

THE BRAZILIAN EMBASSY IN BARCELONA: THE TRANSFER OF THE BRAZILIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS TO CATALONIA DURING THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR (1938–1939)

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Abstract

At the height of the Spanish Civil War in 1938, the Brazilian Embassy in Spain relocated its headquarters from Madrid to Barcelona. The Consulate General in the Catalan capital then became responsible for safeguarding Brazil's political interests in Spain. The Madrid chancellery building remained in the possession of the Brazilian state and became a refuge for asylum seekers. In the aftermath of the conflict, there were episodes of aggression, detention, and theft of property from the last ambassador in Madrid during the Second Spanish Republic. In addition, the chargé d'affaires took up residence in Arenys de Mar, where he provided assistance to Catalan children. These episodes highlight the actions of Brazilian diplomacy amid the upheaval of the Spanish Civil War and foreshadow an equidistant position between Republicans and Nationalists—a stance Brazil would soon adopt again at the outset of World War II.

Keywords: Spanish Civil War. Barcelona. Brazilian diplomacy. Getúlio Vargas. Francisco Franco.

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A EMBAIXADA DO BRASIL EM BARCELONA: A TRANSFERÊNCIA DA SEDE DA CHANCELARIA BRASILEIRA PARA A CATALUNHA NA GUERRA CIVIL ESPANHOLA (1938-1939)

Resumo

Em 1938, no auge da Guerra Civil Espanhola, a sede da Embaixada do Brasil na Espanha foi transferida de Madri para Barcelona. O Consulado-Geral na capital da Catalunha passa, então, a responder também pelos interesses políticos nacionais no país ibérico. O prédio da chancelaria em Madri é mantido em posse do Estado brasileiro e recebe fluxo de solicitantes de asilo. Ao final do conflito, há episódios de agressão, detenção e subtração de bens do último Embaixador em Madri durante a Segunda República Espanhola. Além disso, o encarregado de negócios fixa residência em Arenys de Mar e presta assistência a crianças catalãs. Esses acontecimentos expõem a atuação da diplomacia brasileira no convulsionado contexto da Guerra Civil Espanhola e antecipam posicionamento equidistante entre republicanos e nacionalistas, o que se repetiria pouco depois no início da Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Palavras-chave: Guerra Civil Espanhola. Barcelona. Diplomacia brasileira. Getúlio Vargas. Francisco Franco.

LA EMBAJADA DE BRASIL EN BARCELONA: EL TRASLADO DE LA SEDE DE LA CANCELLERÍA BRASILEÑA A CATALUÑA DURANTE LA GUERRA CIVIL ESPAÑOLA (1938–1939)

Resumen

En 1938, en pleno apogeo de la Guerra Civil Española, la sede de la Embajada de Brasil en España se trasladó de Madrid a Barcelona. El Consulado General en la capital catalana pasó entonces a responder también por los intereses políticos nacionales en el país ibérico. El edificio de la cancillería en Madrid siguió siendo propiedad del Estado brasileño y recibió un flujo de solicitantes de asilo. Al final del conflicto, se producen episodios de agresión, detención y sustracción de bienes del último embajador en Madrid durante la Segunda República Española. Además, el encargado de negocios fija su residencia en Arenys de Mar y presta asistencia a niños catalanes. Estos acontecimientos ponen de manifiesto la actuación de la diplomacia brasileña en el convulso contexto de la Guerra Civil Española y anticipan una posición equidistante entre republicanos y nacionalistas, que se repetiría poco después, al inicio de la Segunda Guerra Mundial.

Palabras clave: Guerra Civil Española. Barcelona. Diplomacia brasileña. Getúlio Vargas. Francisco Franco.

A little-known episode in the history of Brazilian foreign policy is the brief period when the Brazilian Embassy in Spain operated in Barcelona rather than Madrid. Spain had become the stage of what would later go down in history as the prelude to World War II: the Spanish Civil War, a conflict that foreshadowed the international dimensions of the struggle soon to erupt between the Allies and the Axis.

On July 17, 1936, the self-proclaimed “Nationalists” rose up against the newly elected republican government of Manuel Azaña, of the Spanish Popular Front. They believed that it represented a communist threat, contrary, therefore, to the “traditional values of Spanish Catholic society,” as noted by historian Thais Battibugli (2018, 43). Thus began the Spanish Civil War, which would last until April 1, 1939, ending with the fall of the Second Republic and the rise to power of *caudillo* Francisco Franco.

What the rebels had initially envisioned as a swift uprising, an *alzamiento*, escalated into a long and exhausting conflict (Preston 2016). Initially, despite the outbreak of hostilities, the Republican government maintained its official headquarters in Madrid. However, as Nationalist troops advanced, in November 1936, the Second Republic government decided to temporarily relocate to Valencia for security reasons.



13. Spanish Civil war 1936–39: anarchist militia in Barcelona, 1936, on an improvised armoured vehicle.

Source: Hobsbawm, Eric J. *The Age of Extremes: 1914–1991*. First Vintage Books, 1996.

The outbreak of the conflict had almost immediate consequences for the regular functioning of Brazil's diplomatic missions in Spain. As Rogério de Souza Farias notes, on August 22, 1936, less than two months after the July 17 uprising against the Popular Front,

the government authorized diplomatic and consular officials in Spain to withdraw from the country, taking with them any Brazilians who wished to accompany them, while safeguarding existing archives and valuables as best they could (Farias 2021, 243).

In other words, the Brazilian government had already authorized the evacuation of its officials and nationals from Spain even before the Spanish government's first relocation. Despite this, the embassy in Madrid continued to operate under Ambassador Alcebiades Peçanha, the brother of former President Nilo Peçanha. In October 1937, less than a year later, the Republican government moved its headquarters once again, this time to Barcelona, to escape the steady military advance of the Nationalists. Amid this political turmoil, Ambassador Peçanha informed the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs on December 11, 1937, of the Second Spanish Republic's decision to transfer its seat of government to Barcelona (Brazil 1937). Ambassador Peçanha once again chose to remain at his post until February 5, 1938, when First Secretary Carlos da Silveira Martins Ramos took over as *chargé d'affaires*.

Two months later, on February 10, 1938, Martins Ramos reported from Barcelona that "there is no longer any justification, at least for the time being, for our remaining in Madrid, the main center of the tragic conflict that for almost two years has divided Spain and the Spanish people into two distinct camps" (Brazil 1938a). In the same document, he noted that the Secretary-General of the Spanish Ministry of State himself had expressed the wish that the Brazilian Embassy's temporarily relocate its chancellery to the capital of Catalonia, following the "example of the embassies of Great-Britain, France, Argentina, Mexico, Belgium, the United States of America, and the legations of Sweden, Holland, Norway, etc." (Brazil 1938a).

The Transfer of the Headquarters of the Brazilian Embassy in Spain to Barcelona

The Brazilian Embassy officially transferred its headquarters to Barcelona on March 4, 1938, following authorization from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. From March 25 of that year onward, the designation "Embassy

in Barcelona” began to appear in official communications. The Itamaraty Palace, then headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rio de Janeiro, began to send documents “To the Embassy in Barcelona,” with specific instructions on how to proceed amid the Spanish conflict, particularly in matters concerning asylum seekers in Madrid.

Brazil’s political, consular, and administrative interests during the turbulent Spanish context were handled from Barcelona. No ambassador was ever appointed to the city, and the official letters sent to Rio de Janeiro continued to be signed by the Consul General, Martins Ramos. Due to the many sensitive issues handled at the time, a considerable part of the files were classified to some degree.

Even so, the Embassy’s facilities remained operational in Madrid in order to preserve the permanent archive and library. The Embassy building also ended up being responsible for “the archives of the Japanese Embassy, which had been entrusted to Ambassador Peçanha by his Japanese colleague when relations between that country and Spain were severed” (Brazil 1939a). In addition, a humanitarian issue was imposed on Brazilian diplomacy, since “a large number of people, of both sexes, some of Brazilian nationality, flocked to this embassy in search of asylum [...] in the embassy building at Paseo de la Castellana, no. 55,” so that the “adjacent house, no. 57, was rented and renamed ‘the annex,’ where the asylum seekers lived” (Brazil 1939a). By the end of the conflict, sixty people had been received by Ambassador Peçanha and sheltered for varying periods at the Brazilian embassy in Madrid, “with most remaining there until the capital was taken by nationalist forces” (Brazil 1939b), which finally happened in January 1939.

However, before that, and as time went by, the chargé d’affaires in Barcelona began to question Brazil’s asylum policy in Madrid. According to Martins Ramos, “the rebels, refugees in the ‘annex,’ were in no danger whatsoever, except that of having to serve in the ranks of the Republican army.” Furthermore, for the chargé d’affaires, Brazil could not even welcome adults subject to military conscription into its embassy, except in cases of desertion. To reinforce his argument that the policy was misguided, Martins Ramos even reported an episode of “fighting” among the asylum seekers in a letter addressed to the Secretary of State (Brazil 1938b).

Vargas' Strategic Neutrality between Republicans and Nationalists

Despite his sympathy for Francisco Franco, Getúlio Vargas avoided taking an explicit stance in the Spanish conflict. Although Brazil shared certain ideological affinities with members of Franco's Falange, it did not sever relations with the Republicans during the conflict.

The donation of commodities in 1936 illustrates Brazil's ambiguous position. That year, Vargas unofficially sent coffee and sugar to Franco's troops, a gesture that earned him Franco's gratitude in a letter sent from his headquarters in Salamanca. In the letter, identified by historian Eliane Venturini, Franco thanks

the shipment of coffee and sugar to the troops fighting against the "Marxist hordes." He stated that Spain was linked to Brazil by "spiritual and emotional ties." He also said that, in response to Vargas' request, the donation would be kept "within the strictest confidentiality" (Venturini 2022, 233).

Franco showed that he was aware of the political consequences that this rapprochement could entail by ensuring that the donation would remain confidential, which is why he suggested publicizing the Brazilian leader's gesture only when circumstances allowed, "so that all the Spanish people could thank him" (Franco 1936).⁴

If the Nationalists, still far from securing victory, received support from the Brazilian government, Vargas was equally careful to extend gestures to the opposing side, the Republican government. In that same year, 1936, Brazil made another donation of coffee to Spain, this time officially, to the Second Republic (Venturini 2022). The gesture was reported in the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia*. In an interview, Spanish Foreign Minister Alvarez del Vayo expressed his gratitude for the donation of 300,000 kilograms of coffee, to be "sent to the civilian population" (Brazil 1938c).

Another episode that illustrates Brazil's neutrality appears in a document dated December 1938, in which Martins Ramos gives a contemporary assessment of events later confirmed in historical terms. The document concerned the

4 The letter sent by Franco to Vargas is part of the collection of the Center for Research and Documentation of Contemporary Brazilian History. CPDOC/FGV (1936). "Letter from Francisco Franco to Getúlio Vargas thanking him for sending bags of coffee and sugar to his troops (Vol. XXIV/44). Salamanca, October 26, 1936." <https://docvirt.com/docreader.net/correspgv2/7898>.

advisability of appointing a representative to General Franco in Burgos,⁵ following the example of other countries. Martins advised against establishing relations with the Burgos government, in view of its flagrant disregard for international law, and instead recommended maintaining neutrality in the conflict—a stance that was adopted by the Brazilian government.

On December 29, 1938, Martins Ramos sent another letter to Rio de Janeiro to discuss the repatriation of Brazilians who had fought in the Republican ranks and were then held in “various concentration camps established in the territory of the Republic.” He noted that the previously reported figure of 24 imprisoned Brazilians was an underestimate: the actual number was closer to 40.⁶ Among them were “several former officers of the Brazilian army, who were involved in the communist uprising of 1935, such as Captain Costa Leite, who attained the rank of colonel in the People’s Army here” (Brazil 1938d). These military personnel had been convicted by Brazilian courts for their participation in the 1935 uprising. Even so, Brazil intended to repatriate them.

In a dispatch to Martins Ramos, the Secretary of State reported that “the Spanish government, faithful to its commitment to the Non-Intervention Committee, has decided to proceed with the demobilization and repatriation of foreign combatants, and wishes to know whether the Brazilian government would agree to repatriate about forty nationals, including twenty-four volunteers in the Republican army.” The expenses, however, were to be “borne by the Brazilian government, from the Franco-Spanish border.” Another condition stipulated by Brazil was that “no penalties be imposed on the repatriated.” Repatriation, in this sense, implied amnesty in Spain.

Residence in Villa Carmen

With the intensification of the Spanish Civil War and the advance of Franco’s troops into Catalonia, security conditions in the provincial capital, Barcelona, deteriorated to the point that it was no longer advisable for diplomatic offices to remain in that city. Between March 16 and 18, 1938, Barcelona endured a series of air raids by Italian forces, in support of the

5 As historian Eliane Venturini (2018, 157–158) explains, “Government of Burgos” (also called “National Zone”) referred to “the name given to the rebel government, whose core was established in the city of Burgos, north of Castilla y León.”

6 Twenty-four referred only to the number of volunteers in the Republican army.

Nationalists, which severely damaged the city center and killed thousands of people (Villa 2017).

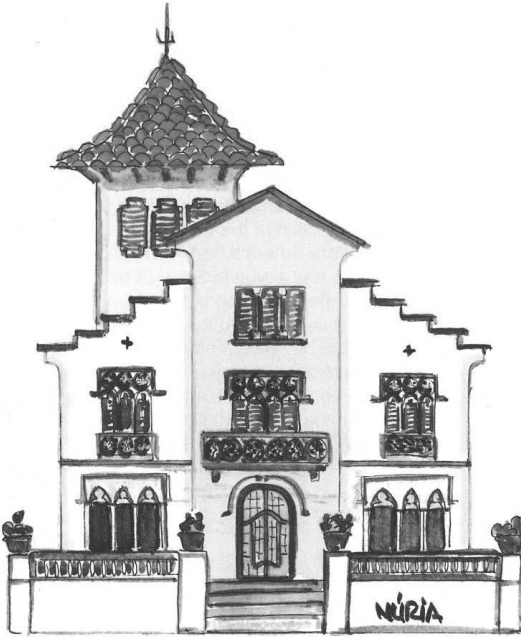
These circumstances led the Republican government to instruct foreign representatives to relocate their headquarters from Barcelona to the Maresme region, a coastal area north of the city, particularly in the municipalities of Caldes d'Estrac, Sant Vicenç de Montalt, Arenys de Mar, Premià de Dalt, and Sant Andreu de Llavanes.

In this context, the embassies of Argentina, Belgium, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, the United States, France, Mexico, New Zealand, Panama, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Switzerland were established in that region, as well as the consulates of Chile, Denmark, France, and the United Kingdom (Consell Comarcal del Maresme 2023).

Martins Ramos took up residence in Villa Carmen, Arenys de Mar, “about 40 kilometers from Barcelona,” where he and his wife began “to attend to the needs of the most disadvantaged children in the area, offering them lunch and a snack twice a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays.” The couple cared for children aged six to twelve from nearby schools, who came to their home in groups of up to 50 students. The food was obtained in Perpignan, a city in southern France (near the Spanish border and about 200 kilometers from Barcelona) (Consell Comarcal del Maresme 2023, 77).

The diplomat suggested that the aid, provided on a personal basis by the couple, be transformed into an official contribution with the creation of “El Hogar Brasileño” (Brazil 1938e), following the example of other countries, such as Sweden. According to Ismara Izepe de Souza,

Itamaraty did not authorize the formalization of this type of aid, given the mistrust that hung over the Spanish Republicans and the alleged lack of funds for extraordinary expenses of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (de Souza 2018, 23).



Official residence of Brazil in Villa Carmen, Arenys de Mar. In: Consell Comarcal Del Maresme (2023). *La Guerra Civil al Maresme*. La impremta d'Argentona, 77.



Grupo de crianças espanholas auxiliadas por Carlos da Silveira Martins Ramos. Fotografia anexada ao ofício n.110 de Carlos da Silveira Martins Ramos, encarregado de negócios do Brasil para Oswaldo Aranha, ministro das Relações Exteriores. Barcelona, 01 nov. 1938. Lata 716, maço 10364. Arquivo Histórico do Itamaraty/RJ.

On February 10, 1939, after the Nationalists took Barcelona, marking the final phase of the Spanish Civil War, Martins Ramos, from Perpignan, wrote a letter to the then Secretary-General of Foreign Affairs, Cyro de Freitas Valle. In the letter, he reports that he had been “the last foreign diplomat to leave,” taking the post’s archives with him. The Consulate General of the United States of Brazil in Barcelona would remain under the charge of Deputy Consul Aluísio Magalhães, and the structure of the official residence was maintained in Arenys de Mar under the care of the cook, a Hungarian national, and other employees. The annex of the Embassy in Madrid continued to house the 40 asylum seekers.

Although Martins Ramos initially hesitated to predict the outcome of the conflict, he expressed little optimism. He highlighted the defection of a third of the Republican army, including “some of the main military and political leaders” who “cowardly abandoned the country” and the recapture of cities with almost no resistance, such as Tarragona, Girona, Figueras, and even the capital of Catalonia, Barcelona:

The Spanish case is so complete that no one dares to make predictions. The civil war may end quickly, but it may also take a few more months. No one predicted the tragic end of the Catalan army, which was supposed to be properly equipped to resist until next summer. The government itself was taken by surprise. And terrible surprises have been coming ever since. None of the lines of resistance withstood the Nationalist attack, supported by powerful Italian contingents (Brazil 1939d).

Amid this scenario, Martins Ramos predicted: “Franco currently controls 98% of Catalonia. Tomorrow, his complete occupation will likely be complete.” At the end of his correspondence, Ramos abandons his ambiguous stance on the events:

I repeat my opinion on the situation: the Republican government is dead; the Republican army, in turn, is dying of starvation due to lack of food. Is it really worth continuing here, watching over a corpse? You will know better than I. But the truth is that I am repulsed by the idea of lending Brazil’s solidarity to a handful of politicians who, out of pride alone, wish to prolong this slaughter that has lasted for almost three years. Incidentally, I must say that the Republican government does not care about us in the least.

Since it hastily abandoned Barcelona, we have lost all contact with its leaders (Brazil 1939d).

As Venturini (2022, 234) explains, “in March of the same year (1939), Brazil recognized Franco as the legitimate representative of the Spanish people,” in line with the position adopted by other countries, such as France and the United Kingdom. The problem of asylum seekers at the Embassy headquarters in Madrid was also resolved; after all, as historian Ismara Izepe de Souza recalls, “before the end of the war, three dozen asylum seekers left the Brazilian representation” (de Souza 2018, 26).

The Role of Brazilian Diplomacy in the Outcome of the Spanish Civil War

Shortly after Franco’s victory, Martins Ramos was instructed by the Brazilian government to leave his post as chargé d’affaires at the Brazilian Embassy in Spain. Argeu de Segadas Machado Guimarães was appointed to replace him.

In June 1939, with Francoism consolidated, the new chargé d’affaires wrote an extensive confidential letter on the “moral profile of Generalissimo Franco” (Brazil 1939c), in which he praises the caudillo’s personality and his spirit of leadership—Franco was affectionally called “*capitán Franquito*” by his soldiers. His admiration extends to Franco’s behavior: according to Guimarães, he “never smoked a cigarette or drank a glass of wine” and had “confirmed the death sentence” of his own brother-in-law, “one of the heads of the Tetuán air base,” at the outset of the military uprising. Even the general’s supposed benevolence in the administration of the special courts established by Franco is praised by Argeu Guimarães:

To give you an idea: dozens of courts operate in the country to carry out the “purge” of all classes, with daily death sentences; none of the sentences are carried out without prior review by the caudillo, who, amid exhaustive work, studies all the evidence, indictments, and arguments in each case to ensure that justice is neither hasty nor precarious. The condemned thus wait up to six months for the sentence to be carried out, which, by virtue of the equanimity of the head of state, may be mitigated at the last minute in the supreme court (Brazil 1939c).

With a markedly pro-Franco stance, the diplomat ends his correspondence addressed to Foreign Minister Oswaldo Aranha with a “praise of the caudillo”:

Unique and remarkable in many ways, Francisco Franco embodies, in the modern Spanish environment, the pure and classic type of “caudillo,” a word that takes on a lofty meaning, unknown in our lexicon, and characterizes a strong personality, a guide and arbiter capable of rallying an entire people behind him (Brazil 1939c).

The end of the Spanish Civil War, however, did not bring about an immediate normalization of diplomatic relations between Brazil and Spain in practical terms. Argeu Guimarães initially sent his official correspondence to the Itamaraty from San Sebastián, in the Basque Country, northern Spain. When the embassy in Madrid was inspected after the conflict, it was found that “the belongings of Ambassador Peçanha and Secretary Fernandes Pinheiro” (Brazil 1939b), left in the chancellery, had been looted.

In June 1939, Ambassador Alcebiades Peçanha was summoned before the Military Court to respond to allegations, made by three witnesses, of mistreatment of asylum seekers at the embassy annex at the beginning of the conflict. In addition, “on his way to the embassy apartment building, he was cowardly and brutally assaulted, including by officers⁷ who accompanied him” (Brazil 1939e). That same day, Peçanha was detained and advised by the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to “leave Spain,” which “had already been ordered to release [him]” (Brazil 1939f). The release only occurred five days later. Ambassador Peçanha left Spain shortly after the incident. According to Argeu Guimarães, this was not an isolated incident:

Finally, it is important to note that cases of rudeness and violence against diplomats, whether on duty or not, have been repeated in Spain today, highlighting the intransigence with which people who had contact with the authorities of the former Spanish Republic are persecuted, even though no special charges have been brought against them (Brazil 1939g).

In view of the aggression and arrest suffered by Peçanha, Itamaraty prepared a verbal note to the Spanish Embassy, proposing reciprocal measures if the ambassador was not “immediately released and allowed to leave Spanish territory with all the guarantees to which he is entitled.” In the communication

7 In this case, Spanish officers.

signed by Macedo Soares, which “was not sent because the matter was satisfactorily resolved,” it was proposed to “use complete freedom of action in relation to the Spanish diplomatic representation in Rio de Janeiro, and accordingly do whatever circumstances dictate” (Brazil 1939h).

On November 16, 1939, with the relative normalization of diplomatic relations with Franco’s Spain, Brazil sent a telegram to the Embassy in Madrid asking it to “send information about Raimundo Fernández-Cuesta, for whom the Spanish government has just requested *agrément* as ambassador” to Brazil. The following day, Abelardo Roças replied that Fernández-Cuesta was “Minister of Agriculture in the previous cabinet, former minister, secretary of the Falange, legal advisor to the Navy, and a leading figure in the current regime, having been held prisoner by the communists for a year and then exchanged.” After receiving the *agrément*, Raimundo Fernández-Cuesta would become Spain’s first ambassador to Brazil during the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, a regime that would last until 1975.

Franco’s victory encouraged the campaign of Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy in World War II. According to Julián Casanova (2007, 261), the international scenario at the end of the 1930s did not provide conditions conducive to peace, which significantly affected the duration and outcome of the events of the Spanish Civil War. Similarly, Paulo Roberto de Almeida (2022, 164) states that the conflict was “an international civil war, even though it was fought mainly on European territory.” Like Salazar’s Portugal, the Spanish caudillo chose to remain neutral in the conflict and managed to extend his regime until 1975. Getúlio Vargas, in turn, was urged to abandon his pragmatic equidistance and declare war on the Axis in 1942, in line with the position adopted by the United States and a significant number of Latin American countries. Brazil’s participation in the conflict, which expressed the inconsistency between the fight against fascist regimes abroad and the maintenance of the Estado Novo domestically, would be pointed out as one of the causes that led to Vargas’ downfall in 1945.

With the end of the conflict, the owner of the building that housed the Brazilian chancellery in Madrid asked Itamaraty to “vacate the building at Paseo de la Castellana No. 57, in order to occupy it” (Brazil 1939h). The Brazilian representation left the Castellana address in 1941 and has since been located at Calle Fernando El Santo, No. 6, a property acquired permanently in 1944,⁸ where it operates to this day.

8 <https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/embaixada-madri/madri-arquivos/historia-do-edificio-da-embaixada>.



“Building of the Brazilian Embassy in Madrid.” <https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/embaixada-madri/madri-arquivos/historia-do-edificio-da-embaixada>.

The actions of Brazilian diplomacy in Spain during the Civil War reflect a trait identified by historiography in the foreign policy of the Vargas government. In a way, the “double game” (Cervo and Bueno 2011), the “pragmatic equidistance” (Moura 1980), or what we call here “strategic neutrality” can be identified in the gestures made toward both sides of the conflict, the Nationalists and the Republicans. On the one hand, there was legal recognition of the Second Republic government until the end of the conflict—including the relocation of the embassy from Madrid to Barcelona and, later, to Arenys de Mar, north of that city—with the victory of Franco’s troops; on the other hand, there was the donation of coffee and sugar to the rebels (Venturini 2022).

In addition, the granting of asylum in Madrid to Nationalists fleeing the Republican regime (Souza 2018) and the reception in Arenys de Mar of children, a group acutely affected by the consequences of armed conflict, also corroborate the equidistant attitude of Itamaraty in the midst of the conflict. The “contradictions within the government itself” (Cervo and Bueno 2011, 252), with actors more or less inclined towards the United States or Germany,

can also be observed in the interpretations and positions adopted towards nationalists and republicans in Spain.

The Consulate General of Brazil in Barcelona after the Spanish Civil War

The Consulate General in Barcelona was the first post of diplomat João Cabral de Melo Neto, who initially lived in the city between 1947 and 1950, where he served as vice-consul and published *O cão sem plumas* (The Dog without Feathers). The poet returned to live in the Catalan capital between 1967 and 1970, when he held the position of consul general. During this period, the Brazilian consular representation was located in the “*rascacielos* Urquinaona,” also known as the Fàbregas building, in Urquinaona Square, as recalled by Professor Basilio Losada Castro (2009).

According to Losada Castro, the poet revitalized Barcelona’s cultural life during its most difficult years. In a country dominated by Francoism, Cabral maintained friendly relations with leading figures of the avant-garde *Dal al Set* movement, such as Joan Brossa, Antoni Tàpies, and Joan Ponç, among others. In Brossa’s words about João Cabral,

His idea was that poetry should point the way to social criticism, but without ever submitting to any theory. It was something very intelligent, something that at that time, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was not discussed by artists in Barcelona. We lived very limited lives during Francoism, and he opened up new perspectives for us with his ideas. Cabral lived his time, and we didn’t [...] (Losada Castro 2009)

João Cabral also wrote a book about the artist Joan Miró, his personal friend.⁹

As British historian Eric Hobsbawm describes, the Spanish Civil War had made the Iberian country “part of the life of every one of my generation.” The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War exposed the failure of the multilateralism proposed by the League of Nations, which opted for non-intervention in the

9 The work was published by Casa Amèrica Catalunya, an institution that has existed since 1911, with the aim of promoting the culture of Latin American countries in Catalonia, notably through literature festivals, such as KM Amèrica, and film festivals, such as LATcinema Fest, as well as exhibitions, seminars, and other cultural events, often featuring Brazilian artists and works. Its current director general, journalist, editor, and writer Marta Nin, lived in Brazil for two years and maintains ties with the country, which she visits frequently. In 2023, she was awarded the Order of Rio Branco. Note from the authors.

Iberian country. According to Eric Hobsbawm (1996), General Franco's victory had no significant global consequences—it merely kept Spain (and Portugal) in international isolation for another 30 years. According to Hobsbawm (2002, 371), Spain,

Despite everything, after 1945 it was still a strange country for other Europeans. In the imagination of all of us, it still belonged to a curious realm in which images of revolution, war, and defeat in arid landscapes were superimposed on images of exoticism—flamenco, castanets, bullfighting, Carmen, Don José, Escamillo—and those of a generic “Hispanicness”—Don Quixote, honor, pride, and silence.

The decision to open the Consulate General of Brazil in Barcelona dates back to the 19th century, in the context of Brazil's post-independence period. On May 20, 1826, Felipe José Ribeiro was the first representative appointed, by decree of Emperor D. Pedro I, to serve as Brazilian consul in Barcelona. Ribeiro, however, was not accredited by Spain, since Brazil would only obtain Spanish recognition as an independent nation in 1834, by resolution of the then Spanish Queen Regent Maria Cristina, after the death of Fernando VII in 1833. The uninterrupted existence of Brazilian representation in Barcelona can only be verified from 1846 onwards, initially as a Vice-Consulate and, since 1881, as a Consulate-General.

The teaching of Portuguese by an official Brazilian institution in Barcelona began informally in 1963, on the initiative of the then Consul General. Classes were held at the Consulate General (Calle Junqueras, 18) as a complementary activity for local employees and contractors. In 1975, a contract was signed to rent a room in the prestigious Casa Amatller, next to Casa Batlló, a tourist attraction located on the well-known Passeig de Gràcia Avenue, where, like the previous cultural center, the current Guimarães Rosa Institute in Barcelona still operates today, with growing demand for Portuguese language teaching in the region. In 2021, the Guimarães Rosa Lectureship Program was established at the renowned Autonomous University of Barcelona, further enhancing educational cooperation in Catalonia.

The transfer of the Brazilian chancellery's headquarters to Catalonia during the Spanish Civil War is still a little-known episode in the 200-year history of the Consulate General of Brazil in Barcelona. The constant presence of Brazil's consular representation in Barcelona, with departments for trade and cultural promotion, as well as science, technology, and innovation, and

with an estimated community of more than 80,000 consultees in 2024,¹⁰ demonstrates the continuity of the country's international activities, in line with established constitutional principles. Finally, the study of the Vargas government's actions in the context of the Spanish Civil War anticipates the stance of strategic neutrality that would be adopted in World War II, as can be seen from the donations of coffee and sugar to both Republicans and Nationalists—albeit confidentially in this case—and deserves a special section in the history of Brazilian foreign policy.

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10 With jurisdiction extending from the Basque Country (Álava, Guipúzcoa, and Vizcaya) in the north to Murcia (Murcia) in the south, the Consulate General of Brazil in Barcelona also covers the autonomous communities of Aragon (Huesca, Teruel, and Zaragoza), the Balearic Islands (Ibiza, Mallorca, and Menorca), Catalonia (Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona), the Valencian Community (Alicante, Castellón, and Valencia), La Rioja (Rioja), Navarre (Navarra), and the Principality of Andorra. Authors' note.

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