

INTRODUCTION

GENDERING ANTIFASCISM

Women's Activism in Argentina and the World, 1918–1947

“I was active in politics . . . in the Junta de la Victoria [Victory Board],” Anita Lang, a former actress, told me proudly.¹ She was one of the persons I interviewed in the early 2000s for a book on the history of Jewish Argentine women.² A significant minority of my other elderly interlocutors also highlighted their participation in this group. They said that it was a large organization that spanned the country and sent goods to the Allies during World War II. Although I had researched Argentine history for over twenty years, I had never heard of it.

The Victory Board’s mere existence during a time in which Argentine women could not yet vote raised a host of questions. I wondered how these disenfranchised women fought fascism at home and abroad. Who joined the group, and how did it unite and energize people of different backgrounds? What did fascism and antifascism mean to its members, and what were their distinct contributions to antifascism? How did they gender their projects and engage across borders? And how did they and their foes react to each other? These are the questions that inspired this book.

As I investigated this largely forgotten all-woman movement, I found that its antifascism involved much more than dispensing aid. In the 1940s, Argentine women worked to democratize their country—and the world—with knitting needles. If women’s gift was to sew and knit, they reasoned, women sewing and knitting together could politicize their labor for a noble cause. The Victory Board defied the neutralist government’s reluctance to confront the Axis by making clothing and supplies for Allied soldiers and their families. Rather than a typical woman’s philanthropy, the Victory Board was a political organization whose members knit garments as a means of defending what they cherished against fascist onslaught, as if through combat. Its leaders also understood that a true democracy must include women. Without explicitly characterizing itself as feminist, at least initially, the Victory Board promoted women’s political rights and visibility more effectively than previous Argentine associations. It attracted as many

as forty-five thousand members of varied origins across the nation who contested both local and foreign fascisms. The board's experiences shed light on women's vibrant resistance to fascism, right-wing populism, and misogyny, then and now.

Centering on the Victory Board—and its antifascist precursors—recasts Argentine history. Many Argentines and Argentine specialists have viewed Peronism, which consolidated in 1945, as the first political movement to mobilize diverse women on a massive scale, but antifascism preceded it. The Spanish Republican cause in the mid- to late 1930s, followed by the Victory Board in the early 1940s, rallied thousands of women of different ethnic, class, and political backgrounds. Historians also have credited Peronism for replacing the hegemonic notion of the Argentine melting pot with multiculturalism, yet the Victory Board, with its celebration of ethnic diversity, was its forerunner.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 prompted the creation of the Victory Board, which became *the* pivotal Argentine women's political organization before suffrage in 1947. The Victory Board was the most active, organized, and publicized group to combine women's rights with a concern for a broad conception of democracy. It took its emblem and name from Winston Churchill's "V for Victory" slogan—victory in the global conflict between democracy and fascism that raged on many fronts, including neutral Argentina.

The Victory Board drew upon a rich history of intertwined local, Latin American, and international resistance to militarism, dictatorship, and fascism, beginning with the end of World War I and Benito Mussolini's consolidation of power in Italy. Its precursors and leaders belonged to women's worldwide peace networks, antifascist Popular Front groups, and hemispheric feminist circles. They expressed solidarity with Ethiopia and Republican Spain, victims of fascist bellicosity. Argentine and other Latin American women decried the suppression of women's rights in Germany and Italy and the spread of fascism to their region. Victory Board president Ana Rosa Schlieper de Martínez Guerrero noted that World War II had crossed the ocean,³ yet the struggle between fascism and democracy had implanted itself on Argentine and Latin American shores years before. The development of women's antifascisms that culminated in the Victory Board is not only an Argentine story—it is a deeply regional, transnational, and global story. This book analyzes Argentine women's activism and their relationships with governments and kindred women in other countries.

Building on these roots, the Victory Board stood out in many respects. It attracted socialites and peasants, professionals and workers, Jews and Catholics, and women of immigrant and Indigenous descent throughout the nation. Argentine women of different classes and backgrounds had in-

teracted largely through unequal exchanges in the marketplace, charitable aid, or domestic service. In contrast, Victory Board members worked together to sew and knit, organize public events, raise money, and resist government and radical rightist attacks. Ushering many women into political involvement, the Victory Board represented an unprecedented local experiment in pluralism, coalition formation, and women's mobilization. The movement emphasized its formal and informal democratic practices. Its mentorship of the Uruguayan antifascist Feminine Action for Victory (Acción Femenina por la Victoria), a sister group that arose in May 1942, also was unique. These and other characteristics made the Victory Board an organization like no other in Argentina, the Americas, or Europe.

This is a pioneering book on a pioneering group. It is the first on Argentine antifascist women, including the Victory Board and its precursors,⁴ and the first of its kind in other respects as well. The fine studies of the Mexican Frente Único Pro Derechos de la Mujer (FUPDM), Movimiento de Emancipación de las Mujeres de Chile (MEMCH), and those whom Katherine Marino called Popular Front Pan-American Feminists, concentrate on their women's rights and social justice advocacy rather than on their antifascism.⁵ Ariel Lambe's excellent book on Cuban antifascism offers valuable insights on gender but does not analyze feminism.⁶ Thus, my study is also the first book-length treatment of a women's movement in Latin America and the Global South to focus both on its feminism and antifascism; indeed, I argue that the two were mutually constitutive. Finally, it is the only monograph to conceptualize antifascist women by dissecting the interplay between the local, national, and transnational.

The Victory Board and Antifascist Studies

Interwar fascism ultimately failed in most Western countries, and antifascism triumphed, as Michael Seidman asserted, noting that antifascism may have been "the most powerful Western ideology of the twentieth century," although Nigel Copley claimed that its proponents' diverse methods and visions of the ideal society prevented antifascism from being a single ideology.⁷ As complex and varied as fascist ones, antifascist movements have received markedly less scholarly attention. The editors of a collection on antifascism published in 1999 described it as "a pan-European phenomenon," and most publications have reflected this mind-set.⁸ The literature has focused on European men, their Communist ties, their armed and clandestine resistance to fascist revolts and rule, and a one-way flow of exiles and ideas from this continent. In fact, it has considered other regions marginal and tangential to antifascism. Only one of the seventeen chapters in a foundational compendium on antifascism published in 2016 dealt

with a non-European country—significantly, Argentina.⁹ Studies examining transnational connections typically have focused on exchanges within Europe or across the North Atlantic. In a journal issue on transnational antifascism that also appeared in 2016, Hugo García observed that anti-fascism “was to a large extent a ‘culture of exile’ built in such metropolises as Berlin, Paris, Moscow, Barcelona, London and New York,” disregarding Latin American capitals such as Mexico City, Santiago, Buenos Aires, and Montevideo, as well as Latin American exiles. García admitted, however, that “the *peripheral* [my italics] areas of the anti-fascist world system actively adapted concepts and tactics to local cultures and conflicts.” Only two of the seven articles in this issue addressed European antifascist contacts with non-Europeans, emphasizing the former’s roles in these exchanges. Centering on German-speaking exiles in Argentina, Bolivia, and Mexico, Andrea Acle-Kreysing wrote that “through both exile and contact with a non-European *audience* [my emphasis], anti-fascism became a transatlantic political culture.” The use of the word *audience* suggested that Latin Americans passively received the refugees’ words, not having already opposed fascism on their own.¹⁰ By concentrating on European voices, these and other authors obscured homegrown activists in other continents, minimized their agency, and ignored their input in transnational exchanges.

Latin Americanists have paid relatively little attention to antifascism, seemingly regarding it as insignificant in this area. Those who have studied it have tended to focus on European sojourners in this region.¹¹ Perhaps some of them implicitly accepted the notion that antifascism was a largely European phenomenon brought by exiles. This book demonstrates its importance in Argentina and Latin America and emphasizes local actors. Therefore, it is a vital contribution to antifascist studies.

Latin America and other areas outside Europe may be “peripheral” to the literature on antifascism, but not to antifascism itself.¹² Latin America was not marginal to a European antifascist “core,” nor did activists in this region simply reproduce European ideas and practices. Reacting to domestic conditions as well as those across the Atlantic, Latin Americans created large movements, such as the Victory Board and its predecessors, and formulated their own antifascisms that differed from European ones. Moreover, by definition, transnational exchanges do not move in a single direction—in this case from Europe—but back and forth in both directions. Along with their peers elsewhere, Argentine and Latin American antifascists engaged in this flow, from the Global South to the Global North, and within the Global South.

Since I started this book, researchers have begun to challenge Eurocentrism. Recent examinations of Global South antifascisms that emphasize their transnational input and local ingredients, including anticolonialism

and anticipation and contestation of Comintern policies, are revamping the field.¹³ Of particular interest for my work is John Flores's account of the Frente Popular Antiimperialista (FPA), founded by Mexican Communists and allied with the Lázaro Cárdenas government (1936–1940), which opposed the intertwined threats of foreign fascists, local magnates tied to US capital, and opponents of the Mexican Revolution. FPA branches arose in several Mexican diasporic communities in the United States. The Chicago affiliate cultivated bonds with white and Black union organizers and local Cuban and Spanish workers. Its women members taught children using the Mexican educational secretariat's socialist materials. FPA and Mexican labor representatives gave lectures and recruited Mexican Americans to attend the antifascist labor leader Vicente Lombardo Toledano's worker university in the homeland. Such activities tied the FPA and its branches together in a South-North axis that expressed Mexican notions of antifascism.¹⁴ Despite the FPA's male leadership and largely male composition, like this group the Victory Board also conducted South-North exchanges and represented a local style of antifascism.

While works on European men traditionally have dominated antifascist studies, to a lesser degree the literature has addressed European women's involvement in global conferences and networks, support for the French Popular Front government and the Spanish Republic, and clandestine resistance. As mentioned, it also has examined the Mexican FUPDM and the Chilean MEMCH. More current writings on women's antifascisms have explored other countries. Sana Tannoury-Karam found that the vibrant women's section of the League against Nazism and Fascism in Syria and Lebanon added women's rights to Arab antifascism and asserted, like the Victory Board, that a true democracy required women's presence. Caroline Waldron Merithew injected women's mobilization into her account of Ethiopian resistance and attempts to secure transnational support.¹⁵ Recent works on US women have privileged their cultural production, Black women's engagement, and insertion of race and gender issues.¹⁶

The Victory Board shared several traits of antifascist groups discussed in the older literature. Official persecution also forced it underground between 1943 and 1945. It, too, included political exiles, although these were a minority; absorbed ideas from abroad; and, as a Popular Front group, had Communist links. Nevertheless, this book forms part of the emerging literature. It reveals how the Victory Board, like other movements of the Global South, constructed its own version of antifascism, exercised agency, and engaged in South-North transnational exchanges.

The excellent literature on Argentina's vigorous homegrown antifascist campaigns has focused on men, their ideological discussions, underlying political struggles, and Buenos Aires city and province. The concentration

on ideas and competition for power helps account for the absence of women, who were disenfranchised and whose thoughts received less publicity than those of men, although there were exceptions.¹⁷ Just as Argentine antifascism was not peripheral, however, neither were its women activists. With their focus on intellectual and political history, scholars have paid relatively little notice to the sizable groups that sent goods to the Spanish Republic¹⁸ and the Allies, where one was most likely to find women. One of the few scholars to analyze the Victory Board, Adriana Valobra's noteworthy articles highlighted its ties with the Communist Party and with postwar Communist organizations.¹⁹ Rather than focus on the Communist Party and developments after 1945, this book fits the Victory Board into a little-known narrative of intertwined pacifist, antifascist, and women's rights movements dating from World War I that enveloped the nation. It adds cross-border relations into the literature on pre-1945 Argentina. Indeed, transnational connections are largely absent from other works on Latin American antifascisms in this period, except for the handful that treat the FPA, Latin American feminist networks, and solidarity with Republican Spain.²⁰

In contrast, cross-border interchanges are at the heart of my book. It traces the conversations among pacifist and feminist women in the Western Hemisphere and the complex debates between progressives and far rightists throughout Latin America that shaped antifascisms in the region. I emphasize the Victory Board's transnational mission of adapting and recirculating imported ideas (while also devising its own), organizing the grassroots by linking the battles against foreign and domestic fascism, forging ties with Uruguayan and Pan-American groups as well as governments in other countries, and sending aid and supportive messages from the Global South to the Global North. The focus on exchanges within the Global South, and with the Global North, sets it apart from most studies on Latin American and women's antifascisms before 1945.²¹

The Victory Board—and my coverage of it—also are unique in other respects. Unlike other southern movements, it did not contest imperialism or capitalism, at least until after 1945, although some of its predecessors had. The Victory Board's accentuation of its democratic alternative to fascism, promotion of multiculturalism, and relationship with Feminine Action for Victory were distinctive. So too were its means of popularizing antifascism. Scholars of Mexican and Chilean feminism discerned antifascist participation in the struggle for women's rights, yet few Argentine specialists have made this connection.²² I see the board as a missing link in the historiography on Argentine feminism.

I argue that women were vital for mobilizing antifascism, and that antifascism, in turn, was vital for politicizing women in Argentina, Uruguay,

and elsewhere in Latin America. Indeed, women activists throughout Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking America had claimed that they deserved the vote to press for amity in a world torn apart by war and fascism. Such reasoning exemplified maternalism, the notion of “gender difference based on motherhood as the foundation for reform and activism.”²³ This concept also rests on an exaltation of women’s roles in the home and society, conceived as the home writ large. As mothers or potential mothers, women have been seen as compassionate caregivers, helpmates, and disseminators of ethical values. Some feminists contended that women’s inherent nature made them uniquely suited for social welfare and peacemaking duties. Their vital reproductive function entitled them to full citizenship, which would enable women to better serve their families and society.

While the literature stresses maternalism as the motive for Latin American women’s political involvement,²⁴ this belief tends to erase women’s multiple identities and political experiences. I posit that many joined the Victory Board and its Uruguayan sister not only for maternalistic motives, but to serve in a prestigious global campaign that enabled them to feel useful, fight for rights and recognition, and deepen their militancy.

Just as the stress on maternalism has obfuscated women’s activism, so too has the tendency to study antifascism in isolation. Historians have specialized in antifascism or fascism and rarely have analyzed the two together in the same work.²⁵ However, to understand one it is necessary to understand the other and the interactions between the two. Latin American and Argentine antifascists, including the Victory Board, debated women’s roles and related issues with their enemies. Argentine fascists physically attacked board chapters and supported government efforts to repress antifascism. They were known as Nationalists, a coalition of shifting fascist, reactionary, and ultra-conservative groups that shared core beliefs and conducted joint operations. Other fascist movements and regimes, such as the Italian variant, also represented coalitions of this type. In times of crisis the ideological distinctions between these sectors tend to fade, as they did in Argentina in the 1930s–1940s.²⁶ Rather than define *fascism* and *antifascism* in detail, I prefer to let my protagonists and their opponents explain their own perceptions of these two amorphous concepts throughout the following chapters.²⁷

The relationship between the Communist Party and the Victory Board also deserves examination. When studying Communist-influenced movements, scholars often have exaggerated the degree of party control. Two Communists, the writer María Rosa Oliver and mathematician Cora Ratto, set the Victory Board into motion, and the male-dominated Communist Party may have asked them to do so. It instructed Fanny Edelman and probably other militants to join.²⁸ However, this Popular Front movement

contained many women in the leadership and ranks who were nonpartisan or loyal to other parties. While the Victory Board endorsed Soviet wartime policies and sent the bulk of its aid to the Soviet Union, non-Communists inside and outside the group agreed with these stances, reasoning that this country was the main battlefield and its needs were desperate. One must recognize that the board had agency, as Francisca de Haan and Jadwiga Pieper Mooney have argued for the Communist-linked Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).²⁹ For these reasons I describe this women's movement as relatively independent of men. The Communist impact on the Victory Board, however, became clearer after the end of World War II.

A Sinuous Path

When I began this study, the Victory Board was largely absent from historical memory, a point I will address in the conclusion. I started on a lengthy research trail and could not predict where it headed. When my interviewees told me about the board, I noticed information on it in the Communist publication *La Hora*. This and other Buenos Aires newspapers held in the Biblioteca Nacional contained Victory Board members' names and a wealth of data on the group's quotidian activities. I continued with the autobiographies of cofounder María Rosa Oliver, who described its beginnings, and Fanny Edelman.³⁰ Multiple sojourns in the Biblioteca Nacional, Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas (CeDIInCI), and Archivo del Partido Comunista in Buenos Aires uncovered a few Victory Board documents and publications, as well as leftist, pacifist, and feminist periodicals of the 1920s–1940s. The Biblioteca Nacional and Biblioteca Tornquist offered scattered information on a few board members. I did not want to simply examine Buenos Aires. After all, the area outside this city and province accounted for over half of the population in the 1940s.³¹ In the Archivo Intermedio of the Archivo General de la Nación, I found official accounts of the repressive national context of the 1930s and 1940s. I followed the trail to provincial collections, where I read local periodicals, government documents, municipal guides, and personal papers. Donated by a US visitor to Argentina, the single most valuable document I discovered was in the Harvard Widener Library: the proceedings of the Victory Board's first national convention, with national and local leaders' speeches and reports. Often ignored, abridged, or filtered by the press, these accounts in the women's own words of the obstacles the movement faced, its inner workings, and its successes and failures were a gold mine.

Still, something was missing. I wanted to recover the lives of women

who had made history but were forgotten. Although several prominent figures—such as Oliver, Ratto, and Schlieper—tie the book together, this is primarily a study of ordinary women. Biographical dictionaries and other printed sources focusing on notable, let alone undistinguished, Argentine women are scarce.³² Even the aristocrats and professionals who joined the Victory Board are largely unknown. How can one learn about the occupations, activism, political affiliations, and friendship networks of women who rarely left papers? The board's size and scope mandated limiting myself to a few locations and samples of members. I picked Buenos Aires, the federal capital at that time, and municipalities in three provinces and two territories. Since no membership lists have survived, I drew names from newspapers. Most Victory Board adherents passed away by the time my research intensified, so after my initial interviews I turned to their descendants. Some had no idea that their mothers or grandmothers had been involved in such an organization, but many knew about their social networks, pursuits outside the board, and political inclinations. Local historians and longtime residents supplied further information on these women.

The federal capital's numerous barrios and huge population also complicated researching members' identities.³³ In smaller provincial locations, where many people are acquainted with or have heard of each other, it was easier to find descendants to interview as well as informed observers who could identify the rank and file than in a metropolis like Buenos Aires. In Santa Fe I met with a focus group composed of journalists, people of various sectors, and elderly inhabitants. I read aloud my list of names, one by one, and the persons in attendance opined on each woman's identity, relatives, and friends, sometimes disagreeing with each other but usually reaching a consensus.³⁴ In such places, newspaper social pages, which did not only report on the elite; archives and city guides; social registers; and published reminiscences also were useful.³⁵ Understanding the makeup of local chapters helped me paint a fuller portrait of the Victory Board's overall composition.

Nevertheless, gathering information on commoners in any setting was challenging. I could not find data on a sizeable percentage of the women surveyed. This likely means that they were housewives, workers, or both, which in itself is noteworthy. It also proved extremely difficult to identify women of color, perhaps because many Argentines thought it disrespectful to refer to one's race or preferred to see their compatriots as part of a white society.³⁶ I present what I have because it is critical to study the ordinary women who have filled the ranks of many movements and enabled them to succeed. We know little about them, and we need to know more. Furthermore, my data demonstrates patterns, especially when combined with qualitative material.

Early in my research I spotted hints that the Victory Board's transnationalism exceeded its exchanges with the Allies. Coverage of its national conventions alerted me to the presence of Uruguayan women. Believing they might have represented an antifascist group, I embarked for Montevideo, where my hunch paid off. Periodicals and several Feminine Action for Victory publications stored in the Biblioteca Nacional attested to this movement's existence, significance, and contacts with the Victory Board. The Archivo General de la Nación and Fondo Centro Republicano Español de la Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de la República, furnished documents on the Uruguayan antifascist context.

I had an inkling that the Victory Board's and its predecessors' cross-border contacts stretched to other places, and again found proof in many collections. The US National Archives, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, and Library of Congress provided crucial data on the Victory Board's precursors, deliberations, connections to women's groups in the Americas and Europe, and relations with US government officials and the First Lady. Oliver's papers, held at the Princeton University Special Collections and Rockefeller Archives Center, discussed her ties with US functionaries and service at Nelson Rockefeller's Office for Inter-American Affairs. British Foreign Office records shed light on the Victory Board's contacts with British officials and Anglo-Argentine associations.

My search for data led me along a winding route with local, national, and transnational side streets. Detecting local variations is crucial to avoid homogenizing countries and groups, a tendency sometimes found in comparative and transnational studies.³⁷ I studied chapters throughout the country not just to explain the Victory Board's composition, but to gauge these regional differences and the entanglement of antifascism with local histories. Often perceived as a conservative backwater, save for a few cities, the "interior" defied this stereotypical notion. It contained hotbeds of political mobilization, even in tiny remote settings. Victory Board leaders were aware of these struggles and tried to unite "the city and the nation" in a progressive campaign and promote dialogue among the metropole and other internal spaces.³⁸ As was true for members' identities, understanding the local can alter our vision of the national:³⁹ in this case, by demonstrating that antifascism, leftism, and Nationalism had followers throughout the country. And understanding the transnational can alter our visions of Argentina: cross-border exchanges of ideas and goods influenced the Victory Board at its local and national levels. Melding the local, national, and transnational is crucial for comprehending the Victory Board and antifascists worldwide and merits attention.⁴⁰

Overview of the Book

This book is organized chronologically and thematically, with most chapters treating the intersection of the local, national, and transnational. Chapter 1 traces the development of women's antifascist consciousness, strategies, and links with hemispheric and international activism from 1918 on that peaked in the Victory Board. The rise of fascism in Europe, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and the Chaco War prompted Latin American women to collaborate with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. They closely followed the women's sector of the antifascist Amsterdam-Pleyel movement, which led to the Communist International's sponsorship of broad-based antifascist coalitions known as the Popular Front. As in Europe and elsewhere in the Americas, Argentine women's Popular Front associations combined pacifism, feminism, and antifascism. They protested official efforts to curtail women's rights, so evocative of Germany and Italy; organized peace conferences in Buenos Aires; and participated in the feminist Inter-American Commission of Women. Progressive women throughout Argentina and the region engaged in South-North solidarity with the Spanish Republic. Many of these women had initially condemned warfare in all instances, but they reluctantly conceded that only arms could defeat fascism. The Victory Board inherited this legacy.

To comprehend antifascists, one must grasp their interactions with their opponents. Chapter 2 continues to examine what fascism and antifascism meant to progressive women by analyzing their South-South debates with radical rightist men and women across the region. In the 1930s, feminist and leftist women in Argentina and Latin America refined their identities against internal and European fascisms. Most fascists believed that "liberating" women meant sending them home, while feminists disputed this notion. Each side accused each other of destroying women's mission. Surprisingly, some extreme rightists outside Argentina seemingly agreed with progressives on the need for women's suffrage, education, and equal opportunities and salaries. Fascists and antifascists—who soon would include Victory Board members—saw each other as a challenge, a menace, and a force they could not afford to ignore.

Building on its precursors and on diverse struggles throughout Argentina, the Victory Board and its brand of antifascism are the topics of chapter 3. Born in 1941, this Popular Front group expanded across Argentina and engaged in South-North solidarity by sending encouragement and handmade goods to the Allies. Participating in a distinguished global campaign to promote democracy overseas and linking it to efforts to strengthen it at home energized Victory Board adherents and popularized antifascism in their communities, as did displaying and dispatching their tangible prod-

ucts. The board distinguished itself from the fraudulently elected civilian governments of the 1930s and 1940s and the Nationalists by presenting itself as a model of genuine democracy. Its support for women's rights was another contribution to Argentine antifascism.

The Victory Board's members and how it united them are the themes of chapter 4. Through its fostering of mutual respect, humanitarianism, and common goals, the Victory Board attracted women of different class, ethnic, religious, and partisan backgrounds. It drew upon the many Spanish Republican sympathizers and the smaller numbers of feminists. Contesting the reactionary church hierarchy, Victory Board orators beseeched Catholics to oppose Nazi persecution of their brethren overseas by joining the organization. Nazi antisemitism and brutality led Jewish and other women with roots in occupied Europe to affiliate, as did the Victory Board's oft-expressed pride in its diversity, which helped spread acceptance of Argentina as a multicultural society. The board weakened the regional divide between Buenos Aires and the rest of the country. Nevertheless, it could not completely close the ideological gap between social classes.

Chapter 5 focuses on the Victory Board's manner of gendering antifascism. The only major Argentine antifascist association composed entirely of women, it carried out tasks typically coded as female. The Victory Board bolstered yet contested these customary roles. Through hand work antifascism became part of women's daily lives, and the board blended private and public by making these domestic labors visible. Reproducing antifascism in their homes also melded public and private. Antifascist couples shared political commitments that buoyed comradeship and sometimes alleviated women's household duties, but could cause friction. While the Victory Board prepared women for citizenship, and its leaders backed women's suffrage, its male allies had little interest in women's rights. Men dominated other antifascist organizations, which often differed from the board's feminized antifascism by concentrating on speechmaking, issuing antifascist tracts, and maneuvering for political gain.

As discussed in chapter 6, the Victory Board's transnational partners ranged from reluctant to enthusiastic. As head of the Inter-American Commission of Women, Victory Board president Ana Rosa Schlieper de Martínez Guerrero forged ties with delegates across the Americas, and the board's cofounder, María Rosa Oliver, served in Washington, DC, as a cultural liaison between the United States and Latin America. Although the Victory Board received US and British government support, the FBI and some embassy officials from these countries tended to disparage it as Communist. Lower-ranking US diplomats in Buenos Aires also made belittling sexist remarks about the board president. The relationship with Feminine Action for Victory was far more positive. Like the Victory Board, this Pop-

ular Front association supplied the Allies, defended democratic ideals, and promoted women's citizenship. At first, the Victory Board served as Feminine Action for Victory's mentor, but the relationship shifted into a deeper, more reciprocal alliance that endured during the Argentine military dictatorship (1943–1946), when the board went underground. The intertwined histories of the Victory Board and Feminine Action for Victory offer an extraordinary example of antifascist women's South-South and South-North solidarity.

The next chapter treats the interactions between the Victory Board and the Nationalists. Both were preoccupied with women's roles in a changing world, peace and war, and social justice, but formulated different solutions. Nationalists labeled the Victory Board as oligarchical, imperialistic, and "Jewish" for provisioning foreigners while many Argentines went hungry. That it ignored the plight of needy locals was the Nationalists' most compelling critique of this group. The Victory Board responded that charity would not cure inequality; only government action after the war's end could usher in a more equitable society. At times Nationalists agreed, yet their favored social, gender, and political order and opinion of the Axis clashed with the Victory Board's views. They attacked the board physically as well as verbally.

The final chapter examines the Victory Board's fate as World War II ended and the Cold War began. The military government allowed it to re-emerge from the shadows, yet still repressed it. Feminine Action for Victory delegates arrived to demonstrate their solidarity. The two groups affiliated with WIDF and adjusted their programs to fit its agenda. The Victory Board still sent aid to Europe but also turned to domestic issues, such as women's suffrage and, tardily, inequality. Rather than receive the vote from Juan Perón, whom they regarded as a fascist, Victory Board members and other women pressed for an elected Congress to pass a suffrage law and collaborated with the anti-Peronist Democratic Union (*Unión Democrática*). Perón's electoral victory in 1946 and shifting Communist strategies in the new Cold War context precipitated the Victory Board's decline. Abandoning the Popular Front, like Communists elsewhere, the Communist Party now regarded the Victory Board as a liability because of its association with the elite and US and British imperialism. It created a new organization to replace the Victory Board, some of whose members joined this group, while others dispersed in varied political directions.

The conclusion assesses the group's significance and considers its relevance for today. The movement contributed to the Allied triumph, fostered women's public roles, politicized women throughout Argentina, and promoted suffrage. Limited by the conflicting interests of its multiclass coalition, wartime alliances, and international Communist strategy, it did

not effectively combine antifascism with social justice. This failure, its anti-Peronism, and the mistaken perception of the Victory Board as upper class helped bury it into oblivion, even as many former adherents continued their activism. Yet its distinctiveness is memorable. Differing from its counterparts, the Victory Board tutored and partnered with a similar group in another southern country, sent aid from the Global South to the Global North, and cultivated and underlined its democratic alternative to fascism. It propelled feminism in postwar Argentina and presaged the feminist groups that followed. The Victory Board demonstrates the heterogeneous, contingent, and complex nature of antifascism. Some of its strengths can help inform women's and other democratic resistance movements today. So, too, can knowledge of its pitfalls.

The time has come for a book on women's antifascism in the Global South. We need historical context to help us comprehend the resurgence of right-wing populism and neofascism—in Brazil and Latin America as in other places—as well as the challenges of creating democratic resistance groups that cross ethnic, religious, class, regional, and national borders. The questions posed at the beginning of this introduction are as relevant to the study of current mobilizations as they are to an understanding of the past. Women have always been at the forefront of struggles against authoritarianism in Latin America—and perhaps the globe. We have much to learn from the successes and failures of the Argentine women who took up knitting for the Allies eighty years ago and forged links throughout the world.