From the Armed Struggle against the Dictatorship to the Socialist Revolution: The Narrative Restraints to Lethal Violence among Radical Left Organisations in Portugal

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Abstract

This article presents a historical case study of three armed organisations that operated in Portugal before and after the April Revolution of 1974. This event put an end to Estado Novo's authoritarian regime, starting a period of transition to democracy. The armed organisations operating during Estado Novo sought, essentially, to combat the dictatorship and the Colonial War. These organisations channelled their actions towards the destruction of the regime's repressive and colonial apparatus, but refused to use lethal violence. During the transition to democracy, disillusionment caused by the negative outcome of the revolutionary process and the end of the utopia of the socialist revolution led some sectors of the radical left to return to armed struggle. This time, such actors targeted both property and human beings but were highly selective in their targeting. We analyse the narratives of restraint of former militants from across these groups, and consider how they were shaped by the evolving socio-political context. In the case of the pre-revolution organisations, we found two collectively accepted narratives inscribed in their genesis: lethal violence as counterproductive and lethal violence as philosophically and ideologically problematic. In the case of the post-revolution organisation we found one restraint narrative shared by the collective: indiscriminate lethal violence is counterproductive. Some militants also developed a restraint narrative that centred on disappointment with the organisation for its perceived operational failures. This study is based on a narrative analysis of data dispersed across personal and public archives, writings, and memoirs of individuals directly and indirectly involved in the armed struggle, with data collected through interviews with former politically violent militants.

Keywords: Portugal, radical left, ARA, BR, FP-25

Introduction

In this article, we examine the narratives of restraint on lethal violence in the context of three armed organisations that operated in Portugal form the 1960s through to the 1980s. Firstly, we explain why political violence by non-state actors was scant and erratic in Portugal during most of the twentieth century, which was dominated by *Estado Novo*, a repressive authoritarian regime. Secondly, we explore how dominant socio-political narratives influenced internal mechanisms and processes regarding the type of, and limits to, the violence committed by three different armed organisations: the ARA (*Ação Revolucionária Armada* [Armed Revolutionary Action]) and the BR (*Brigadas Revolucionárias* [Revolutionary Brigades]), which acted during the dictatorship; and the FP-25 (*Forças Populares do 25 de Abril* [Popular Forces of the 25th of April]), which acted in a period of consolidated democracy. In doing so, we aim to understand why, and to what extent, radical left armed organisations in contemporary Portugal restrained their use of lethal violence.

The breadth and variety of our data allows us to offer a valuable snapshot of the main narratives of restraint to lethal violence shared by former militants who were part of the three armed organisations under analysis. We identify factors which pushed specific organisations not to be lethal (ARA and BR), to be selectively lethal (FP-25), and not to engage in indiscriminatory acts of violence (all three organisations). We also investigate the dominant historical narrative guiding the ideology behind the creation of the armed organisations, to determine what distinguishes lethal and non-lethal organisations that are ideologically similar, as we concur with Smith and Monforte that "the stories people tell are constructed from resources that emerge from outside them and these stories need to be considered as culturally and relationally constructed".[1] Thus, this case study broadens the literature beyond the focus on religious organisations, particularly those connected to al-

Qaeda- and/or Islamic State-inspired terrorism, presenting the case of three armed radical left organisations that have received little scholarly attention. It also examines the interplay between a range of strategic and moral considerations in the context of restraint that have been put forward and explored by other scholars.[2]

This research article is based on a qualitative methodology, which triangulates data dispersed across personal and public archives, writings, and memoirs of individuals directly and indirectly involved in the Portuguese armed struggle in the twentieth century, with data collected through interviews with former ARA, BR, and FP-25 militants. A total of 24 interviews were collected independently by both authors in the context of larger research projects.[3] They both followed a similar semi-structured schedule. This included questions about the use of violence and was used in a flexible way to help stimulate reflection on important topics related to past engagement in the armed struggle, while allowing each interviewee to guide the course of the conversation and to choose what to recount and how. In this study, we employed thematic narrative analysis to identify the accounts related to the commission of violence, and analyse how stories on restraint and escalation of violence draw on, or attempt to, resist socio-political narrative resources, as stories not only work "for people," but also work "on people," leading their construction and understanding of reality, and their course of action.[4]

The Socio-Political Context of the Contemporary Radical Left Armed Struggle in Portugal (1962-1986)

Estado Novo was the longest standing dictatorship in Western Europe (1926-1974). Despite being a typical dictatorship of the fascist era, during its long duration, as the world around it changed it had to adapt to survive.[5] From the early 1950s, social changes caused by economic and industrial development, rural exodus, and emigration to other European countries allowed the growth of the middle class and accelerated the schooling of the masses. This, in combination with increasing access to information about what was happening in the world, altered public attitudes and opinion, and ultimately fostered opposition to the regime.[6]

In 1968, António de Oliveira Salazar, the regime's mastermind, was incapacitated after falling from a chair. He was replaced by Marcelo Caetano as President of the Council, giving rise to the so-called *Primavera Marcelista* (Marcelist Spring). This was a short period in which a number of reforms made it look like the dictatorial situation in Portugal was changing and that the Colonial War could end. However, the beginning of 1970 brought renewed political repression and the determination to carry on waging war in the colonies. This raised societal tensions and contributed to the opposition's radicalisation.[7] The Colonial War was key in the radicalisation of the political struggle in Portugal and the move towards armed violence. It began in February 1961, in Angola, spreading rapidly to Guinea, in January 1963, and to Mozambique, in August 1964, dragging on seemingly with no end in sight. Military recruitment, of more than 900.000 young people, was a decisive factor in the massive emigration of these years. In total 16% of the population (1.4 million) emigrated between 1961 and 1974, two thirds of whom emigrated illegally, including 250.000 fleeing military service. For large sectors of society, the demand for an end to the war began to mark their political activities and encouraged them to challenge the regime.[8] In this context, revolutionary radical left organisations multiplied, attempting to train young guerrillas and collect weapons.[9]

Three organisations decided to engage in armed struggle: the LUAR (*Liga Unitária de Ação Revolucionária* [League of Unity and Armed Revolution]), the ARA and the BR. In this article, we do not analyse the LUAR because this organisation lacks the connections that existed among the three other organisations under analysis, both in ideological and operational terms. LUAR's full structure was based abroad, especially in Paris and Belgium, and all its attempts at armed actions in Portugal were halted by the political police. The LUAR renounced the armed struggle shortly after the April Revolution.[10] The ARA and the BR, as explored in the following sections, carried out armed actions motivated by anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist positions, but did not resort to lethal violence before the April Revolution.

The revolutionary process triggered by the April Revolution was led by radical left groups, both those who carried out armed actions and those who only theorised about their need during the dictatorship. Their aim was

for the workers to seize power and construct a socialist society.[11] This revolutionary movement sought new forms of democratic organisation and expressions of popular power, which manifested itself in the occupation of hundreds of factories, vacant houses, and large landowners' properties in the south of Portugal. It also manifested itself in the Agrarian Reform, and the nationalisation of the main strategic sectors of the economy.[12]

However, on the 25th November 1975, a military coup led by a coalition of moderate and conservative sectors put an end to the revolutionary process started on the 25th April 1974, which comprised a profound defeat for the radical left. From then on, a new phase began with the consolidation of a representative democracy, with its own institutions, whose legitimacy derived from the popular vote and whose political agents tried to stop and deflate revolutionary transformations, even if these had been constitutionally enshrined (e.g., the Agrarian Reform, the nationalisation of banking).[13] The radical left were frustrated by the end of the revolutionary experience, the beginning of the institutionalisation of democracy, the preparation of Portugal's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) and, in due course, by the enormous economic crisis that led to interventions of the IMF in 1977 and in 1983. Furthermore, these developments fuelled a belief within the radical left that Portugal was facing a new fascist offensive, prompting some within this left faction to consider a return to armed struggle.[14] This gave rise to the formation of the FP-25 in 1980, which carried out both lethal and non-lethal acts of political violence. In the subsequent sections we analyse in detail the direction taken by these organisations, as well as the limits that they imposed on the violence committed, and how this was influenced by the dominant socio-political narrative resources surrounding them.

The ARA (*Ação Revolucionária Armada [Armed Revolutionary Action]*)

As the armed wing of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), the ARA constituted a semi-autonomous organisation. It followed the party's political instructions, but also had its own board, which took independent decisions regarding specific armed actions.[15] Although the decision to establish the ARA was made in 1964, its armed activity only began in 1970.[16] The delay was related to factors such as the need for rigorous and time-consuming preparations, the existence of strong political repression, and uncertainty within the PCP about the use of armed struggle: some supported armed actions as the only way to overthrow a violent regime, while others preferred traditional mass struggle, in line with Soviet Union directives.[17]

Since its First Illegal Congress in 1943, the PCP had propagated the need for a national uprising as a means of overthrowing the dictatorship. It condoned the possible use of armed actions, as long as it was directed by the party, in a context of radicalisation and intensification of the mass struggle.[18] However, in the troubled period that followed the Second World War, the use of violence to overthrow the regime was not a priority, with the PCP defending a peaceful and agreed transition under the leadership of Júlio Fogaça, which started in 1949 due to the imprisonment of the secretary-general of the PCP, Álvaro Cunhal.[19] The latter, after his jailbreak on the 3rd of September 1960, fiercely criticised this political orientation and brought renewed focus on armed insurrection.[20] However, the party found itself in a difficult situation having to balance: 1) internal criticism from Cunhal regarding the 'right-wing deviation' that occurred during his time in prison; 2) the international communist movement's line of peaceful coexistence adopted by the Soviet Union; 3) a group of militants demanding radical action; and 4) attempts to forge alliances with the more moderate sectors of the opposition outside the PCP.[21]

This impasse was resolved when a crisis within the regime, which lasted from 1958 to 1962, and was caused by the fraudulent electoral campaign of General Humberto Delgado, resulted in a growing number of voices demanding radicalisation of the political struggle and a move towards armed violence.[22] In late 1964, the PCP began creating a structure dedicated to preparing and executing non-lethal armed actions directed against the regime's colonial and repressive apparatus. This clandestine structure became the ARA, whose emergence in 1970 as an armed organisation was exceptional in the European context. No other communist party decided to engage in armed struggle, not even the Spanish Communist Party, which experienced similar historical conditions.

In terms of the ARA's armed actions, they were primarily aimed at disrupting the Colonial War, which symbolised imperialism, colonialism, repression, and loss of lives.[23] As a former ARA militant put it:

> ARA's goals were, basically, to create problems for the regime, especially for the Colonial War. Because we used to say that we had been in the war, the war was a terrible thing. […] The aim [of the war] was to kill as much as possible. And I came to hate the war, so we used to say: 'We went to war in the service of the state and now we dedicate our lives to making war on war'. And so we did.[24]

This was done, for instance, through the sabotage of the ocean liners *Cunene* and *Muxima,* which transported troops and war material, respectively, to support the Colonial War. The Tancos air base was also sabotaged, destroying 16 helicopters and 11 aircrafts. None of these armed actions provoked deaths, however. The ARA also carried out armed actions against the state apparatus and against imperialism, such as detonating an explosive device outside the political police's training college and outside the American Cultural Centre, respectively. However, the ARA refused to engage in lethal actions, always attempting to create circumstances in which the risk of loss of lives would be reduced:

> We were careful to detonate explosives only at times when we knew that no one would be on the premises or that it was unlikely that anyone would pass by. Of course, there could be an accident, but we were always very careful to avoid such accidents [deaths].[25]

The ARA decided to suspend its actions in May 1973. At this point, quite a few of its militants were in custody and the political police had identified the members of the central command. The ARA justified this decision, arguing that it sought to decrease the strong repression directed against the general anti-dictatorship movement (e.g. progressive Catholics organising peaceful actions against the Colonial War), and in the context of supporting the recently created Socialist Party in the upcoming 1973 elections. The April Revolution and the establishment of democracy allowed the ARA to lay down its arms, and allowed its militants to integrate into the new political life of the country, as they believed that:

> After the 25th of April, the ARA was no longer necessary, it no longer had legitimacy. Even if the ARA's operations were just, they did not have legitimacy in the democracy that was developing.[26]

The main restraint narratives to the commission of lethal violence by the ARA was the view that it was counterproductive: a view shaped by their need to balance between their choice for armed insurrection and the dominant narrative defended by the Soviet Union, the international communist movement, and the Portuguese opposition opposing the armed struggle. Former ARA militants also reflected on the possible effects of the use of lethal force on their efforts to gather popular support under repressive conditions:

> Our actions would not create victims and would not enable the regime to call us terrorists. They never managed to be able to say that. And the population could also make the distinction, and as they themselves were not bombed, they themselves were not confused.[27]

ARAs efforts were focused on showing people that they were fighting the regime, not the general population. Thus, the ARA's restraint in engaging in lethal violence was firmly rooted in their negative assessment of what this kind of strategy would do for them. One former ARA militant's reflections on the killings carried out by the FP-25 in the 1980s (see below for detail) help to illustrate this point:

> The FP-25 killed a man in Sacavém. That man was a scoundrel, deserved to die five hundred times, but that operation should have never happened because it challenged... for the collective consciousness it called into question the nature of a left which wanted to be necessary, which wanted to be fair and to be ethical.[28]

According to this former militant, lethal violence as a political strategy was counterproductive to the cause of the general struggle, even if the targets were seen as legitimate.

The BR (*Brigadas Revolucionárias [Revolutionary Brigades]*).

The launch of the BR in 1970 marked the second major political rupture within the PCP regarding to the armed insurrection issue.[29] This rupture represented the resistance of PCP members like Isabel do Carmo and Carlos Antunes (BR's co-founders) to the dominant pacifist narrative of the PCP.[30] This position was strengthened by the continuation of the Colonial War and by the disillusionment following the *Primavera Marcelista*. The use of revolutionary violence was seen as a political weapon and as a form of solidarity towards the struggle of the liberation movements in the colonies.

The BR represented a new way of confronting the regime, turning away from PCP's Stalinism and proposing armed action to achieve a socialist revolution, where power would be taken by the proletariat.[31] The BR always pointed to the need for a revolutionary structuring of the proletariat, in which the armed struggle and the mass struggle could converge.[32] The former was not considered more important than the latter, but it was seen as the trigger to a revolutionary organisation based on class.[33] Thus, the BR inverted the usual logic of the creation of armed organisations since the armed organisation surfaced first and only later, in 1973, the PRP (*Partido Revolucionário do Proletariado* [Proletariat Revolutionary Party]) was founded.[34]

In terms of armed actions, similar to the ARA, the BR mostly attacked the structures that served the Colonial War and the authoritarian regime.[35] According to a former BR militant this was defensible because:

> The state was extremely violent, so the violence was justified. Violence paid with violence. Arms, bombs, whatever. The more noise we made, the better, because we were saying 'It's not just you, be careful because we can also reach you!' So it was already justified.[36]

However, within the organisation, the debate regarding what type of actions to engage in was very intense. The militants coming from the PCP, including its founders, were still influenced by PCP's dominant no-kill narrative and preferred spectacular and mediatic actions to draw national and international attention to the Portuguese political and colonial issues.[37] They opposed the use of lethal violence, defended "an ideological and philosophical conception of not killing anyone",[38] and saw violence as more than just killing people:

> You ask: 'but then what is violence?' Violence is not just killing people; violence can be destroying structures. We had reasons for killing, especially before the 25th of April, and we did not kill. We did not kill for philosophical reasons because nobody has the right to take anyone's life.[39]

Other militants were more open to the possibility of actions such as abductions and murders of people linked to the regime, at least in theory. They did not proceed with such actions, however, as they saw these as being too difficult and dangerous. As a former BR militant explained:

> To kill someone, we would have killed Salazar or Marcelo Caetano or others, right? As this was very complicated, we did not kill anyone. […] I had no big problems, for example, if someone proposed an action to kill, imagine, the PIDE [political police] director or Spínola, at the time the commander of Guinea, who was inventing new processes of colonialism. I thought he was a very dangerous man, because of that. He was not as dumb as the others.[40]

The overthrow of the regime by the April Revolution brought new debates to the now official political party PRP/BR, namely the choice of dissolving the armed structure or not. Some militants argued that the fall of the regime meant that the armed struggle was no longer legitimate. Others believed that the armed structure should be kept underground, ready to respond to a negative outcome of the revolutionary process.[41] PRP's first political publication after the April Revolution emphasised the revolutionary violence issue: it stated that it remained a necessity to defend workers from the interests of the bourgeoisie, but underlined that the April Revolution had changed the nature of the violence, which was now in the hands of everyone. Therefore, actions such as strikes and workplace occupations, led by the workers themselves, should be given priority.[42] The PRP defended the distribution of weapons to workers' commissions, so that they could resist in the event of a counter-revolutionary coup and defend the conquests of the Revolution.[43]

In October 1975, the growing prospects of a coup led by moderate and conservative right-wing groups forced the PRP to move the BR back into the underground, while preserving its military structure and weapons. At this point, the more moderate faction of the BR had disengaged right after the April Revolution while the remaining militants had been further radicalised by the revolutionary process and then, by the military coup on the 25th November 1975.

In hiding, the BR focused mainly on bank robberies to fund the organisation.[44] However, the PRP remained a legal political party and was directly involved in the 1976 electoral campaign of Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho for president, which united a large part of the radical left. Otelo was one of the April captains who had a prominent role in triggering the revolution and the revolutionary process. He obtained almost 800.000 votes (17% of the total), which led to the rise of the MUP (*Movimento de Unidade Popular* [Popular Unity Movement]), a new political party bringing together the various radical left parties that had united around his candidacy.

Internal disputes meant that the MUP was short-lived, however. Nonetheless the PRP kept trying to find a way to unite the independent sectors that supported Otelo. This gave rise to the formation of the OUT (*Organização Unitária dos Trabalhadores* [Unitary Workers Organisation]) at a congress on the 8th and 9th of April 1978. It brought together delegations from: Sinn Fein (Ireland); ETA (Basque Country); Workers' Autonomy (Italy); the Arab Socialist Party (Iraq); the CNR Socialist Party (Chile); Venezuelan Revolutionary Party Rupture (Venezuela); Dominican Resistance Group (Dominican Republic); Socialist International (USA); Polisario Front (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic); and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (Oman). In this congress the return to armed struggle was strongly defended by several OUT leaders, most of them from the PRP.[45]

During 1978, heightened internal differences within the PRP/BR were further intensified by the bombing of a freight train in Mauritania, which caused the death of eight soldiers. The attack was claimed by the Polisario Front, which had been carrying out a series of attacks in Mauritania as a way of fighting for the independence of the Sahrawi people. It was, however, organised by the Algerian Secret Services and carried out by BR militants. The Algerian Secret Services had pledged to finance the PRP and later continued to finance the FUP (*Frente de Unidade Popular* [Popular Unity Force]), to which we will return in the next section.[46] This was the first BR action intentionally meant to cause deaths. Most of the PRP leadership, who were in prison for bank robberies, deny knowledge of this action, sustaining that it was carried out by a splinter group that went on to start the FP-25, and that they would have never approved it as it contravened BR's position against lethal and indiscriminate violence.[47] Nonetheless, one of the former militants involved in the action affirmed that the PRP leadership knew about it and did not oppose it.[48] We are unable to say with certainty which version of events is closest to the truth. What this does indicate, however, is that within the PRP/BR the question of the type of actions to engage in was always on the table and over time some militants rebelled against the narratives of restraint on lethal violence.

In sum, as in the case of the ARA, before the April Revolution, BR militants found lethal and indiscriminate violence to be both counterproductive and philosophically and ideologically problematic. The former is not surprising as BR founders derived from the PCP. However, they did not owe allegiance to the Soviet Union or to the international communist movement and they were clearly in disagreement with the pacifist opposition to the regime. What they added to their narrative was a moral stance presented as a philosophical and ideological commitment not to take lives which, in their view, differentiated them from the authoritarian regime that exerted arbitrary power over people's lives. After the April Revolution, some BR militants felt that their duty had been accomplished and that there was no justification to carry on with the armed struggle. However, this was not the case for all BR militants, some of whom not only remained underground, but also engaged in lethal violence and joined a new organisation which pursued lethal violence as part of its strategies. It is to this new organisation that we now turn.

The FP-25 *(Forças Populares do 25 de Abril [Popular Forces of the 25th of April])*

The FP-25 publicly announced its existence on the 20th of April 1980 through the explosion of a hundred petards – small bombs – in different parts of the country. They also shared their *Manifesto ao Povo Trabalhador* [Manifesto to the Working People], which presented them as the embryo of a revolutionary army.[49] This organisation was the armed component of a broader political project, designed by the PRP in 1975, the *Projecto Global* [Global Project].[50] This project also had a political and ideological component, initially headed by the OUT and then by the FUP (constituted as a political party in July 1980); a military component; and a component called ÓSCAR, organised around Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, figurehead of the *Projecto Global*.[51] The aim of this project was to create the conditions to establish popular power through armed insurrection against the right-wing, which was perceived as once again seeking to take state power and violently dividing the left in the country.[52]

The FP-25 was composed of radical left individuals who had been very active during the revolutionary process that followed the April Revolution, and who felt extremely disappointed with the social and political developments that followed the coup of 25th November 1975.[53] Most FP-25 militants had been part of the PRP/BR, both before and after the April Revolution, and their choice to join the FP-25 was based on two considerations. Some, from a political perspective, had not supported the laying down of arms after the 25th April 1974 and their view that armed struggle was still needed to attain a socialist revolution intensified after the 25th November 1975 coup. Others felt that they had to keep fighting because they had never stopped, having opted to remain underground carrying out actions such as bank robberies to support their organisation, even as PRP/BR leaders in jail were distancing themselves from such activities in order to negotiate an amnesty.[54] The non-PRP/BR militants within FP-25 originated from the LUAR, the FUP, as well as Trotskyist and anarchist circles. FP-25 also attracted a few individuals who had no record of previous political activity. Most militants were 15 to 20 years old when the April Revolution occurred, and some performed military service during the revolutionary process.

FP-25 militants were divided into small cells based in various parts of Portugal. They carried out several armed actions in the early 1980s, including bank robberies, detonation of explosive devices targeting both people and property; they also used firearms to injure or kill specific individuals.[55] A series of international solidarity actions were carried out, which included destruction of property, and there were plans to kidnap prominent public figures in order to generate funds for the organisation.[56] FP-25 actions resulted in 12 deaths.[57] Most of these were factory managers, who were considered to have abused their employees. This enabled the FP-25 to claim they supported the working class by setting an example for both the workers – encouraging them to fight against injustices – and for the managers – discouraging them from ignoring their employees' rights.[58] According to a former FP-25 militant, the organisation:

> […] appeared in the context of a major assault from the right, in order to articulate more radical ways of struggle and to show the workers that when certain forms of struggle are exhausted, there are other ways to respond to the arrogance of the capital, there are other ways of acting.[59]

For another former militant, the FP-25 was the armed wing of the workers against the abuses of the employers, which meant that shooting an abusive employer in the knee would be seen as:

> An attempt to convey a practical message for both sides, for the employers and for the victims who had been laid off. If there was a guy who was not paying the salaries, or who had fled to Brazil, that guy needed to realise that he could not do that. And since the state did not act, at least there were some guys that would keep him frightened.[60]

Other targets for lethal attacks by FP-25 militants were police officers, the director of the Prison Services, and former members of the organisation who collaborated with the police.[61] The use of lethal violence was fiercely debated within the FP-25 and not all militants agreed with it. Several former militants mentioned endless discussions and conflicts around what type of violence was acceptable. Some considered that people should not be killed, because such an action could harm the struggle and turn out to be ineffective:

> I was against the killings, not for moral reasons, but for tactical reasons. […] I considered that if we wanted to lead by example, in pedagogical terms it was preferable to put them in a wheelchair, transforming them in living examples. Pedagogically that would work better than killing the guy, who would make the news, but after a while nobody would talk about it anymore, it would be forgotten. While in a wheelchair: the guy did this, but that happened.[62]

Others perceived killing a representative of the class they were fighting against to have the potential to set an examplefor the workers and encourage them in their struggle:

> From a certain point the organisation chose to act against employers who fired people. For example, there was an action against the administrator of Sacavém Tableware Factory, and I thought that this was the type of action that could trigger the workers' reaction. I mean, the fact that that person was reached could trigger a sense of strength and lead the workers to react.[63]

The latter standpoint prevailed, as it was decided that discriminate lethal violence was possible if in line with the organisation's strategic plan of inciting the workers to revolt. Indiscriminate lethal violence was seen as counterproductive, however. According to the accounts of former FP-25 militants, the decision to kill someone had to be justified by the actions of specific victims:

> For example, the Gelmar guy was used by the government to close companies. He would arrive and destroy the company; this was his speciality! […] At Sacavém Tableware Factory there were several suicides caused by the life the employer imposed on the workers [unpaid wages] […] In the case of Castelo Branco [Director of the Prison Services] there were people who fell ill: he was a tyrant […] Doctors would say that people needed to go to hospital and he would say: 'No, I am the boss here', which led doctors to resign […] In addition to his behaviour regarding the prisoners in general, what he was doing with FP-25 prisoners was totally inhuman. […] Another case that I almost forgot is the case of the penitent, these are actions that I personally understand, and I understand them as messages that need to be pushed through.[64]

According to this former militant, FP-25's victims were in fact perpetrators, responsible for the suffering of others, and ending their life not only amounted to a form of justice, but would also act as a deterrent to those who would perpetrate similar injustices. This view also extended to the militants who were arrested and decided to collaborate with the police to bring down the organisation:

> It was assumed that guys who clearly betrayed, who chose to go to the other side and cooperate with the police, including joining them in the searches for militants, these guys if we had the chance, we would kill them, of course.[65]

Thus, the narratives of some former FP-25 militants were characterised by a sense of disgust for their targets' behaviour – "They are not really people to me, I would not care if I saw them fallen on the sidewalk, quite frankly".[66] The narratives were also permeated by a sense that the options of FP-25 for fighting injustices were extremely limited – "How could the organisation deal with this situation at that time? Send him a postcard wishing him happy holidays?"[67] – justifying the use of discriminate lethal violence by the organisation.

It is important to note that, as in other militant groups, individuals' commitment and involvement varied. Some felt very disappointed with the organisation's strategies. They could, however, not simply leave the organisation:

> There was a time when I began to question what everything was, and how we were running the organisation, and I said I could not continue to participate in operations, but at the same time I could not move to a legal structure, or simply go home.[68]

This former militant, for instance, opted to take a more logistical role, distancing herself from the direct commission of acts of violence. This decision was mainly due to the death of comrades in confrontations with the police. These, in her opinion "were a tsunami within the organisation," that caused "an extremely strong sense of guilt," because "a good part of the deaths occurred due to clear operational failure".[69] In other words,

she considered that the way the organisation was being run was responsible for the death of its militants, because "people with little experience were involved in actions too soon, because there wasn't anyone else, and some of them fell along the way".[70] Another former FP-25 militant found himself in a similar situation, but at an earlier stage of engagement with the organisation, which allowed him to disengage without having to face the state authorities:

> Things started hitting hard with the start of the repression, arrests, deaths... who was playing around? I mean, had we left everything behind to get money, to rob some shitty corner banks? These were things that made no sense to anyone, in that context people were not there to rob small banks, they wanted to do other things, even without a great degree of violence, but things that were significant to them.[71]

The FP-25 was dismantled through the *Operação Orion* (Orion Operation) in June 1984, which closed down all FUP headquarters and arrested 60 people. However, the FP-25 remained active until its total dissolution in 1989, even though between 1985 and 1987 the majority of its militants were arrested or sought refuge abroad.[72]

Discussion and Conclusion

Molly Andrews affirmed that personal narratives do not only talk about the individual, "but provide a small window into the engines of history and historical change, as we both shape and are shaped by the events of our day".[73] Therefore, at the heart of personal stories it is possible to find the intersection between historical context, and personal circumstances, which shed light on how and why certain events take place and why individuals behave in certain ways. In this article, we examined how different contemporary Portuguese armed organisations negotiated restraint to lethal violence according to the social and political contexts of their time. We found two main narratives in each phase of radical left violence analysed. In the first phase, lethal violence was seen as counterproductive and as philosophically and ideologically problematic. In the second phase, indiscriminate lethal violence was perceived as counterproductive and resulted in disappointment with the organisation.

The first phase corresponds chronologically to the last years of *Estado Novo*'s regime (1968-1974) and was characterized by the activities of three different armed organisations – the LUAR, the ARA, and the BR – as they were fighting against the dictatorship and the Colonial War. Despite countless internal debates, these organisations established a no-kill rule as this type of action was unanimously seen as counterproductive to the struggle. They did not want to be perceived as terrorists by the general population, whose support they sought, or undermine the collaboration of other sectors opposing the regime like the progressive Catholics for whom the defence of the value of life was fundamental. For the ARA, as the armed wing of the PCP, it was important to maintain a balance between the defence of the armed struggle in the Portuguese case and the peaceful coexistence advocated by the international communist movement and by the Soviet Union. BR militants also raised moral concerns when it came to engage in lethal violence. Shortly after the April Revolution, the reading that these organisations made of the country's political and social situation resulted in renouncing armed struggle, opting for the development of popular power structures. However, due to the radicalisation of the revolutionary process during the summer of 1975, the PRP started to defend the arming of workers to defend the achievements of the April Revolution and then opted to move the BR back into hiding. During the following years, the PRP focused on creating a unitary radical left structure that could contest elections and maintain the political struggle on a strictly legal level.

However, disputes within the PRP and the arrest of its historical leaders, led to the rise of the most radical sector within the organisation which wanted to return to armed struggle, challenging the dominant narrative of democratic consolidation. This gave rise to the second phase of radical left violence in contemporary Portugal, led by the FP-25, an organisation that engaged in lethal violence as a political strategy. For FP-25 militants, these actions were justified by the direction of events after the April Revolution, as implementing a parliamentary democracy implied adhesion to the EEC and the reversal of many revolutionary conquests.

The serious economic crisis experienced by the country in the 1970s also played an important role in these militants' radicalisation towards violence because it implied the entry of the IMF in Portugal and the adoption of austerity measures, which led to increased unemployment and poverty. For FP-25 militants, this context morally justified the adoption of more extreme actions, such as the death of company directors accused of mismanagement and dismissal of workers. However, the FP-25, in line with other leftist organisations,[74] never engaged in indiscriminate violence, which was seen as counterproductive since FP-25 aimed at obtaining the support of the population for their main objectives – to halt the advance of the right-wing forces in Portugal and to prevent a reversal of the conquests made by the revolutionary process. Restraint narratives were also found at the individual level, as over time some militants felt disappointed with the strategic directions taken by the organisation and decided to take logistical roles or leave the organisation.

In this study, we found three of the five barriers to mass casualty violence presented by Simi and Windisch's framework based on life history interviews with former white supremacists – mass casualty violence seen as counterproductive; moral apprehension; and internal organizational conflict.[75] This points to the fact that the experiences of former violent militants, independently of ideological leanings and historical periods, can be quite similar. Our findings also substantiate some of the strategic and moral logics put forward by Busher, Holbrook and Macklin in their internal brakes on violent escalation typology.[76] These authors examined how people within militant groups manage their collective violence parameters and put forward different strategic and moral logics. When applying such logics to the Portuguese radical left organisations acting during the dictatorship, we see a solid historical consciousness prompting both strategic and moral narratives of restraint, but also the influence of the repressive environment which created highly compartmentalised organisations whose militants did not network much and were limited to following leadership directives. This scenario changed after the April Revolution, which raised a particularly politicised generation whose practice was informed by different strategic and moral logics. This generation of militants was no longer connected to political parties or broader international movements ideologically positioned against lethal violence. Furthermore, after the November 1975 coup the organisation leading the armed struggle also had a specific agenda – to incite the workers to act against the injustices committed at the workplace, which were perceived as a consequence of right-wing, capitalist policies. This contributed to weakening prior narratives and practices of restraint.

This article attempted to contribute to a growing body of literature on processes of restraint to violence, but it also answers a call from former militants to offer an analysis of the different types of violent actions carried out by different organisations. We perceived such a call in the context of the need to remember past struggles that has defined the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries [77] and decided to embark on this endeavour to also give something back to individuals who have shared so much with us. In doing so, we applied a narrative approach to understand processes of restraint to lethal violence as recounted by former politically violent militants to show how the accounts of their past experiences are influenced by what historical narratives were most important to them and how such narratives moulded their actions.

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