

Article

Post-World War II Brazil: A New Homeland for Jews and Nazis?

SARAH R. VALENTE

The University of Texas at Dallas

Abstract. There is a dearth of research on Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Brazil before, during, and after World War II. Also missing is a comprehensive analysis of how former Nazis escaped to the country after the War. This “co-existence” of Jewish survivors and Nazis within the same geographical location at the same time is a topic of great complexity, which I explore in this paper. In the first section of this paper, I will briefly address Brazil’s political history, while at the same time, its identity as an immigrant country, with a historically multi-ethnic cultural and demographic make-up, by analyzing the census data available. To explore how Jews negotiated their new position as survivors, immigrants, and members of a minority group who, while lived with the possibility of coexisting with war criminals, in section two, I analyze the memoirs of Aleksander Laks and Sabina Kustin, who, in different ways, transferred their fears from the old world to their new realities, due to imagined or real Nazi presence, which afflicted their existence and identity as Jews in Brazil. In the last section, I address the question of Nazi presence in Brazil. Using newspaper articles and governmental documentation, I highlight strategies used by war criminals such as Herbert Cukurs and Gustav Franz Wagner, to live freely in Brazil, and evade justice.

Keywords: Brazil, Holocaust, immigration, Jewish, nazis.

Abstract. Esiste un’impasse nella ricerca sui sopravvissuti dell’Olocausto che sono immigrati in Brasile prima, durante e dopo la seconda guerra mondiale. Manca anche un’analisi comprensiva di come i vecchi nazisti sono fuggiti nel paese dopo il conflitto. La “co-esistenza” di sopravvissuti ebrei e nazisti nella stessa area geografica, allo stesso momento, è un argomento di grande complessità, che studio in questo contributo. Nella prima sezione di questo lavoro, affronto brevemente la storia politica brasiliana, e al contempo, la sua identità come paese di immigrati, con una composizione storicamente demografica, culturale e multi-etnica, mediante un’analisi dei dati del censimento disponibili. Per esplorare come gli ebrei hanno negoziato la loro posizione come sopravvissuti, immigrati e membri di un gruppo minoritario che, ha vissuto con la possibilità di co-esistenza con i criminali di guerra, nella sezione due, esamino le memorie di Aleksander Laks e Sabina Kustin, che, in diverse modalità, hanno trasferito i loro timori dal vecchio mondo alle loro nuove realtà, a causa della presenza reale o immaginaria dei nazisti, i quali affliggevano le loro esistenze e identità come ebrei in Brasile. Nell’ultima sezione, affronto la questione della presenza dei nazisti in Brasile. Attraverso articoli di giornale e documenti governativi, evidenzio delle strategie utilizzate dai criminali di guerra come Herbert Cukurs e Gustav Franz Wagner, per vivere liberi in Brasile ed evadere la giustizia.

Parole chiave: Brasile, Ebrei, Immigrazione, Nazisti, Olocausto.

Jewish presence in Brazil dates to the colonial period, when Sephardic Jews were banished¹ from the Iberian Peninsula from the end of the 15th century. Though it is estimated² that a third of the explorers on board Pedro Alvares de Cabral's fleets were of Jewish ancestry, Jewish presence, assumed as such, only began to appear in Brazil in the early 19th century, after the 1824 Constitution formally instituted religious freedom in the country. The migratory movement also gained significant momentum after the United States and Argentina introduced restrictions on the entry of certain groups. Brazil, which since the late 19th century had established itself as an important destination for international migration, became a natural alternative. Subsequently, Jews from the Russian Empire, the Balkans, and Central Europe began to arrive in increasing numbers; it is estimated that between 1920 and the beginning of World War II more than 50,000 Jews immigrated to Brazil³.

As demonstrated by René Decol⁴, the history of Jewish immigration has not yet been mapped to the same extent as other groups, such as Italians and Japanese, perhaps because it involves unique difficulties such as the fact that Jewish immigration arrived from dozens of different countries⁵. However, the Brazilian census has consistently been tracking Jewish⁶ presence in Brazil since 1940. In fact, Jews form one of the only immigrant groups systematically surveyed by the Brazilian demographic census from 1940s onward. This is due to the existence of the category "Jewish" in the question about religion⁷. The fact that the category is included only as a religious maker imposes certain limitations⁸ due to the unique characteristics of this group, where religious, ethnic, cultural and historical components are intertwined, as well as geographical dispersion and particular socioeconomic structure⁹. When utilizing the numbers, one must keep in mind that individuals of Jewish

¹ By the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews in Spain, dated 31 March 1492, signed by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabel and the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews in Portugal in 1496, by King Manuel. For more on how Jews converted into new Christians had an important participation in the beginnings of the formation of the Brazilian population, see A. Novinsky, *Os Judeus que construíram o Brasil: Fontes inéditas para uma nova visão da história*, São Paulo, Editora Planeta do Brasil, 2015.

² E. Eiger, L. Valente, *A Estrela Oculta do Sertão*, São Paulo, Fototema. DVD video: Portuguese, 2005.

³ J. Lestschinsky, *Jewish migrations, 1840-1956*, in Louis Finkelstein (ed), *The Jews, their history, culture and religion*, 2, 1961; M. Wischinitzer, *To Dwell in Safety: the Story of Jewish migration since 1800*, Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1948.

⁴ Social scientist René Decol's demographical work is a reference for understanding post-World-War-II Jewish immigration to Brazil. Cfr. R.D. Decol's *Imigrações urbanas para o Brasil: o caso dos judeus*, São Paulo, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, UNICAMP, 1999.

⁵ *Ivi*, p. 147.

⁶ The demographic data obtained by the Census are of a self-identifying nature. Jews self-identify when answering the question asked under "religion".

⁷ R.D. Decol, *Op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁸ In order to overcome the difficulties imposed by the fluid and voluntarist definition of who is Jewish, Schmelz and DellaPergola have developed a referential framework where they define three different concepts of Jewish population: nuclear (those who define themselves as Jews when asked, for example, in a census survey), extended (the nuclear population plus those who, although of Jewish origin, are not currently defined as such), and finally expanded (the extended population plus non-Jewish members of their families, such as spouses and children in mixed marriages). From an operational point of view, census data refer only to the nuclear population and refer to those who define themselves as Jews by religion (since the question is formulated in the following we have: «what is the religion of each member of the household?»). Other, broader definitions would probably lead us to different numbers, encompassing other definitions; Cfr. R.D. Decol, *Op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁹ U.O. Schmelz, S. DellaPergola, "World Jewish Populations", in *American Jewish Year Book*, New York, The American Jewish Committee, 1992. p. 486.

Table 1. General and Jewish Immigration to Brazil, by period, 1872-1972.

Period	General		Jewish	
1872-1879	176,337	3.3%	500	0.5%
1880-1889	448,622	8.4%	500	0.5%
1890-1899	1,198,327	22.4%	1,000	1.1%
1900-1909	622,407	11.6%	5,000	5.4%
1910-1919	815,453	15.2%	5,000	5.4%
1920-1929	846,647	15.8%	30,316	32.5%
1930-1939	332,768	6.2%	22,452	24.1%
1940-1949	114,085	2.1%	8,512	9.1%
1950-1959	583,068	10.9%	15,243	16.3%
1960-1969	197,587	3.7%	4,258	4.6%
1970-1972	15,558	0.3%	450	0.5%
Total 1872-1972	5,350,859	100%	93,231	100%

Source: R. Decol, *Judeus no Brasil: explorando os dados censitários*, in «Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais», 16 (46), 2001, p. 153.

origin may experience different levels of attachment to Judaism or the Jewish community, and may resolve to sever their links, whether or not adopting another identity¹⁰, which then has an effect on how they respond to the census question.

It is worth discussing why these data exist, the reasons why¹¹ Jews came to be surveyed by Brazilian demographic censuses in the first place. From 1937 on, with the rise of Getúlio Vargas' *Estado Novo*¹², the Brazilian version of the "Jewish question"¹³ began to take shape. Vargas, as was the case in Nazi Germany, sought to identify Jews

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ After all, the census is fundamentally an instrument for collecting information that can guide public policies. But the census is also a mirror of society: many of its issues stem from political interests existing at the time the survey is organized; Cfr. B. Robey, *The 1990 census: a view from 1984*, in «*American Demographics*», vol. 6, 1984, July, pp. 24-46; M. J. Anderson, *The American census – a social history*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988. At various times in history and in several countries, censuses were also used to obtain information on undesirable minorities, often with the aim of subsidizing restrictive policies. This happened to Jews, for example, in the Czarist Russia of the 19th century; Cfr. R.H. Rowland, *Geographical Patterns of the Jewish Population in the Pale of Settlements of late Nineteenth century Russia*, in «*Jewish Social Studies*», 48 (3-4), 1986, pp. 207-234. And with great organizational and technological sophistication in the Nazi Germany census in 1939; Cfr. W. Seltzer, *Population statistics, the Holocaust, and the Nuremberg Trials*, in «*Population and Development Review*», 24, 1998, pp. 111-188.

¹² The *Estado Novo*, also known as the Vargas Era, was a political regime installed by Getúlio Vargas, who had great admiration for Hitler and his administration in Germany, on 10 November 1937 through a coup d'état. It was characterized by centralization of power, nationalism, anti-communism, and authoritarianism, and lasted until 1946. The Constitution of 1937 granted maximum power to Vargas, implemented the use of propaganda and censorship on the press. In 1938, nationalization laws were passed against foreigners, with penalties such as imprisonment for those caught speaking foreign languages (especially Italian and German) in public spaces, the forbidding of teaching foreign languages in public ethnic schools, as well as the publication of foreign-language texts. Cfr. L. Kreutz, *Escolas comunitárias de imigrantes no Brasil: instâncias de coordenação e estruturas de apoio*, en «*Revista Brasileira da Educação*», n. 15, 2000, pp. 159-176.

¹³ Cfr. M.L. Tucci Carneiro, *O anti-semitismo na era Vargas (1930-1945)*, São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1988; J. Lesser, *O Brasil e a questão judaica: imigração, diplomacia e preconceito*, Rio de Janeiro, Imago, 1995.

Table 2. Jewish Population by region, 1940-2000.

Region	1940	1950	1960	1980	1991	2000
Southeast	43,476	55,402	70,147	75,493	70,960	70,385
South	7,768	9,545	11,341	10,982	10,614	10,010
Northeast	2,180	3,071	2,628	2,600	1,693	3,057
North	1,562	1,791	1,390	1,394	2,308	2,060
Central-West	80	148	532	1,326	841	1,312
TOTAL	55,563	69,955	96,199	91,795	86,416	86,825

Source: IBGE; R. Decol, *A Demographic Profile of Brazilian Jewry*, in «Contemporary Jewry», 29, 2009, p. 105.

and Communists. Part of the discussion involved a demographic question: according to some, hundreds of thousands of Jews had already entered and settled in the country. If nothing was done, thousands more, or perhaps even millions, could seek refuge in Brazilian lands. At the height of the *Estado Novo*, during the debate on the “Jewish question” some made highly exaggerated, fearmongering estimates: «400 thousand Jews live in Brazil, 150 thousand have entered the last six months alone», read the headline of an article published in «Meio Dia», at the end of 1940¹⁴. The extent to which Getúlio Vargas’ courtship with Nazism was the background for the existence of an independent category for the Jews in the Brazilian census of 1940 is open to discussion. What is known is that when Giorgio Mortara, an Italian demographer of Jewish descent, became the director of the 1940 census, he found the census questions already ready¹⁵. It seems undeniable, however, that the introduction of the category in the 1940 census was for political reasons¹⁶.

When the 1940 census results were published in 1943, Vargas had abandoned his sympathy for the Axis and joined the Allies. The “Jewish question” has disappeared - or at least submerged¹⁷. However, the question did not go away. Brazilian diplomats, ambassadors, and representatives were instructed through a number of secret circulars¹⁸ not to grant visas to Jews which would allow them to immigrate to Brazil. What explains the thousands of Jews who were able to bypass these strict measures and immigrate during the War can be attributed to their ability to acquire baptismal records which “proved” that they were not Jewish. The Jews who arrived in Brazil had a unique trajectory, since they had little or no rural experience, they went to the cities much earlier than the rest of oth-

¹⁴ J. Lesser, *Op. cit.*, p. 231.

¹⁵ Cfr. G. Mortara, *Memories of a life-time. A Tribute to Giorgio Mortara*, Roma, Università degli Studi di Roma La Sapienza, 1985.

¹⁶ R.D. Decol, *Judeus no Brasil: explorando os dados censitários*, cit., p. 153.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 152.

¹⁸ The Ministry of Foreign Relations emitted a total of 26 secret circulars from 1937 on, implementing bans on Jewish immigration. The most well-known circulars include secret circular n. 1,127 from 7 June 1937, which forbade “Semitic” immigration. According to Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, at least 16,000 visas were denied to Jews while these circulars were in effect J. Fellet, *A época em que o Brasil barrou milhares de judeus que fugiam do nazismo*, in *BBC News Brasil*, 2019.

er immigrant groups who predominantly settled in rural areas¹⁹. By 1940, about 74% of the total number of Jews residing in Brazil already lived in only three cities: Porto Alegre (South), Rio de Janeiro (Southeast), and São Paulo (Southeast). In comparison, only 8% of all Brazilians lived in these cities at the same time.

1. Post-World War II Jewish Testimonies

As Jews negotiated their new position as Holocaust survivors, immigrants, and members of a minority religious and ethnical group in Brazil, they began to write their testimonies. However, they only published these accounts many decades later. The post-war period²⁰ was followed by a military dictatorship that lasted from 1964 to 1985. During this period, foreigners and Jews were, once again, seen as “subversives,” communists, and possible threats to society. The oral testimony of Boris Schaniderman, a Russian-Jew who served in the Brazilian Military Force from 1943 to 1945, states that during the War, while he was fighting on the Italian front, the Brazilian police invaded his family’s home and took his brother-in-law as prisoner under the suspicion that, being a Jew he must also be a spy. Then years later, Boris himself was taken to the infamous OBAN²¹ and DEOPS²² to be questioned and interrogated for possible subversive political activity. Because of the continuation of fear, survivors did not publish their accounts. Many who felt quite exposed to political violence from the different authoritarian regimes that took power after the War relocated; from 1948 to 1977, about 6,300 Brazilian Jews immigrated to Israel²³.

Besides the fear experienced by survivors due to the political moments of the country, the memoirs²⁴, which started to appear at the end of the twentieth/beginning of the twentieth-first century, point to the fact that survivors took their fears of Nazism along in their suitcases to Brazil. The possibility of Nazi presence afflicted their existence and identity as Jews in Brazil. In examining a dozen of Holocaust memoirs published in the last two decades, I have identified²⁵ that the memoirs published by survivors who immigrated to Brazil after the end of World War II contain certain specific features: the survivors provide general historical contexts about European Jewish life, Judaism, as well as anti-Semitism throughout the many centuries preceding the Holocaust; once they establish the historical context, survivors then describe their personal experiences in hiding, in concentration camps, and in the death marches during the Holocaust; then the survivors describe their

¹⁹ R.D. Decol, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

²⁰ Getúlio Vargas, who had been in power from 1930-1945, returned to power in 1951 until 1954.

²¹ *Operação Bandeirantes* (OBAN) was a center for information and investigation set up by the Brazilian Military in 1969 to coordinate repressive actions against leftist organizations that opposed the military dictatorship.

²² *Departamento de Ordem Política e Social* (DEOPS), created in 1924, was instrumental during the *Estado Novo* and later on the Military Dictatorship for tracking “enemies of the state”. Its objectives were to censor and suppress political and social movements against the regime. DEOPS operations used interrogation, violence, torture, disappearance, and murder as tools of repression.

²³ D.L. Herman, *The Latin-American Community of Israel*, New York, Praeger, 1984, p. 32.

²⁴ In his edited volume titled *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, William Zinsser defines memoirs as literary works that «narrow the lens, focusing on a time in the writer’s life that was unusually vivid, such as childhood or adolescence, or that was framed by war or travel or some special circumstance» (p. 15). These memoirs exemplify this definition exactly.

²⁵ See my doctoral dissertation *Holocaust Aftermath and Memory in Brazil*, The University of Texas at Dallas, 2019 for more information.

journey to immigrate to Brazil and well as their new lives in detail; lastly, the memoirs often end on a note of reflection on memory as well as stating a call for remembrance. The fear of resurgence of neo-Nazi movements and violence against Jews in Brazil makes itself present in the survivors' closing remarks.

Born in Lodz in 1927, Aleksander Laks lived his teenage years confined to the Lodz Ghetto. He survived the Holocaust after going through several concentration camps, including Lärche, Kaltwasser, Flossenbürg, Wüstegiersdorf, and finally Auschwitz. He also endured the forced death marches, where his father, who had survived alongside him until then, perished. In his memoir, *O Sobrevivente* (2000), Laks uses poetic language as a medium to re-create his memory. The fear and premonition of the reoccurrence of the event appears in his work from the beginning, when he states that that which he experienced, "in his skin, bones, blood, nerves, and in each breath of life" could still happen. From the table of contents, which contains 12 chapters, Laks communicates great poetic insight. The title of the first chapter is simply, "You" and as the reader reads town to the tenth chapter the full sentence is formed, «You are in Auschwitz. From here you only leave through the chimney». The last two chapters, eleven and twelve, are commands, «Go West. Perhaps you will find more Jews». This spine-chilling 12-line poem, packages the whole book and sets the tone for the 172-pages that follow. As one advances in the reading, the fast-paced unfolding of events contribute to a feeling of being enclosing into a claustrophobic atmosphere, culminating with the death of his father within days of liberation, and the utter loneliness Laks faces upon liberation.

Sabina Kustin's memoir *A Vida e a Luta de uma Sobrevivente do Holocausto* (2012) poses direct questions to the reader: «Is it possible that the world has forgotten the biggest catastrophe Humanity every experienced? Is it possible that we are born to see such violent massacres? Why has the world not woken up to stop the destruction of Humanity?» (p. 112). As a manifesto against degradation of political rhetoric, injustice, and genocide, Kustin begins her narrative stating, «I was born an adult. I didn't have a childhood. I was never a child» (p. 19). Born in 1928 in Lodz, she was hidden in the basement of a Catholic church along with other children by a Polish Priest for two years, while her whole family was first confined in the Lodz Ghetto and later taken to Auschwitz and Treblinka, where all of them were murdered. When the underground hiding place was discovered, the priest managed to take all the children to the Soviet Union border. But Kustin could not escape her fate, at the end of 1944, she was imprisoned and taken to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. She was liberated by the British armed forced in April of 1945. Towards the end of her memoir, it carries a conversational tone where she speaks directly to the reader in questions. Her questions seem to aim at making the reader feel accountable for their future actions and treatment of others, especially minorities. «I know that the youth and majority of the Brazilian population don't understand the significance Holocaust. [...] It is difficult [for them] to imagine people, some still alive, being burned in crematorium, men, women, elderly, children killed in gas chambers [...] I write not only to remember facts but also to cry out to stop other horrors from happening [...] I hope that whoever reads this book understands the fight of the human being and becomes conscious of the value of life. I propose a path for the right to live and learn how to become a human being» (p. 114).

In the preface of Kustin's book, Tucci Carneiro writes, «Sabina Kustin's memoir comes to us at a timely moment, given the current state of racism which even after the liberation of Auschwitz, continues to trouble Humanity» (p. 11). Thus, the memory of the survivor becomes a means to another end, as «the recent rise of anti-Semitism in Europe demonstrates how people are still incapable of dealing with the past, the heritage of misguided education and a history structured by deliberate silence» (*Ibidem*), Kustin's memoir then is one that not only memorializes her experience, but one that aims to educate new generations, as it extrapolates the individual value of the testimony to achieve a universal meaning as collective memory. Furthermore, Kustin's memories offer us «ammunition to fight against neo-Nazis and dedicated revisionists, among other things, who accuse the Jews of turning the Holocaust into a great 'industry' and of 'manipulating' information for the purpose of becoming eternal sufferers» (p. 12).

2. Nazis in Brazil

Though Nanette Blitz Konig²⁶ does not mention about her fear of Nazis in Brazil in her memoir, *Eu Sobrevivi ao Holocausto: o comovente relato de uma das últimas amigas vivas de Anne Frank* (2015), when I interviewed her in her residence in São Paulo in the summer of 2017, I asked her about this issue. Nanette stated that, «We always knew they [former Nazis] were here. Some even lived not too far from here [Sumaré]». When I asked, how she had heard about this, she told me that, «The government knew, everyone knew. They [the Nazis] were always appearing on the newspapers, it was not a big secret!». In fact, Nanette was correct. Kurt Schrimm, German prosecutor and head of the Central Office of the State Justice Administration for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes in Ludwigsburg estimated that 1,500 to 2,000 Nazi war criminals immigrated to Brazil after the War in order to escape justice²⁷.

After the end of World War II, the Allied Control Council administering Germany invited Brazil, as the only country from Latin America, to send a military mission to Germany. The *Missão Militar Brasileira* (MMB) was set up in the American sector of Berlin, in March 1946, and remained there until December of 1949. Under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Relations, the main objective of the MMB was to assist in solving the «problem of millions of displaced persons in Germany»²⁸, and provide aid and relief in repatriating Brazilian citizens living in Germany, most who had German roots and/or German citizenship, back to Brazil. Further, the MMB's goal was also to identify German engineers and technicians who might help develop Brazilian industry, to acquire laboratory equipment, as well as gather useful information on the military, economic, and political climate of Central Europe, and to select and send immigrants of interest to Brazil²⁹. By

²⁶ Nanette Blitz Konig is a survivor from Bergen-Belsen who has been living in São Paulo since 1953. She was a classmate of Anne Frank at the Jewish Lyceum in 1941, and was together with her at Belsen. For more information, see her memoir, *Eu sobrevivi ao Holocausto: o comovente relato de uma das últimas amigas vivas de Anne Frank*. Universo dos Livros, 2015.

²⁷ C. Klein, *How South America Became a Nazi Haven*, in «History», <<https://www.history.com/news/how-south-america-became-a-nazi-haven>>, accessed 22 April 2019.

²⁸ A.L. Tavares, *Quatro anos na Alemanha ocupada*, Rio de Janeiro, Biblioteca do Exército, 1951, p. 48.

²⁹ M. Frotscher, *De 'alemães no exterior' a brasileiros? A repatriação de cidadãos brasileiros da Alemanha ocupada (1946-1949)*, in «Revista Unisinos», 17 (2), 2013, p. 82.

the end of its operation, the MMB aided the immigration of more than 8,000³⁰ Germans, Brazilians, “immigrant-citizens,” and granted exit visas³¹ to Brazil.

Although there are speculations³² about the political affiliations of the Germans who were in fact repatriated to Brazil through the MMB, from my research, we see that former Nazi war criminals chose to immigrate to Brazil through other channels. World-famous Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal began to trace the escape routes³³ of important Nazis to Brazil in late 1967. Most recently, Gerald Steinacher³⁴ and Marcos Guterman³⁵ have detailed how the Vatican and the International Red Cross provided such escapes to fugitives to South America. However, there are additional, previously unexamined instances that exemplify the arrival of known war criminals to Brazil through the normal channels of immigration that were available to foreigners desiring to relocate permanently to Brazil, which I explore below.

Decorated war pilot Herbert Cukurs became a member of the Latvian Arajs Kommando during the occupation of Latvia by Nazi Germany. He was responsible for the mass murder of Latvian Jews in his leading role in atrocities³⁶ committed in the Riga ghetto³⁷. After the war, Cukurs and his family stayed in France for seven months before embarking on their journey to Brazil, after being granted permanent residency to the country by Brazilian authorities. Cukurs did not hide his identity; rather the Brazilian government’s Ministry of Foreign Relations granted him a special *salvo conduto* permission. Thus, Herbert, his wife, three young children, and his mother-in-law, sailed³⁸ from Marseilles to Rio de Janeiro on Cabo de Buena Esperanza, arriving to Brazil on March 3, 1946. Only four years after the arrival of Herbert and his family to Brazil, on June 24,

³⁰ According to colonel Lyra Tavares’ records, between February 1947 and December 1949, about 2,445 “Brazilians” and 2,752 “foreigners” departed to Brazil on eleven different trips on the ships Satarém and Duque de Caxias, as well as 1,749 “immigrants”; Cfr. M. Frotscher, *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

³¹ These exit visas were granted after a screening process that included checking one’s past political activities as well as their proof of Brazilian citizenship or relationship to someone already living in Brazil, for purposes of family reunification. The Office of the United States Political Adviser noted that the military authorities were exerting much pressure to repatriate as many Germans, as quickly as possible, without following through with the screening process. See *AHI 06/05/1946, Folder 118-5-3; IFZ, 05/09/1946, POLAD/POLA 744/48*.

³² According to Frotscher, exchanges between the U.S. Office of Military Government of Germany and the State Department show that there were Germans, ex-members of the NSDAP, who left Germany without attaining exit permits but with Latin American passports in hand with destination to Brazil; Cfr. M. Frotscher, *Op. cit.*

³³ Cfr. S. Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us: the Simon Wiesenthal Memoirs*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1967

³⁴ Cfr. G. Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run: How Hitler’s Henchmen Fled Justice*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

³⁵ Cfr. M. Guterman, *Nazistas entre nós*, São Paulo, Editora Contexto, 2016.

³⁶ The details of his crimes here included are as described by the Yad Vashem International Institute for Holocaust Research Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust, Riga. On November 30, 1941, German SS soldiers escorted by Latvian policemen under the command of Herbert Cukurs entered the ghetto. About 800 Jews, including infants and elderly men and women, were murdered, and 15,000 Jewish women were forced to walk in the freezing cold to the Rumbula forest eight kilometers away. These women were murdered and their bodies thrown into pits that had been prepared beforehand. Cfr. Guy Miron and Shlomit Shulhani, *The Encyclopedia of Ghettos*, Jerusalem, Yad Vashem Publications, 2009.

³⁷ In mid-August 1941, the German police, under the command of SS officer Rudolf Lange, commander of the SD and the Sipo in Riga, began to concentrate the Jews of Riga in the ghetto with an area of about 9,000 square meters. According to Yad Vashem, 29,602 Jews lived in this ghetto including 8,212 men, 15,738 women, and 5,652 children.

³⁸ Brasil, Cartões de Imigração, 1900-1965, Herberts Cukurs, 1945, Folder 004816366, Image Number 00041, Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro

1950, *O Cruzeiro*³⁹ published a flattering article⁴⁰ titled, “From the Baltic to Brazil,” which included many scenic photographs, including of his “beautiful Aryan children,” against the backdrop of the famous image of the Sugarloaf Mountain at the mouth of the Guanabara Bay in Rio. In the article, the Cukurs were introduced as, «A family from Latvia flees from the horrors of war, lands in Rio on Carnival Sunday, sells a camera and rebuilds their own future. How the paddle boats, floating boats, and motor boats now grace the panorama of the Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon». The article details the family’s story of arriving in Brazil as war refugees to becoming successful citizens.

Cukurs never sought to hide his identity, on the contrary, when the story of Eichmann’s kidnapping in Argentina broke out, feeling quite threatened, Cukurs turned to local authorities and asked for their protection. Cukurs filed a petition stating he feared for the safety of his family due to the allegations being made by the Jewish community against his integrity. The Brazilian secret service not only guarded his home, but also gave him a license to carry a weapon for protection⁴¹. The Brazilian government was aware of who Cukurs was after the Jewish community in the state of São Paulo filed official complaints petitioning for the removal of his Brazilian citizenship and requesting that he be tried for his war-time crimes. According to the Ministry of Justice and Interior Affairs, except for accusations brought forth against Cukurs by the Federação das Sociedades Israelitas do Rio de Janeiro (Federal Jewish Society of Rio), there was no issue of legality regarding Cukurs’ entrance into the country.

Three years later, Cukurs appears in an article⁴² about the tenth-anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and a tree-planting campaign in Israel, published in the «Revista da Semana» on 2 May 1953. «Warsaw was not an isolated case. In any Jewish community there was an executioner of Hitler. In Riga, for example, it was Herbert Cukurs, who now lives happily and peacefully in Copacabana» (p. 50). The quote continues, «In a daring that reaches the streaks of the unbelievable», Cukurs attempted to obtain Brazilian citizenship, but, «the Justice Minister, interpreting the sentiment of the our people, rejected the claim of criminal number seventeen on the list of the Nazi Crimes Investigation Committee in the Baltic States» (*Ibidem*). In fact, the Ministry of Justice did decide to halt the process of petition for naturalization, in virtue of the uncertainty of information available regarding his life prior to naturalization. The United States’ Central Intelligence Agency was also aware of Cukurs’ records. For example, Herbert Cukurs was the subject of a correspondence between the Deputy Director and the Secretary of State in February 1955. The correspondence lays out the biographical information as well as the crimes attributed to him, but the interest of the letter lays on a different issue entirely: «Source stated that several of these Jewish organizations have been involved in pro-Communist activities and that many of the individuals connected with the Cukurs affair were known Communists» (CIA, FOIA, Cukurs, Herberts_0008).

³⁹ Founded by Assis Chateaubriand, *O Cruzeiro* was a well-established, weekly illustrated magazine of *Diários Associados*. With a circulation reaching all major cities in Brazil, Portugal and its colonies, *O Cruzeiro* also included articles from correspondents from Lisbon, Paris, Rome, Madrid, London, Berlin, New York. It ran from 1928 to 1985.

⁴⁰ Martins, J. (1950, June) Do Báltico para o Brasil. *O Cruzeiro*. 22 (36), p. 118-122.

⁴¹ A. Kuenzle, G. Shimron, *The Execution of the Hangman of Riga: The Only Execution of a War Criminal by the Mossad*, Elstree, Vallentine Mitchell, 2004, p. 47.

⁴² E. Morel, *Morreram pela ressurreição da liberdade*, «Revista da Semana», 18, 1953, May, pp. 48-53.

The Cukurs' case was widely reported for over a decade throughout Brazil⁴³. After years of political inaction by the likes of Rio city councilman Cotrin Neto, an integralist, member of the *Partido de Representação Popular*⁴⁴, who refused⁴⁵ to sign a request emitted by the *Liga Israelita* for the expulsion of Cukurs and stalled the case before the Municipal Court, and given the lack of political attention to the serious allegations brought forth against Cukurs by the Jewish community, Israeli special forces Mossad agents⁴⁶ closed in on Cukurs. Their original plan was to get him to confess to his wartime crimes and take him to Israel for his final judgment. Yet, once apprehended, Cukurs reacted and in the struggle, the Mossad operatives killed him.

Gustav Franz Wagner, a high-ranking Nazi official, was also able to flee from Europe and start over, building a new life for himself in Brazil. Wagner arrived⁴⁷ aboard ship *Conte Grande* to Rio de Janeiro on 12 April 1950, from Beirut, as permanent resident of Brazil. Known as the "Beast of Sobibor"⁴⁸, Gustav Wagner worked in the T4 euthanasia program before being promoted to work at the Sobibor extermination camp, where he was responsible for the selections. Know to brag about the fact that he could kill father and son with a single bullet, he became sub commander of the camp. During the Nuremberg trials, Wagner was sentenced to death *in absentia*, as he had already fled to Damascus. Though on the run, he, like Herbert Cukurs, never hid his name or true identity in Brazil. There he worked in a farm that belonged to a fellow-German, an engineer who had also immigrated to Brazil after the war and kept a low profile.

Twenty-eight years after his immigration to Brazil, Wagner's whereabouts finally became known to Simon Wiesenthal, who found him through an article published in the major Brazilian newspaper, «Jornal do Brasil», in April 1978. The article detailed a gathering of sixteen former Nazis, who called themselves the *Encontro 20 de Abril (Group 20 of April)*. The gathering took place at Hotel Tyll, in Itatiaia⁴⁹, in celebration of Hitler's 90th Birthday. This rich article contains various photographs of the gathering, including one of Wagner's headshot, though he was not identified by name in the photo. The article stated that Gustav Wagner, along with Josef Adolf Krall, and Alfred Winkelmann, was leading a Nazi reawakening in the country. There was major repercussion because of this publica-

⁴³ A few of the major publications where he appears include: «Tribuna da Imprensa» (RJ), «Diário de Notícias» (RJ), «Nossa Voz» (SP), «Correio da Manhã» (RJ), «Ultima Hora» (RJ), and «Jornal do Brasil» (RJ).

⁴⁴ The PRP was a right-wing, nationalist political party founded in 1945 by ex-integralist leader Plínio Salgado, it remained active until 1965. For a thorough analysis of this political group, see Gilberto Grassi Calil's *O integralismo no pós-guerra: a formação do PRP, 1945-1950*, Porto Alegre, EDIPUCRS, 2001.

⁴⁵ *Vereador integralista não forma contra o nazista*, «Tribuna da Imprensa», ano 2, n. 205, Rio de Janeiro, 25 Agosto 1950.

⁴⁶ In Anton Kuenzle and Gad Shimron's *The Execution of the Hangman of Riga: The Only Execution of a Nazi War Criminal by the Mossad* (2004) they describe the operation carried out in 1964-65 to identify, locate and execute Cukurs. Anton Kuenzle planned and carried out the operation by creating an identity as a successful businessman and offering Cukurs a lucrative deal to entice him away from his secure life in Brazil to a trap laid for him in Uruguay.

⁴⁷ Brasil, Cartões de Imigração, 1900-1965, Wagner Gustav Franz, 1949, Folder 004916034, Image Number 00024, ANRJ.

⁴⁸ M. Guterman, *Op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁴⁹ A small town in the state of Rio, it is where the oldest Brazilian national park is located. This location is described by Stefan Zweig as, «the three-thousand-meter-high mountain from which you can look out over the Brazilian high plateau with its peaks and see as far as Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro» (p. 8).

tion, prompting DOPS⁵⁰ agents to go after Wagner in order to identify the members of this possible Nazi group that had appeared in the newspaper photograph. Due to mounting pressure, Wagner finally turned himself in, while always maintaining that he was innocent.

Around this same time, Stanislaw Szmajzner, a Jewish survivor of the Sobibor camp who been forced to work as Wagner's personal goldsmith in the camp, who was one of the leaders of the Sobibor uprising, had also immigrated to Brazil after the war. Szmajzner recognized Gustav Wagner and identified him as the criminal that he was. Szmajzner provided testimony of the horrendous episodes he witnessed during his time in the camp, including the murder of his own parents by Wagner's very hands. Extradition⁵¹ requests from Israel, Austria, Poland, and West Germany, were all denied by the Brazilian's Attorney General Henrique Fonseca de Araújo⁵², who was appointed to this position by then-military dictator Ernesto Geisel. Araujo denied extradition requests based on the fact that the crimes for which Wager was being accused of having committed years prior preceded the existence of "crimes against humanity" charge established by the UN in 1970. Thus, the Brazilian Supreme Court stated in 1979, that «the statute of limitations for the offences with which he was charged had expired»⁵³. Wagner was set free in secrecy, due to security reasons, on June 26, 1979. Wagner attempted suicide unsuccessfully four times, before he was found dead⁵⁴ in October 1980, in Atibaia, São Paulo, not too far from the place where Josef Mengele had died eight months before.

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⁵⁰ The Department of Social and Political Order, established in 1924, but used mostly during the military dictatorship (1964-1985) to establish order in the country and catch people with "subversive" behaviors.

⁵¹ For a thorough legal analysis of the extradition case of Stangl and Wager, see Felipe Cittolin Abal's *Nazistas no Brasil e Exatidão: os pedidos de extradição de Franz Stangl e Gustav Wagner emu ma Análise Histórico-Jurídica*, Juruá Editora, 2014.

⁵² Fonseca de Araújo claimed in 1978 that Israel had no jurisdiction to seek the extradition of Wagner "because it was not a state at the time of the crimes – Israel was created in 1948." He also refused extradition to Austria and Poland because Brazilian law understood that Wagner's crimes were prescribed. As for the request from Germany, where the Nazi had declared that he preferred to be extradited to, Araújo state that «in theory, the statute of limitations had been interrupted due to Wagner's conviction (in absentia) in 1967 Germany». Cfr. P. Sperb, *Procurador-geral, pai do chanceler Ernesto Araújo dificultou extradição de nazista*, in «Folha de S. Paulo», 12 Feb 2019.

⁵³ G. Steinacher, *Nazis on the Run: How Hitler's Henchmen Fleed Justice*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 253.

⁵⁴ His body was found with a stab in the chest; his death certificate suggests suicide, without ruling out homicide.

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