



ИЗБИРАТЕЛЬНОСТЬ ВОСПОМИНАНИЙ О ВТОРОЙ МИРОВОЙ ВОЙНЕ В ПОРТУГАЛИИ: РОЛЬ ДОСУГА, ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ, ИСКУССТВА И СМИ

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Аннотация. Несмотря на то, что с момента окончания Второй мировой войны прошло более семидесяти пяти лет, значимость этого события в СМИ, наряду с появлением во всем мире мемориальных маркеров, способствуют его повсеместному присутствию в памяти людей. Тем не менее, восприятие этого исторического события все еще далеки от консенсуса, поскольку нации склонны интерпретировать и помнить эпизоды в соответствии со своей точкой зрения, тем самым усложняя память о Второй мировой войне и о Холокосте. В данной статье описываются особенности недавних португальских мемориальных стратегий и памяти о жертвах Второй мировой войны. Нейтральный статус страны, а также ряд культурных и исторических особенностей привели к распространению стереотипов, ведущих к представлению о Португалии как о изначально терпимой и кроткой нации. Это восприятие, которое часто создается за счет посещения памятников, музеев, туризма и досуга. Несмотря на доказательства, представленные, в основном, недавними академическими исследованиями и документальными фильмами, эти образы все еще продолжают подпитывать воображение португальцев и до сих пор преобладают в некоторых недавно созданных местах памяти о Второй мировой войне.

Ключевые слова: послевоенные нарративы, беженцы, португальская исключительность, национальная мифология, памятные места, досуг, индустрия развлечений, Холокост.

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SELECTIVITY OF MEMORIES OF WWII IN PORTUGAL: THE ROLE OF LEISURE, EDUCATION, THE ARTS AND THE MEDIA

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Abstract. Even though more than seventy-five years have passed since the end of WWII, its prominence in entertainment media productions along with the global emergence of memorial markers have contributed to its omnipresence in people's minds. Nevertheless, the perception of this historical event is still far from reaching consensus as nations tend to interpret and remember episodes in accordance with their perspective, thus adding up to the complexity of WWII and of Holocaust memories. With this in mind, this article describes the idiosyncrasies of Portugal's recent tribute and remembrance strategies for the victims of WWII. The country's neutral status, along with a set of cultural and historical specifics, has led to the dissemination of tropes leading to the idea of Portugal as an inherently tolerant and mild-mannered nation. A perception that is often fostered by resorting to monuments, museums, tourism and leisure activities. Despite evidence provided, mostly, by recent academic studies and documentary films, these tropes continue to fuel Portuguese popular imagination and are still prevalent in some recently established WWII memory places.

Keywords: post-war narratives, refugees, Portuguese exceptionalism, national mythologies, memorial sites, leisure, entertainment industry, Holocaust.

WWII remains a central occurrence in world history. In fact, recent studies establish it as the most ingrained instance of collective memory [Pennebaker et al. 2006; Paez et al., 2008]. While the magnitude and impact of this conflict has led many to consider it a historical turning point, its media prominence and the global emergence of memorial markers have also contributed to solidify its deep-rooted omnipresence in people's minds. However, evidence also shows that nations chose to remember episodes differently depending on the side they were or backed, Allies or Axis [Paez et al., 2008, p. 375]. If, to those, we add the perspective of neutral countries, then we are left with a plurality of voices – some of them still favouring a fictional account of events [Judt, 2005, p. 1–10] –, which is demonstrative of the complexity of WWII and of Holocaust memories. Moreover, it must be noted that the process of developing a WWII collective memory did not take place at the same time in the whole of Europe. National specifics contributed to the non-prioritization of tribute and remembrance strategies for the victims of WWII, with Portugal being a case in point.

Portugal, along with Sweden, Ireland, Switzerland, Turkey, Spain and the Vatican, belongs to the exclusive group of countries that managed to remain neutral till the end of WWII. However, their “neutrality” declarations were respected by Germany mostly because these countries were more useful to the war effort by being neutral. In the specific case of Portugal, its “behavior (sic) as a noncombatant meant carefully maneuvering (sic) between the Allies and the Axis with regard to trade” [Kaplan, 2020, p. 234]. Its peripheral location and the pursuit of an isolationist foreign policy also helped with the government's intention to keep distance from the event ravaging Europe. As a result of not having been directly involved in the war, Portugal not only managed to escape the bombings and extreme violence, but also became a sort of European Casablanca. A fact that has contributed to the development of a set of prevailing memories and narratives which are very different from those generated in participant countries, mostly because they derive from second-hand perceptions. This, along with a set of other cultural and historical specifics, has led Portuguese popular imagination, over the years, into believing and cultivating the idea of Portugal as a tolerant and mild-mannered country, rather than a nation whose psyche tends to oscillate between Prospero and Caliban [Santos, 2002]. Something that is plainly illustrated in the treatment given to WWII refugees by the Portuguese people and by the Portuguese government as it will be revealed in the sections that follow.

This article is solely devoted to the Portuguese case and is structured into four sections. The first one provides context regarding Portugal's role in WWII as it will be essential to understand the overall content of the article. Section two gives an overview of how WWII memory representations have changed over time in the media, in the cinema, in literature and in education. Concurrently, it will look into how all these media have shaped Portuguese people's perception of the conflict. The third section follows the second closely into considering the role of monuments, museums, tourism and leisure in this process too. Lastly, the fourth section resorts to *Vilar Formoso Fronteira da Paz memorial* as an example of one of many recent initiatives which are in harmony with Portugal's commitment as a Liaison member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)

[Portugal.gov.pt., 2019, par. 1] and, on a different note, demonstrate how popular myths regarding the Portuguese psyche are still prevalent in some recently established WWII memory places.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

With the escalation of persecutory policies against the Jewish community in Germany during the 1930s, many found solace in Portugal. The existence of a small Portuguese Jewish community, of about 400 families of Sephardic descent, along with the fact that until 1938 no visas were required to Jewish emigrants [Mucznik, 2012, p. 57; Kaplan, 2020, p. 28], encouraged them to move to Portugal. In addition, and unlike the majority of European countries, Portugal did not promote an antisemitic ideology which allow them to work, build a life and even acquire Portuguese citizenship [Mucznik, 2012, p. 57; Pimentel&Ninhos, 2015, p. 101]. Notwithstanding, Nazism was well-established in Portugal and had a loyal Portuguese fan base whose anti-Semitic displays are well documented [Mucznik, 2012, p. 77–81].

At the time, Portugal was living under a dictatorial regime – *Estado Novo* [New State] – with right-wing totalitarian traits which favoured nationalism, colonialism and anti-Communism. Under the leadership of António de Oliveira Salazar, Portugal's military dictatorship was in tune with the fascist ethos promoted by Germany and Italy. Nevertheless, and contrary to the stance adopted by the latter, the Portuguese regime recognised “the existence of religious, ethical and legal limits as far as the use of violence” [Nunes, 2016, p. 138] was concerned. What is more, its long-established alliance with Britain and the fact that some of the most distinguished members of the Portuguese Jewish community “were especially close to the regime” [Pimentel, Ninhos, 2015, p. 103] also contributed to Portugal's moderate posture towards war refugees [Kaplan, 2020, p. 73]. Nevertheless, after 1936, as the numbers of those enduring forced migration increased, the Portuguese government started to adopt stricter policies regarding the entrance of foreign citizens in the country for fear of an “invasion of undesirables” [Schaefer, 2018, p. 1]. In the specific case of Portugal, these dispossessed roaming masses were undesirable not because of their ethnicity, but because they could disrupt the labour market and lead to social insurrections. In other words, the restrictive measures that would be unleashed from 1936 onwards were based on pragmatic grounds rather than on ideological ones [Pimentel, Ninhos, 2015, p. 103–106].

Several circulars and directives were disseminated amongst Portuguese diplomatic bodies with the intent of preventing the issuing of visas to those seeking a way out of a certain death and, consequently, discouraging them from looking at Portugal as a country of refuge. Nonetheless, while risking their careers, many Portuguese diplomats disobeyed the regime's orders. Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul appointed for Bordeaux (1939–1940), is by far the better known for indiscriminately having issued thousands of visas to those being harassed by Nazi ideology. Yet, even if on a smaller

scale, a number of other Portuguese diplomats ignored the bureaucratic constraints that had been gradually imposed by the New State's regime and helped many Jewish and anti-Nazi elements escape mass extermination by either issuing transit visas or by providing sanctuary in their own homes or embassies [Mucznik, 2012, p. 203; Milgram, 2018, p. 465–466; Pimentel, 2018, p. 443]. Having witnessed the distress of those who approached them in need of urgent assistance and being aware of their fate should that assistance be refused, these diplomats felt compelled to show compassion and act resorting to the means available to them. Their defiance was not unnoticed by Salazar, who took measures to punish them career-wise [Mucznik, 2012, p. 205; Pimentel, 2018, p. 443].

Mostly as a result of Sousa Mendes' humanitarian endeavour, thousands of war refugees roamed towards Portugal, both by train and by car, in the end of June 1940 and congregated in Vilar Formoso, the main land border crossing between Portugal and Spain. Tired, famished and vulnerable, these people were welcomed, fed and provided accommodation by the local population. Unaccustomed to this kind of treatment, many refugees would write about it in ego-documents. Likewise, many were quick to notice the contrast between the peaceful and somehow pastoral Portuguese landscape and that of the remaining war-torn European countries [Ramalho, 2018, p. 88–89]. For those who succeeded in making this crossing, Portugal would become a provisional and liminal space in which WWII refugees would spend a transitional time since the regime was quick to declare, internationally, that Portugal was not a country of refuge [Pimentel, Ninhos, 2015, p. 5]. In any case, the vast majority of refugees had no intention of settling in Portugal as, towards the end of 1941, rumours started to spread that Germany might invade the Iberian Peninsula as a way to get to North Africa [Kaplan, 2020, p. 119]. Their aim was mostly North and South America, and Palestine. Hence, Portugal's geographical position made it the perfect gateway to reach those destinations and as a result became a sort of temporary safe haven. Nonetheless, many would still have to face a long and tedious red tape ordeal until boarding the ship that would take them to the promised land.

While in Portugal, refugees were "[c]ompelled to live in fixed residences in villages or towns some distance from the capital" [Kaplan, 2020, p. 168]. This had a double intention. On the one hand, wealthy refugees could balance luxury hotels' occupancy rates in seaside towns and, on the other hand, it would relieve Lisbon from congestion. This allowed for refugees to socialize with common Portuguese people from all sorts of backgrounds and occupations – landlords, café owners, social workers, amongst other possibilities. As a result, a trait that is commonly referred to in many ego-documents produced by refugees about the Portuguese is their kindness. Actually, "[t]he contrast between the government, which grudgingly accepted refugees, and those Portuguese people who welcomed them could not have been greater" [Kaplan, 2020, p. 88]. Portuguese people somehow empathised with the refugees' suffering and displayed gestures of generosity.

Without access to a free press, many Portuguese were ignorant of what was really happening outside Salazar's rural ideal. In fact, many were unaware of the reason

that brought these newcomers to Portugal, had no knowledge of the atrocities being committed and had no experience with immigration whatsoever. Nevertheless, because antisemitism was not a big issue, and most refugees were highly educated and genteel, won them the sympathy of the Portuguese people. While the pattern seems to be one of positive reports on the Portuguese character, there was also a set of circumstances that contributed to this overall positive reception. To start with, the government was cautious in forbidding refugees from working in Portugal as that may have led to competition within the already under stress Portuguese labour market. Further, refugees depended on relief associations, Jewish and non-Jewish, to help them financially as the government did not want to have them as a financial burden. Next in order, is the fact that many of them were well-off and became a means of sustenance for many families that rented them rooms and sold them goods [Pimentel, Ninhos, 2015, p. 106; Kaplan, 2020, p. 237]. Lastly, they were ethnically similar to the Portuguese. In other words, they were white.

These are, however, still facts that the vast majority of the population is unaware of. As such, the prevailing narrative, conveyed by both formal and informal media channels, is one that places emphasis on the somehow mythical notion that Portugal, when compared to other countries, is a mild-mannered country. That, along with the construct of *saudade* (a sort of nostalgia or feeling of longing that is considered exclusive to Portuguese or Portuguese-speaking peoples), is an essential feature of Portuguese exceptionalism.

THE ROLE OF ARTS, THE MEDIA AND EDUCATION

Not having experienced the atrocities other European countries have, Portugal's experience of WWII is one that relies heavily on second-hand accounts. These tend to be produced abroad, yet a renewed interest in Portugal's agency in WWII has caused a number of documents, both from an academic and artistic nature, to emerge in the country itself. In this regard, academia has been very dynamic in deconstructing a number of misconceptions. One of the most generalised is the notion there were no Portuguese Holocaust victims, which is untrue as there were many Portuguese Jews living in France, in the Netherlands and in Greece whose cries for help were ignored by Salazar and, as a result, perished in extermination camps. Moreover, many of the Portuguese immigrants in France who joined the Resistance were assassinated as a result [Mucznik, 2012, p. 179]. Recent research has also provided evidence that "the German government was considering Portugal as a possible actor in the Nazi plans for the 'Final Solution'" [Pimentel, Ninhos, 2015, p. 109]. Yet, and despite the relevance of these findings, they tend to be circumscribed in academic circles, thus failing to reach a wider public.

Despite being difficult to ignore in the fixed residence towns to which they had been sent to by the Portuguese government, the rest of the country had little knowledge of the presence of these anonymous masses. The press opted for turning a blind eye to their stories, preferring to focus instead on the many distinguished personalities – writers, intellectuals, aristocrats, actors, former rulers and members of royal families – that

had also chosen Portugal as a port of call before embarking towards the United States [Carmo, 2017, p. 241–242]. Furthermore, the decision to adopt a see-nothing, hear-nothing and say-nothing stance during the war turned Portugal into a spy paradise for both sides of the barricades, thus eliciting glamour and stressing Cascais, Estoril and Lisbon's momentary cosmopolitan imprint [Mucznick, 2012, p. 50–52; Pimentel, 2013]. A perception that is thoroughly depicted in Domingos do Amaral's novel *Enquanto Salazar Dormia* [Tr. *While Salazar was sleeping*] (2013). The-Oasis-in-Europe, along with the spy-paradise and the mild-mannered nation tropes as a depiction of Portugal, were extensively explored by Hollywood during the war. These films were welcomed by the regime as they could be used as effective entertaining and doctrinal devices. Likewise, they were part of the American propaganda machine and, as such, this favourable portrayal of Portugal was part of a bigger plan to lure the Portuguese regime into granting the USA access to the Azorian and Cape Verdian military basis and get it to stop selling wolfram to Germany [Lopes, 2016, p. 379].

There were, however, a few who occupied themselves with recording the stay of those less fortunate and of a less distinguished nature. The Portuguese writer and poet Irene Lisboa wrote several chronicles on the traumatic memories of those with whom she mingled and spoke with in the 1940s. These chronicles were published in the anti-regime magazine *Seara Nova*. Nearly two decades later, Alves Redol and Ilse Llosa, two fellow writers and the latter a refugee herself, publish two books in which the refugee experience is given visibility. Redol's is *O cavalo espantado* [Tr. *The astonished horse*] (1960) and Llosa's is *Sob Céus Estranhos* [Tr. *Under Strange Skies*] (2002) [Carmo, 2017, p. 240]. It is, however, possible to speculate, that these texts faced limited readership as, at the time, the vast majority of the Portuguese population was illiterate.

The end of the war, and the fact that not many refugees stayed in Portugal, led to the obliteration of this historical episode from Portugal's collective memory. With the post-war came more pressing issues: the regime's survival and the country's involvement in the Marshall Plan [Mucznick, 2012, p. 222–223]. With the turn of the century, the Portuguese literary and cinema circles follow academia's interest in Portugal's position regarding the Holocaust. Though only a handful of authors has attempted to tackle the topic of the Holocaust in their literary productions, in many cases for fear of insulting the memory of those who have actually lived it [Tomé, 2014, p. 125–126], it is possible to find some Portuguese literary productions in bookshops. While authors such as Ilse Llosa, José Jorge Letria, Manuel Margarido and Conceição Dinis Tomé can be often found in the young adults' section, João Pinto Coelho's carefully researched novels *Os Loucos da Rua Mazur* [Tr. *The Madmen of Mazur Street*] (2017) and *Perguntem a Sarah Gross* [Tr. *Ask Sarah Gross*] (2018) are in the novels section. While still tentative, these literary ventures into such a sensitive and controversial topic emerge out of an attempt to trigger compassion towards the plight of people they never met but that, for the duration of the narrative, they are made to walk in their shoes. This type of "literary imagination" is meant to function as an empathy booster [Nussbaum, 1997].

Even though Portugal's experience of the war was one of shortages, rationing and hunger [Rosas, 1998, p. 284], a number of filmmakers have revisited those times and brought new light into actors long forgotten. A case in point is Daniel Blaufuks, a Portuguese artist of Jewish descent, who releases the documentary film *Sob Céus Estranhos: uma história de exílio* [Tr. *Under Strange Skies: A story of exile*] (2002). In a close dialogue with Ilse Losa's book, we are made to witness the exile experience of Blaufuks' grandparents in Portugal. Ten years later, Nicholas Oulman, another Portuguese filmmaker of Jewish descent, releases *Debaixo do Céu* [Tr. *Under the Sky*] (2017), a documentary about the temporary stay of Jewish refugees in Portugal in the 1940s. Both films were defining in the sense that they introduced this topic to younger audiences and to those who had remained ignorant of it due to the silence surrounding it. While following a different narrative path, the director João Canijo also acknowledges the perspective of some refugees in his documentary *Fantasia Lusitana* [Tr. *Lusitanian Fantasy*] (2010) on the inconsistencies of *Estado Novo*.

On a fictional level, Francisco Manso e João Correa direct the biopic *O Cônsul de Bordéus* [Tr. *The Consul of Bordeaux*] (2012), while Carlos Saboga directs *A Uma Hora Incerta* [Tr. *At an Uncertain Time*] (2015). Again, both motion pictures deal with fictionalised accounts of life as a WWII refugee having Portugal as set. Despite the cinematic contribution, the truth is that these films tend to navigate Cinema Society circuits as they don't have the allure of Hollywood productions, thus leading only a fortunate few to have access to these national narratives. Sadly, the vast majority of viewers continues to consume a more sanitized version of history, one that more often than not leads to its trivialization and to the homogenization of war violence [Tomé, 2014, p. 124].

Portugal's accession to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) – first as an observer country, in 2009, and as a full member in 2019 –, has also had an impact regarding the attention that the topic of the Holocaust has been given in schools and in the media. IHRA's educational guidelines have been adopted and the school curricula now incorporate the Holocaust amongst its essential learning topics of the History subject [Portugal.gov.pt., 2019, par. 3]. Concurrently, MEMOSHOA, a national Association for the Memory and Teaching about the Holocaust, in a joint effort with Yad Vashem has been promoting a number of events. Furthermore, it has teamed up with several media channels in the production and broadcasting of media contents in an attempt to set the record straight, particularly, amidst young adults. Overall, these actions aim at keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive while at the same time declaring it a problem of the whole of humanity.

THE ROLE OF LEISURE, TOURISM AND PUBLIC SPACE

"Devoir de mémoire, droit à l'oubli?" [Tr. *Duty of memory, right to be forgotten?*] was the main theme of 2001's *Le Monde Forum*. During several days, intellectuals, scientists, writers and artists reflected on the pathologies of war memories, and in particular on the memory of the Holocaust, which can be shattering. The interactive debate touched upon

issues such as the “hostility towards memory”, the “commemorative obsession” and “a past that doesn’t pass” [Bertrand, 2003, par. 1].

The handling of war memories is a delicate subject [Winter, 2001] given that they can ease the mourning process and calm remembrances, yet they can easily re-open wounds as well. Though Military Tourism is one of the axes of the 2027 Tourism Strategy of Portugal [Welcome, n.d., par. 1], due to its neutral status during WWII, one will not find memorial monuments or war tourism sites as in other countries which actively took sides. It is, therefore, worth to have a look at how other countries are representing war in the public space as well as in tourism and leisure activities, before zooming into Portugal.

The *Le Monde Forum* of 2001 also questioned whether France was sick of its own memory, for France has, perhaps like no other country, many *lieux des memoires* in the shape of museums, monuments or memorial sites [Kritzman, Nora, 1998]. In Asia there has also been a boom of WWII memorial sites with approaches fluctuating from public engagement to narrative suppression by excluding them from public attention. The discourses also range from emphasising victimhood to instigating reconciliation. In the Chinese province of Guangxi, a 40-acre park was set up in memory of the Flying Tigers, the first American Volunteer Group helping China in the War. An alliance between American and Chinese travel agents stimulates international travellers to visit the park and its memorial museum, the target group being the descendants of American soldiers, their families and friends [Schumacher, 2015, p. 568]. This said, not all visits to memorial sites or monuments are planned. In fact, many visitors are just accidental passer-by tourists [Haskins, Rancourt, 2016]. Not infrequently, those memorial sites end up in “must-see attractions” websites, luring and inviting tourists without a strong emotional connection to the subject to tick them off their list. As an example, and not surprisingly, TripAdvisor lists a number of comments to the Eternal Flame memorial monument to the victims of WWII in Sarajevo that go from “special place in memory of everyone” to “not very special” and “used as a photo moment” [Eternal Flame, 2021].

The impact that a visit to places of remembrance has in the cultural memory of the beholder depends on the level of affective predisposition and on his/her motive to visit it [Pavlakovic and Perak, 2017]. The same applies to the level of engagement. The intensity of the experience will depend on whether one is a simple spectator of a monument, or on whether one is actively participating in a memorial ritual [Haskins and Rancourt, 2017, p. 11]. As put by Robert Musil, “[t]here is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument” [1932/1987, p. 61]. An argument that is still valid as excess leads to banalization. There is a large range of leisure war remembrance and memorial activities, permanent or ephemeral events, in existence worldwide. Memorial sites, war cemeteries and re-enactments, with different symbolic appeals, keep on being erected to capture attention or to trigger emotional responses. However, and in order to avoid becoming a *cliché*, some have started to stress the human element in them. For instance, the Liberation Route through Europe does not only focus on the key locations from the liberation of Europe of World War II, but also on the personal stories of those involved [Europe, n.d.]. By adding real names and faces, this remembrance project grants those portrayed their humanity back, thus pointing

in the opposite direction of that intended by the Nazis which sought to deprive them of an identity and dignity.

As for re-enactment events, they are a unique opportunity for interaction between local communities, heritage organisations and tourists [Carnegie and McCabe, 2008, p. 355]. However, World War II re-enactments are not without controversy as history might be still too fresh to allow for events of this nature to be enjoyed simply as pure entertainment [Tibbetts, 2007, par. 1].

Speaking of entertainment, World War II has inspired many war games. Yet, many pass over the Holocaust [Chapman and Linderoth, 2015] avoiding the risk of playing it down or being ill-suited, given its sensitive nature [Hammond and Pötzsch, 2019, p. 1–4]. There are a few exceptions though. Such is the case of the Nazi Zombie, a mini game embedded in the popular *Call of Duty*, which generated US\$500 million of earnings in only three days after its release [Dring, 2017, par. 1]. Games can be seen as “memory devices” [Sterczewski, 2019, p. 112] which in (mis)representing the past mainly for entertainment purposes, do perpetuate its memory which will always be conditioned by the game’s design and narrative, and coloured by the user’s imagination in a “complex but co-evolving dialectic” [Payne, 2016, p. 11, 14]. The role of games in arbitrating history will continue being a fruitful area of study, given the many angles it can be approached from [Hammond and Pötzsch, 2019, p. 7].

As it can be seen, WWII offers fruitful ground for both entertainment and consciousness-raising projects around the globe, with the Holocaust and World War II museums being the forefathers [Williams, 2007]. Despite its neutral past, Portugal has not been immune to this trend. Thus, wishing to honour its pledge to the IHRA [Portugal.gov.pt., 2019, pars. 1–6] and to the Council of Europe of never forgetting the Holocaust, two World War II related memorial museums were created in Portugal in the last five years. One of them is the first Museum of the Holocaust in the Iberian Peninsula and was inaugurated on the 5th of April 2021 in Oporto. The other one, has had its doors open to the public for the past five years and is the focus of the next section.

VILAR FORMOSO FRONTIER OF PEACE, MEMORIAL MUSEUM

In August 2017 the small, Portuguese border town – Vilar Formoso – witnessed the grand opening of the Museum “Vilar Formoso Frontier of Peace, Memorial of the Refugees and the Consul Aristides de Sousa Mendes”. The memorial is meant to honour, not only the memory of the many who were able to cross the Portuguese-Spanish border while in flight from Nazi Germany, but also Aristides de Sousa Mendes and the population of Vilar Formoso for its hospitality.

This small museum compound is the outcome of a research project developed within the Portuguese Network of Jewish Quarters – Routes of Sepharad and benefited from EEA Grants, as well as from the support of the Portuguese Government funding system

for cultural heritage sites. The project was headed and also partially funded by the Municipality of Almeida, to which Vilar Formoso belongs, as a preventive measure to halt memory erosion regarding the role of that border town, and by extension of Portugal, in saving the lives of many in recent history [Vilar Formoso, n.d.]. For the vast majority of those who crossed the border, Portugal became equated with humanitarian relief and peace.

This somehow explains the structure and content of the museum compound. Bearing in mind that Vilar Formoso is crossed by both road and railway traffic, the museum occupies two formerly derelict, train-station warehouses which have been converted into an effective storytelling device. The choice of the train station's warehouses is, in itself, quite symbolic as they invoke the long and stressful train journey taken by the displaced and dispossessed. In fact, the train station's tile panel announcing VILAR FORMOSO is the bearer of symbolic meaning as well, as it functioned as an announcement for the "frontier of peace". The visitors are invited to enter a memory generator apparatus and participate in an immersive experience as they embark on a journey themselves through the six sections of the exhibition titled "People Like Us", "The Beginning of the Nightmare", "The Trip", "Vilar Formoso: Peace Frontier", "Around Portugal" and "The Departure". While engaged in the journey, the visitors are made to witness and feel, vicariously, the trauma, the fear, the appeasement and even the gratitude of the persecuted. In other words, the metaphor of the journey, with all its tropes, is studiously used to trigger a narrative transportation [Gerrig, 2018] experience, meaning the "psychological process that links effective stories to human sense-making, learning and communication" [Moscardo, 2020, p. 1], while at the exhibition.

Albeit thoroughly documented and carefully designed, the exhibition's storyline places considerable emphasis on the Vilar Formoso population's generosity towards those seeking refuge, as well as on the relished tourist experience that some affluent refugees had while waiting for permission to embark towards their final destination. On the other hand, Portugal's dictatorial regime antagonism regarding this state of affairs is given little prominence, thus promoting the notion that Portugal, but for a handful of statesmen, was even back then an essentially tolerant country willing to welcome all of those who came its way. However, flattering this perspective may be for Portugal, several instances in the past, and in the recent history of the country, have proven that that is not always the case. Moreover, ego-documents – mostly, letters, interviews and memoirs from refugees – are given prominence in the "Vilar Formoso: Peace Frontier" and in the "Around Portugal" sections as they attest the country's favourable depiction. Despite their perceived accuracy, many of these documents were produced with readers and viewers in mind. As such, this poses limitations as "[i]n representing themselves to this imagined audience in the best light, sometimes called 'self-fashioning,' they may have emphasized or omitted portions of their narratives" [Kaplan, 2020, p. 17].

Furthermore, and in addition to its cultural heritage preservation concerns, this museum compound also aims at becoming a pull factor for tourism in a remote, off-the-beaten track and scarcely populated region by combining cultural and architectural heritage

assets [Ribeiro, 2014, p. 10]. A rehabilitation intent that aims at, in some way, regain the once-held status, brought to a halt by the Schengen Agreement, as a mandatory pit-stop for those crossing the border. Something that, according to recent data, is gradually being accomplished considering that since its opening this museum has become a major landmark, as far as memorial museums go, in Portugal (according to the local press, 16,700 people have visited the museum prior to March 2020), and a tourist site for passers-by. Nevertheless, a favoured segment is that made up of Jewish tourists coming from all over the world, as evidenced by the many tour operators that work with this particular segment. This somehow explains the tourism promotion leaning of the "Around Portugal" section of the exhibition. However, by portraying Portugal as a tourism resort for the wealthy, full of happy WWII refugees sunbathing and enjoying their temporary stay at the best hotels Portugal had to offer, the exhibition, while insisting on the notion that Portugal is a welcoming and joyful place for tourist, might also promote the all-Jews-are-rich stereotype and, thus, reinforce the antisemitic beliefs that it seeks to debunk.

CONCLUSION

It is a fact that memory can play tricks, can be selective and episodic. For historical reasons, Portugal did not experience WWII the way most European countries did. Hence, it cannot report trauma in the same way others did. In fact, it would be unethical to even attempt at trying to describe something that for many is still unmentionable because it is unimaginable. Adding to this, Portugal was spared from mass destruction and deprived of information. As a result, choices were made regarding what was worthy of recollection while cherishing a perspective that was beneficial to the regime. Hence, the stress fell on the notion of the mild-mannered and humanitarian country, even though the Portuguese government did everything in its power to bar destitute refugees from entering the country. Those fortunate enough to cross the border found themselves experiencing a transitional time in a provisional and liminal space. In other words, they became trapped in an in-between situation where they lived a provisional life until they could start a new one overseas. As the provisional space itself, Portugal consistently affirmed its neutrality, yet it faced its own in-between situation. Impoverished, frail and peripheral, spent the war cornered between Britain and Germany as it relied on both to survive. Moreover, if on the hand the regime acted selfishly and brutishly towards those who sought help, on the other hand its population demonstrated to have the nobility of character the government lacked. Thus, Portugal embodied both Prospero and Caliban at the same time.

Nowadays, Portugal, while not discarding the myth of the mild-mannered country, has aligned itself with other countries in adopting a stance that supports the idea of the Holocaust memory as part of the European identity [Mucznik, 2012, p. 222]. As a result, and as demonstrated, it has created and invested in policies which aim at fostering Holocaust education, research, and remembrance. This collective compromise seems to acknowledge that despite claiming to be a beacon of civilization, Europe has shown time and time again that it also holds a beast within that when unleashed is capable

of unutterable cruelty. Therefore, memorial monuments may contribute to keep the beast caged. However, and despite being intended as empathy boosters, they have a limited reach as the possibility of having a common collective memory of WWII is now understood as an impossibility. As a result, and notwithstanding the efforts being made on behalf of a common remembrance of things past, “[a] common European memory is more likely to be constructed in terms of expectations rather than from an analysis of past events” [Rouso, 2004, as cited in Leggewie, 2014, par. 31].

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