Extract From the book *Coisas de Loucos – O que eles deixaram no manicómio [The Stuff of Madness-left in the asylum]*

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Photo: Paulo Porfírio

THE HAND-STITCHED IDENTITY DOCUMENT

Leopoldina de Almeida's identity document, issued in 1931, when she was 42, and relinquished as soon as she was admitted to the Miguel Bombarda asylum, was almost certainly her first. There are no previous records of one, and identity documents had at that point only been compulsory in Portugal for the last five years. It's an authoritative six-page booklet, with a hard cover bound in bright red fabric, valid for five years. When Leopoldina received it, she surely had no inkling it would also be her last.

This particular ID document has the unusual feature of having had its spine reinforced by hand with thick black thread. This stitching may have been what kept it intact during the years Leopoldina carried it with her, years that were probably the hardest of her life, or at least the part of her life she spent outside the asylum.

In Leopoldina's time, having your photograph taken for an identity document was an occasion. This is evident from her studied appearance: she poses with a composed, confident smile; her clothes, a modest v-necked blouse and thick woollen jacket, were probably carefully selected. Her hair sits just below her ears, cut in the bob fashionable at the time, or perhaps gathered back;

her eyebrows have been shaped into a circumflex accent. She wears pearl earrings, likely fake, which have the effect of elongating her face and contributing to her elegant look.

When she was certified insane, on 7 April 1942, Leopoldina was stripped of her clothes and belongings, including her identity document. She would never again appear as she had in that photograph, an elegant woman in early middle age. Nor would she ever touch the other objects that have been stored in ‘deposit 139’, an envelope labelled with her name, inside a large cardboard box, for the last 77 years. They’re listed in the accompanying inventory as the ‘invalid’s possessions’, and were all she had left when she was committed: an ink stamp, a pair of glasses, a crucifix, a keyring holding four small keys, and what the inventory describes generically as ‘various papers’.

Though few people were able to travel, the identity document of the Portuguese Republic in the 1930s was proudly trilingual: in the space for ‘profession’, Leopoldina’s is listed in Portuguese as ‘housewife’, in French ‘sans profession’ and English as ‘no profession’.

Leopoldina herself had a different opinion. In the margin she’s stamped, twice, ‘LEOPOLDINA D'ALMEIDA COUTURIER’. This new fact, that Leopoldina identified herself as a couturier, gives another meaning to the hand-stitching along the document’s spine. I show it to a seamstress, who identifies the stitch as blanket stitch, a zigzagging stitch usually used along the edges of fabric to prevent it from fraying.

Did Leopoldina use this pair of glasses when she stitched her document? She intervened to prolong the life of the glasses too, wrapping brown sewing thread around the hinges to reinforce them. The thread is the same colour as the rims, perhaps to disguise the reinforcement.

The ink stamp she used to stamp the words ‘LEOPOLDINA D'ALMEIDA COUTURIER’ is in the deposit envelope too. While its letters are stained with ink, its centre remains white, suggesting it has been used, but not too much. It's a weighty object, better suited to standing erect than being slumped on its side, as I find it now. It’s a fitting object for a woman with a profession, at a time when women with professions were rare.

Leopoldina wasn't a darner, who patched and ironed stockings. She didn’t just mend clothes, nor was she a seamstress. Maria João Martins, a journalist and researcher into the social history of fashion, tells me ‘there was a hierarchy’: Leopoldina’s use of the title ‘couturier’ suggests she saw herself as a designer as well as a maker of clothes.

‘*Sewing machines from the best manufacturers at the best prices. Available on instalment with full guarantee*.’ The ‘women’s supplement’ of the daily newspaper *O Século, Modas & Bordados [Fashion and Embroidery],* first printed in 1912, featured advertisements like this in every issue.

According to Martins, the sewing machine, most popularly the Singer brand, was an instrument of emancipation for Portuguese women from the end of the 19th century onwards. It enabled them to gain some independence by earning their own income making clothes, often from home. People would employ a couturier to replicate French fashions, sometimes using inspiration and patterns from *Modas & Bordados*.

'Off-the-peg clothing only began to appear In Portugal in the 1960s. Before that, everything was handmade,' says Martins. But only some women had the skill and confidence to design dresses, trousers or, most prestigiously of all, wedding gowns.

Maria João Martins looks at the photo on Leopoldina de Almeida's identity document and says, 'She's well-groomed, her eyebrows are shaped. She's an elegant woman, and tall for the time.' The document gives a height of 165cm. When she entered the asylum in 1942, however, Leopoldina apparently stood at 158cm. Perhaps the 11 intervening years had rounded her spine and shortened her stature by seven centimetres, or perhaps one or both measurements were inaccurate.

Given that she saw herself as a designer of clothes and would have been attentive to fashion trends, I wonder how Leopoldina might have been dressed below the neck on the day of her photo. In its September 1931 edition, *Modas & Bordados* was featuring three-quarter length skirts. Skirt lengths had begun to rise at the beginning of the 20th century, and by this point the modern woman would have had her ankles on display. Leopoldina was perhaps wearing the heeled pumps with a T-strap that were in vogue that year. She could have been wearing a shirtwaist dress, and her woollen jacket might have been cinched at the waist, with double buttonholes that buttoned on the left. Or she could have been wearing a skirt, one of the chic figure-hugging style that ended with pleats or darts; probably made by herself.

Her earrings would most likely have been imitation pearls. According to *Modas & Bordados,* 'modern jewellery is an indispensable component of feminine elegance', however 'authenticity is not important: good taste takes precedence over price.' When she entered the asylum, Leopoldina was no longer wearing her pearls.

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There was no place for fashion in the Miguel Bombarda asylum. I put *Modas & Bordados* aside and scrutinise photographs of the hospital's interior at the time Leopoldina was there. Pedro Cintra, in his book *Miguel Bombarda: Preservar a memória [Miguel Bombarda: Preserving the memory]*, estimates that from the time it was founded, in 1848, the institution, the first insane asylum in

Portugal, housed more than 66,000 patients. At some points during its history, there was a practice of photographing individual patients.

Three albums of photographs of female patients remain: ‘Photographs: Women, no. 1 – no. 30’, ‘Photographs: Women, no. 31 – no. 60’ and ‘Photographs: Women, no. 61 – no. 90’. I examine every portrait. Having explored Leopoldina’s 42 year-old face, I’m sure I’ll be able to recognise her at 50, 60 or 72, even once she’s morphed into one of these wretched, bedraggled-looking women in baggy uniforms with vertical stripes. The women’s uniforms are distinguishable from the men's only by their rounded collars, reminiscent of children's bibs. These are images of non-identity, though each has a name written on the back.

Woman 53 could possibly be Leopoldina, but the name says Josefa. Or number 62, but this is Elisa. Number 64 could be a very old Leopoldina, but her name is Mercês.

These images are the antithesis of Leopoldina's ID image, of a person presenting her groomed self to the world. Women nos. 1 – 90, some of whom have been photographed naked, both from the front and in profile, appear dishevelled and stripped of all adornment, the epitome of disregard and neglect.

These women never saw their own reflections. The occupational therapist Isabel Castro Tavares tells me mirrors were not allowed in the asylum, in case patients broke them and used them to hurt themselves or others. When Tavares arrived at the hospital in the early 1970s, however, there was a mirror in her therapy room. One occasion is imprinted on her mind: a woman who’d been institutionalised for decades was called in. When she caught sight of her reflection, she put both hands to her head and fled from the room. ‘She hid from the sight of herself; it was so horrifying.’ The woman eventually returned and stood there staring at herself, saying, ‘That’s me. That’s awful.’

It’s not clear why these particular women were photographed rather than others. In some cases, the intention seems to be to record physical peculiarities, like deformed body parts or excess facial hair. Sometimes the photograph seems to be only of the peculiarity. Woman no. 6 has a dark blotch covering a large part of her shaved skull; no. 8 has a beard; no. 70 is an elderly woman with patches of vitiligo on her skin, who wears two large bow ties made of rags. Woman no. 79 is black and has been photographed naked.

In the article ‘A cultura visual da medicina e os prodígios da fotografia’ [‘The visual culture of medicine and the wonders of photography’], António Fernando Cascais argues that medical photography at this time ‘had to an extent inherited the voyeurism of the old curiosity cabinets and fairground freak shows.’ Psychiatric photography, ‘imbued with scientific pretensions’, aimed to make madness ‘visible’. Squints, tics and physical deformities functioned as clinical records to corroborate the diagnosis.

The Miguel Bombarda albums contain some surprises. Clementina, for example, is a woman who still looks beautiful. She smiles coquettishly, seductively even, one hand behind her head, which is tilted to the right. It's the sort of pose someone might strike for an admirer or a fashion shoot. But Clementina is naked: the intention of this photograph is to display her insanity.

I can't find Leopoldina in the albums of individual photographs. Surprisingly, this comforts me. Perhaps it's because if I don't see her physical degradation recorded in pictures, I can imagine it never happened; that she remained as she was when I first looked at her, groomed and dignified.

The archive also holds some photographs of the asylum's communal areas, the spaces where Leopoldina's life as an inpatient would have played out. One image shows barefooted patients sitting in a corridor with a stained cement floor. A contrasting image shows a women's ward with clean floors and beds neatly made with white sheets.

The photographs are undated, but the images of dirt and overcrowding must have been taken before 1948, those showing order and cleanliness after that date. This was the year in which the institution mounted an exhibition, with accompanying catalogue, in commemoration of its 100th anniversary. 'Before' and 'after' images were used to showcase a supposed radical improvement in conditions for patients. In 1948, Leopoldina had been in the asylum for six years.

The catalogue also tells us that the previously 'idle mad', would now have their time filled with therapeutic work. The medical records that remain for Leopoldina are scant, mainly just official forms, but four years of 'occupational records' show that she was required to sew for between four and six hours daily, apart from Sundays and public holidays. She was particularly productive on 7 and 8 June 1948, when she sewed for more than six hours on each day.

I search for Leopoldina in the photographs of women sewing. In one, five women dressed in black are supervised by a nurse in white, who stands like an angel in the centre of their circle. I can't see Leopoldina in this picture, or in the one in which a woman has her hands joined in prayer. The devout pose reminds me of another of Leopoldina's objects: the figure of Christ on the cross hanging from a rusty safety pin, that she would have worn like a brooch. The weight of the cross has bent the pin out of shape, and the face of Christ, unlike his body, is smooth. Did he lose his features through being caressed during prayer?

The September 1931 astrology page of *Modas & Bordados* features questions from readers on the subject that appears to have been the over-riding female preoccupation of the time. Using pseudonyms like 'In love', 'White Wisteria' and 'Anxious of Alentejo', the correspondents ask when they're going to get married: 'You'll find the one heaven intends for you before the age of 24'; 'You'll marry at the age of 29. Your fiancé will be older than you and possess a reasonable fortune. You'll conceive five children, all of whom you'll raise happily'; 'Your horoscope shows you'll marry late, around the age of 32.'

Leopoldina had fulfilled a popular female wish. Her identity card tells us, however, that by the age of 42, she'd already lost her husband.

As well as the identity document, the stamp, the glasses and the Christ hanging from the safety pin, the inventory for deposit 139 also mentions 'various papers'. The casual description belies the fact that these few sheets constitute a sort of summarised script of Leopoldina's life. My gaze is drawn to the blue sheets. Each has twenty five ruled lines and is stamped with a government seal. They were a type of state stationery used in the past for recording or requesting official information. The first introduces us to Leopoldina at five months old; it's Sunday 12 May 1889, and she's being baptised in the parish of Monte da Caparica. The church is still there, at the centre of the old hamlet. It would probably have been just the same in Leopoldina's time, as would the baptismal font, covered today with a wooden lid that gives it the appearance of a large casserole dish.

The baby girl is recorded as the 'legitimate daughter' of a housewife and a carpenter. The carpenter, Leopoldina's father, is described as having been 'offered to the Lisbon wheel' when he himself was a baby. This refers to one of the 'foundling wheels' or hatches placed at the gates of religious institutions to receive abandoned babies. Leopoldina's godparents, a labourer and a housewife, haven't signed the document 'because they are unable to write.' At the time, around 70 percent of Portuguese people were illiterate. Leopoldina, however, was not one of them.

The baby had been born at 6am on 9 January 1889, in 'the place of Arieiro'. Now called Areeiro, this is still part of Monte da Caparica, in the municipality of Almada, across the river from Lisbon. It's a hotchpotch of houses with an unauthorised feel to them. A noise that I initially take to be a car horn in fact comes from a flock of sheep traversing a waste ground full of weeds and rubble. Nearby is a semi-ruined windmill with a flight of stone steps that leads nowhere. None of the people I speak to has any memory of Leopoldina's family.

In 1889, Monte da Caparica was a village. By the time the nearby Costa da Caparica was designated a beach resort, in 1945, Leopoldina would be locked away from the world. The writer Raul Brandão described that part of the coast in 1923 as 'a great expanse of sand, boats like stranded crescents and a few fishermen mending their nets. Sand and sky, sea and sky.'

The next blue sheet is badly damaged. It's the record of a fantasy Leopoldina was entertaining on 26 May 1937, at the age of 48; a dream of a different life. Seeking to flee Portugal, she'd requested her criminal record check for the purposes of 'obtaining a passport'. Where did she want to go?

In the space for 'signature of applicant', Leopoldina has provided her signature, then added her professional 'couturier' stamp twice on top of it, just as she'd done on her identity document. Perhaps she meant to evidence her ability to provide for herself in foreign lands. Did she want to

travel to continue exercising her profession elsewhere, or to pursue it in a way that for whatever reason wasn't possible in Portugal?

I turn the paper over and notice that Leopoldina has turned the back into a notepad. The pencil script is faded, but the date remains visible: she was writing four years after submitting the criminal record request: a journey into her future. From the few sentences I can decipher, it seems that if the document represented a dream, the lines on the back of it represent despair. The signature on the document shows Leopoldina's married name, Leopoldina de Almeida Soares.

The best preserved of the blue sheets attests that 'on the twenty-first day of September in the year one thousand nine hundred and seven, in this, the parish church of Nossa Senhora da Pena, the groom and bride in attendance were Manuel Soares, aged twenty-six, a civil policeman from Lisbon; and Leopoldina de Almeida, aged eighteen'.

I go one late afternoon to the church of Nossa Senhora da Pena, in central Lisbon, where Leopoldina and Manuel were married. There are only two other people in the gloomy interior, both women. One is siting in a pew reading, presumably the Bible, while the other, older, moves around beneath the side pulpit, shaking a bunch of keys as if it's a child's rattle. I imagine she lives nearby and one of the keys is for the door of the house where she lives alone.

I sit down too, and try to take myself back to Leopoldina and Manuel's wedding day. Was Leopoldina wearing a wedding dress? One she'd made herself? I'm pulled back to the present by a 'hello?' from the sacristy; the lady with the keys answering her mobile phone.

I look at the floor, try again to conjure up the past. This worn wood must be the same as it was on that wedding day. Did Leopoldina wonder, as she stood at the pink marble altar, whether she'd return one day to stand at the baptismal font to her right and watch her child being baptised?

The woman reading sighs and shifts, making the long wooden pew creak. Could these be the same pews at which Leopodina's wedding guests sat? Who would they have been? The parents of the bride and groom? Leopoldina's two sisters?

I look back at the marriage certificate. It was issued on 13 January 1939, thirty years after the wedding. At a time when she must already have been struggling financially, Leopoldina spent 13.24 escudos to obtain this official proof that she'd got married, a copy of the record held by the 8th Lisbon Civil Registry Office, which covered the former parish of Pena. This same office would one day hold the record of her death.

On the way to the house near the river that Leopoldina shared with her husband, I pass the Belém ferry terminal. It occurs to me that in 1908, with 58 years still to pass before a bridge would connect the two banks of the Tagus, Leopoldina and Manuel were like neighbours with a river between them: she on the south bank in Caparica, he on the north bank in Lisbon, until she came to join him there.

The flat they lived in is on the first floor of a small building painted a blue now so faded that it's almost grey. The two windows from which the couple would have looked out on the street have wooden frames patched with crumbling white putty. There are no curtains. The white wooden shutters have been left open in a way that suggests abandonment rather than someone having flung them open before departing for work this morning. Number 139 Rua do Embaixador has no doorbell, and nobody answers when I knock on the ground floor door.

The passers-by are mainly young foreigners. Two electric scooters are propped on the pavement. A woman who cleans several tourist rental properties on the street knows no-one who lives there. Finally I find Virgílio Braz, an old man who walks with a cane. He tells me that 60 years ago, two tram routes served the street, that the inhabitants were of modest means, renting their houses, and that they often sat out on their doorsteps and lit fires outside. 'That's all gone now. I've had enough of this street. It's dead.' He doesn't know who used to lived in the house.

I'm directed to the oldest lady on the street. I ring the bell for her flat and an old woman in a nightdress grudgingly comes to the door. It's clear from her attitude that I need to explain why I'm here as quickly as possible. I ask her if she might know anything about a couple who lived on this street at the beginning of the last century. All she can tell me is that, during her lifetime, Leopoldina and Manuel's flat has been occupied by, not necessarily in this order: 'An aviation lad; an engineer; a 'PIDE' [member of the state police during the dictatorship]; and a couple who left a few months ago because there was a disagreement about the rent – they moved to Cacém [in the suburbs of Lisbon].'

Leopoldina and Manuel weren't in the flat on Rua do Embaixador for long. Another piece of paper, even more formal than the blue ones, records, in officious prose, the fact that at two o'clock on the afternoon of 9 October 1908, in the flat inside the blue building, Leopoldina's husband lost consciousness and died. The couple had been married for a year and a month. Leopoldina was widowed at the age of 19.

I turn this document over to see if it too has been used it as notepaper. It has: there are just a few pencil lines, written 33 years after the date of the death certificate. The sheet of paper contains two dimensions of a life, front and back.

The death certificate also tells us that Leopoldina's husband 'did not make a will, and left no children', and that he was buried in the cemetery nearest to the house where they lived.

The Ajuda cemetery has an imposing, regal atmosphere. Built originally for the burial of the servants of Queen Maria II, it later came into public use. The website of Lisbon City Council highlights several tombs 'of historical or architectural importance', including those of Admiral Gago Coutinho, who made the first aerial crossing between Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro, and the footballers Matateu and Pepe, who played for local team Os Belenenses.

The cemetery office looks like the generic administrative area of any public building, but the little bell that rings every time the door opens gives it the feel of an old-fashioned shop. I enter, with a 'ding-ding-ding', to see if I can find out where Leopoldina de Almeida Soares' young husband was buried.

Cemeteries are one of the places where pronouns earn their keep. While I wait, eavesdropping on conversations amongst the employees, I note the repeated absence of the words 'body' or 'corpse' in several exchanges: 'is that one yours?', 'what about the other one?', 'which one just went in?'

The official attending to my enquiry returns. She tells me Leopoldina's husband died at 'around two o'clock in the afternoon'. Things moved swiftly: by the afternoon of the next day, he was at the cemetery, and he was buried soon after. Book 13 of the Register of Burials shows many deaths from pneumonia and enteritis around that date. Manuel Soares' cause of death is listed as 'dysenteric cachexia'. Infectious diseases were the main cause of death in the country at the time. In the first year for which data is available (1920), a Portuguese person could expect to live to 35. Manuel Soares made it to 26.

I imagine Leopoldina watching helplessly as Manuel's illness progressed, all the doors of the house thrown open, not knowing what else to do to help him. It's unlikely she had the money to pay for a doctor. I find a death like that of Leopoldina's young husband described in a thesis written in 1920 by the doctor Manuel Pereira da Silva:

> *As the disease progresses, the patient exhibits profound emaciation and marked neuro-muscular weakness, indications of severe poisoning.*
> *The tongue becomes dry and tacky due to deficiency in salivary secretion. Thirst is continual and anorexia is absolute; the belly becomes concave and palpation of the colon area provokes pain.*

The fever is initially mild, rising to between 37° and 38.5°, perhaps as far as 39°, before dropping back to between 37° and 38°. If the temperature remains static above 38.5°, serious complications are to be expected.
The pulse is weak and sometimes irregular. After 10 to 15 days, if the patient is beginning to recover, pain subsides, defecation decreases, the patient regains his normal appearance, and appetite gradually returns. The disease can however become chronic, leading to dysenteric cachexia and death.

Manuel was buried in no. 647 of section 3P, ‘P’ standing for ‘perpetual’ graves. The official told me that at the time ‘an arrangement’ [of flowers] would have been provided, but no information remains to suggest what it looked like. I’m unable to discover whether Leopoldina or Manuel's parents commissioned an inscription like some of the others I’ve seen: ‘Son who was a model of all virtue’, ‘Eternal longing’, ‘You left in each of us a living memory and a longing that will never be extinguished.’ I don’t know if they ever came to place flowers on the grave.

What I do find out is that Manuel Soares' perpetual grave ended up being removed for non-payment. The official explains that at that time all the ‘unclaimed dead’ went to the ‘mass grave’. She’s clearly uncomfortable with the expression, with its connotations of war, genocide, epidemics. I ask her where the mass grave is and she answers quickly, ‘In a non-specified location.’

I head for the section where Manuel’s grave existed for a short time. A man dressed in green glances quizzically at me. I ask him if he knows where the mass grave is. I’m expecting the same answer I got from the woman in the office, but he says, ‘Come with me.’

João Frutuoso is a mason who makes gravestones and tombs. I follow him along the path that leads away from the office until he stops and points at the asphalt. ‘See how different it is here?’ With his right hand he draws ‘S’ shapes in the air, like wriggling snakes or the swell of the sea. This is the only pavement in the cemetery with waves. The irregularities mark different phases of the collective burials. João knows the mass graves are here because as a child he played in the cemetery and saw the small paper urns piled up, waiting to be buried. Leopoldina's husband is part of the path I’m standing on.

One area of the cemetery is still just earth. The freshness of the flowers acts as a gauge for the rawness of the loss. Around one mound of earth are piles of gladioli, orchids, flamingo lilies and purple daisies. The wind flaps at the silver and plastic film that still protects them. This funeral happened yesterday.

I say to the woman selling flowers at the entrance that I'm trying to imagine a funeral that took place on 10 October. She tells me people can choose any flowers they want, according to their taste and budget. Like fruit, it’s no longer a question of what's ‘in season’. Flowers can be grown in

heated greenhouses throughout the winter, or they can be flown in, like these roses from Ecuador. I explain that the funeral I'm thinking of was a long time ago.

Before this abundance, the flower-seller says that at that time of year there would only have been 'carnations, roses and what they used to call 'despedidas' [goodbyes]'. I ask her what despedidas look like. 'We call them daisies now, probably because it sounds fancier.' Everything changes, even the names of the flowers.

I tell her this funeral was in 1908, and can see this makes her suddenly feel young, 'I've no idea. I was born in 1954. I don't even know if people bought flowers in those days. Maybe they just picked wildflowers.'

Back at deposit no. 139, I find another scrap of paper that tells a story. It's a receipt from three days before Leopoldina's 50th birthday, recording her attempts to stay afloat. The word 'gold' is scrawled across it. Who knows what sentimental value the 'broken chain and ring' she pawned on 6 January 1939 might have had. The receipt shows only that her 38.5 grams of gold was worth 616 escudos. She would never get her items back.

The receipt has a column of numbers on the right-hand side that gradually reduce. After three months, of the 616 escudos, Leopoldina only had 66 left to collect. When she entered the asylum, she was in possession of 30.50 escudos.

One year after she handed over her gold, on Tuesday, 27 February 1940, at 15 minutes past midnight, we know what Leopoldina was doing with a precision that is otherwise only possible for her birth, her baptism, her husband's death and her own death: she was asleep.

The building she was sleeping in now has a green double door with a metal grille in it. I peer through the grill and see a man coming out of a flat. As he does so, four metal spotlights suspended from a false ceiling snap on, illuminating a spacious hallway with a white marble floor. The tourist closes the door quickly behind him when he spots me staring through.

No. 36 Rua Marechal Saldanha is in the heart of Lisbon's historic centre, on the road that leads to the viewpoint with the well-known statue of the Adamastor, a mythological creature from the Portuguese epic poem The Lusiads. It's now called 'Palácio Camões Serviced Apartments'. No-one here knows anything about Leopoldina, and in fact, no-one lives here. To get in, you need a code: 'On the keypad enter the access code sent to the email address provided during your reservation (voucher). If you have not received a code, re-check your email, or call the number below.' Calling is evidently the last thing they want you to do. The person who answers is friendly, but says, 'I don't know who owns the accommodation. I just do the guest support.'

On the night in question, Leopoldina was sleeping on the wide, cold stone steps of this building. The official record, a yellowed file which I consult in the archives of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia charity in Lisbon, tells me that police officer no. 3094, José Guerreiro, took her into custody 'for enquiries', 'because she was found there sleeping and destitute' and had 'no known means of making a living in order to support herself.' At the time, the police had powers to detain anyone found on the street without a home or livelihood. The time of the incident, when Leopoldina was woken from her sleep, is recorded as 00.15.

On the front of the file, one word appears in red capitals: VAGRANT.

That same year, António Salazar, Portugal's dictatorial leader, had passed new legislation intended to address the social problem of 'beggars and vagrants'. These were defined as the members of 'an itinerant group of people poorly adapted to the life of society and segregated from it due to unemployment, negligence or lack of family assistance'.

The police records report that Leopoldina was removed from the steps, where she'd apparently 'been coming to sleep for some time', and taken to the 3rd precinct, in Travessa das Mercês, which was managed by the Customs and Health unit of the Lisbon Public Security Police. In 'basement cell 1', the 'vagrant' awaited her fate.

When questioned, Leopoldina told them she had a sister living in Lisbon. The police went on to locate a second sister, who lived in Monte da Caparica.

The address in Monte da Caparica where the sister once lived is now a shop selling cheap Chinese goods. Before that it was a wine warehouse. I wasn't able to find anyone who remembered an existence before that.

The building where the Lisbon sister lived, no. 46 Rua da Condessa, is still residential. There's a light on in a first floor flat with modern windows; double-glazed with aluminium frames designed to imitate wood. I buzz and just have time to say, 'Good evening, I'm trying to find out about a lady called –', before a voice interrupts to say, 'Can you speak English?'

The steps where Leopoldina was sleeping are a ten minute walk from this house. I wonder whether the proximity is a coincidence. The book *Sem-Amor Sem-Abrigo* [*Loveless and Homeless*], by the clinical psychologist Elias Barreto and the psychiatrist António Bento, explains that the places where homeless people choose to sleep are often significant. Around Santa Apolónia train station in Lisbon, for example, it's common to find people who've come from the centre and north of the country. It's as if the railway tracks are a sort of umbilical cord that tethers them to their origins. Similarly, people who've come from the other direction often sleep around the Terreiro do Paço ferry terminal, from which boats cross the Tagus to the south. In the book, Bento recalls a man

he met who slept every night on the pavement next to the house where his family had lived before they departed one day without telling him where they were going.

Leopoldina's Lisbon sister testified at the police station that she'd been estranged from Leopoldina for 22 years, but that just a few days before, Leopoldina 'had knocked on her door and was invited in. However, when she immediately began to talk nonsensically, the sister's husband told his wife not to allow her in the house any more, otherwise he would leave her.' The only positive thing the sister said about Leopoldina was that 'she used to be good at making clothes'. She qualified this, however, by saying 'nobody gives her work any more, because of her abnormal condition'.

Salazar's Decree no. 30389 states that, 'Whenever possible, the helpless and infirm destitute should be handed over to the care of their own families'. That wasn't possible in this case.

Around three weeks after she was 'apprehended' on the street, Leopoldina's sisters agreed to foot the bill to send her to the Mitra Mendicity Asylum and keep her there. At the age of 51, Leopoldina became 'Resident 5755'.

In Leopoldina's time, 'mitra' had not yet begun to be used as an adjective (as it still is today), meaning something akin to 'tramp', with connotations of unpleasant appearance and violent or threatening behaviour. When Leopoldina was placed there, Mitra was just the name of a hostel that had opened eight years earlier. António Bento describes it as 'a social dumping ground, for prostitutes, thieves, drunks and the mentally ill.'

According to the 1940 decree, the purpose of these hostels, which were more akin to prisons, was to 'remove the appearance of poverty from streets and public places'. A police magazine of the time, quoted in the book *O Estado Novo e os Seus Vadios* [*The Estado Novo and its Strays]* by Susana Pereira Bastos, states that 'it is essential to put an end to the indecorous appearance of vagrancy' if Lisbon is to 'present itself, to both locals and foreigners, as the fitting capital of our empire: a true European city, not some village in Morocco.'

When Leopoldina scribbled her notes on the back of her criminal record application and her husband's death certificate, she was living at the Mitra. She doesn't acknowledge this, though, referring only to the area in which the hostel was located, 'Poço do Bispo. Lisbon'.

The fading, disjointed scrawl is hard to decipher. I search for at least one capital letter to locate me at the beginning of a sentence. There are many lines I can't make out, others where I can find no logical meaning, but I gather that Leopoldina is in a 'dormitory' and is alarmed to be surrounded by 'prisoner after prisoner', 'villains and whores'. She sees herself as different from the others, saying, 'I've always worked.'

She feels that everything she had has been taken from her: 'I've been brought no dresses, no shoes [...] nothing at all [...] they've given me nothing, which means I can't work'. The words I can

understand evoke helplessness: ‘I’m still me’, ‘I'm here, god!’; loss of control: ‘I'm a puppet [...] in their hands’; the sensation of being detached from the real world: ‘justice can’t serve me, its laws don’t work in here’, ‘my banishment’; and abandonment: ‘my sister doesn’t remember me these days’.

‘I've been here for six months, unfortunately…’ Leopoldina would stay at the Mitra for around two years. In *O Estado Novo e os Seus Vadios,* Susana Pereira Bastos notes that, at the time Leopoldina was there, the loss of a husband and the economic protection he provided, particularly if the couple had no children, was one of the most common causes of destitution for women, and consequently their internment in the Mitra. Almost 60 percent of the women aged over 52 admitted during Leopoldina's time were widows.

Pereira Bastos goes on to say that The Mitra could be termed ‘a pre-psychiatric institution’, with an estimated 70 percent of its inhabitants suffering from mental illness. The policemen who arrested Leopoldina recorded unspecified ‘indications of mental alienation’ in her. Leopoldina had become poor, then ill.

There was no understanding in Leopoldina's time of what we now call ‘determinants of mental health’. The book *A Saúde Mental dos Portugueses* [*The Mental Health of the Portuguese*], by José Miguel Caldas de Almeida, argues that poverty, low social and economic status and economic anxiety can all be ‘predisposing factors’ for mental illness. Loneliness, or lack of love or money, are not enough in themselves to drive you mad, but they can help. Carlos Braz Silva, in *Psiquiatria Fundamental [Fundamental Psychiatry]*, calls this the ‘terrain of fragility’.

António Bento, one of the authors of *Sem-Amor Sem-Abrigo [Loveless and Homeless],* has spent decades working with this population at the Júlio de Matos psychiatric hospital in Lisbon. He told me that ‘in about 60 percent of cases, mental disorders predate street life’, but that the street often aggravates them. ‘It’s the same as if you had a fever of 40 degrees and you were out on the street receiving no treatment: your illness would get worse.’

Most people who live on the street suffer from some sort of mental illness. There are individuals who no longer know who they are. Bento tells of one man, whose name was eventually discovered. When he was approached and asked, ‘Hey, aren't you Tiago?’ he reacted with shock. ‘I’ve never forgotten the look on his face,’ says Bento. ‘He said, 'Ah, yes. I was Tiago.’ The implications of that phrase. It was remarkable. His illness was so severe, he no longer remembered who he was. He’d never had any kind of treatment, and his sense of self had just shattered.’

Bento points out, however, that being ‘homeless’ today is not as bad as being a ‘vagrant’ would have been in Leopoldina's time. It's not just the name that's changed: ‘Leopoldina would have more chances today. She’d be better treated, better accepted by society. She'd be able to get

food from a van, have a shower. She might get a room; if she was lucky, medication.' She might turn up to António Bento's Thursday meetings.

The meetings of the 'Open Psychotherapeutic Group' take place in a circle of plastic chairs in an old gymnasium at the Júlio de Matos Hospital, and homeless people with mental health problems can attend.

Ana Cristina da Silva, 58, is one of the homeless people who sometimes turns up. She carries her important objects with her, just as Leopoldina did. 'I have my wallet with my documents, my ID card, my glasses that work for distance vision and for reading, my mirror, my mascara, my pencil, my notepad, a book. And my medication.' She presents each box: 'This is an antidepressant, this is a mood stabiliser, this is so I don't get aggressive and freak out, this is for anxiety, this is for sleep.' She was diagnosed with bipolar disorder 19 years ago and never skips her medication – it's what gets her out of bed in the mornings, she says, even though she doesn't always sleep in one. 'It's what takes me out of the darkness. These drugs and my pill.' I ask her what she means and she smiles and explains that what she calls her 'pill' is her son, who's 22 and lives with his father. 'Sometimes he's a whole packet of pills.' One of the reasons Ana Cristina ended up on the streets was because she was 'knocked about' by her husband. She calls her son often from her mobile phone, sometimes just to hear his silence at the other end. 'That boy is mine,' she says.

In her cloth bag, there's also a key to a wardrobe door that doesn't close, in a hostel room that isn't hers, where she doesn't know how long she'll be able to sleep.

There are different definitions of homelessness, says António Bento, but for him it boils down to one thing. 'Homeless people don't have these.' He pulls his house keys from his pocket.

I'm reminded that one of the objects Leopoldina had when she entered the asylum was a bunch of keys. There are four of them, two of which are duplicates. They're too small to have opened a house door; a cupboard, perhaps.

Every time I return to Leopoldina's belongings, I find new things or details I'd missed. Now, tucked behind the last page of her identity document, I notice four small, thin sheets of paper, almost translucent. I'm struck by the fact that the writing on them reaches right to the edge of the page, and that if a word ends before that, Leopoldina has artificially extended its final letter – the 'l' in Portugal, the 'a' at the end of her own name – to reach it. It's as if she wanted to lock the lines so no one could add to them, to assert her ownership of the content.

I discover from these fragile sheets that, in August 1941, the year before she entered the Miguel Bombarda asylum, Leopoldina had lost her grip on reality. She'd acquired a new surname, which she added to the one she was born with in place of that of her late husband. The name

appears clearly and is repeated several times: she's no longer Leopoldina d'Almeida Soares, but Leopoldina d'Almeida Franco.

'Franco' refers to the general who had risen to power in Spain two years earlier, and to whom Leopoldina believed she was married. She mentions him often, calling him 'a foreign officer' to whom 'respect' is due. Spain features in this fragmented narrative as a beautiful, wondrous place. It represents non-Portugal, Leopoldina's new Spanish surname a kind of protective shield.

In *Sem-Amor Sem-Abrigo*, Bento and Barreto explain that, for people living on the street, where everything is hostile, delirium can offer 'an alternative objective reality, one that can replace feelings of powerlessness with those of omnipotence.' Leopoldina writes, 'They don't know I'm Leopoldina d'Almeida Franco.'

Seven months after writing these notes in the Mitra, 'Leopoldina d'Almeida Franco' was transferred to the Miguel Bombarda asylum, where a more precise diagnosis of her 'mental alienation' was finally made.

The diagnosis attributed to Leopoldina in April 1942 no longer appears in classifications of mental illness. She was said to have been suffering from 'paraphrenia', from the Greek 'para', meaning 'to the side', and 'frenia', meaning 'thought': 'to the side of thought'. Today, Leopoldina might be labelled schizophrenic. In the book he edited, entitled *Paraphrenias,* Nuno Borja Santos explains that the features of paraphrenia are now often considered under the umbrella of schizophrenia.

The diagnosis recorded on the front page of Leopoldina's medical notes is 'Systematised Paraphrenia'. This is one of the four subtypes of the illness first described by the German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin. Kraepelin is quoted in *Paraphrenias* as saying that the disease tends to begin later in life and is characterised by several phases. In Leopoldina's case, she was able to marry and take up a profession before her symptoms emerged. In the first phase of the illness, Kraepelin describes the patient gradually becoming 'silent [...] dreamy [...] suspicious [...], turned in on himself', and occasionally having 'bizarre and incomprehensible conversations.'

In the second phase of the illness, 'a delirium of persecution appears, as yet unstructured. The patient feels watched, threatened and insecure, and believes his actions are being commented on.' After several years, 'sudden ideas of grandeur' emerge, the most frequent being the 'exaltation of social status': Leopoldina 'd'Almeida Franco'.

Leopoldina died in 1961, at age of 72, of a cerebral thrombosis, in the same parish where she'd been married, as this happened to be the location of the Miguel Bombarda asylum. She'd lived in the asylum for 19 years. By the time of the hospital report of her death, her paraphrenia had been reclassified from 'systematised' to 'expansive'. It's unclear whether this was a reporting error or an indication her disease was considered to have progressed.

According to Kraepelin’s classifications, ‘expansive paraphrenia’ is diagnosed once ideas of persecution cede place to ‘delusional ideas of grandeur’, what he calls a ‘spiral of splendour’ in which patients mentally erect a ‘glorious edifice’.

Leopoldina’s medical notes contain no information about how she was treated. Two typewritten sheets record the answers she gave during two interviews with a doctor when she was first admitted, in April 1942. They reveal a kind of parallel life, nothing like the one Leopoldina actually led.

In the version of herself she presented to the doctor, she had never been homeless or interned in a hostel for vagrants, but had come to the Miguel Bombarda asylum directly from ‘travelling amongst the wonders of the Arabias’. She didn’t have two sisters from whom she was estranged, who’d paid to have her institutionalised, but five brothers, four of whom were ‘infants’, making her ‘the heiress’ of the family. Her father was not a carpenter who’d been left in a foundling wheel as a baby, but ‘Don Lucas’, who was ‘the real king’, while Don Carlos only ‘said he was the king’.

Although she addressed her interlocutor as ‘Doctor’, Leopoldina did not acknowledge she was in an asylum, but described her location variously as a ‘palace’, a ‘parliament’ or a ‘parliament palace’. The doctor noted that when Leopoldina entered his office for her second interview, ‘she was out of breath, laughing, animated’. She said to him, ‘They told me it was my son who’d sent for me!’ She then corrected herself, saying of course that couldn’t be the case, because her son was ‘at [her] brother's house in Caparica’.

Leopoldina never had children, but the Caparica where she was born had remained part of her mental geography. The contributors to the book *Parafrenias* regret the disappearance of paraphrenia as a diagnosis, arguing that it is distinct from schizophrenia because, despite the existence of delusions, the patient’s personality and emotions are preserved.

As I look through Leopoldina's objects, it occurs to me that while carrying these items, maybe she still knew who she was. It was perhaps not by chance that, until she entered the asylum, she’d kept hold of her certificate of baptism, proof that she was born, was once a baby and had parents; her stamp, proof that she once practised a profession; her marriage certificate and her husband’s death certificate, proof that that she once had a husband and lost him; and her hand-stitched identity document.

António Bento tells me of meeting a mentally ill man on the street who showed him an object he swore he would never part with. It was a putrefying quail sandwich. Bento explains that the man and his wife had ‘lived together on the street as a couple, which is very rare’. The wife had died while eating the sandwich, and the man had kept it in a plastic bag. When he opened the bag to display the sandwich like a relic, a foul smell emerged that was bearable only to him.