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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.

Response by Scott Soo, University of Southampton.

I would like to begin this essay by thanking Professor Seidman for taking the time to review my monograph and *H-France Review* for inviting me to respond. I was delighted to read that Professor Seidman believes that "the study makes a significant contribution to the history and memory of Spanish Republicans in France...." It is also gratifying to receive recognition of the range of sources used, though I would like to specify that the national archives from three different countries were also consulted. Above all, I appreciate the opportunity to engage with the reviewer's remarks and thereby explain some of the key issues that underpin *The Routes to Exile* as it goes to print in the second edition.

One of my prime concerns when writing the monograph was to place continual emphasis on both historical contingency and context. Both issues are firmly reflected in the key arguments to the book, which are singularly missing from Professor Seidman's review. While it is neither my intention nor role to rehearse all of the key arguments here, there is a need to engage with some of the relevant elements in order to respond to the reviewer's conclusion that I overemphasize "the Spanish refugees' victimization" and that I am "insufficiently critical of their unitary vision of antifascism."

The word "routes" in the monograph's title is a homonym of "roots" and points towards a preoccupation with time, space and social interaction. There was no determined outcome to the Spanish republican exile and unsurprisingly the refugees' lives were shaped by both conditions in France and the relations with their French hosts. The myriad ways in which the Spanish republicans forged their identities in exile drew from the past as part of a strategy for dealing with contemporary and future concerns. This process involved agency rather than victimhood and mobilised certain ideas, including antifascism, to act as a cohesive for the newly reconstructed groups and organisations in exile. When the monograph's stress on agency and identity construction is acknowledged, the overriding thrust of Professor Seidman's review becomes harder to sustain.

Professor Seidman can be assured that my knowledge of the history of the Spanish Civil War is intact. There is nothing unorthodox about highlighting the de-facto international isolation of the Second Spanish Republic. From the start of the conflict, Nazi German and Fascist Italian military aid and personnel were crucial to the rebel generals' fortunes in Spain. The signing of the non-intervention treaty in August of 1936 failed to stop support from flowing into the rebel camp. The Republic, on the other hand, was considerably hindered in purchasing equipment on the international arms market because of Western banks delaying the transfers of funds. Even when the Republic was able to start securing military support from the Soviet Union in September 1936, it was invariably insufficient to facilitate victory.

I would also like to allay Professor Seidman's worry that I am "unaware of the debates over the 'democratic' nature of Spanish Republic." I do not shy away from evoking the darker aspects of the Spanish republicans' activities in exile, whether their relation to the Resistance in France or the disconnect between the government of the Spanish Republic in exile and the refugees in France. Rather worryingly, Professor Seidman's critique can only be sustained by quoting my work out of context. At no point in the entire book is there any claim that all members of the "Spanish antifascist coalition [Professor Seidman's term, not mine]...supported 'democratic values'." Rather, I underscore how various Spanish republican organisations mobilised certain subjects to position themselves as the antithesis to the reactionary and totalitarian forces in Spain, whilst simultaneously reassuring the French government and public about the refugees' presence in France. This becomes clearer if the text that Professor Seidman refers to is quoted in full: "The looming spectre of a wider European conflict gave Spanish republicans the opportunity to remind their French hosts that the coalition of reactionary forces which had driven them out of Spain now threatened the rest of Europe. At certain junctures displays of Spanish republican solidarity crystallised around an imprecise but evocative mix of democratic values and a powerful sense of anti-fascism as refugees sought to challenge the reductive images which had accompanied their arrival in France" (pp. 93-94).

In a similar vein, the sentence of prose that the reviewer finds unhelpful concerning the divisions amongst Spanish republicans is clearer when read in context: "Taking the 'Spanish Republic' as an umbrella term is not without its problems. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the development of a Spanish republican national identity consistently foundered on the divisions that ran along and across regional, social and ideological-political formations. 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).

Decontextualization appears to occur once again in the review when Professor Seidman suggests that I do not understand fundamental differences between the Spanish and French Popular Front coalitions. In response, I would firstly direct readers to page 32 where I explain the outbreak of the conflict in Spain, along with the ensuing revolution and church desecrations. I certainly allude to some resemblances between the two countries: I evoke a civil war mentality in France and discuss how some French commentators perceived events in Spain as an uncanny echo of tensions within France. All the same, I clearly draw a distinction between a civil war mentality in France and the actual outbreak of an armed and bloody conflict in Spain, thereby evoking the different trajectories of the two Popular Fronts.

Continuing with the Popular Front, there is nothing amiss in underlining how Prime Minister Léon Blum's decision to withhold arms from Spain was influenced by a combination of the British government, the right-wing press in France, and the vast majority of the Radical members of the (French) Popular Front coalition. These were the most immediate and pressing factors bearing down on Blum. A pacifist current was certainly present in the SFIO, but it was not at the forefront of Blum's concerns and certainly did not prevent his government from engaging in a rearmament program just two months after conflict erupted in Spain.

Following on from the French Popular Front, the reviewer alludes to a lack of comparison between the use of decree laws by Blum and Édouard Daladier's administration. Admittedly, this would have further strengthened my argument about the encroaching authoritarianism taking place under Daladier's stewardship, rather than satisfying Professor Seidman's view about the use of decree laws under Blum's premiership. However, the reason for focusing on Daladier is twofold: firstly, his administration employed decrees at a far greater and systematic level than under Blum; and secondly, Daladier oversaw the ominous decree law of 12 November 1938. This established the legal framework for the internment of "undesirable" foreigners that was rapidly employed to intern the largest number of refugees ever in the history of the Third Republic. Significantly, the same law was in operation under the Vichy regime.

On the French reception policy for the Spanish refugees, it is unfortunate that Professor Seidman's charge of de-contextualization begins with a quote of a partial sentence from my book that effectively changes its meaning. Thus instead of "everything was in place for the arrival of the Spanish republican refugees," my book reads "[a]ccording to the French government everything was in place for the arrival of the Spanish republican refugees" (p. 1). The qualifier is needed in order to comprehend the distinction that I make between, on the one hand, the claims of French local officials and the government about its reception policy, and the actual havoc that prevailed. Contrary to the reviewer's subsequent claim, I do indeed broach the unexpected scale of the exodus along with the initial discussions that occurred between the governments of the Spanish and French governments on the matter of asylum. The wider question to consider is whether asylum should account for the conditions of refugee reception or whether it is confined to the subject of border politics and entrance rights.

When tackling conditions, the pressure and machinations of some French officials on the Spanish refugees to return to Spain were far more widespread and problematic than the reviewer implies. In addition, my account of the French government's use of colonial troops, and how this clashed with Spanish republican sensibilities, is part of a wider discussion into the long-term effects of the arrival and reception policy in France. This imperative, Professor Seidman claims, "ignores that all the imperial powers...used colonial forces in their armed forces." While that may well be the case, a comparative study of imperial armed forces is not overly illuminating with regards to Spanish republicans' subjectivities. Conversely, the decisions taken by the French authorities and the attendant consequences are of central importance to the study. One of the arguments set out in the book's introduction thus reads: "We discover how the painful experience of forced relocation was immensely aggravated through the French government's reception strategy, which in turn created a long-standing lens through which Spanish republicans interpreted and subsequently recalled their lives in France" (pp. 3-4).

Irrespective of the conditions underpinning the refugees' arrival, the French government did indeed, as I demonstrate, allow the Spanish refugees to cross the border. However, Professor Seidman reference's to 'so-called 'rojos' ('reds')" is slightly misleading in the context of 1939. As I have stated: "References to '*rouges espagnols*' (Spanish reds) can be found during the first year of exile, but became especially widespread with the Occupation and Vichy era when officials also referred to '*terroristes*'" (p. 5).

As the above quotes partly suggest, I endeavor to balance French administrative terminology with the Spanish republicans' subjectivities. It is for this reason that the book refers to both concentration and internment camps after a careful explanation of the various terms used by both parties. Professor Seidman suggests that internment camps would be a more accurate expression, but fails to acknowledge either my discussion of the matter or the resulting decision to employ the two appellations interchangeably.

The creation of a vast network of concentration/internment camps by a peacetime democratic government is the context within which I discuss the Daladier administration's categorisations of "good" and "bad" foreigners. At no juncture is there any denial on my part that, in Professor Seidman's words, "bad" foreigners existed. As the monograph repeatedly underlines, no one group of people was monolithic. I do, though, elucidate how the dichotomous logic translated into deteriorating refugees' rights and resulted in mass internment. It is a salient process to explore and one that is perhaps impossible to overstate given what happened and what is currently happening in France (and elsewhere).

The perils of generalisation with respect to either the Resistance or the cohesive force of antifascism is another problematic that is carefully considered in the study. Thus when Professor Seidman suggests that I am only partially correct about the Resistance and antifascism with his explanation of the variable nature of antifascism, he is invariably underlining my own argument made on page 197. The bind within which the reviewer seems to have become entangled arises from his conflation of a form of identification with an historical concept. The issues regarding the latter are highlighted perfectly in the

book. The overriding point to note, though, is the role of antifascism as a vector of mobilisation. As explained in the book, different groups drew on antifascist consciousness to legitimate their own interests. Irrespective of the different meanings attached to the term, or the tendency amongst Spanish republicans to conflate antifascism with anti-Francoism, antifascism provided a centripetal force for galvanizing many resisters from differing nationalities in France, albeit within certain limits.

The moral currency of the Resistance and the myriad roles played by the Spanish republicans in the Liberation of France partly account for why international relations in the postwar period were far more complex than Professor Seidman indicates when he refers to the Western powers' toleration of Franco. At the Liberation of France and in the immediate aftermath, antifascism continued to serve as a rallying call for Spanish republicans. It also acquired a new function by shining the spotlight on Franco's record during the Second World War and the trajectories of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. This strategy was particularly evident in the refugees' political meetings and commemorative events during a period when the survival of the Francoist regime was less evident. Significantly, though, as Franco consolidated his international position, the Spanish republicans' strategic employment of antifascism was eventually dropped.

Before concluding this response, the subject of historical contingency is worth raising once again. The final chapter of the book explores the trajectory of the Spanish republicans' commemorative discourses and concludes with the assertion that the Spanish republican exile has been an integral part of France's memorial landscape since the turn of the century. I do not, therefore, imply, that the exile's past "has been left in relative oblivion." Furthermore, although I report that some Spanish republicans believed that commemorative discourses about their internment in the Gurs camp had been overshadowed by the level of attention to Jewish internees and deportees, I clarify the causal factors at stake, as well as the attempts by one memorial association to negotiate the various histories of internment in France.

In conclusion, it is indeed unfortunate that the review does not account for any of the monograph's central arguments, for they counter the critique of victimization and unitary visions of antifascism. It is axiomatic to note, but worth stressing, that a focus on the impact of the war and its aftermath on social actors associated with the Spanish Republic is not synonymous with a process of "victimization."<sup>[1]</sup> There is absolutely no intention to victimize the Spanish republicans in *The Routes to Exile* and there is scant evidence in the book to suggest otherwise. On the contrary, chapter three begins by reflecting on the refugees' reactions to internment in France: "...it would be misleading to entertain any idea of the Spanish republicans as passive victims of circumstance. They more frequently responded to exile with initiative, innovation and perseverance as they went about reconstructing organisations and politico-social networks" (p. 93).

The undeniable fact is that the French government countered the refugees' arrival in 1939 with internment in the most atrocious conditions. The impact of this experience on the refugees' sensibilities and the ways in which this is represented in commemorative discourses constitutes a fundamental element of the book. At certain junctures, antifascism was entwined with the Spanish republicans' responses to exile as it was mobilised by different organisations and individuals to foster support and solidarity. As a concept, antifascism is evidently multi-layered and this is not sidestepped in my study: it was at times used instrumentally but was equally a source of commonality and individual belief. To infer otherwise necessarily involves the elision of one of the book's aims but, most of all, it denies historical agency.

#### NOTE

[1] Interestingly, Professor Seidman's concern about victimization has also been the focus of at least one other review. See his review of Paul Preston, *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in*

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*Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: Harper Press, 2012) in Michael Seidman, "Victimized," *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 September 2012.

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