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Unexpected Routes: Refugee Writers in Mexico. By Tabea Alexa Linhard. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2023. 306 pages.

Unexpected Routes: Refugee Writers in Mexico. Tabea Alexa Linhard's last book. Linhard is professor of Spanish Literature, Comparative Literature, and Global Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. The book analyzes a multilingual and transnational constellation of anti-fascist writers, intellectuals, and artists displaced from Europe and exiled in Mexico in the context of the Spanish Civil War and World War Two. This is a group of writers from the German literary canon (such as Anna Seghers, Egon Erwin Kisch, Ruth Rewald, and Gertrude Duby) and others placed in the intersection of Spanish and Mexican literatures (Max Aub and Silvia Mistral). One of Linhard's interventions is reading these writers vis-à-vis each other, displaced from their literary and linguistic traditions and united by their diverse experiences of forced displacement and destination. This destination was a Mexico which became an "epicenter of anti-fascist resistance" for European intellectuals, but that was no sanctuary for most common Jews fleeing Nazism (see Linhard 12).

The book consists of ten chapters, focused on each analyzed figure but dealing simultaneously with several authors, objects, and preoccupations. Reconstructing the "routes" of each chapter would thus take too much of the space of this review. The book's structure allows Linhard to bring together a diverse cast of writers and create an eclectic object of study constituted by fiction, essays, travel journals, correspondence, photography, cartography, and drawings, among other materials. This is a textual and non-textual archive at the intersection of several national, cultural, and linguistic traditions as well as artistic disciplines. The author claims that analyzing how "refugee writers" conveyed their experiences of displacement in these works "bring[s] us one step closer to understanding the contradictions and nuances of refugee lives" (31). While recognizing their status as an elite, Linhard suggests that the fates of the writers she studies are "haunted" by those who were not able to find asylum, thus illuminating a part of "a whole that can never be fully grasped" (6). Additionally, she claims that while the mid-twentieth century and the present are "by no means identical," this constellation of objects provides "numerous lessons" for understanding the current refugee crisis (5).

To explore these claims, the book first reconstructs the biographical and historical events leading to the authors' displacement and asylum. Furthermore, it identifies the ways in which their works worked through their experiences of displacement and their interaction with spaces of transit and their country of asylum. This involves trailing the sometimes barely visible traces left in Mexico by the refugees and also exploring collaborations, exchanges, and fortuitous encounters between figures as ideologically and aesthetically disparate as Anna Seghers, André Breton, Wifredo Lam, and Germaine Krull (all passengers of the same ship, the Capitaine Paul

Lemerle). Linhard (alluding to the film *Casablanca*) calls "beautiful friendships" the transnational network produced by the encounters between writers and artists escaping fascism in Europe and creating objects that make legible, from today, "the long reach of the Holocaust across the Atlantic" (197).

The author argues that, unlike the cultural legacies of exiles from the Spanish Civil War, "traces of the Germanophone community are far less visible" (29); albeit with Duby's work in Chiapas being a notable exception (181). While in Mexico, Seghers and Kisch (among others) created the German-language newspapers *Freies Deutschland/ Alemania Libre* (1941-1946) and the publishing house *El Libro Libre*, which released, for the first time and in Spanish, books such as Seghers's *Transit* (1944) (13). Moreover, Kisch and Seghers produced several individual works concerned with Mexico, travel journals such as Kisch's *Entdeckungen in Mexiko* (1945), and essays focusing on Mexican culture, such as Seghers' texts on Dolores del Río and Diego Rivera. However, the newspaper and the publishing house disappeared once the war ended, and they returned to Europe. Furthermore, most of these essays were never translated, and the books which were translated were never reprinted; consequently, critics have not analyzed them (with few exceptions).

In addition to focusing on works by canonical authors such as Seghers and Aub, the book explores unpublished anonymous archival records. For example, Chapter 4, focused on Silvia Mistral, analyzes "Diario de a bordo," a logbook collectively written and drawn by the passengers of the Ipanema, a ship carrying around a thousand Spanish refugees (including Mistral) from France to Mexico in July 1939. The logbook provides access to how passengers worked through their experience of forced displacement and limbo (the ship was stranded for a time in Martinique). Furthermore, by analyzing the text, Linhard identifies the "deeply ingrained colonial and racialized views" that refugees carried with them across the Atlantic, even while they were victims of them (55). She constantly remarks how this element permeates practically all the book's materials.

The book's materials are productive not only in uncovering the complexities and ideological contradictions of refugees' imaginaries. They also reveal encounters, collaborations, and implicit dialogues between authors displaced from their homes and thus from their literary traditions and processing in different ways their experiences of traumatic dislocation. For example, Chapter 5 focuses on Max Aub and analyzes his play *El rapto de Europa o siempre se puede hacer algo* (1946). Like Seghers' *Transit*, the piece is concerned with refugees who were, like the authors themselves, stranded in Marseille while trying to secure visas. One of Aub's characters, modeled after Seghers, describes her experience of being in limbo: "There's no longer solid ground for me. Everything feels soft, unreliable, quivering. A world made of cotton, a soil made of mud, slippery, dirty..." (quoted in Linhard 100). For Linhard, the character's vision reveals the "uncertainty and anxiety" and the "yearning for roots"

that “haunt” Aub’s and Seghers’ “fictional and autobiographical accounts” (100). The passage also shows how, in his work, Aub created a “Seghers” unprotected by the emancipatory horizons of communist internationalism. By doing so, Aub implicitly suggested an interpretative key to approach a part of Seghers’ work which advances a different set of politics from the unwavering communist convictions of her essays on Diego Rivera.

Similarly, the book analyzes works such as those of Mexican artist Leopoldo Méndez, who created the artwork for some of Seghers’ books, and pieces such as “Deportación a la muerte,” a print that uses elements of “Mexican post-revolutionary culture” to produce an early depiction of the Holocaust (122). Méndez’s work shows how the encounter with refugees compelled Mexican artists and writers to perform acts of witnessing. That is, to start articulating, through their works, the historicopolitical consequences of the Holocaust as seen from Mexico even before the end of the war.

Aub’s play and Méndez’s art foreground the productivity of assuming a transnational stance to approach works situated at the intersection of several literary and artistic traditions, either because they were produced in displacement or because they were created by authors trying to address, through their works, the consequences of a global event.

In “El arte de la fuga” (1997), Mexican writer Sergio Pitlor recounts an experience from November 1983, when he was serving as a diplomat in Prague and was invited to an exhibition commemorating the centenary of Egon Erwin Kisch’s birth. The exhibition displayed pictures of Kisch alongside Mexican artists and intellectuals like Diego Rivera, Hollywood stars like Orson Welles and Dolores del Río, and communist leaders and writers such as Pablo Neruda and Anna Seghers — all reunited in Mexico by the war (see *Trilogía de la Memoria* 198). With *Unexpected Routes*, Linhard has made a significant contribution to understanding the consequences for literary history of this context of radical dislocation on a global scale described by Pitlor.

Moreover, her book can inspire new works that explore different “routes” to those the book takes. Other possible figures to study are Victor Serge and Jean Malaquais, both authors displaced in similar circumstances and who produced works that could engage in productive dialogue with Linhard’s authors and materials. *Unexpected Routes* contributes to the agendas of Memory Studies and Jewish Studies, especially concerning Latin America, and appeals to specialists interested in exploring the implications of today’s refugee crisis by revisiting past episodes of forced displacement.

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