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Scott Soo, *The Routes to Exile: France and the Spanish Civil War Refugees, 1939-2009*, Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2013. xiii + 290 pp. Maps, bibliography, and index. £29.99. (pb). ISBN 978-0-7190-8691-5.

Review by Michael Seidman, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

This volume explores Spanish Republican refugees' history and memory in France and makes a significant contribution to both by showing the complex relationship between individual and collective memories. Soo has used effectively local archives, the exiles' press, and personal memoirs. Passages concerning the few possessions that the refugees brought with them evoked Tim O'Brien's moving *The Things They Carried*.^[1] Soo's summary of the flight of leftist militants over the Pyrenees is apt: "Mutual support reinforced a sense of ideological continuity and vice versa.... The exodus involved loss and despair, but also the strengthening of group identities" (p. 49). He provides an astute insight into the mentality of Spanish republicans who signaled their intention to return to their native land by calling their exodus "*la retirada*" ("the retreat"), rather than exile. Although he rightly questions whether the 1930s can be interpreted "as a linear narrative of intensifying xenophobia, authoritarianism, and repression of foreigners" (p. 126), he usually emphasizes the victim status of the defeated Spanish who suffered from "long-term discrimination" (p. 12). Yet he shows that although the Spanish Republicans lost militarily, they would eventually triumph culturally.

However, his history is diminished by a lack of knowledge of the Spanish Civil War. The author asserts "the de facto international isolation of the Spanish Republic" (p. 6) when, in fact, it received significant aid from the Soviet Union, fundraisers in the democracies, and 40,000 International Brigaders. More importantly, he seems unaware of the debates over the "democratic" nature of the Spanish Second Republic and assumes that all members of the Spanish antifascist coalition—including Communists, anti-Stalinist POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) members, and anarchists—supported "democratic values" (p. 94). The author's prose sometimes does not help his argument: "Paradoxically, the conflict in Spain suggested a pressing need for the production of a coherent discourse of belonging while simultaneously laying bare all of the long-standing fault lines" (p. 6).

Furthermore, Soo does not understand fundamental differences between Spain and France. He essentially equates both Popular Fronts as sharing "common interests" (p. 26). True enough, but he does not distinguish between the Spanish Popular Front, which became revolutionary by collectivizing private property and killing thousands of priests, and its French counterpart, which remained reformist and pacific. The French Popular Front upheld the French Republic but—unlike its Spanish counterpart—largely protected private property and traditional religions. Soo attributes the refusal of French Popular Front Prime Minister, Léon Blum, to supply arms to the Spanish Republic to "British disapproval, a hysterical response from the right-wing press and the Radicals' reticence about intervention" (p. 32). Soo might have added that the powerful pacifist current in Blum's own SFIO discouraged him from intervention in a civil war which, it was commonly believed, could have easily escalated into another

world war. The author also blames the supposedly undemocratic Prime Minister Edouard Daladier for using decree laws which bypassed parliament but does not acknowledge that Blum also employed them.

Furthermore, the author de-contextualizes the French reception of the refugees.[2] Instead, he states that “everything was in place for the arrival of the Spanish republican refugees” (p. 1), but that “discrimination” against them “bordered on the obsessive” (p. 2). He omits to mention that neither the French nor Spanish Republican authorities expected the rapid movement of 440,000 persons over the border in February 1939 in the midst of a harsh winter. In January 1939, the Republican Minister of Foreign Affairs, Julio Alvarez del Vayo, requested asylum for only 150,000 civilians--women, children, and the elderly. Instead, 220,000 civilians, 210,000 soldiers, and 10,000 injured--figures without precedent in Western Europe--trudged into France. It should be said, but it is not, that by opening its border and receiving these refugees, France prevented a potentially vast massacre of the defeated Republicans. It is also clear that no other country in Europe or North America would have accepted nearly a half million so-called “*rojos*” (“reds”) in the middle of a Great Depression which magnified the xenophobia and social/political tensions.

There is no doubt, however, that the treatment of the exiles was initially shameful in the “*camps du mépris*” (“camps of contempt”). One of the most infamous, Argelès-sur-Mer, humiliated and sickened the veterans of the Popular Army by failing to provide sufficient clothing, shelter, sanitation, and clean water. Dishonor and dysentery were the results. The scale of the influx overwhelmed French medical facilities and personnel. Other camps for civilians were less horrible, and the author claims that the French government occasionally pressured some refugees to return to Spain. By the autumn of 1939, perhaps 250,000 had departed voluntarily for their native land. By the end of the year, 180,000 remained, 45,000 of whom were women, children, and the aged. Soo makes an effort to show that conditions in the French “concentration camps” (the author favors this term even though after the Nazi experience, a more accurate expression would be “internment camps”) were changing quickly and usually for the better.[3] In contrast to a generally unsympathetic right, French leftist and Christian democratic groups pressured their center-right government to improve the reception of the refugees. Demands for labor, rather than humanitarian considerations, on the eve of World War II rapidly released many Spaniards from camps. Thousands of Spanish antifascists enrolled in the French military and its auxiliary forces to combat the Germans in 1940, and many would later join the Resistance.

Soo is convincing when he argues that asylum was “clearly linked to work [demands] rather than universal values” (p. 80), but objects to the French state’s attempt “to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ foreigners” (p. 34) which he finds inherently discriminatory in the worst sense of the word. In fact, he does not seem to believe that “bad” foreigners exist. He dismisses as a “national security obsession” (p. 389), Interior Minister Albert Sarraut’s suspicion that some refugees had been involved in violent crimes in Spain. Soo’s assertion that the French government’s use of Senegalese and Spahi troops to guard the camps “undoubtedly lacked sensitivity, given [General Francisco] Franco’s controversial use of Moroccan soldiers” ignores that all the imperial powers--democratic or not--used colonial forces in their armed forces (p. 48).

The author is only partially correct when he asserts, “for most French nationals resistance was a phenomenon to be created, but for the Spanish republicans it was a form of continuation fueled by their experiences and memories of the Spanish Civil War” (p. 175). Like Soo, many Spanish Republicans conflated their antifascism with that of the French Resistance and, more generally, with that of the Western Allies and after June 1941, with the Soviet Union. Yet Spanish and French antifascisms were quite different. The first was revolutionary, the second conservative and ultimately--as the Liberation showed--restorationist. Indeed, the author demonstrates this evolution. Many refugees began to sing *La Marseillaise* in addition to, or instead of *L’Internationale*. Spanish Popular Army veterans joined the French Resistance, eventually led by Catholic conservatives such as generals Philippe Leclerc or Charles de Gaulle, who had no Spanish equivalent on either the Nationalist or Republican side. Thus it is no

surprise that in late October 1944, as the author confirms, French government officials recommended the continuation of positive relations with the Franco regime. Spanish exiles were granted formal refugee status in March 1945 and continued their integration into French society where they and their children often thrived. Their hopes that the fall of Mussolini and Hitler would also lead to that of Franco were disappointed. Unlike the fallen Duce and Führer, the Caudillo had never declared war against the Western democracies who tolerated him.

I am sympathetic with Soo's emphasis on the refusals by Spanish Republicans to work in the factories and construction sites of German-occupied France. "The most recurrent form of refusal consisted of abandoning the workplace" (p. 181). Refugees described their labor for either the French or the Germans as equivalent to slavery, but the author shows that their resistance to work was as much personal as political. They were reluctant to build anti-Allied fortifications on the Atlantic coast and especially feared being forced to labor for the "*moros blondes*" (p. 161) ("blond Moors") in Germany. In 1944, Vichy authorities set a target number of 33,000 laborers for southern France, but managed to deliver less than 6,000 Spanish workers to the Germans. Soo is undoubtedly aware that what he calls "the stridently subversive transformation of workplaces into spaces of contestation" was not sufficient to end the Occupation (p. 17). Only the powerful armies of the Allies could accomplish the end of German rule in Europe.

Soo's final chapter explores the memory of the exiles, which he implies has been left in relative oblivion since a number of their internment camps were later occupied by Jews who became victims of the Holocaust: "Some Spanish republicans believed their past had been overshadowed through the predominance of references to Jewish internees and deportees" (p. 230). The point may be well-taken, but can also degenerate into a competition among victims which ahistorically equates all suffering.

The author capably blends memory and history. Concerning the latter, however, he overemphasizes the Spanish refugees' victimization and is insufficiently critical of their unitary vision of antifascism.

NOTES

[1] Tim O'Brian, *The Things They Carried* (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2009).

[2] A different view is found in Bartolomé Bennassar, *La guerre d'Espagne et ses lendemains* (Paris, 2006), pp. 353-479. An excellent local study is Vincent Parello, *Des réfugiés espagnols de la guerre civile dans le département de l'Hérault (1937-1939)* (Perpignan, 2010).

[3] Geneviève Dreyfus-Armand and Émile Temime, *Les camps sur la plage, un exil espagnol* (Paris, 1995), pp. 21-26, 81-92.

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