

A CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF THE FAR RIGHT IN PORTUGAL

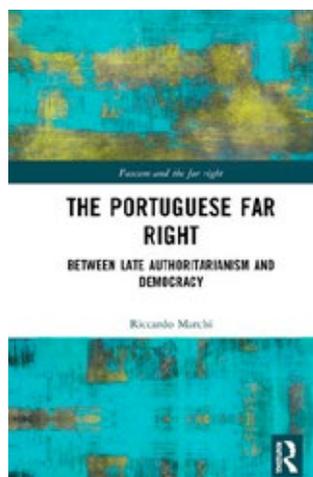
Raquel da Silva

In recent years, the far right has been capturing a vast array of research efforts due to high-profile cases of right-wing extremism taking place across the world. These include the murder of the British MP Jo Cox in 2016, the Finsbury Park van attack in 2017 (killing 1) also in the UK, the Munich mall shootings in 2017 (killing 9), the attacks on migrants in Italy in February 2018, and, more recently, the Christchurch attack in New Zealand in March 2019 (killing 51). In this context, research devoted to the far right, both violent and non-violent, has been undertaken in a more systematic fashion, namely aiming at an understanding of what drives anti-minority activism², characterising the backgrounds and pre-attack behaviours of right-wing lone actor terrorists³, and creating typologies of right-wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe⁴. The monograph under review contributes to this effort by reconstructing, for the first time, the history of the 70 years of Portuguese far right, from the end of the World War Two up to the present. Throughout these decades, the Portuguese far right has undergone profound changes, accompanying the changes both in national and international political contexts. In this vein, Marchi not only examines this political family within the Portuguese context, but also in the context of other Western

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The Portuguese far-right: Between late authoritarianism and democracy (1945-2015)

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countries sharing similar trajectories (e.g., Spain and Greece, which also preserved authoritarian right-wing regimes after the Second World War) or which have influenced Portuguese far right over the years (e.g., France, England, and Germany, which put forward anti-immigration and racist discourses in the 1980s). Thus, in order to reconstruct these historical dynamics, the research showcased in this monograph relies on a qualitative methodology which included interviews with three generations of far-right activists and the analysis of a vast array of archived documentation.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

Marchi does a brilliant job of neatly organising the monograph in three parts, each one representing one of the three overarching periods in the contemporary history of the Portuguese far right – authoritarianism, transition to democracy, and established democracy. Each part is composed of three chapters. The first part covers the period from 1945 to 1974. The first chapter showcases the immediate post-war period from 1945 to the beginning of the 1960s, presenting a generation of young intellectuals under the orientation of Alfredo Pimenta, a far-right monarchist and important figure of the pro-Axis faction within the Portuguese regime during the war. Marchi casts light on their writings and debates in a political environment in which, in 1945, fascism had been defeated at the global level, and how they contributed to the preservation of the authoritarian regime at the local level, stopping the spread of democracy to Portugal. The second chapter covers the period from the onset of the Portuguese African War in 1961 to the political death of Salazar in 1968. Here we meet the second generation of nationalist activists, who were both influenced by the ideas of the previous generation and radicalised by the African War. Attention is given to the youth mobilisation through student organisations and through links to other European far right forces who also opposed the African decolonisation. The third chapter showcases the difficulties posed by the far right to Salazar's replacement – Marcelo Caetano – from September 1968 until April 1974, due to disagreements with his liberalisa-

tion policies. This chapter focusses on a third generation of far-right activists who defended the pluri-continental Empire, who wished to halt left-wing radicalisation, and had ideological and organisational connections with the emerging European neo-fascist movements of the late 1960s and 1970s.

The second part of the monograph dwells on the period of democratic transition from 1974 to 1982. The first chapter examines the period between 25 April 1974 and 25 November 1975 which saw, on the one hand, the quick organisation of the Portuguese right-wing into political parties and, on the other hand, the far-right armed resistance to this revolutionary period led by the radical faction of the Armed Forces Movement (*Movimento das Forças Armadas* – MFA), which conducted the coup d'état. The second chapter covers the period between 1976 and 1982 and examines how the far right strove to become part of the process of democratic institutionalisation. It all began with the counter-revolution of 25 November 1975 in which the leftist forces leading the revolutionary process were defeated by the moderate faction of the MFA. At this point, the far right ceased its violent clandestine activity and led off the legal process of institutionalisation, returning to their propaganda activities, the creation of political parties, think-tanks and youth groups. The third chapter looks into the attempts of modernisation launched by the far right at the end of the democratic transition, which peaked in the mid 1980s led by the intellectuals of the old regime, influenced by the European and North American new right and by European neo-fascism.

The third part addresses the three decades of consolidated democracy from 1982 to 2015. The first chapter looks into the subcultural far-right groups that began to surface in Portugal in the late 1980s. These groups were composed of individuals who had experienced neither the authoritarian regime nor the myth of the pluricontinental and multiracial empire, and who embarked on political militancy a decade after the end of the decolonisation process, in the context of a widely consolidated democratic system. Their influences came mostly from their European counterparts who helped to introduce in Portugal the anti-immigration and racist discourse already in vogue in France, England, and Germany. This type of discourse got some traction in Portugal, in this period, due to the socio-demographic changes taking place in the country, including the modification of the ethnic structure of the suburbs of the two main metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto following the first wave of immigration from the former African colonies. These immigrants joined a social fabric already saturated by the so-called returnees, that is, the former white settlers who felt forced to abandon the Portuguese colonies in Africa after their national independence. This group of people did not tend to be particularly welcoming and, in several cases, nurtured a strong resentment against black and mestizo Africans. From this social fabric then emerged the new generation of far-right activists. They were often the children of returnee and/or proletarian parents who had settled in the peripheries of the major

cities, increasingly occupied by immigrants, as well as the children of middle-class city folks who saw themselves hedged in by shanty towns also inhabited by immigrants. Thus, this period was characterised by the emergence of a new extreme right which took on an ethno-nationalist political identity and discourse, merging the ultra-nationalism of the old extreme right and the neo-Nazi racism of the skinhead subculture. The second chapter focusses on early twentieth-century far right (1999 to 2015) and, particularly, on the evolution of the National Renewal Party (*Partido Nacional Renovador* – PNR) and its links to the right-wing wave in Europe in the beginning of this century. It describes the palpable tensions between the old Salazarists and the skinhead youth in terms of political culture, identity, and strategies. The third chapter examines the Portuguese identitarian movement, which has developed alongside the PNR in the last decade. This movement mirrors the growing ethno-nationalist and identitarian inclinations of the younger far right activists in Portugal, who have been, on the one hand, ostracised by the older generations of radical nationalists who do not align with racialist viewpoints, and, on the other, strongly connected with international networks.

READERSHIP

This monograph is of great importance to those interested in the contemporary history of the European far right, providing a very detailed case study, but also significant indicators for comparative perspectives. In it, readers will find an analysis of

the dynamics of pro-fascist factions both within an authoritarian context and during the transition to democracy, the transformations undergone by successive far right generations throughout the decades and

the influences imprinted on them, and, finally, a discussion of the reasons behind the inability of the Portuguese far right to influence the discourse and political agenda of the Portuguese right. 

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³ BOUHANA, Noémie; CORNER Emily; GILBERT, Paul e SCHUURMAN, Bart – “Background and Preparatory Behaviours of Right-Wing Extremist Lone Actors: A Comparative Study”, In *Perspectives on*

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