

## Spanish refugees in Portugal and the Portuguese solidarity (1936-1945)

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**Submitted:** 2022-03-30. **Accepted:** 2023-03-05. **Published:** 2025-02-07.

**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to analyze the reception and route of refugees through Portugal in the context of the Spanish Civil War, a territory that, due to its geographical proximity, was especially sought as a place of refuge by countless Spaniards to protect themselves from war and persecutions. Due to its authoritarian nature, Salazar's regime proved reluctant to receive them and developed a repression directed at these refugees, considered "undesirable," visible in the increase of the number of border posts and their reinforcement and in the collaboration between different authorities, namely PVDE (State Surveillance and Defense Police), GNR (Republican National Guard), PSP (Public Security Police) and GF (Fiscal Guard), leading to their concentration in large national prisons. In the context of the phenomenon of the Spanish Republican refugees in Portugal, this article also discusses the role played by the Portuguese population and by some elements of the authorities in the assistance provided to Spanish refugees, as well as the repression that was driven by Salazar's regime.

**KEYWORDS:** Refuge; repression; Spanish Civil War; populational movements; Salazarism; Iberian Peninsula.

**Citation / Cómo citar este artículo:** Faria, Fábio A. (2024) "Spanish refugees in Portugal and the Portuguese solidarity (1936-1945)." *Culture & History Digital Journal*, 13 (2): 522. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3989/chdj.2024.522>

**Título traducido:** Los refugiados españoles en Portugal y la solidaridad portuguesa (1936-1945).

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la acogida y el recorrido de los refugiados por Portugal en el contexto de la guerra civil española, un territorio que, por su proximidad geográfica, fue especialmente buscado como lugar de refugio por innumerables españoles para protegerse de la guerra y las persecuciones. Debido a su carácter autoritario, el régimen de Salazar se mostró reacio para recibirlos y desarrolló una represión dirigida a estos refugiados, considerados "indeseables," visible en el aumento del número de puestos fronterizos y su reforzamiento y en la colaboración entre distintas autoridades, a saber, PVDE (Policía de Vigilancia y Defensa del Estado), GNR (Guardia Nacional Republicana), PSP (Policía de Seguridad Pública) y GF (Guardia Fiscal), lo cual llevó a su concentración en grandes prisiones nacionales. En el contexto del fenómeno del refugio republicano español en Portugal, este artículo también aborda el papel jugado por la población portuguesa y por algunos elementos de las autoridades en la asistencia prestada a los refugiados españoles, así como la represión impulsada por el régimen de Salazar.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** refugio; represión; guerra civil española; movimientos de población; salazarismo; península ibérica.

## INTRODUCTION

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was the century of refugees. Due to the unfolding of major international conflicts, such as World War I (1914-1918), the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and World War II (1939-1945), and the intense political, social and religious persecution in the context of the rise of European authoritarian regimes, millions of people felt the need to flee their countries of origin, considering that their lives were at risk. Portugal, due to its geographical position, constituted a space especially requested by these fugitives, providing a means of communication with the American continent, where many wanted to go. However, the refugee movement did not end in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whenever there are armed conflicts or the existence of political regimes of an authoritarian nature, new waves of refugees are generated, without respect for human rights and pose great difficulties for the survival of a large number of people. This is what we have observed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and we continue to witness in the new millennium, as is the case of the flight of countless people from the Middle East, particularly from Syria, and, currently, from the war in Ukraine. The fact that we are frequently faced with new waves of refugees, originating in the most varied parts of the world, demonstrates that history repeats itself, although not under the same circumstances, in the same context, and in the same way. However, the reasons that lead to the forced displacement of people remain the same, namely war situations, political and religious persecution, and the existence of authoritarian regimes.

The 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1936 marked the beginning of the military uprising in Spain that would culminate in the unfolding of a civil war that lasted about three years. With this revolutionary movement the Spanish rebels, led by General Francisco Franco, opposed the legitimate government of the Popular Front that had been elected in February of the same year, led by Manuel Azaña, where socialists, communists, and Republicans were grouped (Bahamonde, 2005; Preston, 2011; Viñas, 2012; Payne 2019).<sup>1</sup> Following the onset of armed clashes and persecution from both sides, many Spaniards sought to flee Spanish territory and find refuge in the nearest countries, such as Portugal and France, and on the American continent, especially Mexico. Portugal was one of the first countries to receive Spanish refugees, right from the beginning of the conflict, a movement that remained high until the end of 1936, decreasing from there (Rodríguez Gallardo, 2011). Two fundamental aspects contributed to the role played by Portugal: the geographical proximity and the traditional relations established between the two Iberian countries at the border level, motivated, above all, by issues of legal work and smuggling (Godinho, 2011). Issues of friendship and family connections also played

a prominent role in the relations established between the two sides of the border.

The refugees who arrived in Portugal in the context of the Spanish Civil War came, for the most part, from border provinces, such as Ourense, Pontevedra, Badajoz, and Zamora, and exercised professions related to the primary sector, with emphasis on journeyman, grinder, worker, farmer, and merchant. Civil and military elements entered Portugal. Men, women, and children of all ages and social categories, with a predominance of male individuals, crossed the border individually, accompanied by their families or in groups of larger or smaller dimensions. This profile reinforces the preponderance that the demographic issue had in the phenomenon of refuge, not least because there was the idea that the war would have a short duration and that they could quickly return home. On the other hand, it is a demonstrative profile of the predominant social stratum on the Portuguese-Spanish border, a medium-low social stratum. It should also be noted that, at first, people tend to seek shelter in the closest countries, and only later move to more distant places, especially if the first options do not provide the conditions and security they need. This was also observed in the case of refugees who were forced to flee Germany after the beginning of the Nazi persecution from 1933 onwards. In fact, initially, the overwhelming majority of these fugitives sought shelter in neighboring countries and only later, following the invasion of these territories by Hitler's troops, is that they moved to other more distant countries.

We use the concept of refugee here to refer to Spaniards who fled their country because they considered that their lives were in danger, both because of the existence of a war situation and because of the expression of certain political-ideological opinions (Pérez Rodríguez, 2022, p. 173). Therefore, these Spaniards could be classified as war refugees or political refugees. The concept of refugee expanded exponentially in the interwar period, thanks to the occurrence of various warlike events and the rise of authoritarian regimes that were at the origin of the massive flight of people. It was, in fact, after World War I that the issue of refugees gained new and important contours, drawing international attention to an unprecedented crisis that would never cease to mark the world reality. In this context, the League of Nations, created in 1919, sought to respond to the refugee crisis through its legal framework, to guarantee them more support and security in the host countries. In the specific case of the Spanish refugees, they did not receive much support from the League of Nations, whose humanitarian action and legal protection were quite limited given the needs of this fleeing population (Santos, 2020, pp. 64-65). During this period, the League of Nations was confronted with the massive displacement of people, fleeing armed confrontations and adverse political realities. We can cite, among others, the cases of Russian refugees, Armenian refugees, refugees from Italy and Germany due to the rise of fascism and Nazism, respectively, and, in particular, Jewish refugees in the context of Hitler's government

<sup>1</sup> Francisco Franco was put at the head of the military coup after General José Sanjurjo, considered the true mastermind of the rebellion, died in a plane crash while traveling from Portugal, where he had been exiled since 1934, to Spain.

and the World War II (Marrus, 2002). In this way, the refugee crisis that marked the troubled interwar period was characterized by a multiplicity of nationalities, reasons, and specificities, which made it difficult to establish legal support, complicating the situation of millions of displaced people.

Over the last few decades, the phenomenon of the Spanish Republican refuge has been studied by international and national historiography. Some authors have addressed the passage of Spanish refugees through European countries, such as France (Dreyfus-Armand, 2000), and Latin American countries, such as Argentina and Mexico. The last one showed itself to be more favorable to their reception, compared to Argentina, which posed more difficulties to their entry (Ortuño Martínez, 2010; Núñez Seixas and Caglio Vila, 2006; Schwarzstein, 2001). In Portugal, the issue of refugees from the Spanish Civil War has been addressed by historians and anthropologists. From the 1980s onwards, when analyzing the relations developed between the two Iberian countries over the period in question, historians have briefly addressed the presence of Spanish refugees in Portugal (Delgado, 1980; Oliveira, 1987), and in recent years there have been studies that assess the reinforcement of border surveillance carried out in the context of the civil war and the passage of these fugitives through localities far from the border, such as Figueira da Foz, and in Alentejo (Candeias, 1997; Faria, 2021; Lopes, 2017; Vaquinhas, 2015). In the case of anthropologists, the focus has been on the experience of border communities that welcomed these refugees, using memories (Simões, 2016; Cunha, 2006).

This article focuses on the phenomenon of the Spanish Republican refuge in Portugal between 1936 and 1945, with special attention on the performance of Salazar's regime about the arrival of refugees and the assistance provided to them by the Portuguese population, seeking to evaluate and oppose the behavior of the central power to the attitude of the Portuguese people who resided in the border towns, who had more contact with these fugitives. We seek to address the social and human dimension across borders associated with the Spanish refuge in Portugal, highlighting, in particular, the solidarity action of the Portuguese population and the repressive response of Salazar's regime. Essentially, police sources are used to study part of the impacts of the Spanish conflict on the Portuguese border.

## THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR AND THE FLIGHT OF REFUGEES TO PORTUGAL

With the beginning of the civil war in Spain, many Spaniards, who were politically committed or not, fled towards Portugal to save their lives. This population movement occurred right from the beginning of the conflict, with the daily entry of refugees into the country, decreasing substantially from the end of 1936, although it did not stop until the end of the

war, in April 1939 (Simões, 2016, pp. 198-199). In general, it was the existence of armed clashes in the localities, especially near the border, which led the Spanish population, both civilian and military, to flee to Portugal, fearing losing their lives. According to César Oliveira, three main reasons led to the departure of refugees: the development of confrontations between Republicans and nationalists and the occupation of localities; the repression developed by Francoist forces against supporters of the Republic; the desire to escape the military call-up decreed by Franco (Oliveira, 1987, p. 156). The entry of Spanish refugees into Portugal took place daily and mainly by land, with a number of letters and telegrams from civil governors and Portuguese authorities attesting this situation. We can find in these communications several references to the reasons that gave rise to the displacement of Spanish refugees, namely the fear of denunciations, the desire to escape the military call-up, and the fear of being shot.<sup>2</sup>

The first three months of the civil war were those in which there was a greater influx of Spanish refugees to the Portuguese border. In general, the movement of Spanish refugees in Portugal proceeded from North to South, following the occurrence of conflicts on the other side of the border. As such, the districts of Viana do Castelo, Bragança, and Vila Real were among the first to receive refugees, in July from the first days of the conflict, moving towards the South, where the Alentejo region was the one that most highlighted, especially during August and September. On the other side of the border, the main refugee-sending provinces were Ourense, Pontevedra, Zamora, and Badajoz, precisely those located closest to these Portuguese regions, with emphasis on the localities of Vigo, Tui, Encinasola, Badajoz, and Oliva de la Frontera. Here, the occurrence of armed conflicts, the intense repression carried out by troops loyal to Franco and its occupation by the insurgents motivated the flight of countless Spaniards to the Portuguese border towns.

A large part of the letters and reports from the Portuguese authorities concerning the entry of refugees into the country did not mention the political tendency of the detainees. However, this information was contained in the documents when refugees were persecuted by communist forces.<sup>3</sup> Unlike refugees who were persecuted by nationalist elements, seen as a threat capable of disturbing internal security and public order, Spaniards who were wanted by communist forces were generally seen as peaceful and elements of order, so they were released, unlike the last, who was arrested and handed over to the Francoist authorities, reinforcing the distinction made between refugees by

2 Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Ministério do Interior (MI), Gabinete do Ministro (GM), Mç. 481, pt. 35/41, 11 August 1936.

3 Arquivo Histórico Militar (AHM), Series 38, Nr. 08, Box 63, Nr. 2, Folder 1, 1 August 1936.

Salazar's regime.<sup>4</sup> As César Oliveira mentions, refugees who supported the military coup were investigated and released, receiving facilities so that they could head to regions controlled by the nationalists (Oliveira, 1987, p. 156).

This differentiated treatment was related to the understanding that Salazar's regime had regarding the control of the border space by Francoist troops as a sign of order and peace. On 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1936, the civil governor of Bragança informed the Minister of the Interior about the situation on the border, considering that there was peace in the villages bordering Portugal that were in favor of the insurgents.<sup>5</sup> This perspective of the Portuguese government is understandable by the position it took in the Spanish Civil War and by the way it behaved in the context of the arrival of Spanish Republican refugees in Portugal. In fact, Salazar has always been more permissive and tolerant relative to the entry of Spaniards who were persecuted by Republican forces and much more repressive towards refugees who wanted to enter the country fleeing Franco's persecution. Thus, the Portuguese government continued the same line of action that it had followed a few years before, when it allowed right-wing refugees to enter Portugal in the context of the establishment of the Second Republic in Spain in 1931.

Although the war in Spain ended in April 1939, the entry of Spaniards into Portugal continued, this time in an even more restrictive and delicate context, such as the period of World War II since the difficulties posed to foreigners who intended to enter the country were increasing. The Spanish fugitives who wanted to escape Franco's repression were then joined by the many refugees of other nationalities, and particularly Jews, who tried to escape Nazi persecution and the dangers of war, despite this movement having begun as early as 1933, when Hitler took power in Germany. However, in numerical terms, the arrival of these refugees in Portugal was much more significant in the period of World War II, especially during the first years of the conflict (Pimentel, 2006; Pereira, 2017; Pimentel and Ramalho, 2016). The period from 1939 to 1945 was marked by a smaller number of Spanish fugitives entering Portugal, especially compared to refugees fleeing the new world conflict. However, it was a movement that did not end, leading Salazar's regime to maintain the same restrictive attitude towards its presence, although on the other side of the border, a regime was already established (albeit in a consolidation phase) with which it had a greater political and ideological affinity and the threat of a communist victory no longer loomed.

## THE ROLE OF SALAZAR'S REGIME ABOUT SPANISH REFUGEES

In the context of the Spanish Civil War, salazar's regime sided with Franco's rebels, providing them with support of the most varied nature since in the opposite camp was the legitimate government of the Popular Front, with links to communism, the great enemy of the *Estado Novo* at that time, when it was still in a phase of consolidation and feared any threat that came from abroad, particularly from Spain, a country with old pretensions to Portuguese territory.<sup>6</sup> Although Portugal only recognized Franco's regime at the end of April 1938, Salazar's support for Spanish nationalists was manifested from the very beginning: permission for the passage of men and weapons through the country; supply of food, weapons, and ammunition to the insurgents; sending Portuguese people to fight in favor of the Francoists; development of pro-nationalist propaganda; surveillance and delivery of Republican refugees to Franco (Oliveira, 1987, pp. 50-51).

It is important to pay attention to the climate of distrust and confrontation that guided Iberian relations after February 1936, when the Popular Front won the elections, and which directly influenced Salazar's policy of persecution and repression of Republican refugees in Portugal. In fact, in contrast to previous years, marked by a greater understanding between the Iberian countries following the electoral victory of the conservative forces in Spain, from February 1936 there was a deterioration of political and diplomatic relations (Oliveira, 1995, p. 32). In addition to the new Spanish policy being contrary to the ideas defended by Salazar's regime, with the permanence in political power of Republicans, socialists, and communists, relations between Portugal and Spain worsened due to the activities carried out by Portuguese exiles in this country, where they had various supports to develop opposition to Salazar (Clímaco, 2017).

On the other hand, we must also take into account the atmosphere of strong propagandistic agitation and the implications and social repercussions that it had in Portugal due to the fear of "communist" contagion from Republican Spain. In fact, the propaganda apparatus at the service of Salazar was effective in instilling in Portuguese society a state of alarm characterized by anti-communism during the civil war, causing the entry of refugees into the country to be frowned upon (Pena Rodríguez, 2017). The traditional "Spanish danger" also contributed to the creation of this climate of agitation and conspiracy, increasing the fear of a possible Spanish aggregation into the Portuguese territory, which was one of the most important constraints of Portuguese foreign policy for some years (Torre Gómez, 2010, p. 45). With the electo-

4 AHM, Series 38, Nr. 08, Box 63, Nr. 2, Folder 1, 18 August 1936.

5 ANTT, MI, GM, Mç. 481, pt. 35/41, 25 July 1936.

6 *Estado Novo* is the name given to the dictatorial regime that ruled Portugal between 1933 and 1974, led by António de Oliveira Salazar until 1968 and then by Marcello Caetano. It ended with the Revolution of April 1974 that established the democratic regime in the country.

ral victory of the Popular Front in February 1936 and the beginning of the civil war in July, this “Spanish danger” was taken advantage of by Salazar’s regime and transformed into the “red danger,” identifying Spanish Republic (particularly the communists) with the desire for annexation relative to Portugal. As such, during the Second Spanish Republic, from 1931 onwards, and in the context of peninsular relations, Salazar’s main concern was with the maintenance of his regime, in particular, and Portuguese sovereignty, in general (Jiménez Redondo, 1993, p. 177). Furthermore, the establishment of the Second Republic in Spain led the Portuguese authorities to pay increased attention to the situation on the other side of the border and was decisive in the recreation of the Portuguese International Police, responsible for controlling foreigners and borders and repressing international crime (Gonçalves, 2022, p. 217).

Considering this context, it is intended to understand how the Portuguese government acted about the presence of Spanish refugees in Portugal. A few days after the beginning of the civil war, concerned about the massive influx of Spaniards, considered “undesirable” by the ideas they could be carriers, understood as subversive and liable to disturb the internal order, Salazar, as Minister of War, decreed various measures aimed at guiding the actions of the Portuguese authorities, namely detention, the absence of contact between refugees and Portuguese soldiers and a greater collaboration between the various police and military authorities.<sup>7</sup> Salazar also ordered a division of the refugees between civilians and soldiers, with the PVDE responsible for the civilians and the Ministry of War in charge of the soldiers.<sup>8</sup>

To control the unwanted entry of Spaniards and foreigners of other nationalities into the country, Salazar’s regime improved its border surveillance network and exercised rigorous repression of these fugitives. Until the end of World War II, in 1945, PVDE, responsible for the surveillance and control of borders and entrances into the country, had 36 delegations, inspections, posts, and sub-stations at its disposal, the overwhelming majority of which (27) were located in the border zone since a large part of the entries into Portuguese territory was carried out by land. During the Spanish Civil War, there was an increase, which favored the border region, especially the district of Bragança and the Alentejo region (Ribeiro, 1995, p. 299). Despite these changes, many refugees managed to enter Portugal, using previously established transit routes, which helped when choosing Portuguese territory as a place of refuge, as well as the issue of geographical proximity. These trails were used, not only by the Spanish refugees but also by the Portuguese authorities who, using the surveillance that was already being carried out to repress the practice of smuggling,

sought to monitor their entry into Portugal (Lanero Táboas, Miguez Macho and Rodríguez Gallardo, 2009).

The measures taken by Salazar proved to be insufficient to stop the flow of Spanish refugees to Portugal since there were several problems faced by the Portuguese authorities in the performance of their duties, particularly the lack of agents and material goods. Leone Santoro, an Italian invited by Salazar in 1937 to study the functioning of the Portuguese police, highlighted, among other flaws, the existence of poor surveillance regarding foreigners and borders and poor collaboration between the various authorities (Ribeiro, 1995, pp. 153-154). Due to these difficulties, requests to reinforce border posts were recurrent, with close collaboration between PVDE, GNR, PSP, GF, and even the Army. Many of these requests were justified by the rugged nature of the terrain, the extensive areas that had to be monitored and the need to carry out more effective inspections at certain points.<sup>9</sup> If, on the one hand, these problems made it difficult for the Portuguese authorities to carry out repression against Republican refugees, on the other hand, they favored their entry, circulation and concealment.

Many Spaniards took advantage of these difficulties and entered the country, where they were persecuted by Portuguese authorities and, in some cases, by Francoist forces. When captured, they were immediately handed over to the nationalist authorities at the border or taken to Portuguese prisons, as has already been studied by César Oliveira (Oliveira, 1987). According to PVDE’s General Registry of Prisoners, around 500 Spanish civilians were arrested in Portugal during the Spanish Civil War, with a greater number of arrests occurring throughout 1936 and 1937. According to a list dated September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1936, Forte de Caxias housed 147 Spaniards at that time, of whom 53 were civilians and 94 were militar (Velázquez Hernández, 2017: 863).<sup>10</sup> On the 25<sup>th</sup> of the same month, information from PVDE reported the existence of 496 Spanish citizens among the total of 500 foreigners imprisoned in Portugal. More than half, 255, were held in Forte de Caxias, with the remainder concentrated in various PVDE’s border posts and in improvised camps, such as Bragança (99 Spaniards), Elvas (61 Spaniards) and Moura (37 Spaniards).<sup>11</sup>

Forte de Caxias, in Lisbon, was one of the main spaces for the detention of Spanish refugees, as well as Fortaleza de São Julião da Barra, also in the capital, and Forte da Graça, in Elvas. César Oliveira presented some data regarding the detention of Spaniards in these spaces. According to this historian, more than 2000 Spanish refugees were detained in these prisons, in political police delegations and prisons, and military units. Since the beginning of August 1936, the number of Spaniards detained in Forte de Caxias and in military prisons has

7 AHM, Series 38, Nr. 10, Box 63, Nr. 2, Folder 2, 24 July 1936.

8 AHM, Series 38, Nr. 08, Box 63, Nr. 2, Folder 1, 27 July 1936.

9 ANTT, MI, GM, Mç. 481, pt. 35/18, 13 August 1936.

10 Forte de Caxias was one of the main political prisons of *Estado Novo*, where numerous foreigners and Portuguese political opponents were held.

11 ANTT, Arquivo Oliveira Salazar (AOS), CO/IN-8C, pt.1, September 25, 1936.

shown an increasing trend. For example, in September of that year, there were 284 prisoners in Forte da Graça, among 136 Spanish refugees and 148 soldiers who were already there, exceeding the maximum capacity of 200 detainees (Oliveira, 1987, pp. 163-164). Thus, one of the main concerns of the Portuguese authorities regarding the detention of Spanish refugees was the issue of overcrowding. Other problems were associated with this concern, namely the issue of surveillance, sustenance, and contact with Portuguese soldiers and the rest of the prison population.

These numbers would change substantially from October 1936, with the departure of around 1500 Spaniards from Portugal. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of that month, refugees who were detained in Lisbon and internment camps in the region of Barrancos were boarding to the town of Tarragona, in Catalonia, still controlled by the Republicans. This repatriation took place as a result of international pressure that accused Salazar's regime of treating refugees in an inhumane way and handing them over to the Francoist authorities, as studied by Dulce Simões (Simões, 2018, p. 113). These refugee camps were created in September 1936, after the attack by Franco's forces on Oliva de la Frontera, province of Badajoz, on the Herdades of Coitadinha and Russianas, constituting another form used by the Estado Novo to more easily control and monitor the Spanish fugitives.

In general, the refugees who fled to Portugal did not intend to settle in the country permanently but to use it as a bridge to reach other places, namely Latin America, where they hoped to find a better reception and greater integration, given the linguistic and cultural similarities and the presence of a greater number of fellow countrymen, the result of previous population movements. Both during and after the Civil War, countless Spaniards managed to continue their journey to the American continent, for which they had the help of several foreign embassies and legations established in Portugal. The Mexican legation stood out since it was one of the few countries that was willing to host Spanish refugees, working together with the *Unitarian Service Committee* (USC), a relief agency established by the North American Unitarian Church, in the post-civil war period (Velázquez Hernández, 2017, p. 870)<sup>12</sup>. The Portuguese authorities, interested in these individuals leaving Portuguese territory, often facilitated their exit from prisons, duly escorted, so that they could go to embassies, consulates, and aid organizations and arrange the trip.

It is also necessary to take into account the existing alignment between the Portuguese and Spanish political polices, acting in the joint repression of refugees, during

the Civil War and World War II. In this context, the exchange of information between the authorities on both sides of the border was constant. These frequent exchanges of information about the persecution and detention of Spaniards prove the good understanding and closeness that marked the relations between Salazar and the Francoist group (Faria, 2021, p. 205). This situation points to the ambiguous nature of the Portuguese position in the world conflict, officially neutral but with understanding with both sides (Telo, 2012). Although it maintained a status favorable to the British, Portugal collaborated with the Axis and, in this specific case, with Spain, also neutral but with many affinities and very close to this group. In this sense, the issue of Spanish refugees in Portugal was at the center of two warlike contexts that occurred practically simultaneously, whose developments conditioned their passage through the country.

Although many refugees left Portugal, either because they were returned to Franco by Salazar's regime, or because they managed to continue their journey to Latin America, many others managed to remain hidden in the country and thus save their lives. The aid provided by the Portuguese population to Spanish fugitives contributed decisively to this last situation, especially those residing in the border region since this was the privileged space for contact between the local population and these refugees, following an already old tradition of sociability and close relations between the two sides of the border. People residing in the border towns of Portugal and Spain were already used to and familiar with contact with the population living on the other side of the border, for work, leisure, smuggling, friendship or family ties. However, in 1936, reality changed completely on the Portuguese border and these Spaniards were forced to move because of war, leading the Portuguese population to also have to deal with a situation that was strange and unprecedented to them and that, therefore, changed their daily lives.

## THE HELP OF THE PORTUGUESE POPULATION TO THE SPANISH REFUGEES

The Portuguese population on the border played a key role in the process of entry and survival of refugees in Portugal during and after the civil war, right from the start because many of these Spaniards needed help to cross the border, especially from Portuguese smugglers, knowledgeable of the border paths through which they managed to elude the surveillance of the Portuguese authorities. Given the help provided to these fugitives, the Portuguese people also suffered repression by Salazar's regime, which intended to prevent them from establishing and maintaining any type of contact and relationship with the refugees, believing that they could be carriers of ideas understood as subversive and disseminate them in Portugal and because this aid helped to facilitate the stay of refugees in the country, causing

12 The USC was one of the main organizations involved in helping refugees in the context of World War II and in Portugal it stood out mainly for the assistance granted to Spanish Republican refugees. Initially, its office in Lisbon was run by Waitstill and Martha Sharp, and later by Charles Rhind Joy. Herta Maria Oppenheimer and Kurt Schwerin, both Jewish refugees of German origin, also stood out in the work developed in this organization.

them to linger longer than Salazar wanted. In general, the majority of Portuguese people were detained for having assisted to refugees in the form of accommodation and food.<sup>13</sup> Many of these arrests were based on failure to comply with the provisions of Decree-Law 15884, dated 24<sup>th</sup> of August, 1928, which required the Portuguese population to inform the authorities of the shelter given to foreigners.<sup>14</sup> There were also some situations in which Portuguese people were captured by PVDE on charges of having helped refugees in the process of obtaining documentation.

According to the General Registry of Prisoners, between 1936 and 1945 around 80 Portuguese people were arrested on suspicion of having helped or maintained contact or relationship with Spanish refugees in Portugal. However, it is credible that this number was substantially higher, as many Portuguese people who provided this assistance did so in a hidden way and were never captured by the authorities. Thus, on the one hand, there are no records of all Portuguese people arrested for providing aid to Spanish refugees, while, on the other hand, many aid providers were not even targeted by Salazar's repression. Among these detainees, males predominated, who exercised a profession linked to the primary sector, with an emphasis on agricultural practice. In the case of women, the overwhelming majority were domestic. In geographic terms, the districts of Bragança, Viana do Castelo, and Beja were the main places of origin of Portuguese detainees, which is justified by the fact that the northern and Alentejo border regions were those where the presence of Spanish refugees was greater. We can observe the existence of a similarity in terms of the socio-professional profile of the Spanish refugees and the Portuguese population that helped them at the border, which refers to a geographic space marked by a medium-low social status, which made it more difficult to assist.

The greater geographical proximity contributed to the provision of assistance by the Portuguese population residing in the border region, which led to the development of more intense relationships, and the many contacts that the Portuguese people and Spaniards already had over time, facilitated by labor issues, friendship, family members and the practice of smuggling and leading to the establishment of a network of various collaborations. The isolation to which the Portuguese population was subjected also played in favor of Spanish refugees, because this population on both sides of the border related and created closer ties with each other than with the population of the same country residing in more distant locations. As such, the presence of Spaniards in border regions was something the Portuguese population was familiar with. The Portuguese authorities had a very particular view of the reasons that led to the provision of aid, arguing that the population acted in this way out of empathy for the refugees, the fear they could instill in them or even the

payment they could receive.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the Portuguese authorities did not raise the hypothesis that the Portuguese population would help the Spanish refugees based on a political and ideological identification, which was related to the opposition and a form of resistance to Salazarism.

The Portuguese authorities demonstrated that they were fully aware of the solidarity shown by the population to Spanish refugees, although they recognized the difficulties sometimes felt in exercising the repression they considered necessary to keep the country free from the presence of these "undesirables." For example, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1936, the 5<sup>th</sup> company of the GF referred to a communication made to the PVDE regarding the shelter provided by the population of the Bragança district residing in the border villages to the fugitives from the neighboring country.<sup>16</sup> During the raids carried out to capture refugees in national territory, the authorities also sought to punish the Portuguese people who helped them, fining some of these individuals.<sup>17</sup> In general, Portuguese people detained on suspicion of aiding refugees remained incarcerated for a few days or for a few months in civil prisons closest to the place where the arrest had taken place or in PVDE posts, thus contradicting what happened in the case of the Spanish fugitives, who were imprisoned in the main Portuguese prisons. Some specific cases can be observed.

In July 1937, four Portuguese people, natural and residing in the districts of Bragança and Viana do Castelo, were arrested, accused of relating to and providing assistance to Spanish refugees. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of that month, PVDE of Bragança detained João Manuel Morais, a farmer residing in Vinhais, for being suspected of having accompanied four undocumented Spaniards to the border in order to help them illegally enter Spain, receiving 50\$00 for each one. He remained detained in the Bragança PSP dungeons until August 7<sup>th</sup> of the same year, when he was released.<sup>18</sup> In the last days of July, Casimiro de Sousa, also a farmer and resident in Arcos de Valdevez, was arrested by PVDE of São Gregório. Casimiro de Sousa was suspected of granting protection to Spanish communists who had taken refuge in Peneda and was taken to the civil prison in Melgaço and transferred to the PVDE delegation in Porto, where he remained for about four months, once he was released on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1937.<sup>19</sup>

The end of this year was particularly active in terms of the detention of Portuguese people accused of showing solidarity with Spanish fugitives, with the capture of several individuals in November, most of whom

13 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, SC, RGP.

14 Decree-Law 15884, 24 August 1928.

15 ANTT, MI, GM, Book 2 PV/V Nr.3, Mç. 495, NT 369, 24 June 1938.

16 ANTT, MI, GM, Mç. 481, 35/41, 17 September 1936.

17 ANTT, MI, GM, Mç. 481, 35/41, 21 September 1936.

18 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, Book 38, Prison biography of João Manuel Morais

19 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, Book 39, Prison biography of Casimiro de Sousa.

resided in the district of Bragança.<sup>20</sup> In November of that year, Joaquim Palma Machado was arrested, this time in Barrancos, accused of helping Spanish communist refugees who were in Portugal. As a result of this accusation, he was incarcerated in Moura's civil prison, albeit for a few days, as he was released later that month.<sup>21</sup> During the same month, through the Bragança post, Armando Joaquim Conceição Gomes and Alípio António Martins, both day laborers and resident in the municipality of Bragança, were arrested. The basis for their capture was the fact that they were suspected of harboring Spanish communist refugees, and they remained detained in that post until the beginning of February of the following year, when they were released.<sup>22</sup>

In the post-civil war period, Salazar's regime continued to act against those who helped the refugees since Spaniards continued to enter Portugal and many of those who had entered between 1936 and 1939 were still circulating in national territory, which demonstrates that the end of the civil war did not mean the end of the entry of refugees into Portugal, many of whom were now fleeing, not because of a particular war situation but because of the repression of the recently instituted authoritarian regime of Franco, as a result of the victory in the civil war. One of the examples of this repressive attitude was registered in June 1939, about a case of forged documents, a process through which it was intended to get a Spanish refugee out of the country. This case was carried out by Manuel Prieto, José Prieto, Raimundo Prieto, and Evaristo Prieto.<sup>23</sup>

José María Pereyra was the Spaniard involved in this case to whom the "Prieto" provided assistance, undocumented and identified by the Portuguese authorities by José Maria Pereira Fernandes, Victor Medina, and José Prieto, having been arrested by PVDE in Peso post on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1939. This refugee, who lived in Ourense, Spain, followed a similar path in Portugal to the Portuguese people who had helped him since he was also detained in the civil prison of Melgaço, from where he was transferred to the PVDE delegation in Porto, having gone to the court of the district of Monção at the end of July of the same year.<sup>24</sup> Also in March 1941, PVDE recorded the arrest of some Portuguese people who had contacted Spanish refugees, all in the northern region of the country.<sup>25</sup>

Given the greater influx of Spanish refugees, the North and Alentejo stood out in terms of solidarity shown to

these fugitives, with a clear predominance of Portuguese detainees from these areas in the General Register of Prisoners of the PVDE. Since in most cases, the flight of these refugees had occurred hastily and suddenly, many arrived at the Portuguese border without any resources or money that would allow them to survive in the new country. As such, hunger was one of the major problems faced by those who carried out this diaspora, a subject often recalled by those who witnessed, directly or indirectly, the events on the Portuguese side of the border.

Since the border Portuguese population that assisted Spanish refugees also lived with many difficulties, it was not always easy to find something that would satisfy their many needs. This reality can lead us to a disinterested help on the part of the Portuguese population since, although also experiencing difficulties, they continued to assist Spanish refugees without receiving anything in return. This does not mean, however, that there have not been cases in which some Portuguese have taken advantage of the fragility of these fugitives to obtain some profits and compensation. Captain António Braz recalled in his memoirs that in Elvas refugees would steal food from dogs and use potato skins to make soup, and some Portuguese people made bread to give them, although this could not be disclosed because of police repression (Braz, 2014, p. 458). In other parts of Alentejo, such as Barrancos, Serpa, or Moura, many years after the end of the civil war, it was still present in the memory of the local inhabitants the difficulties experienced by the Spanish fugitives, who often arrived at these locations asking for food, alms and clandestine work (Pires, 1997, p. 148). Also in Campo Maior, some of the inhabitants who experienced the events in the first person stated that it was common practice for refugees to take advantage of everything they could to feed themselves, such as husks and crumbs (Cunha, 2006, p. 274).

The difficulties faced by refugees, especially hunger, were not exclusive to the period between 1936 and 1939, continuing to manifest over the following years, given the context of poverty experienced in the Iberian Peninsula, aggravated by the occurrence of World War II, which made many supplies scarce, not only in the countries that were in conflict but also in officially neutral nations, such as Portugal and Spain. For example, information included in the correspondence on illegal border traffic dating from 1941 referred to the presence in Arronches of half-naked Spanish children begging for alms, as well as women of the same nationality who were prostitutes in exchange for bread, and the entry of officers of the Spanish Army in the Minho region, who also came in search of food.<sup>26</sup> The close and daily contact between the Portuguese population and the Spanish refugees also led to the emergence of romantic relationships, some of which resulted in marriages and children (Cunha, 2006, pp. 266-267). For example, one of these many situations

20 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, Book 44, Prison biography of Francisco dos Santos Pereira, José António Rodrigues and Luís Nascimento Ferreira.

21 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, Book 45, Prison biography of Joaquim Palma Machado.

22 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, Book 45, Prison biography of Armando Joaquim Conceição Gomes and Alípio António Martins.

23 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, Book 58, Prison biography of Manuel Prieto, José Prieto, Raimundo Prieto and Evaristo Prieto.

24 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, Book 58, Prison biography of José María Pereyra.

25 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, Book 67, Prison biography of Maria Cândida Teixeira Leite.

26 ANTT, AOS, CO/FI-25, pt. 5, 8 March 1941.

occurred in the village of Castro Laboreiro,<sup>27</sup> when the Portuguese authorities learned from the local abbot that a Spanish refugee they were looking for was in a romantic relationship with a Portuguese girl.<sup>28</sup>

Another feature that marked the relationship between the Portuguese population and refugees was the reception of correspondence from Spain and Latin America and destined for the latter. This type of contact with Spanish fugitives was also a valid reason for the authorities to detain these aid providers. One of these cases was related to the arrest of a Portuguese citizen in Bragança on the charge of carrying correspondence destined for a Spanish refugee.<sup>29</sup> There were times when this relationship took on more violent contours, with the joint participation of Portuguese citizens and Spanish refugees in robberies and other crimes carried out on both sides of the border. One of these situations occurred in Porto, when, in 1940, a local businessman was murdered following a robbery.<sup>30</sup> Salazar knew how to take advantage of this aspect of the relationship between the Portuguese population and Spanish refugees as a way of legitimizing the use of force and the need to pursue these fugitives by the Portuguese authorities (Cunha, 2006, p. 278). Thus, the repressive strategy of the Portuguese dictator aimed at Spanish refugees was legitimized by the fact that he intended to fight the crime and insecurity that these fugitives represented.

We can find several points in common between the Spanish population on the run and the Portuguese population providing aid, namely fear and precarious conditions (Cunha, 2006, p. 289). In fact, the experience caused by the war on the Portuguese-Spanish border ended up showing many similar traits for the Portuguese and Spanish populations. The main difference resided in the fact that the Spaniards were forced to flee their country, bringing with them much of the war that was being fought on the other side of the border and which also had important consequences in the Portuguese space. Fear accompanied the entire journey of Republican refugees from leaving Spain to entering Portugal and even during their stay in this country. This feeling was expressed in relation to the possibility of being captured by troops loyal to Franco, in Spain, and by the Portuguese authorities in Portugal, who would return them to their pursuers. As such, in this new country, they were forced to live in hiding. It was also in a hidden way that the Portuguese population had to help them, fearing being discovered and arrested since Salazar did not want the expression of this solidarity. In this way, Portuguese aid

was always associated with the feeling of fear because something that was prohibited by the Portuguese government was practiced. Economic needs also constituted a reality that marked the Spanish refuge in Portugal since, in general, the populations on both sides of the border shared the same medium-low social status. Many of these refugees arrived at the Portuguese border without any resources and experienced many difficulties, in a situation very similar to that experienced by the Portuguese border population, which also lacked many resources. Even so, it was this population that, moved by humanitarian feelings, first helped the Spaniards in flight.

There was no distinction in the support provided by the Portuguese population to Spanish refugees, whether they were Republican sympathizers or people who defended the military coup, with the humanitarian dimension of Portuguese solidarity prevailing. The same was not true of the support provided by the local authorities, which favored refugees who were fleeing the Republican army and, therefore, were supporters of Franco's troops. In this case, the political issue assumed a prominent role and was decisive for the assistance and good reception provided to refugees. For example, in the summer of 1936, the Mayor of Barrancos did not allow people suspected of being linked to the Republican party to remain in the locality. On the other hand, he allowed several Spanish supporters of the military coup from Encinasola to stay in his house during the family's vacation (Simões, 2016, p. 217). It was after the attack by Republican forces on this locality and given the arrival of reinforcements for this army, in early August, that these Spaniards fled towards the Portuguese border. In Barrancos, they also benefited from the help raised through a subscription organized by the newspaper *Diário de Notícias* (Espinosa Maestre, 2005, pp. 173-174).

Portuguese solidarity with the Spanish refugees was not only manifested by the civilian population. Several elements of the authorities who provided service in the border region also stood out in helping these fugitives within their area of action, preventing many from being handed over to Francoist forces and, consequently, to certain death, a situation especially visible in the Alentejo region, although it was a common practice along the entire border. In August 1936, after the flight of many Spaniards following the nationalist conquest of Badajoz, the military chief of the Battalion of Elvas refused to hand over a group of refugees to PVDE, preventing them from being returned to Spain. In the Campo Maior area, Sergeant António Abrantes, commander of GNR, stood out in organizing the departure of some refugees from Portugal and prevented many others from being captured by informing them of the dates and locations for carrying out searches in the locality (Simões, 2016, p. 206). Further north, there was also this support, namely in the Barroso region, where Arlindo Damião, from GF, often ignored the presence of Spanish fugitives, allowing them to flee and informing his superiors that it had not been possible to capture them (Alves, 1987, p. 20). Here, too, we can understand this behavior of the Portuguese

27 Castro Laboreiro, located in the municipality of Melgaço and in the district of Viana do Castelo, in the North of Portugal, is a mountainous region that during the Spanish Civil War and in the immediate post-war period hosted numerous Spanish fugitives who remained there hidden from the Portuguese authorities and developed important bonds of friendship and proximity with the local population.

28 ANTT, MI, GM, Book 2 PV/V Nr. 3, Mç. 495, NT 369, 24 July 1938.

29 ANTT, MI, GM, Mç. 479, 8/9, 16 September 1939.

30 ANTT, PIDE/DGS, SC, Criminal Process 150/40 of Francisco Lázaro Barata, NT 2889.

authorities as a form of resistance to *Estado Novo* since these elements were the legal representatives of the order established by the Portuguese government on the border and, even so, moved by feelings of humanity and solidarity, and aware of the reprisals they could suffer, they did not hesitate to help the Spanish refugees.

The most publicized case of aid was carried out by the GF Lieutenant, António Augusto de Seixas, responsible for surveillance in the Safara border region, in Barrancos, accused of hiding from his superiors the total number of Spaniards who found refugees in the Herdades of Coitadinha and Russianas. So, there were substantially more who went to Lisbon to embark for Tarragona, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 1936. According to the accusations, Lieutenant Seixas concealed the presence of about 300 refugees, a number corresponding to the Spaniards who were sheltering in Russianas, also playing an important role in the transport of some from Barrancos to Moura, where they stayed overnight before moving to Lisbon (Simões, 2007; 2016). As a result of his behavior, Lieutenant Seixas was punished by Salazar in early November 1936 with a two-month suspension since, by secretly allowing the entry and concentration of refugees in Portugal, he had forced the Portuguese government to bear the costs of repatriation to Tarragona. A few days later, the transition to retirement was added to the punishment. However, he was reinstated in the GF of Sines, in 1938 (Barriga, 1999, p. 30). This assistance from the Portuguese authorities was noticed by the local populations who, up close, watched the Spanish refugees pass through their localities. This attitude of solidarity was recognized by the people, who praised their behavior, helping several refugees to escape police raids and not be handed over to Franco (Pires, 1997, p. 158).

We can see that, between 1936 and 1945, the Portuguese civilian and military population committed to helping Spanish refugees at different levels, decisively contributing to save their lives through Portugal, despite having encountered a strongly repressive political regime, in many ways, similar to the Spanish reality from which they wanted to flee, committed to ensuring that communism did not dominate the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, the Portuguese people, especially those residing in the border area, satisfied their hunger and thirst, tried to obtain documentation to allow them to reside in or leave Portugal, shelter them in their homes, protect them from raids carried out by the authorities and prevent them from were handed over to forces of Francisco Franco. These cases correspond to the development of a social and human history across borders, a history of solidarity in times of war led by Spanish refugees and Portuguese citizens. The latter, defying Salazar's orders, helped the Spanish "undesirables" and exposed themselves to the sanctions imposed by the regime, running the risk of being fined, arrested, and punished.

It is undeniable that without the help of the Portuguese population, the Spanish refugees would have experienced many more difficulties in Portugal since Salazar was opposed to their presence. However, there were also ca-

ses in which refugees were reported to the authorities by the local population, mainly through people with some political and social importance in the region (Loff, 2020, p. 18). This reality allows us to associate the political dimension here since we can understand these denunciations as a manifestation of support for Franco's cause, as well as an act of agreement with the policy developed by Salazar regarding Spanish refugees. Thus, in general, there was a confrontation and a clear distinction between the official position taken by the Portuguese government and the attitude adopted by the Portuguese population regarding the presence of refugees. Compared to the Portuguese government, the Portuguese population was much more favorable, not only with regard to the Republican Spaniards as well as in relation to World War II fugitives. This fact allows us to see that authoritarian political regimes, in addition to tending to be countries that generate refugee movements, are also those that place more reservations and enormous obstacles and difficulties in the reception of these fugitives.

In the particular case of Portugal during the early years of *Estado Novo*, the political issue was central to the admission or refusal of Spanish refugees. The fear of communist ideology conditioned the way the Portuguese government looked at these fugitives, repressing and marginalizing them whenever it suspected they were defenders of the Spanish Republic, thus identifying them with communism. Salazar feared the ideological contagion that, in his view, would exist through the contact of the "red refugees" with the Portuguese population, which could lead to the emergence of revolutionary movements of communist influence that would threaten the continuity of his regime. The manifestation of this fear led to many Spanish refugees being detained on charges of being communists and the detention of Portuguese citizens based on the suspicion of aiding communist refugees. This situation demonstrates the anti-communist character of Salazar's regime. In fact, the justification for the need to create the *Legião Portuguesa*<sup>31</sup> emerged from the identification of the defense of national sovereignty with the fight against communism (Rodrigues, 1996, p. 45).

## CONCLUSION

The civil war in Spain, between July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1936 and April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939, led to the flight to Portugal of many Spaniards, especially those who opposed Francisco Franco, although many refugees had also entered the country did not show any political inclination or sympathy and only intended to escape the dangers of war. In the new country, they found Salazar's regime, recently instituted and still in the process of consolidation, which was not

31 *Legião Portuguesa* was the armed militia of *Estado Novo*, existing between 1936 and 1974, created during the Spanish Civil War in September 1936, which demonstrates the impact that the Spanish conflict had on Portuguese soil.

very receptive to those who came from outside and intended to establish themselves in the country, especially when people associated with communist ideology were involved, as was the case of the Spanish refugees. In this context, the Portuguese government developed an intense repressive action aimed at Spanish fugitives, understood as “undesirable,” seeking to detain and expel them from Portugal and prevent them from coming into contact with the Portuguese population, civil and military, within which they could disseminate ideas considered advanced and subversive by Salazar’s regime. Thus, with the beginning of the war in Spain, there was an increase in political persecution and a greater concern with the control and identification of foreigners by the Portuguese authorities. Given the considerable influx of refugees at the Portuguese border, there was an increase in the number of border surveillance posts between 1936 and 1939, especially in the North and Alentejo, and a constant reinforcement with the displacement of several effectives, which denotes the fragility of the Portuguese border surveillance apparatus in the period under consideration.

If the Portuguese government was against the presence of Spanish refugees in the country, the population, on the other hand, and especially the border population, showed solidarity and helped them in the most varied ways, namely by providing them with shelter and food, collaborating in obtaining of documentation and helping to leave the country, representing a form of resistance to *Estado Novo* on the part of these border populations. Due to this benevolent behavior towards fugitives who crossed the border, the Portuguese population, both civilian and military, suffered repression by the Portuguese authorities at the service of Salazar’s regime, who arrested anyone suspected of having a relationship with or having helped the refugees. This situation occurred during and after the Spanish Civil War and was more evident in border areas, especially in areas where a greater number of refugees circulated, particularly in the North and Alentejo regions.

The anti-refugee attitude of Salazar’s government is explained by the Iberian context of the 1930s, marked by constant tensions and differences between Portugal and Spain, by the political and ideological identification with the Francoist cause and by the constant concern to fight communism and guarantee the maintenance of the regime and national sovereignty. To this end, it was fundamental to create an act of propaganda against the presence of Republican refugees in Portugal, classifying them as dangerous elements and, therefore, “undesirable,” due to their identification with the Popular Front and the Spanish Republic, which represented the opposite of what was defended by the Portuguese *Estado Novo*. Salazar led the Portuguese government to adopt a different behavior regarding the presence of Spanish refugees in the country, which reflected the nature of its regime and the position taken in the context of the civil war in Spain. On the one hand, he accepted and allowed the movement of refugees supporting the military coup through Portugal without great difficulties, facilitating their return to Spain.

On the other hand, he marginalized refugees suspected of defending the Popular Front and the Spanish Republic, posing huge obstacles to their presence in the country and exerting intense police repression, which resulted in the persecution, arrest and surrender to Franco.

As such, there was complicity of the Portuguese *Estado Novo* with Franco’s extermination plan aimed at his political opponents and at all those who threatened his intentions, namely defenders of the Republic and the Popular Front and those who had held political positions during the previous period. Salazar’s complicity and collaboration contributed to aggravating the difficulties of Spanish Republican refugees, who found themselves trapped on the Portuguese-Spanish border, pursued by the police and military authorities of the two authoritarian Iberian countries. The communist danger associated with the Spanish refugees was assumed as a major factor in the way Salazar’s regime looked at their presence in the country since with the beginning of the war in Spain the fight against communism came to be understood, in addition to an ideological struggle, as a national struggle (Pereira, 1999, p. 286). The Spanish refugees identified with communism were, therefore, also identified as enemies of the nation, thus legitimizing the repressive action of Salazar’s regime as a way of guaranteeing the maintenance of Portuguese sovereignty.

## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The author of this article declares that they have no financial, professional or personal conflicts of interest that could have inappropriately influenced this work.

## FUNDING SOURCES

The research that allowed the elaboration of this article was financed by the granting of a doctoral grant by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT), identified by the reference SFRH/BD/114813/2016.

## AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Fábio A. Faria: conceptualization, formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, visualization, writing – original draft.

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