

Anti-authoritarian Portugal

Germinating Anarchy

Jesús Sepúlveda

Last June, I was invited by the anarchist publisher, Textos Subterraneos, to speak about the newly-published Portuguese edition of my book, *The Garden of Peculiarities*, in Lisbon and Oporto. Of interest to FE readers, TS has also put out an anthology of Fredy Perlman's work, *A Reprodução da Vida Quotidiana e Outros Escritos*.

My main hosts in Portugal were at the Disgraça Anarchist Center in Lisbon, a place where the seed of anarchy is germinating. This seed is also growing in the editorial group of Flauta de Luz (a journal on anti-civilization, literature, and indigenous peoples) from Portalegre and at the Gato Vadio (Stray Cat) center in Oporto, among other places.

I spoke with members of Disgraça to learn about the history and current situation of anarchism in Portugal.

FE: Can you tell me something about the past and present of the Center?

Disgraça means disgrace in English. The center was originally going to be located in the neighborhood of Grace but since it was moved to Penha de Franca the prefix “dis” was adopted, indicating it wasn't in Grace. The name is also a wink to Punk bands that normally use such a prefix. Disgraca opened in 2015 and since then it's been run horizontally by its core group of eight. There's also a cluster of more than twenty people who often show up and help out. Everyone's a volunteer and all the donations coming from their vegan canteen are used for upkeep and maintenance of the space.

The center is home to an anarchist info/bookshop called Tortuga, a library, Biblioteca dos Estragos da Sociedade Globalizada, a vegan cafe, cinema space, concert venue, rehearsal room, screen-printing shop, and two other workspaces.

The Anti-authoritarian Health Group meets at Disgraça, putting on events and activities critical of the hegemonic health system. The center promotes the do-it-yourself (DIY) spirit and its members reject all forms of authority and oppression caused by the capitalist society and support anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles.

Although they face the same problems as anarchist groups in other developed countries, in Portugal there are specific challenges in attracting young people. There is a generational gap between those who left and new generations who grew up without any historical reference or cultural background. Because of this historical amnesia, anarchist ideas are too foreign to young people, who need to start from zero.

They also deal with many difficulties in maintaining the existence of collectives like Disgraça. It is essential work, since without spaces to gather, it is almost impossible to believe in any kind of movement—organized or non-organized.

Disgraça has had a great impact on anarchists locally, but also among people in other parts of the country. It's the only space in Lisbon where all the elements needed for anarchy to germinate—books, music, good vegan food, and some of the most joyful people in town—come together.

FE: Tell us about Portuguese Anarchism After Salazar?

Since the Salazar dictatorship crushed anarchist movements, after its demise in 1974 there was almost no knowledge of their history among anti-authoritarian activists. Today, there are few collectives that embrace anarchist

ideas: Centro de Cultura Libertaria in Almada, Disgraça in Lisbon, and Rata Dentada, an anarco-feminist group based in Oporto.

When the revolution that ended the Salazar regime broke out in April 1974, some anarchists tried to initiate a new movement. But this was impossible because there was little anarchist memory among the working class and the emerging groups were mostly intellectuals influenced by the Situationists.

However, the Centro de Cultura Libertaria was founded in Almada just after the revolution, publishing the newspaper *Voz Anarquista* (Anarchist Voice). This center still has one of the best archives of the movement over the last 44 years. The newspaper *Batalha* also re-emerged in Lisbon and continues publishing today.

In the 1980s, various groups began appearing in Lisbon, Oporto, Coimbra, and Leiria, among other places. In the 1990s, the squatting movement brought a breath of fresh air, and a new generation of anarchists appeared, publishing dozens of zines, mainly influenced by the DIY culture and the punk movements in England and Spain.

The longest running squat in Portugal is Casa Okupada de Setúbal Autogestionada (COSA) which was started in 2000 in Set-Opal. There another squat, A da Maxada, appeared in 2016, promoting self-management and autonomous life.

From 2007 to 2010 many young people—influenced by the experience of COSA—were able to contribute to a great anti-authoritarian momentum, with hundreds of people demonstrating on the streets. During the yearly official governmental march to celebrate the end of the dictatorship on April 25, 2007, anarchists called for an anti-authoritarian and anti-fascist demonstration on the Av. da Libertade, gathering about 500 demonstrators, an unusual number in those days.

But, after the 2008 economic crisis hit Portugal, almost nothing remained. Today, some people are trying once again to regroup.

In Oporto, there are no spaces that identify themselves as anarchist, but there are several anti-authoritarian places where anarchists hang out and develop activities, including Rosa Imunda, Res da Rua, Musas, and Gato Vadio.

Anarchist publishing in Portugal is, however, in one of its most interesting periods.

Batalha, newspaper of the historical anarcho-syndicalist CGT, recently reworked its design and improved content. There is also the quarterly, *Jornal Mapa*, produced by a collective of people from all parts of Portugal. Their articles offer critical analyses of current topics.

From Oporto comes *Erva Rebelde* (Rebel Weed) and from Portalegre comes *Flauta de Luz* (Flute of Light), mentioned above.

The anarchist book fair in Lisbon taking place at the end of September and now ten years old, is a well-known event. In 2017, people organized the first book fair in Oporto.

Jesús Sepúlveda teaches at the University of Oregon in Eugene. He is the author of eight collections of poetry and three books of essays, including his book on Latin American poetry, *Poets on the Edge*.

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/404-summer-2019/anti-authoritarian-portugal>
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