

## Hands Across the Río de la Plata: Argentine and Uruguayan Antifascist Women, 1941-1947

Sandra McGee Deutsch<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The Junta de la Victoria, an Argentine women's antifascist group, arose in September 1941. Inspired by goals resembling those of the Junta, and similarly linked to the Communist party, Acción Femenina por la Victoria was founded in Uruguay in May 1942. Both became Popular Front associations, with thousands of diverse members who produced clothing and supplies for the Allies, defended democratic ideals, and promoted women's citizenship. At first the Junta was Acción Femenina's mentor, yet the relationship shifted into a deeper, more reciprocal alliance that enabled the organizations to fulfill their mission. The intertwined histories of the Junta de la Victoria and Acción Femenina por la Victoria offer an extraordinary example of antifascist women's transnational collaboration.

**Keywords:** antifascism; women; Uruguay; Argentina

### Resumen

La Junta de la Victoria, un grupo de mujeres antifascistas argentinas, surgió en setiembre de 1941. Inspirada por propósitos parecidos a los de la Junta, y del mismo modo relacionada al Partido Comunista, Acción Femenina por la Victoria se fundó en Uruguay en mayo de 1942. Ambas se convirtieron en asociaciones de Frente Popular, con miles de miembros diversos que produjeron ropa y materiales para los Aliados, defendieron ideales democráticos y promovieron la ciudadanía de las mujeres. Al principio la Junta era mentora de Acción Femenina, pero las relaciones entre ellas se convirtieron en una alianza más profunda y recíproca que facilitó la misión de ambas. Las historias entrelazadas de la Junta de la Victoria y Acción Femenina por la Victoria ofrecen un ejemplo extraordinario de la colaboración transnacional entre mujeres antifascistas.

**Palabras clave:** antifascismo; mujeres; Uruguay; Argentina

<sup>1</sup> Doctor of History, with a certificate in Latin American Studies, from the University of Florida. Professor of History at the University of Texas in El Paso.

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The Junta de la Victoria (Junta, or JV) arose in Argentina in September 1941, several months after the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Years of research had convinced me that this autonomous women's pro-Allied group was unique in Latin America. Then, however, I spotted a brief mention in the press of speeches delivered by members of the Uruguayan *Acción Femenina por la Victoria* (*Acción Femenina*, or AF) at the Junta's national convention of 1943. This intriguing information led me to peruse sources in Montevideo, examine *Acción Femenina*, and analyze the contact between the two women's organizations.

This contact was meaningful for both sides. Inspired by goals resembling those of the Junta, and similarly linked to the Communist party, *Acción Femenina por la Victoria* was founded in May 1942. Both became Popular Front associations, with thousands of members of diverse political, social, and ethnic origins who produced clothing and supplies for Allied soldiers and defended democratic ideals. Starting before and continuing after the creation of AF, JV members shared with it their organizational experience. At first the JV was AF's mentor, yet the relationship shifted over time. As an AF member later noted, it evolved into an alliance that was "más vivo y profundo."<sup>2</sup> After the Argentine military regime (1943-1945) closed the Junta, the latter secretly funded its Uruguayan counterpart's campaign to make bandages and garments. At considerable risk, Uruguayans accompanied their persecuted "hermanas argentinas" to demonstrations against repression in Buenos Aires in 1945. The intertwined histories of the Junta de la Victoria and *Acción Femenina por la Victoria* offer an extraordinary example of Argentine and Uruguayan cross-border antifascist collaboration.

These histories also contribute to the emerging fields of transnational solidarity and Communist mobilization of women in the Americas. Works on the first topic confined themselves largely to U.S. movements supporting Latin American causes until the last few years, which have witnessed a surge of writings on South-North and South-South networks, such as the one discussed in this paper. Indeed, the Junta and *Acción Femenina* epitomized not only South-South solidarity but South-North solidarity, in that they supported the Allied countries.<sup>3</sup> Yet only a handful of the recent publications that decenter solidarity concentrate on women or treat antifascist movements.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the growing scholarship on Latin American Communist women has paid little attention to their participation in the transnational antifascist struggle, except in Argentina. Even studies of large Popular Front groups such as the *Movimiento Pro Emancipación de la Mujer Chilena* and *Frente Unico Pro Derechos de la Mujer* in Mexico focus on their domestic agendas and barely touch on their support for the Spanish Republicans and the Allies, or the ties they may have formed with kindred Latin American movements.<sup>5</sup> As Gerardo Leibner concluded for the Uruguayan case, however, these solidarity campaigns may have increased Communist prestige and membership, and therefore they merit study (Leibner, 2011: 81).

2 *Diario Popular* (Montevideo), 1 Oct. 1945, 4.

3 For an examination of the Junta and all its transnational connections, see Deutsch, book project in progress.

4 See Zubillaga (2013); Casas (2005); Power (n. d.); Mor (2013); Markarian (2005); Hatsky (2015). Also see Hatsky and Stites Mor (2014), and, in particular, the introductory article, as well as Rein (2014). Of the authors cited, Zubillaga, Casas, and Rein focused on antifascist solidarity; only Zubillaga concentrated on women.

5 On Argentina see Deutsch (2012); Valobra (2005; 2015); Franco (2011); Ardanaz (2009). On Uruguay see Leibner (2011; 57-58 and passim; 2005); Zubillaga (2013). On Chile and Mexico see Roseblatt (2000); Antezana-Pernet (1996); Olcott (2005); Tuñón Pablos (1992). Regarding Communist women in Latin America see Adriana and Yusta Rodrigo (2017).

Furthermore, this essay shows that they advanced women's rights in Uruguay and Argentina. There is a significant literature on feminism in these countries,<sup>6</sup> yet historians have not explored its relationship with *Acción Femenina* and the *Junta de la Victoria*. Feminists had long advocated pacifism, and many denounced fascism as the principal enemy of peace and women's citizenship. It is not surprising that some found their way into the *Junta* and *AF*. While these two groups' *raison d'être* was antifascism, they promoted the incorporation of women into the polity and expansion of their roles. The *Junta* favored women's suffrage, and *Acción Femenina* gave women political experience just as many were preparing to vote for the first time. Thus both movements boosted women's rights.

As noted above, the relationship between the *Junta* and *Acción Femenina* evolved from mentorship to collaboration to solidarity. That their connection altered over time is but one of the complexities of transnational exchanges between political movements. To dissect the intricacies of this particular network, I draw on Margaret Power's proposed methodology for studying transnational political relationships (Power, 2016: 22-24). Following her guidelines, I start by describing the political contexts of the two countries,<sup>7</sup> prior political exchanges, and antifascists' familiarity with conditions in the other nation. Next I examine the movements' histories, their interactions, and their understanding of each other's struggles. I discuss their reasons for initiating and continuing these contacts and how these reasons changed, and conclude by determining how the relationship affected the groups and nations in question.

## The Political Context

Uruguay experienced a period of sweeping political and social reform under José Batlle y Ordóñez and his wing of the Colorado party in the early twentieth century. The Constitution of 1918 provided for universal male suffrage, yet women's suffrage did not become law until 1932. Political turmoil kept women from making effective use of it until the next decade. Incited by the economic crisis of the late 1920s, foes of leftism, labor unions, Jews and other "unacceptable" immigrants, and extended social legislation began to coalesce. These consolidating rightist forces included anti-Batllista Colorado factions, prominent ranchers and entrepreneurs, and the sector of the National (or Blanco) party led by the ultra-conservative nationalist Luis Alberto de Herrera. They backed a coup in 1933 by the sitting Colorado president, Gabriel Terra, who dissolved parliament and a key governing body, the Consejo Nacional de Administración. The Montevideo police, headed by Terra's brother-in-law Alfredo Baldomir, and the armed forces also supported the coup, although the latter did not play a major role in it. The regime quickly imprisoned and deported political dissidents, including leftists, killing a few of them; some of the opposition also went into exile. Although the government censored the press, restricted labor and rival partisan activities, and often suppressed hostile demonstrations, it did not prohibit any political party. In fact, it tried to legitimize itself through several elections and a plebiscite over a new constitution. Batllistas and Independent Nationalists, a faction of the National party, abstained from the

6 Among the many studies see Lavrin (1995); Ehrick (2005); Miller (1991); Barrancos (2007); Guy (2000); Giordano (2012); Rodríguez Villamil (1992); Rodríguez Villamil and Sapriza (1984); Sapriza (1988); Osta Vázquez (2008); Nari (2005). However, Marino (forthcoming) includes antifascism.

7 The study of the Argentine and Uruguayan contexts inevitably leads to comparisons between the two. Nevertheless, my primary objective is to understand the conditions which gave rise to the *Junta* and *Acción Femenina* and their relationship, rather than focus on national differences and similarities per se – much less reify them. On the liabilities and benefits of comparative and cross-national history, as well as the possible advantages of combining these approaches, see Cohen and O'Connor (2004).

elections of 1933 and 1938, as well as the plebiscite of 1934. Interestingly, Communists went to the polls all three times, accompanied by Socialists in 1934 and 1938. While Terra's policies generally benefited the economic interests that had favored the coup, the need to address the depression resulted in the retention of Batllista projects and its tradition of strong government involvement, much to the business sector's dismay.<sup>8</sup> Dictatorial and abusive of civil rights, the Terra administration nevertheless was not quite as repressive or as much of a departure from the past as one might have expected.

Nor did it manifest significant fascist influence or enjoy a long legacy. Its rightist views led the regime to break relations with the Soviet Union and the Spanish Republic. Some government officials and close associates sympathized with fascism, and the energetic Italian diplomat Serafino Mazzolini built on these sentiments. Nevertheless, Terra did not create a corporatist state or implement other aspects of fascism beyond the use of force. His successor Baldomir (1938-1943) relinquished his Terrista loyalties and ties to rightists. Heeding public opinion and U.S. pressure, Baldomir nullified some of his predecessor's antidemocratic measures by carrying out his own coup – albeit one respectful of individual freedoms (and supported by the Communist party). At the same time, the small yet vociferous far right contingent gradually faded as Uruguay adopted a non-belligerent stance that favored the United States. The Catholic Church, which had gained some stature under Terra (Hernández Méndez, 2015), tended to support General Francisco Franco and the ideology he represented, but the hierarchy shifted toward the Allies during World War II. Supported by Baldomiristas and Batllistas, President Juan José de Amézaga (1943-1947) completed the transition to democracy and antifascism.

Although Terra's government may not have been fascist, strictly speaking, many saw it as such. Mobilization against this “gobierno de fuerza a [sic] tendencias fascistas”, as the feminist leader Dr. Paulina Luisi characterized it,<sup>9</sup> took various forms. Attempts to create a Popular Front won support, particularly in the interior, but they ultimately failed, as did a rebellion in 1935 backed by the Communist party (Ruiz and Paris, 1987).

Many women abstained from voting until 1942, but this did not mean they were apolitical. They, too, joined the antifascist and democratic struggle in the interior and capital alike. Solidarity with the Spanish Republic and protests against the deportations awakened the political awareness of many women and challenged the regime's policies. Women intellectuals affiliated with the Uruguayan branch of the Agrupación de Intelectuales, Artistas, Periodistas y Escritores (AIAPE), the Argentine Popular Front association that sought to defend culture from fascist onslaughts.<sup>10</sup> Women formed a host of peace groups in the mid-1930s that blamed war on imperialism and fascism, including the Comité Popular Femenino Contra la Guerra y el Fascismo, the local branch of the women's section of the World Committee against War and Fascism. Uruguay's delegate to the World Committee, Luisi played a significant role in this activism, as did future members of Acción Femenina. Claiming that Terra's measures would militarize Uruguay and carry it into war, the Comité Popular organized demonstrations against his “dictadura fascizante.” The Comité Popular and kindred associations, laborers, Communists, and groups from the interior affiliated with the Unión Femenina Contra la Guerra. Under the auspices of this Popular Front

8 For excellent overviews of this period see Broquetas (2014: 33-43); Caetano and Rilla (2006: 215-250); Nahum, Cocchi, Frega and Trochón (1998: 9-71). Also see Reali (2016); Porrini (1994); Jacob (1983); Camou (1988); Bouret, Martínez and Telias (1997).

9 Luisi to Brainerd, June 1936, Box 30, DGo43, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Papers, Pt. 3: U.S. Section, Series A.4 – Pt. 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (scpc).

10 On AIAPE see Pasolini (2013: 35-44 and *passim*); Cane (1997); Bisso and Celentano (2006); Celentano (2006); Oliveira (2012).

organization, 2000 women marched against Italian aggression in Ethiopia in 1935. This and other demonstrations contested fascism overseas and authoritarian rule at home. The Unión Femenina also convened the Primer Congreso Nacional de Mujeres in 1936. Its topics included not only the fascist threat and the prevention of war, but the rights of women, female workers, and children; education; government support for culture; freedom for political prisoners; and the end of regulated prostitution. Women also had a strong presence in the massive march of July 1938, in which the public showed the newly inaugurated President Baldomir its support for democracy.<sup>11</sup> These antifascist and democratic activities throughout the country in the 1930s were precedents for Acción Femenina por la Victoria.

The Argentine situation resembled the Uruguayan in some respects and differed in others.<sup>12</sup> After the passage of universal male suffrage in 1912, this nation experienced democratic rule from 1916 to 1930 under the centrist Radical party. Backed by the former oligarchy and other conservative forces, military officers, and the fascist Nacionalistas, General José F. Uriburu overthrew the Radical president Hipólito Yrigoyen (1916-1922, 1928-1930). Unlike Terra's coup, this was a military action, and it installed a dictatorship harsher and more fascist-inspired than the Uruguayan one. Declaring a state of siege, the Uriburu regime (1930-1932) censored the press and imprisoned, tortured, and deported militants without trial. To consolidate Nacionalista factions and subdue his enemies, the general sponsored the fascist Legión Cívica Argentina, which attracted a large and diverse membership, including women, across the country. It and other paramilitary Nacionalista bands assaulted leftists and Radicals in many places.

Uriburu and some of his functionaries were interested in implementing corporatism. Nevertheless, instead of developing a corporatist-style relationship with labor the authorities simply suppressed unions and strikes. Having laid the groundwork for corporatist rule in Córdoba province, Nacionalista appointees urged Uriburu do the same at the federal level. General Agustín P. Justo, who headed the moderate conservative faction of the military, however, forced Uriburu not to impose a new political system through coercion. The president planned to hold provincial elections in stages, leading up to an elected Congress that would convoke an assembly to vote on corporatist changes to the constitution. When the regime's allies lost the first election, Uriburu nullified it yet gave up some of his corporatist dreams. Nor did his nationalistic economic policies go far enough to satisfy the Nacionalistas. The conservatives who had formed part of his coalition emerged supreme.

Voter fraud and the Radicals' decision to abstain from elections enabled Justo, the conservative candidate, to win the presidency (1932-1936). His victory continued a pattern of electoral corruption and exclusion that lasted until 1943. These elections, like those in Uruguay, did not legitimize the administrations of the "Infamous Decade." Accumulating numbers and strength, the Nacionalistas helped weaken liberal ideological hegemony and attacked workers, leftists, and Jews with impunity. Contrasting with its counterpart across the Río de la Plata, the military

11 *El Día* (Montevideo), 27 Jan. 1936, n.p., Carpeta 1936-1938; *El Día*, 3 Mar. 1937, and Primer Congreso Nacional de Mujeres, 17-22 April 1936, programa, Carpeta 1939, Colección Paulina Luisi, Archivo Literario, Departamento de Investigaciones, Biblioteca Nacional (BN), Montevideo. Also see Caja 256, Carpeta 5, nos. 63, 69, 72, 83-90, and Caja 257, Carpeta 1, especially nos. 88 (untitled and undated flyer) and 127, "¡Por una gran jornada femenina antiguerrera el 1 de agosto!", Archivo de Paulina Luisi, Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Montevideo; Paulina Luisi, "Pro-mitín 23 de Julio 1938", radio address, no. 35, Caja 3, Sección República Española, Fondo Paulina Luisi, Fondo Centro Republicano Español, Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de la República (ACRE), Montevideo; Sapriza (1988: 168-170 and passim); Gravina (1970: 50-51, 53-54); Zubillaga (2013).

12 Among many other works on Argentina during these years, see Deutsch (1999: 193-247); Finchelstein (2014); Nállim (2012); Zanatta (1996); Camarero (2007); Romero (2002: 59-90).

became the power behind the throne in Argentina, and many officers found Nacionalismo attractive. Also strongly influenced by the Nacionalistas, the local Catholic Church assumed much greater prominence in the 1930s than the Uruguayan. A number of leading conservatives such as Governor Manuel Fresco of Buenos Aires province (1936-1940) adopted the Nacionalistas' ideas and at times courted their support. Uriburu had declared the Communist party illegal, and his former minister of the interior, Senator Matías Sánchez Sorondo, sought to formally prohibit the Party in 1932 and 1936. While his bills did not pass congress, and the Justo administration extended some recognition and benefits to labor unions, the authorities continued to target Communists and other leftists. On the other hand, Uriburu and Justo did not hinder Socialist electoral activities. President Roberto Ortiz's (1938-1940) illness and death cut short his attempt to democratize the system, as his successor, Vice-President Ramón S. Castillo (acting president 1940-1942, president 1942-1943), clamped down on freedom, flirted with Nacionalistas, and promoted a neutral stance that tilted toward the Axis. In short, influenced by the far right, Argentina moved away from democracy as Uruguay shifted back toward it.

Leftists identified the Uriburu regime and its successors with fascism, as Uruguayan dissenters had done with Terra's government. Dra. Rosa Scheiner, a Socialist orator and future member of the Partido Obrero Socialista and Junta de la Victoria, in 1934 warned of the Nacionalista militias in the streets and philofascists in the corridors of power.<sup>13</sup> Linking authoritarianism, subjugation, and imperialism in Argentina to events in Europe, the opposition tried to forge a Popular Front electoral coalition, but had no better luck than its counterpart across the estuary.

As in the Uruguayan case, rightist repression provoked resistance. Communists braved the police by organizing among sectors of industrial and rural workers and small farmers. Anarchists and Communists established semi-clandestine groups in solidarity with political prisoners, in which women played critical and dangerous roles. In general, women were important protagonists in the antifascist and democratic campaigns. They also engaged with non-electoral Popular Front groups organized around the country such as AIAPE, which arose in 1935, and the Agrupación Femenina Antiguerrera (AFA), created in the same year, which resembled the Uruguayan Unión Femenina. Tied to the Communist party, AFA called for reduced military service, an end to militaristic education, diversion of military funding into cultural and social projects, measures to benefit working women, and freedom for antiwar protesters.<sup>14</sup> A 1936 bill that threatened to nullify women's rights specified in the civil code, reminiscent of laws in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, galvanized a circle of women in Buenos Aires. They formed the Unión Argentina de Mujeres (UAM), another Popular Front association, which spread to Santa Fe province. UAM mobilized for the defeat of this bill, the expansion of women's rights, including the vote, and improvements for women workers.<sup>15</sup> Solidarity with the Spanish Republic during and after the civil war (1936-1939) assumed massive proportions throughout the nation. One of the largest groups was the Comité Argentino de Mujeres Pro-Huérfanos Españoles (CAMHE), tied to the Communist party, which Fanny Edelman, a Party militant, described as the first mass political organization of women in

13 *La Vanguardia* (Buenos Aires), 23 Feb. 1934, 12.

14 On AFA see Telma Recca, 30 Jan. 1936, to Brainerd, and attached Agrupación Femenina Antiguerrera manifesto, n.d., Folder Correspondence of Brainerd with Persons in Argentina and Chile, 1937-1938, Box 22, DGO43, WILPF Papers, Part 3: U.S. Section, A,4: Pt. 1, SCPC; C. del Franco, *Mujeres*, 16-18; *¡Mujeres! Órgano de la Agrupación Femenina Antiguerrera*, no. 2 (May 1937); *Vida Femenina* 35 (June 15, 1936), 44; Edelman (1996: 28).

15 On UAM see Oliver (1969: 321-322, 348-357; 1981: 42; 1971: 50-51). Also see Valobra (2015: 138-142); Halperín Donghi (2008: 80; 2004: 209-210); Giordano (2012: 157-163); Quierolo (2004); Cosse (2008: 139-156); Meyer (1979: 135-140); Barrancos (2007: 174-175); Lavrin (1995: 94, 282-283, 316).

Argentina (1996: 28). All these groups faced official harassment and repression. Involvement in these and other movements sparked women's militancy and set many of them on a path to the Junta de la Victoria.

## Political Exchanges and Mutual Familiarity

In her methodology for analyzing transnational political relationships, Power stresses the importance of examining prior communications and understandings among activists in the countries under study. Despite the differences, Uruguayans and Argentines shared experiences of dictatorship, resistance, and solidarity, as well as knowledge of each other's circumstances, that would facilitate cooperation between the Junta de la Victoria and Acción Femenina por la Victoria. These two groups also would draw upon a lengthy history of political exchange between their respective countries (Power, 2016; Rilla, Brando and Quirici, 2013). Argentine and Uruguayan politicians fleeing strife and suppression had long sought refuge in each other's nation. Women's movements spanned the Río de la Plata: the Uruguayan freethinker María Abella de Ramírez spent much of her life and feminist career in Argentina, and Paulina Luisi, born in Argentina, was mostly active in Uruguay yet constantly lectured and attended meetings in her birthplace (Lavrin, 1995; Ehrick, 2005).<sup>16</sup> Antifascism strengthened these transnational contacts. For example, Marta Pastoriza of AFA spoke at the Primer Congreso Nacional de Mujeres in Montevideo in 1936, warning of the armed fascist bands in Argentina and the danger of war in the Americas. Socialist Leonilda Barrancos de Bermann described women's struggles in Córdoba, Argentina at the same assembly. In one of her speeches to UAM, Paulina Luisi explained how fascism undermined women's rights. During another sojourn in Buenos Aires, she established ties with the male-led antifascist Acción Argentina, whose members subsequently frequented Uruguay.<sup>17</sup> As noted, AIAPE was active in both countries.

Informed by such communications and the press, Uruguayans and Argentines were familiar with conditions across the estuary. An Uruguayan flyer of the mid-1930s denounced the Argentine armed legions who killed laborers and politicians such as Socialist José Guevara of Córdoba. In another lecture to UAM, Luisi reviewed the history of the oft-thwarted Argentine feminist campaigns, declaring it inconceivable that the women of this culturally advanced nation lacked the vote.<sup>18</sup> In 1942 the antifascist *Argentina Libre* described the Uruguayan women running for parliament and interviewed one of them, Laura Cortinas, future president of Acción Femenina.<sup>19</sup> Understanding of each other's struggles would reinforce the ties between the Junta and Acción Femenina.

16 In fact, as Francesca Miller (1991: 82) noted, "the transnational arena held a particular appeal for Latin American feminists", since they usually were excluded from the formal political systems in their countries and could express themselves and work for change through international meetings.

17 *Uruguay* (Montevideo), 18 and 23 Apr. 1936, n.p., nos. 5 and 15, *El Día*, 22 Apr. 1936, n.p., no. 12, Carpeta 5, Caja 259; *El Día*, 3 Jan. 1942, no. 78, Carpeta 7, Caja 256; Comité de Acción Nacional en Defensa de la Soberanía y la Democracia to Luisi, 28 June 1940, no. 2, Carpeta 7, Caja 252, all in Archivo Luisi, AGN. Also see *La Vanguardia*, 30 Oct. 1938, n.p., Carpeta 1936-1938, Colección Luisi, BN.

18 "Llamado Pro-Congreso de unidad contra el fascismo y la guerra", n.d., nos. 39-40, Carpeta 1, Caja 257, Archivo Luisi, AGN. On the assassination of Guevara, see Deutsch (1999: 210-211). Also see Luisi, "La mujer en la democracia", conferencia en la UAM, 19 Oct. 1938, Buenos Aires, no. 36, Caja 3, ACRE.

19 *Argentina Libre* (Buenos Aires), 14 May 1942, 10.

## The Junta de la Victoria

Dissatisfied with their country's official neutrality in World War II, many Argentines pursued means of defeating the Axis. These efforts magnified with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, which shattered the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939 and revived the Popular Front strategy. Two Argentine Communists, the mathematician Cora Ratto de Sadosky and writer and UAM co-founder María Rosa Oliver, sprang into action. Their goal was to furnish aid to the Allies, as they and other women had done for the Spanish Republicans. They were among the many who regarded World War II as a continuation of the Spanish Civil War, another transnational conflict that they believed had pitted democracy against fascism. For Ratto and Oliver, assisting the Allies meant saving socialism in the shape of the Soviet Union. First they enlisted progressive friends who participated in UAM and solidarity with Spanish Republicans. Then they proceeded to recruit a broad spectrum of women throughout Argentina along the lines of the Popular Front (Oliver, 1981: 41-42).<sup>20</sup> On September 13, twenty-nine women officially inaugurated the Junta at its new headquarters in downtown Buenos Aires. The fledgling organization styled itself as the first Argentine women's group to assist the Allies that attracted adherents of all backgrounds, as previous organizations were structured along ethnic or religious lines.<sup>21</sup>

The Junta addressed national as well as global challenges. At the opening ceremony, Junta president Ana Rosa Schlieper de Martínez Guerrero, head of UAM, secretary general of the antifascist Acción Argentina, and chair of the Inter-American Commission of Women (IACW), announced that the war had crossed the ocean, alluding to fascist and authoritarian inroads in Argentina. She saw Russian and British resistance to German attacks and local struggles for democracy as intertwined. Junta members would contribute to the democratic cause overseas by sending clothing and other materials to the Allies, and at home they would reinforce the sense of determination and unity that the country needed to defend its independence and free institutions.<sup>22</sup>

Cultivating ties with like-minded women in other nations would strengthen democracy and facilitate victory over the Axis. Starting with the opening festivities, the Junta began these conversations by sending a message of solidarity to British and Russian women and describing its mission.<sup>23</sup> A few weeks later, Schlieper, who was in the United States for an IACW meeting, presented Eleanor Roosevelt with a formal greeting personally signed by Junta members in Buenos Aires.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Schlieper's visit and the salutation she carried demonstrated her wish for closer contact between the democratic United States and Argentina, especially with Argentine women.<sup>25</sup> She continued to attend annual IACW gatherings, opened communication with U.S. women's groups, and conferred with U.S. government functionaries on training women for civil defense. The Junta's relationship with Acción Femenina fit within this pattern of transnational exchanges.

20 And interview.

21 *Orientación* (Buenos Aires), 23 Apr. 1942, 1; *La Hora* (Buenos Aires), 14 Sept. 1941, 5.

22 *La Hora*, 13 Sept. 1941, 4, 14 Sept. 1941, 5; Junta de la Victoria, *Primera convención nacional* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1942), 22.

23 *Critica* (Buenos Aires), 14 Sept. 1941, 4.

24 *La Hora*, 27 Sept. 1941, 5; Junta de la Victoria, "Las mujeres argentinas a la señora del presidente", 1941, and Eleanor Roosevelt to Ana Rosa de Martínez Guerrero, undated telegram, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Hyde Park, New York.

25 *La Voz del Interior* (Córdoba), 1 Oct. 1941, 7.



Meanwhile, the Junta spread among diverse women throughout the country. It was found in every region except the Andean northwest, outside the capitals of Tucumán and Jujuy, and Patagonia, apart from Comodoro Rivadavia and General Roca. By June 1943 it claimed chapters in 135 localities and Buenos Aires neighborhoods and 45,000 adherents throughout Argentina.<sup>26</sup> While these numbers surely were overstated, the Junta became the largest women's political organization before Peronism – although to appeal to non-politicized women and assuage the concerns of husbands and the government, it insisted its goal was solidarity rather than politics. Its solidarity, however, was inherently political. There are no surviving membership lists, yet data gathered from a wide variety of sources indicate that professionals, educators, writers, artists, workers and employees, farmers and ranchers, socialites, and housewives of all social classes joined the movement. The Buenos Aires chapters, or secretariats, were found in barrios ranging from lower- to upper-middle class. Working- and middle-class homemakers probably comprised the majority in rural and urban areas alike. The Junta included first- and second-generation immigrants and Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Spiritists, and non-believers, with Jews forming a significant segment in cities and farming communities. It drew upon union militants, feminists, conservatives, Progressive Democrats, Communists, and non-partisan women. Some Radicals and Socialists, particularly in the interior, also joined the organization. Many chapters recruited women of varied income levels, ethnicities, and political allegiances tied by activism, cultural interests, kinship, and friendship. Such links also bound Junta leaders, who included society women, intellectuals, artists, and a few union members; an appreciable number were Communists or sympathizers.<sup>27</sup>

These diverse Junta members conducted many different activities on the Allies' behalf. They collected used apparel, hospital items, food, goods for recycling, and fabric and thread. In hundreds of Junta workshops, women made clothing, bedding, and bandages and assembled first aid kits, while others sewed or knitted at home. Women of farm families supplied Junta workshops in the countryside with wool from their sheep. First aid courses helped prepare Junta members for civil defense. They raised money to purchase materials and items to be shipped abroad by paying dues; selling magazines, flowers, badges, and tickets to benefits that they organized; and requesting contributions door-to-door, on the streets, and through collection boxes. The Junta coordinated some of its campaigns and events with other antifascist solidarity groups.<sup>28</sup>

These sewing, knitting, and fundraising duties accorded with customary gender roles, as did the Junta's maternalistic appeals, yet the movement also opened new horizons for women. It affirmed "your rights as a civilized woman ... [and your] human dignity."<sup>29</sup> This phrase meant the opposite of barbaric fascism, which denied women access to many professions and government employment. A provincial adherent asserted that freedom and democracy were linked to wom-

26 Ana Rosa Schlieper de Martínez Guerrero, letter to President Pedro Pablo Ramírez, 30 June 1943, in Centro de Documentación e Investigación de la Cultura de Izquierdas en la Argentina (CeDInCI), Buenos Aires.

27 *Argentina Libre*, 18 Sept. 1941, 12, indicates the variety of women who congregated at the Junta headquarters. I found names in Buenos Aires and provincial periodicals and Junta publications. Information on individuals came from these sources, biographical dictionaries, social registers, local histories, and consultations with relatives and descendants of Junta members, historians, and residents of provincial areas. The left-of-center Progressive Democratic party was largely based in Santa Fe province.

28 For more details on the Junta's aid and democratic activities, as described in the following paragraphs, see Deutsch (2012).

29 *La Voz del Interior*, 27 Oct. 1941, 7; quote in Junta de la Victoria, *Ayuda de las mujeres argentinas a los países que luchan contra el nazismo*. 13 septiembre 1941 – 13 enero 1942 (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1942), n.p. On the trope of civilization versus barbarism in Argentina, see especially Svampa (1994).

en's ability to learn, think, and perform work useful for the country, in contrast to authoritarian regimes, which prevented women from exercising their rights.<sup>30</sup> As male citizenship rested partly on serving in the military (Valobra, 2010: 31 and *passim*), the Junta asserted women's citizenship by fostering participation in civil defense. Fighting fascism meant creating and defending democracy, and as Junta orators noted, without women there was no democracy.

UAM members and other feminists numbered among the core activists, and they saw the incorporation of women into the political system as part of the Junta's democratic mission. As a step toward this goal, the Junta ushered women into its own democratic structure. Schlieper, Ratto, and other spokeswomen emphasized that members were of all origins, classes, and ideologies, and they had laid aside their differences to work together. Thus they exemplified the diversity, mutual respect, and cooperation that characterized democracy. The organization engaged ordinary women in their residences, farms, and barrios, reducing their isolation and preparing them for civic roles. The national headquarters and many chapters rented locales where women not only sewed and knitted but drew up work plans and debated issues in a democratic fashion. The Junta's Buenos Aires provincial convention in October 1942 and national conventions of April 1942 and May 1943 also served as forums for discussions among women. At these larger meetings, representatives elected by the affiliates delivered reports compiled by their members. The delegates chose convention leaders and national officers, voted on work plans and resolutions, and informed their chapters on the proceedings. The leaders of the 1943 convention came from four provinces as well as the federal capital. In this manner the Junta tried to reduce the regional divisions that had long obstructed democracy and national unity. Other Argentine women's groups (and antifascist women's associations in other countries) had also followed representative norms, but had not called particular attention to them. That the Junta did so at this critical moment indicated its emphasis on women's democratic roles in the antifascist struggle.

Yet its discussions of democracy rarely touched upon social issues. Influenced by the Soviet priority of defeating the Axis, Junta spokeswomen claimed that the implementation of egalitarian reform would have to await the end of the war. Victory would usher in a golden age of socioeconomic and political democracy.

Democracy was increasingly threatened in Argentina. In December 1941, after the creation of the Junta and U.S. entry into the war, President Castillo obtained state of siege powers which his government used to limit freedom of assembly and the press and suspend habeas corpus in order to prevent open disagreement with the official neutrality policy (Finchelstein, 2010: 57, 167; Cane, 2011:86). Authorities in the capital and provinces prohibited a number of Junta events and imposed restrictions on others; they also arrested some members. Even if they authorized Junta activities they often would go back on their word. Donors could designate their contributions for Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, Free France, or China, but those who specified the Soviets experienced mysterious legal problems. Nacionalistas also attacked several Junta chapters.<sup>31</sup>

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30 *Mujeres en la Ayuda (1941-1942)*, 20.

31 Peter Wind, interview with author, 2000, Buenos Aires; Oliver, interview. Other pro-Allied groups also experienced repression before June 1943.

## Acción Femenina por la Victoria and its Relationship with the Junta de la Victoria

One also can trace the origins of Acción Femenina back to the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Unlike the Junta, it originated as the women's committee of the largely male-run Acción Antinazi de Ayuda a la Unión Soviética y Demás Pueblos en Lucha. Acción Antinazi and its Comisión de Damas were more obviously connected to the Communist party than the Junta, since they grew out of efforts to aid only the Soviet Union, and their leaders were Communists or close to the Party. Noting that Argentine women were amassing goods to ship to the Soviet Union, the Comisión quickly began to imitate their example. It also set about recruiting a broader base in the capital and the interior, calling upon women of the democratic parties – Batllistas, Baldomiristas, Independent Nationalists, Communists, and Socialists – to its first assembly on August 30, 1941. Included in the invitation were Catholics and Protestants (Jews were not mentioned), and Uruguayans and foreigners, along with workers, students, professionals, housewives, and mothers. The Comisión configured its appeal to fit accepted gender roles, insisting that since the assembly was not political in nature, attending it would not hurt women's respectability. Even though Uruguayan women could vote, many had not yet done so, and the Comisión, like the Junta, was trying to overcome their potential fear of political activism and calm possible male concerns. It convened women of different parties and creeds to publicize their struggle for democracy at home and abroad by marching through Montevideo. According to its president, Amalia Polleri, a Communist teacher and artist, their attachment to their hard-won rights and respect for Soviet equality between men and women motivated their hatred of Nazi-Fascism. Their support for Baldomir's shift from the right and for renewed diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union, as well as their call for vigilance against local Nazi sympathizers, also led them to participate. Thousands of women walked through the streets on October 25. By early November the Comisión claimed to have twenty-five committees throughout the country.<sup>32</sup>

In December 1941 the Comisión and the Junta initiated contact. Comisión President Polleri and Secretary Sylvia Mainero, a Communist militant, formed part of the Acción Anti-Nazi delegation that delivered the Uruguayan contribution to a Soviet ship in Buenos Aires harbor. Polleri announced that she would converse with JV dignitaries to learn how to expand the "movimiento femenino ayudista." After her return, the Comisión president described in detail how the Junta operated and ensured efficiency in its tasks. The group absorbed these lessons quickly; following the Junta's procedures, the Comisión advised its neighborhood committees that were making sets of clothing for Soviet infants to report how many they had started, how much material they needed or could return to the central office, how they were raising money for this campaign, and how they would meet their stated goals. The Comisión then co-sponsored a visit by Junta officer Rosa Scheiner to trade ideas on women's aid activities. President Gilseno Aguirre and Secretary José Luis Massera of Acción Anti-Nazi, a future national deputy, Communist party leader, and pioneer of mathematical research in Uruguay, attended the Junta's first national convention in April 1942. So, too, did Mainero and Party activist Coca Campistrous of the Comisión. The Uruguayans listened to Junta officers' presentations on organizational and fund-raising matters,

32 *Diario Popular* (DP), 23 Aug., 4, 29 Aug., 8, 5 Sept., 8, 15 Sept., 7, 17 Sept., 7, 24 Oct., 7, 25 Oct., 7, 27 Oct., 7, 7 Nov. 1941, 7 (statistic).

as well as reports by provincial delegates.<sup>33</sup> These encounters gave the Comisión ample opportunities to study its sister movement.

Moving beyond its narrow associations with the Communist party, in May 1942 the Comisión transformed itself into the Popular Front group *Acción Femenina por la Victoria*. Elia Rodríguez Belo de Artucio, a prestigious intellectual, secondary school history professor, and AF officer, declared that the Junta provided the basis of the new organization. Contrasting *Acción Femenina* with earlier groups, which had mobilized along class lines, Rodríguez Belo explained that it wanted to create something resembling the Junta that would bring together women of different social sectors to help the Allies, defend Uruguay, and defeat Nazism. Its first campaign was to make blankets for Allied soldiers, and a workshop had begun to operate in a member's home.<sup>34</sup>

According to its original manifesto, AF's aim was to clarify the democratic consciousness of Uruguayan women, reducing their isolation in their homes or workplaces, so that they could understand the need to defend national independence, culture, and wellbeing against the fifth column and possible foreign aggression. It was women's duty to defend the nation, insisted *Acción Femenina*, since this task was an extension of defending the home. The group would engage the world front by making and sending aid overseas, and the national front by mobilizing democratic women throughout the country and working with the Ministry of National Defense's civil defense measures. This collaboration included training auxiliary nurses in public schools and stocking official emergency posts with drugs and medical supplies.<sup>35</sup> AF proceeded to organize activities that echoed those of its Argentine mentor.

*Acción Femenina* grew in size and diversity throughout the republic. Branches waxed and waned, but as of September 1944 AF claimed seventeen chapters in the interior, twelve neighborhood and seven affiliated committees in the capital, and a total membership of 6400. Each affiliated committee consisted of women of a particular work category or immigrant community, such as the one of Jews. Personnel of the *Frigorífico Nacional*, along with commercial, telephone, and municipal employees, made up the worker committees. Like the Junta, *Acción Femenina* mounted membership drives that targeted industrial laborers; how successful they were is uncertain, but some joined the neighborhood committees in Montevideo, and textile workers at one time formed an affiliated committee.<sup>36</sup> *Comités* were situated in barrios ranging from working – to middle-class. According to Polleri, the movement had spread into the poorest of neighborhoods – but not into the richest.<sup>37</sup> While no membership lists are available, most members in the capital probably were lower to middle-sector housewives, matching the Junta's profile.

A member described the Tacuarembó filial as consisting of women of all income levels. It is difficult to judge whether this was accurate or typical of the chapters in the interior. There were no factories or workshops in Colonia del Sacramento, observed the president of the local chapter, so it could not recruit women from such spaces; nevertheless, she claimed that the great majority

33 Ibid, 14 Dec., 7, 22 Dec. 1941, 7, 29 Jan. 1942, 7; Junta, *Primera Convención*, 9. The convention records listed the two women as officers of a *Comité Femenino Uruguayo*, which seems to have referred to the Comisión.

34 *Justicia* (Montevideo), 17 July 1942, 4.

35 Ibid, 3 July 1942, 8; *DP*, 3 July, 54 July 1942, 16.

36 *DP*, 2 Sept. 1942, 5, 24 Oct. 1942, 5.

37 *DP*, 30 Sept. 1944, 2; "Empleadas y obreras trabajan para la causa de la Victoria", in *Acción Femenina por la Victoria, Campaña Argentino-Uruguaya Sanitaria y de Abrigo, 1943-1944* (Montevideo: n.p., 1944), n.p. I thank Ana Laura de Giorgi for this pamphlet and Rodolfo Porrini for information on neighborhoods. Also see *Barrios Pintos* (1971); *DP*, 9 Apr. 1944, 2.

of the members worked.<sup>38</sup> They labored in their homes and farms and perhaps in schools, small enterprises (usually alongside their husbands), or the telephone company.

Some leaders were of prestigious backgrounds, such as the first two presidents, María Emilia Mendivil, scion of a wealthy and highly placed Colorado family, and Laura Cortinas. An author well-versed in women's issues, Cortinas was the sister of a high-ranking Independent Nationalist, and she ran for parliament in 1942 on this party's ticket.<sup>39</sup> Other eminent members such as national deputy and future senator Julia Arévalo, and Bernarda Martínez, a worker in the shoe industry and union militant, were working-class Communists. Intellectuals, educators, and lawyers figured among the officers. They were loyal to the Communist, Colorado, Independent Nationalist, Socialist, and Blanco-Acedevista (conservative and pro-Terra) parties, in declining order. Many formed part of cultural, friendship, activist, and familial networks.<sup>40</sup> The Communist presence, political and social diversity, and importance of networks resembled the Junta's ruling circle.

Acción Femenina generally imitated the Junta's (and Communist) view that reforms would have to await the end of the war. However, to a somewhat greater extent than its Argentine counterpart, Acción Femenina melded social concerns with its antifascist messages. According to its initial manifesto, it was vital to decrease the cost of living because poverty led desperate people to seek remedies like fascism. Other spokeswomen claimed that if the Nazis won the war or took over Uruguay, they would halt not only its political evolution but its incipient industrialization. The country would sink back into an "estancia" supplying food for the "raza superior", and its people would become keepers of animals for the masters' meals. (Never mind the fact that Uruguay still depended heavily on agrarian exports.) Aside from destroying women's rights, which both the JV and AF dreaded, Nazism would force women to work at low pay under poor conditions that would harm their ability to bear children. Facilitating an Allied victory would help Uruguay determine its economic future and social policies.<sup>41</sup>

Acción Femenina also differed from the Junta in other respects. The most crucial was that the pro-Allied Baldomir and Amézaga administrations and the armed forces supported it, as demonstrated by their sponsorship of AF civil defense activities, and permitted it to operate freely. The president's wife, Sofia Terra de Baldomir, and a representative from the defense ministry bestowed official recognition on AF by attending its opening event, and some AF workshops in Montevideo were located in public schools.<sup>42</sup> While there were instances of right-wing provocation and street violence, and at least one case of harassment of an AF event in the interior,<sup>43</sup> these were minor compared to Argentina. Another difference was that Jews, who were heavily involved in the two movements, organized in distinct ways. The Comité Central Femenino Israelita in Montevideo formed one of the units that partnered with Acción Femenina, and its leader was on the AF board.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, Jews joined women of other backgrounds in many Junta chapters, although affiliates in the Jewish agricultural colony zones tended to be completely or mostly

38 DP, 23 June 1944, 2, 24 July 1944, 2.

39 On Cortinas see *Argentina Libre*, 14 May 1942, 10.

40 I gleaned names of members and biographical information from DP, biographical dictionaries (which, however, contain little on women), and consultations with historians and Emma Massera.

41 *Justicia*, 3 July 1942, 8; DP, 26 Aug. 1942, 5, 15 Apr. 1944, 2.

42 *Justicia*, 24 July 1942, 5; DP, 20 May 1944, 2.

43 See, for example, DP, 29 Aug. 1941, 3, 23 Nov., 3, 4 Dec. 1942, 1, 17 Mar. 1944, 2.

44 "Autoridades emanadas de la Primera Convención Nacional, Agosto 27-29 de 1943", in *Acción Femenina*, n.p. I found only a handful of names of AF members who might have been Jewish. Similar groups existed in Argentina, and sometimes they cooperated with the Junta, but they did not affiliate with it.

Jewish. *Acción Femenina* also had less contact with antifascist women in other countries besides Argentina during the war, with a few exceptions. For example, the wife of the former British ambassador gave the featured speech at AF's opening ceremony, suggesting ties to this country. Generally, however, its connections with the Junta did not fit within a larger transnational pattern.<sup>45</sup>

Junta leaders frequently crossed the Río de la Plata. Ratto spoke on the Junta's goals and practices at the AF's inaugural event, pointing out that its experience could serve the fledgling organization. Two JV members were among the Argentine representatives who attended the *Conferencia Nacional de Ayuda* in Montevideo in 1942, where men and women discussed how to intensify aid. At an *Acción Femenina* celebration of their presence, one of them, Margot Portela Cantilo de Parker, described the Junta's fundraising and successes. Junta president Schlieper did much the same in a speech she delivered at *Acción Femenina's* benefit *Fiesta de la Solidaridad* in October 1942.<sup>46</sup>

AF and JV had several reasons thus far for interaction. Believing in standing together with democratic women in other countries, the Junta wanted to share its experience with a kindred group to help it organize effectively, and *Acción Femenina* welcomed its expertise. Each wanted to meet the other and promote good relations and possible future coordination. These encounters showed that antifascist aid campaigns were gaining momentum and spreading over national boundaries, and the two movements could use this welcome news to raise publicity and encourage people to jump on the bandwagon. Finally, the relationship seemed a natural extension of customary ties between Uruguayan and Argentine political figures, reinforced by antifascist contacts in the 1930s.

One should note that Uruguayan and Argentine women were not operating in a vacuum, for antifascist men also were in touch with their counterparts across the estuary. An *Acción Antinazi* delegate who had attended a conference of *ayudistas* in Buenos Aires reported that he was participating in its ongoing committee on future tasks. Beyond merely representing Uruguay he had joined "el corazón mismo" of a movement in a neighboring country.<sup>47</sup>

Margaret Power observes that it is important to explain how transnational political relations change over time (Power, 2016). By November 1942, the relationship between AF and Jvevolved in a more collaborative direction. Perhaps influenced by the Junta's displays of paintings and sculptures,<sup>48</sup> *Acción Femenina* hosted an exhibition and sale of original works donated by Argentine and Uruguayan artists. Half of the price went to the artist's preferred Allied nation, and the other half to that of the purchaser; the entrance fee was a skein of wool that AF would use to make garments for soldiers. Prestigious artists such as the Argentines Antonio Berni, Lino Spilimbergo, Junta sympathizer Raquel Forner, and Junta members María Carmen de Portela de Aráoz Alfaro, Norah Borges, and Cecilia Marcovich contributed their works, as did AF leaders Carmen Garayalde and Amalia Polleri. A lecture series accompanied the fair, in which foreign and Uruguayan intellectuals, including AF officers, expounded on English, French, and Chinese

45 On Lady Effie Millington Drake's speech see *DP*, 3 July, 5, 21 July, 1, 22 July 1942, 8. Heloise Brainerd of the U.S. section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) initiated correspondence with *Acción Femenina*, but this was at the war's end. See Laura Cortinas to Brainerd, May 23, 1945, Folder Correspondence of Brainerd with Persons in Uruguay, 1942-1945, Box 30, DG 043, WILPF Papers, Pt. 3: U.S. Section, Series A, 4 - Pt. 1, SCPC.

46 *DP*, 24 July, 6, 20 Sept. 1, 21 Sept. 1, 25 Sept., 3, 2 Oct., 5, 5 Oct., 1942, 5.

47 *DP*, 16 Sept. 1942, 5.

48 See, for example, *La Prensa* (Buenos Aires), 11 Sept. 1941, 15, 14 Sept. 1941, 11, on the exposition and sale of Raquel Forner's works in the Junta headquarters.

art; U.S. films; literature, art, and the war; and women's roles in the struggle for freedom. The exposition also featured Uruguayan poets, who paid tribute to Russian resistance, as well as a book sale and display of items Acción Femenina had made for the Allied armies.<sup>49</sup> The exhibit not only proved to be an imaginative and successful fundraising venture, but a way of lifting cultural awareness. The JV and AF considered it fundamental to move art out of private salons and into spaces accessible to ordinary people to help create a more just society and oppose fascism, which they thought destroyed culture. Holding cultural events was part of their alternative to fascism. In addition these expositions publicized antifascist artists, especially women (Iber, 2015: 9).<sup>50</sup>

The Bolsas de Navidad campaign of 1943-1944 also was innovative. Acción Femenina distributed empty bags decorated with symbols of the designated countries, to be filled with clothing, shoes, toys, notebooks, and other practical gifts for Allied children. It also encouraged supporters to bring items to fill the bags or purchase items at AF offices to place in them. Leaders praised contributors for their patriotic and energetic work, solidarity, and "fe y odio anti nazi." The word "hatred" did not necessarily accord with popular depictions of women's emotions or with the Bolsas' maternalistic connotations.<sup>51</sup>

The Bolsa campaign was not the only instance in which Acción Femenina deployed maternalism and assigned women duties that resembled their tasks in the home. Yet like the Junta it too opened new spaces for women. AF – and Junta – spokeswomen insisted that the goods they supplied to the Allies did not constitute charity, a typical women's pursuit, but rather a form of political struggle. Arévalo, Cortinas, and the parliamentarians mentioned below were among the AF leaders who strongly supported women's rights. AF's goal of clarifying women's democratic consciousness, struggling against fascism, and safeguarding the nation meant politicizing them. Uruguayan women had won the vote, but the Terra dictatorship had restricted freedom of expression, and many women protested by abstaining from elections. In their chapters and annual conventions, women followed democratic practices, organized aid and programs, and gave speeches. Thus AF trained them for political activism within and outside the organization, although it did not call as much attention to these activities as the Junta. Members claimed citizenship by participating in civil defense and calling themselves anti-Nazi soldiers, or "combatientes", who wielded sewing needles instead of rifles. AF offered lectures on international issues and women's roles in the Allied countries, convoked members for marches, and impelled them to work for an Allied victory, which would usher in a new age of democracy, peace, and equality between the sexes and classes. As Garayalde, a university profesor, education oficial, and Communist put it, "la mujer esclavizada por los prejuicios será mañana la constructora consciente a la par del hombre de una vida más feliz y justiciera."<sup>52</sup> This utopia signified not only a democratic and social aim, but a feminist one.

Its membership, collection of funds, and production of materials steadily increased by early 1943, yet Acción Femenina faced challenges. One was financing its campaigns; another was recruitment. An AF member admitted that many women, particularly workers, identified with the goals of the movement yet had not joined it. The group had to strengthen its ties to popular sectors, espe-

49 DP, 27 Oct., 5, 8 Nov., 3, 12 Nov., 3, 18 Nov., 2, 10 Dec. 1942, 3.

50 DP, 27 Mar. 1944, 2. As Iber noted (: 29-30), fascism did not necessarily destroy culture but created its own variants.

51 DP, 25 Dec. 1943, 1, 15 Feb. 1944, 2, 11 Mar. 1944, 2 (quote); Acción Femenina por la Victoria, "Bolsa de Navidad para los Niños Aliados", flyer. I thank Ana Laura de Giorgi for this document.

52 DP, 10 Oct. 42, 5, 16 Nov. 1942, 4, 29 Nov. 1942, 4, 3 May 1943, 2, 27 Mar. 1944, 2 (quote), 9 Apr. 1944, 2, 9 May 1944, 2

cially through their workplaces.<sup>53</sup> The Communist-aligned *Diario Popular* called upon all ayudistas, women and men, to double their efforts in view of the growing repression across the Río de la Plata. In contrast to Argentines, Uruguayans enjoyed freedom and their government opposed fascism and favored the Allies, but they had not taken full advantage of this situation.<sup>54</sup>

Still, the Junta's second annual convention of May 1943, which *Diario Popular* styled as a "jornada de solidaridad rioplatense y antiNazi", manifested a more reciprocal relationship between Acción Femenina and its much larger counterpart.<sup>55</sup> Acción Femenina enjoyed the honor of sending members who were congresswomen: Arévalo, the first Communist deputy in the hemisphere, and Blanco Acedevista Sofía Alvarez Vignoli de Demicheli, the first woman senator in South America. This time, rather than simply listen to Junta members, Arévalo, Alvarez Vignoli, and the other two AF delegates gave speeches. Raquel Berro de Fierro, member of a traditional Blanco family who had supported the Spanish Republic, and fellow AF officer Dinorah de Echaniz, a secondary school French teacher, intellectual, and Socialist, detailed Acción Femenina's activities. Impressed by JV delegates' reports on peasant and working-class filiales, they wanted to apply these rich experiences to Uruguay. In addition Echaniz underlined the solidarity among women of the two nations and the rest of the world. Picking up on the transnational theme, Arévalo, who also served on Acción Antinazi's executive board, energized the crowd by proclaiming that they represented two peoples linked through histories of liberation who, once again, were united in confronting global problems. Stirred by Arévalo and the thunderous applause she received, the president of the Junta chapter of Corrientes, María Esther Andreau de Billinghamurst, seized the microphone and urged Argentine mothers like herself to defend democracy by imitating the example of their Uruguayan sisters. This reversed the previous pattern, in which AF imitated the Junta. Alvarez Vignoli affirmed her devotion to Catholicism and democracy and exhorted women of the Americas to maintain their sisterly ties.<sup>56</sup>

This encounter highlighted the cross-border solidarity that supplied inspiration, new ideas, and publicity to the two groups. Its women parliamentarians lent prestige to Acción Femenina and reinforced its and the Junta's subtle advocacy of women's rights. The senator's declaration of Catholic faith served the Junta's campaign to recruit pious Catholic women against the wishes of the Nacionalista-tinged Church hierarchy. The convention approved the Uruguayan delegates' proposal to conduct a joint ten-day campaign entitled the "Jornada de mujeres rioplatenses por la ayuda a los aliados" in July.<sup>57</sup> Now the Junta and Acción Femenina were partners.

The Argentine military coup of June 1943 that overthrew President Castillo, however, interfered with this plan. Heavily influenced by Nacionalistas, these officers established a harsh dictatorship that imprisoned and tortured leftists and union militants, dismissed democratic teachers and Congress, and installed Catholic education in public schools. Officially neutral yet sympathetic to the Axis, the regime closed offices of the Junta and other pro-Allied organizations (Bisso, 2005: 235-236).<sup>58</sup> The JV notified its Uruguayan counterpart that the police had sacked its headquarters, hauling off monies, clothing, bandages, and materials worth an estimated 300,000

53 *Justicia*, 30 July 1943, 3.

54 *DP*, 16 Mar. 1943, 2.

55 *DP*, 12 May 1943, 2.

56 *La Hora*, 8 May, 6, 9 May 1943, 6; *Orientación*, 13 May 1943, 5.

57 *La Hora*, 10 May 1943, 2.

58 Laurence Duggan, 26 June 1943, 835.00/1575, Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Schlieper, letter to Secretary General of the Federación Obrera Nacional de la Construcción, 12 July 1943, and letter to Ramírez, CeDInCI.



pesos. “Da desesperación pensarlo”, lamented Berro de Fierro, adding that AF had to fortify itself to convince the Argentine government to reopen the Junta. If this did not work, then Acción Femenina would have to fill the gap. AF sent a telegram to President Ramírez of Argentina, urging him to permit the Junta to continue its work. Instead, the dictatorship completely shut down this and other antifascist groups in January 1944, claiming they were Communist (Bisso, 2005: 238).<sup>59</sup>

Yet Argentine solidarity with the Allies did not disappear. Tourists vacationing in Uruguayan beach resorts donated money to Uruguayan ayudistas. Some aid organizations moved their operations to Uruguay, accompanying the political figures who went into exile there. Others continued to function secretly under assumed names; the Junta’s alias was Colmena. Aside from surreptitiously sewing, knitting, and sending goods abroad, the Junta remitted funds it had hidden from the police to Acción Femenina. AF used some of the \$17,355.78 Uruguayan pesos it received to purchase materials for making 25,586 bandages, and it followed the Junta’s wishes on where to send them. Leftover monies were applied to a campaign for making winter garments. The conditions under which their Argentine colleagues contributed this sum and fought for freedom inspired AF women to work “con gran calor y ahínco”, as an officer of one chapter put it. Now a double democratic sentiment motivated them: opposition to Nazism and a bond with the Argentine women.<sup>60</sup>

AF women expressed their admiration for the Junta’s pluck in numerous homages. They exhibited the bandages on May 25, 1944, Argentine independence day, in honor of the Junta. Another act that year commemorated the Junta on July 9, 1816, when Argentine patriots swore their allegiance to autonomy and freedom. Antifascists emphasized the contradiction between this patriotic holiday and the Argentine jails jammed with democratic citizens. AF president Cortinas inaugurated the event in the Ateneo de Montevideo, the premier site of cultural and antifascist gatherings. AF members Alvarez Vignoli, Arévalo, Batllista deputy Magdalena Antonelli Moreno, and Batllista senator Isabel Pintos de Vidal lauded the Junta. Emilio Troise, a distinguished doctor, intellectual, Communist sympathizer, and antifascist and human rights leader, deeply thanked the Junta’s Uruguayan “hermanas y camaradas” for their solidarity, which he predicted would revitalize the Argentine organization’s consciousness and determination.<sup>61</sup>

By now this transnational relationship had become vital to both parties. As *Diario Popular* observed, through its partnership with the Junta, Acción Femenina’s renown transcended national boundaries.<sup>62</sup> The ceremony of July 1944 offered AF an opportunity to showcase Uruguayan women’s increasing political visibility. The collaboration enabled the besieged Junta to keep itself and its mission alive, and Acción Femenina to finance aid programs. Perhaps most crucially, the joint campaign heightened the spirit of cross-border sisterhood so meaningful to the two groups. The ayudistas may well have imagined the faces of distant soldiers and families who wore the garments they made. It was easier, however, to visualize their co-workers across the Río de la

59 *Justicia*, 30 July, 3 (Berro de Fierro); 13 Aug. 1943, 2; *DP*, 30 June 1943, 1, 30 Mar. 1944, 2 (figure).

60 *DP*, 30 Mar., 2, 6 Apr., 2, 27 Apr., 2, 25 July, 2, 1 Aug., 2 (quote), 1 Mar. 1944, 2; Dora Cabello Moya, interview with author, 2011, Buenos Aires. Acción Femenina, n.p., details this joint campaign.

61 *DP*, 27 Apr. 2, 3 July, 2, 4 July, 2, 5 July, 2, 6 July 1944, 4. The text of the women’s speeches did not appear in the press. *DP*, 7 July 1944, 1, claimed that Troise could not attend the event, but his address is found in “Discurso pronunciado en acto organizado por Acción Femenina por la Victoria”, Uruguay, [1944], documento 6, Carpeta 5, Caja 4, Discursos frente a organismos antifascistas, Fondo Emilio Troise, CeDInCI. Troise was born in Uruguay but spent most of his life in Argentina.

62 *DP*, 28 May 1944, 2.

Plata, some of whom they had met, and the intensely personalized solidarity that they shared invigorated their labors.

## The End of the War

World War II was nearing its end, and this had consequences for the Junta and Acción Femenina. Uruguayans freely rejoiced the liberation of Paris, but Argentines did not enjoy this luxury. As news of this climactic event swept Buenos Aires on August 25, 1944, Junta leaders secretly convoked women at the Plaza Francia. Many others joined them in a giant protest against fascism abroad and dictatorship at home. At least 200,000 people braved the police as they listened to Berta Singerman, who frequently had performed at Junta benefits, recite the Marseillaise. The authorities suppressed this and other celebrations around the country (Singerman, 1981: 112-115).<sup>63</sup> With the imminent Allied victory, the military government allowed the Junta to reopen in April 1945 as part of the postwar democratic opening that led to the 1946 election. No sooner had the dictatorship taken this step, however, than it revoked its approval of a Junta benefit and, in May, imprisoned Schlieper for eight hours.<sup>64</sup> Repression of the Junta and other democratic forces continued.

The Junta hoped to resume its aid shipments to Europe to supply the Allies, feed and clothe refugees, and contribute to reconstruction. Yet its leaders also recognized that in light of the emerging postwar context, the organization would need to turn its attention to conditions within Argentina. Having reached a similar conclusion, Acción Femenina planned to discuss its future tasks at its second annual convention beginning on October 5, 1944, and it invited Schlieper to attend.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, various groups, including the Communist party, were organizing a demonstration in Montevideo on October 12 in support of democracy, hemispheric solidarity, and uninterrupted aid to the Allies. The women's mobilizing committee implored AF convention delegates to push for *ayudismo* by attending the demonstration. By October the committee had transformed itself into a new movement, the Unión Nacional Femenina (UNF), which invited women's organizations to its Congreso Nacional Femenino in December. The UNF sought to coordinate these institutions' efforts to implement the three aims of the October 12 demonstration, and it promised to respect their independent identities. It was women's task to improve and strengthen democracy, said one UNF activist, and they could do so by insisting on better conditions for women. Representatives of diverse women's groups in Uruguay and other countries, including many workers, attended the conference. Headed by the Uruguayan president's wife, Celia Álvarez Mouliá de Amézaga, who went on to become the UNF's head, the Congreso pressed for equal pay for equal work, enforcement and extension of existing labor laws, married women's rights, greater recognition of labor unions, a minimum rural salary, agrarian reform, economic diversification, health programs for women workers, aid to the Allied countries, and solidarity with the Argentine people and its political prisoners.<sup>66</sup>

63 F. Edelman, interview, and 1996: 89; *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), 7 July 1985, 16; Ida Halperin, phone interview with author, 2000; *La Prensa*, 25 Aug. 1944, 9-11.

64 *DP*, 7 May, 2, 26 May 1945, 4.

65 *Ibid.*, 7 Oct. 1944, 2.

66 *DP*, 9 Oct., 4, 25 Oct., 1, 3 Nov., 4, 18 Nov., 1, 25 Nov., 1, 29 Nov., 1, 3 Dec., 1, 20-31 Dec. 1944, 1. Also see Unión Nacional Femenina, "Las mujeres nos unimos para el bien de la Patria", flyer, attached to Teolinda Daray Vera to Brainerd, Nov. 1945, in Folder Correspondence of Brainerd with Persons in Uruguay, 1946-1947, Box 30, DG 043, *WILPF Papers*, Pt. 3: U.S. Section, Series A, 4 - Pt. 1, SCPC. I found no mention of Argentine delegates at the Congreso.

AF members participated in the assembly and other UNF endeavors. Lifting Uruguayans out of poverty required laws and government initiatives, and the movement cooperated with the UNF to obtain them. While aid for Europe remained its priority, increasingly it, too, emphasized the consolidation of democracy and social justice. Acción Femenina wrote to the United Nations, at its inaugural meeting in San Francisco in April 1945, urging elimination of “los ejércitos invisibles del Nazismo” that had fostered the class domination, racism, capitalist imperialism, and enmities among nations that led to World War II. AF also demanded the economic, social, political, and cultural equality of women and men. Women were eager to collaborate with men in the construction of a free and equitable world, but not as subordinates.<sup>67</sup>

What Schlieper heard at the AF convention and perhaps read about the UNF may have influenced her thinking on a new strategy for the Junta. The most critical determinant, however, was the Communist party and its evolving needs. After the Allied victory in Europe in May 1945, the Soviet Union was relatively secure, and the Party could turn to the challenges of the upcoming Argentine elections and mobilizing the popular sectors for social change.

Similar to the Congreso Nacional Femenino in Uruguay, the Junta invited women around the country to a meeting in early September 1945 to set its new agenda. Junta members, laborers, students, educators, and members of neighborhood and civic groups attended, as well as two AF representatives. One of them, Angela Mures, spoke at the conference and reported on its proceedings in the *Diario Popular*, noting that AF had to send delegates out of gratitude for the funds it had received from its Argentine sisters. The main topic of conversation at this Asamblea Nacional de Mujeres was the reestablishment of democracy. The military government was still in power, and one of its leaders, Juan Perón, was preparing to run for president. Searching for support, he had granted concessions to labor, and it appeared that he would decree women's suffrage. Schlieper observed that the dictatorship had closed democratic entities, arrested Junta members, and fired teachers who belonged to the Junta. The Junta wanted women's participation in the public arena and the recognition of their rights, but this was only possible under democracy. Accordingly, the Asamblea insisted on a return to constitutional rule and refused the vote except if granted through a law passed by an elected congress. It also clamored for higher salaries for women workers, enforcement of the maternity law, assistance for single mothers and their children, reduction of the cost of living, free medical clinics and child care, and secular democratic public education. The Junta started to implement some of these goals by initiating studies of women laborers and poverty in the provinces and establishing kindergartens, clinics, and other projects aimed at working women and their families. The Asamblea gave rise to the Comisión Coordinadora de Asociaciones Femeninas, which declared its support for the Unión Democrática, the alliance of the Radical, PDP, Socialist, and Communist parties against Perón (Barrancos, 2011: 175-198).<sup>68</sup>

The opposition demanded constitutional liberties, proper elections, freedom for political prisoners and students, and an end to the dictatorship, its interference in education, and its state of siege. Defying the mysterious disappearance of public transportation and Perón's veiled warnings of violence, over 200,000 people, mostly of the upper and middle classes, took part in the largest protest, the *Marcha de la Constitución y la Libertad*, on September 19. Many women, including

67 *El Plata* (Montevideo), 14 Apr. 1945, n.p., clipping in Carpeta de Recortes, 1941-1947, Colección Luisi, BN; Acción Femenina por la Victoria, *Periódico de Ayuda a las Naciones Liberadas por los Fascismos*, no. 1 (1946), 7.

68 *La Nación* (Buenos Aires), 4 Sept. 1945, n.p., clipping in Fanny Edelman Papers, Archivo del Partido Comunista, Buenos Aires; *El Patriota* (Buenos Aires), 17 Aug., 2, 24 Aug., 3, 31 Aug., 2, 7 Sept. 1945, 2, 4; F. Edelman, *Banderas*, 94-95; *DP*, 8 Sept., 2, 1 Oct. 1945, 4. On the Junta's social projects and investigations see *La Hora*, 22 Nov. 1945, 1; 17 Dec. 1945, 3; 14 Feb. 1946, 7, 12 Mar. 1946, 3.

Junta members, were among them. Meanwhile, student activists around the country occupied universities and went on strike. The authorities imprisoned students, faculty, and administrators and closed the universities of La Plata, Buenos Aires, and Litoral (Santa Fe). Police brutality did not stop Junta members and other women from supporting the beleaguered youth.<sup>69</sup>

AF pledged its deep support to the Argentine people in their struggle for liberty, and particularly to Argentine women. Uruguayan women professors and students, including AF members, met to protest the repression in the neighboring country. They decided to send representatives to Buenos Aires to deliver a letter to the Minister of the Interior insisting on the release of the women among the jailed students, as well as a letter of solidarity to these prisoners. Among the delegates were María Orticochea, member of the AF advisory board and director of Institutos Normales, and Garayalde, secretary of the AF's workshops. Argentine students, including the women who by now had been freed, and Schlieper, Ratto, and other Junta members, greeted the Uruguayans at the port of Buenos Aires on October 12 and took them to the Plaza San Martín, which protesters had completely occupied. A few days before, Perón's military rivals had forced him to leave the government, and on this same day they arrested him. Discussions about Perón and the future of the regime were taking place in the Círculo Militar, across the street from the plaza. Garayalde, who headed the delegation, and an Uruguayan student addressed the crowd. As they made their way to the podium, Argentine women hugged and kissed them to show their appreciation for their presence. Later the police fired on demonstrators and killed a doctor who had begun treating the wounded. Having witnessed this bloodshed, the Uruguayans gave flowers to the doctor's mother and accompanied the funeral cortege to the cemetery. The delegates handed the former prisoners the letter of solidarity in a ceremony at the Junta's headquarters. They also interviewed professors and students in Buenos Aires and La Plata, as well as Junta member and jurist Dra. Margarita Argúas, who had negotiated with the police to free the jailed women. When they returned to Montevideo, they related their experiences, the academics' struggle, and police abuses to faculty and student groups, who demonstrated on October 20 in favor of severing diplomatic relations with Argentina. Garayalde and one of the students who had accompanied her spoke at this rally.<sup>70</sup>

Aside from its devotion to its partner who had contributed to its aid and success, the AF had another compelling reason for these actions. Now that the Allies had defeated fascism in most of the world, Latin American antifascists wanted to do the same in their region. As they saw it, the last remaining fascist stronghold, outside of Spain, was Argentina. Sharing this goal, the Junta welcomed the AF's solidarity and used the resulting publicity in Uruguay as a means of evading Argentine censorship.

AF members continued to voice their support for the Junta and the opposition to Perón, but to little avail. The end of the war, Perón's election in 1946, and the granting of women's suffrage in 1947 removed the Junta's main purposes. With the Soviet victory and the onset of the Cold War, the Popular Front no longer suited Communist interests. The Unión Democrática's defeat also demonstrated the limits of this strategy. Instead, Argentine Party leaders decided to compete with Peronists for worker backing and reclaim the discourses of social justice, anti-colonialism, and class conflict. Communist leaders Fanny Edelman, a Junta member, and Victorio Codovilla advocated recruiting more women laborers for the Party. They recommended uniting women in

69 *Antinazi*, 27 Sept. 1945, 2; *El Pueblo*, 5-6 Oct. 1945, 1; women's flyers, Nov. 1945, and "¡Por qué están en huelga los universitarios!", flyer, in Folder 4, Box 3, Argentina Subject Collection, Subject File 1939-1944 [sic], Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford. Also see Almaráz (2001); Halperín Donghi (1995).

70 *DP*, 8 Oct., 1, 10 Oct., 1, 11 Oct., 1, 15 Oct., 1, 16 Oct. 1, 17 Oct., 1, 20 Oct., 1, 21 Oct. 1945, 1.

a movement that fought for social welfare, a reduced cost of living, equal salaries, and protective legislation, and tying these issues to the broader struggle against the oligarchy and imperialism. The agenda formulated at the Junta's Asamblea Nacional accorded with these plans, yet the Party decided to create a new organization, one less identified with the upper class, British and U.S. foreign policy, and the resistance to Peronism. The Junta faded away in 1947 and the Unión de Mujeres de la Argentina (UMA) replaced it, although it absorbed existing Junta chapters.<sup>71</sup>

This resembled the trajectory of Acción Femenina and the Unión Nacional Femenina, yet the Uruguayan context differed markedly from the Argentine. At the end of the war Communists continued to advocate a Popular Front style unity of classes and parties and an alliance with the democratic government. Unlike its Argentine counterpart, the Party was not competing with a hostile regime, nor did it experience persecution. Communists did well in the 1946 elections, which chose Arévalo as senator and five others as deputies. Meanwhile Communists, workers, and other groups began to assign more importance to internal conditions than external assistance, and UNF emerged as the umbrella organization of women dedicated largely to these local issues. The UNF waxed as AF waned. By 1948, however, Cold War tensions pushed the Party away from the Luis Batlle Berres administration (Colorado, 1947-51) in a narrow orthodox direction that alienated many supporters.<sup>72</sup> These events take us beyond the framework of this study.

The contact between Uruguayan and Argentine antifascist women increasingly was subsumed under their involvement in a new global organization. Acción Femenina and the Junta, as well as the Unión Nacional Femenina and Unión de Mujeres Argentinas, affiliated with the Communist-led Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), founded in 1945, which fought for peace, antifascism, women's and children's welfare, and women's rights.<sup>73</sup> The Junta and the UNF coordinated plans for WIDF secretary general Marie Claude Vaillant Couturier's visit. A Communist deputy and concentration camp survivor, Vaillant Couturier spoke in Uruguay and Argentina about the WIDF, her experiences in the French Resistance, and the need for continued aid to war-torn Europe. JV leaders Schlieper and Ratto attended some of the festivities in Montevideo celebrating her presence. Uruguayans and Argentines embarked on the same ships to several WIDF congresses, witnessed the devastation in Europe, and pledged to help alleviate it.<sup>74</sup> By this point, however, the UNF and UMA were displacing the Junta and Acción Femenina.

## Conclusion

Margaret Power asks us to analyze not only the links between organizations in different countries and how they changed over time, but how they influenced these groups and nations (Power, 2016). The evolving relationship between the Junta de la Victoria and Acción Femenina por la Victoria affected them in profound ways. Junta leaders believed that cultivating ties with like-minded women elsewhere would expedite victory over the Axis, and their Uruguayan counterparts came to agree. The Junta served as an organizational model and teacher for Acción Femenina, and as the mentorship faded their cooperation and mutual support facilitated their ability to fulfill their missions. Joint appearances raised favorable publicity for both groups and

71 *Mujeres Argentinas*, 1 Apr., n.p., 15 July, n.p., 1 Aug. 1947, n.p.; F. Edelman, *Banderas*, 99-100, 103; A. Valobra, "Partidos" and "La UMA"; Deutsch (2012): 235-236.

72 On Communist strategies and experiences, see Leibner (2011: 83, 87-88, 101-128). Fernando Aparicio and Roberto García Ferreira (2010) discuss police anti-Communist vigilance.

73 On this organization see Pieper Mooney (2012; 2013); Haan (2010; n. d.); Valobra and Yusta Rodrigo (2017).

74 *Nosotras* (Montevideo), nos. 12 (April 1946), 1, 15 (July 1946), 2, 16 (Aug. 1946), 2, 16; *DP*, 1 Mar. 1946, 1, 23-27 Aug. 1946; *La Hora*, 23 Aug.-12 Sept. 1946.

may have helped attract new members by depicting women's wartime roles as commendatory. In addition Senator Sofia Alvarez Vignoli de Demicheli reinforced the Junta's campaign to convince Catholic women that joining the antifascist cause did not contradict their faith. The Junta furnished the monies that AF needed to make and send materials to the Allies; in turn, financing AF enabled the Junta to continue its efforts despite persecution and clandestinity. Finally, by accompanying Junta members to antigovernment protests in Buenos Aires, Acción Femenina offered solidarity to their Argentine sisters. In doing so AF repaid the Junta for its financial backing and tried to undermine Peronism and military authoritarianism, which they both saw as fascism, although this proved unsuccessful.

The contacts between the Junta and Acción Femenina also influenced their respective nations. AF backed the JV's and Unión Democrática's push for liberal political democracy, but this campaign lost to Perón's brand of socioeconomic democracy. Yet one can argue that in other respects the ties across the Río de la Plata strengthened democracy. Through their joint appearances AF and JV leaders called attention to their diverse membership and thus promoted respect for ethnic, religious, and class pluralism, which is fundamental for this form of government. Furthermore, speakers at these events advocated women's citizenship and accustomed the populace to women occupying public and political roles. The cross-border presence of distinguished figures such as Scheiner, Arévalo, and Alvarez Vignoli de Demicheli demonstrated to women that they could aspire to high-ranking political positions, and it may have helped fuel Argentine campaigns for women's suffrage. As Junta spokeswomen had noted, democracy was incomplete without women.

Antifascism was inherently transnational. People of many countries rose up against Italian Fascism and German National Socialism, and the World Committee against War and Fascism and the Comintern, among other groups, spurred coordination and conversation among them. Solidarity across borders continued with global protests against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and efforts to aid the Spanish Republic and the Allies. The relationship between the Junta de la Victoria and Acción Femenina por la Victoria is an important example of such collaboration. Perhaps by reading the fine print of newspapers scholars will uncover women's pro-Allied groups in other Latin American nations and the transnational ties that may have nurtured them.

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