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The populist far right and the intersection of anti-immigration and antifeminist agendas: the Portuguese case

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Abstract

This article argues that far right antifeminist and gendered narratives are not separate from their ethnonationalist/racist purposes; in fact, they are at their core and cannot be analyzed independently. It reflects on the intersections of antifeminist and anti-immigration agendas in the Portuguese far right by critically analyzing PNR/Ergue-te's and Chega's discursive positions on immigration, feminism, and gender equality, and initiates a theoretical dialogue between feminist postcolonial peace and security studies and populist far-right studies. This shows how these political actors convey ethnonationalist, racist and anti-multiculturalist messages by co-opting women's rights agendas (femonationalism), whilst resisting and opposing feminism. Femonationalism, ostensibly disruptive of their own conservative ideology, is thus re-oriented to attack feminism – accused of failing the goal of serving all women and of being co-opted by 'gender ideology'. It concludes that the mobilization of gendered and racialized tropes serves the construction of Europe and Portugal as being at risk from 'external' forces, re-inscribing securitarian discourses in the political sphere.

Keywords

gender ideology, anti-immigration, femonationalism, far-right, populism

Introduction

This article demonstrates that antifeminist agendas (often labelled as anti-gender ideology by proponents) are key to understand how ethnonationalist, xenophobic and racist discourses are forwarded by far-right parties in Portugal and across Europe. Therefore, it focuses on the intersections between antifeminism, including femonationalism¹ (Farris, 2017), and anti-immigration² agendas, examining how gendered and racialized tropes are used in conjunction in far-right propaganda.

We therefore ask: how do these political parties negotiate apparent contradictions between blaming migrants/foreigners for not adhering to ‘European’ gender equality values, while simultaneously adopting antifeminist positions? To address this question, we conduct a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the stances articulated by the far-right political parties Chega [Enough], and Partido Nacional Renovador (PNR) [National Renewal Party], recently renamed as Ergue-te! [Rise up!]). We follow Fairclough’s (1995) mode of CDA, which interrelates objects of analysis (written, oral, and visual texts), processes by which the object is produced and received, and the socio-historical conditions wherein they are enmeshed. It does not only require description, but also interpretation and transdisciplinary analyses of power relations and the discourse’s effect in producing inequalities and social wrongs.

For this purpose, we collected and examined materials produced by Chega and Ergue-te, such as traditional political documents (electoral programs, official site contents, media articles and interviews) as well as the parties’ Facebook posts from May 2019-June 2020 – corresponding to the European Parliamentary (26/05/2019) and national legislative election (6/10/2019) campaigns. Subsequent materials were collected less systematically, based on their direct relevance to the article’s scope; these include verbalizations from Chega’s II national convention (September 2020), Ventura’s presidential campaign (January 2021), and the recent creation of the Women of Chega wing (March 2021). By choosing to combine social media with political document analysis, our research responds to the call to broaden the range of data sources to rely on for developing knowledge (Sakki and Petterson, 2016). Indeed, research on formal political actors has often concentrated on conventional media and official party websites, but studies increasingly demonstrate that social media offer a novel public sphere whose digital and communicative features allow politicians to convey messages in innovative discursive ways (Costa e Silva, 2014).

The following section focuses on the far right and populism and justifies the terminology used in this article, while the subsequent section introduces the far-right political actors under scrutiny. Afterwards, the paper provides an overview of the literature on gender, nation and the far right, and then examines how gender and racialization are at the center of both parties femonationalist and antifeminist (‘gender ideology’) stances – showcasing that (cis)gender and (hetero)sexuality categories are key defining eligibility criteria in patterns of inclusion and marginalization.

The far right: a web of nationalisms, populisms, and racisms

A large and rapidly growing corpus is dedicated to ‘right-wing populism’, the ‘radical right’, the ‘extreme right’, or the ‘far right’ – terms often used as synonyms. Some authors have worked on more precise definitions. Mudde (2019: 7), for instance, posits that the far right can be divided into two subgroups: the extreme right, rejecting democratic principles like popular sovereignty and majority rule; and the radical right, accepting the essence of democracy but opposing key features of liberal democracy, especially minority rights, separation of powers and rule of law. Both subgroups oppose post-war liberal democratic consensus, but differently: the extreme right is revolutionary, while the radical right is mostly reformist (*Idem*). For Marchi and Bruno (2016), the latter refrains from the ethnic, biological, and racist discourse of white supremacists, affirming instead the protection of European

¹ The use of women’s rights and/or gender equality arguments to justify nativist positions.

² We use anti-immigration to refer to both anti-immigration and anti-asylum positions.

culture against Islam, pointing out their supposed irreconcilability with civic, secular, and liberal values of modern Western civilization (e.g. women's rights). Others distinguish 'traditional extreme-right' parties ('old extreme right') from the 'post-industrial extreme right' (or 'new extreme right'), claiming these two groups have similarities, like antisystemic positioning, ethnonationalist and communitarian stances and a preference for direct representation instead of liberal pluralist individualism (Ignazi, 2003: 2).

This terminological variation notwithstanding, we agree there are unifying concerns and ideological commitments among the far-right resurgence, with 'nationalism as the single characteristic that all radical-right parties share' (Ellinas, 2008: 561). For Mudde and Kaltwasser (2015), far-right formations share a commitment to 'nativism, authoritarianism and populism' (20). They clarify that '[w]hereas nativism is a combination of nationalism and xenophobia, and strives for a monocultural state hostile to 'alien' influences, authoritarianism is the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are severely punished' (Idem: 20). If the far right's ethnonationalism distinguishes itself from mainstream right-wing and conservative parties, many scholars argue that this differentiation constitutes in fact a radicalization of the mainstream, rather than a rupture from it. Keskinen (2013), for example, argues that 'claiming multiculturalism as a 'failed' experience [...] is characteristic of European politics during the last decade, involving not only radical right-wing populists but also large sections of mainstream parties' (226). Similarly, Mudde (2010) emphasizes that nativism and authoritarianism in the far right should be regarded as a 'pathological normalcy' and a 'radicalization of mainstream values', or, as based on 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995), imbricated in everyday lives (1181). This article's choice of the term far right to address the political formations often labelled as radical-right or populist radical-right (Rooduijn et al, 2019) follows Greig's (2019) position that intends to highlight this 'pathological normalcy', suggesting that 'racist and racialized stories of Euro-American colonialism and imperialism loom large in far-right imaginaries of the nation and its "rightful people" or ethnos' (16).

But our main concern in this article is not to argue for or against labels, but to demonstrate the prominence of gender – in the form of femonationalism, the promotion of gender conservative roles and the opposition to feminism via the adoption of 'gender ideology' narratives – in both parties' stances on immigration and nation. We argue that ethnonationalism, racism and xenophobia are common ground for both parties under analysis, despite their different origins, and that it reflects ideological preferences, not merely electoral strategies. Clearly, these ideologies are frequently instigated by a set of practices that articulate social identities by dichotomizing the social space (people vs. power; us vs. them) and aggregating particular and not necessarily coherent unaddressed demands under the same agenda (Laclau, 2005). Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) adopt a 'minimal definition,' where right-wing populism comprises three features: attacking 'the elite'; advocating for the interests of 'the common people'; and defending 'popular sovereignty' as the only legitimate source of political power (151). Populism requires the discursive creation of an enemy (the establishment, the oligarchy) and, as we argue, of other dependent enemies supposedly favored by the 'system' (Laclau, 2005). As such, it also implies the construction of scapegoats, namely immigrants or 'internal others'³ – and, in the far right's case, the reproduction of nativist, colonial and racist imaginaries present in people's everyday lives, as demonstrated here.

³ Inspired in El-Tayeb (2011), we use this term to refer to in this case to racialized Portuguese, i.e. with an immigrant background, afro-descendants or Roma people, who are often read as non-Portuguese or as second-class citizens.

The populist far right in Portugal: contextual and methodological considerations

There are currently two far-right political parties in Portugal: the National Renewal Party (PNR), recently renamed Ergue-te, and Chega. We will not address other far-right movements – some of which are overtly racist and violent – but we must register that these are not worlds apart, as the parties might want to suggest. Instead a web of ideological and strategic connections exists between parties and (in)formal movements (Fernandes and Telles, 2021). Ergue-te is an ethnonationalist, protectionist, antiliberal, anti-European and antirepublican party, created in 2000, voicing conservative societal views based on nostalgia of the fascist Portuguese past. It uses populist people-elite divisions in order to ‘demand justice for the people’ against communists, socialists and liberals that they consider “‘traitors” of the nation’ (da Costa, 2011; Marchi, 2013). It has never gained parliamentary representation and is considered an ultra-minority political group, recently overshadowed by Chega.

Chega is one of the most recent and most successful political actors in Portugal, and completely changed the far-right scene in the country by earning its first parliamentary seat in 2019, under André Ventura’s leadership, before turning one year. Ventura is a law professor, whose upbringing was marked by ultraconservative Catholicism and whose political career had been under the media spotlight since he accused Roma people of living on welfare benefits in 2017. At the time, he was still a militant of Portugal’s main right wing party, PSD (Social Democratic Party), and mayoral candidate in the local elections of one of the country’s most populated cities, Loures, with the support of CDS/PP (Christian-Democrats/Popular Party). His remarks led Ergue-te to claim that Ventura was stealing its discourse, and CDS/PP withdrew its support. The fact that Ventura was a well-known football TV commentator and until recently a recurrent and controversial opinion columnist in the tabloid outlet *Correio da Manhã* – where he has since been dismissed, supposedly for ‘editorial reasons’ after declarations on the need for a special confinement plan for Roma people (Rádio Renascença, 2020a) – adds to his and his party’s visibility and ultimately contributed to its success in the 2019 legislative elections. Chega benefited from greater media visibility – profiting from its leader’s media savviness and anti-system positions combined with attacks on minorities – and faced less stigmatization than Ergue-te, since the party split from a mainstream right-wing party and enjoyed high-profile support. In addition, it gained from a political deficit on the right, and from PSD’s internal crisis accentuated by one of the worst results of its history in 2019 (Mendes & Dennisson, 2021). In 2020, Chega was legitimized by PSD, after the Azorean regional elections in October, when, despite winning, the Socialist Party (PS) did not obtain enough lawmakers to form a government. PSD made a parliamentary pact with Chega and other right-wing forces to be able to govern. In January 2021, with 12% of the popular vote, Chega’s leader secured third place in the presidential poll, at 1% from becoming second.

In our analysis, we focus mostly on Chega due to its novelty and success in mirroring strategies from other far-right populist leaders like Santiago Abascal in Spain, Matteo Salvini in Italy, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, or Donald Trump in USA: the personalization of power and the dissemination of fake-news. This focus is further justified by its role in normalizing and mainstreaming far-right discourses, as exemplified by PSD’s alliance with Chega. Ergue-te’s case, in turn, demonstrates resemblances in both parties’ messages in this realm, emphasizing their ideological proximity instead of their strategic differences. It is crucial, after all, to understand the narratives of far-right populist parties about who is included and who is excluded from the cultural and political sphere and who is assumed to be the protectors, the victims, and the threats to the imagined nation (Anderson, [1983] 2016).

Gendering and racializing nations: protecting ‘us’ from ‘others’

Although still frequently marginalized in research on populism and the far right (Mulinari & Neergard, 2014; de Lange & Mügge, 2015; Kovala et al 2018), gender is crucial to grasp how nationalisms, racism and xenophobia are constructed. The imagination and representation of

women and femininities are key to understand how the nation is read in different contexts (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Enloe, 1983; Collins, 2009; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2011).

The 'woman-mother' is a recurrent metaphor to represent the nation and nation-building; women and motherhood are associated with reproducing the social body physically and culturally. Cultural reproduction articulates women's roles as caretakers, educators, and as such they transmit national values, ideas and norms (Cusack, 2003). Consequently, women are protected/attacked to preserve/destroy nations and identities (Hansen, 2001). Men, in turn, are imagined as warriors and as those who produce and maintain the nation economically and politically (Elshtain, 1987). Women are more commonly associated with cultural continuity, while men are associated with progress and modernization (Mosse, 1985). Good men produce the State, the formal and institutional organizing models of the nation, and they must protect 'their' women and children. Hence, family metaphors also intersperse national or popular discourses. Heteronormative patriarchal families are considered constitutive units to nations and must therefore be protected. We address the use of these ideas of community as processes that produce 'others' and fixate homogenous identities that determine inclusion or exclusion from the community, or status as a threat or a recipient of protection. By othering, we mean a process of homogenizing groups and the hierarchization and exclusion of groups/cultures through discourse (Krumer-Nevo & Sidi, 2012). Thus, when the 'other' is present in our 'space' it becomes a threat and a security problem (Giuliani, 2016; Santos et al., 2018).

Feminist security studies underline connections and tensions between practices and representations of gender and violence and the consolidation of stereotypes regarding the margins/peripheries/South/Orient – portrayed as 'primitive,' 'savage' others (Baaz & Stern, 2009) and responsible for violence against women (Agathangelou, 2002). Accordingly, 'women's rights and human rights' become something to be protected outside the European and North American territories (Agathangelou & Turcotte, 2010: 44-45). Gender assumptions, stereotypes and experiences are implicated in the constitution, causes and consequences of security events and policies. Our self-image defines our interests and, logically, what and whom we treasure and intend to protect (Barnett, 2014). As such, 'security stories tell us who to fear but also who [we believe] we are, and [what we define as] our place within the world' (Pears, 2018: 126). Consequently, the antifeminist, anti-LGBTQI+, conservative stances of far-right parties must here be analyzed in connection with their context-related nationalist, racist, xenophobic, and islamophobic biases (Köttig et al., 2017; Spierings et al., 2015).

Studies on gender in the far right (Norocel, 2013; Köttig et al., 2017; Saresma, 2018) stress the promotion of 'traditional families' and conservative gender roles (gender essentialism), alongside opposing women's sexual and reproductive rights and LGBTQI+ emancipation. Notably, the far right emphasizes female support for traditional gender roles and participation in far-right movements and parties (Blee, 2017; Miller-Idriss & Pilkington, 2019) and instrumentalizes women's rights and gender equality discourse against immigration (Keskinen, 2013; Farris, 2017). Hence, women's rights in Europe are used to justify anti-immigration and xenophobic positions and overemphasize the role of Islam in maintaining cisheteropatriarchy, ignoring the cisheteropatriarchal foundations of European societies themselves, and those who are perceived as not following this imagined Europe should not be allowed to 'replace the European people'. Therefore, pro-birth agendas are enmeshed in nationalist and racist imaginaries that claim the 'natural' demographic national and European order is under threat of being 'replaced by foreigners', with specific emphasis on Muslim populations (Bonizzoni, 2017). With a Finnish case study, Keskinen (2013) argues that the rhetoric of far-right movements challenges an alleged sidelining of white masculinities as a result of multiculturalism and feminism. Leaders from these movements present themselves as the defenders of an endangered 'Western civilization' that needs 'white border guard masculinities' to control gender, sexuality and race. Hereby, natality policies are perceived as appropriate forms of protecting national identities from 'others'. Research

in this field has also pointed out how feminism and gender equality are framed as ‘gender ideology’ (Kováts & Põim, 2015; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017), a term coined in the 1990s by the Vatican, to question the legitimacy of progressive actions and policies, like promoting sexual and reproductive rights, same-sex marriage, LGBTQI+ rights, sexual education or antidiscrimination and violence prevention policies.

Anti-immigration and femonationalism

In Chega’s program for the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, Europe – and by extension Portugal – is depicted as ‘successfully fostering diversity’, while maintaining the ‘difference between nations and men’. Contrasting this benign representation of Europe and Portugal’s imperial past, both are considered threatened by ‘European decadence’ – resulting from excessive internal diversity on the one hand, and external invasion (from ‘illegal immigrants’ and ‘alleged refugees’) on the other. These risks are seen as stemming from multiculturalism without ‘real integration’, and excessive state paternalism. Notably, Portugal has not experienced irregular immigration or refugee flows, though, being the country with the least number of asylum applications in Western Europe⁴.

On Chega’s site, Patricia Uva (2019) claims the party has nothing against ‘legal immigration.’ Using gender-loaded metaphors equating the (feminine) house/home with the nation and portraying immigration as potentially disrupting the homeland, she draws boundaries for acceptable people on the move: legal, law abiding and properly integrated. These are pitted against whom she labels ‘alleged Syrian refugees’, portrayed as ‘bearers of fake identities,’ ‘Muslim’, members of illegal enterprises, like ‘organized people smuggling’, and supported by ‘certain NGOs’. Such discourse matches Ergue-te’s positions in the European elections, which ‘denounce the Global Pact for Migrations and family reunification’, and ‘acknowledge Islam as our biggest enemy to our cultural matrix’⁵. Below, Chega’s Facebook post⁶ directly addresses immigration as threatening, explicitly depicting those rescued in the Mediterranean as ‘invaders’ and the navy as ‘rescuers’⁷.



Chega post (25/08/2019)

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_statistics

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2466301340069299>

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/photos/2485779231488604>

⁷ During the COVID-19 pandemic both parties added to the representation of people on the move as security and economic threats a depiction of them as sanitary risks: <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/posts/3081646178568570>; <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/3285429354823156>

The post reads ‘Frigate of the Portuguese navy has rescued over 500 migrants in the Mediterranean Sea.’ (left hand side) ‘The Portuguese Frigate “D. Francisco de Almeida” has conducted a mass rescue of 82 irregular migrants in the Mediterranean yesterday, May 22nd, who were on route to Lampedusa island, Italy. The operation was conducted together with the Italian coast guard.’ (right hand side). ‘The Portuguese navy serves to get us rid of invaders! Not to help bringing them to Portugal!’ (bottom). The military metaphor introduced by the invasion reference is further developed in the post, where the current center-left government, led by the Socialist Party, is blamed for putting the Portuguese navy at the service of ‘migrants’ whose background is first described as unknown but promptly associated with ‘Islamist groups’ (as infiltrating migrant boats and as potential terrorist actors in Europe)⁸.

This representation also builds on nationalist nostalgia (Mols & Jetten, 2014). This refers to the practice of populist right-wing party leaders to instill collective nostalgia to justify tougher positions on immigration, asylum seeking and multiculturalism, by drawing historical parallels to renowned wartime leaders, military battles or by evoking the past achievements of military institutions in securing the nation (*Idem*). This allows far-right actors to convey an image of the country as being ‘at war’ and of themselves as the most suited to lead it. The ‘nation at war’ narrative enables them to rationalize antisocial attitudes and harsher treatment of immigrants and minorities. Depictions of people on the move as threatening articulate the securitization of migration; that is, moving human mobility from the category of normal political phenomena to that of security (Santos et al., 2018).



Ergue-te Facebook poster ‘Against uncontrolled immigration’ (2019)

Portraying refugees as crowds of indistinguishable people, as seen in Ergue-te’s post above⁹, was used repeatedly during the two 2019 campaigns and generates a ‘crisis discourse,’ which invokes fear through images of invasion and/or overwhelmed state services (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017) and depersonalize refugees, who become easily dehumanized.

Framing gender relations among immigrants and refugees as illustrative of non-Western cultures’ ‘backwardness’, making ‘explicit association[s] between sexual violence and migrant/racialized men’ is often a key part of the construction of the far-right ‘masculine Others’ (Scrinzi, 2017: 136). This holds true with the Portuguese far right, but also in collective popular perceptions (Araújo, 2017). Particularly Muslim men are depicted as ‘folk

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/photos/2595360507197142>

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2289433844422717> and used whenever there was news of immigrants or asylum seekers/refugees involved in war-crimes (<https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2379076185458482>), of detention of illegal migrants (<https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2362546680444766>) or of riots in the outskirts of Lisbon (<https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2309968632369238>)

devils,' predisposed to sexual violence and radicalization – constituting a unique patriarchy. Muslim women are conversely seen as 'particular victims,' whose rights are not respected in their countries of origin, unlike Portuguese women (Uva, 2019). 'Female genital mutilation' and forced marriages are listed amongst 'real country issues of our time', perceived as 'politically charged and thus disregarded by radical left-wing parties and other politically correct agents' (Matias, 2020), alongside 'domestic violence, "honor violence", sexual violence, pedophilia, polygamy and acid attacks', which are described as 'a result of the import of so-called multicultural practices' (Vieira, nd).

These femonationalist claims echo in an Ergue-te Facebook post¹⁰ presenting women-only train segments in Germany as a result of the Cologne sexual attacks, attributed to male migrants from North Africa, which pushes controlled immigration as the solution for violence against women. These racialized masculinities articulate a threat not only to the 'nation' (economic precarity, crime, immigration, national security), but to 'Europe' or the 'West' more broadly, since they are depicted as at odds with liberal democratic values such as the autonomy of the individual, democracy, the emancipation of women and LGBTQI+ people, freedom of expression, and separation of church and state (de Lange & Mügge, 2015: 65; Garraio, 2020).

But the portrayal of immigration and Islam as threatening because they are viewed as linked to a 'demographic replacement' project, regarded as jeopardizing the 'Europe of (white) nations and [heteronormative and non-racialized] families' and the 'European values' (Chega, 2019a), is simultaneously part of a nostalgic construction of white, Christian and heteronormative Europe and Portugal. The far right's perceived dangers of immigrant overrepresentation are stressed in the party's European manifesto (*Idem*), where the 'absence of public policy aimed at boosting natality' is highlighted and 'the option for migration as a way to balance the demographic pyramid' condemned, especially since the 'high Muslim expression in these [migrant] communities' is seen as compromising 'native' citizens' security, particularly European women. In Chega's scenario, the need for natality policies is emphasized and clearly associated with the desire to control immigration and thus protect national identity from 'cultures and religions deemed incompatible with the rights and freedoms of Europeans'. A 'Europe of families' is defended, but conditionally so: 'natural families', comprised of 'man, woman and children', 'nuclear and extended families' (read: white heteronormative families) (*Ibid*). Racialized families are devalued – as shown by both parties' opposition to family reunification – and often depicted as responsible for 'integration issues'. This 'demographic replacement' frame is mobilized whenever changes to nationality legislation are discussed, which is described as the 'failed multicultural nationality model'¹¹. Perceived as an 'import' from other Western European countries, this model is presented as the climax of 'process[es] of degradation of nationality', characterized by naturalization rates exceeding births, inexistent 'integration tests', and the 'extension of family reunification rights' (Uva, 2019).

The racialization of women's rights abuse underscores the parties' representation of 'internal others', notably in depictions of Roma and Afro-descendant people as criminal-prone or subsidy-dependent¹² as well as particularly racist and misogynist. In an interview

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2436323233067110>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/photos/2527649627301564>

¹² For example, after the aggression of a bus driver in Lisbon, in the aftermath of a racist episode that involved a bus driver assaulting a black woman for entering the bus with her young daughter without a permit (children up to 10 years old travel for free), Chega insinuated that the aggression to the driver had been a retaliation for the black woman's assault and called for a reaction from the antiracist NGO SOS Racismo. <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/photos/2829824137084110>. This insinuation was echoed by Ergue-te <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/3016046895094738>. During the first COVID-19 confinement (March-May 2020), Chega went as far as calling for a specific confinement plan for the

(Sol, 2019), Chega's leader singled-out women's rights violations in the Roma community. He highlighted forced marriages and girls' school drop-outs, comparing this track record of human rights abuses to those of African communities residing in Portugal, and referred specifically to 'female genital mutilation'. Both are serious human rights offenses in their own right, but not exclusive to the communities targeted and certainly not the most pervasive ones in Portugal, which are intimate partner/domestic violence (PPDM, 2020).

Chega's call for a national demonstration under the motto 'Portugal is not racist' on June 27th 2020¹³ after a series of antiracist demonstrations following episodes, like the racially motivated murder of actor Bruno Candé by a former police officer and former combatant in the colonial war in Angola, clearly attempts to reverse the racist label (Sakki & Petterson, 2016: 167), and scapegoat the 'Other's' raising racist and antifeminist complaints as racist, unpatriotic and antifeminist, whilst allowing the political actors to put forward a positive self-representation of themselves ('good Portuguese'¹⁴). Similarly, Ventura's 2019 racist comment against a newly elected deputy to the national parliament, the Afro-descendant Joacine Katar Moreira, stating 'she [...] should be returned to her country' (Público, 2020) after she pointed out the importance of returning cultural patrimony from former Portuguese colonies to its origin in the parliament exemplifies this strategy. Also, Chega's¹⁵ proposal of labeling a bill on nationality withdrawal 'Mamadou Ba' (Observador, 2021), who is one of the most active antiracist activists in Portugal and habitually attacked by both parties, illustrates this discursive strategy. Such narratives cannot be fully understood without considering the role of colonial/imperial nostalgia and Lusotropicalism¹⁶. Both parties share these ideological foundations, even if differently articulated: that former colonized countries and people should have remained Portuguese and hence rejecting post-imperial configurations (Ergue-te); or that citizens from former colonies are still more acceptable – if they follow assimilationist rules – than people coming from countries never colonized by the Portuguese (Chega and Ergue-te¹⁷). This serves as a political weapon, for instance, against Mamadou Ba, with origins in Senegal.

The dangerous 'masculinity' of the racialized 'Other' narrative, in conjunction with the trope of the emasculated White/majority male as a result of feminism encapsulate the threats to religion, family and nation present in the far right's nationalist imaginary. As such, only nationalist 'women-mothers' can help save the nation and must be protected from these attacks, as we can see in Ergue-te's 2020 celebration of Women's Day¹⁸, where women are praised as 'mothers, warriors, and nationalists', as demonstrated in the next section.

Antifeminism and femonationalism: two sides of the same coin?

In addition to femonationalism, the far right's project of rendering its racist nationalism mainstream uses narratives of 'masculinity in crisis' about excluded and victimized White/majority men. Men then embody societal dislocation and decline, their

Roma population (I Online, 2020). Past November, Ventura repeated that Roma people are the community with the most welfare-dependents and offenders in the country' (Zap, 2020).

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/posts/3162778420455345>

¹⁴ 'The Good Portuguese' was the expression commonly used by Ventura in his presidential run and that featured prominently in his campaign outdoors (Rádio Renascença, 2020b).

¹⁵ It is supported by Ergue-te too: <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/posts/4129570450409038>

¹⁶ Lusotropicalism refers to a socio-political imaginary based on Gilberto Freyre's conception of Portuguese colonialism 'that shaped and still shapes attitudes, representations and policies in the most diverse Portuguese-speaking spaces. It influences the belief in the absence of racism, or to deal smoothly with differences from those who express themselves in Portuguese, based in a hypothetical ability of the Portuguese colonizer to mesh with tropical contexts and people; This belief attracts the most diverse complicities from opinion-makers to the public' (Bastos, 1998: 415) [authors' translation].

¹⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/posts/4133649803334436>

¹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/3122854137747346>

'natural' roles and authority undermined by economic forces ('globalism'), social movements (feminism or 'gender ideology') and public policy ('multiculturalism'). This trope is evident in Chega's posts where men are presented as 'demonized by gender ideology and cultural Marxism'¹⁹ or 'forgotten victims of domestic violence due to the gender ideology approach'²⁰ and in an Ergue-te post²¹ pointing to perils of gender inclusive language after the Ministry of National Defense sent a directive on non-discriminatory language to the military. Here, 'policing language' is charged with emasculating men, and men in uniform are called on to 'act like men, not sissies'. These are consistent with findings from gender and far-right movements in Europe that show 'discourse around masculinity in crisis is very much anchored in far-right ideology and it strengthens the idea of the male fighting for the nation and its nuclear component, the heterosexual family' (Träbert, 2017: 280-281). In this imaginary, the emasculated (White/majority) male, no longer able to fulfill his functions as leader, protector, and breadwinner, represents a crisis that impacts not merely men themselves, but also the heteronormative family and the 'family' of the (Christian/majority faith) nation.

Relatedly, both parties have articulated positions that can be summarized as 'feminism gone wrong', misguided by 'gender ideology'. 'Gender ideology,' as the source of family crisis and national/moral decline, has become a transnational trope for the far right. In Europe, Kováts et al. (2015) note the 'emergence of powerful social movements mobilizing against the enemy they call "gender ideology", "gender theory" or "genderism"' (11). This formulation explicitly places 'gender' as an external imposition, which undermines the sanctity of the family and threatens the wellbeing of children. In Portugal, the term has been disseminated in the past decade as a buzzword mobilizing against legislation initiatives like same-sex marriage (2010) and adoption (2016); against the revision of the 2015 Penal Code to include verbal sexual harassment ('catcalling'), following the Istanbul Convention; against the law on gender identity self-determination (2018), and against Citizenship and Development education in schools (2018-), which includes a module on sexual reproductive rights and gender equality.

The most contentious issues in this realm are threefold: 1) the course on Citizenship and Development, which is taught autonomously in all middle schools and is incorporated transversally in the curriculum of elementary and high schools since 2018; 2) the Law on Gender identity self-determination (38/2018), particularly the disposition calling on the state to ensure its promotion in the educational system²²; and 3) directive 7247/2019 which operationalizes this Law and includes a disposition regarding access to restrooms²³. Chega²⁴ and Ergue-te²⁵ claim these changes correspond to 'ideological indoctrination,' blaming 'cultural Marxism' and 'gender ideology' for this transformation, with Chega even filing an injunction to hinder the directive's entry into force (Notícias ao Minuto, 2019). It is worth mentioning that these types of accusations are also echoed by members of parties like CDS/PP (TVI, 2020) and PS when it comes to the course on Citizenship and Development, arguing that 'the State cannot replace the family' in the first case, and warning against the dangers of 'critical theory' in schools, where there should be no place for issues such as gender and sexuality, in the second case (SIC Notícias, 2020).

In the timeframe under analysis, Ergue-te explicitly referred to feminism substantially more, detracting 'selective' feminism and current feminist issues, namely

¹⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/posts/2524356140964246>

²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/posts/2525900474143146>

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/3732979916734762>

²² <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/photos/2413327552067106>

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2675272115838886>;

<https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/photos/2479925685407292>

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/photos/2529793687087158>;

<https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/photos/2556817921051401>

²⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/3697962350236519>

gender equality²⁶ and LGBTQI+ initiatives in schools and as ‘gone too far’. Chega directly mentioned feminism more rarely – namely in its legislative elections’ program (2019b), when referring to ‘End funding to radical feminist organizations and effectively investigate false complaints’ and ‘Refuse the implementation of gender ideology or feminist perspectives in urban and territorial planning’ – and preferred ‘women’s movements’ or ‘gender ideology’. In a 2019 post, Ergue-te said ‘No to gender ideology!’²⁷ claiming it would ‘always fight against it, in Portugal and in the European Union, and for traditional values of our civilization matrix and our own nature.’ This message is consistent with those of Chega, which warn against ‘the dangers of state paternalism, political correctness, that aim to re-educate the population to accept specific versions of gender equality,’ which are seen as at odds with ‘the traditional family’, depicted as ‘the fundamental unit of society’ (Chega, 2019a), and the perils of selective feminism, ‘the one that defends gender equality everywhere, except in the countries where women are subjected to the most violent repression’ (Bronze, 2019).

These narratives go hand in hand with the re/production of gendered ‘internal others’ like LGBTQI+ activists²⁸ and female feminists (depicted as ‘women gone wrong’). Derogatory posts about feminists like Catarina Marcelino²⁹, who advocated for the course on Citizenship and Education, or Cristina Rodrigues³⁰, who presented a bill against sexual reorientation therapy are examples thereto, as is a piece discussing a highly mediatized sexual assault case in Portugal. Here, Rita Matias (2021), a leading figure in Chega responsible for its social media, criticizes political parties and civil society organizations, particularly women’s groups, for focusing on gender rather than on victims of violence and justice. Here and elsewhere (Vieira, nd), violence against women is used as evidence of the need for stronger law and order, especially ‘heavier prison sentences,’ and ‘values-based education,’ while gender is portrayed as a ‘separatist’ issue, ‘memorial days, studies, observatories’ as ‘a waste of time and resources’ and the ‘alleged champions of women’ as undemocratic, ‘trying to set up a “cordon sanitaire” around Chega and illegalize it.’ In the party’s 2020 convention, the motion Women of Chega, which gave way to the creation of the Women of Chega/MMCH wing, claimed ‘feminists aim to further the homosexual-lesbian-bisexual-transsexual agenda and not the interest of common women’ and presented itself as ‘antifeminist’ (Expresso, 2020). These arguments reiterate a focus on the heteronormative nuclear family in far-right narratives as well as on gender conservative roles, evoking a sense of gender ‘complementarity’ that advocates that women must be ‘rewarded for having as many children as they want, and men must not be ‘penalized for being men’³¹. This is further emphasized by MMCH’s mission (2021), that states:

MMCH believes progress happens by motivating women leaders who have the influence to bring about positive changes in the direction of valuing *traditional family*. It is through feminine hands that generational change happens. The unspeakable greatest mission is the *maternal one*, since *women’s greatest social responsibility is to raise and educate children for the world*. [italics are our own]

This signals a direct endorsement of gender essentialized roles, positing women at the reproductive core of family and nation, as well as of a cisheteronormative gender binary characteristic of the gender conservatism of far-right ideology appealing not only to men but also to many women too.

²⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/3132047570161336>

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2471111722921594>

²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2287504121282356>

<https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/3479452175420872>

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/2426837010682399>

³⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/Partido.Ergue.te/photos/4273247016041380>

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/PartidoChegaOficial/posts/2524356140964246>

These examples demonstrate both far-right parties share at least three ideas: the equation of women's politics with family politics; the defense of 'natural differences' between sexes/genders; and the idea that, since women are the only ones who can give birth and offspring are vital to the nation's survival, they should be 'protected' (Mudde, 2007: 92-94). It is worth mentioning that this coincides with discourses of historical conservative parties, such as CDS/PP, especially its TEM wing, when it comes to feminism and gender equality. It is also noteworthy that these parties are articulated interpersonally and semi-formally, participating in events on 'Gender Ideology' organized by different parties (e.g., the cycle of seminars on 'Gender Ideology', chaired by Ergue-te³², had participants from the rightwing parties PSD, CDS/PP – TEM wing – and Chega; and the social media campaign #JUNTOSCONTRAAIDELOGIADEGENERO, launched by Chega, was reposted by militants from PSD and CDS/PP).

In sum, antifeminist stances coexist with femonationalist ones in both parties, since, on the one hand, we observe an implicit emphasis – via juxtaposition in relation to 'Muslim countries or cultures' or to 'Internal others' – or an explicit one to the European track-record on women's rights, with principles such as freedom of choice and gender equality emphasized with immigration and integration, which are used to justify anti-immigration and particularly anti-Muslim positions and antiminority stances. On the other hand, antifeminist positions are embraced using 'gender ideology' or 'antifeminist' rhetoric in the centering of the heteronormative family, with its essentialized gender roles, and the attachment to a cisgender binary in issues related to education, family, status of marriage, childcare, and generally emancipatory policies. In this setting, where European white masculinity and femininity is presented as under particular 'outside' threat (by external and internal 'others'), both parties frame themselves as the solution to defend and uphold European identity, values and culture.

Conclusion

By focusing on the intersection of the anti-immigration and antifeminist agendas, we showcased the centrality of gendered and racialized narratives in Chega's and Ergue-te's discourses. By portraying specific groups of foreigners and nationals, particularly Muslims, as holding illiberal and traditional views on women, family, and sexuality, these actors intend to rationalize and justify their anti-immigration agenda by presenting their efforts as key to ensure the survival of Europe and its 'enlightened' values. These efforts are part of a larger effort contrasting European modernity (racialized as White and Christian) to the patriarchal primitivism of the 'Other' (racialized as non-White and Muslim), often blaming feminists for 'going too far' or 'gone astray' in embracing multiculturalism. Indeed, these actors do not resort to the ethnic, biologic and outright racist narrative of white supremacists, but rather one that aims to 'save the so-called European cultural matrix from Islam', pointing out to an alleged irreconcilability with modern Western civilization values and to 'gender ideology' as responsible for current societal disruptions and the disaggregation of the white Christian nation. Accordingly, both parties present themselves as 'warriors' and 'saviors', while reformatting their nativist and conservative views of family, masculinities, and femininities. Thus, gender conservative and antifeminist stances are crucial to support the ethnonationalist positions of far-right discourses and to sustain the cisheteronormative and cisheteropatriarchal visions of family and nation.

This seemingly uneasy conciliation of both femonationalism and antifeminism stances is effectuated, on the one hand, through an advocacy of gender equality as a mostly 'external' necessity, in non-European spaces or in relation to perceived non-European people. This co-opts feminism in favor of anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalist agendas, and

³² <http://www.partidoergue-te.pt/2018/07/pnr-promove-conferencias-que-desmascaram-a-ideologia-de-genero/>

labels feminist movements as selective, short-sided and not really at service of women. On the other hand, it emphasizes resistance of current national and international feminist stances, portraying current feminist issues as non-necessary or ridiculous, and as missing the mark because of its concessions to ‘gender ideology’ – proposing a familialist take on women’s activism instead (Women of Chega). In fact, antifeminist and femonationalist positions are more alike than they may seem at first sight: they share convictions about the role of women in the reproduction of the White Christian imagined community. Whereas femonationalist stances place the female body as the cornerstone in the racially imagined nation, in need of protection from the ‘Others’ (external and internal), the critics of ‘gender ideology’ or detractors of feminism render the woman’s body as well as her overall mission at the core of the heteronormative family, which is perceived as the basis for the biological and cultural reproduction of the Christian family.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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