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Source: *Perspectives on Terrorism*, December 2019, Vol. 13, No. 6 (December 2019), pp. 27-42

Published by: Terrorism Research Initiative

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26853739>

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Political Violence from the Extreme Right in Contemporary Portugal

by Riccardo Marchi and Raquel da Silva

Abstract

In Portugal, extreme right political violence can be found in two different periods: in the period of transition from authoritarianism to democracy (between 25 April 1974 and the mid-1980s) and from the second half of the 1980s to the present. In the first period, militants who had been radicalised by the Colonial War (1961-1974), the anti-imperialist mobilisation of the extreme left student movement in the academic crises of the 1960s, but also by the actions of the revolutionary leadership of the transition process after the April Revolution. Militants were active in politically violent organisations aimed at stopping the advance of Communism in Portugal. Among these organisations, the ELP (Exército de Libertação de Portugal / Portugal's Liberation Army) gained salience and will be explored in-depth in this chapter. The second period was characterised by a new extreme right showcasing an ethno-nationalist political identity and discourse, which fused both the ultra-nationalism of the old extreme right and the neo-Nazi racism of the skinhead subculture. Initially, the MAN (Movimento de Acção Nacional / National Action Movement) was key in uniting the nationalist militants and the skinheads. After its dismantling by the authorities, it was replaced by the PHS (Portugal Hammerskins). The dynamics of both organisations is explored in detail throughout this chapter. For this, the research uses a qualitative methodology based on interviews carried out with extreme right militants, on documentation produced by the different movements and on archive material produced by the police and court investigations.

Keywords: anti-communism, radical right, democratic transition, Portugal, Portuguese Liberation Army, right-wing extremism, skinheads

Introduction

For an analysis of extreme right political violence in Portugal, it is necessary to consider the chronological dynamics of this political family as of 25 April 1974. On this date, the MFA (*Movimento das Forças Armadas* / Armed Forces Movement) carried out a military coup, also known as the April Revolution, which overthrew the authoritarian regime of *Estado Novo* and started the transition to democracy. The offensive of the extreme right began in this historical context, which can be divided into two different phases, spanning a period of four decades. The first phase began with the defeat of the authoritarian regime and ended in the mid-1980s. The second phase started in the second half of the 1980s, leading up to the present.

To these two distinct phases correspond two distinct generations of extreme right militants, who had adopted different sociological and ideological standpoints. In the first phase, militants were radicalised in the early 1960s as a consequence of the crisis afflicting the Portuguese overseas empire (the so-called colonies), characterised by the outbreak of the Colonial War in 1961 and by the anti-imperialist mobilisation of the extreme left student movement throughout the 1960s. With the fall of the regime, which initiated the process of democratic transition, this nationalist generation encouraged the emergent right-wing parties and movements, initially, to attempt to safeguard the Portuguese presence in Africa through legal political means and, later on, to resist (violently) the advance of communism in Portugal.[1]

The protagonists of the second phase (second half of the 1980s), on the contrary, experienced neither the authoritarian regime nor the myth of a pluri-continental and multi-racial empire.[2] This generation started its political militancy a decade after the end of the decolonisation process, in a broadly consolidated democratic system, where leftist forces, like the PCP (*Partido Comunista Português* / Portuguese Communist Party), actively participated in the political and administrative organisation of the country.[3]

A common point of both generations was their mobilisation through the creation and development of organisations (political parties and movements), operating as legitimate political actors, as well as the engagement of some of their elements in clandestine and violent actions. In the case of the first generation, this type of actions mostly happened during the so-called PREC (*Processo Revolucionário em Curso* / Ongoing Revolutionary Process), which started with the failed right-wing coup d'état on 11 March 1975 and ended with the failed left-wing coup d'état on 25 November 1975. The months of the PREC were characterised by political turmoil and instability, by a country politically divided between “democrats” and “reactionaries”, with both committing excesses and driving the country towards a near civil war scenario. [4] In this period, as part of a broad front of anti-communist resistance, the clandestine organisation closest associated with the extreme right was the ELP (*Exército de Libertação de Portugal* / Liberation Army of Portugal). As far as the second generation is concerned, clandestine and violent actions were closely linked to the arrival in Portugal of the skinhead subculture towards the end of the 20th century and its organisational evolution at the beginning of the 21st century. The Portuguese skinhead movement began to be structured in the late 1980s, integrating into the already existing nationalist organisation MAN (*Movimento de Acção Nacional* / Movement of National Action). At the beginning of the new millennium, the skinhead movement was strengthened by the creation of the PHS (Portugal Hammerskins), which for a brief period appeared at the forefront of the nationalist milieu.[5]

In the following pages, the article traces the movements of the Portuguese extreme right from the period preceding the April Revolution to the present, focussing particularly on the politically violent organisations. It is based on interviews with former extreme right militants, as well as by the analysis of literature produced by scholars and journalists and documents produced by the political organisations under examination and by the political establishment (e.g., police, Constitutional Court).

The Extreme Right in the Democratic Transition

When *Estado Novo's* regime was overthrown on 25 April 1974, the Portuguese right-wing split into various political parties and movements to enter the democratic structure. Its most radical militants had been mobilised in the 1960s by the need to defend the Portuguese overseas empire, which was under attack in the context of the colonial war. They blamed Marcelo Caetano, who had replaced António de Oliveira Salazar in 1968 as prime-minister and stayed in power until the 25 April 1974, of being used by liberal forces who were interested in distancing Portugal from its African possessions and in the country's integration in the European Economic Community (EEC), and for allowing the occurrence of the April Revolution.[6] The latter was seen as a disastrous date in Portuguese history, [7] opening the possibility for the implementation of a “Marxist/Communist/collectivist/totalitarian dictatorship worse than Salazar's”.[8]

Given the political scenario of transition, the extreme right was divided into two distinct strategic lines. The first one accepted the new democratic situation and founded a political party – the MFP/PP (*Movimento Federalista Português/Partido do Progresso* / Portuguese Federalist Movement/Progress Party) – with the aim of competing for the Constituent Assembly of 25 April 1975. The second strategic line fully rejected any type of adherence to the revolutionary political system and founded a political movement – the MAP (*Movimento de Acção Portuguesa* / Portuguese Action Movement) – with the aim of bringing together the extreme right resistance, mainly from student organisations of the 1960s, but also from the paramilitary structures of the former regime (*Legião Portuguesa* / Portuguese Legion and *Mocidade Portuguesa* / Portuguese Youth), and from the political police, also known as PIDE/DGS (*Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado/Direção Geral de Segurança* / International and State Defence Police/Directorate-General of Security).

In the early months of the democratic transition, these two organisations were characterised by a clear disparity in their resources, but also by a common weakness in failing to have much impact on the national political scene. Although the MFP/PP enjoyed a greater ability to capture logistical and financial support from the different right-wing factions, it remained, as well as the MAP, a marginal player in the transition process. The same happened to other organisations situated at the extreme right of the political spectrum

due to their open criticism of the decolonisation process.[9] However, despite constituting a minor part of the right-wing landscape in Portugal after the 25 April 1974 events, the extreme right parties and movements were the ones most repressed by the leftist military and political parties because they were seen as the armed wing of the conservative reactionary forces in the shadow of General António Spínola, then President of the Republic. After the April Revolution, General António Spínola, who had been deputy chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces during the deposed regime, was part of the conservative faction of the MFA. He started by heading the *Junta de Salvação Nacional* (National Salvation Board) and then became the first President of the Republic, in May 1974.

The repression of the extreme right was first openly demonstrated on 28 September 1974, when supporters of President Spínola called for a demonstration of the conservative forces to consolidate the President's political position, which became known as *Maioria Silenciosa* (Silent Majority). Such a demonstration was seen by the extreme left as a counter-revolutionary action engendered by the extreme right with Spínola's support, which aimed at provoking a harsh reaction from the left, so the President of the Republic could declare a state of siege, put an end to the revolutionary process and take control of the decolonisation process.[10] Allegedly, this perceived attempt at a coup d'état was financed by economic groups linked to the deposed regime and the civilians taking part in it were armed by the extreme right. In this context, on the eve of the demonstration, hundreds of weapons were seized in raids conducted by the leftist forces. In the headquarters of the MFP/PP, they found lists of weapons of war and materials suitable for urban guerrilla warfare. In the headquarters of the MAP, there was a shotgun with telescopic sight, creating the rumour of an imminent terrorist attack against the Prime Minister Vasco Gonçalves. Thus, what was, for the extreme right, a simple and legitimate mobilisation in support of President Spínola, inspired by the demonstration in favour of General de Gaulle in May 1968 in France, turned into a repressive Marxist wave, resulting in hundreds of people being arrested and exiled abroad.[11]

On 11 March 1975, history repeated itself. General Spínola, still President of the Republic, led an armed action to supposedly prevent the killing of his supporters within the armed forces. According to information provided by the Spanish secret services to the extreme right based in Madrid, such plot was orchestrated by the extreme left and became known as *Matança de Páscoa* (Easter Massacre). The real authors of such a plot – the extreme left to replace Spínola or the extreme right to create chaos – are still the object of debates among historians. What is clear is that General Spínola and his collaborators acted ingenuously, committing mistakes at both political and military levels. Their armed reaction was quickly defeated, provoking another repressive wave against the right, which meant new arrests and escapes out of the country, this time including General Spínola himself, who sought exile in Brazil.

The Clandestine and Violent Extreme Right in the Democratic Transition

The second wave of Marxist repression sharply increased both the number of political prisoners in Portugal (around 2,000) and of political exiles abroad (estimates point to a total of 20,000 to 30,000 people), particularly in neighbouring Spain. This laid the groundwork for the creation of armed clandestine organisations, which perceived themselves as part of the anti-communist resistance. As one extreme right former militant exiled in Spain put it:

“After 11 March in Portugal there was no democracy, make no mistake.[...] In the period from March 1975 to November 1975, the real situation in Portugal was that things happened that had nothing to do with democracy.” [12]

According to this former militant, anyone who would disagree with the Council of the Revolution – an institution set up by the MFA after 11 March 1975 to lead the transition process, playing a tutelary role in the selection of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister – was subjected to “warrantless arrests”, “popular trials”, “simulated executions” and being “held in jail without talking with a lawyer”. He also mentioned the control of the media and the “increasing weight of the Communist Party”, which led extreme

right militants to the conclusion that they were “gradually walking towards a totalitarian state” a state which would be tougher than the previous authoritarian regime because “the human rights violations that occurred in Eastern Europe were always worse than the worst times under *Estado Novo*”. This was complemented by the views of another extreme right former militant, who pointed out that the PCP had created “a policy of terror”, which inhibited the resistance of most Portuguese citizens:

“What was happening was that the Portuguese people, who were not Communist, were afraid. They were afraid because they thought that the PCP had the majority and ruled everything, because that was the image portrayed by the PCP: ‘The people are with us and we will never be defeated’. Then, we had to prove that the PCP was a minority, that the PCP could be made afraid, if necessary, and that most of the Portuguese people was not Communist.” [13]

In this context, three main organisations emerged: 1) the ELP (*Exército de Libertação de Portugal* / Portugal’s Liberation Army) (which was perceived at the time as the flagship of the Portuguese extreme right); 2) the MDLP (*Movimento Democrático de Libertação de Portugal* / Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Portugal); and 3) the *Plano Maria da Fonte* (*Maria da Fonte* Plan).

The MDLP was created by General Spínola from his Brazilian exile and was led on the ground by Commander Guilherme Alpoim Calvão. The latter had been a naval officer involved in the events of 11 March 1975, which resulted in his exile in Spain. Some MDLP supporters lived in Portugal, while other were exiled abroad. They were either military men who supported General Spínola or anti-communist civilians. Among the latter, there were prominent MFP/PP cadres who constituted MDLP’s Political Commission. The MDLP aimed at multiplying anti-communist armed actions in Portugal to incite the population against the forces of the extreme left. Their strategy was to create liberated zones in Portugal, starting in the north, laying the foundations for the return of General Spínola to the country to head a provisional government.[14]

The *Maria da Fonte* Plan was designed by three men: Jorge Jardim, a businessman based in Mozambique with links to the intelligence services of different Western countries during *Estado Novo*; Waldemar Paradela de Abreu, a liberal publisher and Major José Sanches Osório, part of the MFA and anti-communist clandestine militant after 11 March 1975. They were joined by individuals connected to the Catholic Church and to moderate parties, whose members started to feel frightened by the radical escalation of the transition process. The uniqueness of this organisation lay in the interaction with local *caciques*, who had operated their clientelist networks since the end of the nineteenth century in Portugal, and with the hierarchies of the Catholic Church in the north of Portugal, which offered a wide base of popular support to the anti-communist uprising. The northern Catholic landowners did not readily accept the socialist proposals of the Council of the Revolution in power. This predisposed them to respond to the call of anti-communist organisations to show their dissatisfaction by attacking left-wing parties’ headquarters after the Sunday mass or after political rallies.[15] Thus, the preferred strategy of the proponents of the *Maria da Fonte* Plan was to mobilise the crowds. They used to infiltrate packed places, such as markets, and incite the people to attack the headquarters of left-wing parties, placing bombs, throwing Molotov cocktails and starting fires, as explained by one extreme right former militant:

“We especially encouraged uprisings of the population in the various villages, towns and cities, against the headquarters of the Communist Party. When there were markets and fairs, we took advantage and carried out armed break-ins, destroying the premises, papers, and so on.”[16]

These three organisations – the ELP, the MDLP, and the *Maria da Fonte* Plan – were flanked by almost three dozen other minor organisations.[17] They participated equally in the anti-communist armed operations taking place in Portugal during the PREC and, particularly, during the so-called *Verão Quente* (Hot Summer) of 1975.[18] They integrated the broad Portuguese anti-communist front, which included moderate parties, Catholic hierarchies, and the anti-Marxist military faction of the MFA.[19] This front was also supported by Western countries, such as the USA and Great Britain, which started as staunch supporters of the armed resistance, but gradually turned to Mário Soares and his Socialist Party as the pillars of the anti-communist opposition.[20]

Despite constituting rather small organisations, at least in number of militants, the operational capacity of the different armed groups was remarkable. Between May 1975 and April 1977, 566 acts of political violence were carried out, including bombings, assaults on political headquarters, fires, shootings, physical assaults and the death of around ten individuals.[21] Of these attacks, 34% were directed at the PCP, [22] which, between July and November 1975, saw more than 100 of its headquarters across the country assaulted.[23] From a geographical point of view, more than 70% of the actions were carried out to the north of the city of Rio Maior, where the armed revolt began and where the extreme right was able to gather more popular support. On one hand, in the words of one extreme right militant, the Northerners “did not want to see their land devastated” by Communist policies, and, on the other hand, the Catholic Church was still very much connected to the “old regime” and would, if necessary, “bring a popular army to arms” to fight the “red invasion”.[24]

The ELP

Within the broad anti-communist front, the ELP appeared as the most prominent organisation of the Portuguese extreme right. This might be explained by two aspects: this organisation conducted the first extreme right armed action in Portugal and its core militants had been protagonists of the deposed regime. In this vein, MDLP militants, for instance, assumed that in the imagination of the Portuguese people, the ELP had played a much larger part in the political violence carried out by the extreme right in the 1970s. One former militant explained:

“The ELP has, even today, you can still see remnants of the ELP on the walls [referring to graffiti]... the ELP created a major impact on the Portuguese public opinion, when they were in Spain, having a near zero contribution in terms of action, right? The psychological part was ELP, ELP, ELP...”[25]

This notion is justified by two features of the ELP. First, the acronym. When said in Portuguese, ELP sounds like the English word *help*, contributing to build the image of an organisation which was going to save the nation from the communist evil – “the name by itself is amazing, isn’t it?” commented one MDLP militant. Second, the propaganda strategy: ELP militants tried to look like the well-known violent organisations of their time – “Then they made a press conference hooded like ETA, which caused a huge impact and made the first page of the newspapers.” These factors are believed to have led people in Portugal to be much more aware of the ELP and to mythologise it as the “bogeyman”, saying “it was the ELP” or “look out, the ELP is coming!” However, MDLP militants emphasised that the ELP was a very small organisation, which lacked credibility, being known for taking the credit for violent actions conducted by other organisations. Additionally, they considered that the ELP aimed at the impossible – “the return to the past state of things, to a regime like *Estado Novo*’s.” Similar characterisations have been given by those responsible for the *Maria da Fonte* Plan. José Sanches Osório, for example, defined the ELP as “an undemocratic Fascist movement ... led by pseudo-enlightened crypto-Nazi tendencies”.[26] Waldemar Paradela de Abreu disqualified the ELP as “half a dozen individuals with limited operational capacity”.[27]

Finally, former militants, such as Miguel Freitas da Costa, stress how the leftist factions of the MFA helped create the myth that the ELP was a highly structured and efficient clandestine organisation.[28] The bigger and more dangerous the ELP appeared, the more they could play up the threat it posed to the Portuguese democratic transition.

Recruitment

As already mentioned, the core militants of the ELP were former elements of *the authoritarian regime*, including the number two in the hierarchy of the political police Agostinho Barbieri Cardoso, *Estado Novo*’s minister Manuel Cotta Dias, Angola’s governor-general Fernando Santos e Castro, and former members of the special forces of the Portuguese Legion, such as José Rebordão Esteves Pinto. These individuals were not only significant due to their previous positions, but also due to their networks. José Rebordão Esteves Pinto,

for instance, played a major role in the formation of ELP's clandestine network. He belonged to the extreme right opposition to Marcelo Caetano, which since the late 1960s had actively collaborated with the French exiles of the OAS (*Organisation Armée Secrète* / Secret Armed Organisation) in Lisbon.[29] Together, they organised the counter-subversive structure *Aginter Presse*, which was led by Guerin Serac and transferred to Madrid after 25 April 1974. In the Spanish capital, the reconstituted Franco-Portuguese network cooperated with the Italian neo-fascist exiles of *Ordine Nuovo* and *Avanguardia Nazionale* led by Stefano Delle Chiaie. [30]

Thus, in January 1975, ELP's core militants began contacting their former Portuguese comrades who kept being sent into exile, but also new people caught up in the repressive wave of 28 September 1974. In most cases, the latter did not have a long history in the extreme right, but after experiencing political backlash from the extreme left, were ready to join the ELP. This is evidenced by two important testimonies of former ELP militants, who were active in Spain and Portugal respectively: Miguel Freitas da Costa and Sebastião de Lancastre.[31] The former decided to travel to Spain to join his already exiled father Eduardo Freitas da Costa, a renowned intellectual nationalist, encountering the ELP through José Rebordão. The latter began travelling to Spain after 28 September 1974 to visit his uncle, Manuel Braancamp Sobral, also a renowned intellectual nationalist, exiled in the neighbouring country. In Madrid, he was contacted by Miguel Freitas da Costa who invited him to join the ELP and, more specifically, to start a cell in Lisbon. Having accepted the invitation, Lancastre formed his own cell, composed of half a dozen members of his family and friendship circles. The activity of this cell never went beyond the production and distribution of clandestine anti-communist propaganda and the custody of detonators delivered by operatives from Madrid. Nonetheless, these testimonies confirm the mechanism of co-optation of personal networks employed by the ELP for its own organisation and proliferation.

The ranks of the ELP were also filled by legionaries and former colonial war combatants.[32] Despite describing, in general terms, the enlistment in the ELP as a rather simple and rudimentary process, some veterans recall complex recruitment mechanisms to enter this organisation. For instance, Luís Cordovil was contacted by unknown people who had him travel through several European capitals to London where he was trained alongside other Portuguese in subversive warfare techniques; [33] and Rafael Caimoto Duarte was recruited in South Africa and sent to northern Portugal where he participated in the bombings of left-wing parties' headquarters, only to later find out that these were actions planned by the ELP.[34]

Aims, Organisational Dynamics, and Strategies

According to Carlos Dugos, [35] who interviewed ELP's leaders whilst in exile in Spain, the organisation aimed to achieve: the restoration of national unity, which had been jeopardised by the Marxist revolution; the real independence of the fatherland, which was threatened by the Communist world; and cultural freedom, which had been subjugated by Marxist dogmatism. Regarding the colonial issue, the ELP took an integrationist approach, which defended the permanent integration of the colonies in national territory. This approach would mean the eradication of the many existent differences between Portugal and its colonies; the defeat of the liberation movements from the colonies through war; and the disposition of the Portuguese people to finance and accomplish all this.[36]

The ELP had a central command in Madrid and several operative cells in both Spain and Portugal. Each cell was composed of less than ten members and did not have contact with the other cells in order to guarantee that its militants knew the smallest possible number of comrades. From the operational point of view, the ELP strategy was modelled on theories of revolutionary warfare, which had been learned in the contra-subversive warfare courses of the 1960s in both the Portuguese military milieu engaged in the colonial war and amongst French OAS exiles in Spain.[37]

The ELP aimed to create and multiply cells of sabotage at different levels (e.g., cities, companies, schools) to spread chaos and render ineffective the civil and military power controlled by the government of Vasco Gonçalves. This would, thus, provoke the population's revolt against the government and the MFA. This plan

was never implemented in its entirety, or at least never went beyond the occasional armed actions. The most daring sabotage operations planned, such as damaging Lisbon's water supply network, were not carried out. The operational difficulties of the ELP were also evidenced by some glaring failures. On 14 September 1975, an ELP van carrying weapons, explosive material, coils for radio broadcasting, and false documents was seized by the authorities in Oporto. The militants' oversight in this situation led to the loss of all the material gathered for the planned assault on the radio station *Radio Clube Miramar*. On 26 September 1975, two ELP militants died when driving a car full of explosives for the destruction of a Portuguese radio television antenna in Monsanto. The militants' mistake was to use remote-controlled detonators in the vicinity of radio antennas. This type of operation had already taken place in the declining phase of the extreme right's armed struggle, after the peak of the 'hot summer' of 1975, in which the ELP conducted dozens of assaults and bombings, but without carrying out any actions with major consequences.[38]

Likewise, attempts to consolidate the propaganda structure, which was supposed to work in parallel to the armed action, were never very effective. For instance, the effort to set up mobile radio stations along the Spanish-Portuguese border for anti-communist broadcasts had little effect. The organisation's official bulletin—*Libertação* (Liberation)—offering instructions on guerrilla warfare (e.g., how to manufacture Molotov cocktails) was only published twice between August and September 1975.[39]

The Denouement of the Clandestine and Violent Extreme Right in the Democratic Transition

On 25 November 1975, a new test of strength arose between the different military factions of the MFA: an attempted armed coup led by the extreme left faction was defeated by the intervention of a group of commandos led by Jaime Neves.[40] Historiography considers this date the turning point in the Portuguese transition, ending the PREC and normalising the democratisation process.[41] This date also had repercussions on the clandestine extreme right. All armed organisations began to demobilise because they believed that the danger of Communist escalation was over.[42] As one extreme right militant put it: "after the 25 November we shut the door and left [...] Communism had not entered Portugal".[43] This reaction was also helped by the fact that the anti-communist component of the Council of the Revolution in collaboration with the anti-communist parties – began to (informally) negotiate a ceasefire with extreme right organisations and the return of their members to Portugal, not facing judicial repercussions.[44] In this sense, most extreme right militants who had been involved with politically violent organisations were able to return to Portugal without facing arrest or any other type of judicial consequences. As explained by a former ELP militant:

"In January 1976 I returned to Portugal. A member of the Council of the Revolution said I could return. I went to Lisbon and after some time I went to Caxias where my file was closed without any reprisals. I was freed from any illegal situations." [45]

However, compared to other clandestine organisations, the ELP accepted the 25 November 1975 less favourably. This date was seen as the symbol of the betrayal of moderate political-military elites in relation to the clandestine militants because, on the one hand, it did not outlaw the PCP and, on the other hand, it did not recognise the role of armed groups in defeating the civilian and military extreme left.[46] This sense of frustration led some ELP militants to continue armed actions throughout 1976. In fact, this year saw a considerable level of political violence in Portugal. However, it cannot be attributed to the ELP in its previously organised hierarchical structure. On the contrary, this was the consequence of the activity of a few disenfranchised militants from different anti-communist organisations who felt that they still had "a score to settle" with "those who carried out the April Revolution", as pointed out by one extreme right militant who integrated the so-called *Rede Bombista do Norte* (Northern Bombing Network), after 25 November 1975.[47]

It is interesting to note that regarding the political violence committed in Portugal by the extreme right during the transition process to democracy, the only instance in which a judicial process took place was in connection with the Northern Bombing Network.[48] This was a hybrid anti-communist structure, active

between October 1975 and July 1976, in the withdrawal phase of clandestine organisations, which comprised extreme right militants, but also ordinary police officers and criminals, who carried out dozens of bombings, resulting in four deaths. Of the sixteen defendants in the judicial process, only five received prison sentences, ranging from three to twenty years.[49]

The Violent Extreme Right in the Consolidated Democracy

The end of the revolutionary phase of the Portuguese transition to democracy and the start of the normalisation phase of the democratic process in the second half of the 1970s culminated in the constitutional revision of 1976. This ended the military's control over political power, dissolving the Council of the Revolution and considerably decreasing politically violent activities. Although violent confrontations continued to take place between radical groups, mainly between the newly created ones of nationalist character and in the student milieu, at the beginning of the 1980s Portugal entered a period of dwindling politically violent activities. The generation of extreme right-wing militants of the 1960s and 1970s had abandoned politics. One of them explained that:

“When there was freedom after 25 November, a new freedom, like the one after 25 April, the people concerned, or most of them, withdrew from politics. All the Spínolista military were never heard from again. I withdrew completely from politics [...] Most of the people who were with me in Spain never engaged in politics again.” [50]

However, in 1985, the MAN (Movimento de Ação Nacional / National Action Movement) appeared, founded by a young right-wing dissident from the mainstream party CDS, Luís Paulo Henriques. The MAN started as a classic nationalist organisation, still attached to the authoritarian past and to the pre-April Revolution claim of the pluri-continental and multi-racial dimension of the Portuguese empire. Nonetheless, throughout the second half of the 1980s, the MAN began to strengthen its relations with its European counterparts and to introduce in Portugal the anti-immigration and racist discourse already en vogue in France, England, and Germany.[51]

This type of discourse got some traction in Portugal in this period, due to the socio-demographic changes taking place in this country. These included the modification of the ethnic structure of the suburbs of the two main metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto by four consecutive waves of immigration, which in 1980 represented 0,5% of the population and at the beginning of the twenty-first century had increased to 2%.[52] The first wave, from 1975 until the beginning of the 1980s, was composed by the so-called returnees from the former African colonies. These were former white settlers who felt forced to abandon the Portuguese colonies in Africa after their national independence, holding, for this reason, strong vengeance feelings toward black and mestizo Africans.[53] This first wave was also composed by some black citizens of the fallen empire, who had, however, lost their Portuguese citizenship. The second wave started after Portugal joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986 and was composed by African workers, as well as Brazilian workers at the beginning of the 1990s, attracted by Portugal's industrialisation boom caused by European funds flowing into the country. The end of the 1990s saw the third wave of immigration in Portugal, composed by Eastern European workers. Finally, the fourth wave of immigration at the beginning of the twenty-first century was characterised by a decrease in immigrants from both Africa and Eastern Europe while immigration from Brazil kept at the same levels.

In the midst of this changing social fabric emerged a new generation of right-wing extremists. They were, often, the children of returnee and/or proletarian parents who had settled in the periphery of the main cities, increasingly occupied by immigrants, as well as the children of middle-class city folks who saw themselves surrounded by shanty towns inhabited by immigrants.[54] In this context, and in an atmosphere devoid of positive political developments, created by the previous forty years of authoritarianism, these young people were easily influenced by foreign political trends, in particular, by the extremism of the skinhead subculture conveyed by the Portuguese media and by accounts of relatives and friends who had emigrated to France and Great Britain.

The Portuguese Skinheads and the MAN

In this sense, the first Portuguese skinheads connected to the only existing nationalist organisation in Portugal, the MAN, due to their analogous identities and racist discourse.[55] In turn, MAN leaders saw the opening to the skinhead movement as a quick way to boost the movement's numbers and capacity. This created, from an organisational point of view, a binary structure: on one hand, there was an organisation with an official hierarchy, perfectly delineated, but only real on paper; on the other hand, there was an organisation with a broad militant base consisting of informal local cells – at neighbourhood or at school levels – which was extremely autonomous and uncontrollable by the leadership of the MAN.[56] This broad militant base was composed of individuals in their twenties, who possessed low educational levels (mostly secondary education and unfinished university degrees) and non-specialised professions. There was no older generation to stand behind them, no veterans of nationalist militancy who could act as mentors or advisors. This duality of a poorly functioning hierarchy and an extremely autonomous base was a constant throughout MAN's existence. Symptomatic in this respect was the meeting in Oporto in December 1989 between MAN leaders and the skinhead movement of the North in order to discuss the integration of the latter into the former, which ended in a violent clash.[57] The organisational duality was also reflected in the strategic duality of the MAN: the hierarchy of the organisation relied on the classic political militancy, which was based on propaganda, mobilisation, and media promotion. In contrast to this, the skinhead base only occasionally adhered to the leadership strategy, being more concerned with the implementation of its subculture of belonging, characterised by the organisation of concerts, neo-Nazi aesthetics, and street violence.[58]

The growing number of episodes of inter-ethnic and/or political violence carried out by skinheads in the second half of the 1980s culminated in the murder of a militant of the PSR (*Partido Socialista Revolucionário* / Socialist Revolutionary Party), José Carvalho, on 28 October 1989, by a group of neo-Nazis who intended to enter the headquarters of the far-left party to attend a concert. The eight skinheads involved in this incident were immediately identified, prosecuted and convicted. The alleged killer was sentenced to twelve years in jail, three individuals to sentences of between five and seven years, two individuals received suspended sentences of less than two years, and the remaining two were acquitted. Following this murder, the Attorney General of the Republic ordered a police investigation on the extreme right landscape in Portugal, in order to clarify the size of the skinhead phenomenon and its links to the MAN. This led the police to wiretap the telephone conversations of prominent extreme right activists in Portugal, between December 1989 and April 1990. Based on the investigations, the police concluded that during the period of September to November 1990, the MAN was in a phase of militant growth, greater structuring and internationalisation. However, in fact, the growth phase can be traced back to 1987-1989, since in 1990 the MAN was already suffering from a deep crisis due to the many internal diatribes and defections following the 1989 criminal offence. [59] In 1991, the police obtained authorisation from the Criminal Investigation Court to carry out domestic raids on the leader of the MAN, as well as on several prominent militants. This operation, at this point in time, encountered a movement already in crisis. The interrogations carried out following the raids allowed the police to demonstrate skinheads' membership of MAN, but could not to prove either a correspondence between the MAN structure and the skinhead movement, nor the existence of a MAN project to organise the Portuguese skinhead movement.[60]

Despite these results, in July 1991, the Attorney General of the Republic sent a request for the extinction of the MAN to the Constitutional Court. The request was based on three rules of Portuguese law: 1) article 46, number 4 of the Portuguese Constitution according to which organisations that embody a Fascist ideology are not allowed; 2) law number 64/78, which also forbids organisations that have a Fascist ideology; and 3) article 10 of the Law of the Constitutional Court which attributes to the Constitutional Court the competence to declare if an organisation has adopted the Fascist ideology and to decree its extinction". The most serious accusation made by the Attorney General of the Republic to the MAN was to attempt to unleash a revolutionary process for the overthrow of the political-constitutional system and for the establishment in Portugal of a "Nationalist State".[61] This accusation was based, essentially, on the ideological aspect of the MAN, which was possible to be outlined thanks to the abundant material seized in the militants' house raids.

In the last quarter of 1991, the Attorney General of the Republic and the Constitutional Court were dedicated to the identification of the legal representatives of the MAN. Several individuals were interrogated by the former between January and March 1992 and were finally summoned by the latter in June 1992 to start the process of dismantling the movement. The proceedings before the Constitutional Court ran from September 1993 to January 1994, ending four years after the first investigation and three years after the self-dissolution of the movement.[62] The conclusions of the Constitutional Court confirmed that the MAN was indeed an organisation which had a leading structure and a set of means targeted at a common goal. Regarding the fact that the MAN did or did not espouse Fascist ideology, the Constitutional Court pointed out some characteristics of the movement that support such an accusation, such as its ultranationalist and antidemocratic character, as well as the apology of historical Fascist regimes and personalities. With regard to violence, it was not possible to define the MAN as an a priori violent organisation. Thus, the Constitutional Court questioned whether it should be considered Fascist purely by dint of its ideological characteristics. Given this legal-constitutional problem, the court decided not to resolve it, appealing to the fact that the self-dissolution of the movement had already removed all justification for a possible extinction measure. This prevented the Constitutional Court from undertaking the delicate task of inaugurating a legal precedent with respect to organisations of the extreme right and therefore, those involved were spared the heavy penalties stipulated by the legal system.

The Portugal Hammer Skin

The repression followed by the 1989 assassination and the constitutional process against the MAN resulted in the disappearance of the more structured organisation of the Portuguese extreme right, allowing the return to unstructured forms of mobilisation without hierarchies.[63] The small organisations created from the debris of the MAN never succeeded in achieving the same relevance as the dissolved organisation and did not even attempt a project of uniting the extreme right. This lack of a substantive political project and the preponderance of subculture behaviour in the younger generation of the extreme right led to the postponement of episodes of political and racial violence until mid-1990s. On 10 June 1995, after a troubled night in central Lisbon, extreme right extremists beat to death a Portuguese citizen of Cape Verdean origin, Alcindo Monteiro. The arrest of several nationalist militants and the subsequent prosecution led to the sentencing, in 1997, of ten skinheads to between sixteen and seventeen years in prison and of six skinheads to between two and thirteen years in prison.[64] This was the severest punishment ever, in Portugal, for hate crimes committed by extreme right militants and a hard blow to the nationalist arena. As a consequence, the Portuguese extreme right was, in the second half of the 1990s, once again deserted by its former militants. Only a few small organisations remained active, but in an extremely hostile milieu to extreme right ideas. In this context, the charismatic figure of Mário Machado emerged at the beginning of the new millennium. Mário Machado became a skinhead at the age of fourteen. In 1997, he received a two-year prison sentence for involvement in the events which culminated in the murder of Alcindo Monteiro, despite not having been part of the group of people who physically committed the crime.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Mário Machado devised an innovative organisational strategy for the Portuguese extreme right organised along three axes: 1) to restructure the Portuguese skinhead movement into one of the largest international organisations of this subculture – the Hammerskins Nation (HSN); 2) to promote a networked structure of all the smaller extreme right Portuguese organisations through the Internet; and 3) to operate, in parallel, through street movements and through the political party *Partido Nacional Renovador* (National Renewal Party), which was founded in 1999 by old school nationalists and young people from the MAN.[65]

As for the skinhead structuring, in 2003 Mário Machado founded the Portuguese chapter of HSN, under the name of Portugal Hammerskins (PHS). Throughout its existence, the PHS never exceeded 150-200 militants across the country and kept the original model put into place by the HSN, namely a three category hierarchy: 1) the *Hangarounds*, who were individuals close but not yet belonging to the organisation; 2) the *Prospects*, who were individuals waiting to join but under scrutiny; and 3) the *Hammers*, who were full members of

the organisation.[66] According to the judicial authorities, the PHS was characterised as a group engaged in propaganda for the white race, showcasing a racist discourse less focused on supremacy and more focused on the defence and safeguard of the existence of the white race, allegedly threatened by the growth of other races and mass immigration.[67]

Regarding the promotion of the extreme right network, Mário Machado was the first, in the Portuguese nationalist arena, to consistently rely on the Internet, creating the *Forum Nacional* (National Forum). He was inspired by the online militancy of the German far-right, with whom he was in contact. The National Forum was managed in a professional manner. It had a team dedicated to the daily production of content and two moderators who constantly monitored the various sections of the Forum.[68] Unlike the PHS, the Forum brought together extreme right activists from the most diverse orientations, reaching 20,000 users. The exponential growth of online activism registered by the Forum alerted the authorities to this phenomenon and convinced them of the need to intervene, despite their overestimation of the danger of the network as a structure with defined common objectives and strategies.

In terms of political party activities, Mário Machado promoted the *Frente Nacional* (National Front), which was an organisation composed of a variety of militants (not only skinheads), whose purpose was to influence the leadership of the PNR. Since 2005, their objective was largely achieved, thanks to the presence of elements of its restricted circle in the PNR's governing bodies.[69] This multifaceted strategy was a notable success in terms of mobilisation and media visibility. To cite only two examples: in 2005, the National Front organised a demonstration against crime attended by five hundred people, making it the largest demonstration of the extreme right since the transition years; in 2007, the National Forum planned and financed, through its subscribers, a controversial billboard against immigration placed in the centre of Lisbon. This was inspired by an anti-Turkish poster created by the German NPD and it gained media and political attention for several weeks.

According to Mário Machado's defence lawyer, the PHS played a central role in attracting the attention of the media and in mobilising the extreme right sympathisers, both due to the careful aesthetics of its militants and to the leader's charisma.[70] However, the National Forum's ability to attract followers also captured the attention and concern of the authorities. In April 2007, the authorities decided to intervene against this tripartite structure – the PHS, the National Front/Forum, and the PNR. However, they did so differently from the constitutional process against the MAN, where they had focused on the Fascist character of the organisation. In this case, they focused on the most active and vulnerable component from the criminal point of view: the fact that the PHS was heavily involved in hate crimes and political violence.[71] With such a focus, police operations led to the arrest of 31 individuals; the authorities also carried out 55 searches, seizing banned weapons and IT equipment used to spread hate, violence and racial discrimination. In this context, dozens of nationalist militants and sympathisers – mostly between the ages of 15 and 20 years old – were interrogated at the headquarters of the DCCB (*Direcção Central de Combate ao Banditismo* / Central Directorate for Combating Banditry). However, particular attention was paid to the inquiry into the core militants of the PHS.

Thus, the public prosecutor's strategy was to prosecute individual crimes related to racist propaganda or political violence, which was possible in almost 60 cases.[72] Of these, only 15 individuals belonged to the PHS. From a socio-demographic point of view, those involved in the process came, mainly, from the proletarian and sub-proletarian strata of the suburbs of the metropolitan area of Lisbon. PHS's skinhead milieu was composed exclusively of young workers, while secondary or university students focused more on the *Causa Identitária* (Identitarian Cause), which was an autonomous nationalist organisation, despite participating in PNR and National Front initiatives.[73] At the end of the trial, only three defendants were convicted of political crimes with an effective prison sentence: two PHS militants were convicted for crimes of physical violence (one against an anti-Fascist militant and one with racist overtone) and one PNR sympathiser was sentenced to three years in prison for posting a racist comment in the Forum, in which he called for the death of black people.[74] Mário Machado – the only person to be held in custody at the beginning of the operation – received a suspended sentence and left jail.[75] Despite few convictions leading

to actual arrests, the whole police operation managed to dismantle the nationalist scene once more.[76]

The judicial operation of 2007 was possible thanks to the daily surveillance of the authorities on the activities of the extreme right.[77] When the lawsuit was filed, there was already a two-to-three-year history of surveillance and wiretapping carried out by the DJCB. The authorities accumulated a large amount of evidence and substantiated the case through a number of small crimes. One of these, for example, was improper participation in a public place: the Hammers went to Oporto to beat up a skinhead affiliated with the rival organisation Blood & Honour, who worked in a supermarket. For this, they entered the supermarket after its closing time to the public which led to the condemnation of entering a place prohibited to the public, although the attack did not ultimately occur.

In parallel to the results of the police investigation, there were particularly serious episodes of political violence transmitted by the media. The most famous of these was the 2006 interview given by Mário Machado to the public television channel RTP, where while holding a shotgun he said that the extreme right was ready for the armed struggle in the event of ethnic riots.[78] In the court process, the defendants had to respond to dozens of similar petty offences. In support of the allegation, the authorities, on the basis of the results of years of surveillance, invited the parties to present a complaint. For example, during another trip to Oporto, the Hammers had an incident with a citizen of African descent, with whom they started a brawl, which was video recorded by the police.

Subsequently arrested for drug offences, the Afro-descendant citizen was invited to file a complaint for racist aggression. The public prosecutor tried to demonstrate that this extreme right network constituted a structured racist organisation and that all the episodes of imputed criminality were part of an organic strategy of a racist nature.[79] Thus, there were no direct accusations of being a Fascist subversive organisation such as in the case of the MAN. In doing so, however, the public prosecutor's office was careful not to over-engage the militants of the Identitarian Cause or of the PNR, even though they had all been raided by the police, including the latter party's headquarters. This was due to the fact that, on the one hand, Identitarian Cause's activists did not have ideological or violent crimes to account for, and, on the other hand, to involve a legal political party like the PNR would have set an unwelcome precedent. Therefore, the aim of the judicial process was not to connect the whole nationalist galaxy with each other, but to target the most vulnerable link – the skinheads – and to make use of the most effective instrument in their reach – the National Forum. The intention was to obtain the maximum sentence of 10 years in prison for belonging to and being active in organisations of this type. However, at the end of the process this scheme did not work. According to the Hammerskins defence lawyer, the whole process was fragile because the organisation itself was quite fragile and only the Forum's action in terms of attracting sympathisers and networking could be relevant.[80]

There was a good number of facts to build a case, but they were all unconnected and difficult to attribute to a single concerted strategy. Thus, the convictions were focused on individuals and not really linked to the PHS as an organisation. For the defence lawyer, the public prosecutor was neither interested in promoting a constitutional procedure against the PHS, nor in a case against a collective organisation, but only in obtaining the highest number of individual convictions to dismantle the nationalist scene.[81]

Conclusion

Throughout the four decades of Portuguese democracy, extreme right-wing political violence has profoundly changed, accompanying the changes in political contexts, which influence how it is carried out and who the militants involved are. In the transition to democracy, the cadres of armed clandestine networks stemmed from political militancy in the nationalist groups or from the paramilitary organisations of the deposed authoritarian regime. This factor provided good doctrinal and technical training, strengthened in operational terms by the experience of the colonial war. In consolidated democracy, the politicisation of the militants of the late 1980s took place in the nationalist vacuum of the post-transition. This has led to extremely fragile paths of radicalisation in doctrinal terms and to militant practices characterised by violent actions that are less a product of elaborated, long-term strategies, but more punctual episodes of little or no political valence.

This difference between the two periods is evident in the repertoire of violent actions: while the transition generation took advantage of popular mobilisations for attacking the headquarters of leftist parties or engaged in armed actions against selected targets, the more recent generation did not engender any armed campaign against selected targets and the most serious episodes (the 1989 and 1995 homicides) resulted from spontaneous waves of urban violence.

As regards the political context, the ELP clandestine network, although somewhat marginalised by other players, participated in the broad anti-communist resistance front in the revolutionary period of 1975. This broad front included other non-right-wing clandestine networks, some individuals from the Armed Forces involved in the military coup of 25 April 1974 and mainstream political parties. Its perceived victory against the extreme left forces at the end of the democratic transition allowed extreme right politically violent militants to avoid any kind of judicial consequences at the moment of their disengagement during the post-revolutionary democratic normalisation. The violent groups of the late 1980s and their early 21st century counterparts, on the contrary, have always remained totally isolated in fringes with subcultural and pre-political characteristics, disconnected from political actors other than the microcosm of the Portuguese extreme right. Their proximity to other nationalist parties or groups has made this whole political area vulnerable, alienating moderate militants who disagree with using violence.

From the sociological point of view, although the transition militants were recruited from among popular strata, the cliques of the extreme right-wing clandestine network came from the middle-upper bourgeoisie, with some elements even of the nobility, with a higher academic background. In the succeeding decades, on the contrary, a proletarianisation of the violent militancy of the extreme right was seen in consonance with the characteristics of the international skinhead movement.

Finally, despite anti-communism being common to all generations, there is a radical change of motivations in the basis of radicalisation and violent action: the political violence of the transition was aimed at safeguarding the Portuguese multi-racial and pluri-continental empire; the political violence of the last radical generations has been exercised on behalf of the white Portugal and Europe against any project of a multi-racial and multi-cultural society.

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Acknowledgements

This work was supported by Portuguese national funds (OE), through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., in the scope of the framework contract foreseen in the numbers 4, 5 and 6 of the article 23, of the Decree-Law 57/2016, of August 29, changed by Law 57/2017, of July 19 and by the British Academy Research Fellowship [GRANT NUMBER pf170092].

Notes

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- [77] Interview conducted in October 2018 with the lawyer José Manuel de Castro by the first author.
- [78] This episode was the subject of an independent judicial proceeding outside the 2007-2008 trial and led to Mário Machado being given a 4-month suspended prison sentence. This conviction was not for racism, but for illegal possession of weapons and for social alarm.
- [79] Fábio Chang de Almeida, 2014, op. cit., pp. 270-271.
- [80] Interview conducted in October 2018 with the lawyer José Manuel de Castro by the first author.
- [81] Interview conducted in October 2018 with the lawyer José Manuel de Castro by the first author.