Ariel Mae Lambe, *No Barrier Can Contain It: Cuban Antifascism and the Spanish Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. xvi + 310 pp. (Paper US\$34.95)

During the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), roughly 35,000 men and women from more than 60 countries volunteered to form part of the International Brigades, which came to the aid of the Second Spanish Republic, as the nation's democratically elected government attempted to put down a military uprising led by right-wing military forces. Why did those men and women volunteer to fight fascism in Spain?

If we could visit a perfect archive, with magical access into the documentation and even the thought processes of each one of the volunteers, we could come up with 35,000 different answers to this single question. (Or perhaps even more, as many of the volunteers often gave different—and at times conflicting—answers to this question, depending on the identity of their interlocutor, and the date of the response.) Another approach—though one not without its own limitations and pitfalls—would be to assemble an archive that revealed the motivations of the volunteers from each of the nations whence the volunteers hailed.

In this beautifully researched, tightly structured, and elegantly written book, Ariel Mae Lambe provides a rich and multilayered set of responses to this question, in the specific context of the more than 1,000 Cuban-born volunteers who took up arms against the right-wing insurgents in Spain. With rigor and creativity, she nimbly shuttles between the biographical and the national contexts of Cuban antifascism, noting on almost every page how the individual lives of so many Cubans, as well as the history and the projects of the Caribbean nation writ large, were already (and still are) immersed in transnational processes. She demonstrates how traveling across an ocean to fight in what was supposedly a “foreign” war could be thought of, by the protagonists themselves, not only as a form of international solidarity, not only a means toward self-fulfillment and self-loyalty, but also as a more or less direct intervention in the construction of a New Cuba.

Chapter 1 explores the complex intersections of Cuban national politics in the 1920s and 1930s with the rise of fascism (and, ergo, antifascism). Chapter 2 explores Cuban responses to Mussolini's 1935 invasion of Ethiopia, paying special attention to the reactions and actions of Communists and Afrodescendants. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the extraordinary married couple Pablo de la Torriente Brau and Tete Casuso. De la Torriente fought and died in Spain, becoming an early martyr to Cuban—and international—antifascism, as well an important recruitment icon for Cuban volunteers in both Havana and New

York City, and Casuso, founded an important Cuban organization to aid Republican children during the Spanish Civil War. Lambe studies the strategies that Casuso was forced to use to navigate the turbulent waters of nonintervention and anticommunism in Cuba. The special linguistic, historical, cultural, and experiential ties that the Cuban volunteers had with both Spain and the United States are the focus of Chapter 5, with particular attention given to Afro-Cubans and Freemasons as quintessentially transnational subjects. Chapter 6 explores the Cuban version of the problem that plagued and perhaps even sealed the fate of the Spanish Republic—strife and factionalism within the antifascist left. Lambe shows how the Spanish Civil War galvanized the Cuban left, providing “an impetus for unity, which was vital for the continuation of struggle at home and abroad” (p. 21). That very continuation is the subject of the book’s disappointingly brief conclusion and postscript, which look at both the “mainstreaming” of antifascism in Cuba during World War II and the Cuban Revolution’s fascinating and problematic appropriation and rewriting of Cuban antifascism from the 1920s and 1930s.

Conventional visions of the volunteers of the International Brigades often depict them predominantly as participants in a foreign war, seeing them either positively, as altruistic paragons of solidarity, or negatively, as interlopers interfering in someone else’s war. Both visions are constrained by the same notion: the idea that biographical, national, and international projects and processes can be kept divorced from one another. Lambe shows us throughout this book how the antifascists that she studies did not abide by this compartmentalization of experience and action. For them, the lines between self-interest and altruism, between “domestic” and “international” initiatives were blurry. Lambe’s recovery of this holistic perspective is invaluable not only because it allows us to understand on its own terms the history of Cuban antifascism, but also because it helps us understand why and how antifascism can—and should—be practiced in places and times where and when, most would argue, fascism is not, in any strict sense, in power. Let’s say, Cuba in 1936 (or 2021). Or the United States in 2021 (or 1936).

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