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A Foothold in the Whirlpool: Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement

Patrick Reed

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

History

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
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Abstract

A Foothold in the Whirlpool: Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement

Patrick Reed

Announced by the government on 2 November 1943, Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement offered a foothold in the whirlpool to approximately 400 refugees from Nazism. The government's scheme, while not devoid of humanitarian considerations, was primarily motivated by William Lyon Mackenzie King's politics of limited gestures. Sensitive to increasing international pressure to help alleviate the refugee crisis and to growing domestic censure of officials' penurious response to those trying to escape Nazi oppression, yet equally aware of the political danger of allowing mass entry of refugees during a period of total war, the Iberian movement enabled the government to defuse criticism through a public display of concern. Since there were little more than 2 000 refugees remaining in Iberia by 1944, and because the war had stopped the flow of refugees from the rest of Europe, the government used this logistically limited movement to afford itself political time and space.

Regardless of the government's motivations, the individuals who came to Canada between the spring and fall of 1944 aboard the *S.S. Serpa Pinto* and the *S.S. Nyassa*, the *Pinto*'s sister ship, were largely able to integrate successfully into Canadian society. After a brief interim of understandable cultural shock, the arrivals planted roots in their adopted communities, almost immediately contributing to the richness of their new environs.

Acknowledgments

Reading history thesis monographs occasionally invokes remembrances of my own past trips to the local county fall fair. Navigating through the stream of people in the Arts and Crafts pavilion, beyond Mary Field's award-winning bumbleberry pie, and just to the left of Isabol Burgoyne's red-ribboned oil painting of the Welland Canal, I stop in front of the highlight of the craft competition: macramé, seniors' division. Guarded by a pack of Scotty-dog bathroom-tissue covers is this year's grand prize winner, Peg Delsey's macramé owl: orange and brown yarn, plastic appliqué eyes, talons embracing a real twig, and a small index card affixed to its beak that reads "I don't give a hoot." Truly, a craft suitable for hanging. While admiring the quality of Mrs. Delsey's artisanship my utilitarian tendencies cause me to ponder a basic question: why labouriously create something which, despite how carefully crafted, will almost invariably gather more dust than compliments?

Regardless of whether my thesis will be consigned to that great dust-heap called history, I wish to acknowledge a number of people without whose assistance this thesis would not have been completed, much less started. Thanks to Dr. Rhoda Howard, an academic mentor and friend, whose very kindly and timely intervention during my undergraduate years at McMaster University encouraged me to consider the possibility of a future beyond Harold's Cartage and Moving, my employer at the time. Similarly, Dr. Frank Chalk, my thesis advisor, demonstrated constant patience

and interest, both scholastically and personally, despite my perpetual indecisiveness. Dov Okouneff graciously allowed me access to his video collection of interviews with *S.S. Serpa Pinto* refugees, affording me insight into their varied experiences, a perspective that is all too often absent in the scholarly literature on refugees from Nazism. The assistance of certain archivists, especially Janice Rosen at the Canadian Jewish Congress, Carol Katz at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, and Lawrence Tapper at the National Archives of Canada (Manuscript Division), saved me countless hours of research time. Thanks, for a very different reason, to the Access to Information Bureau at the National Archives: the few frustrating months of a sporadic paper-chase to locate one topically significant file, to which I was ultimately denied access, allowed me to experience firsthand the inherent difficulty of dealing with a largely indifferent bureaucracy. Although the stakes were radically disparate, this experience helped me to empathize with the refugees in Iberia who were attempting to find that rare breed, a sympathetic bureaucrat, who would intercede on their behalf and issue the necessary documentation for their passage to a safer haven. Some of the shipmates of the *Serpa Pinto* generously shared their memories and reflections, patiently revealing to me their very nuanced and unique pasts. Philip and Tagora Katz provided me with a home-like haven, a place where friendship and 'family' mixed as quickly as their instant coffee. Both Keith Waddington and Danusia Wiazowski carefully and honestly read drafts of my manuscript, offering critical suggestions that improved the final text. Furthermore,

Danusia's continual emotional and intellectual support helped defuse my occasional existential whining about this thesis, keeping me grounded in some semblance of reality. Finally, my greatest thanks go to my family, numerically too large to acknowledge individually, who indirectly taught me the intrinsic worth and weakness of both county fairs and theses.

Preface

Last October, Dr. Frank Chalk, my thesis advisor, encouraged me to attend an upcoming reunion of the shipmates of the *S.S. Serpa Pinto*,¹ refugees from Nazism who came to Canada in 1944. Although I had studied the Holocaust as an undergraduate, my knowledge of refugee movements was limited to a cursory reading of Irving Abella and Harold Troper's *None Is Too Many* (1982) and a youthful viewing of Michael Curtiz' *Casablanca* (1942). Informed by these two very disparate sources, the scholarly and the sensational, on 30 October 1994 I went to Congregation Adath Israel-Poale Zedek, opened the meeting-room door, and stepped forward into the past.

In a room that was well able to hold the seventy-odd persons present, but was having some difficulty containing the conversations, I encountered a group whose members conformed to none of my prior expectations: neither academic abstractions nor Hollywood heroes, they were refreshingly human. Acting as curators of their own past, the shipmates of the *Serpa Pinto* brought historical documents, newspaper clippings, photographs, and personal remembrances to the gathering. Even as the official addresses commenced, the reunited shipmates continued to speak in the active voice of the present past, debating the fine points of their collective experience, and

¹While the individuals who made up the Iberian refugee movement actually came on two different ships (the *S.S. Serpa Pinto* and her sister ship, the *S.S. Nyassa*), spread over three voyages between March and October 1944, they are collectively known as the *Serpa Pinto* refugees.

openly challenging any factual errors, perceived or otherwise, made by the various speakers.

Shortly after the reunion, I started to search through what I soon discovered was a huge body of literature on Allied responses to the Nazi-era refugee crisis, expecting to find scholarly material on the *Serpa Pinto* refugees. Surprisingly, besides a brief section in None Is Too Many, there was virtually no published information on this particular refugee movement. Considering Canada's highly restrictive immigration and refugee policy during the war, the arrival of around 400 Jewish refugees in 1944 presents an interesting anomaly. In a time apparently rife with official inaction, indifference and insensitivity, what were the peculiar circumstances surrounding the immigration of the Iberian refugees which allowed for its successful completion?

This thesis, entitled "A Foothold in the Whirlpool: Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement," will hopefully help rescue the *Serpa Pinto* refugees from the footnotes of history. The title comes from Fritz Mueller-Sorau's "Thoughts of a Refugee," a prize-winning entry in a competition held by the Y.M.C.A. for the best short-story written by an occupant of a Canadian refugee camp during the Second World War:

A refugee is a man, who has learned that nothing on this earth plane is constant, but is subject to a permanent alteration. Yet only by finding a foothold in this whirlpool, and by picking out of the passing waves the red thread of life, he moulds into a real human being.²

²Fritz Mueller-Sorau, "Thoughts of a Refugee," Saturday Night 57 (18 July 1942): 29.

While Canada's Iberian refugee movement offered a small foothold in the European whirlpool for only a very limited number of people, the *Serpa Pinto* refugees adroitly used this support first to secure access and then to ease themselves into Canadian society.

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Chapter One

Historiography and Methodology

"Comparisons are odorous"

Dogberry (Shakespeare: "Much Ado About Nothing," III, v)

"We own your verses are melodious/But then comparisons are odious"
(Swift: "Answer to Sheridan's 'Simile'")

Comparisons, whether odorous or odious, are the navigational device used in much historiography. The historian, adrift in an often vast pool of literature, attempts to bring order out of chaos by first detecting and determining the position of topical texts, gathering and grouping the material according to its relative worth, and finally identifying areas which are under-explored, all the while charting the variable depth of the field of study and observing the various waves of discourse.

To appreciate fully the relative quantity and quality of literature on Canada's response to the Holocaust in general, and Jewish refugees from Nazism in particular, it is instructive to survey briefly another part of the scholarly sea: namely, the United States' historiography on this subject. In an admittedly oversimplified perspective, one may identify three principal historiographical waves, which comprise the topic. The first groundswell was journalist Arthur Morse's best-selling While Six Million Died¹ -- a castigating work on the Roosevelt Administration's allegedly pusillanimous response to the Holocaust that, in keeping with the censorious tone toward bystanders

¹Arthur Morse, While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy (New York: Random House, 1967).

established by Rolf Hochhuth's play The Deputy,² intentionally moves away from value-free explanation, instead offering moral condemnation.

The message of Morse's moral code was quickly integrated into a second wave of writing -- distinguishable from the first by its more scholarly style, yet cresting and breaking in the same fashion: despite substantial differences of approach and analysis among Morse's successors, they similarly conclude that the American response (or, as they would have it, non-response) warrants moral condemnation.³ This historiographical wave, which emphasizes the conditional 'ought' of history rather than the positional 'is,' originates from the same sources as Morse's study, offering a rather repetitious consideration of the same set of major events and policies, occasionally engendering a transference of responsibility for the Holocaust from the

²Rolf Hochhuth, The Deputy, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Grove Press, 1964). Hochhuth's play deals with the Vatican's policy of neutrality toward the Nazis, and the Church's apparent indifference to the plight of the Jews, accusing Pope Pius XII of inexcusable silence despite his knowledge of the Holocaust. For a reasoned assessment of the tactical caution of the Holy See, consult Guenter Lewy, The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

³While by no means an all-inclusive list, this second wave includes Saul Friedman's No Haven for the Oppressed: United States Policy toward Jewish Refugees, 1938-1945 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), David Wyman's Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis 1938-1941 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), and Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), Henry Feingold's The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970), and Monty Noam Penkower's The Jews Were Expendable: Free World Diplomacy and the Holocaust (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

Nazis to the Allies.⁴ Unwittingly confirming Philip Guedalla's dictum that "History repeats itself. Historians repeat each other," the second wave was remarkable for both its voluminousness and its general uniformity.

Just when this overly-consensual subject was becoming a bit of a tidal bore, a third wave of scholarship arose. Propelled forward by Richard Breitman and Alan Kraut's American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, this approach gravitates toward a more dispassionate objectivity, focusing extensively on historical context, emphasizing the politics of the possible, and asserting that "retrospective moral absolutism can only exist in an oversimplified world."⁵ Breitman and Kraut self-consciously try to avoid what Michael Marrus calls "the historians' form of hubris," namely, "apply[ing] to subjects the standards and value systems, and vantage point

⁴This suggestion of nearly equal culpability is evident in Feingold: "...the Roosevelt Administration was guilty of indifference and even complicity in the Final Solution" (299); Friedman, in an otherwise judicious work (see Breitman and Kraut, American Refugee Policy and European Jewry for a positive assessment of Friedman, 3-4), accuses the Western democracies of "complicity" in the Holocaust, charges "perfidy" at the top ranks of the Roosevelt Administration, and maintains that a "yoke of shame" hangs over the United States for its treatment of the European Jews (231-234); Penkower argues that "the nations outside of Hitler's Fortress Europe abdicated moral responsibility and thus became accomplices to history's most monstrous crime" (vii); Wyman, the leading scholar of the second wave, accuses the United States not only of "Abandonment of the Jews," as the title of his second book on the subject clearly establishes, but of complicity in their murder: "The Nazis were the murderers but we were the all too passive accomplices." (ix) For a thoughtful critique of Wyman's conclusions, see Lucy Dawidowicz, "Could America have Rescued Europe's Jews?," chap. in What is the Use of Jewish History, ed. Neal Kozodoy (New York: Schocken Books, 1992).

⁵Richard Breitman and Alan Kraut, American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-45 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 2.

of the present, rather than those of the period being discussed. We believe that people should have acted otherwise, and we set out to show how they did not."⁶ Obviously not crestfallen in the face of this emergent revisionism, David Wyman, the leading scholar of the second wave, has recently responded with a thirteen volume set documenting The Abandonment of the Jews,⁷ and a scathing dismissal of a recent 'realist' reassessment of his work.⁸

This introductory summary of the historiography on America's response to the Holocaust makes no attempt to further feed the debate -- the levee is already overtaxed -- but rather, as indicated above, is meant to mark a water-line by which to measure the corresponding level of accumulated scholarship on Canada's policy toward European Jews under Nazism. A cursory comparison reveals that if historiography on the American aspect of this subject represents a series of waves with an ever-rising watermark, research on the Canadian case remains antediluvian.

The earliest considerations of Canada's response to the refugees from Nazism made virtually no ripples in mainstream Canadian historiography. Relying almost

⁶Michael Marrus, The Holocaust in History (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1987), 157.

⁷David Wyman, ed., America and the Holocaust: A Thirteen Volume Set Documenting the Editor's *The Abandonment of the Jews* (New York: Garland, 1989-1991).

⁸Frank Brecher, "David Wyman and the Historiography of America's Response to the Holocaust: Counter-Considerations," Holocaust and Genocide Studies 5 (1990): 423-446; see "Letter to the Editor" in the same issue of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, for Wyman's dismissive response to Brecher's article: 485-486.

exclusively on Jewish organizational records, Joseph Kage's With Faith and Thanksgiving and Simon Belkin's Through Narrow Gates were Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) sanctioned and published histories, the former dealing with the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society of Canada (JIAS), the latter with the Jewish Colonization Association of Canada (JCA). As a past president of the JIAS, Kage primarily examines the role of this organization, since its formation in 1920, in assisting Jews to migrate and settle in Canada, yet offers little analysis of the government's refugee policy during the Nazi era, "the years of pain and embarrassment," as his chapter on this period is entitled.⁹ Simon Belkin, past director for Canada of the JCA, was, like Kage, a Jewish organizational leader who doubled as an historian of Canadian Jewry. In Through Narrow Gates, Belkin offers a review of Jewish land settlement in Canada, providing evidence that the government's exclusionist policies toward Jewish immigrants during the 1930s were a continuation of previous policies.¹⁰ Unfortunately, Belkin's almost exclusive focus on Jewish farm immigration schemes in Canada effectively ignores the vast majority of Canadian Jewry -- which resided largely in Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg. Also, his periodization -- a centenary time-frame, 1840 to 1940, which obviously excludes the crucial war years -- is more

⁹Joseph Kage, With Faith and Thanksgiving: The Story of Two Hundred Years of Jewish Immigration and Immigrant Aid Effort in Canada, 1760-1960 (Montreal: Eagle Publishing, 1962), 93-112.

¹⁰Simon Belkin, Through Narrow Gates: A Review of Jewish Immigration, Colonization and Immigrant Aid Work in Canada, 1840-1940 (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1966).

suited to community commemoration than to professional historical scholarship.

Apart from these peripherally relevant organizational histories, the first systematic scholarly study dealing, in part, with Canada's record vis-à-vis Jewish refugees from 1933 onwards was political scientist Gerald Dirks' Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism?¹¹ While Dirks considers the totality of Canada's refugee record from the eighteenth century until the mid-1970s, he primarily focuses on the mass refugee movements of the post-Second World War period, tracing the hesitant development from general indifference to partial acceptance of humanitarian responsibility in government and public attitudes toward refugees. Positioning his study within the framework of analyses on sovereignty and nationalism, Dirks argues that the *ad hoc* evolution of Canada's refugee policy mirrors the incremental shift from isolationism to internationalism which took place in the Canadian polity after the Second World War.¹² While acknowledging and criticizing the role played by nativism in the formulation of anti-refugee policies during the interwar years, Dirks stresses that general Canadian indifference to the "world beyond its borders"¹³ was an equally important factor in Canada's restrictive attitudes toward refugees -- an understandable mind-set for a geographically isolated country in transition from colony to nation, and still recovering from a debilitating

¹¹Gerald Dirks, Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism? (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977).

¹²Dirks, 1-2.

¹³Dirks, 50.

Depression. As Dirks states,

Canadians, however, were not entirely heartless, as a vague but conscious sympathy for the troubled refugees did exist. But this sentiment remained unarticulated because the refugees' problems were quite unrelated to the experiences of Canadians while the insecurity within Canada resulting from the depression was a direct and seemingly more pressing problem. Indeed, few envisaged the horrors of the years to come. Canadian policy makers generally contended that action in any form from Canada was unnecessary. Many were motivated by a desire not to become involved in a situation which could have no possible benefit to Canada.¹⁴

Despite introducing archival evidence that personal prejudices (both racist and ideological) shaped public policy during the interwar period, Dirks' study made virtually no waves in either academic or public discourse. Published yet perished through neglect, Canada's Refugee Policy was never reviewed in any scholarly journals and, as Freda Hawkins notes, was only cited twice in Irving Abella and Harold Troper's None Is Too Many,¹⁵ despite the fact that "it covers much of the same ground and comes to similar conclusions."¹⁶

While Dirks' study barely disturbed the historiographical surface, Irving Abella and Harold Troper's None Is Too Many represented nothing short of a scholarly *tsunami*. Commanding immediate attention, it "became one of Canada's most widely

¹⁴Dirks, 52.

¹⁵Irving Abella and Harold Troper, None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1945 (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982).

¹⁶Freda Hawkins, "Indictment," Canadian Forum 62 (December/January 1982-3): 36.

discussed books of 1982-1983."¹⁷ This work, based on traditional Rankean exegesis¹⁸ and rather prosaically written, was noteworthy not for its style but for its castigating conclusions. Presenting a clear indictment of Canadian inaction toward the Nazi era refugee crisis, the authors state that

Like the other western liberal democracies, Canada cared little and did less. . . . In the pre-war years, as the government cemented barriers to immigration, especially of Jews, immigration authorities barely concealed their contempt for those pleading for rescue. There was no groundswell of opposition, no humanitarian appeal for a more open policy. . . .¹⁹

Furthermore, Abella and Troper specifically single out Canada for additional criticism, claiming that it had "the worst record for providing sanctuary to European Jewry of all the nations of the Western world": fewer than 5 000 Jews were permitted entry to Canada, compared to 50 000 for Argentina, 70 000 for Britain, 14 000 for Bolivia, 125 000 for Palestine, 25 000 for China, and 200 000 for the United States.²⁰

¹⁷David Wyman, "Refugees and Survivors: Reception in the New World," Simon Wiesenthal Centre Annual 2 (1985): 194.

¹⁸Rankean in the loose sense of the word: namely, history derived from a meticulous study of government, institutional, and other official documents. As Abella and Troper claim, "The unfolding chain of historical events described in this book, drawn exclusively from the documentation of this era and conversations with participants, needs little or no commentary." J. L. Granatstein, impressed with Abella and Troper's research, states that "There has not been a book on Canadian history that so carefully and fully exploits the available sources." J. L. Granatstein, review of None Is Too Many, in American Historical Review 89 (June 1984): 886.

¹⁹Abella and Troper, 281.

²⁰Abella and Troper, x.

The authors identify a number of factors which insured that no more than a mere handful of Jewish refugees would find a home in Canada: "the unyielding opposition of certain key officials";²¹ the "ethnically selective" immigration policy, revealing that the Canadian government knew exactly "what nationalities and races it wanted and how to keep out those it did not want";²² the economic depression;²³

²¹Abella and Troper, 66. The authors specifically identify an "unholy triumvirate": the Department of Mines and Resources' Immigration Branch, then under the leadership of F. C. Blair, "of course an anti-Semite" whose "contempt for Jews was boundless" (9); the cabinet, notably the anti-immigration Quebec-wing led by Ernest Lapointe; and the Department of External Affairs, specifically the Canadian High Commissioner in London, Vincent Massey, described as "a fringe member of the aristocratic, largely pro-German and anti-Semitic Cliveden set, centred around Lord and Lady Astor." (24) Although Massey was undoubtedly an Anglophile and, at least before 1939, was generally pro-German, to call him a fringe member of the Cliveden set is perhaps an indictment by hazy association. As Claude Bissell, The Imperial Canadian: Vincent Massey in Office (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), notes, Massey made "only one recorded visit to Cliveden on 27 June 1936," a place of "magnitude and magnificence," which was an almost requisite stop for a couple that was as much a part of the London-based social scene as were the Masseys. (21)

²²Abella and Troper, 198-199. For instance, prewar immigration rules allowed the entry of agriculturists, primarily British and American, with capital. While some European immigrants were admitted under this rule, Jews were largely excluded because, in Blair's view, Jews by definition "do not . . . take to farming." See Kage, for a cogent discussion of Canadian immigration restrictions during the interwar period. (60-77)

²³While acknowledged as a contributing factor in the entrenchment of Canada's restrictive immigration policy, the Great Depression is not accepted by Abella and Troper as a sufficient causal explanation for Canada's numerically parsimonious response to the crisis which faced European Jewry. The authors argue that "it is seductively easy to lay Canada's dismal showing on refugee admissions at the foot of the Great Depression -- easy but wrong." Other refugee-receiving countries, who had "suffered under the same world-wide depression," were comparatively more generous in their acceptance of Jews persecuted by Nazism, and the Depression does not account "for the obdurate rigidity that lead Canadian authorities to reject almost every

the political weakness of the Canadian Jewish community;²⁴ the general apathy in English Canada; the outright hostility of French Canada toward immigration in general and Jewish immigration in particular; the overlay of anti-Semitism that dominated official Ottawa; the fear of being made the dumping ground in any British or American scheme to resettle Jews; and the overriding sense on the part of William Lyon Mackenzie King that the admission of Jewish refugees was not politically expedient.²⁵

Abella and Troper's almost Whitmanesque cataloguing of contributive factors -- laudable for resisting the temptation to latch onto a simple master-key solution yet maddening for avoiding the task of assessing the relative explanatory worth of each element of the equation -- can be loosely filed under one overarching belief held by the majority of the government and the populace: Canada had no moral obligation to solve Germany's "Jewish Problem" by making European Jews a Canadian problem.²⁶ As a means of circumventing any appeals to humanitarianism while maintaining the appearance of moral rectitude, the Canadian government consciously

plan to offer haven" to Jews once war broke out. (xi)

²⁴Abella and Troper, 9-10. The political weakness of Canadian Jewry was understandable considering that, according to the 1931 census, it constituted only 1.51 percent of the nation's population.

²⁵According to Abella and Troper, King feared that "whatever momentary sympathy might be stirred up for refugees . . . would quickly be washed away in the wake of boat loads of Jews landing at Halifax or Montreal." (282)

²⁶As King recorded in his diary, nothing is to be gained "by creating an internal problem in an effort to meet an international one." King Diary, 29 March 1938.

employed Machiavellian manoeuvring to mask its "heartless" policy -- using a variety of intentionally ineffectual acts to provide "excuses of inaction." These "excuses of inaction" -- supplemented by various "illusions of action," namely, the Evian²⁷ (July 1938) and Bermuda²⁸ (April 1943) Conferences, and the Allied Declaration against Nazi War Crimes of 17 December 1942²⁹ -- include the following: ostensible Fifth

²⁷According to Abella and Troper, despite expressions of "ritual concern," the failure of the Evian Conference to establish any practical and immediate solution to the European refugee crisis was met with an "almost audible collective sigh of relief" (31) by the Canadian delegates. By their own restrictive standards, the "government had successfully survived Evian and wished not to be bothered with the refugee issue again." (36) The contemporary interpretation of Evian as a "Jewish Munich" was, however, neither immediate nor unanimous. For instance, Jonah Wise, the National Chairman of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), wrote to H. M. Caiserman, the General Secretary of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC): "I consider entirely unfair the accusation made in some circles that the Evian Conference was a failure. It was nothing of the sort. . . . It placed the whole question of refugees on a humanitarian basis -- a unique step forward in international cooperation. What is more, it focused the attention of the world on the problem." Wise, of course, had no way of knowing how little practical help to Jewish refugees would actually flow from the Evian Conference. Canadian Jewish Congress Archives (CJC), ZA 1938, box 5, file 6, Evian Conference. For other contemporary interpretations of the Evian Conference, see Shlomo Katz, "Public Opinion in Western Europe and the Evian Conference of July 1938," Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance 9 (1973): 105-132.

²⁸The Bermuda Conference, in which Canada did not participate, is described by Abella and Troper as an "exploratory conference," a "failure by design," which represented the "fatal betrayal of World Jewry." (137, 148, 143)

²⁹The Allied Declaration against Nazi War Crimes is dismissed by Abella and Troper as "hardly the appropriate response to the slaughter of millions." (127) While the Declaration was not immediately supported by concerted rescue attempts, it did represent a significant contribution to the body of international law dealing with war crimes. As John P. Fox, "The Jewish Factor in British War Crimes Policy in 1942," English Historical Review 92 (1977): 82-106, notes, "This statement officially committed the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the Soviet Union [and Canada] for the first time to the post-war prosecution of those responsible for

Column fears;³⁰ apparent concerns that admission of Jewish refugees would undermine national unity;³¹ the desire to channel all resources into the task of winning the war as soon as possible; the belief that opening the country to more Jews would stimulate anti-Semitism of which Jews, naturally, would be the victims; the lack of European processing facilities and postwar shipping scarcity;³² concern about the impact of immigration on the potential postwar economic downturn;³³ the

Nazi crimes against the Jews of Europe." (82)

³⁰Abella and Troper claim that King introduced the Fifth Column "bogy" to justify continuing to restrain the number of refugees allowed into Canada. (153) Valid or not, wartime security concerns were far more than a specious "bogy," but were rather a real and widespread concern of the Canadian government. See Donald Avery, "Canada's Response to European Refugees, 1939-1945: The Security Dimension," in On Guard For Thee: War, Ethnicity, and the Canadian State, 1939-1945, ed. Norman Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan, and Lubomyr Luciuk (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988), 179-215, for indication that Fifth Column fears dominated Canadian refugee policy. For anecdotal evidence that the Canadian public was fearful of a wartime "Trojan horse," see "Patriotism on the Home Front," chap. in Barry Broadfoot, Six War Years, 1939-1945: Memories of Canadians at Home and Abroad (Toronto: Doubleday, 1974).

³¹Allowing Jewish refugees into Canada, King told his cabinet, might cause riots and would surely exacerbate relations between the federal government and the provinces. This was no time for Canada to act on "humanitarian grounds." Rather, said the prime minister, Canada must be guided by "realities" and political considerations. King Diary, 29 March 1938; cited in Abella and Troper, 17.

³²According to Abella and Troper, "Neither problem was insurmountable -- shipping priorities could be adjusted and the necessary offices set up -- but Immigration officials found it convenient to leave these problems unresolved as a smoke screen masking the real reason for inaction," namely, pure discrimination. (199) And, elsewhere in the book, "If shipping was no longer the problem, another could be found." (206)

³³Abella and Troper reject the veracity of this argument, omnipotently stating that "the litany of [economic] woe would of course be proven wrong." (197) Yet, as J. L. Granatstein, Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government,

priority of repatriation and demobilization of Canadian soldiers.

Each restraint on movement is dismissed by Abella and Troper as a specious smoke-screen, conspiratorial expressions justifying non-response, while "the government dallied and searched for reasons not to admit refugees."³⁴ Accusing the Canadian government of inaction based upon a cynical abdication of assistance, despite full knowledge of the repercussions of their indifference, None Is Too Many concludes with a quote from Mark Sorensen, a Canadian Pacific Railway immigration agent, writing to his superior in 1940: "The day will come when Immigration will be under debate, and then the Ottawa Immigration Service shall be judged by [its] records. For us it will not be unimportant to have these records at our fingertips. They shall then find us as their bad conscience."³⁵

A brief survey of the reviews of None Is Too Many indicates that Sorensen's "bad conscience" wish has been posthumously fulfilled. Using language generally reserved for morality plays rather than scholarly critiques, the reviews are simultaneously favourable and contrite. For instance, Michael Bliss asserts that None

1939-1945 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), notes, "Everyone in government, in the civil service, and in industry seemed afraid that the dislocations that would accompany the reconversion to peace would be marked with massive unemployment and popular unrest." (249-250)

³⁴Abella and Troper, 129.

³⁵Mark B. Sorensen Papers, Sorensen to Cresswell, 11 October 1940; cited in Abella and Troper, 285.

Is Too Many "will leave most readers numb with sorrow and shame. This is a record of the bleakest chapter in Canadian history: the racist and exclusionary policies toward Jewish refugees make our treatment of the Japanese-Canadians during the war look like a model of tolerance."³⁶ Both David Stafford and Richard A. Jones prescribe None Is Too Many as a necessary antidote to Canadians' self-congratulatory image of themselves as traditionally tolerant and humanitarian.³⁷ And Alan Davies describes the book as a "detailed account of the cold-blooded refusal of the Mackenzie King cabinet and its bureaucratic minions (notably the then director of immigration F. C. Blair) to pluck from the burning Jewish refugees seeking sanctuary in Canada." This "ignoble tale," this "study in evil," is "good medicine for s " righteous Canadians."³⁸

Considering that the Holocaust remains an understandably emotionally charged topic, the remorseful tone of these reviews is not surprising. Also, the fact that None Is Too Many entered the public discourse at the time of the expulsion of the "boat people" from Vietnam -- creating a public debate about Canada's appropriate response to the crisis and prominently thrusting Abella and Troper into the media spotlight --

³⁶Michael Bliss, review of None Is Too Many, in Macleans 95 (13 September 1982): 58.

³⁷David Stafford, "A Daydream in Hell," Saturday Night 97 (September 1982): 58; Richard A. Jones, "Canada and the Jewish Refugees of Nazi Europe," Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques 11 (Spring 1984): 83.

³⁸Alan Davies, review of None Is Too Many, in Religious Studies Review 9 (January 1983): 85-86.

partially explains the reviewers' implicit suggestion that Canadians should atone for their past indifference toward refugees through expressions of present generosity. Yet, the transformation of this topic from a site of scholarship to one of mournful memorialization has unfortunately created a moral resort, an ersatz locale where academics can rest their mental faculties and indulge in expressions of righteous indignation. Consequently, since the publication of None Is Too Many there has been no comprehensive reconsideration of Canada's refugee policy during the 1930s and the war years. Apart from a number of studies specifically related to Canada's wartime internment camps, which concurrently contained Nazi prisoners of wars and refugees from Nazism,³⁹ and one essay on the security dimension of Canada's response to European refugees during the Second World War,⁴⁰ this topic has effectively been retired, the case against the Canadian government apparently conclusively proven.

Admittedly, offering counter-considerations to such a sensitive topic is potentially provocative -- the line between historical explanation and perceived

³⁹Literature on the internment camps includes Paula Draper's "The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1983); Eric Koch's Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder (Halifax, NS: Goodread Biographies, 1985); and Ted Jones' Both Sides of the Wire: The Fredericton Internment Camp (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press, 1988).

⁴⁰Donald Avery, "Canada's Response to European Refugees, 1939-1945: The Security Dimension," in On Guard For Thee, 179-215.

exculpation is decidedly fine, as illustrated by the recent German *Historikerstreit*,⁴¹ and, much closer to home, the largely negative and often emotional reaction to J. L. Granatstein's revisionist critique of the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War.⁴² With such precedents in mind, it is understandable that historical study of morally sensitive subjects remains an area where many fear to tread -- understandable, yet unfortunate because much research remains to be done on Canada's refugee policy during these troubled times. While acknowledging the important legacy of None Is Too Many,⁴³ there remains substantial scope for a more objective scholarship which develops the linkages essential to a definitive study of this subject. For instance, more attention should be paid to the context which surrounded

⁴¹For a brief yet thorough consideration of the *Historikerstreit* and the expansive body of literature that the debate has spawned, see Ian Kershaw, The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation, 2d ed. (New York: E. Arnold, 1989).

⁴²J. L. Granatstein, "The Enemy Within? Was the Banishment of B.C.'s Japanese Canadians an Unforgivable Mistake or an Explicable Fact of War," Saturday Night 101 (November 1986): 32-42. For criticism of Granatstein's conclusion (the latter option of his title's follow-up question), see "Letters," Saturday Night 102 (February 1987): 5-6. For a more scholarly debate on the same issue, consult J. L. Granatstein and Gregory A. Johnson, "The Evacuation of the Japanese Canadians, 1942: A Realist Critique of the Received Version," 101-129, and the subsequent "Commentary" section in On Guard for Thee, which largely refutes their argument.

⁴³The revisionist historian should remember that "A major source of renewal in any intellectual field is the legacy of earlier work. As Harold Bloom has suggested for poetry, the underlying impulse may be patricidal, and the honing of graduate students on earlier interpretations can yield diminishing returns." Charles Maier, "Marking Time: The Historiography of International Relations," in The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 366.

policy makers and civil servants; the focal length increased to include more systematically non-Jewish refugees;⁴⁴ the temporal framework enlarged to further establish continuities and discontinuities in Canada's refugee policy; the role of racism in refugee policy, especially relative to other contributory factors (such as, isolationism, security concerns, nationalism and sovereignty), subjected to further analysis; the influence of other nations -- particularly the United States and Great Britain -- on Canadian refugee policy greater developed; and more consideration given to the few successful refugee movements which took place in this restrictive period. All of these elements, each a monograph in its own right, deserves further study.

This thesis, while peripherally considering some of the elements in the above scholarly wish-list, focuses directly on one of the largest refugee movements to Canada during the Second World War: approximately 400 refugees, primarily Jewish, who came aboard the *S.S. Serpa Pinto* and the *S.S. Nyassa* in 1944. The government's opening to Iberian refugees, while not devoid of humanitarian considerations, was primarily motivated by William Lyon Mackenzie King's politics of limited gestures. Increasingly sensitive to international pressure to help alleviate the refugee crisis and to growing domestic censure of apparent official indifference

⁴⁴As Donald Avery's preliminary study, "Canada's Response to European Refugees," suggests, Blair "was opposed to allowing *any* refugees into the country whether they were Spaniards, Jews, Poles, Mennonites or Czechs. . . . [Blair] saw refugees as creating administrative problems, arousing political controversy, and posing a threat to national security." (204)

to those trying to escape Nazi oppression, yet still fully aware of the potential political danger of allowing mass entry of refugees during wartime, the Iberian refugee initiative enabled the Canadian government to defuse criticism through a public display of concern. Since there were only 2 000 refugees in Iberia by 1944, and because the war had stopped the refugee flow from the rest of Europe, the government used this logistically limited movement to afford itself political time and space to reformulate its refugee policy in an effort to reflect postwar realities, and to reposition itself on the world's stage. Although numerically small, the Iberian Refugee Movement is historically significant: in many ways, it represents a progressive step in Canada's halting transition from inward-looking isolationism to outward-looking internationalism; from, if you will, national adolescence to adulthood.⁴⁵

Equally influenced by Tolstoy's conviction that an historical phenomenon can become comprehensible only by reconstructing the activities of all the persons who

⁴⁵Canada, in the 1920s, admitted refugees from the Armenian genocide and Ukrainian pogroms. During this time, however, Canadian refugee policy was still very much dictated by Great Britain. The Iberian Refugee Movement was one of the few significant Canadian refugee initiatives in the crucial nation-building period between the Statute of Westminster in 1931 and the end of the Second World War. Canada's response to refugees from the Armenian genocide is discussed by Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, "Armenian Refugees and Their Entry into Canada, 1919-1930," Canadian Historical Review 71 (1990): 80-108. For a discussion of Canada and the Ukrainian pogroms, see Stephen Scheinberg, "When the Gates Opened: Canada and the Pogrom Refugees, 1919-1926" (unpublished essay; Montreal: Concordia University, History Department, 1995).

participated in it,⁴⁶ and F. W. Maitland's remark that historians must "remember that events now in the past were once far in the future," my microhistory⁴⁷ attempts to avoid the two major pitfalls into which much of the literature on Canada's response to refugees from Nazism has fallen: too narrow a focus, too moral a tone. Trapped in the former pitfall, are Kage and Belkin -- their primary concern with Jewish institutional responses offering only a one-sided image of a multifaceted process -- and Dirks -- his emphasis on governmental policy largely ignoring an essential component of the equation: the refugees themselves. Snared in the latter pitfall, are Abella and Troper -- their occasional dearth of historical context and their use of rhetorically immoderate language⁴⁸ tends to lead toward moral condemnation rather than historical explication.

While the twin constraints of time and space dictate that this thesis conform to a tightly defined frame of investigation, by considering the convergent factors which resulted in Canada's closed-door immigration and refugee policy, by studying the role of precedent, process and personality in the Iberian refugee movement, and

⁴⁶See Isaiah Berlin, "The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History," in Russian Thinkers, ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (New York: Viking, 1978), 22-81.

⁴⁷For a cogent discussion of "microhistory" as a methodological tool, see Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It," trans. John and Anne Tedeschi, Critical Inquiry 29 (Autumn 1993): 10-35.

⁴⁸None Is Too Many, despite its claims of objectivity (see fn 18), is replete with value-immersed descriptive terms: "cold-blooded" (20, 120), "tragic failure" (32), "heartbreaking" (33), "heart-rending" (33), "crafty" "diabolical plot" (114), and "punctilious" (120).

by using personal interviews to include the experiences of the refugees themselves,⁴⁹ the topically applicable facets of the prismatic past will be integrated. One should remember that in history nothing is easier than apportioning praise and blame. Rejecting the approach of presenting allegorical tales of the good, the bad, and the ugly as objective history, emphasis shall be placed on the principal actors' contemporary context and subsequent limits of manoeuvrability. As Michael Marrus suggests, "we shall go much further in the attempt to comprehend the behaviour and activity (or inactivity) of bystanders by making a painstaking effort to enter into their minds and sensibilities."⁵⁰

Despite these rather platitudinous claims to be both inclusive and objective, I am enough of a realist to recognize that the unity of history is such that, to quote F. W. Maitland, "anyone who endeavours to tell a piece of it must feel that his first sentence tears a seamless web." I only hope that dangling threads are not too obvious in the following discussion.

⁴⁹This thesis is not, however, an oral history project. Juxtaposing 'conventional' archival-based history and oral history creates a false dichotomy. There is only good history and bad history. Langlet du Fresnoy, librarian to the Prince of Savoy in the early 1700s, offers timeless advice to the researcher: those historians who combine "hard study, and a great experience of affairs," are considerably superior to those "that shut themselves up in their closets to examine there, upon the credit of others, the facts which themselves were not able to be informed of." Fresnoy, cited in Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 26.

⁵⁰Marrus, 157.

Chapter Two

Refugee Restrictionism in Historical Perspective

In Arthur Koestler's Arrival and Departure, Peter Slavek, an interrogated and tortured student-hero, has escaped from an oppressive dictatorship. He arrives in Neutralia, a tense clearing-house for refugees, in spring 1941. Frustrated by several unsuccessful attempts to obtain the documentation necessary to proceed to a safer haven, Slavek is cautioned by another refugee to expect this kind of official obstructionism:

Well, you go to the poste restante: Is there a letter for me? -- No, madame. Next please. -- You go to the Consulate: Has my visa come through? -- No, madame. Next please. -- You go to the Shipping Office: Is there a vacancy for a passage in sight? -- No, madame. Next please. -- It's quick and simple. They have hoisted the yellow flag over Europe and put us all in quarantine.¹

More fact than fiction, the representative experience of Slavek in Koestler's allegorical tale has been meticulously substantiated by historians considering the Allied response to the Holocaust, conveying "a persistent and depressing theme -- disbelief in reports of mass murder, widespread indifference, and unwillingness to break established patterns to help the Jews."²

While scholars have generally succeeded in demonstrating that the response of

¹Arthur Koestler, Arrival and Departure (London: Penguin, 1969; first published by Jonathan Cape, 1943), 34.

²Michael Marrus, The Holocaust in History (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1987), 156.

the Allies to the Nazi-created refugee crisis was largely ineffectual, some have failed to consider sufficiently the contemporary historical context under which governments formulated and implemented restrictive immigration and refugee policies. Remembering that, as L. P. Hartley noted, "the past is a foreign country," the scholar who fails to properly contextualize the past is likely to share an entrapment similar to Slavek's: foreign 'travel' visa denied, mental movement temporally restricted, physical mobility spatially restrained.

Attempting to penetrate the historical situation, the scholar of the interwar period should recognize that a nation's immigration and refugee policy is an amalgam comprised of internationalist aspirations and incremental solutions to domestic problems. To account for the complex interplay of internal and external factors one must, to use the cinematographic metaphor, alternate between long-shots and close-ups. To understand contextually Canada's restrictive immigration and refugee policy throughout the interwar period and into the Second World War, one must also be aware of the concurrent international response to population movements.

Although political refugees have existed for most of European history, it is only since the twentieth century that European refugees have become a pressing issue of international politics. In fact, the refugee crisis became so acute in the interwar years that, as two researchers observed in 1944, "The history of international migration in the past thirty years has been largely the history of refugees. Ours may

truly be called the era of refugees."³

While in the latter half of this century there has been a slowly emerging consciousness of the refugee phenomenon, refugees in the interwar period were generally the "people who fall through the cracks of history."⁴ Largely remaining a misunderstood miasma in international discourse, no clear-cut definition of the status of the refugee was universally understood during this time, despite the League of Nations' definitions established in 1922 and 1924.⁵ Besides definitional disagreement, the failure of most interwar nations to comprehend fully the modern phenomenon of mass refugee movements is further underscored by the continuation of the standard "immigration-based" approach to migration statistics. Failing to differentiate between refugees and immigrants, countries during this time routinely conflated refugee and immigration statistics. In this way, no accurate record of the number of refugee entries was kept.⁶ Without either definitional status or statistical

³Arieh Tartakower and Kurt Grossman, The Jewish Refugee (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs of the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress, 1944), 1.

⁴Jane Kramer, Unsettling Europe (New York: Random House, 1980), xiii.

⁵Tracing the development of a coherent, universally accepted definition of the term "refugee" is beyond the focus of this paper. For a discussion of this topic, see Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, "Rejecting 'Misfits': Canada and the Nansen Passport," International Migration Review 28 (summer 1994): 281-306; Gerald Dirks, Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism? (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 1-14; and Michael Marrus, The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), *passim*.

⁶For instance, in Canada the classification "refugee" was not included in immigration statistics. Similar "immigration-based" statistical accounting in pre-war

existence, refugees remained an amorphous group, occasionally offered humanitarian expressions of good will yet rarely afforded practical demonstrations of political conviction.

Official ambivalence toward refugees in the interwar period was further exacerbated by popular antipathy. Although difficult to document, even well-informed people have sometimes "reacted with an almost instinctive mistrust" of refugees.⁷ Appreciation of the persecuted was often tinged with a "just-world" mindset, blaming the victim under the assumption that he must have done something to deserve his ill-fate. As Alfred Prager observed in 1938:

A man falls into the river. He is about to drown. From both banks, heedless of their danger, people jump into the water to save him. A man is grabbed from behind and thrown into the river. He is about to drown. People on both banks of the river look on with growing alarm at the desperate attempts of the drowning man to swim and think 'if only he doesn't save himself on *our* shore.'⁸

Historically substantiating Prager's anecdote, the planning committee of the British Ministry of Information (MOI) had reached the conclusion in July 1941 that while a certain amount of horror was needed in home propaganda, this was only to be used sparingly "and must always deal with the treatment of indisputably innocent people.

Britain is discussed by Louise London, "British Government Policy and Jewish Refugees," Patterns of Prejudice 23 (1989): 26-43.

⁷Jacques Vernant, The Refugee in the Post-War World: Preliminary Report of a Survey (London: Allan and Unwin, 1953), 13.

⁸Alfred Prager, Prager Tagblatt (18 September 1938); cited in Kurt Grossman, Emigration (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanst, 1969), 6.

Not with violent political opponents. And not with the Jews." According to the experts of MOI, the public believed that people singled out as victims were probably "a bad lot."⁹ The Canadian manifestation of this pervasive just-world thinking is evident in one woman's reaction to Armenian refugees. In 1927, commenting on the events of the Armenian genocide of 1915, Mrs D. Miller wrote: "If the Armenians had been really God fearing as well as God worshipping, I do not think they would be in their present straits."¹⁰

Moving from expressions of personal prejudice against refugees to political pragmatism, the lack of widespread concern for the refugee problem in the interwar period "is at least partially explained by the dominant interpretation of the concept of sovereignty which prohibited governments from dealing with or assisting the nationals of foreign states."¹¹ No sovereign territorial state, to borrow Leo Kuper's term,¹²

⁹MOI study, cited Walter Laqueur, "Hitler's Holocaust: Who Knew What, When, & How?" in The Nazi Holocaust: Bystanders to the Holocaust, vol. 8, no. 1, ed. Michael Marrus (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989), 74.

¹⁰Mrs D. Miller to the Rev. Ira Pierce, 6 Aug. 1927; cited in Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, "Armenian Refugees and Their Entry into Canada, 1919-30," Canadian Historical Review 71 (1990): 84-85.

¹¹Dirks, 1. The direct connection between the growth of the modern nation-state and diplomatic abjuration of responsibility for refugees is made elsewhere: Marrus, The Unwanted, passim; Lucy Dawidowicz, "Could America Have Rescued Europe's Jews," chap. in What is the Use of Jewish History?, ed. Neal Kozodoy (New York: Schocken Books, 1992), 73-74; Henry Feingold, The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970). Feingold sees "the nature of the nation-state itself . . . as the villain of the piece." (xiii)

permits another to intervene in its internal affairs, especially in matters of human rights. Affected by the interwar climate of appeasement and isolationism, diplomats were generally more concerned with establishing and maintaining cordial relations with foreign states than with assisting refugees.¹³ Thus Germany's mistreatment of its Jewish citizenry was, at least initially, considered by many bystander nations to be a domestic affair.¹⁴ By extension, in an international system where individual liberties were largely contingent upon citizenship rather than any concept of innate human rights, those rendered stateless were beyond the pale of any governmental protection. As W. H. Auden wrote, "If you've got no passport you're officially dead."¹⁵

Despite refugee restrictiveness linked to the hegemonic concept of the

¹²Leo Kuper, "The Sovereign Territorial State: The Right to Genocide," chap. in Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century (London: Penguin, 1981). Kuper argues that "the sovereign territorial state claims, as an integral part of its sovereignty, the right to commit genocide, or engage in genocidal massacres, against peoples under its rule, and that the United Nations, for all practical purposes, defends this right." (161) Through extrapolation, this statist 'prerogative' makes all issues relating to human rights an internal matter.

¹³For evidence of the prevalence of diplomatic correctness, see Shafir Shlomo, "American Diplomats in Berlin and their Attitude to the Nazi Persecution of the Jews," Yad Vashem Studies on the European Catastrophe and Resistance 9 (1973): 71-104.

¹⁴The unwillingness of governments to subordinate considerations of diplomatic correctness to humanitarianism caused James G. McDonald, the High Commissioner for "Refugees (Jewish and other) coming from Germany" (a largely ineffectual body created by the League of Nations Assembly in 1933), to resign on 31 December 1935.

¹⁵W. H. Auden, "Twelve Songs," in Collected Shorter Poems, 1927-1957 (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 157.

sovereign territorial state, there was, of course, one significant international attempt to deal with the interwar refugee crisis: the "Nansen passport." The "Nansen passport," an international identity certificate established after 1918 by the High Commissioner for Refugees, Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, was an intergovernmental effort to facilitate travel and labour for the millions of refugees from the former Russian and Ottoman Empires who found themselves without citizenship. Although the "Nansen-Office" played a major role in successfully alleviating some of the post-war refugee problems,¹⁶ it was generally viewed by the international community as a pragmatic response to a specific crisis rather than a fundamental acknowledgment of the "natural law" concept of the refugee's right to movement and asylum.¹⁷ While Nansen helped to cultivate a fragile political will to do something about refugees, as the immediate postwar problems dissipated into the past and the Depression consumed the Western world, states increasingly looked inward and hastily erected barriers to both immigrant and refugee entry.

¹⁶See Marrus, "The Nansen Era," chap. in The Unwanted, 51-121. For a critique of the way Canada dealt with the Nansen passport, focusing extensively on the issue of returnability, see Kaprielian-Churchill, "Rejecting 'Misfits.'"

¹⁷Although throughout this century some international lawyers have postulated a law of nations that would enjoin states to admit aliens to their territory, the admission of refugees has remained largely regulated by pragmatic economic, political, or demographic considerations. See Richard Plender, International Migration Law (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1972), 38-70, for a review of these idealistic principles and the historic practices of states disregarding them. For more recent philosophically based discussions of refugees' right to asylum, see Howard Adelman, ed., Legitimate and Illegitimate Discrimination: New Issues in Migration (North York, ON: York Lanes Press, 1995); also, Howard Adelman and C. Michael Lanphier, ed., Refuge or Asylum: A Choice for Canada (Toronto: York Lanes Press, 1990).

Considering that in almost every country there is a continuity between wartime restriction and policies established in the 1930s, the impact of the Depression on the constraint of population movements should not be under-stressed. Formulating population policies to reflect pre-Keynesian values, restrictive immigration and refugee measures became focal points of public economic policy and were generally seen as an antidote to the economic ills of the capitalist world. In the words of one American expert (1931):

The limit of production is, in one sense, determined by the buying population or consumer. In another sense immigration is limited by land-absorptive capacity. The addition to a nation's population of such poor [immigrant] buying power does not improve business conditions but rather impoverishes them by adding to those who must be given food for consumption without the means, even through no fault of their own.¹⁸

If the immigrant was routinely rejected for his "poor buying power," the refugee was even further reviled because, as potential recipients of international charity, he was generally seen as the "beggar of the world."¹⁹ Even James G. McDonald, definitely sympathetic to the plight of Jews in Germany (see footnote 14), recognized the severity of the Depression and, consequently, issued no ringing call to open the gates of immigration. "In the present economic conditions of the world," he declared in his letter of resignation to the League, "the European states, and even those overseas,

¹⁸H. Fields, "Closing Immigration Throughout the World," American Journal of International Law, 26 (1936): 675.

¹⁹Kaprielian-Churchill, "Armenian Refugees and Their Entry into Canada," 85.

have only a limited power of absorption of refugees."²⁰

Before 1939, when there was a real opportunity to intervene and alleviate the problem, nations engaged in a game of lifeboat politics. Aware that some form of action was necessary yet hesitant to open their own gates of entry when all others were closed, a position of active passivity was generally maintained. As Malcolm Proudfoot notes,

The one form of international action which would have provided the most substantial relief for the refugees would have been a widespread lowering of immigration barriers. Most nations, however, were prepared to do no more than suggest this course of action for their neighbours.²¹

Consequently, the restrictivist status-quo was universally asserted.

Using historical hindsight, it is easy to criticize bystanders for failing to recognize that changes in Europe rendered the politics of the past an obsolete and inadequate method of dealing with the contemporary refugee crisis. However, to avoid an ahistorical, presentist perspective, one must recognize in any consideration of the interwar period that the Holocaust was still years away. Shifting the scholarly focus on bystanders away from Machiavellian manoeuvring and toward mass myopia, few at this time recognized that the Nazi process of definition, expropriation, and concentration, to use Raul Hilberg's terms, would lead to annihilation. As an example of this lack of foresight, there is evidence that prior to November 1938

²⁰Cited in Marrus, The Unwanted, 162.

²¹Malcolm Proudfoot, European Refugees, 1939-1952: A Study in Forced Population Movement (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 31.

Jewish leadership, both in Germany and abroad, discouraged widespread emigration, viewing the

German Jews' ability to persevere as a test-case for the fate of other Jewish communities who were confronted by increasingly powerful anti-Semitic elements. They feared that a general exodus of Jews from the Third Reich might serve as a precedent for anti-Semites elsewhere to expel Jews.²²

Echoing this attitude, a resolution, which sought the repeal of antisemitic decrees, was adopted by the Fourth General Session of the Canadian Jewish Congress (21-23 January 1939), affirming "the rights of Jews to remain and live in those countries of Europe where they have been for many years and which they have helped develop," and rejecting "any plan contemplating compulsory mass migration from such countries."²³

The spectre haunting refugee policy during the 1930s was that encouraging Jewish fugitives from Nazism might well provoke the flight of hundreds of thousands

²²Abraham Margalio, "The Problem of Rescue of German Jewry During the Years 1933-1939: The Reasons for the Delay in Their Emigration from the Third Reich," in Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust (proceedings of the Second Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, 8-11 April 1974), ed. Yisrael Gutman and Efraim Zuroff (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1977), 251.

²³C. M. Hanane, "The Canadian Jewish Congress," in Canadian Jewish Year Book, 1939-1940, vol. 1, ed. Vladimir Grossman (Montreal, 1939), 127. Also, see King's letter to Simmons, an U. S. diplomat, suggesting that offers of freer immigration from Germany might give "rise to a renewed wave of persecution against German Jewish citizens. . . . Other governments with unwanted minorities must equally not be encouraged to think that harsh treatment at home is the key that will open the doors to immigration abroad. It is axiomatic that no state should be allowed to throw upon other countries the responsibility of solving its internal difficulties." National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG84, file 842.00PR Refugees, King to Simmons, 28 June 1938.

more from Eastern Europe. This was not, of course, an unfounded fear: Hungarian, Rumanian, and Polish representatives made repeated interventions abroad during the 1930s about their "Jewish problems" and proposed massive evacuations of these "unwanted" to other continents. For instance, in 1938 the Rumanians approached the British, calling for "a radical and early solution of the Jewish question in Rumania by means of internationally assisted migration." King Carol spoke directly to the British representative in Bucharest, envisioning the departure of some 200 000 Jews.²⁴ Fearing that the tentative trickle would become an unregulated torrent, potential refugees were urged to be patient²⁵ -- a luxury which many of them could not afford.

Even after 1942 when incontrovertible information documenting the Holocaust was widely available, the event remained, for many observers, beyond belief. The important distinction between information and knowledge, made by Yehuda Bauer,²⁶ is borne out by Walter Laqueur's article "Jewish Denial and the Holocaust"; his theme was not some insidious rejection of kinship with European Jews, but rather

²⁴Marrus, The Unwanted, 142-143.

²⁵As F. C. Blair remarked, "anyone who tries to rush the [Canadian immigration] Act will find out it does not work." NAC, Immigration Branch Records (IR), RG76, file 673931, Blair to file, 16 September 1941.

²⁶Yehuda Bauer, American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939-1945 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), 180-187. The meta-historical distinction between information and knowledge is also discussed by Deborah E. Lipstadt, "Pious Sympathies and Sincere Regrets: The American News Media and the Holocaust From Krystalnacht to Bermuda, 1938-1943," in The Nazi Holocaust: Bystanders to the Holocaust, vol. 8, no. 1 (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989), 114.

simple bewilderment and confusion among a disorganized collection of Jews facing unprecedented calamity.²⁷ If, as Michael Marrus notes, the Holocaust was unprecedented, "then it is also true that people had no experience upon which to base their understanding at the time, and no reliable guides for action. To a degree, everyone was in the dark."²⁸

Mindful of this international framework, the Canadian context is more comprehensible. The history of Canada is, in many ways, the history of immigration. Consequently, the meandering path of Canada's immigration policy has been heavily trodden upon by scholars.²⁹ Avoiding a repetitious revisiting, only a brief foray into Canadian immigration and refugee policy between the wars will be offered.

Compared with Clifford Sifton's open-door policy between 1880 and 1914, immigration in the interwar period was characterized by a swinging-door in the 1920s, and a closed-door in the 1930s. While the Immigration Acts of 1906 and 1910 significantly increased the number of categories of prohibited immigrants and gave officials further sanction to deport 'undesirables,' prior to the First World War

²⁷Walter Laqueur, "Jewish Denial and the Holocaust," Commentary (December 1979): 44-55.

²⁸Marrus, The Holocaust in History, 157.

²⁹One recent general study of the history of Canadian immigration is Valerie Knowles, Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-1990 (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1992); the best anthology of scholarly essays on this topic is Gerald Tulchinsky, ed. Immigration in Canada: Historical Perspective (Mississauga, ON: Copp, Clark, Longman, 1994); a good introductory documentary collection is Howard Palmer, ed. Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism (Toronto: Copp, Clark, 1975).

Canadian immigration policy was relatively permissive. After the war, the situation was not only changed but in a sense reversed. Immigration restrictions, introduced through a series of Orders-in-Council and eventually embodied in the Revised Immigration Act of 1927, represented a caesura in the Canadian approach to population movement. As Joseph Kage correctly notes,

The new immigration policy, in contrast to the pre-war procedure, instead of permitting the admission of all persons, with the exception of certain stipulated *excludable categories*, had changed in the sense that it prohibited the admission of all persons, with the exception of certain stipulated *admissible categories*.³⁰

Despite such restrictive legislation, immigration to Canada continued, albeit sporadically, throughout the 1920s; however, with the onset of the Depression the government closed its doors to potential immigrants and refugees.

Effectively blocking ingress, a new Order-in-Council, P.C. 659, was passed on 31 March 1931. This Order-in-Council prohibited the admission to Canada of all immigrants, in all classes and occupations, with the exception of the following categories: British subjects and American citizens with sufficient capital to maintain themselves until employment was secured; agriculturalists with sufficient means to farm in Canada; farm labourers with guaranteed employment; any individual engaged in the mining, lumbering, or logging industry with assured employment in one of these industries; and the wives and unmarried children of adult males legally

³⁰Joseph Kage, *With Faith and Thanksgiving: The Story of Two Hundred Years of Jewish Immigration and Immigrant Aid Effort in Canada, 1760-1960* (Montreal: Eagle Publishing, 1962), 62.

resident in Canada. As a result of this legislation, between 1932 and 1941 only 140 000 immigrants entered Canada, compared with a total of 1 804 000 immigrants between 1911 and 1921 and 1 166 000 between 1922 and 1931.¹¹

The ethnically restrictive provisions of P.C. 659, although notable for their degree of parsimoniousness, were not a new development in Canadian immigration policy. Throughout the interwar period Canada's immigration policy was as ethnically selective as it was economically self-serving. Its ethnic preferences mirrored the quota system adopted since 1917 by the United States: British and Northern Europeans were at the top of the racial hierarchy while Asians, Blacks, and Southern and Eastern Europeans (including, of course, many Jews) were at the bottom.¹² Since the end of the First World War, Canada had adopted stringent restrictive ordinances which functioned primarily to prevent the admission of immigrants

belonging to any nationality or race of immigrants of any specified class or occupation, by reason of any economic, industrial, or other condition temporarily existing in Canada, or because such immigrants are deemed unsuitable having regard to climatic, social, educational, labour, or other conditions or requirements of Canada, or because such

¹¹Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Book IV, The Contributions of Other Ethnic Groups (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970).

¹²The use of racial hierarchies in immigration policy was based on a mixture of eugenics and Social Darwinism. One contemporary work which espoused such a racial hierarchy was James Woodsworth, Strangers within Our Gates: Or Coming Canadians (1909) (reprint; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972). Recent discussions of this well-covered topic include: Eleoussa Polyzoi, "Psychologists' Perceptions of the Canadian Immigrant Before World War II," Canadian Ethnic Studies 18 (1986): 52-65; and Angus McLaren, "Stemming the Flood of Defective Aliens," chap. in Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990).

immigrants are deemed undesirable owing to their peculiar customs, habits, modes of life and methods of holding property, and because of their probable inability to become readily assimilated . . . within reasonable time following entry.³³

Or, as F. C. Blair more succinctly stated it in the 1941 Annual Report of the Immigration Branch, "Canada, in accordance with generally accepted practice places greater emphasis upon race than upon citizenship."³⁴ Since P.C. 659 informed Canadian immigration policy throughout the Second World War, and because, as mentioned earlier, Canadian policy made no distinction between immigrants and refugees, refugees from Nazism hoping to find safe haven in Canada had to contend with a virtually unbreachable wall of restrictivist precedent.

While there is scholarly consensus that Canada lacked a climate conducive to the entry of European refugees, there is implicit disagreement in the literature about which particular factors underpinned Canada's restrictivist attitudes and how much explanatory weight should be given to each causal element. For instance, both Simon Belkin and Lita-Rose Betcherman see the combination of official prejudice and popular antisemitism as the principal reason for government indifference to Jewish refugees.³⁵ In a more scholarly sophisticated study, Gerald Dirks attributes the

³³Irving Abella and Harold Troper, "'The Line Must be Drawn Somewhere': Canada and the Jewish Refugees, 1933-1939," Canadian Historical Review 60 (June 1979): 179-209.

³⁴Annual Report of the Department of Mines and Resources, Year Ending March 31, 1941 (Ottawa: 1942).

³⁵Simon Belkin, Through Narrow Gates: A Review of Jewish Immigration, Colonization and Immigrant Aid Work in Canada, 1840-1940 (Montreal: Canadian

government's "almost total disinclination to permit any inflow of people" to at least three broad factors: "personal economic insecurity resulting from the depression, indifference to the world beyond Canada's borders, and the phenomenon of nativism which often took the form of anti-semitism."¹⁶ Further expanding the factorial list, Abella and Troper argue that,

the unyielding opposition of certain key officials, the depression, the general apathy in English Canada, the outright hostility of French Canada, the prime minister's concern for votes and the overlay of anti-Semitism that dominated official Ottawa combined to insure that no more than a mere handful of Jewish refugees would find a home in Canada.¹⁷

Intentionally circumventing the above debate, one can accept that an amalgam of factors impacted upon Canada's restrictivist immigration and refugee policy. While acknowledging the contribution of these authors, by focusing almost exclusively on factors restricting immigration, they have incompletely considered those occasions during the Second World War when the door was ajar. Shifting the emphasis toward episodes of success, to understand the political process informing the most numerically significant refugee spurt instituted by the Canadian government during the Second World War -- the Iberian Refugee Movement of 1944 -- one must first

Jewish Congress, 1966), 168-181; Lita-Rose Betcherman, The Swastika and the Maple Leaf: Fascist Movements in Canada in the Thirties (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1975), 131-135, 138-141.

¹⁶Dirks, 50.

¹⁷Irving Abella and Harold Troper, None Is Too Many (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982), 66.

consider two components which may initially appear to be only peripherally important: Canada's existing diplomatic principles, and William Lyon Mackenzie King's politics of limited gestures.

To gain a proper understanding of Canada's diplomatic behaviour in the interwar period, one must recognize the national fixation with identity during this era. While the Statute of Westminster of 1931 formally declared that Canada was no longer a British colony, it was less clear exactly what had supplanted that state.³⁸ Attempting to redefine itself both culturally³⁹ and politically, Canada in the interwar period was like an adolescent overwhelmed into indifference by his newly gained independence. Consequently, Canada's standard diplomatic response during the interwar period was non-commitment.

Faced with the daunting responsibilities that are intertwined with sovereignty and international status, Canada initially eluded the challenge by concentrating upon domestic economic development and nation-building rather than its relative position in the world. Choosing to reluctantly follow rather than actively lead, a scarlet thread

³⁸H. Blair Neatby, The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), 6.

³⁹For evidence of Canada's interwar attempt at cultural redefinition, see Carl Berger, "The True North Strong and Free," in Nationalism in Canada, ed. Peter Russell (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 3-43; Howard Palmer, "Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century," in Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation, 2d ed., ed. R. Donald Francis, Donald B. Smith (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986), 185-201; Enoch Padolsky, "Grove's Nationhood and the European Immigrant," Journal of Canadian Studies 22 (spring 1987): 32-50.

of diplomatic continuity entwines Canada's attempt to weaken Article 10 of the League of Nations Covenant in 1919, its repudiation of Dr. W. A. Riddell's initiative during the Ethiopian crisis of 1935, and its abortive effort to avoid attending the Evian Conference in 1938.⁴⁰ In each of these cases Canada demonstrated a consistent desire to distance itself from any position of international responsibility. This say-nothing and do-nothing diplomacy is summed up in the observations of Hume Wrong, the Canadian delegate to the League of Nations: "Our delegate would have a name, even a photograph; a distinguished record, even an actual secretary -- but he would have no corporeal existence and no one would ever notice that he was not there."⁴¹ Saying little, and doing less, interwar Canada saw itself as a "fire-proof house," safe from the European conflagration.⁴²

Considering the international community's isolationist inclinations during the interwar period, Canada's position of non-involvement was more typical than

⁴⁰For the relevant historical documents relating to Canada's attempt to avoid international commitment, consult C. P. Stacey, Historical Documents of Canada: The Arts of War and Peace, 1914-1945, vol. 5 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), 508-513.

⁴¹Hume Wrong, cited in John English, Shadow of Heaven: The Life of Lester Pearson, 1897-1948, vol. 1 (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989), 194.

⁴²The reference to the fire-proof house is from Raoul Dandurand's address to the League Assembly in 1924: ". . . in this association of Mutual Insurance against fire, the risks assumed by the different States are not equal. We [Canadians] live in a fire-proof house, far from inflammable materials." The Canadian historian Arthur Lower made a similar comment, "Along with the United States we enjoy a private world of our own"; cited in Carl Berger, "Arthur Lower and a National Community," chap. in The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing, 1900-1970 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), 133.

anomalous. What complicated Canada's stance, however, was its ambivalent relationship with both Great Britain and the United States. Caught between Scylla and Charybdis, Canada guarded its independent right to be internationally immobile, yet was also acutely conscious of how this policy of inaction was perceived by its peers. Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, King was "obsessed by the suspicion that Whitehall was plotting designs against Canada's independent nationhood and trying to draw us back into the old imperial framework."⁴³ Despite such misgivings, the title King chose for his own book on Canada's war effort was Canada at Britain's Side.⁴⁴ While obviously influenced by political expediency (most Canadians, especially anglophones, still felt an intimate connection with England),⁴⁵ King's demonstration of support reveals a basic truth: in moments of profound crisis, Canadian diplomacy tended to transcend its principle of narrow isolationism, conforming to the new policy of action adopted by its elders. Once the "Phoney War" had ended, King "let England lead," content to allow first England and later the

⁴³Charles Ritchie, The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad, 1937-1945 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), 11.

⁴⁴William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canada at Britain's Side (Toronto: Macmillan, 1941).

⁴⁵For evidence of prevalent Canadian anglophilism, see Michael Marrus' description of the overwhelming popular response to the Canadian visit of Their Royal Highnesses King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, in the late spring of 1939. Michael Marrus, Mr Sam: The Life and Times of Samuel Bronfman (Toronto: Viking, 1991), 267-268.

United States to issue directives and establish war policies that Canada would follow.⁴⁶ This ambivalent diplomatic approach of apparent indifference yet acute awareness was, as will be demonstrated later, one of the guiding principles behind the Iberian Refugee Movement. To comprehend further the process which allowed for some refugee movement in an otherwise static period, one also must consider King's personality and politics.

Much of the writing on Canada's response to the refugee crisis emphasizes the central role played by obstructionist and prejudicial bureaucrats, particular F. C. Blair, in effectively damming the flow of refugees. As James Gibson, Mackenzie King's private secretary in 1940, notes: "There was almost a kind of legend about Blair: if you wanted to cite an example of obstructionism, he would have been the Number One candidate."⁴⁷ While such criticism is well-founded, it distorts the issue by failing to recognize that the prime minister and the cabinet, not the immigration authorities, ultimately determined refugee admissions -- as Abella and Troper note, this was a political decision not a bureaucratic one.⁴⁸ Since a bureaucrat's success is measured by longevity in his post, he tends to follow precedent and usually restricts himself to assigned tasks. Consequently, when political directives are issued which indicate a new leniency in the administration of immigration policy, such

⁴⁶House of Commons Debates, 9 July 1943; King Diary, 17 September 1944.

⁴⁷Cited in Eric Koch, Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder (Halifax, N.S.: Goodread Biographies, 1985), 201.

⁴⁸Abella and Troper, 9.

bureaucrats generally put their prejudices aside and respond accordingly.⁴⁹ Studying the bureaucrat, the guardian of visa policy, reveals the maintenance of restrictivist precedents; studying the prime minister, the actual maker of immigration policy, exposes the process of admissive developments

Without descending into psychohistory, one can see Mackenzie King as the quintessential Liberal, with both feet planted firmly in mid-air. Whether consummate realist or supreme fence-sitter, King, in F. R. Scott's words, "skilfully avoided what was wrong without saying what was right. . . ." He "blunted us," never allowing our sides "to take shape." He endured, and through the thickets and land-mines of wartime politics, ". . . he led us back to where we were before."⁵⁰ Consciously avoiding statements that would accentuate the divisions of opinion -- especially between anglophones and francophones -- King placed the preservation of national unity above all else.⁵¹ As he stated in the House of Commons on 27 November 1944:

⁴⁹As an example of personal prejudices being transcended for reasons of political pragmatism, Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), discuss the case of Wilbur J. Carr. Described as the "epitome of the bureaucrat," Carr was a "fervent restrictionist" who "harbored anti-Semitic feelings." Despite this, Carr "did not hesitate to moderate his [anti-refugee] stance" when it became apparent in 1936 that there was political will in the U. S. to adopt a more generous approach to refugee applicants. (28-39)

⁵⁰F. R. Scott, "W.L.M.K.," in The Collected Poems of F. R. Scott (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981), 78-79.

⁵¹King's approach is understandable considering the complexity of managing what was at the time a largely bilingual, and bicultural country. As G. P. Glazebrook, A History of Canadian External Relations (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1950), notes, "Political leaders of generations earlier had sadly remarked that Canada was

If there is anything to which I have devoted my political life, it is to try to promote unity, harmony and amity between the diverse elements of this country. My friends can desert me, they can remove their confidence from me, they can withdraw the trust they have placed in my hands, but never shall I deviate from that line of policy. Whatever may be the consequences, whether loss of prestige, loss of popularity, or loss of power, I feel that I am in the right, and I know that a time will come when every man will render me full justice on that score.⁵²

One example of this "unity-above-all" principle was King's reaction to Maurice Duplessis' notorious Padlock Law: the Act Respecting Communist Propaganda.⁵³ In a transitional society which stressed its Roman Catholic heritage and its rural traditions, communism became the great bogey of French Canada in the 1930s. Waging a crusade against the "Red Menace," Maurice Duplessis and Cardinal Villeneuve utilised the Padlock Law as a means of harassing organizations which defended workers' rights. While philosophically opposed to the Padlock Law, King was not above sacrificing principles for unity. Fearing a political backlash in a province that had consistently voted Liberal in federal elections, Ernest Lapointe, his French-Canadian lieutenant, advised King against any form of federal intervention. While King recognized that acquiescence meant condoning "what really should not,

a difficult country to govern. It had become no easier by the thirties; and sectionalism and cross-currents complicated foreign at least as much as domestic policy." (415)

⁵²House of Commons Debates, November 1944, 6617-18.

⁵³For excerpts from the Padlock Law, see Historical Documents of Canada, vol. 5, 129. H. Blair Neatby, "Mackenzie King and French Canada," Journal of Canadian Studies 11 (February 1976): 3-13, provides a brief yet cogent discussion of the Padlock Law.

in the name of Liberalism, be tolerated for one moment,"⁵⁴ he accepted Lapointe's advice and adopted a position of silence.

Even when King did respond to crises, it was always with extreme wariness. If "the politically astute Roosevelt was neither a lion nor a fox but, of necessity, a chameleon,"⁵⁵ then King was a sloth -- an elder statesman who refused to be rushed. Wading into the fray one toe at a time, King took an intentionally cautious approach to decision-making, believing that

one of the curses of our age has been that the decisions affecting the lives of multitudes have been made and are being made without reflection, consultation or knowledge, by irresponsible and inexperienced men.⁵⁶

Revealing a preference for circumlocution, King rationalized his method of governing to a close associate in the following parable:

'If,' said King, pointing to a distant church spire beyond a bend in the [Ottawa] river, 'I try to reach that point directly I shall drown. I must follow the curves of the bank and ultimately I shall get there, though at the time I may seem to be going somewhere else.'⁵⁷

In an effort to remain flexible, King adopted general principles without committing to specific measures. This intentionally hesitant approach is evident in

⁵⁴King Diary, 6 July 1938.

⁵⁵Breitman and Kraut, 223.

⁵⁶William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canada and the War: Mackenzie King to the People of Canada, 1940 (Ottawa: National Liberal Federation of Canada, 1940), 70.

⁵⁷Cited in Bruce Hutchison, The Incredible Canadian: A Candid Portrait of Mackenzie King: His Works, His Times, His Nation (Toronto: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1952), 397.

his handling of the conscription crisis. Doing nothing by halves which could be done by quarters, King dealt with this potentially divisive issue by making conciliatory statements to both English and French-Canadians, delaying a definite decision until 1944.⁵⁸ Stating with unequivocal ambiguity, "not necessarily conscription but conscription if necessary,"⁵⁹ King was opposed to compulsory overseas enrolment for sheer pragmatic reasons -- conscription would create more strife and division than benefits.

King's politics of limited gestures permeated his lengthy term in office. Favouring the hesitant to the dramatic, the ambiguous to the direct, this elusive approach defined King's response to each contentious issue with which he was faced -- whether it was the Padlock Law, the conscription crisis, or, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement.

⁵⁸For a complete discussion of the conscription issue and King's policy of limited liability, see J. L. Granatstein, Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

⁵⁹House of Commons Debates, 10 June 1942.

Chapter Three

An Act of Calculated Kindness: The Politics of Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement

On 2 November 1943, T. A. Crerar, the Minister of Mines and Resources responsible for immigration, announced that Canada would give sanctuary to an unspecified number of European refugees.¹ Interpreted by one newspaperman as a "definite change in government policy,"² Crerar's public statement seemingly signified that the Liberals' approach to the refugee crisis had expressively shifted from the conditional past to the imperative present. Yet studying the context, process, and terms of this government initiative reveals not a profound deviation from precedential patterns, but a subtle modification in contemporary policy.

Despite the inherent vagueness and implicit restraint of Crerar's statement,³ it was immediately and vociferously condemned by anti-refugee forces in Canada.⁴

¹National Archives of Canada (NAC), Department of External Affairs (DEA), RG25, file 5127-40C, Jolliffe to Wrong, 2 November 1943.

²Grant Dexter, "New Refugee Policy," Winnipeg Free Press, 15 November 1943, 13.

³For instance, Crerar's 2 November 1943 press release contained phrases such as "limited numbers" and "qualified applicants," suggesting an attempt to allay widespread fears among the general public about a deluge of refugees. The Gazette (Montreal), 2 November 1943.

⁴For evidence of an immediate backlash among anti-refugee forces, see Irving Abella and Harold Troper, None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1945 (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982), 158-163.

On first viewing, the presence of such a negative popular reaction suggests that William Lyon Mackenzie King, the consummate political artist, had made an uncharacteristic miscalculation, an errant brush-stroke. Closer study of the 1943 decision to allow circumscribed refugee entry reveals that King was aware of persistent restrictivist elements which opposed refugee influx. While these fetters undoubtedly affected political manoeuvrability, renewed pressure from internal as well as external forces encouraged King and other Canadian policy-makers to reconsider the government's response, resolving that a limited gesture of refugee admission, an act of calculated kindness, was worth the political risk.

In order to assess the motivational factors behind Canada's decision in 1943 to open hesitantly its door, one must isolate the elements of restrictive continuity from those of admissive discontinuity. One persistent factor which informed wartime restrictive policies was the fear that refugees were a potential Fifth Column, an enemy within.⁵ A manifestation of the universal phenomenon of war hysteria,⁶ concern that

⁵The image of the refugee as a destabilizing force was, of course, not limited to Canada. See Deborah Lipstadt, "Pious Sympathies and Sincere Regrets: The American News Media and the Holocaust from Krystalnacht to Bermuda, 1938-1943," in The Nazi Holocaust: Bystanders to the Holocaust, vol. 8, no. 1, ed. Michael Marrus (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989), for evidence of the U. S. press' preoccupation with Fifth-Column activities which helped to perpetuate the myth that Nazi agents had successfully infiltrated extensive sectors of American life. (110) For instance, the New York Herald Tribune (10 October 1940, 10) claimed that 42 Nazi agents had been found in Belgium camouflaged as Jewish refugees; Samuel Lubell of the Saturday Evening Post (29 May 1941, 12) charged that "disguised as refugees, Nazi agents had penetrated the world as spies." Lubell relayed an "unofficial report" of a Gestapo school where spies were taught to "speak Yiddish, read Hebrew, pray," and even submitted to circumcision to make their disguise complete.

European refugees could pose a serious security threat was voiced by Crerar as early as December 1938. While meeting with the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution (CNCR), Crerar predicted that "certain foreign states would not be above sending certain people to Canada for subversive purposes."⁷ Similarly, the internees -- labelled by British authorities as dangerous Nazi prisoners yet really refugees -- sent from England to Canada in the summer of 1940 were initially met with widespread distrust. It was assumed that among these "accidental immigrants" were "Nazi Fifth Columnists" much discussed in war propaganda. According to Paula Draper, even United Jewish Refugee Agency (UJRA) officials had "strong suspicions" about the internees when they first arrived.⁸

The prevailing concern that Fifth-Columnists would enter Canada disguised as refugees was reiterated by King in the House of Commons on 9 July 1943. During

⁶As Eric Koch, Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder (Halifax, NS: Goodread Biographies, 1985), notes, "during the French Revolution, on the night before the September massacres of 1792, it was said that Paris was full of aristocrats disguised as ecclesiastics. During the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, Parisians thought they saw Prussian spies 'about everywhere,' sending light signals to the enemy. Early in August 1914, the Germans had no doubt about the activities by French and Russian agents, some in German uniform, others disguised as priests or nuns." (11)

⁷NAC, Canadian National Committee on Refugees Papers (CNCR), vol. 1, proceeding of Conference, 6-7 December 1938; cited in Donald Avery, "Canada's Response to European Refugees, 1939-1945: The Security Dimension," in On Guard For Thee: War Ethnicity, and the Canadian State, 1939-1945, ed. Norman Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan, and Lubomyr Luciuk (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988), 182.

⁸Paula Draper, "The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1983), 98.

a "general statement on the policy of the government with respect to refugees from Europe," King emphasized the necessity to proceed with caution:

Considerations of security must be carefully weighed in every case. Any suggestion that Canada should receive all refugees from Axis territory who could reach her shores, would be an invitation to the German Government to distribute in this manner their spies and secret agents.⁹

Even members of the House who urged the government to "take a greater lead among the united nations" and adopt a more generous refugee policy, made allowances for security considerations. For instance, Dorise Nielsen of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), a party known for its humanitarian approach to the refugee crisis, acknowledged that,

Naturally there is danger that he [Hitler] may use the method of infiltration, by sending his spies in among the refugees. Naturally the greatest care will be taken. . . . Surely adult refugees could be placed in concentration camps so that, with the very greatest care having to be exercised, not one of them could go outside for any purpose, and therefore the danger of spies to a very great degree would be controlled.¹⁰

Besides Fifth Column fears, the Canadian public's response -- ranging from apathy to antipathy -- to both 'foreigners' and refugees also restrained any substantive government¹ change in existing refugee policy. Although the Canadian press had,

⁹NAC, RG2, 18, Privy Council Office Records, memorandum for the War Committee from Hume Wrong, Department of External Affairs, 6 July 1943; House of Commons Debates, 9 July 1943, 4558-61.

¹⁰House of Commons Debates, 9 July 1943, 4611.

by and large, dealt sympathetically with the refugee issue since *Kristallnacht*,¹¹ policy alteration remained a peripheral public issue. Acknowledging this general indifference, King remarked that "I think it is only realism, as hon. members will recognize, to say quite frankly that this is a subject which there can hardly be said to be wide public interest."¹²

Accompanying this general popular disinterest in refugee policy change was evidence of growing public distaste for the 'Other.' For instance, Saul Hayes, the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) executive director, alerted the Congress leadership in November 1943 that,

By all reports based on examination of the press of Canada and even according to the special reports prepared for government departments anti-Semitism in Canada is rising among all sections and classes of the population. This is no less true among English-language groups than it is among the people of French Canada.¹³

Further substantiating the CJC's findings, the Wartime Information Board (WIB) reported in December 1943 that "it is obvious that prejudice against 'foreigners' in

¹¹Abella and Troper, 59.

¹²House of Commons Debates, 9 July 1943, 4605. Indicating that Members of Parliament shared the public's apathy for refugee issues, Dorise Nielsen remarked that "by the look of some of the hon. members this evening it would appear that the subject is not a particularly popular one." House of Commons Debates, 9 July 1943, 4609.

¹³Canadian Jewish Congress Archives (CJC), Canadian Jewish Congress Papers (CJCP), Hayes, memorandum, 25 November 1943.

general and Jews in particular had grown during the war."¹⁴

Another restrictivist constant impinging upon Canada's wartime refugee policy was Quebec's ardent opposition to any form of immigration, especially Jewish. Traceable to Lord Durham's suggestion in 1839 that French Canadians should be systematically Anglicized through mass immigration, Quebec had historically seen population influx as a federal attempt to undermine its cultural specificity.¹⁵ As Quebec shifted from a largely rural and traditional society¹⁶ to an urban and modern one in the 1930s, the rhetoric of identity politics and boundary maintenance became increasingly incendiary. Generally ill at ease with modernity, the francophone elite¹⁷

¹⁴NAC, King Papers (KP), J4, vol. 376, file C260781, memorandum to Cabinet, 27 December 1943.

¹⁵For further consideration of the historic relationship between French Canada and immigration policy, see William Peterson, Planned Migration (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 121-137.

¹⁶As Watson Kirkconnell, Canada, Europe, and Hitler (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), suggested, "The cardinal fact to be remembered with regard to French Canada is that its population is almost autochthonous and regards Canada (in terms of Quebec) as its indubitable homeland. While only 70 per cent. of the Canadian English are Canadian-born, over 97 per cent. of the Canadian French were born in the Dominion, and almost all of these, now three and a half millions in number, are descendants of some 15,000 French peasants who came out as colonists three centuries ago. . . . Unlike the more recently arrived Anglo-Canadians and European-Canadians, they have few contacts with Europe and even lack in rural Quebec any real newspaper service to keep them in touch with the outside world. Their attenuated knowledge of world affairs comes to them largely from radio and from the clergy. Under the circumstances, they probably know less about the world situation than any other group in Canada." (111-112)

¹⁷Although difficult to document, it seems that the francophone elite was generally more antagonistic toward Jews than were the masses. Separating "the French-Canadian race" into "the People" and "the college-bred," R. L. Calder, "Is the

presented the almost exclusively urban, demographically concentrated, and highly visible Eastern European Jews of Montreal as a counterpoint to its mythical, pre-industrial, racially and culturally homogeneous Laurentia.¹⁸

Since Quebec was clearly one of the keys to King's political success,¹⁹ he typically recognized and attempted to accommodate its apprehensions of Jewish immigration. For instance, after *Kristallnacht*, "demonstrations, and newspapers across the nation called for a more generous policy toward refugees," "as did a high-powered delegation of Canadian Jews who arrived in Ottawa on 22 November 1938 to meet with the prime minister and plead the case for Jewish refugees."²⁰ While

French-Canadian a Jew-Baiter?" in Canadian Jewish Year Book, 1939-40, vol. 1, ed. Vladimir Grossman (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Publication Society, 1940), sees the former as harmless and willing to accept some form of peaceful coexistence with Jews. "The college-bred," however, are hostile to Jews, "trained by a system devised to teach them, not to think, but what to think. To this indoctrination they have added the curse of easy rhetoric." (153-155)

¹⁸For the 1930s link between the francophone elites' rejection of modernity and Quebec opposition to immigration in general and Jewish immigration in particular, see Everett Cherrington Hughes, French Canada in Transition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943); Michael D. Behiels, Quebec and the Question of Immigration: From Ethnocentrism to Ethnic Pluralism, 1900-1985, Canada's Ethnic Groups, booklet no. 19, (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991); Pierre Anctil, "Interlude of Hostility: Judeo-Christian Relations in Quebec in the Interwar Period, 1919-1939," in Antisemitism in Canada: History and Interpretation, ed. Alan Davies (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1992), 135-165.

¹⁹As H. Blair Neatby, "Mackenzie King and French Canada," Journal of Canadian Studies 11 (February 1976), notes, "If we look at the totals of all the federal elections under King's leadership we find that Liberal candidates in Quebec won slightly over 60% of the popular vote (compared to 44% of the population vote in Canada as a whole), and an impressive 86% of the seats from that province." (3)

²⁰Abella and Troper, 41.

King suggested that provisions be made to admit refugees, the Quebec ministers, led by Ernest Lapointe, the minister of justice, were solidly opposed. Rather than force the issue and risk alienating Quebec, King announced to the press that the whole question needed further study.²¹ As a result, refugees became "caught between the anvil and the hammer of a purely Canadian controversy which in reality has no relationship to them."²²

Quebec anti-refugee sentiment remained intense throughout the war years. Even before King's 9 July 1943 policy statement, Quebec was teeming with talk of Jews poised to flood Canadian ports of entry. The Immigration Branch had picked up a rumour sweeping Quebec and conscientiously forward it to the wartime "Rumour Clinic": the government was ready to admit one hundred thousand Jewish refugees "as an example to the rest of the world."²³ After Crerar's 2 November 1943 press release, refugees became a major electoral issue in Quebec. Maurice Duplessis, the leader of the Union Nationale opposition, used the rumour of a refugee invasion from Iberia as a political blunderbuss, scattering fear throughout the province. At a pre-election political meeting held in Ste. Claire, Duplessis charged that the Liberals were

²¹King Diary, 23 November 1938; Toronto Daily Star, 23 November 1938. When it came to maintaining favourable relations with Quebec, King was not above sacrificing principles for politics; see his acquiescent response to the Padlock Law (discussed in chapter 2), for further evidence of this conciliatory approach.

²²"Not All Canadians Favor Rescue for Refugees," Congress Bulletin, June 1944.

²³NAC, Immigration Branch Records (IR), RG76, file 673931, Blair to Pratt, 18 June 1943; cited in Abella and Troper, 162.

in league with the "International Zionist Brotherhood," brandishing a 'letter' that ostensibly delineated a plot to allow one hundred thousand Jewish refugees to settle in Quebec.²⁴ With such fear-mongering, Duplessis and his Union Nationale defeated Joseph-Adélarde Godbout's Liberals on 8 August 1944.

Overlaying the above restrictive factors was the compelling argument that during total war all considerations should be subordinated to the ultimate goal of victory. For instance, the King government signed the Allied Declaration against War Crimes on 17 December 1942, acknowledging that the Nazis had adopted "a policy of gradual extermination" of the Jews," condemning "this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination," and warning that "those responsible for these crimes should not escape retribution."²⁵ Yet when the press asked Hume Wrong, Assistant

²⁴Montreal Star, 8 November 1943; cited in Abella and Troper, 162. In addition to Duplessis' inflammatory oratory, La Ligue Nationale circulated a province-wide anti-refugee petition. Presenting pro-refugee forces as being in league with communists, Liguori Lacombe's (Laval-Two Mountains) comment typifies La Ligue's opposition to admissions: "Will the government understand where lay the interests most dear to our people, or will it give in to national and international conspiracies hatched in secrecy and all of them detrimental to Canada?" House of Commons Debates, 1 February 1944. (See similar remarks by Pierre Gautier, Debates, 2 February 1944, 129-132; Emmanuel d'Anjou, Debates, 3 February 1944, 174-175; Joseph-Armand Choquette, Debates, 3 February 1944, 175).

The anti-refugee petition was summarily dismissed by King: "Mr Speaker, I am informed that there have been forwarded to my office a large number of resolutions on the subject referred to. The resolutions are similarly worded ... Were I asked to recall how many of these have been received, and were to say that thousands had come in, such an answer would be wholly misleading. For the most part they would represent the opinions of a mere handful of persons." Debates 27 March 1944, 1861.

²⁵NAC, DEA, file 637-40C-W, Dominions Office to King, 5 December 1942; King to Dominions Office, 11 December 1942.

Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, if Canada was now prepared to admit refugees, he responded that the solution was not admission, "but to defeat Germany and thus liberate the Jews of Europe."²⁶

Even the pro-refugee forces acknowledged the wartime hierarchy of priorities. Samuel Bronfman, president of the CJC and the UJRA, in a report submitted at the National Executive Meeting, 6 September 1941, Montreal, ranked the Jewish community's preeminent concerns as follows:

With reference to financial responsibilities, it was immediately concurred in that our obligations are three-fold; first, that Canadian Jews as Canadian citizens support to the maximum of their ability all patriotic funds, war and auxiliary services. Our aid in winning the war is of paramount importance; all other matters, no matter how important in themselves, are subsidiary; second, to carry on needed home services in local charities, and third, the added obligations arising out of the ravages of the war to offer assistance to our co-religionists who were the immediate victims of Nazi barbarism.²⁷

Similarly, when the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942 effectively halted the government's proposed Children Rescue Scheme, Hayes offered this pragmatic response:

Although we naturally feel very discouraged about the fate of these 6 500 or more children . . . we cannot help feel glad that the ultimate happiness of millions of people will be quicker assured by the events in North Africa. It is certainly a step towards victory and the fate of children all over the world will be the more easily guaranteed by these

²⁶Ottawa Citizen, 15 December 1942.

²⁷Samuel Bronfman, "The War's First Victims -- The Refugees," in Canadian Jewish Year Book, 1941-1942, vol. 3, ed. Vladimir Grossman (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Publication Society, 1942), 84.

events.²⁸

While preoccupied with securing refugee entry, Hayes was able to put aside his particular concerns and recognize the strategic importance of "Operation Torch," which in the words of Winston Churchill marked "perhaps the end of the beginning" of World War II.²⁹

Despite these entrenched restrictivist factors, certain circumstantial developments created a narrow opening, tempting Canadian policy-makers to modify their policies. One catalyst for change was the incrementally increasing pressure asserted by voluntary associations, such as the CJC and the CNCR, for a substantive governmental response to the refugee crisis.

Struggling with fragmented loyalties -- "between Canadian nationalism, advocacy of a Jewish state, and the survival of world Jewry"³⁰ -- the Canadian Jewish community was understandably hesitant to focus specifically on the plight of European refugees. The initial tendency of the leadership was rather to put Canadianism first. In February 1939, Bronfman immediately accepted an offer from Charlotte Whitton, a caustic Conservative and future mayor of Ottawa, to join the

²⁸CJC, United Jewish Refugee Agency Collection (UJRA), file 224A, Hayes to Zacks, 10 November 1942.

²⁹Winston Churchill, "Reporting on the War," House of Commons, 11 November 1942. The full quote, cited in Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, rev. ed. (Boston: Little Brown, 1980), reads as follows: "Now this is not the end; it is not even the beginning of the end; but it is perhaps the end of the beginning." (746)

³⁰Paula Draper, "Fragmented Loyalties: Canadian Jewry, the King Government and the Refugee Dilemma," in On Guard For Thee, 152.

board of the Canadian Welfare Council, an advisory group concerned with social problems. Whitton openly opposed the admission of large numbers of Jewish refugees to Canada. But, as Michael Marrus notes, "in his correspondence, at least, Sam never raised the issue with her. Like most Canadians, he accented national unity as the nation slid into war."³¹

Likewise, while addressing the Western Division of the CJC in August 1939, Bronfman chose to ignore special Jewish anxieties, instead sounding a particularly patriotic note. "Canadian Jews," he told the eighty assembled delegates, "are, or should be, first of all, Canadians." While he conceded that Jews had a right to "consider our problems solely as Jews," he urged them to do otherwise:

By considering ourselves first as Canadians, and as such, guiding ourselves and our affairs, we shall not only meet one of the first requisites of good citizenship, but, what is equally important, we shall increase our prestige in the eyes of that larger body of citizens of Canada.

Speaking to an audience which included many Zionists, angered by the highly restrictive White Paper on Palestine issued in May 1939, Bronfman adopted a conciliatory approach and commended rather than condemned the policies of Great Britain:

If you draw up a list of countries and nations which deal fairly with all the different groups within their realm, the name of the British Empire would lead the list. . . . I am profoundly thankful that Britannia rules the waves. . . . May she long continue to hold her sway, to be mistress to the seas, a bulwark against intolerance and the practice of

³¹Michael Marrus, Mr Sam: The Life and Times of Samuel Bronfman (Toronto: Viking, 1991), 270-271.

inhumanities.³²

During his address, Bronfman issued no protest against restrictive Canadian immigration policies, was silent on the Jewish claims to Palestine, and glossed over the Nazis' persecution of the Jews.³³

This is not to suggest, of course, that the Canadian Jewish leadership responded to the refugee crisis with passivity, only that it proceeded with caution. Although the formation of the UJRA in 1939 established an organizational framework to deal with refugees, delays in the deployment of a comprehensive fund-raising strategy meant that it was chronically capital-poor. As Bronfman noted on 6 September 1941,

We are not receiving a sufficient response from the giving public to enable us to do a job of the magnitude which is cast upon us. . . . Some better methods of fund-raising will have to be evolved if we are to exercise the maximum good. Funds are the life blood of the organization and if we are to avoid a state of pernicious anaemia, the National Officers must give immediate and serious consideration to a coverage of the Jewish communities wherever found.³⁴

Like other Canadians, the Jewish community was slow to fathom the

³²Montreal Star, 7 August 1939; The Gazette (Montreal), 8 August 1939.

³³Not surprisingly, Bronfman's speech won high praise from the anglophone press of Montreal. The editorial in the Montreal Star, 7 August 1939, complimented his "eloquent tribute to British liberty and to the freedom which is enjoyed by the Jewish people under the British flag." The Gazette (Montreal), 7, 8 August 1939, expressed similar sentiments: "Mr. Bronfman has said what too many people in these days are inclined to take for granted," adding how fitting it was that these words "should come from an influential member of one of the great minority groups."

³⁴Bronfman, 78.

unprecedented nature of the atrocities being inflicted upon the Jews of Europe. One Jewish refugee, Thomas Hecht, who entered Montreal on 31 December 1941, remembers being met by "Jews of Silence." Depicting his reception as "a Jewish version of None Is Too Many," Hecht recalls that the local Jewish community was "thoroughly unprepared for refugees who were in shock, lost, unguided, forlorn, and helpless." Expressing evidence of incomprehensibility, Hecht's teenaged Jewish classmates "did not even know what a refugee was." In fact, the only members of the Jewish citizenry who were truly sympathetic were "other recent European refugees who had come to Canada since 1933." These recent transplants, largely from Germany, Austria, and Belgium, "flocked together and complained bitterly not about the cold but about the cold reception of Canadian Jewry." According to Hecht, it was not until 1943 that refugees were met by a much more organized and sympathetic Jewish community.³⁵

Demonstrating an increasing willingness to assume a more active role in refugee integration, Canadian Jewish leadership assured the government that the Iberian Refugee Movement would not diminish the public purse. Attempting to allay contemporary concerns that refugees would financially burden their host country, the UJRA reiterated the following guarantee:

. . . none of the Jewish refugees in the group to be brought in will

³⁵Thomas Hecht, interview by Stanley Asher, 7 September 1995, D. O. films (Dov Okour.eff). Hecht's recollection of his chilly reception by the Montreal Jewish community is also discussed in Voices of Canadian Jews, ed. Bryan Knight, Rachel Alkallay (Montreal: Chestnut Press, 1988), 103-114.

become public charges. The United Jewish Refugee & War Relief Agencies speaks in the name of the Jewish citizens of Canada and undertakes full and complete responsibility for all expenses which may be incurred in connection with this movement. It will unequivocally and unconditionally guarantee full maintenance, up-keep, medical expenses, cost of supervisors, etc., until such time as the refugees will become self-supporting or in part.³⁶

Canadian Jewry's slow but eventually steady mobilization of support for the refugee cause was matched by the expanded public presence of the Canadian National Committee on Refugees (CNCR). Since its genesis in December 1938, this largely Christian body had worked closely with the United Jewish Refugee Agency (UJRA) in pressuring the government to make humanitarian gestures on behalf of refugees. In early July 1943, the CNCR launched its most ambitious project: a nation-wide petition urging the Canadian government to "offer haven to these derelicts." Using Christian phraseology -- "Deliver us from evil"; "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these . . . ye have done it unto Me"; "Let Canada remove this moat [*sic*] from her eye so that she can better see the beam in Germany's" -- the CNCR appeal was obviously suffused with good Samaritan rhetoric. And yet, despite its emotional invocation, the petition was equally informed by political pragmatism. Addressing

³⁶NAC, IR, RG76, file 673931, letter from CJC executive to T. A. Crerar, 1 December 1943. The Canadian government had earlier tentatively accepted the CJC proposal. Responding to Wrong's suggestion that "It is likely that a guarantee of maintenance of Jewish families so admitted could be secured through the Canadian Jewish Congress if this is thought to be wise," King wrote "yes" in the margin of the memorandum. NAC, DEA, RG 25, file 5127-0, memorandum by Assistant Under-Secretary of State (Hume Wrong) for External Affairs to King, 30 August 1943. Similar guarantees for the maintenance of Christian refugees contained in the Iberian movement were made by the CNCR.

the general public's fear that policy change would result in a flood of refugees engulfing Canada, the petition assured that "at the very outside there are probably no more than 15,000 to 20,000 victims of Nazi tyranny who are in a position to come to this or any other sheltered land, and of these Canada might be expected to take in only a thousand or so."¹⁷

Further stressing the necessity to impose strict limits on any refugee movements, Senator Cairine Wilson, the president of the CNCR, stated in the January 1944 issue of the Congress Bulletin, the official organ of the CJC, that,

The war effort comes first, that goes without saying. . . . We do not suggest that we let all barriers down so that peoples from other lands should be allowed to pour in indiscriminately like a flood. We wish to preserve the heritage and traditions which are ours and have made us what we are. But this is an emergency. . . . Our rich and virile country should receive a few thousand at least. Their number should not be so great as to affect materially the racial and social complexion of our people. Nor when admitted do we need to grant them full citizenship or even permanent residence."¹⁸

Thus even proponents of refugee admission modulated their inflection, carefully conforming to the prevailing restrictivist discourse.

In addition to the demands of the UJRA and the CNCR, the government also had to contend with press criticism of its treatment of the refugee problem, typically arguing that the time has come "when we [Canadians] have to stop talking about

¹⁷CNCR petition from the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 7 December 1943; facsimile provided in Abella and Troper's centre-spread of photographs.

¹⁸Senator Cairine Wilson, "The People on Canada's Conscience," Congress Bulletin, January 1944, 7.

doing something about refugees and get down to action."³⁹ Not immune to societal censure, Hume Wrong, in a memorandum to King on 30 August 1943, acknowledged that,

Public pressure for action by the Government to adopt new measures to assist European refugees is increasing. . . . Apart, however, from the Jewish appeals there is wide-spread evidence of an uneasy public conscience over the Canadian record with respect to refugees which has found expression editorially in the Winnipeg Free Press, the Globe and Mail, Saturday Night and many other journals.⁴⁰

Observing that the refugee crisis had been transformed from a narrow minority matter into a wider press preoccupation, the government began to consider the potential political positivity of a less restrictive refugee policy.

While public pressure influenced, as we shall see, the actual terms of the government's Iberian refugee movement, it had less of an impact upon the timing of the decision. Until now, King had been relatively unaffected by the media's widespread denunciation of his response to refugees.⁴¹ Also, as Abella and Troper

³⁹Winnipeg Free Press, 17 June 1943.

⁴⁰NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40, memorandum by Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs (Hume Wrong) to King, 30 August 1943.

⁴¹Although press criticism of King's refugee policy intensified in the second half of 1943, it had been present since *Kristallnacht*. For instance, the following articles in Saturday Night, a journal admittedly sympathetic to refugee issues, urge the government to be more generous toward refugees: Willson Woodside, "Refugee Problem Challenges Canada" (5 November 1938), 2; Gwenthalyne Graham, "Refugees: The Human Aspect" (12 November 1938), 8; Gwenthalyne Graham, "Economics of Refugees" (19 November 1938), 8; R. W. Baldwin, "Refugees Must Try Elsewhere" (24 December 1938), 5; B. K. Sandwell, "Should We Admit Refugees?" (25 February 1939), 3; Pauline C. Shapiro, "The Better Sort of Emigrants and Refugees" (17 May 1941), 38; L. S. B. Shapiro, "Canada Overseas:

note throughout None Is Too Many, King displayed a consistent ability to evade domestic requests to affect refugee policy change.⁴² Considering this precedent of evasion, why Crerar's announcement on 2 November 1943?

The solution to the question of motivation and timing is principally to be found in developmental trends of the larger Allied response to the refugee problem. By 1943, Canadian officials became increasingly concerned with their nation's place on the international stage. Moving tentatively from the wings to centre-stage, the Canadian government began to entertain taking a more prominent global role. Expressing this gradual shift in attitude, M. A. Gray, a Manitoba M.L.A., suggested that,

We must also consider ourselves as seen through the eyes of all other nations of the world. Decisions we make are now of greater moment to us. It is right that we should consider the circumstances of the other countries and reflect on our most enviable position, so that we shall in the long term, establish by our words and our actions, a position of esteem in the minds of the people making up this international family.⁴³

The Exiles in England" (20 February 1943), 9.

⁴²As Howard Palmer, Ethnicity and Politics in Canada Since Confederation, Canada's Ethnic Groups, booklet no. 17 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991), notes, before 1945 the Liberals did not want to be perceived as playing ethnic politics (its dealings with the *Québécois* being the obvious exception). In this way, refugee policy change could potentially be interpreted by other Canadians as pandering to 'special interest' groups.

⁴³M. A. Gray, "Shall We Heed the Cry of the Refugee?" Congress Bulletin, March 1944, 9. For further evidence of Canada's acceptance of collective security and internationalism, see F. H. Soward, Canada in World Affairs: From Normandy to Paris, 1944-1946, vol. 4 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1950). According to Soward, "By 1944 the vastness of the world conflict together with the extent and

The renewed Canadian interest in the politics of international appearances manifested itself when both Great Britain and the United States began to respond more actively to the refugee crisis. Britain informed Canada in January 1943 that the few unoccupied states of Europe were becoming overwhelmed by the economic and social burdens associated with granting asylum to distressed Europeans. According to the British Foreign Office,

The absorptive capacity accessible to neutral countries in Europe seems to be approaching its limit. Allied countries cannot well go on exhorting these countries not to turn away any refugees without offering co-operation in accommodating a portion of them.⁴⁴

Consequently, the United Kingdom High Commissioner officially inquired whether Canada "would feel able to make a contribution by accepting a number of refugees" "and, if so, to what extent." In response to this request, Norman Robertson, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, asked "the Director of Immigration to provide a statement showing the number of refugees which has been admitted to Canada during the war either for permanent residence or temporarily," suggesting to King "that we should make some contribution towards the solution to this pressing problem which concerns at present non-Jewish refugees probably to as large an extent as

diversity of the Canadian contribution had accustomed Canadians to the realization that their country would have to play a prominent and worthy part in the building of a better world community." (124)

⁴⁴NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-EA-40, United Kingdom Secretary of State for the Dominions to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 15 January 1943.

Jews."⁴⁵

Partially based on the premise that "the opening of one door would be a lively promise of the opening of others, since no nation likes to be too far behind others in the practice of humanity,"⁴⁶ Robertson offered Hayes insightful advice during an off-the-record discussion. According to Hayes,

Robertson stated that at no time has the Canadian government been so susceptible to pressure as it is at the present time. . . . A brief to be effective must cite chapter and verse of what other countries have done in the matter of alleviating the human distress of the refugees. The humanitarian side will not move the government . . . to the same degree as the factual story of the numbers taken by the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries. If Canada has not done its share then something might be done to rectify this.⁴⁷

Any revision of Canada's refugee mandate would therefore be formulated in reference to the actions of other receiving nations.

In April 1943, British and American officials met in Bermuda "to discuss proposals aimed at establishing a more adequate multilateral assistance scheme for European refugees."⁴⁸ While the Conference was generally criticized by the media

⁴⁵NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40, memorandum from Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs to Prime Minister, 20 January 1943.

⁴⁶B. K. Sandwell, "The Duty of the Canadian People," Congress Bulletin, August 1946, 4.

⁴⁷CJC, CA25, file 231, memorandum from Saul Hayes, Director, UJRA, to Samuel Bronfman, CJC, Montreal, 8 March 1943.

⁴⁸Gerald Dirks, Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism? (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 93-95.

as a useless effort by the two participants "to pull off a propaganda coup,"⁴⁹ its limited recommendations had a direct and immediate influence upon Canada's refugee policy.

Following an examination of the Conference's proposals, the Department of External Affairs prepared a memorandum indicating its belief that Canada would be called upon to provide greater financial assistance to the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (IGC), and to assist in finding new havens for refugees temporarily accommodated in Spain and Portugal. In addition, the memorandum advised that Canadian authorities should prepare themselves to adopt concrete initiatives in response to concerns expressed by Britain and the United States:

We shall soon be asked to agree to the reconstitution of the Intergovernmental Committee and to be represented at an early meeting of it. It will not be enough to defend our record toward refugees at such a meeting, although our record stands up to that of the United States.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Saul Friedman, No Haven for the Oppressed (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), 170-180. The U. S. media was especially virulent in its criticism of the Bermuda Conference. While in progress, Ida Landau fiercely attacked it in the New York Post. She believed it was "floundering in its own futility" as the delegates "pursued their deliberations in an attitude of doleful defeatism," and suggested that they might "better go home" where they could make a better contribution to the war effort by puttering in their victory gardens." Freda Kirschway, editor of the Nation, described Bermuda as a "farce devoted to finding an excuse why nothing could be done, not to finding a solution." In Free World Congressman Emanuel Celler condemned Bermuda as a "puppet show" in which "even the strings were visible." New York Post, 23 April 1943, 4; Nation, 5 June 1943, 796-797; Free World, July 1943, 16-20. Cited in Lipstadt, "Pious Sympathies and Sincere Regrets," 113.

⁵⁰NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40, internal memorandum, 21 May 1943. Also see the internal memorandum from A. L. Jolliffe, Immigration Branch, 30 August 1943: "Mr Robertson said that Canada should press for early joint action on the

Attempting perhaps to level a preemptive strike against potential Allied proposals, the Canadian government response was uncharacteristically rapid: the IGC was notified, in confidence, that Odilon Cormier, a long-time member of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources, would reopen an office in Lisbon in October 1943, and that a refugee movement from Iberia to Canada would soon commence.⁵¹ The urgency of such action⁵² suggests that Canadian policy-makers

Refugee problem and be prepared to share in the cost and accept some of the refugees. He said that he thought we should reopen our inspectional office at Lisbon. . . . Mr Robertson thought that if action were taken along the lines indicated, the pressures will be greatly eased." NAC, IR, RG76, vol. 441, file 673931, part 4.

⁵¹NAC, KP, Cabinet War Committee, 8 September 1943, vol. 425; NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40C, Canadian Aid to Refugees, 8 September 1943; NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40C, Secretary of State for External Affairs to Massey, 28 September 1943. That the Canadian government used the Iberian Refugee Movement as a means of defusing potential Allied criticism for not taking a more active role in helping alleviate refugee build-up in neutral European countries is evident in King's response to a request by the U.S. government (which had established its War Refugee Board on 22 January 1944) to account for Canada's attitude toward refugees. Directing the U. S. Ambassador to his statement in the House of Commons on 9 July 1943, King expounded that "A further measure intended to assist in meeting the refugee problem was taken in October of last year when the Canadian Government reopened its Immigration Office in Lisbon in order to facilitate the issuance of visas to refugee families in Spain and Portugal who might wish to proceed to this country." NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40, Secretary of State for External Affairs to Ambassador of United States (Ray Atherton), 11 March 1944.

⁵²While the Canadian government promptly presented the Allies with a concrete proposal of action concerning the refugee crisis, policy-makers were less disposed to domestically advertise the planned refugee movement. Attempting to defer attendant home-grown controversy, the Canadian government played the politics of secrecy and delay. As a memorandum to Norman Robertson, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, establishes, "They [External Affairs and the Immigration Branch] did not wish to publicise, in advance, the reopening of the Lisbon office or the number of families to be admitted from the Iberian Peninsula." NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40C, 15 September 1943.

were determined that Canada should "take its place among the other nations of the world in easing the situation of refugees."⁵³

Whereas Canada's partial acquiescence to international exigencies affected the particular timing of its reformulation of refugee policy, the specific terms of the subsequent Iberian Refugee Movement reveal that the government shaped its response to reflect domestic concerns.⁵⁴ Cognizant of both the restrictive domestic framework and potential international criticism, King's 9 July 1943 statement acknowledged that,

We have not, of course, done all we could have done and perhaps we have not done all we should have done. Our record, however, is better than is frequently made out to be and I think it will stand comparison with the records of other parts of the British commonwealth and of the United States."⁵⁵

While accepting that "Canada would participate fully in any programme that might be worked out as a result of the Bermuda conference or of any agreement that might be arrived at by the united nations," King clearly adopted a position of limited

⁵³CJC, CA26, file 244, internal memorandum from Saul Hayes to National Officers, 22 November 1943; stressing the government's urgency to act, A. L. Jolliffe, the new head of the Immigration Branch, informed Hayes that "I don't want this thing to drag." CJC, CA26, file 244, 22 November 1943.

⁵⁴The terms of the Iberian Refugee Movement also partially reflected international concerns. As F. C. Blair noted, if the effort was too bold Canada would shame its Allies. "If care is not taken Canada will find herself pushed into a very awkward position over this whole refugee problem. I cannot see how it is possible to embark on any such enterprise as is being pressed upon us, otherwise than by association with the United Kingdom and the United States." NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40, Director of Immigration (F.C. Blair), Department of Mines and Resources, to Undersecretary of State for External Affairs (Norman Robertson), 5 June 1943.

⁵⁵House of Commons Debates, 9 July 1943, 4558-61.

liability. Underlining the logistical limitations of any refugee movement to Canada, King stressed that most refugees "are still contained within the ring of territories held by the Axis armies, the only escape from persecution lies in the victory of the armies of the united nations." Since "refugees who have reached Switzerland and Sweden cannot be moved to other destinations, as there is no means of transporting them," it was only refugees who had escaped to Iberia "but have not yet found a safe resting place" who Canada could potentially admit.⁵⁶ Furthermore, according to a background paper setting forth the dimensions of the European refugee problem, Canada would provide "200 refugee families from the Iberian Peninsula" not with a permanent home but with a temporary haven⁵⁷:

The refugee problem in its present form mainly concerns the placement for the duration of the war of refugees who have escaped to neutral or Allied territory without as yet finding an asylum in which they can remain until the war is over.⁵⁸

Formulating a refugee movement that was both highly regulated and

⁵⁶House of Commons Debates, 9 July 1943, 4559.

⁵⁷While refugee admission was officially only for the duration of the war, certain policy-makers confidentially intimated that the status of these refugees would be reassessed. Writing on behalf of King, Norman Robertson, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, suggested to Ray Atherson, U.S. Ambassador to Canada, that "while it was obviously impossible for the Government to give a general undertaking that all persons who had been granted temporary admission would be enabled to stay in Canada after the war, nevertheless individual applications for permission to remain would be given sympathetic consideration." NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40, 11 March 1944.

⁵⁸NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40, memorandum from Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs (Hume Wrong) to King, 30 August 1943.

numerically restricted, official concern with the actual number of refugees in Iberia swiftly dominated policy discussions. In a memorandum from Hume Wrong to King on 30 August 1943, the Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs noted that,

There will be further escapes from Axis territory, but it is not likely that the numbers involved will be large. . . . The number actually able to move will probably be very small because of transport conditions. It is suggested that no limit should be publicly set as any figure that might be mentioned would be seen as grossly inadequate by some and as excessive by others.⁵⁹

A report from A. L. Jolliffe to Hume Wrong on 28 December 1943 offered supplementary substantiation to Wrong's assertion that there was only a fixed number of refugees in Iberia:

According to statements made by the various interested organizations in Lisbon there are approximately nine hundred refugees left in Portugal and they are mostly Jewish. Included in these are about eighty-four families, totalling approximately two hundred and ten souls. We think the majority of these families will be eligible for visas to Canada, provided they pass medical inspection.⁶⁰

Finally, in a more public forum, King assured members of the House of Commons that although "the immigration branch has a representative at Lisbon at the present time, and a number of refugees . . . have left for Canada from Lisbon since the

⁵⁹NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-40, memorandum from Wrong to King, 30 August 1943; the following note was written on the memo: Approved V. L. Mackenzie [King].

⁶⁰NAC, DEA, RG25, file 5127-A-40, Acting Director of Immigration (A.L. Jolliffe), Department of Mines and Resources, to Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs [H. Wrong], 28 December 1943.

officer was appointed . . . yet the total number [of refugees in Iberia] is restricted."⁶¹

To ensure further that the number of refugee entries into Canada for the duration of the war would be circumscribed, the government maintained a narrow definition of eligibility. Meticulously applying all the Immigration Branch's criteria while calculating the legal status and number of refugees in Iberia, Cormier was particularly insistent that only complete family units (defined as father, mother, and children under eighteen) would be admitted.⁶² On the basis of these initial restrictions, Jolliffe explained to Crerar that "we are going to get no movement from Portugal on the basis of the Government's decision to admit up to two hundred families."⁶³

Even after the government's scheme was officially announced and the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Lisbon (JDC), acting on behalf of the UJRA, directed refugee families to Cormier, it soon became apparent that only twenty families would

⁶¹House of Commons Debates, 30 March 1944, 1998.

⁶²Cormier's pernickety insistence on complete family units was consistent with contemporary Canadian refugee policy. As F. C. Blair informed T. A. Crerar, "Canada will not depart from the practice of dealing with refugees as family units; in other words, will not separate children from parents, admitting the former and excluding the latter, but if admitting children will admit parents at the same time." NAC, IR, RG76, file 673931, memorandum from Blair to Crerar, 8 June 1943.

⁶³NAC, IR, RG76, file 673931, memorandum for file, 18 November 1943.

be eligible unless modification of the family unit rule could be arranged.⁶⁴ In a meeting with Jolliffe, Saul Hayes argued for a more liberal interpretation of the rules. He requested, for example, that single-parent families, families with grand-parents, families with children over eighteen, and families who had earlier succeeded in getting children out of Europe (usually under the auspices of the United States Committee for the Care of European Children -- USCOM) be allowed to apply for Canadian visas.⁶⁵ Even these changes might only increase the total eligible to ninety families or three hundred persons.⁶⁶ Considering that these concessions would increase the total eligible to only ninety families -- still far short of the government's quota of 200 family units -- Jolliffe agreed, albeit incrementally, to each of Hayes's proposals.⁶⁷

Besides assurances that the refugee trickle would not become a torrent, officials were concurrently concerned about the potential for subversives to enter Canada through this influx of refugees. Passing possible candidates through a fine administrative mesh, the government made strict provisions to address the public's

⁶⁴CJC, CA26, file 244, Donald B. Hurwitz, American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) Lisbon, to AJDC New York, general letter no. 818, 18 February 1944.

⁶⁵CJC, CA26, file 244, Saul Hayes, UJRA internal memorandum, 11 January 1944.

⁶⁶Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), Canada emigration file, memorandum re: emigration to Canada, 12 January 1944; cited in Abella and Troper, 165.

⁶⁷For a fuller discussion of the incremental nature of the liberalization of eligibility restrictions, see Abella and Troper, 165-168.

prevalent concern with security. Despite the fact that many of the refugees in Iberia had escaped the Nazis only because they had false identification papers or phoney visas, when first posted Cormier followed standard immigration regulations and demanded authentic documentation. It was only after Jolliffe interceded and relaxed Cormier's initial instructions that movement commenced. By February 1944, Jolliffe informed Hayes that as long as the families "could identify themselves adequately," Cormier "would not insist on the documents which in peace time he might require."⁶⁸

Granting 354 adults and 92 children Canadian visas before processing operations terminated,⁶⁹ the Iberian Refugee Movement was a palliative measure which attempted to address external and internal calls for refugee admission without antagonizing anti-refugee forces. Offering something for everyone yet everything for no one, the government's limited scheme was politically astute: international demands for Canadian action were momentarily silenced, domestic pressures for admissions were temporarily eased, and even endemic oppositions to entry were relatively muted.

⁶⁸CJC, CA26, file 244, Saul Hayes, internal memorandum of phone conversation with Jolliffe, 10 February 1944.

⁶⁹Annual Report of the Department of Mines and Resources, Year Ending March 31, 1945 (Ottawa: 1946).

Chapter Four

Waiting for *Pinto*: The Refugee Condition in Iberia

"I shall sleep, and move with the moving ships,
Change as the winds change, veer in the tide."
Algernon Charles Swinburne, "The Triumph of Time."

The experience of refugees in wartime Iberia often included junctures of radical chaos and moments of relative calm, dramatic flight followed by infuriating immobility. In the wake of their willed voyage, the refugees frequently found themselves landlocked, forced to play a waiting game in which cryptic rules were determined and enforced by often distant authorities.¹ Concomitantly active subject and passive object in the determination of their fate, these fugitives from Nazism had to adapt to a schizophrenic situation as they awaited entry to a safer haven.

After the fall of France in June 1940, Spain's regional geography and political neutrality made it the primary point of egress for refugees escaping Nazism. Despite Generalissimo Franco's apparent affinities with Nazi Germany and his "frequent anu-

¹Arthur Koestler, *Arrival and Departure* (London: Penguin, 1969; first published by Jonathan Cape, 1943), accurately captures the essence of the refugee waiting game. In Koestler's allegorical tale, Peter Slavek, the protagonist, lacking the necessary exit visa, is entrapped in Neutralia: "Twice a week, dutifully, he still went to inquire at the desk whether there was any news for him. These visits gradually assumed the function of a religious rite. He could never enter the door under the flagstaff without a feeling of solemnity. But when he left again, with the evenly spoken 'Not Yet' ringing like an absolution in his ears, he gave a sigh of mingled regret and relief; and morally strengthened by his strict observance of the rite, emerged from the doorway, climbed up the steep, narrow street at a leisurely pace, and leaving the Past and Future behind, with a purified conscience walked back into the Present through the liquid noon." (42-43)

Semitic utterances,"² refugees who eluded German or French patrols along the Franco-Spanish border were usually granted entry into Spain. Before presenting themselves at Spanish customs stations, however, the refugees were forced to traverse the Pyrenees. One refugee recounts his harrowing crossing of the Pyrenees as follows:

The group crossed the Pyrenees on foot at a very dangerous spot. . . . When we got to the divide our guides left us, pointing in a general direction saying, 'Spain is that way. There is a border guardhouse across the river and they will take care of you.'

We began to slither down the vast and endless mountain side, going down several hundred feet at a time. Fortunately, there was a Polish aristocrat in our group who was an expert mountaineer and he took care of my wife. But my brother and I had to do the best we could. Nor were we properly dressed or equipped, not to say fed, for the ordeal. As we slid down we had to trust luck more or less to escape crashing into rocks sticking out of the snow. The precipices were even more dangerous. On several occasions I was a few feet from going over the side. The world will never know the number of nameless refugees who died in this manner. It was the fortunate ones who got into Spain.¹

One of the more fortunate, his brother was far less lucky in those same snowy mountainous wastes:

One of his desperate slides down the mountain gashed the side of his face. It cut his cheek and eye and made it impossible to keep going.

²Chaim U. Lipschitz, Franco, Spain: the Jews and the Holocaust, ed. Ira Axelrod (New York: Ktav Publishing House, New York, 1984), 3.

¹"My Brother was Killed Before My Eyes," Congress Bulletin, June 1944, 2. For another account of refugees traversing the often perilous Pyrenees after the fall of France, see Lisa Fittko, Escape through the Pyrenees, trans. David Koblick (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991); Margaret Vail, Yours is the Earth (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1944), describes a similar crossing in November 1942, immediately after the German occupation of Vichy France.

. . . He could not move and carrying him was out of the question. He was in a faint most of the time, in ghastly pain the rest of the time and bleeding profusely. We were forced to go ahead to seek help, leaving one member of our party to stay with him and help him as much as he could. . . . House afterwards we reached the customs station. . . . The border patrol gave us all their food and immediately sent a party out to bring in my brother. . . . They found my brother still alive, but hopelessly exhausted from exposure and bleeding and badly frozen from lying in the snow motionless. He expired as he was brought into the station house.

Despite his familial disaster, this refugee emphasized that, "I cannot speak too highly of the way the Spanish people everywhere tried to help us."⁴

Although, as this testimony establishes, the Spanish people generally treated escapees from Nazism with magnanimity,⁵ government policy was more conditionally generous. Those not returning to France after the stabilization of the military situation and the Franco-German armistice were unwelcome as long-term guests in Spain due to a combination of domestic despoliation and international interests.

Addressing the first factor, Michael Marrus notes that,

Spain emerged devastated from the Civil War in 1939, facing enormous problems of demobilization and reconstruction. The fighting killed nearly 600,000 Spaniards, tens of thousands more died of disease and malnutrition. Half a million Spanish workers sat idle, agriculture and

⁴"My Brother was Killed Before My Eyes," 2.

⁵Another anecdotal account, from Felix Brookstein, an art dealer in Danzig until 1938, further underscores the benevolence of the average Spaniard: "No one can exaggerate the kindness of the Spanish. Though we spent weeks in jail, went hungry and were separated from one another, it was not the fault of the people." Congress Bulletin, June 1944, 2. Another refugee noted, "Spain is governed by Fascists, but the Spanish people are alright. They have helped us and even the guards did all they could to facilitate our lot while we were in prison." The Gazette (Montreal), 10 April 1944, 17. For scholarly substantiation of Spanish assistance, see Lipschitz, *passim*.

industry were in shambles, and internal communications were crippled. Spain lost one-third of her livestock and at least 250,000 'omes. Food was scarce, rationing was imperfect, and most of the population was reduced to a primitive level of existence. Moreover, as the end of the conflict coincided with the beginning of a European war, it was practically impossible for Spain to make up the losses abroad. Food and medicine were in even shorter supply in the years 1939-41 than during the Civil War itself.⁶

Consequently, Spain's abilities and facilities for housing and feeding such a large influx of refugees were thoroughly inadequate. Furthermore, in the aftermath of severe internal upheaval, authorities were understandably inclined to turn inwards, avoiding where possible entanglement in external issues.

Spain's policy toward refugees was equally defined by its official position of non-belligerency. Operating in an ideological no-man's-land, Franco played "a delicate and dangerous game": making "extravagant expressions of loyalty to the Axis yet maintaining a profitable trade in strategic materials with Britain and the United States."⁷ Since this intermediary position was both economically and politically advantageous, Spain cautiously formulated its refugee policy to avoid antagonizing either the Axis or Allied powers. By sheltering refugees, Spain "laid itself open to the charge of fostering on its soil the recruitment of armed forces for the Allies against the Axis, and therefore of violating the laws of neutrality."⁸

⁶Michael Marrus, The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 258-259.

⁷Marrus, The Unwanted, 259.

⁸Carlton Hayes, Wartime Mission in Spain, 1942-1945 (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 116.

Whereas, by sealing its border and expelling all refugees, Spain risked alienating Carlton Hayes, the American Ambassador to Spain, who had repeatedly emphasized the military importance of preserving the Iberian escape route.⁹ Attempting to maintain good relations with both belligerents, Spain offered concessions to each. Accordingly, the Franco-Spanish frontier remained open, enabling refugee transit through the country, though settlement for the duration of the war within Spain's borders was denied. Also, German sensitivities would not permit Spain to allow refugees to depart directly from its ports. Justifying this provision, Foreign Minister Jordana y Sousa informed Hayes on 8 March 1943 that "the Germans had bluntly" threatened to "sink any and all refugee ships which might enter or leave Spanish ports."¹⁰

Although admission regulations occasionally altered to account for corresponding shifts in the balance of power,¹¹ the flow of refugees through Spain

⁹Although Carlton Hayes was principally concerned with providing a haven in Spain for American airmen and French military refugees, by insisting that Spain keep the Franco-Spanish frontier open he indirectly aided civilian refugees. For a critique of Hayes' response to stateless refugees, see Richard Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). Breitman and Kraut argue that "Spain was largely a case of missed opportunity, partly the result of the delicate diplomatic situation there." (204) By emphasizing military exigencies and political protocol, Hayes "cost the War Refugee Board and the refugees a great deal of time." (210)

¹⁰Hayes, 118.

¹¹For instance, Haim Avni, "The Zionist Underground in Holland and France and the Escape to Spain," in Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust (proceedings of the Second Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, 8-11 April 1974), ed. Yisrael Gutman and Efraim Zuroff, 555-590, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem,

was never long interrupted, and "the total number rescued through Iberia probably approached 100,000 persons."¹² Succinctly summing up Spain's approach to refugees from Nazism, Jordana stated that the ideal was to have fugitives "passing through our country as light passes through glass, leaving no trace."¹³

When "light" generally passed through Spain, it tended to be concentrated on Lisbon, the refugee capital of Europe, the organizational centre of various relief agencies,¹⁴ and the principal wartime port of embarkation on the continent. From

1977), notes that "in October 1942, when the Spanish authorities became aware of the fact that a large number of Jewish refugees had illegally crossed the Pyrenees, there were indications that the authorities intended to expel all those who had succeeded in entering the country and to bar the entry of additional refugees. A month later, however, following the invasion of North Africa and the subsequent German occupation of Vichy, thousands of Frenchmen of military age crossed into Spain. As a gesture toward the Allies, the Spanish authorities admitted all those who sought to enter the country, and in this policy they did not discriminate against Jewish refugees.

In March 1943, Spain surrendered to German pressure and decided to close her borders to the thousands of Frenchmen who were crossing the Pyrenees on their way to the army camps of the Free French in North Africa. The British and American governments viewed this decision as a blow to their vital interests. As a result of their strong intervention, the Spanish authorities changed their minds, and thus the border remained open to Jewish refugees as well. The fact that a solution to the plight of the Jews coincided with vital Allied interests benefitted the Jews." (556)

¹²Michael Marrus, The Unwanted, 265.

¹³Cited in Haim Avni, Spain, the Jews, and Franco, trans. Emanuel Shimoni (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982), 182.

¹⁴For instance, HICEM (a union of world Jewish emigration and immigration organizations), the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Unitarian Service Committee, and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) all had their European headquarters in Lisbon. As Joseph J. Schwartz, head of the JDC's European operation, informed an official of the American Friends Service Committee on 10 January 1943, "The JDC has no thought of closing their Lisbon office, as far as is known in Lisbon. Even should a considerable program be developed in Spain,

the beginning of the refugee problem in 1933 until the fall of France in June 1940, admission requirements to Portugal were largely liberal.¹⁵ During this time, regular immigration visas were issued by Portuguese consulates in all parts of Germany and Austria, providing several hundred Jewish refugees with residence cards, which enabled them to seek employment or establish businesses. With the capitulation of France, however, the number of refugees dramatically increased and the policy of the Portuguese government was correspondingly altered. Instead of offering refugees permanent residency, Portugal became a country of transit: as in Spain, the policy was to require rapid re-emigration. In practice, however, due to the scarcity and uncertainty of wartime transport, refugees remained in Lisbon for increasingly extended intervals.

Further crowding the Portuguese waiting-room were those who had 'illegally' gained entry. Although the authorities only granted transit visas to refugees who had

communications with England and the States are still much more difficult than from Lisbon. The police pressure there is still much more pervasive than in Portugal; one is watched much more carefully and one's movements and activities considerably interfered with. Until some central place is available, Lisbon must be the link between European work and the rest of the world." Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton, ed., Archives of the Holocaust: An International Collection of Selected Documents, vol. 2, part 2, American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia, 1940-1945, ed. Jack Sutters (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), doc. 392.

¹⁵The following summary of the Portuguese response to the refugee crisis is based largely on a memorandum entitled "Portugal and the Refugee Problem," initially submitted to the American Legation of the JDC by Joseph J. Schwartz, JDC Lisbon, and later forwarded to Joseph A. Conrad, Quaker representative, Lisbon, 14 February 1944. Memorandum contained in American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia, 1940-45, part 2, doc. 404.

a valid final-destination visa and a paid reservation on a steamship leaving on a definite date, documents were often haphazardly examined, allowing refugees entrance into Portugal without the requisite papers. During this period of mass population displacement, falsified documents were readily available. Although forged papers varied dramatically in both price and quality, those with sufficient means, the necessary guile, and ample luck were often able to procure passable certification. As Lisa Fittko, a refugee attempting to leave Marseille and enter Portugal in 1940, recalls:

In the rue St. Feréol there was a Chinese Bureau that issued Chinese visas for a hundred francs. Most of the emigrés could afford that amount, and lines stood in front of the bureau. We, too, got a Chinese stamp in our Czech passports. Much later, a Chinese friend translated the 'visa' for us. It read something like this: 'It is strictly forbidden for the bearer of this document, under any circumstances and at any time, to set foot on Chinese soil.' That made no difference, for the Portuguese in Marseille couldn't understand Chinese -- or perhaps they didn't *want* to understand it?

It was simple to obtain a paid ship passage, for there was always someone who knew how to make a profit from human desperation. Still it was astounding that even the venerable old English travel agency Cook sold false transatlantic tickets. Soon every emigré in Marseille knew about it, and we also went to the big, elegant agency in the city center. We paid two hundred francs, and the genteel, rather supercilious official with the British accent sold us the fake tickets without even turning a hair.¹⁶

After a relatively short period of detention the Portuguese authorities legalized the entry of these paperless people and permitted them to remain in the country. Stealing across the Portuguese border, one refugee recounts that,

¹⁶Fittko, 95.

The people as a whole were friendly and took risks to smuggle them across, often without payment. When they got to Lisbon, they reported to the police and were given a nominal sentence of five days before they were released to the Joint Distribution Committee which maintained them.¹⁷

Although many of these 'illegals' were temporarily placed in forced residence, through official intercession some refugees were allowed freedom of movement, and these mobile individuals generally gravitated to Lisbon.

Wartime Lisbon was, by all accounts, a curious place. "The Portuguese capital swarmed with spies and shady characters; wealthy refugees settled in hotels, and their impoverished counterparts slept in makeshift shelters."¹⁸ Operating as an open port, the harbour concurrently contained "German submarines on one side and British destroyers on the other."¹⁹ This strange mutual coexistence was such that the German consulate, the American consulate, and the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) office were all located in the same building.²⁰ Mixed into this potentially bilious brew was a small number of refugees, newly arrived and eagerly awaiting departure. Quickly establishing a vibrant café culture, Lisbon became "the eyes and

¹⁷"Gorzewski Family Tells Thrilling Tale," Congress Bulletin, June 1944.

¹⁸Marrus, The Unwanted, 263.

¹⁹Morris Shenker, interview by Stanley Asher, 30 October 1994, *Serpa Pinto* Reunion, Hampstead, QC, video recording, D.O. Films (Dov Okouneff, Montreal, QC).

²⁰Maurice Baron, facilitated by Stanley Asher, 6 April 1995, informal lunch marking the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first group of *Serpa Pinto* refugees to Canada, Montreal, QC, video recording, D.O. Films.

ears of the refugees."²¹ "The rumour mill of the coffee houses provided hope for refugees," who often spent entire days in one of Lisbon's two main refugee cafés.²² Through the combined efforts of individual refugees, their families abroad, and the activities of private relief agencies, the majority of refugees who came to Portugal eventually managed to reach an overseas haven. By February 1944, however, there were approximately 800 refugees left in Portugal, the majority of whom were maintained by American relief agencies.²³ Trapped in a state of limbo between arrival and departure, between past and future, this group encapsulated, albeit *in extremis*, the refugee condition of Iberia.

Although these landlocked refugees "were tied together by their common fate -- travellers on the same caravan path huddled around the oasis well,"²⁴ certain divergent circumstances determined differences in their daily condition. The basic experiential divide was contingent upon the refugee's residency situation. About 425 were confined to either Caldas da Rainha, a spa about 100 kilometres from Lisbon, or Ericeira, a small fishing town and summer resort near the capital; of the remaining 300 or so, approximately 200 resided in Lisbon, and the rest were scattered

²¹Thomas Hecht, interview by Stanley Asher, 7 September 1995, Montreal, QC, video recording, D.O. Films.

²²Hecht, 7 September 1995.

²³As Joseph J. Schwartz noted, "in the month of December 1943, the American Joint Distribution Committee [in Lisbon] alone had on its relief rolls 551 individuals." American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia, 1940-45, part 2, doc. 404.

²⁴Koestler, 17.

throughout the provinces.²⁵ Those sequestered in Caldas da Rainha and Ericeira had to adhere to benevolent mobility restrictions, with the male heads of the families 'arrested' and housed in the central resort. These carpeted 'prisons' -- padded floors rather than padded walls -- were characterized by three basic classes of accommodation and, depending upon financial means, some refugees were able to have shoes shined daily and morning papers delivered.²⁶ The rest of the family was free to reside anywhere in the town, with the children often attending local schools. Although refugees in these forced residence compounds were not permitted to leave the town without special police authorization, within their assigned environs they enjoyed complete freedom of movement. As Hella Kahn, a teacher of German and wife of Herbert Kahn, the JDC liaison at Caldas da Rainha, remembers, "Not far from Caldas was a beach and the women, who had nothing to do, would often rent a donkey and spend the day with their children by the waves." "It was not paradise," but considering that they were refugees, those in Caldas had "a very good life."²⁷

While living conditions in Caldas da Rainha and Ericeira were objectively

²⁵American Friends Service Committee, 1940-45, part 2, doc. 404.

²⁶Morris Shenker, 30 October 1994.

²⁷Hella Kahn, interview by author, 24 September 1995, St. Leonard, QC, tape recording. Kahn's observations are unanimously supported by oral and written testimony: Charles Kon, informal discussion facilitated by Stanley Asher, 6 April 1995, describes Ericeira as a "heaven on earth" for refugees; Joseph Cymbalista, interview by Stanley Asher, 30 October 1994, *Serpa Pinto* reunion, Hampstead, QC, video recording, D.O. Films, states that "living conditions were exemplary"; also see the "*Serpa Pinto* Reunion Questionnaire" file, particularly question 23: "What do you recall about these places?," at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre Archives.

agreeable, the seemingly ceaseless state of stasis eventually took its toll on refugee morale. As Robert C. Dexter, executive director of the Unitarian Service Committee (USC), noted in a luncheon talk in New York, 18 February 1944, these refugees "see no hope of ever getting anywhere and are suffering from 'barbed wire sickness.' Consequently, "the USC is spending far more money now per capita for medical care than it did two years ago."²⁸ Unable to work, dependent upon aid, time heavy upon their hands,²⁹ refugees remaining in forced residence eagerly awaited substantive situational change -- either an end to the war or visas to North America.

The refugee experience in Lisbon was markedly different from that in Caldas da Rainha or Ericeira. Refugees residing in Lisbon in 1944 had generally either arrived prior to 1940 or were closely related to someone who had established residency and, consequently, enjoyed freedom of movement and were permitted to

²⁸Summary of luncheon talk by Robert C. Dexter, given in New York, 18 February 1944, distributed to various AFSC Foreign Service staff members, 25 February 1944, in American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia, 1940-1945, part 2, doc. 406.

²⁹The refugees' condition of circumstantial immobility made them easy prey to antisemitic caricatures. One such example was a letter from a Canadian airman, sitting out the duration of the war in Caldas da Rainha: "My only hope, Doll, is that Canada doesn't take all these Jewish Refugees home from Portugal, like they are planning. Cause they are people who will never work and they say they won't work. They are no good to themselves. Just hunks of flesh that sit around in cafes and talk and conspire and live off the money sent them by Charity organizations from England, Canada and the States. . . . I sure would hate to come home after the war is over and find Canada overrun with these Jewish Refugees. Doll, they receive the treatment they've been getting cause they ask for it. . . ." National Archives of Canada (NAC), Immigration Branch Records (IR), RG76, file 673931, E. Bula to Mrs. P. J. Bula, 10 November 1944; cited in Irving Abella and Harold Troper, None Is Too Many (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982), 173.

work. Maria Lowy, for example, left Grosspetersdorf, Austria with her husband and two small children immediately after the *Anschluss*. Her sister, Katherine, and her brother-in-law, Alfred Besthoff, who were living in Lisbon, gave asylum to the Lowys. Because Maria had a diploma from the University of Vienna as a German and English teacher -- "both languages were in great demand in Portugal" -- she was "very quickly able to earn a modest living while [her] husband took care of the household and children." On the basis of her income, the Lowys were soon able to rent a small apartment in Lisbon. Eventually, Maria "was offered a clerical position at the office of the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee . . . and when war broke out in September 1939 and all American staff, except the director, Dr. Joseph J. Schwartz, returned to the U.S.," she "became Dr. Schwartz's secretary," enabling her family to remain in Lisbon "while most of the other refugees were sent to places like Ericeira where they were maintained by the Joint."³⁰ Maria Lowy's story is distinctive, but it is also representative of refugees remaining in Lisbon in 1944 -- employed, informed, and, in some ways, empowered.

Despite their divergent experiences, the refugees in Caldas da Rainha and Ericeira and those in Lisbon generally shared a common cultural and class background. As Morris Shenker, a *Serpa Pinto* refugee, remembers, "Most of the [Iberian] refugees were quite well off. None of the people came from the *shtetl*. They had often lived in Western Europe for generations and were highly adapted to

³⁰Maria Lowy, correspondence with the author, 20 August 1995.

big city life."³¹ Generally having little contact with Eastern European Jewry,³² it was from this body of largely westernized and well-off Jews that candidates for Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement were drawn.

Although, as the last chapter detailed, Canada fastidiously considered applicants for its proposed movement, this is not to say that refugees in Iberia were passive participants in the selection process. Just as Canada rejected certain refugees, certain refugees rejected Canada. For instance, refugee consideration of Canada as a destination was contingent upon the maturation of a Palestine movement handled by British authorities and the JDC in December 1943. The Palestine movement, covering "the permanent settlement of 400 families or single units," was comprised of refugees in both Portugal and Spain. Enjoying a higher priority than the Canadian scheme, "The Joint Distribution Committee are committed to at least 600 passengers in order to get a vessel, and will not divert to Canada anyone already approved for Palestine." When A. L. Jolliffe, the Acting Director of Immigration, mentioned this situation to Saul Hayes, Executive Director of the United Jewish Refugee Agency, Hayes suggested that "refugees who might come to Canada were hesitating to apply for visas until the Palestine movement was disposed of, they being afraid to withdraw

³¹Morris Shenker, 30 October 1994.

³²Many of these refugees, for instance, could not speak or read Yiddish. Growing up in Germany, Bettina Bayreuther "had never seen a Yiddish newspaper before coming to Montreal." Bettina Bayreuther, facilitated by Stanley Asher, 6 April 1995, informal lunch marking the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first group of *Serpa Pinto* refugees to Canada, Montreal, QC, video recording, D.O. Films.

their application for Palestinian visa in favour of a Canadian visa as they might then lose out on both."³³

Also, by late 1943, visas valid only for the duration of the war were less attractive in refugee circles. As Odilon Cormier, the Canadian immigration official in Lisbon organizing Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement, explained to his superior, A. L. Jolliffe,

The universal sentiment being that the war in Europe is just a question of months, the urge no longer exists of going through much trouble and expense to secure temporary admission to a distant land when the possibility of returning to their former place of residence can be awaited in safety in Portugal or North Africa.³⁴

Despite such circumstances, a number of refugees still responded to the Canadian overture, promptly accepting the JDC subsidized passage to the New World. For many of the Jewish refugees in Iberia the notion of returning to their homelands after the Holocaust was unthinkable. Yearning to leave Europe at any cost, some were willing to tolerate the uncertain status afforded by Canadian durational visas, hoping that in the interim they would either be upgraded to landed immigrant status or be allowed entry into the United States. Other refugees in Iberia had children living in America under the aegis of the United States Committee for the Care of European Children (USCOM), and were understandably anxious to reunite

³³National Archives of Canada (NAC), Department of External Affairs (DEA), RG25, file 5127-A-40, A. L. Jolliffe, Acting Director of Immigration, to June Wrong, Assistant Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 28 December 1943.

³⁴NAC, IR, RG76, file 67391, Cormier to Jolliffe, 30 November 1943.

their families. Since the national quotas allotted by the U.S. were filled, Canada provided a geographically convenient base from which to contact their children.³⁵

For reasons such as these, some refugees in Iberia accepted the Canadian offer and, no longer landlocked, discovered their lives in motion again. Describing this existential change from stasis to flux, one *Serpa Pinto* refugee remembers her moment of actual departure:

We are on board the *Serpa Pinto* and in a few minutes from now our voyage will commence, the moment we have been waiting for, full of hope for such a long time. Years of physical and mental exertion unimaginably big lie behind us; years during which we lived in constant unrest and fear of the next day. And now it shall come true what we had been longing for all the years of our being hunted and having lived in lawlessness; to be able to live in a free country as free human beings.³⁶

The waiting game had ended, the Canadian challenge now began.

³⁵Joseph Cymbalista, 30 October 1994; Maria Lowy, 20 August 1995.

³⁶Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), United Jewish Refugee Agency (UJRA), Ge, box 73, "Finally the Day has Arrived," anonymous.

Chapter Five

Refugee Arrival in Canada: A *Mélange* of Public, Political, and Personal Perceptions

Akira Kurosawa's Rashomon (1951) cinematically explores four different viewpoints on the same crime, symbolically stressing the subjectivity of the past. Similarly, historical events, while often spatially and temporally definable, are always experientially indeterminate. Converging at a collective intersection of occurrence, the principal players carry a plurality of assumptions and expectations with them, which directly influence their interpretations of an incident. Not surprisingly, this historical truism appropriately applies to the arrival and integration of Iberian refugees in Canada. Considering media representation, government regard, Canadian Jewish community response, and refugee reaction, a *mélange* of public, political, and personal perceptions emerges.

On 6 April 1944, the eve of Passover, the *S.S. Serpa Pinto*, "gaudy with her Portuguese flag markings," entered the port of Philadelphia. After a "long, hot day on the ship and in the pier shed, questioned and checked by numerous officials," the 276 Canada-bound refugees were finally rushed through landing formalities. "Then they were nearly two hours in buses taking them the few miles from the pier to the train siding in Broad Street Station," where they were promptly placed in a sealed train. Throughout the ordeal, the refugees were ensconced in secrecy -- prevented from speaking to the media and watchfully observed by "enough police to provide an

armed guard for each refugee."¹ As one refugee remembers, "the train was waiting for us like we were the poison plague or something . . . being put in a sealed train. I felt like Vladimir Lenin."² Once the sealed train began to move northward, Canadian immigration authorities and Jewish refugee officials entered the "old and comparatively comfortless" cars, processed the families' papers, provided them with pertinent information, and offered them hampers of food.³ Entering Canada just in time for Passover, the Jewish refugees among the complement of arrivals were invited by Canadian coreligionists to seders at either the Talmud Torah in Montreal or the Jewish Reception Centre in Toronto.⁴

Since the *Serpa Pinto* refugees "were the first [group] of this size in some years and are therefore in many ways a test of press and public opinion," the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) was understandably anxious about media coverage of the event. Although initially entertaining the notion of "'smuggling' the refugees into the country with a minimum of publicity for fear that press reaction may be negative," the CJC, the War Information Bureau, and the Immigration Branch all

¹"272 [*sic*, 276] Refugees En Route Here," The Gazette (Montreal), 8 April 1944, 1.

²Morris Shenker, interview by Stanley Asher, 30 October 1994, *Serpa Pinto* reunion, Hampstead, QC, video recording, D.O. Films (Dov Okouneff, Montreal, QC).

³"272 Refugees En Route Here."

⁴National Archives of Canada (NAC), Immigration Branch Records (IR), RG76, file 673931, Saul Hayes to A. L. Jolliffe, 11 April 1944.

agreed that such secrecy would be "impossible, unwise, and perhaps even dangerous." Instead, they decided to "place the facts squarely before the press and give them an opportunity to report the movement fairly."⁵ Confirming the efficacy of this simple tactic of openness, an unsigned CJC internal memorandum noted,

Publicity . . . substantially and gratifyingly corroborated the first friendly [media] impression. A number of editorials appeared in the press welcoming the refugees and emphasizing that the people of Canada wish to have refugees by the thousands rather than by the hundreds. . . . It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the French press in its news coverage has on the whole been no less sympathetic to the refugee movement than the English press, which is saying a great deal.⁶

While press coverage of the first significant wartime refugee entry to Canada was widespread and generally favourable,⁷ dissecting the angles of reportage offers interesting insights into the contemporary Canadian mind-set. Clearly conscious of the racial and religious ratio of the Iberian refugees, media coverage tended to concentrate on the Christian contingent of the movement. The Montreal Gazette, which had earlier reported that "about 70 per cent. of the Canada-bound refugees

⁵Canadian Jewish Congress Archives (CJC), CA26, file 244, from Press Office (perhaps written by David Rome) to Saul Hayes, National Executive Director of the United Jewish Refugee Agency (UJRA); forwarded to A. L. Jolliffe, Director of the Immigration Branch, 11 April 1944.

⁶CJC, ZA6, file 124, unsigned memorandum, "Publicity on Refugee Movements," 12 June 1944.

⁷See "Not Enough Refugees Says Press," Congress Bulletin, August 1944, for excerpts from various newspaper editorials which were of a positive nature.

were Jewish,"⁸ stressed in a subsidiary headline that "Four Christian Families Among 138 Persons To Be Guests of Montrealers."⁹ Robert Reeds, a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) radio personality, was similarly in tune with the relatively predictable discourse of race and religion. After noting on-air that "not all these families, by the way, are Jewish . . . a large proportion are Protestants and Roman Catholics," Reeds proceeded to discuss extensively his favourite "story told by the refugees": the experiences of Rolf Lohrich and his wife.

Rolf is the deserter from the German army. He's also a scientist, a researcher in psychiatry, one who has gone far in the field of psychotherapy. Rolf is about 30 or 35 I would guess, rather good looking, a clean cut sort of a fellow. His wife is very charming and very pretty. Rolf committed the unpardonable sin in Germany when he married her---in 1936. Mrs. Lohrich is Jewish. Rolf was an anti-Nazi long before that. His hatred for Hitler goes back a long way. In fact he got out of German [*sic*] in 1933 and was living in Spain. But the Gestapo has a long arm. It reached into Spain to grab him for the German army when the war began. Rolf was determined not to fight for Hitler. As he went through his long hours of training, goose stepping closer and closer to the battle front, he thought constantly of

⁸"272 [*sic*, 276] Refugees En Route Here," The Gazette (Montreal), 8 April 1944, 1. "Haven in Canada Thrills Refugees After Long Years of Dodging Nazis," Globe and Mail (Toronto), 10 April 1944, similarly noted that "Not all of them are Jewish. About 30 per cent are Protestant and Roman Catholic." (7) The Toronto Daily Star's editorial on 11 April 1944 mentioned that "The group that arrived in Toronto included a former textile manufacturer from Munich, a Jew to whom the Pope granted an audience. . . ."

⁹"Jewish Refugees Welcomed in City," The Gazette (Montreal), 10 April 1944, 11. Accompanying this article are two photographs which further reveal the media's attempt to provide religious and racial equity of coverage. "In the top picture one little refugee, Paulette Feigenbaum, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Feigenbaum, is shown held in the arms of Danis Wiseberg, of the Westmount Fire Department, as he lends a hand to photographers at the station." The bottom picture is of Dr. P. P. Mandl, "a Roman Catholic from Austria."

escape. Finally he was headed for the Russian front. Suddenly he deserted, forged military papers in the pocket of his slick Nazi uniform. Clear across Germany he travelled, and clear across France. Then a quick change of civilian clothes and on foot an attempt to reach Spain across the Pyrenees [*sic*]. It took six days. At the end of three days without either compass or map, he had found himself back where he'd started. Finally came reunion with his wife in Spain.¹⁰

Indeed, the one article in a mainstream magazine dealing with the Iberian movement focused exclusively on Christian refugees. Recounting how the people of Port Credit received "a little group of refugees, a family of five," the article describes how the concerted efforts of the village clergy, the local Lions' Club, and the Canadian National Committee on Refugees (CNCR) encouraged community acceptance of the family and facilitated its integration into Canadian society.¹¹ In each of the

¹⁰NAC, MG28, V43, vol. 5, file 21, Robert Reeds, "Topic For Tonight," CJBC, 10 April 1944, 11:10-11:15 p.m. Besides its non-Jewish focus, Reeds' radio commentary reveals another angle to the coverage of the Iberian movement: refugee stories which could be presented as war news, such as Rolf Lohrich's, were, not surprisingly, of greater media interest. Accordingly, the editorial in the London Free Press stated that "the story of these refugees . . . is one of the epics of the war"; cited in "Not Enough Refugees Says Press," Congress Bulletin, August 1944, 2. Blatantly attempting to conscript the refugee story for the larger Canadian war effort, one headline of Belleville's Ontario-Intelligencer read: "Canadians Can Learn Patriotism From Refugees' Experiences"; cited in Congress Bulletin, August 1944, 2.

¹¹Aileen Bruce, "A Community Greet Its First Refugee Family," Saturday Night 59 (29 April 1944): 35. Interestingly, the article notes that "Opinion concerning the advisability of permitting the entry into Canada of refugees from the Hitler terror was sharply divided in the village." However, after the refugee family actually arrived and was successfully integrated, those who had earlier opposed refugee admission became "very, very quiet." Perhaps some of those who rejected refugees as abstractions hesitantly grew to accept refugees as individuals. Capturing the essence of people's common distrust of the 'other,' Charles Lamb, the English essayist and critic (1775-1834), "in a vigorous condemnation of a man, said, 'I hate that man.' 'Hate him?' asked a friend. 'Why, you don't even know him.' 'Of course, I don't,'

aforementioned examples, the media emphasized the numerically small, yet symbolically significant Christian fraction of the Iberian movement. Such coverage revealed a basic truth about Canada in 1944: in a predominantly Christian country, empathy for the fundamentally familiar was, not surprisingly, more newsworthy than aid to the hitherto exotic stranger.¹²

Attempting to humanize the 'other,' a Toronto Daily Star editorial expounded, "the newcomers are obviously people of education and refinement, people who were of consequence in their respective countries." Consequently, "if any stigma is attached to the term 'refugee' then it should not be used in their connection. No less than the English people who came to escape the bombing, the European victims of

replied Lamb. 'How could I hate him, if I knew him?' Cited in Joseph Kage, With Faith and Thanksgiving: The Story of Two Hundred Years of Jewish Immigration and Immigrant Aid Effort in Canada, 1760-1960 (Montreal: Eagle Publishing, 1962), 166.

¹²Intensely aware of public perceptions, the CJC found the media's inclusion of Christian refugees edifying. The CJC Press Office's "Interim Report on Press Reaction to Arrival of Refugees" observed that "The newspapers of Montreal and of Toronto which are the only ones to hand at the moment of writing were remarkably warm in their reception of the group. They emphasized, as we would have wished, the pitiful experiences which these refugees had undergone, the fact that a considerable proportion of the arrivals are of Christian faith and that the movement is therefore not entirely a Jewish one. . . ." CJC, CA26, file 244, from Press Office (probably written by David Rome) to Saul Hayes, National Executive Director of the United Jewish Refugee Agency (UJRA); forwarded to A. L. Jolliffe, Director of the Immigration Branch, 11 April 1944. The CJC's attempt to publicly downplay the Jewish specificity of the Iberian group is also evident in the article, "Refugees End Long Journey," Montreal Standard, 8 April 44: "The same Canadian Congress official [name not given] was keen in stressing that the group of refugees had entered Canada through the efforts of Senator Cairine Wilson's Canadian National Committee for Refugees. Jewish organizations were just 'lending a hand,' he said."

naziism should be honoured guests in Canada."¹³ In addition to transmuted the recent arrivals from "refugees" to "guests," certain members of the media presented the European exiles as honorary Canadian compatriots. One newspaper article described "pretty, 16-year-old Inge Sander" as "looking like a Canadian high school girl."¹⁴ The author of another article, who detailed the family reunification of two boys who had lived in America for 15 months under the aegis of the United States Committee for the Care of European Children (USCOM), observed that the youngsters were "lightly tanned after more than a year at Orchard Park, near Buffalo, and wearing zooty two-toned gabardine slack suits, they looked and talked like well-behaved Canadians."¹⁵

While the Canadian media largely accentuated the customary components of the first voyage,¹⁶ events which transpired during the second crossing of the *Serpa*

¹³Toronto Daily Star, 11 April 1944. The stigma attached to the label "refugee" was substantial. As one of the newly arrived remembers, "There's a tremendous trauma attached to being a refugee. My parents were respected people in the community. I was always a top student in school. I usually had a whole circle of people around me. . . . And here nobody knew me. 'Refugee' -- very difficult to live with that kind of thing." Cited in Paula Draper, "The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1983), 455.

¹⁴"Haven in Canada Thrills Refugees After Long Years of Dodging Nazis," Globe and Mail (Toronto), 10 April 1944, 7.

¹⁵"Family Parted in Barcelona Reunited After 15 Months," Globe and Mail (Toronto), 25 August 1944, 7.

¹⁶According to the CJC, "the major news interest [of the first voyage] was the actual arrival of the refugees with the stories of their experiences in Europe secondary." CJC, ZA6, file 124, unsigned memorandum, "Publicity on Refugee Movements," 12 June 1944.

Pinto dictated dramatic alteration in both tone and content of reportage. Carrying only seventy-four Canada-bound refugees, the CJC "anticipated that the second transport would be of much lesser interest from a press point of view since the novelty of refugees had worn out, the stories they would have to tell would be repetitious of those of the first group, and their number was much smaller."¹⁷ Despite such meagre expectations, David Rome, the CJC press officer, was sent to Philadelphia at the end of May 1944, and immediately "found that the news story of the movement was of extraordinary interest."¹⁸ Rivalling the war coverage and completely sweeping aside the story's refugee interest, the second voyage of the *Serpa Pinto* became front-page news.¹⁹ According to one account,

only a few days before reaching the final safety of refuge in Canada, their neutral ship, the *Serpa Pinto*, was stopped by a German submarine and the refugees were forced to take to lifeboats in the middle of the night. They spent hours of anxiety and horror in flimsy boats, being questioned and threatened by the Nazis and praying for rescue. A 16-months baby refugee was lost together with two members of the crew when one lifeboat toppled into the sea.²⁰

¹⁷"Publicity of Refugee Movements," 12 June 1944.

¹⁸"Publicity on Refugee Movements," 12 June 1944.

¹⁹According to the CJC memorandum, "Publicity on Refugee Movements," 12 June 1944, "The newspapers were highly competitive in their treatment of the story and in particular the Toronto Daily Star went to great lengths of initiative and expense to scoop the story. For a time our office was suspected by at least one other paper of having cooperated unduly with this paper, but we have since been able to prove to everybody's satisfaction that we acted scrupulously and fairly and are not at fault there."

²⁰"Nazi U-Boat Stopped Jews on Way Here," Congress Bulletin, June 1944, 1. For similar coverage from the more mainstream media, see "U-Boat Queries Berlin,

With the refugees and the crew adrift in overcrowded lifeboats, tossed about by the stalwart mid-Atlantic for more than five hours, one passenger, Camilo Grande Perez, was taken aboard the U-boat and questioned by the German submarine skipper before being allowed to return to the *Serpa Pinto*. Immediately upon arrival in Canada, Perez, a resident of Winnipeg, "was escorted to RCMP Headquarters for questioning on circumstances surrounding the 'Bermuda incident' with the German submarine."²¹ The attendant element of subterfuge surrounding Perez' experience piqued media interest and reporters "asked nearly every man coming off the train [in Montreal], 'Are you Mr. Perez.'"²² Despite the media's attempt to discover the reason for Perez' detention, the story remained an unsolved mystery.²³

Spares Ship," New York Herald Tribune, 31 May 1944; "Refugee Ship Halted Two Americans Seized By U-Boat in Atlantic," Globe and Mail (Toronto), 1 June 1944; "'I Saw My Baby Plunge To Death in Sea' - Mother," Toronto Daily Star, 1 June 1944; "Refugees Arrive with U-Boat Tale," The Gazette (Montreal), 2 June 1944. For a detailed personal account of the second voyage, see Cecile Tenenbaum, "The Attack of a Neutral Ship: A Terrifying Experience," CJC, CA26, file 244; also, letter from Maria Lowy to Dr. Bernstein, CJC, ZA2, file 31, 9 July 1944.

²¹"R.C.M.P. 'Question' Winnipegger Seized by U-Boat off Refugee Ship," The Gazette (Montreal), 2 June 1944, 13.

²²"Refugees Arrive With U-Boat Tale," The Gazette (Montreal), 2 June 1944, 13.

²³Despite consulting contemporary media accounts and secondary sources, my own preliminary attempts to resolve the mystery surrounding Perez' detainment have also been in vain. However, an RCMP report, dated 1 June 1944, clearly sees Perez as a possible espionage agent: "This man was taken from the SS 'Serpa Pinto' by a U-boat commander who stopped the vessel in mid-Atlantic. . . . The reason he was detained is very obscure. . . . He is being questioned by our officers who are satisfied that he is lying." Cited in Donald Avery, "Canada's Response to European Refugees, 1939-1945: The Security Dimension," in On Guard For Thee: War, Ethnicity, and the Canadian State, 1939-1945, ed. Norman Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan,

Although the CJC's assessment of the media coverage of the second voyage was generally favourable, Congress was concerned that press preoccupation with the Perez affair would inadvertently fuel Canadian Fifth Column fears about refugees. Aware that public perceptions often affect political realities, a CJC memorandum on the publicity about the refugees' movements noted that "one of the passengers [Perez] on the ship, a Canadian not a refugee, was forced to spend several hours on board the submarine and naturally this aroused keen speculation and some suspicion in public and official circles in Canada."²⁴ While voicing concern, the memorandum included a positive coda:

Naturally these incidents caused us a great deal of work and even some unpleasantness, but we should not lose sight of the larger fact that the press reception of this group, no less than of the first group, was most highly favourable and that on the whole the movement was reported accurately and sympathetically.²⁵

On 1 October 1944, the third and final group of Iberian refugees landed at Philadelphia en route to Canada. Coming from Tangiers aboard the sister ship of the *Serpa Pinto*, the *S.S. Nyassa*, these sixty-eight refugees stimulated minimal press interest, and no editorial comment. The Montreal Gazette's one article devoted to the last group followed the standard formula for refugee coverage which had been established during the first movement: after briefly describing the newcomers'

and Lubomyr Luciuk (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988), 202.

²⁴"Publicity on Refugee Movements," 12 June 1944.

²⁵"Publicity on Refugee Movements," 12 June 1944.

various "wanderings" through Europe, the article provided a perfunctory quotation from a refugee expressing his joy at being "in the land of freedom," and finished with a detailed account of "three Catholic physicians' story of persecution."²⁶ Conforming the story to the Canadian context, media representations of the Iberian refugees were sympathetic yet asymmetrical. Generally focusing on arrival rather than Europe, on Christians rather than Jews, on war angles rather than refugee issues, on present success rather than past failure, press coverage implicitly engendered a quite narrow perception of a much larger problem.

While press consideration of the Iberian movement was addressed in the present continuous, political discourse was conducted in the future conditional. Political perceptions of the refugees were coloured by two overriding issues: internal security and postwar status. On 1 June 1944, Commissioner Wood of the RCMP wrote the Minister of Justice, Louis St. Laurent, expressing concern over the ability of the force to ascertain "the bona fides of refugees entering Canada . . . with the object of preventing persons who might be enemy agents from taking up residence here." His complaints were both specific and general. The RCMP had received only a day's notice prior to the Canadian arrival of the first *Serpa Pinto* group. No background information about the refugees had been forwarded by either British or American security agencies, and the force did not have available "the skilled

²⁶"68 Refugees Here of Varied Trades," The Gazette (Montreal), 2 October 1944, 13. The supplementary headline of this article is "Catholic Doctors Fleeing Italy Among Fugitives From Nazism; Ages Range From One Year to 79."

manpower to do an adequate job of screening."²⁷ Receiving immediate governmental attention, on 7 June 1944 St. Laurent asked Norman Robertson, Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, to approach the Prime Minister about this matter "because although it is no doubt necessary to do whatever may be compatible with the safety of our State for the relief of persons persecuted in occupied Europe, there seems to be some danger that the admission of these refugees might be used for the purpose of introducing espionage agents in this country."²⁸ Reacting to the Justice Minister's request, Robertson suggested that "complete information should be secured from the United Kingdom Security Organization as soon as possible concerning all people who have thus far been brought to this country."²⁹

Despite official expressions of security concern, the RCMP's actual handling of the Iberian movement was more in keeping with the Keystone Cops than Sergeant Preston. After the Lisbon screening office was closed in the fall of 1944,³⁰ the main

²⁷National Archives of Canada (NAC), Department of External Affairs (DEA), RG25, 5127-40, Wood to St. Laurent, 1 June 1944.

²⁸NAC, DEA, RG25, 5127-40, St. Laurent to Robertson, 7 June 1944.

²⁹NAC, Immigration Branch Records (IR), RG76, file 673931, Robertson to A.L. Jolliffe, Director of Immigration, Department of Mines and Resources, 13 November 1944.

³⁰Canadian Immigration officials justified this decision as follows: "with the progress of the war refugees not actually in enemy hands are not now in danger of persecution or loss of life and that as the termination of the war might be expected within a reasonable period, a continuance of the movement of refugees to Canada would not be warranted; they would only reside in this country a comparatively short time before the question of return to Europe would have to be considered." NAC, IR, RG76, file 673931, internal memorandum of Jolliffe, 22 September 1944.

concern of immigration officials and the RCMP was the postwar repatriation of the *Serpa Pinto* refugees, who had been admitted only for the duration of the war. However, in December 1944, Commissioner Wood informed A. L. Jolliffe, the recently appointed director of immigration, that the RCMP could not even locate the majority of the Iberian refugees:

It was anticipated that we would be able to keep in touch with these people through the offices of the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Jewish Immigrants' Aid Society but we are now advised that these offices do not maintain contact with refugees who are not in receipt of assistance and, therefore, under the circumstances, it will not be possible for us to keep advised of the whereabouts of those refugees who are not enemy aliens . . . the thought occurs that you may have some suggestion to make in this regard and your comments thereon will be greatly appreciated.³¹

Jolliffe was of little help, suggesting that the RCMP contact the Canadian National Committee on Refugees (CNCR), which might "be able to furnish the addresses to which the individual families were directed."³²

The RCMP's investigative cul-de-sac directly points to the other principle governmental concern regarding the recent arrivals from Iberia: the postwar status of the refugees. As Irving Abella and Harold Troper note, "Jewish leaders knew full well that the refugee visas were temporary. They felt assured, however, that, having granted haven to Jewish refugees, Canada would be somewhat inconsistent pressing

³¹NAC, IR, RG76, file 673931, Wood to Jolliffe, 29 December 1944.

³²NAC, IR, RG76, file, 673931, Jolliffe to Wood, 7 February 1945.

for the immediate departure of its guests before the emergency was over."³³ Informing Saul Hayes in late May 1945, just before the official surrender of Germany, that no action on the issue of refugee repatriation would be taken before a federal election scheduled for 11 June 1945, Jolliffe maintained a holding pattern contingent upon political exigencies.³⁴ In early September, after the Liberals had been victorious in the polls and the Allies victorious in the war, Hayes recontacted Jolliffe regarding the issue of temporary visas. Although Jolliffe again urged Hayes to be patient, the administrative saturation caused by a steady stream of refugees' requests to have visas extended or status changed to that of permanent residents demanded rapid resolution. According to Abella and Troper, Jolliffe and J. Allison Glen, the newly appointed minister of the Department of Mines and Resources (which oversaw immigration),

agreed that the question should be resolved once and for all. The two also agreed that public sentiment would oppose wholesale deportation. One could just imagine news photos of the young and the elderly being herded aboard ship by armed Canadian military personnel. There was no point. A case-by-case approach was a waste of time, and the best way to handle the situation was to regularize all temporary visas by a single order-in-council. It was evident, Glen explained to the cabinet, that many of the refugees had lost everything in Europe, so 'rehabilitation in Europe would be impractical at present and for some years to come.' The majority had integrated well with the larger community and some had knowledge and experience that would be of

³³Irving Abella and Harold Troper, None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948 (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1982), 171.

³⁴CJC, United Jewish Refugee Agency (UJRA), file 300, Hayes telephone interview with Jolliffe, 21 May 1945.

'material value to Canadian trade and industry.'³⁵

Consequently, Order-in-Council P.C. 6687 was passed on 25 October 1945, approving the regularization of temporary visa holders.³⁶

Compared with the government's response of cautious containment, the Canadian Jewish community reacted to the refugee influx with immediate mobilization. Seeing "the arrival of the first 300 [*sic*, 276] refugees and their placement in Canada as one of the most important chapters of Congress activities and of the UJRA,"³⁷ leaders rallied a strong show of community support. Although initially concerned that the timing of the first arrival (exactly concomitant with the first seder -- "when every orthodox housewife is up to her neck preparing for the feast") would adversely affect community response to the *Serpa Pinto* refugees, worries of the Jewish leadership were quickly alleviated. Holding "an emergency meeting of organizations, synagogues and last but not least ladies' auxiliaries," attendance exceeded expectations and "the response was on the whole quite warm and spirited." "Cajoling, coaxing, and pressing the community for more rooms and yet more rooms,"³⁸ the Jewish leadership managed to ensure that "each refugee was

³⁵Abella and Troper, 201.

³⁶NAC, DEA 5127-40, RG25, Order-in-Council P.C. 6687, presented at the Government House at Ottawa, 26 October 1945.

³⁷CJC, CA26, file 244, memorandum, "summary of an article by H.M. Caiserman in the Daily Eagle of April 7th," 7 April 1944.

³⁸CJC, Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS), file 22380, Spanish Refugees, letter from Morris A. Solkin (JIAS, Montreal) to Mandel Kraicer (JIAS, Toronto), 27

assigned a family, which provided temporary accommodation and, ideally, more long-term friendship."³⁹ Further encouraging rapid integration, Samuel Bronfman, the national president of the CJC and the UJRA, officially invited the arrivals "to form part of our community, to avail yourself of its services, to learn to cherish its ancient traditions and to help us mould its fateful future."⁴⁰

These significant gestures of community outreach and goodwill were occasionally accompanied by fragments of friction between host and guest. The Canadian Jewish community in 1944 was predominantly Eastern European and working-class, using Yiddish as its *lingua franca*. Conversely, the Iberian Jewish refugees were largely Western European and middle-class, seeing Yiddish as the *lingua frac*s.⁴¹ As in Aesop's fable "The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse,"

March 1944.

³⁹Charles Kon, facilitated by Stanley Asher, 6 April 1995, informal lunch marking the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first group of *Serpa Pinto* refugees to Canada, Montreal, QC, video recording, D.O. Films.

⁴⁰"Bronfman Extends Welcome to Each Refugee Coming Here," Congress Bulletin, August 1944, 3.

⁴¹There is a growing scholarly literature on the history of the Canadian Jewish community: Edna Paris, Jews: An Account of their Experience in Canada (Toronto: Macmillan, 1980); Stuart E. Rosenberg, The Jewish Community in Canada (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970); Gerald Tulchinsky, Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1992), and "The Third Solitude: A. M. Klein's Jewish Montreal, 1910-1950," Journal of Canadian Studies 19 (summer 1984): 96-112; Bernard Vigod, The Jews in Canada, Canada's Ethnic Groups, booklet no. 7 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984). For an overview of scholarship on this subject, see Gerald Tulchinsky, "The Contours of Canadian Jewish History," in The Jews in Canada, ed. Robert Byrm, William Shaffir, and Morton Weinfeld, 171-192 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993). A fine

some members of the Jewish community found the newcomers to be rather aloof and overly critical of Canada. For instance, Mordecai Richler, who was born in Montreal in 1931, remembers encountering refugees while he was hanging around Tansky's Cigar and Soda Store on St. Urbain Street:

The war in Europe brought about considerable changes within the Jewish community in Montreal. To begin with, there was the coming of the refugees. . . . I think we had conjured up a picture of the refugees as penurious *hassidim* with packs on their backs. We were eager to be helpful, our gestures were large, but in return we expected more than a little gratitude. As it turned out, the refugees, mostly German and Austrian Jews, were far more sophisticated and better educated than we were. They had not, like our immigrant grandparents, come from *shtetls* in Galicia or Russia. Neither did they despise Europe. On the contrary, they found our culture thin, the city provincial, and the Jews narrow. This bewildered and stung us. But what cut deepest, I suppose, was that the refugees spoke English better than many of us did and, among themselves, had the effrontery to talk in the abhorred German language.⁴²

Although Richler's remembrance specifically refers to the recently released interned refugees, the fundamental elements of cross-cultural conflict also apply, as will be shown below, to the integration of the *Serpa Pinto* refugees. Apart from these very brief and very human moments of mild misgiving, the Jewish community greeted the *Serpa Pinto* refugees with overwhelming warmth. As one refugee stresses, "the Jewish community went out of their way, went beyond what should have been done. There was a member of the Montreal Jewish community waiting to meet the train for

fictional consideration of Canadian Jewish life during the interwar period is Adele Wiseman, The Sacrifice (New York: Viking Press, 1956).

⁴²Mordecai Richler, The Street (Toronto. McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 61.

every person that landed in Montreal. It was truly one of the nicest Jewish communities in the world."⁴³

Generally, the *Serpa Pinto* refugees' immediate reaction upon arrival in Canada was euphoric. One refugee remarked, "I wish I weren't ashamed. I could kiss the Canadian earth. I could kiss every one of this Congress committee." Another told reporters that "We spent the entire night sitting up. It was not comfortable, but it was the greatest night in my life."⁴⁴ Still another commented that, "We all have passed through many countries. Nowhere have we found people with such open hearts."⁴⁵ Summing up the general sentiment, one middle-aged woman said to the media, "You know, in twelve years, this is the first time that people have been glad to see us."⁴⁶

However, once the dramatic arrival faded into the banality of the everyday, certain inherent integrative problems became manifest.⁴⁷ For some refugees, the

⁴³Morris Shenker, 30 October 1994. The approximately forty "*Serpa Pinto* Reunion" questionnaires, on file at the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre Archives, unanimously substantiate Shenker's favourable impression of the reception offered by the Canadian Jewish community.

⁴⁴"'I Could Kiss This Soil,' Says Grateful Refugee," Congress Bulletin, June 1944, 6.

⁴⁵"Finally the Day Has Arrived," CJC, UJRA, GE73, undated.

⁴⁶Reeds, "Topic For Tonight," 10 April 1944.

⁴⁷Problems related to integration are, of course, normal for any refugee or immigrant entering a new world. As was noted at the International Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations Interested in Migration, On Putting Down Roots (New York and Geneva, 1954), "apart from the immediate welfare and social needs

Iberian experience, during which time they were not allowed to work and were forced to live on refugee agency hand-outs, made indolence and dependence seem normal. One disgruntled refugee wrote bitterly to a friend in Barcelona: "I will give you some advice, do not leave. As nice as you have it in Spain, you will never have it again."⁴⁸ Concerned over the adjustment of some refugees, Solkin of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society observed that, "they appear reluctant or even unwilling to cease being refugees. . . . The flesh pots of Egypt are a bit too full and fat."⁴⁹ Consequently, the JIAS complained to relief officials in Iberia that international standards of aid created unrealistic expectations of support among refugees. In response, the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) noted,

very often refugees whose morale has been pretty badly shattered will tend to exaggerate certain things in order to improve their present position. Obviously, if pressure is being brought to bear, as it should be, for these people to become self-supporting as quickly as possible, they will soon become absorbed and cease to make comparisons. At present they tend to react as they do by thinking of their previous situation in Spain where they were unable to work and consequently had to be given the necessities of life without working for them. I believe that in a very short time, now that they are in a free land, many of these refugees will make their adjustment and will again become

of the newcomer, the situation of which by itself is a difficult and complex task, there arise other problems of integration, adjustment to a new country, acceptance, and the need to put down roots in a new soil. This is a long-term and life-giving process because 'no adult, just as no plant, can grow without his roots. A good gardener is infinitely careful with the roots of any flower he transplants. He may trim them slightly for sturdier growth, but he will not let them wither.'" Cited in Kage, 163.

⁴⁸NAC, IR, RG76, file 673931, Ilse Marle to Mrs. Adolph Hochstim, 16 April 1944.

⁴⁹CJC, JIAS, file 22380, Solkin to Ilja Dijour, 10 May 1944.

more normalised in their dealings with a relief agency.

The JDC official concluded the letter by observing, "This is the first instance we have had in many years where refugees have stated that they were too well treated, rather than too badly treated."⁵⁰

Apart from complaints about levels of financial assistance, some refugees found Canada a rather uninspiring place. Writing a friend who was still residing at Caldas da Rainha, one recent arrival whined that his life in Montreal "is horribly monotonous as the people are very primitive and the country is like a big village."⁵¹

Another refugee, originally from Paris, saw Montreal as "a big provincial town that was cold and dingy" and constantly badgered her husband to move back to Europe. In 1949, her husband gave her a ship ticket to Paris, saying "if you like it there we will move back." After two months in Paris she returned to Canada and immediately informed the family that "we are staying here."⁵²

Another problem impeding rapid adjustment was the social distance and mutual suspicion between many Western (especially German) and Eastern European Jews. According to Thomas Hecht, Montreal Jews "had no appreciation of the flourishing Jewish life which took place in some countries such as Czechoslovakia, nor in the

⁵⁰CJC, CA27, file 244, Moses Leavitt (JDC) to Henry Rosenberg (JIAS), 12 June 1944; a copy of the letter was subsequently sent to Saul Hayes.

⁵¹NAC, IR, RG76, file 673931, Sigmund Teichthal (Montreal) to Hermann Lewy (Caldas da Rainha), 13 November 1944.

⁵²Charles Kon, 6 April 1995.

Western democracies. They just dismissed it. They have no understanding of it because they were all *shtetl* Jews."⁵³ Hella Kahn, a German Jew from Cologne, remembers being openly discriminated against in Jewish shops for not knowing Yiddish and describes the Eastern European Jews in Montreal as "mean, mean, mean . . . they didn't care if we lived or died."⁵⁴ Others were bluntly told by Polish and Galician Jews, "I want you to know that we don't like German Jews."⁵⁵ Another German refugee, a former Berliner, recalls that her parents had a very difficult time integrating into the Montreal Jewish community because as "very proper Germans they maintained a careful distance from the more 'earthy' Polish Jews."⁵⁶

Despite such isolated problems of adjustment, most of the *Serpa Pinto* refugees settled in well. Sharing a common experience of escape and integration, many of the refugees saw the *Serpa Pinto* as the "umbilical cord between their old life and their new life."⁵⁷ While the ship was the refugees' umbilical cord, it was the Canadian

⁵³Thomas Hecht, in Voices of Canadian Jews, ed. Bryan Knight and Rachael Alkallay (Montreal: Chestnut Press, 1988), 107.

⁵⁴Hella Kahn, interview by author, 24 September 1995, St. Leonard, QC, tape recording.

⁵⁵Paula Draper, "The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1983), 453.

⁵⁶Bettina Bayreuther, facilitated by Stanley Asher, 6 April 1995, informal lunch marking the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first group of *Serpa Pinto* refugees to Canada, Montreal, QC, video recording, D.O. Films.

⁵⁷Thomas Hecht, interview by Stanley Asher, 7 September 1995, Montreal, video recording, D.O. Films.

government and the Jewish community that were the acknowledged midwives in this process of rebirth. Informally banding together for social and cultural purposes,⁵⁸ soon after their arrival the refugees passed the following resolution, which was subsequently transmitted to the Canadian government:

We express our best feelings of gratitude and respectful recognition to the Canadian Government which was the first to respond to the cry for help from the tortured and persecuted victims of Hitlerite barbarism and which accorded us permission to come to the great and free land of Canada, known and respected the world over for its noble humane actions and its democratic and libertarian traditions. We hope that we will not disappoint the country in the confidence imposed in us; we will conduct ourselves honestly and loyally; we will adjust ourselves rapidly to the way of life and the conditions of this country and will take part in the great effort of the Canadian people for complete victory and the destruction of barbarian, cannibalistic Hitlerism and Fascism, an effort being made jointly with all freedom-loving peoples.⁵⁹

Rarely disappointing, almost always contributing, the refugees rapidly found work in various fields and soon realized a stability and security unknown since they first fled their homelands. Some refugees, such as Fred Ullman, Eugene Hecht, and Joseph Cymbalista, managed to establish highly successful businesses, using capital

⁵⁸Reflecting the enduring power of this defining moment, some of the *Serpa Pinto* refugees maintained close contact with the other shipmates. One group of refugees from the ill-fated second voyage met every year at the Quebec resort town of Ste. Agathe, reliving their unforgettable experience and rekindling old friendships. As Oscar Kahn explains, "It's a strange club we have. We became close because we thought we were going to die." Bill Trent, "They Faced A German Sub In Open Boats," *Weekend Magazine*, *The Montreal Star*, 17 August 1963, 12. Another refugee, Morris Shenker, 30 October 1994, still telephones some of his shipmates every 7 April (the first voyage's day of arrival in Canada).

⁵⁹CJC, CA27, file 244, Saul Hayes to A. L. Jolliffe, 27 November 1944.

that had been transferred to U.S. bank accounts before the war.⁶⁰ Other refugees became immediately involved in Jewish institutions. During their first months in Montreal, most of the *Serpa Pinto* children attended a summer camp run by the local Jewish community. Totally immersed in an English-speaking, coreligionist-coordinated milieu, the camp provided the children with a clearly marked entry path into both Canadian and Jewish society.⁶¹ Perhaps "more aware and mature" than the average Canadian child, Charles Kon, Morris Shenker, and Maurice Baron remember helping children who were brought to Montreal in 1947 from European Displaced Person camps "feel more integrated" into the local community, by befriending them and silently sympathizing with their similar situations.⁶² Another refugee, Maria Lowy, "obtained a position at the Federation of Jewish Community Services, later called Allied Jewish Community Services (AJCS) and became the director of its Women's Division," remaining in this position until her retirement in 1971. Her husband, Eugene, also worked at the AJCS, in its bookkeeping division.⁶³

Active and accomplished, the arrivals provided leaven for the lump. Initially

⁶⁰Fred Ullman, interview by author, 16 October 1995, tape recording, Montreal; Joseph Cymbalista, interview by Stanley Asher, 30 October 1995, D.O. Films; Thomas Hecht, 7 September 1995.

⁶¹Morris Shenker, 30 October 1994.

⁶²Charles Kon, Morris Shenker, Maurice Baron, 6 April 1995.

⁶³Maria Lowy, correspondence with author, 20 August 1995.

assisted yet almost immediately making their presence felt in business and community life, Canada may have reluctantly adopted the *Serpa Pinto* refugees yet the newcomers "wholeheartedly adopted Canada."⁶⁴ In the words of one refugee, "those sealed trains brought us to a nice place."⁶⁵

⁶⁴Maurice Baron, facilitated by Stanley Asher, 6 April 1995.

⁶⁵Morris Shenker, 30 October 1994.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

"Not only is there but one way of *doing* things rightly, but there is only one way of *seeing* them, and that is, seeing the whole of them."
John Ruskin, The Two Paths (1859), Lecture ii

The Iberian refugees were primarily the object rather than the subject of history: forced to flee from the malevolence of Nazism, forced to rely upon the benevolence of bystanders, the direction and timing of the exiles' movements was largely contingent upon the actions of others. Marrying form and sense, the structure and content of this thesis has unapologetically reflected the basically involuntary nature of the refugee condition: attempting to address accurately the experience of the Iberian emigrants, historical context was given prominent consideration. Rejecting the false dichotomies of domestic/international, political/social, oral/documentary, narrative/problem-oriented, and marginal/mainstream, this holistic history sought to illuminate areas of overlap and intersection.

After establishing in chapter one the scholarly need for a more nuanced, realist reassessment of Canada's refugee policy, emphasis was placed upon the principal actors' contemporary context and subsequent limits of manoeuvrability. Further shifting the scholarly focus from moral condemnation toward historical explication, chapter two positioned Canada's interwar restrictivist refugee policy within its international and domestic framework. Arguing that a nation's immigration and

refugee policy was an amalgam comprised of internationalist aspirations and incremental solutions to domestic problems, Canada's response to the interwar refugee crisis was synchronized in concert with the rather ineffectual reaction of other nations. During the interwar period, refugees remained a relatively new phenomenon in international discourse -- a misunderstood miasma to be avoided rather than an emergent element to be addressed. Affected by the interwar climate of appeasement and isolationism, diplomats were generally more concerned with establishing and maintaining cordial relations with foreign states than with assisting refugees.

The international community's vacillation on the refugee issue was further entrenched by the onset of the Depression. Stressing that charity begins at home, and accordingly turning their sights inward, states generally saw refugees as financial and political liabilities -- a foreign affair that was not to be domestically downloaded. Consequently, nations drew lines in the sand, cautiously warning Germany to improve its treatment of minorities, yet issuing no ultimatums and offering no meaningful gestures of assistance.

As nations hastily erected barriers to impede refugee entry, Canada was preoccupied with domestic questions of identity and nation-building rather than international issues. In a transitional stage between colony and nation, Canada's standard diplomatic response was one of non-commitment -- saying little, and doing less, interwar Canada saw itself as a "fire-proof house," safe from the European conflagration. Despite its indifferent posture, Canada was not completely immune to

peer pressure from its primary allies, Great Britain and the United States. Especially in times of international crisis, Canadian diplomacy tended to transcend its principles of narrow isolationism, conforming to the new policy of action adopted by its elders.

Any tentative gesture of international commitment, however, was designed to conform to the Canadian context. Cognizant of the complexity of governing a country of two cultural and linguistic solitudes, William Lyon Mackenzie King consciously avoided statements that would accentuate divisions of opinion, placing the preservation of national unity above all else. Doing nothing by halves which could be done by quarters, King dealt with divisive issues (such as the question of refugee admissions) by making conciliatory statements to both sides, delaying decision-making for indefinite periods.

An exiguous response to refugee exigency, Canada's Iberian Refugee Movement, announced on 2 November 1943, was a political attempt to address increasing internal and external pressure to help alleviate the refugee crisis without antagonizing anti-refugee forces. Playing the politics of international appearances, the timing of this limited concession was directly influenced by the Bermuda Conference's proposal to establish a more adequate multilateral assistance scheme for European refugees. The actual terms of the Iberian movement, however, reveals that the government cautiously crafted its response to reflect domestic concerns. Consequently, no more than 200 families were provided with a temporary haven for the duration of the war, and the government made strict provisions to address the

public's prevalent concern about the potential for subversives to enter Canada along with this influx of refugees, passing possible candidates through a fine administrative mesh.

Caught in a strange state of limbo between arrival and departure, the approximately 2 000 refugees remaining in Iberia by early 1944 were evaluated for the Canadian movement. Although Canada fastidiously appraised applicants for its proposed program, the refugees were not passive participants in the selection process. Just as Canada rejected certain refugees, certain refugees rejected Canada: as the war drew to a close, those awaiting repatriation were understandably reluctant to travel to Canada for temporary haven. The refugees who did respond to the Canadian overture, and had their candidacy subsequently approved, discovered their lives in motion again.

The waiting game over, the Canadian challenge begun, the arrival of the refugees in Canada resulted in an interesting intersection of public, political, and personal perceptions. Emphasizing the numerically small yet symbolically significant Christian contingent, and presenting whenever possible the war angle to the story, the press coverage of the Iberian movement, while favourable and widespread, revealed that neither Jewish newcomers nor refugee issues were particularly resonant or newsworthy in editors' eyes.

The government's response to the Iberian refugees was coloured by two overriding issues: internal security and postwar status. Demonstrating a prevalent

preoccupation with potential Fifth Columnists, the RCMP unsuccessfully attempted to surveille the new arrivals. Attending to postwar status, the government approved the regularization of temporary visa holders on 25 October 1945. This decision was not based on humanitarian consideration, but rather was an attempt to resolve conclusively the administrative headache caused by a steady stream of refugees' requests to have visas extended or status changed.

Interaction between the predominantly eastern European, working-class Canadian Jewish community and the largely western European, middle-class Iberian refugees was accompanied by cultural shocks. As the *shtetl* met the city, friction was felt by both host and guest: the refugees were sometimes perceived as being rather aloof and overly critical of Canada, while they occasionally complained that the Canadian Jews had little appreciation of the flourishing Jewish cultural life in central and western Europe. Despite these initial moments of friction, most of the *Serpa Pinto* refugees settled in well, finding work and contributing to their local communities.

Offering a limited number of individuals a foothold in the whirlpool, the Iberian movement represented a slight deviation rather than a significant departure from Canada's normal approach to the Nazi era's refugee crises. Only dimly foreshadowing a more generous postwar response to refugees, the government's pragmatic gesture was an act of calculated kindness, an attempt to afford itself political time and space. Regardless of the government's motivations for initiating

the movement, the *Serpa Pinto* refugees practically benefited from this *ad hoc* action, escaping the whirlpool and establishing fecund roots in Canada.

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