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Extreme-Right Violence in the Portuguese Transition to Democracy

Portugal's Liberation Army (1974–1976)

Riccardo Marchi | ORCID: 0000-0003-2037-7027

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Centro de Estudos
Internacionais, Lisboa, Portugal

Riccardo.Marchi@iscte-iul.pt

Raquel da Silva | ORCID: 0000-0002-5239-5919

Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Centro de Estudos
Internacionais, Lisboa, Portugal

raquel.beleza.silva@iscte-iul.pt

Abstract

The *Exército de Libertação de Portugal* [ELP; Portugal's Liberation Army] was one of the most infamous clandestine organizations active during the Portuguese transition to democracy, bringing together far-right militants from the deposed authoritarian regime. This organization has been considered the most dangerous terrorist group fighting for the restoration of *Estado Novo's* regime. This article aims to challenge this statement, recurrently defended by international historiography, through an in-depth case study of the ELP, which is assessed in its genesis, structuring, ideological identity, strategy and operative capacity, permeability to repression, and dissolution. This study is based on a qualitative methodology triangulating data dispersed in the existing scientific and journalistic literature with data collected, unprecedentedly, in private archives and through face-to-face interviews with former ELP militants. Therefore, this paper is of importance to scholarship on the Portuguese transition to democracy, but also on the role of the extreme right in other post-authoritarian contexts, and on political violence in processes of democratization.

Keywords

Portugal – extreme right – democratization – *Exército de Libertação de Portugal* (ELP) – political violence; authoritarianism

During the Portuguese transition to democracy, the period between October 1974 and February 1977 witnessed an explosion of anti-communist violence. The 1975–1976 biennium was particularly fierce, especially during the so-called ‘Hot Summer of 1975’ in northern Portugal, where 70 per cent of the armed actions were carried out.¹ This was recorded by different sources: a Military Judicial Police report logged in 1976 alone—the deadliest year in the entire period—the occurrence of 453 terrorist acts;² a study conducted by the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) concluded that from May 1975 until March 1976 there were 405 extreme-right terrorist acts, including bombings, assaults against left-wing political headquarters, arson attacks, shootings, and physical aggression, which targeted, in 34 per cent of the cases, the PCP itself;³ and a journalistic investigation identified 566 politically violent acts between May 1975 and April 1977, which killed over ten people.⁴

The protagonists of this broad anti-communist action have been identified as: individuals from the mainstream parties that emerged during the transition period, i.e. the *Partido Socialista* [PS; Socialist Party], the *Partido Social Democrata* [PSD; Social Democrat Party] and the *Centro Democrático e Social* [CDS; Social Democratic Centre]; active and retired military, internal and external to the *Movimento das Forças Armadas* [MFA; Armed Forces Movement];⁵ local chieftains rooted in the social fabric who were small farmers, artisans, and merchants; and local Catholic Church hierarchies, with some Northern bishops occupying the front line of the anti-communist struggle.⁶ At the height

1 Diego Palacios Cerezales, ‘Um caso de violência política,’ *Análise Social* xxxvii, no. 165 (2003): 1127–1157; Diego Palacios Cerezales, ‘Civil Resistance and Democracy in the Portuguese Revolution,’ *Journal of Contemporary History* 52, no. 3 (2017): 688–709.

2 Eduardo Dâmaso, *A invasão spinolista* (Lisboa: Fenda, 1999).

3 AAVV, *Dossier Terrorismo* (Lisboa: Edições Avante!, 1997).

4 Miguel Carvalho, *Quando Portugal ardeu* (Alfragide: Oficina do Livro, 2017).

5 The MFA carried out a military coup on 25 April 1974, also known as the April Revolution, which started the transition to democracy by overthrowing the existing authoritarian regime of Estado Novo. Estado Novo had its origins in the military coup of 28 May 1926. This period is also known as Salazarismo after the instigator and then ruler (1932–1968) António de Oliveira Salazar, who was replaced by Marcelo Caetano in 1969.

6 Riccardo Marchi, *The Portuguese Far Right between Late Authoritarianism and Democracy*

of the violent confrontation, this front was also integrated by three extreme-right armed clandestine networks: 1) the *Exército de Libertação de Portugal* [ELP; Portugal's Liberation Army], which was perceived as the flagship of the Portuguese extreme right during this period; 2) the *Movimento Democrático de Libertação de Portugal* [MDLP; Democratic Movement for the Liberation of Portugal], which emerged in the aftermath of 11 March 1975, the date of the attempted coup by general António de Spínola, his military faction within the Armed Forces, and cadres of the right-wing parties dismantled in 1974; and 3) the *Plano Maria da Fonte* [Maria da Fonte Plan], which was a network of insurgents nurtured by the Catholic Church in northern Portugal in collaboration with right-wing civilians and officers.⁷ This paper uses the expression extreme right in line with the work of Cas Mudde, who considers that extreme-right parties, groups, and movements aim at overthrowing the existing political order through violence;⁸ as well as in line with the work of Piero Ignazi, who talks about the 'old extreme right' composed by militants showcasing ideological connections to authoritarian regimes.⁹

Despite the relevance of this phenomenon in the context of the Portuguese democratic transition, scant attention has been given to anti-communist mobilization, especially from 1975 onwards.¹⁰ The most in-depth work was published in 1997 by the journalist Eduardo Dâmaso, who uncovered the connivance between political parties, the Catholic Church and the armed organizations. The latest study on the violence perpetrated by the Portuguese extreme right in the transition period was published in 2017 by the journalist Miguel Carvalho. In terms of memoirs of former armed militants, the MDLP and the Maria da Fonte Plan have been featured a few times,¹¹ but the ELP has not. Over

1945–2015 (London: Routledge, 2019); Raquel da Silva, *Narratives of Political Violence* (London: Routledge, 2019).

7 António Costa Pinto, 'Political Purges and State Crisis in Portugal's Transition to Democracy, 1975–1976,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 2 (2008): 305–332.

8 Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 12.

9 Piero Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 146.

10 Cerezales, 'Civil Resistance and Democracy in the Portuguese Revolution,' 690; Raquel da Silva and Ana Sofia Ferreira, 'The Post-Dictatorship Memory Politics in Portugal Which Erased Political Violence from the Collective Memory,' *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 53, no. 1 (2019): 24–43.

11 On the Maria da Fonte Plan: Waldemar Paradela de Abreu, *Do 25 de Abril ao 25 de Novembro: Memória do tempo perdido* (Lisboa: Intervenção, 1983); On both the MDLP and the Maria da Fonte Plan: Maria João da Câmara, *Sanches Osório: Memórias de uma revolução* (Alfragide: Oficina do Livro, 2019); On the MDLP: Alpoim Calvão, *De Conakry ao MDLP:*

two decades ago, the historian António Costa Pinto warned that the ELP ‘has received little academic attention’.¹² This gap in the literature has persisted, even in the recent works devoted to the Portuguese extreme right.¹³ Nevertheless, the ELP is among the most important organizations in the category of ‘secular right-wing groups’ involved in armed action.¹⁴ In fact, the first study dedicated to this organization was only published in 2014 by Maria José Tís-car, comprising of an analysis of the reports of the PIDE/DGS (*Estado Novo*’s political police) Extinction Commission and of the information gathered by the intelligence services of the MFA which was released in 1975.¹⁵ These sources of data have been reproduced over the years by the literature on the Portuguese transition. However, there is a lack of in-depth analysis and triangulation with other sources.

Thus, the absence of in-depth analysis of the ELP has led to—at best—fairly generic representations, such as being part of the Portuguese counter-revolutionary ‘spine’,¹⁶ being one of the Portuguese ‘right-wing terrorist organizations’,¹⁷ being a clandestine paramilitary organization,¹⁸ being a neo-Salazarist matrix,¹⁹ being the promoter of counter-revolutionary activity,²⁰ and ‘activities . . . of classic political terrorist type’.²¹ At worse, the literature reiter-

Dossier secreto (Lisboa: Intervenção, 1976); A biography of Alpoim Calvão that covers the MDLP extensively: Rui Hortelão, Luís Sanches de Baêna e Abel Melo e Sousa, *Alpoim Calvão: Honra e dever* (Porto: Caminhos Romanos, 2012).

- 12 António Costa Pinto, ‘Dealing with the Legacy of Authoritarianism: Political Purges and Radical Right Movements in Portugal’s Transition to Democracy 1974–1980’s,’ in *Modern Europe after Fascism, 1945–1980’s*, eds. Stein Ugelvik Larsen and Bernt Hagtvet (New York: Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 1998), 1706.
- 13 Da Silva, ‘The Post-Dictatorship Memory Politics,’ 34; Marchi, *The Portuguese Far Right*, 92–97.
- 14 Jeffrey M. Bale and Gary Ackerman, *Recommendations on the Development of Methodologies and Attributes for Assessing Terrorist Threats of WMD Terrorism* (Monterey CA: Center for Nonproliferation Studies, 2004), 8, https://courses.cs.washington.edu/courses/csep590/05au/readings/Bale_Ackerman_FinalReport.pdf, accessed 10 November 2018.
- 15 Maria José Tís-car, *A contra-revolução no 25 de Abril* (Lisboa: Colibri, 2014).
- 16 Josep Sánchez Cervelló, *A Revolução portuguesa e a sua influência na transição espanhola 1961–1976* (Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 1993), 351.
- 17 António Costa Pinto, ‘Constitution-Making and the Democratization of Portugal,’ *Portuguese Studies* 34, no. 1 (2018): 45.
- 18 Jeffrey M. Bale, *The Darkest Sides of Politics, volume 1: Postwar Fascism, Convert Operations, and Terrorism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).
- 19 Richard A.H. Robinson, ‘The influence of Overseas Issues in Portugal’s Transition to Democracy,’ in *The Last Empire: Thirty Years of Portuguese Decolonization*, eds. Stewart Lloyd-Jones and António Costa Pinto (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2003), 1–16.
- 20 Ronald H. Chilcote, *The Portuguese Revolution* (Lankam: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).
- 21 António Costa Pinto, ‘The Radical Right in Contemporary Portugal,’ in *The Far Right*

ates historiographical inaccuracies, linking and/or confusing the ELP with the MDLP.²² Such inaccuracies are also found when affirming that the ELP was ‘an armed group set up in Angola by a conservative white minority’,²³ composed by ‘Portuguese fascist mercenaries’,²⁴ or by right-wing individuals from the deposed regime, organized and operationally headed by the political police number two Agostinho Barbieri Cardoso.²⁵

The present study is based on a qualitative methodology which triangulates data dispersed in the existing scientific and journalistic literature with data collected, for the first time, from private archives and face-to-face interviews with former ELP militants. In terms of private archives, we highlight the archive of the captain Luís Fernandes, who was a veteran of the Portuguese extreme right and of the war in Africa during the authoritarian regime and who joined the ELP in the transition period; and the archive of José Hipólito Vaz Raposo, director of the right-wing weekly newspaper *Tempo Novo* [New Time], edited after the April revolution, and a refugee in Spain where he had contact with the ELP. In terms of interviews, we conducted face-to-face interviews with five former ELP militants who had never been interviewed before for research purposes: Sebastião de Lancastre (founder of an ELP cell in Portugal), Miguel Freitas da Costa, José Carlos Craveiro Lopes, and Nuno Barbieri Cardoso (ELP militants based in Madrid), and one who prefers to remain anonymous. The following sections present an in-depth and rigorous analysis of the ELP from its genesis to its structuring, ideological positioning, identity, strategy and operative capacity, permeability to repression, and dissolution.

in Western and Eastern Europe, eds. Luciano Cheles, Ronnie Ferguson and Michalina Vaughan (London: Longman, 1995), 117.

- 22 Lesley M. Denny, ‘Portugal and Africa,’ *The RUSI Journal* 129, no. 2 (1984): 38–42; Tom Gallagher, ‘Portugal: The Marginalization of the Extreme Right,’ in *The Extreme Right in Europe and USA*, ed. Paul Hainsworth (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), 232–245; Guy Arnold, *Mercenaries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).
- 23 Gisele Lobato, ‘The Strange Case of Brazilian Support to the FNLA in the Final Stage of Angolan Decolonization (1975),’ *Afriche e Orienti* 3 (2017): 34.
- 24 Victoria Brittain, *Death of Dignity* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 5.
- 25 Cervelló, *A Revolução portuguesa*, 350; Kenneth Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 154; Da Silva, *Narratives of Political Violence*, 26.

The Foundation of the ELP

The ELP was officially founded on 6 January 1975, by a group of far-right militants who took refuge in Spain following repression in the aftermath of events on 25 April and 28 September 1974. On 25 April 1974, the *Estado Novo* regime was overthrown by a military coup led by the MFA; and, on 28 September 1974, civil and military leftist radicals instrumentalized a right-wing mass mobilization in support of the President of the Republic General António de Spínola which ended up with the arrest of hundreds of right leaning individuals. These dates pushed elements of the deposed regime to seek refuge in neighboring Spain, which was the case for the second in command of the political police, Agostinho Barbieri Cardoso. His son and former ELP militant, Nuno Barbieri Cardoso, recalls setting up, with his father, in the Spring/Summer of 1974, a network to support former political police agents arrested in Portugal or who had taken refuge in Spain.²⁶ According to José Hipólito Vaz Raposo, this network served to draft the contours of the ELP in August 1974.²⁷ This chronology was confirmed by the Italian neo-fascist Stefano Delle Chiaie, who was also a refugee in Spain and who participated in the structuring of the ELP, affirming that this clandestine network arose when General António de Spínola was still President of the Republic in Portugal (between May and September 1974).²⁸ Intelligence services' information also corroborates this: the US magazine *CounterSpy* fixed the emergence of the ELP in September 1974 at a meeting in Paris between Agostinho Barbieri Cardoso and Portuguese funders;²⁹ and the Support Section of the Portuguese agency of military intelligence situated the first ELP embryos in the north of Portugal as early as November 1974.³⁰ Moreover, testimonies of ELP militants collected in 1975 point to the worsening of the repression against the right wing, following the appointment of General Vasco Gonçalves as prime minister in July 1974, as a determining factor for the creation of clandestine networks.³¹ Therefore, Agostinho

26 Interview conducted with Nuno Barbieri on July 13, 2018.

27 José Hipólito Vaz Raposo, 'Informação completa acerca do MDLP, ELP e outros agrupamentos: Existiram? Ainda existem? Têm força? O que pretendiam?,' (n.d.), 3, Private archive José Hipólito Vaz Raposo.

28 Stefano delle Chiaie's declarations to the Parliamentary Commission on Terrorism on July 16, 1997. Available at: <http://www.parlamento.it/parlam/bicam/terror/stenografici/steno25.htm>, accessed March 17, 2019.

29 Carvalho, *Quando Portugal ardeu*, 60.

30 Tíscar, *A contra-revolução no 25 de Abril*, 162.

31 Carlos Dugos, *MDLP, ELP, O que são?* (Alfragide: Edições Acrópole, Lda, 1976).

Barbieri Cardoso's network was not the ELP, but served as a support structure in Spain for the elements that then formed this clandestine organization. Among these are, in particular, members of two right-wing organizations formed after 25 April 1974—the *Movimento de Ação Portuguesa* [MAP; Portuguese Action Movement] and the *Partido Liberal* [PL; Liberal Party]. According to MAP and ELP former militant José Carlos Craveiro Lopes, the ELP project emerged in October 1974, based on a collaboration between prominent MAP members (i.e. the nationalist militant veteran intellectual Rodrigo Emilio Alarcão Ribeiro de Melo and the legionary journalist José Rebordão Esteves Pinto) and PL members (i.e. Francisco van Uden and José Harry Almeida Araújo), who took refuge in Spain after 28 September 1974.³²

In forming the ELP, MAP members relied on existing contacts with international far-right groups, including Spaniards from the Falangist area (i.e. the lawyer José Luis Jerez Riesco and the *Guerrilleros de Cristo Rey* [Cristo Rey Fighters], led by Mariano Sánchez Covisa), Latin Americans (i.e. the Brazilian Carlos Barbieri from the World Anti-Communist League—WACL), Italians (i.e. *Avanguardia Nazionale* [National Vanguard], led by Stefano delle Chiaie), and the French (i.e. Aginter Press, led by Yves Guillou, cover name Yves Guerín Serac or Morgan, assisted by the American Jay Simon Salby, cover name Sablosky or Beaver). The latter collaboration was central to this network, dating back to the second half of the 1960s when *Organization Armée Secrète* [OAS; Secret Armed Organization] refugees in Lisbon gave, on behalf of one of the paramilitary structures of *Estado Novo*'s regime—the Portuguese Legion—clandestine action courses on surveillance, interrogation, escape, and screening techniques.³³ The support of some Western countries was also sought by ELP militants, particularly by Francisco van Uden, who, in December 1974, thanks to his privileged network of contacts (due to the fact that he is part of the Portuguese royal family), met with French officials of the Ministry of Interior and French secret services (SDECE), with Belgian diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and with Germans from NATO.³⁴ Such meetings demonstrated the unavailability of European governments to support a Portuguese anti-communist organization in exile, however.³⁵ On the North Ameri-

32 Interview conducted with José Carlos Craveiro Lopes on May 6, 2017.

33 Riccardo Marchi, 'Les réfugiés français d'Extrême-Droite au Portugal de Salazar (1945–1974)', in *Vérités et légendes d'une 'OAS internationale'*, eds. Olivier Dard and Victor Pereira (Paris: Riveneuve, 2013), 143–166.

34 Anonymous interview conducted on February 21, 2013.

35 Ibid.

can side, the literature also highlights the caution of the US administration in backing extreme-right organizations, particularly the ELP.³⁶ With this in mind, the US diplomat Henry Kissinger met with the Spanish Interior Minister to stop the Portuguese clandestine organizations, such as the ELP.³⁷ Miguel Freitas da Costa acknowledged contact between the founders of the ELP and some sectors within the western intelligence services—French and English rather than North American—thanks to the mediation of Agostinho Barbieri Cardoso, but denies any interest on the part of western governments in cooperating with the Portuguese clandestine organizations.³⁸ In the Spanish case, ‘the deep commitment of Franco’s regime to the Portuguese counter-revolution’ has been confirmed,³⁹ and is demonstrated by Prime Minister Arias Navarro inviting ELP militants to constitute a government in exile aimed at seizing the power in Portugal in case of civil war.⁴⁰ However, there is no evidence of anything more than tolerance from the Spanish authorities towards the ELP. Thus, when, in March 1975, the ELP was publicly denounced by the MFA, the Spanish authorities merely characterized it as a small group of Portuguese refugees whose mere anti-communist propaganda activity did not compromise the Spanish state’s principle of non-interference in Portuguese affairs.⁴¹

Political Identity

In its first communiqué of 6 January 1975, the ELP set out its identity by defining its objectives: 1) defending the pluricontinental dimension of the homeland threatened by decolonization; 2) maintaining Portugal outside Soviet and American orbits; and 3) opposing the Marxist infiltration of national culture.⁴² The ELP was also very careful to differentiate itself from the other

36 Maxwell, *The Making of Portuguese Democracy*, 154; Bernardino Gomes and Tiago Moreira de Sá, *Carlucci vs. Kissinger* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2008), 397.

37 Manuel Amaro Bernardo, *Memórias da Revolução* (Lisboa: Prefácio, 2004), 402.

38 Interview conducted with Miguel Freitas da Costa on June 1, 2018.

39 Cervelló, *A Revolução portuguesa*, 351.

40 Ibid., 350; Tíscar, *A contra-revolução no 25 de Abril*, 169.

41 Cervelló, *A Revolução portuguesa*, 348–349; José Manuel Duarte de Jesus, *Os relatórios confidenciais da 11 Repartição do Estado-Maior do Exército para o CEMGFA, 5 Novembro 1974/11 Junho 1975* (Coimbra: Almedina, 2013), 142.

42 Avelino Rodrigues, Cesário Borge and Mário Cardoso, *Portugal depois de Abril* (Lisboa: Intervoz, 1976). Pluricontinentalism was a geopolitical concept which defended that Portugal was not a colonial empire, but a singular nation state spread across continents.

actors in the transition: from the MFA, accused of not representing the Armed Forces, of being controlled by Marxists, and of having negotiated with terrorists in the Portuguese colonies in Africa; from the PCP, singled out as the long-standing Soviet Union in Portugal and, therefore, a priority target; from the other extreme left groups, considered as US anti-PCP instruments, but also usable by the PCP to justify repressing the right-wing; from the PS, perceived as a mere facilitator of the PCP's strategy; from the PPD (later PSD), seen as the party of the Portuguese capitalists who left Africa and embraced the European Economic Community to safeguard their economic interests; and from the CDS, whose moderation refrained the anti-communist reaction.⁴³ Furthermore, the ELP clarified its position regarding the deposed regime, affirming that '[t]he deposed regime has not been overthrown. It has long been dead and rotting'.⁴⁴ Thus, the idea of the ELP as an organization committed to the restoration of authoritarianism is superficial. The ELP's leadership considered *Estado Novo* to be a hopelessly closed period due to the actions of its own rulers, starting with Marcelo Caetano, who replaced António de Oliveira Salazar in 1969, and including General António de Spínola, who was perceived as paving the way for Marxists by joining the coup of 25 April 1974.⁴⁵

Therefore, the ELP undoubtedly stood at the extreme right of the political spectrum due to its anti-Marxist ideas and violent anti-system strategies in relation to the 25 April 1974. Its militants aimed at fighting the potential implementation of a communist regime in Portugal and proving that the majority of the Portuguese people did not support communism.⁴⁶ However, it is more problematic to define it as a fascist organization. For Raposo, the ELP 'in all its communiqués and publications does not show a fascist spirit in the correct sense of the term: statism, totalitarianism of education, interventionist economy in the extreme'.⁴⁷ Furthermore, José Carlos Craveiro Lopes recalled the failed attempt, by MAP militants within the ELP, to promote the doctrinal influence of the fascist intellectuals António José de Brito and Florentino Goulart Nogueira within the organization, which even led to the disengagement of prominent elements of the PL.⁴⁸ Despite being difficult to stamp the ELP as a fascist organization, former MDLP militant Hugo Maia recognized its

43 'ELP Secção PO no. 1—Directiva Política,' (n.d.), Private archive Luís Fernandes.

44 Rodrigues, *Portugal depois de Abril*, 144.

45 Ibid.; Anonymous interview conducted on February 21, 2013.

46 Anonymous interview conducted on February 21, 2013.

47 Raposo, 'Informação completa acerca do MDLP, ELP e outros agrupamentos,' 5.

48 Interview conducted with José Carlos Craveiro Lopes on May 6, 2017.

marked doctrinal character when compared to other anti-communist organizations due to its broader counter-revolutionary identity, including not only the PCP among its enemies, but all the parties created after 25 April 1974.⁴⁹

Finally, the ELP drew on a discourse based on Catholic identity to harness anti-Marxist feelings.⁵⁰ Despite the presence of a Catholic progressive fringe within the opposition to the authoritarian regime, the Catholic Church played a leading role in maintaining Communism as a threat to Portuguese traditional values. However, within the ELP, some militants considered that the organization made cautious use of violence because of its Catholic matrix, who believed that they had to differentiate themselves from the Marxists in this area.⁵¹ This meant that killing people for political purposes was out of question, despite having had the opportunity to do so.⁵² Although the Christian rhetoric used by the ELP was clearly part of the political culture shared by many militants, it was also a discursive strategy for promoting the group among the civil population of northern Portugal with the aim of maximizing the organization's support base and recruitment.

Recruitment, Structure and Financing

The importance of proximity networks as a push factor to involvement in the armed struggle described in the literature⁵³ is confirmed by the testimonies of former ELP militants. Miguel Freitas da Costa and Sebastião de Lancastre are examples of nationalist students from the 1960s who joined the ELP through personal contacts in 1975. A few months after his arrival in Spain in October 1974 Miguel Freitas da Costa accepted an invitation to join the ELP by his friend José Rebordão Esteves Pinto. From there, Miguel Freitas da Costa began meeting former comrades, such as the right-wing intellectuals Caetano de Melo Beirão and António José de Brito, who had been members of the MAP, and had also accepted to join the ELP.⁵⁴ Miguel Freitas da Costa also contacted Sebastião de Lancastre, who began travelling to Spain after 28 September

49 Álvaro Jorge and Hugo Maia, *Nós acusamos o M.D.L.P.! Vida, morte e ressurgimento da resistência nacional, entrevista* (n.p., 1976), 10.

50 Raposo, 'Informação completa acerca do MDLP, ELP e outros agrupamentos,' 3–5.

51 Anonymous interview conducted on February 21, 2013.

52 Ibid.

53 See, for example, Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).

54 Interview conducted with Miguel Freitas da Costa on June 1, 2018.

1974 to visit his exiled uncle, Manuel Braancamp Sobral, a renowned intellectual nationalist.⁵⁵ This is corroborated by the testimonies of two other Portuguese refugees in Spain, whose invitations to join the ELP came through their father's networks: Luís Cordovil, son of Luís Manuel Cordovil, a former legionary detained in Portugal on 28 September 1974; and Francisco Bulhosa, son of the businessman Manuel Bulhosa, provider of finance for the anti-communist clandestine networks.⁵⁶ Therefore, there is no evidence of the existence, as advanced by some literature, of a centralized recruitment mechanism, carried out by Francisco van Uden, Nuno Barbieri, or Miguel Freitas da Costa at the Nossa Senhora de Fátima Foundation's headquarters in Madrid.⁵⁷ Francisco van Uden himself denied that the Foundation, active in providing humanitarian support to Portuguese refugees in Spain, served as an ELP's recruitment center.⁵⁸

This recruitment strategy based on proximity networks reflects ELP's cellular structure, which began to be implemented between February and March 1975, according to van Uden and to military intelligence.⁵⁹ Each cell was composed of three to seven elements and different cells had different functions: political analysis, intelligence gathering, operational assessment, psychological action among the population, fundraising, logistical support for clandestine militants, and armed operations.⁶⁰ Cells contacted each other through their leader, who according to van Uden, only had contact with himself and half a dozen other people.⁶¹ How the cells were run was exemplified by Sebastião de Lancastre's experience. Having accepted the invitation to join the ELP, Lancastre formed his own cell composed of family members and friends and focused on the production and distribution of clandestine anti-communist propaganda. This cell also offered logistical support by storing materials to assemble explosive devices delivered by ELP militants based in Madrid.⁶²

The ELP was clearly organized according to a pyramidal structure, in which the base—the cells—was largely stationed in Portugal, while the vertex—the Provisional Command composed of a dozen militants—was in Spain to guarantee the propagandist and logistical rear-guard for those operating in Portu-

55 Interview conducted with Sebastião de Lancastre on May 30, 2018.

56 Nuno Alves Caetano, *Prisioneiros de Caxias* (Lisboa: Chiado Editora, 2014), 119, 121.

57 Dâmaso, *A invasão spinolista*, 155; Tiscar, *A contra-revolução no 25 de Abril*, 178.

58 Bernardo, *Memórias da Revolução*, 398.

59 *Ibid.*, 399; Jesus, *Os relatórios confidenciais*, 165.

60 'Instruções práticas para a formação de uma célula,' Private archive Luís Fernandes.

61 Bernardo, *Memórias da Revolução*, 399.

62 Interview conducted with Sebastião de Lancastre on May 30, 2018.

gal, as well as the support to militants crossing the border.⁶³ ELP militants in Spain mainly stayed in Madrid at the Santa Zita Convent on Calle Villaviciosa number 24, in the Campamento neighbourhood,⁶⁴ and obtained logistical support from the restaurant *L'Appuntamento* managed by Italian neo-fascists of *Avanguardia Nazionale*,⁶⁵ and by two companies—*Sociedade Mariano SA* and *Tecnomotor SA*—run by José Blanco Santos in partnership with Guerin Serac and Castor.⁶⁶ However, when it comes to precisely defining the evolution of the organization's structure over its two years of existence and its exact sectors, the diverse data sources collected and examined present slightly different, and sometimes confusing, information. This has been attributed to the rigid hierarchical structure of the organization, which did not allow information to circulate freely, creating different interpretations and perceptions.⁶⁷ Memoirs tackling this subject outline the existence of at least four sectors: the political, the administrative, the logistical, and the operational.⁶⁸ An official ELP document states that the above mentioned Provisional Command, also called Provisional Directory, was in charge of nominating the heads of the different sectors of the organization, who composed the National Liberation Council and were responsible for electing the Executive Directory and determining the organization's ideological and political orientation.⁶⁹ Handwritten documents by former ELP militants found in private archives show a more complex structure, possibly elaborated in the late 1976 phase. According to these documents, the ELP was composed of a Central Organization and of a Territorial Organization. The first included the Interim Command, with the functions of direction and coordination, composed of five sections: Politics, Psychological Action, Information, Operations, and Logistics. The second operated in the North, Centre, and South of Portugal and was composed of three sections: the geographical base, organized in cells which had a council and district delegates; the professional base, including networks of lawyers, doctors, nurses, journalists, and police officers; and the operational cross-section base, encompassing liaison officers called 'minutemen'.⁷⁰

63 Raposo, 'Informação completa acerca do MDLP, ELP e outros agrupamentos,' 7; Anonymous interview conducted on February 21, 2013.

64 Interview conducted with José Carlos Craveiro Lopes on May 6, 2017.

65 Luís Fernandes, *Testamento de um miliciano* (Lisboa: Contracorrente, 2018), 265.

66 Carvalho, *Quando Portugal ardeu*, 67.

67 Anonymous interview conducted on February 21, 2013.

68 Bernardo, *Memórias da Revolução*, 399.

69 'ELP—Directiva Geral de Organização no 1,' Private archive Luís Fernandes.

70 Handwritten documents, Private archive Luís Fernandes.

At both central and territorial levels, the assignment of responsibilities was clearly defined, although historiography has never been able to clearly identify those responsible for the different sectors. A handwritten note found in Captain Luis Fernandes' private archive identifies the code names of those responsible for all five sectors of the Central Organization.⁷¹ On the one hand, there is consensus on who shared the vertex responsibility, including people like José Rebordão Esteves Pinto in the political direction, Francisco van Uden in the operational sector, and Pedro Soares Martinez and Manuel Cotta Dias in fundraising. On the other hand, there are some question marks around some people who have been assigned particular responsibilities within the ELP or even simple membership, as well as around people who have never been connected to the ELP, despite having possibly been involved in it. For instance, the former PL president, José Harry de Almeida Araújo, who has been assigned the ELP's political cabinet, did not mention any links to the ELP in his memoir published in 2012.⁷² The same applies to Agostinho Barbieri Cardoso, who has been connected to the ELP's information sector and is said to have had a contact within the ELP in Madrid, the former member of the political police José Manuel da Cunha Passo.⁷³ In the case of those who may have actually been part of the ELP, there is the case of the nationalist veteran, legionary and MAP member, codenamed 'Rodrigues' who was pinpointed by José Carlos Craveiro Lopes as an unidentified key player in the operations of the ELP.⁷⁴ Therefore, the most recent witnesses suggested a more critical look at the rigorous structuring fixed by the primary sources produced by the organization. Miguel Freitas da Costa, for example, warned that some militants may have played a prominent role in some cells, but there has never been a central figure in the different sectors across the clandestine network.⁷⁵ Even the prominent role of the ELP's own political leader, José Rebordão Esteves Pinto, is questionable, considering that he is said to have been very unresponsive to the rules of operating underground, causing the detection and surveillance of ELP's leadership meetings in Verín and Salamanca, in February 1975.⁷⁶

In terms of financing, the ELP's fundraising capacity was much lower than that of other clandestine organizations, such as the MDLP. Fundraising efforts

71 'Madrid,' Private archive Luís Fernandes.

72 José Almeida Araújo, *A Vida aos Pedaços* (Coimbra: Almedina, 2012).

73 Josep Sanchez Cervelló, *Cronologia das organizações de direita, 1973–1976* (Coimbra: Almedina, 1994), 8; Tíscar, *A contra-revolução no 25 de Abril*, 158.

74 Interview conducted with José Carlos Craveiro Lopes on May 6, 2017.

75 Interview conducted with Miguel Freitas da Costa on June 1, 2018.

76 Carvalho, *Quando Portugal ardeu*, 86.

were led by former *Estado Novo's* minister Manuel Cotta Dias and by Professor Pedro Soares Martinez among, mainly, businessmen from the north of Portugal who had been linked to the authoritarian regime. However, such an involvement of entrepreneurs was always accompanied by economic interests. For instance, the banker and industrialist António Champalimaud supported Colonel Sigfredo Costa Campos and Colonel Gilberto Santos and Castro in connecting former combatants with the ELP in order to fight against Mozambique's and Angola's independence, because he had economic interests in these countries. Miguel Freitas da Costa mentioned the possibility that some funding may have come from the French and Spanish intelligence services. However, this did not happen repeatedly, as in MDLP's case.⁷⁷ Thus, the scarcity of funds within the ELP, which meant self-financing was inevitable for its militants, influenced the organization's membership. MDLP militant José Luís Andrade, for example, recalled meeting a comrade in the MDLP who had previously tried to enlist him into the ELP and who had changed organization due the greater financial and logistical capacity of the MDLP.⁷⁸

Operational Dimension

The ELP acted under the rules of subversive warfare, where numerical inferiority was overcome by the unwavering faith of the militants and their strict adherence to the principles of hierarchy, discipline, authority, and security in clandestine houses, in communications with the outside, and in everyday habits.⁷⁹ The ELP outlined three phases of revolutionary war. However, in the documents found in private archives only the first one is explained—the expulsion of the communists from power—which had five stages: 1) identifying the friend and the enemy, the latter being the PCP and its supporters; 2) providing an alternative in terms of individuals and political solutions; 3) organizing the Portuguese people who are against the implementation of socialism in Portugal; 4) collaborating with anti-Marxist forces to circumvent the ELP's structural minority; and 5) breaking the solidarity among the pro-25 April 1974 forces.⁸⁰

The start of the ELP's armed actions was preceded by increased leafletting across Portugal announcing the beginning of urban guerrilla actions against

77 Interview conducted with Miguel Freitas da Costa on June 1, 2018.

78 Interview conducted with José Luís Andrade on April 21, 2018.

79 Raposo, 'Informação completa acerca do MDLP, ELP e outros agrupamentos,' 7.

80 'ELP—Seção POr no 1—Directiva Política,' Private archive Luís Fernandes.

the communists.⁸¹ The actual armed phase was launched on 26 May 1975, with the assault on the building housing PCP's work centre and headquarters of the *Movimento Democrático Português/Comissões Democráticas Eleitorais* [MDP/CDE; Portuguese Democratic Movement/Democratic Electoral Commission] in Bragança and from that day until November 1975, the ELP carried out three dozen bomb attacks.⁸² To this end, the organization distributed written instructions among its militants for the preparation of pyrotechnic and electrical detonators and explosive and incendiary devices,⁸³ and leaned on the aforementioned support of both Spanish and foreign comrades, especially the *Guerrilleros de Cristo Rey*, the French from Aginter Press, and the Italians from *Avanguardia Nazionale*, *Ordine Nuovo* and *Fronte Nazionale*.⁸⁴ This international network had a particular responsibility for ELP's clandestine weapons laboratory, headed by an Italian from *Fronte Nazionale*, Eliodoro Pomar,⁸⁵ and set up mobile radio stations for anti-communist propaganda along the border with Portugal in collaboration with Pomar, Carlo Digilio, Giancarlo Rognoni and the Frenchman Jean-Marie Laurent.⁸⁶ It is important to note that ELP's international network was merely contingent and determined by the fact that in the mid-1970s several far-right militants, from different countries, took refuge under Franco's regime, forming a microcosm in Madrid.

The focus on armed action increased in the summer of 1975. In the face of the widespread anti-communist uprising in the north of the country, the ELP pursued a strategy of multiplying attacks to compel the PCP and the MFA to radicalize security measures. According to the ELP, the spiral of reaction-repression would lead the exasperated population to rise up against communists.⁸⁷ This was portrayed in the pages of the ELP's official newspaper *Libertação* [Liberation], which offered instructions on the construction of handcrafted explosives, such as Molotov cocktails.⁸⁸ At this stage, the ELP became a true part of the broader anti-communist front composed of other clandestine networks

81 Jesus, *Os relatório confidenciais*, 167.

82 Cervelló, *Cronologia das organizações de direita*, 10.

83 'ELP—Inf no 1—Directiva Geral Sobre Informação,' Private archive Luís Fernandes.

84 Interview conducted with José Carlos Craveiro Lopes on May 6, 2017.

85 Carlo Digilio's declarations to the Italian Court on May 9, 1994, and March 26, 1997. Available at: <http://www.strano.net/stragi/tstragi/salvini/salvin46.htm>, accessed March 17, 2019.

86 Matteo Albanese and Pablo del Hierro, *Transnational Fascism in the Twentieth Century: Spain, Italy and the Global Neo-Fascist Network* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 50; Tísicar, *A contra-revolução no 25 de Abril*, 158.

87 'Preparação . . .,' Private archive Luís Fernandes.

88 'Cocktail Molotov,' *Libertação*, no. 1, August 1975, 4.

and mainstream anti-communist parties. ELP militants were present in many assaults against leftist party headquarters, tailing the street demonstrations from which the attacks departed and ensuring armed coverage of the assaults. José Carlos Craveiro Lopes recalled the assault on the headquarters of the PCP in the city of Alcobaça on 16 August 1975, which included the harassment of the PCP's leader, Álvaro Cunhal, and gunshots against communists, as well as support and involvement from local mainstream parties like the PS, the PPD and the CDS.⁸⁹ Sebastião de Lancastre also recounted the assault on the PCP headquarters in the city of Ponte de Lima in September 1975, which was carried out by right-wing individuals belonging to the CDS, to the MDLP, and to the ELP. He highlighted that these assaults were always based on the previous politicization of the population, which was also carried out by local ELP cells.⁹⁰ These collaborations, however, should not be exaggerated. Nuno Barbieri denies any link between the ELP and the PS⁹¹ and Miguel Freitas da Costa is convinced that the large anti-communist parties had very little interest in being linked to the ELP in 1975, although proximity between local PS, PPD and CDS cadres and ELP militants was not excluded.⁹² However, such a combination of right-wing individuals from different organizations in the escalation of street demonstrations against the left that ended in violence, linked to the fact that militants were often recruited to conduct armed actions from the world of micro-crime and not given much information regarding who was giving the orders. This resulted in very porous relationships between the different clandestine armed organizations and the usurpation of each other's actions, claimed on an almost first come, first served basis.⁹³

The number of armed actions conducted by the ELP denotes a good operational capacity, as also demonstrated by the success of a group directed by Van Uden to steal two hundred kilos of dynamite from the Portuguese Explosives Society on 6 September 1975.⁹⁴ However, the organization also had significant setbacks: on 25 September 1975, in Lisbon, two ELP militants died in a car explosion because they had been using radio detonators in the vicinity of radio antennas which they intended to detonate; and in Porto, an ELP car carrying fake documents and weapons was accidentally seized by the authorities.⁹⁵

89 Interview conducted with José Carlos Craveiro Lopes on May 6, 2017.

90 Interview conducted with Sebastião de Lancastre on May 30, 2018.

91 Interview conducted with Nuno Barbieri on July 13, 2018.

92 Interview conducted with Miguel Freitas da Costa on June 1, 2018.

93 Da Silva, *Narratives of Political Violence*, 138.

94 Cervelló, *Cronologia das organizações de direita*, 15.

95 Interview conducted with Sebastião de Lancastre on May 30, 2018.

Moreover, according to Raposo, the ELP's subversive capacity was not so much due to the number of its militants, which is difficult to estimate, as to the ability to convince the press of having authored most of the armed actions that began in May 1975 and spread throughout 1976.⁹⁶

External and Internal Perceptions of the ELP and Political Infiltrations

The ELP was a marginal phenomenon, having built its reputation less on its own operative capacity and more on promotion by the civil and military revolutionary left. Several testimonies point to the hostility suffered by the ELP from the other protagonists of the anti-communist resistance. MDLP number two, Commander Alpoim Calvão, stressed the fact that it was only anti-communism and no other factor, which drew its purposes and forms of action close to those of the ELP.⁹⁷ Major Sanches Osório—minister of the First Provisional Government of the transition in Portugal and then closely associated with the MDLP and the Maria da Fonte Plan in exile—recalled his disappointment when meeting ELP militants among anti-communist refugees in Madrid.⁹⁸ In his memoir, Osório defined the ELP as ‘an undemocratic fascist movement . . . led by a pseudo-enlightened “crypt-nazi” tendency’,⁹⁹ which was immersed in the clandestine milieu of the ‘heavily reactionary right’.¹⁰⁰ As for its operational capacity, Paradela de Abreu described the shortage of ELP's clandestine staff, who only had sufficient members to fill a restaurant table.¹⁰¹ On the MFA's side, according to Colonel Nuno Fisher Lopes Pires, regular information about the ELP gave rise to the idea that ‘a group was coming together with very theoretical wars but, in practice, they did nothing’.¹⁰² General António Pires Veloso, commander of the Northern Military Region at the end of 1975, portrayed the ELP as a ‘more myth than reality’ organization.¹⁰³ These testimonies are backed by the experiences of ELP militants. The Italian neo-fascist Vincenzo Vinciguerra,

96 Raposo, ‘Informação completa acerca do MDLP, ELP e outros agrupamentos,’ 7.

97 Guilherme de Alpoim Calvão, *De Conakry ao MDLP* (Lisboa: Editorial Intervenção, 1976), 146.

98 Dâmaso, *A invasão spinolista*, 133–134.

99 José Sanches Osório, *O MFA no banco dos réus* (Lisboa: Infinito, 1976), 63.

100 Maria João da Câmara, *Sanches Osório* (Alfragide: Oficina do Livro, 2019), 220.

101 Waldemar Paradela de Abreu, *Do 25 de abril ao 25 de novembro* (Lisboa: Editorial Intervenção, 1983), 121.

102 Bernardo, *Memórias da Revolução*, 419.

103 Carvalho, *Quando Portugal ardeu*, 351.

close to the ELP in Madrid, portrays the organization's milieu as 'proactive, as all exiles' milieu probably are, living on illusory hopes and spending their days in the making of almost always unrealizable plans.¹⁰⁴ Miguel Freitas da Costa referred to a poorly organized structure, with a virtual hierarchy and much independence of action.¹⁰⁵

In this context, the ELP's fame was only caused by the international press coverage of its public denunciation by the commander of the Northern Military Region, Colonel Eurico Corvacho, on 23 March 1975, which increased its recruitment capacity and the emergence of multiple emulative actions signed by the organization.¹⁰⁶ For Miguel Freitas da Costa, this dynamic served a mutual interest: the ELP needed to increase its reputation among anti-communists to raise funds and militants, and the revolutionary faction of the MFA needed to increase awareness of armed fascist danger.¹⁰⁷ Three MDLP militants support these affirmations: Captain Hugo Maia confirmed that he had become aware of the ELP through Corvacho's denunciation and tried unsuccessfully to enlist in its ranks, which demonstrates the ELP's incipient structure on the ground,¹⁰⁸ José Luís Andrade pointed to the ELP's meagre implementation in Portugal, and even more so in Africa, where the rumour of its integration as an anti-communist mercenary force was only due to the international press coverage of the use by Captain Alfredo Aparício of the ELP emblem in the South African column that he integrated in southern Angola in support of the FNLA,¹⁰⁹ and a MDLP militant stressed that the ELP was much smaller, less credible and operationally able than the MDLP, although it had a greater impact on the public opinion.¹¹⁰

The role of the MFA in promoting the existence of the ELP leads to the sensitive topic of the infiltration and instrumentalization of the organization by the civil and military revolutionary left present in the institutions of the transition. The ELP was infiltrated and monitored by the MFA from the beginning: the military intelligence detected several trips by Aginter Press personnel between Madrid and Lisbon on the eve of 28 September 1974 and 11 March 1975;¹¹¹ and between 1974 and 1975, the Northern Military Region Headquar-

104 Letter from Vincenzo Vinciguerra to Riccardo Marchi on July 3, 2011, Private archive Riccardo Marchi.

105 Interview conducted with Miguel Freitas da Costa on June 1, 2018.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 Jorge and Maia, *Nós acusamos o M.D.L.P.*, 10.

109 Interview conducted with José Luís Andrade on April 21, 2018.

110 Da Silva, *Narratives of Political Violence*, 137–138.

111 Tíscar, *A contra-revolução no 25 de Abril*, 148.

ters (HQ/RMN) received substantial financial resources to oversee the ELP.¹¹² Colonel Corvacho, head of the HQ/RMN, was thus able to list as an informant the former legionnaire José Pinto Ranito, who had been an ELP militant since its first founding meetings. Thanks to Ranito's collaboration, Colonel Corvacho started reporting back on the ELP as early as 17 February 1975—that is, just a month after the official founding of the organization. According to a military report drawn up by General Fisher Lopes Pires of the Armed Forces General Staff, in February 1975, the two main ELP meetings of Verín (1–2 February) and Salamanca (16 February) had been surveyed, uncovering the most prominent militants of the organization, including the foreigners Yves Guérin-Sérac and Jay Simon Salby.¹¹³ Furthermore, the national and international press were also prompt in revealing all the meeting places of ELP militants in Madrid, Vigo, Verín, Malaga, Marbella, Puebla de Sanabria, Fuentes de Oñoros, Valverde del Fresno, and Valencia de Alcántara. Francisco van Uden confirmed the constant vigilance over the ELP that he himself perceived on all his trips to Portugal. In one of these trips, organized by Ranito, he aimed at recruiting military men for the ELP and was photographed by the MFA next to a car loaded with guns.

The revolutionary faction of the MFA seems to have used the ELP to further its own strategy. The public denunciation of the ELP by Colonel Corvacho happened one month after discovering the organization and twelve days after 11 March 1975. This date marks General Spínola's attempted coup to supposedly prevent the killing of his supporters within the armed forces, which had been, according to information provided by the Spanish secret services to the ELP in Madrid, orchestrated by the extreme left and known as *Matança de Páscoa* [Easter Massacre]. This temporal succession is what led to the suspicion, within some sectors of the Portuguese right, of the ELP's instrumentalization by the revolutionary faction of the MFA to push General Spínola into action and to annihilate him. General Spínola's attempt was quickly defeated, provoking another repressive wave against the right, which meant new arrests and escapes abroad, this time including General Spínola himself, who sought exile in Brazil.¹¹⁴

112 Bernardo, *Memórias da Revolução*, 416.

113 Tíscar, *A contra-revolução no 25 de Abril*, 111, 163–166.

114 Anonymous interview conducted on February 21, 2013.

The Dissolution of the ELP

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.¹¹⁵ Historiography considers this date the turning point in the Portuguese transition, from which the revolutionary process was stopped and the democratization process normalized within the western canon.¹¹⁶ This date had repercussions on the clandestine extreme right, as the armed organizations entered a demobilization process which was over by mid-1976.¹¹⁷ The latest ELP political document is dated 30 November 1976. However, in April 1976 there was an agreement between military personnel close to General Ramalho Eanes (protagonist of 25 November 1975 and future President of the Republic) and the former PL leader Almeida Araújo to stop the international financing of the organization and, simultaneously, the Spanish Army ordered the ELP to surrender their weapons.¹¹⁸ In the same vein, a document from the US Embassy in Lisbon, dated March 1976, informs of the anti-communist officers' efforts towards clandestine organizations to limit their actions.¹¹⁹

In this context, some militants disengaged from the ELP right after 25 November 1975. This was particularly the case when a date for elections was set.¹²⁰ Miguel Freitas da Costa affirmed that the ELP was simply dissolved after 25 November without a central order,¹²¹ and Sebastião de Lancastre recounted having autonomously dissolved his cell without receiving any demobilization orders.¹²² The reasons for such a swift dissolution are related to two factors. On the one hand, Angola achieved independence on 11 November 1975, which made ELP's struggle against decolonization senseless. On the other hand, the most committed militants tolerated with increasing difficulty their forced involvement in their protectors' dirty wars, such as the Spanish government's anti-ETA efforts and the Moroccan government's anti-communist oper-

115 Fernando Rosas, *Lisboa Revolucionária 1908–1975* (Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2007).

116 Maria Inácia Rezola, 'The Military, 25 April and the Portuguese Transition to Democracy,' *Portuguese Journal of Social Science* 7, no. 1 (2008): 3–16.

117 Da Silva, *Narratives of Political Violence*, 123–125.

118 Cervelló, *A Revolução portuguesa*, 351; Cervelló, *Cronologia das organizações de direita*, 19; Anonymous interview conducted on February 21, 2013.

119 US Embassy Lisbon, '1976 Annual Assessment,' March 1, 1976, *Wikileaks*, https://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1976STATE062703_b.html, accessed April 14, 2019.

120 Anonymous interview conducted on February 21, 2013.

121 Interview conducted with Miguel Freitas da Costa on June 1, 2018.

122 Interview conducted with Sebastião de Lancastre on May 30, 2018.

ations.¹²³ In this context, Francisco van Uden started disengaging from the ELP by the end of 1975.¹²⁴ Other militants chose to disengage later on, particularly after being reassured that they would have immunity from prosecution upon returning to Portugal. This was the case for, for instance, José Carlos Craveiro Lopes and José Rebordão Esteves Pinto, who returned to Portugal in September 1976 after being told by military officers from their personal circles that they would not be prosecuted. This route also involved negotiations with the Revolution Council, which was confirmed by José Almeida Araújo, cleared in May 1976, and was common to several underground militants.¹²⁵

However, a few militants refused to demobilize, converging in the grey zone also occupied by former funders of the clandestine networks and Portuguese veterans of those who fought in Africa. The latter were organized in Portugal under clandestine organizations as the *Comandos Operacionais de Defesa da Civilização Ocidental* [CODECO; Operational Commands for the Defense of Western Civilization] and the new *Movimento Anticomunista Português* [MAP; Anticommunist Portuguese Movement]. They were responsible for dozens of bombings between the end of 1975 and 1976, and their actions continued until the early 1980s. They were, however, independent from the clandestine organizations of 1975 and were criticized by them. Thus, paradoxically, the year with the deadliest impact of terrorist actions in Portugal—1976—coincided with the dénouement of anti-communist social movements, as well as with the dissolution of one of its most famous armed organizations, the ELP.

Conclusion

The triangulation between the data already present, although scattered, in the literature, the scarce memorialist data, and the new data collected, for the first time, in private archives and through interviews, allowed us to significantly revise the role of the ELP in the 1975–1976-armed counter-revolution. This organization was never as rigidly structured and compartmentalized as it appeared to be in its planning documents or in the affirmations of its militants. On the contrary, from its foundation, it was permeable to infiltration, surveillance, and repression by the revolutionary factions of the transition. Its unquestionable links with the international extreme right and the Portuguese anti-communist

123 Ibid.

124 Bernardo, *Memórias da Revolução*, 403.

125 Araújo, *A vida aos pedaços*, 201; Da Silva, *Narratives of Political Violence*, 125–126.

milieu do not make it an important element of the alleged black international, nor the central actor of the broad Portuguese anti-communist front of 1975.

The scarcity of logistical and financial means, as well as institutional support, mean that the role played by the ELP in the anti-communist armed resistance cannot be considered materially determinant. In comparative terms, the most important achievement of the ELP was the psychological pressure on its opponents, which was produced by magnifying its image through the national and international media rather than by the real effectiveness of its strategy of revolutionary warfare. In the year and a half of its operation, the ELP did not leave the proximity networks of its founders. As an armed organization, the ELP benefited from integration into the broader anti-communist social movement, mainly thanks to the direct confrontation of the rising phase of the protest cycle in the hot summer of 1975. It resented the post-25 November 1975 reflux phase. As an armed organization, the ELP benefited from integration into the broader anti-communist social movement. This was principally due to direct confrontation with the Left during a phase of rising protest throughout the hot summer of 1975. However, the ELP resented the post-25 November 1975 reflux phase, when most of its militants chose demobilization. In reaction some of its militants chose to join a hybrid anti-communist structure (active between October 1975 and July 1976) that carried out dozens of bombings, resulting in four deaths.

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