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Marion Kaplan

**Lisbon is Sold Out!**

**The Daily Lives of Jewish Refugees in Portugal During World War II**

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**LISBON IS SOLD OUT!**  
**THE DAILY LIVES OF JEWISH REFUGEES IN PORTUGAL DURING WORLD WAR II**

By Marion Kaplan\*

**Abstract**

This working paper focuses on Jewish refugees in Portugal during World War II and examines a triangle of actors: the Jewish refugees themselves; the Portuguese national and local governments, civil servants, and citizens; and Jewish and transnational philanthropies. Using diplomatic, political, and legal history, and the history of daily life, it analyzes the conditions, individuals, and laws that allowed Portugal to open (and sometimes close) its doors to tens of thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing war-torn Europe and Nazi persecution. It highlights how refugees coped once there, both practically and psychologically. The refugees' sojourn in Lisbon captures a poignant moment: how did they adjust to the travails and sentiments of fleeing and waiting? Their frightening odysseys from impending doom to fragile safety, their fearful wait in an oddly peaceful purgatory, and their grateful surprise at the reactions of Portuguese citizens linked up with their private agonies.

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In the opening scene of *Casablanca*, released in 1942 and one of the five most popular American films ever,<sup>1</sup> the camera zooms in on a map of Casablanca in relation to Portugal. The refugees in Casablanca “wait and wait and wait” for visas to get to Lisbon, “the great embarkation point” for the “freedom of the Americas.” At the end of the film, its heroes fly off to Lisbon.

Most Jewish refugees, however, reached Lisbon via far more torturous paths, fleeing by train, car, or foot through France, Spain and Portugal, arriving destitute and forlorn. Many of them had already suffered social death and violence in their homelands. As they learned that their new European “host” nation did not want them either, their knowledge and situation added one more link to the chain of dehumanization they bore. How did Jewish refugees experience their physical and emotional lives and how did the contingencies of World War II and the ambiguities of Portuguese policies affect them? As they fled from Nazi engulfed Europe towards Portugal, how did they adjust to the travails and sentiments of fleeing and waiting? How did they adapt to leaving home, friends, and families behind? And, once in Lisbon, how did they experience their flight and their day-to-day reality? *Their frightening odysseys from impending doom to fragile safety, their fearful wait in an oddly peaceful purgatory, and their grateful surprise at the reactions of Portuguese citizens linked up with their private agonies.*<sup>2</sup> This, then, is a history of the actions and feelings of Jewish refugees caught in a “no-man’s-land” between a lost past and an unpredictable future.<sup>3</sup>

### 1933-1939: Portugal and early refugees

Before the war, Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria sought safety in neighboring countries, especially France and Holland, or in the U.S. and Palestine.<sup>4</sup> About one-third of German Jews had fled their homeland at this time. Many, especially the young, saw no social or economic future in Nazi Germany or Austria. Some left as Nazi economic

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<sup>1</sup> “AFI’s 100 Years, 100 Movies,” American Film Institute website.

<http://www.afi.com/100years/movies.aspx>, accessed May 25, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See: “Forum: History of Emotions,” in *German History* Vol. 28, No. 1 (2010), 67–80.

<sup>3</sup> Koestler, *Arrival and Departure* (New York, 1943), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert A. Strauss, “Jewish Emigration from Germany: Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses,” *Leo Baeck Inst. Year Book*, vols. 25 and 26 (1980 and 1981). Until the end of 1936, Palestine attracted the most refugees from Germany.

strangulation threatened to impoverish them. Others had first become “refugees within [their] own country.”<sup>5</sup> Still others, more politically involved, fled fascism, aware of the arrests and murders of associates. An “‘arrest’ in those times” often meant torture or death.<sup>6</sup>

The vast majority did not consider Portugal, a poor, agricultural country under another dictatorship, an option, even though, until 1938, German citizens could enter Portugal without a visa.<sup>7</sup> Still, even the small trickle of refugees from Central Europe and the larger flow of refugees from the Spanish Civil War -- indeed, all newcomers -- alarmed the government. Several years earlier, in 1936, the secret police worried that “strangers of suspect origin in Portugal” might be engaged in “espionage or international agitation.” The police focused on those with “visas made for Russians, Poles, *heimatlos* (stateless-MK), individuals whose nationalities differ from the country documented, Syrians and Lebanese.”<sup>8</sup> They did not single out Jews, although “Russians, Poles” and “*heimatlos*” surely included Jews.

In 1938, the year of the fruitless Evian Conference on refugees and the Nazi-instigated pogrom of *Kristallnacht*, Portugal issued its Circular no. 10, allowing only 30-day *tourist* visas to persons who could document that they already had visas to overseas destinations and could show proof of ship tickets and the ability to pay expenses in Portugal. This barred “aliens and Jews” from *settling* in Portugal.<sup>9</sup> Under constant pressure to leave, they felt exceedingly vulnerable. Still, refugees came. Despite estimates that Portugal could only accommodate about sixty or seventy refugee

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<sup>5</sup> William A. Neilson, *We Escaped: Twelve Personal Narratives of the Flight to America* (New York, 1941), 213-14.

<sup>6</sup> Neilson, *We Escaped*, 213-14.

<sup>7</sup> This as based on an accord signed by the two countries in 1926. Irene Flunser Pimentel, “Refugiados entre portugueses (1933-1945),” *Vértice* (Nov.-Dec. 1995), 103.

<sup>8</sup> Arquivos Nacional da Torre do Tombo (hereafter, Portuguese National Archive, Lisbon): MC 480, Sector PVDE, Lisboa, No.F. 13, No PT 7/21 NT 352. [‘vistos’ feitos por russos, polacos, heimatlos, individuos de nacionalidade diferente do paiz que os documentous, assirios e libanezes.” *Stateless, Russian, and other individuals in Portugal requesting passports from countries different from their own country, 1936, Spr., 6-Jun. 5.*] See Numbers 3 & 8 of this file. Apr. 7 and Apr. 18, 1936.

<sup>9</sup> Pimentel, “Refugiados,” 103 and Avraham Milgram, *Portugal, Salazar, and the Jews* (Jerusalem, 2011), 66.

families,<sup>10</sup> several hundred arrived there between 1933 and the fall of France in June 1940. Most settled in Lisbon, the capital and a lively port city of about 600,000, where the majority of Portugal's 400 Jewish families, about 2,000 people, lived.<sup>11</sup> The small Jewish Portuguese community had seen its status and socio-economic integration grow in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially with the downfall of the monarchy and the ascendance of the Republic in 1910. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a small group of Jews from North Africa, especially Gibraltar and Morocco, also moved to Portugal, forming a community in Lisbon that grew to about 300-400 members by mid-century. Generally, Jews enjoyed a significant measure of tolerance even before their full emancipation in 1911.<sup>12</sup>

The initial refugees brought some money with them to start small enterprises or had careers or businesses they could continue with some local help, setting up businesses in Lisbon and Porto as importers, manufacturers, doctors, engineers and merchants, or representing German or American companies.<sup>13</sup> In the spring of 1940, however, Portugal suddenly faced a massive influx of refugees.

#### Caught in a Vice: Jews and Mass Flight, 1940

The fall of France triggered a "stampede" southward toward North Africa, Spain and Portugal of tens of thousands of Jews,<sup>14</sup> political refugees, and escaped Allied Prisoners of War to avoid the German juggernaut. Portugal, at first, demonstrated generosity toward those entering its borders, despite new rules to hinder the entry of foreigners, Russians, and "Jews expelled from the country of their nationality or from those they come from" (Circular #14) of Nov. 1939.<sup>15</sup> It admitted tens of thousands of

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<sup>10</sup> Dr. Robert Kauffmann, formerly of the AEG, to James McDonald, Oct. 17, 1934 in Richard Breitman, Barbara McDonald Stewart, and Severin Hochberg, eds., *Advocate for the Doomed: The Diaries and Papers of James G. McDonald, 1932-1935* (Bloomington, 2007), 512-13.

<sup>11</sup> Augusto d'Esaguy; Chairman of COMMASSIS, cited 400 families, June 4, 1941. JDC archives, File 896 (2 of 3), Countries: Portugal general 1933; 1939-42, 1. The number of 2,000 Jewish inhabitants of Lisbon is in: *Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt*, Dec. 10, 1940 (Berlin), 1. Patrik von zur Mühlen estimates about 1,000 in Lisbon, Porto, Far and Braganza together. *Fluchtweg Spanien-Portugal: Die deutsche Emigration und der Exodus aus Europa 1933-1945* (Bonn, 1992), 125.

<sup>12</sup> Milgram, *Portugal*, 26-33.

<sup>13</sup> Ben-Zwi Kalischer, *Vom Konzentrationslager nach Palaestina: Flucht durch die Halbe Welt* (Tel Aviv, 1945?), 151; Zur Mühlen, *Fluchtweg*, 122-23.

<sup>14</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 42 (1940-41), 336

<sup>15</sup> Milgram quotes Circular no. 14 of November 11, 1939. "Portugal, the Consuls, and the Jewish Refugees, 1938-41," Shoah Resource Center, note 58,

transmigrants<sup>16</sup> with even the slimmest evidence, including visas to China, Belgian Congo, and Siam.<sup>17</sup>

Because of Portugal's relatively liberal practices and illegal entries,<sup>18</sup> by July 1940 Lisbon had emerged as the best way station for Jews to escape continental Europe for North and South America. Between 40,000 and 100,000 people reached Portugal in the year 1940/41.<sup>19</sup> In October 1940, American reporter William Shirer logged in his diary that Lisbon served as "the one remaining port on the Continent from which you can get a boat or a plane to New York."<sup>20</sup> That same month, the main German-Jewish newspaper in the U.S., the *Aufbau*, reported: "New émigrés from France and from German occupied territories arrive constantly. One hardly hears any Portuguese ... in the middle of the city.... Lisbon is sold out."<sup>21</sup> The writer Arthur Koestler, who spent seven weeks in Lisbon in the fall of 1940 while trying to get to England, referred to the city as the "last open gate of a concentration camp..."<sup>22</sup> While tens of thousands soon continued their exodus by boat or plane to distant shores, Lisbon housed about 8,000

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[http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CDAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fyad-.org.il%2Fodot\\_pdf%2FMicrosoft%2520Word%2520-%25203230.pdf&ei=qHi1UIDkBg650AGR4YDYAQ&usg=AFQjCNEz3\\_A9NPJjnz-f4WkT5aOqSs8umg&sig2=G\\_-f9rRWTRq50ahp-iMpqg](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CDAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fyad-.org.il%2Fodot_pdf%2FMicrosoft%2520Word%2520-%25203230.pdf&ei=qHi1UIDkBg650AGR4YDYAQ&usg=AFQjCNEz3_A9NPJjnz-f4WkT5aOqSs8umg&sig2=G_-f9rRWTRq50ahp-iMpqg), accessed, Nov. 26, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Milgram's statistics challenge long-established but fuzzy numbers ranging between Yehuda Bauer's *American Jewry and the Holocaust: the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee* (Detroit, 1981), estimate of 40,000 Jews passing through Portugal in 1940-41 (61) and the *American Jewish Yearbook* (1944) estimate of 100,000 mostly Jewish refugees, a figure the same as that of the JDC (between 1936 and 1944). JDC archives, Portugal, file #896-897, p. 365. Michael Marrus also suggested 100,000 in *The Unwanted, European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford U Press, 1985), 265.

*Jewish sources* however, cannot tell the whole story, since Jews also passed through Portugal on their own, without the assistance of Jewish organizations. Some also left Lisbon by air, usually at their own expense. Ronald Weber, *The Lisbon Route: Entry and Escape in Nazi Europe* (New York, 2011), 13. See also: William H. Wriggins, *Picking up the Pieces from Portugal to Palestine: Quaker Refugee Relief in World War II: A Memoir* (Lanham, Md., 2004), 18, who suggests 200,000 for all refugees and Zur Mühlen, *Fluchtweg*, 124,151-52 who leans towards 80,000 using Jewish and non-Jewish sources. He gives the 90% estimate of Jews among the refugees.

<sup>17</sup> David Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-41* (Mass., 1968), 150.

<sup>18</sup> Fry, *Surrender*, 152 and *passim*. This article cannot discuss the organizations, from the OSE to Varian Fry's (American) Emergency Rescue Committee that managed to smuggle refugees into Portugal from France. Obviously "many rings were involved." Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Flight from the Reich: Refugee Jews, 1933-1946* (New York, 2009), 213. This included criminal rings.

<sup>19</sup> See note 16.

<sup>20</sup> Shirer, *Berlin Diary, 1934-1941* (NY, 1941), [entry for Oct. 15, 1940], 542.

<sup>21</sup> *Aufbau*, Oct. 12, 1940 cited in Christa Heinrich, ed., *Lissabon 1933-1945: Fluchtstation am Rande Europas*, eine Ausstellung des Goethe-Instituts Lissabon (Berlin: Akademie der Künste & Haus der Wannsee Konferenz, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> *Scum of the Earth* (New York, 1941), 275.

refugees in Dec. 1940, “most of whom got into the country with useless visas” and among whom Jews made up about 90 per cent.<sup>23</sup> In early June 1941, about 14,000 Jewish refugees required shelter and the Lisbon Jewish community had increased its expenditures for refugees from \$400 to \$10,000 in just four weeks.<sup>24</sup> At that moment, the Nazis directly or indirectly controlled most of Europe. In the West, Britain stood alone in the battle against Hitler’s armies.<sup>25</sup> A few weeks later, 3.9 million Nazi troops invaded the Soviet Union.

### The Portuguese Government Vacillates

Proclaiming formal neutrality on Sept. 2, 1939, one day after Hitler attacked Poland, Portugal first “reap[ed] a refugee harvest of North and South Americans coming from other parts of Europe.”<sup>26</sup> These people gained quick access to ships towards home while spending strong currency during their short stays. Poor refugees, on the other hand, had to produce transit visas to show they planned to move on.

Portugal’s dictator, Dr. António de Oliveira Salazar, who ruled from 1932 until 1968 and also assumed the role of Foreign Minister and Minister of War between 1936 and 1945, stressed Portugal’s neutrality. He and his minions worried that the country’s stability and precarious economic situation could seriously deteriorate if it entered the war.<sup>27</sup> Thus Portugal attempted to balance the Allies and the Germans for a variety of economic and political reasons, including opportunism. More specifically, Portugal had an alliance with England dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century (1373/1386) and renewed in 1899, one that the former perceived as protecting its sovereignty. As significantly Britain and Portugal maintained a centuries-old commercial relationship,<sup>28</sup> and

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<sup>23</sup> *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1940. Wiggins suggests 10,000 Jews in Lisbon in 1940, 24.

<sup>24</sup> d’Esaguy; June 4, 1941. JDC archives, File 896 (2 of 3), Countries: Portugal general 1933; 1939-42, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Antony Beevor points to the Empire’s troops as well as Polish and Czech airmen, all of whom came to Britain’s aid. *The Second World War* (New York, 2012)

<sup>26</sup> Oliver Gramling and Assoc. Press Correspondents, *Free Men are Fighting: The Story of World War II* (New York, 1942), 26.

<sup>27</sup> Fernando Rosas, “Portuguese Neutrality in the Second World War,” in Neville Wylie, ed. *European Neutrals and Non-Belligerents during the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Sandro Sideri, *Trade and Power: Informal Colonialism in Anglo-Portuguese Relations* (Rotterdam, 1970) argues that Britain reaped far more benefit than Portugal. Glyn Stone, *The Oldest Ally: Britain and the Portuguese Connection, 1936-1941* (London, 1994) looks at the relationship from the British diplomatic and strategic perspective.



Portugal depended on American oil, iron and steel, among other supplies.<sup>29</sup> Neutrality “paid handsome dividends” and helped the Portuguese economy.<sup>30</sup>

The warring sides eyed Portuguese tungsten needed to harden steel for military production. As the price of the scarce mineral soared, Portugal supplied more tungsten than any other European nation by 1942.<sup>31</sup> Britain and Germany demanded more of this crucial wartime metal as the war continued.<sup>32</sup> In June 1944 -- two days before D-Day -- Portugal refused to send tungsten to either side.<sup>33</sup> The Portuguese Azores, too, caused tension. The Allies and the Germans hoped to use these islands, located in the North Atlantic, for air and naval operations. Portugal negotiated with each side, but leased naval and air bases to the British as of Oct. 1943. By then, however, Germany had suffered a major defeat at Stalingrad (Jan.), the Allies had already landed in Sicily (July), and Mussolini had been deposed (July). Ultimately – and late -- Portugal tipped toward the Allies.<sup>34</sup>

On a covert level, the Allies and the Axis played roles inside Portugal that could make for a spy thriller. The British secret service, M15 and M16, infiltrated the

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<sup>29</sup> Cordell Hull, *Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 2, part I available at <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015004963727;view=1up;seq=437;q1=Portugal:start=1:size=10;page=search:num=1335>, accessed Dec. 30, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Dividends in Perez Leshem, “Rescue Efforts in the Iberian Peninsula” in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* (1969), 235. Salazar’s trade balance improved from a deficit of \$90 million in 1939 to a surplus of \$68 million in 1943. See: Herbert R. Reginbogen, *Faces of Neutrality: A Comparative Analysis of the Neutrality of Switzerland and other Neutral Nations during WW II* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: 2009), 126.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas Wheeler, “The Price of Neutrality: Portugal and the Wolfram Question and World War II,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* (summer 1986), 108.

<sup>32</sup> The Nazis paid for tungsten with German gold looted from its occupied territories (from national banks, private businesses and individuals). See: Neill Lochery, *Lisbon: War in the Shadows of the City of Light, 1939-1945* (New York, 2011), “Nazi Gold,” chap. 25. Moreover, Portuguese tungsten helped to prolong the war. Reginbogen, *Neutrality*, 129. U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull had worried about exactly this during the war. Hull, *Memoirs*, 1336.

<sup>33</sup> The importance of tungsten (known as wolfram in Europe) cannot be overestimated, bringing economic benefit to Portugal, but also causing the British, the Germans, and, later, the Americans to pressure the Portuguese government. Weber devotes an entire chapter to “Wolfram by Day,” in his: *The Lisbon Route*, 277-92.

<sup>34</sup> Douglas Wheeler, “In the Service of Order: The Portuguese Political Police and the British, German and Spanish Intelligence, 1932-1945,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 18, No. 1 (Jan. 1983), 6-9. Notwithstanding their tilt toward the Allies, Portugal ranked second to Switzerland in the amount of looted gold it received from the Nazi government. See: Antonio Louça and Ansgar Schäfer “Portugal and Nazi Gold: The ‘Lisbon Connection’” in the *Sales of Looted Gold by the Third Reich* (Createspace, 2011). See also: Louça, *Nazigold für Portugal: Hitler & Salazar* (Vienna, 2002) and “Nazi Gold and Portugal’s Murky Role,” *New York Times*, Jan. 10, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/01/10/world/nazi-gold-and-portugal-s-murky-role.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>, accessed Nov. 12, 2012.

Portuguese secret police, the PVDE (*Polícia de Vigilância e Defesa do Estado* or Police of Vigilance and State Defense), and the Germans established several German-paid and Portuguese-staffed spy networks.<sup>35</sup>

Strategic and economic issues involving the warring nations certainly influenced Portuguese government hesitations regarding refugees, but Portuguese leaders also worried about domestic issues. Some thought that the small country, historically a nation of emigrants, could not absorb huge numbers of immigrants.<sup>36</sup> Further, although the refugees provided new consumers and an influx of foreign money, the Portuguese middle class still worried about business competition from Jewish refugees.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Britain's naval blockade, limiting goods into Nazi-controlled Europe, also affected the Portuguese economy stretching its resources. Most importantly, Salazar and his associates feared all aliens, Jewish and non-Jewish, as possible liberals and leftists who might destabilize the regime.<sup>38</sup>

Jews, thus, had to read mixed messages. On the one hand, Jews perceived the anti-immigrant sentiments of the government and the police. On the other hand, they also noticed the lack of specifically anti-Jewish reactions in the Portuguese population. Consciously or unconsciously aware that Portugal had driven out Jews or forced them to convert in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Jewish observers reported that currently Portugal did not have a "Jewish question."<sup>39</sup> Moreover, even when Portugal placed restrictions on immigrants, Jewish newspapers noted that the country still welcomed Jews with capital or businesses.<sup>40</sup>

Salazar himself did not evince overt antisemitism. For him, citizenship meant political and legal status. It did not signify a racial category within the boundaries of

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<sup>35</sup> Wheeler, "Service," 8, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries nearly 2 million Portuguese had left for the U.S. and Brazil. *Korrespondenzblatt über Auswanderungs- und Siedlungswesen*, August 1934 (Berlin), 12. This occurred until Brazil placed restrictions on immigration in 1933 when only 9,000 people left Portugal. *Korrespondenzblatt über Auswanderungs- und Siedlungswesen*, Sept. 1935, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Pimentel, "Refugiados," 106.

<sup>38</sup> Portuguese National Archive, Lisbon, Ministério do Interior, Gabinete do Ministro, MC 486, PVDE, Lisboa, Nov. 1937, Liv 1-PV/L No. 96, NT 359-1 No. F. 20. *Dossier sobre Emigracao*. Salazar sent many back to Spain. <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/28/world/portuguese-recall-wartime-ales-of-aid-to-their-neighbors.html>, accessed Feb. 19, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> In 1938, the government's official paper, *Diário da Manhã*, asserted this. Cited in *Das Jüdische Volk*, Feb. 4, 1938 (Berlin), 2. This was a Zionist paper.

<sup>40</sup> *Korrespondenzblatt über Auswanderungs- und Siedlungswesen*, August 1934, 12; Sept. 1935, 22.

Portugal itself.<sup>41</sup> Even as Salazar regularly opposed “liberals,” “republicans,” and “communists” -- which could have been interpreted as stand-ins or code words for “Jews” -- he did not openly discuss Jews nor use terms like “Judeo-Bolshevik” or “world Jewry” as other European fascists did. He had come to power in 1932, at a time of virulent antisemitism in Europe, without using antisemitic rhetoric.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, individual Portuguese consuls courageously came to the aid of refugees, against the desires of the government. Portugal’s general consul in Bordeaux, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, wrote out between 3,000 and 10,000 visas for refugees, both Jewish and non-Jewish, from every part of Europe.<sup>43</sup> Even if Portugal recalled and punished de Sousa Mendes and tightened its restrictions, contradictions abounded. The government decreed in 1940 that consuls could no longer provide visas and that refugees’ applications would be decided in Lisbon so that Portugal would not become a “dumping ground.”<sup>44</sup> Still, refugees continued to enter “with the active or tacit approval of the government.”<sup>45</sup>

Had the United States acted expeditiously in accepting refugees, the Portuguese would likely have offered temporary visas far more readily, since Portugal officially accepted transmigrants. Although ultimately taking about 130,000 refugees before the end of 1941, within this period, the U.S. had left 110,000 available quota slots unfilled.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, when war broke out in 1939, 310,000 German nationals (mostly Jews) waited for visa numbers – “an unintentional death sentence for most.”<sup>47</sup>

### A Roller Coaster of Emotions

Embedded in daily life, emotions accompanied and often shaped the ways in which refugees in Portugal coped as they waited and waited to journey onwards. Their

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<sup>41</sup> Portugal did make distinctions based on “race” in its colonial empire, with color becoming a near-synonym for “race.” See: Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, *The Colours of the Empire: Racialized Representations during Portuguese Colonialism* (New York and Oxford, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Milgram, *Portugal*, 11, 43.

<sup>43</sup> Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 263.

<sup>44</sup> Zur Mühlen, *Portugal*, 156.

<sup>45</sup> Marrus, *The Unwanted*, 264.

<sup>46</sup> Ira Katznelson, “The Failure to Rescue,” *The New Republic* (July 1, 2013) 51. See also: Richard Breitman and Allan Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (New York, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Katznelson, “Failure,” 51.

previous ordeals with fascism and escape and the continuing hardships of family and friends reverberated. In addition, the frightening process of having come with the right, or wrong, papers haunted them: "...there were things that were now in our blood like a sort of poison. They were called 'work permits' and 'residence permits,' 'identity cards' and ... 'temporary safe conduct and gasoline ration cards,' 'exit visas,' and 'transit visas,' and 'entry visas.'"<sup>48</sup> Reactions to the exigencies of daily life, the highs and lows of refugee existence, included warm feelings toward Portuguese individuals, terror of the secret police, camaraderie with other refugees as well as an utter sense of isolation. In particular, the refugees, having fled their homelands leaving family and friends behind, mourned their losses. They experienced the torment of not knowing what their loved ones faced, or worse, of suspecting what they faced.

### *Lisbon: Peace and Dictatorship*

As the Jewish refugees tried to make sense of their new environment, most saw Portugal as a way station and thus did not dwell either upon the attractiveness nor the geography of Lisbon. Instead of Lisbon's beauty and special attractions, the harassed newcomers focused their psychic energy on "Freedom and peace. ...The 'new world' seemed to begin here. Only one more step and Europe with its oppression and hatred lay behind us."<sup>49</sup> They no longer concerned themselves with bombing raids, blackouts, or food rationing. Arriving just as Italy invaded Greece (Oct. 1940), a young man found himself "stuck in this most pleasant city.... The whole town had become an enormous rooming house."<sup>50</sup>

Certainly most refugees needed financial and logistical assistance to pay for this "rooming house." Local and international aid organizations, especially Jewish ones, took on these tasks. Starting in the summer of 1940, Lisbon ranked second only to Geneva in the amount of Jewish organizational activity. The Jewish organizations – HIAS, HICEM,<sup>51</sup> the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (or JDC, the major

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<sup>48</sup> Carla Pekelis, *My Version of the Facts*, trans. from Italian by George Hochfield (Evanston, Ill.: The Marlboro Press, 2004), 324.

<sup>49</sup> "An Octogenarian's records," 36.

<sup>50</sup> Ernst Hofeller, "Refugee," Leo Baeck Inst., NY, Archive, 29.

<sup>51</sup> These organizations created turf wars, sometimes cooperating. Even as they alleviated dire need, some have criticized them for clinging to legal strategies in the face of growing knowledge of mass murder. Milgram, *Portugal*. HICEM resulted from a merger in 1927 among three Jewish migration associations:

American Jewish aid organization), the World Jewish Congress, and the Portuguese-Jewish relief committees – supported refugees in a spirit of solidarity with Jews in trouble, and also to prevent them from burdening the state. Many of these groups advocated for the refugees with the Portuguese and the American governments.<sup>52</sup> All of them to some extent provided sustenance and shelter, and also attempted to find visas and ship passage for refugees.

The JDC which, by 1940, had offices in over forty countries to assist refugees, had to move its headquarters from Paris to Lisbon as the Germans invaded France.<sup>53</sup> The JDC provided information, tickets and visas to help refugees leave on neutral Portuguese boats and also chartered boats itself.<sup>54</sup> Securing visas took priority. The tiny Portuguese Jewish community of Lisbon also worked closely with American Jewish committees.<sup>55</sup> It distributed aid through its commission to aid Jewish refugees.<sup>56</sup> After Pearl Harbor, American-Jewish organizations could no longer work openly in a neutral nation and instead funneled money into the Portuguese community to continue assisting refugees.<sup>57</sup>

*The Exasperations and Consolations of Refugee Life after 1940: Portuguese Citizens Respond with Kindness*

Like those refugees who came in the 1930s, the later refugees of the 1940s appreciated the compassion of the Portuguese, but now they contrasted that kind-heartedness with the increased brutality of wartime Europe. In comparison with the Germans, the

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HIAS, NY (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, NY), ICA (Jewish Colonization Association), based in Paris), and Emigdirect, a migration organization (Berlin).

<sup>52</sup> The American Friends Service Committee (the Quakers), the Catholic Relief Services, and the Unitarian Service Committee, among others, helped non-Jewish refugees, but often Jews as well. The Quakers cared for Jews who had converted to Christianity as well as stateless people “of Jewish ancestry” who did not identify as Jews, and partners in Jewish-Christian mixed marriages. Wriggins, *Picking up*, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Katzki, Secretary of JDC’s European Executive Council, and his co-workers, “a few steps ahead of the Germans,” slept in fields in France before getting to Lisbon. *Footnotes: The Newsletter of the JDC New York Archives* (Dec. 1999), 2.

<sup>54</sup> Bazarov, “HIAS and HICEM,” 76.

<sup>55</sup> Supported by several wealthy Jewish families, it still could not have functioned on its own, needing financial support from the JDC and coordination with the HICEM.

<sup>56</sup> Its president, Dr. Augusto d’Esaguy, served until Sept. 1941, followed by Elias Baruel (Deputy President of the Lisbon Jewish community and head of Refugee Relief). Thereafter the *Comite da Comunidade Israelita de Lisboa*, headed by Prof. Moses Amzalak, aided refugees who remained in Portugal during the war.

<sup>57</sup> d’Esaguy; June 4, 1941. JDC archives, File 896 (2 of 3), Countries: Portugal General 1933; 1939-42

helpfulness of the Portuguese made a lasting impression. After the fall of France many arrived “flat broke.”<sup>58</sup> Although some hotels took advantage of the influx to raise prices, many refugees reported the opposite.<sup>59</sup> As Alma Mahler-Werfel tried to pay her Portuguese hotel bill, the clerk “seemed to sense that it would leave me short of cash. ‘Never mind paying the bill,’ he said. ‘I’ll advance it for you, and you can send me the money from New York.’”<sup>60</sup> Another refugee woman described the Portuguese as “very nice in every respect.” If it had not been for all the war news, she would have had a good time.<sup>61</sup> The JDC also recognized the friendliness of the Portuguese people and the cooperation of the Salazar government.<sup>62</sup> It should be noted, however, that just as the refugees and aid committees praised the Portuguese for their hospitality and kindness, they seem to have drawn a line between the police and the rest of the population, not acknowledging that the police, too, were Portuguese. Such self-deception notwithstanding, as late as 1944, even the German embassy, probably to its consternation, noted the absence of antisemitism in Portugal.<sup>63</sup>

### *Police Harassment*

Refugee anxieties focused on the danger of arrest by Portuguese secret police. The PVDE, trained in the latest police state techniques by Italian and German police, made torture against its “enemies” routine in the 1930s, particularly against liberals and communists.<sup>64</sup> The PVDE also took charge of all foreigners resident in or transiting through Portugal, issued visas and residence permits, and rounded up foreigners for lack of visas, or on suspicion of communist sympathies. One of the Quaker representatives in Lisbon recognized that:

Portugal was clearly a police state... Informers were thought to be everywhere...  
Telephones were assumed to be bugged, travelers without proper identity cards

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<sup>58</sup> Friedrich Torberg, *Eine tolle, tolle Zeit: Briefe und Dokumente aus den Jahren der Flucht, 1938-1941 in Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XVIII (Munich, 1989), 123 and Lustig, *Rosenkranz*, 66, Fry, *Surrender*, 103.

<sup>59</sup> Lochery, *Lisbon*, 104.

<sup>60</sup> Mahler-Werfel, *Bridge*, 268-69.

<sup>61</sup> Janina Lauterbach, USC Shoah Foundation [hereafter, Shoah Foundation] video, seg. 36-41

<sup>62</sup> American Jewish Committee, *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 43 (1941-42), 203-04, 325.

<sup>63</sup> Zur Mühlen, *Fluchtweg*, 128.

<sup>64</sup> Gallagher, “Controlled Repression,” 387.

could be arrested... Like everyone else, we too felt that we were being watched...<sup>65</sup>

Some of these police also collaborated with the Gestapo. Refugees experienced the police as xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and antisemitic.<sup>66</sup> In some cases, refugees without legal papers landed in jail until aid organizations could provide temporary papers for them.<sup>67</sup>

More consistently, from 1940 on, the Portuguese government interned refugees arbitrarily, especially those without proper papers, in small towns or villages outside of Lisbon, known as fixed residences (*residências fixas*).<sup>68</sup> In 1943, for example, Portugal freed its refugee-prisoners from jails and took them to small seaside villages on the Atlantic coast.<sup>69</sup> Inhabitants of fixed residences needed permission to leave these areas even for a day in order to pursue visas and ship tickets in Lisbon. While Jewish aid groups paid the bill,<sup>70</sup> the refugees themselves understood the government's intentions regarding what someone called their "forced vacation": "We are – let's say it openly – interned."<sup>71</sup>

Because of their isolation, small towns allowed more intimate contacts between the refugees and their Portuguese neighbors. Although cultural differences could irritate – a Portuguese women's group in Figueroa da Foz urged its young women not to imitate refugee women's two-piece bathing suits -- and the refugees' weekly stipends exceeded the family income of many Portuguese,<sup>72</sup> most small towns responded warmly. In Curia, Friedrich Torberg found that Portuguese pedestrians stopped to ask him what he appeared to be looking for and that civil servants seemed pleased when their French or English allowed them to be helpful.<sup>73</sup> "I have to thank the Portuguese with my whole

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<sup>65</sup> Wriggins, *Picking up*, 24-25.

<sup>66</sup> *Lissabon 1933-1945*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> Wriggins, *Picking up*, 18-19.

<sup>68</sup> Jan Lustig noted that on June 25, 1940 the Czech people on his train were sent to Figueira da Foz and the French to Caldas da Rainha. *Rosenkranz*, 66.

<sup>69</sup> Kalischer, *Konzentrationslager*, 149-50.

<sup>70</sup> JDC file 896 (3<sup>rd</sup> of 3) AR33/44, "Portugal general 1933; 1939-42."

<sup>71</sup> Pimentel, "Refugiados," 107, Lustig, *Rosenkranz*, 75.

<sup>72</sup> Pimentel, "Refugiados," 107.

<sup>73</sup> Torberg, *Eine tolle ... Zeit*, 125.

heart.... Their participation in our destiny goes beyond bounds,” one man wrote to the *Aufbau* in Dec. 1940.<sup>74</sup>

*Loss of a past and fears for the future*

Despite sunny, peaceful, and relatively safe situations in the small towns and in Lisbon, refugees’ continued to feel intense dislocation, a crisis of identity, and steep, drastic, downward mobility. For the most part, they had lost their middle class existence, including their homes, their jobs, their previous daily lives.<sup>75</sup> Some had no passports, valid identity papers, or permission to reside, even temporarily, in Portugal. Their languages and many of their friends and relatives remained behind. Many also suddenly realized that their relationship to their homelands had proven illusory. Now they stood unprotected by citizenship and also bereft of psychological belonging.<sup>76</sup>

These wounds festered, as did the economic dislocations of refugee status. Most depended on Jewish philanthropies, having fled with nothing of value, or having spent whatever valuables or cash they had while racing from northern France through Spain. Arriving in Lisbon, many refugees’ “bewildered looks and the condition of their clothes” announced their plight.<sup>77</sup> Still, “crumbling clothes” proved the least difficult problem to address.<sup>78</sup>

Crucially, they had lost a sense of self. Hannah Arendt, a refugee herself, captured this moment: “Once we were somebodies about whom people cared, we were loved by friends, and even known by landlords as paying our rent regularly...” She saw “parables of increasing self-loss” when she depicted Jewish émigrés, and she realized the impossibility of finding a new identity under conditions of flight.<sup>79</sup> Arendt summed up the frustrations of a middle-aged man who had appeared before countless committees “in order to be saved” and finally exclaimed in exasperation, “nobody here

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<sup>74</sup> Pimentel, “Refugiados,” 107.

<sup>75</sup> Hans Reichmann, *Deutscher Bürger und verfolgter Jude, Novemberpogrom und KZ Sachsenhausen 1937-1939*, (Munich, 1998) 261.

<sup>76</sup> Adriana Nunes, *Ilse Losa, Schriftstellerin zwischen zwei Welten* (Berlin, 1999), 43.

<sup>77</sup> Fry, *Surrender*, 4.

<sup>78</sup> USHMM, Isaac Bitton interview, May 17, 1990, RG -50.030\*0027.

<sup>79</sup> Dagmar Barnouw about Arendt in *Der Jude als Paria*, 44, cited in Nunes, *Losa*, 26.



knows who I am!”<sup>80</sup> These identity crises sometimes merged with what later generations have called post-traumatic stress disorder, a type of intense and uncontrollable anxiety that can occur after one has seen or experienced an event involving the threat of injury or death.<sup>81</sup> Observers noted “frayed tempers,” and aid workers, such as Howard Wriggins of the Quakers, agonized about the fragile emotional state of these supplicants when he could no longer hold out one hope and had to “substitute another to give them enough strength to go on. And it all must be done so gently, since they are near the edge already.... Some do go off the handle in my office.”<sup>82</sup> Driven to despair, some committed suicide.<sup>83</sup> Arendt, writing in 1943 about the refugee condition, dwelled on suicides.<sup>84</sup>

Fears of a spreading war ranked highest among their worries. The thought that Hitler might invade Portugal gnawed at terrified Jews in stages between June 1940 and November 1942. Refugees read a “vast assortment of newspapers...written in every language, the reports of which – often contradictory – were the subjects of lengthy discussions.”<sup>85</sup> Many in Lisbon, like Hans Sahl, believed that the feeling of safety, “was deceiving...Hitler had occupied almost all of Europe. Why should he spare Portugal? We had to hurry. We had to ensure a passage before it was too late.”<sup>86</sup> The refugees did not harbor exaggerated fears, as the suspicions and behaviors of Americans attest. Waitstill Sharp of the Unitarian Service Committee in Lisbon heard that 60,000 Nazi Panzers stood at the Spanish border in the summer of 1940.<sup>87</sup> William Shirer’s diary entry of Oct. 15, 1940 read: “For some time I’ve been getting information from military circles

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<sup>80</sup> Arendt, “We Refugees,” in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, ed. by Marc Robinson (Winchester, Mass., 1994), 115. Arendt was certainly not the only refugee writer in Lisbon. Roda Roda (Sandor Rosenfeld), Ulrich Becher, Henry William Katz, Siegfried Kracauer, Soma Morgenstern, Balder Olden, Hans Sahl, Maximilian Scheer, Siegfried Thalheimer, Otto Zoff and Kurt Wolff, among many others, also waited there in 1941. Christina Heine Teixeira in “Warten auf das rettende Schiff - Hanna Arendts Flucht über Lissabon,” in *Neuer Nachrichtenbrief der Gesellschaft für Exilforschung*, vol. 19 (June 2002).

<sup>81</sup> No one used this terminology then. Only in 1955 did psychologists recognize that refugees, too, not only concentration camp survivors, had mental health, social, and psychological problems. Henry B. M. Murphy, *Flight and Resettlement* (Paris: UNESCO, 1955). See also: Atina Grossmann, *Jews, German, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, 2009), 151-53.

<sup>82</sup> “Tempers” in Leshem, “Rescue Efforts,” 240; Wriggins, *Picking up*, 22.

<sup>83</sup> Pauli in Blaufuks, *under strange skies*. Koestler in David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (London, 1988), 169. See also: Lewis, Shoah Foundation, #12696, seg. 44-47.

<sup>84</sup> Arendt, “We Refugees,” 112-14.

<sup>85</sup> Pekelis, *Facts*, 137. For Portuguese worries, see: Lochery, *Lisbon*, 30-31, 86.

<sup>86</sup> Kalischer, *Konzentrationslager*, 148-49. Sahl in Blaufuks, *under strange skies*.

<sup>87</sup> Waitstill and Martha Sharp, *Journey*, 10.

that Hitler is making ready to go into Spain in order to get Gibraltar....”<sup>88</sup> Both Jews and Portuguese only showed relief when the Allies landed in North Africa in Nov. 1942: “the palpable fear of a Nazi march through Spain into Portugal lifted.” As a Portuguese put it, “Germany no longer seemed invincible.”<sup>89</sup>

*The daily chase: food, shelter, visas*

Getting through the day took determination. Refugees prioritized the search for basic shelter and food, after which – and with great urgency – came visas. Lodgings ran the gamut from small, run-down rooms to apartments. Private families and pensions also offered temporary and long-term accommodations.<sup>90</sup> Crucially, aid organizations subsidized many families’ rent and food bills. Some families had cooking facilities. One man remembered many versions of sardine dinners “because that was the main affordable food.”<sup>91</sup> Some inns and private homes offered modest meals. And, those with insufficient incomes or who stayed in rooms where they could not cook, trekked up the Lisbon hills at noon to receive a free, hot lunch from the Jewish community’s COMASSIS (Comissão Portuguesa de Assistência aos Judeus Refugiados) founded in 1933 and subsidized by the JDC.<sup>92</sup>

Acquiring proper papers caused severe consternation. In order to obtain a visa, Carla Pekelis and her husband turned their room into an office. While Alex went out to:

... visit consulates, police commissioners, travel agencies...in search of a million things: travel permits, proofs of citizenship, money exchange, ship passage...and so on ... [she] pounded out letters on the typewriter addressed to friends and relatives, especially in New York, with requests that went from a simple testimonial, authenticated by a notary, to the all-important “affidavit” that would place the responsibility for our future on the shoulders of whoever acted as our guarantor.<sup>93</sup>

These repetitive errands to consulates and aid organizations demanded time and attention. Seeking extensions to remain in Portugal or new visas, they waited on very

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<sup>88</sup> Shirer, *Berlin Diary* [entry for Oct. 15, 1940], 542.

<sup>89</sup> Wriggins, *Picking up*, 45, 54-55.

<sup>90</sup> Sig Adler, Shoah Foundation, #25626, seg. 19-20.

<sup>91</sup> Henri Deutsch, Shoah Foundation, #10463, seg. 57-65.

<sup>92</sup> *New York Times*, Dec. 15, 1940 for the trek; zur Mühlen, *Portugal*, 162, for subsidy.

<sup>93</sup> Pekelis, *Facts*, 134-35.

long lines.<sup>94</sup> The line at the American embassy seemed to have “no end at all.”<sup>95</sup> The lucky ones made it into the waiting rooms of various consulates, “those vestibules of heaven and hell!”<sup>96</sup>

*Sharing feelings, sharing space: the Café as “emotional community”<sup>97</sup>*

The highs and lows, the roller coaster of emotions, alerts us to refugees’ anguish and their moments of relief. In hope and despair, they sought bonds with other refugees. They constructed temporary spaces, communities, where they could evoke the one milieu that might make them feel better -- a café culture in which they could share impressions and feelings with others going through the same upheavals.

When refugees finished their recurring visits to consulates, aid organizations, and shipping offices, they spent the rest of their days wandering central Lisbon, “where they couldn’t help running into each other.”<sup>98</sup> Thereafter, café visits punctuated, but also became, a daily routine. The refugees sat in cafés, bridging national, ethnic and gender differences for the moment, with German generally the *lingua franca*.<sup>99</sup> These tables even bridged class differences, although the very wealthiest chose the town of Estoril, a resort, for their stay. The cafés created a social space of mutual experience, a kind of diasporic homeland.

Because they had left the landscapes, urban features, and knowledge of belonging to their nations behind, they resorted to the only public space that felt private and that they could afford. The café emerged as a new transnational and temporary “home” for a vast variety of European Jewish refugees.<sup>100</sup> This corner of their new urban landscape

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<sup>94</sup> Sol Hasson, Shoah Foundation, #1937, seg. 71-72.

<sup>95</sup> E. Mann, “In Lissabon gestrandet,” 150.

<sup>96</sup> Remarque, *The Night in Lisbon*, 186

<sup>97</sup> Barbara Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 107, #3 (June 2002), 842. See also: Ute Frevert and Lyndal Roper in “Forum: History of Emotions,” *German History*, vol. 28, No. 1. 67-80.

<sup>98</sup> Koestler, *Arrival*, 11.

<sup>99</sup> These cafes approximated the real equality that Habermas attributed to those of the 17<sup>th</sup> c. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

<sup>100</sup> Leshem referred to twenty-one (Jewish) nationalities on a ship leaving Portugal for Palestine in Jan. 1944. “Rescue Efforts,” 254.

offered a setting where they could “[speak] the language we hungered for,”<sup>101</sup> and where “one heard more German and French ... than Portuguese.”<sup>102</sup> German served as a *lingua franca* for many Eastern Europeans as well. A liminal world of café identities allowed most Jews a semblance of normalcy, a place to remember who they once were and feel recognized by others from their previous worlds.

No longer simple sites of culture and sociability -- although these may have been pleasant byproducts -- Lisbon cafés offered indispensable locations in which to exchange advice and rumors (“the refugee telegraph”) about the war and about possible exit visas.<sup>103</sup> The refugees quickly developed relationships, talking about “problems, family ... anxiety, what happened to other members of the family...”<sup>104</sup> Sharing *angst* and empathy, they bonded quickly, creating a temporary solidarity among themselves.<sup>105</sup> The writer, Hermann Kesten, endowed the café with symbolic meaning:

In exile, the café becomes home and homeland, church and parliament.... The café becomes the only site of continuity. I sat in cafés in a dozen lands of exile and it was always the same café....I only have to sit in a café and I feel at home.<sup>106</sup>

Jan Lustig described the cafés more practically:

The emigrants sit in cafes with hollow cheeks and rimmed eyes, stick their heads together and talk, talk. Day and night, day and night. One says with a sigh: “... visa ...” Another smiles ironically and bitterly: “... visa ...” The third gives a long, excited speech, but one understands only: “visa...visa...visa...”<sup>107</sup>

Stretching their cups of coffee for hours, women and men found solace among people in the same situation. Many café patrons faced the same “psychic hell,”<sup>108</sup> worrying about family and friends left behind, exchanging information and innuendos from the letters

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<sup>101</sup> German intellectual Eva Lewinski in Pimentel, “Refugiados,” 105.

<sup>102</sup> F. Mann, *Drastic Turn*, 173.

<sup>103</sup> Rumors about the war in Janina Lauterbach, Shoah Foundation, seg. 36-41. The “refugee telegraph” in Wriggins, *Picking up*, 58.

<sup>104</sup> USHMM, interview with Isaac Bitton, May 17, 1990, RG-50.030\*0027.

<sup>105</sup> Ute Frevert, “Was haben Gefühle in der Geschichte zu suchen?” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 35. No. 2 (Apr. - June, 2009), 183-208.

<sup>106</sup> Kesten, *Dichter im Café* (Vienna, Munich, Basel, 1959), 12-13.

<sup>107</sup> Lustig, *Rosenkranz*, 93.

<sup>108</sup> Wriggins, *Picking up*, 58

they still received from Europe. They mourned the loss of their homes, positions and reputations and dreaded the process of starting all over again in a new place with a new language and new rules. These table partners deeply understood each other's grief. There they sat "hatching little plots to get precious tickets on steamships and clippers to America."<sup>109</sup> Frequently enough, the cafes offered more than solace or food: one could now and then acquire boat tickets from people there.<sup>110</sup> Café rumors further provided hints as to which shipping agencies had come across extra tickets.

The cafes, international spaces in which the sexes mixed and families, including children, found seats, underwent a radical transformation from Portuguese male spaces in these years. Young northern and eastern European women, very much part of the café scene in the big cities of 1920s Europe, now sat in Lisbon's cafes, chatting, gesturing, writing, smoking, and doing needlework. Some even wore pants, and most went out without hats, something only prostitutes did in Lisbon.<sup>111</sup> The café offered a neutral ground for them to feel at home and preserve their customs. Quickly, refugee women noticed that Portuguese women did not frequent cafés at all and that one café refused to seat unescorted women at night.<sup>112</sup> Portuguese observers, according to age and class, found refugee women's behaviors either outrageous or fascinating.<sup>113</sup>

Cafes also presented opportunities for new, if fleeting, friendships among refugees, though not with native Portuguese. Most refugees shared the same situation, the paper chase, the uncertainties, the reliance on charities and bureaucracies. All needed similar documents, signatures, stamps, and tickets. The café served as a temporary meeting space, a "momentary rendezvous, a passing station, on the[ir] never-ending escape through life."<sup>114</sup> These must have been somewhat strange and strained relationships, however. They depended on each other but they competed for scarce visas and shipping space at the same time. Commiseration vied with envy. Erika Mann

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<sup>109</sup> *Life Magazine*, April 28, 1941, 77.

<sup>110</sup> Blaufuks, *under strange skies*.

<sup>111</sup> Lustig, *Rosenkranz*, 104-05, reported that six refugee women had been arrested in Oct. 1940 (two for wearing pants in Figueira) and *Life Magazine*, April 28, 1941, 80.

<sup>112</sup> Nunes, *Losa*, 87.

<sup>113</sup> Feuchtwanger, "An Émigré Life," 1038-40.

<sup>114</sup> Nunes, *Losa*, 60.

observed that while café goers all rejoiced for a lucky woman about to embark for the U.S., “all were jealous of her.”<sup>115</sup>

And some sought Jewish connections beyond the café. The Pekelis couple visited cafes, but also met new acquaintances and made new friends in their hotel, in a variety of offices that they had to visit for emigration papers, and in the synagogue. During prayers, Carla Pekelis could easily distinguish the Portuguese Jews from the refugees: “The first had the indifferent and calm look of people at their ease and at home; the others, the timid, embarrassed manners of uninvited guests. During the services there were those who could not control their sobs.”<sup>116</sup> Refugee Jews also created improvised synagogues, like the one in Ericeira, and celebrated some holidays together.<sup>117</sup> In addition, those Portuguese Jews of European (Ashkenazi) as opposed to Portuguese heritage celebrated Jewish holidays with some of the refugees.<sup>118</sup>

### *Ship Tickets: the final hurdle*

Once a refugee secured the coveted visa, repetitive errands to shipping agencies quickly ensued. Ship tickets, or the lack of them, caused grave concern. If refugees did not acquire the tickets in good time, their visas expired and they had to start the paper chase all over again.<sup>119</sup> When the Romanian writer, Valeriu Marcu approached clerks in the steamship company to buy a ticket for the U.S. in Feb. 1941, they “looked at me in surprise, as though I had come to ask for their daughters’ hands. I want something quite normal and I am regarded as a madman.” He notified them that if he had to wait as long as they suggested, his American visa would expire, but “the gentlemen behind the counter refused to listen to me any longer.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> E. Mann, “In Lissabon gestrandet,” 155.

<sup>116</sup> Pekelis, *Facts*, 141.

<sup>117</sup> Ericeira, see: Pimentel, “Refugiados,” 107. Holiday in Calda da Rainha, see: Pimentel, *Judeus em Portugal durante a II Guerra Mundial* (Lisbon, 2006), photo # 41. Also see refugee leaving an improvised synagogue in Caldas in: <http://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675029919> *Cafe-Bocage refugee-town Jewish-refugee cattle-fair improvised-Synagogue*, accessed Aug. 8, 2012.

<sup>118</sup> Leshem, “Rescue Efforts,” 237.

<sup>119</sup> In 1940 HIAS scrambled to get Jews on a ship “whatever it costs,” before their visas expired. YIVO, HIAS-HICEM archives, 245.4, XII Portugal, A-23, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> Marcu, “*Ein Kopf*,” 203-04.

Most refugees needed to beseech the Jewish philanthropies to pay for the costs of tickets and, when they came back from the shipping agencies empty handed, also to find spots for them aboard the few ships sailing from Lisbon. Reliance on these organizations provided relief, but also exasperation. Hannah Arendt, for example, bitterly resented appearing as a supplicant over and over again,<sup>121</sup> and complained that “a true battle rages over places on the ship.”<sup>122</sup>

In Portugal, the refugees felt increasingly perplexed and stymied. In Feb. 1941, the *Aufbau*, noted that refugees with U.S. visas have been waiting for months for ship reservations: “here, one cannot understand why America doesn’t send a larger ship here at least once a month.” Inexplicably, refugees visiting Lisbon’s Cook Travel Agency longing for any spot on any ship wondered how the huge U.S. liner *Manhattan* could advertise for Hawaiian cruises when people desperately sought to escape war-torn Europe.<sup>123</sup> In April of that year, *Life Magazine* displayed photos of refugees jamming into the American Export Line office although tickets had been sold out until February 1942.<sup>124</sup> Obstructions notwithstanding, by mid-1942 most had managed to emigrate and only about 800 refugees remained in Portugal.<sup>125</sup>

Yet, even on board the coveted ship, countless memories haunted the joy of some as they left Portugal and their hellish experiences in occupied Europe. Fourteen-year old Mara Vishniac, the daughter of photographer Roman Vishniac, felt a “deep sadness” as she realized she was “abandoning Europe.”<sup>126</sup> Hans Sahl mourned the “words that I spoke as a child,” the “music of the countryside,” and the world into which he had been born.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Letter to Adler-Rudel, Feb. 17, 1941, [http://www.hannaharendt.de/documents/briefe\\_1.html](http://www.hannaharendt.de/documents/briefe_1.html), accessed on May 10, 2012.

<sup>122</sup> Letter to Adler-Rudel, April 2, 1941, [http://www.hannaharendt.de/documents/briefe\\_1.html](http://www.hannaharendt.de/documents/briefe_1.html), accessed on May 10, 2012.

<sup>123</sup> *Aufbau* (Feb. 28, 1941), 7.

<sup>124</sup> *Life Magazine* (April 28, 1941), 77.

<sup>125</sup> Milgram, *Portugal*, 116. Three hundred lived in Caldas da Rainha.

<sup>126</sup> Vishniac, in “Natürlich Berlin! Erinnerungen an Roman Vishniac,” in *Roman Vishniacs Berlin*, ed. By James Howard Fraser, et.al. (Berlin, 2005), 32.

<sup>127</sup> Sahl, *Exil*, 103-04.

## Conclusion

Those refugees lucky enough to jump the myriad hurdles between their country of origin and the Portuguese coastline had suffered enormous physical and mental anguish. Ambivalently and ambiguously, Portugal, a poor country whose dictatorial government feared foreigners and leftists, offered a (relatively) safe haven to refugees – as long as they had a visa and ship tickets to prove they would leave shortly. However, in desperation, many refugees flooded in without the necessary papers. Lisbon emerged as a symbol of temporality and transition for refugees.

In his otherwise masterful study of Portugal and its Jewish refugees, Avraham Milgram writes that the refugees in Portugal led “totally ordinary lives.”<sup>128</sup> But that raises the question, what is “ordinary” about being a refugee? As they dashed about to find basic food, shelter, visas and ship tickets, they experienced the wildly abnormal as routine, but never normal or “ordinary.”

Most refugees, their emotional universe in turmoil, regularly sought friendship and advice in cafes, these “meeting [places] of refugees from all over the world.”<sup>129</sup> Many, like Anny Coury’s parents, spent most of their time in cafés, after “applying for visas to go anywhere.”<sup>130</sup> There they also shared news of loved ones, information about visas and ship tickets, hopes and despair.

Jewish and nonsectarian organizations provided aid to the refugees and also interceded with the Portuguese authorities to assure their safety. While some refugees lacked all papers and faced incarceration, the government tolerated others, allowing them to remain in Lisbon or placing them in fixed residences until the time they could emigrate. Thus, Portugal played an ambivalent role in providing a safe haven for hunted Jews, but ultimately saved the lives of tens of thousands who managed to get there.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Portugal*, 116. See my review of his book in *Shofar* (2011) at <http://www.case.edu/artsci/jdst/reviews/Portugal.htm>.

<sup>129</sup> Harris, Shoah Foundation, #13459, seg. 49-51.

<sup>130</sup> Anny Coury, Shoah Foundation, #11780, seg. 47-57.

<sup>131</sup> I am using Milgram’s data which seems the most reasonable. *Portugal*, 289.