion” of the International Brigades (24th Battalion, 15th I.B., 35th Division), which we examined in our discussion of combat volunteers, may have brought together Cuban volunteers who would later form an important network of honored veterans; 14 of the 32 questionnaire respondents reported having served in this particular battalion, whereas the group’s remainder listed no other single military unit more than three times. Mario Morales Mesa, president of the Association of Cuban Internationalist Veterans, called this unit “the Battalion of Cubans reinforced with Latin Americans and Spaniards.” The Cubans listed the battles in which they served and other events they experienced during the war, including wounds, hospitalizations, and imprisonments. Eladio Paula Bolaños lost his brother Aurelio in the war. Evelio Aneiro Subirats reported falling prisoner to Italian troops, and serving time performing forced labor. Several respondents recalled hearing “La Pasionaria,” Dolores Ibárruri, speak upon the occasion of the disbanding of the International Brigades. Many described internments in French concentration camps following Republican defeat.⁸²

Numerous questionnaire respondents stated that they had continued their revolutionary ideas and actions following their return from Spain, and the record makes clear that their government celebrated them for their actions. Nearly all listed in their biographical syntheses the multiple medals and honors bestowed upon them by the Cuban Revolutionary government. Many of those in the Association of Cuban Internationalist Veterans group who responded to the surveys had also been featured in Cuba’s two major books on the Cuban contribution to the Spanish conflict. Testimonies or biographical sketches in *Cuba y la defensa* featured 18 of the

⁸² Ibid.

32 volunteers who completed A.A.B.I. surveys. *Cuba en España* featured 24 veterans in its section on “revolutionary continuity.” Of these, 14 were already deceased by 1996, and of three others their status at the time is unknown—the remaining seven, however, all were part of the group of veterans honored by the A.A.B.I. that year.

Furthermore, a number of the files A.A.B.I. kept on the Cubans contain copies of articles celebrating them, preserved newspaper clippings likely offered by the veterans or their Association. Two are from a series published in Cuba in 1976 featuring the remembrances of Cuban Spanish Civil War volunteers, the tone of which was overtly celebratory of the revolutionary and military achievements of the featured veterans. One described Evelio Aneiros as speaking, for example, “with that mixture of pride and simplicity caused by having fulfilled one’s revolutionary duty.” The bulk of the text was devoted to vivid descriptions of the experience of participating in the war, with an emphasis on combat. Pro-Communist and pro-Soviet political commentary was also readily apparent, as both veterans described the assistance the international volunteers and the Spanish Republic received from various Communist Parties and the U.S.S.R. The only country that sent aid for free, commented Isidro Martínez, was the Soviet Union. Aneiros concluded with his return to Cuba in December 1939, noting that a welcoming reception was dispersed by Cuban police. *A compañero*, he remembered, told him to catch a bus and go quickly—“Two or three days later I received my card from the Party. We returned to the fight!”⁸³ In addition to celebrating the role of Communism and the U.S.S.R., the articles in the A.A.B.I. files focused on Cuban internationalism. One featuring three Cuban

⁸³ Tatiana Coll, “La XV Brigada en el triángulo de la muerte,” Expediente 1/119, and “Con el Quinto Regimiento,” Expediente 1/134, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63184, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete. Clippings include no publication information, but the back of the first is marked: “REPUBLICA DE CUBA” and dated “1976 10–17 Octubre,” and a fragment of text on the back of the second reads: “1976: AÑO DEL XX ANIVERSAR....”

veterans was entitled: “Pioneers of internationalism: Spain, always in the hearts of the Cubans who fought for her,” and another, published in the mid-1980s, bore the heading “From our internationalist history.”⁸⁴ These articles, like *Cuba y la defense* and *Cuba en España*, suggest that by the 1970s and 1980s, Cuban revolutionary officials had determined the principal significance of the Spanish Civil War volunteers. It had two parts: First, they represented socialist continuity and a historical connection with the Soviet Union, and they could speak with conviction and authority of a belief in the longstanding benevolence of the U.S.S.R. towards people’s struggles. Second, they symbolized Cuba’s internationalism. Especially important in the era when Cuba was actively supporting fights in non-aligned nations,⁸⁵ these early Cuban internationalists took on renewed importance. They represented a historical tradition of Cuban individuals and groups traveling to foreign countries to assist other peoples in military conflicts against enemies viewed as oppressive.

By the 1970s and 1980s, and certainly by the time of the trip to Spain in 1996, surviving Cuban veterans were getting older. Photographs (Figures 8.3–9) of those featured in the articles show aging men.

⁸⁴ Pedro Ortiz D., “Pioneros del internacionalismo: España, siempre en el corazón de los cubanos que luchan por ella,” Expediente 1/138, and Iraidá Calzadilla Rodríguez, “De nuestra historia internacionalista: Un hálito mayor que alienta a la victoria,” Expediente 1/144, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63184, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete. Clippings include no publication information, but news items on the back of the second indicate that it was likely published in 1984 or 1985.

⁸⁵ See Domínguez, *To Make a World Safe for Revolution*, and Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Interestingly, Gleijeses notes that Cuban military personnel who fought in Africa received training from exiled Spanish Republican officers. Cubans stationed in Algeria listened to political instruction from Spanish colonel Angelito Martínez, who, in an effort to occupy troops during free time in Bedeau, “lectured to his heart’s content on the Spanish civil war.” Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 18, 49, 376, 402n25.



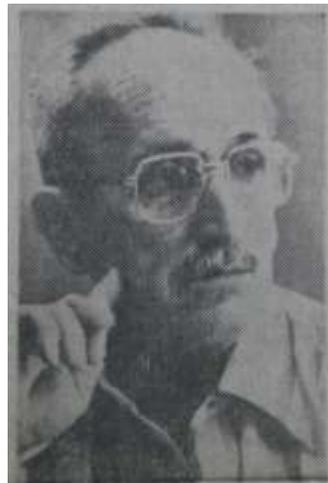
"El comportamiento de los cubanos en España se aprecia por la jerarquía militar que alcanzaron", teniente coronel del MININT Mario Morales.



"Había días que despegábamos a combatir hasta quince veces, porque no teníamos reservas de pilotos", Manuel Fernández.



EVELIO ANEيروس



Isidoro Martínez, que hoy trabaja en Transporte Omnibus Habana, se forjó en el combate con el V Regimiento de Lister y en la Brigada Móvil de Tanques.



Figures 8.3–9 Aging Cuban Spanish Civil War veterans

1930s antifascists already of retirement age likely posed less of a potential threat to Cuban Revolutionary officials than a Rolando Masferrer or a Teté Casuso had in earlier decades. Those featured were known quantities, their political standing long established. The Revolution, too, was getting older. The 1970s and 1980s saw it consolidate power and reach impressive achievements at home and abroad. By 1996 serious new challenges had arisen following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In a context of sudden and drastic economic hardship, any trouble posed by Spanish Civil War veterans to the Revolutionary government was likely practical rather than political in nature.

Increasingly elderly veterans had increasing needs, as documentation of accommodations necessary for the Cuban visitors to Spain in 1996 demonstrates. Although most reported remaining “self-sufficient” in their daily activities, many listed various medical maladies and numerous medications they had to take.⁸⁶ In January of that year in recognition of “the activities carried out in defense of freedom and the democratic principles by the volunteers that made up the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War,” the Spanish government had offered

⁸⁶ Expedientes 5/120–5/137, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63189, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete, Spain.

citizenship through naturalization to aging Spanish Civil War volunteers around the world. With a requirement to forfeit previous nationality, however, the offer met with few acceptances. In 2007, the Historical Memory Act would go on to extend the right of international veterans to citizenship while eliminating the need to give up their original nationalities.⁸⁷ As we have seen, for many Cubans dual nationality was a longstanding reality. The files kept by the A.A.B.I. indicate that one goal of the Association of Cuban Internationalist Veterans during its trip to Spain in 1996 may have been to confirm or negotiate Spanish pension assistance for some or all of the Cuban veterans. The file of Enrique Gómez Corrales, born in Havana but a resident of Spain for a time beginning in 1914 when he was five years old, for instance, includes official Spanish documentation of a pension dated 1996.⁸⁸ And a packet provided to the Spanish organization containing the names and addresses of the Cuban Association members lists their pension information as well as their revolutionary credentials.⁸⁹ Although documentation in the archive does not confirm this hypothesis definitively, the coincidence of the new Spanish law in 1996 along with the pension information included in the files suggests that there may have been a pragmatic consideration at play in the agenda for the Cuban visit to Spain, along with more idealistic and symbolic ones.

Obituaries heralded the death of one of the last known Cuban veterans of the Spanish Civil War in August 2009. The long personal and political trajectories of Universo Lípiz

⁸⁷ Ministerio de Justicia, “Personal formalities and procedures: Request for Spanish citizenship for International Brigade volunteers,” http://www.mjusticia.gob.es/cs/Satellite/en/1200666550200/Tramite_C/1215326476865/Detalle.html (Accessed 5 June 2013).

⁸⁸ Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, “Notificación de Revalorización de 1996,” Expediente 1/125, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63184, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete.

⁸⁹ “Agrupación de Veteranos Internacionalistas Cubanos: España 1936–1939,” Expediente Homenaje CUBA, Legajo Cuba, Caja 63189, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Albacete.

Rodríguez, who died at the age of 91 in his hometown of Matanzas, make his story a fitting endpoint to our journey with Cuba's 1930s antifascists. Lípiz was the son of anarchist parents exiled from Cuba in 1932 for revolutionary activism. His family moved to Barcelona, and when the war began—and Universo was only a teenager—he was involved “in the early skirmishes with the rebels in the Plaza Catalunya” in July 1936. When they entered Barcelona he “went with a group of anarchists to deal with them in the streets” and got shot in the knee. Spanish anarchist Buenaventura Durruti was a friend of his family's, and after convalescence he joined the anarchist Durruti Column to fight for the Republic in various fronts of the war.

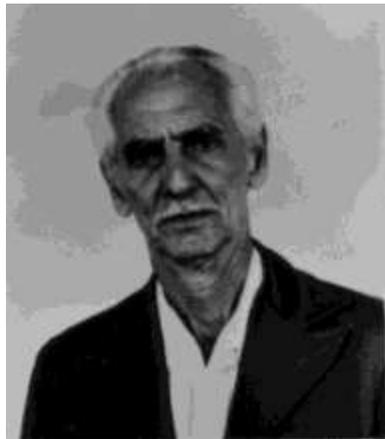


Figure 8.10 Universo Lípiz Rodríguez as an older man⁹⁰

After Republican defeat in 1939 Lípiz spent time in French concentration camps, where he vowed to continue fighting fascism. He joined the French resistance and was taken by the Gestapo as a prisoner of war and held in the German concentration camp at Dachau. Early in 1942 he, now in his twenties, and several companions were able to escape during a blackout, he claimed, after which they survived by stealing food and traveling only under the cover of darkness. Finally making it back to Spain, Universo was arrested by the Guardia Civil and interned at yet another concentration camp prior to being deported back to Cuba. He returned to

⁹⁰ “Brigadista cubano Universo Lipiz Rodríguez,” No. 177, Centro de Documentación de las Brigadas Internacionales (CEDOBI), Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Albacete, Spain.

the island late in 1942. There he took part in the fight against Batista and later the defense against the Bay of Pigs invasion. In October 2008, less than a year before his death, the veteran traveled to Spain as a guest of the A.A.B.I., where he was honored with two medals as an internationalist combatant in the war and expressed the “pride and satisfaction of having defended an ideological position in which I still believe.” Upon his death, his coffin was decorated with “the numerous awards received during his long life.”⁹¹

Yet Universo Lípiz does not appear in the official Cuban lists of veterans of the Spanish conflict published in 1981 and 1990, or in other sources published on the island that account for the Cuban volunteers, even one that documents those in Catalonia specifically.⁹² If the obituaries are accurate, Lípiz was a committed anarchist with an undeniable history of revolutionary activity in Cuba and internationally: anti-Machado, antifascist, anti-Batista, and anti-imperialist. Raúl Roa, friend of Pablo de la Torriente Brau and later devoted Communist within the Cuban Revolutionary government, is quoted in a biography of Universo published in 2004 as having stated: “Lípiz is not a surname; it is a revolutionary institution.”⁹³ It is probable that with this history, Lípiz would have been a complex figure politically for Cuban Revolutionary officials. Yet archival records of the Cuban Communist Party concerning Spanish Civil War veterans and containing assessments of them made only one mention of Universo in a list of names that

⁹¹ Hugo García, “Fallace último matancero defensor de la República Española, *Juventud Rebelde*, 15 August 2009, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/cuba/2009-08-15/fallece-ultimo-matancero-defensor-de-la-republica-espanola/> (Accessed 5 June 2013); Isabel Munera, “El ‘brigadista’ que luchó en tres guerras,” *El Mundo*, 23 August 2009, <http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2009/08/23/opinion/18960598.html> (Accessed 5 June 2013); Michel Porcheron, “Universo Lípiz: último matancero defensor de la República Española,” *Granma*, 3 February 2010, <http://www.granma.cu/espanol/2010/febrero/mier3/universo.html> (Accessed 6 June 2013).

⁹² Porcheron, “Universo Lípiz.”

⁹³ Arcadio Ríos, *Fuego en la sangre* (Matanzas: Ediciones Matanzas, 2004), quoted in Porcheron, “Universo Lípiz.”

included no annotation, suggesting that officials may have taken little notice of him.⁹⁴ Is it possible that he was simply unknown? The possibility seems unlikely if he did indeed participate in the anti-Batista struggle and the Bay of Pigs invasion defense. Given the fact that we have observed in other instances intentional omissions from the official record of 1930s antifascists on political grounds, there exists some suspicion. One author of a commemoration noted the exclusion, and, referring to the idea that Lípiz was unknown, stated provocatively in passing: “There must be other explanation(s).”⁹⁵ With a biography published on the island in 2004, several articles in various Cuban publications in the years following, and commemorations in both *Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde* upon his death in 2009, Universo Lípiz received significant official recognition during his last years. Perhaps, then, the explanation is that publicly celebrating an anarchist veteran who was by all accounts highly intelligent and outspoken was deemed risky—or at least not useful—in Revolutionary Cuba before he was a very elderly man.

Final Thoughts

Coincident with the passing away of the 1930s antifascist generation over the past two decades has been ascension of many of the forces its members sought to fight. Capitalism stands victorious over many previously asserted alternatives, corporations have taken the place of nation-states as principal exploiters of the resources of the earth’s less powerful people and more vulnerable places, many strongman governments still reign oppressively, right-wing fundamentalism makes itself apparent in different settings and contexts around the globe, and

⁹⁴ Doc. 1/2:1/1.10/203–214, Fondo Primer Partido Comunista de Cuba, IHC. Document contains no title, date, or other identifying information.

⁹⁵ Porcheron, “Universo Lípiz.”

even fascism itself—“neo-fascism,” with a nod to the 1930s—is on the rise in Europe, both at the grassroots level and in the form of political parties capable of winning in elections.

The impetus to resist these forces is alive and well, also, if not exactly ascendant. As I conducted research for this dissertation in 2011 and 2012, demonstrations, rebellions, and revolutions erupted across the world, providing me with ample contemporary examples of transnational activism, networks, and solidarity comparable to 1930s antifascism. While in Spain, I watched reports of workers storming the Wisconsin state capitol to protest anti-union measures and of activists fighting to overthrow their dictator in Egypt. Though comparisons made between the two events by some participants and observers were not literally accurate, neither were they laughable, as some experts asserted. It is true that the situations in Egypt and Wisconsin were extremely different, and that most demonstrators in each probably had little understanding of the language, culture, or political realities of the other—but true solidarity born of the shared experience of struggle did exist between them. In Cuba, a Cuban colleague asked me about the Occupy Wall Street strategy, and worried that the movement lacked “revolutionary discipline.” An artist had painted a mural (Figures 8.11 and 8.12) on a University of Havana building depicting a ravenous capitalism monster—whose skin is covered with the names of corporations—gobbling up the world but restrained by ropes hooked into its skin labeled with the Occupy term “the 99%.”⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Photograph by the author, 15 June 2012.



Figures 8.11 and 8.12 Anticapitalist mural on the side of a University of Havana building, June 2012

Substantial barriers extant between Cuba and the United States did not impede Cubans' sense of solidarity with the Yankee popular struggle, reports about which were included in the nightly news. In one striking example of transnational and transhistorical solidarity, Russian activist Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, a member of the female punk rock band Pussy Riot convicted in August 2012 for her group's protest against increasingly authoritarian tendencies of President Vladimir Putin, wore to court a shirt bearing the antifascist Spanish Civil War phrase "¡No pasarán!" Activists in each country saw in the struggles of other places and even eras their own fight.

Recent and current movements are the inheritors of a long history, one example of which has been the subject of this study. By analyzing the diverse elements of Cuban antifascism and support for the Spanish Republic, the activism that drove it and the networks that facilitated it, we have formed a better understanding of a transnational movement, and of transnational solidarity. In so doing, we have gained insight into movements generally and the role of solidarity within them. We have uncovered the diversity and complexity—both personal and political—that exists within movements, learning that idealistic platitudes and myopic interpretations, whether found in propaganda or in history books, are oversimplified and

unrealistic. We have seen idealism clash with both pragmatism and disappointment. We have considered the problem of sustainability in activism, observing how either resilience and continuity or despair and disengagement can result from the many sacrifices and defeats endured by those who choose to struggle and fight. Solidarity is the key to these challenges faced by activists and movements, all of which are applicable also to recent and current efforts. Solidarity allows diverse activists and groups to work together with greater strength. Solidarity builds a human foundation for positive change capable of meeting pragmatic challenges effectively and of withstanding disappointment. Solidarity can be the last safeguard of sustainability in the difficult life of activism when youthful idealism and even ideological convictions have failed to preserve motivation. Transnational solidarity brought diverse Cuban antifascists into a global struggle, along with their brethren from numerous other nations, and sustained the worldwide antifascist movement after the devastating blow of Spanish Republican defeat.

Ahistorical misconceptions about how transnational solidarity functions are common in interpretations of recent and current struggles. Over these past few years I have heard observers acknowledge the influence of movements in the Arab world over those in the United States or the inspiration movements in Latin America have taken from those in Europe. Yet commentators have seemed to struggle with pinpointing why or how this influence and inspiration functions, beyond referencing the role of online social media. They have credited, for example, Twitter with revolution. Also, they have expressed a failure to appreciate how the frustrations of a young professional in Cairo could be truly understood by a public employee in Madison. Citing supposedly irreconcilable obstacles of language, culture, religion, geographic distance, and ignorance of each group about the other, some have claimed that transnational solidarity between such seemingly disparate populations is impossible.

As a case study of a 1930s movement that crossed borders and oceans, this project historicizes present concepts of transnational solidarity. Offering one corrective to these misconceptions, we challenge narratives that attribute fundamental newness to current instances of transnational solidarity or doubt the sincerity or legitimacy of such connections. Examining why, how, and to what extent solidarity functioned transnationally and impacted events in the past, we gain insight into its significance in the present, and work to form a vitally important understanding of how it can move us toward a better world in the future.

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