



Cultural translation and knowledge transfer on alternative routes of escape from Nazi Terror

edited by Susanne Korbel and Philipp Strobl, Studies for the International Society for Cultural History, London/New York, Routledge, 2022, xiii + 264 pp., £120.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780367569112

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Cultural translation and knowledge transfer on alternative routes of escape from Nazi Terror, edited by Susanne Korbel and Philipp Strobl, *Studies for the International Society for Cultural History*, London/New York, Routledge, 2022, xiii + 264 pp., £120.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780367569112

Susanne Korbel and Philipp Strobl's new edited collection seeks to diversify the narratives of those fleeing Nazi Germany during the 1930s with the aim of highlighting individuals on 'alternative routes' and to locations absent from traditional historiography. The collection demonstrates how individuals utilised their cultural capital in a variety of fields to both aid in their journey and also exemplify how many acted as mediators between cultures, languages and artistic networks. The editors identify a range of interlocking factors, including transnationality, cultural translation, transculturation, knowledge transfer, and exchange of cultural capital. By stressing the mutuality of these facets, the editors move away from discussions of assimilation or acculturation, to one of interconnected exchange on the part of the individual mover, and the host society (p. 10). The volume contributes to a historiography that has thus far largely focused on transatlantic knowledge transfer ignoring the global aspect. The editors thus see the volume as a divergence away from this outlook instead focusing on the 'transplanted, displaced or translated knowledge' (p. 7) in geographies where the cultural, social and educational differences between the members of the host society and those arriving are stark. Korbel and Strobl are therefore keen to highlight narratives which show that those who left the Third Reich also contributed to other locations beyond Britain, the USA and Palestine.

The ambitious collection grew out of the international conference 'Imaging Emigration – Translating Exile' held at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna in April 2019 and has now been published in the Routledge series *Studies for the International Society for Cultural History*. Authors include scholars internationally from history, cultural studies, musicology, Jewish studies, and beyond, at different career stages and in different professions. Whilst the original conference from 2019 organised panels by geographical spread, this collection is divided into three parts: 'Networks: Family, Friendship, Relations'; 'Strategies of Cultural Translation and Knowledge Transfer'; and 'Actors of Transfer and Translation'. Whilst ostensibly split into these three sections, the reality is that many of the chapters overlap, looking at networks, strategies and the actors themselves in equal measure.

Section one on the networks available to those forced to flee is comprised of four chapters looking at both specific localities such as China but also more general non-familial links. Gabriel Finder examines the narrative of the physician Jakob Rosenfeld and explores his role as a mediator between Chinese, Central European, and Jewish cultures, whilst Asher Biemann's chapter looks at the global nature of the family of Ermanno Loevinson and how they negotiated their Jewishness in varying locations. Katharina Prager also opts for an actor-centred approach examining the role of gender in the narrative of screenwriter Salka Viertel and her creation of a transnational network in the USA. The first section ends with Swen Steinberg's chapter on the publications of Social Democratic exiles and how these contributed to discussions of escape predominantly into the 'Global South'.

Section two focuses on the strategies adopted by those that left in an exercise of cultural translation and knowledge transfer with four chapters by Christina Wieder, Andrea Strutz, Kathrin Sippel and Andrea Meyer Ludowisy. Wieder details the narrative of the Austrian actress Hedy Krilla, whose methods of mediating her experience of exile for the German/French-speaking exile theatre in Argentina helped modernise independent theatre. Strutz opts to study multiple artists and musicians who fled to Canada and positively transferred many of their skillsets to this new environment, whilst conversely Sippel highlights the cultural clashes between refugees and locals in Portugal, predominantly with regard to the role of women in society. Ludowisy, an Academic Research Librarian at Senate House, London, uses the collection of the Germanist William Rose housed in the University of London archives to detail his experience as a translator and mediator for several writers exiled to Britain.

Section three sees Steven Cooke and Anna Hirsch discuss the life and work of the Viennese artist and costume designer Louis Kahan, tracking his varied journey alongside his transnational and diasporic ties and their influence on his art. The final three chapters by Jeremy Leong, Markus Helmut Lenhart and Melina Paetzold focus on three composers/musicians, respectively: Erwin Felber in China and his postwar career in Shanghai; Melitta and Victor Urbancic in Iceland who integrated Central European music to Icelandic culture; and Ingolf Dahl on his unique knowledge transfer to the USA.

As is evident, the vast majority of contributions to this collection opt for an actor-centred approach where the biography of an individual is narrated, weaving in the aforementioned overarching themes. Indeed, Swen Steinberg argues for the importance of a biographical microhistorical approach. He states that migrants are 'knowledge actors in their own right', having the ability to 'influence, transform, extend or even forget bodies of knowledge' all within specific 'constellations during and especially after migration' (p. 52). Following the cultural and linguistic turn, the 'biographical turn' – especially the focus on the 'new biography' – seeks to move away from 'typical chronological master narratives that focus on the histories of white, western, male subjects ostensibly "worthy" of a biography'.¹ Within the collection, chapters such as Andrea Meyer Ludowisy's on the translator and Germanist William Rose diversify the series of texts by using the narrative of a third party as opposed to the exiles themselves, to highlight mediation between the various literary cultures. Ludowisy argues that Rose's acquaintance with various exiled authors allowed them to 'reinvent themselves in a new language' (p. 173): translation and cultural knowledge which he also applied to the British war effort as a cryptanalyst at Bletchley Park. Interactions with authors such as Alfred Kerr, Stefan Zweig and Franz Werfel, point to Rose as a facilitator of Germanist knowledge production in Britain during the war. Ludowisy suggests that due to Rose's interventions and strong basis himself in German literature and psychoanalytical theory, many were able to 'glide willingly onto England's lap' (p. 185), to quote the noted theatre critic Alfred Kerr on the importance of Rose's translation.

More widely, the contributions merge 'two major trends in modern history: the history of knowledge and the history of diaspora and exile' (p. 7) centring themselves within the rapidly growing field of 'Migrant Knowledge'. Whilst proponents of the history of knowledge previously recognised the transnationality of individual actors, scholarship into how such knowledge was used, adapted and mediated remained at the boundaries of historical discourse. Since 2017, scholars such as Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg have highlighted that whilst the interactions between knowledge spaces and producers is recognised for certain individual actors (citing explorers, colonizers, missionaries, traders and diplomats), migrants were yet to be studied.² This intersection has led to fruitful research by scholars across the globe including many examples within this collection, including Steinberg himself, who looks at German-speaking publications of Social Democratic exiles especially in the Global South. Steinberg's

chapter analyses escape routes taken from Central Europe and how these journeys were communicated back to their original geography in an example of knowledge mediation. Although highlighting various examples in the exile press, Steinberg often returns to the Czech brochure *Emigrant Letters from Five Continents* produced by the Social Democratic refugee relief in Prague on receiving an abundance of correspondence in 1937 on life and experience in exile across the world. Steinberg goes on to touch upon distinguishing types of knowledge in the brochure, such as everyday knowledge and experiential knowledge, giving examples of the racism experienced in South Africa by some that fled, and the experience of arrival from those in Colombia. Steinberg argues that knowledge in many publications was 'conditioned by a specific experience gained in migration' (p. 59) which was then distributed, circulated and partially modified by publishers. The author questions agency within refugee circles, and further goes on to pose new research avenues (p. 60), such as other categories like age and gender within this global knowledge transfer.

As transnational histories of forced migration with regard to the Holocaust continue to grow, what must equally be noted is how culture spread throughout Europe and further afield, moving through and in-between many of the geographies referenced within this collection. Korbelt and Strobl briefly credit the transnational nature of the chapters, stressing their value to the 'growing awareness of the universal importance of information and the knowledge [of] societies we live in' and that regardless of definition, this transnational turn in scholarship shifts the scholar towards a more 'multifocal understanding of historical processes' (p. 9). The volume provides actor-centred empirical studies highlighting the transnational quality of culture as it spread throughout the globe during the period of 'Nazi Terror' and after. The chapters together create a series of transnational microhistories which successfully demonstrate the potential of such studies. Perhaps, the best examples in the collection come from those chapters that exemplify multiple migrations of those fleeing Nazism, and how these various geographies flow between each other.

Asher Biemann's chapter on the archives of the Loevinson family looks at the networks surrounding the siblings Hermann and Johanna. Biemann demonstrates the 'non-linear complexit[ies] of their respective cultural allegiances' (p. 85), tracking Hermann's feelings towards Italy where he relocated before fascism and the impact this had on translated works for his German readers. Simultaneously, Johanna's humanitarian approach to her translation in America connected her with Italian antifascist movements, with Biemann arguing the siblings' shared anchor in Judaism reconciled their conflicting world views. Something further which bonds the disparate branches of the Loevinson family across separate geographies was their 'veritable "archive fever"' (p. 101) and the shared notion of a view to their family's posterity. Conversely, Steven Cooke and Anna Hirsch, in their chapter on the artist and designer Louis Kahan, highlight how his experiences 'travelled with him' (p. 199) to new geographies, building upon each other, and thus all important contributions to his oeuvre. They compare Kahan's 1975 etching *The Flight into Egypt* with the earlier 1952 painting of the same name, noting the explicit references to his family's narrative and topological past. Cooke and Hirsch argue that these two images demonstrate a 'fold in the spatiality of memory' (p. 213), that being the proximity between his pasts, temporally and spatially.

Korbelt and Strobl's collection succeeds at broadening the field to include a wide range of actors, cultural capital and geographies to better encapsulate the heterogeneous nature of migration. Some of the chapters, however, would benefit from making a clearer link to the themes set out by the editors initially, drawing more upon the theoretical to better ground the narratives. Nonetheless, the complexity of the biographies, combined with the diversity of geographies, routes and cultural capitals, make Korbelt and Strobl's collection one to be used as an example of how to best empirically demonstrate the interlocking methodologies of this

area of study. Whilst initially the amount of theoretical underpinnings merged together within these texts appears overwhelming, by the conclusion it is evident that value can be gained from such a varied mix of individual narratives. For those students and academics interested in examples of transculturation in the narratives of those fleeing 'Nazi Terror' or for those following the ever growing body of research on 'Migrant Knowledge', Korbel and Strobl's volume acts as a vessel through which specific examples can be acquired. Alongside the work's success in expanding the geographical range of the present literature, this reviewer would highlight the merits of centring the fleeing individual as a witness and actor in history – as an agent in their own right.

Notes

1. Phillip Stobl, "Migrant biographies as a prism for explaining transnational knowledge transfers," *Migrant Knowledge Blog* (7 October 2019), Accessed via: <https://migrantknowledge.org/2019/10/07/migrant-biographies-as-a-prism-for-explaining-transnational-knowledge-transfers/>, Last accessed: 20 April 2022.
2. Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg, "Knowledge on the move: New approaches toward a history of migrant knowledge," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. (2017): 313-346 (pp. 321-22).

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