

At Western Sahara: Visiting A Forgotten People



Western Sahara - Map:
en.wikipedia.org

06-17-2024 ~ South of the Algerian town of Tindouf on the border with Western Sahara are five refugee camps. The camps are home to the Sahrawi people of Western Sahara and are administered by their freedom movement Polisario, which is fighting to liberate their homeland from Morocco.

Life in the desert camps leaves a deep impression and testifies to a people who, despite limitations, have managed to build a well-organized society under harsh conditions. “We Sahrawis were originally a nomadic people who used to travel around on camels and settled in different places in and around Western Sahara. There were no borders that limited us from moving into what is today Mauritania or Algeria,” said Jadiya who is a translator.

The colonial era saw European powers come to Africa to take over territories, exploit labor, and extract natural resources. In Western Sahara, the Portuguese and French were first beaten back by the local population before Spain [managed to colonize](#) the area in 1884. In 1973, the Polisario freedom movement was established by the indigenous Sahrawi people to liberate their land from the Spanish empire.

Western Sahara remained a Spanish colony until 1975 when the Moroccan government organized a so-called “Green March” with 350,000 protesters

marching into Western Sahara to claim the land. The protesters pressured Spain to leave Western Sahara, which Morocco then occupied. Today, Western Sahara is still occupied by Morocco and is thus considered to be Africa's last colony.

Desert Camps

It is around 35 to 40 degrees Celsius in Wilayah of Bojador, the smallest of the five refugee camps on the border with Western Sahara. My feet are boiling in my shoes, but walking in bare feet is not an option. The sand is far too hot. According to Filipe, a local Sahrawi engineer educated in the Soviet Union, it has been five to six years since it last rained in the camps. "Not a single drop from the sky," he says.

In the refugee camps, people live either in simple huts with tin roofs or in "getouns," square tents with entrances on all sides and a large colored carpet as a floor. Skeletons of cars stripped of wheels, doors, windows, seats, and all interior parts remind me of apocalyptic TV shows. Car doors are reused as fencing for the village's many goats, which are often seen wandering around in herds on the sand hills in the camp. However, the many car frames work well as playgrounds for children who would otherwise not have access to slides, swings, or climbing frames.

The Wall of Shame

Western Sahara is divided into three areas. There is the region of Western Sahara where the occupying power Morocco is in power. There are the liberated areas of Western Sahara, where the freedom movement Polisario is in power. And then there are the refugee camps in Algeria, where Polisario is also in power. To separate the different areas from each other and maintain control over the occupation, the Moroccan monarchy built a 2700-kilometer wall across Western Sahara.

"The Wall of Shame," as the Sahrawis call it, can easily be compared to Israel's apartheid wall in Palestine, as both were built by occupying powers and effectively force indigenous families and other communities to live apart from each other.

Although the Wall of Shame is built of sand, "it's the most dangerous wall in the world," a Polisario soldier says. The wall is divided into several lines: barbed wire, dogs, a moat, the wall itself, 150,000 soldiers, and eight million landmines. The

outermost line is the numerous mines. In addition to making it harder for Polisario soldiers to penetrate, civilian nomads or local cattle are often blown up from stepping on the mines.

A Temporary Situation

As a result of the Moroccan occupation, thousands of Sahrawis fled in the 1970s to the refugee camps in Algeria, whose government allowed Polisario to administer the camps as part of the liberated territories.

The five refugee camps in Algeria are named after towns in Western Sahara. For example, Wilayah of Bojador is named after the city of Bojador, which is in one of the areas ruled by Morocco. “Each camp is named after one of our cities to signal that the camps are temporary. It’s to show that we will return to our real cities one day,” says engineer Filipe.

Wilayah of Bojador may be the newest and smallest of the five refugee camps administered by Polisario. But when I stand on the camp’s largest hilltop, I can see houses and tents far out on the horizon. All around the camps is the flag of Western Sahara, which with its black, white, green, and red colors is very similar to the Palestinian flag. The only difference is that the Western Sahara flag has a red crescent and star in the middle. “The black color symbolizes the occupation. Today, the black color is at the top, but when we will achieve our freedom, from that day on, we will fly the black color at the bottom,” says Filipe.

A Well-Organized Society

Despite limited access to resources, the Sahrawis have in many ways managed to build a well-organized society. For example, each camp—which is considered a region—is divided into several small districts. Each district has a small health clinic, and each camp has a regional hospital. In addition, there is an administrative camp where the main hospital is located. “If you are ill, you first visit the health clinic in your district. If they cannot help you, go to the regional hospital. If they cannot help you either, you go to the administrative camp hospital, then to the hospital in the nearby Algerian town of Tindouf, then to the Algerian capital Algiers, and finally to Spain,” says Filipe. “It is very well organized.”

Around the Wilayah of Bojador, there are small shops where you can buy groceries like rice, pasta, potatoes, and canned tuna. In the camp, I encounter

everything from a school, kindergarten, women's association, and a library to a hairdresser, a mechanic, and small stalls selling tobacco or perfume.

A truck travels the narrow, bumpy roads from home to home, filling bags—the size of inflatable trampolines—with water so families can drink, bathe, and wash their clothes. According to the NGO, [The Norwegian Support Committee For Western Sahara](#), international observers describe the Sahrawi refugee camps as “the best-organized refugee camps in the world.”

A Life Outside the Camp

The Sahrawis and Polisario are doing the best they can to create a dignified life for the people in the refugee camps. But it is not free of challenges. According to Fatima, a member of the Sahrawi Youth Union, one of the biggest challenges today is that there is an older generation that can remember a life before the camps, while a large younger generation has lived their entire lives in the camps.

“To prevent children in the camps from growing up without knowing about life outside the camps, we have set up a scheme where children are sent to Spain to live with a family for a period of time. In this way, they become ambassadors for Western Sahara in Spain, and they see that there is life outside the camps,” says Fatima. When Fatima was six years old, she was part of the program. “I had never in my life seen a fish or seen so many green trees in the same place. I thought it was just something you saw in movies. That it wasn't real. But in Spain, I learned that it's real,” she recalls.

Challenges

There are still problems that Polisario and the local population in the camps struggle to solve. Several young men say that job opportunities vary and that they are often unemployed. Even the men and women employed in hospitals and police stations only receive a salary once every three months, and the pay is not high. Many young unemployed Sahrawis must go abroad to find a job. In the meantime, they volunteer in the camps to carry out various practical tasks.

Refugee camps rely on international donations from bodies like the UN or from other countries. When a bus in Spain is damaged and no longer meets national safety requirements, it can be sent to Western Sahara. Here the buses, which are very similar to Danish city buses, drive around in the sand with passengers. But in many ways, the Sahrawis live a limited life in the camps at Tindouf. During my

entire stay, I didn't see a single trash can. The lack of a waste system means that cigarette packs, plastic bottles, and other rubbish are strewn around the camp.

The power goes out frequently and connecting to the internet is generally a problem. The latter is considered a major problem for the Sahrawis, who want to connect with people in the wider world to bring international attention to their resistance struggle.

Promoting the Cause

The Sahrawis are interested in drawing attention to their cause. In the desert, they have established a museum called the Museum of Resistance, where tourists are taken on a journey from the Sahrawi's original nomadic life through the colonial period and the Moroccan occupation to Polisario's fight for liberation. The museum includes a miniature version of the Wall of Shame and several of the tanks and weapons that Polisario soldiers have managed to take from the Moroccan military. In the desert you will also find a media house where journalists sit behind desktop computers, writing articles and updating the Polisario website and social media with news from the camps. There are soundproof rooms, microphones, and soundboards to record radio broadcasts, and studios with green screens and video cameras to record TV news. Polisario has its own TV channel.

In addition, the Sahrawis organize the renowned international film festival [FiSahara](#), which brings people from all over the world. Many of the international guests at the film festival come from Spain. Sahrawi President Brahim Ghali met journalists at the festival. He criticized Spain's prime minister Pedro Sánchez for [changing](#) his country's position regarding Morocco's occupation; in 2022, Sánchez wrote to Morocco's King Mohammed VI to say that he agreed with the view that Western Sahara should be autonomous but under Moroccan rule. "We have frozen our relations with the Spanish government, but we still have good relations with the Spanish people," said Sahrawi President Ghali.

By Marc B. Sanganee

Author Bio: This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#). Marc B. Sanganee is editor-in-chief of [Arbejderen](#), an online newspaper in Denmark.

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Rebuilding The Left Is Crucial To Stemming The Surge Of Europe's Far Right



C.J. Polychroniou

06-12-2024 ~ *Rebuilding the Left Is Crucial to Stemming the Surge of Europe's Far Right.*

Just over half of the 373 million citizens eligible to vote across the 27 European Union (EU) countries bothered to cast a ballot during the four-day European Parliament (EP) election that concluded on June 9. Germany — the EU's most populous country, and its political and economic powerhouse but with its days as an [industrial superpower](#) rapidly coming to an end — saw a record-high voter turnout, with close to [65 percent of eligible voters](#) turning out for the EP elections. Apparently, German citizens may have felt that the “business as usual” approach both in Brussels and inside their own country could no longer go on, which is why they dealt a humiliating defeat to the coalition government of [Chancellor Olaf Scholtz](#). His ruling party, the Social Democrats, recorded their worst-ever result in EP elections, obtaining less than 14 percent of the vote. The conservatives — whose policies on immigration and climate have shifted close to the position of the far right on these issues — came in first, with over 30 percent of the vote, while the far right Alternative for Germany (AfD) came second by

pulling 16.5 percent of the vote, up from 11 percent in 2019. The Green Party's vote dropped by 8.5 percentage points, from 20.5 percent to 12 percent.

Undoubtedly, in Germany's political and cultural environment today, anti-immigrant and anti-climate policies, and overall support for hardcore conservative and far right outlooks won.

By contrast, Greece, one of the EU's peripheral countries, saw an explosive and unprecedented (by Greek standards) abstention rate, estimated to be around 60 percent. The ruling conservative party of New Democracy won the elections with 28.31 percent of the vote, taking seven seats, but suffered heavy losses (more than 1 million votes) from the last general elections. The once-radical Syriza party came second with 14.92 percent and four seats, while the social democratic PASOK came third with 12.79 percent and three seats. Greek Solution — an ultra-nationalist far right party which was created in the aftermath of Golden Dawn's demise following its conviction for operating [a criminal enterprise](#) — came fourth with 9.3 percent and two seats, while another far right party, Niki, won 4.37 percent and one seat. The Communist Party received 9.25 percent of the vote and two seats.

The record-low voter turnout in Greece is an indication that its own citizens must have felt there is very little they can do to change the shape of the EU and therefore the course of their everyday lives, so why bother to take part in a boring political ritual of little practical consequence? Indeed, average Greeks are fighting to make ends meet even if the message spewed on almost every public occasion from the mouth of their right-wing Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis is that Greece has not only turned the corner but that its economy has become more dynamic than those of Europe's core economies. The fact is that the Greek economy remains a low-tech and low-added value economy, with government debt to GDP higher than it was prior to the bailouts and the average monthly salary 20 percent lower than 15 years ago while unemployment remains above 10 percent.

Voter turnout in France, the second-largest economy in Europe, did not even reach 50 percent, but the French citizens that decided to cast a ballot for this year's EP elections expressed a deep desire for change by swinging to the far right and delivering in turn a massive blow to President Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance party. Marine Le Pen's National Rally came out on top with [31.5 percent](#) of the vote, more than double the share of Macron's party. Within an hour

following the election results, Macron announced that he would dissolve the lower parliament and hold parliamentary elections at the end of the month. His decision to call a snap election was obviously prompted by the apparently unstoppable momentum of the far right, but Macron said he was “[confident in the capacity of the French people to make the right choice for themselves and for future generations](#).” Marine Le Pen welcomed the challenge as she now feels that the time has come for her party to finally take power. And the first opinion poll suggests that the National Rally could [win the snap election](#), but fall short of an absolute majority.

Like the AfD, the far right National Rally is anti-immigrant, in love with fossil fuels and pro-Israel. Incidentally, the European far right has thrown its weight behind Israel, exchanging its historical commitment to antisemitism for anti-Muslim hatred.

The far right also made major gains in Austria and the Netherlands. Austria’s far right Freedom Party came in first with 27 percent in the EP elections, and Geert Wilders’s own Freedom Party in the Netherlands secured seven seats in the new European Parliament, from zero seats in the 2019 EP elections.

In Italy, less than half of the electorate voted, and Giorgia Meloni’s far right Brothers of Italy won the most votes, with [28.8 percent](#), which is greater than it had secured in the 2022 national elections.

Only in some [Nordic countries](#) (Sweden, Denmark and Finland) was there a slight retreat of the far right. In that region of Europe, pro-environmental issues remain priorities, though it’s a different matter when it comes to immigration and integration. These countries had different approaches to immigration until a few years ago, but they have now all moved in the same direction, which is to adopt “[more restrictive immigration and integration policies](#),” points out migration specialist Chris Horwood.

The results of the 2024 EP elections confirm what has been rather obvious to careful observers for at least the past decade or so, which is that Europe has been lurching further and further to the right to the point that the far right has now become mainstream and normalized. The left must now ask itself: Why is the far right gaining favor across Europe, and can it be contained?

The first and most important reason for the rise of the far right has to do with the

very nature and architecture of the European Union. The main purpose of its predecessor, the European Economic Community (EEC), from the late 1970s onwards has been to increase competitiveness in the global market and to boost corporate profits as the era of “managed capitalism” had come to an end. Instead of social protections and growth through fiscal-oriented policies, the new economic approach called for privatization and liberalization of financial markets, price stability and labor market reform. The aim, as revealed by the Single European Act of 1986, was for the EEC to become “a market without a state” and to normalize a noncommitment to welfare. All major decisions were to be made at the top, with powerful countries like Germany almost entirely controlling the economic and social agenda. Subsequently, most member states lost their actual sovereignty as national governments were compelled to follow the commands of the euro masters, and citizens were relegated to a status equal to that enjoyed by the subjects of ancient Rome.

It is within the confines of these structural realities in the design of the EU that political extremism starts to take shape. And lest we forget, Europe is the birthplace of fascism. It would not take much for the old demons to reappear.

The EU’s core periphery divide (and the EU has in fact a number of peripheries — the southern European periphery, the Baltic periphery and the Eastern European periphery) is a major factor for the rise of the far right. In Germany, the AfD was founded by [Euroskeptics](#) who opposed the euro, further European integration and the periphery’s bailouts during the 2010 eurozone debt crisis. Euroskeptic parties, movements and sentiments also began to spread in other core European countries around the same time, including Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. In the periphery (Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal), the far right began to pick up steam during the period of the eurozone’s debt crisis and it is in the context of the collapsing socioeconomic conditions that immigration becomes a catalyst behind its surge.

The growing economic inequalities inside different EU member states also provided fertile ground for the spread of far right ideology as mainstream left-wing parties had fully capitulated themselves to the European project and to neoliberalism. The far right employs an anti-establishment language stolen from the old left and presents itself as the defender of working-class interests. Brussels and the domestic elite become its targets, though the far right has no intention of upsetting the functioning of a capitalist system. It’s a ploy for coming to power.

Hence its promises to voters of a return to a golden past, which includes bringing back the social state and getting rid of immigrants and refugees.

The establishment left, in turn, has nothing to offer but shallow talk about containing austerity and envisioning a more social and humane Europe. Not a word about radical social change, national dignity, popular democracy and socialism. The fact that the European left failed (and continues to fail) to see that its co-optation into the European capitalist universe bears primary responsibility for the rise of the far right is a matter that should consume historians for a long time to come.

The most dramatic example of the outright betrayal of the left to its own followers takes place in Greece in 2015, under the government of the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza), with the bailout referendum. "I call on you to say a big 'no' to ultimatums, 'no' to blackmail," Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras cried. "[Turn your back on those who would terrorize you.](#)"

Greek voters of all political orientations (even right-wingers) listened to the fiery pseudo-leftist and delivered a resounding *no* to EU's bailout terms. [Sixty-one percent of the voters](#) said "no" to a deal that would have imposed even more sadistic austerity measures on a nation whose economy and public health care system had collapsed while the official unemployment had climbed to [28 percent in 2014](#). The referendum scared the living daylight out of Greece's masters, including first and foremost German Chancellor Angela Merkel. But within just a few days, Tsipras caved in to the pressures of the euro masters, shredded into pieces the referendum and signed a new bailout agreement.

It will take generations for Greek voters to trust the left again.

Yet, just like in the past, the only way to stem the surge of the far right across Europe is with the presence of a politically active, anti-systemic left. In much of the 20th century, this role was carried out by Communist parties, but most of them have joined the dustbin of history and Marxism has been reduced to an intellectual or academic exercise.

Rebuilding the left, however, is of absolute critical importance for slowing the surge of the far right across Europe. Not for the sake of the EU, but for Europe's real democracy. To start with, [a new narrative](#) is needed to go beyond the virtually exclusive emphasis on austerity as a critique of contemporary capitalism,

one that offers a viable alternative for creating just and equitable societies. A conception of a viable socialist political economy needs to be advanced and the transformation of capitalism must be the centerpiece for any socialist program. Movements and parties fighting against inequality and for social justice, peace and the environment should be natural allies in the struggle to create a better world. Of course, in order for this to happen, sectarianism, one of the most prevalent but demoralizing features of left political culture, needs to be overcome. This is a must in the historic mission of the left, which remains a world to win.

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C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

Roman Oligarchs Avoided Tax Liability And Restrictions On Land Size



Ager publicus -
Ills.:
de.wikipedia.org

06-10-2024 ~ *The oligarchic tradition of land-grabbing and tax dodging goes back centuries.*

Roman land tenure was based increasingly on the appropriation of conquered territory, which was declared public land, the *ager publicus populi*. The normal practice was to settle war veterans on it, but the wealthiest and most aggressive families grabbed such land for themselves in violation of early law.

Cassius' Indecent Proposal

The die was cast in 486 BC. After Rome defeated the neighboring Hernici, a Latin tribe, and took two-thirds of their land, the consul Spurius Cassius proposed Rome's first agrarian law. It called for giving half the conquered territory back to the Latins and half to needy Romans, who were also to receive public land that patricians had occupied[1]. But the patricians accused Cassius of "building up a power dangerous to liberty" by seeking popular support and "endangering the security" of their land appropriation. After his annual term was over he was charged with treason and killed. His house was burned to the ground to eradicate memory of his land proposal (Livy, *History of Rome* 2.41).

Patricians Versus Plebs

The fight over whether patricians or the needy poor plebians would be the main recipients of public land dragged on for 12 years. In 474 the commoners' tribune, Gnaeus Genucius, sought to bring the previous year's consuls to trial for delaying the redistribution proposed by Cassius (Livy 2.54 and Dionysius 9.37-38). He was blocked by that year's two consuls, Lucius Furius and Gaius Manlius, who said that decrees of the Senate were not permanent law, "but measures designed to meet temporary needs and having validity for one year only." The Senate could renege on any decree that had been passed.

A century later, in 384, M. Manlius Capitolinus, a former consul (in 392) was murdered for defending debtors by trying to use tribute from the Gauls and to sell public land to redeem plebian debts, and for accusing senators of embezzlement and urging them to use their takings to redeem debtors. It took a generation of turmoil and poverty for Rome to resolve matters. In 367 the Licinio-Sextian law limited personal landholdings to 500 *iugera* (125 hectares, under half a square mile; see Livy 6.35-36). Indebted landholders were permitted to deduct interest payments from the principal and pay off the balance over three years instead of all at once.

Gifts of Land

Most wealth throughout history has been obtained from the public domain, and that is how Rome's latifundia were created. The most fateful early land grab occurred after Carthage was defeated in 204. Two years earlier, when Rome's life-and-death struggle with Hannibal had depleted its treasury, the Senate had asked families to voluntarily contribute their jewelry or other precious belongings to help the war effort. Their gold and silver were melted down in the temple of Juno Moneta to strike the coins used to hire mercenaries.

Upon the return to peace, the aristocrats depicted these contributions as having been loans, and convinced the Senate to pay their claims in three installments. The first was paid in 204, and a second in 202. As the third and final installment was coming due in 200, the former contributors pointed out that Rome needed to keep its money to continue fighting abroad, but had much public land available. In lieu of cash payment they asked the Senate to offer them land located within fifty miles of Rome, and to tax it at only a nominal rate. A precedent for such privatization had been set in 205 when Rome sold valuable land in the Campania to provide Scipio with money to invade Africa.

The recipients were promised that “when the people should become able to pay, if anyone chose to have his money rather than the land, he might restore the land to the state.” Nobody did, of course. “The private creditors accepted the terms with joy; and that land was called *Trientabulum* because it was given in lieu of the third part of their money” (Livy 28.46).

Latifundia Changed Rome's Economy Forever

Arnold Toynbee[2] describes this giveaway of Rome's *ager publicus* as the turning point polarizing its economy by deciding, “at one stroke, the economic and social future of the Central Italian lowlands.” Most of this land ended up as latifundia cultivated by slaves captured in the wars against Carthage and Macedonia and imported *en masse* after 198. This turned the region into “predominantly a country of underpopulated slave-plantations” as the formerly free population was driven off the land into overpopulated industrial towns. In 194 and again in 177 the Senate organized a program of colonization that sent about 100,000 peasants, women, and children from central Italy to more than twenty colonies, mainly in the far south and north of Italy. Some settlers lost their Roman citizenship, and they must have remained quite poor as the average land allotment was small.

The Gracchi and Civil War

In 133, Tiberius Gracchus advocated distributing *ager publicus* to the poor, pointing out that this would “increase the number of property holders liable to serve in the army.” He was killed by angry senators who wanted the public land for themselves. Nonetheless, a land commission was established in Italy in 128, “and apparently succeeded in distributing land to several thousand citizens” in a few colonies, but not any land taken from Rome's own wealthy elite. The commission was abolished around 119 after Tiberius's brother Gaius Gracchus was killed.[3]

Appian (*Civil Wars* 1.1.7) describes the ensuing century of civil war as being fought over the land and debt crisis.

“For the rich, getting possession of the greater part of the undistributed lands, and being emboldened by the lapse of time to believe that they would never be dispossessed, absorbing any adjacent strips and their poor neighbors' allotments, partly by purchase under persuasion and partly by force, came to cultivate vast tracts instead of single estates, using slaves as laborers and herdsmen, lest free laborers should be drawn from agriculture into the army. At the same time the

ownership of slaves brought them great gain from the multitude of their progeny, who increased because they were exempt from military service. Thus certain powerful men became extremely rich and the race of slaves multiplied throughout the country, while the Italian people dwindled in number and strength, being oppressed by penury, taxes and military service.”

How Land Changed Rome's Army

Dispossession of free labor from the land transformed the character of Rome's army. Starting with Marius, landless soldiers became *soldati*, living on their pay and seeking the highest booty, loyal to the generals in charge of paying them. Command of an army brought economic and political power. When Sulla brought his troops back to Italy from Asia Minor in 82 and proclaimed himself Dictator, he tore down the walls of towns that had opposed him, and kept them in check by resettling 23 legions (some 80,000 to 100,000 men) in colonies on land confiscated from local populations in Italy.

Sulla Steals Estates and Sells Them for Support

Sulla drew up proscription lists of enemies who could be killed with impunity, with their estates seized as booty. Their names were publicly posted throughout Italy in June 81 BC, headed by the consuls for the years 83 and 82, and about 1,600 *equites* (wealthy publican investors). Thousands of names followed. Anyone on these lists could be killed at will, with the executioner receiving a portion of the dead man's estate. The remainder was sold at public auctions, the proceeds being used to rebuild the depleted treasury. Most land was sold cheaply, giving opportunists a motive to kill not only those named by Sulla, but also their personal enemies, to acquire their estates. A major buyer of confiscated real estate was Crassus, who became one of the richest Romans through Sulla's proscriptions.

By giving his war veterans homesteads and funds from the proscriptions, Sulla won their support as a virtual army in reserve, along with their backing for his new oligarchic constitution. But they were not farmers, and ran into debt, in danger of losing their land. For his more aristocratic supporters, Sulla distributed the estates of his opponents from the Italian upper classes, especially in Campania, Etruria, and Umbria.

Battle of Generals

Caesar likewise promised to settle his army on land of their own. They followed

him to Rome and enabled him to become Dictator in 49. After he was killed in 44, Brutus and Cassius vied with Octavian (later Augustus), each promising their armies land and booty. As Appian (*Civil Wars* 5.2.12-13) summarized: "The chiefs depended on the soldiers for the continuance of their government, while, for the possession of what they had received, the soldiers depend on the permanence of the government of those who had given it. Believing that they could not keep a firm hold unless the givers had a strong government, they fought for them, from necessity, with good-will." After defeating the armies of Brutus, Cassius, and Mark Antony, Octavian gave his indigent soldiers "land, the cities, the money, and the houses, and as the object of denunciation on the part of the despoiled, and as one who bore this contumely for the army's sake."

Imperial Estates

The concentration of land ownership intensified under the Empire. Brown[4] notes that by the time Christianity became the Roman state religion, North Africa had become the main source of Roman wealth, based on "the massive landholdings of the emperor and of the nobility of Rome." Its overseers kept the region's inhabitants "underdeveloped by Roman standards. Their villages were denied any form of corporate existence and were frequently named after the estates on which the villagers worked, held to the land by various forms of bonded labor."

A Christian from Gaul named Salvian[5] described the poverty and insecurity confronting most of the population ca. 440:

"Faced by the weight of taxes, poor farmers found that they did not have the means to emigrate to the barbarians. Instead, they did what little they could do: they handed themselves over to the rich as clients in return for protection. The rich took over title to their lands under the pretext of saving the farmers from the land tax. The patron registered the farmer's land on the tax rolls under his (the patron's) own name. Within a few years, the poor farmers found themselves without land, although they were still hounded for personal taxes. Such patronage by the great, so Salvian claimed, turned free men into slaves as surely as the magic of Circe had turned humans into pigs."

Church Estates

Church estates became islands in this sea of poverty. As deathbed confessions and donations of property to the Church became increasingly popular among

wealthy Christians, the Church came to accept existing creditor and debtor relationships, land ownership, hereditary wealth, and the political status quo. What mattered to the Church was how the ruling elites used their wealth, regardless of how they obtained it as long as it was destined for the Church, whose priests were the paradigmatic “poor” deserving of aid and charity.

The Church sought to absorb local oligarchies into its leadership, along with their wealth. Testamentary disposition undercut local fiscal balance. Land given to the Church was tax-exempt, obliging communities to raise taxes on their secular property in order to maintain their flow of public revenue (many heirs found themselves disinherited by such bequests, leading to a flourishing legal practice of contesting deathbed wills). The Church became the major corporate body, a sector alongside the state. Its critique of personal wealth focused on personal egotism and self-indulgence, nothing like the socialist idea of public ownership of land, monopolies, and banking. In fact, the Crusades led the Church to sponsor Christendom’s major secular bankers to finance its wars against the Holy Roman Emperors, Moslems, and Byzantine Sicily.

Notes

[1] *Roman Antiquities* by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 8.77.2.

[2] *Hannibal’s Legacy* by Arnold Toynbee, 1965, II: pp. 250-51 and pp. 341-373.

[3] *Conquerors and Slaves* by Keith Hopkins, 1978, pp. 61-63.

[4] *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* by Peter Brown, 2012, pp. 330, 366, and 327.

[5] *De gubernatione Dei* (“*The Government of God*”) 5.9.45, paraphrased and discussed in *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* by Peter Brown, 2012, pp. 433-450.

By Michael Hudson

Author Bio: Michael Hudson is an American economist, a professor of economics at the University of Missouri–Kansas City, and a researcher at the Levy Economics Institute at Bard College. He is a former Wall Street analyst, political consultant, commentator, and journalist. You can read more of Hudson’s economic history [on the Observatory](#).

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EU Citizens Are Fully Aware Of EU's Democratic Deficit: An Interview With C. J. Polychroniou



06-09-2024. Europeans go to polls this week for parliament vote. What is at stake? Is the future of the European Union (EU) at risk on account of the surge of the far-right? But is the EU even a democratic institution worth saving? And why is the Left in crisis across Europe? Political economist/political scientist C. J. Polychroniou tackles these questions in an interview with the French-Greek independent journalist Alexandra Boutri.

Alexandra Boutri: Elections for the European Parliament (EP) are taking place this week from Thursday 6 June to Sunday 10 June. Some 373 million citizens across the 27 members of the European Union (EU) are eligible to vote, but it remains to be seen whether the “surge” in participation in 2019 will continue in 2024. Let’s talk about participation in the world’s only transnational elections because the general impression is that Europeans do not take very seriously the EP elections.

C.J. Polychroniou: Participation in EU elections has always been low. We saw a “surge” in participation in the 2019 EP elections in which just slightly over 50% of EU citizens cast a vote. And this was the highest turnout in 20 years. So, yes, it’s obvious that Europeans are not as excited about EU elections as they are about national elections. Votes to the European Parliament also tend to be uncorrelated

to national elections in the various member states. They are really low-turnout protest votes. And the reason that Europeans do not take seriously the EP elections is because they are fully aware of the EU's democratic deficit.

The EP is the only directly elected EU body; yet its authority is extremely limited. Unlike national parliaments, it cannot initiate legislation. What it does is simply debate legislation and can pass or reject laws. It can also make some amendments. It is the European Commission that is solely responsible for planning, preparing and proposing new European laws. Those laws are then debated and adopted by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union which consists of one government minister from each member state (and is not to be confused with the European Council which consists of the heads of government of every EU country). Essentially, we are talking about a rubber-stamping exercise on the part of the EP with regard to legislation. The European Commission is the EU's executive body, surrounded by some 32,000 permanent bureaucrats, but the European Council is the highest political entity of the Union. The Commission president is proposed by the European Council and then approved by the Parliament.

In sum, the EP is not a normal legislature and is clearly the weakest of the three main institutions of the EU. Brussels is also the home of European lobbying. There are more than 30,000 lobbyists in town, most of whom represent the interests of corporations, and they work very closely with EU bureaucrats and politicians. Lobby groups are involved at all levels of lawmaking. So, unfortunately, there is much to be said about the EU being in essence a corporate-driven entity with power vested in an unelected and unaccountable elite. By the same token, countries like Germany, Europe's economic and political powerhouse, have a lot to answer for. Germany has refused to "think European" with regard to EU reform, particularly on economic restructuring, solidarity, and social cohesion. Its policies have created a major rift between Northern and Southern Europe that is having far-reaching effects on the nature of the mission of the Union.

Alexandra Boutri: There is a general feeling however that this year's EU elections are different. They matter because of the surge of far-right ideology across Europe. What's at stake with the 2024 European Parliament elections, and why is the far-right thriving across Europe?

*C. J. Polychroniou:*What one hears from European heads of government and EU-enthusiasts in general is that the 2024 EU elections are crucial because they will have an impact on the EU's response to the increase in democratic backsliding. To be sure, there is serious democratic backsliding across Europe. And I am not talking about the usual suspects like Hungary under Orban. We have seen, for instance, how so-called liberal European democracies like Germany responded to people protesting Israel's mass killings in Gaza. The German government has cracked down on pro-Palestine protests, raided the homes of activists, and banned speakers from the country. In Greece, its right-wing Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis publicly boasted that his government will not tolerate university students setting encampments in support of Palestine and even took the outrageous step of trying to deport students from UK and European Union member states that took part last month in a pro-Palestinian demonstration rally at Athens Law School. It is quite an irony indeed to hear European leaders urging citizens not only to cast a vote but to act "responsibly" in this year's EU elections. For them, apparently, democracy exists only when citizens align their views with existing government positions on domestic and foreign affairs!

Having said that, the surge of the far-right across Europe is a very serious and dangerous matter. The far-right poses a threat to the survival of democracy in every country in which it happens to have a large presence. I am less concerned about its threat to the EU than the threat that the far-right ideology poses to the democratic development of domestic society.

The rise of the far-right in Europe is driven by several factors. The first is fear of economic insecurity. There has been a fundamental shift in recent decades away from the social policies of the post-war era to a ruthless form of capitalism that exploits insecurities, produces staggering inequality, and exacerbates people's anxieties about the future. The far-right taps into people's fears, insecurities, and grievances with promises of a return to a golden past and a restoration of "law and order." It uses everywhere it flourishes ultra-nationalist and xenophobic language but in many, but not all cases, utilizes the context of an economic policy platform which is against austerity and open to social public spending for working-class people. The radical right-wing parties in France, Italy and Finland, for example, are hostile to neoliberalizing reforms and EU-level austerity. In France, Marine Le Pen's National Rally has managed to create the image of being a "working-class" party.

The second factor is disillusionment with the EU and with established policies. For many European voters, both the EU and mainstream political parties (center-right and center-left political parties) work directly against the interests of the common people and serve instead the interests of the few. Another factor is of course Europe's failed migration policies, though there is no mechanical link between immigration and the surge of the far-right.

Alexandra Boutri: Can you elaborate a bit on this? Because there is a widespread impression that immigration is the cause behind the surge of the far-right.

C. J. Polychroniou: Immigration is having an effect on right-wing and extreme right-wing voting. That's an undeniable fact. But the whole issue is quite complicated. It's not a clear-cut case that immigration itself is what's driving support (which is strongest, incidentally, among people of low income and with few educational opportunities) for the far-right. For instance, some studies have shown that unskilled workers feel threatened by the presence of unskilled or low-skilled immigrants from outside of Europe simply because they feel unprotected but that [“high-skilled immigration from non-European countries has a negative impact on extreme right-wing parties.”](#) Thus, the formation of anti-immigrant sentiments may be related to the degree of economic and social integration of immigrants.

But there is an irony here. The EU as such has no integration policy. What it has is a strategy of migrant containment, and “integration” depends entirely on the member states, with national governments defining and applying the term differently.

Other studies have shown that certain demographic factors, such as *emigration* (the movement of people *out* of a region) may also be fueling the spread of anti-immigrant far-right parties. As young people leave the smaller towns in which they grew up for better opportunities in major cities, the regions they leave behind experience a rise in support for extreme right-wing parties due to the negative effects of local population decline and the subsequent deterioration of these regions. [Sweden](#), not long ago dominated by the Social Democratic party, seems to provide the perfect example for the link between emigration and the surge of the far-right.

Alexandra Boutri: European left-wing forces are in crisis. Why is that, especially

since the socioeconomic environment in Europe is quite depressing? Shouldn't one expect the radical left, and not the far-right, to be thriving under dire economic conditions?

C. J. Polychroniou: The mainstream left is clearly in decline. By that I mean social democratic and socialist parties. That's your mainstream left. But then the question is what do we mean by "radical left?" Do we include parties like [Syriza in Greece](#) and Podemos in Spain in the camp of the "radical left?" I think it would be a crude joke to do so. Some anti-systemic movements of the left are out there, but they are very small and fractured. In Greece, there are scores of radical left parties and organizations, but with few followers and yet it's impossible to get them to agree to the formation of a United Front. You encounter the same phenomenon in many other European countries. It is a sad and disconcerting state of affairs. The reasons for the crisis of the left are political and ideological in nature and scope and they deserve an in-depth discussion which cannot be done here. However, I think there is a real misunderstanding on the part of the left about economic uncertainty and political preferences. Scholars who have studied the effects of economic crises on voting behavior found that it is extreme right-wing parties that tend to benefit from the effects of [macroeconomic shocks](#). Of course, there are other variables at play when examining individual case studies where economic crises lead to political support for the extreme right, such as the nature of the political culture in place and the organizational skills of left parties and movements in existence. But, on the whole, it appears that in times of economic downturn, voters turn to the right, not to the left, for solution to their problems. Today this is even more understandable when the left has nothing concrete to offer to Europe's citizens. In France, people cite inflation and security as their main concerns. And opinion polls show that the National Rally has a lead ahead of the EU vote. But I am not sure to what extent the left understands why it is failing to convince citizens why they should vote for it, and not the forces of reaction.

Source: [Originally published by Z. Feel free to share widely.](#)

C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the

deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He has published scores of books and over one thousand articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

Alexandra Boutri is a freelance journalist and writer.

The Far Right's Political Power Is Expected To Grow In EU Elections



C.J. Polychroniou

06-06-2024 ~ *Far right and hardline conservative parties may emerge as the third-biggest political force in the European Parliament.*

Every five years, citizens of European Union (EU) governments elect their representatives as members of the European Parliament. With 720 seats up for grabs, this year's election, which will take place from June 6-9, is especially

crucial for the future of the continent for several reasons.

First, the deadliest war on European soil in more than 70 years has been going on since February 24, 2022, yet Europe remains politically subservient to the United States and is thus completely incapable of forging a strategy of its own to deal with the Ukraine crisis.

Second, Europe is facing an [economic stagnation](#) so severe that its [economic laggards](#), namely Greece, Portugal and Spain — peripheral countries with severe vulnerabilities as they rely excessively on imports and tourism while carrying high public debt and facing high unemployment levels — have become the EU's top economic performers.

Third, democracy in European states has been in decline for several years now. For example, declines in the [rule of law and freedom of the press](#) are well documented, while the recent bans of pro-Palestine protests speak volumes of Europe's democracy deficiencies. Meanwhile, far right parties are making big inroads across Europe.

Fourth, the EU has failed as a political and economic union in promoting integration, in defending humanistic values and in securing prosperity for future generations. It has also failed, subsequently, to create a framework for collective governance. These failures are built into the architecture of this Frankenstein-like entity as the EU was not intended to be democratic and its institutions and their decision-making procedures lack democratic legitimacy.

It is for all the above reasons that many Europeans have become disillusioned with mainstream political parties and why far right parties are gaining support, with [young people fueling the growth of right-wing extremism](#).

In the 2019 elections for the European Parliament, 50.7 percent of eligible voters cast a ballot. This was a historic turnout, although there was a dramatic difference between different EU member states. In some countries, such as in Belgium and Luxembourg, voter turnout was over 80 percent, but less than 30 percent voted in central and eastern European countries like [Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia and the Czech Republic](#). There was also lower turnout in Italy, Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Malta and Bulgaria. While overall, Europeans vote more for their heads of government than for representatives in the European Parliament, it seems that socioeconomic indicators play a crucial role: Voter turnout is lower in

countries where the average salary is lower, though there are exceptions. Nonetheless, [the voter turnout in 2019 was the highest it had been in 20 years](#).

The outcome of the 2019 European Parliament elections was a mix of encouraging and ominous results. First, pundits who had predicted a huge surge of far right parties were proven wrong, but the EU's political landscape was nonetheless shaken up as mainstream political parties (center-left and center-right parties), which had dominated the EU since its inception, lost their majority for the first time in the European Parliament. Nationalist and far right parties ended up with more representation in the European Parliament after the 2019 elections than in any previous one, but the Greens also did quite well, winning more seats (55) than ever before in the European Parliament.

In sum, there was no such thing as "[a new dawn](#)" for the far right. Still, it was obvious that the far right was on the march as it scored well not only in countries where it had already taken root (such as in France, Italy, Austria and Hungary), but also saw increases in other countries, including Germany, Sweden and Spain. But the alternative and radical left won just 5 percent of the vote, losing 14 seats and ending up with just 38 seats in total. Radical parties of the left are facing a truly existential crisis in Europe and there are no signs of a turnaround. Europe's radical left is fractured, demoralized and lacks a vision for the future, let alone a strategy for radical social change. Its economic agenda and rhetoric have been hijacked by the far right as the left narrative is no longer about the working class.

Unsurprisingly enough, and given that the economic and political environment across Europe has deteriorated since 2019 while far right ideas and parties have become mainstream and normalized in many member states, the [forecast](#) for the 2024 European Parliament elections is that there will be a major shift to the right and the far right, while center-left and green parties will lose seats. So, while we may still not witness a "new dawn" for the far right in 2024, it is quite certain that far right and hardline conservative parties will emerge as the third-biggest political force in the next European Parliament. The only consolation from this ominous development is that, for the time being, the far right is divided. [Marine Le Pen](#), the leader of the National Rally party in France, has distanced herself from Germany's AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) and is making overtures to Italy's Giorgia Meloni, who has emerged in the last two years as [Europe's most powerful right-wing leader](#) and is now widely regarded as a [kingmaker](#) ahead of the European elections.

Unlike the German far right AfD, and perhaps Le Pen's National Rally, Meloni does not want to dismantle the EU (she has not delivered on her election campaign promise to clash with the European Union elites) and has even tried to convince people that she rejects fascism, claiming it cannot coexist with democracy and that her far right party Brothers of Italy has [consigned fascism to history](#). Nonetheless, her migration policy and domestic policy measures, particularly in the areas of civil rights and social and cultural values, show that she is clearly pursuing a far right agenda, and her rhetoric finds a strong resonance with people who are drawn to fascism. Even so, Meloni has succeeded in being seen as a reliable partner of NATO and the U.S., while her foreign policy stances on Ukraine and Israel have erased whatever worries Brussels and Washington may initially have had about her leadership.

Of course, it remains to be seen whether Meloni will align herself with the center-right or with the far right in the new European Parliament. The question about whether Meloni is a pragmatist or an ideological politician may very well be answered by the strategy that she decides to adopt in her role "as a kingmaker for the EU." But the bigger question is whether this really matters much. The EU is failing Europe's citizens, and perhaps a case can be made that it is disillusionment more than anything else that is driving Europeans to the far right since all mainstream political parties across the continent remain pro-EU. As a case in point, [the far right is surging even in Ireland](#) — and this is a country that had never before had a far right movement.

There are many factors — such as deindustrialization, profound economic inequalities, the decline of the welfare state and the failure of the left — that have contributed to the rise of extreme right-wing parties and movements in Europe. However, the most consistent theme of the far right's platform is opposition to immigration, and occasionally opposition to feminism and to LGBTQ rights. It is also mainly anti-immigrant sentiment that is fueling the surge of far right politics in Ireland. In Germany, support for the AfD stems largely from opposition to the country's policies on migration.

In sum, the reasons for the rise and surge of the far right in Europe abound; thus, there needs to be a multilevel strategy to confront the monsters of neo-fascism. Moreover, the results of the upcoming EU elections will surely tell us a great deal about the contemporary European state of mind and what may lie ahead for the continent. A "new dawn" for the far right isn't out of the question. But even then,

the European situation may not be as dramatic as the one facing U.S. voters in November, where their choice for the highest office in the land is between a former president who was rated by scholars as the worst president in U.S. history and is now convicted of falsifying business records, and an incumbent who is seen by many, both at home and abroad, as a war criminal.

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C.J. Polychroniou is a political scientist/political economist, author, and journalist who has taught and worked in numerous universities and research centers in Europe and the United States. Currently, his main research interests are in U.S. politics and the political economy of the United States, European economic integration, globalization, climate change and environmental economics, and the deconstruction of neoliberalism's politico-economic project. He is a regular contributor to *Truthout* as well as a member of *Truthout's* Public Intellectual Project. He has published scores of books and over 1,000 articles which have appeared in a variety of journals, magazines, newspapers and popular news websites. Many of his publications have been translated into a multitude of different languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. His latest books are *Optimism Over Despair: Noam Chomsky On Capitalism, Empire, and Social Change* (2017); *Climate Crisis and the Global Green New Deal: The Political Economy of Saving the Planet* (with Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin as primary authors, 2020); *The Precipice: Neoliberalism, the Pandemic, and the Urgent Need for Radical Change* (an anthology of interviews with Noam Chomsky, 2021); and *Economics and the Left: Interviews with Progressive Economists* (2021).

The Humble Carrot's Colorful

History



*Adam Alexander -
Photo: Chelsea
Green Publishing*

06-05-2024 ~ *The carrot has followed armies, colonial explorers, and politicians to become one of the world's most prized vegetables.*

We have the Arabs to thank for introducing carrots (*Daucos carota*) to Western Europe. Two distinct subspecies led to the domesticated carrot. The subspecies *D. carota sativus*, native to Turkey, was grown by the Arabs and consumed by their invading armies, both animal and human.

At the end of the 10th century, carrots were mentioned in a cookery book compiled by [Ibn Sayyār al-Warrā](#), an author from Baghdad. Called *Kitab al-T. abīh* (Book of Dishes), it is the earliest known Arabic cookbook. It may have been added to the libraries of Europe's Moorish invaders who started their own vegetable gardens in the Iberian Peninsula early in the eighth century.

The first historical record of carrots as a crop in Spain and southern Europe, however, is found in the work of the great Arab agriculturalist [Ibn al-'Awwām](#), towards the end of the 12th century. This suggests that by this time, a number of different but unnamed varieties of carrots were being grown.

Some 200 years later, carrots were cultivated in northern Europe and were valued for their high sugar content. Recipes at the time turned carrots into jams, sweet condiments, and puddings.

A Colorful Debate

Although they came in various colors and shades—red, white, and yellow—they

became the most favored in Europe because they were sweeter and didn't turn a muddy brown when cooked. The word "yellow" is used with some literary license, as carrot color has been the subject of much scholarly discourse over the years, including whether the orange carrot existed before the attentions of Dutch breeders.

While Moorish invaders introduced southern Europe to the western subspecies *sativus*, its relative, *D. carota atrorubens*, spread further east from Iran and the Hindu Kush along the Silk Road. Modern genetic sequencing shows that Chinese carrots, which come in red, white, purple, and orange, are all derived from [*atrorubens*](#).

Similarly, deep-red descendants of this family branch remain firmly part of the food culture of Rajasthan, a state in northwestern India. Colored varieties have become [trendy in Western food culture](#), having been a staple in the East for centuries. [Gajar al halwa](#), a Rajasthani dessert that calls for red carrots, dates at least back to the [Mughal Empire](#), which blended Persian, Mongol, and Islamic cultures. The sweet is still very popular throughout India.

The Color Orange

Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean in 1492 sparked a transfer of native vegetables in both directions across the Atlantic. The colonizers who followed him planted carrots, which could be stored for long voyages. However, it was not until the beginning of the 17th century that the carrot underwent a dramatic change of fortune.

As the 16th century drew to a close, Flemish growers started to work on improving the carrot's color, yield, appearance, and eating quality. Yellow, Western varieties, being biennial, were less likely to bolt (produce flowers and seeds rather than expand root size and leaf growth) than their Eastern cousins, and they were genetically predisposed to grow a single bulbous root full of sugars and flavors.

The word 'orange' is relatively new to the English language and first appeared in 1502 in reference to [clothing belonging to Margaret Tudor](#), the Scottish Queen. The orange, native to China, arrived in Europe with the Arabs at the beginning of the eighth century and was called the *sinaasappel* (Chinese apple) in Dutch.

The Spanish took the Persian word for the fruit, *narang*, referring to the

bitterness of its skin, and called it *naranja*, which in Old French translated as 'orange.' The 2011 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary describes the color orange used in Old English as *g.eolurēad* (yellow-red). This name for the fruit was probably adopted into Middle English at the same time as the orange first appeared in Britain after the Norman Conquest in 1066, but it was not used to describe the color of a carrot until much later.

So, it is not surprising that descriptions of carrots of all shades of yellow and red didn't describe them as 'orange' until the word became a common adjective in sixteenth-century English. Because of this, earlier descriptions fail to help the researcher determine a variety's true color.

Although red carrots were cultivated across Europe from the eleventh century, highly selective breeding by the Dutch led to the familiar orange variety becoming ubiquitous 500 years later. It is a common belief that breeders created the carrot to honor the Dutch royal family, but this is a myth. Nevertheless, the carrot became a tool for political propaganda when William and Mary took over the British throne after a bloodless coup in 1688 known as the Glorious Revolution. William inherited the title of sovereign Prince of Orange after a feudal principality, complete with orange groves, in Provence, southern France.

The reality is that the Dutch were growing orange carrots long before William inherited his title and moved to England. Nevertheless, the orange carrot is the Netherlands' national vegetable, and many of its people still cling to the idea that its color was created as a tribute to the House of Orange. As a marketing strategy and way to raise 'brand awareness,' it was brilliant, and it would be churlish to disabuse them of their belief. Since the carrot genome was unraveled, we have learned that orange carrots are the direct descendants of yellow varieties and are a testament to Dutch breeders' genius.

A Long-Lasting Heritage

By the 17th century, carrots had become part of a subsistence diet throughout Europe and the Americas, but different varieties had yet to be given names. A seed seller from London, William Lucas, lists red, orange, and yellow carrots in his catalog of 1677. Although Dutch breeders had named varieties, these were kept from consumers for another hundred years.

At the end of the eighteenth century, English merchants at last listed a few named

varieties. The Curtis seed catalog of 1774 includes three: Early Horn, Short Orange, and Long Orange. In 1780, J. Gordon of Fenchurch Street listed just two carrots: the Early Horn and the Orange or Sandwich carrot (Sandwich refers to where they were grown).

Carrots grow best in light soil, and the land around Sandwich in Kent was perfect. Flemish immigrants escaping Catholic persecution in the latter half of the sixteenth century settled in Kent and grew them there for themselves and their new Protestant queen, Elizabeth I. We also know that Early Horn is one of the oldest named varieties and is related to many of those we enjoy today.

Not only do we have to thank Dutch breeders for the ubiquity of the orange carrot, but we should also give thanks to a Dutchman, O. Banga, who wrote a considerable body of work on the history of carrot cultivation and breeding in the early 1960s. He identified two Dutch varieties, Scarlet Horn and Long Orange, as the progenitors of almost all of today's orange carrots.

Genetic analysis shows us that purple carrots that originated in Afghanistan mutated into yellow ones. As a reminder, descriptions of carrots as being red actually describe those colored purple, similar to red cabbage and red beetroot. Color changes in the earliest cultivated carrots happened through accidental mutation rather than hybridization. The Western Europeans' preference for the yellow over the purple carrot was encouragement enough for those 18th-century Dutch breeders to work on ever-deeper yellows until they got a sweet and tasty orange the consumer would buy.

By the middle of the 18th century, we had new varieties: Early Half Long-Horn, Late Half Long-Horn, Early Short-Horn, and Round Yellow; the last two being the parents of nineteenth-century classics, Paris Market, and one of my favorites, Amsterdam Forcing. It is a testament to breeders' skill that these two early varieties continue to be hugely popular after over 250 years in cultivation. Other carrots, such as Nantes types—with cylindrical roots—resulted from a century of breeding from the now-extinct cultivars Late Half Long-Horn and Early Half Long-Horn. The name suggests the French had a hand in developing this type.

According to Banga, early twentieth-century breeders gave us Emperor. This long, tapering type is a cross between the Nantes and Chantenay, a red-cored variety (delicious, by the way) that had been bred from another eighteenth-

century variety called Oxheart. Emperor types are the basis for most modern cultivars developed for today's supermarket trade.

Autumn King is an open-pollinated stalwart that has been around for a century or more and, thanks to climate change, one that can sit happily in the soil through the winter to be harvested as and when required.

The prettily named Flakkee, an excellent overwintering storage variety, has claims to Italian heritage. It is synonymous with Autumn King, which raises the question: Do we have another example of breeders renaming varieties to suit their markets and cultural sensibilities? Fortunately, many of these very earliest carrot breeds are still with us, and regardless of what they are called, they are culinary delights.

The world's love of carrots and the importance of color in different societies and food cultures means the many traditional varieties grown for centuries will continue to thrive alongside modern cultivars, which are the product of sophisticated modern plant breeding techniques.

By Adam Alexander

Author Bio: Adam Alexander is a consummate storyteller thanks to forty years as an award-winning film and television producer, but his true passion is collecting rare, endangered, and delicious vegetables from around the world. He is a director of OF1200, a company championing food growing in Wales and celebrating local varieties. He is a seed guardian with the [Heritage Seed Library](#). He has appeared on television, including the BBC's "[Gardeners' World](#)" and "[Great British Food Revival](#)," as well as CNN's "[Going Green](#)."

Source: Independent Media Institute

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