

“The Serene Skies of Kobe” Memoires of the Kobe Jewish Refugee Community, 1940-1941

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We were not just in another country, but had entered an entirely different culture, with a very different mindset. And for a moment we were finally able to re-lax. We could stay in Japan for the rest of the war! We had only one question: where are they going to take us? We were told, “Kobe.”¹

In the early years of the Second World War, when the international community had effectively closed its doors to refugees, 4,608 European Jews² found haven in Japan, “in the hands of the ally of their most deadly enemy.”³ Approximately half (2,132)⁴ had been granted visas by Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese consul in Kaunas, Lithuania. Sugihara disregarded orders from his Foreign Ministry by issuing Japanese transit visas to Polish and Lithuanian Jews who did not possess valid entry visas—to the United States, for example—that would guarantee the brevity of their stay

- 1 Samuel Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War: From Bialystok to Shanghai to the Promised Land, an Oral History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 76.
- 2 Pamela Shatzkes, “Kobe: A Japanese Haven for Jewish Refugees, 1940–1941,” *Japan Forum*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1991): 267.
- 3 Marvin Tokayer and Mary Swart, *The Fugu Plan: The Untold Story of the Japanese and the Jews during World War II* (New York: Paddingtoess, 1979), 182.
- 4 Pamela Rotner Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees: A World War II Dilemma* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 164.

in Japan.⁵⁶ Those lucky enough to receive a visa from Sugihara embarked on a journey across Russia via the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, where they boarded a Japanese fishing boat that navigated across the Sea of Japan to Tsuruga, a small port on Japan's western coast. From there, the refugees travelled by rail to Kobe, a major military depot and Japan's second largest port.⁷

Although the Jewish refugee community in Japanese-occupied Shanghai has received attention in both the academic and popular spheres, its counterpart in Kobe has been largely overlooked,⁸ perhaps due to the fact it was comparatively short-lived; the first refugees arrived in July 1940 and the last departed in September 1941.⁹ Nevertheless, refugees' memories of Kobe are remarkably rich. In this paper, I analyze oral histories of the Jewish refugee experience in Kobe as examples of what Takashi Fujitani, Geoffrey White and Lisa Yoneyama call "critical memories." In the introduction to *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, Fujitani, White, and Yoneyama define "critical remembering" as a process that both "denaturalizes and dismembers" dominant memories and "recuperates... memories that have been distorted, disavowed, or effaced by the effects of power."¹⁰ Memories of the Jewish refugee experience in Kobe are, by the definition of Fujitani et al., "perilous" for two reasons. First, there are fewer and fewer alive to remember this often overlooked subset of Holocaust memories. And second, their memories challenge—or at least complicate—dominant memories of World War II, principally by recalling an instance of Japanese moral superiority on the international stage. But, as Fujitani et al. point out, experience and memory are not independent of relations of power; for this reason, the author has asked not only how these oral histories challenge dominant memories, but also how power dynamics inform the memories articulated. To investigate this question, I use Michel Foucault's definition of power in "The Subject and Power" as

5 Sugihara collaborated with the Dutch consul in Kaunas to provide refugees with Curaçao entry visas, but their validity was uncertain. See Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 114.

6 Ibid., 166.

7 Shatzkes, "Kobe: A Japanese Haven for Jewish Refugees," 264-5.

8 Ibid., 257.

9 Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 131.

10 Takashi Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 2.

“a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others [but] upon their actions.”¹¹

The strengths of the oral histories I have chosen to analyze are numerous, but they also have some limitations that should be acknowledged. Because I could only use sources accessible through Interlibrary Loan or online could be used, the diversity of the subjects is limited. For example, all are male. Although Samuel Iwry remembers most of the refugees as being young men,¹² there were also many refugee women and children.¹³ In fact, another potential limitation is that two of the subjects (Andrew Glass and Leo Melamed) were children while in Kobe; I qualify this limitation with “potential,” however, because their memories provide a visceral contrast to those of the adults. Furthermore, all but one of the subjects bring an American perspective to their testimonies, for only Enrique Kaczor did not ultimately end up in the United States, but in Chile. Given that all interviews were conducted between 1989 and 2011, one must also keep in mind that some of the subjects were aware of scholarly interpretations of wartime Japanese-Jewish relations, principally that put forward by Marvin Tokayer in his 1979 book *The Fugu Plan*. Finally, one of the subjects (Leo Hanin) was not a refugee himself, but was secretary of the Jewish Community of Kobe, the organization responsible for the refugees during their stay in Japan (and known by its telegram address, “Jewcom”).

The Jewish community in Kobe predated the refugees’ arrival, and was composed of about 25 families, both Sephardic and Ashkenazi.¹⁴ Hanin relates that the former regarded the latter with some contempt because many were White Russian refugees, “stateless people” who had arrived in Kobe via China and Manchuria in the 1920s and 30s.¹⁵ Most, including Hanin, were affiliated with the import-export industry.¹⁶ In 1937, Anatole

11 Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1982): 789.

12 Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 77-8.

13 The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has many more oral histories—including some with female subjects—in their physical collections.

14 The number given by both Sakamoto (*Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 23) and Tokayer (*The Fugu Plan*, 124). Iwry remembers there being 50 families (*To Wear the Dust of War*, 76); Shatzkes agrees in “Kobe: A Japanese Haven for Jewish Refugees,” but does not cite her source (265).

15 Leo Hanin, “Oral History Interview with Leo Hanin,” video file, United States Memorial Museum, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://collections.usmm.org/search/catalog/irn506762>, 7:00.

16 Tokayer, *The Fugu Plan*, 122.

Ponve (néé Ponevejsky), who had grown up in Harbin, founded the Jewish Community of Kobe (for Ashkenazim), physically located in “a cluster of rooms in a narrow lane at the foot of the steep hills.”¹⁷ Although they had established a synagogue, the community was not very religious; “mostly,” Hanin said, “our people played cards.”¹⁸ Indeed, Hanin’s memories of the pre-war Jewish community are carefree: “[Life over there was] very easy. Being young, friends, social, parties, playing cards, travelling....”¹⁹ The fact that the Jewish community was “like a club”²⁰ did not, however, impede their ability to organize upon the refugees’ arrival; if anything, the community’s fraternity would serve them well as they sought housing, funding, and visas.

Indeed, once the refugees arrived in Kobe, they had little contact with Japanese authorities. Jewcom was “in charge of [their] present lives and uncertain futures” from the moment the refugees arrived on Japanese soil and in many ways functioned as a pseudo-government.²¹ Representatives of Jewcom (which received most of its funding from the United States Joint Distribution Committee as well as HICEM, a European Jewish relief organization)²² met newly arrived refugees in Tsuruga and accompanied them to Kobe. “Hundreds of people started to come in,” Hanin remembers. “Where do we put them? We need housing we need food.... There were problems. There were so many people. We had to have meetings every day. Food, distribution of money, getting visas.”²³ Kaczor, a recipient of a Sugihara visa and one of the “hundreds” Hanin remembers, says, “The truth is that the Jewish community in Kobe helped a lot. They got us a house.” (“La verdad es que ayudó mucho la colonia Judía en Kobe. Nos consiguió una casa.”)²⁴ Iwry echoes Kaczor when he remembers that the “[vibrant] Jewish community in Kobe...took care of us.”²⁵ Not only did Jewcom function as the refugees’ government, but the refugees recognized it as such. They organized themselves in groups of engineers, doctors, miners, journalists,

17 Ibid., 123.

18 Hanin, Oral History Interview, 6:00.

19 Ibid., 8:45.

20 Ibid., 6:00.

21 Tokayer, *The Fugu Plan*, 134.

22 Shatzkes, “Kobe: A Japanese Haven for Jewish Refugees,” 265.

23 Hanin, Oral History Interview, 30:00.

24 Enrique Kaczor, “Oral History Interview with Enrique Kaczor,” video file, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn73272>, 21:00.

25 Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 76.

etc. and would send representatives to Hanin, the secretary of Jewcom, to sort out any difficulties that arose.²⁶ Hanin remembers a delegation of six rabbis who asked him to arrange for a shipment of Passover matza from New York; although American imports were forbidden in Japan, Hanin was able to secure the approval of Japanese authorities.²⁷

What is of greatest Foucaultian import, however, is the fact that Jewcom kept the refugees' documents in a safe at headquarters; the refugees could not travel without them.²⁸ In this way, Jewcom circumscribed the movement of the refugees and "act[ed] upon their actions." Although it did so only as an intermediary between the Japanese government and the refugees, the fact is that Jewcom's control of housing, documents, and finances (those without financial resources of their own were given an allowance of 1.5 yen each day)²⁹ led refugees to recognize it as the most immediate institutional authority in their lives. Hanin relates a story in which a woman, accompanied by her child, came to see him at the Jewcom office:

She says, "I need money to go to Yokohama" [to see the American consul]. I said, "The Community does not have money for that purpose. The money we get from the Joint is for food, for clothing, rents..." "Okay," she says. She had a bracelet. She says, "Here, take this." I said, "This is not a pawn shop, Madame. This is the Jewish Community. I'm sorry." [She said], "Take my child!" It was painful, and young as I was, I wanted to cry.... So what does one do? I said, "How much is the ticket?"³⁰

"That remained in my mind for all those years," Hanin reflects. "I'll never forget that." He shifts uncomfortably in his chair as he tells the story and sighs before moving on. Evidently, even at the time of his interview 50 years later (in 1989), Hanin continued to be preoccupied by this encounter in which he struggled to maintain his position of authority, but eventually succumbed to his humanitarian inclination to aid a desperate woman.

A requisite of Foucault's theory is that the subject of the power relationship—the individual or individuals whose actions are acted upon—

26 Hanin, Oral History Interview, 41:30.

27 *Ibid.*, 40:00.

28 *Ibid.*, 36:00.

29 Shatzkes, "Kobe: A Japanese Haven for Jewish Refugees," 266.

30 Hanin, Oral History Interview, 39:15.

must have a “means of escape or possible flight.”³¹ One might point out that the refugees were stuck in Japan without valid destination visas and were quite literally unable to “escape,” therefore rendering the relationship between the refugees and Jewcom something other than a Foucaultian relationship of power. For Foucault, however, escape and “insubordination” are one and the same.³² Hence, Hanin’s anecdote about the woman desperate to travel to Yokohama not only reveals that Jewcom circumscribed the movement of the refugees (or, as Foucault might say, “structure[d] [their] possible field of action”),³³ but demonstrates just how fitting Foucault’s theory is. Is the woman’s insistence not an overt act of insubordination—of resistance to Jewcom’s power over her actions—and therefore evidence of the power relationship that existed? That being said, while Foucault theorizes that insubordination will culminate with the authority figure forcing the insubordinate to submit,³⁴ the encounter in the Jewcom office ended with Hanin bending to the refugee woman’s request, thus weakening both his and Jewcom’s authority. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that Jewcom was, essentially, a humanitarian organization, the refugees’ wellbeing its end goal. Indeed, it should be stressed that Jewcom’s authority was by no means adverse to the refugees’ interests, nor should the extent of its power be overemphasized; rather, what we can conclude is that Jewcom was the most immediate institutional authority in the lives of the refugees.

Jewcom was, however, subordinate to the Japanese government. After all, as “stateless people,” Jewcom officials were little more than refugees themselves. Sakamoto argues that “Jewcom was successful because it nurtured relations with [Japanese] officials.”³⁵ One Japanese man was an instrumental ally to the Community in this regard: Abraham Kotsuji. A Hebrew scholar and Jewish convert as well as a past official of the South Manchurian Railway,³⁶ Kotsuji functioned as an intermediary between Jewcom and the Japanese government, and was responsible for extending the refugees’ visas so that they would be able to remain in Kobe for up to eight months (instead of the original seven to fifteen days allowed by the

31 Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 794.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., 790.

34 Ibid., 794.

35 Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 141.

36 Ibid., 109.

Sugihara transit visas).³⁷ In his memoir, Kotsuji recounts a meeting with the Japanese Foreign Minister, Yosuke Matsuōka, during which Matsuōka advised Kotsuji that the local prefectural government in Kobe might extend the visas despite the Foreign Ministry's refusal to do so. "The easiest way" to get the prefectural government to extend the visas, Kotsuji writes, "was to buy them, not by obvious bribery, but with liquor, parties, and small gifts."³⁸ Although Iwry was not involved in the administration of Jewcom, he had a sense of the situation: "The Kobe committee [Jewcom] and the Japanese officials that they were friendly with allowed us somehow to stay for months and months, as we needed. Somehow the necessary bribes were paid."³⁹ Sakamoto points out that Jewcom spent \$923.90 on New Year's gifts for Japanese officials between November 1, 1940 and February 15, 1941, further suggesting the Kobe Jewish community's willingness to invest in positive relations with the government.⁴⁰

In fact, Jewcom overall managed to maintain its institutional authority, even in the eyes of Japanese officials. The representatives who met the refugees in Tsuruga were "so thoroughly recognized by the Japanese Government," Jewcom vice president Moise Moiseff observed in a 1941 report to HIAS, "that even American Jews have found themselves unable to land until the Kobe Jewish representative has given his consent."⁴¹ There were, in fact, instances in which Jewcom asserted their institutional agency by resisting the Japanese state. Hanin remembers two Japanese officials who, suspecting that there were Soviet spies among the refugees, asked him to examine each of the refugees' passports for false photographs. Hanin refused. "As far as I'm concerned all the Jews are Jewish refugees.... We don't ask who they are [or] what they are," he remembers responding. "You don't want to cooperate with us?" they asked. To which Hanin replied, "I'll cooperate with you.... But I have no time to look at each passport, there are too many of them."⁴² Resistance also took less innocent forms. Fifty of the refugees decided they wanted to serve in the British army, and working with the British consul in Kobe, Jewcom "smuggled" them out of

37 Shatzkes, "Kobe: A Japanese Haven for Jewish Refugees, 1940–1941," 266.

38 Abram Kotsuji, *From Tokyo to Jerusalem* (New York: B. Geis Associates, 1964), 163.

39 Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 77.

40 Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 141.

41 *Ibid.*, 94.

42 Hanin, Oral History Interview, 36:00.

Japan. “We had the names of the people who wanted to volunteer,” Hanin remembers. “I would call up the British consul, meet him in a bar, and over a couple of beers I would give him the names. He would arrange to have them assigned as crew members on British cargo boats that were sailing from Japan to India [or] to Singapore.”⁴³

Although Jewcom was the most immediate institutional authority in their lives, the refugees were also subject to the power of the Japanese state. “Somebody was looking at you, all the time watching you,” Hanin remembers.⁴⁴ “Immediately after I sat down on the train,” Iwry reflects, “a security person would also sit down...to ask questions.”⁴⁵ The authorities were not the only suspicious ones; one of the Kobe neighborhood associations (*tonarigumi*) was suspicious of the yeshiva students and “their endless humming and singing” until they decided they were “religious fanatics” and “harmless.”⁴⁶ Kaczor recounts getting lost on a walk in his Kobe neighborhood shortly after arriving in Japan. Eventually, he asked a Japanese civilian to show him to the police station. “When I arrived at the police station, they asked me when I arrived in Japan, in what [ship] I arrived, what my name was, and they found me [in some documents]. [Then] they took me to my house!” (*Cuando llegué a la policia, me preguntó cuando llegué a Japón, en que llegué, como me llamo, y me encontró. ¡Me llevó hasta mi casa!*).⁴⁷ This story reveals not only the thoroughness of Japanese records, but also the fact that the authorities were keeping track of the refugees.

Sakamoto argues that the refugees felt safe “even if they felt they were being watched”; indeed, Iwry, Glass, and Melamed all peripheralize memories of hardship. Melamed, for example, remembers “the serene skies of Kobe,”⁴⁸ while Glass reflects that “living in Japan was a lot of fun.”⁴⁹ One might argue that these glowing memories are symptomatic of their youth while in Kobe (Melamed was eight years old and Glass five), yet Iwry, who was a young man at the time, mentions something similar:

43 Ibid., 34:00.

44 Ibid., 8:15.

45 Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 78.

46 Ibid., 79.

47 Kaczor, Oral History Interview, 20:50.

48 Kinue Tokudome, “The Mission Sugihara Would Be Proud of,” in *Courage to Remember* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 97.

49 Andrew Glass, “Oral History Interview with Andrew Glass,” audio file, United States Holocaust Museum, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn516539>, 58:00.

“The charm of pre-war Japan.”⁵⁰ Hanin, on the other hand, who was not a refugee, acknowledges that refugee life in Kobe was difficult: “One tatami mat for two people, no pillows, no blankets, nothing,” he says of the living conditions upon the refugees’ arrival. “People crying, were upset. It was painful.”⁵¹ Tokayer recounts a few distressing incidents that came to pass in the refugee community, including the arrest of two refugees charged with spying,⁵² and the assault of a rebbe and a rabbi by a group of Nazis on a train to Tokyo.⁵³ Of the refugees, however, only Kaczor, when asked why he didn’t want to stay in Japan, emphatically responded, “there was nothing to eat there [in Japan]” (“*No había nada de comer allá.*”).⁵⁴ Otherwise, memories are overwhelmingly positive. The only “unpleasant moment” Melamed recalls is a small earthquake.⁵⁵ As Sakamoto argues, refugees’ experiences were no doubt colored by the sense of relief they felt at having escaped Europe,⁵⁶ relief palpable decades later in their oral histories. “And for a moment we were finally able to relax,” Iwry writes of his arrival in Japan. “We could stay in Japan for the rest of the war!”⁵⁷ Melamed echoes Iwry: “When we got to Japan, [everything] changed. [There was] no real fear, no one was chasing us. It was as if someone suddenly lifted the curtain and a new world came upon us.”⁵⁸

Just as significant as this sense of relief were the “gestures of friendship from locals”;⁵⁹ Japanese civilians’ kindness brings refugees to remember “the charm of pre-war Japan” and “the serene skies of Kobe” when they were in fact living under difficult conditions in a country that was merely “tolerat[ing] their presence.”⁶⁰ Indeed, memories of Japanese civilians’ kindness challenge Allied memories of “Japan as enemy.” “One day,” Iwry remembers, “a delegation of Japanese came over, to our place where we lived, in the little street in Kobe. [They were] carrying little blue and white

50 Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 85.

51 Hanin, Oral History Interview, 38:30.

52 Tokayer, *The Fugu Plan*, 149.

53 *Ibid.*, 172.

54 Kaczor, Oral History Interview, 26:10.

55 Leo Melamed, *Escape to the Futures* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996), 49.

56 Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 143.

57 Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 76.

58 Tokudome, “The Mission,” 102.

59 Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 143.

60 Kotsuji, *From Tokyo to Jerusalem*, 166.

flags with a Star of David, and they brought us food, saying the two Hebrew words, very clearly *b'ruchim, haba'im* which means 'welcome.'"⁶¹ Hanin recalls a Doctor Yoshimura, who cared for the refugees and would not accept payment.⁶² Glass's memories of being a "street kid" and "learning Japanese quickly" are indicative of Japanese acceptance of the refugees.⁶³ "For years and years, my mother would talk about the gentleness, courteousness and friendliness of all the people in Japan..." Melamed reflected, "there was this feeling of friendship."⁶⁴ In fact, although the situation in Kobe might be considered unique—"there was traditionally a warm feeling of mutuality and cooperation between the Japanese and the foreigners" in the city⁶⁵—the fact that Japanese subjects acted despite pervasive anti-foreign sentiment and anti-Semitic propaganda circulated by the Japanese government⁶⁶ complicates conventional understanding of the Japanese consumption of state power. "Kobe's entire Japanese population tended to respond to the refugees with one sympathetic word: *kawaisō*, 'poor unfortunates,'" Tokayer writes.⁶⁷

The refugee experience in Kobe, therefore, was shaped by relations with Jewcom, Japanese authorities, and interactions with Japanese civilians. How did the refugees respond to the unfamiliar power dynamics at play in their lives? I will focus on Iwry here, since an adult perspective is necessary and his oral history is more thorough than Kaczor's. Iwry's reflection on the Jewish Community of Kobe is revealing in a number of ways: "It was a vibrant community, of 50 or so families.... Now, there were too many of us for them.... [But] we were well taken care of. It was not at all like my escape to Vilna."⁶⁸ The impression one gets of Jewcom from Iwry's description is not of an institutional authority; rather, he paints a picture of a supportive but overwhelmed group of families. And in many ways, they were, for as pointed out earlier, Jewcom officials were little more than refugees themselves. However, it is revealing that Iwry remembers the community as being composed of 50 or so families, when Sakamoto and

61 Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 82.

62 Hanin, Oral History Interview, 37:15.

63 Glass, Oral History Interview, 58:00.

64 Tokudome, "The Mission," 102.

65 Tokayer, *The Fugu Plan*, 122.

66 Kotsuji, *From Tokyo to Jerusalem*, 161.

67 *Ibid.*, 129.

68 Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 77.

Tokayer agree that there were only 25 (some of whom were Sephardic, and therefore not associated with Jewcom). It is possible that by the time Iwry arrived in Kobe, other refugees had become involved in the administration of Jewcom, but his overestimate may also suggest the comprehensiveness of the assistance provided to the refugees. Indeed, the contrast Iwry sees between his escape to Vilna and that to Kobe is particularly interesting. In Europe, Jews had to fend for themselves as they fled from one city to another, seeking haven; the fact that there was a community—a benevolent institutional authority, though Iwry may not have recognized it as such—caring for them in Kobe was no doubt a relief.

In fact, Iwry's impressions of the Japanese are reminiscent of his response to Jewcom: "The Japanese were fair to us, even though we were foreigners," he reflects.⁶⁹ "It was a real wonder that we, who came only half-legally to Japan, received the same rations as everybody. We even had special permission to buy two eggs per week."⁷⁰ Given that the Japanese were infamously wary of foreigners, these reflections betray Iwry's surprise—even "wonderment"—that they were as "fair" and caring as the refugees' fellow Jews. Subject to rationing like ordinary Japanese citizens, the refugees were not immune to the power of the state. But taken together, Iwry's impressions of Jewcom and the Japanese reveal that he (and perhaps we can consider him representative of the majority of the refugees) perceived the exertion of authority in terms of the succor it provided. Indeed, the relief they felt upon escaping Europe and arriving in Japan not only colored the refugees' experiences, but their collective response to authority. As can be gleaned from Hanin's reaction to the refugee woman, resistance was not customary; overall, the refugees demonstrated complicity out of gratitude, if nothing else.

Let us now return to the questions that underpin this analysis: How do power dynamics inform the memories articulated in these oral histories? And how do they challenge dominant memories? In the introduction to this paper, I claimed that memories of the Jewish refugee community in Kobe complicate dominant memories of the Second World War, principally by recalling an instance of Japanese moral superiority on the international stage. Scholars, however, are conflicted about the extent to which the Japanese government's decision to accept the refugees does, in fact, demonstrate humanitarianism. Most agree that the move was driven by some ratio of

69 Ibid., 80.

70 Ibid., 81.

pragmatism to humanitarianism; while Sakamoto emphasizes pragmatism, Shatzkes argues that “Japan has received inadequate recognition for her part in helping Jewish refugees.”⁷¹ To consider the intentions of the Japanese government is beyond the scope of this paper; however, it is necessary to ask if the memories analyzed here support Shatzkes’ claim that the Japanese should receive moral commendation for their role in rescuing 4,608 European Jews from the Holocaust. To do so will be to shed light on the nature of critical remembering in these oral histories.

Sakamoto’s distinction between “individual Japanese [who] continued to treat refugees with kindness” and Japanese officials who were made uncomfortable by the refugees’ presence⁷²—a distinction, in other words, between the Japanese people and the Japanese state—is key. Melamed makes a similar distinction when describing wartime depictions of the Japanese in the US, where he and his family ended up in early 1941:

When the war broke out between Japan and the United States in 1941, the propaganda, of course, was very anti-Japanese.... And I had difficulty with that because I remembered that Japanese were such a nice people.... These weren’t the people I knew. But these movies only showed Japanese soldiers. So, pretty soon I got an impression in my mind as a child, “Well, soldiers are different from regular people.”⁷³

Melamed is clearly—and self-consciously—engaged in critical remembering by complicating dominant Allied memories of World War II. But he also differentiates between soldiers and “regular people,” or representatives of the state and subjects. Hanin does something similar when he says, “Sugihara got instructions from Japanese government to stop issuing visas but he didn’t listen. He saved the people...”⁷⁴ Here, he makes a distinction between the Japanese government and Sugihara, that is, between state and subject. However, Japanese civilians, Sugihara and the Japanese state are easily conflated, even by the same individual who at another point differentiates between them: “[I] have never forgotten the profound truth that Japan saved our lives,” Melamed wrote to Sugihara’s

71 Shatzkes, “Kobe: A Japanese Haven for Jewish Refugees, 1940–1941,” 268.

72 Sakamoto, *Japanese Diplomats and Jewish Refugees*, 143.

73 Tokudome, “The Mission,” 102-3.

74 Hanin, Oral History Interview, 29:15.

wife in 1991.⁷⁵

Thus, the extent to which the refugees challenge dominant memories varies not only from oral history to oral history, but from moment to moment. Both Iwry and Hanin accept Tokayer's explanation that Japan accepted the refugees out of self-interest; "they considered the Jews a useful people," Iwry says.⁷⁶ But this belief does not dampen memories of their time spent in Japan. Perhaps the distinction between the state and subject, when made, allows them to reconcile Japan's status as an Axis Power with the fact that the Japanese government saved them from the Holocaust. Jewcom's role also cannot be overlooked. Indeed, the refugees' day-to-day lives—and therefore their memories—were shaped less by the Japanese state than by Jewcom, which acted on their actions in a Foucaultian sense.

Central to the theory of "critical remembering" is the fact that "memory work continually figures and refigures the past...for present purposes."⁷⁷ Yet memories of the Jewish refugee community in Kobe have largely been absent from contemporary "memory work." Why? "Dominant narratives," Fujitani et al. write, "have tended to nationalize memories of the war."⁷⁸ Refugees' lives, by definition, transcend national boundaries, leading their memories to be excluded from the dominant order of historical knowledge. The memories of the Jewish refugees of Kobe are no exception, for they fit into neither Japanese nor American post-war narratives. In Japan, the focus immediately after the war was on collective victimhood and national atonement; where did 4,608 Jewish refugees fit into this narrative? In 1999, in reaction to a rise in Japanese anti-Semitism, Kinue Tokudome published her volume of Holocaust testimonies, in which her interview with Melamed appears. Otherwise, excluding the attention Sugihara has received for the past few decades, memories of the Jewish refugee community in Kobe continue to fall without the bounds of collective memory, no doubt due in part to contemporary Japanese ambivalence about multiculturalism.⁷⁹

Many of the refugees ultimately ended up immigrating to the United

75 Tokudome, "The Mission," 97.

76 Iwry, *To Wear the Dust of War*, 78.

77 Fujitani et al., *Perilous Memories*, 1.

78 *Ibid.*, 7.

79 For example, see Chris Burgess "Japan's 'No Immigration Principle' Looking as Solid as Ever." *The Japan Times*, June 18, 2014, accessed December 15, 2016. <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2014/06/18/voices/japans-immigration-principle-looking-solid-ever/#.WFCl33eZPeQ>.

States, where memories of Japan's wartime benevolence to European Jews would most certainly have been considered "dissonant."⁸⁰ The story might be expected to have arisen early in the Cold War, when the US sought to recast Japan as an American ally in the fight against Communism; however, collective shame about not accepting Jewish refugees during the war—in addition to persistent American anti-Semitism in some quarters—no doubt conspired to keep the refugees' stories in the margins of collective memory. Furthermore, as survivors who escaped Europe in the early years of the Holocaust, refugees' memories do not have the same urgency as those of concentration-camp survivors. That being said, in 2000, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum organized "Flight and Rescue," an exhibition about Jewish refugees during the war, which foregrounded the Kobe and Shanghai refugee communities. Whether or not the refugees consistently challenge dominant memories in their oral histories, the fact remains that they are engaged in critical remembering. They "unsettle and challenge established epistemological boundaries and categories"⁸¹ simply by bringing the collective to question dominant narratives themselves and participate in the work of critical remembering.

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