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Review of Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet, and Cristina Clímaco, eds. *Rethinking Antifascism. History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present*

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**García, Hugo, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet and Cristina Clímaco, eds. *Rethinking Antifascism. History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present*. New York: Berghahn, 2016. 350 pp.**

To edit a book with seventeen authors must be hard. To review it is difficult. The differences in quality, raging from the depth and breadth of the analysis to the clarity of the writing, are the main obstacle when trying to present a fair and balanced appraisal of the book as a whole. The limited space available to the reviewer makes the mission nearly impossible. Nevertheless, it is obvious that in this volume Hugo García and co. have managed to put together a remarkable review of the latest research—both by older and younger scholars—on antifascism; at least for the European context and from a mostly political history point of view.

The emphasis on Europe and politics is not coincidental. Most work on fascism shares these concerns and it is only logical that its nemesis should reflect the same biases. Yet, these emphases have some negative effects on our understanding. Three stand out. The first is that it might make us assume that fascism is more of a core ideology and less of an instrument used by certain social sectors like reactionary elites to: 1) achieve political and social domination and 2) ensure a controlled path to modernization. The second negative effect is that the attraction of the ideological and ceremonial aspects—not to mention the criminal activities of the fascist regimes that ruled Italy, Germany or Spain—might make us forget the role of fascism elsewhere during the interwar period (in China, Japan, India, South Africa, Middle East and Latin-America) and after World War Two, when it disguised itself as anti-Communism. These views (and blindspots) affect our understanding of antifascism. For example, only one chapter in this book deals with a country outside of Europe (Argentina). Likewise, while the semi-failed Popular Fronts of Spain and France are the objects of the attention they deserve, the more successful Chilean Popular Front that led to the presidency of Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1938-1941) is not even mentioned. The third and final negative effect, which is even more pronounced in the scholarship on antifascism, is that the emphasis on political organizations has resulted in the neglect of social roots and social movements.

There are two periods that are particularly scrutinized in this book: one is the 1930s, which we can extend to June 1941; the other is the post-war period. At the core of both periods lays the same problem: the role of Communist parties, or rather the Soviet Union, in antifascist identity and organizations. In this sense, Hugo García is right when he argues, using Robert Paxton's famous analysis, that antifascism, like fascism, has to be understood as an "evolving reality" (103). This developing and difficult identity is very well represented in the poignant story of Ernst Thälmann, the Communist German leader who the Nazi's imprisoned, and later murdered (23-42). Thälmann, as Anson Rabinbach explains, was not an attractive personality but he became a *cause célèbre* of the left before being betrayed by Stalin, who conveniently forgot about his suffering after the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact with Hitler on 23 August 1939. From this date until the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 antifascism, as far as the Communists were concerned, was not just dead but buried.

This problematic relationship between Communism and antifascism runs through many of the chapters of this book, and of course re-appears with the Cold War. This is reflected in Mercedes Yusta's analysis of the 1945 pro-Communist Women's

International Democratic Federation (167-184). Yusta approvingly cites the travails of Dolores Ibárruri, no doubt a grand—and problematic—symbol of both Communism and female emancipation. However, the story gets less glorious when we explore the implications for antifascism of the actions and words of Ibárruri and those of other female leaders of the organization—such as the notorious and, in practice, more important, but unmentioned here, Romanian Communist Ana Pauker—who staunchly defended Stalinist positions. These women no doubt saw themselves as Communists first and antifascists second (and in some cases, but not always, as feminists third). This had serious consequences. Among other things, in those years the Communist parties in Eastern Europe were busy not just cleaning their countries of supposed or real fascist legacies but also eliminating, cajoling or bribing fellow leftist political leaders in order to create people's republics (aka Communist dictatorships). This was a throwback to the International's position before 1935, when Social democrats were targeted as fascists (and very soon, Trotskyists, Bukharinists, etc.) with deadly results.

There are some thought-provoking chapters in this book, such as the one by Michael Seidman who questions the antifascism of the French Popular Front (43-60). I do not agree with his analysis but I deeply respect his iconoclastic proposition. There are also a few questionable judgements. For example, in the otherwise excellent piece on revisionism that closes the book (321-338), Enzo Traverso makes a direct connection between the unprofessional and often unethical works of the notorious Spanish revisionist Pío Moa and the professional works of historians Manuel Álvarez and Fernando del Rey Reguillo. I must object to Traverso's analysis. This link is unwarranted because it reflects neither the objective nor the professional proficiency of these two last authors. Furthermore, the claim that their focus on the violence and shortcomings of the Spanish Second Republic is a "different strategy" (326)—which I must gather means a concerted attempt to normalize the Francoist dictatorship—is unfair since it implies an intention, and even a collusion between two authors (who do not always agree on crucial aspects).

This review has left out many important contributors to this book. I apologize to them because I do not render the honor that their work deserves. They have contributed to what I consider to be the main achievement of this book: a useful, far from monolithic and up to date introduction to the complexities and evolving contradictions of antifascism.

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