Feminism in the Lives of Others: Documenting a twentieth-century refugee story

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Day Conference Feminism and Lives,
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Sources

Steffi's overall file:

- Home Office file, (held by national archive, Kew)
- Police record, (held by national archive, Kew)
- German Jewish Aid Committee (GJAC) dossier, (held by Association of Jewish refugees, Hendon)

Uszer's file

- one large dossier of 279 pages (held in Belgian national archive, Brussels)

Documentary narratives

Steffi

- Home Office: process of acceptance into Britain, naturalisation applications, formal requests for information largely hostile
- *Police*: picture of everyday life, changes of address and workplace, internment and naturalisation decisions - neutral
- German Jewish Aid Committee: conditions of refugee life such as help with finance, health and social conditions censorious

Uszer,

- Police D'Etranger: linear, covers entry into Belgium in 1923 to naturalisation in 1974 – largely neutral

The three sisters (& a husband) in wartime Britain & Steffi





Uszer: pictures from identity card applications







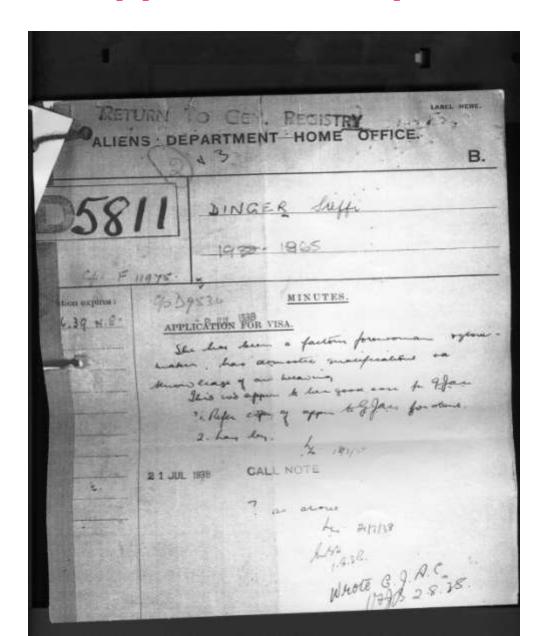




Steffi's police record, from 1938



HO: visa application response, 1938



German Jewish Aid Committee (GJAC) record

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Special Branch report, 1950

deducted under the PAYE system. Except for about \$12 in ready cash, which she intends to keep to pay for a certificate of naturalisation, if granted, she has no savings. She pays £1.5.0 rent a week for two unfurnished rooms at her registered address, and 2/- a week for light. Her home is well kept, and her child is very well cared for, and making excellent progress at school. As far as can be ascertained she has no outstanding debt's, and lives within her means.

Miss DINGER expresses loyalty to the Constitution and established form of government of this country. There is no evidence from enquiry that she holds extreme political views, or that she has been connected with any subversive or foreign political organisation.

She appears to be a respectable person of good character. Metropolitan Police records contain nothing to her detriment.

MI5 report, 30 September 1950



CC. No. 215353

Stefanie DINGER

Born Vienna 19 January, 1903, German formerly Austrian. Father: DINGER (deceased). Mother: Emilie DINGER nee MOSCHOVITS. Arrived in the U.K. on 8 December, 1938.

In Austria she belonged to the Austrian Social Democratic Party; during the illegal period, she got touch with Communist circles, without, however, achieving any political prominence. In the U.K. she joined the Austrian Centre in London becoming the secretary in December, 1942, and fell completely under the influences of its Communist officials, but kept in touch with the left elements of the Revolutionary Socialists, which later seceded to the Koestler Group. It is open to question whether she formally joined the Austrian Communist Party, but undoubtedly she observed party discipline.

In July, 1944 it appeared that she was married to a Polish communist - FROCHT. This however is not confirmed by H.O. records.

HO, 1951

has ever been a member of the Communical Party, but she has considerable Communist asons and sympathies. The M.1. S. conclude their minute of 3/4/57 by saying - her record so such as to raise security objections to her naturalisation, and we should abude by this he face as fre food too don't the discipanded, + it would be a

HO, 'Post Report'1953

Child - Gisela Gabriella - born 9th May, 1944. Illegitimately. (Father is in Belgium now) Alien changed her name to FROCHT (that of the father of her child) so that she and the child would have same name. Nothing of interest resulted from interview.

Alien does not impress one as to reliability, but nothing of apparent security interest resulted from interview.

W

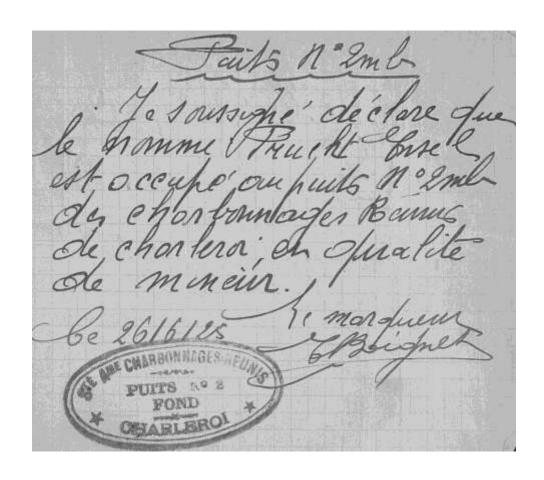
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Special Branch report, 1954

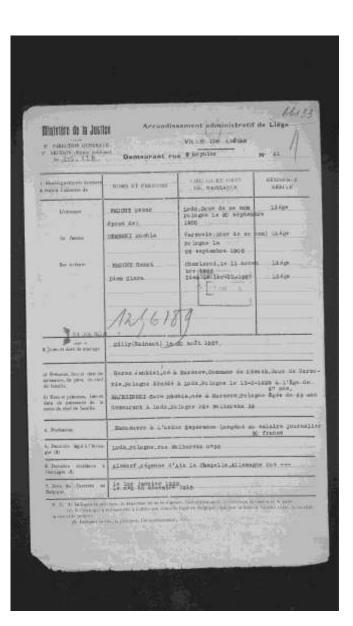
She states that she is anxious to acquire British nationality (a) because it is her intention to remain here permanently, (b) for her daughter's sake', (c) because after her recent short trips to the Continent, she returned here "with a new realisation of how much Britain meant to her". She gave the impression that she was expressing genuine sentiments. She said she understood the significance of the Oath of Allegiance and was ready and willing to take this Oath.

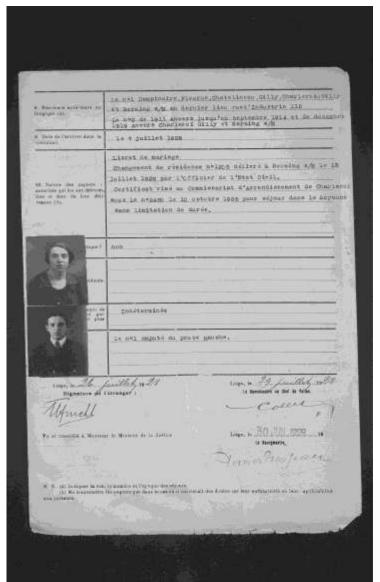
Metropolitan Police records contain nothing to applicant's detriment; and nothing is known in Special Branch to the detriment of the referees.

Uszer: certification as miner, 1925

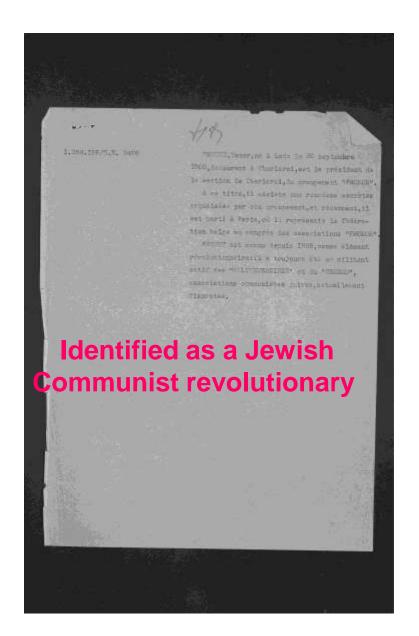


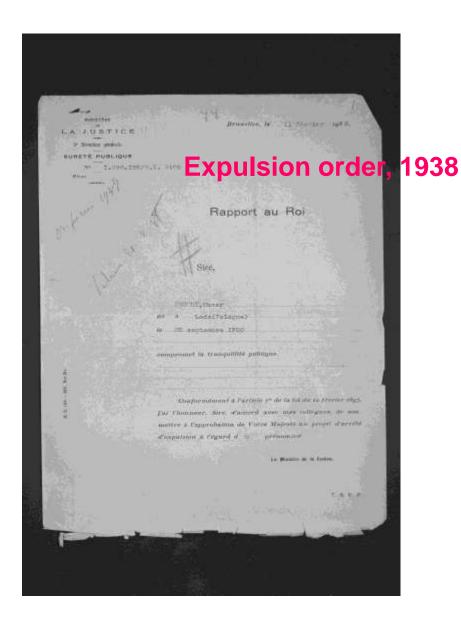
Uszer: identity card application, 1928





Uszer: Documents associated with expulsion





Analysis of documentation

Tone:

- impersonal generally but with some personal glimpses

Documentary Practices

- reproduction of truths
- in/accuracy
- transparency of decision-making

Analysis of documentation

Gender:

Steffi, initially produced as infantilised, unskilled and burdensome; treated with more suspicion when working for Communist-led Austrian Society; and finally identified as untrustworthy due to continuing relationship with communist(s) and transgression against sexual norms of the period.

Uszer, judged on basis of role as worker and husband responsible for maintenance of family (rather than on character /moral behaviour). Utilised to argue against expulsion from Belgium in 1938 and for re-entry after the war. Was regarded as dangerous in the 1930s due to political activities and re-established in the 1950s as of good character because able to support his family financially.

Feminism in the lives of Steffi and Uszer

- Not much evidence of feminism
- Documentation mainly supportive of contemporary ideas about gender relations.
- Some evidence of pro-feminism, e.g.
- police and individual bureaucrats who seemed less swayed by gender norms
- Steffi's practice in providing a stable home for daughter, avoiding stigma of illegitimacy, and creating a milieu in which feminist ideas could flourish.

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