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Portugal and anti-racism

**“Don't ask me to be calm
because I'm tired of your
requests. How long will you
keep saying I'm the same as
those who want to kill me?”**

Publication date: Wednesday 19 August 2020

- IV Online magazine - 2020 - IV547 - August 2020 -

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"How long will they accuse me of being responsible for the racism I'm a victim of? How long will they keep saying I'm the same as those who rape me and want to kill me? How long will they keep asking me to wait while they kill or threaten to kill a part of me? Until when? (...) The only decency I expect from those who insist on denying or relativizing racism is that they have the intelligence and courage to kill racism before it kills us."

Until when?

*"If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!"*

Claude Mckay [1]

In recent years there have been thousands of complaints of racial discrimination made to the competent body, the Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination, not to mention the hundreds of cases of racism which have led to complaints in the courts. A few dozen of these cases have even given rise to a huge public debate in the country. I will just remind you of a few of those that have given rise to public discussion.

In February 2015, dozens of police officers tortured six black citizens in the Alfragide police station and, while assaulting and torturing them, the officers made racist insults against the victims.

In February 2107, the Roma community of Santo Aleixo da Restauração, in the municipality of Moura, was the target of death threats painted on the walls of the village, with swastikas drawn on the walls, arson attacks that spared no homes, animals, cars and even the church building where the families held religious worship. In the style of the Nazi pogroms.

In the same month of February 2017, a controversy about school segregation also broke out over the existence of a Famicão school where the students were all of Roma ethnicity.

In July 2017, the president of the parish council of Cabeça Gorda, in the municipality of Beja, refused to allow a member of the Roma community to be buried and a wake to be held for them at the local mortuary.

In January 2018, a group of parents of 4th grade children at the Major David Neto Elementary School in Portimão denounced mistreatment, racism, xenophobia and discrimination against the students.

In 2018, on Saint John's night, Nicol Quinayas was assaulted by the security guard of a public transport bus in Porto. The victim and those with her reported racist insults. There was also a great debate in Portuguese society at the time.

In January 2019, the Coxi family, residing in the Chã-charos Valley district, commonly known as Jamaica, was savagely assaulted by police officers.

In December 2019, the Cape Verdean student, Luis Giovani Rodrigues, was beaten to death in Bragança. The details of the beatings and his death were concealed for almost a week.

In January 2020, Claudia Simões was assaulted by police officer Carlos Canha at a bus stop in Amadora, and later in the police car that drove her to the police station, because her eight-year-old daughter was not carrying her pass.

In February 2020, Moussa Marega was the target of continued racist chants from Guimarães supporters. After facing the insults alone, he left the pitch in a hugely courageous gesture.

In June 2020, Evaristo Martinho premeditatedly murdered the black actor Bruno Candé Marques in broad daylight on a Moscovide street, after three days of racist insults and explicit death threats.

The election of three Black members of parliament, from the social movements, with a track record in fighting against racism, at the same time as the election of an openly racist lawmaker, has made the expression of racism even more visible. [2] The debate became more explicit and extreme, with the eruption of a torrent of hatred in the public arena, through social media, in broadcast media and the political arena. As the escalation intensified, everyday racism found its voice in the racist lawmaker, who became the sounding board of expressions that had previously remained concealed.

The growing terrorist onslaught by the extreme right in public spaces, from June, with a wave of racist "graffiti" on several buildings and murals in the Lisbon metropolitan area, with explicit threats of violence and death, is in line with this escalation. The escalation culminated in the attack on the SOS headquarters, the ku klux klan parade and death threats against activists and elected officials. [3] As a clear incitement to hatred and violence, these latest threats clearly cross all the red lines of political dispute. And they are the natural consequence of the racist escalation that the far-right lawmaker, André Ventura, has led, giving legitimacy to the terrorist action of neo-Nazi groups. The laxity with which the parliamentary parties have dealt with André Ventura's racist agenda, whether as a result of omission, agreement or political tactics, has created the conditions for the blatant affirmation of racism in public spaces. André Ventura, who brought the racist discourse of the street into the Assembly of the Republic, and all those who, by omission, agreement or silence, choose not to confront it or to feed it, are to blame for the terrorist excesses of the extreme right. The financial mercenaries of the country's economic elite, who finance a project that is suffocating democracy, will also answer for the misfortune that the rise of fascism and racism brings.

In fact, it is becoming impossible to sweep racism under the carpet. The succession of cases of racist violence has helped to lift the veil on the structural character of racism in Portuguese society. Denial and the lack of discussion about its existence and its sometimes tragic consequences, as in the recent murder of actor Bruno Candé Marques, are no longer sustainable. To insist on denying racism or relativising its dimension and consequences in the lives of thousands of our fellow citizens, means not assuming responsibility for defending democracy, making us collectively complicit in the threat that hangs over it. There can be no collective life or possibility of a viable democratic society, so long as some of its members are systematically violated and excluded from the national fabric. Unfortunately, in the face of all the evidence, there are still those who continue to demonstrate extraordinary ethical pettiness and a disconcerting political dishonesty by systematically and hysterically insisting on equating anti-racism with racism. Have any of these people who ask for calm, restraint and common sense from the victims of racism been verbally or physically assaulted because they are Black or Roma in public space? Have they ever been prevented from entering a public space, from renting a house, or from getting a job, or have they been paid a third less for doing the same job as their colleague? Have they been persecuted and their private lives devastated to the point of exhaustion? Has they been blackmailed or persecuted ad hominem on a permanent and systematic basis? Have they ever been

ambushed by the extreme right in the middle of the street? Have they been forced to move because they fear for their safety and that of their family? Have they had to change their telephone or social media account because they can no longer stand insults and threats of all kinds, including death threats? Have any of these people experienced these things?

That is why, in the face of the terrorist action of the extreme right, the demand for calm from those who think that to talk about racism is to foster it, becomes unbearable and sounds like indifference to racist suffering and violence. For a long time, neo-Nazis and racist murderers, like the one who killed Bruno Candé Marques, have been feeding off this indifference and the relativism of those who want to be "sensible" in order not to confront racism. Calmness and restraint and/or silence in the face of racist violence is a form of complicity which no democrat can accede to. As long as the moral and ethical value of racism does not carry the same weight as other kinds of violence that offend human dignity, we will continue to have institutional alienation and little political investment in the fight against racism.

Do not ask me for calm or restraint because I am tired of your requests. How long will you accuse me of being responsible for the racism of which I am a victim? How long will you continue to say that I am the same as those who rape me and want to kill me? How long will you keep asking me to wait while you kill or threaten to kill a part of me? Until when? Or have they not yet realized that any death or threat of racist death is a death for the very idea of the values of humanity they so much like to preach? Only acceptance of the death of the very idea of humanity can lead a political community not to feel itself threatened by death threats based on racial hatred. Therefore, the only decency I expect from those who insist on denying or relativising racism is that they have the intelligence and courage to kill racism before it kills us. For me, as for the overwhelming majority of racialized people, it is increasingly difficult to breathe this air, and it is already unbearable for us to see society and its institutions whistling to the side in the face of our suffering and pain. We have survived because we have never lacked the courage to loosen the suffocation of racism that stifles our lives. We will continue to do so, no matter what the cost. It remains to be seen how long society and its institutions will continue to lack the courage to face the monster. Either we kill the monster or it will kill us all.

That is why, if we want a common collective future, there is only one choice: to defend democracy while there is time, facing with determination the barbarity of the extreme right.

14 August 2020

Exclusive text of Mamadou Ba for the Portuguese newspaper [Expresso](#). Translated by International Viewpoint and published with the authorization of the author.

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[1] From the poem "If We Must Die" by Festus Claudius "Claude" McKay (1889–1948) Jamaican writer and poet.

[2] The three Black women members of Parliament are Joacine Katar Moreira an independent, Beatriz Gomez Diaz of the Left Bloc and Romualda Fernandes of the Socialist Party. André Ventura was elected to parliament representing the party he founded Chega! (Enough!) which is a rightwing, nationalist, populist party.

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[3] Those targeted include Joacine Katar Moreira, Beatriz Gomez Diaz, Mariana Mortágua another Left Bloc MP, and Mamadou Ba, leader of SOS Racismo.