Transnational History: A New Paradigm for Anti-Fascist Studies?

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Anti-fascism – a hallmark of the left since the 1930s, and a vague term for active opposition to Italian fascism, German Nazism and similar movements in the interwar period – used to be studied as a brief episode in the history of European nation states. The available syntheses read like collections of national studies with a clear European or Western focus. However, methodological nationalism may soon become a thing of the past – the last few years have brought a transnational turn in anti-fascist studies, which this special issue tries both to illustrate and to discuss.

Anti-fascism, a hallmark of the left since the 1930s and an ill-defined term for active opposition to fascism, Nazism and similar movements in the interwar period, used to be studied as a brief episode in the history of European nation states.[1] The available syntheses – including the most complete, edited by Alberto De Bernardi and Paolo Ferrari and published in Italian in 2004 – read like collections of national studies with a clear European focus.[2] Regional and local approaches have tended to be even narrower in scope, even when they admit, as the editors of the collected volume *Opposing Fascism* (1999) did, that anti-fascism was 'a pan-European phenomenon'.[3] A more recent collection on the history, memory and historiography of anti-fascism

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[1] Glenda Sluga, 'Fascism and Anti-Fascism', in Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier, eds., *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 381–2.

[2] Enzo Collotti, *L'antifascismo in Italia e in Europa (1922–1939)* (Turin: Loescher, 1975); Jacques Droz, *Histoire de l'antifascisme en Europe, 1923–1939* (Paris: La Découverte, 1985 and 2001); Larry Ceplair, *Under the Shadow of War: Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Marxists, 1918–1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Alberto De Bernardi and Paolo Ferrari, eds., *Antifascismo e identità europea* (Rome: Carocci, 2004).

[3] Tim Kirk and Anthony McElligott, 'Introduction. Community, authority and resistance to fascism', in T. Kirk and A. McElligot, eds., *Opposing Fascism. Community, Authority and Resistance in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2.

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has tried to overcome this weakness by including comparative studies and bringing the Americas into the picture, but still views the phenomenon through the lens of European national histories.[4]

However, the last few years have brought a transnational turn in anti-fascist studies, as they have in most fields of historical research, which this special issue tries both to illustrate and to discuss.[5] Gerd-Rainer Horn pointed out as far back as 1996 that socialist reactions to fascism in the 1930s were largely determined by the 'transnational consciousness' of the European left.[6] His implicit invitation to rethink the phenomenon was heeded in 2010, when Dan Stone stressed the need to internationalise the history of British anti-fascism by recognising the intellectual contribution that refugees from Central Europe made to it, Isabelle Richet described women's anti-fascist networks in Britain in the same period as 'inherently transnational' and Joseph Fronczak reinterpreted the Hands Off Ethiopia movement of 1935–1936 as a key step in the emergence of a 'global left'.[7] The need for transnational or comparative approaches was also emphasised at international conferences on the topic held in Geneva in 2012, in Paris in 2013, in Saarbrücken in 2014 and in Valencia in 2016; these were genuinely transnational exchanges whose debates have greatly inspired the present collection.[8] And this trend has only started: as these lines are being written Michael Seidman is exploring 'Atlantic antifascisms' in the years 1936–1945,[9] and a number of research projects are rethinking the anti-fascist activities of international organisations, the circulation of anti-fascist exiles and ideas across states and continents and the ways in which anti-fascist 'spatial politics' anticipates the current anti-globalisation movement.[10]

[4] Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet and Cristina Clímaco, eds., *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory, and Politics, 1922 to the present* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2016).

[5] Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–18.

[6] Gerd-Rainer Horn, *European Socialists Respond to Fascism. Ideology, Activism and Contingency in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 117–36.

[7] Dan Stone, 'Anti-Fascist Europe Comes to Britain: Theorising Fascism as a Contribution to Defeating it', in Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz, eds., *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War period* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 183–4; Isabelle Richet, 'Marion Cave Roselli and the Transnational Women's Anti-fascist networks', *Journal of Women's History*, 24, 3 (2012), 117–39; Joseph Fronczack, 'Local People's Global Politics: A Transnational History of the Hands Off Ethiopia Movement of 1935', *Diplomatic History*, 39, 2 (2015), 245–74.

[8] *Antifascism as a Practice and as a Discourse*, Geneva, May–June 2012; *L'Antifascisme en question, 1922–1945*, Paris, June 2013; *Anti-fascism as a transnational phenomenon*, Saarbrücken, Oct. 2014; panel *Antifascism in a Global Perspective: Exile Communities and Transnational Movements against Fascism, 1930—945*, European Social Science History Conference, Valencia, Apr. 2016.

[9] Michael Seidman, *Atlantic Antifascisms, 1936–1945*. Unpublished manuscript generously shared by the author.

[10] David Featherstone, 'Black Internationalism, Subaltern Cosmopolitanism, and the Spatial Politics of Antifascism', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 103, 6 (2013), 1406–20. See, besides the projects included in this collection, Adrian Zimmermann, 'The International Labour Movement's Struggle Against Fascism', 2014, available online at http://www.academia.edu/6802568 (last visited 21 Apr. 2016); Silvia Madotto, 'Transnational Antifascism. Silvio Trentin and His Activity between Toulouse and the University of Padua (1926–1944)', in Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-

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In short, the demand apparently exists for a new, explicitly transnational approach to anti-fascism capable of replacing the three large frameworks of analysis that have successively guided scholarly literature on the topic since the Second World War – the moment when anti-fascism won and became history. The approach that dominated post-war European historiography and public memory, commonly known in Italy as the 'anti-fascist paradigm', has been described as a grand narrative based on the celebration of the Resistance, which conveniently passed over in silence the history of support for, and collaboration with, fascism and Nazism in Europe.[11] After the collapse of the Communist Bloc historians such as Renzo de Felice, François Furet and Antonia Grunenberg attacked this 'vulgate' by presenting anti-fascism in a completely opposite light – as 'the new face of Stalinism' in the 1930s, the great 'myth' of the left in the twentieth century and the mirror image of fascist and Nazi totalitarianism.[12] Since the late 1990s, scholars such as Bruno Groppo, Anson Rabinbach and Enzo Traverso have challenged this revisionist view by emphasising the plurality of anti-fascism and its connection to non-communist political cultures, including liberalism.[13] This third approach, which reappraises the enlightened strand of anti-fascism while maintaining an appropriate critical distance, informs the latest – and, arguably, the best – national histories of the movement.[14]

Interest in transnational anti-fascism has grown in parallel with this post-revisionist approach, and in tune with a general trend in recent historical writing. Transnational history has already contributed valuable studies on various topics, including fascism, communism and anti-communism.[15] However, it may prove especially useful for

Liebe, eds., *Fascism without Borders. Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, forthcoming.

[11] Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60; Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin, 2005), 89.

[12] Renzo de Felice, *Rosso e Nero* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1995), 12–25; François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 216 [*Le passé d'une illusion. Essai sur l'idée communiste au XXe siècle,* Paris, Robert Laffont/Calmann-Lévy, 1995]; Antonia Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus –Ein deutscher Mythos* (Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 1993).

[13] Anson Rabinbach, 'Introduction', *Legacies of Antifascism, New German Critique*, 67 (Winter 1996), 16; Bruno Groppo, 'Fascismes, antifascismes et communismes', in Michel Dreyfus et al., eds., *Le siècle des communismes* (Paris: L'Atelier, 2000), 499–511; Enzo Traverso, 'Intellectuals and Anti-Fascism: For a Critical Historization' C. Mandell, trans., *New Politics*, IX, 4 (Winter 2004); Alberto Di Bernardi, 'Introduzione. L'antifascismo: una questiona storica aperta', in A. Di Bernardi and P. Ferrari, eds.; *Antifascismo e identità europea* (Roma: Carocci, 2004) xi–xxxii.

[14] Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); and 'Preface: Towards a New Anti-Fascist "minimum"?', in Copsey and Olechnowicz, *Varieties of Anti-Fascism*, xviii; Gilles Vergnon, *L'antifascisme en France, de Mussolini à Le Pen* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009), 61–3; Andrés Bisso, ed., *El antifascismo argentino* (Buenos Aires: Buenos Libros-CeDinCi, 2007); Christopher Vials, *Haunted by Hitler: Liberals, the Left and the Fight against Fascism in the United States* (Amherst: University of Massachussets Press, 2014).

[15] See, for fascism, Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919–1945* (Durham: N.C., 2010); and Arnd Bauerkämper, 'Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922–1939', *East Central Europe*, 37 (2010), 214–246; for communism, Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the Cominternians* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *International Communism and the Spanish Civil War. Solidarity and Suspicion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and

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understanding interwar anti-fascism, which appears in many respects to be the ideal type of a transnational movement. First, it was closely linked to long-standing international movements (socialism, communism, anarchism, liberalism, Catholicism, freemasonry) with well-established channels of communication and social networks. Many anti-fascists belonged to the diaspora of political exiles who had escaped from countries under fascist or authoritarian rule. Anti-fascism, like its nineteenth century predecessors, was to a large extent a 'culture of exile' built in such metropoles as Berlin, Paris, Moscow, Barcelona, London and New York.[16] Anti-fascists typically recognised one another as part of a 'common humanity', lived 'cross-border lives' and felt compelled to engage in quarrels in 'far away countries between people of which [they] knew nothing' (to quote Neville Chamberlain's infamous remark about Czechoslovakia before the Munich conference).[17] During the movement's heyday in the mid-1930s, they shared slogans ('They shall not pass!', borrowed from French propaganda in the First World War), gestures (the raised clenched fist invented by the Communist Party of Germany) and an 'aesthetics of resistance' captured by politically engaged writers and artists such as André Malraux, John Heartfield and Robert Capa.[18] Most importantly, they shared a historical experience marked by 'transnational moments of change', above all the Nazi seizure of power in Germany in 1933 (the moment when fascism started to be perceived as an international phenomenon), the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935 (which heralded the Popular Front era) and the Nazi–Soviet Pact in 1939 (which closed this era until Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union brought communists back into the struggle).[19] And yet, anti-fascism remained diverse – across nations, regions and political cultures – a common ground for various strategies, visions and discourses rather than a unified movement, as the contributions to this special issue clearly demonstrate.

for anti-communism, Luc van Dongen, Stéphanie Roulin and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War. Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[16] Traverso, 'Intellectuals and Anti-Fascism', 1–15; Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile: Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Frits van Hoolthon and Marcel Van Der Linden, eds., *Internationalism in the Labour Movement, 1830–1940* (Leiden: Brill, 1988); Pietro Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy: London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880–1917)* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

[17] Rabinbach, 'Introduction: Legacies of Antifascism', 7. See also Stéfanie Prezioso, '"Aujourd'hui en Espagne, demain en Italie": l'exil antifasciste italien et la prise d'armes révolutionnaire', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 93 (2007), 79–92 and Tom Buchanan, '"Shanghai-Madrid Axis"? Comparing British Responses to the Conflicts in Spain and China, 1936–39', *Contemporary European History*, 21, 4 (2012), 533–52.

[18] Gilles Vergnon, 'Le "poing levé", du rite soldatique au rite de masse', *Le Mouvement social*, 212, (2005), 77–91; Peter Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance: Volume 1: A Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) [originally published in German in three volumes in 1975]; Cristina Cuevas Wolf, 'Montage as Weapon: The Tactical Alliance between Willi Münzenberg and John Heartfield', *New German Critique*, 107 (2009), 197–203.

[19] Gerd-Rainer Horn and Padraic Kenney, eds., *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). On the impact of the Nazi takeover, see Horn, *European Socialists respond to Fascism*; on that of the German–Soviet Pact, see Bernhard H. Bayerlein, *Der Verräter, Stalin, bist Du!' Vom Ende der Linken Solidarität. Komintern und kommunistische Parteien im Zweiten Weltkrieg 1939–1941* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlagsgruppe, 2008).

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Rather than an ideal type, anti-fascism may prove to be an excellent case study to test the value of transnational history itself, which remains controversial. Is this just an attractive 'brand', or a 'way of seeing' focused on movements, flows, connections and circulations of people, ideas and symbols or a new 'grand narrative' capable of transforming our understanding of historical concepts and practices?[20] If history is made 'in the movement between places, sites, and regions', anti-fascism was largely *made* by the thinkers and activists (the names Willi Münzenberg, Henri Barbusse, Leon Trotsky, Carlo Roselli and Luigi Sturzo come to mind) who tried to check the spread of fascism by establishing networks and organisations capable of bridging national and ideological boundaries.[21] However, states such as the Soviet Union under Stalin, France and Spain under their Popular Front governments, the United States under Roosevelt and Mexico under Cárdenas also played important roles in the movement, and national cultures influenced it in decisive ways. Spain's 'revolutionary anti-fascism', linked to a simplistic conception of Marxism and to the strongest anarchist movement in the world, was certainly different in its goals and methods from the 'counterrevolutionary anti-fascism' that prevailed in France, Britain or the United States in the 1930s,[22] just as communist anti-fascism was more prone to violence in Britain than in the United States.[23] National identities remained central to anti-fascist culture – especially after the adoption of the Popular Front strategy by the Comintern in 1935 –, and national traditions shaped views of fascism and anti-fascism even in exile.[24]

On a more general level, research on anti-fascism may help cast light on the central process studied by specialists in transnational history – namely, the development of an increasingly interconnected civil society, with global institutions, ideas and a supranational public sphere over the last 500 years. The interwar years used to be considered a step backwards in this long-term process, but a recent volume of essays on the period has made clear that transnational ideas and practices continued in areas such as pacifism, humanitarianism, urban reform, economic analysis, feminism and science and technology.[25] The 1920s and 1930s were also a key period in the emergence of global repertoires of protest within the labour movement and a golden age for transnational solidarity movements: the trials of Sacco and Vanzetti, the Scottsboro Boys and Ernst Thälmann and the conflicts in Abyssinia, Spain and China

[20] Matthew Connelly and Sven Beckert, in C. A. Bayly *et al.*, 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History', *American Historical Review*, 111, 5 (2006), 1454.

[21] Isabel Hofmeyr, in 'AHR Conversation: On Transnational History', 1443–44.

[22] Seidman, *Atlantic Antifascisms 1936–1945*, forthcoming.

[23] Nigel Copsey, 'Communists and the inter-war anti-Fascist struggle in the United States and Britain', *Labour History Review*, 76, 3 (2011), 184–206.

[24] Serge Wolikow and Annie Bleton-Ruget, eds., *Antifascisme et nation. Les gauches européennes au temps du Front populaire* (Dijon: EUD, 1998); Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*. Stalinism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Evolution of Soviet Culture, 1931–1941 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 4–5.

[25] Daniel Laqua, ed., *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

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are just some of the best-known examples.[26] As the contributions to this special issue make clear, anti-fascism spread in parallel with other transnational movements such as pacifism, anti-colonialism, feminism and anti-capitalism in its various forms. A closer analysis of its emergence in different areas and at different times may confirm that the global civil society built over the course of the long nineteenth century remained strong in Eric Hobsbawm's 'age of catastrophe', and may help us understand its re-emergence after the Second World War.

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The articles in this special issue – all part of original, ongoing research projects – discuss these problems and many others by exploring the transnational features of anti-fascism in three broad and closely interlinked realms: those of space, time and people. Above all, they engage with the central issue of transnational history – the geographic dimensions of world historical processes – some from an explicitly transnational perspective, most from a comparative one which, however, allows them to capture the genuinely transnational processes at work. Their focus is Europe, where anti-fascism emerged in the early 1920s and which remained its central base of operations. Europe was the place where the main efforts to organise a centralised response were made, where the main international conferences were held, where anti-fascism had its various capitals (Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Moscow, Barcelona) and where it interacted with a series of local groups in the context of the emerging public sphere of the interwar period (as seen in the article by Xosé Manoel Núñez Seixas). But they also pay attention to the spread of anti-fascist ideas and initiatives from Europe to other continents (in particular to the three Latin American countries examined by Andrea Acle-Kreysing: Mexico, Argentina and Bolivia), as well as to the external concerns that influenced European anti-fascism, such as the Italo–Abyssinian War of 1935–1936 and the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945 (discussed by Tom Buchanan).

There are, however, limits to this collection's transnationalism, in geographic as well as in political terms. It leaves out dictatorial countries, where anti-fascism remained clandestine (as in Italy and Germany and most of Europe during the Second World War), or was officially promoted (as in the Soviet Union under Stalin and later in the People's Democracies after 1945).[27] It only briefly touches on the colonial dimension such as the Arab world (with important sites of anti-fascist activism as

[26] See Fronczak, 'Local People's Global Politics'; Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009); Lisa McGirr, 'The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti: A Global History', *The Journal of American History*, 93, 4 (2007), 1085–115; Charlotte Alston, ed., *Transnational solidarities and the politics of the left, 1890–1990*, special issue of *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 21, 12 (2014) and Kasper Braskén, *The International Workers' Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity: Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[27] On the USSR, see José María Faraldo, 'An Antifascist Political Identity? On the Cult of Antifascism in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia', in Hugo García et al., *Rethinking Antifascism*, 202–27; on the people's democracies, Josie McLellan, *Antifascism and Memory in East Germany: Remembering*

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Egypt or Algeria), India, whose National Congress Party played an active role in the anti-fascist movement in the late 1930s, and China, whose long struggle against Japanese aggression has only recently begun to be considered as a key episode in the history of anti-fascism.[28] The contributions underline the remarkable power of anti-fascism to cross borders (through propaganda, exiles and contagion), but also the power of borders to contain anti-fascism (through legal and police persecution, as shown in Claudia Baldoli's article on Italian exile Guido Miglioli's life in Paris and Brussels) and, more crucially, to transform it. Indeed, the peripheral areas of the anti-fascist world system actively adapted concepts and tactics to local cultures and conflicts, as Acle-Kreysing shows in her study on German anti-fascist exiles in Argentina and Mexico.

These geographic issues overlap with chronological problems, as the struggle against fascism was in constant motion as well as undergoing constant change. The articles here focus on the heyday of anti-fascism in the interwar period (Bruno Groppo's 'historic antifascism', spanning from 1933 to 1945), when the circulations of ideas, initiatives and projects was most intense, but they also consider its endurance beyond the fascist epoch. Kasper Braskén makes an obvious, if frequently ignored, point by showing that the anti-fascist crusade of the mid-1930s was largely anticipated by, and indebted to, the concepts and strategies adopted by a series of activists and organisations, above all the ephemeral International Antifascist League founded by Willi Münzenberg and other Communists months after Mussolini's March on Rome in October 1922. Baldoli, Núñez Seixas and Jens Späth explore the initiatives and networks established by Italian exiles, French liberals and European socialists from the mid-1920s onwards, which were certainly timid and uncoordinated as compared with those of the Popular Front era, but also deserving of a place in the history of anti-fascism.

Späth's article on German, French and Italian socialists highlights two other important facts to keep in mind when trying to reconstruct the lifespan of anti-fascism: first, the way different national-political chronologies influenced its development in various countries, in itself a good example of the intimate interplay between national and transnational histories; and second, the way the anti-fascist identity and networks that were forged in the interwar years inspired actions of solidarity and memories among European socialists throughout the Second World War (the Resistance, often disconnected from the anti-fascist tradition) and in the early post-war years, even if these were soon overshadowed by anti-totalitarianism as the hegemonic ideology in the West during the Cold War – paradoxically – after the end of fascism made it possible to implement a variety of plans for an anti-fascist post-war order. Finally, Nigel Copsey enters the virtually unmapped field of contemporary

the International Brigades 1945–1989 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Catherine Plum, *Antifascism After Hitler: East German Youth and Socialist Memory, 1949–1989* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[28] Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski: *Confronting Fascism in Egypt. Dictatorship vs. Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Maria Framke, Delhi-Rom-Berlin. Die indische Wahrnehmung von Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus, 1922–1939 (Darmstadt: WBG, 2012); Tom Buchanan, '"Shanghai-Madrid Axis"?'.

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European anti-fascism by exploring the cross-border exchanges between British and German militant anti-fascists in the 1990s and, in doing so, highlights the substantial transformations that the movement's doctrines and social bases have undergone, as well as the tensions that these changes have produced.

In short, this special issue invites the reader to view anti-fascism from a long-term perspective similar to that adopted by recent national studies, and to understand it – in the same way that Robert Paxton has asked us to view its enemy – as a dynamic movement in the making.[29] These studies make it clear that an anti-fascist culture survived the disappearance of its *raison d'être*, shaping both the institutions of many post-war European democracies and also the political culture of the post-war generation as the widespread 'rhetoric of historical analogy' used by German, French and Italian student movements in 1968 attests.[30] Copsey makes it clear that present-day militant anti-fascism is no longer a mass movement, but also reflects striking continuities between its assumptions – namely, that fascism is an inherent tendency of liberal democracy and capitalism – and the claims made by communist propaganda in the 1920s, described by Braskén.

Furthermore, the special issue sheds light on classic problems in the historiography of anti-fascism and transnational history – above all that of its actors, agents and ideas.[31] The issue focuses on the organised and political aspects of anti-fascism, a reflection of the priorities of current research on the topic. These articles raise interesting methodological problems by combining a traditional top-down approach based on archival sources from international organisations with attention to middle-rank activists, based on such personal sources as letters and journals and more attentive to 'lives across borders' (Baldoli) and ideological transitions (Braskén).

Ultimately, there is no such thing as anti-fascism: there are only anti-fascists, a dizzyingly varied set of political and social actors who persistently refused to conform to any ideal type, as their antifascism coexisted – and often clashed – with other ideological, national and even religious identities.[32] Braskén, Acle-Kreysing and Späth review the well-known initiatives taken by European communists and socialists through their international organisations and national branches and emphasise their tendency to compete among themselves more often than to cooperate against the common enemy. Baldoli explores the more obscure actions of Italian 'Communist Catholic' exiles, an early version of liberation theology promoted by the leaders of the White Leagues (Catholic peasant trade unions) in Northern Italy in the early 1900s, and their efforts to form a 'White International' in Europe in the 1930s, as well as the contradictions that these men faced as they tried to reconcile their political and religious convictions.

[29] Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

[30] Geoff Eley, 'Legacies of Antifascism: Constructing Democracy in Postwar Europe', in *New German Critique*, 7 (Winter 1996), 73–100; Ben Mercer, 'Specters of Fascism: The Rhetoric of Historical Analogy in 1968', *The Journal of Modern History*, 88, 1 (2016), 96–129.

[31] Patricia Clavin, 'Defining Transnationalism', *Contemporary European History*, 14, 4 (2005), 422.

[32] See Nigel Copsey: 'Preface: Towards a New Anti-Fascist "minimum"?', xiv–xxi.

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Together, these articles contribute to the ongoing research into 'varieties of anti-fascism', whose interest lies not so much in giving credit to new actors but rather in highlighting the multiple meanings of anti-fascism as a concept, as well as its connections and tensions with previous movements.[33] Braskén shows how communist anti-fascism emerged in connection to working-class internationalism and pacifism, even if it would develop along very different lines in the 1930s. Núñez Seixas recovers the little known but 'distinctive' contribution of European ethno-nationalist groups from eastern, central and southern Europe to anti-fascism in the 1930s, even if he also emphasises its limits when compared to anti-communist and fascist groups and governments and interprets it as 'a marriage of convenience'. Conversely, Buchanan revises traditional assumptions about the alliance between anti-fascism and anti-colonialism. Stressing the limits of Joseph Fronczak's concept of a 'global left', he argues that British and French anti-fascists active in the Popular Front era and during the Second World War tended to prioritise the former over the latter, or even conceived anti-fascism as the best tool to defend the 'imperial' interests of both countries. (This was a tendency that, paradoxically, did not alienate anti-colonial activists such as Jawaharlal Nehru, for whom anti-fascism and particularly humanitarian aid to the Spanish Republic had an instrumental value as a way of displaying India as 'a country that was ready for independence').[34]

Predictably, transnational history confirms that anti-fascism emerged and grew as a transnational movement, a movement that conceptualised fascism as an international menace and, as Braskén here points out, made efforts to fight it across national lines both out of conviction and out of an awareness of the publicity advantages of such an approach. Anti-fascists, like their nineteenth-century forerunners in the democratic and workers' movements, were keenly aware of the transnational character of political, economic, social and cultural trends in the modern world, even if they could adopt both cosmopolitan and nationalist identities as did the ethno-nationalist émigrés and the 'imperial' anti-fascists studied here by Núñez Seixas and Buchanan. Indeed, as Buchanan argues, one of anti-fascism's main contributions to the history of transnationalism was to replace the prevailing pattern of solidarity of the nineteenth century – the '*cause célèbre* model', individual and petition-based – with one involving entire peoples, with mass action and violence and war as methods, even though anti-fascist volunteers could also still be seen as inheritors to a long tradition of transnational 'soldiers of conscience' which stretches back to the Greek War of Independence of the 1820s.[35]

[33] Copsey and Olechnowicz, *Varieties of Anti-Fascism*.

[34] Maria Framke, 'Political Humanitarianism in the 1930s: Indian Aid for Republican Spain', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 23, 1–2 (2016), 64.

[35] Elizabeth Roberts, *'Freedom, Faction, Fame and Blood': British Soldiers of Conscience in Greece, Spain, and Finland* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010). Transnational perspectives on the International Brigades include Helen Graham, *The War and its Shadow: Spain's Civil War in Europe's Long Twentieth Century* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2012), 75–96; and Nir Arielli, 'Getting There: Enlistment Considerations and the Recruitment Networks of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War', in Nir Arielli and Bruce Collins, eds., *Transnational Soldiers. Foreign Military Enlistment in the Modern Era* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 219–32.

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Beyond the mentioned insights, the collection does not solve the problems that have dominated recent academic debate on the topic, such as the nature of anti-fascism.[36] If anything, it presents the movement in a more complex light: anti-fascism remains a 'monumental ambiguity', a protean and changing project, a 'structure of feeling' rather than a coherent concept.[37] However, as they follow its chaotic trajectories across the world from the 1920s on, they seem to confirm a recent trend of approaching anti-fascism as 'a representation affair', or, more precisely, as the variety of organised responses inspired by fear of Italian fascism or of other movements perceived as being fundamentally similar to it, which typically involved efforts to join forces in a 'united front' with other individuals and groups perceived as 'anti-fascist', both at home and abroad.[38] This explains the crucial role played by propaganda in anti-fascism as a way of building bridges among very different groups, as well as the movement's persistent tendency to create 'umbrella organisations', often ineffective beyond their publicity value, from the 1920s to the present.

Nor does this special issue settle the old debate on the achievements of anti-fascism, traditionally dominated by the pessimists, despite Michael Seidman's provocative view of it as 'the most powerful ideology of the twentieth century'.[39] The articles illuminate only tiny pieces of this vast terrain, which may be presented as evidence of failure as well as of success. Anti-fascists certainly failed to build anything remotely similar to an Antifascist International, a global or even a European Popular Front, but their ability to build platforms in such remote countries as Bolivia and to create a trans-continental debate on fascism and anti-fascism (Acle-Kreysing) was certainly a remarkable feat.

Even if the contributions are only 'indicative' (Copsey), they may help historians rethink fundamental categories by highlighting the contradictions and grey zones that envelop old concepts such as fascism, democracy, the nation and the left, as well as the prevailing view of cultural globalisation as a linear and smooth progress. Ultimately, the collection touches on a central paradox of transnational history: national, political and social differences complicate transnational mobilisation in the age of the internet as much as they did in the 1930s, when letters could take weeks to reach their recipients (as in Acle-Kreysing's Bolivia). Contributors to this special issue find this process of deconstruction – the attempt to write what Baldoli calls 'an ideologically complex history of Europe' reaching out to the rest of the world – both illuminating and exciting, and hope that their efforts encourage the dialogue between different historiographical communities and inspire new and more ambitious projects.

[36] See, for instance, Nigel Copsey: 'Preface: Towards a New Anti-Fascist "minimum"?', xiv–xxi.
[37] Ceplair, *Under the Shadow of War*, 3–4; Vials, *Haunted by Hitler*, 8 [quoting Raymond Williams's *Preface to Film*, 1954].
[38] 'Affaire de représentation', in Vergnon, *L'antifascisme en France*, 15.
[39] Seidman, *Atlantic Antifascisms, 1936–1945*, forthcoming.

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