

ARTICLE

# Learning Forced Migration: Guidance for Prospective Jewish Refugees in Nazi Germany

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## Abstract

How does one prepare for flight? Is it possible to plan for such a disruptive event? This article explores a unique publication project established precisely for that purpose: migration manuals published by a German-Jewish organization to support the masses of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution in the 1930s. These manuals consolidated elaborate information from all over the world to prepare Jews for impending displacement. They encompassed not only essential details but also impressions, recommendations, and complaints. The manuals' editors assembled reports from individuals already settled in refuge, generating a collaborative self-help effort on a global scale. Analyzing their content, this article shows that the process of guiding readers into forced migration extended in this case beyond technical migration procedures to include knowledge transfer about the politics of race, class, and gender, reflecting how German-Jewish refugees studied and situated themselves within these categories.

**Keywords:** Nazi Germany; German Jews; forced migration; refugees; displacement

“For whom among our emigrants is the question of the future resolved?”<sup>1</sup> This problem, raised in July 1938 in the local Jewish community paper in Kassel, was an intimately familiar one to Jews living in and beyond Nazi Germany. It had been debated in various formulations on numerous occasions for the past five years and counting: printed on the pages of Jewish press organs; debated in gatherings of aid organizations; whispered at dinner tables; scribbled anguishly in diaries. “Emigration” (as the process of mass flight of Jews fleeing persecution was commonly called) was a fact of life. It had undeniably and visibly affected all Jews under Nazi rule, whether they undertook flight themselves or watched as their communities were decimated in the process. But as observed by the author in the Kassel paper, the reality of flight left much unresolved, and the uncertainty of life in its midst was a cause for grave concern.

Amid increasingly violent persecution, Jewish organizations and their members scrambled to address a host of lingering questions about unsettled futures in the aftermath of escape. But could they clarify an enigma of this kind? How can a process that is inherently unknowable become known? Is it possible to learn forced migration? In this article, I examine a community instrument created to achieve this goal—migration manuals that were distributed widely between 1933–9 to provide prospective migrants with comprehensive

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, “Aus den Fragebogen des Hilfsvereins,” *Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt für Kassel, Hessen u. Waldeck*, July 29, 1938. d-nb.info/1048858774.

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information in preparation for impending flight. These publications, officially titled *Jewish Emigration: Bulletin about Emigration and Settlement* (*Jüdische Auswanderung: Korrespondenzblatt über Auswanderungs- und Siedlungswesen*) offer a unique and robust account of how German Jews responded to National Socialist terror against them, how they prepared themselves for collective dispersion and what they experienced in the immediate aftermath of forced migration. These texts emerged from a state of emergency that produced a community-wide effort. In their capacity as instructional guidebooks, they show a population immersed in a learning process, the end goal of which was mass flight.

Scholars have recognized that networks of transnational knowledge transfer have been vital for communities in migration.<sup>2</sup> The migration manuals at the heart of this article constitute a remarkably dynamic and detailed example of the workings of such a network. They show that the flow of information facilitated in this exchange is not limited to the immediate needs of the immigrating group. The manuals analyzed here circulated highly elaborate reports and guidance about the prospects facing German-Jewish refugees in multiple countries. They aimed to convey as textured an image as possible about the life that awaited them after flight. This included questions ranging from how much money refugees should expect to spend on food to what their marriage prospects might look like. In the process, the manuals reflected observations, biases, and criticisms relating to various destinations. This commentary, which extended to political conditions, societal habitus, gender norms, racial hierarchies, and class divisions, circulated among the intended readership of German Jews in preparation for flight.

The authors of these publications—employees of the German-Jewish aid organization the *Hilfsverein*—collected, compared, synthesized, and edited vast amounts of data from dozens of countries. They gathered information from government sources, local presses, refugee aid organizations, and Jewish community activists. But the most valuable source at their disposal were letters from fellow Jews who had recently fled Germany and could report back on their experiences of refuge and their lives in new surroundings. The publishers of the manuals believed that with this guidance, the process of flight could become less unpredictable, and that sharing this knowledge would allow people to exercise more control over their fate in forced migration. Structured displacement is less strenuous, less painful, so was the hope.

A great deal of the information included in the manuals fits well into what one might expect from an urgent publication of this sort: visa requirements, available travel routes, employment opportunities, exchange rates, naturalization procedures, and similar elementary knowledge for planning to move across borders. But the manuals at the heart of this article went far beyond these useful pointers. The minutiae of details shared in the bulletins (examples of which will be shared below) can seem unnecessary, even belabored. This comprehensive assembling of information should be read as an effort to seize power over a situation defined by violent disempowerment. As German Jews experienced growing dehumanization and threats, their ability to effectively oppose their persecution narrowed.

<sup>2</sup> For example Margit Franz, “Netzwerke der Zwischenkriegszeit als Fluchthilfen aus Zentraleuropa nach Britisch-Indien 1933 bis 1945,” in *Networks of Refugees from Nazi Germany Continuities, Reorientations, and Collaborations in Exile*, ed. Helga Schreckenberger (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2016), 38–58; *Cultural Translation and Knowledge Transfer on Alternative Routes of Escape from Nazi Terror*, ed. Susanne Korbel and Philipp Strobl (New York: Routledge, 2021); Simone Lässig and Swen Steinberg, “Knowledge on the Move: New Approaches toward a History of Migrant Knowledge,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (2017): 313–46. Beyond Central European migrants, see also Hong Liu, “Old Linkages, New Networks: The Globalization of Overseas Chinese Voluntary Associations and Its Implications,” *China Quarterly* (1998): 588–609; Saima Nasar, “The Indian Voice: Connecting Self-Representation and Identity Formulation in Diaspora,” *History in Africa* (2013): 99–124; Elizabeth Zaroni, *Migrant Marketplaces: Food and Italians in North and South America* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

Yet they took multiple actions to reject, steer, or shape their circumstances under Nazi rule.<sup>3</sup> The *Jewish Emigration* publications was one such response. The specificity and detail of these texts reflect an effort to gain a semblance of agency in structuring the departure of Jews from their home country. Paradoxically, this project, in its attempts to inventory the emigration opportunities available to those seeking flight, more often revealed how little control they actually had in the face of a restrictive international migration regime and in light of their intensified dispossession and disenfranchisement in Germany.

Meant to function as a kind of “forced migration 101,” the manuals reflect the many challenges that Jews faced as a group and as individuals throughout their journeys of forced removal. They documented the bureaucratic hurdles erected by increasingly limiting migration policies, as well as the harsh economic conditions that awaited most of those who succeeded in obtaining the desired permits. They shared warnings and recommendations, cautionary tales, and words of encouragement. To help facilitate smooth transitions, the publications traced the paths of forced migrants months into the process of adjustment and rebuilding. They thus relayed information to help prospective refugees to imagine their lives beyond borders.

In the following pages, I offer a close analysis of the manuals, exploring their function as a medium that facilitated a collaborative learning process that sought to prepare an entire population group for forced migration. I start with an overview of the historical context in which the manuals emerged and their function as a communication organ. I then examine what the manuals reveal about the predicament of Jewish life in Nazi Germany and about Jewish responses to the international community’s failure to permit the flow of refugees.

The contributors and editors of the manuals wanted readers to understand the destinations that they considered and to come prepared. Preparing for forced migration, in this context, relied on the cumulative knowledge of those already experiencing it. To illustrate this, I show how the manuals collected and presented information from refugees writing from all over the world. Their input, based on their own experience, transformed the manuals from simple guidebooks to a transnational forum where advice, opinions, and frustrations from individuals were assembled together for the benefit of an entire community. The insights from recent migrants often read as a somber reminder of the multiple hurdles that refugees in the 1930s had to face. If the ultimate goal of the manuals was to assist communities and individuals in better managing the crisis of mass flight, it is worth asking whether their honest description of such hardships may have had the opposite effect on the readers.

Alongside many disheartening reports, the manuals introduced readers in Germany to countries and societies they knew little about but were contemplating for their own futures. The result is that the manuals appear to speak in two different registers: one clearly articulating a crisis of forced migration; the other written almost like a travel atlas for curious voyagers. Encounters with different flight destinations were filtered in the manuals through the Central European middle-class sensibility that the vast majority of German Jews ascribed to. As the examples in the article show, this was true to most countries and regions discussed in the manuals. Yet it was perhaps most evident in their treatment of destinations in the colonized world, where German-Jewish refugees negotiated their own position within societies structured according to the principles of racialized extraction and subjugation. Towards the end of the article, I focus on the manuals’ approach to these areas, showing how perceptions, observations, and concerns about the possibility of life in various colonies were conveyed to prospective refugees.

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Wolf Gruener, *Resisters: How Ordinary Jews Fought Persecution in Hitler’s Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023); Douglas G. Morris, “The Lawyer Who Mocked Hitler, and Other Jewish Commentaries on the Nuremberg Laws,” *Central European History* (2016): 383–408; Thomas Pegelow Kaplan, “Reinterpreting Jewish Petitioning Practices During the Shoah: Contestation, Transnational Space, and Survival,” *The Journal of Holocaust Research* (2021): 306–25.

The examples assembled in this article are not meant to provide a comprehensive assessment of the global crisis of German-Jewish forced migration in the 1930s. It is well beyond the scope of this piece to offer a deep analysis of circumstances in various refuge destinations addressed in the manuals, nor is it possible to account for the veracity of every detail that they shared. Though the manuals certainly can be read as fascinating sources for tracing the historical conditions of refugee movements in different countries, my goal here is to consider their function as a collective learning tool within the context of mass forced migration. As such, they portray German-Jewish flight as a collaborative project, and they reveal that guidance in preparation for forced migration was not limited to the immediate steps of border-crossing. It also involved paying close attention to international migration governance, to economic trends, cultural geographies, the politics of demography and in some cases, also to the logic of empire. It was a learning project that entailed adapting to new societal coordinates of class-based identities, cultural belonging, and often of ethno-racial categorization.

### A Community Administering Its Flight

The migration manuals are a prime exemplar of the kind of self-help community work that was so essential to the sustenance of Jewish life under Nazi rule. But their origins lie well before 1933. The organization responsible for their publication, the *Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden* (“Aid Organization of German Jews,” hitherto *Hilfsverein*), was founded in 1901 with the goal of supporting Eastern European Jews who arrived in Germany as migrants or refugees, fleeing antisemitism, war, or revolutionary turmoil.<sup>4</sup> Many of them crossed the “impossible border” into Germany with the intention of proceeding westwards and found themselves delayed or stranded for prolonged durations.<sup>5</sup> Established by German Jews as a philanthropic venture, the *Hilfsverein* was created to help facilitate the transmigration of their coreligionists from the east. In this capacity, the *Hilfsverein* gained recognition both inside the Jewish community and from German state authorities as an agency specializing in Jewish emigration.<sup>6</sup> To document its activities, it published reports and bulletins that contained annual summaries of migration statistics, including the first edition of *Bulletin about Emigration and Settlement*, which came out in 1928.<sup>7</sup>

The work of the *Hilfsverein* changed radically with the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship. From a philanthropic institution reflecting the habitus of acculturated German Jews and responding to the plight of a group perceived as distant—even foreign—relatives, the *Hilfsverein* shifted its operation model and became a self-help organization confronting the immediate threats facing its own community. The implementation of the Nazi anti-Jewish agenda prompted waves of forced migration of Jews as the antisemitic politics of the regime continued to radicalize. In this environment, the *Hilfsverein* operated as one body in an ecosystem of community organizations working to address the daily reality of dehumanization,

<sup>4</sup> Like other Jewish community bodies, the organization’s name changed in 1935 to Aid Organization of Jews in Germany. David Jünger, *Jahre der Ungewissheit. Emigrationspläne deutscher Juden 1933–1938* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 217–18; Frank Mecklenburg, “Als deutsch-jüdisch noch deutsch war: Die digitalisierten Sammlungen des Leo Baeck Institut Archivs bis 1933,” in *Das Kulturerbe deutschsprachiger Juden. Eine Spurensuche in den Ursprungs-, Transit- und Emigrationsländern*, ed. Elke-Vera Kotowski (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014), 500.

<sup>5</sup> See Nicole Kvale Eilers, “Emigrant Trains: Jewish Migration through Prussia and American Remote Control, 1880–1914,” in *Points of Passage: Jewish Migrants from Eastern Europe in Scandinavia, Germany, and Britain 1880–1914*, ed. Tobias Brinkmann. (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 63–84; Annemarie Sammartino, *The Impossible Border: Germany and the East, 1914–1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), especially 120–37, 171–94. Jack Wertheim, *Unwelcome Strangers: East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991 [1987]).

<sup>6</sup> On the work of the *Hilfsverein* before 1933, see Tobias Brinkmann, “Why Paul Nathan Attacked Albert Ballin: The Transatlantic Mass Migration and the Privatization of Prussia’s Eastern Border Inspection, 1886–1914,” *Central European History* (2010): 47–83; Sabine Hering, “Rette sich wer kann ... Lehren aus der frühen jüdischen Flüchtlingshilfe (1880–1933),” *Sozial Extra* (2016): 6–9.

<sup>7</sup> Hilfsverein der deutschen Juden, *Korrespondenzblatt über Auswanderungs- und Siedlungswesen*, March 1928. link-s.cjh.org/primo/CJH\_ALEPH005533797.

expropriation, and violence.<sup>8</sup> Its responsibilities revolved around facilitating, funding, and preparing Jews to leave Germany and to support the smooth adjustment of this migrant population in numerous destinations. The organization's jurisdiction covered all countries except British-ruled Palestine, which, due to Zionist politics and to a distinct migration infrastructure, was addressed by a separate agency, the *Palästina-Amt* (Palestine-Office).<sup>9</sup> With a much broader "clientele," the *Hilfsverein* was the largest organization tending to the urgent task of Jewish flight from Germany.<sup>10</sup>

In the absence of international asylum protections, the vast majority of Jews who fled Nazi persecution did so via regulated migration procedures.<sup>11</sup> In many cases, therefore, Jewish flight occurred not in abrupt and erratic departures but through a process of deliberations, applications, and preparations. This process could be agonizingly slow, expensive, and taxing, but it allowed prospective migrants some room for calculations in their planning. The *Hilfsverein's* mission was to support Jews throughout this process by various means. It operated multiple consulting offices throughout the country (nineteen by 1937), where trained employees met with prospective migrants and supplied information about possible escape routes.<sup>12</sup> Employees guided applicants in completing the necessary legal and financial steps and, when needed, intervened on their behalf with officials and diplomats. The *Hilfsverein* offered funding for those who could not afford the high costs of forced migration, and it connected prospective refugees with local networks in destination countries, to aid in employment and housing searches. It also offered a variety of courses, including language classes and vocational training, to increase the refugees' ability to market themselves as valuable "human capital" in the chase after travel permits.

As persecution of Jews intensified, pushing more and more people to seek refuge abroad, the work of the *Hilfsverein* became ever more demanding and stressful (see figure 1). It was, as one worker described, "colossally massive (and sometimes very depressing) work."<sup>13</sup> A poem written by one staff member captured the organization's menial tasks at the backdrop of the terrifying reality that prompted its work: "Here, misery is bound in files, and suffering is registered."<sup>14</sup> Another employee recalled how by 1939, the "desperate clientele" seeking an escape out of Germany would flood the offices of the organization, frantically pleading for help from the workers, who were themselves quite helpless.<sup>15</sup> They too were caught under the same pressures, and the majority of them also attempted to flee the country

<sup>8</sup> On Jewish community organs during the Nazi period see for example: Shalom Adler-Rudel, *Jüdische Selbsthilfe unter dem Naziregime 1933-1939 im Spiegel der Berichte der Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1974); Esriel Hildesheimer, *Jüdische Selbstverwaltung unter dem NS Regime: Der Existenzkampf der Reichsvertretung und Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994); Lily E. Hirsch, *A Jewish Orchestra in Nazi Germany: Musical Politics and the Berlin Jewish Culture League* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Beate Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung. Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland zwischen Hoffnung, Zwang, Selbstbehauptung und Verstrickung (1939-1945)* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Palestine was included in the first editions of the *Bulletins*, which were somewhat more encyclopedic in nature. After 1935, Palestine was not featured in the manuals that are at the center of this article.

<sup>10</sup> On the work of both organizations in relation to each other, see Jünger, *Jahre der Ungewissheit*, 133-6; Fritz Kieffer, *Judenverfolgung in Deutschland—eine innere Angelegenheit? Internationale Reaktionen auf die Flüchtlingsproblematik 1933-1939* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2002), 35-8.

<sup>11</sup> Exceptions did take place, for example, "illegal" border crossing in cases of imminent physical danger, or the few group rescue operations such as the *Kindertransport* that organized the removal of thousands of Jewish children in 1938-9.

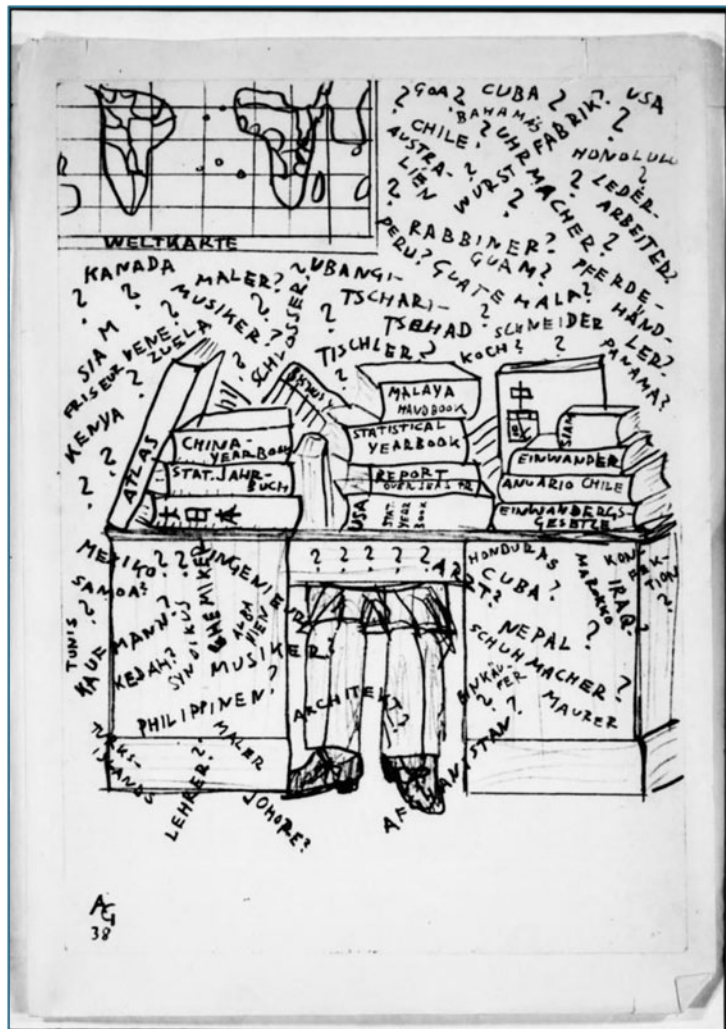
<sup>12</sup> Zentralausschuss der Deutschen Juden für Hilfe und Aufbau, "Arbeitsbericht der Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland für das Jahr 1937," 20 ([links.cjh.org/primo/CJH\\_ALEPH000397541](https://links.cjh.org/primo/CJH_ALEPH000397541)).

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Prinz to Rudolf Opie, March 14, 1937. Arthur Prinz Collection; AR 5103; Box 1; Folder 26; Leo Baeck Institute [LBI] ([https://links.cjh.org/primo/CJH\\_ALEPH000202224](https://links.cjh.org/primo/CJH_ALEPH000202224)). See also Hubert Pollack, "Erinnerungen 1933-1939," (1944) 7.9. Item 3549162, Yad Vashem Archive [YVA] 0.1/17. <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/documents/3549162>.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Weinberg, "zum Umzug des 'Hilfsvereins' im Juni 1939," ca 1939, Heinrich Weinberg Collection; LBIJER 684; LBI ([https://links.cjh.org/primo/CJH\\_ALEPH000413324](https://links.cjh.org/primo/CJH_ALEPH000413324)).

<sup>15</sup> Josef Berolzheimer to Arthur Prinz, March 17, 1975. Arthur Prinz Collection; Box 1; Folder 22; LBI.





**Figure 1.** Caricature of *Hilfsverein* Employee Inundated with Questions and Data. It Shows a Light-hearted Depiction of the Strenuous Work that Employees of the Agency Were Tasked with. By AG ca. 1938. Arthur Prinz Collection; AR 5103; box 1; folder 31, Leo Baeck Institute. Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

sooner or later. With more and more Jews leaving Germany, the *Hilfsverein* regularly lost employees, and finding replacements became a constant challenge.<sup>16</sup> During the *Kristallnacht* pogrom attacks in November 1938, *Hilfsverein* offices throughout the country were ransacked and vandalized.<sup>17</sup> In July 1939, the regime demanded the dissolution and merger of all Jewish community organizations into one representative body—the Reich Association of Jews in Germany. The *Hilfsverein* then ceased to exist as a separate organization, but its remaining staff continued operating under the umbrella of the Association, struggling to offer support to Jews fleeing the country, at least until the final prohibition on Jewish emigration in October, 1941.<sup>18</sup>

Alongside the general transformation of the *Hilfsverein*'s work in 1933, the purpose and content of its bulletin, *Jewish Emigration*, shifted significantly. From an informational report, the publication transformed into a kind of manual that provided guidance to

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Prinz to F. L. Auerbach, May 14, 1939, *ibid.* Also Ernst Salomon Herzfeld, "Meine letzten Jahre in Deutschland 1933–1938," November 24, 1938, 25. YVA 0.1/8.

<sup>17</sup> Prinz, "Plunging into Chaos, 1938–1939," 10. LBI Memoir Collection; ME 805; LBI; Berolzheimer to Prinz (see note 12).

<sup>18</sup> Hildesheimer, *Jüdische Selbstverwaltung*, 153.

soon-would-be-refugees.<sup>19</sup> Between October 1933 and April 1939, the organization published eight such manuals, which were printed in thousands of copies each and distributed to *Hilfsverein* consultation stations, to local Jewish organizations, and also sold to individuals.<sup>20</sup> The first editions of this new rendition were broad and comprehensive and included a vast list of destinations. The 1934 edition, for example, addressed seventy-two different countries across five continents. The multiple countries addressed can be seen on the cover of the 1935 edition (see figure 2). In 1936, the editors adopted a new approach and dedicated different editions to specific regions. The first of these focused on South America, and was followed by editions dedicated to the British Commonwealth and Empire, and to the United States and its colonies.<sup>21</sup> The lengths of these manuals—ranging from thirty-six pages in the first edition to 109 in later ones (A4 size)—provides an indication of their breadth and level of detail, though not all countries were equally examined. The shift to regional editions reflected a need for greater elaboration, and an increase in the flow of information due to the growing numbers of German Jews writing after their flight. It was also a product of greater attention to overseas destinations, as instability across Europe made refuge in nearby countries less viable.

### Forced Migration as a Global Collaborative Project

Opening each edition were introductory essays that addressed the crisis of forced migration and summarized the work of the *Hilfsverein* in response. Written with great caution, these essays avoided explicit mention of the Nazi regime and its antisemitic violence, treading a careful line of communicating a sense of urgency without naming the immediate political reality responsible for it.<sup>22</sup> The self-censorship imposed in the manuals prevented the *Hilfsverein* from addressing specific persecution measures and discussing the deterioration of Jewish life under Nazi rule. In the first edition published after the violence of November 1938, the only veiled reference to the attacks was in the lament that most countries continued to tighten their restrictive migration policies at a time when “the Jewish population in Germany is caught up in the most acute urgency for emigration.”<sup>23</sup>

Yet reading between the lines, it is possible to discern the gravity of the situation. Expressing concern about the fragility of Jewish migration out of Germany, the *Hilfsverein*

<sup>19</sup> In addition to the bulletin, the *Hilfsverein* also collaborated on other publications for prospective migrants, for example, the *Philo-Atlas: Handbuch für die jüdische Auswanderung*, which was published by the Philo Jüdischer Buchverlag in Berlin in 1938. German Jews also turned to other publications for support in planning forced migration, including the Baedeker travel guides and German-Jewish newspapers that regularly covered migration concerns. See Tabea Alexa Linhard, *Unexpected Routes: Refugee Writers in Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023), 36; Thomas Pegelow Kaplan, “Global Jewish Petitioning and the Reconsideration of Spatial Analysis in Holocaust Historiography: The Case of Rescue in the Philippines,” in *Resisting Persecution: Jews and Their Petitions during the Holocaust*, ed. Thomas Pegelow Kaplan and Wolf Gruener (New York: Berghahn, 2020), 164–5; Joachim Schlör, “Irgendwo auf der Welt: German-Jewish Emigration as a Transnational experience,” in *Three-Way Street: Jews, Germans and the Transnational*, ed. Jay Howard Geller and Leslie Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 226.

<sup>20</sup> The *Hilfsverein* reported that the 1936 edition was printed in 10,000 copies. In all likelihood, subsequent editions were printed in at least the same volume and quite possibly more. Zentralausschusses, “Arbeitsbericht” (Berlin, 1936), 50.

<sup>21</sup> The *Hilfsverein* published two editions in 1933. The first, printed in February, was produced before Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor and still reflected the *Hilfsverein*’s focus as a philanthropic organization in the pre-Nazi era. I therefore excluded it from the analysis of this article.

<sup>22</sup> Jewish publications were heavily monitored and placed under pressure by Nazi authorities. While prior to the outbreak of World War II they were not subjected to pre-printing censorship, the threat of repercussions was sufficient. In the words of journalist and editor Robert Weltsch: “Each writer or editor had to be his own censor. Everyone knew that the sword of Damocles was suspended over his head.” Cited in Herbert Freedman, *The Jewish Press in the Third Reich*. Trans. William Templer (Providence: Berg, 1993), 10. See also Kerstin Schoor, “Deutsch-jüdische Literatur im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland,” in *Handbuch der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur*, ed. Hans Otto Horch (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2016), 168–71.

<sup>23</sup> JA (January 1939), 1.



**Figure 2.** Cover Page with Content of *Bulletin for Jewish Emigration and Settlement*, September 1935. Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

editors repeatedly pleaded with the readers to maintain what they understood to be proper migrant conduct, and even admonished refugees for behaviors that they feared would discourage countries from opening their doors to more Jews seeking escape, behaviors that included neglecting to learn local languages, congregating in large cities, and others. “Every Jewish emigrant has a duty to act in such a manner that will not harm the broad interests of Jewish migration but will support it,” counseled the editorial of the 1936 edition. The linkage between individual acts and collective fates stressed what was at stake: “Today, every Jew emigrating from Germany must have a sense of responsibility for the fate of the entire Jewish community, and so he must conduct himself in the country where he wishes to establish a new homeland in such a manner that the authorities of the land see him and his kin as a welcomed and contributing citizen.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> JA (1936), 5.



In various instances, the editors warned against unfavorable conduct that could increase anti-migrant and anti-Jewish sentiments and, in turn, impact not only the refugees but also local Jewish communities, whose material and moral support was fundamental for the welfare of the new arrivals.<sup>25</sup> These recurring warnings reflected a deep anxiety about the possibilities of flight, showing how German-Jewish organizations desperately sought to make the influx of refugees palatable to the international community. The pleas for so-called good behavior also reflect the *Hilfsverein's* understanding of antisemitism as a societal dynamic. Any form of "misbehavior" of Jewish individuals could easily become the basis for a collective punishment that would have serious implications both for local Jewish communities and for the fate of all Jewish refugees.

Following the editorial essays, the main body of the manuals was divided into sections devoted to specific countries. A great deal of research work was invested in accumulating and synthesizing all this information (though its accuracy was hardly assured). Details of immigration law and policy in particular required close attention, because they were subject to frequent changes. A former *Hilfsverein* employee recalled that regular briefings were necessary to keep up to date with constant changes in regulations.<sup>26</sup> In some instances, the manuals even included discussion of legal measures that were recently proposed or still under review by national governments. From pending legislation in Turkey that would bar foreigners from practicing certain professions, to a Texas Senator's proposal to deport 6 million foreigners from the United States, the content of the manuals shows just how attuned the *Hilfsverein* was to global migration politics and their potential ramifications for German Jews.<sup>27</sup>

Cumulatively, the elaborate policies and regulations printed in the manuals convey the burdensome and grinding bureaucratic navigation involved in securing a safe escape. This included, for example, information about money deposits required upon entering Mexico to cover the costs in case of a forced repatriation; clarification that visas to China necessitated a letter from the German Foreign Ministry or from a business intending to employ the prospective migrant; and a warning that if married individuals travel to the United States without their spouses, some American consulates would require the signature of the remaining spouse—in two copies and with notarization.<sup>28</sup> In their scope, the manuals provide an extensive documentation of the international migration regime of the 1930s and the administrative barriers that regulated and inhibited migrant movements all across the world.

To meet refugees' needs after the immediate moments of departure and entry, the manuals went beyond migration requirements to share descriptions of everyday life, especially in the economic sphere. Employment opportunities, wages, average cost of living, prominent industries, exchange rates, export and import data were among the factors explored, both in general terms and through a lens specific to the socioeconomic patterns of the German-Jewish readership. When possible, the ins and outs of everyday expenses were analyzed. This included a breakdown of housing costs (with and without board; furnished and unfurnished; living quarters of different sizes, rooms in shared housing, etc.); of food prices (comparing flour, butter, margarine, lard, pork, beef, mutton, poultry, potato, rice, noodles, legumes, sugar, milk, eggs, and more); and of clothing costs (including suits, shirts, dresses, work clothes, and shoes—in different materials and quality).

The information assembled often exceeded what could be considered necessary guidance for pending migrants. Readers could learn, for example, that Uruguay was the first country in South America to introduce civil marriage and divorce procedures, and that schools there did not teach religious instruction.<sup>29</sup> If they considered travel to places with a very warm

<sup>25</sup> JA (1936), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Fritz Chodziesner to Arthur Prinz, August 6, 1973. Arthur Prinz Collection; Box 1; Folder 23, LBI.

<sup>27</sup> JA (Oct 1933), 17.

<sup>28</sup> JA (1934), 39; JA (1934), 39; JA (1935), 33; JA (1938), 3.

<sup>29</sup> JA (1935), 71.

climate, they were advised that the heat might interfere with their quality of sleep, necessitating lighter types of bed covers.<sup>30</sup> They were also introduced to Australian mealtime habits, including the basic steps for cooking porridge.<sup>31</sup> The purpose of these minutiae may seem questionable use of space in a publication dedicated to forced migration, but they enabled readers to imagine what everyday life in a foreign, distant place might be like. No less important, the accumulation, dissemination, and consumption of this information was an opportunity to act within an increasingly narrowing room for action. Facing growing hostilities from their own society, an indifferent international response and deep uncertainties about life in displacement, German Jews could turn to these manuals for a sense of determination, though a highly tenuous one.

While the content published in the manuals stemmed from a variety of sources, the editors often emphasized information that arrived directly from local aid organizations operating on the ground, as well as from refugees who themselves had recently arrived in various countries. This last source of information was particularly valuable as it intended to convey first-hand experiences, impressions, and possibilities. The *Hilfsverein* took various measures to obtain input from the departing population. They handed out questionnaires to those preparing to leave. To avoid “all-too-usual general phrases about conditions ‘being good’ or ‘terrible’” and instead “receive useful, practical details [to] guide us in our work,” the organization requested that responses be sent soon but not immediately after their arrival, so migrants could become familiar with their surroundings.<sup>32</sup> Questions on the form sought perspective, specificity, and experiences. What line of work did they find? How did they obtain a job and how long did it take to do so? How much money did they earn? How did they find housing and how much were they paying for rent?<sup>33</sup> Beyond collecting the questionnaires, the manuals themselves included appeals for refugees to stay in contact with the *Hilfsverein* and write about their experiences. One ad described communications after flight as a dutiful act of mutual aid (see figure 3): “Migrants! Report your experiences and share opportunities with the *Hilfsverein*. You are supporting the community!”<sup>34</sup> Each edition included full or excerpted letters, the number of which grew and grew as more and more Jews fled the country.

In their printed form, the letters do not reveal a lot of personal information about their authors, though they often discussed the writers’ employment (before and after flight). Most letters do not identify the author’s gender, for example, and those that do more often were written by men, which is noteworthy considering the critical role that Jewish women played in organizing and planning their families’ flight from Germany and in the acclimation in new countries.<sup>35</sup> Both letter writers and the manuals’ editors made reference to how long the writers have spent in their destination of refuge, as an assurance that their observations were founded on more than first impressions. A few letters include references to events and names presumably known to both sender and reader, indicating that the *Hilfsverein* also published letters sent in a private capacity.

Delivering individual accounts, the letters revealed insiders’ views of forced removal and life in its aftermath. Letter writers articulated their experiences, gathered words of advice and warnings and took stock of what they were able to accomplish and the hurdles that

<sup>30</sup> JA (1937), 11.

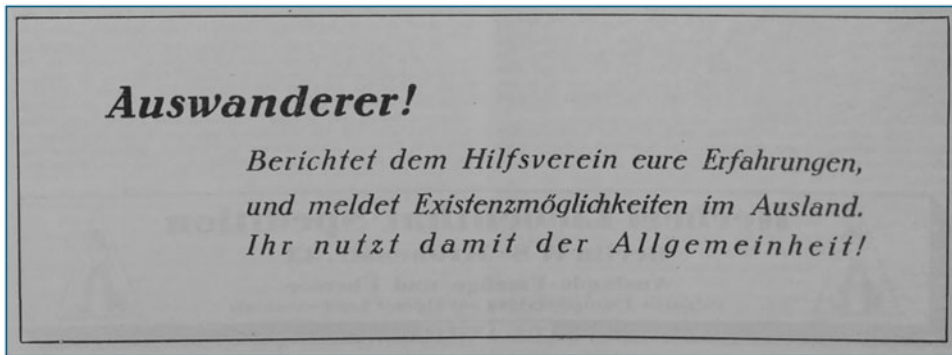
<sup>31</sup> JA (1939), 39.

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Prinz, “Daily Work etc.” (undated). Arthur Prinz Collection; Box 6; Folder 24; LBI.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> JA (1936), 38.

<sup>35</sup> See for example; Viola Alianov-Rautenberg, *No Longer Ladies and Gentlemen: Gender and the German-Jewish Migration to Mandatory Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023); Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), especially 62–71; Joanne Miyang Cho, “German-Jewish Women in Wartime Shanghai and Their Encounters with the Chinese,” in *Gendered Encounters between Germany and Asia: Transnational Perspectives since 1800*, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho and Douglas T. McGetchin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 171–92.



**Figure 3.** Advertisement from the 1936 Edition, Pleading with Readers to Write to the *Hilfsverein* and Report on their Experiences in Displacement. Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

stood in their way. These first-person accounts transformed the manuals from what otherwise would have been a charitable relief measure into a community-wide project that extended beyond borders even as it grappled with the problem of borders. The act of crowdsourcing information and perspectives reflected a foundational understanding of mass forced migration as a challenge that German Jewry needed to confront together with ongoing communication and collaboration. Each and every refugee—according to this approach—was an asset to the ones who would follow them. And while the *Hilfsverein* employees exercised editorial judgment over which letters saw print and whether they were published in full or not, they also made a point of printing letters that communicated diverging, even contradictory experiences, emphasizing that their goal was to give voice to a broad range of impressions. One letter writer residing in Johannesburg was convinced that “anyone who is ambitious and who knows how to take on the fight for existence will succeed.” An entrepreneurial enthusiast, she named examples to support her view: There was the young fellow doing so well as a locksmith, despite having very little prior experience in the profession, and two former lawyers who had opened a fruit store together and were prospering in their new profession.<sup>36</sup> Yet other letter writers from South Africa were not so optimistic. Several stressed that only established expertise was valued on the job market, and that refugees who expected an easy time finding work, or who relied on the retraining classes offered by aid organizations in Germany, ended up struggling to make a living.<sup>37</sup> Subjectivity, beliefs, and personal inclinations clearly mixed with the general reportage, and while the outcome occasionally appeared contradictory, it may also have allowed readers to imagine a more personalized flight experience based on their own sense of self.

The letters revealed a broad range of perceptions and experiences. Some writers shared encouraging reports, like the author writing from Santiago de Chile who was pleased to find a promising position as a typist, where her Chilean colleagues treated her well and she had even received a bonus after only two months on the job. Though she expected winter will get harsh, she was still enjoying the summer weather that allowed her to take coffee breaks outdoors, where “the wine grapes literally drop straight into our mouths.”<sup>38</sup> Occasionally, letter writers expressed resentments towards their places of refuge. A writer in Mexico City openly stated his aversion towards the place, reportedly “due to the lack in culture (at least at present), the phoniness and untrustworthiness of the population,” though he stressed that not all German refugees there shared this verdict.<sup>39</sup> More commonly, letter writers tried to

<sup>36</sup> JA (1935), 83.

<sup>37</sup> JA (1935), 84.

<sup>38</sup> JA (1936), 73.

<sup>39</sup> JA (1937), 73.

provide a pragmatic assessment of what refugees should expect. “America is not waiting for anyone,” noted one writer from New York. “Conditions here are very hard, the unemployment problem is pressing, antisemitism exists here too (though a different kind), and the language issue adds another handicap. But I haven’t yet seen anyone go under.”<sup>40</sup>

Across locales, one topic that frequently elicited pessimism, frustration, and even despair was the matter of financial hardship and the difficulties of finding a source of income. “Job seekers have pretty much zero prospects here,” mentioned one letter from Colombia.<sup>41</sup> “I never would have thought that for us emigrants each Peso would be so hard to earn,” wrote someone from Buenos Aires, concluding that “the sorrow of the emigrant fate is never ending.”<sup>42</sup> One man writing from Istanbul shared a painful account, after he and his adult sons have been unable to find employment for months: “We are all entirely emotionally disturbed and broken [...] I don’t know what will become of us. I think I am losing my mind.”<sup>43</sup> Letter writers who did find work and managed to sustain themselves often stressed that it was a matter of luck more than any other factor, and some warned readers against drawing general conclusions from individual success stories.

It is worthwhile considering what Jews reading these accounts in Nazi-ruled Germany may have taken from them. Did these reports play any role in the considerations of whether or not they should leave, or where they might go? Read in an environment that was becoming ever more stifling, what was the effect of browsing through the *Hilfsverein* publications and encountering stories that—for the most part—hardly inspired confidence? On one hand, the manuals were not the only indication that flight was an onerous process. Practically all Jews in Germany knew of the prohibitive costs, which grew more exorbitant as the regime introduced new measures of dispossession.<sup>44</sup> They knew of the bureaucratic labyrinths set up by migration regulations around the world to prevent people like them from gaining entry. And they received letters and heard stories from scattered relatives, friends, and colleagues whose anecdotes punctuated broad patterns. It is difficult to isolate the impact of the manuals in this environment. In the collective deliberations that scrutinized the possibilities and impossibilities of flight—“[t]his constant conflict,” as one Jewish diarist described it in 1936—the manuals were one among several sources of input.<sup>45</sup> But in addition to the *Hilfsverein*’s distribution network, which ensured a wide reach, the choice of highlighting the experiences of recent refugees by printing their own words likely compelled readers to take these accounts seriously.

Whether some letters may have bred doubt and others may have inspired optimism, their purpose (from the perspective of the *Hilfsverein*, at least) was to provide a reliable account of life after flight. In compiling the letters, the manuals pieced together an array of responses that allowed a sense of familiarity with unfamiliar destinations. They offered graphic and tangible narrations of everyday experiences in foreign surroundings, inviting readers to envision themselves making a life in these places. Some letters encouraged caution, like in the case of the author from New York, who warned against trusting every newspaper ad that promised a quick way to make a buck: “Newcomers with cash often fall into a psychosis in the desire to establish themselves as quickly as possible. That’s usually the best way to say goodbye to the money and to be put off by the new homeland.”<sup>46</sup> Others advised

<sup>40</sup> JA (1938), 78.

<sup>41</sup> JA (1934), 49.

<sup>42</sup> JA (1934), 35.

<sup>43</sup> JA (1934), 17.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Avraham Barkai, *From Boycott to Annihilation: The Economic Struggle of German Jews 1933–1943* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989); Martin Dean, *Robbing the Jews: The Confiscation of Jewish Property in the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Christoph Kreutzmüller and Jonathan R. Zatin, *Dispossession: Plundering German Jewry, 1933–1953* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Wolfgang Benz, *Das Tagebuch der Hertha Nathorff. Berlin–New York. Aufzeichnungen 1933 bis 1945*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Verlag, 2016 [2010]), 87.

<sup>46</sup> JA (1938), 75.

readers to let go of their misconceptions. “Don’t have any ideas about exotic life here,” wrote one person from Lima, Peru. “As foreigners, we live here more or less like we did in Germany.”<sup>47</sup> And some even included attempts to visualize landscapes and city scenes. “Dunedin is beautifully located in a bay that extends deep into the land, with a strong resemblance to Zurich,” wrote someone from New Zealand, adding that he was comforted by nature scenes around the city that reminded him of his Bavarian homeland.<sup>48</sup>

Though the letters focused most closely on the specific circumstances of those who penned them, or on the broader conditions facing the refugee community, some addressed the social, political, and cultural environment of their refuge places. Here migrants often identified and interpreted questions of gender dynamics, ethnic, and racial frictions or class relations. These writings, in their efforts to describe the societies and people around them, reveal far more about the perspectives of the observers and about what they considered noteworthy for other German-Jewish readers.

A writer in Montevideo who lauded Uruguayan society as welcoming and democratic was especially taken with the 250-kilometer-long beach available nearby, which was not only used for bathing, “but for every type of imaginable sport, practiced by young and old, and by all races: White, Yellow, and Black.”<sup>49</sup> A report from Manchukuo, the Japanese-controlled puppet state established after the military invasion into Manchuria, depicted a complex multiethnic environment where newcomers seeking work find themselves at a disadvantage: “The Japanese community favor their own people. The Russians increasingly avoid Jewish doctors or salespersons, and with the large Chinese population—setting aside their meager spending power and their lower standard of living—it is necessary to speak Chinese or to hire a Chinese interpreter [...].”<sup>50</sup> From São Paulo, Brazil, one letter writer described with urgency “an issue that is especially awkward for us Europeans: The women’s question. It remains an unresolved problem for single men.” The problem, as he saw it, was that “[g]irlfriends and friendships as we know them don’t exist here. If you meet a girl here (which is very difficult), and you go out even just once to the movies (women don’t go out to coffeeshops here), then you need to marry her.” Refusing to do so, according to the letter, might get the young man into conflict with the girl’s family, resulting in violent attacks or in trouble with the local police. “I beg you,” pled the writer, “for the sake of all young people who hope to migrate here, to be up front about this [...] Everyone will need to either bring a woman with them, or have one join them here.” Describing the rest of this letter, the editors added that the writer also included a “well-grounded” warning about the risks of sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>51</sup>

Anecdotes and observations like these—regardless of how exaggerated or accurate they were—offer a glimpse into how German Jews observed the societies that they had entered as foreigners. They reveal that the process of learning forced migration—the essence of the project that the manuals were created for—included not only the information necessary to move from one place to another, but also an introduction to the societal configuration of the host countries. When asked to relay their experiences to fellow community members, to help prepare them for their own flight, German Jews wrote about job opportunities, housing costs, and language requirements. But they also wrote about the racial makeup of local populations, about social stratification, and about gender. Far from objective reporters, their diagnoses reflected prejudices, traumas, and strategies for adjustment. This mode of learning forced migration was present throughout the manuals’ content and in relations to many

<sup>47</sup> JA (1935), 71.

<sup>48</sup> JA (Apr. 1939), 61.

<sup>49</sup> JA (1935), 71.

<sup>50</sup> JA (1935), 39.

<sup>51</sup> JA (January 1939), 45. On the dearth of young single women in German-Jewish refugee communities see also Marion A. Kaplan, “‘Did you bring any girls?’ Gender Imbalance in a Jewish Refugee Settlement: Sosúa, the Dominican Republic, 1940–1945,” in *Gender and Jewish History*, ed. Marion A. Kaplan and Deborah Dash Moore (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 104–19.



refuge destinations, but it was perhaps most visible in sections pertaining to colonized regions, where refugees navigated their entry into a political reality structured by the logic of imperial rule.

### Preparing for the Colonial Order

For the vast majority of Jews who fled Nazi Germany into regions controlled by colonial powers, this would have been their first in-person encounter with the colonized world, but not with colonial ideology and politics. Like all Germans, German Jews absorbed colonial consciousness in the metropole. Germany's colonial rule did not involve the volume of settler movements that existed in other colonial projects, yet German society nevertheless developed what Matthew Fitzpatrick has termed "an imperialist topos" that allowed it to experience colonialism vicariously and from afar.<sup>52</sup> In the metropole, Jewish support for Germany's colonial projects in Africa, Asia, and the South-Pacific during the *Kaiserreich* period was no less common than that of non-Jewish Germans. Though few German Jews played an active role in the colonization practice or in the German colonial lobby (to some extent due to the widespread antisemitism of most pro-colonial organizations), colonial enthusiasm was evident among some factions of German Jewry, and it was even understood as an expression of successful assimilation into the German nation. Jews also took part in anticolonial discourse. Outrage at the brutal genocide perpetrated in 1904–7 by Germany against the Herero and the Nama people was widespread in the German-Jewish press, and a number of German-Jewish writers and intellectuals voiced an explicit disavowal of all forms of colonial activity.<sup>53</sup>

Evidently, the readers of the *Hilfsverein's* manuals were not ignorant of colonialism and its consequences. But colonial enchantment and public controversies over colonial violence could hardly prepare them for intimate encounters with colonial structures, which thousands of them came to experience as refugees during the period of Nazi rule. And while colonial nostalgia continued to hold political and cultural power after Germany was forced to surrender its colonies, a not insignificant portion of the German-Jewish population in the 1930s would have been too young to be shaped by the lived memory of Germany as a formal colonial power.<sup>54</sup> In this context, the manuals' accounts of flight into colonial regions, and especially the first-person reports from recently arrived refugees, operated as an important medium for communicating colonialism as an everyday practice while paying close attention to the place of Jews and Jewish refugees in colonial societies.<sup>55</sup> In letters from regions under

<sup>52</sup> Matthew Fitzpatrick, *Liberal Imperialism in Germany: Expansionism and Nationalism, 1848–1884* (New York: Berghahn, 2008), 9. See also David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Erik Grimmer-Solem, *Learning Empire Globalization and the German Quest for World Status, 1875–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); John Philipp Short, *Magic Lantern Empire: Colonialism and Society in Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> See Doron Avraham, "Between Concern and Difference: German Jews and the Colonial 'Other' in South West Africa," *German History* (2022): 38–60; Christian S. Davis, *Colonialism, Antisemitism, and Germans of Jewish Descent in Imperial Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), especially 133–95; Leo W. Riegert, "Subjects and Agents of Empire: German Jews in Post-Colonial Perspective," *The German Quarterly* (2009): 336–55.

<sup>54</sup> Approximately 28% of the Jewish population in Germany in 1933 were between the ages of 1–24 according to Herbert A. Strauss, "Jewish Emigration from Germany: Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (I)," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 25 (1980), 318. On the legacies of German colonialism after the abnegation of colonial territories see Christian S. Davis, "Colonial Revisionism and the Emin Pasha legend in Weimar and Nazi Germany," in *Colonialism and the Jews in German History: From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stefan Vogt (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 232–52; *Weimar Colonialism: Discourses and Legacies of Post-Imperialism in Germany after 1918*, ed. Florian Krobb and Elaine Martin (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2014); Britta Schilling, "Material Memories of Empire: Coming to Terms with German Colonialism," in *The Cultural Legacy of German Colonial Rule*, ed. Klaus Mühlhahn (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter 2017), especially 27–38; Sean A. Wempe, *Revenants of the German Empire: Colonial Germans, Imperialism, and the League of Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>55</sup> The manuals did not cover every colonial territory. The following analysis is therefore limited to the areas included in the publications.

formal colonial rule, refugees addressed the same pertinent issues that were discussed in letters from all other places: employment prospects, cost of living, and so on. But in doing so, their letters divulged the workings of the colonial system that structured social and economic life in these places. To properly prepare incoming refugees for life there, the manuals needed to explain their place within the colonial machine.

Colonial territories remain underexplored in the large body of historiography dedicated to German-Jewish refugees, though emerging scholarship on the topic is quickly expanding. These works raise crucial questions about the significance of colonial regimes in governing refugee movements, as well as about the role of forced migrants in reinforcing or subverting the principles of colonial powers.<sup>56</sup> Observations, advice, and frustrations that were published in the *Hilfsverein* manuals about the colonized world offer an important channel for further probing these questions. They illuminate contradictory attitudes of colonial authorities towards forced migrants, and they reveal how the refugees themselves interpreted their murky positioning on the ladder of race/class hierarchy.

The manuals portrayed the colonized world through the prism of a community organization primarily invested in securing viable routes of migration and settlement for a distressed population. Conditions in various colonial regions were evaluated based on their potential to secure legal status, economic opportunities, and a sense of stability. The manuals thus produced a study of colonial territories that was meant to address a simple question: What kind of life could German Jews hope to have in these places? Answering this question required weaving together pieces of information about colonial societies. Readers who wanted to know, for example, whether they would be allowed to practice medicine in India learned that the medical profession there consisted of a tiered system that prized British medical certification for most positions, but that doctors without British licensing were still able to practice privately (as long as they didn't mind being considered "quacks").<sup>57</sup> Readers interested in exploring business opportunities in the extractive economy of South West Africa (then a League of Nations Mandate territory under the management of South Africa) were informed that their German language skills might come in handy in the former German colony, where German settlers still constituted a large bulk of the white community.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> These works include Anil Bhatti and Johannes H. Voigt, *Jewish Exile in India 1933–1945*, ed. Anil Bhatti and Johannes H. Voigt (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999); Kimberly Cheng, "Between Empires: Central European Jewish Refugees and Chinese Residents in Wartime Shanghai, 1937–1948" (PhD diss., New York University, 2022); Natalie Eppelsheimer, *Roads Less Traveled: German-Jewish Exile Experiences in Kenya, 1933–1947* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019); Margit Franz and Heimo Halbrainer, *Going East—Going South. Österreichisches Exil in Asien und Afrika*, ed. Margit Franz and Heimo Halbrainer (Oldenburg: De Gruyter, 2014); Sara Halpern, "Saving the Unwanted: The International Response to Shanghai's Jewish Refugees, 1943–1949" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2020); Bonnie M. Harris, *Philippine Sanctuary: A Holocaust Odyssey* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022); Atina Grossmann, "Trauma, privilege and adventure in transit Jewish refugees in Iran and India," in *Colonialism and the Jews in German History*, 253–79; Peter Mwangi Kagwanja, "Unwanted in the White Highlands: The Politics of Civil Society and the Making of a Refugee in Kenya, 1902–2002" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003); Pragya Kaul, "Refugees in Empire: Holocaust Refugees in British India" (forthcoming PhD diss., University of Michigan); Edward Kissi, *Africans and the Holocaust Perceptions and Responses of Colonized and Sovereign Peoples* (New York: Routledge, 2020), especially 143–74; Joanna Newman, *Nearly the New World: The British West Indies and the Flight from Nazism, 1933–1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019); Pegelow Kaplan, "Global Jewish Petitioning"; Frank Shapiro, *Haven in Africa* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> JA (1934), 22. On the situation of German-Jewish refugee doctors in India, see Joan G. Roland, *Jews in British India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1989), 178–80.

<sup>58</sup> JA (1934), 60–2. The mention of South West Africa as a possible destination for Jewish refugees is somewhat peculiar precisely because of the large German presence and local support for National Socialism. See Jan H. Hofmeyr, "Germany's Colonial Claims: A South African View," *Foreign Affairs* (July, 1939): 790–2; Willeke Sandler, *Empire in the Heimat: Colonialism and Public Culture in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 242–4. Though exact numbers are difficult to determine, only a very small number of Jewish refugees settled in the mandate territory in the 1930s. Frieda Sichel, *From Refugee to Citizen: A Sociological Study of the Immigrants from Hitler-Europe who Settled in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Balkama, 1966), 49.

The *Hilfsverein* relied often on sources produced by the colonial powers themselves, resulting in a skewed image (as the map of the African continent from the 1935 edition portrays. See figure 4). For example, the editors presented the 1930 Land Apportionment Act, which formalized discriminatory practices restricting Black Africans from land ownership in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), based on a speech given by then colonial prime minister, Godfrey Huggins. This act of dispossession was thus falsely described as a “native-friendly policy” taken by the British colonial authorities in their efforts to better the living conditions of both the African and the European populations.<sup>59</sup> In another section, reports meant to warn readers about an unfolding unemployment crisis in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) highlighted the departure of European settlers, which in the Netherlands even sparked fear of an impending “unwhitening” of the colonies.<sup>60</sup> Reports like these that adopted the perspective of the colonial ruler suggest a general expectation that German Jews who were preparing to migrate to colonial territories will join the ranks of white settler society. In reality, the German-Jewish position in the colonies was less straightforward.

The refugees’ intersected belonging on the axes of race, class, ethnicity, and nationality did not map neatly onto the coordinates of settler societies.<sup>61</sup> In the racist hierarchies that structured colonial rule, German Jews were generally catalogued as white. However, a combination of settler antisemitism, xenophobia, and elitism appended various qualifications to their acceptance into colonial whiteness. Conditions varied from place to place and from one colonial power to another, but German-Jewish refugees were broadly given privileges and access that indigenous communities and non-European colonial subjects were denied.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, however, they were kept subordinate to the ruling class of white settlers and at times also subjected to discrimination. In this sense, German Jews permitted into colonial regions can be considered alongside other “subordinate” or “subaltern” whites—sharing in and benefiting from the subjugation and exploitation of colonized people while still exposed to the threats of the civilizational logic that legitimized these crimes.<sup>63</sup>

This ambiguous positionality was at play already in colonial powers’ debates on how to manage the crisis of Jewish flight from Nazi Germany. When they considered whether to accept Jewish refugees, and if so how many should be allowed in, and what should be the price tag for their entry, imperial powers had to balance multiple perspectives on the matter. On top of geopolitical considerations at a time of intensifying global tensions, opinions differed based on whether German Jews were perceived as white Europeans who could help boost the white settler community, as impoverished refugees who would become a financial burden on the colonial authority and sabotage the prestige of European settlers, as a

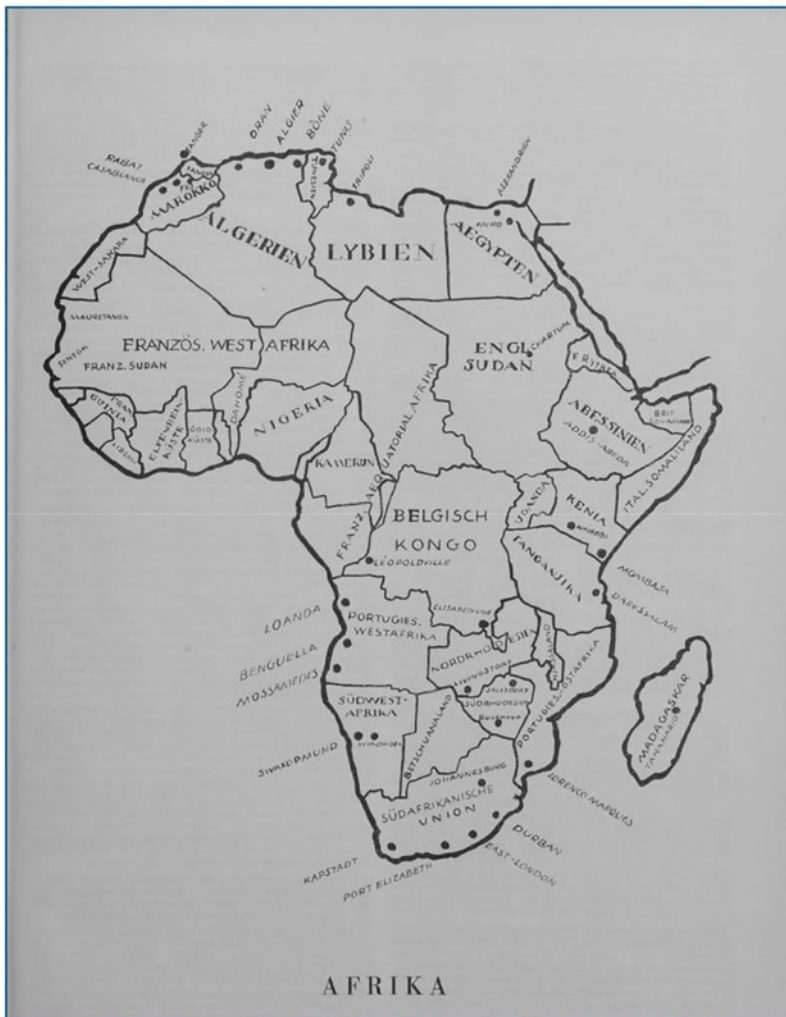
<sup>59</sup> JA (1935), 78.

<sup>60</sup> JA (1934), 26.

<sup>61</sup> Nationality would become important with the outbreak of World War II, when Allied countries imposed enemy alien policies against German nationals—including Jews—both in the metropole and in their colonies and dominions. Since the manuals were no longer published at that point, this aspect is not explored here.

<sup>62</sup> See also Natalie Eppelsheimer, “Diasporic (Dis)Connections and In-betweennesses: German-Jewish Refugees and Indians in Kenya,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* (May 2024), advanced digital publication <https://doi-org.ezp2.lib.umn.edu/10.1093/leobaeck/ybae003>.

<sup>63</sup> See for example George Bishi, “Immigration and Settlement of Undesired Whites in Southern Rhodesia, c. 1940s–1960s,” in *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa: 1930s–1990s*, ed. Duncan Money and Danelle van Zyl-Hermann (New York: Routledge, 2020), 59–77; Harald Fischer-Tiné, *Low and Licentious Europeans: Race, Class and “White Subalternity” in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Orient, 2009); Jochen Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness: Polish Refugees in British Colonial Africa during and after the Second World War* (New York: Berghahn, 2020); Satoshi Mizutani, *The Meaning of White: Race, Class, and the “Domiciled Community” in British India 1858–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Caroline Séquin, “Marie Piquemal, the ‘Colonial Madam’: Brothel Prostitution, Migration, and the Making of Whiteness in Interwar Dakar,” *Journal of Women’s History* (2021): 118–41; Ann L. Stoler, “Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1989): 134–61.



**Figure 4.** Map of Colonized Africa, Published in the 1935 Edition. Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

minority group whose presence would exacerbate inter-ethnic and interracial tensions, or simply as undesired Jews.<sup>64</sup>

Antisemitism within white settler society certainly was an important factor shaping the fate of German-Jewish refugees in colonial regions, but its impact was felt far more forcefully in regulating refugee entry and keeping Jews out of the colonies than it was in the everyday experiences of the refugees who were allowed in.<sup>65</sup> For those who did find refuge in the colonized world, they soon encountered what Natalie Eppelsheimer described as a “peculiar paradox”: expelled from their homeland by a system founded on violent racism, they suddenly found themselves on the other side of the equation, joining the ranks of white

<sup>64</sup> These debates about the Jewish refugee crisis were not limited to the colonial world. Acceptance or rejection of refugees were debated in similar terms in many nation states as well. See for example Daniella Gleizer, *Unwelcome Exiles. Mexico and the Jewish Refugees from Nazism, 1933–1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Marion A. Kaplan, *Dominican Haven: The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosua, 1940–1945* (New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2008).

<sup>65</sup> On how antisemitism shaped colonial migration policies see for example Eppelsheimer, *Roads Less Traveled*, 6–7, 12, 70–1; Lingelbach, 509–13; Shapiro, 26–32, 58–60; Kissi, 145–52.

colonizers.<sup>66</sup> They had moved from a political reality in which Jewishness was a fundamental social marker that barred them from European (read: white) belonging, to one in which whiteness and the proximity to it were primary determinants that dictated one's social status. Alongside whiteness, class and wealth considerations were also crucial in regulating German Jews' placement on the social hierarchy ladder, especially since the majority of refugees had depleted resources, and many even relied on the financial support of aid organizations.

On the pages of the *Hilfsverein* manuals, the interplay between racial, ethnic, class, and gendered identities in the colonies was discussed through the lens of the refugee crisis. The editors and letter writers sought to clarify the implications of these categories for German Jews seeking refuge in colonial territories. One concern that they repeatedly addressed was the colonial anxiety around the stratum identified as "poor whites." This nebulous social category was perceived by colonial authorities as a potential hazard to the fabric of the white settler community. This population posed a twofold threat: first, as a strain on the financial stability of the colony; and second, as an affront to the racial prestige of the white ruling elite.<sup>67</sup> The editors of the *Hilfsverein* were acutely aware of this anxiety and how it might affect the possibilities of Jewish flight into colonial regions. Discussing the situation in British-ruled East Africa, they stated: "If there is one essential issue in East Africa, it is that European settlement must be of the right kind, that no step should be taken that might bring the grave danger of the 'poor white' population there" ("poor white" was written in English in the German original).<sup>68</sup>

This was not an incidental concern. White settlers themselves openly linked their worries over refugee arrival with the supposed threat of "poor whites." During a 1938 meeting of the Kenya Legislative Council, one participant stated that "we have got to protect this country of ours, both the white population and the natives for whom we are responsible, from the threat and the very serious curse of the poor white."<sup>69</sup> At around the same time, colonial officials in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) debated a suggestion to allow a refugee settlement in the territory, which was opposed with the reasoning that it would result in "the production of a class of poor whites whose effect on native life and custom amongst other things would be pernicious."<sup>70</sup> The "poor white" label was evidently a problem that German-Jewish aid organizations like the *Hilfsverein* had to take into consideration when managing their community's forced migration.

For refugees in colonial spaces, being catalogued as "poor whites" could indeed have serious ramifications, especially when it came to earning a living. The labor market they were trying to enter was structured to reinforce racist societal hierarchies that bolstered the colonial economy of exploitation and dispossession. "Here it is very clearly distinguished, which jobs are for Whites and which for Blacks. You can't just do 'everything' here," explained an official with the Jewish community in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (Harare, Zimbabwe), as cited in the *Hilfsverein* manual.<sup>71</sup> A similar message came from the Philippines, then controlled

<sup>66</sup> Eppelsheimer, *Roads Less Traveled*, 10. It is important to note that the codification of German Jews as white in colonial spaces was not unequivocal. Whether for antisemitic reasons or in cases of "false" identification, Jews in the colonies did experience racialization and othering. For example, a former child refugee in Kenya, recalled how her father faced constant discrimination due to his dark skin complexion. RG-50.999.0429, Oral history interview with Jill B. Pauly, Jeff and Toby Herr Oral History Archive, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC. Part 2 of 3, [00:18:30].

<sup>67</sup> See Will Jackson, "Dangers to the Colony: Loose Women and the 'Poor White' Problem in Kenya," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* (2013) (<https://doi.org/10.1353/cch.2013.0029>); Vivian Kong, "Whiteness, Imperial Anxiety, and the 'Global 1930s': The White British League Debate in Hong Kong," *Journal of British Studies* (2020): 343–71; Lingelbach, 469–78; Karl Ittmann, "The Colonial Office and the Population Question in the British Empire, 1918–62," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (1999): 64–5; Mizutani, 50–9; Shadle, 58–84; 64–5.

<sup>68</sup> JA (1934), 56.

<sup>69</sup> Kagwanja, 123.

<sup>70</sup> Shapiro, 19.

<sup>71</sup> JA (April, 1939), 76.



by the United States. Quoting a representative from HICEM, a transnational aid organization for Jewish migrants, it read: “We are aware that the European and American residents of colonies and half-colonies in the Far East wish to maintain the status of the white man, and therefore do not want white people to take up unskilled or rough work.”<sup>72</sup> To maintain the veneer of white superiority and preserve the privileges of the settler elite, white colonists were prevented from taking jobs that were considered demeaning to their racial strata. Refugees who had little means and were in dire need of employment—and rarely welcomed into the socio-economic circles of the ruling settler community—were thus also largely blocked from the type of low-wage work that newly-arrived migrants are so often funneled towards.

The manuals distributed this information, which brought together cultural forces and economic conditions, to German-Jewish readers to prepare them for powerful structures that might shape their lives after flight. In the process, assumptions and frustrations about colonial societies were communicated as well. “The type of available work is very limited. Some jobs are totally off-limits for whites,” wrote one refugee from Manila. He had arrived in the Philippines in early 1938, at a point when the economic extortion program of the Nazi regime left those who were able to flee with barely anything. The writer noted that even if menial positions were open to white migrants, “it’s almost impossible to do them. The natives are paid such a low wage for them, which Europeans couldn’t afford to live off.”<sup>73</sup> With these lines, he captured the position of German Jews like himself who were thrust into the reality of racialized labor segmentation in the colonized world. Fleeing racial persecution in his homeland, in the Philippines he suddenly found himself in a position of racial privilege that spared him from the most exploitative avenues of employment.<sup>74</sup> But as an impoverished refugee in desperate need of a job, this privilege entailed a paradoxical disadvantage.<sup>75</sup> The colonial commitment to white prestige and the racialization of living standards (which the letter writer seemingly accepted without questioning), placed him outside of the labor force of the working poor but also complicated his ability to obtain any type of work. Though he noted that he eventually did get a probationary position as a salesperson, he knew of others who despite great efforts were unable to find work for months and months after their arrival.<sup>76</sup>

But if the colonial labor segregation posed an impediment for many German-Jewish refugees, it provided others with greater opportunity. Letters from Kenya emphasized that white women especially were in great demand to fill various positions. One migrant wrote that while “women find work relatively easy [...] for men I see absolutely no opportunity.”<sup>77</sup> Another stressed the issue even further, writing: “I don’t understand the girls at home. In every edition of the East African Standard you see ads searching for girls for office work, in households, for teaching, and more.”<sup>78</sup> The *Hilfsverein* editors reiterated that with an ongoing gender imbalance, the settler community in Kenya encouraged the migration of white women, suggesting that young German-Jewish women take advantage of this opportunity, which could secure them an escape route from Nazi Germany as well as a way to earn a living.<sup>79</sup> The positions that were open to them—household managers, teachers, secretaries, or stenographers—clarify

<sup>72</sup> JA (1938), 91.

<sup>73</sup> JA (1938), 92.

<sup>74</sup> On this, Oliver Charbonneau’s work on racialized labor management in the Philippines has relevance to other colonial territories as well: “Colonizing Workers: Labor, Race, and U.S. Military Governance in the Southern Philippines,” *Modern American History* (2021): 25–47.

<sup>75</sup> A former child refugee from Germany who arrived to Manila with his family in 1939 noted that there was a “refugee salary” category—higher than the average wages available to the Filipino workers, yet still much lower than the established white settler’s: Frank Ephraim, *Escape to Manila: From Nazi Tyranny to Japanese Terror* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>76</sup> JA (1938), 92.

<sup>77</sup> JA (April 1939), 68.

<sup>78</sup> JA (April 1939), 68.

<sup>79</sup> JA (April 1939), 64. Alianov-Rautenberg discusses similar patterns for German-Jewish refugees in Palestine: *No Longer Ladies and Gentlemen*, 114–59, 208.

their utility as a female laboring class—serving the needs of the British empire in positions that non-whites were prohibited from taking and that the British women of the settler elite were not supposed to perform themselves.<sup>80</sup>

Generally, fewer women than men fled Nazi Germany.<sup>81</sup> The gender disparity was even more pronounced in areas that were perceived as uniquely foreign and thus less appropriate for women of the European middle class. To ease possible hesitations that young women and their families may have about the prospects of sending single women to Kenya, the manual highlighted “perks” that awaited them there. In Kenya, they would not be employed as simple domestics. They would have the opportunity to manage a team of servants, the text clarified.<sup>82</sup> “Almost all tasks that in Europe are performed by the housewife or by domestic workers are performed here by the Boys,” described one letter. Using the English word ‘Boys’ in the German language letter to refer to Black male workers indicates, on one hand, the author’s quick adaptation to the colonial vocabulary. But the fact that he and other letter writers who used this word felt no need to translate and explain it to readers in Germany shows that they expected the European colonial consciousness to fill in the gaps. In any case, the goal was to entice young women and their families with the prospect of a respectable life on the settler farm in Kenya, becoming “more a hostess than a domestic.” On top of that, the gender imbalance offered “excellent marital prospects,” added the author.<sup>83</sup> With dispatches like these, the manuals implied that German-Jewish women could become unlikely beneficiaries of racist and classist labor regimes overseas. They were just white enough to be welcomed into spaces that were closed to non-white colonial subjects, and just needy enough to accept socioeconomic positions that European women of their background would, under normal circumstances, be reluctant to consider.

Reporting from and about the colonized world, the *Hilfsverein* manuals invited Jewish readers in Germany to envision their place in a societal order governed by colonial white supremacy. The underlying logic discernible from the content of these publications was that their prospects for entry and acceptance into colonial territories would rest, to a large degree, on whether their arrival would bolster or harm this principle. Some refugees experienced their position in colonized territories as “painfully in-between.”<sup>84</sup> But in other cases refugees found ways to harness the colonial order to better their living conditions, and the manuals provided them an outlet to share and instruct others on how to follow suit.

### Asserting Agency in Learning?

Looking back at the work of the Information Department of the *Hilfsverein*, which was responsible for publishing and distributing the *Jewish Emigration* manuals, former department director Arthur Prinz proposed that “[a]mong people fleeing for their lives the only information wanted generally concerned visa and passages; there was no time for research, any planning was out of the question.” And yet, Prinz still believed that publishing the manuals were among the few things his department did that “still made good sense,” even when flight from Germany became

<sup>80</sup> See also Lingelbach, 426–30; Stefanie Zweig, *Nirgendwo war Heimat: Mein Leben auf Zwei Kontinenten* (Munich: Wilhelm Heyne, 2014), 62. On the challenges of recruiting white female workers to the British colonies see Lisa Chilton “A New Class of Women for the Colonies: The Imperial Colonist and the Construction of Empire,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (2003), 36–56.

<sup>81</sup> Marion A. Kaplan, “Changing Roles in Jewish Families,” in *Jewish Life in Nazi Germany: Dilemmas and Responses*, ed. Francis R. Nicosia and David Scrase (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 35–6.

<sup>82</sup> JA (April 1939), 66.

<sup>83</sup> JA (April 1939), 68.

<sup>84</sup> Atina Grossmann, “Trauma, Privilege, and Adventure: Jewish Refugees in Iran and India,” US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC, May 8, 2023 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxdyGndjMio>). This was in reference to another example of racialized labor regime, in British Colonial India, where a German-Jewish refugee found employment alongside indigenous Indian workers at a textile factory. Though he earned the same meager wages and resided together with them in dorms, his status as a white European employee still granted him privileges that they were denied.

more and more pressing.<sup>85</sup> These texts had been composed for an intended audience that was contemplating its next steps in the face of increasing uncertainty and hopelessness. Their purpose was to ease the process of forced removal by trying to make it as knowable as possible. But if “planning was out of the question,” as Prinz suggested, was there any real value in the strenuous labor of compiling and disseminating all this information when readers had so little that they could do with it? Jews fleeing Germany and the organizations that tried to support them had limited capacity to structure the path into refuge. In this context, did the manuals offer little more than the illusion that they had some measure of control?

It is difficult to trace how readers responded to the manuals’ content, what they found helpful and what irrelevant. If nothing more, for *Hilfsverein* employees involved in this demanding ongoing task, it may have generated an outlet for self-driven action in response to the violence of the Nazi regime and the indifference of the international community. For their readers, facing the same pressures, the manuals may have fostered a fleeting sense of choice. Dozens of thousands of copies of these publications circulated throughout Jewish communities in Nazi Germany. Perhaps they helped many people in ways large or small—whether making decisions, managing expectations, or understanding an unfamiliar world as their own immediate one came apart. Today, a few remaining copies can be found in archives and libraries in several countries. Occasionally they are put up for sale in antiquarian books or Judaica stores throughout the world. In their scattering, they offer a faint testament to the global displacement of their readers.

But these surviving copies nevertheless offer an opportunity to delve into the workings of mass forced migration and into a collective self-help project that was founded in its midst. The manuals offer a documentation of the frustratingly convoluted migration bureaucracies operating worldwide in the 1930s, and how they curtailed the movements of refugees out of Germany. They clarify what priorities and questions German-Jewish organizations like the *Hilfsverein* had when they prepared their communities for flight. In crowdsourcing the process of data collection to the refugees themselves, the manuals opened a remarkable communication forum about everyday life after flight. And while this may not have been their primary goal, when they collected impressions, complaints, and advice, the manuals also became repositories of German-Jewish experiences in foreign environments. Perhaps inevitably, then, they divulged perceived political and economic realities of race, class, and gender stratifications in various regions, and they considered how the personal circumstances of German-Jewish refugees could be affected by these forces—how they might potentially be impaired as well as whether they stood to benefit from them.

While the term migration manuals might suggest a compendium of maps with highlighted routes, timetables of freight companies or bullet-points for visa requirements, the manuals at the heart of this article show that, for German-Jewish readers, trying to learn forced migration came to encompass much more than travel logistics and government lists. In hoping to prepare this population for flight, the manuals tried to convey a detailed and textured depiction of everyday lives of refugees. Ultimately, forced migration is too unpredictable, variegated, and dynamic to fit in any manual. No guidebook, no matter how well-researched, could have fully prepared German Jews for what awaited in their places of refuge (and even less so for the events that unfolded after April 1939, when the last edition was published). But one insight that the manuals captured and communicated effectively to their readers was the extent and scope of their community’s dispersion. Country section by country section, letter by letter, the manuals made legible what was palpable all around them: Flight, still ongoing at the time, was shaking German Jewry to the core.

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<sup>85</sup> Prinz, “Plunging into Chaos,” 24.