

## Portugal, the Consuls, and the Jewish Refugees,

1938-1941

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### Introduction

The history of Portugal and the Jews during the Holocaust has not yet been sufficiently clarified by either the Portuguese or the Holocaust historiography. Although the neutrality of the Iberian countries offered a potential haven for a considerable number of Jews persecuted by the Nazis, the excellent Portuguese historiography, published in the 1990s about the “New State” (*Estado Novo*), has overlooked this matter<sup>1</sup> — with the exception of the newspaper reports that described the passage of Jews through Portugal.<sup>2</sup> In the Jewish historiography, while there are serious contributions to the analysis of this potential haven during the Nazi period,<sup>3</sup> they remain few. In the case of Portugal, one of the problems of this historiography, evident in Yehuda Bauer’s significant work,<sup>4</sup> is the discrepancy between Jewish and Portuguese documentation. The past inaccessibility of the latter has directly affected the results of the research.

Another important contribution is that of Patrick von Zur Mühlen, historian at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Bonn, who wrote a book about German

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<sup>1</sup> Fernando Rosas, *O Estado Novo nos Anos Trinta 1928-1938* (Lisboa: Estampa, 1996); idem., *Portugal Entre a Paz e a Guerra 1939-1945* (Lisboa: Estampa, 1995); idem., ed., *O Estado Novo (1926-1974)* (Lisboa: Vega, 1991), volume 7 of *História de Portugal*, series editor José Mattoso; António Telo, *Portugal na Segunda Guerra (1941-1945)*; *Portugal e o Estado Novo (1930-1960)*, vol. XII, Coordenação de Fernando Rosas (Lisboa: Presença, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Irene F. Pimentel, “Refugiados entre portugueses (1933-1945), *Vé rtice* no. 69 (November/ December 1995), pp. 102-111; “Salazar impediu os refugiados de ‘contagiarem’ Portugal” *Publico*, Saturday, March 18, 1995; See also Ferreira Fernandes, *Passagem para a Vida*, report in *Publico*, Sunday, March 26, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> In relation to Spain, see the definitive study of Haim Avni, *SPAIN, the Jews, and Franco* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), pp. 35-55, 197-216.

emigration to Spain and Portugal during 1933-1945.<sup>5</sup> However, in analyzing several aspects of this “emigration,” this work, due to its generic outlook, left several gaps in the issue regarding refugees.

This paper focuses on three aspects of the Portugal-Jewish axis. The first concerns Jews persecuted by the Nazis from the late 1930s until the beginning of the 1940s. The second concerns António de Oliveira Salazar and his ambassadors and consuls who became involved in the Jewish question. And the third aspect concerns the way the consuls dealt with persecuted Jews. The analysis of the attitude of Portuguese diplomats will form the backbone of this article.

The first studies of the potential haven for Jews offered by Latin American diplomats were published forty years ago.<sup>6</sup> However, extensive research about the diplomats’ involvement in the Jewish question began only in the late 1960s, with the study of the United States and the Jews during the Holocaust.<sup>7</sup> Another interesting treatment of this theme can be found in papers that examine the handling of European Jews by Latin American countries, mainly Argentina and Brazil, based on documentation from official archives which opened up to the public in the late 1980s.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, this

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<sup>5</sup> Patrick von Zur Mühlen, *Fluchtweg Spanien-Portugal — Die Deutsche Emigration und der Exodus aus Europa 1933-1945* (Bonn: Dietz, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Nathan Eck, “The Rescue of Jews With the Aid of Passports and Citizenship Papers of Latin American States,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, I (Jerusalem, 1957), pp. 125-152; Artur Prinz, “The Role of the Gestapo in Obstructing and Promoting Jewish Emigration,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, II (Jerusalem, 1958), pp. 205-218.

<sup>7</sup> David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), pp. 155-168; Shlomo Shafir, “American Diplomats in Berlin (1933-1939) and Their Attitude to the Nazi Persecution of the Jews,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, IX (Jerusalem, 1973), pp. 71-105; idem., “George S. Messersmith: Anti-Nazi Diplomat’s View of the German-Jewish Crisis,” *Jewish Social Studies*, XXXV, 1973, pp.32-41.

<sup>8</sup> Leonardo Senkman, *Argentina, la Segunda Guerra Mundial y los Refugiados Indeseables 1933-1945* (Buenos Aires: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1991), pp. 41-58, 88-99, 275-279; Maria Luiz Tucci Carneiro, *O Antisemitismo na Era Vargas* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988), pp. 155-348; Avraham Milgram, “The Jews of Europe from the Perspective of the Brazilian Foreign Service, 1933-1941,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1995), pp. 94-120; Jeffrey Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), pp.118-169; Daniel Feierstein and Miguel Galante, “Argentina and the Holocaust: The

historiography remains incomplete since it does not cover all the Latin American diplomatic missions.

An exception to this pattern is the literature dealing with the consuls who were honored as “Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem for having saved Jews while risking their own lives or careers. Among these consuls, the most famous is without doubt the Swedish Raoul Wallenberg, largely due to his personal merits, which came to light during the Nazi occupation of Hungary. His mysterious disappearance at the end of the war, with his arrest by the Soviets, also contributed to his fame. By the same token, in general, the popular literature about the deeds of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Sempo Sugihara, and Giorgiu Perlasca, to name the best known, is incomparably larger than the number of scholarly studies. And although the research addressed the diplomatic representation of neutral countries in Hungary in 1944-45, little or nothing was done to clarify the attitude of Argentinian and Turkish representatives in the same circumstances. António Louça and Eva Ban<sup>9</sup> have made an important contribution on Portugal and Salazar and the protection granted to Jews in Hungary within the context of the polemic about Salazar’s role vis-à-vis the plight of Jews during the Holocaust.<sup>10</sup>

This article will cover the period from 1938 to the beginning of the “Final Solution.” A second article, spanning the period of the “Final Solution” in Western Europe and Hungary, is presently being prepared.

## Salazar and the Jewish Refugee Question

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Conceptions and Policies of Argentine Diplomacy, 1933-1945”; Moshe Nes-El, “Dos memorias de embajadores latinoamericanos en Europa durante la segunda guerra mundial,” *Estudios Sobre el Judaismo Latinoamericano* (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 91-102.

<sup>9</sup> António Louça and Eva Ban, “Budapeste, 1944 — dois diplomatas portugueses face ao Holocausto,” *História*, ano XVIII (nova série), no.15 (December 1995), pp. 24-33; see also Feierstein and Galante, “Argentina and the Holocaust.”

<sup>10</sup> João Mendes and Clara Viana, “Budapeste, 1944: a embaixada que salvou 1000 judeus,” *Publico*, March 27, 1944; Mena Mendonça, “A verdade sobre a acção diplomática de Portugal na protecção dos judeus na Hungria durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial através dos Ministro Plenipotenciario Carlos de Sampayo Garrido e Encarregado de Negócios Carlos Branquinho,” *O Dia*, July 3, 1944.

Portugal, apparently, was one of the last countries in Europe to confront the problem of refugees from Germany and Austria. Unlike other West European countries, Portugal did not attract Jewish immigrants from Germany and Eastern Europe in the 1930s. Western Europe, the United States, South America, and even Palestine under the British Mandate were more attractive than Portugal in economic terms, professional advantages, capacity for absorption, and possibilities for socio-cultural adaptation. Objectively, Portugal was not in a position to absorb masses of immigrants, nor did the Salazar regime want any foreigners. They were seen as sources both of infiltration of ideas incompatible with the “national spirit” and of possible social tensions. They were, for these reasons, a priori considered potential enemies of the Portuguese authoritarian regime.

Portugal’s marginality as a welcome country for immigrants was such that the Portuguese were not even invited to take part in Evian Conference in July 1938, and were pushed to the sidelines of world efforts on behalf of refugees from Nazism.<sup>11</sup> However, this depreciative attitude would be quickly reconsidered by England and the United States.<sup>12</sup> At that urgent moment no power would allow itself to discard territorial options even if they were seen as of little value.

The authoritarian regime of Oliveira Salazar, the lack of funds in the Portuguese treasury, the proximity of Spain in the midst of a civil war, and a tiny Jewish community that did not exceed 1,000 were all negative factors for any immigrant, especially a Jewish one. In spite of this, however, in the period from 1933 to the end of World War II, a considerable number of Jews passed through Portugal as they headed for countries overseas.<sup>13</sup> The majority of

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<sup>11</sup> Informação — Resumo — Parecer, “A Conferencia de Evian,” AMNE (Arquivo do Ministerio dos Negócios Estrangeiros) 2o. P. P. A-47, M-58.

<sup>12</sup> On September 8, 1938, Portugal was invited by the British to participate in the Inter-Governmental Committee created by the Evian Conference. The invitation was endorsed by the American embassy in Lisbon, AMNE, *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> There are several estimates of the number of Jewish refugees who passed through Portugal: Yehuda Bauer estimated approximately 40,000 for the period 1940-1941; *American Jewry and the Holocaust*, p. 48. Haim Avni, based on reports of the HICEM from the fall of France till the end of December 1942, points to 10,500 Jews who sailed from Lisbon. This account does not

these passed through Lisbon in the summer of 1940, evading the Nazis and the “*blitzkrieg*,” which, from April to June, would result in the conquest of countries in Western Europe.

Portugal became aware of the situation of the Jewish refugees right after the annexation of Austria and the violent campaign unleashed by the SS against Austrian Jews, which aimed at their expropriation and expulsion from the Greater Reich. Viennese Jews became interested in Portugal as a country of transit only when the consuls of Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland stopped granting them visas. The majority of those who received transit visas for these countries did not continue their journey, preferring to remain in Europe for various reasons — sometimes simply due to lack of funds for the trip.<sup>14</sup> Those with German or Austrian passports did not need a visa to enter Portugal as tourists for a period of less than thirty days, an exemption which applied to Jews as well.<sup>15</sup> However, the tragic days brought about by the annexation of Austria and the difficulty of obtaining visas to other countries aroused among Jews such an interest in Portugal that the consuls in Vienna and in other West European capitals did not know how to cope with the unexpected number of interested people. João de Lucena, referring to the great number of Polish Jews who were in Vienna, warned the Portuguese Foreign Ministry that;

...almost all these people declared to me that they did not want to remain in Portugal, but only to wait in Lisbon for permission to enter the US or some South American republic, however they cannot guarantee that they will obtain that permission within the 30 days' deadline. I fear therefore that the Portuguese police will have difficulties in getting the undesirable elements to leave, for it is probable that the authorities of the countries through which they would have to return will create

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include those who sailed on their own; Avni, *Spain, the Jews, and Franco*, pp.90-93; p. 236 note 57. This is the most precise account. *The American Jewish Year Book*, vol. 46, 1944, mentions that approximately 100,000 refugees, most of them Jews, passed through Portugal, which contradicts its own sources, *The American Jewish Year Book*, 42 (1941), where Captain Agostinho of the PVDE (see below) stated that there were 15,000 refugees in August 1940.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from the consul in Vienna, João de Lucena to the MNE on June 15, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. P. A-43, M-81.

<sup>15</sup> This was the information which hundreds of Jews received at the Portuguese consulate in Vienna. João de Lucena to the MNE on August 24, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

difficulties in granting them transit visas, knowing that Poland will not receive them.<sup>16</sup>

The ambassador in Berlin, Veiga Simões, suggested to Salazar that they should inform the German government of the need for a Portuguese consular visa in passports stamped with the letter J; that is, to Jews who, on leaving Germany, would lose the right to return.<sup>17</sup> This suggestion was meant to prevent the arrival of Jews without violating the existing bilateral agreement between Portugal and Germany. Salazar accepted the suggestion and instructed consuls and shipping companies that the Portuguese consular visa was compulsory in these passports.<sup>18</sup>

The embassy in Brussels requested instructions about granting visas for the Portuguese colonies to Jews expelled from Germany.<sup>19</sup> And in Lisbon, Adolfo Benarus<sup>20</sup> resigned from the presidency of the Portuguese Committee of Assistance to Jewish Refugees (COMASSIS), an institution that he had headed since 1933. The aging leader, exhausted by years of community leadership, was unable to cope with the wave of refugees arriving in Lisbon in 1938.

The consuls usually reported to the Foreign Ministry about the anguished situation of Jews so, in 1938, ministers, the heads of their offices, the heads of departments, and especially Oliveira Salazar, became aware of the way the Nazis were solving “the Jewish question.” The dictator’s involvement in the issue of the Jewish refugees was no less than in other questions vital to the

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<sup>16</sup> João de Lucena to the MNE on June 22, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

<sup>17</sup> Telegram from the Berlin embassy to the MNE, September 7, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

<sup>18</sup> Telegram of the MNE to the Berlin embassy, September 30, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Antonio de Seves, head of the legation in Brussels to the MNE, August 27, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

<sup>20</sup> Adolfo Benarus, one of the leaders of the Jewish community of Lisbon, was president of the Zionist Federation, founder and director of the Jewish school, wrote books on Jewish and Zionist issues and was in touch with Jewish leaders, such as Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Goldman. See farewell letter dated April 22, 1941, of Dr. Augusto d’Esaguy, who succeeded Adolfo Benarus in the presidency of COMASSIS, Archive of the Jewish Community of Lisbon. Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, (CAHJP) Po/Li/A-II/12a, 2.

future of Portugal in the 1930s and the 1940s. The civil war in Spain and its political-military implications on the Iberian level was the historical moment that paved the way for Salazar's involvement in international affairs.<sup>21</sup> It was not by chance that, in 1936, Salazar, who was already head of the Council of Ministers and Minister of Finances, also took on the functions of minister of Foreign Affairs and minister of War.

In spite of the logistic support that Salazar offered the Spanish nationalists, Portugal did not regard itself safe from the ideological-imperialist threats breeding in the radical wing of the Falangists, who aspired to create a "Great Spain" that would embrace Portuguese territory. For the Germans, the nationalist victory predestined the fascist superiority over the republican, liberal, and parliamentary models. However, the German strategic implications went further than might be apparent at first. The ideological-authoritarian climate of the Iberian Peninsula on the eve of the war led the Germans to visualize a different Europe, more German than British.<sup>22</sup> Salazar understood that intervention of the Axis countries in the Spanish civil war would render Portuguese colonial interests vulnerable and would upset the centuries-old historic alliance between Portugal and Great Britain.

With Salazar's recognition of the need to neutralize the Iberian Peninsula and distance it from a possible confrontation between the two belligerent blocks,<sup>23</sup> he began increasing the dimensions of the Police of Vigilance and Defense of the State (Polícia de Vigilancia e Defesa do Estado; PVDE), thus enlarging its influence in the Portuguese state apparatus. This was the case especially for the International Section of the PVDE, which controlled the borders and the entry of foreigners.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Rosas, ed., *O Estado Novo (1926-1974)*, pp. 295-299.

<sup>22</sup> Fernando Rosas, *O Salazarismo e a Aliança Luso-Britânica* (Lisbon: Ed. Fragmentos, 1988), pp. 13-49-107-120.

<sup>23</sup> Cesar Oliveira, "A Sobrevivência das Ditaduras e a Neutralidade Peninsular na Segunda Guerra Mundial" in *O Estado Novo das Origens ao Fim da Autarcia 1926-1959* (Lisboa: ed. Fragmentos, 1987), pp. 357-366; see also "Oliveira Salazar e a Política Externa Portuguesa: 1932-1968" in *Salazar e o Salazarismo* (Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 1989), pp.71-83.

<sup>24</sup> Studies about the PVDE are few, and their absence is more evident in matters referring to the admission and control of foreigners. From 1933, the PVDE became the main agent of social and political control of the regime,

From 1935,<sup>25</sup> the PVDE, dependent on the Ministry of the Interior, insisted that a clear and rigid policy should dictate the granting of visas, especially where Poles, Russians, Jews, and individuals without a recognized nationality were concerned.<sup>26</sup> Later, this tendency would increase, due to the influence of pro-Germanic and antisemitic figures such as Captain Paulo Cumano, chief of the Fiscalization Services and Borders of the International Section of the PVDE. Cumano, who had a degree in mining engineering from Berlin, was, it seems, the only Portuguese agent who was trained as a policeman in Germany.<sup>27</sup> His privileged position in the Section of Portuguese International Police, together with his antisemitism, “certified” in Germany,<sup>28</sup> were pernicious to German and Austrian Jews who tried to come to Portugal, and also created difficulties for several consuls who acted according to the law.

In short, the Spanish issue in the context of the Iberian Peninsula, the intervention of the Axis countries in the civil war, the crisis of Jewish refugees in the Reich, the hypersensitivity of Salazar and his regime to the entry of foreigners, and the policy of distancing Portugal from the European crisis were all factors in determining Portugal’s response to the Jewish question.

The first signs of sensitivity toward the Jews were not late in coming. In the second half of 1938, consuls in London, Amsterdam, Marseilles, Budapest, and Berlin continuously reported on the strategy being used to discourage Jews from entering Portugal. The Portuguese International Police circulated

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infiltrating itself into innumerable areas of national life, trying to detect potential enemies of the regime, especially communists and liberals. Tom Gallagher, “Controlled Repression in Salazar’s Portugal,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 14 (1979), pp. 385-402. According to Douglas L.Wheeler, the PVDE and, after 1945, the PIDE was a more defensive than aggressive instrument; he points out that the neutralization or destruction of the policy of the opposition was only one among several police functions which it set out to fulfill. Douglas L.Wheeler, “In the Service of Order: The Portuguese Political Police and the British, German and Spanish Intelligence, 1932-1945,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 18 (1983), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Mühlén, *Fluchtweg Spanien-Portugal*, p. 126.

<sup>26</sup> Maria da Conceição Ribeiro, *A Polícia Política no Estado Novo 1936-1945* (Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1995), pp. 94-95.

<sup>27</sup> Wheeler, “In the Service of Order,” p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Maria da Conceição Ribeiro quotes British sources in which Paulo Cumano is described as a Germanophile favoring Nazi racial ideas. See Ribeiro, *A Polícia Política*, p. 119.



instructions to shipping companies warning them that unauthorized passengers would not be allowed to land. One example is that of a Jew of Polish origin, Abram J. Lachman, who had a visa granted by Consul Alfredo Casanova in Genoa. This episode was described by the director of the PVDE:

The agency refused to sell him a ticket because they did not have orders from the Portuguese authorities. The consul then phoned the shipping company Italia, saying that the Pole had permission to enter Portugal. The company asked him to put this in writing, and the consul did so. The company sold the ticket to the Polish Jew, but the Portuguese police did not let him land. The Pole continued on the same ship to America, where he also did not land. He then returned to Lisbon, and from there to Italy once again, where it was not certain whether the Italian police would allow his landing. The Company Italia via their agency in Lisbon protested. We answer, saying only that the warning about the sale of tickets referred to the order of the police and not to that of the consulates.<sup>29</sup>

This episode reflects the efforts of the PVDE to impose its discipline on consuls and shipping companies so that they would obey the orders of the International Police.

The perplexity regarding the situation was shared by consuls and victims alike. The consuls, because they were the last ones to know about the scheme being plotted in Lisbon by Salazar, the minister of the Interior, and the PVDE to prevent the disorganized arrival of Jews, and the Jews, because they did not understand why they were denied passage while Portugal granted visas to German and Austrian passports.<sup>30</sup> From this one can infer that, at least until October 1938, there were no official guidelines preventing Jews from entering Portugal. However, in order to hinder the haphazard entry

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<sup>29</sup> Letter from the Director of the PVDE to the Secretary-General of the MNE, Lisbon, October 18, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-73.

<sup>30</sup> Telegram from Ambassador Veiga Simões, Berlin, September 27, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38; Letter from General Consul M. de Castro, London, September 20, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38a; Letter from Vice-Consul Joaquim de Souza Cordeiro in Amsterdam, October 4, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38a; Letter from Consul Jose Augusto Magalhães in Marseilles, October 21, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38a; Letter from Consul Vasco da Gama Santos in Budapest, October 16, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

of these refugees, the police had begun to apply Salazar's orders and the verbal instructions transmitted by the minister of Interior.<sup>31</sup>

The purpose of the above stratagem, as applied by the PVDE, was to prevent refugee Jews from staying indefinitely in Portugal. From then on, and according to circular number 10 of October 28, 1938, addressed to consular representations, settling in Portugal was forbidden to Jews; however, they were allowed entry as tourists for thirty days.<sup>32</sup> Ansgar Schäfer, in a preliminary article, has discussed the various decrees issued by the Foreign Ministry during this period.<sup>33</sup> Patrick von Zur Mühlen has asserted that Portuguese policy was not determined by antisemitic reasons but rather by factors of Portugal's internal and external policy.<sup>34</sup>

The above-mentioned decree became a basic guideline for the transit of Jews through Portugal and Spain until the end of World War II. It is worth noting that the Portuguese and Spanish models relative to the entry of foreigners were very similar; the difference between them was more noticeable in the treatment offered the refugee. Portugal was, from the beginning, more liberal and less violent than Spain.<sup>35</sup> As permanent residence in Portugal was forbidden, obtaining documents to enter and leave the country was a *sine qua non* condition for any refugee. Besides the money to buy sea passage, it was first necessary to get an exit visa from Vichy French territory, an entry visa to an overseas country or countries, usually on the American continent, and a Portuguese visa, so that finally a transit visa through Spain could be received.

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<sup>31</sup> Letter from the Secretary-General of the Ministry of the Interior, Mario Caes Esteves, to the MNE on September 30, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

<sup>32</sup> This is the content of the letter signed by the Secretary-General of the PVDE, Jose Catela, to the Secretary-General of the MNE on October 27, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

<sup>33</sup> Ansgar Schäfer, "Obstáculos no caminho para a liberdade," in *Aspectos e Tendências de Estudos Germanísticos em Portugal*, Lisboa, December 1992, pp. 85-94.

<sup>34</sup> Mühlen, *Fluchtweg Spanien-Portugal*, p. 129. Had the book not been so clearly apologetic, presenting Portugal as a country welcoming refugees, we would have had no reason to distrust the categorical tone of this statement.

<sup>35</sup> Avni, *SPAIN, the Jews, and Franco*, pp. 72-79.

<sup>36</sup> For someone requesting visas, this metaphoric via Dolorosa symbolized the anguish of being a refugee.

The arrival and departure of these people would be controlled by the International Section of PVDE, which followed every step of the process, in compliance with the wishes of Oliveira Salazar. The foreign minister and the consular representations would adapt and submit themselves quickly to this reality.

In their urgency to abandon the Greater Reich and other antisemitic countries such as Poland, Rumania, and Hungary, the Jews besieged consulates of several countries, searching for the emancipating visa mainly to North and South America. In comparing the attitudes of the consular agents of Brazil, Argentina, and the United States with those of the Portuguese consuls, we notice the almost complete lack of Portuguese antisemitic prejudice — which was almost *sui generis* among consular services of that period. The Brazilian negative attitude was far to the opposite pole.<sup>37</sup> The full range of attitudes among the Argentinean consuls has not yet been verified, but there are already some serious contributions on the subject. Leonardo Senkman has described some negative cases of the Argentinean consular corps in Germany, as opposed to empathic attitudes to Jews expressed by members of the consular corps in Bucharest and Sofia.<sup>38</sup> In a recent study, focusing on information sent by Argentinean consuls from Germany, Bulgaria, Italy, and Rumania, and the nature of their attitudes during the persecutions of Jews, we find a dichotomous reality of both antisemitism and philo-Semitism.<sup>39</sup> David

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<sup>36</sup> António Louçã, “Portugal, Double Game, Between the Nazis and the Allies,” in Avi Becker, ed., *Challenging European History: The Plunder of Jewish Property During the Holocaust* (London: Macmillan, forthcoming).

<sup>37</sup> Several studies were published in the last ten years about Brazil and the issue of the Jewish refugees during the 1930s and 1940s. Without taking into account the historiographic differences, these studies reflect the negative and deeply antisemitic attitude of the majority of the consuls serving in Europe.

Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, *O Anti-Semitismo na Era Vargas* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988), pp.155-247; Avraham Milgram, “The Jews of Europe from the Perspective of the Brazilian Foreign Service, and *Os Judeus do Vaticano*,” (Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1994), pp. 107-124. Lesser, *Welcoming the Undesirables*.

<sup>38</sup> Senkman, *Argentina, la Segunda Guerra Mundial*, pp. 41-58.

<sup>39</sup> Feierstein and Galante, “Argentina and the Holocaust.”

S.Wyman, in his classic *Paper Walls*, presents an eclectic variety of attitudes taken by American consuls in relation to refugees — Jews and non-Jews. And in spite of the critical tone evident in the book, the general picture of the consuls is more positive than negative. Except for some cases of extreme intransigence, most of them collaborated with aid organizations (Quakers, Unitarian Service, American Friends Service Committee, etc.) and empathized with the cause of the refugees.<sup>40</sup>

The policy of the American states and the attitude of their consuls was vital, since obtaining a Portuguese visa and transit through Spain was dependant on their being a final haven. The importance of the Portuguese consuls can be measured by their courage to help Jews deprived of visas to other countries, in the first stage, and by their strategic positions, as neutral consular agents, in the stage of deportations to the extermination camps.

A Paragon of Ambivalence-Ambassador Alberto daVeiga Simões<sup>41</sup>

Veiga Simões began his consular and diplomatic career with the establishment of the republic; he was foreign minister for a short time in 1921. During this period he absorbed liberal and democratic ideas, a fact which, at

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<sup>40</sup> Wyman, *Paper Walls*, pp. 155-168.

<sup>41</sup> Alberto da Veiga Simões was born on December 16, 1888, in Arganil. From an early age he showed his literary skills, writing short stories and essays on political issues for local newspapers. He studied law at the University of Coimbra, receiving his diploma in 1910. Till he entered the consular corps in 1915, Alberto da Veiga Simões practiced law and was also involved in the politics of Arganil, aspiring to become a national figure. His republican leanings led him to become a journalist, writing for the weekly of the Centro Republicano Evolucionista [Evolutionary Republican Center] in his city, having been invited by Antonio José de Almeida, president of the Central Committee of the Evolutionary Party, to become the political editor of its organ: *República*. See Neves, ed., *Veiga Simões, Vida e Obra* (Arganil: Publication of the City Council, 1988). This study, published in his memory and therefore apologetic, is clearly anti-authoritarian. "Today we can no longer doubt: the memory of Veiga Simões has not been respected with the attention it deserves, for reasons whose roots are clearly political. Who knows if unconsciously, but the truth is that the political struggles in which he became involved in the early years of the Republic increased later, during the long years of authoritarianism which followed 1926, as if it were a crime to be a democrat." p. 13.

the end of the republic,<sup>42</sup> would create serious problems and lead to the end of his diplomatic career. In August 1933, after long years of service, Veiga Simões was appointed ambassador to Germany. His antagonism to Hitler's policy and ideology and to the mystic zeal of the Nazi pseudo-religion increased with time, and this emerges in the long and frequent reports he sent to Salazar. For Veiga Simões, the German imperialistic rhetoric breached the limits of the norms ruling relationships between nations in the modern state. He witnessed the way in which the German Reich introduced new and threatening elements into the state, especially the concept of "*Volk* [which is a] dynamic assimilator of all the analogous elements that fall within the range of its functioning, and [are] in constant movement."<sup>43</sup> He understood clearly that the cult of the state, the subordination of the family unit to totalitarian guidelines, the disintegration of religious orders, and the gradual destruction of minorities would all produce a dangerous amorphous mass.

In fact, the Third Reich's eliminatory zeal regarding all the religious denominations — Jews, Catholics, Lutherans of all kinds — has one source and one end: to substitute all the religious truths of *human* and *universal* order that share a faith that joins them to all of mankind, with a religiosity exclusively oriented to the Germanic community, its mystic roots, its traditions, its future power.<sup>44</sup>

Veiga Simões frequently used irony and cynicism to express his contempt for German anti-humanism, which, within Portuguese governmental circles, greatly contributed to his image as an enemy of the Reich. However, and perhaps paradoxically, his attitude toward the persecuted Jews involved a distancing and an ambivalence: alienation in relation to the majority of Jewish victims of Nazism and hypersensitivity in relation to some Jews, usually those

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<sup>42</sup> Cesar Mendes, twin brother of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, became an uncompromising enemy of Veiga Simões in the mid-1920s, and all the more so when he was nominated minister of the MNE by Salazar. Mendes pursued Veiga Simões so as to remove him from the ministry due to his republican past. See Rui Afonso, *Injustiça. O Caso Souza Mendes* (Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1990), pp. 193-197; *Um Bom Homem. Aristides Sousa Mendes o "Wallenberg Português,"* (Lisboa: Editorial Caminho, 1995), p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Veiga Simões to Salazar, Berlin, March 29, 1937, AMNE 3o. P. A-11, M-34.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

of great wealth, great renown and well-connected with the Portuguese diplomatic corps in Germany.

The antisemitism unleashed in 1938, culminating in the notorious “*Kristallnacht*” pogrom, aroused Veiga Simões’ concern with regard to three aspects related to the persecution of Jews:

He feared a mass emigration to Portugal of Jews deprived of funds who would remain there for lack of any immigrant options. He systematically warned Salazar of this “danger” and proposed a series of measures to prevent such an event.<sup>45</sup>

He tried to ensure that consuls retain the exclusive right to grant or refuse visas, a right which was being systematically undermined by the PVDE with Salazar’s connivance.

He tried to protect certain Jews against the wishes of the PVDE, deliberately overlooking the warnings by the police and justifying himself to Salazar for the visas issued to people in whom he was interested.

After *Kristallnacht* the demand for Portuguese visas intensified. Many visas were authorized by the PVDE itself in Lisbon through formal requests by Portuguese residents and then issued to those concerned at the consulates in Germany. An identical situation occurred in the Brazilian consulates — contrary to the wishes of Ambassador Ciro de Freitas Valle.<sup>46</sup> This reality of *faits accomplis*, his power-struggle with the PVDE’s and the consequent lessening of his own prerogatives as head of the Legation, motivated Veiga

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<sup>45</sup> Entry to Portugal to be conferred to holders of German passports marked with a J, “only if: a) they have relatives who are already resident in Portugal, and able to pay for their upkeep (especially in the case of old people, women and minors) ; b) gave sufficient guarantees that they possessed funds and could continue their journey to another country, the Portuguese territory serving only as transit or a short stay, for a period of time to be decided in each individual case by the proper authorities in Lisbon, a period which could be prolonged till they settled down if the authorities were to decide that this was convenient and the interested party wished it; c) the people involved are on a high scientific or technical level, of recognized merit, a case which is probably very rare; d) the people involved gave all the guarantees of social respectability, and of not being able to undertake activities which competing with local ones would harm Portugal’s economy or certain of its classes”; Veiga Simões to Salazar, Berlin, March 29, 1937, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

<sup>46</sup> Milgram, *Os Judeus do Vaticano*, pp. 115-116

Simões to grant visas to Jews without prior authorization by the Portuguese police. The number of authorized visas without prior consultation which he advocated was considerably reduced, but was still high enough for him to be reprimanded by Salazar.<sup>47</sup> In this context he authorized the visa to Rudolf Kissinger, son-in-law of the Portuguese consul in Nuremberg, a businessman with a record number of visits to Lisbon. In the case of Siegfried Dankowitz, ex vice-director of an important Austrian bank, who wanted to spend six months in Portugal before re-emigrating to Australia,<sup>48</sup> the visa contradicted the spirit of circular no. 10 of October 1938.

Of special interest are the three cases which Veiga Simões advocated to Salazar because they were paradigmatic of his sensitivity to Jews belonging to the former high German society and close to the circle of his own personal relations.

Dr. Edmund Werner, personal doctor of several diplomats in Berlin and who was recommended by the secretary-general of the Anti-Komintern, wanted to settle down in Madeira Island to establish a convalescent home.

Madame Deutsch, former owner of the house bought for the Portuguese Legation, was an elderly lady with a big fortune abroad who lived part of the year in Italy. "The capital which she possesses abroad is very great and ensures her a very comfortable life. It's a case which need not be seen as an emigration of Jews, but rather as tourism and rich tourism at that."<sup>49</sup>

3. Prof. Dr. Hermann Strauss had taught several Portuguese doctors and for that reason:

when he saw his position reduced to the present one, forbidden from treating Aryans, from using his car, etc. thought of settling down in Portugal....I promised him in due time an unlimited visa for Portugal, or the

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<sup>47</sup> "The Police informs consulate in Berlin is granting visas, passports, German Jews without prior consultation Portuguese police. Chancellor of the Consulate also gives declarations to those interested that it has no objections to their coming to Portugal. I beg Your Excellency to order the immediate stop of these procedures. signed Minister." Telegram of Salazar to Veiga Simões, December 21, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

<sup>48</sup> Veiga Simões to Salazar, Berlin January 14, 1939, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38-A.

<sup>49</sup> Veiga Simões to Salazar, Berlin December 31, 1938, AMNE 2o. P. A-43, M-38.

islands....I did it without the request of strangers because my reason refused to conceive that a civilized country would close its gates to one of the world's most famous practitioners of clinical medicine simply for so-called racial reasons.<sup>50</sup>

At the end of the letter, after relating their case histories and insisting on the well-being and future of the three Jews from the elite — and even appealing to the humanitarian feelings of Salazar — Veiga Simões fearfully and apprehensively warned the dictator of the eventual arrival of Czech Jews [from the annexed Sudetenland], armed with passports, but without the red J, which would render difficult the “racial” identification of the holders.<sup>51</sup> For the ambassador, famous, wealthy, and persecuted Jews were victims, while the persecuted and dispossessed masses were Jews. Nevertheless, his correspondence — dictated by his liberal-democratic leanings together with his anti-Nazism — is free of hatred, racism, or antisemitism.

The consul general in Hamburg granted visas to Jews on his own initiative and with the approval of Veiga Simões, and, by establishing direct contacts with the civilian governors of the Azores and Madeira, enabled the admission of Jews.<sup>52</sup> Thus he bypassed the PVDE, the MNE, and the minister (Salazar). Veiga Simões and the consul general in Hamburg experienced several difficulties. First, the tendency of the PVDE to centralize and control immigration, demanding the subordination of ambassadors and consuls, even at the price of the loss of their prestige. For example, a letter from the PVDE, signed by Captain Paulo Cumano and addressed to the Marcus and Harting

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. The PVDE authorized the arrival of these people as tourists during a period of thirty days, that is, within the limits established by the decree of October 10, 1938, and also as a show of authority. Letter of the PVDE to the General Director of Political Affairs and Internal Administration of the MNE, Lisbon, March 3, 1939, AMNE 20. P. A-43, M-38-A.

<sup>51</sup> Three days later, on January 17, 1939, he again warned the MNE about visas authorized by the PVDE to Jews lacking funds and proof of their being able to go on to other countries. Telegram of January 17, 1939, AMNE, 20. P. A-43, M-38.

<sup>52</sup> Confidential letter of Paulo Cumano to the Secretary-General of the MNE, Lisbon, April 11, 1939, AMNE 20. P. A-43, M-38-A. The consul addressed the Civil Governor of Ponta Delgada asking for authorization for twenty-eight Jewish families to land.



firm of Lisbon, was presented in the Hamburg consulate declaring that “residence in Portugal having been authorized to a certain person, a ticket to Portugal may be sold to him, independently of the consular visa.”<sup>53</sup> In April 1939, Mrs. Franziska Elisabeth Deutsch, mentioned above, widow of the president of the AEG industry, did not yet have her visa authorized by the International Police. Embarrassed and discredited, Veiga Simões ordered the consul in Hamburg to stamp her passport with the visa, even without the authorization of the PVDE, and appealed to Salazar not to hinder the landing of Mrs. Deutsch:

Your Excellency, to defend the prestige of the Portuguese diplomatic representation, you will of course give the Police incisive orders to place no difficulties to her landing in Lisbon, and this time to abstain from undermining the authority of the diplomatic and consular representatives vis-à-vis all of Berlin, as they have done in other cases.  
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The second reason is more serious. It refers to the critical attitude of Veiga Simões toward the German regime, which was not backed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and even less so by the PVDE. However, what was bearable until the collapse of France, which brought Hitler’s troops to the Pyrenees, had become intolerable from the point of view of diplomacy and the efforts at neutrality that Salazar desired. Nobody, therefore, was surprised when Veiga Simões was substituted by the pro-Germanic Count of Tovar on July 31, 1940. On his return, Veiga Simões was investigated; the information gathered about him clarifies the fate of the circle of those who were *personae non gratae* to Salazar:

I don’t think that at this moment he can be a disturbing element since he lacks followers, and given his long absence from the country. In spite of his sympathy for the cause of the so-called democracies I don’t believe he has any kind of links with their representatives. Nevertheless, he does not hide his faith in parliamentarism, saying that here one notices immediately the lack of liberty and that without

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<sup>53</sup> Veiga Simões to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Salazar), Berlin, May 4, 1939, AMNE, 2o. P. A-43, M-38-A.

<sup>54</sup> Veiga Simões to Salazar, Berlin, April 8, 1939. AMNE, 2o. P. A-43, M-38-A.

freedom of the press one cannot carry out a constructive and honest enterprise.<sup>55</sup>

Veiga Simões was “frozen” after his return until February 1946, when he was appointed the representative of Portugal to the China of Chiang Kai-Shek. After the long years of hibernation, he felt this new post degraded him, and, when he did not take it up, Salazar decreed that he be discharged.<sup>56</sup>

Salazar, who did not tolerate any opposition and, still less, any disregard of his authority, had a special ability to undo undisciplined subordinates who acted as circumstances and their consciences dictated: he ostracized them. For these reasons he punished Veiga Simões, avenged himself on Aristides Mendes, and humiliated Sampayo Garrido, head of the Portuguese Legation in Budapest.

### The Incredible Lightness of Disobedience - Aristides de Sousa Mendes

Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the consul whose memory was officially omitted for years, appears today next to other immortal diplomats who saved Jews during World War II.<sup>57</sup> Sousa Mendes was prosecuted for disobeying orders that forbid the entry of certain kinds of foreigners, mostly Jews. On being prosecuted, reviled, and discharged from his consular functions, he lost his pension — a situation that ruined him financially. In 1938, after nine years in the consulate general at Antwerp, he was appointed to the inferior consular post at Bordeaux. Here his personal drama played itself out.

His problems began before the great exodus of refugees to the south of France. The process that ended with Sousa Mendes’s discharge from his consular career began with two visas that he granted to “undesirable”

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<sup>55</sup> Unsigned information to Salazar, dated May 8, 1941, *A.N.T.T. Oliveira Salazar Archive AOS/CO/IN-8 B*

<sup>56</sup> Neves, ed., *Veiga Simões, Vida e Obra*, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> The road to his rehabilitation in Portugal started in Jerusalem, which distinguished him in 1967, with the noble title of “Righteous Among the Nations” conferred by Yad Vashem.

foreigners<sup>58</sup> without having been authorized to do so. The first case was on November 21, 1939, and concerned Arnold Wiznitzer, a former professor of history, and his wife; the second was on March 21, 1940, regarding the Spanish doctor and Republican Eduardo Neira Laporte, ex-professor at Barcelona University. The threat of internment in French concentration camps hovered over both men. The Wiznitzer couple were in Portugal when their request for a visa was refused; whereas Dr. Eduardo Neira Laporte, whose visa the Foreign Ministry had refused because of an unfavorable report of the PVDE, was not allowed to land. Sousa Mendes was reprimanded and warned in writing that “any new transgression or violation on this issue will be considered disobedience and will entail a disciplinary procedure where it will not be possible to overlook that you have repeatedly committed acts which have entailed warnings and reprimands....”<sup>59</sup>

The conquest of Western countries and the exodus of refugees who massed together in the south of France waiting for visas to cross the Pyrenees forced Salazar to confront once again the delicate question of neutrality. Apart from worries as to whether Franco would succumb to Hitler’s pressure and about

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<sup>58</sup> The new instructions of the MNE, hindering entry to foreigners distrusted by Salazar’s regime, appear in circular no. 14 of November 11, 1939. These instructions forbid fourth-class consuls to grant passports or consular visas without first consulting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Without first consulting the Minister of Foreign Affairs, consuls will not be able to grant consular visas to: foreigners of indefinite, or contested nationality or one under litigation, to displaced persons, to holders of Nansen passports and to Russians; to foreigners whose reasons for coming to Portugal the consul does not consider satisfactory, and furthermore, those on whose passports a declaration or some sign states that they will not be able to return to their country of origin; consuls should try to find out from all foreigners whether they have means of subsistence; to Jews expelled from the countries of their nationality or from those they come from; to those, who invoking their sailing from a Portuguese port, do not have in their passports a visa valid for the country of their destination, a ticket by sea or air, or one which the respective companies guarantee. The consuls will, however, be very careful not to hinder the arrival in Lisbon of passengers going on to other countries and especially those travelling on trans-Atlantic air routes or to the Far East. In the Minister’s name  
(a) Luiz F. Sampayo. AMNE, RC 779.

<sup>59</sup> This is the final text of the reprimanding letter, which the Secretary-General of the MNE Luiz Sampayo sent to Sousa Mendes on April 24, 1940, AMNE RC M 779. See also the chapter “Desobediência” by Rui Afonso, *Um Homem Bom, Aristides de Sousa Mendes, o “Wallenberg português.”*

the strategic interests of Portugal, new dilemmas emerged with the fall of France. Would it be realistic to close the borders to refugees, most of whom were “undesirable” foreigners, without wounding the sensitivities of the Allied countries? Would it be possible to reconcile the policy of neutrality with the measures designed to reject the entry of these foreigners? The circumstances imposed by the German conquests, in an accelerated rhythm, limited the time and the options open to Salazar.

As pragmatics and strategy were fundamental, Salazar now reconsidered the passage of the persecuted and refugees, especially if they were citizens of Allied countries. Salazar instructed the consulates in Spain and those in the south of France — Bordeaux, Bayonne, Perpignan, Marseilles, Nice, etc.-to grant transit visas to British citizens recommended by the nearest British consul.<sup>60</sup>

It was in these circumstances that Sousa Mendes granted thousands of visas to refugees of various nationalities, visas which he could not grant without the previous authorization of the MNE. His nephew, Cesar Mendes (Jr.), witnessed the dramatic days which preceded the granting of visas to the refugees:

Since May 10, 1940 until the occupation of the city, the dining-room, the drawing-room and the consul’s offices were at the disposal of the refugees, dozens of them of both sexes, all ages, and mainly old and sick people. They were coming and going, there were pregnant women who did not feel well, there were people who had seen, powerless to defend themselves, their relatives die on the highways killed by machine guns firing from planes. They slept on chairs, on the floor, on the rugs, there could never be any control again. Even the consul’s offices were crowded with dozens of refugees who were exhausted, dead tired because they had waited for days and nights on the street, on the stairways and finally in the offices. They could not satisfy their needs, they did not eat nor drink for fear of losing their places in the lines, what happened nevertheless and caused some disturbances. Consequently, the refugees looked bad, they did not wash themselves, they did not comb their hair, they did not change their clothes and they did not shave. Most of them had nothing but the clothes they were wearing.

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<sup>60</sup> *Aide-mémoire* of the British Embassy in Lisbon, April 24, 1940, AMNE RC M 779.

The incidents took such proportions that it was imperative to ask the army to preserve the order. In each room and in each office there was a soldier. These soldiers were under the orders of a sergeant. At that time the chancellery was located on the first floor of a building in the Quai Louis XVIII. It is still located there today. The sidewalks, the front door, the large stairways that led to the chancellery were crowded with hundreds of refugees who remained there night and day waiting for their turn. The discipline was enforced by soldiers. In the chancellery they worked all day long and part of the night. My uncle got ill, exhausted, and he had to lie down. He considered the pros and cons and decided to give all the facilities without distinction of nationalities, races or religion and bear all the consequences. He gets up impelled by a “divine power” (these were his own words) and gives orders to grant free visas to everybody.<sup>61</sup>

A slight analysis of the lists and visas granted by Sousa Mendes to Jews and non-Jews in May and June 1940,<sup>62</sup> shows — without diminishing the greatness of his attitude — that the number of visas granted by the consul was lower than the numbers mentioned in the literature, raising a series of questions relative to Portugal and to the entry of Jewish refugees.

It was probably Harry Ezratty<sup>63</sup> who was the first to mention in an article published in 1964 that Sousa Mendes had saved 30,000 refugees, of which 10,000 were Jews, a number which has since then been repeated automatically by journalists and academics.<sup>64</sup> That is, Ezratty, imprudently, took the total number of Jewish refugees who passed through Portugal and ascribed it to the work of Aristides de Sousa Mendes. According to the visa lists of visas issued in the Bordeaux consulate, Sousa Mendes granted 2,862 visas between January 1 and June 22, 1940. The majority, that is, 1,575 visas, were issued between June 11 and 22, in the last days of his consular career there.<sup>65</sup> We shall never know exactly how many visas he issued in the

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<sup>61</sup> Testimony of Cesar Mendes. Dossier Aristides Sousa Mendes, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), M 31/264.

<sup>62</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Mordechai Paldiel, director of the department of the “Righteous Among the Nations” at Yad Vashem, for his courtesy in making the visa list of the Bordeaux consulate available to me.

<sup>63</sup> Harry Ezratty, “The Portuguese Consul and the 10,000 Jews,” *Jewish Life*, Sept.-Oct. 1964, pp. 17-19.

<sup>64</sup> Ezratty based his calculations on information given by Ilja Dijour, representative of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in Lisbon, according to which 10,000 Jews entered Portugal during the war.

<sup>65</sup> Lists of visas of the Portuguese consulate in Bordeaux.

sub-post of Bayonne and in the city of Hendaye, places through which he passed on being called home for insubordination; in these places he granted visas without a consular stamp and only in handwriting, and therefore they were not registered anywhere.<sup>66</sup>

In order to have an idea of the extent of the exaggeration in the number of Jews who actually entered Portugal on the one hand, and the number that is believed entered thanks to Sousa Mendes on the other, it is sufficient to cite that, in the report of the HICEM, 1,538 Jews who came to Portugal as refugees without visas to other countries sailed from Lisbon in the second half of 1940, and 4,908 Jews, with the help of HICEM, sailed during 1941. To this number one should add approximately 2,000 Jews who came directly from Italy, Germany, and countries annexed by the Germans armed with American visas. In total, in the eighteen months from July 1940 to December 1941, the HICEM took care of the sea transport of 8,346 Jews who left Lisbon for trans-Atlantic countries.<sup>67</sup> We must presumably add to the numbers above the Jews who transited and left Portugal by themselves. Even so, the discrepancy between the reality and the myth of the number of visas granted by Sousa Mendes is great. Nevertheless, we must conclude that the majority of Jews who, in the summer of 1940, succeeded in crossing the Pyrenees and Spain to the Portuguese border, did so thanks to Sousa Mendes.

Certainly Salazar and his police were tolerant whenever Jewish organizations, such as the HICEM and the Joint, provided practical solutions for the maintenance, documentation, and transport of Jews out of the country. In the first six months (July to December 1940), both governmental authorities as well as the police distrusted the activities of the HICEM in Portugal; this attitude improved the following year (1941), when HICEM began to be seen as the “Jewish Agency” for emigration purposes. In collaboration with the Section of Assistance to the Refugees of the Jewish Community of Lisbon,

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<sup>66</sup> Haim Avni’s interview of the Michaeli family on April 3, 1962, Oral History Division, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Project no. 1, interview 5.

<sup>67</sup> Report of the HIAS-ICA Activities in Lisbon. July 1, 1940—December 18, 1941, HIAS-HICEM Archives, series I — reel 30.

they obtained transit visas, permission of residence till the date of sailing, and even freed Jews who had been arrested.<sup>68</sup>

Other HICEM reports mention the interventions of this organization in favor of illegal refugees, held back at the borders and kept from entering Portuguese territory:

We tried, thanks to constant intervention — with the most valuable assistance of Dr. Augusto d'Esaguy — to facilitate and hasten the issue of such organizations. Day after day, we had to intervene in favor of the liberation of emigrants and refugees, held up at the border, in the ports or in the aerodromes.<sup>69</sup>

Many of the refugees with visas granted by Sousa Mendes, including Rabbi Kruguer, his wife and children, were detained by Portuguese police authorities in Vilar Formoso, on the Spanish border. With the intervention of Dr. Augusto d'Esaguy, president of the COMASSIS and of Moyses Amzalak,<sup>70</sup> head of the Jewish community of Lisbon and friend of Oliveira Salazar, they were authorized to continue their journey into the country. No less important was d'Esaguy's intervention on behalf of Jews expelled from Luxembourg in September 1940. Some time ago the German authorities issued an order that all the Jewish population of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg leave without delay. Hence, two groups of refugees from Luxembourg arrived in the last few months in Portugal, accompanied by the President of the Jewish Community of Luxembourg, Mr. A. Nussbaum. After having stopped a few times at the Spanish-Portuguese frontier, nearly all of them finally succeeded — thanks to the intervention of Mr. Dr. Augusto d'Esaguy — to obtain permission to remain in Lisbon, while waiting for the possibility to emigrate overseas.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Report on the Activity of the HIAS-ICA Emigration Association for 1940, HIAS-HICEM Archives, series I — reel 30.

<sup>70</sup> Testimony of Rabbi Haim Kruguer, 1966. Dossier Aristides de Sousa Mendes, YVA, M31/264. Rabbi Kruguer received the visa on June 15, 1940, visa no. 1605, list of visas of the Bordeaux consulate.

<sup>71</sup> Report of the Activities of the HICEM in 1940 from January 1 to September 30, 1940, HIAS-HICEM Archives, series I-reel 30. The liberation of these two groups was mentioned by Dr. Augusto d'Esaguy in his farewell letter, Archive of the Jewish Community of Lisbon, CAHJP, Jerusalem, Po/Li/A-II/12a, 2. The president of the Consistoire Israélite of Luxembourg, Albert Nussbaum, who

Part of a third group of 287 Luxembourg Jews expelled on November 14, 1940, and rejected at first by Portuguese police authorities, were authorized after some months to enter Portuguese territory.<sup>72</sup>

There are two versions regarding the disciplinary process that was set up against Aristides de Sousa Mendes. The most accepted sees the process as a consequence of the visas that he gave Jewish refugees after the invasion of France. The second, defended by Rui Afonso,<sup>73</sup> explains the persecution of Sousa Mendes as the consequence of internal and personal intrigues at the MNE, especially by Secretary-General Luiz Sampayo against his twin brother Cesar Mendes, in addition to the irregular visas granted by Sousa Mendes to the Wiznitzer couple and to Eduardo Neira Laporte.

Another episode which angered the MNE, and which eventually led to Sousa Mendes being recalled from the consulate general, has its source in an *aide-mémoire* sent by the British embassy in Lisbon to the MNE complaining about the behavior of the consul in Bordeaux who demanded extra taxes from British citizens requesting visas:

The Portuguese Consul at Bordeaux has been deferring until after office hours all applications for visas and has then been charging them at a special rate; in at least one case the applicant has also been

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succeeded in entering Portugal with one of these groups, put pressure through several channels to admit Luxembourg families. One of them, through the Belgian legation in Lisbon, appealed, at his request, to Salazar to allow the admission of the Lieblich family who were in Vilar Formoso; Letter of "Legation de Belgique" to Salazar, Lisbon, December 30, 1940, AMNE 2o. P. A-44, M-152.

<sup>72</sup> See report of V. Bodson, Minister of Justice of Luxembourg to A.W.G. Randall, March 2, 1942, Public Record Office (London), FO 371/32655. The train traveled from the Portuguese border to Bayonne on November 19, 1940. On November 26, the train was sent by the SS to unoccupied France, where they were refused admission, and forced to return again to Bayonne. As the German military authorities in Bayonne insisted that they should be moved within the shortest delay, the SS forced these Jews to infiltrate Spain in small groups. See Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office* (N.Y.: Holmes & Meier, 1978), pp.45-46; Bauer, *American Jewry*, pp. 53-55.

<sup>73</sup> This thesis, which is a main statement in his first book, *Injustiça*, is marginalized in his second book, *Um Homem Bom*.



requested to contribute to a Portuguese charitable fund before the visa was granted.<sup>74</sup>

This was too much. Not only did he grant free visas to thousands of refugees without permission, but he also demanded an extraordinary payment from British subjects, in whom Salazar had a special interest. Sousa Mendes, who continued to violate laws and disrespect the minister and head of government, entertained no doubts that he would be submitted to a disciplinary process. Given the circumstances of his insubordination, which would end his career, the possibilities that he would be forgiven were minimal. Why then did he act this way?

Encouraged by the rehabilitation of Aristides de Sousa Mendes by the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal in March 1988, Portuguese journalists and writers identified him with the heroic figure of Raoul Wallenberg<sup>75</sup> In March 1996, the Assembly decided on his posthumous reintegration to the consular function,<sup>76</sup> and, in July of the same year, Minister of Foreign Affairs Jaime Gama decided to indemnify the family of Aristides de Sousa Mendes.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Aide-mémoire* of the British Embassy in Lisbon on June 20, 1940, AMNE RC M 779. In 1923, while posted in San Francisco, Sousa Mendes clashed with the local Portuguese community over a contribution to a charity institution to which the American Portuguese refused. The affair, which was not reported to the MNE, reached the press in the form of insults and the MNE, which considered it a serious error. Afonso Rui, *Injustiça*, pp. 22-26. This was therefore not the first time that Sousa Mendes had struggled for a charitable cause. On this occasion he did so in extremely delicate circumstances.

<sup>75</sup> To the contrary of what is usually held, apart from the fact that Sousa Mendes and Raoul Wallenberg entered the diplomatic service and saved Jews during World War II, there is little in common between these figures. For the differences, see Douglas Wheeler, "And Who Is My Neighbor? A World War II Hero or Conscience for Portugal?" *Luso-Brazilian Review* XXVI, 1, 1989 p. 120. The sub-title of the biography written by Rui Afonso reflects this tendency: *Um Homem Bom Aristides de Sousa Mendes. O "Wallenberg português,"* and several articles published in newspapers also look for this affinity, so as to raise up the figure and the deeds of Sousa Mendes. "Portuguese Wallenberg' honored at last" *Toronto Star*, April 19, 1987; "Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese Wallenberg: The Crime of Saving Jews" *O Jornal* 52, March 30, 1988, pp. 26-31; Jose Antunes, "Lisboa: Porto de Êxodo; Salazar demitiu Wallenberg português," *Gente*, Lisboa, October 21-27, 1987.

<sup>76</sup> Antonio Melo, "Homem Bom," *Público*, December 8, 1966, p. 27.

<sup>77</sup> *Expresso*, no. 1238, July 20, 1966.

## Disregarding Orders – A Widespread Phenomenon

Fearing that Jews who had entered illegally in the period from June to September 1940 would remain in the country, the Portuguese government began to create difficulties for Jews in France to come to Portugal, even for those holding visas to other countries. At the end of 1940, after the French-German border agreements and given the successful smuggling of Jews out of Portugal by Jewish organizations, the question of the entry of Jews reverted to what it had been before the summer of 1940. That is, the parameters of the policy of entry for foreigners established in 1938 and radicalized with the circular of November 14, 1939, permitting transit but not residence in Portugal, were once again strictly enforced. The Jewish organizations contributed to this tendency by guaranteeing the expenses of the residence and transportation of Jews who were in France, Italy, and Hungary and who had visas for other countries.<sup>78</sup>

In May 1940, the MNE refused a tourist visa requested by the Milan consulate for the Rumanian student Saul Steinberg. It alleged that “Rumania was struggling with the serious problem which it is trying hard to solve, to free itself of an undesirable, numerous and increasing population of Jewish race.”<sup>79</sup> The

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<sup>78</sup> “On December 17, 1940, we received for the first time permission for about 200 people who came to Portugal in transit. This began the second period of six months. People were able to come to Portugal at that time having their destination visa and transit visa in perfect order. This was a great success for us and during this period from January to July 1941, we sent over 2856 people of whom 1282 were sent directly from Portugal and the remaining 1574 from France and other European countries.” Report of the HIAS-ICA Activities in Lisbon, July 1, 1940 — December 18, 1941, HIAS-HICEM Archives, series I — reel 30.

<sup>79</sup> Vaz da Cunha, General Director of Economic and Consular Affairs of the MNE to the director of the PVDE, Lisbon May 11, 1940, AMNE, 2o. P. P. A-44, M-152. Rumania, which, from the end of the 1930s, publicized its intention of diminishing its Jewish population, was enlarged after World War I with the territories annexed from Transylvania and Bessarabia, paradoxically caused opposite results because this antisemitism was assimilated by the consular representations in Bucarest. One of the clearest examples is the document sent by the first secretary of the Brazilian legation, Labianno Salgado dos Santos to Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1938. See Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, *O Anti-Semitismo na Era Vargas*, São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1988, pp. 314-417.

problems of the honorary consul of Milan, Giuseppe Agenore Magno,<sup>80</sup> began on September 6, when the plane, carrying Saul Steinberg with a visa granted by the consul on August 29, landed at the airport in Sintra. The Jewish student, whose visa had been refused four months before, was forbidden entry to Portugal and forced to return on the same plane.<sup>81</sup> This episode coincided with the initial procedure of Sousa Mendes, described above, regarding the Wiznitzer couple and Eduardo Neira Laporte. In both circumstances it turns out that the consuls granted visas after these were refused by the MNE.

The Steinberg case and other similar ones led to the discharge of Giuseppe Agenore Magno from his consular functions and his substitution by a vice-consul,<sup>82</sup> who never took up the post. What is surprising in this case, as opposed to that of Sousa Mendes, is that Agenore Magno, in spite of being discharged, continued to run the consulate till the day of his death on February 5, 1947.<sup>83</sup> With his morale and self-respect shaken, his new status enabled him to maintain appearances in spite of perceiving himself as “castrated” as regards the conferring of visas.

The discharge was seen by Consul Alfredo Casanova of Genoa, Magno’s superior in Italy, as an expression of human injustice. Casanova criticized Salazar for reacting negatively to the consular protection granted to Jews, defending them with empathy in personal letters he addressed to the dictator.

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<sup>80</sup> Count Giuseppe Agneore Magno was the scion of a Neapolitan aristocratic family. He served as head of the Italian Immigration Service in Buenos Aires in the first decades of the century and was recommended as honorary consul of Portugal in Milan, by his friend, Augusto de Castro, at the time Portugal’s ambassador in Rome. He was appointed in 1934. Magno, the Lusophile, knew the Portuguese language well and had even translated Portuguese literature into Italian, including works of Augusto de Castro. Rui Afonso, “Count Giuseppe Agenore Magno,” *Portuguese Studies Review*, vol. V, no.1, Spring-Summer 1966, pp. 12-22.

<sup>81</sup> Letter of the PVDE to Vaz da Cunha, AMNE, 2o. P. P. A-44, M-152.

<sup>82</sup> Section of the Consular Administration, January 30, 1941, AMNE, RPA 103. The discharge decree was signed by the Secretary of the Presidency of the Republic, Dossier G. A. Magno no. 3459.

<sup>83</sup> Rui Afonso explains this *sui generis* phenomenon as the result of the appeals to Salazar by Alfredo Casanova, consul in Genova and superior to Agenore Magno, and by the eventual intervention of Augusto de Castro. In regard to Augusto de Castro, there are no documents proving that he helped Magno.

In one of the letters to Salazar, Casanova stated that the irregular granting of visas to Jews should be seen as a praiseworthy expression of humanity and not an act to be condemned.

Mr. Agenore Magno did indeed grant some passports which I suppose were not quite regular, but...if he has transgressed, it was certainly because of his warm heart, his open and sound [liberal — A.M.] mind and not for dishonest reasons. There are transgressions which on certain occasions constitute facts which, according to my way of seeing and feeling, should be accorded a generous absolution, due to the tragic situations, such as were those of the Hebrews, human beings and most unhappy, ferociously murdered, robbed and persecuted for several years, just as if it were a hunt of furious dogs....I, in Barcelona, during the barbaric Marxist regime... granted 18 or 20 passports to *foreign* nuns. But I will be asked: were they legal? NO! But, my documents were the only way that the precious lives of these innocent ladies could have been saved.

In commenting on the irregularity of his procedure during the Spanish civil war, when he saved nuns by falsifying their identifying details and names, Casanova indirectly defended Magno's attitude to Jews on the principle that all means are justified in saving human lives.

I assure Your Excellency that, if the Law were to be applied rigorously and strictly to me, I would deserve a punishment for falsifying the truth, but as far as my conscience is concerned, I feel happy, proud and at ease. With Mr. Magno certainly the same case happened. There are transgressions, crimes, which being perfectly identical, but committed in certain and serious circumstances, are absolutely opposite. Some deserve a severe punishment while others are merited commendation and a great benevolence.<sup>84</sup>

In November 1941, Salazar ordered Casanova, a consul first-class, to exchange his post in Genoa with that of his counterpart in Marseilles, a second-class consul. Rui Alfonso asks whether this was a form of punishment or a temporary posting for his last year before retirement from active service

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<sup>84</sup> Alfredo Casanova to Oliveira Salazar, Genoa, June 19, 1941, G.A. Magno file, YVA, M31/3459.

at age sixty-five.<sup>85</sup> The first hypothesis seems more in keeping with the way Salazar solved disciplinary issues involving his subordinates.

In February 1941, the International Police informed the MNE “that the Portuguese consulates in Milan, Budapest, Bucharest and Antwerp are granting visas to passports of foreigners, ignoring instructions received from above. Some of them have visas to Panama, Haiti, etc. and almost all lack assured passages.”<sup>86</sup> This indicates that disregarding orders was a widespread phenomenon in consular circles, and, in spite of the strict control of the International Police, such occurrences were frequent, albeit on a small scale.

This reality created an embarrassing situation for the Section of Assistance to Refugees of the Jewish Community in Lisbon, which was forced to solve health and financial problems in the cities of Marvão, Valença do Minho and Elvas. Such Jews had entered the country with transit visas granted by one of the Guizol brothers of the Cannes consulate without previous police authorization.<sup>87</sup>

The persecution and destruction of the Jews triggered diametrically opposite attitudes, ranging from outright evil to compassion for others. Both attitudes are fascinating and impel us to question their reasons. To ask why hatred of the Jew was absent in Portuguese consular circles is as legitimate as to ask why, in identical times, places, and circumstances, it was present in

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<sup>85</sup> Afonso Rui, *Injustiça*, p. 18.

<sup>86</sup> Letter from the PVDE to the General Director of the Economical and Consular Affairs of the MNE, Lisbon, February 21, 1941, AMNE, 2o. P. P. A-44, M-152. The visas of Agenore Magno were granted before his discharge. It was probably Sam Levy, a Jew of Greek origin and registered at the Milan consulate in 1936, who suggested asking the honorary consul of Panama, Comendador Segre, of Jewish lineage, to grant entry visas. This enabled Magno to grant transit visas to Jewish refugees; G.A. Magno file, YVA, M31/3459. The visas to Haiti were probably obtained by bribery; see Bauer, pp. 45-46.

<sup>87</sup> Letter of Elias Baruel, Vice-President of the Section of Assistance to Refugees of the Jewish Community in Lisbon to the director of the PVDE, Lisbon May 12, 1942, Archive of the Jewish Community of Lisbon. Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem, Po/Li/A-II/12 a, 5. The visas were granted by Vice-Consul Gabriel Guizol, who headed the consulate till his death in December 1941, or by his brother Roland Guizol who substituted him.

corresponding circles of other nations. Compassion for the suffering of others, in the case of the Jews, was shared by the monarchist Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the anti-Marxist Alfredo Casanova, the republican Alberto Veiga Simões, the liberal Giuseppe Agenore Magno, and other less well-known patriots of the Portuguese consular service. It is, however, simpler to raise the questions rather than to offer answers.

## Conclusions

Until the middle of 1938, Portugal was the European country of least interest for persecuted Jews. Between October 1938 and November 1939, legal norms were laid down regulating the entry of Jewish refugees to Portugal, principles which would be strictly followed during the period of the Holocaust. During the war, the policy of neutrality, authored in the main by Salazar, enabled thousands of Jewish refugees to enter after the fall of France in the summer of 1940. This specific moment was exceptional in the system created by Salazar, which basically restricted the entry of “undesirables.”

We find opposite official attitudes toward the Jewish question. On the one hand, the consular representations abroad were, in general, sensitive and empathic to the fate of the Jews. On the other hand, Salazar, the Foreign Ministry, the Interior Ministry, and the PVDE were intransigent, apathetic, legalistic, and, at times, affected by antisemitic prejudice.

We do not find in the archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents that indicate any antisemitic prejudice or attitudes on the part of Portuguese consuls abroad; in the same way, there was no common denominator — ideological or political — among the Portuguese diplomats who helped Jews leave Europe via Portugal. Solidarity with Jews was not rare in Portuguese consular circles, and this was therefore tightly controlled by the police and governmental institutions of Salazar’s regime.

Translated by Anna Shidlo

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