

literature, Wemheuer sometimes leaves the targets of his criticism unnamed (p. 58). He also sometimes relies on German-language sources when good English alternatives (or, in one case, the original French source) are available. The book is wonderfully balanced, but sometimes (e.g. p. 20) the search for nuance blunts the force of the argument. Yet, on the whole, the book is a remarkable achievement.

Jacob Eyferth

Department of History, University of Chicago
1050 E. 59th Street, Wieboldt Hall, room 301
Chicago, IL 60637, United States
E-mail: eyferth@uchicago.edu
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VARELA, RAQUEL. *A People's History of the Portuguese Revolution*. Ed. by Peter Robinson. Transl. [from Portuguese] by Sean Purdy. [People's History.] Pluto Press, London 2019. 334 pp. Ill. £75.00. (Paper; E-book: £19.99).

The social revolution that took place in Portugal in 1974 is a fascinating case study of a somewhat rare type of revolutionary outcome: liberal democracy. Over the course of approximately two years, various sectors of the Portuguese population – including women, students, peasants, urban squatters, factory workers, neighborhood commissions, and many others – agitated for more rights and better living conditions. The revolutionary process upended the political institutions of the Salazar-Caetano regime; six successive provisional governments were established in the two years following the 25 April 1974 events. The transitions between governments were punctuated by ideological divisions between factions of the Armed Forces Movement (the group of junior officers who had initiated and carried out the *coup d'état* that ended the *Estado Novo*); social and political tensions came to a boil in the summer of 1975, culminating in the coup of 25 November 1975, in which pro-liberal democracy factions of the MFA ousted members sympathetic to the far left, taking effective control over the provisional government, and ending a period of dual power.

For Raquel Varela, this is the moment that the revolution died and the counter-revolution took hold (p. 248). Deliberately positioning her work in the tradition of activist historian Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, Varela proposes an interesting task: that she will narrate the history of the Portuguese Revolution from the point of view of the people, whom she sees as the true leaders of the revolutionary process. Varela's book tells a story of a revolution in which "the people" are members of the working class creating and participating in grassroots organizations such as *plenários* (plenary sessions), worker's commissions, and other similar bottom-up organizations that came to be known as *poder popular* (popular power). In Varela's view, "the people" are in conflict with the elites, understood as those who control state institutions (individuals and parties), the means of production (such as factory owners and managers), and sectors of the military and the population whose interests are aligned with the bourgeoisie (which includes the Armed Forces Movement, known popularly as the MFA). On the whole, the author views the Revolution through a lens that depicts a romanticized image of workers, especially

in factories, as being pure of intention, often spontaneous in their organizing, and the only truly democratic force in the process. Alternatively, the MFA officers are cast as representatives of the bourgeoisie and/or of bourgeois interests who were drawn together primarily by self-interest (pp. 11, 22).

Varela juxtaposes her argument against mainstream approaches to the Portuguese revolutionary process, which, she writes, “have been top down, often written by ‘personalities’ focusing perhaps on themselves, or upon the army and senior military personnel and bourgeois machinations and almost never on the *povo*, that is, the people” (p. 3). This contention is overstated. As the author herself acknowledges in one of the concluding chapters, there are a number of well-known academic works on the Portuguese Revolution that focus on the grassroots’ activism and political impact of the landless peasants in the Alentejo (Bermeo), the urban squatters’ movements and neighborhood commissions (Downs, Dows), and the labor movement (Chilcote, Hammond).¹ A new wave of scholars has also looked at the Revolution through the lens of social-movement theories, particularly the contentious politics approach (e.g. Cerezales, Pinto).² Herein lies one of the main weaknesses of Varela’s study: that it only superficially engages the existing, rich body of literature on revolutionary processes generally, and on the Portuguese Revolution specifically.

The book is divided into twenty chapters, ranging from topics addressing strikes and worker self-management, to women’s mobilizations, artists, and urban and rural squatters. Most of the author’s attention, however, is dedicated to factory workers in urban settings. Up until Chapter Nineteen – where the author expands on and responds to some academic debates surrounding her argument – the book proceeds primarily in a journalistic style, by which the story moves forward through the introduction of various vignettes and descriptive examples of workers’ direct engagement in grass-roots organizations, self-management, and strikes. The author has an engaging narrative style that is easily accessible, provided the reader has at least a working understanding of Marxist concepts. The book also includes an interesting chronology focusing primarily on strikes, and demonstrations that involved urban workers. The selection of pictures and images that accompany the text is excellent.

The author’s main departure from, and point of contention with, the historiography of the Portuguese Revolution surrounds her interpretation of the events around 25 November 1975. Varela argues that “it is indisputable that this day marked the beginning of the end of the revolution and the consolidation of [...] the ‘democratic counter-revolution’ and which, because of the ideological strength of the victors, is today dubbed ‘democratic normalisation’” (p. 265). Instead, Varela views the events of late November as a subversion of the democratic process, a takeover by elite actors more concerned with political and economic ambitions than with the democratic ideals of the revolution per se.

1. See Nancy G. Bermeo, *The Revolution within the Revolution: Workers’ Control in Rural Portugal* (Princeton, NJ, 1986); Chip Downs, Fernando Nunes da Silva, Helena Gonçalves, and Isabel Seará, *Os moradores à conquista da cidade. Comissões de moradores e lutas urbanas em Setúbal, 1974–1976* (Lisbon, 1978); Charles Dows, *Revolution at the Grassroots: Community Organizations in the Portuguese Revolution* (Albany, NY, 1989); Ronald H. Chilcote, *The Portuguese Revolution: State and Class in the Transition to Democracy* (Lanham, MD, 2010); John L. Hammond, *Building Popular Power: Workers’ and Neighborhood Movements in the Portuguese Revolution* (New York, 1988).

2. See Diego P. Cerezales, *O poder caiu na rua. crise the estado e ações colectivas na Revolução Portuguesa, 1974–1975* (Lisbon, 2003); Pedro R. Pinto, *Lisbon Rising: Urban Social Movements in the Portuguese Revolution, 1974–7* (Manchester, 2015).

The author strongly implies that there was more legitimacy in the types of direct democracy practiced in popular-power organizations than in the representative democracy that emerged after the 25 November events. One might point out, however, that the Portuguese electorate turned out *en masse* (91.7 per cent) to vote in the Constituent elections of 1975. Pre-empting such critique, Varela explains this phenomenon by suggesting that the Socialist Party persuaded the electorate with promises of “socialism, freedom, personal liberty, a desire for a proper parliamentary system and the orderly management by the State of the economy” (p. 258). “Militants,” she writes, “had not been schooled in the fight against reformists” and “many workers lacked the experience and judgment” to evaluate Socialist Party leader Mário Soares’ discourse and interests, and finally, that the “‘brilliant’ achievements of the struggle did not mean that Portuguese workers had bypassed a faith in reformism or were permanently immune to it” (pp. 258–259). Yet, a year later, following the events of the Hot Summer and 25 November, the population turned up again in great numbers (83.53 per cent) to the ballot box, overwhelmingly supporting and legitimizing the parties that benefited from the 25 November coup. (Far-left parties supporting popular power and defending that the 25 November was a counterrevolutionary coup had negligible results.) In sum, it is difficult to square Varela’s vision of the workers – who had the agency to create commissions, mobilize and paralyze industries, and to make constant demands on the transitional government – with her argument that they were naïve voters.

An additional consideration for the reader is to ponder what shape direct democracy would take at the state level in the absence of the 25 November coup. The author writes somewhat derisively about the “‘peaceful’ model of counter-revolution,” tying it to US foreign policy towards Latin America in the 1970s, and concluding that “in essence, the idea was to defeat revolutionary processes through elections; liberal democracy is preferable to dictatorial regimes” (p. 263). As a reader, I’m left wondering: it isn’t? Overall, the analysis would be enriched if the author had expanded on her thinking about the matter.

Overall, Varela’s book is on firmer ground when illustrating the various forms of workers’ mobilization that took place during the revolution. Chapters like the one on women’s mobilization (Ch. 8), however, felt out of place in the narrative. The chapter provides only a superficial understanding of the types of specifically female political mobilizations that occurred, and does not explain to the reader how they fit into the author’s analytical framework. Upon reading, one is left wondering whether Varela sees a group like the Women’s Liberation Movement as a bourgeois organization, or as a revolutionary and democratic organization akin to the popular-power organizations (I suspect the first). Furthermore, despite providing some examples about organizations such as the Women’s Democratic Movement and the Women’s Liberation Movement, the author is quick to dismiss them as less important than female workers’ participation in the agrarian struggles or in the neighborhood commissions (p. 98). Yet, the Women’s Democratic Movement became, during the revolution, the most far-reaching women’s organization in Portugal, with branches in every district of the country and throughout much of the diaspora, with thousands of quota-paying members, and deep involvement in mobilizing working women in rural and urban areas. This is not captured by the chapter.

Generally, the English translation reads well, except for the occasional awkward sentence translated directly from the Portuguese. A more distracting issue is that several Portuguese words and some names are misspelled throughout the text. The most frequent one is *saneamento*, which appears countless times as “saneamento.” It is highly unlikely that the author misspelled such terms in her native language; this was probably the result of a poor

translation (this reviewer did not compare the original Portuguese text). In any event, it is the job of the translator and English-language editor to catch and correct such errors.

In conclusion, Varela has correctly identified a need and an appetite for more studies focusing on the various types of mobilizations that powered the Portuguese Revolution. The different episodes related throughout the book do successfully convey the range of political and even emotional involvement that ordinary citizens had with the revolutionary process. Yet, in the process of trying to tell the story from below, Varela underplays the dynamic, and often interdependent, relationship between these organizations and the transitional elites.

Daniela Melo

Boston University, College of General Studies
871 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215, United States

E-mail: dfmelo@bu.edu

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